

Study: More link Christian faith to being American

by [Adelle M. Banks](#)

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(RNS) As the U.S. has grown more diverse, more Americans believe that being a Christian is a key aspect of being "truly American," researchers say.

Purdue University scholars found that between 1996 and 2004, Americans who saw Christian identity as a "very important" attribute of being American increased from 38 percent to 49 percent.

Scholars said the findings, published in the fall issue of the journal *Sociology of Religion*, couldn't be definitively tied to a particular event but they suspect the 9/11 attacks and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan could have played a role.

"We suspect that these events accentuated the connection between Christianity and American identity by reinforcing boundaries against non-Christians and people of foreign origin," said Jeremy Brooks Straughn, co-author of the study.

"Although we can't be certain of the underlying causes, our data clearly show diverging attitudes between American Christians and their non-Christian counterparts here in the United States."

Researchers found that non-Christians and those with no religious

affiliation overwhelmingly rejected a link between being Christian and being "truly American."

The findings are based on an analysis of data from the General Social Survey, collected by the National Opinion Research Center, in which more than 1,000 respondents were queried in 1996 and 2004.

In a separate survey, Public Religion Research Institute found that 42 percent believe "America has always been and is currently a Christian nation." The survey, taken Sept. 1-14, was based on a random sample of 3,013 adults.