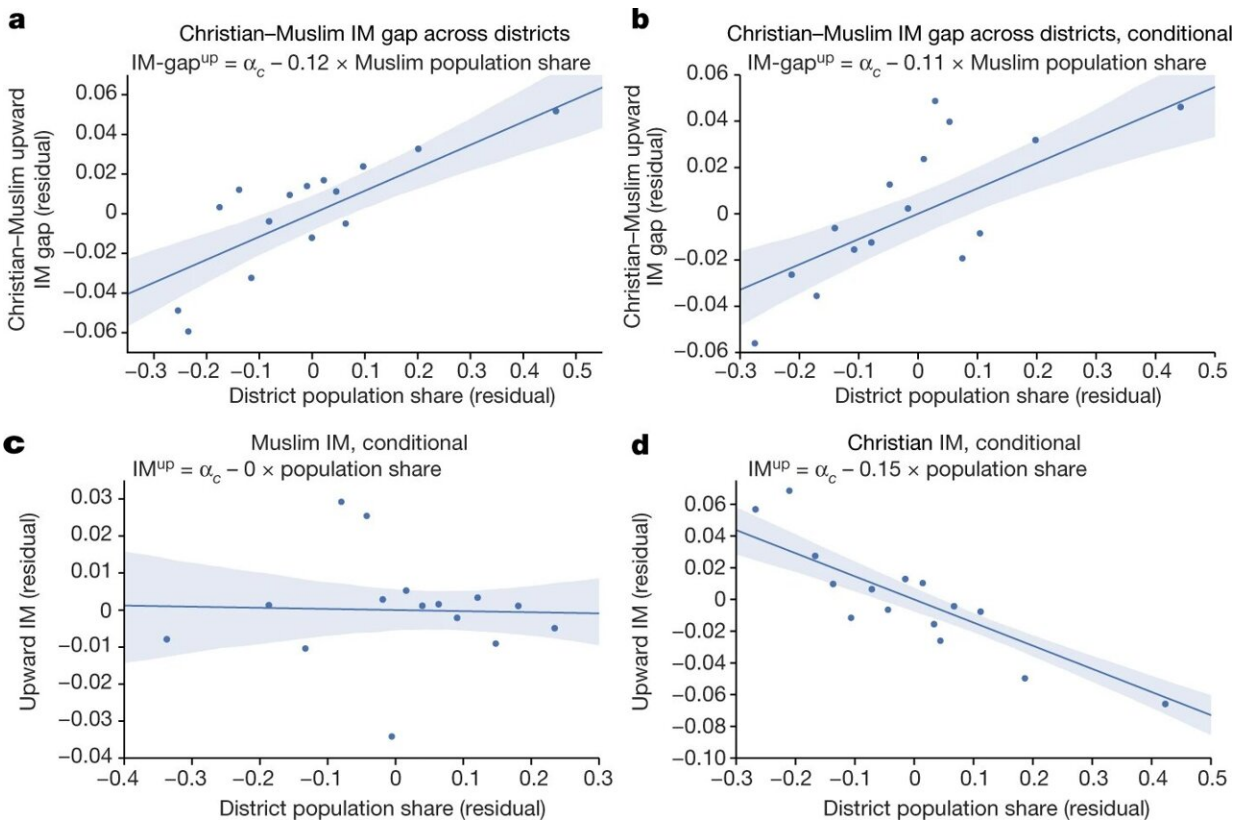


# Census data show differences in education levels attained in Africa based on religion

May 22 2023, by Bob Yirka



District upward IM (gap) and Christian–Muslim population share. **a,b**, Binned scatterplots of the gap in upward IM between Christians and Muslims (**a**) against the share of Muslims in the district’s population conditional on country fixed effects (**b**). Panel **b** also conditions on the religion-specific shares of the older generation with completed primary education in the district. **c,d**, Binned within-country scatterplots of upward IM for Christians (**c**) and Muslims (**d**) against their own religious share in the district’s population, conditioning on the share of completed primary education of the older generation in the district for Christians

and Muslims, respectively. The figure also shows 95% confidence bands obtained by a simple bootstrap procedure. Specifically, for 10,000 bootstrap iterations, we resample the data with replacement, re-estimate the regression in the bootstrap sample and record the estimated coefficient values. We then use the 10,000 bootstrap estimates to predict the dependent variable along a regularly spaced grid from the minimum to the maximum of the independent variable. For each grid point, the lower end of the confidence band is the 2.5th percentile and the upper end is the 97.5th percentile of the 10,000 bootstrap predictions. Credit: *Nature* (2023). DOI: 10.1038/s41586-023-06051-2

A small team of economists from Harvard University, Sihlquai 10, Adliswil, Brown University, and the London Business School has found differences in education level attainment across Africa based at least in part on religion. In their paper published in the journal *Nature*, the group describes how they used data collected via censuses in multiple countries in Africa to learn more about whether education levels in Africa are impacted by religious affiliation.

In all the team looked at [census data](#) for 21 African countries, noting that religion plays a very important role in not just daily life, but also in education, across the continent. They also note that Africa is home to some of the largest Muslim and Christian communities and that participation rates in religious activities are high.

To learn more about the impact of religion on education, the team compared average levels of educational attainment with religion type. In so doing, they found what they describe as significant differences in intergenerational educational mobility across these two main groups of people. The researchers define intergenerational educational mobility as a measure of offspring going farther in their educational attainment than their parents.

The research group found that Christians tended to have higher [upward mobility](#) and lower downward mobility than did Muslims and traditionalists. They suggest this indicates that Christian children are more likely to complete [primary school](#) if their parents did not, and are less likely to drop out of primary school if their parents did finish.

It also suggests that Muslim and traditionalist children are more likely to drop out of primary school even if their parents did not drop out, and that they are also less likely to complete such education if their parents did not.

In looking at other factors the research team was not able to find any other that might account for such differences in educational attainment. But they do note that history has likely played a role in the differences they have seen. Colonialism, which often began with the introduction of Christian missionaries, they point out, tended to stress education. Meanwhile, colonial authorities tended to restrict education when encountering people who were established Muslims.

The researchers conclude by suggesting that their findings indicate that officials looking to improve [educational attainment](#) in Africa may need to take a closer look at the impact that religion plays in participation in programs geared toward raising [education levels](#) and make adjustments accordingly.

**More information:** Alberto Alesina et al, Religion and educational mobility in Africa, *Nature* (2023). [DOI: 10.1038/s41586-023-06051-2](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-023-06051-2)

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