



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

Public Health Service
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

National Center for Health Statistics
3311 Toledo Road
Hyattsville, Maryland 20782

December 1, 2021

Alison Gill, Esq.
Vice President, Legal & Policy American
American Atheists
225 Cristiani Street
Cranford, NJ 07016

Dear Ms. Gill:

First, NCHS wishes to apologize for the inadvertent omission of the American Atheists’ memo dated 8/9/21 from our 30-day OMB notice. We appreciate the commitment and time that this detailed memo represents on behalf of the American Atheists organization, and we regret the lapse in communication within our agency that resulted in this omission.

Second, we have read your comments and suggestions carefully, and we thank you for sharing them. We would like to share some further context behind the religion questions planned for our NSFG data collection beginning in January 2022 in hopes that it may clarify the rationale and uses of these data items. There may also be some misunderstanding of our questions, so we hope to clear those up as well.

Some of your comments appear to reference our older religious affiliation questions. In the interest of reducing respondent burden as well as improving the representativeness of our response categories, we have modified the religion categories for 2022+ as shown below. We think that the revised religion categories for NSFG 2022 (year 1 of the proposed data collection described in the OMB Information Collection Request #0920-0314) address many of your concerns with the categories used in 2017-2019 NSFG. The changes are based on lessons learned from prior data analyses as well as prior consultations with experts in the field. The religion categories that will be offered for both “religion raised” and current religious affiliation for NSFG in 2022 are as follows:

- Protestant (for example: Christian-no denomination, Baptist, Methodist, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Pentecostal, Episcopalian, and others)..... 1
- Catholic2
- Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS/Mormon).....3
- Jewish (Judaism)4
- Muslim (Islam)5
- Buddhist.....6

| | |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| Hindu | 7 |
| Another religion (specify) | 8 |
| No religion (agnostic, atheist) | 9 |

Note that there are no longer separate response categories for the different Protestant denominations that were asked about separately in past NSFGs, and we have also added categories for some religion groups that you noted in your memo (for example, Muslim). As you see from the 1st category offered for “Protestant,” specific Protestant denominations are provided as examples to aid respondents in classifying themselves in this group if appropriate. Those who answer “Another religion” are asked to specify this religion in a follow-up, open-ended question.

With regard to your comments about the FUNDAM question (asking participants to describe the type of Christian religion they consider themselves to be) that we do plan to continue asking in 2022, we note that this question is included in the NSFG upon request of our cosponsoring agencies and advice from other experts in the field of religion. Along with other religion-related questions in the survey, this question has shown significant associations with several key NSFG measures of fertility, family formation, and reproductive health, and as such, has contributed to our understanding of differentials and disparities in the U.S. population. We will certainly continue to evaluate the utility of all or our religion questions going forward, including more consideration of your organization’s comments.

Your memo also raised several important concerns about confidentiality of religious affiliation data that we also hold as paramount concerns. Every public-use file release from NSFG or any other NCHS survey undergoes careful confidentiality review by the NCHS Disclosure Review Board. As you may already know, due to sample sizes of many of the religious categories we have asked about in past NSFGs, these categories have not been included in the 2-year data file releases from NSFG. For any greater detail than what is provided on these public-use data files, researchers must submit proposals for accessing restricted-use data within the Research Data Center. Any such research proposals, which would typically also involve combining NSFG data from multiple file releases to obtain sufficient sample sizes, would be evaluated to ensure respondent confidentiality is protected.

We hope you find this additional information and response helpful. We will continue our efforts to improve the utility and representativeness of all our survey questions, and we hope to use your memo along with other expert guidance and cognitive lab testing to enhance our religion questions going forward. Thank you again for sharing your organization’s perspective.

Sincerely,



Amy M. Branum, PhD

Associate Director for Science
National Center for Health Statistics
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention