

Religion and politics in South Sudan: How beliefs change in daily practices in the new nation

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Abstract

In South Sudan, the practical application of laws frequently diverges from their written text. A relevant example of this disparity between enacted laws and their everyday enforcement is Article 8 of South Sudan's Constitution, 2011, as amended, which addresses the separation of religion and state. Paradoxically, those responsible for enacting the laws are the very individuals who undermine them during implementation. The persistent question is: what fuels the disconnect between written laws and their implementation in South Sudan? A common claim is that South Sudanese leaders lack the political will to uphold enacted laws. Yet, the underlying drivers of this perceived lack of political will remain elusive. While alternative explanations may exist, the concept of the central value systems, a core theory developed in earlier research, offers a plausible account of this pervasive issue. This paper, therefore, aims to explain the concept of the central value systems as the fundamental cause of the disconnect between enacted laws and their daily implementation. The case is Article 8 of South Sudan's Constitution on the separation of religion and state, and the lack of its implementation. The disparity in the implementation of Article 8 is in the second section, which stipulates that "All religions shall be treated equally, and religion or religious beliefs shall not be used for divisive purposes." The literature reviewed indicates that disregard for enacted laws includes support for some religions by political leaders in the South Sudanese government. My main objective in this article is to present the concept of the central value systems and their role in the disparity between Article 8(2) and its implementation in a more accessible format than a dissertation or book, enabling a broader readership to engage with its implications.

Keywords

central value systems; separation of religion and state; Constitution of South Sudan; implementation disparity; Article 8(2)

1. Introduction

South Sudan leaders appear inconsistent in the implementation of enacted laws. As Kindersley (2019) stresses, the nation's enacted laws are often not enforced in day-to-day affairs. One of the examples is Article 8 of South Sudan's Constitution, 2011, as amended. This Article stipulates the separation between religion and state. Section two specifies that "All religions shall be treated equally and religion or religious beliefs shall not be used for divisive purposes." Yet, it had often been undermined by government officials. So, "why does the South Sudanese government deviate from the secular principles articulated in its constitution?" Certain scholars might contend that South Sudanese leaders deviate from enacted laws because their government is a "kleptocracy" (de Waal 2014). While this perspective holds some validity, it is crucial to acknowledge that the motivations behind such deviations may extend beyond a mere kleptocratic system.

Following the 2013 war, South Sudan's top political leaders began exhibiting what appears to be preferential treatment for some religions, a departure from Article 8 of the Constitution. This pattern became evident with President Salva Kiir's appointments. For instance, on May 4, 2016, Sheikh Al-Tahir Bior Lueth Ajak was designated as the Presidential Advisor on Islamic Affairs. Following Al-Tahir's death in 2017, President Kiir appointed Sheik Juma Saeed Ali to the same role on September 6, 2017.

One could argue that the consecutive appointments of two Muslim individuals to the position of Presidential Advisor on Religious Affairs in 2016 and 2017 do not inherently signal favouritism. This viewpoint might conjecture that the early advisor's untimely death in office justified selecting another Muslim to complete the remainder of that term, thereby maintaining continuity. However, the deliberate rebranding of the title from "Advisor on Religious Affairs" to "Advisor on Islamic Affairs" is undeniably significant and suggests a strategic shift rather than a mere coincidence.

The advisors' selections that seem privileged directly contradict the established understanding that this advisory role should cover general Religious Affairs, a concept introduced after South Sudan seceded from Sudan in 2011. The Bureau for Religious Affairs, situated within the Office

of the President, is intended to oversee broad religious matters, with its Presidential Advisor and the Director jointly responsible for general religious guidance, not for specific religion or denominations. This inclusive approach was consistently upheld by the President until 2016. An earlier appointment, on October 19, 2011, of Mark Lotende Lochapi as Presidential Advisor on Religious Affairs, exemplified this broader mandate.

The President also appears to show preferential treatment of religion when he openly provided financial support for the annual Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca until the national economic crisis reduced such support. This is even though Muslims constitute less than 7% of the population in South Sudan. The 2010 Pew demographic survey found that Christians accounted for 60% of the population. Followers of African Traditional Religions accounted for 33%, while Muslims represented 6% (U. S. Department of State 2018).

During a thriving economic period from 2005 to 2020, no other religious institution benefited from state funding. However, beginning in 2022, this financial backing shifted towards the Catholic Church, evidenced by substantial allocations. These included a \$50,000 grant to the Catholic Church in Yei (Radio Tamazuj 2022, May 17). Another was \$15 million donated together with a V6 Land Cruiser, presented to the newly appointed Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Torit (Pachodo 2022, November 21). This new bishop was the successor to the new Archbishop of Juba, who seems to be softer on the President. The President then gave another \$10 million and a similar luxury V6 vehicle to the same Diocese of Torit (David 2023, January 16). The largest donation was a \$150 million sum that the President gave to his home Catholic parish, St. Joseph in Kuajok (Malek 2023, March 2023).

This shift in state donation followed the controversial appointment of the new Catholic Archbishop, Dr Stephen Ameyu Martin Mulla, who succeeded Archbishop Paulino Lukudu Loro. Dr Mulla's installation had been met with significant resistance from a segment of Christians within the Archdiocese of Juba (ACI Africa 2019, December 13; Nzwili 2020, March 12). The presence of the President at the enthronement of Dr Mulla apparently quelled dissenters who intended to disrupt the proceedings (Onyalla 2020, March 23). The shift in support from Islam to Catholic

implies a perceived shared unease and a desire by the President to solidify his bond with the Catholic Church, potentially by aligning himself with the new Archbishop and leveraging this bond to secure renewed church support.

The President also gives executive vehicles to top religious leaders upon their election to a national religious office. This gift is selective, but it is given to every religious leader. The pattern of selective support for religious groups such as Muslims might have sparked considerable unease within Christianity. A prominent instance that might have drawn intense scrutiny was a substantial \$200,000 contribution from the President in 2014, designated for mosque construction, Islamic school construction, and Muslims' religious pilgrimage to Mecca (Sudan Tribune 2014, June 27).

Government officials, in apparent defiance of the equal treatment mandate outlined in Article 8(2) (Sudan Tribune 2014, June 27), appear to introduce the principle of financially supporting minority religions, specifically Islam, within South Sudan. Yet, they know that this principle is not stipulated in the South Sudanese Constitution. Muslims have never claimed to be supported under the principle of granting financial support to minor religions. It is also vital to recognise that Muslims have never opposed the funding of other religions.

