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Global Religious Diversity

*Half of the Most Religiously Diverse
Countries are in Asia-Pacific Region*

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION
ON THIS REPORT:**

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Overview

Several years ago, the Pew Research Center produced estimates of the religious makeup of more than 200 countries and territories, which it published in the 2012 report “[The Global Religious Landscape](#).” The effort was part of the Pew-Templeton Global Religious Futures project, which analyzes religious change and its impact on societies around the world. As part of the next phase of this project, Pew Research has produced an index that ranks each country by its level of religious diversity.

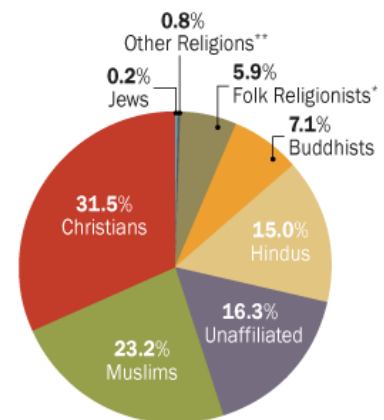
Comparing religious diversity across countries presents many challenges, starting with the definition of diversity. Social scientists have conceived of diversity in a variety of ways, including the degree to which a society is split into distinct groups; minority group size (in share and/or absolute number); minority group influence (the degree to which multiple groups are visible and influential in civil society); and group dominance (the degree to which one or more groups dominate society). Each of these approaches can be applied to the study of religious diversity.¹

This study, however, takes a relatively straightforward approach to religious diversity. It looks at the percentage of each country’s population that belongs to eight major religious groups, as of 2010.² The closer a country comes to having equal shares of the eight groups, the higher its score on a 10-point Religious Diversity Index.

The choice of which religious groups to include in this study stems from the original research that was done for “The Global Religious Landscape” report. That study was based on a country-by-country analysis of data from more than 2,500 national censuses, large-scale surveys and official population registers that were collected, evaluated and standardized by Pew Research staff and, in

Size of Major Religious Groups, 2010

% of the global population



*Includes followers of African traditional religions, Chinese folk religions, Native American religions and Australian aboriginal religions.

**Includes Baha'is, Jains, Sikhs, Shintoists, Taoists, followers of Tenrikyo, Wiccans, Zoroastrians and many other faiths.

Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Source: Pew Research Center, “The Global Religious Landscape,” December 2012.

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¹ See Johnson, Todd M. and Brian J. Grim. 2013. Chapter 3: Religious Diversity. *The World’s Religions in Figures: An Introduction to International Religious Demography*. Wiley-Blackwell, pages 93-108. The Pew Research study builds on the methodology developed by Johnson and Grim, a former senior researcher at the Pew Research Center.

² Membership in each religious group is based on self-identification. It relies on the number of people around the world who view themselves as belonging to various religious groups. The study does not attempt to measure the degree to which members of these groups actively practice their faiths or how religious they are. For definitions of the religious groups, see the Pew Research Center’s December 2012 report “[The Global Religious Landscape](#).”

the case of European countries, by researchers at the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA) in Laxenburg, Austria.

In order to have data that were comparable across many countries, the study focused on five widely recognized world religions – Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and Judaism – that collectively account for roughly three-quarters of the world’s population. The remainder of the global population was consolidated into three additional groups: the religiously unaffiliated (those who say they are atheists, agnostics or nothing in particular); adherents of folk or traditional religions (including members of African traditional religions, Chinese folk religions, Native American religions and Australian aboriginal religions); and adherents of other religions (such as the Baha’i faith, Jainism, Shintoism, Sikhism, Taoism, Tenrikyo, Wicca and Zoroastrianism).

Some efforts to measure religious diversity have attempted to take into account subgroups of the major religious traditions.³ The main challenge in looking at religious diversity in this way is the serious data limitations for subgroups within religions other than Christianity. For most countries, Pew Research was able to generate estimates for four main types of Christians – Catholics, Protestants, Orthodox and the remainder as an “other” category.⁴ For some countries with large Muslim populations, Pew Research has estimated the size of two main subgroups – Sunnis and Shias – but these are only approximations, expressed in ranges.⁵ Beyond Christians and Muslims, cross-national demographic data on religious subgroups are generally not available. For this reason, the study is limited to the eight major categories described above.

