

Religion Among the Millennials

*Less Religiously Active Than Older Americans,
But Fairly Traditional In Other Ways*

MILLENNIALS

A PORTRAIT OF GENERATION NEXT

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RELIGION AMONG THE MILLENNIALS

Table of Contents

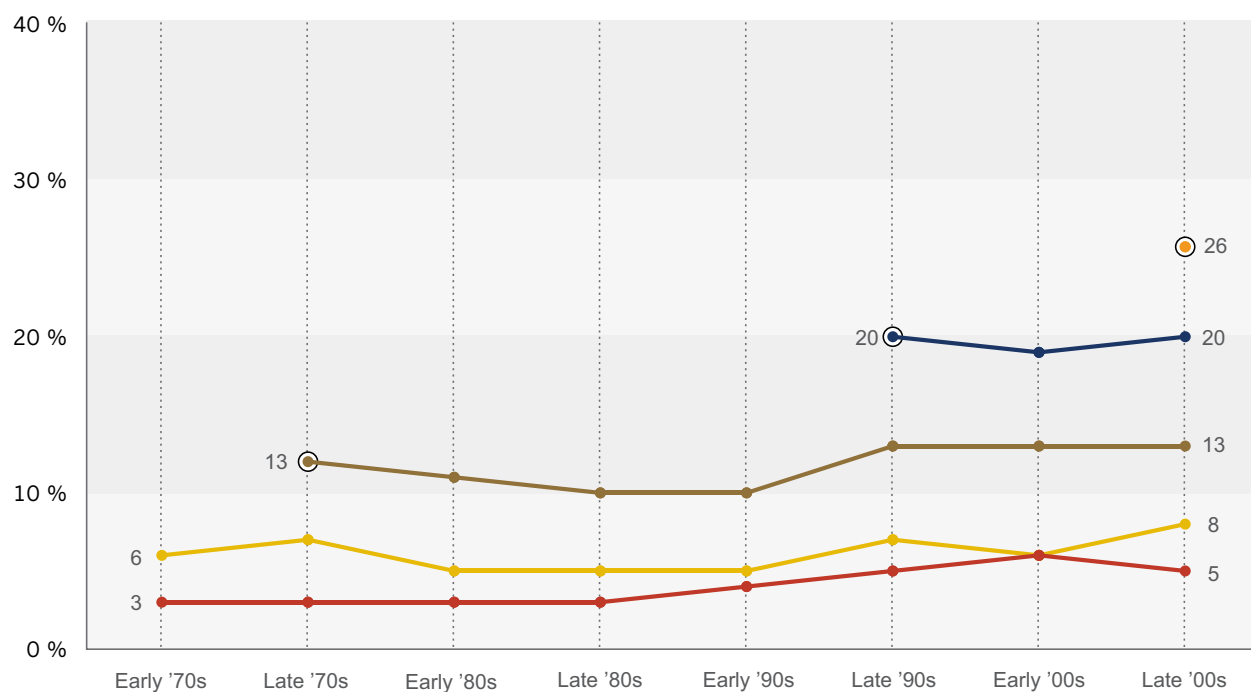
Introduction and Overview	1
Religious Affiliation	3
Worship Attendance	6
Other Religious Practices	8
Religious Attitudes and Beliefs	10
Social and Culture War Issues	18
More Information	25
Appendix	26

Introduction and Overview

By some key measures, Americans ages 18 to 29 are considerably less religious than older Americans. Fewer young adults belong to any particular faith than older people do today. They also are less likely to be affiliated than their parents' and grandparents' generations were when they were young. Fully one-in-four members of the Millennial generation – so called because they were born after 1980 and began to come of age around the year 2000 – are unaffiliated with any particular faith. Indeed, Millennials are significantly more unaffiliated than members of Generation X were at a comparable point in their life cycle (20% in the late 1990s) and twice as unaffiliated as Baby Boomers were as young adults (13% in the late 1970s). Young adults also attend religious services less often than older Americans today. And compared with their elders today, fewer young people say that religion is very important in their lives.

Young People Less Religiously Affiliated

Percent unaffiliated with a religion, by generation



Source: General Social Surveys.

Question Wording: What is your religious preference?

Is it Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, some other religion or no religion?

- Millennial (born 1981 or later)
- Gen X (born 1965-80)
- Boomer (born 1946-64)
- Silent (born 1928-45)
- Greatest (born before 1928)
- Indicates point when generations were at comparable ages

Yet in other ways, Millennials remain fairly traditional in their religious beliefs and practices. Pew Research Center surveys show, for instance, that young adults' beliefs about life after death and the existence of heaven, hell and miracles closely resemble the beliefs of older people today. Though young adults pray less often than their elders do today, the number of young adults who say they pray every day rivals the portion of young people who said the same in prior decades. And though belief in God is lower among young adults than among older adults, Millennials say they believe in God with absolute certainty at rates similar to those seen among Gen Xers a decade ago. This suggests that some of the religious differences between younger and older Americans today are not entirely generational but result in part from people's tendency to place greater emphasis on religion as they age.

In their social and political views, young adults are clearly more accepting than older Americans of homosexuality, more inclined to see evolution as the best explanation of human life and less prone to see Hollywood as threatening their moral values. At the same time, Millennials are no less convinced than their elders that there are absolute standards of right and wrong. And they are slightly more supportive than their elders of government efforts to protect morality, as well as somewhat more comfortable with involvement in politics by churches and other houses of worship.

These and other findings are discussed in more detail in the remainder of this report by the Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life. It explores the degree to which the religious characteristics and social views of young adults differ from those of older people *today*, as well as how Millennials compare with previous generations *when they were young*.

Daily Prayer Among Young Adults, by Decade

	Among adults ages 18-29 in the...		
	1980s	1990s	2000s
Pray daily	41	40	45
Pray less often	59	60	55
	100	100	100
N	2,130	1,224	1,679

Source: General Social Surveys

Question wording: About how often do you pray?
[RESPONSE CATEGORIES INCLUDE: Several times a day, once a day, several times a week, once a week, less than once a week, never.]

A Note on Sources and Methods

This report is based on data from a variety of sources, including Pew Research Center surveys, which are used primarily to compare young adults with older adults today. General Social Surveys and Gallup surveys are used primarily for cohort analyses, which compare young adults today with previous generations when they were in their 20s and early 30s. While the surveys explore similar topics, exact question wording and results vary from survey to survey.

Present-day comparisons are made between adults ages 18-29 and those age 30 and older. By contrast, the cohort analyses define generations based on respondents' year of birth. There is significant – but not complete – overlap between the two approaches. That is, in the present-day analyses, depending on the year of the survey being analyzed, some in the 18-29 age group are actually young members of Generation X (defined here as those born between 1965 and 1980) and not true members of the Millennial Generation (defined here as those born after 1980).

Religious Affiliation

Compared with their elders today, young people are much less likely to affiliate with any religious tradition or to identify themselves as part of a Christian denomination. Fully one-in-four adults under age 30 (25%) are unaffiliated, describing their religion as “atheist,” “agnostic” or “nothing in particular.” This compares with less than one-fifth of people in their 30s (19%), 15% of those in their 40s, 14% of those in their 50s and 10% or less among those 60 and older. About two-thirds of young people (68%) say they are members of a Christian denomination and 43% describe themselves as Protestants, compared with 81% of adults ages 30 and older who associate with Christian faiths and 53% who are Protestants.

	Religious Composition of Age Groups								
	Total Pop.	Total 18-29	Total 30+	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70+	
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	
Christian	78	68	81	76	80	80	84	88	
Protestant	51	43	53	47	52	54	57	62	
<i>Evangelical Churches</i>	26	22	27	26	28	27	29	30	
<i>Mainline Churches</i>	18	12	19	16	17	20	21	26	
<i>Historically Black Churches</i>	7	8	7	6	7	7	7	6	
Catholic	24	22	24	25	25	23	24	23	
Mormon	2	2	2	2	2	1	2	1	
Jehovah's Witness	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	
Orthodox	1	1	1	1	1	1	<0.5	1	
Other Christian	<0.5	<0.5	<0.5	<0.5	<0.5	<0.5	1	<0.5	
Other Religions	5	6	4	5	4	5	5	4	
Jewish	2	2	2	1	1	2	2	2	
Muslim	1	1	<0.5	1	<0.5	<0.5	<0.5	<0.5	
Buddhist	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	<0.5	
Hindu	<0.5	<0.5	<0.5	1	<0.5	<0.5	<0.5	<0.5	
Other World Religions	<0.5	<0.5	<0.5	<0.5	<0.5	<0.5	<0.5	<0.5	
Other Faiths	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	
Unaffiliated	16	25	14	19	15	14	10	8	
<i>Religious Unaffiliated*</i>	6	9	5	7	6	5	3	3	
<i>Secular Unaffiliated*</i>	6	9	6	7	6	6	4	3	
<i>Atheist</i>	2	3	1	2	1	1	1	1	
<i>Agnostic</i>	2	4	2	2	2	2	2	1	
DK/REF	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	
	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	
N	35,556	4,242	30,453	5,085	6,738	7,379	5,517	5,734	

Source: 2007 U.S. Religious Landscape Survey, Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life

Throughout this analysis, figures may not add to 100 and nested figures may not add to the subtotals indicated due to rounding.