It is essential to acknowledge that state support might shift in the future to a different religious community, as long as that group poses no threat to the current regime's firm grip on power. Initially, upon its inception in 1983, the relationship between the Christian religion and the SPLM/A was fraught with tension. However, the relationship between the two improved as the war neared its end, with SPLM leadership recognising Christianity as the sole remaining institution of public support throughout the prolonged struggle (Ashworth 2022). Presently, this bond is once again strained, as moral appeals from globally respected Christian figures, including the Pope, are disregarded (Samasumo 2019, May 16).

The selective favourable treatment given to Islam is a decision of top state officials for reasons they know. It could be the search for political support that dictates their decisions. The prevailing sentiment among South Sudan's religious communities remains one of mutual respect (Wilson 2019). Ironically, Christian political leaders, who now extend what appears

to be preferential support to Islam, are the very individuals who engaged in a twenty-one-year war against the previous Sudanese regime. Their twenty-one-year-long war stemmed from that government's integration of religious laws with the apparatus of the state.

The motivation behind that war was more political than religious. Politicians who were Christians believed that Islamic doctrines included in state laws would block them from ruling the state. Islamist factions in Sudan, and indeed elsewhere, appear to prioritise the preservation of divine unity, or *tawhid*, as the paramount ethical imperative within governmental and religious institutions. This concept, often translated as the “oneness of Allah,” posits a singular, universal legal framework. Consequently, Muslims believe that “there can be only one law for the world, which is Islamic law, sharia, and Muslims must impose it, by force if necessary” (Sookhdeo 2014, p. 29). To uphold this absolute divine unity across all societal domains, Islamists ensure that individuals outside Islam are excluded from any roles that could lead them to enact laws that contradict the fundamental doctrines of *tawhid*.

For the above Islamic doctrine, the Christian and African Traditional Religious communities in Sudan faced animosity from the Arab-dominated administration and the Islamic religious establishment in Khartoum. It is crucial to understand that references to the “Islamic regime” in Khartoum specifically denote a ruling party influenced by extremist factions, such as those led by Dr Hassan Al-Turabi (Sidahmed 2012). These groups, closely aligned with the radical Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, constituted the influential Islamist element within Sudan (D'Anglo 2010).

The Sudanese government's entanglement of religious and secular authority is clearly reflected in its laws. The 1998 Constitution of the Republic of the Sudan, specifically Article 65, declares that “Islamic law and the consensus of the nation, by referendum, Constitution and custom shall be the sources of legislation.” Furthermore, Article 1 of this same Constitution acknowledges Islam as “the religion of the majority of the population.” Consequently, Islamic legal principles exert a great impact, shaping the nation's jurisprudence and societal norms. The recognition of Islam as the majority religion highlights its pervasive influence in the Sudanese government. Moreover, such official endorsement solidifies the

state's Islamic identity, leaving an indelible mark on both public life and judicial interpretation.

In 2005, the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) was signed in Kenya between the regime in Khartoum and the SPLM/A. This momentous deal ended a devastating 21-year civil war and gave birth to the autonomous Government of Southern Sudan (GoSS) in the southern region. Meanwhile, the Government of National Unity (GoNU) maintained its principal base in Khartoum. A significant result of this freedom was the constitutional separation of religion and state, a deliberate measure to thwart any attempt by the Muslim-dominated government to declare Sudan an Islamic state (Sudan Tribune 2013, Feb 25).

Article 8 of the South Sudanese Constitution addresses the mixing of state and religion, drawing on the negative experience of South Sudanese politicians with the Islamic regime in Khartoum. It is, therefore, clear that politicians in South Sudan are not oblivious to the fact that preferential support extended to one religious group, whether Islam or Christianity, contravenes the constitutional principle set out in Article 8(2). They may have a reason for not adhering to the law. The apparent inconsistency in the implementation of enacted laws may suggest that laws in South Sudan primarily serve as symbols, valued more for external validation than for their utility in governance.

The principle of secular governance, enshrined in Article 8 of the Constitution of South Sudan, is widely endorsed by international bodies as a crucial safeguard against the mixing of religion and state. Despite its constitutional grounding and international recognition, a pervasive ambiguity persists regarding the practical application of this separation among South Sudan's top political leaders. This conceptual dissonance fuels a paradoxical situation. While the constitution clearly defines the boundaries between state and religion, there appears to be a reluctance to operationalise these prescribed principles.

Despite South Sudan's nascent nationhood, the political leaders possess extensive experience. They effectively managed the Sudan People's Liberation Movement and Army (SPLM/A) for twenty-one years during the North-South civil war. The effective management of the rebel movement motivated other countries to support it. Moreover, most of the ministers and

members of parliament in South Sudan are highly educated. Therefore, the disconnect observed between enacted laws and their practical application does not stem from a lack of familiarity with governance principles among these political figures.

If politicians are qualified and experienced to understand the laws they enact in South Sudan, one may argue that discrepancies in their implementation may originate from factors beyond mere inexperience. Alternatively, a peculiar psychological dynamic, a form of inverted psychology, could be at play (Ferrerira 1970). In other words, the deliberate discrepancy between a stated constitutional principle and its actual implementation may represent this phenomenon, in which South Sudanese political leaders appear to act contrary to their genuine inclinations. Another interpretation, moreover, suggests an attempt to foster a more humane disposition in former adversaries, primarily Muslims and Christians, encouraging a departure from their prior modes of interaction during the era of a united Sudan. Nevertheless, this reason appears insufficient, as the observed inconsistency in the application of Article 8 of South Sudan's Constitution contradicts such a charitable hypothesis.

The precise factors that lead to ambiguity in the application of legal mandates remain obscure. The persistent question is: what fuels the disconnect between written laws and their implementation in South Sudan? A common claim is that South Sudanese leaders lack the political will to uphold enacted laws. Yet, the underlying drivers of this perceived lack of political will remain elusive. Initially, I examine decision-making paradigms, including teleological, deontological, and areteological perspectives. However, these frameworks appear insufficient to fully elucidate the origins of inconsistencies in decision-making during the implementation of enacted laws in South Sudan.

