

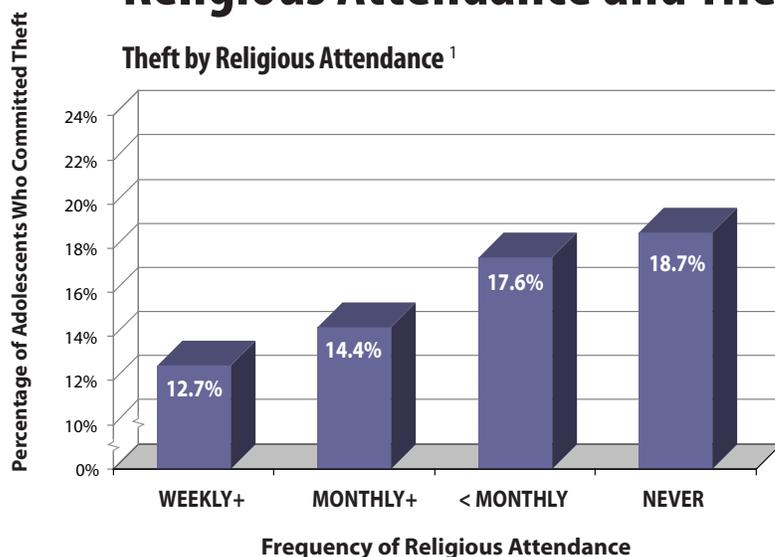


# Mapping America™

Marriage, Religion, and the Common Good – Number 22

## Religious Attendance and Theft

Theft by Religious Attendance <sup>1</sup>



Source: Adolescent Health Survey, Wave I. Adolescents grade 7-12.

Adolescents who worship at least weekly are less likely to steal than those who worship less frequently.

Thirteen percent of students in Grades 7-12 who attend religious services at least weekly admit to having stolen at least \$50 worth of goods, according to a confidential survey conducted as part of the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, Waves I and II.<sup>2</sup> By comparison, 19 percent of those who never worship, 14 percent of those who worship one to three times a month, and 18 percent of those who attend religious services less than once a month have committed such thefts.

### Other Studies

Several other studies corroborate these findings. Examining the same set of data, Mark Regnerus of the University of Texas at Austin and Glen Elder of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill reported that students who worship weekly are less likely to engage in delinquent behavior than those who worship less frequently.<sup>3</sup>

Christian Smith and Robert Faris of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill reported that only 6.4 percent of twelfth graders who attended religious services at least weekly had stolen. By contrast, 14.1 percent of twelfth graders who never attended religious services had stolen. In between were those who worshiped “once or twice a month” (13.9) and those who

“rarely” attended religious services (13.5).<sup>4</sup>

Examining data from the National Youth Survey, Byron Johnson of Baylor University and colleagues also found that the higher the religious involvement of black youth, the lower the incidence of “serious crime,” which included felony theft, felony assault, robbery, and illegal services.<sup>5</sup>

This evidence indicates that students who frequently attend religious services are far less likely to steal.

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- 1 This chart draws on a large national sample (16,000) from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health. This work was done by the author in cooperation with former colleagues at The Heritage Foundation, Washington, D.C.
  - 2 The data indicate those adolescents who have stolen more than \$50 worth of goods.
  - 3 Mark D. Regnerus and Glen H. Elder Jr., “Religion and Vulnerability among Low-Risk Adolescents,” *Social Science Research*, vol. 32 (2003): 633-658. The delinquency measures included stealing something worth more than \$50 and stealing something worth less than \$50.
  - 4 Christian Smith and Robert Faris, *Religion and American Adolescent Delinquency, Risk Behaviors and Constructive Social Activities* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: National Study of Youth and Religion, 2002): 32-33. The data indicate those adolescents who have stolen more than \$50 worth of goods.
  - 5 Bryon R. Johnson, et al., “The ‘Invisible Institution’ and Black Youth Crime: The Church as an Agency of Local Social Control,” *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, vol. 29 (2000): 479-498.



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