

Who is Leading America’s Congregations? A Social and Demographic Profile of U.S. Pastors

Who are the men and women that provide leadership for America’s estimated 350,000 congregations? Studies suggest that today’s pastors are an increasingly diverse group that in many ways reflects the diversity found in the U.S. population as a whole. Demographic shifts, combined with changing gender roles and views on religious authority, have contributed to important changes in the makeup of America’s congregational leadership.

In this learning module, you will use quantitative data from the Association of Religion Data Archives to explore the social and demographic characteristics of America’s congregational leaders.

If you find yourself lost at any point, refer to the instructions on the right.

Open your web browser and go to the homepage for the Association of Religion Data Archives (ARDA) at www.thearda.com.

Begin by clicking on “Data Archive” in the toolbar, and “browse alphabetically” to locate the *Pulpit and Pew National Survey of Pastoral Leaders, 2001*. We will use this dataset to create a profile of U.S. congregational leaders. Once you find the correct file, select it.

You should now see a summary, or description, of the study. Let’s see what we can find out about this study from its description. Read through the summary and answer the following questions.

1. When was this survey conducted?

2. How were the respondents surveyed (Hint: see collection procedures)?

Open your web browser.

Go to www.thearda.com

Click on “Data Archive” in the main toolbar.

Click on the “Browse Alphabetically” tab.

Click on “P” and select “Pulpit and Pew National Survey of Pastoral Leaders, 2001”.

3. How many congregational leaders were surveyed (Hint: people are referred to as “cases” in surveys)?

4. What types of individuals were surveyed for the *Pulpit and Pew* study?

Now that you know a little more about this data file, let’s use it to create a social and demographic profile of today’s congregational leaders. This dataset will allow us to examine the age, race, and sex of pastors in the United States. In addition, we can examine information about the types of congregations that they lead.

To search for particular questions within the survey, click on the “Search” tab at the top of the summary page that you are on and enter a specific search term (Note: You can also browse through all of the questions on a survey by clicking on the “codebook” tab).

First, let’s take a look at the age of today’s congregational leaders. Try searching for the word “age” using the “Search” tab. This will generate a list of questions containing that word.

Locate the question I-AGE (Variable #272) in the list of questions that is generated. It should be near the bottom of the list. This question breaks respondents down into five age groups.

To see how the respondents are distributed among these five age groups, you must select “Analyze Results” directly beneath the response categories listed for the question I-AGE.

Scroll back to the top of the summary page and click on the “Search” tab.

Search for the word “age”.

Locate the question “I-AGE” in the list of results.

Select “Analyze Results” for variable #272.

5. What **percentages** of congregational leaders fall into the following age groups?

Younger than 35: _____

35 – 44: _____

45 – 54: _____

55 – 64: _____

65 or older: _____

6. What do these percentages suggest about the future of congregational leadership in the U.S.?

Now, scroll down to the table showing the relationship between the question I-AGE and religious tradition (I-RELIGION).

7. Which major religious tradition (not counting Other Religions) currently has the largest percentage of pastors over the age of 65?

8. Which religious tradition currently has the fewest pastors under the age of 35?

Scroll down to view the tables.

Find the “Religion” table.

9. What do these results suggest for the future of the Catholic priesthood in the U.S.?

Next, let's look at the racial make-up of America's congregational leadership. Click on the "Search" tab again, and this time search for questions containing the word "race." As before, a list of all of the survey questions containing that word will be generated.

Find the question I-RACE (Variable #273) among the listed questions, and select "Analyze Results."

10. What **percentages** of congregational leaders fall into the following race categories?

White: _____

African-American: _____

Asian-American / Pacific Islander: _____

American Indian / Alaskan Native: _____

Something Else: _____

11. What **percentage** of U.S. pastors is non-white?

These data also allow us to examine the relationships that exist between various characteristics of U.S. congregational leaders. For instance, we can explore the relationship between race and religious tradition. We may want to know whether non-white pastors are more likely to be found in some religious traditions than others?

Search for the word "race" using the "Search" tab.

Locate the question "I-RACE" in the list of results.

Select "Analyze Results" for variable #273.

To determine this, scroll down and find the table that shows the relationship between the question I-RACE and religious tradition (I-RELIGION).

