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## THE NETHERLANDS IN MAPS

# REGIONAL RELIGIOUS COMPOSITIONS IN THE NETHERLANDS

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### INTRODUCTION

Religious diversity is a stock feature of multicultural societies and as such figures in many discussions of multiculturalism. Specific religions go hand in hand with many social characteristics that contribute to cultural diversity such as specific lifestyles and differences in demographic behaviour, political preference and social participation. Worldwide, religious diversity differs substantially between countries and regions. Generally speaking, the level of religious diversity is high in the Asia-Pacific region, and moderate in most European countries (Pew Research 2014). The Netherlands however have a reputation for being an exception here, with a relative multitude of religious denominations. The total number of such denominations, counted by the 'Handbook Christian Netherlands', is now around 650. Neighbouring European countries show lower levels of religious diversity, which may be connected to a greater historical dominance of official 'state religions' like the Roman Catholic church in Belgium and France, the protestant Lutheran church in Germany and the Scandinavian countries, or the Anglican church in the United Kingdom. Conversely, in the Netherlands protestant life has been quite diverse since the Reformation, when a spirit of liberty started to sustain a climate of religious tolerance (Hoekstra & Ipenburg 2008).

Interestingly, the pattern of religious diversity in the Netherlands still shows striking regional differences and the same holds true for the level of non-religiousness (atheism). In this second instalment of *The Netherlands in*

*Maps on this year's theme of 'multicultural society'* we will show and comment on both types of spatial variations.

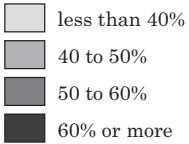
### RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY IN THE NETHERLANDS

The main map depicts religious diversity in the Netherlands as per NUTS 3 regions with circle diagrams ('pie charts'). In the Netherlands as a whole, of those who consider themselves as religious, almost half (49%) regard themselves to be Roman Catholic. A quarter of the religious population are Protestants (16% Reformed and 9% Calvinists) and 4 per cent profess Islam, leaving 22 per cent to 'other religions'. Among these 'others' are confessors of the Jewish, Hindu, and Buddhist religions and a wide range of other religious groups, representing all kinds of migrant religions as well as split-offs of original Dutch denominations. The biggest group within 'other religions' however, in all NUTS 3 regions, is the so-called PKN (Protestantse Kerken in Nederland) which represents the renewed co-operation (since 2004) between the three main protestant groups, that is, Reformed, Calvinists and Lutherans. In population surveys, some respondents now regard themselves to be PKN-members, while others still stick to their original adherence to the Reformed, Calvinist or Lutheran churches. Particular large PKN segments (covering 10–20% of the pie diagram) are found in NUTS 3 regions in Zeeland, the East and South of South Holland, the Veluwe, the North of Overijssel, and Friesland. In fact all of these regions belong to the well-known 'Bible Belt' (see Van

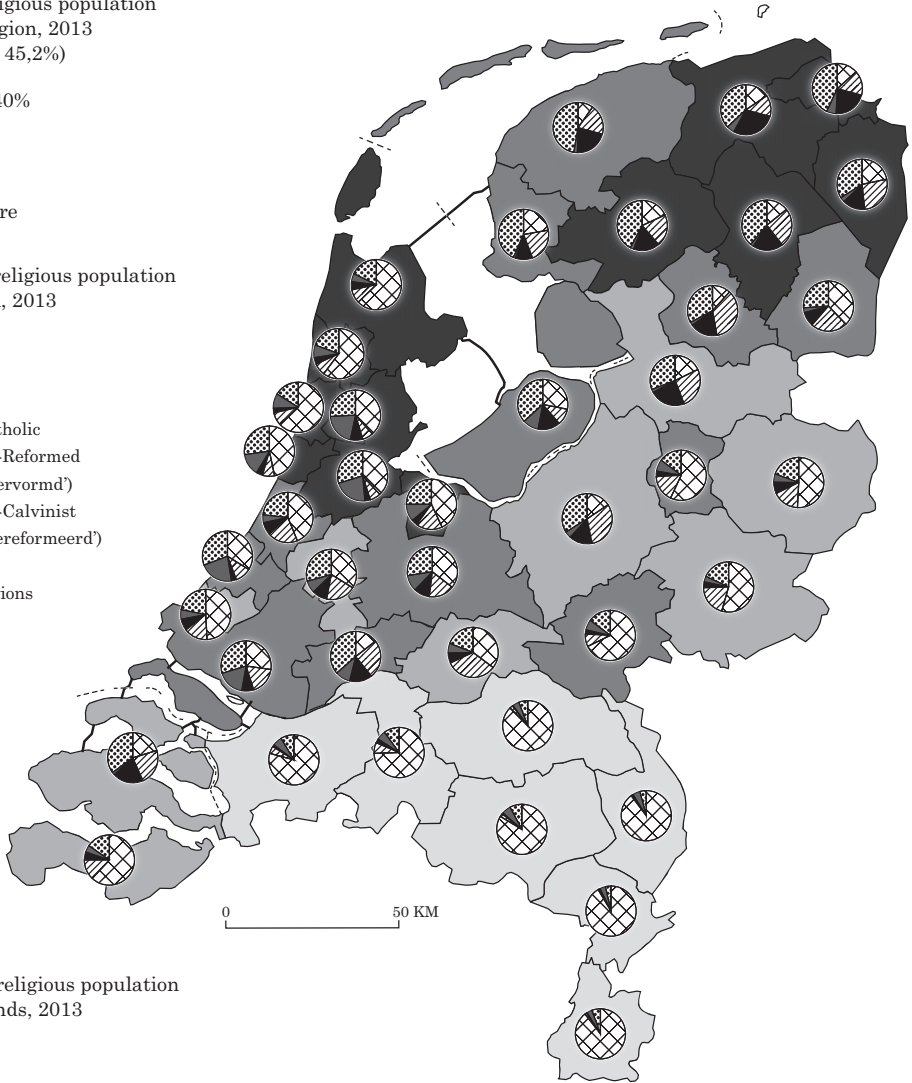
THE NETHERLANDS IN MAPS  
Multicultural Society (Part 2)