Shalom Schwartz's (2012) theory of basic human values emerges as the most compelling explanation of the determinants of choices made by both policymakers and those responsible for implementation. Nevertheless, a limitation of the basic human values theory lies in its assertion that values are rigidly positioned within a circular motivational continuum. It is conceivable that the uppermost segment of Schwartz's (2012) circular model, which he employs to explicate liberalism, could, under the influence

of value-based pressures on individual predispositions, function as the lower segment that accounts for conservatism.

Although other interpretations are conceivable, the concept of the central value systems, a core theory in my doctoral dissertation, offers a plausible account of this pervasive issue. I, therefore, conjecture that central value frameworks may be instrumental in the observed divergence between enacted legislation and its practical implementation.

While “value system” is a familiar concept in scholarly discourse, the notion of “central value systems” is entirely new. We define central value systems as the foundational beliefs ingrained during formative years, representing the dominant principles of one’s upbringing environment. These deeply embedded values shape both personal conduct and public engagement, serving as the foundation of decision-making. Such core values possess an impressive resilience, resisting the penetration of conflicting new beliefs. An individual might outwardly embrace new beliefs for convenience, whether political or social, yet the true allegiance will be exposed as disingenuous when these foundational principles are challenged by newly adopted values.

The primary purpose of this paper is to elucidate how central value systems drive the disparity between written laws and their practical applications. The case is Article 8 of South Sudan’s Constitution, which addresses the separation of religion and state, and its apparent absence from daily practice. Numerous instances may exist that illustrate the egregious disregard for established laws by South Sudan’s top politicians. However, the underlying impetus driving such contraventions likely remains consistent: value for power. The perceived support for Muslims in disregard for Article 8 serves as a compelling illustration in this article, offering a lens through which to explore the case. In other words, by examining this faith-based case, we can show how deeply ingrained core belief systems can lead to apparent contradictions in individuals’ perceptions of threats to their most cherished values.

The literature reviewed indicates that some religious groups are treated more favourably than others by political leaders in the South Sudanese government. My main objective in this paper is to present the concept of the central value systems and their role in the disparity between Article

8(2) and its implementation in a more accessible format than a dissertation or book, enabling a broader readership to engage with its implications.

This research adopts Blum's (2012) interpretive phenomenological framework, which emphasises the crucial integration of diverse disciplines when examining a phenomenon. Blum postulates that disciplines like religion are inseparably linked to their historical context, meaning that to truly grasp religious phenomena, one must also examine related historical phenomena. Consequently, this paper begins by exploring briefly the foundational concepts and theories surrounding decision-making to understand their relation to decision-making in South Sudan. This includes their entrenched values and attitudes, facilitated by precise interpretation. It then examines "how these particular attitudes inform and are informed by other, related attitudes, beliefs, and practices" (Blum, 2012: 1030).

2. Decision-making theories

This article examines the likely discord arising from disparities between the fundamental beliefs held by South Sudan's leaders and the principles enshrined in Article 8 of the Constitution, particularly concerning the disparities in the practical application of its provisions. The article's main concern is not a superficial examination of the separation between religion and the state, but rather an in-depth analysis of how central value systems contribute to possible conflicts and incongruities in the implementation of Article 8.

When carefully crafted and passed laws are not executed as prescribed, this prompts speculation that the discrepancies stem from fundamental theoretical underpinnings that guide the choices. This raises a crucial question: what principles guide the judgment of South Sudanese political leaders in their application of enacted laws? Decision-making theories offer essential insights into why enacted laws may deviate from their intended application. Analysing these theoretical frameworks helps illuminate the complex processes influencing implementation. Understanding the motivations and pressures faced by decision-makers is key. Various factors, from personal biases to institutional constraints, can shape how laws are implemented. Alternative explanations for implementation gaps will be investigated if decision-making theories prove insufficient. This ensures a

comprehensive understanding of the issue. The theories are summarised from my doctoral dissertation, published as a book.

Rational agents' choices are inherently directed towards a perceived good or morally sound outcome (Baird 2016; Hacker-Wright 2010; Piazza and Sousa 2014; Ronzoni 2010). Yet, the definition of what constitutes “good” or “right” is fluid, varying significantly across individuals and cultural settings. Divergent ideological frameworks and deeply held convictions offer a fascinating explanation for these varying interpretations. Empirical evidence underscores a distinct divergence in decision-making patterns between political conservatives and liberals (Piazza and Sousa 2014).

For instance, a noticeable sensitivity among conservatives to breaches of group solidarity, deference to authority, and transgressions against sexual or bodily purity has been observed (Graham, Haidt, and Nosek 2009). These infractions are believed to be intrinsically linked to the weakening of social cohesion or challenges to established order (Piazza and Sousa 2014). Furthermore, some researchers argue that while both political factions place substantial importance on minimising harm and upholding equity, conservatives place a notably greater emphasis on the principles of authority and purity than their liberal counterparts (Holyoak and Powell 2016).

In the United States, a notable congruence has been identified between political and religious conservatism, a phenomenon that may extend to South Sudan. The fundamental distinction between liberal and conservative orientations, irrespective of geographical or societal boundaries, could stem from a deeper psychological imperative (De Keersmaecker, Schmid, Sibley, and Osborne 2024). Conservatives may possess a keen tendency to mitigate perceived threats and navigate uncertainty (Piazza and Sousa 2014).

The divergence between conservative and liberal ethical viewpoints provides a valuable lens for understanding the drivers of moral choices. Furthermore, the deeply ingrained ethical principles an individual espouses may significantly shape their decision-making processes. The very foundation of an individual's ethical framework, the theories they deem vital, can illuminate the distinctions observed in their choices.

Consider, for instance, the inherent tension between deontology and teleology in decision-making, a conflict that frequently arises when individuals confront competing ethical imperatives. Deontological adherents, in their deliberations, prioritise moral duties over rights. Conversely, teleologists subordinate the concept of “right” action to the pursuit of desirable outcomes or the “good.” As Holyoak and Powell (2016, p. 1186) articulate it, “appropriate prescriptions for conduct in a given situation can be derived from consideration of the rights of each agent.”

