

# IIRF Reports

International Institute for Religious Freedom  
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Institut International pour la Liberté Religieuse



Thomas Schirrmacher

## **The Situation of Christians and Muslims according to the Pew Forum's "Global Restrictions on Religion"**

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research projects, reprints and documentation**

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Thomas Schirrmacher

**The Situation of Christians and Muslims according to the Pew Forum's "Global Restrictions on Religion"**



Prof. Dr. theol. Dr. phil. Thomas Schirrmacher, PhD, DD is director of the International Institute for Religious Freedom (Bonn, Cape Town, Colombo), professor of the sociology of religion at the State University of the West in Timisoara (Romania) and Distinguished Professor of Global Ethics and International Development at William Carey University in Shillong (Meghalaya, India), as well as speaker for human rights of the World Evangelical Alliance, speaking for appr. 600 million Christians. He is member of the board of the International Society for Human Rights. His newest publications include books on 'Fundamentalism', 'Racism', and 'Christians and Democracy'. (Photo: *Schirrmacher (left) with the UN-Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief at a double lecture in Nuremberg.*)

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The following considerations are based on the Pew Forum's 2010 "Global Restrictions on Religion" results.<sup>1</sup> The report comprises 198 countries and territories which make up more than 99% of the world population, and it investigates the two-year period from July 2006 to June 2008. Brian Grim summarizes the report as follows:

"On this basis our study comes to the conclusion that 64 nations – about one-third of the countries in the world – have high or very high restrictions on religion, be it as a result of government limitations, or on the basis of religiously-based hostile acts within society, or on the basis of both. Since some of the most restrictive countries are very populous, this means, however, that nearly 70 percent of the world's population lives in countries with high restrictions on religion. As a result, the brunt often falls most severely on religious minorities."<sup>2</sup>

The *Government Restriction Index* (GRI), which ranges from 0 (complete freedom) to 10 (no freedom whatsoever), is calculated as a result of 20 questions/categories determining countries' restrictions on religious freedom. Both of the country groups listed here are those having high or very high restrictions on religion imposed by the state.

The *Social Restriction Index* (SRI) is calculated on the basis of 13 questions/categories capturing religiously-based hostile acts of all kind within society. Both of the country groups listed here are those having high or very high restrictions on religion by social groups. *All of the following numbers are rounded, while the detailed numbers are found in the tables.*

*Designations such as "Islamic" or "Buddhist" for a country refer to the majority religion, not necessarily a state religion.*

### Muslims according to GRI

In countries with a GRI value of 5 to 6.6, there are 542 million Muslims, while in countries with a GRI value of 6.6 to 10 (thus the highest restriction on religious freedom by the state), there are 236.5 million. That results in a total of **778.5 million**.

From among them, how many Muslims live in countries in which Muslims represent a minority? Those to be mentioned are China with 21 million, Myanmar

(Burma) with 2 million, Russian with 14.5 million, and Vietnam and White Russia (Belarus) together with 184,000. Taken altogether the number is **38 million**. Eritrea is an exception with 2.5 million, where Islam is the largest religious community and accounts for one-half of the population. However, members of that religion do not enjoy any freedom. In the case of Vietnam, China, and in a certain sense Eritrea, one is dealing with socialist/communist countries, and in the case of Myanmar a Buddhist country. In Russia and White Russia, and hence in Christian (Orthodox) countries with a GRI value over 5, there are a total of **14.5 million** Muslims. (Catholics and Protestant countries are completely missing here.)

If we subtract 38 million Muslims from the 778.5 million, we have the number **740.5 million** Muslims, which according to the GRI Index live in Islamic countries with high restrictions on religion or with an absence of religious freedom, i.e., a large majority of Muslims.

**Conclusion:** A majority of Muslims worldwide (namely about 60%) live in countries with high restrictions on religious freedom, and this is in countries where Muslims comprise the majority of the population. (However, they notice little of this, since they have the 'correct' religion. The exception is when they adhere to a form of Islam which is not tolerated, convert to another religion, or let it be known that they are atheists or the like.)

### Christians according to the GRI

In countries with a GRI Index of 5 to 6.6 there are 168 million Christians, and in countries with a GRI Index of 6.6 to 10 (hence with the highest restriction on religious freedom by the state) a further 136 million. Added together this comes to the sum of **304 million**. Of this amount, 121.5 million Christians live in communist countries (China and Vietnam), **121 million** in Orthodox (Christian) countries (Russia and White Russia/Belarus), **54.5 million** in Islamic countries, and 4 million in Buddhist Myanmar (Burma).

