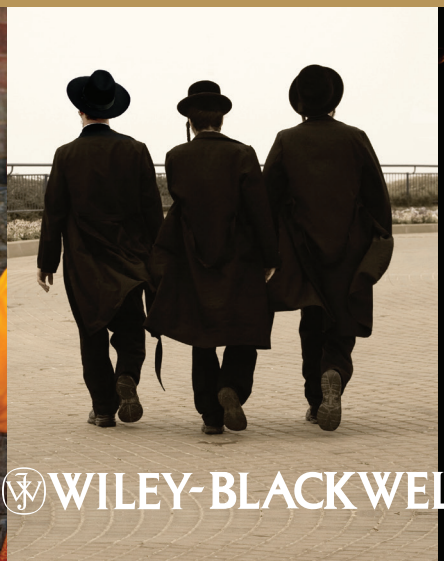
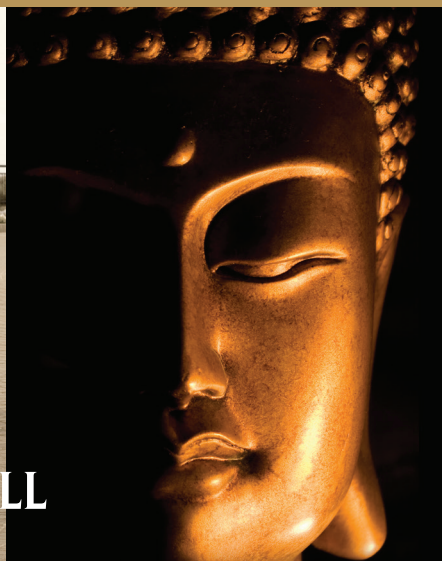


THE WORLD'S RELIGIONS IN FIGURES

An Introduction to International Religious Demography

TODD M. JOHNSON AND BRIAN J. GRIM

FOREWORD BY PETER L. BERGER

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An Introduction to International Religious Demography

Todd M. Johnson and Brian J. Grim

With Gina A. Bellofatto

Foreword by Peter L. Berger

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A John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., Publication

This edition first published 2013

Wiley-Blackwell is an imprint of John Wiley & Sons, formed by the merger of Wiley's global Scientific, Technical and Medical business with Blackwell Publishing.

Registered Office
John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 8SQ, UK

Editorial Offices
350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148-5020, USA
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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Johnson, Todd M. (Todd Michael), 1958–
The world's religions in figures : an introduction to international religious demography / Todd M. Johnson, Brian J. Grim; editorial associate, Gina A. Bellofatto.
pages cm
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-0-470-67454-3 (cloth)
1. Religions–Statistics. I. Bellofatto, Gina A. II. Title.
BL80.3.J65 2013
200.2′1–dc23
2012047272

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Cover image: Top: Praying with rosary beads © spxChrome. Detail from people praying on a sajadah © Eray Haciosmanoglu. Priest in robe blessing wine for Communion © kokophoto. Bottom: Sadhu Indian holyman sitting in the temple © Bartosz Hadyniak. Three Hasidic Jews © Keith Reicher. Detail of bust of Buddha © Navin Khianey.
Cover design by www.simonlevyassociates.co.uk

Set in 10/12.5pt Galliard by SPi Publisher Services, Pondicherry, India

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Foreword

This book is a remarkable achievement. It is the result of many years of work by the two authors, who must be considered the deans of international religious demography, a discipline that now has as its primary location the two centers with which the authors are associated (Todd Johnson with the Center for the Study of Global Christianity, near Boston, and Brian Grim with the Pew Forum for Religion and Public Life, in Washington). It pleases me that they have deposited (if that is the right word in our electronic age) their database at our Institute on Culture, Religion and World Affairs at Boston University. The book, with its plenitude of numerical tables, is a wonderful companion to another recent publication, this one full of maps, by Todd Johnson and Kenneth Ross, *Atlas of Global Christianity* (2009). The two volumes together constitute an indispensable and enormously useful resource for anyone interested in the shape of religion in the contemporary world. These are not books to be read once and all from cover to cover, but rather to be kept close at hand for ready reference (my own case).