To bridge the divide between duty-based and consequence-driven ethical frameworks, virtue ethics emerges as a potential alternative. This approach, drawing its name from the Greek term *aretē* – signifying excellence, exceptional quality, or the insightful realisation of an individual’s inherent purpose – shifts the moral focus (Pastura and Land 2016). Instead of focusing on prescribed obligations or the ultimate outcomes of choices, virtue ethics centres on the intrinsic moral appeal and the cultivated character of the individual making the decision (Piazza and Sousa 2014; Hacker-Wright 2010). Yet, these theories have flaws in explaining discrepancies in the implementation of the laws in South Sudan.

When ethical theories successfully shape choices, those accustomed to their principles can consciously apply them. However, for individuals unacquainted with such theoretical underpinnings, the ethical soundness of their actions becomes a matter of chance rather than intentional design. Evidence suggests that ordinary individuals, when comprehending societal rules, operate from an ingrained sense of entitlement and obligation (Holyoak and Powell 2016). Consequently, any ethical configuration in their decision-making might emerge by accident rather than by considered ethical reasoning. It is conceivable that leaders in South Sudan lack formal exposure to deontology, teleology, or virtue ethics. Their choices, therefore, could be driven by innate inclinations toward duty-bound or consequence-focused reasoning, a blend of both, value-driven justifications, an emphasis on character, or entirely different motivations. In such scenarios, even if a decision coincidentally mirrors an established ethical paradigm, genuine ethical coherence will remain elusive. Other theories than the ones mentioned above may explain the ethical choice of South Sudan leaders in relation to the implementation of laws.

3. Basic human values and their relevance to decision-making

If the theories of decision-making discussed above fail to adequately shed light on the various circumstances surrounding the discrepancies in Article 8's implementation within South Sudan's constitutional framework, the next crucial analysis must focus on this question: What are the driving forces behind the ethical decision-making of individuals holding significant political authority in South Sudan? A significant body of academic work posits that the theory of basic human values offers a potential explanation for the driving forces behind human choices and conduct, transcending cultural boundaries (Schwartz 1992; Schwartz 2012; Caprara et al. 2017; Piurko, Schwartz, and Davidov 2011; Cieciuch, Schwartz, and Vecchione 2013; Tamir et al. 2016). These values are deeply held convictions, intrinsically linked to and influencing desired outcomes, serving as guiding principles for people's aspirations (Schwartz and Sortheix 2018). Their pervasive influence extends beyond immediate contexts, serving as standards for appraising individuals, their actions, societal occasions, and public policies.

Furthermore, basic human values possess a structured hierarchy that dictates their relative importance and significantly shapes people's attitudes and actions. While values share common characteristics, their distinct motivational objectives distinguish them (Biar 2022). This inherent motivational capacity of values, which underpins human attitudes and behaviours, illuminates the diverse ways in which individuals navigate the world across cultures. It also sheds light on the deep-seated motivations that fuel specific decisions and actions within the realms of religion and politics.

The foundational framework of basic human values categorises the spectrum of values into ten discrete, motivational drivers (Cieciuch, Schwartz, and Vecchione 2013). These ten values are arranged radially to illustrate their inherent relationships and divergences. For instance, the principle of "Openness to Change" occupies the upper-right quadrant of this circular model, juxtaposed with its antithesis, "Conservation," in the lower-left quadrant. Similarly, "Self-transcendence" resides in the upper left, opposed to "self-enhancement," which is situated in the lower right of this value continuum.



Figure 1. Circular motivational continuum of 19 values in the refined value theory.

Source: Cieciuch, Schwartz, Vecchione (2013, p. 3)

However, the relationship is not strictly dichotomous. “Self-enhancement” can intersect with “Openness to Change” in the upper-right quadrant, highlighting a shared emphasis on individual aspirations. Furthermore, it is connected to “Conservation,” its lower-lying counterpart, in that it represents a drive for self-preservation. Analogously, “Self-transcendence,” positioned in the upper left, can align with “Conservation” in the lower left, reflecting a shared orientation towards the collective. It also aligns with the adjacent “Openness to Change” in the upper right, particularly in its emphasis on fostering personal development and growth. Empirical evidence consistently demonstrates that these value categories cluster at the confluence of the overarching dimensional axes (Magun, Rudnev, and Schmidt 2016).

The ten basic human values, broadly recognised across diverse societies and nations, are commonly used to illuminate consistent human actions, particularly collective endeavours and the essential requirements for group sustenance and prosperity (Schwartz 2012). This section will briefly examine these ten core human values, organising them into two principal classifications: 1) anxiety-free values and 2) anxiety-avoidance values. The primary premise guiding this division is that liberal orientations invariably align with freedom from anxiety, while conservative perspectives inherently manifest as strategies for avoiding it. Nevertheless, a subsequent analysis will challenge this assumption and highlight potential gaps.

We shall begin by explaining “anxiety-free” values, a key component within the “circular motivational continuum” as conceptualised by Cieciuch and colleagues (2013). These values predominantly occupy the upper echelon of this theoretical circular framework. Within this continuum, the principle holds that values positioned adjacent to one another are intrinsically linked by shared motivational drivers and thus exhibit compatibility. Conversely, values that are further apart exhibit diminishing relatedness, potentially leading to conflict (Magun, Rudnev, and Schmidt 2016). Consequently, values categorised as “anxiety-free” are assumed to possess inherent commonalities, even when exhibiting minor divergences.

The “anxiety-free” domain is broadly segmented into two principal branches: “openness to change values” and “self-transcendence values.” These categories, which will be further elucidated, fundamentally underscore the significance of autonomy in thought, action, and emotion (Schwartz 2012). While both “anxiety-free” categories embrace an inclination towards change, a crucial distinction emerges between “Openness to Change” and “Self-transcendence.”

Values aligned with “Openness to Change” are characterised by a pursuit of activities that foster self-direction and stimulation. This orientation is described as a disposition toward curiosity, imagination, intellect, and broad-mindedness, in contrast to conventionality, caution, and narrow-mindedness (Cieciuch et al. 2013). In contrast, values associated with “Self-transcendence” are driven by a desire to promote the well-being and care of others (Schwartz 2012). Further differentiating these categories, “Openness to Change” exhibits an essentially individualistic focus, whereas “Self-transcendence” centres on a collective, societal orientation (Schwartz 2006; Magun et al. 2016).

