

HOW FAITH SHAPES FEELINGS ABOUT THE CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAK

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 UChicago Divinity School and The AP-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.

Most Americans believed in God before the outbreak and still do. About a quarter say their faith or spirituality has strengthened because of the outbreak, only 1% say it's weakened. A majority who believe in God feel 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 data also reveal that Americans hold nuanced views about balancing public health and safety with the protection of rights such as freedom of religion and freedom of assembly. Adults with a religious affiliation are more likely to support the protests against stay-at-home orders than those without one.



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Three Things You Should Know

About the UChicago Divinity School/AP-NORC Center Poll on Religion and the Coronavirus Among Americans Age 18 and Older:

- 1) 34% believe prohibiting in-person religious services violates freedom of religion.
- 2) Since the outbreak, those with a religious affiliation are engaging in pro-social behaviors, like looking after neighbors (61% vs. 39%), more often than those without one.
- 3) 43% blame the current situation on foreign governments and 37% blame the U.S. government. Fewer, but still 11%, attribute it to human sinfulness.

The nationwide poll was conducted April 30-May 4, 2020, 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 sample error is +/- 4.2 percentage points.

Other findings from the poll include:

- 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 (28% in 2019 vs. 14% now) groups, or participated in a public protest (8% in 2019 vs. 4% now) since the outbreak.
- White Evangelical Christians are more likely than other Americans who believe in God 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.
- 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.
- Though many are still following social distancing guidelines, Americans who support protests against stay-at-home orders are less likely than those who oppose the protests to follow social distancing measures like limiting trips out of the house (81% vs. 90%), keeping a 6-foot radius from others (77% vs. 87%), and limiting interaction to small groups (67% vs. 83%).

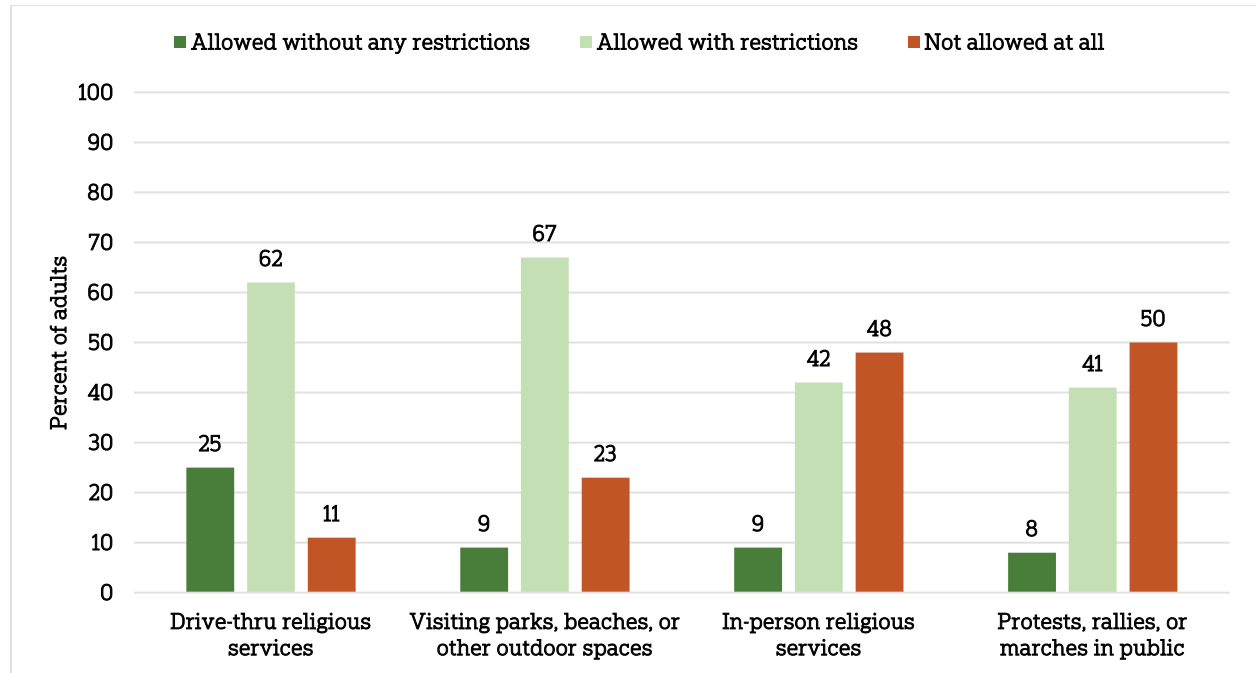
AMERICANS HAVE NUANCED VIEWS ABOUT FREEDOM OF RELIGION AND PUBLIC HEALTH.

Though not explicitly directed at religious organizations, social distancing orders put in place to slow the spread of the coronavirus have closed congregations across the country. Most Americans are supportive of at least some restrictions on religious services, though some believe these orders come in conflict with religious freedom.

Among all Americans, 41% say the congregation they usually go to remains closed, compared to 4% who say their congregation was closed but is now open and 3% who say theirs was never closed. Fifty-one percent do not typically attend a religious congregation.

While 51% of Americans think in-person religious services should be allowed in some form, only 9% think services should be allowed without any restrictions. More say drive-thru services should be allowed in some form. By comparison, 76% say people should be allowed to visit outdoor spaces like parks or beaches at least in some form, and 49% say the same about a protest, rally, or march in public.

During the coronavirus outbreak, please indicate whether each of the following should be...

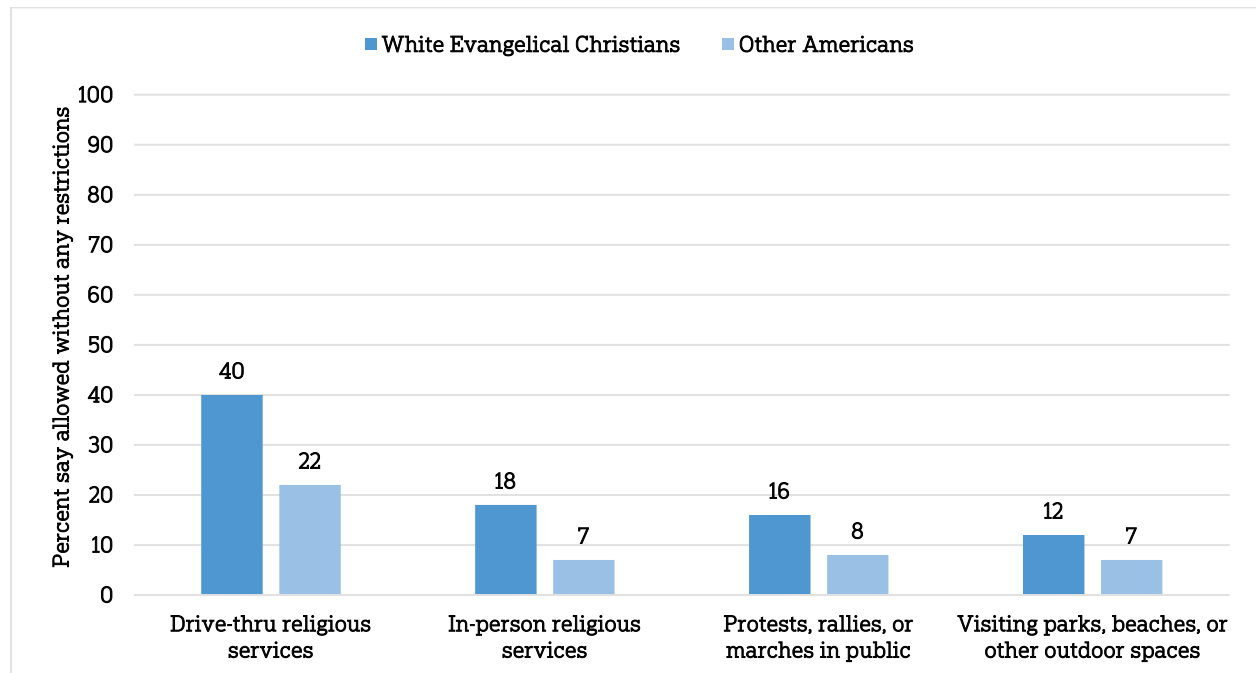


Question: During the coronavirus outbreak, please indicate whether each of the following should be allowed without any restrictions, allowed but with restrictions on crowd size or physical distancing, or not allowed at all in the United States: [ITEM]

Source: UChicago Divinity School/AP-NORC Poll conducted April 30-May 4, 2020, with 1,002 adults nationwide.

