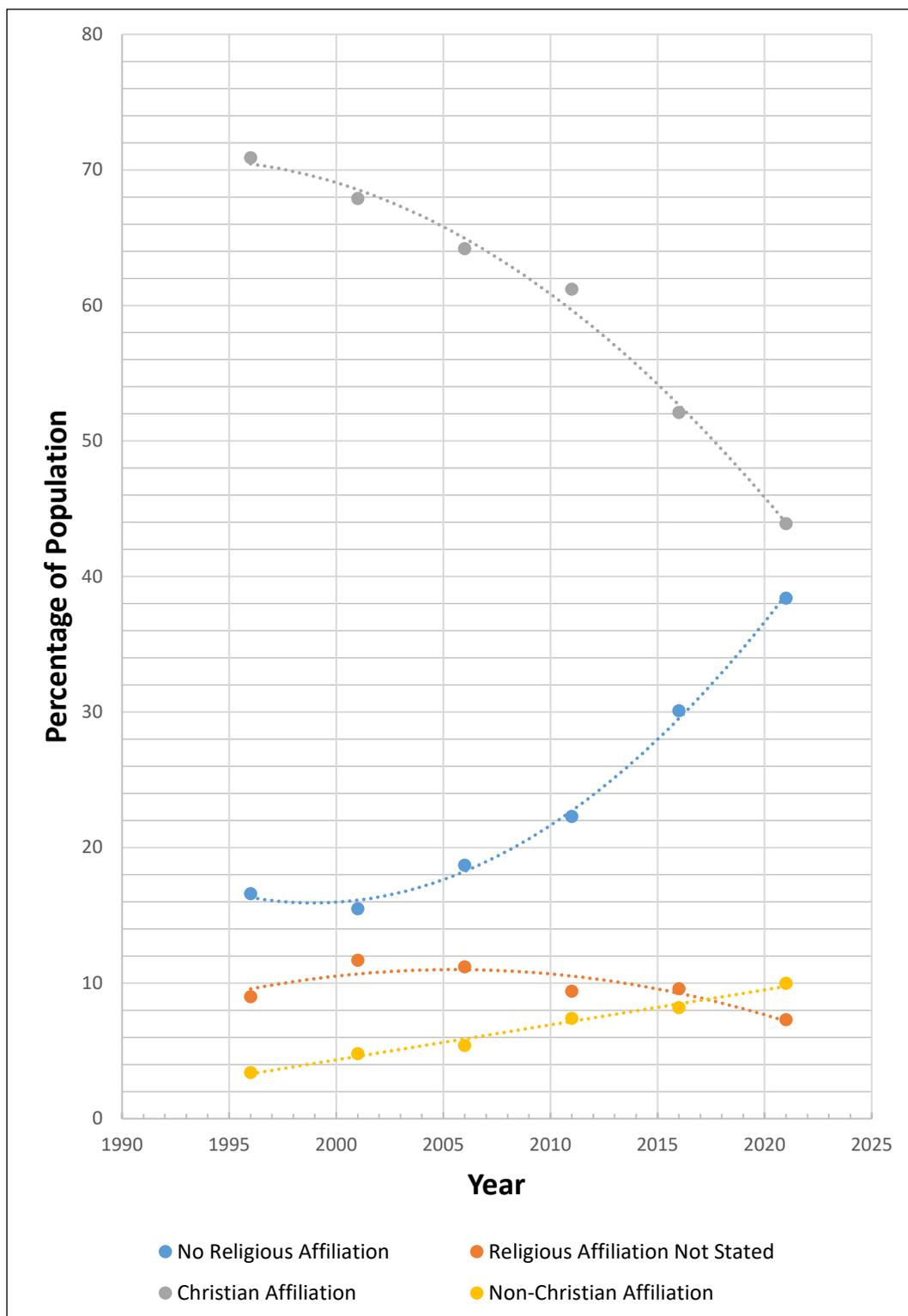


# From Religious Diversity to Multi-Faith Society



From ABS Census figures 1996-2021

Christianity remains the dominant religion in Australia. Since 1996, the number of people reporting Christian affiliation decreased from 12.6 million to 11.1 million, and as a proportion of the total population this number fell from 70.9 percent to 48.9 percent. The sharpest decline in the number of people reporting Christian affiliation occurred between 2016 and 2021.

