

# American Foreign Policy Council

## TANZANIA

### QUICK FACTS

Population: 52,482,726 (July 2016 est.)

Area: 947,3000 sq km

Ethnic Groups: mainland - African 99% (of which 95% are Bantu consisting of more than 130 tribes), other 1% (consisting of Asian, European, and Arab); Zanzibar - Arab, African, mixed Arab and African

Religions: Christian 61.4%, Muslim 35.2%, folk religion 1.8%, other 0.2%, unaffiliated 1.4%

Government Type: presidential republic

GDP (official exchange rate):\$46.7 billion (2015 est.)

*Map and Quick Facts courtesy of the CIA World Factbook (January 2017)*

### OVERVIEW

*Tanzania currently harbors a low level of Islamist activity, especially as compared to regional neighbors such as Egypt, Somalia, Sudan, and Kenya. However, a number of factors—among them secular nationalism, a lame parliamentary democracy, slow and uneven economic growth, and unequal opportunity—have spurred at least some Muslim Africans in Tanzania, as elsewhere, to adhere to Islamism as an ideological alternative.*

*Like other states in Africa south of the Sahara with large Muslim populations, Tanzania remains vulnerable to the popular unrest that has swept North Africa and the Gulf region since January 2011. The Arab Spring phenomenon presents a “backdoor” opening for radical jihadist Islam, which already maintains a strong presence in North Africa and the Sabel. Tanzania is significant for the number of Muslims in the population (some 18 million people), for its proximity to Somalia, the eastern African cockpit of Islamism, in which both al-Qaeda and ISIS are deter-*

*mined to vie for influence; and for the character of its internal politics: a one-party-dominant political system, in which the status of the Muslim population is emerging as a divisive political issue.*

## ISLAMIST ACTIVITY

The bombing of the U.S. embassy in Dar es Salaam in 1998, which killed eleven people and injured eighty-five others, revealed the existence of *jihadi* terrorists in Tanzania. The bombing, however, was not a plot planned inside the country, or even one organized by Tanzanian Muslims, although two Zanzibari residents were implicated. Rather, the attack was actually orchestrated by a handful of Somalis, al-Qaeda operatives and sleepers with regional links to cells in Tanzania and Kenya.<sup>1</sup>

Although no other similarly high-profile attacks occurred for years, Tanzania overall has remained vulnerable to radical Islamists, as a spate of acid and explosive attacks since 2012—as well as the discovery of suspected terror training camps inside Tanzania—confirm.<sup>2</sup> The country has a low-capacity government presiding over a large territorial expanse (one the size of France and Germany combined). Sixty-seven percent of the population lives below the poverty line.<sup>3</sup> *Jihadi* attacks have occurred just across its northern border in neighboring countries of Kenya and Uganda, and small arms and other weapons are readily available on the black market in East Africa. Somali terror group *Al-Shabaab*, which remains a threat to Somalia as well as the broader region, is committed to transnational expansion, including operations in, recruits from, and attacks on Tanzania.<sup>4</sup> With rudimentary border controls, a wide-open coastline and troubled neighbors, Tanzania's large coastal trade and extensive, illegal smuggling industry provide excellent logistical cover for extremists. Meanwhile, the Tanzanian police are unable, and sometimes unwilling, to provide even the most basic public safety services, and major crimes often go unsolved. The Tanzanian National Security Service is more capable than its police force, but is better suited to spying on political opponents than combating criminal networks. These weaknesses make Tanzania a relatively soft target.<sup>5</sup>

The 2012 arrest of Emrah Erdogan, an associate of both al-Qaeda and al-Shabaab, in Dar es Salaam was considered by the Tanzanian National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) to be a confirmation that extremist organizations “have elements and plans within the country's borders.”<sup>6</sup> This looming threat was thrown into the spotlight once again in May 2013 when a church in the predominantly Christian area of Arusha was bombed, wounding over 60. Four Saudi nationals and four Tanzanians were arrested in connection with the attack, but to date no group has claimed responsibility.<sup>7</sup> A series of acid and improvised explosive device (IED) attacks targeting tourists, Christians, and moderate Muslims have occurred since 2012.<sup>8</sup> While no group claimed responsibility, some suggested that a radical Zanzibari separatist group might have inspired—if not carried out—the attacks.<sup>9</sup>

