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Why Do Some Americans Leave Their Religion While Others Stay?

Study shows most Americans who leave their childhood religion do so by age 30

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About this research

This Pew Research Center report examines religious switching in the United States, including the reasons people give for staying in or leaving their childhood religion. It also looks at social and demographic factors associated with switching, such as age and political party.

Why did we do this?

The Center conducts high-quality research to inform the public, journalists and leaders. Studying Americans' religious identities is a key part of the Center's long-standing research agenda.

[Learn more about Pew Research Center.](#)

How did we do this?

This report includes findings from a survey of 8,937 U.S. adults who are part of the Center's [American Trends Panel](#) (ATP). The survey was conducted from May 5 to 11, 2025. The survey's overall margin of error is plus or minus 1.4 percentage points.

Here are the [questions](#) from that survey that we used for this report, the [topline](#) and the [survey methodology](#).

This report also includes findings from the Center's [2023-24 Religious Landscape Study](#) (RLS), a survey of 36,908 U.S. adults. It was conducted from July 17, 2023, to March 4, 2024, and has an overall margin of error of plus or minus 0.8 percentage points. The RLS was made possible by The Pew Charitable Trusts, which received support from the Lilly Endowment Inc., Templeton Religion Trust, The Arthur Vining Davis Foundations and the M.J. Murdock Charitable Trust.

Here is the full list of [questions](#) from the RLS, the [topline](#) and the [survey methodology](#).

Table of contents

About Pew Research Center	1
About this research	2
Table of contents	3
Overview	5
Reasons people say they left their childhood religion	8
Reasons people say they are religiously unaffiliated	11
People raised in a religion: Factors in whether they have stayed or left	13
People <i>not</i> raised in a religion: Factors in whether they have joined one	18
The timing of religious switching	19
Why some Americans have left Protestantism, while others stay or join	21
Why do Protestants say they are Protestant?	22
Why people who have become Protestant left their former religion	24
Why religious ‘nones’ who grew up Protestant are now unaffiliated	25
Experiences with being raised Protestant	26
Why some Americans have left Catholicism, while others stay	27
Why do Catholics say they are Catholic?	28
Former Catholics: Why they left the church	30
Why some people who grew up Catholic are now Protestant	31
Why religious ‘nones’ who grew up Catholic are now unaffiliated	32
Experiences with being raised Catholic	33
Why many U.S. adults are ‘nones,’ and why some former ‘nones’ have joined a religion	35
What reasons do people give for <i>not</i> having a religion?	36
Why some people who were not raised in a religion now identify with one	38
Experiences being raised with no religion	39
How parents are raising their children, religiously	40
Comparing how Protestant, Catholic and religiously unaffiliated parents are raising their children	42
Which adult plays the biggest role in how children learn about religion?	44

Comparing current parents of minors with parents of grown children, religiously	45
How many parents have the same religion as their children?	47
Acknowledgments	48
Methodology	50
The American Trends Panel survey methodology	50

Why Do Some Americans Leave Their Religion While Others Stay?

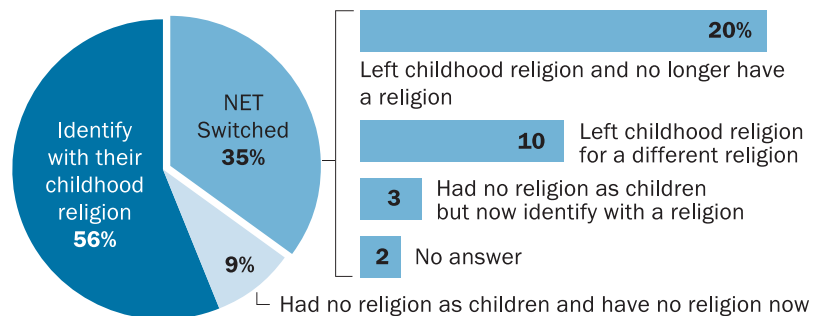
Study shows most Americans who leave their childhood religion do so by age 30

Many U.S. adults (35%) have moved on from the religion of their youth. Yet most Americans have not, including a majority – 56% – who still identify with their childhood religion. Another 9% weren't raised in a religion and still don't have one today.

This Pew Research Center report looks at the choices behind these decisions: why some people continue to identify with their childhood religion, why others have decided to leave it, and why others don't identify with any religion at all.

56% of U.S. adults identify with their childhood religion

% of U.S. adults who ...



Note: The analysis combines people's responses to questions about their childhood religion and about their current religion. "No answer" includes people who answered one of the questions (about their childhood religion or their current religion) but not the other question. Those who didn't answer both questions (fewer than 0.5% of all respondents) aren't shown. Source: Religious Landscape Study of U.S. adults conducted July 17, 2023-March 4, 2024. "Why Do Some Americans Leave Their Religion While Others Stay?"

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The findings about how many people switch religions come from our U.S. Religious Landscape Study (RLS) conducted in 2023-24. But to dig deeper into the reasons people give for switching or staying, we conducted a follow-up survey in May 2025.

The follow-up survey shows that most U.S. adults who still identify with their childhood religion credit the following as *extremely* or *very important* reasons:

- They believe the religion's teachings (64% of adults who identify with their childhood religion say this).
- Their religion fulfills their spiritual needs (61%).
- Their religion gives their life meaning (56%).

Fewer say that other reasons – such as a sense of community (44%), familiarity (39%), traditions (39%), or the religion’s teachings on social and political issues (32%) – are extremely or very important reasons why they continue to identify with their childhood religion as adults.¹

Among Protestants who have held onto their religious identities, 70% cite belief in their religion’s teachings as a key reason why they are Protestant today. Most lifelong Protestants also say they are Protestants today because their faith meets their spiritual needs and gives their life meaning.²

Among Catholics who have held onto their religious identities, 54% say a key reason they are Catholic today is because it fulfills their spiritual needs, 53% cite belief in the religion’s teachings, and 47% say it’s because it gives their life meaning.

¹ The survey also asked everyone identifying with a religion whether there are any other important reasons for doing so, beyond the items we included in our list. Refer to the [topline](#) for the full list of coded responses.

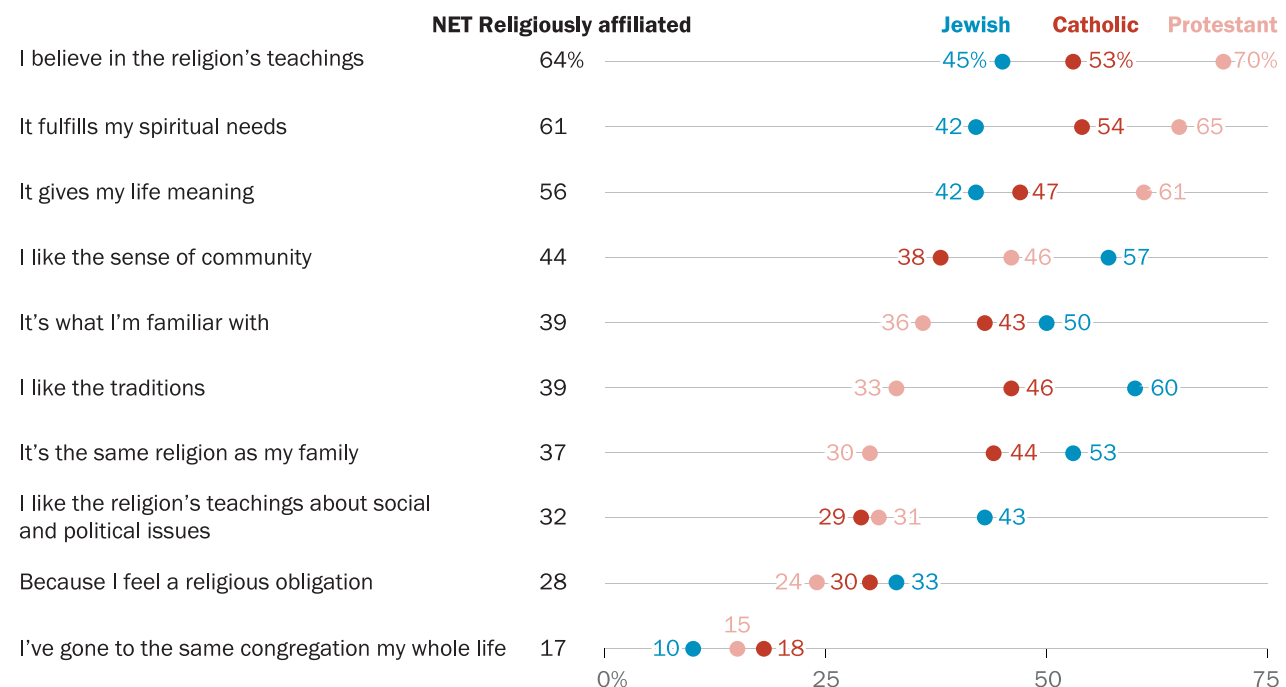
² The survey asked people one question about their childhood religious identity and a separate question about their current religious identity. We use the word “lifelong” to refer to people who provided the same answer to both questions.

Lifelong Jews most commonly mention a somewhat different set of reasons for why they are Jewish. Among U.S. adults who were raised Jewish and still identify as Jewish by religion, 60% say liking the traditions is an extremely or very important reason they are Jewish, and 57% cite liking the sense of community. About half of Jews say they are Jewish because it's their family religion and/or because it's something they're familiar with.

(There were not enough respondents from other groups – such as people raised Muslim who still identify as Muslim, or people raised Buddhist who are still Buddhist – for us to be able to analyze their responses separately.)

Top reasons Jews identify with their religion include liking traditions, sense of community

Among U.S. adults who currently identify with their childhood religion, % who say each of the following is a(n) **extremely/very important reason** why they identify with that religion



Note: Sample sizes of other U.S. religious groups are too small to report separately.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted May 5-11, 2025.

"Why Do Some Americans Leave Their Religion While Others Stay?"

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Americans' choices to stay in or leave their childhood religion also are tied to their religious upbringing, their age and their political leanings.