Support for opening each of these things to the public without restrictions is low across religious affiliations; however, white Evangelical Christians are less skeptical than other Americans.

During the coronavirus outbreak, please indicate whether each of the following should be...



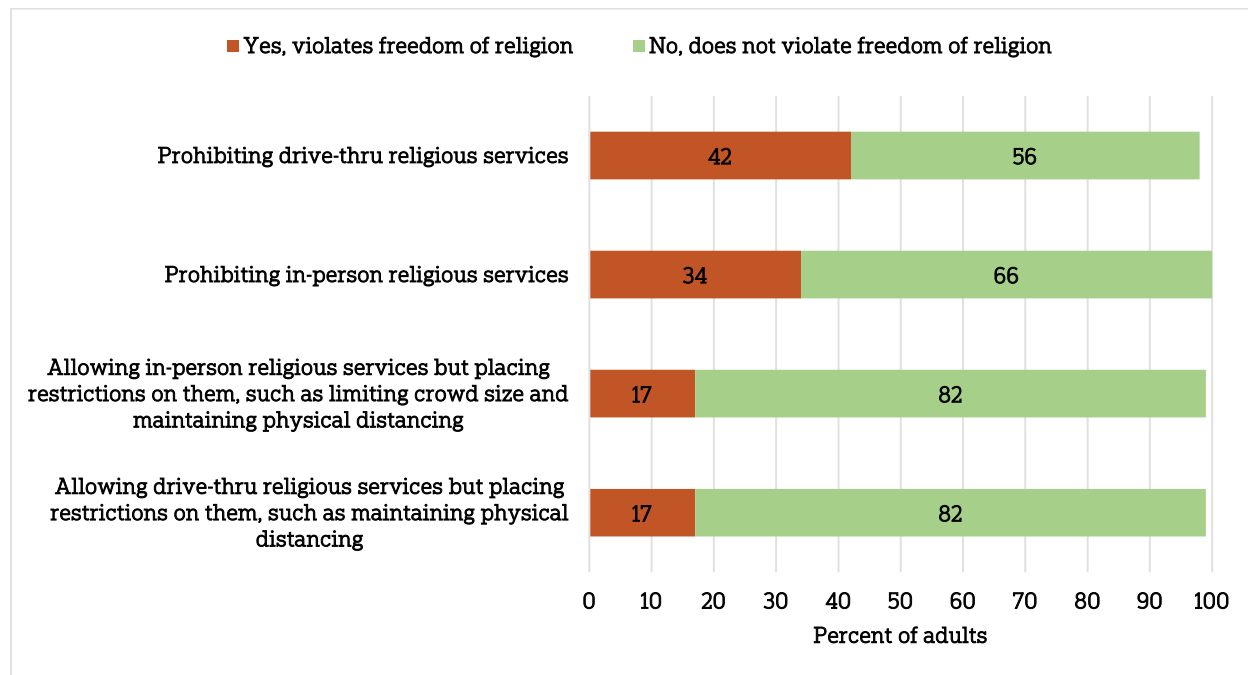
Question: During the coronavirus outbreak, please indicate whether each of the following should be allowed without any restrictions, allowed but with restrictions on crowd size or physical distancing, or not allowed at all in the United States: [ITEM]

Source: UChicago Divinity School/AP-NORC Poll conducted April 30-May 4, 2020, with 1,002 adults nationwide.

Republicans are more likely than Democrats and independents to support allowing drive-thru (38% vs. 18% and 16%) or in-person (15% vs. 7% and 5%) religious services, and visiting outdoor spaces (16% vs. 4% and 9%) without restrictions.

Few Americans believe the restrictions on religious activities designed to slow the spread of the virus violate freedom of religion, but they are more likely to think complete prohibition of services to be a violation than services with restrictions.

During the coronavirus outbreak, would you say the following government orders violate freedom of religion in the United States, or not?



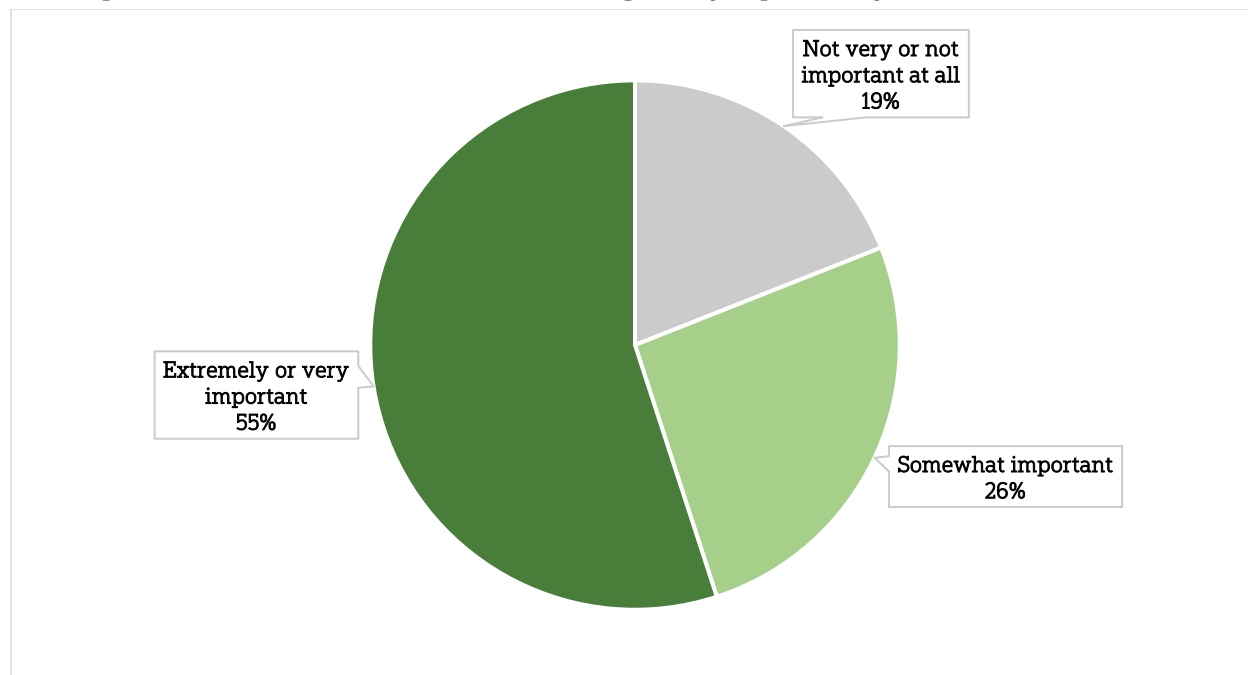
Question: During the coronavirus outbreak, would you say the following government orders violate freedom of religion in the United States, or not?

Source: UChicago Divinity School/AP-NORC Poll conducted April 30-May 4, 2020, with 1,002 adults nationwide.

While few Americans consider restrictions on religious activities a violation of freedom of religion, this does not imply that freedom of religion is unimportant to them. According to a UChicago Divinity School/AP-NORC poll conducted in February,¹ a majority of Americans say that issues related to religious freedom are extremely or very important to them.

¹ The nationwide poll was conducted February 13-16, 2020, 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 1,015 adults. The margin of sample error is +/- 4.2 percentage points.

How important are issues related to freedom of religion to you personally?

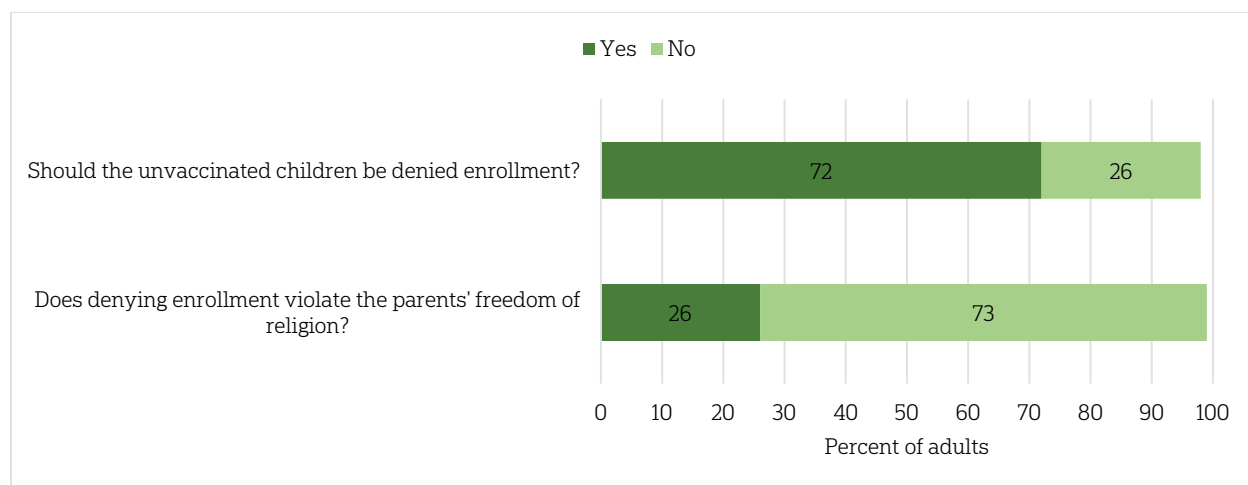


Question: How important are issues related to freedom of religion to you personally?

