

ENVIRONMENT

# MUDDY WATERS

England's rivers are under the spotlight, after recent findings suggested only 17 per cent are in either good or high health

The figure comes from an annual Environment Agency (EA) study into the health of 'water bodies' - segments of river divided into comparable sections - using a Europe-wide classification system called the Water Framework Directive (WFD). Each water body is graded across various ecological and chemical categories as either bad, poor, moderate, good or high.

However, much of the difference can be explained by a tightening of rules across the whole continent. It's more than likely there hasn't been an actual change compared to last year in the rivers, it's more that monitoring systems are now more sophisticated,' explains Rose O'Neill, water policy manager for WWF. 'The EA doesn't actually know if things have got worse, but what it has done is make a significant improvement to its monitoring system, which means it now has a much better idea of the health of rivers.'

'After considerable investment, rivers in England are the healthiest for 20 years,' claimed an EA spokesperson. It pointed out that for the individual tests done on the water bodies, 74 per cent were graded either good or high. 'EU legislation means the assessment criteria has just got even tougher.'

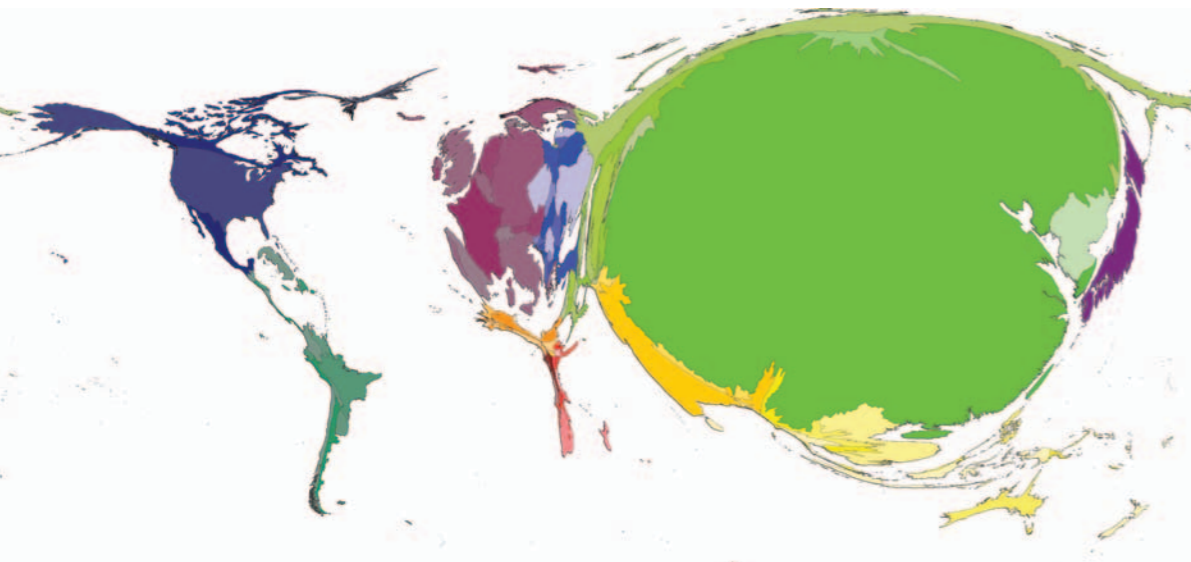
Nevertheless, O'Neill highlights that most other European countries are still performing much better when it comes to river health, with an average of 53 per cent of water bodies across the continent graded either good or high. 'There has been quite a bit of progress over the last five or six years on tackling water company pollution and over extraction,' she says. 'The other major pressure on our rivers is pollution running off of farms. When it rains you get all of the water that falls on the farmlands taking all the minerals, fertilisers and nutrients and washing it into rivers. That agricultural pollution is responsible for about a third of our rivers failing.'



