

Belonging Without Believing



Jews and their Distinctive Patterns of Religiosity - and Secularity

Selected Results from the 2008
Pew Forum U.S. Religious Landscape Survey



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JCCs of North America

מרכזים קהילתיים יהודיים בצפון אמריקה



Religious and Secular, Religious and Ethnic

American Jews have long represented something of an anomaly in American society. In many ways, they are indeed religious. When they marry, especially when they marry each other, large majorities of Jews join congregations, provide religious schooling for their children, attend religiously based family life cycle ceremonies, observe ritual practices, and participate in holiday celebrations in home and synagogue. As such, they demonstrate a widespread engagement in Jewish religious life (though, of course, not as much as their clerical leadership would want).

At the same time, many knowledgeable observers see Jews as among the most secular population segments in American society. Jews claim relatively low rates of religious service attendance. They strongly favor a high wall separating church and state, and they favor public policy positions generally associated with more secularized Americans and opposed by most visible religious leaders and institutions.

These seemingly contrasting images raise questions about the nature of Jews and Judaism in America: Are Jews religious, secular, both, or some peculiar combination of the two?

A further complication entails their basic group definition. What sort of group are they: A religious group or an ethnic group? Certainly, Jews exhibit many of the signs of a religious group: synagogues, clergy, liturgy, religious texts, seminaries, rituals, and the like. Yet, much of their group passions and energies are invested in causes and institutions which have no genuine parallels among major American religious groups, suggesting that being Jewish in America is also something other than a matter of religion. Among these are locally based multi-purpose charities (federations), political mobilization for an ethnic homeland (Israel), community relations and the advocacy of group rights and interests (the numerous Jewish “defense” agencies), and scores of cultural, recreational and social centers (Jewish Community Centers) whose total Jewish membership actually exceeds that of any major Jewish denomination (Reform being the largest). These are only the most easily identifiable expressions of the non-religious (is it “ethnic”?) dimension to American Jewish identity and community.

Now, recent decades certainly have seen declines in most measures of Jews’ ethnic identity. Fewer Jews have Jewish spouses, friends, neighbors and co-workers; fewer Jews espouse attachment to Jewish community, peoplehood or Israel. That said they continue to display features of both religiosity and ethnicity, and of combining religion with ethnicity. In this peculiar combination of religion and ethnicity, Jews are radically different from other American affinity groups, and from any national ancestry group with as many years and generations in the United States.

The complexity of Jews’ distinctive group definition raises a host of questions related to how they compare with other Americans. Are they, in fact, as religious, more religious, or less religious than other religious groups? To what extent and in what ways may they be properly seen as secular rather than religious? Can they be seen as both religious and secular, just as they are (still) both religious and ethnic?

The answers to these intriguing questions can emerge in a comparative study of American Jews, placing them in direct comparison with other Americans. Until now, in the world of social scientific research, rarely have we been able to compare large numbers of Jews with other Americans; and even in those circumstance, never have large-scale studies encompassed a vast array of evidence covering a broad conceptual tapestry touching on many ways in religious engagement is expressed. Until now.

The U.S. Religious Landscape Survey

This past February and June, the Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life released the first two of three main reports from its massive study, *The U.S. Religious Landscape Survey*. This study of religious affiliations, beliefs, and behavior, derives from an unusually large national sample of 35,000+ respondents, including a representative sample of 682 Jews nationwide. As such, the newly released Pew study represents the first time in years (if ever) that we can compare the religious beliefs and behavior of a large national sample of Jews with thousands of respondents from other religious groups. Most critically, all respondents were asked the same wide array of questions, in the same way, at the same time.

The questions indeed cover a broad landscape of matters of religious belief, behavior, and belonging. Analysis of these data certainly demands sensitivity to the problems and complexities in question wording. Inevitably, questions designed for the general population must reflect, if only subtly, the thinking and nomenclature of the Protestant majority in America, even when addressed to small religious minorities such as Moslems, Hindus, Buddhists, and of course Jews. But with that caution in mind, we can explore the relative religiosity of American Jews.

More precisely, in the graphs presented below, we examine numerous ways in which Jews resemble and depart from the major population segments of Christians in America: Evangelical Protestants (26% of the American adult population), so-called "Mainstream" Protestants (18%), and Roman Catholics (24%). Given their huge number and outsized historical and contemporary cultural prominence, these groups define what being religious means in America today. We ask, where, how, and to what extent do Jews (just 1.7% of America) differ from these major Christian groups (which are, themselves, collections of groups, as are Jews) (fig. 1).

Jews, Christians, and the Religiously Unaffiliated

To put the Jews in full comparative perspective, we also present the responses of the major non-religious population segment in America which Pew researchers termed, the “religiously unaffiliated.” They constitute 16% of American adults, about nine times the size of American Jews. These are the individuals who, when asked, declined to affiliate with any religious group. If Christians represent a standard of American religiosity, the religiously unaffiliated represent a standard of American secularity.

In reading the results below, we need to bear in mind that the Jews identified by the Pew survey are a select segment, albeit a majority, of American Jews. These are those Jews who attest to a religious identity as Jews. Local and national Jewish population surveys use several questions to find and identify Jews. They find that a significant minority (perhaps 20%) of those who identify as Jews in some way answer “no religion” or its variants when asked by interviewers to state their religious preference or affiliation.

Accordingly, relative to the entire universe of American Jews, we need to bear in mind that the Jews in the charts below constitute a more religious representation of American Jews. The no-religion Jews are absent from the charts, and their absence is consequential. From other research, we do know that these more secular Jews score lower than Jews by religion on most indicators of Jewish religious engagement. Consequently, Jews-by-religion score higher on religious indicators than the total Jewish population. For example, in this study, 55% of Jews-by-religion belong to a congregation; in the National Jewish Population Study of 2001, only about 40% were synagogue members.

With the sensitivity to the complexities of concepts and language, and to the somewhat religious tilt in this sample of Jews, we can proceed to examine the findings selected and extracted from the two recently published reports of the Pew Forum. To be clear, we undertook no original analysis; the data set will be made available to scholars and the public only in 2009. Rather, we have selected, ordered, and presented a large portion of the published findings so as to facilitate an understanding of American Jews’ distinctive patterns of religiosity -and secularity. These patterns emerge quite visibly and dramatically when Jews’ findings are placed in direct comparison with those of religiously affirming Christians, as well as with those of Americans with no religious affiliation.

The Findings: Varieties of Unbelief

To any well-informed observer or experienced analyst, the findings for Jews in this study are both familiar and recognizable. Attesting to their validity, the Pew results largely confirm and conform with scattered pieces of evidence and observation that have accumulated in recent years. Thus, compared to other Americans, Jews are predictably older, better educated, more affluent, and over-represented in the Northeast region of the United States (figs. 2-5).

Most significantly, and of greater consequence for our purposes here: *Jews uniformly score lower than all three Christian groups on all available measures of religious belief.* Compared to Christians, Jews are much less likely to say they believe in God in general or in a personal God, in the Bible as the word of God, in life after death, in heaven or in hell, and in miracles (figs. 6-12). Jews say that religion is less important to them than do affirming Christians (fig. 13). In fact, in all ways *Jews' belief patterns approach those of the religiously unaffiliated.* Although Jews usually, as a group, score above the unaffiliated, their scores on religious belief items sometimes trail those of even this very secular slice of the American population.

Jews also trail Christians in terms of their religious behavior. This generalization applies to attending services, praying privately, reading the Bible, meditating, and praying with one's children (figs. 14-18).

Against this background, it is no surprise that *Jews are less favorably disposed than Christians to the involvement of religion or churches in public affairs, or to the government's role in shaping morality* (figs. 21-22). Jews also part company with religiously affirming Christians on such issues as abortion and homosexuality, and more broadly on where they locate themselves on the political spectrum (figs. 23-26).

In part, these "secular-friendly" views grow out of Jews' historic concerns with being accepted in American society, and their tendency to connect religious involvement in public affairs with heightened potential for intolerance for diversity. In other words, to many Jews, a more overtly Christian America or a more moralistic America translates into an America that may be less accepting of difference in general and of Jews in particular.

But They Do Belong: A Paradox?

There is a significant exception to this pattern. In one major domain of religious identity, Jews actually resemble their Christian counterparts and consistently differ from the religiously unaffiliated: religious belonging. *Jews may not believe all that much; but they do belong to congregations, as this study demonstrates, and to a wide variety of other institutions, as we know from other sources.* Jews' behavior with respect to joining congregations, and their relatively high levels of participation in those congregations, approaches the comparable levels of the three Christian groups (figs. 31-32). The extent to which Jews provide religious schooling - be it full-time or part-time - for their children equals, if not surpasses, that of their Christian counterparts (figs. 33-34).

In other words, Jews' patterns of religious belief and religious behavior more closely resemble those of the religiously unaffiliated. But matters are different for their expressions of group belonging, as measured by congregational-joining and sending their children to religious schools, as well as numerous other ways of group belonging that are unique to American Jews. In this area, Jews' relatively high scores stand in sharp contrast with their low levels of conventional religious belief. Thus, they may believe like the religiously unaffiliated, but they belong like the religiously committed Christians.

Inferences

These distinctive patterns, unlike those exhibited either by Christians or by the religiously unaffiliated, point to several inferences:

1. **Some Jews are religious:** Jews are certainly diverse. The overall tendencies in these findings ought not diminish an appreciation for the good number of religiously committed Jews, even well beyond the Orthodox.
2. **Less religious overall:** Strict apples-to-apples comparisons between Jews and Christians are a conceptual and methodological impossibility. Certainly, such concepts as afterlife, heaven, hell, miracles, and traditional sexual mores play less of a role in Jews' religious consciousness than in that of Christians, and are less pertinent to measuring Jews' religious beliefs than those of Christians. But the same cannot be said of God, prayer, and the Bible. These are commonly shared concepts in Christian and Jewish belief systems. The low scores of Jews with respect to these symbols testify, in our view, to a genuinely lower level of religiosity on the part of American Jews. Accordingly, with all the obvious qualifications in mind, it is fair to say that, as a group, self-avowed Christians probably have a larger proportion of religiously committed individuals than do Jews.
3. **Jewish Purpose that is Non-religious:** With so many Jews belonging, and so few Jews believing, something other than religiosity must be motivating Jews to engage in all sorts of acts of affiliation, both formal and informal. In other words, many Jews join with other Jews in different contexts, even in congregations, for reasons other than religious purpose alone.
4. **A Different Language of Religiosity:** Insofar as Jews are religious, they think and speak in language and concepts differently than their Christian neighbors.

Implications for Communal Policy

Given the variations in what may be called, “spiritual lexicon,” the language of Jewish clergy and educators must take into account those differences for maximal effectiveness in reaching and mobilizing Jews’ religious and spiritual quests.

Given the implied well of motivation for Jewish belonging that lies outside of religiosity (be it of the conventional American variety or otherwise), organized Jewry has an obvious policy interest in maintaining pluralism. We refer not to just religious pluralism, but to ethnic pluralism, cultural pluralism, ideological pluralism, and institutional pluralism as well. Religious and spiritual language certainly speaks to major segments of American Jewry. But, at the same time, still other Jews can be engaged by way of other channels, symbols, causes, language, and modes of engagement.

By implication from the evidence here, with all its erosion over the years, the ethnic, cultural and nationalist dimension of American Jewish identity remains alive and potent. It remains a significant and compelling component to American Jews’ identities that clearly continue to embrace both religious and ethnic elements. In fact, they implicitly reject the externally imposed religious/ethnic distinction as colliding with Jewish self-conceptions, both historic and contemporary. Traditionally, Jews and Judaism have blended spirituality and nationality, religion and ethnicity, or, more metaphorically, God and country (or people). Though the American experience may well serve to rent these dualities asunder, Jews - at least until now - have largely resisted these influences. Of course, whether they do so into the future remains to be seen.

