

FOR RELEASE JAN. 4, 2021

# Faith on the Hill

*The religious composition of the 117th Congress*

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**RECOMMENDED CITATION**

Pew Research Center, Jan. 4, 2021, "Faith on the Hill:  
The religious composition of the 117th Congress"

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## How we did this

Every two years, Pew Research Center publishes a report on the religious affiliation of members of the incoming Congress. This report is the seventh in the series, which started with the 111th Congress that began in 2009.

Data on members of Congress comes from CQ Roll Call, which surveys members about their demographic characteristics, including religious affiliation. Pew Research Center researchers then code the data so that Congress can be compared with U.S. adults overall. For example, members of Congress who tell CQ Roll Call they are “Southern Baptists” are coded as “Baptists” – a broader category (including Southern Baptists as well as other Baptists) used for analysis of the general public.

Data in this report covers members of Congress sworn in on Jan. 3, 2021. One contested election, in New York’s 22nd District, was uncalled by the start of the new Congress. Congressman-elect [Luke J. Letlow](#) of Louisiana’s 5th District died before the swearing-in; his seat will go unfilled until a March [special election](#). One representative, Mariannette Miller-Meeke of Iowa, was [sworn in provisionally](#) on Jan. 3; she is included in this analysis. In addition, both of Georgia’s Senate seats were subject to runoff elections set to take place Jan. 5, 2021. Therefore, this analysis includes 531 members of Congress, rather than 535.

Data for all U.S. adults comes from aggregated Pew Research Center political surveys conducted on the telephone from January 2018 through July 2019 and summarized in the report “[In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace](#).” Figures for Protestant subgroups and Unitarians come from the Center’s [2014 U.S. Religious Landscape Study](#), conducted June 4 to Sept. 30, 2014, among more than 35,000 Americans. For more information about how Pew Research Center measures the religious composition of the U.S., see [here](#).

## Acknowledgments

This report was produced by Pew Research Center with data collected by CQ Roll Call. Pew Research Center is solely responsible for the interpretation and reporting of the data. Find related reports online at [pewresearch.org/religion](http://pewresearch.org/religion).

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# Faith on the Hill

## *The religious composition of the 117th Congress*

When it comes to religious affiliation, the 117th U.S. Congress looks similar to the previous Congress but quite different from Americans overall.

While about a quarter (26%) of U.S. adults are religiously unaffiliated – describing themselves as atheist, agnostic or “nothing in particular” – just one member of the new Congress (Sen. Kyrsten Sinema, D-Ariz.) identifies as religiously unaffiliated (0.2%).

Nearly nine-in-ten members of Congress identify as Christian (88%), compared with two-thirds of the general public (65%). Congress is both more heavily Protestant (55% vs. 43%) and more heavily Catholic (30% vs. 20%) than the U.S. adult population overall.

Members of Congress also are older, on average, than U.S. adults overall. At the start of the 116th Congress, the average representative was 57.6 years old, and the average senator was 62.9 years old.<sup>1</sup> Pew Research Center surveys have found that adults in that age range are more likely to be Christian than the general public (74% of Americans ages 50 to 64 are Christian, compared with 65% of all Americans ages 18 and older). Still, Congress is more

## In new Congress, nearly nine-in-ten describe themselves as Christian

Religion	Number in Congress	% of Congress	% of U.S. adults
Christian	468	88.1	65
Protestant	294	55.4	43
Baptist	66	12.4	15
Methodist	35	6.6	5
Anglican/Episcopal	26	4.9	1
Presbyterian	24	4.5	2
Lutheran	22	4.1	4
Congregationalist	3	0.6	1
Nondenom. Protestant	12	2.3	6
Pentecostal	2	0.4	5
Restorationist	4	0.8	2
Adventist	2	0.4	1
Reformed	1	0.2	<1
Pietist	1	0.2	<1
Unspecified/other	96	18.1	5
Catholic	158	29.8	20
Mormon	9	1.7	2
Orthodox Christian	7	1.3	<1
Jewish	33	6.2	2
Buddhist	2	0.4	1
Muslim	3	0.6	1
Hindu	2	0.4	1
Unitarian Universalist	3	0.6	<1
Unaffiliated	1	0.2	26
Other	1	0.2	3
Don't know/refused	<u>18</u>	<u>3.4</u>	<u>2</u>
<b>Total</b>	<b>531*</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

\*Several seats were unfilled at the beginning of the 117th Congress: two Senate seats in Georgia, one House seat in New York and one House seat in Louisiana.

Note: Figures may not add to 100% or to subtotals due to rounding. General public figures for Protestant subgroups do not sum to total indicated because the figures come from two different sources.

Source: Figures for Congress based on Pew Research Center analysis of data collected by CQ Roll Call, reflecting members of Congress to be sworn in on Jan. 3, 2021. Figures for U.S. adults based on aggregated Pew Research Center political surveys conducted in 2018 and 2019. Figures for Protestant subgroups and Unitarians come from Pew Research Center's 2014 U.S. Religious Landscape Study, conducted June 4-Sept. 30, 2014.

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<sup>1</sup> See Manning, Jennifer E. 2020. “[Membership of the 116th Congress: A Profile.](#)” Congressional Research Service.

heavily Christian even than U.S. adults ages 50 to 64, by a margin of 14 percentage points.<sup>2</sup>

Over the last several Congresses, there has been a marked increase in the share of members who identify themselves simply as Protestants or as Christians without further specifying a denomination. There are now 96 members of Congress in this category (18%). In the 111th Congress, the first for which Pew Research Center [analyzed the religious affiliation of members of Congress](#), 39 members described themselves this way (7%). Meanwhile, the share of all U.S. adults in this category has held relatively steady.

Over the same period, the total *number* of Protestants in Congress has remained relatively stable: There were 295 Protestants in the 111th Congress, and there are 294 today. The increase in Protestants who do not specify a denomination has corresponded with a decrease in members who *do* identify with denominational families, such as Presbyterians, Episcopalians and Methodists.

Still, members of those three Protestant subgroups remain overrepresented in Congress compared with their share in the general public, while some other groups are underrepresented – including Pentecostals (0.4% of Congress vs. 5% of all U.S. adults), nondenominational Protestants (2% vs. 6%) and Baptists (12% vs. 15%).<sup>3</sup>

Jewish members also make up a larger share of Congress than they do of the general public (6% vs. 2%). The shares of most other non-Christian groups analyzed in this report (Buddhists, Muslims, Hindus and Unitarian Universalists) more closely match their percentages in the general public.

Nearly all non-Christian members of Congress are Democrats. Just three of the 261 Republicans who were sworn in on Jan. 3 (1%) do not identify as Christian; two are Jewish, and one declined to state a religious affiliation.

These are some of the key findings of an analysis by Pew Research Center of CQ Roll Call data on the religious affiliations of members of Congress, gathered through questionnaires and follow-up phone calls to candidates' and members' offices.<sup>4</sup> The CQ questionnaire asks members what religious group, if any, they belong to. It does not attempt to measure their religious beliefs or

