Historical Efforts to Collect U.S. Data on Religious Congregations

Clifford Grammich

In many nations, population censuses regularly collect data on religion. Censuses in both Canada and Mexico are among those collecting such data. Canada has collected data on religion in its census since 1871; supplemental surveys administered to 25 percent of households in the 2021 Canadian Census found 63 percent claim a religious identification, primarily Christian. Mexico, too, has routinely collected data on religion in its census; its 2020 Census found the population to be nearly 80 percent Catholic, with a growing proportion who profess no religion.

The U.S. Census Bureau collected data on religion regularly from the mid-19th to the mid-20th century, but, with minor exceptions, has not done so since then. The most extensive Census Bureau efforts to gather data on religion focused on religious bodies and their congregations rather than individuals.

This chapter discusses historical efforts to gather data on U.S. religion. It focuses on efforts by the Census Bureau as well as more recent efforts in a series currently conducted by the Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies (ASARB). As such, it focuses on efforts to gather data on congregations, but it also discusses some related efforts to gather data on individuals.

U.S. Census Efforts to Gather Data on Religion

Initial Efforts in the Decennial Census

The first U.S. efforts to gather data on religion were in the 1850 decennial census. Census takers asked local faith leaders about religion in their communities, including the number of houses of worship, their seating capacities, and their property values. The results indicated there were 18 principal denominations in the United States. The censuses of 1860 and 1870 took similar approaches. From 1850 to 1870, the number of churches and congregations included in the census increased from 38,061 to 72,459. The 1870 Census also tabulated 27 distinct religious traditions. These included two Baptist groupings, Catholics, Episcopalians, Friends, Jews, Latter-day Saints, Lutherans, Methodists, two Presbyterian groupings, Adventists, Shakers, and Unitarians.

The 1880 U.S. Census expanded Census efforts yet again in collecting data on religion. That year, the Census collected, through correspondence with denominational officials, statistics on the number and status of congregational staff, the number of congregation members, criteria for membership in the congregation, average attendance, founding date, and congregation income, expenditures, and debt. The Census also sought information on local contextual information such as proportion of population in a congregation’s locality that attends any religious service and the number of other congregations within a three-mile radius. The Department of the Interior, which was responsible for the Census prior to 1902, cited both lack of funds for publication and the views of some Census officials that the data were unreliable as their reasons for declining to publish the results on religious bodies.

In 1890, the Census collected—and, this time, published—information on religion, including the number of faith or worship leaders in each religious body. The 1890 Census did take a more focused approach than the 1880 effort, seeking a scope of “inquiry broad enough to embrace the necessary items of information, and narrow enough to insure success in collecting, tabulating, and publishing them.” The 1890 Census also made an adjustment in how it counted Catholics, which remained the single-largest religious body in the United States, counting communicants rather than population.

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9 Turner, 2019.

The 1936 data in 1936. As a result, the number of reported Southern Baptist decongregations decreased from 23,374 in 1926 to 13,815 in 1936. This decrease in the number of congregations was likely a result of congregational failure to report rather than a decrease in the number of religious bodies participating in 1926 (see Table 1). The Census Bureau’s Religious Bodies series among data on congregations collected in the Religious Bodies series that on year of establishment, amount of debt, language of services, number of faith or worship leaders and their salaries, the number of congregation-operated schools and their personnel, and demographic characteristics of congregations.

The Religious Bodies data showed growth in the number of reporting religious bodies over time, and for congregations through 1926 (see Table 1). The Census Bureau’s Religious Bodies series faltered after that. While the number of religious bodies participating in 1936 was greater than ever, the number of congregations reported decreased by more than 30,000 from what was reported in 1926. This was likely a result of congregational failure to report rather than a decrease in the number of congregations. The Census Bureau estimated that half of Southern Baptist congregations did not submit data in 1936. As a result, the number of reported Southern Baptist congregations decreased from 23,374 in 1926 to 13,815 in 1936. Other possible reasons for decreased participation in the 1936

### The Religious Bodies Series

The 1902 establishment of the Census Bureau as a permanent office marked a shift in how the Census collected data on religion. The law creating the Census Bureau also authorized it to undertake a separate decennial enumeration of religious bodies. For most religious bodies, the Census Bureau had individual congregations report their own membership, capacity, and finances. For others, including the Catholic Church and Jewish organizations, the Census Bureau had officials of the bodies collect the data. For still others, such as leading African American bodies, the Census Bureau employed its own agents to collect the data.