As noted in previous Pew Research reports, some of the faiths that have been consolidated into the “folk religion” and “other religion” categories have millions of adherents around the world. However, in the overwhelming majority of countries, these religions are not specifically measured in censuses, large-scale surveys or population registers.

Religious Diversity Index

The Religious Diversity Index is a version of the Herfindahl-Hirschman Index, which is commonly used in environmental and business studies to measure the degree of ecological diversity or market concentration. The main difference is that Religious Diversity Index scores are inverted so that higher scores indicate higher diversity. (For more details on the Herfindahl-Hirschman Index and the methods used to calculate the Religious Diversity Index scores, see the Methodology.)

³ See Grim, Brian J., Vegard Skirbekk, and Jesus Crespo Cuaresma. 2013. “Deregulation and Demographic Change: A Key to Understanding Whether Religious Plurality Leads to Strife.” *Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion* volume 9, article 8.

⁴ See the Pew Research Center’s December 2011 report “[Global Christianity: A Report on the Size and Distribution of the World’s Christian Population](#).”

⁵ For more information, see Methodology for Sunni-Shia Estimates in the Pew Research Center’s October 2009 report “[Mapping the Global Muslim Population: A Report on the Size and Distribution of the World’s Muslim Population](#).”

The 10-point Religious Diversity Index is divided into four ranges: Countries with scores of 7.0 and higher (the top 5%) are categorized as having a “very high” degree of religious diversity. Countries with scores from 5.3 to 6.9 (the next highest 15% of scores) are categorized as having a “high” level of diversity.⁶ Countries with scores from 3.1 to 5.2 (the following 20% of scores) are categorized as having “moderate” diversity, while the rest are categorized as having “low” diversity.

⁶ In this report, 16% of countries ended up in the “high” category because of tie scores.

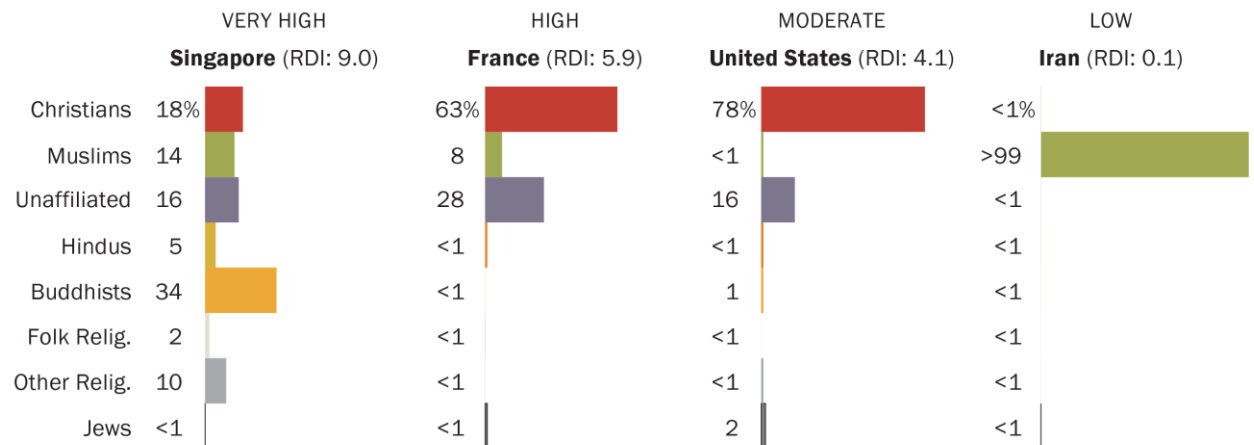
How Countries Ranked

Looking at the percentage of each country's population that belongs to the eight major religious categories included in the study, 12 countries have a very high degree of religious diversity. Six of the 12 are in the Asia-Pacific region (Singapore, Taiwan, Vietnam, South Korea, China and Hong Kong); five are in sub-Saharan Africa (Guinea-Bissau, Togo, Ivory Coast, Benin and Mozambique); and one is in Latin America and the Caribbean (Suriname). No countries in Europe, North America or the Middle East-North Africa region have a very high degree of religious diversity as measured in this study.

