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Advocating for Gender Equality in a "Conservative Christian Nation": An Exploration of The Bahamas 2016 Referendum

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The Bahamas 2016 Referendum

Seeks to further gender equality by allowing the following through four amendments:

Amendment 1) Allows children born abroad to obtain Bahamian citizenship from either their Bahamian father or mother. Currently, only Bahamian men are entitled to pass their Bahamian citizenship to their children born abroad.

Amendment 2) Enables a Bahamian woman who marries a non-Bahamian man to secure for him the same ability to apply for Bahamian citizenship currently afforded to a Bahamian man married to a non-Bahamian woman.

Amendment 3) Allows an unmarried Bahamian man to pass on his Bahamian citizenship to a child fathered with a non-Bahamian woman, a right that currently belongs only to women.

Amendment 4) Would insert the word "sex," defined as male or female, into article 26 of the Bahamian constitution that protects citizens from being discriminated against based on race, place of origin, political opinions, color, or creed.

All four amendments faced a crushing defeat at the polls, worst of all being amendment four which gained less than 25% of votes. This was due to a successful "vote NO" campaign.



Equality
Bahamas



Wallace, A. (2017). Taste Of Life. Retrieved from <http://shuganspic.com/tasteoflife/articles/life-in-leggings-bahamas.html>

The "Vote YES" Campaign

- Received funds from the Bahamian government. This resulted in many Bahamians believing that their government had a hidden agenda which ultimately fueled support for the "vote NO" campaign.

- Dismissive of fundamentalist Christian concerns, decreasing the willingness of many Christian Bahamians to listen to them.

- Supported by some Bahamian Christians, notably leaders of the Global United Fellowship of Churches, the Anglican Church, and the Roman Catholics.

"After over 60 years of active, ongoing engagement with the revelation of God contained in Holy Scripture, I can categorically state that I am unaware of any element within that sacred teaching that can be construed to support inequality, unfairness and injustice in any shape, form or fashion. Furthermore, I remain convinced that a yes vote is totally consistent with the ethical teaching of Jesus as contained in Holy Scripture. I therefore strongly recommend a yes vote of each of the four amendments." - Drexel Gomez, the retired Anglican archbishop of the Province of the West Indies.

Conclusion

The Bahamian government has shown signs that it wants to move towards a more egalitarian society, but faces opposition from a primarily Christian fundamentalist population. Thus, the key to advancing gender equalizing legislature is understanding how to advocate for it in Christian fundamentalist spaces. Although most Christian voters were against the gender equality bills, there was a minority that supported them. Recognizing how they perceive their "yes" vote to reflect their values as Christians could provide insight into how to best advocate for gender equality in a Christian populated nation.

Possibilities for future research:

- In order to understand how their Christian beliefs influenced their support of the gender equality bills, interview Christians who voted "yes."
- Determine how to support Christian leaders of various denominations advocate for gender equality.

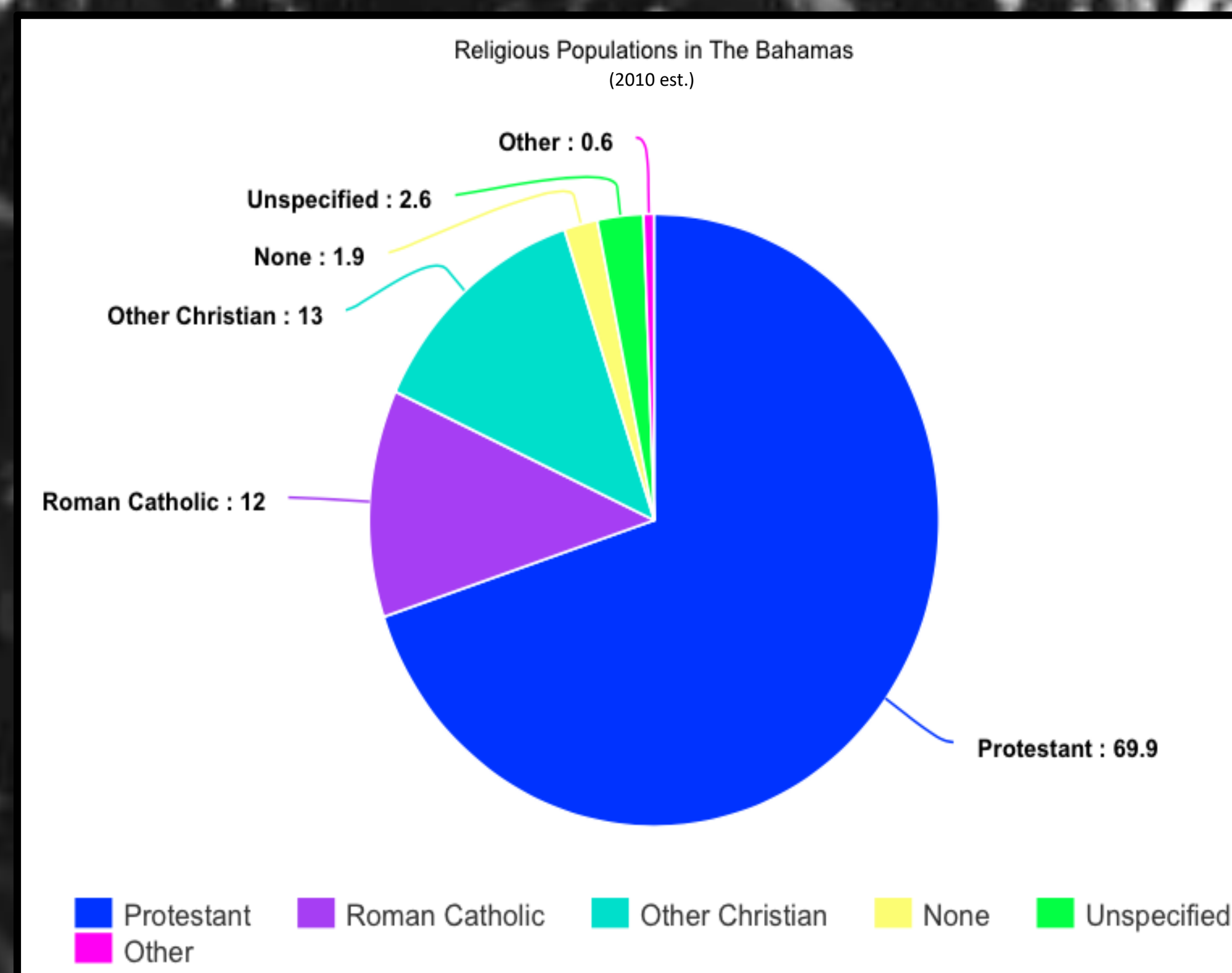
The "Vote NO" Campaign

- The "Vote NO" campaign was spearheaded by conservative, fundamentalist Christian leaders. (Fundamentalist Christianity is a belief in the strict, literal translation of biblical texts)

- It was based on the belief that adding the word "sex" to article 26 would allow for the legality of same sex marriage, as well as contest their biblical interpretation of man as the head of woman.

- It spread misinformation about the fourth amendment legalizing same sex marriage, or taking steps towards its legalization.

- It was supported by the Bahamas Christian Council.



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