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Most Americans Who Go to Religious Services Say They Would Trust Their Clergy's Advice on COVID-19 Vaccines

But a slim majority have not heard their congregation's leaders say much about them

BY *Justin Nortey and Michael Lipka*

FOR MEDIA OR OTHER INQUIRIES:

Gregory A. Smith, Associate Director, Research
Anna Schiller, Senior Communications Manager

202.419.4372

www.pewresearch.org

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How we did this

Pew Research Center conducted this survey to help track how the coronavirus outbreak is affecting religious worship in the United States and to gauge the views of the American public on the impact of religious organizations on society. For this report, we surveyed 6,485 U.S. adults from Sept. 20-26, 2021. All respondents to the survey are part of Pew Research Center's American Trends Panel (ATP), an online survey panel that is recruited through national random sampling of residential addresses. This way nearly all U.S. adults have a chance of selection. The survey is weighted to be representative of the U.S. adult population by gender, race, ethnicity, partisan affiliation, education, religious affiliation and other categories. For more, see the [ATP's methodology](#) and the [methodology for this report](#).

The questions used in this report can be found [here](#).

Acknowledgments

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

Primary Researchers

Justin Nortey, *Research Assistant*

Claire Gecewicz, *Research Associate*

Research Team

Gregory A. Smith, *Associate Director, Research*

Alan Cooperman, *Director of Religion Research*

Becka A. Alper, *Senior Researcher*

Joshua Alvarado, *Research Assistant*

Besheer Mohamed, *Senior Researcher*

Methods Team

Andrew Mercer, *Senior Research Methodologist*

Nick Bertoni, *Senior Panel Manager*

Ashley Amaya, *Senior Survey Research Methodologist*

Dorene Asare-Marfo, *Survey Research Methodologist*

Arnold Lau, *Research Methodologist*

Editorial and Graphic Design

Michael Lipka, *Editorial Manager*

David Kent, *Senior Copy Editor*

Rebecca Ann Leppert, *Editorial Assistant*

Bill Webster, *Senior Information Graphics Designer*

Communications and Web Publishing

Stacy Rosenberg, *Associate Director, Digital*

Travis Mitchell, *Digital Producer*

Anna Schiller, *Senior Communications Manager*

Kelsey Beveridge, *Communications Associate*

Most Americans Who Go to Religious Services Say They Would Trust Their Clergy's Advice on COVID-19 Vaccines

But a slim majority have not heard their congregation's leaders say much about them

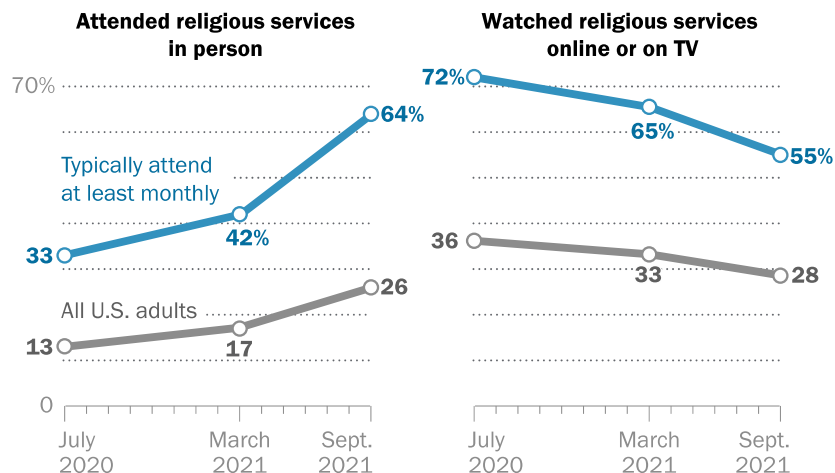
As houses of worship continue to reopen, most U.S. adults who regularly attend religious services voice confidence in their clergy to provide guidance on the coronavirus vaccines – and far more say they have heard their pastor, priest, rabbi or imam encourage people to get vaccinated than have heard their clergy raise doubts about COVID-19 vaccines. But a slim majority of regular worshippers say they have not heard their religious leaders say much about vaccinations either way, according to a new Pew Research Center survey conducted Sept. 20-26, 2021.

Also, among U.S. adults overall, there is no clear consensus about whether houses of worship have had a positive or negative impact on the American response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The survey finds that a growing share of Americans are now attending religious services in person. Among those who say they typically attend services at least once or twice a month, a clear majority (64%) report that they actually have gone *in person* in the past month, the first time that has been the case in three surveys conducted since the pandemic began.

As in-person religious attendance rises, virtual attendance falls

% of U.S. adults who say they have done each of the following in the last month



Note: Results for all U.S. adults from July 2020 and March 2021 based on respondents who participated in both surveys.

Source: Survey conducted Sept. 20-26, 2021, among U.S. adults.

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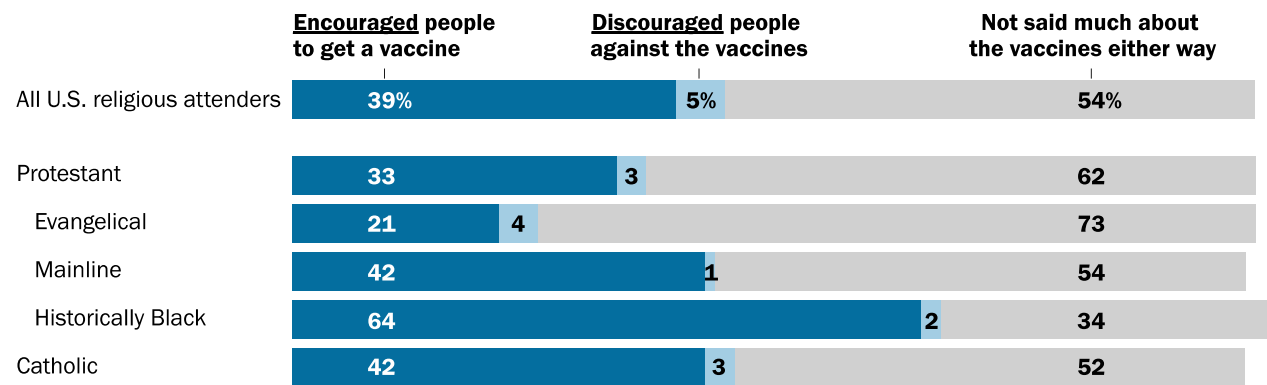
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The resumption of in-person attendance has been accompanied by a decline in the share of both U.S. adults overall and regular worshippers who say they have watched religious services online or on TV in the past month.

