



# TANZANIA

## Quick Facts

Population: 53,950,935

Area: 947,300 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 Africa

Government Type: Presidential republic

GDP (official exchange rate): \$51.61 billion (2017 est.)

*Source: CIA World FactBook (Last Updated April 2018)*

## INTRODUCTION

*Tanzania's level of Islamist activity is currently low, especially as compared to its regional neighbors Egypt, Somalia, Sudan, and Kenya. However, a number of factors—among them secular nationalism, a weak parliamentary democracy, slow and uneven economic growth, and unequal opportunity—have spurred at least some Muslims in Tanzania to adhere to Islamism as an ideological alternative.<sup>1</sup> The character of Tanzania's internal politics as a one-party-dominant political system and historic grievances by the Muslim Zanzibari population further strain inter-religious relations and threaten to politicize what has historically been the localized (and moderate) practice of Islam.*

*Tanzania's proximity to Somalia, inside of which both al-Qaeda and ISIS are determined to vie for influence, remains a risk factor. Similarly, the presence of foreign-funded mosques and universities has only increased in recent years. Tanzanian Muslims thus experience competing forms of Islam, and more radical strains become more attractive as avenues for legitimate political expression continue to shrink.*

## ISLAMIST ACTIVITY

The bombing of the U.S. embassy in Dar es Salaam in 1998, which killed eleven and injured eighty-five others, was the first indication of the existence of militant jihadi activity in Tanzania. The bombing, however, was not a plot planned inside the country, or even one organized by Tanzanian Muslims, though two Zanzibari residents were eventually implicated. Rather, the attack was planned by several Somalis, al-Qaeda operatives, and sleepers with regional links to cells in Tanzania and Kenya.<sup>2</sup> Although no other similarly high-profile attacks occurred for years, Tanzania is still vulnerable to radical Islamists. Since 2012, a spate of unresolved acid and explosive attacks attributed to Islamist extremists, as well as the recent discovery of suspected terror training camps inside the country, confirm these fears.<sup>3</sup> In 2016 and 2017, a series of violent ambushes of the Tanzanian police—not unlike some of the violent attacks on police by al-Shabaab elements in Kenya—have rattled residents but to date attribution has focused on

criminal, rather than terror, groups as the perpetrators.<sup>4</sup>

Jihadi attacks have occurred just across Tanzania's northern border in neighboring Kenya and Uganda, and small arms and other weapons are readily available on the black market across East Africa. The 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. Al-Shabaab's success in Tanzania thus far has been limited.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, some weaknesses make Tanzania a relatively easy target.<sup>6</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 basic public safety services, and major crimes often go unsolved; though the country's National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) illustrates an inter-agency approach to preventing and countering violent extremists, its capacity remains limited. Corruption is a serious challenge to the effectiveness of Tanzania's security forces, notably its police force.<sup>7</sup> Lastly, a sense of political and economic marginalization that is especially evident among Zanzibaris has not to date led to widespread radicalization or violence, but the situation continues to evolve.

The NCTC considered the 2012 arrest of Emrah Erdogan, an al-Qaeda and al-Shabaab associate, in Dar es Salaam as confirmation that extremist organizations "have elements and plans within the country's borders."<sup>8</sup> A series of acid and improvised explosive device (IED) attacks targeting tourists, Christians, and moderate Muslims have occurred in both mainland Tanzania and Zanzibar since 2012, and the May 2013 bombing of St. Joseph's Roman Catholic Church in an Arusha suburb, which killed three people and wounded more than 60, further confirmed these fears.<sup>9</sup> While no group claimed responsibility for these attacks, some suggested that a radical Zanzibari separatist group might have, at a minimum, inspired them.<sup>10</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>11</sup> It is unclear which group is responsible for setting them up, though authorities suggested that al-Shabaab was the prime suspect. Tanzania is not part of the African Union Mission in Somalia like its neighbors Kenya and Burundi, but it remains 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>12</sup>). Both groups have an interest in Tanzania, evident especially in the large number of Tanzanian citizens recruited to fight for al-Shabaab in Somalia. In 2016, a cell purportedly aligned with the Islamic State (ISIS) issued a video message from a cave in Tanzania, drawing attention to a third group with its eye on Tanzania.<sup>13</sup> The emergence the same year of an Islamic State-affiliated group, Jahba East Africa, also bears watching, as the group claims Tanzanians among its membership. Thus far, however, Jahba East Africa is "more of an ideological threat than a physical one" and its sole attack to date was in Somalia.<sup>14</sup> There is little known about whether ISIS recruits in person or solely online in Tanzania, though the group's shift to inspiring and encouraging lone wolf attacks could have deadly ramifications.<sup>15</sup>

