

Diversity and Similarity in the Perception of Environmental Problems among *Salafi* and *Sufi* Muslim Denominations in Northeast Nigeria

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Religion has a recognized role in influencing attitudes, behaviors, perceptions, modes of coping, and actions in response to environmental problems, and is thus seen to be an important domain of research and policy on current environmental change. Using qualitative data generated via interviews and focus groups in Muslim congregations, this study seeks to contribute to current understandings of the influence of Islamic beliefs and worldviews in shaping perceptions of and modes of coping with environmental problems in Northeast Nigeria.

This devoutly religious subregion of Nigeria was chosen as the study location to explore perception of environmental problems between the two major denominations of the Islamic faith. The region is predominantly Muslim, with one of the highest rates of population growth in the world. The region is currently experiencing severe and wide-ranging environmental problems including climate change, human-made environmental degradation, and inefficient management of scarce environmental resources. Like other parts of sub-Saharan Africa, the region is home to some of the world's most vulnerable populations to the impact of climate change, and that vulnerability is having huge economic and humanitarian impacts. Thus, by focusing on one of the areas designated as a “hotspot” of environmental change where little research has been done, this study aims to contribute to existing knowledge on the perception of environmental problems.

In previous studies on Christian and Muslim congregations in the region, I found that compared to Christians, for Muslims religion played a much bigger role in shaping how they interpreted environmental issues in the region. My present study seeks to achieve a deeper understanding of the interpretations of environmental issues between the two dominant sects of the Islamic faith—the *Sufi* and *Salafi* denominations. By exploring perceptions of environmental issues among religious denominations in the region, the study hopes to contribute to a better understanding of the sociocultural processes that shape interpretations, adaptation, and responses to environmental change in Muslim majority regions. Since religious ideas and congregations play an important role in shaping public opinions about environmental issues, a more nuanced analysis of how different religious denominations perceive environmental problems could be used to promote awareness of the anthropogenic causes of environmental problems, especially among religious denominations that hold fatalistic views on contemporary environmental problems. An improved environmental awareness is important for mobilizing public support for policies aimed at combating environmental decline, and for increasing resilience to its negative impacts.