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Being Christian in Western Europe

The majority of Europe's Christians are non-practicing, but they differ from religiously unaffiliated people in their views on God, attitudes toward Muslims and immigrants, and opinions about religion's role in society

FOR MEDIA OR OTHER INQUIRIES:

Neha Sahgal, Associate Director of Research
Alan Cooperman, Director of Religion Research
Anna Schiller, Communications Manager
202.419.4372
www.pewresearch.org

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This report is a collaborative effort based on the input and analysis of the following individuals:

Research Team

Neha Sahgal, *Associate Director of Research*

Scott Gardner, *Senior Researcher*

Jonathan Evans, *Research Analyst*

Alan Cooperman, *Director of Religion Research*

Ariana Monique Salazar, *Research Analyst*

Kelsey Jo Starr, *Research Assistant*

Methodology Team

Patrick Moynihan, *Associate Director, International Research Methods*

Danielle Cuddington, *Research Analyst*

Courtney Nelson, *Research Assistant*

Martha McRoy, *Research Methodologist*

Editorial and Graphic Design

Michael Lipka, *Senior Editor*

Aleksandra Sandstrom, *Copy Editor*

Jeff Diamant, *Senior Writer/Editor*

Bill Webster, *Information Graphics Designer*

Communications and Web Publishing

Stacy Rosenberg, *Associate Director, Digital*

Anna Schiller, *Communications Manager*

Travis Mitchell, *Digital Producer*

Jessica Pumphrey, *Communications Associate*

Others at Pew Research Center who provided research guidance include Michael Dimock, James Bell, Claudia Deane, Gregory A. Smith, Conrad Hackett, Phillip Connor, Anna Dean, Besheer Mohamed, Katayoun Kishi and Stephanie Kramer. Former Pew Research Center staff who contributed to this report include Steve Schwarzer, Gijs van Houten and Angelina E. Theodorou.

Pew Research Center received valuable advice on the questions reported in this survey from: David Voas, professor of social science at University College London; Matthias Koenig, professor in the Institute of Sociology at Georg-August-Universität Göttingen; Patrick Simon, senior researcher at the Institut National d'Études Démographiques; Linda Woodhead, professor in the Politics, Philosophy and Religion department at Lancaster University; Naika Foroutan, professor of social sciences at the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin; Tuomas Martikainen, director of the Migration

Institute of Finland; and Nasar Meer, professor of race, identity and citizenship at the University of Edinburgh.

While the analysis for this report was guided by our consultations with the advisers, Pew Research Center is solely responsible for the interpretation and reporting of the data.

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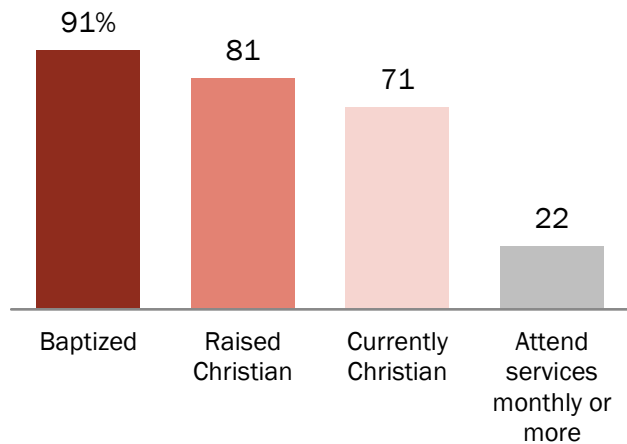
Being Christian in Western Europe

The majority of Europe's Christians are non-practicing, but they differ from religiously unaffiliated people in their views on God, attitudes toward Muslims and immigrants, and opinions about religion's role in society

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 baptized, 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.

Most Western Europeans continue to identify as Christians, though few regularly attend church

Across 15 countries, median % ...



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

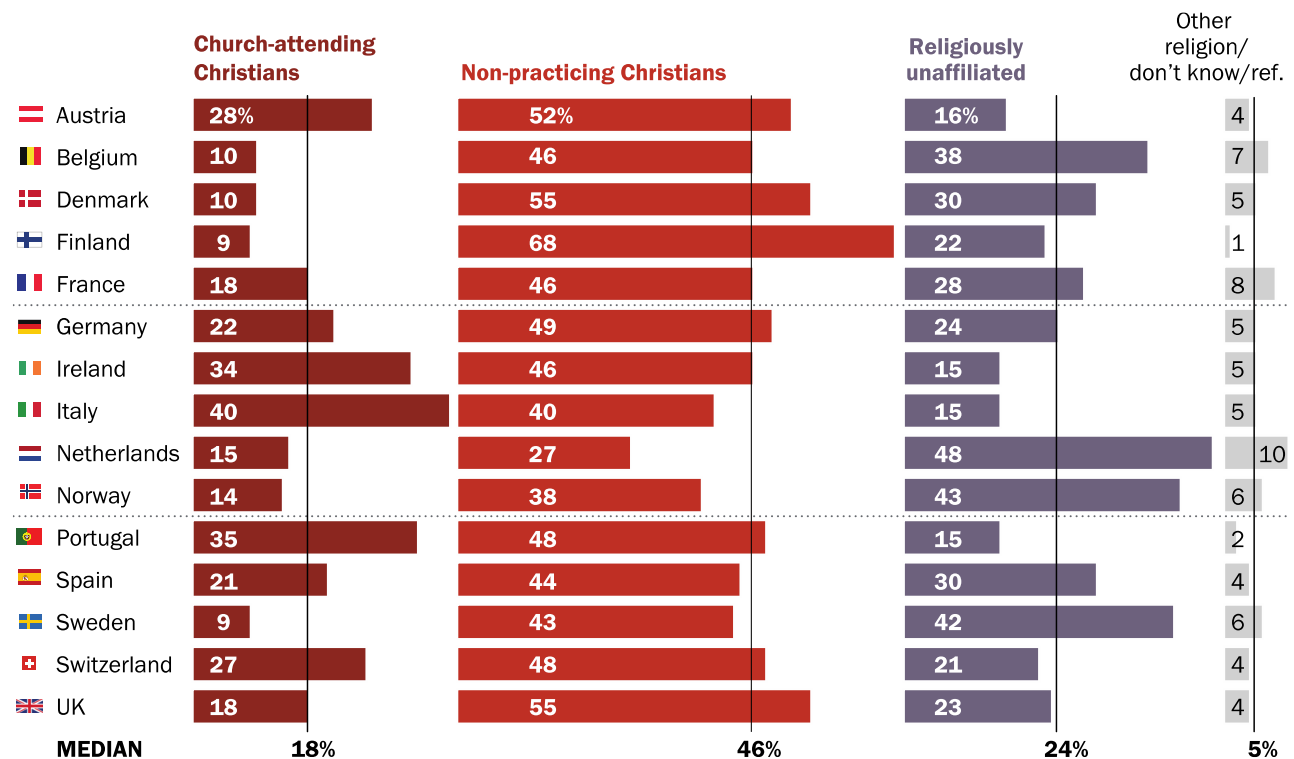
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Yet most adults surveyed still *do* consider themselves Christians, even if they seldom go to church. Indeed, the survey shows that non-practicing Christians (defined, for the purposes of this report, as people who identify as Christians, but attend 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.

In most Western European countries, non-practicing Christians are largest group

% who are ...



Note: Church-attending Christians are defined as those who say they attend church at least monthly. Non-practicing Christians are defined as those who attend less often. Other religion/don't know/ref. are mostly Muslim respondents. General population surveys in Western Europe may not fully capture the size of minority populations, such as Muslims. Therefore, these figures may differ from previously published demographic estimates. Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.

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

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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.¹ 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.).

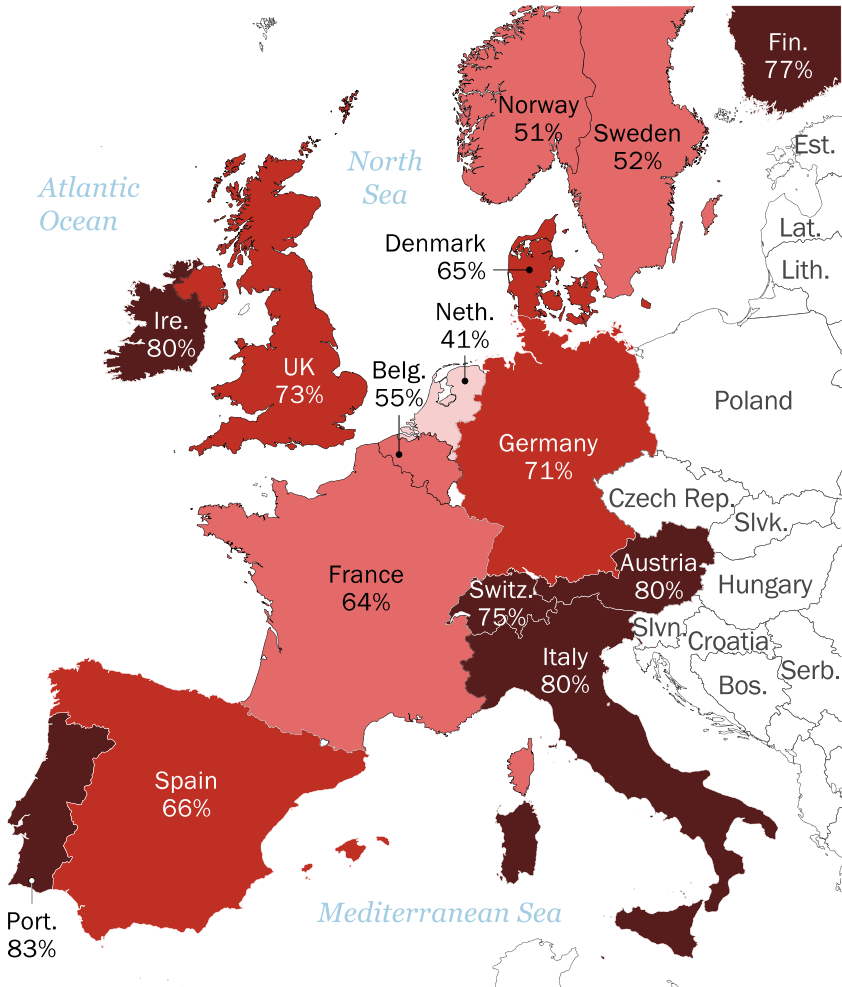
These figures raise some obvious questions: What is the meaning of Christian identity in Western Europe today? And how different are non-practicing Christians from religiously unaffiliated Europeans – many of whom also come from Christian backgrounds?

The Pew Research Center study – which involved more than 24,000 telephone

Majorities across Western Europe identify as Christian

% who say they are Christian

0-49% 50-64% 65-74% 75%+ Non-surveyed country



Note: Respondents were asked “What is your present religion, if any? Are you Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu, atheist, agnostic, something else or nothing in particular?”

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

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¹ To measure religious identity, the Pew Research Center survey asks: “What is your present religion, if any? Are you Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu, atheist, agnostic, something else or nothing in particular?” The wording of this question may result in more respondents giving a religious affiliation (saying they are Christian or Muslim, for example) than previous surveys in some countries, particularly if those surveys used what researchers call a “two-step” approach to religious identification. For example, the [European Social Survey \(ESS\)](#) asks: “Do you consider yourself as belonging to any particular religion or denomination?” Only respondents who say “yes” to this first question are presented with a list of religions to choose from. The two-step approach tends to find smaller shares of people who say they are Christians (or belong to some other religious group) – and larger shares of people with no religion – than are found by surveys that use a one-step approach to religious identification, as Pew Research Center does. Both approaches are valid, though the results may differ. See page 36 for more discussion of question wording and an analysis of ESS data on religious identity.

interviews with randomly selected adults, including nearly 12,000 non-practicing Christians – 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 favorable 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, favor 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.

Christian identity in Europe remains a religious, social and cultural marker

Across 15 countries, median % who ...

	General population	Church-attending Christians	Non-practicing Christians	Religiously unaffiliated
Religious beliefs				
Believe in God as described in the Bible	27%	64%	24%	1%
Believe in other higher power or spiritual force	38	32	51	28
Religion in society/politics				
Say government should support religious values and beliefs	36%	58%	35%	14%
Agree churches and other religious organizations play an important role in helping poor and needy	62	78	62	48
Immigration/religious minorities				
Say immigrants from the Middle East are not honest	26%	26%	29%	18%
Say immigration should be reduced	38	40	37	28
Say Islam is fundamentally incompatible with their national culture and values	42	49	45	32
Are not willing to accept Jews in their family	17	14	19	7
Are not willing to accept Muslims in their family	24	29	30	11
Nationalism/national identity				
Completely/mostly agree "our people are not perfect, but our culture is superior to others"	45%	54%	48%	25%
Say it is very/somewhat important to have ___ family background to be truly ___ (e.g., German family background to be truly German)	53	72	52	42
Social issues				
Favor legal abortion in all/some cases	81%	52%	85%	87%
Favor legal gay marriage	75	58	80	87
Are raising children as Christian	70%	97%	87%	9%

Note: Church-attending Christians are defined as those who say they attend church at least monthly. Non-practicing Christians are defined as those who attend less often.

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

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Religious identity and practice are not the only factors behind Europeans' beliefs and opinions on these issues. For instance, highly educated Europeans are generally more accepting of immigrants and religious minorities, and religiously unaffiliated adults tend to have more years of schooling than non-practicing Christians. But even after statistical techniques are used to control for differences in education, age, gender and political ideology, the survey shows that churchgoing Christians, non-practicing Christians and unaffiliated Europeans express different religious, cultural and social attitudes. (See page 27 of this Overview and Chapter 1.)

These are among the key 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 behaviors, 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 the second half of this Overview more closely examines the beliefs and other characteristics of the religiously unaffiliated population in the region.

While the vast majority of Western Europeans identify as either Christian or religiously unaffiliated, the survey also includes interviews with people of other (non-Christian) religions as well as with some who decline to answer questions about their religious identity. But, in most countries, the survey's sample sizes do not allow for a detailed analysis of the attitudes of people in this group. Furthermore, this category is composed largely of Muslim respondents, and general population surveys may underrepresent Muslims and other small religious groups in Europe because these minority populations often are distributed differently throughout the country than is the general population; additionally, some members of these groups (especially recent immigrants) do not speak the national language well enough to participate in a survey. As a result, this report does not attempt to characterize the views of religious minorities such as Muslims, Jews, Buddhists or Hindus in Western Europe.

What is a median?

On many questions throughout this report, median percentages are reported to help readers see overall patterns. The median is the *middle* number in a list of figures sorted in ascending or descending order. In a survey of 15 countries, the median result is the eighth on a list of country-level findings ranked in order.

Non-practicing Christians widely believe in God or another higher power

Most non-practicing Christians in Europe believe in God. But their concept of God differs considerably from the way that churchgoing Christians tend to conceive of God. While most church-attending Christians say they believe in God “as described in the Bible,” non-practicing Christians are more apt to say that they do *not* believe in the biblical depiction of God, but that they believe in some other higher power or spiritual force in the universe.

For instance, in Catholic-majority Spain, only about one-in-five non-practicing Christians (21%) believe in God “as described in the Bible,” while six-in-ten say they believe in some other higher power or spiritual force.

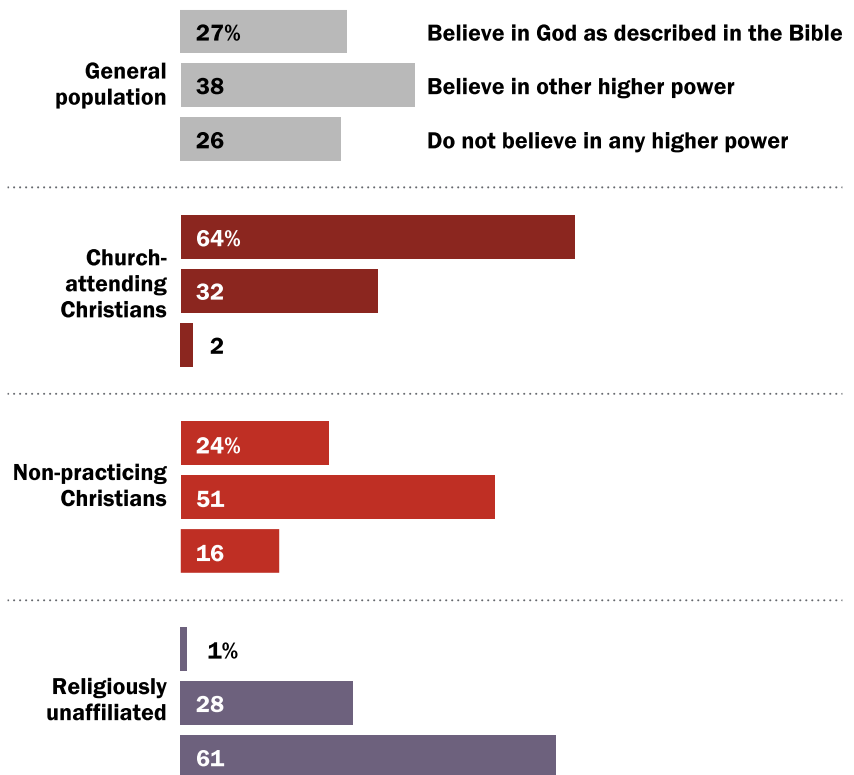
Non-practicing Christians and “nones” also diverge sharply on this question; most unaffiliated people in Western Europe do not believe in God or a higher power or spiritual force of any kind. (See page 43 for more details on belief in God among religiously unaffiliated adults.)

Similar patterns – in which

Christians tend to hold spiritual beliefs while “nones” do not – prevail on a variety of other beliefs, such as the possibility of life after death and the notion that humans have souls apart from their physical bodies. Majorities of non-practicing Christians and church-attending Christians believe in

Most non-practicing Christians in Europe believe in God, but not necessarily as described in the Bible

Across 15 countries, median % who ...



Note: Muslim respondents were not asked these questions. Church-attending Christians are defined as those who say they attend church at least monthly. Non-practicing Christians are defined as those who attend less often. Don't know/refused responses not shown. Source: Survey conducted April-August 2017 in 15 countries. See Methodology for details. "Being Christian in Western Europe".

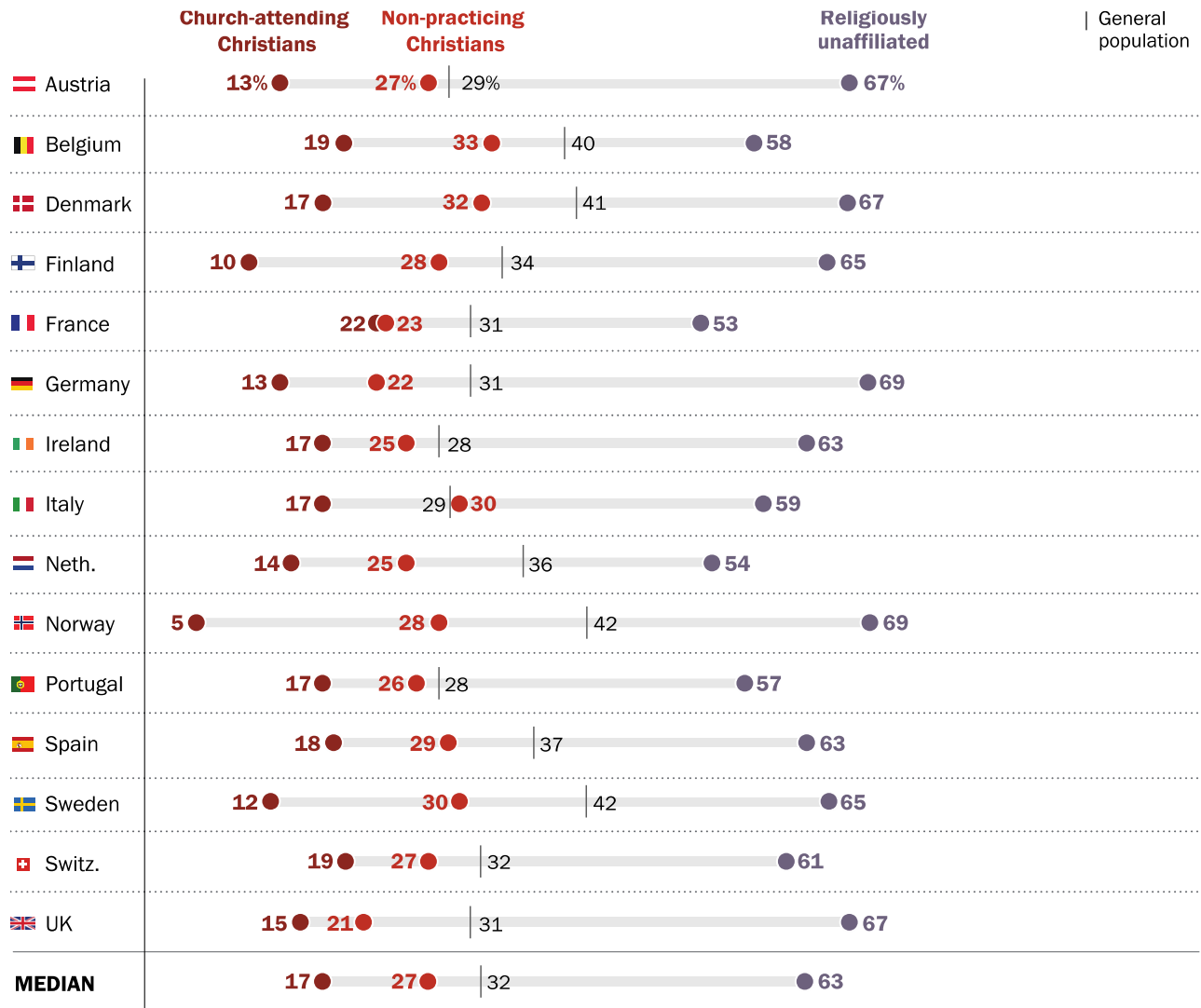
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these ideas. Most religiously unaffiliated adults, on the other hand, reject belief in an afterlife, and many do not believe they have a soul.

Indeed, many religiously unaffiliated adults eschew spirituality and religion entirely. Majorities agree with the statements, “There are no spiritual forces in the universe, only the laws of nature” and “Science makes religion unnecessary in my life.” These positions are held by smaller shares of church-attending Christians and non-practicing Christians, though in most countries roughly a quarter or more of non-practicing Christians say science makes religion unnecessary to them. (For a detailed statistical analysis combining multiple questions into scales of religious commitment and spirituality, see Chapters 3 and 5.)

Most religiously unaffiliated Europeans say science makes religion unnecessary

% who completely/mostly agree with the statement, "Science makes religion unnecessary in my life"



Note: Church-attending Christians are defined as those who say they attend church at least monthly. Non-practicing Christians are defined as those who attend less often.

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

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Views on relationship between government and religion

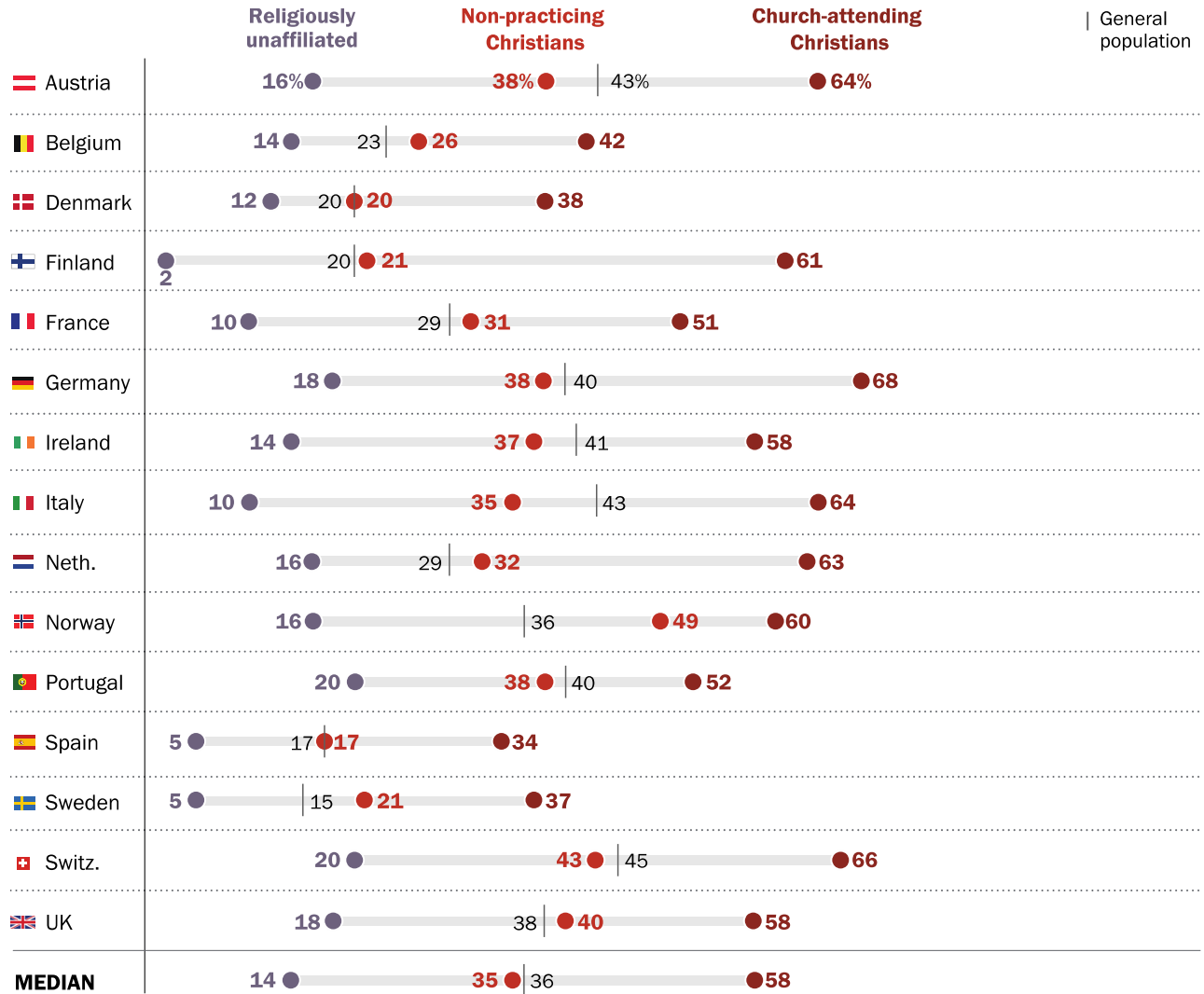
Generally speaking, Western Europeans do not look favorably on entanglements between their governments and religion. Indeed, the predominant view in all 15 countries surveyed is that religion should be kept separate from government policies (median of 60%), as opposed to the position that government policies should support religious values and beliefs in their country (36%).

Non-practicing Christians tend to say religion should be kept out of government policy. Still, substantial minorities (median of 35%) of non-practicing Christians think the government should support religious values and beliefs in their country – and they are much more likely than religiously unaffiliated adults to take this position. For example, in the United Kingdom, 40% of non-practicing Christians say the government should support religious values and beliefs, compared with 18% of “nones.”

In every country surveyed, church-attending Christians are much *more* likely than non-practicing Christians to favor government support for religious values. In Austria, for example, a majority (64%) of churchgoing Christians take this position, compared with 38% of non-practicing Christians.

Christians more likely than religiously unaffiliated to say government should support religious values and beliefs

% who say government policies should support religious values and beliefs in their country



Note: Church-attending Christians are defined as those who say they attend church at least monthly. Non-practicing Christians are defined as those who attend less often.

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

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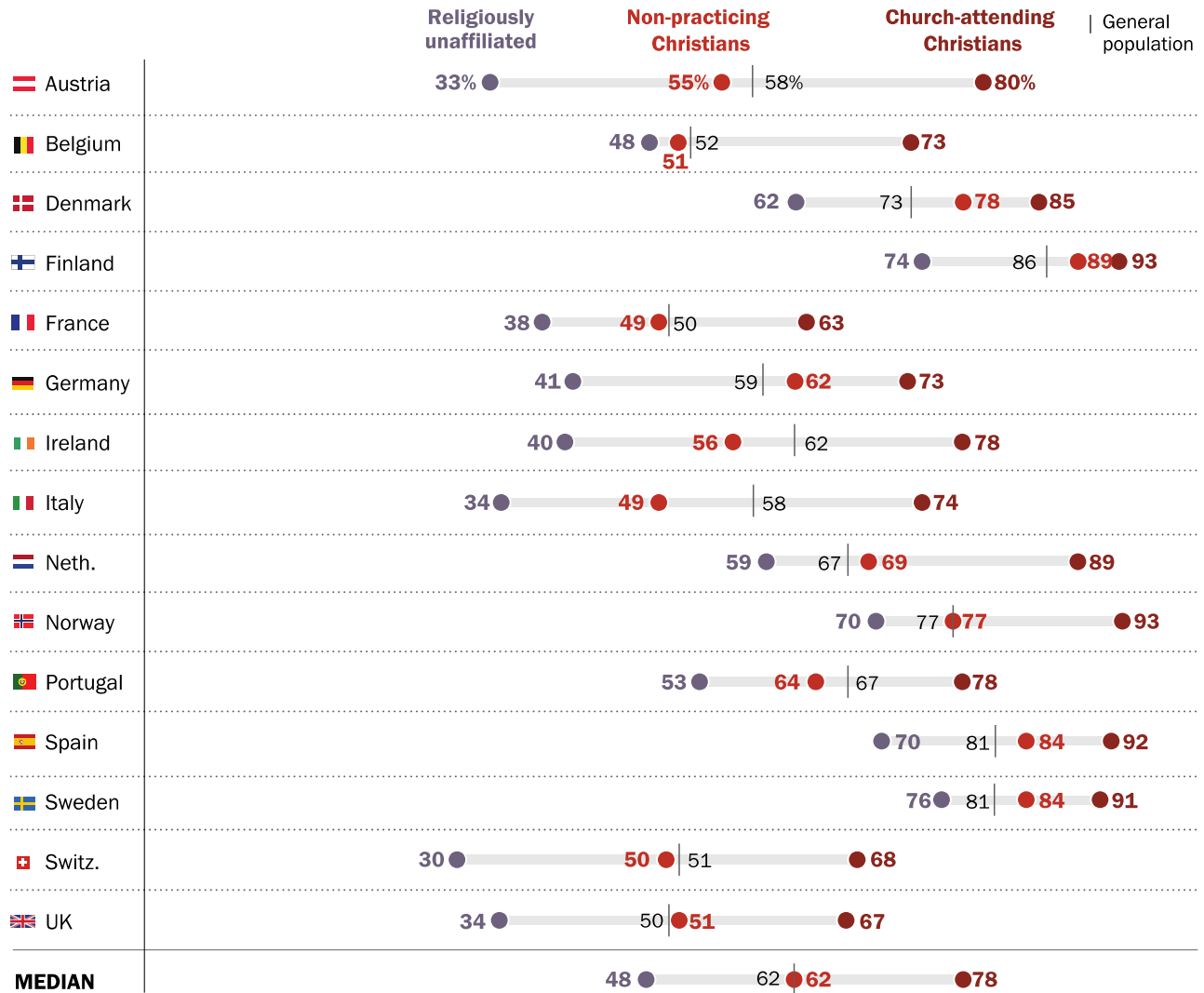
The survey also gauged views on religious institutions, asking whether respondents agree with three positive statements about churches and other religious organizations – that they “protect and strengthen morality in society,” “bring people together and strengthen community bonds,” and “play an important role in helping the poor and needy.” Three similar questions asked whether they agree with negative assessments of religious institutions – that churches and other religious organizations “are too involved with politics,” “focus too much on rules,” and “are too concerned with money and power.”

