

Renewalist Christianity and the Political Saliency of LGBTs: Theory and Evidence from Sub-Saharan Africa

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One key political development in the past decade in many, but not all, countries across Africa has been the growing saliency of morality politics in general, and of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) politics in particular. I argue that the uneven upward trend in the political saliency of LGBTs is closely related to two recent political processes: (1) a rapid growth of Pentecostal, Evangelical, and related Renewalist or Spirit-filled churches (demand-side factor) and (2) a democratization process leading to heightened political competition (supply side). To evaluate the above proposition, I created an original, fine-grained longitudinal dataset of media coverage of LGBTs in Africa, which I use as a measure of issue saliency. Using a series of negative binomial regression models, I find robust evidence that the saliency of LGBTs increases with a country's population share of Renewalist Christians and that this effect increases with rising levels of political competition.

In October 2009, David Bahati, then a relatively unknown Member of Parliament (MP) from Uganda's ruling party, introduced a bill that sought to further criminalize any homosexuality activity in Uganda.¹ Following mounting international pressure, Bahati's bill—which would institute the death penalty for “aggravated homosexuality”—was removed from the agenda, stirring a national debate over the country's sovereign right to criminalize any activity it sees fit.² Immediately thereafter, similar bills were introduced in other African countries: anti-gay measures passed in Burundi in late 2009, Malawi in 2010, Nigeria in 2011, and Liberia in 2012.³ Political and religious leaders in Zimbabwe, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Zambia, Cameroon, and Ghana are cur-

rently pushing forward similar bills that place further limitations on same-sex relations.

In February 2012, Bahati's bill was reintroduced to the Ugandan parliament. When he rose to address parliament, he received a resounding standing ovation from both his party and the opposition caucuses.⁴ The events surrounding Uganda's anti-gay bill underline several intriguing political developments in Sub-Saharan Africa in the past decade. First is the growing saliency of morality politics in general and of same-sex behavior in particular, at least in *some* African countries. Second, in contrast to the situation in Western democracies, morality politics in Africa is constructed as a consensual (valence) rather than a wedge issue.

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1. Supplementary material for this article is available at the “Supplements” link in the online edition. Data and supporting materials necessary to reproduce the numerical results in the article will be made available at <http://thedata.harvard.edu/dvn/dv/guygrossman> no later than a month following publication.

2. At the time Bahati introduced his anti-gay legislation, homosexuality was already illegal in Uganda under colonial-era laws, punishable by up to 14 years in prison.

3. Burundi criminalized homosexuality in 2009 and Malawi outlawed same-sex relations between females in 2010. In 2011, the Nigerian Senate passed the *Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Bill*, which criminalizes not only same-sex marriages but also the registration or operation of any gay organization. A 2012 Liberian law made homosexuality a second-degree felony and gay marriage illegal.

4. See “Bill to Outlaw Homosexuality in Uganda Re-tabled,” *New Vision*, February 8, 2012. See also “Government Resurrects Anti-homosexuality Bill,” *Daily Monitor*, February 8, 2012.

Third, unlike the human rights discourse that surrounds lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) politics in the West, in Africa LGBT issues have been framed in relation to wider discourses regarding threats to *public morality*, *African values*, *national integrity*, and *sovereignty*.⁵

Mainstream political science scholarship has recently added gay and lesbian politics to the study of morality politics issues such as abortion, alcohol, and drug policies (Lax and Phillips 2009; Reynolds 2013). As the Bahati anti-gay bill suggests, the dynamic surrounding LGBT politics in Africa may be different than in advanced liberal democracies. The study of the politics of highly salient morality issues, however, has thus far concentrated on a handful of Western countries. Focusing on spatial and temporal variation in the saliency of LGBTs in Sub-Saharan Africa, this article seeks to begin closing this gap.⁶

This study's key outcome of interest is the extent to which LGBT-related issues have become politically salient in Sub-Saharan Africa in the past decade. Following Wlezien (2005), I use the term "political salience" to denote the importance that citizens and elites place on a certain policy area (the greater their level of concern about the issue, the more salient it is). Put differently, political saliency can be thought of as the degree to which political information on issue x impacts the way citizens evaluate political parties and politicians. Thus a politician's position on a salient issue is of political relevance, competing with other evaluative criteria such as his or her experience and past record.

Building on past research, such as Haider-Markel and Meier (1996), I measure the spatial and temporal political saliency of LGBTs using media coverage: the number of articles on LGBTs in year t in country j 's highest circulating paper.⁷ Figure 1 shows the aggregated trend in the saliency of the LGBT issue in Sub-Saharan Africa between 2003 (the earliest available digitalized media data via *Factiva*) and 2013. Consistent with anecdotal evidence, media coverage data suggest that the saliency of LGBT issues in Africa has increased in the past decade.

5. In justifying signing a modified version of the bill into law, President Museveni tellingly said "homosexuality in Uganda has been provoked by the arrogant and careless Western groups that are coming in our schools and recruiting homosexuals into homosexuality and lesbianism." He then added "This is social imperialism. To impose social values of one group on our society." See "President Museveni Signs Anti-Gay Bill into Law," *New Vision*, February 24, 2014.

6. See, however, Currier (2012) for a notable exception.

7. In all regression analyses, I control for the total number of articles in year t to ensure that my measure of LGBT salience is not simply assessing how developed the media market is. I provide further information on the construction of the measure in the online appendix

Note, however, that the regional upward trend may obscure important variations between countries. Figure 2, which provides information on the mean number of LGBT-related articles across available newspapers, demonstrates that while LGBT politics is becoming increasingly salient in some countries in Africa (e.g., Kenya, Nigeria, Uganda, South Africa, and Zimbabwe), in other countries (e.g., Ethiopia and Gabon) the issue hardly enters the political sphere. Explaining this variation is the key objective of this article.

My measure of LGBT saliency builds on the intuition that the amount of media attention devoted to issue x mirrors not only the degree of *public* concern about the issue, but also the degree to which *elites* have an interest in addressing it. That the public's concern is insufficient to make an issue politically salient has been evident, for example, in the slow and uneven response of African governments to the AIDS crisis (Lieberman 2009). In other words, for issue x to become salient, both pull and push factors must be in place. On the demand side, a relatively large number of *dedicated and well-organized* citizens need to support political action on issue x . On the supply side, there have to be politicians who see political gains in addressing citizens' priorities and preferences on that issue.

I argue that the upward trend in the issue saliency of LGBTs is closely related to two key processes that occurred in (*parts of*) Africa in the past two decades: (1) a rapid growth of Pentecostal, Evangelical, and related Renewalist or Spirit-filled churches (demand factor) and (2) a democratization process leading to heightened political competition (supply factor). Whereas recent articles have begun exploring the policy implications of Africa's democratization (Grossman and Lewis 2014; Harding and Stasavage 2014), the political implications of the uneven spread of Pentecostal and Evangelical Christianity have largely been overlooked by students of African politics. This is another important knowledge gap that this article seeks to address.

