

FOR RELEASE JAN. 3, 2019

Faith on the Hill

The religious composition of the 116th Congress

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RECOMMENDED CITATION

Pew Research Center, Jan. 3, 2019, "Faith on the Hill:
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Acknowledgments

This report was produced by Pew Research Center with data collected by CQ Roll Call. Pew Research Center is solely responsible for the interpretation and reporting of the data. Find related reports online at pewresearch.org/religion.

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Faith on the Hill

The religious composition of the 116th Congress

The new, 116th Congress includes the first two Muslim women ever to serve in the House of Representatives, and is, overall, slightly more religiously diverse than the prior Congress.¹

There has been a 3-percentage-point decline in the share of members of Congress who identify as Christian – in the 115th Congress, 91% of members were Christian, while in the 116th, 88% are Christian. There are also four more Jewish members, one additional Muslim and one more Unitarian Universalist in the new Congress – as well as eight more members who decline to state their religious affiliation (or lack thereof).

While the number of self-identified Christians in Congress has ticked down, Christians as a whole – and especially Protestants and Catholics – are still overrepresented in proportion to their share in the general public. Indeed, the religious makeup of the new, 116th Congress is very different from that of the United States population.

Christians overrepresented in Congress

Religion	Number in Congress	% of Congress	% of U.S. adults
Christian	471	88.2	71
Protestant	293	54.9	48
Baptist	72	13.5	15
Methodist	42	7.9	5
Anglican/Episcopal	26	4.9	1
Presbyterian	26	4.9	2
Lutheran	26	4.9	4
Congregationalist	4	0.7	1
Nondenom. Protestant	10	1.9	6
Pentecostal	2	0.4	5
Restorationist	1	0.2	2
Adventist	2	0.4	1
Christian Scientist	0	0	<1
Holiness	1	0.2	1
Reformed	1	0.2	<1
Anabaptist	0	0	<1
Friends/Quakers	0	0	<1
Pietist	0	0	<1
Unspecified/other	80	15.0	5
Catholic	163	30.5	21
Mormon	10	1.9	2
Orthodox Christian	5	0.9	<1
Jewish	34	6.4	2
Buddhist	2	0.4	1
Muslim	3	0.6	1
Hindu	3	0.6	1
Unitarian Universalist	2	0.4	<1
Unaffiliated	1	0.2	23
Other faiths	0	0	2
Don't know/refused	<u>18</u>	<u>3.4</u>	<u>1</u>
Total	534*	100	100

*One race, in North Carolina's 9th District, has not yet been certified due to allegations of electoral fraud.

Note: Figures may not add to 100% or to subtotals due to rounding.

Source: Figures for Congress based on Pew Research Center analysis of data collected by CQ Roll Call, reflecting members of Congress to be sworn in on Jan. 3, 2019. Figures for U.S. adults based on Pew Research Center's 2014 U.S. Religious Landscape Study, conducted June 4-Sept. 30, 2014.

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¹ In this report, Congress is defined as both the Senate and the House of Representatives. Nonvoting delegates that represent U.S. territories and the District of Columbia are not counted in this analysis. They are: Aumua Amata Coleman Radewagen, R-American Samoa; Michael San

Within Protestantism, certain groups are particularly numerous in the new Congress, including Methodists, Anglicans/Episcopalians, Presbyterians and Lutherans. Additionally, Protestants in the “unspecified/other” category make up just 5% of the U.S. public, but 15% of Congress.² By contrast, some other Protestant groups are underrepresented, including Pentecostals (5% of the U.S. public vs. 0.4% of Congress).

But by far the largest difference between the U.S. public and Congress is in the share who are unaffiliated with a religious group. In the general public, 23% say they are atheist, agnostic or “nothing in particular.” In Congress, just one person – Sen. Kyrsten Sinema, D-Ariz., who was recently elected to the Senate after three terms in the House – says she is religiously unaffiliated, making the share of “nones” in Congress 0.2%.

