Religion and Armed Conflict in Sub-Saharan Africa, 1990 to 2008 – Results from a New Database

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Abstract:

Despite the religious diversity in sub-Saharan Africa and the religious overtones in a number of African armed conflicts, little systematic research has been done on the religion–conflict nexus in sub-Saharan Africa. Quantitative studies mostly limit analysis to demographic variables, and systematic studies on Africa are completely absent. Case studies investigate the religion–conflict link more closely but focus on a limited number of cases, such as Nigeria and Sudan. The following questions thus remain: Does religion matter at all for armed conflict in Africa? Do religious factors significantly impact the onset of armed conflict? What explains the religious overtones in these conflicts?

This paper contributes to filling the gap by using a unique and newly compiled data inventory of all sub-Saharan countries for the period 1990–2008. The database comprises classical non-religious controls and conflict data as well as available data on religion, but extends beyond other approaches by taking into account both the multidimensionality and the ambivalence of religion vis-à-vis conflict. Based on a systematic base of sources, we coded detailed information on various structural aspects of religion (e.g. demographic changes, parallel ethno-religious identities) as well as religious factors connected to violence (e.g. existence of armed religious groups, inter-religious clashes, desecrations, incitement by religious leaders). Taking into account the "ambivalence of the sacred", the inventory also encompasses phenomena conducive to peace such as inter-religious networks and religious peace initiatives. Based on systematic description and multiple (logit) regressions, preliminary results suggest that religion indeed plays a significant role in African armed conflicts. Six countries in particular are heavily affected by different religious aspects of violence: Chad, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Republic of Congo, Sudan and Uganda. (Religious) Armed conflict is more likely when ethnic and religious identities run parallel and religious demography change occurs. There is little evidence that inter-religious networks are effective in avoiding (religious) conflict onset.

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Man is a Religious Animal. He is the only Religious Animal. He is the only animal that has the True Religion - several of them. He is the only animal that loves his neighbor as himself and cuts his throat if his theology isn't straight. He has made a graveyard of the globe in trying his honest best to smooth his brother's path to happiness and heaven. ***Mark Twain***

Religion is like a knife: you can either use it to cut bread, or stick in someone's back.
Desmond Tutu

1. Introduction[1]

While the world was watching the World Cup final in South Africa on July 11, 2010, two bombs exploded in Kampala, Uganda, killing more than 70 people. The Somali Islamist armed group Al-Shabaab claimed responsibility for the attack. Religious violence in Africa[2] is not confined to Somalia or Uganda. In Mali, a French hostage was killed by the North African branch of Al-Qaida in mid-2010. In Nigeria, bloody clashes between Muslims and Christians have claimed hundreds if not thousands of victims in the last two years. Armed conflicts[3] in Ethiopia, Eritrea and Sudan are also connected to religion. While in these cases religion apparently plays an important role, quantitative research on conflict has failed to find evidence for a significant causal influence of religious factors in Africa and elsewhere. Natural resources, weak state capacity and socio-economic problems appear to be among the most important robustly significant variables (Dixon 2009; Hegre/Sambanis 2006; Fearon/Laitin 2003; Collier/Sambanis 2005; Elbadawi/Sambanis 2000).

Given this gap between case-oriented, anecdotal evidence and the lack of general statistical evidence, it seems useful to take a closer look at the role of religion in conflict in the region. A new database on religion in sub-Saharan Africa (RSSA) that has collected data for different religious dimensions provides the basis for such an undertaking.

The paper asks the following questions: Does religion matter at all for armed conflict in Africa? Do religious factors significantly impact the onset of armed conflict? What explains the religious overtones in these conflicts?

The paper proceeds as follows: First, we review the literature and show that research on the religion–conflict link suffers from the lack of adequate data. We then present our database starting with methodological aspects and a systematic-descriptive overview of the results. In

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[2] If not indicated otherwise, "Africa" denotes the 48 countries of "Sub-Saharan Africa" (that is, excluding North Africa).

[3] According to the definition by UCDP/PRIO, armed conflict is a "contested incompatibility that concerns government and/or territory where the use of armed force between two parties, of which at least one is the government of a state, results in at least 25 battle-related deaths." If not indicated otherwise, "conflict" refers to armed conflict.

particular, we show that religion is connected to conflict or peace in different dimensions (e.g. identities, ideas, organisations, behaviour). We then move to a preliminary causal analysis of the impact of religious factors on both armed conflict onset in general and "religious" armed conflict onset, employing multiple regressions. The final section summarizes the findings and draws conclusions for theory and future research.

2. State of the Art: The Role of Religion in Armed Conflict

Over the last decade, there has been growing interest in research on the religion–conflict link (e.g. Huntington 1996; Juergensmeyer 2008). Today, the "ambivalence of religion" has been widely accepted: Religion may not only incite violence but also contribute to peace (Appleby 2000; Philpott 2007). Ambivalence also refers to the scope of impact. Sometimes religion may count more, in other circumstances it may count less. It seems plausible that the ambivalence of religion depends on context (Basedau/De Juan 2008). Under certain religious and non-religious conditions, religion spurs conflict or fosters peace – or differs as regards how much religion counts. Finally, it appears useful to consider different religious dimensions. "Religion" is a vague and often rather poorly defined term (e.g. Ter Haar 2005); for scientific analysis it makes sense to distinguish between different dimensions. There are different ways to typologize these dimensions, but in this paper we will mainly distinguish between religious identity structures (e.g. demographic constellations), religious ideas (e.g. religious incompatibilities in conflict), religious organizations (e.g. churches, networks) and related behaviour of religious actors.

According to this basic understanding of the role of religion in conflict – ambivalence, context-dependence and multidimensionality – we will review the literature as to whether we can find evidence for a substantial role of religion in conflict. We will start with approaches and results from systematic-descriptive research and then move to findings on causal relations between religious variables and conflict; finally, we will have a closer look at the state of the art of the religion–conflict link in Africa.

2.1 Systematic-descriptive Approaches

The relevance of religion for conflict can be demonstrated in two different ways. The first – maybe less well-known – way can be labelled systematic-descriptive. Systematic-descriptive means that the relevance is not demonstrated through evidence on causal relationships between variables but the systematic identification of phenomena which in themselves demonstrate a connection. For this purpose, it makes sense to make use of various religious dimensions (Basedau 2009; Harpviken/Røislien 2008). As mentioned above, religious variables cut into several dimensions and operate at different levels. If conflict parties or

warring factions differ by their religious affiliation, this indicates relevance of religion in the identity dimension. In contrast, a common religious identity cross-cutting the differences between warring factions may be a resource for peace-building efforts. Religion is important for conflict in the ideological dimension, when religious ideas such as the introduction of religious laws or the domination of a particular religion in a given society are disputed among varying societal forces. Furthermore, conflict parties or religious actors can legitimize violence or peace with reference to religious ideas such as values and norms. The existence of armed groups with religious goals or inter-religious networks indicates the relevance of religion in the organizational dimension. Finally, the behavioural dimension includes certain forms of violence which can indicate the relevance of religion in conflict. Such events are attacks on clergymen or places of worship. In contrast, calls for peace or more pronounced activities such as peace initiatives or mediation approaches by religious actors can show their engagement for peace.

Regarding empirical studies so far, none has captured all these (or possibly further) religious dimensions. In fact, variables connecting religion and peace are not included in comparative or quantitative empirical studies. In regard to the religion–conflict nexus, two studies in particular extend beyond the (common) identification of different religious identities of conflict parties. For the period 1989–2003, Svensson (2007) analyses 218 conflict dyads worldwide and identifies those dyads with different religious identities in 68 cases (31.3%) and a religious component in the incompatibility of the conflict in 43 cases (19.8%). Such "religious" conflicts seem to occur at a below-average rate in Africa: Out of 87 African conflict dyads only 11 cases show divergent religious identities between the conflict factions (12.6%) and in 13 cases a religious component in the conflict incompatibility is present (14.9%). Of the 48 sub-Saharan African countries, 23 have experienced a civil war. Approximately one-third of those countries (seven) had a religious conflict dimension.[4] Another study captures the ideological and behavioural dimensions (Croissant et al. 2009). The study defines religious conflicts as a subtype of cultural conflicts. Verbal or active references to religious people or symbols in conflict-related events (e.g. assassination of a religious leader or a disputed visit of a temple by the head of government) indicate religious conflicts. Of all global conflicts from 1945 to 2007, 11% were religious; sub-Saharan Africa's percentage was no exception, standing also at 11%.

