SPOTLIGHT: What We Learned about Africa

▶ In April, the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life issued an extensive report on religious attitudes in sub-Saharan Africa, based on more than 25,000 face-to-face interviews in 19 countries. Most media coverage hit well-worn ground: the continent is the world's "most religious"; both Christianity and Islam have grown dramatically; and one of four Africans fears religious conflict in his or her country. But buried deeper in the 324-page report (features.pewforum.org/africa) were more surprising findings.

Tens of thousands have died in recent religious clashes, especially near Jos. But Nigerian Christians are the least likely among surveyed African Christians to have concerns about **religious extremism** in their country (22%), and are unlikely to say Muslims are violent (38%).

About half (48%) of Chad's Christians practice **polygamy**, far more than Christians or Muslims elsewhere in Africa, Chadian Christians also score high in support of **extramarital sex** (31%) and **prostitution** (12%).

Ethiopia and Uganda are the only countries surveyed where more Christians than Muslims practice **female genital mutilation**. Ethiopian Christians also have the lowest support for women in religious leadership (24%). But they are more likely than average to say women have as much right to jobs as men.

Liberia

Nigeria

Cameroon

Chad

Cameroon's Christians want to see **Islam** have more influence in the country, and more than half say they associate Islam with tolerance. Some 77 percent believe many religions lead to eternal life. But they have Africa's lowest rate of cooperating with Muslims (12%).

Rwanda has had the most **switching within Christianity**: the percentage of people who are currently Catholic (54%) is 12 points lower than the percentage who were raised Catholic. Protestant percentages, by contrast, are 12 points higher.

Founded as Africa's first Christian nation but since plagued by civil wars, Liberia (along with Guinea-Bissau) is the only country to have more Christians (20%) than Muslims (17%) who believe that **violence** against civilians in defense of religion is justified. It also has the second-highest rate of Christians who associate the word *violence* with Christians (20%).

Rwanda

Tanzania

Uganda

The country has made international headlines for a bill proposing the death penalty or life imprisonment for homosexual acts. But it has one of the highest rates among African nations of Christians who think homosexuality is morally acceptable or neutral (16%).

Tanzania is Africa's most **syncretistic** majority-Christian country, with many Christians believing in spells and curses (78%) and in sacred objects that protect from harm (44%). (If it's any consolation, the country's Muslims are syncretistic, too.) Ironically, prosperity gospel beliefs are relatively weak here.

Mozambique

Ethiopia

Mozambique is home to Africa's few **secularists**: 2 percent say they are atheist and 11 percent describe their religion as "nothing in particular." In most other African nations, the percentage is zero.