

# The U.S. Religion Census: Introduction and National Overview

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The U.S. Religion Census (USRC), conducted by the Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies (ASARB), is the most comprehensive enumeration of religious congregations and their adherents in the United States. For 2020, it provides data on religious bodies from the Advent Christian Church to Zoroastrianism. It continues a decennial series started in 1952.<sup>1</sup> The series is unrivaled in the detail it provides over time and by place.

The core of the data is a county-level enumeration of congregations, i.e., groups of individuals who meet regularly (typically weekly) at a pre-announced time and location. Congregations may be churches, mosques, temples, or other meeting places.

This publication summarizes findings from the 2020 USRC. In addition to this overview, it provides: several interpretive chapters; tables summarizing results for the nation and by state, metropolitan and micropolitan area, and county; and a series of thirty-five county-level maps highlighting overall numbers of congregations and adherents, world religious traditions, major Christian traditions, Black Protestant religious bodies, and individual Christian religious bodies with at least one million adherents or congregations in at least 1,500 counties. Detailed data are available on the USRC website (<https://www.usreligioncensus.org/>) as well as on the website of the Association of Religion Data Archives (<https://thearda.com/us-religion/census/congregational-membership>).

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<sup>1</sup> Previous works in the series are: Laura B. Whitman and Glen W. Trimble, 1956-1958, *Churches and Church Membership in the United States: An Enumeration and Analysis by Counties, States, and Regions* (80 bulletins), New York: National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.; Douglas Johnson, Paul R. Picard, and Bernard Quinn, 1974, *Churches and Church Membership in the United States 1971: An Enumeration by Region, State, and County*, Washington, D.C.: Glenmary Research Center; 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; Martin B. Bradley, Norman M. Green Jr., Dale E. Jones, Mac Lynn and Lou McNeil, 1992, *Churches and Church Membership in the United States 1990: An Enumeration by Region, State and County Based on Data Reported for 133 Church Groupings*, Atlanta: Glenmary Research Center; Dale E. Jones, Sherri Doty, Clifford Grammich, James E. Horsch, Richard Houseal, Mac Lynn, John P. Marcum, Kenneth M. Sanchagrin, and Richard H. Taylor, *Religious Congregations & Membership in the United States 2000: An Enumeration by Region, State and County Based on Data Reported for 149 Religious Bodies*, Nashville, Tenn.: Glenmary Research Center; and Clifford Grammich, Kirk Hadaway, Richard Houseal, Dale E. Jones, Alexei Krindatch, Richie Stanley, and Richard H. Taylor, *2010 U.S. Religion Census: Religious Congregations & Membership Study—An Enumeration by Nation, State and County Based on Data Reported for 236 Religious Groups*, Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies.

The 2020 USRC includes congregations for 372 religious bodies. For 217 of these 372 bodies, the 2020 USRC provides data on affiliated adherents, i.e., the most complete count of individuals affiliated with a congregation, including members, children of members, and other attendees who are not members. The number of bodies participating in the 2020 USRC is the greatest in the series.

In addition to summarizing the overall data, below we summarize findings for the following traditions:

- Conservative Protestant
- Mainline Protestant
- Black Protestant
- Catholic
- Orthodox Christian
- Latter-day Saints
- Jehovah's Witnesses
- Other Christian
- Buddhism
- Hinduism
- Islam
- Judaism
- Other

Our classifications are based on those created by the ARDA. Readers wishing more details on the ARDA classifications should consult the ARDA website. Readers wishing more details on USRC methods should consult our website, particularly the information at <https://www.usreligioncensus.org/node/1638>.

## Overall Findings

According to other estimates, the 2020 USRC appears to have included most U.S. religious congregations. In recent decades, estimates for the total number of religious congregations in the United States have ranged from 268,000 to 414,000.<sup>2</sup> The USRC in 2020 reported 356,642 congregations in 3,141 of 3,143 counties.

Because the USRC focuses on congregations and the individuals affiliated with them, and not on religious individuals directly, it does not include all U.S. religious adherents. The number of adherents in this study represents 48.6% of the U.S. Census 2020 population. National surveys show higher levels of religious identification. The

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example, 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. 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.

2018 General Social Survey (GSS) of the National Opinion Research Center (NORC), the last GSS conducted before 2020, indicated that 76.5% of adult respondents identify with a religious group.<sup>3</sup>

Christian bodies comprise most religious congregations in the United States, and Protestant bodies comprise most U.S. Christian congregations. Table 1 lists congregations, adherents, and adherents as percent of population by religious tradition. Conservative Protestants comprise most Protestant congregations and, indeed, most U.S. religious congregations.