[4] Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Mali, Sudan and Uganda.

2.2 Causal Approaches

A second possible way to demonstrate the relevance of religion in conflict is to find theoretically plausible empirical evidence that religious variables and conflict are causally linked. The involved religious variables themselves – such as population-shares of religious communities – are not necessarily connected to violence. Theoretically, a number of hypotheses connect religious variables to conflict. Similar to ethnic and other social identities, diverse religious identities can result in escalating socio-psychological dynamics. Research demonstrates that people often privilege in-group members over out-group members (Seul 1999: 565; Stewart 2009). As a result, violent escalation becomes likelier. Furthermore, religious identities are special: They are connected to certain religious ideas. Such religious ideas are shared values and norms legitimised by a transcendental source, and therefore they are hardly subject to negotiation and compromise given their (accepted) supernatural origin. This can also entail a higher propensity for violent behaviour by religious actors: Non-believers and adherents to different religious traditions might be converted by force, especially if the religion in question claims universal validity. Furthermore, combatants might be motivated through specific religious rewards for participation in acts of violence (e.g. Anderson 2004; Toft 2007; Svensson 2007).

Empirically, the co-existence of various religious communities within a given society should increase the likelihood of conflict onset because of the aforementioned socio-psychological dynamics and/or principally incompatible religious values (Huntington 1996; Hasenclever/Rittberger 2003: 109–110). Studies find no empirical evidence for this assumption (e.g. Russet et al. 2000; Tusicisny 2004). Furthermore, the studies show mixed or non-significant results for other religious demographic structures. The results are consistent neither for a strongly fractionalized religious structure, nor for a so-called polarized structure, in which two more-or-less large religious groups co-exist (e.g. Montalvo/Reynal-Querol 2005; Fearon/Laitin 2003; Schneider/Wiesehomeier 2006; Ellingsen 2000). However, some studies find positive evidence that conflicts that are fought along religious boundaries may display a higher intensity and may endure longer than other conflicts that are not fought along such lines (Horowitz 2009: 167–172; Svensson 2007; Toft 2007; Pearce 2005; Ellingsen 2005).

A second theoretical branch understands religion as a possible mobilization resource for and in conflicts. The main argument is that leaders are important for the organisation of collective action and therefore have to mobilize followers (Fearon/Laitin 2000; De Juan/Hasenclever 2009). In order to mobilize, leaders can choose from different identities, such as religious,

ethnic or other social identities. Under specific conditions, religion may be the most rational choice for them. For instance, politicisation of religion might increase the risk of a violent escalation of a conflict, which is principally rooted in political or socio-economic problems (e.g. Keddie 1998; Hasenclever/De Juan 2007: 21–24). Yet, there is little evidence for this claim. Studies found a resurgence of religion in politics in the last few decades worldwide, but a corresponding increase in religious conflicts did not occur (Moghadam 2003; Fox 2007). Moreover, case studies show that religious overtones do not necessarily depend on religious politicisation. Rather, elites must convince believers to engage in specific behaviour. Furthermore, these studies point out the importance of – and the dependence upon – numerous (non-religious) factors in mobilization processes, such as the organisational structures of religious organizations and their dependence on state regulations (e.g. De Juan/Hasenclever 2009; Wiktorowicz 2004; Fox 1999).[5] These recent approaches underscore the importance of looking not only at interfaith relations, but also at the relationship between the religious groups and the conflict parties. In addition, religious communities themselves should be taken into consideration because internal power struggles over religious leadership can influence the behaviour of religious groups (e.g. Silberman et al. 2005; Johnston/Figa 1988).

The peace dimension of religion in conflict is theoretically underdeveloped. The majority of theoretical works identify religious peace norms as the only explanation of religious peace engagement (Gopin 2000; Butselaar 2005). This argumentation ignores the fact that peace efforts vary considerably. So far, empirical studies on religion and peace have yielded limited results regarding the structure and impact of religious peace initiatives (e.g. Little 2007; Carter/Smith 2004; Appleby 2001; Sampson 1997).

Other religious factors, especially "amicable" inter-religious relations and inter-religious networks, are often mentioned as possible preventers of violence. Cordial inter-religious relations may decrease the possibility of mobilizing believers for violence because the required negative out-group stereotypes are not available, or at least less available. Additionally, inter-religious networks can establish communication channels between the various religious communities to hinder escalation and to contribute to a better understanding of other religious traditions by common believers (Abu-Nimer 2002; Varshney 2001; Gopin 2002). For these two factors, comparative empirical findings do not yet exist.

[5] Toft argues it the other way around: Political elites will tender religious bids, if religious legitimacy seems to be rational to secure their own survival (Toft 2007). This also emphasises the role of political leaders for the process of religious charging of a conflict. Another approach argues that successful mobilization requires that both sides – conflict party and religious actor – must have interest in it (De Juan 2009). But in both approaches it is necessary that religious leaders convince their believers of their religious interpretations – which is likelier under specific (non-)religious conditions such as credibility of religious leaders or problematic inter-religious relations.

2.3 Religion, Conflict and Peace in Sub-Saharan Africa

The majority of studies on religion and conflict in sub-Saharan Africa are single case studies (Basedau/De Juan 2008: 6; Körner 2007). Comprehensive comparative studies on religion and conflict are virtually non-existent. This comes as a surprise since religion has a high social relevance in Africa, and it has apparently increased in recent years (Pew 2010; Ellis/Ter Haar 2007; McCauley/Gyimah-Boadi 2009). Systematic-descriptive studies, as discussed above, find (below-)average relevance of religious dimensions in African conflicts. Large-N studies on the causal religion–conflict link in Africa find no evidence for a significant influence of religious diversity (Collier/Sambanis 2005; Elbadawi/Sambanis 2000). Instead, Collier and Hoeffler (2002) find that high ethnic and religious fractionalisation decreases the likelihood of civil war onset in Africa. In contrast, Haynes (2005) estimates that socio-economic and political factors better explain civil war (onset) value than ethnic and religious fragmentation. Basedau and De Juan (2008) find initial support for the mobilization hypothesis. In particular, the overlap of religious and ethnic boundaries apparently makes armed conflict more likely (see also Stewart 2009).

The religion–peace nexus in Africa remains even more neglected than the religion–conflict link. The bulk of studies only discusses specific religious peace initiatives and gives no explanation for their occurrence, and at best anecdotal evidence of their impact (e.g. Haynes 2009; Abu-Nimer/Kadayifici-Orellana 2008; Johnston 1994).

Few studies focus on the religious ambivalence of conflicts in Africa. In the majority of conflicts, religion seems indeed to have both an escalating and a de-escalating influence (Basedau/De Juan 2008: 17). This is consistent with a historical study by Møller (2006), in which he traces the ambivalent behaviour of large religious communities in East Africa. A comparison of Côte d'Ivoire and Benin supports this assessment and identifies first relevant context conditions for the violence/peace behaviour of religious groups (Basedau 2009).

Summarizing the global and Africa-specific state of the art, three observations are striking: Firstly, there is a contradiction between the findings of single case studies and the results of quantitative and cross-regional studies. While religion generally plays at best a minor role in armed conflict, religion evidently impacts armed conflict and its dynamics in some particular countries such as Nigeria and Somalia (e.g. Harnischfeger 2006; Love 2006). Secondly, the data quality of most of the large-N studies seems to be questionable. Commonly, studies only measure the influence of religion with demographical constellations. Only a few studies go further and consider religious incompatibilities or general remands on religious symbols.

Thirdly and finally, the religion–peace link remains under-researched both empirically and theoretically.

3. The Database on Religion in Sub-Saharan Africa (RSSA)

The goal of the database is primarily to fill one of the gaps identified in the previous section: to make data available that exceeds the kind of data commonly used in comparative and quantitative studies on the religion–conflict/peace link. This is useful for two reasons. First, we are able to get a more detailed, accurate – or systematic-descriptive – picture of when and where religious factors are connected to conflict and peace. Second, such data allows for analysing theoretically important causal relationships of religious factors and conflict (or peace), an analysis otherwise impossible to perform due to lack of data.

