

Most churchgoers say they won't skip worship for football

January 9, 2015

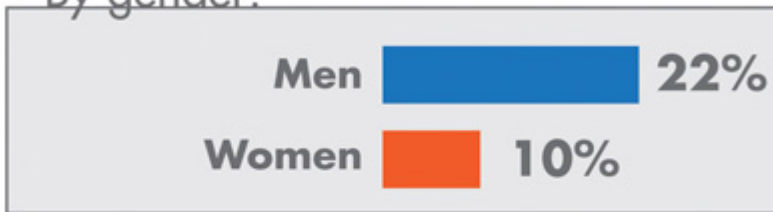
NASHVILLE, Tenn.—Most American churchgoers say they would rather attend worship services than watch their favorite football team. But a few diehard fans acknowledge they are willing to miss out on church to watch a game.

Among Churchgoers:

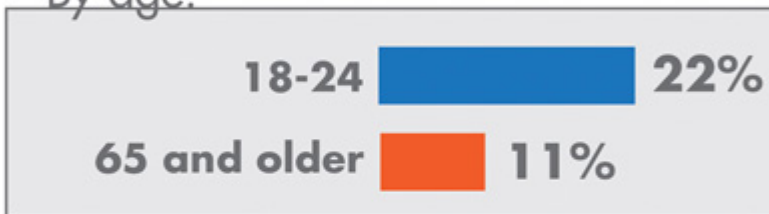
Percent who agree they would skip a weekly worship service to watch a football game

About one in seven churchgoers (15 percent) say they'd skip church in order to watch their favorite football team, according to a survey of 994 churchgoers from Nashville-based [LifeWay Research](http://LifeWayResearch.com).

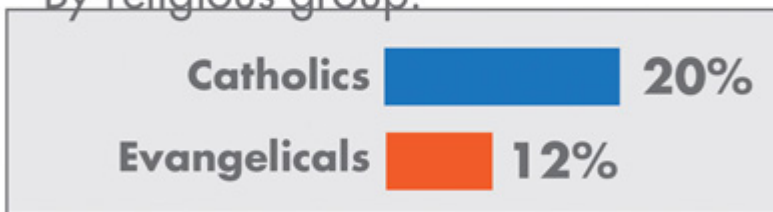
By gender:



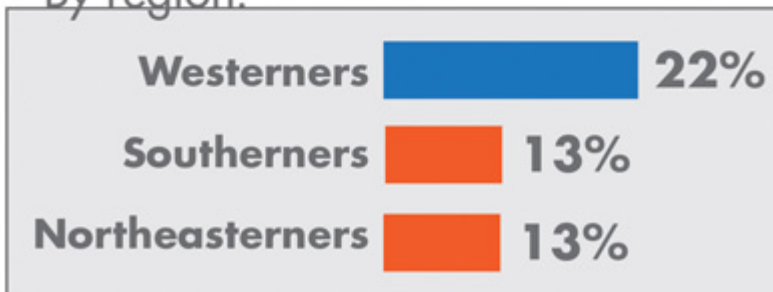
By age:



By religious group:



By region:



Researchers found most of the faithful balk at skipping church for football.

More than eight in 10 (83 percent) disagree with the statement: “I would skip a weekly worship service in order to watch my favorite football team.”

Many worshippers had particularly strong feelings—nearly seven in 10 (68 percent) strongly disagree.

“Most churchgoers put divine revelation ahead of division rivalries,” said Scott McConnell, vice president of LifeWay Research.

Some churchgoers, though, are more devoted to their team—especially when the team is doing well.

Two years ago, Daniel Espy, pastor of [The Bridge Church in Snohomish, Wash.](#), scheduled an 8 a.m. service in order to accommodate Seattle Seahawks fans, whose team had experienced a revival after years of struggling.

On the church’s Facebook page, Espy joked that all churches in Seattle should hold early services, so fans could worship and then watch a playoff game. The idea took off and eventually landed the church on the front page of the local newspaper.

