

**SINGAPORE CENSUS OF POPULATION, 2000**  
**ADVANCE DATA RELEASE NO. 2**

– RELIGION –

1 Advance data from the Population Census 2000 reveal that the religious composition of adult Singapore residents remained relatively stable over the last ten years. There was no significant change in the population shares of the major religious groups.

2 Buddhism and Taoism, which were the traditional Chinese religions, jointly accounted for 51 per cent of the resident population aged 15 years and over in 2000 compared with 54 per cent in 1990 (Table 1). The main shift had been from Taoism to Buddhism among the Chinese. The proportion of Muslims and Hindus remained relatively unchanged at 15 per cent and 4 per cent respectively.

**TABLE 1 RESIDENT POPULATION AGED 15 YEARS AND OVER BY RELIGION**

|                 | Number           |                  |                  | Per Cent     |              |              |
|-----------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
|                 | 1980             | 1990             | 2000             | 1980         | 1990         | 2000         |
| <b>Total</b>    | <b>1,640,078</b> | <b>2,078,842</b> | <b>2,494,630</b> | <b>100.0</b> | <b>100.0</b> | <b>100.0</b> |
| Christianity    | 165,586          | 264,881          | 364,087          | 10.1         | 12.7         | 14.6         |
| Buddhism        | 443,517          | 647,859          | 1,060,662        | 27.0         | 31.2         | 42.5         |
| Taoism          | 492,044          | 465,150          | 212,344          | 30.0         | 22.4         | 8.5          |
| Islam           | 258,122          | 317,937          | 371,660          | 15.7         | 15.3         | 14.9         |
| Hinduism        | 58,917           | 77,789           | 99,904           | 3.6          | 3.7          | 4.0          |
| Other Religions | 8,971            | 11,604           | 15,879           | 0.5          | 0.6          | 0.6          |
| No Religion     | 212,921          | 293,622          | 370,094          | 13.0         | 14.1         | 14.8         |

3 The shift towards Christianity continued but the increase in proportion of Christians was very gradual - from 10 per cent in 1980 to 13 per cent in 1990 and 15 per cent in 2000. This shift was associated mainly with the increase in the better-educated Chinese who were more inclined towards Christianity.

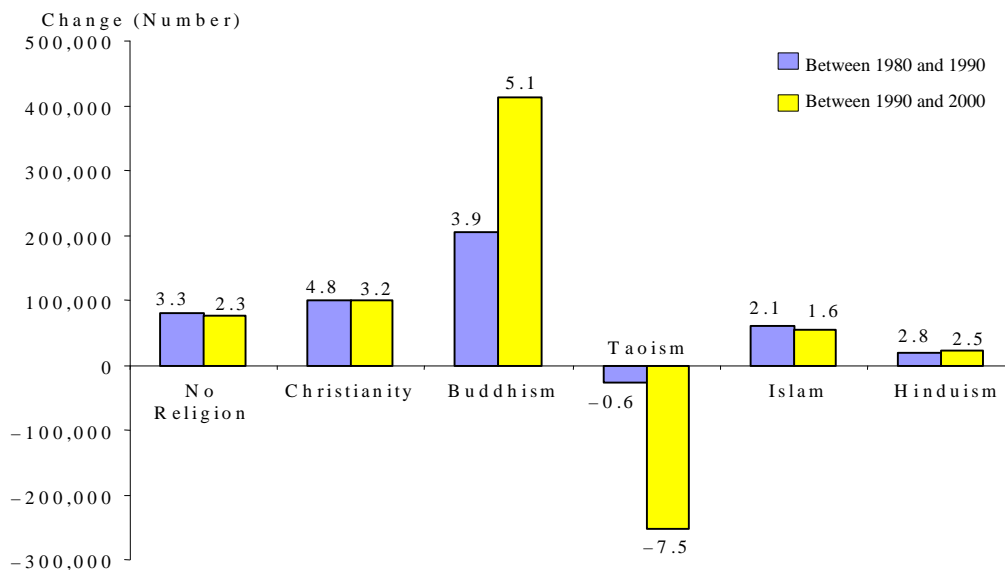
4 Persons without religious affiliation constituted about 15 per cent of the population, increasing very slightly from 14 per cent in 1990 and 13 per cent in 1980. This represents a 2 percentage-point decline in the proportion with religious affiliation between 1980 and 2000. The small magnitude of decline over two decades suggests a certain level of stability in the overall level of religious affiliation of the Singapore society. The decline came mostly from the Chinese, with the Malays and Indians maintaining an extremely high level of religious affiliation.