Generally, the database includes three different kinds of data: (1) Data on armed conflict referring to onset, intensity, duration, termination, etc., were taken from the Armed Conflict Data Set (V. 4, Gleditsch et al. 2002; V. 3 Lacina/Gleditsch 2005) compiled by UCDP and PRIO. (2) Non-religion-specific control variables referring to surrounding demographic, social, economic and political conditions were taken from existing data, mainly from sources such as Hegre/Sambanis (2006) and Dixon (2009). (3) The third type of data constitutes the original contribution of the database to the field and contains some 50 religion-specific variables, which we believe are theoretically important. Following a multidimensional understanding of religion, we collected data referring to identities, ideational, organizational and behavioural dimensions (for an overview of variables used in this paper, see Annex I). Identity structures refer, for instance,[6] to religious demographics including the shares of religious groups, and the degrees of religious fractionalization and polarization, but also to overlaps between religious and other social identities such as ethnicity, region or class. Ideational variables are religious incompatibilities in armed or other conflicts or the resorting to religious ideas in peace efforts. Organizational religious variables include the existence of armed religious groups or inter-religious networks. With regards to the behavioural dimension, we raised data concerning (principally peaceful) politicization, escalation and de-escalation by religious actors. Did religious actors intervene in politics? Did religious violence such as clashes between different groups occur? Did religious actors incite violence or did they call for peace or even engage in peace initiatives? If possible, we made use of existing data sources which – as extensively discussed above – are largely confined to religious

[6] We do not explain and discuss particular variables at this point. Variables will be explained within the text as soon as it becomes important to do so.

demographics and the role of religion and the state (Fox 2004). For many variables, however, we had to gather the data on our own.

The database covers the years 1990 to 2008 and includes all 48 countries of sub-Saharan Africa.[7] Data were coded by year and we have a maximum of 909 observations per variable. Principally, variables were coded according to an extensive 16-page code book (available upon request) which contains concise questions and coding rules for every variable. Usually, variables were constructed either dichotomously or on nominal or ordinal scales. We were keen to maintain a uniform, consistent basis of sources in order to avoid distorted information. We used annual Africa Yearbook editions, Religious Freedom Reports and Human Rights Practices Country Reports (the latter two compiled by the US state department) as well as Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) Country Reports published on a quarterly basis. Coding was performed by the project members and proved time-consuming. It took on average approximately one week per country. We assured quality of the codings through an extensive review process including "database conferences" in which all country cases were thoroughly discussed. When necessary, code sheets were corrected afterwards.

4. Descriptive Results[8]

This section gives an overview of the descriptive results of the database. We first present our findings on religion and conflict and then move on to the results on religion and peace.

4.1 Religion and Violence

Warring factions differ by religious identities

When is a conflict a religious conflict? One possible answer (e.g. Svensson 2007) is that the conflict parties differ with regards to their religious identity, e.g. side A is primarily Christian while side B is primarily Muslim. In the database we tried to identify constellations of political conflicts in which the conflict parties differed substantially according to their religious identities. In general, we differentiated between armed and non-armed conflict. For non-armed or purely political conflicts we coded positively when our sources mentioned significant relationships between political preferences and religious identities of citizens. In the case of armed conflict (according to the UCDP/PRIO definition) we referred to such differences between the warring factions. According to the evidence in our sources, we decided whether the opponents of these differences were not (or hardly), partially or mostly

[7] Eritrea became an independent state in 1993 (before: 47 states).

[8] If not indicated otherwise, all information in the following sections derives from the above-mentioned sources in the database.

present. As shown by Table 1, such parallel boundaries are absent in more than half of the countries. Remarkable examples are notorious civil wars in Sierra Leone and Somalia, where religious identities have not separated the warring factions. In a cluster of 17 cases conflict and religious boundaries do partially run parallel. In ten cases civil war occurred. In four cases, Congo (Republic of), Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria and Sudan, we find that the boundaries between conflict parties are widely parallel. All four countries are civil-war cases and it comes as little surprise that Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria and Sudan are notorious examples for such identity conflicts. Until the comprehensive peace agreement in Sudan in 2005, Muslim government forces fought the Christian and African traditional Southern rebels. Such a religious North–South divide is typical of many West African countries. In Côte d'Ivoire and Nigeria we find bloody conflict mostly between Christian and Muslim opponents.

Table 1: Armed Conflicts and Religious Identities in Africa, 1990-2008

Conflict incidence and onset (UCDP/PRIO)[a]	Conflict parties differ by religious identity		
	No	Partly	Widely
Yes	Burundi Comoros Djibouti Guinea Guinea-Bissau Mali Mozambique* Niger Rwanda Sierra Leone Somalia Togo	Angola Central African Rep. Chad Congo, DR Eritrea Ethiopia Lesotho Liberia Senegal Uganda	Congo, Rep. Côte d'Ivoire Nigeria Sudan*
No	Botswana Burkina Faso Equatorial Guinea Gabon Gambia Kenya Madagascar Malawi Mauritania Namibia São Tomé Swaziland Tanzania Zambia Zimbabwe	Benin Cameroon Cape Verde Ghana Mauritius Seychelles South Africa	
Total	27	17	4
Conflict cases (% of total)	12 (44%)	10 (59%)	4 (100%)
Non-conflict cases (% of total)	15 (56%)	7 (41%)	0 (0%)

Notes: [a] Civil war onset with a one-year intermittency threshold. The Seychelles and São Tomé are not included in the UCDP/PRIO data and thus considered as non-conflict cases. / * = Countries with an incidence between 1990 and 2008 but no conflict onset.

Religious ideas as incompatibilities in conflict

How can we find evidence on a systematic-descriptive level that religious ideas may have constituted at least partial causes for armed conflict? One option is to identify that religious ideas were contested between the conflict parties. Such religious incompatibilities may refer to the role of religion within the state (dominance of a particular religion) or the introduction of religious laws.[9]

In the great majority of cases, religious ideas are apparently not contested between the conflict factions. However, in 13 countries we identify political conflicts in which religious incompatibilities separated the conflict factions. Again, we can differentiate whether this occurs in an armed or purely political conflict. In Benin in 1997, for example, then-President Mathieu Kérékou entered into conflict with Parliament over the intended – but eventually avoided – abolishment of an official Vodoun holiday. In Niger and Mauritania political conflicts between moderate and conservative Muslim groups over the role of Islam in politics emerged. All these conflicts were mainly or completely free from violence. In contrast, religious incompatibilities characterize eight cases with armed conflict (Chad Ethiopia, Democratic Republic Congo [DRC], Republic of Congo, Nigeria, Somalia, Sudan and Uganda, see Table 3). In Nigeria, Somalia, Sudan and Ethiopia the (attempted) introduction of Islamic law, the Sharia, played a role in the onset of armed conflicts. For instance, the Ethiopian rebels of the *Ogaden National Liberation Front* called for a holy war against the (overwhelmingly Christian-orthodox) government, in order to liberate the Ogaden region and establish an Islamic state. In contrast, the attempt to re-establish a Bakongo state in the DRC was connected to the idea of an African-Christian kingdom. The case of the DRC (and also Chad) also reminds us of the fact that conflicts with such religious incompatibilities form only part of a more complex conflict structure within these countries. Main conflict cleavages in the DRC and Chad are not connected to contested religious ideas.

Where do we find armed religious groups?