At least three times between 2013 and 2016, authorities raided suspected terror training camps in Tanzania, some of which were recruiting and indoctrinating children.<sup>10</sup> It is unclear which group is responsible for setting them up, though authorities suggested that al-Shabaab was the prime suspect. While Tanzania is not part of the African Union Mission in Somalia like its neighbors Kenya and Burundi, it is susceptible to the threat of Somali terror group al-Shabaab and its Kenyan affiliate *al-Hijra* (Erdogan, whose case is detailed above, was apprehended in part due to his links to *al-Hijra* members).<sup>11</sup> Both groups have made known their interest in Tanzania—evident especially in the large number of Tanzanian citizens recruited to fight for al-Shabaab in Somalia. More recently, a video message from a cell purported to be aligned with the Islamic State (ISIS) emerged, drawing attention to a third group with its eye on Tanzania, though there is little known about whether the group recruits in person or solely online in Tanzania.<sup>12</sup> The threat of these groups infiltrating Tanzania and carrying out attacks there bears watching, but of equal concern is the transnational power of the radical Islamic ideology that al-Shabaab and ISIS preach, and the potential that Tanzanians could be inspired by the groups to carry out lone wolf attacks.

The potential for volatility and radicalization is higher in Zanzibar, a semi-autonomous archipelago situated off the northeastern Tanzanian coast. The islands are majority Muslim, and thus constitute a prime target for radical figures like Sheikh Ponda Issa Ponda. Ponda has led a smattering of Islamist organizations, including *Simba wa Mungu* (God's Lion) and *Jumuiya ya Taasisi za Kiislām* (Community of Muslim Organizations), which in the past has forcibly taken over mosques in Dar es Salaam and violently targeted tourists.<sup>13</sup> He preaches *jihadi* Islamism and reputedly enjoys ties with al-Qaeda officials.<sup>14</sup> In early 2013, he was convicted of inciting violence “likely to lead to a breach of peace in the country” and given a year-long suspended sentence.<sup>15</sup> Three months later, unidentified men threw acid on two young British tourists in the Zanzibar town of Stone Town in a drive-by attack. Zanzibar authorities immediately arrested Ponda, asserting that his recent meetings with the leaders of the UAMSHO Muslim separatist group may have prompted the attack.<sup>16</sup>

UAMSHO (an acronym for the Association for Islamic Mobilization and Propagation, and also the Swahili word for “Awakening”) first began offering public lectures on Islam in the 1990s and later expanded into the sphere of Muslim rights.<sup>17</sup> Its stated goals are to increase the standard of living for Muslims living in Zanzibar and to ultimately achieve Zanzibari independence.<sup>18</sup> UAMSHO's supporters have accused the government of intervening in religious affairs in violation of Article 19 of the Constitution, and they claim that government corruption has led to the moral decline of the country. Finally, they complain that the corrupt government does not properly enforce the laws in Tanzania regulating dress codes and alcohol. The government of Zanzibar, for its part, has accused the group of holding and disseminating fundamentalist views. In addition, various Western groups and think tanks have also

accused the group of contemplating terrorist attacks against the tourist industry in Zanzibar, though a 2009 inquiry by the British, American, and Danish embassies in Tanzania found the organization to be non-violent.<sup>19</sup> However, more recently, the group's public image has been tarnished. Tanzanian Prime Minister Mizengo Pinda opined in 2012 that UAMSHO "has of late lost direction and is propagating hatred among the people of Zanzibar."<sup>20</sup>

In 2012, protests against the arrest of some thirty UAMSHO members resulted in the destruction of two churches in Zanzibar; according to Zanzibari police, UAMSHO "was responsible for inciting these riots"—a charge the group has denied.<sup>21</sup> In August 2013, the group was linked to outbreaks of violence, including acid attacks as well as religiously motivated abductions, rioting, and arson.<sup>22</sup> Part of UAMSHO's popularity stems from the formation of the 2010 government of national unity (a coalition between the ruling CCM and opposition CUF in Zanzibar), which to many Zanzibaris closed off the last legitimate, mainstream avenue for expressing their political grievances. In the wake of this agreement, UAMSHO positioned itself as the only group able and willing to bring about positive change for Zanzibari Muslims.

