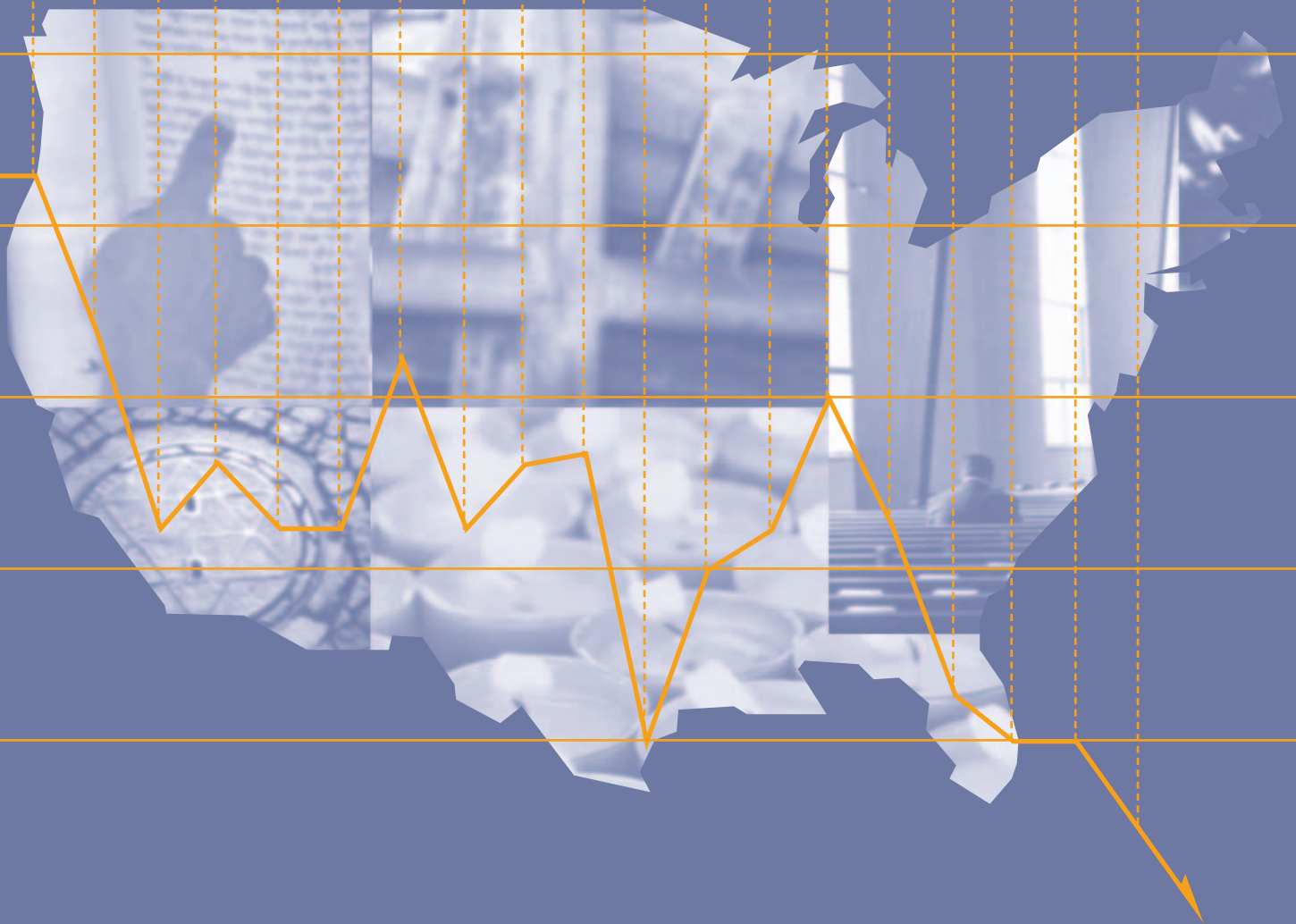


# THE DECLINE OF RELIGIOUS IDENTITY IN THE UNITED STATES



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2004

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## RELIGIOUS CHANGE IN CONTEMPORARY AMERICA

Discussion of the religious landscape is not new to American discourse. Is religious identity in long-term decline or in the midst of rejuvenation? As a people, are we becoming more secular in belief and behavior? What is the relationship between, on one hand, psychological affiliation with a church or denomination,<sup>1</sup> and, on the other, our spirituality and religious practice? What is the public significance if we are, in fact, moving unequivocally toward secular thinking and away from religion-based belief and understanding?

Much of the debate about religious change, according to noted observer Wade Clark Roof, turns on the impact of the tumultuous 1960s and 1970s, and the lasting effects of that period's social and cultural transformations on religious beliefs, practices, and institutions. The Vietnam War and outbreaks of urban unrest had radically changed the mood of the country. By the 1960s, deep disaffection with the social order had given rise to a counterculture that embraced Eastern mysticism and the politics of the new left. One position holds that those decades produced a profound rupture in the nation's moral and religious fabric, from which we have not yet recovered — that it caused a turning away from God, from all but the most superficial religious involvements, and that it produced at best a narcissistic, inward-looking spirituality.<sup>2</sup>

A second group of observers views those changes as temporary and sees most of the large cohort of boomers who came of age during those decades as having largely returned from youthful experimentation and the cultural excesses of that time. They point to the growth in Evangelical and Charismatic churches and to the more conservative moral

and religious mood that now prevails. Just like others before them, with passage into middle age, and establishment of family, neighborhood, and work-related ties, the boomer generation will re-connect with religious institutions.

A third, middle position acknowledges that a spiritual awakening has taken place but that it will not lead to return to conventional religious life. According to Roof, his position emphasizes:

... that the age of strong religious hegemonomies in the modern world is over; [and] that cognitive, moral, and religious pluralism is now a reality in the everyday lives of Americans ... Skeptical of established institutions and highly subjective in their approaches to religion, the post-World War II generations choose for themselves what to believe and what to practice ... [and] are far less concerned about orthodoxies and inherited faith traditions than were their parents ... Objective truth loses much of its persuasiveness, and consistency of belief and practice becomes less important than coherence ... Religion has not been abandoned but is expressed in a mood, style and discourse strikingly different from that of a half-century ago.<sup>3</sup>

Roof agrees with much of this third position about the changing nature of spiritual concerns — that “even if not always defined in traditional religious language, [they] will find widespread expression and are leading to major realignments of people and institutions.”<sup>4</sup>

Compared to even 15 years ago, fewer Americans today espouse a religious identity

— at least as conventionally ascertained through survey questioning. Based on the data to be presented, this change, we believe, is indisputable. Supporting evidence will be presented later. But, as our analysis will also suggest, the meaning of religious identity (and non-identity) is increasingly murky. Does growing unwillingness to claim a religious identity — to respond “None” to the standard survey questions (“What is your religion?”, “What is your religious preference?”, “Are you Roman Catholic, Protestant, Jewish ...?”) — represent a broad rejection of religion, i.e., a distinct indicator of secularization? Or, is the meaning more nuanced or more uncertain? Could it instead signal that the appropriate conceptual categories and methodologies we use are increasingly inadequate to the task, given the more expansive and multifac-

eted nature of contemporary religion? That is, does it reflect the limitations of our tools as researchers?

In this report we examine not religious *practice* like church attendance or membership but rather religious *identity*. We find that the religious identity of Americans has shifted in potentially significant ways, and the implications of these shifts may be felt for generations to come in politics, philanthropy, and other areas of civic life seemingly disconnected from religion itself.

Before delving into the data on religious self-identification, it is worthwhile first to address why this matters, and, second, to review trends in other indicators of Americans' religiosity.

## MAJOR FINDINGS

### **Approximately one of every six Americans has no religious identity**

Sixteen percent of United States adults either fail to place themselves in any denominational category (answering “none” or “no religion”), or they describe themselves as secular, humanist, ethical-culturalist, agnostic, or atheist.

### **Individuals who identify with no religion are a growing population**

Based on a review of survey evidence, the proportion of non-identifiers appears to have grown substantially in the last 10-12 years.

### **The non-religiously identified make up the third largest group in the country**

The two largest groups are Catholics and Baptists. Those non-religiously identified are virtually tied with Baptists as the second largest group since the difference in estimated size between them is within “sampling error.”

### **Those raised in no religion are most likely to not identify with a religion**

About 1 of every 9 Americans who was raised in some religion now identify with no religion; nearly three-quarters of those with no religious upbringing are current non-identifiers.

### **Being raised in more than one religion may lead to no religion**

Those raised in multiple religious traditions are more than twice as likely to be non-identifiers as adults than those raised in a single religion.

### **Younger Americans are less religiously identified than older Americans**

Younger adults (under 35) are most likely to be non-identifiers, and those over 65 are least

likely to be. Religious identification shows a steadily increasing association with age. It is unclear whether this represents a persistent growth trend in non-identifiers, or if it reflects a snapshot in time, with younger people likely to become more affiliated with religion as they pass through customary life-cycle stages. Non-identification in the United States likely will continue to increase.

### **Westerners lead the country in the proportion of people who do not identify with a religion**

Those living in the West region of the country are much more likely to be non-identifiers (24%) than Americans residing elsewhere (14%). While Southerners are somewhat less likely than those living in the Midwest and Northeast to be non-identifiers, the differences across the three non-West regions are modest compared to the contrast between the West and the rest of the United States.

### **Men are less likely to identify with a religious denomination**

Men are more likely to be non-identifiers than women, 20% versus 13%.

### **Some people who do not identify with a religion, nevertheless, practice some form of religion**

Sizable numbers of those who do not affiliate psychologically with any religion are, nevertheless, occasional or unsettled practitioners. As such, they might sometimes attend religious services, have previously identified religiously as adults, or expect to take up a religion sometime in the future. A more complete religious profiling requires additional information about religious beliefs and behavior.

## THE CIVIC BENEFITS OF RELIGION

As citizens of a democratic nation, there are several reasons why we might be concerned by an ostensible decline in religiosity or, at least, in some connectedness with organized religion. First, apart from religion's role in imparting salutary personal values<sup>5</sup> — which, we assume, conveys net societal benefits<sup>6</sup> — religious participation is also instrumental in building “social capital.” This is especially critical for those on the lower rungs of the socio-economic ladder or who are otherwise disadvantaged, such as from racial or ethnic discrimination.