### Conservative Protestant

Protestantism remains the most prevalent form of Christianity in the United States. Among Protestant Christians, Conservative Protestants, also sometimes called Evangelical Protestants, are most prevalent. The bodies we classify as Conservative Protestants may emphasize biblical authority or seek separation from the broader culture.<sup>4</sup> Conservative Protestants are more theologically and socially conservative than Mainline Protestants, although there is variety among the large number of Conservative Protestant bodies. Conservative Protestants exceed 30% of the total population in Alabama, Oklahoma, Mississippi, Arkansas, Tennessee, and Kentucky, primarily due to the large number of Southern Baptist Convention adherents in these states.

Conservative Protestants account for most of the religious bodies participating in the U.S. Religion Census. Among the largest Conservative Protestant bodies, as measured by both number of congregations and number of adherents in the 2020 USRC, are

Non-denominational Christian Churches, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), and the Assemblies of God. Together, these three account for more than half of all Conservative Protestant congregations in the 2020 USRC and more than three-fourths of all Conservative Protestant adherents. Each of these three groups has different areas of geographic concentration.

Non-denominational Christian Churches comprise the second-largest body as measured by adherents in the 2020 USRC, trailing the Catholic Church, and have the second-greatest number of congregations, trailing the Southern Baptist Convention. Since 2010, their number of congregations has increased by nearly 9,000 and their number of adherents by nearly nine million. They exceed 10% of the population in Washington, Oklahoma, Ohio, Alabama, North Carolina, and Alaska. See Map 35 in the maps section for the prevalence of Non-denominational Christian Churches by county.

The Southern Baptist Convention has the third-greatest number of adherents in the 2020 USRC. It has more congregations than any other religious body in the United States. It is highly concentrated in the Southern United States, which is home to 87% of its adherents and 78% of its congregations. SBC adherents exceed 30% of the population in 343 counties, 325 of which are in the South. See Map 33 in the maps section for the prevalence of SBC adherents by county. The SBC has participated in the USRC and its predecessors since 1952, providing extensive data for analysis of change over time.

The Assemblies of God have the eighth-greatest number of adherents in the 2020 USRC and the sixth-greatest number of congregations. Assemblies of God adherents exceed 100,000 in nine

**Table 1: Number of Congregations and Affiliated Individuals by Religious Body Tradition in the 2020 USRC**

| Tradition               | Participating Bodies Reporting |           | Total Congregations | Total Adherents | Adherents as % of 2020 Population | Adherents as % of Total Adherents |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------|---------------------|-----------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
|                         | Congregations                  | Adherents |                     |                 |                                   |                                   |
| Protestant—Conservative | 245                            | 139       | 199,694             | 54,652,238      | 16.5%                             | 33.9%                             |
| Protestant—Mainline     | 33                             | 18        | 69,865              | 17,184,424      | 5.2%                              | 10.7%                             |
| Protestant—Black        | 22                             | 16        | 23,483              | 7,404,653       | 2.2%                              | 4.6%                              |
| Catholic                | 5                              | 2         | 19,522              | 61,858,937      | 18.7%                             | 38.4%                             |
| Orthodox Christian      | 26                             | 24        | 2,921               | 1,164,594       | 0.4%                              | 0.7%                              |
| Latter-day Saints       | 2                              | 1         | 14,631              | 6,721,031       | 2.0%                              | 4.2%                              |
| Jehovah's Witnesses     | 1                              | 1         | 12,285              | 3,016,924       | 0.9%                              | 1.9%                              |
| Other Christian         | 16                             | 4         | 2,764               | 210,685         | 0.1%                              | 0.1%                              |
| Buddhism                | 3                              | 3         | 1,984               | 1,040,796       | 0.3%                              | 0.6%                              |
| Hinduism                | 2                              | 2         | 1,811               | 1,268,344       | 0.4%                              | 0.8%                              |
| Islam                   | 1                              | 1         | 2,771               | 4,453,908       | 1.3%                              | 2.8%                              |
| Judaism                 | 6                              | 5         | 3,306               | 2,068,827       | 0.6%                              | 1.3%                              |
| Other                   | 10                             | 1         | 1,605               | 178,727         | 0.1%                              | 0.1%                              |
| Total                   | 372                            | 217       | 356,642             | 161,224,088     | 48.6%                             | 100.0%                            |

<sup>3</sup> Tom W. Smith et al., serial, *General Social Surveys*, Chicago: National Opinion Research Center.