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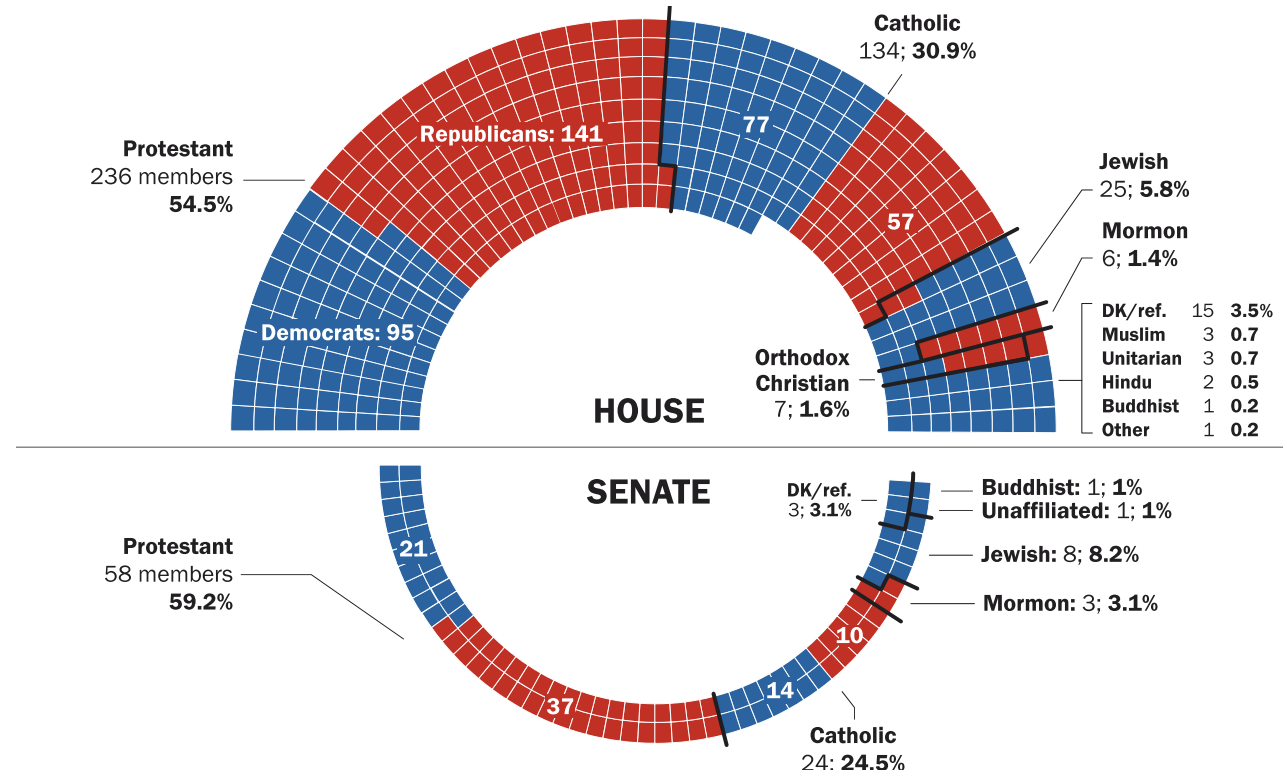
<sup>2</sup> See Pew Research Center's 2019 report, "[In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at a Rapid Pace.](#)"

<sup>3</sup> Nondenominational Protestants are those who specifically describe themselves this way. This category is distinct from "unspecified/other" Protestants, who give general, sometimes vague answers about their Christian affiliation, such as "just a Christian," "evangelical Protestant" or "evangelical Christian."

<sup>4</sup> In this report, Congress is defined as both the Senate and the House of Representatives. Nonvoting delegates who represent U.S. territories and the District of Columbia are not counted in this analysis. They are: Aumua Amata Coleman Radewagen, R-American Samoa; Michael San Nicolas, D-Guam; Jenniffer González-Colón, R-Puerto Rico; Eleanor Holmes Norton, D-D.C.; Stacey Plaskett, D-Virgin Islands; and Gregorio Kilili Camacho Sablan, I-Northern Mariana Islands. All are Catholic except Norton (who is Anglican/Episcopalian) and Plaskett (who is Lutheran).

practices. The Pew Research Center analysis compares the religious affiliations of members of Congress with the Center’s survey data on the U.S. public.

**The religious makeup of the 117th Congress**



\*Several seats were unfilled at the beginning of the 117th Congress: two Senate seats in Georgia, one House seat in New York and one House seat in Louisiana.

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

Source: Figures for Congress based on Pew Research Center analysis of data collected by CQ Roll Call, reflecting members of Congress to be sworn in on Jan. 3, 2021.