When asked about their religious affiliation, a growing number of members of Congress decline to specify (categorized as “don’t know/refused”). This group – all Democrats – numbers 18, or 3% of Congress, up from 10 members (2%) in the 115th Congress. Their reasons for this decision may vary. But one member in this category, Rep. Jared Huffman, D-Calif., announced in 2017 that he [identifies as a humanist and says he is not sure God exists](#). Huffman remains categorized as “don’t know/refused” because he declined to state his religious identity in the CQ Roll Call questionnaire used to collect data for this report.³

These are some of the findings from an analysis by Pew Research Center of CQ Roll Call data on the religious affiliations of members of Congress, gathered through questionnaires and follow-up phone calls to members’ and candidates’ offices.⁴ The CQ questionnaire asks members what religious group, if any, they belong to. It does not attempt to measure their religious beliefs or practices. The Pew Research Center analysis compares the religious affiliations of members of Congress with the Center’s survey data on the U.S. public.⁵

Nicolas, D-Guam; Jenniffer Gonzalez-Colon, R-Puerto Rico; Eleanor Holmes Norton, D-D.C.; Stacey Plaskett, D-Virgin Islands; and Gregorio Kilili Camacho Sablan, I-Northern Mariana Islands. All are Catholic except Norton (who is Anglican/Episcopalian) and Plaskett (who is Lutheran).

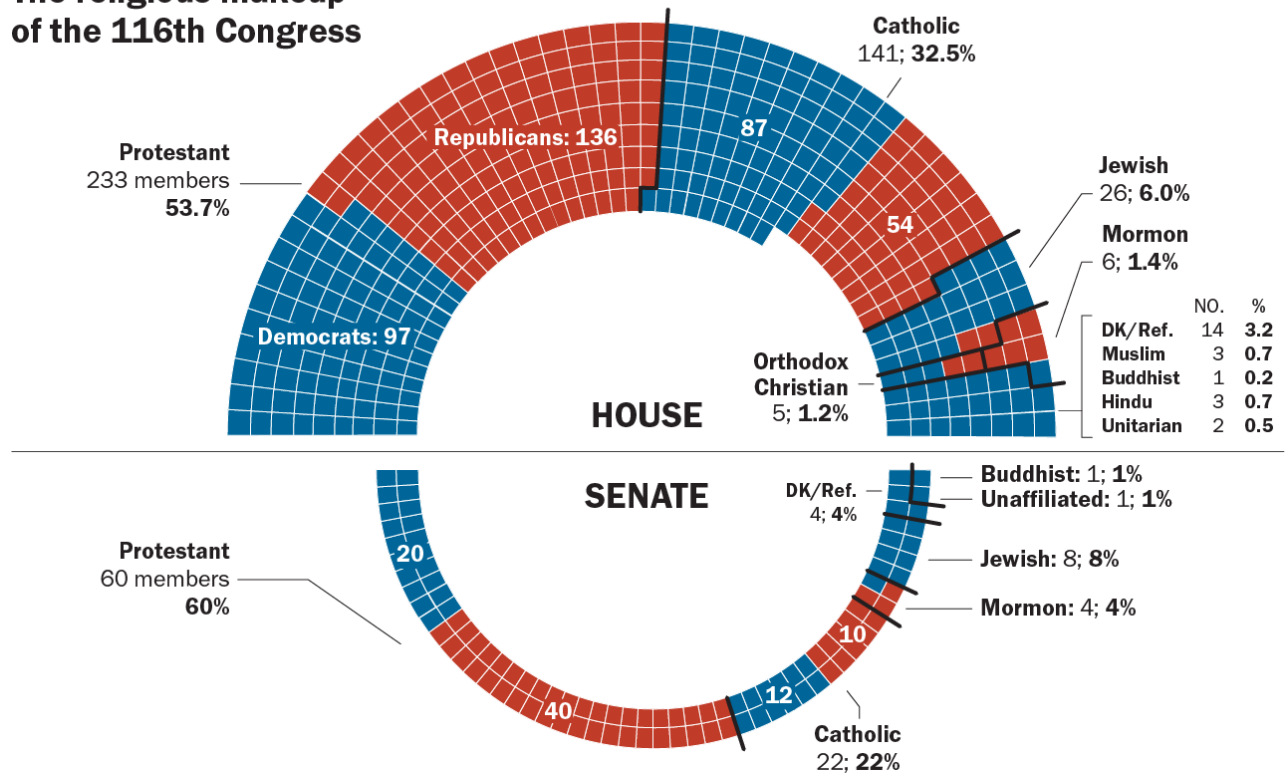
² Among the general public, the “unspecified/other” Protestant category includes Jehovah’s Witnesses and members of other Christian denominations that are not listed separately, as well as people who say they are Christian or Protestant and do not specify a denomination. There are no Jehovah’s Witnesses or members of other specific Christian denominations among members of Congress. Therefore, the “unspecified/other” Protestant category includes only those members of Congress who say they are Christian, Protestant, evangelical Christian or evangelical Protestant but do not specify a denomination.

