

[News](#)



Commuters walk along a corridor in the World Trade Center in New York on Nov. 18, 2019. Thirty percent of Americans don't identify with a religious group — but not all of them are atheists or agnostics. In fact, 43% of the group known as the "nones" say they believe in God, even if they largely dislike organized religion. (AP/Mark Lennihan, File)

Peter Smith

[View Author Profile](#)

Associated Press

[View Author Profile](#)

[**Join the Conversation**](#)

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. [Learn more](#)

October 11, 2023

[Share on Facebook](#)[Share on Twitter](#)[Email to a friend](#)[Print](#)

Thirty percent of Americans don't identify with a religious group — but not all of them are atheists or agnostics.

In fact, 43% of the group known as the "nones" say they believe in God, even if they largely dislike organized religion.

Those are among the findings of a new poll by the Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

The poll of 1,680 adults was conducted May 11-15 using a sample drawn from NORC's probability-based AmeriSpeak Panel, which is designed to be representative of the U.S. population. The margin of sampling error for all respondents is plus or minus 3.4 percentage points.

Religious or not

Thirty percent of adults identified with no religion. That group, commonly called nones, includes those identifying as atheist (7%), agnostic (7%) and nothing in particular (16%).

Sixty-four percent in the poll identified with a Christian tradition, including Protestant (25%), Catholic (19%), "just Christian" (18%), Mormon (1%) and Orthodox (less than 1%).

Other groups included Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish and Muslim (1% each) and something else (2%).

Age gap

Forty-three percent of those 18 to 29 are nones, while 52% identify as Christians and 4% are affiliated with other religions.

Adults over 60 are the most religious age group, but even among them, nearly 1 in 5 are nones.

God without religion

Forty-three percent of all nones professed belief in God or a higher power — including 61% of nothings in particular, 40% of agnostics and 4% of atheists. Overall, 79% of U.S. adults professed faith in God.

Beliefs

About half of nothings in particular said they believe in angels, the power of prayer and heaven. So did about a quarter of agnostics. Agnostics and nothing in particulars were less likely to believe in hell or Satan. Almost no atheists believed in any of that.

But most agnostics (67%) and nothings in particular (79%), and 44% of atheists, agreed "some things can't be explained by science or natural causes."

Advertisement

Unconventional

Nothings in particular were at least as likely as other Americans to accept various beliefs and practices outside of the Judeo-Christian tradition, including astrology, yoga as a spiritual practice, reincarnation, spiritual energies in physical things, the interaction of spirits of the dead with the living and karma.

Good or bad?

More Americans overall say the trend of people moving away from identifying with a religious group is a bad thing (37%) than that it's a good thing, (23%), but 39% say it's neither.

Among the nones, most atheists say it's good (69%), compared with 52% of agnostics and only 36% of nothings in particular.

About half of those with a religious affiliation say it's a bad thing.

Spiritual but not religious

In addition to having no religious affiliation, about 9 in 10 nones also don't consider themselves "religious."

But about half of agnostics and those nothings in particular consider themselves "spiritual but not religious." About two-thirds of nothings in particular consider themselves spiritual, religious or both. Eight in 10 atheists consider themselves neither.

Why not religious?

Among the nones who say they are also not personally religious, 68% cited their dislike of organized religion as a very or extremely important reason. For 63%, a top reason is their dislike of the stances religious faiths take on social and political issues, while 54% say the same about reports of abuse or misconduct by religious leaders. Forty-six percent cite disbelieving in God as a top reason. That was true of 81% of atheists, but just 40% of agnostics and 32% of nothings in particular.

Gender

Nearly two-thirds of atheists and 56% of agnostics are male, while 52% of nothings in particular are women.

Race

Nones tend to be white, especially atheists. Nothings in particular are a somewhat more diverse subgroup, with a third of them identifying as Black, Hispanic, Asian, multiracial or with another racial or ethnic group other than white.

Politics

About two-thirds of atheists and agnostics identify as Democrats or lean toward the Democratic Party, as do half of nothings in particular, while 13% of atheists, 17% of agnostics and 22% of nothings in particular identify with or lean toward the Republicans.

Education

Forty-one percent of atheists have a college degree, compared with 34% of agnostics and 28% of nothings in particular (and 30% of U.S. adults overall).

Where to find fulfillment

Close to three-quarters of religious adults say their faith provides them with at least some meaning and fulfillment, including 46% who say it provides a lot.

While widespread majorities of atheists and agnostics get no fulfillment from religious faith, only 62% of those nothings in particular say the same.

Large majorities of people with and without a religious affiliation said they get at least some fulfillment from spending time outdoors, physical exercise and spending time with family and friends.

[Read this next: The nonreligious are a growing US phenomenon. They really don't like organized religion.](#)

AP journalists Linley Sanders and Emily Swanson contributed to this report.