

Resisting & Challenging Religious Fundamentalisms



AWID's Resisting & Challenging Religious Fundamentalisms Initiative

- 50+ in-depth interviews
- Survey 1,600+ responses; & young feminists survey
- Strategic dialogues & consultations
- Young Women's Institute
- 18 case studies on feminist strategies from around the world

Religious Fundamentalism on the Rise: A case for action

Shared In Women's rights activists define religious fundamentalism

awid women's rights www.awid.org

Religious Fundamentalisms

REPEATED

Ten myths revealed about religious fundamentalisms

awid women's rights www.awid.org

Christian Fundamentalisms and Women's Rights in the African Context: Mapping the Terrain

awid women's rights

Christian Fundamentalisms and Women's Rights in the African Context: Mapping the Terrain

Jessica Horn

Context
This case study explores the dynamics of Christian fundamentalism in sub-Saharan Africa and the impact of fundamentalist doctrine, advocates and mobilization on women's rights in the region. It focuses on fundamentalism in Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity, as well as fundamentalist actors in mainline Protestant churches. In the African context, religious discourses and institutions have been used opportunistically by politicians and extreme conservatives in civil society as a means of pushing their political, ideological and economic agendas on a range of issues from starting in power, to becoming wealthy, to maintaining legal and social gender inequality. The new waves of African Pentecostalism and its charismatic doctrines in particular have proved a useful tool to this end because of four key characteristics: a mass popular base (useful for mobilizing political pressure and votes); a theology that focuses on and celebrates prosperity and accumulation of capital (and thus facilitates both wealth accumulation and lucrative corruption); a lack of regulation (given the absence of a centralized religious authority and weak non-profit oversight mechanisms); and the lack of a hermeneutic tradition and/or critical debate about scriptures, the latter two characteristics enabling the doctrine to spread largely unquestioned. The fact that the congregations of these churches are predominantly economically disenfranchised women and men with limited access to information or social and political capital means that their men can also be drawn to the church through promises of material conditions.

Christian Fundamentalist Strategies for Mobilizing and Advocacy
While Christian fundamentalism has played out in a variety of ways across Africa, fundamentalist groups apply common strategies:
Comprehensive communication structure: This includes TV channels, radio stations, newspapers, websites and blogs, as well as popular culture such as gospel music. At a local level, this also includes leaflets, billboards and rallies to draw people to attend events. Church members are themselves a resource in disseminating messages.

Jessica Horn | summary

awid women's rights

~~A DEFINITION~~ → “**SHARED CHARACTERISTICS**”

Absolutist & Intolerant 42%

Anti-women & Patriarchal 24%

About the Fundamentals of Religion 18%

About Politics & Power 17%

Anti-HR & Freedom 17%

Literalist & Outmoded 11%

Violent 6%

About Culture And Tradition 2%

survey question: “How would you define ‘religious fundamentalisms’?”



Religion is not the same as religious fundamentalisms

Examples of rights-based groups from within religions:

