

Executive summary

The 2023-24 Religious Landscape Study (RLS) and other Pew Research Center polling find that the Christian share of the population, after years of decline, has been relatively stable since 2019. And the religiously unaffiliated population, after rising rapidly for decades, has leveled off – at least temporarily. At present:

- **62% of U.S. adults describe themselves as Christians:** 40% are Protestant, 19% are Catholic, and 3% are other Christians.
- **29% are religiously unaffiliated:** 5% are atheist, 6% are agnostic, and 19% identify religiously as “nothing in particular.”
- **7% belong to religions other than Christianity:** 2% are Jewish, and 1% each are Muslim, Buddhist or Hindu (all figures are rounded).

Some key measures of religious belief and practice also have held fairly steady in recent years. The 2023-24 RLS finds that:

- 44% of U.S. adults say they pray at least once a day. Though down significantly since 2007, this measure has held between 44% and 46% since 2021.
- 33% say they go to religious services at least once a month. Since 2020, the percentages saying this have consistently hovered in the low 30s.

And large majorities of Americans have a spiritual, supernatural outlook. For example:

- 86% believe people have a soul or spirit in addition to their physical body.
- 83% believe in God or a universal spirit.
- 79% believe there is something spiritual beyond the natural world.
- 70% believe in heaven, hell or both.

But in future years we may see further declines in the religiousness of the American public, for several reasons:

- Young adults are far less religious than older adults.
- No recent birth cohort has become more religious as it has aged.
- The “stickiness” of a religious upbringing seems to be declining: Compared with older people, fewer young adults who had a highly religious upbringing are still highly religious as adults.
- The “stickiness” of a *nonreligious* upbringing seems to be rising.

This is the third time Pew Research Center has conducted a Religious Landscape Study. The first RLS was conducted in 2007. The second was in 2014. Other key findings from the new study include:

- 35% of U.S. adults have switched religions since childhood, leading to net gains for the unaffiliated population and net losses for the Christian population.
- All three major strands of Protestantism have declined in percentage terms since 2007.
 - Evangelical Protestants now make up 23% of U.S. adults, down from 26%.
 - Mainline Protestants account for 11% of U.S. adults, down from 18%.
 - Members of historically Black Protestant churches make up 5% of U.S. adults, down from 7%.
- The share of Americans who identify with nondenominational Protestantism is growing.
- Many other Protestant denominational families (including Baptists, Methodists, Lutherans and others) have declined as shares of the population.
- The United Methodist Church, which has splintered in recent years, now makes up slightly fewer than 3% of U.S. adults, down from 5% in 2007.

The 2023-24 RLS also reveals patterns by:

- **Gender:** Women remain more religious than men in the United States by a variety of measures, such as prayer frequency and belief in God or a universal spirit. But the gender gap in religiousness is less pronounced among the youngest adults than among older people, and it's slightly smaller today than in 2007. Still, women in every age group are at least as religious as men.
- **Political ideology:** The share of self-described political liberals who identify as Christians has fallen 25 percentage points since 2007, from 62% to 37%. Among self-described conservatives, the Christian share has declined 7 points, from 89% to 82%.
- **Race and ethnicity:** 66% of adults who attend religious services say that most or all people in their congregation have the same race or ethnicity they do. Even more (78%) say this was true of the religious services they attended as children.
- **Immigration status:** A majority of U.S. immigrants (58%) are Christian. About a quarter of foreign-born adults are unaffiliated, and 14% belong to other religions, including 4% who are Muslim, 4% who are Hindu and 3% who are Buddhist.

Decline of Christianity in the U.S. Has Slowed, May Have Levelled Off

Findings from the 2023-24 Religious Landscape Study

After many years of steady decline, the share of Americans who identify as Christians shows signs of leveling off – at least temporarily – at slightly above six-in-ten, according to a massive new Pew Research Center survey of 36,908 U.S. adults.