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## Little change between 116th and 117th Congresses for most religious groups

The overall composition of the new Congress is similar to that of the previous Congress – in part because 464 of the 531 members of the 117th Congress (87%) are returning members.

Methodists saw the largest loss – seven seats – followed closely by Baptists (six seats) and Catholics (five seats). There also are four fewer Lutherans in the 117th Congress than there were in the 116th. By contrast, Protestants who do not specify a denomination are up substantially, gaining 16 seats in the 117th Congress after also gaining 16 seats two years ago, when the 116th took office. Protestants in the Restorationist family also gained three seats (all members of Congress in this category identify with the Churches of Christ).<sup>5</sup>

In total, there currently are three fewer Christians in the new Congress than there were in the previous Congress,

although this gap is all but certain to narrow once three of the four open seats are filled. Five of the

## 117th Congress looks very similar to 116th

Religion	116th Congress		117th Congress		Change Number
	Number	%	Number	%	
Christian	471	88.2	468	88.1	-3
Protestant	293	54.9	294	55.4	+1
Baptist	72	13.5	66	12.4	-6
Methodist	42	7.9	35	6.6	-7
Anglican/Episcopal	26	4.9	26	4.9	0
Presbyterian	26	4.9	24	4.5	-2
Lutheran	26	4.9	22	4.1	-4
Congregationalist	4	0.7	3	0.6	-1
Nondenom. Protestant	10	1.9	12	2.3	+2
Pentecostal	2	0.4	2	0.4	0
Restorationist	1	0.2	4	0.8	+3
Adventist	2	0.4	2	0.4	0
Holiness	1	0.2	0	0	-1
Reformed	1	0.2	1	0.2	0
Pietist	0	0	1	0.2	+1
Unspecified/other	80	15.0	96	18.1	+16
Catholic	163	30.5	158	29.8	-5
Mormon	10	1.9	9	1.7	-1
Orthodox Christian	5	0.9	7	1.3	+2
Jewish	34	6.4	33	6.2	-1
Buddhist	2	0.4	2	0.4	0
Muslim	3	0.6	3	0.6	0
Hindu	3	0.6	2	0.4	-1
Unitarian Universalist	2	0.4	3	0.6	+1
Unaffiliated	1	0.2	1	0.2	0
Other	0	0	1	0.2	+1
Don't know/refused	<u>18</u>	<u>3.4</u>	<u>18</u>	<u>3.4</u>	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>534</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>531</b>	<b>100</b>	

\*Several seats were unfilled at the beginning of the 117th Congress: two Senate seats in Georgia, one House seat in New York and one House seat in Louisiana.

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

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<sup>5</sup> Of the three new Restorationist members of Congress, two are freshmen and one, Rep. Lance Gooden, R-Texas, was incorrectly listed as a Congregationalist in the last report due to a coding error.



six candidates in the uncalled or outstanding races identify as Christians; Jon Ossoff, a Democrat running for Senate in Georgia, is Jewish.<sup>6</sup>

When it comes to the 63 members of Congress who are not Christian, a slim majority (33) are Jewish, a number that has held relatively steady over the past several Congresses.

The next largest non-Christian group is made up of those who declined to specify a religious affiliation. There are 18 people in this category in the 117th Congress, the same as in the 116th, which had seen an increase of eight members in this group.

The three Muslim representatives from the 116th Congress return for the 117th: Reps. André Carson, D-Ind.; Ilhan Omar, D-Minn.; and Rashida Tlaib, D-Mich. Similarly, both Buddhists from the previous Congress return: Georgia Democratic Rep. Hank Johnson and Hawaii Democratic Sen. Mazie Hirono.

Unitarian Universalists gained one seat, as Rep. Deborah K. Ross, D-N.C., joins California Democratic Reps. Ami Bera and Judy Chu.

