

The cover features a minimalist design with three overlapping blue circles of varying sizes. The largest circle is at the top right, a medium one in the center, and another large one at the bottom right. Two thin blue lines intersect to form a large 'V' shape that frames the central circle and extends towards the top and bottom right corners.

# **RELIGIOUS EDUCATION OCCASIONAL PAPERS**

**GREEK ORTHODOX IN AUSTRALIA – THE BIG PICTURE**

**James A Athanasou  
April 2019**

*Religious Education Occasional Papers* is a series of articles on religion. They deal with theoretical, policy and empirical issues related to faith. The views expressed are those of the author.

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## GREEK ORTHODOX IN AUSTRALIA – THE BIG PICTURE

The purpose of this report is to document some basic demographic statistics on Eastern Orthodox and Greek Orthodox in Australia. This report relies upon the Census statistics as the most accurate measure of religion, where religion is defined as the answer to the optional question “What is the person’s religion?”.

<p><b>19 What is the person’s religion?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Answering this question is <b>OPTIONAL</b>.</li> <li>• Examples of ‘Other’: LUTHERAN, SALVATION ARMY, JUDAISM, TAOISM, HUMANISM.</li> <li>• Remember to mark the box like this: <input type="checkbox"/></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> No religion</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Catholic</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Anglican (Church of England)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Uniting Church</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Presbyterian</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Buddhism</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Islam</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Greek Orthodox</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Baptist</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Hinduism</li> <li>Other (please specify)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> No religion</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Catholic</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Anglican (Church of England)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Uniting Church</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Presbyterian</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Buddhism</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Islam</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Greek Orthodox</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Baptist</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Hinduism</li> <li>Other (please specify)</li> </ul>																																																																																
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The discussion is in three parts. It proceeds from a macro-perspective on religion in the population to a more specific meso-outline of Eastern Orthodox in Australia and finally a micro-analysis of Greek Orthodox.

In Part 1, the analysis first considers the role of religion and Christianity in the Australian population as revealed by the Census and answers some basic questions such as:

- What is the general religious background of Australia?
- Has Christianity declined in Australia?
- Has the Christian background of Australia changed?

Part 2 of this report focuses on the numbers of Eastern Orthodox in Australia and it goes on to consider issues such as:

- Who are the Eastern Orthodox?
- How many Eastern Orthodox are there in Australia?
- What is the proportion of Eastern Orthodox in the Australian population?
- How have the numbers of Orthodox changed over the years?
- How do the numbers of Greek Orthodox compare against other faiths?

Part 3 concludes the analysis with a description of some features of the Greek orthodox population in Australia. It answers questions such as:

- How many people are Greek Orthodox?
- How are the distributed in terms of sex, age, place of birth, or area of residence?

## PART 1 – RELIGION AND CHRISTIANITY IN AUSTRALIA

### What is the general religious background of Australia?

Australia still remains a religious nation in the majority, with around 60% (all percentages rounded) professing some faith see Figure 1.

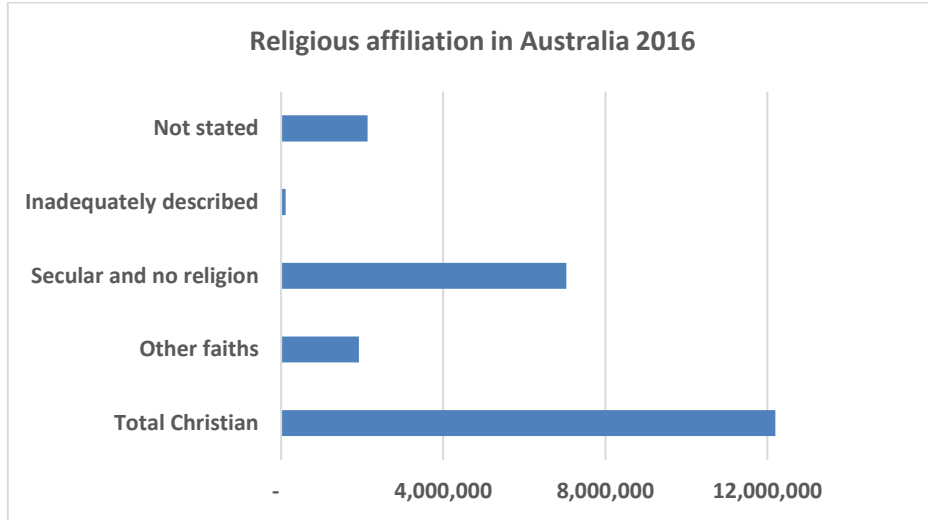


Figure 1. Overall religious affiliation in Australia - 2016

The proportion of the category Christians (in which Eastern Orthodoxy is included), however, is now only around 52%. Around 39% of Australians indicate a secular response or no religion and there were 9% whose religion was inadequately stated.

### Has Christianity declined in Australia?

The proportion of Christians in Australia has declined considerably from 1954 to 2016 (see Figure 2).