Demographics

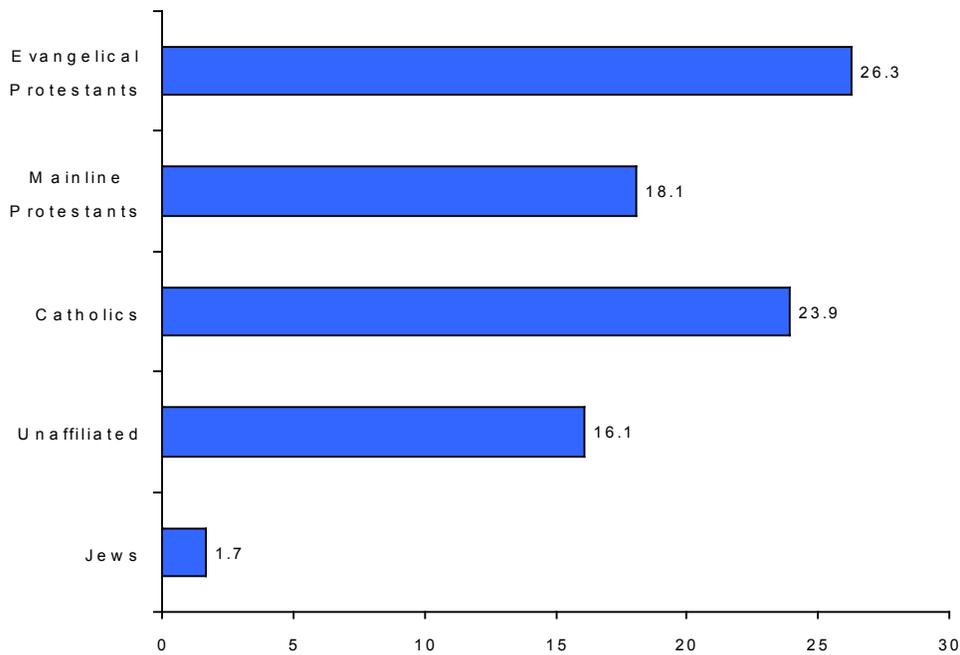
Jews' characteristics in this survey closely resemble those found in other studies. Relative to other religious groups, they are older, better educated, more affluent, and more concentrated in the Northeast.

1. American's religious affiliation in 2008: Five selected groups

Entries are percentages of the US adult population, totaling 86% of the US population.

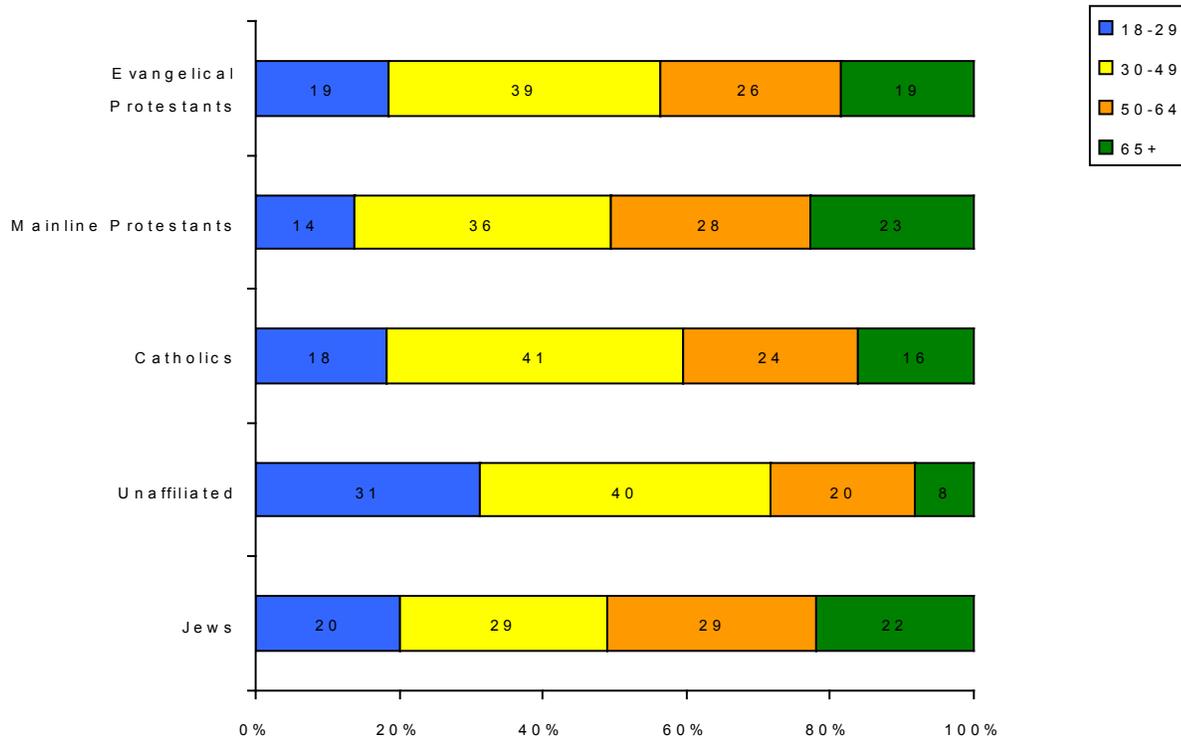
Unaffiliated = No religious affiliation.

Jews = Jews who say their religion is Jewish, excluding Jews who claim no religion.



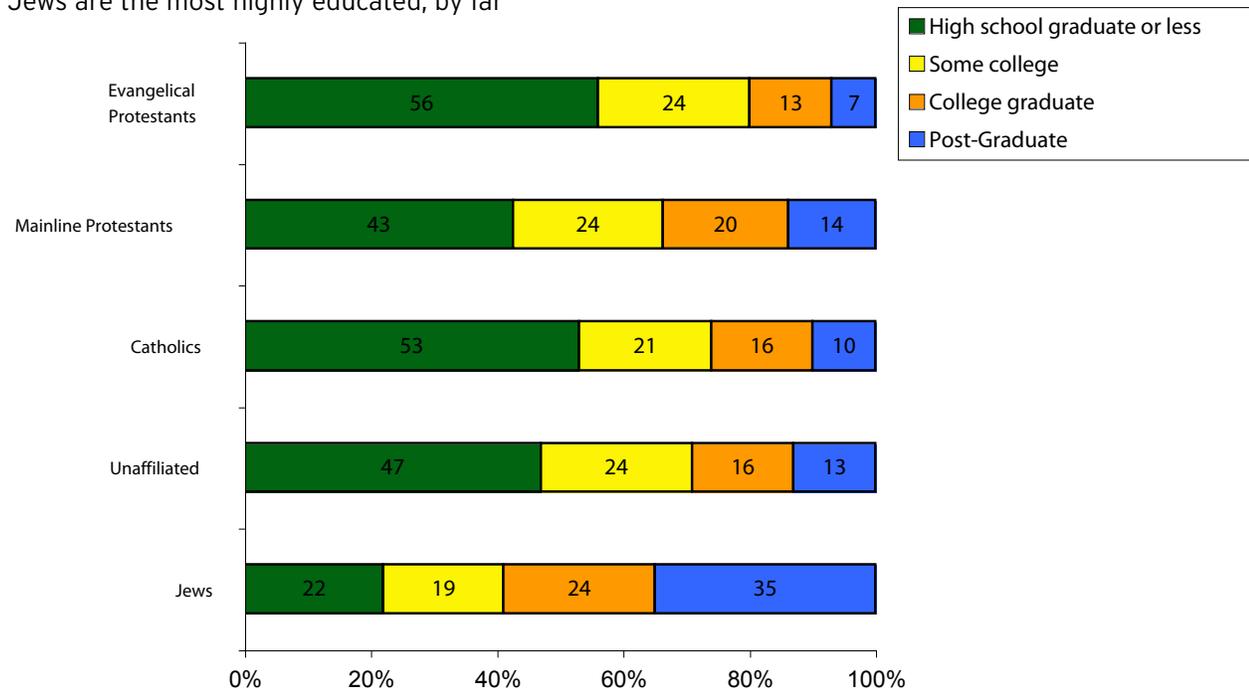
2. Age distribution: Jews are older

Jews and Mainline Protestants are the oldest, and the religiously Unaffiliated are the youngest



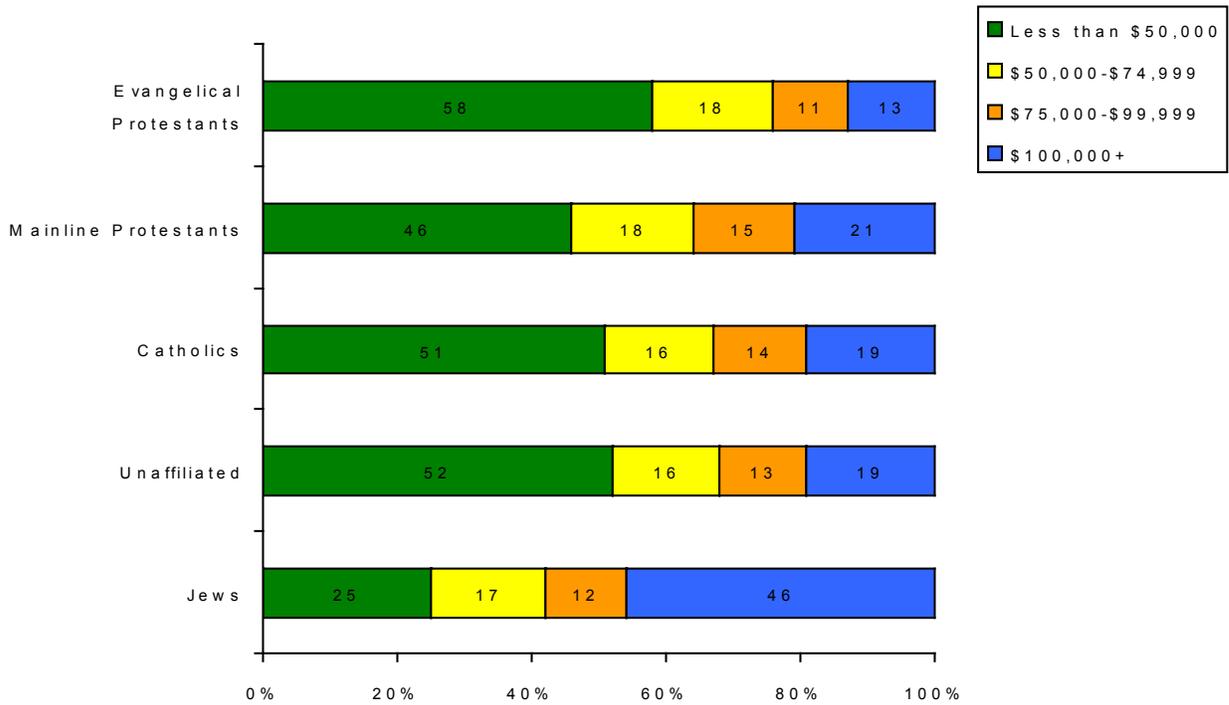
3. Educational attainment: Well-educated Jews

