

Impact of Religion on American Government & Society

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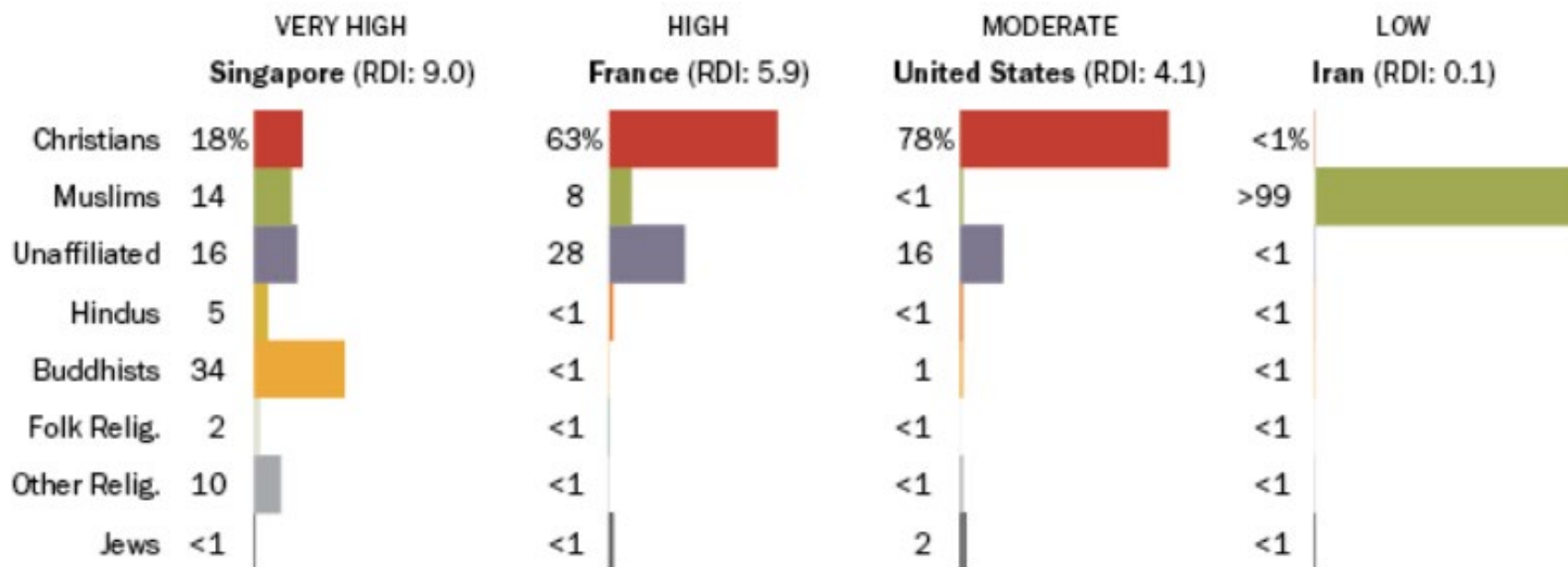
- A dinner table conversation
- Politics
- Religion

Distribution of Religious Diversity Worldwide

PEW Research Center 2014

Four Levels of Religious Diversity

Examples of countries with very high to low religious diversity as measured by the RDI:



Note: RDI is a Religious Diversity Index. Numbers are 2010 religious composition estimates for entire population, including children.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

U.S. Ranks 68th out of 232 Countries in RDI

Definitions

- Religious
 - Believes in God and is a member of an organized religion or church
- Unaffiliated
 - Religious unaffiliated
 - Believes in a god or a spiritual force but is not a member of any organized religion or a regular church-goer
 - Secular unaffiliated
 - Religion does not play any part in his/her life and is not a member of any organized religion or church
- Agnostic
 - Does not believe there is any proof that God exists or that God does not exist
- Atheist
 - Does not believe in the existence of God or any god

2014 PEW Research Center Study

Major Religious Traditions in the U.S.