Reasons people say they left their childhood religion

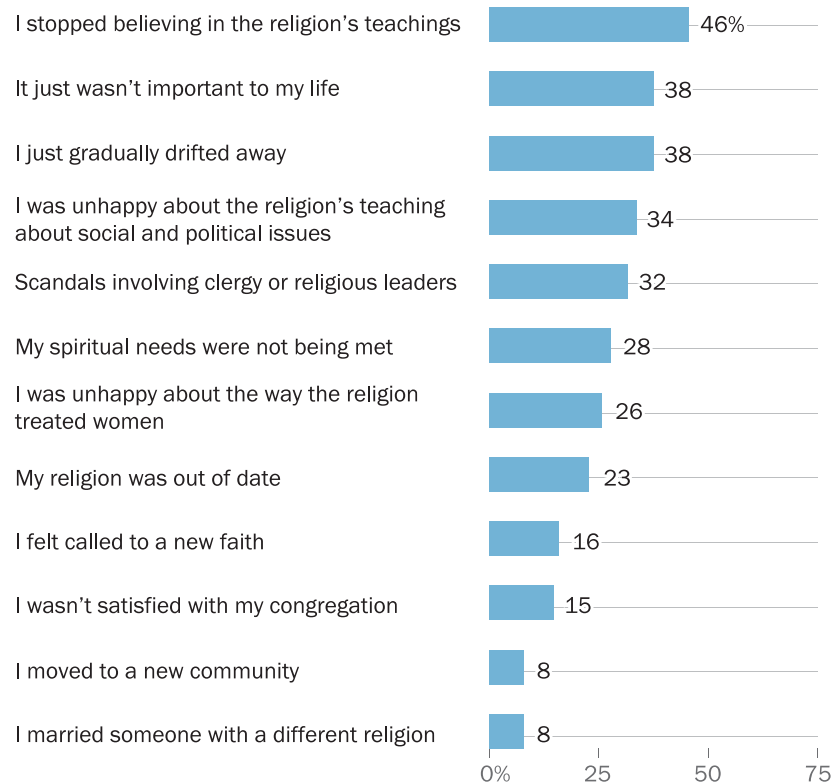
We asked a different group of Americans, those saying they had left their childhood religion, to evaluate the importance of various factors that may have led them to leave. This group includes Americans who were raised in one religion and have switched to *another* religion (10% of U.S. adults) as well as those who no longer identify with *any* religion (20%).

Americans who've left their childhood religion most commonly cite the following as extremely or very important reasons behind their decision:

- They stopped believing in the religion's teachings (cited by 46% of people who were raised in a religion and have left that religion).
- It wasn't important in their life (38%).
- They just gradually drifted away (38%).

46% of people who left their childhood religion say they did so because they stopped believing in the religion's teachings

*Among U.S. adults who were raised in a religion and no longer identify with their childhood religion, % who say each of the following is a(n) **extremely/very important reason** why they no longer identify with their childhood religion*



Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted May 5-11, 2025.
 "Why Do Some Americans Leave Their Religion While Others Stay?"

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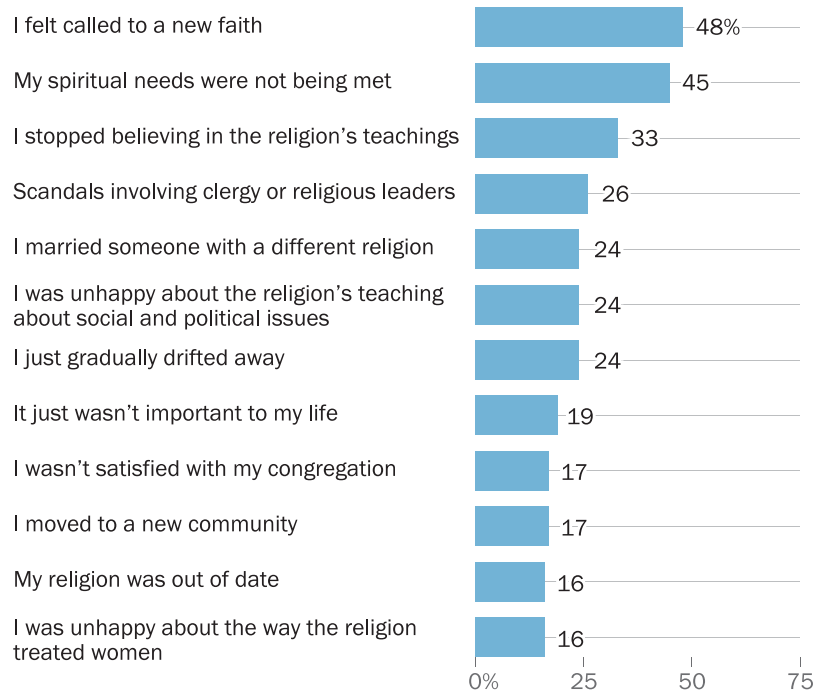
About a third of people in this group say their religion's teachings about social and political issues (34%) or scandals involving clergy or religious leaders (32%) were important reasons for leaving the religion in which they were raised.³

Among people who have left their childhood religion, those who now identify with another religion tend to give different reasons than those who are now religiously unaffiliated.

For example, 48% of those who switched into another religion say feeling “called to a new faith” was an extremely or very important reason for leaving their childhood religion. A similar share of switchers to another religion (45%) say the religion in which they grew up did not meet their spiritual needs.

About half of adults who left their childhood religion for a different one say they felt ‘called’ to their new faith

*Among U.S. adults who left their childhood religion and now identify with a different religion, % who say each of the following is a(n) **extremely/very important reason** why they no longer identify with their childhood religion*



Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted May 5-11, 2025.
 “Why Do Some Americans Leave Their Religion While Others Stay?”

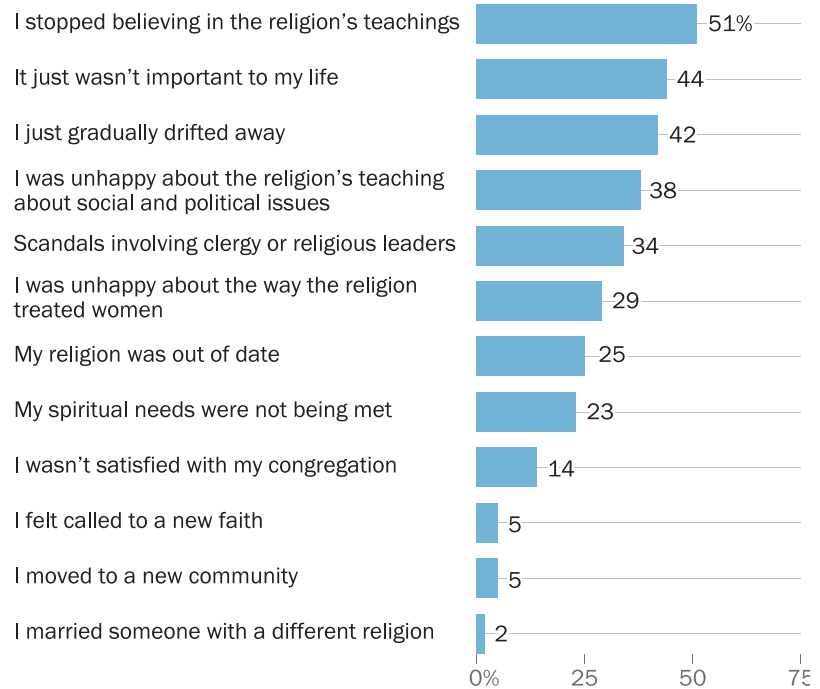
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³ The survey also asked those who left their childhood religion if, in their own words, there were any other important reasons they did so, beyond the items we included in our list. Refer to the [topline](#) for the full list of coded responses.

On the other hand, switchers who are now “nones” are most likely to cite having stopped believing in the religion’s teachings as an important reason for having left their childhood religion (51%). Many also say their childhood religion just wasn’t important in their life (44%) or they “gradually drifted away” from it (42%).

About half of adults who left their childhood religion for no religion say they left because they stopped believing

*Among U.S. adults who left their childhood religion and are now religiously unaffiliated, % who say each of the following is a(n) **extremely/very important reason** why they no longer identify with their childhood religion*



Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted May 5-11, 2025.
 “Why Do Some Americans Leave Their Religion While Others Stay?”

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Reasons people say they are religiously unaffiliated

We directed a third set of questions to adults who are religiously unaffiliated (sometimes called religious “nones”). This group – which consists of people who answer a question about their present religion by saying they are atheist, agnostic or “nothing in particular” – makes up 29% of U.S. adults, according to our [2023-24 Religious Landscape Study](#).

We asked the “nones” in our survey to evaluate the importance of several possible reasons why they *don’t* identify with a religion. The reasons they most commonly describe as extremely or very important include:

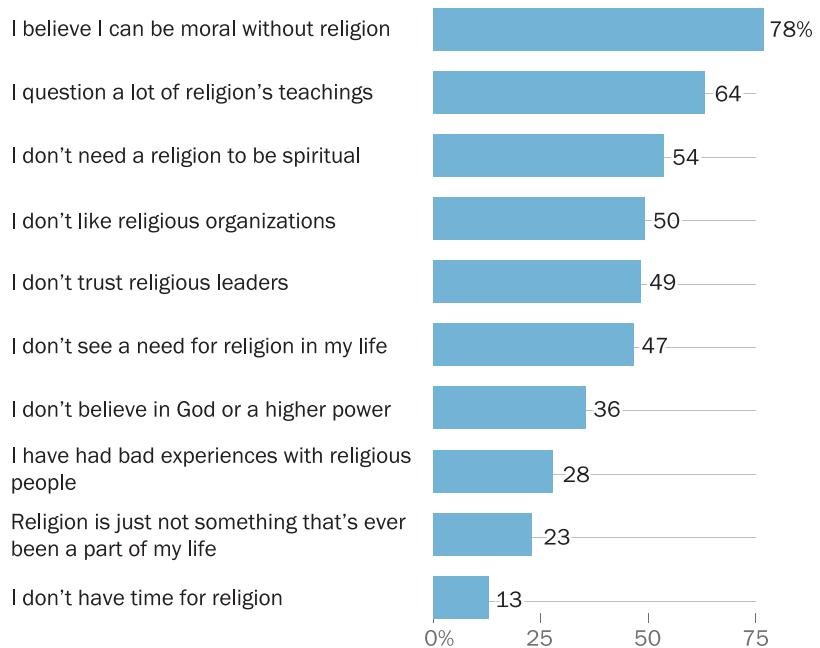
- They believe they can be moral without religion (78%).
- They question a lot of religious teachings (64%).
- They don’t need religion to be spiritual (54%).

Additionally, about half of the religiously unaffiliated Americans surveyed cited not liking religious organizations (50%) or not trusting religious leaders (49%) as extremely or very important reasons.

The survey also asked “nones” if, in their own words, there were any other important reasons why they don’t identify with a religion. Some expressed the view that religion is harmful (6% of all “nones”) or said they believe in God or scripture or are otherwise open to religion, but don’t feel the need to affiliate (6%). Refer to the [topline](#) for the full list of coded responses.

Reasons ‘nones’ say they don’t identify with a religion

*Among U.S. adults who are currently religiously unaffiliated, % who say each of the following is a(n) **extremely/very important reason** why they are not affiliated with a religion*



Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted May 5-11, 2025.
“Why Do Some Americans Leave Their Religion While Others Stay?”

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Our study also found that 3% of U.S. adults weren't raised with a religion but now identify with one. (Read about [why some childhood “nones” say they joined a religion as adults](#) in our later report chapter.)

These are among the key findings of a new analysis based on two Pew Research Center surveys: a survey of 8,937 U.S. adults conducted May 5-11, 2025, on our [American Trends Panel](#); and the 2023-24 [Religious Landscape Study](#), which was conducted from July 17, 2023, to March 3, 2024, among 36,908 U.S. adults.

