A Secular Religion: Appeal of the “Good Life”
“Traditional” African Beliefs

- An omnipotent but otiose Creator
- Existence of a variety of spirit beings
- Primacy of man
- Role of ancestors
- Spiritual power of political leadership
- “Life Force”
- Supernatural “medicine”
- Sorcery
Africans can’t be all that different, can they???

So give me some examples of why I should care about “World View”!
World View
“Law of Limited Good”

Basic Premise: All good things are finite

Like a pie: You can get more, but only at the expense of someone else
World View
Sorcery

Basic Premise: Bad things in life often come from the deliberate supernatural harm perpetrated by people who bear you ill-will.

Bad driving or sorcery?

Business success or sorcery?

Bad playing or sorcery?

Bacillus or sorcery?
Local narrative always trumps empirical fact. . .

. . .your historiography is not my historiography
For most of the continent... it lasted from about the 1870s to the 1960s.
Memories of European Colonial Intervention

- Slavery
- Seizure of productive land
- Coercion and violence
- Horrific atrocities and human rights abuses
- Economic exploitation
The Cold War Legacy
A continuing narrative of trauma

They had their egregious clients...
The Cold War Legacy
A continuing trauma

And we had ours...
The Cold War Legacy in Africa
Implications For Americans

Many Africans are justly proud of their Liberation War history... supported by the “East Block”

The US is viewed as key backer of the forces of reaction against African Freedom Fighters
Many elite Africans now have ties to US (or family in US)

Many Africans have valued connections to US business, missionaries or humanitarian groups

Much ambivalence about US foreign policy
African Legacies of Recent History

- Governing elites are often not representative or accountable.
- Emphasis on coercion and “personalization” of power.
- Rule of law is weak, law enforcement difficult and often arbitrary.
- State redistributive capacities limited. Other institutions in civil society often command more loyalty.
- Many Africans totally disconnected from the public sector.
In Africa, men in uniforms and men with guns... are generally not your friends
And...

...to most Africans

AFRICOM still looks very “military”
Three Critical Legacies Of Africa’s Recent Past

- Traditional political landscape was totally rearranged
  -- Questions of “legitimacy” for emerging elites
  -- Deep insecurity and suspicions

- Security sectors not aligned with African concepts of “security”
  -- Military and police often are the security problem

- Most of the African economy is “informal”
  -- Not harnessed to the redistributive capabilities of the state

Bottom Line: Flux and fragility in state capacity
The European-style nation state has its shallowest roots in Africa.