Over the same period, those affiliated with other religions increased from 670,600 to 2.54 million. Collectively, they accounted for 10.0 percent of the total population in 2021, representing an increase of almost 300 percent since 1996.

Since 1996, the number of Australians indicating no religion on the census form increased from 2.9 million to 9.8 million in 2021, i.e. 16.6 percent of all residents in 1996 and 38.4 percent in 2021. Those who did not indicate any religious affiliation, or whose responses were too vague to do so, have fluctuated between 9.0 and 11.7 percent over the time period and was 7.3 percent in 2021.

## Major Religious Affiliations Described in the Australian Census

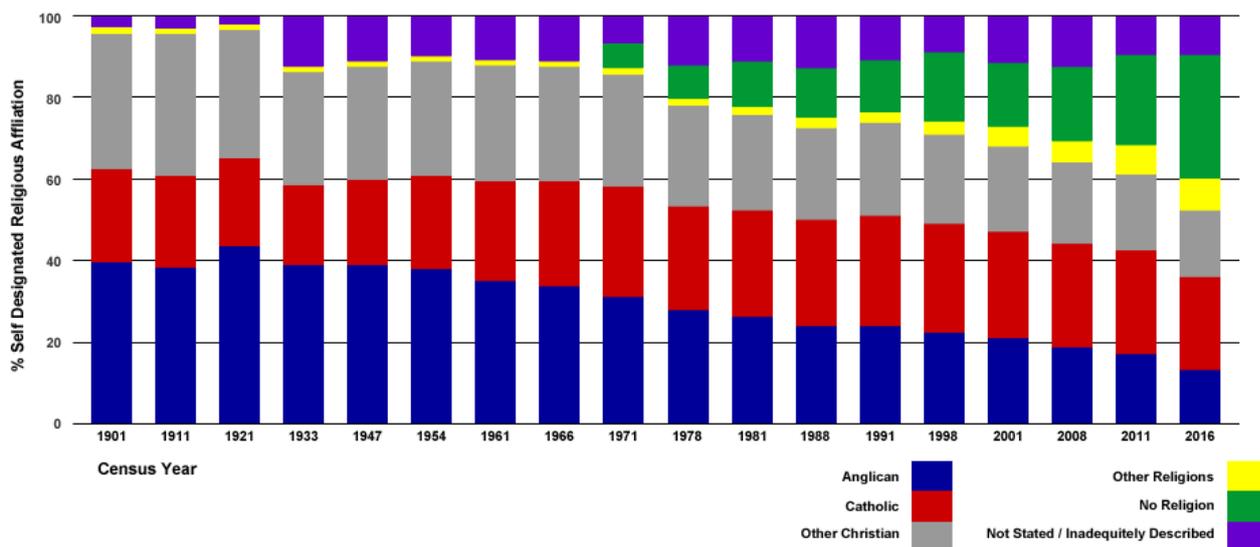
### Affiliation by Rank

2011		2016		2021	
Catholic	25.3%	No religion	30.1%	No religion	38.4%
No religion	22.3%	Catholic	22.6%	Catholic	20.0%
Anglican	17.1%	Anglican	13.3%	Anglican	9.8%
Uniting Church	5.0%	Uniting Church	3.7%	Christian*	3.8%
Presbyterian/Reformed	2.8%	Christian*	2.6%	Islam	3.2%
Eastern Orthodox	2.6%	Islam	2.6%	Hinduism	2.7%
Buddhism	2.5%	Buddhism	2.4%	Uniting Church	2.6%
Christian*	2.2%	Presbyterian/Reformed	2.3%	Buddhism	2.4%
Islam	2.2%	Eastern Orthodox	2.1%	Eastern Orthodox	2.2%
Baptist	1.6%	Hinduism	1.9%	Presbyterian/Reformed	1.6%
Hinduism	1.3%	Baptist	1.5%	Baptist	1.4%
Lutheran	1.2%	Pentecostal	1.1%	Pentecostal	1.0%
Pentecostal	1.1%	Lutheran	0.7%	Sikhism	0.8%
Judaism	0.5%	Other Protestant	0.5%	Lutheran	0.6%
Jehovah's Witnesses	0.4%	Sikhism	0.5%	Judaism	0.5%
Other Protestant	0.3%	Judaism	0.4%	Other Protestant	0.4%
Sikhism	0.3%	Jehovah's Witnesses	0.4%	Jehovah's Witnesses	0.3%
Seventh Day Adventists	0.3%	Seventh Day Adventists	0.3%	Seventh Day Adventists	0.3%

