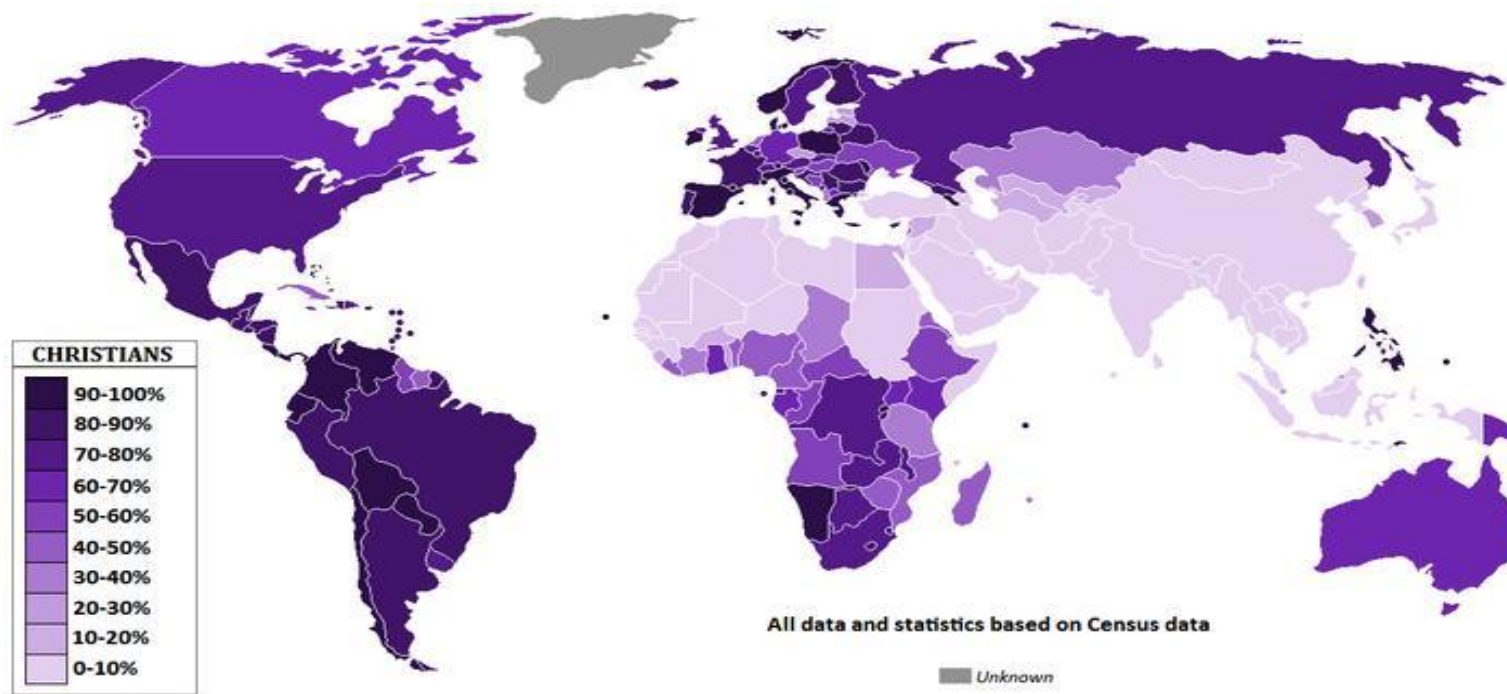


Christians by numbers around the world. Report Sees Shift in Global Distribution.

Christians account for almost a third of the world's population. This was one of the findings in a report published Monday by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life.

The data from the 2010 survey of more than 200 countries found that worldwide, there are 2.18 billion Christians, nearly a third of the estimated global population at that time of 6.9 billion.



The report looked at what has changed in the past century. Since 1910 the number of Christians nearly quadrupled, from about 600 million to more than 2 billion. In that time, however, world population rose sharply, from around 1.8 billion in 1910 to 6.9 billion. So, the percentage of Christians dipped a bit, going from 35% to 32%.

