

Link:

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/american-cremation-rate_us_597b7e9ce4b02a4ebb755bb9

[RELIGION](#)

07/28/2017 05:58 pm ET

Americans Are Opting For Cremation Over Burial At The Highest Rate Ever

America's changing religious landscape may be a factor affecting funeral practices.

[By Antonia Blumberg](#)

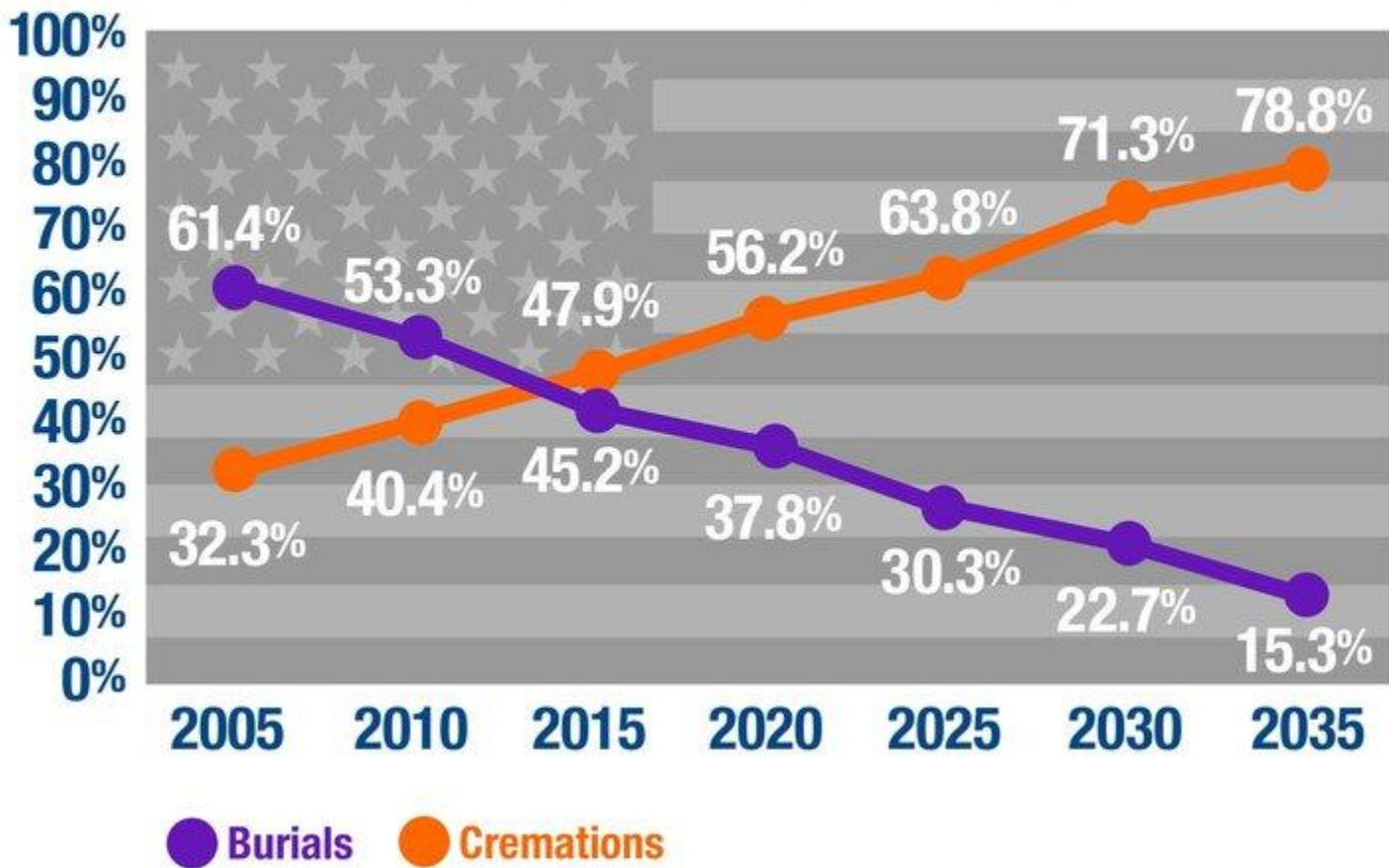
The rate at which Americans are choosing to be cremated rather than buried after their death [has been rising](#) for many years. In 2016, that rate reached an all-time high.

