

# Religion Census Newsletter

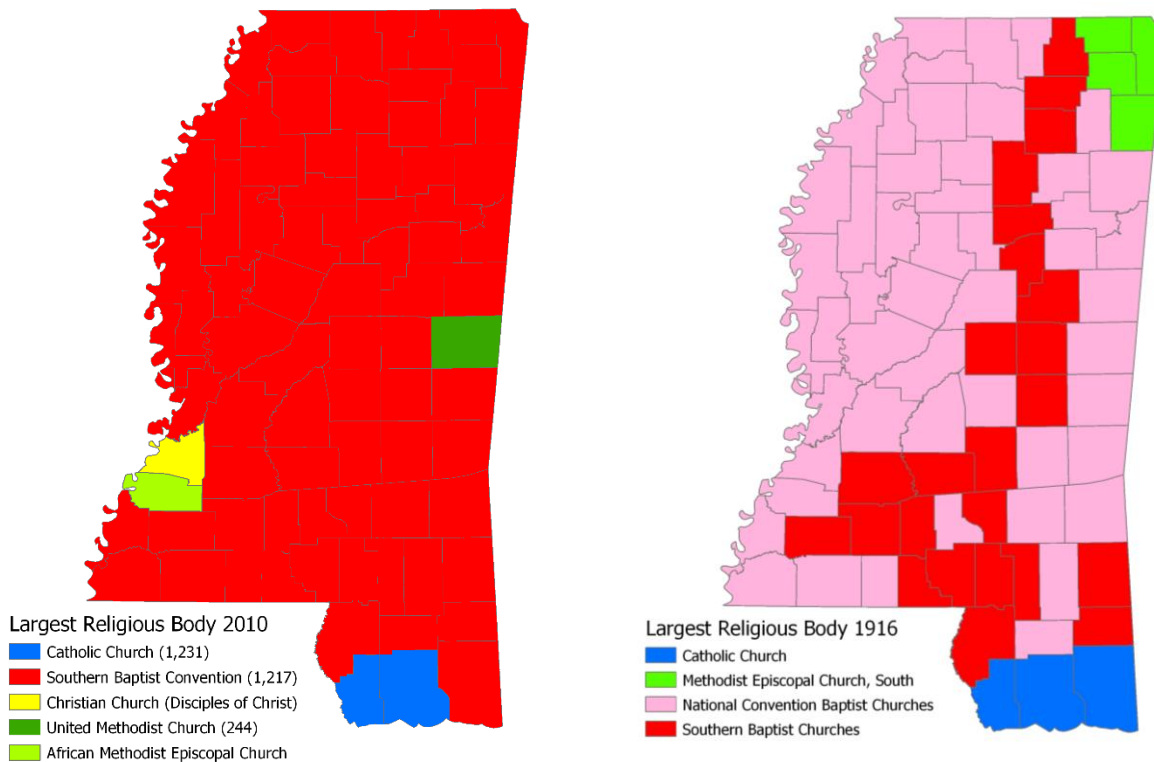
December, 2017

## Mississippi's Second Century

The [U.S. Religion Census](#) is often used to identify dominant religions within individual counties\*. It is the best source for comparative county-level data across the nation. With this data available, it is then easy to compile the data at state and metropolitan area levels.

Mississippi celebrated its bicentennial this month. Not surprisingly to those who study religion, the Southern Baptist Convention, with over 900 thousand adherents\*\*, is the largest single group in the state and in seventy-seven of Mississippi's eighty-two counties.

But the Southern Baptists have not always been so dominant in Mississippi religion. The U.S. Census Bureau collected religious information in 1916, and the Southern Baptists were outnumbered statewide nearly 2-to-1 by National Baptists. And Methodists or Catholics outnumbered any Baptist group in seven counties a century ago.\*\*\*



Historical comparisons like these raise questions: How did Southern Baptists come to dominate the state? Why did the proportion of National Baptists drop? What else was going on in society that might have affected these trends? Are African Americans in Mississippi now more likely to join religious groups outside the historically African American denominations?

Amateur historians can point to the creation of additional Baptist groups that may have attracted those who would have been National Baptists otherwise. The African American migration to the large cities of the North and West would have affected church participation in Mississippi. Perhaps the involvement of

national church bodies in the Civil Rights movement affected the participation rates in historically White denominations. And there is evidence that many African Americans are indeed taking part in religious groups outside the African American Protestant tradition.

This last point may need some clarification: Hinds and Rankin counties in the Jackson area had a total population of 387 thousand in 2010, of whom 195 thousand identified as African American or Black. Not counting seven traditionally African American denominations in those counties, there were 221 thousand adherents reported that year—which is 26 thousand more than the non-African American population.

In other words, it appears that at least 26 thousand African Americans in those two counties are part of religious groups other than those traditionally regarded as African American denominations.

To explore these and related issues is beyond the scope of this newsletter, however. Instead, this shows the importance of documenting just what the religious situation is at particular times so that such issues can be raised.

### ***Undercounts***

Those who are familiar with our studies may wonder about another possible explanation for the drop in National Convention Baptist presence in 2010. It is true that traditionally African American denominations do not always have the same emphasis on reporting statistics that other groups do. In most decades, this has resulted in almost no data being gathered at the county level.

In 2010, however, [strong efforts](#) were made to have these groups represented. Still, the data collectors are certain there was an undercount. But in only two counties was the undercount at all likely to have affected the ranking of denominations—and then only if the undercount was more than thirty percent.

The original researchers regularly document their methodologies and caution about possible undercounts, but those who use their data are not always careful to repeat the cautions. This is why the original researchers encourage every group to supply the most accurate data possible, so that such cautions are not needed.

### ***Preparing for the next census***

Before 1940, the U.S. government used its resources to create these periodic analyses. Since 1950, the job has fallen to independent researchers with far less resources. That is why the voluntary participation of individual groups is so important.

When future scholars analyze the religious involvement of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, we want to provide them with the most complete picture we can. That is why we are preparing now to launch the 2020 U.S. Religion Census. All these religious 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](#).

**\*\*\***At the time of the 1916 report, Humphreys County had not yet been created. All four of the counties from which it was formed reported National Baptists as the largest group, so Humphreys County is shown the same way on the 1916 map.

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 6,000 people visited our website in November. 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.**