The Ansar Muslim Youth Center (AMYC), based in Tanzania's Tanga region, is another group of potential importance. Thought to be led by Sheikh Salim Abdulrahim Barahiyan, the organization began as an al-Qaeda-linked group before aligning itself with al-Shabaab and *al-Hijra*. Its goal is to "promote moral reform through the propagation of Salafi Islam," and the group exercises considerable influence over a large network of mosques and religious schools in the country.<sup>23</sup> Rather than having a centralized leadership structure, AMYC is "one visible part of a loose network" that includes everyone from hardline Islamic clerics to financiers and recruiters operating across Tanzania.<sup>24</sup> While it is difficult to tell if the group is directly responsible for any recent attacks, the AMYC's danger is its network, through which it has close relations with *al-Hijra* and has reportedly offered safe haven to *jihadists* passing through Tanzania.<sup>25</sup> Using such connections to recruit and fundraise for other radical Islamists may not be far off.

On a broader level, several Islamic groups, associated with a loosely organized movement known as *Ansar al-Sunnah*, seek a purified Islam in Tanzania. Although other revivalists are critical of *Ansar*, saying it is too closely linked to *Salafism*, *Wahabism*, and *Hanbalism* (all of which are conservative Muslim religious movements)<sup>26</sup> *Ansar* has recently grown more visible in Tanzania, both in small towns and in larger cities.<sup>27</sup>

So far, however, both movements are largely ripples on the surface of theology and social life across the country. Sufi Islam and Islamic traditions remain mixed with local tribal customs, creating a formidable barrier to radical Islamists.<sup>28</sup> As a further preventative measure, the NCTC intends to work directly with local police to encourage respected figures in Tanzanian communities, including elders and religious authorities, to try to promote conflict resolution through dialogue rather than violence.<sup>29</sup>

Yet it is important to note that these efforts may easily be counterbalanced by foreign influence. In recent years, expatriate *Wahhabis* from Saudi Arabia have been active in Muslim charitable organizations and in schools. According to a 2011 Western intelligence report, the Saudis are spending about \$1 million a year in Tanzania to build new mosques and buy influence with the ruling CCM party.<sup>30</sup> “We get our funds from Yemen and Saudi Arabia,” says Mohammed Madi, a Zanzibari separatist activist.<sup>31</sup> “Officially the money is used to buy medicine, but in reality the money is given to us to support our work and buy guns.”<sup>32</sup> Indeed, *Wahhabi*-style fundamentalists have, on occasion, taken over 30 of the 487 mosques in Dar es Salaam, bombed bars, and beaten women who go out without being fully covered.<sup>33</sup>

## ISLAMISM AND SOCIETY

Of Tanzania’s population of about 52 million, it is estimated that about one-third are Muslim, nearly two-thirds are Christian, and a small percentage are “animist.”<sup>34</sup> The Christian population dominates the southwest and north-central areas of the country. Muslims live largely along the pre-colonial and colonial trade routes: coastal north-south, and east-west. In the past, these routes were active in the transport of slaves, ivory, sisal, coffee and tea. The Zanzibar islands, which once served as the hub of pre-colonial trade, now have a population of roughly 1.3 million, the vast majority of which are Muslim.<sup>35</sup> In the traditional centers of Swahili culture along the coast, Muslims adhere to Sunni Islam, though a sizable minority of Tanzania’s Muslims identify as Shi’a.<sup>36</sup>

Tanzania’s major, simmering conflict is now the political struggle between the Tanzanian mainland and Zanzibar, which are separate former dependencies of Britain. Despite efforts to tie Zanzibar to the mainland, separatist sentiments never died in the islands.<sup>37</sup> Because many Zanzibaris identify culturally with their alleged Arab ancestry from across the Indian Ocean, rather than the African mainland, the potential for Zanzibari sovereignty remains a political issue linked to religious tensions and thus relevant to the question of the spread of radical Islam.