Social capital, a powerful concept popularized by Robert Putnam,<sup>7</sup> refers to the social networks, and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them. Meaningful at the individual and aggregate levels, social capital develops through interactions with others, especially with others who move in different circles than oneself. The greater the amount of interaction and, particularly, the greater the diversity of interactions, the greater the stock of social capital. Social capital can be thought of simultaneously as both a “private good” and a “public good.” That is, it can help individuals succeed in their personal pursuits as well as carry benefits for the broader community by facilitating collective action through “connections,” interpersonal trust, and sense of reciprocal obligation. It is the latter — the use of social capital to facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefits — that has gotten the most attention, partly because it is seen as an antidote to the oft bemoaned decline of community.

So, how is religion relevant to social capital? As Putnam points out, “Faith communities in which people worship together are arguably the single most important repository of social capital in America,”<sup>8</sup> as judged by the number who participate (as in the proportion who attend worship services, but not only that form of church-based interaction) and the frequency of participation. So, while faith-based participation has declined overall in recent decades according to Putnam's analysis (though not as much as other forms of social interaction — political, civic, work-related, neighborhood-based, and other informal types of interaction), it nevertheless remains the most capacious source of social capital formation. As such, it has tremendous potential to produce collective benefits and to contribute to the public good.<sup>9</sup>

Secondly, in addition to the direct importance of religion to social capital formation and the consequent individual and collective benefits this can bring, much research also documents the positive correlation between church-based participation and various forms of altruistic behavior like charitable giving (to both religious and secular organizations) and volunteering one's time to help others.<sup>10</sup> While skeptics might argue that the direction of causality is ambiguous - that altruistic people might be attracted to religious participation - the theoretical connection between religious instruction/belief and charitable behavior is too compelling to dismiss.<sup>11</sup>

A recent in-depth survey analysis by Tom W. Smith of the National Opinion Research Center reached an unequivocal conclusion.



While finding that demographic variables have only slight-to-moderate relationships with altruistic values and a mixed pattern with empathy and altruistic behavior:

A number of the non-demographic variables do show notable, statistically significant, and consistent relationships with empathy and altruism [altruistic behavior]. In particular, religious involvement (e.g., attending church and praying) are associated with greater empathy and altruism ...<sup>12</sup>

Thirdly, newer cross-national research pinpoints a connection between certain religious beliefs and economic growth. The beliefs that seem to matter, i.e. produce growth, are those concerned with heaven, hell, and an afterlife:

Convictions such as a belief in heaven or hell, might affect individuals by creating perceived punishments and rewards that relate to “good” and “bad” lifetime behavior — which in turn can influence behaviors like thrift, work ethic, and honesty

that contribute to economic growth ... The overarching conclusion of this research is inescapable: A state's religiosity has important influences on its economic performance.<sup>13</sup>

Whether these cross-national findings apply similarly to over-time change in one country is unknown, though the evidence is intriguing and suggestive.

To summarize, considerable evidence documents a linkage between religious beliefs and behavior, on the one hand, and a variety of societal benefits. Some researchers would conclude even more strongly that they *produce* positive public outcomes. If trends in the relevant religion indicators are downward, it could signify a diminution in these goods. In this sense, then, there is reason to believe that religion matters for civil society, and that a decline in forms of religious attachment would — or, at least, could — have negative consequences.

## TRENDS IN MEASURES OF RELIGIOSITY (OTHER THAN IDENTIFICATION)

It is useful to place religious self-identification trends in context by reviewing over-time changes in other religion indicators. Apart from changes in the propensity to report a religion category as a component of one's identity (I am [a Catholic, a Hindu, a Methodist, etc.]), what *other* changes are occurring in religious beliefs, beliefs about religion, and religion-oriented practices? We review those indicators for which timelines exist stretching back at least several decades: first the cognitive measures, and then several behavioral gauges.

### **Belief in God**

Belief in God (or some higher power) is the most fundamental religious belief. Across a broad range of surveys taken in recent decades, 90% of Americans or more have said they believe in God or a higher power.<sup>14</sup> More convincingly, in the ten times the question was asked since 1987 by the Pew Research Center, 87-88% completely or mostly agreed with the stronger statement, "I never doubt the existence of God"<sup>15</sup> Although not quite universal in the United States, belief in God is more prevalent here than nearly everywhere else, and so far it has been virtually invariant over time.

### **Belief in the Efficacy of Religion**

Neither has there been much change in perceptions of the efficacy of religion, as measured by Gallup's question: "Do you believe that religion can answer all or most of today's problems, or that religion is largely old-fashioned and out of date?" In 30 Gallup Polls taken since 1974, the percentage giving the efficacious response — Religion can answer

today's problems — has ranged between 56-68% with no clearly discernable trend overall. The question was asked only once before 1974 (in 1957), when fully 82% then thought religion could answer our problems. So, if there has been any decline in this key belief, it appears to have occurred in the third quarter of the past century.<sup>16</sup>

### **The Importance of Religion in One's Life**

"How important would you say religion is in your own life?" is another question that Gallup has asked regularly since the early 1980s and intermittently before that time. On this measure, polls taken from 1990 onward had somewhat more Americans responding that religion is very important in their lives (average = 59%), compared to an average of 55% in the 1980s.<sup>17</sup> So, there appears to have been a modest rebound in the perceived importance of religion in one's personal life after an apparent drop-off during the 1980s.<sup>18</sup>

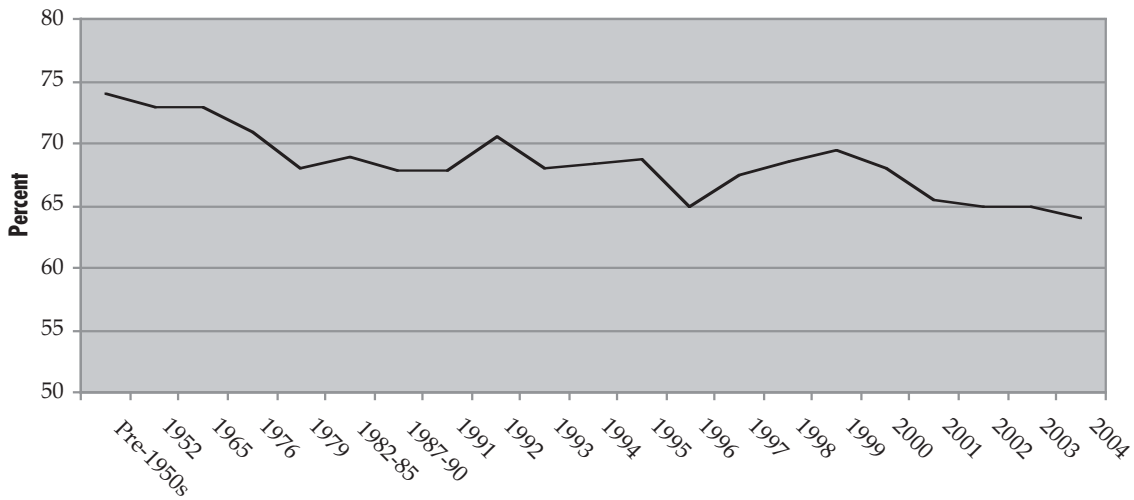
### **Religious Behavior: Church Membership, Church Attendance, and Prayer**

Three commonly used behavioral measures of religiosity are church membership, attendance at worship services, and the importance of prayer in one's daily life. Gallup has asked about church membership and attendance for almost 70 years. Surveys taken since 1980 consistently place membership in the mid-high 60% range, where it appears to have stabilized following a decline (Figure 1).

The percent reporting past-week church attendance has varied in recent years between the high 30s and low 40s — a narrow interval that has not changed much since the 1960s. Before

**Figure 1**

**Church Membership by Year**  
(Source: The Gallup Organization)



that decade, attendance had increased briefly to a peak during the 1950s, following World War II, before falling back to the normal pattern of minor fluctuations within the specified interval (Figure 2).

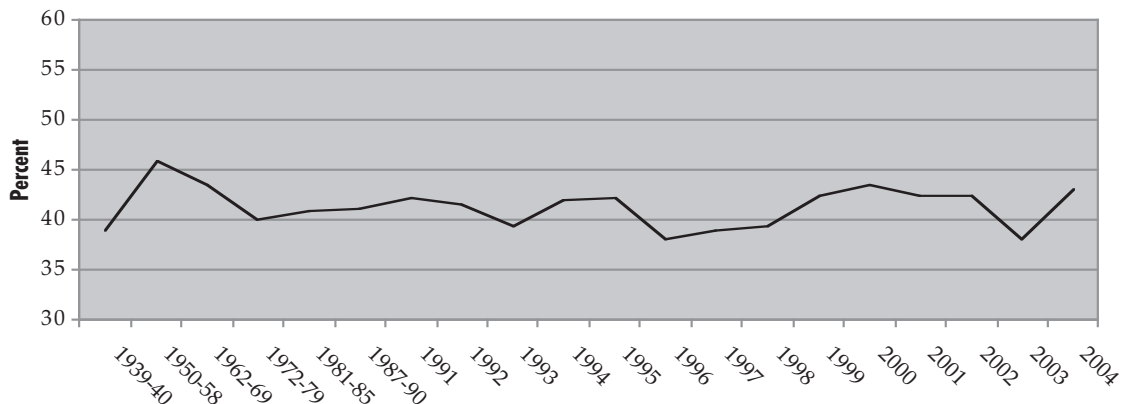
The Pew Research Center has asked Americans in eleven polls since 1987 how much they agree or disagree with the following statement: “Prayer is an important part of

my daily life.” If anything, there has been a slight up-tick in daily prayer over the course of this series (Figure 3).