The present volume consists of three sections. The first section, the juiciest of the three, contains an overview of the findings. There follows an elaborate discussion of the methodology employed. This is obviously of most interest for any putative practitioners of religious demography, but it is also useful in allaying the skepticism about statistics felt with good reason by many scholars of religion: we know that people lie about their own religious activity or find it difficult to fit themselves into the categories of a survey questionnaire, that numbers declared by religious institutions and by governments are iffy, and that many believers meet in informal or even illegal gatherings which are difficult to count. Johnson and Grim are skeptical themselves, and they explain in great detail how they have developed methods which painstakingly cull credible findings from highly discrepant bodies of evidence. The third section of the volume consists of what they call "case studies" – two from very important areas, the Muslim world and China – to which is added the religious demography of the new nation of South Sudan and of what remains of Sudan after its southern parts seceded. Needless to say, this unhappy region is not very important on the contemporary scene, but the secession is the result of a violent conflict (not yet fully ended) between the Christian South and the Muslim North – an

instructive case of what Samuel Huntington famously called "the bloody frontiers of Islam" (in *The Clash of Civilizations*, 1996).

It would be futile, indeed impossible, to summarize the rich contents of the present volume. It contains well over 150 numerical tables (I started to count, gave up before I got to the end). This is a formidable mountain to climb even for someone less numerophobic than me. (I have often explained that, every time arithmetic was taught in my elementary school in Vienna, I had the measles – like three times weekly.) I will not pretend to have studied every table (no one would believe me if I did). I have skimmed through the volume, especially the first section, and often stopped to read especially intriguing portions of the text. What I will do here is to comment briefly on what I think are key findings, some of which throw startling light on the global religious scene. Then I will, also briefly, point out significant political implications that should be of interest to people not particularly enamored of religious demography. Johnson and Grim are obviously fond of numbers. But they succeed in making the numbers speak. Often the numbers make us change the way we look at the world.

Perhaps the most startling findings come from a comparison of two dates – 1910 and 2010. The former date, not so incidentally, marks the international Protestant missionary conference in Edinburgh, which proclaimed the twentieth century as the era of world evangelization. That purpose was remarkably successful. However, in addition to spreading Christianity in general and Protestantism in particular, into previously "heathen" regions, the time span between the two dates saw an amazing demographic shift from the global North to the global South. In 1910 over 80% of Christians lived in Europe and North America; in 2010 that had shrunk to less than 40%. Today the majority of Christians live in Latin America, Africa, and Asia. This shift has many important implications. Possibly the most important is the fact that Christians in the global South (Protestant as well Catholic) are more robustly supernaturalist than their coreligionists in the North. Thus African Christians, for example, live in a world of spirits (divine as well as demonic), miracles, and exorcisms quite different from their Northern brethren – and much closer to the world of the New Testament. This theological fact is now beginning to sink in widely. It is vividly illustrated by developments in the Anglican communion, as dissident conservative Episcopalians in places like the parish in Falls Church, Virginia (where George Washington, no less, used to worship), put themselves under the care of African bishops, and as the Archbishop of York, the second-ranking cleric in the Church of England, is an African. But it is mostly through immigration that Southern Christianity is washing over into the Global North – for example, in the increasing presence of Latinos in the Catholic Church in the United States.

Despite the great successes of Evangelical and especially Pentecostal missionaries in many countries, notably in Latin America, there are now more Catholics than Protestants among Christians globally (51.5%) than there were in 1910 (47.6%). While Catholics may not match Protestants in missionary successes, they keep up demographically by way of fertility. But this comparison obscures an enormously important fact: the dramatic growth in both groupings of what the authors call "Renewalist" Christianity (a less than happy synonym, in my opinion, for what is conventionally called Pentecostal or Charismatic). This is, precisely, a robustly supernaturalist version of the faith, characterized by the "gifts of the spirit," notably miraculous

healing and "speaking in tongues." "Renewalists" were 0.2% of all Christians in 1910, but had grown to 25.8% in 2010. Put simply, *at least* one fourth of today's Christians have a worldview much closer to the New Testament than that of most theology professors in Europe and the United States. This fact should be understood in the larger context that, in all likelihood, the majority of all Christians in the global South, not only the Charismatic ones, have a familiar relationship with the supernatural that is much rarer in the North. In other words, the "gifts of the spirit" are even washing up into the suburbs of Washington.