We got our data about religious switching from two separate questions: “What is your present religion, if any?” and “In what religion were you raised, if any?” On each of these questions, we offered respondents the same list of options: Protestant, Catholic, a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon), Orthodox Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, atheist, agnostic, something else, or “nothing in particular.” Those who said they are atheist, agnostic or “nothing in particular” were combined to create the religiously unaffiliated category.

We count respondents who give the same answer to *both* questions as people who have *not* switched religions. Those who gave different answers are counted as having switched. Switchers include, for example, people who said they were raised Protestant and are now religiously unaffiliated; or who said they were raised Jewish and now consider Buddhism to be their religion; or who said they were not raised in any religion and are now Catholic.

However, this analysis does *not* count people who changed from one Protestant denomination to another as having switched religions. For example, someone who was raised Methodist and is now Baptist is not considered in this report to have switched religions. Similarly, someone who grew up as an atheist but now identifies as agnostic is not counted as having switched, since both of those identities are part of the religiously unaffiliated category.

The rest of this Overview looks at:

- [People raised in a religion: Factors in whether they have stayed or left](#)
- [People *not* raised in a religion: Factors in whether they have joined one](#)
- [The timing of religious switching](#)

People raised in a religion: Factors in whether they have stayed or left

Another way to examine why people leave or stay in their childhood religion is through an analysis of how various factors – such as religious upbringing and social and demographic traits – may be tied to their religious identity as adults.

Religious upbringing

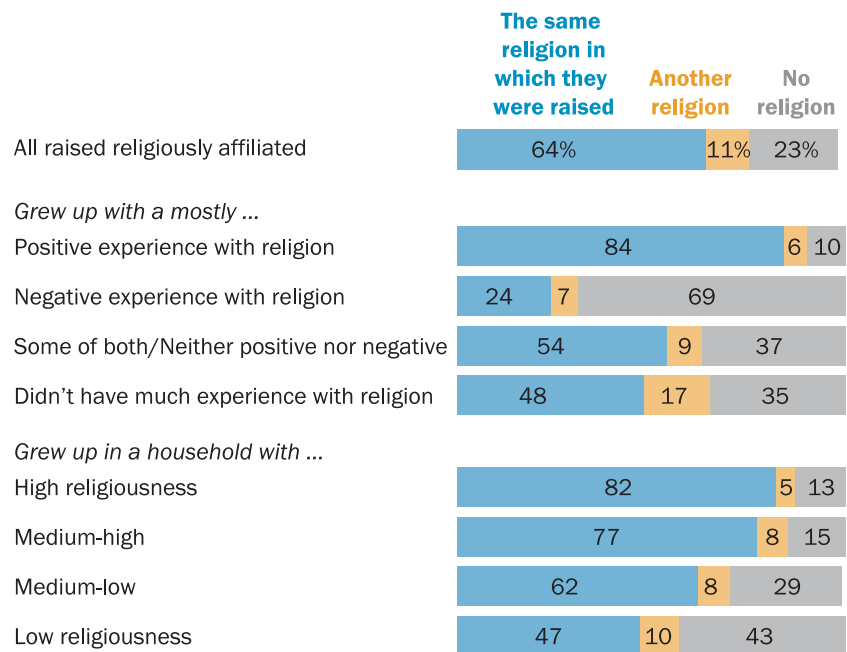
Most U.S. adults (86%) were raised in a religion. Our data shows that the nature of their religious experiences as children – that is, whether they were mostly positive or negative – plays a significant role in whether they stay in their childhood religion as adults.

For example, 84% of Americans who were raised in a religion and who had a mostly *positive* childhood experience with religion still identify with that religion as

adults. Just 10% of people who grew up in a religion and had a positive childhood experience with it are “nones” today, while 6% identify with a different religion than the one they were raised in.

Americans who were raised in a religion and had a positive experience are more likely to have stayed

Among U.S. adults raised in a religion, % who currently identify with ...



Note: Those who did not answer the question about current religious identity in the Religious Landscape Study are not shown. The childhood religiousness scale is based on four questions about how respondents were raised: how often they went to religious services, how often their parents talked with them about religion, the number of religious practices they did regularly, and what they say about the religiousness of their childhood household. Refer to the “About our childhood religiousness scale” box for more details.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted May 5-11, 2025; Religious Landscape Study of U.S. adults conducted July 17, 2023-March 4, 2024.

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In sharp contrast, 69% of those who grew up in a religion and had a *negative* experience with it no longer identify with any religion at all. Far fewer (24%) still identify with their childhood religion, and 7% identify with a different religion.⁴

The survey also finds that adults raised in a religion who grew up in *highly religious* households are more likely to have remained in their childhood religion (82%) than those who grew up in households with *medium-high* (77%), *medium-low* (62%) or *low* levels of religiousness (47%), as categorized on our religiousness scale.

⁴ It may be that having had mostly negative experiences with religion during childhood leads some people to leave their childhood religion. Conversely, it may be that those who leave their childhood religion tend to look back on it more negatively than those who stay in it.

About our childhood religiousness scale

For this analysis, we used four questions to assess the religiousness of people's childhood households: how often they went to religious services, how often their parents talked with them about religion, the number of religious practices they did regularly, and what they say about the religiousness of the household. We recoded responses to these questions so they ranged from 0 (low) to 2 (high), as follows:

- **Attendance at religious services:** 0 for people who seldom or never went to religious services while growing up, 1 for those who went a few times a year, and 2 for those who went at least once or twice a month. Those who did not answer the question were placed in the middle category (1).
- **Parents talked with them about religion:** 0 for people who said their parents talked about religion with them "not too often" or "not at all often" when growing up, 1 for people who said "somewhat often," and 2 for those who said their parents talked about religion with them "extremely often" or "very often" while growing up. Those who did not answer the question were placed in the middle category (1).
- **Regular religious activities:** The survey asked whether people regularly did five different religious activities when they were growing up: saying prayers at night, making religious arts and crafts, saying grace or praying before meals, listening to religious music, and reading religious stories. Those who did four or five of these practices were coded as 2, those who did two to three were coded as 1, and those who did zero to one were coded as 0.
- **What they say about the religiousness of the household:** 0 for people who said they grew up in a "not too religious" or "not at all religious" household, 1 for those who said they grew up in a "somewhat religious" household, and 2 for those who said they grew up in a "extremely religious" or "very religious" household. Those who did not answer the question were placed in the middle category (1).

Each of these four variables were then added together to form a scale from 0 to 8. The lowest two groups (0-1) are in the "low" childhood religiousness category (18% of U.S. adults), the next three groups (2-4) are in the "medium-low" category (31% of U.S. adults), the next two groups (5-6) are in the "medium-high" childhood religiousness category (25% of U.S. adults) and the top two groups (7-8) are in the "high" category (26% of U.S. adults).

Social and demographic traits

Among U.S. adults who were raised in a religion, 73% of Republicans and independents who lean toward the Republican Party still identify with the religion in which they were raised, compared with 56% of Democrats and Democratic leaners.

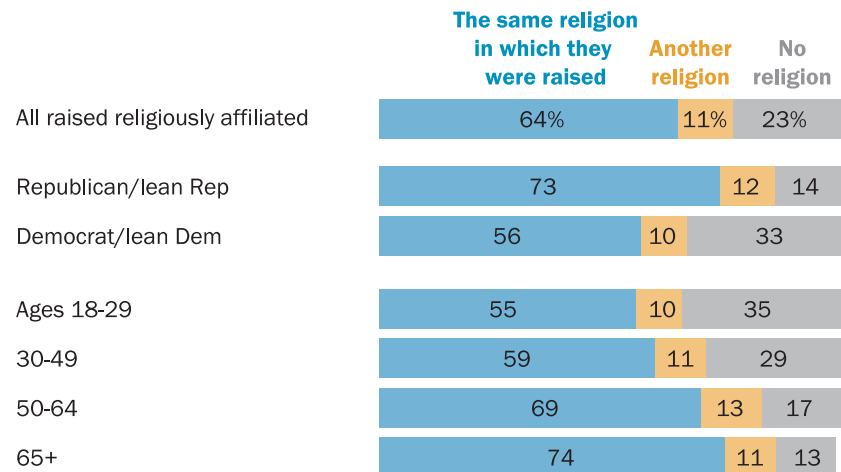
Meanwhile, Democrats who were raised in a religion are more likely to be religious “nones” today compared with Republicans who were raised in a religion.

These patterns also differ by age. Among adults ages 65 and older who were raised in a religion, 74% still identify with

that religion, while 11% identify with a different religion than the one they were raised in, and 13% do not identify with any religion. On the other hand, among adults under 30, 55% still identify with their childhood religion, while 10% now identify with another religion, and 35% are not affiliated with any religion.

Americans who were raised in a religion and are currently Republican are more likely to still identify with their childhood religion

Among U.S. adults raised in a religion, % who currently identify with ...



Note: Those who did not answer the question are not shown.

Source: Religious Landscape Study of U.S. adults conducted July 17, 2023-March 4, 2024. "Why Do Some Americans Leave Their Religion While Others Stay?"

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Retention rates by religious group

When it comes to [retention rates](#), Americans who were raised as Hindus (82%), Muslims (77%) and Jews (76%) are among the most likely to have remained in their childhood religion. Additionally, 73% of those raised without a religious affiliation have remained unaffiliated as adults, and 70% of people who were raised as Protestants still identify that way today. By comparison, retention rates are much lower among Catholics (57%), Latter-day Saints (54%) and Buddhists (45%).

Many U.S. adults who have left their childhood religion have become “nones.” But 14% of Americans raised Catholic are now Protestant. And 11% of those raised as Buddhists or as Latter-

day Saints now identify as Protestants. (For more detail, read the chapter on [religious switching](#) in our 2023-24 Religious Landscape Study report.)

People *not* raised in a religion: Factors in whether they have joined one

Overall, 13% of all U.S. adults say they were raised with no religious affiliation. Most of them – 9% of *all U.S. adults* – were raised as “nones” and are still “nones.” But 3% of American adults were raised as “nones” and now identify with a religion.

About three-quarters (73%) of people who grew up as “nones” remain religiously unaffiliated as adults, while 26% identify with a religion today.

In general, we find that Republicans who were raised as “nones” are more likely than Democrats who were raised as “nones” to identify with a religion as adults. That said, a majority of Republicans who grew up as “nones” have retained this identity (64%).

We also find that older people who were raised as “nones” are more likely than younger people who were raised that way to say they now identify with a religion. For example, 46% of adults ages 65 and older who were raised with no religious affiliation now identify with a religion, compared with 20% of adults under 30 who were raised as “nones.” (It’s also true, of course, that older “nones” have lived longer than younger “nones,” so they’ve had more time to change their religious identities.)