Of the 232 countries in the study, Singapore – an island nation of more than 5 million people situated at the southern tip of Malaysia – has the highest score on the Religious Diversity Index. About a third of Singapore's population is Buddhist (34%), while 18% are Christian, 16% are religiously unaffiliated, 14% are Muslim, 5% are Hindu and <1% are Jewish. The remainder of the population belongs to folk or traditional religions (2%) or to other religions considered as a group (10%).

Examples of Countries With Different Levels of Religious Diversity

% of each country's population that belongs to each of eight major religious groups



Religious groups are ordered from largest to smallest by overall global share. Folk or traditional religionists include followers of African traditional religions, Chinese folk religions, Native American religions and Australian aboriginal religions. The "Other religions" category includes Baha'is, Jains, Sikhs, Shintoists, Taoists, followers of Tenrikyo, Wiccans, Zoroastrians and adherents of many other faiths. Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding. Data are for 2010. For details on how the Religious Diversity Index (RDI) scores are calculated, see the Methodology.

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According to the new index, the United States has a moderate level of religious diversity, ranking 68th among the 232 countries and territories included in the study. Counting both adults and children, Christians constitute a sizable majority of the 2010 U.S. population (78%). Of the seven other major religious groups, only the religiously unaffiliated claim a substantial share of the U.S. population (16%).⁷ All other religious groups combined account for about 5% of Americans. (The U.S. would register as considerably more diverse if subgroups within Christianity were counted.⁸)

By contrast, France has a high degree of religious diversity, ranking 25th among the 232 countries. Christians make up 63% of France's 2010 population, and two other groups account for sizable shares: the religiously unaffiliated (28%) and Muslims (8%). Iran, whose population is almost entirely Muslim, falls into the low diversity category.

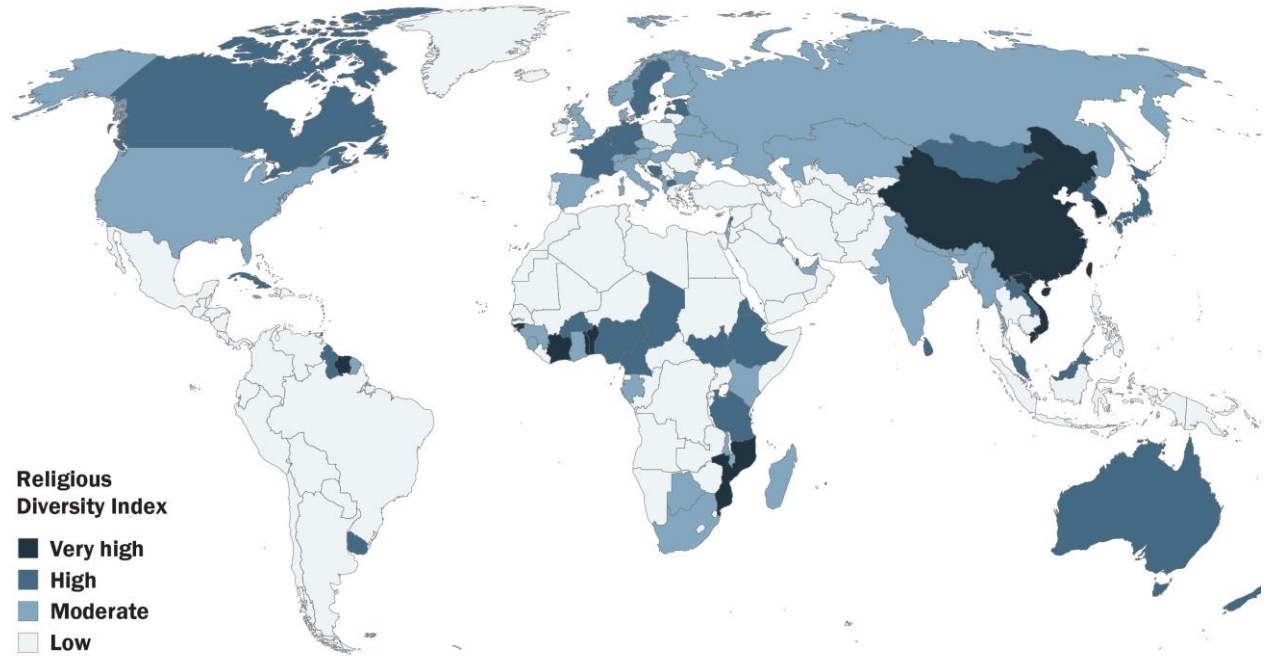
To see how all 232 countries scored on the Religious Diversity Index, see Appendix 1.