Once again, there are marked differences of opinion on these questions among Western Europeans across categories of religious identity and practice. Throughout the region, non-practicing Christians are more likely than religiously unaffiliated adults to voice positive opinions of religious institutions. For example, in Germany, a majority of non-practicing Christians (62%) agree that churches and other religious organizations play an important role in helping the poor and needy, compared with fewer than half (41%) of “nones.”

Church-attending Christians hold especially positive opinions about the role of religious organizations in society. For example, nearly three-in-four churchgoing Christians in Belgium (73%), Germany (73%) and Italy (74%) agree that churches and other religious institutions play an important role in helping the poor and needy. (For more analysis of results on these questions, see Chapter 6.)

Majorities of non-practicing Christians say churches and other religious organizations play an important role in helping poor and needy

% who agree with the statement, "Churches and other religious organizations play an important role in helping the poor and needy"



Note: Church-attending Christians are defined as those who say they attend church at least monthly. Non-practicing Christians are defined as those who attend less often.

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

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Both non-practicing and churchgoing Christians are more likely than the unaffiliated to hold negative views of immigrants, Muslims and Jews

The survey, which was conducted following a surge of immigration to Europe from Muslim-majority countries, asked many questions about national identity, religious pluralism and immigration.

Most Western Europeans say they are willing to accept Muslims and Jews in their neighborhoods and in their families, and most reject negative statements about these groups. And, on balance, more respondents say immigrants are honest and hardworking than say the opposite.

But a clear pattern emerges: Both church-attending and non-practicing Christians are more likely than religiously unaffiliated adults in Western Europe to voice anti-immigrant and anti-minority views.

For example, in the UK, 45% of church-attending Christians say Islam is fundamentally incompatible with British values and culture, as do roughly the same share of non-practicing Christians (47%). But among religiously unaffiliated adults, fewer (30%) say Islam is fundamentally incompatible with their country's values. There is a similar pattern across the region on whether there should be restrictions on Muslim women's dress, with Christians more likely than "nones" to say Muslim women should not be allowed to wear any religious clothing.

Although current debates on multiculturalism in Europe often focus on Islam and Muslims, there also are long-standing Jewish communities in many Western European countries. The survey finds Christians at all levels of religious observance are more likely than religiously unaffiliated adults to say they would *not* be willing to accept Jews in their family, and, on balance, they are somewhat more likely to agree with highly negative statements about Jews, such as, "Jews always pursue their own interests, and not the interest of the country they live in." (For further analysis of these questions, see Chapter 1.)

Christians more likely than ‘nones’ to say Islam is incompatible with national values

% who say, “Islam is fundamentally incompatible with our country’s culture and values”



Note: Church-attending Christians are defined as those who say they attend church at least monthly. Non-practicing Christians are defined as those who attend less often.

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

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When it comes to immigration, Christians – both churchgoing and non-practicing – are more likely than “nones” in Europe to say immigrants from the Middle East and Africa are *not* honest or hardworking, and to favor reducing immigration from current levels.² For example, 35% of churchgoing Christians and 36% of non-practicing Christians in France say immigration to their country should be reduced, compared with 21% of “nones” who take this position.

There are, however, exceptions to this general pattern. In a few places, church-attending Christians are *more* accepting of immigration and *less* likely to say immigration should be reduced. In Finland, for example, just one-in-five churchgoing Christians favor reducing immigration (19%), compared with larger shares among religiously unaffiliated adults (33%) and non-practicing Christians (37%).

But overall, anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim and anti-Jewish opinions are more common among Christians, at all levels of practice, than they are among Western Europeans with no religious affiliation. This is not to say that *most* Christians hold these views: On the contrary, by most measures and in most countries surveyed, only minorities of Christians voice negative opinions about immigrants and religious minorities.

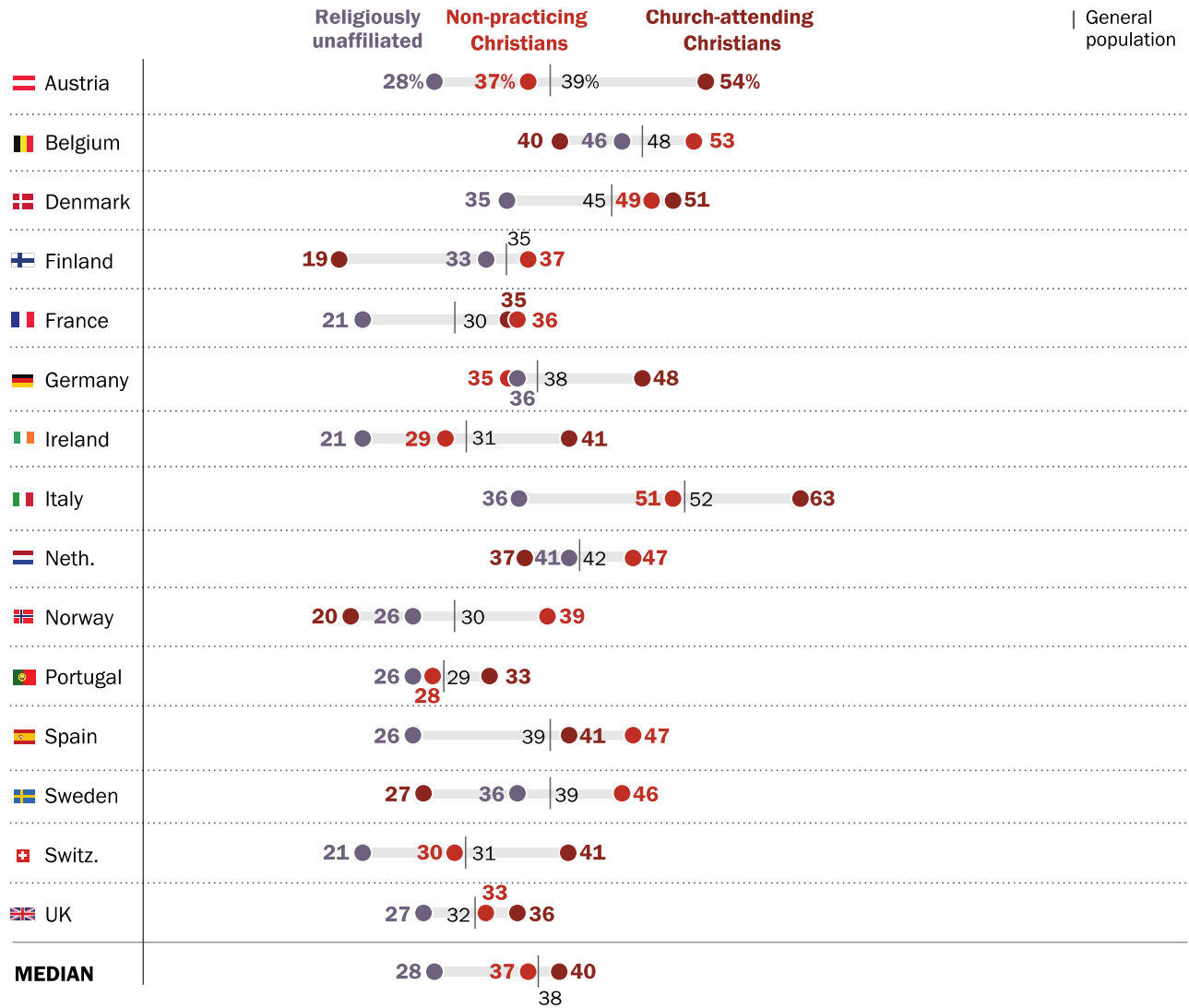
There also are other factors beyond religious identity that are closely connected with views on immigration and religious minorities. For example, higher education and personally knowing someone who is Muslim tend to go hand in hand with more openness to immigration and religious minorities. And identifying with the political right is strongly linked to anti-immigration stances.

Still, even after using statistical techniques to control for a wide variety of factors (age, education, gender, political ideology, personally knowing a Muslim or a Jewish person, personal assessments of economic well-being, satisfaction with the country’s general direction, etc.), Western Europeans who identify as Christian are more likely than those who have no religious affiliation to express negative feelings about immigrants and religious minorities.

² Respondents were asked about their views toward immigrants from the Middle East, “such as those from Syria,” and toward immigrants from Africa, “such as those from Nigeria.”

Non-practicing Christians more likely than unaffiliated to favor reducing immigration levels

% who say the number of immigrants to their country should be reduced



Note: Church-attending Christians are defined as those who say they attend church at least monthly. Non-practicing Christians are defined as those who attend less often.

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

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Sidebar: Are Christian identity and Muslim immigration linked? The broader debate in Europe

Pew Research Center's survey of Western Europe was conducted in the spring and summer of 2017, following the [two highest years](#) of [asylum applications](#) on record. Some scholars and commentators have asserted that the influx of refugees, including many from Muslim-majority countries, is spurring a revival of Christian identity. Rogers Brubaker, a professor of sociology at UCLA, calls this a [reactive Christianity](#) in which highly secular Europeans are looking at new immigrants and saying, in effect: "If 'they' are Muslim, then in some sense 'we' must be Christian."

The survey – a kind of snapshot in time – cannot prove that Christian identity is now growing in Western Europe after decades of secularization. Nor can it prove (or disprove) the assertion that *if* Christian identity is growing, immigration of non-Christians is the reason.

But the survey can help answer the question: What is the nature of Christian identity in Western Europe today, particularly among the large population that identifies as Christian but does not regularly go to church? As explained in greater detail throughout this report, the findings suggest that the answer is partly a matter of religious beliefs, partly a matter of attitudes toward the role of religion in society, and partly a matter of views on national identity, immigrants and religious minorities.

This confluence of factors may not surprise close observers of European politics. Olivier Roy, a French political scientist who studies both Islam and secularization, [writes that](#), "If the Christian identity of Europe has become an issue, it is precisely because Christianity as faith and practices faded away in favor of a cultural marker which is more and more turning into a neo-ethnic marker ('true' Europeans versus 'migrants')."

Some commentators have expressed strong misgivings about the promotion of "cultural" Christian identity in Europe, seeing it as driven largely by fear and misunderstanding. In the "present context of high levels of fear of and hostility to Muslims," [writes Tariq Modood](#), professor of sociology, politics and public policy at the University of Bristol in the UK, efforts to develop cultural Christianity as an "ideology to oppose Islam" are both a challenge to pluralism and equality, and "a risk to democracy."

Others see a potential revival of Christianity in Western Europe as a bulwark against extremism. While calling himself an "incurable atheist," the British historian Niall Ferguson said in a [2006 interview](#) that "organised Christianity, both in terms of observance and in terms of faith, sail[ed] off a cliff in Europe sometime in the 1970s, 1980s," leaving European societies without "religious resistance" to radical ideas. "In a secular society where nobody believes in anything terribly much except the next shopping spree, it's really quite easy to recruit people to radical, monotheistic positions," Ferguson said.

But not everyone agrees on immigration's impact. British author and lecturer Ronan McCrea contends that Muslim migration is making Europe [more secular](#), not less. "Previously, many of those who are not particularly religious were content to describe themselves as Christian on cultural grounds," he writes. "But as religion and national identity have gradually begun to separate, religious identity becomes more a question of ideology and belief than membership of a national community. This has encouraged those who are not true believers to move from a nominal Christian identity to a more clearly non-religious one."

In Western Europe, religion strongly associated with nationalist sentiment

Overall levels of nationalism vary considerably across the region.³ For example, solid majorities in some countries (such as Italy and Portugal) and fewer than half in others (such as Sweden and Denmark) say that it is important to have ancestors from their country to truly share the national identity (e.g., to have Danish ancestry to be truly Danish).

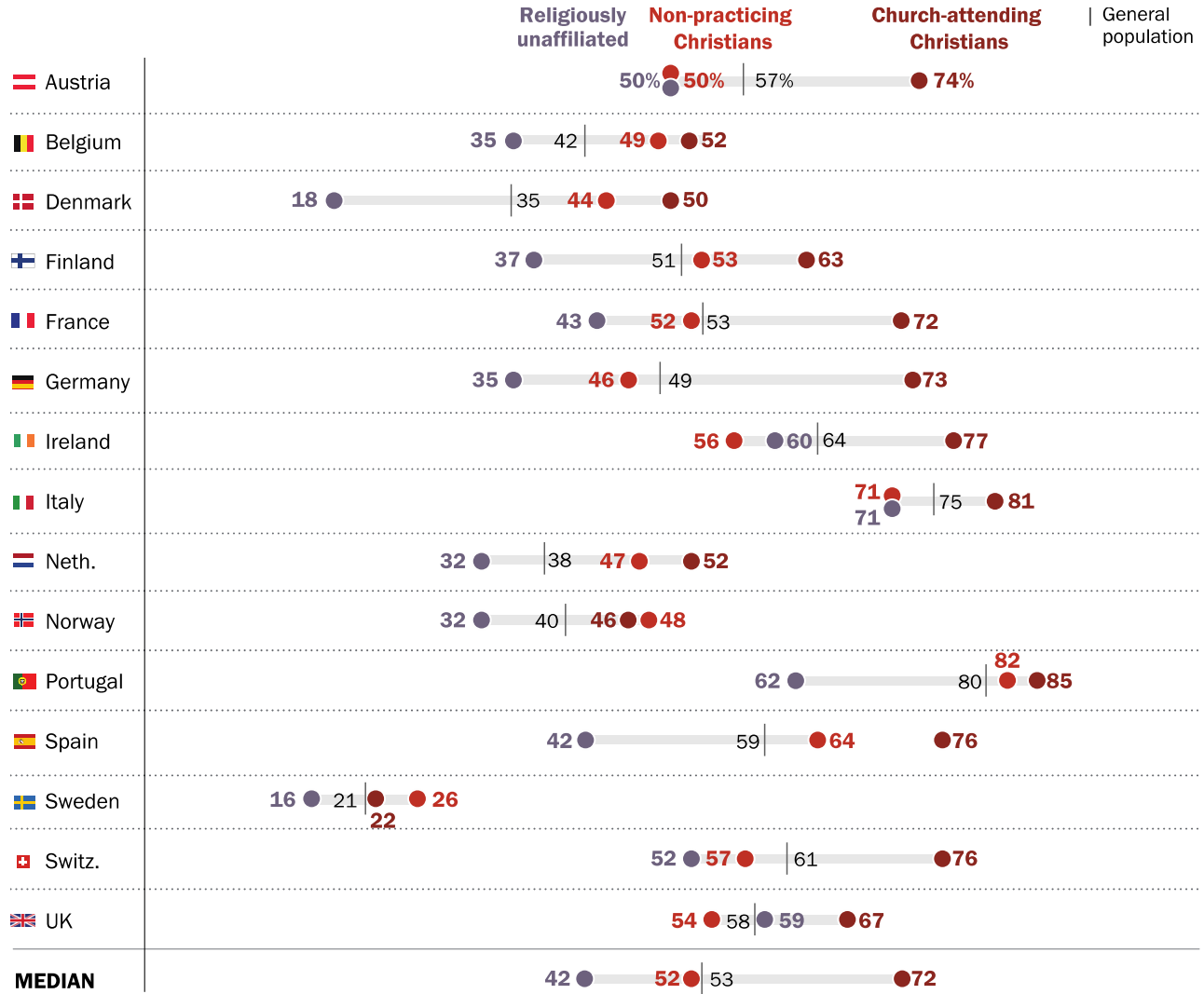
Within countries, non-practicing Christians are less likely than churchgoing Christians to say that ancestry is key to national identity. And religiously unaffiliated people are less likely than both churchgoing and non-practicing Christians to say this.

For example, in France, nearly three-quarters of church-attending Christians (72%) say it is important to have French ancestry to be “truly French.” Among non-practicing Christians, 52% take this position, but this is still higher than the 43% of religiously unaffiliated French adults who say having French family background is important in order to be truly French.

³ The survey asked four questions related to the concept of nationalism: Whether people completely/mostly agree or completely/mostly disagree with the statement “Our people are not perfect, but our culture is superior to others;” whether they think it is very/somewhat/not very/not at all important to have been born in the country to truly share its national identity; whether they think it is very/somewhat/not very/not at all important to have family background in the country to truly share its national identity; and whether people are very/somewhat/not too/not at all proud to be a national of their country (e.g., to be French, to be Swedish). The first three items are highly correlated with one another and are included in the scale measuring nationalist, anti-immigrant and anti-minority views (NIM). See Chapter 1 for a full analysis of these results.

Both church-attending and non-practicing Christians more likely than unaffiliated to link national identity with ancestry

% who say having _____ family background is very/somewhat important to be truly _____ (e.g., Austrian family background to be truly Austrian)



Note: Church-attending Christians are defined as those who say they attend church at least monthly. Non-practicing Christians are defined as those who attend less often.

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

“Being Christian in Western Europe”

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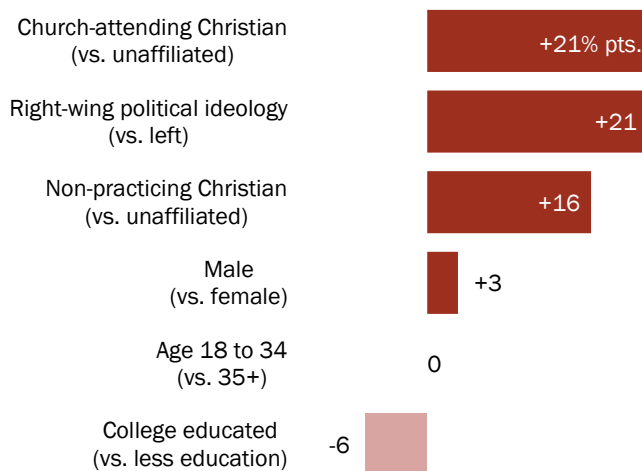
Both non-practicing and churchgoing Christians are more likely than “nones” to agree with the statement, “Our people are not perfect, but our culture is superior to others.” And additional statistical analysis shows that this holds true even after controlling for age, gender, education, political ideology and other factors.

In other words, Christians as a whole in Western Europe tend to express higher levels of nationalist sentiment. This overall pattern is *not* driven by nationalist feelings solely among highly religious Christians or solely among non-practicing Christians. Rather, at all levels of religious observance, these views are more common among Christians than among religiously unaffiliated people in Europe.

Altogether, the survey asked more than 20 questions about possible elements of nationalism, feelings of cultural superiority, attitudes toward Jews and Muslims, views on immigrants from various regions of the world, and overall levels of immigration. Many of these views are highly correlated with each other. (For example, people who express negative attitudes toward Muslims and Jews are also more likely to express negative attitudes toward immigrants, and vice versa.) As a result, researchers were able to combine 22 individual questions into a scale measuring the prevalence of nationalist, anti-immigrant and anti-minority sentiments in each country and to conduct additional statistical analysis of the factors associated with these sentiments in Western Europe today. For details of this analysis, see Chapter 1.

In Western Europe, both church-attending and non-practicing Christians are more likely than unaffiliated to say their culture is superior

Relative influence of each factor on the likelihood of a respondent to completely/mostly agree that, “Our people are not perfect, but our culture is superior to others” (see note below for explanation)



Note: The number shown is the difference in predicted probability of agreeing (either completely or mostly) with the statement, “Our people are not perfect, but our culture is superior to others,” after controlling for other factors. The model includes several other factors that are not shown in the chart, including respondents’ assessments of their personal economic well-being, satisfaction with their country’s general direction, diversity of their friend circle, personally knowing someone who is Muslim/Jewish and having familiarity with Islam/Judaism. Individual effects of each country are also taken into account. Church-attending Christians are defined as those who say they attend church at least monthly. Non-practicing Christians are defined as those who attend less often. See Appendix A for a more detailed explanation.

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

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Same-sex marriage, abortion widely accepted by non-practicing Christians

Vast majorities of non-practicing Christians and religiously unaffiliated adults across Western Europe favor legal abortion and same-sex marriage. In some countries, there is not much difference on these questions between the attitudes of Christians who rarely attend church and adults who do not affiliate with any religion.

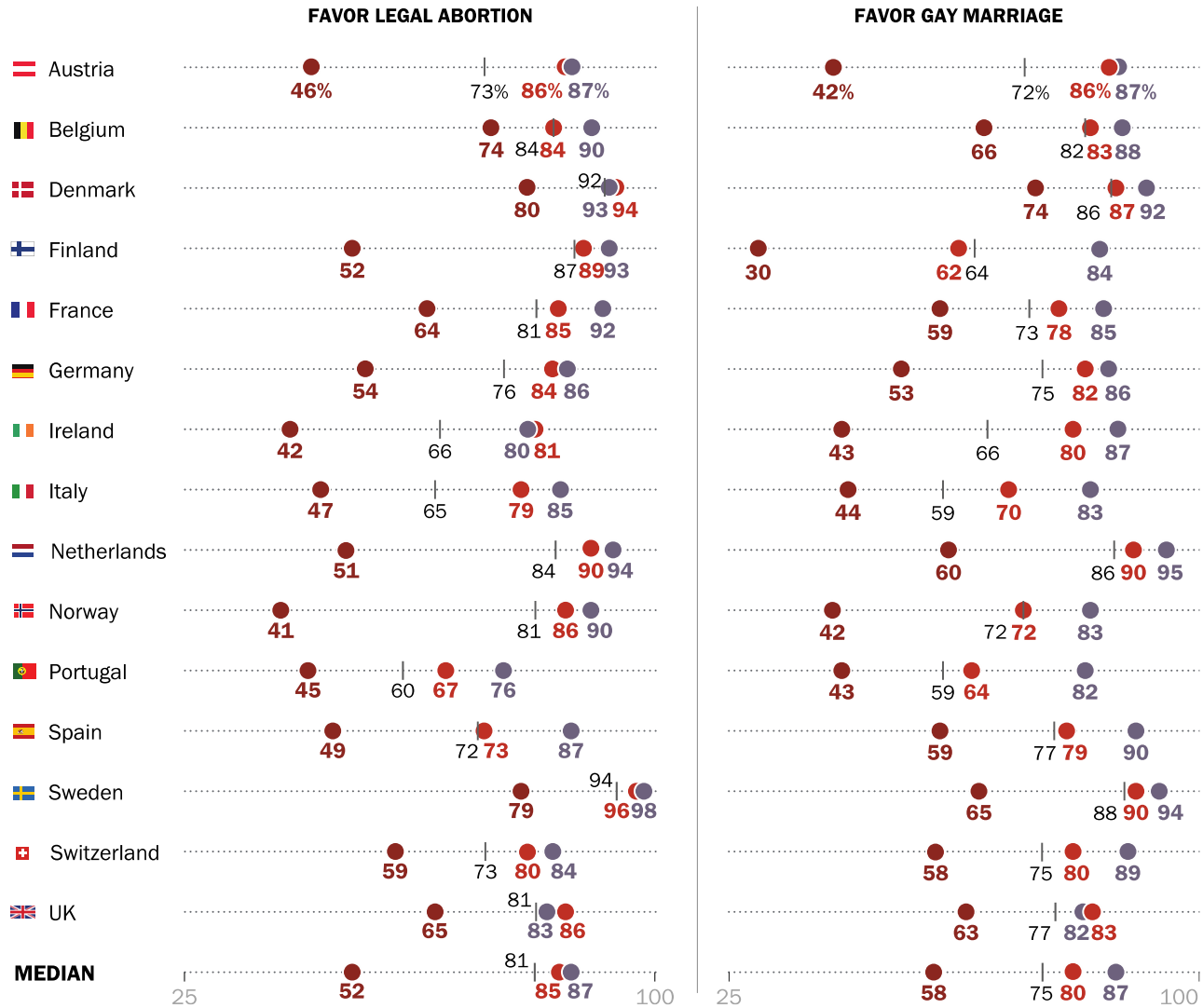
In every country surveyed, on the other hand, church-attending Christians are considerably more conservative than both non-practicing Christians and religiously unaffiliated adults on questions about abortion and same-sex marriage.

Education has a strong influence on attitudes on both issues: College-educated respondents are considerably more likely than those with less education to favor legal abortion and same-sex marriage. On balance, women are more likely than men to favor legal gay marriage, but their attitudes are largely similar on abortion.

Unaffiliated adults and non-practicing Christians generally favor legal abortion, same-sex marriage

% who ...

● Church-attending Christians ● Non-practicing Christians ● Religiously unaffiliated | General population



Note: Church-attending Christians are defined as those who say they attend church at least monthly. Non-practicing Christians are defined as those who attend less often.

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

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Summing up: On what issues do non-practicing Christians resemble ‘nones’? And on what measures are they similar to church-attending Christians?

While the religious, political and cultural views of non-practicing Christians in Western Europe are frequently distinct from those of church-attending Christians and religiously unaffiliated adults (“nones”), on some issues non-practicing Christians resemble churchgoing Christians, and on others they largely align with “nones.”

Religious beliefs and attitudes toward religious institutions are two areas of broad similarity between non-practicing Christians and church-attending Christians. Most non-practicing Christians say they believe in God or some higher power, and many think that churches and other religious organizations make positive contributions to society. In these respects, their perspective is similar to that of churchgoing Christians.

On the other hand, abortion, gay marriage and the role of religion in government are three areas where the attitudes of non-practicing Christians broadly resemble those of religiously unaffiliated people (“nones”). Solid majorities of both non-practicing Christians and “nones” say they think that abortion should be legal in all or most cases and that gays and lesbians should be allowed to marry legally. In addition, most non-practicing Christians, along with the vast majority of “nones,” say religion should be kept out of government policies.

When asked whether it is important to have been born in their country, or to have family background there, to truly share the national identity (e.g., important to have Spanish ancestry to be truly Spanish), non-practicing Christians generally are somewhere in between the religiously unaffiliated population and church-attending Christians, who are most inclined to link birthplace and ancestry with national identity.

Many in all three groups reject negative statements about immigrants and religious minorities. But non-practicing Christians and church-attending Christians are generally more likely than “nones” to favor lower levels of immigration, to express negative views toward immigrants from the Middle East and sub-Saharan Africa, and to agree with negative statements about Muslims and Jews such as, “In their hearts, Muslims want to impose their religious law on everyone else” in their country or “Jews always pursue their own interests and not the interest of the country they live in.” (For further analysis of these questions, see Chapter 1.)

Overall, the study shows a strong association between Christian *identity* and nationalist attitudes, as well as views of religious minorities and immigration, and a weaker association between religious *commitment* and these views. This finding holds regardless of whether religious

commitment among Christians is measured through church attendance alone, or using a scale that combines attendance with three other measures: belief in God, frequency of prayer and importance of religion in a person's life. (See Chapter 3 for a detailed analysis of the scale of religious commitment.)

Sidebar: Religious observance and attitudes toward minorities among Catholics and Protestants in Western Europe

Although people in some predominantly Catholic countries in Europe, including Portugal and Italy, are more religiously observant than others in the region, Catholics and Protestants overall in Western Europe display similar overall levels of observance.

But Catholics and Protestants in the region differ in their attitudes toward religious minorities. For example, Catholics are more likely than Protestants to hold negative views of Muslims: Catholics are more likely than Protestants to say they would not be willing to accept Muslims as family members, that Muslim women in their country should not be allowed to wear any religious clothing, and that they agree with the statement, “Due to the number of Muslims here, I feel like a stranger in my own country.”

Differences between Catholics and Protestants on these issues can be difficult to disentangle from historical and geographic patterns in Western Europe, where Catholic-majority countries are primarily concentrated in the south, while the north is more heavily Protestant. But in a handful of countries with substantial populations of both Catholics and Protestants – including the United Kingdom and Germany – more Catholics than Protestants hold negative attitudes toward Muslims. For example, in the UK, 35% of Catholics and 16% of Protestants say Muslim women in their country should not be allowed to wear any religious clothing. In Switzerland, however, the opposite is true; 35% of Swiss Protestants express this view, compared with 22% of Catholics.

Catholics more likely than Protestants to express negative views of Muslims

% who ...

	Say Muslim women should not be allowed to wear any religious clothing	Are not willing to accept Muslims as family members	“Feel like a stranger in my own country” due to the number of Muslims
<i>Protestants</i>			
Denmark	27%	18%	23%
Finland	16	31	7
Germany	16	16	19
Netherlands	10	13	20
Norway	24	19	23
Sweden	18	17	15
Switzerland	35	41	29
UK	16	39	18
MEDIAN	17	19	20

Catholics

Austria	25%	39%	27%
Belgium	32	21	42
France	28	31	23
Germany	31	51	31
Ireland	26	35	22
Italy	35	48	35
Netherlands	19	10	27
Portugal	14	23	14
Spain	28	22	28
Switzerland	22	34	24
UK	35	51	40
MEDIAN	28	34	27

Note: Darker shades represent higher values.

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

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Context of the survey

The survey was conducted in mid-2017, after immigration emerged as a front-and-center issue in national elections in several Western European countries and as populist, anti-immigration parties questioned the place of Muslims and other religious and ethnic minorities in Germany, France, the United Kingdom and elsewhere.

Muslims now make up an estimated 4.9% of the population of the European Union (plus Norway and Switzerland) and somewhat higher shares in some of Western Europe's most populous countries, such as France (an estimated 8.8%), the UK (6.3%) and Germany (6.1%). These figures are [projected to continue to increase](#) in coming decades, even if there is no more immigration to Europe.

The survey asked not only about attitudes toward Muslims and Jews, but also about Catholics' and Protestants' views of one another. The findings about Protestant-Catholic relations were [previously released](#) before the commemoration of the 500th anniversary of the start of the Protestant Reformation in Germany.⁴

This report also includes material from 20 focus groups convened by Pew Research Center in the months following the survey's completion in five of the countries surveyed. The focus groups in France, Germany, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom provided an opportunity for participants to discuss their feelings about pluralism, immigration, secularism and other topics in more detail than survey respondents typically can give when responding to a questionnaire. Some conclusions from focus groups are included in illustrative sidebars throughout the report.

