

SURVEYS ON RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

**A Talk by Joe Sampson to The Atheist Society (Melbourne, Australia)
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INTRODUCTION

This talk is about a few surveys of people in seventeen countries on their views on religion and spirituality. All the survey reports were written in 2018.

I will discuss the results of four surveys. The first two were conducted by Pew Research Center, a U.S.A. think tank which does public polling on a variety of issues. The third one was conducted by NCLS, an Australian organisation which conducts surveys on community spirituality and well-being. The fourth is the Australian Values Study, carried out by The Social Research Centre at the Australian National University. A lot of the surveys' results are given verbatim.

U.S. BELIEFS ABOUT GOD

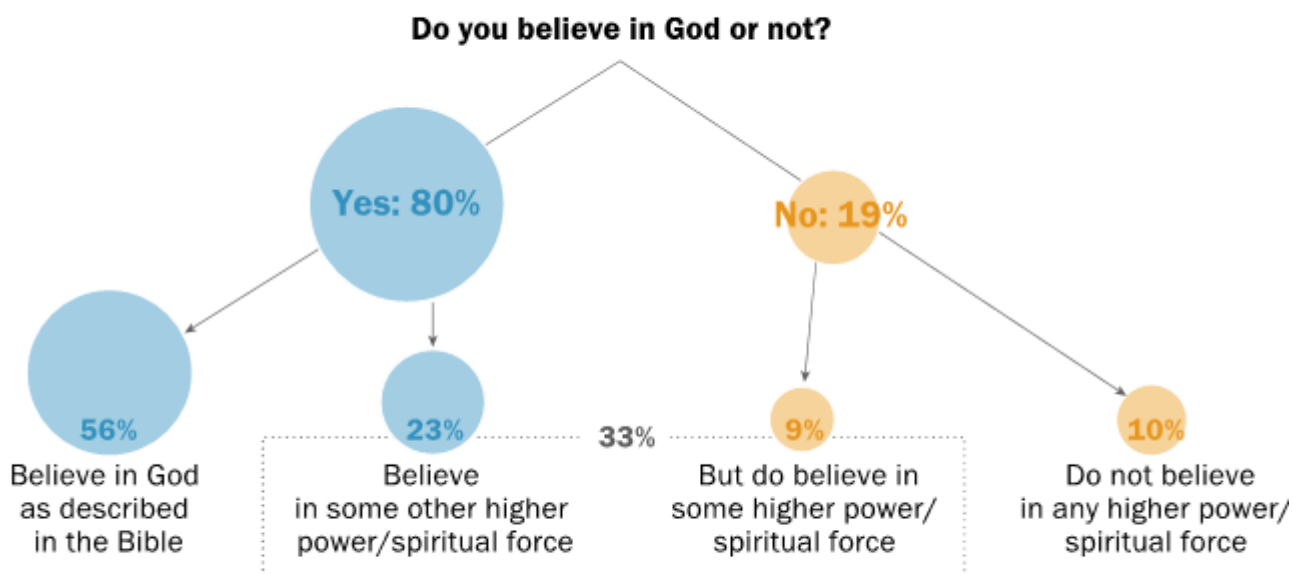
The first survey is entitled “When Americans Say They Believe in God, What Do They Mean?” These are the findings of the survey, conducted Dec. 4 to 18, 2017, among 4,729 participants in Pew Research Center’s nationally representative American Trends Panel, with an overall margin of sampling error for the full survey of plus or minus 2.3 percentage points.

In answer to the question “Do you believe in God or not?” 80% said “Yes” and 19% said “No”. Of the 80% who said “Yes” 56% believed in God as described in the Bible and 23% believed in some other higher power/spiritual force”. Of the 19% who answered “No”, 10% said they that they believed in some higher power/spiritual force” and 9% said that they did not believe in some other higher power/spiritual force”.

In the U.S., belief in a deity is common even among the religiously unaffiliated – a group composed of those who identify themselves, religiously, as atheist, agnostic or “nothing in particular,” and sometimes referred to, collectively, as religious “nones.” In fact, nearly three-quarters of religious “nones” (72%) believe in a higher power of some kind, even if not in God as described in the Bible.

The survey questions that mention the Bible do not specify any particular verses or translations, leaving that up to each respondent’s understanding. But it is clear from questions elsewhere in the survey that Americans who say they believe in God “as described in the Bible” generally envision an all-powerful, all-knowing, all-loving deity who determines most or all of what happens in their lives. By contrast, people who say they believe in a “higher power or spiritual force” – but **not** in God as described in the Bible – are much less likely to believe in a deity who is omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent and active in human affairs.

One-third of U.S. adults believe in a higher power of some kind, but not in God as described in Bible



Note: Don't know or unclear responses not shown. Figures may not add to subtotals indicated due to rounding.

Source: Survey conducted Dec. 4-18, 2017, among U.S. adults.

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Overall, about half of Americans (48%) say that God or another higher power directly determines what happens in their lives all or most of the time. An additional 18% say God or some other higher power determines what happens to them "just some of the time."

Nearly eight-in-ten U.S. adults think God or a higher power has protected them, and two-thirds say they have been rewarded by the Almighty. By comparison, somewhat fewer see God as judgmental and punitive. Six-in-ten Americans say God or a higher power will judge all people on what they have done, and four-in-ten say they have been punished by God or the spiritual force they believe is at work in the universe.

In addition, the survey finds that three-quarters of American adults say they try to talk to God (or another higher power in the universe), and about three-in-ten U.S. adults say God (or a higher power) talks back. The survey also asked, separately, about rates of prayer. People who pray on a regular basis are especially likely to say that they speak to God and that God speaks to them. But the survey shows that praying and talking to God are not fully interchangeable. For example, four-in-ten people (39%) who say they seldom or never pray nonetheless report that they talk to God.

When asked additional questions about what they believe God or another higher power in the universe is like, those who believe in God as described in the Bible and those who believe in another kind of higher power or spiritual force express

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substantially different views. Simply put, those who believe in the God of the Bible tend to perceive a more powerful, knowing, benevolent and active deity.

