

Religion Census Newsletter

May, 2018

What Kinds of People Are We Near?

Correlating the religious community to national census data

Some counties have a much larger proportion of new homes than the national average. Others have a higher concentration of Hispanics. The census bureau reports on literally hundreds of characteristics: education levels, poverty status, occupation types, household structure and income, ages, marital status, and many more. Researchers constantly refer to census statistics to locate concentrations of different population groups within different counties*.

One characteristic not reported by the census bureau is religious participation. Since the 2010 [U.S. Religion Census](#) includes data for 236 different groups, it is possible to use this information to add a religious dimension to census data: The number of adherents** that specific faith groups have in each county.

Researchers use a technique called “correlations***” to see how certain data items cluster together.

Likely to be present together:

Adults with bachelor’s degrees AND Adults in managerial or professional occupations

Adults with bachelor’s degrees AND Household income at least \$150,000

Adults without a high school diploma AND People living at or near the poverty level

Asian, Non-Hispanic persons AND Pacific Islander, non-Hispanic persons

Adults age 30 to 44 AND Households with children under 18

Adults age 30 to 44 AND Household income at least \$150,000

Likely not to be present together:

Adults with bachelor’s degrees AND Adults in construction or production occupations

White, non-Hispanic persons AND Black, non-Hispanic persons

White, non-Hispanic persons AND Hispanic persons

Adults 30 to 44 AND Adults 65 or older

Adults 18 to 29 AND Adults 45 or older

Some correlations seem obvious: The higher the percentage of White, non-Hispanic Americans, the smaller the percentage of Black, non-Hispanic Americans and the smaller the percentage of Hispanics. After all, those persons in the first group cannot be in the second or third. Perhaps it is not quite as obvious that the higher the percentage of college graduates, the higher the ratio of people in

managerial or professional occupations. Still, this may be intuitive as well, since those jobs tend to require more education.

Other correlations may be less obvious initially. While the percentage of children under 18 does correlate to the presence of adults between 18 and 30 (often called Millennials), it is more than three times as strongly correlated to the presence of adults between 30 and 44 (sometimes called Busters). This confirms other findings that suggest American adults are waiting longer to start their families.

And some correlations may be surprising. Normally, we think of the Boomers (ages 45 to 64 at the time of the 2010 census) as being in their peak earning years. But the presence of Boomers is not at all correlated with the presence of high income households. Instead, counties with a high proportion of Busters are likely to have a high percentage of households with annual incomes of at least \$150,000. Of course, this might mean that areas with higher incomes are attracting this age group, rather than suggesting that this age group typically earns that much money.

This is an important point: Two groups may be correlated, but establishing the reason for the correlation is not always easy. This is evident in another correlation.

The percentage of Pacific Islanders in a county tends to be higher in counties with a higher presence of Asians. Rather than one of these groups attracting the other to a county, it is likely that both groups tend to move to large cities, especially in our western states. So a correlation can indicate a relationship; but it takes further research to determine whether one of the factors encourages the other, or if both are affected by yet another factor.

So how do some of the major religious groups fit into these correlations?

Conventional wisdom would suggest a high concentration of Hispanics would coincide with a high proportion of Catholics. Both Catholics and members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are known for large families, so perhaps they would correlate with families with children. And Episcopalians and Presbyterians are sometimes identified with more affluent parishioners.

There are family characteristics that tend to go together with certain religious groups.

Non-family households AND Unitarian Universalist Association

Non-family households AND Presbyterian Church (USA)

Families with children AND Latter-day Saints

The relationship between Catholics and children was weaker. The presence of youth (ages 10 to 17) had more of a connection to Catholics, but even in that age group the strongest correlation was with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Two groups were strongly correlated with an absence of children. Actually, non-family households not only lack children, but if there are multiple adults in the home then they are not related to each other. However, this could be the result of being strong in such areas as college communities or retirement centers. College communities happen to contain large numbers of non-family households, as do concentrations of widows and widowers, so this may be the case of a third factor that affects the correlation.

Some adult age groups tend to go with certain groups. This table lists the two strongest correlations for each age group.

