

Shaking the Traditional Order: Women's Conversion to New Christian Churches in Sub-Saharan Africa

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May 19, 2026

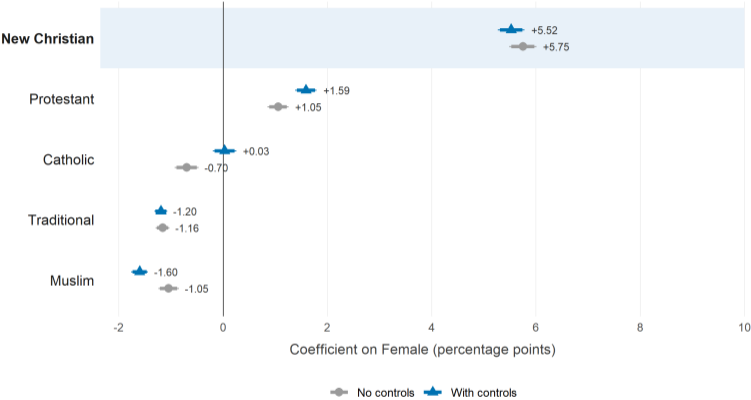
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Dramatic rise of new Christianity, especially among women

- New Christian churches (NCC) – including Evangelical and Pentecostal denominations – are growing very fast in both rich and poor countries
- In sub-Saharan Africa the rise has been dramatic: from 3% before 2000 to 19% after 2015 (DHS); recent studies suggest that they represent 40% of all Christians
[Zurlo and Johnson (2024)]
- Yet very little is known in economics about the roots of this movement, and even less about its gender dimension

Gender gap in affiliation across religions: DHS data



Thick band = 90% CI; thin band = 95% CI. All specifications include country-round fixed effects. Controls include age, age squared, education, marital status, labor market participation and DHS cluster fixed effects.

This paper: Why do women convert more to these new churches?

Why do people convert?

Why conversion?

- Economists view conversion through a cost-benefit lens: individuals convert if expected benefits (economic, spiritual and psychological) exceed the costs (fixed cost of entry, cost of switching/deviating)

[Aldashev and Platteau (2014), Barro et al. (2010), Carvalho et al. (2019), Iannaccone (1992, 1994), and Iyer (2016)]

- Benefits: literature on NCC emphasizes the provision of economic services to the poor:
 - Insurance [Auriol et al. (2020)]
 - Community support during economic hardship [Alfonsi et al. (2024) and Costa et al. (2022)]

...suggesting women convert more as they are poorer and more exposed to negative shocks

Why conversion?

- Other social sciences point in a different (complementary) direction. NCC described as supporting economically dynamic individuals:
 - Provide spiritual services such as healing and protection against spiritual attacks, which often target economically successful individuals [Haar (2007) and Platteau (2014, 2019)]
 - Promote set of values compatible with wealth accumulation (prosperity gospel) [Haynes (2012) and Heuser (2016)]
 - Reject traditional authority structures and rituals (typically patriarchal) [Onyinah (2009) and Platteau (2019)]

Alternative view: women seeking economic empowerment find supporting services

This paper I

Provides experimental evidence from an RCT in Benin showing that NCC support individual economic emancipation

- Women (randomly) offered an income generating opportunity convert more to NCC
- No clear advantage of the churches in terms of strictly economic services
- Protection against spiritual attacks appears central, in a context where women are particularly vulnerable when they are economically successful

This paper II

Provides quasi-experimental evidence at scale to test the external validity of the RCT findings:

- We show that new economic opportunities trigger women's conversion to NCC:
 - Dif-in-dif: Shocks to international prices of locally suitable crops where women are involved in cash crop production increase conversion
 - Dif-in-dif: World Bank gender-related aid projects increase conversion
 - These effects are stronger where witchcraft beliefs are widespread

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 - These effects are stronger where witchcraft beliefs are widespread
- Supportive descriptive evidence that NCC facilitate individual economic emancipation
 - Female members of NCC enjoy higher agency (LFP, fertility, decision making)
 - They are more likely to reject traditional beliefs, rituals, and authorities
 - They feel protected by the Holy Spirit and believe in God ordained prosperity

Contributions

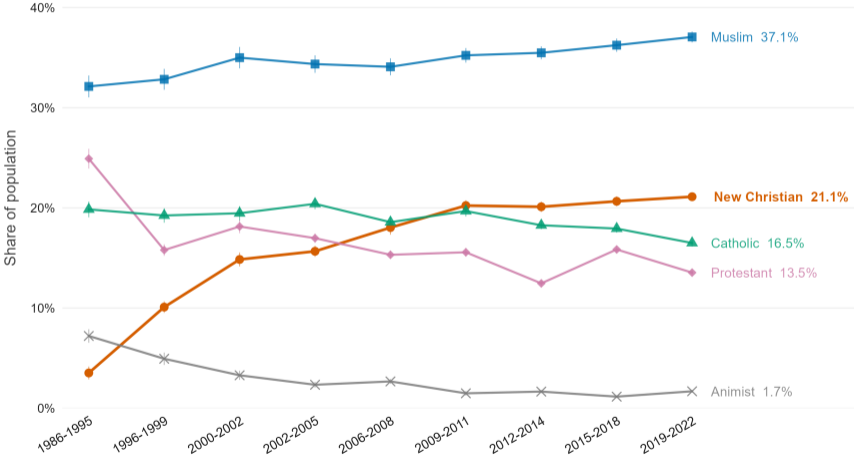
- Literature on the (economic) determinants of religious participation [Auriol et al. (2020), Costa et al. (2022), Hersey (2024), Montero et al. (2024), and Sinding Bentzen (2019)]
 - NCC allow women to escape patriarchal control; intra-hh conflicts are central in the conversion process
- Literature on the links between conversion and economic development [Becker, Pfaff, et al. (2016), Becker and Woessmann (2008, 2009), Cantoni (2015), Cantoni et al. (2018), and Iyer (2016)]
 - Our findings suggest that the spread of NCC in SSA may have more in common with the spread of Protestantism in Europe than previously thought
- Literature on witchcraft and economic outcomes [Gershman (2016) and Miguel (2005)]
 - Our findings are in line with witchcraft being used to preserve gender-based differences in social status [Federici (2018)]

Roadmap

1. **The changing picture of religion in SSA**
2. **Features of new Christian churches**
3. **Experimental evidence from Benin**
4. **Cross country evidence**
5. **Conclusion: religious conversion and institutional change**