Anxiety-free values are assumed to be universal. Drawing on the work of Piurko et al. (2011), a significant correlation exists between a commitment to universalism and benevolence and a left-leaning political stance. This perspective suggests that a deep concern for the well-being of all humanity and the natural world drives individuals with liberal ideologies. As articulated by Caprara et al. (2017), the left and liberalism, as political frameworks, are characterised by their endorsement of robust social welfare systems, a steady dedication to social justice, an embrace of diverse

groups even when they challenge established norms, and a fundamental belief in pluralism and equity.

Reinforcing these insights, Piurko et al. (2011) also identified a strong link between liberal identification and a valuation of equal standing for all individuals. Caprara et al. (2017) lend further credence to Piurko et al.'s (2011) conclusions, corroborating the association between liberalism and the prioritisation of values that are not characterised by apprehension. In essence, values residing within the “anxiety-free” domain – encompassing openness to change and a transcendence of the self, from which higher-order principles like universalism and benevolence emerge (Cieciuch et al. 2013) – exhibit a powerful affinity with left-wing or liberal political inclinations. The subsequent examination will shift focus to the values categorised as “anxiety-avoidance” to assess their alignment or divergence with the principles of the anxiety-free spectrum, including openness to change and self-transcendence.

In contrast to values that embrace freedom from worry, anxiety-avoidance values occupy the lower reaches of Schwartz's (2012) dynamic framework of motivational drivers (Cieciuch et al. 2013). These values are primarily partitioned into two distinct branches: those centred on personal advancement and those focused on preservation. Values geared toward “Self-enhancement” are intrinsically linked to “Self-transcendence” values because of their individualistic orientation. Conversely, “Conservation” values align with “Openness to Change” values through a societal lens. Within the “Self-enhancement” cluster, core elements include the pursuit of accomplishment and the exertion of influence.

The “Conservation” domain is characterised by adherence to established norms, enduring customs, and the assurance of safety. Fundamentally, the driving force behind anxiety-avoidance values is the imperative to sidestep anything perceived as discomforting or as an existential peril to one's existence and aspirations. These values primarily serve to safeguard the existing order, driven by an intense need for persistent security and the preservation of entrenched convictions (Schwartz 2011). The imperative for security, under the umbrella of anxiety-avoidance, can manifest in both tangible physical circumstances and in the complex emotional well-being.

The core of “Conservation” values lies in prioritising safety and stability. These values, encompassing tradition, adherence to norms, and a sense of security, are characterised by a deep-seated inclination to maintain existing structures, to restrain personal impulses, to cherish the past, and to resist any form of upheaval. This inherent emphasis on collective well-being and the preservation of the status quo suggests that “Conservation” values are predominantly oriented towards societal concerns rather than individual aspirations.

In stark contrast, “Self-enhancement” values, such as the pursuit of achievement and the exertion of influence, are driven by a strong focus on individualistic goals and the desire for personal advancement and preeminence. However, it is crucial to recognise that even these self-centred motivations can be understood as a form of anxiety mitigation, as they underscore a fundamental drive to pre-emptively neutralise any obstacles that could jeopardise one’s ambitions or achievements.

The prevailing perspective in basic human values research posits that values associated with anxiety avoidance are intrinsically linked to collective or societal concerns rather than to individualistic or personal pursuits (Smack et al. 2017). This dichotomy of “individualistic versus collectivistic Orientations” (Smack et al. 2017, p. 2) illuminates disparities in value systems between Western nations and their African and Asian counterparts.

Intriguingly, values centred on the individual integrate certain principles of freedom from anxiety, such as autonomy, novelty, and pleasure, with elements of anxiety mitigation, including accomplishment and influence. Conversely, values with a social orientation intertwine other freedom-from-anxiety principles, such as understanding and altruism, with anxiety-avoiding principles, including adherence to custom, compliance, and safety (Smack et al. 2017).

Researchers assumed to have identified a strong link between a preference for avoiding anxiety and conservative or right-wing political stances, even though some nations exhibit a blend of liberal and conservative values. This association stems from a desire to sidestep the unease that often accompanies societal shifts. Consequently, both anxiety-avoidance values and conservatism champion the preservation of the current order,

as individuals with these leanings tend to shy away from perceived dangers and ambiguities. The influence of conservationist values is evident in voting patterns across numerous democracies, as indicated by Caprara et al. (2017). Citizens who prioritise tradition, adherence to norms, and a sense of safety, alongside aspirations for status and accomplishment, are drawn to leaders who champion these anxiety-mitigating ideals.

A critical perspective suggests that values rooted in anxiety avoidance may be detrimental (Schwartz 2011). This viewpoint posits that such values serve an individual's unmet psychological needs by prioritising self-preservation and ego defence against perceived threats and deprivation. The pursuit of security, conformity, and power is often driven by external validation, with a focus on garnering approval and avoiding social disapproval. Ultimately, those who embrace anxiety-avoidant values may interpret others as sources of danger, leading to a life characterised by ill health.

4. The gap in the basic human values theory

The prevailing framework for understanding basic human values theory postulates a dynamic, cyclical arrangement that suggests their inherent motivational stability. Specifically, values located at the top of this conceptual circle are assumed to indicate liberal leanings, whereas those on the lower bend are associated with conservative ideologies (Schwartz 2011). Furthermore, values positioned to the left of the cycle are associated with collective societal concerns, whereas those placed to the right emphasise individualistic pursuits.

Empirical evidence suggests a correlation between a “growth-oriented” or “anxiety-free” value orientation and nations boasting a high gross national income (GNI) per capita, as highlighted by Magun and colleagues (2016). At the individual level, Magun et al. (2016) observe that highly educated individuals and those from academically accomplished families tend to embrace these growth-centric, anxiety-free values. Conversely, nations with diminished GNI per capita and individuals with less formal education are more inclined towards “self-preservation” or “anxiety-avoidance” value systems.

Regarding the impact of values on subjective well-being (SWB), studies indicate that a growth-driven or anxiety-free value system acts as a catalyst for enhanced well-being (Schwartz and Sortheix 2018). This positive influence extends to values that prioritise individual focus. Yet, both individualistic orientations and self-protective, anxiety-avoidant values have been found to diminish subjective well-being (Schwartz and Sortheix 2018).

Research into basic human values frequently explores the interconnections within Schwartz's motivational circular model. Specifically, these investigations examine how values that prioritise the well-being of others are linked to values that champion individual pursuits (Schwartz and Sortheix 2018). Contemporary research has predominantly concentrated on the correlation between the ten core human values and an individual's sense of flourishing (Joshani and Ghaedi 2009; Haslam, Whelan, and Bastion 2009; Karabati and Cemalcilar 2010; Bobowik et al. 2011; Sortheix and Lönnqvist 2015; Sortheix and Schwartz 2017).