For instance, nearly all adults who say they believe in the God of the Bible say they think God loves all people regardless of their faults, and that God has protected them. More than nine-in-ten people who believe in the biblical God envisage a deity who knows everything that goes on in the world, and nearly nine-in-ten say God has rewarded them, and has the power to direct or change everything that happens in the world.

Far fewer people who believe in some other higher power or spiritual force (but not the God of the Bible) ascribe these attributes and actions to that higher power. Still, even among this group, half or more say they believe another higher power in the universe loves all people (69%), is omniscient (53%), has protected them (68%) and rewarded them (53%).

Belief in God as described in the Bible is most pronounced among U.S. Christians. Overall, eight-in-ten self-identified Christians say they believe in the God of the Bible, while one-in-five do not believe in the biblical description of God but do believe in a higher power of some kind. Very few self-identified Christians (just 1%) say they do not believe in any higher power at all.

Compared with Christians, Jews and people with no religious affiliation are much more likely to say they do not believe in God or a higher power of any kind. Still, big majorities in both groups *do* believe in a deity (89% among Jews, 72% among religious “nones”), including 56% of Jews and 53% of the religiously unaffiliated who say they do not believe in the God of the Bible but do believe in some other higher power of spiritual force in the universe. (The survey did not include enough interviews with Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus or respondents from other minority religious groups in the United States to permit separate analysis of their beliefs.)

When asked about a variety of possible attributes or characteristics of God, U.S. Christians by and large paint a portrait that reflects common Christian teachings about God. For instance, 93% of Christians believe God (or another higher power in the universe) loves all people, regardless of their faults. Nearly nine-in-ten (87%) say that God knows everything that happens in the world. And about eight-in-ten (78%) believe God has the power to direct or change everything that goes on in the world. In total, three-quarters of U.S. Christians believe that God possesses all three of these attributes – that the deity is loving, omniscient and omnipotent.

However, the survey finds sizable differences in the way various Christian subgroups perceive God. For example, while nine-in-ten of those in the historically black Protestant (92%) and evangelical (91%) traditions say they believe in God as

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described in the Bible, smaller majorities of mainline Protestants and Catholics say they have faith in the biblical God. Sizable minorities of Catholics (28%) and mainline Protestants (26%) say they believe in a higher power or spiritual force, but **not** in God as described in the Bible.

Three-quarters of U.S. Christians believe God is loving, omniscient and omnipotent

	Believe in God as described in Bible	Believe in other higher power (not God of Bible)	Believe in deity, declined to say which	Do not believe in God or higher power of any kind	Unclear/refused	Believe God/higher power is all-loving	Believe God/higher power is all-knowing	Believe God/higher power is all-powerful	NET Believe God has all three traits
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Christian	80	18	1	1	<1=100	93	87	78	74
Protestant	85	13	1	<1	<1	95	91	83	80
<i>Evangelical</i>	91	8	1	<1	0	97	95	89	87
<i>Mainline</i>	72	26	1	1	1	91	82	64	62
<i>Historically black Prot.</i>	92	6	1	0	0	98	97	96	91
Catholic	69	28	<1	2	<1	88	78	67	61

Note: The "believe in deity, declined to say which" column is composed of respondents who said they believe in God but declined to answer a follow-up question asking whether they believe in God as described in the Bible or they believe in some other higher power or spiritual force in the universe. Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Source: Survey conducted Dec. 4-18, 2017, among U.S. adults.

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Similarly, while about nine-in-ten adherents in the historically black Protestant tradition (91%) and evangelicals (87%) believe that God is all-loving, all-knowing and all-powerful, just 61% of Catholics and 62% of mainline Protestants say God possesses all three attributes.

Evangelicals and those in the historically black Protestant tradition are also more likely than members of other major U.S. Christian traditions to say that God has personally protected, rewarded and punished them. But across all subgroups, Christians are far more likely to say God has protected and rewarded them than to say God has punished them.

None of the survey respondents who describe themselves as atheists believe in God as described in the Bible. About one-in-five, however, do believe in some other kind of higher power or spiritual force in the universe (18%). Roughly eight-in-ten self-described atheists (81%) say they do not believe in a higher power of any kind.

Self-described agnostics look very different from atheists on this question. While very few agnostics (3%) say they believe in God as described in the Bible, a clear majority

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(62%) say they believe in some other kind of spiritual force. Just three-in-ten say there is no higher power in the universe.

Respondents who describe their religion as “nothing in particular” are even more likely to express belief in a deity; nine-in-ten take this position, mirroring the U.S. public overall in this regard. While most people in this “nothing in particular” group believe in a spiritual force other than the biblical God (60%), a sizable minority (28%) say they do believe in God as described in the Bible.

Majorities in all adult age groups say they believe in God or some other higher power, ranging from 83% of those ages 18 to 29 to 96% of those ages 50 to 64. But young adults are far less likely than their older counterparts to say they believe in God as described in the Bible. Whereas roughly two-thirds of adults ages 50 and older say they believe in the biblical God, just 49% of those in their 30s and 40s and just 43% of adults under 30 say the same. A similar share of adults ages 18 to 29 say they believe in another higher power (39%).

The survey also shows that, compared with older adults, those under age 50 generally view God as less powerful and less involved in earthly affairs than do older Americans. At the same time, however, young adults are somewhat *more* likely than their elders to say they believe that they personally have been punished by God or a higher power in the universe.

Among U.S. adults with a high school education or less, fully two-thirds say they believe in God as described in the Bible. Far fewer adults who have obtained some college (i.e. tertiary) education say that they believe in God as described in the Bible (53%). And among college graduates, fewer than half (45%) say they believe in the biblical God.

The data also show that, compared with those with lower levels of educational attainment, college graduates are less likely to believe that God (or another higher power in the universe) is active and involved in the world and in their personal lives. For instance, while roughly half of college graduates (54%) say they have been rewarded by God, two-thirds of those with some college education (68%) and three-quarters of those with a high school education or less (75%) say this. And just one-third of college graduates say God determines all or most of what happens in their lives, far below the share who say this among those with less education.

Republicans and Democrats have very different beliefs about the divine

Republicans and Democrats have very different notions about God. Among Republicans and those who lean toward the Republicans, seven-in-ten say they believe in God as described in the Bible. Democrats and those who lean Democratic, by contrast, are far less likely to believe in God as described in the Bible (45%), and are more likely than Republicans to believe in another kind of higher power (39% vs. 23%). Democrats also are more likely than Republicans to say they do not believe in any higher power or spiritual force in the universe (14% vs. 5%).

