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# Why Americans Go (and Don't Go) to Religious Services

*Many cite practical or personal reasons, rather than lack of belief, for staying home*

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# Why Americans Go (and Don't Go) to Religious Services

*Many cite practical or personal reasons, rather than lack of belief, for staying home*

In recent years, the percentage of U.S. adults who say they regularly attend religious services has been declining, while the share of Americans who attend only a few times a year, seldom or never **has been growing**. A new Pew Research Center survey finds that the main reason people regularly go to church, synagogue, mosque or another house of worship is an obvious one: to feel closer to God. But the things that keep people away from religious services are more complicated.

Among those who attend no more than a few times a year, about three-in-ten say they do not go to religious services for a simple reason: They are not believers. But a much larger share stay away *not* because of a lack of faith, but for other reasons. This includes many people who say one very important reason they don't regularly attend church is that they **practice their faith in other**

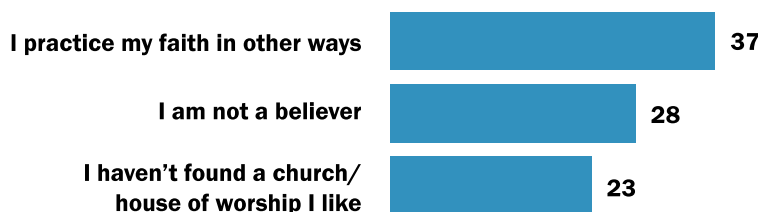
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## Top reasons U.S. adults give for choosing to attend or not attend religious services

*Among U.S. adults who attend religious services at least once or twice a month, % who say \_\_\_\_\_ is a "very important" reason they ATTEND religious services*



*Among U.S. adults who attend religious services a few times a year or less often, % who say \_\_\_\_\_ is a "very important" reason they DO NOT attend more often*



Source: Survey conducted Dec. 4-18, 2017, among U.S. adults.  
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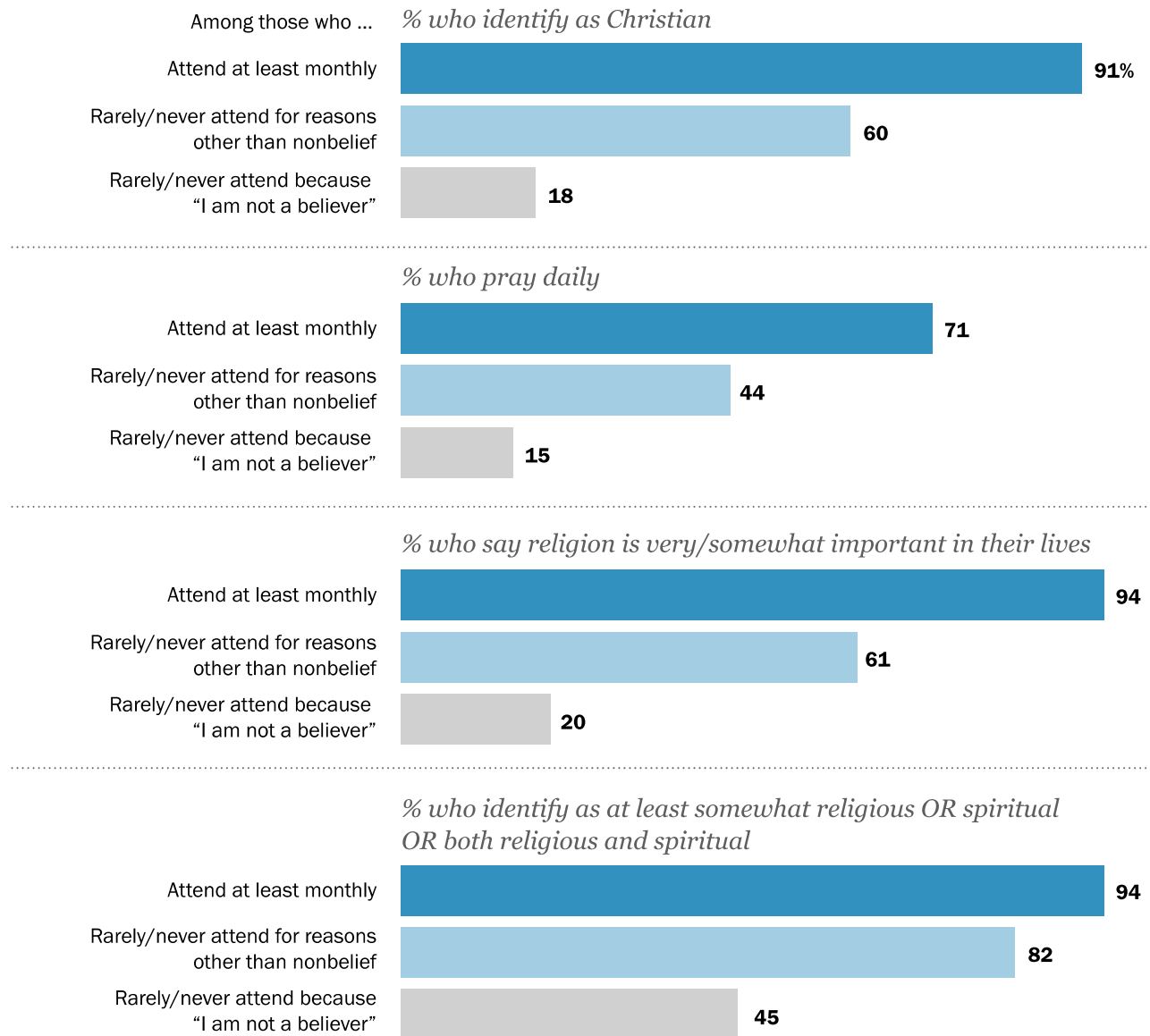
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**ways.** Others cite things they dislike about particular congregations or religious services (for example, they **haven't found a church or house of worship they like**, or they **don't like the sermons**). Still others name logistical reasons, like being **in poor health** or not **having the time** to go, as very important reasons for not regularly attending religious services.

By their own description, those who cite reasons *other* than a lack of belief for avoiding church are a fairly religious group. About seven-in-ten identify with a religion (including six-in-ten who are Christian), and most say religion is either “very” or “somewhat” important in their lives. To be sure, they are not as religious as Americans who report going regularly to religious services. But by several standard measures, they are much more religious than those who say, “I am not a believer.”

## Americans who give reasons other than nonbelief for eschewing religious services are fairly religious



Note: The "Rarely/never attend for reasons other than nonbelief" category includes those who do *not* say "I am not a believer" is a very important reason they do not attend religious services, but do say other reasons (such as "I practice my faith in other ways," dislike of congregations or religious services, or logistical difficulties) are very important. The "Rarely/never attend because 'I am not a believer'" category includes some respondents who also cite other reasons as very important for not attending. Those who did not cite any of the eight possible reasons in the survey as "very important" for not attending religious services are not shown.