Among all adults...	
	%
Christian	78.4
Protestant	51.3
<i>Evangelical churches</i>	26.3
<i>Mainline churches</i>	18.1
<i>Hist. black churches</i>	6.9
Catholic	23.9
Mormon	1.7
Jehovah's Witness	0.7
Orthodox	0.6
<i>Greek Orthodox</i>	<0.3
<i>Russian Orthodox</i>	<0.3
<i>Other</i>	<0.3
Other Christian	0.3
Other Religions	4.7
Jewish	1.7
<i>Reform</i>	0.7
<i>Conservative</i>	0.5
<i>Orthodox</i>	<0.3
<i>Other</i>	0.3
Buddhist	0.7
<i>Zen Buddhist</i>	<0.3
<i>Theravada Buddhist</i>	<0.3
<i>Tibetan Buddhist</i>	<0.3
<i>Other</i>	0.3
Muslim*	0.6
<i>Sunni</i>	0.3
<i>Shia</i>	<0.3
<i>Other</i>	<0.3
Hindu	0.4
Other world rel.	<0.3
Other faiths	1.2
<i>Unitarians and other liberal faiths</i>	0.7
<i>New Age</i>	0.4
<i>Native American rel.</i>	<0.3
Unaffiliated	16.1
Atheist	1.6
Agnostic	2.4
Nothing in particular	12.1
<i>Secular unaffiliated</i>	6.3
<i>Religious unaffiliated</i>	5.8
Don't Know/Refused	0.8
	100

Religion and the US Constitution

- The framers the Constitution favored a strictly neutral posture toward religion, therefore the word “religion” is mentioned only twice in the Constitution, and God is never mentioned
- Article VI of the Constitution (1787)
 - *“No religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States”*
- First Amendment of the Bill of Rights (1789)
 - *“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof ...”*
- *Signatory Section*
 - *“Done in Convention by the Unanimous Consent of the States present the Seventeenth Day of September in the Year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and eighty seven ...”*

First Amendment of the US Constitution (1789)

- First Amendment to the Constitution (Bill of Rights)
 - *“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof ...”*
- The Establishment Clause prohibits the government from making any law *“respecting an establishment of religion.”*
 - forbids the government from establishing an official religion
 - prohibits government actions that unduly favor one religion over another
 - prohibits the government from unduly preferring religion over non-religion, or non-religion over religion.
- The Free Exercise Clause protects the right of citizens to
 - practice any religious belief
 - engage in religious rituals
 - act based on those beliefs

Inherent Conflict of First Amendment

- Constitutional scholars and Supreme Court opinions have contended that the two religion clauses are in conflict
- Free Exercise Clause implies special accommodation of religious ideas and actions, even to the point of exemptions to “generally applicable laws”
- Such a special benefit violates the neutrality between “religion and non-religion” mandated by the Establishment Clause
- This has led to controversial decisions by the Supreme Court that threaten basic “human rights” (women’s rights, LGBTQ rights) while protecting “religious rights”

Separation of Church and State

- The principle of separating church from state is not specially stated in the constitution, however it quickly became a convenient metaphor for the non-establishment clause
- The framers believed that any governmental intervention in the religious affairs of citizens would necessarily infringe on their religious freedom
- “Separation of church and state” was first used by Thomas Jefferson and others attempting to limit the influence of the Anglican / Baptist Church in Virginia
- Today separation of church and state is a myth

Declaration of Independence (1776)

- The opening preamble to the Declaration of Independence reads,
 - *“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”*
- Undermines the later Constitution’s attempt to be religiously neutral
- Solidified the American government’s unbreakable link to a supreme being, a monotheistic God, a “Creator”
- Written by white, rich, land-owning, men
- “Men” excluded black slaves (who had no “Liberty”), indigenous peoples, and women, none of whom had any “Rights”
- This is one of the most revered sentences in the founding documents of the United States

