

Profiling Religion among the Millennials—Less Religiously Active but Fairly Traditional: Results of a Pew Survey

Summarized and posted by Bob Young

A new report published last month by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life shows that young adults today are less religious than former generations were when they were in their 20s. Of the Millennials, those born after 1980, only 74% have a religious affiliation. The research also revealed that the rate of religious affiliation increases with age:

- Seventy-four percent of Millennials (born 1980 and after)
- Eighty percent of Generation X (born 1965-1980)
- Eighty-seven percent of Baby Boomers (born 1946-1964)
- Ninety-two percent of the Silent Generation (born 1928-1945)
- Ninety-five percent of the Greatest Generation (born before 1928)

While "religious affiliation" seems high, only 18% of Millennials say they attend worship services every week, and only 21% of Gen Xers. In comparison, 26% of Boomers say they attended worship services weekly when they were in their 20s.

Other characteristics of Millennials are that they are confident, liberal, upbeat, and open to change. They embrace multiple modes of self-expression. About three-quarters have created a profile on a social networking site; one-in-five have posted a video of themselves online. They treat their hand-held gadgets like a body part with eight-in-ten sleeping with a cell phone glowing by their bed.

Introduction and Overview

By some key measures, Americans ages 18 to 29 are considerably less religious than older Americans. Fewer young adults belong to any particular faith than older people do today. They also are less likely to be affiliated than their parents' and grandparents' generations were when they were young. Fully one-in-four members of the Millennial generation -- so called because they were born after 1980 and began to come of age around the year 2000 -- are unaffiliated with any particular faith.

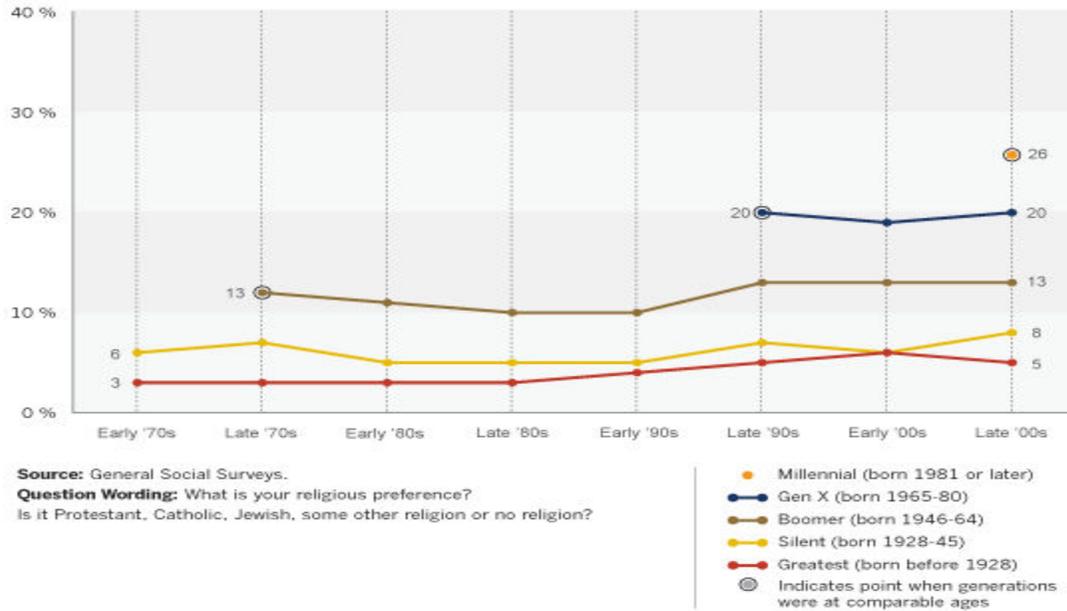
Religious Affiliation and Beliefs

Indeed, as shown by the chart below, Millennials are significantly more unaffiliated than Generation Xers were at a comparable point in their life cycle (20% in the late 1990s) and twice as unaffiliated as Baby Boomers were as young adults (13% in the late 1970s). Young adults also attend religious services less often than older Americans today. And compared with their elders today, fewer young people say that religion is very important in their lives.