Source: UChicago Divinity School/AP-NORC Poll conducted February 13-16, 2020 with 1,015 adults nationwide.

The February poll also suggests how tensions between public health and freedom of religion may arise. About three-quarters of Americans favor denying unvaccinated children access to public schools, and similar numbers say this does not violate the parents’ freedom of religion. This shows that even outside the context of the coronavirus outbreak, Americans have a nuanced view of the interaction between religious freedom and other rights and values, like safety and health.

A parent does not vaccinate their children because of religious beliefs against this practice, and the children are denied enrollment in public school because of its policy that all students must be vaccinated.



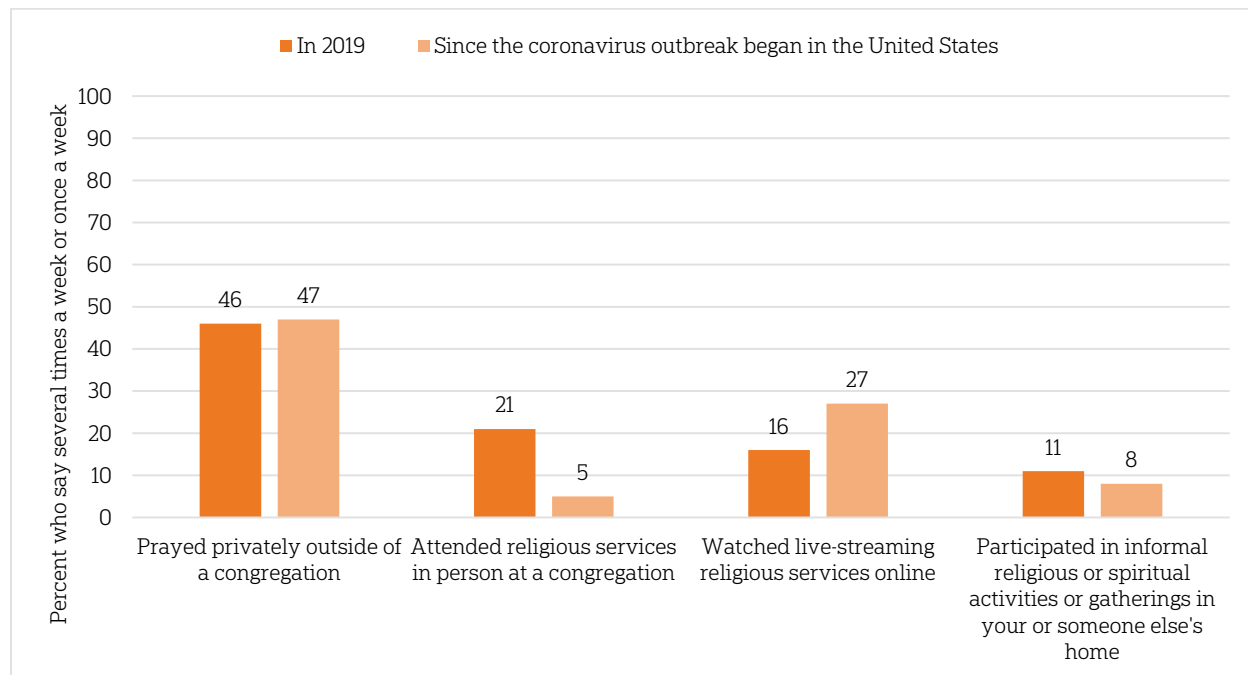
Questions: A parent does not vaccinate their children because of religious beliefs against this practice and the children are denied enrollment in public school because of its policy that all students must be vaccinated. Should the unvaccinated children be denied enrollment? Does denying enrollment violate the parents’ freedom of religion?

Source: UChicago Divinity School/AP-NORC Poll conducted February 13-16, 2020 with 1,015 adults nationwide.

ONLINE SERVICES GAIN POPULARITY DURING THE PANDEMIC.

The coronavirus outbreak has affected Americans' religious behaviors. In 2019, 21% of adults attended religious services in person at least weekly, but since the outbreak, just 5% say the same. On the other hand, more Americans are now regularly watching live-streaming religious services online than in 2019 (27% vs. 16%).

How often have you done each of the following?

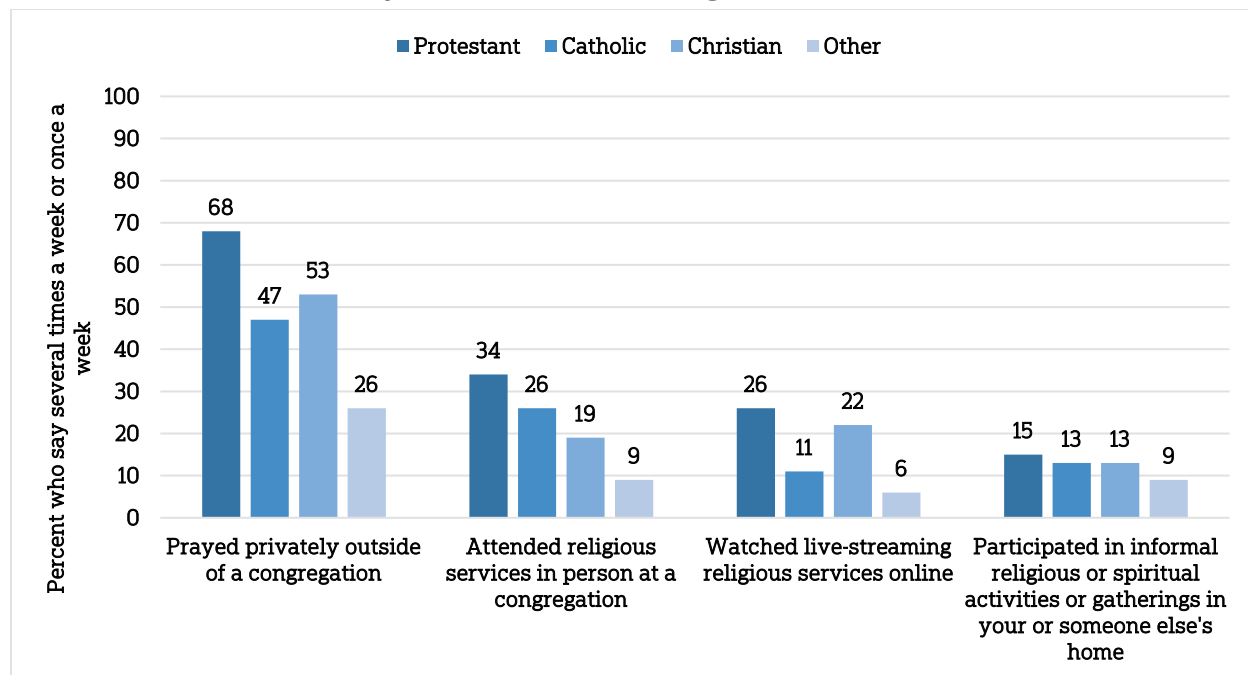


Questions: In 2019, how often, if at all, did you do each of the following? / Since the coronavirus outbreak began in the U.S., how often have you done each of the following?

Source: UChicago Divinity School/AP-NORC Poll conducted April 30-May 4, 2020, with 1,002 adults nationwide.

These shifts in behavior are similar across faiths. Protestants, Catholics, Christians, and people with other religions are watching more live-streaming services now than before the outbreak of the pandemic, while fewer are attending in-person services. Participation in private praying and informal activities or gatherings remains steady.