The changing picture of religion in sub-Saharan Africa

The dramatic rise of new Christianity: DHS data

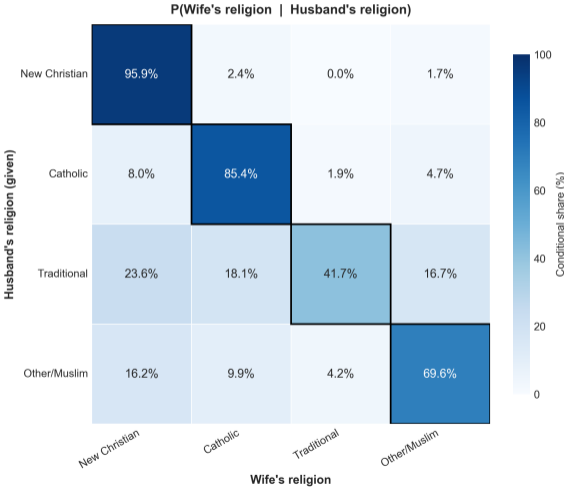
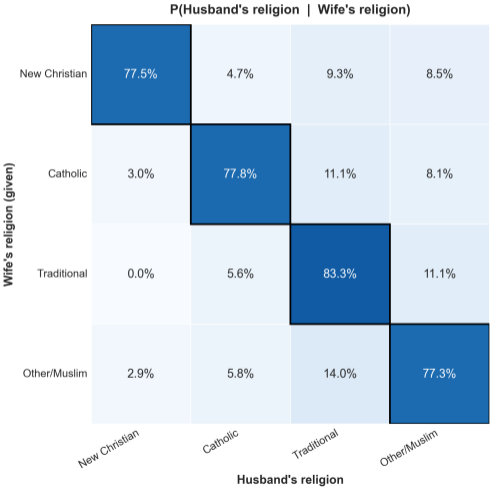


The dynamics of religious conversion: first-hand data

- In a context where conversions are frequent, existing surveys do not capture the full dynamic of the religious landscape
- Our own data (representative of pineapple producers in Southern Benin, N=1798):
 - 40 percent have converted to another religion at some stage of their life
 - Most of them leave a traditional religion (41% of women and 58% of men) or a mainline missionary church (40% of women and 28% of men)
 - most of the new converts join a new Christian church (57% of women and 54% of men), while a much smaller fraction of them join missionary churches (28% of women and 26% of men)

The gender asymmetry in couples

Religious assortative matching among couples — first hand data (n = 843)



Features of new Christian churches

Features of new Christian churches (I)

- In contrast to the imported, mainstream missionary churches, the new post-colonial Christian churches usually emerge locally, and are mostly founded by Africans
- New Christian movements in SSA are:

"an attempt by Africans to forge new identities for themselves experimenting with and breaking down traditions. In theological terms they are regarded as processes of inculturation of Christianity in the African context [...]. They can simply be defined as autonomous church groups with an all-African leadership and an all-African membership" [Mwaura (2013, p.415)]

Features of new Christian churches (II)

- Related to Protestant Christianity and its individualistic ethics
- They emphasize charisma, a direct relation to God through spontaneous prayer (often with singing and dancing), and a strong feeling of community

[J. Caldwell and P. Caldwell (1987)]

- They promote individual salvation in the Hereafter and, at the same time, prosperity in this world
- They accept the ontological reality of witchcraft and evil spirits, but offer protection against them by invoking superior supernatural forces [Meyer (1998)]
- More broadly, they stress the importance of supernatural phenomena such as miracles [Brown (2011)]

Breaking with the past (I)

- Although new Christian churches accord a great importance to the nuclear family, they simultaneously give a central place to community life
- In reality, the church congregation has come to replace the extended family, a major turning point in African social life [J. Caldwell and P. Caldwell (1987) and Fanello (2006)]
- Unlike the traditional village societies anchored in the local clans, the new religious communities are based on the idea of equal membership in status
- Despite the existence of lines of continuity between the old and the new orders, a fundamental break with the past is occurring under the new wave of religious conversions [Hagen (1975), Kennedy (1988), and Mildnerova (2014)]

Breaking with the past (II)

- What new Christian churches are challenging is no less than the body of tradition and its associated authority structure
- Conditions to become a member:
 - Renunciation and condemnation of one's past cultural and religious beliefs (i.e., ancestor worship)
 - Disobedience to, or distancing from, the clan elders in charge of implementing the associated rituals
 - Bans on alcohol and the use of fetishes, condemnation of the waste of time and money in ancient feasts and rituals, traditional medicines and visits to traditional healers, and polygamous unions

Economic opportunities and conversion: Experimental evidence from Benin

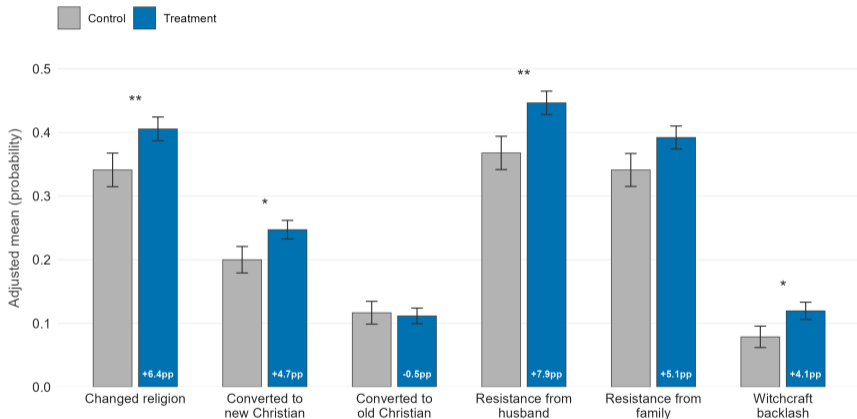
The intervention

- Pro-women agricultural program in southern Benin: it includes a business training and an in-kind subsidy to cultivate pineapple
- Beneficiaries randomly selected from a pool of households who had expressed their interest for a previous intervention of the agency (yet had not benefited)
- The in-kind subsidy consists in the preparation of the soil and the planting of pineapple over an area of 0.5 ha
- Training program: 7 sessions (2-4 hours each, every two weeks) dealing with management and accounting, goal setting, gender issues, and a technical session on pineapple production

