



## Review of 2021 Census topics

### Religion

The ABS is consulting to seek views on the information to be collected in the next Census and this topic brief provides detail about what has been previously included on religion.

The opportunity to participate in the consultation will be available from 3 April to 30 June 2018 via [consult.abs.gov.au](http://consult.abs.gov.au)

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#### Why does the Census collect religion?

A person's religion is asked as part of a suite of questions on cultural diversity and has been collected since the first national Census in 1911. This is the only optional question on the Census. Information gathered is used by religious organisations and government agencies to plan service delivery and encompass religious practices within community services, such as education, hospitals and aged care facilities.

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#### What have we heard from you about religion?

During the 2016 Census topic review process, many submissions recommended changes to the religion topic. The issues raised in the submissions were very similar with most commenting that the current question wording assumes everybody has a religion. Suggestions made and investigated for 2016 included using two part filter questions, changes or additions to wording, and placing the 'no religion' response as first in the list of options. The suggestions were considered via user consultation, testing and review of the approaches taken in other countries. For 2016, the ABS responded to feedback by moving 'no religion' to be the first response category in the question, which was consistent with the approach already taken in a number of other countries.

Feedback has also been received on the standard classification of religious groups, including suggestions for further identification of the broad religious groups of Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam. Changes of this type would require an update to the standard and classification used for processing Census data, rather than the question asked. The standard and associated classification will be reviewed during 2018/19 and will reference feedback from stakeholders, and evaluation of the 2016 Census data.

For more information on the standards and classifications for statistics relating to religion refer to the following publications.

- [1200.0.55.003 - Religious Affiliation Standard, 2016](#)
- [1266.0 - Australian Standard Classification of Religious Groups, 2016](#)

Specific feedback or queries on the religious affiliation standard can be provided at any time via [standards@abs.gov.au](mailto:standards@abs.gov.au).

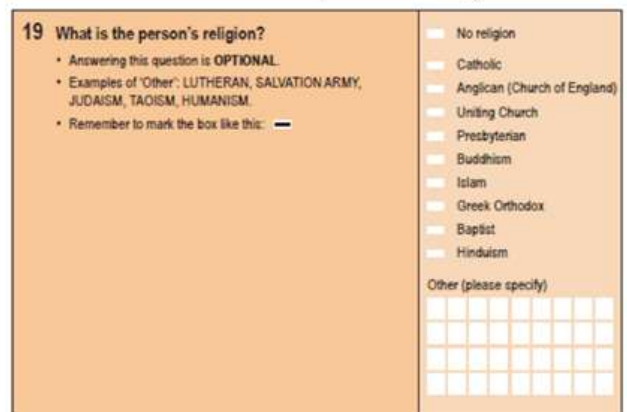
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#### Why is my religion not listed on the Census form?

While it is possible to report any of the vast number of religions practised in Australia, it would be difficult to list them all on the form without the question becoming too long and burdensome. Each time the Census form is designed, the most common responses from the previous Census are listed on the form, while a write-in response is available for all other religions. This makes it easy for the majority of people to select an option rather than having to type or write a response (see the example from the paper form). This same approach is used for questions on country of birth, ancestry and language spoken at home.

If a person does not identify with any of the options or would like to specifically name the religion they practice, they can provide more information in the 'Other (please specify)' box.

2016 Census Household Form question on religious affiliation



19 What is the person's religion?

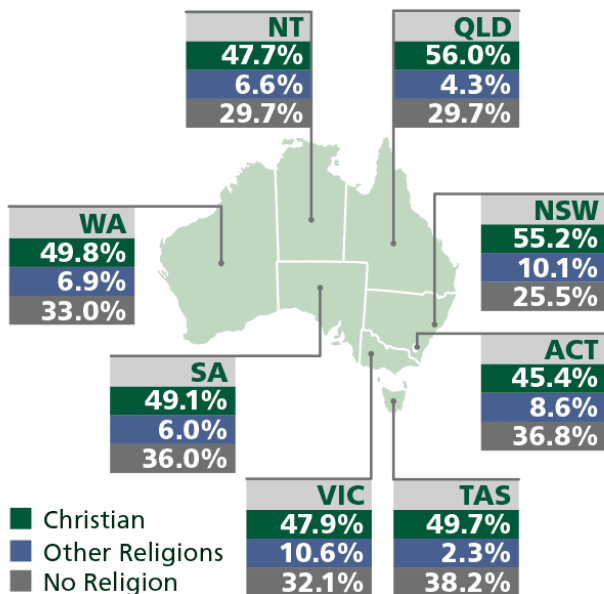
- Answering this question is **OPTIONAL**.
- Examples of 'Other': LUTHERAN, SALVATION ARMY, JUDAISM, TAOISM, HUMANISM.
- Remember to mark the box like this:

<input type="checkbox"/> No religion
<input type="checkbox"/> Catholic
<input type="checkbox"/> Anglican (Church of England)
<input type="checkbox"/> Uniting Church
<input type="checkbox"/> Presbyterian
<input type="checkbox"/> Buddhism
<input type="checkbox"/> Islam
<input type="checkbox"/> Greek Orthodox
<input type="checkbox"/> Baptist
<input type="checkbox"/> Hinduism
Other (please specify)

The standards and classification on religious groups is then used to prepare responses in a consistent way. The 2016 Census collected information on close to 150 different religions. Almost 10 percent of people who responded to the religion question in 2016 provided an unlisted religion.

