ROLE OF RELIGIOUS INSTITUTION IN POLITICAL CHANGE AND DEMOCRACY

Case Studies Of Democratic Republic Of Congo, Kenya, South Sudan And Ethiopia

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ROLE OF RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS IN POLITICAL CHANGE AND DEMOCRACY IN KENYA, ETHIOPIA, SOUTH SUDAN, AND THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO (DRC)

Introduction

Religious institutions play a significant role in shaping the political landscapes of various African nations, including Kenya, Ethiopia, South Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). These countries, each marked by its unique historical, socio-economic, and political context, have experienced diverse struggles for political change and democratization over the years. The role of religious institutions in these processes has garnered attention and scholarly inquiry within the respective nations. In many African nations, they represent not only religious centres but also formidable platforms for the dissemination of socio-political ideologies, civic engagement, and the advocacy of human rights. This literature review seeks to unravel the complex interplay between religious institutions, political change, and the evolution of democratic ideals in these East and Central African nations.

While the role of religious institutions in politics is not unique to this region, the dynamics and outcomes differ significantly from one country to another. Understanding the intricate roles religious institutions play in these diverse contexts is paramount in shedding light on the broader dynamics of political transformation in Africa. Through a thorough examination of existing literature, this review aims to provide insights into the contextual analysis of the aforementioned countries, which covers the socio-economic and political situations in the selected countries and challenges related to political change and democratization. The review assesses strategies employed by various faith actors, including political parties, civil society organizations, and international entities, in shaping political transitions. With a focus on religious institutions, we also analyse their specific roles, strategies, and impact on political change. This review will explore the values guiding these interventions, encompassing universal religious tenets and regional expressions. Ultimately, we will conclude with practical recommendations for harnessing the constructive influence of religious institutions in promoting political change and democracy in Kenya, Ethiopia, South Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Contextual Analysis

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has a significant religious demography, highlighting the influential role of faith-based networks in the country. However, in the twentieth century religion in the country was ignored or marginalised to the analyses of social, economic, and political phenomena. This was attributed to the dominance of non-eschatological paradigms. The paradigms were mainly influenced by the writings of philosophers and age of Enlightenment[1]

In DRC, Christianity is dominant, with approximately 80% of the population identifying as Christian. Among Christians, around 50% are Roman Catholic, while 20% are Protestant. The Kimbanguist religious movement[2] represents about 10% of the population, and Islam accounts for another 10%, primarily concentrated in urban areas. The remaining 10% encompasses various other religious organizations and traditional religions[3]. However, the complexity of the religious landscape in the DRC is characterized by overlapping affiliations, making exclusive categorizations challenging. Moreover, religious identity, similar to class and ethnic identities, is often influenced by situational factors and pragmatism.[4] Further, over 90% of the country's population are Christians with Catholic Church having powerful influence on religious issues. Religious networks have facilitated initiatives that led to the formal cessation of hostilities in the DRC. For example, in 2003 the Catholic Church joined forces with other civil society actors to give support for the Inter-Congolese Dialogue (ICD) which was convened at Sun City, South Africa.[5] During this process the Catholic Church played key role in peace restoration process through sponsoring delegates to the ICD. Working in partnership with civil society organizations religious institutions has shifted their focus on peace-building initiatives to promoting reconciliation, fostering national unity as

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[1] *Religious networks in post-conflict Democratic Republic of the Congo.* ACCORD. (2020a, February 10). https://www.accord.org.za/ajcr-issues/religious-networks-in-post-conflict-democratic-republic-of-the-congo/

[2] An African Initiated Church, founded by Baptist catechist Simon Kimbangu (1887-1951), it focused on healing and black liberation, the latter causing Kimbangu to be imprisoned for thirty years by colonial authorities. Though it became a member of the World Council of Churches, the All Africa Conference of Churches, and the Organization of African Instituted Churches, it controversially identifies its founder as an incarnation of the Holy Spirit. The WCC has withdrawn its membership.See: Martin, Marie-Louise (1976). *Kimbangu: An African Prophet and His Church* Grand Rapids, MI: William B Eerdmans; Website: www.kimbanguisme.net.

[3] *Religious networks in post-conflict Democratic Republic of the Congo.* ACCORD. (2020a, February 10). https://www.accord.org.za/ajcr-issues/religious-networks-in-post-conflict-democratic-republic-of-the-congo/

[4] *Religious networks in post-conflict Democratic Republic of the Congo.* ACCORD. (2020a, February 10). https://www.accord.org.za/ajcr-issues/religious-networks-in-post-conflict-democratic-republic-of-the-congo/

[5] Ibid

well as creating the ambience conducive for the reconstruction and resuscitation of state institutions.

Religious leaders have also been trained by Independent electoral commission (CEI) of DRC to promote awareness about elections. In 2006 Mr. Guéhenno, the Under-Secretary General for UN Peacekeeping Operations met Archbishop Laurent Monsengwo, Chairman of the Episcopal Conference in the DRC to promote civil society involvement in the ũ2006 generalĩ elections[6]. On that occasion, Archbishop Monsengwo '*told the media that civil society networks would do all they ũcouldĩ to discourage and appease those trying to create tension in the democratic process in the DRC'*. Religious leaders have also played a key role in 'healing the wounds' of the democratic transition in DRC.

Religious networks and institutions have also demonstrated their comparative advantage in delivering social justice and services in the face of mismanagement and corruption on the part of the political elite. According to Wetho and Uzodike (2006) reported that 'the onset of war in the DRC deepened the imperative for constructive engagement by faith-based groups in the public domain, not least in the area of peace building'[7].

South Sudan

Religion, religious actors and institutions in South Sudan have worked hard to preach peace. Religious leaders have also participated in signing peace agreements that have promoted peace in South Sudan. For instance, in 1998 the religion actors signed the Wunlit Peace Agreement under the auspices of the New Sudan Council of Churches which convened Dinka and Nuer chiefs and leaders to talk about peace. According to Manyok (2021) the government constitution has granted the Islam special treatment (Article 8 of the constitution) by giving it funds for the building of Islamic schools and annual financial facilitation of pilgrimages to Mecca. However, the political leaders that has been reported providing special treatment to Islam are Christians who fought against the former Sudanese government for two decades for mixing Islamic religion with the state[8].

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[6] Ibid

[7] Whetho, A. & U.O. Uzodike, forthcoming (b). Religious networks in conflict and peace: The case of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, 1996-2006.

[8] Manyok, Z. (2021). *Church, state and the ethical imagination: a phenomenological study of Christian, cultural and constitutional value clashes in South Sudan* (Doctoral dissertation, Stellenbosch: Stellenbosch University).

Based on the fav0ritism to Islamic, the Christianity was not active in South Sudan in the early years. However, Christianity rapidly grew because it was seen as stronger alternative to the religion of the oppressors in the North due to civil war that broke out in 1983 between the government in Khartoum and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) in the South. The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of South Sudan in 2013 invited the government leaders who were its member to discuss with them Article 8 in the constitution of the Republic of South Sudan 2011[9].

The imposition of the Sharia law on the whole country (Former Sudan) under President Nimeiri's resulted into war in 1983 despite the south's unique multi-ethnic and multi-religious character. The liberation struggle was mainly for political and socioeconomic self-determination and religious freedom[10]. In 2012 the World Council of Churches (WCC) reports that 60.5 % of the total population are Christians, 32.9 % adherents to African traditional religions and 6.2 % are Muslims[11]. The main religions in South Sudan include Christianity, Islam and Animism. As per the 2020 Pew –Templeton Global Religious Futures Project report findings, around 60.5 per cent of the populace follows the Christian faith, approximately 32.9 per cent are animist (indigenous spiritual practices), and Muslims account for 6.2 per cent of the population.[12] In addition, there are smaller communities of various religious affiliations, including the Baha'i Faith, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Judaism.[13]

Kenya

In Kenya, religious institutions play in social development and religious beliefs are tightly integrated in Kenya's politics, society, and economy. According to World Faith Development Dialogue report 2017, religious leaders have played key roles in Kenya's political affairs[14]. However, the roles of religious institutions and actors such as community involvement, service delivery, and political engagement have been ignored or taken for granted. For

[9] Ibid

[10] Rothfuss, R., & Joseph, Y. (2015). The role of religion in the formation of a new state on the world map: South Sudan. *The Changing World Religion Map: Sacred Places, Identities, Practices and Politics*, 3515-3540.

[11] Ibid

[12] Office of International Religious Freedom," South Sudan 2022 International Religious Freedom Report." Accessed August 18 on https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/441219-SOUTH-SUDAN-2022-INTERNATIONAL-RELIGIOUS-FREEDOM-REPORT.pdf

[13] ibid

[14] World Faith Development Dialogue (2017) .Faith and Development in Focus, Kenya

instance, during the 2007-2008 post-election violence, religious leaders were widely seen as failing to avert or address communal violence, prompting new reflections on religious roles, especially on governance matters[15]. Moreover, the public role of the Anglican Church during the general elections in 2007 was criticised because the church appeared to play a partisan role in the political campaigns.[16]

In 1986, the National Council of Churches Kenya convene a meeting under the chairmanship of Anglican Bishop David Gitari to oppose the new system of voting by the ruling party KANU (Kenya Africa National Union))by then. The gathering asked the ruling party to "to find an alternative method in which church leaders can exercise their democratic rights as members of this nation".[17] The founder Anglican Bishops, Henry Okullu, David Gitari and Alexander Muge began to call for opening up of democratic space through the re-introduction of multiparty.

In 1990 Bishop Henry Okulu supported by Dr Timothy Njoya, a Presbyterian minister critiqued the Moi ruling of one-party rule and agitated for free debate on Kenya's economic and political future. Their political call was to abandon the queuing system of voting and to free and credible elections through the establishment of electoral commission to conduct general elections.[18] The call for multi-party state by the church organizations, international groups and civil society organizations resulted into the removal of Section 2-A of the Constitution in 1991 and this paved ways for the registration of opposition parties and multi-party elections in 1992.

Religions practised in Kenya include Christianity, Protestantism, Catholicism, Islam, Hinduism and Traditions beliefs. As of 2019, over 85% of the population identified as Christians, including 33.4% Protestants, 20.6% Catholics, 20.4% Evangelicals, and 7% affiliated with African Instituted Churches, while around 11% practised Islam.[19] Politics and religion are closely related and religious leaders in Kenya are increasingly taking partisan political stands resulting into lack of trust in them by the public. In 2005, free and independent churches came together, alongside the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) and rejected the Bomas Constitution draft in the referendum. The constitution draft was rejected because it provided clauses on legalizing abortion and the establishment of the Kadhi courts.[20] Religious institutions have also acted as a voice of hope in a religious and political

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[15] Ibid

[16] Wandera J. (2012). Anglican Responses to Kadhi's Court in Kenya

[17] Ibid

[18] Ibid

[19] Lars Kamer. (2022, August). Distribution of the Population in Kenya by Religion. *Statista.* Available at https://www.statista.com/statistics/1199572/share-of-religious-groups-in-kenya/

[20] *Inter-religious Council of Kenya (IRCK), 2021* The role of free and independent churches in the context of politics and society in Kenya

scene which is much affected with corruption. Further the rise in religious-ethnic political competition and mobilization have defined the present politics and democracy in Kenya.[21]

Ethiopia

Ethiopia, officially recognised as the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia is an expansive landlocked nation located in the Horn of Africa. It is one of Africa's most populous countries, second to Nigeria with a population of 126.5 million people.[22] The major religions common in Ethiopia include Christianity, Islam, and traditional indigenous beliefs.[23] Christianity is the dominant religion in the country, with approximately 62.8% of the population identifying as Christians. The majority of Christians in Ethiopia belong to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, which has a strong presence and influence in the country at 43.5% followed by the Protestants at 18.6% and Roman Catholics at 0.7% of the Christian population.[24] Islam is the second-largest religion in Ethiopia, representing around 33.9% of the population.[25] Ethiopian Muslims are predominantly Sunni, following the teachings of the Shafi'i school of jurisprudence. Additionally, 3.3% of the population adheres to traditional indigenous beliefs[26], which incorporate various animistic and ancestral worship practices.[27] These religious traditions have coexisted in Ethiopia for centuries, contributing to the diverse and vibrant religious landscape of the country.

Between 1529 and 1543 the tension between the Othordox Christian emperors and neighbouring Muslim states faced each other in the Abyssinian–Adal War[28]. In the country's emperors move to end Christological conflict within the Ethiopian church Catholics were reconverted in the process of Orthodox state restoration in Gondar era (1632–1706). According to Haustein, Idris, and Malara (2023).the Orthodox Christianity is the oldest denomination in Ethiopia, extending back to the fourth century during the conversion of Ethiopian kings and consolidation of Christian monasticism and theology in the late fifth

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[21] Ibid

[22] *World Population Dashboard -Ethiopia | United Nations Population Fund.* (Accessed 2023, June 20.). United Nations Population Fund. https:///data/world-population/ET

[23] Abbink, J. (2014). Religious freedom and the political order: The Ethiopian 'secular state'and the containment of Muslim identity politics. *Journal of Eastern African Studies, 8*(3), 346-365. DOI: 10.1080/17531055.2014.917855; Arts and Humanities Research Council. (2018, September 20). Keeping Faith in 2030: Religions and the Sustainable Development Goals Workshop Report: Religions and Development in Ethiopia. In *https://religions-and-development.leeds.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/10/2019/02/Workshop-Report-Ethiopia-Final-corr1.pdf.*

[24] *Population of Ethiopia 2023 | Religion in Ethiopia | Find Easy.* (2021, May 24). Find Easy. https://www.findeasy.in/population-of-ethiopia/

[25] Ibid

[26] Ibid

[27] Ibid

[28] Haustein, J., Idris, A. K., & Malara, D. M. (2023). Religion in contemporary Ethiopia: history, politics, and inter-religious relations.

century.[29] The enforcement of Christian Orthodoxy between 1871–1889 strengthened Yohannes' political base in Tigray, Gondar and Gojjam, while weakening Menelik II (r. 1889–1913), who drew his strength from expanding into the Muslim and 'pagan' areas of the east and south.

In 1955 the relationship between nation and faith was amended in the revision of the constitution promulgated at Haile Selassie's silver jubilee, enshrining Orthodox Church legally as the Ethiopian Empire's established faith. However, the Protestant mission churches continued to operate under the 1944 missions' decree, with national churches not formed until the end of the Haile Selassie era.[30] The Ethiopian state have created a relationship with religion which started with the introduction of Christianity to the Aksumite kingdom. This gave the Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity more political power as a state religion before the 1974 revolution.[31] Post 1974 revolution, there was a separation between the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and the state. This sees other religions like Islam, Catholicism and evangelical Christianity being granted more freedom of worship. In December 2003 an indigenous religion known as Waqqeffana which is professed by 3% of the Oromo population secured legal recognition by the Ministry of Justice of the Federal State of Ethiopia.[32]

In Ethiopia, there is universal in religious affiliation where each and every associates with either Orthodox, Islam, or Protestantism, Catholicism and traditional religions. In 2010 the Ethiopian Inter-Religious Council (IRC) was established to demonstrate inter-religious unity and to calm any conflict related situation by jointly visiting victims of clashes and organising an inter-religious discussion event for promoting peace.[33] The study by Haustein (2023) revealed that the IRC members seemed disconnected from the realities of its initial intended purpose of formation as it is seen as government 'spokespeople' rather than representatives of their religious communities. The role of IRC has been seen as a double-edged sword. In Hawassa State Ethiopia during 2018 and 2019 clashes, the inter-religious council was seen as a failure of leadership where elders of the Sidama religious traditions and some Protestant

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[29] Ibid
[30] Ibid
[31] Serawit Bekele Debele (2018) Religion and politics in post-1991 Ethiopia: making sense of Bryan S. Turner's 'Managing Religions', Religion, State & Society, 46:1, 26-42.

