

American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS 2008)



SUMMARY REPORT

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AMERICAN RELIGIOUS IDENTIFICATION SURVEY (ARIS) 2008

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Highlights

The ARIS 2008 survey was carried out during February-November 2008 and collected answers from 54,461 respondents who were questioned in English or Spanish.

The American population self-identifies as predominantly Christian but Americans are slowly becoming less Christian.

- 86% of American adults identified as Christians in 1990 and 76% in 2008.
 - The historic Mainline churches and denominations have experienced the steepest declines while the non-denominational Christian identity has been trending upward particularly since 2001.
 - The challenge to Christianity in the U.S. does not come from other religions but rather from a rejection of all forms of organized religion.
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34% of American adults considered themselves “Born Again or Evangelical Christians” in 2008.

The U. S. population continues to show signs of becoming less religious, with one out of every five Americans failing to indicate a religious identity in 2008.

- The “Nones” (no stated religious preference, atheist, or agnostic) continue to grow, though at a much slower pace than in the 1990s, from 8.2% in 1990, to 14.1% in 2001, to 15.0% in 2008.

- Asian Americans are substantially more likely to indicate no religious identity than other racial or ethnic groups.
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One sign of the lack of attachment of Americans to religion is that 27% do not expect a religious funeral at their death.

Based on their stated beliefs rather than their religious identification in 2008, 70% of Americans believe in a personal God, roughly 12% of Americans are atheist (no God) or agnostic (unknowable or unsure), and another 12% are deistic (a higher power but no personal God).

America’s religious geography has been transformed since 1990. Religious switching along with Hispanic immigration has significantly changed the religious profile of some states and regions. Between 1990 and 2008, the Catholic population proportion of the New England states fell from 50% to 36% and in New York it fell from 44% to 37%, while it rose in California from 29% to 37% and in Texas from 23% to 32%.

Overall the 1990-2008 ARIS time series shows that changes in religious self-identification in the first decade of the 21st century have been moderate in comparison to the 1990s, which was a period of significant shifts in the religious composition of the United States.

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Research Design

ARIS 2008 is the third in a landmark time series of large, nationally representative surveys that track changes in the religious loyalties of the U.S. adult population within the 48 contiguous states from 1990 to 2008. The 2001 and 2008 surveys are replicas of the 1990 survey, and are led by the same academic research team using an identical methodology of random-digit-dialed telephone interviews (RDD) and the same unprompted, open-ended key question “What is your religion, if any?” Interviewers did not prompt or offer a suggested list of potential answers. Moreover, the self-description of respondents was not based on whether established religious bodies or institutions considered them to be members. To the contrary, the surveys sought to determine whether the respondents regarded themselves as adherents of a religious community. The surveys tap subjective rather than objective standards of religious identification. The value of this unique series of national surveys, which allows scientific monitoring of change over time, has been recognized by the U.S. Bureau of the Census. The Bureau itself is constitutionally precluded from such an inquiry into religion, and so has incorporated NSRI/ARIS findings into its official publication the *Statistical Abstract of the United States* since 2003.

The key religion question is part of an inquiry that also probes a range of socio-demographic, political, social, and life-cycle issues as well as attitudes that add richness to the main findings. These responses reveal the nation’s pattern of religious beliefs, behaviors and belonging. The ARIS 2008 survey was carried out from February through November 2008 and collected answers from 54,461 respondents who were questioned in English or Spanish. In order to fill the information gap on the growing number of people who do not have a landline but use cellular telephones mainly or exclusively, we supplemented the traditional RDD sample with a separate national cell phone survey. Results for the ARIS key open-ended question on religious self-identification indicate no statistically significant differences between the RDD sample and the cell phone sample.¹ ARIS 2001 interviewed 50,281 respondents and the 1990 NSRI interviewed 113,713 respondents. The huge number of cases in these surveys provides unparalleled, in-depth profiles of the social make-up of religious groups and detailed geographical coverage with a high degree of statistical precision and a standard error of under 0.5 percent for the full sample in 2008.

As one might expect with over 220,000 interviews recorded over three surveys, the ARIS respondents offered a vast number of theological, religious and denominational responses to our key question. These open-ended answers have to be aggregated down to a manageable number of categories for analytical purposes. This requires using a simplified aggregation that helps highlight the major trends in religious sentiments across five major theological blocs as utilized in Tables 1, 2 and 12. The category Catholic is comprised of (1) Roman Catholics, (2) Eastern Rites Catholics, and (3) all others who used the term “Catholic” in their response. The “Other Christians” bloc is composed of all non-Catholic respondents who self-identified with a religious group which claims to be Christian as well as any theological term that related to Christianity. The “Other Religions” bloc comprises all the other faiths, world religions and religious groups that are not Christian. The “Nones” are an amalgamation of all the respondents who provided answers to our key question which identified them as having no religious identity or connection. The most common response was “None” or “No Religion.” This bloc can be described as the non-religious, irreligious and anti-religious bloc. It includes anti-clerical theists, but the majority are non-theists. For reasons of scientific integrity we have also included data on the “Unknown” category, composed of those who said they did not know the answer to our key religion question and those who refused to reply to our key question. We have no religious identification data on this population but we do have demographic and attitude data.

A further re-classification of the responses that offers a finer-grained taxonomy identifying 12 religious traditions and some of the larger religious groups is provided in Table 3 and other subsequent tables. However, this summary is just the tip of the iceberg of statistical data on a much larger number of religious groups than can be handled here and many more social variables than are highlighted here. The 1990 and 2001 studies were fully analyzed and reported in *One Nation under God: Religion in Contemporary American Society* (1993) and *Religion in a Free Market: Religious and Non-Religious Americans* (2006).²

¹Detailed analysis of the religious and socio-demographic profiles of the cell phone users will be provided in a later report.