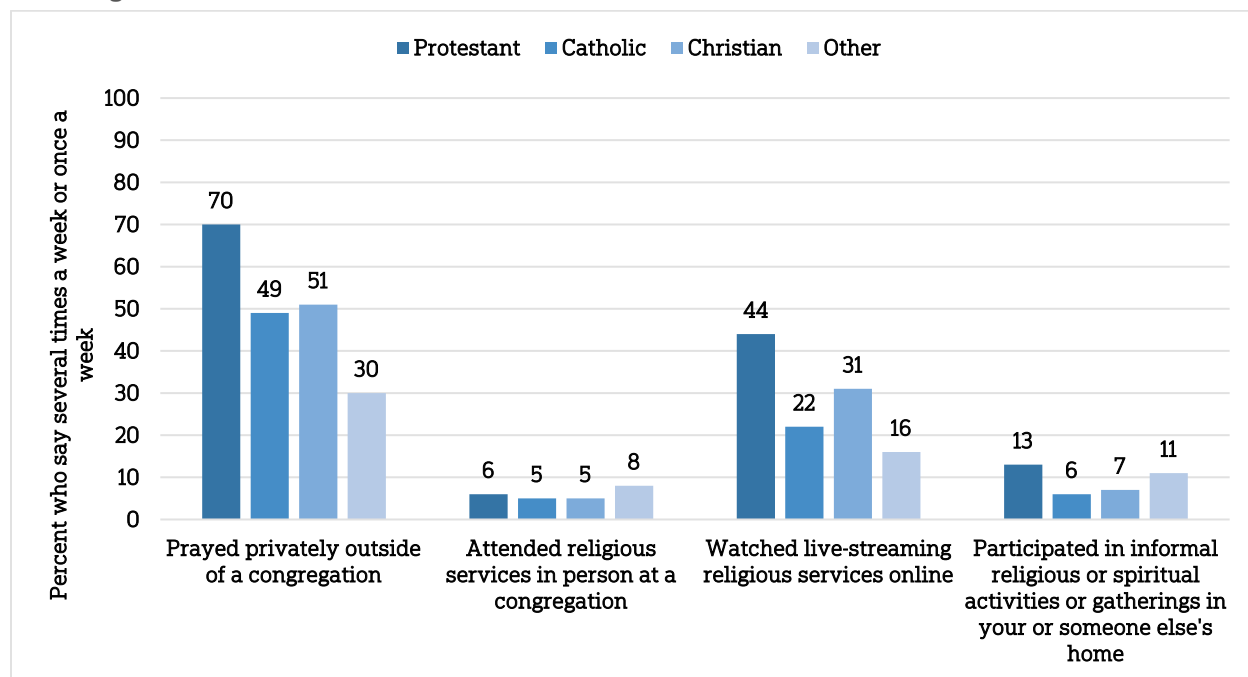
In 2019, how often, if at all, did you do each of the following?



Question: In 2019, how often, if at all, did you do each of the following?

Source: UChicago Divinity School/AP-NORC Poll conducted April 30-May 4, 2020, with 1,002 adults nationwide.

Since the coronavirus outbreak began in the United States, how often have you done each of the following?

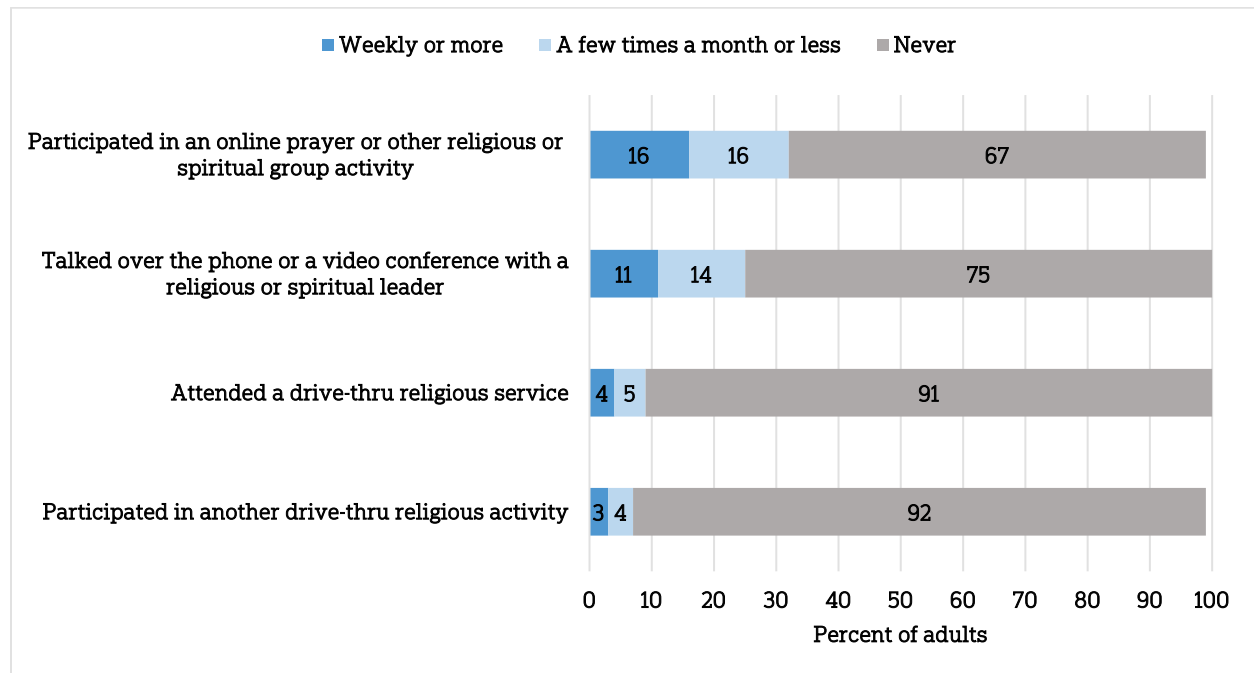


Question: Since the coronavirus outbreak began in the U.S., how often have you done each of the following?

Source: UChicago Divinity School/AP-NORC Poll conducted April 30-May 4, 2020, with 1,002 adults nationwide.

Although religious congregations have been using different ways to reach their audiences—such as radio, television, and online technologies— for decades, the coronavirus outbreak has made them rely almost entirely on contactless interactions. However, most Americans say they have not attended drive-thru religious services or activities, participated in online religious group activities, or talked to a religious leader via phone or video conference. This is true across religious affiliation and faiths.

Since the coronavirus outbreak began in the U.S., how often have you done each of the following?



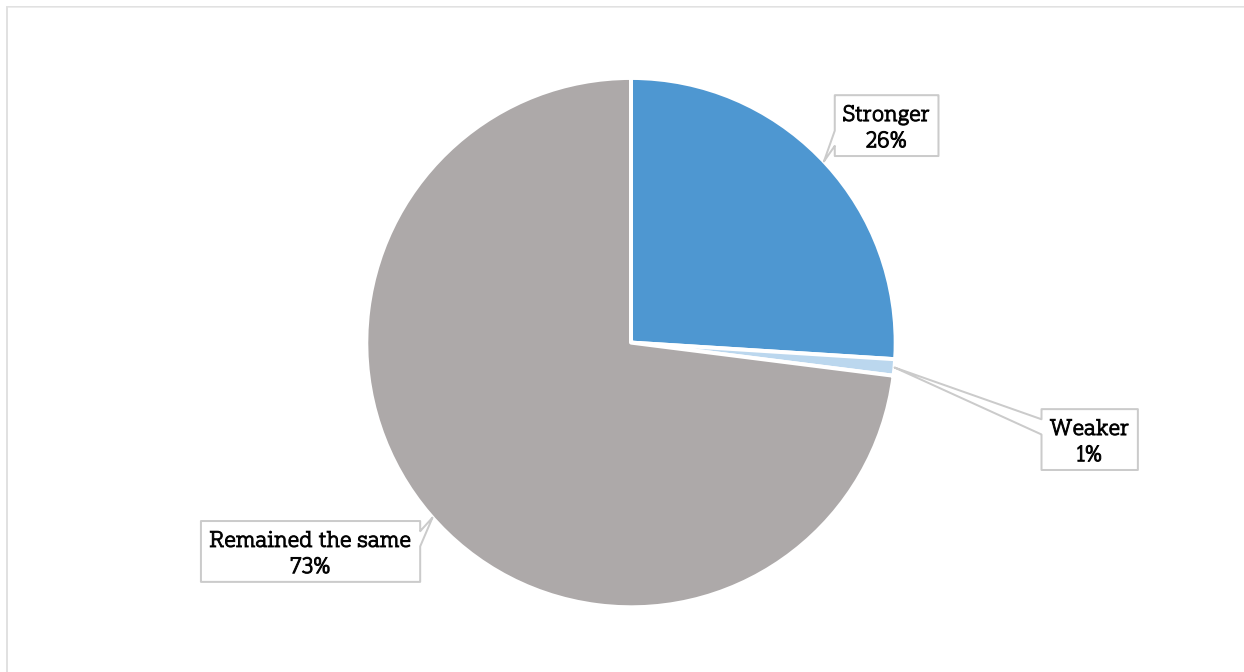
Questions: Since the coronavirus outbreak began in the U.S., how often have you done each of the following?
 Source: UChicago Divinity School/AP-NORC Poll conducted April 30-May 4, 2020, with 1,002 adults nationwide.