* The “religious unaffiliated” category includes those who describe their faith as “nothing in particular” but say that religion is somewhat or very important in their lives. The “secular unaffiliated” category includes those who describe their faith as “nothing in particular” and say that religion is not too important or not at all important in their lives (or who decline to say how important religion is in their lives). For more details on question wording and the classification of Protestant traditions, see the U.S. Religious Landscape Survey report, <http://religions.pewforum.org/pdf/report-religious-landscape-study-full.pdf>.

The large proportion of young adults who are unaffiliated with a religion is a result, in part, of the decision by many young people to leave the religion of their upbringing without becoming involved with a new faith. In total, nearly one-in-five adults under age 30 (18%) say they were raised in a religion but are now unaffiliated with any particular faith. Among older age groups, fewer say they are now unaffiliated after having been raised in a faith (13% of those ages 30-49, 12% of those ages 50-64, and 7% of those ages 65 and older).

	Switched from ...				N
	Affiliated to unaffiliated	Unaffiliated to affiliated	One faith to another/switched within tradition*	Have not switched	
	%	%	%	%	
Total population	13	4	27	57=100	35,556
Ages 18-29	18	4	20	58=100	4,242
Ages 30+	11	4	29	56=100	30,453
Ages 30-49	13	4	27	56=100	11,823
Ages 50-64	12	3	30	55=100	10,484
Ages 65+	7	3	30	60=100	8,146

Source: 2007 U.S. Religious Landscape Survey, Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life

*Includes people who have switched faiths within religious traditions such as within Protestantism (e.g., from Baptist to Methodist) and within the unaffiliated (e.g., from atheist to agnostic). Also includes respondents who refused to specify childhood faith but did specify current faith, as well as those who refused to specify current faith but did specify childhood faith.

Young people’s lower levels of religious affiliation are reflected in the age composition of major religious groups, with the unaffiliated standing out from other religious groups for their relative youth. Roughly one-third of the unaffiliated population is under age 30 (31%), compared with 20% of the total population.

Data from the General Social Surveys (GSS), which have been conducted regularly since 1972, confirm that young adults are not just more unaffiliated than their elders today but are also more unaffiliated than young people have been in recent decades. In GSS surveys conducted since 2000, nearly one-quarter of people ages 18-29 have described their religion as “none.” By comparison, only about half as many young adults were unaffiliated in the 1970s and 1980s.

	18-29	30-49	50-64	65+	N
	%	%	%	%	
Total Population	20	39	25	16=100	34,695
Protestant	17	38	26	20=100	18,494
<i>Evangelical Churches</i>	17	39	26	19=100	9,281
<i>Mainline Churches</i>	14	36	28	23=100	7,271
<i>Hist. Black Churches</i>	24	36	24	15=100	1,942
Catholic	18	41	24	16=100	7,856
Mormon	24	42	19	15=100	565
Jehovah’s Witness	21	39	25	14=100	207
Orthodox	18	38	27	17=100	358
Jewish	20	29	29	22=100	664
Muslim*	29	48	18	5=100	1,027
Buddhist	23	40	30	7=100	410
Hindu	18	58	19	5=100	250
Unaffiliated	31	40	20	8=100	4,947
<i>Religious Unaffiliated</i>	30	43	20	7=100	1,662
<i>Secular Unaffiliated</i>	29	41	21	8=100	1,965
Atheist	37	36	16	12=100	502
Agnostic	34	34	22	9=100	818

* Source for Muslims is “Muslim Americans: Middle Class and Mostly Mainstream,” Pew Research Center, 2007. All other results from the 2007 U.S. Religious Landscape Survey, Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life.

Percentages have been adjusted to exclude nonresponse.

Among Millennials *who are affiliated with a religion*, however, the intensity of their religious affiliation is as strong today as among previous generations when they were young. More than one-third of religiously affiliated Millennials (37%) say they are a “strong” member of their faith, the same as the 37% of Gen Xers who said this at a similar age and not significantly different than among Baby Boomers when they were young (31%).

Religious Affiliation among Young Adults, by Decade				
	Among adults ages 18-29 in the...			
	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s
Unaffiliated (no religion)	12	12	16	23
Affiliated	88	88	84	77
	100	100	100	100
N	2,722	3,434	2,525	2,711

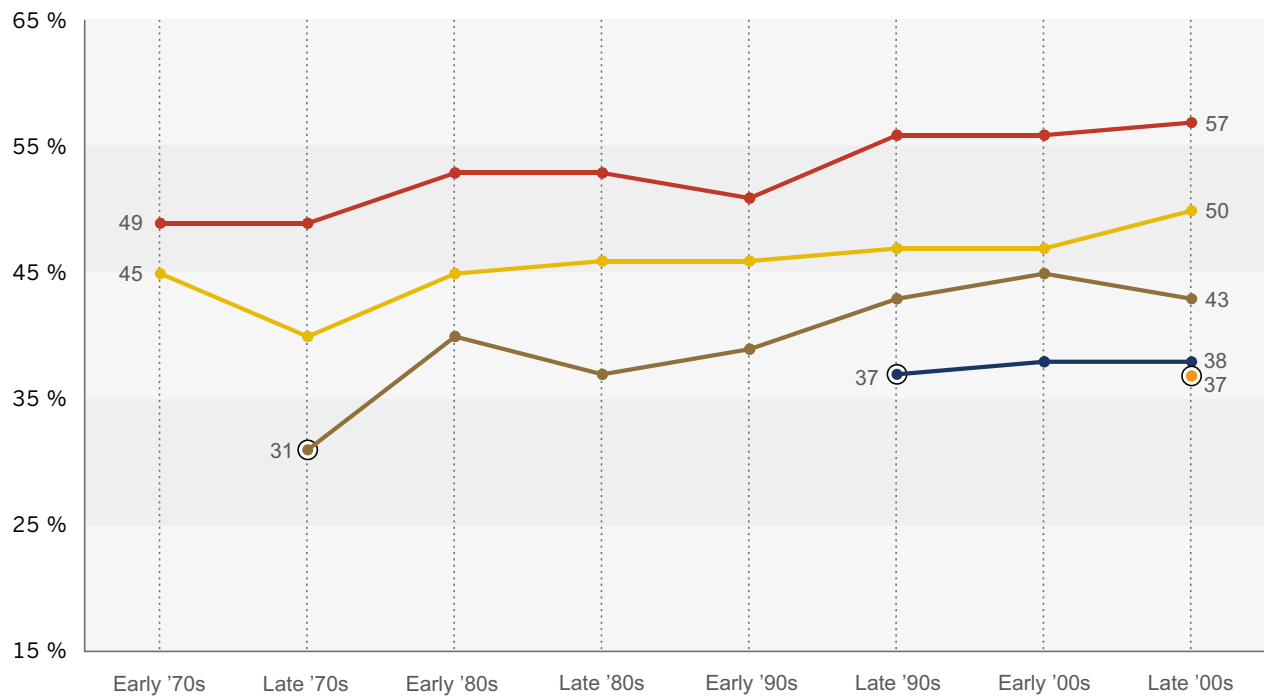
Source: General Social Surveys

Question wording: What is your religious preference? Is it Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, some other religion or no religion?

Percentages have been adjusted to exclude nonresponse.

Intensity of Religious Affiliation, by Generation

Percent saying they are a “strong” member of their religion



Source: General Social Surveys.

Based on those affiliated with a religion.

Question wording: Would you call yourself a strong [INSERT RELIGIOUS PREFERENCE] or a not very strong [INSERT RELIGIOUS PREFERENCE]?

- Millennial (born 1981 or later)
- Gen X (born 1965-80)
- Boomer (born 1946-64)
- Silent (born 1928-45)
- Greatest (born before 1928)
- Indicates point when generations were at comparable ages

Worship Attendance

In the Pew Forum's 2007 Religious Landscape Survey, young adults report attending religious services less often than their elders today. One-third of those under age 30 say they attend worship services at least once a week, compared with 41% of adults 30 and older (including more than half of people 65 and older). But generational differences in worship attendance tend to be smaller within religious groups (with the exception of Catholics) than in the total population. In other words, while young people are less likely than their elders to be affiliated with a religion, among those who are affiliated, generational differences in worship attendance are fairly small.