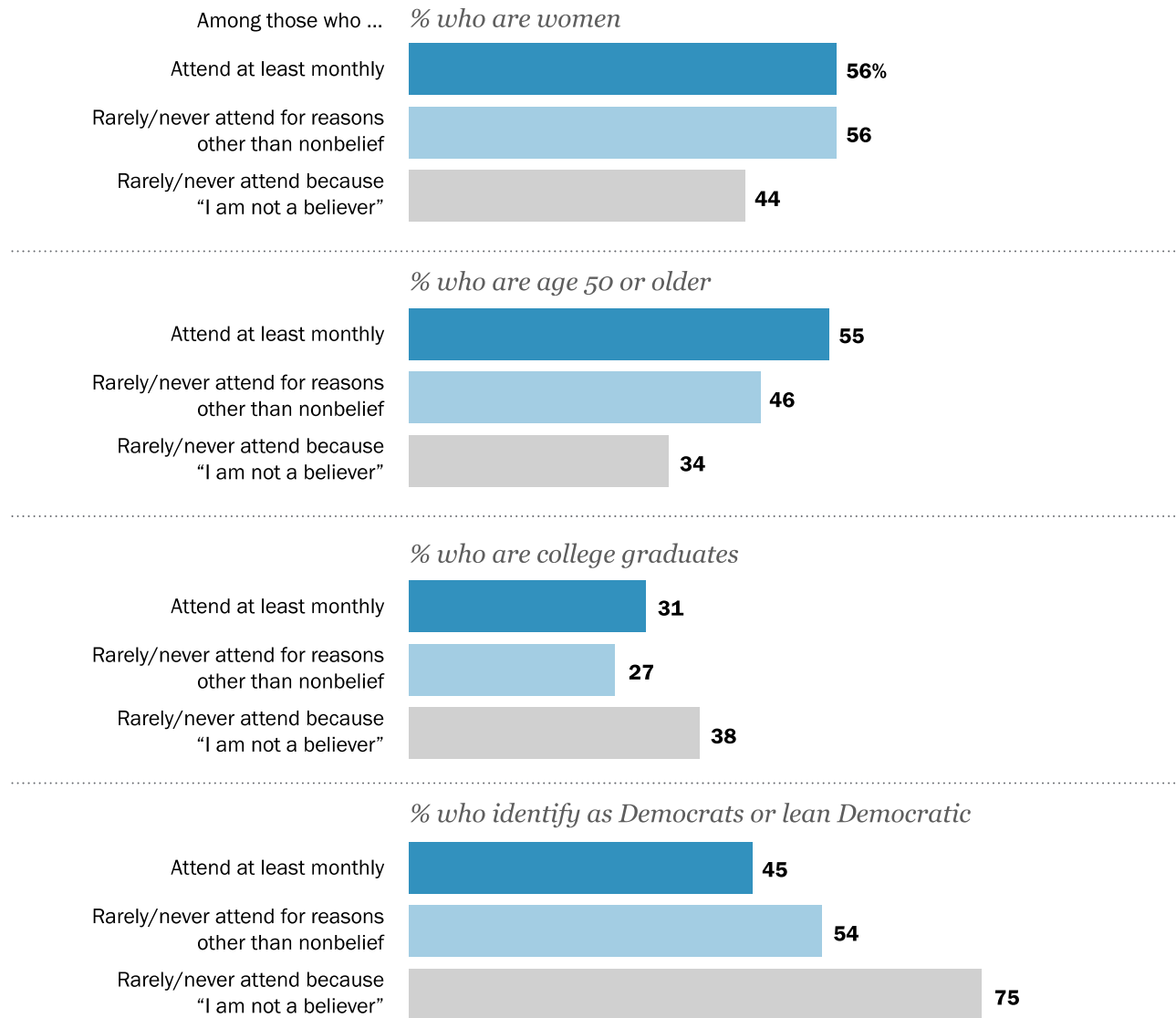
Source: Survey conducted Dec. 4-18, 2017, among U.S. adults.

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Demographically, more than half of those who do not attend church or another house of worship for reasons other than nonbelief are women, and they tend to be older, less highly educated and less Democratic compared with those who do not go because of a lack of faith. Meanwhile, those who refrain from attending religious services because they are nonbelievers are more highly educated and largely male, young and Democratic.

## Americans who do not attend religious services due to lack of belief are younger, more highly educated, largely male and Democratic



Note: The "Rarely/never attend for reasons other than nonbelief" category includes those who do *not* say "I am not a believer" is a very important reason they do not attend religious services, but do say other reasons (such as "I practice my faith in other ways," dislike of congregations or religious services, or logistical difficulties) are very important. The "Rarely/never attend because 'I am not a believer'" category includes some respondents who also cite other reasons as very important for not attending. Those who did not cite any of the eight possible reasons in the survey as "very important" for not attending religious services are not shown.

Source: Survey conducted Dec. 4-18, 2017, among U.S. adults.

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The new survey, conducted online Dec. 4 to 18, 2017, among a nationally representative sample of 4,729 adults on Pew Research Center’s American Trends Panel, asked respondents who attend religious services a few times a year or less often (including those who never attend) whether each of eight reasons is “very important, somewhat important, or not important” for why they do not go to religious services more often.<sup>1</sup>

Overall, the single most common answer cited for not attending religious services is “I practice my faith in other ways,” which is offered as a very important reason by 37% of people who rarely or never attend religious services. A similar share mention things they dislike about religious services or particular congregations, including one-in-four who say they have not yet found a house of worship they like, one-in-five who say they dislike the sermons, and 14% who say they do not feel welcome at religious services.

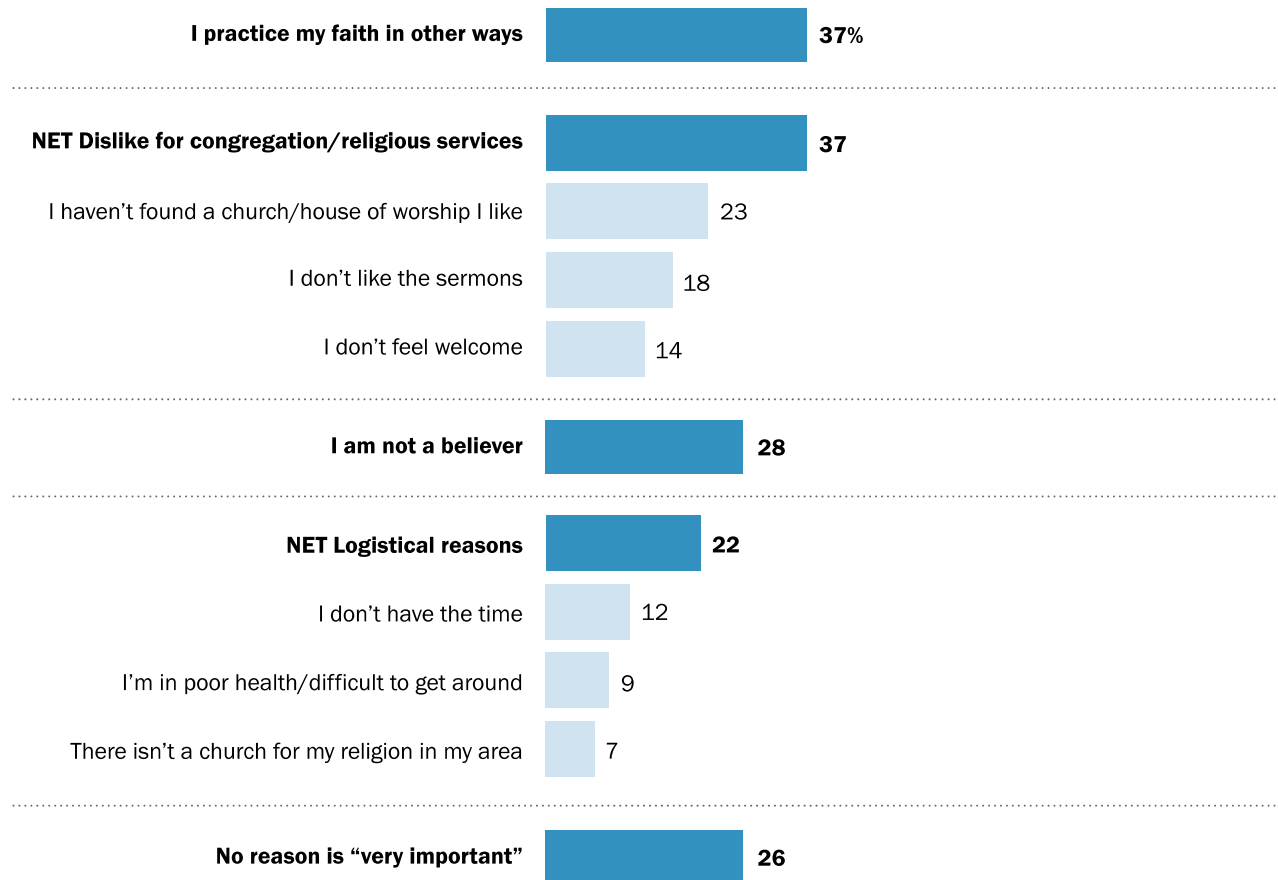
About three-in-ten non-attenders say they are not believers, while 22% cite logistical reasons for not going to religious services, such as not having the time or being in poor health. And fully a quarter of those who infrequently attend religious services say none of these factors is a very important reason why.

