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# For a Lot of American Teens, Religion Is a Regular Part of the Public School Day

*Yet many other U.S. adolescents rarely observe religious behavior in their schools, and a majority say they rarely or never discuss religion with friends*

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# For a Lot of American Teens, Religion Is a Regular Part of the Public School Day

*Yet many other U.S. adolescents rarely observe religious behavior in their schools, and a majority say they rarely or never discuss religion with friends*

Religion in public schools has long been a controversial issue. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled in 1962 that teachers and administrators cannot lead prayers in public schools, and a decision in 2000 barred school districts from sponsoring student-led prayers at football games. At the same time, the court has held that students retain a First Amendment right to the free exercise of religion and may voluntarily pray before, during and after school. [Where exactly to draw the line](#) between constitutionally protected religious activity and impermissible state-sponsored religious indoctrination remains under dispute. This year, the Supreme Court [declined to hear a case](#) involving a high school coach who was fired for leading prayer after games, just one of several [recent controversies](#) in this area of law.

While periodic battles continue in the courts, what is the day-to-day experience of students in public schools across the country? A new Pew Research Center survey asked a nationally representative sample of more than 1,800 teenagers (ages 13 to 17) about the kinds of religious activity they engage in – or see other students engaging in – during the course of the school day.

The survey finds that about four-in-ten teens who attend public schools say they commonly (either “often” or “sometimes”) see other students praying before sporting events at school. This includes about half of teenage public schoolers who live in the South, where students are more likely than those in other regions to witness and partake in various religious expressions at school.

In addition, roughly half of U.S. teens who attend public school say they commonly see other students in their school wearing religious clothing (such as an Islamic headscarf) or jewelry with religious symbols (such as a necklace with a Christian cross or a Jewish Star of David).

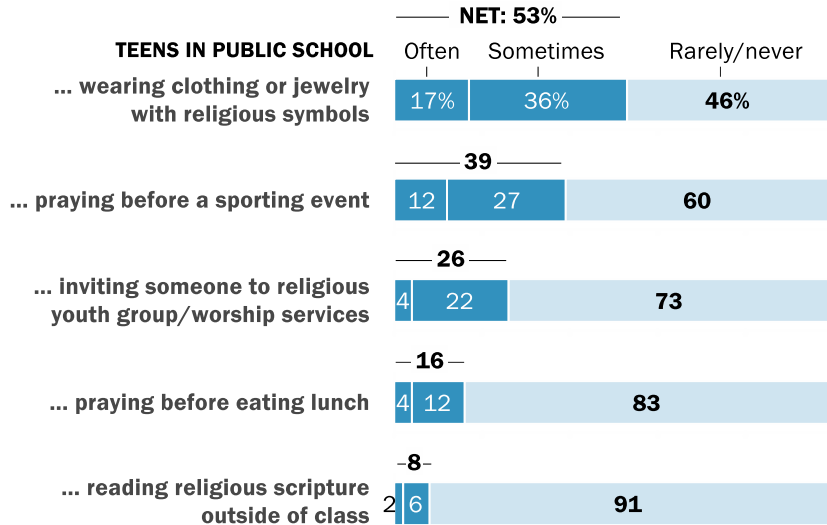
About a quarter of teens who attend public schools say they often or sometimes see students invite other students to religious youth groups or worship services. About one-in-six (16%) often or sometimes see other students praying before lunch in their public school. And 8% report that they commonly see other teenagers reading religious scripture outside of class during the school day.

Overall, on an index combining these **five types of religious expressions and activities by fellow students** – wearing religious clothing or jewelry, praying before a sporting event, inviting other students to youth groups or services, praying before eating lunch, and reading religious scripture during the school day

– 8% of teens in public schools say they commonly see all five (3%) or four out of five (5%). A third

## Clothing and jewelry are most common forms of religious expression seen in public schools

% of U.S. teenagers ages 13-17 in public schools who say they see other students in their school ...



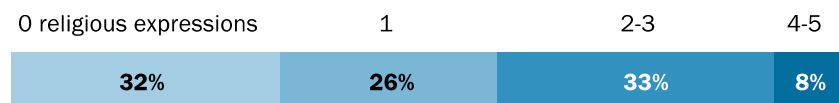
Note: Figures may not add to subtotals indicated due to rounding. Those who did not answer are not shown.

Source: Survey conducted March 29-April 14, 2019, among U.S. teenagers ages 13-17. "For a Lot of American Teens, Religion Is a Regular Part of the Public School Day"

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## Four-in-ten U.S. teens see at least two of these five types of religious expression on a regular basis

% of U.S. teenagers ages 13-17 in public schools who say they see \_\_\_\_\_ religious expressions in school often/sometimes



Note: Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding. The five types of religious expression on the index include seeing other students wearing religious clothing or jewelry, praying before a sporting event, inviting someone to religious youth groups or services, praying before eating lunch, and reading religious scripture during the school day (not as part of a class).

Source: Survey conducted March 29-April 14, 2019, among U.S. teenagers ages 13-17. "For a Lot of American Teens, Religion Is a Regular Part of the Public School Day"

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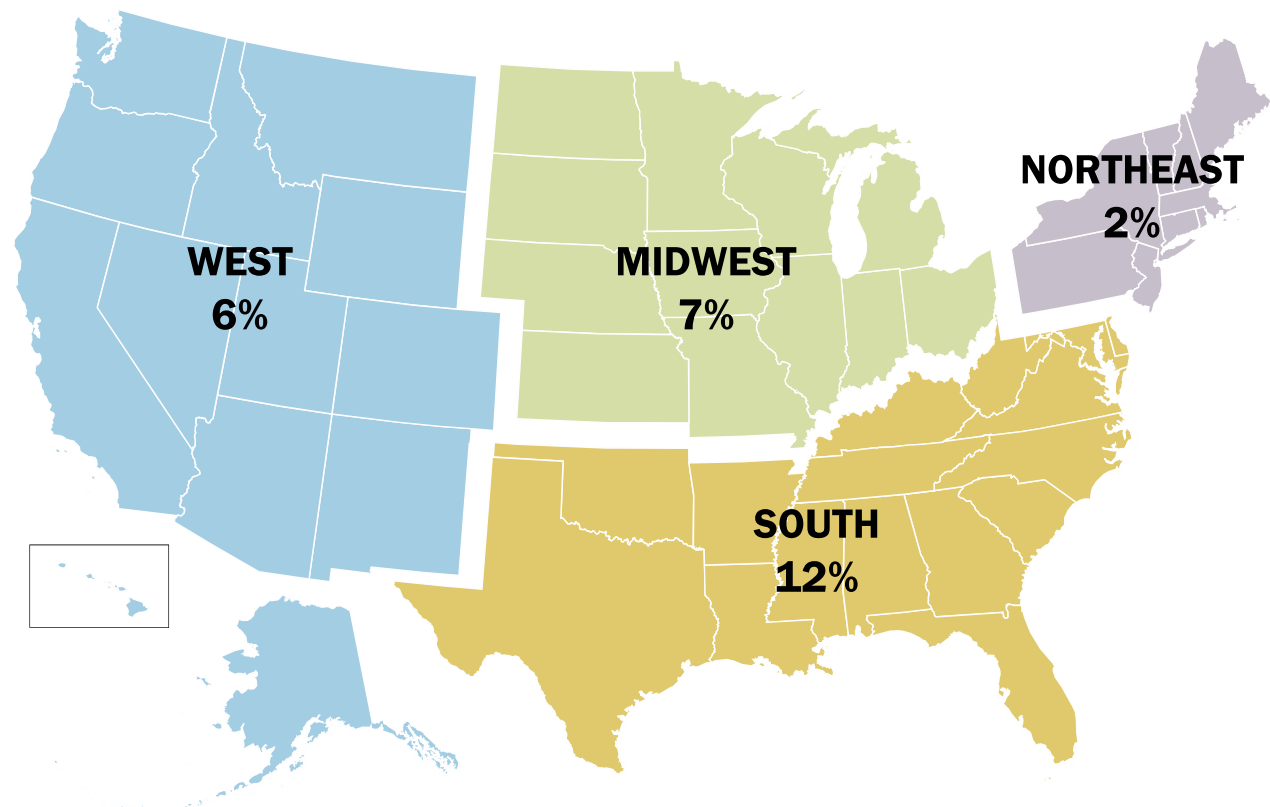
of students say they often or sometimes see two (20%) or three (13%) of these forms of religious expression in their public school, while 26% say they commonly see just one. And a third of public school teens (32%) say they rarely or never see *any* of these religious expressions by fellow students (or they did not answer the questions).