²Barry A. Kosmin and Seymour P. Lachman, *One Nation under God: Religion in Contemporary American Society*, New York, Harmony Press, 1993; Barry A. Kosmin and Ariela Keysar, *Religion in a Free Market: Religious and Non-Religious Americans*, Ithaca, N.Y., Paramount Market Publishing, 2006.

Part I

National Statistics on Belonging, Belief and Behavior

A. Belonging

Table 1.
Religious Self-Identification of the U.S. Adult Population 1990, 2001, 2008

	1990		2001		2008	
	Estimated Number of People	%	Estimated Number of People	%	Estimated Number of People	%
<i>Catholic</i>	46,004,000	26.2	50,873,000	24.5	57,199,000	25.1
<i>Other Christian</i>	105,221,000	60.0	108,641,000	52.2	116,203,000	50.9
Total Christians	151,225,000	86.2	159,514,000	76.7	173,402,000	76.0
Other Religions	5,853,000	3.3	7,740,000	3.7	8,796,000	3.9
Nones	14,331,000	8.2	29,481,000	14.1	34,169,000	15.0
DK/Refused	4,031,000	2.3	11,246,000	5.4	11,815,000	5.2
Total	175,440,000	100.0	207,983,000	100.0	228,182,000	100.0

The U.S. adult population over 18 years of age grew by nearly 53 million persons in the 18 years between 1990 and 2008. As a result, all the religious identification categories shown in Table 1 increased their overall numbers. The most dramatic changes in the balance of religious sentiments seem to have occurred during the 1990s. The changes between 2001 and 2008, when the adult population expanded by over 20 million persons, largely reflect the influence of the heavy immigration primarily from Latin America in recent years.

The 2008 findings confirm the conclusions we came to in our earlier studies that Americans are slowly becoming less Christian and that in recent decades the challenge to Christianity in American society does not come from other world religions or new religious movements (NRMs) but rather from a rejection of all organized religions. To illustrate the point, Table 1 shows that the non-theist and No Religion groups collectively known as “Nones” have gained almost 20 million adults since 1990 and risen from 8.2 to 15.0 percent of the total population. If we include those Americans who either don’t know their religious identification (0.9 percent) or refuse to answer our key question (4.1 percent), and who tend to somewhat resemble “Nones” in their social profile and beliefs, we can observe that in 2008 one in five adults does not identify with a religion of any kind compared with one in ten in 1990.

Other Non-Christian religious groups and faiths have steadily grown in numbers from a small base and have gained three million adherents since 1990 but they represent only 4 percent of the national population. The various Christian churches and groups gained 31 million adherents to total over 173 million but their combined numbers as a proportion of the population fell by 10 percent from 86.2 percent down to 76 percent over the past two decades. The nation’s largest Christian group, the Catholics, gained 11 million, thanks largely to immigration and now numbers just over 57 million adult self-identifiers, but the Catholic percentage of the national population still fell from 26.2 percent to 25.1 percent between 1990 and 2008. The Other Christian category, largely composed of adherents of the Protestant Churches and traditions, also gained 11 million people but fell from 60 to 51 percent of the total population.

Table 2.**Change in the Religious Self-Identification of the U.S. Adult Population 1990-2008**

	Estimated Population 1990	Estimated Population 2008	Estimated Population Growth	% Growth of Group	% Share of National Population Growth
Catholic	46,004,000	57,199,000	11,195,000	24	21
Other Christian	105,221,000	116,201,000	10,980,000	10	20
Other Religions	5,853,000	8,796,000	2,943,000	50	6
Nones	14,331,000	34,169,000	19,838,000	138	37
DK/Refused	4,031,000	11,815,000	7,784,000	193	15
Total U.S.	175,440,000	228,182,000	52,742,000	30	100

Table 2 illustrates the dynamics of religious population changes over the period 1990-2008 which saw the total population grow by 30 percent. As was stated previously every group has increased in absolute numbers but the rate of growth has varied. The largest net increase in numbers went to the Nones which have grown by 138% in the period. The right hand column reflects the distribution of the population gains since 1990. The Nones also secured nearly 38 percent of the total population increase. Catholics and the Other Christians groups each received around a 21 percent share of the population increase. The Other Religions group rose by 50 percent in absolute numbers and gained 6 percent of the share of the national growth.

The population we know least about, those who do not know or refuse to reveal their religious identification, grew the most rapidly. This reflects social changes in attitudes and in American society over the past two decades. There is less willingness to participate in surveys of all types by the American public. Although this leaves a lacuna in the ARIS statistics the overall rate of refusal to participate is low by international standards. For example, the rate of refusal to the religion question in the national U.K. Government 2001 Census was higher at seven percent.

Table 3.

Self-Identification of U.S. Adult Population by Religious Tradition 1990, 2001, 2008