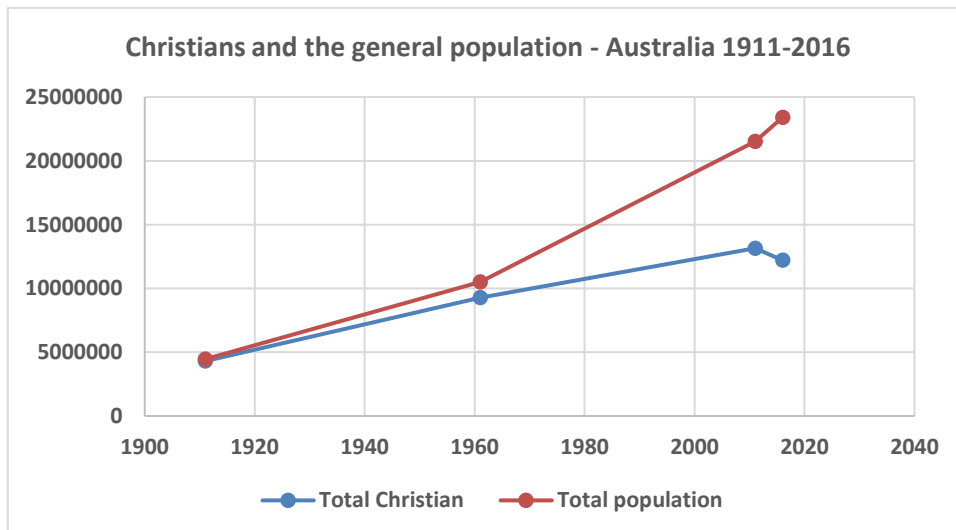


Figure 2. Christians compared to the total population in Australia 1911-2016

### Has the Christian background of Australia changed?

The Christian background has changed markedly since 1911. At that time 42% of all Christians were Anglican and 26% were Roman Catholic. Moving forward to 2016, the position is almost reversed with only 25% Anglican and 43% Roman Catholic. The overall pattern is shown in Figure 3.

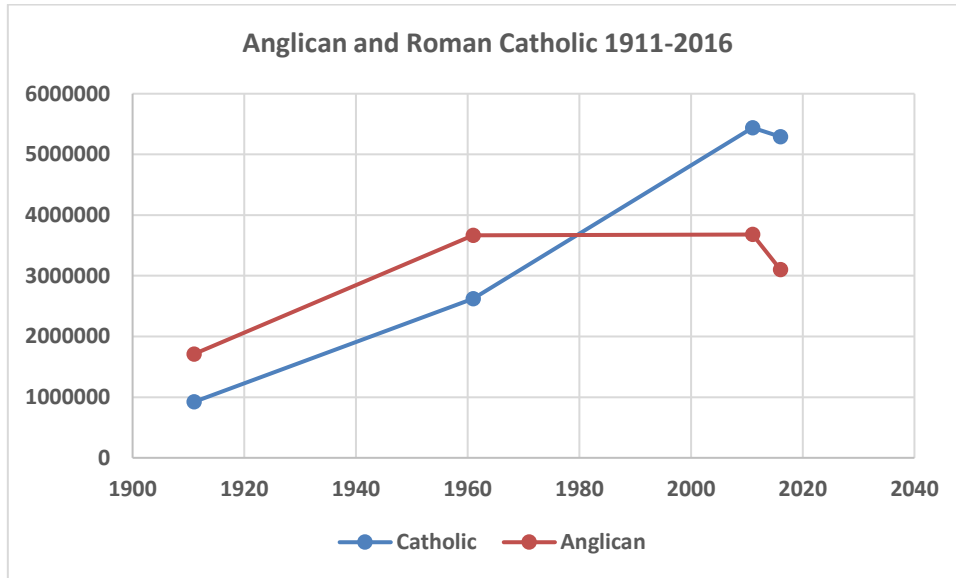


Figure 3. Pattern of Anglican and Roman Catholic affiliation in Australia 1911 - 2016

The demise of the Anglican Church has altered the religious landscape of Australia. Secondly, the ascendancy of Roman Catholics in the population of Christians, means that to all intents and purposes Australia in terms of Christianity can be viewed as more of a Roman Catholic nation. A third point from Figure 3 is the recent decline in the numbers of both these groups from 2011-2016. Given the increase in the overall Australian population this may reflect disaffection with these two major denominations. The recent decline is mirrored in the number of Eastern Orthodox but it may not be the case that the causes of the decline are similar.

Figure 4 shows an analysis of the major Christian groups in Australia. Only Christians not formally defined (nfd) have shown some increase but these represent a very small proportion of Christians overall.

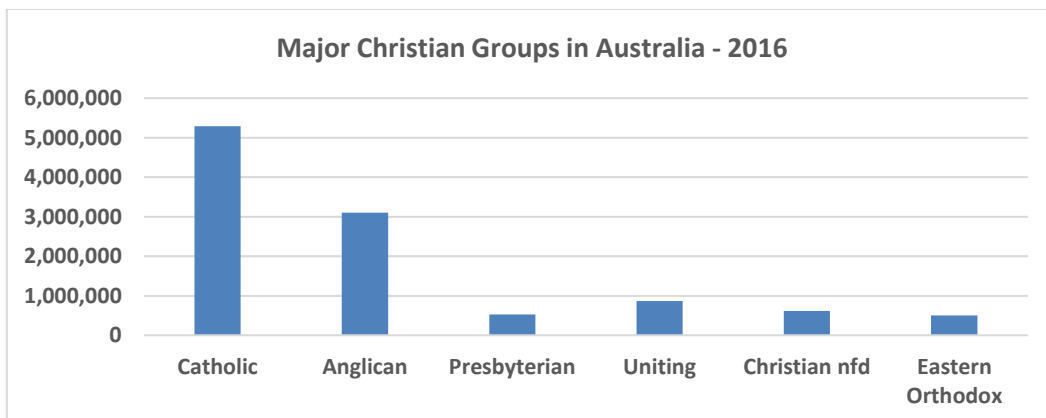


Figure 4. Major Christian groups in Australia including Eastern Orthodox

## PART 2 – EASTERN ORTHODOX IN AUSTRALIA

### Who are the Eastern Orthodox?

The group called Eastern Orthodox in the Census is not homogeneous. It does include denominations that are part of the Episcopal Assembly of Oceania (Antiochian Orthodox, Greek Orthodox, Romanian Orthodox, Serbian Orthodox, Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia). In addition, the Australian Bureau of Statistics adds Macedonian Orthodox and Albanian Orthodox plus some who are not classified elsewhere.