³ In April 2018, Huffman and three other members of Congress [launched the Congressional Freethought Caucus](#), “to promote sound public policy based on reason, science, and moral values, protect the secular character of our government, and champion the value of freedom of thought worldwide.” The other founders, all House Democrats, include two Catholics (Jerry McNerney of California and Dan Kildee of Michigan) and one Jewish member (Jamie Raskin of Maryland). Several other members of Congress have since joined, including two from the “don’t know/refused” category (Rep. Pramila Jayapal, D-Wash., and Rep. Mark Pocan, D-Wis.).

⁴ Figures for members of Congress reflect the 534 members to be sworn in on Jan. 3, 2019. One race, in North Carolina’s 9th District, has not yet been certified due to [allegations of electoral fraud](#) that could nullify the results of the election.

⁵ Figures for U.S. adults are from Pew Research Center’s 2014 U.S. Religious Landscape Study, though the figures reported here differ from previously published Landscape Study estimates in the following ways: a) Those categorized in the “Jehovah’s Witness” and “other Christian”

The religious makeup of the 116th Congress



Note: Figures may not add to 100% or to subtotals due to rounding.
 Figures for Democrats include two independents who caucus with Democrats.
 Source: Figures for Congress based on Pew Research Center analysis of data collected by CQ Roll Call, reflecting members of Congress to be sworn in on Jan. 3, 2019.
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traditions in the Landscape Study reports are included as "Protestants" here. Specifically, they are included here in the "unspecified/other" group of Protestants, except for Christian Scientists, who are listed separately here. b) Those categorized as belonging to the "other world religions" and "other faiths" traditions in the Landscape Study reports are categorized as belonging to "other faiths" here, except for Unitarian Universalists, who are listed separately here.

Religious makeup of new Congress similar to that of previous class

While the overall composition of the new Congress is similar to that of the previous Congress – roughly nine-in-ten members of each identified as Christian – the 116th Congress has 14 fewer Christians than the 115th, and 20 fewer Christians than the 114th Congress (2015-2016).

Anglicans/Episcopalians and Presbyterians experienced the largest losses in the 116th Congress, which has nine fewer members in each of these groups compared with the previous Congress. Methodists, Congregationalists, Restorationists and Christian Scientists also lost at least one seat; there are no longer any Christian Scientists in Congress.