There are now two Hindus in Congress – Rep. Ro Khanna, D-Calif., and Rep. Raja Krishnamoorthi, D-Ill., both returning members. Former Rep. Tulsi Gabbard, D-Hawaii, who served in the 115th and 116th Congresses, ran for president in 2020 and withdrew her reelection bid for her House seat. She is replaced by Kai Kahele, who declined to specify a religious affiliation.

One member, California Democratic Rep. Jared Huffman, [describes himself as a humanist](#). He is listed in the “other” category. Fewer than [three-tenths of 1% of U.S. adults](#) specifically call themselves humanists.

Sinema is the only member of the 117th Congress who identifies as religiously unaffiliated. Both Sinema and Huffman have said they do not consider themselves atheists.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Republican Congressman-elect [Luke J. Letlow](#) of Louisiana died Dec. 29 before he could be sworn in. His seat will be filled in a [special election](#) set for March 20.

<sup>7</sup> Former Rep. Pete Stark, D-Calif., publicly stated that he did not believe in God and [identified as Unitarian](#). Otherwise, no members of Congress in recent decades have publicly declared themselves atheists.

## Differences by chamber

Most members of the House and Senate are Christians, with the House just slightly more Christian than the Senate (88% vs. 87%). And both chambers have a Protestant majority – 55% of representatives are Protestant, as are 59% of senators.

Within Protestantism, the largest differences are in Presbyterians (3% in the House vs. 12% in the Senate) and Protestants who do not specify a denomination (20% in the House, 11% in the Senate).

Catholics make up a larger share in the House (31%) than in the Senate (24%).

The Senate, meanwhile, has a higher share of Jewish (8% vs. 6%) and Mormon (3% vs. 1%) members than the House does.

All of the Muslims, Hindus and Unitarian Universalists in Congress are in the House, while there is one Buddhist in each chamber.

The sole religiously unaffiliated member of Congress (Sinema) is in the Senate, and the only member in the “other” category (Huffman) is in the House.

## Both chambers of Congress have Protestant majorities

Religion	—House—		—Senate—		U.S. adults
	Number	%	Number	%	%
Christian	383	88.5	85	86.7	65
Protestant	236	54.5	58	59.2	43
Baptist	55	12.7	11	11.2	15
Methodist	29	6.7	6	6.1	5
Anglican/Episcopal	20	4.6	6	6.1	1
Presbyterian	12	2.8	12	12.2	2
Lutheran	15	3.5	7	7.1	4
Congregationalist	1	0.2	2	2.0	1
Nondenom. Protestant	10	2.3	2	2.0	6
Pentecostal	2	0.5	0	0	5
Restorationist	3	0.7	1	1.0	2
Adventist	2	0.5	0	0	1
Reformed	1	0.2	0	0	<1
Pietist	1	0.2	0	0	<1
Unspecified/other	85	19.6	11	11.2	5
Catholic	134	30.9	24	24.5	20
Mormon	6	1.4	3	3.1	2
Orthodox Christian	7	1.6	0	0	<1
Jewish	25	5.8	8	8.2	2
Buddhist	1	0.2	1	1.0	1
Muslim	3	0.7	0	0	1
Hindu	2	0.5	0	0	1
Unitarian Universalist	3	0.7	0	0	<1
Unaffiliated	0	0	1	1.0	26
Other	1	0.2	0	0	3
Don't know/refused	<u>15</u>	<u>3.5</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>3.1</u>	<u>2</u>
<b>Total</b>	<b>433*</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>98*</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

\*Several seats were unfilled at the beginning of the 117th Congress: two Senate seats in Georgia, one House seat in New York and one House seat in Louisiana.

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Source: Figures for Congress based on Pew Research Center analysis of data collected by CQ Roll Call, reflecting members of Congress to be sworn in on Jan. 3, 2021. Figures for U.S. adults based on aggregated Pew Research Center political surveys conducted in 2018 and 2019. Figures for Protestant subgroups and Unitarians come from Pew Research Center's 2014 U.S. Religious Landscape Study, conducted June 4-Sept. 30, 2014.