### How many Eastern Orthodox are there in Australia?

There are 502,801 Eastern Orthodox in Australia. This broad classification of Eastern Orthodox is dominated by Greek Orthodox who comprise 74% of the Eastern Orthodox.

Eastern Orthodox according to the census includes: 373,591 Greek Orthodox, 41,019 Serbian Orthodox, 49,682 Macedonian Orthodox, 21,967 Russian Orthodox, 9,840 Antiochian Orthodox and 2,741 Ukrainian Orthodox plus other smaller groups (see Figure 5).

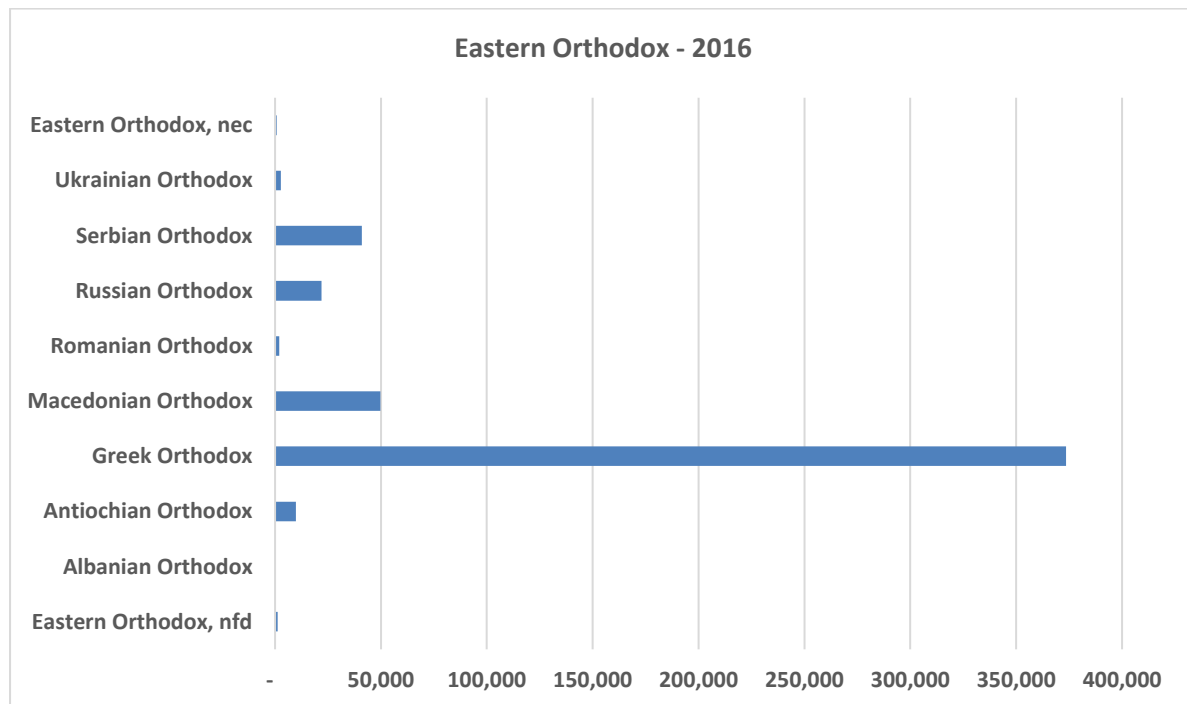


Figure 5. Denominations listed under the heading of Eastern Orthodox by the Australian Bureau of Statistics

### What is the proportion of Eastern Orthodox in the Australian population?

At the present time the proportion of Orthodox in the Australian population is 2.15%. Figure 6 shows that the proportion has declined noticeably in the last Census and for the first time in many years is below 2.5%.

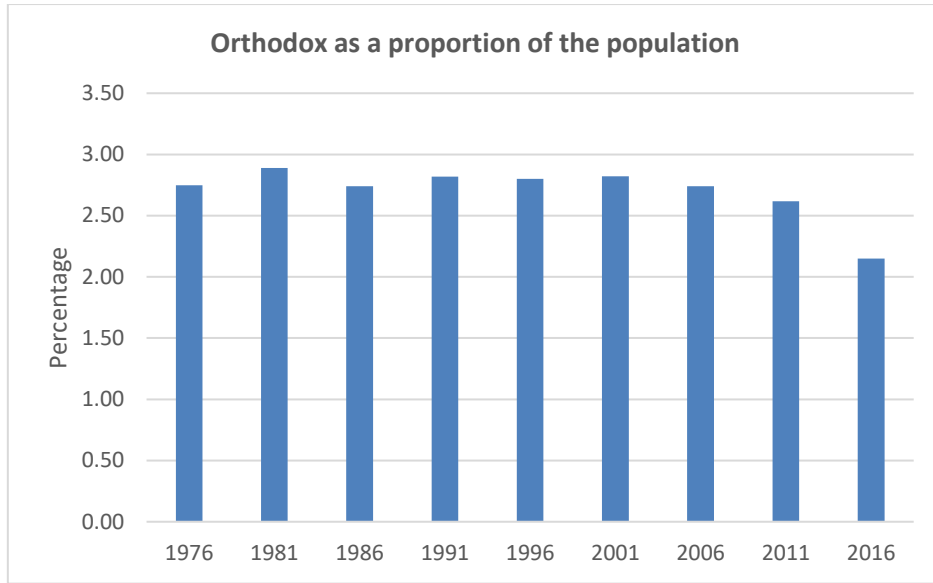


Figure 6. Proportion of Eastern Orthodox in the Australian population

**How have the numbers of Eastern Orthodox changed over the years?**

The numbers of Orthodox have changed, firstly increasing at a steep rate since the 1950s then with slower growth and a recent decline (Figure 7). These reflect the influence of migration, birth rates and the aging of the population.