Declaration of Independence (Continued)

- Other references to a supreme being in the Declaration of Independence include ...
 - Introduction
 - “... and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature* and of Nature's God entitle them ...”
 - Conclusion
 - “... appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions ...”
 - “... protection of divine Providence ...”
 - Translation: God is on our side.
- Although the Declaration included 27 complaints against George III, none included infringement of religious freedoms

Religion in U.S. Institutions

Notwithstanding the First Amendment and the alleged policy of separation of church and state, many entrenched U.S. institutions support the belief in a Judeo-Christian God

Pledge of Allegiance

- “... *one Nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.*”
- In 1954, in response to the “godless” communist threat of the times, President Eisenhower encouraged Congress to add the words “under God”

National Motto and U.S. Currency

- A law passed in a Joint Resolution by the 84th Congress (P.L. 84-140) and approved by President Eisenhower on July 30, 1956, declared “*In God We Trust*” as the national motto of the United States. This motto was first used on paper money in 1957 though had been used on U.S. coins since 1864

Religion became an important weapon in the Cold War

- “*The fate of the world rests with the clash between the atheism of Moscow and the Christian spirit throughout other parts of the world*”, Senator Joe McCarthy

Religion in U.S. Institutions (Cont.)

Prayer beginning each day in the U.S. Congress

- Prayer for April 23, 2015
 - Our gracious Heavenly Father, we come into Your presence today acknowledging that You alone are God and worthy of all worship.
 - We declare that You are the Creator and Sustainer of all things and the one who provides the means of forgiveness to all mankind.
 - We recognize Your sovereign rule over Heaven and Earth and that we, Your created beings, are Your stewards.
 - In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Religion in U.S. Institutions (Cont.)

Swearing an oath when giving testimony before a court, or before Congress

- “I do solemnly swear that the testimony I am about to give will be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. So help me God.”
- Derives from the 9th Judeo-Christian Commandment, “Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.” Known as perjury
- A secular affirmation is accepted ... if you ask for it!

Naturalization Oath of Allegiance for new citizens

- “I do hereby declare, on oath, that I So help me God.”
- A secular affirmation is accepted

Religion in U.S. Institutions (Cont.)

Oath of Office for Executive Branch, Legislative Branch and Judicial Branch

- “I do solemnly swear ... so help me God.”
- Interestingly, the official inauguration oath for the President does not include “so help me God”, but most new Presidents choose to say it.

Opening proclaim before each Supreme Court session

- “God save the United States and this honorable court.”

Traditional ending to all major presidential speeches

- “God bless the United States of America”

Controversy

- The use of “In God We Trust” in the National Motto and on currency, and “under God” in the Pledge of Allegiance has been the subject of numerous unsuccessful lawsuits
- Court decisions striking down these lawsuits have been arguable flimsy
 - “The nation's institutions presuppose a Supreme Being and government recognition of God does not constitute the establishment of a state church as the Constitution's authors intended to prohibit.” U.S. Supreme Court. 1952
 - “It is quite obvious that the national motto and the slogan on coinage and currency 'In God We Trust' has nothing whatsoever to do with the establishment of religion. Its use is of patriotic or ceremonial character and bears no true resemblance to a governmental sponsorship of a religious exercise.” U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit. 1970.
 - “These acts of ceremonial deism are protected from Establishment Clause scrutiny chiefly because they have lost through rote repetition any significant religious content.” U.S. Supreme Court. 1984

Religion in U.S. Politics

- During the 1960 presidential election, many seriously questioned whether a “Catholic” could or should be elected president
- During the 2008 and 2012 presidential elections, some questioned whether being a “Mormon” would be a detriment to being elected
- The allegation that that President Obama is a closet “Moslem” was debated endlessly on TV talk shows and social media
- Is the U.S. ready to elect a Jewish president? Yes
- Is the U.S. ready to elect a Moslem president? No
- Is the U.S. ready to elect a “secular unaffiliated” president? No
- Is the U.S. ready to elect an atheist president? Definitely Not
- Until the U.S. is truly able to separate religion from politics, then the U.S will never be religiously diverse, inclusive or disinterested

Religion in State Constitutions

- In contrast to the US Constitution, State Constitutions are definitely not religiously neutral
- All State Constitutions include mention one or several of ...