Compared with Democrats, Republicans who were not raised in a religion are more likely to identify with one as adults

Among U.S. adults who were not raised in a religion, % who currently ...

	Have no religion	Have a religion
All raised religiously unaffiliated	73%	26%
Republican/lean Rep	64	34
Democrat/lean Dem	80	19
Ages 18-29	79	20
30-49	77	22
50-64	63	36
65+	52	46

Note: Those who did not answer are not shown.

Source: Religious Landscape Study of U.S. adults conducted July 17, 2023-March 4, 2024. “Why Do Some Americans Leave Their Religion While Others Stay?”

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The timing of religious switching

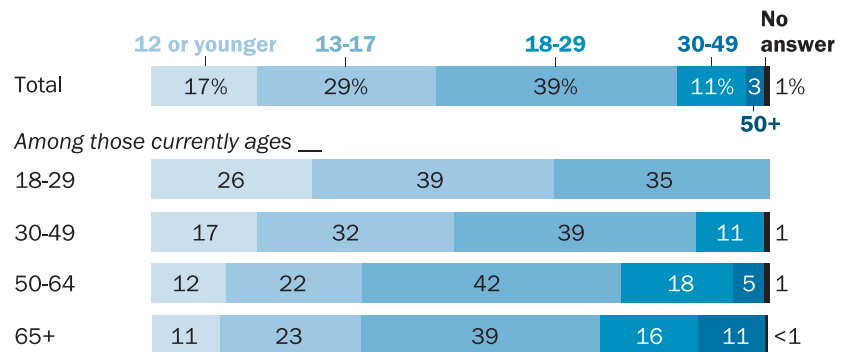
Americans who switch religions tend to do so early in life: 85% who have switched say they did so by the age of 30. This includes 46% who switched as children or teenagers.

Even the oldest adults in our survey, Americans ages 65 and older, are far more likely to say they switched religions before turning 30 than afterward.

People who have switched from a childhood religion to having no religion tend to have made that change earlier in life than people who have switched from one religion to another, or from having no religion to having a religion.

Most U.S. adults who switch religions do so before they are 30

Among U.S. adults who have switched religions, % who say they switched when they were ...



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

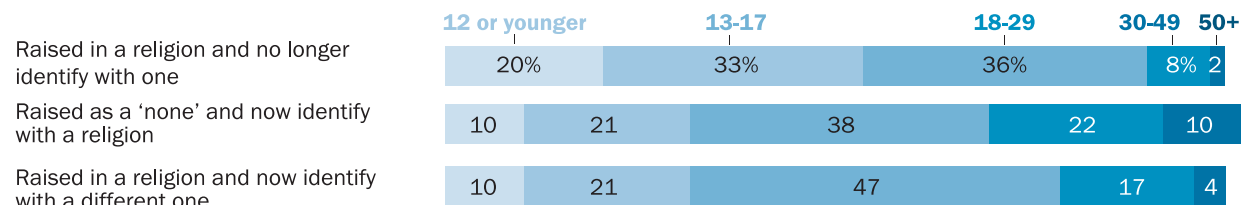
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted May 5-11, 2025.

"Why Do Some Americans Leave Their Religion While Others Stay?"

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Most Americans who were raised in a religion but no longer identify with one left by early adulthood

Among U.S. adults who have switched religions, % who switched when they were ...



Note: Those who did not answer are not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted May 5-11, 2025.

"Why Do Some Americans Leave Their Religion While Others Stay?"

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For example, 53% of people who were raised in a religion but are now religious “nones” say they left their childhood religion before turning 18, and another 36% left prior to turning 30.

By comparison, about three-in-ten people who have switched from one religion to another, or who went from not having a religion to having one, made those moves before age 18.

For more, jump to the following chapters:

- [Why some Americans have left Protestantism, while others stay or join](#)
- [Why some Americans have left Catholicism, while others stay](#)
- [Why many U.S. adults are ‘nones,’ and why some former ‘nones’ have joined a religion](#)
- [How parents are raising their children, religiously](#)

Why some Americans have left Protestantism, while others stay or join

Protestantism, which includes many [denominations of different sizes](#) as well as nondenominational Protestant churches, is the largest subgroup of Christians in the United States. This analysis looks at the reasons Protestant adults give for being Protestants, the reasons *former* Protestants give for having left, and the reasons some other Americans give for having become Protestants. (This chapter does *not* examine religious switching within Protestantism, such as from Methodist to Presbyterian.)

Overall, four-in-ten U.S. adults are Protestants, according to Pew Research Center's [2023-24 Religious Landscape Study](#) (RLS). This includes:

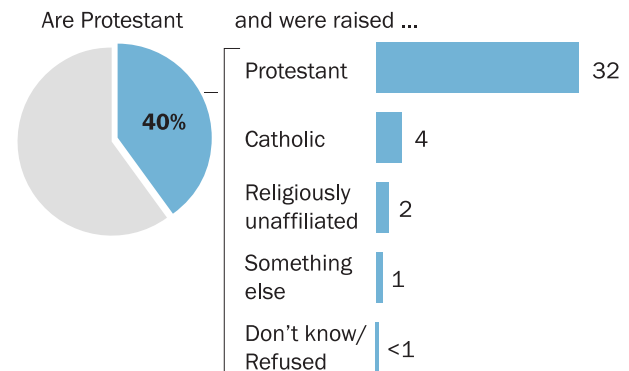
- 32% of U.S. adults who are Protestants today and were also raised Protestant
- 8% of U.S. adults who are Protestants today after having been raised another way (including 4% who were raised Catholic and 3% who were raised in another religion or no religion)

The RLS also finds that 14% of U.S. adults are former Protestants – people who say they were raised Protestant but no longer identify as such. This group includes:

- 10% of U.S. adults who were raised Protestant but now are religiously unaffiliated
- 1% who were raised Protestant but now identify as Catholic
- 2% of U.S. adults who were raised Protestant but now identify with another religion

32% of U.S. adults were raised Protestant and are still Protestant today

% of U.S. adults who ...



Note: Figures may not add to subtotal indicated due to rounding.
Source: Religious Landscape Study of U.S. adults conducted July 17, 2023-March 4, 2024.

"Why Do Some Americans Leave Their Religion While Others Stay?"

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Why do Protestants say they are Protestant?

A Pew Research Center survey conducted in May 2025 finds that most current Protestants cite the following as *extremely* or *very important* reasons why they identify as Protestant today:

- They believe in the religion's teachings (71% of Protestants).
- Their religion fulfills their spiritual needs (66%).
- Their religion gives meaning to their lives (61%).

This data on Protestants' reasons for being Protestant comes from a broader set of survey questions that asked U.S. adults who identify with a religion why they do so. The survey also asked religiously unaffiliated Americans why they *don't* identify with any religion. And it asked people who switched religions between childhood and adulthood why they left their childhood religion.

71% of Protestants say their belief in the religion's teachings is an extremely or very important reason they are Protestant

Among U.S. adults who are Protestants, % who say each of the following is a(n) ___ important reason why they identify as Protestant

	Extremely/ Very	Somewhat	Not too/ Not at all
I believe in the religion's teachings	71%	21%	8%
It fulfills my spiritual needs	66	23	11
It gives my life meaning	61	23	15
I like the sense of community	47	31	21
It's what I'm familiar with	34	35	30
I like the traditions	31	34	34
I like the religion's teachings about social and political issues	31	31	37
It's the same religion as my family	29	28	42
Because I feel a religious obligation	24	28	47
I've gone to the same congregation my whole life	14	17	69

Note: Those who did not answer are not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted May 5-11, 2025.

"Why Do Some Americans Leave Their Religion While Others Stay?"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Former Protestants say the following are extremely or very important reasons why they no longer identify as Protestant:

- They stopped believing in the religion's teachings (45%).
- They just gradually drifted away (40%).
- The religion just wasn't important in their life (38%).

Read on to explore the following:

- [Why people who have become Protestant left their former religion](#)
- [Why religious 'nones' who grew up Protestant are now unaffiliated](#)
- [Experiences with being raised Protestant](#)

45% of former Protestants say they left their childhood religion because they stopped believing in its teachings

Among U.S. adults who are former Protestants, % who say each of the following is a(n) ___ important reason why they no longer identify as Protestant

	Extremely/ Very	Somewhat	Not too/ Not at all
I stopped believing in the religion's teachings	45%	20%	34%
I just gradually drifted away	40	26	34
It just wasn't important to my life	38	26	36
I was unhappy about the religion's teaching about social and political issues	33	23	43
Scandals involving clergy or religious leaders	27	20	52
I was unhappy about the way the religion treated women	25	20	55
My spiritual needs were not being met	22	20	58
My religion was out of date	20	17	62
I wasn't satisfied with my congregation	14	19	67
I felt called to a new faith	13	8	79
I married someone with a different religion	9	6	85
I moved to a new community	7	8	84

Note: Those who did not answer are not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted May 5-11, 2025.

"Why Do Some Americans Leave Their Religion While Others Stay?"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Why people who have become Protestant left their former religion

An estimated 8% of U.S. adults are Protestants who were raised in another religion or in no religion at all.

Our May 2025 survey asked U.S. adults who now identify with a religion other than the one they grew up in why they left their former religion. Around half (51%) of adults who switched to Protestantism from their childhood religion say an extremely or very important reason they left their childhood religion is that their spiritual needs were not being met. A similar share (49%) says feeling called to a new faith was an extremely or very important reason.

Some other factors commonly cited by people who left their childhood religion for Protestantism include no

longer believing in the religion's teachings (35%), scandals involving clergy or religious leaders (29%), and unhappiness with their former religion's teachings about social and political issues (26%).

51% of Americans who were raised in another religion but now identify as Protestants say they left their childhood religion because of unmet spiritual needs

Among U.S. adults who were raised in a religion other than Protestantism and are now Protestant, % who say each of the following is a(n) ___ important reason why they left their childhood religion

	Extremely/ Very	Somewhat	Not too/ Not at all
My spiritual needs were not being met	51%	20%	28%
I felt called to a new faith	49	18	32
I stopped believing in the religion's teachings	35	23	41
Scandals involving clergy or religious leaders	29	19	49
I was unhappy about the religion's teachings about social and political issues	26	21	52
I just gradually drifted away	25	28	46
It just wasn't important to my life	20	22	56
I wasn't satisfied with my congregation	19	19	61
I moved to a new community	17	14	68
My religion was out of date	17	21	60
I was unhappy about the way the religion treated women	16	19	64
I married someone with a different religion	16	13	70

Note: Those who did not answer are not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted May 5-11, 2025.

"Why Do Some Americans Leave Their Religion While Others Stay?"

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Why religious ‘nones’ who grew up Protestant are now unaffiliated

An estimated 10% of U.S. adults are *former* Protestants who are now religiously unaffiliated, meaning they identify religiously as atheist, agnostic or “nothing in particular.” (The unaffiliated are often called religious “nones.”)

