

Statistical bulletin

# Religion, England and Wales: Census 2021

The religion of usual residents and household religious composition in England and Wales, Census 2021 data.



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## Table of contents

1. [Main points](#)
2. [Religion in England and Wales](#)
3. [How religious affiliation varies across England and Wales](#)
4. [Religion within households](#)
5. [Future publications](#)
6. [Religion, England and Wales: data](#)
7. [Glossary](#)
8. [Measuring the data](#)
9. [Strengths and limitations](#)
10. [Related links](#)
11. [Cite this statistical bulletin](#)

# 1 . Main points

- The religion question is voluntary; 94.0% (56.0 million) of usual residents answered the question in 2021, an increase from 92.9% (52.1 million) in 2011.
- For the first time in a census of England and Wales, less than half of the population (46.2%, 27.5 million people) described themselves as “Christian”, a 13.1 percentage point decrease from 59.3% (33.3 million) in 2011; despite this decrease, “Christian” remained the most common response to the religion question.
- “No religion” was the second most common response, increasing by 12.0 percentage points to 37.2% (22.2 million) from 25.2% (14.1 million) in 2011.
- There were increases in the number of people who described themselves as “Muslim” (3.9 million, 6.5% in 2021, up from 2.7 million, 4.9% in 2011) and “Hindu” (1.0 million, 1.7% in 2021, up from 818,000, 1.5% in 2011).
- Wales had a greater decrease in people reporting their religion as “Christian” (14.0 percentage point decrease, from 57.6% in 2011 to 43.6% in 2021) and increase in “No religion” (14.5 percentage point increase, from 32.1% in 2011 to 46.5% in 2021) compared with England and Wales overall.
- London remains the most religiously diverse region of England in 2021, with over a quarter (25.3%) of all usual residents reporting a religion other than “Christian”; the North East and South West are the least religiously diverse regions, with 4.2% and 3.2%, respectively, selecting a religion other than “Christian”.

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## 2 . Religion in England and Wales

### The religion question was voluntary

The census introduced a voluntary question on religion in 2001. In the census data, religion refers to a person’s religious affiliation. This is the religion with which they connect or identify, rather than their beliefs or active religious practice. As the question is voluntary, be cautious when comparing figures between different areas or between censuses because of varying response rates.

Percentages are calculated out of the overall population as opposed to out of the population who answered the religion question. This aids comparison across time and between areas, as the percentage of the population who answer the question varies.

In total, 94.0% of the overall population in England and Wales (56.0 million people) chose to answer the religion question in 2021. This is a higher percentage than in 2011, when 92.9% (52.1 million) answered the religion question and 7.1% (4.0 million) chose not to answer.

### Religious composition of England and Wales

The 2021 data show that the largest changes since 2011 were for those describing their religion as “Christian” and those reporting “No religion”.

#### Figure 1: The percentage of the population reporting “No religion” has increased

##### Religious composition, 2011 and 2021, England and Wales

##### Notes:

1. The base population used to calculate percentages is the overall population for England and Wales.

## Download the data

[.xlsx](#)

As in 2011, the most common response to the religion question in England and Wales was "Christian" (46.2% of the overall population, 27.5 million people). This was the most common answer in both England (46.3%) and in Wales (43.6%).

However, the number of people who described themselves as "Christian" decreased to less than half the population for the first time. It was a 13.1 percentage point decrease from 59.3% in 2011 (33.3 million people). This continues the decrease since 2001, when 71.7% (37.3 million) described themselves as "Christian".

This coincided with an increase in the number of people reporting "No religion" to 37.2% (22.2 million) in 2021 from 25.2% (14.1 million) in 2011. Again, this continues the trend between 2001 and 2011, when the number of people reporting "No religion" had risen from 14.8% (7.7 million people).

There are many factors that may be contributing to the changing religious composition of England and Wales, such as differing patterns of ageing, fertility, mortality, and migration. Changes may also be caused by differences in the way individuals chose to answer the religion question between censuses.

## Other religious groups

The groups shown so far all correspond to the tick-box responses for the religion question. A person could also identify their religion through the "Any other religion, write in" response option. This write-in functionality has enabled us to produce a detailed classification for religion in our Religion (detailed) in England and Wales dataset, providing insights for 58 religious groups. Further information on how write-in responses are included in the detailed classification for the ethnic group, national identity, language and religion questions can be found in our blog post [How am I represented in Census 2021 data?](#)

Among the 405,000 (0.7% of the overall population in England and Wales) who chose to write-in a response through the "Any other religion" option were the following religions:

- Pagan (74,000)
- Alevi (26,000)
- Jain (25,000)
- Wicca (13,000)
- Ravidassia (10,000)
- Shamanism (8,000)
- Rastafarian (6,000)
- Zoroastrian (4,000)

The largest increase was seen in those describing their religion as "Shamanism", increasing more than tenfold to 8,000 from 650 in 2011.