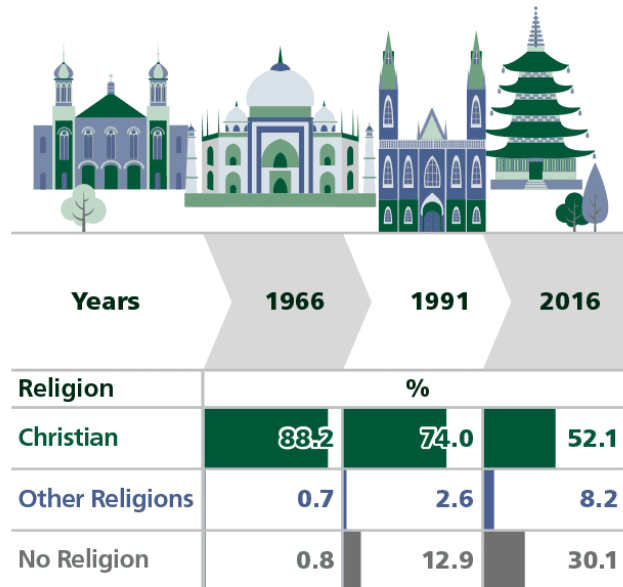
## Highlights from the 2016 Census on religion

RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION WITHIN THE STATES AND TERRITORIES, 2016



Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing, 2016

RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION OVER TIME - 1966, 1991, 2016(a)(b)

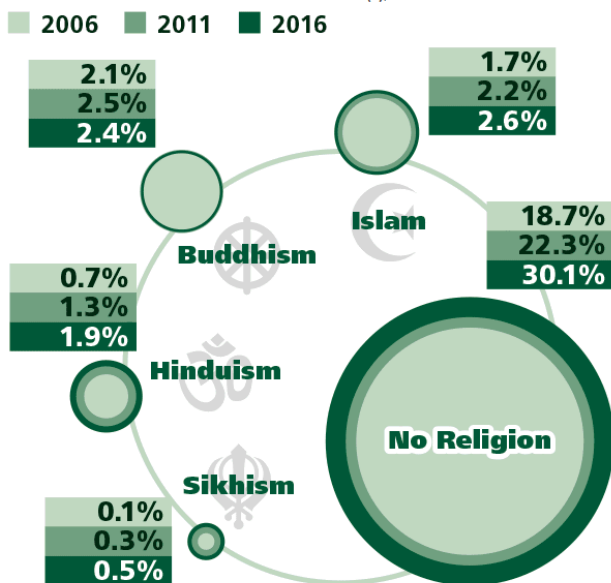


(a) Other religions includes: Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and other religions.

(b) No Religion includes: Secular Beliefs (e.g. Atheism) and Other Spiritual Beliefs (e.g. New Age).

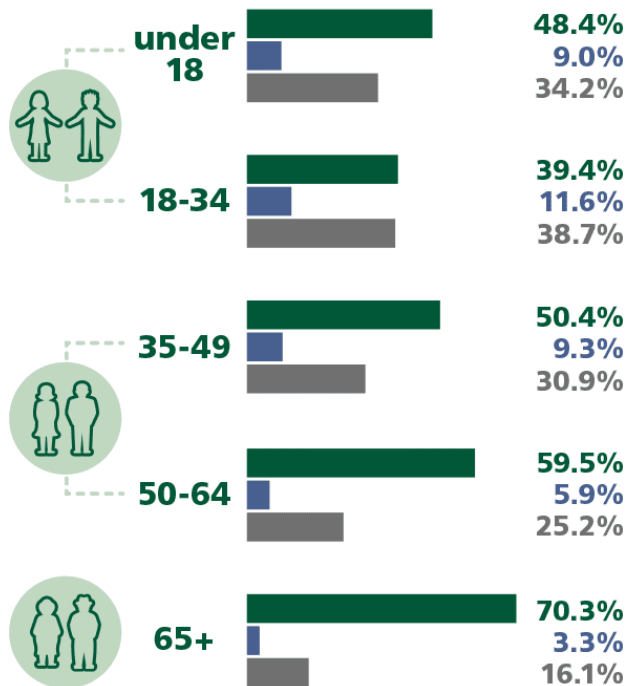
Source: Census of Population and Housing 1966, 1991, 2016

EMERGING MAJOR RELIGIONS(a), 2006 - 2016



(a) The percentages are as a proportion of the total population  
Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing, 2006, 2011, 2016

RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION AND AGE, 2016



Legend: Christian (Green), Other Religions (Blue), No Religion (Grey)

Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing, 2016

To better understand the data needs in regard to religion, we encourage you to share your views. Make your submission to our review of 2021 Census topics at the ABS consultation hub via [consult.abs.gov.au](https://consult.abs.gov.au).

For more information go to [www.abs.gov.au/census](https://www.abs.gov.au/census)