The resulting series on Religious Bodies from 1906 to 1936 yielded an extraordinary amount of information. This included not only detailed characteristics of congregations but also detailed histories and background information from the religious bodies.

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### Table 1: Number of Religious Bodies, Congregations, and Affiliated Individuals in U.S. Census Bureau Tabulations, 1890 to 1936

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Religious Bodies Reporting</th>
<th>Total Congregations Reported</th>
<th>Total Affiliated Individuals Reported</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>165,177</td>
<td>20,613,364</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1906</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>212,229</td>
<td>40,208,812</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1916</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>227,674</td>
<td>41,926,854</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1926</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>232,154</td>
<td>58,017,032</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1936</td>
<td>262</td>
<td>199,302</td>
<td>58,524,213</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This study included dislocations caused by the Great Depression as well as fears among some religious leaders of New Deal intentions.

### Demise of the Religious Bodies Series and Tentative Consideration of Individual Data

The Census Bureau collected data for the Religious Bodies study in 1946 but shelved the project when Congress failed to appropriate money to complete its tabulation or publication. By 1956, Congress had discontinued all funding for this work. The discontinuation of this series was, in part, a casualty of World War II. In the wake of the Holocaust, members of Congress thought there would be little net benefit in producing documentation on religious divisions in U.S. society. With one exception discussed below, the Census Bureau did not again collect data on religious congregations.

Changes in Census Bureau leadership under the Eisenhower administration led to interest in a decennial Census question on religion. By the 1950s, about half the nations in the world with populations of at least 500,000 had at least one question regarding individual religion on their census, with Switzerland having asked such questions since 1860. Both the director of the Census Bureau and the assistant director for demographic fields were interested in religion and sought to include it in the decennial Census. Such interest led to inclusion of a question on religion in the Current Population Survey in 1957. This is the only time the Census Bureau has asked a cross section of the population about its religious identity.

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11 Historical data on religion, including that from past U.S. Census Bureau collections on Religious Bodies and ASARB USRC tabulations, are available at the Association of Religion Data Archives, https://thearda.com/data-archive/browse-alphabetically (as of May 11, 2023).


14 Turner, 2019.


16 Turner, 2019.

17 Christiano, 1984.


The proposal to include questions on religion in the decennial Census foundered in the face of division among religious bodies and social scientists. Among religious bodies, the Catholic Church favored the proposal in part to demonstrate its numerical strength and in part to better plan schools and hospitals. Jewish groups opposed it in part because of First Amendment concerns and in part because such tabulations might fuel anti-Semitism. A Jewish statement of opposition to the proposal also suggested that "questions of religious belief are basically a matter of individual judgment not subject to objective verificaton' and hardly susceptible to accurate definition . . . due to the complexity and varying subtleties of religious denominations, an undue responsibility [would be] placed on a census enumerator whose data might be colored by his own religious identification." Some social scientists have continued to raise similar concerns over time, with one recently stating, "Religious affiliation or identity may be too complicated a matter for government nose-counters to deal with accurately."

Ultimately, the director of the Census Bureau, who had initially favored the proposal, decided against it, noting the mandatory nature of the decennial census and the possible reluctance of some persons to complete a census form with a question on religion. In 1976, the Census Bureau rejected another proposal to include a religion question on the decennial census, again citing the mandatory nature of the Census.

Federal law now prohibits the Census Bureau from asking non-voluntary questions regarding religious beliefs or membership in a religious body. Information on individual religious beliefs in the United States has become increasingly available over time through non-governmental population surveys.

Today, though the Census Bureau can ask voluntary questions about religion, it collects information on religious activities in only two limited ways. First, the Survey of Income and Program Participation asks questions about contact with religious organizations generally (e.g., as source of material support, location of child's activities). Second, the Census Bureau's annual collection of County Business Patterns data includes data on "religious organizations."

