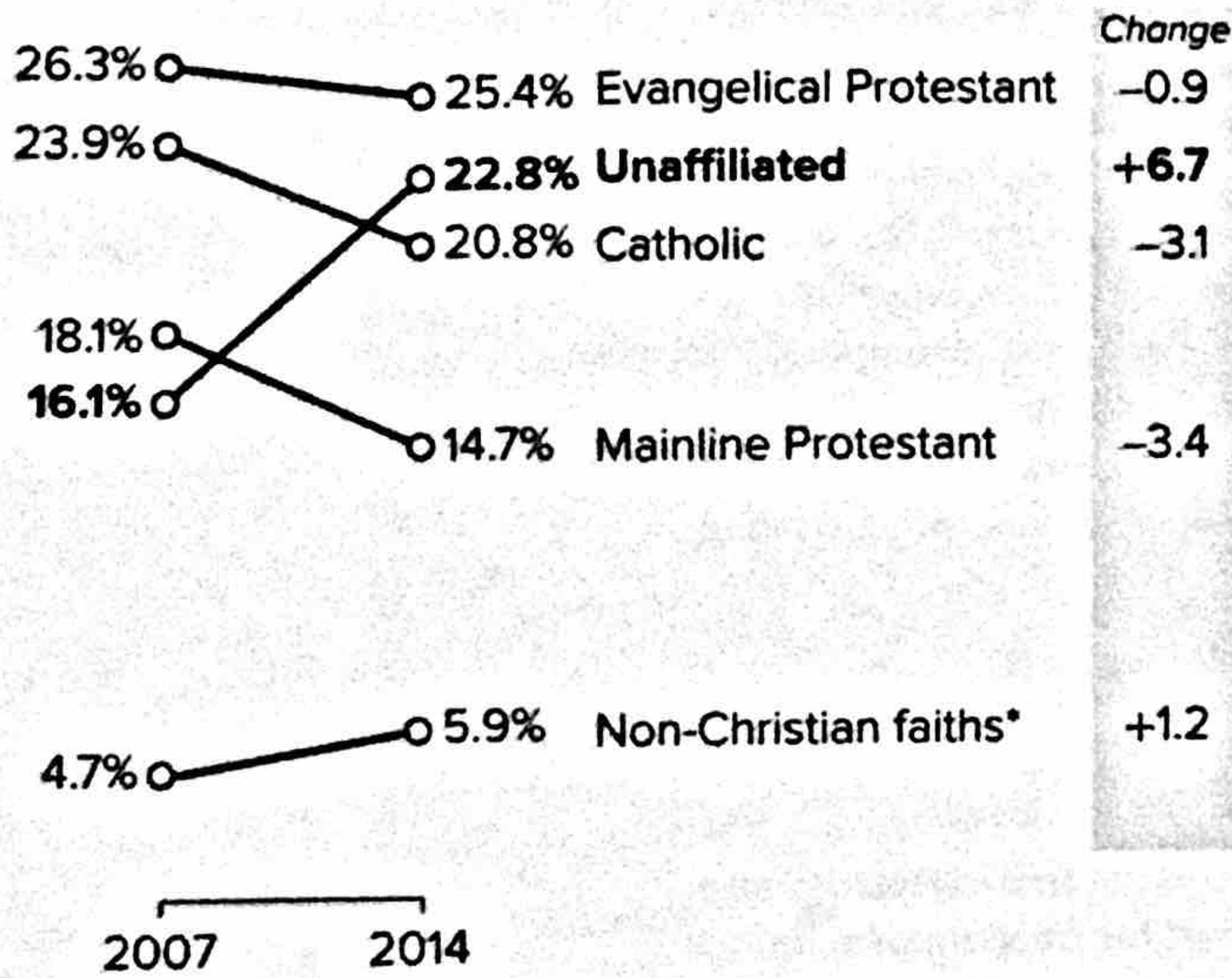


Changing U.S. Religious Landscape

Between 2007 and 2014, the Christian share of the population fell from 78.4% to 70.6%, driven mainly by declines among mainline Protestants and Catholics. The unaffiliated experienced the most growth, and the share of Americans who belong to non-Christian faiths also increased.



*Includes Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, other world religions and other faiths. Those who did not answer the religious identity question, as well as groups whose share of the population did not change significantly, including the historically black Protestant tradition, Mormons and others, are not shown.

Source: 2014 Religious Landscape Study, conducted June 4-Sept. 30, 2014.

Lemon test The three-part test for establishment clause cases that a law must pass before it is declared constitutional: It must have a secular purpose; it must neither advance nor inhibit religion; and it must not cause excessive entanglement with religion.

Establishment Clause

While free exercise cases involve government intrusion into the practice of religion, establishment clause cases deal with the formal relationship between religion and government. We will see that the United States has usually followed a tradition of attempting to separate church from state, yet there also has been a strong inclination to mix politics and religion. This is not surprising because Americans are a very religious people. A 2013 poll revealed that 92 percent of the population believe in God, 56 percent say religion is very important in their lives, and 39 percent attend religious services at least once a week.²¹ However, an extensive 2015 study by the same research center shows that the number of Americans not identifying with any organized religion is growing while the Christian share of the population is declining.²² (See Changing U.S. Religious Landscape figure.) This trend includes all education levels, all racial groups, and both men and women.²³ The drop in Christian affiliation is particularly pronounced among young adults, the Older Millennials. (See Unaffiliated Make Up Growing Share Across Generations table.) By contrast, the relationship between religion and party identification remains consistent.²⁴ Americans who are very religious identify with the Republican Party while less religious persons lean toward the Democrats. (See Political Party Affiliation by Religiousness table.) That relationship has played out clearly in the last three midterm elections. (See 2014 National House Vote by Religion table.)²⁵

Even the Founding Fathers disagreed about the relationship between church and state. Jefferson wrote that the First Amendment built "a wall of separation between Church and State." This is known as the separationist position because it prohibits most if not all forms of government support for religion.

Most scholars contend that a majority of the Founding Fathers disagreed with Jefferson and instead held accommodationist views. Accommodationists argue that the establishment clause forbids the government from showing preference to one religion with respect to another and prohibits the government from establishing a national religion.²⁶ However, they believe that government may constitutionally support religion as long as it does not discriminate against any particular faith.

The ambiguity of the establishment clause led the Supreme Court to develop a test for resolving establishment cases. According to the **Lemon test**, a law must meet three conditions in order not to violate the establishment clause:

1. The law must have a secular (nonreligious) purpose.
2. The primary effect of the law must be one that neither advances nor inhibits religion.
3. The law must not foster an excessive government entanglement with religion.

Using the test, the Court struck down a Pennsylvania law that provided direct state financial aid to pay teachers at a religiously affiliated school. The majority ruled that the law created an excessive entanglement between the state government and religion by requiring close government oversight of church matters.²⁷ Using similar reasoning, the Court upheld a state law granting property tax exemptions to religious organizations. The majority in that case argued that taxing the churches would create an extensive government entanglement.²⁸

Most of the establishment clause cases that have reached the Supreme Court in recent years have involved issues such as the teaching of religion in public schools, religious use of public school facilities and funds, recitation of prayers in public schools, government aid to