Christians, nevertheless, remain the world's largest religious group. Muslims, according to previous studies by the Pew group, account for a bit under a quarter of the world's population.

The survey found that almost half, 48%, of Christians live in the 10 countries with the largest number of Christians. Three of the top 10 countries are in the Americas -- the United States, Brazil and Mexico. Two are in Europe -- Russia and Germany. Two are in the Asia-Pacific region -- the Philippines and China. And three are in sub-Saharan Africa -- Nigeria, Democratic Republic of the Congo and Ethiopia.

In spite of so many being in a small number of countries, Christians are still a majority of the population in 158 countries and territories, about two-thirds of all the countries and territories in the world.

Distribution shift

The spread of countries reflects a major shift in where Christians are to be found. In 1910, about

two-thirds of the world's Christians lived in Europe. A century later only 26% of Christians live in Europe. More than a third are now found in the Americas, 37%. While just under a quarter, 24%, live in sub-Saharan Africa. The Asia-Pacific region accounts for 13%.

Taking Europe and the Americas together these two still make up a majority of Christians, with 63%. That is, however, a notable decline from the 1910 level of 93%. In both regions the numbers of Christians have dropped. In 1910, 95% of Europe's population was Christian, but by 2010 it was only 76%. In the Americas over the same period it went from 96% to 86%.

This decline contrasts with the dramatic change in sub-Saharan Africa. In 1910 only 9% were Christians, but a century later the Christian faith had exploded, making up 63% of the population.

While the overall numbers in Asia and the Pacific are still low, the percentage more than doubled, from 3% to 7%.

The Middle East and North Africa are the regions with the lowest number of Christians. They account for only about 4% of the population, or around 13 million people.

In fact, the report pointed out, there are more Christians in Indonesia, which has a Muslim majority, than there are in all the 20 countries in the Middle East and North Africa.

And the changes in Africa mean that Nigeria now has more than twice as many Protestants as Germany, where the Protestant Reformation originated.

Church groups

There are 1.1 billion Catholics worldwide, according to the report. This means they account for half of the global Christian population.

Brazil is the country with the largest number of Catholics, at 134 million. This means there are more Catholics in Brazil than in Italy, France and Spain combined.

Catholics are a majority of the population in 67 countries. The Americas accounts for 48% of the global number, with almost 40% in Latin America alone. Europe comes second with 24% of the world's Catholics, while sub-Saharan Africa makes up 16% and the Asia-Pacific region has 12%.

The broad definition of Protestants the report uses means they number 801 million worldwide, or 37% of the global Christian population. Protestants form a majority of the total population in 49 countries.

Despite the European origins of the Protestant churches the survey found that only two of the 10 countries with the largest Protestant populations are European.

The country with the largest number of Protestants is the United States, with about 160 million, making up 20% of the worldwide total. Nigeria comes second, with nearly 60 million Protestants, and China is in third place with approximately 58 million.

China, in fact, has the world's seventh-largest Christian population, which the report estimated at 67 million. The report acknowledged the difficulty of obtaining reliable data on religion in China, but according to its results, in Asia only the Philippines, with 87 million, has more Christians.

There are about 260 million Orthodox Christians, the study found, which accounts for 12% of the global Christian population.

Russia is home to the largest group of Orthodox with 39% of them. Ethiopia has the second-largest population, 13.4% of the global number. While Constantinople is the seat of the Patriarch of Constantinople, Turkey's Orthodox population is small, at about 180,000. Despite Ethiopia's large numbers Europe remains the center of Orthodox Christianity, with 77% of the global numbers.

The report gives a more precise idea of what observers have been commenting on in recent years regarding the shift of Christianity to the Global South. The rapid growth of Christians in Africa and China will likely continue, with significant implications for Christianity.

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