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White Evangelicals See Trump as Fighting for Their Beliefs, Though Many Have Mixed Feelings About His Personal Conduct

To the public overall, morality is more important in a president than strong religious beliefs

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How we did this

For this report, we surveyed 6,395 U.S. adults from Feb. 4 to 15, 2020. All respondents to the survey are part of Pew Research Center's American Trends Panel (ATP), an online survey panel that is recruited through national, random sampling of residential addresses. This way nearly all U.S. adults have a chance of selection. The survey is weighted to be representative of the U.S. adult population by gender, race, ethnicity, partisan affiliation, education and other categories. Read more about the [ATP's methodology](#) and the methodology for this report on page 52.

Acknowledgments

This report is a collaborative effort based on the input and analysis of the following individuals. Find related reports online at pewresearch.org/religion.

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White Evangelicals See Trump as Fighting for Their Beliefs, Though Many Have Mixed Feelings About His Personal Conduct

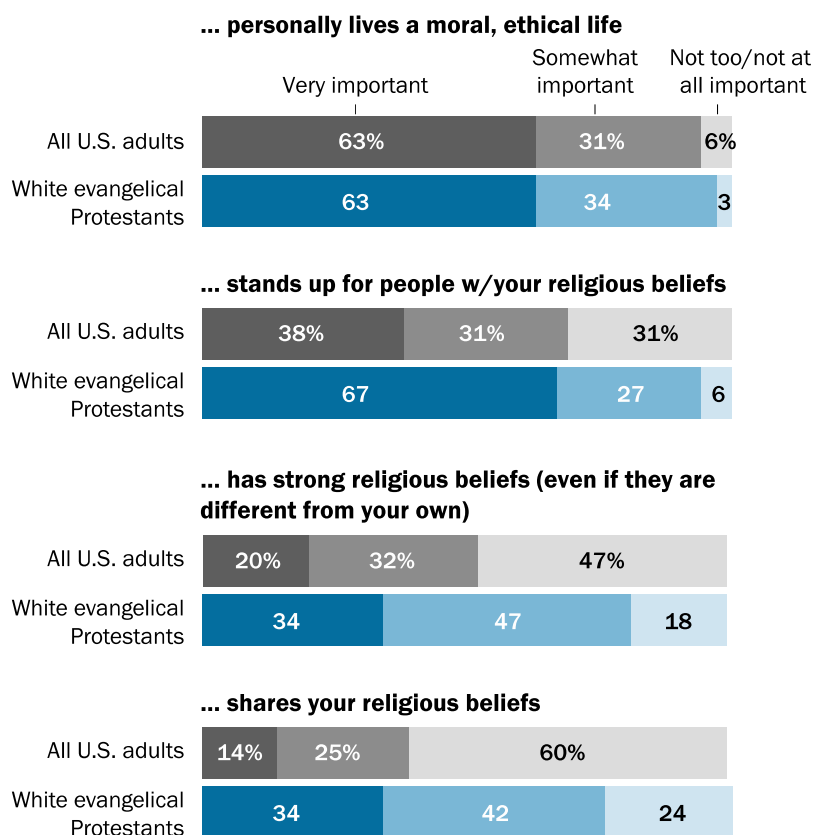
To the public overall, morality is more important in a president than strong religious beliefs

Heading into the 2020 election season, a new Pew Research Center survey delves into the relationship between religion and politics, including perceptions about President Donald Trump among white evangelical Protestants, a key part of his electoral base. It finds that white evangelicals largely see Trump as fighting for their beliefs and advancing their interests, and they feel their side generally has been winning recently on political matters important to them. But when it comes to Trump's personal qualities and conduct, many express mixed feelings. Even among this strongly supportive constituency, most do not view Trump as a *very* religious, honest or morally upstanding person (though many white evangelicals say he is *somewhat* religious, *fairly* honest or *fairly* morally upstanding).

More broadly, the survey finds that U.S. adults prize a president who lives a moral and ethical life more than they care about having one who is religious. More than six-in-

More than six-in-ten U.S. adults say it is 'very important' to them to have a president who personally lives a moral, ethical life

% of U.S. adults who say it is _____ to them to have a president of the United States who ...



Note: Those who did not answer are not shown. White evangelical Protestants do not include Hispanics.

Source: Survey conducted Feb. 4-15, 2020, among U.S. adults.

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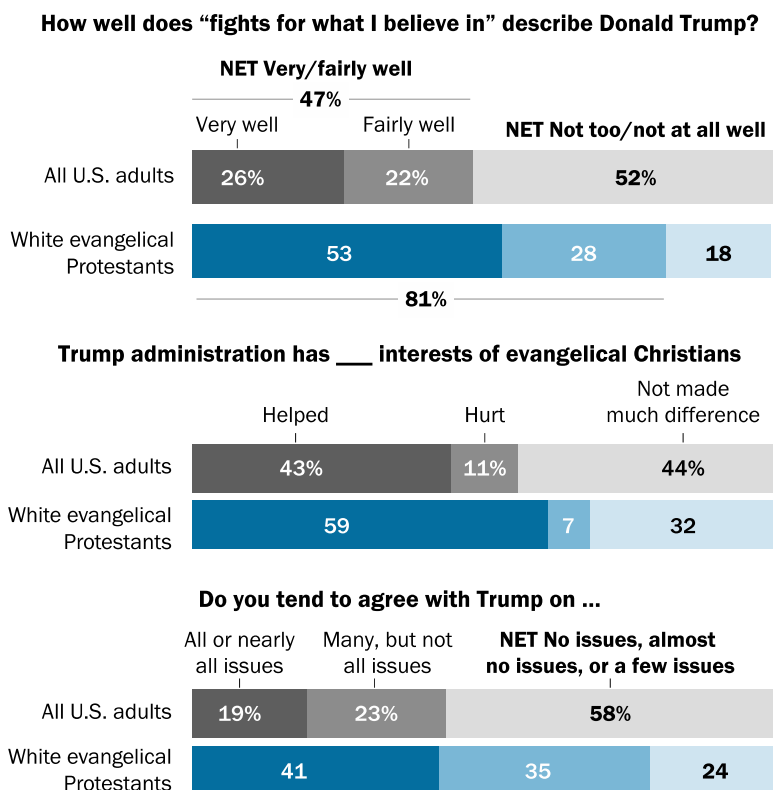
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ten Americans say it is “very important” to them to have a president who personally lives a moral and ethical life. By comparison, just one-in-five say it is very important for a president to have strong religious beliefs, and even fewer respondents think it is vital for the president to share their own religious beliefs.

On the whole, Americans care more about having a president who stands up for their religious beliefs than having one who personally shares those beliefs. Roughly seven-in-ten say it is either very (38%) or somewhat (31%) important to have a president who stands up for people with their religious beliefs.

White evangelical Protestants are particularly likely to hold this view. Two-thirds of white evangelicals say it is very important to have a president who stands up for their religious beliefs, about double the share who say it is very important for a president to have strong religious beliefs. And white evangelicals say Trump fits the bill: Fully eight-in-ten white evangelical Protestants say that the phrase “fights for what I believe in” describes Trump “very well” or “fairly well,” including roughly half who say this describes him “very well.”¹

Most white evangelical Protestants think the Trump administration has helped evangelicals



Note: Figures may not add to subtotals indicated due to rounding. Those who did not answer are not shown. White evangelical Protestants do not include Hispanics.

Source: Survey conducted Feb. 4-15, 2020, among U.S. adults.

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¹ This question did not specifically ask about *religious* beliefs; respondents may also have been thinking of political beliefs when they answered this question. Among Republicans and those who lean toward the GOP, 87% say “fights for what I believe in” describes Trump very or fairly well, even higher than the share among white evangelicals (81%).

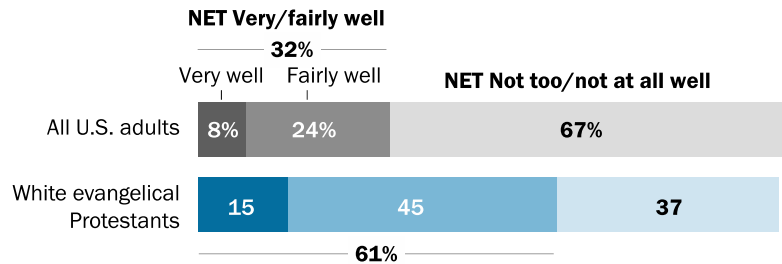
Moreover, white evangelical Protestants overwhelmingly feel that the Trump administration has helped (59%) rather than hurt (7%) the interests of evangelical Christians. And three-quarters of white evangelicals say they agree with the president on “many,” “nearly all” or “all” important issues facing the country.

While white evangelical Protestants generally see Trump as standing up for them, they are less convinced that he personally lives a moral and ethical life or conducts himself admirably. Just 15% of white evangelicals say the phrase “morally upstanding” describes Trump very well, and about a quarter say “honest” is a very good descriptor of the president (23%). About one-third of white evangelicals (31%) say they like the way Trump conducts himself as president (aside from his positions on the issues). Fully two-thirds either have “mixed feelings” about his conduct (44%) or say they don’t like it (22%). And only about one-in-eight white evangelicals (12%) think Trump is a very religious person.

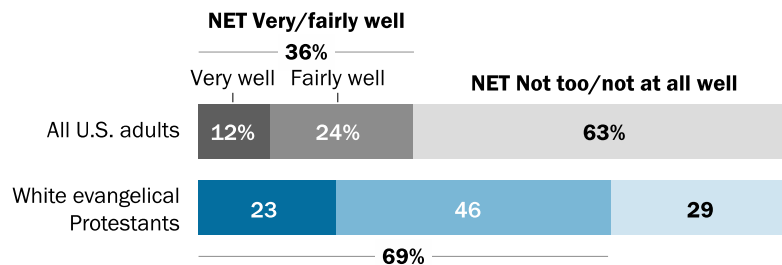
Still, even though relatively few white evangelicals say words and phrases like “morally upstanding” and “honest” describe Trump *very* well, most say these traits describe Trump at least *fairly* well. And while just one-in-eight white evangelicals say they think Trump is “very”

15% of white evangelicals say ‘morally upstanding’ describes Trump very well

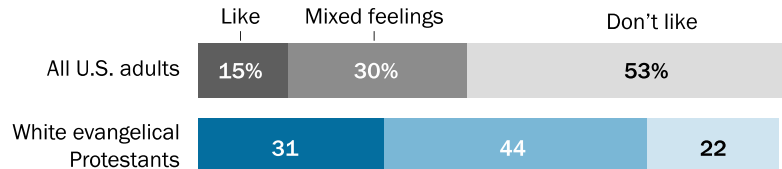
How well does “morally upstanding” describe Donald Trump?