	Attend services at least weekly %	N
Total Population	39	35,556
Ages 18-29	33	4,242
Ages 30+	41	30,453
Ages 30-49	36	11,823
Ages 50-64	40	10,484
Ages 65+	53	8,146
Religiously Affiliated	46	30,236
Ages 18-29	43	3,163
Ages 30+	47	26,360
Unaffiliated	5	5,048
Ages 18-29	5	1,034
Ages 30+	5	3,913
Evangelical Protestant Churches	58	9,472
Ages 18-29	55	929
Ages 30+	59	8,352
Mainline Protestant Churches	35	7,470
Ages 18-29	33	528
Ages 30+	35	6,743
Hist. Black Protestant Churches	59	1,995
Ages 18-29	55	356
Ages 30+	60	1,586
Catholic	41	8,054
Ages 18-29	34	926
Ages 30+	43	6,930

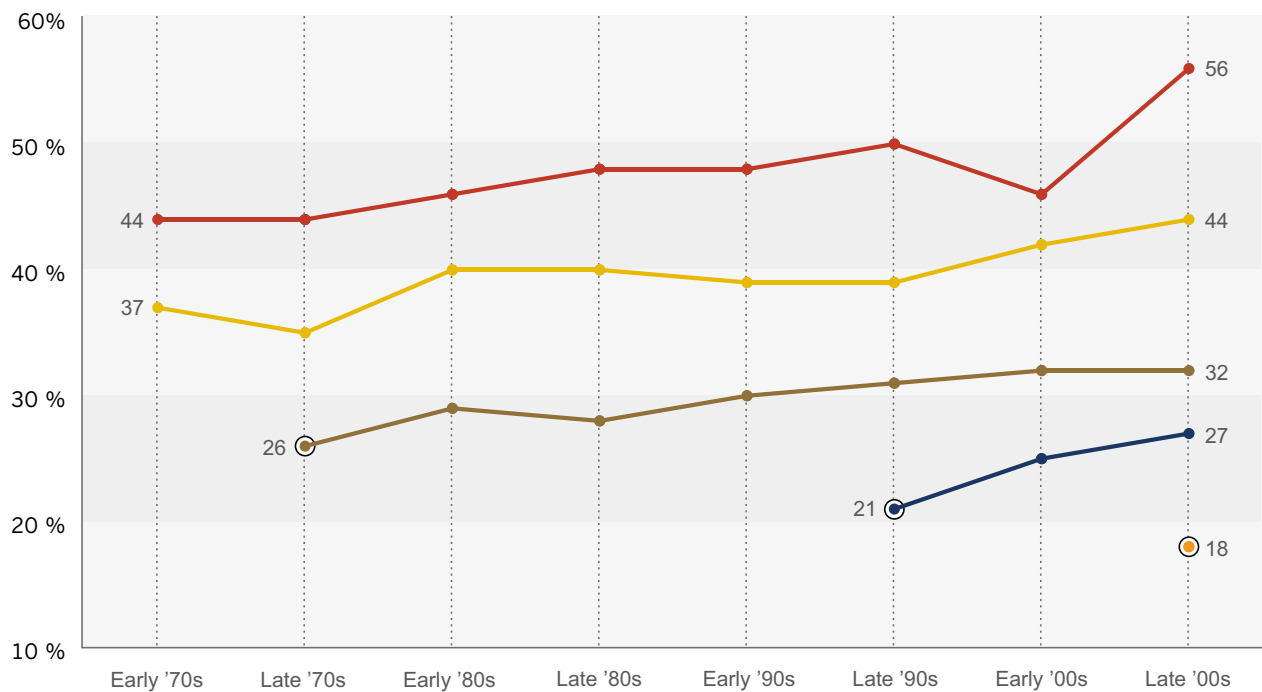
Source: 2007 U.S. Religious Landscape Survey, Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life

Question wording: Aside from weddings and funerals, how often do you attend religious services...more than once a week, once a week, once or twice a month, a few times a year, seldom, or never?

The long-running GSS also finds that young people attend religious services less often than their elders. Furthermore, Millennials currently attend church or worship services at lower rates than Baby Boomers did when they were younger; 18% of Millennials currently report attending religious services weekly or nearly weekly, compared with 26% of Boomers in the late 1970s. But Millennials closely resemble members of Generation X when they were in their 20s and early 30s, when one-in-five Gen Xers (21%) reported attending religious services weekly or nearly weekly.

Attendance at Religious Services, by Generation

Percent saying they attend several times a week, every week or nearly every week



Source: General Social Surveys.

Question wording: How often do you attend religious services?

[RESPONSE CATEGORIES, USED AS PROBES AS NECESSARY: Never, less than once a year, about once or twice a year, several times a year, about once a month, two to three times a month, nearly every week, every week, several times a week.]

- Millennial (born 1981 or later)
- Gen X (born 1965-80)
- Boomer (born 1946-64)
- Silent (born 1928-45)
- Greatest (born before 1928)
- ⊙ Indicates point when generations were at comparable ages

Other Religious Practices

Consistent with their lower levels of affiliation, young adults engage in a number of religious practices less often than do older Americans, especially the oldest group in the population (those 65 and older). For example, the 2007 Religious Landscape Survey finds that 27% of young adults say they read Scripture on a weekly basis, compared with 36% of those 30 and older. And one-quarter of adults under 30 say they meditate on a weekly basis (26%), compared with more than four-in-ten adults 30 and older (43%). These patterns hold true across a variety of religious groups.

In addition, less than half of adults under age 30 say they pray every day (48%), compared with 56% of Americans ages 30-49, 61% of those in their 50s and early 60s, and more than two-thirds of those 65 and older (68%). Age differences in frequency of prayer are most pronounced among members of historically black Protestant churches (70% of those under age 30 pray every day, compared with 83% among older members) and Catholics (47% of Catholics under 30 pray every day, compared with 60% among older Catholics). The differences are smaller among evangelical and mainline Protestants.

Scripture Reading, Prayer and Meditation				
	Read Scripture weekly %	Pray daily %	Meditate weekly %	N
Total Population	35	58	39	35,556
Ages 18-29	27	48	26	4,242
Ages 30+	36	60	43	30,453
Ages 30-49	33	56	35	11,823
Ages 50-64	37	61	46	10,484
Ages 65+	43	68	56	8,146
Religiously Affiliated	40	65	42	30,236
Ages 18-29	34	58	28	3,163
Ages 30+	41	66	45	26,360
Unaffiliated	9	22	26	5,048
Ages 18-29	8	18	21	1,034
Ages 30+	10	24	28	3,913
Evangelical Protestant Churches	60	78	46	9,472
Ages 18-29	51	73	28	929
Ages 30+	62	79	50	8,352
Mainline Protestant Churches	27	53	35	7,470
Ages 18-29	23	49	18	528
Ages 30+	28	54	37	6,743
Hist. Black Protestant Churches	60	80	55	1,995
Ages 18-29	45	70	37	356
Ages 30+	64	83	61	1,586
Catholic	21	58	36	8,054
Ages 18-29	17	47	24	926
Ages 30+	22	60	39	6,930

Source: 2007 U.S. Religious Landscape Survey, Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life

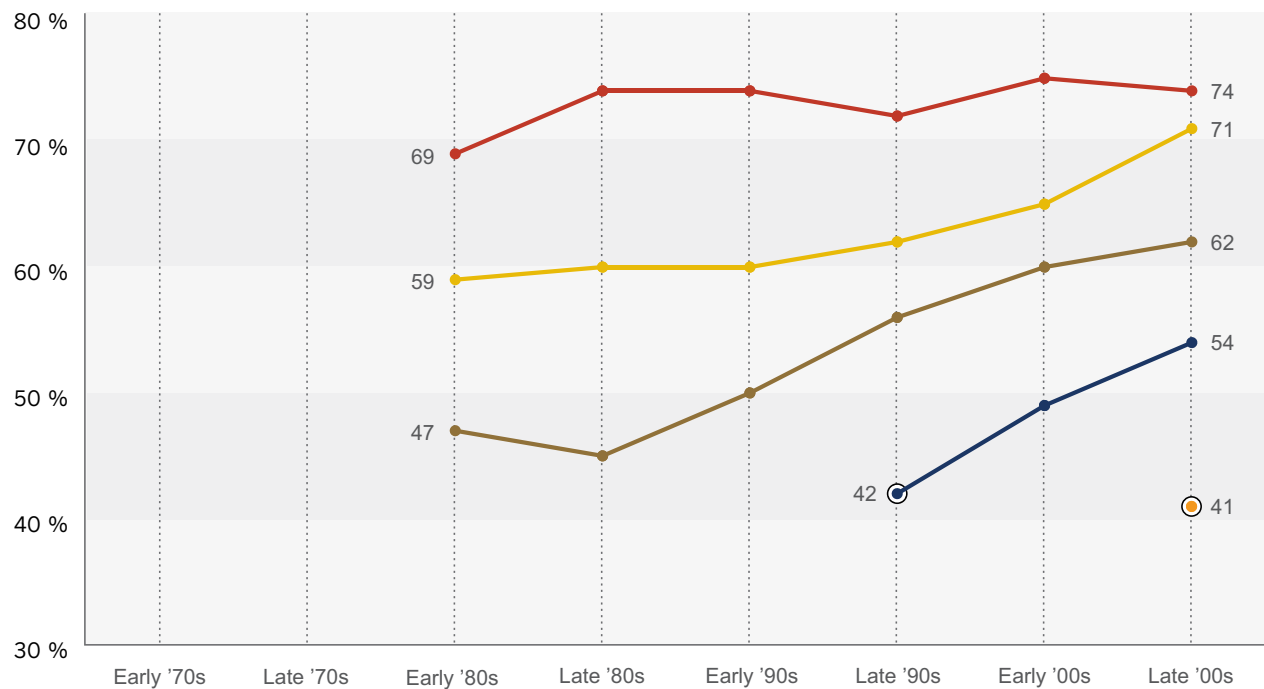
Question wording: Please tell me how often you do each of the following. How often do you [read Scripture outside of religious services/meditate]? Would you say at least once a week, once or twice a month, several times a year, seldom, or never?

People practice their religion in different ways. Outside of attending religious services, do you pray several times a day, once a day, a few times a week, once a week, a few times a month, seldom, or never?