Fifty percent of Americans chose cremation in 2016, according to a new report by the National Funeral Directors Association. The rate of cremation in the U.S. has risen steadily over the years, going from just five percent in the 1970s to 40 percent in 2010.

The U.S. cremation rate is still much lower than countries like Japan and Switzerland, where 100 percent and 85.4 percent of those countries' populations, respectively, are cremated. But NFDA predicts that by 2035, nearly 80 percent of Americans will be cremated after their death.

The national cremation rate exceeded the burial rate for the first time in 2015. Right now, burials fall behind cremations by just a few percentage points. But NFDA expects the gap to increase starkly over the next few years.

U.S. Projected Cremation and Burial Rates



Source: National Funeral Directors Association 2017 Cremation and Burial Report

National Funeral Directors Association

The association credits a number of factors in the dramatic rise in cremations. Kurt L. Soffe, a fourth-generation, Utah-based funeral director and a member of NFDA, said he started noticing a shift toward cremation in the 1990s and attributes the trend largely to what he calls American “individualism.”

“As I would meet with families who were arranging for the burial services of their loved ones many of those family members would say, ‘This (i.e. burial) is fine for Mom/Dad, but I just want to be cremated,’” Soffe said in an email to HuffPost.

Post-death practices also became “institutionalized” and increasingly impersonal throughout the end of the 20th century, Soffe said, as Americans started dying and being memorialized outside the home.

“In my opinion the resulting attitudes attempt to intellectualize the death experience with the thinking: the quicker we remove or dispose of the body the less emotional pain or grief or emotion we will experience or show,” he said.