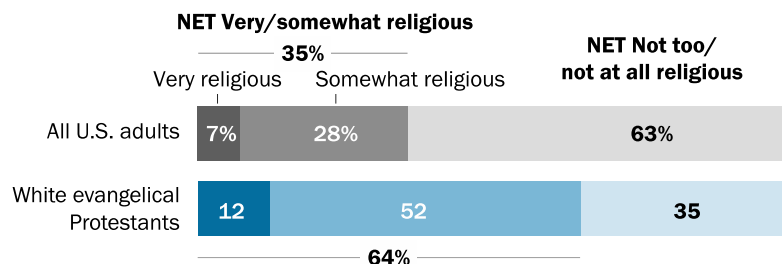
How well does “honest” describe Trump?



Aside from issues, % who ___ Trump’s conduct



% who say Trump is ...



Note: Figures may not add to subtotals indicated due to rounding. Those who did not answer are not shown. White evangelical Protestants do not include Hispanics.

Source: Survey conducted Feb. 4-15, 2020, among U.S. adults.

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religious, about half (52%) view him as “somewhat” religious.

Compared with white evangelical Protestants, the U.S. public as a whole is far less apt to praise the way Donald Trump conducts himself, or to describe him as even somewhat religious, honest or morally upstanding. For example, just 35% of U.S. adults overall say Trump is either very religious (7%) or somewhat religious (28%); a solid majority of the general public thinks he is “not too” or “not at all” religious (63%). Likewise, majorities say that “honest” and “morally upstanding” describe Trump “not too well” or “not at all well.” And on balance, Americans are much more likely to say they dislike (53%) rather than like (15%) the way Trump conducts himself, while an additional three-in-ten say they have “mixed feelings” about his conduct.

Across all religious groups in this analysis, there is near consensus on one Trump characteristic: Majorities of all groups, including 70% of white evangelicals, say that “self-centered” describes Trump at least fairly well.

These are among the key findings of a new Pew Research Center survey conducted Feb. 4 to 15, 2020, among 6,395 U.S. adults on the Center’s online, nationally representative American Trends Panel. The rest of this Overview looks at these questions and others in greater detail.

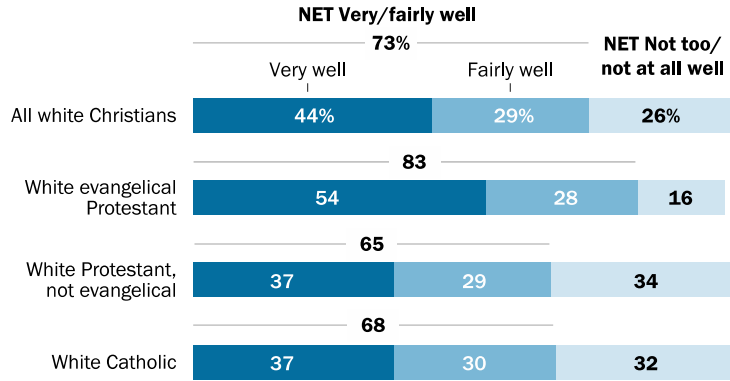
Many other white Christians – not just evangelicals – express affinity for Trump

White evangelical Protestants are not alone in their admiration of Trump. Among other groups of white Christians, smaller but still substantial majorities also express agreement with Trump’s policies and associate him with a number of positive traits, such as intelligence.

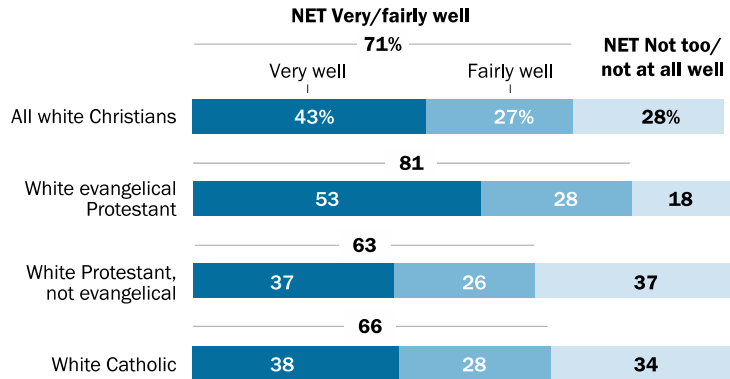
For example, roughly two-thirds of white Catholics say the phrase “fights for what I believe in” describes Donald Trump very well or fairly well, and 68% of white Catholics say “intelligent” is a fairly or very good descriptor of Trump. Similar shares of white Protestants who are not born-again or evangelical Christians say the same. And more than half of people in both groups say they agree with Trump on many, nearly all or all of the important issues facing the country.

Two-thirds of white Catholics, white Protestants who are not evangelical say Trump is intelligent

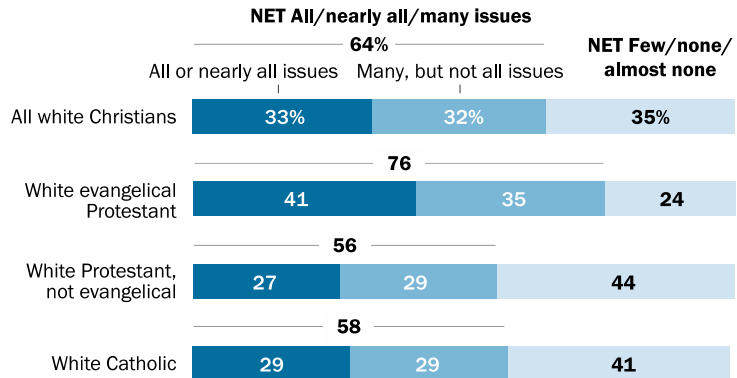
How well does “intelligent” describe Donald Trump?



How well does “fights for what I believe in” describe Trump?



Do you tend to agree with Trump on ...



Note: Figures may not add to subtotals indicated due to rounding. Those who did not answer are not shown. Whites do not include Hispanics.

Source: Survey conducted Feb. 4-15, 2020, among U.S. adults.

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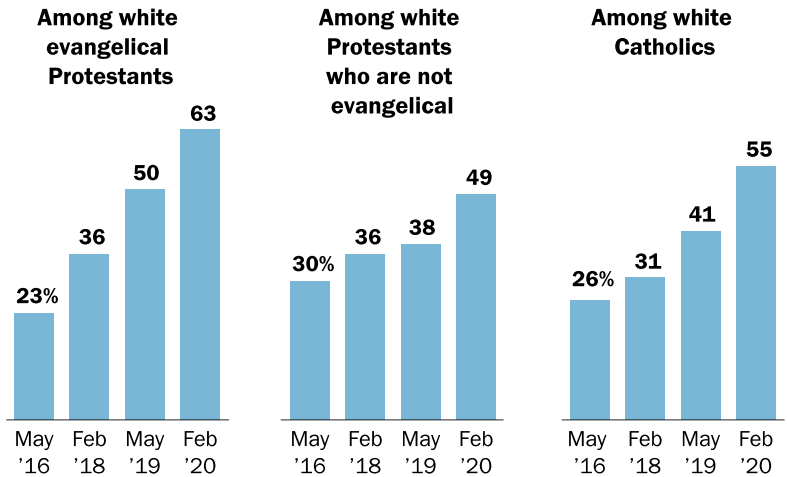
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The survey shows, furthermore, that growing numbers in all three of the largest white Christian groups (white evangelical Protestants, white Protestants who are not evangelical and white Catholics) think that their side has been winning recently on the political issues that matter to them.

Today, 63% of white evangelical Protestants say their side has been winning lately, nearly triple the share who said this in May 2016, six months before Trump’s election. The share of white non-evangelical Protestants who think their side has been winning politically is up 19 percentage points over the same period, and the share of white Catholics who think their side has been politically victorious of late is 29 points higher today than it was in 2016.

Growing shares of white Christians think their side has been winning politically

Thinking about the way things have been going in politics over the last few years on the issues that matter, % of U.S. adults who say their side has been winning



Note: Whites do not include Hispanics.

Source: Survey conducted Feb. 4-15, 2020, among U.S. adults.

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The positive sentiments that white Christians express about Trump and their growing sense that their side has been winning politically [largely reflect their political partisanship](#). In the current survey, 83% of white evangelicals identify with or lean toward the Republican Party, as do 64% of white Protestants who are not evangelical and 65% of white Catholics.

Meanwhile, religious groups whose partisan leanings favor the Democratic Party over the GOP – including Christians who belong to racial and ethnic minority groups, Jews and people with no religious affiliation – are far less admiring of Trump and far more discouraged about how their side has been doing in politics lately.

For example, the share of black Protestants and religious “nones” (those who describe their religious identity as atheist, agnostic or “nothing in particular”) who think their side has been winning lately on the political issues that matter to them is down considerably since Trump’s

election. Whereas 43% of black Protestants said their side was generally winning in May 2016, just 26% say this today. And the share of religious “nones” who think their side has been winning in politics is 13 points lower today than it was in 2016.

On most measures, black Protestants, Hispanic Catholics, Jews and religious ‘nones’ more negative toward Trump compared with white Christians

% of U.S. adults who say _____ describes Trump very/fairly well, among ...

	White Christians	Black Protestants	Hispanic Catholics	Jews	Unaffiliated
Self-centered	77%	76%	65%	89%	87%
Prejudiced	45	70	56	70	70
Intelligent	73	24	44	38	35
Fights for what I believe in	71	27	31	39	32
Honest	57	15	24	28	23
Morally upstanding	51	14	22	26	19
Even-tempered	40	19	21	21	19
<i>% who ...</i>					
Agree w/Trump on all, nearly all or many issues	64	15	30	32	28

Note: Blacks and whites are not Hispanic; Hispanics are of any race.

Source: Survey conducted Feb. 4-15, 2020, among U.S. adults.

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In addition, while seven-in-ten white Christians say “fights for what I believe in” describes Trump at least fairly well, that perception is shared by just four-in-ten or fewer Jews (39%), religious “nones” (32%), Hispanic Catholics (31%) and black Protestants (27%). Three-in-ten or fewer people in these groups say the terms “honest,” “morally upstanding” or “even-tempered” describe Trump at least fairly well. Meanwhile, 56% of Hispanic Catholics and seven-in-ten black Protestants, Jews and religious “nones” say they think Trump is at least fairly “prejudiced.”

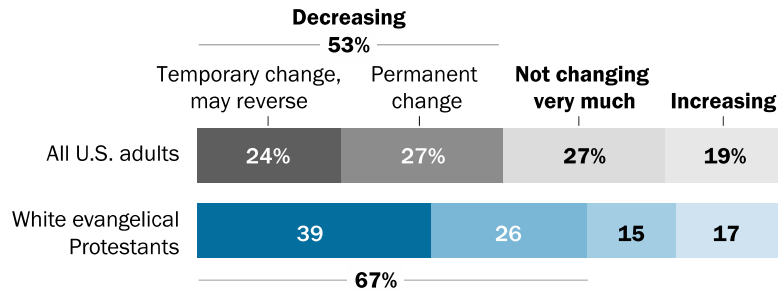
Americans tend to see Christianity declining in influence

While white Christians – and especially white evangelical Protestants – are feeling good about their political prospects, they are not as positive about the status of Christianity in America today. Fully two-thirds of white evangelicals think Christianity’s influence is decreasing in American life. And a similar share of white evangelical Protestants (66%) say there is at least some conflict between their own religious beliefs and mainstream American culture, including three-in-ten who say there is a “great deal” of conflict.