Although Millennials report praying less often than their elders do today, the GSS shows that Millennials are in sync with Generation X and Baby Boomers when members of those generations were younger. In the 2008 GSS survey, roughly four-in-ten Millennials report praying daily (41%), as did 42% of members of Generation X in the late 1990s. Baby Boomers reported praying at a similar rate in the early 1980s (47%), when the first data are available for them. GSS data show that daily prayer increases as people get older.

Daily Prayer, by Generation

Percent saying they pray daily



Source: General Social Surveys.

Question wording: About how often do you pray?

[RESPONSE CATEGORIES, USED AS PROBES AS NECESSARY:

Several times a day, once a day, several times a week, once a week, less than once a week, never.]

- Millennial (born 1981 or later)
- Gen X (born 1965-80)
- Boomer (born 1946-64)
- Silent (born 1928-45)
- Greatest (born before 1928)
- ⊙ Indicates point when generations were at comparable ages

Religious Attitudes and Beliefs

Less than half of adults under age 30 say that religion is very important in their lives (45%), compared with roughly six-in-ten adults 30 and older (54% among those ages 30-49, 59% among those ages 50-64 and 69% among those ages 65 and older). By this measure, young people exhibit lower levels of religious intensity than their elders do today, and this holds true within a variety of religious groups.

Importance of Religion		
	Religion is very <u>important</u> %	<u>N</u>
Total Population	56	35,556
Ages 18-29	45	4,242
Ages 30+	59	30,453
Ages 30-49	54	11,823
Ages 50-64	59	10,484
Ages 65+	69	8,146
Religiously Affiliated	64	30,236
Ages 18-29	57	3,163
Ages 30+	66	26,360
Unaffiliated	16	5,048
Ages 18-29	12	1,034
Ages 30+	17	3,913
Evangelical Protestant Churches	79	9,472
Ages 18-29	71	929
Ages 30+	80	8,352
Mainline Protestant Churches	52	7,470
Ages 18-29	42	528
Ages 30+	53	6,743
Hist. Black Protestant Churches	85	1,995
Ages 18-29	81	356
Ages 30+	86	1,586
Catholic	56	8,054
Ages 18-29	45	926
Ages 30+	58	6,930

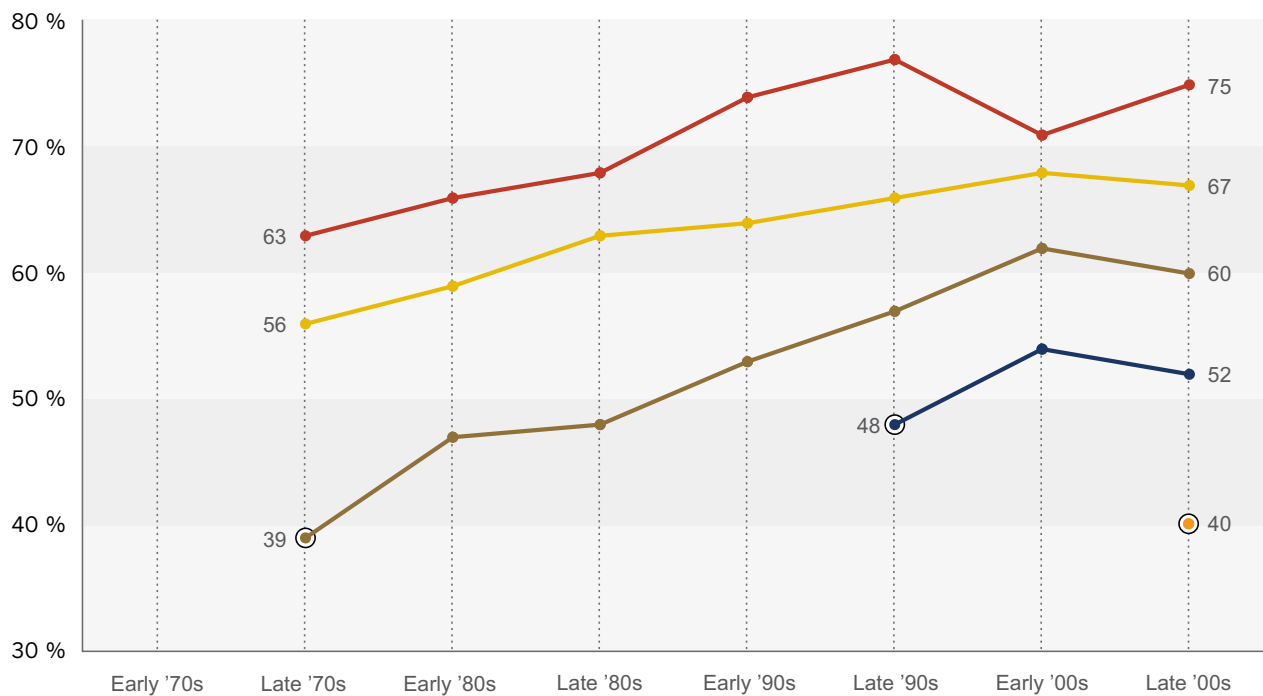
Source: 2007 U.S. Religious Landscape Survey, Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life

Question wording: How important is religion in your life ... very important, somewhat important, not too important, or not at all important?

Gallup surveys conducted over the past 30 years that use a similar measure of religion’s importance confirm that religion is somewhat less important for Millennials today than it was for members of Generation X when they were of a similar age. In Gallup surveys in the late 2000s, 40% of Millennials said religion is very important, as did 48% of Gen Xers in the late 1990s. However, young people today look very much like Baby Boomers did at a similar point in their life cycle; in a 1978 Gallup poll, 39% of Boomers said religion was very important to them.

Importance of Religion, by Generation

Percent saying religion is very important in their lives



Source: Gallup Surveys.

Question wording: How important would you say religion is in your [own] life ... [would you say] very important, fairly important, or not very important?

- Millennial (born 1981 or later)
- Gen X (born 1965-80)
- Boomer (born 1946-64)
- Silent (born 1928-45)
- Greatest (born before 1928)
- ⊙ Indicates point when generations were at comparable ages

Similarly, young adults are less convinced of God’s existence than their elders are today; 64% of young adults say they are absolutely certain of God’s existence, compared with 73% of those ages 30 and older. In this case, differences are most pronounced among Catholics, with younger Catholics being 10 points less likely than older Catholics to believe in God with absolute certainty. In other religious traditions, age differences are smaller.

Belief in God		
	Absolutely certain belief in God %	N
Total Population	71	35,556
Ages 18-29	64	4,242
Ages 30+	73	30,453
Ages 30-49	71	11,823
Ages 50-64	73	10,484
Ages 65+	77	8,146
Religiously Affiliated	79	30,236
Ages 18-29	74	3,163
Ages 30+	80	26,360
Unaffiliated	36	5,048
Ages 18-29	34	1,034
Ages 30+	37	3,913
Evangelical Protestant Churches	90	9,472
Ages 18-29	86	929
Ages 30+	91	8,352
Mainline Protestant Churches	73	7,470
Ages 18-29	70	528
Ages 30+	73	6,743
Hist. Black Protestant Churches	90	1,995
Ages 18-29	88	356
Ages 30+	91	1,586
Catholic	72	8,054
Ages 18-29	64	926
Ages 30+	74	6,930

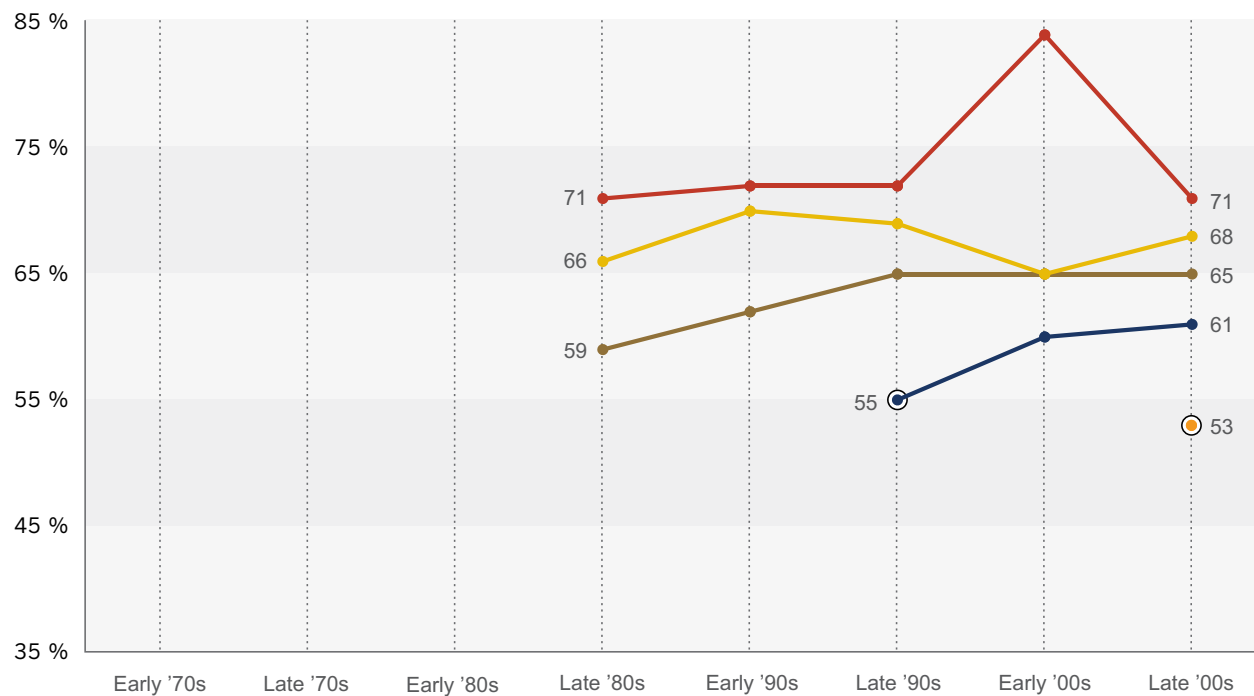
Source: 2007 U.S. Religious Landscape Survey, Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life

Question wording: Do you believe in God or a universal spirit? [IF YES, ASK:] How certain are you about this belief? Are you absolutely certain, fairly certain, not too certain, or not at all certain?

