

Article

Pentecostalisation, the American Christian Right, and Civil Religion in Ghana

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Abstract: Christianity's political prominence in Ghana has attracted the attention of scholars interested in the wider issues of religion and politics in sub-Saharan Africa. Analyses of the political influence of Christianity in Ghana generally focus on domestic factors, without considering external actors' involvement. This article examines the political impact of the leading form of Christianity in Ghana, Pentecostalism, in relation to both domestic and external factors. The aims of the article are, first, to explain and account for Pentecostals' political impact in Ghana. The second aim is to explain and account for the links between elements of the American Christian Right and prominent Pentecostals in Ghana. Both support normatively conservative, even regressive, policies which, the article argues, encourages the breakdown of Ghana's civil religion. Ghana is the first west African nation to be subject to sustained attention from elements of the US Christian Right, following similar efforts in east Africa, particularly in relation to Kenya and Uganda. This novelty makes the American Christian Right's focus on Ghana both noteworthy and an important topic of research in the context of the internationalisation of the former. The article is divided into four sections. The introductory section presents the main sections of the article, and provides a thorough account of the background of the study. The second section surveys what has been called the 'pentecostalisation' of Christianity in Ghana, which aligns with similar processes in other sub-Saharan African countries, including Nigeria. The third section examines the links between Ghana's Pentecostals and elements of the American Christian Right and explains how this helps to fuel a breakdown Ghana's longstanding allegiance to civil religion. The final section describes the main political result: the scapegoating and criminalisation of Ghana's numerically small, beleaguered gay community.

Keywords: Ghana; pentecostalisation; American Christian right; civil religion; 'anti-gay' bill



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1. Introduction

This article offers both theoretical and empirical contributions to the expanding literature on the impact of the American Christian Right on politics in sub-Saharan Africa via its relations with Christian conservatives in the region, many of whom are Pentecostals. Theoretically, the article builds on the work of scholars, notably the Zambian, US-educated scholar, pastor, and human rights activist, Kapyra Kaoma, who has written much on the relationship between the US Christian Right and Pentecostals in sub-Saharan Africa, including in Kenya and Uganda. To date, however, Kaoma's analysis has not been extended to west Africa. Empirically, the article seeks to rectify this omission, recounting the close relationship between Ghana's Christian conservatives, including Pentecostals, and elements of the American Christian Right, notably the World Congress of Families and Family Watch International. Ghana's Christian conservatives and elements of the American Christian Right share the aim of reducing—ideally, eliminating—the influence of Ghana's small, beleaguered gay community and work together, ideationally, organisationally, and financially, to achieve that aim.

Seeking to define the US Christian Right, scholars emphasise various factors. [Diamond \(2000\)](#) understands the US Christian Right as a broad community of generic Christian conservatives. For [Lewis \(2017\)](#), the US Christian Right is best understood as a smaller subset

of institutionalised Christian organisations which pursue goals collectively characterised by cultural, social, and political conservatism. Components of the US Christian Right include religious professionals, Christian conservative activists, and advocates, as well as non-religious professionals, motivated by their personal Christian beliefs and values. Finally, Kopya [Kaoma \(2013\)](#) identified the religious make-up of the US Christian Right in relation to their activities in sub-Saharan Africa, which includes ‘right-wing Roman Catholic, Mormon, and Protestant evangelical traditions’.

The US Christian Right works to disseminate Christian conservative values and ideas to sub-Saharan African countries, including Ghana, because they are seen as crucial for the appropriate development of the region. For the US Christian Right, the countries within sub-Saharan Africa are collectively a bastion of religion-based traditionalism facing a relentless onslaught of Western-inspired and -imposed secularism and liberalism which, unless stopped and rolled back, will destroy both traditional cultures and undermine Africans’ commitment to religious—especially Christian—values. In short, the US Christian Right sees sub-Saharan Africa as a battleground between Christian conservative ambitions and the West’s liberal–secular values.

American politics has long been significantly influenced by the Christian Right, and its interest in sub-Saharan Africa is both longstanding and, more recently, of increasing intensity. The US Christian Right has long decried secular and liberal values everywhere, including those exhibited by prominent international Christian organisations. This was apparent as long ago as the 1980s, when the World Council of Churches faced opposition to its human rights work during transitions from colonialism to postcolonialism and from white minority rule to popular rule in several southern African countries, including Namibia and South Africa. Prior to political transitions from white minority to black majority rule, the governments of South Africa, Portugal, and the United States invoked Christian conservative themes in support of groups allegedly battling ‘godless communism’, which, critics believed, was a cover for a more general opposition to the development of human rights in the region ([Zubovich 2023](#), p. 308). The most resolute on-the-ground resistance came from American Christian evangelical missionaries, whose numbers were rapidly expanding at this time, not only in sub-Saharan Africa but also in many other areas of the global south. American Christian evangelicals were at the forefront of opposition to liberal and left-wing religious groups in southern Africa, just as they were contemporaneously in the United States. A diffuse network of evangelicals provided public support for anti-communist military organisations in Africa, and some are believed to have sent military aid to anti-communist rebels ([Zubovich 2023](#), p. 308).

