

## WEB REVIEW: *The Pew Forum On Religion & Public Life*

By Trisha A. Burr

“The Pew Research Center’s Forum on Religion & Public Life” offers a wealth of information on what they describe as the “intersection of religion and public life.” It is dense with data, tables, and graphs – most of which are taken from surveys and statistical analysis done by the Pew Research Center. The website offers a transparent look at their source material with extensive footnotes, links to other polls that may have been used, and questions that were asked during surveys. Most of the articles on the website are executive summaries with links to the full documents.

The Pew Forum is part of the Pew Research Center, which is a Washington-based nonpartisan, non-advocacy organization that is funded by the Pew Charitable Trust. According to their website, “The Pew Forum conducts surveys, demographic analyses and other social science research on important aspects of religion and public life in the U.S. and around the world.” They also purport to not take positions on any of the issues covered or on policy debates.

Since the Pew Forum seeks to address how religion and public life intersect, the main issues are broken down into the following topical sections: Abortion, Church-State Law, Death Penalty, Education, Gay Marriage & Homosexuality, Government, Politics & Elections, Science & Bioethics, and Social Welfare. For example, if you want to find the “official statement” from the Evangelical Church in America (ELCA) on capital punishment, you don’t need to read through a lengthy document from the ELCA website which may or may not help you to understand where the denomination stands. The issue has been summarized on the Pew Forum’s website along with the positions of other religious affiliations. A researcher who wants to find out more about the evolution debate they can look under the “Education” link and find a handy timeline that starts in 1809 with Charles Darwin’s birth in Shropshire, England and ends in 2007 with the Kansas Board of Education.

The Pew Forum is kept up-to-date with religious feeds from the web and a “Spotlight” section that currently features “Religion & Politics 2012.” Here you can find a short synopsis of each candidate’s religious affiliation and beliefs. There are also links to recent articles covering religious topics related to each candidate from other news sources. It’s an incredibly useful resource in this political season. If you need to find where a candidate actually stands on an issue, this is a good place to start.

Although the Pew Forum website is dense with information, it’s user friendly and easy to navigate. The main section of the home page lists recent stories that contain polls, graphics, and analysis. If you click into any of these, there are tables and graphs that detail their findings. Slideshows are also available for certain topics with downloadable charts of the presentations. Do you want to know about “The Future of the Global Muslim Population: Projections for 2010-2030”? You can download the full 221-page report or read the executive summary with a hyperlinked table of contents on the right.

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The Pew Forum offers insights into trends with supporting data about the global religious climate. The amount of information contained here is a data geek's dream. The website is a highly relevant resource for a journalist, sociologist, or researcher looking for quantitative data about major religious groups and their positions related to public life. If a student or faculty member is looking for nonpartisan primary research on religion, point them to "The Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life" and they won't be disappointed.