Many U.S. congregants – i.e., people who say either that they typically attend religious services at least monthly *or* that they have attended in person in the past month, who together comprise a little more than a third of all U.S. adults – say they have heard the clergy or religious leaders at their house of worship weigh in on coronavirus vaccines. And among those who have heard from their clergy on this issue, far more say their priest, pastor, rabbi, imam or other religious leader has encouraged people to get vaccinated (39% of all religious attenders) than say their clergy has discouraged getting the shots (5%).

Far more U.S. worshippers say their clergy have encouraged COVID-19 vaccines than discouraged them

Among U.S. adults who typically attend religious services at least monthly or attended in person in the last month, % who say their clergy have ...



Note: Those who did not answer are not shown.

Source: Survey conducted Sept. 20-26, 2021, among U.S. adults.

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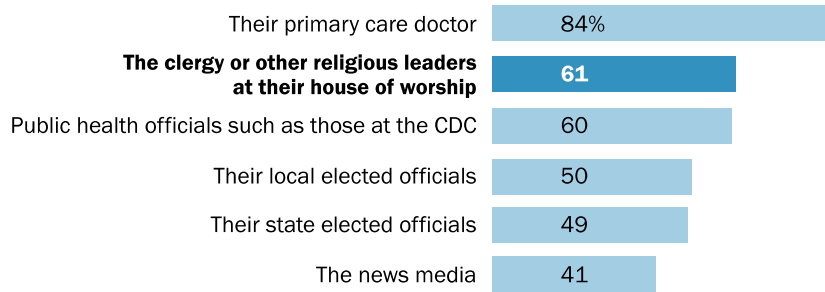
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Even among evangelical Protestants, who have tended to be [relatively skeptical toward the vaccines](#), just 4% say their clergy have discouraged people from getting a vaccine. But more than half of U.S. congregants (54%) and nearly three-quarters of evangelical churchgoers (73%) say their clergy have not said much about COVID-19 vaccinations either way. Most members of the historically Black Protestant tradition, on the other hand, say their pastors have encouraged people to get a vaccine (64%).

There is a relatively high degree of trust in clergy to give advice on the coronavirus vaccines: Fully six-in-ten U.S. congregants (61%) say they have at least “a fair amount” of confidence in their religious leaders to provide reliable guidance about getting a vaccine. This figure is virtually identical to the share who express confidence in public health officials, such as those at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), to give reliable guidance on COVID-19 vaccinations (60%), although Americans who attend religious services at least monthly are slightly more likely to say they have “a great deal” of confidence in guidance from public health officials than to say the same about their clergy (27% vs. 21%).

Among those who attend religious services, most trust clergy as source of information about COVID-19 vaccines

Among U.S. adults who typically attend religious services at least monthly or attended in person in the last month, % who say they have at least ‘a fair amount’ of confidence in _____ to provide guidance about receiving a COVID-19 vaccine



Source: Survey conducted Sept. 20-26, 2021, among U.S. adults. “Most Americans Who Go to Religious Services Say They Would Trust Their Clergy’s Advice on COVID-19 Vaccines”

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Religious attenders express more trust in their clergy on this issue than they do in state elected officials, local elected officials or news media. Among the options presented by the survey, only primary care doctors rank above clergy in the share of U.S. congregants who have at least “a fair amount” of trust in each group to provide guidance on vaccines.

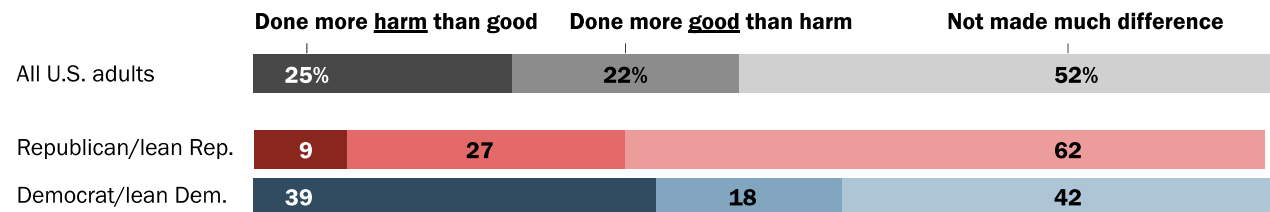
Clergy have responded in differing ways to the COVID-19 outbreak that began in the United States in early 2020. At various points in the pandemic, some religious leaders have [refused to limit attendance or enforce other public health restrictions](#) at their houses of worship. At the same time, other members of the clergy have encouraged vaccinations and even [hosted vaccination sites](#) at their churches or other facilities.

Americans overall express ambivalent views about the broad impact of churches and other religious organizations on the U.S. response to the pandemic, with 25% saying that religious organizations have done “more harm than good” and 22% saying they have done “more good than harm.” About half (52%) say that religious organizations have not made much difference.

There is a substantial gap between the two major political parties on this question, with four-in-ten Democrats and those who lean toward the Democratic Party saying that religious organizations have done more harm than good (39%), compared with just one-in-ten Republicans and GOP leaners who take that position (9%).

Democrats more likely than Republicans to see harm from religious groups in COVID-19 response

% of U.S. adults who say that churches and religious organizations have _____ on the way the U.S. has handled the coronavirus outbreak



Note: Those who did not answer are not shown.

Source: Survey conducted Sept. 20-26, 2021, among U.S. adults.

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Even more broadly, there appears to have been a modest but noticeable change in recent years in the way Americans view the role of churches and other houses of worship when it comes to addressing social and political issues. Some [pastors have waded](#) into a wide range of political and social debates regarding not only the pandemic but also the 2020 presidential election and the national conversation on racial injustice in the wake of the murder of George Floyd.

Fully seven-in-ten U.S. adults now say that, in general, churches and other houses of worship should keep out of political matters, up from 63% the last time this question was asked, in [March 2019](#). Just three-in-ten Americans (29%) now say that churches should express their views on day-to-day social and political questions, down from 36% in 2019. Democrats remain more likely than Republicans to say that houses of worship should stay out of politics (76% vs. 62%), although members of both parties are more likely to express this view now than they were when the question was last asked.