But GSS data show that Millennials' level of belief in God resembles that seen among Gen Xers when they were roughly the same age. Just over half of Millennials in the 2008 GSS survey (53%) say they have no doubt that God exists, a figure that is very similar to that among Gen Xers in the late 1990s (55%). Levels of certainty of belief in God have increased somewhat among Gen Xers and Baby Boomers in recent decades. (Data on this item stretch back only to the late 1980s, making it impossible to compare Millennials with Boomers when Boomers were at a similar point in their life cycle.)

Certain Belief in God, by Generation

Percent saying they know God exists, with no doubts



Source: General Social Surveys.

Question wording: Please look at this card and tell me which statement comes closest to expressing what you believe about God: I don't believe in God; I don't know whether there is a God and I don't believe there is any way to find out; I don't believe in a personal God, but I do believe in a Higher Power of some kind; I find myself believing in God some of the time but not at others; While I have doubts, I feel that I do believe in God; I know God really exists and I have no doubts about it.

- Millennial (born 1981 or later)
- Gen X (born 1965-80)
- Boomer (born 1946-64)
- Silent (born 1928-45)
- Greatest (born before 1928)
- ⊙ Indicates point when generations were at comparable ages

Differences between young people and their elders today are also apparent in views of the Bible, although the differences are somewhat less pronounced. Overall, young people are slightly less inclined than those in older age groups to view the Bible as the literal word of God. Interestingly, age differences on this item are most dramatic among young evangelicals and are virtually nonexistent in other groups. Although younger evangelicals are just as likely as older evangelicals (and more likely than people in most other religious groups) to see the Bible as the word of God, they are less likely than older evangelicals to see it as the literal word of God. Less than half of young evangelicals interpret the Bible literally (47%), compared with 61% of evangelicals 30 and older.

Views of Scripture					
	<i>Scripture is word of God</i>			Not word of God / Other / Don't know %	N
	NET word of God %	Literal, word for word %	Not literal %		
Total Population	63	33	30	37=100	35,556
Ages 18-29	59	28	31	41=100	4,242
Ages 30+	64	34	30	36=100	30,453
Ages 30-49	63	32	30	37=100	11,823
Ages 50-64	62	33	29	38=100	10,484
Ages 65+	70	39	31	30=100	8,146
Religiously Affiliated	71	37	34	29=100	30,236
Ages 18-29	71	35	37	29=100	3,163
Ages 30+	71	38	33	29=100	26,360
Unaffiliated	25	11	14	75=100	5,048
Ages 18-29	26	11	15	74=100	1,034
Ages 30+	25	11	14	75=100	3,913
Evangelical Protestant Churches	88	59	29	12=100	9,472
Ages 18-29	88	47	41	12=100	929
Ages 30+	88	61	27	12=100	8,352
Mainline Protestant Churches	61	22	38	39=100	7,470
Ages 18-29	60	21	39	40=100	528
Ages 30+	61	23	39	39=100	6,743
Hist. Black Protestant Churches	84	62	22	16=100	1,995
Ages 18-29	83	59	24	17=100	356
Ages 30+	84	63	21	16=100	1,586
Catholic	62	23	39	38=100	8,054
Ages 18-29	62	25	36	38=100	926
Ages 30+	62	22	40	38=100	6,930

Source: 2007 U.S. Religious Landscape Survey, Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life

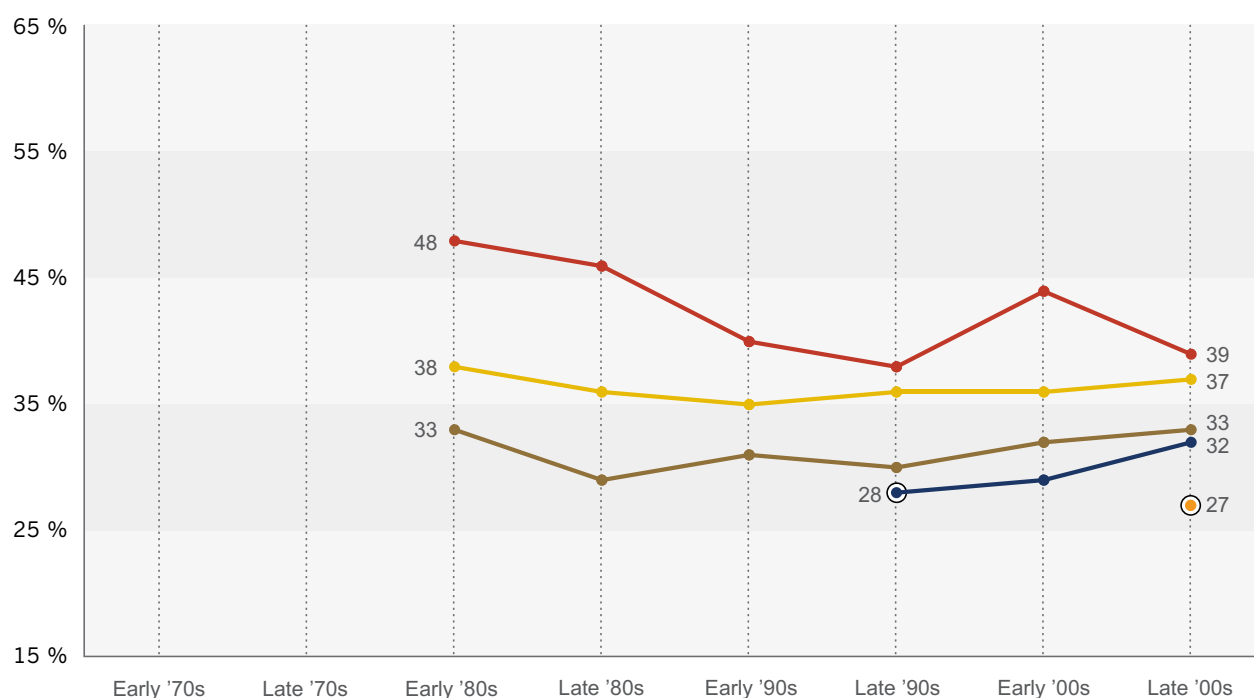
Question wording: Which comes closest to your view? [HOLY BOOK*] is the word of God, or [HOLY BOOK] is a book written by men and is not the word of God? [IF WORD OF GOD, ASK:] And would you say that [HOLY BOOK] is to be taken literally, word for word, OR not everything in [HOLY BOOK] should be taken literally, word for word?

*For Christians and the unaffiliated, "the Bible" was inserted for HOLY BOOK; for Jews, "the Torah" was inserted; for Muslims, "the Koran" was inserted; for members of other faiths, "the holy scripture" was inserted.

On this measure, too, Millennials display beliefs that closely resemble those of Generation X in the late 1990s. In the 2008 GSS survey, roughly a quarter of Millennials (27%) said the Bible is the literal word of God, compared with 28% among Gen Xers when they were young. This is only slightly lower than among Baby Boomers in the early 1980s (33%) and is very similar to the 29% of Boomers in the late 1980s who said they viewed the Bible as the literal word of God.

Views of the Bible, by Generation

Percent saying Bible is actual, literal word of God



Source: General Social Surveys.

Question wording: Which of these statements comes closest to describing your feelings about the Bible? **a.** The Bible is the actual word of God and is to be taken literally, word for word; **b.** The Bible is the inspired word of God but not everything in it should be taken literally, word for word; **c.** The Bible is an ancient book of fables, legends, history, and moral precepts recorded by men.

- Millennial (born 1981 or later)
- Gen X (born 1965-80)
- Boomer (born 1946-64)
- Silent (born 1928-45)
- Greatest (born before 1928)
- ⊙ Indicates point when generations were at comparable ages

On still other measures of religious belief, there are few differences in the beliefs of young people compared with their elders today. Adults under 30, for instance, are just as likely as older adults to believe in life after death (75% vs. 74%), heaven (74% each), hell (62% vs. 59%) and miracles (78% vs. 79%). In fact, on several of these items, young mainline Protestants and members of historically black Protestant churches exhibit somewhat higher levels of belief than their elders.