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<sup>1</sup> The questions were asked of all respondents who attend religious services a few times a year or less, including those who self-identify as Christians, those who identify with other religions, and religious “nones” (i.e., those who identify, religiously, as atheist, agnostic or “nothing in particular”). The questions employed neutral phrasing – they asked about why respondents attend “religious services” a few times a year or less, not why respondents attend “church” a few times a year or less – so as to be applicable to all such groups, not just Christians. However, since most U.S. adults identify as Christians, this report sometimes uses phrases like “church attenders” as shorthand for those who attend religious services regularly. Full question wording is available in the topline.

## Among those who rarely attend religious services, nearly four-in-ten say they don't go because they practice their faith in other ways

Among U.S. adults who say they attend religious services a few times a year or less, % who say \_\_\_\_ is a "very important" reason for not attending



Note: Figures do not add to 100% or to subtotals indicated because respondents could say more than one reason is a "very important" reason they do not attend religious services.

Source: Survey conducted Dec. 4-18, 2017, among U.S. adults.

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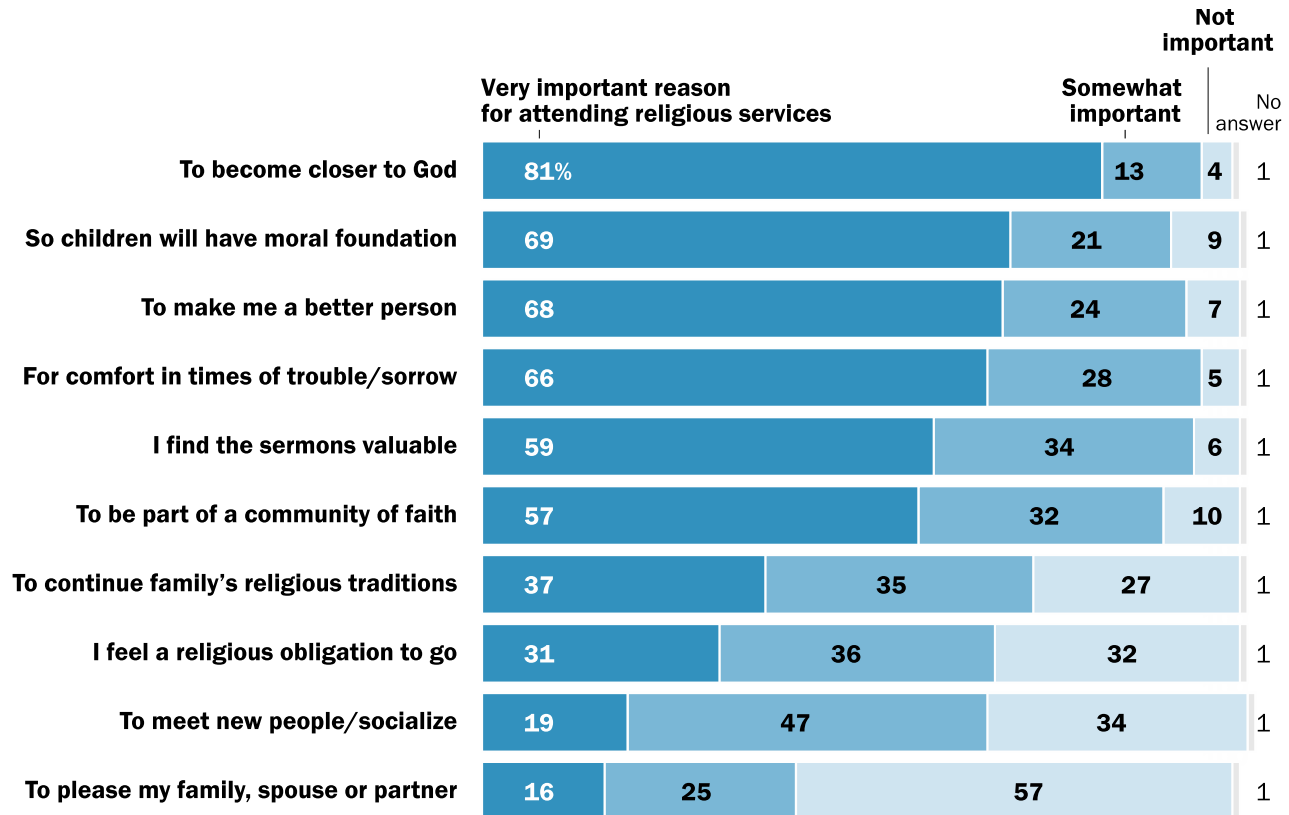
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The survey also asked U.S. adults who say they attend religious services at least once or twice per month about 10 possible reasons they may do so. In response, eight-in-ten regular attenders say becoming “closer to God” is a very important reason they go to religious services.<sup>2</sup>

Additionally, roughly two-thirds say they attend religious services to give their children a moral foundation, to become better people, and for comfort in times of trouble or sorrow. Smaller majorities say that valuable sermons and being part of “a community of faith” are very important reasons for their regular religious attendance.

## Relationship with God, moral foundation for children, self-improvement and comfort in tough times are among key reasons people go to religious services

*Reasons for attending religious services among U.S. adults who say they attend at least once or twice a month*



Note: Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Source: Survey conducted Dec. 4-18, 2017, among U.S. adults.

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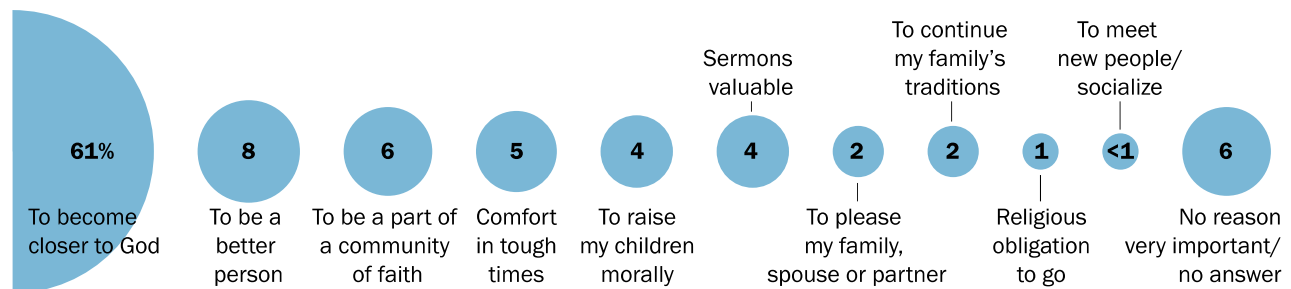
<sup>2</sup> Respondents were able to cite more than one reason as “very important” for why they attend religious services. Overall, 88% of respondents who attend religious services at least once or twice a month indicated that more than one reason is “very important.”