[32] Serawit Bekele Debele (2018) Religion and politics in post-1991 Ethiopia: making sense of Bryan S. Turner's 'Managing Religions', Religion, State & Society, 46:1, 26-42
[33] Haustein J. (2023). Religious Polarization in Ethiopia : urban conflicts and resources for Peace

pastors were involved in nationalist propaganda and youth mobilisation that causes conflict among the people[34].

The Struggle for Political Change

Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

In the quest for political change, the DRC has undergone significant events, transitions, and challenges since independence. The DRC gained independence from Belgium in 1960 led by Patrice Lumumba. However, the political landscape has not been as smooth and conducive as expected and has been characterized by unending political instability and conflicts. One remarkable shift occurred when Mobutu Sese Seko seized power in a military coup in 1965, which toppled Patrice Lumumba's regime. Mobutu established an authoritarian regime characterized by corruption and repression that lasted for over three decades.[35] After taking power in 1965, Mobutu ruled the Democratic Republic of Congo with a focus on his interests rather than a shared vision for the country's development. There was a lack of a clear political agenda, allowing corruption, opportunism, and materialism to thrive. The distinction between Mobutu's government and those who opposed it became unclear as the conduct of the Congolese elite mirrored the prevailing political culture in the country.[36]

Another notable event in the Congolese political landscape occurred in 1997 when a rebellion led by Laurent-Désiré Kabila brought about a major political transformation in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) by overthrowing Mobutu's regime. This marked a turning point in the country's history. However, the path towards political change encountered obstacles when Laurent-Désiré Kabila was assassinated in 2001. As a result, his son Joseph Kabila assumed the presidency, but his tenure was plagued by political instability, ongoing armed conflicts, and allegations of human rights violations. The DRC continued to face challenges in its journey towards a stable and democratic political landscape.[37] Notably, Joseph Kabila's presidency in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) was marked by the concentration of political, military, and economic power in his hands, which undermined existing institutions and deviated from the 2006 constitution. Amendments were made to the constitution to benefit Kabila in the 2011 presidential election, reducing its credibility and legitimacy. The organization of the elections in 2011 was chaotic, and suspicions of fraud

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[34] Ibid

[35] Tull, D. M. (2010). Troubled state-building in the DR Congo: the challenge from the margins. *The Journal of Modern African Studies, 48*(4), 643–661. http://www.jstor.org/stable/40961832

[36] The challenges facing democratic consolidation in the Democratic https://infinitypress.info/index.php/jsss/article/viewFile/114/112

[37] Encyclopaedia Britannica (2023, May 31). Joseph Kabila. Encyclopedia Britannica. https://www.britannica.com/biography/Joseph-Kabila

further eroded Kabila's legitimacy. His attempts to secure an unconstitutional third term in power sparked popular protests led by the Catholic Church, civil society groups such as *Lutte pour le Changement* (Struggle for Change) or LUCHA and opposition figures such as Moise Katumbi advocating for political change within the country. [38]

In 2018, the presidential elections marked a significant turning point in the quest for political transformation. Despite notable delays, these elections achieved a historic milestone by facilitating the peaceful transfer of power, a first in the country's post-independence history. As a result, Félix Tshisekedi succeeded Joseph Kabila and assumed the presidency, signifying a new era of leadership in the Democratic Republic of Congo.[39] However, the election results were disputed and the elections could not pass international standards for credibility. According to a post-election assessment by the Carter Centre, the general elections held in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in 2018 did not meet international standards due to various shortcomings.[40] The implementation of electoral laws and regulations lacked consistency and faced political interference.

The electoral institutions, including the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI), made controversial decisions that infringed upon democratic rights, such as cancelling the presidential vote in certain areas and limiting campaigning.[41] Media coverage and campaign freedom were also restricted, with opposition parties disproportionately affected.[42] The lack of transparency in the results-management process further undermined the credibility of the provisional results, as disaggregated data was not released for verification. The absence of effective legal remedies to protect fundamental rights and freedoms compounded these issues.[43] Also, the Catholic church in DRC which had deployed a large number of observers, determined that Martin Fayulu had won the 2018 election by a significant margin, which was not surprising given their extensive coverage of voting

[38] Kennes, E. (2023). Decisive elections in the DRC. https://www.egmontinstitute.be/app/uploads/2023/04/Erik-Kennes_Paper_120_vFinal.pdf; Perera , S., Kambale , V. A., & Bussy, J. M. (2018). *Youth Participation and Non-violent Resistance in the Democratic Republic of Congo: The Case of LUCHA.* Developmental Leadership Program. https://dlprog.org/wpcontent/uploads/publications/X60G6tVUz8jcNdB0OaGNZ5BPJHWAsEJ1OPub PxRg.pdf

[39] UN News. "First Peaceful Transfer of Power in DR Congo 'an Extraordinary Opportunity' for Advancing Rights." 2019. https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/03/1034971.

[40] Ibid.

[41] "Elections in DR Congo: Reducing the Risk of Violence." 2023. International Crisis Group. December 8, 2023. https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/great-lakes/democratic-republic-congo/312-elections-en-rd-congo-limiter-les-risques-de-violence.

[42] Ibid.

[43] The Carter Center. (2018). *Democratic Republic of the Congo 2018 Harmonized Presidential, Parliamentary and Provincial Elections Expert Mission Report.* The Carter Center https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/news/peace_publications/election_reports/drc-2018-election-report-final-en.pdf

locations by their election monitors and observers.[44] However, considering the challenging political circumstances and the unlikelihood of new elections, political actors had to confront the harsh reality and let Félix Tshisekedi stay as the president.

South Sudan

Before it was recognized as an independent State in 2011, South Sudan was part of Sudan which gained independence in 1956.[45] Whereas Sudan was jointly controlled by Britain and Egypt between 1899 and 1955, Britain systematically excluded the southern part of the country through policies.[46] The British policies The north of Sudan was more developed and received greater attention in terms of infrastructure and administrative concentration, whilst the south of Sudan was frequently overlooked. Upon attaining independence, Sudan experienced long periods of civil conflicts which have been deemed to be Africa's lengthiest, resulting in two million deaths and the displacement of four million people.[47] These conflicts pitted the people of the northern part of Sudan against those in the southern part, as the latter viewed their northern counterparts as oppressors. This motivated the southern part of Sudan to fight and demand political power which was mainly held by in the north, natural resources and the right to their own cultural identity. The issue of cultural identity was particularly core to the people of the south as there had been several attempts by northern Sudan to Islamize and Arabize the whole of Sudan even though the majority of the south were either Christians or African traditionalists.[48]

The struggle of the southern part of Sudan culminated in the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005 which suggested a new beginning for the people of the south as it stipulated for a referendum whereby the people would decide on their autonomy

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[44] Congo Research Group and Ebuteli. (2022). The Catholic Church in the DRC A Neutral Arbiter or at the Heart of Protests? https://cic.nyu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/report-crg-ebuteli-the-catholic-church-in-drc.pdf

[45] Deng,Francis M., "Sudan – Civil War and Genocide: Disappearing Christians of the Middle East," *Middle East Quarterly* 8, no. 1 (Winter 2001): 13–21.

[46] Ibid

[47] Peter Martell, "After Independence, What Next for South Sudan?" *Africa Renewal,* August 2011, http://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/august-2011 /after-independence-what-next-south-sudan.

[48] Sarwar, N. (2011). Breakup of Sudan: challenges for North and South. *Strategic Studies*, 31(1/2), 224–240. https://www.jstor.org/stable/48529353

status.[49] The results of the plebiscite which took place on January 9th 2011 saw a majority of those who participated in the voting decide that the south should secede from the north.[50]

The secession of South Sudan from Sudan was not only significant for its people but also historic in the African continent as it was the first that had been occasioned by a vote as opposed to the secession of Eritrea from Ethiopia – that came about as a consequence of Ethiopia's defeat by Eritrea.[51] The status of an independent state has unfortunately not shielded South Sudan from conflict as the country was plagued by civil war two years later. This was elicited by a supremacy battle within the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A), which was at the forefront of advocating for South Sudan's independence. The top leadership of the party, President Salva Kiir and Vice President Riek Machar, moved in different political directions. The split exacerbated ethnic tensions between the two dominant ethnic groups, the Dinka and Nuer, and later spilled over to other ethnic groups in the country.[52]

The tussle between the two leaders led to the formation of a breakaway faction in the SPLM led by Riek Machar which adopted the name Sudanese People's Liberation Movement in Opposition (SPLM-IO). This prompted the rise in conflict in the country and consequently, external pressure from regional actors was exerted on the two leaders to have a truce. The result of the pressure led to the signing of the 2018 Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS).[53] The R-ARCSS was further extended for a period of 24 months and a transitional government formed. The South Sudanese leaders have made the commitment to fully implement the agreement as they prepare for the elections in December of 2024. Viewed as a communal and inter-ethnic conflict, several states in the country were affected including Jonglei and Warrap, and, as observers note, the tendency towards increased conflict occurs whenever there is real or

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[49] "The Comprehensive Peace Agreement Between the Government of the Republic of the Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Sudan People's Liberation Army," n.d., http://unmis.unmissions.org/Portals/UNMIS/Documents/General/cpa-en.pdf.

[50] Southern Sudan Referendum Commission, "Southern Sudan Referendum Final Results Report," 7 February 2011, p. 13, http://southernsudan2011.com /sites/default/files/Final_Results_Report_20110206_1512.pdf.

[51] Ibid note 4

[52] Mutasa, C., & Virk, K. (2017). The Challenges of Building Peace in South Sudan. In *Building Peace In South Sudan: Progress, Problems, and ProspectS* (pp. 10–12). Centre for Conflict Resolution. http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep05143.6

[53] Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED). (2021). Surface Tension: 'Communal' Violence and Elite Ambitions in South Sudan. https://acleddata.com/2021/08/19/surface-tension-communal-violence-and-elite-ambitions-in-south-sudan/

perceived rivalry between the leaders.[54] The consequence of long periods of marginalisation has seen South Sudan still lag in some of its socio-economic aspects manifested in forms of illiteracy, poor infrastructure, poverty and lack of basic health services.[55] The situation has further been degenerated by the return of its citizens who had fled to neighbouring countries in search of refuge as they compete for access to social services that are already limited.[56] As recently as 2022, Human Rights Watch[57] noted that the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) documented that more than seven million people were food insecure, which was attributable to not only the conflict situation but also climate change and poverty, thus classifying the situation as one of the worst humanitarian crisis since the attainment of independence by South Sudan.[58]

Whereas the country has more than sixty ethnic groups, the eruption of the civil war in 2013 took an ethnic trajectory in the fight for the country's resources between the two largest ethnic groups of Dinka and Nuer, to the detriment of the other ethnic groups. This has been blamed on the lack of capacity to handle diversity by the country's leadership.[59] Furthermore, a comparison has been drawn of what has been seen as attempts of dominion by the Dinka tribe similar to the domination of the Arab north during the struggle for independence.[60] This has, therefore seen the concentration of resources within the confines of power, with those belonging to the two dominant ethnicities being beneficiaries contrary to the expectations of the people of South Sudan and observers after independence. As the north of former Sudan was deemed a perpetrator of human rights violations to the people of the south, it was anticipated that the narrative would change following the attainment of self–rule by South Sudan. This has, however not been the case as South Sudan and, in particular, SPLM/A has been at the forefront of human rights violations against its people since the signing of the peace agreement in 2005.[61]

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[54] Ibid
[55] Bereketeab, R. (2014). Post-Liberation State Building in South Sudan: Potentials and Challenges. *Journal of African Foreign Affairs*, *1*(1), 25–60. https://www.jstor.org/stable/26664015
[56] Ibid
[57] Human Rights Watch (2023*). South Sudan. Events 2022.* https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/south-sudan
[58] Ibid note
[59] Ibid
[60] Ibid
[61] Jok, J. M. (2016). *National Security Versus Basic Liberties: Human Rights Challenges in South Sudan.* Sudd Institute. http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep11036

Furthermore, in 2014, the National Security Law was passed, which authorized security forces to bypass the Constitution to counter security threats to the country.[62] Loosely interpreted, this can be construed as giving the security officers a blank check to deal with real and imagined security threats, generating leeway to target dissenting political voices in the country. The 2022 Human Rights Watch Report on the events of South Sudan paints a grim picture of the human rights violations that have been spearheaded by authorities, with civilian killings, destruction of property and cases of displacement being documented.[63]

Kenya

In its quest for independence, Kenya began the process of detachment as one of the colonies of Britain in the year 1922, a journey marked by years of conflict that ended in 1963.[64] In the same period, several uprisings from neighbouring states were also agitating for their independence from their respective colonies.[65] While the country's push for independence bore fruit on December 12, 1963, many pundits considered Kenya's democratic tussle far from over.[66] This, they argued, was because the oppressor had shifted from being a white man to being a black man (the political elites). Ten years prior, an uprising known as Mau Mau – mainly comprised of the Kikuyu ethnic community, put up a spirited fight against the British colonialists who, as a result, responded by subduing the rebellion by not only using resources but also butchered civilians and curtailed the rights of the natives in different regions of the colony.[67] Whereas the tactics employed by the British occasioned severe consequences for both civilians and members of the Mau Mau, it was an awakening call to them that things would not remain the same.[68]

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[62] Ibid

[63] Human Rights Watch (2023). *South Sudan: Events 2022.* https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/south-sudan

[64] Insight Guides. Kenya history and timeline. Available at: https://www.insightguides.com/destinations/africa-middle-east/kenya/historical-highlights ; Ochieng, W.R. (1985), *A History of Kenya* (Nairobi: Macmillan Kenya); Anderson D (2005). *Histories of the Hanged: The Dirty War in Kenya and the End of Empire.* London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson; Elkins C (2005). *Imperial Reckoning: The Untold Story of Britain's Gulag in Kenya.* New York: Holt Paperbacks

[65] Insight Guides, Ibid

[66] History Channel. *Kenya declares independence from Britain.* Available at: https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/kenya-declares-independence-from-britain

[67] Ibid; see also: Anderson, D. (2005), *Histories,* passim.; Elkins, C. (2005), *Imperial Reckoning,* passim.

