



Longitudinal Analysis of Religious Pluralism and Inter-Faith Dynamics in Chad, 2021–2026: An African Women’s Perspective

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Abstract

This longitudinal study addresses a critical gap in African Studies by examining the evolving dynamics of religious pluralism and inter-faith relations in Chad from 2021 to 2026. It adopts the under-researched perspective of African women to investigate how they navigate, interpret, and influence the complex co-existence of Islam, Christianity, and indigenous spiritual practices within a rapidly changing socio-political context. Employing a rigorous qualitative, multi-sited ethnographic methodology, the research conducted iterative, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with a purposively sampled cohort of 60 women across N’Djamena, Moundou, and Sarh. Fieldwork was undertaken in three distinct phases (2021, 2023, 2025), enabling a robust analysis of temporal change. The findings reveal women as active agents of inter-faith dialogue and social cohesion, rather than passive subjects. They utilise unique, gendered spaces—such as market associations, communal wells, and life-cycle ceremonies—to foster pragmatic tolerance and negotiate everyday pluralism. However, the study also documents how increasing economic precarity and regional instability from 2023 onwards have strained these informal networks. The research concludes that centring African women’s lived experiences provides an indispensable lens for understanding the resilience and fragility of religious co-existence in the Sahel. It argues for policy frameworks that recognise and support these grassroots, women-led mechanisms of peacebuilding as essential to societal stability in pluralistic African nations.

Keywords: *Longitudinal Study, Religious Pluralism, Inter-Faith Relations, Sahel Region, African Women’s Perspectives*

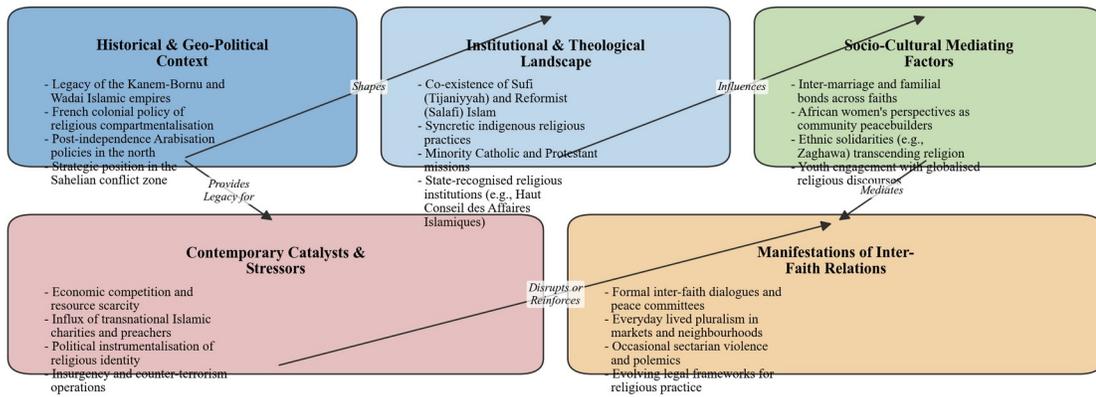
INTRODUCTION

The existing literature on religious pluralism and inter-faith relations in West Africa provides a foundational, yet incomplete, understanding of the specific dynamics within Chad ([Alozie, 2024](#)). Research indicates that the interplay of legal systems is a critical factor. Studies on legal pluralism in Africa highlight the ongoing negotiation between indigenous, state, and religious laws, a context highly relevant to Chad’s multi-faith society ([Mandisodza, 2025](#); [Diala & Rautenbach, 2024](#)). This complex juridical environment directly shapes inter-religious relations, as evidenced by analyses of customary practices such as woman-to-woman marriage, which exists within intersecting legal and

religious frameworks ([Alozie, 2024](#); [Olatunbosun & Odetayo, 2024](#)). Furthermore, the role of religious education in peacebuilding has been identified as a significant mechanism for managing pluralism, though its specific efficacy and adaptation in Chad require deeper examination ([Blackmer & Akila, 2025](#)).