<sup>4</sup> See also the ARDA definition at <https://thearda.com/us-religion/group-profiles/traditions?T=1>

states: California, Texas, Florida, Washington, Missouri, Minnesota, Pennsylvania, Illinois, and Oklahoma. These states account for 53% of its USRC adherents and 46% of its congregations. See Map 18 in the maps section for the prevalence of Assemblies of God adherents by county.

### *Mainline Protestant*

Mainline Protestantism has among the deepest roots of religious bodies in the United States. The bodies we classify as Mainline Protestants “typically emphasize a proactive view on issues of social and economic justice and a tolerance of varied individual beliefs.”<sup>5</sup> Mainline Protestants are more theologically and socially liberal than Conservative Protestants, but there is variety among them as well. Mainline Protestants exceed 10% of the population in North Dakota, South Dakota, Iowa, Minnesota, West Virginia, and Nebraska.

The two largest Mainline Protestant bodies in the 2020 USRC are the United Methodist Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). Together, these two bodies account for 60% of Mainline Protestant congregations and 69% of Mainline Protestant adherents.

The United Methodist Church, the fourth-largest body in the 2020 USRC, is present in more counties than any other religious body. It has the third-greatest number of congregations in the United States. United Methodists are remarkable even in their distribution. In more than 2,500 counties they comprise at least 1% of the population, but in only five counties do they comprise more than 30% of the population. See Map 34 in the maps section for the prevalence of United Methodists by county.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the seventh-largest religious body in the 2020 USRC, is concentrated in the Midwest. Among all ELCA adherents, 61% are in the Midwest, compared to 21% of the total U.S. population. See Map 26 in the maps section for the prevalence of ELCA adherents by county.

Lutheran populations help demonstrate how religious bodies from the same tradition can vary in distribution. Seven states – Minnesota, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, Iowa, Ohio, Illinois, and North Dakota – each have at least 100,000 ELCA adherents. Combined, these states account for 62% of ELCA adherents. The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS), a Conservative Protestant body, is the second-largest Lutheran body in the 2020 USRC. Seven states – Illinois, Wisconsin, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Texas, and Nebraska – each have at least 100,000 adherents of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS). Combined, the seven states with at least 100,000 LCMS adherents account for 56% of that body’s adherents. See Map 28 in the maps section for the prevalence of LCMS adherents by county. The Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS), a Conservative Protestant body, is the third-largest Lutheran body in the 2020 USRC. One state, Wisconsin, has more than 100,000 WELS adherents; Wisconsin adherents account for 61% of WELS adherents in the 2020 USRC. There is some overlap here: Wisconsin appears among the top states for all three leading

Lutheran bodies, and Illinois and Minnesota are among the top states for both the ELCA and LCMS. But most of the top states for the ELCA are not among the top states for the WELS.

Lutheran populations also help demonstrate the difference between individuals identifying with a specific body and the number of individuals a specific body may claim. Applying 2018 NORC-GSS percentages to 2020 population data indicates 12.2 million persons in the United States identify as “Lutheran,” 10.2 million both identify as Lutheran and attend religious services more frequently than “never,” and 4.6 million identify with a specific Lutheran body and attend religious services more frequently than never. The USRC found Lutheran bodies claiming 5.6 million adherents. From this, we surmise there are at least 1.0 million Lutherans who do not know their specific denomination, and there are millions more who are not counted by a specific body.

### *Black Protestant*

African American religious bodies have not participated to the same degree in the USRC that those comprising European Americans have. To compensate for this, the USRC has sought data for these bodies from other sources, including online church directories or church lists. We believe our estimates for most of these bodies are reasonably accurate, but we also recognize likely inaccuracies in several.<sup>6</sup>

Altogether, the USRC produced congregation counts for 22 Black Protestant religious bodies, and adherent counts for 16. Black Protestant religious bodies minister to predominantly African American congregations in the United States. The first of these were formed by free African Americans in the 18th century. The theology and organization of Black Protestant bodies are similar to those for many Conservative Protestant bodies, but Black Protestant bodies may emphasize different aspects of Christian doctrine.<sup>7</sup> Black Protestants exceed 5% of the population in the District of Columbia, Mississippi, Alabama, Arkansas, Tennessee, South Carolina, Louisiana, and Georgia. See Map 14.1 in the maps section for the prevalence of Black Protestants among the total population by county, and Map 14.2 for their prevalence among the non-Hispanic Black population.

