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# Rise in religion

In many countries around the world organised religion is taking on a greater role in public life. Both traditional world religions and non-traditional faith movements are increasing in numbers and strength, particularly in post-Soviet states and China – a trend that is shifting the global religious and cultural landscape.

The apparent rise of religious fundamentalism is only one aspect of this phenomenon, albeit an important one. As the global South becomes increasingly religious, religious doctrines and faith-based arguments could provide the impetus for values shifts across society. Ethical and moral issues may take greater prominence in national conversations, and business, governments and other organisations that do not pay heed to them may face a backlash.

It is therefore important that business, governments and NGOs understand the impact of religious teachings and values on motivations, attitudes and behaviours – including on business and consumer ethics. [1]

Footnotes:

1. World Economic Forum (2014). Does Faith Matter? Leaders on the Role of Faith in Society, pg 3

## Implications

- Religion will likely remain a significant component of individual, community and national identity in future, with the spread of representative governments providing an opportunity for some religions to become increasingly politically assertive. [1] Religion could also exert more influence over consumer culture in some countries.
- Some fragile states – especially in the Middle East and North Africa – may struggle to break the cycle of power politics, patronage, religious tension and authoritarianism. Social, environmental and economic issues – including an under-employed young population, a decline in natural energy resources and the effects of climate change – may continue to threaten the region’s stability, with further implications for the societal role and influence of religion. [2]
- Some interpretations of religious doctrine may continue to prevent women from taking part in education and the economy. [3]
- Religious institutions can be powerful advocates of sustainability, as shown by their involvement with the nascent fossil fuel divestment movement, and Pope Francis’ statements on climate change.

Footnotes:

1. Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre - UK Ministry of Defence (2014). Global Strategic Trends-Out to 2040.
2. Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre - UK Ministry of Defence (2014). Global Strategic Trends-Out to 2040.
3. Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre - UK Ministry of Defence (2014). Global Strategic Trends-Out to 2040.

## Current trajectory

- In 1970, nearly 80% of the world's population was religious. By 2010 this had risen to around 88%, and could reach almost 90% by 2020. The growth of religious adherence can largely be attributed to the continuing resurgence of religion in China and post-Soviet states. [1]
- According to the World Bank, the nations with the lowest proportions of religious people had an average annual population growth rate of just 0.7% over the period 1975-97, while the populations of the most religious countries grew three times as fast. [2]
- The world's Muslim population is expected to increase by about 35% in the next 20 years, according to projections by the Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life, rising from 1.6 billion in 2010 to 2.2 billion by 2030 - a slightly faster rate than the global population growth rate. [3]
- In the World Economic Forum's 2013 survey, faith plays a significant role in issues related to anti-corruption, business ethics and civil society. It is also seen as an important influence on the response to climate change, an informed society, sustainability and population growth. [4]
- Religion-related hostility, such as attacks on minority faiths or pressure to conform to certain norms, was strong in one-third of the 198 countries and territories surveyed for a Pew Research Report in 2012, especially in the Middle East and North Africa. Religious-related terrorism and sectarian violence occurred in one-fifth of those countries in that year, while states imposed legal limits on worship, preaching or religious wear in almost 30% of them. [5]
- Although three former US presidents had no formal religious affiliation, since Andrew Johnson left office in 1869 every US president has been affiliated with a Christian church. A Pew survey carried out in 2014 found that half (53%) of Americans would be less likely to support an atheist for president - slightly lower than the 63% who gave the same response when the survey was carried out in 2007, though still a larger share than for any other trait, including being gay or never having held elected office. [6]
- The number of atheists fell from 4.5% of the world's population in 1970 to 2.0% in 2010, and is projected to drop further to 1.8% by 2020, according to a new report by the Center for the Study of Global Christianity at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. [7] [8]

### Footnotes:

1. Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary in Massachusetts (2013). Christianity In Its Global Context,

1970-2010.

2. [The Economist – Intelligent Life \(2008\). Faith Equals Fertility](#)
3. [Pew Forum \(2010\) The Future of the Global Muslim Population.](#)
4. World Economic Forum (2014). Does Faith Matter? Leaders on the Role of Faith in Society, pg 6.
5. Pew Research Centre (2014). Religious Hostilities Reach Six-Year High Report.
6. [Pew Research Centre \(2014\). Americans are somewhat more open to the idea of an atheist president](#)
7. [Center for the Study of Global Christianity at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary \(2013, June\). Christianity in its Global Context, 1970-2020 - Society, Religion, and Mission](#)
8. This is highly contested, with Gallup's 2012 survey directly contradicting this statistic by stating that global atheism has instead risen. Both Gordon-Conwell's and Gallup's statistics can be problematic. Gallup's survey was based on self-identification and it surveyed over 50, 000 individuals from just 57 countries, making it hardly representative while Gordon-Conwell's data is based on national censuses which can be misleading depending on how citizens are categorised in each state. Even though both have problems, we chose the Gordon-Conwell statistic as it is more representative of the global population.