Religious Tradition	1990		2001		2008	
	Estimate	%	Estimate	%	Estimate	%
Catholic	46,004,000	26.2	50,873,000	24.5	57,199,000	25.1
Baptist	33,964,000	19.3	33,820,000	16.3	36,148,000	15.8
Mainline Christian	32,784,000	18.7	35,788,000	17.2	29,375,000	12.9
<i>Methodist</i>	14,174,000	8.0	14,039,000	6.8	11,366,000	5.0
<i>Lutheran</i>	9,110,000	5.2	9,580,000	4.6	8,674,000	3.8
<i>Presbyterian</i>	4,985,000	2.8	5,596,000	2.7	4,723,000	2.1
<i>Episcopalian/ Anglican</i>	3,043,000	1.7	3,451,000	1.7	2,405,000	1.1
<i>United Church of Christ</i>	438,000	0.2	1,378,000	0.7	736,000	0.3
Christian Generic	25,980,000	14.8	22,546,000	10.8	32,441,000	14.2
<i>Christian Unspecified</i>	8,073,000	4.6	14,190,000	6.8	16,834,000	7.4
<i>Non-Denom. Christian</i>	194,000	0.1	2,489,000	1.2	8,032,000	3.5
<i>Protestant Unspecified</i>	17,214,000	9.8	4,647,000	2.2	5,187,000	2.3
<i>Evangelical/ Born Again</i>	546,000	0.3	1,088,000	0.5	2,154,000	0.9
Pentecostal/ Charismatic	5,647,000	3.2	7,831,000	3.8	7,948,000	3.5
<i>Pentecostal Unspecified</i>	3,116,000	1.8	4,407,000	2.1	5,416,000	2.4
<i>Assemblies of God</i>	617,000	0.4	1,105,000	0.5	810,000	0.4
<i>Church of God</i>	590,000	0.4	943,000	0.5	663,000	0.3
Protestant Denominations	4,630,000	2.6	5,949,000	2.9	7,131,000	3.1
<i>Churches of Christ</i>	1,769,000	1.0	2,593,000	1.2	1,921,000	0.8
<i>Jehovah's Witness</i>	1,381,000	0.8	1,331,000	0.6	1,914,000	0.8
<i>Seventh Day Adventist</i>	668,000	0.4	724,000	0.3	938,000	0.4
Mormon/Latter Day Saints	2,487,000	1.4	2,697,000	1.3	3,158,000	1.4
Jewish*	3,137,000	1.8	2,837,000	1.4	2,680,000	1.2
Eastern Religions	687,000	0.4	2,020,000	1.0	1,961,000	0.9
<i>Buddhist</i>	404,000	0.2	1,082,000	0.5	1,189,000	0.5
Muslim	527,000	0.3	1,104,000	0.5	1,349,000	0.6
NRMs & Other Religions	1,296,000	0.8	1,770,000	0.9	2,804,000	1.2
Nones/No Religion	14,331,000	8.2	29,481,000	14.1	34,169,000	15.0
<i>Agnostic</i>	1,186,000**	0.7	991,000	0.5	1,985,000	0.9
<i>Atheist</i>	N/A	N/A	902,000	0.4	1,621,000	0.7
DK/Refused	4,031,000	2.3	11,300,000	5.4	11,815,000	5.2
Total	175,440,000	100	207,983,000	100	228,182,000	100

* This refers only to Jews by religion and not to the total Jewish ethnic population
 ** Agnostics and Atheists were combined in NSRI 1990

Categorizing and aggregating religious groups is a difficult and controversial task but it is necessary in order to effectively monitor and measure trends. Table 3 provides details on changes in the popularity of the 12 main religious traditions to be found among the American population for the three time points. Data is also provided for some sub-categories such as the largest Mainline and Protestant denominations and churches and other large religious identification response categories. The full listing of the religious groups comprising each tradition can be found in the appendix. It must be born in mind that respondents to ARIS could easily and quite legitimately offer a number of terms when answering our key question. The protocol in ARIS is to use the first response offered. In fact over 100 unique response categories were recorded. This is particularly true among the “Other Christian” group where a generic religious tradition response, a theological outlook or belief response or a denominational affiliation response were recorded. In order to try to get some specificity to the answers if an ARIS respondent offers the answer “Christian” or Protestant” there is then a filter question which asks “*What denomination is that?*” As Table 3 illustrates, over time this further probing has been successful in refining the “Protestant” response category. However, it has not succeeded in curbing the tide of preference for self-identification as a plain “Christian,” the numbers of which have doubled since 1990. This trend suggests that among those we categorize as “Other Christian” both personal preferences and collective religious labeling is in flux.

As Table 3 warrants additional discussion. Since we discussed Catholics above, we now turn to the Baptist tradition. “Baptist” is the majority response category in this tradition but numerous varieties of Baptist denomination, right down to the level of the local chapel, were offered by respondents. This includes, of course Southern Baptist and American Baptist. The Baptist population was relatively stable over the 1990s. The sudden growth spurt in Baptist numbers since 2001 seems to reflect a measurable reassertion of a Baptist identity among the population and more detailed varieties of Baptist were offered by respondents in 2008 than in 2001.

The historic Mainline Christian churches have consistently lost market share since the 1950s, but since 2001 there has been a significant fall in numbers. The Methodists and Episcopalians have been particularly affected by losses. Much of this decline in Mainline identification is due to the growing public preference for the generic “Christian” response and the recent growth in the popularity of the “non-denominational Christian” response. Fewer than 200,000 people favored this term in 1990 but in 2008 it accounts for over eight million Americans. Another notable finding is the rise in the preference to self-identify as “Born Again” or “Evangelical” rather than with any Christian tradition, church or denomination.

The Pentecostal tradition made particular headway during the 1990s but its growth appears to have leveled off recently. The incidence of specific Pentecostal denominational labels such as Assemblies of God or Church of God has varied over the years. The Protestant denominations, mainly composed of conservative and sectarian groups, have grown in size and proportion. The Mormon and Latter Day Saints tradition has slowly but steadily grown throughout this period. The above findings lead us to conclude that among the Christian groups the tendency is to move either to a more sectarian or to a more generalized form of Christian identity at the expense of a denominational identity. These trends also suggest a movement towards more conservative beliefs and particularly to a more “evangelical” outlook among Christians. This important historical trend in American religious development is discussed in greater detail later in this report.

As we pointed out earlier the so-called minority faiths or non-Christian religions are growing in size and as a proportion of the American population but at a much slower pace than is often claimed. The Jewish

religious population is in slow decline due mainly to a movement towards the Nones among young ethnic Jews. This is part of a general trend among younger white Americans as is illustrated later in Table 12. The Eastern religions, aside from Buddhism, rely on immigration for growth but social integration often leads to numerical losses for these groups. The popularity of Buddhism and its attraction for white converts that was evident in the 1990s seems to have receded. The Muslim population doubled during the 1990s but its growth in numbers now seems to be slowing. The size and proportion of the Muslim population has often been debated but the ARIS numbers closely resemble the recent findings of the General Social Survey and the 2007 Pew Religious Landscape Survey. The category of the New Religious Movements and Other Religions is a mixed one and includes many groups often referred to as cults. The 2008 survey revealed marked increase in preferences for personalized and idiosyncratic responses as well as increases in the Neo-Pagan groups.