⁷ As noted in the text, the figures in this report are for 2010. The Pew Research Center's latest religious affiliation estimates for the U.S. show that just under 20% of the adult population is religiously unaffiliated, part of a trend toward disaffiliation that has accelerated over the past five years. For more information, see the Pew Research Center's July 2013 report "[Growth of the Nonreligious](#)" and October 2012 report "['Nones' on the Rise](#)." Note, however, that Pew Research surveys include only adults ages 18 and older, while Pew Research demographic estimates take into account people of all ages. For more details, see "Age Structure Procedures" in the Methodology of the December 2012 report "[The Global Religious Landscape](#)."

⁸ For more information on the religious breakdown of U.S. adults, see the Pew Research Center's 2008 report "[U.S. Religious Landscape Survey](#)."

Levels of Religious Diversity

Countries are shaded according to level of religious diversity



Based on Religious Diversity Index scores. For more information about how the index is calculated, see the Methodology. Data are for 2010.

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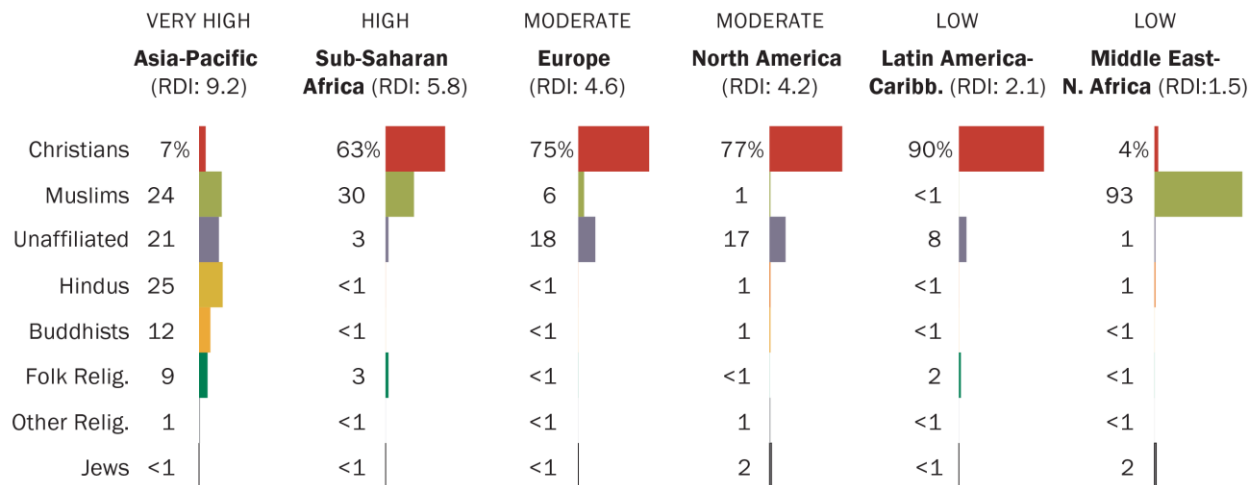
Religious Diversity by Region

Religious diversity differs substantially by geographic region. Among the six regions analyzed in this study, the Asia-Pacific region has the highest level of religious diversity, followed by sub-Saharan Africa. Europe and North America have a moderate level of religious diversity, while the Latin America-Caribbean and Middle East-North Africa regions have a low degree of religious diversity.