When asked to evaluate several possible reasons why they are not affiliated with a religion, 81% of these former Protestants who are now “nones” say an extremely or very important reason is that they believe they can be moral without having a religion.

Other common reasons include:

81% of former Protestants who are now ‘nones’ say an important reason for the change is that they believe they can be moral without religion

Among U.S. adults who were raised Protestant and are now religiously unaffiliated, % who say each of the following is a(n) ___ important reason why they are not affiliated with a religion

	Extremely/ Very	Somewhat	Not too/ Not at all
I believe I can be moral without religion	81%	13%	6%
I question a lot of religion’s teachings	67	21	12
I don’t need a religion to be spiritual	57	21	22
I don’t like religious organizations	49	28	22
I don’t trust religious leaders	49	25	25
I don’t see a need for religion in my life	47	24	29
I don’t believe in God or a higher power	36	14	49
I have had bad experiences with religious people	34	22	43
Religion is just not something that’s ever been a part of my life	13	19	67
I don’t have time for religion	10	16	73

Note: Those who did not answer are not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted May 5-11, 2025.

“Why Do Some Americans Leave Their Religion While Others Stay?”

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

- Questioning a lot of religion’s teachings (cited by 67% of former Protestants who are now “nones”)
- Not needing religion to be spiritual (57%)
- Not liking religious organizations (49%)
- Distrusting religious leaders (49%)

The survey did not include enough adults who were raised Protestant and now identify with a different religion to analyze them separately.

Experiences with being raised Protestant

The May 2025 survey also included several questions about how much religion people had in their lives growing up, and whether their childhood religious experiences were positive or negative.

Upward of eight-in-ten Americans who were raised Protestant and are still Protestant (83%) say they grew up attending religious services at least once or twice a month, while fewer former Protestants who are now religiously unaffiliated (66%) say this.

72% of Americans who were raised Protestant and are still Protestant say they had a mostly positive experience with religion as children

Among U.S. adults who were raised Protestant, % who say ...

	They grew up attending religious services at least monthly	They had a mostly positive experience with religion when growing up	They grew up doing 4-5 religious activities regularly*	They grew up in a household that was extremely/very religious	Their parents talked about religion extremely/very often when they were growing up
Raised Protestant, currently Protestant	83%	72%	49%	41%	34%
Raised Protestant, currently religiously unaffiliated	66	29	27	22	20

* Respondents were asked whether they did each of the following activities on a regular basis when they were growing up: say prayers at night, do religious arts and crafts, say grace or pray before meals, listen to religious music or read religious stories.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted May 5-11, 2025.

"Why Do Some Americans Leave Their Religion While Others Stay?"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

And most Americans who were raised Protestant and are still Protestant say they had a mostly positive experience with religion when they were growing up (72%). Far fewer former Protestants who are now religious "nones" say this (29%).⁵

People raised Protestant who still identify that way also are more likely than those who are now "nones" to say their parents talked about religion extremely or very often; that they grew up in an extremely or very religious household; and that they grew up regularly doing at least four of the five religious activities that we asked them about (including saying prayers at night, saying grace or praying before meals, doing religious arts and crafts, listening to religious music or reading religious stories).

⁵ Respondents were provided the following response options to this question: "Mostly positive" experiences, "Mostly negative," "Some of both" and "Neither positive nor negative." They could also say "I did not have much experience with religion when I was growing up."

Why some Americans have left Catholicism, while others stay

Catholics make up one of the largest religious groups in the United States. This analysis looks at the reasons Catholic adults identify with the faith, as well as the reasons *former* Catholics have left it.

An estimated 19% of U.S. adults are Catholic, according to the [2023-24 Religious Landscape Study](#) (RLS). This group includes:

- 17% of U.S. adults who are Catholic today and who were raised Catholic
- 2% who are Catholic today after having been raised another way, including 1% who were raised Protestants and an additional 1% who were raised in another religion or no religion

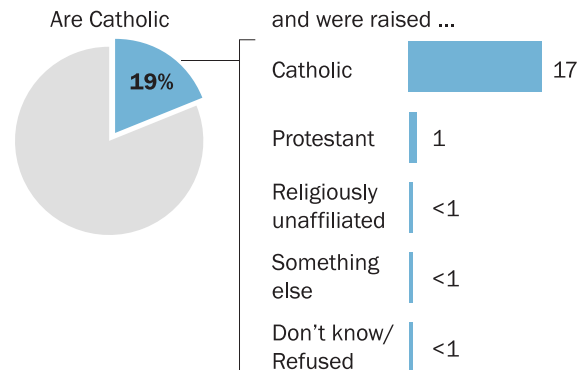
The RLS also finds that 13% of U.S. adults are former Catholics – people who say they were raised in the Catholic faith but no longer identify with it. This group includes:

- 7% of U.S. adults who were raised Catholic but now are religiously unaffiliated
- 6% who were raised Catholic but now identify in another way (in most cases, with some variety of Protestantism; 4% of U.S. adults are former Catholics who are now Protestant)

(For a more detailed look at the connections Americans have to Catholicism, read [our recent report](#) exploring Catholic identity, beliefs and practices, as well as Catholics' views of the church.)

Most current U.S. Catholics were raised in the faith

% of U.S. adults who ...



Note: Figures may not add to subtotal indicated due to rounding.
Source: Religious Landscape Study of U.S. adults conducted July 17, 2023-March 4, 2024.

"Why Do Some Americans Leave Their Religion While Others Stay?"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Why do Catholics say they are Catholic?

A survey we conducted in May 2025 finds that many Catholics in the United States cite the following as *extremely* or *very important* reasons why they identify with the faith today:

- Their religion fulfills their spiritual needs (54% of Catholics cite this reason).
- They believe in the religion's teachings (53%).
- Their religion gives their life meaning (48%).
- They like the traditions (46%).

(To read about what Catholics say is *essential* to being Catholic for them, refer to [our recent report](#).)

Fulfillment of spiritual needs, belief in teachings are top reasons Catholics cite for being Catholic

Among U.S. adults who are Catholic, % who say each of the following is a(n) ___ important reason why they are Catholic

	Extremely/ Very	Somewhat	Not too/ Not at all
It fulfills my spiritual needs	54%	30%	15%
I believe in the religion's teachings	53	33	13
It gives my life meaning	48	31	20
I like the traditions	46	36	17
It's the same religion as my family	43	34	22
It's what I'm familiar with	42	41	17
I like the sense of community	39	37	23
Because I feel a religious obligation	30	36	34
I like the religion's teachings about social and political issues	29	31	39
I've gone to the same congregation my whole life	17	25	57

Note: Those who did not answer are not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted May 5-11, 2025.

"Why Do Some Americans Leave Their Religion While Others Stay?"

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This data on Catholics' reasons for being Catholic comes from a broader set of survey questions that asked U.S. adults who identify with a religion why they do so. The survey also asked religiously unaffiliated Americans why they *don't* identify with any religion, and it asked people who have switched religions between childhood and adulthood why they left their childhood faith.

Here's what *former* Catholics most commonly cite as extremely or very important reasons they no longer identify as Catholics:

- No longer believing in the religion's teachings (46%)
- Scandals involving clergy or religious leaders (39%)
- Being unhappy about the religion's teachings about social and political issues (37%)

Read on to explore the following:

- [Former Catholics: Why they left the church](#)
- [Why some people who grew up Catholic are now Protestant](#)
- [Why religious 'nones' who grew up Catholic are now unaffiliated](#)
- [Experiences with being raised Catholic](#)

46% of former Catholics say a loss of belief was a major reason they left the faith

Among U.S. adults who are former Catholics, % who say each of the following is a(n) ___ important reason why they no longer identify as Catholic

	Extremely/ Very	Somewhat	Not too/ Not at all
I stopped believing in the religion's teachings	46%	25%	29%
Scandals involving clergy or religious leaders	39	25	35
I was unhappy about the religion's teachings about social and political issues	37	24	39
It just wasn't important to my life	36	23	39
My spiritual needs were not being met	36	18	45
I just gradually drifted away	35	27	37
I was unhappy about the way the religion treated women	27	20	52
My religion was out of date	27	21	52
I felt called to a new faith	20	11	68
I wasn't satisfied with my congregation	16	16	67
I moved to a new community	10	9	80
I married someone with a different religion	7	7	85

Note: Those who did not answer are not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted May 5-11, 2025.

"Why Do Some Americans Leave Their Religion While Others Stay?"

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The May 2025 survey did not include enough Catholic respondents who were raised in another religion to analyze their responses separately. For more on why some Americans who were raised in another religion become Catholic, read [this analysis from the February 2025 survey](#).

Former Catholics: Why they left the church

The most widely cited reasons people select for leaving Catholicism vary depending on their *current* religious identity.

For example, among former Catholics who now identify as Protestants, the most commonly cited reasons for having left Catholicism are that their spiritual needs were not being met (52%) and that they felt called to a new faith (49%).

On the other hand, among former Catholics who are now religiously unaffiliated (meaning, they identify religiously as atheist, agnostic or “nothing in particular”), about half say a loss of belief is a major reason they left the church.

When asked why they left the church, former Catholics who are now “nones” also are more

likely than former Catholics who are now Protestant to say the church just wasn’t important in their life and to mention scandals, unhappiness with the church’s social/political views, and having just gradually drifted away.

Former Catholics who are now religious ‘nones’ tend to give different reasons for leaving the faith than former Catholics who are now Protestants

*Among U.S. adults who are former Catholics, % who say each of the following is a(n) **extremely/very important reason** why they no longer identify as Catholic*

	All former Catholics	Former Catholic, now Protestant	Former Catholic, now religiously unaffiliated
I stopped believing in the religion’s teachings	46%	34%	52%
Scandals involving clergy or religious leaders	39	30	44
I was unhappy about the religion’s teachings about social and political issues	37	26	42
My spiritual needs were not being met	36	52	26
It just wasn’t important to my life	36	20	45
I just gradually drifted away	35	24	41
I was unhappy about the way the religion treated women	27	17	33
My religion was out of date	27	18	32
I felt called to a new faith	20	49	4
I wasn’t satisfied with my congregation	16	20	14
I moved to a new community	10	17	5
I married someone with a different religion	7	16	1

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted May 5-11, 2025.
“Why Do Some Americans Leave Their Religion While Others Stay?”

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Why some people who grew up Catholic are now Protestant

Protestants who were raised Catholic make up 4% of all U.S. adults. When asked to rate 10 possible reasons why they now identify as Protestants, many of these former Catholics choose statements about belief and spirituality as extremely or very important.

For example, roughly eight-in-ten former Catholics who have become Protestants say belief in their new religion's teachings is an important reason they are Protestant. And 76% say they are Protestant because it fulfills their spiritual needs.

Many Catholics-turned-

Protestants also say that their current religion gives their life meaning (63%) and that they like the sense of community (56%) when asked why they are Protestants today.