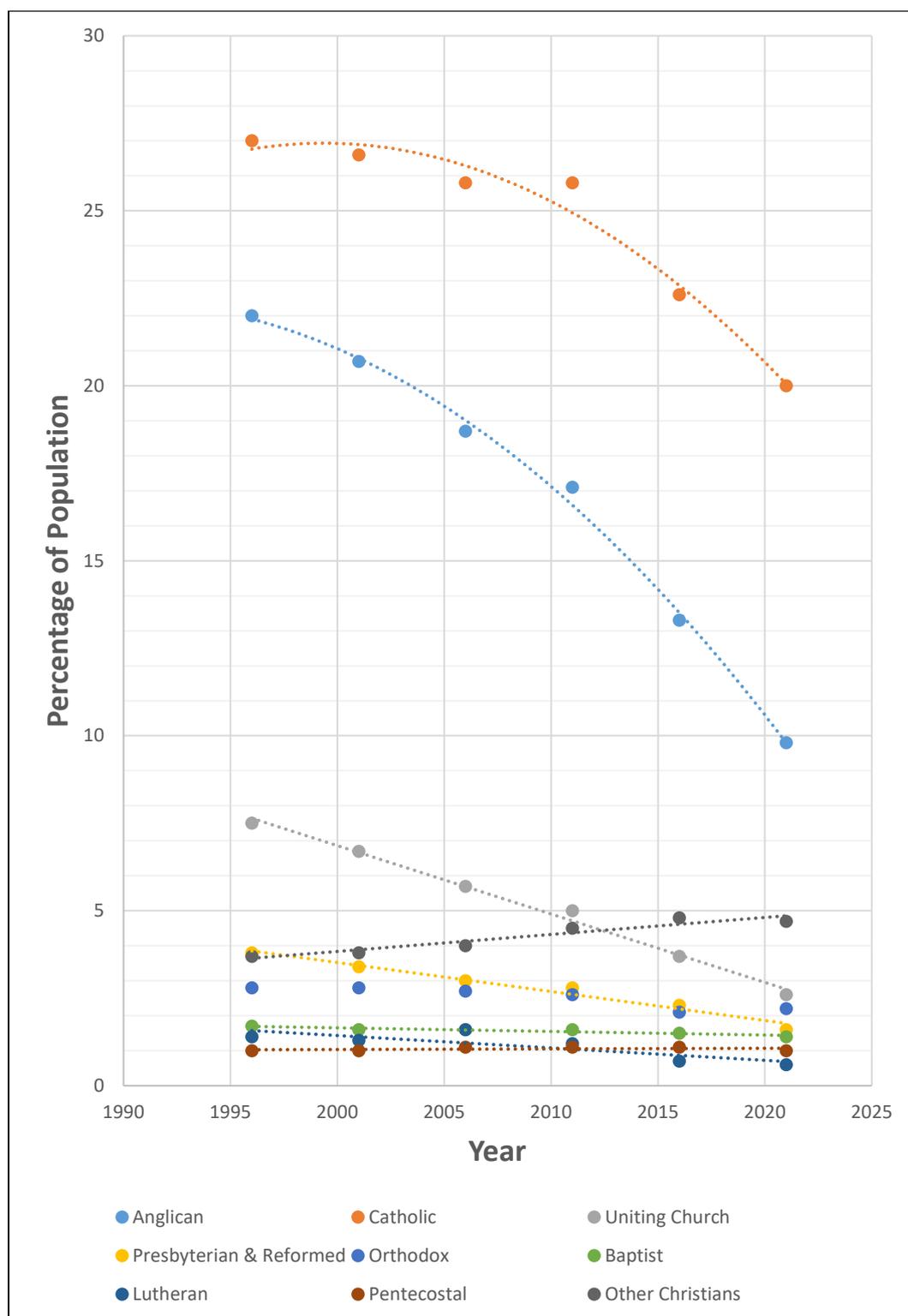
Latter-day Saints	0.3%	Latter-day Saints	0.3%	Latter-day Saints	0.2%
Salvation Army	0.3%	Oriental Orthodox	0.2%	Oriental Orthodox	0.2%