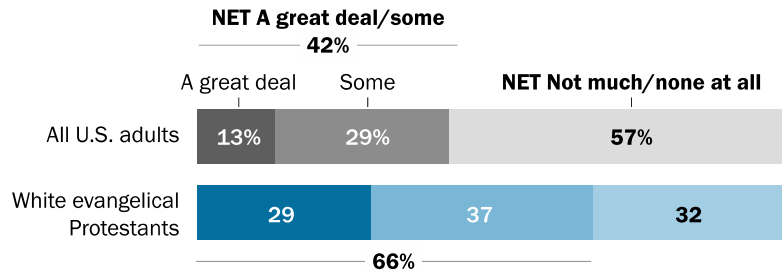
Why do people feel this way? The survey asked respondents who said Christianity’s influence is declining a series of follow-up questions to gauge several possible causes for this decline, and the most common reasons cited as “major causes” are growth in the number of people in the U.S. who are not religious and misconduct by Christian leaders. But among white evangelical Protestants, the most commonly cited reason for Christianity’s declining influence is “more permissive attitudes about sexual behavior and sexuality in popular culture” (see Chapter 2 for full details).

Most white evangelical Protestants say Christianity’s influence is waning, but many see this as temporary change

% of U.S. adults who say Christianity’s influence on American life is ...



How much conflict is there between your religious beliefs and mainstream American culture?



Do you think of yourself as part of a minority group because of your religious beliefs?



Note: Figures may not add to subtotals indicated due to rounding. Those who did not answer the questions are not shown.

Source: Survey conducted Feb. 4-15, 2020, among U.S. adults.

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On the other hand, relatively few white evangelicals say they see themselves as part of a minority group because of their religious beliefs (32%). And while the prevailing view is that Christianity's influence in American life is waning, many white evangelical Protestants are more optimistic about the future. Indeed, among white evangelicals, there are more people who think Christianity's declining influence in American life is a temporary change that may reverse itself (39% of all white evangelicals) than there are who think the faith's reduced influence will be a lasting feature of U.S. society (26%).

Among U.S. adults overall, about half (53%) think that Christianity's influence is declining, and they are about evenly divided on whether this is a permanent change (27%) or just temporary (24%).

Half of Americans say the Bible should influence U.S. laws

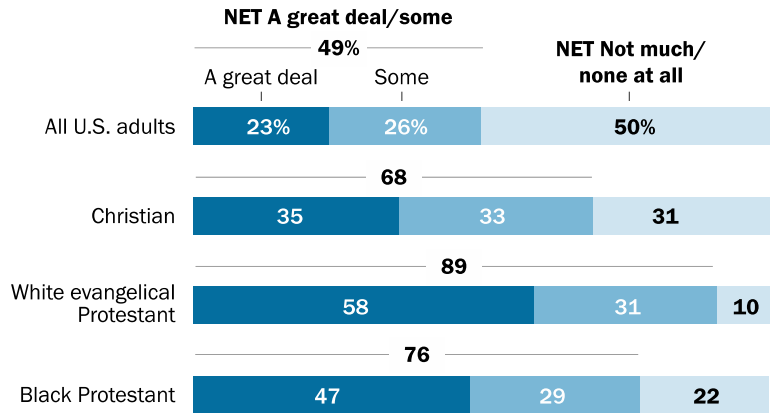
U.S. adults are split over the amount of influence the Bible should have on the laws of the United States. Half of the public says the Bible should have a “great deal” or “some” influence over U.S. laws, while the other half says the Bible should have little or no influence on the laws of the land. Support for biblically based laws is highest among white evangelical Protestants (89%) and black Protestants (76%). It is much lower among all other groups analyzed. (See Chapter 2 for details.)

Respondents who say the Bible should have at least some influence on U.S. laws were asked a hypothetical follow-up question: When the Bible and the will of the people conflict with each other, which should have more influence on the laws of the United States? Overall, 28% of U.S. adults say the Bible should take precedence over the will of the people – including roughly

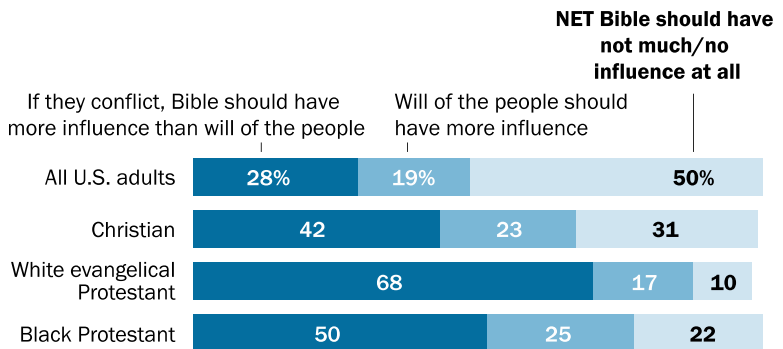
two-thirds of white evangelical Protestants (68%) and half of black Protestants who say the Bible should override the will of the people when the two conflict. These are two of the most highly religious segments of the U.S. population, at least by standard measures such as self-reported rates of prayer and church attendance, though they diverge sharply in political partisanship, with

Many white evangelicals, black Protestants want Bible to influence U.S. laws, even over the will of the people

Bible should have ___ influence on U.S. laws



If Bible and will of people conflict, which should have more influence on U.S. laws?



Note: Figures may not add to subtotals indicated due to rounding. Those who did not answer the questions are not shown. Blacks and whites are not Hispanic; Hispanics are of any race. Source: Survey conducted Feb. 4-15, 2020, among U.S. adults.

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white evangelical Protestants strongly identifying with the Republican Party and black Protestants with the Democratic Party.

The survey did not attempt to gauge what, if any, specific types of laws respondents had in mind when answering these questions. But to put these figures into context, recent surveys show that 63% of white evangelicals say they oppose [allowing gay and lesbian couples to marry legally](#) (which has been permitted nationwide since 2015), 77% say they think [abortion should be against the law](#) in most or all cases, and 61% say they think the [Supreme Court should overturn its decision](#) in *Roe v. Wade*, which legalized abortion nationwide. Among black Protestants, 50% oppose same-sex marriage, but just 35% say abortion should be illegal in most or all cases, and 28% think *Roe v. Wade* should be overturned.

Few Americans think God specifically picked Trump due to his policies

A substantial minority of Americans think that the results of recent presidential elections are broadly part of God’s plan for the world. But far fewer believe that God has chosen specific U.S. presidents as an endorsement of their policies.

Overall, just 5% of U.S. adults believe God chose Trump to become president because God approves of Trump’s policies. An additional 27% say Trump’s victory in the 2016 election must be part of God’s overall plan, but it does not necessarily mean that God favors Trump’s policies. The remaining two-thirds of Americans either say that God does not get involved in U.S. presidential elections (49%) or that they do not believe in God (16%).

Public opinion about God’s role in the 2008 and 2012 elections is very similar. Only 3% of U.S. adults say God chose Obama to be president in 2008 and 2012 because God approved of his policies, 29% say Obama’s election was part of God’s broader plan but not necessarily an indication that God endorsed Obama’s policies, and the remainder say either that God does not get involved in elections (49%) or that they do not believe in a deity (16%).

White evangelicals, black Protestants say Obama and Trump elections must be part of God’s plan

	All U.S. adults	Christian	White evang. Prot.	Black Prot.
<i>Which comes closest to your views about God’s role in the 2016 election?</i>				
	%	%	%	%
God chose Trump to become president because God approves of Trump’s policies	5	7	13	5
Trump’s election must be part of God’s overall plan, but doesn’t necessarily mean God approves of Trump’s policies	27	39	57	51
God doesn’t get involved in U.S. presidential elections	49	51	27	38
I do not believe in God	16	1	<1	2
No answer	2	2	3	3
	100	100	100	100
<i>Which comes closest to your views about God’s role in the 2008 and 2012 elections?</i>				
God chose Obama to become president because God approved of Obama’s policies	3	4	3	14
Obama’s election must have been part of God’s overall plan, but doesn’t necessarily mean God approved of Obama’s policies	29	41	64	51
God doesn’t get involved in U.S. presidential elections	49	51	29	32
I do not believe in God	16	1	<1	<1
No answer	2	2	4	3
	100	100	100	100

Note: Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.
 Source: Survey conducted Feb. 4-15, 2020, among U.S. adults.
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White evangelical Protestants and black Protestants tend to think the outcomes of recent presidential elections reflect God's will in *some* way, mainly in the sense that the elections of Trump and Obama must be part of God's overall plan. White evangelicals are somewhat more likely than others to say that God picked Trump due to his policies (13%), while a similar share of black Protestants say the same about Obama (14%), but these are minority views in both groups.

Republicans more likely than Democrats to want a religious president

Overall, upward of nine-in-ten Republicans and Democrats agree that it is at least somewhat important to have a president who personally lives a moral and ethical life, though Democrats and those who lean toward the Democratic Party are more likely than Republicans and Republican leaners to say that this is “very important” (71% vs. 53%).

Most people in both parties also say they want a president who stands up for their religious beliefs; on this question, Republicans are more likely than Democrats to say this is “very important” (47% vs. 30%).

Having a president who is deeply religious or who shares one’s own religious beliefs is less important to both Republicans and Democrats, but Republicans place a higher premium than Democrats on both of these qualities. This dovetails with the fact that [most religious “nones” are Democrats](#), and that this group has been [growing more quickly](#) in the Democratic Party than in the GOP.

More Democrats than Republicans say it is ‘very important’ to have a president who personally lives a moral, ethical life

% of U.S. adults who say it is ___ to have a president who ...

	Rep./ lean Rep.	Dem./ lean Dem.
<i>... personally lives a moral and ethical life</i>	%	%
NET Very/somewhat important	93	94
Very important	53	71
Somewhat important	40	24
NET Not too/not at all important	7	6
No answer	<1	<1
	100	100
<i>... stands up for people with your religious beliefs</i>		
NET Very/somewhat important	79	60
Very important	47	30
Somewhat important	32	30
NET Not too/not at all important	20	40
No answer	<1	<1
	100	100
<i>... has strong religious beliefs (even if different from yours)</i>		
NET Very/somewhat important	65	41
Very important	24	16
Somewhat important	41	25
NET Not too/not at all important	34	59
No answer	1	<1
	100	100
<i>... shares your religious beliefs</i>		
NET Very/somewhat important	53	27
Very important	20	9
Somewhat important	33	18
NET Not too/not at all important	47	73
No answer	<1	<1
	100	100

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

Source: Survey conducted Feb. 4-15, 2020, among U.S. adults.

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Fewer than half of Americans describe Trump's religion as Christian

President Trump identifies as Presbyterian, but most Americans do not associate him with Christianity or Protestantism. When asked what Donald Trump's religion is, about a third say they think Trump is Protestant and 8% say they think he is Catholic.