[68] Ibid

In 1957, eight Africans were elected to the Legislative Council for the first time.[69] The subsequent years saw several changes, including the fall of racial barriers, independence and regular elections.[70] Additionally, as a sign of 'goodwill' on their part, several reforms in the economic sector were introduced by the colonialists such as access to land ownership for coffee growing which was hitherto a preserve of the Europeans.[71] Under the independence banner, Kenya got its first President – Jomo Kenyatta, who was elected on the Kenya National African Union (KANU) ticket following the party gaining the majority of seats in the 1961 and 1963 elections. During Kenyatta's subsequent rule, several opposition parties were suspended but this did not bar parliamentary candidates from contesting for parliamentary seats which led reference of Kenya as an open society as compared to its counterparts.[72] Following the untimely demise of Jomo Kenyatta in 1978, the then vice-president Daniel Arap Moi ascended to power as president. His tenure was manifested by the oppression of the rights of the citizens, a compromised judiciary, clamp down on non-governmental organizations and manipulated elections marked by limited freedom of campaigns by opponents.[73]

In the spirit of native land ownership introduced by the colonialists, subsequent regimes oversaw the allocation of land to landless Kenyans through a scheme that advocated for individual ownership of land.[74] Consequently, almost a third of the previous British-owned extensive lands were occupied by Africans by the end of the 1970s.[75] A key example was the distribution of a million-acre settlement scheme in 1976 that saw 430,000 hectares allocated to 34,000 families.[76] The lands allocated were fertile and supported the growth of cash crops including tea and coffee, hence increasing the output of coffee and tea produced by Africans to 70 per cent in the 1980s from nil at independence.[77] On its end, the Government motivated the farmers by subsidizing not only marketing infrastructure but also

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[69] Rouyer, A. R. (1975). Political Recruitment and Political Change in Kenya. *The Journal of Developing Areas, 9*(4), 539–562. http://www.jstor.org/stable/4190299
[70] Ibid
[71] Ibid
[72] Throup, D. (1993). Elections and Political Legitimacy in Kenya. *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute, 63*(3), 371–396. https://doi.org/10.2307/1161427; Cf. Branch D (2011). *Kenya. Between Hope and Despair, 1963–2011*. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press,
[73] Throup, Ibid
[74] Ndegwa, S. N. (1998). Citizenship Amid Economic and Political Change in Kenya. *Africa Today, 45*(3/4), 351–367. http://www.jstor.org/stable/4187233
[75] Ibid
[76] Gurushri Swamy, "Kenya: Patchy, Intermittent Commitment," in Ishrat Husain and Rashid Faruquee, eds., *Adjustment in Africa: Lessons from Country Case Studies* (Washington, D.C.: The World Bank, 1994), p. 236.
[77] Ibid

fertilizers.[78] The strategies put in place by the government contributed to the rise in rural household earnings and the yearly economic growth of 5 per cent between 1974 and 1982.[79] Despite the efforts made to spur economic growth through the Kenyan farmers, the country's economy faced hardship in the 1980s that was occasioned by recession amid a rapidly growing population.[80]

The challenges experienced in the young republic, coupled with the human rights violations under the Moi regime, were condemned by several actors including the press, churches, the legal profession and the judiciary in certain instances.[81] While these actors were vocal against the atrocities committed against Kenyan citizens, the majority of them belonged to the Kikuyu ethnic community as they felt that they were the greatest casualties of the Moi regime as most of their leaders had been censured.[82] It was not until 2002 that Kenya witnessed a peaceful transition after the onset of multi-party elections in 1992. This was however short-lived after the succeeding elections were marred by violence following contested presidential election results five years after in 2007. It is estimated that more than 1,000 Kenyans lost their lives with several injured and others internally displaced.[83] Interventions by the Western nations and the African Union through the then United Nations Secretary General the late Kofi Annan saw the quelling of the violence as the conflicting parties agreed to a power-sharing deal between the two top contenders Mwai Kibaki and Raila Odinga hence the birth of a coalition government.[84]

Drawing on lessons from the 2007 elections and the 2010 constitution, the 2013 elections, although marred by rigging allegations, were relatively peaceful. Similar to the 2002 transition, 2013 saw the peaceful inauguration of the Uhuru Kenyatta administration, marking the end of the Mwai Kibaki era. These elections established a precedent in line with the 2010 Constitution. Building on the 2013 experience, the 2017 elections initiated the next phase of Kenya's political and economic development. Significant reforms, aligned with the 2010 Constitution, have since led to sustained political stability, fiscal growth, and social expansion in recent years. However, persistent challenges include issues such as transparency,

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[78] Ibid
[79] Ibid
[80] Ibid
[81] Ibid; on the churches see: Gifford, P (2009), *Christianity Politics and Public Life in Kenya* London: Hurst & Co., Sabar, G (2002), *Church, State, and Society in Kenya: From Mediation to Opposition, 1963-1993* London: Frank Cass.
[82] Ibid
[83] Jalloh, C. (2011). *Situation in the Republic of Kenya.* Available at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5305/amerjintelaw.105.3.0540
[84] Ibid

accountability, poverty, limited private sector investment, youth unemployment, inequality, and the economy's vulnerability to internal and external shocks. While there is an argument that colonial introduction of capitalism in Africa emphasized destructive material accumulation, Kenya's economy exhibited notable growth between 2015 and 2019, with an average rate of 4.8%. This growth contributed to reducing the country's poverty level from 36.5% in 2005 to 27.2% in 2019.[85]

The COVID-19 pandemic affected the economy in 2020 as several sectors were interrupted including tourism, international trade, transport and urban services. The saving grace of the period was the persistent agricultural sector which ensured that the GDP of the country minimally shrank to only 0.3%.[86] A year later in 2021 following containment measures put in place by the government the Kenyan economy began reviving thus leading to a growth of 7.5% in some of the previously affected sectors excluding the tourism sector.[87] Furthermore, it was estimated that there was a potential GDP growth of 5.5% in 2022 and a decline in the poverty level which was high during the pandemic period.[88] There is, however, uncertainty on the duration of the economic growth due to issues such as including through Kenya's exposure (as a net fuel, wheat, and fertilizer importer) to the global price impacts of the war in Ukraine.[89]

Ethiopia

Ethiopia's political journey from independence to the current government has been characterized by significant shifts and challenges. During the Scramble for Africa in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, European powers aggressively sought to colonize and control parts of Africa. This was due to imperialistic ambitions, economic interests, and competition among European nations. However, Ethiopia stood out as one of the few African countries that maintained its independence under Emperor Menelik II.[90] Italy posed a significant challenge to Ethiopia, attempting to expand its influence in the Horn of Africa through the 1889 Treaty of Wuchale. The treaty dispute led to the First Italo-Ethiopian War, culminating

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[85] World Bank (2023), *ibid*
[86] Ibid
[87] Ibid
[88] Ibid
[89] Ibid
[90] Demelash, H. (2011). Does Ethnic Federalism Promote Conflict? Ethiopia as a Case Study. *Comparative Political Studies*, *45*(12), 1543. http://jsaw.lib.lehigh.edu/campbell/demelash_hiwot.pdf

in the pivotal Battle of Adwa in 1896.[91] Despite being outnumbered, Ethiopian forces under Menelik II's leadership decisively defeated the Italians, sending a powerful message of African resistance and independence. Emperor Menelik II led Ethiopia to victory in the Battle of Adwa against the Italians in 1896. Italian influence in Ethiopia increased after the Great Famine of 1888-1892, allowing them to find allies for their impending invasion. Tension escalated with the signing of the Wuchale Treaty in 1889, which had two versions—one in Amharic and one in Italian, granting more power to the Italians. Emperor Menelik II rejected the treaty, leading to a full Italian invasion under General Oreste Baratieri. Due to poor planning by the Italians and Ethiopia's numerical superiority, Emperor Menelik II achieved victory.[92]

The Battle of Adwa was significant, elevating Ethiopia's status internationally and inspiring pride and unity among Ethiopians. The Italians signed the Treaty of Addis Ababa, recognizing Ethiopia's independence. The victory became a symbol of independence and dignity for Ethiopia, influencing their national identity even to this day. Ethiopia's 1896 triumph at Adwa showcased that African nations could resist European aggression, earning the country international respect. Ethiopia remained independent during the colonial era and served as an inspiration to other African nations seeking freedom.[93] In the 1930s, Italy attempted to colonize Ethiopia again during the Second Italo-Ethiopian War, leading to a brief period of colonial occupation. Emperor Haile Selassie's rule was characterized by absolutism, concentrating power in the monarchy and favouring the nobility economically. His 1931 proposed Constitution sought to centralize executive power but lacked legitimacy due to limited public involvement and civil liberties. Ethiopia faced Italian occupation between 1936 and 1941, a consequence of weakened unity and civil administrators in power.[94]

Ethiopia gained independence from Italy in 1941 after unsuccessful colonial conquest and domination under the patronage of Emperor Haile Selassie by the Italian forces.[95] During the period, Ethiopia underwent a period of modernization and reform under Emperor Haile

[91] Fikremariam, M. (2020). Ethiopia: A Rising regional power?
https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/475696644.pdf
[92] Ibid.
[93] Ibid
[94] Ibid
[95] Bayu, B. (2022) Ideological Differences in the Sino-Ethiopian Relations from the Early 1950s to the Late 1960s. *Open Journal of Political Science*, **12**, 125-143. doi: 10.4236/ojps.2022.122008; Encyclopædia Britannica,. (n.d.). *The rise and reign of Haile Selassie I (1916–74)*. Encyclopædia Britannica. https://www.britannica.com/place/Ethiopia/The-rise-and-reign-of-Haile-Selassie-I-1916-74

Selassie. However, the transformation journey was not without challenges. Heightened discontent and demands for political participation grew among various groups, leading to widespread protests in the 1960s and early 1970s.[96] In 1974, a committee of junior military officers (the Derg) overthrew Emperor Haile Selassie's regime and implemented Marxist-Leninist policies. The new government's authoritarian rule, human rights abuses, and devastating famine in the 1980s led to discontent and resistance.[97] Like its predecessor, the Derg regime also faced armed opposition from groups like the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP) and the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF).

A notable shift that subsequently shaped Ethiopia's clamour for political transformation occurred in 1991. The Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) successfully overthrew the authoritarian Marxist-Leninist Derg regime, which ruled the country since 1974.[98] The EPRDF established a federal system and implemented political and economic reforms, but criticism of human rights violations and ethnic tensions persisted, leading to ongoing protests and political unrest in subsequent years.[99] This development marked a transition from a socialist authoritarian regime to a new political arrangement through a new constitution, multi-partyism and electoral processes.[100]

The EPRDF, led by Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, introduced a new political ideology called "Revolutionary Democracy." This ideology aimed to establish a system of ethnic federalism, recognizing the ethnic diversity of the country and devolving power to regional states based on ethnic identity.[101] The EPRDF's approach to state-building and nation-building involved granting self-governance to different ethnic groups, allowing them to have their own regional governments and cultural institutions.[102] However, widespread

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[96] Ibid
[97] Ibid
[98] Jean-Nicolas Bach (2011) *Abyotawi* democracy: neither revolutionary nor democratic, a critical review of EPRDF's conception of revolutionary democracy in post-1991 Ethiopia, Journal of Eastern African Studies, 5:4, 641-663, DOI: 10.1080/17531055.2011.642522
[99] Ibid
[100] Challenges and prospects of democratization process in Ethiopia - core. (n.d.). https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/234690384.pdf
[101] Zegeye, A. (2022). Revolutionary Democracy: A Terminus or Way Station for Ethiopia? *Journal of Developing Societies, 38*(4), 463–482. https://doi.org/10.1177/0169796X221125269
[102] Samuel, E. (2022). Diasporas as Agents of Political Change: The Role of the Oromo Diaspora in the 2015 Oromo Protest in Ethiopia. *Ethiopian Journal of the Social Sciences and Humanities, 18*(1), 33-63. https://www.ajol.info/index.php/ejossah/article/view/235266

protests in 2018 and demands for political change led to the appointment of Abiy Ahmed as the Prime Minister[103], marking a new era of reform and liberalization.

The adoption of a new constitution in 1994 was a significant milestone in Ethiopia's political transition. The constitution enshrined principles of federalism, democracy, and human rights.[104] It established a parliamentary system with regular multi-party elections, providing a framework for democratic governance in the country. Elections have been held in Ethiopia since the political transition in 1991, although the level of competitiveness and credibility has been a subject of debate. The EPRDF and its affiliated parties have been dominant in the political landscape, winning the majority of seats in successive elections until 2019 when the EPRDF and its affiliate parties were dissolved and merged into a new party (Prosperity Party) by the Prime Minister of Ethiopia and then the chairman of EPRDF Abiy Ahmed.[105] However, opposition parties have also participated, and some have gained representation in the Ethiopian Parliament.

The National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) is responsible for conducting elections in the country, at various levels including national, regional, and local. NEBE's primary mandate is to ensure the integrity, transparency, and fairness of the electoral process.[106] This includes voter registration, education, candidate nomination, ballot preparation, logistics, polling management, and result announcement. NEBE establishes guidelines and regulations to ensure compliance with electoral laws, and it also handles election-related disputes and complaints, conducting investigations and making decisions on irregularities or violations. [107] It establishes mechanisms for addressing grievances, conducting investigations, and making decisions regarding electoral irregularities or violations. By upholding electoral standards and facilitating citizen participation, NEBE contributes to the consolidation of democracy and the peaceful transfer of power in Ethiopia upholding the credibility and legitimacy of the electoral process.

The Role of Different Actors in Democracy and Politics
Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)

[103] International Crisis Group. (2019, February 21). Managing Ethiopia's Unsettled Transition. https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/ethiopia/269-managing-ethiopias-unsettled-transition
[104] Ibid
[105] Ibid
[106] *National Election Board of Ethiopia.* https://nebe.org.et/en/about-nebe
[107] Ibid

Various key actors are involved in democracy and politics in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Firstly, the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI) plays a vital role in electoral preparations, encompassing candidate registration, logistics, electoral process training, legal issue resolution, polling management, result collection and tabulation, and communication/public relations.[108] One of the significant tasks undertaken by the CENI is the implementation of new electoral legislation. For instance, in December 2017, a new electoral law was approved by President Kabila,[109] aiming to address the structural flaws of the Congolese political system. The legislation aimed to reduce the high number of candidates in past elections by introducing electoral thresholds mandating a minimum share of the total vote for parties to qualify for seats in national and regional parliaments. Additionally, it raised the non-returnable deposit for candidates, curbing smaller parties and legislative fragmentation.[110] These reforms sought to streamline the electoral process and enhance the functioning of the political system.