While the accuracy and meaning of the first two measures have been disputed — (1) the concept of “membership” applies more clearly in some churches than others and (2) attendance is widely believed to be over-reported — these methodological objections are beyond

**Figure 2**

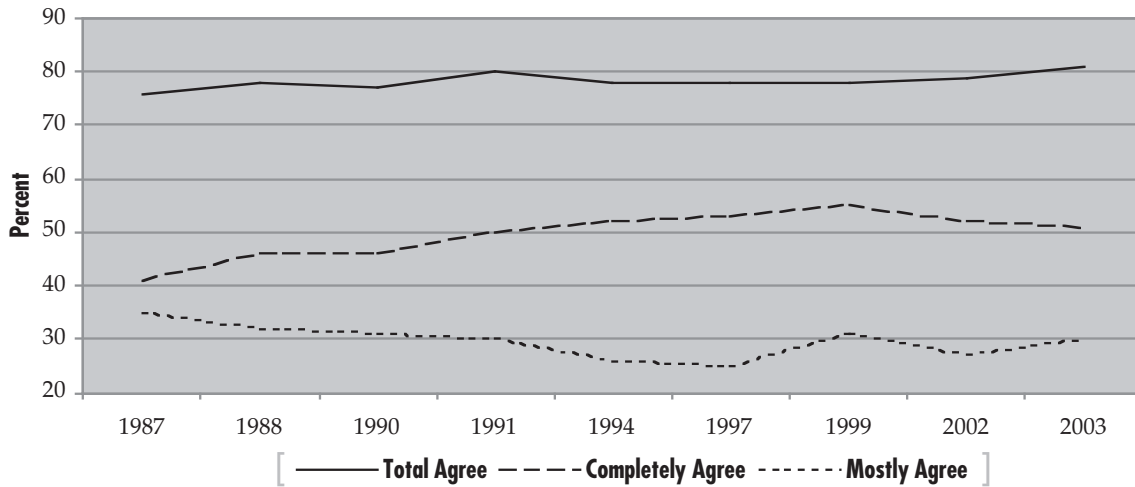
**Past Week Church Attendance by Year**  
(Source: The Gallup Organization)



**Figure 3**

**“Prayer is an important part of my daily life.”**

(Source: Pew Research Center for the People and the Press)



the scope of this paper. Besides, since our focus is on change rather than absolute estimates at a particular point in time, any biases should be constant over time and, thus, should not matter.

To summarize this review of religious trends:

1. Belief in the existence of God and the importance of daily prayer is widespread and largely unchanging.
2. Belief in the efficacy of religion might have declined during the third quarter of the last century, but has shown no persistent directional trend since that time.

3. The perceived importance of religion in one's life rebounded modestly during the 1990s, after a drop-off in the 1980s.
4. Church membership and attendance both appear to have declined somewhat since 1960 (after post-World War II increases), but most of the decline took place in the 1960s and 1970s. Rates show limited changes in the past 25 years.

Overall, there is scant evidence of much change in these measures of religious beliefs and behavior during the past quarter century.

## RELIGIOUS SELF-IDENTIFICATION

Religious identification has long been taken as a sign of belongingness to some faith tradition:

Ever since Will Herberg's well-known *Catholic-Protestant-Jew*, written in the mid-1950s, Americans have been singled out for their high levels of religious identification, even if they are religiously indifferent in other respects. People might have a shallow level of faith and weak institutional commitments, yet maintain loyalty to a religious community as a means of affirming both a religious identity and the American Way of Life ... In a dynamic society, the scope and direction of such preferences are an important index of what is happening religiously and culturally at any given time.<sup>19</sup>

While the data about changes in religious belief and commitment reviewed above reveal some evidence of change, mostly in the 1960s and 1970s, they also show signs of impressive stability and virtually no noticeable movements since the early 1990s. The picture is different for the tendency to identify oneself religiously, which has declined significantly in recent years after many decades where the proportion choosing a religion was high and unchanging. As we will show, Americans today are more likely than ever before to answer "None" when asked in surveys to specify their religion or religious preference.

Other estimates of religious identification (and non-identification) come from the American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS), based on 50,281 interviews conducted in 2001, which is intended as a sequel to the National Survey of Religious Identification (NSRI), taken in

1990.<sup>20</sup> Comparing the results reveals a sharp increase in the number of United States adults specifying "no religion" or "none" (or atheist, agnostic, Humanist, Ethical Culture, or secular)<sup>21</sup> in response to the open-ended question, "What is your religion (if any)?" The proportion giving these responses rose from 8.2% to 14.1%. If respondents refusing to answer are excluded from the base of the percentages, the recalculated figures become 8.4% (1990) and 15.0% (2001).

Although the magnitude of this change in non-identification is probably exaggerated somewhat because of the addition of "if any" in the wording of the 2001 survey question, for the same reason it is also likely that the more recent estimate is more accurate. As the ARIS researchers have duly acknowledged: By not presuming a substantive response, the "if any" appendage makes it easier for respondents with no religious identity/preference to answer "none."

Survey researchers have long recognized that interview responses can be affected by perceptions of "social desirability." While acceptance of diversity in recent decades has increased with regard to most ethnic and "lifestyle" categories, the one group that is still looked upon with considerable suspicion by most Americans are those who choose to affiliate with no religious faith tradition.<sup>22</sup> The implication is that survey questions presuming the respondent to have some religious identity or preference by not offering a "None" option, or otherwise making it appear unacceptable to give that answer (e.g., by not

appending “if any”), likely convey a subtle pressure to select some religion, thus biasing the distribution of responses in the direction of under-estimating the extent of non-identification in the United States

The National Survey of Religion and Ethnicity (NSRE) is a second recent large-scale survey which contains the same identification question as the ARIS: “What is your religion, if any?” The NSRE, conducted in parallel with the National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS), consists of a national random-digital sample of 4,027 interviews.<sup>23</sup> This survey produced a slightly lower estimate of non-identifiers than the ARIS, 12.3%, but one which, nevertheless, represents an increase in the number of Americans who claim no religious identity, when compared with data from a decade earlier.<sup>24</sup>

The NSRE/NJPS religion estimates have been criticized because of the positioning of the key identification question at the very beginning of the interview, before a sense of trust and rapport between interviewer and respondent could be established. Given that the first question in the interview signaled that the topic is “religion,” it is quite possible that a disproportionate number of non-identifiers refused to participate, perceiving the content to be irrelevant or uninteresting. If true, this would produce a sample biased in favor of those with some religious affiliation, making the 12.3% figure is an under-estimate.

Another survey report, released in 2004, also finds a significant increase in the number of religion non-identifiers. The 2002 General Social Survey conducted by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago reports the percentage of Americans saying they have no religion jumped from

nine percent (1992) to nearly 14%. The latest wave of this biennial series of in-person surveys, well-known to social researchers, is based on a nationally representative sample of 2,765 adults.

Gallup Polls, which use a differently worded question emphasizing “religious preference,” seem to indicate less change over the same time period as well as a lower current proportion of “no religion” / “none” responses. Unfortunately, Gallup changed the question wording several times, complicating analysis. Since mid-2000, they included the “if any” phrasing in their primary version of the question:

“What, if any, is your religious preference — Protestant, Roman Catholic, Jewish, Mormon, Muslim, or an Orthodox religion such as Greek or Russian Orthodox?”

Before that time, the question did not contain “if any.” Moreover, in the early 1990s they added the reference to Orthodox religions in the stem of the question. Further confounding analysis, they sometimes break out the percentage of respondents who answer “Atheist” and “Agnostic,” and sometimes not in the information they make available to the public. And, they do not present separate codes for “Ethical Culture,” “Humanist,” and “Secular,” or explain how those responses are coded.

Since the middle of year 2000, when Gallup began using the “if any” wording, the percentage of none / Atheist / Agnostic responses has ranged widely in 32 of their surveys from 7%-17%, though with most readings nearer the lower end of the range. This substantial and unpatterned volatility over a short period of time causes one to be suspicious of the measure's reliability. Notwithstanding these methodological considerations, Gallup's “reli-

gious preference” questioning places the current number of non-identifiers at 10-11% when the recent estimates are averaged.

One can only speculate that the ARIS/NSRE and Gallup questions must convey different meanings. It seems plausible that some respondents find it easier to state a preference from among a set of offered choices than to name a religion that categorically defines one-

self (“I am [NAME OF RELIGION]”) — possibly because the latter carries a stronger sense of commitment or invariance, whereas “preferring” (as opposed to “being”) implies a less certainty/clarity about one's beliefs and behavior. The same reasoning might help explain why the Gallup trend data shows less *growth* in the number of non-identifiers. (Or should they be labeled “non-preferrers?”)

**A NEW DATA SOURCE: THE SURVEY OF HERITAGE AND RELIGIOUS IDENTIFICATION**

The data source for our primary analysis is the national survey of Heritage and Religious Identification (HARI), conducted for the Institute for Jewish & Community Research during the second half of 2001 and the first half of 2002 (n=10,204 interviews).<sup>25</sup> The purposes of the HARI survey included profiling the United States population in terms of ethnic/cultural group identification and religion, estimating the size of the Jewish population, examining the phenomena of religion switching and the practice of multiple religions. Most of the survey items thus dealt with ethno-cultural group identification or with religious identification, background, and practice of self and family.

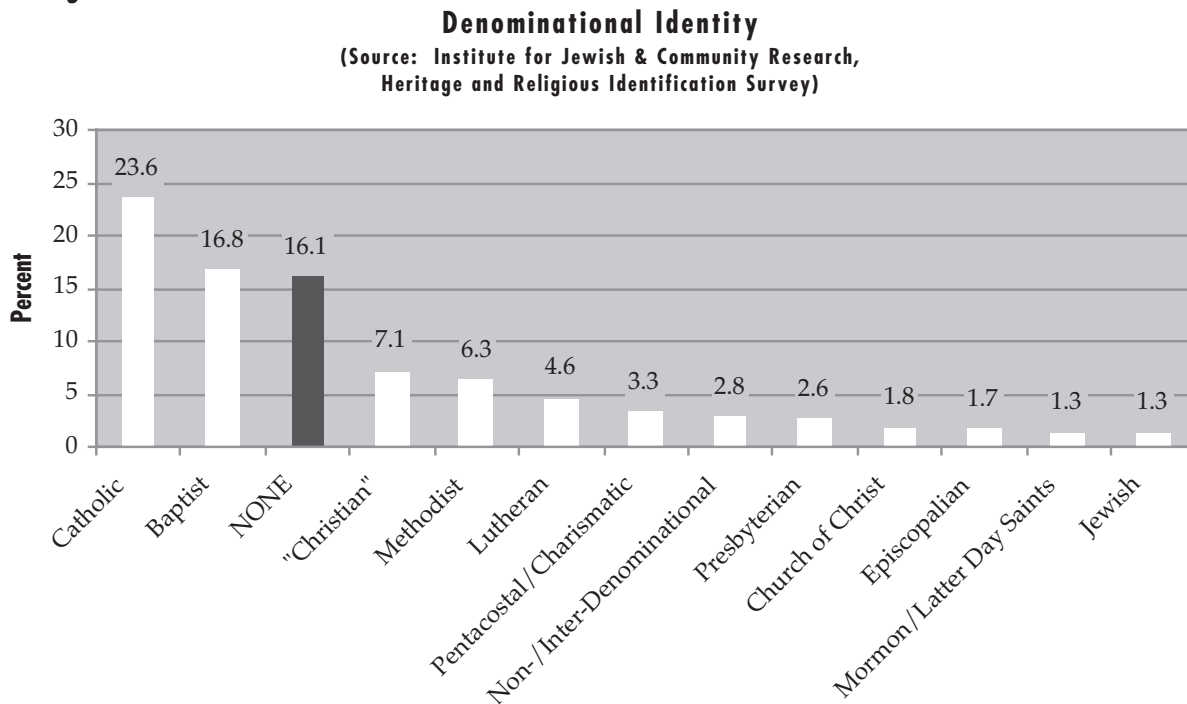
Supplementing the ARIS/NSRI surveys, the HARI data provides further documentation of

the trend toward religious non-identification and allows us to examine this dimension of religiosity more deeply by profiling the “no religion” segment — 1,588 respondents — in terms of their religious identity when growing up, their spouse's religious identity, past church-based participation, future intentions, and demographics. By facilitating comparisons with their counterparts on these dimensions, this data on non-identifiers provides a rich and in-depth source of information to describe and understand non-identifiers.