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, who has been in and out of prison for charges ranging from inciting violence to trespassing.<sup>16</sup> Ponda has led a smattering of Islamist organizations, including Simba wa Mungu (God's Lion) and the Council of Islamic Organizations, which in the past has forcibly taken over mosques in Dar es Salaam and violently targeted tourists.<sup>17</sup> He preaches jihadi Islamism and reportedly enjoys ties with al-Qaeda officials.<sup>18</sup>

The Zanzibari organization UAMSHO (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>19</sup> Its stated goals are to increase the standard of living for

Muslims in Zanzibar and to ultimately achieve Zanzibari independence.<sup>20</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. Lax enforcement of Tanzanian laws regulating dress and alcohol—especially in Zanzibar where local Muslims complain that foreign tourists flout local laws and Islamic customs—remains a grievance.<sup>21</sup> The government of Zanzibar, for its part, has accused the group of holding and disseminating fundamentalist views, and in 2012, Tanzanian Prime Minister Mizengo Pinda opined that UAMSHO “has of late lost direction and is propagating hatred among the people of Zanzibar.”<sup>22</sup>

In 2012, protests following 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 denied.<sup>23</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>24</sup> UAMSHO's popularity has reportedly risen since the formation of the 2010 government of national unity (a coalition between the ruling CCM and opposition CUF in Zanzibar), which to many Zanzibaris showed the bankrupt nature of their political system.<sup>25</sup> In the wake of this agreement, UAMSHO positioned itself as the only group able and willing to bring about positive change for Zanzibari Muslims. This position has only strengthened following the annulled 2015 Zanzibari elections.

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>26</sup> While it has been quiet in recent years, the AMYC's danger lies its network, through which it has close relations with hardline Islamic clerics, financiers, and recruiters, and has reportedly offered safe haven to jihadists passing through Tanzania.<sup>27</sup> Using such connections to recruit and fundraise for other radical Islamists may not be far off.

So far, however, these 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. They also finance university scholarships for Muslim Tanzanians, who often return from their studies abroad with a Wahhabist interpretation of Islam that clashes with the localized Tanzanian practice.<sup>30</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>31</sup>

## ISLAMISM AND SOCIETY

Official estimates suggest that of Tanzania's population of about 54 million, about one-third are Muslim, nearly two-thirds are Christian, and a small percentage are “animist.”<sup>32</sup> The Christian population dominates the southwest and north-central areas of the country. Many Tanzanian Muslims live along the pre-colonial and colonial trade routes. 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 majority of whom are Muslim.<sup>33</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 Shia.<sup>34</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>35</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 dictating 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>36</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>37</sup> Rising crime, as well as high levels of youth unemployment (up to 85% of youth are unemployed in Zanzibar) and drug addiction (estimates suggest that some 7% of Zanzibar's population is addicted to heroin<sup>38</sup>) exacerbate the situation.<sup>39</sup> Thus its dissatisfied population is likely even more vulnerable to radicalization than are the residents of the mainland.

For nearly four decades, wealthy Gulf donors have funded Zanzibar's mosques, madrassas, health clinics, and secondary schools, as well as some scholarships to study in Sudan or Saudi Arabia.<sup>40</sup> Two of Zanzibar's universities are Islamic, funded by Saudi Arabians and Kuwaitis. 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>41</sup> As a Zanzibari 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>42</sup>

Tanzania is undergoing an Islamic "revival," spawned by a set of interrelated factors.<sup>43</sup> First, the country's economic and political opening in the 1990s codified protections of association and assembly, leading new non-governmental organizations to flourish.<sup>44</sup> Second, Islamist organizations took advantage of this opening to agitate for political causes,<sup>45</sup> particularly those needs not being met by the state; the increasing availability of Islamic materials and media in multiple languages adds to an ability for Tanzanian Muslims to "individualize" their religion.<sup>46</sup> Lastly, these political realities are exacerbated by Tanzania's economic woes, as high growth rates and government services have not managed to keep up with an even higher population growth rate. This translates into a \$3,300 per capita GDP, with a large percentage of the population living below the poverty line.<sup>47</sup>

The Islamic revival thus faces competing narratives: on one hand, Muslim traditions are threatened by a secular state as well as the "onslaught and failure" of Western values,<sup>48</sup> requiring a return to the "basics" to protect Islam.<sup>49</sup> In Zanzibar, this revival has focused primarily on munafik ("Muslims in name only") and Sufis; on the mainland, the revival targets Christians. The goal of these groups is to address what is viewed as a state failure in service provision and governance that is especially tangible among Muslim communities. At the same time, this revival clashes with the highly localized and individual practice of Islam that has flourished in Zanzibar for decades.

