

Trends in Religious Affiliation

The majority of Americans identify as religious. This is holds particularly for those who are Christian. However, social scientists disagree about the practical significance of changing trends in religious affiliation. On the one hand, Pew Research Center reports that Americans are becoming less religious and that the percentage of Christians is rapidly declining.¹⁾ On the other hand, Dr. Rodney Stark of Baylor University reports that Americans are more religious than ever and that Christians are increasing.²⁾

1. Religious Trends in the United States

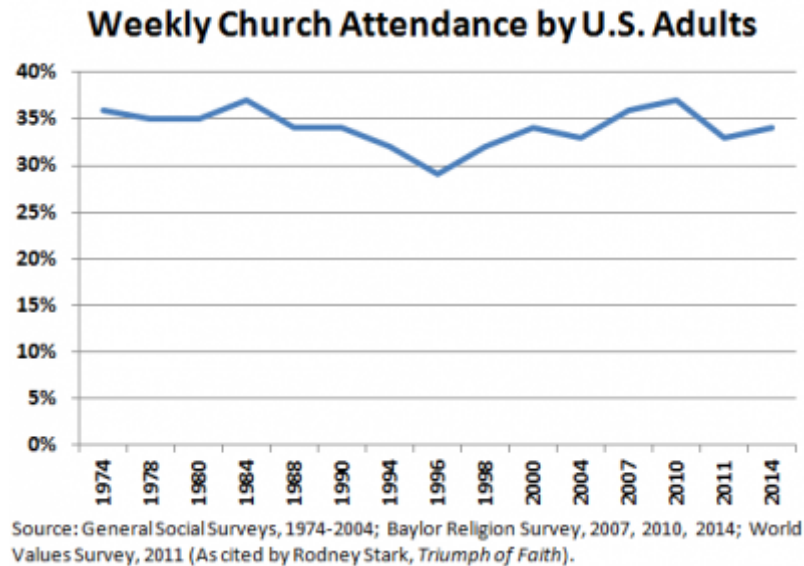
In their 2015 publication, “America’s Changing Religious Landscape”, Pew Researchers reported that, between 2007 and 2014, the proportion of Christians decreased by 7.8 percent (from 78.4 percent to 70.6 percent), Non-Christians increased by 1.2 percent (from 4.7 percent to 5.9 percent) and the Unaffiliated increased by 6.7 percent (16.1 percent to 22.8 percent).³⁾ The decline in Christians and rise in “Religious Nones” led Pew to conclude that Americans are becoming less religious—particularly less Christian.⁴⁾ However, Dr. Rodney Stark posits that the rise in “Unaffiliated” does not indicate a retreat from religion or even Christianity; rather, the “Unaffiliated” captures the rising number of Americans who do not identify with a nominal religion denomination.⁵⁾ These “Unaffiliated”, according to Dr. Stark, are Christians who have left the denominations in which they were raised—especially the mainline Protestant denominations—to join nondenominational conservative churches.⁶⁾

Religious Affiliation Pew Religious Landscape Study <i>Based on Pew Surveys (2007-2014)</i>	
Christian	70.6%
<i>Evangelical Protestant</i>	25.4%
<i>Mainline Protestant</i>	14.7%
<i>Historically Black Protestant</i>	6.5%
<i>Catholic</i>	20.8%
<i>Mormon</i>	1.6%
<i>Orthodox Christian</i>	0.5%
<i>Jehovah's Witness</i>	0.8%
Other Christian	0.4%
Non-Christian	5.9%
<i>Jewish</i>	1.9%
<i>Muslim</i>	0.9%
<i>Buddhist</i>	0.7%
<i>Hindu</i>	0.7%
Other World Religions	0.3%
Other Faiths	1.5%
<i>Unaffiliated (religious "nones")</i>	22.8%
<i>Atheist</i>	3.1%
<i>Agnostic</i>	4.0%
<i>Nothing in Particular</i>	15.8%
Don't Know	0.6%
Source: Pew Research Center, "Religious Landscape Study", available at http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/	

Religious Affiliation Dr. Rodney Stark, <i>Triumph of Faith</i> <i>Based on Gallup World Polls (2006-2014)</i>	
Christian	78%
<i>Protestant</i>	48%
<i>Catholic</i>	27%
<i>Other</i>	3%
Jewish	2%
Other	4%
Unaffiliated*	12%
None	4%
*Most of them Christians without a denominational preference. Source: Stark, Rodney, <i>The Triumph of Faith: Why The World Is More Religious Than Ever</i> , ISI Books, 2015.	