The CENI encountered a major hurdle in managing voter registration. Conducted between July and August 2017, the process recorded over 46 million potential voters, exceeding expectations. Despite a substantial government budget allocation, the registration faced opposition and Catholic Church criticism due to cited irregularities and concerns about the voter register's accuracy.[111] These challenges underscored the importance of ensuring a transparent and credible voter registration process, as it forms the foundation for free and fair elections.[112] Furthermore, the electoral calendar and limited transition period posed significant challenges. The CENI aimed to finish the entire electoral cycle, including local elections, by February 16, 2020. Critics, including political and civil society groups, argued that this schedule favored President Kabila and his ruling party, given their organizational and resource advantages. Conversely, the tight schedule disadvantaged the numerous and fragmented opposition parties, who needed more preparation time. Despite scepticism, most parties tried to adhere to the CENI's calendar, underscoring the complexities and constraints of organizing elections in the DRC.[113]

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[108] *DRC - Commission Electorale Nationale Independante - ECF-SADC.* ECF. (2023, April 27). https://www.ecfsadc.org/members/drc-commission-electorale-nationale-independante/

[109] *Elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.* ACCORD. (2019, September 5). https://www.accord.org.za/conflict-trends/elections-in-the-democratic-republic-of-the-congo/

[110] International Crisis Group. (2018, April 4). Electoral poker in DR Congo | Crisis Group. https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/democratic-republic-congo/259-electoral-poker-dr-congo; CEPPS. (2018a). Support to DRC Elections Assessment Report.https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/CEPPS_DRC_Assessment_Report_Final_09.01.pdf

[111] Ibid

[112] Ibid

[113] Ibid

Secondly, civil society organizations play a crucial role in promoting political change and democratic processes, often in collaboration with faith-based groups and other governmental and non-governmental agencies. These actors are key in democratic processes as they enhance the social contract between the governed and the governors.[114] They engage in activities such as advocating for policy changes, overseeing governmental actions, increasing public awareness, delivering services to marginalized communities, and advocating for citizen participation in decision-making procedures.[115] Non-religious civil society actors have been involved in the political process in collaboration with religious groups. Several civil society organizations that play a crucial role in politics and peacebuilding have collaborated with the Justice and Peace Commission of the Catholic Church in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to advocate for political change.[116] A female religious leader from in DRC noted that the Diocesan Justice and Peace Commission in provided crucial insights into the role and impact of religious institutions in Lubumbashi. She highlighted recent reconciliations in Lubumbashi involving the Katangese and political leaders in disagreement, with religious leaders playing a pivotal role in facilitating the process. She actively participated in leading workshops that brought together Kasaïan leaders and young Katangese. In moments of tension, the participants recognized her as a Reverend Sister, seeking her perspective. Before speaking, she prayed for guidance, acknowledging the complexity of the situation. The trust in God and the perceived presence of God in religious leaders contributed to successful reconciliation efforts among political leaders, bringing joy to all involved. Pope Francis played a major role in reconciling the Congolese people together during his visit in 2023. Thus, religious leaders are vital in promoting political and democratic change due to their power and purpose of bringing people back to God and each other.

Community-based NGOs, through extensive mediation networks, have greatly advanced democracy in the DRC. They played a pivotal role in challenging President Kabila's attempt to extend his rule beyond constitutional limits. Civil society in the Democratic Republic of the Congo formed alliances and coalitions with opposition parties to challenge the ruling party's status quo. Prominent figures and parties in these alliances

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[114] Van Leeuwen, M., & Verkoren, W. (2012). Complexities and Challenges For Civil Society Building In Post-Conflict Settings. *Journal Of Peacebuilding & Development*, *7*(1), 81–94. https://www.jstor.org/stable/48603411

[115] Pinckney, J., Butcher, C., & Braithwaite, J. M. (2022). Organizations, resistance, and democracy: How civil society organizations impact democratization. *International Studies Quarterly*, *66*(1), sqab094. https://doi.org/10.1093/isq/sqab094; The Africa Center for Strategic Studies. (2017, July 21). *The role of civil society in averting instability in the DRC*. Africa Center for Strategic Studies. https://africacenter.org/spotlight/role-civil-society-averting-instability-drc/

[116] Ibid

included Étienne Tshisekedi's Union for Democracy and Social Progress, Vital Kamerhe's Union for the Congolese Nation, and Eve Bazaiba Masudi's Congolese Liberation Movement.[117] By uniting with opposition parties and mobilizing public support, the civil society aimed to bring about political change and prevent the consolidation of power within the ruling party.

The United Nations recognized the importance of non-state actors in fostering democracy in the DRC and held consultations with civil society organizations. These consultations aimed to encourage their active participation in the electoral process and ensure their voices were heard, creating a more inclusive political environment. An illustrative case is the Lutte pour le Changement – 'LUCHA' (Struggle for Change) movement, a grassroots movement led by young activists advocating for political reform and social justice.[118] LUCHA emerged as a response to the political challenges faced by the country and has gained significant traction among the youth population.[119] Through peaceful protests, advocacy campaigns, and community mobilization, LUCHA has become a prominent voice in demanding political accountability and democratic change in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Political parties serve as platforms for like-minded individuals to seek representation in decision-making bodies, such as Parliament, through elections. They aim to secure government positions, advocate for their constituents' interests, champion policies aligning with voter priorities, and develop party programs outlining their principles, goals, and policy stances.[120] In the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), political parties have played a vital role in the political landscape and the process of political change. They advocate for policy reforms, represent diverse interests, and shape public opinion while influencing decision-making. In the realm of political change and democracy, DRC's political parties have been pivotal in challenging the status quo and advocating for democratic reforms.[121] They have organized and mobilized opposition movements, formed coalitions, and presented alternative governance visions. For instance, during President Joseph Kabila's attempt to

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[117] Ibid

[118] An interview with Bienvenu Matumo - ROAPE. https://roape.net/2022/06/28/the-struggle-for-change-in-the-congo-an-interview-with-bienvenu-matumo/

[119] Perera, S., Kambale, V. A., & Bussy, J. M. (2018, May 31). *Youth participation and non-violent resistance in the Democratic Republic of the Congo: The case of lucha.* Africa Portal.://www.africaportal.org/publications/youth-participation-and-non-violent-resistance-democratic-republic-congo-case-lucha/

[120] Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties. (2014, September 3). *The purpose of political parties.* Democracy | Government.nl. https://www.government.nl/topics/democracy/the-purpose-of-political-parties

[121] Ibid.

exceed constitutional term limits in 2018, political parties and opposition coalitions united against his unconstitutional third term bid. They mobilized the public, coordinated with like-minded organizations, and campaigned for political change and Kabila's retirement from the presidency.[122]

Another commendable achievement of the Congolese democratic landscape was the commitment to shunning violence by opposition parties in the previously concluded presidential elections of 2018, despite enduring years of exclusion and frustration caused by previous fraudulent elections.[123] By opting for non-violent strategies, they safeguarded a positive political trajectory for achieving a democratic transition, facilitating the realization of authentic democratic reforms without fear of the emergence of political conflicts in the fragile country. Through their efforts, political parties have been involved in pushing for constitutional reforms, term limits, and the promotion of democratic principles to ensure a more inclusive, accountable, and representative political system in the country.

The international community, comprising regional organizations, global institutions, and foreign governments, plays a pivotal role in bolstering democratic processes in the DRC.[124] Their support has been indispensable for democratic initiatives in the country, particularly in resolving political standoffs and ensuring the success of democratic endeavors.[125] Collaborating with local stakeholders, including religious and civil society groups, the United Nations and other international actors have worked to promote stability and address underlying sources of instability. For instance, they pressured President Kabila to publicly declare his non-intention to seek re-election, a silence he maintained until his prime minister's announcement in June 2018. This helped alleviate tensions surrounding the timing of elections.[126] The selection of Emmanuel Shadary as the ruling party's presidential candidate, a trusted ally of Kabila, partly resolved concerns about his intentions. While the international community viewed the election calendar as progress, scepticism persisted among many Congolese people due to ongoing tensions, historical conflicts, and violent

[122] Ibid

[123] Africa Center for Strategic Studies. (2019, January 13). *DRC election results suggest a rare chance for change.* Africa Center for Strategic Studies. https://africacenter.org/spotlight/drc-election-results-suggest-a-rare-chance-for-change/

[124] ReliefWeb. April 19, 2023. Global Community Must Bolster Efforts to Decrease Tensions in Great Lakes Region, Special Envoy Tells Security Council, Highlighting Role of Regional Peace Plans. https://reliefweb.int/report/democratic-republic-congo/global-community-must-bolster-efforts-decrease-tensions-great-lakes-region-special-envoy-tells-security-council-highlighting-role-regional-peace-plans.

[125] Ibid.

[126] International Crisis Group. (2018, April 4). Electoral poker in DR Congo | Crisis Group. https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/democratic-republic-congo/259-electoral-poker-dr-congo

protests that resulted during the pre-election period, which were met with excessive force by the state.

Recognizing the importance of regional cooperation, the African Union (AU) has played a major role in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) through the establishment of a liaison office in Kinshasa and engaging in preventive diplomacy talks with Congolese political actors and regional leaders.[127] The AU Peace and Security Council expressed its support for the implementation of the Saint Sylvester Agreement and called for technical, logistical, and financial support for the elections from the region and the international community.[128] Moreover, the involvement of regional powers and neighbouring countries in the election process was notable, with some expressing frustration towards President Kabila's lack of cooperation, while others, including SADC and several foreign countries, called for the respect of the election calendar.[129]

The involvement of regional, and international powers/organizations and neighbouring countries in the election process has been very important. The United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) was mandated to provide technical assistance and logistical support for the electoral process.[130] However, the Congolese authorities rejected any assistance from MONUSCO, considering the election as an internal matter funded by the government.[131] The international community's support and engagement have been crucial in facilitating peacebuilding efforts in the DRC. Collaboration with local stakeholders, diplomatic initiatives, and logistical support have aimed to promote stability, address underlying issues, and ensure the success of the democratic processes in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

The media in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has also played a crucial role in advocating for political change and democracy. As a key source of information and public opinion, the media has the power to shape public discourse, hold government officials

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[127] International Crisis Group. (2018, April 4). Electoral poker in DR Congo | Crisis Group. https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/democratic-republic-congo/259-electoral-poker-dr-congo
[128] Ibid
[129] *World Report 2019: Rights trends in Democratic Republic of Congo.* Human Rights Watch. (2019, January 17). https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/democratic-republic-congo
[130] *Briefing Security Council on Democratic Republic of Congo, special representative underscores need for credible electoral process, despite unrest - Democratic Republic of the Congo.* ReliefWeb. (2018, March 8). https://reliefweb.int/report/democratic-republic-congo/briefing-security-council-democratic-republic-congo-special
[131] *Elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.* ACCORD. (2019, September 5). https://www.accord.org.za/conflict-trends/elections-in-the-democratic-republic-of-the-congo/

accountable, and mobilize citizens for democratic participation.[132] During periods of political change and transition, the media has often served as a watchdog, exposing corruption, human rights abuses, and other injustices. Journalists have investigated and reported on government actions, providing transparency and giving a voice to marginalized communities. Through investigative journalism, the media has shed light on issues that would otherwise go unnoticed, helping to build public awareness and pressure for political reform.[133]

The media plays a crucial role in promoting civic engagement and democratic values by providing platforms for public debate and discussion through various channels like print, broadcast, and online media. This fosters dialogue among political actors and ensures diverse perspectives are heard, contributing to a more inclusive and pluralistic political landscape. Additionally, the media informs citizens about their rights and responsibilities, supports voter education, and encourages participation in electoral processes. For example, in Kasai, DRC, media professionals are actively working to promote peace. They have established a committee to address biased reporting and reduce violent conflicts during elections. This committee, created through a workshop organized by Action pour la paix et la Concorde (APC) and Interpeace, aims to promote conflict-sensitive reporting and raise awareness about the impact of irresponsible journalism.[134] This initiative is part of a broader project in collaboration with the provincial government, reflecting the media professionals' commitment to contribute to a more peaceful and democratic society.[135] By disseminating information about candidates, party platforms, and electoral procedures, the media has empowered citizens to make informed choices and actively participate in shaping the country's political future.

However, journalists in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) face numerous challenges that hinder their ability to report freely and independently on the country's democratic processes.[136] The country's media landscape is marked by threats, violence, and self-censorship.[137] Journalists are often subjected to physical attacks, intimidation, and

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[132] Fleshman, M. (2007, April). *Congolese media defend democracy | africa renewal.* United Nations. https://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/april-2007/congolese-media-defend-democracy
[133] Ibid
[134] Monica. (2023, February 16). *Media Professionals in Kasai establish a committee for Promotion of Peace in DRC.* Interpeace https://www.interpeace.org/2023/02/media-professionals-in-kasai-establish-a-committee-for-promotion-of-peace-in-drc/
[135] Ibid.
[136] Monica. (2023, February 16). *Media Professionals in Kasai establish a committee for Promotion of Peace in DRC.* Interpeace https://www.interpeace.org/2023/02/media-professionals-in-kasai-establish-a-committee-for-promotion-of-peace-in-drc/
[137] Ibid.

harassment, particularly when covering sensitive political issues or exposing corruption.[138] The lack of legal protection and impunity for those who target journalists contribute to a climate of fear and self-censorship. Additionally, economic constraints, media ownership by politicians and limited resources in the media industry make it difficult for journalists to carry out their work effectively. The combination of these challenges severely restricts press freedom and the ability of journalists to fulfil their crucial role as democratic watchdogs and informers in the DRC.[139]

South Sudan

Different actors have played distinct roles in the struggle for political change in South Sudan. This includes both internal and external actors. This includes international actors, regional organizations, South Sudan's government, non-intergovernmental institutions, civil societies, religious institutions, influential people and youths among others. Especially with the war in South Sudan that erupted after independence, many stakeholders have put efforts to end the conflict, while others have stepped in for humanitarian assistance and potential funding to aid the country grow and relieve it from the phase of struggle.