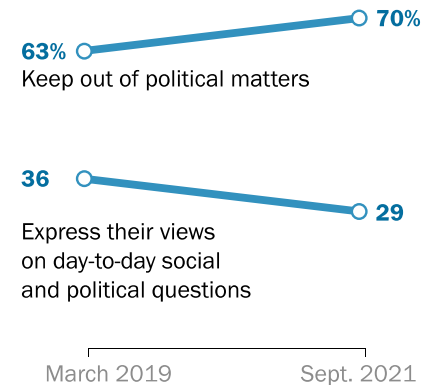
There has been little change on two other questions about religion's role in public life over the past few years: More people continue to say that churches and other religious organizations mostly bring people together (rather than push them apart), and that in general – not just regarding the pandemic – religious institutions do more good than harm (as opposed to more harm than good).

These are among the key findings from a new Pew Research Center survey of 6,485 U.S. adults, conducted on the Center's [American Trends Panel](#). Although the survey was conducted among Americans of all religious backgrounds, including Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, Mormons and more, it did not obtain enough respondents from these smaller religious groups to report separately on their views.

The remainder of this report explores the survey findings in more detail.

Rising share in U.S. says houses of worship should keep out of politics

% of U.S. adults who say churches, other houses of worship should ...



Note: Those who did not answer are not shown.

Source: Survey conducted Sept. 20-26, 2021, among U.S. adults.

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Roughly equal shares of U.S. adults recently have attended religious services in person and virtually

About a quarter of U.S. adults (26%) say they have attended religious services in person in the last month (prior to when the survey was conducted, Sept. 20-26). This is up from 17% who reported having attended in person as of March 2021, and from 13% who said they went to services in person earlier in the pandemic, in July 2020.

A similar share of Americans in the new survey (28%) say they have watched religious services online or on TV in the past month, down modestly from March 2021 (33%) and July 2020 (36%). This drop has been particularly pronounced among U.S. adults who say that they typically attend religious services at least monthly. Within this group, the share who have watched virtual services (online or on television) has dropped from 72% to 65% to 55% over the course of the three surveys, and virtual participation is now especially low among Catholic churchgoers (35%).

Among those who typically attend religious services, most have gone in person recently

% of U.S. adults who say they have done each of the following in the last month

	Attended religious services in person			Watched religious services online or on TV		
	July 2020	March 2021	Sept. 2021	July 2020	March 2021	Sept. 2021
	%	%	%	%	%	%
All U.S. adults	13	17	26	36	33	28
Typically attend at least monthly	33	42	64	72	65	55
Attend less often	3	5	7	17	16	15
<i>Among those who typically attend at least monthly ...</i>						
Christian	33	43	64	74	67	55
Protestant	35	44	65	78	71	61
<i>Evangelical</i>	44	53	72	80	71	62
<i>Mainline</i>	21	34	56	68	69	51
<i>Historically Black</i>	18	21	50	84	76	69
Catholic	32	38	65	63	51	35
White, non-Hispanic	39	50	69	71	65	53
Black, non-Hispanic	19	25	50	77	73	73
Northeast	35	46	69	68	63	57
Midwest	34	44	70	75	66	48
South	32	42	61	72	68	58
West	31	37	60	71	62	52
Republican/lean Rep.	42	57	74	73	64	53
Democrat/lean Dem.	19	26	55	70	67	54

Note: March 2021 figures for all U.S. adults are based on those respondents who participated in both the July 2020 and the March 2021 surveys. The survey did not obtain enough interviews with members of non-Christian religious groups who said in a previous survey that they typically attend religious services monthly or more often to analyze those groups' answers separately. White and Black adults include those who report being only one race and are not Hispanic.

Source: Survey conducted Sept. 20-26, 2021, among U.S. adults.

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Meanwhile, Americans who typically attend religious services are now attending in person at a much higher rate. Only a third reported doing this during the summer of 2020, but that share has nearly doubled in the new survey (64%). Evangelical Protestant churchgoers (72%) are more inclined than those in the mainline Protestant (56%) or historically Black Protestant (50%) traditions to have attended recently in person.

Most congregants say houses of worship are open with coronavirus-related restrictions in place, and that this should be the case

The rise in religious service attendance is accompanied by an increase in the number of churches and other places of worship that are reopening to in-person services and/or loosening pandemic-related restrictions. Among U.S. adults who say they typically attend religious services at least monthly or who attended in person in the past month, a growing share report that the house of worship they attend most often is now open for in-person services. This includes three-in-ten (29%) who say their congregation is open to the public and holding services just as it did before the pandemic – up from 12% who said this about their congregation in March 2021.

Most U.S. religious attenders (59%) continue to say that their house of worship is open for services, but with precautions in place to protect against COVID-19. Just 6% now say their congregation is closed entirely for in-person services, down from 31% who said this in July 2020 and 17% earlier this year.

Congregants who identify with the evangelical Protestant tradition are far more likely than other Christians to say that their churches are open without any coronavirus-related restrictions. Roughly half of evangelical Protestants (49%) say this is the case, compared with 20% of mainline Protestants, 14% of congregants in the historically Black Protestant tradition and 19% of Catholics.

White religious attenders are more likely than Black and Hispanic congregants to say their houses of worship are back to normal operations (38% vs. 16% and 20%, respectively). Republicans and those who lean toward the Republican Party also are much more likely than Democrats and Democratic leaners to report that their congregations are open without restrictions (43% vs. 16%). Still, no more than about one-in-ten in any of these groups say that their house of worship remains closed entirely to in-person services.

Dwindling share of U.S. religious attenders report that in-person services at their congregation remain shut down

Among U.S. adults who typically attend religious services at least monthly or attended in person in the past month, % who say the house of worship they attend most often is currently ...

	July 2020				March 2021				September 2021			
	Open to public and holding services in same way as before outbreak	Open to public for services, but with changes as result of outbreak	NOT open for in-person services	Not sure	Open to public and holding services in same way as before outbreak	Open to public for services, but with changes as result of outbreak	NOT open for in-person services	Not sure	Open to public and holding services in same way as before outbreak	Open to public for services, but with changes as result of outbreak	NOT open for in-person services	Not sure
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
All U.S. attenders	6	55	31	7	12	64	17	6	29	59	6	5
Christian	5	57	31	7	11	66	17	6	30	60	6	4
Protestant	7	56	31	6	14	62	18	5	37	55	4	4
<i>Evangelical</i>	7	64	24	4	19	67	9	4	49	46	2	2
<i>Mainline</i>	4	45	45	6	6	58	31	5	20	68	4	6
<i>Historically Black</i>	9	35	41	15	6	49	36	9	14	69	9	7
Catholic	3	65	23	9	5	79	8	8	19	73	3	5
White, non-Hispanic	5	65	25	4	14	70	11	4	38	55	4	3
Black, non-Hispanic	7	37	42	14	7	50	36	6	16	67	10	6
Hispanic	6	41	41	12	11	61	20	9	20	66	8	6
Northeast	4	67	24	4	10	64	17	8	26	56	12	4
Midwest	5	64	24	7	13	71	13	3	35	56	4	5
South	7	51	33	9	15	63	17	4	30	61	5	5
West	5	47	40	7	8	59	23	10	26	61	9	4
Rep./lean Rep.	7	66	23	5	17	71	7	5	43	53	1	3
Dem./lean Dem.	5	43	42	10	6	59	28	7	16	69	9	6

Note: White and Black adults include those who report being only one race and are not Hispanic. Hispanics are of any race. Those who did not answer are not shown.

