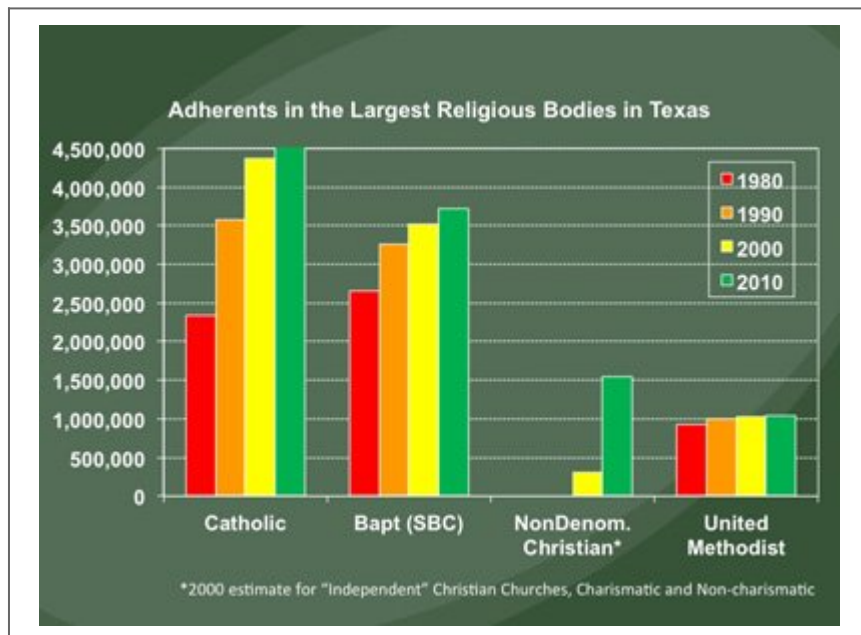


Nondenominational Christians, Muslims among top Texas religious adherents

July 11, 2012

Southern Baptists continue to rank second only to Roman Catholics in terms of total adherents in Texas, but nondenominational churches have overtaken Methodists, according to Clay Price, information analyst with the Baptist General Convention of Texas.



And while the precise number of Muslims in Texas may be debated, nobody can question their increasing presence in the state, Price said. The number of Texas mosques grew from 91 to 166 in 10 years, and Muslims may be the state's fifth-largest religious group.

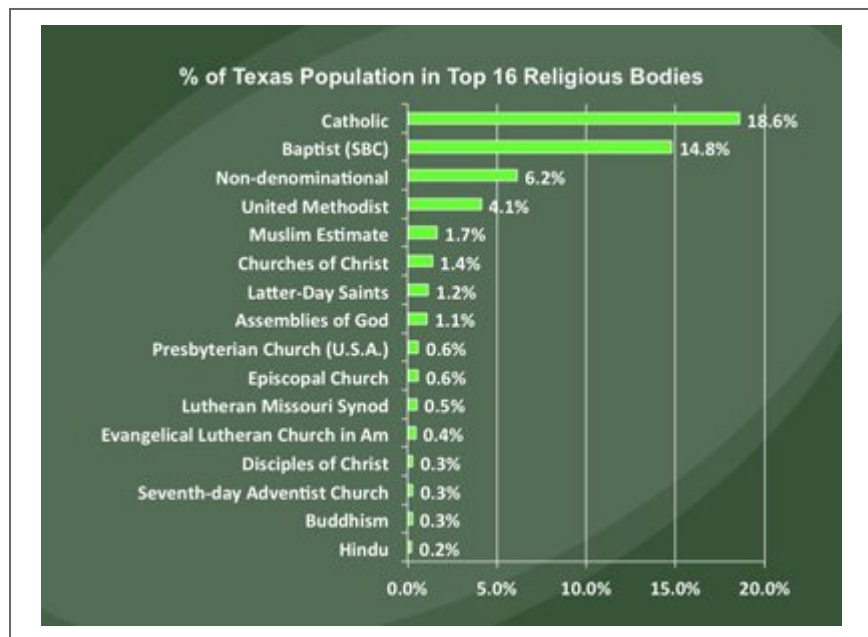
Price analyzed data from the recently released [2010 U.S. Religion Census](#), conducted by the Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies. He presented an overview of his findings to the July 10 meeting of the

BGCT Leadership Council.

The U.S. Religion Census showed 152 religious bodies in Texas claim 56 percent of the state's population, with more than 13.9 million adherents in 27,848 congregations.

Nationally, 236 religious groups participated in the 2010 study—produced every 10 years to coincide with the U.S. Census. The survey found 49 percent of the United States population related to a religious group, with more than 150 million adherents in 344,894 congregations.

"The adherent figure is meant to be the most complete count of people affiliated with a congregation and the most comparable count people across participating groups," Price said. Adherents not only include members, but also children and people who attend but have not joined a place of worship.



For groups that count members but not adherents, the U.S. Religion Census estimates that number by computing what percentage a group's membership is of a county's adult population, applying that percentage to the county's child population and then adding the resulting figure to the group's reported membership, Price explained.

