

# Year Book Australia

## Culture and Recreation

### Religion

[http://www.abs.gov.au/Ausstats/abs@.nsf/dc057c1016e548b4ca256c470025ff88/](http://www.abs.gov.au/Ausstats/abs@.nsf/dc057c1016e548b4ca256c470025ff88/56c35cc256682bc0ca256dea00053a7a!OpenDocument)

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In 1983, the High Court of Australia defined religion as 'a complex of beliefs and practices which point to a set of values and an understanding of the meaning of existence'.

At the time of European settlement, the Aboriginal inhabitants followed their own religions which were animistic in nature, involving beliefs in spirits behind the forces of nature, and the influence of ancestral spirit beings.

During the 1800s, European settlers brought their traditional churches to Australia. These included the Church of England (now the Anglican Church), and the Methodist, Catholic, Presbyterian, Congregationalist and Baptist churches.

Section 116 of the 1900 Act to constitute the Commonwealth of Australia (Australian Constitution) provides that:

The Commonwealth of Australia shall not make any law establishing any religion, or for imposing any religious observance, or for prohibiting the free exercise of any religion, and no religious test shall be required as a qualification for any office or public trust under the Commonwealth.

With the exception of a small but significant Lutheran population of Germanic descent, Australian society in 1901 was predominantly Anglo-Celtic, with 40% of the population being Anglican (then Church of England), 23% Catholic, 34% other Christian and about 1% professing non-Christian religions.

Further waves of migration helped to reshape the profile of Australia's religious affiliations over subsequent decades. The impact of migration from Europe in the aftermath of World War II led to increases in affiliates of the Orthodox Churches, the establishment of Reformed bodies, growth in the number of Catholics (largely from Italian migration), and the creation of ethnic parishes among many other denominations. More recently, immigration from South-East Asia and the Middle East has expanded Buddhist and Muslim numbers considerably, and increased the ethnic diversity of existing Christian denominations.

In response to the 2001 Census of Population and Housing question, Australians' stated religious affiliations were: 27% Catholic, 21% Anglican, 21% other Christian denominations and 5% non-Christian religions. Just over one-quarter of all Australians either stated they had no religion, or did not adequately respond to the question to enable classification of their religion.

A question on religious affiliation has been asked in every census taken in Australia, with the voluntary nature of this question having been specifically stated since 1933. In 1971, the instruction 'if no religion, write none' was introduced. This saw a seven-fold increase from the previous census year in the percentage of Australians stating

they had no religion. Since 1971, this percentage has progressively increased to about 16% in 1996 and 2001. Table 12.19 provides a summary of the major religious affiliations at each census since 1901.

### 12.19 MAJOR RELIGIOUS AFFILIATIONS

Census year	Christianity							Total '000
	Anglican	Catholic	Other	Total	Other religions	No religion	Not stated/ inadequately described	
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	
1901	39.7	22.7	33.7	96.1	1.4	0.4	(a)2.0	<b>3,773.8</b>
1911	38.4	22.4	35.1	95.9	0.8	0.4	(a)2.9	<b>4,455.0</b>
1921	43.7	21.7	31.6	96.9	0.7	0.5	(a)1.9	<b>5,435.7</b>
1933	38.7	19.6	28.1	86.4	0.4	0.2	12.9	<b>6,629.8</b>
1947	39.0	20.9	28.1	88.0	0.5	0.3	11.1	<b>7,579.4</b>
1954	37.9	22.9	28.5	89.4	0.6	0.3	9.7	<b>8,986.5</b>
1961	34.9	24.9	28.4	88.3	0.7	0.4	10.7	<b>10,508.2</b>
1966	33.5	26.2	28.5	88.2	0.7	0.8	10.3	<b>11,599.5</b>
1971	31.0	27.0	28.2	86.2	0.8	6.7	6.2	<b>12,755.6</b>
1976	27.7	25.7	25.2	78.6	1.0	8.3	11.4	<b>13,548.4</b>
1981	26.1	26.0	24.3	76.4	1.4	10.8	11.4	<b>14,576.3</b>
1986	23.9	26.0	23.0	73.0	2.0	12.7	12.4	<b>15,602.2</b>
1991	23.8	27.3	22.9	74.0	2.6	12.9	10.5	<b>16,850.3</b>
1996	22.0	27.0	21.9	70.9	3.5	16.6	9.0	<b>17,752.8</b>
2001	20.7	26.6	20.7	68.0	4.9	15.5	11.7	<b>18,769.2</b>

(a) Includes 'object to state'.