Source: Survey conducted Sept. 20-26, 2021, among U.S. adults.

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When asked what *should* be happening in their religious congregations – as opposed to what *actually is* happening – survey respondents give similar answers. For example, the percentage of religious attenders who say their congregation is open to the public for services with some health restrictions in place as a result of the coronavirus (59%) is identical to the share who say this *should* be the case (59%).

Among religious attenders, evangelical Protestants, White (non-Hispanic) Americans and Republicans are considerably more inclined than others to say their congregations should be open *without* pandemic-related restrictions. For instance, half of evangelical Protestant churchgoers take this position, compared with a quarter of Catholic churchgoers. And 53% of Republicans and people who lean toward the Republican Party say their congregations should be open without restrictions, compared with 15% of Democrats and people who lean toward the Democratic Party.

Growing minority of U.S. religious congregants say their house of worship should be open and holding services just as it did pre-pandemic

Among U.S. adults who typically attend religious services at least monthly or attended in person in the past month, % who say the house of worship they attend most often **should** currently be ...

	July 2020			March 2021			September 2021		
	Open to public and holding services in same way as before outbreak	Open to public for services, but with changes as result of outbreak	NOT open for in-person services	Open to public and holding services in same way as before outbreak	Open to public for services, but with changes as result of outbreak	NOT open for in-person services	Open to public and holding services in same way as before outbreak	Open to public for services, but with changes as result of outbreak	NOT open for in-person services
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
All U.S. attenders	13	57	28	26	58	15	34	59	6
Christian	13	59	27	26	59	14	33	60	7
Protestant	15	58	26	28	57	14	39	56	5
<i>Evangelical</i>	18	64	18	35	56	8	50	46	3
<i>Mainline</i>	9	49	40	20	57	22	24	70	4
<i>Historically Black</i>	10	46	41	11	60	28	18	70	10
Catholic	8	62	27	21	67	10	25	70	5
White, non-Hispanic	15	63	21	32	58	9	41	55	3
Black, non-Hispanic	10	44	42	9	59	30	23	65	11
Hispanic	10	51	37	22	61	14	24	65	11
Northeast	7	69	19	21	60	16	35	57	8
Midwest	16	61	22	29	59	11	43	54	3
South	14	53	31	25	60	13	30	62	7
West	12	51	35	27	53	19	32	60	7
Rep./lean Rep.	19	64	16	40	55	4	53	44	2
Dem./lean Dem.	6	48	44	7	64	26	15	77	7

Note: Those who did not answer are not shown. White and Black adults include those who report being only one race and are not Hispanic. Hispanics are of any race.

Source: Survey conducted Sept. 20-26, 2021, among U.S. adults.

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Most worshippers feel at least ‘somewhat’ confident in safety of communal worship, but fewer than half are ‘very’ confident

The vast majority of U.S. adults who typically attend religious services or have gone in person in the past month (82%) now say they feel at least somewhat confident they could safely worship in person without catching or spreading the coronavirus. This figure is up slightly since March 2021 (76%), although the share who say they are *very* confident they can attend religious services safely is unchanged over this period, at 45%. And among those who actually have attended in person in the past month, the share who say they are very confident they can do so safely has fallen from 66% in March to 54% in September.

More than half of White (non-Hispanic) religious attenders (55%) now say they are very confident they can attend religious services in person without catching or spreading COVID-19, far higher than the share of Black (35%) or Hispanic (23%) worshippers who say the same, mirroring a pattern from the earlier surveys. There also is a persistent partisan gap: Republican congregants are twice as likely as those who identify with or lean toward the Democratic Party to say they are very confident in the safety of communal worship (62% vs. 30%).

Eight-in-ten religious attenders now at least somewhat confident they could go to services in person without catching, spreading COVID-19

Among U.S. adults who typically attend religious services at least monthly or attended in person in the past month, % who say they are ___ confident they could safely attend in-person religious services right now without spreading or catching the coronavirus

	July 2020			March 2021			September 2021		
	Very %	Somewhat %	NET Not too/not at all %	Very %	Somewhat %	NET Not too/not at all %	Very %	Somewhat %	NET Not too/not at all %
All U.S. religious attenders	34	29	35	45	32	23	45	37	18
Christian	35	29	35	46	31	22	46	36	18
Protestant	37	30	32	47	31	22	52	32	16
<i>Evangelical</i>	42	32	25	52	30	17	57	29	13
<i>Mainline</i>	26	30	43	45	30	24	50	36	14
<i>Historically Black</i>	30	20	49	31	33	34	34	40	25
Catholic	31	28	40	43	34	21	40	41	19
Attended in person in last month	59	30	11	66	27	7	54	37	9
Have not attended	20	29	49	26	36	37	27	36	38
White, non-Hispanic	40	32	27	53	29	17	55	31	14
Black, non-Hispanic	29	20	49	28	32	39	35	39	25
Hispanic	24	27	48	36	38	25	23	54	22
Northeast	34	34	30	47	31	20	50	34	16
Midwest	37	32	31	49	31	19	52	38	10
South	35	27	38	42	34	23	42	36	21
West	31	30	38	44	29	27	42	37	21
Republican/lean Rep.	47	32	21	61	27	11	62	29	9
Democrat/lean Dem.	18	26	55	25	38	36	30	43	28

Note: Those who did not answer are not shown. White and Black adults include those who report being only one race and are not Hispanic. Hispanics are of any race.

Source: Survey conducted Sept. 20-26, 2021, among U.S. adults.

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Most U.S. congregants express at least some trust in their clergy's guidance on COVID-19 vaccines

Where do religious leaders stand in comparison with other authorities as trusted sources of information about coronavirus vaccinations – particularly as many Americans [express skepticism](#) about the vaccines?

