

New Times, Old Beliefs: Projecting the Future Size of Religions in Austria

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Abstract

Austria finds itself into a period of 'religious transition' where the long-time dominant Catholic Church faces large declines in membership due mainly to secularization, accentuated by immigration of populations with other beliefs. In this context, projections of the religious composition of the population are relevant for two main reasons: (1) religious beliefs influence the behaviour of populations e.g. childbearing; (2) religion is a driver of social cohesion. Our projections for Austria indicate that the proportion of Catholics is likely to decrease from 75% to less than 50% over the period 2001-2051 unless current trends in fertility, secularization or immigration changes. The most uncertain projections are for those without religion: it could be as low as 10% and as high as 33%. The Muslim population, which grew from 1% in 1981 to 4% in 2001, will, according to our estimates, represent 14 to 26% of the population by 2051.