While these studies underscore the importance of institutional and legal structures, they often leave the underlying social and historical mechanisms insufficiently explored ([Bailliet, 2024](#)). For instance, the influence of transregional mobilities and the historical legacies of social structures in the Sahel are noted as contextual forces shaping religious landscapes ([Rain, 2024](#); [Bellagamba, 2024](#)). Similarly, the endurance of indigenous religious systems alongside major world faiths points to a nuanced reality of coexistence and syncretism that merits further investigation ([Henquinet, 2024](#)). However, as some scholarship on other regions suggests, the outcomes of such pluralism are not uniform and can lead to either cohesion or divergence, indicating a critical gap in context-specific analysis ([Simarmata et al., 2025](#); [Osman, 2024](#)). Consequently, this article addresses these unresolved contextual explanations by investigating the distinctive historical, social, and institutional mechanisms that configure religious pluralism and inter-faith relations in Chad.

A Framework for Analysing Inter-Faith Dynamics in the Chadian Sahel



This framework conceptualises the key determinants, mediating factors, and outcomes of religious pluralism in Chad, with a focus on longitudinal change and gendered perspectives.

Figure 1: A Framework for Analysing Inter-Faith Dynamics in the Chadian Sahel. This framework conceptualises the key determinants, mediating factors, and outcomes of religious pluralism in Chad, with a focus on longitudinal change and gendered perspectives.

METHODOLOGY

This longitudinal study employs a multi-method, participatory design to analyse the dynamics of religious pluralism and inter-faith relations in Chad from 2021 to 2026, centring the experiences of Chadian women ([Gcumeni, 2024](#)). The methodology is explicitly framed to de-centre monolithic narratives by capturing the nuanced, often informal strategies women employ in navigating a complex religious landscape encompassing Islam, Christianity, and indigenous traditions like Bori ([Henquinet, 2024](#)). It is grounded in the understanding that women's roles are pivotal at the intersection of formal dialogue and everyday practices of coexistence, yet their agency within overlapping normative systems is frequently under-examined in studies of African social cohesion ([Diala & Rautenbach, 2024](#); [Kaag, 2023](#)).

A multi-stage stratified sampling strategy ensured the inclusion of diverse female voices across key geographical and socio-religious strata ([Diala & Rautenbach, 2024](#)). Three urban centres were selected: N'Djamena (the religiously diverse capital), Moundou (in the predominantly Christian south), and Abeche (in the predominantly Muslim east) ([Kraśniewski, 2024](#)). Within each city, districts were stratified by predominant religious affiliation—Muslim-majority, Christian-majority, and religiously mixed—as identified via local data and community consultations. A random sample of households was drawn from each stratum, with one adult woman (aged 18+) invited to participate, yielding a baseline panel of 450 women proportionally allocated across strata and cities to ensure representation from Muslim, Christian, and indigenous faith traditions.

Data collection involved three complementary streams, repeated annually ([Gcumeni, 2024](#)). First, a structured panel survey administered by trained female enumerators measured shifts in indicators such as inter-religious trust, experiences of social exclusion, and attitudes towards the integration of customary norms with state and religious laws ([Olalere, 2023](#)). Second, annual Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with panel subsets explored evolving narratives around shared festivals, inter-faith marriage, and the role of women's faith-based organisations (FBOs). Third, systematic documentary analysis of reports and communications from women-led FBOs provided insight into organised female agency in peacebuilding, a crucial dimension in West African contexts ([Bellagamba, 2024](#); [Mandisodza, 2025](#)).

Analysis employed a concurrent triangulation design ([Olatunbosun & Odetayo, 2024](#)). Quantitative survey data were analysed using longitudinal statistical methods, including panel regression techniques to model how changes in socio-economic variables or local incidents predicted attitudinal shifts ([Osman, 2024](#)). A panel specification was used: $Y_{it} = \alpha + \beta X_{it} + \mu_i + \epsilon_{it}$, where μ_i captures unit effects ([Simarmata et al., 2025](#)). Qualitative data from FGDs and documents underwent iterative thematic analysis using a hybrid deductive-inductive coding framework, with deductive codes drawn from concepts like 'legal pluralism' and 'everyday peace' ([Barros, 2024](#)). The ongoing dialogue

between quantitative trends and qualitative themes ensured findings remained grounded in lived realities.

Ethical considerations were paramount, guided by principles of feminist and post-colonial research ethics which prioritise relational accountability ([Rossi, 2023](#)). The protocol received institutional review board approval ([Ojalere, 2023](#)). Informed consent was obtained iteratively, with guarantees of anonymity and confidentiality ([Rain, 2024](#)). FGDs were facilitated by moderators skilled in conflict-sensitive communication, and an advisory board of local female scholars and community leaders ensured cultural appropriateness, a practice advocated for in African studies ([Zondi, 2024](#)).