Far fewer cite their family’s religious traditions (37%) or a feeling of religious obligation (31%) as reasons for their steady religious attendance, while even fewer say socializing and meeting new people (19%) or pleasing their spouse or family (16%) are key reasons they attend church regularly.

In a follow-up question, regular worship attenders were asked to choose the *most* important reason they attend religious services.<sup>3</sup> Overall, six-in-ten indicate they go to religious services primarily to become closer to God, and no other reason comes close.<sup>4</sup> For example, just 8% say they go to religious services mainly to become a better person, and about one-in-twenty say they attend religious services primarily to be part of a community of faith, to find comfort in troubling times, to provide their children with a moral foundation, or because they find the sermons valuable.

## Six-in-ten attenders go to religious services primarily to get closer to God

Among those who attend religious services at least once or twice a month, % who say \_\_\_\_\_ is the **most** important reason why



Note: Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding. Each category includes those who named *only* the corresponding item as a “very important” reason for regularly attending religious services, as well as those who named more than one reason as “very important” and then indicated, in a follow-up question, that the corresponding item is the *most* important reason they attend religious services.

Source: Survey conducted Dec. 4-18, 2017, among U.S. adults.

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<sup>3</sup> The survey did not include a question that asked those who rarely or never attend religious services about the most important reason they refrain from doing so.

<sup>4</sup> This includes both those who named *only* becoming “closer to God” as a “very important” reason for attending religious services, as well as those who named more than one reason as “very important” and then indicated, in the follow-up question, that becoming closer to God is the *most* important reason they attend religious services. Other categories are calculated the same way.

Other findings from the new survey include:

- Eight-in-ten regular attenders say they “always” or “often” experience a sense of God’s presence when they attend worship services. Nearly three-quarters say they “always” or “often” feel a sense of community with people who share their religion when they attend religious services, and six-in-ten say they feel a sense of connection to a longstanding tradition.
- Catholics who attend Mass regularly are significantly less likely than other Christian churchgoers to say that the sermons they hear are what keeps them coming back. Indeed, among those who attend church regularly, Protestants are roughly twice as likely as Catholics (71% vs. 36%) to say valuable sermons are a very important reason.
- While the survey does not include measures of every conceivable way in which a person might put their religious convictions into practice (e.g., through environmental stewardship, social justice activism, etc.), those who avoid religious services because they “practice their faith in other ways” are *less* involved in a variety of community, charitable and social groups than are those who attend religious services regularly. Among those who cite practicing their faith in other ways as a very important reason for not attending religious services, 50% say they are active in at least one of several types of such groups measured by the survey, compared with 63% among regular attenders. And the people who say they practice their faith in other ways are far less religious, by a variety of traditional measures beyond worship attendance (including frequency of prayer, assessment of religion’s importance in one’s life, etc.), than those who attend religious services regularly.
- One-in-four respondents who rarely or never attend religious services (26%) give no specific reason why – they do not select any of the eight factors mentioned in the survey as very important reasons for not going to church. This group is considerably *more* religious than those who say they do not attend religious services because of a lack of faith, but somewhat *less* religious than those who cite other reasons (e.g., logistical difficulties or that they “practice their faith in other ways”) for not going to church.

## **More than four-in-ten Christians who do not attend religious services say they practice their faith in other ways**

Among self-identified Christians, the predominant reason that non-churchgoers offer for not attending worship services is that they practice their faith in other ways. Upwards of four-in-ten (44%) say this is a very important reason for not going to church more often. The next most common reason Christians give for not attending services is that they haven't found a church or house of worship they like (28%).

By contrast, the most common reason religiously unaffiliated non-attenders do not attend religious services is a lack of belief (46% say this is a very important reason they do not attend religious services), while one-quarter cite practicing their faith in other ways as a central reason for not going to services.

Among both of these groups of non-attenders (self-identified Christians and religious "nones"), fewer cite not feeling welcome, not having time, being in poor health and not having a nearby house of worship for their religion or denomination as very important reasons for not going to services.

Women, adults ages 50 and older and those who identify as Republicans or lean toward the Republican Party are more likely than other groups of infrequent churchgoers to say they don't attend religious services because they practice their faith in other ways. Meanwhile, men, younger adults, college graduates and Democrats are more likely to cite a lack of belief as a very important reason they do not go to religious services.

The survey does not find much variation by race on these questions, although black respondents who do not attend church regularly are more likely than whites to say they do not go to church because they don't feel welcome and because there is no church for their religion nearby.

## Among those who rarely attend church, Christians name a variety of reasons

Among U.S. adults who attend religious services a few times a year or less often, % who say \_\_\_\_\_ is a “very important” reason they DO NOT attend religious services

	I practice my faith in other ways	NET Dislikes	I haven't found a church/house of worship I like	I don't like the sermons	I don't feel welcome	I am not a believer	NET Logistics	I don't have the time	Poor health/difficulty getting around	There isn't a church/house of worship for my religion in my area
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Total	37	37	23	18	14	28	22	12	9	7
Christian	44	38	28	14	15	11	29	15	13	9
Evangelical Protestant	46	41	33	12	11	11	31	13	13	10
Mainline Protestant	39	42	33	10	17	5	20	12	9	3
Catholic	47	31	19	17	14	12	29	19	16	10
Unaffiliated	26	35	16	20	14	46	14	9	4	3
Men	32	34	19	18	13	32	19	12	7	7
Women	42	40	26	17	16	25	25	12	11	7
Ages 18-29	24	40	25	18	16	32	24	18	6	7
30-49	34	39	21	20	14	32	20	13	6	7
50-64	47	38	24	17	17	21	25	10	12	8
65+	45	28	18	13	8	27	18	5	14	6
White	36	35	22	17	13	29	20	11	8	6
Black	38	39	24	18	22	21	30	17	13	14
Hispanic	40	44	26	19	15	24	26	17	11	8
High school or less	38	40	26	18	18	23	25	10	14	9
Some college	38	41	24	20	15	27	23	14	9	7
College graduate+	34	30	17	16	9	37	16	13	3	3
Republican/lean Rep.	42	38	27	14	12	17	22	12	9	7
Democrat/lean Dem.	34	37	19	20	15	36	22	12	9	7

Note: Figures do not add to 100% or to subtotals indicated because respondents could say more than one reason is a “very important” reason they do not attend religious services. Whites and blacks include only those who are not Hispanic. Hispanics can be of any race.

Source: Survey conducted Dec. 4-18, 2017, among U.S. adults.

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## Religious and demographic profiles of types of non-attenders

The survey also makes it possible to flip the lens and analyze the data from the other direction – to ask, for example, who are the people who do not attend church because they simply do not believe in God or religion, and how do they compare with the people who do not attend church because they practice their faith in other ways or because they do not feel welcome?<sup>5</sup>

Most non-attenders who cite a lack of belief as a very important reason for not attending religious services are, simply put, not very religious. But those who cite other reasons as key explanations for not attending church are, overall, more religiously observant.

For instance, two-thirds of people who cite logistical reasons or that they “practice their faith in other ways” as very important factors in keeping them away from religious services identify with a religion (primarily Christianity), as do 56% of those who dislike features of particular congregations or religious services. Roughly half of those who say they practice their faith in other ways also report praying every day, as do 44% of those who name logistical reasons as key factors in keeping them away from church and 36% of those who dislike elements of services and congregations. By contrast, just 15% of those who do not attend religious services due to a lack of belief say they pray daily.

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<sup>5</sup> These categories are not mutually exclusive; for example, some respondents who say “I practice my faith in other ways” is a very important reason they do not attend religious services also say “I don’t feel welcome” is a very important reason.