The attention paid by the US Christian Right to sub-Saharan Africa was further stimulated during the presidency of Barack Obama (2009–17), during which his administration’s foreign policy supported human rights for sexual minorities, including for LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender, questioning/queer) individuals and communities, in sub-Saharan Africa and elsewhere. The subsequent Trump presidency sought to overturn Obama’s policies in this regard, and, during the Trump presidency, the US Christian Right was enthusiastically engaging with like-minded Christian conservatives in sub-Saharan Africa ([Cooper 2015](#); [McAlister 2019](#); [Marsden 2020](#)).

The US Christian Right’s interest in sub-Saharan Africa was spurred by the rapidly growing public influence of Pentecostalism, including in Ghana, which saw a “‘pentecostalization’ of the public sphere’ from the 1990s ([Goshadze 2022](#)).

Although the issue of Pentecostalism’s social and political prominence in Ghana is already well documented, previous analyses generally focus on domestic factors, without fully considering the roles of external actors ([Bediako 2005](#); [Dovlo 2005](#); [Gifford 2004](#); [Asamoah-Gyadu 2007](#)). This article seeks to rectify this omission, examining the social and political impact of Christianity in Ghana in relation to the American Christian Right, which, the article argues, has contributed to the breakdown of Ghana’s civil religion. The article not only builds on many studies of singular events or church bodies that have impacted

aspects of Ghanaian politics over the years but also extends their insights, by expanding the analysis to external factors, notably elements of the American Christian Right.

The article is structured as follows. Following this introduction, the next section surveys the pentecostalisation of Christianity in Ghana in the context of its wider progress in sub-Saharan Africa. This article's initial observation is that Ghana's Christian landscape has been transformed since the 1990s by the rapid growth of Pentecostalism and the relative marginalisation of the country's historic mission churches. The transformation has been informed by burgeoning links between elements of the American Christian Right and influential figures among Ghana's Pentecostals and, more generally, with Ghana's Christian conservatives.

This leads to the third section, which examines, in detail, the outcomes of links between Ghana's Pentecostals and other Christian conservatives and elements of the American Christian Right. The conclusion is that the de facto coalition between Ghana's Pentecostals and other Christian conservatives and elements of the American Christian Right is the key reason for the controversial and intensive scapegoating and criminalisation of Ghana's already beleaguered gay community, which threatens elements of Ghana's long-established liberal democracy.

2. Research Methods and Theoretical Framework

Research for the article began in 2017 and 2018 when the author made several visits to the USA, trips which yielded much information about the American Christian Right and its international activities, including in relation to sub-Saharan Africa. A subsequent book by the current author, drawing on this research, was published by Routledge UK in 2021.

The author followed this with regular research trips to Ghana, each of one to two weeks' duration, in July and November 2022, April 2023, and February, June, and November 2024. Overall, the author's research visits to the USA and Ghana led to the amassing of much new and relevant information for this article, which benefits from more than 50 personal interviews with knowledgeable Americans and Ghanaians on the general topics of religion and politics as well as on the burgeoning relationship between Ghanaian Pentecostals and elements of the US Christian Right. A list of the author's anonymised personal interviews cited in the article can be found following its concluding section.

Interviewees in the USA and Ghana included theologians, public intellectuals, political scientists, representatives of government and civil society organisations, and journalists. The article also benefitted from additional information acquired during the hiatus occasioned by the recent COVID-19 pandemic with frequent personal email and WhatsApp conversations with colleagues in Ghana and the USA. In relation to both countries, the author selected personal interviewees as well as email and WhatsApp respondents based on their personal involvement and/or knowledge of politics and religion. The research material the author gained from these interviews and email communications was significantly augmented by peer-reviewed journal articles, research monographs, press statements, newspaper articles, news websites, blogs, and social media, including Facebook. Finally, the article draws on grey literature,¹ a key resource in the ongoing debate about the political role of Christianity in sub-Saharan Africa, including Ghana.

3. Pentecostalisation of African Christianity

Ghana's recent and current pentecostalisation is part of a wider African phenomenon, described by [Mzondi \(2018\)](#) as the 'pentecostalisation of Africa' (Interviews B, D). The South African theologian, Modisa Mzondi, persuasively argues that Pentecostalism is an increasingly prominent feature of Africa's religious and political landscape. Mzondi explains that Pentecostalism's growth has been particularly dramatic since the era of decolonisation, which began in Africa in the mid-1950s with the liberation from colonial rule of Sudan and Ghana. According to [Wariboko \(2017\)](#), by '2015 the population of Pentecostals (renewalists) in Africa was estimated at 202.92 million, constituting 35.32 percent of the

continent's Christian population of 574.52 million and 17.11 percent of total continent's population of 1.19 billion'.

Ebenezer Obadare (2018) examines the 'pentecostalization' of Christianity in Nigeria, and Cephus Omenyo (2005) and J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu (2007) have carried out the same examination in relation to Ghana. These recent analyses follow a long line of African authors who have examined the theological, cultural, social, and historical impact of Christianity in sub-Saharan Africa.

