

Poll: Nearly half of US wants a Christian nation

by [Jack Jenkins](#)

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Forty-five percent of Americans believe the US should be a “Christian nation,” one of several striking findings from a sweeping new [Pew Research Center survey](#) examining Christian nationalism.

But researchers say respondents differed greatly when it came to outlining what a Christian nation should look like, suggesting a wide spectrum of beliefs.

“There are a lot of Americans—45 percent—who tell us they think the United States should be a Christian nation. That is a lot of people,” Greg Smith, one of the lead authors of the survey, said in an interview. “(But) what people mean when they say they think the US should be a Christian nation is really quite nuanced.”

The findings, unveiled October 27, come as Christian nationalism has become a trending topic in midterm election campaigns, with [extremists](#) and even [members of Congress](#) such as Georgia Republican Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene identifying with the term and others, such as Rep. Lauren Boebert of Colorado and Pennsylvania Republican gubernatorial candidate Doug Mastriano, expressing [open hostility to the separation of church and state](#).

According to the survey, which was conducted in September, 60 percent of US adults believe the country was originally intended to be a Christian nation, but only 33 percent say it remains so today. Most (67 percent) say churches and other houses of worship should keep out of political matters, with only 31 percent endorsing faith groups’ expressing views on social and political issues.

Even those who believe America should be a Christian nation generally avoided hard-line positions. Most of this group (52 percent) said the government should never declare any particular faith the official state religion. Only 28 percent said they wanted Christianity recognized as the country’s official faith. Similarly, 52 percent said the government should advocate for moral values shared by several religions, compared with 24 percent who said it should advocate for Christian values alone.

But the pro-Christian US group was more split on the separation of church and state: 39 percent said the principle should be enforced, whereas 31 percent said the government should abandon it. An additional 30 percent disliked either option, refused to say, or didn’t know.

Most in the group (54 percent) also said that if the Bible and US laws conflict, scripture should have more influence than the will of the people.

Smith stressed that some respondents who expressed support for a Christian nation “do mean that they think Christian beliefs, values, and morality ought to be reflected in US laws and policies.” But many respondents “tell us that they think the US should be guided by Christian principles in a general way, but they don’t mean that we should live in a theocracy,” he said. “They don’t mean that they want to get rid

of separation of church and state. They don't mean they want to see the US officially declared to be a Christian nation. It's a nuanced picture."

Among US adults overall, only a small subset believe the US government should declare Christianity the national faith (15 percent), advocate for Christian values (13 percent) or stop enforcing the separation of church and state (19 percent).

Partisanship strongly shaped the responses, with those who are Republican or lean toward the GOP far more likely to say America should be a Christian nation (67 percent) than Democrats or people who lean Democratic (29 percent). Republicans were also significantly more likely to say the founders intended the country to be a Christian nation (76 percent), although nearly half of Democrats agreed (47 percent).

These divisions appear to reflect national political trends. While Democratic lawmakers—especially members of the [Congressional Freethought Caucus](#)—have [voiced concerns](#) about Christian nationalism's [role in the January 6, 2021, attack on the Capitol](#), many congressional Republicans have [declined to condemn the ideology](#), with only a small number affirming support for the separation of church and state.

The outsized presence of White evangelicals in the GOP may play a role. In Pew's survey, White evangelicals were the faith group most likely to say the US should be a Christian nation (81 percent). But they were followed by Black Protestants (65 percent), a heavily Democratic group. White nonevangelical Protestants were more split, with 54 percent agreeing the US should be a Christian nation.

Catholics were the only major Christian group where a majority did not express support of the idea (47 percent) of a Christian nation, though they were split along racial lines: Most White Catholics (56 percent) agreed America should be a Christian nation, while Hispanic Catholics were the least likely of any Christian group to say the same (36 percent).

Few Jewish (16 percent) or religiously unaffiliated Americans (17 percent) thought the US should be a Christian nation, followed by an even smaller subset of atheists and agnostics (7 percent).

Age was also a factor. Among Americans ages 65 or older, 63 percent said America should be a Christian nation, compared with 23 percent of 18- to 29-year-olds.

Pew asked half of respondents to define a “Christian nation” in their own words and used their open-ended answers to group most people into three categories: those who see it as general guidance of Christian beliefs and values in society (34 percent); those who see it as being guided by beliefs and values, but without specifically referencing God or Christian concepts (12 percent); and those who see it as having Christian-based laws and governance (18 percent).

Those who think the US should not be a Christian nation were more likely to describe a Christian nation as having Christian-based laws and governance (30 percent) than did those who believe it should be (6 percent).

The survey polled the other half of respondents about their views on Christian nationalism. Among all US adults, fewer than half (45 percent) said they had heard anything about the term. Non-Christians were more likely than Christians overall to have heard or read anything about Christian nationalism (55 percent vs. 40 percent), and Democrats were more likely to express familiarity than Republicans (55 percent vs. 37 percent).

But researchers noted that while 54 percent of those surveyed said they hadn’t heard of Christian nationalism, respondents overall were far more likely to view the concept unfavorably (24 percent) than favorably (5 percent), suggesting that people familiar with the concept generally view it negatively. —Religion News Service