The intervention

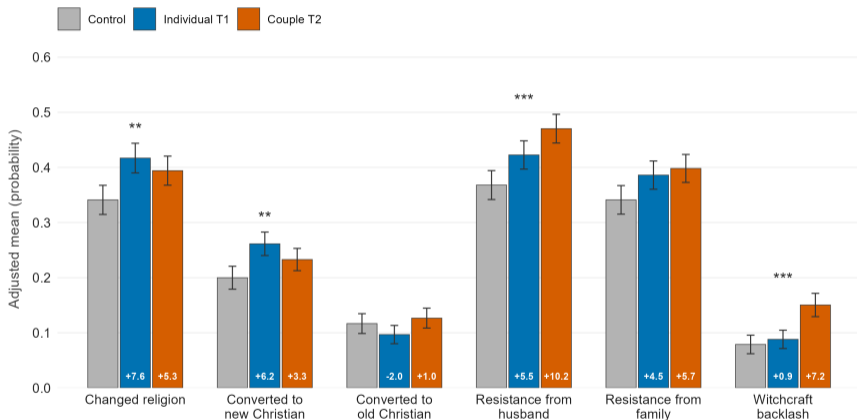
- Households randomized into 3 groups: control, subsidy and business training (husband invited to one session), subsidy and business training (husband invited to full training)
- Subsidy was always targeted at women; husband involvement was meant to raise awareness and leverage support
- We surveyed 1009 households:
 - Baseline carried out in 2020
 - Implementation of the intervention in 2022
 - First follow-up in 2024, including questions on religious conversion
 - Second follow-up in 2025 to gather additional information on mechanisms

Impacts on conversion, family resistance, and witchcraft threats



Bars are adjusted means at covariate means, estimated separately for each outcome from a regression of the outcome on a treatment indicator, age, education, baseline new-Christian status, polygamy, and non-married indicator, with department fixed effects and robust standard errors. Error bars show +/- 1 SE of the adjusted mean. Stars on the Treatment bar mark the significance of the ATE: * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Witchcraft backlash is estimated on the subsample of married women.

Impacts on conversion, family resistance, and witchcraft threats



Bars are adjusted means at covariate means, estimated separately for each outcome from a regression of the outcome on the treatment arm (treat_cat_baseline: Control, Individual T1, Couple T2), age, education, baseline new-Christian status, polygamy, and non-married indicator, with department fixed effects and robust standard errors. Error bars show +/- 1 SE of the adjusted mean. Stars above each treatment-arm bar mark the significance of that arm's effect vs Control: * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Witchcraft backlash is estimated on the subsample of married women.

Impacts on conversion, family resistance, and witchcraft threats

Key experimental results:

- When offered a new economic opportunity, women seek religious conversion
- Yet they face opposition from their husband
- Women's acknowledgment of witchcraft used by their husband to counter their plan confirms their perception of a strong resistance
- This is in a context where a majority believes that spiritual attacks are more likely when individuals are economically successful (62% of respondents)

Why? What are the benefits from conversion?

- We do not find important differences in the provision of economic services

	Current church provides:				
	ROSCAs (1)	Emergency loans (2)	Investment loans (3)	Mediation (4)	Use of ROSCAs (5)
Panel A: New Christians compared to all other denominations					
New Christian	0.0488* (0.0291)	0.0280 (0.0227)	0.0152 (0.0154)	0.116*** (0.0260)	-0.00622 (0.0259)
R-squared	0.0411	0.0162	0.00982	0.167	0.0611
Panel B: New Christians (and non-Christians) compared to missionary churches					
New Christian	0.00979 (0.0316)	0.0161 (0.0247)	0.0180 (0.0166)	0.0625** (0.0271)	-0.00903 (0.0276)
Non Christian	-0.167*** (0.0349)	-0.0508* (0.0302)	0.0121 (0.0257)	-0.229*** (0.0462)	-0.0102 (0.0397)
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mean Y	0.232	0.127	0.0534	0.771	0.811
R-squared	0.0558	0.0184	0.0101	0.195	0.0611
N	899	899	899	899	905

Why? What are the benefits from conversion?

- In qualitative interviews, economic services never mentioned, instead:
 - Superior healing and protection against "spiritual attacks" (= illness accompanied by nervous breakdown, typically attributed to evil spirits)
 - Rejection of traditional beliefs and practices
- These aspects deserve careful attention inasmuch as spiritual attacks are narrowly linked to women's economic emancipation → economic emancipation makes protection services against witchcraft necessary

Why? What are the benefits from conversion?

	Fearing witchcraft (1)	Using fetishes (2)	Drinking magical potions (3)	Consulting with wizards (4)	Believing in ancestors (5)
Panel A: New Christians compared to all other denominations					
New Christian	-0.0770** (0.0322)	-0.167*** (0.0448)	-0.0627*** (0.0213)	-0.0975*** (0.0247)	-0.190*** (0.0293)
R-squared	0.148	0.0814	0.0195	0.0610	0.106
Panel B: New Christians (and non-Christians) compared to missionary churches					
New Christian	-0.0930*** (0.0347)	-0.167*** (0.0483)	-0.0570** (0.0232)	0.00924 (0.0222)	-0.147*** (0.0317)
Non Christian	-0.0533 (0.0417)	0.00192 (0.0685)	0.0169 (0.0318)	0.313*** (0.0416)	0.139*** (0.0436)
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mean Y	0.426	0.337	0.110	0.142	0.310
R-squared	0.149	0.0814	0.0199	0.168	0.118
N	924	439	876	767	936

- New Christians clearly stand apart in rejecting traditional beliefs and practices

Broader literature on witchcraft, conflict and conversion

- Rather than being the result of a pure economic calculus, conversion is seen as a source of defense against magic threats and witchcraft accusations directed against aspiring women
- Witchcraft reflects serious tensions within the family [Evans-Pritchard (1937, 1940), Geschiere (1994), Haar (2007), Meyer (1998), and Nyaga (2007)]
- Women targeted and blamed to prevent them "from effectively competing in male-dominated areas" [Akrong (2007) and Ntloedibe-Kuswani (2007)]
- In Ghana, for example, "many women do not want to go beyond their respective (gender) roles, for fear of becoming the object of witchcraft accusations" [Akrong (2007)]

Broader literature on witchcraft, conflict and conversion

- Women pursuing autonomy from husbands and kin face accusations of severing family ties [Meyer (1998)]
- Converted women report ailments (headaches, physical disturbances) that neither traditional healers nor modern doctors could cure
- Return to normalcy requires a supernatural force deemed more powerful than ancestral spirits
- Parallels the conversion to Islam of young people in conflict with elders threatened by their new activities [Kennedy (1988) and Parkin (1972)]

Economic opportunities, magic threats and women's conversion
to new Christian churches: cross-country evidence

Economic opportunities and conversion: causal evidence

- We evaluate whether economic opportunities, for women in particular, trigger their conversion and thereby contribute to the rise of new Christian churches
- We use two indicators of economic opportunities:
 - The rise in the international price of locally suitable crops
 - The presence of World Bank development projects that explicitly target women
- We explore whether the presence of witchcraft beliefs amplifies the effect of new economic opportunities on the appeal of new Christian churches

