



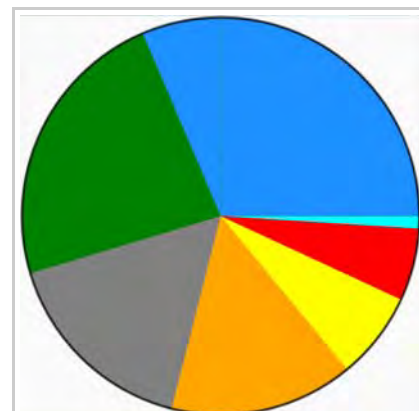
Major religious groups

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

The world's principal religions and spiritual traditions may be classified into a small number of major groups, although this is by no means a uniform practice. This theory began in the 18th century with the goal of recognizing the relative levels of civility in societies.^[2]

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Worldwide percentage of Adherents by Religion, 2010^[1]

	Christianity (31.5%)
	Islam (23.2%)
	Irreligion (16.3%)
	Hinduism (15.0%)
	Buddhism (7.1%)
	Folk religion (5.9%)
	Other religions (1%)

History of religious categories

In world cultures, there have traditionally been many different groupings of religious belief. In Indian culture, different religious philosophies were traditionally respected as academic differences in pursuit of the same truth. In Islam, the Quran mentions three different categories: Muslims, the People of the Book, and idol worshipers. Initially, Christians had a simple dichotomy of world beliefs: Christian civility versus foreign heresy or barbarity. In the 18th century, "heresy" was clarified to mean Judaism and Islam,^[3] along with paganism, this created a fourfold classification which spawned such works as John Toland's *Nazarenus, or Jewish, Gentile, and Mahometan Christianity*,^[4] which represented the three Abrahamic religions as different "nations" or sects within *religion* itself, the "true monotheism."



An 1821 map of the world, where "Christians, Mahometans, and Pagans" correspond to levels of civilization (The map makes no distinction between Buddhism and Hinduism).

Daniel Defoe described the original definition as follows: "Religion is properly the Worship given to God, but 'tis also applied to the Worship of Idols and false Deities."^[5] At the turn of the 19th century, in between 1780 and 1810, the language dramatically changed: instead of "religion" being synonymous with spirituality, authors began using the plural, "religions," to refer to both Christianity and other forms of worship. Therefore, Hannah Adams's early encyclopedia, for example, had its name changed from *An Alphabetical Compendium of the Various Sects...* to *A Dictionary of All Religions and Religious Denominations*.^{[6][7]}

In 1838, the four-way division of Christianity, Judaism, Mahommedanism (archaic terminology for Islam) and Paganism was multiplied considerably by Josiah Conder's *Analytical and Comparative View of All Religions Now Extant among Mankind*. Conder's work still adhered to the four-way classification, but in his eye for detail he puts together much historical work to create something resembling our modern Western image: he includes Druze, Yezidis, Mandeans, and Elamites^[8] under a list of possibly monotheistic groups, and under the final category, of "polytheism and pantheism," he listed Zoroastrianism, "Vedas, Puranas, Tantras, Reformed sects" of India as well as "Brahminical idolatry," Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Lamaism, "religion of China and Japan," and "illiterate superstitions" as others.^{[9][10]}

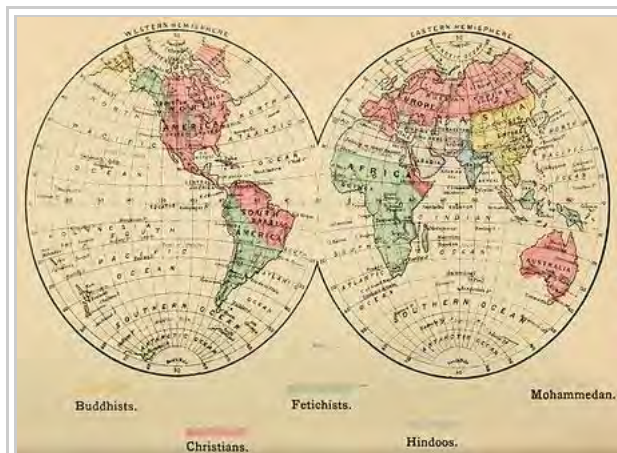
The modern meaning of the phrase "world religion," putting non-Christians at the same level as Christians, began with the 1893 Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago. The Parliament spurred the creation of a dozen privately funded lectures with the intent of informing people of the diversity of religious experience: these lectures funded researchers such as William James, D. T. Suzuki, and Alan Watts, who greatly influenced the public conception of world religions.^[11]

In the latter half of the 20th century, the category of "world religion" fell into serious question, especially for drawing parallels between vastly different cultures, and thereby creating an arbitrary separation between the religious and the secular.^[12] Even history professors have now taken note of these complications and advise against teaching "world religions" in schools.^[13] Others see the shaping of religions in the context of the nation-state as the "invention of traditions."

