

Religion Census Newsletter

July, 2018

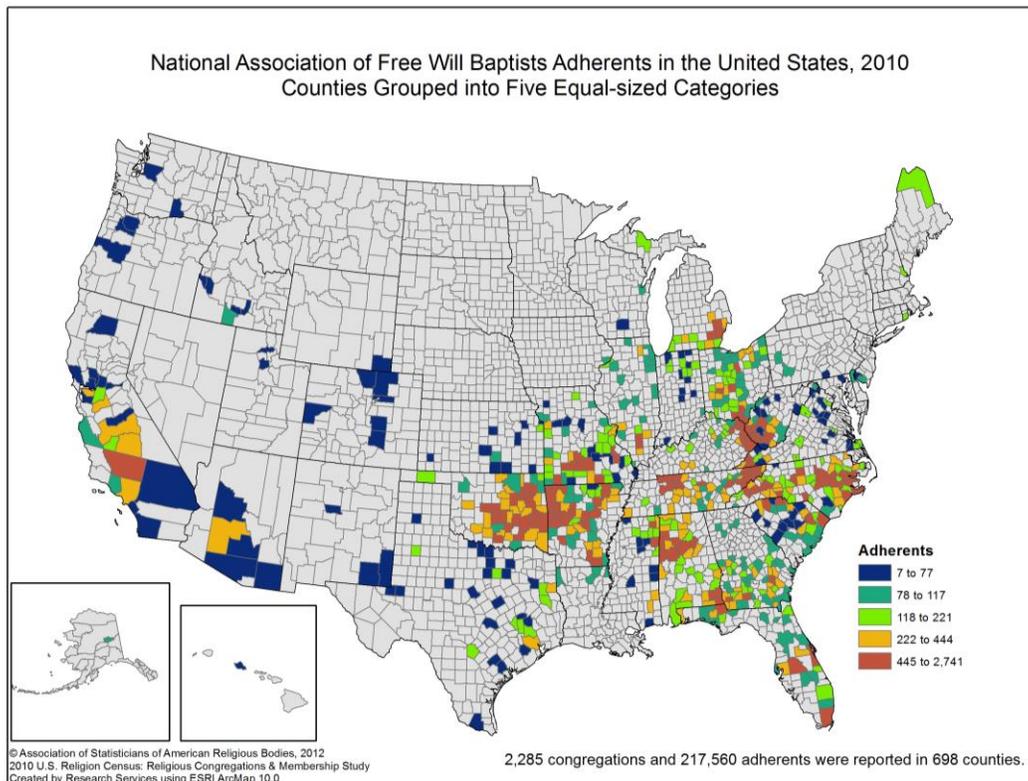
When Religious Groups Make the News

Sometimes a politician identifies with a specific religious group. Sometimes a local church does something that attracts national attention to its religious body. And sometimes a national group holds a convention or other special meeting. In all these cases, reporters often want to add national perspective to the story by learning about the distribution of the group.

Some groups have research offices to answer such questions. But dozens of groups do not maintain a national office, and dozens more do not include a research branch. And frankly, some reporters prefer a neutral data source with consistent definitions across religious groups.

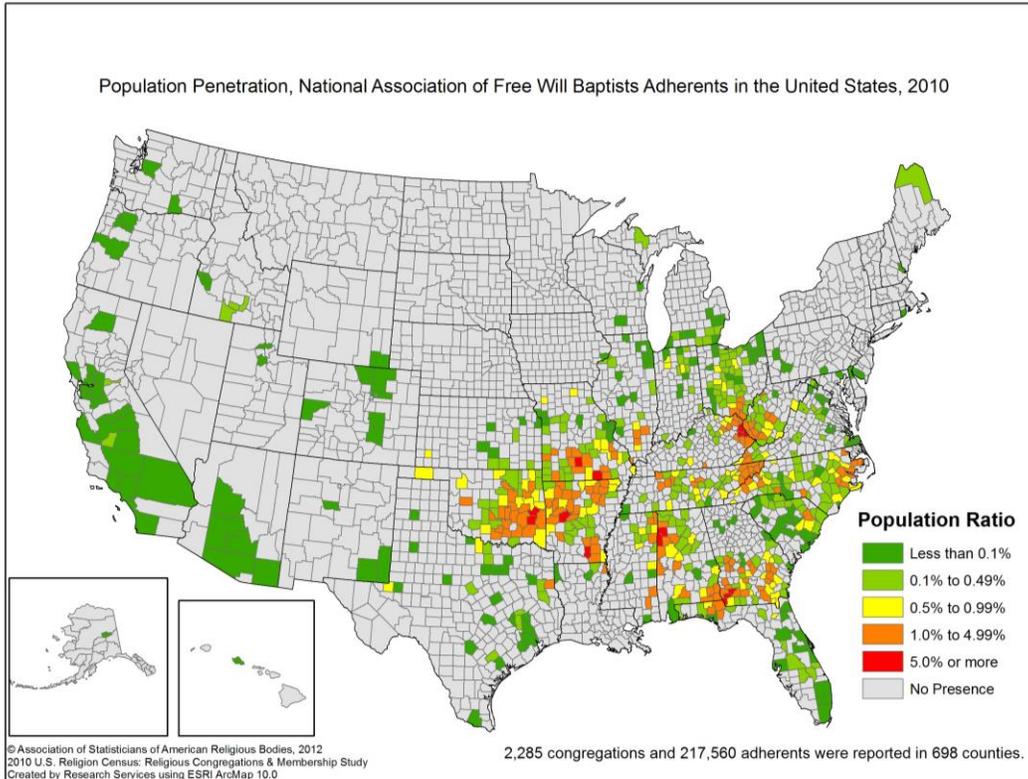
So reporters turn to the U.S. Religion Census. We aren't aware of any other dataset that can give as complete a religious picture of every county¹ and metro area as the Religion Census. So when a group like the National Association of Free Will Baptists holds its national convention, as it is doing during the month of July, our website is visited.