For establishments grouped by six-digit North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) codes, this series provides county-level data on establishments, employment, and payroll. It considers religious organizations under NAICS code 813110. This includes "establishments primarily engaged in operating religious organizations, such as churches, religious temples, mosques, and monasteries" as well as "establishments primarily engaged in administering an organized religion or promoting religious activities." For 2020, County Business Patterns indicated there were 183,327 establishments with NAICS code 813110. This was fewer than the 356,642 congregations tabulated in the 2020 U.S. Religion Census (USRC) conducted by ASARB. We surmise one reason for the difference is that some religious congregations, lacking paid employees, are not "establishments" as defined by County Business Patterns.

**Legacy of Census Bureau Efforts**

Though roughly a century old now, the Census Bureau's series on religious bodies remains a valuable resource for analysis of U.S. religion. Its tabulations, when combined with those of the USRC series since 1952, offer comparable data on long-standing religious bodies such as the Catholic Church and the Southern Baptist Convention, and, when combining earlier categories, can yield insights over a century on bodies such as the United Methodist Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. At the same time, the Census Bureau's gathering of statistics on Religious Bodies had several problems, some of which remain difficult to address. These include varying definitions of membership, falsification of membership statistics (both to increase or decrease reported totals, depending on circumstances in a congregation and its polity), poor record-keeping by congregations, inadequate coverage, and errors in tabulation. A historical analysis of those statistics concluded that the series had considerable usefulness for students of religion and society, but that much of the research on them suffered from inadequate understanding of their limitations and possibilities.

ASARB has sought to address many of these problems over time, with efforts improving as social science methods improve, though some longstanding problems remain.

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26 Ostling, 2023.
30 See, for example, Tom W. Smith et al., serial, General Social Surveys, Chicago: National Opinion Research Center, as well as Pew Research Center, 2007 and 2014, Religious Landscape Study, summary available (as of May 12, 2023) at https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/religious-landscape-study/.
32 U.S. Census Bureau, annual, County Business Patterns. Available (as of May 12, 2023) at https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/cbp.html.
34 Christiano, 1984.
results, published in a series of 80 pamphlets from 1956 to 1958 on Churches and Church Membership, summarized, by county, 1952 data on religious congregations and their members in 114 religious bodies. These ranged from longstanding large bodies such as the Catholic Church and the Southern Baptist Convention to the Church of Jesus Christ (Cutlerites).

These data had some shortcomings. First, as in the previous Religious Bodies series conducted by the Census Bureau, definitions of membership varied by body; the most common variation was by whether only adult members or others were counted. Second, the tabulation included congregations but not numbers of affiliated individuals for six bodies, including the Church of God in Christ, Bahá’í, and two Orthodox Christian bodies, and affiliated individuals but not congregations for Judaism and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Churches and Church Membership, 1971

The next effort took place in 1971, with the National Council of Churches working with the Glenmary Research Center (a Catholic agency), and the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod to collect and tabulate, by county, data on congregations and affiliated individuals for 53 religious bodies. Though this represented the smallest number of religious bodies to participate in the series, the total number of affiliated individuals did represent nearly half the total U.S. population as enumerated in the Census of the previous year.

The Glenmary Research Center largely led the efforts of the 1971 (and 1980) studies. The mission of Glenmary, a Catholic order founded in 1939, has been to establish a Catholic presence in rural counties lacking one. This effectively meant a focus on the rural South and its large number of counties, many without a Catholic church or priest. County-level data was critical for such work. Glenmary had long published maps of “no priest land” (highlighting, for example, the roughly one-third of U.S. counties that in the 1930s did not have a resident Catholic priest). To this, using 1971 data, Glenmary added maps of Catholic population prevalence by county as well as the dominant religious family by county. The county-level data have also proved useful to other religious bodies who typically divide their polities by counties.

The principal method of the 1971 study was to contact all U.S. religious bodies listed in the Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches, inviting them to submit their own data. The 1971 study undertook an innovation to make statistics on affiliated individuals across religious bodies. It invited participants to submit data on both members, as each body defined the term, and adherents, which was to include others regularly participating in congregational life, such as children and those who attended but were not full members.

Among participating religious bodies, fewer than half provided data on both members and adherents. For those providing data on members but not adherents, the compilers used a mathematical formula to estimate adherents. Over time, the number of bodies reporting their own adherent data has increased, though some, such as the Southern Baptist Convention, continue to rely on the mathematical formula of study compilers for adherent estimates.