To see Religious Diversity Index scores for countries and regions, see Appendix 2. That appendix also includes the percentage of each country's population that belongs to each of the eight major religious groups in the study. For more information on the size, share and geographic distribution of each of the major religious groups, see Pew Research's 2012 report "[The Global Religious Landscape](#)."

Religious Diversity Around the World

% of each region's population that belongs to each of eight major religious groups



Religious groups are ordered from largest to smallest by overall global share. Folk religionists include followers of African traditional religions, Chinese folk religions, Native American religions and Australian aboriginal religions. The "Other religions" category includes Baha'is, Jains, Sikhs, Shintoists, Taoists, followers of Tenrikyo, Wiccans, Zoroastrians and adherents of many other faiths. Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding. Data are for 2010. For details on how the Religious Diversity Index (RDI) scores are calculated, see the Methodology.

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Methodology

This study calculates Religious Diversity Index (RDI) scores for countries, regions and the world based on the shares of eight major world religions (Buddhism, Christianity, folk or traditional religions, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, other religions considered as a group, and the religiously unaffiliated). The methodology used by Pew Research to calculate the levels of religious diversity was developed by former senior researcher Brian J. Grim in consultation with other members of the Pew Research Center staff, building on a methodology that Grim developed with Todd M. Johnson, director of the Center for the Study of Global Christianity.⁹

The RDI is a version of the Herfindahl-Hirschman Index, which is used in various fields to measure the degree of concentration of human or biological populations as well as organizations. The main difference is that RDI scores are inverted so that higher scores indicate higher diversity.¹⁰

The Herfindahl-Hirschman Index is a widely accepted measure of concentration used by biologists, ecologists, linguists, economists, sociologists and demographers. For instance, the U.S. Department of Justice and the Federal Reserve Board use the Herfindahl-Hirschman Index to evaluate the competitive effects of mergers.¹¹ A variant of the index was introduced as a measure to describe the diversity of ecological populations and was used in a variety of related studies, including measuring the diversity of languages spoken in a region.¹² Starting in the 1960s, the index was used to measure population groups, including occupations and religions.¹³ Sociologists and other population researchers consider the Herfindahl-Hirschman Index a reliable measure to describe religious diversity.¹⁴

⁹ See Johnson, Todd M. and Brian J. Grim. 2013. Chapter 3: Religious Diversity. *The World's Religions in Figures: An Introduction to International Religious Demography*. Wiley-Blackwell, pages 93-108.

¹⁰ The Herfindahl-Hirschman Index (HHI), sometimes called the Simpsons Ecological Diversity Index, is named for economists Orris C. Herfindahl and Albert O. Hirschman, who were the first to use it to measure industry concentration (that is, the extent to which a small number of companies account for the majority of a given market). See Charles R. Laine. June 22, 1995. "The Herfindahl-Hirschman Index: A Concentration Measure Taking the Consumer's Point of View." *Antitrust Bulletin*.

¹¹ Calkins, Stephen. 1983. *The New Merger Guidelines and the Herfindahl-Hirschman Index*. *California Law Review*, volume 71, pages 402-429. Also see Rhoades, Stephen A. 1993. *The Herfindahl-Hirschman Index*. *Federal Reserve Bulletin*, volume 79, pages 188-189.

¹² For more information on the use of the index to measure ecological diversity, see Simpson, E.H. 1949. *Measurement of Diversity*. *Nature*. Vol. 163: 688. For more information on the use of the index in measuring linguistic diversity, see Greenberg, Joseph H. 1956. *The Measurement of Linguistic Diversity*. *Language* volume 32, pages 109-115.

¹³ Gibbs, J.P. and W.T. Martin. 1962. *Urbanization, Technology and the Division of Labor*. *American Sociological Review* volume 27, pages 667-677. Also see Lieberman, Stanley. 1969. *Measuring Population Diversity*. *American Sociological Review*, volume 34, pages 850-862.

