

# Sub-Saharan Africa is world's "most religious" area: Islam and Christianity dominate

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Researchers say they've found the most religious place on Earth. It's between the southern border of the Sahara Desert and the tip of South Africa. Religion is "very important" to more than three-quarters of the population in 17 of 19 sub-Saharan nations, according to a new survey.

In contrast, in the United States, the world's most religious industrialized nation, 57 percent of the people say religion is very important.

"On a continent-wide basis, sub-Saharan Africa comes out as the most religious place on Earth," said Luis Lugo, director of the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, which released the study on April 15.

The survey found 98 percent of respondents in Senegal say religion is very important, followed by 93 percent in Mali. The lowest percentage was reported in Botswana: 69 percent, which is still a sizable majority.

"That begins to paint a picture of how religious sub-Saharan Africans are," Lugo said. The study is part of the Pew-Templeton Global Religious Futures Project. More than 25,000 sub-Saharan Africans responded in face-to-face interviews in more than 60 languages.

While the study confirms that Africans are indeed morally conservative and religiously pious, researchers explored a variety of topics, including religious tolerance, polygamy, the role of women in society, and political and economic satisfaction.

Islam and Christianity dominate as the most popular religions in the region—a stark reversal from a century ago when Muslims and Christians were outnumbered by followers of traditional indigenous religions. But for the past 100 years, indigenous

spirituality has been diluted as missionaries carried Islam and Christianity throughout the African continent. -*Religion News Service*