(Out of the 121 million Christian who live in the Orthodox [i.e., Christian] countries of Russia and White Russia/Belarus, 108 million are Russian Orthodox. 13 million are Christians belonging to other confessions.)

**Conclusion:** The large part of Christians (namely 85%) who live in countries with high government imposed restrictions on religious freedom, live in countries in which Christians comprise a minority.

<sup>1</sup><http://pewforum.org/docs/?DocID=491>; entire pdf at <http://pewforum.org/uploadedFiles/Topics/Issues/Government/restrictions-fullreport.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup>Brian J. Grim. "Beeinträchtigung von Religion im weltweiten Vergleich: Eine Einführung in aktuelle Forschungsergebnisse." p. 47–59 in Max Klingberg et. al. *Märtyrer 2010: Das Jahrbuch zur Christenverfolgung heute*. Bonn: VKW, 2010. p. 47.

## Muslims according to SHI

In countries with an SHI value of 4.5 to 6.5, there are 353 million Muslims, while in countries with an SHI value of 6.6 to 10 (the highest social oppression of religion), there are 801 million. This is a sum of **1.154 billion**.

Out of that number, how many Muslims live in countries in which Muslims comprise a minority? Taken together this amounts to 173.5 million. In principle, there are five countries that can be left out on account of the small number of Muslims concerned, namely Kenya, Mexico, Sri Lanka, and Israel (moreover, they are countries with an SHI value under 5.0) – in these countries the total number amounts to 7.5 million. The only large group which remains is that of *Muslims in India* with 166 million.

One of the countries is denominationally mixed Christian, one is Catholic Christian, one Jewish, one Buddhist, and India is Hindu. In the ‘Christian’ countries of Kenya and Mexico, which have the particularly low value of 4.7, there are just 3 million Muslims.

If we subtract 173.5 million from the 1.154 billion Muslims, we receive a number of 980.5 million. This is the number of Muslims who according to the SHI Index live in Islamic countries with high restrictions on religious freedom or an absence of religious freedom due to the behavior of the population (SHI), i.e., the large majority of Muslims.

**Conclusion:** A very large majority of Muslims worldwide (namely 85%) live in Islamic countries with high restrictions on religious freedom due to the behavior of the population. (They notice very little of this since they have the ‘correct’ religion. The exception is when they are affiliated with a form of Islam that is not tolerated, convert to another religion or let it be known that they are atheist or the like.)

**Conclusion:** There are not considerable numbers of Muslims living in Christian countries with high restrictions on religious freedom on account of the

behavior of the population or with an absence of religious freedom on account of the behavior of the population.

## Christians according to SHI

In the countries with an SHI Index of 4.7 to 6.5 there are 226.5 Christians, while in countries with an SHI Index of 6.6 to 10 (i.e., the highest social oppression of religion) there are 101 million. Together this amounts to **327.5 million**.

**121 million** of them live in Islamic countries, while 72 million of them are in the Islamic-Christian country of Nigeria, which I count among Islamic countries since the political set of problems is strongly determined by the Islamic federal states. 58.5 million live in the Hindu countries of India and Nepal, 1.8 million in Buddhist Sri Lanka, 177,000 in the Jewish country of Israel, and 139.5 million in the Christian countries of Mexico and Kenya (SHI Index of 4.7).

**Conclusion:** The conclusion with respect to the GRI Index, which is that the larger part of Christians who live in countries with high government imposed restrictions on religious freedom live in countries in which Christians comprise a minority, is not so clearly confirmed in the case of the SHI Index.

### Explanations concerning the attached tables:

- GRI and SHI Index information is from the Pew Forum; all other numbers are from the World Christian Database.
- Regarding the column ‘Christians’ Gray = countries with a Muslim majority.
- Italics = countries with a Christian majority.
- Regarding the column ‘Muslims’ Gray in the column = countries with an Islamic minority.



