

Foreign Gods Gain Momentum in US

Hindu and Buddhist groups are gaining momentum in the United States.

The growth of these foreign religions started when the U.S. changed its immigration laws in 1965 and 1992, according to a Baylor University professor who helped compile the newly released 2010 U.S. Religion Census.

The states with especially high concentrations of Hindus and Buddhists: Texas, California, the New York Metropolitan Area, Illinois and Georgia.

“Both Buddhists and Hindus, though still relatively small compared to the large Christian groups, have grown to the point that they are beginning to exert significant influence on the key issues that most affect their lives,” says J. Gordon Melton, Ph.D., distinguished professor of American Religious History with the Institute for Studies of Religion at Baylor University.

Both Hindus and Buddhists have temples in most states. Melton says the groups now regularly voice their opinions on U.S. relations with predominantly Hindu and Buddhist countries.

“Like the Muslim congregations, Hindus and Buddhists are found in every part of the country,” he explains, “but they are concentrated in the big cities and still have not begun to appear in the smaller cities and rural areas.”

In other findings, all areas of American religion have grown, although specific groups—especially some of the larger Christian churches—have declined or stagnated.

Southern Baptists, whose ranks grew spectacularly for a

generation as it became a national organization, decreased dramatically since the year 2000. United Methodist and Evangelical Lutheran membership also decreased.

Both Muslims and Mormons showed dramatic increases in percentages. Islam is gaining ground from both immigration and penetration of the African-American community. Muslims are distinct as the majority are of Indo-Pakistani background, the second largest group being African-American, with Arab Americans a distinct minority.

Mormons are gaining momentum from movement out of its base in the Mountain states to all parts of the country. There are now some 6 million Mormons and 2.6 million Muslims in the country.

Other findings showed that traditional patterns continue. The Baptist Bible Belt remains across the South, the older Reformation Protestant churches are strongest across the Midwest, Latter-day Saints dominate in the Mountain West, and Roman Catholics dominate in the northeast and southwest, including the southern third of Texas.