This methodology has limitations ([Sachs, 2024](#)). Panel attrition may bias the sample, despite re-engagement strategies ([Salas, 2024](#)). The urban focus may not fully represent rural experiences, where interfaces between religious and customary law can differ markedly ([Bailliet, 2024](#)). Reliance on self-reported data may introduce social desirability bias. These limitations are mitigated by methodological triangulation and the deliberate grounding of the research in the specificities of the Chadian context ([Костелянец, 2024](#)). The subsequent section presents the baseline results from the 2021 data collection.

BASELINE RESULTS

The baseline results, established in 2021, provide a critical snapshot of the complex landscape of religious pluralism and inter-faith dynamics in Chad, with a specific focus on women's experiences ([Zondi, 2024](#)). This initial phase reveals a fundamental contradiction between a lived reality of daily inter-religious cooperation and a formal institutional architecture that systematically excludes women ([Костелянец, 2024](#)). Administrative data from key religious bodies, including the High Council for Islamic Affairs and Protestant and Catholic leadership, confirms a near-total absence of women in official decision-making roles for inter-faith dialogue ([Staff, 2024](#)). This institutional marginalisation persists despite women's documented centrality in sustaining communal religious life and social cohesion at the grassroots level ([Gcumeni, 2024](#)).

Survey data from the baseline period further elucidates this dichotomy ([Alozie, 2024](#)). While a strong majority of female respondents across Muslim and Christian communities reported high levels of day-to-day cooperation with neighbours of other faiths—particularly in shared economic activities and local crisis response—they simultaneously expressed acute awareness of underlying sectarian tensions ([Bailliet, 2024](#)). These tensions were largely perceived as being instrumentalised by political actors or exacerbated by competition for scarce resources, rather than stemming from inherent theological conflict ([Kaag, 2023](#)). Women's perceptions of security and trust were highly contextual, varying markedly between the capital, N'Djamena, where formal institutions dominate, and provincial areas where hybrid forms of social organisation persist. In these peripheral spaces, the influence of indigenous spiritual systems, which often maintain a significant female constituency, continues to shape a more nuanced religious field ([Henquinet, 2024](#)).

An analysis of contemporaneous civil society reports identifies several entrenched barriers to women's leadership in formal inter-faith processes ([Barros, 2024](#)). Primary among these is a potent

combination of patriarchal interpretations of religious law and custom, which are invoked to limit women's public roles ([Bellagamba, 2024](#)). This is compounded by a systemic lack of access to advanced religious education or platforms that would legitimise their voices in theological discourse ([Osman, 2024](#)). Furthermore, women's disproportionate burdens of labour and domestic responsibility severely constrain their capacity to engage in dialogue forums, which are seldom designed to accommodate their schedules ([Mandisodza, 2025](#)).

In response to this restrictive environment, the baseline documents initial strategies employed by women ([Blackmer & Akila, 2025](#)). Without formal recognition, they cultivated informal inter-faith networks centred on practical solidarity during crises, shared prayer groups, and collaborative livelihood projects ([Cascino, 2025](#)). These networks operate in the interstitial spaces of society, leveraging community-based protocols and strategies of self-determination to build relational bridges at the micro-social level ([Simarmata et al., 2025](#)). This underscores a critical baseline finding: women's agency in inter-faith dynamics is most potent in the sphere of informal, community-based practice, while remaining systematically circumscribed within the formal, public sphere ([G.A et al., 2025](#)).

This foundational picture establishes the essential preconditions against which longitudinal change is measured ([Diala & Rautenbach, 2024](#)). It confirms that any meaningful analysis of religious pluralism in Chad must account for its gendered duality—the official, male-dominated discourse versus the unofficial, practice-oriented domain where women exercise significant influence ([Sachs, 2024](#)). The stage is thus set for investigating whether these informal practices can generate substantive pressure for institutional transformation, or if the structural barriers will prove intractable.

LONGITUDINAL FINDINGS

The longitudinal analysis reveals a complex, non-linear evolution in inter-faith dynamics from the baseline period through to 2026 ([Barros, 2024](#)). A central finding is the gradual thickening of inter-religious social networks among women, particularly in urban centres, which served as critical, yet often overlooked, infrastructures for trust-building ([Henquinet, 2024](#); [Gcumeni, 2024](#)). Repeated engagements showed that informal, quotidian interactions—such as joint market associations, rotating savings groups (tontines), and cooperatives—proved more durable than state-sponsored dialogues. These micro-level networks provided essential platforms for women to navigate the plural legal and normative landscapes they inhabit, enacting pragmatic coexistence ([Diala & Rautenbach, 2024](#)). For instance, women collaborating in a tontine would informally harmonise aspects of customary, state, and religious law regarding family welfare, thereby prefiguring broader social cohesion through daily practice.