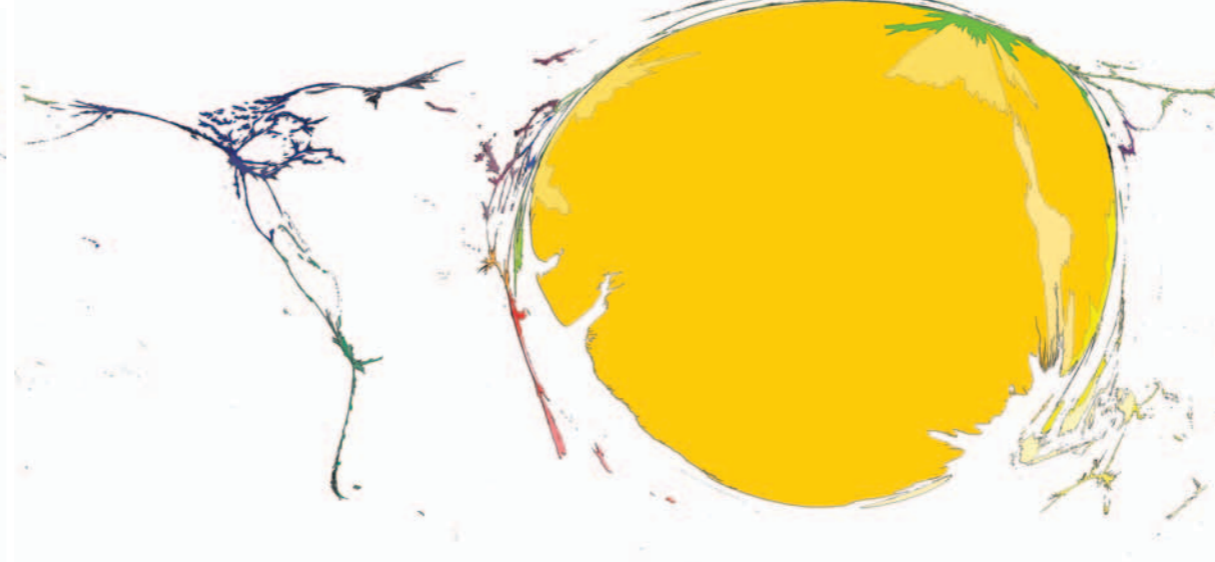
CHRISTIANS (2.2 billion)



MUSLIMS (1.6 billion)



NON RELIGIOUS (1 billion)



HINDUS (1 billion)

CARTOGRAMS

## WORLD RELIGIONS

BY BENJAMIN HENNIG

Religion as something 'eminently social' (as described by Émile Durkheim) finds its expression in the distribution of the major religious groups in the world. These have distinct geographical patterns to them, showing the regional influences that each of the groups define, as well as the spread of these influences in the course of history which have significantly changed over the past centuries.

Today, the three largest religions as well as the group of

the non-religious put together make up 5.8 billion people, accounting for almost 80 per cent of the world's population. This highlights their importance in understanding some of the world's social, cultural and political realities that define how people live together within countries but also between borders. As much as religion can unite and reconcile, it can equally be the cause of conflict and violence.

Conflict and peace are both elements that are replicated in the diverse religious shapes that emerge in the cartogram series of these four largest religious groups as assembled in the World Religion Database (adjusted to today's populations). The cartograms above show the countries of the world resized according to the distribution of people within each of the four groups. A consistent colour scheme is used throughout all the maps giving every region an individual shade and every country a unique colour within this shade.

Christianity is the largest group with 2.2 billion followers and is also the most spread large religion. While numbers in the wealthy world are in constant decline, this group remains strong and stable in regions such as

Africa and South America. Islam, with 1.6 billion followers, forms the largest religious group in about 57 countries concentrated in Northern Africa and Asia (including the Middle East), where the majority of Muslims live. The third-largest group related to religion are the approximately 1 billion 'unbelievers' or irreligious people. It is a very diverse group (as much as it is the hardest to quantify), ranging from agnostics to atheists. The geographical distribution reflects the long history of irreligion in China over a long period of time, still outnumbering the growing numbers in the wealthier parts of the world, such as Europe and North America.

The third-largest religious group, and fourth-largest group in this feature, is Hinduism with one billion followers. It is, geographically, the most concentrated group, forming the largest religion in India and being generally strong in South Asia.

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