



This is an archived site and is no longer being updated. New 538 articles can be found at www.abcnews.com/538.



AUG. 13, 2014, AT 5:00 PM

Dear Mona Followup: Where Do People Drink The Most Beer, Wine And Spirits?

By [Mona Chalabi](#)

Filed under [Drinks](#)

Get the data on [GitHub](#)



Nepalese farmers drink wheat beer as they work at a rice field in Chunnikhel, Katmandu, Nepal, in June.

NIRANJAN SHRESTHA / AP

On Friday, I [responded to a question](#) from a reader who wanted to know how many people had, like him, never had a drink of alcohol. After looking at trends within the

U.S., I compared the percentage of lifetime abstainers in countries across the world using data from the World Health Organization (WHO).

People in Islamic countries conformed to assumptions (mine at least) about being the most likely to abstain from alcohol, but what about international trends in alcohol consumption?

Luckily, being a health organization, WHO isn't just interested in who is and isn't drinking — it wants to know what's in their glasses and how much they're knocking back. It has national data on average alcohol consumption per capita for those age 15 and over in each country.

The data also describes consumption by beverage type: wine, beer, spirits and “other.” To break consumption down by beverage, WHO again used government records as well as statistics from the alcohol industry and the United Nation's [Food and Agriculture Organization](#) database.

WHO presents the data in liters of pure alcohol consumed in 2010. But to make the comparisons more comprehensible (after all, when was the last time you ordered a liter of pure alcohol?), I've taken [average alcohol content](#) and [average serving size](#) for each beverage and converted those numbers into standard serving sizes. The results show how many glasses of wine, cans of beer and shots of spirits were drunk per person in each country in 2010. Here are the countries that drink the most of each drink in per-capita terms (you can find the full results in the lengthy table at the bottom of this article):

Who Drinks The Most Beer, Spirits And Wine?

Top 10 countries by servings consumed per person, 2010

	BEER		SPIRITS		WINE	
1	Namibia	376	Grenada	438	France	370
2	Czech Rep.	361	Belarus	373	Portugal	339
3	Gabon	347	Russia	326	Andorra	312
4	Germany	346	Haiti	326	Switzerland	280
5	Lithuania	343	Saint Lucia	315	Denmark	278
6	Poland	343	Guyana	302	Slovenia	276
7	Venezuela	333	Slovakia	293	Luxembourg	271
8	Ireland	313	Dominica	286	Croatia	254
9	Palau	306	Thailand	258	Italy	237
10	Romania	297	Cook Islands	254	Eqtr. Guinea	233

FIVETHIRTYEIGHT

SOURCE: WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

Some of that data conforms to [stereotypes](#). The French consume more wine than people in any other country — 370 glasses of wine per person per year, compared to just 84 glasses in the U.S. Remember though, these are just drinking figures per capita — they don't take [all those abstainers](#) into consideration. The wine consumption of the drinking population of France will be higher still.

Namibia is the world's biggest beer-drinking country, with 376 12-ounce cans of beer consumed per person. In Germany, the average is 346 cans, and in the U.S. it's 249 cans.

If you assume that 1.5 fluid ounces is a normal measure of hard liquor (that's about a shot-glass worth), then the average person in Grenada drinks 438 measures of spirit per year. That's far more than any other country — including Russia, where the average is 326 measures.

My colleague Ritchie King (while he was working at Quartz) [used Euromonitor data](#) to look in even more detail at which spirits are purchased in each country. Yes, before you ask, Russia does go for vodka and Mexicans choose tequila. According to those sales numbers, Americans' favorite spirit is vodka, but that's a relatively new phenomenon. One brand, Smirnoff Vodka, ["took America by storm"](#) in the late 1940s, "capitalizing on

