

POLITICS JUNE 21, 2021

As U.S. Pandemic Eases, Fewer See Religion Gaining Influence

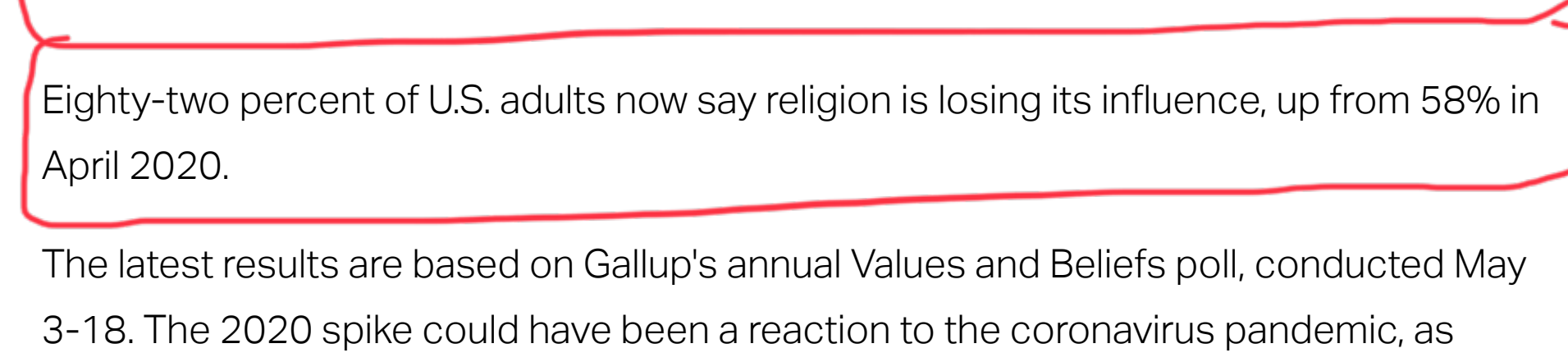
BY JEFFREY M. JONES



STORY HIGHLIGHTS

- Perception that religion is gaining influence on American life sinks to 16%
- Last year saw spike to 38% in perceptions of heightened religious influence
- Current figure one of lowest in Gallup's trend

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- After doubling last spring and staying elevated in December, the percentage of Americans who believe that religion is increasing its influence on American life has retreated to 16%, in line with pre-pandemic levels.



Eighty-two percent of U.S. adults now say religion is losing its influence, up from 58% in April 2020.

The latest results are based on Gallup's annual Values and Beliefs poll, conducted May 3-18. The 2020 spike could have been a reaction to the coronavirus pandemic, as Americans likely perceived people were turning to religion to help them cope with the crisis.

Every major subgroup of Americans showed an increased belief that religion was becoming more influential in U.S. life last year, followed by a sharp decline in those attitudes this year. As a result, nearly every group has views that are similar today to what they were in 2019. Two notable exceptions are Republicans and Americans with no religious preference, as both are now less likely to perceive religion as influential.

Recent Changes in Perceptions That Religion Is Increasing Its Influence on American Life, by Subgroup

