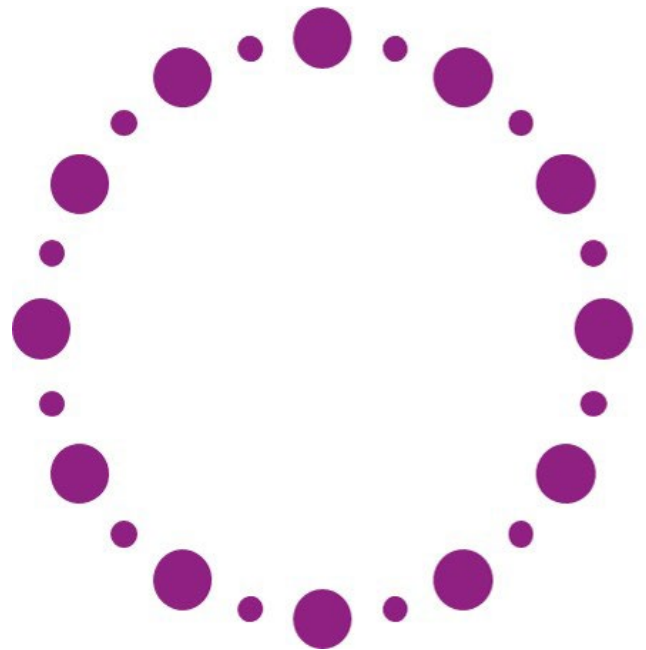


census
2021



Main statistics for Northern Ireland
Statistical bulletin
Religion

22 September 2022



[nisra.gov.uk/Census2021](https://www.nisra.gov.uk/Census2021)

1. Summary

The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) today released further results from Census 2021, which was held on 21 March 2021. The statistics released today provide a profile of the Northern Ireland population covering demography, ethnic group, identity, language and religion. The information covers Northern Ireland and the 11 Local Government Districts (LGDs).

This report relates to religion – for display purposes figures are appropriately rounded but full figures are available in the [Census 2021 tables](#) on the NISRA website.

2. Key points

The key points relating to the religion topic are as follows:

- In 2021, the main **current religions** were: Catholic (42.3%); Presbyterian (16.6%); Church of Ireland (11.5%); Methodist (2.3%); Other Christian denominations (6.9%); and Other religions (1.3%).
- In addition 17.4% of our population had ‘No religion’ – this is a marked increase on 2011 when 10.1% had ‘No religion’. This points to the increased secularisation of our population.
- The proportion of the population in Census 2021 with ‘No religion’ ranges from 30.6% in Ards & North Down council to 7.8% in Mid Ulster council. All councils are more secular in 2021 than they were ten years ago.

The key points relating to the religion and religion of upbringing topic are as follows:

- Combining current **religion and religion of upbringing** gives 45.7% of our population who were ‘Catholic’, 43.5% who were ‘Protestant, Other Christian or Christian related’ and 1.5% who were from other non-Christian religions.
- The remaining 9.3% of our population, or 177,400 people in Census 2021 neither belonged to nor were brought up in any religion. This group has increased in size from 2011 when 5.6% or 101,200 people were recorded in this way.

3. Questions asked

Census 2021 contained two religion questions, the first question related to 'current religion' with a follow-up question on 'religion of upbringing' for those indicating they had no current religion.

There are two sets of Census 2021 religion statistics published, the first relates to the current religion of the usual resident population and is based solely on responses to the 'What religion, religious denomination or body do you belong to?' question. A [guidance paper](#) on the religion questions in Census 2021 has been published today. The first religion question is shown in Figures 1 (online) and 2 (paper).

Figure 1: Census 2021 question on religion - online

What religion, religious denomination or body do you belong to?