In explaining why the spread of evangelical Christianity in Africa increases the political saliency of LGBTs, I build on insights from the literature on the "culture wars" in the United States (Cromartie 2003) and on the political and sociological work on religious fundamentalism (Marty and Appleby 1993). As I explain below, religious doctrine and political opportunities underscore the active role that Renewalist Christian groups in Africa are playing in mobilizing demand for state regulation of morality issues, particularly demands for further limiting homosexual behavior. Note, however, that strong anti-gay feelings on their own are insufficient to make LGBTs politically salient, as is evident in the low saliency of LGBTs in almost all Muslim-majority

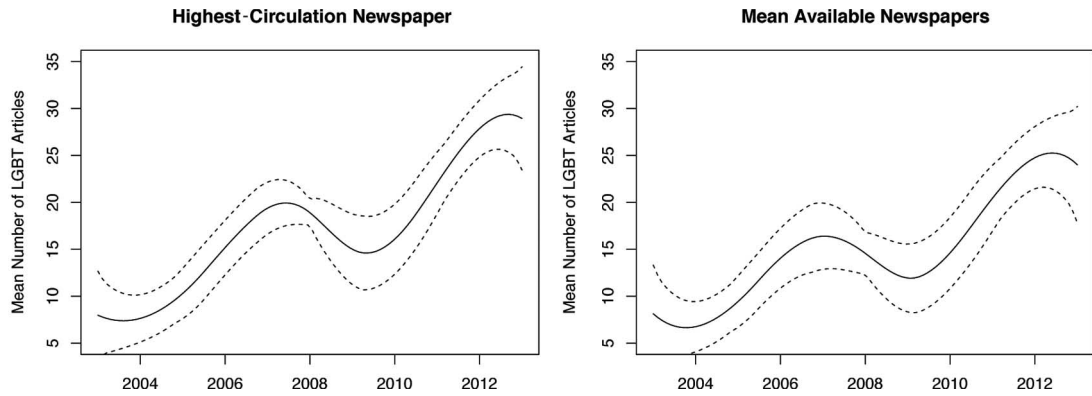


Figure 1. LGBT saliency, Sub-Saharan Africa (2003–11). The left panel shows the number of LGBT articles in year t in country j 's highest circulating paper, averaged across all countries for which data is available. In the right panel I use an alternative measure, which averages the number of LGBT articles in *all* newspapers for which data exists in country j . Estimation line, including the 95% confidence interval, is derived from local regression using the locfit procedure.

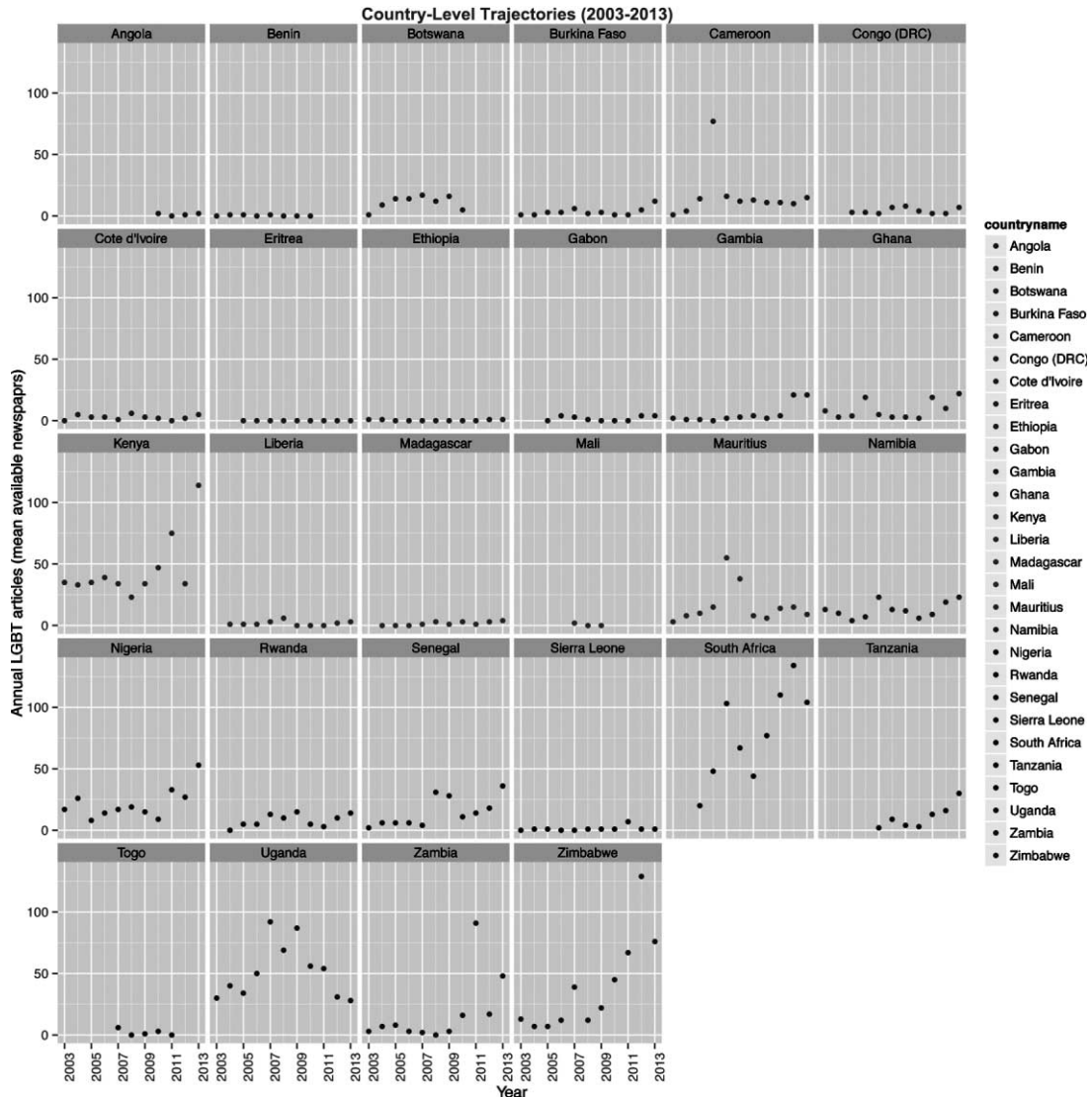


Figure 2. LGBT issue saliency by country. This figure describes the number of LGBT-related articles in 2003–13 by country, across Sub-Saharan Africa. Data does not exist for several countries in which no newspaper has been digitalized—Burundi, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritania, Mozambique, Niger, Somalia, and Swaziland.

African countries. I explore some reasons for this finding in the concluding section.

As mentioned, that a majority of citizens is prioritizing an issue does not guarantee that politicians will act in response. I argue that political agents are more likely to be responsive to morality politics demands when they face growing levels of political competition. In short, democratization processes increase the pressure that politicians face to distinguish themselves by building a political reputation or negatively branding their opponents. The imperative of differentiation, however, can lead politicians to become standard-bearers for any number of issues that remain “unclaimed” by political parties (Riker 1986).

Below, I explore several characteristics of LGBT politics that make them especially appealing to African politicians and parties. These include the high rewards from religious legitimacy, the high-mobilization capacities of churches, and the low-information barrier that citizens and politicians face when participating in morality debates. I also examine some reasons why incumbents may have a comparative advantage over opposition parties in claiming LGBT issues. Here I focus especially on incumbents’ greater ability to use policy levers to credibly signal commitment to “addressing the problem of homosexuality,” which is especially important given the valence nature of LGBT politics in Africa.

