

UCHICAGO DIVINITY SCHOOL/AP-NORC POLL: FEW FEEL RESTRICTIONS ON IN-PERSON WORSHIP VIOLATE FREEDOM OF RELIGION

Though most congregations are closed, 26% say their faith has grown stronger since the outbreak. A majority of those who believe in God feel God is sending humanity a message to change how we are living.

CHICAGO, May 15, 2020 — While the coronavirus outbreak has shuttered congregations across the country, religious Americans' sense of spirituality and faith remain strong, according to a new study by the University of Chicago Divinity School and The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. While few are able to attend religious services in-person, many continue to pray privately in their homes, and more are watching live-streaming services than before the outbreak. And though many support allowing drive-thru or in-person religious services—at least with restrictions—less than half think measures prohibiting these services violate freedom of religion.

About a quarter of Americans say their faith or spirituality has strengthened because of the outbreak, and only 1% say it's weakened. A majority who believe in God feel, because of the outbreak, that God is telling humanity to change how it is living and that God is protecting them from being infected.

Most Americans attribute blame for the current coronavirus situation in the United States on governments, global trade, and other things in nature, though 1 in 10 Americans attribute it to human sinfulness.

“The current economic and public health crisis has in no way weakened people’s faith,” said David Nirenberg, Dean of the University of Chicago’s Divinity School. “On the contrary, many Americans feel that God is sending humanity a message with this disease. But what is striking is that when it comes to blame, people are not pointing fingers at particular groups such as sinners, non-believers, or followers of other faiths. Nor are they looking for natural causes. People are pointing fingers at governments.”

Other findings from the poll include:

- 34% believe prohibiting in-person religious services violates freedom of religion.

- 63% of those who believe in God say they feel God is telling humanity to change the way we are living, and 55% feel God will protect them from being infected.
- 43% blame the current situation on foreign governments and 37% blame the U.S. government. Fewer, but still 11%, attribute it to human sinfulness.
- White Evangelical Christians are more likely than other Americans to feel that God will protect them from being infected (67% vs. 53%). They are less likely than others to doubt God exists (7% vs. 15%) or feel God has abandoned humanity (3% vs. 10%) because of the outbreak.
- 55% of Americans disapprove of the protests that have taken place in some states in the U.S. against stay at home orders compared to 31% who approve and 14% who neither approve nor disapprove. Those who approve of the protests are less likely than those who disapprove to follow social distancing measures like limiting trips outside the house, keeping a 6-foot radius from others, and limiting interactions to small groups.
- While a majority of Americans still say they have helped or checked in on neighbors, fewer have done so since the outbreak (56%) compared to 2019 (62%). Fewer also say they have made donations to a religious organization (47% in 2019 vs 33% now), volunteered with religious (29% in 2019 vs 15% now) or non-religious groups (28% in 2019 vs 14% now), or participated in a public protest (8% in 2019 vs 4% now) since the outbreak.
- Protestants (27% in 2019 vs. 44% now), Catholics (11% in 2019 vs. 22% now), other Christians (22% in 2019 vs. 31% now) and people with other religions (6% in 2019 vs. 16% now) are all watching more live-streaming services now than before the outbreak of the pandemic.

“Like in many facets of life these days, people are adapting and finding ways to fulfill their spiritual needs during the outbreak,” said Trevor Tompson, director of The AP-NORC Center. “Even with congregations closed, private prayer continues and more Americans, across faiths, are now regularly watching live-streaming religious services online than in 2019.”

About the Study

The nationwide poll was conducted between April 30 and May 4, 2020 by the University of Chicago Divinity School and The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research using the AmeriSpeak Panel®, the probability-based panel of NORC at the University of Chicago. Online and telephone interviews using landlines and cell phones were conducted with 1,002 adults. The margin of sampling error is +/- 4.2 percentage points.

This survey was conducted with funding from NORC at the University of Chicago.

About the University of Chicago Divinity School

The Divinity School generates knowledge about the history, theology, beliefs, and practices of religions using a broad array of methodological and theoretical approaches. One of the world's leading institutions in the academic study of religion, the Divinity School prepares students for careers in scholarship, teaching, and public religious leadership through multiple graduate and undergraduate programs.

<https://divinity.uchicago.edu/>

About The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research

The AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research taps into the power of social science research and the highest-quality journalism to bring key information to people across the nation and throughout the world.

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The two organizations have established The AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research to conduct, analyze, and distribute social science research in the public interest on newsworthy topics, and to use the power of journalism to tell the stories that research reveals.

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