Beliefs about Afterlife, Miracles, and Angels and Demons						
	<i>Believe in ...</i>					<i>N</i>
	<u>Life after death</u>	<u>Heaven</u>	<u>Hell</u>	<u>Miracles</u>	<u>Angels and demons</u>	
	%	%	%	%	%	
Total Population	74	74	59	79	68	35,556
Ages 18-29	75	74	62	78	67	4,242
Ages 30+	74	74	59	79	69	30,453
Ages 30-49	74	75	61	79	71	11,823
Ages 50-64	75	72	58	80	69	10,484
Ages 65+	71	74	57	76	62	8,146
Religiously Affiliated	79	81	65	83	74	30,236
Ages 18-29	82	84	72	85	76	3,163
Ages 30+	79	80	64	83	74	26,360
Unaffiliated	48	41	30	55	40	5,048
Ages 18-29	54	46	34	58	42	1,034
Ages 30+	45	39	28	53	40	3,913
Evangelical Protestant Churches	86	86	82	88	87	9,472
Ages 18-29	86	89	85	87	85	929
Ages 30+	86	86	81	89	87	8,352
Mainline Protestant Churches	78	77	56	81	65	7,470
Ages 18-29	86	85	70	84	68	528
Ages 30+	77	77	54	81	65	6,743
Hist. Black Protestant Churches	79	91	82	88	87	1,995
Ages 18-29	84	94	88	93	92	356
Ages 30+	77	90	80	87	86	1,586
Catholic	77	82	60	83	69	8,054
Ages 18-29	78	82	63	85	70	926
Ages 30+	77	82	59	83	69	6,930

Source: 2007 U.S. Religious Landscape Survey, Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life

Question wording: Do you believe in life after death?

Do you think there is a heaven, where people who have led good lives are eternally rewarded?

Do you think there is a hell, where people who have led bad lives and die without being sorry are eternally punished?

Here are a few statements. For each one, please tell me if you completely agree with it, mostly agree with it, mostly disagree with it, or completely disagree with it. The first/next one is [miracles still occur today as in ancient times/angels and demons are active in the world].

Young people who are affiliated with a religion are more inclined than their elders to believe their own religion is the one true path to eternal life (though in all age groups, more people say many religions can lead to eternal life than say theirs is the one true faith). Nearly three-in-ten religiously affiliated adults under age 30 (29%) say their own religion is the one true faith leading to eternal life, higher than the 23% of religiously affiliated people ages 30 and older who say the same. This pattern is evident among all three Protestant groups but not among Catholics.

Interestingly, while more young Americans than older Americans view their faith as the single path to salvation, young adults are also more open to multiple ways of interpreting their religion. Nearly three-quarters of affiliated young adults (74%) say there is more than one true way to interpret the teachings of their faith, compared with 67% of affiliated adults ages 30 and older.

Obtaining Eternal Life, Interpreting Religious Teachings					
	Own religion is one true faith that leads to eternal life	Many religions can lead to eternal life	Only one true way to interpret own religion	More than one true way	N
	%	%	%	%	
Total Affiliated	24	70	27	68	30,236
Ages 18-29	29	66	23	74	3,163
Ages 30+	23	71	28	67	26,360
Ages 30-49	24	71	26	70	9,882
Ages 50-64	20	73	28	68	9,062
Ages 65+	24	68	33	59	7,416
Evangelical Protestant Churches	36	57	41	53	9,472
Ages 18-29	43	52	33	64	929
Ages 30+	35	58	43	51	8,352
Mainline Protestant Churches	12	83	14	82	7,470
Ages 18-29	18	79	11	87	528
Ages 30+	11	84	15	81	6,743
Hist. Black Protestant Churches	34	59	39	57	1,995
Ages 18-29	39	55	34	63	356
Ages 30+	33	61	40	55	1,586
Catholic	16	79	19	77	8,054
Ages 18-29	17	78	15	82	926
Ages 30+	15	79	20	76	6,930

Results based on those affiliated with a religion.
Source: 2007 U.S. Religious Landscape Survey, Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life

Question wording: Now, as I read a pair of statements, tell me whether the FIRST statement or the SECOND statement comes closer to your own views even if neither is exactly right. First/next ...
My religion is the one true faith leading to eternal life, OR Many religions can lead to eternal life.
There is only ONE true way to interpret the teachings of my religion, OR There is MORE than one true way to interpret the teachings of my religion.

Social and Culture War Issues

Young people are more accepting of homosexuality and evolution than are older people. They are also more comfortable with having a bigger government, and they are less concerned about Hollywood threatening their values. But when asked generally about morality and religion, young adults are just as convinced as older people that there are absolute standards of right and wrong that apply to everyone. Young adults are also slightly more supportive of government efforts to protect morality and of efforts by houses of worship to express their social and political views.

According to the 2007 Religious Landscape Survey, almost twice as many young adults say homosexuality should be accepted by society as do those ages 65 and older (63% vs. 35%). Young people are also considerably more likely than those ages 30-49 (51%) or 50-64 (48%) to say that homosexuality should be accepted. Stark age differences also exist within each of the major religious traditions examined. Compared with older members of their faith, significantly larger proportions of young adults say society should accept homosexuality.

Views of Homosexuality		
	Homosexuality should be accepted by <u>society</u> %	<u>N</u>
Total Population	50	35,556
Ages 18-29	63	4,242
Ages 30+	47	30,453
Ages 30-49	51	11,823
Ages 50-64	48	10,484
Ages 65+	35	8,146
Religiously Affiliated	46	30,236
Ages 18-29	58	3,163
Ages 30+	43	26,360
Unaffiliated	71	5,048
Ages 18-29	79	1,034
Ages 30+	67	3,913
Evangelical Protestant Churches	26	9,472
Ages 18-29	39	929
Ages 30+	24	8,352
Mainline Protestant Churches	56	7,470
Ages 18-29	69	528
Ages 30+	54	6,743
Hist. Black Protestant Churches	39	1,995
Ages 18-29	51	356
Ages 30+	36	1,586
Catholic	58	8,054
Ages 18-29	72	926
Ages 30+	55	6,930

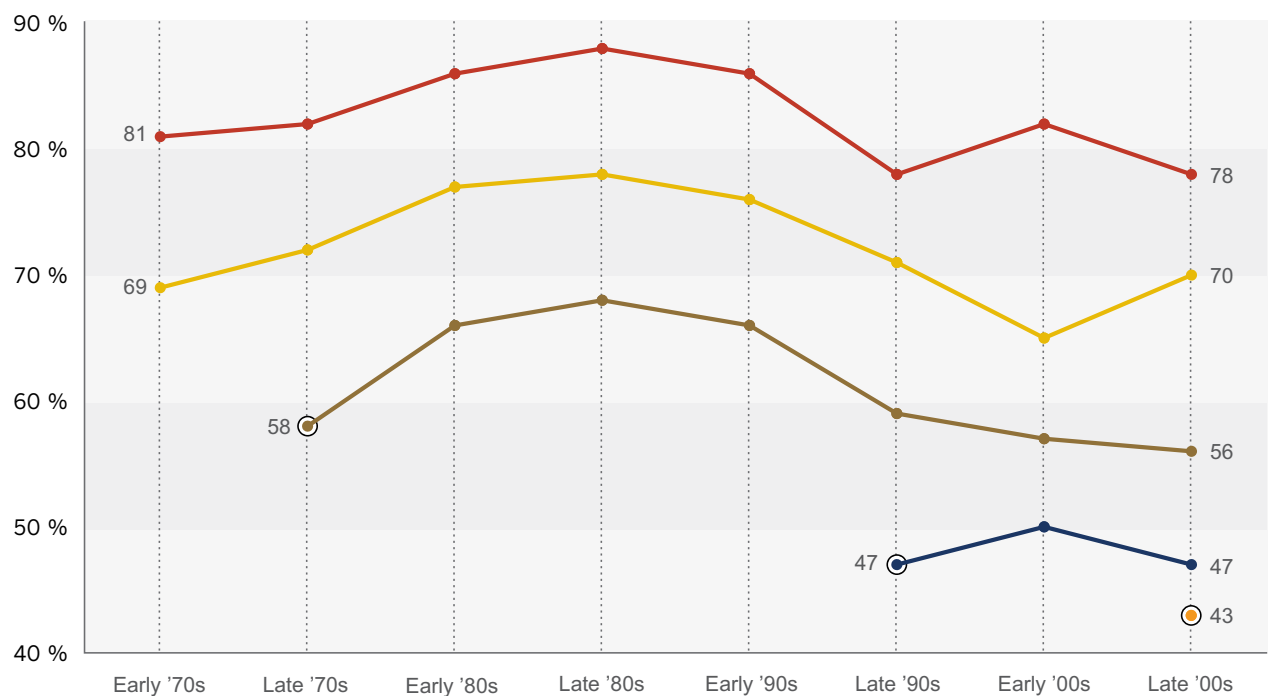
Source: 2007 U.S. Religious Landscape Survey, Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life

Question wording: Now I'm going to read you a few pairs of statements. For each pair, tell me whether the FIRST statement or the SECOND statement comes closer to your own views – even if neither is exactly right: Homosexuality is a way of life that should be accepted by society, OR homosexuality is a way of life that should be discouraged by society.

