



Census IBGE 2010 and Religion

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Brazil has routinely included in its censuses the collection of data on the population's religious affiliation. This fact must be hailed as something very positive, especially because it is not obviousness. There are other countries, not a few, which do not do that, whether due to complexity or “ideological” reasons – religion might belong to citizens' private life and it should not be a task of the State, secular, to survey it.

By the way, it is worth observing, thus, that the meaning of “secular State” is rather dubious and we could even classify it as “discriminatory”. Well, the separation between Church and State, an achievement of modernity, finds its *raison d'être* in the rejection to theocratic States or a social and political order granting or guaranteeing privileges to one or more religions or churches, to the detriment of the others and the population that does not adhere to any of them. In other words, the State should guarantee equal rights to all citizens, regardless of their religious affiliation, and it should not provide specific segments with privileges. Thus, the concept of “secular State” must be supported and preserved.

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However, the concept itself becomes discriminatory and authoritarian when it is used to exclude the religious element from the public space, confining it to the private sphere or the realm of temples. Well, religion is notoriously one of the most public manifestations. And it would be absurd to renounce to its study and the data that can consistently support it, when it is intended to know the reality of a country. In short, the survey of data regarding the religious affiliation of the Brazilian population would be condemnable only if it would be used to favor certain religion(s), to the detriment of the other ones or people with no religion, but it is praiseworthy and, also, indispensable as a knowledge instrument in the population's religious scene.

The Brazilian censuses have been used towards the second hypothesis and, therefore, the survey of data on the population's religious affiliation in the census must be hailed as positive and crucial for a better understanding of the Brazilian reality. Having these data as a basis, we may carry out studies such as those published in this journal. Census IBGE 2010 shows to be particularly useful when it also crosses data concerning religious affiliation to data regarding, among other aspects, income, profession, education level, age group, gender, and ethnic group.

However, properly collecting data on the population's religious affiliation is not an easy task and it requires a complex engineering for classifying the religious groups, in a notoriously fragmented scenario. For preparing these data, it is indispensable to have the cooperation of the largest and most representative group of experts in the field of Theology and Religious Sciences (including Sociology and Anthropology), in order to avoid at most that data collection itself leads to distortions. This attention, unfortunately, did not take place, at least not to the extent needed.

In this regard, therefore, Census 2010, conducted by IBGE, deserves not only praise, but also repair. An analysis of data leads us to say, briefly, that, regarding data on religions in Census 2010, IBGE hit the "wholesale" and missed the "retail".

Let us start with the “wholesale”. According to data published by IBGE, since the previous census there was a new marked decrease in the percentage of Catholics among the Brazilian population, for the first time also in absolute terms. This decrease was from 73.6% in 2000 to 64.6% in 2010 (in the first census, in 1872, there were no less than 99.7% and in 1970 there still were 91.8%); in absolute terms, the number of Catholics fell from 125,000,000 in 2000 to 123,000,000 in 2010. Even if a portion of the “Brazilian Catholic Apostolic people” (560,000) may, in fact, consist of “Roman Catholic Apostolic people”, a mistake that is very easy to take place, there will be no significant change in the overall numbers.

On the other hand, there was another sharp increase in the number of Evangelicals, especially Pentecostals (from 15.4% in 2000 to 22.2% in 2010; in absolute terms, from 26,200,000 to 42,300,000). In 1991, the percentage was still in single-digit, 9.0%, and in 1980 it was only 6.6%.

This decreasing trend in the number of Catholics and the increasing trend in the number of Evangelicals, noticeable in the last three censuses, is likely to persist in the coming years, with an extremely high probability, almost to the degree of absolute certainty. Some survey data corroborate this observation. The percentage of Catholics is higher in rural areas than in urban areas. Well, the urbanization process is an irreversible fact. The percentage of Catholics is also higher among older age groups, where the mortality rate is obviously higher. Finally, among Catholics male individuals predominate, although not sharply; but among Evangelicals women clearly predominate. And there is also among children a greater propensity to follow mother’s religion than father’s religion, since she “takes” religious education with greater frequency and intensity. Apparently, a couple of decades from now and no more than half of the Brazilian population will regard themselves as Catholics. (By the way, in the state of Rio de Janeiro only 45.8% declared themselves as Catholics in Census 2010.)

