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American Orthodoxy Today: Results from the Pew and CES Surveys

By Matthew Namee and
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Last year, two major surveys were conducted on the American population: the Pew Religious Landscape Study (with nearly 37,000 respondents) and the Cooperative Election Study (with almost 60,000 respondents). Both Pew and CES asked respondents a battery of questions, and we can learn a lot about our own Orthodox community from the data. In this report, we'll present some key findings from the two new surveys.

All of this is a bit of a preamble to what we'll be working on at OSI in the coming months. Pew and CES are datasets that we didn't compile, using questions that we didn't design. We're trying to extract insights from them about the Orthodox community, but there are lots of limitations and drawbacks inherent in both surveys. Soon, we'll have our own, much larger, much more reliable data on the US Orthodox population. To prepare for that, we've been analyzing Pew and CES – fully cognizant of their imperfections.

The Short Version

If you want just the highlights, here they are:

1. Demographically, American Orthodoxy is unique in several ways. We are younger, more male, and more immigrant-heavy than basically anyone else.
2. However, in terms of *behavior*, such as church attendance and frequency of prayer, we look basically the same as other “historic” Christian groups like Roman Catholics and Mainline Protestants. We have far less “engagement” than Evangelicals, Mormons, and Jehovah's Witnesses.
3. Roughly 6 in 10 cradle Orthodox stay in the Church as adults, according to Pew. And roughly a quarter of current Orthodox in America are converts.
4. There's no evidence, *from these surveys*, that Orthodoxy in America is either growing or shrinking as a share of the general US population. But there are significant caveats that give us pause about this observation.

Methodologies and Limitations of These Surveys

Pew started with a random list of home addresses from the US Postal Service. They sent physical mailings to 205,100 addresses, inviting people to take their survey, with options to take it online, via physical mail, or by phone. Almost 37,000 people responded, with 25,250 opting for the online survey, around 10,733 using pen and paper, and 925 choosing the phone option.

CES, on the other hand, surveyed close to 60,000 people entirely online, via YouGov. They tried their best to find a collection of respondents to match the overall US population (based on Census Bureau surveys), but they were naturally limited because the kind of people who take online surveys through YouGov aren't fully representative of the US adult population. CES provides "weights" that can be used in analyzing its sample, basically to correct for some of these biases. However, for both Pew and CES, we are using the raw, unweighted data in this report.

Pew's respondents skew older than CES's, but in both surveys, younger adults are underrepresented. And as we'll discuss below, the Orthodox respondents in both surveys are younger than most other religious groups. This could mean that Orthodoxy is unusually underrepresented in both Pew and CES.

There's also a difference in wording: when asked about their religious affiliation, Pew respondents could choose "Orthodox Christian," while the equivalent option for CES respondents was "Eastern or Greek Orthodox."

Finally, we must admit that the sample sizes of Orthodox Christians in both surveys are very small – although not so small that they aren't worth analyzing. Pew had 225 Orthodox respondents, and CES had 313. The fact that these are random samples of the general adult population means that there's not a selection bias problem directly related to Orthodoxy. But still, we're talking about a handful of hundreds of people, and you can only slice a sample like that so thinly before it starts to become unstable. Having said that, where we can confirm a finding across multiple surveys – such as Orthodoxy's high male and immigrant percentages compared to other religious groups – we can be more confident in the finding.

American Orthodoxy Isn't Growing – or Shrinking – At Least, Not According to These Surveys... However...

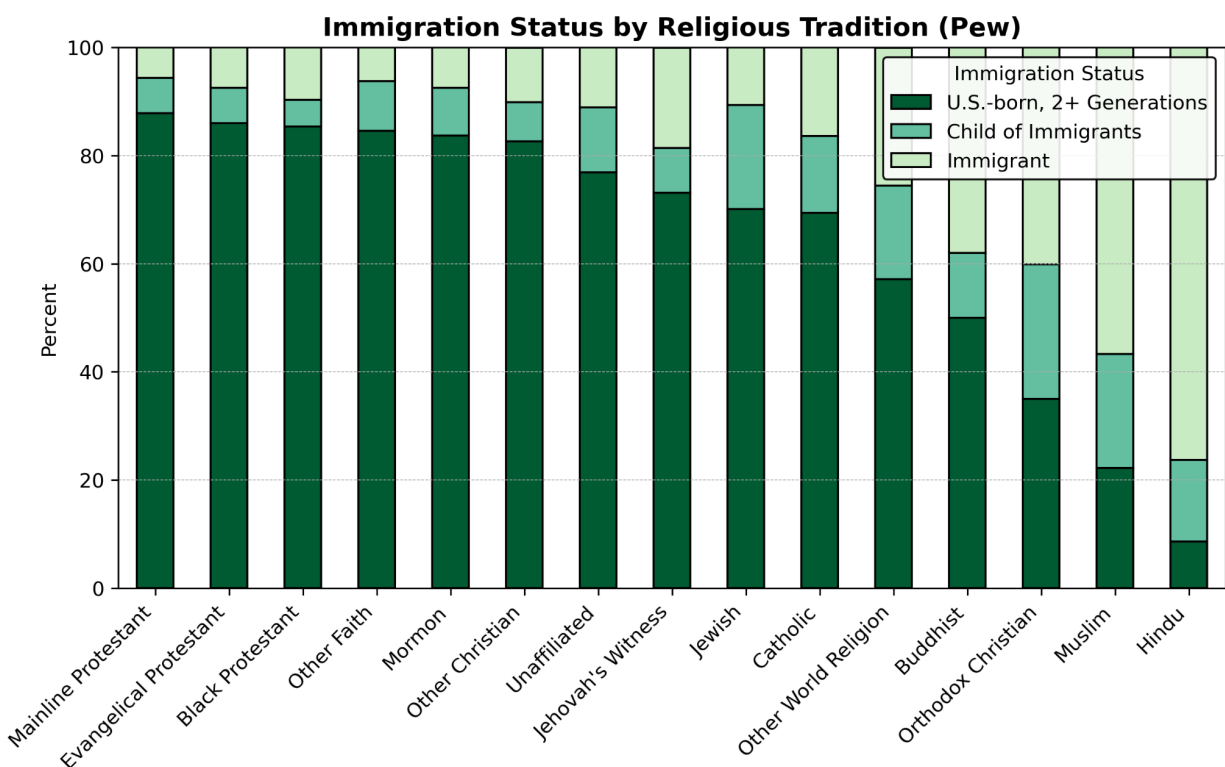
In Pew, 0.61% of respondents were Orthodox; in CES, it was 0.53%. This suggests between 1.8 and 2.1 million Orthodox Christians in America, although we know that this number includes some non-Chalcedonians ("Oriental Orthodox"; more on that below). Overall, the new data doesn't really change [our estimate, from last year](#), that there are about 1.6 million Eastern Orthodox Christians in America. As a share of the general US population, this is consistent with survey data throughout the 21st century.

But, as noted above, there are reasons to be skeptical of this finding, because younger people are underrepresented in both Pew and CES. If the limited information we have is accurate, and a disproportionate share of Orthodox growth is coming from a younger demographic, then we'd expect both Pew and CES to miss a lot of this growth. And we already know, from the Pew and CES data itself, that Orthodoxy is younger than most other religious groups. So we can probably safely assume that Pew and CES actually represent a low-end estimate of the US Orthodox population, rather than a midpoint estimate.

Put another way: after digging into Pew and CES, along with other data sets that we're working with (stay tuned for those...) we are increasingly skeptical of our earlier 1.6 million estimate for the US Orthodox population. This may not just be too low – it may be MUCH too low.

American Orthodoxy Has a Lot of Immigrants

A great example of a difference between Pew and CES is in the area of immigration. In Pew, a remarkable 40% of Orthodox Christians reported being immigrants, and another 25% were the children of immigrants. This makes Orthodoxy by far the most immigrant-heavy Christian group in the Pew study, and behind only Hindus and Muslims among all religious groups.



Source: Religious Landscape Study 2023–24. Pew Research Center.
Analysis by Orthodox Studies Institute – orthodoxstudies.org.

Table: Immigration Status by Religious Tradition

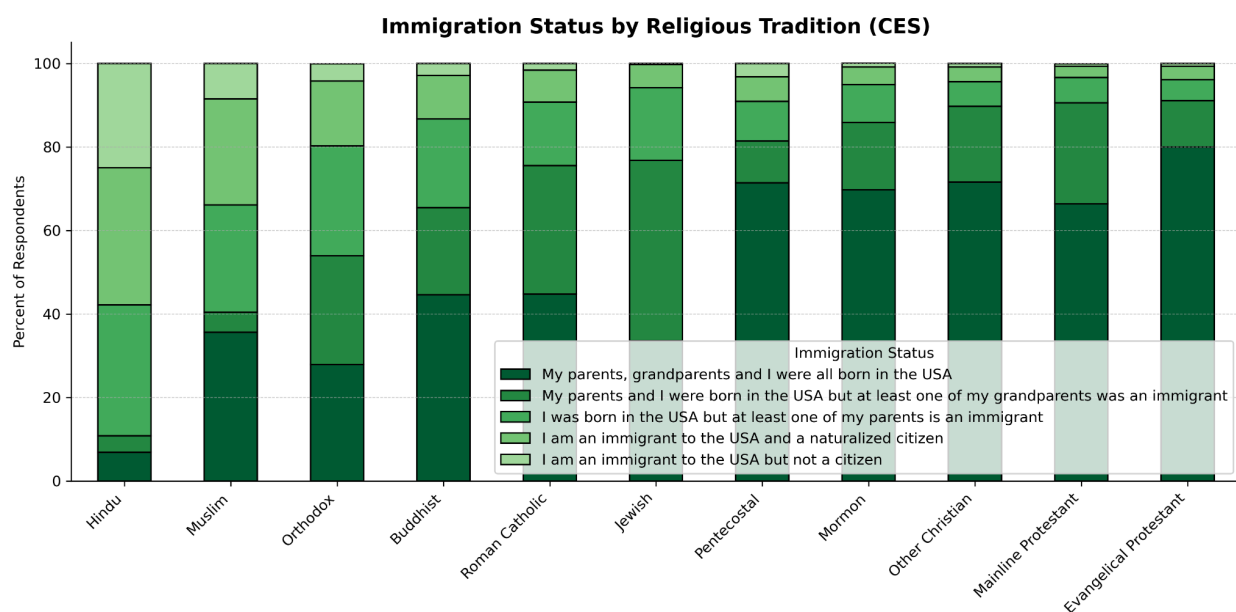
Immigration Status	U.S.-born, 2+ Generations	Child of Immigrants	Immigrant
Religious Tradition			
Mainline Protestant	87.8%	6.6%	5.6%
Evangelical Protestant	86.0%	6.5%	7.6%
Black Protestant	85.4%	4.9%	9.7%
Other Faith	84.6%	9.1%	6.3%
Mormon	83.7%	8.8%	7.5%
Other Christian	82.6%	7.3%	10.0%
Unaffiliated	76.9%	12.0%	11.1%
Jehovah's Witness	73.1%	8.3%	18.5%
Jewish	70.1%	19.2%	10.7%
Catholic	69.4%	14.2%	16.4%
Other World Religion	57.1%	17.3%	25.5%
Buddhist	50.0%	12.0%	38.0%
Orthodox Christian	35.0%	24.9%	40.1%
Muslim	22.2%	21.1%	56.7%
Hindu	8.6%	15.1%	76.3%

Source: *Religious Landscape Study 2023–24*. Pew Research Center.

Analysis by Orthodox Studies Institute – orthodoxstudies.org.

Orthodoxy is also very immigrant-heavy in CES, but the percentages are very different. Once again, the Orthodox had more immigrants than anyone but the Hindus and Muslims, but in CES, our immigrant percentage was just shy of 20% – half of the Pew share – although the “children of immigrants” number was almost identical (26% in CES vs. 25% in Pew). The difference is in longer-term Americans: 54% of the CES Orthodox were American-born going back 2+ generations, compared to 35% of the Pew Orthodox.

This isn't just an Orthodox thing, either. Muslims in Pew were 57% immigrant, whereas in CES, they were only 34% immigrant. Basically, it seems that something about the methodology of the two studies results in very different coverage of immigrant groups. (This isn't too surprising – one might surmise that immigrants are less likely to sign up for YouGov than they are to take a survey promoted by mail.) Either way, Orthodoxy is very, very immigrant-heavy, but it's a difference between “we have lots of immigrants” and “we are practically dominated by immigrants.”



Immigration Status by Religious Tradition

immstat	My parents, grandparents and I were all born in the USA	My parents and I were born in the USA but at least one of my grandparents was an immigrant	I was born in the USA but at least one of my parents is an immigrant	I am an immigrant to the USA and a naturalized citizen	I am an immigrant to the USA but not a citizen
Religious_Tradition					
Hindu	6.9%	3.9%	31.4%	32.8%	25.0%
Muslim	35.6%	4.8%	25.7%	25.4%	8.5%
Orthodox	27.9%	26.0%	26.3%	15.6%	4.1%
Buddhist	44.6%	20.8%	21.3%	10.4%	2.9%
Roman Catholic	44.8%	30.7%	15.2%	7.7%	1.6%
Jewish	33.6%	43.2%	17.4%	5.5%	0.3%
Pentecostal	71.4%	10.0%	9.5%	5.9%	3.2%
Mormon	69.7%	16.2%	9.0%	4.2%	1.0%
Other Christian	71.6%	18.1%	5.9%	3.5%	0.9%
Mainline Protestant	66.4%	24.2%	6.0%	2.7%	0.6%
Evangelical Protestant	80.0%	11.1%	5.0%	3.2%	0.7%

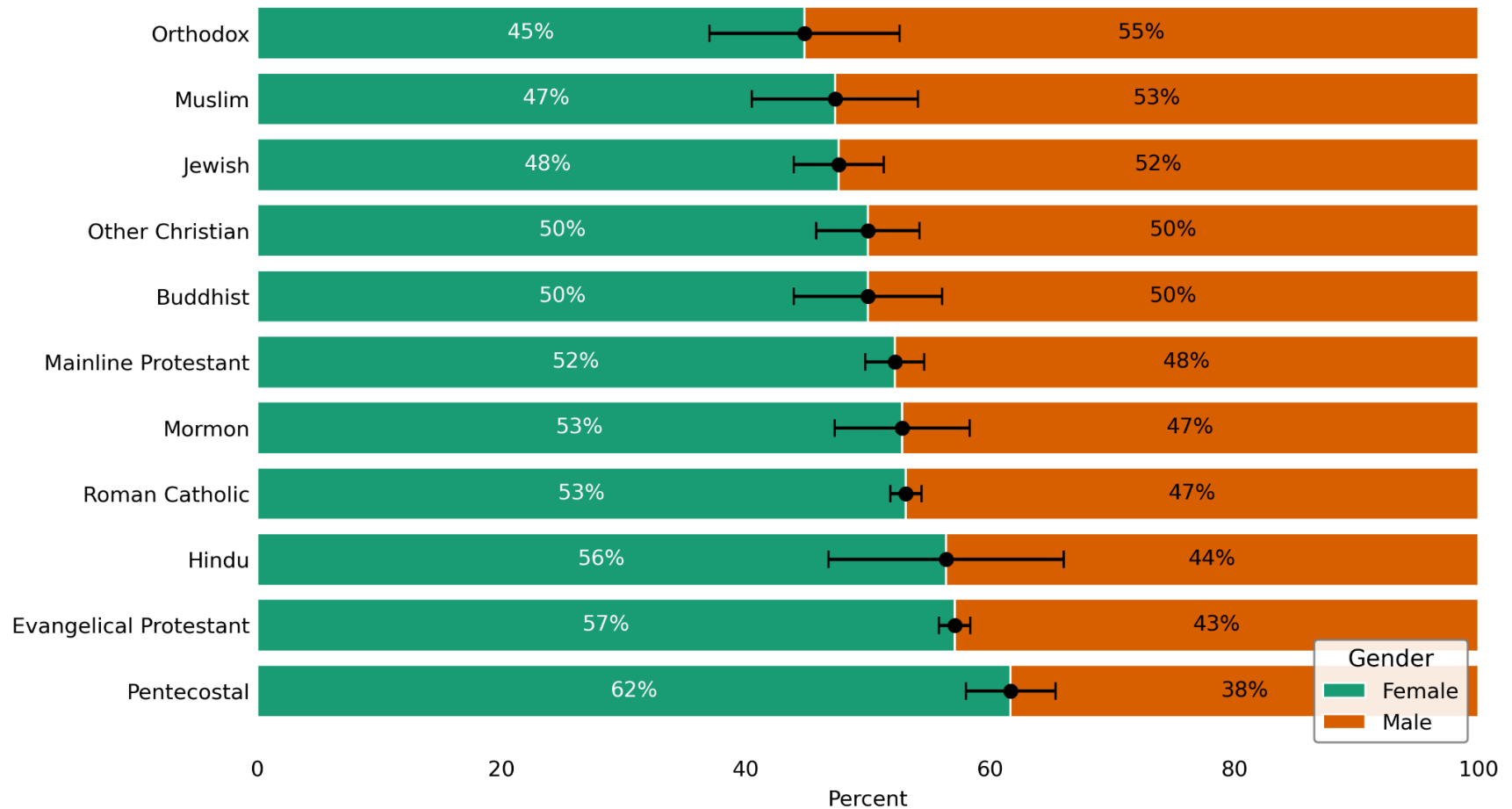
COOPERATIVE ELECTION STUDY, 2024: COMMON CONTENT. cces.gov.harvard.edu
Analysis by Orthodox Studies Institute - orthodoxstudies.org

American Orthodoxy Has a Lot of Men

In both Pew and CES, Orthodoxy is the most male-heavy Christian group in America. And really, the most male-heavy religion, period. (The weird exception here is the Hindus: in Pew, Hindus were 66% male – but in CES, they were just 44% male.)¹ Orthodoxy was 53% male in Pew, and 55% male in CES. Every other Christian group was majority female. We aren't *overwhelmingly* male – just a slight majority, and within the margin of error of 50-50 – but just having an even split makes us unusual.

