

The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010-2050

The Global Religious Landscape

487,760,000

7.1%

34

UN Population Data by Religion



As of 2010, there were about 488 million Buddhists around the world, representing 7% of the world's total population. The number of Buddhists around the world is expected to increase between 2010 and 2030, rising to about 511 million. However, the global Buddhist population is projected to decline after 2030, falling to 486 million by 2050, roughly where it was in 2010.

Buddhists are expected to remain very heavily concentrated in the Asia-Pacific region, where 99% of Buddhists lived in 2010 and a similarly high proportion (98%) are projected to reside in 2050. The share of the world's Buddhist population living in North America is expected to grow from about 0.8% in 2010 to 1.2% in 2050. Europe also is expected to see very slight increases in their shares of the global Buddhist population. Between 2010 and 2050, the most rapid Buddhist population growth, in percentage terms, is projected to occur in the Middle East and North Africa.

The three major branches of Buddhism in the modern world are Mahayana Buddhism, Theravada Buddhism and Vajrayana (sometimes described as Tibetan) Buddhism. While affiliation with particular branches of Buddhism is not measured in most censuses and surveys, 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. Vajrayana Buddhism, the smallest of the three major branches, is concentrated in Tibet, Nepal, Bhutan and Mongolia.

Explore population characteristics of Buddhists using [Topics & Questions](#) or the [Data Explorer](#).

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