

## **Social and Political Role of a Minority: The Case of Islam in Uganda**

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An estimated 30% of the population across East Africa is Muslim, but this data includes significant variations. In Somalia, almost all of the population is Muslim, while in Kenya and Uganda Muslims constitute just around 10% of the population. This paper will analyse the relationship between the development of this minority community and the state in Uganda.

Historic records affirm that the first foreign person who entered Buganda (one of pre-colonial Ugandan kingdoms) was an Arab trader, who in the mid-1800s introduced Islam in the region. Thanks to a highly centralised administration, as well as a receptive king, the dissemination of Islam to the Baganda (the people living in Buganda) was quite easy. It is true that there were some African traditions and customs that worked against the spread of Islam in Buganda, but the open nature of Ganda society, which allowed for unrestricted upward mobility for those who were able to compete, helped Islam to overcome many of these difficulties. Islamic influence begun to be challenged when the first European explorers and missionaries introduced Christianity in the 1870s. Within a few years, rivalries between different religious groups erupted in the so called Wars of religion, won by the Christians and determining the marginalisation of Islam at the very eve of Ugandan colonisation. This marginalisation forced the Islamic community to find new social and political spaces where it could not just survive but also develop and grow, particularly education. Thus, even if prior to 1900 Islam was a recognised force in Ugandan politics, after the independence in 1962, Muslims lost most of their political role. Also because of Amin's regime they were partially marginalised, but the public stigma attached to them almost disappeared during Museveni's government. The latter enjoined Ugandans not to discriminate against Muslims, and he invited Muslims to play a role in the national reconstruction.