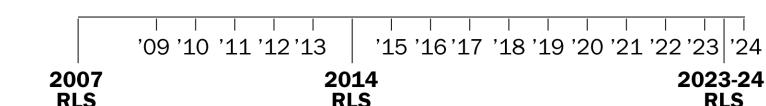
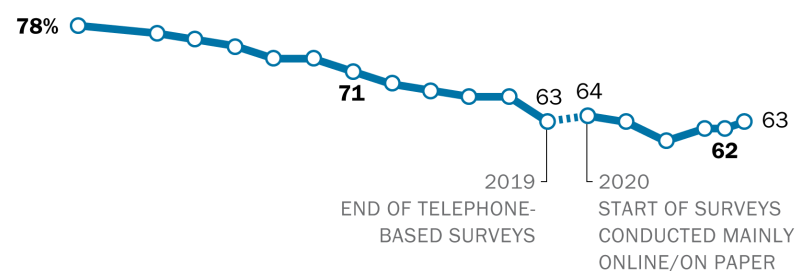
The Religious Landscape Study (RLS) is the largest single survey the Center conducts, aiming to provide authoritative figures on the size of U.S. religious groups because the U.S. census does not collect that information.

We have conducted three of these landscape surveys over the past 17 years, with more than 35,000 randomly sampled respondents each time. That's enough to paint a statistical portrait of religion not only nationally, but also in [all 50 states and the District of Columbia](#), as well as in 34 large metro areas.

This introductory essay walks through the big-picture trends: evidence both of a long-term decline in American religion and of relative stability in the last few years, since 2020 or so.

After years of decline, the Christian share of the U.S. population stabilizes

% of U.S. adults who identify as Christian



Note: The 2007, 2014 and 2023-24 data comes from Pew Research Center's Religious Landscape Studies. Other estimates come from the Center's random-digit-dial telephone surveys (until 2019), and from the Center's annual National Public Opinion Reference Survey (since 2020).

Source: Religious Landscape Study of U.S. adults conducted July 17, 2023-March 4, 2024.

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Jump to an [executive summary of key findings](#).

Search for [data on religious groups](#).

The first RLS, fielded in 2007, found that 78% of U.S. adults identified as Christians of one sort or another. That number ticked steadily downward in our smaller surveys each year and was pegged at 71% in the second RLS, conducted in 2014.

The latest RLS, fielded over seven months in 2023-24, finds that 62% of U.S. adults identify as Christians. That is a decline of 9 percentage points since 2014 and a 16-point drop since 2007.

But for the last five years, between 2019 and 2024, the Christian share of the adult population has been relatively stable, hovering between 60% and 64%. The 62% figure in the new Religious Landscape Study is smack in the middle of that recent range.

The largest subgroups of Christians in the United States are Protestants – now 40% of U.S. adults – and Catholics, now 19%. People who identify with all other Christian groups (including the Greek and Russian Orthodox Churches, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Jehovah’s Witnesses and many others) total about 3% of U.S. adults.

Both Protestant and Catholic numbers are down significantly since 2007, though the Protestant share of the population has remained fairly level since 2019 and the Catholic share has been stable since 2014, with only small fluctuations in our annual surveys.

Meanwhile, the share of Americans who identify with a religion other than Christianity has been trending upward, though it is still in single digits.

Today, 1.7% of U.S. adults say they are Jewish when asked about their religion, while 1.2% of respondents in the new survey are Muslim, 1.1% are Buddhist, and 0.9% are Hindu.

Religiously unaffiliated adults – those who identify as atheists, agnostics or as “nothing in particular” when

asked about their religion – account for 29% of the population in the new RLS. The size of the religiously unaffiliated population, which we sometimes call religious “nones,” has plateaued in recent years after a long period of sustained growth.

7% of U.S. adults now identify with a religion other than Christianity

% of U.S. adults who are ...