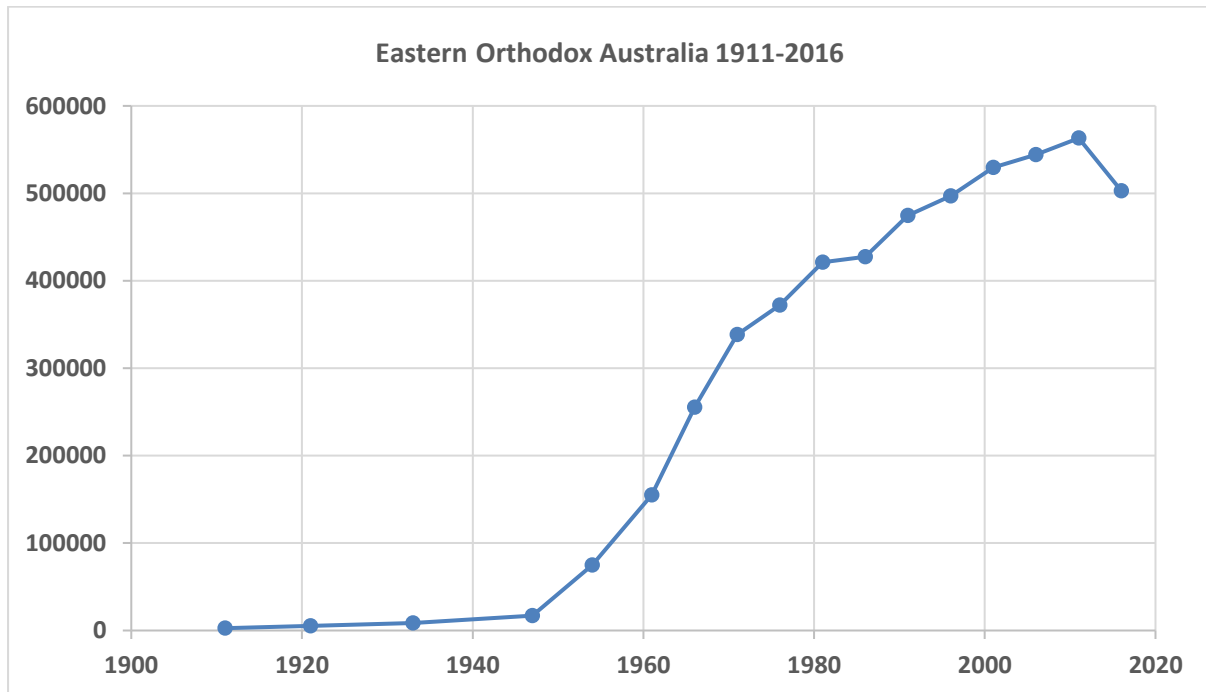


Figure 7. Census figures for Eastern Orthodox 1911-2016

One of the reasons for the decline in the number of Eastern Orthodox is simply the age distribution. The difference between Eastern Orthodox and the general Australian population is shown in the pattern of age distribution in Figure 8.



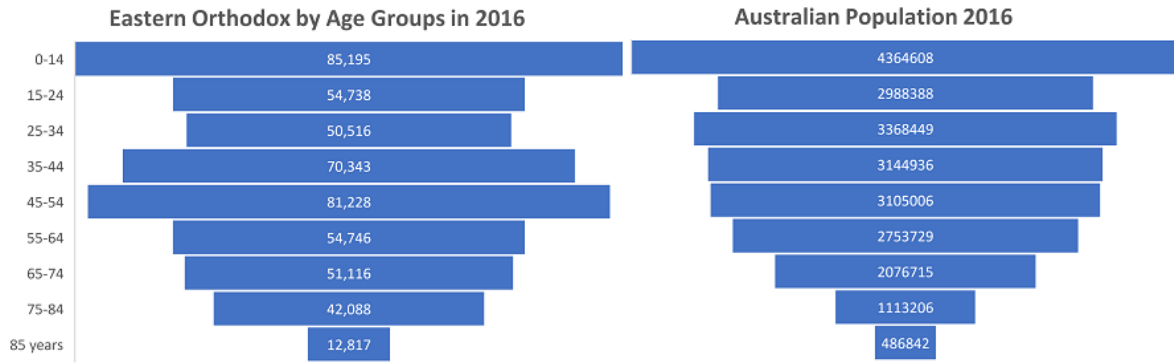


Figure 8. Pattern of age distribution in Eastern Orthodox and Australia overall

In the case of Eastern Orthodox, it is heavily weighted towards those who are over 65 years. This may reflect the pattern of adult migrations following World War II. For ages 35-54 there is also a bulge in the distribution of Eastern Orthodox.

Overall, the population of Eastern Orthodox is weighted (a) towards the middle-aged with (b) quite a high proportion of seniors and (c) only 38% under 34 years compared with 46% for the general Australian population (see Figure 9 for a side-by-side comparison of proportions).