The survey also asked about **two kinds of teacher-led, classroom activities**. It finds that 8% of public school students say they have *ever* had a teacher lead their class in prayer – an action

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### Among teens in public schools in the South, 12% say teacher has ever led a class in prayer

*% of U.S. teenagers ages 13-17 in public schools who have ever had a teacher lead them in prayer*



Source: Survey conducted March 29-April 14, 2019, among U.S. teenagers ages 13-17.  
 "For a Lot of American Teens, Religion Is a Regular Part of the Public School Day"

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that the courts have ruled is a violation of the Establishment Clause of the Constitution.<sup>1</sup> An identical share (8%) say they have had a teacher read from the Bible as an example of literature, which the courts have said is fine. Both of these experiences are more common in the South (where 12% of public school students say a teacher has led their class in prayer, and 13% say a teacher has read to them from the Bible as literature) than in the Northeast (where just 2% say a teacher has led them in prayer, and 3% say a teacher has read from the Bible as an example of literature).

Nationwide, roughly four-in-ten teens (including 68% of evangelical Protestant teens) who go to public school say they think it is “appropriate” for a teacher to lead a class in prayer. Some of the teens who express this view are unaware of the Supreme Court’s ruling. But most *know* what the law is; 82% of U.S. teens in public schools (and 79% of evangelical teens) correctly answer a factual question about the constitutionality of teacher-led prayer in public school classrooms. Just 16% of teens incorrectly believe that teacher-led prayer is allowed by law, far fewer than the 41% who say it is “appropriate.”

Put another way, roughly half of teens who attend public school (53%) know that teacher-led prayer is prohibited and also find the practice inappropriate. At the same time, roughly three-in-ten (29%) know that it is unconstitutional but say that it is appropriate for a public school teacher to lead a class in prayer. Smaller shares think that teacher-led prayer is both legally permitted and appropriate (11%) or that it is permitted but inappropriate (4%).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Teens were asked if they have ever had a teacher lead their class in prayer, not just in their current school. It is possible that some teens who have experienced teacher-led prayer and now attend public schools may have attended other types of schools (for example, private school or home school) in the past and experienced teacher-led prayer in those places, which is not a violation of the Constitution.

<sup>2</sup> A small share (3%) of teenage public school students did not answer one or both of these questions on teacher-led prayer.

In addition to asking about what they have seen in school, the survey also asked teens who identify with a religion and attend a public school **whether they personally participate in religious expressions in their school.** Roughly three-in-ten or fewer say they regularly wear jewelry or clothing with religious symbols, pray before lunch, invite other students to worship services or a youth group, or leave school during the day to participate in religious activities.

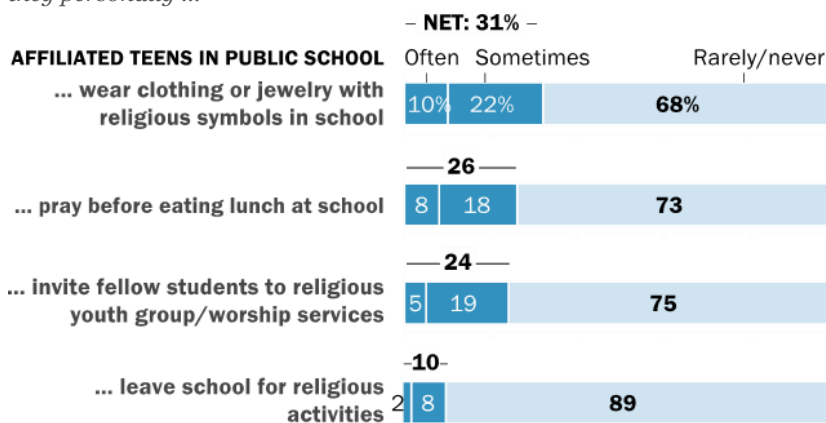
To be sure, some religiously affiliated public school

students do many of these four things on a regular basis: 12% say they sometimes or often participate in three or more of these religious expressions at school. But roughly half (49%) of the students surveyed say they rarely or never participate in any of these religious expressions during the school day, or they did not answer the questions. In addition, only 5% of all public school students say that there is a religious support or prayer group that meets in their school and that they have taken part in it in the past year. The vast majority say that as far as they know, there is no such group in their school.

An experience that is more common in American schools – both public and private – is bullying. The majority of U.S. teens surveyed say they either “often” (16%) or “sometimes” (38%) see students in their school being teased or made fun of. But this is rarely for religious reasons: Just 13% say they regularly **see fellow students being teased because of their religion**, and even fewer say they have directly experienced religiously motivated bullying. Overall, teens are far more likely to say they “rarely” or “never” see this type of bullying than they are to report that they sometimes or often witness such behavior.

## A quarter of religiously affiliated teens say they sometimes or often pray before lunch in public school

*% of religiously affiliated U.S. teenagers ages 13-17 in public schools who say they personally ...*



Note: Figures may not add to subtotals indicated due to rounding. Those who did not answer are not shown.

Source: Survey conducted March 29-April 14, 2019, among U.S. teenagers ages 13-17. “For a Lot of American Teens, Religion Is a Regular Part of the Public School Day”

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At the same time, roughly one-in-ten teens in public and private schools (9%) say that other students have made **comments that are unfriendly to their personal religious or spiritual views**, and 5% say that teachers have made such comments.

These are among the key findings of a survey of 1,811 U.S. adolescents ages 13 to 17, conducted online from March 29 to April 14, 2019. The survey was administered using the Ipsos KnowledgePanel and asked questions of both a teenager and one of their parents; this report focuses on the responses of the teens. For more information on how this survey was conducted, see the Methodology.

While several previous surveys have examined the religious lives of teenagers, this is the first large-scale, nationally representative survey asking teens a series of questions about their own practices and perceptions regarding religious expressions in public schools.

This topic is important to the broader study of religion in American society because of the friendships adolescents form in their classes and the way they experience religion in public spaces during some of their most formative years.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> For example, see Sorenson, Gail. 1996. "[Religion and American Public Education: Conservative Religious Agendas and the U.S. Constitution.](#)" Education and Urban Society. Also see Cheadle, Jacob E. and Philip Schwadel. 2012. "[The 'Friendship Dynamics of Religion,' or the 'Religious Dynamics of Friendship'? A Social Network Analysis of Adolescents Who Attend Small Schools.](#)" Social Science Research.

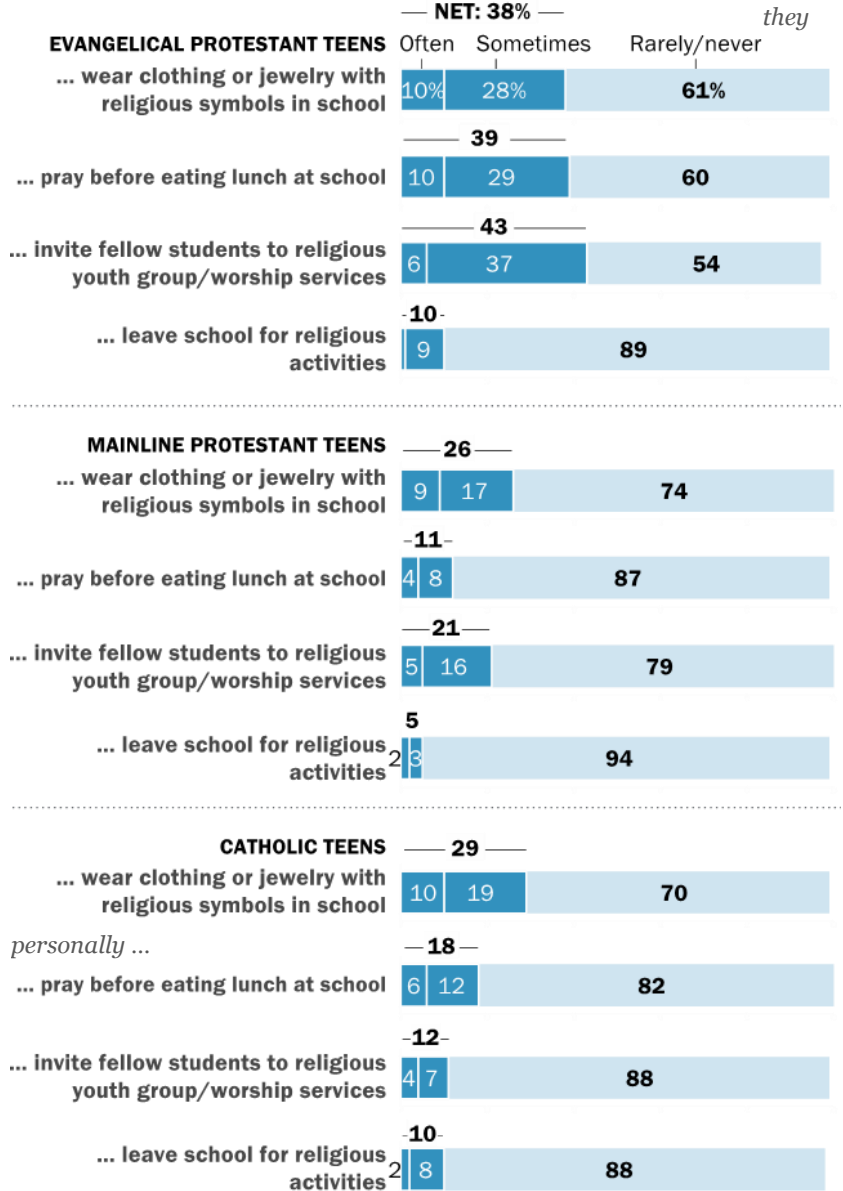
The survey included teens from many religious backgrounds, including non-Christian faiths, such as Judaism, Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism. However, the sample of 1,811 teens did not include enough teens in those religious groups – or in some of the smaller Christian traditions, such as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (sometimes called Mormons) or the historically black Protestant tradition – to allow their views to be analyzed and reported separately. The sample size is sufficient, though, to allow separate analysis of Catholic, evangelical Protestant, mainline Protestant and religiously unaffiliated teens.

