By world standards, the United States is a religious country. Even when we take into account the considerable over-reporting of religious service attendance and uncertainty about what people mean when they say that they pray or believe in God, Americans still are more pious than people in any industrialized country, with the possible exceptions of Ireland and Portugal (Baker 2005:209-211; Greeley 2003:70). High levels of religious belief and practice have characterized American society from its beginnings.

We cannot say anything definitive about long-term trends in U.S. religious belief or practice, since surveys of nationally representative samples of individuals do not exist before the middle of the twentieth century. But historical studies of local communities do provide a picture of church attendance rates in some times and places. One prominent historian of American religion who reviewed the available historical evidence concluded that “participation in congregations has probably remained relatively constant.” He elaborates, “For most of the past three hundred years, from 35 to 40 percent of the population has probably participated in congregations with some degree of regularity” (Holifield 1994:24). Remarkably, the weekly religious service attendance rate implied by the 2006 General Social Survey is within that range: 38 percent. This overstates true weekly attendance (Hadaway et al. 1993; Presser and Chaves
2007), but it probably represents fairly the proportion of Americans who participate in congregations with some degree of regularity.

Considering the continuing high levels of American religiosity, it is tempting to treat any signs of change as mere footnotes to the main story of continuity. We will resist this temptation, however, because the General Social Survey (GSS) does indeed reveal important change over the last 35 years, even if that change is relatively slow. As we will see, since 1972, several slow-moving—even glacial—trends in American religion have been underway. But slow does not mean unimportant, and long-term, profound social change can occur more slowly than anyone would notice without repeated observation over decades.

This chapter describes eight trends evident in the GSS between 1972 and 2006: increased religious diversity; increased affiliation among Protestants with conservative and evangelical denominations; softening involvement with congregations; reduced belief in an inerrant Bible; reduced confidence in the leaders of religious organizations; reduced tolerance of certain kinds of religious involvement in the public sphere; a tighter connection between religious service attendance and political, social, and religious conservatism; and—the only trend that might be interpreted as an increase in American religiosity—somewhat higher levels of diffusely spiritual attitudes. Some trends are indicated by a single repeated GSS item while others represent our interpretation of a set of similarly trending items. Among the many aspects of religion measured more than once in the GSS, these eight trends stand out.

Some of these trends are well-known. We again document even the well-known trends here in order to provide a stand-alone summary of recent religious change evident in the GSS.

1 The most recent comprehensive discussion of trends in American religion is Chapter 8 in Fischer and Hout (2007). Some of the trends we describe here are described in more detail there, and we will refer to their work in several places. Other general discussions of trends in American religion include Greeley (1989), Gallup and Lindsay (1999), and Putnam (2000:Ch. 4). Unless otherwise noted, all numbers mentioned in this chapter are from the GSS, and all
Our agenda is descriptive rather than explanatory, and our focus is on aggregate change. Although we occasionally comment on variations across subgroups of Americans or offer explanations of what may underlie these trends, mainly we seek to summarize the aggregate changes in American religion since 1972 that can be seen in the GSS. Readers interested in greater detail may follow our references to literature that explores these trends in more depth.

**Continuity in American Religion**

We begin by documenting the remarkable continuity in American religious belief and practice between 1972 and 2006. Table 1 displays more than two dozen GSS religion items that show no aggregate change over time. The range of beliefs, attitudes, experiences, and practices which show continuity rather than change is impressive. The percentages of Americans who know God exists (64%), who ever had a born-again experience (36%), or who pray at least several times a week (69%) have remained steady from the 1980s to the present. The percentages who read the Bible at least weekly (31%), who watch religious television (28%), who feel extremely close to God (31%), who consider themselves very or extremely religious (26%), or who believe in heaven (86%) or hell (73%) did not change notably during the 7-to-10 year periods over which they were measured.

* * * * * TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE * * * * *

Percentage or mean differences to which we call attention are statistically significant at least at the 0.05 level. We weight the GSS data with the variable WTSSALL, which adjusts for respondents’ different household sizes and also for the subsampling design implemented in 2004. We also correct for black oversamples in 1982 and 1987. Given the large sample sizes that result when GSS surveys from different years are combined, some of the cross-year differences behind the pooled percentages in Table 1 are statistically significant, but none of them seem substantively important. A few cross-year percentage point differences are greater than 2 or 3 points, but many of these items were measured at only 2 points in time, and a 5 or 6 percentage-point difference on an isolated item measured at just 2 points in time seems too flimsy a basis for discerning a trend. We are more comfortable interpreting small-magnitude changes as real trends when several conceptually related items trend in the same direction. Not included in Table 1, but also showing no trend over time, are mean scores on a set of items tracking how people imagine God, for example as father or mother, or as friend or king.
There is much continuity, then, in the American public’s basic religiosity. And it bears repeating that, by world standards, Americans remain remarkably religious in both belief and practice. The trends that we next describe should be seen against the backdrop of these stably high levels of religiosity. This stability cautions us against overstating the amount of change in American religion, but it also makes the trends stand out more than they otherwise might.

**Increasing Religious Diversity**

Fischer and Hout (2006) emphasize that the United States has become more religiously diverse since the beginning of the twentieth century. It is more religiously diverse than it was even in 1972. Figure 1 tells the basic story of trends in Americans’ self-reported religious affiliations. We call attention to three features of this figure. First, the proportion of Americans who claim no religious affiliation has increased. This increase is most noticeable beginning in the 1990s, when it quickened, but it is a long-term trend. In 1957, three percent of Americans said they have no religious affiliation; by 2006, 16 percent said so.

Second, there are more Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, and others who are neither Christian nor Jewish. From one perspective this increase is dramatic, with the number of people claiming a religion other than Christian or Jewish more than doubling from about 1 percent in the 1970s to between 2.5 and 3 percent today. The percentage of religious “others” remains very small,

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3 These are trends in responses to the item, “What is your religious preference? Is it Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, some other religion, or no religion?”

