News
Analysis



Pilgrims gather in the plaza of the Our Lady of Guadalupe Basilica, in one of the world’s largest religious pilgrimages marking the feast day of the patroness of Latin America, in Mexico City, Dec. 12, 2024. (AP File/Fernando Llano)



Aleja Hertzler-McCain

View Author Profile

Religion News Service

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

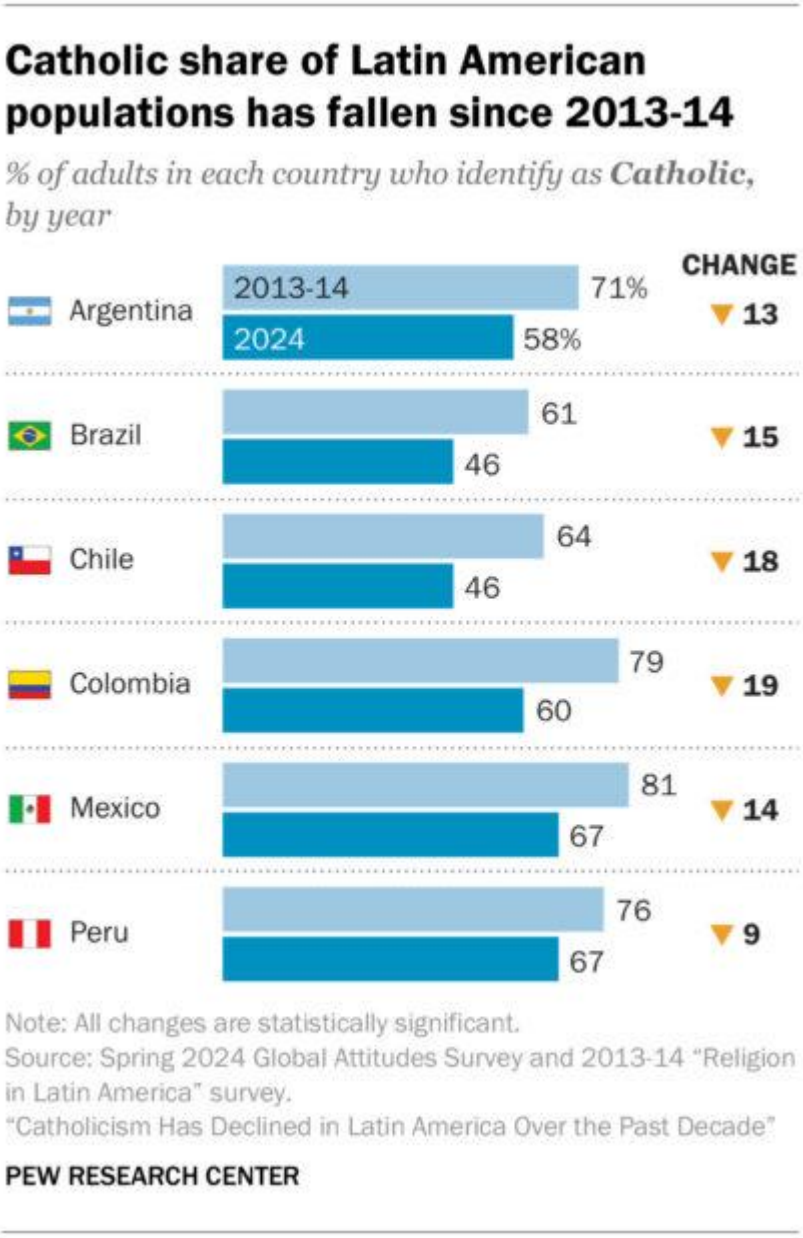
Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

January 22, 2026
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

Over the last decade, Catholicism has continued to decline sharply in Latin America, as the share of adults who are religiously unaffiliated rises, according to a new survey looking at religiosity in six countries.

The survey, fielded in 2024 and released Wednesday (Jan. 21) by the Pew Research Center, studied Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico and Peru and found declining rates of Catholicism in every country. Colombia saw the largest drop, where 6 in 10 (60%) adults identified as Catholic in 2024 compared with 8 in 10 (79%) in the 2013-2014 survey.

The smallest drop in Catholicism was in Peru — the country where Pope Leo served for more than two decades before being elected pope — with a 9-point decrease over the decade between surveys (76% in 2013-2014 down to 67% in 2024).