Country	Population	Christians	Christian %	Muslims	Muslim %	GRI Index
Saudi Arabia	26.246.000	1.144.298	4,36%	24.401.095	92,97%	8,4
Iran	75.078.000	406.962	0,54%	74.060.007	98,64%	8,3
Uzbekistan	27.794.000	348.366	1,25%	22.967.730	82,64%	8,0
China	1.330.585.000	114.364.041	8,60%	20.843.228	1,57%	7,7
Egypt	84.474.000	10.339.157	12,24%	73.608.121	87,41%	7,6
Burma (Myanmar)	50.496.000	3.986.432	7,89%	1.904.675	3,77%	7,5
Maledives	314.000	1.404	0,45%	309.086	98,44%	7,2
Eritrea	5.224.000	2.468.663	47,26%	2.571.105	49,22%	7,0
Malaysia	27.914.000	2.484.210	8,90%	15.800.061	56,60%	6,8
Brunei	407.000	55.916	13,74%	227.370	55,86%	6,7
Complete		135.599.449		236.692.478		

Country	Population	Christians	Christian %	Muslims	Muslim %	GRI Index
Indonesia	232.517.000	27.539.574	11,84%	183.700.581	79,01%	6,6
Mauritania	3.366.000	8.845	0,26%	3.335.686	99,10%	6,5
Pakistan	184.753.000	4.038.107	2,19%	177.647.251	96,15%	6,5
Turkey	75.705.000	219.391	0,29%	73.745.237	97,41%	6,4
Vietnam	89.029.000	7.529.976	8,46%	158.958	0,18%	6,3
Algeria	35.423.000	61.721	0,17%	34.685.807	97,92%	6,2
Belarus	9.588.000	7.076.857	73,81%	25.259	0,26%	6,1
Russia	140.367.000	114.041.632	81,25%	14.585.122	10,39%	6,0
Turkmenistan	5.177.000	79.465	1,53%	4.578.731	88,44%	6,0
Libya	6.546.000	176.803	2,70%	6.325.171	96,63%	5,6
Sudan	43.192.000	7.066.426	16,36%	30.816.898	71,35%	5,6
Tajikistan	7.075.000	101.074	1,43%	6.114.629	86,43%	5,6
Jordan	6.472.000	182.200	2,82%	6.076.486	93,89%	5,3
Complete		168.122.071		541.795.816		

Country	Population	Christians	Christian %	Muslims	Muslim %	SHI Index
Iraq	31.467.000	564.703	1,79%	30.626.084	97,33%	9,4
India	1.214.464.000	57.550.262	4,74%	165.958.890	13,67%	8,8
Pakistan	184.753.000	4.038.107	2,19%	177.647.251	96,15%	8,4
Afghanistan	29.117.000	29.992	0,10%	29.037.669	99,73%	8,1
Indonesia	232.517.000	27.539.574	11,84%	183.700.581	79,01%	7,8
Bangladesh	164.425.000	817.013	0,50%	146.090.117	88,85%	7,5
Somalia	9.359.000	4.439	0,05%	9.335.702	99,75%	7,4
Israel	7.285.000	177.208	2,43%	1.408.179	19,33%	7,2
Sri Lanka	20.410.000	1.791.098	8,78%	1.948.399	9,55%	7,1
Sudan	43.192.000	7.066.426	16,36%	30.816.898	71,35%	6,8
Saudi Arabia	26.246.000	1.144.298	4,36%	24.401.095	92,97%	6,8
Complete		100.723.120		800.970.865		

Country	Population	Christians	Christian %	Muslims	Muslim %	SHI Index
Egypt	84.474.000	10.339.157	12,24%	73.608.121	87,41%	6,5
Palestine	4.409.000	81.951	1,86%	3.554.047	80,61%	6,3
Yemen	24.256.000	41.765	0,17%	24.032.439	99,08%	6,2
Nigeria	158.259.000	72.023.815	45,51%	71.845.953	45,40%	5,8
Comoros	691.000	3.587	0,52%	679.208	98,29%	5,6
Kyrgyzstan	5.550.000	335.626	6,05%	3.864.409	69,63%	5,5
Syria	22.505.000	1.169.358	5,20%	20.877.202	92,77%	5,4
Nepal	29.853.000	904.305	3,03%	1.263.049	4,23%	5,4
Iran	75.078.000	406.962	0,54%	74.060.007	98,64%	5,2
Lebanon	4.255.000	1.508.660	35,46%	2.470.012	58,05%	4,9
Turkey	75.705.000	219.391	0,29%	73.745.237	97,41%	4,9
Mexico	110.645.000	106.058.166	95,85%	103.650	0,09%	4,7
Kenya	40.863.000	33.400.991	81,74%	2.879.163	7,05%	4,7
Complete		226.493.734,00		352.982.497		



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