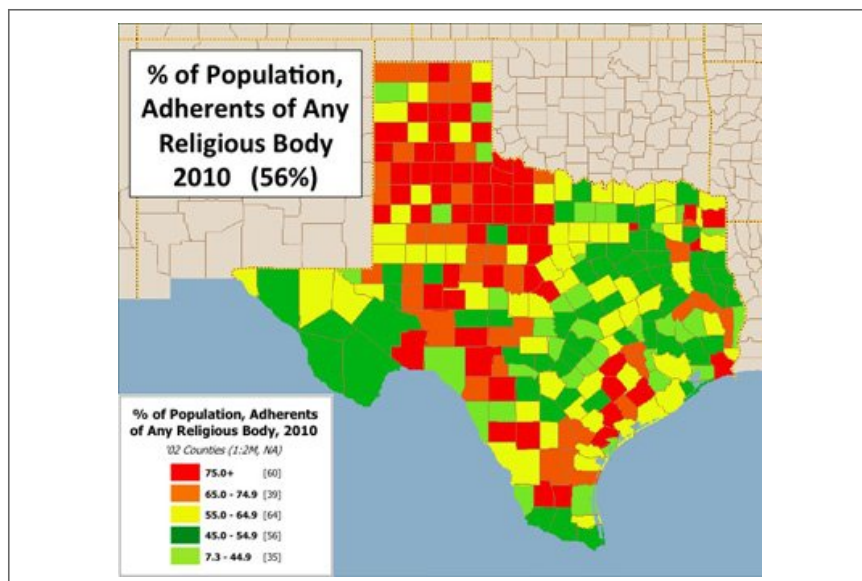
Southern Baptists in Texas grew by 5.8 percent, from 3.5 million to 3.7 million, while Catholics grew 7 percent, from 4.37 million to 4.67 million. The U.S. Religion Census counts as Southern Baptists any churches affiliated with either the Baptist General Convention of Texas or the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention.

Baptists are the largest religious group in 167 Texas counties, and Catholics are largest in 82 counties. Predictably, Catholics dominate in the southern third of the state, where the Hispanic population is highest, but they also post a strong presence in parts of metropolitan North Texas—notably Dallas, Collin and Cooke counties.

Together, Catholics and Baptists account for one-third of the state's population—19 percent for Catholics and 15 percent for Baptists.

Although nondenominational Christian churches were not identified in that way in the 2000 survey, they emerged as the third-largest group in 2010 with more than 1.5 million adherents in 3,600 congregations.

Adherents in nondenominational churches are concentrated particularly along the highly populated Interstate 35 corridor and the Houston area, but they blanket the state, with adherents in 210 of the 254 Texas counties.



United Methodists posted a modest 1.3 percent increase, from 1.02 million in 2000 to 1.03 million in 2010.

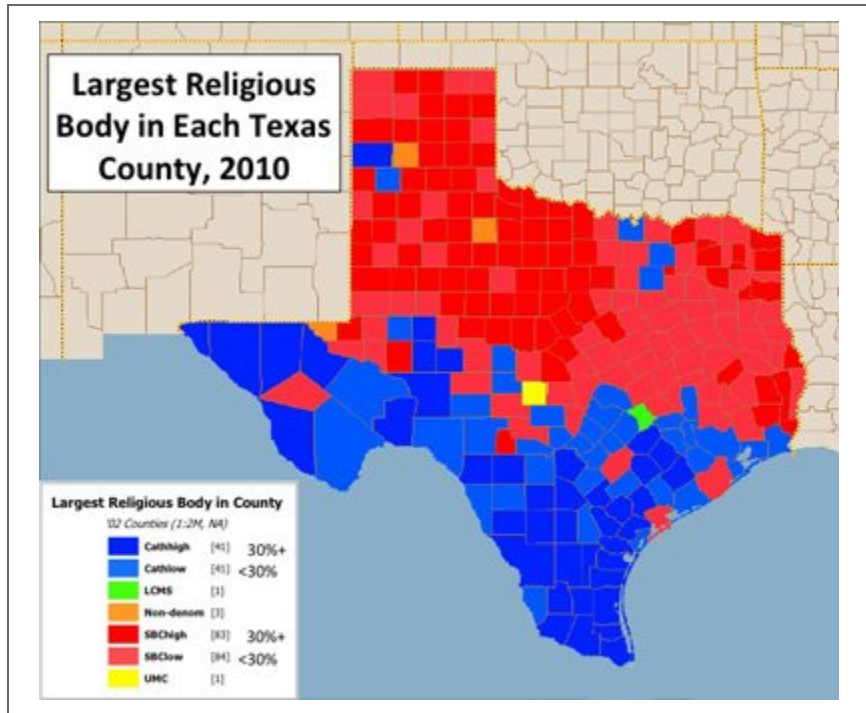
The survey showed Muslims had a 267 percent increase, from about 115,000 in 2000 to 422,000 in 2010, but Price took issue with the methodology used to arrive at that estimate.

Researchers estimated 2,542 average participants per mosque in Texas, based on the average size of mosques that reported their number of adherents, he noted. Price determined that average was applied to 47 of the Texas mosques, including some in counties with a relatively small population.

"The U.S. average was 1,247, and if this number had been used, the total Texas Muslim count would have been reduced by at least 61,000. The total Texas Muslim estimate would have been 361,000, and Muslims still would have been the fifth-largest religious group in the state," Price said.

He insisted a more accurate number would have been based on the median rather than the average, bringing the number closer to 300,000. Still, he noted, mosques are located in 35 of the 254 Texas counties.

"The estimate as reported is high, but even when using alternate methods, Muslims would still have a significant presence in Texas."



The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America posted the most significant decline in the last 10 years, losing 43,372 adherents. Other groups sustaining deep declines were the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), down 36,471; the Episcopal Church, down 29,471; Churches of Christ, down 26,135; and Presbyterian Church USA, down 25,269.

In contrast, the Mormons (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints) posted a 91 percent increase in adherents, and Seventh-day Adventists showed a 60 percent increase.

About 11 million Texans are unclaimed by any religion. Of the 44 percent of Texans not connected to any religious body, the largest number are in the counties with the largest populations, Price noted.

"There are 35 Texas counties where 55 percent or more of the population have no connection to a religious body, and there are another 56 counties where the percentage is 45 to 55 percent," he said.

"Baptist outreach in the form of new churches, evangelism and ministry are needed everywhere, but these 91 counties with higher-than-average levels

of unclaimed people demand our special attention."