Economic opportunity I: Shocks to crop prices and NCC

- Our first measure exploits local exposure to changes in international world prices of agricultural commodities [Berman et al. (2025) and McGuirk and Burke (2020)]
- We first divide the African continent into cells of $0.5^\circ \times 0.5^\circ$ ($55 \times 55 \text{ km}^2$)
- We then combine cell-level information on crop suitability with international prices. The potential value of crops in cell c and year t is given by the following suitability-weighted price index:

$$\text{Crop price index}_{ct} = \sum_{j=1}^n (\pi_{jt} \times \text{Suitability}_{jc}),$$

$$Y_{i,c,t} = \beta \text{Crop price index}_{c,t-1} + FE_c + FE_t + X'_{i,t} \Phi + \epsilon_{i,c,t},$$

- We interact with the prevalence of witchcraft beliefs: we use the DHS question "Do you believe that HIV can be caused by witchcraft?"

Shocks to crops and conversion to new Christianity

	Respondent is New Christian					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Cash Crop Price Index	0.0707*** (0.0134)	0.0711*** (0.0134)	0.0746*** (0.0133)	0.0621*** (0.0135)	0.0742*** (0.0141)	0.0661*** (0.0144)
Female		0.0250*** (0.00118)	0.0298*** (0.00126)	0.0120*** (0.00398)	0.0302*** (0.00133)	0.0189*** (0.00405)
Cash Crop Price Index x Female				0.0185*** (0.00420)		0.0112*** (0.00416)
Cash-crop PI x witchcraft (cell)					0.0231*** (0.00430)	0.000384 (0.00526)
Cash-crop PI x Female x witch.						0.0327*** (0.00481)
Mean Y	0.234	0.234	0.231	0.231	0.240	0.240
R-squared	0.429	0.430	0.429	0.429	0.429	0.430
Basic controls	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Full controls	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Grid-cell FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
N	1961792	1958050	1857296	1857296	1709570	1709570

Economic opportunity II: Gender-focused development aid projects

- Our second measure of economic opportunities exploits the deployment in certain areas of development aid projects targeted on women
- we rely on geo-coded data on development aid projects funded by the World Bank during the years 1995–2014 [AidData (2020)].
 - 1,717 such projects distributed in 15,268 geo-coded project sites in Africa.
- A gender-related project is one whose main theme is gender. According to the World Bank classification: projects that — irrespective of sector — address and/or close gaps between males and females.
 - 200 project sites have gender as their main theme.
- As before, we interact with the cell-level prevalence of witchcraft

World Bank gender-related projects and conversion to NCCs

	Respondent is New Christian			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Female	0.0259*** (0.000900)	0.0278*** (0.000814)	0.0278*** (0.000827)	0.0301*** (0.000882)
Female x Witchcraft (cell)			0.00723*** (0.000950)	0.00749*** (0.000942)
WB gender project	-0.000928 (0.0105)	0.0141 (0.00975)	0.00193 (0.00815)	0.00188 (0.00828)
WB gender project x Female	0.0160** (0.00629)	0.0137** (0.00602)	0.00249 (0.00383)	0.00196 (0.00381)
WB gndr project x Witch. (cell)			0.0262*** (0.0101)	0.0272*** (0.0102)
WB gndr x Female x Witch. (cell)			0.0218*** (0.00437)	0.0219*** (0.00433)
Total number of WB projects	0.00776*** (0.000903)	-0.000592 (0.00118)	-0.00115 (0.00125)	-0.00101 (0.00127)
Mean Y	0.239	0.239	0.246	0.245
R-squared	0.294	0.464	0.466	0.463
Country and year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Grid-cell FE	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Individual	No	No	No	Yes
N	1781810	1781809	1672681	1602447

NCC, female empowerment and rejection of traditional order:
empirical regularities in SSA

New Christian churches and women empowerment

- If NCC facilitate individual emancipation, particularly for women, we may expect female members to have greater agency
- No causality: NCC could attract women who have more agency
- Outcomes:
 - DHS: working status, use of contraceptive, ideal number of children, children ever born, decision making-index (has some say in use of own earnings, health care, large hh purchase, visiting relatives)
 - PEW: "Is Christianity associated with more gender-equal views than other religions?" and "Should women be allowed to serve in religious leadership roles, such as pastor, priest or imam?"

New Christian churches and women empowerment

	Labor market		Reproductive		Decision-making		
	Working status (1)	Contraceptives (2)	Ideal nr of children (3)	Children ever born (4)	At home	In the church	
					Decision-making Index (5)	Respect for women (6)	Female leadership (7)
Panel A: New Christians compared to all other denominations							
New Christian	0.0542*** (0.00207)	0.0495*** (0.00133)	-0.591*** (0.0120)	-0.412*** (0.0145)	0.0694*** (0.00181)	0.0968*** (0.00570)	0.185*** (0.00686)
R-squared	0.0926	0.112	0.244	0.155	0.271	0.0859	0.197
Panel B: New Christians (and non-Christians) compared to missionary churches							
New Christian	0.0140*** (0.00205)	0.0119*** (0.00132)	-0.101*** (0.00974)	-0.0822*** (0.0141)	0.0219*** (0.00169)	0.0234*** (0.00795)	0.0571*** (0.00975)
Non Christian	-0.0966*** (0.00234)	-0.0928*** (0.00134)	1.250*** (0.0133)	0.789*** (0.0152)	-0.110*** (0.00192)	-0.113*** (0.00917)	-0.197*** (0.0107)
Country-round FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mean Y	0.766	0.217	5.154	5.568	0.578	0.791	0.460
R-squared	0.0985	0.117	0.269	0.164	0.280	0.0921	0.210
N	624192	1549400	1387105	441793	961925	24605	23839

- And gender-equalizing prohibitions: alcohol and polygamy

► Results

New Christian churches and rejection of traditional beliefs

- If NCC allow individuals to distance themselves from traditional society, we may expect members to reject traditional beliefs
- Traditional beliefs:
 - PEW:
 - Participate to rituals to honor ancestors; to initiations; believe that sacrifices to ancestors prevent bad events; use traditional religious healers
 - On holy spirit healing and protection: have witnessed a divine intervention to heal an illness; the expulsion of evil spirits from a person; believe that god can directly intervene to ensure material success or good health
 - First-hand Benin: power of ancestors

