

Americans' erratic relationship with religion will be tested again after abortion ruling, experts say

May 30 2022, by Sarah Elbeshbishi, Usa Today



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Liz Cooper-Klish said the Bible ultimately led her down the path of becoming an atheist.

After taking a biblical studies certificate through her church to learn more about her faith, Cooper-Klish said she found herself questioning her devotion as she looked at how scripture and churches dealt with [societal issues](#), including poverty and the LGBTQ+ community.

"Once I kind of saw the results of the church and just examined their outsized influence, whether it's COVID-19 or anything else—just the harm that churches can do in a society, I was like 'I just don't think I buy this,'" Cooper-Klish told U.S. TODAY.

The tumult of the past two years has made more Americans examine their relationship with [religion](#). Now, as the Supreme Court weighs a decision that could lead to overturning the 1973 Roe v. Wade ruling, some experts think it could lead even more Americans to move away from organized religion.

Nearly 30% of Americans reported they were religiously unaffiliated in 2021 and that group—known as "the nones"—has increased by 10 percent in the past decade, according to the Pew Research Center.

"Abortion is framed as a black and white issue in evangelism in that it's always bad, and I think what we're going to see—especially if Roe is overturned—is that there's a gray area that's going to jump into the picture in ways that many pro-life people have never thought about," said Sophie Bjork-James, a professor of anthropology at Vanderbilt University.

Bjork-James, who specializes in evangelicalism and reproductive politics, noted that in her work, she's come across very few people discussing the consequences of criminalizing abortions and instead calling for it to be outlawed.

However, Bjork-James believes that the consequences of banning

abortions will spark up conversations and shift perspectives.

"We're going to see women having unsafe abortions when they no longer have access to safe [abortion](#) and women are going to be dying, or injured women are going to be criminalized," Bjork-James added.

"We're already seen this happen when Roe is the law of the land," she said. "The gray area has become much more significant to the conversation, and that's going to probably shift some people's perspective, especially [younger people](#) who are seeing the impacts of this."

As the number of nones rise, the percentage of Americans who identify with Christianity has significantly decreased.

The Pew Research Center also found that 63% of Americans identified with Christianity in 2021, a drop of 12 percentage points from 2011.

While Christians still make up the religious majority, the percentage of Christians decreased 15 percentage points between 2007 and 2021.

A large reason for the increase of religiously unaffiliated Americans is the rising role of religion in politics, primarily within the Republican Party, according to Geoff Layman, the chair of the department of political science at the University of Notre Dame.

"There's been an allergic reaction to the merging of religion and conservative Republican politics, such that people—who are not conservative or Republican—have become increasingly alienated from religion," Layman said. "That has driven them to become increasingly likely to say they are none."

While Christians make up the majority of both major political parties,

the Public Religion Research Institute found that in 2020:

- 23% of Democrats were religiously unaffiliated, 10 percentage points more than Republicans
- 29% of Republicans identified as white evangelical Protestants, compared to 9% of Democrats
- 32% of Democrats are Christians of color, whereas they make up 14% of Republicans.
- Christians of color are the largest religious affiliation within the Democratic Party, followed by those who are unaffiliated.
- White evangelical Protestants are the largest share among Republicans (29%), followed by white mainline Protestants.

Younger evangelicals tend to be more pro-life, Bjork-James said, but the PRRI report also found that those between the ages of 18 and 29 make up the largest group of religiously unaffiliated Americans, at 36%. That number shrinks as the cohorts get older, the report showed.

"If we look at what has led to many younger evangelicals leaving evangelicalism, and often even leaving Christianity, it's often been around issues of thinking that politics are too wrapped into faith," Bjork-James said. "I do think that this will create more controversy and probably more skepticism about tying in anti-abortion politics with faith."

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Citation: Americans' erratic relationship with religion will be tested again after abortion ruling, experts say (2022, May 30) retrieved 13 March 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2022-05-americans-erratic-relationship-religion-abortion.html>

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