I follow a three-step empirical strategy to evaluate the above propositions. First, I put together an original longitudinal dataset of media coverage of LGBTs in Africa. Using a series of negative binomial regression models, I find robust evidence that LGBT saliency increases with a country’s population share of Evangelical Christians, but this effect is only significant beyond a certain level of political competition. Second, I analyze the content of all newspaper articles on LGBTs in 2011 to examine how the issue is constructed in the public sphere. If the media coverage of LGBTs is generally positive, then the demand side of my argument is unlikely to be correct. I find that an article is almost five times more likely to have a negative tone than a positive one. This finding, reported in the online appendix, is consistent with the idea that anti-gay sentiment is pushing LGBT issues to the top of the political agenda in some African countries. Third, I collected equivalent media data on two other politically salient issues—agriculture and corruption—and ran two placebo tests. Reassuringly, I find that, contrary to its effect on the number of LGBT articles, Renewalist population share has no effect on either the number of agriculture articles or the number of corruption articles. These findings further increase confidence that the relationship between Renewalist population share and LGBT saliency is not spurious.

The argument and findings in this article have implications for several distinct literatures. Most importantly, this article contributes to the literature on when “unclaimed” issues become politically salient. As explained below, the current literature focuses on the impetus of *losing* politicians to explore polarizing issues (Carmines and Stimson 1986). This article argues instead that, at least in Africa, the interest in politicizing same-sex behavior is likely stronger for *incumbents*. Moreover, whereas the current literature—developed in and for advanced Western democracies—holds that only polarizing issues are likely to become salient, I argue instead that in low-income countries, dormant issues are more likely to become salient the wider their popular support.

This article also contributes to the literature on the effects of Africa’s political liberalization. This literature focused initially on whether liberalization processes are genuine or superficial, merely designed to appease the international community (Chabal and Daloz 1999). Recently, the literature has gone on to explore the policy implications of heightened political competition, for example on education spending (Stasavage 2005) and decentralization policies (Grossman and Lewis 2014). My theoretical argument and empirical evidence contributes to these recent debates, in particular by providing further support for the logic advanced by Harding and Stasavage (2014)—that African incumbents respond to democratization pressures by implementing populist policies that are visible, do not require a high implementation capacity, and can be credibly attributed to the incumbent. The anti-gay rhetoric (and legislation) follows a similar logic: opposition to LGBTs offers a way for politicians to gain religious legitimacy and credibly signal their responsiveness to popular will.

The article is also related to the literature on the role that organized religion plays in politics. The literature on the political impact of religious groups in advanced liberal democracies is vast (Woodberry 2012). Outside the West, much of the recent scholarship has focused on the determinants of the success of political Islam (Blaydes and Linzer 2008) and the role that Catholic and mainline churches have played in the “third-wave” democratic transitions in Latin America (Gill 1998), Asia (Freston 2001), and Africa (Haynes 2004). Increasingly, prominent religion scholars have lamented that mainstream scholarship on religion and politics tends to ignore or downplay the burgeoning evangelical sector of Christianity in the global South (Ranger 2008). Indeed, in Africa “little is really known about the role of the churches beyond the leadership of the mainline churches” (Freston 2001, 156). I contribute to this literature by focusing attention on the role of Renewalist Christian

groups (rather than Roman Catholic and Protestant mainline churches) in policymaking in Africa (rather than on their role in democratization processes).⁸

Finally, the article contributes to the literature on the rights of sexual minorities. To date, this literature has mostly focused on determinants of trends in prohibitions against homosexual behavior. For example, Sanders (2009) shows how the interdiction of “carnal intercourse against the order of nature” in the penal code of British colonies has affected current patterns of decriminalization. Using a more quantitative approach to the question of legality, Asal, Sommer, and Harwood (2013) show that the legality of homosexual acts is mostly a function of the type of legal system, economic development, religiosity, and democratic conditions. Though the above studies make important contributions, a focus on *legal prohibitions* may be too narrow for understanding the status of sexual minorities (Bruce-Jones and Itaborahy 2011). By focusing on issue saliency, rather than legality, this article broadens the scope of this nascent literature.

THEORETICAL ARGUMENT

Political scientists have long recognized the significance of issue saliency—the relative importance of different policy areas. Studies that seek to explain the electoral success of politicians and parties commonly take into account where those actors stand. Scholars must also assess, however, which issues have become important and which have been marginalized or remain “unclaimed.” From a theoretical point of view, however, the study of issue saliency has been underdeveloped. Specifically, political scientists have insufficiently addressed endogenous changes in political saliency: the ability and will of political actors to reshape the relative importance of different issue areas (Humphreys and Garry 2000).

Indeed, we have only a limited understanding of how and why new issues become salient (De Vries and Hobolt 2012, 247). The literature on issue saliency still follows some variant of the seminal studies of Carmines and Stimson (1986) and Riker (1986), who posit that “dormant” issues become salient following the mobilization efforts of opposition parties, which have a greater incentive than incumbents to promote conflict along a new policy dimension. According to Carmines and Stimson (1986), this sort of political entrepreneurship is successful only to the extent that voters are aware of differences in position; i.e., that attitudes on the issue are known to be polarized. According to Haider-Markel and Meier (1996, 332), the issue saliency of morality politics is

not fundamentally different from that of distributive politics. Both allegedly involve two competing coalitions that are often formed along partisan lines. Whereas in redistributive politics groups seek to redistribute resources, in morality politics they seek to redistribute values by having the government approve (or disapprove) of a specified set of values.

It is important to flesh out the assumptions that underlie Carmines and Stimson’s theoretical framework. First, it implicitly conceptualizes political issues as being concerned with different positions within a policy space that typically map onto known societal cleavages. Second, it assumes a polarized constituency, a well-functioning party system that reflects societal cleavages, and a mature media market. There are, however, good reasons to question whether this framework can explain newfound political salience in political environments with underdeveloped media markets and political parties that are weakly institutionalized and nonideological (Riedl 2014), as is often the case in developing countries.

One implication of the weak party system prevalent in Africa is that consensual (i.e., valence) issues are more likely to become politically salient than polarizing issues that force politicians to take positions (Bleck and van de Walle 2013).⁹ An additional implication of the weak party system in many African countries is that opposition parties commonly lack elite coordination and discipline, as well as the resources and mobilization capacity necessary to stimulate new issue dimensions. Instead, they are more likely to react to cues from incumbents or organized social groups. In this section, I provide a theoretical framework to explain the growing saliency of LGBT politics in Africa. I first highlight the key role that Renewalist churches play in LGBT politics and then examine the role of political actors, especially incumbents.

DEMAND SIDE: SPREAD OF RENEWALIST CHRISTIANITY

Among civil society organizations, African churches are uniquely positioned to aggregate preferences and mobilize citizens in support of initiatives the church wishes to advance. As a prominent religion scholar noted, “in Africa . . . churches become the main mediating institutions, and Christian appeals count as major arbiters of political legitimacy. Churches become alternative communities wielding power through non governmental organizations, and Pentecostals especially may act as alternative oppositions,

8. See also the important study of McCauley (2013), which explores the nature of clientelistic relationships between charismatic church leaders and new adherents.