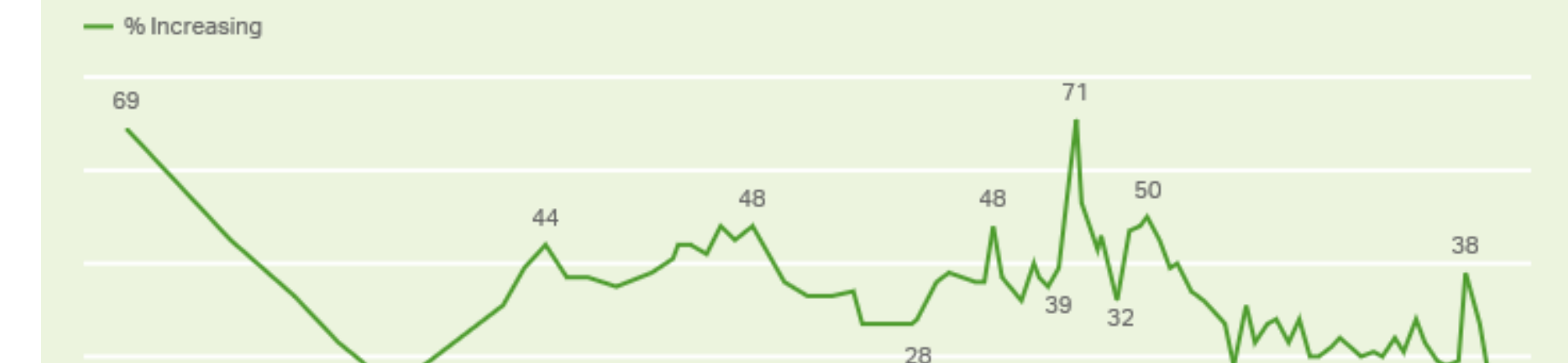
	2019	Apr 2020	May 2021	Increase, 2019 to 2020	Decrease, 2020 to 2021
	%	%	%	pct. pts.	pct. pts.
U.S. adults	19	38	16	+19	-22
Men	16	33	14	+17	-19
Women	21	43	18	+22	-25
White adults	17	37	13	+20	-24
Non-White adults	22	41	22	+19	-19
18-29 years old	20	40	19	+20	-21
30-49 years old	19	39	16	+20	-23
50-64 years old	19	39	15	+20	-24
65+ years old	15	34	16	+19	-18
College graduate	17	34	15	+17	-19
College nongraduate	19	40	17	+21	-23
Married	17	36	12	+19	-24
Not married	20	40	19	+20	-21
Children under 18	18	41	17	+23	-24
No children under 18	18	37	15	+19	-22
Republican	18	44	7	+26	-37
Independent	17	33	19	+16	-14
Democrat	21	37	20	+16	-17
Protestant	18	43	15	+25	-28
Catholic	19	35	19	+16	-16
No religion	20	31	13	+11	-18
Attend church weekly	23	46	21	+23	-25
Attend church monthly	18	43	13	+25	-30
Seldom/Never attend church	17	32	15	+15	-17

Figures for 2019 are based on an average of two surveys.

Perceptions of Religious Influence Near Record Low

Gallup has asked Americans to say whether religion is becoming more influential for more than 60 years, including at least annually since 1997. The current 16% who see religion as increasing its influence is just two percentage points above the historical low point -- 14%, registered in 1969 and 1970 polls.

For most of the trend, less than a majority of Americans have said that religion is increasing its influence. One major exception came in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks in late 2001, when a record-high 71% of U.S. adults thought religion was becoming more influential as the nation dealt with that crisis and threat to safety. The 32-point increase in 2001 before and after 9/11 is the only surge in Gallup's trend bigger than the 19-point jump seen last year.



Bottom Line

Americans have long thought that religion is losing rather than increasing its influence on U.S. society, but those views eased last year as the U.S. dealt with the onset of the coronavirus pandemic. Now, with many Americans vaccinated against the disease and COVID-19 infections falling, U.S. public opinion on the influence of religion has returned to pre-pandemic levels, sitting just slightly above the historical low point.

These results come as more Americans attend church in person than did so a year ago, but at a time when reports of church attendance still lag behind what they were before the pandemic and remain lower than in previous decades. Additionally, the percentage of U.S. adults who belong to a formal place of worship has fallen below the majority level for the first time. With increasing numbers of U.S. adults, particularly young adults, lacking a religious affiliation, the likelihood of religion becoming more influential seems low. However, as Gallup's trends show, in times of national crisis Americans perceive that religion is becoming more influential, at least temporarily.

[View complete question responses and trends \(PDF download\).](#)

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