Pew: Muslims projected to outnumber Christians worldwide by 2035

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News

On 18 November 2026 the Washington-based Pew Research Center released new projections of the world's religious groups for 2020–2070. If recent trends continue, the world's Muslim population (about 2.57 billion) will exceed the Christian population (about 2.52 billion) by 2035, making Islam the largest religion by number of followers. In 2020 there were about 2.27 billion Christians and 2.02 billion Muslims; by 2070 Muslims would number over 3.6 billion and Christians just under 3 billion. The main driver is fertility – Muslim women averaged 3.1 children in 2020–25, Christians 2.5 and others 1.6 – along with the younger age profile of Muslims. Pew demographer Conrad Hackett summed it up: 'It's the babies.' Pew said religious switching is a much smaller factor and that one group's growth is not coming at the other's expense (AP). By 2070 Pakistan is projected to have the largest Muslim population, followed by India, Nigeria and Indonesia. It is a projection based on current trends, not a certainty.

Key facts for the exam

Point	Details
Report	Projections of the world's religious groups, 2020–2070 – Pew Research Center
Released	18 November 2026

Point	Details
2020	Christians ~2.27 bn; Muslims ~2.02 bn
2035 (projected)	Muslims ~2.57 bn; Christians ~2.52 bn
2070 (projected)	Muslims >3.6 bn; Christians <3 bn
Fertility (2020–25)	Muslims 3.1; Christians 2.5; others 1.6
Main driver	Higher fertility, younger age profile; switching a minor factor
Most Muslims now	Indonesia; Pakistan by 2070 (projected)

Background

- Population projections combine fertility, age structure, mortality, migration and religious switching. Replacement-level fertility is about 2.1. Most of the world's population growth in coming decades will be in Africa, especially south of the Sahara, where most people are Christians or Muslims (AP).
- Indian Constitution: Article 25 – freedom of conscience and to profess, practise and propagate religion (under its Explanation II, 'Hindus' in 25(2)(b) includes Sikhs, Jains and Buddhists); Article 26 – freedom of religious denominations to manage their own affairs; Article 27 – no compulsory tax to promote a religion; Article 28 – no religious instruction in State-funded institutions. 'Secular' was added to the Preamble by the 42nd Amendment, 1976.
- In India, religion-wise population data come from the decennial Census, conducted under the Census Act, 1948. The next Census (2027) will be the first digital one.

Tamil Nadu link: Tamil Nadu is known for religious harmony: in Nagapattinam district, a few kilometres apart, stand the Nagore Dargah (of Sufi saint Hazrat Shahul Hameed) and the Velankanni Basilica of Our Lady of Good Health, both visited by people of all faiths.

Frequently asked questions

What is this news about?

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What are the key facts to remember for the exam?

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Practice questions (with answers)

1. Which country currently has the world's largest Muslim population?

A) Indonesia

B) Pakistan

C) India

D) Bangladesh

Answer: A – Explanation: Indonesia. Pew projects Pakistan will lead by 2070, followed by India.

2. Which Article gives religious denominations the right to manage their own affairs and own property?

A) Article 25

B) Article 28

C) Article 26

D) Article 29

Answer: C – Explanation: Article 26. Article 25 is individual religious freedom; Article 28 bars religious instruction in State institutions.

3. India's Census, which collects religion-wise population data, is conducted under which law?

A) Registration Act, 1908

B) Census Act, 1948

C) Statistics Act, 2008

D) Births Regn. Act, 1969

Answer: B – Explanation: The Census Act, 1948. The 2027 Census will be India's first digital census.

4. Under Article 25(2)(b), the reference to 'Hindus' is construed as including persons of which religions?

A) Parsis, Jews

B) Christians, Parsis

C) Jews, Bahais

D) Sikhs, Jains, Buddhists

Answer: D – Explanation: Sikhs, Jains and Buddhists – Explanation II to Article 25. Explanation I treats wearing a kirpan as part of the Sikh religion.

5. The Nagore Dargah in Nagapattinam district is the shrine of which Sufi saint?

A) Hazrat Shahul Hameed

B) Moinuddin Chishti

C) Nizamuddin Auliya

D) Salim Chishti

Answer: A – Explanation: Hazrat Shahul Hameed – honoured each year at the Kanduri festival. Moinuddin Chishti – Ajmer; Nizamuddin – Delhi; Salim Chishti – Fatehpur Sikri.

Sources: Pew Research Center, 18 Nov 2026 – pewresearch.org; AP via AJC; DD News; Census of India; Constitution of India; Tamil Nadu Tourism. © Shanmugam IAS Academy.