	2007	2014	2023-24
Jewish	1.7%	1.9%	1.7%
Muslim	0.4	0.9	1.2
Buddhist	0.7	0.7	1.1
Hindu	0.4	0.7	0.9
Other non-Christian religions	<u>1.4</u>	<u>1.8</u>	<u>2.2</u>
NET Non-Christian religions	4.7	5.9	7.1

Note: Figures may not add to subtotals indicated due to rounding. Pew Research Center typically reports survey results rounded to the nearest whole number. However, the Religious Landscape Study is an exceptionally large survey, and the margin of error for results based on the full sample is less than 1 percentage point. Thus, in some analyses, we show results out to one decimal point if that level of precision is necessary to show trends over time or to compare the sizes of relatively small religious groups.

Source: Religious Landscape Study of U.S. adults conducted July 17, 2023-March 4, 2024.

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Rates of prayer, attendance at religious services also relatively stable

Other standard survey measures contribute to this emerging picture of stability:

- Though down significantly since 2007, the share of Americans who say they **pray daily** has consistently held between 44% and 46% since 2021. In the new RLS, 44% say they pray at least once a day.
- Similarly, since 2020, the percentage of U.S. adults who say they **attend religious services monthly** has hovered in the low 30s. In the new RLS, 33% say they go to religious services at least once a month.

Spiritual beliefs are widespread

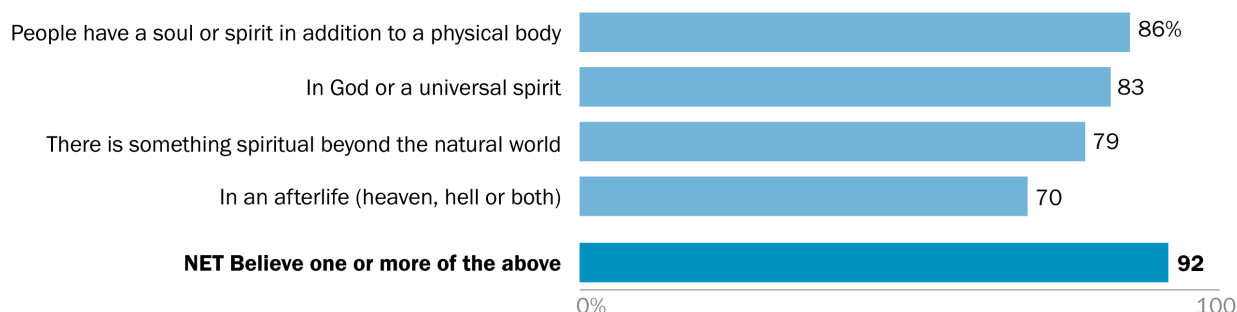
Moreover, the survey shows that large majorities of Americans have a spiritual or supernatural outlook on the world.

For example:

- 86% believe people have a soul or spirit in addition to their physical body.
- 83% believe in God or a universal spirit.
- 79% believe there is something spiritual beyond the natural world, even if we can't see it.
- 70% believe in an afterlife (heaven, hell or both).

Large majorities of U.S. adults believe in the existence of a soul, something spiritual beyond the natural world

% of U.S. adults who say they believe ...



Source: Religious Landscape Study of U.S. adults conducted July 17, 2023-March 4, 2024.

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But, despite these signs of recent stabilization and abiding spirituality, other indicators suggest we may see further declines in the American religious landscape in future years.

Namely, younger Americans remain far less religious than older adults.

For example, the youngest adults in the survey (ages 18 to 24) are *less likely* than today's oldest adults (ages 74 and older) to:

- Identify as Christian (46% vs. 80%)
- Pray daily (27% vs. 58%)
- Say they attend religious services at least monthly (25% vs. 49%)

And the youngest adults are *more likely* than the oldest Americans to be religiously unaffiliated (43% vs. 13%).

Also, younger Americans are less likely than older adults to say they were raised in religious households.¹ And, compared with older adults, fewer young people who were raised in religious households have *remained* religious after reaching adulthood.