The three largest Black Protestant bodies in the 2020 USRC are the National Missionary Baptist Convention of America, the National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc., and the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Combined, these three bodies account for 59% of Black Protestant congregations and 68% of Black Protestant adherents.

The National Missionary Baptist Convention of America has the tenth-greatest number of adherents in the 2020 USRC and the 11th-greatest number of congregations. It is present in 46 states (including the District of Columbia) and nearly 1,300 counties. It

<sup>6</sup> For a more complete discussion of African American religious bodies in the 2020 USRC, see Dale E. Jones, “Appendix D: African American Groups,” at [https://www.usreligioncensus.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/Appendix\\_D--African\\_American\\_Groups.pdf](https://www.usreligioncensus.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/Appendix_D--African_American_Groups.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> See the ARDA definition at <https://thearda.com/us-religion/group-profiles/traditions?T=6>.

<sup>5</sup> See the ARDA definition at <https://thearda.com/us-religion/group-profiles/traditions?T=2>.

has more than 125,000 adherents each in Texas, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Tennessee, California, and Michigan. These seven states account for 52% of the body's USRC adherents and 47% of its congregations. See Map 30 in the maps section for the prevalence of this body by county.

The National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc., is present in 42 states (including the District of Columbia) and more than 600 counties. It has more than 65,000 adherents each in Georgia, Alabama, Florida, Illinois, Texas, Michigan, Tennessee, Ohio, New Jersey, and New York. These ten states account for 57% of the body's USRC adherents and 54% of its congregations. See Map 29 in the maps section for the prevalence of this body by county.

The African Methodist Episcopal Church is present in 44 states (including the District of Columbia) and nearly 1,000 counties. It has more than 50,000 adherents each in Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, Maryland, New York, and California. These six states account for 53% of its adherents and 43% of its congregations. See Map 16 in the maps section for the prevalence of this body by county.

### *Catholic*

The Catholic tradition as defined here includes the Catholic Church, the single-largest religious body in the USRC, and four "old" Catholic bodies which reject papal authority. Of the five Catholic bodies, the Catholic Church accounts for more than 99% of both reported congregations and adherents to the 2020 USRC. Hence, our comments below focus only on it.

The Catholic Church is the largest religious body in the United States. It has the fourth-largest number of congregations. It is present in more counties than any other religious body but the United Methodist Church. Its presence varies widely, from 4% of the population in Mississippi to 41% of the population in Rhode Island. Catholics exceed 50% of the total population in more than 50 counties, but are less than 0.5% of the total population, or not at all present, in nearly 300 counties. See Map 19 in the maps section for Catholic prevalence by county.

The Catholic Church has participated in the USRC and each one of its predecessors, including the U.S. Census Bureau's earlier series on Religious Bodies. As a result, there is a great deal of detail over time available on the Catholic Church. Comparing these data over time show how the Catholic Church has shifted with the U.S. population. In 1971, 71% of Catholic adherents and 66% of congregations were in the Northeast and Midwest, as was 52% of the total U.S. population. In 2020, 46% of Catholic adherents and 58% of congregations were in the Northeast and Midwest, as was 38% of the total U.S. population. Put another way, the Catholic population shifted to the South and West more rapidly than did the total U.S. population, while Catholic congregations shifted more slowly than the total population. This has contributed to some extraordinarily large average Catholic congregation sizes in the West and South, including more than 10,000 per congregation in Nevada, more than 8,000 in California, and more than 7,000 in Florida.

Catholic data also help illustrate the difference between USRC data on individuals affiliated with congregations and survey data on individuals affiliating with a religion. The 2020 USRC includes 61.8

million persons affiliated with a Catholic congregation. By contrast, applying the 2018 GSS to 2020 population figures shows a total Catholic population of 76.6 million and a Catholic population that attends religious services more frequently than "never" of 63.3 million.

### *Orthodox Christian*

The 2020 USRC includes data on 26 Orthodox Christian bodies. Orthodox Christians are present in all 50 states plus the District of Columbia. They exceed 1% of the population in the District of Columbia and Alaska. Orthodox Christians are present in nearly 800 counties and exceed 1% of the population in nearly 50 counties.

Orthodox Christianity in the United States comprises two distinct families: Eastern Orthodox, including 16 bodies, and Oriental Orthodox, including eight bodies.<sup>8</sup>

Eastern Orthodox bodies have the greater number of congregations, nearly 2,000, and adherents, nearly 700,000. Their adherent numbers decreased 17% in the past decade. Nearly half live in California, New York, Illinois, Florida, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania. Map 11 of the maps section shows the prevalence of Eastern Orthodox Christians by county.

