

## **Issue Brief: Minority Religions and Violence in the United States**

### Key Words:

Minority Religions, Christians, Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Violence, United States Census

### Description:

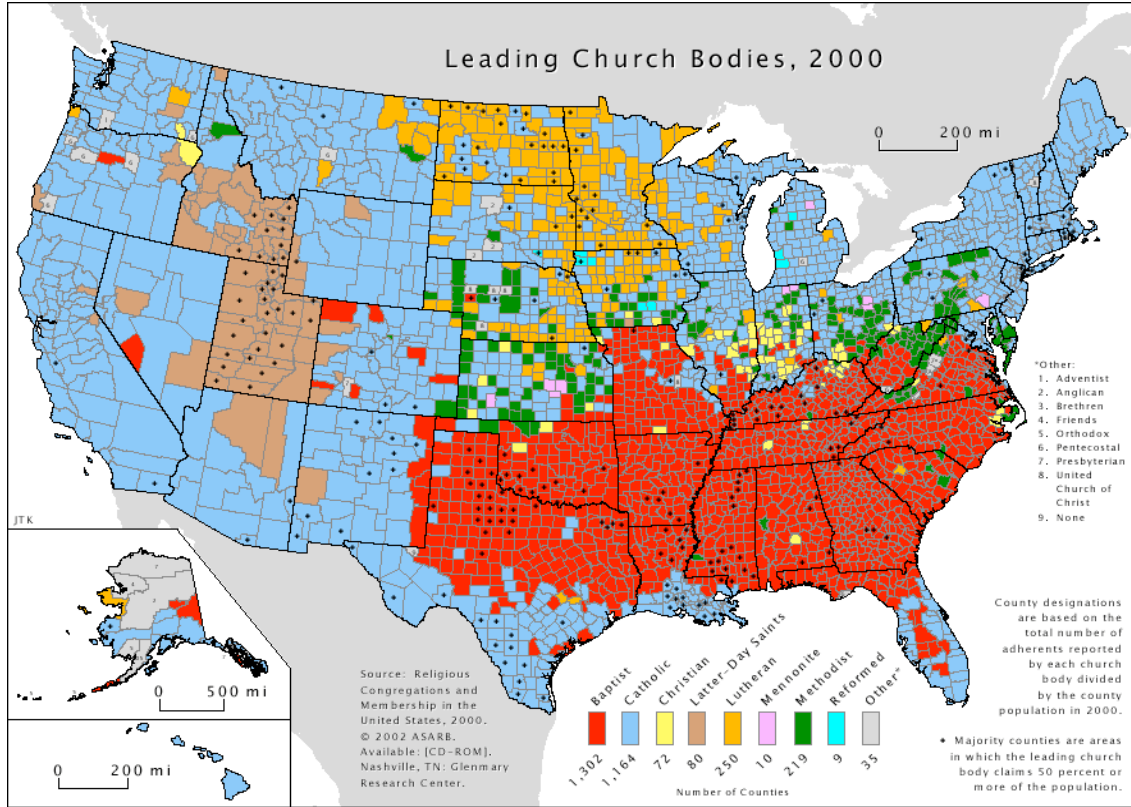
This issue brief explores the use of violence by and against Minority Religions. It will center around attacks, the threat of attacks and other sorts of external interference that specifically seek to hinder worship by minority religious groups in the United States.

### Key Points:

- Recent surveys performed in the United States have shown that the percentage of individuals identifying with some religion besides Christianity is small.
- Estimates range between 11% and 16% for those who say they have no religion while only 5% to 9% of Americans claim religious adherence to some belief system other than Christianity.
- 67% of all Americans state that religion is of “importance to their daily lives”.
- Different minority religions are the targets of religiously motivated violence within the United States at differing rates.