Almighty God	He, His, Him (capital H)
Creator	Legislator of the Universe
Creator and Preserver of the Universe	Religious Liberties
Divine Being	Sovereign Ruler of Nations
Divine Goodness	Sovereign Ruler of the Universe
Divine Guidance	Supreme Being
Divine Providence	Supreme Ruler of the Universe
God	Year of Our Lord

- Several States deny the right to hold government office or be a witness in a trial, if they do not believe in a monotheistic God
 - Arkansas, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee and Texas

Religion in the United Kingdom

- 16th Century Reformation
- Henry VIII breaks from the Roman Catholic Church
- Church of England becomes Protestant
- Church and State never claims to be separate in the UK
- King/Queen is the ceremonial head of the Church of England
- Some Catholic traditions maintained in the Church of England
 - Christening = Baptism
 - Communion = Mass
- UK society is more secular than US society
 - % population who are unaffiliated: UK 49%, US 21% (British Council)
 - No “God bless the UK” in political speeches
 - National Anthem is “God save the Queen”
 - UK politicians do not need to affirm a belief in God as do US politicians
 - Past UK politicians have been atheists and that’s OK with the UK public

Atheist Politicians in Western Democracies

United Kingdom	France	United States
James Callaghan, Prime Minister (1976-1979)	Francois Hollande, President (2012- 2017)	Pete Stark, D-CA (1973-2013)
Nick Clegg, Deputy Prime Minister (2010-2015), Leader of the Liberal Democratic Party (2007-2015)		Barney Frank, D-MA (1981-2013) Agnostic
Ed Miliband, Leader of the Labor Party (2010-2015)		Jared Huffman, D-CA (2013-Present)
David Miliband, Foreign Secretary (2007-2010)		

U.S. Supreme Court

- Perhaps the most important branch of US Government is the Supreme Court
- “Interprets” the constitution and the constitutionality of legal and controversial issues, and opines on existing federal laws/statutes
- Issues where “religious rights” threaten “human rights” (women’s rights, LGBTQ rights, etc.)
 - Hobby Lobby - refusal to provide family planning / contraceptive services in health insurance plan
 - Refusal of bakery to cater to same-sex weddings
 - Abortion
 - Challenges to Roe vs. Wade
 - Court’s refusal to block Texas anti-abortion law

Suggested Changes to U.S. Supreme Court

- Increase size to 21
 - Increased diversity, harder for one new judge to upset the balance
- Require 2/3 majority for a decision
 - Eliminate split “decisions” with a simple majority of 1
- Impose term limit of 12 years
 - Eliminates influence of “lifetime” appointments
- Do not allow court to select its own cases
- Discontinue presidential appointments
 - Nominated by lower courts
 - Elected by the people
 - Reduces influence of politics
- Require justices to affirm they will not allow political affiliations or religious dogma to influence their decisions

Religious “Rights”

- The only “religious right” is your right to worship your God
 - You do not have the “right” to negatively impact the “rights” of others based on your religious beliefs or actions
- Golden Rule
 - Jesus said, “*Do unto others as you would have them do unto you*”, Luke 6:31, Matthew 7:12
 - Most all religions have a similar moral directive
 - Note that this does not appear in the Ten Commandments
- A modern affirmation of the Golden Rule could be ...
 - We will treat all others with the dignity, equality, and respect that they deserve, regardless of color, ethnic origin, gender, gender identity, sexual preference, political persuasion or religious belief

Attitudes of American Public towards Different Religions

- Public views Evangelicals, Jews and Catholics most favorably
- Public views Muslims and Atheists most unfavorably