**RELIGIOUS AND NON-RELIGIOUS POPULATION**

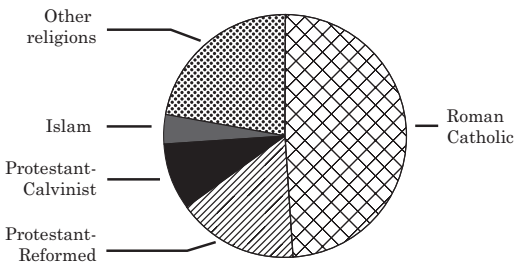
Share of non-religious population  
per NUTS III region, 2013  
(national figure: 45,2%)



Composition of religious population  
NUTS III region, 2013



Composition of religious population  
in the Netherlands, 2013



Source: CBS Statline (2014)

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Steen & Pellenburg 2012). The same regions also tend to have large segments (>20%) of Reformed people. Calvinists are relatively numerous in the North, where many regions also reach up to 20 per cent or more. The Roman Catholic (RC) group clearly dominates in the South. In the provinces of North Brabant and Limburg the RC group represents 80–90 per cent of all religious people. In most of the Eastern provinces, the RC share is slightly higher than average (50–60%) and in the North it is extremely low, that is, lower than 20 per cent (with the exception of SE Drenthe).

The 'religious map' of the Netherlands today is a legacy of the past, especially of the Dutch independence war against the Spanish (1568–1648), which was partly a conflict between Catholics and Protestants. After the war ended, initially the Roman Catholic church was formally forbidden in the newly founded republic, although connived at in the southern provinces of North Brabant and Limburg, which explains its present dominance in those regions. For more details concerning the history of the religious map of the Netherlands we refer to the standard work of Knippenberg (1992) and a recent short update of that work by Schmeets (2014).

### SECULARISATION AND CHURCH ATTENDANCE

At the time of the 1899 population census in the Netherlands, only 2.3 per cent of the population was found to be non-religious. Six out of 10 persons were Protestant (mainly Reformed), the other four were Roman Catholics. The share of atheism rose to 14 per cent in the 1930 census, and 18 per cent in 1960 (CBS 2009). In the 1960s and 1970s secularisation grew fast. In 1980, 50 per cent of the population is counted as non-religious, and in 2012 that share has risen to 70 per cent. The circle diagrams in our map apply to a humble 30 per cent of the Dutch population that regard themselves as belonging to a church community (De Hart 2014). The shading of the NUTS 3 regions underlying the circles, demonstrates that not only the composition of the religious population, but also the share of non-religious people varies in space. The process of secularisation in the Netherlands did not start in the big cities, but in the

rural areas of the northern Netherlands, where social needs among farm-hands and peat-cutters fostered the growth of socialism and church departure. A comparable breeding place was found in the communities of poor factory workers in the Zaanstreek, in North Holland (Knippenberg & De Pater 1988). The map shading indicates that up until the present, the highest percentages of non-religious people are still found in the three Northern provinces and in North Holland. Low shares of atheism appear in the southern provinces of North Brabant and Limburg, where 60–80 per cent of the inhabitants still regard themselves as religious, which is mainly Roman Catholic there. However in these same two provinces the level of church attendance is very low (CBS 2014), demonstrating a considerable difference between feelings of belonging and religious practice, for the various denominations.

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