Some Protestant denominational families now have more members in the new Congress, led by those in the “unspecified/other” category, which gained 16 seats, bringing the total number in this category to 80. Among members of Congress,

Percentage of Christians in Congress down slightly

Religion	115th Congress		116th Congress		Change Number
	Number	%	Number	%	
Christian	485	90.7	471	88.2	-14
Protestant	299	55.9	293	54.9	-6
Baptist	72	13.5	72	13.5	0
Methodist	44	8.2	42	7.9	-2
Anglican/Episcopal	35	6.5	26	4.9	-9
Presbyterian	35	6.5	26	4.9	-9
Lutheran	26	4.9	26	4.9	0
Congregationalist	5	0.9	4	0.7	-1
Nondenom. Protestant	8	1.5	10	1.9	+2
Pentecostal	2	0.4	2	0.4	0
Restorationist	2	0.4	1	0.2	-1
Adventist	2	0.4	2	0.4	0
Christian Scientist	2	0.4	0	0	-2
Holiness	1	0.2	1	0.2	0
Reformed	1	0.2	1	0.2	0
Anabaptist	0	0	0	0	0
Friends/Quakers	0	0	0	0	0
Pietist	0	0	0	0	0
Unspecified/other	64	12.0	80	15.0	+16
Catholic	168	31.4	163	30.5	-5
Mormon	13	2.4	10	1.9	-3
Orthodox Christian	5	0.9	5	0.9	0
Jewish	30	5.6	34	6.4	+4
Buddhist	3	0.6	2	0.4	-1
Muslim	2	0.4	3	0.6	+1
Hindu	3	0.6	3	0.6	0
Unitarian Universalist	1	0.2	2	0.4	+1
Unaffiliated	1	0.2	1	0.2	0
Other faiths	0	0	0	0	0
Don't know/refused	<u>10</u>	<u>1.9</u>	<u>18</u>	<u>3.4</u>	+8
Total	535	100	534*	100	

*One race, in North Carolina's 9th District, has not yet been certified due to allegations of electoral fraud.

Note: Figures may not add to 100% or to subtotals due to rounding.

Source: Figures for the 116th Congress based on Pew Research Center analysis of data collected by CQ Roll Call, reflecting members of Congress to be sworn in on Jan. 3, 2019.

Figures for 115th Congress based on Pew Research Center analysis of data collected by CQ Roll Call, reflecting members of Congress who were sworn in on Jan. 3, 2017.

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“unspecified/other” Protestants include those who say they are Christian, evangelical Christian, evangelical Protestant or Protestant, without specifying a denomination. By contrast, nondenominational Protestants, who also gained two seats (going from eight to 10), are Christians who specifically describe themselves as nondenominational.

There are five fewer Catholics and three fewer Mormons in the new Congress. There has been no change in the number of Orthodox Christians (five seats in both the new and prior Congress).

Among non-Christians, four additional Jewish members bring the Jewish share of the new Congress to 6% – three times the share of Jews in the general public (2%). Additionally, Unitarian Universalists gained one seat.

Muslim women join the new Congress for the first time – Michigan Democrat Rashida Tlaib and Minnesota Democrat Ilhan Omar. They join Andre Carson, a Muslim Democrat from Indiana, in the House, bringing the number of Muslims in the new Congress to three – one more than in the 115th Congress. (Omar represents Minnesota’s 5th district – replacing Keith Ellison, who was the first Muslim elected to Congress in 2006.)

The number of Hindus in Congress is holding steady at three. All of the Hindus from the 115th Congress are returning for the 116th: Rep. Ro Khanna, D-Calif.; Rep. Raja Krishnamoorthi, D-Ill.; and Rep. Tulsi Gabbard, D-Hawaii.

The number of Buddhists in Congress has dropped by one. Colleen Hanabusa, D-Hawaii, decided to run for governor in Hawaii rather than seek re-election in the House. (She was ultimately unsuccessful in her gubernatorial campaign.) Georgia Democratic Rep. Hank Johnson and Hawaii Democratic Sen. Mazie Hirono, both Buddhist members of the previous Congress, are returning for the 116th.

Sinema remains the sole member of Congress who publicly identifies as religiously unaffiliated, although there has been an increase of eight members in the “don’t know/refused” category.