On the Zanzibar islands, Muslim religious scholars are becoming more influential in setting rules for social behavior—such as enforcing a dress code and attempting to shut down establishments that serve alcohol. High levels of poverty and feelings of marginalization at the hands of the mainland government on the islands continue to contribute to political discontent.<sup>38</sup> Zanzibar, which fared poorly from the economic liberalization of the 1990s, has fallen behind the mainland in economic growth, and its Western-focused tourist industry is small and fragile.<sup>39</sup> Rising crime, as well as high levels of youth unemployment (up to 85% of youth are unemployed in Zanzibar) and drug addiction<sup>40</sup> (estimates suggest that some 7% of Zanzibar’s population is addicted to heroin) exacerbate the situation.<sup>41</sup> Thus its dissatisfied population is likely even more vulnerable to radicalization than are the residents of the mainland.

Since the 1980s, wealthy individuals from the Gulf States have funded mosques, *madrassas*, health clinics, and secondary schools in Zanzibar.<sup>42</sup> In addition, young Zanzibari men have received scholarships to study in Medina and Khartoum. Two of Zanzibar's universities are Islamic, funded by Saudi Arabians and Kuwaitis. Zanzibar University is funded by the Darul Iman Charitable Association, while Chukwani College of Education offers classes in Islamic studies and Islamic education. The amount of money provided from abroad is formidable; a 2012 study estimated that Saudi Arabia spends \$1 million annually on religious institutions—including schools, radio stations, and mosques—in Zanzibar.<sup>43</sup> As a Zanzibar parliamentarian stated, “it’s very difficult for the traditional *madrassas* that are really in poor shape to rival the influence of those that are being funded by foreigners and Wahhabi-based institutions.”<sup>44</sup>

Three distinct factors have helped foster an Islamic revival in Tanzania. First, the demise of the single-party state via a 1992 law guaranteeing freedom of political organization allowed for alternative forms of association.<sup>45</sup> Groups that were formerly prohibited have emerged to proselytize for a more purified Islam.<sup>46</sup> Second, new Islamic organizations are opposing formerly state-sanctioned groups.<sup>47</sup> This Muslim revival is part of a “reconnecting” with the Muslim world that is taking place in Tanzania after years of isolation. It parallels, and may be due in part to, the new availability of Islamic satellite television channels and Islamic media in the country.<sup>48</sup> Third, Tanzania remains plagued by poverty. Despite mineral discoveries (including a massive natural gas find in 2016 worth some \$8 billion<sup>49</sup>), its economy relies on agriculture, but only a small portion of its land is subject to sustainable cultivation. Comparatively paltry resources, combined with failed economic programs since independence, have translated into a \$2,900 per capita GDP, with a large percentage of the population living below the poverty line.<sup>50</sup>

The religious figures leading this revival now portray Muslim traditions as threatened by a secular state, requiring a return to the basics in order to protect the Islamic way of life.<sup>51</sup> The revival includes all age groups and socioeconomic classes. On the Zanzibar islands, the revival is directed toward Muslims who are *munafik* (“Muslims in name only”) and the Sufi brotherhoods. On the mainland it is directed toward Christians because of their increasing belief in a version of Islam that is hostile to all other religions.<sup>52</sup> While concerned with the “onslaught and failure” of Western values, the revival in Tanzania also seeks to address the lack of effective governance in the country and tap into widespread dissatisfaction within the Muslim population.<sup>53</sup> The revival groups offer an alternative to the older, state-sanctioned Muslim identity. New sources of information on Islam are now available to Tanzanians, offering alternative avenues from the leading clerics inside the country.