4 The 1957 number is from the Current Population Survey (United States Department of Commerce 1958). This survey included individuals in the civilian population who were at least 14 years old, and in some cases the religion of everyone in a household was reported by a single respondent. Fischer and Hout suggest that the faster pace of this trend after 1990 has political roots: “the increasing identification of churches with conservative politics led political moderates and liberals who were already weakly committed to religion to make the political statement of rejecting a religious identification” (Fischer and Hout 2006:193-4). See Hout and Fischer (2002) for details.
however. Though this may seem surprising, recall that a majority of recent immigrants to the United States come from predominantly Christian countries, and two-thirds of recent legal immigrants are Christian (Alba and Nee 2003:181-182; Jasso et al. 2003:223). The proportion of self-identified Jews in the United States has remained at about 2 percent since 1975, and there are about as many Jews in the U.S. as there are Muslims, Buddhists, and Hindus combined. Still, though the percentage of non-Judeo-Christians in the United States remains small, the proportion of Americans who claim a religious affiliation that is neither Christian nor Jewish has grown, and continues to grow.5

Third, the increases in those with no religion and those whose religion is something other than Christian or Jewish have come mainly at the expense of Protestants. The declining proportion of Protestants in the United States is a very long-term trend, and it continues since 1972. In the early 1970s, approximately 62 percent of GSS respondents identified with a Protestant church or denomination; by 2006, just over half do. If this continues, as it surely will, the United States soon will not have a Protestant majority for the first time in its history.6

The upshot of these trends is that religious diversity increased in the United States over this period.7 This increasing religious diversity also is evident in friendship circles. In 1988 and 1998, the GSS asked respondents to describe as many as three “good friends they feel close to,” not including a spouse.8 The percentage of friends in the same broad religious category as the respondent (the same five categories in Figure 1) declined from 59 percent in 1988 to 54 percent

6 See Smith and Kim (2005) for more on this trend.
7 Since the GSS began interviewing in Spanish only in 2006, it is not an ideal source for tracking another kind of immigration-related increase in religious diversity over recent decades: the increasing presence of Latinos among American Catholics.
8 In 1998, respondents were asked questions about five friends; in 1988, they were asked only about three friends. To maintain comparability, we use only information about the first three friends in 1998.
in 1998. The percentage of friends who attended the same congregation as the respondent declined from 26 percent to 22 percent. Over a longer time span, in 1985 and 2004 the GSS asked respondents to describe as many as five “people with whom you discussed matters important to you.” The percentage of non-family confidantes in the same broad religious category as the respondent declined from 66 percent in 1985 to 60 percent in 2004. Though these are not large shifts, their consistency makes them worth noting.

Families as well as friendship circles also are more religiously diverse than they used to be. The overall percentage of people who have married across religious lines is not much different in 2006 than in the 1970s, but increasing religious intermarriage is evident if we look across generations instead of across years. Only about 10 percent of ever-married people born before 1920 married across one of the five religious categories tracked in Figure 1; about 25 percent of those born after 1950, and about 30 percent of those born after 1980, have married across those lines. Clearly, religious diversity has increased in many people’s everyday lives as well as in the society as a whole.

Other data show that Americans also have become more accepting of religious diversity during this period. The percentage of Americans who say they would vote for an otherwise qualified Catholic, Jew, or atheist who was running for President has increased dramatically since the middle of the twentieth century, to the point where today almost all say they would vote for a Catholic or Jew and about half say they would vote for an atheist. In Muncie, Indiana, the percentage of high school students who agreed that “Christianity is the one true religion and everyone should be converted to it” dropped from 91 percent in 1924 to 41 percent in 1977. Today, three quarters of Americans say “yes” when asked if they believe there is any religion
other than one’s own that offers a true path to God. Not only is the United States more religiously diverse than it was several decades ago; Americans appreciate that religious diversity more than they used to.

Increasing Numbers of Conservative Protestants

A second trend is well-known: The center of gravity within American Protestantism has shifted from more liberal, mainline (sometimes now called old line) denominations to more conservative, evangelical denominations. Figure 2 shows the trend. Since 1972, the percentage of Americans affiliated with theologically more liberal, mainline denominations has steadily declined while the percentage affiliated with more conservative, evangelical denominations has steadily increased. Parity came in 1983, and by 2006 there were twice as many individuals affiliated with conservative denominations as with theologically more liberal ones (28 percent and 14 percent of GSS respondents in 2006, respectively).10

* * * * * FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE * * * * *

Many attribute this trend to people fleeing liberal denominations for the warmer confines of evangelical churches, but Hout, Greeley, and Wilde (2001) showed that approximately 80 percent of the shift comes from differential fertility rather than religious switching. In every birth cohort for which we have the relevant data, women affiliated with conservative Protestant denominations have more children than those affiliated with more moderate and liberal denominations.

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9 All of the facts in this paragraph are taken from Fischer and Hout (2006:192, 200, 341n41). The Muncie numbers are originally from Caplow et al. (1983); the other numbers in this paragraph are from Gallup polls. See Wuthnow (2005) for more extensive discussion of religious diversity in the United States.

10 The categories in Figure 2 are constructed using a slightly modified version of the classification described by Steensland et al. (2000). The largest group in the mainline category is the United Methodist Church. Other sizable groups in that category include American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A, Episcopal Church, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A, and United Church of Christ. The largest group in the evangelical category is the Southern Baptist Convention. Other sizable groups in that category include Assemblies of God, Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, and Seventh-day Adventist. Nondenominational churches also are classified as evangelical.
denominations. Religious switching is part of the story, but not in the way many people think. The most important trend in religious switching is that conservative denominations now lose fewer people to moderate and liberal denominations than in previous decades, probably because upward social mobility no longer prompts switching from being, say, Baptist, to being Presbyterian or Episcopalian. Evangelical denominations and congregations have, with their people, become firmly middle class, even affluent. Evangelical denominations also lose fewer of their young people to secularity than do more liberal denominations.

In sum, evangelical and conservative denominations have been doing better than more liberal denominations in recent decades, but not because many people have switched from one to the other. The main dynamic is demographic.

**Softening Involvement in Religious Congregations**

Discussions of religious involvement always begin with attendance at worship services. Figure 3 shows trends in the percentage of American adults who attend religious services using two different sources, the GSS and time-use diaries. Note first that the weekly attendance rate implied by the GSS is much higher than that calculated from time-use studies. Since 1990, the weekly attendance rate implied by the GSS has hovered around 40 percent, while the four time-diary studies conducted since then all yield weekly rates of about 27 percent. Time-use studies use an indirect approach by asking respondents to describe what they did on the preceding day.