In the opinion of U.S. adults who typically attend religious services at least monthly or who attended in person in the last month, primary care doctors are by far the most trusted source of information asked about in this survey. Fully 84% of monthly attenders say they have either “a great deal” or “a fair amount” of confidence in their own doctor to provide guidance about receiving a COVID-19 vaccine.

But those who regularly attend religious services also express trust in their clergy or other religious leaders at their house of worship as sources of information about coronavirus vaccinations. About six-in-ten monthly attenders (61%) say that they have at least a fair amount of confidence in their religious leaders to provide reliable guidance about the vaccines, nearly identical to the share who express confidence in public health officials such as those at the CDC. Overall, more Americans who attend religious services at least monthly express trust in their clergy and religious leaders to provide vaccine guidance than say the same about their state elected officials, their local elected officials or the news media.

Black Americans who attend religious services are especially likely to be confident in their clergy to provide guidance about receiving the COVID-19 vaccine, with 77% expressing at least a fair amount of confidence in religious leaders to do so, compared with 59% of White (non-Hispanic) and 62% of Hispanic congregants.

Among those who attend religious services, clergy rank above elected officials, news media as trusted source of information about COVID-19 vaccines

Among U.S. adults who typically attend religious services at least monthly or attended in person in the last month, % who say they have at least 'a fair amount' of confidence in _____ to provide guidance about receiving a COVID-19 vaccine

	Their primary care doctor	The clergy or other religious leaders at their house of worship	Public health officials such as those at the CDC	Their local elected officials	Their state elected officials	The news media
	%	%	%	%	%	%
All U.S. religious attenders	84	61	60	50	49	41
Protestant	82	61	55	46	46	36
<i>Evangelical</i>	79	57	44	40	40	24
<i>Mainline</i>	91	58	69	54	52	43
<i>Historically Black</i>	80	78	77	56	59	68
Catholic	91	56	64	53	57	47
White, non-Hispanic	84	59	53	44	44	30
Black, non-Hispanic	84	77	78	56	57	67
Hispanic	87	62	71	61	55	55
Ages 18-49	80	55	61	47	47	40
50+	87	66	60	52	50	43
High school or less	78	66	60	52	50	45
Some college	86	59	57	47	47	40
College graduate	87	59	61	47	47	36
Graduate degree	90	55	68	53	50	41
Republican/lean Rep.	81	58	41	42	41	23
Democrat/lean Dem.	90	65	82	61	60	64

Note: White and Black adults include those who report being only one race and are not Hispanic. Hispanics are of any race.

Source: Survey conducted Sept. 20-26, 2021, among U.S. adults.

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The survey also asked U.S. Catholics about the level of confidence they have in Pope Francis – who has [urged people to get vaccinated](#) – to provide guidance about the vaccine.

Catholic Americans are split on this question: 47% say they have “a great deal” or “a fair amount” of confidence in Francis to provide vaccine guidance, while 52% say they have “not too much” confidence or “no confidence at all” in the pope as a source of information on coronavirus vaccinations. Six-in-ten Catholics who attend Mass monthly or more often say that they have at least a fair amount of confidence in Pope Francis to provide guidance about the shots – similar to the share who say the same about their own parish priests (56%). Meanwhile, 40% of Catholics who attend Mass less often have the same level of confidence in the pope.

U.S. Catholics split on Pope Francis as a source of vaccine guidance

% of U.S. Catholics who say they have _____ confidence in Pope Francis to provide guidance about receiving a COVID-19 vaccine

	A great deal/ a fair amount	Not too much/ none at all
	%	%
All U.S. Catholics	47	52
Attend monthly or more often	60	39
Attend less often	40	59

Note: Those who did not answer are not shown

Source: Survey conducted Sept. 20-26, 2021, among U.S. adults.

“Most Americans Who Go to Religious Services Say They Would Trust Their Clergy’s Advice on COVID-19 Vaccines”

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More than half of U.S. congregants have not heard advice from clergy about coronavirus vaccines

Among Americans who attend services monthly or attended in person during the past month, far more say that their clergy have encouraged people to get a COVID-19 vaccine (39%) than discouraged it (5%), though a slim majority (54%) say that their clergy have not said much about the vaccines.

Nearly six-in-ten Democrats and Democratic leaners who attend religious services say that their religious leaders have encouraged people to get vaccinated, compared with just 24% of Republican attenders who say they have heard the same message from their religious leaders.

Additionally, almost two-thirds of Protestants in the historically Black tradition (64%) say their clergy have encouraged people to get the vaccine, much higher than the share of Catholics (42%), mainline Protestants (42%) and evangelical Protestants (21%) who say they have received the same kind of encouragement from their leaders. Still, just 4% of evangelicals say they have heard their clergy *discourage* the vaccine.

Members of historically Black Protestant tradition especially likely to hear clergy urging COVID-19 vaccinations

Among U.S. adults who typically attend religious services at least monthly or attended in person in the last month, % who say their clergy have ...

	Encouraged people to get a vaccine %	Discouraged people from getting a vaccine %	Not said much about the vaccines either way %
All U.S. religious attenders	39	5	54
Protestant	33	3	62
<i>Evangelical</i>	21	4	73
<i>Mainline</i>	42	1	54
<i>Historically Black</i>	64	2	34
Catholic	42	3	52
Republican/lean Rep.	24	4	69
Democrat/lean Dem.	57	5	37

Note: Those who did not answer are not shown.

Source: Survey conducted Sept. 20-26, 2021, among U.S. adults.

"Most Americans Who Go to Religious Services Say They Would Trust Their Clergy's Advice on COVID-19 Vaccines"

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Most Americans say churches and other religious organizations should keep out of politics

A majority of Americans prefer that religious leaders and organizations stay away from discussing politics. When asked whether churches and other houses of worship should keep out of political matters or express their views on day-to-day social and political questions, fully seven-in-ten U.S. adults say that houses of worship should keep out – up from 63% the last time this question was asked, in [March 2019](#). About three-in-ten now say that churches should express their views on these questions (29%).

There are differences in views of this question based on race, party affiliation and religious affiliation. Black adults are more likely than White, Asian or Hispanic adults to say that churches and other houses of worship *should* express their views on political and social matters, with 40% saying this is something they support. Additionally, 37% of U.S. adults who identify with or lean toward the Republican Party say that churches should express their views on these matters, while fewer Democrats and Democratic leaners (24%) say the same.

Even though a strong majority of evangelical Protestants identify with the GOP and a larger majority of Protestants in the historically Black tradition identify with the Democratic Party, the two groups have similar views on this question, with relatively large shares saying that churches should express their views on political and social issues (47% and 45%, respectively). Smaller shares of mainline

Most U.S. adults want houses of worship to stay out of politics

% of U.S. adults who say churches and other houses of worship should ...