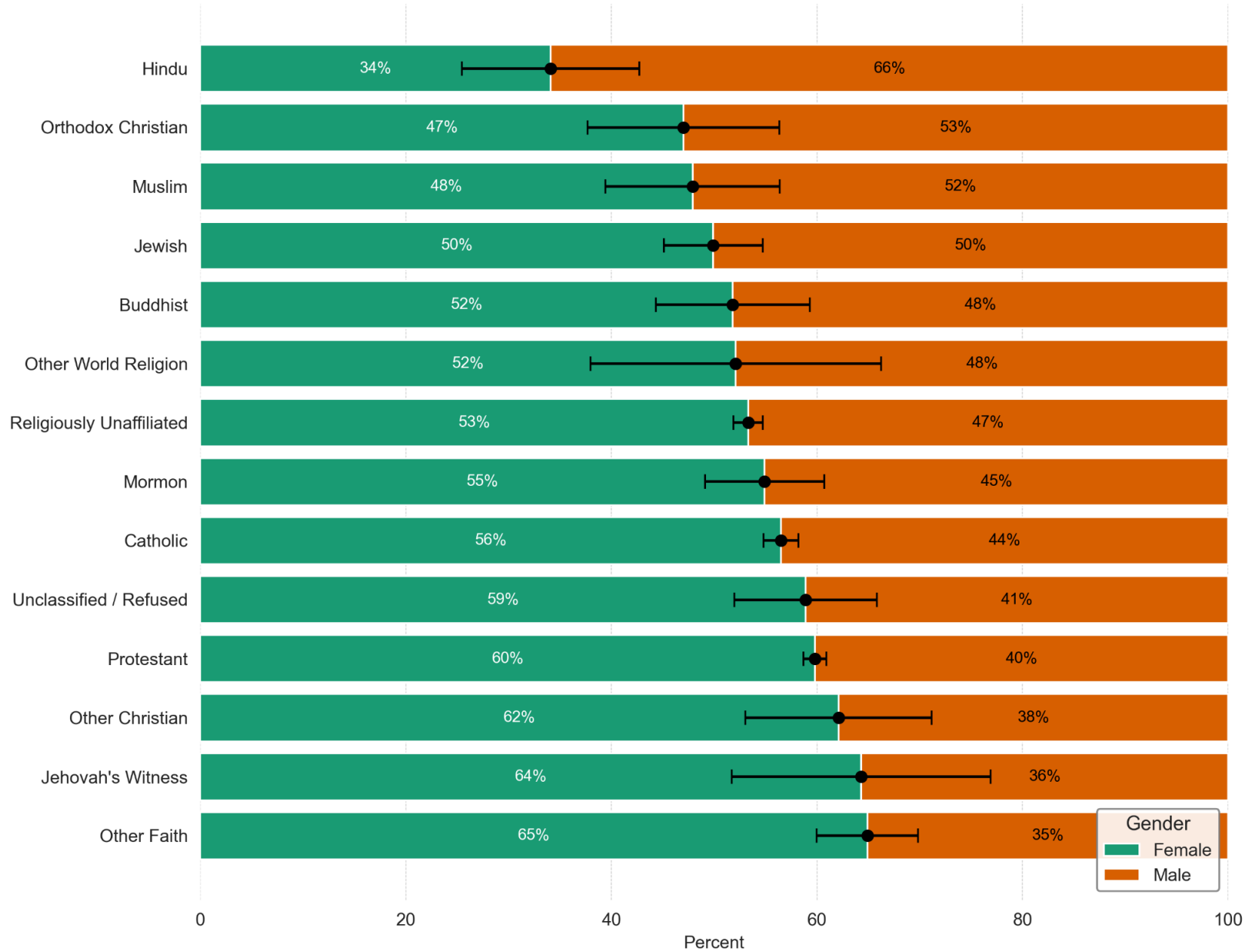
¹ Number of Hindu respondents in Pew 2024: 247. Number of Hindu respondents in CES 2024: 204.

Gender Composition by Religious Tradition (CES)



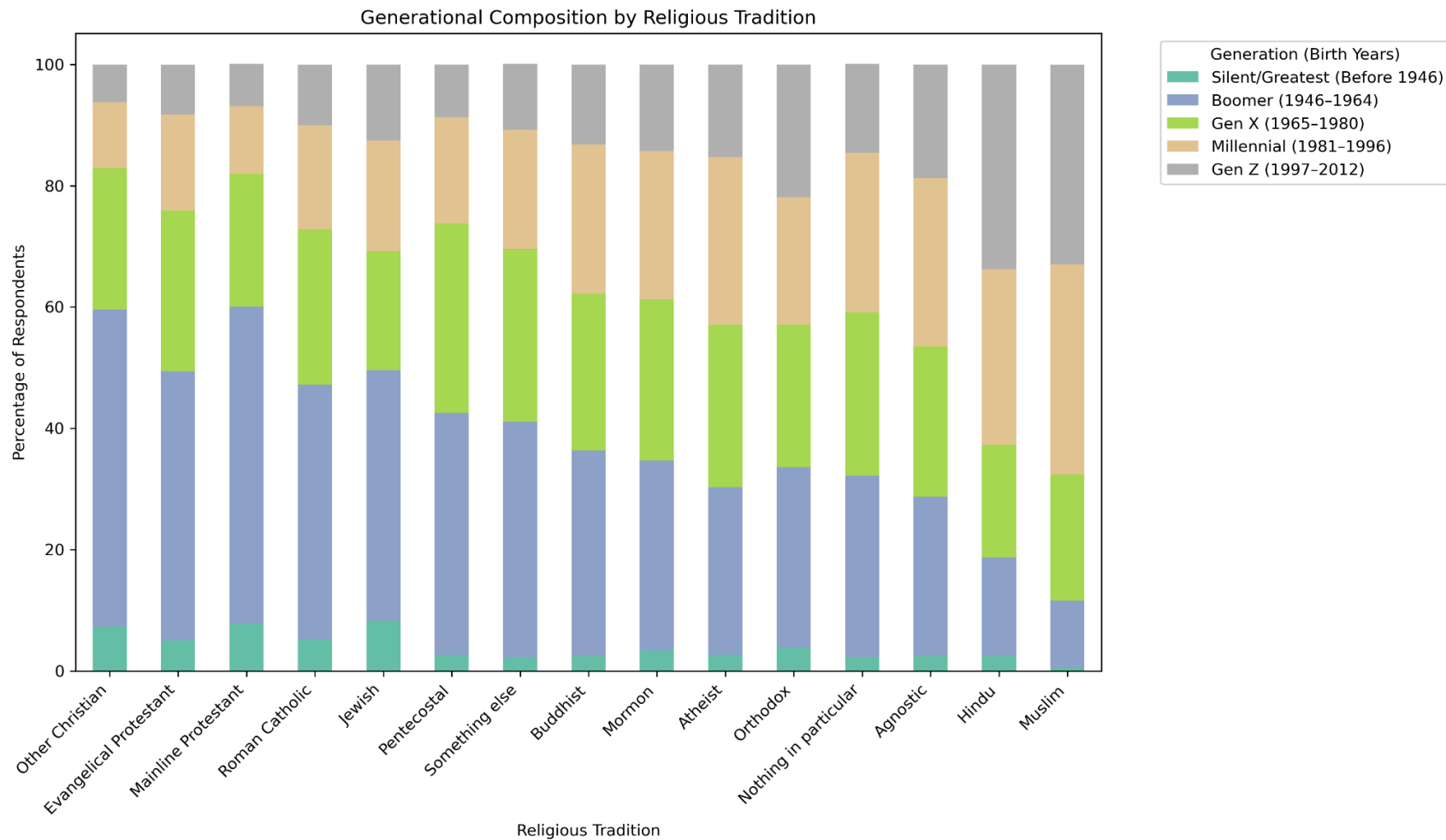
Source: COOPERATIVE ELECTION STUDY, 2024: COMMON CONTENT. cces.gov.harvard.edu
 Analysis by Orthodox Studies Institute - orthodoxstudies.org.

Gender Composition by Religious Group (Pew)



American Orthodoxy is Young

According to CES, 22% of Orthodox Christians are Gen Z – the highest percentage for any group other than Muslims and Hindus, and higher than atheists, agnostics, and “nones.” And Orthodoxy has the lowest share of Boomers of any Christian group. With a median age of 48, the Orthodox CES respondents were significantly younger than every other Christian group – compare to median ages of 58 for Catholics, 59 for Evangelicals, and 63 for Mainline Protestants.



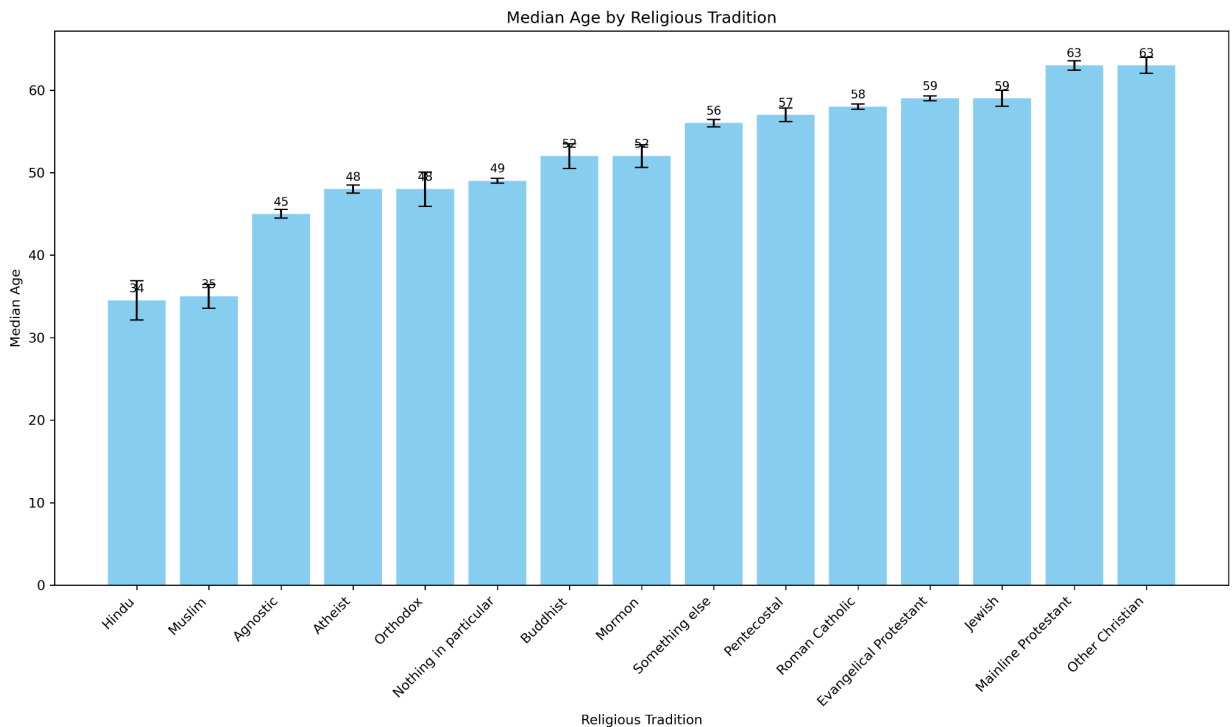
Source: COOPERATIVE ELECTION STUDY, 2024: COMMON CONTENT. cces.gov.harvard.edu
 Analysis by Orthodox Studies Institute - orthodoxstudies.org

Table: Generational Composition by Religious Tradition

Generation	Silent/Greatest (Before 1946)	Boomer (1946–1964)	Gen X (1965–1980)	Millennial (1981–1996)	Gen Z (1997–2012)
Religious Tradition					
Other Christian	7.3%	52.3%	23.3%	10.9%	6.2%
Evangelical Protestant	5.1%	44.3%	26.5%	15.8%	8.2%
Mainline Protestant	7.8%	52.3%	21.9%	11.1%	7.0%
Roman Catholic	5.3%	41.9%	25.6%	17.1%	10.0%
Jewish	8.3%	41.3%	19.6%	18.2%	12.6%
Pentecostal	2.6%	39.9%	31.3%	17.5%	8.7%
Something else	2.2%	38.9%	28.5%	19.6%	10.9%
Buddhist	2.5%	33.8%	25.9%	24.6%	13.2%
Mormon	3.4%	31.3%	26.6%	24.4%	14.3%
Atheist	2.7%	27.6%	26.8%	27.6%	15.3%
Orthodox	3.8%	29.8%	23.5%	21.0%	21.9%
Nothing in particular	2.2%	30.0%	26.9%	26.3%	14.7%
Agnostic	2.5%	26.2%	24.8%	27.7%	18.8%
Hindu	2.5%	16.2%	18.6%	28.9%	33.8%
Muslim	0.5%	11.1%	20.8%	34.6%	32.9%

Source: COOPERATIVE ELECTION STUDY, 2024: COMMON CONTENT. cces.gov.harvard.edu

Analysis by Orthodox Studies Institute - orthodoxstudies.org

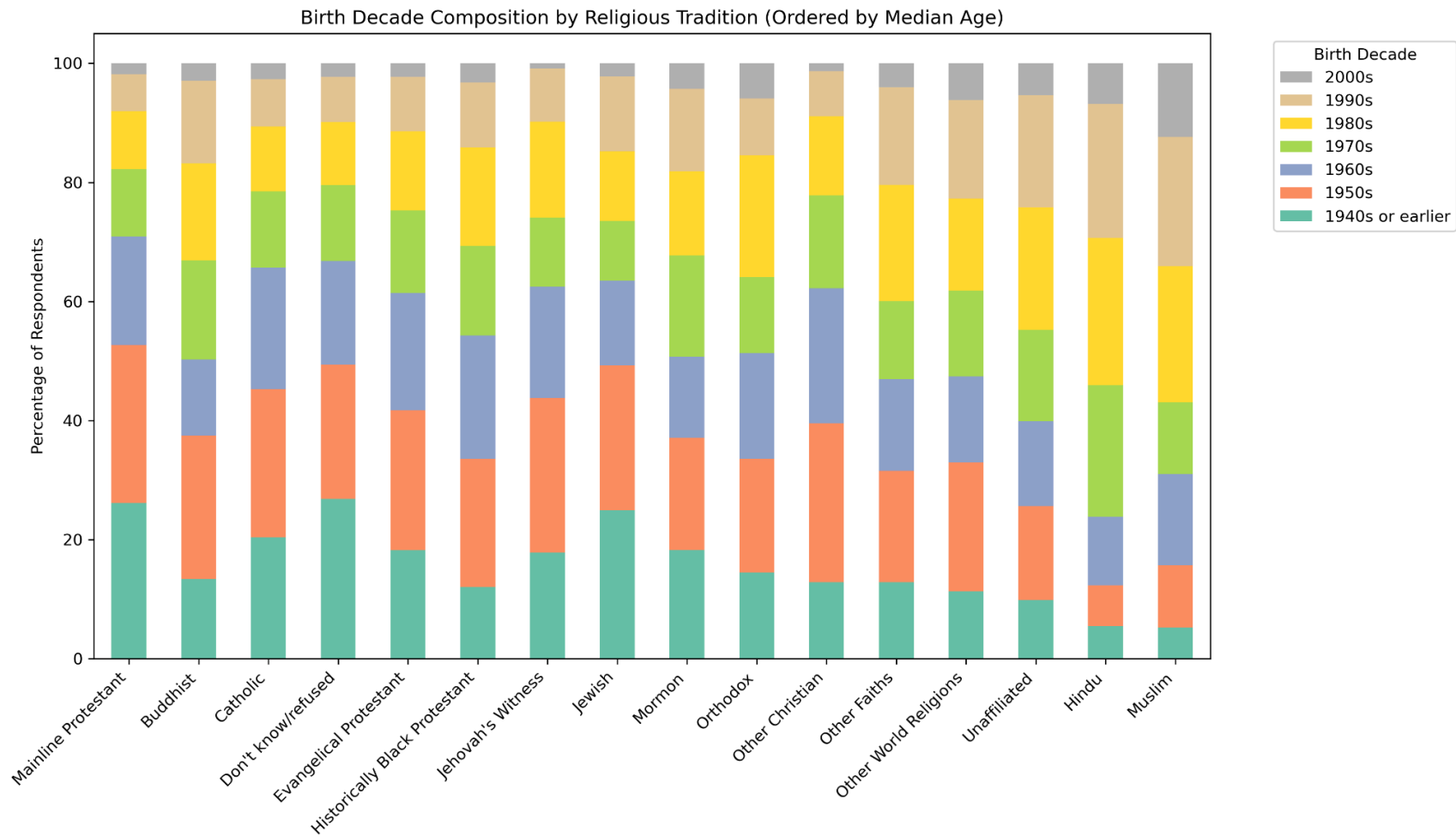


Source: COOPERATIVE ELECTION STUDY, 2024: COMMON CONTENT. cces.gov.harvard.edu
Analysis by Orthodox Studies Institute - orthodoxstudies.org

The publicly-available Pew data only gives us birth decade rather than birth year, so we can't be as precise as with the CES data. In Pew, 16% of Orthodox were born in either the 1990s or the 2000s – a high figure for Pew, with no other Christian group beating it (unless you count Mormons as Christians; they're 18% 1990s-2000s). 34% of the Pew Orthodox were born before 1960 – tied with Black Protestants, and below all other Christian groups.