Millennials (ages 18 to 29) AND Unitarian Universalist Association
Millennials (ages 18 to 29) AND Islam
Builders (ages 68 or older) AND United Methodist Church
Builders (ages 68 or older) AND Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Interestingly, no religious groups have strong positive correlations with the two other age groups. Perhaps the fact that these groups are so widely present, especially the Boomers (ages 45 to 64), obscures the correlations.

However, several groups are less likely to appear where concentrations of these adults are found.

Busters (ages 30 to 44) AND Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Busters (ages 30 to 44) AND Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod
Boomers (ages 45 to 64) AND Latter-day Saints

Once again, the negative correlation between Lutherans and Busters may have more to do with the counties where Lutherans are located. Many Upper Midwest counties have declining populations, with many younger adults leaving for employment opportunities elsewhere.

Ethnicity is considered a major cultural factor in the United States. Some religious groups are historically related to particular ethnicities, so some of these links may not be surprising.

White, non-Hispanic persons AND Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod
Black, non-Hispanic persons AND National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc.
Native American, non-Hispanic persons AND Episcopal Church
Asian, non-Hispanic persons AND Buddhism
Pacific Islander, non-Hispanic persons AND Buddhism
Hispanic persons AND Catholic Church

These were the largest correlations for each ethnic group. Some smaller but still strong correlations are also interesting: Conservative Judaism tends to be stronger in areas with a high Asian presence; the Baha’í tend to be stronger in counties with a high Black, non-Hispanic presence; and the Southern Baptist Convention is also stronger in counties with a high Black, non-Hispanic presence. This last is probably explained by the Convention’s strong presence throughout the South, which has a large Black population in many non-metropolitan counties. This also may be the reason for the correlation between this ethnic group and the Church of (Cleveland, TN) and the Presbyterian Church in America.

And there are some strong negative correlations as well.

White, non-Hispanic persons AND National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc.

Black, non-Hispanic persons AND Catholic Church

Native American, non-Hispanic persons AND United Methodist Church

Asian, non-Hispanic persons AND Buddhism

Pacific Islander, non-Hispanic persons AND Buddhism

Hispanic persons AND United Methodist Church

The census bureau also reports socio-economic data for each county. Some of these characteristics are strongly associated with the presence or absence of certain religious groups.

Household Income at least \$150,000 Annually (Affluence indicator)

<i>Religious Groups Strong in Affluent Counties (correlation 0.2000 or more)</i>	<i>Religious Groups Weak in Affluent Counties (correlation -0.1500 or less)</i>
Conservative Judaism Unitarian Universalist Association Greek Orthodox Archdiocese Reform Judaism Catholic Episcopal Church Islam	Southern Baptist Convention United Methodist Church

Bachelor's Degree or Higher (Education indicator)

<i>Religious Groups Strong in Educated Counties (correlation 0.2000 or more)</i>	<i>Religious Groups Weak in Educated Counties (correlation -0.1500 or less)</i>
Unitarian Universalist Association Conservative Judaism Greek Orthodox Archdiocese Episcopal Church Reform Judaism Catholic	Southern Baptist Convention Churches of Christ Church of God (Cleveland, TN) Free Will Baptist

Population Near or Below Poverty Level (Poverty indicator)

<i>Religious Groups Strong in Poverty Counties (correlation 0.2500 or more)</i>	<i>Religious Groups Weak in Poverty Counties (correlation -0.1500 or less)</i>
Southern Baptist Convention African Methodist Episcopal Church Christian Methodist Episcopal Church National Missionary Baptist Convention, Inc. National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc.	Evangelical Lutheran Church in America Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod Catholic Church United Church of Christ Evangelical Free Church

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](#).

****Correlations are usually calculated with a statistical program. For this article, the package available in Microsoft Excel was used. Correlations are expressed as a decimal number between -1 and 1. A correlation of 1 indicates that every increase in the first data item results in a similar increase in the second. (The number of people in a room could have a correlation of 1 with the number of hands in the room. If anyone in the room has other than two hands, the correlation would be slightly less than 1.) A correlation of -1 indicates that every increase in the first data item results in a similar decrease in the second. (The ratio of blue-eyed persons in the room would have a -1 correlation with the ratio of non-blue-eyed persons. It would not necessarily have a -1 correlation with the ratio of brown-eyed persons, however, since some people might have green eyes.) The closer the correlation is to zero, the less likely it is that one data item is related to the other.*

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 7,500 people visited our website in April. 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.



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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.