In the 2008 GSS survey, just over four-in-ten (43%) Millennials said homosexual relations are always wrong, similar to the 47% of Gen Xers who said the same in the late 1990s. These two cohorts are significantly less likely than members of previous generations have ever been to say that homosexuality is always wrong. The views of the various generations on this question have fluctuated over time, often in tandem.

Views of Homosexuality, by Generation

Percent saying same-sex sexual relations are always wrong



Source: General Social Surveys.

Question wording: What about sexual relations between two adults of the same sex - do you think it is always wrong, almost always wrong, wrong only sometimes, or not wrong at all?

- Millennial (born 1981 or later)
- Gen X (born 1965-80)
- Boomer (born 1946-64)
- Silent (born 1928-45)
- Greatest (born before 1928)
- ⊙ Indicates point when generations were at comparable ages

Roughly half of young adults (52%) say abortion should be legal in all or most cases. On this issue, young adults express slightly more permissive views than do adults ages 30 and older. However, the group that truly stands out on this issue is people 65 and older, just 37% of whom say abortion should be legal in most or all cases.

Interestingly, this pattern represents a significant change from earlier polling. Previously, people in the middle age categories (i.e., those ages 30-49 and 50-64) tended to be more supportive of legal abortion, while the youngest and oldest age groups were more opposed. In 2009, however, attitudes toward abortion moved in a more conservative direction among most groups in the population, with the notable exception of young people. The result of this conservative turn among those in the 30-49 and 50-64 age brackets means that their views now more closely resemble those of the youngest age group, while those in the 65-and-older group now express the most conservative views on abortion of any age group.

	Abortion should be...			N
	Legal in all/most cases	Illegal in all/most cases	Don't know	
	%	%	%	
Total Population	47	44	9=100	5,534
Ages 18-29	52	44	5=100	761
Ages 30+	46	45	10=100	4,679
Ages 30-49	48	44	8=100	1,627
Ages 50-64	48	42	10=100	1,664
Ages 65+	37	51	12=100	1,388
Religiously Affiliated	42	49	9=100	4,648
Ages 18-29	45	50	5=100	541
Ages 30+	42	49	10=100	4,039
Unaffiliated	68	25	7=100	807
Ages 18-29	67	28	5=100	210
Ages 30+	69	23	8=100	582
White Evangelical Protestant	23	71	6=100	1,266
Ages 18-29	<i>Sample size too small for analysis</i>			
Ages 30+	23	70	6=100	1,162
White Mainline Protestant	55	34	11=100	1,116
Ages 18-29	55	37	8=100	115
Ages 30+	56	34	11=100	980
Catholic	45	45	10=100	1,199
Ages 18-29	45	51	4=100	156
Ages 30+	44	44	11=100	1,025

Source: Aggregated Pew Research Center surveys, 2009

Question wording: Do you think abortion should be legal in all cases, legal in most cases, illegal in most cases or illegal in all cases? [Response categories read in reverse order for half of sample]

Note: Most of the analyses in this report compare responses among Protestant groups as defined by denominational affiliation. In this table, however, Protestants are categorized as "white evangelicals" or "white mainline Protestants" on the basis of their race and their responses to a question asking if they think of themselves as "born-again or evangelical" Christians.

Surveys also show that large numbers of young adults (67%) say they would prefer a bigger government that provides more services over a smaller government that provides fewer services. Among older Americans, only 41% feel this way. Fewer young people than older people see their moral values as under assault from Hollywood; one-third of adults under age 30 agree that Hollywood and the entertainment industry threatens their values, compared with 44% of people 30 and older. And more than half of young adults (55%) believe that evolution is the best explanation for the development of human life, compared with 47% of people in older age groups. These patterns are seen both in the total population and within a variety of religious traditions, though the link between age and views on evolution is strongest among Catholics and members of historically black Protestant churches.

Evolution, Hollywood and Size of Government				
	Evolution best explanation for <u>human life</u> %	Agree Hollywood threatens <u>values</u> %	Prefer bigger government, more <u>services</u> %	<u>N</u>
Total Population	48	42	46	35,556
Ages 18-29	55	33	67	4,242
Ages 30+	47	44	41	30,453
Ages 30-49	49	41	48	11,823
Ages 50-64	47	46	39	10,484
Ages 65+	40	48	31	8,146
Religiously Affiliated	44	45	46	30,236
Ages 18-29	49	36	68	3,163
Ages 30+	43	47	41	26,360
Unaffiliated	72	28	48	5,048
Ages 18-29	73	25	64	1,034
Ages 30+	71	29	41	3,913
Evangelical Protestant Churches	24	53	41	9,472
Ages 18-29	27	42	65	929
Ages 30+	23	55	36	8,352
Mainline Protestant Churches	51	41	37	7,470
Ages 18-29	52	32	62	528
Ages 30+	50	42	33	6,743
Hist. Black Protestant Churches	38	35	72	1,995
Ages 18-29	47	29	81	356
Ages 30+	36	36	69	1,586
Catholic	58	43	51	8,054
Ages 18-29	68	35	73	926
Ages 30+	56	45	46	6,930

Source: 2007 U.S. Religious Landscape Survey, Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life

Question wording: Now, as I read some statements on a few different topics, please tell me if you completely agree, mostly agree, mostly DISagree or completely disagree with each one. [Evolution is the best explanation for the origins of human life on earth / I often feel that my values are threatened by Hollywood and the entertainment industry]

If you had to choose, would you rather have a smaller government providing fewer services, or a bigger government providing more services?

But differences between young adults and their elders are not so stark on all moral and social issues. For instance, more than three-quarters of young adults (76%) agree that there are absolute standards of right and wrong, a level nearly identical to that among older age groups (77%). More than half of young adults (55%) say that houses of worship should speak out on social and political matters, slightly more than say this among older adults (49%). And 45% of young adults say that the government should do more to protect morality in society, compared with 39% of people ages 30 and older.

Morality, Religion and Government				
	Agree there are absolute standards of right and wrong %	Government should do more to protect morality %	Houses of worship should express views on social and political issues %	N
Total Population	77	40	50	35,556
Ages 18-29	76	45	55	4,242
Ages 30+	77	39	49	30,453
Ages 30-49	77	41	52	11,823
Ages 50-64	77	35	47	10,484
Ages 65+	78	39	42	8,146
Religiously Affiliated	79	43	53	30,236
Ages 18-29	80	50	61	3,163
Ages 30+	79	41	51	26,360
Unaffiliated	67	27	34	5,048
Ages 18-29	67	32	39	1,034
Ages 30+	67	24	32	3,913
Evangelical Protestant Churches	85	50	64	9,472
Ages 18-29	85	54	72	929
Ages 30+	85	49	62	8,352
Mainline Protestant Churches	77	33	46	7,470
Ages 18-29	78	46	50	528
Ages 30+	77	31	45	6,743
Hist. Black Protestant Churches	78	48	69	1,995
Ages 18-29	83	52	77	356
Ages 30+	77	47	66	1,586
Catholic	79	43	48	8,054
Ages 18-29	77	48	56	926
Ages 30+	79	41	46	6,930

Source: 2007 U.S. Religious Landscape Survey, Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life

Question wording: Now, as I read some statements on a few different topics, please tell me if you completely agree, mostly agree, mostly DISagree or completely disagree with each one: There are clear and absolute standards for what is right and wrong.

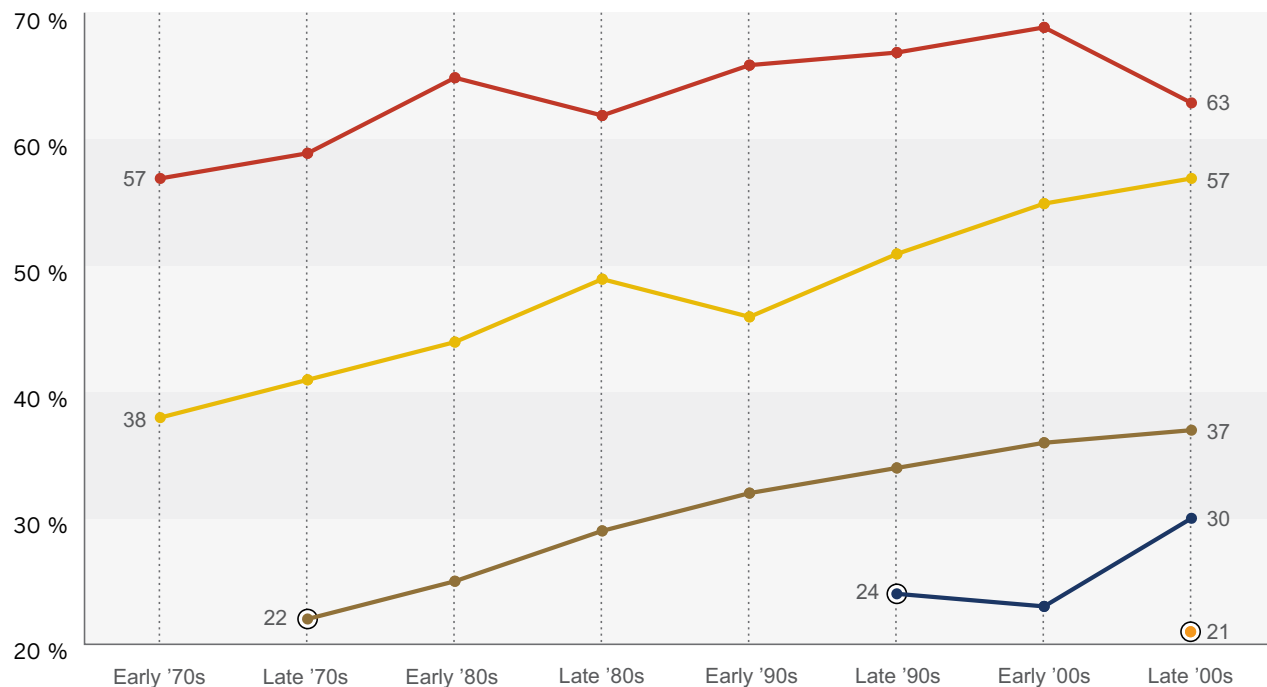
Now I'm going to read you a few pairs of statements. For each pair, tell me whether the FIRST statement or the SECOND statement comes closer to your own views – even if neither is exactly right: The government should do more to protect morality in society, OR I worry the government is getting too involved in the issue of morality.