We mentioned this above, but the methodologies of both Pew and CES tend to oversample older adults and undersample younger adults. We also know from the Pew and CES surveys themselves that their Orthodox samples skew younger – and this means that both surveys are likely under-counting the number of Orthodox Christians in America. Put another way: if you don't survey very many people from the Millennial and Gen Z generations, but there's a higher concentration of Orthodox people in those cohorts, you'll end up with a lower concentration of Orthodox in your survey than there is in the overall population.

The Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA has been surveying large samples of college freshmen going back decades, and for the past ten or so years, the "Eastern Orthodox" share of those college freshman has been around 0.9%. In the most recent UCLA survey (2024), it was 1.1%. Meanwhile, a free speech organization called the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression (FIRE) does an annual survey of over 50,000 college students, and in their past two iterations, the "Orthodox" percentage was 1.76% and 1.37%. These samples provide further evidence for the theory that Orthodox people are more concentrated among young adults than among older adults – and thus, that Pew and CES, with their older skew, may be significantly undersampling Orthodox Christians.



Religious Tradition (Oldest to Youngest)

Source: Religious Landscape Study 2023-24. Pew Research Center.
 Analysis by Orthodox Studies Institute - orthodoxstudies.org.

Table: Birth Decade Distribution by Religious Tradition

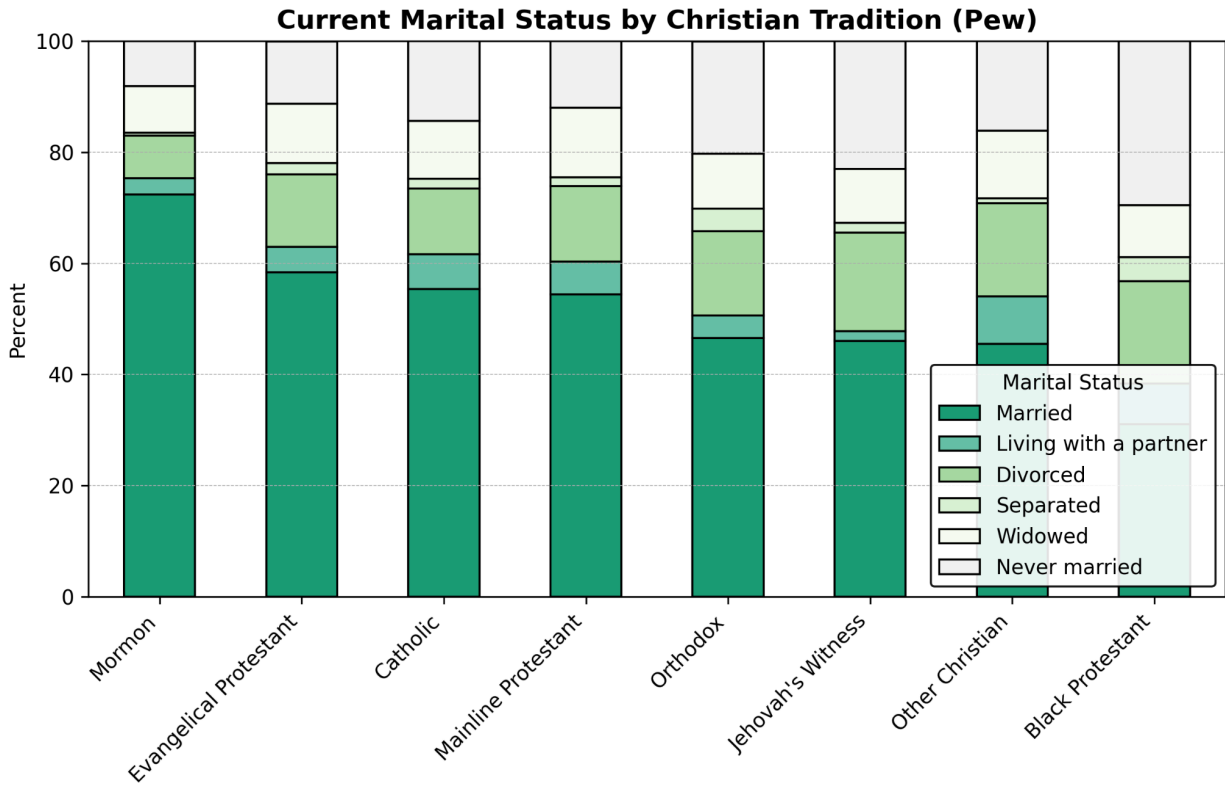
Birth Decade	1940s or earlier	1950s	1960s	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s
Religious Tradition							
Mainline Protestant	26%	27%	18%	11%	10%	6%	2%
Buddhist	13%	24%	13%	17%	16%	14%	3%
Catholic	20%	25%	20%	13%	11%	8%	3%
Don't know/refused	27%	22%	18%	13%	11%	8%	2%
Evangelical Protestant	18%	24%	20%	14%	13%	9%	2%
Historically Black Protestant	12%	22%	21%	15%	16%	11%	3%
Jehovah's Witness	18%	26%	19%	12%	16%	9%	1%
Jewish	25%	24%	14%	10%	12%	12%	2%
Mormon	18%	19%	14%	17%	14%	14%	4%
Orthodox	14%	19%	18%	13%	20%	10%	6%
Other Christian	13%	27%	23%	16%	13%	8%	1%
Other Faiths	13%	19%	15%	13%	20%	16%	4%
Other World Religions	11%	22%	14%	14%	16%	16%	6%
Unaffiliated	10%	16%	14%	15%	20%	19%	5%
Hindu	6%	7%	12%	22%	25%	23%	7%
Muslim	5%	10%	15%	12%	23%	22%	12%

Source: Religious Landscape Study 2023-24. Pew Research Center.

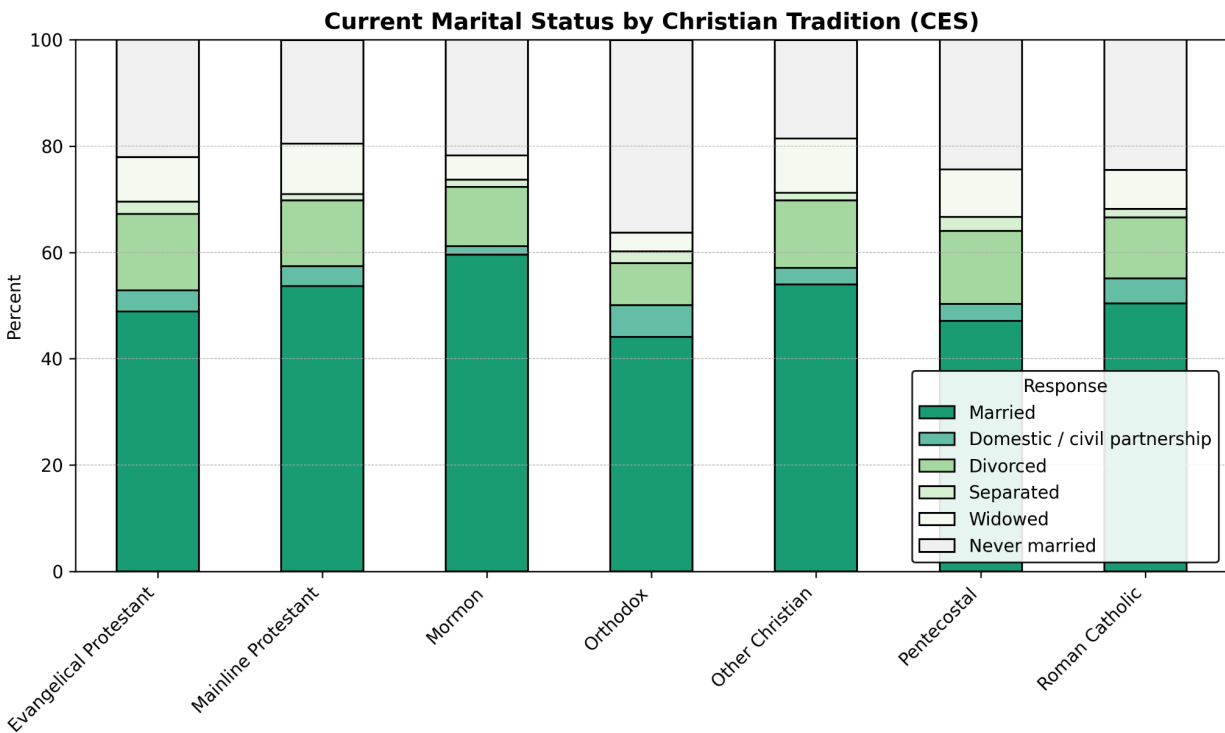
Analysis by Orthodox Studies Institute - orthodoxstudies.org.

Lots of Orthodox Have Never Married

In both Pew and CES, a fairly high percentage of Orthodox respondents had never married. In Pew, our unmarried percentage was higher than every “Christian” (in a broad sense) group, except Black Protestants and Jehovah’s Witnesses. In CES, we had the highest unmarried percentage of all, and by a lot – 36%, with the next-highest group (Roman Catholics) at 24.5%. This might be a function of Orthodoxy being more youthful than other religious groups.



Source: Religious Landscape Study 2023-24. Pew Research Center.
 Analysis by Orthodox Studies Institute - orthodoxstudies.org

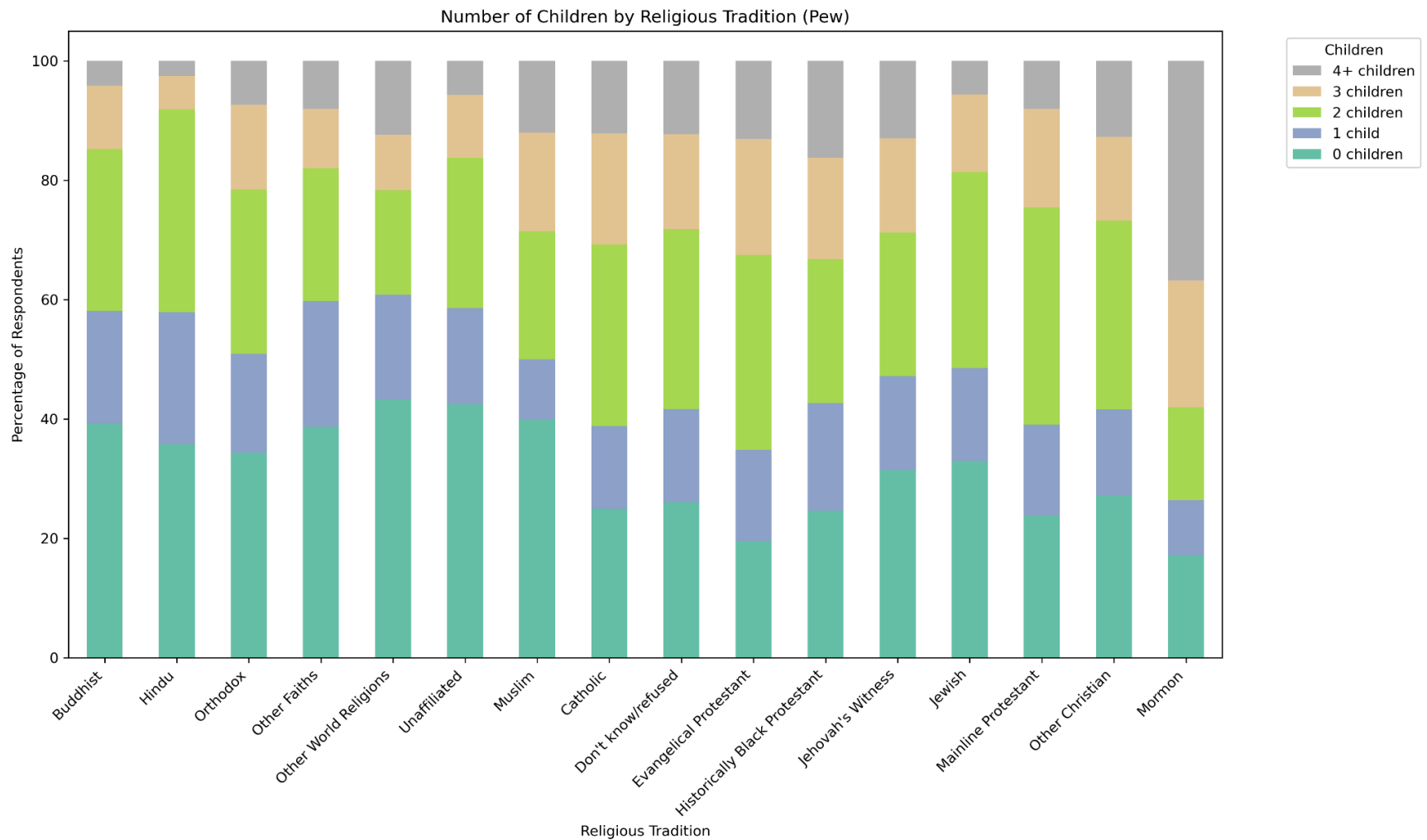


Source: COOPERATIVE ELECTION STUDY, 2024: COMMON CONTENT. cces.gov.harvard.edu
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Household Size and Children

Given that Orthodox survey respondents tend to be younger than other groups, and less likely to be married, it shouldn't be surprising that we also aren't having as many children. (Yes, I know, many of our parishes are jam-packed with kids. But these surveys are capturing self-identified Orthodox, regardless of how active they are in church. Also, many of our newer converts are unmarried.)

According to Pew, 34% of Orthodox respondents have no children, while only 21% have three or more. Compare that to Catholics (25/31), Mainline Protestants (24/25), and Evangelicals (20/32). The Mormons are – one might say – on another planet (pun intended): 17% have no children, while a whopping 58% have 3+ kids.