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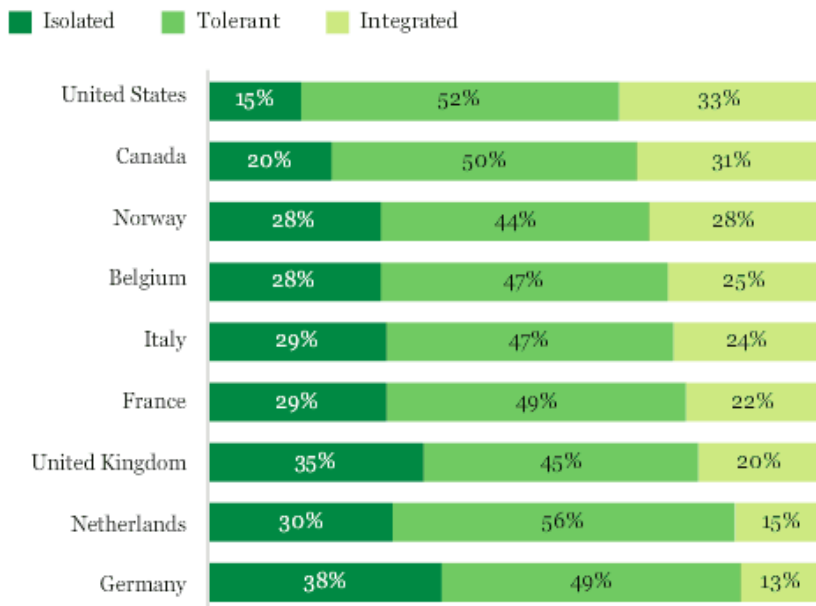
The number of individuals who identify with some religion other than Christianity in the United States is relatively small. According to recent surveys by the Pew Research Forum, as few as 4.7% of all persons living in the United States identify with some religion other than Christianity. Historically, religious minorities have been victims of violence in the forms of physical attacks, vandalism, theft and intimidation. We should also take into account that religious representation occurs in differing percentages depending on the geographical region of the United States that we take into consideration. The following table illustrates how, even among those claiming practice of Christianity--the country's majority religion—one can observe various densities of denominations across counties and states:



Religious violence persists as a problem in the United States, but one must also note (1) the significant progress that the United States has made on this front and (2) the vigilant defense of religious freedoms by persons of all faiths. Gallup polls show that only 15% of Americans can be described as religiously “isolated”. Gallup defines this as meaning, “They do not want to know about other religions. They also neither respect nor feel respected by those of other faiths.” Generally, this data indicates that residents of the United States have more open minds with regard to individuals practicing faiths different from their own relative to citizens of other nations, including European and North American industrialized powers such as the United Kingdom, Canada and Germany.

*United States, Canada More Likely to Have "Integrated" Populations*

Among all respondents



Data collected in 2008

GALLUP POLL

However, these favorable statistics should not distract us from the severity of that strife derived from religious differences in the United States. According to 2006 data released by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1,750 individual attacks made on the primary basis of religion were reported in the United States for that year. This represent 18.1% of all hate crimes committed in the United States for that year. Examples of such violence are still occurring. On October 13, 2009, the University of Memphis reported that a house planned as the future residence of a Jewish fraternity had been vandalized. Two large red swastikas were found painted on the exterior of the building. Curt Guenter, forcefully stated on the behalf of the University of Memphis, "We condemn that. We have no part in it whatsoever."

It is also important to note that not all individuals victimized for religious purposes actually practice the religion for which they are attacked. For example, the organization Human Rights First notes that occasionally those individuals attacked because the attacker believes them to be Muslim are in fact not Muslim. The attacker bases his or her assumptions of the victim's faith on clothing and general appearance, or, rather, those externally observable characteristics comprising "race and ethnicity". This trend shows that attackers are typically ignorant of the religious practices of their victims, do not seek to understand the religious beliefs of their victims prior to the attack, and that attacks based on religious discrimination roughly correlate with those based on racial and ethnic discrimination.

Denunciations of violence and persecution have been made at every level of government in the United States. United States President Barack Obama perhaps gave the most memorable recent example of such an inclusionary act in his 2009 inauguration address. He made a clear point of acknowledging the important place

of minority religions in the United States, stating, "We are a nation of Christians and Muslims, Jews and Hindus, and nonbelievers...America must play its role in ushering in a new era of peace." Such rhetoric gives hope for decreased examples of violence committed on the grounds of religious practices. Such rhetoric must also be taken in the light of this fact: the United States government makes more widespread effort than any other nation to monitor and decrease examples of violence against individuals and groups practicing minority religions.

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