This study, funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts and the John Templeton Foundation, is part of a larger effort by Pew Research Center to understand religious change and its impact on societies around the world. The Center previously has conducted religion-focused surveys across [sub-Saharan Africa](#); the Middle East-North Africa region and many other countries with [large Muslim populations](#); [Latin America](#); [Israel](#); [Central and Eastern Europe](#); and the [United States](#).

The rest of this Overview examines what it means to be a “none” in Western Europe, including the extent of religious switching from Christianity to the ranks of the religiously unaffiliated and the reasons “nones” give for leaving their childhood faith. It also looks at their beliefs about religion

⁴ A previously published [analysis of data from this survey](#) used an older version of survey weights. Since then, Pew Research Center has improved the survey weights for greater accuracy, leading to slight differences in some figures between the two publications. The substantive findings of the previous publication are not affected by the revised weights. Please contact Pew Research Center for questions regarding weighting adjustments.

and spirituality, including a closer look at the attitudes of religiously unaffiliated adults who say they *do* believe there is a God or some other higher power or spiritual force in the universe.

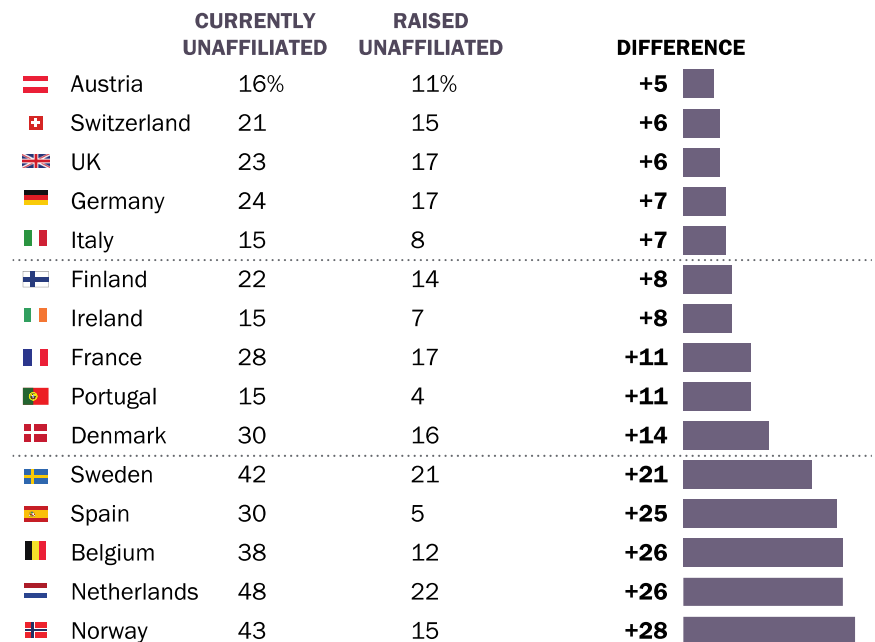
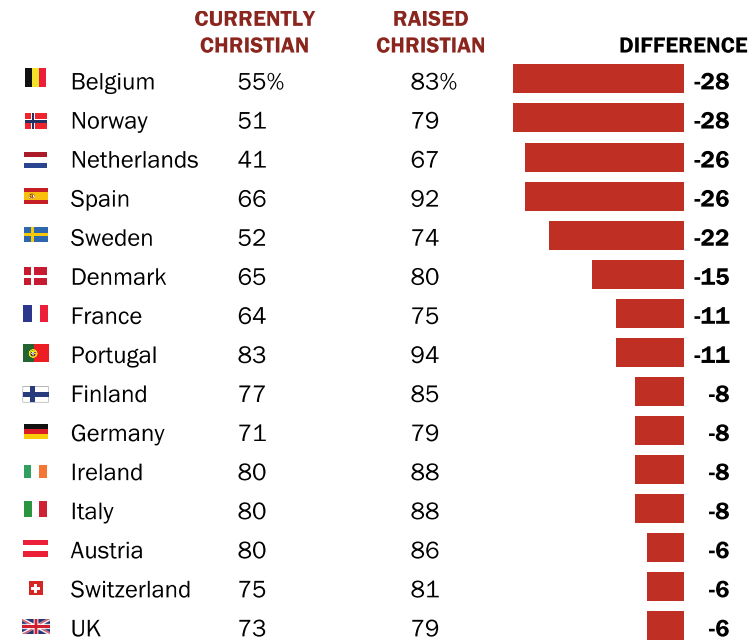
Europe's changing religious landscape: Declines for Christians, gains for unaffiliated

Most people in Western Europe describe themselves as Christians. But the percentage of Christians appears to have declined, especially in some countries. And the net losses for Christianity have been accompanied by net growth in the numbers of religiously unaffiliated people.

Across the region, fewer people say they are Christian now than say they were raised as Christians. The opposite is true of religiously unaffiliated adults – many more people currently are religiously unaffiliated than the share who were raised with no religion (i.e., as atheist, agnostic or “nothing in particular”). For example, 5% of adults in Spain say they were raised with no religion, while 30% now fit this category, a difference of 25 percentage points. The religiously unaffiliated have seen similarly large gains in Belgium, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden.

In Western Europe, net losses for Christians are largely matched by gains for religiously unaffiliated

% who say they are/were ...



Note: Differences are calculated after rounding. All differences are statistically significant. Source: Survey conducted April-August 2017 in 15 countries. See Methodology for details. “Being Christian in Western Europe”

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Sidebar: Religious identity in Western Europe over time

Several countries in Western Europe have been collecting census data on religion for decades, and these data (from Austria, Finland, Ireland, the Netherlands, Portugal and Switzerland) indicate that the percentage of the population that identifies as Christian has fallen substantially since the 1960s, while the share of the population that does not identify with any religion has risen.⁵

More recent data collected by the European Social Survey (ESS) since 2002 show a continuation of the long-term trend in some countries. Christianity has experienced relatively rapid declines in Belgium, Finland, Ireland, the Netherlands, Portugal and Spain. But in the nine other countries included in the Pew Research Center survey, the ESS finds the share of Christians has either been relatively stable or has declined only modestly, suggesting that the rate of secularization varies considerably from country to country and may have slowed or leveled off in some places in recent years.

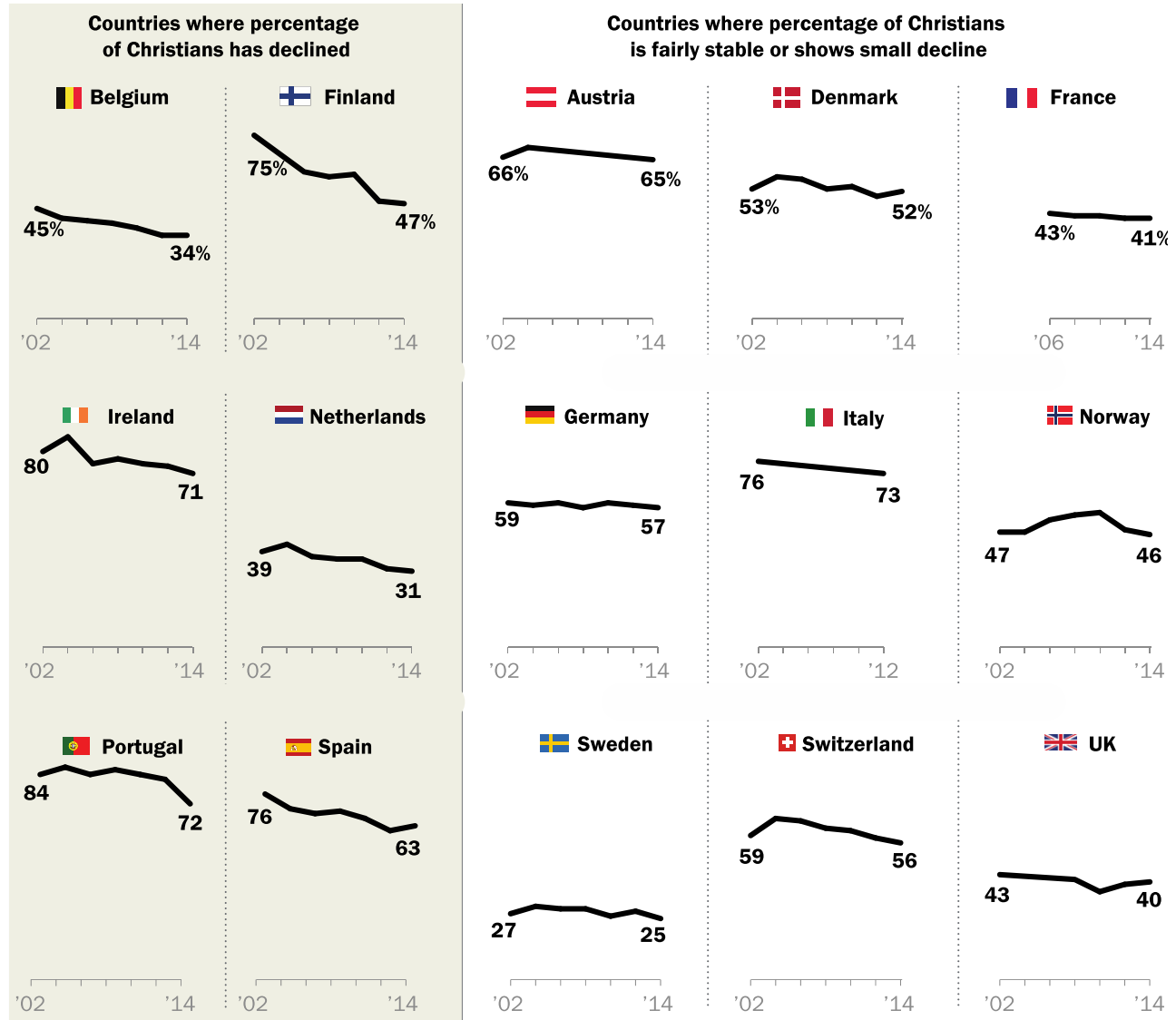
Due to major differences in question wording, the ESS estimates of the percentage of Christians in each country differ considerably from Pew Research Center estimates. The ESS asks what is known as a “two-step” question about religious identity: Respondents first are asked, “Do you consider yourself as belonging to any particular religion or denomination?” People who say “Yes” are then asked, “Which one? Roman Catholic, Protestant, Eastern Orthodox, other Christian denomination, Jewish, Islamic, Eastern religions or other non-Christian religions.” Pew Research Center surveys ask a “one-step” question, “What is your present religion, if any? Are you Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu, atheist, agnostic, something else or nothing in particular?”

Using the ESS question wording and two-step approach consistently yields lower shares of religiously affiliated respondents (including Christians) in Western Europe. For example, in the Netherlands, 31% of respondents identify with a Christian denomination in the 2014 ESS, while in the Pew Research Center survey, 41% identify as Christian. Presumably, this is because some respondents who are relatively low in religious practice or belief would answer the first question posed by ESS by saying they have no religion, while the same respondents would identify as Christian, Muslim, Jewish, etc., if presented with a list of religions and asked to choose among them. The impact of these differences in question wording and format may vary considerably from country to country.

⁵ In addition to these countries, the UK census has asked about religious identity in 2001 and again in 2011, showing a considerable decline in the Christian share of the population and a rise in the share with no religion in that 10-year period.

In several Western European countries, recent declines in Christian identity

% who say they belong to a Christian denomination



Note: 2016 European Social Survey data were not final at the time of this report's publication. Data on religious denomination are not available for 2014 in Italy.

Source: European Social Survey (ESS).
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Who are Western Europe's religiously unaffiliated?

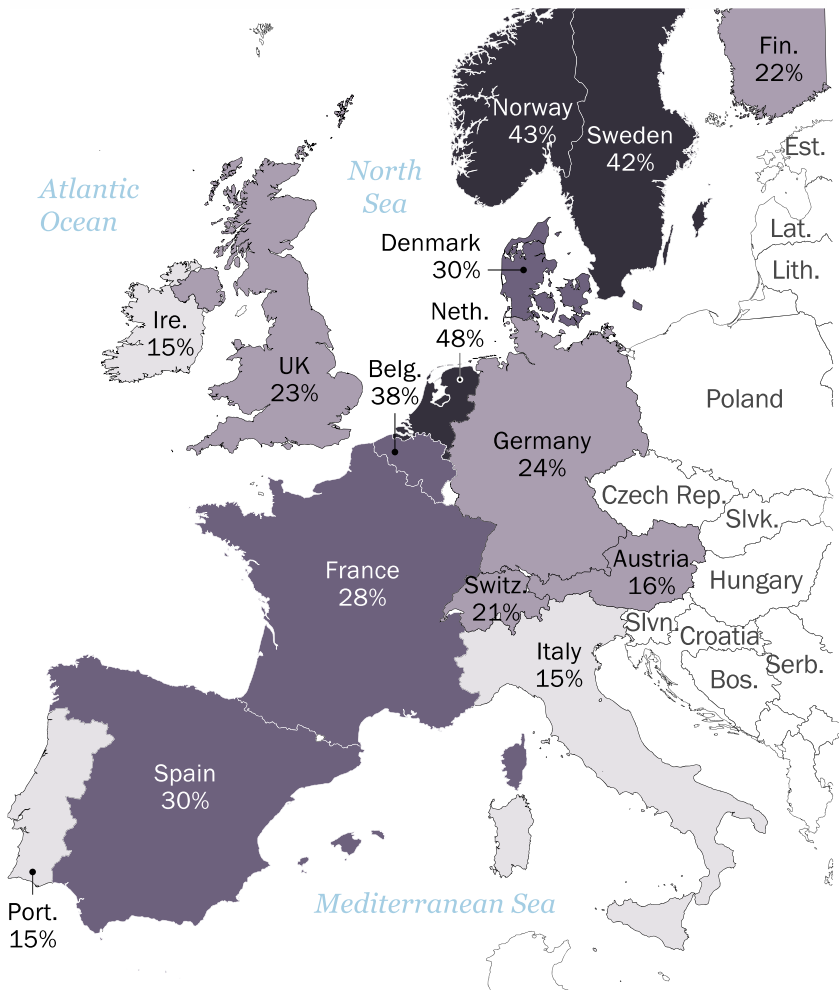
While Christians (taken as a whole) are by far the largest religious group in Western Europe, a substantial minority of the population in every country is religiously unaffiliated – also sometimes called “nones,” a category that includes people who identify as atheist, agnostic or “nothing in particular.” The unaffiliated portion of the adult population ranges from as high as 48% in the Netherlands to 15% in Ireland, Italy and Portugal.

Demographically, “nones” in Western Europe are relatively young and highly educated, as well as disproportionately male.

Share of ‘nones’ in Western Europe ranges from 15% in Ireland, Italy and Portugal to 48% in the Netherlands

% who say they are atheist, agnostic or have no particular religion

■ 0-15% ■ 16-25% ■ 26-39% ■ 40%+ □ Non-surveyed country



Note: Respondents were asked “What is your present religion, if any? Are you Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu, atheist, agnostic, something else or nothing in particular?”

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

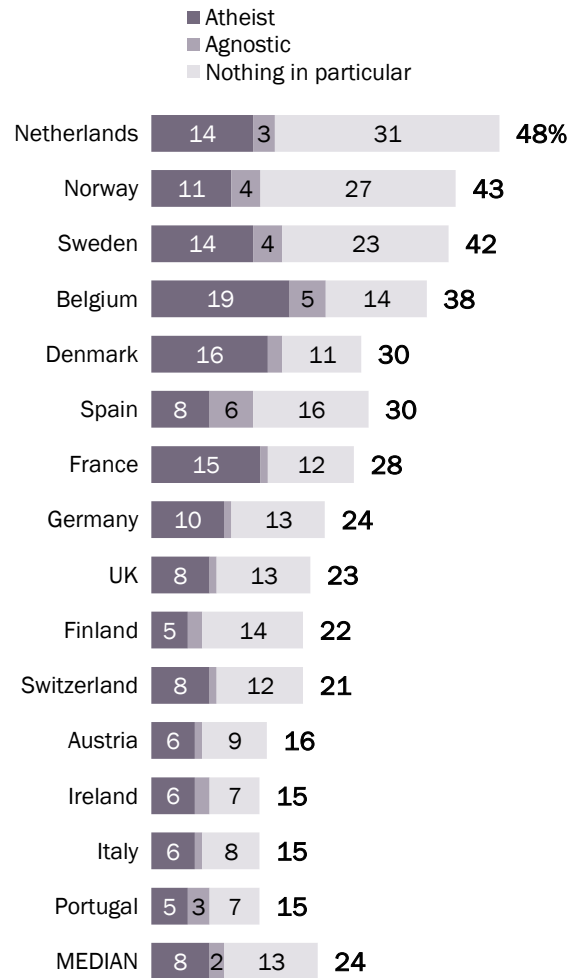
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Within the unaffiliated category, those who describe their religious identity as “nothing in particular” make up the biggest group (relative to atheists and agnostics) in most countries. For instance, fully three-in-ten Dutch adults (31%) describe their religious identity in this way, compared with 14% who are self-described atheists and 3% who consider themselves agnostics.

But in some other places, such as Belgium, Denmark and France, atheists are at least as numerous as those in the “nothing in particular” category. Agnostics, by comparison, have a smaller presence throughout Western Europe.

Substantial shares across the region say they are atheist, agnostic or have no particular religion

% who say they are ...

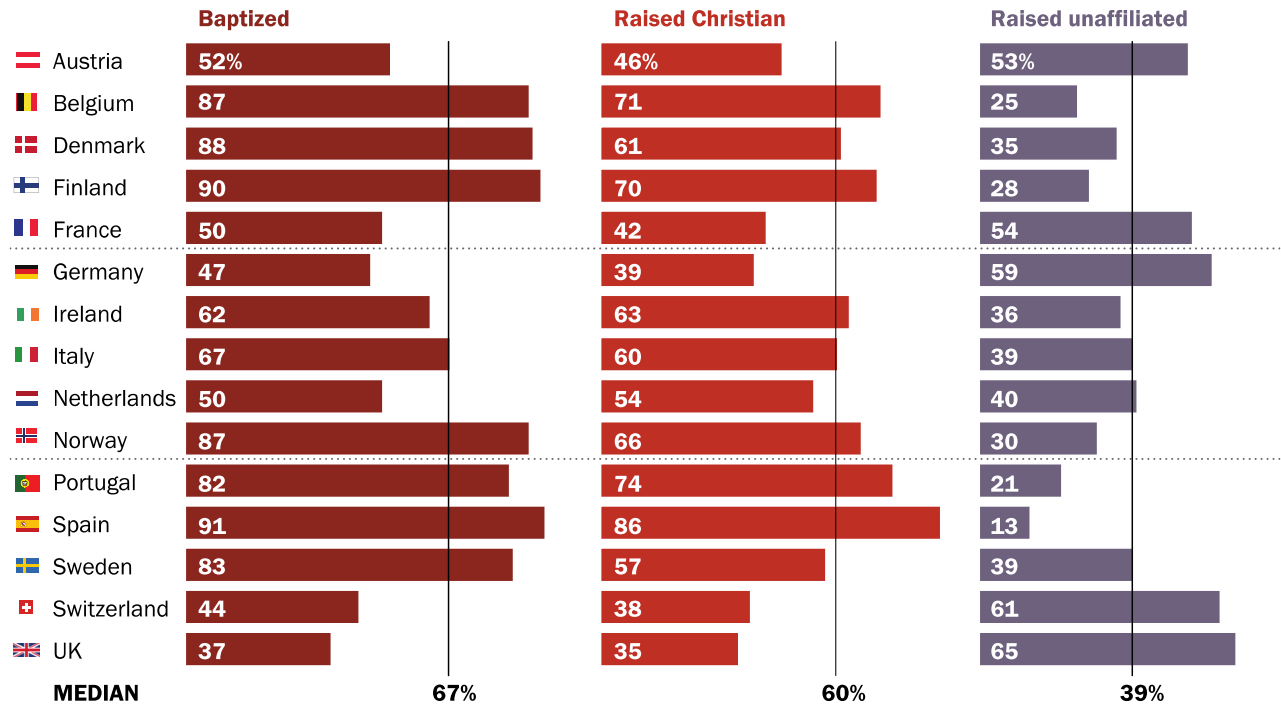


Note: Figures may not add to subtotals indicated due to rounding.
 Source: Survey conducted April-August 2017 in 15 countries. See Methodology for details.
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Many unaffiliated adults in Western Europe were raised Christian

% of unaffiliated adults who say they were ...



Source: Survey conducted April-August 2017 in 15 countries. See Methodology for details.
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A majority of "nones" in most countries surveyed say they were baptized, and many of them also say they were raised as Christians. Overall, more religiously unaffiliated adults in Europe say they were raised Christian (median of 60%) than say they were raised with no religious affiliation (median of 39%).

However, these figures vary widely from country to country. For example, the vast majority of unaffiliated adults in Spain (86%) and Portugal (74%) say they were raised as Christians. In the UK, by contrast, roughly two-thirds (65%) of adults who currently have no religious affiliation say they were raised that way.

What has led Europeans to shed their religious identity?

For religiously unaffiliated adults who were raised as Christians (or in another religion), the survey posed a series of questions asking about potential reasons they left religion behind.⁶ Respondents could select multiple reasons as important factors why they stopped identifying with their childhood religion.

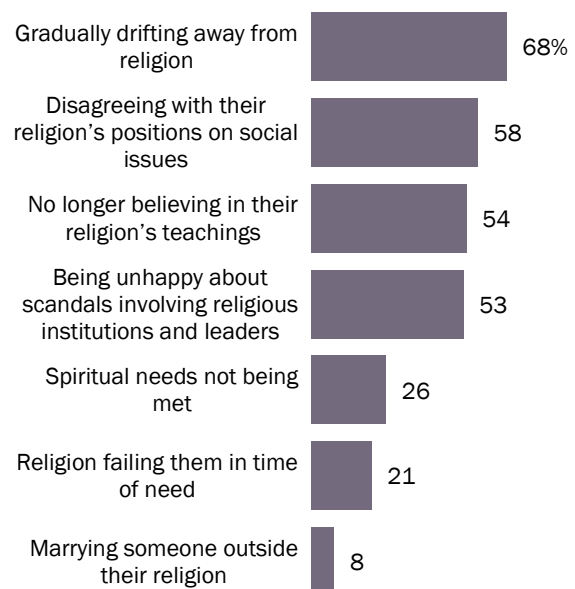
In every country surveyed, most “nones” who were raised in a religious group say they “gradually drifted away from religion,” suggesting that no one particular event or single specific reason prompted this change.⁷ Many also say that they disagreed with church positions on social issues like homosexuality and abortion, or that they stopped believing in religious teachings. Majorities in several countries, such as Spain (74%) and Italy (60%), also cite “scandals involving religious institutions and leaders” as an important reason they stopped identifying as Christian (or with another religious group).

Smaller numbers give other reasons, such as that their spiritual needs were not being met, their childhood religion failed them when they were in need, or they married someone outside their religious group.

For more detail on patterns of religious switching in Western Europe and the reasons people give for their choices, see Chapter 2.

Most Western Europeans who stopped identifying with a religion ‘gradually drifted away,’ among other reasons

Among those who were raised in a religion but now identify as unaffiliated, median % of people who cite _____ as an important reason why they left religion



Source: Survey conducted April-August 2017 in 15 countries. See Methodology for details.
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⁶ The vast majority of “nones” who were raised in a religious group (median of 97%) were raised as Christians.

⁷ Many focus group participants spoke about how they became less attached to religion over time, while others pointed to an event in their life that prompted a shift in their religious identity. See Chapter 2 for further analysis of focus group discussions on this topic.

Religiously unaffiliated Europeans tend to express different attitudes toward Muslims depending on how they were raised

People who have left Christianity in favor of no religious identity may have multiple reasons for doing so. But their attitudes, overall, are more positive toward religious minorities than are the views of either Christians overall or “nones” who say they were raised with no religious identity.

On balance, those who were raised Christian and are now religiously unaffiliated are less likely than those who were always unaffiliated to say Islam is fundamentally incompatible with their national culture and values, or to take the position that Muslim women in their country should not be allowed to wear religious clothing.

They also are *more* likely to express acceptance of Muslims. For example, in several countries, higher shares of “nones” who were raised Christian than those who were raised unaffiliated say they would be willing to accept Muslims as neighbors.

Definitive reasons for this pattern are beyond the scope of the data in this study. But it is possible that some Western Europeans may have given up their religious identity, at least in part, because it was associated with more conservative views on a variety of issues, such as multiculturalism, sexual norms and gender roles. It also may be that their attitudes toward immigrants shifted along with the change in their religious identity. Or, it could be that some other, unknown factor (political, economic, demographic, etc.) underlies both their switching from Christian to unaffiliated and their views of immigrants and religious minorities.

Religiously unaffiliated adults who were raised as Christians are more accepting of Muslims as neighbors

% who say they would be willing to accept Muslims as neighbors

	General population	Among religiously unaffiliated		Diff.
		Raised Christian	Raised unaffiliated	
Germany	77%	93%	79%	+14
United Kingdom	78	95	81	+14
Austria	77	94	81	+13
Ireland	75	90	77	+13
Italy	65	85	72	+13
Norway	92	97	86	+11
France	85	94	87	+7
Switzerland	76	95	88	+7
Belgium	91	94	88	+6
Denmark	91	97	93	+4
Sweden	90	91	91	0
Netherlands	96	97	98	-1
Finland	83	89	NA	NA
Portugal	83	90	NA	NA
Spain	86	96	NA	NA

Note: Differences are calculated after rounding. Statistically significant differences are indicated in **bold**. NA indicates adequate sample size is not available for analysis.

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

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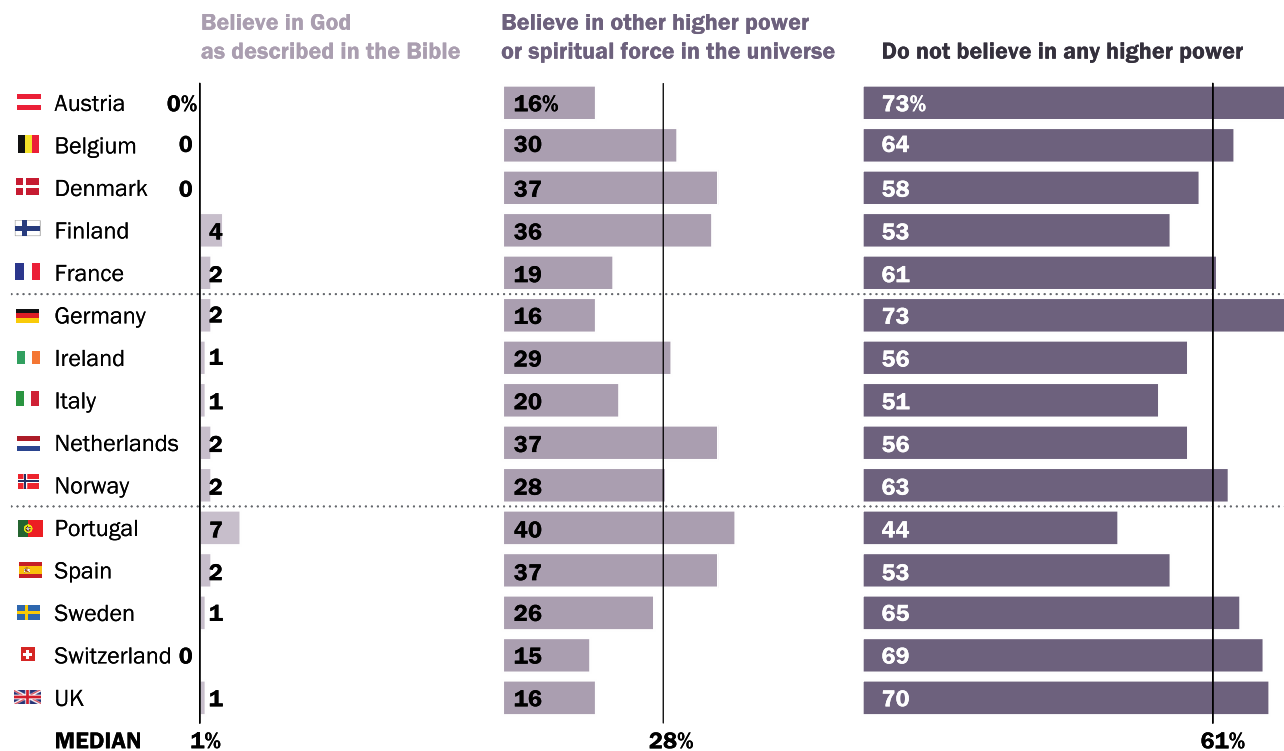
Most unaffiliated Europeans do not believe in a higher power, but a substantial minority hold some spiritual beliefs

Regardless of how they were raised, “nones” across Western Europe seldom partake in traditional religious practices. Few, if any, religiously unaffiliated adults say they attend religious services at least monthly, pray daily, or say religion is “very” or even “somewhat” important in their lives.

Most “nones” in Western Europe also affirm they are truly nonbelievers: Not only do majorities in all countries surveyed say they do not believe in God, but most also clarify (in a follow-up question) that they do not believe in *any* higher power or spiritual force.

Roughly three-in-ten unaffiliated people report believing in some higher power

% of religiously unaffiliated adults who ...



Note: Other/both/neither/depends/don't know/refused responses are not shown.