Notable African scholars, such as Lamin Sanneh (1996) and Kwame Bediako (2005), explain that Christianity in Africa existed before the arrival of Western missionaries. Both Sanneh and Bediako acknowledge that modern African Christianity developed from the late 19th century initially via the endeavours of European and subsequently African missionaries and practitioners who were instrumental in the exponential growth of Christianity in the region. During the first decades of Africa's independence from colonial rule, Christianity largely conformed to the model introduced by the Europeans. Over time, however, African Christianity developed its own trajectory, significantly informed by the swift growth of Pentecostalism and the founding of African-centred churches (Interview E).

Christianity has long had a very significant public voice in Ghana, consistently being more vocal than the country's second largest religion, Islam (Interview A). For several decades after independence in 1957, the chief Christian voices came from the historic mission churches. More recently, however, a significant new Christian tradition has developed in Ghana, which is now publicly prominent, even dominant. Pentecostal churches now account for almost 40 per cent of Ghana's 25 million Christians; influential Pentecostals are prominent in public discourse in Ghana. The Ghana Pentecostal Council is the umbrella organisation for more than 120 of Ghana's Pentecostal churches.

During the first three decades of independence, that is, until the 1990s, mainline Christian churches² dominated Ghana's religious space. Since then, Pentecostal and Charismatic churches have made great inroads, undermining the former dominance of the historic mission churches (Interview H).

Missionary Pentecostalism was introduced in Ghana in the first decades of the 20th century. Churches in Ghana were often derived from American and English churches, including the Assemblies of God and the Apostolic Church. Over time, Ghana's Christian landscape has undergone Pentecostalisation, a process by which Pentecostalism has become the most popular form of Christianity in the country, having a significant impact on the Ghana's religious and political landscape. Pentecostalisation is the consequence of rapid growth of new Pentecostal churches since the 1990s. Converts to Pentecostalism came primarily from the older churches, such as the Catholic, mainline Protestant, and possibly also the older Evangelical churches.

Adopting a broad and inclusive definition of Pentecostal and Pentecostalism, Pentecostalism (including Charismatic and Neo-Pentecostal forms) is now the dominant expression of Christianity in Ghana (Anderson 2002, 2004). J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu (2007) appears to celebrate the pentecostalisation of mainline churches in Ghana, while Arnett (2017) finds the development problematic. Both agree, however, that the Christian faith in Ghana, and more widely in sub-Saharan Africa, is now thoroughly influenced by Pentecostalism. In Ghana, pentecostalisation is 'marked by an emphasis on healing and deliverance ministries, as well as a stress on the Holy Spirit and the individual's relationship with Christ'. Omenyo (2005, p. 39) notes that pentecostalisation has resulted in 'a major paradigmatic shift in the spirituality, theology, practices and programs of mainline churches in Ghana'.

The late Dr Kwame Bediako, Christian theologian and rector of the Akrofi-Christaller Institute for Theology, Mission and Culture, noted the central role of Christian leaders and organisations in Ghana's redemocratisation in the early 1990s, regarding this as characteristic of a new public theology contesting the then existing tendency to vest political power with sacred authority (Bediako 2005, p. 117). Recounting the election in 2000 of a democratic challenger to succeed the then president, Jerry John Rawlings, Bediako regarded

the new public theology as having a central role in encouraging Ghana's political culture to advance in a genuinely democratic direction, away from political conflict involving religion (Interview C).

Moving the gravitational centre of Christianity in Ghana from the historic mission churches to Pentecostal churches increased the latter's public prominence, while catching the media's attention. What leaders of Pentecostal–Charismatic churches had to say about public issues became newsworthy; in turn, increased media attention helped to build Pentecostalism's dominance over Ghana's religious landscape. According to the late Pastor Dr Joseph Quayesi-Amakye of the Church of Pentecost, Ghana's Pentecostal churches have become 'the heartland of the Christian faith' (Joseph [Quayesi-Amakye 2015](#), p. 640). In addition, as Asamoah-Gyadu states, burgeoning Pentecostalism encouraged the advance of 'the Christian faith with a fervour that is increasingly shaping its national identity', characterised by 'ecstatic worship' and belief in 'a God of miracles' (Asamoah-Gyadu quoted in [Bigg 2017](#)).

The approach of the Pentecostal–Charismatic churches differed significantly from that of the mainline Christian churches, grouped together in the Christian Council of Ghana.³ According to Asamoah-Gyadu, '[t]he mainline churches or the historic mission denominations have relied on their human intellectual resources to respond to developments through communiqués and statements in the media addressed to the parties involved'. The Pentecostal–Charismatic churches' approach was different, organising 'periods of prayer and fasting' designed 'to deal with threats of violence' and political instability, including during election periods. In addition, as Dr Fredrick Acheampong (n.d.) notes, leaders of Pentecostal–Charismatic churches use prayer and prophetic declarations and employ biblical passages to interpret and explain why Ghanaians are suffering now and what to do about it ([Acheampong n.d.](#); also see [Acheampong 2018](#)).

