Religion Census Newsletter  
March, 2018  

Everybody Grows Somewhere—Nobody Grows Everywhere

See the note at the bottom of the page to learn how YOUR group can have maps like this!

Since the U.S. Religion Census reports data over many decades, researchers use it to show how groups have changed over time within individual counties*. It is the best source for comparative county-level data across the nation. The 2010 publication lists numbers of churches, members, adherents**, and worshippers for 236 different groups in 3,143 counties.

Ninety-two of those groups also reported data in the 2000 study. This makes it possible to see how each of these religious groups changed in geographic distribution over the decade.

![Change in Adherents, Southern Baptist Convention, 2000 to 2010](image)

For instance, the above map shows how the Southern Baptist Convention expanded well beyond its Southern roots during the ten years. The dark red counties across the northern part of the country were all newly entered from 2000 to 2010. Of course, the dark blue counties across the same territory suggest that this group is not firmly established in the North.

Because the group already covers almost every county in the South and has been there for so long, dramatic growth (pink counties) is fairly rare in that part of the country. Likewise, dramatic losses (light blue counties) are also rare in the South.

Other groups do not always have a stable base across such a wide part of the country.
Nor do gains always outnumber losses. Adherent change maps can reveal additional insights about the growth and loss of various groups. And sometimes the losses are in groups that are actually showing increases nationally.

The Assemblies of God, for instance, were one of the groups that showed major gains over the decade, outpacing population growth 15% to 10%. But they actually left more counties than they entered during the ten years.

Their growth areas are scattered across the nation, as are their areas of loss. Despite overall gains, many counties in the Upper Midwest and in the South no longer report having Assemblies of God congregations. The growth, while impressive, was not universal for this group.

Sixteen groups with at least one million adherents took part in both the 2000 and 2010 religion censuses. In addition to the Assemblies of God, four others outpaced the national population growth. But none of them grew everywhere.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>National Growth Rate</th>
<th>Counties Growing at Least 50%</th>
<th>Counties Losing at Least 50%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Muslims</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>1,109</td>
<td>252</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seventh-day Adventist Church</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>543</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assemblies of God</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>519</td>
<td>410</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church of God (Cleveland, Tennessee)</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>362</td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Five of the groups with at least one million adherents declined by at least 10% over the decade, and yet all of them had areas where they showed gains.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>National Rate of Change</th>
<th>Counties Growing at Least 50%</th>
<th>Counties Losing at Least 50%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>American Baptist Churches in the USA</td>
<td>-12%</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>239</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Episcopal Church</td>
<td>-16%</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>419</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evangelical Lutheran Church in America</td>
<td>-18%</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)</td>
<td>-22%</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>278</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Church of Christ</td>
<td>-24%</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>227</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The group with the largest national losses, the United Church of Christ, still showed areas of growth in various parts of the nation.

The Religion Census data can provide information across several decades. Twenty-one groups have participated in all six censuses going back to 1952. Perhaps another dozen, such as the United Methodist Church or the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), did not exist in their present form back in 1952, but the groups that merged to create them did report in the earlier studies. This means that similar studies can be made across various time periods for well over 100 million religious adherents today. Such analyses help to note trends such as suburban development, regional expansion, and declining rural populations.

But all these comparisons depend on data supplied by individual groups. This is why we are counting on people like YOU to encourage your own religious group to take part in the 2020 study.
*As in nearly all national research, “counties” is a broad term that includes the District of Columbia, Louisiana’s parishes, independent cities in several states, and boroughs and census divisions in Alaska. The more correct phrase is “counties or equivalents,” but many reports use the verbal shorthand of “counties.”

**Adherents: Every participating group is asked to provide an actual count or an estimate of the number of people associated with each local congregation. This number is termed “adherents.” Ideally, adherents include all regular participants and/or all those regarding that congregation as their spiritual home. This is done because religious traditions differ in whether they would include children and regular worshippers in their normal membership counts; and some traditions do not even have a membership category.

For specific adherent definitions for a particular group, see Appendix A on our Methods web page. For the general definition used when a group didn’t have a specific adherent figure, see page xvi of the introductory material.

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**GETTING AN ADHERENT CHANGE MAP FOR YOUR GROUP**

If your group provided adherent information in the 2000 and 2010 studies, your change map already exists. On our website is a link to 2010 Maps and Charts. Select your religious group from the first drop-down list, then select the “Adherent Change” map in the second box. Press the Confirm Selection button, and your map will download in a zip format. (Each browser handles such downloads differently. Look for prompts as pop-up windows, messages on the frame, or wherever your program normally provides instructions.)

*If you’re not certain about your group’s participation, look for the group in the first drop-down box. If it is listed there, it did take part in the 2010 census. Select the group. Then check the maps listed in the second box. If it provided adherent data in both decades, the Adherent Change map will be listed.*

If your group did not provide data for one or both of those years, but data is available, contact us. Our data collectors may still be able to add your group to our data tables. Once the data is available to us, we can generate appropriate maps for your group as well.

Every decade the US Religion Census tries to include additional religious groups, making the US Religion Census increasingly accurate. The 236 groups that took part in 2010 are listed online. If you know of other faith groups that would like to participate and be included in this census effort, please send us the group’s contact information or contact person.

Meanwhile, over 5,800 people visited our website in February. Several have let us know how valuable this resource is, and how they are looking forward to the 2020 update. Naturally, we hope to include information from your group in the 2020 counts.
Published by the Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies, sponsor of the U.S. Religion Census

This newsletter is intended for the following audiences:

Groups that participated in the 2010 Religion Census. The newsletter is sent to the latest contact we have for the supplier of the statistics.

Groups that are eligible to participate in the upcoming 2020 Religion Census. The newsletter is sent to the latest contact we have for the supplier of the statistics.

Members of the sponsoring agency for the Religion Census, the Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies.

Those who requested to receive the newsletter through our website.