79% of Protestant adults who grew up Catholic cite belief in teachings as extremely or very important reason they are Protestant

Among U.S. adults who were raised Catholic and are now Protestant, % who say each of the following is a(n) ___ important reason why they identify as Protestant

	Extremely/ Very	Somewhat	Not too/ Not at all
I believe in the religion's teachings	79%	16%	5%
It fulfills my spiritual needs	76	17	7
It gives my life meaning	63	20	18
I like the sense of community	56	28	16
I like the religion's teachings about social and political issues	34	28	38
It's what I'm familiar with	29	20	50
Because I feel a religious obligation	24	19	56
I like the traditions	24	30	45
It's the same religion as my family	17	16	67
I've gone to the same congregation my whole life	4	11	84

Note: Those who did not answer are not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted May 5-11, 2025.

"Why Do Some Americans Leave Their Religion While Others Stay?"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Why religious ‘nones’ who grew up Catholic are now unaffiliated

Religious “nones” who were raised Catholic make up 7% of all U.S. adults. When asked to evaluate reasons why they are not affiliated with a religion, 81% say an extremely or very important reason is that they believe they can be moral without religion.

Many also cite the following as extremely or very important reasons why they no longer have a religion:

- They question a lot of religion’s teachings (67%).
- They don’t need a religion to be spiritual (57%).
- They don’t like religious organizations (53%).
- They distrust religious leaders (52%).

When asked why they are religiously unaffiliated, 81% of ‘nones’ who used to be Catholic say an extremely or very important reason is that they can be moral without religion

Among U.S. adults who were raised Catholic and are now religiously unaffiliated, % who say each of the following is a(n) ___ important reason why they are not affiliated with a religion

	Extremely/ Very	Somewhat	Not too/ Not at all
I believe I can be moral without religion	81%	11%	8%
I question a lot of religion’s teachings	67	18	14
I don’t need a religion to be spiritual	57	20	22
I don’t like religious organizations	53	26	21
I don’t trust religious leaders	52	26	21
I don’t see a need for religion in my life	47	23	30
I don’t believe in God or a higher power	33	17	48
I have had bad experiences with religious people	30	23	46
Religion is just not something that’s ever been a part of my life	16	23	59
I don’t have time for religion	14	16	68

Note: Those who did not answer are not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted May 5-11, 2025.

“Why Do Some Americans Leave Their Religion While Others Stay?”

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Experiences with being raised Catholic

The May 2025 survey also included several questions about the extent to which people grew up with religion in their lives, and whether their childhood religious experiences were positive or negative.

The majority of lifelong Catholics say they had a mostly positive experience with religion when growing up (73%). Fewer *former* Catholics say they had a mostly positive experience with religion as children. Those who are now Protestant (56%) are more likely to say this than those who no longer identify with any religion (26%).⁶

Lifelong Catholics are more likely than former Catholics to say they had positive religious experience as kids

Among U.S. adults who were raised Catholic, % who say ...

	They grew up attending religious services at least monthly	They had a mostly positive experience with religion when growing up	They grew up in a household that was extremely/very religious	They grew up doing 4-5 religious activities regularly*	Their parents talked about religion extremely/very often when they were growing up
Raised Catholic, currently Catholic	84%	73%	40%	31%	28%
Raised Catholic, currently Protestant	77	56	32	31	19
Raised Catholic, currently religiously unaffiliated	68	26	22	17	15

* Respondents were asked whether they did each of the following activities on a regular basis when they were growing up: say prayers at night, do religious arts and crafts, say grace or pray before meals, listen to religious music or read religious stories.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted May 5-11, 2025.

"Why Do Some Americans Leave Their Religion While Others Stay?"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

People raised Catholic who, as adults, are either Catholic or Protestant, are generally more likely to have had a religious upbringing than people raised Catholic who are now "nones." For example, 84% of U.S. adults who were raised Catholic and still identify as Catholic say they grew up attending Mass at least once or twice a month, as did 77% of former Catholics who are now Protestant. By comparison, 68% of former Catholics who are now religious "nones" say they went to Mass weekly as children.

There's a similar pattern with childhood religious activities. We asked people if they grew up doing five types of religious activities on a regular basis: saying prayers at night, making religious arts and crafts, saying grace or praying before meals, listening to religious music, and reading religious

⁶ Respondents were provided the following response options to this question: "Mostly positive" experiences, "Mostly negative," "Some of both" and "Neither positive nor negative." They could also say "I did not have much experience with religion when I was growing up."

stories. We find that among adults who were raised Catholic, those who are still Catholic or are now Protestant are more likely to have regularly done more of these activities as children than those who are now religious “nones.”

Why many U.S. adults are ‘nones,’ and why some former ‘nones’ have joined a religion

In recent decades, religiously unaffiliated Americans – atheists, agnostics and people who identify religiously as “nothing in particular” – have risen as a share of the U.S. adult population.

This chapter explores the reasons why unaffiliated Americans (often called religious “nones”) don’t identify with a religion, and why many of them say they left the religion in which they were raised. Additionally, it looks at why some people who were raised without a religion have joined one as adults.

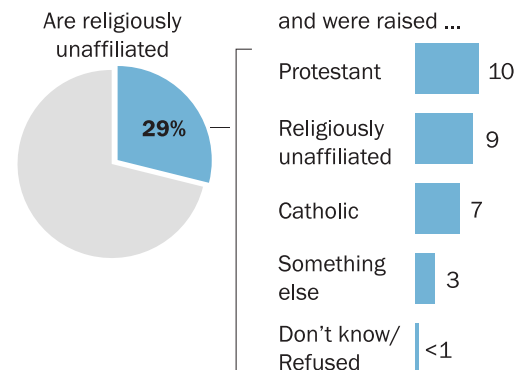
Overall, 29% of U.S. adults are religiously unaffiliated, according to the 2023-24 Religious Landscape Study (RLS). This group includes:

- 10% of all U.S. adults who are “nones” today and were raised Protestant
- 9% who were raised as “nones”
- 7% who were raised Catholic
- 3% who were raised in another religion (other than Protestantism or Catholicism)

Additionally, the RLS finds that 3% of U.S. adults were raised as “nones” but now identify with a religion, including 2% who are now Protestant and 1% who identify with other religions.

Most U.S. religious ‘nones’ were raised in a religion

% of U.S. adults who ...



Note: Figures may not add to subtotal indicated due to rounding.
Source: Religious Landscape Study of U.S. adults conducted July 17, 2023-March 4, 2024.

“Why Do Some Americans Leave Their Religion While Others Stay?”

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

What reasons do people give for *not* having a religion?

A Pew Research Center survey conducted in May 2025 finds that most “nones” cite the following as *extremely* or *very important* reasons why they are not affiliated with a religion:

- They believe they can be moral without religion (cited by 78% of “nones”).
- They question a lot of religion’s teachings (64%).
- They don’t need religion to be spiritual (54%).

This data on the reasons “nones” don’t identify with a religion comes from a set of survey questions given to Americans of various religious backgrounds about the reasons for their current affiliation (or lack of affiliation).

78% of ‘nones’ say an extremely or very important reason why they have no religion is that they can be moral without it

Among U.S. adults who are religiously unaffiliated, % who say each of the following is a(n) ___ important reason why they are not affiliated

	Extremely/ Very	Somewhat	Not too/ Not at all
I believe I can be moral without religion	78%	12%	8%
I question a lot of religion’s teachings	64	20	15
I don’t need a religion to be spiritual	54	20	25
I don’t like religious organizations	50	25	24
I don’t trust religious leaders	49	25	25
I don’t see a need for religion in my life	47	23	29
I don’t believe in God or a higher power	36	16	46
I have had bad experiences with religious people	28	23	48
Religion is just not something that’s ever been a part of my life	23	23	52
I don’t have time for religion	13	17	70

Note: Those who did not answer are not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted May 5-11, 2025.

“Why Do Some Americans Leave Their Religion While Others Stay?”

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

We also asked “nones” who were raised in a religion to rate the importance of 12 possible reasons why they left their childhood religion. They could describe each statement as an extremely, very, somewhat, not too, or not at all important reason why they left their childhood religion.

Here are a few reasons selected by many “nones” as extremely or very important:

- They stopped believing in the religion’s teachings (51%).
- It just wasn’t important to their life (44%).
- They just gradually drifted away (42%).

Read on to explore the following:

- [Why some people who were not raised in a religion now identify with one](#)
- [Experiences being raised with no religion](#)

51% of ‘nones’ who left their childhood religion say an important reason they did so is that they stopped believing in the religion’s teachings

Among U.S. adults who were raised in a religion and are now religiously unaffiliated, % who say each of the following is a(n) ___ important reason why they no longer identify with their childhood religion

	Extremely/ Very	Somewhat	Not too/ Not at all
I stopped believing in the religion’s teachings	51%	22%	26%
It just wasn’t important to my life	44	24	30
I just gradually drifted away	42	26	32
I was unhappy about the religion’s teaching about social and political issues	38	23	38
Scandals involving clergy or religious leaders	34	22	44
I was unhappy about the way the religion treated women	29	20	50
My religion was out of date	25	20	54
My spiritual needs were not being met	23	18	58
I wasn’t satisfied with my congregation	14	16	69
I felt called to a new faith	5	5	88
I moved to a new community	5	7	87
I married someone with a different religion	2	4	93

Note: Those who did not answer are not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted May 5-11, 2025.

“Why Do Some Americans Leave Their Religion While Others Stay?”

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Why some people who were not raised in a religion now identify with one

The transition from not having a religion as a child to identifying with one as an adult is relatively rare. Overall, 3% of U.S. adults have made this switch.

Americans who were raised as “nones” and have since joined a religion cite a variety of reasons for why they identify with their current religion. Of 10 possible reasons offered in the survey, the ones most commonly selected as *extremely* or *very important* are:

- They believe in the religion’s teachings (61%).
- It fulfills their spiritual needs (60%).
- It gives their life meaning (55%).

6 in 10 former ‘nones’ who now identify with a religion say they do so because they believe in the religion’s teachings, it fulfills their spiritual needs

Among U.S. adults who were raised religiously unaffiliated and now identify with a religion, % who say each of the following is a(n) ___ important reason why they identify with a religion

	Extremely/ Very	Somewhat	Not too/ Not at all
I believe in the religion’s teachings	61%	24%	14%
It fulfills my spiritual needs	60	29	11
It gives my life meaning	55	29	16
I like the sense of community	39	35	26
I like the religion’s teachings about social and political issues	24	26	46
I like the traditions	20	33	46
It’s what I’m familiar with	20	33	47
It’s the same religion as my family	18	17	64
Because I feel a religious obligation	17	26	53
I’ve gone to the same congregation my whole life	2	12	86

Note: Those who did not answer are not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted May 5-11, 2025.

“Why Do Some Americans Leave Their Religion While Others Stay?”