Other findings in this report include:

- Teens who identify as evangelical Protestants are much more likely than Catholics and mainline Protestants to participate in religious activities in their public school, such as praying before lunch or inviting other students to their worship services or a religious youth group. For example, among teens who attend public schools, 39% of evangelical Protestants say they sometimes or often pray

### Evangelical Protestant teens most likely to pray at lunch and invite others to church or youth group

% of religiously affiliated U.S. teenagers ages 13-17 in public schools who say they



Note: Figures may not add to subtotals indicated due to rounding. Those who did not answer are not shown.

Source: Survey conducted March 29-April 14, 2019, among U.S. teenagers ages 13-17. "For a Lot of American Teens, Religion Is a Regular Part of the Public School Day"

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before lunch, compared with 18% of Catholics and 11% of mainline Protestants who say they do this.

- Teens with no religious affiliation – those who identify as atheist, agnostic or “nothing in particular,” sometimes called religious “nones” – are less likely than others to notice religious activities in their schools. For instance, just 17% of unaffiliated teens say they sometimes or often see other students invite someone to worship services or a religious youth group, compared with three-in-ten Christian teens (31%) who commonly see this happen. These differences may reflect their circles of friends, the schools they attend, their attentiveness to religious behavior, or other factors.
- About three-quarters of all religiously affiliated teens (78%) report that at least some of their friends share their religion. A smaller proportion (60%) of all religiously *unaffiliated* teens say they have friends who identify – like they do – as atheist, agnostic or nothing in particular. Indeed, 19% of unaffiliated teens say that *none* of their friends are religiously unaffiliated, and an additional 19% say that “hardly any” of their friends share their lack of religious affiliation.
- Most American teens (64%) say they rarely or never discuss religion with their friends, and only 5% say they often engage in such discussions. Again, evangelical Protestants are much more likely than others to engage in this type of religious behavior; roughly six-in-ten evangelical teens say they sometimes (47%) or often (11%) talk to their friends about religion, compared with four-in-ten mainline Protestant teens, a third of Catholics and about one-in-five religious “nones” who at least sometimes discuss religion with friends.

## Girls more likely than boys to talk to their friends about religion

% of U.S. teenagers ages 13-17 who talk to their friends about religion ...

% of U.S. teenagers ages 13-17 who say \_\_\_\_ of their friends share their religion/lack of religion



Note: Figures may not add to subtotals indicated due to rounding. Those who did not answer are not shown.

Source: Survey conducted March 29-April 14, 2019, among U.S. teenagers ages 13-17.

"For a Lot of American Teens, Religion Is a Regular Part of the Public School Day"

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- Religion seems to play a somewhat larger role in friendships for adolescent girls than for boys. The survey shows that girls are more likely than boys to talk to their friends about religion (41% vs. 31%) and somewhat more likely to be religiously similar to most of their friends. Girls who attend public school also are more likely to notice when other students wear clothing or jewelry with religious symbols and to invite other students to their religious youth group or worship services. This reflects a broader pattern among adults: [Women are generally more religious than men](#), particularly among Christians.
- Just 1% of mainline Protestant teens say they have ever been teased or made fun of in school for their religion, compared with 9% of Catholic teens and 10% of evangelicals who say the same.

The rest of this report explores findings from the survey's questions about religion in school and among teenagers' friendship circles in more detail, including analysis by religious group, age and grade level, race or ethnicity, gender, and geographic region.

## Religion in school

### Most teens surveyed attend public schools, fewer attend private schools or are home-schooled

The vast majority (87%) of teenagers surveyed say they attend public schools.<sup>4</sup> An additional 5% attend religious private schools, while 6% are home-schooled. Just 1% attend a nonreligious private school.<sup>5</sup>

However, the type of school adolescents attend tends to vary depending on their self-described religious background. Teens who describe themselves as evangelical Protestants are more likely to be home-schooled (11%) than “nones” (5%) and Catholics (2%). And, not surprisingly, teens with a religious affiliation (6%) are more likely than those without one (1%) to attend a religious private school. The survey indicates that Catholic teens are more likely than Protestant teens (9% vs. 4%) to attend a religious school.

### One-in-ten evangelical Protestants are home-schooled

% of U.S. teenagers ages 13-17 who say they attend a ...

	Public school	Religious private school	Non-religious private school	Home school	Other/ no answer
	%	%	%	%	%
<b>Total</b>	87	5	1	6	2=100
Affiliated	85	6	1	6	1
Christian	86	6	1	6	1
Protestant	85	4	1	9	1
<i>Evangelical</i>	82	5	1	11	1
<i>Mainline</i>	88	4	2	6	0
Catholic	86	9	2	2	1
Unaffiliated	90	1	1	5	3

Note: Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding. Other/no answer category also includes teens who say they are not currently in school. The figures for teens who attend public school here and throughout the report include those who say they attend charter or magnet schools.

Source: Survey conducted March 29-April 14, 2019, among U.S. teenagers ages 13-17.

“For a Lot of American Teens, Religion Is a Regular Part of the Public School Day”

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*Most of the analyses in this report are limited to teenagers who attend a public school. When it comes to experiences with religion in a school environment, adolescents who attend religious schools or are home-schooled are much different from those who do not, and the survey did not include sufficiently large samples of students who attend religious private schools, or who are being home-schooled, to compare these groups with teenagers who go to public schools.<sup>6</sup>*

<sup>4</sup> The figures for teens who attend public school here and throughout the report include those who say they attend charter or magnet schools.

<sup>5</sup> According to 2019 estimates from the [National Center for Education Statistics \(NCES\)](#), 9% of high school students enrolled in school (not counting home-schooled students) are in private schools. In the survey sample, 5% of high school students enrolled in schools are in private schools. It is more difficult to calculate a national estimate for those who are home-schooled because U.S. states vary in their laws around reporting home-schooling statistics. Nonetheless, the [NCES](#) estimates that 4% of high school-aged adolescents in the U.S. were home-schooled in 2016, the most recent year for which the estimates are available.

<sup>6</sup> An additional reason for this analytical decision is to avoid conflating the associations between adolescent characteristics and religious experiences in schools with the type of school teens attend. For example, Catholic teens who attend Catholic schools are presumably much more likely to experience prayer and other religious activities in school, which would disproportionately affect the Catholic figures in the analysis. See Uecker, Jeremy E. 2008. “[Alternative Schooling Strategies and the Religious Lives of American Adolescents.](#)” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion.*

### **Most U.S. teens commonly see at least one type of religious expression in public school**

Some religious expressions are relatively common in public schools. For instance, about half (53%) of U.S. teens in public schools often or sometimes see other students wearing clothing or jewelry with religious symbols, and four-in-ten (39%) regularly see students praying before a sporting event.

Other religious activities and expressions are less common. A quarter of teens in public schools (26%) say they often or sometimes see students inviting other students to religious youth groups or worship services. About one-in-six (16%) regularly see other teens praying before lunch, and 8% often or sometimes see students reading religious scripture outside of class. This means that large majorities of U.S. teens rarely or never see these behaviors in school.