\*Excluding Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh Day Adventists, Latter-day Saints, Oriental Orthodox

- Increase in rank between successive censuses
- Decrease in rank between successive censuses



## Christianity



From ABS Census figures 1996 to 2021

## Catholics and Anglicans

Australia's largest Christian denominations continue to be the:

1. Catholic Church, with 20.0 percent of the population
2. Anglican Church with 9.8 percent.

Since 1996, the number of Australians affiliated with the Catholic Church grew by 5.8 percent to 5.08 million, although as a proportion of the total population, the number decreased from 27.0 percent to 20.0 percent. For the first time since 1996, the number of Catholics decreased from 5.29 million to 5.08 million between 2016 and 2021.

Since 1996, the number of Australians affiliated with the Anglican Church decreased to 2.6 million in 2021. As a proportion of the total population, the number decreased from 22.0 percent to 9.8 percent.

## Other Christians

Other Christian denominations to decline were the:

1. Uniting Church, whose numbers decreased by 49.6 percent to 673,360, or 2.6 percent of the total population
2. Presbyterian and Reformed Churches, whose numbers decreased by 36.9 percent to 414,882, or 1.6 percent of the total population.

During the same period, the number of Australians affiliated with the Orthodox Church remained steady at around 535,000. As a proportion of the total population, the number decreased from 2.8 percent in 1996 to 2.2 percent in 2021.

Those affiliated with the Baptist Church increased by 17.7 percent to 347,334, but as a proportion of the total population the number decreased from 1.7 percent to 1.4 percent in 2021. The number of people affiliated with the Lutheran Church decreased from 249,989 in 1996 to 145,863 in 2021. As a proportion of the total population, this number represents a decrease from 1.4 percent to 0.6 percent in 2021.

The Other Christians category comprises groups such as the:

1. Assyrian Apostolic Church
2. Brethren
3. Churches of Christ
4. Jehovah's Witnesses
5. Latter Day Saints
6. Salvation Army
7. Seventh-Day Adventists
8. other small Christian groups.

Since 1996, the number of people belonging to these groups almost doubled to 1.20 million, or from 3.7 percent to 4.7 percent of the total population.

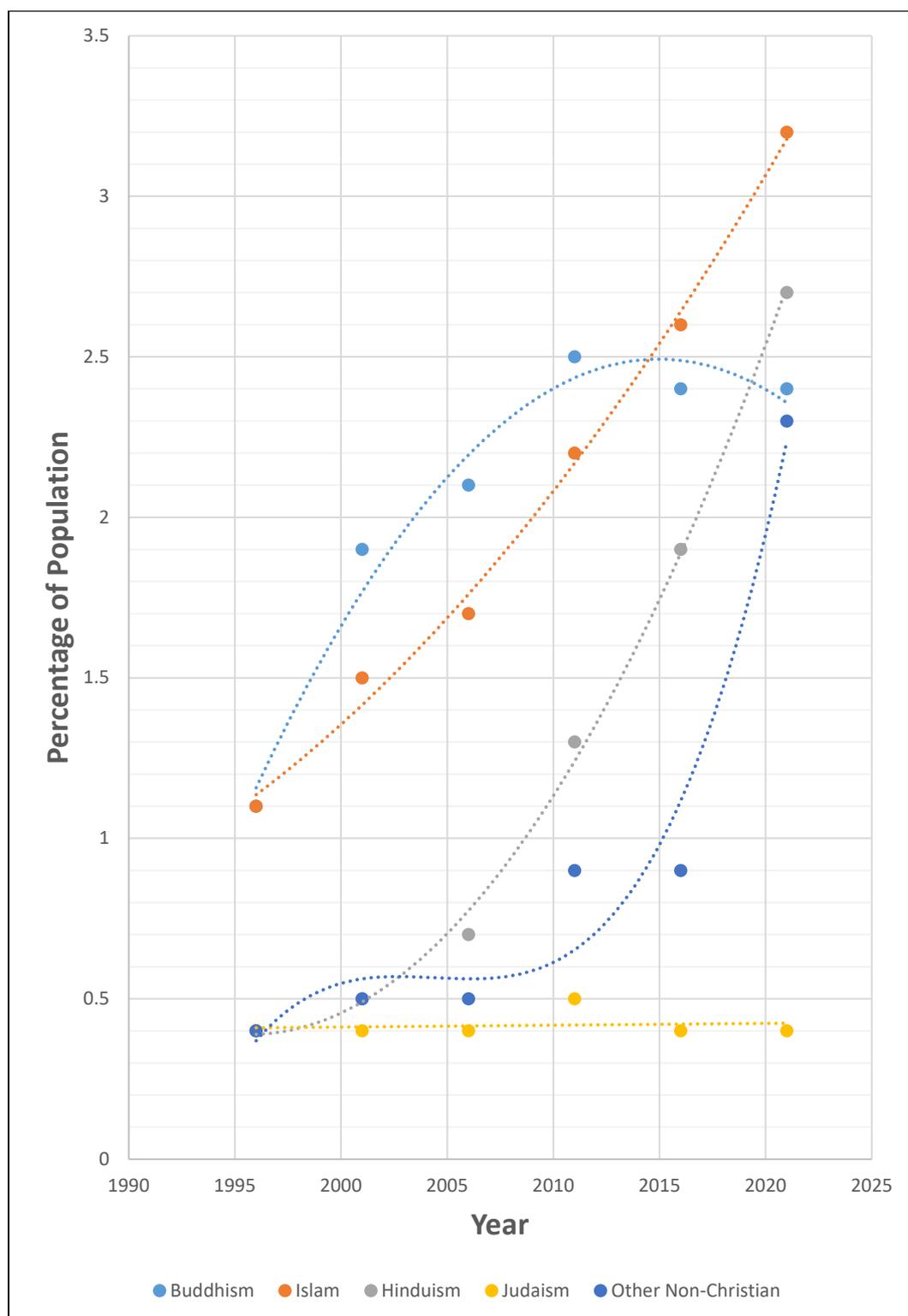
## Pentecostal Christians

Since 1996, the number of people affiliated with the Pentecostal churches appears to have remained steady at 1.0 percent of the population, while the actual number of adherents grew by 46.4 percent to 255,858. However, these numbers are likely to be conservative, as the Pentecostal churches are still growing, although the rate of growth is slowing.

The reason for this not showing in the census figures is that in 2000 leaders of the Pentecostal churches encouraged their members to indicate they were affiliated with the Australian Christian Churches. It is not possible to estimate how many people in the 'Other Christians' category belong to the Pentecostal churches.

Membership of the Pentecostal churches has grown particularly among young people. Increases in the 0-14, 15-24 and 25-34 age profiles have been recorded in each census since 2006. Associate Professor, Ann Evans of the Australian National University's school of demography said, 'Modern Pentecostal churches are actually very appealing to a wide demographic of young people - they have a very strong social element and very dynamic and engaging services. They're like going to a concert for young people.'

## Other Religious Traditions



From ABS Census figures 1996 to 2016

## Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism

According to the 2021 census, the largest other religious traditions after Christianity in Australia are Buddhism, Islam and Hinduism. Other religions and Judaism follow. The 'other religions' category has increased significantly between 2016 and 2021.

In the same census, 2.4 percent of the population declared themselves to be Buddhists with the total number of Buddhists increasing by a factor of about three to 615,823 between 1996 and 2021. 3.2 percent of the population declared themselves to be followers of Islam, with the number of Muslims increasing by a factor of about four, to 813,302 in the period 1996 to 2021. Over that same period, the proportion of Muslims increased to 3.2 percent of the Australian population.