Source: ABS data available on request, Census of Population and Housing.

Table 12.20 shows the distribution of religious groupings by the number and percentage of affiliates at the 1996 and 2001 censuses, and the change which occurred during the five-year period. Affiliates of religions other than Christianity have shown the largest proportional increases since the 1996 census. Buddhist affiliates increased by 79%, Hindu affiliates by 42%, Islam affiliates by 40% and Judaism affiliates by 5%. These changes partly resulted from trends in immigration. Although the most common religious affiliation of immigrants is Christianity, affiliates of other religions are more highly represented among recent immigrants than in the total population. Between 1996 and 2001, there were just over half a million new arrivals to Australia. Of these, 9% were affiliated to Islam, 9% to Buddhism, 5% to Hinduism and 1% to Judaism.

Christian denominations had smaller proportional changes in the numbers of affiliates than the non-Christian religions. Between 1996 and 2001, Catholic affiliates increased by 4.2% and Baptist affiliates by 4.8%. However, as the Australian population grew by 6% during this period, the actual percentage of the population professing affiliation to these denominations remained virtually unchanged. The most notable decreases in Christian affiliation occurred for Churches of Christ (decreasing by 18%), the Uniting Church (decreasing by 7%), and Presbyterian and Reformed (decreasing by 6%). An increase was seen for Pentecostal affiliation, which increased by 11% between 1996 and 2001 (from 174,720). A substantial increase, associated with immigration from South Eastern Europe, was also seen for the

Orthodox Churches, with the number of Orthodox affiliates increasing by 7% (from 497,015).

## 12.20 RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION

	1996		2001		Change %
	'000	%	'000	%	
Christianity					
Anglican	3,903.3	22.0	3,881.2	20.7	-0.6
Baptist	295.2	1.7	309.2	1.6	4.8
Catholic	4,799.0	27.0	5,001.6	26.6	4.2
Churches of Christ	75.0	0.4	61.3	0.3	-18.2
Jehovah's Witness	83.4	0.5	81.1	0.4	-2.8
Lutheran	250.0	1.4	250.4	1.3	0.2
Orthodox	497.0	2.8	529.4	2.8	6.5
Pentecostal	174.7	1.0	194.6	1.0	11.4
Presbyterian and Reformed	675.5	3.8	637.5	3.4	-5.6
Salvation Army	74.1	0.4	71.4	0.4	-3.7
Uniting Church	1,334.9	7.5	1,248.7	6.7	-6.5
Other Christian	420.6	2.4	497.9	2.7	18.4
Buddhism	199.8	1.1	357.8	1.9	79.1
Hinduism	67.3	0.4	95.5	0.5	41.9
Islam	200.9	1.1	281.6	1.5	40.2
Judaism	79.8	0.4	84.0	0.4	5.2
Other religions	68.6	0.4	92.4	0.5	34.6
No religion	2,948.9	16.6	2,906.0	15.5	-1.5
Not stated/inadequately described	1,604.7	9.0	2,187.7	11.7	36.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>17,752.8</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>18,769.2</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>5.7</b>

Source: ABS data available on request, 1996 and 2001 Censuses of Population and Housing.

In 2001, 82% of Australians aged 65 years and over identified themselves as Christian, compared with 60% of 18-24 year olds. In contrast, the other religions have a younger age profile. For example, 15% of all Christian affiliates were aged 65 years and over, compared with 6% of Buddhist affiliates; and 8% of Christian affiliates were aged between 18 and 24 years, compared with 13% of Buddhist affiliates. The largest group of Buddhist affiliates was 35-44 year olds. Similar trends were evident for Hindu and Muslim affiliates. In the 2001 census, people in the 18-24 years age group were the most likely to state that they had no religion (20%).