### Change in Size of Main Religious Groups

5 In 2000, there was a total of 1.1 million adult residents who reported their religion as Buddhism, up from 650,000 in 1990. The number of persons who practised Taoism in 2000 was about half of those in 1990. Chart 1 shows clearly that the growth in the Buddhist population during 1990–2000 came mainly at the expense of Taoism which experienced a decline in the number of followers, continuing the trend observed during 1980–1990.

6 In absolute terms, the change in the population size of the other religious groups was about the same during the 1980s and 1990s.

**CHART 1 CHANGE IN POPULATION BY RELIGION AND AVERAGE ANNUAL PER CENT GROWTH**



## **Shifts in Religion mainly among the Chinese**

7 The Chinese experienced the most significant shifts in religious affiliation between 1990 and 2000 (Table 2). While both Buddhism and Taoism were the traditional Chinese religions of long standing, Buddhism had become much more widespread in the past two decades and had surpassed Taoism as the main religion of the Chinese. In 2000, 54 per cent of the Chinese identified themselves as Buddhists, up from 34 per cent in 1980 and 39 per cent in 1990. Despite the growth of Buddhism, there was a distinct shift away from the traditional Chinese religions as a whole. The proportion of Chinese who practised either Buddhism or Taoism declined from 73 per cent in 1980 to 68 per cent in 1990 and 64 per cent in 2000.

8 While the growth of Christianity had not kept pace with Buddhism, Christianity had overtaken Taoism as the second most important religion of the Chinese. The Christians made up just 17 per cent of the Chinese in 2000. The proportion of Christians had grown steadily from 11 per cent in 1980 to 14 per cent in 1990, but the increase had slowed in the last decade. The increase in share was due to the prevalence of Christianity among the growing population of the better-educated Chinese with post secondary and university qualifications.

9 There were no significant changes in the religious affiliation of the Malays during the last twenty years. Virtually all Malays were Muslims.

10 The religious affiliation of the Indians was more diverse though there was no change over the years. Among the Indians, Hinduism had the largest following (55 per cent). Islam was the second most important religion, accounting for slightly over a quarter of the Indians. Christianity had not gained any ground among the Indians, with the proportion of Christians remaining at 12 per cent in the last two decades.

11 The Chinese accounted for the bulk of persons reporting 'no religion'. Some 19 per cent of the Chinese reported no religious affiliation. The proportion was negligible among the Malays and Indians.

**TABLE 2 RESIDENT POPULATION AGED 15 YEARS AND OVER  
BY ETHNIC GROUP AND RELIGION**

| Ethnic Group/Religion | Per Cent     |              |              |
|-----------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
|                       | 1980         | 1990         | 2000         |
| <b>Chinese</b>        | <b>100.0</b> | <b>100.0</b> | <b>100.0</b> |
| Christianity          | 10.9         | 14.3         | 16.5         |
| Buddhism              | 34.3         | 39.4         | 53.6         |
| Taoism                | 38.2         | 28.4         | 10.8         |
| Other Religions       | 0.2          | 0.3          | 0.5          |
| No Religion           | 16.4         | 17.7         | 18.6         |
| <b>Malays</b>         | <b>100.0</b> | <b>100.0</b> | <b>100.0</b> |
| Islam                 | 99.6         | 99.6         | 99.6         |
| Other Religions       | 0.3          | 0.3          | 0.4          |
| No Religion           | 0.1          | 0.2          | 0.1          |
| <b>Indians</b>        | <b>100.0</b> | <b>100.0</b> | <b>100.0</b> |
| Christianity          | 12.5         | 12.2         | 12.1         |
| Islam                 | 22.1         | 26.5         | 25.6         |
| Hinduism              | 56.3         | 53.1         | 55.4         |
| Other Religions       | 8.0          | 7.1          | 6.3          |
| No Religion           | 1.2          | 1.2          | 0.6          |

### Age and Religion

12 There is no relationship between age and religion for the Malays and the Indians. However, for the Chinese, the level of religious affiliation is positively correlated with age : the higher the age, the higher is the level of religious affiliation. Conversely, the younger the age, the higher is the proportion reporting no religion. The Census data show that among the Chinese aged 55 years and over, about 12 per cent reported no religion. Among the younger Chinese aged 15 to 24 years, a higher proportion of 23 per cent reported no religion (Table 3). Over the last decade, the proportion of the Chinese reporting no religion had increased across all age groups, with the middle age groups showing the largest increase.