Roman Catholic

Presbyterian Church in Ireland

Church of Ireland

Methodist Church in Ireland

Other
You can enter your religion on the next question

Or

None

Save and continue

Figure 2: Census 2021 question on religion - paper

13 What religion, religious denomination or body do you belong to?

Roman Catholic ➔ GO TO 15

Presbyterian Church in Ireland ➔ GO TO 15

Church of Ireland ➔ GO TO 15

Methodist Church in Ireland ➔ GO TO 15

Other, write in ➔ GO TO 15

None

4. Current religion – Census 2021

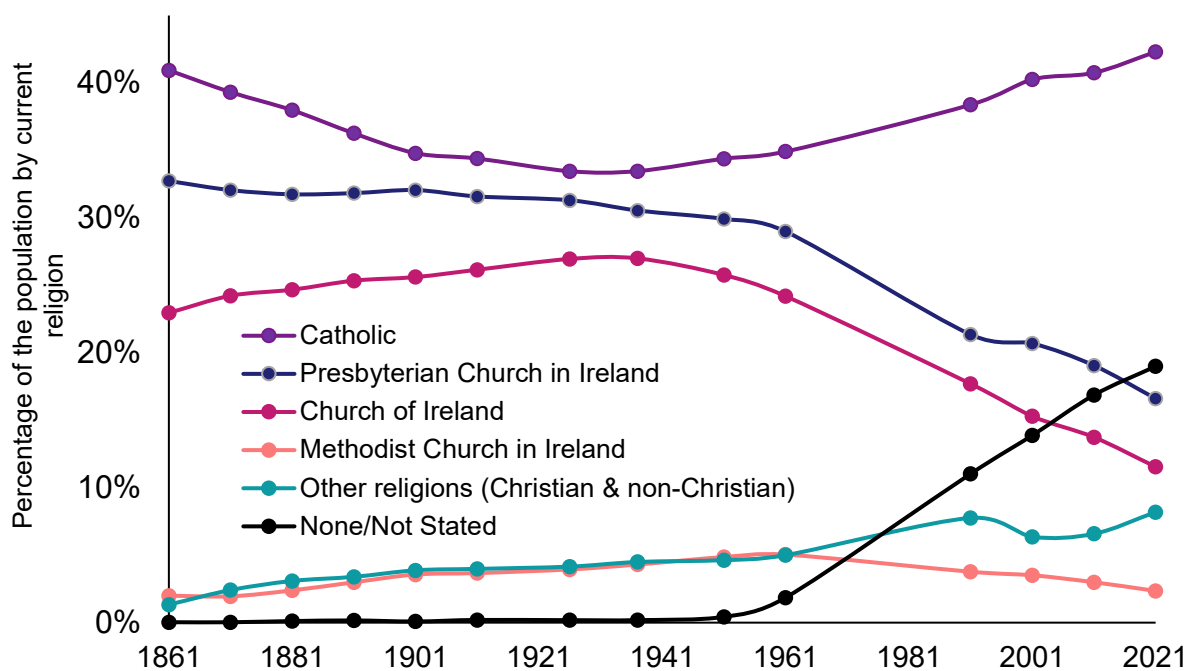
On Census Day 2021 just under one person in five (19.0%) either had ‘no religion’ (17.4%) or ‘religion not stated’ (1.6%). The equivalent percentages for the main religions were:

- Catholic (42.3%);
- Presbyterian Church in Ireland (16.6%);
- Church of Ireland (11.5%);
- Methodist (2.4%);
- Other Christian denominations (6.9%); and
- Other non-Christian Religions (1.3%).

5. Current religion – Change over time

Religion has been recorded in the census in Ireland/Northern Ireland since 1861 and Figure 3 below shows how the main religious groupings have changed over the last 160 years. The graph shows the increase in the population who have ‘no religion’ or ‘religion not stated’ over the last seventy years; this group is now second only to Catholic. This points to the increasingly secular nature of the population.