Following the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement, women's organizations in South Sudan, including the South Sudan Chamber of Women Entrepreneurs (SSCWE) and the Sudan Women Entrepreneurs Association (SWEA), sought to empower women in the country through capacity building, in cooperation with others such as the women's caucus of women parliamentarian of the SPLM that focuses on advocating for equality.[140] Women's organizations were additionally fundamental in providing information at the local level with the South Sudan Women General Association (SSWGA) being credited for interpreting the CPA into local languages and distributing them to ten states during the referendum.[141]

Notably, the December 2013 conflict outbreak caught the international community by surprise. The humanitarian sector faced challenges in expanding its efforts to reach the most

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[138] Ibid.
[139] Internews. (2023, May 5). *Democratic Republic of Congo - information saves lives.* https://internews.org/region/democratic-republic-of-congo/
[140] Mai, N. J. H. (2015). *The Role of Women in Peace–Building in South Sudan.* Sudd Institute. http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep11051
[141] Ibid

severely impacted, particularly by constrained access and inadequate readiness.[142] A varied civil society exists in South Sudan and because of their proximity to communities affected by disasters, they substantially enhance the relevance of humanitarian interventions. For example, in 2014 conflict erupted in Leer, Unity State and the community fled and upon return, the International Committee of the Red Cross initiated food distribution efforts in Leer town.[143] According to Oxfam, the Universal Intervention and Development Organization (UNIDO) in this situation could not match the scale of food provision, hereby collaborating with Christian Aid to offer cash vouchers, non-food items, and materials for temporary shelter to the most vulnerable households[144]

Being the newest and 193rd member of the United Nations, the conflict that rocked the young nation saw interventions and pressure from within and without the country.[145] The United States (US) led calls for a cease-fire in South Sudan which resulted in the signing of the agreement on the resolution of the conflict in the Republic of South Sudan on 17th August 2015.[146] While there were strained relations between Juba and the US since December 2013, the latter was deemed to be instrumental in the CPA and, hence has been considered the most powerful external sponsor of the agreement.[147] Other external actors that played a role in the country's political change include the European Union (EU) and neighbouring states such as Kenya, which deployed resources to enhance capacity building in sectors such as education and health.[148]

While it has been argued that intervention in the South Sudan conflict by Western nations is driven more by their self-interests, the involvement of regional actors such as the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) has been viewed as best placed to ensure South Sudan's stability is realized under the context of 'African solution to African problems'. As endeavours to broker a truce between the government and the opposition were

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[142] Oxfam "Missed Out: The Role of Local Actors in the Humanitarian Response in the South Sudan Conflict." Accessed 14 August on https://www-cdn.oxfam.org/s3fs-public/file_attachments/rr-missed-out-humanitarian-response-south-sudan-280416-en.pdf
[143] Ibid
[144] Ibid
[145] Mutasa, C., & VIRK, K. (2017). The Role of External Actors in South Sudan. In *Building Peace In South Sudan: Progress, Problems, and Prospects* (pp. 30–33). Centre for Conflict Resolution. http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep05143.12
[146] Ibid.
[147] Ibid
[148] Ibid

futile, IGAD took the initiative of aiding peace talks between the two sides of the conflict.[149] IGAD's intervention has not been without its fair share of challenges as its intervention has been marked by numerous methods that have, in certain instances, led to the duplication of some roles assigned by the regional economic bloc.[150]

The religious leaders in South Sudan have also been at the forefront of championing for social change in politics and democracy in South Sudan. A religious leader who was part of the Focus Group Discussion in South Sudan noted that religious leaders in South Sudan act as caretakers of God's creation, advocating against mistreatment of the environment. He further emphasized the role of religious leaders in times of conflict, where they have served as stewards in society, providing support, shelter, and education to those affected. Their pivotal role in instilling hope is crucial. During the 2013 war, religious leaders were instrumental in promoting peace through their preaching efforts. The wars in South Sudan inflicted considerable suffering, prompting the religious leaders to offer counselling services to those affected and provide essential resources like food and clothing to displaced individuals during conflicts. The religious leader also noted that the leaders particularly from various churches have been at the forefront of speaking for the disadvantaged, urging dialogue and peace during wars. Some religious leaders even participated as mediators in the peace agreement signed in Addis Ababa.

Another religious leader observed that religious leaders in South Sudan have played a pivotal role in advancing education, as seen with the Catholic Church establishing various educational institutions at primary, secondary, and tertiary levels. Leveraging their networks, these leaders have actively sought funds and provided scholarships for economically disadvantaged students who cannot afford tuition fees. Consequently, with significant influence in South Sudanese society, religious leaders, particularly the South Sudan Council of Churches, are trusted voices advocating for the people. Their recommendations, such as initiating a national dialogue from grassroots to top levels after the Addis-Ababa peace agreement, garnered widespread support. Despite some suggestions from the national dialogue remaining unimplemented, many South Sudanese actively engaged in the process, guided by the religious leaders' messages of peace, reconciliation, unity, and the shared identity of being one people during the South Sudan National Dialogue.

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[149] Radon, J., & Logan, S. (2014). South Sudan: Governance Arrangements, War, and Peace. *Journal of International Affairs*, *68*(1), 149–167. http://www.jstor.org/stable/24461710

[150] Wight,Patrick. (2017). South Sudan and the Four Dimensions of Power-Sharing: Political, Territorial, Military, and Economic. *African Conflict and Peacebuilding Review*, 7(2), 1–35. https://doi.org/10.2979/africonfpeacrevi.7.2.01

Kenya

A diverse array of actors operating within the societal framework intricately influences the dynamics of political change and the advancement of democracy. Each participant contributes to the complex tapestry of change, encompassing government bodies, political parties, civil society organisations, and grassroots movements. Gaining insight into the multifaceted processes of political transition and the establishment of democratic institutions necessitates comprehension of the distinct roles these stakeholders fulfil and how they engage with each other. These stakeholders include international actors, regional actors, government entities, political parties, civil society organizations, media, electoral bodies, youths and grassroots movements, traditional and religious leaders and women organizations, among others.

The International community has played a significant role in building peace in Kenya. International entities like the United Nations, regional organizations, and foreign administrations frequently collaborate with Kenya to foster democratic principles, offer expertise, and facilitate peaceful shifts in political leadership. For instance, the 2007 elections brought about a deadly wave of post-election violence that claimed 1,000 lives and around 350,000 people displaced.[151] This prompted the then AU Chair, President John Kufuor of Ghana, through a consensus by the African Union Peace and Security Council, to hold a mediation between the warring factions, Mwai Kibaki and Raila Odinga.[152] Dr. Koffi Annan, the former Secretary General of the United Nations, later took control of the mediation process 149 to end the humanitarian crisis.[153] This was done through the Panel of African Eminent Personalities/Panel of the Wise.[154] Koffi Annan was facilitated the discussions on the National Accord, an agreement approved by the parliament to create the foundation for the Coalition Government.[155] It is noted that the Constitution of Kenya 2010 came into effect two years after the National Accord was signed. The agreement to share power, facilitated by Kofi Annan on behalf of the African Union, played a significant role in stopping violence in Kenya.[156]

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[151] Mary Kimani. (2008, April). East Africa Feels Blows of Kenyan Crisis. African Renewal. Available at https://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/april-2008/east-africa-feels-blows-kenyan-crisis

[152] Tinashe Sithole & Lucky E. Asuelime. (n.d) The Role of the African Union in Post-Election Violence in Kenya. Department of Politics and International Relations, Johannesburg, South Africa. https://journals.co.za/doi/pdf/10.10520/EJC-e5aca3f5e

[153] Ibid

[154] Ibid

[155] Ibid

[156] Ibid

The Independent Electoral Boundaries Commission of Kenya, being one of the actors in political change and democracy, plays a significant role. After the enactment of the new constitution, the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) was established in 2011, and subsequently, on March 4, 2013,[157] to serve as a body that oversees that elections are free and fair. During the 2007 elections, it is stipulated by Mérino that the lack of dependability and impartiality in the approaches to arranging elections (encompassing electoral boundaries, voter registration, compilation procedures, transmission, and mainly result validation) played a significant role in initiating the onset of violence.[158] As much as the electoral body is not entirely responsible for the losses of lives and displacement, it played a significant role in steering the rise of the conflict, as earlier stated.

Actors such as the civil society in Kenya have assumed a pivotal role in ensuring governmental accountability and advocating for a governance approach rooted in human rights principles. Among the key responsibilities of the Kenyan civil societies took the lead in 2020 the lead in uncovering instances of corrupt behaviour among public officials and calling for enhanced governance standards.[159] The civil society have also assumed the responsibility of vigilant monitors, carefully scrutinising how government officials and various entities wield their power. They achieve this by shedding light on potential instances of power misuse, generating concern, and passionately pursuing advocacy methods from public displays to legal proceedings.[160] Furthermore, civil society has emerged as a noteworthy participant in initiatives focused on mitigating conflicts and advocating for fundamental democratic principles. This encompasses fostering tolerance, temperance, collaboration, and recognizing diverse viewpoints.

Ethiopia

Ethiopia has undergone significant political and democratic changes, but these transitions have been accompanied by challenges that have required strategic approaches and involvement from various actors to address them. Since 1991, the Ethiopian political

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[157] Mathieu Mérino. (n.d). Kenya: The Role of the EMB in Electoral Reform. Available at https://aceproject.org/ace-en/topics/lf/annex/lfc/kenya-the-role-of-the-emb-in-electoral-reform/mobile_browsing/onePag
[158] Ibid
[159] Ndung'u Wainaina. (2020). The Role of Kenyan Civil Society in Democratic Governance. The Elephant. Available at https://www.theelephant.info/op-eds/2020/10/16/the-role-of-kenyan-civil-society-in-democratic-governance/
[160] Ibid

landscape has been under the firm control of the EPRDF.[161] This dominance has been accompanied by uncompetitive elections and the implementation of restrictive legislation targeting antiterrorism, civil society, and media. Through these means, the EPRDF has successfully cemented its authoritarian rule, resulting in the marginalization of opposition parties, the silencing of independent news sources, and the suppression of dissent in all its forms.[162] Under the leadership of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, Ethiopia has implemented political reforms and promoted democratic institutions as a key strategy. This approach aims to foster a more inclusive and participatory political system. Some notable measures include releasing political prisoners, removing restrictions on media and civil society organizations, and creating space for opposition parties to engage in the political process.[163] Consequently, efforts have been made to establish diverse political parties, promoting pluralism and democratic change[164]. Recent years have seen initiatives to encourage the formation of new parties, fostering a more inclusive political landscape and granting opposition groups opportunities to contribute to democratic processes.[165] These reforms are intended to cultivate political pluralism, uphold freedom of expression, and safeguard human rights.

Ethiopia's political figures have committed to addressing historical injustices and promoting healing and forgiveness. To facilitate dialogue and reconciliation, Ethiopia established the National Reconciliation Commission in 2018 as part of the broader political and social reforms.[166] The commission is a platform for different ethnic and political groups to address grievances and promote peace, provides space for victims and perpetrators to share their experiences, seek understanding, and work towards reconciliation.[167] By acknowledging past atrocities and promoting dialogue, the Commission seeks to contribute to healing and building trust among different groups in Ethiopian society. This initiative acknowledges the importance of inclusive and transparent processes in resolving conflicts and promoting political stability and democracy.

[161] Badwaza, Y., & Temin, J. (2018, September). *Reform in Ethiopia: Turning promise into progress.* Freedom House. https://freedomhouse.org/report/policy-brief/2018/reform-ethiopia-turning-promise-progress
[162] Ibid
[163] Ibid
[164] Gedamu, Y. Y. (2018). Understanding Ethiopia's Survivalist EPRDF Coalition and Recent Political Changes: Any Hope for Democracy? *International Journal of Ethiopian Studies, 12*(2), 97–118. https://www.jstor.org/stable/27026557
[165] Badwaza, Y. ., & Temin, J. . (2019). Aspirations and Realities in Africa: Ethiopia's Quiet Revolution. *Journal of Democracy, 30*(3), 139-153.https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/aspirations-and-realities-in-africa-ethiopias-quiet-revolution/
[166] Dersso, S. A. (2021, September 17). *Ethiopia's experiment in reconciliation.* United States Institute of Peace. https://www.usip.org/publications/2019/09/ethiopias-experiment-reconciliation
[167] Ibid

International and local actors have played a crucial role in politics and democratic change in Ethiopia. They have provided support, guidance, and resources to promote stability, democratic processes, and human rights as well as facilitating dialogue, mediating conflicts, and providing technical assistance to strengthen democratic institutions, electoral processes, and the rule of law.[168] International actors have also contributed to peacebuilding efforts and reconciliation processes, helping to address underlying grievances and promote inclusive political participation. Local leaders (elders, religious figures, and community leaders), have played a significant role in national dialogues on political change and democracy by leveraging their influence, experience and legitimacy, thus preventing political manipulation by political elites.[169] Communities in Ethiopia have a deep understanding and respect for their local leaders, facilitating their effective engagement in democratic dialogue processes.

By engaging with the Ethiopian government, local leaders, stakeholders, as well as international actors have in the past exerted diplomatic pressure for political change, advocated for human rights, and supported efforts to ensure transparency, accountability, and respect for fundamental freedoms in Ethiopia. For instance, the United Nations, the African Union, and regional bodies like the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD)[170] have played a very big role in supporting Ethiopia's political and democratic changes in areas such as electoral processes and human rights promotion.[171]

The role of civil society organizations and the media has also been crucial in driving political change in Ethiopia. These actors have been instrumental in advocating for human rights, democratic reforms, election monitoring and observation, conducting civic and voter education, advocacy and stakeholder engagement in democratic spaces, calling for freedom of media and expression, and holding the government accountable.[172] For instance, the Coalition of Ethiopian Civil Society Organizations for Elections (CECOE) is an umbrella of Ethiopian civil societies that fosters collaboration and cooperation on election-related

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[168] *The Ethiopian national dialogue: To the making or breaking? | Democracy in Africa.* (2023, May 8). Democracy in Africa | a Resource for the Study of Democracy in Africa. https://democracyinafrica.org/the-ethiopian-national-dialogue-to-the-making-or-breaking/
[169] Ibid
[170] Asfaw, G. K. (2017). *The Crucial Role of IGAD in the Horn of Africa.* International Journal of African and Asian Studies. https://www.iiste.org/Journals/index.php/JAAS
[171] Ibid
[172] *Ethiopia must respect rights to protest and media.* (2023, April 17). Amnesty International. https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/04/ethiopia-government-should-respect-the-right-to-peaceful-protest/; *PUBLICATIONS / CECOE.* (n.d.). PUBLICATIONS | CECOE. https://cecoe.org/downloads/publications/

activities. CECOE serves as a platform for dialogue between civil society organizations, electoral management bodies, political parties, and other stakeholders involved in the electoral process.

Through these dialogues, the coalition seeks to address electoral concerns, share best practices, and contribute to the development of a robust electoral system in Ethiopia. By actively engaging in election-related activities, CECOE strengthens democratic institutions, fosters a culture of political pluralism, and empowers citizens to exercise their right to vote freely and fairly.[173] Consequently, Amnesty International has been at the forefront of calling the Ethiopian government to respect the right to peaceful protest, and the need to protect freedom of expression and freedom of the press in many instances, recent being the unrest experienced in the Amhara region.[174] Civil society organizations have played a vital role in raising awareness, facilitating public discourse, and ensuring transparency and justice in the political process.

During the focused group discussion held in Ethiopia, the participants affirmed that various religious institutions actively engage in political and democratic matters in Ethiopia. The denominations frequently mentioned included the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, Islamic, Apostolic Church of Ethiopia, Hiwot Berhan Church, Full Gospel Believers Church, Mekane Yesus Church Lutheran Church, and Catholic, among others. Historically, in the 1960s, the Ethiopian government recognized only the Ethiopian Orthodox Church as a Christian denomination, leading Pentecostal churches and other denominations to practice privately and maintain a low profile. A religious leader in the focused group discussion emphasized that "the Orthodox Church used to be the main church of Ethiopia, granted many privileges by the government, and was often referred to be the government church." A youth representative added that youth groups have been at the forefront of promoting the Pentecostal churches movement, facilitated by the Ethiopian Evangelical Student Association operating on all university campuses in Ethiopia. It was evident that evangelical churches and the Orthodox Church are actively involved in voicing concerns on political change and democracy in the country.

Role of Religious Institutions in Political Change and Democracy
Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

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[173] Ibid
[174] Ibid

Religious leaders and institutions in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) have played significant roles in the country's political landscape, particularly about political change, elections, and democracy. First, they have been at the forefront of peace negotiations, mediating conflicts, and promoting peace in the DRC. Through their involvement in peace negotiations and reconciliation efforts, they have fostered dialogue and resolved conflicts at national and local levels. One notable example is their contribution towards the Inter-Congolese Dialogue (ICD) that led to the Sun City Agreement in 2003, a crucial step in ending the Second Congo War.[175] Representatives from the Catholic Church used their religious authority ultimately facilitating compromises on key issues and establishing a roadmap for political transition and democratic elections. Through the Inter-Congolese Dialogue (ICD) held at the Sun City resort in South Africa, an agreement for a transitional government ended political rivalries in DRC. The Inter-Congolese Dialogue at Sun City created an environment conducive to dialogue and reconciliation, addressing underlying tensions and promoting social cohesion, ethnic harmony, and economic stability.