Islam has grown substantially in the relevant time span – from 12.6% of the world population to 22.5% in 2010. In some parts of the world the increase was due to missionary activity, especially in Africa, but mostly it was caused by high fertility. The future projections are interesting; I'll get to them presently. But today the geographical distribution of Muslims is very interesting indeed: The largest number is in Indonesia, followed by India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Iran. Egypt occupies the sixth place in this demographic hierarchy. The denizens of Cairo may be justified in thinking of themselves as being at the heart of the *Arab* world, but surely not of the *Muslim* world. In other words, the center of the Muslim world is *not* in the Middle East, as is widely assumed. Arabs can proudly recall that Islam originated in Arabia, that the language of the Qur'an is Arabic, and that the holiest cities for Muslims are indeed in the Middle East. But today most Muslims live in countries to the east of that region.

Those of us who have long pondered the questions raised by so-called secularization theory – the proposition that modernity means a decline of religion – can also derive useful lessons from the demographic data in this volume. If there was a process of secularization in the past, it reached its worldwide peak in 1970, when around 20% of the global population was self-described as "not religious." Needless to say, one might quibble about what this phrase actually means (probably very different things to different people), or for that matter about the categories of "agnostic" and "atheist" used by the authors. Be this as it may, the number of people who can be described as "nones" (having no allegiance to any religion, here arrived at by a combination of "agnostics" and "atheists") stands today at 11.8%. By contrast, there has been a steady increase since 1970 of people who describe themselves as religious. *That* category is projected to be 91% by 2050. Again, this may be due to differential fertility – the religious have more kids – not necessarily to greater religious fervor. In many countries there will be greater religious diversity. If I may beat my own drum in this connection, I have long argued that secularization theory should be replaced by pluralization theory. But that is another story.

I am much intrigued by the authors' projections of future demographics. Of course these are prefaced by the phrase "if present trends continue." The phrase reminds me of the one coined by Herman Kahn, sometimes called the father of futurology – "surprise-free future"; we know all too well how many surprises, many of them very unpleasant, the future may hold. Still, some present trends *will* continue, and it is instructive to imagine the ensuing demographic scenarios.

There is what the authors call "the continued resilience of world religions into the future." Christians in 2010 number 32.8% of the world population, and are projected to number 35.8% in 2050. The corresponding Muslim numbers are, respectively, 22.5% and 27.5%. In other words, there will probably be no great change in the

global distribution of the two major religions. There is projected a significant decrease in the number of people under the age of 30 in Muslim-majority countries, from 60% to 50% – bad news for Jihadist recruiters (even worse news would be comparable or larger decreases of unemployed young men in this age bracket). The aforementioned decrease in the "agnostic/atheist" category will likely continue unabatedly, from 11.8% to 8.7%. In other words, the age of triumphant secularity, whether hoped for or feared, is becoming more implausible as we look into the future.

