

Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (<https://www.ncronline.org>)

May 14, 2014 at 10:49am

Survey: One-quarter of the world harbors anti-Semitic sentiment

by Lauren Markoe by Religion News Service

The first global study of anti-Semitic attitudes shows that more than a quarter of the world's population harbors intense anti-Jewish sentiment, with region, more than religion, shaping people's view of Jews and Judaism.

The poll, released Tuesday by the New York-based Anti-Defamation League, also finds that a large proportion of the world has never heard of the Holocaust or denies historical accounts of it.

Of those polled, 46 percent have either not heard of the Holocaust that killed 6 million Jews or think it is a myth or exaggerated.

"For the first time we have a real sense of how pervasive and persistent anti-Semitism is today around the world," said Abraham H. Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League.

He called the results of the Global 100 Index "sobering but not surprising" and said it would serve as a baseline for the ADL to understand where anti-Semitism is most prevalent and where education is most necessary. The results of the survey of 102 nations and territories revealed stark regional differences, and hotspots of anti-Semitism around the globe.

The survey found that the least anti-Semitic place in the world is Laos, where anti-Semitic beliefs are held by just 0.2 percent of the population. The most anti-Semitic place is in Israel's backyard, the West Bank and Gaza, where 93 percent of people held anti-Semitic beliefs.

The 10 most anti-Semitic countries and territories, according to the survey, are the West Bank and Gaza, Iraq, Yemen, Algeria, Libya, Tunisia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Jordan and Morocco.

The 10 least anti-Semitic countries, surveyors found, are Laos, the Philippines, Sweden, the Netherlands, Vietnam, the United Kingdom, the United States, Denmark, Tanzania and Thailand.

In the United States, 9 percent of those surveyed revealed anti-Semitic views.

The poll is based on 11 questions that refer to common stereotypes about Jews, such as "Jews have too much power in international financial markets" and "Jews are responsible for most of the world's wars." Those who answered "probably true" to six or more questions were deemed to be anti-Semitic.

Overall, 28 percent of respondents answered "no" to all 11 stereotypes presented of Jews when asked if they were true.

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Asked if a person could still be considered anti-Semitic for affirming only three anti-Semitic stereotypes, Foxman said the ADL purposely set the bar for anti-Semitism very high, so as to make its results conservative.

The ADL found that much of the world greatly overestimates the global Jewish population: Nearly half the respondents (48 percent) believe that Jews account for more than 1 percent of the population, and nearly one in five (18 percent) believe they make up 10 percent. In reality, Jews account for 0.19 percent of the world's people.

Though the survey found Muslims to harbor more anti-Semitic views than Christians, Hindus and Buddhists -- and Protestants fared better in the survey than Catholics -- a person's region seemed to correlate more strongly with views on Jews than did a person's religion.

Among Muslims, nearly half (49 percent) were found to hold anti-Semitic views. But across the Muslim-majority Middle East and North Africa, 75 percent of Muslims held anti-Semitic views. Muslims outside of the Middle East and North Africa showed lower levels of anti-Semitic attitudes; 64 percent of Christians in the Middle East and North Africa held anti-Semitic views, compared with 24 percent of Christians overall.

Regionally, 74 percent of all respondents in the Middle East and North Africa held anti-Semitic attitudes. That compares with 23 percent of all people in sub-Saharan Africa, 22 percent in Asia, 19 percent in the Americas and 14 percent in Oceania, the region with the lowest anti-Semitic scores in the world.

The survey shows that Greece, at 69 percent, has the highest levels of anti-Semitic attitudes of any country outside the Middle East, a proportion far higher than the Western European average of 24 percent. Already, Foxman said, "the prime minister of Greece had learned of our findings and requested that we come and visit."

A large majority of respondents (74 percent) said they had never met a Jew, and of those, one in four displayed anti-Semitic attitudes. Of the 26 percent of people worldwide who harbor anti-Semitic attitudes, 70 percent said they had never met a Jewish person, the survey showed.

Survey researchers polled more than 53,000 adults in 96 languages. The study has a margin of error of plus or minus 4.4 percentage points for most countries.

The survey was funded by a grant from New York philanthropist Leonard Stern. Foxman said the survey cost "a lot" but declined to disclose the exact cost.

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