Of those who wrote-in a non-religious group to "Any other religion", the largest numbers were:

- Agnostic (32,000)
- Atheist (14,000)
- Humanist (10,000)

# 3 . How religious affiliation varies across England and Wales

## England and Wales

In England, there were decreases in the percentage of the population identifying as "Christian" and this coincided with increases in the percentage of the population reporting "No religion" in all English regions and in Wales.

Wales had a greater decrease in people reporting their religion as "Christian" (14.0 percentage point decrease, from 57.6% in 2011 to 43.6% in 2021) and a greater increase in "No religion" (14.5 percentage point increase, from 32.1% in 2011 to 46.5% in 2021) compared with England and Wales overall.

## Regions of England

London remained the most religiously diverse region of England. "Christian" was still the most common response in London (40.7%, 3.6 million of all usual residents). Over a quarter (25.3%, 2.2 million) of London's population identified with a religion other than "Christian", up from 22.6%, 1.8 million, in 2011. The next most common religious groups in London were "Muslim" (15.0%, up from 12.6% in 2011) and "Hindu" (5.1%, up from 5.0% in 2011).

## Local authorities across England and Wales

Local authority statistics provide further insight into where religious groups tend to be concentrated within England and Wales.

### Figure 2: Religion, 2021, local authorities in England and Wales

Source: Office for National Statistics – Census 2021

#### Download the data

[.xlsx](#)

Areas that have seen decreases in the percentage of the population describing their religion as "Christian" have generally seen increases across other response options to the religion question.

### "Christian" and "No Religion" by local authority

The English local authorities with the highest percentage of people reporting their religion as "Christian" were all in areas in the North West: Knowsley (66.6%), Ribble Valley (66.4%), and Copeland (65.1%). The Welsh local authorities with the highest proportion of people describing their religion as "Christian" were the Isle of Anglesey and Flintshire (both 51.5%).

The areas of England and Wales with the highest percentage of people reporting "No religion" overall were in Wales: Caerphilly (56.7%), Blaenau Gwent (56.4%), and Rhondda Cynon Taf (56.2%). In England, Brighton and Hove had the highest percentage of the population reporting "No religion" (55.2%), and also saw a relatively large decrease in the percentage of people describing their religion as "Christian" (30.9%, from 42.9% in 2011). Wales also had the areas that saw the greatest decrease in the percentage of people describing their religion as "Christian", with Blaenau Gwent (36.5%, down from 49.9% in 2011) and Caerphilly (36.4%, down from 50.7% in 2011) again in the top two positions.

As well as being the local authority with the highest percentage of people reporting their religion as "Christian", Knowsley also experienced a large percentage increase in the number of those reporting "No religion", from 12.6% (18,000) in 2011 to 27.2% (42,000) in 2021. This increase (of 14.6 percentage points) corresponds with a 14.3 percentage point decrease in the percentage of people in Knowsley who identified as "Christian" (from 80.9% in 2011 to 66.6% in 2021).

## Other religious groups by local authority

For other religious groups, the local authorities with the highest percentages of each group tended to be urban areas. As in 2011, the area with the highest percentage of the population who described themselves as “Muslim” was Tower Hamlets (39.9%, up from 38.0% in 2011) [note 1]. Other areas with high percentages of people responding as “Muslim” included Blackburn with Darwen (35.0%) and Newham (34.8%).

Harrow remained the local authority with the highest percentage of the population responding to the religion question as “Hindu” (25.8%, up from 25.3% in 2011), but Leicester, the second highest percentage, had a greater increase of 2.7 percentage points (17.9%, up from 15.2% in 2011).

The areas with both the highest percentage overall and the largest percentage increase of people describing their religion as “Sikh” was Wolverhampton (12.0%, up from 9.1% in 2011) and Sandwell (11.5%, up from 8.7%). The areas with the highest proportions of people describing their religion as “Jewish” were Hertsmere (17.0%) and Barnet (14.5%), and the area with the highest proportion of “Buddhists” was Rushmoor (4.7%).

The area with the highest percentage of people reporting “Any other religion” in 2021 was Enfield (3.1%). Enfield was also the area with the largest increase in people reporting “Any other religion” (up 2.5 percentage points, from 0.6% in 2011).

1. Because of an error in the processing of the 2011 Census data, the number of usual residents in the “Religion not stated” category was overestimated by a total of 62,000 for three local authorities: Camden, Islington, and Tower Hamlets. The 2011 data provided here has been corrected using published correction factors available in the [2011 Census products: Issues and corrections notice](#).

## 4 . Religion within households

For the first time, Census 2021 provides insights into religious group composition within the 17.3 million households that had more than one person (69.8% of total occupied households), in:

- 32.7% of households (8.1 million) all members who answered the religion question reported the same religion
- 20.4% of households (5.1 million) all members who answered the question reported “No religion”
- 13.7% of households (3.4 million) all members who answered the question reported a combination of the same religion and “No religion”
- 1.9% of households (460,000) all members did not answer the question
- 1.1% of households (285,000) at least two different religions were reported

## 5 . Future publications

More detailed data and analysis on religion will be published in the coming months, alongside the release of multivariate data. Read more about our [Ethnic group, national identity, language and religion analysis plans](#) and the [Release plans for Census 2021](#) more generally.