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## Differences by party

Fully 99% of Republicans in Congress identify as Christians. There are two Jewish Republicans in the House, Reps. Lee Zeldin of New York and David Kustoff of Tennessee. New York Rep. Chris Jacobs declined to specify a religious affiliation. All other Republicans in the 117th Congress identify as Christian in some way.

Most Republican members of Congress identify as Protestants (68%). The largest Protestant groups are Baptists (15%), Methodists (6%), Presbyterians (6%), Lutherans (5%) and Episcopalians (4%). However, 26% of Republicans are Protestants who do not specify a denomination – up from 20% in the previous Congress. There are 15 Republican freshmen in this category, compared with three Democratic newcomers.

Now that Democratic Sen. Tom Udall of New Mexico has retired, all nine members of the

## Nearly all non-Christian members of Congress are Democrats

Religion	---Democrats---			---Republicans---		
	House number	Senate number	%	House number	Senate number	%
Christian	175	35	77.8	208	50	98.9
Protestant	95	21	43.0	141	37	68.2
Baptist	25	2	10.0	30	9	14.9
Methodist	17	2	7.0	12	4	6.1
Anglican/Episcopal	10	5	5.6	10	1	4.2
Presbyterian	5	4	3.3	7	8	5.7
Lutheran	7	3	3.7	8	4	4.6
Congregationalist	0	2	0.7	1	0	0.4
Nondenom. Protestant	3	0	1.1	7	2	3.4
Pentecostal	0	0	0	2	0	0.8
Restorationist	0	0	0	3	1	1.5
Adventist	2	0	0.7	0	0	0
Reformed	0	0	0	1	0	0.4
Pietist	0	0	0	1	0	0.4
Unspecified/other	26	3	10.7	59	8	25.7
Catholic	77	14	33.7	57	10	25.7
Mormon	0	0	0	6	3	3.4
Orthodox Christian	3	0	1.1	4	0	1.5
Jewish	23	8	11.5	2	0	0.8
Buddhist	1	1	0.7	0	0	0
Muslim	3	0	1.1	0	0	0
Hindu	2	0	0.7	0	0	0
Unitarian Universalist	3	0	1.1	0	0	0
Unaffiliated	0	1	0.4	0	0	0
Other	1	0	0.4	0	0	0
Don't know/refused	<u>14</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>6.3</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0.4</u>
<b>Total</b>	<b>222</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>211</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>

Note: Figures may not add to 100% or to subtotals due to rounding. Several seats were unfilled at the beginning of the 117th Congress: two Senate seats in Georgia, one House seat in New York and one House seat in Louisiana. Figures for Democrats include independents who caucus with Democrats.

Source: Figures for Congress based on Pew Research Center analysis of data collected by CQ Roll Call, reflecting members of Congress to be sworn in on Jan. 3, 2021.

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Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (sometimes called Mormons) in Congress are Republicans.<sup>8</sup>

Democrats in Congress also are heavily Christian – much more than U.S. adults overall (78% vs. 65%).<sup>9</sup> But the share of Democrats who identify as Christian is 21 percentage points lower than among Republicans (99%). Democrats are much less likely than Republicans to identify as Protestant (43% vs. 68%). Conversely, Catholics make up a higher share among Democrats than they do among Republicans (34% vs. 26%).

Among Democrats, 11% are Jewish, and 6% did not specify a religious affiliation. All of the Unitarian Universalists (3), Muslims (3), Buddhists (2) and Hindus (2) in Congress are Democrats, as are the single members in the “other” and religiously unaffiliated categories.

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<sup>8</sup> All members of Congress in this category are members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, but they are listed in the table under the broader Mormon label for comparability with U.S. adults overall. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, which used to embrace the name “Mormons,” now prefers for its full name to be used instead.