The rise of the Nones has been one of the most important trends on the American religious scene since 1990. The overall rate of growth of those expressing no religious preference slowed after 2001 but the numbers offering a specific self-identification as Agnostic or Atheist rose markedly from over a million in 1990 to about 2 million in 2001 to about 3.6 million today. The historic reluctance of Americans to self-identify in this manner or use these terms seems to have diminished. Nevertheless as Table 4 shows the level of under-reporting of these theological labels is still significant.

B. Belief

Table 4.

Beliefs about God among U.S. Adult Population 2008
Regarding the existence of God, do you think . . . ?

There is no such thing	2.3%
There is no way to know	4.3%
I'm not sure	5.7%
There is a higher power but no personal God	12.1%
There is definitely a personal God	69.5%
Refused	6.1%
n = 1,000	100%

A new belief question was introduced into ARIS in 2008. Table 4 shows that when asked about the existence of God less than 70 percent of Americans now believe in the traditional theological concept of a personal God. This question was not asked in 1990 and 2001. A surprisingly large proportion of contemporary Americans, just over 12 percent, believe in a deist or paganistic concept of the Divine as a higher power. Whereas Table 3 showed that only one percent of Americans actually self-identify as agnostics, Table 4 reveals that 10 percent hold agnostic beliefs (5.7% a “softer” form and 4.3% a “harder form” of agnosticism). These findings about the “belief” aspect of religiosity tend to complicate our interpretation of some of the trends and findings in the earlier tables relating to “belonging.” If 76 percent of Americans self-identify with Christianity and 80 percent with a religion then many millions do not subscribe fully to the theology of the groups with which they identify.

Table 5.

Size and Composition of the Born-Again or Evangelical Christian Population 2008

Religious identification	Number	% Born Again
Mainline Christians	11,158,000	38.6
Other Christian Groups	56,505,000	60.2
Catholics	10,083,000	18.4
Total Christian Adults	77,747,000	44.8

Table 5 reveals the dimensions of a significant trend in “belief” among the 76 percent of contemporary Americans who identify as Christians. These respondents were specifically asked “*Do you identify as a Born Again or Evangelical Christian?*” No definition was offered of the terms, which are usually associated with a “personal relationship” with Jesus Christ together with a certain view of salvation, scripture, and missionary work. As the table shows, 45 percent of all American Christians now self-identify in this manner and they account for 34 percent of the total national adult population. What is significant is the recent spread of Evangelicalism well beyond Christians affiliated with those groups that are members of the National Evangelical Association so that millions of Mainliners and Catholics now identify with this trend.

Tables 4 and 5 show that there is a real and growing theological polarization in American society whereby 34 percent of the population believe they are “Born Again” but 25-30 percent reject the idea of a personal divinity. These questions on belief reveal the cultural polarization between the pious and non-religious portions of the national population, which are today roughly similar in size.

C. Behavior

Table 6.

Life Cycle Religious Rituals of the U.S. Adult Population 2008

	% Yes	% No	Don't Know/ Refused	% Total
Did you have a religious initiation ceremony, such as a baptism, Christening, circumcision, confirmation, bar mitzvah or naming ceremony?	71	26	3	100
Were you married in a religious ceremony? (ever married respondents only)	69	30	1	100
When you die, do you expect to have a religious funeral or service?	66	27	7	100

n = 1,000

Behavior is the third “B” in the triangle of religiosity together with belonging and belief. Table 6 reveals new and unique data, only available only in the 2008 survey, on the extent of religious rituals, practices, or sacraments of Americans relating to those life cycle events that have been the traditional preserve of most religions. The proportion of adults who have undergone a religious initiation of some kind is reduced somewhat by the large number of Baptists in the American population who delay baptism into the adult years. However, for most people this was a decision made by their parents so the statistics (given the median age of the adult population) really reflect religious practice in an earlier generation, that is to say on average around 1960.

The religious marriage question relates to a more recent and personal decision by the actual respondents but it is probably also a negotiated decision with the spouse. Nevertheless there is a significant minority, 30 percent of married couples, that has rejected a religious marriage ceremony. It is the final question that relates to expectation of a religious funeral which is probably the most revealing of social trends today. Funerals and interments are important if one has personal concerns about salvation and the immortality of the soul. It appears that over one-fourth of contemporary Americans are unconcerned with such religious ideas. Overall the trend in Table 6 though not definitive does suggest a slight erosion of participation in religious rituals over their own life cycles by our 2008 respondents.

The findings and patterns shown in Tables 1-6 that relate to current patterns of religious belonging, belief and behavior seem to show a high degree of correlation. They reveal that the United States in 2008 can be characterized as a country with a Christian majority population but with a growing non-religious or irreligious minority. The growing non-religious minority reduces the traditional societal role of congregations and places of worship in family celebrations of life-cycle events. Forestalling of religious rites of passage, such as marriage, and the lowering expectations on religious funeral services, could have long lasting consequences for religious institutions.

Part II

Demography of the Religious Traditions in 2008

Table 7.

Gender Composition of the Religious Traditions 2008

	% Male	% Female
Catholic	46	54
Baptist	43	57
Mainline Christian	44	56
Christian Generic	48	52
Pentecostal/Charismatic	42	58
Protestant Denominations	45	55
Mormon/LDS	45	55
Jewish	49	51
Eastern Religions	53	47
Muslim	52	48
NRM & Other Religions	52	48
Nones	60	40

Since women live longer than men there are normally more women than men in the population. The current sex ratio or gender balance of the national U.S. adult population is 49 males to every 52 females. Table 7 reveals that there is a split among the religious traditions whereby Christian groups tend to meet or exceed this female bias whereas all the non-Christians in the bottom five rows exceed the national average of 49 percent males. Among the religious groups having more female adherents are the Pentecostals, Baptists, and Mainline Christians of which 56%-58% are females. The most gender unbalanced group is the Nones, those who profess no religion or self-identified as atheists or agnostics. The ratio of 60 males to 40 females is a remarkable result. These gender patterns correspond with many earlier findings that show women to be more religious than men particularly in majority Christian societies. The male gender bias found among the minority religious traditions such as Muslims and the Eastern Religions is due to the high proportion of young immigrant males in these groups.