However, a significant gap remains in the current scholarship regarding whether specific values occupy a central position within this motivational framework. Furthermore, the implications of inverting this continuum, in which values oriented toward freedom from anxiety might supersede those oriented toward avoiding it, remain unexplored. The puzzling phenomenon of conservatives sometimes exhibiting liberal tendencies and vice versa, even within nations where the distinctions between these ideologies are generally unambiguous, also lacks a clear explanatory foundation. Nations such as the United States of America, and indeed many non-communist countries, provide contexts in which conservatism and liberalism, or right-wing and left-wing orientations, are typically well defined.

Schwartz's (2012) theory of basic human values overlooks the possibility that values initially perceived as fostering a sense of security can, under certain circumstances, become mechanisms for actively evading anxiety. Furthermore, he may not have considered the possibility that specific values could occupy the core of a self-preservation-driven motivational cycle. Indeed, all values leverage anxiety-avoidance as a fundamental survival strategy. When circumstances shift, any value system perceiving itself as endangered by emerging developments will trigger its defensive protocols,

safeguarding its fundamental principles from external disruption. This suggests that the beliefs most dear to an individual or collective are positioned at the core of their value framework, thereby exhibiting resilience against the intrusion of discordant ideals.

There are instances where progressive values dominate the motivational core, and at other times, conservative values assume a more peripheral role. For example, progressives advocate embracing openness to change, particularly when it advances society and aligns with contemporary postmodernist philosophies. Conversely, conservatives resist such change, endeavouring to safeguard beliefs they regard as eroded by postmodernism. Should the trajectory of change reverse, aiming to reinstate modernist and premodern values, conservatives could then ascend to the position of anxiety-free values. At the same time, progressives might assume the protective role for the values they ardently champion – those of postmodernism. Consequently, progressives may find themselves in the anxiety-avoidance sphere when they perceive their core beliefs as threatened by regressive shifts.

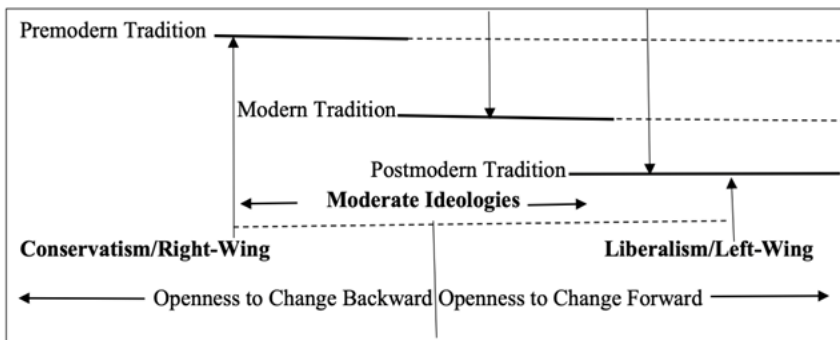


Figure 3: Value Changes in Relation to Traditions or Schools of Thought. Source: Author

The subsequent discussion will extend beyond mere value interrelationships within Schwartz's motivational circular model. It will endeavour to ascertain whether distinct value systems can indeed form central value systems. It will also examine how these fundamental value systems shape an individual's choices when confronting conflicting interests in politics and religion, as exemplified by the implementation of Article 8 of South Sudan's Constitution.

5. Central value systems as an alternative for decision-making

While the theory of basic human values explains the interconnections of values within the motivational circular continuum and how they influence decision-making, it falls short of definitively identifying the underlying reasons that account for the inconsistencies in the implementation of Article 8 of South Sudan's Constitution. It is precisely this gap in understanding that compels us to examine the concept of central value systems.

The concept of the central value systems posits that specific values reside at the core of an individual's or group's belief structure. As highlighted by Ponizovskiy et al. (2019), a value that is immediately relevant will naturally dominate discourse. Nevertheless, the value that commands this central discursive position, as described by Ponizovskiy et al. (2019), is not definitively synonymous with the core value system itself. However, their notion of values assuming a central role based on contextual significance offers a close approximation to a concept of the central value systems.

The circular model alluded to in the context of the central value systems is inspired by Schwartz's motivational circular continuum. The key divergence lies in Schwartz's framework, which does not designate values as occupying a central point to constitute core systems. Instead, Schwartz's (2012) model elegantly maps values in a rounded, interconnected manner, illustrating the relationships among adjacent values. Conversely, values in opposition are positioned at opposite extremes of this circular arrangement (Schwartz 2012; Cieciuch et al. 2013; Schwartz and Sortheix 2018).



Figure 2: Central value systems

Source: Author

In contrast to the circular model of Schwartz's (2012) value continuum, central value systems organise values by showing adaptable, fluid values on their periphery and immutable, ingrained values at their core. For example, more adaptable values, such as a willingness to embrace new experiences and a concern for others' welfare (openness to change and self-transcendence), are situated at the outer periphery of this conceptual circle. Conversely, more unyielding values, such as the pursuit of personal achievement and adherence to tradition (self-enhancement and conservation), are placed at the centre. This stratification suggests a fundamental difference in receptiveness. While flexible values readily accommodate novel perspectives or evolving ideologies, rigid values present a formidable barrier to such transformations.

The established theory of basic human values (Schwartz 2012), which explains the interconnectedness of values along a motivational spectrum, may illuminate central value systems and their impact on resistance to change. Empirical observations suggest this connection, with some scholars noting that certain decisions are rooted in "domain-specific core values" (Goren et al. 2016, p. 978). These values empower individuals to reach swift and efficient judgments that align with their abstract political convictions. Such core values serve as powerful navigators for rapid decision-making, as they can be effortlessly and unconsciously accessed from an individual's central value systems (Vaisey and Lizardo 2010). Miles (2015, p. 681) articulates this phenomenon, stating that "individuals carry around beliefs, predispositions, perceptual schemas, and other cognitively stored elements that influence how they act without requiring much (if any) conscious effort on their part." This mechanism likely underlies the sway of the central value systems over people's choices.