New Christian churches and rejection of traditional beliefs

	Traditional beliefs and practices				Beliefs in supernatural power		
	Rituals (1)	Sacrifices (2)	Initiation (3)	Trad. healing (4)	Miracles (5)	Exorcism (6)	God-ordained prosperity (7)
Panel A: New Christians compared to all other denominations							
New Christian	-0.0492*** (0.00611)	-0.0874*** (0.00643)	-0.0534*** (0.00617)	-0.0748*** (0.00691)	0.205*** (0.00702)	0.173*** (0.00696)	0.0548*** (0.00712)
R-squared	0.108	0.164	0.101	0.104	0.0747	0.0687	0.0718
Panel B: New Christians (and non-Christians) as compared to missionary churches							
New Christian	-0.0434*** (0.00886)	-0.0704*** (0.00944)	-0.0310*** (0.00901)	-0.0407*** (0.00982)	0.154*** (0.0100)	0.108*** (0.0101)	0.0525*** (0.0102)
Non Christian	0.00882 (0.00979)	0.0258** (0.0104)	0.0343*** (0.00997)	0.0523*** (0.0108)	-0.0778*** (0.0109)	-0.0993*** (0.0109)	-0.00354 (0.0113)
Mean Y	0.263	0.329	0.267	0.424	0.477	0.420	0.571
R-squared	0.108	0.165	0.101	0.105	0.0766	0.0719	0.0718
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
N	24204	23458	24132	23587	24369	23694	23562

New Christian churches and rejection of traditional authorities

- If conversion to NCC is motivated by an escape from the traditional patriarchal order, we expect members to reject traditional authority structures (and to join new communities)
- Outcomes:
 - Afrobarometer: trust in traditional authorities and in the family
 - PEW: participation in singing ceremonies and charitable giving, more attendance to the church

New Christian churches and rejection of traditional authorities

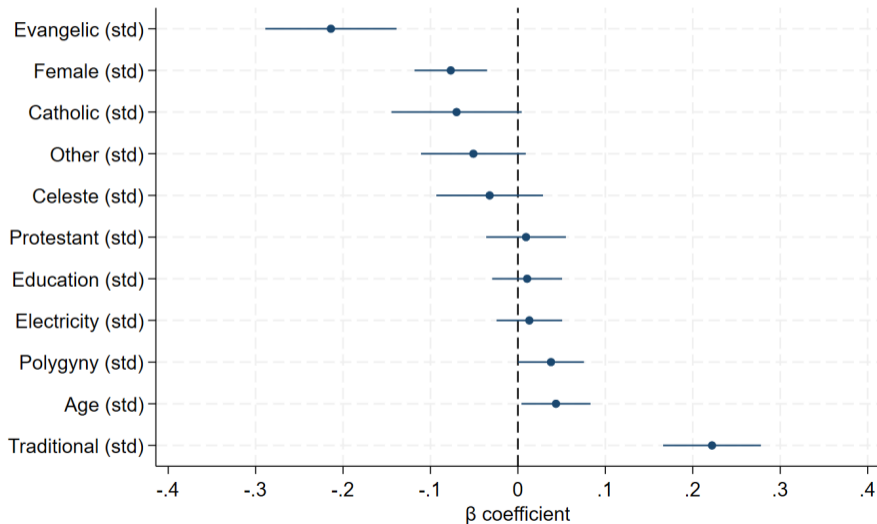
	Afrobarometer data		PEW data		
	Trad. leaders (1)	Family (2)	Singing (3)	High attendance (4)	Charitable giving (5)
Panel A: New Christians as compared to all other denominations					
New Christian	-0.0932*** (0.00554)	-0.0693*** (0.00566)	0.121*** (0.00623)	-0.0175** (0.00700)	-0.0567*** (0.00620)
R-squared	0.128	0.122	0.0418	0.0746	0.104
Panel B: New Christians (and non-Christians) as compared to missionary churches					
New Christian	-0.0345*** (0.00616)	-0.0335*** (0.00619)	0.134*** (0.00754)	0.193*** (0.00818)	0.142*** (0.00973)
Non Christian	0.154*** (0.00707)	0.0984*** (0.00678)	0.0237*** (0.00873)	0.387*** (0.00978)	0.355*** (0.00920)
Mean Y	1.838	2.361	0.265	0.469	0.801
R-squared	0.130	0.123	0.0421	0.126	0.163
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country-Wave FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
N	197268	141462	24291	24273	21466

Conclusion:
religious conversion and institutional change

Conclusion: religious conversion and institutional change

- Historical experience of Europe demonstrates how religious transformation dismantled kinship-based social structures due to the church ability to set social norms [Goody (1973)]
- Some resemblance with conversion movement in SSA:
 - NCC challenge customary norms centered on clan elders and the cult of ancestors
 - They provide an spiritual framework that emphasizes agency and divine protection (particularly attractive to women – central agents of change)
- Elsewhere, Pentecostal and Evangelical churches are linked to lower women's status and rising far-right support [Buccione and Mello (2020) and Solá (2025)]
 - Key contextual differences: coexistence with traditional religions and beliefs may drive demand for a distinctive set of spiritual services + bottom-up organization

NCC and traditional beliefs: Benin sample



Gender and traditional beliefs and practices

	Rituals (1)	Sacrifices (2)	Initiation (3)	Trad. healer (4)
Female	-1.273** (0.549)	-2.564*** (0.577)	-3.204*** (0.554)	-1.222* (0.628)
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mean Y	0.262	0.329	0.267	0.423
R-squared	0.109	0.165	0.104	0.103
N	23537	22816	23474	22964

Gender and traditional beliefs and practices

	Traditional beliefs and practices			
	Vodoun religion (1)	power of ancestors (2)	power of wizards (3)	power of magic potion (4)
Female/100	-7.295*** (1.798)	-14.69*** (2.735)	-5.392** (2.339)	-9.690*** (2.271)
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mean Y	0.103	0.367	0.156	0.146
R-squared	0.0194	0.0305	0.0322	0.0273
N	1703	1705	1480	1383

New Christianity and alcohol consumption

	DHS data		First-hand data Benin
	Partner/husband drinks alcohol (1)	Man drinks alcohol (2)	Respondent drinks trad. beverage (3)
New Christian	-0.0671*** (0.00392)	-0.147*** (0.0323)	-0.0330* (0.0201)
Non Christian	-0.290*** (0.00405)	0.0629*** (0.0201)	0.0781*** (0.0288)
Mean Y	0.353	0.428	0.156
R-squared	0.186	0.128	0.0370
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country-Wave FE	Yes	Yes	No
N	255115	12049	1480

NOTE. Data: DHS and first-hand data from Benin. The sample is restricted to women in column 1, to men in column 2, and to both men and women in column 3. The outcome variable in column 1 is a indicator that equals one if the woman reports that her husband or partner drinks alcohol. The outcome variable in column 2 is a indicator that equals one if the man reports drinking alcohol. The outcome variable in column 3 is a indicator that equals one if the respondent drinks sodabi (traditional alcoholic drink in Benin). "New Christian" is a indicator that equals one if the respondent's main religion is a new Christian church. Controls include age, age squared, education, occupation, marital status and rural/urban place of residence in the DHS data; and age, education, marital status, and electricity at home in the first-hand data. Standard errors are clustered at the DHS-cluster level when using DHS data.