9. Bleck and van de Walle (2013, 4) define *valence* issues as political issues on which there is generally broad agreement, but on which parties may differ when it comes to the means of achieving those goals or the relative competence of different political actors in doing so.

picking up the sentiments of the excluded” (Martin 2002, 133–34). This insight lies at the heart of my argument regarding the key role that conservative religious groups play in advancing the issue saliency of LGBTs in Africa. Below I define Renewalist Christianity and then provide an account of why Renewalist churches might be more involved in morality politics than mainstream churches and the reasons Renewalists are especially preoccupied with state-imposed limitations on homosexual behavior.

Defining Renewalist Christianity

Renewalist Christianity, and the related Pentecostal, Evangelical, and Charismatic movements, is one of the fastest-growing movements in global Christianity. Its major strands account for at least a quarter of all Christians worldwide (World Christian Database). In Africa, as recently as 1970, Pentecostals and Charismatics together represented less than 5% of the continent’s population. According to the World Christian Database, by 2005 Pentecostals alone represented 12% of Africa’s population of nearly 890 million people. Charismatic members of non-Pentecostal denominations number an additional 40 million, or approximately 5% of the population (Pew 2006).

There is considerable debate about how to define Renewalist Christianity and related traditions. Prominent religion scholars such as Freston (2001) and Ranger (2008) suggest using a “working definition” that highlights the centrality of four broad characteristics: *conversion* (emphasis on the need to change one’s life), *activism* (emphasis on missionary efforts), *biblicism* (the special importance attached to the Bible), and *crucicentrism* (the centrality of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross). Other widespread characteristics of Renewalism are belief in the prosperity gospel, exorcism and the existence of demons, spiritual warfare against representatives of the devil in everyday life, and syncretic blending with traditional indigenous practices (Kay 2011, 64–67). These definitions tend to emphasize spiritual experience and congregational participation rather than adherence to a formal codified doctrine. Paul Gifford therefore suggests an organizational (residual) definition that does not emphasize theology: Renewalist Christians in Africa are “not the Roman Catholics, not the mainline Protestants [. . .], not the classical African Initiated Churches, but the rest” (Ranger 2008, 225). Notwithstanding some doctrinal differences, I follow Pew (2006) by using the terms Pentecostals, Evangelical Christians, and Renewalists interchangeably.¹⁰

10. See online appendix for a short glossary of conservative Christian denominations.

Renewalist Christianity and Morality Politics

There are several reasons that Renewalist churches might be more involved than mainline churches in lobbying the state to regulate same-sex behavior in Africa. Assuming that intense belief is a prerequisite for advocating the regulation of behavior according to a “Christian understanding” of morality, Renewalists hew to their faith with greater intensity than Christians who identify with mainline churches. Consider the findings of a national representative public opinion survey conducted by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life in 19 African countries in 2010.¹¹ As shown in Figure 3 (left panel), compared to non-Renewalists, Pentecostals are significantly more likely to claim that religion plays an important part of their lives, to be “absolutely certain in their belief in God,” to take the Bible literally, and to claim to have received personal revelations from God. Moreover, Renewalists pray, go to church, and attend Bible study groups more often than any other Christian population.

Relatedly, existing public opinion data suggests that Renewalists in Africa hold, on average, more conservative views on social issues than members of other Christian denominations. For example, further analysis of the data assembled by Pew (2010) reveals that Renewalists express a more negative view—measured as the belief that behavior *x* is morally wrong—of divorce, prostitution, abortion, extramarital sex, polygamy, drinking alcohol, euthanasia, and most relevant, homosexual behavior (Figure 3, right panel).¹² Consistent with public opinion studies in the United States (Burdette, Ellison, and Hill 2005), Renewalists have the least accepting views of homosexuals among Christian denominations across Africa.

In the American context, Evangelicals and Pentecostals’ opposition to homosexuals is usually explained by high levels of church attendance as well as a literal acceptance of the Bible as God’s word (Burdette, Ellison, and Hill 2005).¹³ A belief in an infallible, inerrant Bible, more common among Renewalist Christians than in mainline churches, may lead to a moral absolutism that is incompatible with gay and lesbian lifestyles and alternative family structures (Wilcox and Jelen 1990).

11. The Pew survey took place in Botswana, Cameroon, Chad, Congo (DRC), Djibouti, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea Bissau, Kenya, Liberia, Mali, Mozambique, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia.

12. These findings partially reflect the fact that unlike those joining Renewalist churches, people who have been raised in mainline churches may not be practicing religion actively. The fact that religiosity and concern about morality issues are endogenous to membership in Pentecostal churches is, nonetheless, consistent with my claim that the presence of Renewalists has important social and political implications.

13. See especially Genesis 19, Leviticus 18:22, and Romans 1:18–32

Pentecostals' Belief and Conservative Views

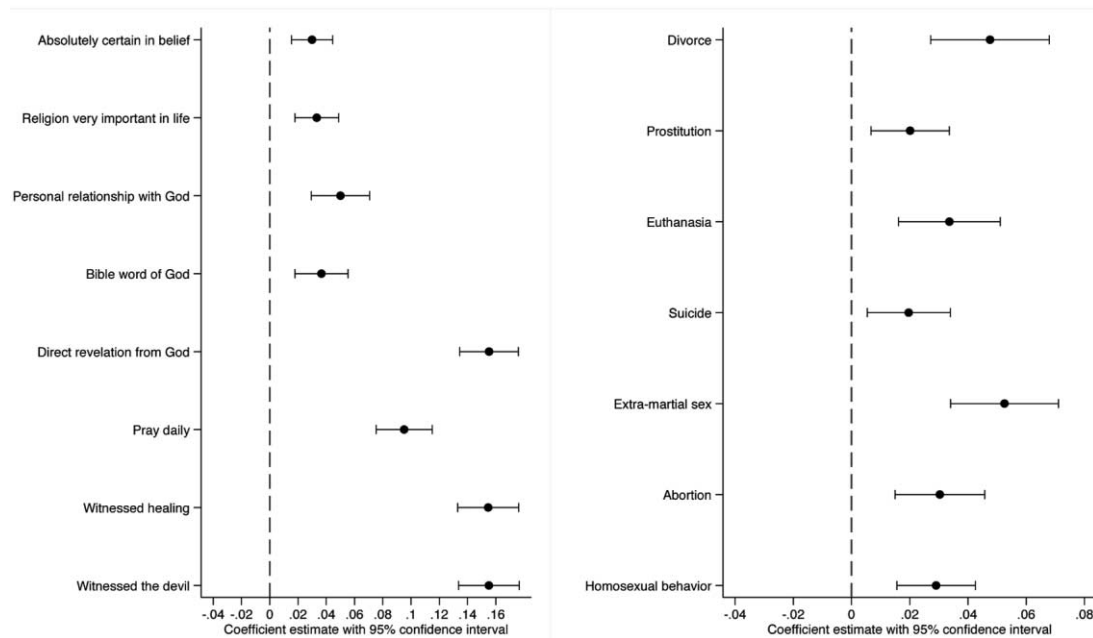


Figure 3. Pentecostals' belief and support for conservative views. This figure describes the marginal effect of a binary measure of Pentecostalism on various proxy measures of the strength of religious belief (left panel) and on respondents' support for conservative views, measured as an indicator of agreeing that *x* (e.g., abortion or homosexuality) is morally wrong (right panel). Regression results are derived from simple OLS with county fixed effects, controlling for respondents' sex, age, education, and income levels. Number of observations: 15,542.