Figure 3: Percentage of the population by current religion (1861 - 2021)

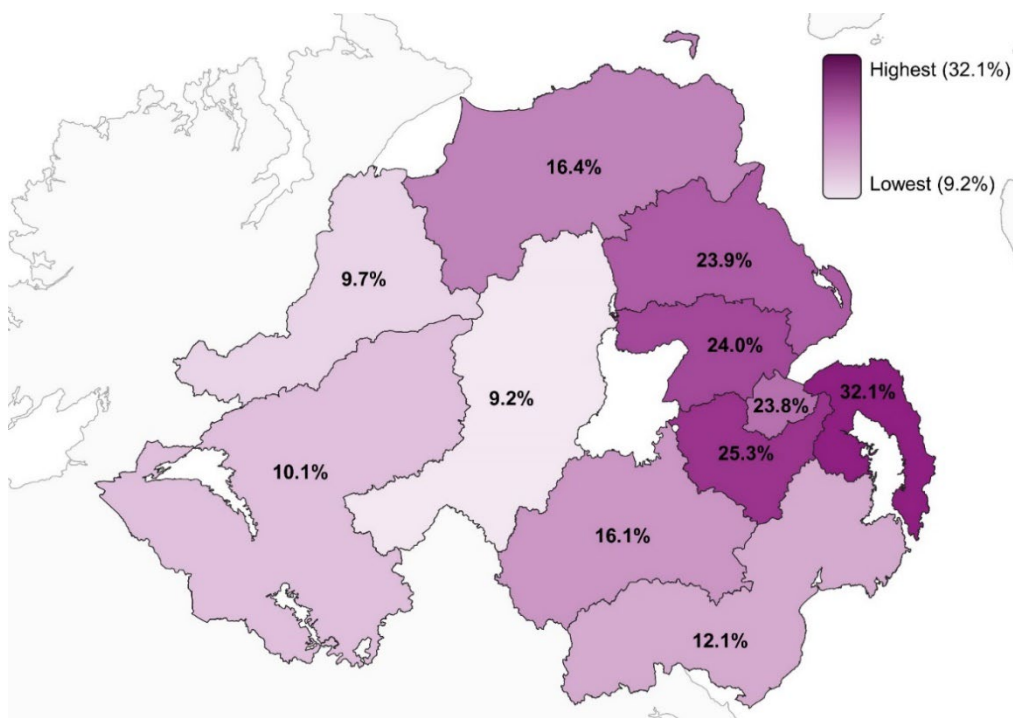


6. Current religion – Local Government District (Census 2021)

Looking across Local Government Districts (LGD) a number of patterns are found:

- Derry and Strabane (68.4%) and Newry, Mourne and Down (68.2%) were the Local Government Districts with the highest percentage of the population whose current religion was Catholic;
- Mid and East Antrim (32.2%) and Ards and North Down (28.5%) were the Local Government Districts with the highest percentage of the population whose current religion was the Presbyterian Church in Ireland;
- Lisburn and Castlereagh (16.3%), Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon (15.9%) and Fermanagh and Omagh (15.6%) were the Local Government Districts with the highest percentage of the population whose current religion was Church of Ireland; and
- Nearly one person in three in Ards and North Down (32.1%) and around one person in four in Lisburn and Castlereagh (25.3%), Antrim and Newtownabbey (24.0%), Mid and East Antrim (23.9%), and Belfast (23.8%), had ‘no religion’ or ‘religion not stated’. A map of this indicator by Local Government District is shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Percentage of the population with ‘no religion/religion not stated’ by LGD (Census 2021)



7. Religion/religion of upbringing – Census 2021

As noted in the introduction, Census 2021 included a follow-up question on ‘religion of upbringing’. The second question was asked only of respondents who answered ‘None’ or chose not to answer the ‘current religion’ question. The follow-up question is shown in Figures 4 (online) and 5 (paper).

Figure 5: Census 2021 question on religion of upbringing - online

What religion, religious denomination or body were you brought up in?

