

Immigration reform no longer unites faith groups

by [Jack Jenkins](#) in the [March 9, 2022](#) issue



Migrants are seen in custody at a US Customs and Border Protection processing area under a bridge in Mission, Texas, on March 19, 2021. (AP Photo/Julio Cortez, File)

Back in 2013, creating a pathway to citizenship for millions of undocumented immigrants in the United States was the rare issue that virtually all major religious groups in the United States could agree on. The cause was so unifying that conservative evangelicals joined liberal leaders from other faiths that year to muster an unsuccessful but vibrant faith-based campaign to push Congress to pass immigration reform.

But according to a new poll from the Public Religion Research Institute, that united religious front on the issue may be a thing of the past.

In a survey released on February 3, PRRI found that, while overall support for a pathway to citizenship has remained virtually unchanged between 2013 and 2021 (63 percent to 62 percent), some faith groups have undergone notable shifts.

The most notable shift occurred among White evangelicals: in 2013, most of them (56 percent) backed a pathway to citizenship, but only 47 percent say they support it today. That makes White evangelicals the only religious group without a majority who support a pathway to citizenship,

a difference that widens when limited to those who attend religious services weekly or more (58 percent to 45 percent).

But while small downward shifts also occurred among White mainline Protestants (61 percent to 59 percent) and Hispanic Catholics (74 percent to 70 percent), some faith communities trended in the opposite direction. Black Protestants are now the most supportive religious group regarding a pathway to citizenship, rising from 70 percent in 2013 to 75 percent in 2021. Support among religiously unaffiliated Americans also increased to 69 percent from 64 percent.

Meanwhile, several major groups are now more likely to describe immigration as a “critical issue.” In 2013, it was a minority position among White evangelicals (38 percent), White Catholics (36 percent), and White mainline Protestants (32 percent). But last year, majorities of all three said they see the issue as critical, with White Catholics topping the list (57 percent).

Among White evangelicals who do view immigration as a critical issue, only 34 percent expressed support for allowing undocumented immigrants to become citizens provided they meet certain requirements. They were more receptive (41 percent) to allowing immigrants brought illegally to the United States as children to gain legal status, a policy known as Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, or DACA.

In some ways, the views of White evangelicals have remained the same. White evangelicals remain the religious group least likely to agree that the “growing number of newcomers from other countries strengthens American society,” barely shifting from 38 percent to 35 percent from 2011 to 2021.

The religiously unaffiliated, meanwhile, saw a marked shift and are now the group most likely to say immigrants strengthen society: support shot up from 65 percent to 74 percent. An even more dramatic change took place among Black Protestants: while only 48 percent agreed in 2011, 69 percent do now. —Religion News Service