Oriental Orthodox bodies have nearly 1,000 congregations and nearly 500,000 adherents. Their adherent numbers increased 67% in the past decade. More than half live in four states: California, New Jersey, New York, and Illinois. Map 12 of the maps section shows the prevalence of Oriental Orthodox Christians by county.

### *Latter-day Saints*

The Latter-day Saints tradition as defined here includes two religious bodies: the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and the Church of Jesus Christ (Bickertonite). Churches in this tradition follow the teachings of Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints comprises 99% of the Latter-day Saints congregations reported to the USRC and was the only Latter-day Saints body to report adherents. Hence, our comments below focus on it.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has the fifth-greatest number of adherents in the 2020 USRC and the fifth-greatest number of congregations. It is present in all 50 states plus the District of Columbia. It is most concentrated in Utah, home to 32% of all its U.S. adherents. Adherents of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are 65% of the total population in Utah, 25% in Idaho, and 12% in Wyoming. They are also more than 5% of the total population in Arizona, Nevada, and Hawaii. Together, these six states account for 50% of the church's U.S. adherents. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is present in more than 1,900 counties. It exceeds 25% of the population in 39 counties, including every county in Utah. Map 22 of the maps section shows the prevalence of its adherents by county.

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<sup>8</sup> For further information, see Alexei Krindatch, "Appendix F: Orthodox Christian Groups," at [https://www.usreligioncensus.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/Appendix\\_F--Orthodox\\_Christian\\_Groups.pdf](https://www.usreligioncensus.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/Appendix_F--Orthodox_Christian_Groups.pdf), and Alexei Krindatch, Second National Census of American Orthodox Christian Churches, at <https://orthodoxreality.org/latest/second-census-2020-of-american-orthodox/>.

## *Jehovah's Witnesses*

The Jehovah's Witnesses tradition comprises one religious body: the Jehovah's Witnesses. We consider it to be its own tradition because of its unique origins and because of its lack of obvious connections to other Christian traditions. The movement emerged from the Bible Student movement of Charles Taze Russell, who founded the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society in the 1880s. The Jehovah's Witnesses took their current name in 1931.<sup>9</sup>

The Jehovah's Witnesses are the ninth-largest religious body in the 2020 USRC. The USRC included Jehovah's Witnesses congregations in 2010. The Jehovah's Witnesses provided their own data on congregations and adherents in 2020. In 2020, the Jehovah's Witnesses had more than 12,000 congregations in all 50 states plus the District of Columbia.

Six states – California, Texas, Florida, New York, Georgia, and North Carolina – are each home to more than 100,000 Jehovah's Witnesses. Together, these states account for 50% of Jehovah's Witnesses in the United States, compared to 40% of the total U.S. population. Jehovah's Witnesses are present in nearly 2,200 counties. They exceed 3% of the total population in 34 counties scattered across the nation. See Map 27 in the maps section for the prevalence of Jehovah's Witnesses by county.

## *Other Christians*

The 2020 USRC includes data on 16 religious bodies that fall outside any of the religious traditions noted above. Of these, it has adherent data for four.

The 2020 USRC includes 2,764 Other Christian congregations. States with at least 100 Other Christian congregations are California, Florida, Massachusetts, Texas, New York, and Ohio. Other Christian bodies with at least 100 congregations are the Unitarian Universalist Association, the Association of Unity Churches, the Church of Christ, Scientist, the New Apostolic Church USA, the United Church of God, and the Christadelphians.

The Unitarian Universalist Association is the largest Other Christian body to report adherents to the 2020 USRC. It reports 201,541 adherents in all 50 states plus the District of Columbia. It reports more than 25,000 adherents in Massachusetts and more than 10,000 each in California, New York, and Texas.

## *Buddhism*

Buddhism was founded no later than the fifth century BCE by Siddhartha Gautama, who became known as the Buddha, in India.<sup>10</sup> It has three major branches: Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana. Buddhist numbers have increased rapidly in the United States following the passage of the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, which allowed for more immigration from Asia.<sup>11</sup>

The USRC previously tabulated Buddhist congregations in 2000, then congregations and adherents by tradition in 2010 and

2020. The 2020 USRC indicates Buddhist congregations in 49 states plus the District of Columbia. They are most prevalent in Hawaii. Buddhist adherents are present in 426 counties and exceed 1% of the total population in four counties. See Map 5 in the maps section for the prevalence of Buddhists by county in the United States.