Further evidence for the relevance of religion in violent conflict derives from the finding that armed religious groups are active in a given country. What are armed religious groups? According to the understanding of the database, armed religious groups are groups actually involved in violence that have self-declared religious goals (though not necessarily exclusively religious goals). The use of religious terms in the names of the groups is an

[9] Coding of contested religious ideas between the parties derives from the self-ascribed goals of conflict actors. Such an assessment does not include any statement as to whether these ideas were merely instrumentalized by leaders or whether they result from truly religious convictions.

insufficient indicator for an armed religious group. Hence, we did not code the Malian rebel group *Front Islamique Arabe de L'Azouad* (FIAA), contrarily to Svensson (2007), as an armed religious group because we could not – despite additional and intense research – find positive evidence for religious goals of FIAA. [10]

Altogether, we identified such groups (see Table 3) in 13 countries (> 25%). Yet, important differences between these groups exist in terms of their level of activity and their origin. Sometimes these groups did not emerge from the countries in which they were active. In Tanzania and Kenya, Al-Qaida activities were mostly confined to the attacks on US embassies in 1998. In the Sahel from Mauritania to Chad, the *Al-Qaïda au Maghreb Islamique,* the North African affiliate of Al-Qaida (the former GSPC), has been active and clashed with security forces in Mauritania, Niger, Mali and Chad. Its origin is Algeria. The Ethiopian *Al-Ittihad* uses neighbouring Somalia as a base for military operations. The *Eritrean Islamic Jihad Movement* operates from safe haven Sudan. Islamic armed groups with a (more) pronounced national basis are found in Chad, Nigeria, Somalia and Sudan. In particular, the Somali Al-Shabaab has engaged in fierce battles with African Union peace-keepers and government militias. In 2010, Al-Shabaab declared its affiliation to Al-Qaida. Armed groups are not an Islamic monopoly. Besides the Christian *Lord's Resistance Army* (LRA) in Uganda, we can identify in the Republic of Congo the *Mouvement Nsilulu*, which was led by Pasteur Ntoumi and which fought against the Regime of President Denis Sassou-Nguesso from 1998 until a peace accord was reached in 2003.

How much religious violence has occurred?

The role of religion in conflict may be best captured through the prevalence of religious violence. But what is religious violence? We believe that religious violence denotes any violent event or act in which the involvement of religion is evident. According to the understanding of the database, there are four types of such events[11]: The first type includes assaults on religious targets such as clergymen or places of worship or other sacred objects. A

[10] Likewise, we have not coded the Mungiki-Sect in Kenya as an armed religious group. Despite its religiously connoted label as a "sect" no pronounced religious goals could be detected. In essence, it is an ethnic secret society (Kagwanja 2003). Uganda's *Lord's Resistance Army* (LRA) proved to be a highly controversial case within the project team. Frequently, it is reported that the LRA aims to implement the Ten Commandments by force. On closer inspection, however, this goal cannot be ultimately substantiated. Moreover, the LRA has increasingly transformed into a quasi-criminal group that sustains itself through violence and looting (Van Acker 2004). Eventually, we coded the LRA as an armed religious group because some of its leaders had claimed religious goals in interviews (Farmar 2006).

[11] Mob justice against alleged "witches" is not counted as religious violence. We only coded violent events in which a minimum of political relevance is evident or religious groups were targeted as such.

second type comprises assaults by religious actors[12] against secular targets (for instance, the attacks by Muslim extremists on pork butcheries in spring 1993 in Dar es Salaam in Tanzania). Confrontations between religious groups and government security forces form a third type. In Chad in 2008, for instance, Sheikh Ahmet Ismael Bichara had called for a holy war against the government. Subsequent clashes between security forces and the group resulted in some 70 deaths. The fourth and final type refers to "intercommunal" confrontations between different religious communities such as the bloody clashes between Christian and Muslim ethnic groups in Nigeria in recent years.

The database codes both whether and how many such events occurred and also estimates how intense the events were. The four variables were counted separately and then aggregated in an index of events of religious violence. Number of fatalities/victims were estimated, which, however, proved difficult because sources were often imprecise ("some", "several") or inconsistent (in case of varying estimates we calculated the average of maximum and minimum estimates).[13] Table 2 shows both the number of events and the (roughly estimated) levels of intensity of violence according to fatalities for the whole period of investigation.

Table 2: Fatalities of Religious Violence in Africa, 1990–2008

Estimated fatalities of religious violence 1990–2008[a]	Country
>999	Congo, DR (27), Nigeria (95), Uganda (38)
500–999	Côte d'Ivoire (9), Liberia (26), Somalia (22)
100–499	Burundi (14), Chad (17), Ethiopia (42), Kenya (31), Sierra Leone (7), Sudan (30)
25–99	Cameroon (10), Central African Republic (12), Guinea (14), Mali (10), Mauritania (10), Niger (25), Rwanda (11), South Africa (8), Tanzania (27)
1–24	Angola (5), Benin (3), Burkina Faso (1), Congo, Rep. (17), Djibouti (5), Equatorial Guinea (8), Eritrea (14), Gabon (11), Ghana (17), Madagascar (5), Malawi (12), Mauritius (14), Mozambique (5), Senegal (10), Swaziland (2), Zimbabwe (7)
0	Botswana (0), Cape Verde (10), Comoros (6), Gambia (2), Guinea-Bissau (3), Lesotho (0), Namibia (0), São Tomé and Príncipe (0), Seychelles (1), Togo (1), Zambia (0)

Notes: Numbers in brackets indicate the frequency of events of religious violence. [a] Religious violence includes assaults on religious targets, assaults by religious actors and violent clashes between religious groups or between religious groups and security forces. See also main text and Annex I.

We could identify such events of religious violence in all but five countries from 1990 to 2008. Though, frequency and intensity differ substantially. In 11 countries, mainly small island states or Southern African countries, no fatalities occurred. In one further third of cases, religious violence resulted in less than 25 estimated deaths during the whole period. Nine

[12] If not indicated otherwise, religious actors are both individuals (e.g. clergymen, leaders of religious organizations) and collective actors such as (armed) religious groups.

[13] The final coding of exact causalities has not yet been finished.

cases show between an estimated 25 and 100 religion-related deaths while in six countries religious violence claimed up to 499 lives.[14] Some of the countries with fatalities above 500 deserve brief illustration. In Liberia, believers and churches were repeatedly targeted by the warring factions. In 1990, 600 refugees were slaughtered after they had sought refuge in a church in Monrovia. In Côte d'Ivoire, the presidential elections in 2000 were marred by massive religious violence. Churches and mosques were set afire, in the suburbs of the city a mass grave was discovered with the bodies of more than 50 Muslims inside, who had apparently been murdered by government forces.

Looking at dynamics, the aggregated incidence of events of religious violence was not subject to dramatic change within the period under investigation. The climax of events is observed in 1999 and 2000 and then – after a brief increase after 2001 – decreases slowly. With regards to clusters of individual countries, four different patterns emerge. The first group comprises cases in which religious violence is constantly low and, at best, confined to sporadic incidents of very low intensity (e.g. Cape Verde, Comoros). In some countries, religious violence intensifies in particular years but, by and large, remains rather isolated (e.g. Angola, Cameroon, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Madagascar, Mauritania and Niger). In a third group, religious violence climbs to higher levels at a certain point in time and then stagnates on this level (e.g. Central African Republic, DRC, and Zimbabwe). A constantly high number of events of religious violence characterizes a final group of countries, mainly represented by Nigeria, where we find the highest number of incidents by far. The aforementioned clashes between Muslim and Christian groups claimed several thousand lives. Fighting between government forces and religious extremists also occurred in 2009 and 2010.

Summing up our descriptive findings on the role of religion in armed conflict we find that in 24 cases – half of the cases of the region – a substantial link between religion and violence can be identified (see Table 3). This is much more than other studies found. Yet, the picture has to be differentiated. In only six cases are religion and conflict connected in all the four dimensions – "identity", "ideology", "organization" and "behaviour" (Chad, Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Sudan, Uganda). DRC, Eritrea and Somalia show three affected dimensions. Four countries – Kenya, Liberia, Niger and Tanzania – have two dimensions. The remaining 11 countries show just one of the factors. Remarkably, none of these 11 cases (and none of the countries with two affected dimensions either) displays a finding in the ideological dimension. Positive findings at the ideological level usually coincide with

[14] Please note that fatalities in armed conflicts in which conflict factions differ according to religious identity or in which religious incompatibilities exist (such as in Sudan) are not automatically counted as religious violence. In any incident, the religious character has to be proven.

problems at all levels. Looking at dynamics from 1990 to 2008, no very pronounced patterns for the whole region emerge (see Annex III). Diverging religious-identity boundaries and incompatibilities in conflict are roughly stable. Proven activities of armed groups increase until 1998 and then stay roughly the same. Religious violence peaks in 2000 and then decreases again.