New Christianity and polygyny

	In polygamous union			
	Unconditional		Married at the time of the survey	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
New Christian	-0.00483** (0.00192)	-0.00464** (0.00193)	-0.00399** (0.00182)	-0.00407** (0.00183)
Non Christian	0.156*** (0.00207)	0.158*** (0.00206)	0.156*** (0.00207)	0.158*** (0.00207)
Mean Y	0.335	0.339	0.335	0.339
R-squared	0.203	0.204	0.203	0.204
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country and year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
N	1238252	1011337	1238252	1011337

NOTE. Data: Demographic and Health Surveys. "New Christian" is an indicator equal to one if the respondent reports one of the new Christian religions as her main religion. The outcome variable is an indicator equal to one if the respondent is engaged in a polygamous union. In columns 2 and 4, attention is restricted to women who have ever been married. In columns 1 and 2, "New Christian" is a indicator that equals one if the respondent reports one of the new Christian religions as their main religion. In columns 3 and 4, "New Christian" is a indicator that equals one if the respondent reports being New Christian or Protestant in surveys where New Christians and Protestants are together. Country and year FE and individual controls include: age, age squared, gender and urban/rural place of residence. Standard errors clustered at the DHS cluster level are in parenthesis.

Shocks to cash crops: strict definition

	Respondent is New Christian					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Cash Crop Price Index	0.0889*** (0.0137)	0.0892*** (0.0138)	0.0934*** (0.0138)	0.0768*** (0.0138)	0.0943*** (0.0146)	0.0816*** (0.0148)
Female		0.0249*** (0.00117)	0.0293*** (0.00125)	0.00562 (0.00391)	0.0297*** (0.00132)	0.0120*** (0.00401)
Cash Crop Price Index x Female				0.0247*** (0.00414)		0.0179*** (0.00413)
Cash-crop PI x witchcraft (cell)					0.0312*** (0.00469)	0.00322 (0.00527)
Cash-crop PI x Female x witch.						0.0405*** (0.00500)
Mean Y	0.198	0.198	0.196	0.196	0.204	0.204
R-squared	0.408	0.409	0.405	0.405	0.406	0.407
Basic controls	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Full controls	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Grid-cell FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
N	1961792	1958050	1857296	1857296	1709570	1709570

NOTE. Data: Demographic and Health Surveys and Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). "Cash Crop Price Index" is the sum across fifteen crops (banana, barley, cocoa, coconut, coffee, cotton, maize, palm oil, rice, sorghum, soybean, sugar, tea, tobacco, wheat) of their price in $t-1$ (indexed to 1 in year 2010 for each crop) weighted by their suitability. "Witchcraft (cell)" is the standardized mean prevalence of witchcraft in a given grid cell. The outcome variable is an indicator that equals one if the respondent is from a new Christian church. Basic controls include age, age squared and gender. Full controls further include education, labor market participation, marital status and urban/rural residence. Robust standard errors clustered at the cell-year level appear in parenthesis.

Shocks to cash crops: M3 dataset (Monfreda et al., 2008)

	Respondent is New Christian					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Cash Crop Price Index	0.0646*** (0.00832)	0.0517*** (0.00813)	0.0695*** (0.00795)	0.0709*** (0.00803)	0.0710*** (0.00778)	0.0566*** (0.00761)
Cash-crop PI x witchcraft (cell)	0.0163*** (0.00354)	0.00965** (0.00417)				
Female	0.0300*** (0.00133)	0.0114*** (0.00371)		0.0249*** (0.00118)	0.0296*** (0.00126)	0.00820** (0.00341)
Cash Crop Price Index x Female		0.0181*** (0.00375)				0.0208*** (0.00339)
Cash-crop PI x Female x witch.		0.00948** (0.00382)				
Mean Y	0.239	0.239	0.233	0.233	0.231	0.231
R-squared	0.431	0.431	0.431	0.432	0.431	0.431
Basic controls	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Full controls	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes
Grid-cell FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
N	1702846	1702846	1946828	1943178	1843949	1843949

NOTE. Data: Demographic and Health Surveys and Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). "Cash Crop Price Index" is computed using M3-crop instead of GAEZ data. "Witchcraft (cell)" is the standardized mean prevalence of witchcraft in a given grid cell. The sample is restricted to grid-cells for which "Witchcraft (cell)" has been computed using at least 50 observations. The outcome variable is an indicator that equals one if the respondent is from a new Christian church (or Protestant in surveys where new Christians and Protestants are grouped together). Basic controls include age, age squared and gender. Full controls further include education, labor market participation, marital status and urban/rural residence. Robust standard errors clustered at the cell-year level appear in parenthesis.

Shocks to cash crops: 28x28km (Roessler et al., 2022)

	Respondent is New Christian					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	Women	Men	(6)
				(4)	(5)	
Cash Crop Price Index	0.0660*** (0.00489)	0.0651*** (0.00490)	0.0636*** (0.00494)	0.0673*** (0.00519)	0.0547*** (0.00581)	0.0585*** (0.00552)
Female		0.0250*** (0.00104)	0.0297*** (0.00110)			0.0296*** (0.00113)
Cash-crop PI x witchcraft (cell)						0.00407* (0.00229)
Mean Y	0.237	0.238	0.237	0.235	0.242	0.243
R-squared	0.459	0.460	0.456	0.466	0.454	0.458
Basic controls	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Full controls	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Grid-cell FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
N	1822215	1818726	1737891	1202408	535458	1627689

NOTE. Data: Demographic and Health Surveys and Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). "Cash Crop Price Index" is measured as in Roessler et al. (2022). It is the standardized sum across nine cash crops (coffee, cocoa, cotton, groundnuts, oil palm, sugarcane, tea, tobacco, and banana) of their price in t-1 (indexed to 1 in year 2010 for each crop) weighted by their suitability. "Witchcraft (cell)" is the standardized mean prevalence of witchcraft in a given grid cell. The outcome variable is an indicator that equals one if the respondent is from a new Christian church (or Protestant in surveys where new Christians and Protestants are grouped together). Basic controls include age, age squared and gender. Full controls further include education, labor market participation, marital status and urban/rural residence. Robust standard errors clustered at the cell-year level appear in parenthesis.