**How many non-identifiers?**

Fully 16% of the HARI sample answered either “none” when asked how they identify themselves or gave one of the other answers classified equivalently (atheist, agnostic, secular, Humanist, or Ethical Culture):<sup>26</sup>

**Figure 4**

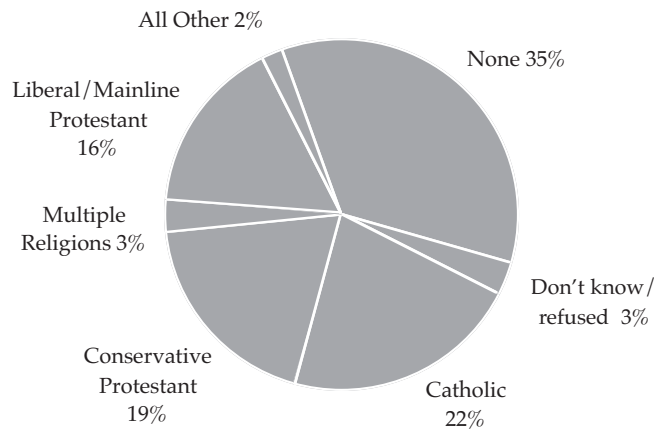




**Figure 5**

**Religious Origins of Current Non-Identifiers**

(Source: Institute for Jewish & Community Research, Heritage and Religious Identification Survey)



Do you now consider yourself [INSERT RELIGION RAISED IN (FROM PREVIOUS ANSWER)]; IF NO RELIGIOUS UPBRINGING, READ:] Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Muslim, some other religion, more than one religion, or none?<sup>27</sup>

This new figure — approximately one of every six adults — suggests that the growth in the proportion of Americans having no religious identity might be further advanced and proceeding faster than previously believed. It also makes non-identifiers the third largest religion-defined segment in the United States after Catholics and Baptists, and only barely behind Baptists (Figure 4).

As noted earlier, this 16% figure represents nearly a doubling of the ARIS study estimate arrived at one decade earlier, perhaps a bit less of a change if the 1990 ARIS estimate is somewhat understated because “if any” was not in the 1990 question wording. Nevertheless, this methodological difference in measurement cannot possibly explain all of the difference between the 1990 ARIS estimate and our 2002 HARI survey estimate. It is our view

that most of this change represents real growth in the number of Americans who view themselves as belonging to no religious group. The large-sample 2001 ARIS analysis, which derives an estimate of non-identifiers almost as high as ours, supports this conclusion, as does the trend documented in the NORC’s latest General Society Survey.

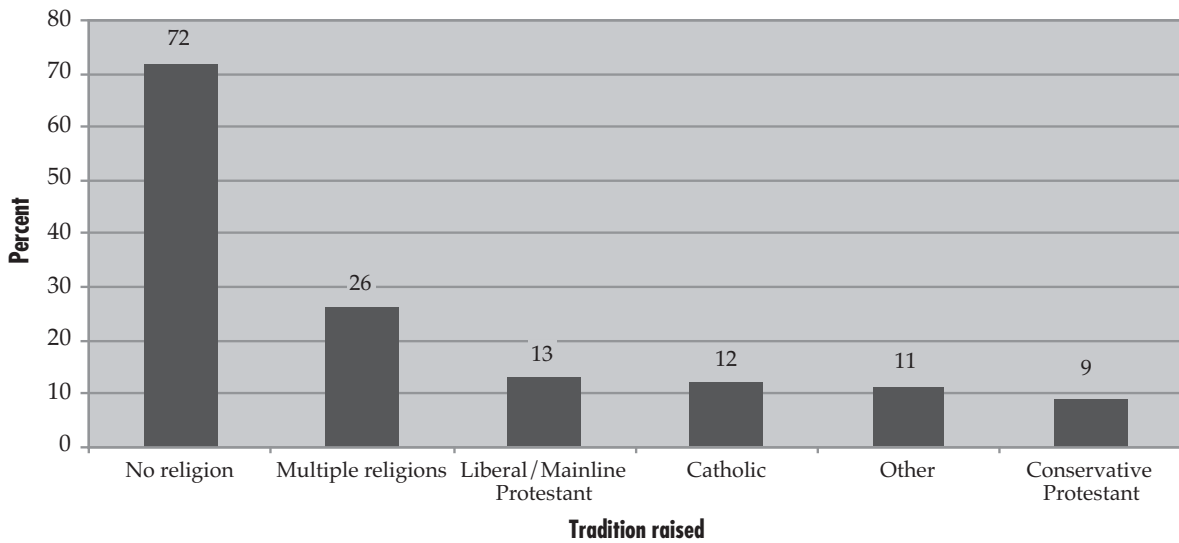
**Religious Origins of Non-Identifiers**

The largest number of non-identifiers (35%) were not raised in any religion as a child. Nevertheless, 62% of them had religious training or background (Figure 5). This compares with virtually all (97%) of respondents designating a current religion. The fact that well over half of current non-identifiers *were* raised in some religion indicates substantial attrition in the proclivity to claim a religious affiliation. Movement in the opposite direction — from no religion to a current identification — is less extensive (26% of those raised in no religion now identify with some religious category). This opposite-direction movement — acquiring a religious identity after having none in childhood — is not nearly large enough to off-

**Figure 6**

**Percent Who are now Non-Identifiers by Religion of Origin**

(Source: Institute for Jewish & Community Research, Heritage and Religious Identification Survey)



set the elimination of identity<sup>28</sup> among those with a religious upbringing. *Among adults alive today*, our calculation produces a net loss of about 8% in the number having a religious identity relative to when they were young (no figure).

Former Catholics (22%), former Conservative Protestants (19%), and former Liberal/Mainline Protestants (16%) make up most of the remaining non-identifiers. Combining these groups shows that over half of current “nones” in the United States are former Christians.

Figure 6 reverses the percentaging to compute how many from each tradition when young later repudiated all religious identification (or, for those with no religion at youth, remained unaffiliated). Nearly three-quarters of those raised in no religion remain non-identifiers today. Among persons brought up in a single religious faith, between 9-13% have become non-identifiers. Most interesting is the high percentage of Americans raised in two or

more religious traditions, fully 26% of whom have relinquished all religious identity. The finding is consistent with the popular theory that children raised in mixed religious traditions are less likely to maintain any religious orientation as adults. No other category of origin (including “Jewish” — included in “All Other”) indicates a loss of nearly that magnitude.

**Demographics of Non-Identifiers**

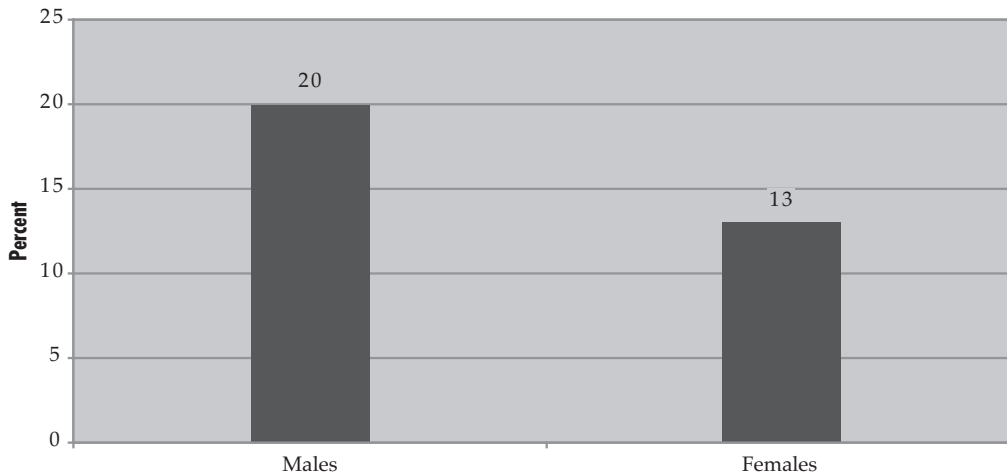
Just as non-identifiers' religious origins exhibit patterning, their demographic characteristics are also far from randomly distributed in the population. Instead, our analysis demonstrates that they are disproportionately male, younger, unmarried, less likely to have children if married, living in the West region of the country, and Asian-American.