4. Pentecostalisation, Civil Religion, and the American Christian Right

According to [Niedźwiedz \(2023\)](#), Pentecostalism's rapid recent advance in Ghana was in part 'initiated or influenced by global institutions and movements', notably from the USA. [Benyah \(2019, p. 155\)](#) contends that 'the dominance of the Pentecostal movement' in Ghana 'fuels democratic participation that results in the amalgamation of religious ideas, beliefs and practices in the discussion of national issues that affects the everyday-politics, economics, legal and educational matters'. At the same time, it is speculated that Ghana's previously unifying civil religion is being undermined by ideas associated with Pentecostalism, including those linked to the American Christian Right ([Haynes 2023](#)).

Civil religion in this article refers to presumed, often implicit, shared religious values of a nation. It is expressed in public rituals, symbols (such as the national flag), and the commemoration of sacred days and sacred places (such as monuments, battlefields, or national cemeteries). Civil religion is distinct from churches, church officials, and ceremonies, which in Ghana have long been incorporated into the practice of civil religion. For some, pursuing a Christian and conservative approach to social and political issues, makes civil religion both redundant and unworkable (Interview O). This is because the main purpose of civil religion is not only to unite a country's citizens but also to engender a sense of inclusion, belonging, identity, unity and structure, worth, confidence, transcendence, and purpose. Such values are undermined if civil religion loses its veracity in a nation.

In Ghana today, there is a theological and ideational overlap between Christian conservatives, including Pentecostals, and elements of the American Christian Right (Interviews J, K, S). According to [Van der Tol \(2024\)](#), this encourages and exacerbates a previous latent division between the historically relatively liberal views of the historic mission churches and the socially conservative opinions of the American Christian Right and Ghana's Christian conservatives, including many of the country's Pentecostals.

Whereas civil religion speaks broadly to the importance of God, historically in Ghana it does not seek to situate the nation strategically in the Christian story or to privilege Christian forms in public life. The influence of Pentecostals on presidents and other national

leaders in Africa has been noted by, among others, Naomi Haynes (2021). Haynes, focusing on Zambia, argues that influential Pentecostals seek an explicit political intervention; that is, they wish to *make* Zambia a Christian nation. Haynes (2021) explains that Zambia was *made* Christian by a presidential announcement in 1991, which was formalised in the country's 1996 constitution. In Ghana, on the other hand, the idea of a Christian nation has primarily been expressed as a demographic fact: Ghana's Christians amount to 71.3 per cent of the population of 35 million people. Unlike in Zambia, there has been no presidential decree stating that Ghana is officially a Christian nation nor is there sustained pressure to change this status (Interview L).

Leading Pentecostals in Ghana adopt an approach to political engagement derived from biblical interpretation; that is, 'a type of political evangelism which encourages conservative Christians to seek political power to assume "dominion" over the earth with the aim of hastening the Kingdom of God' (Garrard 2020). Biblical interpretations of social and political issues raise concerns about what forms of behaviour are appropriate in Ghanaian society (Interview N). Ghana's Pentecostals are at the forefront of demands to embed normatively conservative social concerns, such as denying the appropriateness of LGBTQ+ rights, feminism, including abortion rights, and children's comprehensive sex education (Church of Pentecost 2019). Whether openly religious or not, politicians seeking elected office are anxious to be seen to be responding to these concerns, to highlight their public importance, to stress their personal adherence to the agenda, and to win votes.

This is not to suggest that all Ghanaians are sanguine about Pentecostalism's religious-conservative dominance. (Interview I). One fear is that if Ghana follows the Pentecostal agenda, it will seriously undermine or even cause the country's constitutional secularity to collapse. It should be mentioned, however, that senior Pentecostals themselves do not share this concern and do not see their political involvement as affecting Ghana's secularity (Interview U). Secularity, that is, no official favouring of any single religion, was enshrined in the 1992 constitution which ushered in the current, three-decades long, phase of democracy, Ghana's longest since independence in 1957. Ghana is west Africa's longest continuous liberal democracy, and for critics, the growing Christian influence on politics is a major challenge to Ghana's liberal democratic status (Affre 2022; Interviews F, G, M).

5. The US Christian Right and Ghana's Christian Conservatives: Singing from the Same Hymn Sheet⁴

In a recent article, Marietta Van der Tol (2024) discusses the transnational focus of America's Christian Right. She explains that the US Christian Right focuses on 'resonances around loosely organised groups, movements, and political parties', as well as shared concerns and interests, including 'religion and secularism, traditionalism and LGBT+ rights or feminism, images of good and evil, which are mostly a matter of ideas and ideology' (Van der Tol 2024).

The US Christian Right works with African Christian conservatives, including Pentecostals in Ghana, in pursuit of shared goals, informed by the following dichotomies: 'religion and secularism, traditionalism and LGBT+ rights or feminism, [and] images of good and evil, which are mostly a matter of ideas and ideology' (Kaoma 2009; Interview R). The views of US Christian Right organisations, including World Congress of Families and Family Watch International, are prominent in Ghana's debates about Christianity's social, cultural, and political role (Human Rights Campaign 2019; Nabaneh et al. 2022).