Source: Religious Landscape Study 2023–24. Pew Research Center.
Analysis by Orthodox Studies Institute - orthodoxstudies.org

Table: Number of Children by Religious Tradition (Pew)

	Number of Children	0 children	1 child	2 children	3 children	4+ children
Religious Tradition						
Buddhist		39.2%	18.9%	27.1%	10.6%	4.1%
Hindu		35.7%	22.1%	34.0%	5.5%	2.6%
Orthodox		34.4%	16.5%	27.5%	14.2%	7.3%
Other Faiths		38.7%	21.0%	22.3%	9.9%	8.0%
Other World Religions		43.3%	17.5%	17.5%	9.3%	12.4%
Unaffiliated		42.5%	16.1%	25.1%	10.6%	5.7%
Muslim		39.8%	10.2%	21.4%	16.5%	12.0%
Catholic		25.0%	13.9%	30.4%	18.6%	12.1%
Don't know/refused		26.1%	15.6%	30.2%	15.9%	12.3%
Evangelical Protestant		19.6%	15.3%	32.7%	19.4%	13.1%
Historically Black Protestant		24.7%	18.0%	24.1%	17.0%	16.2%
Jehovah's Witness		31.5%	15.7%	24.1%	15.7%	13.0%
Jewish		32.9%	15.6%	32.8%	13.0%	5.6%
Mainline Protestant		23.9%	15.3%	36.3%	16.5%	8.0%
Other Christian		27.1%	14.5%	31.7%	14.0%	12.7%
Mormon		17.1%	9.3%	15.5%	21.2%	36.8%

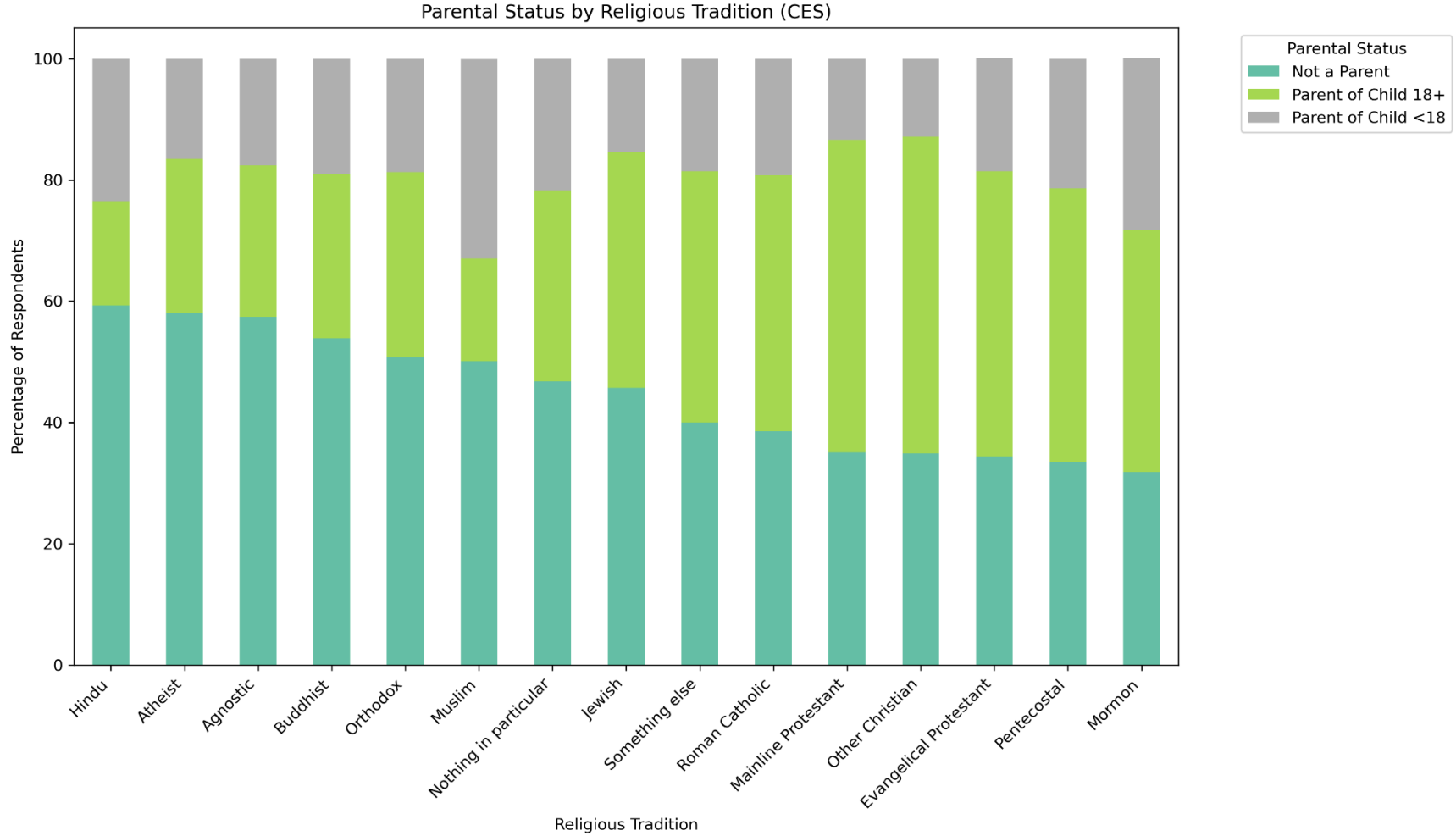
Source: *Religious Landscape Study 2023-24. Pew Research Center.*

Analysis by Orthodox Studies Institute - orthodoxstudies.org

CES didn't ask its respondents about family size, but they did ask whether they're parents (and if their kids are adults or under 18). Here again, the methodological differences between Pew and CES paint different pictures overall, but for the Orthodox remain much less likely to have children than any other Christian group. A slight majority (51%) of Orthodox Pew respondents have no children of any age, compared to 38.6% of Catholics, 35.1% of Mainlines, and 34.4% of

Evangelicals. (That's right – there were more childless Catholics than childless Mainlines in Pew's survey, which is definitely not what I expected.)

Again, though, some of this could be chalked up to Orthodox people being younger, overall, than their heterodox counterparts.



Source: COOPERATIVE ELECTION STUDY, 2024: COMMON CONTENT, cces.gov.harvard.edu
 Analysis by Orthodox Studies Institute - orthodoxstudies.org

Table: Parental Status by Religious Tradition (CES)

Parental Status	Not a Parent	Parent of Child 18+	Parent of Child <18
Religious Tradition			
Hindu	59.3%	17.2%	23.5%
Atheist	58.0%	25.5%	16.5%
Agnostic	57.4%	25.0%	17.6%
Buddhist	53.9%	27.1%	19.0%
Orthodox	50.8%	30.5%	18.7%
Muslim	50.1%	16.9%	32.9%
Nothing in particular	46.8%	31.5%	21.7%
Jewish	45.7%	38.9%	15.4%
Something else	40.0%	41.4%	18.6%
Roman Catholic	38.6%	42.2%	19.2%
Mainline Protestant	35.1%	51.5%	13.4%
Other Christian	34.9%	52.2%	12.9%
Evangelical Protestant	34.4%	47.0%	18.7%
Pentecostal	33.5%	45.1%	21.4%
Mormon	31.8%	40.0%	28.3%

Source: COOPERATIVE ELECTION STUDY, 2024: COMMON CONTENT. cces.gov.harvard.edu

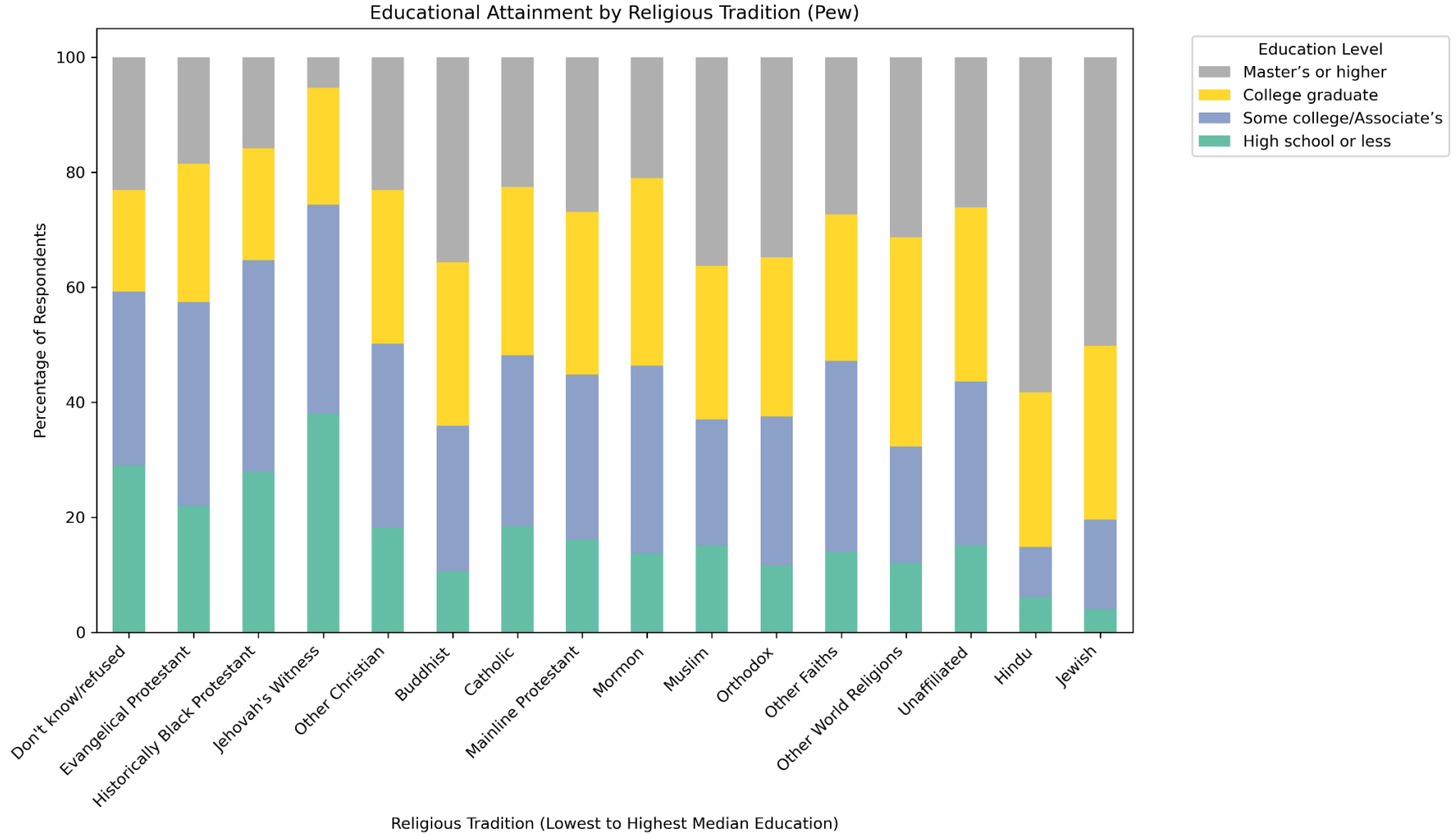
Analysis by Orthodox Studies Institute - orthodoxstudies.org

Education

American Orthodox Christians are highly educated – according to Pew, 35% hold graduate degrees, which is higher than anyone except Hindus, Jews, Muslims, and Buddhists. When you throw in 4-year degrees, 63% are college graduates. No other Christian group comes close.

CES respondents, as a group, were less educated than Pew respondents, but the shape of the data is similar, with the Orthodox coming out as highly educated compared to heterodox

Christians. In CES, almost 20% of Orthodox have a master's degree or higher (trailing only Hindus, Jews, and Buddhists), and 48% of Orthodox are college graduates.



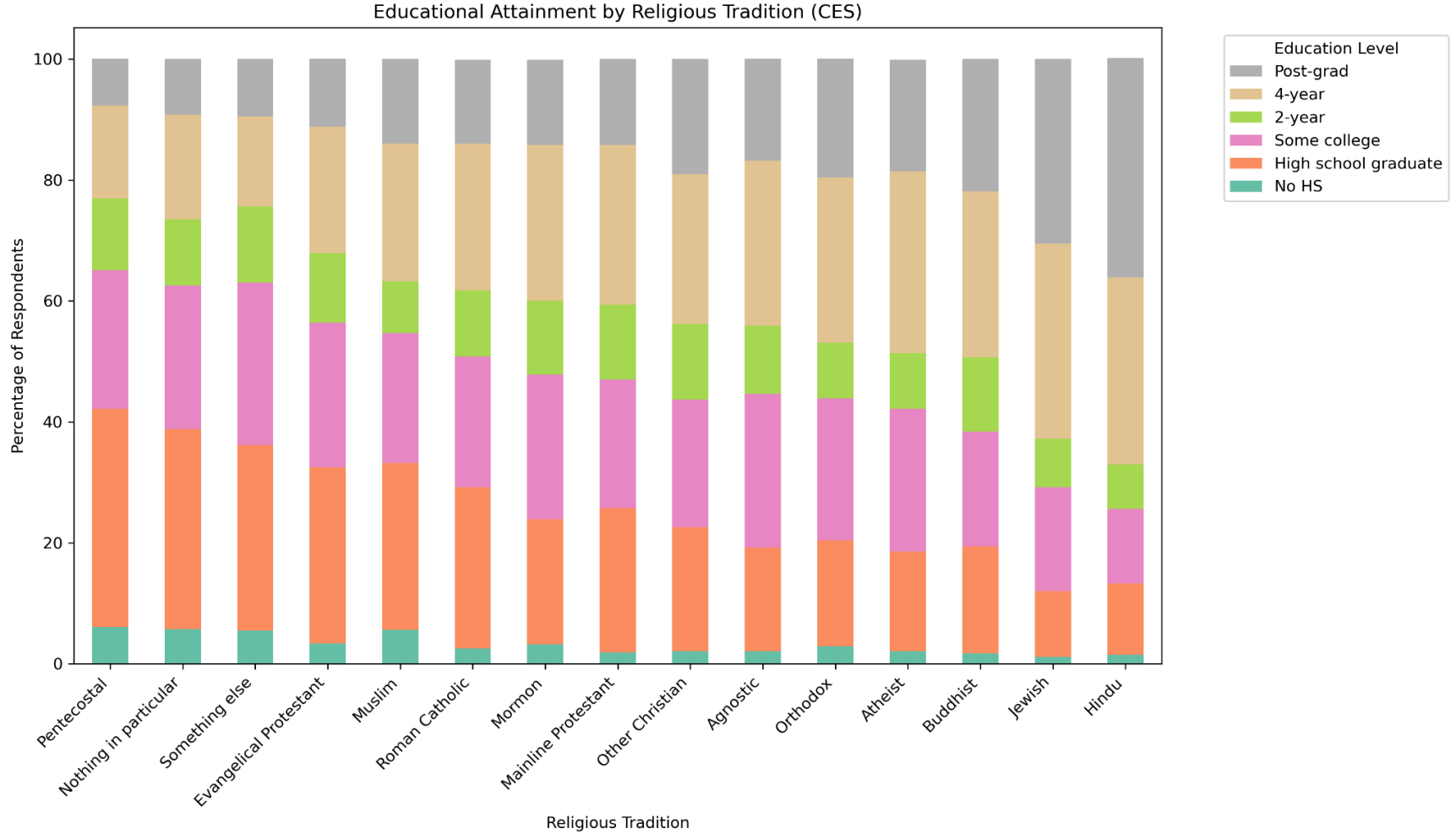
Source: Religious Landscape Study 2023-24. Pew Research Center.
 Analysis by Orthodox Studies Institute - orthodoxstudies.org

Table: Educational Attainment by Religious Tradition (Pew)

Education Level	High school or less	Some college/Associate's	College graduate	Master's or higher
Religious Tradition				
Don't know/refused	29.0%	30.3%	17.6%	23.1%
Evangelical Protestant	22.0%	35.4%	24.0%	18.5%
Historically Black Protestant	27.9%	36.8%	19.4%	15.9%
Jehovah's Witness	38.1%	36.3%	20.4%	5.3%
Other Christian	18.2%	32.0%	26.7%	23.1%
Buddhist	10.6%	25.3%	28.4%	35.6%
Catholic	18.5%	29.7%	29.3%	22.6%
Mainline Protestant	16.1%	28.8%	28.2%	26.9%
Mormon	13.8%	32.6%	32.6%	21.1%
Muslim	15.2%	21.9%	26.7%	36.3%
Orthodox	11.6%	25.9%	27.7%	34.8%
Other Faiths	13.9%	33.3%	25.4%	27.4%
Other World Religions	12.1%	20.2%	36.4%	31.3%
Unaffiliated	15.2%	28.4%	30.3%	26.1%
Hindu	6.2%	8.7%	26.9%	58.3%
Jewish	4.1%	15.5%	30.2%	50.2%

Source: Religious Landscape Study 2023–24. Pew Research Center.