Mahayana Buddhism is the largest, and oldest, branch of Buddhism in the United States. It formed among Japanese immigrants to what is now Hawaii in the 1880s. The 2020 USRC has 969 Mahayana congregations with 549,344 adherents. Mahayana Buddhists are now in 44 states plus the District of Columbia. California has more than 250 Mahayana Buddhist congregations with more than 175,000 Mahayana Buddhists. Hawaii has the second-greatest number of Mahayana Buddhist congregations, and Washington state has the second-greatest number of Mahayana Buddhist adherents.

Theravada Buddhism is the second-largest branch of Buddhism in the United States. It has grown in the United States largely through immigration from Southeast Asia. The 2020 USRC has 566 Theravada Buddhist congregations with 291,413 adherents. Theravada Buddhists are in 47 states plus the District of Columbia. California has more than 75,000 Theravada Buddhist adherents and more than 125 such congregations. Texas has the second-greatest number of Theravada Buddhist congregations and adherents.

Vajrayana Buddhists have their roots in several Asian nations, primarily Japan and Tibet. The first Vajrayana temples in the United States were Japanese Shingon temples in Hawaii and California. The 2020 USRC has 449 Vajrayana Buddhist temples with 200,039 adherents. Vajrayana Buddhists are in 43 states plus the District of Columbia. California has nearly 100 Vajrayana Buddhist temples with nearly 60,000 adherents. New York ranks second on both these.

## *Hinduism*

Hinduism is the name of the majority religion of India.<sup>12</sup> It has no central authority. Its origins lie in the Vedas composed between 1200 and 900 BCE. Like Buddhism, its numbers in the United States grew after passage of the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, which allowed for more immigration from Asia.

The USRC previously tabulated Hindu congregations in 2000, then congregations and adherents by type in 2010 and 2020. The 2020 USRC includes data on 1,811 Hindu congregations with 1,268,344 adherents. Hindu congregations are present in 49 states plus the District of Columbia. Hindu adherents exceed 1% of the total population in New Jersey and Delaware. Hindu adherents are present in nearly 400 counties and exceed 1% of the population in 82 counties. See Map 7 in the maps section for the prevalence of Hindu adherents by county.

The 2020 USRC differentiates Hindu congregations by whether they are Traditional Temples or Yoga and Meditation Groups. The

<sup>9</sup> For more on Buddhist enumeration methods in the USRC, see J. Gordon Melton, "Appendix G: Buddhist Groups," at [https://www.usreligioncensus.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/Appendix\\_G--Buddhist\\_Groups.pdf](https://www.usreligioncensus.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/Appendix_G--Buddhist_Groups.pdf). The discussion below on the origins of each of the three branches of Buddhism in the United States relies on this appendix.

<sup>12</sup> See the ARDA discussion at <https://thearda.com/us-religion/group-profiles/traditions?T=9>.

<sup>9</sup> See the ARDA discussion at <https://thearda.com/us-religion/group-profiles/groups?D=450>.

<sup>10</sup> See the ARDA discussion at <https://thearda.com/us-religion/group-profiles/traditions?T=10>.

2020 USRC has 433 Hindu Traditional Temples with 831,229 adherents. These are in 44 states. California ranks first with 50 temples and nearly 120,000 adherents. New York state ranks second and New Jersey ranks third, each with nearly 50 temples and about 100,000 adherents. The 2020 USRC has 1,378 Hindu Yoga and Meditation groups with 437,115 adherents. These are in 49 states plus the District of Columbia. California ranks first with nearly 280 groups and more than 120,000 adherents. New York state ranks second on both.

## *Islam*

Islam was founded by the Prophet Muhammad (570-632).<sup>13</sup> Its two main branches are Sunni and Shi'ite, reflecting a division that occurred in 632 due to different opinions on leadership succession. Its numbers have grown in the United States following the passage of the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, which allowed more immigration from Muslim-majority countries.

The USRC has included estimates of Muslim congregations and adherents since 2000. These do not differentiate by tradition. Its numbers are based on a survey of mosques, defined as Muslim organizations that organize Jum'ah prayer, conduct other Islamic activities, and controls the space in which activities are held.<sup>14</sup>

The 2020 USRC includes 2,771 mosques with 4,453,908 adherents. This is an increase of nearly 700 mosques and nearly 1.9 million adherents since 2010. Muslims comprise the sixth-largest religious body in the USRC. See Map 8 in the maps section for the prevalence of Muslim adherents by county.

