

BA/BSc 4th SEMESTER (MAJOR)
PAPER 402: HUMAN GEOGRAPHY (Theory)

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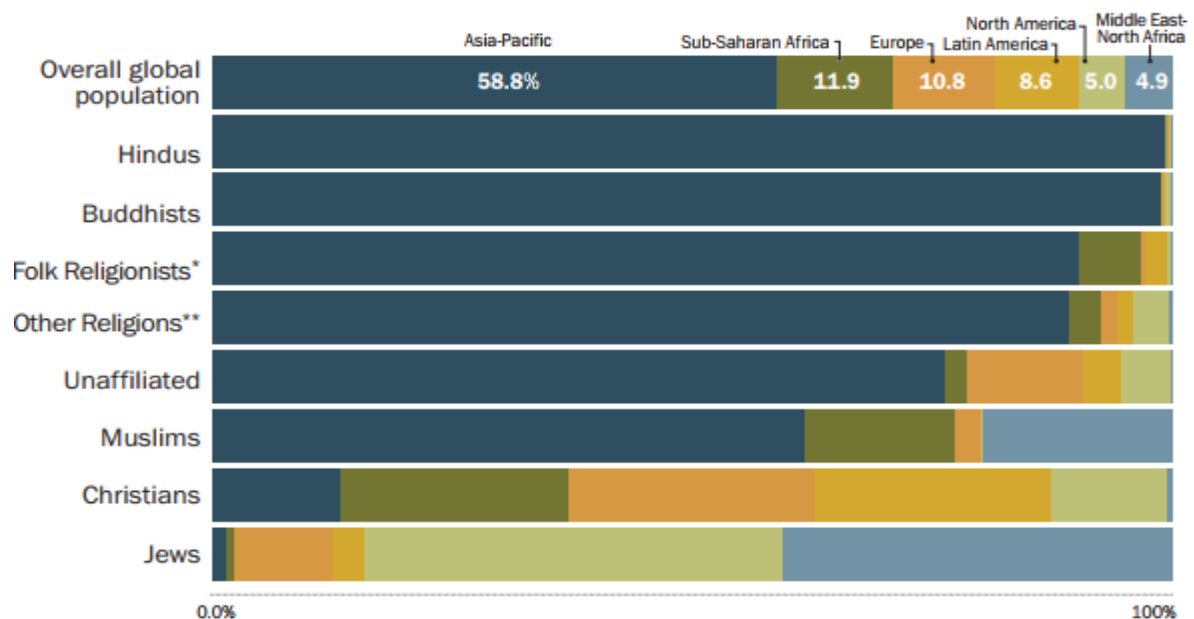
UNIT 5: MAJOR RACES

RELIGIOUS REGIONS IN THE WORLD

The geographic distribution of religious groups varies considerably. Several religious groups are heavily concentrated in the Asia-Pacific region, including the vast majority of Hindus (99%), Buddhists (99%), adherents of folk or traditional religions (90%) and members of other world religions (89%). Three-quarters of the religiously unaffiliated (76%) also live in the massive and populous Asia Pacific region. Indeed, the number of religiously unaffiliated people in China alone (about 700 million) is more than twice the total population of the United States. The Asia-Pacific region also is home to most of the world’s Muslims (62%). About 20% of Muslims live in the Middle East and North Africa, and nearly 16% reside in sub-Saharan Africa. Of the major religious groups covered in this study, Christians are the most evenly dispersed. Roughly equal numbers of Christians live in Europe (26%), Latin America and the Caribbean (24%) and sub-Saharan Africa (24%). A plurality of Jews (44%) live in North America, while about four-in-ten (41%) live in the Middle East and North Africa – almost all of them in Israel.

Geographic Distribution of Religious Groups

Percentage of each group’s total population that lives in particular regions



Christians number 2.2 billion, or about one-in-three (32%) people worldwide. About half of all Christians are Catholic (50%). An estimated 37% of Christians belong to the Protestant tradition, broadly defined to include Anglicans as well as independent and nondenominational churches. Christianity has spread far from its historical origins and is geographically widespread. Indeed, the vast majority of Christians (99%) live outside the Middle East-North Africa region where Christianity began. The greatest share of the global Christian population is in Europe (26%), followed closely by

Latin America and the Caribbean (24%) and sub-Saharan Africa (24%). Significant numbers of Christians also live in Asia and the Pacific (13%) and North America (12%). Less than 1% of the world's Christians are found in the Middle East and North Africa. There are four Christian majorities regions: Latin America and the Caribbean (90%), North America (77%), Europe (75%) and sub-Saharan Africa (63%). Christians live as minorities in the Asia-Pacific region (7%) and the Middle East-North Africa region (4%).

Muslims number 1.6 billion, representing 23% of all people worldwide. There are two major branches of Islam – Sunni and Shia. The overwhelming majority (87-90%) of Muslims are Sunnis; about 10-13% are Shia Muslims. Muslims are concentrated in the Asia-Pacific region, where six-in-ten (62%) of all Muslims reside. Many Muslims also live in the Middle East and North Africa (20%) and sub-Saharan Africa (16%). The remainder of the world's Muslim population is in Europe (3%), North America (less than 1%) and Latin America and the Caribbean (also less than 1%).

There are about 1 billion **Hindus** around the world, representing 15% of the global population. Major traditions within Hinduism include Vaishnavism, which is devoted to worship of the god Vishnu, and Shaivism, organized around worship of the god Shiva. Hinduism traces its roots to the Asia-Pacific region, where the overwhelming majority of its adherents (more than 99%) reside. Indeed, Hinduism is the most geographically concentrated of the eight religious groups analyzed in this report. Less than 1% of Hindus live outside Asia and the Pacific. An overwhelming majority of Hindus (94%) live in one country, India. The largest populations of Hindus outside India are in Nepal (2% of all Hindus) and Bangladesh (1%).

There are about 488 million **Buddhists** worldwide, representing 7% of the world's total population as of 2010. The three major branches of Buddhism in the modern world are Mahayana Buddhism, Theravada Buddhism and Vajrayana (sometimes described as Tibetan) Buddhism. Mahayana Buddhism is widely believed to be the largest, because it is prevalent in several countries with very large Buddhist populations, particularly China, Japan, South Korea and Vietnam. Theravada Buddhism, the second-largest branch, is concentrated in such countries as Thailand, Burma (Myanmar), Sri Lanka, Laos and Cambodia. Buddhism began in Asia, and the vast majority of all Buddhists (nearly 99%) still live in the Asia Pacific region. Only two other regions – North America (3.9 million) and Europe (1.3 million) – have more than 1 million Buddhists.

Worldwide, there are an estimated 58 million members of **other religions**, accounting for nearly 1% of the global population. The "other religions" category is diverse and comprises groups not classified elsewhere. This category includes followers of religions that are not specifically measured in surveys and censuses in most countries: the Baha'i faith, Taoism, Jainism, Shintoism, Sikhism, Tenrikyo, Wicca, Zoroastrianism and many others. Members of other world religions are heavily concentrated in the Asia-Pacific region (89%). The remainder is divided among North America (4%), sub-Saharan Africa (3%), Latin America and the Caribbean (2%), Europe (2%) and the Middle East and North Africa (less than 1%).

There are about 14 million **Jews** around the world, representing 0.2% of the global population. Geographically, Jews are concentrated primarily in North America (44%) and the Middle East-North Africa region (41%). The remainder of the global Jewish population is found in Europe (10%), Latin America and the Caribbean (3%), Asia and the Pacific (between 1% and 2%) and sub-Saharan Africa (less than 1%).