Additionally, the translation of the Quran into Swahili has ensured that the established Arabic-speaking scholars no longer have a monopoly on its interpretation.<sup>54</sup> There is currently an abundance of Islamic literature, tapes, CDs, and DVDs available in Arabic, English, and Swahili. These products are widely available in bookstores, streets, and outside mosques after Friday prayers, further aiding the individualization of Islam and allowing more freedom of interpretation of the religion through expanded access. Thus, the revival is not just directed at the state, but also toward those Muslims perceived as being a part of the state apparatus (consisting largely of an older group of Muslims working within the state's construction of a passive Muslim identity).

For the most part, a long history of cooperation in the name of nationalism has mitigated religious conflict in the country. Indeed, “while there are some ethnic identities and geographic areas that coincide with a certain religious tradition, often other identities, such as class divisions or support for political parties, are cross-cutting and do not reinforce these religious divisions.”<sup>55</sup> The legacy of the Tanganyika African National Union's (TANU) emphasis on inter-religious cooperation, has, for the most part, endured.

Yet, in the past decade, circumstances have changed. Prior to the 2015 general elections and a scheduled constitutional referendum (which was later postponed), former President Jakaya Kikwete warned of heightened religious tensions: “You don't need to be a master of astrology to know that the current situation, if left unchecked, could plunge our country into a major conflict between Christians and Muslims.”<sup>56</sup> In addition to this general increase in political and sectarian tensions—worsened by political disagreements including the disputed Zanzibar elections, groups like al-Shabaab and ISIS have increasingly appealed to Tanzania's disaffected Muslims. In May 2016, Defense Minister Hussein Mwinyi warned about the radicalization of young Tanzanians and his concern that foreign recruits—previously fighting for al-Shabaab or ISIS—would return to Tanzania, though the government's response to date has primarily been through law enforcement.<sup>57</sup>

## ISLAMISM AND THE STATE

The path remains open for simplistic and politicized interpretations of Islam to capitalize on local grievances, such as the integrity of the federation of the mainland and Zanzibar, and to reinterpret those issues as a source of Muslim-Christian tensions. While it is important to note that anti-Christian sentiment thus far has not instigated a wave of Islamist radicalism throughout the rest of the population, the issue of Zanzibari sovereignty is crucial to the problem of this potentially violent reframing.

Tanganyika (the predecessor to Tanzania) came into being after achieving independence from Britain in 1962. Zanzibar achieved independence shortly thereafter, in 1963, and in the election that followed, the Zanzibar Nationalist Party (ZNP) co-

alition (generally representing the islands' Arab population) narrowly defeated the Afro-Shirazi Party (ASP), which represented the African "labor" class. Subsequently, an uprising of African laborers and ex-soldiers mushroomed into the anti-Arab Zanzibari Revolution of 1964, which overthrew the ZNP government, the Sultan, the Arab elite, and the whole enterprise of constitutional monarchy.<sup>58</sup> Abeid Karume, the leader of the ASP coalition, ruled by decree, warding off any challenges to the new regime. Three months later, Karume and Tanganyikan President Nyerere united Zanzibar and Tanganyika into Tanzania. The rapid pace and questionable constitutionality of these origins remains a background factor to the increasing demands for full autonomy in Zanzibar, a demand which is frequently linked to the differing ethnic and religious composition of the islands' population.

During the early years of one-party socialist rule, President Julius Nyerere was adamant about creating a nation free of racial and religious divisions.<sup>59</sup> The demise of *ujamaa* ("community") socialism in the 1980s, as well as the rise of the multi-party system, permitted region and religion to divide the population, frustrating Nyerere's plans. Today, ethnic differences and overlapping religions have become salient rallying points in the search for the "true" identity of Zanzibar, which have faint echoes on the mainland. All across Tanzania, "people at the grassroots level advance religious identities in pursuit of their interests in regard to spiritual, material, and political interests."<sup>60</sup> The idea of full autonomy was first raised in 1994, but Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM), the ruling party since 1963, has constantly rejected the notion.<sup>61</sup>

In Tanzania, religion has taken a subservient position to the unifying nationalist agenda of the CCM. In one notable exception, as a response to transferring control of the nation's education and health administration to the Catholic Church in 1992, the Council for the Propagation of the Quran (commonly known as Balukta) accused the Tanzanian government's National Muslim Organization (Bakwata) of corruption, temporarily seizing its headquarters. Balukta was Tanzania's first militant Islamist group, but its actions were short-lived. President Ali Hassan Mwinyi expelled them from the Bakwata headquarters, and the group was banned in 1993.<sup>62</sup> Since then, most Islamists have tended to be critical of anti-government fundamentalists.