The 1971 study had several shortcomings. It had no non-Christian participation. It had no participation from historically African American religious bodies. It had no Orthodox Christian participation. It also lacked participation from prominent bodies such as the Assemblies of God and, like the 1952 effort, had data on affiliated individuals but not congregations for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Churches and Church Membership, 1980

The 1980 study, conducted by the National Council of Churches, the Glenmary Research Center, the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, the Southern Baptist Convention, and the Lutheran Church in the U.S.A., corrected some of the problems in the 1971 study. It included 111 religious bodies, compared to 53 in 1971 and 114 in 1952. The number of affiliated individuals it tabulated again represented nearly half the population of the corresponding decennial Census. It also regained participation from the Assemblies of God and published data on both congregations and adherents for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. It included Conservative Judaism and Reform Judaism, although it had no other bodies from Judaism, nor any other non-Christian bodies. It included the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, although it had no other participation from historically African American religious bodies. It included data from three Orthodox Christian bodies, although several were still lacking.

Churches and Church Membership, 1990

Following the 1980 study, and changes in leadership at the Glenmary Research Center, the county-level enumeration of religious bodies needed a new home. Glenmary approached ASARB about the possibility of taking responsibility for the decadal study. ASARB, founded in 1934, has long sought to increase standardization in statistics on U.S. religion. And many of its members, as the statisticians for their religious bodies, had already been reporting the relevant statistics for this series.

ASARB agreed to take on this task and designated the Church of the Nazarene Research Department to lead it, a role it continued through 2020. Under this leadership, the series would undertake several innovations in coming decades. These would include greater inclusion of both Christian and non-Christian bodies, use of other data sources to verify or, where necessary, generate statistics, and


39 Bernard Quinn, Herman Anderson, Martin Bradley, Paul Goetting and Peggy Shriver, 1982, Churches and Church Membership in the United States 1980: An Enumeration by Region, State, and County Based on Data Reported by 111 Religious Bodies, Atlanta: Glenmary Research Center.
The 2000 work included 149 religious bodies and still more congregations than the 1990 work did. Its tabulation of affiliated individuals again represented about half the U.S. population in the decennial Census that year. One of the chief innovations of the 2000 work was the inclusion of 14 bodies for which data on congregations but not affiliated individuals was available. Among these were several bodies that had never participated in similar efforts, whether in the series now conducted by ASARB or in the earlier Census Bureau series on religious bodies.

The 2000 series replicated the 1990 work in including an estimated Jewish population and congregations, again not differentiated by tradition. To this, it added several non-Christian bodies, including the first tabulations in the series of Muslim congregations and adherents, Bahá’í congregations and adherents, and of Buddhist, Hindu, Jain, Sikh, Tao, and Zoroastrian congregations.

The 2000 work was lacking in participation of historically African American religious bodies. The National Primitive Baptist Convention, USA, participated, but none of those who had participated in 1980 and 1990 did so. The work did, of course, include African Americans in other religious bodies. Proof of this was in the total number of adherents exceeding the non-African American population but representing reasonable ratios of the population in 89 Southern counties. Still, the lack of participation by historically African American religious bodies remained a serious drawback.

The 2000 work did include the most extensive collection of data on Orthodox bodies in the series to that point. Altogether, 23 Orthodox bodies reported congregations to the USRC in 2000, and 19 reported adherents as well.

The 2000 work again sought to include independent churches of at least 300 adherents, differentiating these by charismatic or non-charismatic. The total number of such congregations included was 1,700, with more than 2 million adherents.

**2010 U.S. Religion Census**

The 2010 work further expanded the scope of the series. Recognizing this expanded scope, ASARB changed the name of the study to the U.S. Religion Census. The 2010 USRC included 236 religious bodies, exceeding the number of any in the previous series, as well as all but one work in the Census Bureau’s series on Religious Bodies. The number of congregations tabulated, 344,864, was the most in any similar work on U.S. religion. The number of adherents tabulated was again about half the U.S. population.