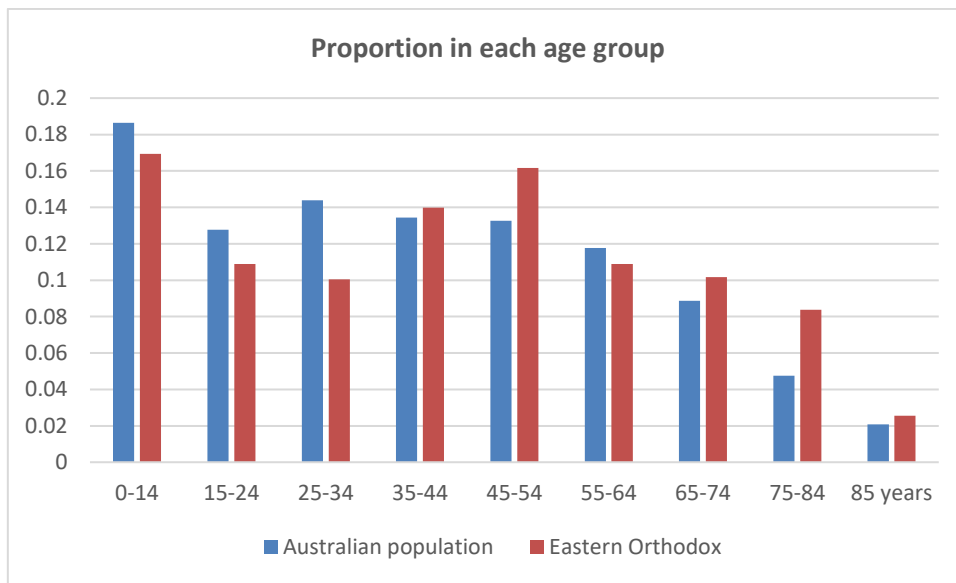


Figure 9. Proportion in each age group – Australian population and Eastern Orthodox

**How do the numbers of Eastern Orthodox compare against non-Christian faiths?**

In this section the numbers of Eastern Orthodox are compared to non-Christian faiths.

Figure 10 compares Eastern Orthodoxy with Judaism and Islam. Since 1976 there has been a substantial increase in the number and proportion of Islam compared with Eastern Orthodox and Judaism has shown a slight increase in numbers but not necessarily in its proportion.

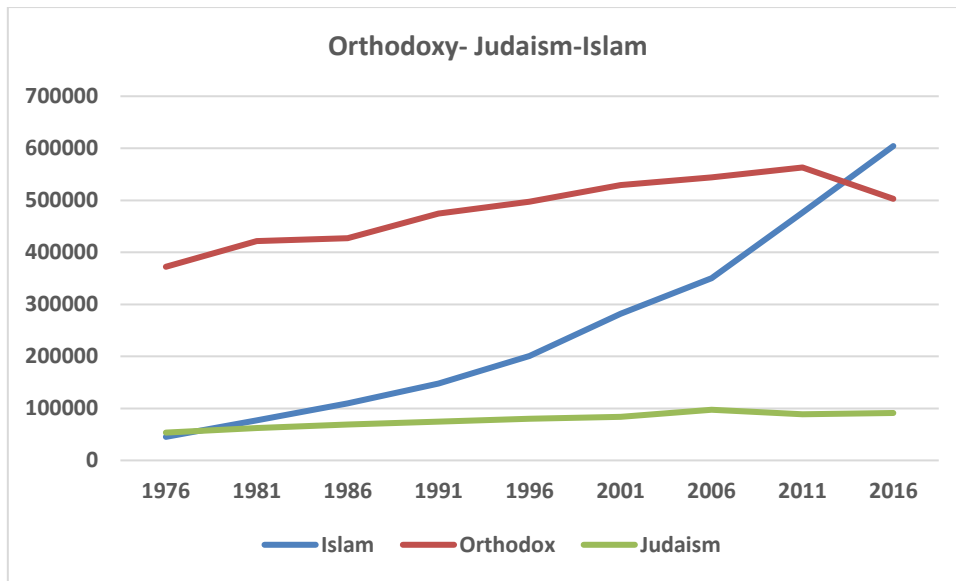


Figure 10. A comparison of Eastern orthodox with Judaism and Islam in Australia 1976-2016

Figure 11 compares Eastern Orthodoxy with Buddhism and Hindu in Australia. Since 1976, there has been a substantial increase in the number and proportion of Buddhists and Hindus in Australia compared with Eastern Orthodox. This also reflects changes in migration and the multicultural nature of Australia.