12. According to the table, which traditions are pastors in the following racial groups most likely to be affiliated with?

African-American: _____

Asian-American / Pacific Islander: _____

American Indian / Alaskan Native: _____

Something Else: _____

Next we'll look at the percent of U.S. pastors who are male and female. Click on the "Search" tab again, and search for the word "sex". This should bring up a list of all survey questions containing the word sex.

Find the question I-GENDER (Variable #277), and select "Analyze Results."

13. What **percentage** of congregational leaders in the U.S. are male and female?

Male: _____

Female: _____

Traditionally, leadership in most denominations has been limited to adult males. For the most part, females have not been able to seek ordination or serve in positions of congregational leadership. Shifts in gender role attitudes, however, have opened the way for women to join the ranks of ordained clergy in some religious traditions. Let's explore the relationship between a pastor's sex and his or her religious tradition.

Scroll down to view the tables.

Find the "Religion" table.

Scroll back to the top of the summary page and click on the "Search" tab.

Search for the word "sex" using the "Search" tab.

Locate the question "I-GENDER" in the list of results.

Select "Analyze Results" for variable #277.

14. Given what you already know about denominations in the United States, which of the major religious traditions (Catholic, Conservative Protestant, Mainline Protestant, Historic Black) do you predict will have the highest **percentage** of female pastors?

15. What major religious tradition do you predict will have the lowest **percentage** of female pastors?

To test your predictions, find the table that shows the relationship between the question I-GENDER and religious tradition (I-RELIGION).

16. Were your predictions supported or contradicted by the survey data?

17. In which religious tradition are female clergy most prevalent?

We can also examine the types of congregations led by pastors in the United States. One of the most obvious ways that these organizations vary is by religious tradition.

Let's see what percentage of U.S. pastors is affiliated with each of the major religious groups in the United States. Once more, click on the "Search" tab, and search for the word "**traditions**." This will generate a list of all of the survey questions that contain the word "traditions."

Look through these survey items and find the question I-RELIGION (Variable #274). Once you find this question, select "Analyze Results."

Scroll down to view the tables.

Find the "Religion" table.

Scroll back to the top of the summary page and click on the "Search" tab.

Search for the word "traditions" using the "Search" tab.

Locate the question "I-RELIGION" in the list of results.

18. What are the five major religious groups represented in the United States and the **percentages** of U.S. pastors affiliated with each?

| <u>Religious Groups</u> | <u>%</u> |
|-------------------------|----------|
| _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ |

The congregations led by today’s pastors also vary significantly by size. Some congregations are made up of only a handful of families who have worshiped there for years, while others claim thousands of weekly attendees at services led in arenas and auditoriums. Let’s take a look at the size of the congregations in which America’s pastors serve.

Use the “Search” tab to find the question **MSHIPI** (Variable #3). Analyze results for MSHIPI4. This question reports the average weekly attendance of the pastors’ congregations.

19. According to this survey, what constitutes a “small congregation” and what constitutes a “mega-church”?

Select “Analyze Results” for variable #274.

Scroll back to the top of the summary page and click on the “Search” tab.

Search for the question “MSHIPI” using the “Search” tab.

Select “Analyze Results” for variable #3.

20. What **percentage** of U.S. pastors lead small congregations?

21. What **percentage** of U.S. pastors lead mega-churches?

22. Why might the percentage of all U.S. clergy serving in mega-churches actually be higher than these data suggest?

23. Which of the major religious traditions that we looked at earlier (Catholic, Mainline Protestant, Conservative Protestant, Historic Black) do you think has the largest percentage of mega-church pastors?

Scroll down and find the table that shows the relationship between the question MSHIPI4 and religious tradition (I-RELIGION).

24. Do the data support your prediction?

25. According to the survey data, which tradition has the largest **percentage** of mega-church pastors?

Scroll down to view the tables.

Find the “Religion” table.

26. Why do you think that pastors in this religious tradition might be more likely to lead very large congregations than those in the other traditions?

27. Drawing on the data that we have examined in this learning module, develop a demographic and social profile of the majority of U.S. pastors. What is their age, gender, race, and religious tradition likely to be? What size church are they most likely to pastor?