SPIRITUALITY AND BELIEFS IN GOD REMAIN UNCHALLENGED BY THE CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAK.

Beliefs about God have not changed much as a result of the coronavirus pandemic—just 2% of Americans say they believe in God today but did not before the outbreak, and less than 1% say they believed in God before but no longer do. Eighty percent say they believed in God before the outbreak and still do, and 17% do not believe in God today and did not before.

Similarly, nearly all say their sense of religious faith or spirituality remains the same as a result of the outbreak or has grown stronger.

Would you say the coronavirus outbreak has made your sense of religious faith or spirituality stronger, weaker, or has it remained the same?



Question: Would you say the coronavirus outbreak has made your sense of religious faith or spirituality stronger, weaker, or has it remained the same?

Source: UChicago Divinity School/AP-NORC Poll conducted April 30-May 4, 2020, with 1,002 adults nationwide.

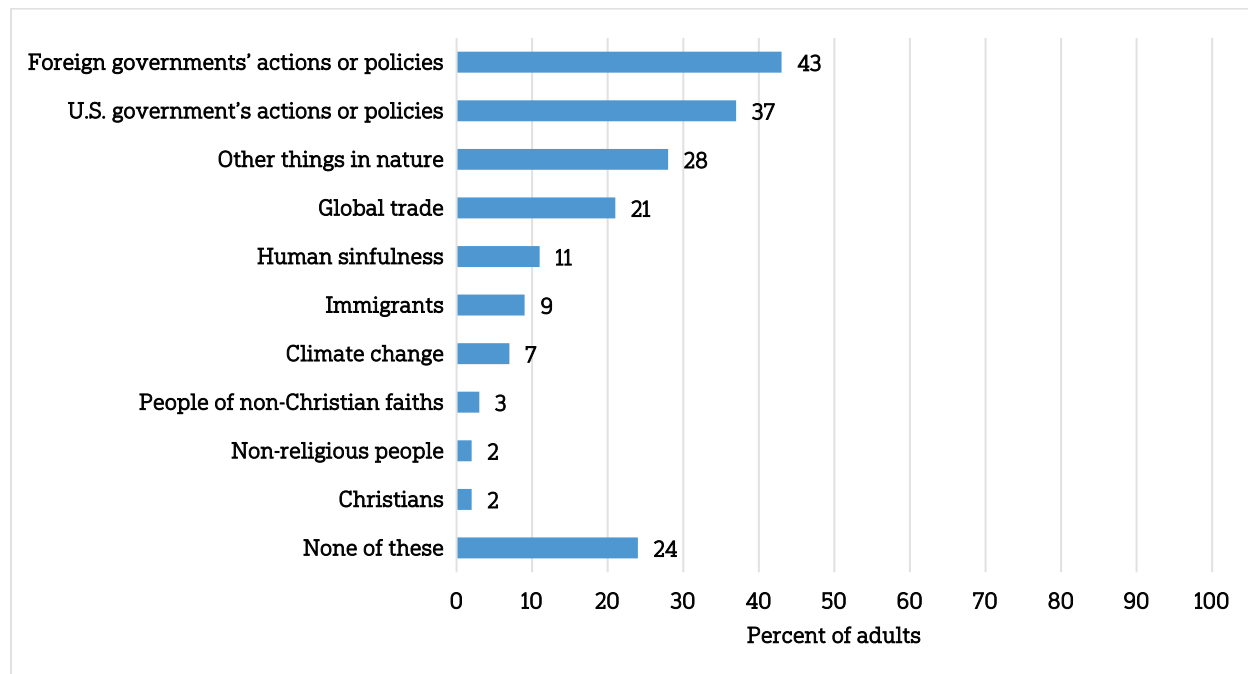
Differences arise across partisanship and some religious groups. White Evangelical Christians are more likely to say their faith has grown stronger compared to other Americans (36% vs. 24%).

Similarly, 33% of Republicans say their faith has grown stronger compared to 20% of Democrats.

MORE BLAME GOVERNMENT ACTIONS THAN RELIGIOUS REASONS FOR THE CURRENT CORONAVIRUS SITUATION.

Americans are most likely to think governments, global trade, and other things in nature are causes of the current coronavirus situation in the United States. Fewer say religious or non-religious individuals have caused the current situation.

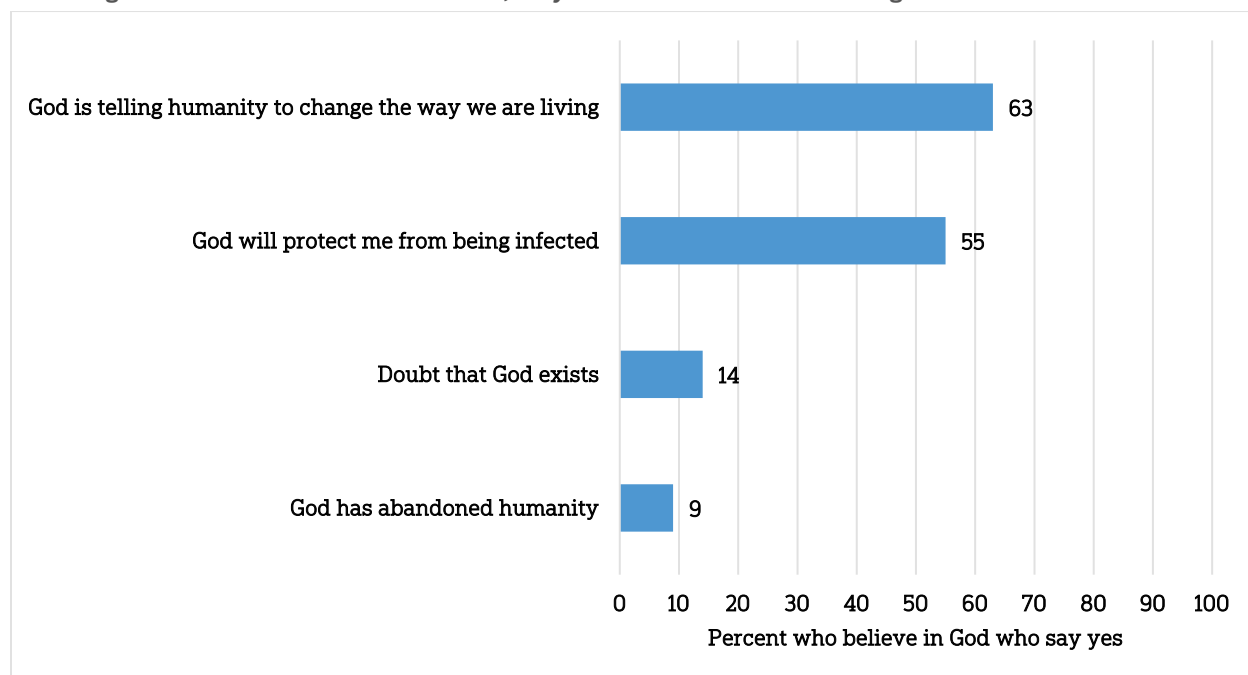
Which of the following, if any, would you say is a cause of the current coronavirus situation in the United States?



Question: Which of the following, if any, would you say is a cause of the current coronavirus situation in the U.S.? Source: UChicago Divinity School/AP-NORC Poll conducted April 30-May 4, 2020, with 1,002 adults nationwide.

Although only 11% of adults think human sinfulness is a cause of the current situation in the country, a majority feel God is telling humanity to change how we are living. Among those who believe in God, many also feel God will protect them from infection with the coronavirus. Fewer say the outbreak has made them feel God has abandoned humanity or doubt God's existence.

Thinking about the coronavirus outbreak, do you feel each of the following or not?



Question: Thinking about the coronavirus outbreak, do you feel each of the following or not? Source: UChicago Divinity School/AP-NORC Poll conducted April 30-May 4, 2020, with 1,002 adults nationwide.