Roman Catholic

Presbyterian Church in Ireland

Church of Ireland

Methodist Church in Ireland

Other
You can enter the religion on the next question

Or

None

Save and continue

Figure 6: Census 2021 question on religion of upbringing - online

14 What religion, religious denomination or body were you brought up in?

Roman Catholic

Presbyterian Church in Ireland

Church of Ireland

Methodist Church in Ireland

Other, write in

None

This leads to the second set of statistics on religion, based on a composite measure labelled ‘religion/religion of upbringing’. This is the respondent’s current religion

unless they have 'No current religion' in which case it is their 'religion of upbringing'^{1,2}. The results from Census 2021 are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Religion/religion of upbringing (Census 2021)

Religion/religion of upbringing	Number	Percentage
Catholic	869,800	45.7%
Current religion	805,200	42.3%
Religion of upbringing	64,600	3.4%
Protestant and other Christian (including Christian related)	827,500	43.5%
Current religion	711,000	37.4%
Religion of upbringing	116,600	6.1%
Other religions	28,500	1.5%
Current religion	25,500	1.3%
Religion of upbringing	3,000	0.2%
None	177,400	9.3%
All usual residents	1,903,200	100.0%

On census day 2021 bringing together information on current religion and religion of upbringing, 45.7% of the population were either Catholic or brought up as a Catholic, while 43.5% were recorded as 'Protestant and other Christian (including Christian related)'. Again, bringing together information on current religion and religion of upbringing, 1.5% of the population are classified as 'other religions' and 9.3% of the population identified that they neither belonged to nor were brought up in a religion ('None').

8. Religion/religion of upbringing – Change over time

The two religion questions approach has been taken in the last three censuses (2001, 2011 and 2021) and religion/religion of upbringing statistics are shown in

¹ The composite measure classifies respondents as 'None' if they have 'No current religion' and 'No Religion of Upbringing'

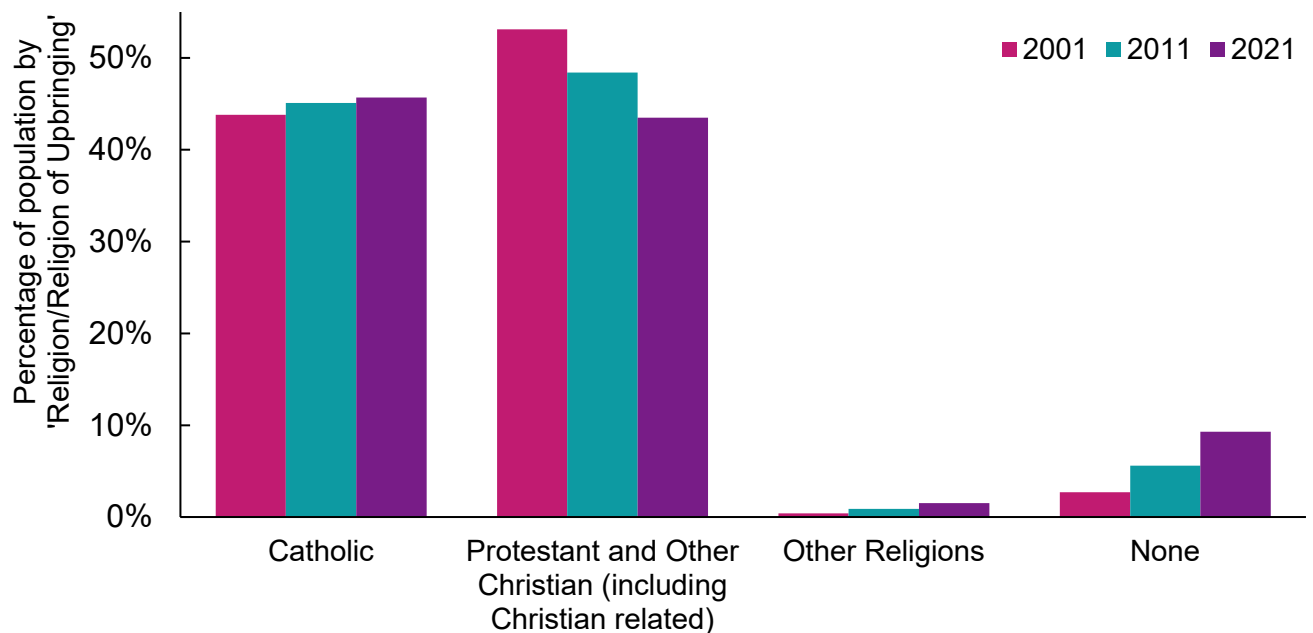
² A [guidance paper](#) on the religion questions in Census 2021 has been published today

Figure 7 and Table 2. Proportionately, the fastest growing groups are the ‘None’ (No religion) group (up from 45,900 people in 2001 to 177,400 people in 2021), and the ‘other religions’ group (up from 6,600 people in 2001 to 28,500 people in 2021). Both have approximately quadrupled in size over the last twenty years and now make up over one in ten of the population. This points to the increasingly diverse and secular nature of the population.