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

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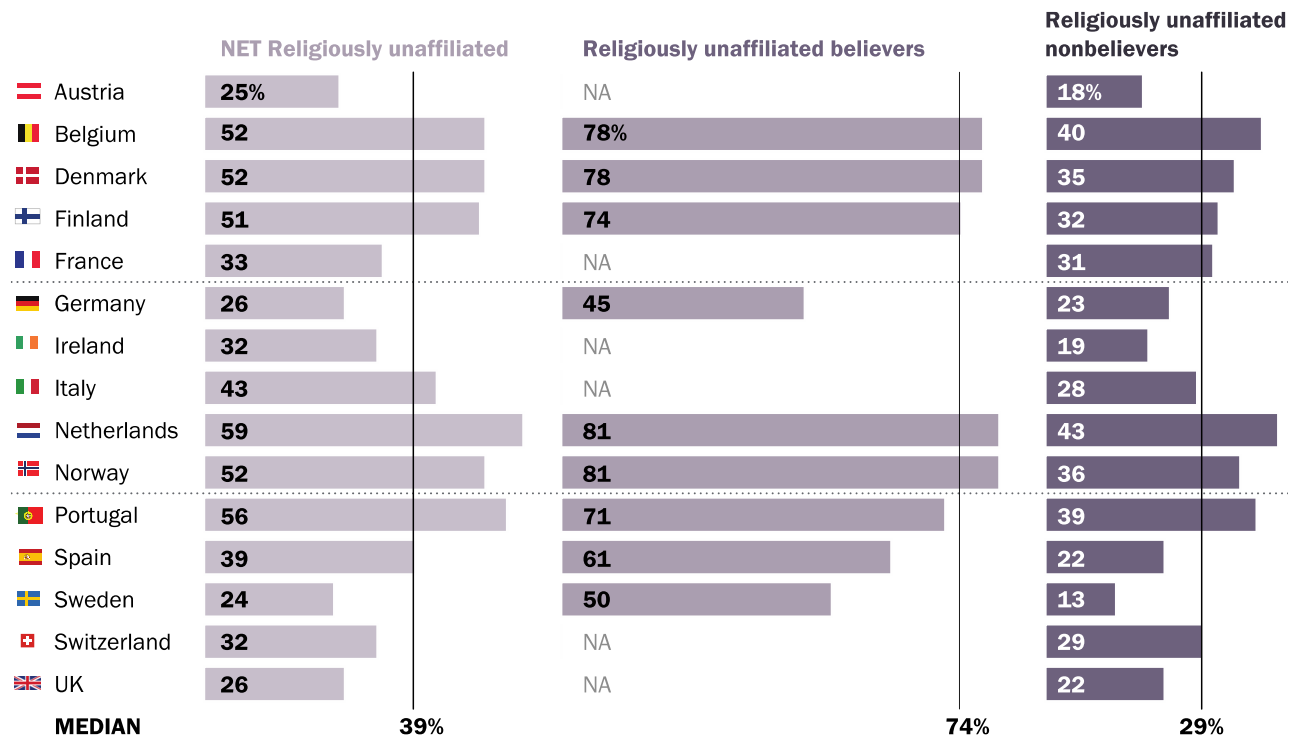
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Still, substantial shares of “nones” in all 15 countries surveyed, ranging from 15% in Switzerland to 47% in Portugal, express belief in God or some other spiritual force in the universe. Even though few – if any – of these religiously unaffiliated believers say they attend church monthly or pray daily, they express attitudes toward spirituality that are different from those of most other “nones.”

For example, religiously unaffiliated believers – the subset of “nones” who say they believe in God or some other higher power or spiritual force – are especially likely to believe they have a soul as well as a physical body, including roughly eight-in-ten in the Netherlands and Norway. Among the larger group of “nones” who do *not* believe in any higher power, belief in a soul is much less common.

A majority of unaffiliated believers agree they have a soul as well as a physical body

% who completely/mainly agree they have a soul as well as a physical body



Note: Religiously unaffiliated believers are defined as “nones” who say they believe in God or some other higher power or spiritual force in the universe. Religiously unaffiliated nonbelievers are defined as “nones” who say they believe there is no higher power or spiritual force in the universe. NA indicates adequate sample size is not available for analysis.

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

“Being Christian in Western Europe”

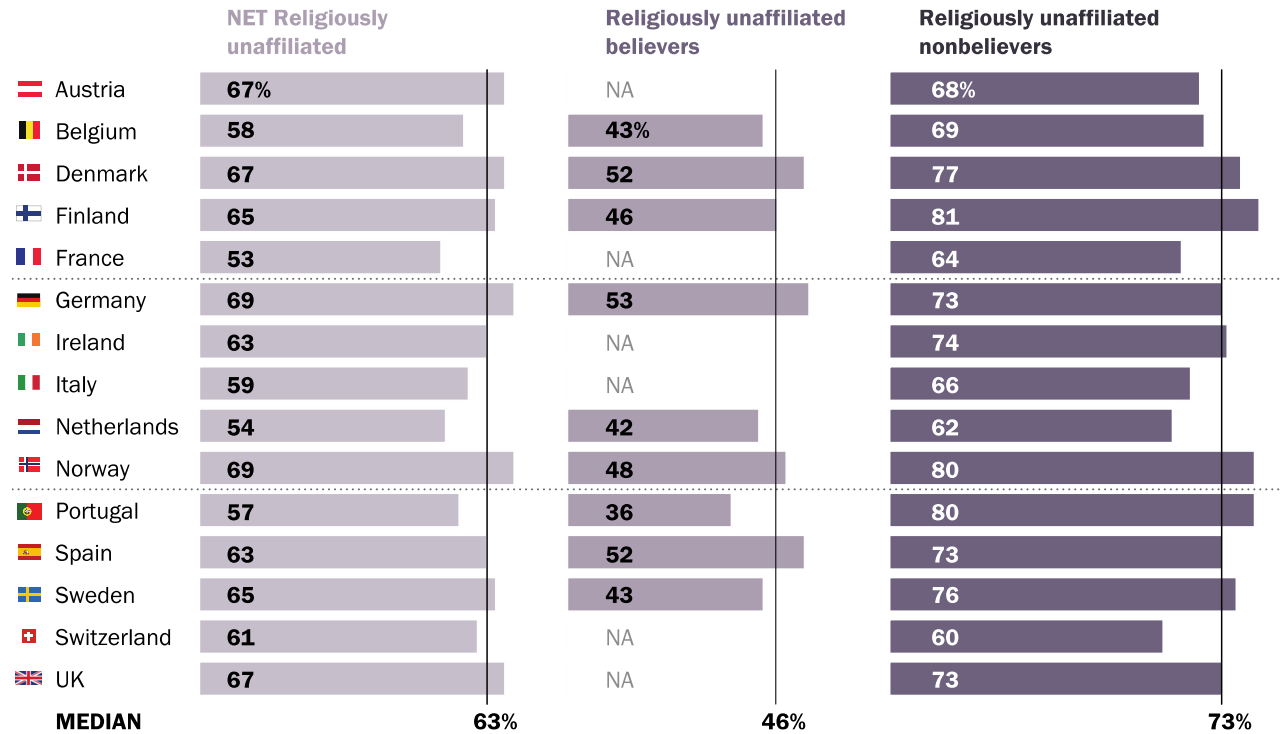
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The survey also posed questions about the concepts of fate and reincarnation, and about astrology, fortune tellers, meditation, yoga (as a spiritual practice, not just as exercise), the “evil eye” and belief in “spiritual energy located in physical things, such as mountains, trees or crystals.” Most Western European “nones” do not hold or engage in these beliefs and practices, which are often associated with Eastern, New Age or folk religions. But religiously unaffiliated respondents who believe in a higher power or spiritual force are more likely than those who do not to hold these beliefs.

While many “nones” in Europe express skeptical or negative views about the value of religion, religiously unaffiliated believers are considerably less likely than nonbelievers to hold anti-religious attitudes. For example, in Belgium, 43% of believing “nones” agree that science makes religion unnecessary, compared with 69% of unaffiliated nonbelievers. And in Germany, 35% of unaffiliated believers say that religion causes more harm than good, compared with 55% of nonbelieving “nones.”

Most unaffiliated adults say science makes religion unnecessary in their life

% who completely/mainly agree with the statement, "Science makes religion unnecessary in my life"



Note: Religiously unaffiliated believers are defined as "nones" who say they believe in God or some other higher power or spiritual force in the universe. Religiously unaffiliated nonbelievers are defined as "nones" who say they believe there is no higher power or spiritual force in the universe. NA indicates adequate sample size is not available for analysis.

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

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Sidebar: Western Europeans are less religious than Americans

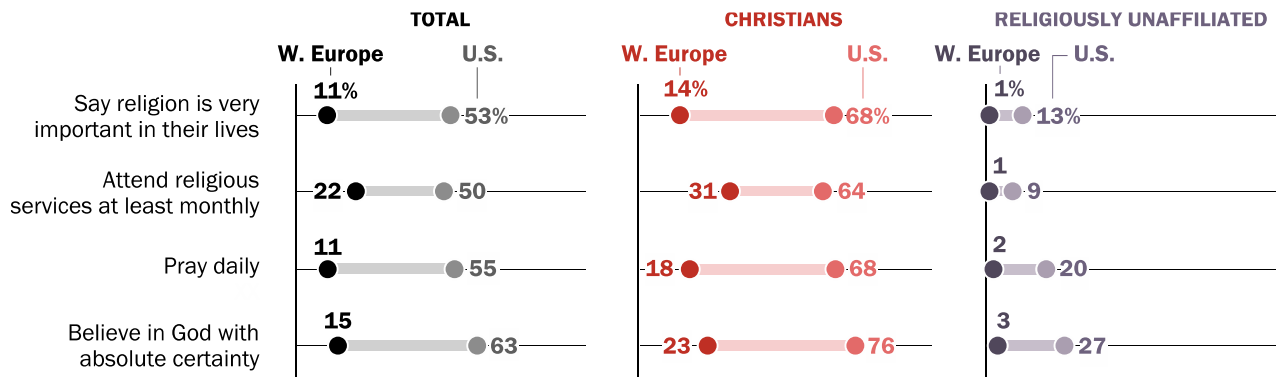
The vast majority of adults in the United States, like the majority of Western Europeans, continue to identify as Christian (71%). But on both sides of the Atlantic, growing numbers of people say they are religiously unaffiliated (i.e., atheist, agnostic or “nothing in particular”). About a quarter of Americans (23%, as of 2014) fit this description, comparable to the shares of “nones” in the UK (23%) and Germany (24%).

Yet Americans, overall, are considerably more religious than Western Europeans. Half of Americans (53%) say religion is “very important” in their lives, compared with a median of just 11% of adults across Western Europe. Among Christians, the gap is even bigger – two-thirds of U.S. Christians (68%) say religion is very important to them, compared with a median of 14% of Christians in the 15 countries surveyed across Western Europe. But even American “nones” are more religious than their European counterparts. While one-in-eight unaffiliated U.S. adults (13%) say religion is very important in their lives, hardly any Western European “nones” (median of 1%) share that sentiment.

Similar patterns are seen on belief in God, attendance at religious services and prayer. In fact, by some of these standard measures of religious commitment, American “nones” are as religious as – or even more religious than – Christians in several European countries, including France, Germany and the UK.

Compared with U.S. adults, relatively few Western European Christians and religiously unaffiliated people are religiously observant

% who ...



Source: Survey conducted April-August 2017 in 15 countries. See Methodology for details. U.S. data from 2014 Religious Landscape Study. “Being Christian in Western Europe”

Additionally, the survey asked respondents whether they consider themselves religious and, separately, whether they consider themselves spiritual. These two questions, combined, result in four categories: those who describe themselves as both religious and spiritual, spiritual but not religious, religious but not spiritual, and neither religious nor spiritual.

The largest group across Western Europe (a median of 53%) is “neither religious nor spiritual.” In almost every country surveyed, roughly four-in-ten or more adults, including majorities in several countries, say they are *neither* religious *nor* spiritual. The biggest exception is Portugal, where more than half of adults (55%) say they are both religious and spiritual.

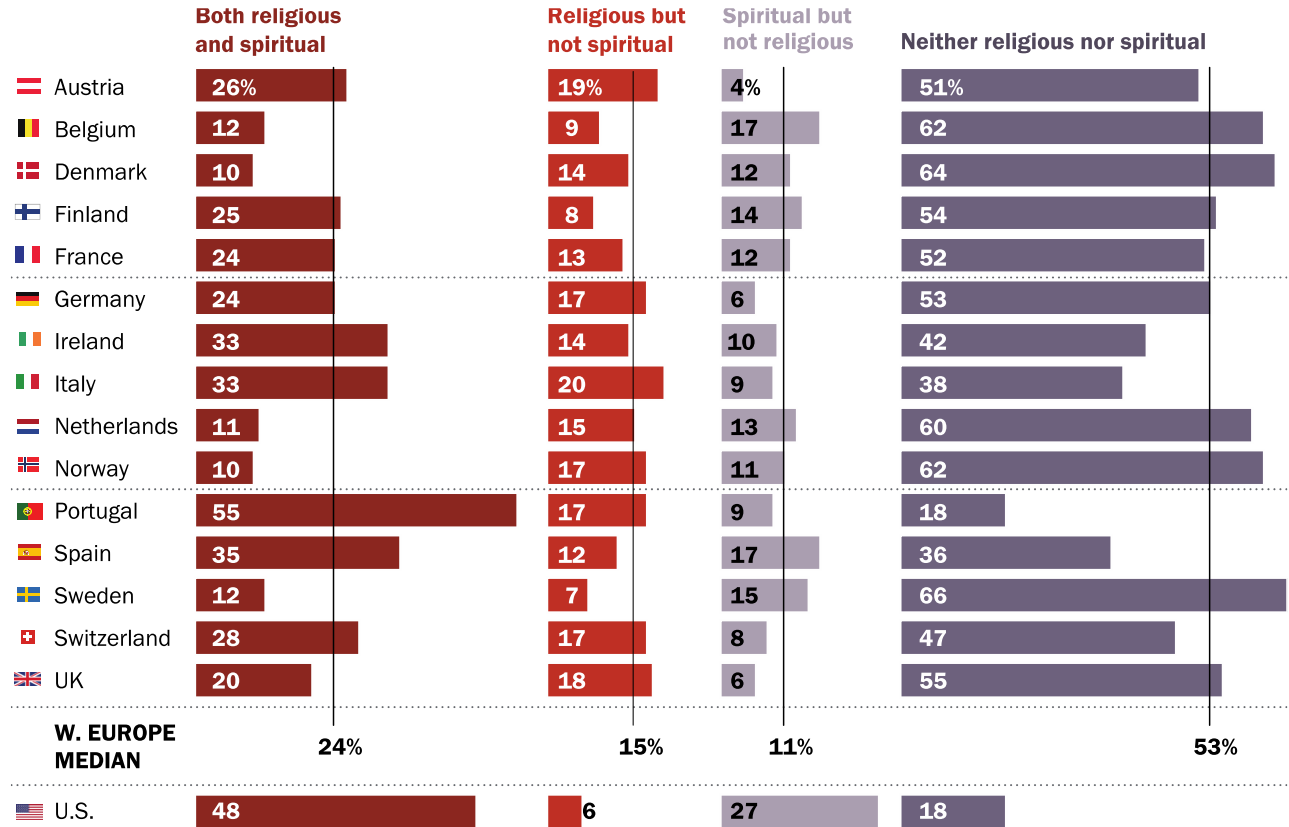
Smaller shares of populations in most countries say they are spiritual but not religious, or religious but not spiritual.

The religious makeup of Western Europe by this measure is significantly different from [that of the United States](#). The largest group in the U.S. is both religious and spiritual (48%), compared with a median of 24% across Western Europe. Americans are also considerably more likely than Western Europeans to say they think of themselves as spiritual but not religious; 27% of Americans say this, compared with a median of 11% of Western Europeans surveyed.

Very few religiously unaffiliated adults – 2% to 4% in almost every Western European country surveyed – say they consider themselves to be religious people. While somewhat larger shares (median of 19%) consider themselves spiritual, this is still much lower than in the United States, where about half of “nones” describe themselves as spiritual (including 45% who say they are spiritual but not religious).

In contrast with U.S., Western Europeans tend to describe themselves as neither spiritual nor religious

% who say they are ...



Note: Totals for each country may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Source: Survey conducted April-August 2017 in 15 countries. See Methodology for details. U.S. data from survey conducted April 25-June 4, 2017. "Being Christian in Western Europe"

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1. Nationalism, immigration and minorities

Europe's religious landscape is changing: The Christian share of the population is declining while the religiously unaffiliated population is increasing. In addition, [Muslim populations in Western European countries continue to grow](#) in both absolute and percentage terms due to immigration, relatively high fertility rates, and a relatively young population. [Jewish populations, meanwhile, appear to be declining](#).

Against this backdrop, the survey sought to gauge public opinion on Muslims and Jews, immigrants and immigration, and nationalism and national identity. Beyond exploring overall public perceptions of these issues, the survey also provides opportunities for statistical analysis to help illuminate some of the social, political and cultural factors associated with views on pluralism and multiculturalism.

Overall, most people across the region express positive and accepting views of religious minorities, saying that they are willing to accept Muslims and Jews in their neighborhoods and in their families. Majorities of the population in each of the 15 countries surveyed do not agree with negative statements about Muslims and Jews, such as, "In their hearts, Muslims want to impose their religious law on everyone else," and "Jews always pursue their own interest and not the interest of the country they live in."

Still, undercurrents of discomfort with multiculturalism are evident in Western European societies. For example, across the region, people express mixed views on whether Islam is compatible with their country's values and culture. Most Europeans support at least some restrictions on religious dress for Muslim women. And public opinion is divided on whether it is important to be born in a given country, and to have ancestry in that country, to truly share the national identity (e.g., to be born in France to be truly French, or to have a Dutch family background to be truly Dutch).

Attitudes on nationalism, immigration and religious minorities are closely connected with one another. For example, those who say Islam is incompatible with their country's values and culture are also more likely to favor restricting immigration. And those who express negative views of Muslims are also more likely to express negative views of Jews. These associations allowed researchers to combine 22 individual questions probing these views into a 10-point scale of [Nationalist, anti-Immigration and anti-Minority views \(NIM\)](#). The higher an individual scores on the scale, the higher their nationalist, anti-immigrant and anti-minority sentiment.

Generally, most Western Europeans tend to score on the lower half of the NIM scale (less than 5 points out of the possible 10). But there are wide variations by country: Italians are especially likely to score above 5, while Swedes score lower, on average, than people in any other country surveyed.

Other than what country people live in, various factors are associated with relatively high NIM scores. Researchers conducted advanced statistical analysis of the scale, considering the effects of age, gender, religion, education and several other factors one by one, holding all others constant. The results show that both church-attending and non-practicing Christians are more likely than religiously unaffiliated adults to score high on the NIM. That is, *Christian identity* – irrespective of level of religious observance – is associated with higher levels of nationalist, anti-immigration and anti-religious minority sentiment.

But religion is not the only factor associated with NIM scores: College-educated people and those who personally know a Muslim score significantly lower on the NIM, relative to those with less education and those who are not personally acquainted with a Muslim. Conversely, those who profess right-wing political ideology score significantly higher than those who lean left.

This chapter walks individually through survey results on more than 20 questions pertaining to the themes of nationalism, immigration and attitudes toward religious minorities, presenting descriptive findings at the national level. Question wording and response options are explained for each question. The chapter then goes on to discuss the results of the NIM scale and the factors associated with scoring high on the NIM.

Nationalism

Western Europeans take pride in both their national identity and European identity

The survey asked people how proud they are of three possible elements of their identity: their national identity, their European identity and their religion. Respondents could select “very proud,” “somewhat proud,” “not very proud” or “not proud at all.”

National pride is widespread in Western Europe, with large majorities in every country saying they are either “very” or “somewhat” proud of their nationality (e.g. proud “to be Austrian,” proud “to be Belgian”). This includes at least nine-in-ten respondents in Finland (94%), Portugal (93%) and Norway (92%) who express national pride in this way. Germans are less likely than people in most other countries to say they are *very* proud to be a national of their country (32%), but most (78%) say they are at least *somewhat* proud to be German.

Western Europeans more likely to say they are ‘very proud’ of national identity than European identity

% who say they are very/somewhat proud to be a national of their country (e.g. proud “to be Austrian”)/to be European

	National pride			European pride		
	Very proud	Somewhat proud	NET National pride	Very proud	Somewhat proud	NET European pride
Austria	43%	43%	85%	28%	41%	69%
Belgium	37	44	81	34	45	79
Denmark	48	40	88	35	47	82
Finland	59	35	94	45	42	87
France	41	44	85	31	42	73
Germany	32	46	78	25	41	66
Ireland	53	32	85	33	39	72
Italy	45	39	84	28	37	64
Netherlands	39	46	85	31	48	79
Norway	61	32	92	45	38	84
Portugal	69	24	93	56	30	86
Spain	54	25	79	48	31	78
Sweden	51	34	85	43	37	80
Switzerland	41	43	84	27	37	64
United Kingdom	38	48	86	20	41	62
MEDIAN	45	40	85	33	41	78

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

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

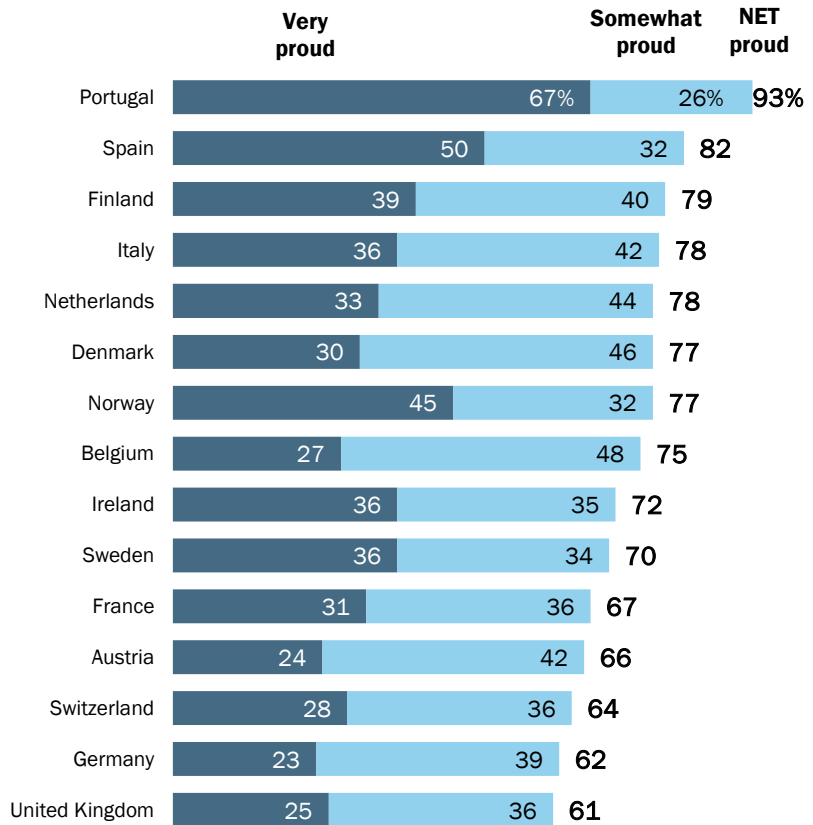
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While most Western Europeans also express pride in a shared regional identity, more respondents express high levels of pride in their nationality than in being “European.”

Majorities of Christians in every country surveyed say they are at least somewhat proud of being Christian. This includes vast majorities of Christians in the Iberian states of Portugal (93%) and Spain (82%), which also have among the highest shares saying they are *very* proud to be Christian (67% and 50%, respectively). By contrast, about a quarter of Christians say they are very proud of their religious affiliation in Belgium (27%), Austria (24%), the UK (25%) and Germany (23%).

Most Christians in Western Europe express pride in being Christian

% of Christians who say they are very/somewhat proud to be Christian



Note: Figures may not add to subtotals indicated 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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In general across the region, Christians are more likely to express high levels of national than religious pride. For example, in Ireland, a slim majority of Christians (56%) say they are very proud to be Irish, compared with 36% who are very proud to be Christian.

The survey also asked respondents who identify as atheist or agnostic whether they are proud of their religious identity; roughly half or more in nearly every country surveyed say they are at least somewhat proud to be atheist or agnostic, including two-thirds or more in Portugal (79%) and Spain (68%). (People who said they have no particular religion were not asked this question.)

Among Christians, pride in nationality more common than pride in religion

% of Christians who say they are very proud to be a national of their country (e.g. "to be Finnish")/ very proud to be a Christian

	Very proud to be a national of their country	Very proud to be Christian	Difference
Finland	63%	39%	+24
Austria	47	24	+23
Denmark	53	30	+23
Sweden	59	36	+23
Norway	67	45	+22
Ireland	56	36	+20
Switzerland	47	28	+19
United Kingdom	42	25	+17
France	46	31	+15
Germany	37	23	+14
Italy	50	36	+14
Belgium	40	27	+13
Netherlands	44	33	+11
Spain	60	50	+10
Portugal	72	67	+5
MEDIAN	50	33	

Note: All differences are statistically significant.

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

"Being Christian in Western Europe"

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What does it take to be one of us?

Most Western Europeans emphasize civic elements of their national identity over nativist elements. Overwhelming majorities in every country surveyed say that speaking the national language and respecting their country's laws are important to truly share the national identity of their country (e.g., it is very important or somewhat important to speak German to be truly German, or to respect the laws of Switzerland to be truly Swiss). By comparison, fewer people take the view that one must have family background in the country, or have been born in the country, to truly share the national identity. Even fewer say one must be Christian to be truly a national of the country (e.g., it is very important or somewhat important to be Christian to be truly French).

Still, roughly half or more in most countries say one must have ancestry in the country, or that one must be born in the country, to truly share the national identity. In Portugal, at least eight-in-ten adults say one must be born in the country (81%) and share its ancestry (80%) to be truly Portuguese.

Most people see respecting the country's institutions and laws and speaking national language as important to national identity

% who say that _____ is very/somewhat important to truly share their national identity (e.g. to be truly "Austrian")

	To respect the country's institutions and laws	To be able to speak national language*	To have family background from that country	To have been born in the country	To be a Christian
Austria	94%	85%	57%	53%	39%
Belgium	95	86	42	49	19
Denmark	98	93	35	36	19
Finland	98	68	51	51	32
France	91	88	53	48	32
Germany	93	86	49	48	34
Ireland	91	82	64	59	48
Italy	91	87	75	68	53
Netherlands	97	96	38	41	22
Norway	98	97	40	41	21
Portugal	96	95	80	81	62
Spain	87	89	59	66	38
Sweden	96	89	21	22	15
Switzerland	93	86	61	58	42
United Kingdom	92	83	58	57	34
MEDIAN	94	87	53	51	34

* In most countries, the dominant language was used (for example, French in France). In three countries, multiple languages were listed (Belgium: Dutch, French and German; Finland: Finnish and Swedish; Switzerland: French, German and Italian).

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

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CORRECTION (Dec. 13, 2023): A previous version of the asterisk note in the chart titled "Most people see respecting the country's institutions and laws and speaking national language as important to national identity" incorrectly described the languages listed in Belgium, Finland and Switzerland. The chart has been replaced. This change does not substantively affect the findings of this report.

Western Europeans divided over whether their culture is superior to others

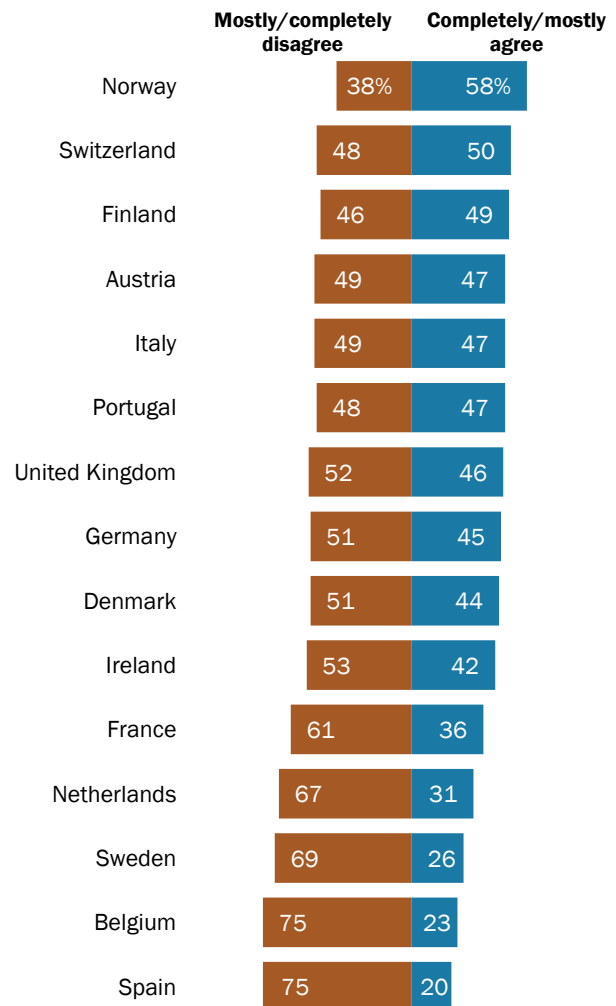
Beyond measuring national pride, the survey also sought to measure nationalist sentiment by asking people whether they completely agree, mostly agree, mostly disagree or completely disagree with the following statement: “Our people are not perfect, but our culture is superior to others.”

Overall, there is no regional consensus on this question. Norway is the only country where a majority of respondents completely or mostly agree that their culture is superior. Conversely, majorities in five nations disagree with this idea, including three-quarters in both Spain and Belgium. Elsewhere, there is a relatively even split between people who agree and disagree with the statement.

Pew Research Center also asked this question in [Central and Eastern Europe](#), where somewhat larger percentages tend to express feelings of cultural superiority, particularly in Greece (89%), Georgia (85%) and Armenia (84%).

In many countries, people are split on whether their culture is superior to others

% who agree/disagree with the statement, “Our people are not perfect, but our culture is superior to others”



Note: Don't know/refused responses not shown.

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

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Views on immigration

Many Europeans favor the current level of immigration

Western Europeans are much more likely to say that the number of immigrants coming to their country should be *reduced* than to say immigration levels should be *increased* (median of 38% vs. 11%).

At the same time, there is a lot of public support for maintaining current levels of immigration. This is the view of a clear majority of adults surveyed in Switzerland (58%) and the UK (57%), as well as roughly half in France (53%), Austria (52%), Germany (51%), Finland (50%) and Ireland (47%).⁸

Indeed, in most of the 15 countries surveyed, if one adds the people who favor an increase in immigration to those who favor maintaining the current level, then together they outnumber the share of the public that wants to reduce immigration.

A notable exception is Italy, which [received an estimated 720,000 migrants](#) between mid-2010 and mid-2016 (the fourth highest total in the region, surpassed only by the UK, Germany and France). More Italians say immigration should be reduced (52%) than say it should be maintained at its current level (36%) or increased (5%). In Belgium, Denmark and Spain, there also is somewhat more public support for reducing immigration than for maintaining current levels. And attitudes on the issue are closely divided in Sweden and the Netherlands.

In most countries, pluralities favor keeping immigration at its current level

% who say the number of immigrants to their country nowadays should ...