One of the most significant innovations of the 2010 USRC was the use of denominational address lists and other data sources to estimate congregations and adherents of several historically African American religious bodies. This resulted in the inclusion of 16,125 congregations with 4,877,067 adherents in eight historically African American religious bodies. For four additional historically African

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American religious bodies, the USRC included congregation counts by county. The accuracy of these data very likely varied. While, for example, the number of congregations the USRC was able to estimate for some historically African American religious bodies was comparable to what the bodies themselves claimed, for others it was a small fraction, and for still others it was unknown. Nevertheless, this represented the most detailed count, if incomplete, of historically African American religious bodies to date.

Coverage of non-Christian bodies improved in several ways. The 2010 USRC again included data on Muslim congregations and adherents as well as Bahá’í congregations and adherents. To these it added data on both congregations and adherents for three Buddhist groupings, four Hindu groupings, four traditions of Judaism, and Zoroastrianism, and data on congregations in the Jain, Shinto, Sikh, and Tao traditions. Some of these were likely incomplete. Nevertheless, these numbers provided detail on non-Christian populations that had not been available in the United States for decades, if ever.

There were also improvements in coverage of several Christian traditions. The number of Orthodox bodies included in the USRC remained at 23, but the number reporting adherents increased to 22 (an increase of three from the 19 reporting adherents in 2000). The 2010 USRC included the first congregational tabulation of Jehovah’s Witnesses in the series. It also included the first counts of Amish and Plain Anabaptist congregations and adherents in the series. Finally, the USRC sought to include all independent churches, rather than just those known to have at least 300 adherents. This yielded more than 35,000 congregations and more than 12 million adherents.

2020 U.S. Religion Census

The 2020 USRC improved still further on these innovations. It included 372 religious bodies, by far the most in any similar study. This was particularly remarkable given the delays caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. This made it more difficult both for religious bodies to gather data on congregations as well as for USRC staff to reach appropriate contacts for reporting the data. Ultimately, the data were gathered and released by late 2022. This was roughly comparable to release dates of past studies. Unlike the 2010 and 2020 studies, however, the 2020 study was not able to report any attendance data for religious bodies.

The 2020 USRC included more than 350,000 congregations, more than any similar study, and close to what other sources indicate may be a complete count of religious congregations in the United States.43 Its number of tabulated adherents yet again represented nearly half the U.S. population. USRC adherents continued to trail persons claiming a religious identification but who do not belong to or regularly participate in a religious congregation.

The 2020 USRC improved upon many of the innovations of the 2010 work. For historically African American religious bodies, it combined data submitted by participants with online information from other data sources to yield data on congregations for 22 such bodies, including data on adherents for 16 of them. Again, the accuracy of such statistics is likely to vary by body and available information, but it does represent detail not seen in decades, if ever.44

Coverage of non-Christian bodies remained relatively consistent. For the third straight decade, the USRC included data on Muslim congregations and adherents45 as well as Bahá’í congregations and adherents. It included data on congregations and adherents for four traditions of Judaism and added data on congregations for two more traditions of Judaism.46 It included data on congregations and adherents for three Buddhist groupings, two Hindu groupings, and of congregations in Jain, Sikh, Shinto, and Tao traditions.

Among Christian bodies, the 2020 USRC provided the first tabulation in the series of Jehovah’s Witnesses adherents and congregations. It again included independent churches regardless of size, finding this group to comprise the second-largest identifiable religious body in the United States.47 It included data on congregations and adherents for 24 Orthodox Christian bodies, and on congregations alone for two more Orthodox Christian bodies.48 It repeated its count of Amish congregations and adherents49 and provided the most detail ever on Plain Anabaptist bodies,50 listing congregations and adherents for several dozen.

Table 2 summarizes the number of religious bodies, congregations, and affiliated individuals in the current ASARB series, which

43 In recent decades, estimates for the total number of religious congregations in the United States have ranged from 268,000 to 414,000. See Simon G. Brauer, 2017, “How Many Congregations Are There? Updating a Survey-Based Estimate,” Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, Vol. 56, No. 2, pp. 438-448, available (as of May 12, 2023) at https://doi.org/10.1111/jssr.12330. Because the total number of religious congregations in the United States is not known, we cannot estimate precisely what proportion are included in the USRC.


45 For more information on Muslim tabulations, see Ihsan Bagby, 2023, 2020 U.S. Religion Census Appendix K: Muslim Estimate, available (as of May 12, 2023) at https://www.usreligioncensus.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/Appendix_K--Muslim_Estimate.pdf.