U.S. Public Has Warmest Feelings for Jews, Catholics and Evangelicals

Respondents in a Pew Research Center poll were asked:

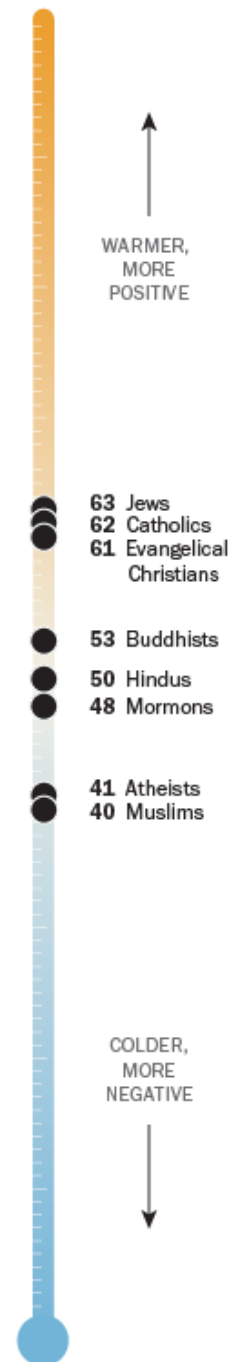
"We'd like to get your feelings toward a number of groups on a 'feeling thermometer.' A rating of 0 degrees means you feel as cold and negative as possible. A rating of 100 degrees means you feel as warm and positive as possible. You would rate the group at 50 degrees if you don't feel particularly positive or negative toward the group."

Results at right show total mean ratings of each religious group



Source: American Trends Panel (wave 4). Survey conducted May 30-June 30, 2014.

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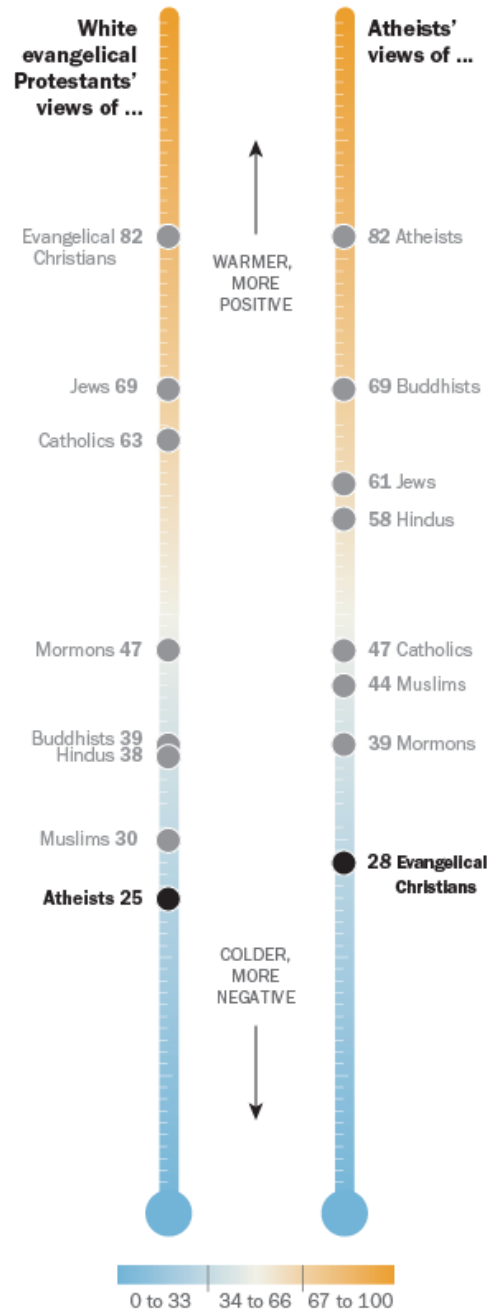