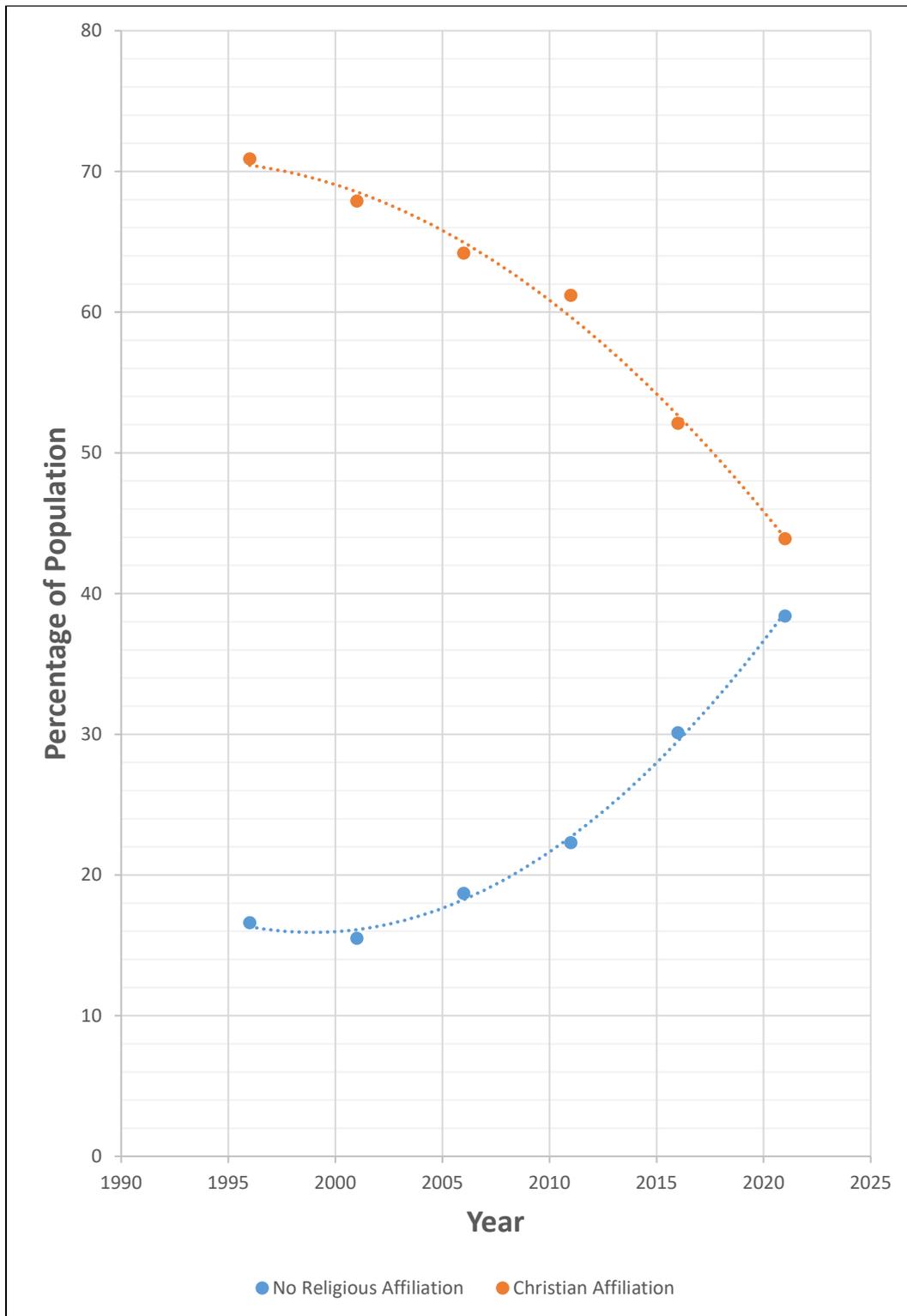
In the 2021 census, 2.7 percent of the population reported adherence to Hinduism. Numbers of Hindus increased by a factor of about ten to 684,002 in the period 1996 to 2021.

## Judaism

For the Jewish community, the figures have remained steady. From 1996 to 2021 the proportion of Jews in the Australian population remained around 0.4 percent and 0.5 percent. The number of Jews increased by 25.3 percent to 99,956 in 2021.

## Census Data

### Analysis



Over time, data on religious adherence collected by the Australian Bureau of Statistics usually follow a uniform pattern, which makes statistical analysis possible. Mathematical modelling is a method that uses data over a period of time from which predictions can be made. Models produced are based on the data and provide an estimate, not an actual record of the statistics. The difference is called a degree of error and is an accepted imperfection in mathematical modelling.