**Gender**

It is a sociological truism that women, on average, are more “religious” than men. As Barry Kosmin and Seymour Lachman note,

**Figure 7**

**Non-Identifiers by Gender**  
 (Source: Institute for Jewish & Community Research,  
 Heritage and Religious Identification Survey)

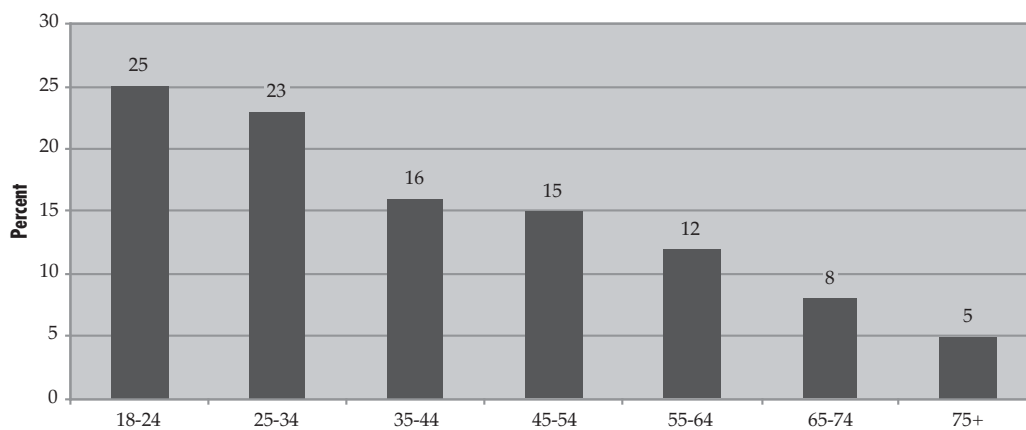


“the lay and professional literature have consistently shown what ministers and parishioners have observed: that women are more likely than men to join religious organizations and participate actively. It appears that Christianity is especially associated with female spirituality.”<sup>29</sup> Our data indicate that women in contemporary America are also significantly more likely than men to possess a religious identity (Figure 7). The relationship between gender and reporting a religious

identity is robust, holding within all categories of education, income, and age. So, it is not just a case of women having lower socioeconomic status than men, for example, that drives the statistical association — 85% of female college graduates are identifiers compared to 78% of males — or that women tend to be slightly older than men, on average. (Even among the oldest age segments, women are 5-6 percentage points more likely to be identifiers than are men.)

**Figure 8**

**Non-Identifiers by Age**  
 (Source: Institute for Jewish & Community Research,  
 Heritage and Religious Identification Survey)



**Age**

Age is an even stronger predictor of religious non-identification. Figure 8 shows a steep and perfectly monotonic relationship between age and reporting “no religion” / “none” which ranges from only five percent, among the oldest segment of the population 75 and over, to 25% of 18-24 year-olds. In a single cross-sectional measurement, such as the HARI survey, it is not possible to calculate precisely or conclusively how much of these differences in religious non-affiliation are due to generational changes affecting specific age cohorts more than others — and which are more likely to persist — and how much are due to life-cycle changes. For example, as people reach certain stages of life (getting married and raising young children), they are more likely to join a church and assume a corresponding religious identity. It is also not clear from the data how much of the total observed decline in identification has occurred among members of each age group.

One way to begin to sort out the relative influence of these various causes is to examine the

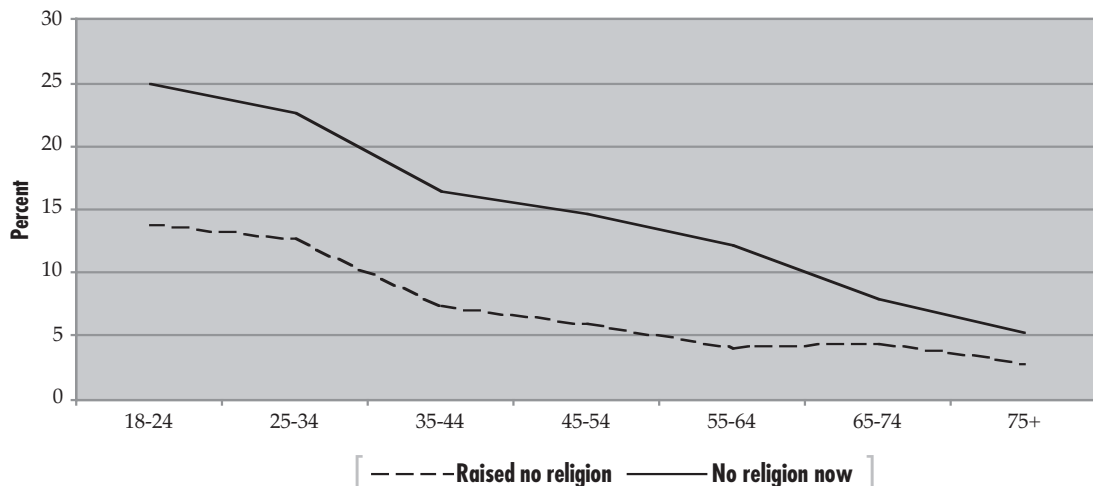
proportion of non-identifiers in each age segment who have a religious origin, that is, whether they were raised in some religion or not. The narrowing gap between the two time series in Figure 9 suggests that the rate of growth in the proportion of non-identifiers by age cohort is not constant. Instead, the least amount of change has occurred among the two oldest cohorts (65-74 and 75+), with considerably more apparent in the other cohorts — among those born after the middle-to-late 1930s and coming of age as adults after the middle-to-late 1950s.

The growth in non-identifiers since youth increases steadily as one moves from the oldest group to the youngest group, as indicated by a widening gap between the two lines. Although one might reasonably expect the opposite trend, as progressively more time has elapsed since youth in the older cohorts, thus allowing more time for change to occur, the overall pattern seems to be acceleration in the growth of non-identifiers as new age cohorts enter adulthood: Not only are younger cohorts today less likely to start out (as youth) with less religious background, but

**Figure 9**

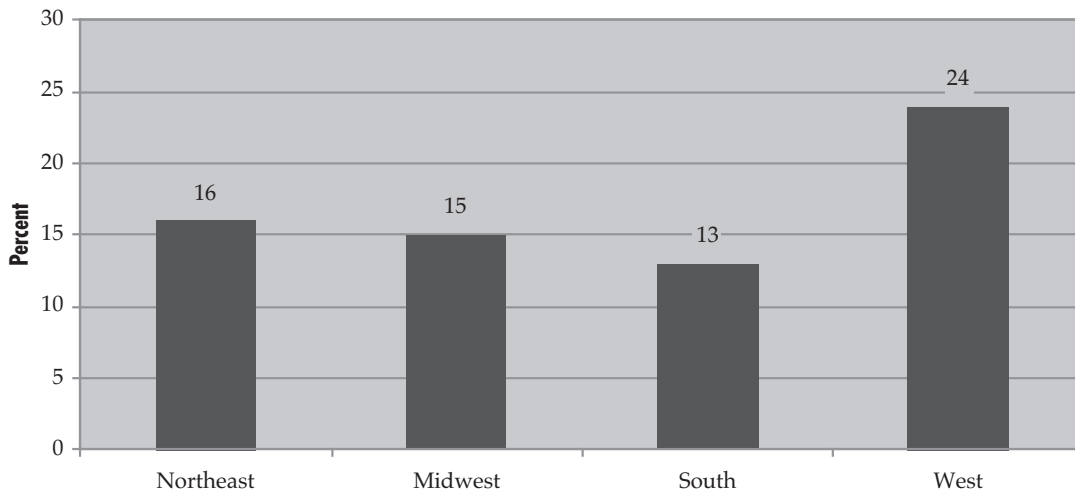
**Raised in No Religion and No Religion Now by Age**

(Source: Institute for Jewish & Community Research, Heritage and Religious Identification Survey)



**Figure 10**

**Non-Identifiers by Region**  
 (Source: Institute for Jewish & Community Research,  
 Heritage and Religious Identification Survey)



those that *do* have some religious upbringing are also more likely to become non-identifiers. The data indicate that the observed change in the direction of increasing religious non-identity, while applying to all population age cohorts to some extent, least characterizes persons 65 and older.

Without additional evidence it is hazardous to extrapolate the trend. However, the perfect age monotonicity of the patterns — both the *proportion* of persons with no religious identity as well as in the *amount of growth* in non-identity by cohort from youth to the present — is suggestive. The data are inadequate for addressing the extent to which life-cycle effects play a role (they cannot tell us *when* changes occurred within the cohorts between youth and the time of the survey), though it is plausible that some regularities in identifying, or not identifying, with a religious group pertain as one moves from adolescence into young adulthood into middle age and, finally, into senior citizenship. Testing that hypothesis conclusively would require longitudinal data (multiple measurements on the same sample over time) on more than one cohort.

**Region of the Country**

The American West has always been a pioneering, free-wheeling region where unorthodox and experimental ways of life are common and tolerated. Many new sects and denominational splinter groups originated in the West or moved there seeking religious freedom. It should come as no surprise, then, that the largest proportion of non-identifiers, conceptualized perhaps as an extreme form of religious unorthodoxy, should also reside in the West. As Figure 10 shows, the incidence of religious non-identity is markedly higher in the West region than anywhere else.<sup>30</sup>

Sociologist Mark Shibley observes:

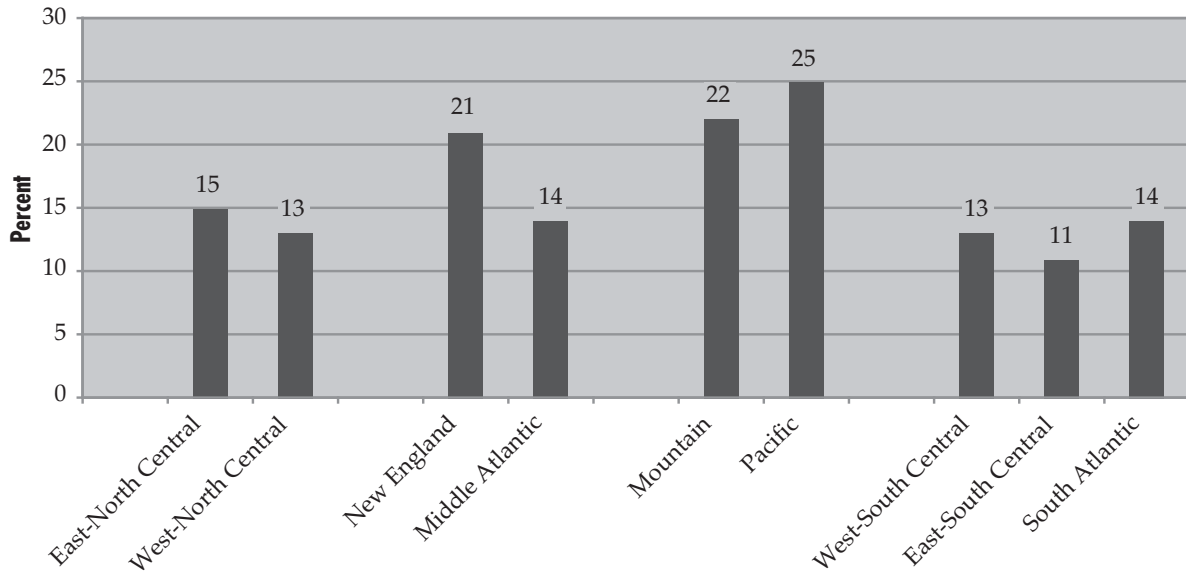
The West is a vast place geographically, which has made it harder for religious institutions to pervade the landscape and corner the market ... There's a sense of space — an openness — in this culture.<sup>31</sup>