Moreover, the Catholic Church in the DRC, particularly through the National Episcopal Conference of the Congo (CENCO), mediated and negotiated the Saint Sylvester Agreement in 2006[176] between the government and the opposition. This agreement outlined the end of Joseph Kabila's presidency and prohibited constitutional amendments for a third term, paving the way for the 2017 general elections. However, Kabila did not honour the agreement hence religious institutions participated in public protests despite state intimidation which eventually forced him to call for the 2018 presidential elections.[177] Furthermore, religious leaders actively promoted reconciliation and social cohesion post-elections, encouraging peaceful dispute resolution and facilitating dialogue among rival political factions, crucial for a peaceful transition of power.

Religious leaders in the DRC have also demonstrated a unique ability to promote peaceful coexistence and bridge divides in conflict resolution efforts, particularly in the North Eastern parts of the country. Congolese religious leaders have many times expressed their

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[175] *Religious networks in post-conflict Democratic Republic of the Congo.* ACCORD. (2020a, February 10). https://www.accord.org.za/ajcr-issues/religious-networks-in-post-conflict-democratic-republic-of-the-congo/

[176] *World Report 2019: Rights trends in Democratic Republic of Congo.* Human Rights Watch. (2019, January 17)https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/democratic-republic-congo

[177] *Elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.* ACCORD. (2019, September 5). https://www.accord.org.za/conflict-trends/elections-in-the-democratic-republic-of-the-congo/; Eneflo, K. (2019). The role of religion in the democratization process A Case Study on the Catholic Church in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. http://uu.divaportal.org/smash/get/diva2:1322567/FULLTEXT01.pdf

commitment to interfaith initiatives for peace in the region and emphasized their support for the efforts of the authorities to restore law and order. Religious leaders involved in the platform have advocated for inclusive governance structures that accommodate the interests of diverse groups as well as initiatives to promote forgiveness and social cohesion, aiming to restore relationships and rebuild communities after violent conflicts. Furthermore, interfaith religious leaders have called on the faithful to actively promote peace, highlighting the importance of regular ecumenical prayers as a means to foster peace thus creating an enabling environment for democracy to thrive.[178] By engaging with conflicting parties and addressing underlying issues, religious leaders have significantly influenced the political landscape of the DRC, contributing to stability and the advancement of democratic values.

Voter education is a fundamental pillar for any election, empowering citizens with the necessary knowledge they need to navigate the political system, understand their rights, and make informed choices at the ballot. By informing voters about the voting process and locations, voter education enables active participation in democracy. This education is essential for the legitimacy of elections, equipping voters with the awareness and skills necessary to cast valid ballots and engage effectively in shaping their collective future.[179]

Religious leaders and institutions in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) have played a pivotal role in promoting democratic participation and ensuring peaceful, fair elections through voter education and mobilization efforts. During the 2018 general elections, the Catholic Church led a campaign for transparent and fair elections in the DRC, utilizing its influence to promote awareness of active participation, conduct voter education programs, and deployment of observation teams to monitor the voting process. They also engaged with political figures to encourage dialogue and peaceful transitions.[180] Also, in anticipation of the 2023 elections, the National Episcopal Conference of Congo (CENCO) collaborated with the Church of Christ in Congo (ECC), a coalition of 64 Protestant and Evangelical denominations, to raise awareness among their followers about exercising democratic rights through voter registration.[181] These initiatives have cultivated a culture of democratic engagement, bolstered the credibility of the electoral process, and motivated citizens to shape the political landscape

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[178] AfricaNews. (2022, December 5). *Religious leaders meet in Eastern DRC.* Africanews. https://www.africanews.com/2022/12/04/religious-leaders-meet-in-eastern-drc//

[179] United Nations. (n.d.). *Chapter 5.* United Nations. https://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/wps/publication/Chapter5.htm

[180] Ibid

[181] Al Jazeera. (2023, January 24). *Catholic Church urges DRC citizens to vote as election looms.* News | Al Jazeera. https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/1/24/congos-catholic-church-says-enlist-and-vote-as-election-season-looms

of their nation. During the elections, religious leaders, have deployed teams to polling stations, ensuring transparency and reporting any violations.[182] For instance, in the recently concluded elections, the National Episcopal Conference of Congo (CENCO), representing the Catholic Church, actively monitored the electoral process during the 2018 presidential elections deploying around 40,000 election observers, thus demonstrating the church's commitment to a peaceful and fair electoral process.[183] CENCO's observation and subsequent release of accurate and independent election results had a significant impact on public perception and international recognition of the election outcome.

Additionally, they championed electoral reforms, underscoring the importance of an independent electoral commission and impartiality within electoral institutions. During the election period, religious leaders actively monitored the voting process, observing polling stations and reporting any anomalies or violations. They led efforts to marshal voters, ensuring a credible outcome. Moreover, they called upon the Congolese electorate to remain vigilant and safeguard their votes at polling stations. Emphasizing transparency in the electoral process, they urged the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI) to ensure fair voting and accurate vote counting. Catholic bishops from the National Episcopal Conference of Congo (CENCO) advised citizens not to leave polling stations until the 2023 general election results are posted, thereby providing clarity on winners and preventing potential manipulation. Their monitoring endeavours elevated transparency and held electoral authorities accountable.[184] The engagement of religious leaders in promoting electoral reform and transparency underscores [185]their dedication to democratic principles and the well-being of the nation. Through advocating for electoral system enhancements and actively monitoring the process, they have bolstered credibility, fairness, and public trust in DRC elections.

Religious leaders in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) have assumed a pivotal role in offering moral guidance and advocating for ethical and competent leadership within the realm of politics. Their active engagement encompasses a range of critical issues, including corruption, social inequality, and political accountability, all directed towards cultivating a more just and transparent governance system. These leaders have consistently

[182] Al Jazeera. (2023a, January 24). *Catholic Church urges DRC citizens to vote as election looms.* News | Al Jazeera. https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/1/24/congos-catholic-church-says-enlist-and-vote-as-election-season-looms
[183] Ibid
[184] Africa Times. (2018, August 29). *DRC election: CENCO Bishops Express concern over credibility.* Africa Times. https://africatimes.com/2018/08/29/drc-election-cenco-bishops-express-concern-over-credibility/
[185] Ibid

called upon political actors to uphold democratic principles, denouncing violence and fraud, while championing the importance of respecting the legitimacy of election outcomes.[186]

During the December 2023 general elections, the Catholic Bishops of the DRC issued a resounding call for voters to prioritize the competence and moral integrity of political candidates. Emphasizing the significance of choosing leaders who have demonstrated a track record of serving the country's interests over personal gain, members of the National Episcopal Conference of Congo (CENCO) cautioned against divisive elements such as tribalism, nepotism, bribery, and opportunism. Their stance against corruption, an enduring challenge within the DRC, reflects the leaders' unwavering commitment to safeguarding citizens' well-being and promoting the nation's holistic development.[187] Importantly, their moral authority and credibility lend substantial weight to calls for accountability, transparency, and the preservation of democratic spaces within the Democratic Republic of Congo.[188] By underscoring the values of integrity and honesty, religious leaders have striven to instil a sense of responsibility among politicians and government officials, encouraging ethical behaviour in public service and fostering a culture of moral and principled leadership.

Religious leaders have also been vocal advocates for heightened political accountability, urging politicians and government officials to act in the best interests of the public. Through their sermons, public pronouncements, and social advocacy, these leaders have actively championed the establishment of mechanisms that ensure checks and balances, effectively curbing abuses of power and reinforcing greater accountability across the political landscape.[189] In response to social issues, religious institutions in the DRC have effectively employed peaceful protests as a means of dissent. Rather than resorting to violence or attacking the regime, these protesters have chosen alternative avenues, organizing nonviolent demonstrations near places of worship. They have also facilitated dialogue, organized conferences, and collaborated with civil society organizations and international partners to advocate for positive change.[190] By employing poignant symbols such as kneeling in prayer, holding Bibles, and conveying peaceful appeals, these peaceful protests have consistently

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[186] Kahiu, M. (2023, June 25). *Prioritize candidates' "competence, moral integrity": Bishops in DR Congo to electorate.* ACI Africa. https://www.aciafrica.org/news/8546/prioritize-candidates-competence-moral-integrity-bishops-in-dr-congo-to-electorate

[187] Ibid

[188] *The Catholic Church in the DRC: A neutral arbiter or at the heart of protest?* Center on International Cooperation. (2022, November 17). https://cic.nyu.edu/resources/the-catholic-church-in-the-drc-a-neutral-arbiter-or-at-the-heart-of-protest/

[189] Ibid

[190] World Council of Churches. (2015, September 17). Congolese church leader speaks on DRC electoral process at UN event. https://www.oikoumene.org/news/congolese-church-leader-speaks-on-drc-electoral-process-at-un-event

marked a steadfast commitment to expressing dissatisfaction and advocating for transformative political change.[191] Throughout various periods, this trend of peaceful protests has endured as the predominant mode of voicing dissent, signifying a resilient dedication to addressing corruption, social inequality, and political accountability, the cornerstones in the ongoing evolution towards a more equitable and responsible political system in the country.

Religious leaders in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) have emerged as leading advocates for human rights, social justice, and the rule of law, often in close collaboration with civil society organizations. With unwavering resolve, they have voiced their opposition to corruption, violence, and oppression while emphatically calling upon the government to prioritize the welfare of its citizens. Notably, the Catholic and Protestant clergy have extended their active support to grassroots civil society movements such as the LUCHA movement, providing moral guidance, spiritual support, and practical assistance to youth activists.[192] driving positive change. Through their sermons, public statements, and engagement with both government and non-governmental officials, religious leaders have raised awareness about human rights abuses, misuse of electoral processes to sanitize autocracy and the need for social justice.

In addition, religious leaders in the DRC have been vocal in denouncing social inequality and advocating for the rights of marginalized and vulnerable populations. They have highlighted issues such as poverty, lack of access to basic services, and discrimination, urging the government to prioritize the well-being of all citizens.[193] They have also facilitated dialogue, organized conferences, and collaborated with civil society organizations and international partners to advocate for positive social change.[194] Their involvement has mobilized communities, generated public support, and created platforms for constructive dialogue between various stakeholders.

The efforts of religious leaders in the DRC demonstrate their unwavering commitment to addressing systemic challenges and fostering a more inclusive and equitable society. Their moral authority and credibility have lent significant weight to demands for

[191] Ibid
[192] Ibid
[193] Peace Direct. (2015). *Commission diocesaine justice et Paix (CDJP) - moundou.* Peace Insight. https://www.peaceinsight.org/en/organisations/commission-diocesaine-justice-et-paix-cdjp-moundou/?location=chad&theme
[194] World Council of Churches. (2015, September 17). Congolese church leader speaks on DRC electoral process at UN event. https://www.oikoumene.org/news/congolese-church-leader-speaks-on-drc-electoral-process-at-un-event

accountability, transparency, and respect for human rights. By standing against corruption, violence, autocracy and oppression, religious leaders have played a crucial role in advocating for the well-being of Congolese citizens and promoting a society where human rights are protected and social justice is upheld. This concerted endeavour to illuminate socio-economic disparities underscores their commitment to cultivating an inclusive societal fabric firmly rooted in the principles of social justice. Their steadfast commitment stands as a beacon guiding the nation towards a future where human rights are enshrined, and the principles of social justice are steadfastly upheld.

South Sudan

As opposed to its counterpart Sudan, South Sudan lags in the number of religious actors present in the country with those that are active being categorized into two types: those found in regions previously occupied by the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and those in areas that were freed by the SPLM in the struggle for independence. [195]In the backdrop of destruction and political setbacks, church leaders stood as the only individuals possessing credibility and extensive recognition. This position empowered them to effectively advocate for global support for the Southern cause and facilitate the reconciliation of communities torn apart by violence and ethnic tensions.[196] Furthermore, religious institutions also have played a big part in humanitarian assistance during the strife period hereby being a key actor in the struggle for peace and political stability. Key examples of the active religious actors include the Sudan Council of Churches which has a presence in both Juba and Khartoum and conducts advocacy, mediation and intra-faith and inter-faith dialogues.[197] The New South Sudan Council of Churches, which is predominantly based in Juba, has been at the forefront of offering education and relief services, while the Church Ecumenical Action in Sudan (CEAS) (which is a consortium of five umbrella organizations) has in addition to activities similar to the other two organizations participated in the realization of transitional justice in South Sudan.[198]

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[195] Mans, U., & Ali, O. M. O. (2006). Religious actors in Sudan's peace process. In *Stuck in Change: Faith-based Peace-building in Sudan's Transition* (pp. 8–14). Clingendael Institute. http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep05507.7

[196] James Jerrey," Church and Conflict in South Sudan."*ReliedWeb/Inter Press Service,* 2018 July. https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/church-and-conflict-south-sudan#:~:text=Amid%20destruction%20and%20failed%20politics,by%20war%20and%20ethnic%20strife.