Additionally, while 85% of Republicans believe God loves all people, eight-in-ten believe God is all-knowing, and seven-in-ten believe God is all-powerful; Democrats are less likely to express each of these views. Two-thirds of Republicans say they believe God possesses all three of these attributes, compared with roughly half of Democrats (49%). Republicans also are more likely than Democrats to say God has protected, rewarded or punished them.

Compared with Republicans, Democrats far less likely to believe in God as described in Bible

	Rep./lean Rep.	Dem./lean Dem.
	%	%
NET Believe in God, higher power or spiritual force	95	86
Believe in God as described in Bible	70	45
Believe in other higher power/spiritual force	23	39
Unclear	1	2
Do not believe in God or higher power of any kind	5	14
Unclear/refused	<1	<1
	100	100
<i>% who believe that God/higher power ...</i>		
Loves all people, despite their faults	85	72
Knows everything	81	64
Has power to direct/change everything	71	54
NET Believe God has all three traits	67	49

Note: Figures may not add to 100% or to subtotals indicated due to rounding.

Source: Survey conducted Dec. 4-18, 2017, among U.S. adults.

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Among Democrats, the survey finds big differences between whites and nonwhites in views about God. Most nonwhite Democrats, who are predominantly black or Hispanic, say they believe in God as described in the Bible, and seven-in-ten or more say they believe God is all-loving, all-knowing or all-powerful, with two-thirds

ascribing all of these attributes to God. In these ways, nonwhite Democrats have more in common with Republicans than they do with white Democrats.

In stark contrast with non-white Democrats, just one-third of white Democrats say they believe in God as described in the Bible, while 21% do not believe in a higher power of any kind. And just one-in-three white Democrats say they believe God (or another higher power in the universe) is all-knowing, all-powerful and all-loving.

WESTERN EUROPEAN BELIEFS ABOUT GOD AND SPIRITUALITY

The second survey is entitled “Being Christian In Western Europe” These are the findings of the survey, conducted April to August, 2017, among participants in fifteen countries in Western Europe. The countries were Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.

These are findings of a new Pew Research Center survey of 24,599 randomly selected adults across 15 countries in Western Europe. Interviews were conducted on mobile and landline telephones from April to August, 2017, in 12 languages. The survey examines not just traditional Christian religious beliefs and behaviours, opinions about the role of religious institutions in society, and views on national identity, immigrants and religious minorities, but also Europeans’ attitudes toward Eastern and New Age spiritual ideas and practices. And this survey also examines the beliefs and other characteristics of the religiously unaffiliated population in the region

Western Europe, where Protestant Christianity originated and Catholicism has been based for most of its history, has become one of the world’s most secular regions. Although the vast majority of adults say they were baptised, today many do not describe themselves as Christians. Some say they gradually drifted away from religion, stopped believing in religious teachings, or were alienated by scandals or church positions on social issues, according to a major new Pew Research Center survey of religious beliefs and practices in Western Europe.

Yet most adults surveyed still **do** consider themselves Christians, even if they seldom go to church. Indeed, the survey shows that non-practicing Christians (defined, for the purposes of this report, as people who identify as Christians, but attend church services no more than a few times per year) make up the biggest share of the population across the region. In every country except Italy, they are more numerous than church-attending Christians (those who go to religious services at least once a month). In the United Kingdom, for example, there are roughly three times as many

non-practicing Christians (55%) as there are church-attending Christians (18%) defined this way.

Non-practicing Christians also outnumber the religiously unaffiliated population (people who identify as atheist, agnostic or “nothing in particular,” sometimes called the “nones”) in most of the countries surveyed. And, even after a recent surge in immigration from the Middle East and North Africa, there are many more non-practicing Christians in Western Europe than people of all other religions combined (Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, etc.).

Overall 71% identified as Christians. The percentage who say they are Christian were as follows in each country: Austria (80%), Belgium (55%), Denmark (65%), Finland (77%), France (64%), Germany (71%), Ireland (80%), Italy (80%), Netherlands (41%), Norway (51%), Portugal (83%), Spain (66%), Sweden (52%), Switzerland (75%) and the United Kingdom (73%).

These figures raise some obvious questions: What is the meaning of Christian identity in Western Europe today? And how different are non practicing Christians from religiously unaffiliated Europeans – many of whom also come from Christian backgrounds? The Pew Research Center finds that Christian identity remains a meaningful marker in Western Europe, even among those who seldom go to church. It is not just a “nominal” identity devoid of practical importance. On the contrary, the religious, political and cultural views of non-practicing Christians often differ from those of church-attending Christians and religiously unaffiliated adults. For example:

- Although many non-practicing Christians say they do not believe in God “as described in the Bible,” they do tend to believe in some other higher power or spiritual force. By contrast, most church-attending Christians say they believe in the biblical depiction of God. And a clear majority of religiously unaffiliated adults do not believe in any type of higher power or spiritual force in the universe.
- Non-practicing Christians tend to express more positive than negative views toward churches and religious organizations, saying they serve society by helping the poor and bringing communities together. Their attitudes toward religious institutions are not quite as favourable as those of church-attending Christians, but they are more likely than religiously unaffiliated Europeans to say churches and other religious organizations contribute positively to society.
- Christian identity in Western Europe is associated with higher levels of negative sentiment toward immigrants and religious minorities. On balance, self-identified Christians – whether they attend church or not – are more likely than religiously unaffiliated people to express negative views of immigrants, as well as of Muslims and Jews.
- Non-practicing Christians are less likely than church-attending Christians to express nationalist views. Still, they are more likely than “nones” to say that their culture is superior to others and that it is necessary to have the country’s ancestry to share the national identity (e.g., one must have Spanish family background to be truly Spanish).