Renewalists are also more likely to oppose sharp distinctions between public and private, church and state, and secular and divine affairs. Renewalist Christianity developed in reaction to the rise of liberalism over the past 200 years (Martin 2002). At the heart of modern liberal societies lies the public/private distinction; i.e., the idea that the primary role of government is to regulate behavior in the public sphere according to secular rules, whereas in the private sphere people are free to behave as they see fit. Renewalist groups, however, vehemently reject the liberal notion that religion can be separated from law and politics (Regnerus and Smith 1998). This rejection of the secularization of modernity, for example, forms the basis of the "culture wars" that have engulfed the United States since the 1980s (Haider-Markel and Meier 1996). Charismatics, Evangelicals, and Pentecostals may have doctrinal disagreements, but they share the view that influencing all spheres of the secular world is a Christian mandate (Fulton, Gorsuch, and Maynard 1999).

Closely related, Renewalists are more likely to believe that homosexuals pose a threat to society, and specifically to the traditional nuclear family, which is considered the basis of religious life. Framed as such, morality cannot be accepted as a matter of personal choice, since it affects all members of society (Burdette, Ellison, and Hill 2005). Call-

ing upon state intervention is, therefore, justified as a means to protect religiosity itself (Garvey 1991).

More so, the spread of Renewalist churches fragments existing congregations and heightens competition among churches, which encourages religious leaders to sharpen their messages in order to attract broader followings (Martin 2002). Existing public opinion data suggest that ideas closely related to the Pentecostal movement—e.g., belief in the prosperity gospel—are now held by many African Christians from mainline churches (Pew 2010). The Pew 2010 report thus concludes that in many African countries, the impact of Pentecostalism on public opinion and religious practices extends well beyond the growth of Pentecostal churches. This process further increases the pressure on churches, including mainline churches, to mobilize to demand state regulation of morality and family.

The sociological literature highlights an additional reason for the mobilization of conservative Christian groups against homosexuality: political opportunity. The idea is that religious groups are strategic and focus on political battles they believe they can win. These battles tend to be issues on which the people who oppose the mingling of religion and politics are unlikely to be dedicated or well organized (Fox 2013). In Africa, gay rights groups are hardly resourced, if they are even legal to begin with (Currier 2012),

which increases the prospect of religious groups' success in demanding state regulation of sexual behavior. I formalize the above discussion using the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: LGBT-related issues are more likely to be politically salient the higher a country's population share of Renewalist Christians.

Journalistic accounts of the Ugandan anti-gay bill commonly attribute the growing saliency of LGBTs in Africa to a deliberate export of the United States' own culture wars by far-right Christian groups.¹⁴ This argument has more than a grain of truth, in that several prominent American conservative Christian groups have dramatically increased their activities in Africa in the past several years (Kaoma 2012). Attempts to diffuse ideas internationally, however, require local affiliates in target countries. In what follows, I explore the incentives of national politicians and political parties to claim the issue of LGBTs.

SUPPLY SIDE: POLITICAL COMPETITION

When political competition is high, politicians are more inclined to promote new issues and attempt to make them salient in order to differentiate themselves from their competitors. Moreover, high levels of political competition increase the likelihood that politicians and political parties will become responsive to popular demands. The relationship between political competition and responsiveness has been demonstrated in both advanced Western democracies (Besley, Persson, and Sturm 2010) and poor African countries (Kudamatsu 2012).

The fact that democratization processes force politicians to differentiate themselves does not by itself explain why they tend to mobilize around morality issues rather than other issues. I argue that LGBT issues are especially appealing for politicians (in some African countries) who are pressured by heightened competition. One reason is the pressure to balance supply and demand: the more religious a politician's constituents are, the more he or she will seek religious legitimacy. Religious legitimacy is especially valued by *low-performing incumbents* seeking to divert attention away from the state of the economy or corruption allegations. A closely related reason why African politicians exploit LGBT issues is that they are risk averse and information constrained; therefore they are more likely to claim an issue that enjoys broad support and shy away from po-

larizing issues (Bleck and van de Walle 2013). Existing public opinion data suggest that negative attitudes towards homosexual behavior are rather widespread in many African countries (Pew 2010).

This obviously raises the puzzle of why (and how) politicians differentiate themselves if they are constructing an issue in valence terms. Recall that citizens share a broad agreement over valence issues—e.g., fighting corruption, promoting development and national security. Parties and candidates instead distinguish themselves based on how best to achieve these desired goals and who is best positioned to do so. As Bleck and van de Walle aptly explain, “on valence issues, partisan rhetoric focuses on proving competence around the issue, rather than on the rightness of a specific position regarding policy objectives” (2013, 4). I argue that incumbents enjoy a comparative advantage in morality politics, since they can use policy levers to signal deep-seated commitment. For example, President Museveni has used the signing of the anti-gay bill into law in Uganda—in the face of mounting international pressure, including threats to cut off aid to the country—to signal a credible commitment to addressing the “homosexuality problem.”¹⁵ This sort of signaling is not readily available to opposition leaders.

Political actors also find morality issues attractive since religious institutions are among the few organizations in low-income countries that have access to resources and can help mobilize voters (Gill 2008). Specifically, Renewalist churches often have charismatic leaders who are thought to possess a unique ecclesiastical authority and therefore have significant influence over their followers (McCauley 2013). The organizational capacity of religious organizations has been evident, for example, in the key role that “born-again” pastors have played in mobilizing support of the anti-gay bill in Uganda (Sadgrove et al. 2012).

Finally, morality issues are also attractive to politicians because they offer an effective way to build a political reputation and to negatively brand (or even silence) one's opponents (Currier 2010).¹⁶ Thus the incentive to seek the support of constituents with deeply held religious values by offering dramatic solutions to morality issues is high in areas with competitive political parties (Ripley and Franklin 1991). When debating morality policies, bureaucratic

14. See Max Strasser 2010, *Foreign Policy*, “The Global Gay Rights Battlefields.”

15. See The Big Story, “Uganda Holds ‘Thanksgiving’ Event for Anti-gay Law,” March 31, 2014.

16. For example, Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe, Binguwa Mutharika of Malawi, and former Zambian President Rupiah Banda all accused their opponents of being homosexuals when their leadership was threatened.

institutions cannot bring their prime resource—information—to bear on the issue and therefore tend to remain on the sidelines. Indeed, compared to other policy domains, such as fiscal policy, politicians face few expertise barriers to participation in debates about morality politics (Haider-Markel and Meier 1996). Politicians often find it relatively easy to communicate their position on morality policies to the electorate, because citizens also require little information to participate in the debate. As Haider-Markel and Meier aptly comment, “everyone is an expert on morality” (1996, 333).

I summarize the above discussion with the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2 (Political Competition): LGBT-related issues are more likely to be politically salient the higher a country’s level of political competition.