Table 8.

Age Composition of the Religious Traditions 2008

	18-29	30-49	50-69	70+	% Total
U.S. National Population	22	38	28	12	100
Catholic	21	38	28	13	100
Baptist	11	31	37	21	100
Mainline Christian	18	35	33	14	100
Christian Generic	25	41	25	9	100
Pentecostal/Charismatic	16	34	36	14	100
Protestant Denominations	22	36	28	14	100
Mormon/LDS	22	40	28	10	100
Jewish	21	28	33	18	100
Eastern Religions	37	40	20	3	100
Muslim	42	45	12	1	100
NRM & Other Religions	24	40	27	9	100
Nones	29	41	23	7	100

Nationally 60 percent of the adult population is aged under 50 years and 40 percent is 50 or older. The Catholic population as the country's largest tradition is not surprisingly closest to this age balance. A close examination of Table 8 reveals that the age composition of the religious traditions fluctuates widely but the overall tendency is again for a split between the Judeo-Christian traditions and the others towards the bottom of Table 8. This binary trend is particularly noticeable for the proportion of adherents in the oldest age group. Baptists and Jews have the highest proportions of adherents over 70 years of age.

The proportion of younger adherents varies more across religious traditions. The Generic Christian tradition has the most youthful adherents among the Christian groups, which helps explain the recent growth in this category of religious self-identification as shown in Table 3. The age profile of the minority Eastern religions and Islam, which as previously noted were disproportionately male, shows they are also very young with about 40 percent of their adult adherents under age 30. This reflects their largely recent immigrant origins. The much larger None group, which we also previously noted was heavily male, has in addition a largely young age profile with over 70 percent under 50 years of age and very few older people.

Table 9.

Marital Status of the Religious Traditions 2008

	Single Never Married	Single Living w/ Partner	Married	Divorced/ Separated	Widowed	Don't Know/ Refusal	% Total
U.S. National Population	25	N/A	56	13	6	0	100
Catholic	20	7	53	11	8	1	100
Baptist	13	4	60	11	12	1	100
Mainline Christian	20	6	49	14	11	0	100
Christian Generic	23	6	53	12	5	1	100
Pentecostal/ Charismatic	19	4	52	16	10	0	100
Protestant Denominations	23	2	55	11	8	1	100
Mormon/ LDS	14	2	68	9	6	1	100
Jewish	23	5	54	8	10	1	100
Eastern Religions	35	8	45	10	1	3	100
Muslim	36	11	42	10	1	0	100
NRM & Other Religions	24	13	40	16	7	1	100
None	29	11	45	11	3	1	100

The marital status of any population tends to correlate with or be affected by its age composition. Thus as Table 8 shows, traditions such as Muslim, Eastern Religions, and None, with many young adherents, would be expected to and do contain large proportions of single, never-married adults. By contrast those with an older age profile, such as the Baptist, Mainline, Pentecostal and Jewish traditions, have many more widowed persons.

However, with the issue of marital status we would expect to see some influence on the statistics of the teachings of the various religious traditions. This should apply especially among those that advocate the sanctity of marriage as well as strict sexual morality and so disfavor cohabitation of couples “living in sin” - or have prohibitions against divorce.

As regards currently married adults, the Mormons and Baptists have the highest proportions with 68 and 60 percent respectively, reflecting the emphasis on family values in these traditions. Cohabitation or “living with a partner” is more prevalent among younger people than older persons so we should expect traditions with a younger age profile to have greater proportions of those just “living together”. This appears to be true as this phenomenon is more prevalent towards the bottom of Table 9 and highest among the NRM, Muslim and None traditions while it is very low among the Mormon and conservative Protestant Denomination traditions. The latter two groups seem best able to transmit their moral teachings to the young.

Divorce appears to be widespread and no religious tradition is immune, nor are Nones the most likely to be currently divorced. Catholics’ divorce rate is close to the national average. Divorce rates are lowest among Mormons and Jews, traditions known for the emphasis they place on married life and the family. Divorced and separated persons, on the other hand, are most common in the New Religion Movements, other minority religions, and the Pentecostal/Charismatic tradition. Of course divorce and separation are linked to marriage for those who never marry and remain single or cohabit cannot have this marital status.

One final way to measure commitment to “traditional or normative family values” is to create a combined index of the proportions divorced and cohabiting, whereby those tradition that score lowest are the most familial. The traditions with the lowest percentages on this index are Mormons (11%), Jews (13%) and the Protestant Denominations (13%). Each of these traditions is relatively small in terms of numbers and it might be expected that conformity with religious and social norms is easier to maintain in a smaller group than a larger one.

Part III

Religious Identification and Social Change 1990-2008

The interrelationship between changing patterns of religious identification and changes in other social indicators is complex and dynamic. This third section of the report will provide three examples of social variables--racial composition, education and geographical distribution – that help explain how and why the findings reported in the earlier tables change over time as well as how they impact American society.

A. Racial Composition

Table 10.

