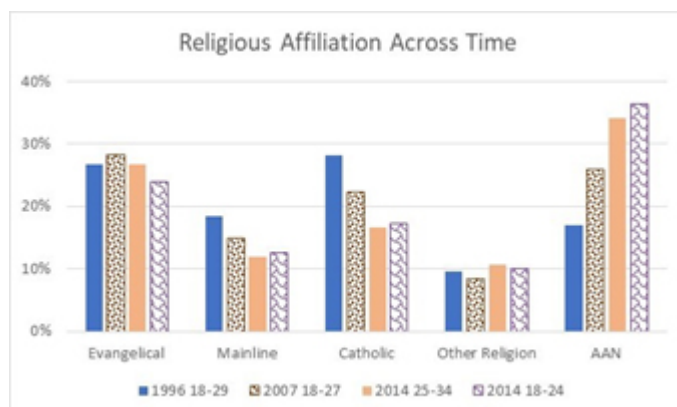


# Religious Affiliation of American Emerging Adults: 1996 to 2014

In my past few posts, I have been focusing on data from the monumental surveys taken by Pew Research in 2007<sup>{1}</sup> and 2014<sup>{2}</sup>. These surveys of about 35,000 Americans allow us to get more accurate data on American beliefs and drill down with greater confidence into specific subsets of Americans (e.g. emerging adults, Asian-Americans, those with advanced degrees). The earlier posts focused on the Nones and their increased role in American society. In this post, we will consider the general religious makeup of American emerging adults. In subsequent posts, we will look at their religious beliefs, religious practice and their cultural beliefs.

The Pew surveys parse religious affiliation down to specific denominations. In this post, I have combined those into five categories: Evangelical, Mainline Protestant, Catholic, Other Religions, and Atheists/Agnostics/Nothing in Particular (the Nones). The Pew surveys list Historically Black Churches as a separate group. I used the technique described in the footnote below<sup>{3}</sup> to assign the different historically black denominations to Evangelical or Mainline Protestant.



In the figure to the right, I have shown how the denominational categories split up the population in 1996, 2007 and 2014. Data from the 1996 survey by Pew on Religion and Politics<sup>[4]</sup> was added to provide a better understanding of the trends in religious affiliation among young adults.

As shown, both Mainline and Catholic denominations have decreased significantly over this period. Mainline denominations have decreased from 18.5% down to 12.0%, or by almost a third. During the same time period, Catholics have reduced from 28% to about 17%, a reduction of almost 40%. By 2014, almost half (46%) of young adult Catholics were Hispanic. At the same time, only about 37% of emerging adult Hispanics (18–29) reported being affiliated with a Catholic church as compared to over 55% of those Hispanics over 40. Seven years earlier, in 2007, well over half (55%) of emerging adult Hispanics reported being affiliated with the Catholic Church, highlighting a dramatic drop by 2014. So, we find this interesting mix of trends:

- the percentage of Catholics is greatly reduced,
- young Hispanics are significantly less likely to be Catholics than in the past,
- but still almost half of young Catholics are Hispanic.

In contrast, the Atheists, Agnostics and Nothing in Particulars (Nones) have more than doubled, going from 17% of the young adult population up to about 36% in 2014, as discussed in an earlier post.

Over the same period, those selecting to affiliate with an Evangelical denomination and those affiliating with another religion (e.g. Mormon, Muslim, Hindu) have remained relatively constant.

The data from these surveys shows that the results reported in my book, *Cultural Captives*, from 2010 are continuing at an alarming pace. Those results indicate that the Nones will soon

constitute the majority of emerging adults in America largely at the expense of Mainline Protestants and Catholics. Although declining at a slower pace than other Christian denominations, Evangelicals are showing a steady decline as well.

## Notes

1. The **U.S. Religious Landscape Survey 2007**, Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life (a project of The Pew Research Center). The Pew Research Center bears no responsibility for the analyses or interpretations of the data presented here. The data were downloaded from the Association of Religion Data Archives, [www.TheARDA.com](http://www.TheARDA.com), and were collected by the Pew Research Center.

2. The **U.S. Religious Landscape Survey 2014**, Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life (a project of The Pew Research Center). The Pew Research Center bears no responsibility for the analyses or interpretations of the data presented here. The data were downloaded from the Association of Religion Data Archives, [www.TheARDA.com](http://www.TheARDA.com), and were collected by the Pew Research Center.

3. **Historically Black denominations affiliated with Evangelicals**: All Baptists except for Progressive Baptists, Nondenominational blacks, Pentecostals, and Holiness Family

**Historically Black denominations affiliated with Mainline Protestants**: Progressive Baptists, Methodists, non-specific Protestants

4. **Religion and Politics Survey 1996**, Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life (a project of The Pew Research Center). The Pew Research Center bears no responsibility for the analyses or interpretations of the data presented here. The data were downloaded from the Association of Religion Data Archives, [www.TheARDA.com](http://www.TheARDA.com), and were collected by the Pew Research Center.