## Many of those who avoid religious services for reasons other than lack of faith are at least somewhat religious

Religious profiles of those who say \_\_\_\_\_ is a "very important" reason they attend religious services no more than a few times a year

	I practice my faith in other ways	NET Dislikes	I haven't found a church/house of worship I like	I don't like the sermons	I don't feel welcome	I am not a believer	NET Logistics	I don't have the time	Poor health/difficulty getting around	There isn't a church/house of worship for my religion in my area
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Christian	<b>56</b>	<b>47</b>	58	37	48	<b>18</b>	<b>60</b>	58	69	63
Non-Christian faiths	<b>11</b>	<b>8</b>	9	9	7	<b>6</b>	<b>9</b>	10	6	14
Unaffiliated	<b>32</b>	<b>43</b>	33	52	44	<b>74</b>	<b>29</b>	32	22	22
Atheist	<b>1</b>	<b>8</b>	4	13	7	<b>29</b>	<b>2</b>	4	<1	1
Agnostic	<b>6</b>	<b>10</b>	7	16	10	<b>20</b>	<b>6</b>	9	1	6
Nothing in particular	<b>25</b>	<b>25</b>	22	23	27	<b>25</b>	<b>21</b>	19	21	15
Refused	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>&lt;1</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>
	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	100	100	100	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	100	100	100
Pray daily	<b>48</b>	<b>36</b>	47	26	39	<b>15</b>	<b>44</b>	35	58	56
Weekly/monthly	<b>25</b>	<b>23</b>	26	19	23	<b>9</b>	<b>27</b>	25	26	26
Seldom/never	<b>27</b>	<b>41</b>	26	54	39	<b>76</b>	<b>28</b>	40	16	18
Refused	<b>&lt;1</b>	<b>&lt;1</b>	<b>&lt;1</b>	<b>&lt;1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>&lt;1</b>	<b>&lt;1</b>	<b>&lt;1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	100	100	100	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	100	100	100
Say religion is ___ important in their lives										
Very	<b>27</b>	<b>23</b>	29	20	32	<b>14</b>	<b>30</b>	26	48	47
Somewhat	<b>32</b>	<b>26</b>	33	14	23	<b>6</b>	<b>35</b>	32	32	25
Not too/not at all	<b>40</b>	<b>50</b>	36	66	45	<b>80</b>	<b>34</b>	41	18	27
Refused	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>&lt;1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	100	100	100	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	100	100	100

Note: The columns are not mutually exclusive; for example, some respondents who say they practice their faith in other ways also say they don't like the sermons. Figures may not add to 100% or to subtotals indicated due to rounding.

Source: Survey conducted Dec. 4-18, 2017, among U.S. adults.

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People who rarely or never attend religious services are younger, on average, than those who attend more regularly. And those who say they do not attend religious services because they don't have time are younger than other non-attenders. About seven-in-ten are under the age of 30, while one-in-five (22%) are between the ages of 50 and 64, and just 7% are over the age of 65. By contrast, those who do not attend religious services because they are in poor health are older than many other groups, with six-in-ten over the age of 50, and they also have less education than most other groups.

Democrats are less likely than Republicans to attend worship services regularly, and among non-attenders, those who say they eschew religious services because they are nonbelievers largely identify with or lean toward the Democratic Party – 75%, vs. 22% who are Republicans. Republicans are more heavily concentrated, though still outnumbered, among those who say they don't attend for other reasons.

## Those who don't attend religious services because they do not believe are more highly educated than other groups, predominantly male and Democratic

Demographic profiles of those who say \_\_\_\_\_ is a "very important" reason they attend religious services no more than a few times a year

	I practice my faith in other ways	NET Dislikes	I haven't found a church/house of worship I like	I don't like the sermons	I don't feel welcome	I am not a believer	NET Logistics	I don't have the time	Poor health/difficulty getting around	There isn't a church/house of worship for my religion in my area
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Men	<b>44</b>	<b>46</b>	42	52	46	<b>56</b>	<b>44</b>	50	37	51
Women	<b>56</b>	<b>54</b>	<u>58</u>	<u>48</u>	<u>54</u>	<b>44</b>	<b>56</b>	<u>50</u>	<u>63</u>	<u>49</u>
	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	100	100	100	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	100	100	100
Ages 18-29	<b>16</b>	<b>26</b>	27	24	26	<b>27</b>	<b>26</b>	35	16	23
30-49	<b>31</b>	<b>36</b>	32	38	34	<b>39</b>	<b>31</b>	36	24	32
50-64	<b>33</b>	<b>26</b>	28	25	31	<b>19</b>	<b>30</b>	22	35	31
65+	<b>20</b>	<b>12</b>	<u>13</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>9</u>	<b>15</b>	<b>13</b>	<u>7</u>	<u>25</u>	<u>14</u>
	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	100	100	100	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	100	100	100
H.S. or less	<b>40</b>	<b>42</b>	45	39	49	<b>32</b>	<b>45</b>	33	60	53
Some college	<b>33</b>	<b>34</b>	34	35	32	<b>30</b>	<b>33</b>	37	30	34
College graduate	<b>27</b>	<b>24</b>	<u>22</u>	<u>26</u>	<u>19</u>	<b>38</b>	<b>22</b>	<u>30</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>13</u>
	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	100	100	100	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	100	100	100
Republican/lean Rep.	<b>41</b>	<b>37</b>	43	29	31	<b>22</b>	<b>37</b>	36	35	38
Democrat/lean Dem.	<b>55</b>	<b>59</b>	51	67	63	<b>75</b>	<b>60</b>	61	60	57
Other/no lean	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<u>6</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<u>4</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>
	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	100	100	100	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	100	100	100

Note: The columns are not mutually exclusive; for example, some respondents who say they practice their faith in other ways also say they don't like the sermons. Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding. Results for age and education repercentaged to exclude nonresponse.

Source: Survey conducted Dec. 4-18, 2017, among U.S. adults.

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### Sidebar: Overlap between the reasons given for not attending religious services

Respondents were given the option to name more than one very important factor why they do not regularly attend religious services, and many of them did. As a result, there is overlap across the categories; for example, among those who say they do not regularly attend religious services because they practice their faith in other ways, half *also* say there are things they dislike about congregations or religious services, and three-in-ten say logistical reasons are part of what keeps them from getting to church.

### Many non-attenders cite multiple reasons for not going to religious services

<i>% of non-attenders who cite ...</i>	<i>%</i>
0 types of responses as “very important” reasons for not attending	26
1 type of response as “very important”	39
2 types of responses as “very important”	23
3 types of responses as “very important”	9
All 4 types of responses as “very important”	3

Note: Based on U.S. adults who say they attend religious services a few times a year, seldom, or never. The four types of responses are: (1) “I practice my faith in other ways”; (2) “I am not a believer”; (3) Dislikes about religious services, including “I haven’t found a church or other house of worship I like,” “I don’t like the sermons,” and “I don’t feel welcome”; and (4) Logistical difficulties, including a lack of time, poor health/limited mobility, and the absence of a house of worship for the respondent’s religious group near where they live.

Source: Survey conducted Dec. 4-18, 2017, among U.S. adults. “Why Americans Go (and Don’t Go) to Religious Services”

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Overall, one-in-three non-attenders cite more than one kind of reason as a factor in their decision to refrain from going to religious services, including 3% who say all four types of reasons contribute to their non-attendance, 9% who cite three types of reasons and 23% who cite two kinds of reasons. An additional 39% name only one very important reason for not attending church, while 26% pick *none* of these reasons.