As an old joke has it: As the lady said to the insect specialist after sitting next to him at a dinner party, during which he told her endlessly about his beloved insects – "This is very interesting, if you are interested in it." There are important *political* reasons to be interested in demographic data about religion. This has become increasingly clear to people in international relations and in the policy community since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. The first focus, logically enough, was on Islam. Then grew an understanding of the complexity of the Muslim world, and the insight that religious groups with no terrorist activists can be politically relevant. If the Muslim projection is broken down from the "resilient" total, things become very interesting indeed. The Muslim population in Europe is projected to go from 5.6% now to 6.9% in 2050 – a sizable increase, but hardly supporting the "Eurabia" dystopia evoked by anti-Muslim agitators. In the United States the Muslim population is projected to go from 2.6 millions now to 6.2 millions in 2050. The political implications of this become clear when one reflects that the increase will mean that there will be roughly equal numbers of Muslims and Jews in the country, with probable consequences for US Middle East policy. Demography is also likely to be significant for the domestic future of Israel. Palestinian fertility seems to be declining, while the fertility of Orthodox Jews in Israel (as in America) is expected to remain high. Consequently, demography suggests that there is no basis for the fear (by many Israelis) and the hope (by many Arabs) that there will be before long a Palestinian majority even within the 1967 borders of Israel (not to mention the entire territory "between the river and the sea," that is within the borders of historic Palestine).

China is another focus in this volume. Demography features highly in any speculation about its future. Overall is the much-discussed consequence of the one-child family policy. A shrinking workforce will have to take care of an expanding population of the non-working aged. No religious factors come immediately to mind (unless it be a decline in the Confucian virtue of filial piety). But there are two demographic developments involving religion. Ethnic minorities have been exempted from the one-child policy, thus making for a higher birthrate among ethnic Muslims than among Han Chinese. Also, there has been a big increase in the number of Christians, now estimated by Johnson and Grim to be about 67 millions, or 5% of the population. Given the great difficulties of counting Christians in China, because of the illegal or semi-legal status of many churches, I suspect that this estimate is too low. If present trends continue, the number of Christians is likely to grow considerably. Much of this growth is Protestant, not (as in many other regions) by upwardly mobile poor people, but through the conversion of people who are already middle class (some with the wonderful title of "boss Christians"). One can only speculate on the political effects of an assertive Protestant middle class in China, possibly similar to effects already visible in Latin America.

I think I have said enough on why this book is important and why it should be read by people who are not, and do not aspire to become, religious demographers. Todd Johnson and Brian Grim are to be warmly congratulated and thanked.

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Acknowledgments

This book would not have been possible without the support of our two research projects: the Center for the Study of Global Christianity at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in South Hamilton, MA, and Pew-Templeton Global Religious Futures Project at the Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion and Public Life in Washington, DC, funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts and the John Templeton Foundation.

We would not have been able to write this book without significant help from our Editorial Associate, Gina Bellofatto. Gina worked with us from the beginning of this project, organizing and editing the material, filling in the gaps, and keeping us moving in the midst of many other commitments.

At the Center for the Study of Global Christianity we are grateful for the work of our Data Analyst, Peter Crossing, who provided all the detailed tables extracted from the *World Religion Database*. We are also thankful to Research Associate Albert Hickman for copy-editing this text, making numerous suggestions and improvements throughout. Other researchers working at the Center include LouAnn Stropoli, Brad Coon, Shawn Woo, Joanne Yen, Elizabeth LeLievre, Chak Him Chow, Sam Rogers, and Katie Bethea.

At the Pew Research Center, we thank Conrad Hackett, Philip Connor, Juan Carlos Esparza Ochoa, Chris Gao, Noble Kuriakose, Anne Shi, Peter Henne (now at the University of Virginia), Becky Hsu (now at Georgetown University), and Mehtab Karim (now at George Mason University). Also, Vegard Skirbekk, Marcin Stonawski, Michaela Potančoková, and Anne Goujon, researchers at the Age and Cohort Change Project at the International Institute for Advanced Systems Analysis (IIASA), Laxenburg, Austria, contributed to the case studies on Muslim population growth.

We are also grateful to Peter Berger and Robert Hefner at the Institute on Culture, Religion and World Affairs at Boston University for hosting us as Visiting Research Fellows in the Study of International Religious Demography. The *World Religion Database*, on which much of this study is based, is housed there.

The opinions expressed in this book are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the organizations with which they are affiliated.