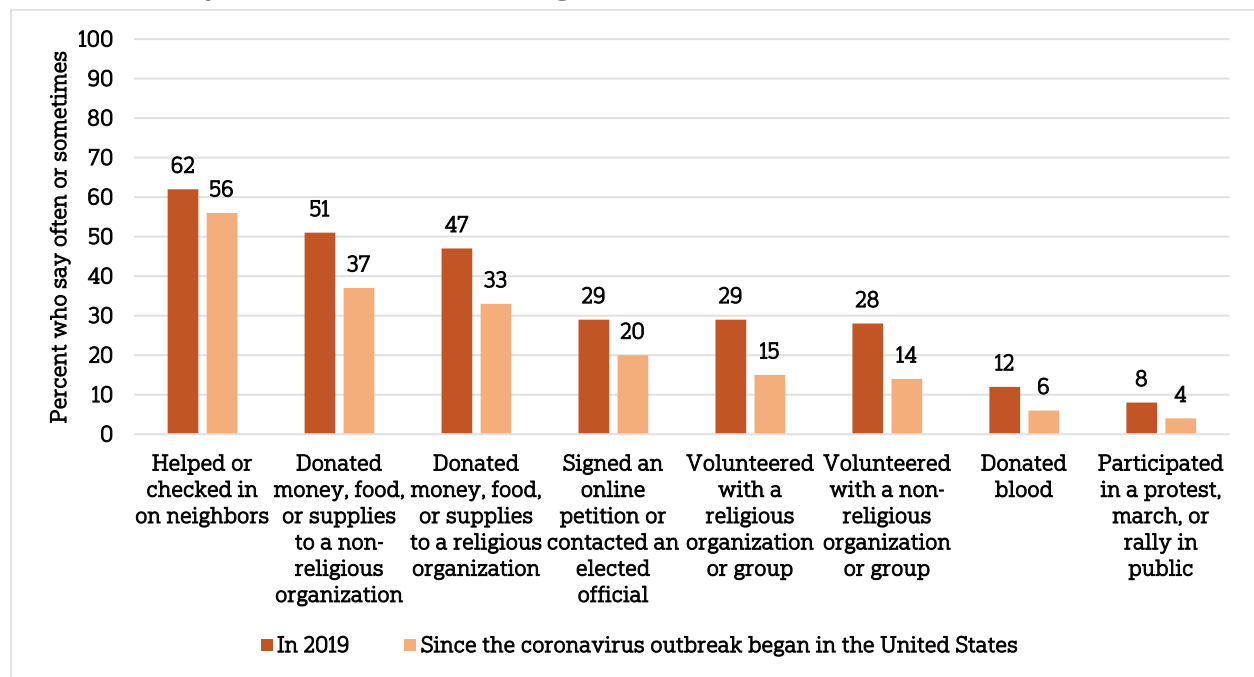
While a majority of adults say God will protect them from being infected, 67% of white Evangelical Christians think so compared to 53% of other Americans who believe in God. White Evangelical Christians are less likely than others to doubt God exist or feel God has abandoned humanity (3% vs. 10%) during the outbreak. But overall, 73% of black Americans and 65% of Hispanic Americans who believe in God feel God is telling humanity to change compared to 48% of white Americans.

Those who believe that God will protect them from getting the virus are similarly concerned to others about them or a family member being infected.

VOLUNTEERING AND PARTICIPATION DECLINE AS SOCIAL DISTANCING BECOMES THE NORM.

Since the coronavirus outbreak began in the United States, Americans have reduced their social interactions and volunteering. While a majority still say they have helped or checked in on neighbors, fewer say they have made donations, volunteered with religious or non-religious groups, or participated in a public protest compared to 2019.

How often have you done each of the following?

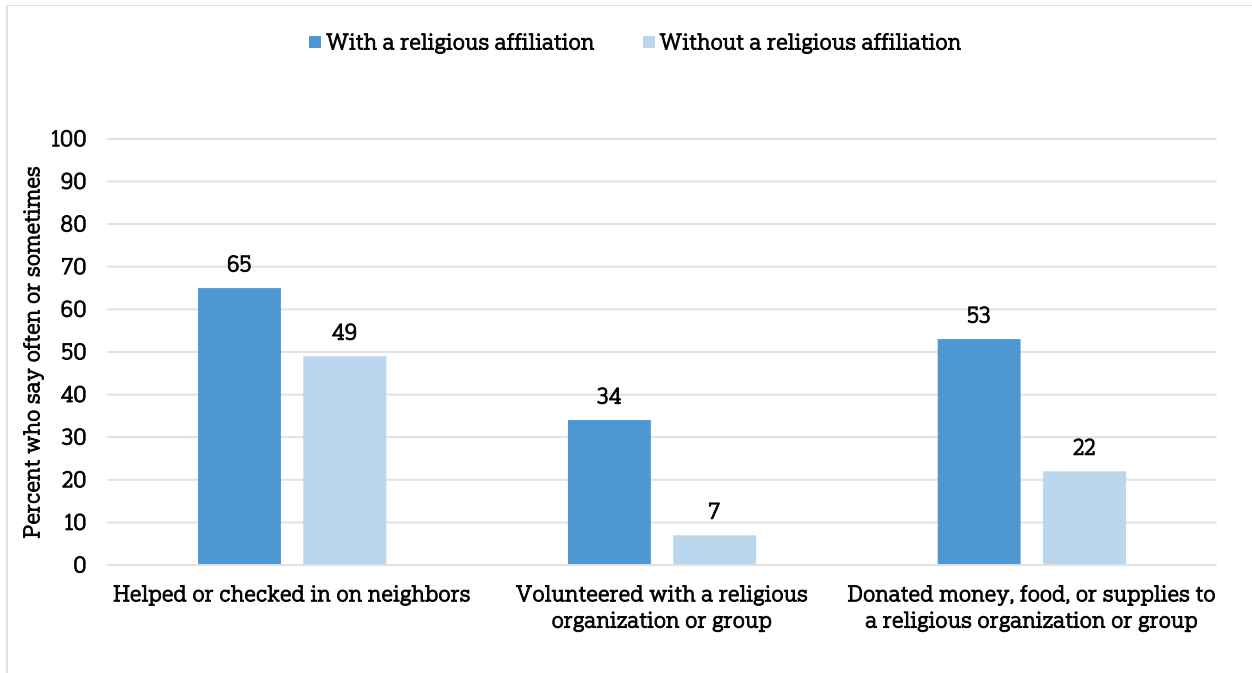


Questions: In 2019, how often, if at all, did you do each of the following? / Since the coronavirus outbreak began in the U.S., how often have you done each of the following?

Source: UChicago Divinity School/AP-NORC Poll conducted April 30-May 4, 2020, with 1,002 adults nationwide.

Both Americans with a religious affiliation and those without one have decreased their social interactions and volunteering. But, Americans with a religious affiliation are more likely than those without one to say they check in on their neighbors or volunteer with or donate to a religious organization both before the outbreak and now.

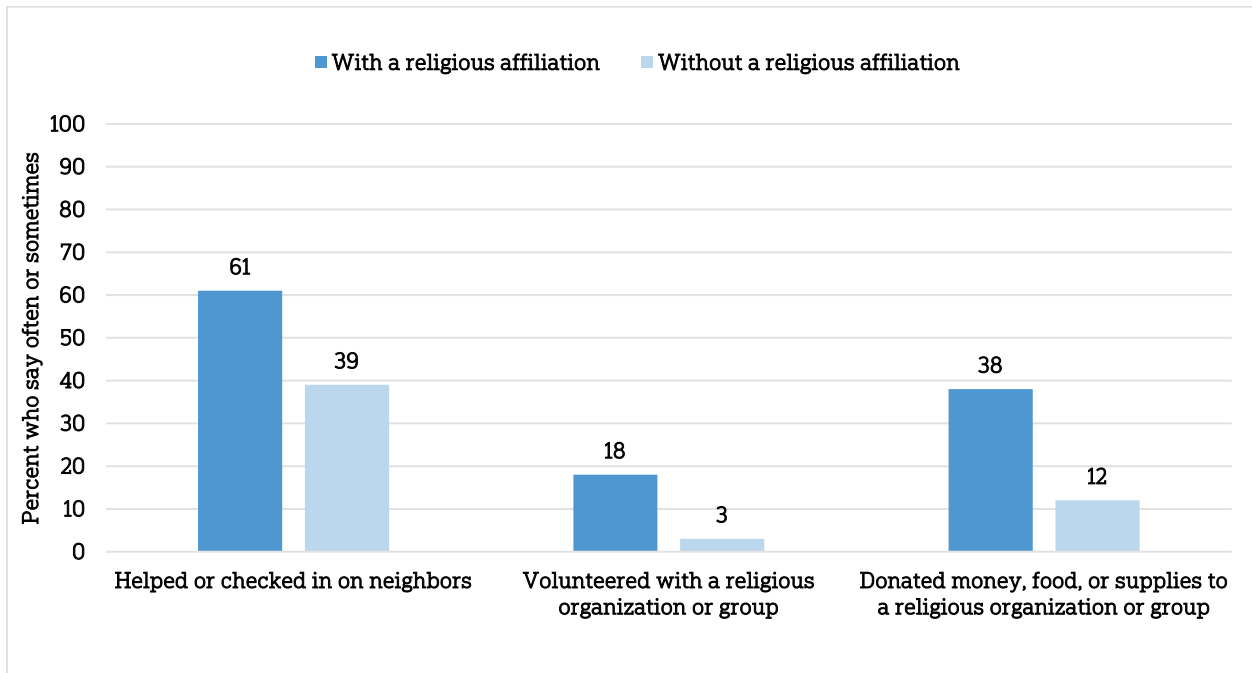
In 2019, how often, if at all, did you do each of the following?