## **Across all religious groups, large majorities cite desire to grow closer to God as key reason for attending religious services**

Among those who attend religious services regularly, large majorities across all demographic groups and major Christian traditions say becoming “closer to God” is a very important factor in their decision to attend religious services. Smaller majorities in most Christian traditions name instilling a moral foundation in their children, becoming a better person, seeking comfort in times of trouble, finding value in the sermons, and being part of a community of faith as key reasons they attend religious services. Catholics are the only group of Christians in which fewer than half of regular churchgoers mention an appreciation of sermons as a key factor for why they go to Mass regularly.

In general, women are more likely than men to say that a variety of factors are very important for why they attend religious services regularly. There is one notable exception to this pattern – men are significantly more likely than women to say pleasing a spouse or other family member is a very important reason they go to religious services (22% vs. 12%).

Young adults who attend religious services regularly are more likely than older adults to do so for social reasons: 30% of adults under 30 say meeting new people or socializing is a key factor in why they attend religious services, compared with 19% or fewer among older age groups.

Black Americans who attend church regularly are more likely than their white or Hispanic counterparts to say becoming closer to God, becoming a better person, finding comfort in times of trouble or sorrow, finding the sermons valuable, and feeling a religious obligation are very important reasons for going to church.

## Among churchgoers, large majorities across Christian traditions, demographic groups go to religious services to become closer to God

Among U.S. adults who attend religious services at least monthly, % who say \_\_\_\_\_ is a "very important" reason why

	Personal religious reasons					Family reasons			Community reasons	
	To become closer to God	To make me a better person	For comfort in times of trouble/sorrow	I find the sermons valuable	Feel religious obligation to go	So my children will grow up with a moral foundation	To continue family's religious traditions	To please family/spouse/partner	To be part of community of faith	To meet new people/socialize
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Christian	83	68	67	60	31	71	37	16	58	19
Protestant	87	69	69	71	30	71	35	13	64	19
<i>Evangelical</i>	90	70	69	76	30	75	36	13	67	20
<i>Mainline</i>	77	56	58	54	17	59	32	13	54	15
<i>Historically black</i>	89	85	79	72	42	75	36	15	65	18
Catholic	75	63	60	36	35	69	44	22	46	19
Men	76	62	57	51	30	65	34	22	52	19
Women	85	72	72	66	33	72	40	12	61	19
Ages 18-29	75	65	60	54	32	67	36	24	52	30
30-49	78	67	65	61	29	72	38	20	55	17
50-64	85	70	69	67	32	68	37	16	59	19
65+	85	67	66	52	33	67	37	9	60	15
White	81	63	63	55	29	68	36	12	59	18
Black	89	84	79	74	42	77	36	18	64	22
Hispanic	77	70	64	57	23	67	40	28	45	19
H.S. or less	82	72	70	59	38	73	42	23	60	24
Some college	84	72	69	68	30	70	39	15	54	18
College graduate	78	58	58	50	24	63	29	9	57	14
Republican/lean Rep.	87	68	68	61	32	74	38	13	63	18
Democrat/lean Dem.	77	68	65	58	30	65	36	20	52	19

Note: Whites and blacks include only those who are not Hispanic. Hispanics can be of any race.

Source: Survey conducted Dec. 4-18, 2017, among U.S. adults.

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## At religious services, eight-in-ten Christians regularly feel a sense of God's presence

Majorities of U.S. churchgoers say that when they're at religious services, they "always" or "often" feel a sense of God's presence (80%), a sense of community with others (73%) and a sense of connection to a longstanding tradition (60%). Women are more likely than men to say they often or always have these feelings.

Adults under the age of 30 are about as likely as their older counterparts to say they feel a sense of connection to tradition or a sense of community while at religious services. But when it comes to feeling a sense of God's presence at services, younger adults are much less likely than their elders to say they experience this. Roughly six-in-ten adults under 30 (63%) often feel a sense of God's presence at religious services, compared with eight-in-ten or more in older age groups.

### Among regular attenders, most experience God's presence, sense of community and connection to tradition while at services

*Among U.S. adults who attend religious services at least monthly, % who say they experience \_\_\_\_\_ "always" or "often but not always" when they attend religious services*

	<b>A sense of God's presence</b>	<b>A sense of community with people who share your religion</b>	<b>A sense of connection to a longstanding tradition</b>
	%	%	%
Total	80	73	60
Christian	81	73	60
Protestant	83	75	59
<i>Evangelical</i>	86	77	54
<i>Mainline</i>	77	73	66
<i>Historically black</i>	83	71	69
Catholic	78	67	64
Men	76	68	55
Women	84	76	64
Ages 18-29	63	70	58
30-49	83	70	59
50-64	86	76	57
65+	80	74	65
White, non-Hispanic	78	75	59
Black, non-Hispanic	79	68	62
Hispanic	86	72	58
H.S. or less	82	75	63
Some college	85	70	60
College graduate	73	72	57
Republican/lean Republican	83	77	61
Democrat/lean Democratic	77	69	59

Note: Whites and blacks include only those who are not Hispanic. Hispanics can be of any race.

Source: Survey conducted Dec. 4-18, 2017, among U.S. adults. "Why Americans Go (and Don't Go) to Religious Services"

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## Methodology

The American Trends Panel (ATP), created by Pew Research Center, is a nationally representative panel of randomly selected U.S. adults recruited from landline and cellphone random-digit-dial surveys. Panelists participate via monthly self-administered web surveys. Panelists who do not have internet access are provided with a tablet and wireless internet connection.

Data in this report are drawn from the panel wave conducted Dec. 4 to Dec. 18, 2017, among 4,729 respondents. At the time this wave was conducted, the panel was being managed by Abt Associates. The margin of sampling error for the full sample of 4,729 respondents is plus or minus 2.3 percentage points. Many of the questions in this survey were filtered on how frequently respondents say they attend religious services. The margin of sampling error for the 1,894 respondents who say they attend religious services at least once or twice a month is plus or minus 3.7 percentage points. The margin of sampling error for the 2,826 respondents who say they attend religious services a few times a year, seldom or never is plus or minus 3.0 percentage points.

Members of the American Trends Panel were recruited from several large, national landline and cellphone random-digit-dial surveys conducted in English and Spanish. At the end of each survey, respondents were invited to join the panel. The first group of panelists was recruited from the 2014 Political Polarization and Typology Survey, conducted Jan. 23 to March 16, 2014. Of the 10,013 adults interviewed, 9,809 were invited to take part in the panel and a total of 5,338 agreed to participate.<sup>6</sup> The second group of panelists was recruited from the 2015 Pew Research Center Survey on Government, conducted Aug. 27 to Oct. 4, 2015. Of the 6,004 adults interviewed, all were invited to join the panel, and 2,976 agreed to participate.<sup>7</sup> The third group of panelists was recruited from a survey conducted April 25 to June 4, 2017. Of the 5,012 adults interviewed in the survey or pretest, 3,905 were invited to take part in the panel and a total of 1,628 agreed to participate.<sup>8</sup>

The ATP data were weighted in a multistep process that begins with a base weight incorporating the respondents' original survey selection probability and the fact that in 2014 some panelists were subsampled for invitation to the panel. Next, an adjustment was made for the fact that the

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<sup>6</sup> When data collection for the 2014 Political Polarization and Typology Survey began, non-internet users were subsampled at a rate of 25%, but a decision was made shortly thereafter to invite all non-internet users to join. In total, 83% of non-internet users were invited to join the panel.

<sup>7</sup> Respondents to the 2014 Political Polarization and Typology Survey who indicated that they are internet users but refused to provide an email address were initially permitted to participate in the American Trends Panel by mail, but were no longer permitted to join the panel after Feb. 6, 2014. Internet users from the 2015 Pew Research Center Survey on Government who refused to provide an email address were not permitted to join the panel.