Shocks to cash crops: effect on different religions

	Respondent is:			
	New Christian	Catholic	Protestant	Traditional
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Cash Crop Price Index	0.0746*** (0.0133)	-0.0411*** (0.00911)	-0.0761*** (0.0145)	-0.00234 (0.00516)
Mean Y	0.231	0.186	0.117	0.0211
R-squared	0.429	0.243	0.274	0.203
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Grid-cell FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
N	1857296	1857296	1857296	1857296

NOTE. Data: Demographic and Health Surveys and Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). "Cash Crop Price Index" is the sum across fifteen crops (banana, barley, cocoa, coconut, coffee, cotton, maize, palm oil, rice, sorghum, soybean, sugar, tea, tobacco, wheat) of their price in t-1 (indexed to 1 in year 2010 for each crop) weighted by their suitability. The outcome variable is an indicator that equals one if the respondent is from a new Christian church (or Protestant in surveys where new Christians and Protestants are grouped together) in column 1, Catholic in column 2, from a Protestant denomination in column 3, or from a Traditional religion in column 4. Controls include age, age squared, gender, education, labor market participation, marital status and urban/rural residence. Standard errors clustered at the cell-year level are in parenthesis.

Shocks to cash crops: effect on different religions

	Respondent is New Christian							
	Women sample				Men sample			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Cash-crop price index	0.0871*** (0.0178)	0.0873*** (0.0180)	0.0948*** (0.0184)	0.0958*** (0.0186)	0.0528*** (0.0195)	0.0539*** (0.0196)	0.0545*** (0.0197)	0.0525*** (0.0201)
CC PI x women in CC	0.0214*** (0.00694)	0.0214*** (0.00694)	0.0210*** (0.00698)	0.0196*** (0.00688)	0.00563 (0.00708)	0.00564 (0.00710)	0.00657 (0.00715)	0.00771 (0.00739)
CC PI x witchcraft (cell)				0.0252*** (0.00486)				0.0147** (0.00582)
CC PI x women in CC x witch.				-0.00917 (0.00607)				-0.00922 (0.00652)
Mean Y	0.236	0.237	0.232	0.236	0.237	0.237	0.238	0.243
R-squared	0.434	0.434	0.433	0.436	0.416	0.416	0.417	0.418
Basic controls	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Full controls	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes
Grid-cell FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
N	1274966	1273497	1193245	1150175	539400	537621	524805	506668

NOTE. Data: Demographic and Health Surveys and Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). "Cash Crop Price Index" is the sum across fifteen crops (banana, barley, cocoa, coconut, coffee, cotton, maize, palm oil, rice, sorghum, soybean, sugar, tea, tobacco, wheat) of their price in t-1 (indexed to 1 in year 2010 for each crop) and their suitability. "Women in cash-crops" is measured at the grid-cell level and it is calculated as the standardized share of women who earn cash in their work and their main occupation is agriculture. "Witchcraft (cell)" is the standardized mean prevalence of witchcraft among individuals with information on witchcraft in a given grid cell, assigned to everyone in the grid-cell. The sample is restricted to grid-cells for which "Women in cash-crops" has been computed using at least 50 observations. In columns 4-7, the sample is restricted to grid-cells for which "Women in cash-crops" or "Witchcraft (cell)" have been computed using at least 50 observations. The outcome variable is a dummy that equals one if the respondent is from a new Christian church (or Protestant in surveys where new Christians and Protestants are grouped together). Basic controls include age, age2 and gender. Full controls further include education, labor market participation, marital status and urban/rural residence. Robust standard errors clustered at the cell level in parenthesis.

Variable	(1) Control		(2) Couple		(3) Individual		(2)-(1) Pairwise t-test Difference		(3)-(1) Difference	
	N	Mean (0.027)	N	Mean (0.027)	N	Mean (0.027)	N	Difference	N	Difference
New Christian	336	0.417 (0.027)	337	0.436 (0.027)	336	0.414 (0.027)	673	0.020	672	-0.003
Number children	336	4.244 (0.126)	337	4.151 (0.122)	336	4.131 (0.132)	673	-0.093	672	-0.113
Age women	334	37.802 (0.568)	335	37.531 (0.553)	333	36.793 (0.526)	669	-0.271	667	-1.010
Father alive	336	0.360 (0.026)	337	0.436 (0.027)	335	0.334 (0.026)	673	0.076**	671	-0.026
Phone	336	0.667 (0.026)	337	0.691 (0.025)	336	0.664 (0.026)	673	0.025	672	-0.003
Bank account	336	0.367 (0.020)	337	0.125 (0.018)	336	0.140 (0.019)	673	-0.042	672	-0.027
Has mobile money	273	0.538 (0.030)	269	0.554 (0.030)	266	0.466 (0.031)	542	0.015	539	-0.072*
Attended school	336	0.399 (0.027)	337	0.421 (0.027)	336	0.393 (0.027)	673	0.023	672	-0.006
Owns TV	336	0.375 (0.026)	337	0.362 (0.026)	336	0.333 (0.026)	673	-0.013	672	-0.042
Extension area	336	0.500 (0.027)	337	0.472 (0.027)	336	0.473 (0.027)	673	-0.028	672	-0.027
Isolated	336	0.027 (0.009)	337	0.039 (0.011)	336	0.054 (0.012)	673	0.012	672	0.027*
Polygamous	336	0.125 (0.018)	337	0.125 (0.018)	336	0.146 (0.019)	673	-0.000	672	0.021
Father produced pineapple	334	0.171 (0.021)	333	0.150 (0.020)	332	0.169 (0.021)	667	-0.021	666	-0.002
Pineapple women	336	0.402 (0.027)	337	0.383 (0.027)	336	0.414 (0.027)	673	-0.019	672	0.012
Pineapple men	294	0.741 (0.026)	296	0.733 (0.026)	287	0.725 (0.026)	590	-0.008	581	-0.017
IGA women	228	1.123 (0.029)	237	1.169 (0.028)	240	1.113 (0.027)	465	0.046	468	-0.010
Woman applied individually	336	0.021 (0.008)	337	0.015 (0.007)	336	0.009 (0.005)	673	-0.006	672	-0.012
Norms: Pineapple=male activity	336	0.170 (0.021)	337	0.205 (0.022)	336	0.179 (0.021)	673	0.035	672	0.009
Empowerment: free to visit family	336	0.646 (0.026)	337	0.620 (0.026)	336	0.673 (0.026)	673	-0.026	672	0.027
Empowerment: free to buy land	336	0.804 (0.022)	337	0.798 (0.022)	336	0.753 (0.024)	673	-0.005	672	-0.051

