Religion, identity and politics in Tanzania

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Abstract

In Samuel Huntington's world of hostile civilisations, Tanzania would fall into the category of a torn country, a battle ground for the forces of African, Western and Islamic meta-cultures to expand their influence. On the surface, this might seem the case. Tanzania is an impoverished country where the benefits of economic liberalisation have reached only a narrow stratum and the fruits of political liberalisation are yet to be seen, placing severe strain on national social cohesion. There is certainly a possibility that pent up economic and political frustrations could be channelled into religious extremist movements. However, religion has not served as a primary fault-line for sustained political violence and conflict, although there are signs that this might be changing. In this paper we argue that uncovering and analysing these relationships elucidates how cross-cutting cleavages complicate the mobilisation of individuals and organised groups based on identity, not only in Tanzania, but in other societies as well.