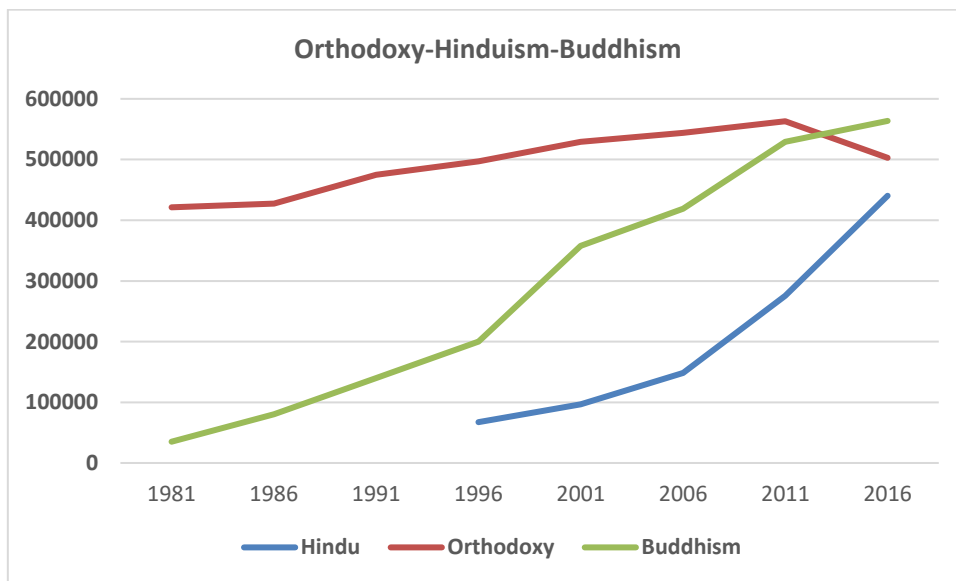


Figure 11. A comparison of Eastern Orthodoxy with Hindu and Buddhism in Australia 1976-2016

### PART 3 – GREEK ORTHODOX IN AUSTRALIA

This third section in the analysis deals solely with Greek Orthodox. In 2016, there is a finer breakdown of the figures for Eastern Orthodox and some characteristics of the Greek Orthodox population are defined in terms of age, residence, year of arrival.

#### How many people are Greek Orthodox?

In 2016, there were 373,591 Greek Orthodox throughout Australia, making up 1.59% of the population.

Greek Orthodox were categorised originally under the heading of Greek Catholic in the census and in recent times are included under the heading of Eastern Orthodox.

**Male-Female.** There were almost equal numbers of male and female Greek Orthodox in Australia (male = 184,395; female = 189,187).

**Age.** The age distribution of Greek Orthodox is shown in Figure 12. This highlights the aging of the Greek Orthodox population in Australia, in that majority of Greek Orthodox are aged 45 years and over.

Figure 12 compares the proportion in each group for Greek Orthodox with that in the general population. It highlights much lower proportions of Greek Orthodox in the 0-4 years and 20-39 years groups. There are significantly higher proportions for the 70-74, 75-79, 80-84 and 85+ years age groups. Long-term there will be a demographic effect of the reduced numbers of 0-4 years and 20-39 years.

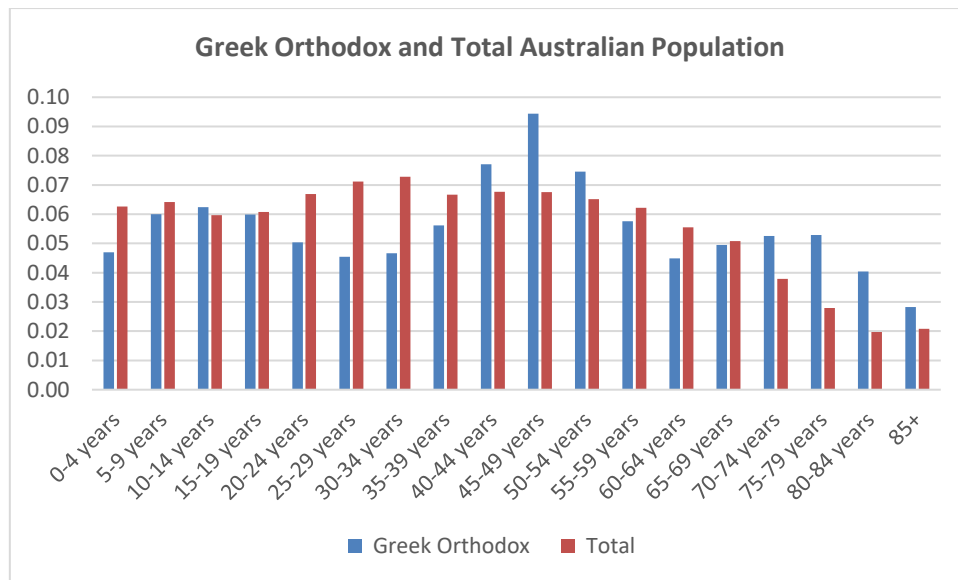


Figure 12. Greek Orthodox and the total population – a comparison of proportions

**Place of Birth.** Almost two-thirds of Greek Orthodox were born in Australia (63%) with some 29% born in Southern or Eastern Europe (Figure 13).

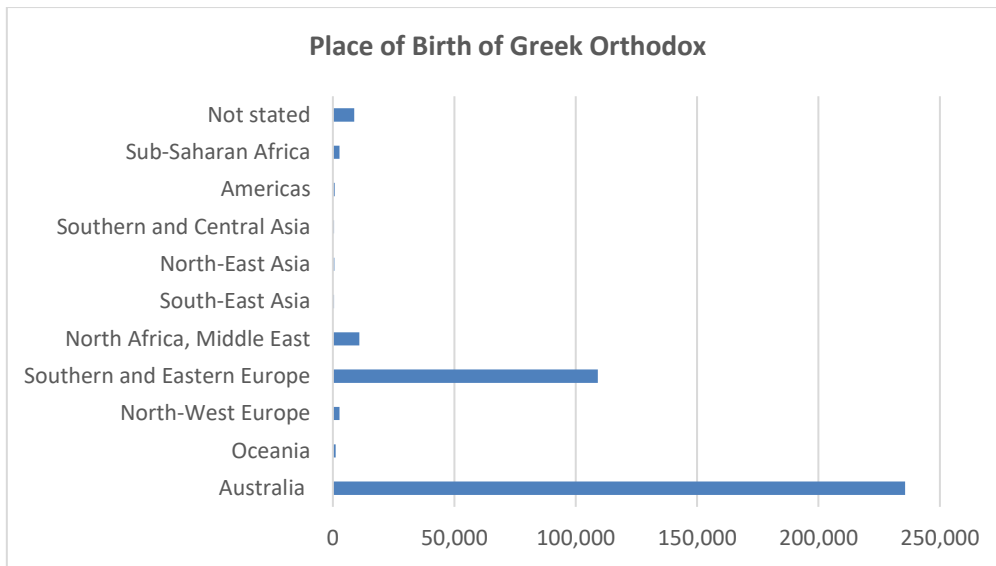


Figure 13. Place of birth of Greek Orthodox

The year of arrival of those Greek Orthodox not born in Australia confirms that most arrived in the period 1956-1975 (see Figure 14).