<sup>9</sup> Both independents in Congress, Sens. Angus King of Maine and Bernie Sanders of Vermont, are counted as Democrats in this analysis because they caucus with the Democrats. King is in the Anglican/Episcopal category; Sanders is Jewish.

## First-time members

While the small freshman class of the 117th Congress does little to change the overall makeup of the body, there are some notable differences in religious affiliation between incumbents and freshmen.

The freshman class is slightly *more* Christian than its incumbent counterpart. Just six of the 67 new members are not Christian: Three are Jewish, one is a Unitarian Universalist and two declined to share an affiliation.

The largest difference between newcomers and incumbents is in the share of Protestants who do not specify a denomination – 27% of freshmen are in this category, compared with 17% of incumbents. Similarly, those who specifically describe themselves as nondenominational Protestants make up 2% of incumbents and 7% of freshmen.

Among freshmen, there are two Restorationists – the same number as there are among incumbents.

## Small freshman class has little effect on overall makeup of Congress

Religion	---Incumbents---		---Freshmen---	
	Number	%	Number	%
Christian	407	87.7	61	91.0
Protestant	256	55.2	38	56.7
Baptist	61	13.1	5	7.5
Methodist	33	7.1	2	3.0
Anglican/Episcopal	23	5.0	3	4.5
Presbyterian	23	5.0	1	1.5
Lutheran	21	4.5	1	1.5
Congregationalist	3	0.6	0	0
Nondenom. Protestant	7	1.5	5	7.5
Pentecostal	2	0.4	0	0
Restorationist	2	0.4	2	3.0
Adventist	2	0.4	0	0
Reformed	1	0.2	0	0
Pietist	0	0	1	1.5
Unspecified/other	78	16.8	18	26.9
Catholic	140	30.2	18	26.9
Mormon	7	1.5	2	3.0
Orthodox Christian	4	0.9	3	4.5
Jewish	30	6.5	3	4.5
Buddhist	2	0.4	0	0
Muslim	3	0.6	0	0
Hindu	2	0.4	0	0
Unitarian Universalist	2	0.4	1	1.5
Unaffiliated	1	0.2	0	0
Other faiths	1	0.2	0	0
Don't know/refused	<u>16</u>	<u>3.4</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3.0</u>
<b>Total</b>	<b>464</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>100</b>

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

Source: Figures for Congress based on Pew Research Center analysis of data collected by CQ Roll Call, reflecting members of Congress to be sworn in on Jan. 3, 2021.

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Other Protestant subgroups are smaller among newcomers than they are among incumbents. For example, freshmen are less likely than incumbents to be Baptists (7% vs. 13%) or Methodists (3% vs. 7%).