Others point to the fact that people in the West, especially on the West Coast, tend to be from somewhere else — and that they tear up roots when they move to the West, including their religious roots.<sup>32</sup>

**Figure 11**

**Non-Identifiers by Geographic Sub-Region**

(Source: Institute for Jewish & Community Research, Heritage and Religious Identification Survey)



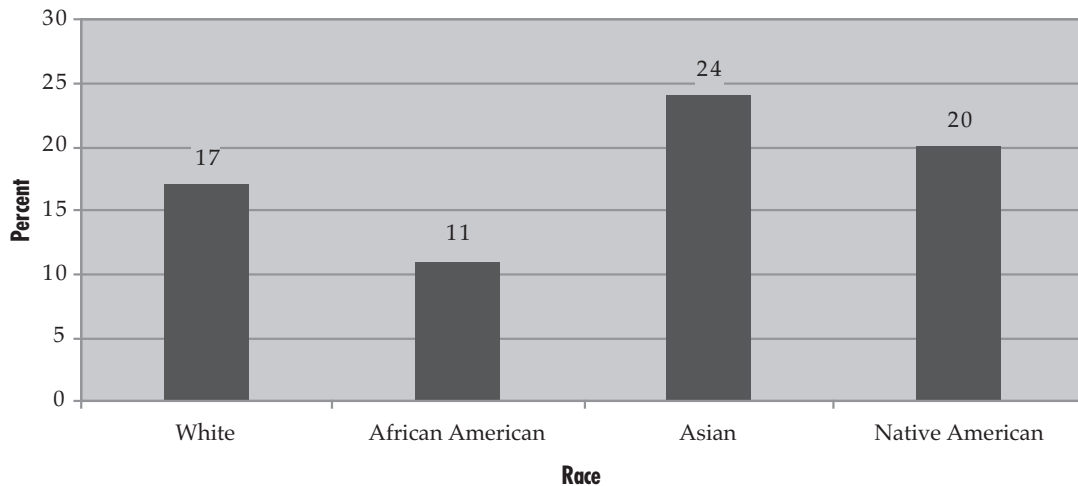
Breaking the four standardized United States Census regions into their smaller divisional components reveals that the Pacific coastal area has the highest percent of “no religion” inhabitants — fully one-quarter of the population (Figure 11). Also evident is the significant contrast in the Northeast region between New

Englanders — which, at 21% no religious affiliation, is significantly higher than the national average — and those in the Mid-Atlantic area, which has a non-identifier incidence close to the national average. Not coincidentally, the Pacific states and New England also tend to be the most liberal areas of the country. (The

**Figure 12**

**Non-Identifiers by Race**

(Source: Institute for Jewish & Community Research, Heritage and Religious Identification Survey)



end of this section documents at the individual level of analysis the linkage between non-identification and political liberalism.)

**Race**

African-Americans are less likely than other racial groups to have no religious affiliation (Figure 12). The long-time prominence of the church in African-American communities is well-known. Less well established in the sociology of American religion is the high incidence of non-identification among Asian-Americans (24%).<sup>33</sup> Native-Americans also appear to have a higher-than-average rate of non-identification, but this difference is not statistically significant.

**Marital Status and Children**

In every age bracket through 55-64, non-identifiers are significantly less likely to be married than identifiers (Figure 13). At the same time, through age 74, non-identifiers are *more* likely to be living unwed with a partner (not

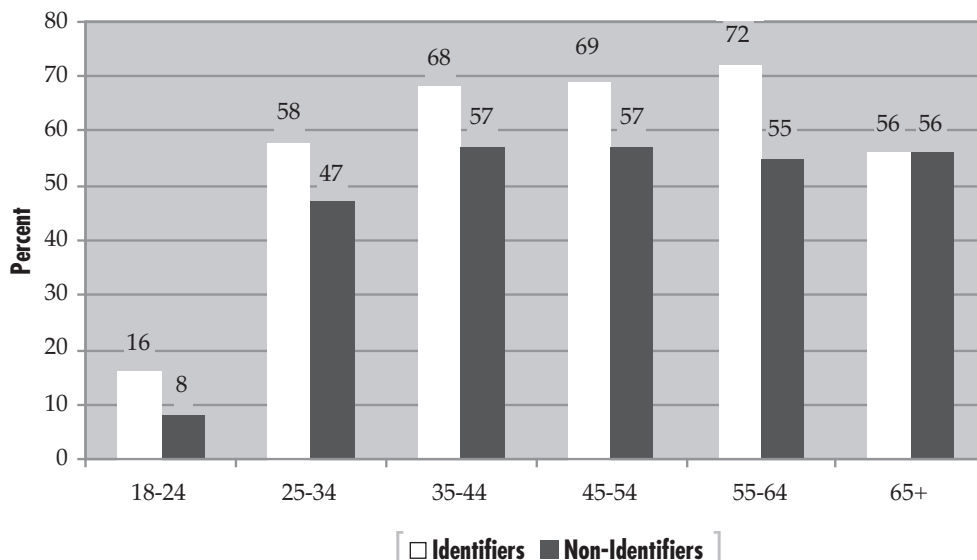
shown in figure), but for persons 35 and older the incidence of living unmarried with a partner is low for both segments and the differences are small. Having a religious identity seems consistent with traditional marriage and incompatible with living unmarried with a partner. It is also the case that married non-identifiers are less likely to have children than married individuals with a religious affiliation.<sup>34</sup>

To what extent are couples homogeneous with respect to having no religious identity? In other words, do the non-religiously like-minded tend to attract one another? Among married/partnered couples, if one partner has some religious identity, the other partner is also likely to be an identifier (91%). However, if one partner has no religious identity, then the chances of the other partner having an identity are the same as his/her being a non-identifier: 48% yes, 48% no, and four percent not sure. Given that the overall population incidence of “no religion” is 16%, this indicates a strong tendency for clustering to occur.

**Figure 13**

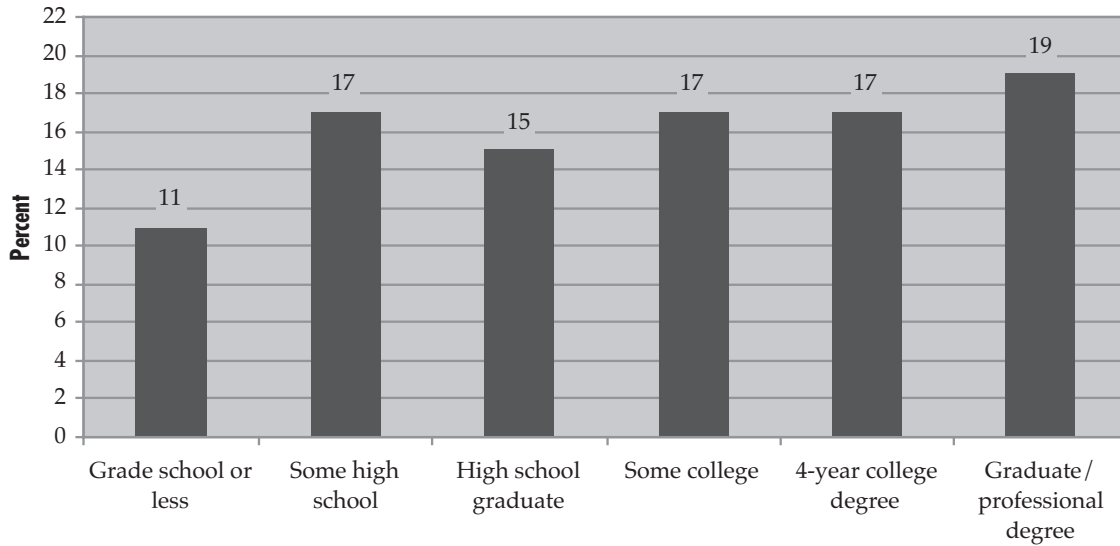
**Percent Married by Age and Religious Identification**

(Source: Institute for Jewish & Community Research, Heritage and Religious Identification Survey)



**Figure 14**

**Non-Identifiers by Education**  
 (Source: Institute for Jewish & Community Research,  
 Heritage and Religious Identification Survey)



**Socio-Economic Status**

Contrary to what some might anticipate, education and income show little correlation with religious identity rates. Household income is entirely unrelated. Education is only modestly related, as persons who have not been to high school are less likely than others to be non-identifiers, while those with graduate or professional degrees are slightly more inclined to report no religion (Figure 14). But, except for those in the lowest education bracket (grade school or less), the differences are modest. Although greater levels of education are thought to expose a person increasingly to rational and scientific modes of thought and

discourse, it has only modest impact on the propensity to claim a religious affiliation.

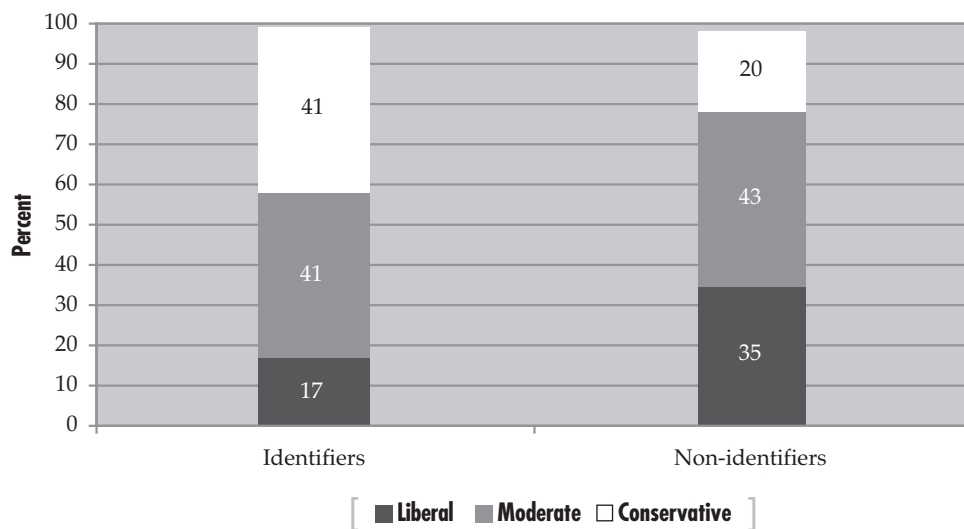
**Political Orientation**

Analysis of Gallup Poll data shows that non-identifiers are much more likely to say they are moderate or liberal than are those with a religious preference and less likely to describe themselves as conservative (Figure 15). This finding is consistent with the well-documented tendency for religious Americans to be more politically conservative. Among religious identifiers, there are more than twice as many conservatives as liberals. Among non-identifiers, the ratio is 1.5 to 1 in favor of liberals.<sup>35</sup>



**Figure 15**

**Political Orientation by Religious Identification**  
(Source: The Gallup Organization)



## DISCUSSION: INTERPRETING NON-IDENTIFICATION

What does it really mean to have no religious identification — to answer “none” when asked to specify one’s religion or religious preference? To what extent does the answerer’s non-affiliation extend to other dimensions of secularity? Are non-identifiers, in fact, a world apart when it comes to matters of conventional (and non-traditional) religious beliefs, behavior, and spirituality?