Table 3: Armed Conflict and Religion in Africa, 1990–2008

Country/Dimension	Identity[a]	Ideology[b]	Organization[c]	Behaviour[d]
	Conflict parties (partly) differ by religion	Religious incompatibility	Armed religious groups	Above Ø religious violence
Chad	X	X	X	X
Congo, Rep.	X	X	X	X
Ethiopia	X	X	X	X
Nigeria	X	X	X	X
Sudan	X	X	X	X
Uganda	X	X	X	X
Congo, DR	X	X		X
Eritrea	X		X	X
Somalia		X	X	X
Kenya			X	X
Liberia	X			X
Niger			X	X
Tanzania			X	X
Angola	X			
Burundi				X
Central African Republic	X			
Côte d'Ivoire	X			
Ghana				X
Guinea				X
Lesotho	X			
Mali			X	
Mauritania			X	
Mauritius				X
Senegal	X			
Total	14 cases	8 cases	13 cases	17 cases

Notes: [a] Conflict parties (armed conflict incidence) differ at least partially in terms of religious identity/ [b] Religious ideas or ideologies as incompatibility in armed conflict. / [c] Proven activity of armed religious groups. / [d] Above-average frequency of events of religious violence.

4.2 Religion and Peace

As already discussed at the beginning of the paper, religion may not only bring war but also peace (Smock 2006). In the following paragraphs, we have a look at two pertinent phenomena in which religion is clearly connected to peace.

Inter-religious networks

Inter-religious dialogue or networks are often proposed as a means to avoid inter-religious conflict. If people come together and sit down and talk, negative attitudes and action against the other religious community may be averted. The database defines a religious network as an institution that refers to a more-or-less institutionalized cooperation of different religious communities (e.g. Christians and Muslims[15]). Cooperation includes at least (more-or-less regular) meetings for dialogue but can also include more sophisticated activities. The database captures their sheer existence but also probes for the degree of institutionalization (informal/formal) as well as its regional coverage (local/regional vs. national). Instances of regional and informal networks are relatively rare. In the Central African Republic, for example, the *Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace* (CCJP) was the driving force behind an informal inter-religious network (2000–2005). The CCJP co-conducted educational and developmental programs with other religious groups throughout the country. Mostly, however, inter-religious networks have a rather formal and national character. Commonly, the major religious communities in the countries participated in these networks (e.g. Rwanda, Liberia). The activities of the inter-religious networks were often limited to common prayer ceremonies and talks between the religious leaders (e.g. Tanzania). Contrarily, some inter-religious networks were also very active in civil society and in politics (e.g. Angola, Côte d'Ivoire and Kenya). The *Inter-Religious Council* in Sierra Leone, for example, supported anti-corruption campaigns from civil society groups and supported reconciliation and rehabilitation efforts in the peace process after the end of the civil war in 2000.

Looking at the whole period from 1990 to 2008, we found such inter-religious networks in more than 75% of all cases. Their number has been constantly on the increase since 1990 (see Annex III). However, there is little initial evidence that inter-religious networks contribute to avoiding armed conflict. In more than half of all cases where inter-religious networks operated, armed conflict also occurred (see Table 4).

[15] In case one religious community comprises more than 90% of the population, we also code networks as "interreligious" in which different denominations below that level (e.g. different Muslim brotherhoods or Christian churches) are included.

Religious peace initiatives

Inter-religious networks must not be equated with (religious) peace initiatives. Peace initiatives differ as they necessarily aim to maintain or promote peace. The database defines a religious peace initiative as an enterprise by religious actors that aims to promote peace and exceeds a singular call for peace. Examples are mediations, education of local peace-promoters or lobbying for awareness of the conflict on national and international levels. A peace initiative should be explicitly (and mainly) established in order to maintain or promote peace. The promotion of peace is the main raison d'etre. For example, the *Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative* was very active in the peace process in Northern Uganda: It educated local peace-promoters and lobbied on the national and international levels for a conflict settlement. A successful religious peace initiative was the People-to-People Peace Process of the New Sudanese Council of Churches. The peace initiative organized several local conferences between the warring ethnic factions in Southern Sudan. The database also codes minor forms of religious peace initiatives if religious actors participate in a peace initiative which was founded by or comprises mainly secular actors. In addition, we coded whether or not the participation of religious actors was connected to the success of the peace initiative – that is, whether or not the armed conflict in question was settled afterwards in the period of investigation.

Table 4 shows that such peace initiatives can be identified in 18 countries. It is no surprise that peace initiatives frequently coincide with armed conflict. Only in Kenya and Tanzania are religious peace initiatives present without armed conflict in the sense that UCDP/PRIO define it. However, in both cases, religious (and ethnic) violence occurred as we have shown above. In more than half of all conflict cases religious actors participated in peace efforts, suggesting that religious peace initiatives are a reaction to violence rather than proactive prophylaxis. However, we have little evidence that these peace initiatives are particularly successful. In only five countries did conflicts end after the peace initiatives were established (Central African Republic, Mali, Mozambique, Sudan and Uganda). The most well-known instance is certainly the settlement of the civil war in Mozambique. The Catholic laymen organization *Sant'Egidio* brokered the peace agreement in 1992 (Bartoli 1999). Although the relative contribution of Sant'Egidio to ending the war in general remains subject to speculation, a substantial impact is likely in this case.

Table 4: Inter-religious Networks and Religious Peace Initiatives in Africa, 1990–2008		
Conflict incidence and onset (UCDP/PRIO)[a]	Existence of inter-religious networks	
	No networks	Networks
Yes	**Burundi** Comoros **Guinea-Bissau** **Somalia** **Togo**	**Angola** **Central African Republic (s)** **Chad** Congo, DR Congo, Rep. Côte d'Ivoire Djibouti Eritrea **Ethiopia** Guinea Lesotho **Liberia** **Mali (s)** **Mozambique (s)*** Niger **Nigeria** **Rwanda** Senegal **Sierra Leone** **Sudan (s)*** **Uganda (s)**
No	Burkina Faso Cameroon Cape Verde Mauritania São Tomé Seychelles	Benin Botswana Equatorial Guinea Gabon Gambia Ghana **Kenya** Madagascar Malawi Mauritius Namibia South Africa Swaziland **Tanzania** Zambia Zimbabwe
Notes: [a] Civil war onset with a one-year intermittency threshold. The Seychelles and São Tomé are not included in the UCDP/PRIO data and thus considered non-conflict cases. / **Bold letters** indicate a religious peace initiative – a religious peace initiative includes peace initiatives established by religious institutions and/or the active and passive participation of religious actors or institutions in conflict settlement. / (s) = Successful conflict settlement. / * = Countries with an incidence of armed conflict between 1990 and 2008 but no conflict onset.		

Calls for peace (and war)

Religious peace efforts do not necessarily take the form of institutionalized efforts such as inter-religious networks and religious peace initiatives. We thus asked whether any religious actor issued at least a single call for peace in one instance. The item also probes for more consistent calls or even active engagement in peace efforts, but here we are interested in the verbal form of peace engagement. In order to capture the "dark side" of religion we also asked

for any evidence of calls for violence by religious actors and institutions. At least, a religious actor had to legitimize violence ("active" incitement was also included) in order to be coded. The findings are grouped in a matrix in Table 5 and impressively confirm the "ambivalence of the sacred" (although this does not suggest that the calls produced substantial impact). In just eight cases we find neither pro-peace nor pro-violence verbal statements. In 15 cases, both escalation and de-escalation are present. In the Comoros and Eritrea, no calls for peace but rather calls for violence were identified. The cases showing exclusively pro-peace statements are much more frequent: Calls for peace but no escalating statements form the biggest group by far with 23 cases. Both forms of statements have increased since 1990 (see Annex III).

Table 5: Verbal Escalation and De-Escalation by Religious Actors in Africa, 1990–2008

De-escalation by religious actors[a]	Escalation by religious actors[b]	
	Yes	No
Yes	Chad Congo, DR Congo, Rep. Ghana Guinea Kenya Mauritania Niger Nigeria Rwanda Senegal Somalia Sudan Tanzania Uganda	Angola Benin Burkina Faso Burundi Cameroon Cape Verde Central African Republic Côte d'Ivoire Ethiopia Guinea-Bissau Lesotho Liberia Malawi Mali Mauritius Mozambique São Tomé Seychelles Sierra Leone South Africa Togo Zambia Zimbabwe
No	Comoros Eritrea	Botswana Djibouti Equatorial Guinea Gabon Gambia Madagascar Namibia Swaziland
Total	17	31

Notes: [a] At least sporadic or isolated calls for peace by religious actors (but also more permanent calls or active engagement in peace efforts). / [b] At least legitimisation of violence by religious actors (but also proactive incitement of violence, or active participation).