**TABLE 3 PROPORTION REPORTING NO RELIGION  
BY AGE AND ETHNIC GROUP**

| Ethnic Group | Per Cent |      |       |      |       |      |       |      |           |      |
|--------------|----------|------|-------|------|-------|------|-------|------|-----------|------|
|              | 15–24    |      | 25–34 |      | 35–44 |      | 45–54 |      | 55 & Over |      |
|              | 1990     | 2000 | 1990  | 2000 | 1990  | 2000 | 1990  | 2000 | 1990      | 2000 |
| Chinese      | 21.8     | 22.5 | 20.6  | 23.0 | 17.9  | 19.1 | 13.5  | 16.7 | 10.6      | 11.9 |
| Malays       | 0.1      | 0.0  | 0.2   | 0.1  | 0.2   | 0.0  | 0.1   | 0.0  | 0.2       | 0.0  |
| Indians      | 0.8      | 0.7  | 1.1   | 0.6  | 1.1   | 0.6  | 1.6   | 0.5  | 1.7       | 0.4  |

13 There were higher concentrations of Buddhists amongst the older adults aged 45 years and over as compared with the younger adults (Table 4). In contrast, the share of the Christians was relatively higher in the younger ages between 25 and 44 years. There were proportionately more Muslims among the younger than older age groups. This reflected the relative youthfulness of the Malays in the resident population. For the Hindus, their proportions were higher in the age groups 25–44 years.

**TABLE 4 RESIDENT POPULATION AGED 15 YEARS AND OVER  
BY RELIGION AND AGE GROUP**

| Religion        | Per Cent     |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |
|-----------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
|                 | 15–24        |              | 25–34        |              | 35–44        |              | 45–54        |              | 55 & Over    |              |
|                 | 1990         | 2000         | 1990         | 2000         | 1990         | 2000         | 1990         | 2000         | 1990         | 2000         |
| <b>Total</b>    | <b>100.0</b> | <b>100.0</b> | <b>100.0</b> | <b>100.0</b> | <b>100.0</b> | <b>100.0</b> | <b>100.0</b> | <b>100.0</b> | <b>100.0</b> | <b>100.0</b> |
| Christianity    | 13.2         | 12.8         | 14.0         | 15.8         | 12.7         | 15.7         | 11.4         | 14.4         | 11.1         | 13.7         |
| Buddhism        | 29.1         | 38.9         | 29.8         | 40.2         | 32.6         | 41.5         | 34.2         | 44.9         | 32.0         | 47.4         |
| Taoism          | 18.9         | 8.4          | 18.6         | 5.6          | 22.8         | 6.9          | 26.6         | 9.9          | 29.7         | 12.7         |
| Islam           | 17.7         | 18.6         | 17.2         | 15.1         | 13.2         | 15.7         | 12.4         | 13.0         | 13.8         | 12.3         |
| Hinduism        | 3.6          | 3.5          | 3.9          | 4.6          | 3.4          | 4.5          | 3.6          | 3.6          | 4.2          | 3.5          |
| Other Religions | 0.5          | 0.6          | 0.6          | 0.6          | 0.5          | 0.7          | 0.6          | 0.6          | 0.6          | 0.7          |
| No Religion     | 16.9         | 17.3         | 16.0         | 18.1         | 14.8         | 15.0         | 11.2         | 13.7         | 8.6          | 9.8          |

### **Spread of Buddhism among the Better-Educated**

14 The proportion of Christians had declined within each educational group of the adult residents with secondary or higher qualifications (Table 5). While Christians still formed the largest religious group among university graduates, their proportion had declined in 2000 compared with 1990. One out of three university graduates was a Christian in 2000.