There was also an increase in the number of people who regard themselves as having no religion, particularly in urban areas and in the lower social groups. In 2000 they were almost 12,500,000 (7.3%), exceeding 15,000,000 in 2010 (8.0%). Strictly speaking, it is only a moderate rise. There is a need to notice, also, that this does not necessarily involve a-religious people, nevertheless, they do not keep adherence ties to any established religion. Even though it is still low in absolute numbers, this increase trend, already recorded in Census 2000, is likely to persist, having in mind the urbanization and secularization process of modern life. Even so, very few people declared themselves as atheists (only 615,000).

The country remains, therefore, deeply religious and, in a large majority, Christian. What is going on is an increasing fragmentation and a process of strong reorganization of Christianity in the country, favoring, above all, Pentecostal churches. Not all, however. As a more historical Pentecostal church, such as the Assembly of God, grew between 2000 and 2010 from 8,400,000 to impressive 12,300,000 adherents, a Neopentecostal church with a great media impact, such as the Universal Kingdom of God, fell from 2,100,000 to 1,800,000 adherents. This observation is worth thinking through. Apparently, in the medium and long-term, dedication to the constitution of communities where all people actively participate in some way is more effective than the leading role of faith “shows”!

Let us, however, address “retail”. We observe, at first, that census is not the most appropriate instrument to survey double (or even multiple) religious adherence. Only 15,000 people were registered this way, certainly a tiny fraction of reality. This also explains the very low number of adherents to Spiritualism and the African religiosity (particularly, Umbanda and Candomblé), although census has registered an increase when compared to Census 2000, something that could signalize a growing inner freedom of its adherents to declare themselves this way. Numerous other people preferred to declare only their “other” affiliation, namely, to one of the “hegemonic” religions, especially the Catholic.

If this example contains “subjective” reasons of some surveyed people in order to compromise data, we also must register, secondly, some major failures of the census with an objective nature. There is a need for providing the methodology adopted by IBGE for classifying religions with strong repairs, as it makes data not fully reliable. The nomenclature and classification employed lack scientific rigor. They adopted, for instance, the category “orthodox Catholic”. Well, those who minimally know the global religious scene are aware that Orthodoxy is one of the major branches of Christianity worldwide, although not markedly present in our country, and it cannot be understood as confessionally Catholic.

IBGE also chose to avoid the category “Protestant churches”, something which is, at least, debatable. Instead, it opted for the term “Evangelical churches”. Up to this point, it is an option that may still be acceptable. The decision, however, becomes highly questionable when IBGE subqualified them as “of mission” and “of Pentecostal origin”. Well, the term “of mission” could not only also characterize the churches of Pentecostal origin – with a great missionary impetus and many of them coming from missionary action abroad –, but it is absolutely inappropriate, for instance, to the Brazilian Lutheranism, which is characterized as a “transplantation church”, derived from the immigration flow of European Lutherans, especially German ones, particularly in the 19th century. Having chosen the designation “evangelical churches”, the complement should have been “historical” (or even “traditional”), instead of “of mission”.

By the way, the data collection devices used by the census agents contained a large number of possible designations pre-programmed and presented for selection on the part of the surveyed people. In the case of “Lutheranism” there were nothing less than 48 pre-programmed versions, several of them completely odd, e.g. “Gota Casque Lutheran”, a laughable corruption of the German term “*Gotteskasten*”, designation of a missionary society that acted in Brazil in times gone by... On the other hand, the list with 48 names did not contain the designation of the largest

Brazilian Lutheran church, the Evangelical Church of Lutheran Confession in Brazil (IECLB).

Consulted by IECLB, IBGE informed that all designations contained in the scheduling were derived from statements of people surveyed in previous censuses. As IBGE did not express itself regarding the omission of the designation IECLB, the answer seems to suggest that among the more than 700,000 members of this church (about $\frac{3}{4}$ of the entire national Lutheranism) absolutely no one has informed the correct designation of her/his church in previous censuses... It is, of course, something completely unlikely. Moreover, the instruction to census agents urged them to reject the statement “Protestant”, which was correct, as it is a generic term, it does not refer to a specific church, but, at the same time, it suggested as a possible designation “Pentecostal Lutheran”. If someone declared her/himself this way, it is a mystery to know where IBGE has catalogued her/him: among the Lutherans from a church “of mission” or among the churches “of Pentecostal origin”?!