Muslim: www.musawah.org
www.wluml.org

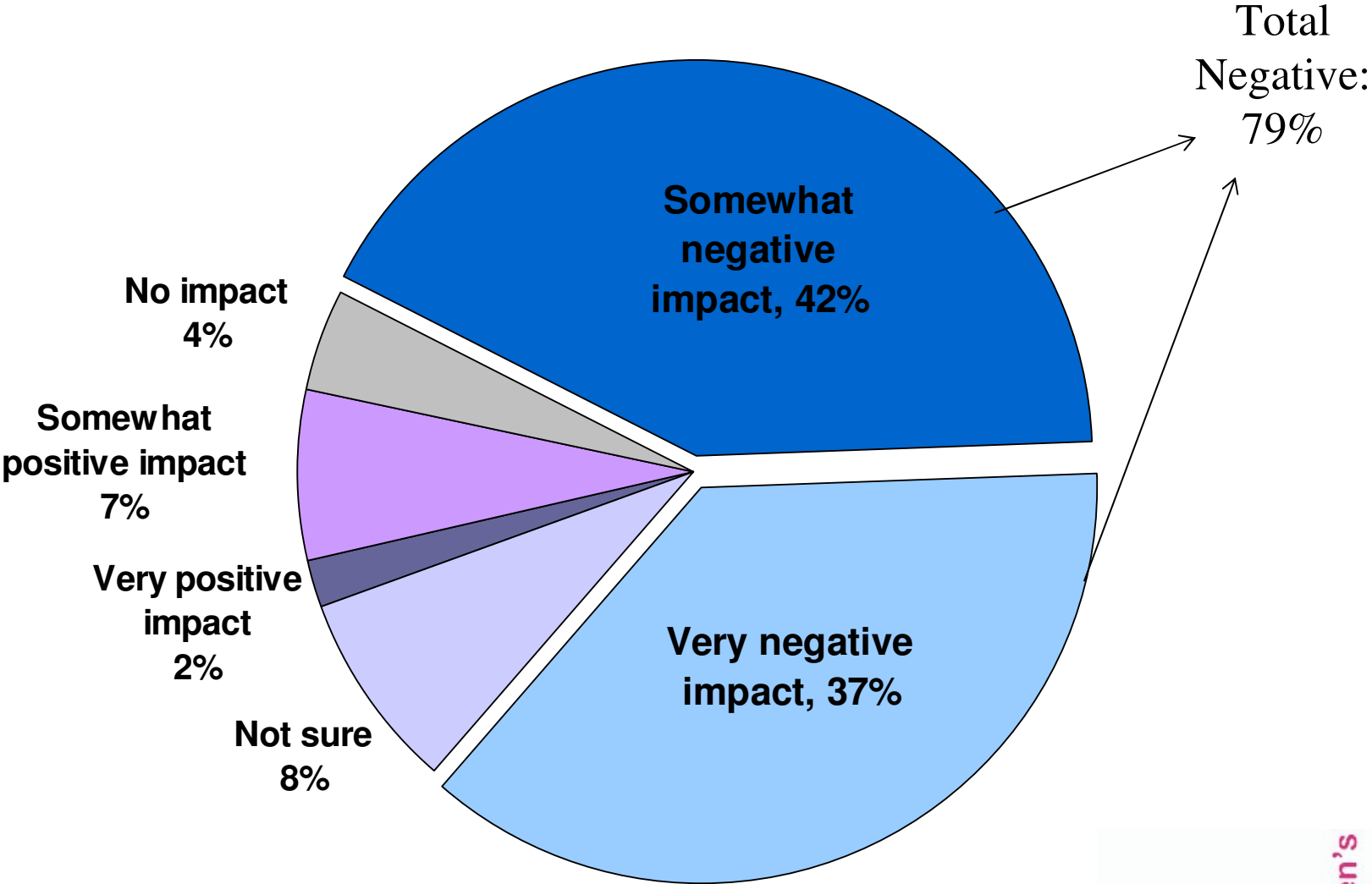
Catholic: www.catholicsforchoice.org
Católicas por el derecho a decidir