[197] Ibid

[198] Ibid

The SSCC has recently undergone significant self-reflection, and this evolution is currently reaching its culmination. During a spiritual retreat for church leaders in 2015, hosted in Rwanda—a nation still grappling with the aftermath of genocide—the SSCC formulated its Action Plan for Peace. These strategies, built upon the foundations of advocacy, impartial platforms, reconciliation, and organizational enhancement, also incorporate gender-sensitive components.[199] The SSCC's commitment is evident in their active participation or direct support for community-based peace initiatives in regions including Wau, Pochalla, Yambio, and the Murle community. Plans for similar initiatives are also in progress. The council is also elevating its promotional efforts through avenues like radio, although the actual impact of these endeavours remains uncertain.[200]

The roles played by these faith-based organizations have brought about significant change in the political landscape of South Sudan. For instance, the New Sudan Council of Churches (NSCC) was instrumental in ending the conflict between the Nuer and Dinka communities; it used an inclusive approach during mediation which entailed bringing on board women, youth and elders from the two communities.[201] Traditionally, community elders have been pivotal in matters of conflict and their use to date is still monumental. Furthermore, during the 1999 *Wulnit* Dinka – Nuer conference, the NSCC with the support of the SPLM was able to able to mobilize one thousand different stakeholders who were key in deciding the direction of the conflict.[202]

In the face of seemingly insurmountable challenges, religious leaders and organizations throughout South Sudan have consistently endeavoured to advance peace, offer guidance to victims of the conflicts, and deliver essential services, especially during the turmoil in the 2013 conflict.[203] Throughout South Sudan, churches hosted tens of thousands of displaced individuals within their premises, receiving intermittent funding for essentials such as food from international-based partners like Caritas and ACT Alliance members.[204]

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[199] Jacqueline Wilson," The Religious Landscape in South Sudan. Challenges and Opportunities for Engagement."   United States Institute for Peace, Peaceworks No 148, 2019 June. https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/2019-07/pw_148-the_religious_landscape_in_south_sudan_challenges_and_opportunities_for_engagement.pdf
[200] Ibid
[201] Moro, L. N. (2015). *CSOs/CBOs and faith–based organizations–led peace and reconciliation efforts.* Sudd Institute. http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep11024
[202] Ibid
[203] Jacqueline Wilson, ibid
[204] Oxfam "Missed Out: The Role of Local Actors in the Humanitarian Response in the South Sudan Conflict." Accessed 14 August on https://www-cdn.oxfam.org/s3fs-public/file_attachments/rr-missed-out-humanitarian-response-south-sudan-280416-en.pdf

Further, it is seen that there was a partnership between non-governmental organizations and the church. For instance, the Sudanese Relief & Development Agency affiliated with the Episcopal Church of Sudan and supplied 20,000 people with a two-week sorghum ration.[205] The highly influential and paramount religious figures and organizations fostering Peace in South Sudan encompasses Christian institutions, commencing with the Catholic Church and the Episcopal Church of South Sudan, the Presbyterian Church and the Seventh-Day Adventist Church.[206]

It is Islamic humanitarian principles which oblige Muslims to accept refugees given that Prophet Muhammad was a refugee.[207] In South Sudan, the organization has led in the provision of basic services to those who have been victims of the conflict in collaboration with other organizations such as the United Nations High Commissioner (UNHCR) present in the country.[208] Whereas its areas of operation have mainly been Muslim-dominated, Islamic Relief has offered its services to all victims of conflict their religion notwithstanding.[209] Consequently, prominent figures within the Islamic community like Juma Said Ali, who holds the role of South Sudan's presidential adviser on Islamic Affairs, have played a significant role. Juma has contributed to the Addis Ababa peace process and has been involved in numerous charitable initiatives. Recognized for his peace endeavours, he has collaborated with interfaith institutions that encompass diverse religious groups, including Muslim communities. Notably, interfaith committees operating in several major towns have commended his peace efforts.[210]

Kenya

Even though religion can be and often is an instrument of peace, the 9/11 attack and successive allegedly[211] religiously-motivated terrorist incidents, many but not all perpetrated

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[205] Ibid

[206] Ibid

[207] Kirmani, N., & Khan, A. A. (2008). Does Faith Matter: An Examination Of Islamic Relief's Work With Refugees And Internally Displaced Persons. *Refugee Survey Quarterly, 27*(2), 41–50. http://www.jstor.org/stable/45054316

[208] Ibid

[209] Ibid

[210] Jacqueline Wilson," The Religious Landscape in South Sudan. Challenges and Opportunities for Engagement." *United States Institute for Peace, Peaceworks* No 148, 2019 June. https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/2019-07/pw_148-the_religious_landscape_in_south_sudan_challenges_and_opportunities_for_engagement.pdf

[211] We say allegedly because in many cases motives are often mixed – political, economic, social grievances in which religious belief plays a part – or political acts rationalized by religious belief.

by Islamist groups, have led many to see religion as a major source of violence[212] Due to this, there has been an increase in the number of religious actors involved in matters conflict and peace.[213] As the majority of people profess a certain religion/ faith, this has necessitated religious leaders to devise ways through which people of different faiths can play a role in the peacebuilding field, both as initiators of peace and preventers of conflict.[214] Whereas the war on terror and countering violent extremism became the major focus of United States foreign policy, legislators pursued ways of not only understanding but also incorporating religious institutions, actors and ideas into this war.[215]

The Church played an important role in the events leading to the realization of multi-party democracy in Kenya.[216] A key example was in 1986 when 1,200 ministers during the National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCK) publicly called out the government's decision to quash the secret ballot voting system in the country.[217] The condemnation by the Church was received with both hostility and violence by the President Daniel Arap Moi regime but this did not deter the Church leaders from speaking against one-party rule and the concentration of political power held by the then ruling party.[218]

As a nation, Kenya's renaissance was headed by the Church as it was in the forefront of advocating for democracy, upholding human rights and calling for transparency and accountability for those in leadership positions.[219] Even after the achievement of multi-partyism in the country, the Church is still actively engaged in research on social problems, speaking up against police brutality and condemning rampant corruption in different sectors of the government.[220] When Kenya's Rift Valley Province witnessed ethnic conflicts in 1992, the Church led in the process of caring for the victims which involved provision of clothes, shelter and food in addition to criticizing the perpetrators of the skirmishes.[221] At the forefront of these efforts was the National Christian Council of Kenya (NCCK) which set up a camp in

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[212] Basedau, M., & De Juan, A. (2008). *The 'Ambivalence of the Sacred' in Africa: The Impact of Religion on Peace and Conflict in Sub-Saharan Africa*. PLACE OF PUBLICATION: German Institute of Global and Area Studies (GIGA). http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep07641
[213] Mandaville, P., & Nozell, M. (2017). *Engaging Religion and Religious Actors in Countering Violent Extremism*. Washington DC: US Institute of Peace. http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep12243
[214] Ibid
[215] Ibid
[216] Kamaara, E. (2000). The Role of the Christian Church In Socio-Economic And Political Development In Kenya. *Journal of Third World Studies*, 17(1), 165–176. http://www.jstor.org/stable/45197852
[217] Ibid
[218] Ibid
[219] Ibid
[220] Ibid
[221] Ibid

Eldoret where those affected would seek assistance.[222] It is important to note that other faiths in Kenya have equally played a role in addressing social-political change in the country. The Supreme Council of Kenyan Muslims (SUPKEM) for instance promised to start screening Muslim clerics following frequent incidents of attacks on non-Muslim civilians, particularly in the coastal region of the country.[223] This was to assist the Government's plan of weeding out rogue preachers whose teachings were believed to have negatively influenced their followers.[224]

As a result of the work done by different religions and faiths, there has been the sprouting of Faith-based organizations (FBOs) which have drawn their inspiration from faith-based values such as assisting paupers, care of creation, dignity and social justice.[225] For some of the FBOs associated with the Catholic Church such as the Catholic Agency for Overseas Development (CAFOD), the Church's social teachings are critical as they provide the context for examining socio-political and economic happenings in the world.[226] The Catholic Relief Services (CRS) and the Jesuit Refugee Services (JRS), in carrying out their interventions in the humanitarian sector, adhere to the *Dignitas humana* principle which is also one of the Catholic's Church social teaching on the biblical creation doctrine of human beings having the image of God.[227] On the other hand, the Aga Khan Development Foundation though a non-denominational organization adheres to Ismaili Imamat's effort to realize societal morality of Islam courtesy of actions by institutions.[228]

The religious associations in Kenya have played a big role in the advocacy for peace. This includes the National Council of Churches of Kenya, the Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops, and the Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims who acknowledged that the nation was moving on the wrong track, following the 2023 protests against President's Ruto administration. The protests were due to the high cost of living, new and higher taxes imposed on Kenyans, and the dismissal of IEBC commissioners in advance of the divisive

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[222] Ibid

[223] Ndzovu, H. J. (2017). Religious Indoctrination or Marginalization Theory? Muslim-Christian Public Discourses and Perceptions on Religious Violence in Kenya. *Journal for the Study of Religion*, 30(2), 154–177. https://www.jstor.org/stable/26489068

[224] Ibid

[225] Moyer, J. M., Sinclair, A. J., & Spaling, H. (2012). Working for God and Sustainability: The Activities of Faith-Based Organizations in Kenya. *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 23(4), 959–992. http://www.jstor.org/stable/41683090

[226] Ibid

[227] May ,John D'Arcy. (2006). Human Dignity, Human Rights, and Religious Pluralism: Buddhist and Christian Perspectives. *Buddhist-Christian Studies*, 26, 51–60. http://www.jstor.org/stable/4139180

[228] Ibid

2022 presidential election.[229] Religious leaders urged the opposition leader Raila Odinga to embrace deliberations and dialogue to resolve differences and advance peace.[230] They also exhorted Kenyans to take advantage of every possibility to influence policy and decision-making processes by participating in forums and other opportunities for public input.[231] At the regional and local level, the FBOs adhere to their individual self–descriptive texts which vary from one organization to the other and include their mission statements, objectives and vision.[232] Not only do these texts lay out the purpose of the organizations but they also give a glimpse of their faith-based constituent.[233]

Ethiopia

Ethiopian religious institutions have played a significant role in advocating for peace, political change, and democratic reforms in the post-Derg era. Owing to their immense influence on Ethiopian society, the organizations have employed a wide range of methods and strategies to reach the masses and political actors in the country. In Ethiopia, challenges such as the manipulation of religious or ethnic identities for political purposes, youth unemployment, an eroding sense of national identity and solidarity, an absence of respect and awareness of human rights, and the lack of democratic space[234] have always led to violent confrontations with the state. However, religious institutions have taken the initiative to solve the impasse by negotiating for national reconciliation. The initiative is aimed at solving the long-standing grievance through active and peaceful participation in democratic processes.

Religious leaders are playing a prominent role in fostering religious and ethnic inclusivity following Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's political reforms in Ethiopia. These reforms have created opportunities for peacebuilding and reconciliation. For instance, the Inter-Religious Council of Ethiopia (IRCE) organized an event where both Muslim and Christian communities discussed the establishment of a Truth and Justice Commission to address Ethiopia's societal issues.[235] Consequently, in the wake of the recent political reforms, the Ethiopian Catholic Church recognised the importance of peace and reconciliation for

[229] Winnie Mabel. (2023). What the Church has Advised Raila Ahead of Maandamano Promax. Nairobi News. https://nairobinews.nation.africa/what-the-church-has-advised-raila-ahead-of-maandamano-promax/
[230] Ibid
[231] Ibid.
[232] Ibid
[233] Ibid
[234] Ojulu, D. O. M. (2018, November 8). *Ethiopia's New Democratic Space offers opportunity for peace building and reconciliation.* The Lutheran World Federation. https://www.lutheranworld.org/blog/ethiopias-new-democratic-space-offers-opportunity-peace-building-and-reconciliation
[235] Ibid

sustainable peace among the Ethiopian communities.[236] These initiatives could avert the perennial inter-ethnic conflicts that are the source of human suffering in many parts of Ethiopia.

Religious institutions have used religious platforms to issue public statements and declarations advocating for political change, and participatory electoral and democratic reforms. Religious leaders have addressed election-related concerns by encouraging participation in voting processes. They also advocate for electing responsible leaders who can promote national unity, solidarity, equality, justice, peace, good governance and respect for human rights[237]. The Inter-Religious Council of Ethiopia (IRCE) in collaboration with the National Election Board of Ethiopia (NEBE), has in the past called their faithful to exercise their democratic rights through voting for their leaders.[238] The inter-religious council has been at the forefront of stressing the importance of religious institutions in supporting the country's development and democratic processes.[239] This underscores the significance of inter-religious cooperation in fostering peace and inclusiveness in Ethiopia. These public statements have served as a means to raise awareness, mobilize support, and put pressure on relevant stakeholders to act on citizens' grievances as well as urging citizens to exercise their democratic responsibility.

Religious establishments have also used social media activism through social media platforms to mobilise, advocate, and demonstrate societal and political transformation.[240] Religious leaders have effectively harnessed social media platforms to disseminate information and establish meaningful connections among individuals who share a common objective. For instance, in advocating for the recognition and respect for Ethiopian minority groups' rights, the Ethiopian Muslims used Facebook for the *Let Our Voices Be Heard*

[236] AMECEA Social Communications, l. (2018, November). *Ethiopia: Church discusses impact of recent political reforms.* Online News. https://communications.amecea.org/index.php/2018/11/09/ethiopia-church-discusses-impact-of-recent-political-reforms

[237] *Ahead of Ethiopia's General Elections, Bishops Say Citizens "desire an upright leader."* ACI Africa. https://www.aciafrica.org/news/3701/ahead-of-ethiopias-general-elections-bishops-say-citizens-desire-an-upright-leader

[238] AMECEA Social Communications. (2015, April 30). *Ethiopia: Religious leaders call for a peaceful national election.* Online News. https://communications.amecea.org/index.php/2015/04/30/ethiopia-religious-leaders-call-for/

[239] *Statement by the Leaders of Inter-Religious Council of Ethiopia.* (2020, November 26). World Council of Churches. https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/statement-by-the-leaders-of-inter-religious-council-of-ethiopia

[240] Omar, A. (2020). *The Ethiopian Muslims protest in the era of Social Media Activism.* Master Programme in Religion in Peace and Conflict Master thesis, Spring.. https://uu.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1467630/FULLTEXT01.pdf

campaigns.[241] The use of social media activism by religious institutions has cultivated strong bonds among people in the realm of political change and democracy by ensuring Ethiopians' voices are heard.

Addressing education on human rights is crucial in fostering a more just and inclusive society, as it helps cultivate a culture of respect for human rights, equality, and dignity among the population. Incorporating human rights education into the curriculum can contribute to this goal.[242] In line with this, the Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa (AMECEA) and the Ethiopian Catholic church through the Social and Development Commission (ECCSDCO) have supported social development projects in education. This has played a significant role in providing quality education and promoting equal opportunities for all, recognizing that access to education is a fundamental human right.[243] By focusing on marginalized communities, especially children, the church's efforts aim to ensure that future generations have access to education and can fully develop their potential to alleviate the root cause of some of the problems witnessed in the country's democratic transition.[244]

Religious institutions play a vital role in promoting peaceful and just democratic transitions, acknowledging that such processes can be turbulent and occasionally lead to violence due to societal divisions, power struggles, historical grievances, and external influences. They utilize their religious authority to provide moral guidance through public prayers, sermons, and messages that emphasize the importance of democratic values and just political transitions.[245] According to Tarekegn (2018), the Ethiopian Orthodox Church has for centuries been organizing public prayers *(Mihila)* to seek God's help and to advocate for peaceful resolutions in societal issues including elections and political transitions. For example, during violent conflicts that arose from protests against the government in the Amhara and Oromiya regions due to political, identity-based questions, administrative

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[241] Ibid

[242] Ibid

[243] AMECEA Social Communications. (2021, April 09). *ETHIOPIA: Church's Initiative in Social Development Projects Benefit Millions of Ethiopian Citizens.* Online News. https://communications.amecea.org/index.php/2021/04/09/ethiopia-churchs-initiative-in-social-development-projects-benefit-millions-of-ethiopian-citizens/

[244] AMECEA Social Communications. (2018, September 11). *ETHIOPIA: Church Discusses Impact of Recent Political Reforms.* Online News. https://communications.amecea.org/index.php/2018/11/09/ethiopia-church-discusses-impact-of-recent-political-reforms/

[245] Tarekegn. (2018). The Role of Religious Institutions in Conflict Resolution in Ethiopia: A Study on Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church, Amhara Regional State, Ethiopia. In https://ir.bdu.edu.et/bitstream/handle/123456789/8878/Mengistu%20Tarkegn%20Final%20thesis.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

dissatisfaction and other interests of the government, the church declared seven days of public prayer at the beginning of each month to contribute to peaceful conflict resolution and protect the people and the country from further crises.[246]

Also, before the 2021 national elections, the Catholic Bishops' Conference in Ethiopia (CBCE) emphasized the importance of prayer for the selection of leaders who uphold the highest standards of principled leadership.[247] The church's influential positions have allowed it to reach a wide audience and promote messages of peace and political change. This helps reduce further conflicts, destruction, and hostility among people or conflicting parties arising from political and undemocratic issues.