5. Preliminary Causal Analysis

This section presents some preliminary findings of regression analyses using selected variables of the described new database. In order to test whether our religious indicators have an impact on internal violence propensity, we employed two different dependent variables. The variable *onset* was taken from the UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset (version 4/2009) to measure intra-state conflict onset. The dichotomous variable *conflict onset* has a value of 1 if there is a conflict onset with more than 25 annual battle-related deaths[16]. A total of 60 civil war events happened within the period under consideration (1990–2008).[17]

In order to capture the religious overtones in conflict, we employed another dichotomous dependent variable (*religious conflict onset*) that takes the value of 1 if an intra-state conflict onset happened in which the warring factions differed substantially according to their religious affiliation. This variable corresponds with the finding in the descriptive section.[18] The variable encompasses a total of 36 internal violence episodes in 13 different countries.

Control variables were chosen in accordance with sensitivity and meta-analyses performed by Hegre and Sambanis (2006) and Dixon (2009). Given that our sample is restricted to relatively few cases (48 countries) and a short period of time (19 years), we decided to limit our base model to a total of eight control variables: total population, GDP growth, per capita GDP (all from the *World Bank Indicators*), regime durability measuring the years since the most recent regime change, the level of democracy measured by the combined polity score (both from the *Polity IV Project*, see Jaggers/Marshall 2009), ethnic fractionalization (from Fearon 2003), religious fractionalization (from Alesina et al. 2003) as well as rough terrain (from Hegre/Sambanis 2006). In addition, a variable reflecting the duration since the last event/onset (*peace*) was included in all models in order to minimize problems of temporal dependence on a history of conflict. Except for *peace*, all other independent variables were lagged one year.[19]

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[16] Usually, these are new conflicts. However, we also count new episodes of armed conflicts as onset if the conflict remained under 25 battle deaths for at least one year.

[17] Following the suggestion made by Hegre and Sambanis (2006: 523), ongoing conflict years are coded as 0s instead of dropping them from the sample, as multiple conflicts happening in the same country are not uncommon.

[18] We also created another variable for religious conflicts in which the conflicts included a religious incompatibility. However, there are only 13 cases in seven countries rendering analysis less fruitful.

[19] Likelihood Ratio Tests of the reported specification against several different nested models revealed that the applied full models have a proper specification. In addition, a stepwise inclusion of all independent variables as well as the variance inflated factor *(VIF)* indicated that the reported findings are unlikely to be driven by multi-collinearity.

Table 6 presents the results of the logistic estimations for both dependent variables.[20] The base model suggests that a mountainous terrain as well as ethnic fractionalization promote armed conflicts (Model 1), whereas more wealthy and religious fractionalized countries seems to be spared from internal violence (Model 3). When the variable measuring religious fractionalization is replaced by an indicator of religious polarization[21] (Models 2 and 4), it turns out that polarization also has a negative impact on armed conflict war onset in general as well as religious conflict onset. Thus, religious fractionalization and polarization both appear to reduce the conflict potential.

Table 6: Conflict Onset and Religious Fractionalization/Polarization

	(1) Conflict onset	(2) Conflict onset	(3) Religious conflict onset	(4) Religious conflict onset
Peace	-0.103***	-0.107***	-0.164*****	-0.157*****
	(0.0336)	(0.0333)	(0.0462)	(0.0465)
$Population_{(t-1)}$	1.97e-09	2.20e-09	5.38e-09	5.72e-09
	(7.40e-09)	(7.49e-09)	(7.50e-09)	(7.51e-09)
$Gdpgrowth_{(t-1)}$	0.0152	0.0218	0.0195	0.0251
	(0.0136)	(0.0142)	(0.0150)	(0.0157)
$Gdppc_{(t-1)}$	-0.000586**	-0.000918***	-0.000203	-0.000467**
	(0.000270)	(0.000297)	(0.000167)	(0.000193)
Regime $change_{(t-1)}$	-0.0212	-0.0110	-0.0536***	-0.0415*
	(0.0181)	(0.0171)	(0.0207)	(0.0217)
$Polity2_{(t-1)}$	0.0454	0.0422	0.0259	0.0232
	(0.0295)	(0.0305)	(0.0327)	(0.0345)
Rough $terrain_{(t-1)}$	0.344***	0.184	0.363**	0.251*
	(0.124)	(0.116)	(0.146)	(0.148)
Ethnic $frac_{(t-1)}$	1.622**	1.136	2.723***	2.106**
	(0.816)	(0.802)	(1.023)	(0.861)
Religious $frac_{(t-1)}$	-1.906***		-1.837**	
	(0.722)		(0.933)	
Religious $Polarization_{(t-1)}$		-1.510***		-1.296*
		(0.571)		(0.704)
_cons	-2.362*****	-1.793**	-3.342*****	-2.950*****
	(0.634)	(0.700)	(0.790)	(0.833)
Prob > chi^2	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000
N	711	711	711	711
pseudo R^2	0.099	0.102	0.147	0.150

Robust standard errors in parentheses, * p<0.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01, ***** p<0.001

This is hard to explain at first glance and goes at least partly against theoretical reasoning as well as previous findings that have mostly found no significance. For fractionalization one could argue that higher fractionalization increases the collective action problem as argued by

[20] In addition to the logit estimations, "rare-event logit models" as suggested by King and Zeng (2001) were equally performed for all models presented in this paper. The authors show that when binary dependent variables measure the occurrence of "rare events", standard logit or probit estimations may produce biased coefficients.

[21] The indicator is a polarization index of inter-religious structure (Christians, Muslims, African Traditionalists) constructed according to Montalvo/Reynal-Querol (2005) ranging from 0 to 1. We have recalculated the values for all sub-Saharan countries on the basis of data provided by the *World Christian Database* (see also Annex).

Horowitz (1985). Polarization, theoretically a risk according to Horowitz, might be less of a problem because the conflict potential is salient and actors do something about it. Whether this holds true, however, remains subject to further investigation.

Next, novel indicators generated by the RSSA database are included in the base model in order to test some of our preliminary hypotheses. We asked, for example, whether a change of the religious-demographic balance of power within a country affects its internal conflict propensity. Particularly, relatively shrinking groups may feel threatened, a fear that may be exploited as a mobilization resource in conflict (e.g. Slack/Doyon 2001). The variable *demogchange* has a value of 1 if the sources of the database indicate any kind of substantial demographic change and 0 otherwise, that is, whether the balance of power between religious groups changed or not. Table 7 shows that a change in the inter-religious relative strength in fact increases the risk for armed conflict (at the 10% significance level). Odds ratios reveal that a given religious-demographic change makes internal violence 2.5 times more likely. This also applies to religious armed conflicts; significance stands even at the 5% level. Both findings support theoretical predictions that demographic change may be risky.[22]

Table 7: Conflict Onset and Religious-Demographic Change

	(1) Conflict onset	(2) Religious conflict onset
Peace	-0.108***	-0.162***
	(0.033)	(0.043)
$Population_{(t-1)}$	-3.50e-08	-8.22e-10
	(8.00e-08)	(7.77e-09)
$Gdpgrowth_{(t-1)}$	0.015	0.019
	(0.014)	(0.015)
$Gdppc_{(t-1)}$	-0.0007**	-0.0003*
	(0.0003)	(0.0002)
$Regime\ change_{(t-1)}$	-0.014	-0.044**
	(0.018)	(0.021)
$Polity2_{(t-1)}$	0.064**	0.057*
	(0.020)	(0.034)
$Rough\ terrain_{(t-1)}$	0.420***	0.468***
	(0.141)	(0.165)
$Ethnic\ frac_{(t-1)}$	1.989**	3.412***
	(0.890)	(1.166)
$Religious\ frac_{(t-1)}$	-2.010***	-2.097**
	(0.753)	(0.965)
$Demogchange_{(t-1)}$	0.896*	1.028**
	(0.499)	(0.526)
_cons	-2.649*****	-3.951****
	(0.705)	(0.922)
Prob > chi^2	0.0000	0.0000
N	711	711
pseudo R^2	0.1065	0.1592

Robust standard errors in parentheses; * p<0.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01, ***** p<0.001

[22] Interestingly, democratic regimes (measured by polity2) seem to be more prone to conflict onset (see Table 7). Given that squared terms of polity2 show opposite signs (negative) this may indicate an inverted U-curve relationship between democracy and conflict as suggested by Hegre et al. (2001).