Christian: www.ufmcc.com

Buddhist: www.womenforpeaceandjustice.org

Jewish: www.kolech.com

Impacts of RFs on Women's Rights



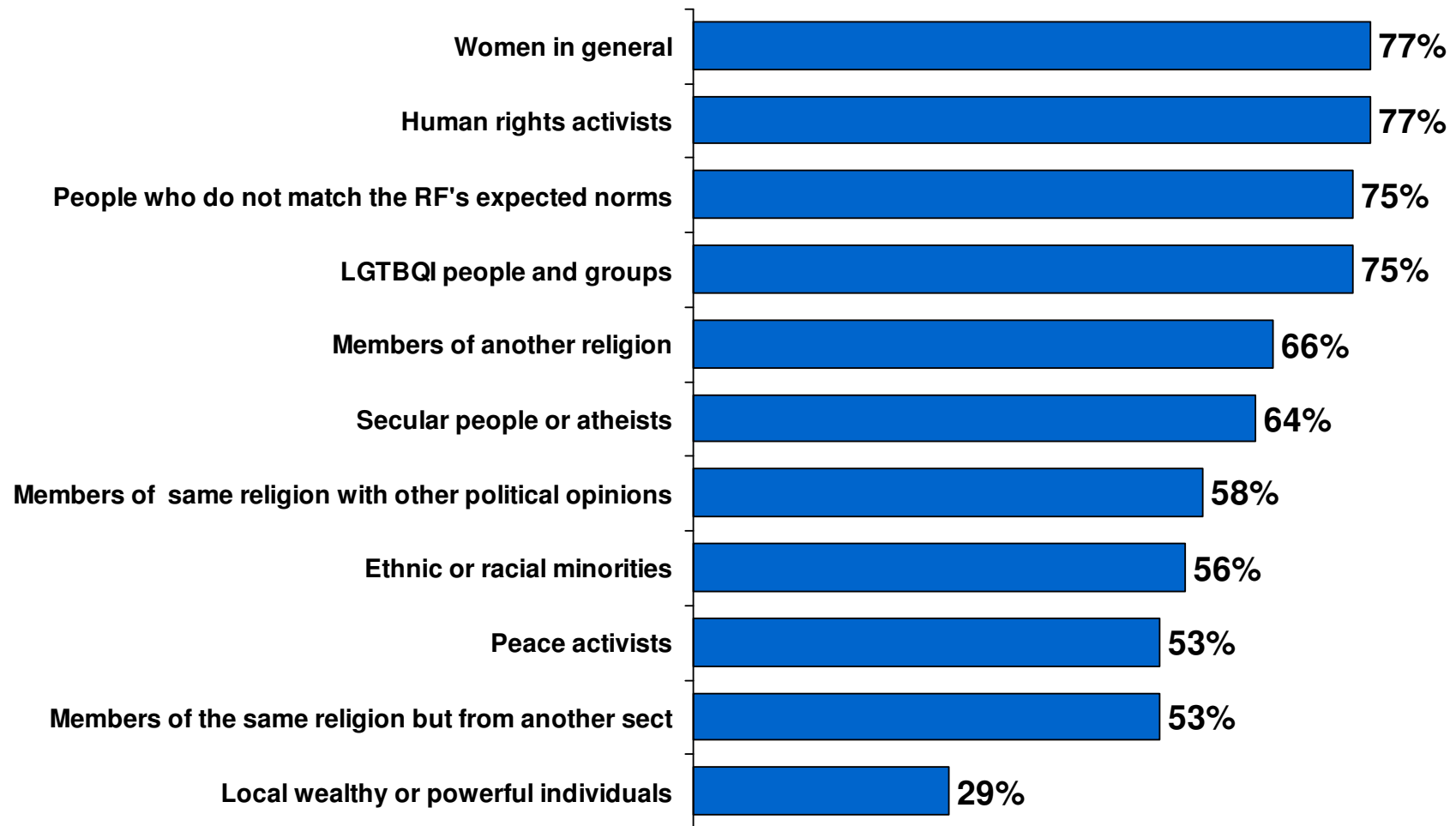
Impacts of RFs on all spheres of society

- ↓ Rights for women in private public & economic spheres
- ↓ Sexual and reproductive rights & health
- ↓ LGBTQI rights
- ↓ Pluralism & tolerance in society

- ↑ Control of individual, community and public policy choices – in e.g., education, family life & sexuality
- ↑ Physical & psychological violence against women
- ↑ Violence and intimidation of opponents, dissidents & minorities

Leads to → Negative impact on pluralism, democracy, development and peace

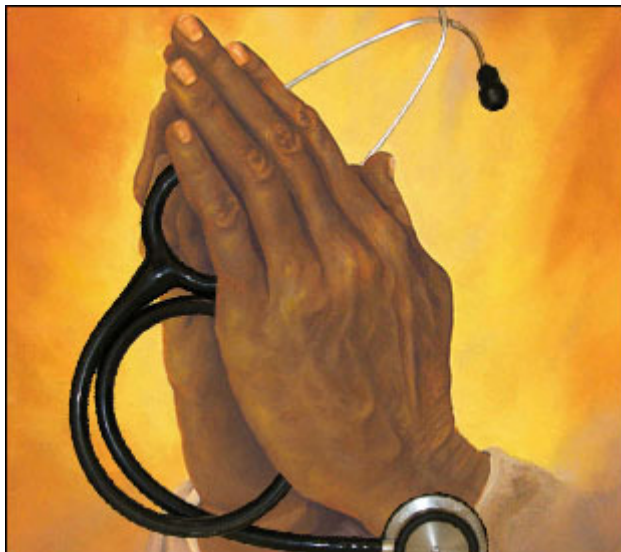
Targets of attack



Percent reporting each has happened sometimes or frequently.