**TABLE 5 RESIDENT POPULATION AGED 15 YEARS AND OVER  
BY RELIGION AND HIGHEST QUALIFICATION ATTAINED**

| Religion        | Per Cent     |              |                    |              |                 |              |              |              |                |              |              |              |
|-----------------|--------------|--------------|--------------------|--------------|-----------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|----------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
|                 | Total        |              | Full-time Students |              | Below Secondary |              | Secondary    |              | Post Secondary |              | University   |              |
|                 | 1990         | 2000         | 1990               | 2000         | 1990            | 2000         | 1990         | 2000         | 1990           | 2000         | 1990         | 2000         |
| <b>Total</b>    | <b>100.0</b> | <b>100.0</b> | <b>100.0</b>       | <b>100.0</b> | <b>100.0</b>    | <b>100.0</b> | <b>100.0</b> | <b>100.0</b> | <b>100.0</b>   | <b>100.0</b> | <b>100.0</b> | <b>100.0</b> |
| Christianity    | 12.7         | 14.6         | 17.1               | 14.3         | 6.3             | 6.4          | 16.1         | 14.6         | 24.7           | 20.8         | 39.3         | 33.5         |
| Buddhism        | 31.2         | 42.5         | 29.0               | 37.3         | 34.1            | 51.5         | 30.3         | 41.6         | 25.7           | 38.3         | 15.1         | 23.6         |
| Taoism          | 22.4         | 8.5          | 18.2               | 8.5          | 29.4            | 13.2         | 14.8         | 5.8          | 13.0           | 5.5          | 7.4          | 2.7          |
| Islam           | 15.3         | 14.9         | 12.0               | 16.2         | 17.1            | 17.2         | 17.3         | 18.9         | 8.5            | 11.2         | 2.6          | 3.5          |
| Hinduism        | 3.7          | 4.0          | 2.9                | 3.6          | 3.9             | 3.5          | 3.9          | 4.1          | 3.1            | 3.5          | 3.5          | 6.9          |
| Other Religions | 0.6          | 0.6          | 0.5                | 0.7          | 0.5             | 0.5          | 0.7          | 0.7          | 0.7            | 0.7          | 0.9          | 0.9          |
| No Religion     | 14.1         | 14.8         | 20.3               | 19.3         | 8.7             | 7.7          | 16.9         | 14.3         | 24.4           | 20.0         | 31.1         | 28.9         |

15 Buddhism appeared to have attracted a sizeable group of followers from all levels of education. The fastest growth was among those with below secondary qualifications. Over the decade, there was a sizeable increase in proportion of Buddhists among the graduates. Their share in the graduate population increased from 15 per cent in 1990 to 24 per cent in 2000. In absolute terms, the number of graduate Buddhists jumped by 4 times between 1990 and 2000, compared with an increase of 1.7 times for the graduate Christians. Among those with post secondary qualifications, the Buddhists had become the largest group with significant gains in the absolute and relative sizes of their population.

16 The proportion of Muslims also increased across all educational levels between 1990 and 2000. Among the Hindus, the largest increase was among university graduates, reflecting the large presence of permanent residents with university qualifications.

17 While the proportion of residents who professed to have no religion had declined in all educational groups, they still formed a significant group among those with post secondary and university qualifications. It was the absolute increase in these two higher educational groups that gave rise to the overall increase in the proportion reporting no religion.

## Strong Correlation between Religion and Language

18 Cultural factors, as manifested through the home language, have a strong influence on the religious affiliation of the resident population. Singapore residents who have adopted English as their home language appear to have greater exposure to the influence of Christianity. Thus, in 2000, Christians formed the largest group among the English-speaking population. Buddhism and Taoism, the traditional Chinese religions, were the main religions of the Mandarin- and dialect-speaking populations (Table 6).

19 There is also a strong correlation among ethnicity, home language and the religion among the Malays and Indians. Almost all Malay-speaking residents were Muslims while most Tamil-speaking residents were Hindus in 2000.