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11 The GSS numbers are from responses to the open-ended question: “How often do you attend religious services?” Responses to this question are coded by interviewers into one of nine categories. We calculate a weekly attendance rate by translating each response category into the following probabilities of attending in any given week: never=0, less than once a year=0.01, about once or twice a year=0.02, several times a year=0.05, about once a month=0.23, two to three times a month=0.58, nearly every week=0.85, every week=0.99, several times a week=0.99. The 1993 time-diary number is from the University of Maryland’s Time Use Study. The 2002-2004 time-diary numbers are from the American Time Use Study, conducted by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. See Presser and Chaves (2007) for more information on these time-use studies.
The time-diary numbers in Figure 3 represent the percentage of respondents who, when asked to describe what they did on a Sunday, reported attending religious services. The lower numbers are more accurate; they come closer to attendance rates based on direct observation at services (Hadaway et al. 1993).

* * * * * FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE * * * * *

What about the trend? Since 1990, the GSS shows a modest but statistically significant decline in weekly attendance. The rate of decline in the GSS is very slow—about one third of a percentage point per year since 1990—and the time-use data register no statistically significant decline since 1990. The American National Election Studies also show stability in attendance since 1990. It seems most prudent, then, to conclude that weekly attendance at religious services has been essentially stable since 1990. At the same time, however, Figure 3 also shows that the percent of people who never attend religious services, while still relatively small, has increased from 13 percent in 1990 to 23 percent in 2006.

Looking at the decades prior to 1990, it is clear that attendance did not increase, but whether it declined or remained stable is a matter of debate. We think attendance did decline between 1960 and 1990. We reach this conclusion for several reasons. First, attendance

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12 Since respondents in these time diary studies report their activities only for a single day, it is not possible to use those data to adjust the weekly rate to take account of attendance on days other than Sunday. In 1996 and 1998, however, the GSS asked respondents what days they attended. Eighty percent of those reporting attendance on a day other than Sunday also attended on Sunday, and only 2 percent of all respondents reported attending on a day other than Sunday without also attending on Sunday. Hence, even ignoring the over-reporting of attendance on days other than Sunday, taking account of attendance on those days would raise the Sunday-based time diary estimate of weekly attendance by only 2 percentage points.

13 The time-diary studies produce more accurate results because directly asking people how often they attend services leads people who think of themselves as regular (but perhaps not literally weekly) attenders to overstate their attendance. Asking indirectly about attendance, by contrast, seems less likely to evoke an “I’m a churchgoer” identity in respondents’ minds, and an indirect approach therefore produces more accurate responses.


15 Much of the increase in never attending comes from shifts from very infrequent attendance into nonattendance. Because shifts across these low attendance categories have little effect on the overall weekly attendance rate, the juxtaposition of a stable weekly attendance rate since 1990 and rising “never attend” does not imply that those who attend are attending much more frequently.
declined, especially for Catholics, during the 15 or 20 years before the GSS began in 1972, and it seems to have continued its decline, although at a slower pace, since 1970 (Putnam 2000:71; cf. Fischer and Hout 2006:203-205). Second, time-use studies indicate a notable decline in weekly attendance, from approximately 40 percent in 1965 to approximately 27 percent in 1993 (Presser and Stinson 1998). Third, studies that compare attendance among children and young people at different points in time consistently find that today’s young people attend services at lower rates than did comparably aged individuals in earlier decades (Hofferth and Sandberg 2001; Wuthnow 2007:53). Fourth, a different GSS item, asking respondents whether they are members of “church-affiliated groups,” also declines from the 1970s to the 1980s, and is stable since then.\footnote{“Now we would like to know something about the groups or organizations to which individuals belong. Here is a list of various organizations. Could you tell me whether or not you are a member of each type?” This question was asked regularly from 1974 through 1994. After 1994 it was not asked again until 2004. The overall percent of people who say that they belong to “church-affiliated groups” declines over this period. We hesitate to overemphasize that decline, however, because responses to this item seem to be affected by whether or not respondents already had been asked about their religious affiliation and worship service attendance. The percent who say “yes” to this item is significantly lower when it is preceded by the standard religion items, perhaps because having already reported their religious affiliation and worship attendance makes people inclined to say “yes” to this question only if they are involved beyond mere affiliation or attendance. When these two contexts are separated, the item declines a bit from the 1970s into the 1980s and then levels off. When the other religion questions precede this item, it is stable from 1980 to 2004.}

Overall, then, we conclude that weekly religious service attendance declined in the several decades leading up to 1990 but has remained essentially stable thereafter.

Many people participate in religious activities other than by attending worship services. The GSS has three times asked how often people are involved in a religious congregation beyond attendance at services.\footnote{“How often do you take part in the activities and organizations of a church or place of worship other than attending services?”} The percent who say they are involved nearly every week or more increased from 15 to 18 percent between 1991 and 1998, and then declined to 12 percent in 2006. The pattern is the same for people who are regular attenders. These results may represent
stability since 1991, a small decline since 1991, or a larger decline since 1998 in the level of congregational involvement beyond worship service attendance.

Figure 4 extends the discussion of religious involvement by examining trends in childhood religious socialization. Religious involvement in youth is one of the best predictors of religious involvement in adulthood, so trends in the extent to which people are raised in religiously active households can foreshadow future trends in involvement. As with intermarriage, we examine religious socialization by birth year rather than by survey year. Since childhood religious socialization does not change as an individual ages, in a long-lived population like the United States the percentage of people who were raised in religiously active households will change slowly, even if generational differences in the prevalence of childhood religious socialization are substantial. Limiting our attention to year-by-year change would lead us to overlook the long-term generational change that is afoot.