"Catholic share of Latin American populations has fallen since 2013-14" (Courtesy of Pew Research Center)

Meanwhile, the survey found the religiously unaffiliated nearly doubled or saw even larger gains in every country. In Brazil, where the gains were the smallest, the unaffiliated grew from 8% to 15% of the population. In Peru, 12% of adults identified as religiously unaffiliated in 2024, up from just 4% a decade ago.

But religiously unaffiliated gains were largest in Chile and Colombia. A third of Chileans identified as religiously unaffiliated in the most recent Pew survey, more

than double the 16% of Chileans who said the same a decade ago, reflecting a 17-point gain. Colombia also saw a 17-point gain in the religiously unaffiliated. In 2024, nearly a quarter (23%) said they were religiously unaffiliated, almost quadrupling the 6% who said they were unaffiliated in the survey a decade earlier.

Despite dramatic growth in Pentecostalism in previous decades, Pew found that, over roughly the last decade, while Protestantism stayed steady in all the surveyed countries, the share of Protestants who were Pentecostal dropped.

In Argentina, where 16% of adults identified as Protestant in 2024, only 54% of Protestants said they were Pentecostal in the 2024 survey, compared with 71% a decade earlier. That reflects a 17-point, statistically significant change, though Pew cautioned that the sample sizes of Protestants are small, creating large margins of error in all countries. Brazil, with Protestants comprising 29% of adults in 2024, also saw a statistically significant, 15-point drop, from 8 in ten (80%) Protestants identifying as Pentecostal in 2013-2014 to just 65% in 2024.

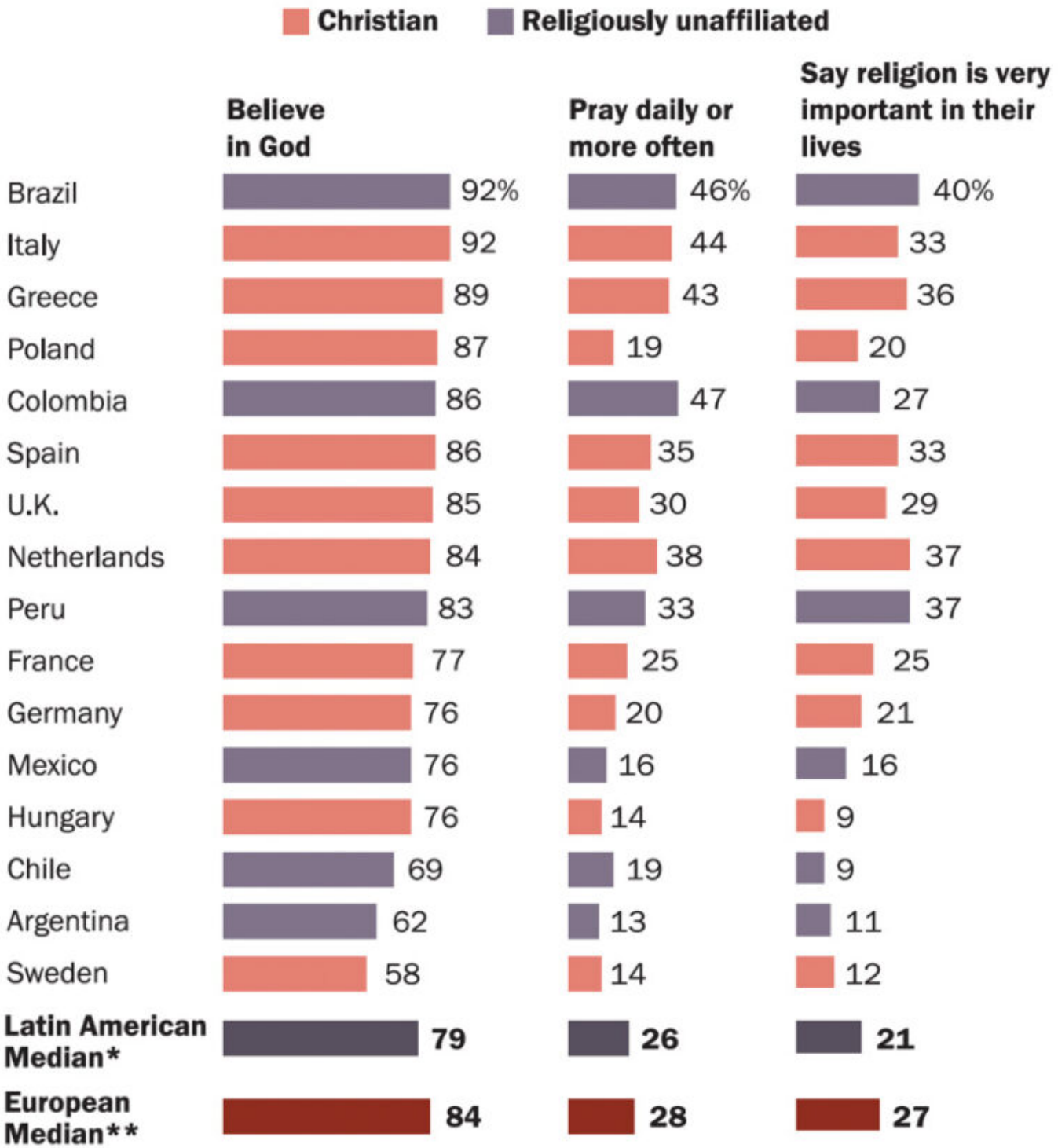
Chile, Peru and Colombia also all reported drops in the share of Pentecostals, though they were smaller decreases and not statistically significant.

