

BOOK REVIEW

Ezra Chitando, Lovemore Togarasei, and Joram Tarusarira, eds. *Religion-Regime Relations in Zimbabwe: Co-operation and Resistance*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2024. 230 pp. Index. \$54.99. Paper. ISBN: 9781032365183.

This interesting edited volume reexamines the ambivalent relationship characterizing religion and politics in the aftermath of Zimbabwe's contentious political transition. While the political figures in the presidium have changed, arguably the political strategies of the previous regime are seen to continue the legacies of the previous political leadership. The book pins its analysis of religion and politics on this political transition. All thirteen chapters tackle the religious question from an implicit perception of a major political shift in the governance of the state. Zimbabwe got a second head of state after more than 30 years; the change can be interpreted as intra-party political dynamics rather than a wholesale political change. The term 'second republic' masks the continuities that frame the modus operandi of the ruling party that has dominated the Zimbabwean political space since independence. This framing of political change is important in anticipating significant change in the policy direction of the "new political actors." As noted in Chapter Five, it is a case of old wine in new wineskins. Rather than seeing a comprehensive shift of regime-religion relations we can observe a heightening of already-existing relations. Hence, the proliferation of religious groupings in support of and against the political establishment mimic already existing linkages.

The authors excellently capture these dynamics of continuities. Through looking at the wide range of religious bodies, mainly Christian, they note the continued polarization of political support pitting regime enablers and those that are labeled anti-establishment. Politics of patronage dominate attitudes of religious bodies towards religious figures. The chapter by Gunda shows continuities in the stance of "pro-democracy" religious bodies such as the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops Conference (ZCBC), which has sought to hold the state accountable, regardless of the government of the day. Throughout Zimbabwe's political changes, ZCBC has always been critical of state violations and projected itself as the voice of the downtrodden.

The second major Christian grouping has been the Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC), which is the umbrella body for most ecumenical churches. The other Christian organizations discussed include the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe (MCZ), the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zimbabwe (ELCZ) as well as various Pentecostal denominations. The various authors note the episodes of cooperation and resistance as different religious groupings interact with the second republic. It is undeniable that two sides have emerged that pit religious organizations as either pro- or anti-government. Working with, teaching, and

encouraging congregants in manners that uphold the status quo was seen as being pro-state, while attempts at holding the state accountable is always interpreted as being anti-government.

One of the interesting aspects about the contributions in the book is the ability to capture how religious actors continuously reposition themselves in response to political change. Chapter Six aptly captures the continuities in politicking as religious leaders and groups strategically position themselves to benefit from the new political dispensation. This is not a new trend. However, it shows that in every epoch, there are religious groups and leaders who will stand ready to cooperate with the government of the day, often in a bid to benefit from the political feeding trough. In as much as political leaders will always find collaborators, the book attempts to show how some religious groups also attempt to maintain their values through advocating for both moral and good governance. Political actors themselves are also seen to use religion as capital as they either appropriate religious views or fraternize with religious groups in order to bolster their support base. The “God is in it” mantra and the claim that the “voice of the people is the voice of God” show two major religion-based slogans that have dominated political approaches in the country.

The book also tries to bring in a new dimension of diversity by looking at other religions. An interesting contribution covers Islam, which is a minority religion in Zimbabwe. However, the book has a strong bias towards Christianity. It would have been interesting to have contributions that capture other religions, especially the indigenous traditional religions. Their visibility in issues of governance in the second republic has been increasing and it is an area that is worth exploring. Chapter Eleven performs a fleeting analysis of traditional religion, which the author links to liberation war veterans. There was need for a deeper examination of contemporary contributions of traditional religion so as to present a complete picture of the Zimbabwean religious dynamics. The final chapter presents an important aspect of contested interpretations of religious ideas in political issues. However, the inclusion of migration sometimes side-tracks the religious discussion as the authors attempt to infuse the migration perspective. While migrants are an important population, there was need to capture more of the religious aspects of their interpretations of the transition to the second republic.

Overall, the book stimulates important discussions on religion and politics. It is a great read for students of politics, religion, and governance. It offers valuable insights into the conduct of religious actors when it comes to their relationship to politics. It also provides a good understanding of the important role occupied by religion in the Zimbabwean society and a good way of measuring political and governance change through the lens of religious practices.

Hardlife Stephen Basure 
 University of KwaZulu Natal
 Durban, South Africa
basureh@gmail.com
[doi:10.1017/asr.2025.24](https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2025.24)