* * * * * FIGURE 4 ABOUT HERE * * * * *

Generational differences in childhood religious socialization are appreciable. More recently born individuals are increasingly likely to say they had no religion when they were 16 years old and, beginning with people born after 1940, the percentage increases at a faster rate with each generation. The childhood weekly attendance rate respondents report declines from nearly 80 percent among people born before 1910 to under 60 percent for those born between 1971 and 1980. Respondents born in the first part of the twentieth century report that, while they were growing up, about 70 percent of their mothers were weekly attenders, a figure that declines to between 60 and 65 percent for people born in the latter part of the century. Most striking of all is a steady decline in the percentage of people who report growing up with religiously active fathers—from nearly 70 percent for those born before 1900 to under half for those born between
1961 and 1970. There can be little doubt that Americans are increasingly less likely to grow up in religiously active households.\textsuperscript{18}

Putting all of this together, there seems to be a softening of involvement in American religious congregations over recent decades. Aggregate weekly attendance at worship services is either stable or very slowly declining since 1990, but it declined in the decades before that, and the percent of people who never attend is steadily increasing. Moreover, each new cohort of individuals attends religious services less than did earlier cohorts at the same age, and each new generation of Americans is less likely to be raised in a religiously active family than were earlier generations.

None of this decline is happening fast, and levels of religious involvement in the United States continue to remain very high by world standards. Calling this a softening rather than a decline in religious involvement strikes an interpretive balance between acknowledging the signs of changing religious involvement while also recognizing the high levels of involvement with American religious organizations evident in the data.

**Declining Belief in an Inerrant Bible**

Figure 5 shows that a gradual but steady decline in belief in an inerrant Bible is underway.\textsuperscript{19} Over 30 years, the percentage of people who say they believe that the Bible should

\textsuperscript{19}The questions about mother’s and father’s attendance are: “When you were growing up, how often did your mother/father (or mother/father substitute) attend religious services?” We compute implied weekly attendance rates in the same manner described in note 11. Respondents who had no father or father substitute present when they were growing up are excluded from these calculations, so the sharp decline in fathers’ attendance is not an artifact of increasing divorce or single-mother household rates. The lines in Figure 4 begin and end with different birth cohorts because the religion-at-age-16 question has been asked in more years than the questions about parents’ attendance, and the parental attendance items were asked in more years than the question about the respondent’s own attendance at age 12. So the birth cohorts covered by these various items differ. In a separate set of items, respondents were asked about their parents’ attendance “when you were a child.” Responses to these items produce results similar to those presented in Figure 4. Reliability checks reassure us that the trends we report are not produced by people reporting more religious childhoods as they age.
be taken literally declined from approximately 40 percent to just over 30 percent. This trend appears in two different time series (Gallup polls as well as the GSS), which increases our confidence that this trend is real, if slow. Almost all of this change, moreover, is produced by cohort replacement. People do not generally change their minds about the Bible as they get older. Instead, more recently born individuals are less likely to believe in an inerrant Bible than those born longer ago. Almost half of Americans born before 1910 believe that the Bible is the literal word of God; fewer than one third of those born after 1940 believe that. The overall percentage of inerrantists in American society is declining slowly but surely as older generations are replaced by younger generations with less strict views about the Bible. Social change occurring in this way can be gradual, but still profound.

* * * * FIGURE 5 ABOUT HERE * * * *

Connecting this trend with the increase described earlier in tolerance for, and even appreciation of, religions other than one’s own, we might say that even in the midst of high levels of religious belief and practice in American society, there is declining confidence in the special status of one’s own religion.

**Declining Confidence in the Leaders of Organized Religion**

Americans are less likely to express a great deal of confidence in leaders of religious institutions than they used to be. Figure 6 shows this trend both for all adults and for those who

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19 In both the GSS and Gallup polls, people are asked: “Which of these statements comes closest to describing your feelings about the Bible?” The options are: “The Bible is the actual word of God and is to be taken literally, word for word; The Bible is the inspired word of God but not everything in it should be taken literally, word for word; The Bible is an ancient book of fables, legends, history, and moral precepts recorded by men.” Figure 5 graphs the percent choosing the first option.

20 “I am going to name some institutions in this country. As far as the people running these institutions are concerned, would you say you have a great deal of confidence, only some confidence, or hardly any confidence at all in them?”
say they attend religious services at least once per month. Between 1975 and 2006, the number of people with a great deal of confidence in religious leaders declined from about 35 to about 25 percent. Higher percentages of regular attenders express a great deal of confidence in religious leaders, but the trend is the same.

* * * * * FIGURE 6 ABOUT HERE * * * * *

This declining confidence is not unique to religious organizations. Americans are less confident in the leaders of many kinds of institutions than they were in the 1970s. Still, confidence in religious leaders has declined faster than confidence in the leaders of other institutions. Between 1973 and 1983, 35 percent of people, on average, expressed a great deal of confidence in the leaders of religious organizations, compared with only 29 percent, on average, expressing a great deal of confidence across all of the other institutions about which they were asked. Between 1998 and 2006, only 25 percent expressed a great deal of confidence in religious organizations, compared with 26 percent with a great deal of confidence, on average, in the other kinds of institutions. In the 1970s, religious leaders inspired somewhat greater public confidence than did leaders of other institutions, but their relative position has since declined. People now express as low a degree of confidence in religious leaders as they do, on average, in leaders of other major institutions.21

Increasing Disapproval of Religion in the Public Sphere

Americans continue to debate appropriate kinds of public religious expression and appropriate kinds of political involvement for religious leaders. Taken together, several items in

21 There is quite a lot of variation in public confidence in different institutions. The percentages of people in 2006 who expressed a great deal of confidence in the leaders of various types of institutions are: military (48), scientific community (43), medicine (40), U.S. Supreme Court (34), banks and financial institutions (30), education (28), organized religion (25), major companies (18), executive branch of the federal government (16), organized labor (12), Congress (12), press (10), and TV (9). Religion is in the middle of the pack.
the GSS seem to point to increases since the 1970s in disapproval of certain kinds of public expressions of religion. Figure 7, for example, shows a rise in the percent of Americans approving of a Supreme Court prohibition, first articulated in 1962, of mandatory prayer in public schools, from just over 30 percent in the 1970s to just over 40 percent in the 1980s. Approval has hovered around 40 percent since then. The number of people who strongly agree that “religious leaders should not try to influence how people vote in elections” increased from 30 percent in 1991 to 37 percent in 1998, and the number who strongly agree that “religious leaders should not try to influence government decisions” increased from 22 percent in 1991 to 31 percent in 1998. More recently, according to Gallup polls, the percent of people who agree that organized religion should have less influence in this nation increased from 22 percent in 2001 to 34 percent in 2008 (Blow 2008). Finally, opinions of both Protestants and Catholics (but not Jews) seem less favorable today than they were in the 1980s.