¹⁴ See Barro, Robert J. and Rachel M. McCleary. 2003. *Religion and Economic Growth Across Countries*. *American Sociological Review*, volume 68, pages 760-781; Iannaccone, Laurence R. 1991. *The Consequences of Religious Market Structure*. *Rationality and Society*, volume 3, pages 156-177; Johnson, Todd M. and Brian J. Grim. 2013. *The World's Religions in Figures: An Introduction to International Religious Demography*. Wiley-Blackwell; and Phillips, Rick. 1998. *Religious Market Share and Mormon Church Activity*. *Sociology of Religion*, volume 59, pages 117-130.

Although the Herfindahl-Hirschman Index is one of the most commonly used measures of diversity, there are other measures in use, including the raw number of different religions of a certain share or size in a country.¹⁵

Calculating the Religious Diversity Index (RDI)

The Religious Diversity Index (RDI) is calculated using a three-step procedure. First, the shares of the eight major religious groups analyzed in this study are squared and summed. For example, in a case where the entire population belongs to one religious group, the first step results in a score of 10,000 ($100^2 = 10,000$). By contrast, in a case where the population is equally distributed among the eight religious groups (12.5% each), the first step would result in a score of 1,250 ($12.5^2 + 12.5^2 + 12.5^2 + 12.5^2 + 12.5^2 + 12.5^2 + 12.5^2 + 12.5^2 = 1,250$). This first-step score of 1,250 represents maximum possible diversity when eight groups are considered. (See tables to the right and below for an example of calculating the RDI.)

Second, the first-step score is inverted so that lower scores reflect lower religious diversity and higher scores reflect higher religious diversity. To invert the scores, the first-step score is subtracted from the score representing no religious diversity (10,000). In the case where the entire population belongs to one religious group, the score would now become 0 ($10,000 - 10,000 = 0$). In the case where the population is equally distributed among the eight religious groups, the score would now become 8,750 ($10,000 - 1,250 = 8,750$). This inverted second-step score of 8,750 now represents maximum possible diversity when eight groups are considered.

Step 1: Calculating the Religious Diversity Index

Calculating the RDI for the United States

Religion	% of country population	% squared
Christian	78.3%	6,132.3
Muslim	0.9	0.8
Unaffiliated	16.4	269.8
Hindu	0.6	0.3
Buddhist	1.2	1.3
Folk religions	0.2	0.0
Other religions	0.6	0.4
Jewish	1.8	3.4
Total	100	6,408.3

Figures are calculated based on unrounded numbers and are displayed rounded to the nearest tenth.

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Step 2: Calculating the Religious Diversity Index

Calculating the RDI for the United States

10,000
<u>-6,408.3</u>
3,591.7

Figures are calculated based on unrounded numbers and are displayed rounded to the nearest tenth.

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¹⁵ A variety of approaches have been used to gauge the level of diversity in a society. They generally focus on one of five main indicators: fractionalization (the degree to which a society is split into distinct groups often measured by the Herfindahl-Hirschman Index); minority group size (in share and/or absolute number); polarization (maximum level is when there are only two groups of equal size); dominance (ranking based on the size of the largest group); and cleavages or splits (based on the size of the largest and second largest groups). See Johnson, Todd M. and Brian J. Grim. 2013., Chapter 3: Religious Diversity. *The World's Religions in Figures: An Introduction to International Religious Demography*. Wiley-Blackwell, pages 93-108.

Third, the second-step score is divided by 875 to put the final Religious Diversity Index on a 0-10 scale. In the case where the entire population belongs to one religious group, the score would remain 0 ($0/875=0$). But in the case where the population is equally distributed among the eight major religious groups, the score would now become 10 ($8,750/875=10$).

Step 3: Calculating the Religious Diversity Index

Calculating the RDI for the United States

$$\begin{array}{r} 3,591.7 \\ \div 875 \\ \hline 4.1 \end{array}$$

Figures are calculated based on unrounded numbers and are displayed rounded to the nearest tenth.