	Keep out of political matters	Express their views on day-to-day social and political questions
	%	%
All U.S. adults	70	29
Christian	64	35
Protestant	58	41
<i>Evangelical</i>	51	47
<i>Mainline</i>	73	26
<i>Historically Black</i>	54	45
Catholic	74	25
<i>White Catholic</i>	75	24
<i>Hispanic Catholic</i>	72	28
Unaffiliated	81	18
Atheist	83	16
Agnostic	89	11
Nothing in particular	79	21
Attend services monthly or more often	55	44
Attend services a few times a year or less	77	22
White, non-Hispanic	71	28
Black, non-Hispanic	60	40
Hispanic	70	29
Asian, non-Hispanic*	80	20
Republican/lean Rep.	62	37
Democrat/lean Dem.	76	24

*Asian adults were interviewed in English only.

Note: Those who did not answer are not shown. White, Black and Asian adults include those who report being only one race and are not Hispanic. Hispanics are of any race.

Source: Survey conducted Sept. 20-26, 2021, among U.S. adults. "Most Americans Who Go to Religious Services Say They Would Trust Their Clergy's Advice on COVID-19 Vaccines"

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Protestants and Catholics say the same, with roughly three-quarters in each group saying that churches and other houses of worship should refrain from weighing in on political matters.

On balance, religious organizations still viewed as positive forces in society

Questions about whether churches and other houses of worship should speak out on political and social issues are part of a larger discussion on the impact that these institutions have on public life in the United States.

More U.S. adults say churches and religious organizations mostly bring people together rather than push people apart (52% vs. 19%), and 28% say they do neither. These figures are little changed since [2019](#) and [2017](#).

Christians are far more likely than religiously unaffiliated Americans to say that religious organizations mostly bring people together (66% vs. 25%), with evangelical Protestants especially likely to hold this view (77%). Meanwhile, most self-described atheists (62%) say religious groups mostly push people apart. Additionally, Republicans and independents who lean Republican are much more likely than Democrats to say churches and other religious institutions mostly bring people together (70% vs. 40%).

More Americans say religious institutions unite than divide

% of U.S. adults who say churches and other religious organizations ...

	Mostly bring people together %	Mostly push people apart %	Neither %
All U.S. adults	52	19	28
Christian	66	9	23
Protestant	69	7	23
<i>Evangelical</i>	77	4	18
<i>Mainline</i>	61	11	27
<i>Historically Black</i>	57	10	32
Catholic	62	12	25
<i>White Catholic</i>	63	9	27
<i>Hispanic Catholic</i>	59	18	22
Unaffiliated	25	37	37
Atheist	10	62	27
Agnostic	21	43	36
Nothing in particular	30	29	39
Attend services monthly or more often	78	7	13
Attend services a few times a year or less	40	24	35
Ages 18-49	47	24	27
50+	58	13	28
Republican/lean Rep.	70	8	22
Democrat/lean Dem.	40	28	31

Note: Those who did not answer are not shown. White adults include those who report being only one race and are not Hispanic. Hispanics are of any race.

Source: Survey conducted Sept. 20-26, 2021, among U.S. adults.

"Most Americans Who Go to Religious Services Say They Would Trust Their Clergy's Advice on COVID-19 Vaccines"

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In a similar vein, respondents were asked whether they feel that churches and religious organizations do more harm than good; more good than harm; or don't make much of a difference in American society. Overall, 53% say they do more good than harm, 21% say they do more harm than good, and 25% express a neutral view. These figures also are largely unchanged from 2019 and 2017.

Once again, Christians are much more positive than the religiously unaffiliated in their assessments of the influence of religious organizations on public life, as are Republicans compared with Democrats. Two-thirds of Christians (67%) say that all things considered, churches do more good than harm in American society, a view shared by just 26% of religious “nones.” And roughly seven-in-ten Republicans (71%) express this positive view of religious organizations, compared with four-in-ten Democrats.

Notably, U.S. adults between the ages of 18 and 49 are about twice as likely as those ages 50 and older to take the opposite position, saying that churches and religious organizations do more harm than good (27% vs. 14%).

Americans generally view religious organizations as more beneficial than harmful

% of U.S. adults who say churches and other religious organizations _____ in American society

	Do more good than harm	Do more harm than good	Don't make much difference
	%	%	%
All U.S. adults	53	21	25
Christian	67	9	23
Protestant	71	7	21
<i>Evangelical</i>	81	5	14
<i>Mainline</i>	65	10	25
<i>Historically Black</i>	55	10	34
Catholic	61	12	26
<i>White Catholic</i>	64	11	25
<i>Hispanic Catholic</i>	56	17	26
Unaffiliated	26	42	30
Atheist	12	71	17
Agnostic	24	52	23
Nothing in particular	31	32	36
Attend services monthly or more often	77	8	14
Attend services a few times a year or less	41	27	31
Ages 18-49	45	27	27
50+	62	14	23
Republican/lean Rep.	71	7	22
Democrat/lean Dem.	40	33	26

Note: Those who did not answer are not shown. White adults include those who report being only one race and are not Hispanic. Hispanics are of any race.

Source: Survey conducted Sept. 20-26, 2021, among U.S. adults.

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No clear consensus on religious organizations' impact amid pandemic

The survey also asked more narrowly about the impact that churches and religious organizations have had on the way the United States has handled the coronavirus outbreak. U.S. adults are not quite as positive in assessing the impact of churches and other religious organizations in this specific area as they are when it comes to society as a whole. About half of Americans (52%) say houses of worship have not made much difference on the way the U.S. has handled the coronavirus outbreak, while 25% say religious institutions have done more harm than good, and 22% say they have done more good than harm.

Most Christians (55%) say that churches have not made much of a difference in the country's handling of the coronavirus, with the remainder more likely to say they have helped (28%) rather than harmed (16%). A strong majority of atheists (71%), meanwhile, say that religious organizations have

U.S. adults ambivalent about impact of religious organizations on COVID-19 response

% of U.S. adults who say that churches and religious organizations have _____ on the way the U.S. has handled the coronavirus outbreak

	Done more good than harm	Done more harm than good	Not made much difference
	%	%	%
All U.S. adults	22	25	52
Christian	28	16	55
Protestant	30	14	54
<i>Evangelical</i>	35	12	51
<i>Mainline</i>	20	19	58
<i>Historically Black</i>	33	10	56
Catholic	23	18	58
<i>White Catholic</i>	20	17	62
<i>Hispanic Catholic</i>	26	19	55
Unaffiliated	10	43	46
Atheist	5	71	23
Agnostic	6	50	44
Nothing in particular	13	34	52
Attend services monthly+	37	14	47
Attend services less often	15	30	54
White, non-Hispanic	20	25	54
Black, non-Hispanic	29	17	53
Hispanic	24	25	49
Asian, non-Hispanic*	22	40	38
Ages 18-29	16	37	45
30-49	21	28	51
50-64	26	19	53
65+	24	16	58
Some college or less	23	21	54
College degree or more	20	32	47
Republican/lean Rep.	27	9	62
Democrat/lean Dem.	18	39	42

*Asian adults were interviewed in English only.