On an index combining all five of these types of religious expression in school, about a third of teens (32%) say they rarely or never see any of them (or they did not answer the questions), while just 3% say they see all five on a regular basis. Another way to sum up their experiences: On the one hand, a majority of teens (68%) report seeing *at least one* of these religious expressions or activities in their public schools often or sometimes; on the other hand, fewer than half (41%) say they commonly see *more than one* of these religious behaviors.

There are substantial differences in what students tend to see in public school depending on the student's religious affiliation. Religiously affiliated teens are more likely than unaffiliated teens to say they at least sometimes see each of the five types of religious activities or expressions in school. There also are differences among religiously affiliated teens. For instance, Protestant teens (38%) are twice as likely as Catholic teens (19%) to say they see students inviting other students to youth group or worship services at least sometimes. And there are differences even among Protestants: Evangelical Protestant teens (18%) are twice as likely as mainline Protestants (8%) to say they regularly see their peers reading religious scripture in school.

It is not completely clear what accounts for such large differences in what adolescents see in their schools. It is possible that the tendency to have religiously similar friendship circles (see page 31) affects what students see.<sup>7</sup> For example, religious teens – who tend to have friends who are similarly religious – may be exposed to more religious activities and expressions. But it's also possible that religious and nonreligious teens may perceive the world somewhat differently: What may appear as a religious expression to an evangelical Protestant teen may not even be noticed by

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<sup>7</sup> For a discussion of Americans' tendency to have friends who are religiously like themselves, see McPherson, Miller, Lynn Smith-Lovin and James M. Cook. 2001. "[Birds of a Feather: Homophily in Social Networks](#)." Annual Review of Sociology.

a nonreligious teen. Yet another factor is that certain groups are concentrated in parts of the country where religious expressions may be more (or less) common.

Indeed, geographic region of residence is also associated with how likely teens are to witness religious activities and expressions in school. Teens in the South – where adults, on average, are [more religious than in other regions](#) – are particularly likely to report seeing religious expressions in school. About a quarter (23%) of Southern teens often or sometimes see other students praying before lunch, compared with 13% in the Northeast and 11% in both the Midwest and West.

Public school students in the South also are more likely than those in other regions to report seeing students pray before sporting events and wear clothing or jewelry with religious symbols.

There also are gender, age, and racial and ethnic differences in what adolescents experience in school. Girls are more likely than boys to see students wearing religious jewelry or clothing as well as more likely to see students inviting other students to religious services or youth group. Older adolescents are especially likely to say they “often” or “sometimes” see students pray before sporting events. And white (non-Hispanic) teens are more likely than nonwhite teens to see students inviting other students to youth groups or services.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> The net nonwhite category includes teens who identify as black, Asian, Hispanic, some other race, or multiple races. It is the unit of analysis in this survey because the sample sizes for most of the nonwhite categories are too small to analyze individually. The combined category is used in this report so that broad comparisons can be made to highlight differences between groups. Researchers prefer to break out subgroups when possible to show the differences that may exist between groups of people. The use of a net nonwhite category is not intended to obscure the fact that the religious experiences and behaviors of [black Americans](#), [Hispanic Americans](#), and [Americans of other races and ethnicities](#) may be quite different.

## Unaffiliated teens tend to see fewer religious expressions and activities in school

% of U.S. teenagers ages 13-17 in public schools who say they see other students in their school ...

	Wearing clothing or jewelry with religious symbols		Praying before a sporting event		Inviting someone to religious youth group/worship services		Praying before eating lunch		Reading religious scripture outside of class	
	Often/sometimes	Rarely/never	Often/sometimes	Rarely/never	Often/sometimes	Rarely/never	Often/sometimes	Rarely/never	Often/sometimes	Rarely/never
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
<b>Total</b>	53	46	39	60	26	73	16	83	8	91
Affiliated	56	44	47	53	31	69	19	80	11	89
Christian	56	43	48	52	31	68	20	80	11	89
Protestant	59	40	53	46	38	61	25	75	14	86
<i>Evangelical</i>	63	37	55	45	45	54	25	75	18	81
<i>Mainline</i>	55	44	52	48	33	67	16	83	8	92
Catholic	51	49	42	58	19	81	13	85	7	93
Unaffiliated	46	52	24	75	17	82	9	90	3	95
Boys	47	52	36	64	20	79	15	84	7	92
Girls	59	40	42	57	32	68	17	83	9	91
Ages 13-14	49	51	34	66	27	73	13	86	6	93
15-17	55	44	42	57	25	74	17	82	9	90
White, non-Hispanic	54	45	37	63	30	69	12	87	7	92
NET Nonwhite	51	48	42	58	22	78	19	80	9	90
Northeast	45	55	26	74	16	84	13	87	9	90
Midwest	52	48	34	66	26	74	11	89	8	92
South	61	38	56	44	32	67	23	75	10	89
West	46	52	28	70	24	75	11	88	6	93

Note: Those who did not answer are not shown. The net nonwhite category includes teens who identify as black, Asian, Hispanic, some other race or multiple races; these groups could not be analyzed separately due to sample size limitations.

Source: Survey conducted March 29-April 14, 2019, among U.S. teenagers ages 13-17.

"For a Lot of American Teens, Religion Is a Regular Part of the Public School Day"

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Aside from what they *see* in school, what are adolescents *doing* in school, religiously speaking?

The survey asked religiously affiliated teens about their own religious practices and expressions in school. Among public school teens who identify with a religion, 31% say they at least sometimes wear clothing or jewelry with religious symbols, and about a quarter say they sometimes or often pray before lunch (26%) or invite other students to their worship services or a religious youth group (24%).<sup>9</sup> One-in-ten religiously affiliated teens say they regularly leave school for religious activities or programs.

Evangelical Protestants stand out on some of these measures. Roughly four-in-ten evangelical Protestant teens who attend public school say they at least sometimes pray before lunch at school (39%), compared with 18% of Catholic teens and 11% of mainline Protestant teens. Similarly, about four-in-ten evangelical teens (43%) say they sometimes or often invite other students to their worship services or youth group, compared with 21% of mainline Protestants and 12% of Catholics who say they do this. Evangelical Protestant adolescents (38%) also are more likely than mainline Protestants (26%) to regularly wear religious clothing or jewelry.

There are differences between boys and girls on some of these measures. While four-in-ten religiously affiliated girls (39%) sometimes or often wear religious jewelry or clothing, a quarter of religiously affiliated boys (25%) do so. This may be due to overall differences in the amount of jewelry that girls and boys wear; if girls wear jewelry more often than boys do in general, it stands to reason that they would also wear religious jewelry more often. But there also are gender differences when it comes to inviting fellow students to church or youth group: Nearly three-in-ten girls (28%) report that they sometimes or often invite others to their youth group or worship services, compared with one-in-five boys (20%).

Religious activities and expressions in public schools vary by region, too. Religiously affiliated teens in the South (38%) are more likely than those in the Midwest (23%), West (20%) and Northeast (13%) to report praying before lunch at school. Southern teens (31%) also are more likely than teens in the West (21%) and Northeast (14%) to invite other students to their youth group or worship services.

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<sup>9</sup> The survey did not ask teens specifically how they pray before lunch, therefore this practice could include everything from prayer with a public component (for example, prayers said aloud or prayers preceded by or followed by the sign of the cross) to private prayers that students pray silently.

## Evangelical Protestant teens most likely to pray before lunch and invite others to church or youth group

% of religiously affiliated U.S. teenagers ages 13-17 in public schools who say they personally ...

	Wear clothing or jewelry with religious symbols in school		Pray before eating lunch at school		Invite fellow students to youth group/worship services		Leave school for religious activities	
	Often/sometimes	Rarely/never	Often/sometimes	Rarely/never	Often/sometimes	Rarely/never	Often/sometimes	Rarely/never
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Affiliated	31	68	26	73	24	75	10	89
Christian	32	68	27	73	25	74	10	89
Protestant	34	65	34	66	32	66	10	90
<i>Evangelical</i>	38	61	39	60	43	54	10	89
<i>Mainline</i>	26	74	11	87	21	79	5	94
Catholic	29	70	18	82	12	88	10	88
Boys	25	75	28	72	20	78	9	89
Girls	39	61	24	75	28	72	11	89
Ages 13-14	27	72	23	77	20	79	8	90
15-17	34	66	28	72	26	73	10	89
Northeast	26	74	13	87	14	84	5	95
Midwest	35	65	23	77	23	75	8	92
South	36	63	38	61	31	68	11	87
West	25	75	20	80	21	79	13	86

Note: Those who did not answer are not shown.