Core values, fundamental to both individuals and societies, are most likely instilled during childhood. This is due to the inherent connection between the development of one's character and the formation of one's values. The values acquired in early childhood may shape how individuals perceive their fundamental needs. This includes their biological imperative for sustenance, the necessity for harmonious social engagement, and the drive for collective prosperity and security. Ponizovskiy et al. (2019, p. 9) suggest

that these childhood-formed values likely define “needs of individuals as biological organisms, the need for coordinated social interaction, and the need for survival and well-being of social groups.” Consequently, specific actions are better suited to fulfilling these needs than others, with variation across national contexts. This divergence could explain the differential prevalence of particular values in distinct regions and countries.

For instance, Bayram (2015) posits that some values are intrinsically linked to individuals’ self-perception as global citizens. Those who strongly embrace a “world citizen” identity often believe that their cherished principles are more effective globally than within their immediate surroundings. This may account for the strong alignment between universalism and a world citizen identity observed in Europe.

A similar phenomenon occurs in North America, where “resistance to conformity is the most critical predictor of a cosmopolitan self-view” (Bayram 2015, p. 469). In Asia, values emphasising self-transcendence foster a strong sense of identification with global citizenship among many (Alviar-Martin and Baidon 2022). In Central and South America, values centred on achievement and hedonism serve as powerful motivators for individuals who identify as global citizens (De Wet et al., 2024). Although generalised trust strongly encourages many in mainland Australia to embrace an international identity, Bayram (2015) also highlights that the cultivation of values equally contributes to this strong self-identification. Finally, security values propel Africans to adopt a world citizen perspective (Durokifa 2023).

The observed divergences in priorities across diverse geographic regions suggest that individuals hold distinct core beliefs and value systems. Consequently, those whose fundamental values differ are likely to champion their cherished principles with greater fervour. For instance, if security is paramount for Africans, they would naturally align themselves with entities that bolster global security. Conversely, they would likely adopt a critical stance towards any actors who undermine their security, refusing to embrace changes that introduce instability. This could manifest as African nations severing ties with countries perceived as security risks. This aligns with Ponizovskiy et al.’s (2019, p. 9) assertion that while values represent universal motivations at an abstract level, they can also function

as independent cognitive frameworks intricately connected to other mental constructs.

As embracing openness to change is often categorised as an anxiety-free pursuit within Schwartz's (2012) motivational framework, it has become a central belief for a forward-thinking Europe, characterised by the adoption of new values and the relinquishment of outdated ones (Russo et al. 2022). However, this forward-looking "openness to change" becomes a protective mechanism when the pursuit of change entails a regressive focus on reestablishing old values. This principle extends to all values. In particular, when progress is jeopardised, a defensive posture is adopted.

Transformative shifts are more readily incorporated into the periphery of an individual's value system, exemplified by traits such as receptiveness to novelty and the pursuit of goals beyond the self. Conversely, deeply ingrained principles, such as the drive for personal achievement and adherence to tradition, are far more resistant to change. Schwartz's conceptual model of motivational values depicts openness to change and conservation as opposed poles of a circular continuum (Cieciuch, Schwartz, and Vecchione 2013). Consequently, openness to change lies at the upper edge of this spectrum, whereas conservation lies at the lower end of the circular motivational continuum (Schwartz 2012).

Empirical investigations utilising the World Value Survey data from 2005–2008 have illuminated this dynamic (Bayram 2015). Multinomial logistic regression analysis reveals that values aligned with self-transcendence, self-enhancement (excluding the specific facet of power), and readiness for transformation actively foster a cosmopolitan outlook (López et al. 2025; Lane et al. 2023). In stark contrast, conservation values act as a significant impediment to such global interconnectedness (Bayram 2015). This suggests that self-enhancement, encompassing the drive for power, occupies a position closer to the conservation end of the value hierarchy. Simultaneously, self-transcendence is associated with the inner layer below openness to change.

Within the two more permeable strata susceptible to external influences, one layer, openness to change, is characterised by an individualistic orientation. The other, self-transcendence, is defined by a broader societal focus. The more insulated, less adaptable core layers, representing self-

enhancement and conservation, exhibit a parallel divergence. Self-enhancement emphasises personal interests, while conservation prioritises collective norms and stability.

6. Central value systems and discrepancy in law implementation in South Sudan

A critical assessment of Article 8 of South Sudan's Constitution exposes a stark deviation in its implementation. Top politicians appear to support Islam over other religions. This substantial divergence provokes a question: "Why does the South Sudanese government deviate from the secular principles articulated in its constitution?" The assumption is that the relentless pursuit of political survival is the underlying motive. Consequently, this section attempts to analyse these perplexing contradictions, investigating the potential influence of central value systems on these observed discrepancies.

To grasp the situation, one must first examine the timing of deviations from Article 8 of the Constitution. Before 2014, no religious group received preferential treatment from the state. However, in 2014, the President disbursed \$200,000 specifically to Muslims, a gesture not extended to any other religion (Sudan Tribune 2014, June 27). Moreover, the subsequent significant change occurred in 2016 with the re-designation of the Presidential Advisor on Religious Affairs to Presidential Advisor on Islamic Affairs. This terminology shift ushered in a consistent pattern of appointing Muslim individuals to this advisory position. For example, Sheikh Al-Tahir Bior Lueth Ajak was appointed as the Presidential Advisor on Islamic Affairs on May 4, 2016. Upon Al-Tahir's death in 2017, President Kiir appointed Sheikh Juma Saeed Ali to assume this position on September 6, 2017.

A more thorough analysis reveals that what appears to be the preferential treatment of Islam over other religions commenced precisely in the wake of the civil war that erupted on December 15, 2013, in Juba, South Sudan. Before the eruption of this war, influential Christian leaders, including the Primate of the Episcopal Church of South Sudan, Dr Daniel Deng Bul, and Catholic Archbishop Paulino Lukudu Loro, implored the President and Vice President to exercise prudence and de-escalate their public

dispute during the SPLM convention. Their contention revolved around the electoral mechanism for selecting party nominees for the forthcoming general elections. Unfortunately, these pleas for prudence went unheeded. Once the war began, Christian leaders adopted a stance of vocal disapproval towards the government. Conversely, Muslims remained reticent or seemingly aligned with the government. This observable dynamic offers a compelling explanation for the favour given to Islam, to the exclusion of other religious communities.