Note: Those who did not answer are not shown. White, Black and Asian adults include those who report being only one race and are not Hispanic. Hispanics are of any race.

Source: Survey conducted Sept. 20-26, 2021, among U.S. adults.

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done more harm than good in the country's response to the pandemic.

Democrats are much more likely than Republicans to say that churches have done more harm than good in the country's response to the pandemic (39% vs. 9%), as are Americans who attend religious services a few times a year or less compared with those who attend monthly or more often (30% vs. 14%).

Methodology

The American Trends Panel survey methodology

Overview

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

Data in this report is drawn from the panel wave conducted from Sept. 20 to Sept. 26, 2021. A total of 6,485 panelists responded out of 7,252 who were sampled, for a response rate of 89%. 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 1%. The margin of sampling error for the full sample of 6,485 respondents is plus or minus 1.9 percentage points.

Panel recruitment

The ATP was created in 2014, with the first cohort of panelists invited to join the panel at the end of a large, national, landline and cellphone random-digit-dial survey that was conducted in both English and Spanish. Two additional recruitments were conducted using the same method in 2015 and 2017, respectively. Across these three surveys, a total of 19,718 adults were invited to join the ATP, of whom 9,942 (50%) agreed to participate.

In August 2018, the ATP switched from telephone to

American Trends Panel recruitment surveys

Recruitment dates	Mode	Invited	Joined	Active panelists remaining
Jan. 23 to March 16, 2014	Landline/ cell RDD	9,809	5,338	1,604
Aug. 27 to Oct. 4, 2015	Landline/ cell RDD	6,004	2,976	939
April 25 to June 4, 2017	Landline/ cell RDD	3,905	1,628	470
Aug. 8 to Oct. 31, 2018	ABS	9,396	8,778	4,433
Aug. 19 to Nov. 30, 2019	ABS	5,900	4,720	1,627
June 1 to July 19, 2020; Feb. 10 to March 31, 2021	ABS	3,197	2,812	1,701
May 29 to July 7, 2021	ABS	1,085	947	728
	Total	39,296	27,199	11,502

Note: Approximately once per year, panelists who have not participated in multiple consecutive waves or who did not complete an annual profiling survey are removed from the panel. Panelists also become inactive if they ask to be removed from the panel. The 2021 recruitment survey was ongoing at the time W96 was conducted. The counts reflect completed recruitment interviews up through July 7, 2021.

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address-based recruitment. Invitations were sent to a stratified, random sample of households selected from the U.S. Postal Service's Delivery Sequence File. Sampled households receive mailings asking a randomly selected adult to complete a survey online. A question at the end of the survey asks if the respondent is willing to join the ATP. Starting in 2020 another stage was added to the recruitment. Households that do not respond to the online survey are sent a paper version of the questionnaire, \$5 and a postage-paid return envelope. A subset of the adults returning the paper version of the survey are invited to join the ATP. This subset of adults receives a follow-up mailing with a \$10 pre-incentive and invitation to join the ATP.

Across the four address-based recruitments, a total of 19,578 adults were invited to join the ATP, of whom 17,257 agreed to join the panel and completed an initial profile survey. In each household, the adult with the next birthday was asked to go online to complete a survey, at the end of which they were invited to join the panel. Of the 27,199 individuals who have ever joined the ATP, 11,502 remained active panelists and continued to receive survey invitations at the time this survey was conducted.

The U.S. Postal Service's Delivery Sequence File has been estimated to cover as much as 98% of the population, although some studies suggest that the coverage could be in the low 90% range.¹ The American Trends Panel never uses breakout routers or chains that direct respondents to additional surveys.

Sample design

The overall target population for this survey was non-institutionalized persons ages 18 and older, living in the U.S., including Alaska and Hawaii.

This study featured a stratified random sample from the ATP. The sample was allocated according to the following strata, in order: tablet households, White mainline Protestants who attend religious services monthly or more, White evangelical Protestants who attend religious services a few times a year or less, White Catholics who attend monthly or more, Black Protestants, White Catholics who attend a few times a year or less, Hispanic Catholics, White mainline Protestants who attend a few times a year or less, atheists and agnostics, White evangelical Protestants who attend monthly or more, those with no religious affiliation in particular, foreign-born Hispanics, U.S.-born Hispanics, not registered to vote, high school education or less, foreign-born Asian adults, people ages 18 to 34, non-Hispanic Black adults, uses internet weekly or less, nonvolunteers, and all other categories not already falling into any of the above.

¹ AAPOR Task Force on Address-based Sampling. 2016. "[AAPOR Report: Address-based Sampling.](#)"

All strata were sampled at rates designed to ensure that the share of respondents in each stratum is proportional to its share of the U.S. adult population to the greatest extent possible. 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 Pew Research Center in consultation with Ipsos. The web program was rigorously tested on both PC and mobile devices by the Ipsos project management team and Pew Research Center researchers. The Ipsos project management 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 a gift code to Amazon.com or could choose to decline the incentive. 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 Sept. 20 to Sept. 26, 2021. Postcard notifications were mailed to all ATP panelists with a known residential address on Sept. 20, 2021.

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 Sept. 20, 2021. The ATP panelists chosen for the initial soft launch were known responders who had completed previous ATP surveys within one day of receiving their invitation. All remaining English- and Spanish-speaking panelists were included in the full launch and were sent an invitation on Sept. 21, 2021.

All panelists with an email address received an email invitation and up to two email reminders if they did not respond to the survey. All ATP panelists that consented to SMS messages received an SMS invitation and up to two SMS reminders.

