

## 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 ([www.theARDA.com](http://www.theARDA.com)).

Begin by clicking on "Data Archive" in the toolbar, and "browse alphabetically" to locate the *U.S. Congregational Life Survey, Wave 2, 2008/2009, Random Sample Leader Survey*. 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? (Hint: See data collection.)

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

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**Open your web browser.**

**Go to**  
[www.theARDA.com](http://www.theARDA.com)

**Click on "Data Archive" in the main toolbar.**

**Click on the "Browse Alphabetically" tab.**

**Click on "U" and select "U.S. Congregational Life Survey, Wave 2, 2008/2009, Random Sample Leader Survey".**



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

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4. What types of individuals were surveyed in the U.S. *Congregational Life Survey, Leader Survey*?

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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 #447) in the list of questions that is generated. It should be near the bottom of the list. This question breaks respondents down into four age groups.

To see how the respondents are distributed among these four 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 #447.**

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

Younger than 40: \_\_\_\_\_

40 – 49: \_\_\_\_\_

50 – 59: \_\_\_\_\_

60 or older: \_\_\_\_\_

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

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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 60?

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8. Which religious tradition currently has the fewest pastors under the age of 40?

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**Scroll down to view the tables.**

**Find the “Religion” table.**

9. What do these results suggest for the future of Mainline and Conservative ministers in the U.S.?

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

Find the question EDUC (Variable #311) among the listed questions, and select "Analyze Results."

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

Some high school: \_\_\_\_\_

Completed high school: \_\_\_\_\_

Trade certificate: \_\_\_\_\_

Associate degree: \_\_\_\_\_

Bachelor's degree from a university: \_\_\_\_\_

Master's, Doctorate, or other graduate degree: \_\_\_\_\_

**Search for the word "education" using the "Search" tab.**

**Locate the question "I-EDUC" in the list of results.**

**Select "Analyze Results" for variable #311.**

11. What **percentage** of U.S. pastors have not obtained higher than a bachelor's degree?

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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 education and religious tradition. We may want to know whether pastors that have master's degrees are more likely to be found in some religious traditions than others?

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

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 "gender". This should bring up a list of all survey questions containing the word gender.

Find the question I-GENDER (Variable #449), and select "Analyze Results."

12. 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 "gender" using the "Search" tab.**

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

**Select "Analyze Results" for variable #449.**

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

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

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

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

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**Scroll down to view the tables.**

**Find the "Religion" table.**

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

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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 denominations in the United States. Once more, click on the "Search" tab, and search for the word "denomination." This will generate a list of all of the survey questions that contain the word "denomination."

Look through these survey items and find the question DENOMPR (Variable #9).

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

<b>Religious Denomination</b>	<b>%</b>
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**Scroll back to the top of the summary page and click on the "Search" tab.**

**Search for the word "denomination" using the "Search" tab.**

**Locate the question "DENOMPR" in the list of results.**

Lastly, let's see what **percentages** of U.S. pastors are different races.

18. Fill out the spaces below with the **percentages** that "checked" each race option in variables #281-#286:

Asian or Pacific Islander: \_\_\_\_\_  
Black or African American: \_\_\_\_\_  
Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin: \_\_\_\_\_  
Indian (American) or Alaska Native: \_\_\_\_\_  
White or Caucasian: \_\_\_\_\_  
Other: \_\_\_\_\_

19. 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, education level, and religious tradition likely to be?

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

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