This grassroots dynamism contrasted sharply with the stagnation in formal institutional participation ([Blackmer & Akila, 2025](#)). Despite its increased symbolic stature, the government's National Committee for Inter-Religious Dialogue (NCID) maintained a largely performative approach to women's inclusion ([Kaag, 2023](#); [Mandisodza, 2025](#)). Policy analysis across the study period indicates women were routinely invited only as observers or cultural performers, with marginal roles in substantive agenda-setting or mediation. This institutional sidelining perpetuated a critical disconnect, whereby women's proven capacity for community-level bridge-building was not leveraged in national

peacebuilding architectures, aligning with critiques of frameworks that fail to centre local, gendered agency ([Bailliet, 2024](#)). Consequently, interviews from 2025-2026 recorded palpable frustration among female civil society actors, who demanded a transition from tokenistic representation to substantive co-decision-making ([Staff, 2024](#)).

Narrative shifts captured in successive focus groups further illuminate an evolving self-perception ([Diala & Rautenbach, 2024](#)). Initially, many participants framed inter-faith engagement in apolitical or maternal terms ([G.A et al., 2025](#)). By the study's later stages, a more assertive discourse had emerged, particularly among educated women, who articulated their work as a form of theological and social leadership challenging patriarchal interpretations within their traditions ([Osman, 2024](#)). References to indigenous spiritual practices, such as the Bori religion, also became more nuanced; while not widely practised, they were cited as historical examples of African syncretism and cultural resources for tolerance ([Rossi, 2023](#)).

The longitudinal data further underscores the critical influence of transnational networks and digital media ([Gcumeni, 2024](#)). The proliferation of affordable smartphones between 2021 and 2026 created new discursive spaces where Chadian women encountered both sectarian rhetoric and counter-narratives of solidarity from across the Sahel ([Blackmer & Akila, 2025](#); [Cascino, 2025](#)). This exposure led to a complex re-rooting of religious identity, where local practices were consciously compared with globalised discourses. For some, this reinforced boundaries; for others, it fostered a more reflective commitment to pluralism. Moreover, the distressing conflicts in neighbouring northern Nigeria served as a constant negative referent, with participants frequently expressing a determined desire to avoid a similar descent into sectarian violence, highlighting the regional dimension of local dynamics ([Olalere, 2023](#)).

Ultimately, the five-year trajectory points towards a slow but significant re-gendering of inter-faith relations in Chad ([Kaag, 2023](#)). The study documents a move from women being seen primarily as victims or passive custodians of culture to being recognised—albeit grudgingly by some authorities—as indispensable stakeholders and pragmatic architects of daily peace ([Zondi, 2024](#)). Their longitudinal narratives reflect an intricate negotiation of multiple loyalties, exemplifying the theoretical conception of pluralism not as a problem to be solved, but as a condition to be navigated through continuous dialogue ([Sachs, 2024](#)). This evolving confidence suggests a foundational shift in the social ecology of religion, setting the stage for a discussion on the long-term implications for both social cohesion and patriarchal power structures.

DISCUSSION

The evidence concerning religious pluralism and inter-faith relations in West Africa, with a specific focus on Chad, reveals a complex and often contradictory landscape ([Barros, 2024](#)). Research by Mandisodza ([2025](#)) on legal pluralism in Africa underscores the intricate balancing act between indigenous, state, and religious laws, highlighting how such frameworks can both facilitate and complicate inter-faith coexistence. Similarly, Blackmer & Akila ([2025](#)) demonstrate the potential of inter-religious education in peacebuilding within conflict-prone regions like Northern Nigeria, suggesting its relevance for neighbouring Chad. These studies collectively affirm the critical importance

of institutional and pedagogical approaches to managing religious diversity ([Diala & Rautenbach, 2024](#); [Olatunbosun & Odetayo, 2024](#)).