<sup>8</sup> White, non-Hispanic college graduates were subsampled at a rate of 50%.



propensity to join the panel and remain an active panelist varied across different groups in the sample. The final step in the weighting uses an iterative technique that aligns the sample to population benchmarks on a number of dimensions. Gender, age, education, race, Hispanic origin and region parameters come from the U.S. Census Bureau's 2016 American Community Survey. The county-level population density parameter (deciles) comes from the 2010 U.S. decennial census. The telephone service benchmark comes from the July-December 2016 National Health Interview Survey and is projected to 2017. The volunteerism benchmark comes from the 2015 Current Population Survey Volunteer Supplement. The party affiliation benchmark is the average of the three most recent Pew Research Center general public telephone surveys. The internet-access benchmark comes from the 2017 ATP Panel Refresh Survey. Respondents who did not previously have internet access are treated as not having internet access for weighting purposes. Sampling errors and statistical tests of significance take into account the effect of weighting. Interviews are conducted in both English and Spanish, but the Hispanic sample in the American Trends Panel is predominantly U.S. born and English speaking.

The following tables show the unweighted sample sizes and the error attributable to sampling that would be expected at the 95% level of confidence for different groups in the survey:

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### Sample sizes and margins of error for those who attend religious services a few times a year or less

Group	Unweighted sample size	Plus or minus ...
All non-attenders	2,826	3.0 percentage points
Christian	1,267	4.5 percentage points
Evangelical Protestant	315	9.0 percentage points
Mainline Protestant	398	8.0 percentage points
Catholic	423	7.8 percentage points
Unaffiliated	1,266	4.5 percentage points
Men	1,456	4.2 percentage points
Women	1,370	4.3 percentage points
Ages 18-29	380	8.2 percentage points
30-49	874	5.4 percentage points
50-64	896	5.3 percentage points
65+	674	6.2 percentage points
H.S. or less	455	7.5 percentage points
Some college	844	5.5 percentage points
College graduate	1,523	4.1 percentage points
White	2,138	3.5 percentage points
Black	204	11.2 percentage points
Hispanic	260	9.9 percentage points
Republican/lean Republican	922	5.3 percentage points
Democrat/lean Democratic	1,836	3.7 percentage points
<i>Reasons for not attending religious services</i>		
I practice my faith in other ways	1,107	4.8 percentage points
NET Dislike for congregations/religious services	912	5.3 percentage points
I haven't found a church I like	559	6.8 percentage points
I don't like the sermons	432	7.7 percentage points
I don't feel welcome	310	9.1 percentage points
I am not a believer	849	5.5 percentage points
NET Logistical reasons	518	7.0 percentage points
I don't have the time	308	9.1 percentage points
I'm in poor health	174	12.1 percentage points
There's no church for my religion in my area	144	13.3 percentage points
NET Have reasons other than nonbelief for not attending religious services	1,314	4.4 percentage points

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**Sample sizes and margins of error for those who attend religious services at least once or twice a month**

<b>Group</b>	<b>Unweighted sample size</b>	<b>Plus or minus ...</b>
All attenders	1,894	3.7 percentage points
Christian	1,717	3.9 percentage points
Protestant	1,165	4.7 percentage points
<i>Evangelical</i>	708	6.0 percentage points
<i>Mainline</i>	316	9.0 percentage points
<i>Historically black</i>	141	13.5 percentage points
Catholic	421	7.8 percentage points
Men	896	5.3 percentage points
Women	998	5.1 percentage points
Ages 18-29	183	11.8 percentage points
30-49	511	7.1 percentage points
50-64	594	6.6 percentage points
65+	603	6.5 percentage points
H.S. or less	288	9.4 percentage points
Some college	574	6.7 percentage points
College graduate	1,027	5.0 percentage points
White	1,337	4.4 percentage points
Black	230	10.6 percentage points
Hispanic	170	12.3 percentage points
Republican/lean Republican	1,061	4.9 percentage points
Democrat/lean Democratic	785	5.7 percentage points

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Sample sizes and sampling errors for other subgroups are available upon request.

In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

This panel wave had a response rate of 86% (4,729 responses among 5,510 individuals in the panel). Taking account of the combined, weighted response rate for the recruitment surveys (10%) and attrition from panel members who were removed at their request or for inactivity, the cumulative response rate for the wave is 2.4%.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Approximately once per year, panelists who have not participated in multiple consecutive waves are removed from the panel. These cases are counted in the denominator of cumulative response rates.

**2017 PEW RESEARCH CENTER'S AMERICAN TRENDS PANEL (ATP)  
WAVE 30 December  
FINAL TOPLINE  
December 4-18, 2017  
TOTAL N=4,729**

**PRECEDING QUESTIONS HELD FOR FUTURE RELEASE**

**ASK ALL:**

RELIMP How important is religion in your life?<sup>10</sup>

Dec 4-18	
<u>2017</u>	
35	Very important
26	Somewhat important
18	Not too important
21	Not at all important
<1	No answer

**INTERVENING QUESTIONS HELD FOR FUTURE RELEASE**

Thinking now about your attendance at religious services...

**ASK RESPONDENTS WHO ATTEND RELIGIOUS SERVICES ONCE OR TWICE A MONTH OR MORE OFTEN [N=1,894]<sup>11</sup>:**

REASONATTEND\_1 People attend religious services for many reasons. How important, if at all, is each of the following reasons for why you personally attend religious services?

**[PROGRAMMING NOTE: RANDOMIZE a-e]**

	<u>Very important</u>	<u>Somewhat important</u>	<u>Not important</u>	<u>No answer</u>
a. To become closer to God Dec 4-18, 2017	81	13	4	1
b. To be part of a community of faith Dec 4-18, 2017	57	32	10	1
c. To continue my family's religious traditions Dec 4-18, 2017	37	35	27	1
d. To meet new people or to socialize Dec 4-18, 2017	19	47	34	1
e. Because I feel a religious obligation to go Dec 4-18, 2017	31	36	32	1

<sup>10</sup> For a variety of methodological reasons (e.g., differences in weighting procedures, mode of survey administration, etc.), figures are not directly comparable to estimates from telephone surveys, including Pew Research Center's Religious Landscape Studies.

<sup>11</sup> Respondents were asked about their attendance at religious services in a previous wave of the ATP; nearly all respondents (n=4,699) most recently answer the question about religious attendance in an ATP wave conducted May 30-Oct. 23, 2017, though a few respondents (n=30) last answered the question in an earlier survey. The religious attendance question in the May 30-Oct. 23, 2017 wave was "Aside from weddings and funerals, how often do you attend religious services? More than once a week, once a week, once or twice a month, a few times a year, seldom, never."

**ASK RESPONDENTS WHO ATTEND RELIGIOUS SERVICES ONCE OR TWICE A MONTH OR MORE OFTEN [N=1,894]<sup>12</sup>:**

REASONATTEND\_2      And now, still thinking about why you attend religious services, how important, if at all, is each of the following reasons for why you personally attend religious services? **[RANDOMIZE]**

	<u>Very important</u>	<u>Somewhat important</u>	<u>Not important</u>	<u>No answer</u>
f. For comfort in times of trouble and sorrow Dec 4-18, 2017	66	28	5	1
g. To make me a better person Dec 4-18, 2017	68	24	7	1
h. I find the sermons valuable Dec 4-18, 2017	59	34	6	1
i. To please my family, spouse or partner Dec 4-18, 2017	16	25	57	1
j. So my children will grow up with a moral foundation Dec 4-18, 2017	69	21	9	1

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<sup>12</sup> Respondents were asked about their attendance at religious services in a previous wave of the ATP; nearly all respondents (n=4,699) most recently answer the question about religious attendance in an ATP wave conducted May 30-Oct. 23, 2017, though a few respondents (n=30) last answered the question in an earlier survey. The religious attendance question in the May 30-Oct. 23, 2017 wave was "Aside from weddings and funerals, how often do you attend religious services? More than once a week, once a week, once or twice a month, a few times a year, seldom, never."