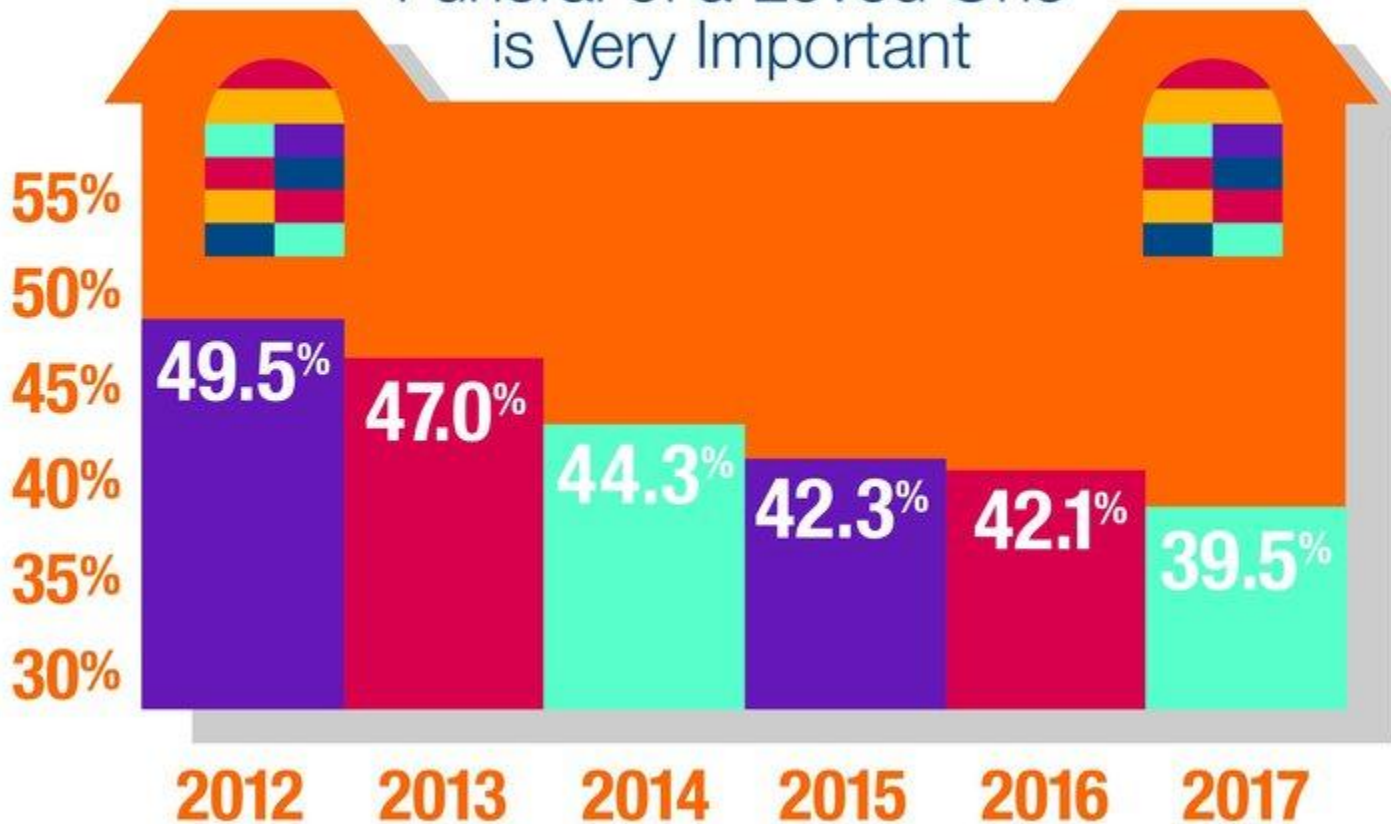
NFDA also points to changes in American religion as a factor affecting funeral practices. More Americans than ever [identify as religiously unaffiliated](#), which NFDA says “has contributed to the decline of the historically traditional funeral in America and the rise in cremation as the disposition of choice.”

“Changes in the American religious landscape are causal to increase in cremation,” Soffe said. “I have been told by many families, ‘I am spiritual, just not religious.’ We as a funeral home have performed many memorial services which have been centered around and celebrated a lifestyle, interest or hobby.”

The world’s religions are divided on the acceptability of cremation. Jewish and [Islamic law](#) have traditionally [forbidden cremating the deceased](#). Some Christians also [look down on the practice](#), though the Catholic Church has [approved of cremations](#) since 1963. Cremation is [common among Buddhists](#), and it’s the [mode of choice for Hindu funerals](#).

Those who are non-religious — who made up [nearly a quarter of American adults](#) according to a 2014 Pew Research Center report, and whose numbers are rising — are more likely than religious Americans to consider cremation for their deceased loved ones. NFDA also found that the percentage of U.S. adults who feel that religion is an important part of a funeral service has decreased from roughly 50 percent in 2012 to under 40 percent in 2017.

Percent Who Feel a Religious Component in a Funeral of a Loved One is Very Important



Source: National Funeral Directors Association 2017 Cremation and Burial Report

National Funeral Directors Association

Another factor is cost. Cremations cost roughly a third of what funerals with burials cost, according to NFDA. They also tend to be more environmentally friendly, which has [increasingly become a concern](#) for many Americans.

The study also found that 47 percent of U.S. adults have attended a funeral presided over by non-clergy. Americans are also increasingly choosing to memorialize a death with family and friends instead of seeking out services from a funeral director.

Of those opting for cremation, NFDA reported that 39 percent of cremated remains are returned to families, roughly 37 percent are buried at a cemetery and less than two percent are scattered at a cemetery. Nearly 20 percent of cremated remains are scattered at non-cemetery locations.