Classification

Religious traditions fall into super-groups in comparative religion, arranged by historical origin and mutual influence. Abrahamic religions originate in West Asia,^{[14][15]} Indian religions in the Indian subcontinent (South Asia)^[16] and East Asian religions in East Asia.^[17] Another group with supra-regional influence are Afro-American religion,^[18] which have their origins in Central and West Africa.

- Middle Eastern religions:^[19]
 - Abrahamic religions are the largest group, and these consist mainly of Christianity, Islam, Judaism and the Bahá'í Faith. They are named for the patriarch Abraham, and are unified by the practice of monotheism. Today, around 3.4 billion people are followers of Abrahamic religions^[20] and are spread widely around the world apart from the regions around East and Southeast Asia. Several



An 1883 map of the world divided into colors representing "Christians, Buddhists, Hindus, Mohammedans and Pagans".

Abrahamic organizations are vigorous proselytizers.^[21]

- Iranian religions (not listed below due to overlaps), partly of Indo-European origins,^{[22][23]} include Zoroastrianism, Yazdânism, Ætsæg Din, Ahl-e Haqq and historical traditions of Gnosticism (Mandaeism, Manichaeism). It has significant overlaps with Abrahamic traditions, e.g. in Sufism and in recent movements such as Bábism and the Bahá'í Faith.
- Indian religions, originated in Greater India and partly of Indo-European origins, they tend to share a number of key concepts, such as dharma, karma, reincarnation among others. They are of the most influence across the Indian subcontinent, East Asia, Southeast Asia, as well as isolated parts of Russia. The main Indian religions are Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism.
- East Asian religions consist of several East Asian religions which make use of the concept of *Tao* (in Chinese) or *Dō* (in Japanese or Korean). They include many Chinese folk religions, Taoism and Confucianism, as well as Korean and Japanese religion influenced by Chinese thought.
- African religions:^[19]
 - The religions of the tribal peoples of Sub-Saharan Africa, but excluding ancient Egyptian religion, which is considered to belong to the ancient Middle East;^[19]
 - African diasporic religions practiced in the Americas, imported as a result of the Atlantic slave trade of the 16th to 18th centuries, building on traditional religions of Central and West Africa.
- Indigenous ethnic religions, found on every continent, now marginalized by the major organized faiths in many parts of the world or persisting as undercurrents (folk religions) of major religions. Includes traditional African religions, Asian shamanism, Native American religions, Austronesian and Australian Aboriginal traditions, Chinese folk religions, and postwar Shinto. Under more traditional listings, this has been referred to as "paganism" along with historical polytheism.
- New religious movement is the term applied to any religious faith which has emerged since the 19th century, often syncretizing, re-interpreting or reviving aspects of older traditions such as Ayyavazhi, Mormonism, Ahmadiyya, Pentecostalism, polytheistic reconstructionism, and so forth.

Religious demographics

One way to define a major religion is by the number of current adherents. The population numbers by religion are computed by a combination of census reports and population surveys (in countries where religion data is not collected in census, for example the United States or France), but results can vary widely depending on the way questions are phrased, the definitions of religion used and the bias of the agencies or organizations conducting the survey. Informal or unorganized religions are especially difficult to count.

There is no consensus among researchers as to the best methodology for determining the religiosity profile of the world's population. A number of fundamental aspects are unresolved:

- Whether to count "historically predominant religious culture[s]"^[24]
- Whether to count only those who actively "practice" a particular religion^[25]
- Whether to count based on a concept of "adherence"^[26]
- Whether to count only those who expressly self-identify with a particular denomination^[27]
- Whether to count only adults, or to include children as well.
- Whether to rely only on official government-provided statistics^[28]
- Whether to use multiple sources and ranges or single "best source(s)"

Largest religions

The table below lists religions classified by philosophy; however, religious philosophy is not always the determining factor in local practice. Please note that this table includes heterodox movements as adherents to their larger philosophical category, although this may be disputed by others within that category. For example, Christianity and Islam include those are culturally Christian and Muslim as well as indigenous people combining folk religions or shamanism with either.

The population numbers below are computed by a combination of census reports, random surveys (in countries where religion data is not collected in census, for example the United States or France), and self-reported attendance numbers, but results can vary widely depending on the way questions are phrased, the definitions of religion used and the bias of the agencies or organizations conducting the survey. Informal or unorganized religions are especially difficult to count. Some organizations may wildly inflate their numbers.