Jews are the most highly educated, by far



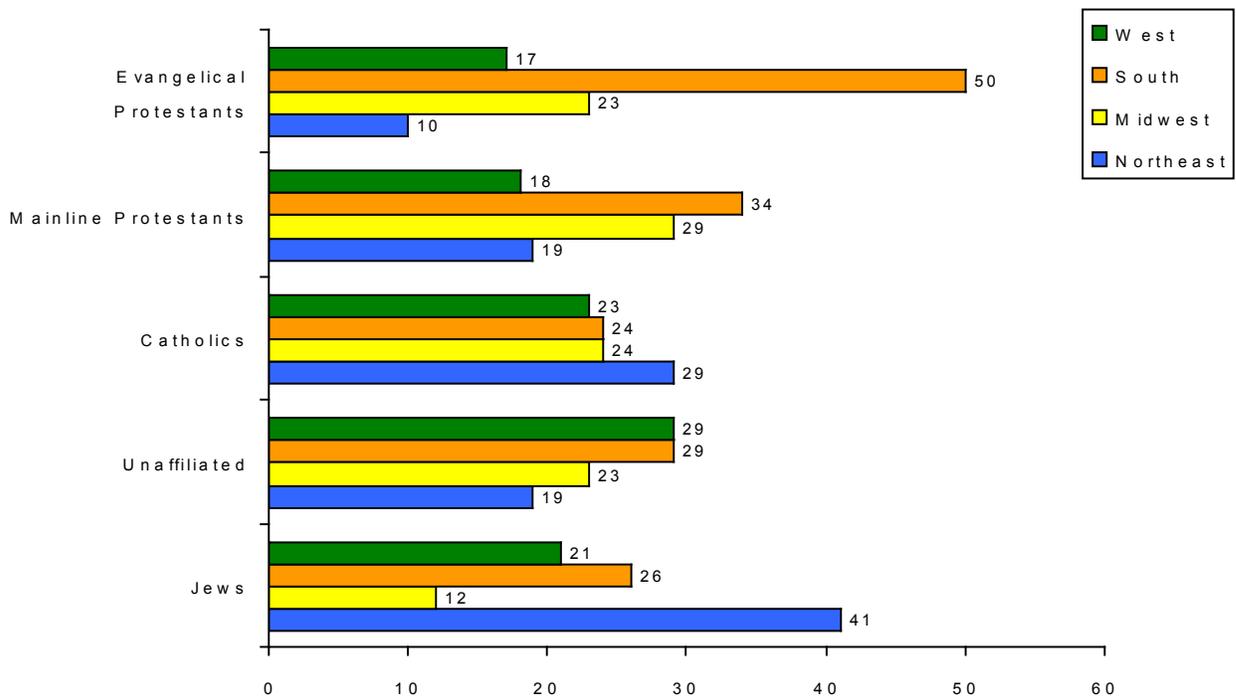
4. Income: Jews are more affluent

Jews have the highest levels of affluence, and by far the smallest percentage with low-income



5. Regional distribution: Jews in the Northeast US

Jews still relatively concentrated in the Northeast

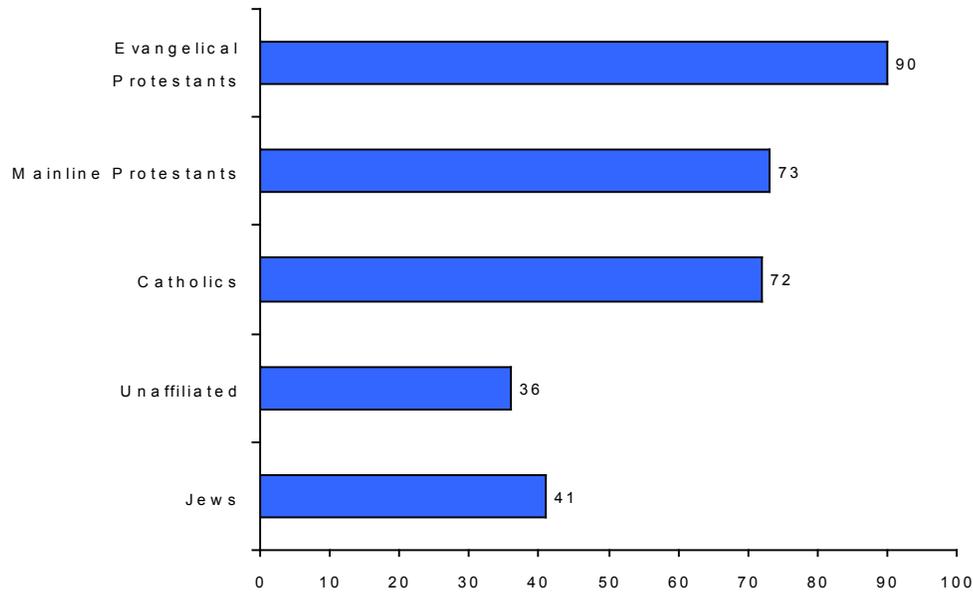


Religious Beliefs

Jews approximate the Unaffiliated with respect to religious beliefs and many practices. Jews approximate all three Christian groups with respect to church/synagogue affiliation and children’s religious education.

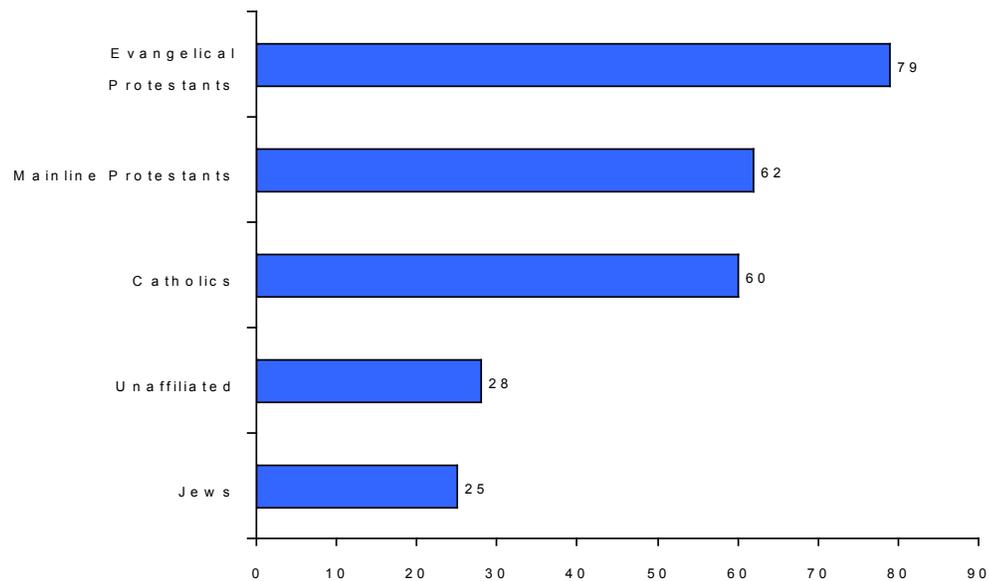
6. Belief in God or universal spirit: “absolutely certain”

Jews and the religiously Unaffiliated are far less certain about belief in God than the three Christian groups.



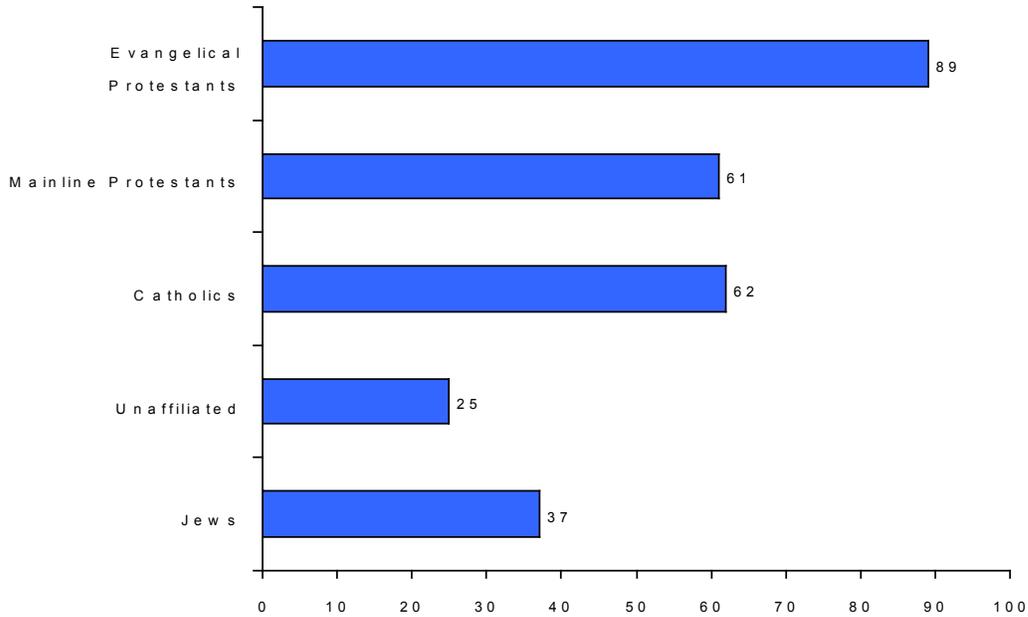
7. God is a person with whom people can have a relationship

On having a personal relationship with God, Jews score far lower than Christians, and lower than the religiously Unaffiliated



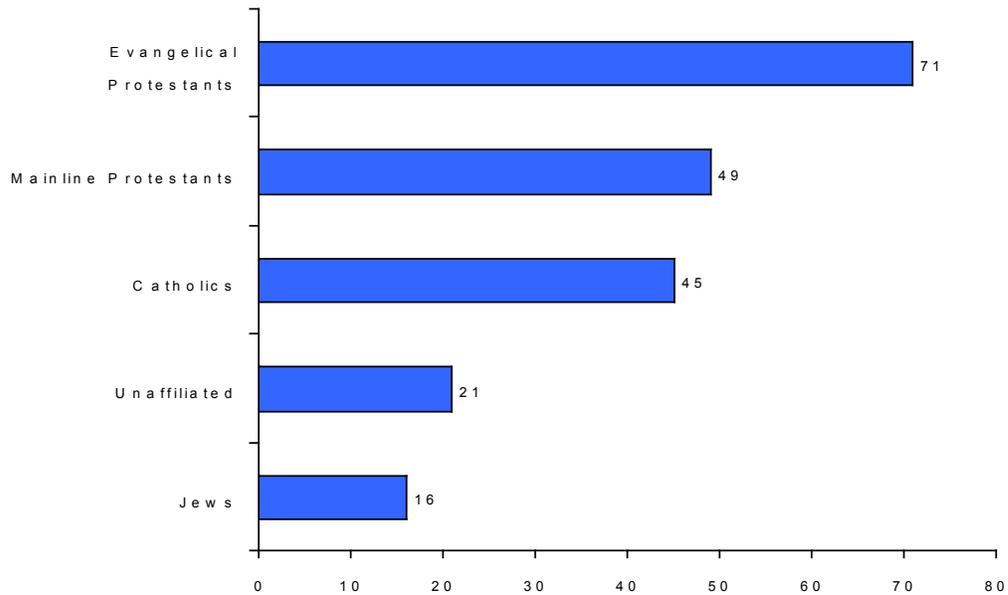
8. The Bible is the word of God

On seeing the Bible as God's word, Jews are very far from Christians and much closer to the Unaffiliated



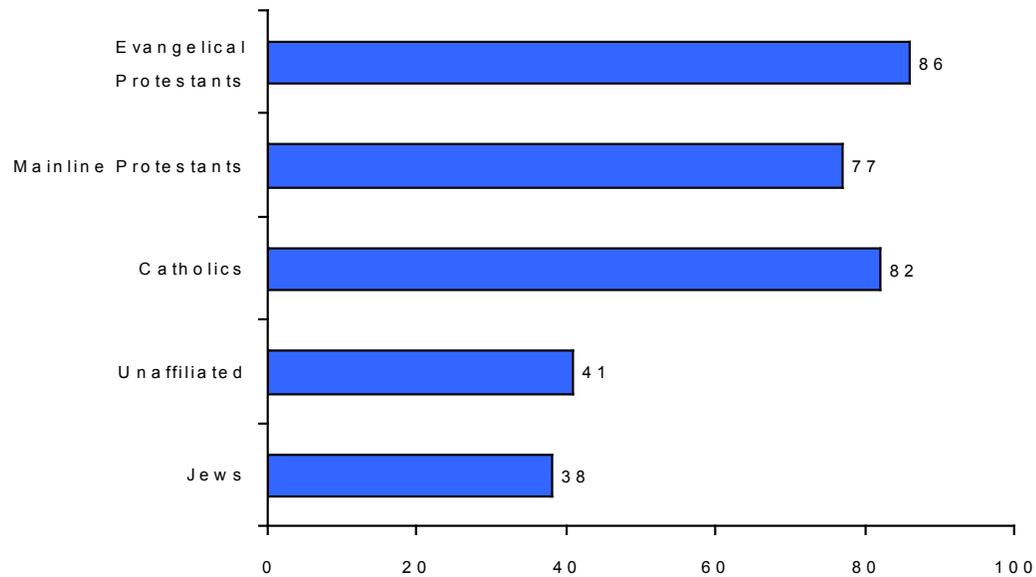
9. Belief in life after death: "Absolutely certain"