Analysis by Orthodox Studies Institute - orthodoxstudies.org



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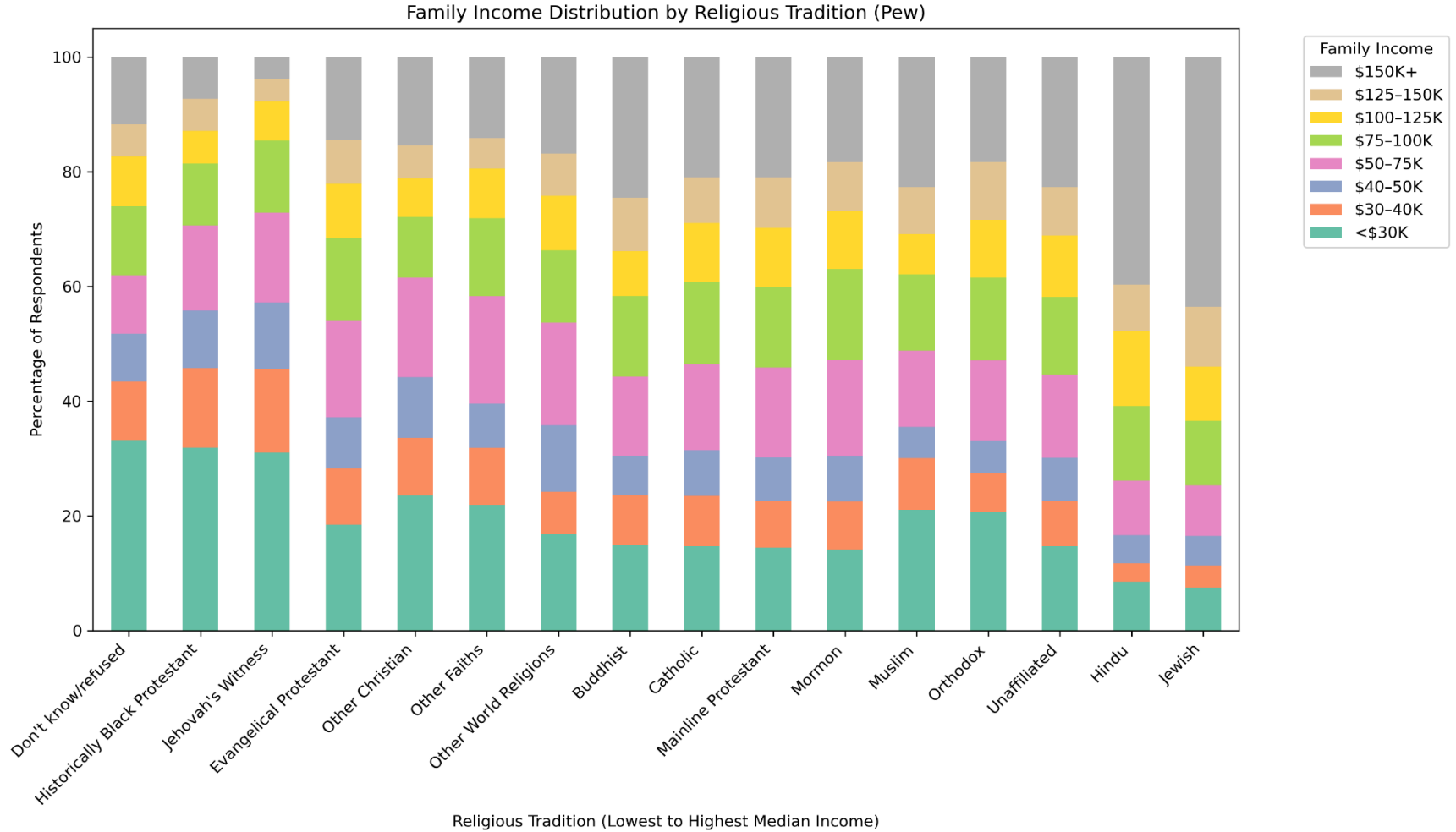
	Education Level	No HS	High school graduate	Some college	2-year	4-year	Post-grad
Religious Tradition							
Pentecostal	6.1%		36.0%	23.0%	11.9%	15.3%	7.8%
Nothing in particular	5.7%		33.1%	23.8%	10.9%	17.3%	9.2%
Something else	5.5%		30.7%	26.8%	12.6%	14.9%	9.5%
Evangelical Protestant	3.4%		29.1%	23.9%	11.5%	20.9%	11.3%
Muslim	5.6%		27.6%	21.5%	8.5%	22.8%	14.0%
Roman Catholic	2.5%		26.7%	21.6%	11.0%	24.2%	13.9%
Mormon	3.2%		20.7%	23.9%	12.2%	25.8%	14.1%
Mainline Protestant	1.9%		23.8%	21.3%	12.4%	26.4%	14.2%
Other Christian	2.1%		20.5%	21.1%	12.5%	24.7%	19.1%
Agnostic	2.1%		17.1%	25.4%	11.3%	27.3%	16.9%
Orthodox	2.9%		17.5%	23.5%	9.2%	27.3%	19.7%
Atheist	2.1%		16.4%	23.7%	9.2%	30.0%	18.5%
Buddhist	1.7%		17.7%	19.0%	12.3%	27.4%	21.9%
Jewish	1.1%		10.9%	17.2%	8.0%	32.3%	30.5%
Hindu	1.5%		11.8%	12.3%	7.4%	30.9%	36.3%

Source: COOPERATIVE ELECTION STUDY, 2024: COMMON CONTENT. cces.gov.harvard.edu

Analysis by Orthodox Studies Institute - orthodoxstudies.org

Income

Given how highly-educated American Orthodox are, you might expect us to have higher incomes, too – but it's not that simple. Pew's data has us looking pretty similar to Roman Catholics and Mainline Protestants on income. Here's a simplified chart with three income tiers (\$125k+, \$50k-125k, and under \$50k), along with a table showing the full Pew breakdown:



Source: Religious Landscape Study 2023-24, Pew Research Center.
Analysis by Orthodox Studies Institute - orthodoxstudies.org

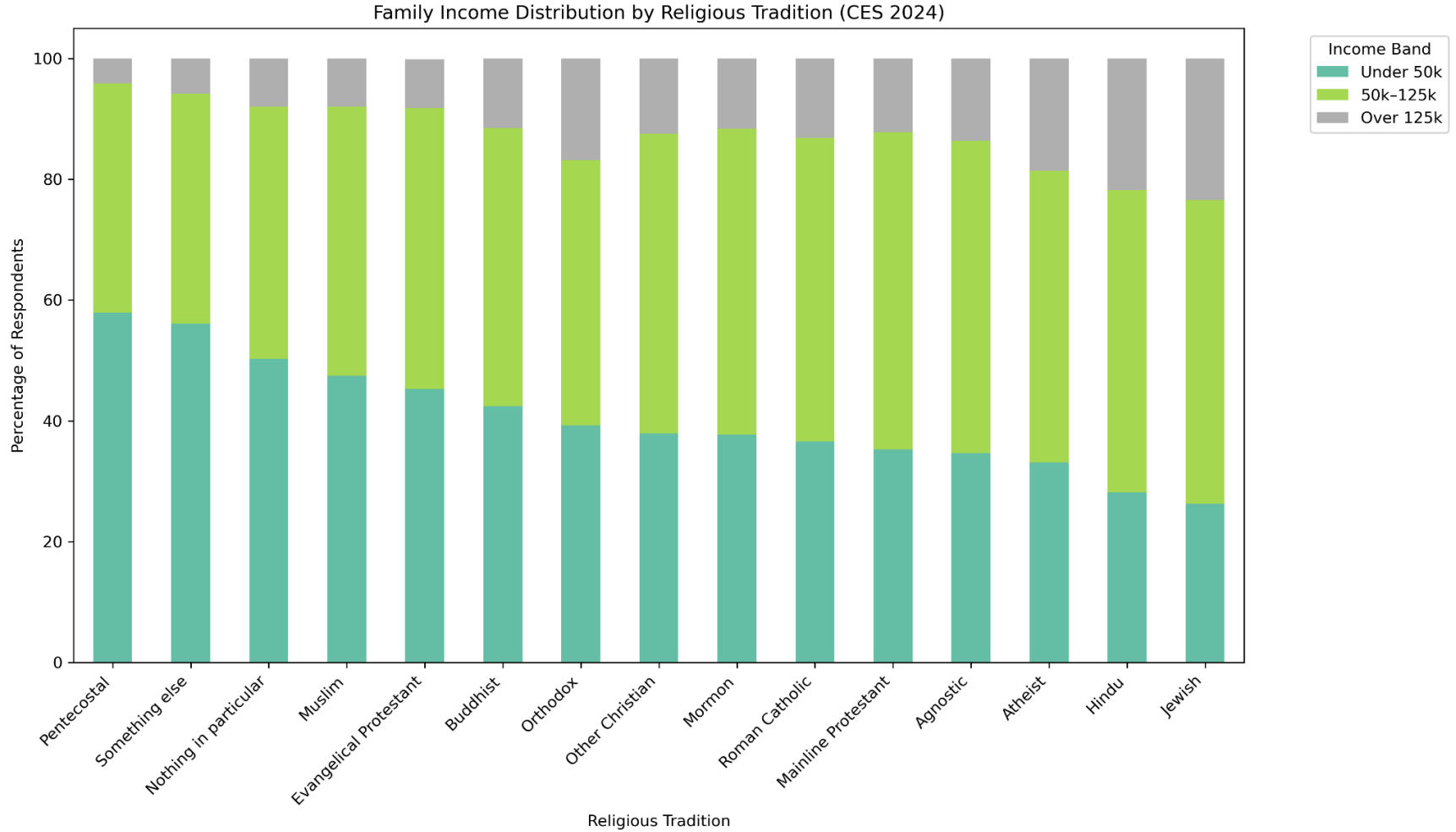
Table: Family Income Distribution by Religious Tradition (Pew)

Family Income	<\$30K	\$30–40K	\$40–50K	\$50–75K	\$75–100K	\$100–125K	\$125–150K	\$150K+
Religious Tradition								
Don't know/refused	33.2%	10.2%	8.4%	10.2%	12.0%	8.7%	5.7%	11.7%
Historically Black Protestant	31.9%	13.9%	9.9%	14.9%	10.8%	5.7%	5.6%	7.3%
Jehovah's Witness	31.1%	14.6%	11.7%	15.5%	12.6%	6.8%	3.9%	3.9%
Evangelical Protestant	18.5%	9.8%	8.9%	16.8%	14.4%	9.5%	7.6%	14.5%
Other Christian	23.6%	10.1%	10.6%	17.3%	10.6%	6.7%	5.8%	15.4%
Other Faiths	22.0%	9.9%	7.7%	18.7%	13.6%	8.7%	5.3%	14.1%
Other World Religions	16.8%	7.4%	11.6%	17.9%	12.6%	9.5%	7.4%	16.8%
Buddhist	15.0%	8.7%	6.9%	13.8%	14.1%	7.8%	9.3%	24.6%
Catholic	14.8%	8.7%	8.0%	15.0%	14.3%	10.3%	8.0%	21.0%
Mainline Protestant	14.5%	8.1%	7.6%	15.7%	14.1%	10.2%	8.8%	21.0%
Mormon	14.2%	8.3%	8.0%	16.7%	15.9%	10.0%	8.5%	18.4%
Muslim	21.1%	9.0%	5.5%	13.3%	13.3%	7.0%	8.2%	22.7%
Orthodox	20.7%	6.7%	5.8%	13.9%	14.4%	10.1%	10.1%	18.3%
Unaffiliated	14.8%	7.8%	7.6%	14.5%	13.5%	10.7%	8.4%	22.7%
Hindu	8.6%	3.2%	5.0%	9.5%	13.1%	13.1%	8.1%	39.6%
Jewish	7.6%	3.8%	5.1%	8.8%	11.3%	9.5%	10.4%	43.5%

Source: *Religious Landscape Study 2023–24*. Pew Research Center.

Analysis by Orthodox Studies Institute - orthodoxstudies.org

With CES, the Orthodox do have a bit more in the \$125k+ tier compared to heterodox Christians, although we're dealing with small enough sample sizes that we can't draw any real conclusions from this:



Source: COOPERATIVE ELECTION STUDY 2024; COMMON CONTENT. cces.gov.harvard.edu
 Analysis by Orthodox Studies Institute - orthodoxstudies.org

Table: Family Income Distribution by Religious Tradition (CES 2024)

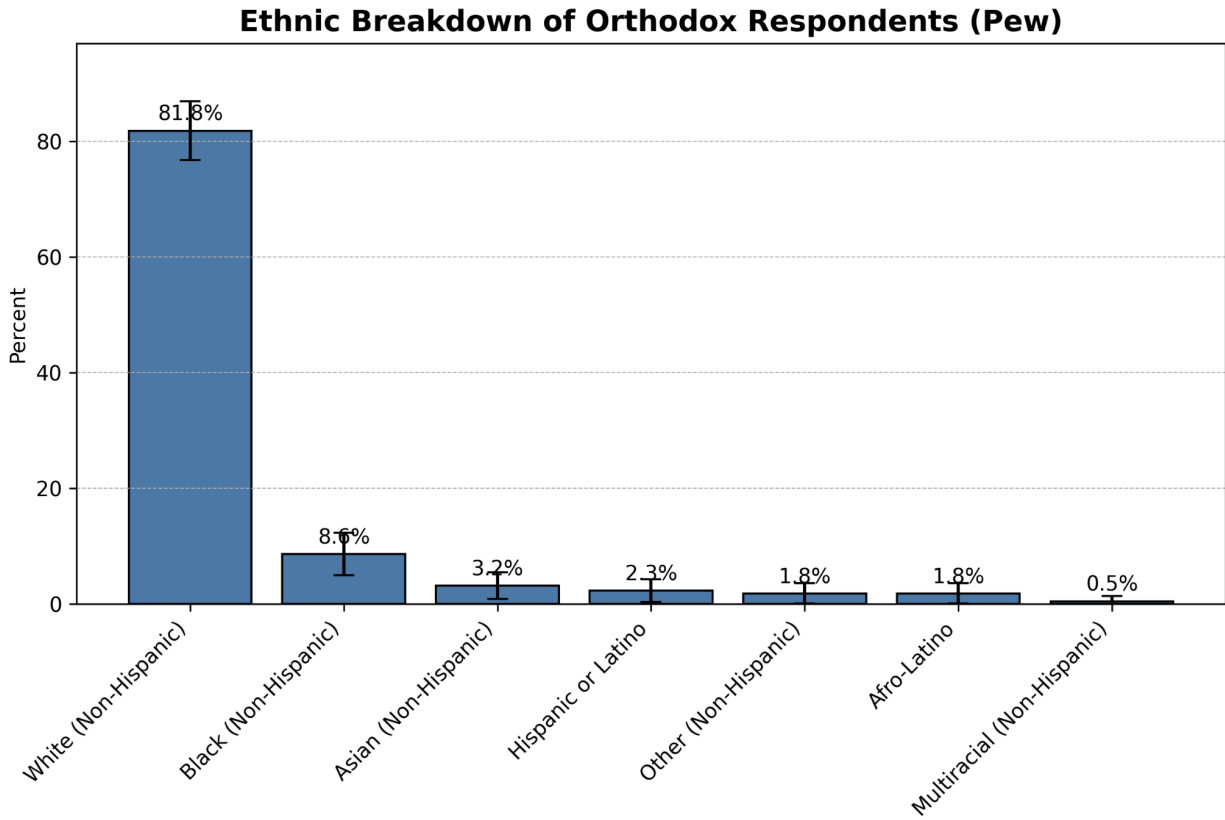
	Income Band	Under 50k	50k–125k	Over 125k
Religious Tradition				
Pentecostal		57.9%	38.0%	4.1%
Something else		56.1%	38.1%	5.8%
Nothing in particular		50.3%	41.7%	8.0%
Muslim		47.5%	44.5%	8.0%
Evangelical Protestant		45.3%	46.5%	8.1%
Buddhist		42.4%	46.1%	11.5%
Orthodox		39.2%	44.0%	16.8%
Other Christian		37.9%	49.7%	12.4%
Mormon		37.7%	50.7%	11.6%
Roman Catholic		36.6%	50.3%	13.1%
Mainline Protestant		35.3%	52.5%	12.2%
Agnostic		34.7%	51.7%	13.6%
Atheist		33.1%	48.3%	18.6%
Hindu		28.2%	50.0%	21.8%
Jewish		26.3%	50.3%	23.4%

Source: COOPERATIVE ELECTION STUDY 2024: COMMON CONTENT. cces.gov.harvard.edu

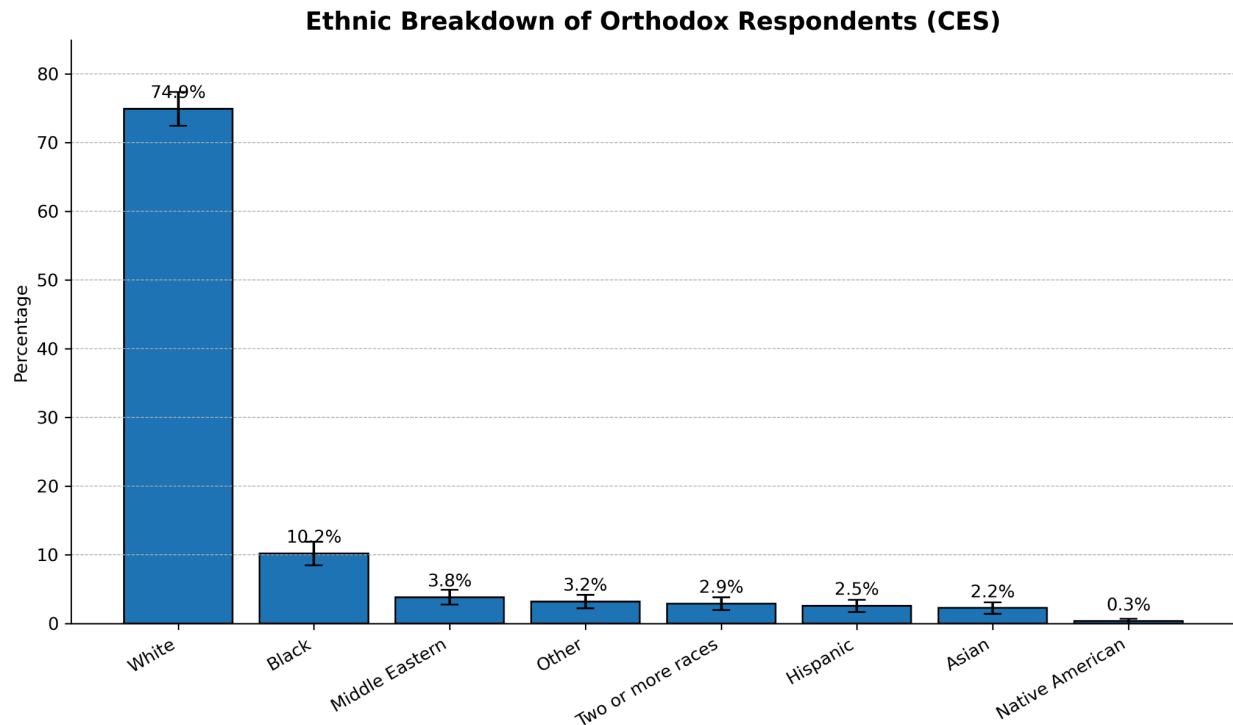
Analysis by Orthodox Studies Institute - orthodoxstudies.org

Race

Unsurprisingly, the vast majority of Orthodox in America (82% in Pew, 75% in CES) reported their race as white. This is basically in line with the US population, which is 75% white. Around a tenth identified as black, which isn't too far off of the overall US population – [according to US Census data](#), 13.7% of Americans are black. It's possible that some of the black Orthodox Christians in these surveys are Ethiopians or Eritreans.



