

Power-sharing rules keep peace between faiths, study shows

January 13 2017

A new UT Dallas study examines why Christians and Muslims regularly clash in some parts of Nigeria, but live together peacefully in others.

The answer lies in different electoral rules across Nigerian districts designed to create political power-sharing between both religions, according to research by Dr. Jonas Bunte, assistant professor of public policy and political economy in the School of Economic, Political and Policy Sciences and a co-author of the study.

For example, some districts use conventional ballots and ask citizens to decide between individual Muslim or Christian candidates. In contrast, other districts require citizens to choose between teams of candidates in which one partner must be Christian and the other Muslim. Power-sharing agreements are common in some parts of Nigeria but do not exist in others.

Districts without the agreements had four times more clashes per year than districts with agreements, according to the study published in the *Journal of Peace Research*. The study included incidents in which a mosque or church was destroyed and fatal clashes between Christians and Muslims.

Districts without power-sharing rules experienced an average of more than four violent events per year, while those with power-sharing rules had between zero and one event per year, researchers found.

"The popular opinion is that different religions never ever get along. It's much easier to find newspaper reports of burning churches or destroyed mosques than instances in which there's actually peaceful coexistence," Bunte said.

"We found some districts where Christians and Muslims constantly clashed over decades," Bunte said. "At the same time, there were other districts where that wasn't the case at all."

Bunte and co-author Dr. Laura Thaut Vinson assistant professor of political science at Oklahoma State University, analyzed election data, conducted interviews and collected reports of interreligious violence for the study. They focused on two areas in central Nigeria, Jos North and Chikun, where nearly equal numbers of Christians and Muslims live in the same communities, speak the same language and have similar income levels.

Jos North has no power-sharing agreements. In Chikun, Christian and Muslim candidates for top leadership positions must run on joint tickets.

"Since the tickets are made up of Christians and Muslims, they can't play the religion card," Bunte said. "They can't credibly say the other religion is bad if they have to run on a joint ticket. So this one rule, a joint ticket with someone from the other religion, changes the dynamics completely."

Power-sharing agreements change the language of the leaders, Bunte said. Leaders of different religions living in those areas are 12 times more likely to express more intentions to cooperate, and 10 times more likely to meet and negotiate to settle disputes, he said. That helps shape the perception of the people living in those areas.

"We show that the general population feels much less threatened by

competition from other religions in these districts with power-sharing agreements," Bunte said. "They feel much safer because the discourse is different. If the elites don't use derogatory language and the general population doesn't feel threatened, that explains why there are fewer incidents of interreligious violence."

Bunte said he hopes that the findings can be generalized to prevent religious conflicts in other parts of the world.

"Our findings show that local-level initiatives that create stable channels of communication and collaboration among religious groups are effective ways of achieving peaceful coexistence," Bunte said.

More information: J. B. Bunte et al. Local power-sharing institutions and interreligious violence in Nigeria, *Journal of Peace Research* (2015). [DOI: 10.1177/0022343315614999](https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343315614999)

Provided by University of Texas at Dallas

Citation: Power-sharing rules keep peace between faiths, study shows (2017, January 13) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2017-01-power-sharing-peace-faiths.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.