Table 2: Religion/religion of upbringing (2001 – 2021)

Religion/religion of upbringing	2001 Number	2001 Percent	2011 Number	2011 Percent	2021 Number	2021 Percent
Catholic	737,400	43.8%	817,400	45.1%	869,800	45.7%
Protestant and other Christian (including Christian related)	895,400	53.1%	875,700	48.4%	827,500	43.5%
Other religions	6,600	0.4%	16,600	0.9%	28,500	1.5%
None	45,900	2.7%	101,200	5.6%	177,400	9.3%
All usual residents	1,685,300	100.0%	1,810,900	100.0%	1,903,200	100.0%

Figure 7: Percentage of the population by ‘religion/religion of upbringing’ (2001 – 2021)



9. Associated outputs

[Census 2021 outputs on religion](#) are available to download from the NISRA website, they include:

- MS-B19 Religion
- MS-B20 Religion - intermediate detail
- MS-B22 Religion - 1861-2021
- MS-B23 Religion or religion brought up in
- MS-B24 Religion or religion brought up in (expanded classification)

10. Further information

Census statistics are produced by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency free from political influence. In May 2022, following a full assessment, the United Kingdom Statistics Authority designated these statistics as National Statistics, in accordance with the [Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007](#) and the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#). National Statistics status means that the statistics meet the highest standards of trustworthiness, quality and public value, and it is NISRA's responsibility to maintain compliance with these standards.

The census plays a fundamental role in the provision of official statistics – census data are used to inform key policies, plan key services and allocate public funds.

10.1. Quality of the results

The census data collection operation was supported by an independent [coverage survey](#). The coverage survey along with administrative data and information from the field operation were combined to allow statistical estimates to be made of the small proportion of people who did not make a return. The statistical estimates discussed here, as with all Census 2021 outputs, reflect the full population of Northern Ireland.

Further information on accuracy, coverage and imputation is provided on the NISRA website in the [Census 2021 quality assurance report \(PDF 275 KB\)](#).

10.2. Confidentiality

Census Office has taken steps to ensure that the confidentiality of respondents is fully protected. All published results from the census have been subject to statistical processes to ensure that individuals cannot be identified. For more information, please refer to the [statistical disclosure control methodology](#). These processes may result in very marginally different results between tables for the same statistic.

10.3. Comparability with previous censuses

The census is designed to provide the most accurate possible picture of the population on the day the census is taken. Whilst this report contains a small number of historical tables that give comparisons at the Northern Ireland level of some key demographic statistics, users should be aware that comparisons may be affected by other differences, in particular, between the census questionnaires, impacts of issues of the day, etc.

As the last three censuses (2001, 2011 and 2021) were all adjusted for under-enumeration and reflect the Northern Ireland population on census day, this supports comparisons between those censuses.

10.4. Supporting material

A number of [supporting documents](#) are available on the census pages of the NISRA website. These documents describe the census methodology in more detail, the quality assurance processes applied, the paper questionnaire used in the census, and a full list of definitions and output classifications.

10.5. More details

Further information on the statistics provided in this publication can be obtained from Census Customer Services at:

Telephone:	028 9025 5156
Email:	census@nisra.gov.uk
Responsible Statistician:	Dr David Marshall

This report was made possible by the co-operation of the public in responding to the census, the commitment of the census field and headquarters staff, and the assistance of many other people and organisations throughout all aspects of the census. The Registrar General for Northern Ireland, who is responsible for the planning, conduct and reporting of the census, would like to thank all of those who contributed to the census.

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