One-third of U.S. adults (34%) say they aren't sure what Trump's religion is, and an additional 16% say Trump has no religion (that he is atheist or that his religion is "nothing in particular"). Much smaller shares say he is Jewish, Muslim or Buddhist. And one-in-twenty Americans (5%) say Trump has some other religion; when asked to specify what they mean, many people in this latter group provide caustic responses, saying they think Trump worships himself, that he worships money or power, that he is a fake Christian or someone who only pretends to be religious, or that he is evil.

Republicans and those who lean toward the GOP are twice as likely as Democrats and their leaners to say Trump is Protestant (47% vs. 23%). Democrats are more likely to think Trump does not have a religion, with one-quarter saying Trump has no religion (including 4% who say he is an atheist and one-in-five who say his religion is "nothing in particular"), compared with 7% of Republicans who say this.

Overall, more than six-in-ten Americans (63%) say Trump is either "not too" or "not at all" religious. But Americans think differently about the vice president. About seven-in-ten say Mike Pence is very or somewhat religious, while just 18% say he is not too, or not at all, religious.

Republicans and Democrats have divergent opinions about Trump's religiousness: 62% of Republicans think Trump is at least somewhat religious, compared with 12% of Democrats who share that assessment. But the partisan gap in opinion about Pence is not as stark. Majorities in

One-third of U.S. adults say they are not sure what Trump's religion is

As far as you know, what is Donald Trump's religion?

	All U.S. adults	Rep./lean Rep.	Dem./lean Dem.
	%	%	%
Christian	44	60	31
Protestant	33	47	23
"Just Christian"	2	3	1
Catholic	8	10	7
Jewish	1	1	1
Muslim	<1	<1	<1
Buddhist	<1	0	<1
No religion	16	7	24
Atheist	2	1	4
Nothing in particular	13	6	20
Something else	5	1	8
Not sure	34	31	35
No answer	1	1	1
	100	100	100

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

Source: Survey conducted Feb. 4-15, 2020, among U.S. adults. "White Evangelicals See Trump as Fighting for Their Beliefs, Though Many Have Mixed Feelings About His Personal Conduct"

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both parties say Pence is at least somewhat religious, although Republicans are more likely than Democrats to say this (81% vs. 67%).

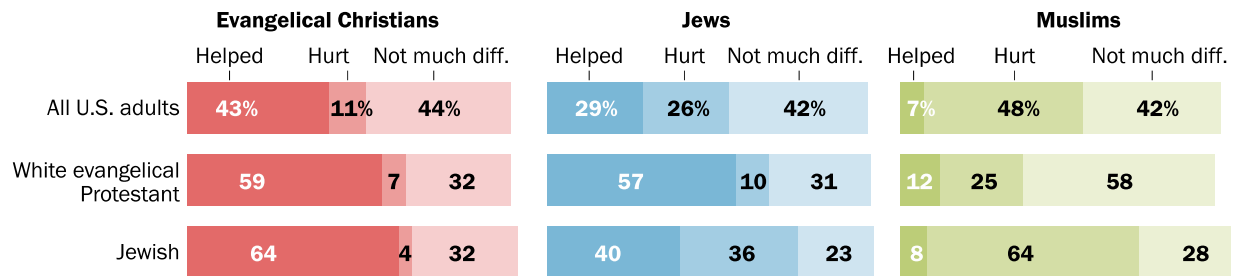
On balance, Americans say Trump administration has helped evangelicals, hurt Muslims

The survey asked whether the Trump administration has helped, hurt or not made much of a difference to the interests of five groups: evangelical Christians, Jews, Catholics, Muslims and people who are not religious. Fewer than half of U.S. adults think the Trump administration has helped any of these groups. But more say the Trump administration has helped evangelical Christians than say it has helped any of the other groups asked about in the survey (43%). And nearly half of U.S. adults say the Trump administration has hurt Muslims. Indeed, U.S. adults are seven times more likely to say the administration has hurt Muslims than to say it has helped this group (48% vs. 7%).

Americans are somewhat divided on the Trump administration's impact on Jews, with 29% saying Trump has helped Jews, 26% saying he has hurt this group, and 42% saying he has made no difference. Jews themselves also are divided on this question: 40% of U.S. Jews say the administration has helped their interests and 36% say it has hurt them, with fewer saying it has not made much difference (23%). A majority of white evangelical Protestants (57%), meanwhile, say the administration has helped Jewish interests. See Chapter 1 for full details.

Jews divided over whether Trump administration has helped or hurt their group

% of U.S. adults who say the Trump administration has ___ each of the following groups



Note: While the full sample included Muslim respondents, there were not enough to analyze the views of Muslims separately. Those who did not answer are not shown.

Source: Survey conducted Feb. 4-15, 2020, among U.S. adults.

"White Evangelicals See Trump as Fighting for Their Beliefs, Though Many Have Mixed Feelings About His Personal Conduct"

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1. How different religious groups view religion's role in the presidency, Trump's traits

The vast majority of Americans say it is at least somewhat important to them to have a U.S. president who lives a moral and ethical life (93%), and most also say they want the president to stand up for people with their religious beliefs (69%). Smaller shares want the president to have strong religious beliefs or to share their religious faith – although more than half of Christians say these things are at least somewhat important.

Jews and religiously unaffiliated adults (those who say their religion is atheist, agnostic or “nothing in particular,” also known as religious “nones”) want a president who lives a moral and ethical life, but these groups are much less likely than Christians to say it is important that the president has strong religious beliefs or shares theirs.

Does the current president exhibit these attributes? Perceptions of Donald Trump vary widely by political party and religious group. Most Americans do not consider Donald Trump to be a religious person, but white evangelical Protestants stand out on this question: Nearly two-thirds say Trump is “very” or “somewhat” religious. There is a similar pattern on a question about how well the phrase “morally upstanding” describes Trump. Most Americans say it does not describe him well, but a majority of white evangelicals (as well as most Republicans) say it is at least a fairly good descriptor.

White evangelicals, as well as other white Christian groups, also are more likely than others to describe Trump in other positive terms and to say that they agree with him on the issues. Jews, black Protestants and people with no religious affiliation express decidedly more negative views of the president.

The chapter also explores Americans' perceptions of the impact the Trump administration has had on several religious groups: Catholics, evangelical Christians, Jews, Muslims and people who are not religious.

More than nine-in-ten Americans want a U.S. president who lives a moral and ethical life; far fewer say it's important for a president to have strong religious beliefs

Across a variety of religious and demographic groups, nine-in-ten or more say it is at least somewhat important to them to have a president who lives a moral and ethical life.

Eight-in-ten U.S. Christians also prioritize having a president who stands up for people with their religious beliefs. This includes nine-in-ten white evangelical Protestants (93%) and the vast majority of black Protestants (84%) who say this is very or somewhat important to them. About three-quarters of white Protestants who do not identify as born-again or evangelical (75%) and Catholics (73%) share this view. Eight-in-ten U.S. Jews (82%) also say it is important to them to have a president who stands up for people with their religious beliefs, including 60% who say this is *very* important. By comparison, far fewer religiously unaffiliated adults say this is very or somewhat important (47%).

When it comes to a president's religious beliefs, Christians are more likely to say it's important for a president to have strong religious beliefs of some kind – even if those beliefs are different from their own – than they are to say it's important to have a president who shares their religious beliefs (70% vs. 55%). Among religious “nones,” just 23% say it is important for a president to have strong religious beliefs, and 15% say they want a president who shares their own religious beliefs.²

Republicans and those who lean toward the GOP are much more likely than Democrats and those who lean toward the Democratic Party to say it is at least somewhat important to them to have a president who has strong religious beliefs or who shares their own personal religious beliefs. Older Americans (ages 50 and older) also are more likely than those under 50 to desire a president who has strong religious beliefs or who shares their beliefs.

² Previous surveys, conducted between 2000 and 2016, have shown that a decreasing share of Americans agree with the statement, “It's important to me that a president have strong religious beliefs” – a parallel trend to [Americans becoming less religious](#) themselves. The new survey is not comparable to the earlier surveys because of differences in question wording and the way in which the surveys were conducted (previous surveys were conducted over the telephone, while the new survey was self-administered over the internet).

Eight-in-ten Christians, Jews want a president who stands up for people with their religious beliefs

% of U.S. adults who say it is ___ important to them to have a president of the United States who ...

	... personally lives a moral, ethical life		... stands up for people with your religious beliefs		... has strong religious beliefs, even if they are different from your own		... shares your religious beliefs	
	Very	Somewhat	Very	Somewhat	Very	Somewhat	Very	Somewhat
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
All U.S. adults	63	31	38	31	20	32	14	25
Christian	64	31	48	33	29	41	21	34
Protestant	65	30	53	32	31	43	25	37
White evangelical	63	34	67	27	34	47	34	42
White, not evangelical	58	35	35	40	20	45	6	34
Black Protestant	73	20	52	32	40	34	30	34
Catholic	62	31	38	35	26	36	14	28
White	61	34	40	36	24	38	9	28
Hispanic	60	29	34	33	28	32	22	28
Jewish	66	25	60	22	12	28	1	15
Unaffiliated	60	32	19	28	6	17	5	10
Atheist	64	29	20	22	1	3	2	4
Agnostic	59	34	12	27	2	6	1	4
Nothing in particular	59	31	21	30	9	25	7	14
Men	57	35	35	30	16	31	12	23
Women	68	27	40	33	24	33	16	26
White	61	33	39	31	18	33	12	25
Black	69	22	43	29	32	31	25	27
Hispanic	63	28	31	35	24	30	18	25
Ages 18-29	60	31	26	31	9	24	7	17
30-49	61	31	31	33	15	30	12	23
50-64	62	31	45	29	28	35	20	29
65+	67	28	50	30	30	39	18	28
Republican/lean Republican	53	40	47	32	24	41	20	33
Democrat/lean Democratic	71	24	30	30	16	25	9	18

Note: Blacks and whites are not Hispanic; Hispanics are of any race.

Source: Survey conducted Feb. 4-15, 2020, among U.S. adults.

"White Evangelicals See Trump as Fighting for Their Beliefs, Though Many Have Mixed Feelings About His Personal Conduct"

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Most U.S. adults do not think Trump is religious, while seven-in-ten think Pence is at least ‘somewhat religious’

Most U.S. adults think President Trump is “not too” (23%) or “not at all” religious (40%). Roughly one-third consider Trump to be at least “somewhat” religious, including 7% who say he is “very” religious. By comparison, U.S. adults are about twice as likely to say Vice President Mike Pence is at least somewhat religious as they are to say the same about Trump. Seven-in-ten U.S. adults think Pence is very (43%) or somewhat (29%) religious, while just 18% say he is not too or not at all religious.

(The same survey shows that 55% of U.S. adults say Joe Biden is at least somewhat religious, while 35% view Bernie Sanders as at least somewhat religious. For additional details of how the public views the religiousness of Democratic presidential candidates, see [“Most Americans don’t see Democratic candidates as very religious.”](#))

Pence seen as more religious than Trump

How religious is _____ ?