The attention of the US Christian Right towards Ghana, and on sub-Saharan Africa more generally, comes in the context of wider competition between conservative and liberal interpretations of what constitutes societal progress and how to achieve it (Interview T). The third wave of democracy between the mid-1970s and early 2000s, had profound effects in sub-Saharan Africa. These included the general demise of authoritarian governments and their replacement by democratically elected successors (Haynes 1996). Since the third wave of democracy fizzled out in the early 2000s, however, sub-Saharan Africa has emerged as a battleground between ideologically differentiated external actors. Western governments

claim to continue—often hesitantly and with little clear sense of purpose—to encourage liberal democracy and individualistic human rights. Some normatively conservative forces, including the US Christian Right, appear less concerned with liberal democracy, seeking to disseminate normatively conservative values, including those linked to religious belief.

The US Christian Right regards what it sees as alien Western values, which it believes undermine Ghana's traditional culture, as inappropriate and inauthentic; many Christian conservatives in Ghana concur (Interview P). It claims to be interested in stemming and reversing the tide of what it regards as the Western-derived destructive liberal secularism, key issues include LGBTQ+ rights, same-sex marriage,⁵ feminism, including abortion rights, and children's comprehensive sex education (McEwen 2023; Nabaneh et al. 2022; Interview Q). The irony, however, which seems to escape Ghana's Christian conservatives, is that the view of the US Christian Right on social matters in relation to Ghana and Africa more generally is itself a Western-derived approach to understanding society and religion.⁶ Like many Ghanaian Christian conservatives, including Pentecostals, the US Christian Right approaches societal issues in a black-and-white fashion, primarily drawing inspiration from the Bible to pronounce what it claims are God's views on 'good' and 'evil'. For Christian conservatives in Ghana, 'good' is represented by normatively conservative, religiously derived values, and 'evil' is manifested as liberal secularism's claimed ills and immoralities (Haynes 2024).

Kaoma (2009) traces the influence of the US Christian Right in several sub-Saharan African countries, including Kenya and Uganda. Over time, the US Christian Right has expanded its African operations, turning its attention to Ghana in the 2010s. According to Kaoma, the key entry point, as elsewhere in Africa, was the 'contestation of LGBTQI+ rights', whereby 'all advocates—both pro- and anti-gay rights—incorporate the language of human rights in distinctive and/or novel ways'. Advocates from the US Christian Right 'emphasize, among other values, religious rights, the traditional family, and culture, and opposition to the liberalization of African sexual norms'. Kaoma argues that this agenda is 'heavily informed by movement intellectuals (rather than movement activists) who mobilize congregations and faith-based actors'. Advocates for liberalisation, on the other hand, 'emphasize the human rights to equality, inclusion, dignity, and individual freedom'. They also seek to reverse social injustices which followed 'colonialism, neo-colonialism, capitalism, and now the American Christian Right. Both are, in a sense, countermovements to each other, and are heavily influenced by both local African and global actors.' (Kaoma 2023, pp. 339–41).

In a March 2024 interview with Ghana's Citi TV, the prominent American political sociologist and expert on democracy, Professor Larry Diamond, declared that the US's 'extreme religious right [has] failed to achieve [its] religious agenda in the United States. And so now they are coming to Africa to try and push the agenda. People who complain about neo-colonialism? Shouldn't they be asking questions about this?''.

Professor Diamond was commenting on the US Christian Right's strong support for Ghana's controversial Human Sexual Rights and Ghanaian Family Values Bill (popularly known in Ghana as the 'anti-gay' bill). According to Professor Diamond, 'This act will be a disaster for Ghana economically [if passed into law]. Because Western companies are not going to come and invest in a country that is pummeling minority rights' (Anti-LGBTQI+ Bill Will Bring Economic Disaster to Ghana If Signed into Law—Prof. Diamond 2024).

Many of Ghana's Christian conservatives share the view of the US Christian Right that to improve Ghana socially, morally, culturally, and politically, values which they regard as 'Christian' must be pursued, and liberal 'Western' values resolutely fought against. Examples include determination to diminish or remove aspects of comprehensive sexual education for schoolchildren, questioning females' sexual and reproductive health rights, including removal or limiting of abortion rights, denying the veracity of same-sex marriage, and fighting the spread and implementation of 'gender ideology'. The latter 'putatively denies biological sex or because it undermines the natural or divine character

of the heteronormative family. They fear that men will lose their dominant positions or become fatally diminished if we start thinking along gender lines' (Butler 2021).

Introduced to parliament in 2021, Ghana's Human Sexual Rights and Ghanaian Family Values Bill is a domestic and international *cause célèbre*, a prominent controversy. This 'anti-gay' bill, as it is widely referred to in Ghana, pits Christian conservatives and other proponents of Ghana's traditional culture against secular and religious liberals who argue that a crackdown on LGBTQI+ rights is against Ghana's tradition of free speech and freedom of assembly, guaranteed in the 1992 constitution.