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Experiences being raised with no religion

The May 2025 survey also included several questions about how much religion people had in their lives as children. The survey finds that people who are religious “nones” today are less likely than adults who identify with a religion to say they:

- Attended religious services at least once or twice a month as children (50% vs. 78%)
- Had a mostly positive experience with religion while growing up (23% vs. 69%)⁷
- Grew up regularly doing four or five religious activities that we asked about (18% vs. 40%)
- Grew up in an extremely or very religious household (17% vs. 39%)
- Had parents who spoke extremely or very often about religion (14 % vs. 31%)

Americans who identify with a religion much more likely than ‘nones’ to say they had a mostly positive experience with religion as kids

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

	Grew up attending religious services at least monthly	Had a mostly positive experience with religion when growing up	Grew up doing 4-5 religious activities regularly*	Grew up in a household that was extremely/very religious	Parents talked about religion extremely/very often when they were growing up
Currently identify with a religion	78%	69%	40%	39%	31%
Currently religiously unaffiliated	50	23	18	17	14

* Respondents were asked whether they did each of the following activities on a regular basis when they were growing up: say prayers at night, do religious arts and crafts, say grace or pray before meals, listen to religious music or read religious stories.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted May 5-11, 2025.

“Why Do Some Americans Leave Their Religion While Others Stay?”

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

⁷ Respondents were provided the following response options to this question: “Mostly positive” experiences, “Mostly negative,” “Some of both,” and “Neither positive nor negative.” They could also say “I did not have much experience with religion when I was growing up.”

How parents are raising their children, religiously

The religiousness of U.S. adults is strongly linked with [how much religion they had in their lives as kids](#). So we wondered: How are parents today raising their children – the next generation of adults – when it comes to religion?

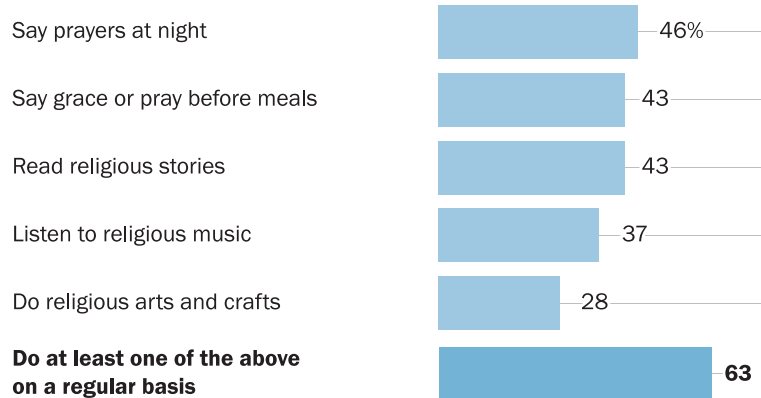
In our May 2025 survey, we asked parents how often their children attend religious services, how often they talk with their kids about religion, how religious their household is, and whether their children have the same religion they do. We found that:

- 43% of parents say their children attend religious services at least monthly.
- 25% say they talk with their children about religion extremely or very often; an additional 31% say they do this somewhat often.
- 22% say they are raising their children in extremely or very religious households; 34% say their children are being raised in a somewhat religious household.

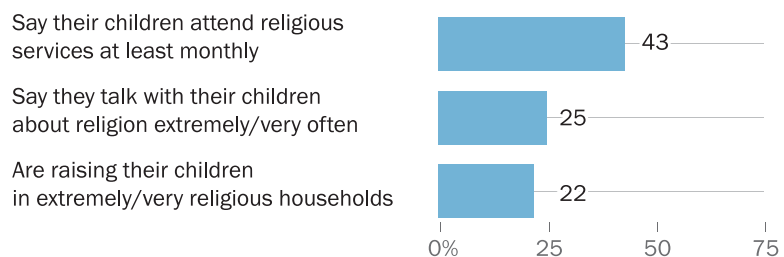
The survey also asked parents about various religious activities their children might do on a regular basis, such as saying prayers at night, saying grace or praying before meals, reading religious stories, listening to religious music, or doing religious arts and crafts. Overall, 63% of parents say their children do *at least one* of those five activities on a regular basis.

46% of parents say their children regularly say prayers at night

% of U.S. parents of children under the age of 18 who say their children do each of the following on a regular basis



% of U.S. parents of children under the age of 18 who ...



Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted May 5-11, 2025.

"Why Do Some Americans Leave Their Religion While Others Stay?"

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Read on to explore the following:

- [Comparing how Protestant, Catholic and religiously unaffiliated parents are raising their children](#)
- [Which adult plays the biggest role in how children learn about religion?](#)
- [Comparing current parents of minors with parents of grown children, religiously](#)
- [How many parents have the same religion as their children?](#)

Comparing how Protestant, Catholic and religiously unaffiliated parents are raising their children

Overall, 43% of parents of children under 18 say their kids attend religious services at least monthly. One-quarter say they talk with their children about religion extremely or very often, and 22% say they are raising their children in extremely or very religious households.

Protestant parents are more likely than Catholic parents to say their children attend religious services at least monthly (61% vs. 47%). A

higher share of Protestants (38%) than Catholics (24%) also report that they often talk with their kids about religion, and more Protestant parents than Catholic ones describe their households as extremely or very religious (35% vs. 20%). Religiously unaffiliated parents are far less likely to report these things.

Many U.S. parents say their children regularly participate in various religious activities, such as saying prayers at night (46%), saying grace before meals (43%), reading religious stories (43%), listening to religious music (37%), or doing religious arts and crafts (28%).

Overall, 27% of parents say their children take part in *at least four* of these activities on a regular basis. This includes 42% of Protestant parents who report that their children do at least four of these activities regularly, as do 25% of Catholic parents. Far fewer religiously unaffiliated parents say the same about their children (3%).

61% of Protestant parents say their children attend religious services at least monthly

% of U.S. parents of children under 18 who ...

	Say their children attend religious services at least monthly	Say they talk with their children about religion extremely/very often	Say they are raising their children in extremely/very religious households
Parents of children under 18	43%	25%	22%
Protestant	61	38	35
Catholic	47	24	20
Religiously unaffiliated	7	4	1

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted May 5-11, 2025.
 “Why Do Some Americans Leave Their Religion While Others Stay?”

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63% of Protestant parents, 57% of Catholic parents say their kids regularly say prayers at night

% of U.S. parents of children under 18 who say their children do each of the following on a regular basis

	Say prayers at night	Say grace or pray before meals	Read religious stories	Listen to religious music	Do religious arts and crafts	Do 4-5 of these activities regularly
Parents of children under 18	46%	43%	43%	37%	28%	27%
Protestant	63	58	61	56	37	42
Catholic	57	47	46	28	30	25
Religiously unaffiliated	12	11	12	8	5	3

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted May 5-11, 2025.

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Which adult plays the biggest role in how children learn about religion?

The survey also asked parents, “Who is more responsible for how your children learn about religion?” The options included “Me,” “My spouse or partner,” “Another person,” “It is shared equally between myself and another person,” or “No one – my children don’t receive religious instruction.”

The data shows that mothers are more likely than fathers to say they are taking the lead role in their children’s religious upbringing (39% vs. 17%). Fathers are more likely than mothers to say someone else (such as a spouse or partner) is taking the lead on this front.

Many mothers and fathers say their children’s religious upbringing is being shared equally between themselves and someone else or that their children aren’t receiving religious instruction.

Mothers are more likely than fathers to say they are primarily responsible for how their children learn about religion

“Who is more responsible for how your children learn about religion?” (%)

	Me	Someone else (such as a spouse/partner or another person)	Shared equally between myself and another person	No one, my child isn’t receiving religious instruction	No answer
Fathers	17%	27%	38%	17%	<1%=100%
Mothers	39	13	34	13	1

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

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted May 5-11, 2025.

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Comparing current parents of minors with parents of grown children, religiously

The May 2025 survey asked these same questions to parents of grown (now adult) children, asking what their children did when they were growing up.⁸

In some ways, the survey indicates that today's parents of children under 18 are raising their children as religiously as parents of grown children did. For example, parents of minors and parents of adult children are about equally likely to say they talk(ed) with their kids

about religion extremely or very often, and also to say they are raising (or raised) their children in an extremely or very religious household.

However, parents of grown children are more likely than today's parents of children under 18 to say their children attend(ed) religious services at least monthly (63% vs. 43%). Likewise, parents of adult children are more likely to report that their children regularly said prayers at night or grace or prayers before meals than current parents are to say the same.

Parents in both categories are about equally likely to say their children read religious stories or do/did religious arts and crafts.

And when it comes to listening to religious music, parents of children under 18 are slightly *more* likely than parents of adult children to say their children regularly listen(ed) to it.

Most parents of adult children say their kids attended religious services at least monthly, 43% of parents of children under 18 say the same

% of U.S. parents who ...

	Say their children attend/attended religious services at least monthly	Say they talk/talked with their children about religion extremely/very often	Are raising/Have raised their kids in extremely/very religious households
Parents of children under 18	43%	25%	22%
Parents whose children are all 18+	63	24	21

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted May 5-11, 2025.

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⁸ Some parents have both adult children *and* children under 18. Any parent who has children under 18 was asked about how they are currently raising their children under 18, even if they also have adult children. Only parents who have adult children, and no children under 18, were asked what they did with their adult children when they were growing up. For some of these parents, many years have passed since their children were minors, which means these parents drew from older memories to answer the question.

What do parents say about their children's religious activities?

% of U.S. parents who say their children do/did each of the following on a regular basis

	Say/Said prayers at night	Say/Said grace or pray before meals	Read religious stories	Listen/ Listened to religious music	Do/Did religious arts and crafts	Does/Did 4-5 of these activities regularly
Parents of children under 18	46%	43%	43%	37%	28%	27%
Parents whose children are all 18+	56	51	45	32	28	28

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted May 5-11, 2025.

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How many parents have the same religion as their children?

Most parents say that they and their children have the same religion. Among parents of children under 18 years old, 81% say this.

Fewer parents of adult children (64%) say their children have the same religion that they do.

Most parents have the same religion as their children

% of U.S. parents who say their children ___ as/than them

	Have the same religion	Have different religions	Some have the same religion, and others do not	No answer
Parents of children under 18	81%	7%	10%	2%=100%
Protestant	90	4	6	<1
Catholic	91	4	5	<1
Religiously unaffiliated	72	10	13	4

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

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted May 5-11, 2025.

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Methodology

The American Trends Panel survey methodology

Overview

Much of this report is based on data from Wave 170 of the American Trends Panel (ATP), Pew Research Center’s nationally representative panel of randomly selected U.S. adults. The survey was conducted from May 5 to 11, 2025. A total of 8,937 panelists responded out of 9,531 who were sampled, for a survey-level response rate of 94%.

The cumulative response rate accounting for nonresponse to the recruitment surveys and attrition is 3%. The break-off rate among panelists who logged on to the survey and completed at least one item is less than 1%. The margin of sampling error for the full sample of 8,937 respondents is plus or minus 1.4 percentage points.

