



Number of Muslims Worldwide Expected to Nearly Equal Number of Christians by 2050; Religiously Unaffiliated Will Make Up Declining Share of World's Population

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First-of-Their-Kind Population Growth Projections Examine Future of World Religions Over Next Four Decades.

Washington, April 2, 2015 — The religious profile of the world is rapidly changing, driven primarily by differences in fertility rates and the size of youth populations among the world's major religions, as well as by people switching faiths. Over the next four decades, Christians will continue to make up the largest religious group, but Islam will grow faster than any other major religion. If current demographic trends continue, by 2050 the number of Muslims around the world (2.8 billion, or 30% of the population) will nearly equal the number of Christians (2.9 billion, or 31%), possibly for the first time in history.

With the exception of Buddhists, all of the world's major religious groups are poised for at least some growth in absolute numbers in the coming decades. Atheists, agnostics and other people who do not affiliate with any religion – though also increasing in absolute numbers – will make up a declining share of the world's total population.

These are among the global religious trends highlighted in new demographic projections by the Pew Research Center. The research, report and an interactive website, www.globalreligiousfutures.org, are part of the Pew-Templeton Global Religious Futures project, a multi-year effort jointly funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts and the John Templeton Foundation to analyze religious change and its impact on societies around the world.

The [new report](#) on the demographic projections explores expected changes from 2010 to 2050 in the size and geographic distribution of eight major religious groups: Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Jews, Muslims, adherents of folk religions, adherents of other religions and the unaffiliated.

While many people have offered predictions about the future of religion, these are the first formal demographic projections using data on age, fertility, mortality, migration and religious switching for multiple religious groups around the world.

In addition to making projections at the global level, the report projects religious change in nearly 200 countries and territories and looks at how religious composition is likely to change from 2010 to 2050 in six different regions of the world.

The projections find that, if current trends continue, by 2050:

- In Europe, Muslims will make up 10% of the overall population.
- India will retain a Hindu majority but also will have the largest Muslim population of any country in the world, surpassing Indonesia.
- In the United States, Christians will decline from more than three-quarters of the population

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in 2010 to two-thirds in 2050, and Judaism will no longer be the largest non-Christian religion. Muslims will be more numerous in the U.S. than people who identify as Jewish on the basis of religion.

- Four out of every 10 Christians in the world will live in sub-Saharan Africa.
- The global Buddhist population is expected to remain fairly stable because of low fertility rates and aging populations in countries such as China, Thailand and Japan.

Jews, the smallest religious group for which separate projections were made, are expected to grow 16%, from a little less than 14 million in 2010 to 16.1 million worldwide in 2050.

The report details the projections from multiple angles. The first chapter looks at the demographic factors that shape the projections, including sections on fertility rates, life expectancy, age structure, religious switching and migration. The next chapter details projections by religious group, with separate sections on Christians, Muslims, the religiously unaffiliated, Hindus, Buddhists, adherents of folk or traditional religions, adherents of "other religions" (consolidated into a single group) and Jews. The final chapter takes a region-by-region look at the projections, including separate sections on Asia and the Pacific, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, the Middle East and North Africa, North America and sub-Saharan Africa.

Data from the report can be explored online and custom visualizations can be created at www.globalreligiousfutures.org.

The [full report](#), "The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010-2050," is available on the [website](#) of the Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life project.

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