

Americans most friendly toward Jews, Catholics, and evangelicals

by [Cathy Lynn Grossman](#) in the [August 20, 2014](#) issue

A Pew Research [survey finds that](#) U.S. adults feel most warmly about people who share their religion or those they know as family, friends, or coworkers. Americans give the highest scores to Jews, Catholics, and evangelicals. In a zero-to-100 ‘thermometer’ scale featured in the survey, “How Americans Feel about Religious Groups,” released July 16, those three groups are nestled within a few degrees of each other: Jews, 63; Catholics, 62; evangelicals, 61.

In the middle of the chart were Buddhists, 53; Hindus, 50; and Mormons, 48. Trending toward the chilly negative zone: atheists at 41 and Muslims at 40.

Pew did the survey because “understanding the question of how religious groups view each other is valuable in a country where religion plays an important role in public life,” said Greg Smith, Pew’s associate director of religion research.

America’s largest groups—Catholics and Protestants—benefit from self-regard. Pew found that people rate their own groups higher than others. Still, the groups’ overall average scores are pulled down by those who don’t share these faiths. Catholics give themselves a score of 80 while non-Catholics give them a 58. Evangelical Christians score 79 with people who call themselves “born-again” or evangelical, but only 52 with others.

“People are somewhat polarized about evangelicals,” Smith said. The survey finds “roughly as many people give evangelicals a cold rating (27 percent) as give them a warm rating (30 percent).”

White evangelicals gave their highest score to Jews, 69. However, all that warmth is not reciprocated. Jews gave evangelicals overall a score of 34.

White evangelicals are leery of other non-Christians and downright chilly toward nonbelievers. They rank Buddhists at 39, Hindus at 38, and atheists at 25—the lowest score of any group.

Among the major findings:

- We like people we know. People who say they personally know someone from another group rated them ten to 20 points higher. That gap is widest for atheists—falling from a rating of 50 by people who know an atheist to 29 by those who say they don't. Buddhists' rating falls from 70 to 48.
- Age matters. Christian groups and Jews receive higher ratings from Americans ages 65 and older, a group that identifies overwhelmingly (85 percent) as Christian, according to Pew. But adults under age 30, with fewer self-identified Christians (59 percent), give their highest ratings to non-Christians.
- Race matters, too. Muslims receive a neutral rating from black people (49 on average), but Muslims are rated more coldly by whites (38). According to a 2011 Pew survey, 23 percent of Muslims in the United States are black. And 57 percent of black people say they know someone who is Muslim; among white people, that figure is 34 percent.

[Katherine E. Ritchey of the Pew Research Center, in an e-mail to the *Christian Century*, acknowledged that mainline Protestants were not among the eight groups asked about in the survey, though they were included among those surveyed.

Ritchey said, "We did not ask Americans to rate 'mainline Protestants' on the thermometer because it is uncertain how many Americans would understand and be familiar with the term."]

The survey was conducted between May 30 and June 30 with a nationally representative panel of 3,217 randomly selected adults—2,849 people answering the survey online and 368 responding by mail. The margin of error is plus or minus 2.2 percentage points.

The Pew results match closely with a similar "feelings thermometer" study in 2007 conducted by Robert Putnam and David Campbell for their 2010 book, *American Grace*.

Campbell, a political scientist at the University of Notre Dame, said he was struck that Pew found that "there hasn't been any real change in views on Mormons in spite of [the hit Broadway musical] *The Book of Mormon* and Mitt Romney's presidential campaign." —RNS

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