Variable	(1)		(2)		(3)		(2)-(1)		(3)-(1)	
	Control		Couple		Individual		Pairwise t-test		Difference	
	N	Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean	N	Difference	N	Difference
New Christian	307	0.414 (0.028)	315	0.448 (0.028)	321	0.477 (0.028)	622	0.034	628	0.004
Number children	307	4.329 (0.131)	315	4.238 (0.127)	321	4.112 (0.135)	622	-0.091	628	-0.217
Age woman	305	37.682 (0.600)	313	37.486 (0.564)	318	36.723 (0.536)	618	-0.196	623	-0.959
Father alive	307	0.355 (0.027)	315	0.429 (0.028)	320	0.334 (0.026)	622	0.074*	627	-0.021
Phone	307	0.664 (0.027)	315	0.692 (0.026)	321	0.667 (0.026)	622	0.028	628	0.002
Bank account	307	0.147 (0.020)	315	0.121 (0.018)	321	0.143 (0.020)	622	-0.026	628	-0.003
Has mobile money	250	0.516 (0.032)	254	0.539 (0.031)	255	0.455 (0.031)	504	0.023	505	-0.061
Attended school	307	0.381 (0.028)	315	0.410 (0.028)	321	0.396 (0.027)	622	0.028	628	0.015
Owns TV	307	0.358 (0.027)	315	0.349 (0.027)	321	0.333 (0.026)	622	-0.009	628	-0.025
Extension area	307	0.489 (0.029)	315	0.448 (0.028)	321	0.467 (0.028)	622	-0.041	628	-0.021
Isolated	307	0.026 (0.009)	315	0.038 (0.011)	321	0.056 (0.013)	622	0.012	628	0.030*
Polygamous	307	0.121 (0.019)	315	0.130 (0.019)	321	0.146 (0.020)	622	0.010	628	0.026
Father produced pineapple	305	0.174 (0.022)	311	0.158 (0.021)	318	0.173 (0.021)	616	-0.016	623	-0.001
Pineapple woman	307	0.404 (0.028)	315	0.400 (0.028)	321	0.424 (0.028)	622	-0.004	628	0.020
Pineapple men	270	0.748 (0.026)	275	0.745 (0.026)	274	0.723 (0.027)	545	-0.003	544	-0.026
IGA woman	209	1.129 (0.031)	224	1.165 (0.029)	230	1.104 (0.027)	433	0.036	439	-0.025
Woman applied individually	307	0.020 (0.008)	315	0.016 (0.007)	321	0.009 (0.005)	622	-0.004	628	-0.010
Norms: Pineapple=male activity	307	0.166 (0.021)	315	0.216 (0.023)	321	0.178 (0.021)	622	0.050	628	0.011
Empowerment: free to visit family	307	0.638 (0.027)	315	0.616 (0.027)	321	0.676 (0.026)	622	-0.023	628	0.038
Empowerment: free to buy land	307	0.798 (0.023)	315	0.797 (0.023)	321	0.751 (0.024)	622	-0.001	628	-0.047

	Probability of attrition	
Treatment	-0.0313* (0.0177)	0.0113 (0.0915)
Couple treatment		-0.0210 (0.0204)
Individual treatment		-0.0417** (0.0190)
New Christian x T		-0.0319 (0.0368)
Nr of children x Treat.		0.00554 (0.00792)
Age x Treat.		0.000197 (0.00206)
Father Alive x Treat.		0.00408 (0.0389)
Bank account x Treat.		-0.102 (0.0652)
Mobile Phone x Treat.		0.0420 (0.0394)
Mobile money x Treat.		-0.0164 (0.0415)
Attended School x Treat.		-0.0260 (0.0358)
TV x Treat.		-0.0220 (0.0406)
Extension area x Treat.		0.00238 (0.0362)
Father grows pineapple x Treat.		-0.0337 (0.0440)
Polygamous x Treat.		-0.0365 (0.0622)
Pineapple women x Treat.		-0.0344 (0.0405)
IGA x Treat.		-0.00865 (0.0387)
Pineapple=male activity x Treat.		-0.0531 (0.0501)
Freedom to visit relatives x Treat.		-0.0210 (0.0379)
Freedom to buy land x Treat.		-0.00944 (0.0426)

WB projects: alternative definition

	New Christian (broad def.)			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Female	0.0258*** (0.000929)	0.0281*** (0.000840)	0.0281*** (0.000854)	0.0303*** (0.000908)
Female x Witchcraft (cell)			0.00692*** (0.000980)	0.00720*** (0.000971)
WB gender project	-0.0120* (0.00634)	-0.00779 (0.00605)	-0.00641 (0.00548)	-0.00572 (0.00553)
WB gender project x Female	0.00848** (0.00377)	0.00163 (0.00343)	0.00153 (0.00281)	0.00108 (0.00285)
WB gndr project x Witch. (cell)			0.0246*** (0.00647)	0.0254*** (0.00648)
WB gndr x Female x Witch. (cell)			0.0161*** (0.00337)	0.0160*** (0.00338)
Total number of WB projects	0.00804*** (0.000964)	-0.000159 (0.00118)	-0.000905 (0.00125)	-0.000792 (0.00127)
Mean Y	0.268	0.268	0.277	0.275
R-squared	0.302	0.467	0.468	0.465
Country and year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Grid-cell FE	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Individual	No	No	No	Yes
N	1781810	1781809	1672681	1602447

RCT results: ToT estimates

	Endline 1					Endline 2
	Women's conversion			Opposition by:		Witchcraft
	Ever (1)	To new Xty (2)	To old Xty (3)	Husband (4)	Other family (5)	Used by husband (6)
Panel A: Aggregated treatment						
Treatment	0.0825** (0.0415)	0.0605* (0.0325)	-0.00643 (0.0278)	0.101** (0.0416)	0.0625 (0.0409)	0.0475* (0.0281)
R-squared	0.0655	0.241	0.0555	0.110	0.0929	0.0181
Panel B: By treatment arm						
Partial husband involvement	0.0980** (0.0488)	0.0795** (0.0384)	-0.0257 (0.0317)	0.0708 (0.0475)	0.0582 (0.0472)	0.0117 (0.0306)
Full husband involvement	0.0673 (0.0472)	0.0419 (0.0367)	0.0124 (0.0321)	0.131*** (0.0473)	0.0728 (0.0464)	0.0900*** (0.0342)
Department FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mean Y control	0.341	0.203	0.115	0.365	0.342	0.0789
N	936	936	936	924	924	835