

# Highly religious Americans are less likely to see conflict between faith and science

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A majority of the public (59%) says science and religion often conflict, while 38% says science and religion are mostly compatible. But people's sense that there is a conflict between religion and science seems to have less to do with their own religious beliefs than it does with their perceptions of other people's beliefs, according to newly released findings from a Pew Research Center survey.

The representative survey of more than 2,000 U.S. adults finds that 30% of Americans say their personal [religious beliefs](#) conflict with science, while 68% say there is no conflict.

Paradoxically, the perception that there is generally a conflict between science and religion is particularly common among Americans who are not very religiously observant (as measured by frequency of attendance at worship services). Some 73% of adults who seldom or never attend religious services say science and religion are often in conflict. But fewer of the more religiously observant Americans say the same: Half (50%) of adults who attend religious services at least weekly say science and religion are often in conflict. Other key data in the survey:

- 76% of respondents who have no religious affiliation think science and religion, in general, are often in conflict. But when it comes to personal beliefs, just 16% of the religiously unaffiliated say their religious beliefs conflict with science.
- 40% of white evangelical Protestants say their personal beliefs sometimes conflict with science, while a 57% majority say they

do not.

- The share of all adults who perceive a conflict between science and their own religious beliefs has declined in recent years from 36% in 2009 to 30% in 2014. The change occurred only among those who are affiliated with a religion; among this group, the share who say science sometimes conflicts with their personal beliefs is 34%, down 7-percentage points from 41% in 2009.
- Among the three-in-ten adults who say their own religious beliefs conflict with science, the most commonly mentioned source of conflict was beliefs about the creation of the universe and evolution.

The survey also finds that the public is closely divided in its views about the role of churches and other houses of worship in scientific policy debates. Half of adults say churches should express their views on policy decisions about scientific issues, while 46% say churches should keep out of such matters. Among specific groups:

- Most white evangelicals Protestants (69%) and black Protestants (66%) say churches should express their views on scientific policy issues.
- Catholics are closely divided: 45% say churches should express their views, and 49% say they should keep out.
- 66% of religiously unaffiliated adults say churches should keep out of policy decisions on such issues, 31% say otherwise.

"It is the least religiously observant Americans who are most likely to perceive conflict between science and religion. But that perception is not closely tied to their own religious or supernatural beliefs. By far, the majority of those who seldom or never attend religious services say their own beliefs do not conflict with science. "This suggests the perception of [conflict](#) is rooted in assumptions about other people's beliefs."

The report examines the views of religious groups across a range of science-related topics. The findings show only a handful of areas where people's religious beliefs and practices have a strong connection to their views about a range of science-related issues. Key examples include:

- 65% of adults in the U.S. say "humans and other living things have evolved over time," while 31% say humans and other living things have "existed in their present form since the beginning of time."
- An overwhelming majority of the religiously unaffiliated (86%) say humans and other living things have evolved over time, as do most white Catholics (73%), white mainline Protestants (71%) and Hispanic Catholics (59%).
- 49% of black Protestants and 36% of white evangelical Protestants say humans have evolved over time.
- 46% of adults say "the idea of changing a baby's genetic characteristics in order to reduce the risk of serious disease is making appropriate use of medical advances," while 50% say that is taking medical advances too far.
- A 61% majority of adults who attend worship services at least weekly say genetic modification to reduce a baby's disease risk is taking medical advances too far. By comparison, 45% of those who attend worship services less than weekly say genetic modifications for this purpose are taking advances too far.

There are also wide differences among religious groups when it comes to perceptions of scientific consensus about evolution and the creation of the universe.

- 66% of the general public say scientists generally agree that humans have evolved over time, while 29% say scientists generally do not agree about this.
- A majority of most major religious groups say scientists

generally agree that humans have evolved, including 78% of the unaffiliated, 69% of white mainline Protestants and 65% of Catholics. White evangelical Protestants are closely divided in their views of scientific consensus: 46% say scientists generally agree, while 49% say scientists do not agree that humans have evolved over time.

- 42% of U.S. adults perceive scientific consensus about the creation of the universe; 52% say scientists are generally divided in their views about how the universe was created.
- 61% of the religiously unaffiliated say scientists "generally believe the universe was created in a single, violent event."
- Most white evangelical Protestants (69%) and Hispanics Catholics (62%) perceive scientists as generally divided about the creation of the universe.

There are multiple topics, however, where people's religious differences do not play a central role in explaining their beliefs. These include opinions about:

- Whether or not to allow access to experimental drug and medical treatments before they have been fully tested
- The appropriateness of using bioengineered, artificial organs for human transplant
- The safety of genetically modified foods
- Climate change
- Space exploration
- Long term payoffs from government investment in science

"When you step back and look at public attitudes across these 20-some science-related topics, what is most striking is the multiple influences on people's views. Sometimes religion is front and center - as with beliefs about evolution. Still, that is not the only factor tied to people's views about evolution. People's partisan and ideological orientations also are

associated with their beliefs about evolution, as are generational divides, gender, educational attainment and differences in knowledge about science," said Funk. "Our analysis points to only a handful of areas where people's religious beliefs and practices have a strong connection to their views about [science](#) topics and a surprising number of topics where religious differences do not play a central role in explaining their beliefs."

**More information:** These findings will be available at:  
[www.pewinternet.org/2015/10/22...cience-and-religion/](http://www.pewinternet.org/2015/10/22...cience-and-religion/)

Provided by Pew Research Center

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