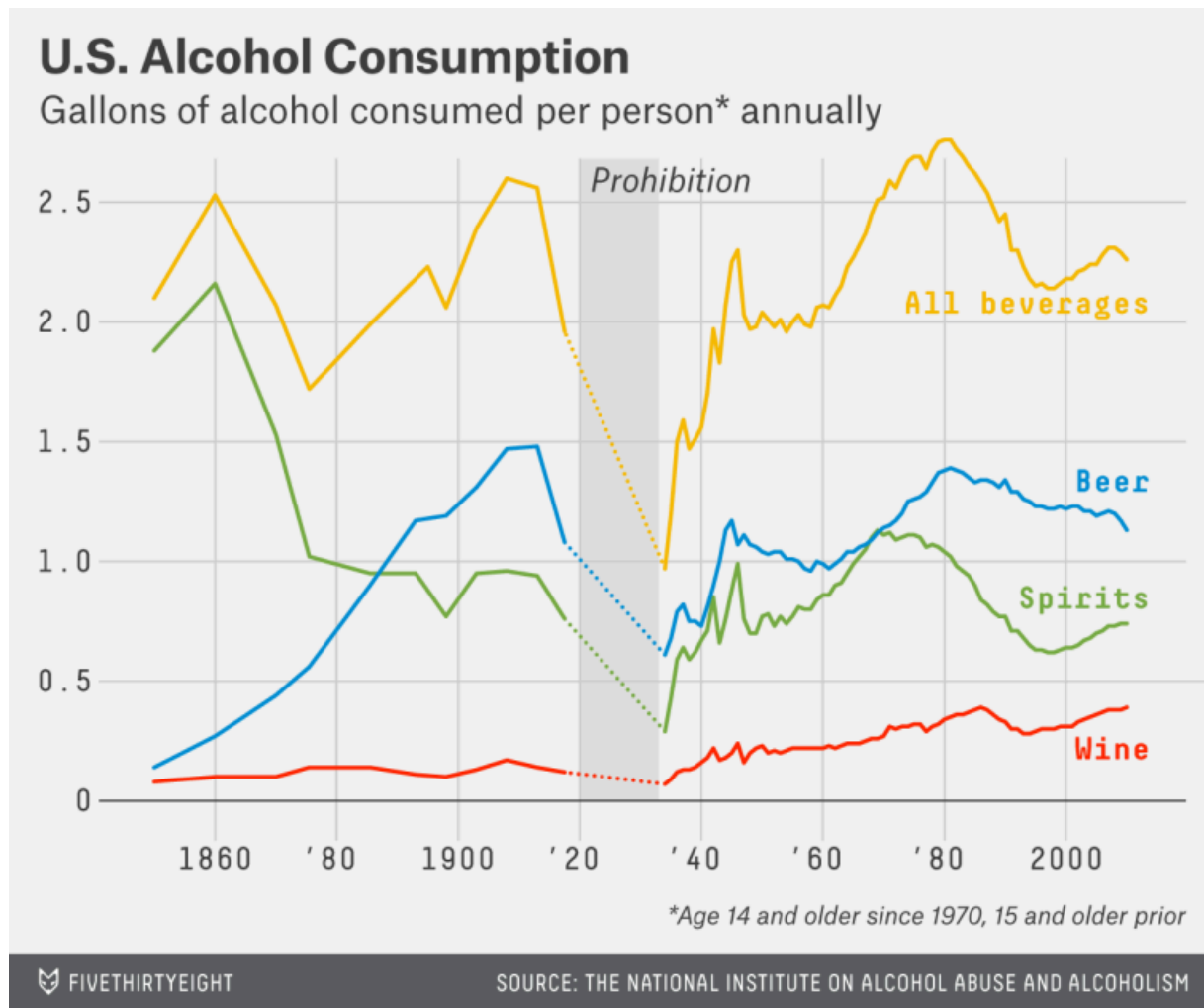
the popularity of America's new ally just after WWII by marketing the Moscow Mule, made with vodka and Cock 'N Bull ginger beer."

But there's an even more simple explanation for changing tastes in spirits: availability.

According to Bowling Green State University professor [Scott Martin](#), who studies the use of drugs and alcohol in the U.S., grain was needed for food as opposed to distillation during WWII, and imported liquor such as Scotch was scarce. "Rum from the Caribbean, however, was more available, though not initially as popular," he said in an email. "Bars had to push rum because it was all they could get, so they created new drinks, such as [the Hurricane](#) in New Orleans."

Beyond spirits, we do have some idea about the popularity of alcohol in the U.S. The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism has [data](#) going all the way back to 1850. Overall, it shows that after prohibition, alcohol consumption per person (age 15 and over before 1970, 14 and over thereafter) rose, peaking in the early 1980s at 2.76 gallons per year, then fell in the late 1990s before rising again to 2.26 gallons per year in 2010.

The data also demonstrates changing American tastes. In 2010, wine consumption was the highest it had been in any of the previous 160 years. Since the 19th century, beer has been a firm national favorite. Although spirits briefly caught up in the 1960s, beer is consumed more than any other alcoholic beverage.