Question: In 2019, how often, if at all, did you do each of the following?

Source: UChicago Divinity School/AP-NORC Poll conducted April 30-May 4, 2020, with 1,002 adults nationwide.

Since the coronavirus outbreak began in the United States, how often have you done each of the following?



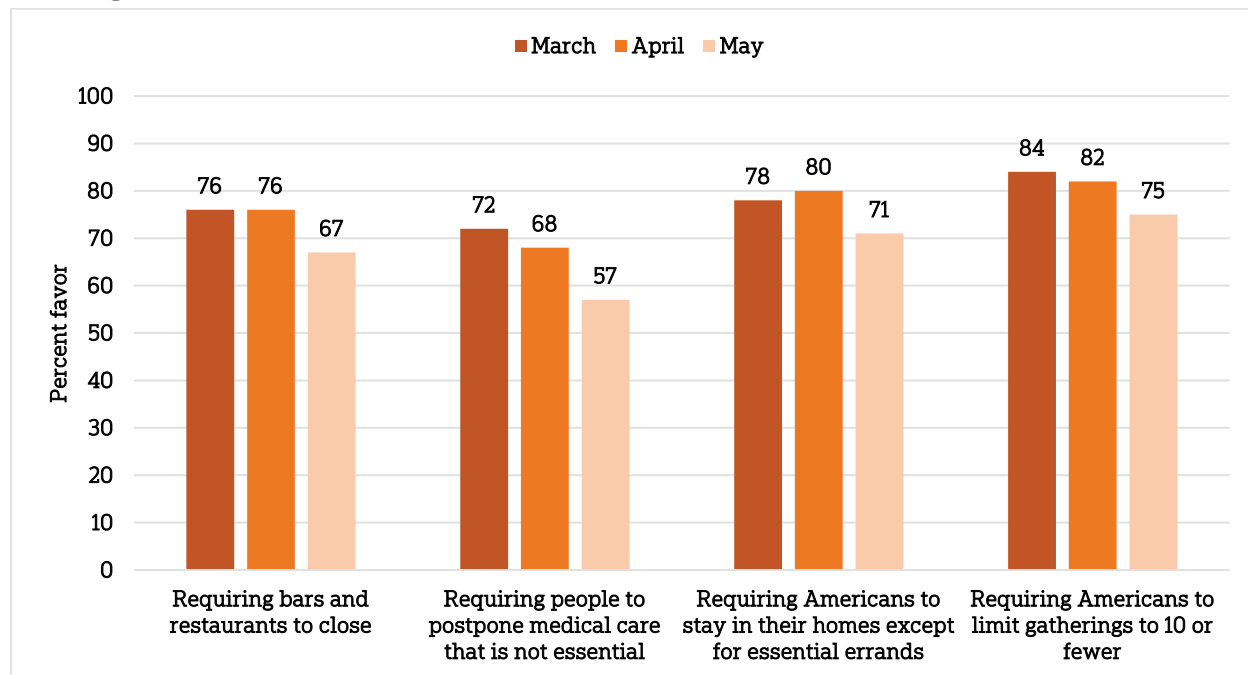
Question: Since the coronavirus outbreak began in the U.S., how often have you done each of the following?

Source: UChicago Divinity School/AP-NORC Poll conducted April 30-May 4, 2020, with 1,002 adults nationwide.

HALF OF ADULTS HAVE EXPERIENCED A LOSS OF INCOME IN THEIR HOUSEHOLD BECAUSE OF THE OUTBREAK IN THE UNITED STATES.

A majority of Americans continue to support social distancing restrictions like closing restaurants and bars, postponing nonessential medical care, stay-at-home orders, and limiting gatherings to 10 or fewer people. However, rates of support have declined since April.

In response to the coronavirus outbreak, do you favor, oppose, or neither favor nor oppose each of the following?

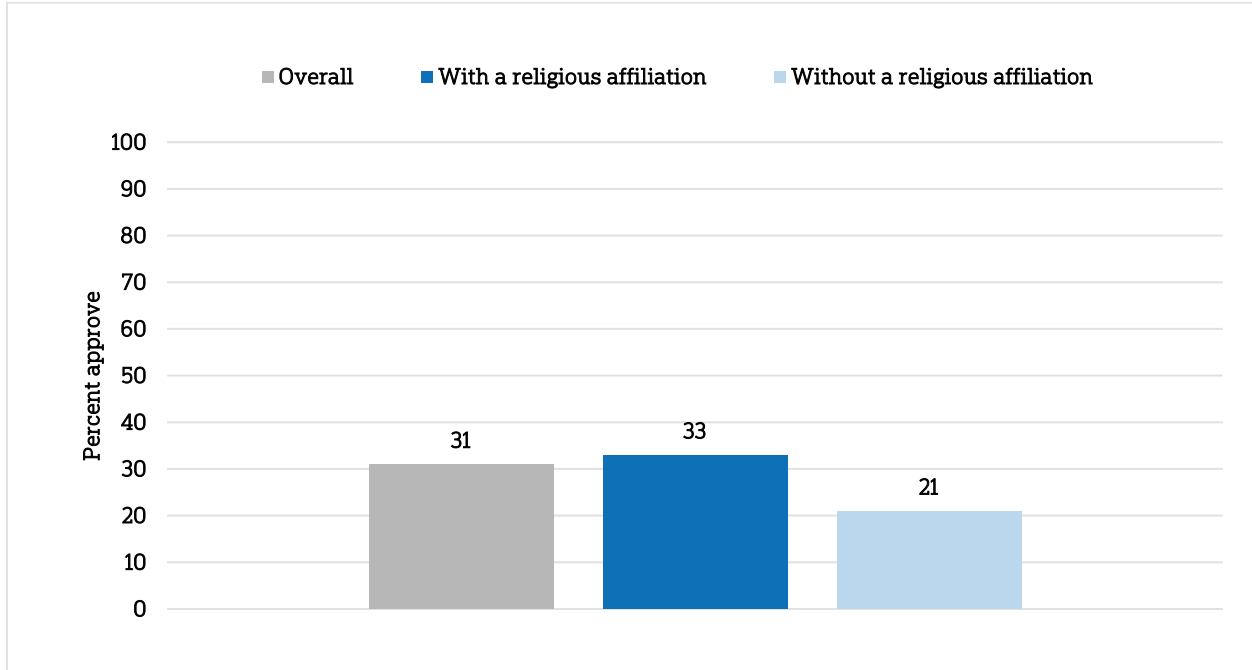


Question: In response to the coronavirus outbreak, do you favor, oppose, or neither favor nor oppose each of the following?
 Source: AP-NORC Polls conducted March 26-29, 2020 with 1,057 adults; April 16-20, 2020, with 1,057 adults; and April 30-May 4, 2020, with 1,002 adults nationwide.

Fifty-five percent of Americans disapprove of the protests against stay-at-home orders that have taken place in some states in the United States compared to 31% who approve and 14% who neither approve nor disapprove.

Adults with a religious affiliation are more likely to support the protests than those without one (33% vs. 21%).

Do you approve, disapprove, or neither approve nor disapprove of the protests of stay-at-home orders that have taken place in some states in the United States?