Jews least likely to believe in life after death, even less likely than the religiously Unaffiliated



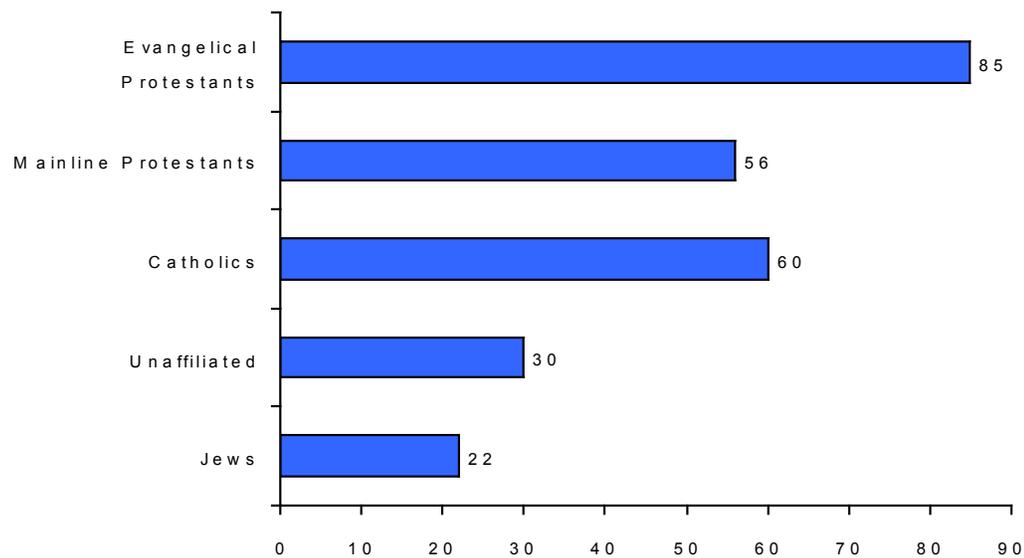
10. There's a heaven, where good people are rewarded

Jews are least likely to believe in heaven, far less than Christians, and even less than the Unaffiliated



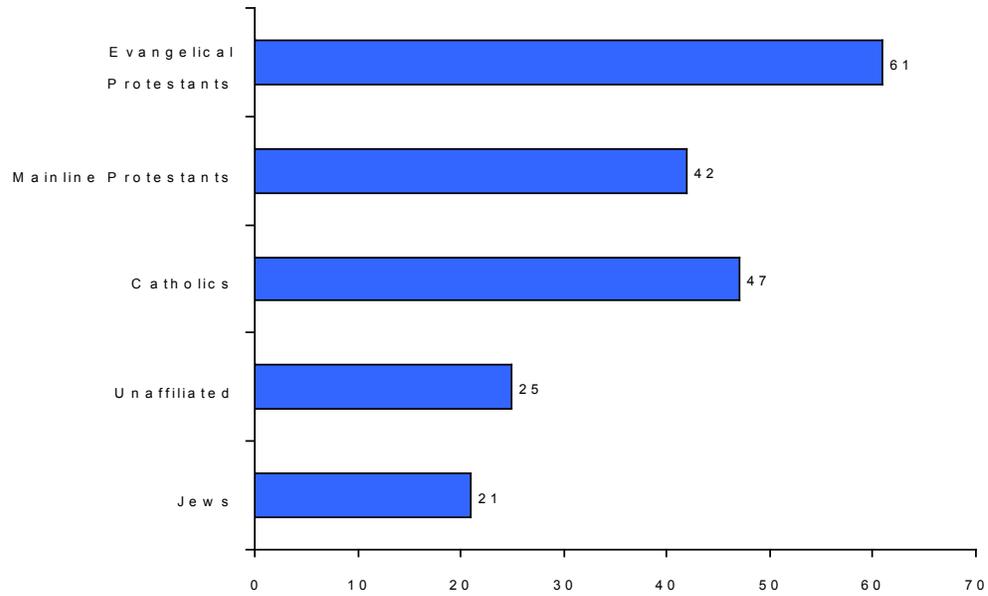
11. There's a hell, where bad people are punished

Jews are least likely to believe in hell, far less than Christians, and even less than the Unaffiliated



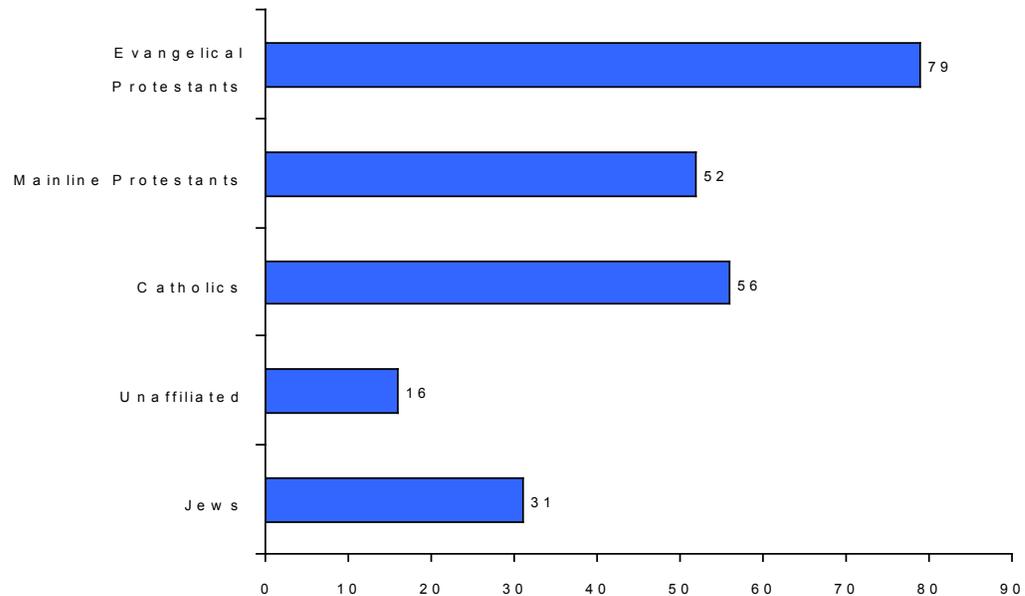
12. Miracles still occur today as in ancient times

Jews are the least likely to believe in miracles, even less than the religiously Unaffiliated



13. Religion is “very important” in your life

On the importance of religion, Jews score above the low-scoring Unaffiliated and below the three higher-scoring Christian groups

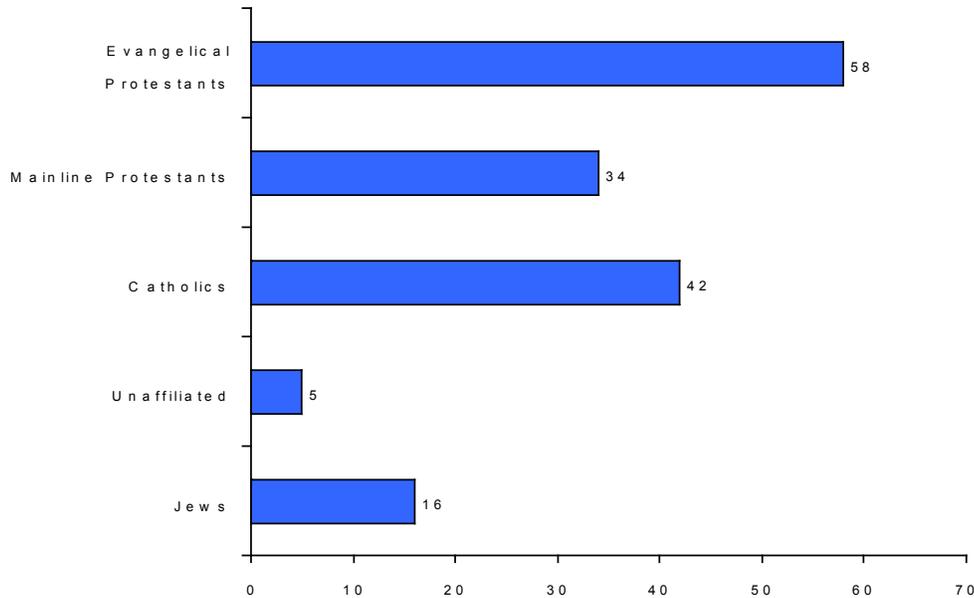


Religious Behavior

Jews approach the Unaffiliated in their low levels of religious behavior

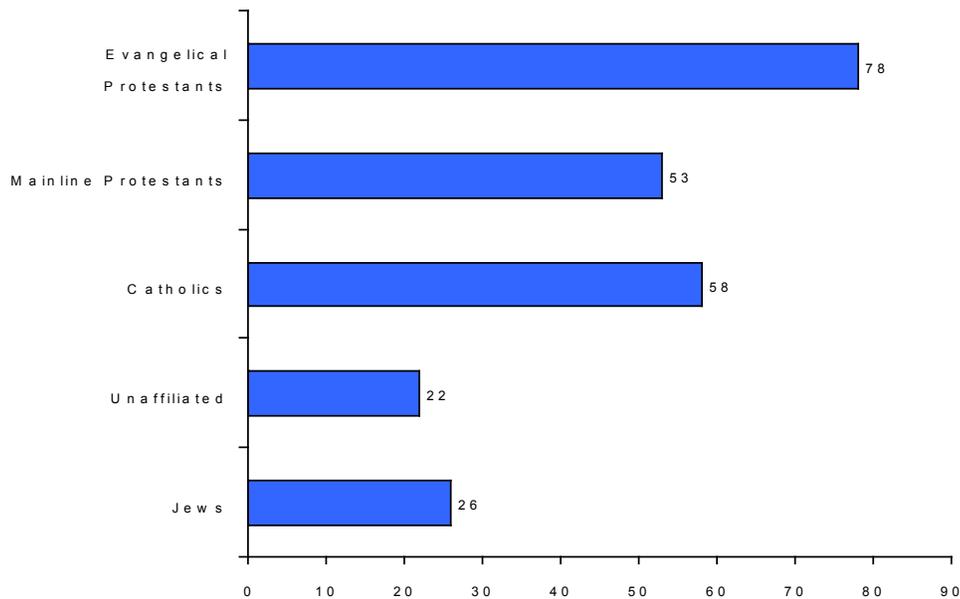
14. Attend religious services at least once a week

Jews attend services far less often than Christians, but much more often than the religiously Unaffiliated



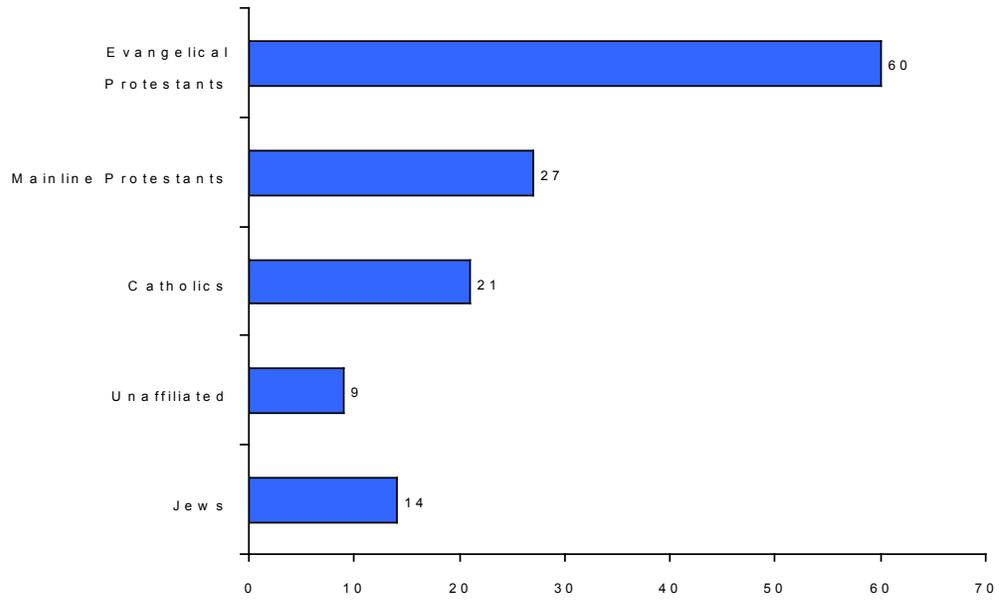
15. Pray outside of religious services daily