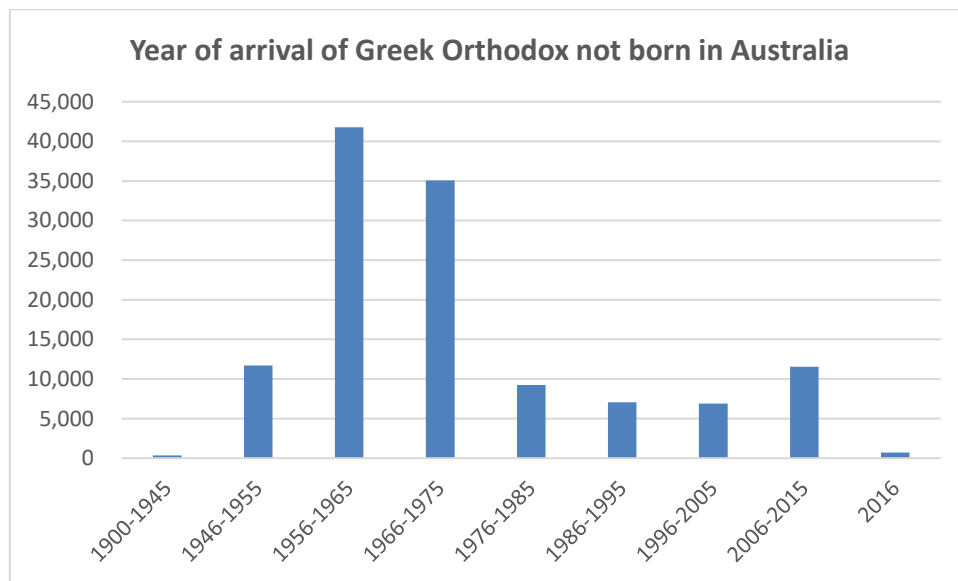


Figure 14. Year of arrival of Greek Orthodox not born in Australia

**Area of residence.** Just over 290,000 of the 373,591 Greek Orthodox reside in Victoria (44%) and New South Wales (34%). The distribution is depicted in Figure 15.

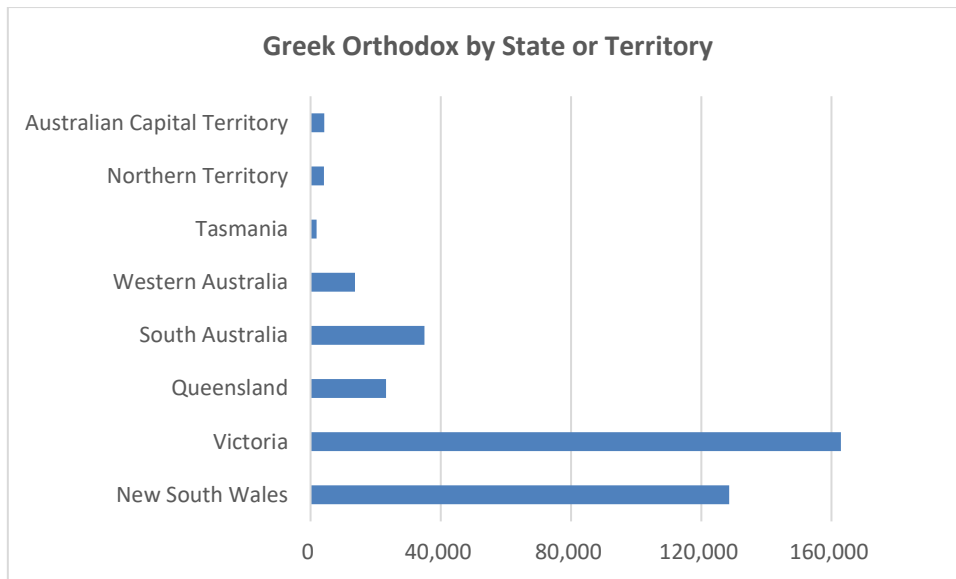


Figure 15. Greek orthodox by State or Territory

Most Greek Orthodox (92%) reside in metropolitan areas rather than non-urban or rural areas (see Figure 16), with 117,032 in Greater Sydney and 156,247 in Greater Melbourne. It is only in Queensland where the figure drops to 66% in the capital city area.