Those fluctuations are due to “factors like availability, price, government regulation, and technology,” Martin said. Take the example of beer before 1900. Martin explained that it “was less popular, or at least less consumed, before the 20th century because it was perishable. With technological innovations like refrigeration, bottling, cans, and so on, beer became easier to produce, transport and sell, both at bars and at home.”

These days, American purchasing choices aren’t so different from international ones. In 101 of the 193 countries WHO looked at, people drank more servings of beer than any other alcohol, followed by spirits (59 countries), then wine (20). The other 13 countries, most of which have predominately Muslim populations, recorded alcohol consumption as zero. (You can find the data behind this table [on Github](#).)

Have a question you would like answered here? Send it to dearmona@fivethirtyeight.com or [@DataLab538](https://twitter.com/DataLab538).

COUNTRY	BEER SERVINGS	SPIRIT SERVINGS	WINE SERVINGS	TOTAL LITERS PURE ALCOHOL
Afghanistan	0	0	0	0.0
Albania	89	132	54	4.9
Algeria	25	0	14	0.7
Andorra	245	138	312	12.4
Angola	217	57	45	5.9
Antigua & Barbuda	102	128	45	4.9
Argentina	193	25	221	8.3
Armenia	21	179	11	3.8
Australia	261	72	212	10.4
Austria	279	75	191	9.7
Azerbaijan	21	46	5	1.3
Bahamas	122	176	51	6.3
Bahrain	42	63	7	2.0
Bangladesh	0	0	0	0.0
Barbados	143	173	36	6.3
Belarus	142	373	42	14.4
Belgium	295	84	212	10.5
Belize	263	114	8	6.8
Benin	34	4	13	1.1
Bhutan	23	0	0	0.4
Bolivia	167	41	8	3.8
Bosnia-Herzegovina	76	173	8	4.6
Botswana	173	35	35	5.4
Brazil	245	145	16	7.2
Brunei	31	2	1	0.6
Bulgaria	231	252	94	10.3
Burkina Faso	25	7	7	4.3
Burundi	88	0	0	6.3
Cabo Verde	144	56	16	4.0
Cambodia	57	65	1	2.2
Cameroon	147	1	4	5.8

Country	Beer (liters per person per year)	Wine (liters per person per year)	Spirits (liters per person per year)	Total (liters per person per year)
Canada	240	122	100	8.2
Central African Republic	17	2	1	1.8
Chad	15	1	1	0.4
Chile	130	124	172	7.6
China	79	192	8	5.0
Colombia	159	76	3	4.2
Comoros	1	3	1	0.1
Congo	76	1	9	1.7
Cook Islands	0	254	74	5.9
Costa Rica	149	87	11	4.4
Cote d'Ivoire	37	1	7	4.0
Croatia	230	87	254	10.2
Cuba	93	137	5	4.2
Cyprus	192	154	113	8.2
Czech Republic	361	170	134	11.8
Denmark	224	81	278	10.4
Djibouti	15	44	3	1.1
Dominica	52	286	26	6.6
Dominican Republic	193	147	9	6.2
DR Congo	32	3	1	2.3
Ecuador	162	74	3	4.2
Egypt	6	4	1	0.2
El Salvador	52	69	2	2.2
Equatorial Guinea	92	0	233	5.8
Eritrea	18	0	0	0.5
Estonia	224	194	59	9.5
Ethiopia	20	3	0	0.7
Fiji	77	35	1	2.0
Finland	263	133	97	10.0
France	127	151	370	11.8
Gabon	347	98	59	8.9
Gambia	8	0	1	2.4

Country	Beer	Wine	Spirits	Total
Georgia	52	100	149	5.4
Germany	346	117	175	11.3
Ghana	31	3	10	1.8
Greece	133	112	218	8.3
Grenada	199	438	28	11.9
Guatemala	53	69	2	2.2
Guinea	9	0	2	0.2
Guinea-Bissau	28	31	21	2.5
Guyana	93	302	1	7.1
Haiti	1	326	1	5.9
Honduras	69	98	2	3.0
Hungary	234	215	185	11.3
Iceland	233	61	78	6.6
India	9	114	0	2.2
Indonesia	5	1	0	0.1
Iran	0	0	0	0.0
Iraq	9	3	0	0.2
Ireland	313	118	165	11.4
Israel	63	69	9	2.5
Italy	85	42	237	6.5
Jamaica	82	97	9	3.4
Japan	77	202	16	7.0
Jordan	6	21	1	0.5
Kazakhstan	124	246	12	6.8
Kenya	58	22	2	1.8
Kiribati	21	34	1	1.0
Kuwait	0	0	0	0.0
Kyrgyzstan	31	97	6	2.4
Laos	62	0	123	6.2
Latvia	281	216	62	10.5
Lebanon	20	55	31	1.9
Lesotho	82	29	0	2.8