**TABLE 6 RESIDENT POPULATION AGED 15 YEARS AND OVER  
BY RELIGION AND LANGUAGE MOST FREQUENTLY SPOKEN AT HOME**

| Religion        | Per Cent     |              |              |              |                  |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |
|-----------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
|                 | English      |              | Mandarin     |              | Chinese Dialects |              | Malay        |              | Tamil        |              | Others       |              |
|                 | 1990         | 2000         | 1990         | 2000         | 1990             | 2000         | 1990         | 2000         | 1990         | 2000         | 1990         | 2000         |
| <b>Total</b>    | <b>100.0</b> | <b>100.0</b> | <b>100.0</b> | <b>100.0</b> | <b>100.0</b>     | <b>100.0</b> | <b>100.0</b> | <b>100.0</b> | <b>100.0</b> | <b>100.0</b> | <b>100.0</b> | <b>100.0</b> |
| Christianity    | 39.2         | 39.8         | 8.2          | 8.3          | 8.2              | 9.9          | 0.7          | 0.7          | 8.2          | 6.7          | 11.1         | 11.1         |
| Buddhism        | 21.2         | 24.8         | 43.1         | 60.0         | 43.2             | 61.0         | 0.4          | 0.2          | 0.1          | 0.1          | 3.7          | 10.3         |
| Taoism          | 7.2          | 2.2          | 26.7         | 11.2         | 36.0             | 15.5         | 0.2          | 0.0          | 0.0          | 0.0          | 0.1          | 0.5          |
| Islam           | 6.1          | 7.1          | 0.0          | 0.0          | 0.0              | 0.0          | 98.2         | 98.8         | 16.5         | 17.9         | 15.2         | 16.3         |
| Hinduism        | 5.3          | 5.4          | 0.0          | 0.0          | 0.0              | 0.0          | 0.2          | 0.1          | 74.7         | 75.0         | 38.9         | 43.6         |
| Other Religions | 1.4          | 1.5          | 0.1          | 0.2          | 0.1              | 0.2          | 0.0          | 0.0          | 0.2          | 0.1          | 26.1         | 14.7         |
| No Religion     | 19.5         | 19.2         | 21.8         | 20.3         | 12.5             | 13.3         | 0.3          | 0.1          | 0.3          | 0.2          | 4.9          | 3.5          |

## Differentials in Religious Affiliation between Private Property and HDB Flat Dwellers

20 Residents of private flats and houses tended to have larger representations of Christians and persons with no religion than HDB flat dwellers (Table 7). In comparison, the bulk of the HDB dwellers were Buddhists and Muslims.

**TABLE 7 RESIDENT POPULATION AGED 15 YEARS AND OVER  
BY RELIGION AND TYPE OF DWELLING**

| Religion        | Per Cent            |              |               |              |               |              |                           |              |                           |              |
|-----------------|---------------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|---------------------------|--------------|---------------------------|--------------|
|                 | HDB<br>1- & 2- Room |              | HDB<br>3-Room |              | HDB<br>4-Room |              | HDB 5-Room<br>& Executive |              | Private Flats<br>& Houses |              |
|                 | 1990                | 2000         | 1990          | 2000         | 1990          | 2000         | 1990                      | 2000         | 1990                      | 2000         |
| <b>Total</b>    | <b>100.0</b>        | <b>100.0</b> | <b>100.0</b>  | <b>100.0</b> | <b>100.0</b>  | <b>100.0</b> | <b>100.0</b>              | <b>100.0</b> | <b>100.0</b>              | <b>100.0</b> |
| Christianity    | 5.5                 | 6.8          | 8.0           | 9.7          | 10.0          | 10.2         | 20.3                      | 17.4         | 30.0                      | 34.3         |
| Buddhism        | 27.8                | 41.8         | 32.2          | 46.3         | 34.1          | 46.3         | 29.4                      | 39.5         | 26.1                      | 30.1         |
| Taoism          | 32.7                | 11.8         | 25.1          | 10.5         | 23.2          | 9.8          | 15.3                      | 6.4          | 13.2                      | 4.2          |
| Islam           | 16.1                | 23.7         | 19.9          | 16.7         | 16.2          | 17.4         | 11.9                      | 14.3         | 3.3                       | 2.8          |
| Hinduism        | 4.7                 | 5.2          | 3.3           | 3.9          | 3.7           | 3.9          | 4.0                       | 4.2          | 3.7                       | 3.6          |
| Other Religions | 0.3                 | 0.4          | 0.4           | 0.5          | 0.6           | 0.5          | 0.7                       | 0.8          | 0.9                       | 0.9          |
| No Religion     | 12.8                | 10.5         | 11.1          | 12.5         | 12.2          | 11.9         | 18.4                      | 17.4         | 22.9                      | 24.2         |

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