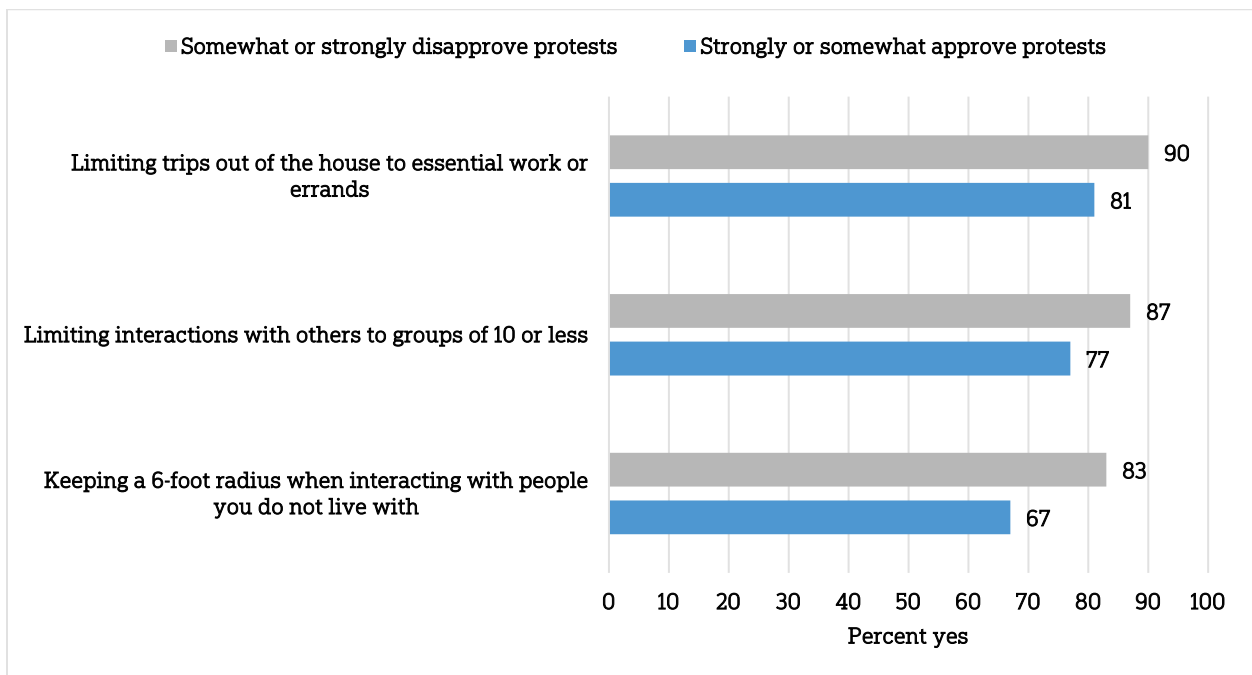


Question: Do you approve, disapprove, or neither approve nor disapprove of the protests of stay-at-home orders that have taken place in some states in the U.S.?

Source: UChicago Divinity School/AP-NORC Poll conducted April 30-May 4, 2020, with 1,002 adults nationwide.

Also, Americans who support stay at home protests are less likely than those who oppose them to say they follow some measures to stop the spread of the virus.

Which of the following measures, if any, are you taking in response to the outbreak of the new coronavirus?

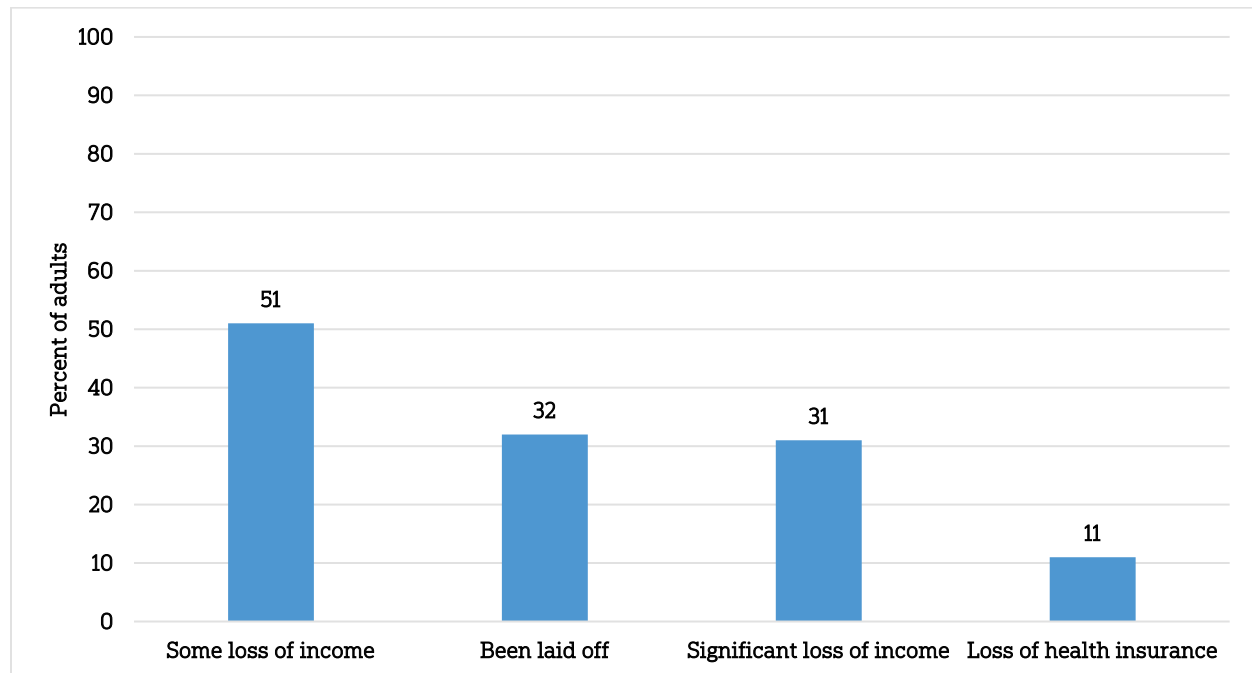


Question: Which of the following measures, if any, are you taking in response to the outbreak of the new coronavirus?

Source: UChicago Divinity School/AP-NORC Poll conducted April 30-May 4, 2020, with 1,002 adults nationwide.

At the same time, many Americans are feeling a financial squeeze as a result of the outbreak. Fifty-one percent have experienced some loss of income, 32% have been laid off, and 11% have lost health insurance.

Have you or has someone in your household experienced each of the following because of the coronavirus outbreak in the United States?



Question: Have you or has someone in your household experienced each of the following because of the coronavirus outbreak in the U.S.?

Source: UChicago Divinity School/AP-NORC Poll conducted April 30-May 4, 2020, with 1,002 adults nationwide.

Those who support the protests against stay-at-home orders are no more or less likely than those who oppose the orders to have experienced any of these economic difficulties.

STUDY METHODOLOGY

This survey was conducted by the University of Chicago Divinity School and The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research and with funding from NORC at the University of Chicago.

Data were collected using the AmeriSpeak Omnibus®, a monthly multi-client survey using NORC's probability-based panel designed to be representative of the U.S. household population. The survey was part of a larger study that included questions about other topics not included in this report. During the initial recruitment phase of the panel, randomly selected U.S. households were sampled with a known, non-zero probability of selection from the NORC National Sample Frame and then contacted by U.S. mail, email, telephone, and field interviewers (face-to-face). The panel provides sample coverage of approximately 97% of the U.S. household population. Those excluded from the sample include people with P.O. Box only addresses, some addresses not listed in the USPS Delivery Sequence File, and some newly constructed dwellings.

Interviews for this survey were conducted between April 30 and May 4, 2020, with adults age 18 and over representing the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Panel members were randomly drawn from AmeriSpeak, and 1,002 completed the survey—884 via the web and 118 via telephone. Interviews were conducted in both English and Spanish, depending on respondent preference. The final stage completion rate is 14.4%, the weighted household panel response rate is 24.1%, and the weighted household panel retention rate is 85.6%, for a cumulative response rate of 3.0%. The overall margin of sampling error is +/-4.2 percentage points at the 95% confidence level, including the design effect. The margin of sampling error may be higher for subgroups.

Once the sample has been selected and fielded, and all the study data have been collected and made final, a poststratification process is used to adjust for any survey nonresponse as well as any noncoverage or under and oversampling resulting from the study specific sample design. Poststratification variables included age, gender, Census division, race/ethnicity, and education. Weighting variables were obtained from the 2018 Current Population Survey. The weighted data reflect the U.S. population of adults age 18 and over.

For more information, email info@apnorc.org.

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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/>

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- NORC at the University of Chicago is one of the oldest objective and non-partisan research institutions in the world.

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