Religious fundamentalist strategies



RF Strategies

- Emphasizing “the family”, “morality”, gender roles
- Combining religion + nationalism, racism, ethnic or cultural exclusivism
- Cultural and moral superiority, ‘purity’, ‘true’ religion
- Mobilizing the fear of ‘the other’
- Selectively use human rights, democracy, pluralism
- Violence towards internal & external dissent
- Simplistic, effective communication; misinformation

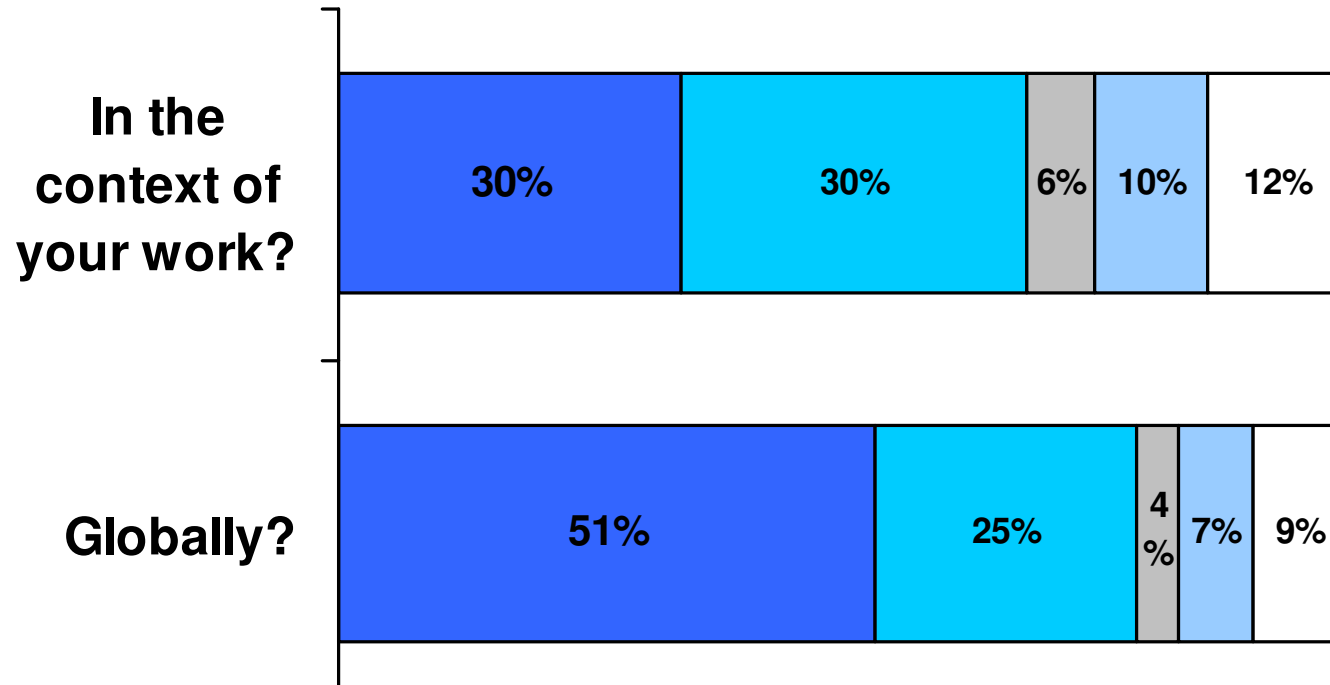


Women's strategies of resistance

- Promoting pluralism, secularity and citizenship
- Providing alternative information
- Unmasking agendas
especially of 'secular' actors & orgs
- Unmasking actual impact
including on development & peace
- Rights-based interpretations of religion
- Challenging dichotomies
especially women's rights vs culture
- Holding the state, politicians & INGOs to account

And individual resistance...

Religious fundamentalisms on the rise



- Increased a lot
- Increased somewhat
- Cyclic
- Decreased
- Not/Sure/Other



An invitation to collaboration:

- **What would you need to strengthen your work to protect women's rights in a context where religion is used to undermine peace?**
- **What forms, if any, of continued engagement with AWID on this topic would work best for you?**

THANK YOU!