

United States and Mexico: Religious Practice

In my prior post, we looked at how many people in Mexico and the United States profess a God-focused worldview. Now let's consider some religious practices typically associated with an active faith. This worldwide survey did not ask many questions about religious practice, but the three that it did ask unveil some interesting differences.

The three questions asked were:

1. Apart from weddings and funerals, about how often do you pray?
2. Do you have an active membership in a church or religious organization?
3. Apart from weddings and funerals, about how often do you attend religious services these days?

Let's look at the responses based on the country of the respondent, their religious preference, and their age (less than 30 or over 60). The "Pray" columns are those who pray daily or more often. The "Active" columns refer to those who say they have an active membership. The "Attend" columns are those who attend religious services once a month or more often.

Table 1: Those Actively Participating in Religious Practices

Country	Age	All (%)			Protestant (%)			Catholic (%)		
		Pray	Active	Attend	Pray	Active	Attend	Pray	Active	Attend
Mexico	All	60	38	62	72	60	81	64	40	69
	Under 30	48	33	55	66	61	74	53	35	63
	Over 60	78	46	79	88	56	88	81	49	84
United States	All	46	35	44	64	54	65	52	40	54
	Under 30	34	25	36	55	40	58	30	34	53
	Over 60	55	42	50	65	58	67	64	48	58

How many say they pray daily or more often? Overall 60% of Mexicans and only about 45% of people from the United States said they prayed that often. But of those under the age of 30, the numbers were only 48% for Mexico and 34% for the United States. In both locations, those over 60 were over 50% more likely to have an active prayer life than those under 30. In both countries, Protestants were more likely to say they prayed at least once a day than Catholics. Almost nine out of ten Protestants from Mexico over the age of 60 pray at least once a day. At the other end of the spectrum, only three out of ten Catholics from the United States pray at least once a day.

Active memberships are fairly close in number between Mexico and the United States. But like prayer, those from Mexico are more likely to profess an active membership. Typically, those over 60 are at least 50% more likely to be active members. Interestingly, Mexican Protestants are essentially the same percentage (60%) regardless of age.

As with prayer, regular church attendance is much more common in Mexico among both Protestants and Catholics. Looking at all respondents, we see 62% of Mexicans versus only 44% of those from the United States attend church as least monthly. Although not as pronounced as for prayer frequency, we see that those under 30 are less likely to attend regularly than those over 60.

What does it look like when we consider those who combine all three of these characteristics as shown below?

Table 2: Those Who Pray At Least Daily, Are Members, and Attend Monthly or More

Country	Age	All (%)	Protestant (%)	Catholic (%)
Mexico	All	23	44	24
	Under 30	17	39	18
	Over 60	37	50	30
United States	All	26	45	27
	Under 30	15	32	14
	Over 60	35	48	41

Very interestingly, when we combine these three, the significant difference between Mexico and the United States on the individual questions disappears for both Protestants and Catholics. Apparently, about one quarter of people are serious enough about their religion to pray and to attend regularly regardless of whether they reside in Mexico or the United States.

However, the difference between those under the age of 30 and older ages remains for the combination. For Catholics, those over 60 are at least twice as likely to do all three as those under 30. For Protestants, they are about 50% more likely if they are over 60 than those who are under 30. So in both countries, emerging adults are less likely (i.e., only about 15% of the group) to pray, belong and attend.

Just looking at these three very simple practices, we see that the vast majority of people in both countries do not actively practice their faith. And, those under the age of 30 are much less likely than their seniors to practice these characteristics.