	Donald Trump	Mike Pence
	%	%
NET Very/somewhat religious	35	72
Very	7	43
Somewhat	28	29
NET Not too/not at all	63	18
Not too	23	13
Not at all	40	6
Never heard of/no answer	2	9
	100	100

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

Source: Survey conducted Feb. 4-15, 2020, among U.S. adults.

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Members of most of the largest Christian traditions are more likely to say that Trump is not too or not at all religious than they are to say he is very or somewhat religious. The one exception is white evangelical Protestants. About two-thirds in this group say Trump is at least somewhat religious, while one-third think he is not very religious. By contrast, roughly three-quarters or more of Jews (73%), religious “nones” (75%) and black Protestants (84%) say Trump is not religious.

Like U.S. adults as a whole, people across a variety of religious groups – including white evangelicals – are more likely to say Mike Pence is religious than they are to say the same about Trump, with majorities in most religious groups saying Pence is at least somewhat religious.

Republicans and Democrats hold starkly different opinions about Trump’s religiousness. Republicans and those who lean toward the GOP are about five times as likely as their Democratic counterparts to say that Trump is at least somewhat religious (62% vs. 12%). Republicans also are more likely than Democrats to say Pence is very or somewhat religious, but the partisan divide on this question is much smaller, and majorities in both parties say they think Pence is at least somewhat religious.

Majority of Republicans think Trump is religious, while majority of Democrats do not

How religious is _____ ?

	Donald Trump		Mike Pence	
	NET Very/ somewhat	NET Not too/ not at all	NET Very/ somewhat	NET Not too/ not at all
	%	%	%	%
All U.S. adults	35	63	72	18
Christian	43	56	72	19
Protestant	46	53	71	20
White evangelical	64	35	80	14
White, not evangelical	45	53	78	16
Black Protestant	14	84	49	37
Catholic	37	61	72	16
White	44	55	84	11
Hispanic	28	69	56	25
Jewish	26	73	90	9
Unaffiliated	23	75	73	18
Atheist	22	78	90	9
Agnostic	17	81	87	10
Nothing in particular	25	73	63	23
Republican/lean Republican	62	37	81	13
Democrat/lean Democratic	12	87	67	23

Note: “Never heard of this person” and no answer responses not shown. Blacks and whites are not Hispanic; Hispanics are of any race.

Source: Survey conducted Feb. 4-15, 2020, among U.S. adults.

“White Evangelicals See Trump as Fighting for Their Beliefs, Though Many Have Mixed Feelings About His Personal Conduct”

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Eight-in-ten U.S. adults describe Trump as self-centered, half say he is intelligent

The survey listed seven different potential traits, asking respondents whether each describes President Trump “very well,” “fairly well,” “not too well” or “not at all well.” The two negative traits were the ones most commonly ascribed to Trump, with eight-in-ten Americans saying “self-centered” describes him at least fairly well, and roughly six-in-ten saying “prejudiced” describes him at least fairly well. Even among white evangelical Protestants, some of Trump’s strongest supporters, seven-in-ten describe him as self-centered.

Still, white evangelical Protestants are the mostly likely to attribute several positive qualities to Trump. Majorities say “intelligent” (83%), “fights for what I believe in” (81%), “honest” (69%) and “morally upstanding” (61%) are at least fairly good descriptors of Trump. And only about one-third of white evangelical Protestants (35%) say “prejudiced” describes Trump very or fairly well, by far the lowest share who say this across the largest U.S. religious groups.

Other white Christians also express positive views of Trump. For example, roughly two-thirds of white Catholics and white Protestants who do not describe themselves as born-again or evangelical Christians say they think Trump is “intelligent” or “fights for what I believe in.”

Black Protestants, on the other hand, hold negative views of Trump, with about one-in-four or fewer saying any of the positive traits asked about in the survey describes Trump very or fairly well. Most black Protestants describe Trump as “self-centered” and “prejudiced.”

Religiously unaffiliated and Jewish Americans also see Trump negatively. Nearly nine-in-ten in each group say Trump is self-centered, and seven-in-ten say he is prejudiced. Far fewer say any of the positive traits in the survey describes Trump well.

Republicans and Democrats are sharply polarized in their opinions about which traits describe the president. For details see [“Few Americans Express Positive Views of Trump’s Conduct in Office.”](#)

White evangelicals ascribe positive traits to Trump, but also say he's 'self-centered'

% of U.S. adults who say each of the following describes Donald Trump very or fairly well

	Self-centered	Prejudiced	Intelligent	Fights for what I believe in	Honest	Morally upstanding	Even-tempered
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
All U.S. adults	80	59	50	47	36	32	27
Christian	75	51	60	57	45	40	32
Protestant	75	49	62	60	48	42	34
<i>White evangelical</i>	70	35	83	81	69	61	49
<i>White, not evangelical</i>	81	52	65	63	49	42	31
<i>Black Protestant</i>	76	70	24	27	15	14	19
Catholic	77	55	56	51	39	36	30
<i>White</i>	83	51	68	66	51	48	37
<i>Hispanic</i>	65	56	44	31	24	22	21
Jewish	89	70	38	39	28	26	21
Unaffiliated	87	70	35	32	23	19	19
Atheist	92	82	20	18	14	11	13
Agnostic	94	76	33	26	13	10	8
Nothing in particular	83	64	41	39	29	24	25
Republican/lean Republican	73	35	86	87	71	62	49
Democrat/lean Democratic	87	79	19	14	7	6	9

Note: Blacks and whites are not Hispanic; Hispanics are of any race.

Source: Survey conducted Feb. 4-15, 2020, among U.S. adults.

"White Evangelicals See Trump as Fighting for Their Beliefs, Though Many Have Mixed Feelings About His Personal Conduct"

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More than four-in-ten U.S. adults think the Trump administration has benefitted evangelical Christians, while about half say it has hurt Muslims

When asked whether the Trump administration has helped or hurt five different religious groups (Catholics, evangelical Christians, Jews, Muslims and people who are not religious), fewer than half of U.S. adults say the Trump administration has helped any of these groups. But Americans are more likely to say the Trump administration has helped the interests of evangelical Christians than they are to say this about the other groups. More than four-in-ten U.S. adults (43%) say the Trump administration has helped evangelical Christians, compared with fewer who say the same about Jews (29%), Catholics (25%), people who are not religious (14%) or Muslims (7%).

White evangelical Protestants tend to be more likely than others to see the Trump administration as beneficial to the religious groups asked about in the survey. For instance, 59% of white evangelical Protestants say the Trump administration has helped evangelical Christians. And a similar share of white evangelical Protestants say the Trump administration has helped Jews (57%). Jews, however, are more divided on this question: 40% say the Trump administration has helped their group's interests, while 36% say the administration has hurt Jews.

More Americans say Trump administration has helped, not hurt, evangelical Christians

% of U.S. adults who say the Trump administration has ____ each of the following groups

	Evangelical Christians			Jews			Catholics		
	Helped	Hurt	No diff.	Helped	Hurt	No diff.	Helped	Hurt	No diff.
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
All U.S. adults	43	11	44	29	26	42	25	10	62
Christian	43	11	44	37	20	40	28	9	60
Protestant	44	12	41	39	19	39	28	9	60
White evangelical	59	7	32	57	10	31	39	5	53
White, not evangelical	44	9	44	37	21	39	27	6	65
Black Protestant	21	26	51	12	35	50	12	21	64
Catholic	40	9	49	33	22	42	26	9	62
White	47	5	46	42	19	38	30	7	61
Hispanic	28	14	54	22	24	49	20	10	66
Jewish	64	4	32	40	36	23	32	11	55
Unaffiliated	42	10	46	16	36	45	21	11	65
Atheist	61	8	30	15	51	32	31	9	58
Agnostic	51	8	40	17	41	41	24	11	65
Nothing in particular	33	11	53	17	30	51	18	12	67
Republican/lean Rep.	50	3	45	53	4	41	38	2	57
Democrat/lean Dem.	39	17	43	10	47	41	15	17	66

Note: Those who did not answer are not shown. Blacks and whites are not Hispanic; Hispanics are of any race.

Source: Survey conducted Feb. 4-15, 2020, among U.S. adults.

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More Americans perceive the Trump administration as having hurt Muslims than any other religious group asked about in the survey. Roughly half of respondents (48%) say the Trump White House has hurt Muslims, while very few (7%) say it has helped the group. (While the full sample included Muslim respondents, there were not enough to analyze the views of Muslims separately.)

Two-thirds of Americans say the Trump administration has had little impact on the interests of people who are not religious. But 45% of self-described atheists think the Trump administration has hurt people who are not religious.

Republicans and Democrats differ in their opinions about the Trump administration's influence on the five religious groups asked about in the survey. For example, more than half of Republicans think the Trump administration has helped Jews (53%), compared with 10% of Democrats who say this. And a large majority of Democrats (73%) say the Trump White House has been harmful to Muslims, compared with just one-in-five Republicans who agree.

Nearly half of U.S. adults say the Trump administration has hurt Muslims

% of U.S. adults who say the Trump administration has ____ each of the following groups

	People who are not religious			Muslims		
	Helped %	Hurt %	No diff. %	Helped %	Hurt %	No diff. %
All U.S. adults	14	18	65	7	48	42
Christian	18	12	67	8	39	49
Protestant	19	13	65	9	37	51
<i>White evangelical</i>	25	8	65	12	25	58
<i>White, not evangelical</i>	17	12	69	8	40	49
<i>Black Protestant</i>	11	22	63	4	55	39
Catholic	15	12	70	8	41	47
<i>White</i>	15	10	73	10	39	49
<i>Hispanic</i>	14	16	65	6	41	47
Jewish	10	30	59	8	64	28
Unaffiliated	8	26	64	5	61	32
Atheist	7	45	46	2	82	15
Agnostic	5	28	67	3	70	26
Nothing in particular	8	20	69	6	52	39
Republican/lean Rep.	23	4	70	14	20	62
Democrat/lean Dem.	6	31	61	2	73	24

Note: Those who did not answer are not shown. Blacks and whites are not Hispanic; Hispanics are of any race.

Source: Survey conducted Feb. 4-15, 2020, among U.S. adults.

"White Evangelicals See Trump as Fighting for Their Beliefs, Though Many Have Mixed Feelings About His Personal Conduct"

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Most white evangelicals agree with Trump on the issues, but fewer like the way he conducts himself as president

White evangelical Protestants are more likely than other U.S. religious groups to agree with Trump on the issues. About four-in-ten say they agree with Trump on “all” or “nearly all” issues facing the country (41%), and an additional one-third agree with him on “many” issues (35%). Most white Catholics and white Protestants who are not evangelical also say they agree with Trump on many, all or nearly all issues. At the other end of the spectrum, about half or more among Jews (49%), agnostics (51%), black Protestants (57%) and atheists (65%) say they agree with Trump on “no” or “almost no” issues.