Source: Survey conducted March 29-April 14, 2019, among U.S. teenagers ages 13-17.

"For a Lot of American Teens, Religion Is a Regular Part of the Public School Day"

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## Most teens do not have religious support groups in school

The vast majority of U.S. teens who attend public schools say there is no religious support group or prayer group that meets in their school (82%). Nearly one-in-five teens say that religious support or prayer groups do meet in their schools (17%), including 5% who say they have participated in such a group in the last year and 12% who have not done so.

Among Protestant teens, roughly three-in-ten (31%) say that a religious support group or prayer group meets in their school. But far fewer Catholics and religious “nones” say the same: Only about one-in-ten Catholic and unaffiliated teens report that their school hosts such a group.<sup>10</sup>

Unaffiliated teens also are highly unlikely to attend a support group, with fewer than 1% saying they have done so in the past year (the question was intended to capture nonreligious groups as well, such as the Secular Student Alliance). Protestant teens are somewhat more likely than their Catholic peers to participate in religious or prayer groups in school (11% vs 6%).

Teens’ awareness of, and attendance at, religious support or prayer groups at their school also varies by region, with teens in the South more likely to say that prayer or religious support groups meet in their public school and that they, personally, participate in such activities, compared with those in the Northeast and West. Still, just 9% of Southern teens who go to public

## Most U.S. teens say there are no religious support or prayer groups that meet in their school

*% of U.S. teenagers ages 13-17 in public schools who say a religious support or prayer group does/does not meet in their school building*

	NET Yes	Yes, attended in past year	No, did not attend in past year	No group in school	No answer
	%	%	%	%	%
<b>Total</b>	17	5	12	82	1=100
Affiliated	21	8	13	78	1
Christian	22	8	14	77	1
Protestant	31	11	20	69	<1
<i>Evangelical</i>	36	13	22	64	<1
<i>Mainline</i>	31	9	22	69	<1
Catholic	10	6	5	89	1
Unaffiliated	8	<1	8	90	1
Northeast	11	3	9	87	1
Midwest	16	5	12	83	<1
South	24	9	15	75	1
West	11	3	8	88	1

Note: Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding. “No, did not attend in past year” figures include those who said a religious support or prayer group meets at their school but did not indicate whether they attend.

Source: Survey conducted March 29-April 14, 2019, among U.S. teenagers ages 13-17.

“For a Lot of American Teens, Religion Is a Regular Part of the Public School Day”

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

<sup>10</sup> This question was asked of both religiously affiliated and unaffiliated teens and included examples of religious groups (for example, the Fellowship of Christian Athletes) and nonreligious groups (the question referenced the “Secular Student Association”) under the broader umbrella of religious support or prayer groups.

school say that in the past year they have attended a prayer group or religious support group (such as the Fellowship of Christian Athletes) that meets in their school.

## Religion in the classroom relatively rare

Relatively few U.S. teens in public schools report that they have *ever* seen teachers either lead a class in prayer (8%) or read from the Bible as an example of literature (8%).<sup>11</sup>

Protestant teens (11%) are more likely than unaffiliated teens (5%) to report that a teacher has led their class in prayer, and to report that a teacher has read from the Bible as an example of literature (12% vs. 4%).

Adolescents' reports of teachers' religious activities in the classroom also vary by race and ethnicity and region. Nonwhite teens are more likely than white (non-Hispanic) teens to say a teacher has led their class in prayer (11% vs. 5%) and read from the Bible as literature (12% vs. 6%). And teens in the South are especially likely to say a teacher has led their class in prayer (12%) and read from the Bible (13%) when compared with the small shares of teens in the Northeast who report the same (2% and 3%, respectively).

Gender, age and grade are not associated with having seen teachers lead a class in prayer or read from the Bible as literature.

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## About one-in-ten Southern teens in public schools say teacher has led prayer

*% of U.S. teenagers ages 13-17 in public schools who have ever had a teacher ...*

	Lead class in prayer %	Read from Bible as literature %
<b>Total</b>	8	8
Affiliated	9	11
Christian	10	11
Protestant	11	12
<i>Evangelical</i>	11	14
<i>Mainline</i>	6	5
Catholic	9	10
Unaffiliated	5	4
White, non-Hispanic	5	6
NET Nonwhite	11	12
Northeast	2	3
Midwest	7	5
South	12	13
West	6	9

Note: The net nonwhite category includes teens who identify as black, Asian, Hispanic, some other race or multiple races; these groups could not be analyzed separately due to sample size limitations. Source: Survey conducted March 29-April 14, 2019, among U.S. teenagers ages 13-17. "For a Lot of American Teens, Religion Is a Regular Part of the Public School Day"

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<sup>11</sup> Teens were asked if they have *ever* had a teacher lead their class in prayer, not just in their current school. It is possible that some teens who have experienced teacher-led prayer and now attend public schools may have attended other types of schools (for example, private school or home school) in the past and experienced teacher-led prayer in those places, which is not a violation of the Constitution.

What do students in public schools think about teachers leading a class in prayer or reading from the Bible as an example of literature?

About four-in-ten (41%) say they think it is appropriate for a teacher in their school to lead a class in prayer, and 55% say it is appropriate for a teacher to read from the Bible as an example of literature. But there are large differences by religion.

Among those in public schools, religiously affiliated students (49%) are about twice as likely as religious “nones” (25%) to think it is acceptable for a teacher to lead a class in prayer. Affiliated adolescents also are more likely than “nones” to think it is acceptable for a teacher to read from the Bible as literature (62% vs. 42%).

There are large differences among religiously affiliated adolescents as well. For instance, six-in-ten Protestants approve of a teacher leading a class in prayer, compared with four-in-ten Catholics who say this. Evangelical Protestants are especially likely to approve of teachers bringing religion into the classroom: Two-thirds of evangelical Protestant teens (68%) say it is appropriate for a teacher to lead a class in prayer, compared with four-in-ten mainline Protestants (41%). Roughly eight-in-ten evangelical Protestant teens approve of a teacher reading from the Bible as an example of literature (82%), compared with six-in-ten mainline Protestant teens who say this (59%).

Views toward teachers bringing religion into the classroom also vary across racial and ethnic groups, regions, and grade levels. Nonwhite teens are more supportive of teachers praying: 46% of nonwhite teens think it is appropriate for teachers in public schools to lead a class in prayer, while 36% of non-Hispanic white teens think so. But there are no differences between white and nonwhite teens in views toward teachers reading from the Bible as an example of literature.

## Evangelical Protestant teens most likely to approve of teacher leading a class in prayer

*% of U.S. teenagers ages 13-17 in public schools who think it is appropriate for a teacher in their school to ...*

	Lead class in prayer %	Read from Bible as literature %
<b>Total</b>	41	55
Affiliated	49	62
Christian	50	63
Protestant	60	73
Evangelical	68	82
Mainline	41	59
Catholic	40	49
Unaffiliated	25	42
White, non-Hispanic	36	55
NET Nonwhite	46	55
<i>Current grade level</i>		
8th grade or lower	47	59
9th-10th grade	39	53
11th-12th grade	37	53
Northeast	28	41
Midwest	40	59
South	55	64
West	30	49

Note: The net nonwhite category includes teens who identify as black, Asian, Hispanic, some other race or multiple races; these groups could not be analyzed separately due to sample size limitations. Source: Survey conducted March 29-April 14, 2019, among U.S. teenagers ages 13-17. “For a Lot of American Teens, Religion Is a Regular Part of the Public School Day”

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Teens in the South and Midwest are particularly likely to approve of teachers praying and reading from the Bible in class. About half (55%) of Southern teens in public schools say it is appropriate for a teacher to lead a class in prayer. By comparison, three-in-ten teens in the West (30%) and Northeast (28%) think it is acceptable for a teacher to lead a class in prayer. There is a similar pattern on the question about teachers reading the Bible as literature.

Teens who have been in school for more years are less supportive of teachers praying in the classroom. Nearly half (47%) of pre-high school teens think it is appropriate for a teacher to lead a class in prayer, compared with 37% of those in 11th and 12th grades.

The survey also asked teens what they *know* about the U.S. Supreme Court’s stance on teacher-led prayer, finding that those in 8th grade or lower are more likely than those in 9th through 12th grades to incorrectly say that the court permits the practice (20% vs. 14%).

Overall, most U.S. teens in public schools (82%) know that their teachers are not permitted to lead a class in prayer, according to rulings by the U.S. Supreme Court. At the same time, 16% think this is legally allowed – although this is much smaller than the share who think it would be appropriate (41%). Among just those who say teacher-led prayer is appropriate, a somewhat higher share believe it is permitted by law (28%), but 70% still know that it is unconstitutional.