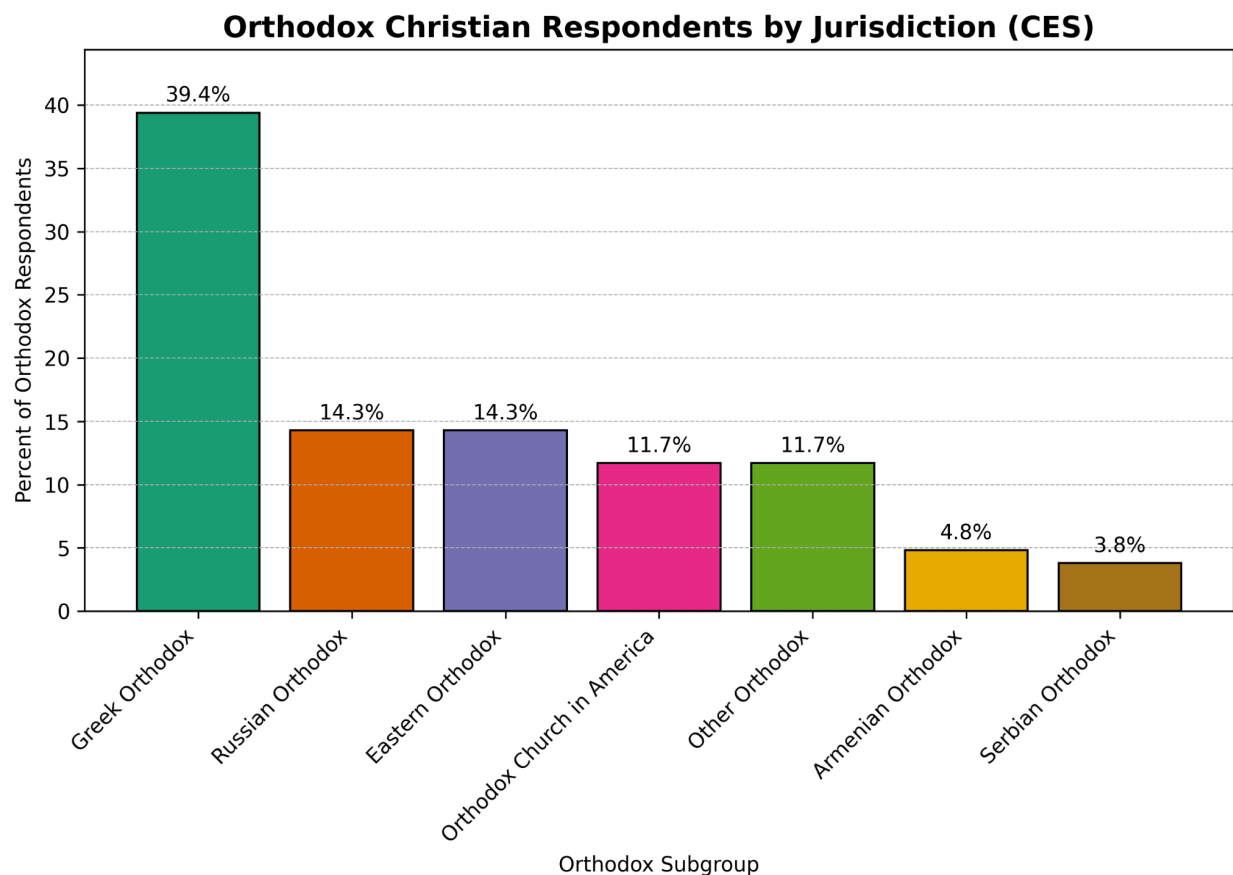
Source: Religious Landscape Study 2023-24. Pew Research Center.
Analysis by Orthodox Studies Institute - orthodoxstudies.org



Source: COOPERATIVE ELECTION STUDY, 2024: COMMON CONTENT. cces.gov.harvard.edu
Analysis by Orthodox Studies Institute - orthodoxstudies.org.

“To Which Orthodox Church Do You Belong?”

In past Religious Landscape Studies, Pew would ask a follow-up question to respondents who identified as Orthodox – to which Orthodox church do you belong? Unfortunately, for unclear reasons, Pew removed this question from its 2024 survey. However, CES also asks the question, and we can glean a little bit about what you might call the “jurisdictional” breakdown of Orthodoxy in America.



Source: COOPERATIVE ELECTION STUDY, 2024: COMMON CONTENT. cces.gov.harvard.edu
 Analysis by Orthodox Studies Institute - orthodoxstudies.org

A strong plurality – 39% – of CES’s Orthodox respondents identified as “Greek Orthodox.” Most of these are probably connected to the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, although it’s important to remember that “Greek Orthodox” is also frequently used not just as a jurisdictional or ethnic identity, but as a way to distinguish Orthodoxy from heterodoxy in the East. For example, in English, the official name of the Patriarchate of Antioch is the *Greek Orthodox* Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East. Given that none of CES’s listed options includes “Antiochian,” it’s likely that many Antiochians and perhaps other non-Greek Orthodox Christians selected “Greek Orthodox.”

Only about 12% of the CES Orthodox respondents chose the OCA – but 14% chose Russian Orthodox. This shouldn’t be interpreted to mean that ROCOR (and the tiny Moscow Patriarchate jurisdiction) actually have more members than the OCA. Given the OCA’s Russian heritage, it’s likely that many of its members also selected “Russian Orthodox.” Also, if you’re a Russian who attends a Serbian parish, or a Greek who attends an Antiochian parish, which option do you select?

Confusingly, the CES list also includes “Eastern Orthodox,” which doesn’t correspond to a particular jurisdiction, but is a term that’s used to refer to *all* Chalcedonian Orthodox Christians.

It's clear that the CES list of Orthodox churches was not made by people who actually understand the Orthodox Church.

What About the Oriental Orthodox?

And then there's the "Armenian Orthodox" option. About 5% of the Orthodox CES respondents identified as Armenian Orthodox. In his 2020 survey of parishes, Alexei Krindatch found that 11% of all "Orthodox" adherents (both Eastern and Oriental) were part of the Armenian Orthodox jurisdictions. This suggests that Armenian Orthodox are not being lumped in with Eastern Orthodox at a level that matches their parish membership.

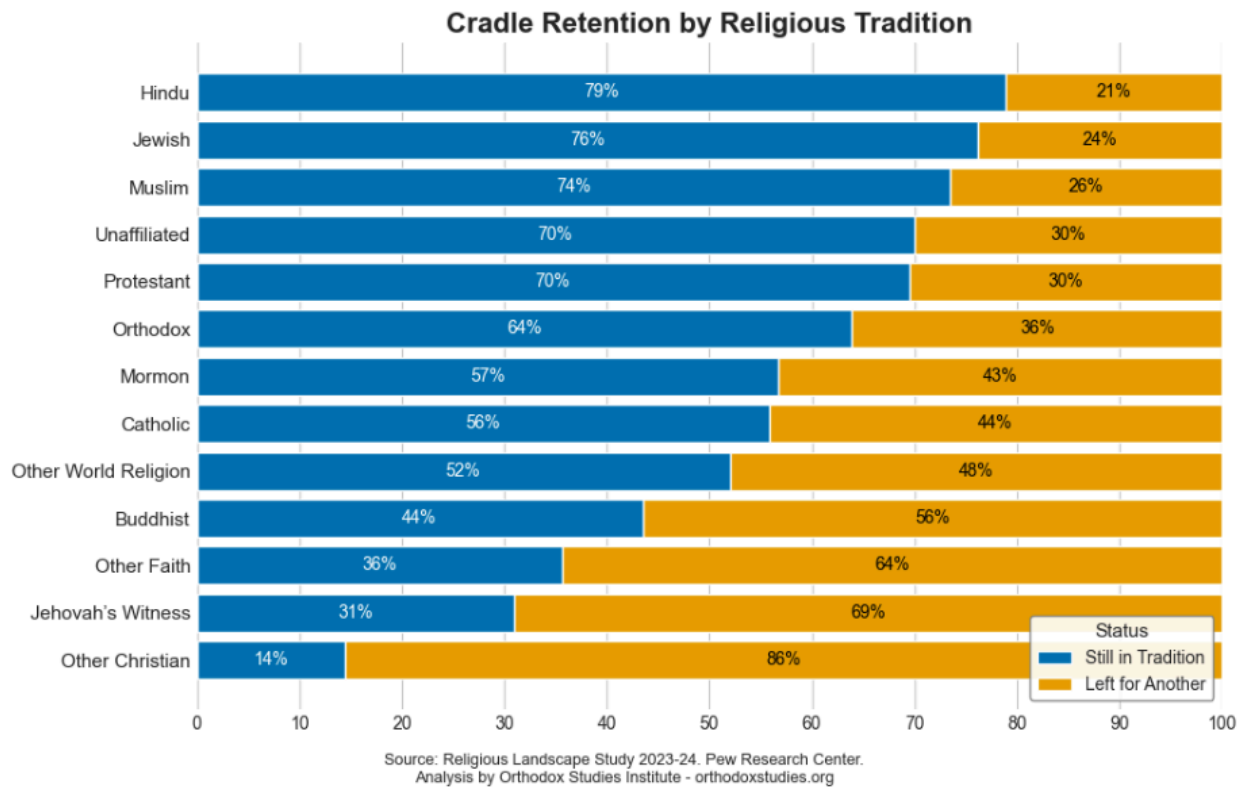
What about the rest of the Oriental Orthodox? Other than the Armenians, where would an Oriental Orthodox person fit themselves into this list? The logical place is "Other Orthodox," and some may have chosen "Eastern Orthodox." But those categories likely also include Antiochians, Romanians, Ukrainians, etc. If we take the 5% that chose Armenian, and we assume that $\frac{2}{3}$ of the "Other Orthodox," and $\frac{1}{3}$ of the "Eastern Orthodox," are Oriental Orthodox (most likely a high estimate), this would imply that *maybe* 16% of the Orthodox CES sample is actually Oriental Orthodox. And that's at the extreme high end.

In his [2020 survey of parishes](#), Alexei Krindatch estimated that Oriental Orthodox make up a combined 42% of all "Orthodox" (both Chalcedonian and non-Chalcedonian) in America. It's pretty clear that the Oriental Orthodox share of the Orthodox respondents to Pew and CES is *much* lower than 42% – almost certainly no higher than 16%, and probably closer to 10%.

Cradle Retention Rates

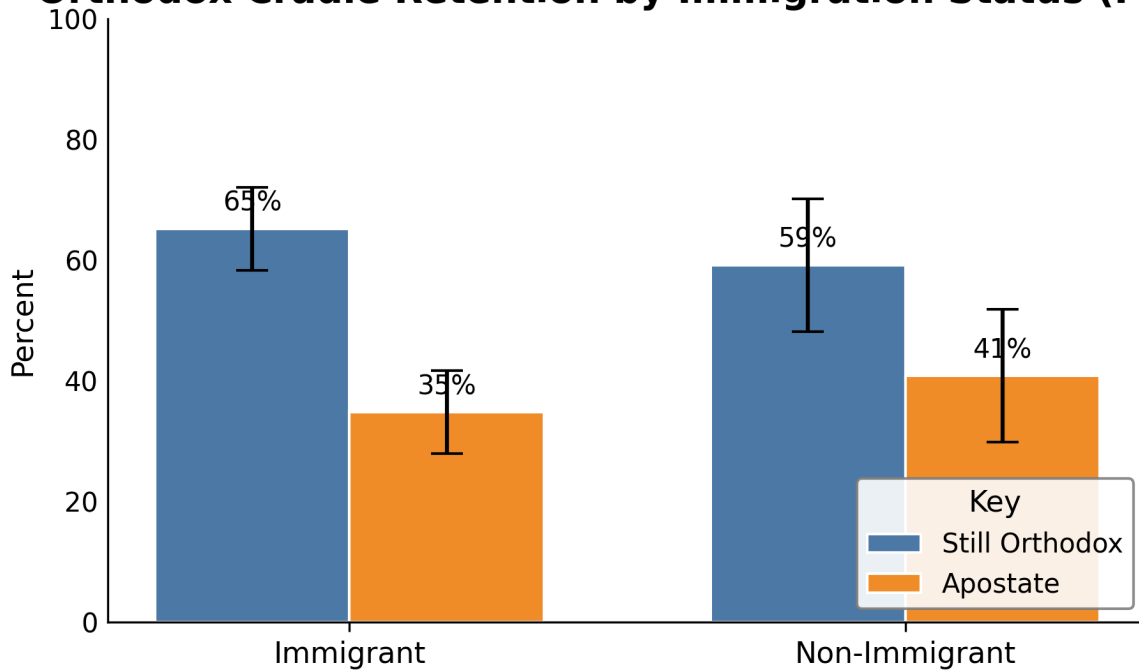
Pew asked respondents about their childhood religion, as well as their current one. From this, we can calculate a retention rate for cradle Orthodox – 64%, for the cradle Orthodox respondents to this Pew survey. That's a bit better than cradle Roman Catholics (56%), but much lower than Jews and Muslims. It's also lower than Protestants, who are at 70% – but take that number with a grain of salt, because Pew restricts access to data that would allow us to distinguish between Mainline and Evangelical Protestants for purposes of determining childhood religious tradition. Similarly, this does not track someone who left one Protestant tradition (e.g., Baptist) to go to another one (e.g., non-denominational or Methodist). So there is a lot more movement within the Protestant category than this graph lets on.

From other, somewhat older data sets, we have previously estimated the cradle Orthodox retention rate at 58%, and the 64% figure in the new Pew data is pretty close to that. Basically, six in ten Americans who grew up Orthodox still identify as Orthodox.



Retention is slightly better for cradle Orthodox who are either immigrants or the children of immigrants, compared to cradles who come from American-born parents. But the difference is not statistically significant.