- The vast majority of non-practicing Christians, like the vast majority of the unaffiliated in Western Europe, favour legal abortion and same-sex marriage. Church-attending Christians are more conservative on these issues, though even among churchgoing Christians, there is substantial support – and in several countries, majority support – for legal abortion and same-sex marriage.
- Nearly all churchgoing Christians who are parents or guardians of minor children (those under 18) say they are raising those children in the Christian faith. Among non-practicing Christians, somewhat fewer – though still the overwhelming majority – say they are bringing up their children as Christians. By contrast, religiously unaffiliated parents generally are raising their children with no religion.

After asking respondents whether they believe in God or not, the survey asked further questions to better understand what belief in God (or lack thereof) means to people. Based on their responses to follow-up questions, researchers categorized respondents into one of three groups: 1) those who believe in God as described in the Bible; 2) those who do not believe in God as described in the Bible, but do believe there is some other higher power or spiritual force in the universe; and 3) those who do not believe in God or any higher power.

The prevailing belief in Western Europe is in a higher power or spiritual force that is not the God of the Bible; in 11 of the 15 countries surveyed, the largest percentage of respondents choose this option. For instance, in Germany, 28% of adults believe in God as described in the Bible, while 38% believe in some other higher power or spiritual force. An additional 26% of Germans do not believe in any higher power, and 8% say they do not know or decline to answer. People in predominantly Catholic countries – especially Italy (46%), Ireland (39%) and Portugal (36%) – tend to have higher levels of belief in a biblical God than people in predominantly Protestant countries. But, still, belief in the God of the Bible is lower in all of these countries than in the United States, where most adults (56%) say they believe in God as described in the Bible.

In every Western European country surveyed, at least half of churchgoing Christians believe in God as described in the Bible, while those who are non-practicing tend to believe in some other higher power or spiritual force.

Religiously unaffiliated people generally say they do **not** believe in God or any higher power in the universe. Still, in several countries, a considerable number among the unaffiliated say they believe in some kind of spiritual force. Amongst the religiously unaffiliated the median percentage believing in another higher power or spiritual force is 28%.

Adults ages 35 and over are more likely than younger adults to say they believe in either the biblical God or in another kind of higher power. And on balance, women are more likely than men to believe in God as described in the Bible. For instance, 42% of Portuguese women believe in a biblical God, compared with 29% of Portuguese men.

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The Table below shows for each country what percentage believe in the Biblical God, what percentage believe in another higher power or spiritual force and what percentage do not believe in any higher power.

TABLE 1. Beliefs about God

	Believe in Biblical God	Believe in Other Higher Power or Spiritual Force	Do Not Believe in Any Higher Power
Italy	46	27	15
Ireland	39	35	18
Portugal	36	46	9
Austria	32	40	19
Switzerland	30	36	25
UK	29	35	27
Germany	28	38	26
France	27	33	27
Finland	24	48	20
Spain	22	48	20
Netherlands	20	42	34
Norway	20	38	33
Denmark	17	48	29
Belgium	14	41	39
Sweden	14	37	41
MEDIAN	27	38	26

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The Table below shows for each country what percentage believe that God or a higher power is all-loving, what percentage believe that God or a higher power is all-knowing and what percentage believe that God or a higher power is all-powerful.

TABLE 2. Beliefs about the nature of God or a higher power

	All-loving	All-knowing	All-powerful
Portugal	78%	63%	52%
Finland	56	41	26
Italy	54	49	38
Denmark	53	23	13
Spain	52	40	25
Ireland	49	43	37
Netherlands	48	32	21
Norway	46	32	18
Austria	43	35	29
Belgium	41	25	15
Germany	37	30	25
Sweden	36	26	13
Switzerland	36	34	27
France	35	30	23
United Kingdom	34	31	24
MEDIAN	46	32	25

RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

Spirituality and religion can be defined in many different ways, and the distinction between the two concepts often is not clear. For the purposes of the Pew study, spirituality refers to beliefs or feelings about supernatural phenomena, such as life after death, the existence of a soul apart from the human body, and the presence of spiritual energy in physical things such as mountains, trees or crystals.

People may have these kinds of beliefs about supernatural phenomena or participate in spiritual practices even if they do not consider themselves to belong to a religion. Some people may reject religion – with its strong connotations of structure, tradition and organization – while still embracing spiritual beliefs. In the United States, for example, nearly half of adults (48%) describe themselves as *both* religious and spiritual, but a substantial – and rising – share of the public (27% in 2017, up from 19% in 2012) call themselves spiritual but not religious.

In Western Europe, by contrast, many people describe themselves as *neither* religious *nor* spiritual. Across the 15 countries surveyed, a median of 53% place

themselves in this category. Far fewer Europeans consider themselves both religious and spiritual, spiritual but not religious, or religious but not spiritual.

The Pew survey shows that these self-descriptions generally match the way Europeans answer other questions about their beliefs, practices and attitudes. For example, people who describe themselves as **both religious and spiritual** (median of 24%) generally affirm that they believe in God, they have a soul as well as a physical body, and religion helps them choose between right and wrong. They also are largely inclined to disagree with statements such as, “There are NO spiritual forces in the universe” and “Overall, religion does more harm than good.”

Europeans who describe themselves as **spiritual but not religious** (median of 11%) tend to say they believe there is some higher power or spiritual force in the universe, but not a God as described in the Bible. They are just as likely as self-described “religious” people to believe they have a soul, but much less likely to say that religion helps them choose right from wrong. And while they tend to reject the statement that “There are NO spiritual forces in the universe,” many of them (median of 43%) agree that “Overall, religion does more harm than good.”

Europeans who call themselves **religious but not spiritual** (median of 15%) generally are inclined to say they believe in the God of the Bible, they have a soul, and religion helps them choose right over wrong. Most disagree that “There are NO spiritual forces in the universe,” and they overwhelmingly reject the idea that “Overall, religion does more harm than good.”

Finally, Europeans who consider themselves **neither religious nor spiritual** (median of 53%) – the largest group across the region – are much more likely than people in the other three categories to say they do not believe in *any* God or other higher power. They are also the least likely to say they have a soul (though a substantial minority *do* believe in a soul). They generally reject the statement that religion helps them choose between right and wrong, and agree that “There are NO spiritual forces in the universe.” Their views differ from country to country on whether religion does more harm than good.

Europeans who identify as Christians tend to embrace spiritual beliefs and to view religion’s role in their lives and societies positively, while religiously unaffiliated Europeans tend to lean in the opposite direction.