There are massive gaps between Republicans and Democrats on this question. For details, see [“Few Americans Express Positive Views of Trump’s Conduct in Office.”](#)

Religious ‘nones,’ Jews and black Protestants among groups who say they agree with Trump on few – if any – issues

% of U.S. adults who say they tend to agree with Donald Trump on _____ issues facing the country today

	NET All/ nearly all/ many issues	All or nearly all	Many, but not all	NET A few/ no/ no issues	A few	No or almost no	No answer
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
All U.S. adults	42	19	23	58	23	34	1=100
Christian	51	25	26	48	22	26	1
Protestant	53	27	27	46	20	25	1
White evangelical	76	41	35	24	13	10	1
White, not evang.	56	27	29	44	19	25	<1
Black Protestant	15	7	8	84	26	57	1
Catholic	45	22	23	54	26	28	1
White	58	29	29	41	20	21	1
Hispanic	30	14	17	68	34	34	2
Jewish	32	15	17	68	19	49	0
Unaffiliated	28	9	19	72	26	46	<1
Atheist	16	6	11	83	19	65	<1
Agnostic	20	4	16	79	27	51	1
Nothing in particular	33	11	22	66	27	39	<1
Republican/lean Rep.	80	38	42	20	17	3	<1
Democrat/lean Dem.	10	3	7	90	28	62	1

Note: Figures may not add to 100% or to subtotals indicated due to rounding. Blacks and whites are not Hispanic; Hispanics are of any race.

Source: Survey conducted Feb. 4-15, 2020, among U.S. adults.

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One-in-seven U.S. adults say that aside from the issues, they like the way Trump conducts himself (15%), while about half don't like the way he conducts himself (53%) and three-in-ten express mixed feelings about Trump's conduct as president.

Black Protestants, Jews and religiously unaffiliated adults are especially negative about Trump's behavior: Six-in-ten or more in these groups say they do not like the way Trump conducts himself.

By comparison, white evangelical Protestants, white Protestants who are not evangelical and white Catholics are less negative in their assessments of Trump's conduct. Most in these groups, however, stop short of endorsing Trump's conduct; instead, many say they have mixed feelings about Trump's conduct.

Many white evangelicals, Republicans have mixed feelings about the way Trump conducts himself

% of U.S. adults who say, aside from issues, they _____ the way Donald Trump conducts himself

	Like	Have mixed feelings about	Don't like	No answer
	%	%	%	%
All U.S. adults	15	30	53	3=100
Christian	20	33	43	4
Protestant	21	35	41	3
White evangelical	31	44	22	3
White, not evangelical	20	40	37	3
Black Protestant	6	16	74	4
Catholic	18	29	49	4
White	24	32	40	4
Hispanic	9	26	59	5
Jewish	11	23	63	3
Unaffiliated	8	24	66	2
Atheist	8	12	78	1
Agnostic	3	21	73	2
Nothing in particular	9	28	60	3
Republican/lean Rep.	31	50	16	3
Democrat/lean Dem.	1	12	85	2

Note: Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding. Blacks and whites are not Hispanic; Hispanics are of any race.

Source: Survey conducted Feb. 4-15, 2020, among U.S. adults.

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2. Views about religion in American society

Most U.S. Christians perceive their religion as losing influence in America, and many go so far as to say that there is tension between their beliefs and the mainstream culture. These views are particularly widespread among white evangelical Protestants, two-thirds of whom see at least some conflict between their own religious beliefs and mainstream American culture.

The survey also shows, however, that Christians are somewhat more likely to think their religion's perceived decline in influence is a temporary, rather than permanent, change. In addition, just one-in-five U.S. Christians, including a third of white evangelical Protestants, see themselves as members of a minority group because of their religious beliefs. (Jews and atheists answer this question quite differently, with 78% and 45%, respectively, saying they see themselves as part of a religious minority group.)

The study also finds that the public is divided over how much influence the Bible should have on U.S. laws. Half of U.S. adults say it should have "a great deal" or "some" influence – with 28% going on to say that the Bible should take precedence over the will of the people – while the other half want little or no biblical influence on the laws of the land.

The rest of this chapter explores these and other questions in more detail.

Four-in-ten Americans perceive conflict between their religious beliefs and mainstream culture; fewer think of themselves as part of a religious minority group

Four-in-ten U.S. adults say there is at least some conflict between their own religious beliefs and mainstream American culture, including 13% who say there is “a great deal” of conflict and 29% who see “some” conflict between their values and the prevailing culture.

The perceived disconnect between personal religious beliefs and mainstream culture peaks among white evangelical Protestants, 66% of whom say there is at least some conflict between their own religious beliefs and the prevailing culture – including three-in-ten who feel “a great deal” of conflict. But white evangelicals are not alone in this perception; about six-in-ten atheists and roughly half of Jews also say their own religious beliefs conflict at least “some” with mainstream American culture.

Roughly half of Republicans and those who lean toward the Republican Party see at least

“some” conflict between their own religious beliefs and mainstream American culture (48%), higher than the 37% of Democrats and Democratic leaners who say the same. And white

White evangelicals, Jews and atheists more likely than other groups to see conflict between their own religious beliefs and mainstream American culture

How much conflict, if any, is there between your own religious beliefs and mainstream American culture?

	NET A great deal/ some	A great deal	Some	NET Not much/ no conflict	Not much	No conflict at all	No answer
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
All U.S. adults	42	13	29	57	32	25	2=100
Christian	45	15	31	53	32	21	2
Protestant	49	18	31	50	30	19	2
White evangelical	66	29	37	32	23	10	1
White, not evang.	36	7	29	62	39	23	2
Black Protestant	35	10	25	62	34	28	3
Catholic	37	8	29	62	35	26	1
White	40	9	31	59	36	23	1
Hispanic	32	5	27	67	33	33	2
Jewish	52	17	35	46	33	13	2
Unaffiliated	34	9	25	65	32	33	1
Atheist	57	19	38	42	25	18	<1
Agnostic	31	6	25	68	33	35	<1
Nothing in particular	27	6	21	71	34	37	2
Republican/lean Rep.	48	18	30	50	28	22	2
Democrat/lean Dem.	37	8	29	62	34	27	1
White	46	14	31	53	32	22	1
Black	33	11	22	64	33	31	3
Hispanic	33	7	26	65	28	36	2

Note: Figures may not add to 100% or to subtotals indicated due to rounding. Blacks and whites are not Hispanic; Hispanics are of any race.

Source: Survey conducted Feb. 4-15, 2020, among U.S. adults.

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respondents are more likely than those who are black or Hispanic to perceive a conflict between their own beliefs and the broader culture (46% of white respondents vs. 33% each for black and Hispanic respondents).

About three-quarters of U.S. Jews (who [make up roughly 2% of U.S. adults](#)) say they think of themselves as part of a minority group because of their religious beliefs, as do 45% of self-described atheists (who account for roughly 4% of the U.S. adult population). Across all Christian traditions analyzed, one-third or fewer say they think of themselves as part of a minority group because of their religious beliefs.

Roughly three-quarters of U.S. Jews see themselves as part of a religious minority group

Do you think of yourself as part of a minority group because of your religious beliefs?

	Yes	No	No answer
	%	%	%
All U.S. adults	24	74	2=100
Christian	22	76	2
Protestant	24	73	3
White evangelical	32	64	3
White, not evangelical	11	87	1
Black Protestant	25	71	4
Catholic	15	83	2
White	13	85	2
Hispanic	17	81	2
Jewish	78	22	0
Unaffiliated	21	77	2
Atheist	45	54	1
Agnostic	19	80	2
Nothing in particular	15	83	2

Note: Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding. Blacks and whites are not Hispanic; Hispanics are of any race.

Source: Survey conducted Feb. 4-15, 2020, among U.S. adults.

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Among U.S. adults, no consensus on whether Christianity's declining influence is temporary or permanent

About half of U.S. adults say Christianity's influence on American life is decreasing (53%), while one-in-five say Christianity's influence is growing and 27% say Christianity's level of influence in American life is not changing very much. The view that Christianity's influence is declining is more common among white respondents than among black and Hispanic adults, and it is more common among Republicans and those who lean toward the GOP than among Democrats (though a plurality of Democrats agree with most Republicans that Christianity's influence is waning).

Half of Americans say Christianity's influence is declining in U.S.

% of U.S. adults who say Christianity's influence on American life is ...

	Decreasing %	Increasing %	Not changing very much %	No answer %
All U.S. adults	53	19	27	1=100
Christian	56	18	26	1
Protestant	59	18	23	1
White evangelical	67	17	15	1
White, not evangelical	62	12	25	<1
Black Protestant	43	24	32	1
Catholic	49	17	33	1
White	60	13	27	<1
Hispanic	35	22	43	1
Jewish	39	30	31	<1
Unaffiliated	49	20	30	1
Atheist	52	26	22	1
Agnostic	60	22	18	<1
Nothing in particular	45	18	36	1
Republican/lean Republican	63	14	23	<1
Democrat/lean Democratic	46	23	31	<1
White	59	17	23	1
Black	41	21	37	1
Hispanic	37	25	38	1
Ages 18-29	50	20	29	1
30-49	53	19	27	1
50-64	51	19	29	1
65+	59	17	24	<1

Note: Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding. Blacks and whites are not Hispanic; Hispanics are of any race.

Source: Survey conducted Feb. 4-15, 2020, among U.S. adults.

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U.S. adults are about evenly divided between those who see the decline of Christianity's influence as permanent and those who see it as potentially fleeting: 27% of U.S. adults say Christianity's influence is decreasing and that this is a permanent change, while 24% say Christianity's influence is waning but that this is a temporary development that may reverse itself.

Christians are somewhat more likely to see their religion's declining influence as temporary than they are to see it as a permanent decline (31% vs. 24%). By contrast, Jews and religious "nones" tend to think Christianity's declining influence will be permanent.

The survey also shows that a larger share of Republicans than Democrats see Christianity's loss of influence as a temporary development. And the oldest Americans (ages 65 and older) are more inclined than younger adults to believe that Christianity's decline will prove to be a blip rather than a lasting change.

More than half of U.S. Christians say Christianity's influence on American life is decreasing, but a quarter think this is a temporary change

% of U.S. adults who say Christianity's influence on American life is ...

	Decreasing and this is a ...				NET Increasing	Not changing very much	No answer
	NET Decreasing	Permanent change	Temporary change that may reverse itself	Declined to say whether permanent or temporary			
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
All U.S. adults	53	27	24	1	19	27	1=100
Christian	56	24	31	2	18	26	1
Protestant	59	24	33	2	18	23	1
<i>White evangelical</i>	67	26	39	2	17	15	1
<i>White, not evangelical</i>	62	28	33	1	12	25	<1
<i>Black Protestant</i>	43	16	24	3	24	32	1
Catholic	49	22	27	1	17	33	1
<i>White</i>	60	26	33	1	13	27	<1
<i>Hispanic</i>	35	17	17	1	22	43	1
Jewish	39	27	10	2	30	31	<1
Unaffiliated	49	33	15	1	20	30	1
Atheist	52	46	6	0	26	22	1
Agnostic	60	43	15	1	22	18	<1
Nothing in particular	45	26	18	1	18	36	1
Republican/lean Rep.	63	28	34	1	14	23	<1
Democrat/lean Dem.	46	28	16	1	23	31	<1
White	59	31	27	1	17	23	1
Black	41	17	21	3	21	37	1
Hispanic	37	18	17	1	25	38	1
Ages 18-29	50	31	19	1	20	29	1
30-49	53	30	22	1	19	27	1
50-64	51	23	26	2	19	29	1
65+	59	25	31	2	17	24	<1

Note: Figures may not add to 100% or to subtotals indicated due to rounding. Blacks and whites are not Hispanic; Hispanics are of any race.