First off, as we have already seen, one would be mistaken to assume that this religious component of one’s identity is unchanging. A large number have abandoned their religious identity, a smaller number who had no religious upbringing have adopted one, many others have switched affiliation from one church or denomination to another — some of them multiple times.<sup>36</sup> As the ARIS researchers describe, identity today is polymorphous and in constant flux:

... in an environment where individuals may hold multiple notions of self, and hold membership in multiple, non-continuous communities and associations, establishing any fixed notions of identity is problematic. One of the hallmarks of contemporary American society in particular is that individuals can lay claim to a variety of identities ... with varying commitment to each ... In such an environment, it becomes difficult to speak of anyone’s identity as a permanent fixture of the self.<sup>37</sup>

Given the fluidity of religious identification and the fact that it is but one of numerous components of one’s sense of self, it is unlikely that the non-identifier segment of the population is entirely distinctive, even on matters of religion.

Indeed, analysis of the ARIS data reveals that eight percent of the “no religion” group describe their outlook as “religious” and another 28% describe it as “somewhat religious.” (This compares with 43% “religious” and another 43% “somewhat religious,” for United States adults who profess some religion.) Fully 67% of them believe that God exists, and 68% of those believers agree that “God performs miracles” — clearly a religiously grounded belief.<sup>38</sup>

In the HARI data, we find similar evidence that current non-identifiers are far from adamantly, persistently, or consistently secular: At least 26% of them say that they will definitely (4%) or probably (22%) take up a religion sometime in the future, and another nine percent do not know (Table 1 below: sum of rows C, D, G, and H)<sup>39</sup>. More than one-third of them (36%) had attended a religious worship service other than a wedding or funeral sometime in the past year (Table 1: sum of rows D, E, F, and H) — 15% had done so within the past month. (Nine percent of non-identifiers reported that they typically attended religious services at least once a month.) Fully one-half of non-identifiers (51%) reported practicing a religion sometime in the past (Table 1: sum of rows B, C, D, and E).

Only 45% are what might be called “hard-core” in their current and expected non-religion (rows A + B). In contrast, the data analysis indicates that 55% of those reporting no religious identity are either presently engaging in some form of manifestly religious

**Table 1**

**Religious Characteristics of Non-Identifiers**

A. No past religion, no current attendance, no religion in future	26%
B. Past religion, no current attendance, no religion in future	19
C. Past religion, no current attendance, possible religion in future	11
D. Past religion, current attender, possible religion in future	11
E. Past religion, current attender, no religion in future	10
F. No past religion, current attender, no religion in future	9
G. No past religion, no current attendance, possible religion in future	8
H. No past religion, current attendance, possible religion in future	6

behavior or say they intend to do so, as presented in the highlighted rows C-H in Table 1.<sup>40</sup> As a group, their “secularity” is hardly pure in this sense. That two-fifths of them (41%) expect to adopt some religion in the future or are undecided — only one-tenth of them being uncertain — indicates an openness to change among a sizeable minority of the currently unaffiliated as well as further evidence that the “non-identifier” label is not always capturing a fixed trait. The latter point is underscored by the relative youthfulness of non-identifiers: 43% are younger than 35 and fully two-thirds are less than 45.

While non-identifiers are demographically different than their counterparts — and obviously join churches and participate less in faith-based activities — they are not as distinctive a group as might be expected. Even in terms of basic religious tenets, it is more accurate to describe them as formally unaffiliated than as non-believers, although a sizeable minority of non-identifiers do reject notions of God’s existence.

The foregoing suggests a 2 X 2 mapping (Table 2).

**Table 2**

**A Typology of Religious Identifiers and Non-Identifiers**

	<b>Some Religious Group Identity (“Identifiers”)</b>	<b>No Religious Group Identity (“Non-Identifiers”)</b>
<b>Religious Participants:</b>	“Traditionals” (70%)	“Non-Rejectors” (6%)
<b>Non-Participants:</b>	“Absentees” (13%)	“Seculars” (11%)

“Traditionals,” by far the largest population group, affiliate psychologically with some church/denomination and practice their religion by participating in worship services at least occasionally.<sup>41</sup> “Seculars” represent the opposite extreme, neither identifying with any religion nor attending services. They make up about one in nine Americans. But even among these non-identifying, non-participating Seculars, 29% expect to take up some religion in the future and another 7% of them did not know. “Absentees” (who are 13% of the population) maintain a religious identification but, like Seculars, rarely or never attend worship services. “Non-Rejectors” are the smallest segment at six percent. They are the ones with no fixed religious identity but nevertheless sometimes participate in religious services. Non-Rejectors might be the most interesting segment for further study.

While it is beyond the scope of this research to explore the differences between “Traditionals” and “Absentees,” in keeping with the focus of this paper it might be illuminating to point out what distinguishes “Non-Rejectors” from “Seculars” among Non-Identifiers. In fact, the differences that divide the two sub-segments are narrower than what distinguishes the aggregate of the two (non-identifiers in total) from identifiers. Apart from Non-Rejectors attending religious services more often — although not nearly as often as religious identifiers — and being more open to taking up a religion sometime in the future, there are only a few differences in the respective profiles of the Non-Rejector and Secular varieties of non-identifiers:

- Non-Rejectors are more likely than Seculars to be in the youngest age group (18-24), more likely to be single, but also more likely to have minor-age children;

- Non-Rejectors are more likely than Seculars to be African-American and less likely than Seculars to be Caucasian; and
- Non-Rejectors are more likely than Seculars to live in the South region and less likely to live in the West.

Although non-identifiers, especially Non-Rejector non-identifiers, are not as differentiated from the rest of society or outside the mainstream as certain religious conservatives like to claim, they are nonetheless sufficiently different and proliferating in number for observers to try to understand them and the phenomenon they represent.

So what accounts for their growth, and what does it mean? Some have argued that the growth in non-identifiers connotes much less than a full-fledged abandonment of religion. One line of thinking, propounded by Berkeley sociologists Michael Hout and Claude Fischer, holds that the increase in “nones” is a reaction to the emerging activism of Christian conservatism in American politics:

In the 1990s, many people who had weak attachment to religion and either moderate or liberal political views found themselves at odds with the conservative political agenda of the Christian Right and reacted by renouncing their weak attachment to organized religion.<sup>42</sup>

As we have seen, non-identifiers are indeed less conservative. Such a politically based response might account for some of the growth in non-identifiers, but this explanation is too ad hoc and simplistic to be the main reason. It seems just as plausible that identifiers put off by the Christian Right might channel their anti-conservative energies within the more liberal religious denominations. Moreover, the act of renouncing all affiliation,

however weakly held before, is itself worthy of note.

Other students argue that because the nature of religious belief and practice in the United States today is not well encapsulated by the conventional set of categories and denominations, the standard survey approaches do not accommodate the newer forms of identity, often non-institutionalized, non-traditional, or multi-category hybrids.<sup>43</sup> In practice, the absence of appropriate survey response options and/or failure to probe for in-depth descriptions results in some fraction of respondents erroneously being counted among the “no religion” group.

This methodological consideration might help account for some of the observed increase in non-identification. To be sure, however, it cannot explain all of the observed increase between the 1990 NSRI survey and its 2001 ARIS follow-up (which employed the same questions and coding procedures), or between the NSRI and HARI surveys.

A similar viewpoint denying that true change has occurred is espoused by Robert Fuller, author of *Spiritual But Not Religious*. Fuller claims that there have always been many more people with no religious identification, but until recently they have been reluctant to

admit it. But lately, a sufficiently large critical mass of non-identifiers has emerged, creating a social reference group and making it more comfortable for people to now say they have no religion.<sup>44</sup> Roof too recognizes this development, pointing to a new and stable “culture of non-affiliation” making defection and/or the rejection of religious identity “an increasingly acceptable alternative in American society.”<sup>45</sup>

This hypothesis would be difficult to test. In one important sense though, it does not matter, as some — probably most — of the new members of the critical mass making up the “no religion” reference group are surely true converts to “no religion” — not just closet non-identifiers who have finally come out. Moreover, the very willingness to express one's non-identity and associate “publicly” with other unaffiliateds is itself significant.

None of these explanations seems convincing enough to rebut the conclusion that the growth in non-identification is, to a significant degree, a genuine movement away from religion as historically understood in this country. Though in some cases temporary, and in most cases not an abandonment of spirituality, we believe that the numeric trend represents a substantive alteration in the American religious landscape.

## CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

This paper has documented a marked decline since 1990 in the number of Americans espousing a religious identity, from less than one-tenth of the public to nearly one in every six adults today. Far from being randomly distributed in the population, the data portray non-identifiers as more likely than those expressing a religious affiliation to be young, male, living in the West and New England, moderate-to-liberal politically, and unmarried.

Although not all non-identifiers are thoroughly secular in their outlook or behavior, they are certainly far less likely than identifiers to hold religious beliefs and engage in traditional religious behaviors such as participating in worship services. While the empirical evidence presented is hardly definitive on this point (let alone the causal relationships), the decline in identification might be accompanied by a decline in civic altruism, socially constructive attitudes, economically productive beliefs, and social capital formation. If similar patterns were observable on other indicators of religious belief and practice, we would feel more confident in projecting impacts. But because the other trend measures were stable or mixed in direction, it is not possible to be unequivocal on the interpretation and implications.