The Pew survey also asked about a variety of beliefs and practices that are often associated with Eastern, New Age or folk religions. These include belief in yoga (as a spiritual practice, not just as exercise); belief in spiritual energy located in physical things such as mountains, trees or crystals; belief in the “evil eye” (that certain people can cast spells that cause harm); belief in fate, reincarnation and astrology; the practice of meditation; and the use of horoscopes, tarot cards or fortune tellers.

In many Western European countries, a substantial minority of adults say they hold these beliefs or engage in these practices. For example, a median of 34% say they believe in fate (that is, the course of their lives is largely or wholly preordained). A median of 23% believe in astrology (that is, the position of the stars and planets can affect people’s lives). And a median of 20% believe in reincarnation (that is, that people will be reborn in this world again and again), while a median of 19% say they meditate. Such beliefs and practices are particularly common among Europeans who describe themselves as spiritual but not religious.

The Pew survey asked respondents two separate but related questions: Do you think of yourself as a religious person? And do you think of yourself as a spiritual person? In most countries, fewer than half of respondents say they are religious, and fewer than half say they are spiritual.

Only in Portugal do solid majorities describe themselves as religious (72%) and spiritual (64%). Roughly half of adults in Italy (53%), Ireland (47%) and Spain (47%) say they think of themselves as religious. And, in Spain, a similar share of adults (52%) also say they are spiritual.

Based on their responses to these two questions, Europeans can be sorted into four categories: 1) those who consider themselves *both* religious and spiritual; 2) those who consider themselves religious but not spiritual; 3) those who say they are spiritual but not religious; and 4) those who say they are neither religious nor spiritual.

Western Europeans tend to see themselves as neither religious nor spiritual

% who say they think of themselves as ...

	Both religious and spiritual	Religious but not spiritual	Spiritual but not religious	Neither religious nor spiritual
Austria	26%	19%	4%	51%
Belgium	12	9	17	62
Denmark	10	14	12	64
Finland	25	8	14	54
France	24	13	12	52
Germany	24	17	6	53
Ireland	33	14	10	42
Italy	33	20	9	38
Netherlands	11	15	13	60
Norway	10	17	11	62
Portugal	55	17	9	18
Spain	35	12	17	36
Sweden	12	7	15	66
Switzerland	28	17	8	47
United Kingdom	20	18	6	55
MEDIAN	24	15	11	53

Note: Totals for each country may not sum to 100% due to rounding. Respondents were asked two separate questions: "Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a religious person?" and "Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a spiritual person?" Responses are combined for analysis.

Source: Survey conducted April-August 2017 in 15 countries. See Methodology for details. "Being Christian in Western Europe"

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Of these four categories, "neither religious nor spiritual" is the largest in most Western European countries. A median of 53% across the 15 countries surveyed consider themselves neither religious nor spiritual, including clear majorities in Sweden (66%), Denmark (64%), Belgium (62%), Norway (62%) and the Netherlands (60%). On balance, "neither religious nor spiritual" is a smaller category in predominantly Catholic countries, such as Ireland (42%) and Italy (38%).

Overall, fewer Western Europeans say they are both religious *and* spiritual (median of 24%), or pick one of these categories but not the other – either religious but not spiritual (15%) or spiritual but not religious (11%). By comparison, many more U.S. adults describe themselves as both religious and spiritual (48%) or as spiritual but not religious (27%).

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People who say they are religious or spiritual (or both) generally believe in God or a higher power, while those who are neither religious nor spiritual tend to reject belief in God or a higher power altogether.

People who say they are ‘spiritual but not religious’ largely reject biblical God, but believe in higher power of some kind

Across 15 Western European countries, median % who say they believe in ...

	God as described in the Bible	Some other higher power or spiritual force in the universe	NO higher power or spiritual force in the universe
Both religious and spiritual	51%	44%	2%
Religious but not spiritual	56	39	1
Spiritual but not religious	12	64	18
Neither religious nor spiritual	10	33	44

Note: Respondents were asked two separate questions: “Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a religious person?” and “Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a spiritual person?” Responses are combined for analysis. Respondents were asked if they believe in God, or not. Those who said they believe in God were asked if they believe in God as described in the Bible or in some other higher power or spiritual force in the universe. Those who said they do not believe in God were asked if they believe in some kind of higher power or spiritual force in the universe or in nothing at all. Responses are combined for analysis. Don’t know/refused response options not shown. A median of 13% among those who are neither religious nor spiritual say they are unsure whether they believe in God or a higher power.

Source: Survey conducted April-August 2017 in 15 countries. See Methodology for details.

“Being Christian in Western Europe”

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The prevailing view among those who describe themselves as religious – either religious and spiritual, or religious but not spiritual – is that God exists “as described in the Bible” (medians of 51% and 56%, respectively). By contrast, a median of 64% of those who are spiritual but not religious say they believe in some other higher power or spiritual force, though *not* in the God of the Bible. Europeans who are neither religious nor spiritual tend to reject belief in any higher power or spiritual force (median of 44%).

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In a region where the labels “spiritual” and “religious” are rejected by much of the population, the Pew survey sought to dig deeper into feelings on these topics, asking respondents the extent to which they agree or disagree with a series of statements – four about spiritual concepts and four about the value of religion to individuals and society.

Two statements about spirituality were framed affirmatively – “I have a soul as well as a physical body,” and “I feel a connection to something that cannot be seen or measured scientifically.” And two were framed negatively, giving respondents the opportunity to agree with statements *rejecting* spiritual concepts: “There are NO spiritual forces in the universe, only the laws of nature,” and, “When people die, that is the end; there is NO life after death.” A similar approach was used to probe feelings about religion

Majorities in most Western European countries believe they have a soul

% who completely/mostly agree with the following statements

	Positively worded statements		Negatively worded statements	
	I have a soul as well as a physical body	I feel a connection to something that cannot be seen or measured scientifically	There are NO spiritual forces in the universe, only the laws of nature	When people die, that is the end; there is NO life after death
Austria	64%	49%	29%	31%
Belgium	66	42	61	51
Denmark	68	45	52	52
Finland	73	46	49	42
France	54	45	36	32
Germany	57	42	35	37
Ireland	62	52	35	31
Italy	66	55	35	30
Netherlands	69	49	49	41
Norway	70	46	48	46
Portugal	80	59	52	41
Spain	65	47	52	40
Sweden	39	39	54	50
Switzerland	56	46	32	29
United Kingdom	49	35	34	36
MEDIAN	65	46	48	40

Source: Survey conducted April-August 2017 in 15 countries. See Methodology for details.
“Being Christian in Western Europe”

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Surveys on Religion and Spirituality

Majorities in most countries agree with the idea that they have a soul, including seven-in-ten or more in Portugal (80%), Finland (73%) and Norway (70%). Sweden and the UK are exceptions; roughly four-in-ten Swedes (39%) and about half of British respondents (49%) say they believe they have a soul. Smaller, but still substantial shares across the region (median of 46%) feel a connection to something that cannot be seen or measured scientifically.