Latin American Protestants attended weekly religious services at higher rates than Latin American Catholics in the 2024 survey. Nearly 7 in 10 Protestants in Brazil (69%) and Colombia (68%) said they attended weekly, while in Argentina (63%), Peru (57%) and Chile (43%) Protestants reported somewhat lower rates but still much higher than Catholics in those countries.

The highest rates of weekly religious service attendance among Catholics were in Mexico (41%), Colombia (40%) and Brazil (36%). Catholic attendance dropped as low as 8% in Chile, 12% in Argentina and 27% in Peru.

‘Nones’ in Latin America are similar to Christians in Europe on some measures of religiousness

% of ___ adults in each country who ...



* Median of religiously unaffiliated adults in six Latin American countries above.

** Median of Christian adults in 10 European countries above.

Source: Spring 2024 Global Attitudes Survey.

“Catholicism Has Declined in Latin America Over the Past Decade”

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

"'Nones' in Latin America are similar to Christians in Europe on some measures of religiousness" (Courtesy of Pew Research Center)

In terms of religious belief and practice, Pew found that the religiously unaffiliated in Latin America were roughly similar to Christians in Europe.

For example, similar percentages (46% and 47%) of the religiously unaffiliated in Brazil and Colombia said they pray daily, making them more likely to do so than Christians in any European country surveyed in 2024, where the highest rates of daily prayer among Christians was in Italy at 44%.

Overall, the median rate of daily prayer for religiously unaffiliated Latin Americans was 26%, compared with 28% of European Christians.

Religiously unaffiliated Latin Americans also reported very high rates of belief in God, ranging from 92% in Brazil to 62% in Argentina. Their median belief in God, at 79%, is only 5 points lower than the median rate among European Christians (84%).

The Latin American Pew survey also asked about beliefs that are common among African-rooted religions such as Candomblé, Santería and Umbanda, as well as Indigenously rooted faith traditions. Some of the beliefs Pew asked about included reincarnation, spiritual energies in nature, animals and objects, and ways of seeing the future.

Advertisement

Belief in reincarnation, framed in the survey as being "reborn in this world again and again," has grown over the last decade, according to the Pew survey. Four in 10 adults in Argentina, Colombia and Peru believe in reincarnation (42%), including nearly half of Catholics (ranging from 48% to 50%) in all three countries.

While Chile and Mexico did not report a statistically significant increase in belief in reincarnation among the general population or Catholics, the belief in reincarnation among the religiously unaffiliated grew substantially, from 32% to 49%, in Chile and from 18% to 43% in Mexico. (With a small sample size, the margin of error for the Mexican number is plus or minus 10 percentage points.)

Majorities of adults in all countries believe "spells, curses or other magic can influence people's lives" and that animals and parts of nature, like mountains, rivers or trees, can have spirits or spiritual energies.

The 2024 survey was conducted in the spring and included more than 6,200 adults.