Jews pray privately far less than Christians, and about as often as the religiously Unaffiliated



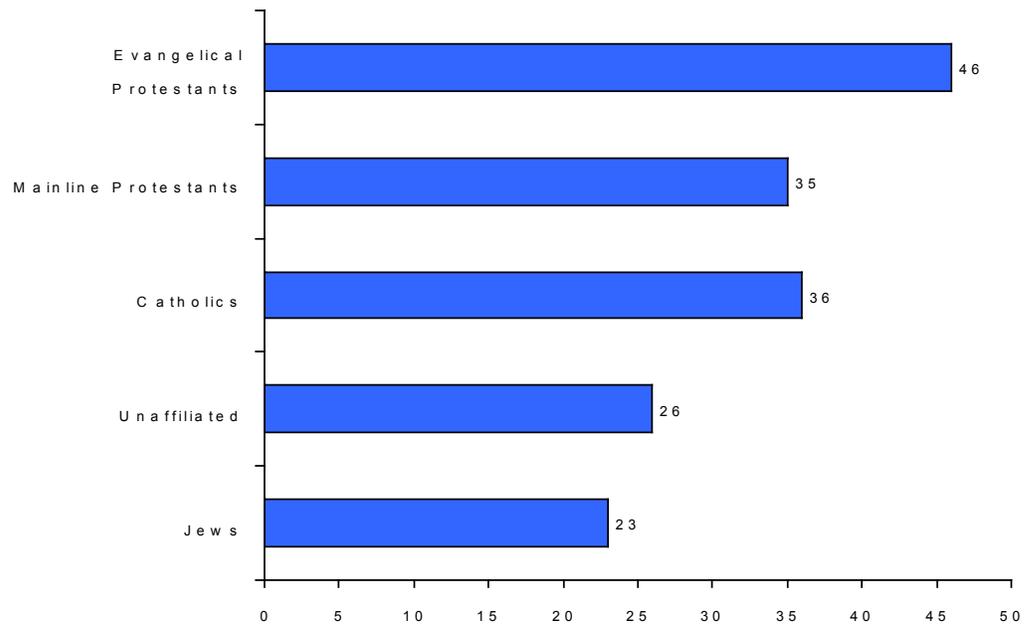
16. Read the Bible at least weekly

Jews read the Bible outside of services less than all Christian groups, but more than the Unaffiliated



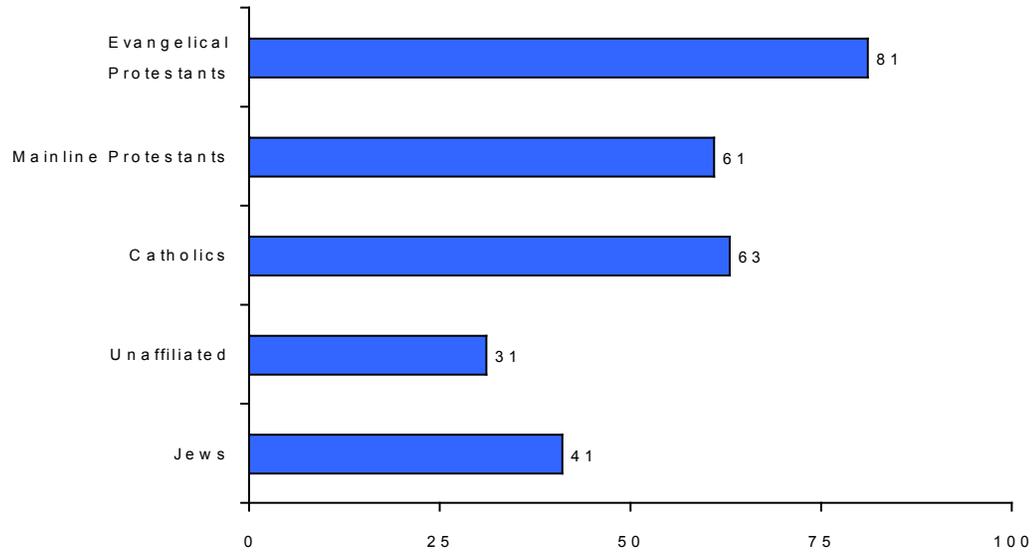
17. Meditate at least weekly

Jews meditate the least of all groups, even less than the religiously Unaffiliated



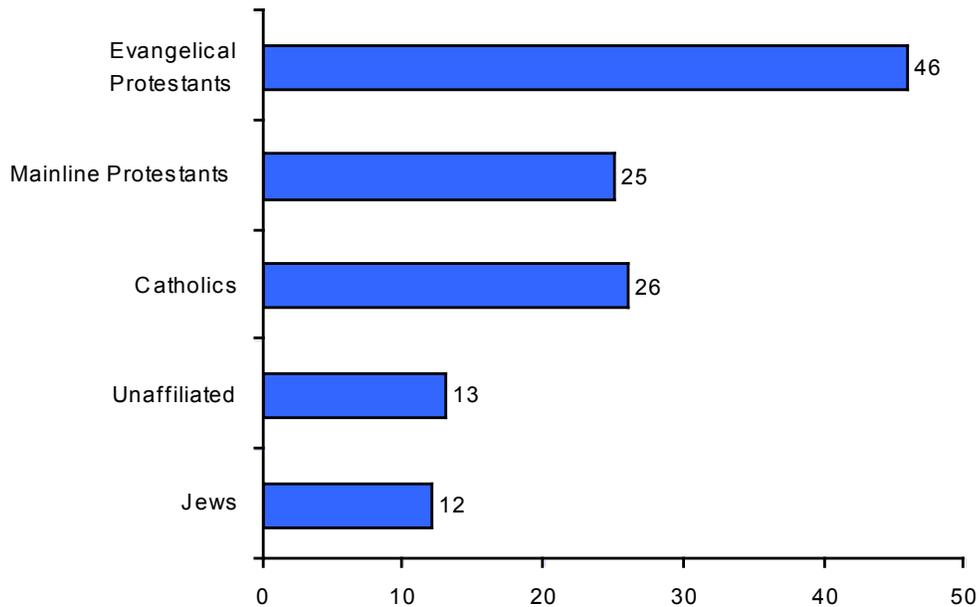
18. Pray or read the Bible with your children

Jews less likely to pray with or read the Bible to their children than Christians, but more than the religiously Unaffiliated



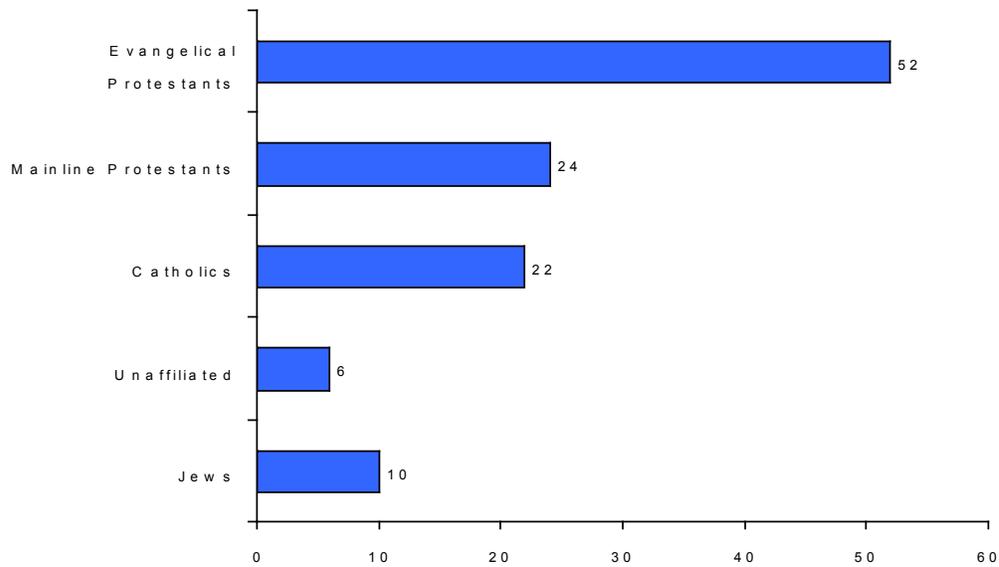
19. Receive definite answers to specific prayer requests

Jews and the religiously Unaffiliated least often feel they receive definite answers to their specific prayers



20. Look to religious teaching for guidance on questions of right and wrong

Few Jews or Unaffiliated look to religious teaching for guidance on right and wrong, far less than Christians



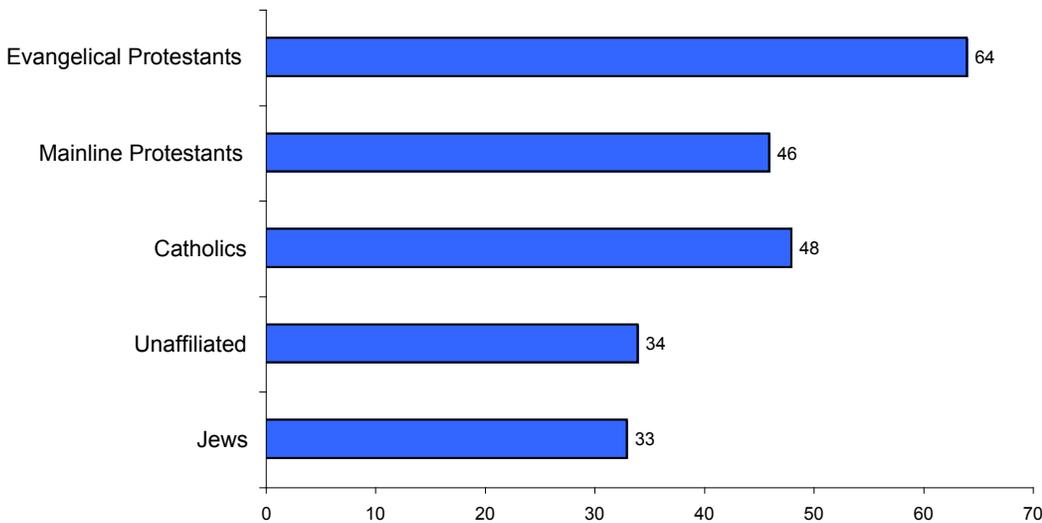
* Other choices of where you look for guidance: philosophy and reason, practical experience and common sense, scientific information

Social and Political Views

Jews are the most liberal, most tolerant on social issues, and least favorable to religious influence in the political domain.