Introduction

Censuses of people have been conducted for several centuries. The science of counting religionists around the world, however, is a relatively new field of study – the development of the academic discipline of international religious demography has taken place largely in the latter part of the twentieth century. In 1969, Hyman Alterman published *Counting People: The Census in History*,[1] one of the first comprehensive treatments of censuses. Our book, over 40 years later, is an attempt to compose an analogous volume on counting religionists around the world. We describe the emerging discipline of international religious demography by examining its methods and techniques in the context of national, regional, and global statistics on religious adherents. We define "religious demography" as the scientific and statistical study of the demographic characteristics of religious populations, primarily with respect to their size, age-sex structure, density, growth, distribution, development, migration, and vital statistics, including the change of religious identity within human populations and how these characteristics relate to other social and economic indicators. In this sense, we go beyond basic demographic features of religion (age, sex, fertility, mortality) and look at religion as a demographic characteristic of human populations deserving its own field of inquiry.

The increased prominence religion has assumed in academic fields including history, sociology, international relations, and a host of others is one of the unexpected developments of the early twenty-first century. In the latter part of the twentieth century, conventional wisdom held that religion was on the wane and, by implication, that the study of religion was of little importance to understanding the world. In particular, leading anthropologists and sociologists such as Anthony F. C. Wallace and Bryan Wilson predicted the demise or even disappearance of religion within a very short time. One of the first sociologists to recant this position was Peter Berger, who

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founded the Institute on Culture, Religion and World Affairs (CURA) at Boston University and later published *The Desecularization of the World*.[2]

Recent books, such as John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge's *God is Back*,[3] show that journalists' and scholars' treatments of religion as a passing fad were not simply minor oversights. *God's Century: Resurgent Religion and Global Politics* by Monica Duffy Toft, Daniel Philpott, and Timothy Samuel Shah[4] offers evidence that a lack of attention to religion has greatly hindered international relations and peacemaking.

In the meantime, the number of sources of religious data has greatly expanded (see chapter 7 for a detailed overview of major sources). Approximately half of the world's national censuses ask questions on religion. Religious communities continue to collect data on their members and publish annual reports of the results. Professional survey groups conduct polls and surveys, increasingly outside of the Western world. Scholars are writing monographs on religious communities, including their demographics. All of these data offer a rich repository of information for an assessment of religious demographics.

While the main purpose of this book is to describe in detail *how* one counts religionists around the world, we felt that it would be helpful to provide a summary of the number of people counted in each religion in the first chapter. While in other publications we have used maps to display these data,[5] in this volume the data are presented in sets of tables. Explanations of the methodology, sources, and techniques of analyses behind these figures follow in the remainder of the book. The documentation for these estimates resides in our databases and research centers: the *World Christian Database*,[6] the *World Religion Database*,[7] the Center for the Study of Global Christianity at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary (South Hamilton, MA), and the Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion and Public Life (Washington, DC).

This book is divided into three parts: (1) Overview; (2) Data and Methods; and (3) Case Studies. In addition, we offer a technical glossary and appendix with country-by-country statistics on religion. Each chapter also includes lists of references.

Part I: Overview

The overview offers results of our analysis of religious populations around the world. Detailed tables list the number of adherents in each of the world's major religions by United Nations continents and regions.[8] Religious diversity is also explored via three distinct measurement techniques, highlighting the reality that due to movement of the world's peoples (as well as conversions to and from religion), most countries are becoming more diverse in their religious composition. Next is a comprehensive treatment of the future of religion worldwide, with projections to 2050. The chapter explains the methodology undergirding these projections and makes suggestions for research on the future of religion.

Part I ends with a series of projections to 2050 for the future of the largest world religions, as well as agnostics and atheists. The overview addresses important issues about the status of religion in the beginning of the twenty-first century, issues that have critical implications for governments, non-governmental organizations, religious communities, and others.

Part II: Data and Methods

The chapters on data and methods offer the rationale, techniques, and specific problems associated with counting religionists. They begin by discussing differing definitions of religion, settling on one that allows the creation of a taxonomy of religions and their followers – essential for counting religionists. Also discussed are complexities related specifically to counting religionists, such as multiple religious belonging.