DATA SOURCES AND MEASUREMENT OF KEY VARIABLES

This section briefly describes the data used to test the above hypotheses and how it was collected. In the empirical literature, issue saliency—the key dependent variable—has been measured using party manifestos, mass surveys, and media coverage. Party manifestos are inadequate in Africa, since most parties are weakly institutionalized and thus their manifestos (if they exist) tend to be short, abstract, and uninformative. In addition, party manifestos hardly change between electoral cycles, limiting their ability to measure changes over short periods of time. Mass surveys of public opinion are also inadequate for measuring issue saliency in Africa, since they are infrequent and—with the exception of the Afrobarometer, which has limited coverage—generally not comparable across countries.

I therefore instead use media coverage to construct two measures of LGBT saliency. First, LGBT saliency is measured as the number of LGBT-related articles that appear in year t in the news or opinion pages of country j ’s highest-circulating newspaper. Second, I check the robustness of my findings using an alternative measure: the mean number of articles in a given year of all available newspapers of country j . One key advantage of these measures is that they allow us to capture fine-grained spatial and temporal variation that is comparable across Africa. They are also “objective,” in the sense that they are based on minimal coding rules and publicly available documents, which make the measurements easily replicable. These measures build on ample evidence suggesting that when events resonate with more general social concerns, they are significantly more

likely to be reported (Earl et al. 2004). I provide additional information on the coding of the dependent variable, including a complete list of newspapers, in the online appendix.

Key Independent Variables

The main independent variables in the empirical analysis include a country’s major religion and population share of Renewalist Christians, which are both derived from the World Christian Database (WCD). *Christian majority* is an indicator variable that equals 1 if the population share of Christians is larger than 0.5, and 0 otherwise. To measure the spread of Renewalist Christianity, I follow WCD’s approach and calculate the share of total population that is Pentecostal, Charismatic, or neo-Charismatic. The variable *Renewalist share* is a continuous variable with a mean value of 17%. In all model specifications, I include, an interaction term between *Christian majority* and *Renewalist share* to capture the likelihood that the influence of Renewalist churches on the issue saliency of LGBTs will be significantly larger in Christian-majority countries than in Muslim countries.

The key political variable is political competition. I use a country’s Polity IV score as a proxy measure of *political competition*. Note that the results are robust to an alternative measure—margin of minority—derived from the World Bank Database of Political Institutions. Consistent with my theoretical framework, all models include an interaction between political competition and Renewalist population share. To test whether low-performing incumbents are more likely to seek religious legitimacy, I use a 12-point scale measure of state legitimacy constructed by the State Fragility Project.

Figure 4 shows the unconditional relationship between LGBT saliency and the study’s key explanatory variables over time. Several trends seem clear from Figure 4. First, LGBT saliency is higher in countries that have above the mean share of Renewalist Christians and where the opposition’s share of seats in parliament is relatively high. Second, the *gap* between high and low share of Renewalist Christians and between high and low share of opposition seats has been increasing over time from around 2007.

Control Variables

In addition to the key independent variables, I employ various political, social, and economic measures as controls. The inclusion of controls is based on theoretical reasoning. I use two variables to capture features of the legal system that may impact LGBT saliency. First, I control for a country’s colonial past using indicators for the identity of

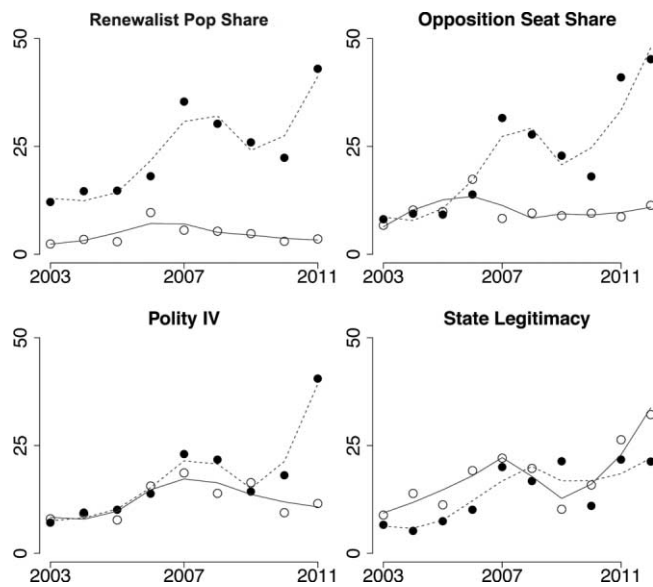


Figure 4. LGBT saliency and key explanatory variables. Each of the four variables has been cut at the median such that black circles represent values above the median and hollow circles are values below the median. Dotted and straight lines for above and below median, respectively, are derived using the loess local fit procedure in R.

the most recent colonial power.¹⁷ Second, all regressions include an indicator of whether male homosexuality was illegal in 2002, since illegality likely increases media coverage—for example, by generating media reports of arrests of LGBT persons. In models that use the highest-circulating newspaper, I also control for *private ownership*—an indicator variable that takes the value of 1 for privately owned newspapers and 0 for government-controlled media outlets. All models control for the total number of articles published in the data source (AllAfrica or Factiva) in a given year.

A large body of work argues that fundamentalism develops in reaction to modernization (Emerson and Hartman 2006). Therefore I further control for GDP per capita, which is taken from the World Bank Development Indicators database, and for a country's Human Development Index score. I further control for foreign aid committed per capita (log), derived from the World Bank Development Indicators, since aid-dependence may constrain governments' treatment of LGBTs. I also control for HIV prevalence, taken from the UNAIDS project, since media outlets in high-infection countries are more likely to report stories related to the relationship between homosexuality and

HIV/AIDS. Further controls include a measure of ethnic heterogeneity, which I derive from Desmet, Ortuño-Ortín, and Wacziarg (2012), and a measure of population size (log) using data from the US Census Bureau International Census project, since larger countries are more likely to be regional leaders in the politicization of new issues. Finally, I account for regional clustering and spatial diffusion by adding regional indicators for Central, Western, Eastern, and Southern Africa and for time trends by adding year indicators. Descriptive statistics for all variables used in the regression analysis is provided in the online appendix.

CORRELATES OF LGBT POLITICAL SALIENCY IN AFRICA

Since the dependent variable is count data, the natural starting point would be to fit a Poisson regression. However, as is well known, the Poisson model makes the strong assumption that the variance of the count is equal to the (conditional) expectation. As Figure 1 in the online appendix shows, the distribution of the dependent variable is overdispersed (i.e., the variance is larger than the mean). I therefore instead estimate a set of negative binomial regression models, which allows me to model Poisson heterogeneity using a closed-form likelihood function.

Estimation Strategy

I fit two models for each of the two outcomes. The first model is a quadratic (mean dispersion) negative binomial model (NB2).¹⁸ The second model is a Zero-inflated Negative Binomial (ZINB), which was developed specifically to address the problem of a high percentage of zero counts, exceeding what is accounted for by the negative binomial distribution. The ZINB model accounts for overdispersion through a splitting process that models the outcomes as zero or nonzero (Long 1997, 242–47). In all models I cluster standard errors by country.