What follows is an example of mathematical modelling based on the ABS 1996, 2001, 2006, 2011, 2016 and 2021 census data provided in the table at the beginning of this part. Therefore, this model is based on data over twenty five years and can be used to make general predictions.

We begin by determining the line of best fit of each denomination. This is shown in the graph.

## Explanation of Model

Over time, the percentage of Christians and people claiming no religious affiliation in the Australian population follows a simple relationship shown by the line of best fit. Each line of best fit can be represented by a mathematical equation. In the case of the total Christian population, the equation is:

$$\text{Percentage of Christians} = 70 - 0.0539 \times (\text{number of years elapsed since 1996})^2 - 0.1459 \times (\text{number of years elapsed since 1996}).$$

This relationship can be used to *predict* that in 2026, thirty years after the 1996 census, the percentage of Christians will drop to 33.8 percent.

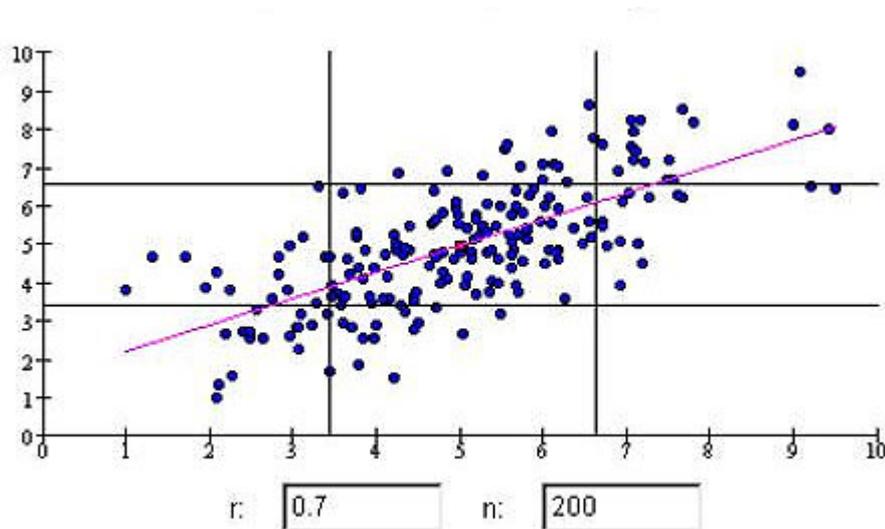
$$\text{Percentage of Christians} = 70 - 0.0539 \times 30^2 - 0.1459 \times 30$$

Religious Group	Relationship	Predictions for 2026
Catholic	Percentage = $27 - 0.0137 \times (\text{number of years elapsed since 1996})^2 - 0.0655 \times (\text{number of years elapsed since 1996})$	In 2026, the percentage of Catholics will drop to 16.6 percent.
Anglican	Percentage = $22 - 0.0126 \times (\text{number of years elapsed since 1996})^2 - 0.1729 \times (\text{number of years elapsed since 1996})$	In 2026, the percentage of Anglicans will drop to 5.6 percent.
Uniting	Percentage = $7.5 - 0.0019 \times (\text{number of years elapsed since 1996})^2 - 0.1498 \times (\text{number of years elapsed since 1996})$	In 2026, the percentage of Uniting Church adherents will drop to 1.3 percent. This is less than the percentage of Muslims and Hindus predicted for 2026.
All Christians	Percentage = $70 - 0.0539 \times (\text{number of years elapsed since 1996})^2 - 0.1459 \times (\text{number of years elapsed since 1996})$	In 2026, the percentage of all Australian Christians will drop to 33.8 percent. This is significantly less than the percentage of the population claiming no religious affiliation predicted for 2026.
Islam	Percentage = $1.1 + 0.0011 \times (\text{number of years elapsed since 1996})^2 + 0.0547 \times (\text{number of years elapsed since 1996})$	In 2026, the percentage of Muslims will rise to 3.7 percent.