Wade Clark Roof concurs on the ambiguity of the meaning of the changes in contemporary religion:

Boundaries that once separated one faith tradition from another are now often blurred; religious identities are malleable and multifaceted, often overlapping several traditions. Trends and events stretch our imagination, even as we try to predict

the direction of religious change. Some indicators point to institutional religious decline, others to a profound spiritual ferment, confusing the picture and making it difficult to describe what is really happening.<sup>46</sup>

A lingering question for this research is whether the decline in psychological affiliation with any church or denominational organization will persist, level off, or reverse course. Will the decline in religious identification observed in this research continue or prove to be a temporary phenomenon?

If the question is meant to refer to the traditional, established churches and faith systems that have been with us for some time, the answer is very likely to be yes, it is likely to continue. But if we expand the concept of “religion” to include the increasingly popular forms such as New Age religions, Eastern-Western blends, multi-stranded hybrids, the “small-group movement,” pseudo-scientific spiritual formulations, and other types, then maybe no.

While this report has focused on the psychological aspects of religious identity, more research is needed to examine some of the *beliefs* and *behaviors* not traditionally associated with church attendance but that may be affiliated with spirituality, such as specific beliefs about religion and God, civic practices that correlate with religious ones, and non-traditional definitions of religion, spirituality, and beliefs.

The basic character of American society virtually guarantees that religious identity, like

other dimensions of our concept of self, will continue to evolve and be transformed:

Religious identity ... can be difficult to preserve unchanged even for those who

live in the most traditional of societies. But it can be especially difficult to maintain when faced with the individualism and mobility of American life.<sup>47</sup>

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> For smoother presentation, we use the term “church” in this paper to be an all-inclusive reference to all religions. It is meant to incorporate synagogues, mosques, temples, etc.

<sup>2</sup> Wade Clark Roof, *The Spiritual Marketplace* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), pp.113-115.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.114-115.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.115.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Barro sees religion influencing individual traits such as honesty, work ethic, thrift, and openness to strangers through the build-up of “spiritual capital” - a concept which includes formal education through organized religion as well as influences from family and social interactions (“Spirit of Capitalism: Religion and Economic Development,” *Harvard International Review* [Winter, 2004]). Spiritual capital is not to be confused with “social capital,” as described in the text.

<sup>6</sup> We do not wish here to be drawn into the argument over whether organized religion is more of a force for good or for evil, though, with the recent growth in religion-inspired terrorism and violence, it is tempting to dismiss its positive effects as, on the whole, insufficient to counter the negatives.

<sup>7</sup> Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p.66.

<sup>9</sup> This fact is doubly significant for those concerned about inequalities in American life because religion oriented interaction is the one source of social capital that is not highly stratified. Religious involvement provides one effective resource enhancing vehicle for the poor and disadvantaged that is not disproportionately available to the better off.

<sup>10</sup> The *Giving and Volunteering in the U.S.* series by Independent Sector is perhaps the best source. A recent edition is co-authored by Virginia A. Hodgkinson and Murray S. Weitzman (Washington DC: Independent Sector, 1996).

<sup>11</sup> Alan Wolfe is one observer who demurs, presenting a more mixed summary of the empirical literature. See *The Transformation of American Religion* (The Free Press, 2003), pp.151-54.

<sup>12</sup> Tom W. Smith, “Altruism in Contemporary America: A Report from the National Altruism Study,” unpublished report prepared for the Fetzer Institute, (July, 2003), p.13.

<sup>13</sup> Barro, op cit.

<sup>14</sup> George Gallup, Jr. and D. Michael Lindsay, *Surveying the Religious Landscape: Trends in U.S. Beliefs* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1999), p.23. Unless otherwise specified, all data reported in this paper comes from nationally representative surveys.

<sup>15</sup> Pew Research Center for the People and the Press web site: <http://people-press.org> .

<sup>16</sup> Gallup Polls. There appears to have been one modest and short-lived upward blip in this measure, observable in a half-dozen polls between mid-1997 and mid-2000, when the average efficacious response was 66%, compared to an average close to 60% both before and after that period.

<sup>17</sup> In the few readings before the 1980s, the percentage answering “very important” was higher: 70% (1965) and 75% (1952).



<sup>18</sup> As with other religion-related measures, the contrast with Europe is striking: In the Pew Research Center's Global Attitudes Project survey conducted in May 2003, 59% of Americans regarded religion as important in their lives, compared to 11% of the French, 21% of Germans, 27% of Italians, 33% of the British, and 35% of Poles (<http://people-press.org/reports/display.php3?ReportID=185>).

<sup>19</sup> Roof, p.123.

<sup>20</sup> Both surveys were designed and analyzed by Egon Mayer, Barry A. Kosmin, and Ariela Keysar of the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. The 1990 NSRI sample is more than twice as large. Documentation and further detail is available at: [http://www.gc.cuny.edu/studies/aris\\_index.htm](http://www.gc.cuny.edu/studies/aris_index.htm).

<sup>21</sup> We and the ARIS researchers consider these answers as equivalent to having no religious identity as it is traditionally understood.

<sup>22</sup> Wolfe, p.248.

<sup>23</sup> It was conducted in conjunction with the 2000-2001 National Jewish Population Survey by United Jewish Communities, the association of local American Jewish federations and independent communities. The NSRE sample is nationally representative on religious identification when combined and properly weighted with the NJPS sample data.

<sup>24</sup> The NORC researchers note that much of this decline comes from former Protestants, the once dominant broad religious category which now constitutes a bare majority (52%) in the U.S. and whose numbers are expected to further decline. (University of Chicago News Office press release, July 20, 2004: <http://www-news.uchicago.edu/releases/04/040720.protestant.shtml>).

<sup>25</sup> The survey was conducted using random-digit-dialing. At least ten contact attempts were made before sample replacement, including refusal conversion attempts. Sampling reliability for estimates based on the total sample of 10,204 is  $\pm 1.0$  points; for estimates based on subsets of the total, confidence intervals are wider: For example, for the 1,523 non-identifiers, the sampling reliability is  $\pm 2.5$  points.

<sup>26</sup> Carried out to one decimal place, the figure is 16.1%. If those refusing to answer (or saying "Don't know") are excluded from the base, the number increases to 16.4%. Henceforth, all percentages include "don't know" and "refused" in the base unless otherwise specified.

<sup>27</sup> Appropriate follow-up questions were asked to pinpoint the respondent's current religious identity if (1) their current religion was not the same as the religion they were raised in, (2) to specify which Protestant denomination, or (3) to specify which "other" religion.

<sup>28</sup> While it might not be literally true that all those brought up in a religion "identified" with it at the time of their youth, we consider this more of a semantic than substantive problem.

<sup>29</sup> Barry A. Kosmin and Seymour P. Lachman, *One Nation under God: Religion in Contemporary American Society* (New York: Crown Trade Paperbacks, 1993), pp. 210-211.

<sup>30</sup> It is not just that there are more young adults in the West driving this finding because the pattern holds when age is controlled.

<sup>31</sup> Quoted by Don Lattin, *San Francisco Chronicle* Religion writer, in "Living the Religious Life of a None: Growing Numbers Shed Organized Church for Loose Spiritual Sensibility," SFGate.com, (December 4, 2003).

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> It could be that this is partly a methodological artifact - a result of first question on religious identity administered to respondents mentioning Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, and Muslim, but not traditional Asian religions such as Buddhism, Hinduism, etc. But "Other religion" was explicitly offered as a choice, and those selecting it were asked what other religion in a follow-up question. So, we believe that this approach is unlikely to have inflated the number of Asian-American non-identifiers by more than a few percentage points. Similar logic applies to the higher than average rate of non-identity among Native Americans.

<sup>34</sup> Between 25-54 years of age (the general age span for having / raising children under 18), 65% of married identifiers have children under 18, compared to 58% of married non-identifiers. The same generalization, in fact, applies to all non-singles under 55 (not just people currently married): 60% of identifiers have children under 18, compared to 53% of non-identifiers. Perhaps identifiers are more mindful of biblical injunction to "be fruitful and multiply."

<sup>35</sup> Steve Hanway, Gallup Poll Tuesday Briefing Correspondent, April 22, 2003. This analysis is based on 14,928 interviews conducted in 2002. The HARI survey did not include questions on political party preference or ideology.

<sup>36</sup> The highly regarded sociologist of religion Robert Wuthnow believes that 20-30% of Americans practice a faith other than the one in which they were raised - cited in Steven Waldman, "The Politics of Piety" *Washington Post* (January 11, 2004). The 2001 ARIS study derived a smaller estimate - 16%.

<sup>37</sup> Egon Mayer, Barry A. Kosmin, and Ariela Keysar, "American Jewish Identity Survey 2001," p.31.

<sup>38</sup> Ariela Keysar, Egon Mayer, and Barry A. Kosmin, "No Religion: A Profile of America's Unchurched," *Public Perspective* (January-February, 2003), pp.28-32.

<sup>39</sup> The numbers do not appear to add to 35% exactly because of rounding.

<sup>40</sup> This includes those are unsure about future plans to take up some religion. Excluding those who are uncertain about their religious future, the proportion drops to 51%.

<sup>41</sup> They attended worship services at least once within the past year (other than a wedding, Bar / Bat Mitzvah, or funeral).

<sup>42</sup> Quoted in Lattin, op cit.

<sup>43</sup> Roof, op cit, p.207.

<sup>44</sup> Robert C. Fuller, *Spiritual But Not Religious: Understanding the Unchurched in America*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); quoted in Lattin, op cit.

<sup>45</sup> Roof, p.125, quoting C. Kirk Hadaway and Penny Long Marler, "All in the Family: Religious Mobility in America," *Review of Religious Research*, Vol. 35 (December, 1994), p.104.

<sup>46</sup> Roof, op cit, p.4.

<sup>47</sup> Wolfe, op cit, p.215.

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Dr. Groeneman has participated in several major research projects for the IJCR including surveys (as well as subsequent reports and press releases) about attitudes toward Israel, international terrorism, anti-Semitism, the size of the United States Jewish population, and religious identity in the United States. He is the project manager of research on mega-gifts in American philanthropy.

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**THE INSTITUTE FOR JEWISH & COMMUNITY RESEARCH**  
**Dr. Gary A. Tobin, *President***

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The Institute for Jewish & Community Research, San Francisco, is an independent non-profit dedicated to the growth of the Jewish community. The Institute serves as a national and international think tank providing policy research to the Jewish community and society in general. We design and develop initiatives that help build a more vibrant and secure Jewish community.

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