## 6 . Religion, England and Wales: data

### [Religion in England and Wales](#)

Dataset | Released 29 November 2022

This dataset provides Census 2021 estimates that classify usual residents in England and Wales by religion.

### [Religion \(detailed\) in England and Wales](#)

Dataset | Released 29 November 2022

This dataset provides Census 2021 estimates that classify usual residents in England and Wales by religion.

### [Multi-religion households in England and Wales](#)

Dataset | Released 29 November 2022

This dataset provides Census 2021 estimates that classify households in England and Wales by multi-religion households.

## 7 . Glossary

### **Multi-religious household**

Classifies households by whether members identify with the same religion, no religion, did not answer the question, or a combination of these options.

This question was voluntary and the variable includes those who answered the question alongside those who chose not to.

### **Religion**

The religion people connect or identify with (their religious affiliation), whether or not they practice or have belief in it.

This question was voluntary, and the variable includes people who answered the question, including “No religion”, alongside those who chose not to answer this question.

This variable classifies responses into the eight tick-box response options. Write-in responses are classified by their “parent” religious affiliation, including “No religion”, where applicable.

### **Usual resident**

A usual resident is anyone who on Census Day, 21 March 2021, was in the UK and had stayed or intended to stay in the UK for a period of 12 months or more, or had a permanent UK address and was outside the UK and intended to be outside the UK for less than 12 months.

## 8 . Measuring the data

## Reference date

The census provides estimates of the characteristics of all people and households in England and Wales on Census Day, 21 March 2021. It is carried out every 10 years and gives us the most accurate estimate of all the people and households in England and Wales.

We are responsible for carrying out the census in England and Wales, but will also release outputs for the UK in partnership with the Welsh Government, the National Records of Scotland (NRS) and the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA). The census in Northern Ireland was also conducted on 21 March 2021, whereas Scotland's census was moved to 20 March 2022. All UK census offices are working closely together to understand how this difference in reference dates will impact UK-wide population and housing statistics, in terms of both timing and scope.

## Response rate

The overall person response rate for the census is the number of usual residents for whom individual details were provided on a returned questionnaire, divided by the estimated usual resident population.

The person response rate for Census 2021 was 97% of the usual resident population of England and Wales, and over 88% in all local authorities. Most returns (89%) were received online. The response rate exceeded our target of 94% overall and 80% in all local authorities.

Further information on question-specific response rates will be published in a separate report later this year.

## Religious groups in the detailed religion classification

The counts for religious groups identified in our [Religion \(detailed\) in England and Wales](#) dataset are a representation of those who chose to write-in their religion. Some people may have chosen to describe a denomination of one of the tick-box responses (for example, Catholic as a denomination of Christian or Orthodox as a denomination of Jewish) through the "Any other religion" write-in response option.

Take care when comparing the religion data from Census 2021 with the detailed religion classification from the 2011 Census. In 2011, an error in the processing of census data led to the number of usual residents in the "Religion not stated" category being overestimated by a total of 62,000 for the following three local authorities combined: Camden, Islington and Tower Hamlets.

We have published corrected figures for estimates based on the tick-box classification. However, it could not be corrected for the detailed religion classification because the processing and relationships with other output variables is so complex.

For this reason, only apply comparisons for these three local authorities to the tick-box classification, using the corrected figures set out in our 2011 Census products: Issues and corrections notice.

## 9 . Strengths and limitations

Quality considerations, along with the strengths and limitations of Census 2021 more generally, can be found in the [Quality and Methodology Information \(QMI\) for Census 2021](#). Read more about the specific quality considerations for [Ethnic group, national identity, language and religion](#).

Further information on our quality assurance processes is provided in our [Maximising the quality of Census 2021 population estimates methodology](#).

## 10 . Related links

### [Census map](#)

Interactive content | Updated 29 November 2022

Interactive map tool that visualises Census 2021 data on different topics down to a local authority area and neighbourhood level.

### [Ethnic group, national identity, language, and religion quality information for Census 2021](#)

Methodology | Released 29 November 2022

Known quality information affecting ethnic group, national identity, language and religion data from Census 2021 in England and Wales.

### [Ethnic group, national identity, language and religion variables Census 2021](#)

Supporting information | Released 28 November 2022

Variables and classifications used in Census 2021 data about ethnic group, national identity, language and religion.

### [Ethnic group, national identity, language, and religion in Wales \(Census 2021\)](#)

Bulletin | Released 29 November 2022

A summary by Welsh Government of Census 2021 data about ethnic group, national identity, language, and religion in Wales.

## 11 . Cite this statistical bulletin

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