Orthodox Cradle Retention by Immigration Status (Pew)



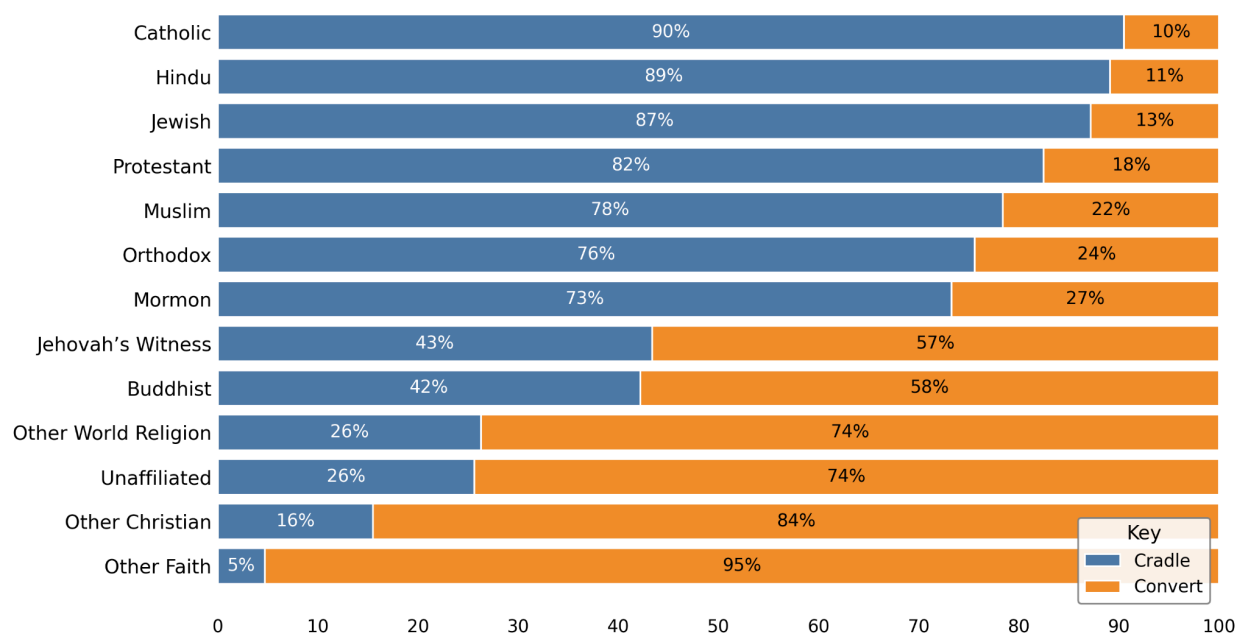
*Source: Religious Landscape Study 2023-24. Pew Research Center.
Analysis by Orthodox Studies Institute - orthodoxstudies.org*

Cradles versus Converts

Thanks to Pew's childhood religion data, we can also determine the percentage of respondents who converted to Orthodoxy – people who are Orthodox now, but who were raised in some other tradition. In the Pew data, 24% of current Orthodox people are converts, which is far higher than the convert share of Catholics (10%) – despite the fact that our cradle retention rate is also higher than the Catholics'. And with minimal evangelism on our part, we have almost as high a share of converts as Mormons do.

The same caveat about Protestantism applies here, too – because we can't access Pew's restricted data, we can't identify people who grew up in one Protestant tradition but are now part of another one. If we had that granular data, the convert share for some Protestant groups would undoubtedly be higher than it is here.

Cradle vs. Convert by Religious Tradition (Pew)



Source: Religious Landscape Study 2023-24. Pew Research Center.
Analysis by Orthodox Studies Institute - orthodoxstudies.org

Childhood Religious Importance Among Current Orthodox Christians

Focusing just on current Orthodox Christians in the Pew study, there's an understandable relationship between how important religion was in the respondent's family as a child, and how important religion is to the respondent today. A majority of Orthodox (55%) who grew up in very religious families still consider religion to be very important, while just 10% don't consider it important (even though they identify as Orthodox). But a similar dynamic doesn't exist at the other extreme: for current Orthodox Christians who grew up in families where religion was not important, 38% still feel that way (despite being Orthodox) – but 41% now consider religion to be very important.

Among Orthodox Christians: Importance of Religion Now vs. Childhood Family Influence

Q1: When you were growing up, how important was religion to your family?

Q2: How important is religion in your life today?

Importance of religion today			
Very important Somewhat important Not too/Not at all important			
Importance of religion in childhood			
Very important	55%	35%	10%
Somewhat important	24%	41%	35%
Not too/Not at all important	41%	22%	38%

Source: Religious Landscape Study 2023-24. Pew Research Center.

Analysis by Orthodox Studies Institute - orthodoxstudies.org

That’s focusing on the admittedly vague question of “importance of religion.” More concretely, we can look at the relationship between childhood and current-day church attendance. Remember that we are focusing here on people who currently identify as Orthodox, regardless of whether they are cradle or convert:

Among Orthodox Christians: Religious Service Attendance Now vs. Childhood

Q1: How often did you attend religious services as a child?

Q2: How often do you attend religious services today?

Current attendance	Weekly+	Monthly	Seldom	Never
Childhood attendance				
Weekly+	30%	12%	48%	9%
Monthly	16%	24%	43%	18%
Seldom	12%	6%	57%	25%
Never	5%	5%	57%	33%

Source: Religious Landscape Study 2023-24. Pew Research Center.

Analysis by Orthodox Studies Institute - orthodoxstudies.org

Among current Orthodox who grew up attending church every week, 30% still attend weekly – but 57% attend seldom or never (even while identifying as Orthodox). Current Orthodox who never attended church as children are very unlikely to be regular attenders as adults – just 5% report attending weekly and another 5% monthly, compared to a whopping 90% attending seldom or never.

None of those numbers are particularly great, but this does show an unsurprisingly strong relationship between childhood and adult church attendance.

Related to this, check out this table, from the main Pew report:

Americans raised in religiously observant families are more likely to retain their religious identity in adulthood

Based on U.S. adults who say they were *raised religiously affiliated*

Among those who were raised religiously affiliated and grew up __	% who currently identify with ...			
	Same religion in which they were raised (e.g., Protestantism or Catholicism)	Different religion	No religion	No answer
Attending services weekly in a family in which religion was 'very important'	74%	10%	15%	1%=100%
Seldom/Never attending religious services in a family in which religion was not too/not at all important	42	16	40	2=100
All others	59	12	27	1=100

Note: Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding. The "No religion" category consists of people who describe themselves as atheist, agnostic, or "nothing in particular" when asked about their religion.

Source: Religious Landscape Study of U.S. adults conducted July 17, 2023-March 4, 2024.

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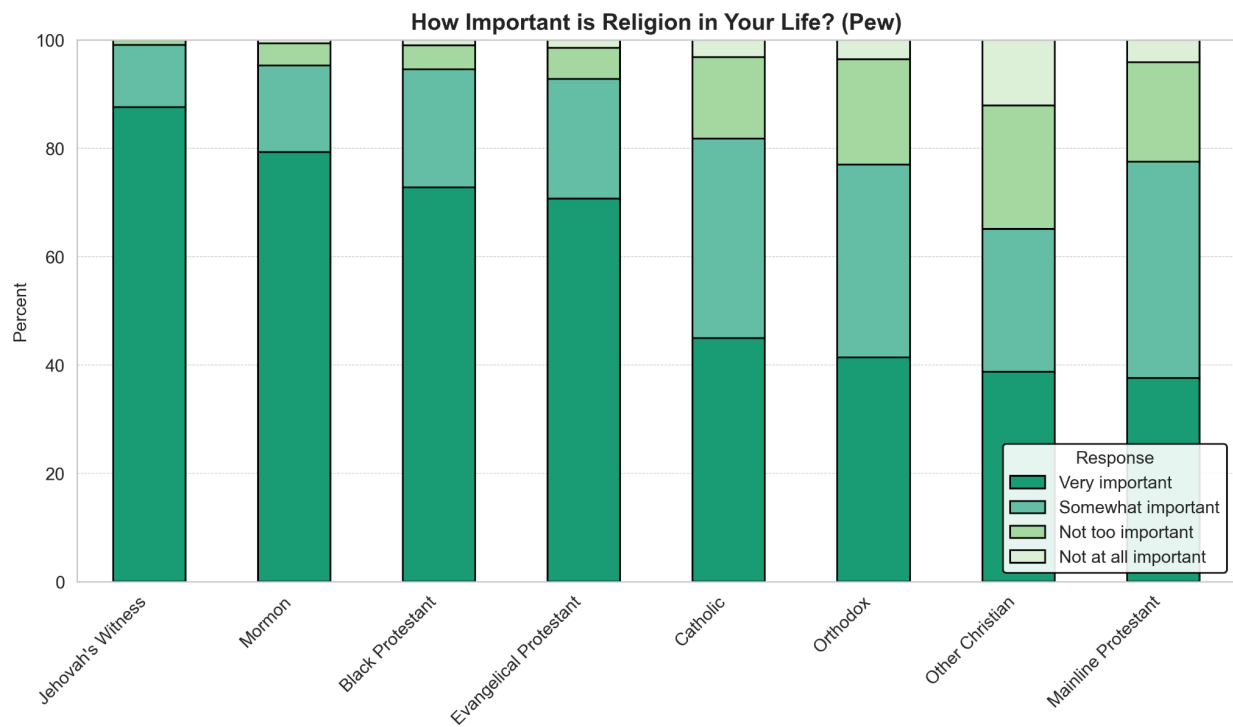
For the Orthodox, we just don't have enough data to slice the sample this thinly – but the overall data for all religions shows that people who grew up in families where religion was very important *and* the family attended church weekly, 74% remained in their childhood religion. That's a pretty strong relationship! At the other extreme, it is perhaps surprising that the retention number is as high as it is: 42% of people who grew up in families that (a) identified with a particular religion, but where (b) religion was not important, and (c) the family rarely attended church, nevertheless continue to identify with their childhood religion.

How Important is Religion for Orthodox Christians?

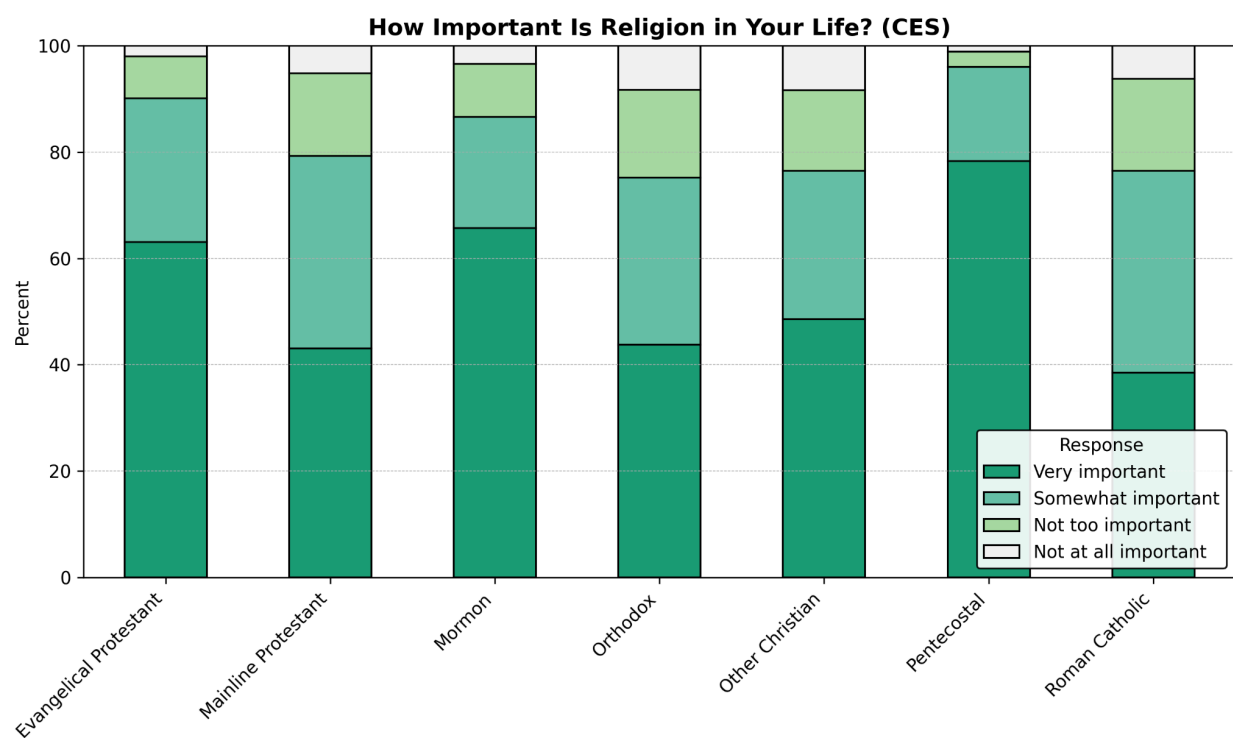
Both Pew and CES asked a series of questions around the topic of religious engagement:

- How important is religion in your life?
- How often do you attend religious services?
- How often do you pray outside of religious services?

On importance of religion, the Orthodox were roughly similar to Roman Catholics and "Other Christians," and far below Evangelicals and Mormons. Just over 40% of Orthodox respondents in both Pew and CES said that religion is very important to them. Our breakdown in both surveys mirrors Mainline Protestants.



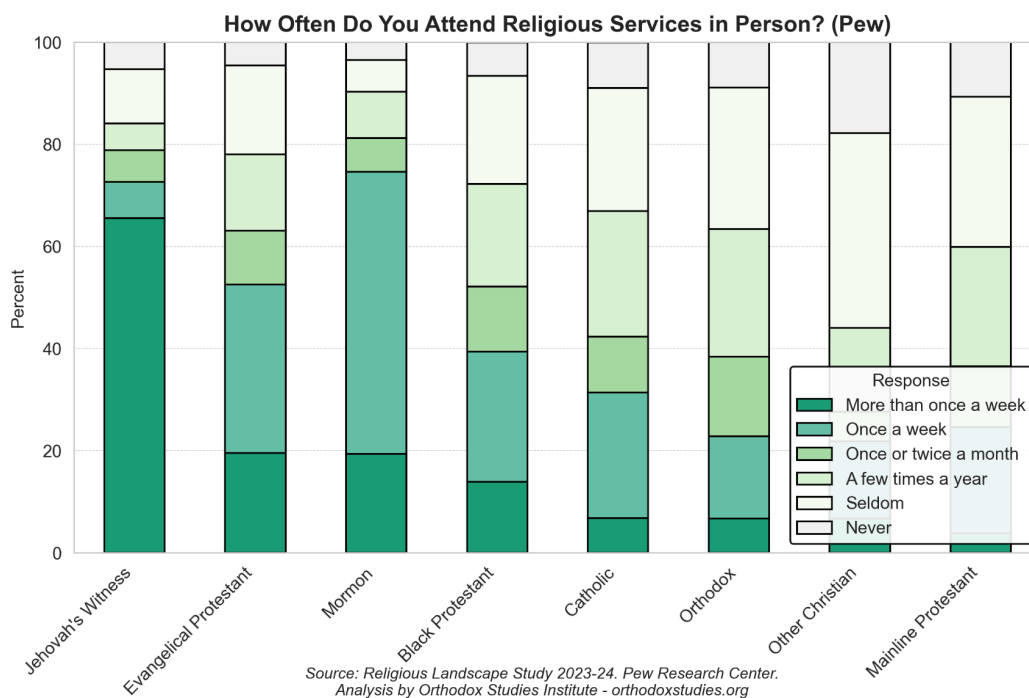
Source: Religious Landscape Study 2023-24. Pew Research Center.
Analysis by Orthodox Studies Institute - orthodoxstudies.org.

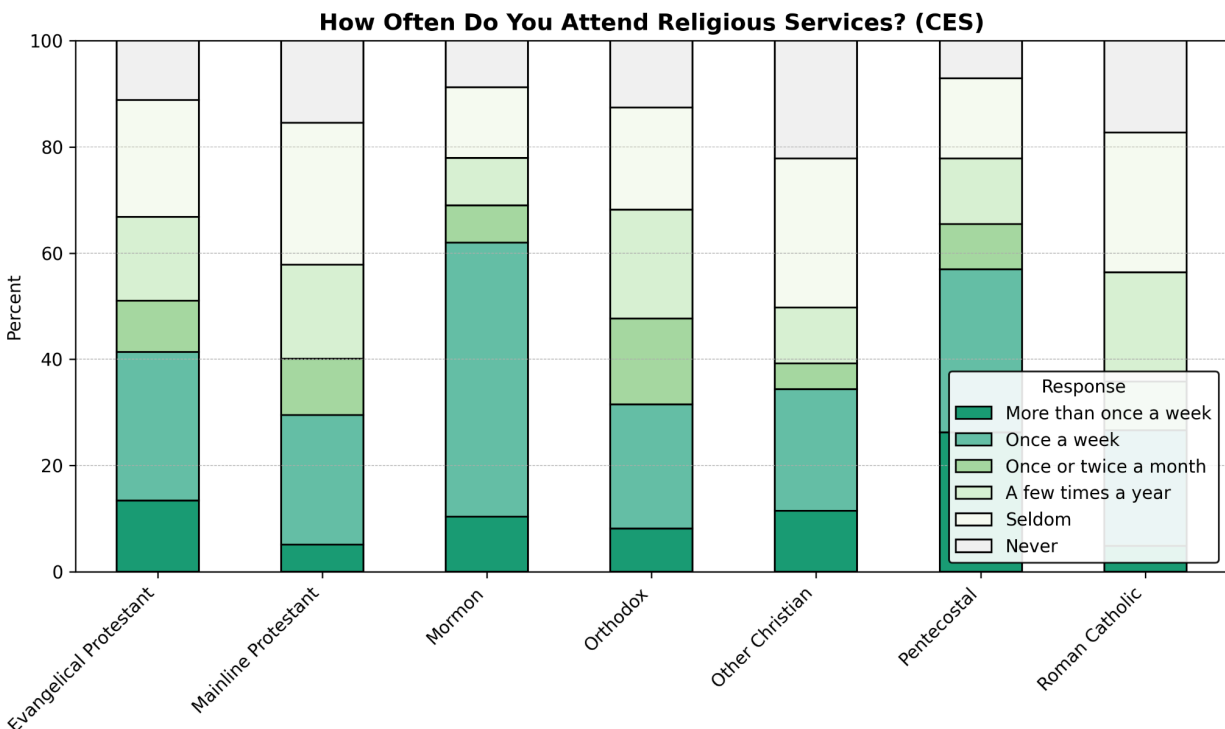


Source: COOPERATIVE ELECTION STUDY, 2024: COMMON CONTENT. cces.gov.harvard.edu
Analysis by Orthodox Studies Institute - orthodoxstudies.org

Self-reported church attendance data should always be taken with a grain of salt. It's widely understood that people overestimate how often they go to church (for example, see [this 2014 paper](#)). You can imagine why this might be the case. People may answer aspirationally – they intend to go weekly and so they say they're weekly attenders, even if they miss a couple Sundays a month. And even a very committed weekly attender may miss several Sundays a year due to illness, travel, etc. That said, it's still instructive to compare the Orthodox respondents to other religious groups.