Composition of Racial and Ethnic Groups by Religious Tradition 1990, 2001, 2008

	White Non-Hispanic			Black Non-Hispanic			Hispanic			Asian*		
	1990	2001	2008	1990	2001	2008	1990	2001	2008	1990	2001	2008
Catholic	27	23	21	9	7	6	66	57	59	27	20	17
Baptist	15	15	15	50	46	45	7	5	3	9	4	3
Mainline Christian	21	22	17	12	10	7	4	3	1	11	6	6
Christian Generic	17	11	15	9	10	15	8	11	11	13	11	10
Pentecostal/ Charismatic	3	3	3	6	7	7	3	4	3	2	1	0
Protestant Denominations	2	3	3	4	4	6	2	3	4	2	1	2
Mormon/LDS	2	2	2	0	0	0	1	1	0	2	0	0
Jewish	2	2	2	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	0
Eastern Religions	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	22	21
Muslim	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	3	8	8
NRM & Other Religions	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	2
None	8	15	16	6	11	11	6	13	12	16	22	27
DK/Refused	2	4	4	1	2	2	1	3	5	4	5	5
Total %	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

*Asian and Other Race combined in NSRI 1990

The changing make-up of the U.S. population in terms of race and ethnicity is an important factor for understanding religious patterns. Americans are becoming more diverse in terms of race and ethnic origins and as a result there has been a growth in the size of the minority population in terms of both numbers and percentage. The most significant change since 1990 both statistically and demographically has been the rapid growth of the Hispanic population and to a much lesser extent the Asian population. Hispanics have replaced African-Americans as the nation's largest minority.

Table 10 does not measure the changing balance of racial groups but instead how the pattern of religious identification has changed over time within these groups as religious sentiments have altered. The zeros in the table do not mean that the cell is completely empty but that the cell contains less than 0.5 percent of the group. The Don't Know/Refused row of the table provides an insight into the nature of American society and how different ethnic groups relate to religion. As mentioned earlier there is a growing reluctance to participate in surveys but the table seems to reveal a trend towards decreasing racial differentiation. Nevertheless, African-Americans, long considered the most religious group in society, continue to have fewer inhibitions about discussing religion while Asians, the least religious group, are the most unwilling to reveal their religious identification.

Historically there have been major differences in the religious allegiances among Americans along racial lines. The top row of Table 10 shows that Catholicism lost ground within every ethnic group between 1990 and 2008. If the Hispanic population, which is the most Catholic, had not expanded then the Catholic population share nationally would have significantly eroded. One feature of the white population today is in fact the large number of ex-Catholics, who are now found among the Nones and have helped that group grow. The overall pattern of identification among whites other than for Catholics and Nones seems relatively stable over time. Another feature revealed is that the rapid proportionate growth of the Nones among whites was a 1990s phenomenon while the fast decline in white Mainline Christians is a more recent trend.

Among the black or African-American population the main trend in the 1990s was similar to that of whites, a move into the Nones, in this case mostly by former Baptists. Since 2001 the main movement in self-identification has been towards a Generic Christian identity and slightly to the conservative Protestant Denominations tradition. There is also movement out of the Mainline tradition, which in this case is mainly the African Methodist churches.

The Hispanic religious profile reflects changes brought about by immigration particularly since 2001. The evidence for this is that we found significant differences between our respondents interviewed in English and those who chose to be interviewed in Spanish. Spanish speakers are much more likely to be Catholic, while English-speaking Hispanics are more likely to identify as Baptist or Mainliners. Interestingly there is not much difference in the proportions of Nones by language preference. Though the percentages do not show it, the doubling in the number of Hispanics identifying with the Protestant Denominations since 1990 is quite large in terms of real numbers.

The religious profile of Asian Americans has also changed over time mainly as a result of immigration especially as the source countries of immigration have changed. The entry of Chinese, Koreans and Indian immigrants has diminished the Catholic proportion since 1990. The main trend in the 1990s was towards a greater share for Eastern Religions but this has now slowed. In contrast the share of the Nones among Asians has continually and steadily grown since 1990.

In conclusion, Table 10 demonstrates that the historical trend of major religious differences between Americans of different racial and ethnic origins still seems to persist even as the internal patterns are modified by changes in religious outlook and sentiment.

B. Education

Table 11.

**Percentage of College Graduates in the Population Age 25 and Over
by Religious Tradition 1990-2008**

	1990	2008
U.S. National Population	21	27
Catholic	22	25
Baptist	11	16
Mainline Christian	26	35
Christian Generic	22	26
Pentecostal/Charismatic	9	13
Protestant Denominations	13	21
Mormon/LDS	22	31
Jewish	50	57
Eastern Religions	44	59
Muslim	41	35
NRM & Other Religions	35	33
None	28	31
DK/Refused	29	31

Aside from differences in religious profiles by race another major historical feature of American religion has been differences in terms of social class. A good measure of class in a meritocratic society is education, particularly the attainment of a college degree. The overall level of educational attainment has improved in U.S. society in recent decades so that in 2008 more than one-fourth of American adults age 25 and over are college graduates. As Table 11 shows nearly every religious tradition has made advances since 1990 with the exception of Muslims and NRMs. Nevertheless different religious traditions attract or perhaps produce different proportions of college graduates. Interestingly, aside from Mainline Christians, the domain of the old “WASP” elite, all the Christian groups have a smaller proportion of well-educated individuals than the Non-Christian traditions as of 2008.

Since 1990 the best educated groups, the Jews and those in Eastern Religions, have made advances and so continued to attract, retain or produce graduates. The Muslims and NRMs have lost some ground. In contrast the Pentecostals and Baptists have considerably improved their proportions of graduates though from a low base. The Mormons too have made considerable headway since 1990. Another significant finding is that the Nones are only slightly better educated than the average American. This may reflect the changing make up of the population of Nones, as a wider spectrum of people are choosing this option.

One caveat is required here. In terms of statistical probability it is much more likely for small religious groups to show educational homogeneity than for large ones to do so. Therefore, it is not surprising that the Catholic and Generic Christian traditions with tens of millions of adherents tend to mirror the overall national proportions of college graduates while groups with only two or three million adherents do not.