Another implication of the mobilization hypothesis assumes that countries in which religious identities overlap with other social ties (such as ethnic or social boundaries) exhibit an increased conflict potential because out-group differences become more salient and are more easily exploited.[23] In order to test this hypothesis, we included two more new variables in the outlined base model: *rel_eth_bound* (religious boundaries overlap with ethnic boundaries) and *rel_soc_bound* (religious boundaries overlap with social boundaries in terms of social stratum/economic differences). The preliminary results summarized in Table 8 below lend positive evidence for the hypothesized link between the co-existence of multiple boundaries and internal conflict onset. Models 1 and 3 confirm the increased risk for internal violence whenever religious identities run along ethnic lines. The same does not apply, though, for the co-existence of religious and social boundaries (Models 2 and 4).

Table 8: Armed Conflict Onset and Overlapping Identities

	(1) Conflict onset	(2) Conflict onset	(3) Religious conflict onset	(4) Religious conflict onset
Peace	-0.0835**	-0.101***	-0.126***	-0.159*****
	(0.0342)	(0.0337)	(0.0434)	(0.0440)
$Population_{(t-1)}$	7.02e-10	3.82e-09	3.20e-09	8.14e-09
	(7.16e-09)	(8.34e-09)	(7.04e-09)	(8.67e-09)
$Gdpgrowth_{(t-1)}$	0.0108	0.0147	0.0130	0.0191
	(0.0133)	(0.0134)	(0.0146)	(0.0148)
$Gdppc_{(t-1)}$	-0.000635**	-0.000576**	-0.000262	-0.000185
	(0.000290)	(0.000261)	(0.000237)	(0.000186)
Regime $change_{(t-1)}$	-0.0183	-0.0203	-0.0520**	-0.0535**
	(0.0194)	(0.0183)	(0.0239)	(0.0210)
$Polity2_{(t-1)}$	0.0673**	0.0471	0.0553	0.0218
	(0.0332)	(0.0302)	(0.0374)	(0.0355)
Rough $terrain_{(t-1)}$	0.362***	0.308**	0.362***	0.310**
	(0.121)	(0.121)	(0.138)	(0.143)
Ethnic $frac_{(t-1)}$	0.609	1.249	1.032	2.128**
	(0.932)	(0.826)	(1.568)	(0.832)
Religious $frac_{(t-1)}$	-2.216***	-1.590**	-1.699	-1.487*
	(0.778)	(0.698)	(1.081)	(0.836)
Rel_eth_boun $d_{(t-1)}$	0.943**		1.769**	
	(0.409)		(0.734)	
Rel_soc_boun $d_{(t-1)}$		-0.473		-0.539
		(0.470)		(0.567)
_cons	-2.143***	-2.172*****	-3.553*****	-2.996*****
	(0.661)	(0.650)	(0.865)	(0.780)
Prob > chi^2	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000
N	711	711	711	711
pseudo R^2	0.115	0.101	0.185	0.149

Robust standard errors in parentheses, * p<0.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01, ***** p<0.001

[23] Please note that this kind of parallel identity differs from differences in religious identities between the conflict parties. Here, we deal with overlaps of religious and ethnic/social identities, but not with overlaps of religious identities and the support base/members of the conflict parties.

Finally, we tested whether inter-religious networks reduce conflict potential. While it does not significantly impact conflict onset in general, to our surprise, the absence of networks reduces the risk for religious armed conflicts (Model 1 of Table 9). In contrast, informal networks seem to promote this type of conflict (compared to situations with no institutionalization or formally institutionalized networks – see Model 3). Compared to total absence of networks or the presence of local/regional networks, the availability of nationwide inter-religious networks also seems to spur internal violence (Model 4). Though this might be hard to explain, we do not believe that (informal, national) inter-religious networks do in fact spur violence and should be abolished in order to maintain peace.

Table 9: Conflict Onset and Inter-Religious Networks

	(1) Conflict onset	(2) Religious conflict onset	(3) Religious conflict onset	(4) Religious conflict onset
Peace	-0.106***	-0.166*****	-0.162*****	-0.162*****
	(0.0347)	(0.0438)	(0.0423)	(0.0450)
$Population_{(t-1)}$	1.37e-09	3.17e-09	3.00e-09	3.08e-09
	(7.41e-09)	(7.34e-09)	(8.07e-09)	(7.29e-09)
$Gdpgrowth_{(t-1)}$	0.0147	0.0169	0.0191	0.0168
	(0.0135)	(0.0145)	(0.0151)	(0.0144)
$Gdppc_{(t-1)}$	-0.000618**	-0.000286	-0.000222	-0.000296
	(0.000272)	(0.000198)	(0.000178)	(0.000199)
$Regime\ change_{(t-1)}$	-0.0214	-0.0576**	-0.0658***	-0.0593**
	(0.0184)	(0.0234)	(0.0232)	(0.0240)
$Polity2_{(t-1)}$	0.0424	0.00933	-0.00474	0.00407
	(0.0296)	(0.0324)	(0.0351)	(0.0340)
$Rough\ terrain_{(t-1)}$	0.348***	0.409***	0.410***	0.435***
	(0.124)	(0.151)	(0.151)	(0.151)
$Ethnic\ frac_{(t-1)}$	1.619**	2.780***	2.545**	2.976***
	(0.821)	(1.025)	(1.033)	(1.047)
$Religious\ frac_{(t-1)}$	-1.925***	-1.905**	-1.454	-1.980**
	(0.724)	(0.957)	(0.895)	(0.952)
$No\ networks_{(t-1)}$	-0.169	-0.713**		
	(0.308)	(0.351)		
$Informal\ networks_{(t-1)}$			1.389***	
			(0.519)	
$Formal\ networks_{(t-1)}$			0.519	
			(0.387)	
$Regional\ networks_{(t-1)}$				0.00949
				(0.962)
$National\ networks_{(t-1)}$				0.781**
				(0.356)
_cons	-2.225***	-2.974*****	-3.794*****	-3.862*****
	(0.688)	(0.846)	(0.752)	(0.799)
Prob > chi^2	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000
N	711	711	711	711
pseudo R^2	0.099	0.159	0.166	0.160

Robust standard errors in parentheses (* p<0.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01, ***** p<0.001)

More probably, we deal with endogeneity problems: The establishment of inter-religious networks is especially likely when tensions between religious communities already exist;

these tensions might escalate but particularly the informal networks are not efficient enough to avoid the onset of religious conflict. Nationwide networks might work less well compared to regional networks because the regional networks are closer to actual inter-religious tensions which often occur at the local/regional level.

6. Summary and Conclusion

Despite the many religiously diverse societies south of the Sahara and the religious overtones in a number of African conflicts, little systematic research has been done on the religion–conflict nexus in Africa. Most global quantitative studies limit analysis to demographic variables. Systematic studies on Africa are completely absent. Case studies study the religion–conflict link more closely but focus on a limited number of cases. The questions thus remain of whether or not conflicts in Africa have a religious dimension, whether religious factors significantly impact the onset of civil war in Africa, or what may explain the religious overtones in some of these conflicts.

This paper contributes to filling the gap by using a unique and newly compiled data inventory of all sub-Saharan countries for the period 1990–2008. At the systematic-descriptive level, the paper demonstrates that religion matters for conflict (in Africa). Religion and armed conflict are connected at different levels in many countries, particularly through warring factors varying by religious affiliation, religious incompatibilities, armed religious groups and events of religious violence. We also find religion to be connected to peace, a finding exemplified by religious peace initiatives and inter-religious networks. Descriptive results do not only demonstrate the relevance and ambivalence but also marked differences between countries. We found that 12 countries are particularly prone to religious violence, while more than half of the countries are not really affected by any religious dimension of violent conflict.