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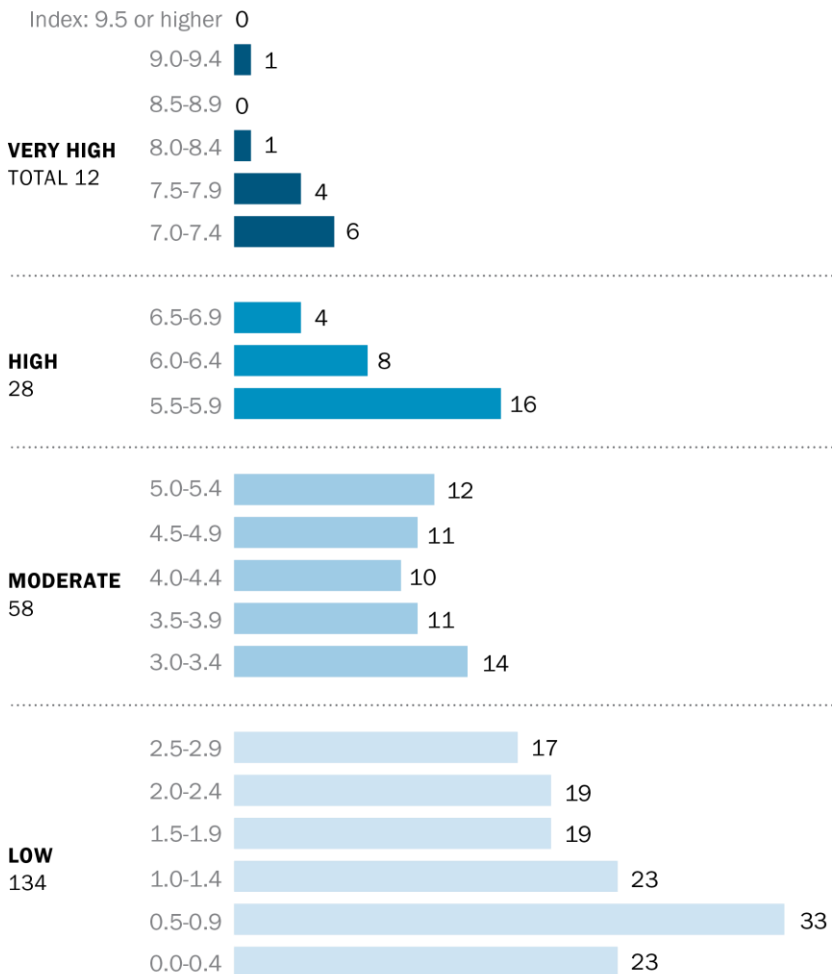
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Levels

The Religious Diversity Index is divided into four ranges: very high (the top 5% of scores), high (the next highest 15% of scores, which works out to 16% because of tie scores), moderate (the next 20% of scores) and low (the bottom 59% of scores). Readers should note that since the RDI measures the level of religious diversity based on the shares of eight religious groups, there is no precise breakpoint for the levels based on the size of the largest group. Nevertheless, some generalizations are possible. In countries with *very high* diversity, the largest religious group usually makes up no more than 50% of the population and at least two other religious groups each account for 10% or more of the population. In countries with *high* religious diversity, the largest religious group generally accounts for less than 70% of the population and two or more groups account for most of the remainder. In countries with *moderate* religious diversity, the largest religion usually accounts for 70-85% of the population, while the remainder of the population tends to belong to one other religion. And in countries with *low* religious diversity, the largest group typically accounts for more than 85% of the population.

Religious Diversity Index Score Levels

Number of countries with Religious Diversity Index scores at each level



Based on Religious Diversity Index scores. For more information about how the index is calculated, see the Methodology.

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Data Sources

This new Pew Research study uses its estimates from the December 2012 report “[The Global Religious Landscape: A Report on the Size and Distribution of the World’s Major Religious Groups as of 2010](#)” to analyze religious diversity in 232 countries and territories for the year 2010. The study includes estimates for Christians, Muslims, the religiously unaffiliated, Hindus, Buddhists, folk religionists, adherents of other religions and Jews. Taken together, these eight major religious groups comprise the world’s total population.

As part of the Global Religious Landscape report, Pew Research staff acquired and analyzed religious composition information from about 2,500 data sources, including censuses, demographic surveys, general population surveys and other studies – the largest project of its kind to date.¹⁶ Censuses were the primary source for Pew Research’s religious composition estimates in 90 countries, which together cover 45% of all people in the world. Large-scale demographic surveys were the primary sources for an additional 43 countries, representing 12% of the global population. General population surveys were the primary source of data for an additional 42 countries, representing 37% of the global population.