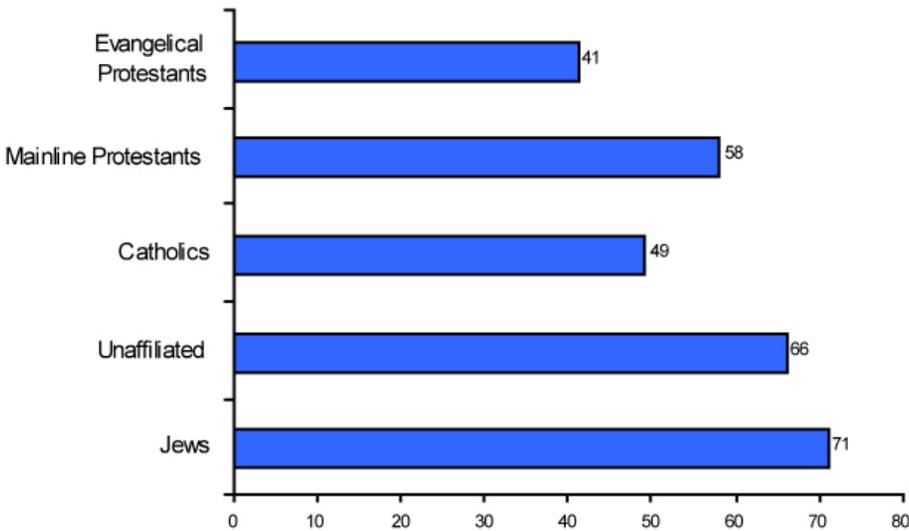
21. Churches should express their views on social and political questions

Jews and the religiously Unaffiliated are the least likely to favor church involvement in social and political questions



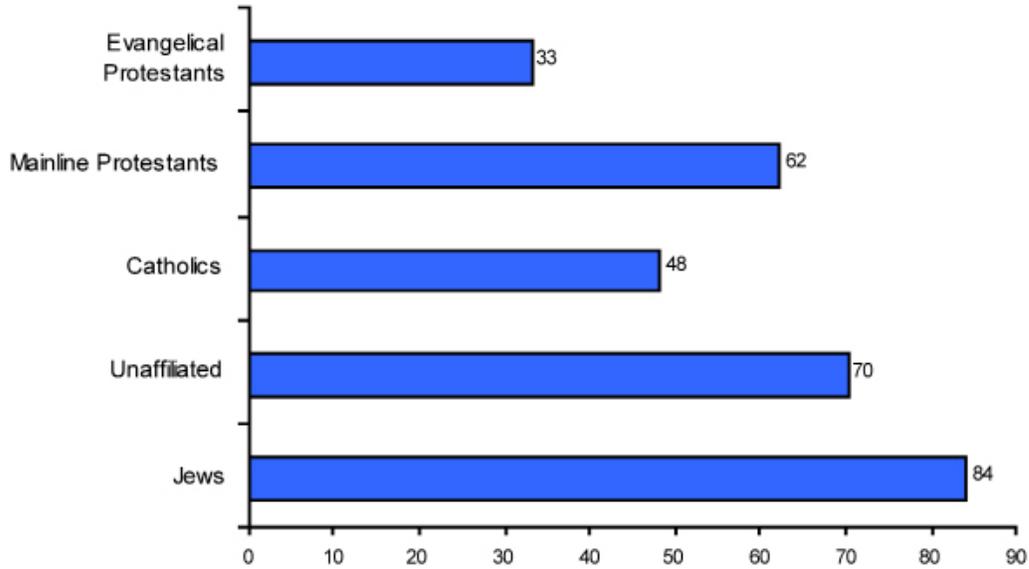
22. Government is too involved in the issue of morality

Jews lead all in worrying about government involvement in morality issues, followed by the religiously Unaffiliated



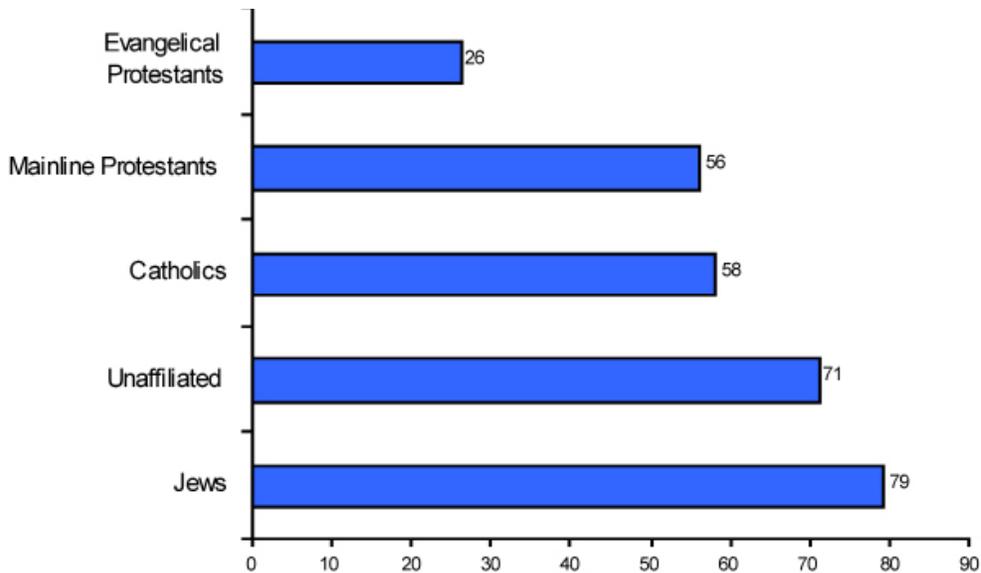
23. Abortion should be legal in most/all cases

Jews are the most pro-choice, followed by the religiously Unaffiliated



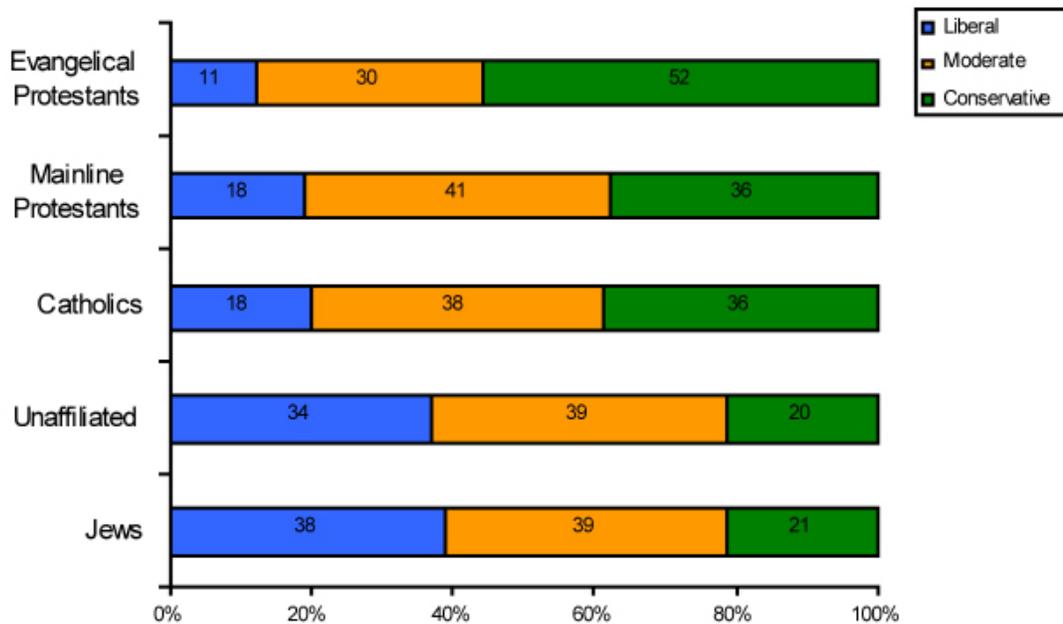
24. Homosexuality is a way of life that should be accepted by society

Jews are the most "pro-gay", followed by the religiously Unaffiliated



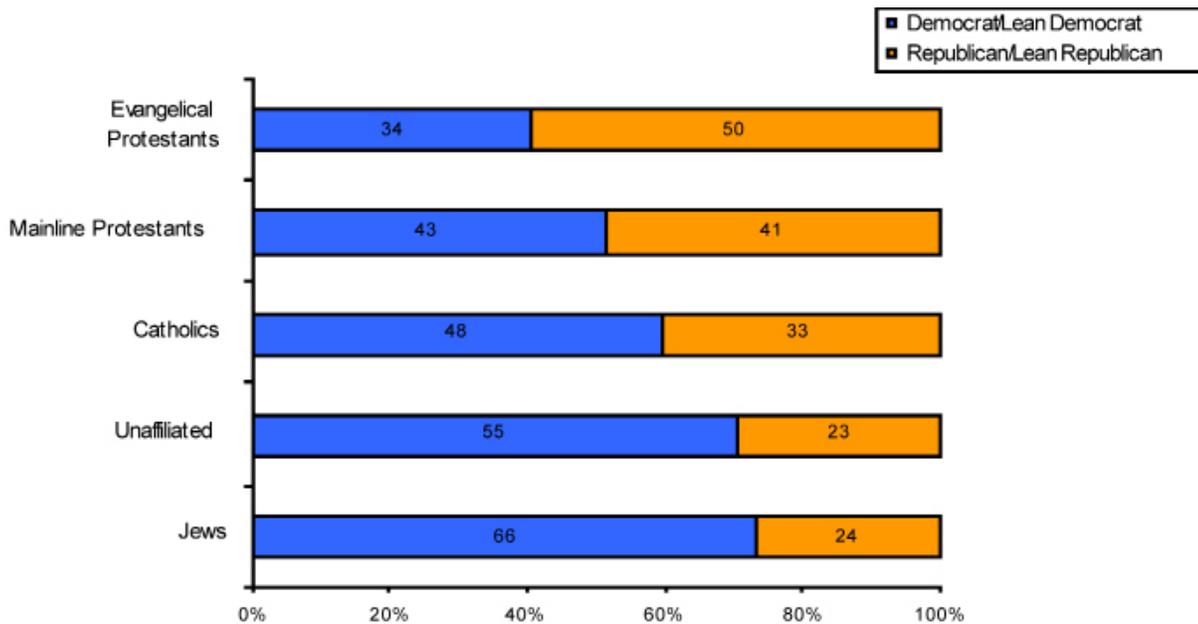
25. Conservative, moderate, or liberal political views

Jews and the Unaffiliated are the most politically liberal; many more Christians identify as conservative



26. Republican or Democrat

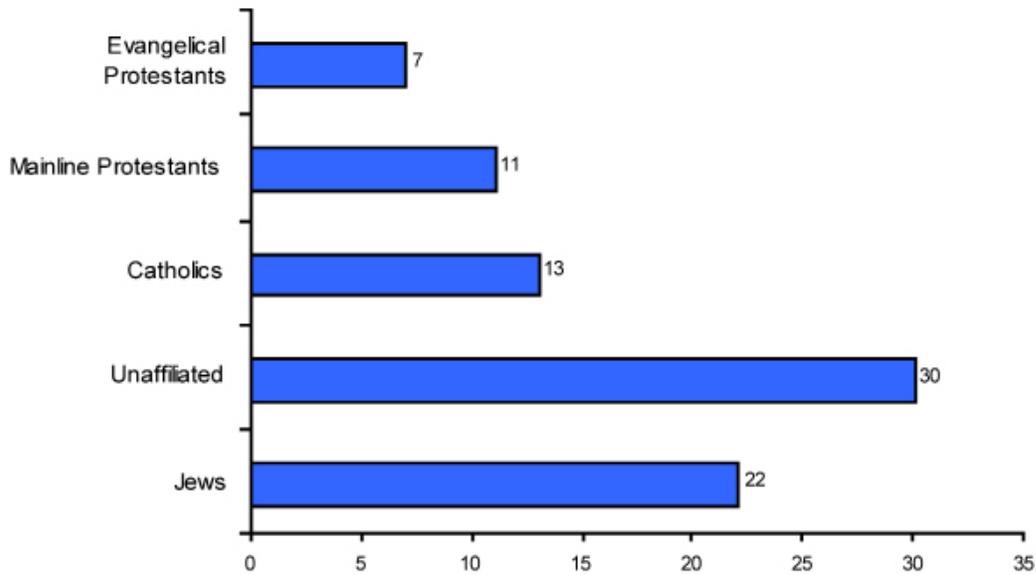
Jews most often identify as Democrats, followed by the religiously Unaffiliated (Independents were asked to select the party they lean towards)



* If independent, asked "do you lean more towards the Republican or Democratic Party?"