SSRS conducted the survey for Pew Research Center via online (n=8,720) and live telephone (n=217) interviewing. Interviews were conducted in both English and Spanish.

To learn more about the ATP, read “[About the American Trends Panel](#).”

Panel recruitment

Since 2018, the ATP has used address-based sampling (ABS) for recruitment. A study cover letter and a pre-incentive are mailed to a stratified, random sample of households selected from the U.S. Postal Service’s Computerized Delivery Sequence File. This Postal Service file has been estimated to cover 90% to 98% of the population.⁹ Within each sampled household, the adult with the next birthday is selected to participate. Other details of the ABS recruitment protocol have changed over time but are available upon request.¹⁰ Prior to 2018, the ATP was recruited using landline and cellphone random-digit-dial surveys administered in English and Spanish.

A national sample of U.S. adults has been recruited to the ATP approximately once per year since 2014. In some years, the recruitment has included additional efforts (known as an “oversample”) to improve the accuracy of data for underrepresented groups. For example, Hispanic adults, Black adults and Asian adults were oversampled in 2019, 2022 and 2023, respectively.

⁹ AAPOR Task Force on Address-based Sampling. 2016. “[AAPOR Report: Address-based Sampling](#).”

¹⁰ Email pewsurveys@pewresearch.org.

Sample design

The overall target population for this survey was noninstitutionalized persons ages 18 and older living in the United States. All active ATP members who previously completed ATP Wave 162 were invited to participate in this wave. Respondent weights are adjusted to account for differential probabilities of selection as described in the Weighting section below.

Questionnaire development and testing

The questionnaire was developed by the Center in consultation with SSRS. The web program used for online respondents was rigorously tested on both PC and mobile devices by the SSRS project team and Center researchers. The SSRS project team also populated test data that was analyzed in SPSS to ensure the logic and randomizations were working as intended before launching the survey.

Incentives

All respondents were offered a post-paid incentive for their participation. Respondents could choose to receive the post-paid incentive in the form of a check or gift code to Amazon.com, Target.com, or Walmart.com. Incentive amounts ranged from \$5 to \$20 depending on whether the respondent belongs to a part of the population that is harder or easier to reach. Differential incentive amounts were designed to increase panel survey participation among groups that traditionally have low survey response propensities.

Data collection protocol

The data collection field period for this survey was May 5 to 11, 2025. Surveys were conducted via self-administered web survey or by live telephone interviewing.

For panelists who take surveys online: Postcard notifications were mailed to a subset on May 5.¹¹ Survey invitations were sent out in two separate launches: soft launch and full launch. Sixty panelists were included in the soft launch, which began with an initial invitation sent on May 5. All remaining English- and Spanish-speaking sampled online panelists were included in the full launch and were sent an invitation on May 6.

¹¹ The ATP does not use routers or chains in any part of its online data collection protocol, nor are they used to direct respondents to additional surveys. Postcard notifications for web panelists are sent to 1) panelists who were recruited within the last two years and 2) panelists recruited prior to the last two years who opt to continue receiving postcard notifications.

Invitation and reminder dates for web respondents, ATP Wave 170

	Soft launch	Full launch
Initial invitation	May 5, 2025	May 6, 2025
First reminder	May 8, 2025	May 8, 2025
Final reminder	May 10, 2025	May 10, 2025

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Panelists participating online were sent an email invitation and up to two email reminders if they did not respond to the survey. ATP panelists who consented to SMS messages were sent an SMS invitation with a link to the survey and up to two SMS reminders.

For panelists who take surveys over the phone with a live interviewer: Prenotification postcards were mailed on May 2. Soft launch took place on May 5 and involved dialing until a total of five interviews had been completed. All remaining English- and Spanish-speaking sampled phone panelists' numbers were dialed throughout the remaining field period. Panelists who take surveys via phone can receive up to six calls from trained SSRS interviewers.

Data quality checks

To ensure high-quality data, Center researchers performed data quality checks to identify any respondents showing patterns of satisficing. This includes checking for whether respondents left questions blank at very high rates or always selected the first or last answer presented. As a result of this checking, two ATP respondents were removed from the survey dataset prior to weighting and analysis.

Weighting

The ATP data is weighted in a process that accounts for multiple stages of sampling and nonresponse that occur at different points in the panel survey process. First, each panelist begins with a base weight that reflects their probability of recruitment into the panel. These weights are then calibrated to align with the population benchmarks in the accompanying table to correct for nonresponse to recruitment surveys and panel attrition. If only a subsample of panelists was invited to participate in the wave, this weight is adjusted to account for any differential probabilities of selection.

Among the panelists who completed the survey, this weight is then calibrated again to align with the population benchmarks identified in the accompanying table and trimmed at the 1st and 99th percentiles to reduce the loss in precision stemming from variance in the weights. Sampling errors and tests of statistical significance take into account the effect of weighting.

American Trends Panel weighting dimensions

Variable	Benchmark source
Age (detailed)	2023 American Community Survey (ACS)
Age x Gender	
Education x Gender	
Education x Age	
Race/Ethnicity x Education	
Race/Ethnicity x Gender	
Race/Ethnicity x Age	
Born inside vs. outside the U.S. among Hispanics and Asian Americans	
Years lived in the U.S.	
Census region x Metropolitan status	
Volunteerism	2023 CPS Volunteering & Civic Life Supplement
Voter registration	2020 CPS Voting and Registration Supplement
Frequency of internet use	2024 National Public Opinion Reference Survey (NPORS)
Religious affiliation	
Party affiliation x Race/Ethnicity	
Party affiliation x Age	
Party affiliation among registered voters	

Note: Estimates from the ACS are based on noninstitutionalized 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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Confirming childhood and current religious identity

All of the respondents in Wave 170 also participated in Wave 162, which we conducted in February 2025. Wave 162 asked respondents about their current religion (“What is your present religion, if any?”). Wave 162 also asked respondents about their childhood religion (“Thinking about when you were a child, in what religion were you raised, if any?”). Each question had the following response options:

- Protestant (for example, Baptist, Methodist, non-denominational, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Pentecostal, Episcopalian, Church of Christ, Congregational/United Church of Christ, Holiness, Reformed, Church of God, etc.)
- Roman Catholic
- Mormon (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints or LDS)
- Orthodox (such as Greek, Russian, or some other Orthodox church)
- Jewish
- Muslim
- Buddhist
- Hindu
- Atheist
- Agnostic
- Something else (please specify)
- Nothing in particular

In Wave 170, most respondents were asked to confirm both their current religious identity and their childhood religious identity from Wave 162.¹² For instance, people who said in Wave 162 that they are Catholic were asked in Wave 170, “In a previous survey we asked what your current religion is, and you indicated you are Catholic. Do we have that right?” And people who said in Wave 162 that they were raised Catholic were asked in Wave 170, “And you also indicated that as a child, you were raised Catholic. Do we have that right?”

Asking respondents to confirm their religion was necessary because Wave 170 included lots of questions about religious switching and other topics that required filling in blanks based on the respondent’s religious background. For instance, people who were raised Catholic but who now identify as atheist were asked about the reasons for why they are “atheist” today. Conversely,

¹² Respondents who indicated their current or childhood religion was “Something else” or who didn’t answer one or both questions were not asked to confirm their religion.

people who were raised atheist but are now Catholic were asked about the reasons for why they are “Catholic” today.

Overall, 92% of respondents who were asked to confirm their religious identity did so, while 8% did not.

Throughout this report, analysis of the Wave 170 data that looks at people within religious categories (i.e., analysis of Protestants or Catholics, or of religiously unaffiliated people) is based on respondents who confirmed both their current religion and their childhood religion from Wave 162. Similarly, all analyses that look at religious trajectories (i.e., people who have switched religions or people who still identify with their childhood religion) are based on respondents who successfully confirmed both their current religion and their childhood religion from Wave 162.¹³

¹³ We checked to see what difference it would make if our analysis was based on all respondents, and not just on those who confirmed their religion. The results reported here would not change meaningfully if they were based on all respondents rather than restricted to those who confirmed their religion.

The table titled “Sample sizes and margins of error, ATP Wave 170” 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.

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.

Sample sizes and margins of error, ATP Wave 170

Group	Unweighted sample size	Plus or minus ...
Total sample	8,937	1.4 percentage points
Parents of children under 18	2,298	2.7 percentage points
Parents whose children are all 18+	4,140	2.0 percentage points
<i>Subgroups based on those who confirmed their childhood and current religious identities</i>		
Religiously affiliated	5,922	1.7 percentage points
Religiously unaffiliated	2,239	2.8 percentage points
<i>Same religious identity as childhood</i>		
Religiously affiliated	5,152	1.8 percentage points
Protestant	3,022	2.3 percentage points
Catholic	1,505	3.3 percentage points
Jewish	330	9.2 percentage points
Religiously unaffiliated	533	5.8 percentage points
<i>Different religious identity than childhood</i>		
Currently religiously affiliated	770	4.6 percentage points
Currently religiously unaffiliated	1,706	3.1 percentage points
Ages 18-29	263	7.5 percentage points
30-49	901	4.1 percentage points
50-64	653	4.9 percentage points
65+	652	5.0 percentage points
Raised in a religion and no longer has one	2,277	2.7 percentage points
Raised Catholic, now 'none'	662	5.1 percentage points
Raised Protestant, now 'none'	886	4.3 percentage points
Raised as a 'none' and now identify with a religion	199	8.7 percentage points
Raised in a religion and now identify with a different one	571	5.5 percentage points
Raised Catholic, now Protestant	337	6.9 percentage points
<i>Parents of children under 18</i>		
Protestant	868	4.2 percentage points
Catholic	362	6.6 percentage points
Religiously unaffiliated	607	5.3 percentage points

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Dispositions and response rates

Final dispositions, ATP Wave 170

	AAPOR code	Total
Completed interview	1.1	8,937
Logged in (web)/Contacted (CATI), but did not complete any items	2.11	107
Started survey; broke off before completion	2.12	44
Never logged on (web)/Never reached on phone (CATI)	2.20	441
Survey completed after close of the field period	2.27	0
Other non-interview	2.30	0
Completed interview but was removed for data quality	2.90	2
Total panelists sampled for the survey		9,531
Completed interviews	I	8,937
Partial interviews	P	0
Refusals	R	151
Non-contact	NC	441
Other	O	2
Unknown household	UH	0
Unknown other	UO	0
Not eligible	NE	0
Total		9,531
AAPOR RR1 = $I / (I+P+R+NC+O+UH+UO)$		94%

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Cumulative response rate, ATP Wave 170

	Total
Weighted response rate to recruitment surveys	11%
% of recruitment survey respondents who agreed to join the panel, among those invited	73%
% of those agreeing to join who were active panelists at start of Wave 170	35%
Response rate to Wave 170 survey	94%
Cumulative response rate	3%

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