Results

I report results from the four models in Table 1 (exponentiated coefficients, or “incidence rate ratio”) and Table 2 (marginal effects).¹⁹ To allow readers to compare between model fits, I report the Akaike Information Criterion (AIC). For both outcomes, the ZINB and NB2 models perform quite similarly.

18. Whereas the Poisson model assumes dispersion is equal to 1, NB2 yields a model with dispersion equal to $1 + \alpha \exp(x_i\beta + \text{offset}_i)$; i.e., the dispersion is a function of the expected mean.

19. When coefficients are exponentiated, coefficients above (below) the value of 1 are positively (negatively) associated with the dependent variable.

17. I use “No-European rule” as the colonialism reference category. Controlling for a country's type of legal system in addition to its colonial past does not improve the model fit, due to the high correlation between these variables.

Table 1. Determinants of LGBT Saliency (annual data)

	Highest Circulation		Mean Available Newspapers	
	NB2	ZINB	NB2	ZINB
Polity IV index	0.970*	0.970	0.987	0.987
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Renewalists share	1.027	1.029	1.017	1.017
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Polity IV × Renewalists share	1.003*	1.003*	1.005*	1.005*
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
State legitimacy	0.879*	0.881*	0.870*	0.870*
	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Christian majority	6.088*	6.042*	4.920*	4.920*
	(5.13)	(5.26)	(3.97)	(3.97)
Christian majority × Renewalists share	1.005	1.004	1.022	1.022
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Annual articles in database	1.000*	1.000*	1.000*	1.000*
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Private ownership	0.797	0.781		
	(0.23)	(0.24)		
Control variables				
Effective number of religions	1.109	1.108	1.024	1.021
	(0.15)	(0.15)	(0.12)	(0.12)
Homosexuality criminal	7.367*	7.514*	10.528*	10.528*
	(2.81)	(2.82)	(2.77)	(2.77)
Elections held	0.819	0.821	0.770*	0.770*
	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.09)	(0.09)
Human Development Index	0.277*	0.272	0.260*	0.260*
	(0.21)	(0.22)	(0.19)	(0.19)
HIV prevalence	0.787	0.790	0.923	0.923
	(0.14)	(0.15)	(0.15)	(0.15)
GDP per capita	5.002*	5.059*	4.998*	4.998*
	(4.20)	(4.35)	(3.99)	(3.99)
Aid committed per capita	0.992	0.998	1.055	1.055
	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)
Population (log)	1.273	1.271	1.325*	1.325*
	(0.20)	(0.20)	(0.15)	(0.15)
Ethnic fractionalization	1.031*	1.031*	1.026*	1.026*
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
British colony	0.494*	0.493*	0.420*	0.420*
	(0.17)	(0.16)	(0.13)	(0.13)
French colony	4.116*	4.274*	4.780*	4.780*
	(3.39)	(3.45)	(3.73)	(3.73)
Belgian colony	6.975*	7.151*	7.468*	7.468*
	(3.91)	(4.01)	(3.32)	(3.32)
Portuguese colony	1.373	1.403	0.956	0.956
	(1.68)	(1.71)	(1.11)	(1.11)
South African rule	1.659	1.697	3.273*	3.273*
	(0.65)	(0.66)	(1.03)	(1.03)
Region indicators	X	X	X	X
Year indicators	X	X	X	X
Log likelihood	-507.585	-507.462	-499.256	-499.256
AIC	1061.169	1060.925	1046.511	1048.511
Observations	182	182	192	192

Note—Clustered standard errors in parentheses. Coefficients are exponentiated.

* $p < 0.1$.

Table 2. Unconditional Marginal Effects: Key Independent Variables

Source	Model	Variable	Estimate	SE	Min95	Max95	<i>p</i> -value
Highest Circulation	NB2	Polity IV index	0.025	(0.467)	-0.891	0.941	0.957
Highest Circulation	NB2	Renewalists share	0.571	(0.182)	0.213	0.928	0.002
Highest Circulation	NB2	State legitimacy	-2.026	(1.036)	-4.056	0.005	0.051
Highest Circulation	NB2	Christian majority	23.870	(13.750)	-3.080	50.819	0.083
Highest Circulation	ZINB	Polity IV index	0.071	(0.444)	-0.799	0.941	0.873
Highest Circulation	ZINB	Renewalists share	0.572	(0.180)	0.219	0.925	0.002
Highest Circulation	ZINB	State legitimacy	-1.942	(1.015)	-3.932	0.047	0.056
Highest Circulation	ZINB	Christian majority	23.354	(14.099)	-4.280	50.989	0.098
Mean available newspapers	NB2	Polity IV index	0.488	(0.257)	-0.015	0.992	0.057
Mean available newspapers	NB2	Renewalists share	0.535	(0.10)8	0.323	0.746	0.000
Mean available newspapers	NB2	State legitimacy	-1.785	(0.668)	-3.095	-0.476	0.008
Mean available newspapers	NB2	Christian majority	18.629	(10.188)	-1.339	38.597	0.067
Mean available newspapers	ZINB	Polity IV index	0.488	(0.257)	-0.015	0.992	0.057
Mean available newspapers	ZINB	Renewalists share	0.535	(0.108)	0.323	0.746	0.000
Mean available newspapers	ZINB	State legitimacy	-1.785	(0.668)	-3.094	-0.476	0.008
Mean available newspapers	ZINB	Christian majority	18.629	(10.188)	-1.339	38.597	0.067

Note—Unconditional marginal effects are calculated by holding all control variables at their mean values.

Recall that I hypothesize that LGBT issue saliency increases as a country's share of Renewalist Christians increases (H1). The results are consistent with the theoretical expectations: in all four models, we find a large positive and significant relationship between the share of Renewalist Christians and LGBT saliency (Table 2). More so, as expected, the effect of a country's share of Renewalists increases with the country's level of political competition (H2), as shown by the significance of the interaction term (Table 1).

To further facilitate appreciation of the magnitude of the relationship between the key independent variables and LGBT saliency, I use the ZINB model for the highest-circulating newspaper to calculate the marginal effects of the share of Renewalist Christians as a function of a country's democratization level. As Figure 5 shows, the effect of Renewalist population share positively increases with a country's level of democratization. A 10-point increase in the share of Renewalist Christians is associated with about 2.2 more LGBT articles per year at one standard deviation below the mean level of democratization (Polity IV equals -5), 4.5 more articles at the mean level of democratization (Polity IV equals 0) but almost nine more articles per annum at high levels of democratization.

Robustness

I conduct several tests to assess the robustness of the findings, employing two alternative dependent variables, using an alternative measure of political competition, estimating

the determinants of LGBT saliency using three- and five-year averages, and conducting two placebo tests. This section summarizes these tests in brief. The robustness checks and their results are described in greater detail in the online appendix

First, instead of the Polity IV score, I run the same model specifications using an alternative measure of political competition: *margin of minority*, which measures the percentage of parliamentary seats held by parties other than the government and is calculated by dividing the number of nongovernment seats by the total (government plus opposition plus nonaligned) seats. The results, presented in Table 5 of the online appendix, produce rather similar findings.

Second, to ensure that the above findings are not driven by the sensitivity of my models to exceptional years, I compute a three-year average dataset (2003–2005, 2006–2008, 2009–11) and a five-year average (2002–2006, 2007–11) dataset and run similar negative binomial models on the two alternative specifications of the dependent variable. The results, presented in Tables 6 and 7 of the online appendix, support the findings from the annual data.

