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Millennials increasingly are driving growth of ‘nones’

BY MICHAEL LIPKA

Generational Replacement Drives Growth of Unaffiliated

	Evangelical Protestants	Mainline Prot.	Historically black Prot.	Catholic	Other Christian groups	Other groups	Unaffil.
Silent generation (1928-1945)	30%	22	5	24	3	4	11
Baby Boomers (1946-1964)	28	17	7	23	3	5	17
Generation X (1965-1980)	25	13	7	21	4	6	23
Older Millennials (1981-1989)	22	10	6	16	3	8	34
Younger Millennials (1990-1996)	19	11	6	16	3	8	36

2014 Religious Landscape Study, conducted June 4-Sept. 30, 2014. Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding. Don't know/refused answers not shown. "Other Christian groups" includes Mormons, Orthodox Christians, Jehovah's Witnesses and a number of smaller Christian groups.

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For years, surveys have indicated that members of the **youngest generation of adults** in the U.S. are far less likely than older Americans to identify with a religious group. But a major new **Pew Research Center survey** finds that, as time goes on, the already-large share of religiously unaffiliated Millennial adults is increasing significantly.

A high percentage of younger members of the Millennial generation – those who have entered adulthood in just the last several years – are religious “nones” (saying they are atheists or

agnostics, or that their religion is “nothing in particular”). At the same time, an *increasing* share of older Millennials also identify as “nones,” with more members of that group rejecting religious labels in recent years.

Overall, 35% of adult Millennials (Americans born between 1981 and 1996) are religiously unaffiliated. Far more Millennials say they have no religious affiliation compared with those who identify as evangelical Protestants (21%), Catholics (16%) or mainline Protestants (11%).

Although older generations also have grown somewhat more religiously unaffiliated in recent years, Millennials remain far more likely to identify as religious “nones.” The 35% of Millennials who do not identify with a religion is double the share of unaffiliated Baby Boomers (17%) and more than three times the share of members of the Silent generation (11%).

Fully 36% of the youngest members of the Millennial generation – those between the ages of 18 and 24 when the survey was conducted in 2014 – eschew an affiliation with organized religion. This youngest group was not eligible to be surveyed as adults during Pew Research’s initial Religious Landscape Study in 2007. But the older cohort of Millennials – those born between 1981 and 1989 – was surveyed that year, when they were ages 18-26. In 2007, 25% of this group identified as religious “nones.” Among

this same cohort, now ages 25-33, the share of “nones” has increased 9 percentage points and now stands at 34%.

While some Millennials are leaving their childhood religion to become unaffiliated, most Millennials who were raised without a religious affiliation are remaining religious “nones” in adulthood. Two-thirds of Millennials who were raised unaffiliated are still unaffiliated (67%), a higher retention rate than most other major religious groups – and much higher than for older generations of “nones.”

It is possible that more Millennials who were raised unaffiliated will begin to identify with a religion as they get older, get married and have children, but [previous Pew Research Center studies](#) suggest that generational cohorts typically do not become more religiously affiliated as they get older. And the new survey finds that most generational cohorts actually are becoming less religiously affiliated as they age.

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Americans may be getting less religious, but feelings of spirituality are on the rise

BY [DAVID MASCI](#) AND [MICHAEL LIPKA](#)

The phrase “spiritual but not religious” has become widely used in recent years by some Americans who are trying to describe their religious identity. While Pew Research Center does not categorize survey respondents in such a way, our surveys do find that the U.S. public overall appears to be growing a bit less religious – but also somewhat more spiritual.

Americans have **become less religious in recent years** by standard measures such as how important they say religion is to them and their frequency of religious service attendance and prayer. But, at the same time, the share of people across a wide variety of religious identities who say they often feel a deep sense of spiritual peace and well-being as well as a deep sense of wonder about the universe has *risen*.

The drop in religiosity in the U.S. has been limited to religious “nones” (that is, those who describe themselves as atheists or agnostics and those who say they have no particular religion). The growth of the unaffiliated population and their decreasing religiosity have been the main factors behind the emergence of a less religious public overall. But, interestingly, the rise in spirituality has been happening among both highly religious people and the religiously unaffiliated.