U.S. teens are much less familiar with the law when it comes to reading from the Bible as an example of literature, which the Supreme Court has ruled permissible. About a third (36%) of U.S. teens in public school know that their teachers are permitted to do this, while six-in-ten (62%) think it is not allowed.

Evangelical Protestant teens stand out from other traditions on this measure: 47% know that public school teachers are allowed to read from the Bible as literature, compared with about a third each of mainline Protestant teens (34%), religious “nones” (33%) and Catholics (32%).

In contrast with the question about teacher-led prayer, teens in 11th and 12th grades are *less*

## Most teens in public schools know their teachers are not permitted to lead a class in prayer

According to rulings by the U.S. Supreme Court, is a public school teacher permitted to do each of the following, or not?

% of U.S. teenagers ages 13-17 in public schools who say ...

	Lead class in prayer		Read from Bible as literature	
	Yes	No (correct)	Yes (correct)	No
	%	%	%	%
<b>Total</b>	16	82	36	62
Affiliated	17	81	37	61
Christian	17	81	37	61
Protestant	16	82	39	58
Evangelical	18	79	47	50
Mainline	11	86	34	63
Catholic	20	78	32	66
Unaffiliated	13	85	33	65
White, non-Hispanic	12	87	37	61
NET Nonwhite	20	78	33	65
<i>Current grade level</i>				
8th grade or lower	20	79	40	58
9th-10th grade	14	84	34	64
11th-12th grade	14	84	31	66
Northeast	13	86	32	67
Midwest	16	83	35	62
South	18	79	39	59
West	15	83	33	65

Note: Those who did not answer are not shown. The net nonwhite category includes teens who identify as black, Asian, Hispanic, some other race or multiple races; these groups could not be analyzed separately due to sample size limitations.

Source: Survey conducted March 29-April 14, 2019, among U.S. teenagers ages 13-17.

“For a Lot of American Teens, Religion Is a Regular Part of the Public School Day”

PEW RESEARCH CENTER



likely to correctly answer this question than those in eighth grade or lower.

There are no statistically significant differences across regions on either of these questions.

## Relatively few teens witness religion-related bullying in schools

To further explore what teens are encountering in their schools, the survey asked about experiences with teasing, bullying and being subject to unfriendly comments. The analyses of bullying and hostility toward religion in school include students in both religious and nonreligious schools (but not those who are home-schooled).<sup>12</sup>

Many educators, parents, and researchers have pointed out that [bullying is a major concern in U.S. schools](#), and the new survey finds that 54% of U.S. teens report regularly seeing students in their school being teased or made fun of – including 16% who say they often see this and 38% who sometimes see it. About three-in-ten say they rarely witness bullying in school, while 14% say they never see it.

### Majority of teens regularly witness bullying at school

% of U.S. teenagers ages 13-17 who say they \_\_\_\_\_ see students in their school being teased or made fun of

	NET			NET			No answer
	Often/ sometimes	Often	Sometimes	Rarely/ never	Rarely	Never	
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
<b>Total</b>	54	16	38	45	31	14	1=100
Affiliated	53	17	37	46	31	15	<1
Christian	54	17	37	46	31	15	<1
Protestant	59	19	40	41	28	13	<1
Evangelical	58	17	41	41	31	11	<1
Mainline	55	20	35	45	25	20	0
Catholic	47	12	34	53	35	18	0
Unaffiliated	56	16	40	42	31	12	2
Northeast	54	17	37	46	30	17	0
Midwest	59	18	41	41	27	14	0
South	58	18	40	42	29	13	1
West	46	12	33	53	39	14	1

Note: Based on teens who attend public or private school (but not those who are home-schooled). Figures may not add to 100% or to subtotals indicated due to rounding.

Source: Survey conducted March 29-April 14, 2019, among U.S. teenagers ages 13-17. "For a Lot of American Teens, Religion Is a Regular Part of the Public School Day"

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Christians and religious "nones," boys and girls, and older and younger teens are all about equally likely to witness bullying in school. Teens who live in the Midwest (59%) and the South (58%) are somewhat more likely than those in the West (46%) to say they see other students being teased or made fun of in school with any regularity. But, on the whole, there is little variation in how often students in these various demographic categories report witnessing bullying.

<sup>12</sup> The analyses here are expanded to include private schools because research shows that bullying is not limited to public schools. And, even when examining religiously motivated bullying, there are not the same concerns about conflating the type of school a teen attends (e.g. religious private school) with the potential types of unfriendliness toward religion that he or she may experience in that setting. See Choy, Susan P. 1997. "Public and Private Schools: How Do They Differ?" National Center for Education Statistics.

While many teens in both public and private schools observe bullying in their school, fewer say that they see other students being teased or made fun of *because of their religion*, specifically. In fact, six-in-ten (58%) say they never witness this type of behavior, and 28% say they rarely see it. One-in-ten say that they sometimes see religiously motivated bullying in their school (11%), and 2% see this often.

On this question, mainline Protestants stand out from other religious groups as being the least likely to say that they regularly see religious bullying in their school. Just 3% say they witness this behavior at least sometimes, compared with 11% among religious “nones,” 13% among Catholic teens and 17% among evangelicals. Evangelical teens are the least likely to say that they never see religious bullying in their school (48%).

Across many demographic groups, most school-attending teens rarely, if ever, see other students being bullied for their religion. There are virtually no differences between boys and girls, younger and older teens, or across regions on this question.

## Most teens rarely or never witness religiously motivated bullying in their school

% of U.S. teenagers ages 13-17 who say they \_\_\_\_\_ see students in their school being teased or made fun of *because of their religion*

	NET Often/ sometimes %	Often %	Sometimes %	NET Rarely/ never %	Rarely %	Never %	No answer %
<b>Total</b>	13	2	11	86	28	58	<1=100
Affiliated	14	2	12	85	29	56	<1
Christian	14	2	12	86	30	55	1
Protestant	14	2	13	85	32	53	<1
Evangelical	17	2	15	82	35	48	1
Mainline	3	0	3	96	36	61	1
Catholic	13	3	10	86	26	60	1
Unaffiliated	11	2	8	89	26	63	0
Northeast	10	2	7	90	26	65	<1
Midwest	11	2	9	89	33	56	<1
South	16	2	14	84	29	55	1
West	14	3	11	86	25	61	<1

Note: Based on teens who attend public or private school (but not those who are home-schooled). Figures may not add to 100% or to subtotals indicated due to rounding.

Source: Survey conducted March 29-April 14, 2019, among U.S. teenagers ages 13-17. “For a Lot of American Teens, Religion Is a Regular Part of the Public School Day”

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Among public or private school students who are affiliated with a religious tradition, roughly one-in-ten say that they, personally, have ever been teased or made fun of in school because of their religion.<sup>13</sup>

Just 1% of mainline Protestant teens say they have ever been bullied in school for their religion, compared with 10% of evangelicals and 9% of Catholic teens who say the same.

There are few discernible differences on this question among religiously affiliated teens by gender, age, and race

and ethnicity. Roughly one-in-ten or fewer in each demographic group say they have personally been teased or made fun of in school because of their religion.

Unaffiliated teens were asked a similar question about being teased for their *lack* of religion. Among students who identify religiously as atheist, agnostic or “nothing in particular,” very few (4%) say they have personally experienced bullying in school because they are not religious.

## Few teens subject to religious bullying in their school

% of U.S. teenagers ages 13-17 who say they have been \_\_\_\_\_ teased or made fun of *because of their religion*

	NET Yes, teased because of religion				No, not teased because of religion	
	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	No answer	No answer	
Affiliated	9	1	5	3	91	<1=100
Christian	8	1	4	3	92	<1
Protestant	6	1	4	2	93	<1
<i>Evangelical</i>	10	1	6	3	90	<1
<i>Mainline</i>	1	0	1	1	99	0
Catholic	9	1	4	4	91	0

Note: Based on teens with a religious affiliation who attend public or private school (but not those who are home-schooled). “Rarely” figures include those who said they have been teased because of their religion but did not answer how often. Figures may not add to 100% or to subtotals indicated due to rounding.

Source: Survey conducted March 29-April 14, 2019, among U.S. teenagers ages 13-17. “For a Lot of American Teens, Religion Is a Regular Part of the Public School Day”

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<sup>13</sup> Much of the research on religion-related bullying focuses on minority religions, such as Judaism and Islam in the United States. This report, however, does not analyze responses from Jewish or Muslim teens separately due to insufficient sample sizes. Jewish and Muslim teens (and those from other religious groups) are included in the full sample and in the analysis of religiously affiliated teens. See Dupper, David R., Shandra Forrest-Bank and Autumn Lowry-Carusillo. 2015. “[Experiences of Religious Minorities in Public School Settings: Findings from Focus Groups Involving Muslim, Jewish, Catholic, and Unitarian Universalist Youths](#).” Children & Schools.