	Be increased	Remain the same as it is	Be reduced
Austria	6%	52%	39%
Belgium	9	36	48
Denmark	11	39	45
Finland	12	50	35
France	10	53	30
Germany	9	51	38
Ireland	15	47	31
Italy	5	36	52
Netherlands	13	40	42
Norway	21	43	30
Portugal	17	42	29
Spain	13	32	39
Sweden	16	40	39
Switzerland	8	58	31
UK	7	57	32
MEDIAN	11	43	38

Note: Don't know/refused responses not shown.

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

"Being Christian in Western Europe"

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⁸ In several of these countries, a similar question in the 2013 International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) survey found significantly higher percentages of the public in favor of reducing immigration. The difference may be accounted for, at least in part, by the context of the question in the two surveys. The current survey asked respondents about immigration immediately after posing a series of questions about nationalism and views of religious minorities, while the ISSP survey asked a series of agree/disagree questions about the economic and social impact of immigrants before asking whether immigration should be reduced. For example, the ISSP asked respondents whether they agree with the statements, "Immigrants take jobs away from people who were born in [COUNTRY]," and "Immigrants increase crime rates."

On balance, immigrants from Eastern Europe viewed more positively than those from Middle East or Africa

The survey gauged views of immigrants from three different parts of the world by asking respondents whether they associate two positive attributes with each group: working hard and being honest. Across the region, people are more likely to hold these positive views of immigrants from Eastern European countries (like Poland) than those from African countries (like Nigeria) or Middle Eastern countries (like Syria).

Indeed, majorities in nearly every country say Eastern European immigrants in general are hardworking. This includes at least three-quarters in Norway (82%), the Netherlands (78%) and the United Kingdom (77%). By contrast, in fewer than half

the countries surveyed do majorities say Middle Eastern or African immigrants are hardworking.

Substantial shares across the region decline to answer these questions. This is especially true in Portugal and Spain, where a quarter of respondents or more say they “don’t know” or decline to answer the questions about immigrants’ work ethic. In most countries, nonresponse is especially common on questions about Middle Eastern and African immigrants.

Western Europeans more likely to say that immigrants from Eastern Europe are hardworking

% who say that immigrants from each region are ...

	Hardworking			NOT hardworking		
	Eastern Europe	Middle East	Africa	Eastern Europe	Middle East	Africa
Austria	70%	51%	54%	21%	37%	34%
Belgium	74	38	40	13	30	33
Denmark	70	35	27	18	41	44
Finland	65	41	40	8	25	26
France	73	61	65	15	23	21
Germany	74	58	58	17	31	30
Ireland	75	53	58	16	25	27
Italy	55	45	47	30	39	37
Netherlands	78	41	27	9	23	36
Norway	82	39	31	7	23	32
Portugal	57	34	47	10	16	12
Spain	52	45	61	17	15	13
Sweden	74	57	44	6	14	17
Switzerland	74	65	65	20	27	27
United Kingdom	77	61	65	18	30	26
MEDIAN	74	45	47	16	25	27

Note: The survey asked respondents about the characteristics of immigrants from “Eastern Europe, such as those from Poland,” “the Middle East, such as those from Syria” and “Africa, such as those from Nigeria.”

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

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Still, in several countries, at least three-in-ten say immigrants from outside Europe are *not* hardworking. About four-in-ten Danish adults take this position about immigrants from the Middle East (41%) and Africa (44%).

Similarly, in most countries surveyed, immigrants from Eastern Europe are more likely than Middle Eastern or African immigrants to be viewed as honest. In Italy, for instance, more than half of the public (55%) says Eastern European immigrants are honest, compared with 47% who say the same about immigrants from both the Middle East and Africa. Fully a third of Italians express the opinion that Middle Eastern and African immigrants are *not* honest.

Spain is an exception to this pattern; Spanish respondents are more likely to say African immigrants are honest or hardworking compared with those from Eastern Europe or the Middle East.

Majorities in France, Germany, Switzerland and the UK view immigrants from various regions as honest

% who say that immigrants from each region are ...

	Honest			NOT honest		
	Eastern Europe	Middle East	Africa	Eastern Europe	Middle East	Africa
Austria	66%	54%	55%	21%	32%	31%
Belgium	52	42	49	24	26	22
Denmark	46	43	40	36	33	34
Finland	46	39	41	23	27	25
France	66	61	64	18	23	19
Germany	69	58	59	21	29	29
Ireland	66	50	55	17	25	25
Italy	55	47	47	26	33	33
Netherlands	50	47	38	26	21	28
Norway	53	44	38	22	19	25
Portugal	42	30	40	14	15	11
Spain	44	40	54	17	14	9
Sweden	58	53	49	14	15	15
Switzerland	74	64	64	18	27	27
United Kingdom	73	58	63	19	32	25
MEDIAN	55	47	49	21	26	25

Note: The survey asked respondents about the characteristics of immigrants from "Eastern Europe, such as those from Poland," "the Middle East, such as those from Syria" and "Africa, such as those from Nigeria."

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

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Again, many respondents decline to answer these questions. In fact, a majority of Portuguese adults (56%) did not offer an answer about whether Middle Eastern immigrants are honest.

Attitudes toward religious minorities

Western Europeans say they know little about Islam, Judaism

Vast majorities in every country surveyed say they know either “some” or a “great deal” about the Christian religion and its practices, including majorities of adults in Norway (62%) and Ireland (56%) who say they know a “great deal” about Christianity.

But in most countries, people tend to say they know “not too much” or “nothing at all” about the Muslim religion and its practices (median of 63%), or the Jewish religion and its practices (median of 67%).

Majorities say they know not too much, or nothing at all about Islam, Judaism

% who say they know _____ about ...

	Christianity		Islam		Judaism	
	A great deal/some	Not much/nothing at all	A great deal/some	Not much/nothing at all	A great deal/some	Not much/nothing at all
Austria	83%	17%	32%	68%	27%	72%
Belgium	86	14	50	50	35	64
Denmark	88	12	46	54	33	67
Finland	92	8	32	68	30	69
France	77	23	42	57	33	66
Germany	81	19	38	62	33	67
Ireland	81	18	32	67	28	70
Italy	84	16	25	74	24	76
Netherlands	72	28	29	71	23	77
Norway	94	6	60	39	51	48
Portugal	85	15	24	74	17	82
Spain	82	18	28	72	17	83
Sweden	86	14	50	49	40	60
Switzerland	79	21	37	62	34	65
United Kingdom	82	18	37	63	32	67
MEDIAN	83	17	37	63	32	67

Note: Don't know/refused responses not shown.

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

“Being Christian in Western Europe”

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Western Europeans less likely to say they know Jews than Muslims

Although relatively few respondents say they know much about the Islamic religion, far more say they personally know someone who is Muslim. About half or more in every country surveyed say they know a Muslim, with the exceptions of Finland and Portugal.

Throughout the region, fewer Western Europeans say they personally know someone who is Jewish. This finding aligns with the fact that [Muslim populations in Europe continue to rapidly rise](#) while [Jewish populations in the region have long been falling](#).

The survey also asked whether respondents personally know an atheist; most people in nearly every country surveyed report that they do.

Majorities in nearly every country say they personally know atheists and Muslims, but fewer know Jews

% who say that they personally know someone who is ...

	Atheist	Muslim	Jewish
Austria	71%	62%	42%
Belgium	63	73	30
Denmark	57	68	33
Finland	63	35	19
France	81	79	55
Germany	74	67	39
Ireland	63	59	44
Italy	66	52	41
Netherlands	58	72	40
Norway	70	69	31
Portugal	52	31	18
Spain	73	60	18
Sweden	73	71	39
Switzerland	77	66	50
United Kingdom	76	71	55
MEDIAN	70	67	39

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

“Being Christian in Western Europe”

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Roughly half of adults in Norway say they have a religiously diverse friendship circle

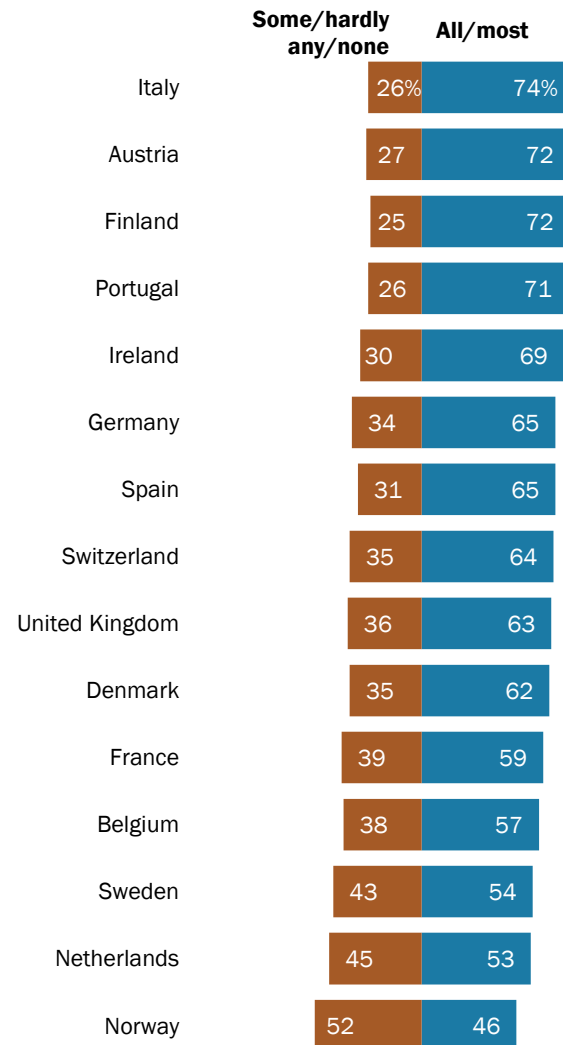
While many Western Europeans say they know someone who has a different religion, they generally report that their close friendship circles consist largely of people who have the same religious identity that they do.

Majorities in all but three countries say all or most of their close friends share their religion (or, like them, identify as religiously unaffiliated). In Italy, roughly three-in-four people (74%) say their friends generally share their religion. And in Austria, Finland, Portugal and Ireland, where 75% or more of adults identify as Christian, at least two-thirds say all or most of their close friends share their religious identity.

People report more religiously diverse friendship circles in Norway, where about half of respondents (52%) say “some,” “hardly any” or “none” of their close friends share their religious identity.

Majorities say most of their close friends share their religious identity

% who say _____ of their close friends share the same religion as the respondent



Note: Those who said their religion was “something else” were asked how many of their close friends “have the same religion as you.” Those who said their religion was “nothing in particular” were asked how many of their close friends “belong to no particular religion.” “None of them,” was a volunteered response option. Don’t know/refused responses not shown. Source: Survey conducted April-August 2017 in 15 countries. See Methodology for details. “Being Christian in Western Europe”

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Vast majorities would accept Muslims as neighbors; fewer as family members

To measure openness toward members of minority religious groups, the survey asked respondents a series of hypothetical questions: Would they be willing to accept Jews and Muslims as neighbors, or as members of their family?

Majorities in every country surveyed say they would be willing to accept Jews as relatives, while *overwhelming* majorities say that they would be OK with having Jewish neighbors. Majorities in most countries also say they would be willing to accept Muslims as neighbors or family members.

But, on balance, Europeans appear to be somewhat less accepting of Muslims than of Jews. For example, about seven-in-ten British adults (69%) say they would be willing to accept Jews as relatives, while fewer (53%) say this about Muslims. And nearly nine-in-ten respondents in the UK (88%) would accept Jews as neighbors, 10 percentage points higher than the share who say they would accept Muslims as neighbors (78%).

Higher acceptance of Jews than Muslims as members of family

Would you be willing to accept Jews/Muslims as members of your family?

	Jews			Muslims		
	Yes	No	Other/ DK/ref.	Yes	No	Other/ DK/ref.
Austria	65%	21%	14%	54%	34%	12%
Belgium	89	8	4	77	16	6
Denmark	92	6	2	81	16	3
Finland	82	13	5	66	28	6
France	76	17	7	66	24	10
Germany	69	19	12	55	33	12
Ireland	70	18	12	60	30	10
Italy	57	25	18	43	43	14
Netherlands	96	3	1	88	9	3
Norway	95	3	2	82	13	5
Portugal	73	18	9	70	20	10
Spain	79	13	8	74	18	8
Sweden	92	5	3	80	14	6
Switzerland	72	17	11	57	31	12
United Kingdom	69	23	7	53	36	11
MEDIAN	76	17	7	66	24	10

Note: Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding. Further analysis of the data shows that those who do not give a clear response are more similar in their characteristics to those who say “no” than those who say “yes.”

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

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In several countries, significant shares do *not* express willingness to accept Jews and Muslims in their neighborhoods or families. That is, they either say they would be unwilling to accept these groups in their communities or families, or they decline to answer the question. For example, just under half (46%) of Austrians say they would be unwilling (34%) or do not know whether they would be willing (12%) to accept Muslims as members of their family. Roughly a third of Austrians (35%) say they would be unwilling (21%) or do not know whether they would be willing (14%) to accept Jews in their family.

Most people say they would be willing to accept Jews, Muslims as neighbors

Would you be willing to accept Jews/Muslims as neighbors?

	Jews			Muslims		
	Yes	No	Other/ DK/ref.	Yes	No	Other/ DK/ref.
Austria	85%	8%	7%	77%	13%	10%
Belgium	94	4	2	91	7	3
Denmark	97	2	1	91	8	1
Finland	93	5	2	83	14	3
France	90	7	3	85	11	4
Germany	86	8	6	77	13	10
Ireland	82	10	8	75	14	11
Italy	77	12	11	65	21	14
Netherlands	99	1	0	96	3	1
Norway	98	1	0	92	6	2
Portugal	85	10	5	83	11	6
Spain	87	8	4	86	11	3
Sweden	96	2	1	90	8	2
Switzerland	86	8	6	76	13	10
United Kingdom	88	9	3	78	16	5
MEDIAN	88	8	3	83	11	4

Note: Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding. Further analysis of the data shows that those who do not give a clear response are more similar in their characteristics to those who say “no” than those who say “yes.”

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

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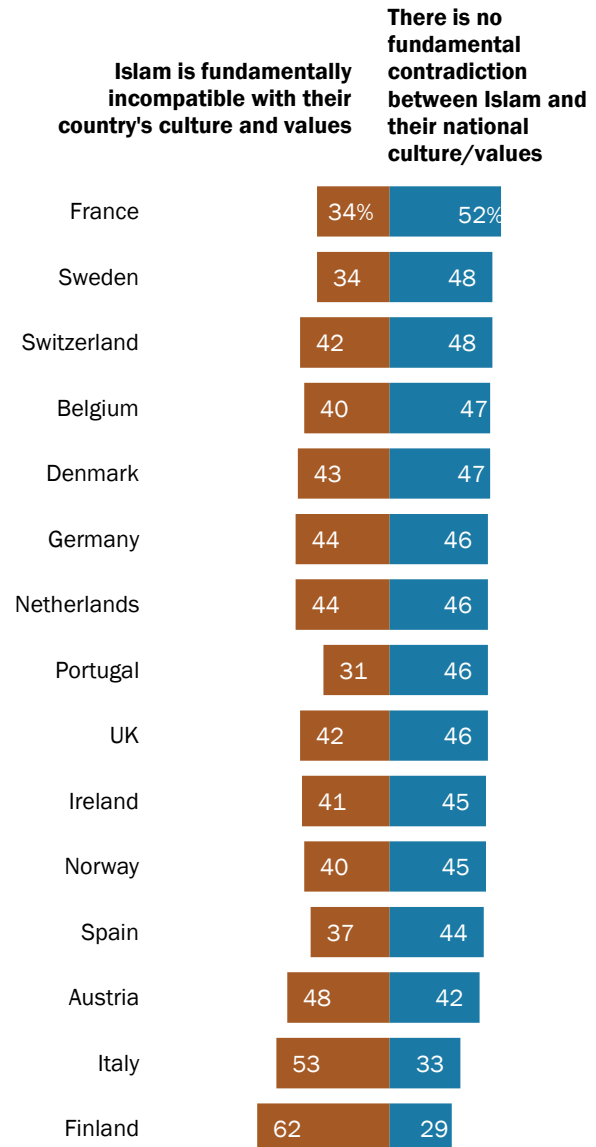
Western Europeans divided over whether Islam is compatible with national values

While most Western Europeans express willingness to accept Muslims as neighbors or family members, they are more divided on whether Islam fits with their national values and culture.

The survey asked respondents to choose which of two statements comes closer to their own views: “Islam is fundamentally incompatible with [their country’s] culture and values,” or “There is no fundamental contradiction between Islam and [their country’s] culture and values.” Across the region, there is no clear consensus on this question. In Finland and Italy, the prevailing view is that there is a fundamental contradiction between Islam and the national culture and values. Elsewhere, opinions are more evenly split or lean toward the position that Islam is compatible with national values.

Across Western Europe, no consensus on whether Islam is compatible with national culture and values

% who say ...



Note: Don't know/refused responses are not shown.

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

“Being Christian in Western Europe”

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Western Europeans support restrictions on Muslim women's face coverings

A hotly debated question in some parts of Europe is whether Muslim women should be prohibited from wearing various kinds of religious clothing. Respondents were asked which of three options they favor: "Muslim women who live in [country] should be allowed to wear any religious clothing of their choosing," "Muslim women who live in [country] should be allowed to wear religious clothing, as long as it does not cover their face," or "Muslim women who live in [country] should not be allowed to wear any religious clothing."

Most Western Europeans favor restricting the religious clothing worn by Muslim women in their country, especially clothing that covers a woman's face. Half or more of adults in eight of the 15 countries surveyed favor restricting face coverings, such as niqabs and burqas. And an additional one-in-five or more in most countries favor prohibiting *all* religious clothing for Muslim women. Combined, majorities in 12 out of 15 countries favor at least some restrictions on Muslim religious dress.

In France, where debates on religious attire in beach towns have been highly publicized and politically charged, 22% of respondents favor restrictions on *all* religious clothing for Muslim women, while half say that just face coverings should be restricted. On the other hand, roughly half of the public in Portugal (52%) and Sweden (49%) say Muslim women should be allowed to wear whatever religious clothing they want.

Most favor at least some restrictions on the religious clothing of Muslim women

% who say Muslim women who live in their country ...

	Should be allowed to wear any religious clothing of their choosing	At least some restrictions	
		Should be allowed to wear religious clothing, as long as it does not cover their face	Should not be allowed to wear any religious clothing
Austria	23%	52%	24%
Belgium	19	51	28
Denmark	38	39	22
Finland	45	39	14
France	25	50	22
Germany	25	50	24
Ireland	32	43	22
Italy	23	46	30
Netherlands	19	65	14
Norway	26	53	19
Portugal	52	32	12
Spain	30	38	24
Sweden	49	32	16
Switzerland	20	56	23
United Kingdom	27	52	19
MEDIAN	26	50	22

Note: Don't know/refused responses not shown.

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

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Few say large shares of Muslims in their country support violent extremist groups

In several of the countries surveyed, including [the UK](#), [France](#) and [Belgium](#), extremists have carried out attacks in the name of Islam in recent years. However, relatively few Western Europeans think there is widespread support among Muslims in their country for violent extremist groups.

The survey asked respondents to estimate how many Muslims in their country support violent extremist groups: “most,” “many,” “just some” or “very few.” The most common answer is that “very few” or no Muslims support violent extremist groups: A median of 49% of adults across the region choose this option (or volunteer that no Muslims support extremism), including 57% in the UK and 56% in Switzerland. Belgian (32%) and Dutch (33%) respondents are less likely to take this position; most say at least “some” Muslims in their country support violent extremist groups (61% and 63%, respectively).

In some countries, significant shares decline to answer the question. In Portugal, 32% of respondents say that they do not know or refuse to answer the question, as do 18% of respondents in Spain.

Most Belgian and Dutch respondents see at least some support for extremism among Muslims within their borders

% who say ___ Muslims in their country support violent extremist groups

	All/most/ many	Just some	Very few/none
Belgium	22%	39%	32%
Spain	19	30	33
Netherlands	18	45	33
Denmark	17	32	46
Finland	17	34	42
Italy	16	34	42
France	13	27	55
Norway	13	32	49
Germany	12	32	52
United Kingdom	12	28	57
Sweden	11	28	54
Austria	10	32	53
Portugal	9	27	32
Switzerland	9	31	56
Ireland	8	26	52
MEDIAN	13	32	49

Note: “All” and “none” are volunteered responses. Don’t know/refused responses not shown.

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

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At least one-in-five people in most countries say the teachings of some religions promote violence

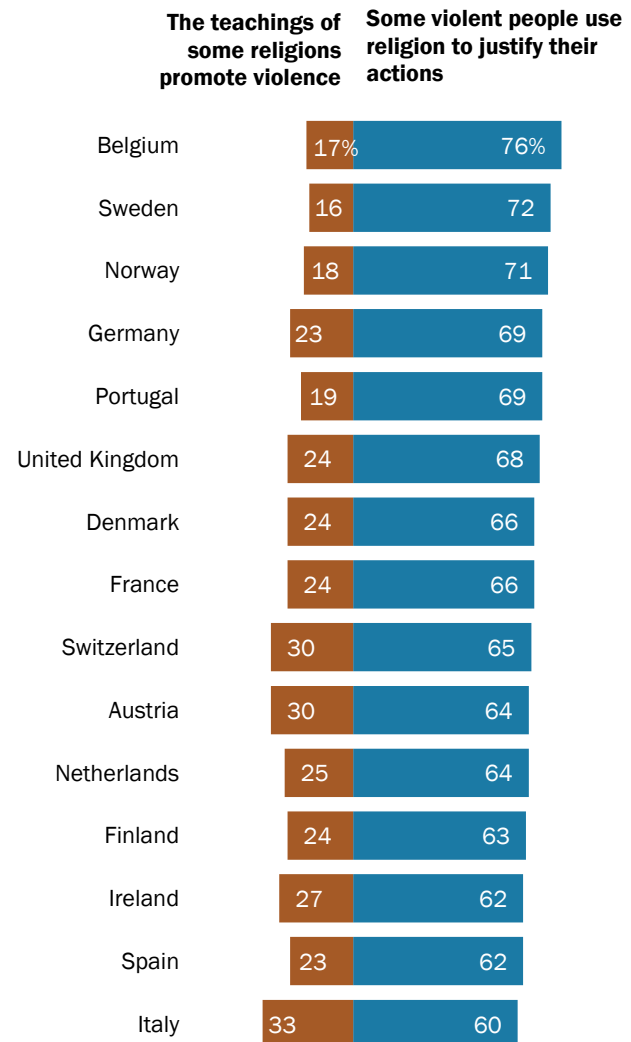
The survey was conducted from April to August, 2017, a few months after the [Berlin Christmas Market terror attack](#) on Dec. 20, 2016. Interviews were already underway in the UK when the [Manchester concert terror attack](#) took place in May 2017.

In light of these and other events, the survey asked respondents to choose which of two statements they consider to be the bigger problem with regard to violence committed in the name of religion: “The teachings of some religions promote violence,” or “Some violent people use religion to justify their actions.” Majorities in every country say the bigger problem is that some violent people use religion to justify their actions.

At the same time, roughly one-in-five or more respondents in most countries say the bigger problem is that the teachings of some religions promote violence. A third of respondents in Italy and three-in-ten in Austria and Switzerland take this position.

Majorities say some violent people use religion to justify their actions

% who say the bigger problem about violence committed in the name of religion is ...



Note: Other/neither/depends/don't know/refused responses not shown.

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

“Being Christian in Western Europe”

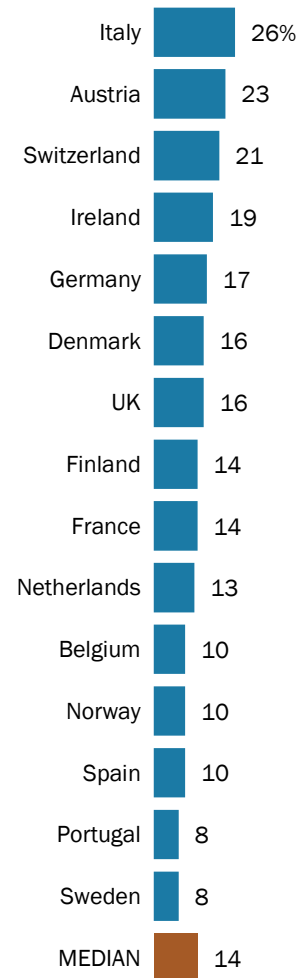
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Those who said that the teachings of some religions promote violence were asked an open-ended follow-up question: “Which religion or religions in particular have teachings that promote violence?” The most common answer is Islam. Among all respondents, roughly one-in-five or more say this in Italy (26%), Austria (23%), Switzerland (21%) and Ireland (19%). Far fewer Western Europeans mention Christianity or other religions, or say that the teachings of all religions promote violence.

In France, which experienced several terror attacks committed in the name of Islam in the year leading up to the survey, 14% say Islamic teachings promote violence, as do 16% in the UK, where in light of the concert bombing in Manchester, terror threat levels were raised to “critical” while the survey was in the field.

One-in-ten or more in most countries say Islamic teachings promote violence

% who say “the teachings of some religions promote violence,” and name Islam in particular



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

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Most disagree with negative statements about Muslims

To further examine Western Europeans' attitudes toward Islam and Muslims, the survey asked the extent to which people agree or disagree with the following statement: "In their hearts, Muslims want to impose their religious law on everyone else" in the country. Majorities in almost every Western European country surveyed completely or mostly disagree with this statement.

Still, a median of 30% across the countries surveyed say they either completely or mostly agree with it, including 41% in Belgium and 40% in Spain. One-in-five Spaniards and Danes *completely* agree that Muslims want to impose religious law on everyone else in their countries.

At least one-in-five in all countries say Muslims want to impose religious law

% who agree/disagree with the statement, "In their hearts, Muslims want to impose their religious law on everyone else" in the respondent's country

	Completely agree	Mostly agree	NET Agree	Mostly disagree	Completely disagree	NET Disagree
Belgium	17%	24%	41%	27%	29%	56%
Spain	20	20	40	20	29	49
Denmark	20	17	37	23	35	58
Italy	12	22	35	23	36	60
Norway	18	18	35	23	36	58
Netherlands	15	18	34	27	35	62
Finland	13	18	31	25	36	61
Austria	9	21	30	28	39	66
Germany	9	18	27	26	44	70
Ireland	8	19	27	25	43	67
Switzerland	7	18	25	26	47	73
United Kingdom	10	13	24	27	47	75
France	8	15	23	23	49	73
Portugal	12	10	23	16	48	65
Sweden	11	12	23	12	57	69
MEDIAN	12	18	30	25	39	65

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

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

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The survey also asked non-Muslim respondents the extent to which they agree or disagree with the following statement: “Due to the number of Muslims here, I feel like a stranger in my own country.” In every country surveyed, large majorities disagree with this statement, including 80% or more in Norway, Sweden and Finland.

In most countries, about one-in-five or more adults agree with the statement, although no more than one-in-ten *completely* agree. The only exception is Belgium, where 15% completely agree and an additional 22% mostly agree. In Italy, 32% of respondents say they feel like a stranger in their country due to the number of Muslims, and, in Germany, which has received a large number of [refugees from predominantly Muslim countries](#) in recent years, 25% express this view.

More than a third of Belgians feel alienated due to number of Muslims in Belgium

% of non-Muslim adults who agree/disagree with the statement, “Due to the number of Muslims here, I feel like a stranger in my own country”

	Completely agree	Mostly agree	NET Agree	Mostly disagree	Completely disagree	NET Disagree
Belgium	15%	22%	37%	26%	36%	62%
Italy	10	22	32	24	41	65
Germany	7	19	25	28	45	73
Austria	6	19	25	30	44	74
Netherlands	10	13	23	21	55	76
Spain	10	13	24	25	46	70
Switzerland	7	16	23	26	50	76
United Kingdom	8	14	23	26	50	76
Denmark	9	12	21	18	60	78
Ireland	5	16	21	26	49	75
France	6	13	20	23	53	77
Norway	8	10	18	18	63	80
Sweden	5	9	14	11	73	83
Portugal	6	7	14	13	66	79
Finland	3	5	8	15	74	89
MEDIAN	7	13	23	24	50	76

Note: Don't know/refused responses not shown. Figures may not add to subtotals indicated 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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Negative stereotypes about Jews widely rejected

To gauge levels of anti-Jewish sentiment in public opinion in Western Europe, the survey asked respondents whether they completely agree, mostly agree, mostly disagree or completely disagree with two strongly worded negative statements: “Jews always pursue their own interest and not the interest of the country they live in,” and “Jews always overstate how much they have suffered.”

Majorities across the region disagree with both of these statements, including about three-quarters or more in France, Germany, the Netherlands and the UK. Still, about 30% or more in Belgium, Italy, Portugal and Spain completely or mostly agree with each of these statements.

Many respondents decline to answer these questions. In approximately half the countries surveyed, at least one-in-ten people either refuse to say whether they agree or disagree with the statements or say they do not know; these percentages are highest in Spain and Portugal.

Measuring Islamophobia and anti-Semitism

The survey included a few questions in which respondents were asked whether they completely agree, mostly agree, mostly disagree or completely disagree with strongly worded negative statements about Muslims and Jews. These should be interpreted with caution: They were not designed to measure Islamophobia or anti-Semitism in a robust or comprehensive way, but rather to capture some *expressed* sentiments about these minority groups. Some respondents may harbor negative feelings about Muslims and Jews but not express them to a survey interviewer; others may express hostile feelings in a survey but not have the opportunity or inclination to act in a hostile way. (The survey did not attempt to measure hostile actions or behaviors against religious and ethnic minorities.) Also, the questions about Muslims and Jews were not constructed to parallel each other, so comparisons between the levels of expressed negative sentiment toward the two groups should be made very cautiously, if at all.