Religious institutions have actively engaged in mediation and conflict resolution efforts in conflicts arising due to political marginalization, ethnic federalism and repression in Ethiopia. Faith leaders have sought to resolve conflicts and disputes at both the local and national levels by facilitating platforms for political dialogues and negotiations between politically instigated crises.[248] For instance, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church was instrumental in setting grounds for the solution of politically motivated skirmishes and power struggles in 2015/16 in the Amhara region. Consequently, the church was very instrumental in laying the foundation for a referendum that ended the Amhara–Qimant community conflicts in 2016/17.[249]

Political leaders have utilized religious heterogeneity in their quest to bring political transformation to Ethiopia. For instance, religious identity has played a prominent role in the current Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's shaping of the political rhetoric in Ethiopia.[250] His identity with religion has helped his transition from a military to a political figure thus making his political and governing ideology more acceptable to the Ethiopian population whose majority are affiliated with religion. Nevertheless, his religious approach has sparked

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[246] Ibid
[247] Ibid
[248] Ibid
[249] Ibid
[250] Haustein, J., Idris, A. K., & Malara, D. (2020) Religion In Contemporary Ethiopia. https://riftvalley.net/sites/default/files/publication-documents/Religion%20in%20Contemporary%20Ethiopia_Final%2029%20May%202023-compressed.pdf

debate within the nation due to the inherent conflict between faiths and the extensive historical ties between the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and the state.[251]

Historically, religious leaders and organizations have significantly promoted and advocated for political change and democracy in Ethiopia. However, these efforts have had their profound limitations. One significant challenge in Ethiopia is the issue of government control and interference in religious affairs, which has raised concerns about religious freedom and autonomy. The Ethiopian government has been known to exert influence over religious institutions like the Ethiopian Orthodox Church[252], appointing religious leaders and regulating religious practices. For instance, Some Muslims have expressed concerns over what they perceive as government interference in religious matters and the influence of the Ethiopian Islamic Affairs Supreme Council (EIASC), particularly about issues of religious representation and autonomy, which they believe are closely aligned with the government.[253] This level of control can restrict the independence of religious organizations and impede their ability to freely express their beliefs and engage in religious activities without government interference. Such interference can undermine the principles of religious freedom and create tensions between the state and religious communities, ultimately affecting the overall religious landscape in the country.

The politicization of religion in Ethiopia has significant implications for the country's socio-political landscape. When religious institutions and leaders become actively involved in ethnopolitical activities, it can lead to the polarization of society along ethnic and religious lines and exacerbate existing tensions.[254] An example of this can be seen in the case of Ethiopia's recent political conflicts in the Tigray region, where religious divisions based on ethnic identities have played a role in fuelling unrest and violence.[ũ255ĩ ũ256ĩ] The blurring of

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[251] Evangelicalism is rapidly growing in Ethiopia, particularly in regions like Oromia and the south, where people have felt oppressed by the Orthodox empire. Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed holds an antiquated belief that Ethiopia, as a Christian nation destined for greatness under Christian leadership, should be united and restored to its former glory. However, this vision seems to be causing more harm than good, leading to division within the country and causing widespread suffering. It is exacerbating conflicts and suppressing dissenting voices that advocate for peace, open dialogue, and a harmonious, inclusive Ethiopia accommodating its diverse population. See DeCort, A. (2022, June 18). *Christian nationalism is tearing Ethiopia apart.* Foreign Policy. https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/06/18/ethiopia-pentecostal-evangelical-abiy-ahmed-christian-nationalism/

[252] Girma, M. (2018). *Religion, politics and the dilemma of modernising Ethiopia.* HTS Theological Studies. http://www.scielo.org.za/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0259-94222018000100023

[253] Ibid

[254] *Ethiopia - United States Department of State.* (2022, June 2). United States Department of State. https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-report-on-international-religious-freedom/ethiopia/

[255] Ibid

boundaries between religion and politics not only undermines the neutrality and integrity of religious institutions but also hampers the democratic process by injecting religious bias into political decision-making. Ethiopia must address this challenge by promoting a clear separation of religion and politics, building good ecumenical relations between Christian churches, fostering interfaith dialogue, and encouraging inclusive political participation that transcends religious affiliations. By doing so, the country can strive towards a more inclusive and cohesive society where diverse religious communities can coexist and contribute to the democratic process.

The presence of diverse religious groups in Ethiopia poses significant challenges and implications for the country's political landscape. One key challenge is the potential for religious tensions and conflicts to arise due to differences in beliefs, practices, and values among these groups. Such conflicts can disrupt social cohesion, impede political stability, and hinder the development of a united and inclusive society. For example, in recent years, Ethiopia has witnessed inter-religious violence and clashes between different religious communities (Protestants versus Ethiopian Orthodox Church, Muslims versus Christians),[257] which have resulted in the loss of lives and displacement of populations. [258] These incidents highlight the urgent need for effective mechanisms to manage religious diversity, promote interfaith dialogue, and foster mutual understanding among religious groups. The government and relevant stakeholders should work towards creating an environment that respects the rights and freedoms of all religious communities while ensuring that religious differences do not become a source of division and conflict in Ethiopia's political landscape.

Internal wrangles within Ethiopian religious institutions have hindered political and democratic change in many ways. When religious leaders and institutions are preoccupied with internal power struggles and divisions, they may neglect their roles as social and moral influencers, failing to advocate for democratic values and human rights. Internal conflicts within religious establishments have exacerbated ethnic and religious tensions within the country, leading to heightened social divisions and polarization as witnessed in the Ethiopian

[256] Østebø, T. (2013). Islam and State Relations in Ethiopia: From Containment to the Production of a "Governmental Islam." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion, 81*(4), 1029–1060. http://www.jstor.org/stable/24488114

[257] *Religion, Politics And The State In Ethiopia.* (2023).https://riftvalley.net/sites/default/files/publication-documents/RVI%202023.03.17%20Religion%2C%20Politics%20%26%20the%20State%20in%20Ethiopia_Briefing.pdf

[258] Bachelet, M. (2022, May 7). *Inter-religious clashes in Ethiopia.* OHCHR. https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements/2022/05/inter-religious-clashes-ethiopia

Orthodox Church divisions in Tigray.[259] This undermines the spirit of inclusivity and cooperation necessary for democratic processes to flourish. When religious institutions are divided and factionalized, their ability to engage in meaningful dialogue and negotiation with political actors is significantly diminished thus reducing their capacity to effectively advocate for the interests and rights of their followers, hindering the development of a pluralistic and democratic society. Internal wrangles within Ethiopian religious institutions create a climate of instability and disunity, hampering the prospects for political and democratic change.

Conclusion

The role of religious institutions in political change and democracy in Kenya, Ethiopia, South Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of Congo is a diverse and context-dependent phenomenon. The impact of religious institutions varies based on historical, socio-economic, and political contexts. These institutions often serve as influential platforms for civic engagement, advocacy for human rights, and the dissemination of socio-political ideologies. However, the specific strategies and values guiding their interventions can differ significantly. To harness the constructive influence of religious institutions in promoting political change and democracy in these East and Central African nations, it is imperative for policymakers, civil society actors, and international entities to recognize and engage with the unique dynamics at play in each country. By fostering partnerships and dialogue between religious institutions and other stakeholders, a more inclusive and effective approach to advancing democratic ideals can be realized, tailored to the distinct challenges and opportunities within each nation.

Recommendations

Democratic Republic of Congo

1. **There is a need to organize forums, workshops, and conferences for religious leaders on matters of political change and democratic processes:** Hosting regular forums and events focused on political, social, and ethical issues is crucial for religious leaders to engage their communities in critical thinking and civic participation. These platforms provide opportunities for open discussions, knowledge-sharing, and the development of informed perspectives on political matters. Workshops and conferences can serve as educational tools to enhance the political awareness of both religious leaders and their followers.

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[259] Ibid

2. **There is a need to promote dialogue and collaboration between diverse religious institutions:** Encouraging collaboration among diverse religious institutions fosters national unity and mutual understanding. By transcending religious differences, religious leaders can contribute to a unified national identity, which is essential for political stability. Interfaith dialogues can address common challenges and build bridges between communities, fostering a sense of solidarity and shared purpose.

3. **There is a need to provide ongoing training for religious leaders:** Continuous education for religious leaders is crucial in equipping them to address contemporary political challenges. Training programs should cover a range of issues, including governance structures, human rights, and democratic principles. This ensures that religious leaders remain well-informed and capable of guiding their communities effectively in the face of evolving political landscapes.

4. **There is a need to harness moral influence for mediation of the religious leaders:** Religious institutions possess significant moral influence, making them ideal intermediaries for peaceful conflict resolution. Leveraging this influence, religious leaders can engage in mediation efforts to resolve political disputes and contribute to overall stability. Their involvement in peace processes emphasizes moral values and ethical considerations, promoting a harmonious political environment.

5. Religious leaders should continue advocating for ethical and competent leadership within the political sphere. Emphasize the importance of selecting leaders who prioritize the welfare of the nation over personal gain, and denounce corruption, nepotism, and tribalism.

6. The international community should acknowledge the effectiveness of peaceful protests as a means of dissent and advocacy for political change. They should support religious leaders and civil society organizations in their efforts to organize and participate in nonviolent demonstrations, dialogues, and conferences.

7. All actors should recognize the importance of the media in promoting democratic values and transparency. Encourage religious institutions to work with media organizations to amplify their messages of peace, justice, and accountability. Also, they should advocate for the protection of journalists in the DRC, as they play a crucial role in reporting on political developments and holding leaders accountable. Push for legal protections and measures to ensure their safety.

South Sudan

1. The government should take concrete steps to address ethnic tensions and promote inclusivity. It should work to ensure that resources and opportunities are distributed equitably among all ethnic groups.

2. **There is a need for empowerment of religious leaders through education:** The religious leaders who were part of the focused group discussion recognized the need for education and training, particularly in theology, to empower them to advocate for political change. A student who was a participant in the focused group discussion emphasized the need for mandatory training of religious leaders to ensure a deep understanding of their roles, including preaching peace, justice, and reconciliation. Hence, education is seen as a tool to overcome the lack of knowledge that often makes religious leaders hesitant in addressing political issues.

3. **There is a need to empower religious leaders for boldness:** The training of religious leaders should not only be about imparting knowledge but also about instilling boldness. With proper education, religious leaders can be brave enough to confront corrupt political leaders and rebuke them. This empowerment through education is viewed as essential to overcome timidity and enhance the confidence of religious leaders when engaging with political figures.

4. **There is a need for the unification of religious leaders:** There is a recognition of existing divisions among religious organizations and churches in South Sudan. To effectively advocate for political change, religious leaders need to unite and speak in one voice. Examples like the Episcopal Conference of South Sudan and the South Sudan Council of Churches, which represent unified voices, are highlighted as influential. Unity is seen as a prerequisite for religious leaders to be taken seriously by both the political class and the general population.

5. **There is a need for religious leaders to collaborate with Government:** Collaborative efforts between religious leaders and the government are acknowledged as vital for the realization of a peaceful and prosperous South Sudan. The annual national prayer day, where leaders from various sectors gather to pray for peace and unity, serves as a successful model of collaboration in South Sudan. The recommendation emphasizes that religious leaders should take the initiative in proposing areas of collaboration rather than waiting for government invitations, indicating a proactive role in shaping collaborative efforts.

6. The International Community should provide humanitarian assistance to address food insecurity, displacement, and other urgent needs. Collaborate with NGOs and UN agencies to ensure aid reaches those in need.

7. Religious leaders and institutions should engage in peace mediation efforts and use moral authority to encourage conflicting parties to seek peaceful solutions. Religious leaders can play a vital role in reconciliation processes

Kenya

1. The government should provide a level plain ground during the registration process of faith-based or religious-based organizations regardless of the faith/ religion they subscribe to. Regardless of the specific faith or religion they represent, organizations should be granted equal and unbiased opportunities to register and operate legally. This approach fosters a more inclusive and pluralistic society, where diverse religious groups can coexist and contribute to the broader social fabric without discrimination.

2. Faith-based organizations or religious institutions should avoid trading accusations against each other based on the acts or omissions committed by individuals professing a certain faith. Encouraging open and respectful conversations fosters tolerance and unity, promoting a more harmonious coexistence in diverse societies. By focusing on shared values and common goals, we can bridge gaps and build bridges of understanding among people of various faiths.

3. Faith-based organizations or religious institutions should conduct joint interventions as they are guided by universal values that cut across the different faiths and religions. This inclusive and collaborative effort allows diverse religious communities to work together towards common goals, fostering unity and understanding among people of different beliefs. By drawing upon shared values, these joint interventions can effectively address a wide range of social, humanitarian, and ethical challenges faced by societies worldwide.

Ethiopia

1. Religious institutions should enhance inter-religious cooperation to work together in advocating for political change and democratic reforms. The Inter-Religious Council of Ethiopia (IRCE) should continue facilitating dialogue and joint initiatives to address societal divisions and promote peacebuilding and reconciliation.

2. Religious leaders should embrace inclusive political dialogue processes throughout the country. They should engage local leaders, including religious figures, elders, and

community leaders, in national dialogues on political change and democracy. Their influence, experience, and legitimacy can prevent political manipulation by political elites and contribute to more inclusive and transparent decision-making processes.

3. In the wake of increased politically motivated ethnic conflicts in Ethiopia, religious organisations/leaders should support civil society organizations and media. They should strengthen the role of civil society organizations and the media in advocating for human rights, and democratic reforms, and holding the government accountable. They should provide resources, capacity building, and protection for these actors to ensure their independence and effectiveness from government-imposed censorships.

4. The government of Ethiopia should collaborate with religious institutions, such as the Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa (AMECEA), the Ethiopian Catholic Church and other religious and non-religious stakeholders to support social development projects that promote human rights and provide equal opportunities for all, particularly marginalized communities cultivate a culture of respect, equality, and dignity among the population.

5. Religious institutions should support the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) in ensuring the integrity, transparency, and fairness of elections. They can provide technical assistance, training, and resources to strengthen electoral institutions, voter education, and election monitoring, and encourage broad participation and competition among political parties to enhance the democratic process in Ethiopia.

6. Religious leaders should advocate for transparency, accountability, and respect for fundamental freedoms in Ethiopia. They should engage and collaborate with other international actors such as the United Nations, the African Union, and regional bodies to exert diplomatic pressure and provide support for democratic processes, human rights promotion, and the rule of law.

7. In the era of the digital divide, religious institutions/leaders should utilize social media platforms to effectively mobilize, advocate, and demonstrate societal and political transformation. By amplifying citizens' voices through social media activism, they can raise awareness, foster connections, and put pressure on relevant stakeholders to address grievances and uphold democratic principles.

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