The survey also asked teens whether other students have been “unfriendly” to their religious or spiritual views. Those who said “yes” then had the opportunity to explain, in their own words, how this has occurred, with the goal of getting more details about any religiously motivated bullying that teens may be facing in school.

Overall, about one-in-ten of all school-attending adolescents report that other students have been unfriendly toward their religious views. And they give a wide range of responses to demonstrate just what they are experiencing from their peers.

Some religiously affiliated students say they have been bullied for their religious beliefs (3%). They report some general examples, such as other students “making fun of my religion,” “they make fun of me going to church” or “they think I attend church too much.” Other teens give examples of more specific comments they have experienced, such as “someone told me that they used to think I was intelligent until they found out I believed in God” and “[they] made fun of Catholics.”

A similar share of religiously unaffiliated students (4%) give examples of how they feel bullied for their *lack* of religious beliefs. They report that their peers “[say] that I was the reason the country is going downhill” and that “they say I’ll go to hell for not believing in [G]od.”

Equally small shares of both affiliated and unaffiliated teens (1% each) note that they have lost friends or felt distanced from former friends due to different beliefs.

### About one-in-ten affiliated, unaffiliated teens say other students have been unfriendly to their religious beliefs

*In what ways have other students been unfriendly to your religious or spiritual views?*

	Total %	Affiliated %	Unaffiliated %
Bullied for religious beliefs	2	3	0
Being mean or made fun of in general	2	2	1
Bullied for lack of religious beliefs	1	0	4
Called wrong/challenged on truth of religious beliefs	1	2	0
No longer friends/left out due to different beliefs	1	1	1
Other students try to force their views/feel preached to	<1	<1	1
Negative or inaccurate comments made about beliefs	<1	<1	0
Called wrong/challenged on truth of irreligious beliefs	<1	0	<1
Other/not interpretable	1	1	0
No answer	1	1	<1
<b>No, other students have not been unfriendly</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>92</b>
<b>No answer to whether students have been unfriendly</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Note: Based on teens who attend public or private school (but not those who are home-schooled). Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Source: Survey conducted March 29-April 14, 2019, among U.S. teenagers ages 13-17.

“For a Lot of American Teens, Religion Is a Regular Part of the Public School Day”

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

School-attending teens are slightly less likely to say that *teachers* have been unfriendly toward their religious or spiritual views than they are to say the same about other *students* (5% vs. 9%). Those who report that they have experienced this type of behavior by a teacher cite a variety of circumstances and ways in which it has happened.

Some teens who belong to a religion offer responses that indicate a teacher challenged the students' religious beliefs, including questioning a student's intelligence (2%). These teens report experiences such as, "I had a life science teacher once talk for 30 minutes about why religion is stupid and a joke" and "they've made fun of me and not supported me in going to my before school scripture study class."

At the other end of the spectrum, some teens who identify as religious "nones" report animosity toward their views from teachers who the teens perceive as promoting their own beliefs (2%). One student recalls a teacher "posting pro Christianity posters in [the] classroom, making negative comments about those who don't worship Christianity." Another says: "A few teachers kinda force me to believe that [G]od is real."

## Few teens have experienced teachers being unfriendly to their religion

*In what ways have teachers been unfriendly to your religious or spiritual views?*

	Total %	Affiliated %	Unaffiliated %
Teachers challenge students' religious beliefs	1	2	0
Hold different social views, political or religious beliefs	1	1	<1
Teachers promote own beliefs in classroom	1	0	2
Teachers don't allow certain religious conversations/ expressions	1	1	<1
General feelings of being judged/mocked	<1	<1	1
Students feel judged for religious beliefs	<1	1	0
Teachers show favoritism toward students who share their beliefs	<1	<1	1
Students feel teachers are unfair in work assignments/ grades due to different beliefs	<1	<1	0
Students feel judged for lack of religious beliefs	<1	0	<1
Teachers challenge students' lack of religious beliefs	<1	<1	<1
Teachers haven't been unfriendly	<1	<1	0
Other/not interpretable	1	1	0
No answer	1	1	<1
<b>No, teachers have not been unfriendly</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>95</b>
<b>No answer to whether teachers have been unfriendly</b>	<b><u>1</u></b>	<b><u>1</u></b>	<b><u>&lt;1</u></b>
	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Note: Based on teens who attend public or private school (but not those who are home-schooled). Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Source: Survey conducted March 29-April 14, 2019, among U.S. teenagers ages 13-17. "For a Lot of American Teens, Religion Is a Regular Part of the Public School Day"

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The survey also asked students a more general question: Has a teacher ever said anything about religion that made you feel uncomfortable? About one-in-ten students say they have experienced this type of discomfort in their schools, with some small distinctions between those who have a religion and those who do not.

Some religiously affiliated students share examples of teachers challenging religious beliefs, even if they were not personally challenging the respondent: “[The teachers said] that God was made believe and religion was to control the masses” and “taught us multiple religions as if they were all true.” At the same time, some students who identify as religious “nones” note their discomfort when they perceive teachers as promoting particular religious

beliefs. For instance, one teen reports that teachers have “brought the [Ten Commandments] to class and preached.” Some expound on why a teacher’s comments were unacceptable: “This teacher was heavily promoting having a relationship with God as being the most important thing in life and I didn’t think that was appropriate to express while teaching an unrelated subject.”

## One-in-ten teenage students report teachers making them uncomfortable with comments about religion

*Can you tell us more about what a teacher said about religion that made you feel uncomfortable?*

	Total %	Affiliated %	Unaffiliated %
Teachers challenge religious beliefs, including making fun	2	3	1
Teachers promote own religious beliefs	1	<1	3
Teachers discuss their own beliefs in general, engage in debates with students	1	1	1
Teachers promote secular worldview in context of science, social or political issues	1	1	<1
Teachers challenge irreligious beliefs, including making fun	<1	<1	1
Forced religion (e.g. prayer, music)	<1	<1	1
Teachers promote religious worldview in context of science, social or political issues	<1	<1	<1
Teachers promote own irreligious beliefs	<1	<1	0
Other/not interpretable	1	1	<1
No answer	1	2	1
<b>No, teachers have not made teen uncomfortable</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>92</b>
<b>No answer to whether teachers have made teen uncomfortable</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Note: Based on teens who attend public or private school (but not those who are home-schooled). Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Source: Survey conducted March 29-April 14, 2019, among U.S. teenagers ages 13-17. “For a Lot of American Teens, Religion Is a Regular Part of the Public School Day”

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## Teenage friendships and religion

According to sociologists, religion is usually a social phenomenon, taking place among a community of believers.<sup>14</sup> People affect – and are affected by – the religious and spiritual beliefs and activities of their friends and family. Contemporary research points to the idea that social interactions promote and maintain religious worldviews.<sup>15</sup> And among teenagers, too, there is evidence that the friendships adolescents form in school influence their religious trajectories.<sup>16</sup>

Indeed, most teens have at least some friends who share their religion (or lack thereof). Overall, only about a quarter (27%) say that “hardly any” or “none” of their friends share their religion – or, in the case of unaffiliated respondents, that “hardly any” or “none” of their friends are atheist, agnostic, or have no particular religion. Three-in-ten teens report that most or all of their friends share their religion, and even more (43%) say some of their friends share their religious identity.

### Affiliated teens more likely to have religiously similar friends

*% of U.S. teenagers ages 13-17 who say \_\_\_\_\_ of their close friends share their religion/lack of religion*

	All/ most %	Some %	Hardly any/ none %	No answer 1=100
<b>Total</b>	30	43	27	1=100
Affiliated	36	42	21	<1
Christian	37	43	19	<1
Protestant	35	43	21	1
<i>Evangelical</i>	39	41	19	1
<i>Mainline</i>	36	47	16	1
Catholic	39	46	15	1
Unaffiliated	16	44	38	2
Boys	27	44	28	1
Girls	33	42	25	1

Note: Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding. No answer includes one respondent who should have received the question but did not due to backcoding.

Source: Survey conducted March 29-April 14, 2019, among U.S. teenagers ages 13-17.