2. Religiosity of the Affiliated

Both Pew's and Dr. Stark's research indicate that religiously affiliated Americans are just as religious as their predecessors, and in some ways even more so. According to Pew Research, between 2007 and 2014 the percent of religiously affiliated U.S. adults who say their religion is very important to them, who read Scripture weekly, who participate in weekly prayer/ study groups, and who share their faith with others on a weekly basis have all increased.⁷⁾ Relying on the General Social Survey, Baylor Religion Survey, and World Values Survey, Dr. Stark points out that weekly Church attendance has remained fairly consistent since 1974 (see chart below).⁸⁾



3. Religiosity of the Unaffiliated

The religiously unaffiliated are the quickest growing religious identity in America.⁹⁾ The majority of those identifying as “religiously unaffiliated” are “nothing in particular”, and only a smaller minority are atheist/ agnostic.¹⁰⁾ Dr. Rodney Stark asserts that the Unaffiliated are still deeply spiritual and primarily identify with smaller non-denominational churches.¹¹⁾ To an extent, Pew’s research supports this conclusion: among Protestants, those identifying as Evangelical have increased, those identifying as Mainline have decreased, and over a quarter refused to identify with any particular denomination.¹²⁾ Even among the unaffiliated, 68 percent believe in “God or a universal spirit.”¹³⁾ Among those as identifying as “nothing in particular”, 27 percent pray daily or more, 24 percent pray weekly/ monthly, and 48 percent pray seldom/ never.¹⁴⁾

However, although the “Nones” believe in the spiritual realm, Pew research indicates that they generally do not practice religion. Only 26 percent of those identifying as “nothing in particular” attend a worship service monthly or yearly; the majority seldom or never attend.¹⁵⁾ The portion of “Nones” who express absolute or fair certainty in their belief in God has also declined in recent years.¹⁶⁾ Therefore, although Pew researchers agree with Dr. Stark that denominational labeling among Christians accounts for some of the supposed decline in religious affiliation, they assert that it does not explain the full story.

4. Religious Affiliation by Region

4.1 Northeast

Religious Affiliation in the Northeast Pew Religious Landscape Study Based on Pew Surveys (2007-2014)	
Christian	65%
<i>Evangelical Protestant</i>	13%
<i>Mainline Protestant</i>	15%
<i>Historically Black Protestant</i>	5%
<i>Catholic</i>	30%
<i>Mormon</i>	1%
<i>Orthodox Christian</i>	1%
<i>Jehovah's Witness</i>	1%
Other Christian	<1%
Non-Christian	10%
<i>Jewish</i>	4%
<i>Muslim</i>	1%
<i>Buddhist</i>	1%
<i>Hindu</i>	1%
Other World Religions	<1%
Other Faiths	2%
<i>Unaffiliated (religious "nones")</i>	25%
<i>Atheist</i>	4%
<i>Agnostic</i>	5%
<i>Nothing in Particular</i>	16%
Don't Know	1%

Source: Pew Research Center, "Religious Landscape Study", available at <http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/region/northeast/>



4.2 South

Religious Affiliation in the South Pew Religious Landscape Study Based on Pew Surveys (2007-2014)	
Christian	76%
<i>Evangelical Protestant</i>	34%
<i>Mainline Protestant</i>	14%
<i>Historically Black Protestant</i>	11%
<i>Catholic</i>	15%
<i>Mormon</i>	1%
<i>Orthodox Christian</i>	<1%
<i>Jehovah's Witness</i>	1%
Other Christian	<1%
Non-Christian	4%
<i>Jewish</i>	1%
<i>Muslim</i>	1%
<i>Buddhist</i>	<1%
<i>Hindu</i>	<1%
Other World Religions	<1%
Other Faiths	1%
<i>Unaffiliated (religious "nones")</i>	19%
<i>Atheist</i>	2%
<i>Agnostic</i>	3%
<i>Nothing in Particular</i>	14%
Don't Know	<1%

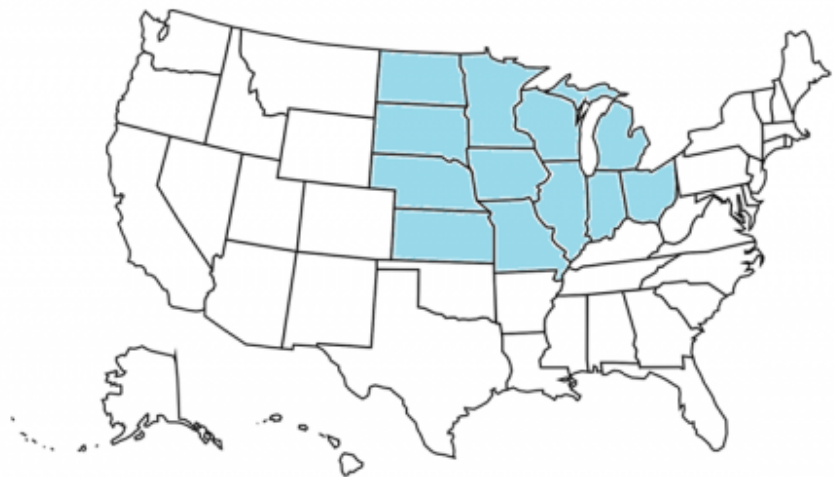
Source: Pew Research Center, "Religious Landscape Study", available at <http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/region/south/>