At the same time, negative statements about spirituality also find some resonance in the region. A median of 48% – including most Belgians (61%) – say there are *no* spiritual forces in the universe, only the laws of nature. And a median of 40% say there is no afterlife.

Religious and/or spiritual people say they have a soul

Median % in Western Europe who completely/mainly agree with the following statements, among those who are ...

	Positive statements		Negative statements	
	I have a soul	I feel a connection to something	There are NO spiritual forces	There is NO life after death
Both religious and spiritual	85%	79%	19%	18%
Religious but not spiritual	76%	53%	34%	26%
Spiritual but not religious	75%	64%	37%	35%
Neither religious nor spiritual	43%	26%	61%	53%

Note: Respondents were asked two separate questions: "Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a religious person?" "And generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a spiritual person?" Responses are combined for analysis.

Source: Survey conducted April-August 2017 in 15 countries. See Methodology for details.

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Respondents who describe themselves as either religious or spiritual (or as both) are more likely than those who identify as neither religious nor spiritual to embrace the spiritual ideas tested in the survey.

In almost every country, majorities of those who say they are religious, spiritual or both say they have a soul. In Austria, for example, 89% of those who say they are both religious and spiritual believe in the soul. Among Austrians who say they are

spiritual but *not* religious, 68% believe in the soul. And among those who say they are religious but not spiritual, 76% say they have a soul.

Europeans who identify as *neither* religious nor spiritual tend to express sceptical or negative attitudes toward spirituality. For example, majorities in this group agree with the proposition that there are “no spiritual forces in the universe, only the laws of nature,” and many also say there is no life after death. Nevertheless, substantial shares of people who describe themselves as neither religious nor spiritual – including majorities of respondents in this category in Finland (60%), Portugal (60%), Denmark (58%), Norway (58%), Belgium (57%) and the Netherlands (57%) – say they believe they have a soul.

Eastern, New Age beliefs and practices more common among ‘spiritual but not religious’

The Pew survey also explored the extent to which Western Europeans hold beliefs and engage in practices often associated with Eastern, New Age or folk religions. These include whether they believe in fate, astrology, spiritual energy, yoga as a spiritual practice, reincarnation, and the evil eye, as well as whether they meditate or consult horoscopes, tarot cards or fortune tellers.

Most people surveyed say they do *not* hold these beliefs or follow these practices. But there is considerable variation across the region: People on the Iberian Peninsula have relatively high levels of engagement with some of these beliefs, while the beliefs are much less common in Scandinavia. For example, roughly half of adults in Portugal (48%) and a third in Spain (33%) believe in the “evil eye” (the idea that certain people can cast curses or spells that cause bad things to happen to someone), compared with 9% each in Denmark and Sweden.

Of the eight items tested, belief in fate – the idea that the course of your life is largely or wholly preordained – is most common across the region. Majorities of adults in Portugal (60%) and Spain (59%) say they believe in fate, as well as roughly half in Belgium (49%) and a median of about one-third (34%) across the 15 countries surveyed.

Surveys on Religion and Spirituality

A smaller, but still substantial, share of Western Europeans believe in yoga as a spiritual practice (regional median of 26%). This belief is especially prevalent in Sweden (40%), Portugal (39%) and Finland (38%).

A median of 20% across the region say they believe in reincarnation – that people will be reborn in this world again and again. But relatively few adults across the countries surveyed say they consult the horoscope, tarot cards or see a fortune teller (median of 13%).

Previous Pew Research Center surveys have asked about some of these same beliefs and practices in other parts of the world. Generally speaking, they are less common in Western Europe than elsewhere. For example, a median of 16% of respondents in Western European countries say they believe in the evil eye, compared with a median of 48% in Central and Eastern Europe as well as medians of 46% in Latin America and 39% in sub-Saharan Africa.

Substantial minorities across Western Europe hold Eastern, New Age or folk beliefs

% who ...

	Beliefs						Practices	
	Believe in fate	Believe in yoga as spiritual practice, not just exercise	Believe in astrology	Believe in spiritual energy in physical things	Believe in reincarnation	Believe in the "evil eye"	Practice meditation	Consult horoscope/tarot cards
Austria	34%	20%	23%	22%	18%	13%	13%	16%
Belgium	49	36	30	35	24	23	28	20
Denmark	36	26	29	23	22	9	18	20
Finland	39	38	26	23	24	10	11	22
France	31	24	21	26	18	20	19	16
Germany	31	19	24	17	15	13	13	16
Ireland	34	24	20	24	20	19	20	12
Italy	24	19	19	23	23	18	17	12
Netherlands	38	30	26	29	22	12	21	9
Norway	34	28	19	21	18	16	23	18
Portugal	60	39	35	37	31	48	47	13
Spain	59	35	37	49	24	33	47	12
Sweden	37	40	23	20	19	9	20	8
Switzerland	28	19	22	22	19	17	13	13
United Kingdom	25	18	19	22	17	13	15	13
MEDIAN	34	26	23	23	20	16	19	13

Source: Survey conducted April-August 2017 in 15 countries. See Methodology for details.
 "Being Christian in Western Europe"