Christian conservatives include both Christian professionals and lay people who pursue Christian-conservative goals in their professional and private lives. The Bill enjoys the support of a community of Christian organisations, including churches and faith-based non-governmental organisations, as well as individual Christian conservatives, including leaders of Ghana's ubiquitous 'one-man' churches, that is, independent evangelical churches with no organisational structure. Often, 'one-man' churches pursue goals characterised by cultural, social and political conservatism.

This coalition of Christian-conservatives articulates the desirability of a single Christian cultural framework in a putatively hegemonic fashion, which appeals to many conservative Christians in Ghana. Among them are religious professionals, as well as Christians working in secular environments, such as the judiciary, legislature, and government. Christian conservatives actively engage with social, electronic, and traditional print media, including online news sites, and op-eds in various media, as well as television and radio interviews.

Christian conservatism in Ghana is associated with traditional markers of Ghanaian identity—including political and social conservatism juxtaposed with 'African-ness' or 'African traditional culture'. While Ghanaians obviously have the right to seek to protect their country's culture and traditions against what they see as unwelcome and unacceptable external intrusions, critics both at home and abroad claim that it leads to vilification of sexual minorities whose human rights are abused by local 'vigilantes' who claim to be defending what they regard as Ghana's traditional values (Haynes 2023).

Ghana's 1992 constitution is silent on the topic of religious leaders commenting on political issues, including democracy and human rights. However, many Ghanaians would be flabbergasted if their religious leaders did not speak out on prominent political and social issues, given their general societal prominence. This may simply be a case of religious leaders speaking as private citizens, seeking to make their personal views known on topical issues, which is of course perfectly acceptable for all citizens in a democracy. In addition, religious leaders may claim institutional justification for their public pronouncements, to acquire increased gravity and authority.

Ghana's controversial engagement of religion with politics gained added stimulus following announcement in March 2017, by the then newly re-elected president of Ghana, Nana Akufo-Addo, that he would commission Ghana's first national cathedral to the 'glory of God'. The national cathedral, Akufo-Addo explained, would be his personal tribute to God for facilitating his election as president, after two failed attempts. Akufo-Addo's national cathedral project was initially applauded institutionally by many of Ghana's Christian churches, both the historic mission and Pentecostal-Charismatic churches.

President Akufo-Addo's plan was contested on legal grounds. James Bomfeh, former leader of the Convention Peoples Party, a party founded by Ghana's first president, Kwame Nkrumah, made a legal argument that state financial support for the national cathedral was unconstitutional. Bomfeh's argument was rejected by Ghana's Supreme Court. The justices ruled that Ghana's secular constitution was compatible with the Head of State's personal decision to commission a national cathedral, even though it would draw on significant sums of public money. A few years later, during a February 2024 meeting with representatives from the Christian Global Forum in Accra, President Akufo-Addo claimed that Ghana is 'practically' a Christian nation. For some, this underlined that the national cathedral project was merely the starting point of a campaign to make Ghana a

Christian nation, whose people should live according to 'Christian values' ([Despite Secular Constitution, "Ghana Is a Christian Nation Practically"-Akufo-Addo 2024](#)).

What of President Akufo-Addo's claim that Ghana is 'practically' a Christian nation? Most Ghanaians, 71.3 per cent according to the 2021 census, are Christians.⁷ Ghana is demographically a Christian nation. But what does being 'practically' a Christian nation amount to? Does it mean something more than the fact that Christianity is demographically Ghana's most prominent religion? Does it imply that Ghana is a Christian-majority country which under President Akufo-Addo's leadership is undergoing a process of Christianisation which threatens Ghana's more than 30 years of secular democracy?

Akufo-Addo's national cathedral project did not come in isolation, nor did it represent an arbitrary Christian project as a state plan. The national cathedral plan indicates how Christian concerns are now mainstream political issues in Ghana. In addition, prominent Christians have close personal relationships with members of the country's political elite, including current and former presidents and members of parliament. As a result, they can inform policy and decision making via personal relations with the politically powerful. Politicians coveted Christian support of prominent and high-profile Christians, seen as a major asset in their bid to gain or regain power.

Critics regard the national cathedral project as an unwelcome indication of growing Christian influence in Ghana's public realm; some label it a Christian nationalist project ([Bob-Milliar and Lauterbach 2019](#)). [Adjepong \(2021\)](#) claims that 'although Ghana is technically a secular state', Christian groups, such as the Christian Council of Ghana and the Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference, 'have long held sway over the government. . . . The intimate relationship between Christian groups and Ghana's government has entrenched fundamentalist Christian ideas in the state's operations and curtail opportunities for the advancement of progressive social agenda'.

[Bob-Milliar and Lauterbach \(2019\)](#) argue that conservative Christian public and political influence is manifested in 'the ever-less-hidden links between the President [Akufo-Addo] and certain Pentecostal/charismatic leaders [which] is a sign of Ghana going in the direction of being an enchanted democracy, as seen elsewhere on the continent (such as Nigeria and Zambia)'. For [Bob-Milliar and Lauterbach \(2019\)](#), this 'reveals an interesting crossover of two dominating trends in which culture, religion and politics merge, namely the ambition to create and define the future of civilization in Africa and the emergence' of a Christian conservative 'theocratic-political elite'.