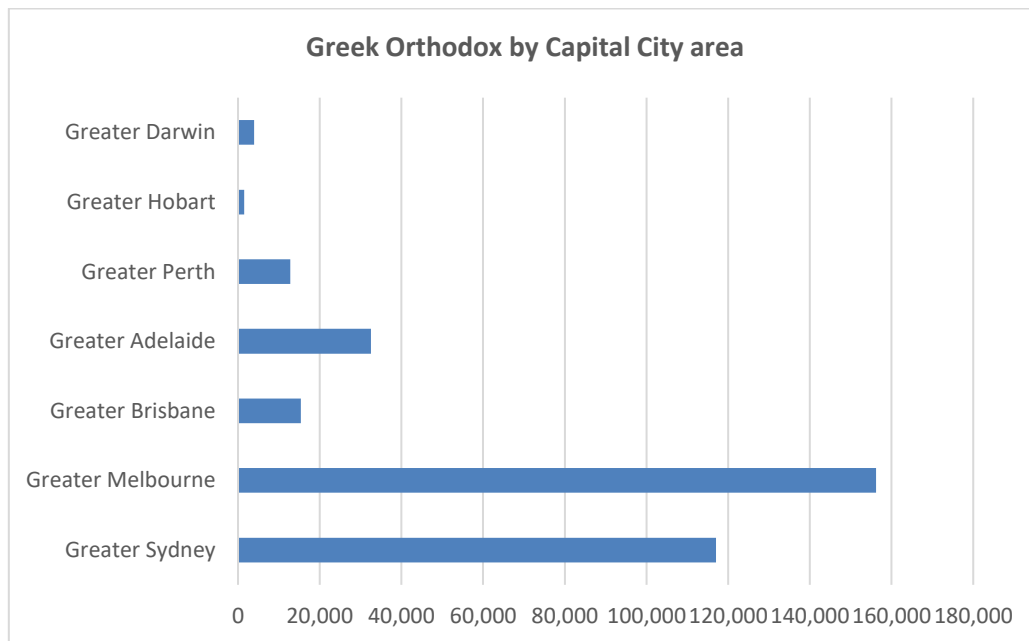


Figure 16. Greek Orthodox by capital city area

## SUMMARY

In summary it can be said that Australia is still a religious nation with around 60% professing some faith but it is more heterogeneous than in the past.

It was once a predominantly Christian nation. Christians, however, have now declined to just over half of the population. It is likely that the proportion of Christians will decline further as their actual number in the population was reduced for the first time since 1911 in the last Census.

There have also been changes within Christianity as a whole. The Christian background has moved from being predominantly Anglican and Protestant to being Roman Catholic. In terms of Christianity, Australia can be viewed as a Roman Catholic nation because Catholics now comprise 43% of Christians. The other change in Christianity in Australia is the rise of the Orthodox faith, which ranks around equal fourth with Presbyterians.

The group called the Eastern Orthodox includes various denominations. Altogether there are just over 500000 Eastern Orthodox in Australia and Greek Orthodox comprise almost three quarters.

For the first time in the history of the Census, the proportion of Eastern Orthodox in the Australian population has declined together with the numbers of Eastern Orthodox. Part of the reason for this decline is demographic. It reflects the older age structure the Orthodox population, no large-scale migration and probably fertility rates.

Eastern Orthodoxy have also declined in terms of their position amongst all religions in Australia. Groups such as Islam and Hindu have overtaken Eastern Orthodoxy.

Altogether there are only 373,591 Greek Orthodox in Australia and they make up 1.59% of the population. This is much less than figures cited elsewhere such as “650000 Faithfull” (Tamis, 2009). The nature of the Greek Orthodox population is characterised by:

- almost equal numbers of male and female;
- an aging population with most Greek Orthodox aged 45 years and over;
- a touch under two-thirds of the Greek Orthodox (63%) were born in Australia;
- of those who were not born in Australia, most arrived in the period 1956 to 1975;
- 78% of Greek Orthodox reside in Victoria and New South Wales;
- most Greek Orthodox reside in metropolitan areas with 117000 in Sydney and 156000 in greater Melbourne.

These statistics will confirm some views but also challenge some misconceptions about the numbers of Orthodox. Certainly, the findings could have implications for the planning of Greek Orthodox religious, health, education or welfare services.

No doubt the findings will be interpreted in a number of different ways but there is no predetermined criteria for their application. What can be said, however, is that (a) the numbers of Greek Orthodox are declining; (b) the overall position of Greek Orthodoxy in the religious landscape of Australia is fairly constant within the Christian of denominations; but (c) its position is moving lower across all faiths when non-Christian religions are included.

The results of the findings provide opportunities for implementation. Future papers in this series will undertake more detailed comparisons as well as finer analyses of Greek Orthodox in Australia.

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## Occasional papers

- 1 A comment on “From Opportunity to Outcomes...” with reference to the implications for Special Religious Education, April 2012
- 2 A rationale for general religious education and special Orthodox religious education in the Australian Curriculum, May 2012
- 3 The place of religions in the Australian Curriculum, June 2012
- 4 Do students in a Greek Orthodox college agree that the school’s mission has been achieved?, July 2012
- 5 What is the level of general religious knowledge of Greek Orthodox students?, July 2012
- 6 Thirteen curriculum concerns with the Australian Curriculum “Civics and Citizenship Draft Paper”, July 2012
- 7 Special Religious Education and its role in State Schools in New South Wales with reference to the Education Act (1990), July 2012
- 8 Implications of the 2011 census for Orthodox religiosity with special reference to ancestry and language, July 2012
- 9 A critical comment on “‘Jeesis is alive! He is the king of Australia’: Segregated religious instruction, child identity and exclusion”, December 2013 (**embargoed**)
- 10 A Greek Orthodox special religious education curriculum K to 7, January 2014
- 11 A note on the forthcoming review of special religious education in New South Wales, January 2014
- 12 An analysis of Greek Orthodox Colleges from the MySchool and NAPLAN data, August 2013
- 13 Appraising the importance of bullying for the National Safe Schools Framework, May 2016
- 14 Greek Orthodox in Australia – the big picture, April 2019