Liberia	19	152	2	3.1
Libya	0	0	0	0.0
Lithuania	343	244	56	12.9
Luxembourg	236	133	271	11.4
Macedonia	106	27	86	3.9
Madagascar	26	15	4	0.8
Malawi	8	11	1	1.5
Malaysia	13	4	0	0.3
Maldives	0	0	0	0.0
Mali	5	1	1	0.6
Malta	149	100	120	6.6
Marshall Islands	0	0	0	0.0
Mauritania	0	0	0	0.0
Mauritius	98	31	18	2.6
Mexico	238	68	5	5.5
Micronesia	62	50	18	2.3
Moldova	109	226	18	6.3
Monaco	0	0	0	0.0
Mongolia	77	189	8	4.9
Montenegro	31	114	128	4.9
Morocco	12	6	10	0.5
Mozambique	47	18	5	1.3
Myanmar	5	1	0	0.1
Namibia	376	3	1	6.8
Nauru	49	0	8	1.0
Nepal	5	6	0	0.2
Netherlands	251	88	190	9.4
New Zealand	203	79	175	9.3
Nicaragua	78	118	1	3.5
Niger	3	2	1	0.1
Nigeria	42	5	2	9.1
Niue	188	200	7	7.0

North Korea	0	0	0	0.0
Norway	169	71	129	6.7
Oman	22	16	1	0.7
Pakistan	0	0	0	0.0
Palau	306	63	23	6.9
Panama	285	104	18	7.2
Papua New Guinea	44	39	1	1.5
Paraguay	213	117	74	7.3
Peru	163	160	21	6.1
Philippines	71	186	1	4.6
Poland	343	215	56	10.9
Portugal	194	67	339	11.0
Qatar	1	42	7	0.9
Romania	297	122	167	10.4
Russian Federation	247	326	73	11.5
Rwanda	43	2	0	6.8
Samoa	105	18	24	2.6
San Marino	0	0	0	0.0
Sao Tome & Principe	56	38	140	4.2
Saudi Arabia	0	5	0	0.1
Senegal	9	1	7	0.3
Serbia	283	131	127	9.6
Seychelles	157	25	51	4.1
Sierra Leone	25	3	2	6.7
Singapore	60	12	11	1.5
Slovakia	196	293	116	11.4
Slovenia	270	51	276	10.6
Solomon Islands	56	11	1	1.2
Somalia	0	0	0	0.0
South Africa	225	76	81	8.2
South Korea	140	16	9	9.8
Spain	284	157	112	10.0

Sri Lanka	16	104	0	2.2
St. Kitts & Nevis	194	205	32	7.7
St. Lucia	171	315	71	10.1
St. Vincent & the Grenadines	120	221	11	6.3
Sudan	8	13	0	1.7
Suriname	128	178	7	5.6
Swaziland	90	2	2	4.7
Sweden	152	60	186	7.2
Switzerland	185	100	280	10.2
Syria	5	35	16	1.0
Tajikistan	2	15	0	0.3
Tanzania	36	6	1	5.7
Thailand	99	258	1	6.4
Timor-Leste	1	1	4	0.1
Togo	36	2	19	1.3
Tonga	36	21	5	1.1
Trinidad & Tobago	197	156	7	6.4
Tunisia	51	3	20	1.3
Turkey	51	22	7	1.4
Turkmenistan	19	71	32	2.2
Tuvalu	6	41	9	1.0
Uganda	45	9	0	8.3
Ukraine	206	237	45	8.9
United Arab Emirates	16	135	5	2.8
United Kingdom	219	126	195	10.4
Uruguay	115	35	220	6.6
USA	249	158	84	8.7
Uzbekistan	25	101	8	2.4
Vanuatu	21	18	11	0.9
Venezuela	333	100	3	7.7
Vietnam	111	2	1	2.0
Yemen	6	0	0	0.1

Zambia	32	19	4	2 . 5
Zimbabwe	64	18	4	4 . 7