Muslims are present in all 50 states plus the District of Columbia. Five states – New York, California, Illinois, New Jersey, and Texas – each have more than 300,000 Muslims. Eleven more states each have at least 100,000 Muslims. Eight states have at least 100 Muslim congregations. Three metropolitan areas – New York, Chicago, and Washington – have at least 100,000 Muslims each. The Chicago, New York, and Detroit metropolitan areas each have Muslim populations of at least 4%. Muslim congregations are present in 670 counties and exceed 5% of the total population in 19 counties.

## *Judaism*

The U.S. Religion Census has published a variety of estimates on Jewish congregations and adherents over time. In some years (i.e., 1952, 1990, 2000), the USRC published estimates of the total Jewish population, without differentiating by tradition. In 2010 and 2020, the USRC differentiated by tradition within Judaism. The U.S. Religion Census for 2010 and 2020 includes data on congregations and adherents for Conservative, Orthodox, Reconstructionist, and Reform Judaism. The 2020 USRC also includes data on congregations and adherents for Independent Judaism and on congregations for Chabad Judaism.

Judaism is another tradition where the population claiming an identity differs from those affiliating with a congregation. While survey estimates indicate there are 7.5 million Jews in the United States, the 2020 USRC enumerates only 2.1 million. Furthermore, the share of Jews who affiliate with a congregation varies by tradition. As a result, readers should be cautious when comparing USRC data on Jewish adherents both over time and across traditions.<sup>15</sup>

Across all traditions of Judaism, the 2020 USRC includes 3,306 congregations and 2,068,827 adherents. Note that 953 of these congregations are of Chabad Judaism, for which adherent data is not available. Jewish congregations are present in 49 states plus the District of Columbia. States with at least 100 Jewish congregations are New York, California, New Jersey, Florida, Pennsylvania, Illinois, and Texas. More than half the Jewish congregations in California are of Chabad Judaism. Judaism adherents in the 2020 USRC exceed 1% of the total population in more than 60 counties. See Map 9 in the maps section for a map of the prevalence of Judaism adherents by county.

The three largest traditions of Judaism in the United States – Orthodox, Reform, and Conservative – differ in their geographic concentration. Orthodox Judaism congregations are in 37 states plus the District of Columbia. Nearly half of its U.S. congregations and more than half of its U.S. adherents are in two states: New York and New Jersey. Reform Judaism congregations are the most widespread of the three largest groups of Judaism, being in 49 states plus the District of Columbia. Eight states – New York, California, Florida, New Jersey, Illinois, Massachusetts, Texas, and Pennsylvania – each have more than 30,000 congregational adherents of Reform Judaism. These states account for more than 60% of such adherents nationwide. Conservative Judaism congregations are present in 45 states plus the District of Columbia. Four states – New York, New Jersey, California, and Florida – each have more than 30,000 congregational adherents of Conservative Judaism. These states account for nearly half the congregations and adherents of Conservative Judaism nationwide.

## *Other Traditions*

The 2020 USRC includes ten bodies that do not belong to any of the groupings above. These include traditions such as Bahá'í, Jainism, Sikhism, and Shinto, as well as groups such as spiritual or theosophical groups or independent meditation centers not associated with a particular religious tradition.

Bahá'ís are the largest of these bodies. The Bahá'í Faith was founded by Baha'u'llah in 19th-century Persia (today known as Iran). The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada was incorporated in 1927.<sup>16</sup> Bahá'ís participated in the Religion Census in 2000, 2010, and 2020, as well as the similar 1952 effort by the National Council of Churches. Statistically, Bahá'ís are unique among USRC participants for reporting adherents by

<sup>13</sup> See the ARDA discussion at <https://thearda.com/us-religion/group-profiles/traditions?T=7>.

<sup>14</sup> For more information, see Ihsan Bagby, "Appendix K: Muslim Estimate," at [https://www.usreligioncensus.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/Appendix\\_K--Muslim\\_Estimate.pdf](https://www.usreligioncensus.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/Appendix_K--Muslim_Estimate.pdf).

<sup>15</sup> For a more detailed discussion of these issues, see Aaron Spiegel and Deborah Coe, "Appendix C: Jewish Groups," at [https://www.usreligioncensus.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/Appendix\\_C--Jewish\\_Groups.pdf](https://www.usreligioncensus.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/Appendix_C--Jewish_Groups.pdf).

<sup>16</sup> See the ARDA discussion at <https://thearda.com/us-religion/group-profiles/groups?D=97>.

county of residence rather than by county of congregation. See Map 4 in the maps section for the prevalence of Bahá'ís by county.