The concept of 'enchanted democracy' was outlined in Ebenezer [Obadare's \(2018\)](#) book on Pentecostal politics in Nigeria. Obadare employs the adjective 'enchanted' to refer to Nigerian democracy since the onset of the Fourth Republic in 1999. He points to the proclivity of Nigerian political agents customarily consulting the 'spiritual realm' when making important decisions substantially to affect the state's fortune; this has led, he claims, to an 'enchanted' democracy in Nigeria, where spiritual leaders, among them prominent Pentecostal Christians, have considerable influence on those in power ([Obadare 2018](#), p. 15).

Like their Nigerian counterparts, Ghanaian politicians regularly consult spiritual figures when making important decisions. Prominent Christians make regular political prophecies, predicting, for example, who will win the December 2024 presidential and parliamentary elections. Such examples are not, however, novel. To mention just one prominent figure, since Jerry John Rawlings' political domination in the 1980s, Archbishop Nicholas Duncan Williams, General Overseer of the Action Chapel International Ministry, has been a spiritual guide and confidante of successive presidents in Ghana ([Salah 2020](#)).

Some of Ghana's parliamentarians have close links with elements of the US Christian Right, pursuing shared goals, and exchanging ideas, strategies, and tactics. Prominent Christian conservatives, including the high-profile parliamentarian, Samuel George,⁸ as well as national organisations, such as the Ghana Evangelism Committee, regularly engage with US Christian Right organisations, including faith-based entities ([Asante 2023](#)).

Close links between the US Christian Right and Christian conservatives in Ghana were made clear in the context of a high-profile international conference held in Ghana's

capital, Accra, on 31 October–1 November 2019. The international conference focused public attention on the issue of LGBTQ+ rights in Ghana.

According to the AllAfrica⁹ news agency, '[s]ome parliament members have been actively provoking anti-LGBT sentiment and practices'. Samuel George, a self-described 'charismatic Christian', and seven other members of parliament introduced a private members bill, the 'anti-gay' bill, to Ghana's parliament in June 2021. Although the bill was unanimously passed by parliament, at the time of writing (November 2024), it is awaiting assent by President Akufo-Addo, which so far does not appear to be forthcoming as the legality of the bill is being assessed by the Supreme Court.

The Accra conference was organised, financially sponsored, and its agenda developed by the US-based World Congress of Families (WCF), 'a United States coalition that promotes Christian right values internationally' (Buss and Herman 2003). Some years prior to the Accra conference, the WCF established contact with conservative Christian individuals and organisations in Ghana, including the parliamentarian, Samuel George, and a prominent lawyer, Moses Foh-Amoaning, Executive Secretary of the National Coalition for Proper Human Sexual Rights and Family Values, key supporter of Ghana's 'anti-gay' bill. 'Statements, by George and allies, claiming that sexual and gender equality are incompatible with African culture attract the support of religious and traditional leaders, and many Ghanaians' (Kojoué 2023).

Family Watch International (FWI), founded in 1999 by Sharon Slater, is another US Christian Right organisation active in Ghana. The president of FWI, Sharon Slater, is a long-time anti-LGBTQ+ and anti-choice activist. Slater, an American Mormon, claims that FWI seeks to protect 'family values' against the 'evils' of secularism and liberalism (Southern Poverty Law Center n.d.). Since its founding, FWI has expanded its focus and interests to, among other regions, sub-Saharan Africa. Like the WCF, Family Watch International works with Ghana's Christian conservatives to further criminalise LGBTQ+ people and their representative institutions (Asante 2023).

6. Conclusions

Since the 1980s, Christianity's demographic hub has moved from the global north to the global south, making great strides in sub-Saharan Africa to become the region's largest religion (Kaoma 2009). This shift has led to sub-Saharan Africa having a significant influence on global Christianity, attracting the sustained attention of the US Christian Right. The US Christian Right seeks to exploit this situation by exporting America's culture wars, which the former appeared to be losing, to sub-Saharan Africa. Clifford Bob (2012, pp. 14–15) explains that Christian conservative groups, including the US Christian Right, 'have for years engaged in clashes over family policy. Much of their activism aims to preserve traditional families against what they decry as an onslaught of feminism, abortion and gender politics'.

In Ghana, Christian conservatism with a political focus has developed from both domestic and external influences. Christian conservatism in Ghana, including among prominent Pentecostals, feeds politically on public concerns that society is degenerating and the belief what is needed to address this is an injection of appropriate Christian values, beliefs, and morals to get the country back on track (Interview U). Christian conservatives in Ghana work with like-minded external actors from the US Christian Right. There does not, however, appear to be any significant intra-African transnational networks linking like-minded Christian conservatives. The transnational network of note in this respect is between the US Christian Right and individual African constituencies in several regional countries. The collective aim is to influence public opinion, policy makers and legislators on several issues including LGBTQ+ equality, same sex marriage, abortion rights, and comprehensive sex education in schools.