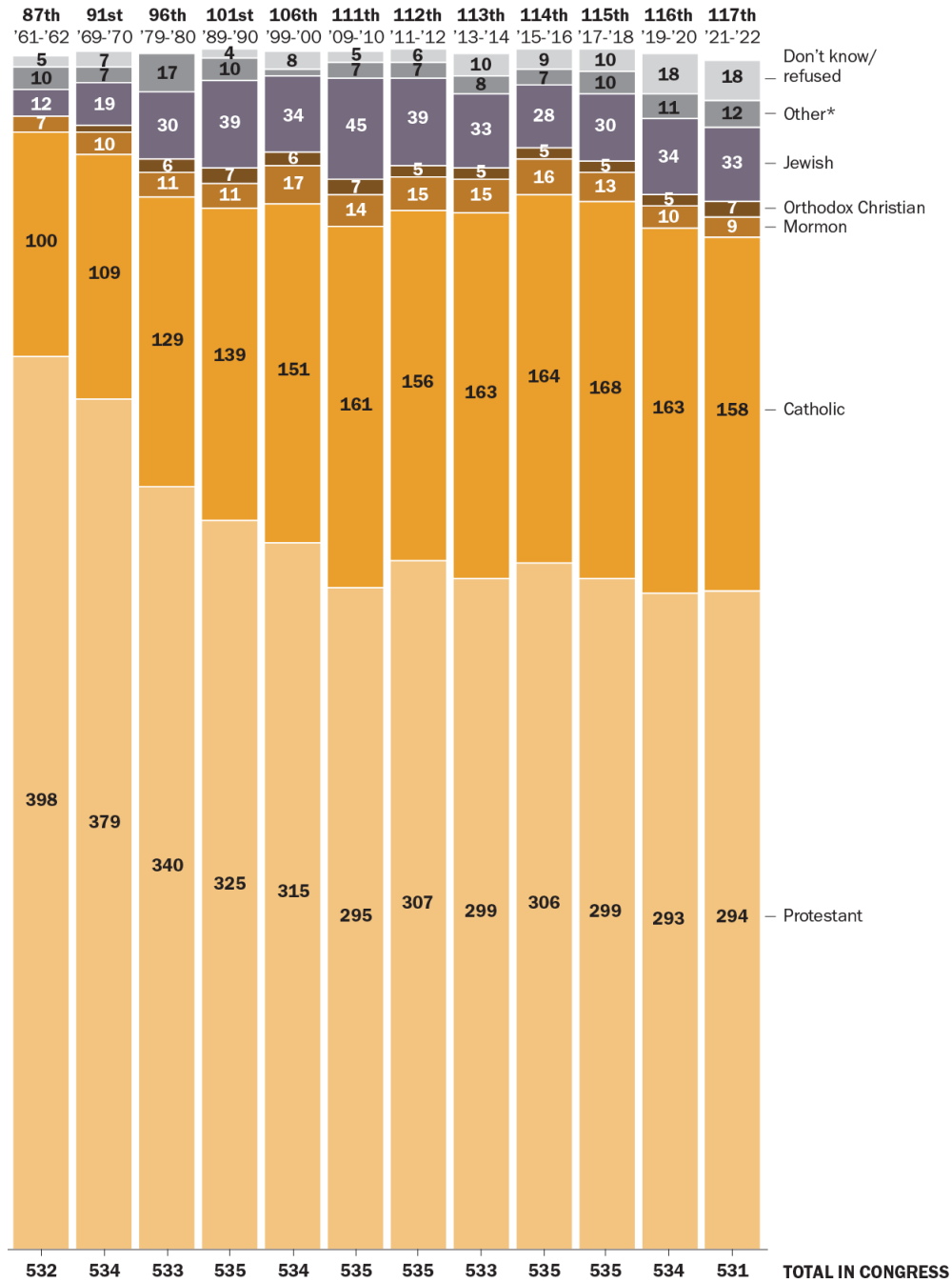
Catholics, who make up 30% of Congress and 30% of incumbents, make up a smaller share of freshmen (27%). Orthodox Christians, on the other hand, make up just 1% of incumbents and 4% of freshmen (three new members).

**Looking back**

While the U.S. population [continues to become less Christian](#), Congress has held relatively steady in recent years and has remained heavily Christian. In the 87th Congress (which began in 1961), the earliest for which aggregated religion data is available, 95% of members were Christian, which closely matched the roughly 93% of Americans who identified the same way at the time, according to [historical religion data from Gallup](#).

Since the early '60s, there has been a substantial decline in the share of U.S. adults who identify as Christian, but just a 7-point drop in the share of members of Congress who identify that way. Today, 88% of Congress is Christian, while 65% of U.S. adults are Christian, according to Pew Research Center surveys.

**Changes in the religious makeup of Congress (1961-2021)**



\*Includes Buddhists, Muslims, Hindus, Unitarian Universalists, the unaffiliated and other faiths.  
 Source: 1961 data from the Library of Congress; other data from CQ Roll Call and Pew Research Center. Figures for 117th Congress based on Pew Research Center analysis of data collected by CQ Roll Call, reflecting members of Congress to be sworn in on Jan. 3, 2021.  
 "Faith on the Hill: The religious composition of the 117th Congress"