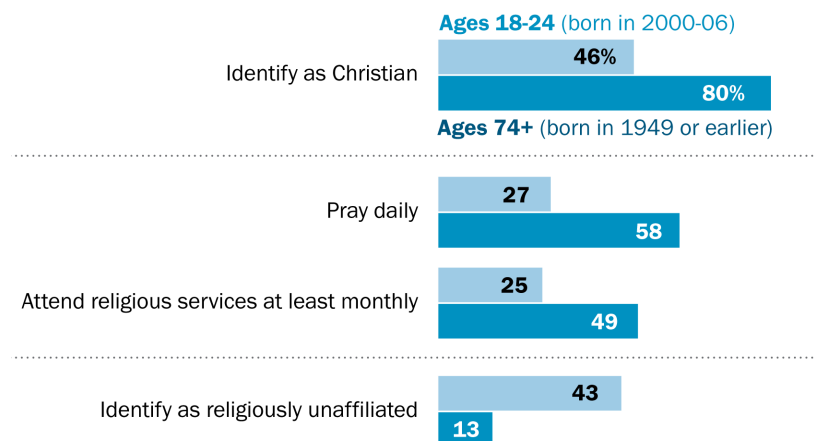
These are among the key findings of Pew Research Center’s 2023-24 Religious Landscape Study. Like the previous studies, the new survey offers a great deal of information on what Americans believe and how they practice a wide variety of religions.

In this report, we cover in detail:

- [Religious affiliation and religious switching](#)
- [Religion and family life](#)
- [Religious or spiritual beliefs and practices](#)
- [Social and political views](#)
- [Opinions on religion’s place in society](#)
- [Demographics of U.S. religious groups](#)

Big age gaps in shares of Americans who identify as Christian, pray regularly

% of U.S. adults who say they do the following, by birth cohort



Note: The survey asked respondents, “In what year were you born?” Approximate age was calculated by subtracting the respondent’s year of birth from the year in which they completed the survey (2023 or 2024). The “Religiously unaffiliated” category consists of people who describe themselves as atheist, agnostic, or “nothing in particular” when asked about their religion.

Source: Religious Landscape Study of U.S. adults conducted July 17, 2023-March 4, 2024.

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¹ Compared with older people, younger adults are less likely to say they were raised in a religion, less likely to say they grew up going to religious services at least monthly, and less likely to have received a lot of formal religious education as children. Young adults also are somewhat less likely than older people to say religion was “very important” to them personally when they were children, and more likely to say religion was “not too important” or “not at all important” to them personally when they were children. An exception to this pattern is that there is little difference across age categories in the share of people who say religion was “very important” to their *families* when they were kids.

Reasons for the long-term decline and recent stability

The RLS and other recent Pew Research Center surveys suggest that two things are happening simultaneously in American religion:

- Over the long term (since 2007 in our data and going back further in other major surveys), there is a downward trend in several measures of religiousness, including affiliation with Christianity.
- In the short term (the last four or five years), these changes have slowed or perhaps even plateaued.

Long-term decline

One driver of the long-term trend is “generational replacement.” Older, highly religious, heavily Christian generations are passing away. The younger generations succeeding them are much less religious, with smaller percentages of Christians and more “nones.”²

In addition, the landscape surveys show that between 2007 and 2023-24, each birth cohort has become less religious, by several measures, as it has aged.

What’s a birth cohort?

Throughout this report, we use “birth cohort” to refer to a group of people who were born in the same years. We categorize U.S. adults into seven cohorts: people born in the 1940s (or earlier) and those born in the 1950s, the 1960s, the 1970s, the 1980s, the 1990s, and from 2000 through 2006.

One advantage of analyzing these cohorts rather than conventional “generations” (like the Silent Generation, Baby Boomers, Gen X, Millennials and Gen Z) is that most of the cohorts are of equal length (a decade long).