4.3 Midwest

Religious Affiliation in the Midwest Pew Religious Landscape Study Based on Pew Surveys (2007-2014)	
Christian	73%
<i>Evangelical Protestant</i>	26%
<i>Mainline Protestant</i>	19%
<i>Historically Black Protestant</i>	5%
<i>Catholic</i>	21%
<i>Mormon</i>	1%
<i>Orthodox Christian</i>	<1%
<i>Jehovah's Witness</i>	1%
Other Christian	<1%
Non-Christian	4%
<i>Jewish</i>	1%
<i>Muslim</i>	1%
<i>Buddhist</i>	1%
<i>Hindu</i>	<1%
Other World Religions	<1%
Other Faiths	1%
<i>Unaffiliated (religious "nones")</i>	22%
<i>Atheist</i>	3%
<i>Agnostic</i>	4%
<i>Nothing in Particular</i>	16%
Don't Know	1%

Source: Pew Research Center, "Religious Landscape Study", available at <http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/region/midwest/>



4.4 West

Religious Affiliation in the West Pew Religious Landscape Study Based on Pew Surveys (2007-2014)	
Christian	64%
<i>Evangelical Protestant</i>	22%
<i>Mainline Protestant</i>	11%
<i>Historically Black Protestant</i>	2%
<i>Catholic</i>	23%
<i>Mormon</i>	5%
<i>Orthodox Christian</i>	1%
<i>Jehovah's Witness</i>	1%
Other Christian	1%
Non-Christian	7%
<i>Jewish</i>	2%
<i>Muslim</i>	1%
<i>Buddhist</i>	1%
<i>Hindu</i>	1%
Other World Religions	<1%
Other Faiths	2%
<i>Unaffiliated (religious "nones")</i>	28%
<i>Atheist</i>	4%
<i>Agnostic</i>	5%
<i>Nothing in Particular</i>	19%
Don't Know	1%

Source: Pew Research Center, "Religious Landscape Study", available at <http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/region/west/>



¹⁾ Pew Research Center, "America's Changing Religious Landscape" (May 12, 2015), available at <http://assets.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/11/2015/05/RLS-08-26-full-report.pdf>. Pew Research Center, "U.S. Becoming Less Religious" (November 3, 2015), available at http://assets.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/11/2015/11/201.11.03_RLS_II_full_report.pdf.

Pew Research Center, "Religious Landscape Study", available at <http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/>. The Pew Research Center bases their research on the Pew Research survey.

²⁾ Stark, Rodney, *The Triumph of Faith: Why The World Is More Religious Than Ever*, ISI Books, 2015. Dr. Stark primarily bases his research on the World Gallup Polls, 2006-2014.

³⁾ Pew Research Center, "America's Changing Religious Landscape" (May 12, 2015), available at <http://assets.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/11/2015/05/RLS-08-26-full-report.pdf>.

⁴⁾ , ⁹⁾ , ¹²⁾ Pew Research Center, "America's Changing Religious Landscape" (May 12, 2015), available at <http://assets.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/11/2015/05/RLS-08-26-full-report.pdf>.

⁵⁾ , ¹¹⁾ Stark, Rodney, *The Triumph of Faith: Why The World Is More Religious Than Ever*, ISI Books, 2015.

⁶⁾ Stark, Rodney, *The Triumph of Faith: Why The World Is More Religious Than Ever*, ISI Books, 2015, pgs. 194-196.

⁷⁾ , ¹³⁾ , ¹⁵⁾ , ¹⁶⁾ Pew Research Center, "U.S. Becoming Less Religious" (November 3, 2015), available at http://assets.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/11/2015/11/201.11.03_RLS_II_full_report.pdf.

⁸⁾ Stark, Rodney, *The Triumph of Faith: Why The World Is More Religious Than Ever*, ISI Books, 2015, pg. 189.

¹⁰⁾ , ¹⁴⁾ Pew Research Center, "Nones" on the Rise: One-in-Five Adults Have No Religious Affiliation (October 2012), available at

<http://assets.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/11/2012/10/NonesOnTheRise-full.pdf>.

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