Differences by chamber

Christians make up large majorities in both chambers. In fact, Protestants alone form majorities in both the House (54%) and the Senate (60%). For the most part, there are only modest differences between the chambers within the Protestant denominational families, except when it comes to Presbyterians: There are 13 Presbyterians in each chamber, making up 13% of the Senate and just 3% of the House.

By contrast, Catholics make up a larger share of the lower chamber than the upper chamber: There are 141 Catholics in the House (32%) and 22 in the Senate (22%).

The Senate gains its first member to identify as religiously unaffiliated: Sen. Kyrsten Sinema, D-Ariz., joins the Senate from the House, where she was the first unaffiliated member in that chamber.⁶

All of the Hindus and Muslims (three each) are in the House, along with both Unitarians.

Large gaps between chambers of Congress in shares of Presbyterians, Catholics

Religion	—House—		—Senate—		U.S. adults
	Number	%	Number	%	%
Christian	385	88.7	86	86.0	71
Protestant	233	53.7	60	60.0	48
Baptist	61	14.1	11	11.0	15
Methodist	32	7.4	10	10.0	5
Anglican/Episcopal	22	5.1	4	4.0	1
Presbyterian	13	3.0	13	13.0	2
Lutheran	19	4.4	7	7.0	4
Congregationalist	2	0.5	2	2.0	1
Nondenom. Protestant	9	2.1	1	1.0	6
Pentecostal	2	0.5	0	0	5
Restorationist	1	0.2	0	0	2
Adventist	2	0.5	0	0	1
Christian Scientist	0	0	0	0	<1
Holiness	1	0.2	0	0	1
Reformed	1	0.2	0	0	<1
Anabaptist	0	0	0	0	<1
Friends/Quakers	0	0	0	0	<1
Pietist	0	0	0	0	<1
Unspecified/other	68	15.7	12	12.0	5
Catholic	141	32.5	22	22.0	21
Mormon	6	1.4	4	4.0	2
Orthodox Christian	5	1.2	0	0	<1
Jewish	26	6.0	8	8.0	2
Buddhist	1	0.2	1	1.0	1
Muslim	3	0.7	0	0	1
Hindu	3	0.7	0	0	1
Unitarian Universalist	2	0.5	0	0	<1
Unaffiliated	0	0	1	1.0	23
Other faiths	0	0	0	0	2
Don't know/refused	<u>14</u>	<u>3.2</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>4.0</u>	<u>1</u>
Total	434*	100	100	100	100

*One race, in North Carolina's 9th District, has not yet been certified due to allegations of electoral fraud.

Note: Figures may not add to 100% or to subtotals due to rounding.

Source: Figures for Congress based on Pew Research Center analysis of data collected by CQ Roll Call, reflecting members of Congress to be sworn in on Jan. 3, 2019. Figures for U.S. adults based on Pew Research Center's 2014 U.S. Religious Landscape Study, conducted June 4-Sept. 30, 2014.

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⁶ Former Rep. Pete Stark, D-Calif., publicly stated that he did not believe in God, but [identified as Unitarian](#).

The two Buddhists in the 116th are split between the chambers. Jewish members make up a slightly larger proportion of the Senate than the House (8% vs. 6%).

The number of members who prefer not to specify a religious affiliation doubled in the House between the 115th Congress and the 116th – they now number 14. In the Senate, there are four members who do not specify a religion, up from three who said this in the previous Congress.