C. Geography and Religion

The vast array of geographic data available from ARIS shown in Table 12 demonstrates how the American religious map has been redrawn at the state, Census Division and regional levels between 1990 and 2008. In order to follow these changes over time it is necessary to return to an analysis based upon the five main religious blocs used in Tables 1 and 2. The pace and direction of change varies across these spatial units but the decrease in the share of the combined total Christian population occurred in every region of the country over the past two decades.

The large bloc of Other Christians, i.e. non-Catholics, declined nationally from 60% in 1990 to just 51% of the adult population in 2008 yet in the West it declined faster from 54 percent to 42 percent. In California the proportion of Other Christians dropped from 49% in 1990 to just 35% in 2008. The absolute number of Other Christians—not just their share of the population—fell despite major population growth in the state during the 18-year period.

Catholic numbers and percentages rose in many states in the South and West mainly due to immigration from Latin America. Catholics increased their share in California and Texas to about one-third of the adult population and in Florida to over one-fourth. In terms of numbers they gained about 8 million adherents in these three states in the past two decades. At the same time the proportion of Catholics was eroded in other parts of the country, mainly in the Northeast Region, where Catholic adherents fell from 43 percent to 36 percent of the adult population. New England had a net loss of one million Catholics. Big losses in both the number of Catholic adherents and their proportion occurred also in Massachusetts, and in Rhode Island, the nation's most heavily Catholic state where the proportion of Catholics dropped from 62 percent to 46 percent. New York state lost 800,000 Catholics and they dropped from 44% to 37% of the adult population.

The most significant influence on American religious geography over time has been the increase in the Nones, or No Religion bloc. As noted earlier, nationally the Nones more than doubled in numbers from 1990 to 2008 and almost doubled their share of the adult population, from 8% in 1990 to 15% in 2008. Moreover, the Nones increased in numbers and proportion in every state, Census Division and Region of the country from 1990 to 2008. No other religious bloc has kept such a pace in every state.

Nones have historically been concentrated in the West region and particularly in the Pacific Northwest (i.e. Oregon and Washington), where now they account for about one-quarter of the population. However, this pattern has now changed and the Northeast emerged in 2008 as the new stronghold of the religiously unidentified. In 2008 Vermont reached 34% Nones, New Hampshire 29%, Maine 25%, and Massachusetts 22%. A surge in the proportion of Nones also occurred in the Mountain States of Colorado, Idaho, Nevada and Wyoming (28 percent) in 2008.

An intriguing research question we intend to explore further is the relationship between the two phenomena, the relative decline of the combined Christian population and the increase in Nones. There appear to be regional differences at play. The data presented in this report show that changing patterns of religious self-identification by gender, age, race, and region can help to explain this important and recent phenomenon. An in-depth investigation of religious switching will shed further light on the doubling of the Nones during this period.

Table 12.

**Religious Self-Identification of US Adult Population by Census Region,
Census Division, and State, 1990 and 2008**

NORTHEAST REGION							
New England Division							
State	Year	Catholics	Other Christians	Other Religions	Nones	DK/Refused	% TOTAL
CT	1990	50	36	3	6	4	100
	2008	38	36	8	14	4	100
MA	1990	54	29	6	8	3	100
	2008	39	26	5	22	7	100
ME	1990	31	54	2	11	2	100
	2008	22	47	3	25	4	100
NH	1990	41	44	4	9	2	100
	2008	32	30	2	29	7	100
RI	1990	62	26	3	6	3	100
	2008	46	28	2	19	5	100
VT	1990	37	47	3	13	1	100
	2008	26	29	4	34	6	100
Division Total	1990	50	35	4	8	3	100
	2008	36	32	5	22	6	100
Middle Atlantic Division							
State	Year	Catholics	Other Christians	Other Religions	Nones	DK/Refused	% TOTAL
NJ	1990	46	40	6	6	3	100
	2008	42	30	7	15	6	100
NY	1990	44	36	10	7	3	100
	2008	37	34	8	14	6	100
PA	1990	33	56	3	6	2	100
	2008	31	46	4	15	4	100
Division Total	1990	41	43	7	6	3	100
	2008	36	38	6	15	5	100
Region Total	1990	43	41	6	7	3	100
	2008	36	36	6	17	5	100

Table 12. (continued)

**Religious Self-Identification of US Adult Population by Census Region,
Census Division, and State, 1990 and 2008**

MIDWEST REGION							
East North Central Division							
State	Year	Catholics	Other Christians	Other Religions	Nones	DK/Refused	% TOTAL
IL	1990	33	53	3	8	3	100
	2008	32	45	3	13	6	100
IN	1990	19	69	1	8	2	100
	2008	19	59	3	15	4	100
MI	1990	29	57	3	9	2	100
	2008	20	55	3	16	5	100
OH	1990	24	64	2	8	2	100
	2008	20	56	3	17	4	100
WI	1990	39	52	2	6	2	100
	2008	29	47	4	15	5	100
Division Total	1990	29	59	2	8	2	100
	2008	24	53	3	15	5	100
West North Central Division							
State	Year	Catholics	Other Christians	Other Religions	Nones	DK/Refused	% TOTAL
IA	1990	22	69	1	7	1	100
	2008	22	54	4	15	5	100
KS	1990	17	74	1	6	2	100
	2008	21	61	3	11	5	100
MN	1990	29	61	2	6	2	100
	2008	29	51	4	12	5	100
MO	1990	20	69	1	7	2	100
	2008	18	61	3	14	5	100
ND	1990	30	65	0	2	3	100
	2008	28	62	0	7	4	100
NE	1990	29	60	2	7	2	100
	2008	22	53	3	17	6	100
SD	1990	26	69	1	4	1	100
	2008	19	59	4	12	5	100
Division Total	1990	24	67	1	6	2	100
	2008	23	57	3	13	5	100
Region Total	1990	27	61	2	7	2	100
	2008	23	54	3	15	5	100

Table 12. (continued)