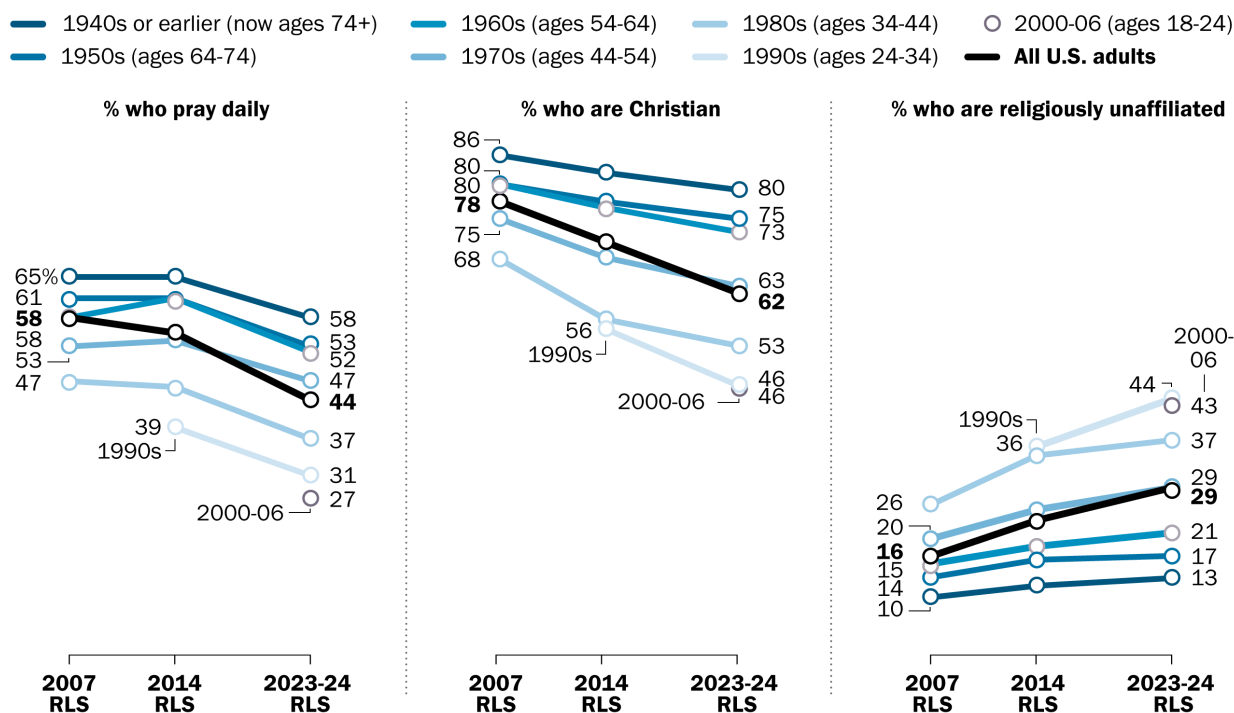
Another advantage is that the decade-long cohorts may not carry as many [assumptions](#) – or stereotypes – as the familiar generations do.

For example, people within the oldest and youngest cohorts, as well as those in between, have become less likely to say they pray daily, less likely to identify with a religion (including Christianity), and less likely to believe in God or a universal spirit with absolute certainty.

² For more on generational changes in American religion, read Hout, Michael, and Claude S. Fischer. 2014. [“Explaining Why More Americans Have No Religious Preference: Political Backlash and Generational Succession, 1987-2012.”](#) Sociological Science. Also refer to Voas, David, and Mark Chaves. 2016. [“Is the United States a Counterexample to the Secularization Thesis?”](#) American Journal of Sociology.

As they have grown older, U.S. adults in all birth cohorts have become less likely to pray daily and less likely to identify as Christian

Among U.S. adults born in ...



Note: The 2023-24 survey asked respondents, "In what year were you born?" Approximate age was calculated by subtracting the respondent's year of birth from the year in which they completed the survey (2023 or 2024). The "Religiously unaffiliated" category consists of people who describe themselves as atheist, agnostic, or "nothing in particular" when asked about their religion. Source: Religious Landscape Study of U.S. adults conducted July 17, 2023-March 4, 2024.

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