Religion	Number of followers (in millions)	Cultural tradition	Founded	References
Christianity	2,200	Abrahamic religions	Middle East	[1]
Islam	1,600	Abrahamic religions	Middle East	[1]
Hinduism	1,100	Indian religions (Dharmic)	Indian subcontinent	[1]
Buddhism	488	Indian religions (Dharmic)	Indian subcontinent	[1]
Folk religion	400	Organized religion	Asia	[29]

Medium-sized religions

The following are medium-sized world religions:

Religion	Number of followers (in millions)	Cultural tradition	Founded	References
Taoism	12–173	Chinese religions	China	[30]
Shinto	100 ^[nb 1]	Japanese religions	Japan	[31][32]
Falun Gong	80-100	Chinese religions	China, 20th century	[33]
Sikhism	28	Indian religions (Dharmic)	Punjab region of the Delhi Sultanate, 15th century	[34]
Judaism	17	Abrahamic religions	Levant (Asia)	[1]
Korean shamanism	5–15	Korean religions	Korea	[35]
Caodaism	5–9	Vietnamese religions	Vietnam, 20th century	[36]
Bahá'í Faith	5–7.3	Abrahamic religions	Iran, 19th century	[37][38][nb 2]
Tenriism	5	Japanese religions	Japan, 19th century	[39]
Jainism	4.2	Indian religions (Dharmic)	Indian subcontinent, 7th to 9th century BC	[40]
Cheondoism	3–4	Korean religions	Korea, 19th century	[41]
Hoahaoism	1.5–3	Vietnamese religions	Vietnam, 20th century	[42]

By region

- Religions by country according to The World Factbook - CIA ^[43]
- Religion by region
- Religion in Africa
- Religion in Antarctica
- Religion in Asia
 - Religion in the Middle East
 - Muslim world (SW Asia and N Africa)
- Religion in Europe
 - Religion in the European Union
- Religion in North America
- Religion in Oceania
- Religion in South America

Trends in adherence

Since the late 19th century, the demographics of religion have changed a great deal. On the one hand, since the 19th century, large areas of Sub-Saharan Africa have been converted to Christianity, and this area of the world has the highest population growth rate. On the other hand, some countries with a historically large Christian population have experienced a significant decline in the numbers of professed active Christians: see demographics of atheism. Symptoms of the decline in active participation in Christian religious life include

declining recruitment for the priesthood and monastic life, as well as diminishing attendance at church. In the realm of Western culture, there has been an increase in the number of people who identify themselves as secular humanists. In many countries, such as the People's Republic of China, communist governments have discouraged religion, making it difficult to count the actual number of believers. However, after the collapse of communism in numerous countries of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, religious life has been experiencing resurgence there, both in the form of traditional Eastern Christianity and particularly in the forms of Neopaganism and East Asian religions.

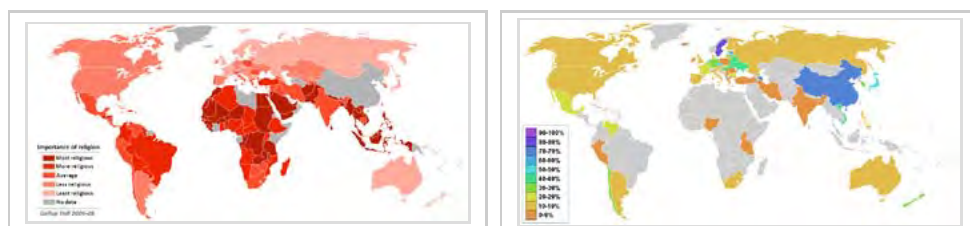
World Christian Encyclopedia

Following is some available data based on the work of the *World Christian Encyclopedia*:^[44]

Trends in annual growth of adherence

1970–1985 ^[45]	1990–2000 ^{[46][47]}	2000–2005 ^[48]	% change 1970–2010 (40 yrs) ^[38]
3.65%: Bahá'í Faith	2.65%: Zoroastrianism	1.84%: Islam	9.85%: Daoism
2.74%: Islam	2.28%: Bahá'í Faith	1.70%: Bahá'í Faith	4.26%: Bahá'í Faith
2.34%: Hinduism	2.13%: Islam	1.62%: Sikhism	4.23%: Islam
1.67%: Buddhism	1.87%: Sikhism	1.57%: Hinduism	3.08%: Sikhism
1.64%: Christianity	1.69%: Hinduism	1.32%: Christianity	2.76%: Buddhism
1.09%: Judaism	1.36%: Christianity		2.62%: Hinduism
	1.09%: Buddhism		2.60%: Jainism
			2.50%: Zoroastrianism
			across 40 yrs, world total 2.16%
			2.10%: Christianity
			0.83%: Confucianism
			0.37%: unaffiliated (inc. atheists, agnostics, religious but not affiliated)
			-0.03%: Judaism
			-0.83%: Shintoism