Finally, what, if anything, does the alliance between the American Christian Right and Ghana's Christian conservatives, including Pentecostals, mean for Ghana's liberal democracy? The research carried out for this article indicates that, to some extent, the

US Christian Right–African Christian conservative agenda, with the example of Ghana’s ‘anti-gay’ bill in mind, is succeeding in influencing social and political realities in Ghana. On the other hand, the December 2024 general election in Ghana focuses heavily on ‘bread and butter’ issues—jobs, price inflation, unemployment, corruption—rather than social issues such as the ‘anti-gay’ bill. For now, at least, Ghanaians seem to agree that political stability and societal progress are best achieved by a secular agenda rather than a religious one informed by the US Christian Right–Ghana Christian conservative agenda ([Democracy in Ghana. The People’s Perspective 2024](#)).

Author’s personal interviews cited in the article:

- A. Chair, Muslim Non-Governmental Organization, via Zoom, 10 May 2023.
- B. Executive Director, Christian Institute, Accra, 17 April 2023.
- C. Director of Research, Peacekeeping Non-Governmental Organization, Accra, via Zoom, 25 July 2022.
- D. Academic, theologian and priest, Accra, via Zoom, 4 May 2023.
- E. Executive Director, Theological Research Institute, Accra, 21 April 2023.
- F. Political Activist, Accra, 25 April 2023.
- G. Political Scientist, Accra, 18 April 2023.
- H. Former political party leader and religious scholar, Accra, via Zoom, 30 May 2023.
- I. Managing Editor, news website, Accra, 25 April 2023.
- G. Political Scientist, Kumasi, 1 November 2022.
- K. Political Scientist, Accra, 21 April 2023.
- L. Representative of the National Cathedral, Accra, 26 April 2023.
- M. Political Scientist, Kumasi, 1 November 2022.
- N. Sociologist, Kumasi, via Zoom, 12 May 2023.
- O. Research Fellow, Religious Studies Institute, Accra, 24 April 2023.
- P. Sociologist, Accra, via Zoom, 9 May 2023.
- Q. University Research Fellow and Church of Pentecost member, Kumasi, 1 November 2022.
- R. Executive Director, Democracy Non-Governmental Organization, Accra, 30 May 2023.
- S. Religious scholar, Accra, via Zoom, 6 May 2023.
- T. Political Scientist, New York, USA, via Zoom, 2 September 2022.
- U. Senior Lecturer and the Head of the Centre for Ministerial Formation and Training at Pentecost University, Accra, 15 November 2024.

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Notes

- ¹ Grey literature is any information not produced by commercial publishers, including research reports, working papers, conference proceedings, theses, preprints, white papers, blogs, podcasts, social media posts, guidelines, policy documents, and reports produced by government departments, academics, business, and industry. Such sources of information are often useful in helping find out current information on emerging areas of research, enabling us to learn from a more diverse range of voices. As such information is not peer reviewed, the quality of information may be variable. https://library.leeds.ac.uk/info/1110/resource_guides/7/grey_literature%20 (accessed on 20 November 2024).

- 2 Ghana's mainline churches include the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Ghana, Presbyterian Church of Ghana, Methodist Church Ghana, the Anglican Church, the Roman Catholic Church and the Baptist Church:
- 3 The Christian Council of Ghana (CCG) was founded on 30 October 1929 by five churches, namely African Methodist Episcopal (AME), Zion Church, English Church Mission (Anglican), Ewe Presbyterian Church (now Evangelical Presbyterian Church); Presbyterian Church of the Gold Coast (now Ghana), and Wesleyan Methodist Church (now the Methodist Church Ghana).
- 4 "Singing from the same hymn sheet" is an idiom that means people agree or express similar views, thus presenting a united front. It can be used to describe people in different organisations who appear to agree about something and say similar things in public.
- 5 The US Christian Right's hostility to same-sex marriage in sub-Saharan Africa was triggered by the 2015 legalisation of same-sex marriage in the USA, which followed its parliamentary validation a year earlier in the United Kingdom ([European Union Funds Charity That Compares Abortion to Holocaust 2024](#)).
- 6 Comments made by Professor Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu at the 19th Annual 'Kronti ne Akwamu' (Democracy and Good Governance) Public Lecture. "Topic" Religion and Liberal Democracy in the Fourth Republic, Accra, 12 November 2024. The author of this article attended this event in person.
- 7 Muslims comprise 20 per cent of Ghanaians, followers of African traditional religions, 5 per cent, and religious 'nones', 5 per cent.
- 8 Profile of Samuel Nartey George at <https://www.graphic.com.gh/lifestyle/personality-profiles/samuel-nartey-george-mp-for-ningo-prampram.html> (accessed on 20 November 2024).
- 9 'AllAfrica is a voice of, by and about Africa-aggregating, producing and distributing 400 news and information items daily from over 100 African news organizations and our own reporters to an African and global public. We operate from Cape Town, Dakar, Abuja, Johannesburg, Nairobi and Washington DC'. <https://allafrica.com/misc/info/about/> (accessed on 20 November 2024).

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