46 For more information on Jewish tabulations, see Aaron Spiegel and Deborah Coe, 2023, 2020 U.S. Religion Census Appendix C: Jewish Groups, available (as of May 12, 2023) at https://www.usreligioncensus.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/Appendix_C--Jewish_Groups.pdf.


49 For more on tabulation of Amish bodies, see Joseph F. Donnermeyer, 2023, 2020 U.S. Religion Census Appendix I: Amish Groups, available (as of May 12, 2023) at https://www.usreligioncensus.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/Appendix_I--Amish_Groups.pdf.

originated with the efforts of the National Council of Churches seven decades ago. The ASARB series has adapted over time as the religious landscape has evolved, including, for example, more non-Christian bodies; and as methods improve, including, for example, online data sources that have become available only in recent decades.

### The Strengths, Weaknesses, and Uses of Congregation-Based Data

Between them, the U.S. Religion Census series currently conducted by ASARB and the Census Bureau's earlier series on religious bodies provide more than a century's worth of data on hundreds of religious bodies. Such detail and length of time is not available in any other source of data on U.S. religion.

To be sure, the data have their weaknesses. By including congregational adherents, they exclude millions of other persons who have a religious identity but not a congregational affiliation. The quality of reported data on individuals will vary by those who do the reporting. Membership standards vary by religious body, and hence counts of affiliated individuals do as well. And data on most non-Christian bodies, and many Christian ones, remain lacking.

Yet, each of these weaknesses is offset by a strength or by improved methods. While the data, by their nature, exclude persons without a congregational affiliation, they provide more detail on the variety of U.S. religious life than even the most sophisticated surveys of adherents can. The 2020 USRC, for example, included data on nearly three dozen different Baptist bodies. This allows users not only to assess differences in distribution of the American Baptist Churches, USA, and the Southern Baptist Convention, but also differences between the American Baptist Churches, USA, and the American Baptist Association. The doctrinal differences in such groups are real, but it is unlikely all persons belonging to these bodies know the exact affiliations of their local congregation.

The quality of data will always vary by those who report it. Yet, electronic record keeping is likely to have made data gathering by religious bodies easier to accomplish over time. And electronic resources of all kinds—ranging from online directories to other data sources indicating likely congregational sizes—can help verify the accuracy of statistics submitted, or even help USRC staff generate statistics from these resources when religious bodies do not submit data directly.

Membership standards will continue to vary by religious body, and these can lead to variation in which individuals are, or are not, included in a religious body. Yet adherent estimation formulae developed in the U.S. Religion Census series can help ease these comparability problems. Easing them even further is the growing number of religious bodies able and willing to submit their own adherent numbers, more inclusive than their membership numbers.

Data on many bodies, particularly non-Christian ones, have been lacking. But the USRC has made substantial progress in recent decades including more non-Christian bodies. This progress has also included many Christian bodies, such as nondenominational Christians, Jehovah's Witnesses, Orthodox Christians, Amish, and Plain Anabaptists, among others, who now regularly provide data to the USRC.

As the number of regularly participating bodies increases, the detail the USRC offers on religious life becomes increasingly vivid. Nearly two dozen religious bodies have participated in every USRC since 1952, and nearly six dozen have participated in five such studies. At the same time, dozens more have seen first-time participation in recent decades. The USRC is becoming increasingly broad, and deep.

Other researchers are increasingly realizing the value of the data. Recent citations to the work include analyses of county-level variation in substance abuse, political polarization, responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, gun violence, suicide rates, social welfare systems, environmental management, marriage patterns, juvenile delinquency, and health promotion, among others.51

In sum, the USRC, like the Census Bureau’s series on religious bodies before it, provides decadal snapshots of American religion over more than a century that are unrivaled in their county-level geographic detail and in their detail on differences in religious bodies. Thanks to improvements in methods and extraordinary efforts by many researchers affiliated with the project, the resolution of such snapshots has continually improved. This has benefited analyses of U.S. religion, and of other aspects of U.S. life affected by religion, in countless ways.

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51 See, for example, the Google list of scholarly works citing the 2010 USRC at https://tinyurl.com/4zbsf25k.