For the most part, a long history of cooperation in the name of nationalism has mitigated religious conflict in Tanzania. 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>50</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, a serious political legitimacy challenge has emerged. Prior to the 2015 general elections and a scheduled constitutional referendum (which was later postponed), former President Jakaya Kikwete warned of heightened religious tensions: "the current situation, if left unchecked, could plunge our country into a major conflict between Christians and Muslims."<sup>51</sup> In addition to this general increase in political and sectarian tensions, which are worsened by political disagreements including the disputed

Zanzibar elections, groups like al-Shabaab and ISIS have increasingly appealed to Tanzania's disaffected Muslims—many of whom are young men. In May 2016, Defense Minister Hussein Mwinyi warned about the radicalization of young Tanzanians and his concern that foreign recruits who fought for al-Shabaab or ISIS could return to Tanzania, though the government's response to date has primarily been through law enforcement.<sup>52</sup>

## ISLAMISM AND THE STATE

The practice of Islam in Tanzania remains highly localized, though a path remains for literal and politicized interpretations of Islam—particularly those supported by foreign Gulf state donors—to capitalize on local grievances and reinterpret them as a source of Muslim-Christian tensions. While 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) coalition (generally representing the islands' Arab population) narrowly defeated the Afro-Shirazi Party (ASP), which represented the African "labor" class. Subsequently, an uprising of laborers and former 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>53</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 Julius 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 Nyerere insisted creating a nation without racial or religious divisions.<sup>54</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. Across Tanzania, "people at the grassroots level advance religious identities in pursuit of their interests in regard to spiritual, material, and political interests."<sup>55</sup> The idea of full Zanzibari autonomy was first raised in 1994, but Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM), the ruling party since 1963, has constantly rejected the notion.<sup>56</sup>

In Tanzania, religion has taken a backseat 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, briefly seizing its headquarters in protest. Balukta was Tanzania's first militant Islamist group, but it did not last long. President Ali Hassan Mwinyi expelled them from the Bakwata headquarters, and the group was banned in 1993.<sup>57</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 professed their goal to be to "release Tanzanian society from the dictatorship of Christianity,"<sup>58</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 historically has maintained that it does not support violence as a means of gaining power, favoring instead legitimate, democratic means. Yet, it has not totally dismissed the use of violence as a means for establishing itself in Zanzibar, especially if the ongoing issues of political corruption and marginalization are not resolved.<sup>59</sup>

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>60</sup> There is now a chance that frustrated Zanzibaris 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. Although the Tanzanian state is officially secular and its constitution guarantees freedom of religion and prohibits religious political parties, smoldering tensions belie the effectiveness of this guarantee. Moderate groups, which offer no structural challenge to the system, are more likely to be candidates for political co-optation, while radicals are forced to work outside the system. Thus, the government risks pushing Islamists 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 moderates.

Since the end of socialist rule in the 1990s, Zanzibari Arabs have alleged that the government of Zanzibar (directed by the CCM) purposely discriminates against them, denying them access to government jobs, housing, and business licenses. Coastal Swahili and Arab populations that live on the mainland have often expressed similar concerns.<sup>61</sup> When the Tanzanian government signed "The Prevention of Terrorism Act" into law in December 2002 (in large part due to pressure from the United States),<sup>62</sup> 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>63</sup> While some amendments were passed in 2016, "insufficient sentencing guidelines" remain.<sup>64</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 or Christian places of worship.<sup>65</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.

Tensions between Muslims and Christians, which rose parallel to an increase in political visibility and assertiveness of the Muslim community over the past decade, remained constant in 2017.<sup>54</sup> The potential for divisive internal politics to presage violent and dangerous radicalization remains, and it is worsened by shrinking domestic space for political opposition groups. Although there has not been a major terror attack in Tanzania in years, the overall dynamic bears watching. Al-Shabaab's continued threat to Somalia and its interest in expanding throughout the region—as well as the ideological and physical presence of ISIS and its affiliates throughout East Africa—means that Tanzania must also remain vigilant against radical external influences.

## ENDNOTES

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