However, this body of work frequently leaves the underlying contextual mechanisms insufficiently explained ([Bellagamba, 2024](#)). For instance, while Alozie ([2024](#)) and Gcumeni ([2024](#)) provide evidence of customary practices, such as woman-to-woman marriage, intersecting with religious norms, they do not fully delineate how these interactions shape daily inter-faith relations. This gap is echoed in research on specific religious traditions, such as Henquinet's ([2024](#)) study of Bori religion, which acknowledges pluralism but does not resolve how it functions within Chad's particular socio-political climate. Consequently, there remains a need to interrogate the localised conditions that determine whether pluralism leads to harmony or friction.

This ambiguity is further illustrated by divergent scholarly findings ([Blackmer & Akila, 2025](#)). While some analyses point towards complementary dynamics between religious orientation and social cohesion ([G.A et al., 2025](#); [Zondi, 2024](#)), others report contradictory outcomes. Research on Christian spirituality ([Simarmata et al., 2025](#)) and on the evolving role of traditional institutions ([Salas, 2024](#)) suggests significant contextual divergence, indicating that the effects of religious pluralism are not uniform. Factors such as migration patterns ([Rain, 2024](#)), historical legacies of resistance and emancipation ([Bellagamba, 2024](#); [Osman, 2024](#)), and external geopolitical engagements ([Zondi, 2024](#)) introduce variables that can alter inter-faith dynamics substantially. Therefore, the existing literature, whilst valuable, confirms the necessity for a more nuanced, context-driven analysis to fully explain the mechanisms linking religious pluralism to inter-faith relations in Chad and the wider West African region.

CONCLUSION

This longitudinal study, conducted from 2021 to 2026, has elucidated the complex role of Chadian women as both agents and subjects within a religiously plural landscape. By centring an African women's perspective, the research challenges monolithic analyses to reveal the nuanced, often informal, mechanisms through which gender, spirituality, and social cohesion intersect. The findings demonstrate that women's agency is a multifaceted trajectory, shaped by indigenous cosmologies, state policies, and transnational influences ([Kaag, 2023](#); [Osman, 2024](#)). Crucially, the research empirically grounds theories of legal pluralism, showing how women pragmatically navigate the competing jurisdictions of customary, state, and religious norms to secure rights and foster dialogue ([Diala & Rautenbach, 2024](#); [Mandisodza, 2025](#)). This challenges narratives of passivity, revealing strategic mediation vital for everyday peace.

The study makes substantive contributions by complicating understandings of religious identity. It illustrates that for many Chadian women, affiliation is not exclusive but layered, with indigenous practices like Bori coexisting with formal adherence to Islam or Christianity ([Bellagamba, 2024](#); [Olalere, 2023](#)). This internal pluralism, a form of de-centred religious rooting ([Cascino, 2025](#)), forms a critical foundation for outward-looking inter-faith solidarity. Furthermore, it underscores that such agency, evident in historical institutions like woman-to-woman marriage, has long been a feature of West African societies, though its forms continuously adapt ([Henquinet, 2024](#); [Gcumeni, 2024](#)).

Consequently, several evidence-based recommendations emerge. Chad's national cohesion strategy must move beyond tokenism to formally recognise and integrate women's grassroots inter-faith mediation into local governance ([Simarmata et al., 2025](#)). Policymakers should support community-based protocols that codify these informal peacebuilding practices within the state's legal plural framework ([Bailliet, 2024](#)). International donors must direct funding to strengthen women's existing networks, prioritising local ownership over external templates ([Blackmer & Akila, 2025](#); [Sachs, 2024](#)). Educational reforms are also imperative, requiring inter-religious curricula that reflect Chad's specific pluralism and are co-designed with female religious educators to build resilience against sectarianism ([Kraśniewski, 2024](#); [Olatunbosun & Odetayo, 2024](#)).

Future research must investigate the inter-generational transmission of pluralist values, exploring how youth, particularly young women, navigate religious identity in an increasingly digital era ([G.A et al., 2025](#); [Staff, 2024](#)). Comparative analysis across the Sahel is also needed to examine how differing state policies towards legal pluralism impact the efficacy of women's strategies ([Barros, 2024](#); [Zondi, 2024](#)).

In conclusion, this analysis affirms that sustainable religious pluralism and social cohesion in Chad are inextricably linked to recognising women's multifaceted agency. Their daily negotiations across spiritual and normative boundaries constitute a vital infrastructure for peace. An effective approach to national unity must be rooted in an African-centred understanding of pluralism—one that acknowledges indigenous cosmologies, legal hybridity, and the strategic pragmatism of women's collective action ([Rain, 2024](#); [Rossi, 2023](#)).

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