Was public appreciation of religion dampened by 1990s political activism that was explicitly proclaimed, and sometimes celebrated, as religiously motivated? We cannot be sure about the answer to that question on the basis of these few items. Still, taken together, these mini-trends suggest that over this period the American public became less enamored of at least some kinds of explicit religious involvement in the public sphere.

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22 "The United States Supreme Court has ruled that no state or local government may require the reading of the Lord’s Prayer or Bible verses in public schools. What are your views on this—do you approve or disapprove of the court ruling?"

23 In 1986, 1988, 1989, and again in 2004, GSS respondents were asked about their feelings towards Protestants, Catholics, and Jews using the following item: “I’d like to get your feelings toward groups that are in the news these days. I will use something we call the feeling thermometer, and here is how it works. I’ll read the names of a group and I’d like you to rate that group using the feeling thermometer. Ratings between 50 degrees and 100 degrees mean that you feel favorable and warm toward the group. Ratings between 0 degrees and 50 degrees mean that you don’t feel favorable toward the group and that you don’t care too much for that group.” Combining results from the three 1980s surveys and comparing them to those for 2004, the mean temperature rating of Protestants dropped from 69 to 66 degrees, while that for Catholics dropped from 67 to 63 degrees. These drops are small but statistically significant. The rating assigned to Jews was 61 degrees in both time periods. Respondents were first asked to rate Muslims in 2004, when they were assigned a mean temperature of 48 degrees. It will be important, of course, to track change in this last number over the coming years.
Tighter Connection between Attendance and Conservatism

We examined correlations between religious service attendance and dozens of other variables to see if the connection between attendance and other beliefs, attitudes, or behaviors might be strengthening or weakening. Religious service attendance is correlated with many beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors, and many of these correlations have not changed over time. That is, active religious practice does not differentiate Americans on many other individual characteristics any more or less than it did 35 years ago. One major set of attitudes, however, has become more tightly connected with religious service attendance over the last few decades: attitudes indicating political, social, and religious conservatism.

Figure 8 shows the trend in the correlation between religious service attendance and two measures of political conservatism: how liberal or conservative a person’s political views are and political party identification. Figure 8 shows that the correlation between attendance and political conservatism is always positive—throughout this period more religiously active people are also more conservative—but it also shows that this correlation has increased in recent

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24 Variables whose correlation with religious service attendance has not changed include measures of economic conservatism, illicit sexual activity, use of computer technology, gender role attitudes, capital punishment attitudes, happiness, and perceptions of how much inequality and conflict are present in society.

25 Some of the trends we describe in this section are discussed in more detail in Putnam and Campbell (forthcoming). Putnam and Campbell also emphasize an increasingly positive correlation between religious service attendance and educational attainment, combining it with other evidence to suggest that attendance declined during this period among the white working class.

26 “We hear a lot of talk these days about liberals and conservatives. I’m going to show you a seven-point scale on which the political views that people might hold are arranged from extremely liberal to extremely conservative. Where would you place yourself on this scale?” And: “Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, Democrat, Independent, or what?” If Republican or Democrat: “Would you call yourself a strong (Republican/Democrat) or a not very strong (Republican/Democrat)?” If Independent, no preference, or other: “Do you think of yourself as closer to the Republican or Democratic party?” This set of questions on political party identification produces a 7-point scale ranging from “strong Democrat” to “strong Republican.” Figures 8, 9, and 10 report Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients. These coefficients can vary between -1.0 and +1.0, but they are always above zero in these figures, indicating that, throughout this period, more frequent attenders are more conservative than less frequent attenders.
decades. That is, the connection between religiosity and political conservatism has grown tighter. It seems that this correlation became qualitatively stronger after 1992.

** * * * * FIGURE 8 ABOUT HERE * * * * **

Percentages rather than correlations help to convey the magnitude of this trend. In the 1970s, 19 percent of respondents who attended religious services at least weekly said that their political views were conservative or extremely conservative compared to 13 percent of less frequent attenders. Across the 2000 through 2006 surveys, 32 percent of weekly attenders said they are conservative or extremely conservative, compared to only 16 percent of less frequent attenders. Over recent decades, infrequent religious service attenders have become only slightly more politically conservative while weekly attenders have become much more conservative. The gap between these groups has widened considerably.

The picture is similar for political party identification. In the 1970s, 9 percent of weekly attenders said that they were strong Republicans, compared to 7 percent of less frequent attenders. The comparable numbers in the 2000-06 surveys are 19 percent and 10 percent, respectively. Weekly attenders have moved from being nearly indistinguishable from others in their political party affiliations to being nearly twice as likely as others to call themselves strong Republicans. This is a significant change over a 30-year period.27

We observe similar trends in several key indicators of social conservatism: attitudes about abortion, sex, and euthanasia. The abortion trend is particularly interesting. The GSS asks respondents whether or not they think it should be possible for a pregnant woman to obtain a legal abortion in seven situations: if there is a strong chance of serious defect in the baby, if she

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27 This trend is well documented and analyzed by political scientists. See, for example, Green (2007), Fiorina et al. (2006), and Campbell (2002). It is apparent in the American National Election Studies (ANES) as well as in the GSS, increasing our confidence that it is a real trend. Fiorina et al., using ANES data, also notice a qualitative change in 1992. They suggest that “the common observation that religiosity now is more closely related to party identification may reflect a repositioning of the parties rather than a change in voter attitudes” (2006:180-81).
is married and does not want any more children, if the woman’s own health is seriously endangered by the pregnancy, if the family has very low income and cannot afford any more children, if she became pregnant as a result of rape, if she is not married and does not want to marry the man, and if the woman wants it for any reason. Opposing legal abortion in any of these situations is strongly correlated with religious service attendance, but these correlations have become stronger in recent decades for only two of these items: abortion in the case of rape and in the case of serious fetal defect.