Invitation and reminder dates

	Soft Launch	Full Launch
Initial invitation	Sept. 20, 2021	Sept. 21, 2021
First reminder	Sept. 23, 2021	Sept. 23, 2021
Final reminder	Sept. 25, 2021	Sept. 25, 2021

Data quality checks

To ensure high-quality data, the Center’s researchers performed data quality checks to identify any respondents showing clear patterns of satisficing. This includes checking for very high rates of leaving questions blank, as well as always selecting 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 multistep process that accounts for multiple stages of sampling and nonresponse that occur at different points in the survey process. First, each panelist begins with a base weight that reflects their probability of selection for their initial recruitment survey. Among respondents to this survey, the base weights for panelists recruited in different years are scaled to be proportionate to the effective sample size for all respondents in their cohort. To correct for nonresponse to recruitment surveys and panel attrition, the base weights for all active panelists are calibrated to align with the population benchmarks in the accompanying table to create a full-panel weight. If only a subsample of panelists was invited to participate in the wave, the full-panel 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.

Some of the population benchmarks used for weighting come from surveys conducted prior to the coronavirus outbreak that began in February 2020. However, the weighting variables for panelists recruited in 2021 were measured at the time they were recruited to the panel. Likewise, the profile variables for existing panelists were updated from panel surveys conducted in July or August 2021.

This does not pose a problem for most of the variables used in the weighting, which are quite stable at both the population and individual levels. However, volunteerism may have changed over the intervening period in ways that made panelists' 2021 measurements incompatible with the available (pre-pandemic) benchmarks. To address this, volunteerism is weighted using the profile variables that were measured in 2020. For all other weighting dimensions, the more recent panelist measurements from 2021 are used.

Weighting dimensions

Variable	Benchmark source
Age x Gender	2019 American Community Survey (ACS)
Education x Gender	
Education x Age	
Race/Ethnicity x Education	
Born inside vs. outside the U.S. among Hispanics and Asian Americans	
Years lived in the U.S.	
Census region x Metro/Non-metro	2020 CPS March Supplement
Volunteerism	2019 CPS Volunteering & Civic Life Supplement
Voter registration	2018 CPS Voting and Registration Supplement
Party affiliation	2021 National Public Opinion Reference Survey (NPORS)
Frequency of internet use	
Religious affiliation	

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

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For panelists recruited in 2021, plausible values were imputed using the 2020 volunteerism values from existing panelists with similar characteristics. This ensures that any patterns of change that were observed in the existing panelists were also reflected in the new recruits when the weighting was performed.

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

Group	Unweighted sample size	Plus or minus ...	
All U.S. adults	6,485	1.9 percentage points	
Christian	4,310	2.3 percentage points	
Protestant	2,745	2.8 percentage points	
<i>Evangelical</i>	1,421	3.9 percentage points	
<i>Mainline</i>	911	4.9 percentage points	
<i>Historically Black</i>	413	6.9 percentage points	
Catholic	1,375	4.3 percentage points	
<i>White Catholic</i>	857	4.8 percentage points	
<i>Hispanic Catholic</i>	432	9.4 percentage points	
Unaffiliated	1,814	3.7 percentage points	
Atheist	339	8.3 percentage points	
Agnostic	334	8.8 percentage points	
Nothing in particular	1,141	4.7 percentage points	
Attend services monthly+	2,162	3.3 percentage points	
Attend services less often	4,302	2.3 percentage points	
White	4,334	2.2 percentage points	
Black	662	5.6 percentage points	
Hispanic	975	6.0 percentage points	
Asian	260	9.1 percentage points	
Ages 18-29	618	6.0 percentage points	
30-49	2,130	3.2 percentage points	
50-64	1,831	3.4 percentage points	
65+	1,876	3.1 percentage points	
Ages 18-49	2,748	3.0 percentage points	
50+	3,707	2.3 percentage points	
Some college or less	3,260	2.6 percentage points	
College degree or more	3,208	2.3 percentage points	
	Unweighted sample size	Weighted %	
Republican/lean Rep.	2,958	42	2.8 percentage points
Democrat/lean Dem.	3,342	51	2.6 percentage points

Group	Unweighted sample size	Plus or minus ...
<i>Among U.S. adults who typically attend religious services at least monthly or attended in person in the last month</i>		
Total	2,437	3.2 percentage points
Christian	2,250	3.3 percentage points
Protestant	1,532	3.8 percentage points
<i>Evangelical</i>	933	4.9 percentage points
<i>Mainline</i>	346	8.0 percentage points
<i>Historically Black</i>	253	8.6 percentage points
Catholic	590	6.9 percentage points
White, non-Hispanic	1,509	3.8 percentage points
Black, non-Hispanic	353	7.5 percentage points
Hispanic	380	9.7 percentage points
Northeast	307	8.6 percentage points
Midwest	531	6.7 percentage points
South	1,114	4.8 percentage points
West	485	6.9 percentage points
Republican/lean Rep.	1,397	4.1 percentage points
Democrat/lean Dem.	962	4.9 percentage points
<i>Among U.S. adults who typically attend religious services at least monthly</i>		
Total	2,162	3.3 percentage points
Christian	2,055	3.4 percentage points
Protestant	1,432	3.9 percentage points
<i>Evangelical</i>	885	5.0 percentage points
<i>Mainline</i>	312	8.6 percentage points
<i>Historically Black</i>	235	8.5 percentage points
Catholic	499	7.5 percentage points
White, non-Hispanic	1,356	4.0 percentage points
Black, non-Hispanic	326	7.1 percentage points
Northeast	252	9.4 percentage points
Midwest	482	6.9 percentage points
South	991	5.0 percentage points
West	437	7.3 percentage points
Republican/lean Rep.	1,256	4.4 percentage points
Democrat/lean Dem.	842	5.2 percentage points

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.

Dispositions and response rates

Final dispositions	AAPOR code	Total
Completed interview	1.1	6,485
Logged on to survey; broke-off	2.12	89
Logged on to survey; did not complete any items	2.1121	48
Never logged on (implicit refusal)	2.11	626
Survey completed after close of the field period	2.27	2
Completed interview but was removed for data quality		2
Screened out		0
Total panelists in the survey		7,252
Completed interviews	I	6,485
Partial interviews	P	0
Refusals	R	765
Non-contact	NC	2
Other	O	0
Unknown household	UH	0
Unknown other	UO	0
Not eligible	NE	0
Total		7,252
AAPOR RR1 = $I / (I+P+R+NC+O+UH+UO)$		89%

Cumulative response rate	Total
Weighted response rate to recruitment surveys	12%
% of recruitment survey respondents who agreed to join the panel, among those invited	69%
% of those agreeing to join who were active panelists at start of Wave 96	42%
Response rate to Wave 96 survey	89%
Cumulative response rate	3%

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