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Gallup: Americans see religious influence waning

by Adelle M. Banks by Religion News Service

Two-thirds of Americans think religion is losing its influence on U.S. life, a sharp jump from just three years ago when Americans were nearly evenly split on the question, according to a new Gallup Poll.

Sixty-seven percent of Americans think religious influence is waning while just 27 percent say it is increasing. That perspective demonstrates a continuing downward trend, Gallup said.

But the 27 percent figure is still higher than the record low, set in a 1970 poll, when just 14 percent of Americans thought religion was increasing in influence.

Those who regularly attend worship services are more likely to say religion is losing its influence; three out of four weekly attenders (74 percent) said religious influence is falling, compared to 24 percent who thought its influence is on the rise.

At other times in American history, religion has been perceived by more Americans as having increasing significance. In 1957, 69 percent thought its influence was increasing, compared to 14 percent who thought it was declining. Likewise, in 2001, three months after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, 71 percent saw an increasing religious influence, compared to 24 percent who said it was decreasing.

The latest poll also finds that the percentage of Americans believing that religion "can answer all or most of today's problems" has reached an all-time low. Slightly more than half of those surveyed -- 53 percent -- held that view, while 28 percent say it is "largely old-fashioned and out of date."

The poll results are based on telephone interviews conducted Dec. 4-7 with 1,009 adults; the poll has a margin of error of plus or minus 3 percentage points.

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