Figure 9 shows the trend in the correlation between attendance and opposing legal abortion in cases of rape. The correlation has steadily increased since the 1970s, so that being religiously active now is more tightly connected to opposing legal abortion in cases of rape than it was in the 1970s. In the 1970s, 29 percent of weekly attenders opposed legal abortion in cases of rape, compared with 12 percent of less frequent attenders. In the 2000-2006 surveys, 42 percent of weekly attenders opposed legal abortion in this situation, compared with 16 percent of less frequent attenders. The trend is similar for abortion in cases of serious fetal defect. Similar to political conservatism, the attitude gap between weekly and infrequent attenders has widened substantially on these two items because more frequent attenders have become more conservative. None of the other abortion items changes in this way, however. There is no general widening of the gap between attenders and nonattenders in those abortion attitudes. Rather, it seems that the most religiously active people have increased their attitudinal distance from the rest of the population only with respect to the two situations in which support for legal abortion is greatest.

“Please tell me whether or not you think it should be possible for a pregnant woman to obtain a legal abortion if...

Putnam and Campbell (forthcoming) find that general attitudes about abortion (and homosexuality) are more tightly tied to religiosity among younger generations.
Figure 9 also shows the trends in the correlations between attendance and attitudes about premarital sex and homosexuality. Like opposing abortion in cases of rape or serious defect, disapproval of premarital sex and homosexuality both became more tightly connected to religious service attendance in recent decades. There is, however, an important difference between these trends in views about sexuality and those about abortion. For the abortion items, the population at large has grown more conservative, and the correlation with attendance has increased because the most religious people have become especially conservative over time. On the sexuality items the population is trending in a liberal direction, but the most religious people are either resisting liberalization (in the case of premarital sex), or liberalizing more slowly than others (in the case of homosexuality).

Percentages tell the story more clearly. In the 1970s, 53 percent of weekly religious service attenders said that premarital sex is always wrong, compared with 23 percent of infrequent attenders; the 2000-2006 numbers are 55 percent and 17 percent, respectively. Weekly attenders are about as conservative on premarital sex today as they were in the 1970s, but less frequent attenders have become somewhat less conservative on this issue. Both frequent and infrequent attenders have become more liberal about homosexuality: 85 percent of 1970s weekly attenders said that homosexuality is always wrong compared to 67 percent of infrequent attenders, while since 2000 the comparable numbers are 79 percent and 50 percent, respectively. On this issue, less religiously active people have liberalized faster.

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30 “If a man and woman have sexual relations before marriage, do you think it is always wrong, almost always wrong, wrong only sometimes, or not wrong at all?” And: “What about sexual relations between two adults of the same sex. Do you think it is always wrong, almost always wrong, wrong only sometimes, or not wrong at all?” We code these scales so that larger numbers indicate stronger disapproval.
Attitudes about euthanasia show a similar pattern: the overall trend is in a liberal direction, but the most religiously active people are liberalizing more slowly.31 In the 1970s, 59 percent of weekly attenders, compared with 32 percent of less frequent attenders, opposed legal euthanasia when a terminally ill patient requests it. The comparable numbers from the 2000-2006 surveys are 55 percent and 25 percent, respectively.

Turning from political to religious conservatism, Figure 10 shows increasingly strong connections between attendance and whether a person believes the Bible is the literal word of God and whether he or she has had a born-again experience.32 Since the 1980s, the positive correlations of these items with religious service attendance have grown stronger. The increasingly strong connection between attendance and a conservative view of the Bible is especially dramatic because frequent and infrequent attenders are trending in opposite directions. In the 1980s, 48 percent of weekly religious service attenders said that the Bible is the literal word of God, compared to 31 percent of less frequent attenders; the comparable 2000-2006 numbers are 53 percent and 27 percent, respectively. The “born-again” trend is less dramatic, but similar in shape. Fifty-five percent of 1980s weekly attenders said they were born again, compared with 29 percent of infrequent attenders; the comparable 2000-2006 numbers are 60 percent and 26 percent, respectively. Not only are the most religiously active people more politically and socially conservative; they also are more religiously conservative.33

* * * * FIGURE 10 ABOUT HERE *****

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31 “When a person has a disease that cannot be cured, do you think doctors should be allowed by law to end the patient’s life by some painless means if the patient and his family request it?”
32 “Would you say you have been ‘born again’ or have had a ‘born again’ experience – that is, a turning point in your life when you committed yourself to Christ?” The Bible item is the same item described in note 19.
33 Interestingly, religious service attendance is not increasingly associated either with believing in God or frequency of prayer. Rather than an increasingly tight connection between attendance and general, religiously unspecific belief and practice, we see an increasingly tight connection between religious service attendance and a specific type of conservative evangelical Protestant theology.
In sum, the connection between frequent religious service attendance and political, social, and religious conservatism is increasingly tight. In some cases, it has grown tighter because the most religiously active people have become more conservative over time. In other cases, the connection has grown tighter because the most religiously active people are liberalizing more slowly than others. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the attitudinal distance between the most and least religiously active people in U.S. society has increased in recent decades. The public may not be more polarized on these issues than it was at some point in the past, but differences of opinion now line up with religious differences more than they did previously.\footnote{This discussion brings to mind debates about “culture wars” in American society. For more on this subject see DiMaggio et al. (1996), Williams (1997), Fiorina et al. (2006), and chapter nine of Fischer and Hout (2006).}

**Increasing Diffuse Spirituality**

The “spiritual but not religious” phenomenon in American society is now well known, but it should not be exaggerated. The vast majority of people--approximately 80 percent--describe themselves as both spiritual and religious. Still, a small but growing minority of Americans describe themselves as spiritual but not religious. In 1998, 9 percent of GSS respondents described themselves as at least moderately spiritual but not more than slightly religious. That number rose to 14 percent in 2006.\footnote{“To what extent do you consider yourself a religious person? Are you very religious, moderately religious, slightly religious, not religious at all?” And: “To what extent do you consider yourself a spiritual person? Are you . . .”} Younger people are much more likely than older people to describe themselves in this way. The increase occurred because nonreligious people are more likely to say they are spiritual, not because people are less likely to say that they are religious. In 1998, 24 percent of people who were slightly or not at all religious said they were at least moderately spiritual; that increased to 36 percent in 2006. If what people mean when they say they are spiritual but not religious is that they are generally concerned with
spiritual matters but they are not interested in organized religion, then there seems to be a still small but growing minority of the population whose spiritual inclinations do not lead them to become involved in conventional religious organizations.\textsuperscript{36}