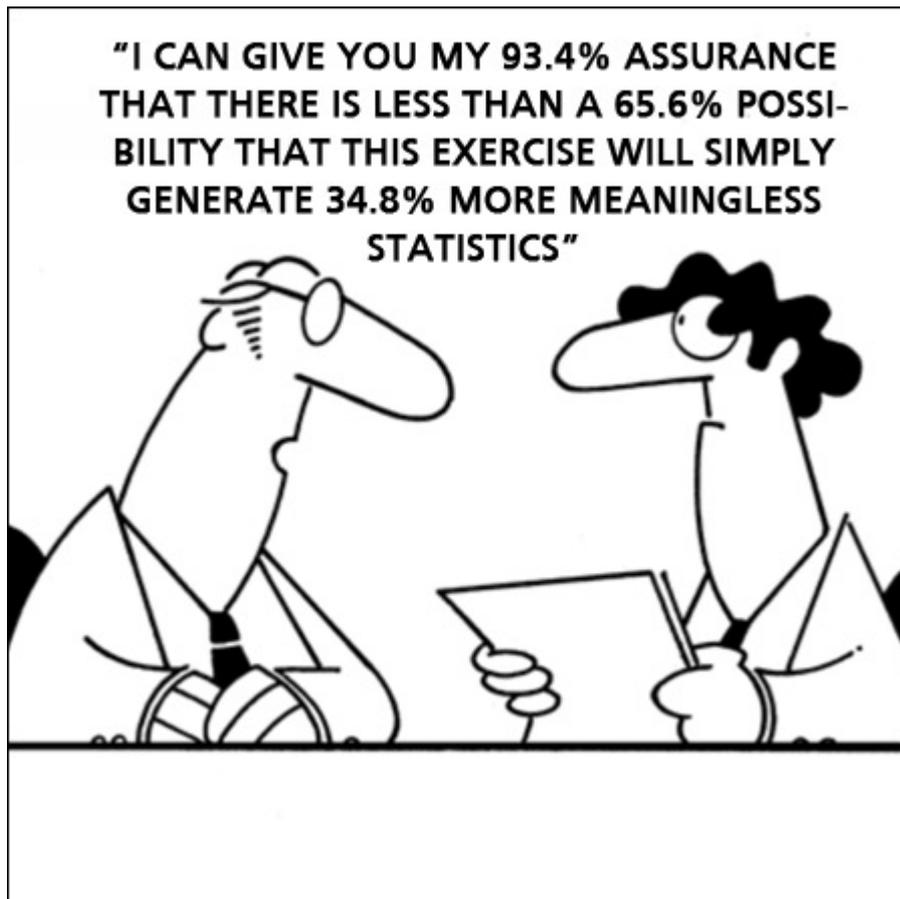
Hinduism	Percentage = $0.4 + 0.0037x$ (number of years elapsed since 1996) <sup>2</sup> + $0.0005x$ (number of years elapsed since 1996)	In 2026, the percentage of Hindus will rise to 3.7 percent, equal to the percentage of Muslims.
No religious affiliation	Percentage = $16.6 + 0.0479x$ (number of years elapsed since 1996) <sup>2</sup> - $0.3141x$ (number of years elapsed since 1996)	In 2026, the percentage of people claiming no religious affiliation will rise to 50.3 percent, which is more than half the Australian population.

Similar statistical analyses may be performed on the data relating to other non-Christian religious traditions. However, percentages of these groups over time follow a more complex pattern.

## Usefulness



Scatter, Correlation and Regression



Statistical models are useful insofar as they enable us to make predictions about the future. But they are also limited, because they assume that past patterns will continue in exactly the same way into the future. However, statistical models can assist in making general predictions. For example, statistical modelling suggests that by 2030, thirty five years after the 1996 census, in Australia:

1. about 21.4 percent of the population is likely to be Christian
2. about 12.5 percent of the population will be Catholic
3. the proportion of adherents to the Anglican Church is likely to drop to 0.6 percent
4. the Uniting Church will cease to exist in Australia
5. the percentage of Hindus is expected to exceed the percentage of Muslims (5.0 and 4.4 percent respectively)
6. the percentage of people claiming no religious affiliation will rise to 64.3 percent

Since these figures have been extrapolated from data gathered in the past, they should be regarded as estimates only. However, they do reveal a telling picture about Australia's future religious landscape.

Assuming that past and current trends continue, Australia is rapidly emerging as a religiously diverse nation - a multi-faith nation. It is likely that by 2030, there will be more Hindus in Australia than Muslims. While Christianity will remain the single largest religious tradition in Australia by 2030, non-Christian religious traditions will become a significant group within Australian society.