The CCM faces an ongoing challenge from the Zanzibar-based Civic United Front (CUF). A minority party whose various elements have even professed their goal to be to "release Tanzanian society from the dictatorship of Christianity,"<sup>63</sup> the CUF's primary constituents are Zanzibaris of Arab descent. Although its supporters have clashed violently and repeatedly with the police since 1995, the CUF has maintained that it does not use or condone violence as a means of gaining power, preferring to operate through legitimate, democratic means. Yet, it has not totally dismissed the use of violence as a means for establishing itself in Zanzibar, especially if political corruption and marginalization continue to occur there.

Tanzania held general elections in 2015 and, while the contest was considered well-administered, the Zanzibar Electoral Commission annulled results on the island after the opposition looked poised to win (the ruling CCM won handily on the mainland). The subsequent electoral standoff resulted in heightened tensions across Zanzibar; a series of subsequent IED attacks were assumed to be politically motivated. The election annulment effectively ended Zanzibar's government of national unity and simultaneously eliminated what many felt was a last legitimate and mainstream avenue for expressing discontent.<sup>64</sup> There is now a chance that frustrated citizens who feel that they have been ejected from mainstream politics will seek out more radical representation.

To many, political marginalization is a reality in Tanzania. The country faces the common dilemma of post-authoritarian states in Africa: a tropism toward official blandishments or outright control of associations once prohibited under one-party rule. Although the Tanzanian state is officially secular and its constitution guarantees freedom of religion and prohibits religious political parties, smoldering religious tensions in the country belie the effectiveness of this guarantee. The more moderate groups, which offer no structural challenge to the system, are more likely to be candidates for co-optation, while radicals are forced to work outside the system. Thus, the government risks pushing Islamist believers in more radical directions through sheer clumsiness: its entrenched corruption, election rigging, and alleged detentions and torture of opposition members dramatically exacerbate the perception of marginalization among the moderates.

Since the end of socialist rule in the 1990s, people claiming Zanzibari Arab identity have also alleged that the government of Zanzibar (directed by the CCM) deliberately and systematically discriminates against them, denying them access to government jobs, housing, and business licenses. Similar dissatisfaction has spread to the mainland among the coastal Swahili and Arab population.<sup>65</sup> When the Tanzanian government signed "The Prevention of Terrorism Act" into law in December 2002 (largely under pressure from the United States), it further aggravated this demographic and prompted waves of criticism for specifically targeting Muslims. Opponents of the law noted that it borrowed heavily from the *U.S. Patriot Act*, the *British Prevention of Terrorism Act*, and the *Suppression of Terrorism Act* of apartheid South Africa.<sup>66</sup>

Finally, although Muslims have always held key governmental positions (and the presidency has unofficially rotated between a Christian and a Muslim), many Muslims perceive the governing elite as Christian, which contributes to the feeling of marginalization. Such frustrations with the state tend to manifest themselves in attacks upon Christians.<sup>67</sup> Additional dissatisfaction is aimed at the police, since in many Muslim areas, the police are often Christians that tend to disregard local customs and further alienate residents.

Thus, the dynamic in Tanzania bears watching. The rise in tensions has paralleled the rise in political visibility and assertiveness of the Muslim community in the past decade.<sup>54</sup> Moreover, al-Shabaab's continued threat to Somalia and its interest in expanding throughout the region—as well as the ideological and increasingly physical presence of ISIS in East Africa—means that Tanzania must remain vigilant against radical external influences, as well as the internal politics and politics that presage violent and dangerous radicalization.

## ENDNOTES

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