Maps of self-reported adherence

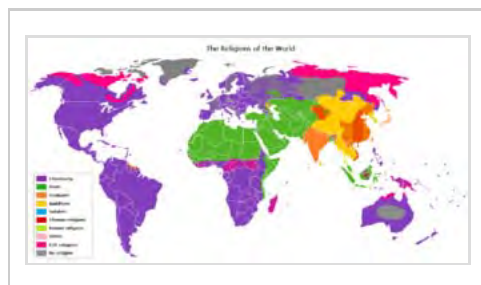




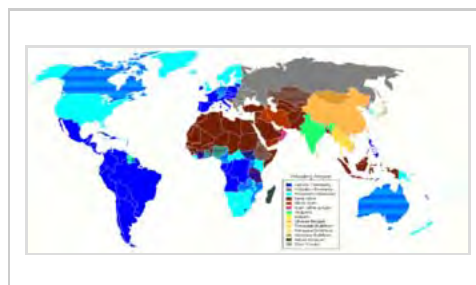
Map showing self-reported religiosity by country. Based on a 2006–2008 worldwide survey by Gallup.



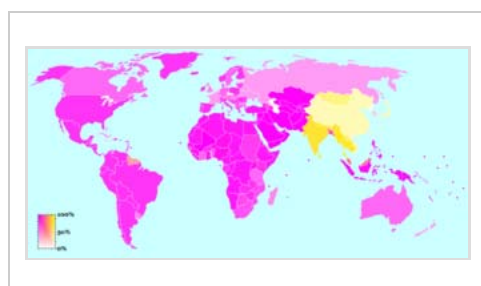
World map showing the percentages of people who regard religion as "non-important" according to a 2002 Pew survey



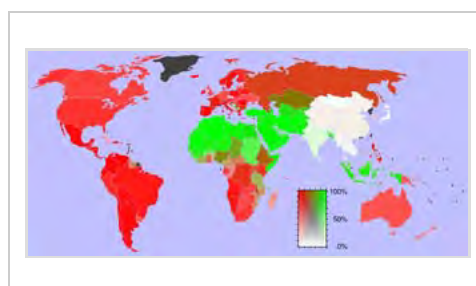
Religions of the world, mapped by distribution.



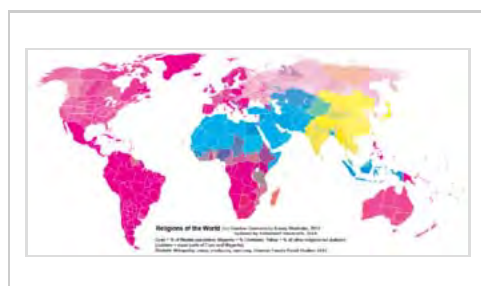
Predominant religions of the world, mapped by state



Map showing the prevalence of "Abrahamic religion" (purple), and "Indian religion" (yellow) religions in each country.



Map showing the relative proportion of Christianity (red) and Islam (green) in each country as of 2006



Map showing the distribution of world religions by country/state, and by smaller administrative regions for the largest countries (China, India, Russia, United States), according to the most recent data available (2012).

Christianity

Islam

Buddhism, Chinese religions,
Hinduism, indigenous religions

See also

- Dharma
- Irreligion
- Numinous
- State religion
- Religious conversion
- Religious text
- Category:Religion by country
- List of religious populations

Notes

1. Controversial, see the references.
2. Historically, the Bahá'í Faith arose in 19th century Persia, in the context of Shia Islam, and thus may be classed on this basis as a divergent strand of Islam, placing it in the Abrahamic tradition. However, the Bahá'í Faith considers itself an independent religious tradition, which draws from Islam but also other traditions. The Bahá'í Faith may also be classed as a new religious movement, due to its comparatively recent origin, or may be considered sufficiently old and established for such classification to not be applicable.

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External links

- Animated history of World Religions (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/tools/civilisations/index.shtml>)—from the "Religion & Ethics" part of the BBC website, interactive animated view of the spread of world religions (requires Flash plug-in).
- BBC A-Z of Religions and Beliefs (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/>)
- Major World Religions (<http://greenmangos.net/Beliefs-And-Ideas/world-religions.aspx>)
- International Council for Inter-Religious Cooperation (<http://www.icirc.org>)
- International Imam Organization (<http://www.globalimam.com>)

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Categories: Religion-related lists | Religious demographics

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