Differences by party

In the 116th Congress, just two of the 252 GOP members do not identify as Christian: Reps. Lee Zeldin, R-N.Y., and David Kustoff, R-Tenn., are Jewish.⁷

By contrast, 61 of the 282 Democrats do not identify as Christian. More than half of the 61 are Jewish (32), and 18 decline to specify a religious affiliation. Congressional Democrats also include Hindus (3), Muslims (3), Buddhists (2), Unitarian Universalists (2) and one religiously unaffiliated member.⁸

Christians remain overrepresented in both parties' congressional delegations compared with their coalitions in the general public. While 78% of Democrats in Congress identify as Christians, among registered voters in the broader U.S. adult population, the share of Democrats and those who lean toward the Democratic Party

GOP members of Congress almost all Christians

Religion	---Democrats---			---Republicans---		
	House number	Senate number	%	House number	Senate number	%
Christian	188	33	78.4	197	53	99.2
Protestant	97	20	41.5	136	40	69.8
Baptist	25	2	9.6	36	9	17.9
Methodist	17	3	7.1	15	7	8.7
Anglican/Episcopal	10	4	5.0	12	0	4.8
Presbyterian	5	3	2.8	8	10	7.1
Lutheran	10	3	4.6	9	4	5.2
Congregationalist	0	2	0.7	2	0	0.8
Nondenom. Protestant	2	0	0.7	7	1	3.2
Pentecostal	0	0	0	2	0	0.8
Restorationist	0	0	0	1	0	0.4
Adventist	2	0	0.7	0	0	0
Christian Scientist	0	0	0	0	0	0
Holiness	0	0	0	1	0	0.4
Reformed	0	0	0	1	0	0.4
Anabaptist	0	0	0	0	0	0
Friends/Quakers	0	0	0	0	0	0
Pietist	0	0	0	0	0	0
Unspecified/other	26	3	10.3	42	9	20.2
Catholic	87	12	35.1	54	10	25.4
Mormon	1	1	0.7	5	3	3.2
Orthodox Christian	3	0	1.1	2	0	0.8
Jewish	24	8	11.3	2	0	0.8
Buddhist	1	1	0.7	0	0	0
Muslim	3	0	1.1	0	0	0
Hindu	3	0	1.1	0	0	0
Unitarian Universalist	2	0	0.7	0	0	0
Unaffiliated	0	1	0.4	0	0	0
Other faiths	0	0	0	0	0	0
Don't know/refused	<u>14</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>6.4</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>
Total	235	47	100	199	53	100

Note: One race, in North Carolina's 9th District, has not yet been certified due to allegations of electoral fraud. Figures may not add to 100% or to subtotals due to rounding. Figures for Democrats include independents who caucus with Democrats.

Source: Figures for Congress based on Pew Research Center analysis of data collected by CQ Roll Call, reflecting members of Congress to be sworn in on Jan. 3, 2019.

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⁷ A previous version of this report's dataset had the wrong member of Congress listed for California's 21st District. Freshman Rep. TJ Cox, a Catholic Democrat, represents the district. The report and detailed tables were updated on Jan. 3, 2018, to reflect this correction.

⁸ Both independents in Congress, Sens. Angus King, I-Maine, and Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., are counted as Democrats in this analysis because they caucus with the Democrats. King is in the Anglican/Episcopal category; Sanders is Jewish.

who identify as Christians is just 57%.⁹

Among Republicans and those who lean toward the Republican Party in the general public, 82% of registered voters are Christians, compared with about 99% of Republicans in Congress. Put another way, 18% of Republican voters are not Christian, which stands in stark contrast to the 0.8% of congressional Republicans who are not Christian.

Republican members of Congress are more likely than Democratic members to identify as Protestants (70% vs. 41%). Democrats in Congress, by contrast, are more likely to be Catholic – 35% of congressional Democrats are Catholic, compared with 25% of Republicans in Congress.

There has been a rapid shift in the partisan composition of Catholics in the House. In the 114th Congress (2015-2016), the numbers of [Catholic Democrats and Catholic Republicans](#) in the House were almost identical (68 vs. 69), and the figures remained similar in the [115th Congress](#) (74 Catholic Democrats vs. 70 Catholic Republicans in the House). But the new Congress has 33 more Catholic Democrats than Catholic Republicans in the House (87 vs. 54).