Together, censuses or surveys provided estimates for 175 countries representing 95% of the world’s population. In the remaining 57 countries, representing 5% of the world’s population, the primary sources for the religious-composition estimates include population registers and institutional membership statistics reported in the World Religion Database and other sources.

The measure of religious identity in this study is sociological rather than theological. In order to have statistics that are comparable across countries, the study attempts to count individuals who self-identify with each religion. This includes people who hold beliefs that may be viewed as unorthodox or heretical by others who claim the same religion. It also includes people who do not regularly practice the behaviors prescribed by their religion, such as those who seldom pray or attend worship services.

For more information, see the [Methodology of the Global Religious Landscape report](#). A list of the primary sources used to estimate the overall religious composition of each country is provided in [Appendix B \(PDF\)](#) of that report.

¹⁶ Population figures used in this report and the 2012 Global Religious Landscape report may differ slightly from figures available on the Global Religious Futures project’s [website](#). The website is periodically updated to reflect more recent or higher-quality data as they become available.

A Note on Geographic Spread and Segregation

Geographic distribution and/or segregation are important aspect of diversity. For instance, a recent analysis of census data indicates that even though racial diversity is increasing in the United States, it is rare to see highly diverse neighborhoods because segregation is still a common phenomenon.¹⁷ However, religious diversity at the subnational or neighborhood level is not estimated in this study primarily because of a lack of data at this level for almost every country in the world.

A Note on Regions

This report groups 232 countries and territories into six major regions: Asia and the Pacific, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, the Middle East and North Africa, North America and sub-Saharan Africa. Some previous Pew Research reports including “Global Christianity: A Report on the Size and Distribution of the World’s Christian Population” and “The Future of the Global Muslim Population” grouped the world into five regions, with an Americas region that included both North America and Latin America and the Caribbean.

The 60 countries and territories in the Asia and the Pacific region are: Afghanistan, American Samoa, Armenia, Australia, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Brunei, Burma (Myanmar), Cambodia, China, Cook Islands, Cyprus, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, French Polynesia, Guam, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Iran, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kiribati, Kyrgyzstan, Laos, Macau, Malaysia, Maldives, Marshall Islands, Mongolia, Nauru, Nepal, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Niue, North Korea, Northern Mariana Islands, Pakistan, Palau, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Samoa, Singapore, Solomon Islands, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Tajikistan, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Tokelau, Tonga, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Tuvalu, Uzbekistan, Vanuatu, Vietnam and Wallis and Futuna.

The 50 countries and territories in Europe are: Albania, Andorra, Austria, Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Channel Islands, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Faeroe Islands, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Gibraltar, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Isle of Man, Italy, Kosovo, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Moldova, Monaco, Montenegro, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Macedonia, Romania, Russia, San Marino, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Ukraine, United Kingdom and Vatican City.

¹⁷ See Holloway, Steven R., Richard Wright and Mark Ellis. 2012. The Racially Fragmented City? Neighborhood Racial Segregation and Diversity Jointly Considered. *The Professional Geographer*, volume 64, issue 1, pages 63-82.

The 46 countries and territories in Latin America and the Caribbean are: Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Aruba, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Bolivia, Brazil, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Falkland Islands (Malvinas), French Guiana, Grenada, Guadeloupe, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Martinique, Mexico, Montserrat, Netherlands Antilles, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Puerto Rico, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, Turks and Caicos Islands, U.S. Virgin Islands, Uruguay and Venezuela.

The 20 countries and territories of the Middle East and North Africa are: Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, the Palestinian territories, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, Western Sahara and Yemen.

The five countries and territories of North America are: Bermuda, Canada, Greenland, St. Pierre and Miquelon and the United States.

The 51 countries and territories of sub-Saharan Africa are: Angola, Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mayotte, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Republic of the Congo, Reunion, Rwanda, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Africa, South Sudan, St. Helena, Swaziland, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.