There also are small but noticeable increases in the percentage of people who say they believe in life after death, from about 75 percent in the 1970s to just over 80 percent in 2006, and in the percentage who definitely believe in miracles, from 46 percent in 1991 to 53 percent in 1998.\textsuperscript{37} We mention these trends here because we think they are related to the “spiritual-but-not-religious” trend. The largest increases in belief in the afterlife, for example, are among subgroups who have not traditionally emphasized an afterlife. The number of Jews who say they believe in life after death increased from fewer than 20 percent before the 1970s to 50 percent in 2006, and among those with no religion the number who believe in life after death increased from fewer than 40 percent to 60 percent during that same period.\textsuperscript{38} In the 1970s, 90 percent of weekly attenders said they believe in an afterlife, compared with 71 percent of less frequent attenders; the comparable 2000-2006 numbers are 91 percent and 79 percent, respectively. Here the correlation between religious service attendance and belief in life after death is weakening because the gap in belief between the most and least religious people is decreasing.\textsuperscript{39}

The increasing number of people saying they are spiritual but not religious comes from increasing interest in spirituality among the nonreligious, and the increase in belief in the afterlife has occurred almost wholly among Jews and the less religious. Hence we see these

\textsuperscript{36} See Marler and Hadaway (2002) for measurement problems related to the spiritual-but-not-religious phenomenon.
\textsuperscript{37} “Do you believe there is a life after death?” “Do you believe in miracles?”
\textsuperscript{38} The numbers in this sentence are from Fischer and Hout (2006:208). See Greeley and Hout (1999) for more detail on trends in belief in an afterlife.
\textsuperscript{39} The correlation between religious service attendance and frequency of prayer also may have weakened somewhat in recent decades.
trends as indicating a small but noticeable increase in a generic and diffuse spirituality rather than an increase in traditional religiosity or piety.

**Conclusion**

Perhaps the most striking aspect of the eight trends discussed in this chapter is that no indicator of traditional religious belief or practice is going up. There is much continuity, there is some decline, there are shifting fortunes for liberal and conservative Protestant denominations, and there is a tighter connection between religious service attendance and political, social, and religious conservatism. The only upward trend over the last several decades is in a diffuse spirituality. Increasing spirituality may provide a growing market for certain kinds of religious products, such as self-help books with spiritual themes, but even if it continues to rise, it probably will not provide a solid foundation for new kinds of religious institutions or new forms of religious collective action.

The long-term increase in tolerance of, even appreciation for, religions other than one’s own is good news for our pluralistic society. The flip side of this increasing tolerance, however, is declining confidence in the special status of one’s own religion. The gradual decline in biblical literalism, shaken confidence in institutions in general and religious institutions in particular, and continuing decline in the percentage of children raised in religiously active households together indicate a slow but steady hollowing out of some kinds of traditional religious belief and practice alongside a tentative increase in a generic kind of spirituality that is not tied to any specific religious tradition or institution. These trends pose challenges for U.S. society’s religious institutions, despite continuing high levels of religious belief and some kinds of practice. They challenge religious institutions to combine tradition and adaptation in ways
that lead people to express their religiosity through face-to-face gatherings and local organizations to the same extent as they have in the past.\footnote{See Chaves and Anderson (2008) for information about trends within American congregations.}

We do not believe that the tighter connection between religious service attendance and political, social, and religious conservatism amounts to an increasingly divisive culture war. Recall some of the subtleties of this trend. In a group of 100 regular churchgoers, for example, 32 place themselves on the high end of a political conservative scale and 79 believe that homosexuality is always wrong, while in a group of 100 nonattenders, 16 place themselves high on the conservatism scale and 50 believe that homosexuality is always wrong. These are real differences, but most people in both groups consider themselves politically moderate, liberal, or only slightly conservative, and most (or nearly most) people in both groups still believe that homosexuality is always wrong. Recall also that, when it comes to attitudes about homosexuality, both groups are trending in the liberal direction. On that attitude, the increasingly tight connection between religiosity and conservative attitudes comes about only because one group is liberalizing faster than the other, not because the groups are heading in opposite directions. Indeed, attenders and nonattenders are heading in opposite directions only when it comes to \textit{religious} conservatism. These nuances lead us to refrain from interpreting these trends as indicating dangerously increasing polarization in American society. Still, the attitudinal distance between the most and least religiously active people in U.S. society has increased in recent decades. The public may not be more polarized on these issues than it was previously, but differences of opinion line up with religious differences more in 2006 than they did in the 1970s. This trend should be watched closely in the coming years.

This chapter focused on continuities and changes in American religion that are evident in the GSS, but trends evident in the GSS are not the only important recent trends in American
religion. We call attention to one particularly significant shift in the social organization of American religion that is not tracked by the GSS: more and more people are concentrated in the very largest congregations. People always have been concentrated in the largest congregations—today approximately half of all those who attend religious services are in only the largest 10 percent of congregations—but that concentration began to intensify in the 1970s, and it continues. This can be seen in the increasing number of very large churches across the country, but it goes beyond the stereotypical megachurch. It is occurring in every Protestant denomination on which we have data. It is occurring in large and small denominations, in conservative and liberal denominations, and in growing and declining denominations. Concentration is rising because churchgoers are shifting from small and medium-sized churches into larger ones, not because the very largest churches are attracting the otherwise unchurched.\footnote{See Chaves (2006) for more on this increasing concentration.}

Increasing concentration helps to answer a question that may arise in response to the trends we have emphasized in this chapter: If the basic story of American religion over the past several decades is one of stability on many fronts and decline on some others, why do many see these decades as a time of increasing public presence, social prominence, and political influence for American religion? Why have some observers even claimed that recent decades are ones of religious revival, awakening, or revitalization?\footnote{The New York Times columnist David Brooks, for example, referred to “the current religious awakening” as if it were an established fact (Brooks 2006).}