Now The Bridge has two services, making it easier for church members to worship before games. Still, attendance goes down when the Seahawks have an early game.

“Attendance can swing about 30 to 40 percent, depending on kickoff,” Espy said.

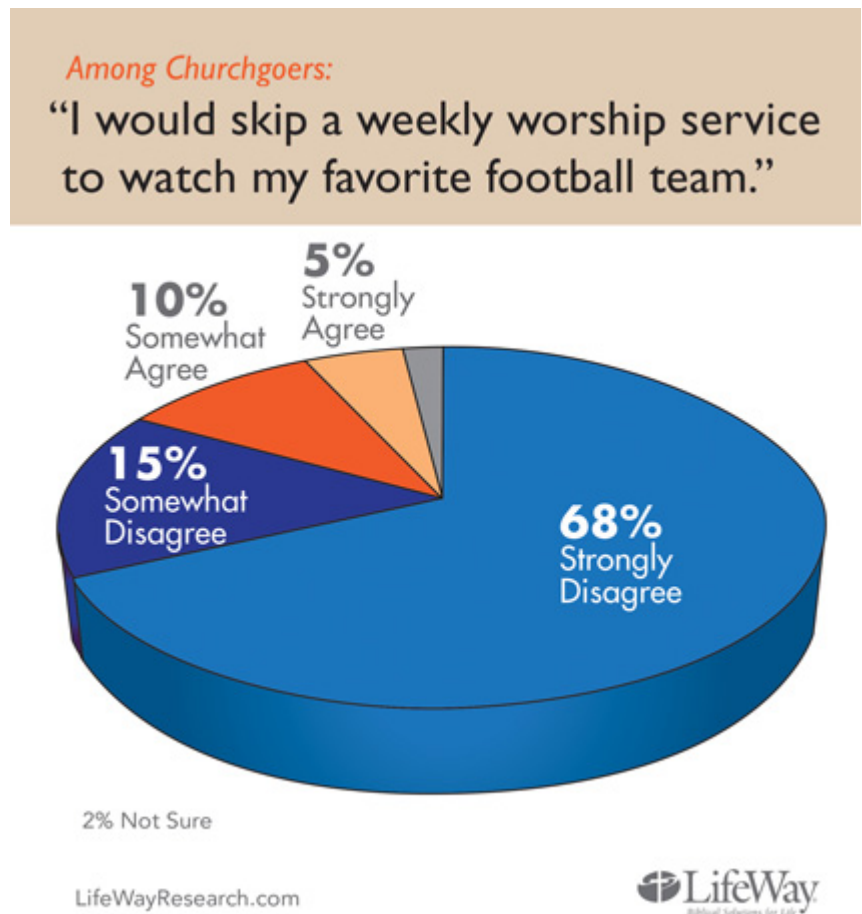
LifeWay Research found faithful football fans in the West (22 percent) are more willing to skip church than those in South (13 percent) or Northeast (13 percent.)

About one in four churchgoing men (22 percent) say they'd skip church to watch football. That drops to one in 10 for women churchgoers. Catholic football fans (20 percent) are more willing to skip church than evangelicals (12 percent).

Espy insists he's taken a good-natured approach to those who skip church to watch football. That works better than a guilt trip, he observed.

"Honestly, we just try to show people that Jesus is better than football," he said.

Researchers conducted the phone survey of 2,000 Americans Sept. 19 to Oct. 5, 2014. The calling list utilized Random Digit Dialing. Sixty percent of completed surveys were among landlines, and 40 percent were among cell phones.



Researchers used maximum quotas and slight weights for gender, region, age, ethnicity and education to reflect the population more accurately. They screened responders to include only those whose religious preference

is Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox or nondenominational Christian and who who attend a religious service on religious holidays or more often.

The completed sample is 994 surveys. The sample provides 95 percent confidence the sampling error does not exceed plus or minus 3.5 percent. Margins of error are higher in sub-groups.