

# Religion Census Newsletter

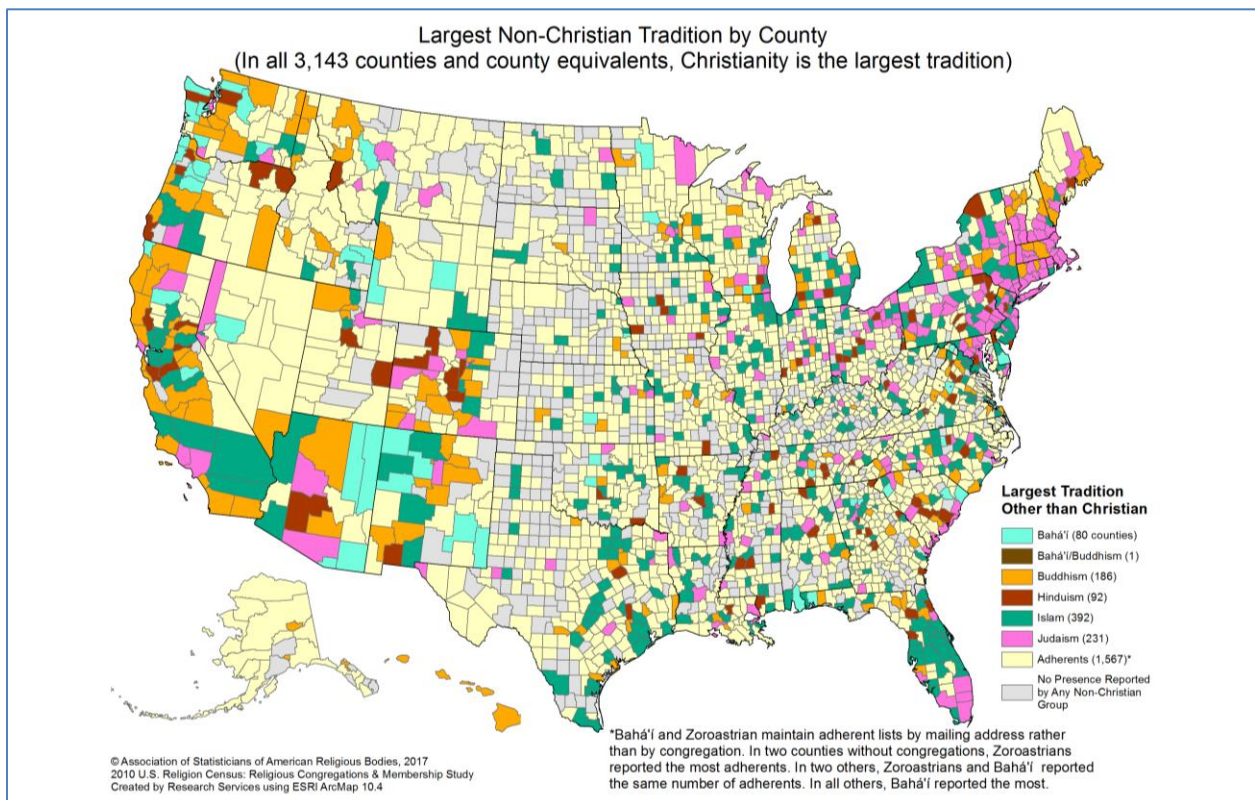
March, 2017

*Our 2010 US Religion Census (released in 2012) included information from 236 religious bodies. The participation of so many diverse religious groups provides a rich data source for valuable analysis, including news articles that attract attention literally years later. Last week, we were asked about [an article](#) that first appeared in June of 2014. Unfortunately, the article needed a slight tweak, as you can read below.*

## Largest Non-Christian Faith Tradition by County

The 2010 book was nearly ready for publication. We had been promised data from one more very large religious group, but we already had statistics from nearly every other multi-million member group in the country. It was time to finalize which maps we'd include in the [published book](#).

We prepared potential maps with the information we had at the time. In cooperation with Glenmary Home Missioners, we have published a very popular [wall map](#) that shows the largest religious family in each county. Predictably, Christian groups dominated every county in the country. We thought that it might be interesting to identify the second largest (after Christianity) religion in each county.



Ultimately, we decided not to include this map. After all, there were a lot of other maps to choose from. But we did make this map available to news outlets and to others interested. (It's still available on our website, in fact.)

But remember when this was first prepared? Before we had all the data. As a result, that parenthetical subtitle read, “In 3,142 of 3,143 counties, Christian is the largest tradition.” And that’s the map that we distributed to our editorial committee. But just to our editorial committee, we thought.

Alas, that’s the version of the map that was picked up by that major news organization!

So, nearly three years later, we still have people asking us about that one non-Christian county. And it doesn’t exist. It never did.

Lessons to be learned?

1. Put “PRELIMINARY” across every map until the final data has been received.
2. Double-check what you send to any news organization to be certain that the latest available information is included.
3. Be grateful that you hadn’t highlighted the “non-Christian” county.
4. And finally, be very thankful that the people who contact our office are very understanding when we point out the truth.

So far, those who’ve contacted us have always seemed appreciative of getting the accurate picture when we explain what happened. But their questions do indicate that people pay attention to statistics about American religion.

News organizations, scholars, and everyday folks are very interested in getting facts about religious involvement in America. Your help is definitely needed to create the most complete picture possible as the 2020 count approaches.

*What about that “Adherents” footnote? Interestingly, that note hasn’t raised any questions for those contacting the Religion Census data collection office. But it has its own story that helps to clarify our methodology.*

Very few religious groups keep lists of their members at a central national office. In order to report people by county, nearly every group relies on counts from individual congregations. That’s why the subtitle of our book says “Religious Congregations and Membership Study.” Most of us only report the numbers of people associated with individual congregations.

But the Bahá’í and the Zoroastrians have address lists of individual members, and both used those lists to give us totals for counties where they actually had no congregations to report. That methodology is drastically different from the other non-Christian groups in our study and from all the Christian groups. So we treated those reports differently.

If there were no congregations in the county, we did not credit either the Bahá’í or Zoroastrians as largest. We had no comparable figures for Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, or several other non-Christian groups. Without such additional counts, we had no way of knowing which group might really be largest. But we did want to acknowledge that we knew that there were at least some non-Christian adherents known to religious bodies. So we compromised with that “Adherents” color scheme.

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 7,000 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.



[www.asarb.com](http://www.asarb.com)

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.*** 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.***