Source: Survey conducted Feb. 4-15, 2020, among U.S. adults.

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The survey also asked respondents who think Christianity’s influence is declining to assess whether each of a variety of factors has been a major cause, minor cause, or not a cause of the decline. Overall, six-in-ten

people who think Christianity’s influence is waning say that growth in [the number of people in the U.S. who are not religious](#) is a “major cause” of the change, and a similar share (58%) blame [misconduct by ministers, priests or other Christian leaders](#).

About half of those who say Christianity’s influence is declining cite more permissive attitudes about sex and sexuality in popular culture as a major cause, and four-in-ten say negative portrayals of Christianity in pop culture have played a key role. Roughly three-in-ten say growth in the number of adherents of non-Christian faiths, the association of Christianity with conservative politics, or government policies limiting religion’s role in public life have been major causes of Christianity’s waning influence.

Americans who say Christianity’s influence is declining cite growth in number of nonreligious people, misconduct by Christian leaders as key reasons

Among U.S. adults who say Christianity’s influence in American life is declining, % who say each of the following is a ___ of the decline

	Major cause %	Minor cause %	Not a cause %	No answer %
Growth in the number of people in U.S. who are not religious	60	30	9	1=100
Misconduct by Christian leaders	58	34	7	1
More permissive attitudes about sexual behavior and sexuality in popular culture	53	32	14	1
Negative portrayals of Christianity in pop culture	41	40	18	1
Growth in the number of people in U.S. who identify with non-Christian religions	29	48	22	1
Christianity is too closely associated with conservative politics	29	38	31	2
Government policies have limited religion’s role in public life	28	36	34	1

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

Source: Survey conducted Feb. 4-15, 2020, among U.S. adults.

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Compared with other Christian groups and especially with religious “nones,” white evangelical Protestants who say Christianity’s influence is declining are more inclined to blame this on society’s changing standards relating to sex and sexuality and on negative portrayals of Christianity in popular culture. By contrast, Catholics and black Protestants are more apt than white evangelicals to attribute Christianity’s declining influence to misconduct by ministers, priests and other religious leaders.

There also are significant partisan divisions regarding the cause of Christianity’s perceived loss of influence. Two-thirds of Democrats who say Christianity’s influence is declining (65%) cite misconduct by religious leaders as a major cause, compared with 52% of Republicans who say this. Democrats also are more likely than Republicans to see Christianity’s association with conservative politics as a major cause of its loss of influence. By contrast, Republicans are much more likely than Democrats to cite changing norms about sexuality as a major cause of Christianity’s declining influence (62% vs. 43%). Republicans also are more likely than Democrats to view negative portrayals of Christianity in pop culture (52% vs. 28%), growth in the number of adherents of non-Christian religions (35% vs. 22%), and government policies limiting religion’s role in public life (36% vs. 18%) as major causes of Christianity’s declining influence.

Most Catholics, black Protestants, religious ‘nones’ cite misconduct by Christian leaders as major cause of Christianity’s declining influence

Among U.S. adults who say Christianity’s influence in American life is declining, % who say each of the following is a major cause of the decline

	Republican/ lean Rep.	Democrat/ lean Dem.	White evangelical Protestant	White Prot., not evang.	Black Protestant	Catholic	Unaffiliated
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Growth in the number of people in U.S. who are not religious	62	58	59	61	41	62	64
Misconduct by Christian leaders	52	65	48	53	64	66	60
More permissive attitudes about sexual behavior and sexuality in popular culture	62	43	72	50	57	56	39
Negative portrayals of Christianity in pop culture	52	28	60	41	43	51	24
Growth in the number of people in U.S. who identify with non-Christian religions	35	22	36	30	29	32	26
Christianity is too closely associated with conservative politics	16	44	17	26	30	27	37
Government policies have limited religion’s role in public life	36	18	43	30	37	30	14

Source: Survey conducted Feb. 4-15, 2020, among U.S. adults.

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Respondents who say Christianity's influence is decreasing also received an open-ended question (in addition to the questions about specific possible reasons): Are there any other reasons for Christianity's waning influence? Just under half of respondents offered an answer, and the responses covered a wide array of topics.

The most common type of response involves large-scale societal and cultural changes happening in the U.S. (14%). This includes mentions of changes in family structure (3%), a general decline in morals in the U.S. (2%) and religion being taken out of schools (2%) as reasons for Christianity's declining influence.

Some respondents also give answers about advances in science and technology and increased educational attainment contributing to a decreased need for religion (6%). The same share cite negative actions by Christians and religious leaders as contributing to pushing people away from Christianity (6%).

Some cite broad societal changes as a reason for Christianity's decreasing influence

Among U.S. adults who say Christianity's influence is decreasing, % who say, in an open-ended question, each of the following is a cause of Christianity's decreasing influence in American life

	%
NET Major cultural/societal changes	14
Change in family structure, deterioration of the nuclear family	3
Money/materialism/selfishness/consumerism	2
Decline in morals	2
People have stopped believing in God/the Bible	2
Society has become more secular/society has undergone major cultural and demographic changes	2
Religion is being taken out of schools/schools are indoctrinating children	2
Young people are no longer interested in religion	1
NET Science/technology/education have replaced need for religion	6
Science/education/modern knowledge replacing religion	5
Technology/social media/the internet	2
NET Actions by Christians/the church are pushing people away	6
Christians are hypocritical/hateful/intolerant	3
The church is too strict/rigid/outdated	1
Misconduct by religious leaders	1
Christians, religious leaders spreading the wrong message/watered down message	1
NET Government/politics	3
Influence of Democrats/liberals	2
Connection between religion and conservative politics	1
People no longer need religion/religion is not a priority/too busy/too lazy	3
Entertainment/Hollywood/celebrities	2
The media	1
Other/unsure	7
No answer	3
No other reason for Christianity's decreasing influence	49
Did not answer question about other causes of Christianity's decreasing influence	6
	100

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

Source: Survey conducted Feb. 4-15, 2020, among U.S. adults.

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Fewer Americans say Christianity’s influence is *increasing*, but these respondents also were asked about several possible reasons for this perceived trend. Half of those who say Christianity’s influence is growing see the Trump administration giving Christians more influence as a “major cause” of the change (51%), and a similar share cite Christians’ efforts to push back against secular trends in society (47%).

Roughly one-in-three cite God’s intervention, positive portrayals of Christianity in popular culture, and Christians’ efforts to build communities of people who watch out for one another as major causes of Christianity’s growing influence. One-in-four Americans who think Christianity’s influence is growing (23%) say that improvements in the way Christian leaders have responded to scandals and misconduct are a major cause of Christianity’s increasing influence, while one-in-five say Christianity’s influence has declined so much that a rebound was inevitable (19%).

Among those who say Christianity’s impact is growing, half point to Trump administration giving renewed influence to Christians

Among U.S. adults who say Christianity’s influence in American life is growing, % who say each of the following is a ___ of the growth

	Major cause %	Minor cause %	Not a cause %	No answer %
The Trump administration giving Christians more influence	51	24	23	2=100
Christians pushing back against secular trends in society	47	31	18	4
God intervening to ensure Christianity prospers	36	13	48	2
Positive portrayals of Christianity in popular culture	36	35	28	2
Christians are building strong communities that watch out for people	34	32	32	2
Church leaders are doing a better job responding to scandals and misconduct	23	31	44	2
Christianity’s influence has declined so much it was bound to increase eventually	19	30	48	3

Note: Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.
 Source: Survey conducted Feb. 4-15, 2020, among U.S. adults.
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Among religious “nones” who think Christianity’s influence in American life is growing, 63% chalk this up to the actions of the Trump administration, compared with 40% of Christians who say this. By contrast, 55% of Christians who think Christianity’s influence is growing see God’s intervention as a major cause, and 51% say this about Christians’ efforts to build strong communities. Just one-in-ten religious “nones” take these positions. Christians also are more apt than religious “nones” to cite positive portrayals of Christianity in pop culture, improved reactions to clerical scandals and misconduct, and an inevitable reversal after a decline as key factors in what they perceive as Christianity’s resurgent influence.

Among those who say Christianity’s influence is growing, Democrats are more likely than Republicans to cite

the Trump administration as a major cause of Christianity’s growing influence. Otherwise, Republicans are more inclined than Democrats to say most of the factors asked about in the survey are “major causes” of Christianity’s renewed influence in American life.

Among Christians who think Christianity’s influence is growing, 55% say this reflects God’s intervention

Among U.S. adults who say Christianity’s influence in American life is growing, % who say each of the following is a major cause of the growth

	Republican/ lean Rep. %	Democrat/ lean Dem. %	Christian %	Unaffiliated %
The Trump administration giving Christians more influence	46	55	40	63
Christians pushing back against secular trends in society	50	46	46	47
God intervening to ensure Christianity prospers	61	23	55	12
Positive portrayals of Christianity in popular culture	50	29	45	23
Christians are building strong communities that watch out for people	55	23	51	12
Church leaders are doing a better job responding to scandals and misconduct	32	17	32	11
Christianity’s influence has declined so much it was bound to increase eventually	25	16	24	13

Source: Survey conducted Feb. 4-15, 2020, among U.S. adults.

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In response to an open-ended question asking about any other reasons why Christianity's influence is increasing in American life, respondents with this perspective most commonly mention the Trump administration and the connection between religion and politics in the U.S. (7%).

Another 3% say that Christianity's growth is due to people seeking comfort and hope in the face of adversity or uncertainty, while similarly small shares mention racism and xenophobia (3%) or the intervention of God (3%). Just over half of people who see Christianity's influence as increasing (55%) do not cite another reason for this trend (in addition to those specifically measured by the survey).

Most do not cite additional reasons for Christianity's growing influence

Among U.S. adults who say Christianity's influence is increasing, % who say, in an open-ended question, that each of the following is a cause of Christianity's increasing influence in American life

	%
Trump/Republicans/conservative political movement/connection between religion and politics	7
People are seeking something in the face of adversity	3
Racism/Islamophobia/xenophobia	3
God has intervened/divine intervention/mention of the end times	3
Christians are pushing back against secular trends/liberal policies	2
Impact of money/lobbying	1
Social media/the internet	1
Ignorance	1
The media	1
Prayer/reading the Bible	1
Other/unsure	10
No answer	6
No other reason for Christianity's increasing influence	55
Did not answer question about other causes of Christianity's increasing influence	5
	100

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

Source: Survey conducted Feb. 4-15, 2020, among U.S. adults.