**ASK IF RESPONDENT SELECTED MORE THAN ONE ITEM AS "VERY IMPORTANT" IN REASONATTEND\_1 OR REASONATTEND\_2:**

REASONATTEND\_3 What is the MOST IMPORTANT reason you attend religious services?

**[PROGRAMMING NOTE: DISPLAY SELECTED ITEMS IF SELECTED MORE THAN ONE ITEM AS "VERY IMPORTANT" IN REASONATTEND\_1 OR REASONATTEND\_2]**

**BASED ON THOSE WHO ATTEND RELIGIOUS SERVICES AT LEAST ONCE OR TWICE A MONTH OR MORE OFTEN [N=1,894]**

**Summary table: Each row includes those who named *only* the corresponding item as a "very important" reason for regularly attending religious services, as well as those who named more than one reason as "very important" in REASONATTEND\_1a-e or REASONATTEND\_2f-j and then indicated, in a follow-up question (REASONATTEND\_3), that the corresponding item is the "most" important reason they attend religious services.**

Dec 4-18

2017

61	To become closer to God
8	To make me a better person
6	To be part of a community of faith
5	For comfort in times of trouble and sorrow
4	So my children will grow up with a moral foundation
4	I find the sermons valuable
2	To please my family, spouse or partner
2	To continue my family's religious traditions
1	Because I feel a religious obligation to go
<1	To meet new people or to socialize
6	No reason is very important ( <b>IN REASONATTEND_1a-e or REASONATTEND_2f-j</b> ) or no answer ( <b>in REASONATTEND_3</b> )

**ASK IF ATTEND RELIGIOUS SERVICES A FEW TIMES A YEAR OR LESS OFTEN [N=2,826]<sup>13</sup>:**

NOATTEND In a previous survey you indicated that you **[IF ATTENDS A FEW TIMES A YEAR:** “only attend religious services”, **IF SELDOM ATTENDS:** “seldom attend religious services”, **IF NEVER ATTENDS:** “never attend religious services”]. How important, if at all, is each of the following reasons for why you **[IF ATTENDS A FEW TIMES A YEAR:** “only attend religious services a few times a year”, **IF SELDOM ATTENDS:** “seldom attend religious services”, **IF NEVER ATTENDS:** “never attend religious services”]?

**[RANDOMIZE]**

	<u>Very important</u>	<u>Somewhat important</u>	<u>Not important</u>	<u>No answer</u>
a. I am not a believer Dec 4-18, 2017	28	21	48	3
b. I don't have the time Dec 4-18, 2017	12	28	58	2
c. I haven't found a church or other house of worship I like Dec 4-18, 2017	23	26	50	1
d. There isn't a church or other house of worship for my religion in my area Dec 4-18, 2017	7	15	76	2
e. I don't like the sermons Dec 4-18, 2017	18	26	55	2
f. I don't feel welcome Dec 4-18, 2017	14	22	62	2
g. I'm in poor health or find it difficult to get around Dec 4-18, 2017	9	13	76	2
h. I practice my faith in other ways Dec 4-18, 2017	37	29	33	1

**INTERVENING QUESTION HELD FOR FUTURE RELEASE**

<sup>13</sup> Respondents were asked about their attendance at religious services in a previous wave of the ATP; nearly all respondents (n=4,699) most recently answer the question about religious attendance in an ATP wave conducted May 30-Oct. 23, 2017, though a few respondents (n=30) last answered the question in an earlier survey. The religious attendance question in the May 30-Oct. 23, 2017 wave was “Aside from weddings and funerals, how often do you attend religious services? More than once a week, once a week, once or twice a month, a few times a year, seldom, never.”



**ASK RESPONDENTS WHO ATTEND RELIGIOUS SERVICES ONCE OR TWICE A MONTH OR MORE OFTEN [N=1,894]<sup>14</sup>:**

ATTENDEXP How often do you experience each of the following when you attend religious services?  
[RANDOMIZE]

	<u>Always</u>	<u>Often but not always</u>	<u>Sometimes</u>	<u>Rarely</u>	<u>Never</u>	<u>No answer</u>
a. A sense of God's presence Dec 4-18, 2017	51	29	14	3	3	<1
b. A sense of connection to a longstanding tradition Dec 4-18, 2017	36	24	25	8	6	1
c. A sense of community with people who share your religion Dec 4-18, 2017	41	32	19	5	2	1

**INTERVENING QUESTION HELD FOR FUTURE RELEASE****ASK ALL:**

PRAY Other than during religious services, how often do you pray?<sup>15</sup>

Dec 4-18

2017

29	Several times a day
15	Once a day
14	A few times a week
3	Once a week
5	A few times a month
17	Seldom
17	Never
1	No answer

<sup>14</sup> Respondents were asked about their attendance at religious services in a previous wave of the ATP; nearly all respondents (n=4,699) most recently answer the question about religious attendance in an ATP wave conducted May 30-Oct. 23, 2017, though a few respondents (n=30) last answered the question in an earlier survey. The religious attendance question in the May 30-Oct. 23, 2017 wave was "Aside from weddings and funerals, how often do you attend religious services? More than once a week, once a week, once or twice a month, a few times a year, seldom, never."

<sup>15</sup> For a variety of methodological reasons (e.g., differences in weighting procedures, mode of survey administration, etc.), figures are not directly comparable to estimates from telephone surveys, including Pew Research Center's Religious Landscape Studies.

**INTERVENING QUESTIONS HELD FOR FUTURE RELEASE****ASK ALL:**

ACTVORG\_1 Are you currently active in any of the following groups or organizations, or not?  
[RANDOMIZE]

**ACTVORG\_1a HELD FOR FUTURE RELEASE**

	<u>Yes, active</u>	<u>No, not active</u>	<u>No answer</u>
b. A book club or study group Dec 4-18, 2017	11	88	1
c. A performing arts, singing or dance group Dec 4-18, 2017	7	92	1
d. A professional association, trade association or union Dec 4-18, 2017	16	83	1
e. A parent group or youth organization, such as PTA, scouts or youth sports Dec 4-18, 2017	9	90	1

**ASK ALL:**

ACTVORG\_2 Are you currently active in any of the following groups or organizations, or not?  
[RANDOMIZE]?

	<u>Yes, active</u>	<u>No, not active</u>	<u>No answer</u>
f. A social club, sorority or fraternity Dec 4-18, 2017	8	91	1
g. A veterans group such as American Legion or VFW Dec 4-18, 2017	5	94	1
h. A hobby group or club Dec 4-18, 2017	19	80	1
i. A charitable or volunteer organization Dec 4-18, 2017	18	80	1
j. A community group or neighborhood association Dec 4-18, 2017	15	84	1

**ASK ALL:**

ACTVORG\_2k Are you currently active in any other group or organization not already listed?

Dec 4-18

2017

10	Yes, active
90	No, not active
1	No answer

**RANDOMIZE ORDER OF RELPER AND SPIRPER****ASK ALL:**

RELPER To what extent do you consider yourself a RELIGIOUS person? Are you...

Dec 4-18

2017

13	Very religious
37	Somewhat religious
23	Not too religious
26	Not at all religious
<1	No answer

**ASK ALL:**

SPIRPER To what extent do you consider yourself a SPIRITUAL person? Are you...

Dec 4-18

2017

28	Very spiritual
43	Somewhat spiritual
18	Not too spiritual
11	Not at all spiritual
<1	No answer

**REMAINING QUESTIONS PREVIOUSLY RELEASED OR HELD FOR FUTURE RELEASE**