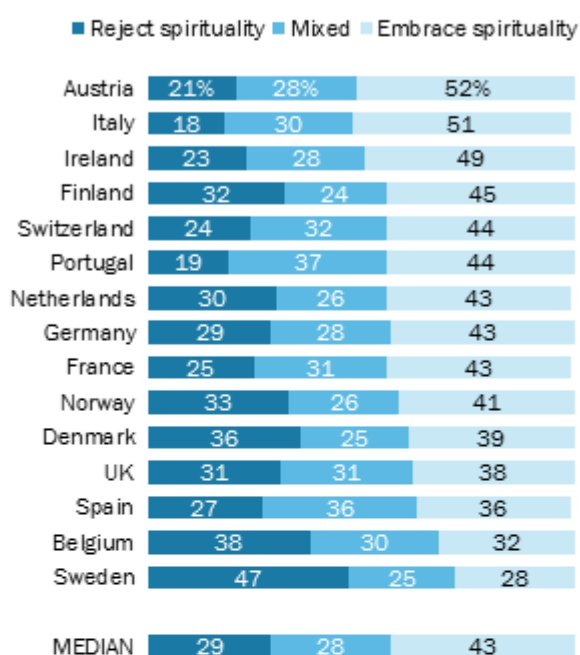
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Surveys on Religion and Spirituality

Adults who say that they are spiritual but not religious are more likely than others in Western Europe to say they engage in these beliefs and practices. By contrast, respondents who describe themselves as neither religious nor spiritual are least likely to engage in most of these beliefs and practices.

In Western Europe, no consensus about spiritual concepts

% who ...



Note: Respondents were asked four questions about spiritual concepts. For each of the four questions, respondents who expressed a spiritual belief (e.g., agree they have a soul, or disagree with the idea that there is no afterlife) received a score of 1, while those who rejected a spiritual belief (e.g., disagree that they feel a connection to something that cannot be seen or measured scientifically, or agree there are no spiritual forces in the universe, only the laws of nature) were given a score of minus 1. Those who said "don't know" or declined to answer were given a score of 0. Cumulative scores of 2 to 4 are coded as embracing spirituality; scores of minus 2 to minus 4 are coded as rejecting spirituality, and scores of minus 1 to 1 are coded as mixed. See Appendix A: Scaling and regression analysis for further details on the index. Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Source: Survey conducted April-August 2017 in 15 countries. See Methodology for details.

"Being Christian in Western Europe"

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These four questions can be combined into a scale to more comprehensively measure overall levels of spiritual beliefs in Western Europe.

Many people across the region embrace spiritual concepts such as the soul, an afterlife and connections that cannot be seen or measured scientifically; pluralities in 10 of the 15 countries surveyed lean in this direction, including roughly half of adults in Austria (52%), Italy (51%) and Ireland (49%).

But substantial shares of adults across the region largely reject such beliefs or feelings about supernatural phenomena, including nearly half of Swedes (47%). And many others express mixed views – either embracing some spiritual concepts while rejecting others, or repeatedly saying they are unsure.

AUSTRALIAN BELIEFS ABOUT GOD AND SPIRITUALITY

NCLS SURVEY

The third survey was conducted by NCLS, an Australian organisation which conducts surveys on community spirituality and well-being.

Australians were asked: “To what extent do you see yourself as a religious person?” and “To what extent do you see yourself as a spiritual person?”.

Results reveal that Australians fall into four groups:

- Religious and spiritual (practising religious and spiritual);
- Moderately religious and spiritual (non-practising religious and spiritual);
- Spiritual but not religious; and
- Neither religious nor spiritual.

“Religiousness” and “spirituality” are terms which have different but overlapping meanings in popular language. Both concepts are concerned in some way with the sacred or the transcendent. While the distinctions are not hard and fast, there may be dichotomies between religiousness and spirituality on the basis of institutional versus personal scales of reference, and belief versus emotion and experience.

“Religious” tends to refer to adherence to a particular religion, including its practices, beliefs and communities of expression, whereas “spiritual” refers more to an appreciation of the sacred as well as personalised beliefs and practices.

Surveys on Religion and Spirituality

On scales from 0 (not at all) to 10 (very), a sample of Australians were asked to indicate: “To what extent do you see yourself as a religious person?” and “To what extent do you see yourself as a spiritual person?”. There were widespread results in the survey, on both religious and spiritual self-perceptions. Overall, respondents considered themselves to be a little more spiritual than religious.

The median response for religiousness was 4 on the 11-point scale, whereas it was 5 for spiritualness. The most common (modal) responses were “not at all religious” (36%) and “not at all spiritual” (24%). Just 4% considered themselves to be “very religious” and 7% “very spiritual”.

Australians fall into four clusters

Given the overlaps and distinctions between religiousness and spirituality, it is helpful to examine whether there are groups of people who answer the questions about religious and spiritual self-perceptions in similar ways. Other survey research has found that there is a group of people who consider themselves to be “spiritual but not religious”. For example, 14% of people in the 2017 Faith and Belief study indicated that they had spiritual beliefs but didn’t identify with any main religion (“Faith and Belief In Australia (McCrinkle, Renton, Phillips and Miles, 2017)”).

In the 2018 survey NCLS used an empirical technique called cluster analysis on the responses to both the religious and spiritual self-perception questions. It found four groups of people, which are indicative of four general approaches to religion and spirituality in contemporary Australia.