Substantial minorities in some countries hold negative stereotypes about Jews

Statement 1: "Jews always pursue their own interests and not the interest of the country they live in"

% who ...	Completely agree	Mostly agree	NET Agree	Mostly disagree	Completely disagree	NET Disagree
Portugal	21%	15%	36%	14%	22%	36%
Spain	15	17	32	15	18	34
Italy	9	22	31	25	34	59
Belgium	11	17	28	28	27	55
Norway	10	15	25	20	35	55
Switzerland	6	18	24	23	50	72
Austria	5	17	22	26	46	72
Finland	7	14	21	26	34	60
Ireland	6	15	21	27	41	67
France	6	13	19	22	51	73
Germany	5	14	19	27	49	76
Denmark	7	11	18	22	42	64
United Kingdom	5	12	16	28	52	80
Netherlands	6	8	14	21	52	73
Sweden	4	9	13	8	59	66
MEDIAN	6	15	21	23	42	66

Statement 2: "Jews always overstate how much they have suffered"

% who ...	Completely agree	Mostly agree	NET Agree	Mostly disagree	Completely disagree	NET Disagree
Italy	12%	25%	36%	22%	33%	55%
Portugal	18	15	33	17	26	43
Spain	13	17	30	20	22	42
Belgium	10	18	28	28	31	59
Austria	6	15	22	28	45	73
Ireland	7	15	22	25	42	67
Norway	8	13	21	21	47	68
Switzerland	5	16	21	24	51	75
Finland	5	14	19	27	39	66
Germany	6	12	18	26	51	77
Denmark	7	11	17	24	46	70
France	5	13	17	22	53	76
United Kingdom	4	12	16	26	55	81
Netherlands	5	10	15	22	54	77
Sweden	4	7	11	9	66	75
MEDIAN	6	14	21	24	46	70

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

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

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Scale of Nationalist, anti-Immigrant, anti-religious Minority sentiment

Overall, attitudes on nationalism, immigration and religious minorities are closely associated with one another. For example, people who express negative views of Muslims also generally favor reducing immigration. And people who voice negative views of Muslims are also more likely to voice negative views of Jews.⁹

These correlations made it possible for researchers to combine 22 individual questions on these topics into a scale. The higher the score on the scale – on which scores from zero to 10 are possible – the more likely a respondent is to express Nationalist, anti-Immigrant and anti-religious Minority views (NIM). Because the number of questions about each topic varies, each question was weighted so the three topics covered have equal impacts on the scale.¹⁰

The NIM scale illuminates country-level variations. Swedes are the least likely to express nationalist, anti-immigrant and anti-minority views (8% score higher than 5). Italians, meanwhile, score relatively high on the scale:

Nearly four-in-ten (38%) score above 5, a larger share than in any other country surveyed. Median scores in the 13 other countries fall in between Sweden’s median (1.2) and Italy’s (4.1).

One-in-four Danish, German, Irish and Swiss adults score higher than 5 on a 10-point scale of nationalism, anti-immigrant and anti-minority sentiment

% who score ...

	Score between 5.01 and 10	Median score (0-10)
Austria	29%	3.3
Belgium	20	2.7
Denmark	25	2.7
Finland	23	3.1
France	19	2.5
Germany	25	2.9
Ireland	25	3.1
Italy	38	4.1
Netherlands	16	2.3
Norway	19	2.5
Portugal	18	3.5
Spain	17	2.9
Sweden	8	1.2
Switzerland	25	3.3
United Kingdom	22	3.0
MEDIAN	22	

Note: The NIM score combines answers to 22 individual questions measuring nationalist sentiment, anti-immigration attitudes and anti-Muslim and anti-Jewish sentiment. See page 76 for full list of items included in the scale. See Appendix A for more details on the scale. Source: Survey conducted April-August 2017 in 15 countries. See Methodology for details.

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⁹ In the U.S. and UK, David Voas and Rodney Ling also find that attitudes toward minority groups such as Muslims, Jews and Buddhists tend to be highly correlated with each other, even though a higher share of the population harbors negative sentiment toward Muslims than toward other groups. See Voas, David, and Rodney Ling. 2010. “Religion in Britain and the United States.” In Park, Alison, John Curtice, Katarina Thomson, Miranda Phillips, Elizabeth Clery and Sarah Butt, eds. “British Social Attitudes: The 26th Report.”

¹⁰ In total, there are 22 items in the scale – three on nationalism, seven on immigration and 12 on religious minorities. Since the three topics contribute varying numbers of questions, the total score was scaled to 10 such that questions on all three topics contribute equally to the scale. The three questions about nationalism are each worth 1.11 points on the 10-point scale; questions about immigration are each worth roughly 0.48 points; and questions about Muslims and Jews are each worth about 0.28 points.

What goes into the **Nationalist, anti-Immigrant and anti-Minority (NIM) scale**

The following questions were combined into a scale such that questions on each of the three topics (nationalism, immigration and religious minorities) contributed equally to the scale. Scores increase by the amount noted below if a respondent says ...

Nationalism (each worth 1.11 points)

1. It is very/somewhat important to have been born in [COUNTRY] to be truly [NATIONALITY] (e.g., to have been born in France to be truly French).
2. It is very/somewhat important to have [NATIONALITY] family background to be truly [NATIONALITY] (e.g., to have French family background to be truly French).
3. I completely/mostly agree that, "Our people are not perfect, but our culture is superior to others."

Immigration (each worth 0.48 points)

1. The number of immigrants to [COUNTRY] should be reduced.
2. Immigrants from Eastern Europe, such as those from Poland, are *not* hardworking.
3. Immigrants from the Middle East, such as those from Syria, are *not* hardworking.
4. Immigrants from Africa, such as those from Nigeria, are *not* hardworking.
5. Immigrants from Eastern Europe, such as those from Poland, are *not* honest.
6. Immigrants from the Middle East, such as those from Syria, are *not* honest.
7. Immigrants from Africa, such as those from Nigeria, are *not* honest.

Religious minorities (each worth 0.28 points)

1. I am *not* willing, or don't know (or declined to answer) if I'm willing, to accept Muslims as neighbors.
2. I am *not* willing, or don't know (or declined to answer) if I'm willing, to accept Muslims as family members.
3. I am *not* willing, or don't know (or declined to answer) if I'm willing, to accept Jews as neighbors.
4. I am *not* willing, or don't know (or declined to answer) if I'm willing, to accept Jews as family members.
5. I completely/mostly agree that, "In their hearts, Muslims want to impose their religious law on everyone else in [COUNTRY]."
6. I completely/mostly agree that, "Due to the number of Muslims here, I feel like a stranger in my own country."
7. I completely/mostly agree that, "Jews always overstate how much they have suffered."
8. I completely/mostly agree that, "Jews always pursue their own interests and not the interest of the country they live in."
9. Islam has teachings that promote violence.
10. All/most/many Muslims in the country support violent extremist groups
11. Muslim women who live in the country should not be allowed to wear *any* religious clothing.
12. Islam is fundamentally incompatible with the country's culture and values.

The scale provides an opportunity to analyze which attributes are most closely associated with a person's likelihood of expressing nationalist opinions and negative views of religious minorities and immigrants. Overall, Christians (both church-attending and non-practicing) are more likely than religiously unaffiliated people to score higher than 5 on the NIM scale. For example, in the UK, 27% of churchgoing Christians and 24% of non-practicing Christians score higher than 5 on the NIM scale, compared with 15% of "nones."

But many factors could be correlated with holding nationalist, anti-immigration and anti-minority views. Controlling for a variety of variables – such as age, gender, education, political ideology, personal economic situation, religious affiliation, religious observance, and more – researchers conducted statistical analysis of the survey data to determine which characteristics stand out above the others.

Independent of other factors, Western Europeans who identify as Christian (whether churchgoing or not) score higher on the NIM scale than those who have no religious affiliation. Put more

Christians, whether they go to church or not, are more likely than religious 'nones' to score higher than 5 on the 10-point NIM scale

% who score higher than 5 on the 10-point NIM scale

	Church-attending Christians	Non-practicing Christians	Religiously unaffiliated
Austria	42%	26%	17%
Belgium	26	24	14
Denmark	26	31	14
Finland	26	25	14
France	29	23	10
Germany*	41	24	18
Ireland	38	21	11
Italy	49	38	16
Netherlands	17	21	12
Norway	16	25	16
Portugal	21	19	11
Spain	22	23	7
Sweden	8	10	7
Switzerland	34	27	13
United Kingdom	27	24	15
MEDIAN	26	24	14

* In West Germany, 44% of church-attending Christians and 22% of non-practicing Christians score above 5 on the 10-point NIM scale, compared with 15% of "nones." Survey sample sizes do not permit conclusive statements about patterns by religion in East Germany vs. West Germany.

Note: The NIM score combines answers to 22 individual questions measuring nationalist sentiment, anti-immigration attitudes and anti-Muslim and anti-Jewish sentiment. See page 76 for full list of items included in the scale.

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

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simply: Christian identity, on its own, is associated with higher levels of nationalism and negative views of religious minorities and immigrants.¹¹

This is *not* to say that most Christians in Europe oppose immigration or want to keep Muslims and Jews out of their neighborhoods. In all 15 countries surveyed, fewer than half of all Christians score higher than 5 on the scale. The results also do not imply that Christian theology or religious teachings necessarily lead to anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim or anti-Jewish positions; on the contrary, many [churches have been active in resettling refugees](#) from the Middle East and elsewhere. Theoretically, the causal connection could go in either direction (or in both directions): It could be that holding anti-immigrant positions may lead a person to embrace Europe's historically dominant religious identity, rather than that identifying with Europe's historically dominant religious group leads a person to take anti-minority positions. The survey data show a statistical correlation – not a clear relationship of cause and effect.

¹¹ These results are based on a logistic regression model predicting high scores on the 22-item NIM scale (alpha = 0.866; ordered alpha = 0.95) weighted into a scale ranging from zero to 10. Respondents who scored 5.01 or higher were coded as 1. People who scored zero to 5 were coded as zero. Other ways of dividing the scale produce similar results, as do other types of regression modeling (for example, OLS). The model controls for several factors, including age, education, gender, political ideology, religion, religious observance, satisfaction with the way things are going in the country, satisfaction with personal economic situation, personal familiarity with Muslims, personal familiarity with Jews, having knowledge about Islam, having knowledge about Judaism, and having a diverse friend circle. See Appendix A for full explanation of the development of the scale, including statistical tests for robustness.

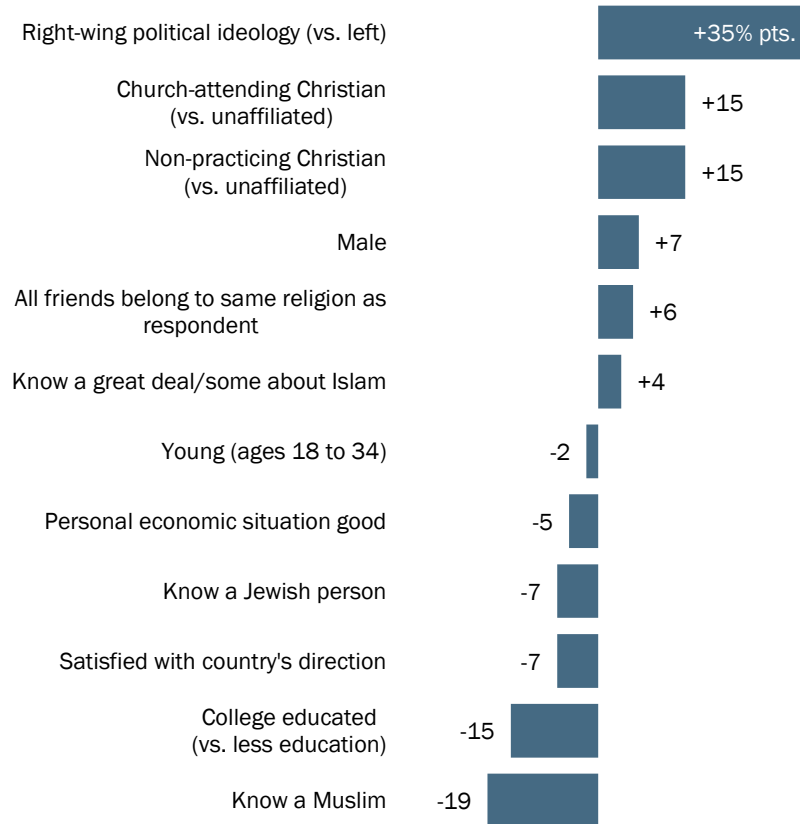
Several other studies have examined the correlates of attitudes toward immigration and minorities. See, for example, Weber, Hannes. 2015. "[National and regional proportion of immigrants and perceived threat of immigration: A three-level analysis in Western Europe](#)." International Journal of Comparative Sociology. Also see Kehrberg, Jason E. 2007. "[Public Opinion on Immigration in Western Europe: Economics, Tolerance, and Exposure](#)." Comparative European Politics. Also see Storm, Ingrid. 2011. "['Christian Nations'? Ethnic Christianity and Anti-Immigration Attitudes in Four Western European Countries](#)." Nordic Journal of Religion and Society. The logistic regression model controls for many of the factors previously identified by these studies, including gender, education, ideology, contact with Muslims (for example, having Muslim friends) and self-described personal economic situation.

Moreover, religious identity is far from the only characteristic associated with where respondents stand on these questions. The analysis also finds that personal familiarity with Muslims or Jews is associated with lower NIM scores. That is, people who say they personally know a Muslim tend to have *lower* scores on the scale (i.e., to be more accepting of immigrants and minorities, and to be less nationalistic). To a lesser extent, the same pattern holds for those who personally know a Jewish person, although significantly more people in Europe today say they are personally acquainted with Muslims than with Jews.

Political ideology also is tied very closely to NIM scores.¹² People who describe their political views as being more toward the right wing in their country are much more likely to score high on the scale, compared with those who classify themselves as left-leaning. Education, too, is a

Nationalist, anti-Immigrant and anti-religious Minority (NIM) views in Western Europe

Relative influence of each factor



Note: The number shown is the difference in predicted probability of scoring above 5 on the 10-point Nationalist, anti-Immigrant and anti-Minority (NIM) scale, after controlling for other factors. "Church-attending Christian" is defined as Christians who attend services at least monthly. Those who attend no more than a few times a year are defined as non-practicing Christians. The model was also tested using a scale of religious commitment (see results on page 162). Individual effects of each country are also taken into account. Roughly 1,800 respondents across all 15 countries did not provide a political ideology. These respondents are controlled for in the model. See Appendix A for full explanation of the development of the scale, including statistical tests for robustness.

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

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¹² Respondents were asked to place themselves on a seven-point spectrum of political ideology. The first three points are categorized as "left" and the last three are categorized as "right." Those who chose the middle of the scale are considered "center" and are not shown in the chart above, although they are controlled for in the model. In addition, roughly 1,800 respondents across all 15 countries did not provide a political ideology; they are also controlled for in the model.

strong factor: Adults with college degrees are considerably more likely than those with less education to score low on the NIM scale.

The relationship between age and NIM scores is weaker. While younger people tend to score lower on the NIM, statistical analysis suggests that this has to do less with their age and more with other, related factors such as ideology, religion and familiarity with Muslims. For example, younger people are considerably more likely than older people to say they personally know a Muslim. They are also more likely than older adults to say they are religiously unaffiliated. Both factors are closely associated with lower NIM scores.

Many intangible factors can influence how respondents choose to answer questions on sensitive topics like nationalism, immigration and the place of minorities in European society, including the general proclivity of people to frame their views in a manner than is socially acceptable. Nonetheless, the survey reveals several measurable attributes that are correlated with these views. All in all, Christian affiliation and right-wing political ideology are closely associated with higher levels of nationalist, anti-immigration and anti-minority views, while college education and personal familiarity with Muslims are associated with *lower* levels of nationalist, anti-immigrant and anti-minority sentiment.

Measuring religious commitment

In many places in this report, religious commitment is measured primarily by attendance at religious services: Christians who attend church at least monthly are categorized as churchgoing Christians, while those who attend no more than a few times a year are categorized as non-practicing Christians. Many scholars consider attendance at religious services a standard measure of religious observance, especially for Christians. But church attendance is not the *only* way to measure Christian religious commitment. An alternative approach, also used in this report, combines four separate measures of religious commitment into an index: how important a person considers religion in their lives, how often they attend religious services, how often they pray and whether they believe in God with absolute certainty. Christian respondents are classified as high, medium or low in their religious commitment based on their scores on the index.

If one replaces “churchgoing Christians” and “non-practicing Christians” with this more complex scale (high, medium and low levels of religious commitment), the NIM regression models continue to find significant differences between Christians (at all levels of religious commitment) and religiously unaffiliated adults in the region. For the results of this regression model, see Appendix A.

2. Religious identity

Most people in Western Europe identify as Christians. But across the region, fewer people say they are currently Christian than say they were baptized or raised as Christians.

In every country, net losses for Christians are accompanied by net gains for the share of adults who say they have no religion. College-educated people, younger adults and men are more likely than others to say they are now religiously unaffiliated after having been raised Christian.

Those who were raised in a religion and now identify as unaffiliated cite several factors as important in their decision to leave their faith. Most say they “gradually drifted away from religion.” Majorities also report disagreeing with religious positions on social issues, like homosexuality and abortion, as a reason they no longer identify with a religion. And at least half of respondents in several countries, especially in predominantly Catholic ones, cite church scandals.

Secularization is evident in Western Europe, but most people continue to identify as Christians

% who were/are ...

	Baptized	Raised Christian	Currently Christian
Austria	91%	86%	80%
Belgium	93	83	55
Denmark	95	80	65
Finland	97	85	77
France	83	75	64
Germany	86	79	71
Ireland	90	88	80
Italy	94	88	80
Netherlands	69	67	41
Norway	93	79	51
Portugal	95	94	83
Spain	96	92	66
Sweden	90	74	52
Switzerland	86	81	75
United Kingdom	82	79	73
MEDIAN	91	81	71

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

“Being Christian in Western Europe”

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Most Western Europeans identify as Christian

Across the countries surveyed, most adults identify as Christian, including eight-in-ten or more in Portugal (83%), Austria (80%), Ireland (80%) and Italy (80%). By contrast, the Netherlands has the lowest share of Christians in the region (41%).

Religiously unaffiliated adults — that is, those who do not identify with a religion, but describe themselves instead as “nothing in particular,” agnostic or atheist — are a sizable population in the region. Still, of the countries surveyed, only in the Netherlands do religiously unaffiliated adults outnumber Christians (48% vs. 41%).

Five hundred years after the start of the Protestant Reformation, most countries in the region are still either predominantly Catholic or predominantly Protestant. Generally, the Protestant countries have higher shares of unaffiliated adults than do Catholic countries in the region. For example, in Ireland, Italy and Portugal (all predominantly Catholic), just 15% of adults are religiously unaffiliated, compared with 23% in the UK and 30% in Denmark (both predominantly Protestant).

Younger adults (those between the ages of 18 and 34), men and college graduates are more likely to self-identify as religiously unaffiliated, while older respondents (age 35 and up), women and those with less than a college education are more likely to identify as Christian.

While most Western Europeans identify as Christian, considerable minorities claim no religious identity

% who identify as ...

	Christian	Religiously unaffiliated	Other/DK/ref.
Austria	80%	16%	4=100%
Belgium	55	38	7
Denmark	65	30	5
Finland	77	22	1
France	64	28	8
Germany	71	24	5
Ireland	80	15	5
Italy	80	15	5
Netherlands	41	48	10
Norway	51	43	6
Portugal	83	15	2
Spain	66	30	4
Sweden	52	42	6
Switzerland	75	21	4
United Kingdom	73	23	4
MEDIAN	71	24	5

Note: Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding. “Other/DK/ref.” are mostly Muslim respondents. General population surveys may not fully capture the size of minority populations, such as Muslims; therefore, these figures may differ from previously published demographic estimates.

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

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Decline in share of Christians is accompanied by gains for religiously unaffiliated

Even though majorities across the region identify as Christian, in every country surveyed, Christianity has experienced net losses as a result of religious switching. The vast majority of Western European adults say they were raised Christian, but significantly fewer in every country currently identify as Christian. The decreases in Christian identity are mirrored by increases in the shares who report having no religion.

Christians have seen the most substantial net losses in Belgium, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain and Sweden. For example, there is a difference of 28 percentage points between the share of Norwegians who were raised Christian (79%) and the share who are currently Christian (51%), matching the 28-point gap between those who were raised unaffiliated (15%) and the current unaffiliated share (43%).

Declines for Christianity mirrored by gains for religiously unaffiliated

% who say they were/are ...

	Raised Christian	Currently Christian	NET Change	Raised unaffiliated	Currently unaffiliated	NET Change
Belgium	83%	55%	-28	12%	38%	+26
Norway	79	51	-28	15	43	+28
Netherlands	67	41	-26	22	48	+26
Spain	92	66	-26	5	30	+25
Sweden	74	52	-22	21	42	+21
Denmark	80	65	-15	16	30	+14
France	75	64	-11	17	28	+11
Portugal	94	83	-11	4	15	+11
Finland	85	77	-8	14	22	+8
Germany	79	71	-8	17	24	+7
Ireland	88	80	-8	7	15	+8
Italy	88	80	-8	8	15	+7
Austria	86	80	-6	11	16	+5
Switzerland	81	75	-6	15	21	+6
United Kingdom	79	73	-6	17	23	+6
MEDIAN	81	71		15	24	

Note: All changes are statistically significant.

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

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In several countries, the share of religiously unaffiliated adults has more than doubled within the lifetime of the survey respondents. For instance, in Belgium, 12% of adults were raised unaffiliated and 38% report having no religion today. By comparison, the rise in the share of religiously unaffiliated adults has been more modest in Austria, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.

Overall, large majorities of those raised Christian still identify as Christian today, but Christians have relatively low retention rates (the share of all people raised as Christian who are still Christian) in Belgium (65%), Sweden (65%), Norway (62%) and the Netherlands (57%). The overwhelming majority of those who have left Christianity now identify as religiously unaffiliated.

Similarly, the vast majority of those raised religiously unaffiliated stay religiously unaffiliated, but significant minorities in some countries now identify as Christian or with some other religion, or give an ambiguous response about their current religion. In France, for example, 88% of those raised religiously unaffiliated are still religiously unaffiliated today, while 8% say they are now Christian and 4% say they now identify with another religion or do not provide a definitive response about their current religion.

Christians and religiously unaffiliated Europeans have similar retention rates

	Among those raised Christian, share who still identify as Christian	Among those raised religiously unaffiliated, share who still identify as unaffiliated
Austria	91%	78%
Belgium	65	83
Denmark	75	66
Finland	81	43
France	83	88
Germany	87	84
Ireland	89	75
Italy	90	76
Netherlands	57	88
Norway	62	85
Portugal	87	NA
Spain	70	NA
Sweden	65	77
Switzerland	90	84
United Kingdom	89	88
MEDIAN	83	83

Note: NA indicates adequate sample size is not available for analysis. Source: Survey conducted April-August 2017 in 15 countries. See Methodology for details. "Being Christian in Western Europe"

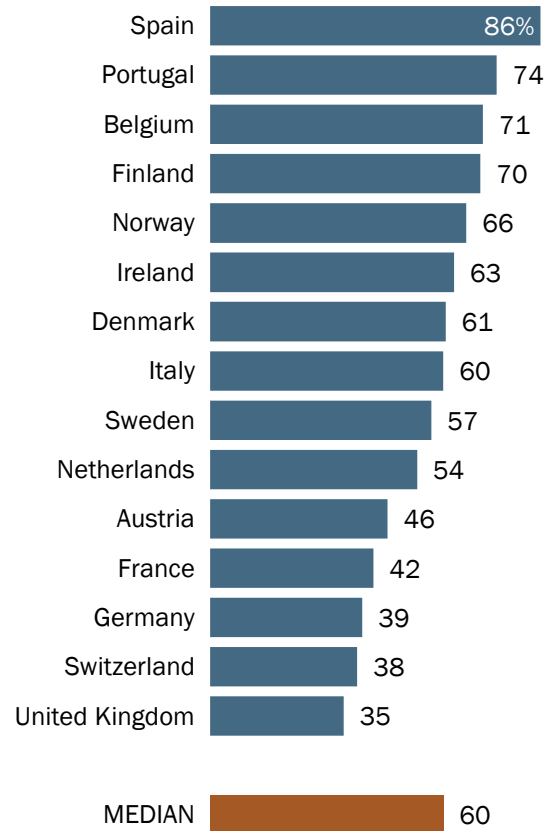
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Among those who are currently unaffiliated, majorities in most Western European countries say they were raised as Christians. For example, 86% of current “nones” in Spain are former Christians, as are seven-in-ten or more in Portugal (74%), Belgium (71%) and Finland (70%).

Former Christians who are now religiously unaffiliated are significantly younger and more highly educated than current Christians. For example, in Switzerland, adults who have left Christianity are considerably more likely to be younger than 35 (52% among former Christians vs. 19% among current Christians) and to have a college education (57% vs. 37%).

Many religiously unaffiliated Western Europeans were raised as Christians

% of religiously unaffiliated adults who were raised Christian



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

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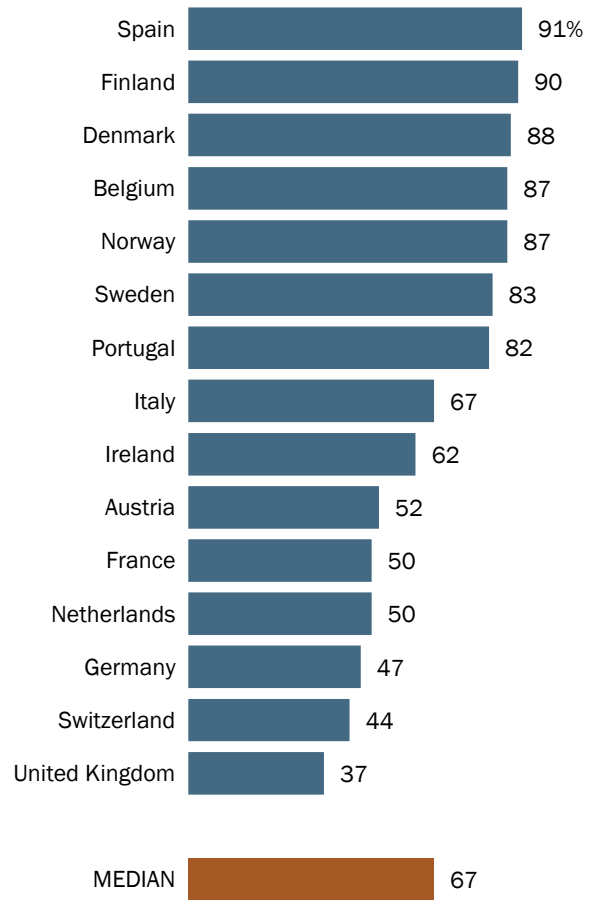
Large shares of Western Europeans – including many unaffiliated adults – report having been baptized

Generally, the share of people who say they were baptized is higher than the share of people who say they were raised as Christians. Across the region, the vast majority of adults (median of 91%) report having been baptized, including nearly all Christians in several countries.

Even among religiously unaffiliated adults in the region, half or more in most places report having been baptized, including roughly nine-in-ten in Spain (91%), Finland (90%) and Denmark (88%).

Many religiously unaffiliated respondents say they have been baptized

% of religiously unaffiliated adults who say they have been baptized



Source: Survey conducted April-August 2017 in 15 countries. See Methodology for details.
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Why did unaffiliated people turn away from religion?

The survey asked people who were raised in a religion but are now unaffiliated whether each of seven possible factors was an important reason for the change. Respondents could choose as many reasons as apply. The most common reason, cited by majorities across the region, is that they “gradually drifted away from religion.” In addition, roughly half or more in most countries say they stopped believing in the teachings of their childhood religion, or that they disagreed with their religion’s positions on social issues like homosexuality and abortion.

Variety of factors led Western Europeans to shed their religious identity

Among those who were raised in a religion but now identify as unaffiliated, % who cite _____ as an important reason they left religion

	Gradually drifting away from religion	Disagreeing with their religion’s positions on social issues	No longer believing in their religion’s teachings	Being unhappy about scandals involving religious institutions	Spiritual needs failing them in time of need	Religion failing them in time of need	Marrying someone outside their religion
Austria	66%	75%	44%	59%	32%	24%	12%
Belgium	74	51	70	40	31	21	8
Denmark	85	42	60	19	22	12	8
Finland	65	56	48	35	25	6	4
France	65	64	54	48	32	21	15
Germany	75	64	54	57	24	23	8
Ireland	69	64	54	58	21	17	6
Italy	72	64	35	60	30	23	6
Netherlands	72	55	60	43	28	31	14
Norway	68	58	58	37	20	11	7
Portugal	77	65	55	60	35	26	8
Spain	65	69	64	74	39	20	6
Sweden	60	33	57	15	19	7	6
Switzerland	59	56	46	56	26	24	15
United Kingdom	68	55	37	53	25	24	11
MEDIAN	68	58	54	53	26	21	8

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

“Being Christian in Western Europe”

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Large shares (regional median of 53%) also cite scandals involving religious institutions and leaders as an important reason they no longer identify with a religion. This position is especially common in Catholic-majority countries such as Spain (74%), Italy (60%) and Portugal (60%).

Smaller shares say that they stopped identifying with a religion because their spiritual needs were not being met (median of 26%), or that religion failed them when they were in need (median of 21%). Even fewer say marrying someone who did not share their childhood faith (median of 8%) was an important reason for shedding their religious identity.

Sidebar: Europeans' relationships with religion change over time

Focus groups in five countries explored how individuals' religious identities, beliefs and practices have changed throughout their lives. Groups composed entirely of Christians or entirely of religiously unaffiliated adults shared stories about the role of religion during their childhoods. Many focus group participants considered themselves active Christians when they were young; they attended church regularly, prayed and held traditional religious beliefs. Several people in the groups said that when they reached their teenage and young adult years, they reduced their religious activity. Some turned completely away from organized religion. Focus group participants offered different explanations for how and why this shift occurred. A few participants pointed to particular moments when they lost faith and abandoned Christianity. Others said the attachment to Christianity faded gradually as they got older, with no particular turning point. Some mentioned specific disagreements with Christian teachings or disillusionments with church leaders and institutions, including recent scandals.

"My mum is Christian and her family are very sort of Protestant. My dad's an atheist, so mum had more influence on the childhood. So we grew up relatively Christian just going to church at Easter, Christmas, that kind of thing. ... When I was probably like 10, 11, it was just the kind of thing where I was in between atheism and Christianity. But my mum got cancer when I was about 12, and then I sort of like, on my own, just became quite religious. I had three sisters and none of them did it or anything. Dad was still an atheist; my mum didn't really change her opinions. But I became sort of quite like praying all the time. I listened to a lot of country music, which I found really comforting so they would talk about God and stuff in it, and it was kind of like my turn towards religion in the struggle. And then, because she was cured a couple of years later, I was like, 'Oh my God, it worked, God's there for me.' But then it was my interest in politics and stuff, and my exposure to lots of the more negative sides of Christianity in terms of social anachronistic ideas and stuff – so like opinions about gay marriage, or opinions about like sex before marriage and stuff. So when I was about 16, 17, I sort of thought, 'Actually, I'm not too sure I agree with this institution.' ... Now I'd probably say I'm agnostic."