Source: Pew Research Center 2014

Religious Attitudes between Believers and Non-believers

- Evangelicals and Atheists view each other most unfavorably

On a "feeling thermometer" of zero to 100

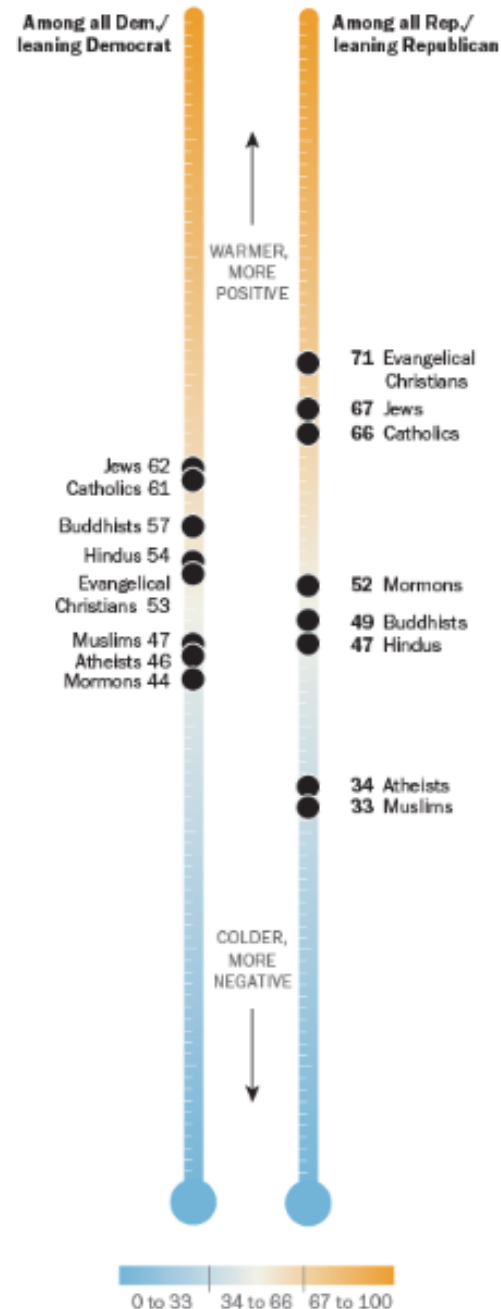


Source: Pew Research Center 2014

Religious Attitudes of Democrats and Republicans

- Republicans view Evangelicals, Jews and Catholics favorably
- Democrats view Jews and Catholics favorably
- Both Republicans and Democrats view Atheists and Muslims most unfavorably
- Democrats also view Mormons unfavorably

Mean thermometer ratings



Source: Pew Research Center 2014

Recent Headlines Regarding Religion

- Texas death row inmate alleged “violation of religious freedom” because the prison disallowed a pastor to “touch inmate and say prayers at time of lethal injection.” Supreme Court stayed execution so that it could hear case
- US Catholic bishops propose denying President Biden the sacrament because of Biden’s position on abortion
- Vaccine mandates allow waivers for medical reasons and “religious objections”

Diversity and Inclusion

Personal Questions to Ask Ourselves

- Does your own religious faith allow you to accept others with different monotheistic beliefs?
- Does your own religious faith allow you to accept others who do not share your belief in a monotheistic God?
- Do you believe that belief in God is necessary to be a moral person?
- Do you believe that the national identity should be guided by religion?
- If not, how can we fix it?

- A dinner table conversation
- Politics
- Religion

- A dinner table conversation
- Politics - control of the many by the few
- Religion

- A dinner table conversation
- Politics - control of the many by the few
- Religion - control of the many by the few

- A dinner table conversation
- Politics - control of the many by the few
- Religion - control of the many by the few
- Religion was the first political tool

- A dinner table conversation
- Politics - control of the many by the few
- Religion - control of the many by the few
- Religion is still a political tool today

www.philrutherford.com/Religion_and_Atheism.pdf