Next, I conduct two placebo tests designed to provide greater assurance that the relationship between LGBT saliency and Renewalist share of the population is not spurious. I collect equivalent data from the same newspaper sources and years on two additional salient issues: agriculture and corruption. I selected these issues because we

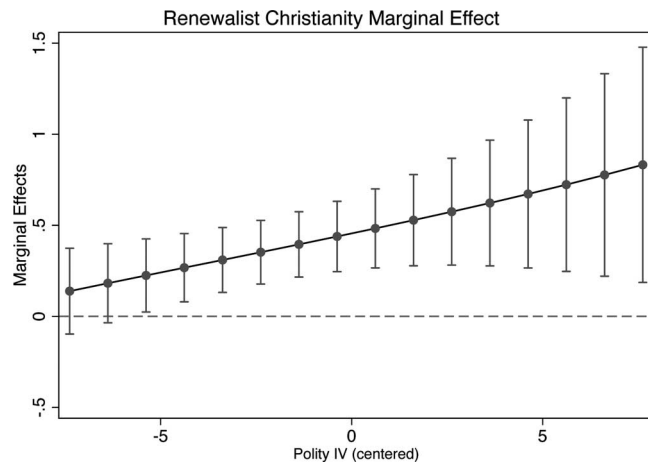


Figure 5. Marginal effects: The marginal effect of Renewalist population share is displayed as a function of countries' democratization level. Marginal effects are derived from ZINB model for the highest-available circulation newspapers. The Polity IV index has been centered such that its grand mean is equal to zero with a standard deviation of about 5. $N = 182$.

do not necessarily expect them to be affected by a country's share of Evangelical Christians. As Table 8 in the online appendix shows, Renewalists share of the population is not associated with the issue saliency of either agriculture or corruption.

Discussion

We know relatively little about how new issues become politically salient. The theoretical literature on the determinants of issue saliency has developed in (and for) advanced Western democracies. This literature suggests that political "losers" have the strongest incentive to reconfigure voter alliances by promoting hitherto "dormant" issues that are politically polarizing. The strategic mobilization of Southern voters by the Republican Party around morality issues is a case in point. However, in this article I have argued that the dominant framework for explaining new-found political issues does not apply well to Sub-Saharan Africa. Given the institutional weakness of opposition parties in Africa, as well as their (largely) nonideological nature, it may not be that losing parties are crafting new issue dimensions so much as they are responding to cues from existing societal groups. I further argued, and empirically demonstrated, that among civil society groups, organized churches are well positioned to aggregate interests and serve as vehicles for new issue saliency.

Focusing specifically on the saliency of LGBT-related issues, this article highlights the key role that Renewalist Christianity plays in policymaking in some parts of Africa. Though Renewalism's dramatic expansion has left almost

no part of Sub-Saharan Africa unaffected, the extent of its growth varies across the region. I argue that the uneven expansion of Renewalism can help explain variation in the saliency of morality politics. At the upper end of Renewalist expansion are Zimbabwe (50%), South Africa (48%), Ghana (36%), Nigeria (31%), Kenya (30%), Zambia (25%), and Uganda (22%), where Pentecostals and Charismatics represent a large share of the national populations. Importantly, in all those countries, LGBT-related issues are found to be highly salient. At the lower end of Renewalist expansion are Ivory Coast, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Sierra Leone, Cameroon, Madagascar, and Eritrea, where Pentecostals and Charismatics make up less than 10% of the populations; LGBT issues are not politically salient in any of these countries. Using a set of negative binomial regressions, I provide robust evidence that the relationship between LGBT saliency and Renewalist expansion holds for the entire set of African countries for which data is available.

Commenting on the recent wave of legislation that places limitations on same-sex behavior, journalists and commentators in policy circles commonly claim that American Christian groups are responsible for exporting US-style "culture wars" to the African continent (Kaoma 2012). These accounts tend to assume, at least implicitly, that Northern conservatives are manipulating Southern communities for their own ends. While the growing ties between Northern and Southern Christian groups is undisputed—and should be the focus of future studies—this argument tends to downplay the agency of African political leaders and their constituents, who have their own social, political, and moral concerns (Anderson 2011). I have argued that political actors in Africa are especially attuned to demands from Christian groups when levels of political competition are high and the legitimacy of the incumbent regime is low. This is because engaging in morality politics gives political actors a relatively easy way to gain religious legitimacy and thereby enhance their standing with voters.

The findings and arguments of this article expand the study of the implications of Africa's recent democratization process. Previous work has focused mostly on the impact of Africa's heightened political competition on service delivery policies, such as education spending (Stasavage 2005) and health spending (Kudamatsu 2012). Given that many African countries have rather weak democratic institutions—e.g., weak parliaments, constitutions that have little bite, and a court system that is hardly independent—there is also a great need to examine whether the continent's emboldened majorities are using their power to infringe on the rights of minorities. Pointing to the fact that heightened political competition is contributing to a wave

of legislation that limits the rights of a weak minority group (in this case, gays and lesbians) is one of the article's key contributions. Future work should further examine this "dark side" of democratization processes in low- and middle-income countries in Africa and beyond.

One of the puzzling findings of this article is the near absence of public discourse regarding homosexuality in Muslim-majority countries in Africa. Analyzing the data assembled by Pew (2010)—not presented here for the sake of brevity—we can easily eliminate the possibility that African Muslims are somehow more tolerant of homosexuals than their Christian counterparts. Instead, I suspect that the low saliency of LGBT issues in Muslim-majority countries stems from the fact that discussing homosexuality is considered taboo and that leaders prefer not to acknowledge the existence of gays and lesbians in their communities. For example, in July 2010, the now president of South Sudan, Salva Kiir Mayardit, argued that "homosexuality is not in the character of Southern Sudanese people. It is not even something that anybody can talk about here in southern Sudan in particular. It is not there and if anybody wants to import or to export it to Sudan, it will not get the support and it will always be condemned by everybody."²⁰

Another possibility is that the low saliency is the result of the severe punishments that homosexuals face in most Muslim-majority countries: e.g., under some conditions, the death penalty in Northern Nigeria, Sudan, Mauritania, and some regions of Somaliland. In such an environment, gays and lesbians likely remain in an "underground world" that both advocates and opponents of gay rights may prefer to preserve. For example, The US Department of States 2010 Human Rights Report on Chad found that "there were no known lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) organizations (in Chad). There were few reports of violence or discrimination against LGBT persons, in large part because most such persons were discreet about sexual orientation due to social and cultural strictures against homosexuality." Future work should explore in greater depth the reason why LGBT issues have not become salient in Muslim-majority countries in Africa.

Finally, this article expands the nascent comparative literature on issue saliency in Africa. This literature has, by and large, been limited to examining spatial and temporal variation in the political saliency of *ethnicity*. I have no desire to challenge the prominence of ethnicity in the study of African politics. However, by focusing on the issue saliency of LGBT, this article contributes to a growing body of work

that rejects the reductionist view, which tends to explain political phenomena in Africa—from vote choice to civil wars—exclusively through the lens of tribalism.

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