– 20-year-old agnostic woman, United Kingdom

"We mostly celebrated Christmas. We didn't really celebrate Easter or anything. No one in my family was religious in that way. No one talked about it. But in school there were the church's children hours, and I went to those when I was younger ... and the children's choir in church. I started toward getting confirmed. But I stopped that because I didn't think it was my thing when I got there – those meetings they had once a week. It felt a lot like they were imposing a lot on us about how to believe and about God, but I felt that I don't believe this. I couldn't stand and say something, or pray and write to God. For me it was really 'No thank you,' so I backed away and that's the first time I realized – that's when I felt that I don't believe this."

– 26-year-old atheist woman, Sweden

"Of course, while I was attending confirmation classes, I had to show up [for church]. Otherwise, I would have jeopardized the whole confirmation, and this, of course, pressured me in an unpleasant way. ... And after that it decreased and, frankly, when I was in college I enjoyed sleeping in on Sundays. Like I have said before, the parish is just around the corner from me, less than half a kilometer away, and I started to go to church again more often 10 years ago, when my father died. And the pastor who gave the eulogy for him and hosted his funeral, was really, downright good, him being an acquaintance of my parents, so he just got to the heart of things in his Berlin bluntness. Seriously, that guy, he was no

windbag, let me tell you! So he got to the heart of things and was everything but a talker and he was really easy to listen to. ... Unfortunately, [he] retired in 2011. After that, I went one more time and did not like it at all. With services, it completely depends on who is standing up front, and they spoiled it for me, going to church and attending services. And this pastor who is now retired, he was really good and you just could go once every three or four weeks and listen to him, and during that time I also really enjoyed this sense of community.”

– 46-year-old Christian man, Germany

“Maybe halfway through primary school I started questioning it. And when the first death occurred in my family, I said ‘No, that is not it, this is not how it works.’ And then I was done with the whole thing.”

– 29-year-old “nothing in particular” woman, Germany

“My parents are Protestant. When I was a kid, my mum used to take us with her to church. She tried to instill things in me about that. But I never got hooked. I never really followed. I went because she wanted me to go. In the end, I tried to avoid it – to avoid it totally. She tried to get me in it, but I refused to stay in it and follow everything that went with it because I wasn’t attracted by it. Later, we had a death in the family, which led me to be offended by faith. So, I ended up feeling hatred because of it. When we were younger, we used to have times of prayer in the family. But it didn’t continue. It all stopped. My parents, yes, they are really involved in it. But my sisters and I don’t talk about it at all. We each have our own beliefs, our own ritual ... each one individually.”

– 36-year-old Christian man, France

Focus group participants commonly described their early interactions with Christianity in terms of going to church, praying and being brought up with particular religious beliefs and identities, (e.g., Catholic, Lutheran, Church of England). Many practiced along with their families. Some described religious aspects of their youth as something that was imposed on them, calling them a “chore,” “tradition” or “obligation.” However, some in the focus groups said they have embraced these practices in adulthood; they now attend church services, pray occasionally or hold some religious beliefs. They gave a variety of reasons for these changes, such as wanting to teach Christian values to their children. Others started attending church to be part of a community or sing in a choir. Some participants say they have resumed aspects of Christianity, like praying on a regular basis, without adopting other traditional beliefs and practices.

While many of those who have left Christianity say they drifted away gradually, those who have returned to Christianity almost invariably pointed to a particular event, person or other circumstance that prompted them to come back to their childhood religion. And although participants talked about inconsistencies or contradictions in their religious practices – such as praying to God without believing there is a God – the group discussions typically revolved around an implicit assumption that Christians are *supposed* to attend church services, pray, believe in God, and mark key life passages (births, weddings, deaths) with religious ceremonies. Even as they talked freely about breaking these expectations – by seldom going to church, for example – the focus groups continually returned to the implicit paradigm, with each participant discussing the ways in which he or she adheres to or departs from it.

"I was baptized Catholic, but my family aren't religious so I don't really know why that happened. I was always sent to Church of England schools, we had to go to chapel, we had to pray, but my parents always told me not to actually get involved in religion. They don't like the idea of what it does to people. And when I was about 10 years old, I pretty much thought about it, realized that I didn't have much belief. But as I got older ... I [pray] more so when I want someone else to be OK. So even though I don't have a set religion, if someone said to me, do I believe in God, I wouldn't say, "yes," but as I'm older I probably pray more now than I ever would before – if I want a family member to be OK, if I want something to go well for someone else. It's more just a way of reassuring myself, even though I don't know if it actually has any use."

– 20-year-old agnostic man, United Kingdom

"One day I was smoking some weed ... and this band came over ... and I was 16. And my friends were talking to them and I was like, 'Oh, I'm going to talk to them.' And then they started talking about God and stuff and I just sat at the back and listened and then they invited us to this gig night where you didn't need any ID. So we brought along our bottles of White Lightning and then my friend who was really rebellious, way more rebellious than me, said she was going back to church and it was just in my head. And things kept popping up and kept popping up, and I was like 17 so I was really shy and really scared. And I made this pact: I was like, 'OK if this and this happens, I'll go back, I'll go there.' I'd never been, really. And then those things happened so I was like, 'OK, I'm going to go.' And I just quite liked the singing so I went back again. And then some people were like, 'Oh, hi! We saw you...' and started texting me, and I just kept going."

– 29-year-old Christian woman, United Kingdom

"I received Holy Communion, was confirmed, and was a catechist administering communion to younger children until I was about 22 years old. Suddenly at that moment, the figure of God disappeared for me. Because of life's circumstances – not necessarily bad ones, just your day to day – at that time, there was no room [for God] in my plans. ... A couple of years ago, my partner and I considered getting married and in the last few months [before the wedding], he brought up the idea of getting married in a church. I told him I had no problem since I came from that culture and those beliefs. So we started preparation classes for marriage. I regained my faith thanks to a priest, who is a friend to me nowadays, because of what he talked about: the way of sharing things. He is modern, he knows how to speak to people who believe in religion, but who also believe in science. And thanks to him, I have been married for a month now."

– 33-year-old Christian woman, Spain

"My parents did not have much to do with church, and I came to sing in a choir through a friend and learned how to play a few musical instruments and attended church every now and then. But since we never talked about it at home, I just experienced this with my friend a little bit – like how they did mealtime prayers and when we had sleepovers there, they prayed before bedtime. I missed that a little bit at home, but it just wasn't a part of life there and as far as I was concerned that was OK. I realized when I had children and also through school and nurseries, that something is missing. And I started reading the Children's Bible to my kids, but not in such a way as to force it on them, but to see how they would react to it and if they would wish for more, and that is what actually happened. By my children's request – two boys – we attended children's services regularly every week. One of them was absolutely

thrilled. The other one went, 'Well, let's see' – and that was it. And both of them have been christened, confirmed and the older one actually just got married in a church. And that was important to me – for them, because it was something I had missed, something I only experienced through a friend, and so it was important to me for the kids."

– 53-year-old Christian woman, Germany

"I think it was at the age of 18, something like that. I believe difficulties in finding work and all that, relationship problems, too, maybe a need to confide, but not wanting to confide in friends ... because they may not have given me the right advice. I don't know, something clicked in me to go to church and to confide. It is true that later so many things happened in my life, and the more I confided [in God] the more things started to look up, and that is when I understood that there was truly a God and that it feels good to confide."

– 35-year-old Christian woman, France

For details on the focus groups, including locations and composition, see Methodology.

Religious identity in the family

The survey asked respondents about the religion of their spouse or partner. The overwhelming majority of Christian adults who are married or living with a partner have a Christian spouse or partner (median of 94%), and most unaffiliated adults who are in such a relationship have an unaffiliated partner (65%).

In addition, respondents who are the parents or legal guardians of children under 18 in their household were asked how they are raising their child or children with regard to religion. Large majorities of Christian parents, both church-attending and non-practicing, say they are raising their children Christian, although nearly a third (31%) of non-practicing Christian parents in Sweden and 19% in Belgium say they are raising their children with no religion.¹³

Religiously unaffiliated parents, meanwhile, are mostly raising their children without a religion, although 26% of unaffiliated parents in Spain say they are raising their children Christian.

¹³ Church-attending Christians are defined as those who attend religious services at least once a month. Non-practicing Christians are defined as those who attend church no more than a few times a year.

Most non-practicing Christians say they are raising their children Christian

Among those who are the parents or legal guardians of children under 18 in their household, % who are raising their children Christian/unaffiliated

	Among church-attending Christians		Among non-practicing Christians		Among unaffiliated	
	Raising Christian	Raising unaffiliated	Raising Christian	Raising unaffiliated	Raising Christian	Raising unaffiliated
Austria	97%	0%	91%	8%	NA	NA
Belgium	NA	NA	76	19	17	83
Denmark	NA	NA	85	14	NA	NA
Finland	NA	NA	85	13	NA	NA
France	99	1	84	15	7	87
Germany	99	0	92	7	9	89
Ireland	99	1	92	5	NA	NA
Italy	97	1	92	8	NA	NA
Netherlands	NA	NA	NA	NA	9	85
Norway	NA	NA	NA	NA	14	82
Portugal	93	7	86	13	NA	NA
Spain	97	3	87	13	26	71
Sweden	NA	NA	68	31	14	85
Switzerland	97	2	89	10	4	94
United Kingdom	100	0	89	11	8	91
MEDIAN	97	1	87	13	9	85

Note: Church-attending Christians are defined as those who say they attend church at least monthly. Non-practicing Christians are defined as those who attend less often. NA indicates adequate sample size is not available for analysis.

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

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3. Religious practice and belief

Relatively few adults in Western Europe participate in religious activities. For example, across the 15 countries surveyed, a median of 22% say they attend religious services at least once a month. By comparison, regular religious service attendance is much more common in some other parts of the world with large Christian populations, including Africa, Latin America and the United States, and it is somewhat more common in Central and Eastern Europe.

The survey also asked about several other religious practices, including praying, sharing religious beliefs with others and donating money to religious organizations. These practices are also relatively rare across Western Europe.

Despite these low levels of religious practice, most people in the region say they believe in God (58% median), although few say they believe in God with absolute certainty (15% median). Elsewhere around the world, considerably higher shares say they believe in God with absolute certainty, including in sub-Saharan Africa (median of 89%), the United States (63%) and Central and Eastern Europe (median of 40%).

To provide a fuller picture of religious commitment across the region, researchers analyzed four standard measures of religious belief and practice together as an index: frequency of attendance at religious services, frequency of prayer, degree of importance of religion in the respondent's life and belief in God.

On this index, Portugal is the most religiously observant country in Western Europe, with more than a third of Portuguese adults (37%) showing high levels of religious commitment. Some other predominantly Catholic countries, including Italy (27%), Ireland (24%) and Spain (21%), also have relatively large shares of highly observant people. At the other end of the spectrum, just 8% of adults in predominantly Protestant Denmark are highly religious, and three-quarters of Swedes show *low* levels of religious commitment.

Overall, women and people ages 55 and older are more likely than men and younger adults to display high levels of religious commitment.

Few people in Western Europe attend religious services on a regular basis

Roughly half or more people in most of the countries surveyed say they seldom or never attend religious services (median of 58%), while relatively few attend services at least monthly (22% median). Even in Italy, which has the highest share of people who attend at least monthly (43%) in the region, a substantial share seldom or never attend services (39%).

People in Western European countries are far less likely than people in several other parts of the world to attend religious services regularly. In [sub-Saharan Africa](#), for example, a regional median of 83% attend services monthly or more, and in [Latin America](#), the corresponding figure is 64%. In the [United States](#), 50% of adults say they attend services monthly or more. And in [Central and Eastern Europe](#), a median of 32% attend religious services at least monthly.

Attending religious services ‘seldom’ or ‘never’ is the norm in Western Europe

% who say they attend religious services ...

	Weekly/ monthly	A few times a year	Seldom/ never
Italy	43%	18%	39%
Ireland	37	22	41
Portugal	36	22	42
Austria	30	22	48
Switzerland	29	18	53
Germany	24	23	53
Spain	23	11	66
France	22	16	62
United Kingdom	20	22	58
Netherlands	18	18	64
Norway	16	24	60
Denmark	12	36	51
Belgium	11	20	68
Sweden	11	25	63
Finland	10	33	58
MEDIAN	22	22	58

Note: Don't know/refused responses not shown.

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

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Western Europeans tend to say religion is not important in their lives

In most countries surveyed, majorities or pluralities say religion is either “not too” or “not at all” important in their lives (median of 54%). Large majorities say this in Denmark (72%) and Sweden (72%), as do roughly six-in-ten or more adults in Belgium (64%), Finland (62%) and the UK (60%).

Fewer people say religion is either “very” or “somewhat” important in their lives (median of 46%), including a median of just 11% of adults who say religion is *very* important to them.

Still, in three countries – Ireland, Italy and Portugal – respondents are significantly more likely to say religion is very or somewhat important in their personal lives than to say it is not too or not at all important. The share of adults who say religion is at least somewhat important to them is especially high in Portugal (72%).

Fully seven-in-ten in Denmark, Sweden say religion is not important to them

% who say religion is ___ important in their lives

	Very/ somewhat	Not too/not at all
Denmark	27%	72%
Sweden	27	72
Belgium	36	64
Finland	38	62
United Kingdom	40	60
France	42	57
Netherlands	44	56
Norway	46	54
Switzerland	47	53
Germany	47	52
Spain	49	50
Austria	51	49
Ireland	56	44
Italy	58	42
Portugal	72	27
MEDIAN	46	54

Note: Don't know/refused responses not shown.

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

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Most people in Western Europe say they seldom or never pray

A median of just one-in-ten people (11%) across the 15 Western European countries surveyed say they pray daily, while nearly four times as many – a median of 40% – say they *never* pray. In several countries, at least half of adults say they never pray, including majorities in Sweden and Denmark (62% each).

Rates of daily prayer in the region are very low compared with several other regions surveyed by Pew Research Center – including Central and Eastern Europe, where a median of 27% across 18 countries pray daily. In the U.S., a slim majority of adults (55%) say they pray daily, and rates of daily prayer are even higher in Latin America (median of 67%) and sub-Saharan Africa (median of 77%).

Fewer than one-in-ten in UK say they pray daily

% who say they pray ...

	Daily	Occasionally	Seldom	Never
Portugal	37%	20%	20%	21%
Spain	23	14	20	42
Italy	21	39	14	25
Netherlands	20	12	15	53
Ireland	19	34	17	28
Finland	18	15	30	37
Norway	18	12	20	50
Belgium	11	15	19	55
France	11	26	21	42
Sweden	11	10	16	62
Denmark	10	10	18	62
Germany	9	33	22	35
Austria	8	38	22	31
Switzerland	8	36	19	37
United Kingdom	6	31	23	40
MEDIAN	11	20	20	40

Note: Don't know/refused responses not shown.

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

"Being Christian in Western Europe"

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Belief in God varies widely across the region

People in Western European countries are more likely to express a belief in God than they are to regularly engage in traditional religious practices – majorities in 10 of the 15 countries surveyed say they believe in God. Yet there are wide variations from country to country: In Portugal, 83% of people believe in God, compared with 36% of adults in Sweden.¹⁴

Sweden is one of three countries surveyed (along with Belgium and the Netherlands) where nonbelief is significantly more common than belief among the general population, while Norwegian and Danish adults are roughly split between believers and nonbelievers. (See Chapter 4 for an analysis of questions that further probed views about the nature of God or another higher power or spiritual force.)

Large majorities of Christians across the region are believers (median of 79%), but belief in God is far from universal among Western European Christians. For example, roughly three-in-ten or more Christians in Sweden, Belgium, Denmark and Finland say they do *not* believe in God.

Religiously unaffiliated adults, meanwhile, are overwhelmingly nonbelievers: Just 4% of unaffiliated British and German people, for instance, say they believe in God. (See Overview of this report for a more detailed discussion of belief in God among “nones.”)

Majority of Christians believe in God, but few do among the unaffiliated

% who say they believe in God among ...

	General population	Christians	Religiously unaffiliated
Portugal	83%	93%	30%
Italy	73	85	9
Ireland	69	79	14
Austria	67	79	6
Spain	64	86	17
Switzerland	62	79	5
Germany	60	79	4
Finland	58	68	20
United Kingdom	58	76	4
France	56	77	9
Denmark	51	68	14
Norway	49	79	13
Netherlands	44	78	13
Belgium	42	63	12
Sweden	36	59	7
MEDIAN	58	79	12

Note: This question was not asked of Muslim respondents; general population figures shown are the percentage of all non-Muslims who believe in God. Pew Research Center’s previous field testing of questions about belief in God in predominantly Muslim countries and those with large Muslim populations found these questions tend to cause offense and prompt interview break-offs among Muslim respondents.

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

“Being Christian in Western Europe”

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¹⁴ This question was not asked of Muslim respondents; figures shown are the percentage of all non-Muslims who believe in God. Pew Research Center’s previous field testing of questions about belief in God in predominantly Muslim countries and those with large Muslim populations found these questions tend to cause offense and prompt interview break-offs among Muslim respondents.

People in Portugal far more likely than those in any other country to say they are certain about their belief in God

The survey also asked those who said they believe in God how certain they are about their belief. Relatively few people across Western European countries are “absolutely” certain of God’s existence: A median of 15% across the region express this view, compared with twice as many (median of 30%) who say they are only “fairly” certain. By comparison, a median of 36% of Western Europeans say they do not believe in God at all.

Only in Portugal does a plurality of the overall population (44%) express belief in God with absolute certainty. In Germany, just 10% of adults say they believe in God and are absolutely certain, while nearly four times as many (37%) say they are fairly certain that God exists and a similar share (36%) do not believe in God.

In Western Europe, belief in God with absolute certainty is relatively uncommon

% who say they ...

	Believe in God, absolutely certain	Believe in God, fairly certain	Believe in God, less certain	Do not believe in God
Portugal	44%	31%	7%	13%
Italy	26	37	9	21
Spain	25	27	11	31
Ireland	24	33	11	26
Finland	23	26	8	37
Norway	19	19	11	47
Denmark	15	24	12	46
Netherlands	15	19	9	53
Sweden	14	15	7	60
Austria	13	41	12	29
Belgium	13	20	9	54
United Kingdom	12	30	15	36
France	11	31	14	37
Switzerland	11	38	13	33
Germany	10	37	13	36
MEDIAN	15	30	11	36

Note: This question was not asked of Muslim respondents; figures shown are the percentage of all non-Muslims who give each response. Pew Research Center’s previous field testing of questions about belief in God in predominantly Muslim countries and those with large Muslim populations found these questions tend to cause offense and prompt interview break-offs among Muslim respondents. Don’t know/refused responses about belief in God or certainty of belief not shown.

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

“Being Christian in Western Europe”

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Across Western Europe, people tend to score low on an index of religious commitment

Four standard measures of religious observance – worship attendance, prayer, belief in God and importance of religion in one’s life – were combined into an overall index of religious commitment. Using this index, researchers categorized respondents into three groups: high, moderate and low levels of religious commitment.

To be counted as showing a high level of religious commitment, a respondent had to report at least two of four highly observant behaviors or beliefs – attending religious services at least monthly, praying at least daily, believing in God with absolute certainty or saying that religion is very important to them.¹⁵ Those in the low commitment group, on the other hand, said at least two of the following: They seldom or never attend religious services, seldom or never pray, do not believe in God, or consider religion “not too” or “not at all” important in their life.

People with other combinations of responses – for example, those who say they attend religious services once or twice a year, pray once or twice a month, believe in God and are fairly certain, and consider religion somewhat important to them, or those who show mixed levels of observance across the measures (such as praying daily and attending religious services monthly but saying religion is not important in their lives and that they don’t believe in God) – were categorized as having a moderate level of religious commitment.

Fewer than a quarter of people in most Western European countries show high levels of religious commitment

% who have _____ levels of religious commitment, according to a four-item index

	Low	Moderate	High
Portugal	30%	33%	37%
Italy	36	37	27
Ireland	41	34	24
Spain	55	24	21
Netherlands	64	19	18
Norway	61	22	17
Austria	49	38	14
Finland	62	26	13
France	58	29	12
Germany	53	36	12
Switzerland	52	37	12
United Kingdom	58	31	11
Belgium	68	22	10
Sweden	75	15	10
Denmark	69	23	8
MEDIAN	58	29	13

Note: The index is created by combining four individual measures of religious observance: self-assessment of religion’s importance in one’s life, religious attendance, prayer, and belief in God. Respondents were assigned a score of 1 on each of the four measures on which they exhibit a high level of religious observance, a score of 0 on each of the measures on which they exhibit a medium level of religious observance, and a score of minus 1 on each measure on which they exhibit a low level of religious observance. Combined scores of 2 or higher are considered “high”; scores of minus 2 or lower are “low”; and scores from minus 1 to 1 are “moderate.” Additional details can be found in Appendix A. Source: Survey conducted April-August 2017 in 15 countries. See Methodology for details. “Being Christian in Western Europe”

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¹⁵ Muslims were not asked about belief in God, but Muslim respondents could still be considered highly religious if they display two of the other three behaviors.

Overall, relatively few people across the region score high on the index (median of 13%), while most Western Europeans score low (median of 58%). The remainder (median of 29%) fall somewhere in the middle.

People ages 55 and older are significantly more likely than both 18- to 34-year-olds and 35- to 54-year-olds to show high levels of religious commitment. And in Western Europe, as in many [other parts of the world](#) where Christians predominate, women generally are more religious than men. For example, 22% of women in Norway score high on the index, compared with 12% of men.

While the countries with the largest shares of highly religious people in the region have Catholic majorities (Portugal, Italy, Ireland and Spain), Catholics and Protestants overall show similar levels of religious commitment. A median of 14% among both Catholics and Protestants across the countries surveyed (with large enough sample sizes for either group) score high on the index.

Even among Christians, high levels of religious commitment are relatively rare

In every country surveyed, Christians are more likely than religiously unaffiliated people to exhibit a high degree of religious observance; still, relatively few Christians score high on the index of religious commitment (median of 16%). For example, in Austria, 39% of Christians display low levels of religious commitment, while a plurality (46%) are moderately religious, and far fewer (15%) show high levels of observance.

In no country surveyed are a majority of Christians highly religious on the index, although substantial shares of Christians show high levels of engagement in Portugal (43%), the Netherlands (35%), Italy (31%) and Spain (31%).

Most Christians in Western Europe display moderate or low levels of religious commitment

Among Christians, % who have _____ levels of religious commitment, according to a four-item index

	Low	Moderate	High
Portugal	20%	37%	43%
Netherlands	36	29	35
Italy	26	43	31
Spain	38	31	31
Norway	38	33	29
Ireland	33	39	27
Sweden	62	21	18
Finland	54	31	16
Austria	39	46	15
Belgium	54	32	14
Switzerland	38	48	14
France	45	42	13
Germany	39	48	13
United Kingdom	46	41	13
Denmark	59	30	11
MEDIAN	39	37	16

Note: The index is created by combining four individual measures of religious observance: self-assessment of religion's importance in one's life, religious attendance, prayer, and belief in God. Respondents were assigned a score of 1 on each of the four measures on which they exhibit a high level of religious observance, a score of 0 on each of the measures on which they exhibit a medium level of religious observance, and a score of minus 1 on each measure on which they exhibit a low level of religious observance. Combined scores of 2 or higher are considered "high"; scores of minus 2 or lower are "low"; and scores from minus 1 to 1 are "moderate." Additional details can be found in Appendix A. Source: Survey conducted April-August 2017 in 15 countries. See Methodology for details. "Being Christian in Western Europe"

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Relatively few Europeans give money to religious organizations, fast or share their faith

The survey also asked about several other traditional religious practices, including wearing religious clothing or symbols, fasting during holy times and sharing one's religious beliefs with others. Few people across the region engage in these practices (regional medians of 17%, 12% and 8%, respectively).

Voluntarily giving money to one's church, mosque, synagogue or temple is somewhat more common: A median of 24% in the region say they donate to a house of worship. Still, in no country does even half of the population donate money to a religious organization.

In general, Christians are more likely than religiously unaffiliated adults to engage in

these practices, but even among Christians, these practices are far from the norm. For example, only in two countries, Norway and the Netherlands, do majorities of Christians voluntarily give money to their churches (61% and 58%, respectively). And in Italy, the historic heartland of Catholicism, fewer than half of Christians (40%) typically wear or carry religious symbols or garments with them.

Across the region, more women than men donate money to a religious institution and wear religious clothing or symbols. And those without a college education are more likely to wear religious symbols than are college graduates.

Religious practices such as giving money to church, fasting are the exception rather than the norm in Western Europe

% who say they ...

	Give money to their religious organization	Wear or carry religious symbols	Fast during holy times	Try to persuade other adults to adopt their religious views
Portugal	43%	33%	33%	17%
Norway	41	15	6	8
Italy	37	34	24	13
Ireland	36	28	23	12
Spain	35	19	18	8
Netherlands	33	9	8	11
Finland	31	11	1	6
Austria	24	23	16	9
Germany	24	21	13	9
Denmark	22	10	3	4
Sweden	22	10	5	7
Switzerland	21	18	12	8
Belgium	20	15	11	6
France	20	16	13	8
UK	18	17	11	8
MEDIAN	24	17	12	8

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

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Overall, young adults (ages 18 to 34) are less likely than older people to say they give money to religious organizations. But when it comes to fasting, wearing religious symbols or persuading others to adopt their religious beliefs, there is no clear pattern of differences between these age groups.

Across the region overall, Catholics are more engaged with some of these practices than are Protestants. For example, Catholics are more likely than Protestants to wear religious symbols (medians of 27% among Catholics and 15% among Protestants across the region) and fast during holy times (15% and 6%, respectively). But Protestants are somewhat more likely than Catholics to give money to their churches (34% median, compared with 27% among Catholics).

4. Beliefs about God

Most people in Western Europe say they believe in God. But in Europe today, believing in God does not necessarily mean belief in the God of the Bible.

Indeed, even though all 15 countries surveyed are historically Christian, and nearly all of them still have Christian majorities, fewer respondents say they believe in God “as described in the Bible” than say they believe in “some other higher power or spiritual force.” And substantial numbers of people surveyed across the region do not believe there is *any* higher power or spiritual force in the universe.

Belief in a biblical God is much more common among church-attending Christians than it is among non-practicing Christians (those who attend church no more than a few times a year). While most non-practicing Christians say they *do* believe in God or some other higher power, most say they do *not* believe in God as described in the Bible. And among religiously unaffiliated people in Western Europe, the prevailing view is that there is no higher power of any kind.

The survey questions that mention the Bible do not specify particular verses, editions or translations, leaving that up to the understanding of respondents. But it is clear from other questions in the survey that people who say they believe in God as described in the Bible generally envision a deity who is all-knowing and all-powerful, and who loves all people and, ultimately, will judge all people. By contrast, respondents who say they believe in some other “higher power or spiritual force” – but *not* the God of the Bible – are much less likely to envision a deity with these characteristics.

Similarly, Christians who attend religious services at least monthly are much more likely than other Christians to say that God has personally rewarded or punished them, or that they regularly communicate with God. And those who believe in a biblical God are considerably more likely than others to say they have these kinds of interactions with the divine.

Belief in the biblical God is a minority view in Western Europe

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.¹⁶ 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.¹⁷

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, pluralities 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.

Most people believe in a higher power, but often not God as described in the Bible

% who ...

	Believe in God as described in the Bible	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	45	24
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

Note: These questions were not asked of Muslim respondents; figures shown are the percentage of all non-Muslims who give each response. Don't know/refused/other/both/neither/depends responses not shown.

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

"Being Christian in Western Europe"

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¹⁶ A similar survey was recently conducted [in the United States](#). In Western Europe, questions about belief in God were not asked of Muslims. Pew Research Center's previous field testing of questions about belief in God in predominantly Muslim countries and those with large Muslim populations found these questions tend to cause offense and prompt interview break-offs among Muslim respondents. In some predominantly Muslim countries or those with large Muslim populations, [Pew Research Center has asked](#) respondents if they believe in one God and his Prophet Muhammad.

¹⁷ The full wording and sequence of questions that resulted in this categorization can be found in the survey questionnaire.

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.

Churchgoing Christians believe in biblical God; non-practicing Christians do not

% who ...

	Church-attending Christians			Non-practicing Christians			Religiously unaffiliated		
	Believe in God as described in the Bible	Believe in other higher power or spiritual force	Do not believe in any higher power	Believe in God as described in the Bible	Believe in other higher power or spiritual force	Do not believe in any higher power	Believe in God as described in the Bible	Believe in other higher power or spiritual force	Do not believe in any higher power
Austria	64%	31%	2%	25%	52%	12%	0%	16%	73%
Belgium	58	34	4	17	51	26	0	30	64
Denmark	54	41	3	20	55	19	0	37	58
Finland	79	18	0	23	51	18	4	36	53
France	61	34	0	29	40	16	2	19	61
Germany	63	32	2	26	51	13	2	16	73
Ireland	69	26	3	29	42	17	1	29	56
Italy	75	19	0	33	38	15	1	20	51
Netherlands	78	17	2	22	60	13	2	37	56
Norway	75	21	0	23	56	12	2	28	63
Portugal	58	33	1	29	57	3	7	40	44
Spain	53	41	0	21	60	8	2	37	53
Sweden	73	15	5	14	51	26	1	26	65
Switzerland	64	33	1	24	46	19	0	15	69
UK	57	37	0	32	42	17	1	16	70
MEDIAN	64	32	1	24	51	16	1	28	61

Note: Church-attending Christians are defined as those who attend church at least monthly. Non-practicing Christians are defined as those who attend less often. Don't know/refused/other/both/neither/depends responses not shown.

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

"Being Christian in Western Europe"

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Religiously unaffiliated people generally say they do *not* believe in God or any higher power in the universe. Still, in several countries, considerable shares among the unaffiliated say they believe in some kind of spiritual force. (See Overview of this report for additional analysis of the opinions of “nones” who are believers.)

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.

Those with less than a college education are more likely than college graduates to believe in a biblical God. For example, in the United Kingdom, 32% of adults who have not completed college believe in God as described in the Bible, compared with 23% of college graduates.

Relatively few believe that God is all-knowing and all-powerful

The survey also asked respondents who believe in God or a higher power about three traits that are often associated with the divine in Christianity: being all-loving, all-knowing and all-powerful. Overall, the view that God or another higher power has these characteristics is a minority belief in most countries across Western Europe. A median of just 14% across the region believe God has all three attributes.

Consistent with their higher levels of religious observance overall, Portuguese adults are the most likely in the region to believe that God has all three traits.

Of these three characteristics, the most widely believed is that God “loves all people regardless of their faults.” For example, in Denmark, roughly half (53%) of adults say they believe in an all-loving God, compared with 23% of Danes who say God “knows everything that goes on in the world” and 13% who say God “has the power to direct or change everything that goes on in the world.”