The first question usually involves the number of adherents² reported by the denomination. This is a deliberately different number from membership or attendance, both of which are also collected.



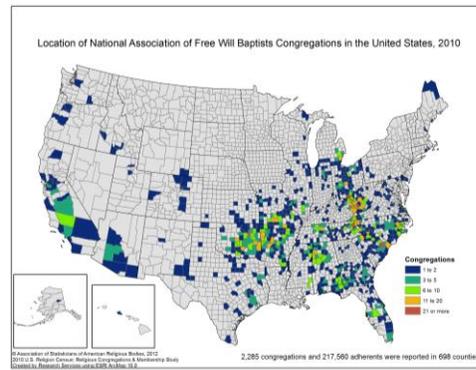
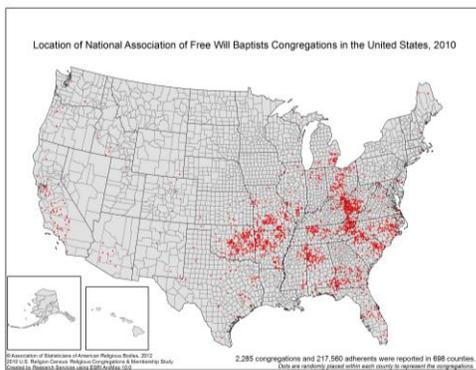
In the case of these Free Will Baptists, their largest concentrations are in the Appalachians and the Ozarks, with additional concentrations in the South and around some Northern and Western cities.

A related question involves the relative size of the group within the general population. This is often referred to as “population penetration.”



Despite the large numbers of adherents around Lake Erie and in California, the even larger population in these areas means that less than half of one percent of the population is associated with the group. But the penetration in southern Georgia, for instance, is much higher than the previous map might have indicated. The smaller numbers of adherents represent a higher percentage of the population in many of those counties.

And what about actual church locations?



There are multiple ways of displaying church locations. On the left, each church is represented by a dot placed randomly within its county. On the right, the county is colored in based on numbers of churches.

This information is readily available for each religious group that was included in the 2010 U.S. Religion Census. Our [map page](#) has a drop-down menu for every religious group. After selecting the group, the various maps and charts that have been prepared are listed in the second drop-down box. After selecting one or more, use the “confirm selection” button. Then, a “download” button appears at the bottom of the page.

Nearly 200 thousand maps and charts have been downloaded since the site went active in 2012. Over one thousand have already been downloaded in July.³

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.

¹ *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.”*

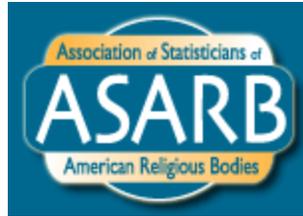
² *Adherents: Every participating group is asked to provide an actual count or an estimate of the number of people associated with each local congregation. This number is termed “adherents.” Ideally, adherents include all regular participants and/or all those regarding that congregation as their spiritual 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](#).

³ *The Religion Census office has records of which maps and charts have been downloaded for each group. If that information would be of interest to your group, [contact us](#).*

Every decade the US Religion Census tries to include additional religious groups, making the US Religion Census increasingly accurate. The 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 5,500 people visited our website in June. 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](http://www.asarb.com), 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.