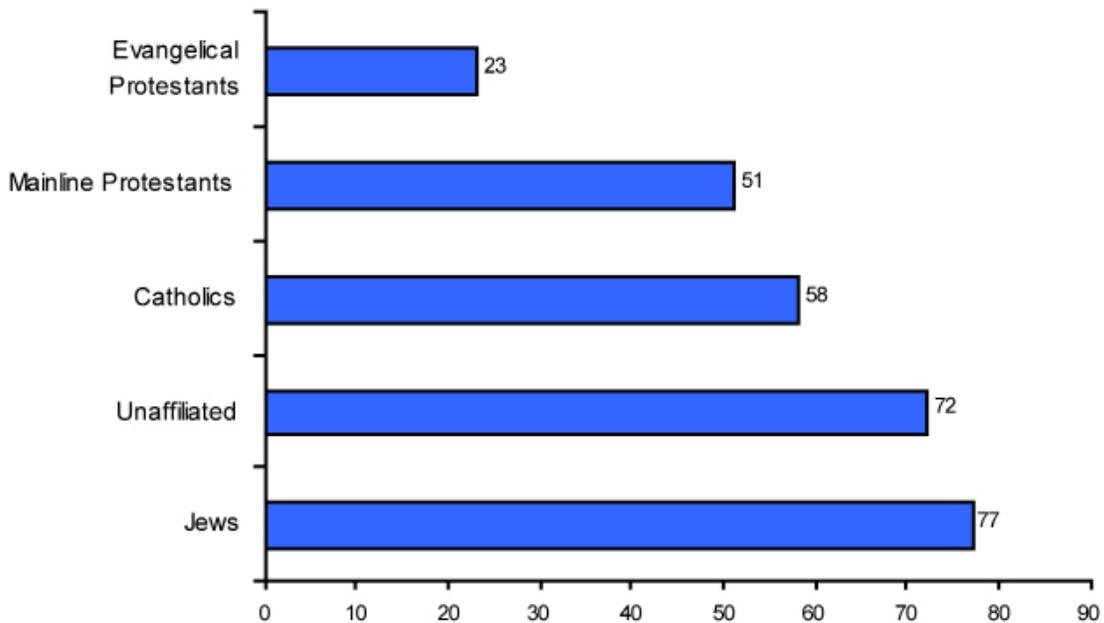
27. Religion causes more problems in society than it solves

Far more than Christians, Jews agree that religion causes problems, second only to the Unaffiliated



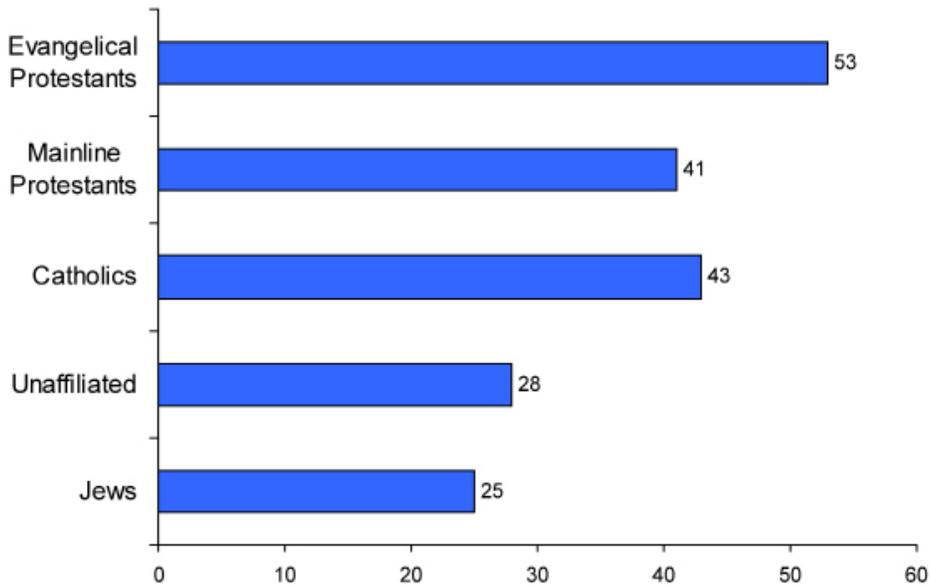
28. Evolution is the best explanation for the origins of human life

Jews are the most likely to agree with the theory of evolution, followed by the religiously Unaffiliated



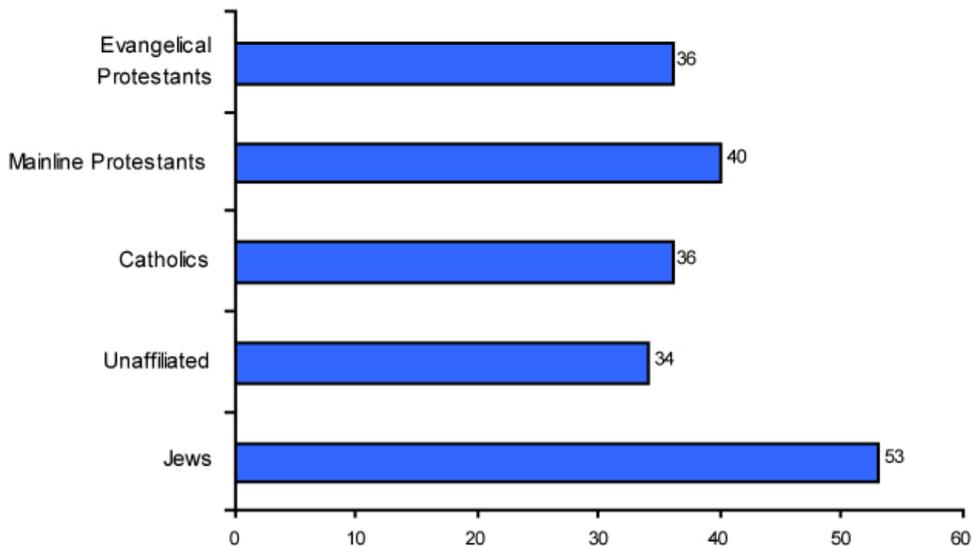
29. My values are threatened by Hollywood and the entertainment industry

Jews are the least likely to believe that Hollywood threatens their values, even less often than the Unaffiliated



30. It is best for the future of our country to be active in world affairs

Jews are the most "internationalist" of all five groups

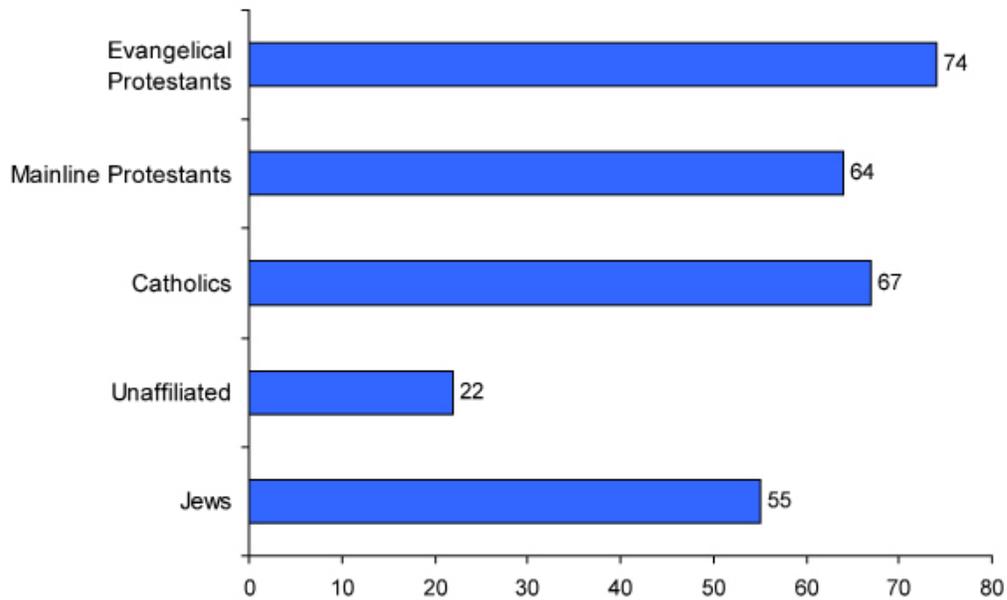


Religious Belonging

Jews' indicators of religious belonging resemble those of Christians, higher than the Unaffiliated

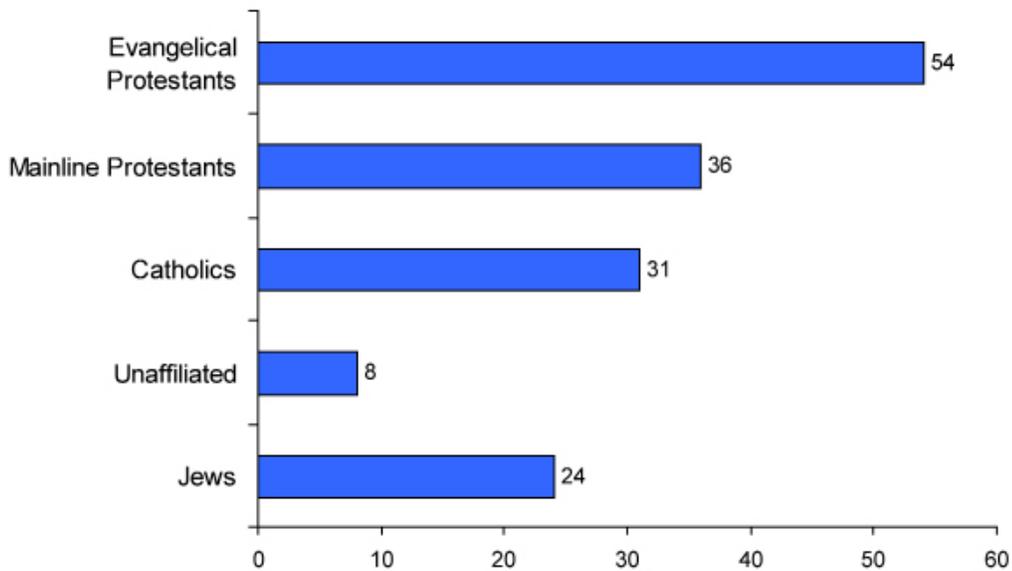
31. Member of a church or house of worship

Jews are members of congregations almost as much as Christians, and far more than the religiously Unaffiliated



32. Participate in activities at house of worship at least monthly

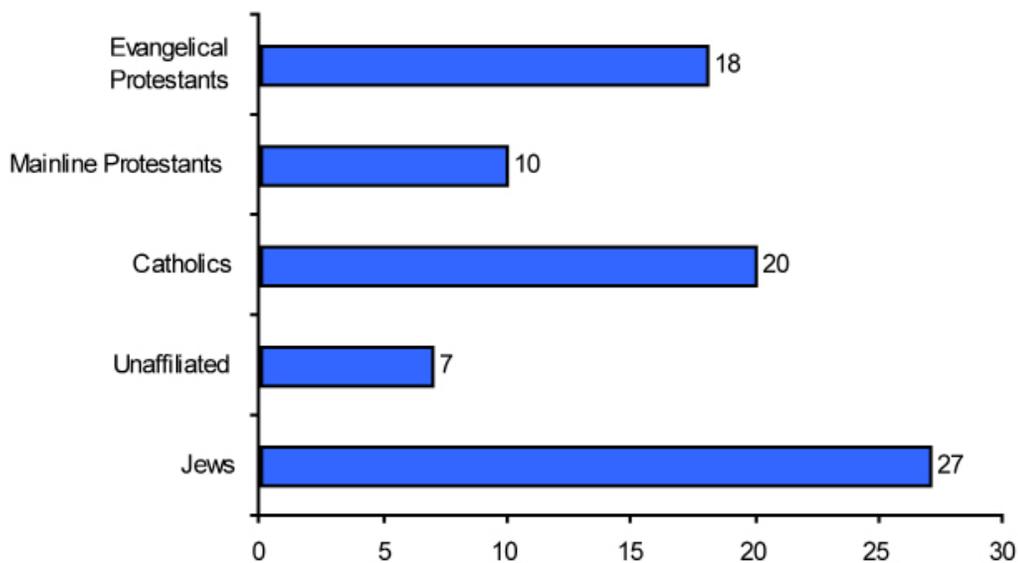
Jews are almost as active in synagogues as Christians in their churches, and far more than the Unaffiliated



* Choir or musical program, community volunteer work, work with children, social events such as meals or clubs