**Religious Self-Identification of US Adult Population by Census Region,
Census Division, and State, 1990 and 2008**

SOUTH REGION							
South Atlantic Division							
State	Year	Catholics	Other Christians	Other Religions	Nones	DK/Refused	% TOTAL
DC	1990	16	71	4	7	2	100
	2008	13	59	6	18	4	100
DE	1990	26	59	1	7	6	100
	2008	26	48	1	23	2	100
FL	1990	23	62	5	8	2	100
	2008	27	49	4	14	6	100
GA	1990	6	86	2	5	1	100
	2008	9	72	4	9	6	100
MD	1990	25	61	4	8	2	100
	2008	27	49	6	13	5	100
NC	1990	6	86	1	5	2	100
	2008	9	73	2	10	6	100
SC	1990	6	88	1	3	2	100
	2008	10	73	2	10	4	100
VA	1990	12	76	3	7	2	100
	2008	11	65	4	15	5	100
WV	1990	6	83	1	8	2	100
	2008	7	70	2	15	5	100
Division Total	1990	14	74	3	7	2	100
	2008	17	61	4	13	5	100
East South Central Division							
State	Year	Catholics	Other Christians	Other Religions	Nones	DK/Refused	% TOTAL
AL	1990	4	89	1	4	1	100
	2008	6	80	1	11	3	100
KY	1990	13	77	1	7	2	100
	2008	14	66	1	13	5	100
MS	1990	7	88	1	3	1	100
	2008	11	80	1	5	3	100
TN	1990	5	87	1	6	2	100
	2008	7	76	3	9	5	100
Division Total	1990	7	85	1	5	1	100
	2008	9	75	2	10	4	100

Table 12. (continued)

**Religious Self-Identification of US Adult Population by Census Region,
Census Division, and State, 1990 and 2008**

SOUTH REGION							
West South Central Division							
State	Year	Catholics	Other Christians	Other Religions	Nones	DK/Refused	% TOTAL
AR	1990	5	85	1	6	3	100
	2008	8	79	1	8	3	100
LA	1990	47	49	1	3	1	100
	2008	31	57	1	8	3	100
OK	1990	8	79	2	7	4	100
	2008	7	73	2	11	6	100
TX	1990	23	68	2	5	2	100
	2008	32	48	2	12	6	100
Division Total	1990	23	68	2	5	2	100
	2008	27	55	2	11	5	100
Region Total	1990	16	74	2	6	2	100
	2008	19	62	3	12	5	100

Table 12. (continued)

**Religious Self-Identification of US Adult Population by Census Region,
Census Division, and State, 1990 and 2008**

WEST REGION							
Mountain Division							
State	Year	Catholics	Other Christians	Other Religions	Nones	DK/Refused	% TOTAL
AZ	1990	24	57	3	13	3	100
	2008	29	44	5	17	5	100
CO	1990	25	56	4	13	3	100
	2008	21	49	4	21	5	100
ID	1990	12	72	1	13	3	100
	2008	10	59	3	23	6	100
MT	1990	28	58	1	11	3	100
	2008	12	58	4	21	5	100
NM	1990	37	48	2	11	2	100
	2008	33	41	3	16	7	100
NV	1990	24	56	4	14	2	100
	2008	23	41	4	24	7	100
UT	1990	6	81	1	9	3	100
	2008	7	71	1	14	7	100
WY	1990	18	56	9	14	3	100
	2008	13	54	1	28	3	100
Division Total	1990	23	59	3	12	3	100
	2008	22	50	4	19	6	100
Pacific Division							
State	Year	Catholics	Other Christians	Other Religions	Nones	DK/Refused	% TOTAL
CA	1990	29	49	5	14	3	100
	2008	37	35	5	18	5	100
OR	1990	15	62	2	18	2	100
	2008	14	52	3	24	7	100
WA	1990	19	60	2	15	3	100
	2008	16	48	5	25	6	100
Division Total	1990	27	51	4	15	3	100
	2008	32	39	5	20	5	100
Region Total	1990	26	54	4	14	3	100
	2008	29	42	5	20	5	100

Appendix A

The Taxonomy of the Religious Traditions

The long list of religious classifications supplied by ARIS respondents' calls for a shorter, more manageable list for most analytical purposes. Therefore, for Table 3 the ARIS respondents have been collated into the following 13 religious groupings of varying sizes:

1. **Catholic:** *Roman, Greek and Eastern Rites.*
2. **Mainline Christian:** *Methodist, United Methodist, African Methodist, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Episcopalian/Anglican, United Church of Christ/Congregational, Reformed/Dutch Reform, Disciples of Christ, Moravian, Quaker, Orthodox (Greek, Russian, Eastern, Christian)*
3. **Baptist:** *including Southern Baptist, American Baptist, Free-Will, Missionary, and African-American denominations.*
4. **Christian Generic:** *Christian, Protestant, Evangelical/ Born Again Christian, Born Again, Fundamentalist, Independent Christian, Missionary Alliance Church, Non-Denominational Christian.*
5. **Pentecostal/Charismatic:** *Pentecostal, Assemblies of God, Full Gospel, Four Square Gospel, Church of God, Holiness, Nazarene, Salvation Army.*
6. **Protestant Denomination:** *Churches of Christ, Seventh Day Adventist, Mennonite, Brethren, Apostle, Covenant, Christian Reform, Jehovah's Witness, Christian Science, Messianic Jews.*
7. **Mormon/ Latter Day Saints**
8. **Jewish/Judaism**
9. **Eastern Religions:** *Buddhist, Hindu, Taoist, Baha'i, Shintoist, Zoroastrian, Sikh.*
10. **Muslim/Islam**
11. **New Religious Movements and Other Religions:** *Scientology, New Age, Eckankar, Spiritualist, Unitarian-Universalist, Deist, Wiccan, Pagan, Druid, Indian Religion, Santeria, Rastafarian.*
12. **Nones:** *None, No religion, Humanistic, Ethical Culture, Agnostic, Atheist, Secular.*
13. **Refused:** *Don't Know.*

Appendix B

The Authors

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