In other ways, Millennials remain fairly traditional in their religious beliefs and practices. Pew Research Center surveys show, for instance, that young adults' beliefs about life after death and the existence of heaven, hell and miracles closely resemble the beliefs of older people today.

Young People Less Religiously Affiliated

Percent unaffiliated with a religion, by generation



Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life • Religion in the Millennial Generation, February 2010

Daily Prayer

Though young adults pray less often than their elders do today, the number of young adults who say they pray every day rivals the portion of young people who said the same in prior decades. And though belief in God is lower among young adults than among older adults, Millennials say they believe in God with absolute certainty at rates similar to those seen among Gen Xers a decade ago. This suggests that some of the religious differences between younger and older Americans today are not entirely generational but result in part from people's tendency to place greater emphasis on religion as they age.

Daily Prayer Among Young Adults, by Decade

	Among adults ages 18-29 in the...		
	1980s	1990s	2000s
Pray daily	41	40	45
Pray less often	59	60	55
	100	100	100
N	2,130	1,224	1,679

Source: General Social Surveys

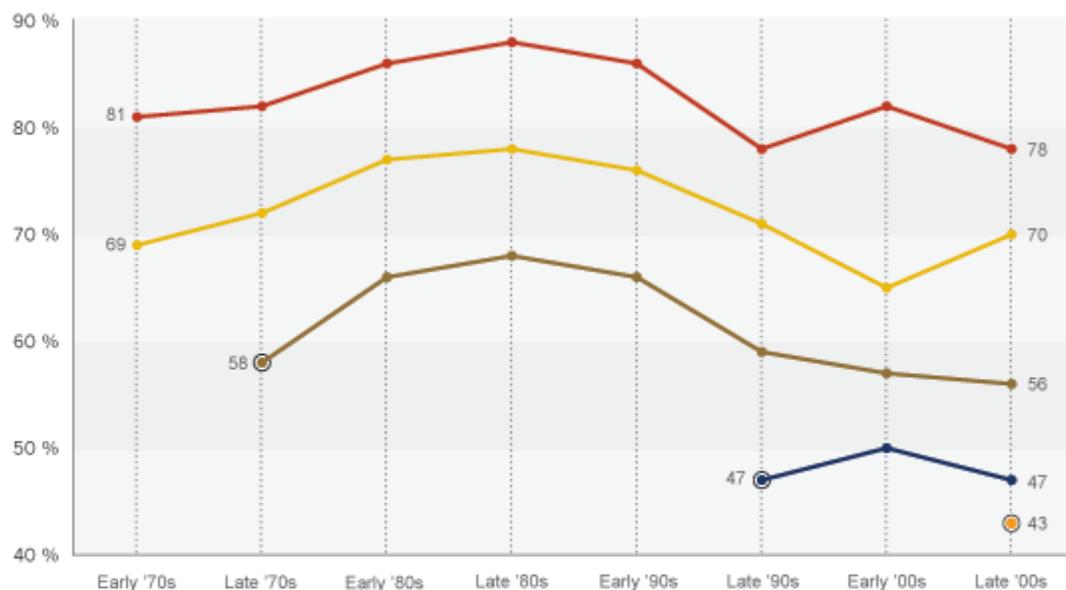
Question wording: About how often do you pray?
 [RESPONSE CATEGORIES INCLUDE: Several times a day, once a day, several times a week, once a week, less than once a week, never.]

Social and Political Views

In their social and political views, young adults are clearly more accepting than older Americans of homosexuality, more inclined to see evolution as the best explanation of human life and less prone to see Hollywood as threatening their moral values. At the same time, Millennials are no less convinced than their elders that there are absolute standards of right and wrong. And they are slightly more supportive than their elders of government efforts to protect morality, as well as somewhat more comfortable with involvement in politics by churches and other houses of worship.

Views of Homosexuality, by Generation

Percent saying same-sex sexual relations are always wrong



Source: General Social Surveys.

Question wording: 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?

- Millennial (born 1981 or later)
- Gen X (born 1965-80)
- Boomer (born 1946-64)
- Silent (born 1928-45)
- Greatest (born before 1928)
- ⊙ Indicates point when generations were at comparable ages