The utility of the database is also demonstrated by the results of a preliminary causal analysis employing multiple (logit) regressions. Though religion is certainly not the master variable to explain African conflict, findings lend at least initial suspicion that religious variables substantially impact (religious) armed conflict in Africa. Some of the results support the mobilization hypothesis. Apparently, countries with changes in religious demography and parallel ethnic and religious boundaries face a higher risk of both armed conflict in general and "religious" armed conflict. Other findings are more difficult to explain at first glance. Results suggest that inter-religious networks increase, contrary to expectation, the risk of religious armed conflict. Apparently, the establishment of inter-religious networks is

especially likely when inter-religious tensions already exist; conflict between religious groups further escalates but the networks are not strong enough to avoid the onset of armed conflict.

Hence, many challenges for future research persist. First, we still have to fully exploit our existing material. This refers to other dependent variables (e.g. incidence, duration, termination, intensity, "religious violence", non-conflict variables) and other models including variables on the politicization of religion and the behaviour of religious actors, variables on the state–religion relationship and on the (de-)escalation with reference to religion by non-religious actors.

The database is also well-suited to other methodologies. Given that we identified a group of countries with very marked influences of religion, configurational methods such as QCA that can deal with equifinality and non-linear relationships seem promising. The database may also be useful for small-N studies, in particular the selection of cases according to pertinent criteria (e.g. most-similar-systems design). In fact, the project also includes a small-N comparison of Nigeria, Côte d'Ivoire and Tanzania where cases were chosen according to similarities in religious demography but differences in violence and the role of religion therein.

Finally, we concede that our database in its present form might still leave something to be desired. As a matter of fact, the inventory contains relatively few observations – at least if multiple regressions are the methodology of choice. Hence, it would certainly be useful to expand the coverage in terms of time. Likewise, the database should be (and actually will be) expanded to other world regions (namely, Asia, Latin America, North Africa and the Middle East). It seems also promising to code data at the subnational level in order to create geo-referenced data. In any case, it will be particularly promising to have a close look at the micro level in order to really understand how religion may result in violence – or peace.

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Annex

Annex I: Variable definitions and data sources

Variable	Definition	Source
Dependent variables		
Conflict onset	Armed conflict onset (> 25 battle deaths) according to UCDP/PRIO	Harbom/Wallensteen 2009; Gleditsch et al. 2002
Religious conflict onset	Armed conflict onset in which warring factions differ according to religious identities	UCDP/PRIO conflict onsets and GIGA-RSSA
Religious independent variables		
Religious frac	Religious fractionalization index	Alesina et al. 2003, missing years imputed
Religious polarization	Polarization index of inter-religious structure (Christians, Muslims, African Traditional)	GIGA-RSSA calculated on the basis of *World Christian Database* according to the definition of Montalvo/ Reynal-Querol 2005
Demogcchange	Demographic change, 1 = any kind of substantial change according to sources of database, see also main text	GIGA-RSSA
Rel_eth_bound	Boundaries of religious identities at least partially parallel to ethnic boundaries	GIGA-RSSA
Rel_soc_bound	Religious boundaries at least partially parallel to social boundaries (class/social stratum)	GIGA-RSSA
Armed religious groups	A religious organization, which is militarily active, maintains militias or other kinds of troops, or systematically exerts violence. OR a militarily active (armed) group that pursues religious goals. Decisive is the pursuit of religious goals in the sense of a religious institution.	GIGA-RSSA
Religious violence	Violent events including: a) Attacks on religious targets b) Attacks by religious actors on secular targets c) Clashes between religious communities d) Clashes between religious (armed) groups and government security forces, see also main text	GIGA-RSSA
No networks	Absence of any kind of inter-religious networks	GIGA-RSSA
Informal networks	Existence of informal inter-religious networks (sporadic meetings, no institutionalization)	GIGA-RSSA
Formal networks	Existence of formal networks (permanent and regular meetings, institutionalized)	GIGA-RSSA
Regional networks	Inter-religious networks (i.e. activities and members) are confined to one region/province	GIGA-RSSA

Annex I: Variable definitions and data sources

Variable	Definition	Source
National networks	Inter-religious networks (i.e. activities and members) cover the territory of the whole country (at least approximately)	GIGA-RSSA
Religious peace initiatives	An initiative explicitly aiming at the promotion of peace and exceeding beyond a singular call for peace (e.g. mediations or dialogues). A religious peace initiative is either founded by religious actors are religious actors are actively participating in it.	GIGA-RSSA
De-escalation by religious actors	At least sporadic or isolated call for peace by religious actors (but also more permanent calls or active engagement in peace efforts)	GIGA-RSSA
Escalation by religious actors	At least legitimization of violence by religious actors (but also proactive incitement of violence, or active participation in peace initiatives)	GIGA-RSSA
Non religious control variables		
Ethnic frac	Ethno-linguistic fractionalization index (elf), with values from original soviet atlas	Hegre/Sambanis 2006, missing years imputed
Regime change	Regime durability, years since most recent regime change	Jaggers/Marshall 2009
Gdpgrowth	GDP growth (annual %)	World Bank: African Development Indicators
Gdppc	GDP per capita (constant 2000 US$)	World Bank: African Development Indicators
Rough terrain	Rough terrain (such as mountainous terrain)	Hegre/Sambanis 2006, missing years imputed
Polity2	Combined polity score from the Polity IV Project (autocracy and democracy index)	Jaggers/Marshall 2009
Population	Population, total	World Bank: African Development Indicators
Peace	Years since last (religious) conflict onset	Constructed on basis of UCDP/PRIO (and GIGA RSSA)

Annex II: Descriptive Statistics*

Variable	Observations	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Conflict onset	909	.0660066	.2484303	0	1
Religious conflict onset	909	.039604	.1951343	0	1
Rel_eth_bound	909	.4565457	.4983824	0	1
Rel_soc_bound	909	.1881188	.3910222	0	1
Demogchange	909	.2035204	.5426204	0	3**
No networks	909	.5522552	.4975356	0	1
Informal networks	909	.090209	.2866387	0	1
Formal networks	909	.3575358	.4795382	0	1
Regional networks	909	.0220022	.1467713	0	1
National networks	909	.4290429	.495212	0	1
Reltension	713	.7671809	.6374898	0	2
De-escalation by religious actors	909	.5984598	1.03061	0	3
Escalation by religious actors	909	.3520352	.9441151	0	4
Religious frac	909	.5023618	.254891	.0028	.8603
Religious polarization	909	.5907701	.3003853	.04	.99
Rough terrain	776	1.536626	1.405957	0	4.421247
Population	909	1.38e+07	2.13e+07	70000	1.51e+08
Gdpgrowth	866	3.834423	8.185503	-51.03	106.28
Gdppc	867	920.5724	1457.538	62.24	8692.03
Regime change	849	9.690224	11.26961	0	81
polity2	849	.1142521	5.486682	-10	10
Ethnic fractionalization	795	.7087327	.1930154	.1800001	.952575
Peace (conflict onset)	909	6.420242	5.306412	0	18
Peace (religious conflict onset)	909	7.529153	5.590512	0	18

* Table only covers variables used in the multiple regressions; ** binary variable used in regressions.

Annex III: Cumulated values of variables per annum 1990-2008

Variable/Year	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Incidence of religious conflicts (identity conflicts)	7	6	7	6	7	6	5	8	9	8	8	8	8	7	6	4	6	6	4
Religious incompatibility in armed conflict	5	5	5	4	6	4	5	5	6	6	5	6	6	3	4	4	6	6	5
Armed religious groups (activity of)	3	3	3	5	5	5	5	5	8	6	6	7	7	8	10	7	6	7	7
Estimated deaths in religious violence (min)	667	440	350	52	380	403	1032	771	1280	918	5210	689	1444	3186	1726	140	340	212	713
Estimated deaths in religious violence (max)	667	1258	1057	96	687	514	1269	883	1915	1318	7417	1208	1486	3280	2539	191	421	226	950
Inter-religious networks	9	9	10	11	12	11	11	14	14	22	25	26	28	30	31	32	33	34	35
Religious peace initiative	2	1	2	0	1	1	2	2	3	4	3	2	3	3	2	0	0	2	0
De-escalation by religious actors	6	3	4	5	4	5	5	7	6	10	11	14	14	14	16	19	18	11	15
Escalation by religious actors	2	2	5	5	6	5	4	4	9	7	6	9	11	7	9	7	7	7	8

Note: If not indicated otherwise, data refers to the number of observed incidents of activity