⁹ Party affiliation data for the general public come from Pew Research Center's 2018 report, "[Wide Gender Gap, Growing Educational Divide in Voters' Party Identification](#)."

First-time members

The new, 116th Congress has the largest freshman class since 2011 – 97 new members join 437 incumbents.¹⁰

Of the new members, fully 81% identify as Christians. While this is lower than the Christian share of incumbents, it is still higher than the share of U.S. adults who are Christian (71%).

About half of freshmen are Protestants (49%), and three-in-ten are Catholic (30%). Among the Protestants in the freshman class, 23% are in the “unspecified/other” Protestant category. Rounding out the Christian freshmen are two Mormons (Democratic Rep. Ben McAdams and Republican Sen. Mitt Romney, both of Utah) and one Orthodox Christian (Rep. Chris Pappas, D-N.H.).

Among the newcomers, there also are seven Jewish members and eight who prefer not to specify their religion, as well as two Muslims and an

About eight-in-ten new members of Congress are Christians

Religion	—Incumbents—		—Freshmen—	
	Number	%	Number	%
Christian	392	89.7	79	81.4
Protestant	246	56.3	47	48.5
Baptist	66	15.1	6	6.2
Methodist	36	8.2	6	6.2
Anglican/Episcopal	24	5.5	2	2.1
Presbyterian	23	5.3	3	3.1
Lutheran	21	4.8	5	5.2
Congregationalist	3	0.7	1	1
Nondenom. Protestant	8	1.8	2	2.1
Pentecostal	2	0.5	0	0
Restorationist	1	0.2	0	0
Adventist	2	0.5	0	0
Christian Scientist	0	0	0	0
Holiness	1	0.2	0	0
Reformed	1	0.2	0	0
Anabaptist	0	0	0	0
Friends/Quakers	0	0	0	0
Pietist	0	0	0	0
Unspecified/other	58	13.3	22	22.7
Catholic	134	30.7	29	29.9
Mormon	8	1.8	2	2.1
Orthodox Christian	4	0.9	1	1
Jewish	27	6.2	7	7.2
Buddhist	2	0.5	0	0
Muslim	1	0.2	2	2.1
Hindu	3	0.7	0	0
Unitarian Universalist	2	0.5	0	0
Unaffiliated	0	0	1	1
Other faiths	0	0	0	0
Don't know/refused	10	2.3	8	8.2
Total	437	100	97	100

Note: Figures may not add to 100% or to subtotals due to rounding.

Source: Figures for Congress based on Pew Research Center analysis of data collected by CQ Roll Call, reflecting members of Congress to be sworn in on Jan. 3, 2019.

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¹⁰ A previous version of this report's dataset had the wrong member of Congress listed for California's 21st District. Freshman Rep. TJ Cox, a Catholic Democrat, represents the district. The report and detailed tables were updated on Jan. 3, 2018, to reflect this correction.