The American Sikh Council also has more than 300 congregations in the 2020 USRC. Nearly one-fourth of these are in California.

## Interpretive Essays

The USRC offers broad detail about congregational life in the United States, as well as about hundreds of religious bodies in thousands of counties. An overview essay such as this can but scratch the surface of its information. In addition to the basic information it conveys, the USRC offers context for other aspects of life in the United States, as well as context for analyses of many other topics. Hundreds of academic articles have used USRC data for context in analyses of myriad social and economic topics.<sup>17</sup>

This volume also offers several interpretive essays using USRC data to yield insights on religious life in the United States.

In Chapter 2, Alexei Krindatch provides several examples of how the 2020 USRC identifies several unique U.S. communities distinguished by their religious life. These include communities with the greatest and least numbers of congregations and adherents, as well as dispersion of U.S. religious communities.

In Chapter 3, Clifford Grammich reviews the history of efforts similar to the USRC, dating back to the mid-19th century. Combined with other data sources, the USRC can document U.S. religious life over an extraordinarily long time, though caution is necessary in piecing together such analyses.

In Chapter 4, Erica Dollhopf assesses overall adherence statistics for the 2020 USRC. The overall levels of adherence reported by the USRC have remained relatively stable over time, but there have been some shifts by state. Dollhopf examines the data by state and identifies some key areas for future research.

In Chapter 5, Richard Houseal shows how U.S. history continues to shape religious life today. This is particularly evident in the differing distributions of the Southern Baptist Convention and the American Baptist Churches in the USA, the concentration of the United Methodist Church along trails of western expansion, and the concentration of Latter-day Saints in the western United States.

In Chapter 6, Dale Jones explores ways to use the USRC to measure religious diversity. The USRC indicates great diversity in religious life across the nation, but how one measures that diversity can yield different findings. Jones presents the results of differing indices and different ways of grouping religious bodies for analysis.

In Chapter 7, Mary Gautier explores regional differences in religious congregations and adherence. The United States has long seen regional differences in its religious life. Changes across regions, including those resulting from migration, continue to shape these. Gautier documents these and what they indicate for U.S. religious life today.

In Chapter 8, Dale Jones assesses the distribution of religious bodies by metropolitan area. Many religious bodies are predominantly urban or rural. For example, Muslims are concentrated in

high-population metro areas, while the Amish are concentrated in rural and other areas with smaller populations. Jones documents these distributions for dozens of religious bodies as well as world religious traditions.

In Chapter 9, Mike McMullin documents the growth of non-Christian communities in “gateway” areas. The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 led to immigration from many new areas of the world, and growth in the United States of several non-Christian religions. McMullin documents how this growth differed by type of immigration “gateway,” defined by when an area was most active in receiving immigrants.

In Chapter 10, Allison Norton explores immigration and religion more broadly. Immigration has long defined much of life in the United States, religion included. Norton shows how it has led to greater diversity in religious life across the United States. She gives particular attention to Muslim, Catholic, and Protestant communities.

In Chapter 11, Scott Thumma discusses the question of what constitutes religious bodies in an era of decreasing denominational attachment. The USRC has traditionally relied on central denominational offices (e.g., for the Southern Baptist Convention or the United Methodist Church) to report their own data. The effort has become increasingly challenging as more congregations decline to affiliate with traditional denominations. The growth of non-denominationalism has profound implications for U.S. religious life and efforts to document it.

## Maps and Other Resources

This volume also includes more than three dozen maps depicting county-level prevalence of

- All adherents
- World religion traditions
- Major Christian traditions
- Individual religious bodies with at least one million adherents or congregations in at least 1,500 counties.

Readers may also wish to create their own maps on the USRC website at <https://www.usreligioncensus.org/interactive-maps> or download the data or static maps at <https://www.usreligioncensus.org/node/1639>. Complete details on USRC methods are available at <https://www.usreligioncensus.org/node/1638>, with links to many of the resources cited in this chapter.

The ARDA also has display functions for U.S., state, metro-area, or county-level USRC data since 1980 at <https://thearda.com/us-religion/census/congregational-membership>. Downloads of data since 1952, as well as data from the U.S. Census Bureau series on religious bodies and other data resources are available at <https://thearda.com/data-archive/browse-alphabetically>.

<sup>17</sup> See, for example, the Google list of scholarly works citing the 2010 USRC at <https://tinyurl.com/4zbs725k>.