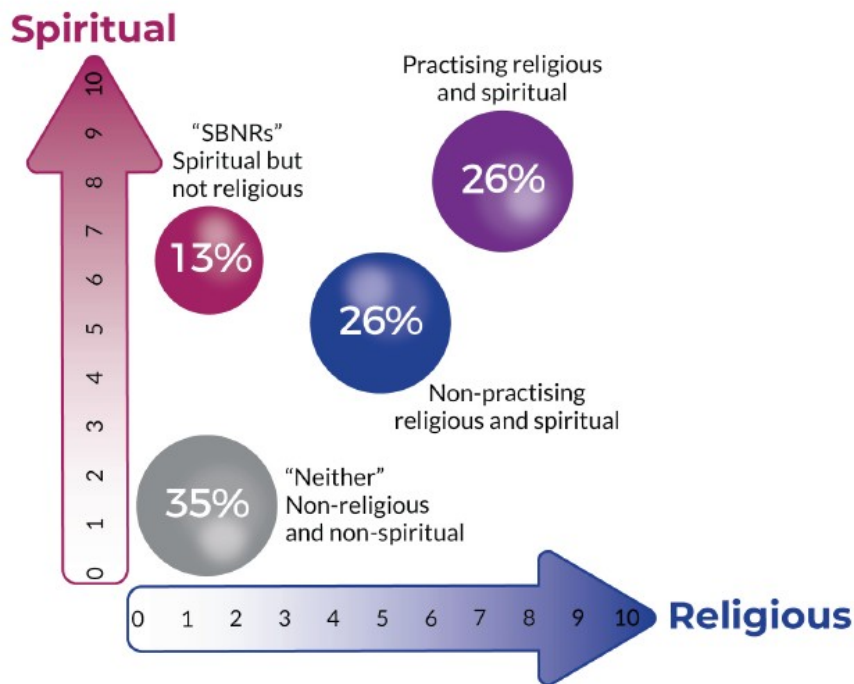
The first two groups are religiously affiliated and see themselves as religious and spiritual. Yet they differ in terms of the degree of religiousness and spiritualness and whether or not they formally practise their religion, and so they have been labelled “practising” and “non-practising religious and spiritual”. These two groups are of equal size and, together, make up half of adult Australians.

The third (smallest) group emphasises spirituality (especially spiritual experience) but not adherence to, nor practice of a religion. The survey used the short label, “SBNR”, which is used widely by other researchers to indicate those who are spiritual but not religious. The fourth (and largest) group is unaffiliated, atheist/agnostic and neither religious nor spiritual.

So, in summary, the four clusters are:

- Religious and spiritual: “Practising religious and spiritual”
- Moderately religious and spiritual: “Non-practising religious and spiritual”
- Spiritual but not religious: “SBNR”
- Neither religious nor spiritual: “Neither”.

4 groups of Australians: Religious and spiritual self-perceptions



Australians' religious and spiritual self-perceptions in four clusters.
Source: 2018 Australian Community Survey, by NCLS Research (n=1,200).

 NCLS Research www.ncls.org.au

Four clusters explained

As now detailed, each of these four clusters has its own distinct features in terms of religious affiliation as well as other dimensions of religiousness and spiritualness.

Practising religious and spiritual

This group (26% of respondents) saw themselves as both religious and spiritual, with mean scores of 8.0 and 8.3 respectively on the religiousness and spiritualness 11-point scales. Religious faith or spirituality tended to be "very important" to their life decisions. Almost all identified with a religion (79% Christian, 15% other religion). They believed in either a personal God (66%) or a higher power (30%). Religious service attendance varied widely in this group but on average it was monthly. Prayer or meditation was much more regular - a few times a week on average. Four in ten had had a mystical or supernatural experience.

Non-practising religious and spiritual

This group (26% of respondents) saw themselves as moderately religious (mean score of 5.2 on religiousness) and moderately spiritual (mean score of 5.0 on spiritualness). Religious faith or spirituality tended to be "important" to their decisions. A large majority identified with a religion (71% Christian, 11% other religion) and they mostly either believed in a higher power (42%) or a personal God (28%), with a quarter being agnostic. Religious service attendance on average was once a year, and prayer or meditation was occasional. Less than a quarter (22%) had had a mystical experience, but a third believed it could happen.

Spiritual but not religious: "SBNR"

This was the smallest group (13% of respondents). They saw themselves as spiritual (mean score of 6.5 on spiritualness) but not religious (mean score of 0.7), yet faith/spirituality tended to be "of little importance" to their decisions.

This group was largely unaffiliated and non-practising, the emphasis was rather on experiencing the sacred. The majority did not identify with a religion (64%) and half (54%) believed in a higher power while two in 10 were agnostic. They didn't attend religious services and they rarely prayed or meditated. However, half (47%) had had a mystical or supernatural experience.

Non-religious and non-spiritual: "Neither"

This group (35% of respondents) saw themselves as neither religious nor spiritual (mean scores of 0.4 and 0.6 on religiousness and spiritualness respectively), and faith/spirituality tended to be "not important" to their life's decisions. The majority did not identify with a religion (70%). They were either atheist (55%) or agnostic (29%). They didn't attend services, pray or meditate, and the majority (56%) thought that mystical experiences don't occur.

The most distinguishing feature to note

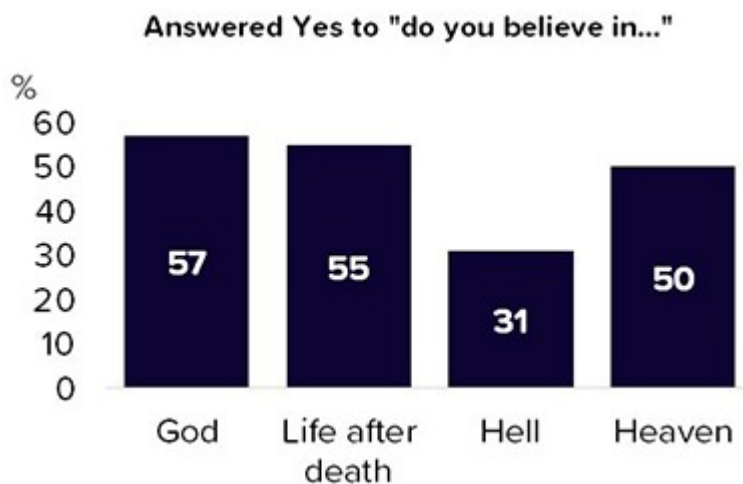
When people chose to identify how "religious" or "spiritual" they were, the terms were used in quite similar ways. While being spiritual as opposed to religious has gained attention in religious studies and in general

Surveys on Religion and Spirituality

commentary, a cluster analysis found that only 13% of Australians fitted a type which could be called “spiritual but not religious”. A more significant distinguishing feature is whether or not a person is practising or non-practising (26% each). Around a third of Australians were neither religious nor spiritual.

AUSTRALIAN VALUES STUDY

The fourth survey showed that more than half – 57 per cent – of the Australians surveyed report that they believe in God. Similar numbers believe in an afterlife generally and heaven specifically, but only 31 per cent believe in hell.



SUMMARY

This talk was about a few surveys of people in seventeen countries on their views on religion and spirituality. All the survey reports were written in 2018.

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