The academic study of religious demography is introduced by examining its context in the broader field of demography. Demography is not well integrated with other academic disciplines, yet at the same time, religious demography is increasingly recognized as impacting foreign policy, development, health, education, and a host of other fields.

The methodology chapters continue with an examination of sources of data on religion. While the three most significant are government censuses, commissioned surveys, and membership reports from the religious communities themselves, other sources of data are investigated and commented on. Part II also considers the limitations of each source of data on religion. We conclude by exploring the three sets of dynamics of religious change – births and deaths, conversions to and conversions from, immigration and emigration – that serve as the foundation for analyzing religious populations around the world.

Part III: Case Studies

The included case studies reproduce recent scholarship that provides the results of specific demographic inquiries. The most detailed of these case studies centers on counting Muslims, the world's second most populous religion. Other case studies include reflections on how to count religionists in the largest country in the world (China) as well as one way of interpreting the religious demographics of the world's newest country (South Sudan) and of the remainder of the former Sudan. Also included is perhaps the most detailed examination of the religious affiliations of migrants – highlighting especially the religious diasporas created around the world by the movement of peoples.

Recent History

This book emerges from two sources on religious demography that have developed over the past several decades. First, Anglican researcher David Barrett essentially pioneered this field with the award-winning *World Christian Encyclopedia*,[9] first produced in 1982. Barrett studied the demographics of Christianity in detail but also collected data on other religions. Thus, Barrett produced the first country-by-country comprehensive statistical assessment of religion. Todd Johnson joined Barrett in 1989 and helped him to produce the second edition of the *World Christian Encyclopedia*, published in 2001.[10] In 2003, Johnson moved the research center to Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary near Boston, where he established the Center for the Study of

Global Christianity and launched the *World Christian Database* – an online database with detailed demographics on over 9,000 Christian denominations. In 2009, he co-edited the *Atlas of Global Christianity* with Kenneth R. Ross, offering the first comprehensive visual representation of international religious demographics.

Second, the Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion and Public Life in Washington, DC has given great priority to researching international religious demography. Thus, through the work of sociologist Brian Grim (and, more recently, including Conrad Hackett and Phillip Conner), the Pew Forum has released a series of reports on various aspects of religious demography. Some of these are reproduced with permission in the case studies in part III.

In 2008, we started the International Religious Demography project at Peter Berger's Institute on Culture, Religion and World Affairs at Boston University. This project has provided a place to work out specific challenges in the field of international religious demography. The first achievement was launching the *World Religion Database* in 2008, the source of most of the data in part I. The *World Religion Database* is updated every quarter, and new variables are added regularly.

A First Offering

Our hope is that this book will offer a starting place for a global conversation on the academic field of religious demography. We recognize the crucial nature of this field for understanding the world today and believe that these studies can have a direct impact on international relations, diplomacy, foreign policy, and a host of other practical considerations in how the world is governed. An additional hope is that a deeper understanding of religious demography will help inform debates that are often driven by anecdotes and conjecture instead of facts and figures.

Notes

1 Hyman Alterman, *Counting People: The Census in History* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1969).
2 Peter L. Berger, *The Desecularization of the World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999).
3 John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge, *God is Back: How the Global Revival of Faith is Changing the World* (New York: Penguin Press, 2009).
4 Monica Duffy Toft, Daniel Philpott, and Timothy Samuel Shah, *God's Century: Resurgent Religion and Global Politics* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2011).
5 Todd M. Johnson and Kenneth R. Ross, eds., *Atlas of Global Christianity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009).
6 Todd M. Johnson, ed., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2007).
7 Todd M. Johnson and Brian J. Grim, eds., *World Religion Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2008).
8 Since the data in this volume originate from two different sources (the *World Religion Database* and The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life), some differences in nomenclature regarding names of world regions and some countries exist.
9 David B. Barrett, *World Christian Encyclopedia* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1982).