In your opinion, should churches and other houses of worship keep out of political matters, or should they express their views on day-to-day social and political questions?

GSS surveys show Millennials are more permissive than their elders are today in their views about pornography, but their views are nearly identical to those expressed by Gen Xers and Baby Boomers when members of those generations were at a similar point in their life cycles. About one-in-five Millennials today say pornography should be illegal for everyone (21%), similar to the 24% of Gen Xers who said this in the late 1990s and the 22% of Boomers who took this view in the late 1970s. Data for the Silent and Greatest generations at similar ages are not available, but data from the 1970s onward suggest that people become more opposed to pornography as they age.

Views on Pornography, by Generation

Percent saying pornography should be illegal for people of all ages



Source: General Social Surveys.

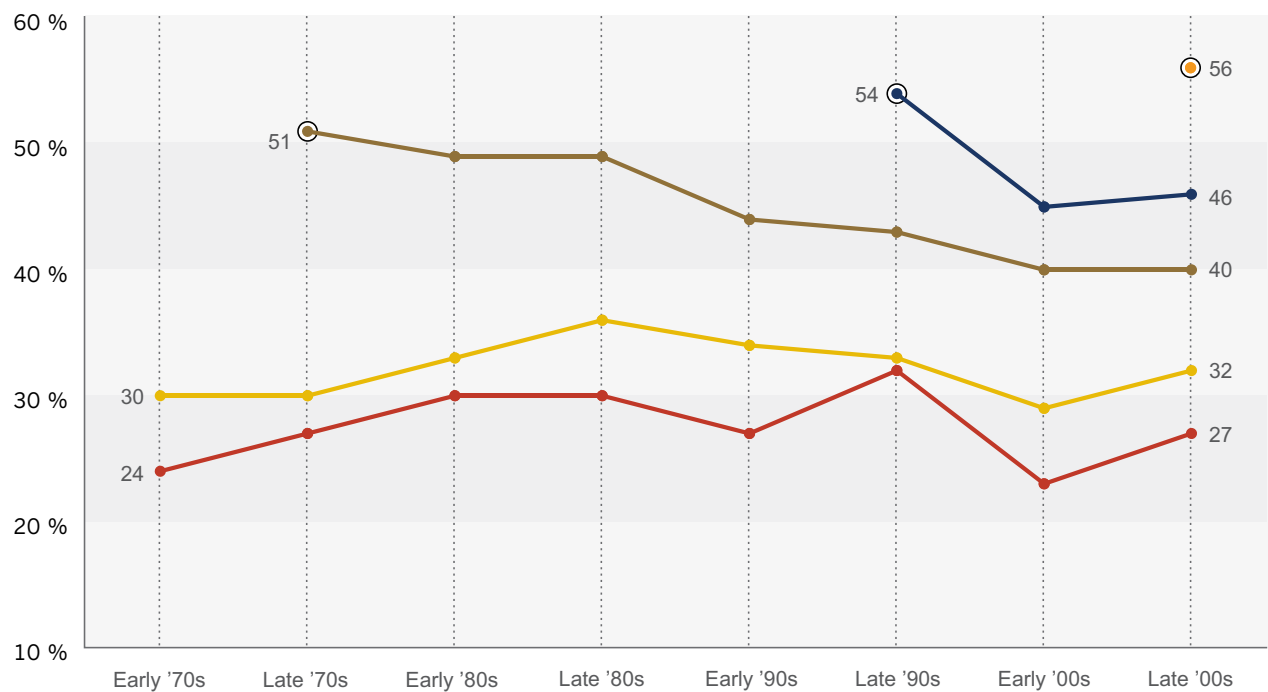
Question wording: Which of these statements comes closest to your feelings about pornography laws? There should be laws against the distribution of pornography whatever the age; OR There should be laws against the distribution of pornography to persons under 18; OR There should be no laws forbidding the distribution of pornography.

- Millennial (born 1981 or later)
- Gen X (born 1965-80)
- Boomer (born 1946-64)
- Silent (born 1928-45)
- Greatest (born before 1928)
- ⊙ Indicates point when generations were at comparable ages

Similarly, Millennials at the present time stand out from other generations for their opposition to Bible reading and prayer in schools, but they are less distinctive when compared with members of Generation X or Baby Boomers at a comparable age. During early adulthood, about half of Boomers (51%) and Gen Xers (54%) said they approved of U.S. Supreme Court rulings that banned the required reading of the Lord’s Prayer or Bible verses in public schools; 56% of Millennials took this view in 2008. Generation X and the Boomer generation have become less supportive of the court’s position over time, while the pattern in the views of the Silent and Greatest generations has been less clear.

Opposition to Bible Reading, Lord's Prayer in Schools

Percent saying they approve of Supreme Court ruling banning required reading of Lord's Prayer or Bible verses in public schools



Source: General Social Surveys.

Question wording: The United States Supreme Court has ruled that no state or local government may require the reading of the Lord’s Prayer or Bible verses in public schools. What are your views on this - do you approve or disapprove of the court ruling?

- Millennial (born 1981 or later)
- Gen X (born 1965-80)
- Boomer (born 1946-64)
- Silent (born 1928-45)
- Greatest (born before 1928)
- Indicates point when generations were at comparable ages

More Information

For other treatments of religion among young adults in the U.S. and how they compare with older generations, see, for example, *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults* by Christian Smith and Patricia Snell (2009) and *After the Baby Boomers: How Twenty- and Thirty-Somethings Are Shaping the Future of American Religion* by Robert Wuthnow (2007).

Appendix:

Selected Religious Beliefs and Practices among Ages 18-29 by Decade

	<u>1970s</u>	<u>1980s</u>	<u>1990s</u>	<u>2000s</u>
<i>Religious Affiliation</i>	%	%	%	%
Unaffiliated	12	12	16	23
Affiliated	<u>88</u>	<u>88</u>	<u>84</u>	<u>77</u>
	100	100	100	100
N	2,722	3,434	2,525	2,711
Question wording: What is your religious preference? Is it Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, some other religion or no religion?				
<hr/>				
<i>Service Attendance</i>				
Attend nearly weekly	26	25	22	21
Attend less	<u>74</u>	<u>75</u>	<u>78</u>	<u>79</u>
	100	100	100	100
N	2,722	3,432	2,486	2,697
Question wording: How often do you attend religious services? [Response categories, used as probes if necessary: Never, less than once a year, about once or twice a year, several times a year, about once a month, 2-3 times a month, nearly every week, every week, several times a week]				
<hr/>				
<i>Frequency of prayer</i>				
Pray daily	NA	41	40	45
Pray less		<u>59</u>	<u>60</u>	<u>55</u>
		100	100	100
N		2,130	1,224	1,679
Question wording: About how often do you pray? [Response categories, use as probes if necessary: Several times a day, once a day, several times a week, once a week, less than once a week, never.]				
<hr/>				
<i>Belief in God</i>				
Certain God exists	NA	55	59	53
Less certain/doesn't exist		<u>45</u>	<u>41</u>	<u>47</u>
		100	100	100
N		356	1,041	1,097
Question wording: Please look at this card and tell me which statement comes closest to expressing what you believe about God: I don't believe in God; I don't know whether there is a God and I don't believe there is any way to find out; I don't believe in a personal God, but I do believe in a Higher Power of some kind; I find myself believing in God some of the time but not at others; While I have doubts, I feel that I do believe in God; I know God really exists and I have no doubts about it.				
<hr/>				
<i>Belief in an afterlife</i>				
Believe in afterlife	73	79	80	82
Don't believe	<u>27</u>	<u>21</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>18</u>
	100	100	100	100
N	1,439	2,298	1,587	1,654
Question wording: Do you believe there is a life after death?				
<hr/>				
<i>View of the Bible</i>				
Bible literal word of God	NA	33	31	30
Not literal/book of fables		<u>67</u>	<u>69</u>	<u>70</u>
		100	100	100
N		1,205	1,755	1,810
Question wording: Which of these statements comes closest to describing your feelings about the Bible? The Bible is the actual word of God and is to be taken literally, word for word; The Bible is the inspired word of God but not everything in it should be taken literally, word for word; The Bible is an ancient book of fables, legends, history, and moral precepts recorded by men.				

Source for all items: General Social Surveys. Results based on total answering.

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