Part of the answer to this question lies in the increasingly tight connection between religiosity and political and social conservatism. This is the social reality behind, and in part created by, the rise of the religious right in recent decades, a development that has tremendously increased religion’s visibility in politics at every level. Another part of the answer, though, is the increasing concentration of churchgoers within very large churches. This shift also increases
religion’s visibility, and possibly its social and political influence, even in the face of stable or declining religiosity among individuals. One 2,000-person church is more visible than ten 200-person churches; one 2,000-person church presents a more attractive audience for a politician than ten 200-person churches; the pastor of a 2,000-person church gets an appointment with the mayor more easily than the pastors of 200-person churches. Increasing religious concentration, in other words, can create the impression that more people are turning to religion when what is really underway is a change in religion’s social organization. Of course, organizational concentration can lead to real increase in the social and political influence of religious congregations and their leaders, if only because it creates more very large congregations and more leaders of very large congregations with which to contend. But we should not mistake this change in social organization for an increase in the underlying levels of religious belief and practice in the society. There is no evidence of such an increase.

We have documented changes in religious belief and behavior, but these changes have not occurred in isolation. Recent waves of immigration obviously contribute to religious diversity and to increased acceptance of that diversity. The century-long movement of the American population from rural areas into cities and suburbs and the decades-long increase in U.S. educational levels also have shaped religious belief and practice. Changes in American family life such as increased divorce rates, declining percentages of two-parent-plus-children households, and the movement of women into the paid labor force, all have affected American religious life and institutions. The rapid diffusion of computer technologies across American society is influencing both private and corporate expressions of religion in ways we have only begun to understand. And what we have called softening involvement in religious congregations surely reflects broader trends in civic engagement and involvement in other kinds of voluntary
associations. Fully understanding and explaining religious change requires that we attend to these other social changes.

Before we attempt to understand and explain religious change, though, we need to know what kinds of religious change are transpiring. We hope that our distillation of eight trends from the vast reservoir of information about religion available in the GSS clarifies the current state of knowledge about trends in American religion and facilitates ongoing efforts to explore these trends more deeply.
REFERENCES


Table 1. Stable GSS Religion Items, 1972-2006

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practice/Behavior/Experience</th>
<th>Pooled (%)</th>
<th>(N)</th>
<th>Years Spanned</th>
<th># Surveys</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attended Sunday school most of the time or regularly at 16</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>2,911</td>
<td>1988-1998</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watches no religious television</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>2,926</td>
<td>1988-1998</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reads the Bible at least once a week</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>2,910</td>
<td>1988-1998</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prays at least several times/week</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>22,143</td>
<td>1983-2006</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has had a “born again” experience</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>8,495</td>
<td>1988-2006</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has tried to convince others to accept Jesus Christ</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>5,870</td>
<td>1988-2006</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Beliefs and Attitudes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Beliefs and Attitudes</th>
<th>Pooled (%)</th>
<th>(N)</th>
<th>Years Spanned</th>
<th># Surveys</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knows God exists and has no doubts</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>10,993</td>
<td>1988-2006</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Believes in God now and always has</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>2,964</td>
<td>1991-2004</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describes self as extremely or very religious</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>2,508</td>
<td>1991-1998</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describes self as having strong religious affiliation</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>46,259</td>
<td>1974-2006</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attending services regularly is highly important for being a good Christian or Jew</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>2,863</td>
<td>1988-1998</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Believing in God without doubt is highly important for being a good Christian or Jew</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>2,870</td>
<td>1988-1998</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Following the teaching of one's church/synagogue is highly important for being a good Christian or Jew</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>2,861</td>
<td>1988-1998</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Following one's conscience, even if against church/synagogue teachings, if highly important for being a good Christian or Jew</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>2,791</td>
<td>1988-1998</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evil in the world has never caused doubts about religious faith</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>2,829</td>
<td>1988-1998</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal suffering has never caused doubts about religious faith</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>2,833</td>
<td>1988-1998</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Death in the family has strengthened religious faith</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>2,772</td>
<td>1988-1998</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birth of a child has strengthened religious faith</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>2,780</td>
<td>1988-1998</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probably or definitely believes in heaven</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>2,387</td>
<td>1991-1998</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probably or definitely believes in hell</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>2,330</td>
<td>1991-1998</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agrees that God concerns Himself with human beings personally</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>2,423</td>
<td>1991-1998</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agrees that life is meaningful only because God exists</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>2,407</td>
<td>1991-1998</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has had a turning point when made new commitment to religion</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>6,835</td>
<td>1991-2006</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feels extremely close to God</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>10,009</td>
<td>1983-1991</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thinks that churches and religious organizations have too much power</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2,267</td>
<td>1991-1998</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The widest 95% confidence interval for any of these percentages is +/- 2 percentage points.
Figure 1
Americans’ Self-Reported Religious Affiliations
(3-year moving average)

- Protestant
- Catholic
- Jewish
- None
- Other

Figure 2
Percent of Americans Affiliated with Evangelical and Mainline Protestant Denominations
(3-year moving average)
Figure 3
Religious Service Attendance, 1972-2006

Figure 4
Declining Religious Socialization
Figure 5
Declining Belief in Inerrant Bible, 1976-2006
(3-year moving averages)

Percent


Percent

Gallup
GSS

Figure 6
Declining Confidence in Organized Religion
(3-year moving averages)

Percent with "a great deal" of confidence


Year

Regular Attenders
All Adults
Figure 7
Approve Prohibition on Mandatory Christian Prayer in Public Schools
(3-year moving average)

Figure 8
Increasingly Strong Connection between Attendance and Political Conservatism
(3-year moving average)
Figure 9
Increasingly Strong Connection between Attendance and Social Conservatism
(3-year moving average)

- Premarital sex is always wrong
- Oppose legal abortion in cases of rape
- Homosexuality is always wrong

Figure 10
Increasingly Strong Connection between Attendance and Religious Conservatism
(3-year moving averages)

- Born-again experience
- Literal view of the Bible