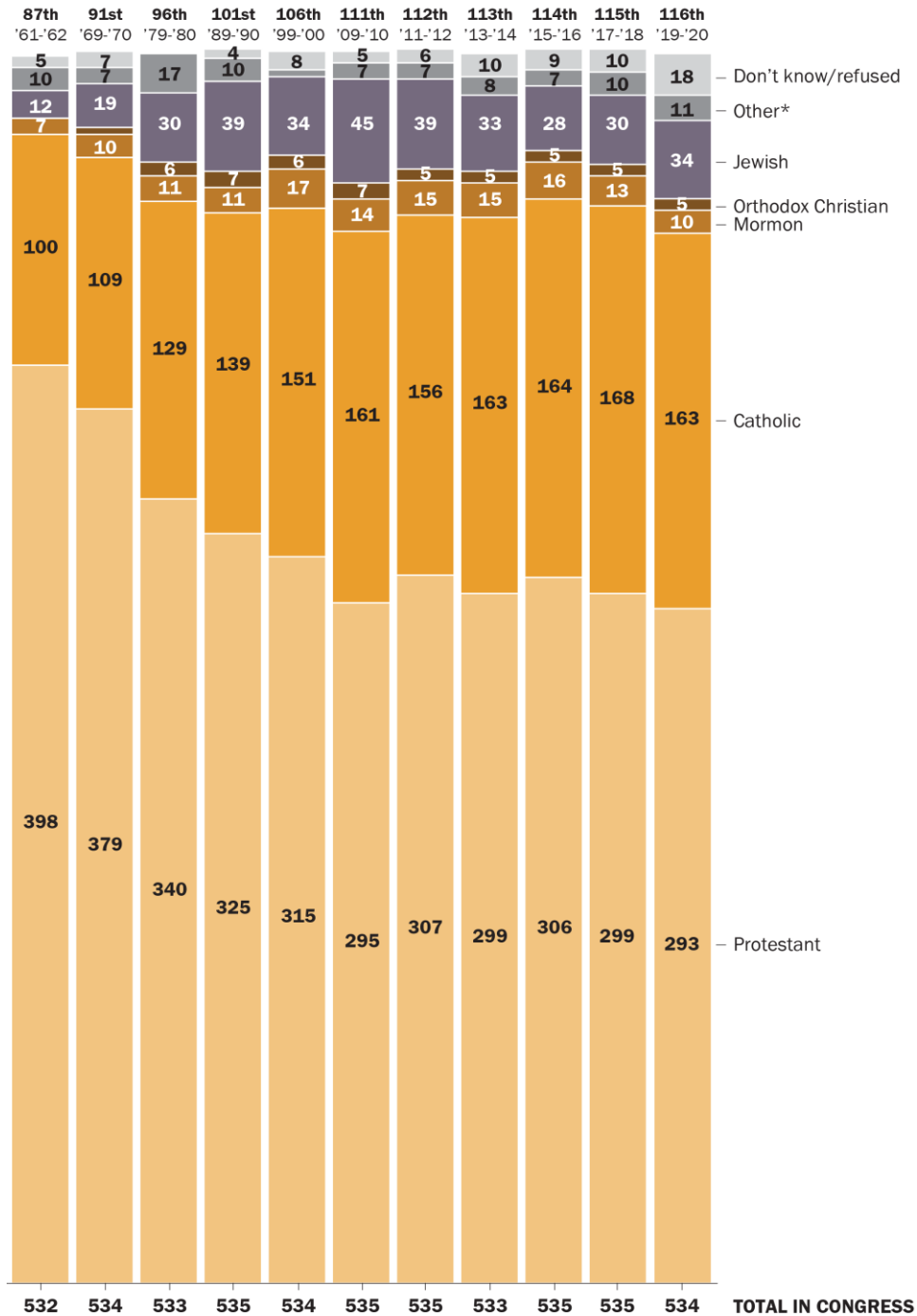
unaffiliated member (Sinema is counted as a freshman because she is moving from the House to the Senate).

Looking back

Over the 11 congresses for which Pew Research Center has data, the 116th has the lowest number of both Christians (471) and Protestants (293). The 116th Congress also has the fewest Mormon members in at least a decade – members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints now number 10, a low over the last six congresses.

Catholics have held steady at 31% over the last four congresses, although there are now many more Catholics in Congress than there were in the first Congress for which Pew Research Center has data (19% in the 87th Congress, which began in 1961). The share of Jewish members also has increased markedly since the early '60s.

Changes in the religious makeup of Congress (1961-2019)



*Includes Buddhists, Muslims, Hindus, Unitarian Universalists, the unaffiliated and other faiths.
 Note: Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.
 Source: 1961 data from the Library of Congress; other data from CQ Roll Call and Pew Research Center. Figures for 116th Congress based on Pew Research Center analysis of data collected by CQ Roll Call, reflecting members of Congress to be sworn in on Jan. 3, 2019.
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