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Half say Bible should have a great deal or some influence on U.S. laws

Half of U.S. adults say the Bible should have “a great deal” or “some” influence on the country’s laws. This view is most common among white evangelical Protestants (89%) and black Protestants (76%). More than half of white Protestants who do not self-identify as born-again or evangelical Christians also want the Bible to have at least “some” influence on U.S. laws, though people in this group are much less inclined than white evangelicals or black Protestants to say the Bible should have “a great deal” of influence. Catholics are evenly divided on this question; half say the Bible should have at least some influence on U.S. laws, while the other half say the Bible should have little or no influence on American laws.

Eight-in-ten religious “nones,” including 96% of self-described atheists and 90% of agnostics, say the Bible should have little or no influence on U.S. laws. And about seven-in-

Public split on proper influence of Bible on U.S. laws

% of U.S. adults who say the Bible should have ____ influence on laws of U.S.

	NET A great deal/ some %	A great deal %	Some %	NET Not much/ none %	Not much %	None at all %	No answer %
All U.S. adults	49	23	26	50	19	31	1=100
Christian	68	35	33	31	17	14	1
Protestant	76	43	33	23	13	10	1
White evangelical	89	58	31	10	6	4	1
White, not evangelical	56	19	38	43	24	19	1
Black Protestant	76	47	29	22	14	8	2
Catholic	51	19	32	48	26	23	1
White	50	15	34	49	27	22	1
Hispanic	52	21	30	47	24	23	1
Jewish	31	15	17	68	17	51	<1
Unaffiliated	21	6	15	78	21	58	1
Atheist	4	1	4	96	10	86	0
Agnostic	8	2	6	90	19	72	1
Nothing in particular	30	8	22	70	25	45	<1
Republican/lean Rep.	67	34	33	32	18	15	1
Democrat/lean Dem.	33	13	20	66	20	46	1
White	48	22	26	52	19	33	1
Black	62	36	27	36	18	18	1
Hispanic	50	22	28	48	20	28	2
Ages 18-29	30	11	18	69	22	47	1
30-49	43	19	24	57	21	35	<1
50-64	61	32	29	39	16	22	1
65+	64	32	32	35	14	21	1
H.S. or less	58	31	27	41	17	24	1
Some college	49	22	27	50	18	32	1
College grad	38	15	23	61	21	40	1

Note: Figures may not add to 100% or to subtotals indicated due to rounding. Blacks and whites are not Hispanic; Hispanics are of any race.

Source: Survey conducted Feb. 4-15, 2020, among U.S. adults.

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ten Jewish respondents want little or no biblical influence on the country's laws.

The survey shows that Republicans and Democrats are mirror images of each other on this question. Two-thirds of Republicans and those who lean toward the GOP say the Bible should have “a great deal” or “some” influence on the country's laws. By contrast, two-thirds of Democrats say the Bible should not have much, if any, influence on U.S. laws.

There are twice as many Americans ages 65 and older who want the Bible to have an influence on the laws of the land as there are among adults under 30 (64% vs. 30%). And Americans with a high school degree or less education are much more inclined than college graduates to say the Bible should influence U.S. laws (58% vs. 38%).

Respondents who said they think the Bible should have at least “some” influence on U.S. laws were asked a hypothetical follow-up question: When the Bible and the will of the people conflict with each other, which should have more influence on the laws of the United States?

Overall, three-in-ten U.S. adults say they think the Bible should have more influence on the laws of the land in cases where the Bible and the will of the people conflict. This view is most commonly held by white evangelical Protestants, among whom about seven-in-ten say that when the Bible and the will of the people conflict, the Bible should be more influential. Half of black Protestants share this view. Majorities in all other religious groups in this analysis say either that the Bible should have little or no influence on U.S. laws or that it should be subordinate to the will of the people.

Four-in-ten Republicans and Republican leaners say they think that when the Bible and the will of the people conflict, the Bible should have more influence on U.S. laws, while 16% of Democrats share this view.

About seven-in-ten white evangelicals say the Bible should have more influence on U.S. laws than will of the people

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

	NET Bible should have a great deal/ some influence on U.S. laws	When Bible and will of people conflict, which should have more influence on U.S. laws?			NET Bible should have not much/ no influence on U.S. laws	No answer
		Bible	Will of people	No answer		
	%	%	%	%	%	%
All U.S. adults	49	28	19	2	50	1=100
Christian	68	42	23	3	31	1
Protestant	76	51	22	3	23	1
<i>White evangelical</i>	89	68	17	4	10	1
<i>White, not evangelical</i>	56	27	26	3	43	1
<i>Black Protestant</i>	76	50	25	2	22	2
Catholic	51	25	24	2	48	1
<i>White</i>	50	24	24	2	49	1
<i>Hispanic</i>	52	27	23	2	47	1
Jewish	31	12	19	1	68	<1
Unaffiliated	21	7	13	<1	78	1
Atheist	4	1	4	0	96	0
Agnostic	8	2	6	<1	90	1
Nothing in particular	30	11	19	1	70	<1
Republican/lean Republican	67	41	23	2	32	1
Democrat/lean Democratic	33	16	16	1	66	1

Note: Figures may not add to 100% or to subtotals indicated due to rounding. Blacks and whites are not Hispanic; Hispanics are of any race.

Source: Survey conducted Feb. 4-15, 2020, among U.S. adults.

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Methodology

The American Trends Panel survey methodology

The American Trends Panel (ATP), created by Pew Research Center, is a nationally representative panel of randomly selected U.S. adults. Panelists participate via self-administered web surveys. Panelists who do not have internet access at home are provided with a tablet and wireless internet connection. The panel is being managed by Ipsos.

Data in this report is drawn from the panel wave conducted Feb. 4 to Feb. 15, 2020. A total of 6,395 panelists responded out of 7,855 who were sampled, for a response rate of 81%. This does not include three panelists

who were removed from the data due to extremely high rates of refusal or straightlining. The cumulative response rate accounting for nonresponse to the recruitment surveys and attrition is 4.5%. The break-off rate among panelists who logged on to the survey and completed at least one item is 1%. The margin of sampling error for the full sample of 6,395 respondents is plus or minus 1.6 percentage points.

American Trends Panel recruitment surveys

Recruitment dates	Mode	Invited	Joined	Active panelists remaining
Jan. 23 to March 16, 2014	Landline/ cell RDD	9,809	5,338	2,315
Aug. 27 to Oct. 4, 2015	Landline/ cell RDD	6,004	2,976	1,337
April 25 to June 4, 2017	Landline/ cell RDD	3,905	1,628	685
Aug. 8 to Oct. 31, 2018	ABS/web	9,396	8,778	6,417
Aug. 19 to Nov. 30, 2019	ABS/web	5,900	4,720	4,700
	Total	35,014	23,440	15,454

Note: Approximately once per year, panelists who have not participated in multiple consecutive waves or who did not complete an annual profiling survey are removed from the panel. Panelists also become inactive if they ask to be removed from the panel.

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This study featured a stratified random sample from the ATP. The sampling strata were defined by the following variables: religious affiliation, age, ethnicity, education, country of birth (among Hispanics), internet status, party affiliation, voter registration and volunteerism.

The ATP was created in 2014, with the first cohort of panelists invited to join the panel at the end of a large, national, landline and cellphone random-digit-dial survey that was conducted in both English and Spanish. Two additional recruitments were conducted using the same method in 2015 and 2017, respectively. Across these three surveys, a total of 19,718 adults were invited to join the ATP, of which 9,942 agreed to participate.

In August 2018, the ATP switched from telephone to address-based recruitment. Invitations were sent to a random, address-based sample (ABS) of households selected from the U.S. Postal Service's Delivery Sequence File. In each household, the adult with the next birthday was asked to go online to complete a survey, at the end of which they were invited to join the panel. For a random half-sample of invitations, households without internet access were instructed to return a postcard. These households were contacted by telephone and sent a tablet if they agreed to participate. A total of 9,396 were invited to join the panel, and 8,778 agreed to join the panel and completed an initial profile survey. The same recruitment procedure was carried out on Aug. 19, 2019, from which a total of 5,900 were invited to join the panel and 4,720 agreed to join the panel and completed an initial profile survey. Of the 23,440 individuals who have ever joined the ATP, 15,454 remained active panelists and continued to receive survey invitations at the time this survey was conducted.

The U.S. Postal Service's Delivery Sequence File has been estimated to cover as much as 98% of the population, although some studies suggest that the coverage could be in the low 90% range.³

³ AAPOR Task Force on Address-based Sampling. 2016. "[AAPOR Report: Address-based Sampling](#)."

Weighting

The ATP data was weighted in a multistep process that begins with a base weight incorporating the respondents' original selection probability. The next step in the weighting uses an iterative technique that aligns the sample to population benchmarks on the dimensions listed in the accompanying table.

Sampling errors and test of statistical significance take into account the effect of weighting. Interviews are conducted in both English and Spanish.

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.

Weighting dimensions

Variable	Benchmark source
Gender	2018 American Community Survey
Age	
Education	
Race/Hispanic origin	2019 Pew Research Center American Trends Panel Profile Survey
Country of birth among Hispanics	
Home internet access	
Region x Metropolitan status	2019 CPS March Supplement
Religion	2019 Pew Research Center American Trends Panel Profile Survey
Volunteerism	2017 CPS Volunteering & Civic Life Supplement
Voter registration	2018 CPS Voting and Registration Supplement
Party affiliation	Average of the three most recent Pew Research Center telephone surveys.

Note: Estimates from the ACS are based on non-institutionalized adults. Voter registration is calculated using procedures from Hur, Achen (2013) and rescaled to include the total U.S. adult population.

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The following table shows 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:

Group	Unweighted sample size	Plus or minus ...	
Total sample	6,395	1.6 percentage points	
Christian	3,935	2.0 percentage points	
Protestant	2,641	2.4 percentage points	
<i>White evangelical</i>	927	3.8 <i>percentage points</i>	
<i>White, not evangelical</i>	773	4.2 <i>percentage points</i>	
<i>Black Protestant</i>	598	5.6 <i>percentage points</i>	
Catholic	1,188	3.7 percentage points	
<i>White</i>	687	4.3 percentage points	
<i>Hispanic</i>	421	7.1 percentage points	
Jewish	303	7.9 percentage points	
Unaffiliated	1,870	2.9 percentage points	
Atheist	395	6.5 percentage points	
Agnostic	380	6.5 percentage points	
Nothing in particular	1,095	3.8 percentage points	
NET All white Christians	2,480	2.3 percentage points	
Men	2,849	2.4 percentage points	
Women	3,537	2.1 percentage points	
White, non-Hispanic	4,245	1.8 percentage points	
Black, non-Hispanic	775	4.9 percentage points	
Hispanic	927	4.8 percentage points	
Ages 18-29	787	4.4 percentage points	
30-49	2,078	2.7 percentage points	
50-64	1,907	2.8 percentage points	
65+	1,602	3.0 percentage points	
High school or less	1,535	3.1 percentage points	
Some college	1,879	2.7 percentage points	
College graduate+	2,966	2.1 percentage points	
Group	Unweighted sample size	Weighted %	Plus or minus ...
Republican/lean Republican	2,599	45	2.3 percentage points
Democrat/lean Democratic	3,588	51	2.2 percentage points

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