In turn, Anglican Episcopalians do not appear in the tables published by IBGE. They are in the country in a larger number than those who are generally listed under “other Evangelical churches of mission” (that, incidentally, would be a totally inadequate classification for the Episcopal Anglican Church in Brazil). Who declared her/himself as “Episcopal” would be computed along with the Catholics? We must also raise an important question regarding the decision of computing as Pentecostal no less than 180,000 adherents to a so-called “Evangelical Community”. Although there is in Rio de Janeiro the International Evangelical Community from the South Area, with Pentecostal features, it is also known that, particularly in the Southern country, many Lutherans declare themselves simply as members of the local “Evangelical community” (e.g. the Evangelical Community of Porto Alegre (CEPA)). It would suffice to search for the term “evangelical community” in Google to find out that this generic designation is inappropriate for the proposed surveying purpose.

In addition to these examples, there is also a fact which sets wide open IBGE's inability to accurately capture the actual scene of the Brazilian Evangelical or Protestant context. Due to the great proliferation of Pentecostal and independent Neopentecostal churches, we may also generously accept that a total of no less than 5,200,000 adherents to "other Pentecostal Evangelical churches" are listed. However, what may be said about the impressive 9,200,000 adherents to the "undetermined Evangelical" church that, according to IBGE, could be either Pentecostals or from a church of mission? Would not it be possible to determine this?...

Well, the number (almost 5% of the Brazilian population!) is much larger than the total number presented for adherents of all Evangelical churches of mission (7,700,000). Among Evangelicals, 18.5% are from the various Evangelical churches named "of mission" and no less than 21.8% of them would be "undetermined" Evangelicals. This "additional" contingent of adherents would substantially change the numbers related to churches of Pentecostal origin, but, remarkably, those related to churches of mission, quite possibly, were underestimated. There are in IBGE's tables clues to assume that a good number of these "undetermined" must be computed among those "of mission". Because IBGE, commendably, prepared for each religious group tables regarding the average age, the distribution by color or race, the education level, and the income level. In all these tables, the indices calculated for adherents to the "undetermined Evangelical" church are among the indices calculated for adherents to the church of mission and those of Pentecostal origin. It also draws attention that, in most cases, this is an index closer to that referring to adherents to the church of mission (and not of churches of Pentecostal origin). With over 20% of the global universe of Evangelicals in the category "undetermined evangelical church", the margin of error in the numbers presented rises accordingly.

By way of conclusion, we may reasonably rely on the overall number of “Evangelicals”, also in the fact that the “Pentecostals” add up much more than those “of mission” and, equally, that the set keeps growing. But IBGE should provide more consistent numbers regarding the distribution of these Evangelicals among the various designations. This is partly due to the multiplicity of current designations, but, in a large part, to the alluded lack of scientific rigor in the classification and, perhaps, as a consequence, to the poor training of census agents concerning this issue. It is a shame!

Let us raise, finally, the question for further censuses. The difficulties and failures registered in Census 2010 could obscure the relevance of data obtained. We must not forget that, in the “wholesale”, the census is right and it allows important analyses, also concerning the intersection with other data, such as those of income, education level, ethnic group, etc. It would be even worse if those voices advocating for the exclusion of data collection on religious affiliation of the Brazilian population in further censuses got strengthened and if this took place on behalf of the aforementioned State “secularity”! It would be, rather, excluding from the census an important dimension of the Brazilian reality. It would be, therefore, a decision with an ideological and arbitrary nature.

What is needed for further censuses is that IBGE gets a better basis, with a wide range of experts from the various perspectives within the areas of Theology and Religious Sciences, with the possibility of starting from teaching resources available in the graduate courses within these areas and related areas (Religion Sociology, Anthropology), particularly those best evaluated by CAPES. There is time enough for this – eight years until the next census. But two years are already gone!