Following the 2018 signing of the Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS) in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, the government's preferential treatment of Muslims appears to have been poised. This shift may stem, in part, from the nation's prevailing financial hardships. An additional contributing factor could be the less assertive public stance against the politicians by the new Catholic and Episcopal archbishops, in contrast to their predecessors. Regardless of the precise motivations, the top political leaders now perceive a more stable footing than they experienced in 2014 and 2016.

The core principles shaping the approach of both South and North Sudanese to matters of religion and governance are deeply ingrained. These fundamental values include safeguarding security, upholding tradition, and adhering to established norms (D'Angelo 2010, Sidahmed 2012). Actions that deviate from these principles are prone to being manipulated. South Sudanese political leaders consistently strive to protect their political leadership aspirations, whether within a unified Sudan or as an independent country. However, their actions may appear perplexing to those unaware of the influence these guiding principles exert on their decision-making. This dynamic is mirrored by the actions of Islamists in Khartoum.

The central value systems concept posits that shifts in perspectives are driven by inherent conservation values, which function as protective shields for any given belief structure. Within any worldview, specific values may be soft, while others remain firm. Those deeply ingrained values, often acquired during formative years, prove particularly resistant to change. When a worldview or its associated values face perceived threats, these conservation values – such as adherence to tradition, conformity, and the pursuit of security – are mobilised.

Consider, for instance, a scenario where liberals unite around their foundational principles when conservatives hold power and attempt to reintroduce earlier societal norms that liberals find objectionable. This defensive stance involves reinforcing liberal tradition and leveraging conformity to ensure members align with these established beliefs. Ultimately, this traditional framework is revived by activating security-oriented values. A reciprocal dynamic emerges when liberals are in power and initiate alterations to conservative values.

This complex interplay results in individuals feeling endangered, seeking solace within the anxiety-avoidance quadrant of Schwartz's (2012) motivational circular continuum, while those wielding power comfortably inhabit the anxiety-free zone. A salient illustration can be found in Sudan's historical context, where Muslims constituted the dominant population and consistently held positions of authority. In nations where the state and religious institutions are intertwined, such as Sudan, religious doctrines are state-sanctioned. Consequently, Muslims occupied the anxiety-free segment of the motivational continuum. The Islamic legal framework, sharia, which prohibits non-Muslims from governing Muslims, ensured that Muslim officials experienced an overwhelming absence of anxiety. Conversely, Christians and their political representatives perpetually resided in the anxiety-avoidance sector of the continuum, actively employing conservation values to safeguard Christian principles. Christian politicians joined with the broader Christian community within this anxiety-avoidance sphere, driven by the imperative to preserve their claims to political influence.

Following its independence from Sudan in 2011, South Sudan experienced a demographic shift in which Christians constituted the dominant population. This demographic reality presented Christian political figures with unparalleled access to the highest echelons of power. Consequently, Christians assumed positions previously held by Muslims, occupying a space on a motivational spectrum characterised by freedom from anxiety. In contrast, Muslim leaders, seeking to safeguard their religious principles from erosion, gravitated towards the antithetical end of this spectrum, a domain focused on circumventing anxiety.

The overriding objective of South Sudan's political elite – whether to maintain their current political power or to ascend to it – became evident in the events of 2013 and 2016. During these periods, it became apparent that Christian leaders frequently voiced dissent against poor governance, while their Muslim counterparts remained obviously silent. This vocal opposition from Christian leadership engendered unease among politicians who desired unchecked dominion. As a result, these politicians strategically relocated to the anxiety-avoidance segment of the motivational continuum, joining the Muslim leaders already situated there. This convergence may offer a plausible explanation for the formation of an alliance between South Sudanese political leaders and the Muslim community.

The above is the same case with the shift of the state's support from Muslims to Catholics. Following Dr. Mulla's enthronement as the new Archbishop of the Catholic Archdiocese of Juba, a noticeable redirection of governmental support towards the Catholic Church became evident. This transition in state support appears to stem from Archbishop Mulla's strategic alliance with influential state figures such as the President, a move potentially driven by a perceived vulnerability arising from initial dissent from Catholic adherents within Juba (ACI Africa 2019, December 13; Nzwili 2020, March 12).

This dynamic suggests that positions on the circular motivational continuum (Schwartz 2012) are not rigidly fixed. Instead, the concept of the central value systems maintains a degree of consistency in explaining the discrepancy between written laws and their implementation in South Sudan. These core values transform when individuals from diverse belief systems engage with and activate them.

7. Conclusions

This article examines the enduring paradox of why written legislation in South Sudan often fails to be implemented in practice. While the prevailing notion that South Sudanese leaders lack sufficient political commitment to uphold enacted laws is echoed here, a more profound revelation emerges. The primary impetus behind the actions of South Sudanese leaders in their daily activities is their deep-seated prioritisation of acquiring and securing political power. Consequently, the framework of the central value systems

provides a more compelling explanation for these discrepancies than any established decision-making theory.

The deeply entrenched values safeguarding the conservation principles of South Sudanese communities appear remarkably resilient, presenting a tough barrier to external influence. Along this line, the politicians in South Sudan seem intent on shielding their entrenched notions of authority from any perceived weaknesses. For instance, the diplomatic entreaties from the global stage, urging South Sudanese leadership to adopt legislation aligning with international standards, struggle to breach the walls of their conservative values. A paramount emphasis is placed on adhering to established norms, a practice that serves to preserve existing practices and hierarchies.

This pervasive drive for uniformity may, in part, explain the apparent disparities in the South Sudanese government's implementation of Article 8 of the Constitution, particularly concerning equitable treatment of all faiths. Religious factions that exhibit any divergence from governmental directives in South Sudan are not afforded the same recognition as those who offer firm support.

Given that Islam constitutes a minority faith (seven percent) in South Sudan relative to Christianity (sixty percent), it aligns with Schwartz's (2012) framework of anxiety-avoidance within the motivational continuum. Political leaders in South Sudan are supposed to be in the anxiety-free section of the circular motivational continuum. Nonetheless, as Christian leaders consistently voice their disapproval of governmental mismanagement, political leaders have chosen to align with Muslims, who reside within the anxiety-avoidance spectrum, to safeguard their paramount value: power. This strategic alliance explains the political leaders' failure to comply with the stipulated law, as exemplified by their apparent disregard for the constitutional principle of the separation of religion and state, as enshrined in Article 8.

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