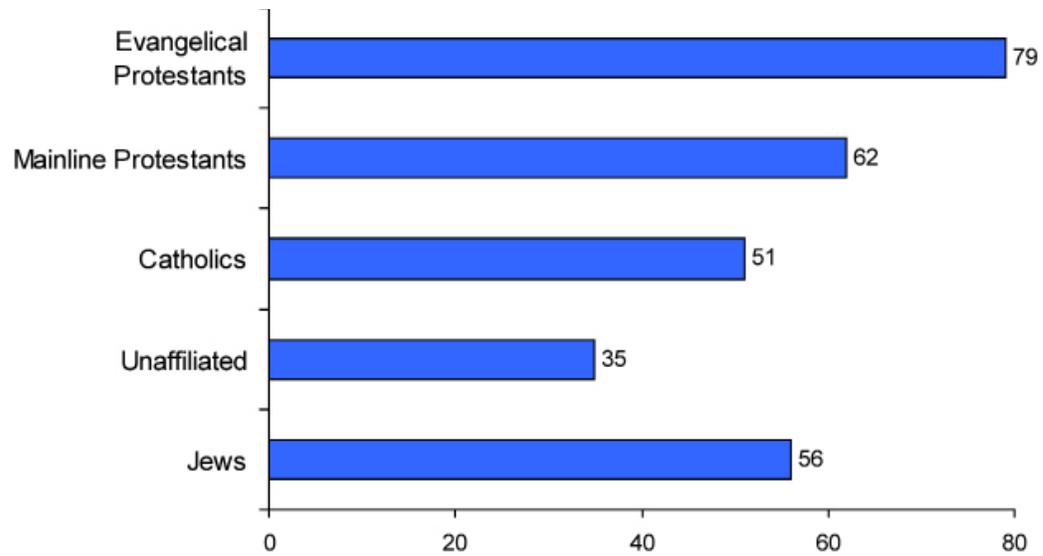
33. Send your children to a religious (day) school

Jews score highest in the use of all-day religious schools; Unaffiliated the least



34. Send children to Sunday school or other religious education

Jews send their kids to Sunday school as much as Christians, and far more than the religiously Unaffiliated



Original Question Wording

1. What is your present religion, if any? Are you Protestant, Roman Catholic, Mormon, Orthodox such as Greek or Russian Orthodox, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, atheist, agnostic, something else, or nothing in particular?
 - [IF SOMETHING ELSE OR DK/REF]: Do you think of yourself as a Christian or not?
 - Several additional follow up questions
2. What is your age?
3. What is the last grade or class that you completed in school?
4. Last year, that is in 2006, what was your total family income from all sources, before taxes? Less than \$10,000, 10 to under \$20,000, 20 to under \$30,000, 30 to under \$40,000, 40 to under \$50,000, 50 to under \$75,000, 75 to under \$100,000, 100 to under \$150,000, \$150,000 or more
 - Do you believe in God or a universal spirit?
 6. [IF BELIEVE IN GOD]: How certain are you about this belief? Are you absolutely certain, fairly certain, not too certain, or not at all certain?
 7. [IF BELIEVE IN GOD]: Which comes closest to your view of God? God is a person with whom people can have a relationship or God is an impersonal force?
8. Which comes closest to your view? [INSERT NAME OF HOLY BOOK]** is the word of God, OR [INSERT NAME OF HOLY BOOK] is a book written by men and is not the word of God.
 - Do you believe in life after death?
 9. [IF YES]: How certain are you about this belief? Are you absolutely certain, fairly certain, not too certain, or not at all certain?
10. Do you think there is a heaven where people who have led good lives are | eternally rewarded?
11. Do you think there is a hell, where people who have led bad lives and die without being sorry are eternally punished?
12. Do you completely agree, mostly agree, mostly disagree or completely disagree that miracles still occur today as in ancient times.
13. How important is religion in your life - very important, somewhat important, not too important, or not at all important?
14. Aside from weddings and funerals, how often do you attend religious services...more than once a week, once a week, once or twice a month, a few times a year, seldom, or never?

15. People practice their religion in different ways. Outside of attending religious services, do you pray several times a day, once a day, a few times a week, once a week, a few times a month, seldom, or never?
- Please tell me how often you do each of the following. First, how often do you ----- would you say at least once a week, once or twice a month, several times a year, seldom, or never?
 - 16. Read Scripture outside of religious services
 - 17. Meditate
 - Are you the parent or a guardian of any children under 18 now living in your household?
 - [IF PARENT OR GUARDIAN OF CHILD UNDER 18 LIVING AT HOME]: As I read a list, please tell me if you do any of the following things with your child/children. Do you
 - 18. Pray or read the Scripture with your child/any of your children.
19. [IF PRAY MORE THAN SELDOM]: Now, thinking about some different kinds of experiences, how often do you receive a definite answer to a specific prayer request? Would you say at least once a week, once or twice a month, several times a year, seldom, or never?
20. When it comes to questions of right and wrong, which of the following do you look to most for guidance? Would you say religious teachings and beliefs, philosophy and reason, practical experience and common sense, or scientific information?
21. In your opinion, should churches and other houses of worship keep out of political matters - or should they express their views on day-to-day social and political questions?
- Now I'm going to read you a few pairs of statements. Tell me whether the first statement or the second statement comes closer to your own views, even if neither is exactly right.
 - 22. The government should do more to protect morality in society, OR I worry the government is getting too involved in the issue of morality
 - 24. Homosexuality is a way of life that should be accepted by society, OR Homosexuality is a way of life that should be discouraged by society
23. Do you think abortion should be legal in all cases, legal in most cases, illegal in most cases, or illegal in all cases?
25. In general, would you describe your political views as very conservative, conservative, moderate, liberal, or very liberal?

26. In politics today, do you consider yourself a Republican, Democrat, or Independent? [IF INDEPENDENT, NO PREFERENCE, OTHER]: As of today do you lean more to the Republican Party or more to the Democratic Party?
- Do you completely agree, mostly agree, mostly disagree or completely disagree
 - 27. Religion causes more problems in society than it solves
 - 28. Evolution is the best explanation for the origins of human life on earth
 - 29. I often feel that my values are threatened by Hollywood and the entertainment industry
 - Now I'm going to read you a few pairs of statements. Tell me whether the first statement or the second statement comes closer to your own views, even if neither is exactly right.
 - 30. It's best for the future of our country to be active in world affairs, OR we should pay less attention to problems overseas and concentrate on problems here at home.
31. Are you or your family official members of a local church or house of worship?
32. [IF ATTEND WORSHIP SERVICES MORE THAN SELDOM]: And still thinking about the church or house of worship where you attend religious services most often, please tell me how often, if ever, you do each of the following. How often do you ----- would you say at least once a week, once or twice a month, several times a year, seldom or never?
- Participate in a choir or other musical program there
 - Do community volunteer work through your place of worship
 - Work with children or youth there
 - Participate in social activities, such as meals, club meetings, or other gatherings there
- [IF PARENT OR GUARDIAN OF CHILD UNDER 18 LIVING AT HOME]: As I read a list, please tell me if you do any of the following things with your child/children. Do you
 - 33. Home-school or send your child/any of your children to a religious school instead of a public school
 - 34. Send your child/any of your children to Sunday school or another religious education program
- All original questions can be downloaded here: <http://religions.pewforum.org/reports>

Methodology

(Adapted from the complete appendix on methodology: <http://religions.pewforum.org/reports>)

- The U.S. Religious Landscape Survey completed telephone interviews with a nationally representative sample of 35,556 adults living in continental United States households with telephones. The survey was conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates International (PSRAI). Interviews were done in English and Spanish by Princeton Data Source, LLC (PDS), and Schulman, Ronca and Bucuvalas, Inc. (SRBI), from May 8 to Aug. 13, 2007. Statistical results are weighted to correct known demographic discrepancies.
- The complete appendix on methodology can be downloaded here: <http://religions.pewforum.org/reports>

Summary of Major Findings

(Adapted from the complete summary at <http://religions.pewforum.org/reports>)

- An extensive new survey by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life details statistics on religion in America and explores the shifts taking place in the U.S. religious landscape. Based on interviews with more than 35,000 Americans age 18 and older, the U.S. Religious Landscape Survey finds that religious affiliation in the U.S. is both very diverse and extremely fluid. Most Americans have a non-dogmatic approach to faith. A majority of those who are affiliated with a religion, for instance, do not believe their religion is the only way to salvation. And almost the same number believes that there is more than one true way to interpret the teachings of their religion. This openness to a range of religious viewpoints is in line with the great diversity of religious affiliation, belief and practice that exists in the United States.
- More than one-quarter of American adults (28%) have left the faith in which they were raised in favor of another religion - or no religion at all. If change in affiliation from one type of Protestantism to another is included, 44% of adults have either switched religious affiliation, moved from being unaffiliated with any religion to being affiliated with a particular faith, or dropped any connection to a specific religious tradition altogether.
- The Landscape Survey confirms that the United States is on the verge of becoming a minority Protestant country; the number of Americans who report that they are members of Protestant denominations now stands at barely 51%. Moreover, the Protestant population is characterized by significant internal diversity and fragmentation, encompassing hundreds of different denominations loosely grouped around three fairly distinct religious traditions - evangelical Protestant churches (26.3% of the overall adult population), mainline Protestant churches (18.1%) and historically black Protestant churches (6.9%).

- Among the foreign-born adult population, Catholics outnumber Protestants by nearly a two-to-one margin (46% Catholic vs. 24% Protestant); among native-born Americans, on the other hand, the statistics show that Protestants outnumber Catholics by an even larger margin (55% Protestant vs. 21% Catholic). Immigrants are also disproportionately represented among several world religions in the U.S., including Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism.
- In addition to detailing the current religious makeup of the U.S. and describing the dynamic changes in religious affiliation, the findings from the Landscape Survey also provide important clues about the future direction of religious affiliation in the U.S. By detailing the age distribution of different religious groups, for instance, the study's statistics on religion show that more than six-in-ten Americans age 70 and older (62%) are Protestant but that this number is only about four-in-ten (43%) among Americans ages 18-29. Conversely, young adults ages 18-29 are much more likely than those age 70 and older to say that they are not affiliated with any particular religion (25% vs. 8%). If these generational patterns persist, recent declines in the number of Protestants and growth in the size of the unaffiliated population may continue.
- This is not to suggest that Americans do not take religion seriously. More than half of Americans rank the importance of religion very highly in their lives, attend religious services regularly and pray daily.
- The Landscape Survey also confirms the close link between Americans' religious affiliation, beliefs and practices, on the one hand, and their social and political attitudes, on the other. Indeed, the social and political fault lines in American society run through, as well as alongside, religious traditions. The relationship between politics and religion in the United States is particularly strong with respect to political ideology and views on social issues such as abortion and homosexuality, with the more religiously committed adherents across several religious traditions expressing more conservative political views. On other issues included in the survey, such as environmental protection, foreign affairs, and the proper size and role of government, differences based on religion tend to be smaller.
- The lack of dogmatism in American religion may well reflect the great diversity of religious affiliation, beliefs and practices in the U.S. For example, while more than nine-in-ten Americans (92%) believe in the existence of God or a universal spirit, there is considerable variation in the nature and certainty of this belief. A similar pattern is evident in views of the Bible. Nearly two-thirds of the public (63%) takes the view that their faith's sacred texts are the word of God. And more than a quarter of adults - including two-thirds of Buddhists (67%) and about half of Jews (53%) - say their faith's sacred texts are written by men and are not the word of God.

- The diversity in religious beliefs and practices in the U.S. in part reflects the great variety of religious groups that populate the American religious landscape. The survey finds, for example, that some religious groups - including Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses and members of historically black and evangelical Protestant churches - tend to be more likely to report high levels of religious engagement on questions such as the importance of religion in their lives, certainty of belief in God and frequency of attendance at religious services. Other Christian groups - notably members of mainline Protestant churches and Catholics - are less likely to report such attitudes, beliefs and practices. And still other faiths - including Jews, Buddhists, Hindus and Muslims - exhibit their own special mix of religious beliefs and practices.
- The Landscape Survey also reveals that people who are not affiliated with a particular religious tradition do not necessarily lack religious beliefs or practices. In fact, a large portion (41%) of the unaffiliated population says religion is at least somewhat important in their lives, seven-in-ten say they believe in God, and more than a quarter (27%) say they attend religious services at least a few times a year.
- The complete summary can be downloaded here: <http://religions.pewforum.org/reports>



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