Overall, the Orthodox look roughly similar to Roman Catholics and Mainline Protestants when it comes to church attendance. In Pew, there are actually two different attendance questions – one about in-person services and the other focused on online or televised services. For in-person services, just 2 in 10 Orthodox report attending weekly or more – one of the lowest percentages of all Christian groups. It's a similar story in CES, where only 3 in 10 Orthodox report weekly+.

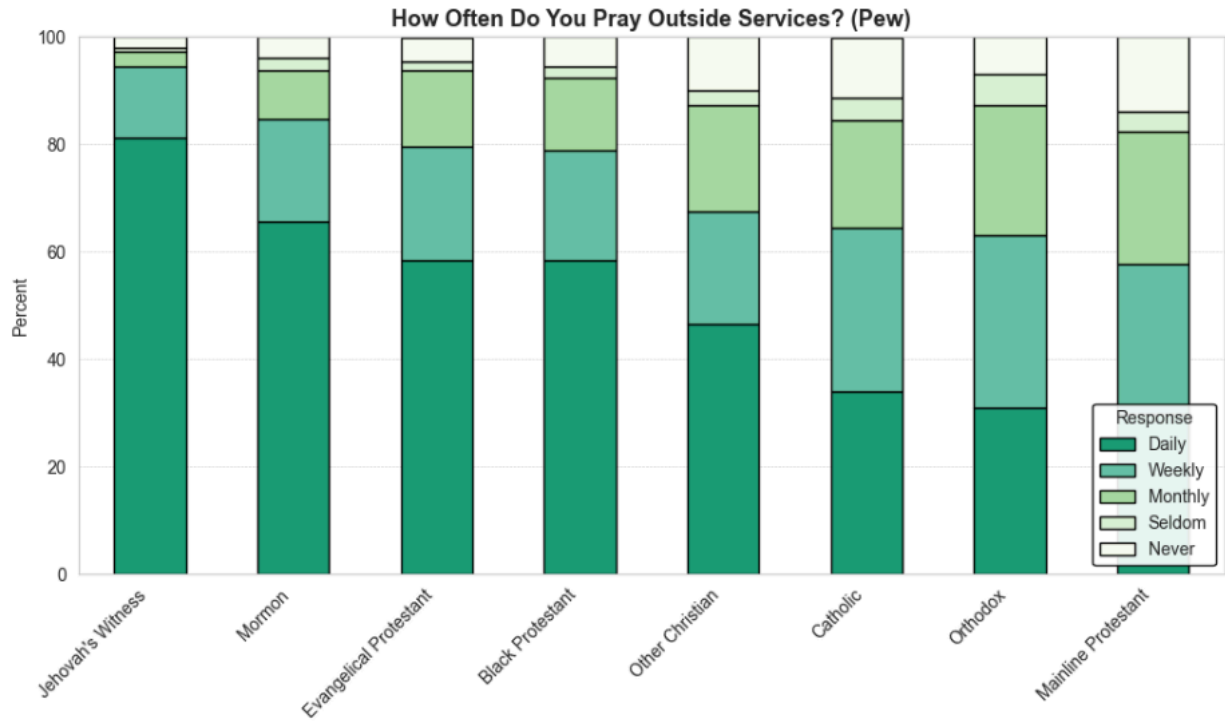




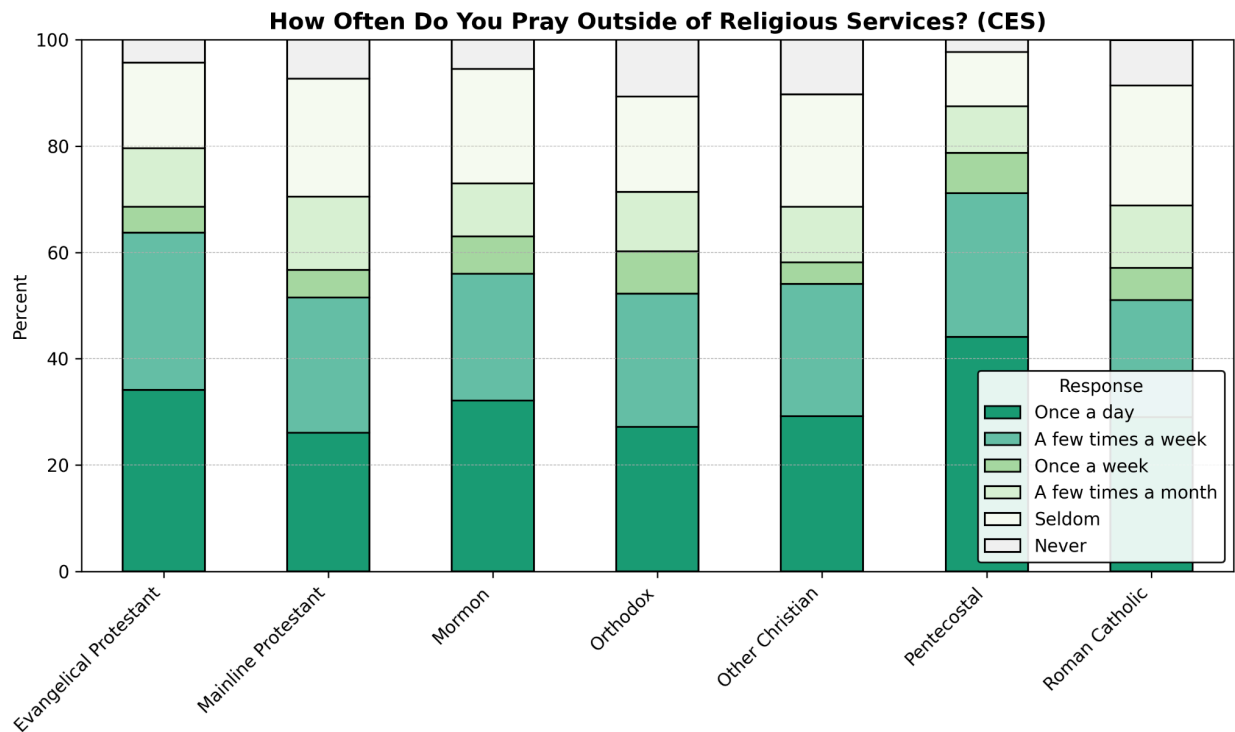
Source: COOPERATIVE ELECTION STUDY, 2024. COMMON CONTENT. cces.gov.harvard.edu
 Analysis by Orthodox Studies Institute - orthodoxstudies.org.

If we took those numbers at face value, and we assume 1.6 million Orthodox in America, we'd expect something like 500,000 people to be in our churches on a typical Sunday. But according to [Alexei Krindatch's 2020 survey of parishes](#), the number is closer to 200,000. Granted, four years elapsed between the Krindatch study and the Pew/CES surveys – but also, there's insufficient evidence to say that American Orthodoxy has experienced *net growth* in that period, as some parishes are booming but others are dying, and recent survey data doesn't show net growth compared to prior years.

With daily prayer, the Orthodox also come in pretty low, again basically in line with Roman Catholics and Mainline Protestants, and far below Evangelicals and groups like Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses. In both surveys, only around 3 in 10 Orthodox report praying daily. In other words, about a quarter to a third of American Orthodox (try to) attend church weekly, and about a quarter to a third (try to) pray daily.



Source: Religious Landscape Study 2023-24, Pew Research Center.
Analysis by Orthodox Studies Institute - orthodoxstudies.org

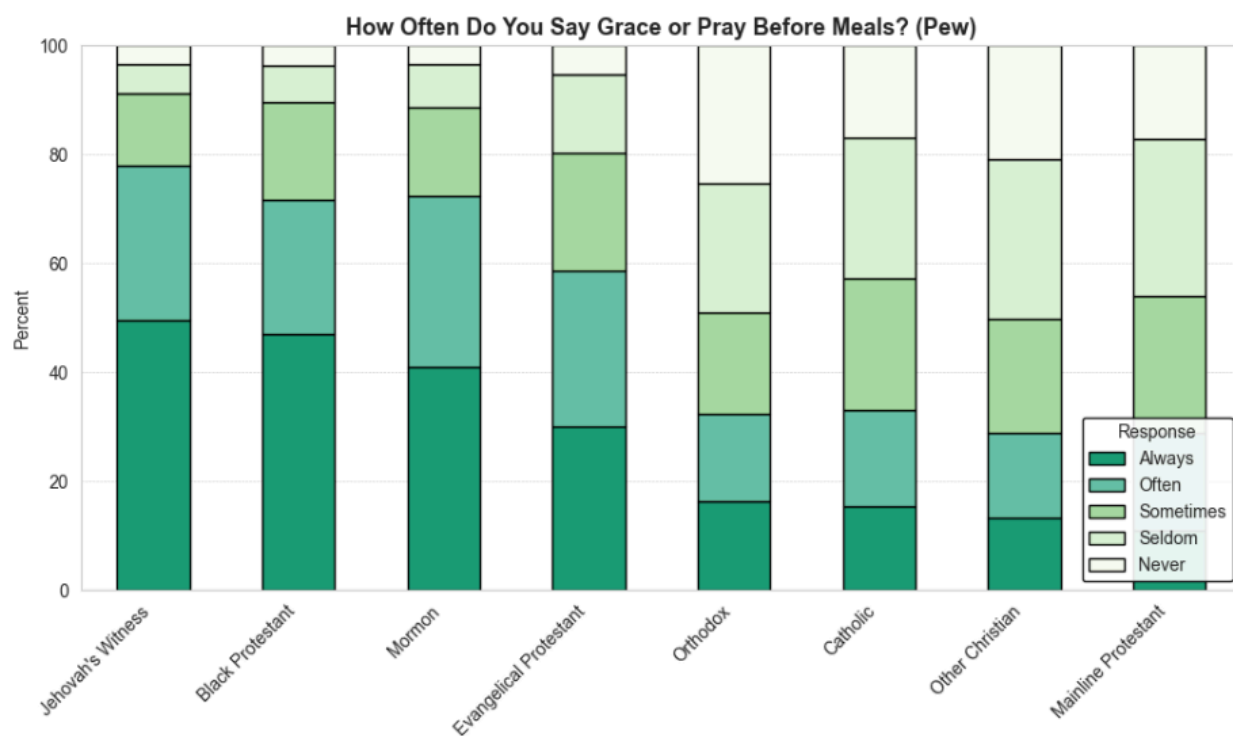


Source: COOPERATIVE ELECTION STUDY, 2024, COMMON CONTENT, cces.gov.harvard.edu
Analysis by Orthodox Studies Institute - orthodoxstudies.org

On the prayer question, the surveys could be missing something with the Orthodox. An Orthodox person may consider “prayer” to be standing in his icon corner and saying morning or

evening prayers, and may not consider a less-formal communication with God, or a Jesus Prayer uttered under the breath, to be “prayer” for purposes of these surveys. We can’t say for sure that this is the case, but it’s something that could be affecting the results.

Pew digs a bit deeper in their survey, also asking respondents how often they “say grace or pray before meals.” Yet again, the Orthodox score poorly here, coming in at about the same rates as Roman Catholics and Mainline Protestants, and, again, far below Evangelicals, Black Protestants, Mormons, and Jehovah’s Witnesses. But would an Orthodox Christian who crosses himself before a meal consider that to be “saying grace or praying”?

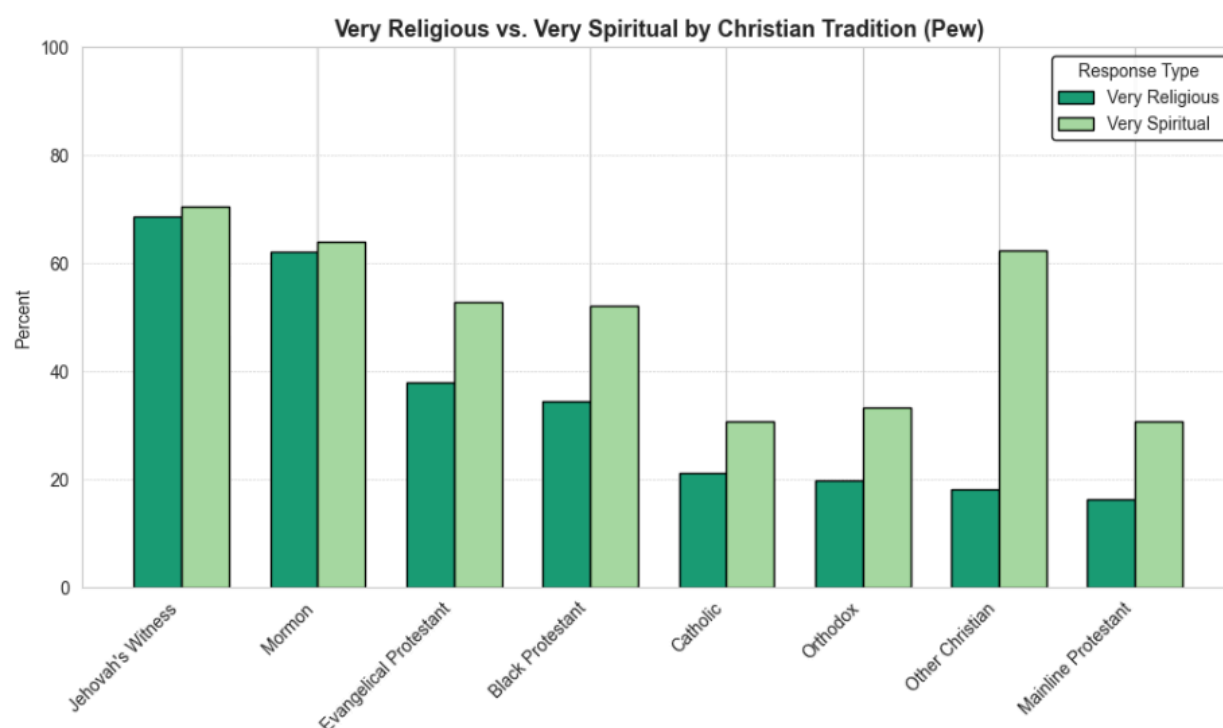


Source: Religious Landscape Study 2023-24. Pew Research Center.
Analysis by Orthodox Studies Institute - orthodoxstudies.org.

It’s a similar story with other “praxis”-type questions. Pew asks about reading Scripture outside of religious services, reading “devotions or inspirational literature,” and the importance of the Bible in the person’s life. The charts on all these questions look pretty much the same – Orthodox, along with Catholics and Mainline Protestants, are much less likely to engage with religious texts than other people who identify as Christians. Again, though, many of these “praxis” questions tend to assume a Protestant/Evangelical frame for piety that might not always map onto the way an Orthodox person thinks about religion.

Pew also asked both how “religious” and how “spiritual” its respondents considered themselves. In every “Christian” group, people were more likely to say they were “very spiritual” than “very religious.” For the Orthodox, just under 20% were “very religious,” but a third were “very spiritual.” Once again, those rates are comparable to Catholics and Mainline Protestants.

Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons scored the highest in both categories, and they were also the most “balanced,” with almost the same percentages of “very religious” and “very spiritual.”



Source: Religious Landscape Study 2023-24. Pew Research Center.
Analysis by Orthodox Studies Institute - orthodoxstudies.org

Conclusion

Obviously, we have to take some of this with a grain of salt, given the relatively small samples of Orthodox Christians in these two surveys. But it's fair to say that Orthodoxy in America is rather young, has lots of immigrants, and has a lot of men compared to other religious groups. But our people act, religiously, in ways similar to other “historic Christian” groups – Roman Catholics and Mainline Protestants – even though we differ a lot demographically. This should be a bit of a wake-up call: even as we may be excited by the waves of new converts, we have work to do in strengthening the engagement of current Orthodox Christians with the life of the Church.