“For a Lot of American Teens, Religion Is a Regular Part of the Public School Day”

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

There is good reason to expect that this should vary by religion. Most Americans identify as Christians of some kind, meaning it may be harder for nonreligious adolescents to find friends who are like them, religiously. That is borne out by the data: Religiously affiliated teens as a whole are roughly twice as likely as religious “nones” (36% vs. 16%) to report that most or all of their friends share their religion (or lack thereof). About four-in-ten unaffiliated teens (38%) say that

<sup>14</sup> The social nature of religion is a key theme in social scientific research. This is perhaps most famously associated with the work of the sociologist Emile Durkheim. Durkheim argued that interaction among co-religionists creates and reinforces religion by fostering solidarity through the creation and veneration of shared symbols. See Durkheim, Emile. 1912. “The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life.”

<sup>15</sup> Stroope, Samuel. 2012. “[Social Networks and Religion: The Role of Congregational Social Embeddedness in Religious Belief and Practice.](#)” *Sociology of Religion*.

<sup>16</sup> Cheadle, Jacob E. and Philip Schwadel. 2012. “[The ‘Friendship Dynamics of Religion,’ or the ‘Religious Dynamics of Friendship’? A Social Network Analysis of Adolescents Who Attend Small Schools.](#)” *Social Science Research*.



hardly any or none of their friends are, like them, atheist, agnostic or “nothing in particular” when it comes to religion.

Among adults, some religious groups are more likely than others to have friendship networks that reflect their own beliefs or affiliations.<sup>17</sup> Protestants, for example, are overall less likely than Catholics, members of non-Christian faiths and religious “nones” to have interreligious social connections. But, unlike adults, Protestant adolescents are no more likely than Catholic teens to say that most or all of their friends share their religion.<sup>18</sup>

Aside from religious affiliation, region, age and grade play few, if any, statistically significant roles in the religious makeup of adolescents’ social networks. But gender is a factor. A third of girls (33%) report that most or all of their friends share their religious identity, making them moderately more likely than boys (27%) to be in that situation.

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<sup>17</sup> Smith, Christian. 1998. “American Evangelicalism: Embattled and Thriving.”

<sup>18</sup> For the research on interreligious social connections by religious group, see Scheitle, Christopher P. and Buster G. Smith. 2011. “[A Note on the Frequency and Sources of Close Interreligious Ties](#).” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*.

## Most teens do not regularly talk to friends about religion

For most teens, religion is not a regular topic of conversation with friends. Roughly two-thirds (64%) say they rarely or never talk to their friends about religion. Still, a sizable minority of American teenagers (36%) say they sometimes or often talk with friends about religion.

Not surprisingly, religious teens are particularly likely to engage in these kinds of discussions. Almost half (45%) of religiously affiliated teens report that they regularly (that is, “sometimes” or “often”) talk to their friends about religion. Conversely, only 17% of unaffiliated teens at least sometimes talk to their friends about religion.

But there also are differences among religiously affiliated teens. A majority of evangelical Protestant teens (58%) regularly talk to their friends about religion, compared with about four-in-ten mainline Protestant teens (39%) and roughly a third of Catholics (35%).

In addition to religious affiliation, gender and region also are related factors. Four-in-ten girls (41%) report sometimes or often talking to their friends about religion; just three-in-ten boys (31%) say the same.

Adolescents in the South are particularly likely to talk to their friends about religion. About four-in-ten Southern teens (41%) report doing so at least sometimes, while smaller shares in the West (31%) and Northeast (29%) say the same.

There are fewer differences across age, grade, and race and ethnicity in how frequently teens report talking with friends about religion.

## Evangelical Protestant teens especially likely to talk to friends about religion

*% of U.S. teenagers ages 13-17 who talk to their friends about religion ...*

	Often/ sometimes %	Rarely/ never %	No answer %
<b>Total</b>	36	64	1=100
Affiliated	45	55	<1
Christian	45	54	<1
Protestant	51	49	<1
<i>Evangelical</i>	58	41	1
<i>Mainline</i>	39	61	0
Catholic	35	65	<1
Unaffiliated	17	82	1
Boys	31	68	1
Girls	41	59	<1
Northeast	29	71	<1
Midwest	37	63	<1
South	41	58	1
West	31	68	<1

Note: Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Source: Survey conducted March 29-April 14, 2019, among U.S. teenagers ages 13-17.

“For a Lot of American Teens, Religion Is a Regular Part of the Public School Day”

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## Methodology

The analysis of adolescents in this report is based on a self-administered web survey conducted from March 29 to April 14, 2019, among a sample of 1,811 dyads, with each dyad – or pair – comprised of one U.S. adolescent ages 13 to 17 and one parent per adolescent. The margin of sampling error for the full sample of 1,811 teens is plus or minus 3.1 percentage points.

The survey was conducted by Ipsos in English and Spanish. Ipsos sampled households with adolescents ages 13 to 17 from its KnowledgePanel, a probability-based web panel designed to be representative of the United States. A parent panelist and one teen ages 13 to 17 in the household participated. Households were provided with access to the internet and hardware if needed.

A random sample of 4,588 panel members with children ages 13 to 17 in their homes was drawn from the KnowledgePanel. Of the sampled panelists, 2,176 (excluding breakoffs) responded to the invitation and 1,819 qualified for the survey,<sup>19</sup> yielding a study completion rate of 47.4% and a qualification rate of 83.6%. The recruitment rate for this study, reported by Ipsos, was 11.5% and the profile rate was 59.7%, for a cumulative response rate of 3.3%. Once the parent panelist qualified, they were asked for permission to interview their teen upon the completion of the parent portion of the survey. When the parent portion was complete, the parent was instructed to hand the survey off to the teen they had previously been asked about.

KnowledgePanel’s recruitment process was originally based exclusively on a national random-digit dial (RDD) sampling methodology. In 2009, Ipsos migrated to an address-based sampling (ABS) recruitment methodology via the U.S. Postal Service’s Delivery Sequence File (DSF). The U.S. Postal Service’s Delivery Sequence File has been estimated to cover as much as 98% of the population, although some studies suggest that the coverage could be in the low 90% range.<sup>20</sup>

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### Parent weighting dimensions

Variable	Benchmark source
Age by gender	2018 March Supplement of the Current Population Survey (CPS)
Education	
Race/Hispanic origin	
Region by metropolitan status	
Household income	
Household size	
Language proficiency	2017 American Community Survey (ACS)

Note: Estimates from the ACS are based on non-institutionalized adults.

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<sup>19</sup> Eight of these cases were excluded due to refusing to answer more than one-third of the substantive survey questions.

<sup>20</sup> AAPOR Task Force on Address-based Sampling. 2016. “AAPOR Report: Address-based Sampling.”

## Weighting

The teen data was weighted in a multistep process that begins with base design weights that reflect each parent's probability of selection. These parent weights were then raked to match the demographic distribution of parents with teens ages 13 to 17. The teen weights were then further adjusted to reflect each teen's probability of selection out of all eligible teens in their household. Finally, the weights were raked to match the demographic distribution for all teens ages 13 to 17.

Sampling errors and tests of statistical significance take into account the effect of weighting.

In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error into the findings of opinion polls.

The following tables show the unweighted sample sizes and the error attributable to sampling that would be expected at the 95% level of confidence for different groups in the survey:

Teen Group	Unweighted sample size	Plus or minus ...
Total teen sample	1,811	3.1 percentage points
All religiously affiliated teens	1,246	3.7 percentage points
Christian	1,179	3.9 percentage points
Protestant	680	5.2 percentage points
Evangelical	407	6.6 percentage points
Mainline	208	9.0 percentage points
Catholic	428	6.4 percentage points
Unaffiliated	555	5.7 percentage points

## Teen weighting dimensions

Variable	Benchmark source
Age by gender	2018 March Supplement of the Current Population Survey (CPS)
Race/Hispanic origin	
Region by metropolitan status	
Household income	
Household size	
Language proficiency	2017 American Community Survey (ACS)

Note: Estimates from the ACS are based on non-institutionalized adults.

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<b>Teen Group</b>	<b>Unweighted sample size</b>	<b>Plus or minus ...</b>
Boys	912	4.4 percentage points
Girls	888	4.5 percentage points
Ages 13-14	701	5.0 percentage points
15-17	1,101	4.0 percentage points
White, non-Hispanic	1,022	4.1 percentage points
NET Nonwhite	777	4.8 percentage points
<i>Current grade level</i>		
8th grade or lower	562	5.7 percentage points
9th-10th grade	713	5.0 percentage points
11th-12th grade	515	5.8 percentage points
Northeast	289	7.7 percentage points
Midwest	454	6.3 percentage points
South	606	5.4 percentage points
West	462	6.2 percentage points

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Sample sizes and sampling errors for other subgroups are available upon request.

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