Young adults (under 35) and college graduates are less likely than older adults and people with less education to believe that God possesses these traits. For instance, 16% of college-educated Spaniards say God is all-powerful, while 28% of those who have less education believe this.

Western Europeans more likely to see God as all-loving than all-powerful, all-knowing

% who believe in God or a higher power and say that God/higher power is ...

	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

Note: These questions were not asked of Muslim respondents; figures shown are the percentage of all non-Muslims who give each response. Respondents were asked if God or the higher power “loves all people regardless of their faults,” “knows everything that goes on in the world,” and “has the power to direct or change everything that goes on in the world.”

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

“Being Christian in Western Europe”

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Fewer than half of non-practicing Christians believe in an all-knowing or all-powerful God

% who believe in God or a higher power and say that God/higher power is ...

	Church-attending Christians			Non-practicing Christians			Religiously unaffiliated		
	All-loving	All-knowing	All-powerful	All-loving	All-knowing	All-powerful	All-loving	All-knowing	All-powerful
Austria	69%	58%	45%	41%	31%	28%	5%	6%	4%
Belgium	87	63	37	50	29	16	16	11	7
Denmark	86	49	36	63	25	12	23	11	6
Finland	94	86	71	62	43	26	22	16	9
France	59	53	39	40	34	26	9	8	6
Germany	67	60	46	40	31	26	4	3	4
Ireland	75	70	62	40	35	29	18	7	7
Italy	76	70	52	47	43	34	14	10	8
Netherlands	94	80	67	69	40	22	21	11	6
Norway	94	88	58	63	37	19	17	10	5
Portugal	92	81	72	81	63	49	36	23	17
Spain	86	71	51	62	45	26	15	10	5
Sweden	89	83	58	47	31	12	12	8	4
Switzerland	64	61	55	35	33	22	4	3	4
UK	60	58	48	37	32	26	6	5	3
MEDIAN	86	70	52	47	34	26	15	10	6

Note: Church-attending Christians are defined as those who attend church at least monthly. Non-practicing Christians are defined as those who attend less often.

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

"Being Christian in Western Europe"

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Churchgoing Christians are more likely than non-practicing Christians to ascribe these traits to God or another higher power. And non-practicing Christians are more likely than religiously unaffiliated people in Western Europe to say God has these characteristics.

Indeed, few "nones" associate these traits with God, in large part because relatively few believe in a higher power to begin with. For example, just 6% of religiously unaffiliated adults in France say God is all-powerful. But in some countries, substantial shares of "nones" say they believe in an all-loving God or higher power, including about one-in-five in Denmark (23%), Finland (22%) and the Netherlands (21%).

Few in region say God will judge people for their deeds

In most countries surveyed, fewer than a third of adults believe God will judge all people on their deeds (median of 27%). But individuals in several predominantly Catholic countries, including Portugal (53%) and Italy (46%), are more likely than others in the region to hold this belief.

Churchgoing Christians are much more likely than those who are non-practicing to think God will act as judge. And very few religiously unaffiliated people believe in a God or higher power that will judge all people for their deeds.

Throughout the region, younger adults (ages 18 to 34) and college graduates are less likely than individuals who are older and have less education to say God will judge all people.

Generally, Western Europeans are considerably more likely to believe in an all-loving God or higher power than a judgmental one (medians of 46% vs. 27%).

Most churchgoing Christians say God will judge all

% who believe in God or a higher power and say that God/higher power will judge all people on what they have done

	General population	Church-attending Christians	Non-practicing Christians	Religiously unaffiliated
Portugal	53%	72%	51%	13%
Italy	46	69	39	5
Ireland	41	67	33	8
Spain	36	59	44	9
Austria	32	61	25	4
Switzerland	30	60	25	4
France	29	58	31	5
Germany	27	56	25	3
Finland	26	61	28	6
United Kingdom	26	52	27	3
Belgium	24	58	28	11
Netherlands	24	69	29	6
Norway	18	60	19	3
Denmark	14	22	16	6
Sweden	12	52	12	3
MEDIAN	27	60	28	5

Note: Church-attending Christians are defined as those who attend church at least monthly. Non-practicing Christians are defined as those who attend less often. This question was not asked of Muslim respondents; figures shown are the percentage of all non-Muslims who give each response.

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

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Western Europeans are more likely to say God has rewarded them than punished them

Consistent with a general sense that God or a higher power is more likely to love than to judge, Western Europeans are more likely to say God has ever personally rewarded them than to say God has punished them because of their behavior. In Spain, for example, 41% of adults believe God has rewarded them, while just 18% believe they have been punished by God.

Churchgoing Christians are more likely than non-practicing Christians or “nones” to say they have been either rewarded or punished by God or a higher power. (Very few “nones” in the region say they have had these experiences.)

Older Western Europeans (those 35 years old and above) generally are more likely than younger adults to say God has rewarded them. Norway is an exception to this pattern; 17% of older Norwegians say God has rewarded them, compared with 26% of adults under 35. In Belgium, Denmark and the Netherlands, older and younger adults have similar views.

More belief in personal reward than punishment from God

% who believe in God or a higher power and say that God/higher power has ever rewarded/punished them personally because of their behavior

	Rewarded them	Punished them	Difference
Portugal	63%	23%	+40
Spain	41	18	+23
Italy	40	24	+16
Ireland	36	25	+11
Austria	29	19	+10
Belgium	21	11	+10
Germany	28	19	+9
Netherlands	19	10	+9
Sweden	16	7	+9
Switzerland	32	23	+9
France	28	20	+8
Norway	19	11	+8
Finland	25	18	+7
United Kingdom	25	18	+7
Denmark	14	8	+6
MEDIAN	28	18	

Note: These questions were not asked of Muslim respondents; figures shown are the percentage of all non-Muslims who give each response. All differences are statistically significant.

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

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Sidebar: Differing conceptions of God or a higher power

Participants in focus groups in five Western European countries shared descriptions and characteristics that they associate with God or a higher power. The focus groups were composed either entirely of Christians or entirely of religiously unaffiliated people. This conversation began with a word association exercise where everyone was asked to either draw or write what comes to mind when hearing the word “God.” In both kinds of focus groups, many participants talked about their idea of a supreme being or higher power. But their descriptions varied and were split mostly on religious lines. Christian participants generally used the word “God” or a male pronoun and spoke about characteristics often associated with God in the Bible – a powerful deity who is all-knowing and all-seeing – while many religiously unaffiliated adults said they do not believe in God at all. However, these patterns were not unanimous; a few Christians expressed doubts about God or described the deity in a more abstract manner, while several religiously unaffiliated adults mentioned belief in either a biblical God or a more abstract power, such as a source of balance in the universe or a force connecting all living things.

“Accepting, peaceful and forgiving ... I think that’s what I take from the Bible, and I think that’s what he asks of us. So I’m assuming, it’d be a bit arrogant if he wasn’t like that himself, wouldn’t it? So I think that would be his characteristics.”

– 39-year-old Christian man, United Kingdom

“Sees everything, knows everything and is ancient. That is how I picture God, just sitting there and looking down on us all day long and seeing everything and knowing everything.”

– 28-year-old “nothing in particular” woman, Germany

“To me, when someone talks about God, I have the image of Jesus Christ – the image of Jesus Christ with his beard that is taught to us as children in catechesis. When I have seen God, I have seen what he has taught us. The first image that comes to mind is that.”

– 50-year-old Christian woman, Spain

“Every time I picture God, I think of this massive person with this huge great beard.”

– 34-year-old Christian man, United Kingdom

“I would say a patriarch too, who watches over all his sheep. It’s what we were taught.”

– 25-year-old Christian man, France

“Higher power, and by that I mean something along the lines of ‘energy.’ And more like a guardian angel. ... To me, God is also not just one, but several. When I pray, I rather pray to my guardian angels that surround me, rather than praying directly to God.”

– 53-year-old Christian woman, Germany

“[The] characteristics of God are moss on a crisp Sunday morning in a park under your feet and there’s nobody else around; it’s gorgeous.”

– 35-year-old “nothing in particular” man, United Kingdom

“For me it is kindness. Goodness in the broadest sense of the word: good. And then, as I’m very fond of the family, I think it’s a superfather. ... He’s there when you need it, he will forgive you for what you do wrong, will let you be free if you want to, and is never going to reprimand you at all. He will explain, and

nothing more.”

– 67-year-old Christian man, Spain

“It’s the concept of a panoramic view. He is above everybody.”

– 34-year-old Christian man, France

“So for the drawing of God, I didn’t really know how to draw it because I guess my idea would be that God is outside matter, space and time, so it’s not a physical thing, like people were saying, so I just did a squiggle. But what are the qualities? I said it’s uncertain and we can’t really know much about it because it’s beyond our kind of understanding.”

– 20-year-old agnostic man, United Kingdom

“[I wrote] ‘Him or her in heaven!’ Very stylistic picture, not strictly traditional, a little Whoopi Goldberg, if you are going to picture God.”

– 30-year-old agnostic man, Sweden

While many could give a description of God or a higher power, a lot of the religiously unaffiliated participants and even some Christians provided reasons they do not think that such a being, or force, exists. They said the existence of a biblical version of God or a higher power conflicts with their belief in logic, reason and science.

“I’m very science- [and] evidence-based. ... I don’t necessarily think all Christians genuinely believe that there is a man sitting in the clouds in the sky that created the planet. I think it’s that sense of willing, of wanting to believe in something bigger, as opposed to it being a being. Because I think a lot of the Christians that I would speak to don’t necessarily talk about God as a creator.”

– 32-year-old “nothing in particular” woman, United Kingdom

“I think that man created this concept of God.”

– 57-year-old “nothing in particular” man, France

“Of course, people should be able to believe in what they want, and then it is up to them if it is spiritual, or if it is God, or whatever. But for me, it just doesn’t exist. For me it’s not logical – in my head it’s just not logical. I haven’t experienced anything, maybe if I would experience something, then I would say it, but not quite. But one can always change.”

– 26-year-old atheist woman, Sweden

“I quite like science. I just can’t believe there’s one – or more than one – god at the moment that has created everything in the universe, based on science today.”

– 30-year-old atheist man, United Kingdom

“I’d really love to believe, as I see how much it helps many people. I can see the help it can bring. Unfortunately, it never did so for me. And, for me, God is just a story.”

– 32-year-old Christian woman, France

For details on the focus groups, including locations and composition, see Methodology.

Few in the region say God communicates with them daily

The survey also asked people who believe in God (or some other higher power) whether that higher power talks to or communicates with them. In several countries across the region, at least a quarter of adults say God or some higher power communicates with them somewhat regularly.

In Switzerland, for example, 38% say God communicates with them monthly or more. Among those who believe in God, fewer say God seldom (13%) or never (15%) communicates with them. (An additional 27% of Swiss adults do not believe in God or any other higher power.)

In other countries, such as Belgium, Denmark and Sweden, lower shares say they have monthly communications with God or a higher power. And across most of the region, very few people say God communicates with them on a *daily* basis, although in Portugal, more than a quarter of adults (28%) say this.

Relatively high share in Portugal say God communicates with them daily

% who say God/higher power talks to or communicates with them ...

	At least daily	Weekly/monthly	Seldom	Never/Don't believe in God
Portugal	28%	17%	13%	30%
Spain	15	10	12	55
Netherlands	14	10	15	57
Italy	10	34	14	33
Norway	10	9	16	58
Belgium	9	10	13	62
Ireland	9	29	14	39
Sweden	8	7	12	66
Finland	6	7	25	54
France	5	23	16	46
Germany	5	33	16	40
Austria	4	36	16	37
Denmark	4	5	16	70
Switzerland	3	35	13	42
UK	3	29	16	43
MEDIAN	8	17	15	46

Note: This question was not asked of Muslim respondents; figures shown are the percentage of all non-Muslims who give each response. Don't know/refused/other/both/neither/depends responses are not shown. Source: Survey conducted April-August 2017 in 15 countries. See Methodology for details.

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Churchgoing Christians are much more likely than non-practicing Christians or “nones” to say God communicates with them on at least a monthly basis. For example, a majority (72%) of Swiss Christians who attend religious services at least monthly say God talks to them monthly or more, but just 36% of Christians who attend less frequently say this, as do just 3% of religiously unaffiliated Swiss.

Women are more likely than men to say God communicates with them regularly. For example, 25% of women in Norway say this, compared with 12% of men. And adults ages 35 and over also are more likely than younger adults to say God talks to them.

Majorities of church-attending Christians say God communicates with them

% who say God/higher power talks to or communicates with them monthly or more

	Church-attending Christians	Non-practicing Christians	Religiously unaffiliated
Austria	73%	34%	1%
Belgium	57	20	6
Denmark	24	8	4
Finland	53	9	6
France	70	27	3
Germany	76	39	2
Ireland	68	27	3
Italy	69	35	2
Netherlands	76	27	6
Norway	68	16	5
Portugal	66	39	14
Spain	60	21	6
Sweden	75	13	3
Switzerland	72	36	3
United Kingdom	69	33	2
MEDIAN	69	27	3

Note: Church-attending Christians are defined as those who attend church at least monthly. Non-practicing Christians are defined as those who attend less often.

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

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People who believe in a biblical God generally say God is all-loving, all-knowing and judging

Overall, an image of an omnipotent and omniscient God is more commonly held by people who believe in a biblical description of God than by those who say they believe in some other kind of higher power or spiritual force. A regional median of 54% of those who believe in God as described in the Bible say God is all-powerful, compared with a median of 27% among those who express belief in some other higher power. A similar pattern is seen on the questions about whether God is omniscient (medians of 72% vs. 38%), loves all people (86% vs. 58%) or will judge all people (59% vs. 31%).

Believers in a biblical God are also more likely to say they have had personal interactions with God. Those who believe in God as described in the Bible are more likely than other believers to say God has rewarded them (52% vs. 32% medians) or regularly communicates with them (78% vs. 55%).

Believers in a biblical God more likely to see God as all-powerful, all-knowing, and involved in their life

Median % in Western Europe who believe God/higher power ...

	<i>Among those who ...</i>	
	Believe in God as described in the Bible	Believe in other higher power or spiritual force
Is all-loving	86%	58%
Is all-knowing	72	38
Is all-powerful	54	27
Will judge all people	59	31
Has ever personally rewarded them	52	32
Has ever personally punished them	29	22
Has ever communicated with them	78	55

Source: Survey conducted April-August 2017 in 15 countries. See Methodology for details.
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5. Attitudes toward spirituality and religion

Spirituality and religion can be defined in many different ways, and the distinction between the two concepts often is muddy. For the purposes of this analysis, 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 (or actively practice) a religion. Indeed, 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 survey shows, moreover, 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.

On the whole, Western Europeans have mixed views on religion and spirituality. When multiple questions about the impact of religion on individuals and society are combined into a scale, there is no consensus among people across the region on whether religion has a positive, negative or mixed influence. Public opinion in the Scandinavian countries of Sweden, Denmark and Norway is comparatively negative toward religion, while respondents in Portugal, Italy, Austria and Ireland hold much more positive views of religion’s value for individuals and society.

Similarly, when multiple questions about spiritual concepts are combined into a scale, the overall picture also is mixed, with about half of the public embracing spiritual beliefs in Austria, Italy and Ireland (some of the same countries where attitudes toward religion are most positive) and far fewer respondents affirming spiritual views in such countries as Sweden and Belgium.

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 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.

Minorities across the region describe themselves as religious, spiritual

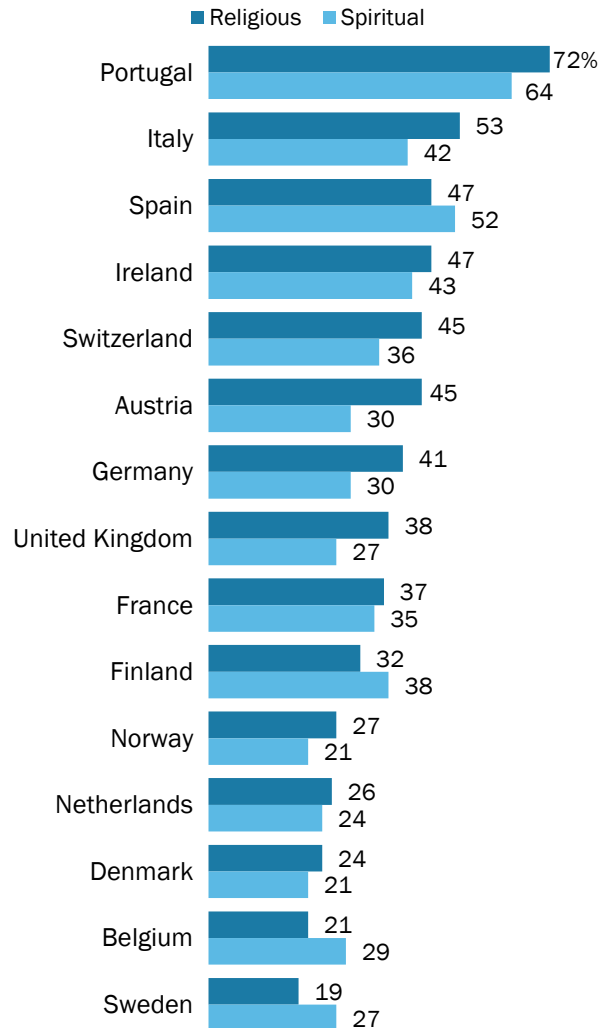
The survey asked respondents two separate but related questions: Do you think of yourself as a religious person? And do you think of yourself as a spiritual person? In most countries, fewer than half of respondents say they are religious, and fewer than half say they are spiritual.

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.

Identifying as 'religious' or 'spiritual' is common in Portugal, but less so elsewhere in the region

% who say they think of themselves as ...



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

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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%). (For more comparisons with the U.S., see page 47 in the Overview of this report.)

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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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.

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%).

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.

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Overall, most Christians in the region describe themselves as religious or spiritual in some way, but there are significant differences depending on levels of religious commitment. A majority of Christians with low levels of observance say they are neither religious nor spiritual (median of 71%). But among those with moderate or high levels of religious commitment, far fewer fall into this category (28% and 6%, respectively).¹⁸

Highly committed Christians generally say that they are either both religious and spiritual (median of 54%) or that they are religious but not spiritual (median of 33%).

Among religiously unaffiliated adults, those who say they believe in God or some other higher power are considerably more likely than those who do not to consider themselves spiritual but not religious (medians of 34% vs. 7%), although majorities among both groups say they are neither religious nor spiritual (59% and 91%, respectively).

On balance, women and those over the age of 34 are more likely than men and younger adults to say they are both religious and spiritual. And college-educated respondents are more likely than those with less education to identify as spiritual but *not* religious.

‘Spiritual but not religious’ label most common among ‘nones’ who say they believe in God or a higher power

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

<i>Among...</i>	Both religious and spiritual	Religious but not spiritual	Spiritual but not religious	Neither religious nor spiritual
Christians	31%	20%	8%	43%
<i>High commitment</i>	54	33	4	6
<i>Moderate commitment</i>	43	24	7	28
<i>Low commitment</i>	8	9	12	71
Religiously unaffiliated	2	1	16	80
<i>Believe in God/higher power</i>	6	2	34	59
<i>Do not believe</i>	1	1	7	91

Note: Religious commitment is measured as an index of the following individual practices: attendance at religious services, importance of religion in one’s life, frequency of prayer and belief in God. See Appendix A: Scaling and regression analysis for more details. 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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¹⁸ Religious commitment is measured as an index of the following individual practices: attendance at religious services, importance of religion in one’s life, frequency of prayer and belief in God.

Spiritual concepts embraced by some, rejected by others in Western Europe

In a region where the labels “spiritual” and “religious” are rejected by much of the population, the 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 (see page 130).

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.
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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.

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 skeptical 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.

Religious and/or spiritual people say they have a soul

Median % in Western Europe who completely/mostly 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. “Being Christian in Western Europe”

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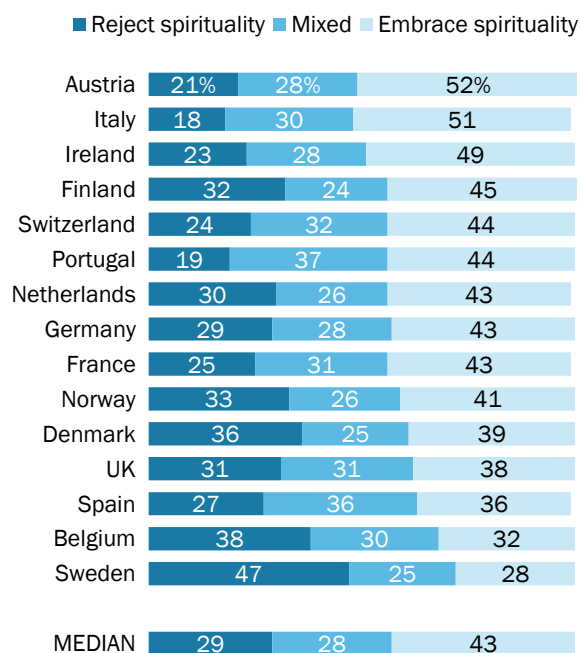
These four questions can be combined into a scale to more comprehensively measure overall levels of spiritual beliefs in Western Europe.¹⁹ The results indicate varying sentiments toward spirituality in the region.

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.

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.
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¹⁹ 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 for further details on the index.

Christians across the region tend to embrace the spiritual ideas tested in the survey. But those with high or moderate levels of religious commitment are much more likely than those with low levels of commitment to do so.

Religiously unaffiliated adults, on the other hand, reject spiritual ideas. But the subset of religiously unaffiliated adults who believe in God or a higher power are considerably more likely to embrace other spiritual beliefs than are religiously unaffiliated people who do not believe in any higher power or spiritual force in the universe.

Adults ages 35 and older are more likely than younger adults to embrace spiritual ideas. For example, about half (51%) of those ages 35 and older in Switzerland score at the high end of the four-question spirituality scale, compared with about a quarter (26%) of Swiss adults under 35. Belgium is one exception to this pattern, where older people are *less* likely than younger adults to embrace spiritual concepts.

In several countries, Europeans with a college or university degree are *more* likely than those with less education to embrace spiritual ideas. For example, in France, 53% of college graduates largely affirm spiritual concepts, compared with 38% of those who have less education. This is the case even though highly educated Europeans are generally *less* positive in their views toward the value of religion for individuals and society. (See page 133.)

On balance, women are more likely than men to embrace spiritual ideas. In Sweden, for example, 35% of women score at the high end of the spirituality scale, compared with 22% of men.

Religiously unaffiliated Europeans who believe in a higher power are more likely to embrace other spiritual ideas

Across 15 Western European countries, median % who ...

Among...	Reject spiritual concepts	Have mixed views on spirituality	Embrace spiritual concepts
Christians	17%	29%	53%
<i>High commitment</i>	3	17	80
<i>Moderate commitment</i>	13	27	61
<i>Low commitment</i>	30	37	29
Religiously unaffiliated	56	26	19
<i>Believe in God/higher power</i>	22	33	45
<i>Do not believe</i>	73	20	6

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, 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. Religious commitment is measured as an index of the following individual practices: attendance at religious services, importance of religion in one's life, frequency of prayer and belief in God. See Appendix A: Scaling and regression analysis for more details. Source: Survey conducted April-August 2017 in 15 countries. See Methodology for details.

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Mixed views on religion's value in personal life, society

Using a similar approach to measure overall attitudes toward religion, the survey finds no clear consensus across Western Europe about the personal and social value of religion. In eight countries, attitudes toward religion are, on balance, more positive than negative. But attitudes toward religion lean negative in four countries and are divided in three countries.

The survey asked respondents whether they agree with two positive statements about religion and two negative ones. More Western Europeans *disagree* than agree with the two positive statements – “Religion helps me choose between right and wrong” and “Religion gives meaning and purpose to my life.” But respondents across the region also are more likely to disagree than to agree with the two negative statements – “Overall, religion causes more harm than good” and “Science makes religion unnecessary in my life.”

On balance, fewer than half express positive or negative sentiments about religion

% who completely/mostly agree with the following statements

	Positive statements about religion		Negative statements about religion	
	Religion helps me choose between right and wrong	Religion gives meaning and purpose to my life	Overall, religion causes more harm than good	Science makes religion unnecessary in my life
Austria	47%	47%	27%	29%
Belgium	37	34	44	40
Denmark	31	36	47	41
Finland	47	38	41	34
France	39	38	37	31
Germany	44	43	27	31
Ireland	52	50	33	28
Italy	57	54	28	29
Netherlands	40	37	42	36
Norway	44	40	48	42
Portugal	62	64	24	28
Spain	45	39	31	37
Sweden	30	25	50	42
Switzerland	46	44	31	32
United Kingdom	39	37	32	31
MEDIAN	44	39	33	32

Source: Survey conducted April-August 2017 in 15 countries. See Methodology for details.
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In most countries, fewer than half of people surveyed (median of 44%) say that religion helps them choose right over wrong. And similar shares in most countries (median of 39%) say religion gives meaning to their lives. On balance, even smaller percentages agree with the negative statements about religion – that it causes more harm than good (median of 33%) and that science makes it unnecessary (median of 32%).

Only in Portugal and Italy do more than half of adults say religion helps them discern right from wrong and provides meaning and purpose. Meanwhile, at the other end of the spectrum, roughly half of adults in Sweden (50%), Norway (48%) and Denmark (47%) agree that religion causes more harm than good.

Respondents who say they are religious (either religious but not spiritual, or both religious and spiritual) generally express positive attitudes toward religion. They overwhelmingly agree that religion gives them meaning, purpose and moral guidance, and they are considerably less likely to agree with the survey's negative statements about religion.

Those who say they are neither religious nor spiritual, meanwhile, are more likely to agree with negative rather than positive statements about religion. Indeed, relatively few say religion has value for them personally. But, still, negative views about religion are not dominant: In no country do a majority of adults in this category say religion causes more harm than good, overall (median of 43%).

People who say they are spiritual but not religious present a mixed picture. They tend to *disagree* that religion causes more harm than good, or that science makes religion unnecessary. But at the same time, they also disagree that religion gives their life meaning or helps them choose between right and wrong.

People who say they are not religious do not necessarily view religion as harmful

Across 15 Western European countries, median % who completely/mainly agree with the following statements among those who are ...

	Positive statements		Negative statements	
	Religion gives meaning and purpose to my life	Religion helps me choose between right and wrong	Overall, religion causes more harm than good	Science makes religion unnecessary in my life
Both religious and spiritual	83%	81%	22%	16%
Religious but not spiritual	71	70	22	19
Spiritual but not religious	30	33	43	33
Neither religious nor spiritual	17	20	43	47

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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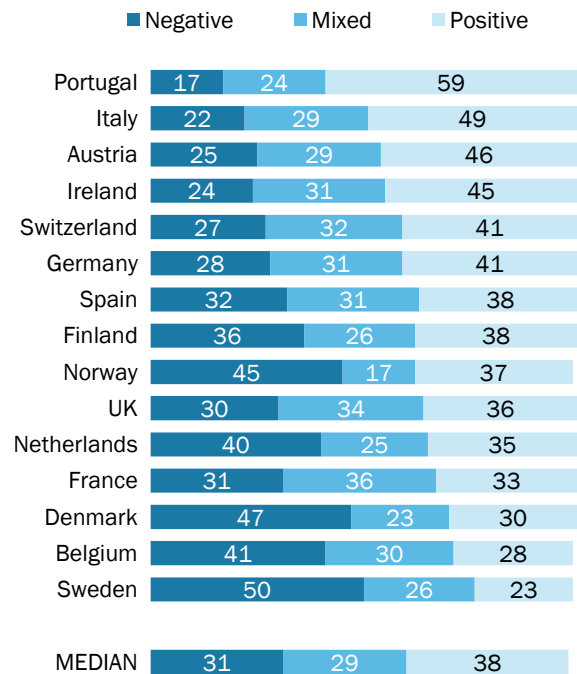
As with the battery of questions about spiritual beliefs, the four questions about religion were combined into a scale to gauge overall attitudes in Western Europe.²⁰

In about half the countries surveyed, people are more likely to hold positive views of religion than negative ones. A majority of adults in Portugal (59%), for example, express mainly positive views on the religion scale, compared with 17% who voice largely negative views. Views about religion are also more positive than negative in Italy, Austria and Ireland, to name a few examples.

On the other hand, in several countries – especially Sweden and Denmark – people tend to express negative attitudes toward religion. Roughly half of adults in Sweden (50%) and Denmark (47%) have highly negative scores on the religion scale, while far fewer in both countries express highly positive views of religion.

Half of Swedes view religion more negatively than positively

% who have a _____ view of religion



Note: Respondents were asked four questions about religion. For each of the four questions, respondents who expressed a positive view (e.g., agree religion gives meaning and purpose to their life, or disagree that religion causes more harm than good) received a score of 1, while those who expressed a negative view (e.g., agree science makes religion unnecessary in their life, or disagree that religion helps them choose between right and wrong) 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 positive views toward religion, scores of minus 2 to minus 4 are coded as negative, and scores of minus 1 to 1 are coded as mixed. See Appendix A: Scaling and regression analysis for additional details on the scale. Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.

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

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²⁰ For each of the four questions about religion, respondents who expressed a positive view (e.g., agree religion gives meaning and purpose to their life, or disagree that religion causes more harm than good) received a score of 1, while those who expressed a negative view (e.g., agree science makes religion unnecessary in their life, or disagree that religion helps them choose between right and wrong) 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 positive views toward religion, scores of minus 2 to minus 4 are coded as negative, and scores of minus 1 to 1 are coded as mixed. See Appendix A for additional details on the scale.

Generally, Christians across the region tend to hold positive views of religion's impact on their lives or in society overall. But even among Christians, roughly a third of people in Sweden (35%) and Denmark (35%) hold more negative than positive attitudes on the scale. This at least partly reflects differences by level of observance:

Majorities of highly committed and moderately committed Christians express positive attitudes about religion, but those with low levels of commitment tend to voice mixed or negative views.

Religiously unaffiliated Europeans generally hold negative views of religion, but among this group, those who believe in God or a higher power are more likely than those who do not to have positive attitudes toward religion (medians of 15% vs. 2%). Even among religiously unaffiliated believers, roughly half or more in nearly every country score on the negative end of the scale.

Across many countries, women, older adults and those with less than a college education are more likely than men, adults under 35 and college graduates to have positive views of religion. In Spain, for example, college graduates tend to have negative attitudes toward religion (41% mostly negative vs. 28% mostly positive), while people with less education tend to lean toward positive attitudes (29% negative vs. 41% positive).

Religiously unaffiliated Europeans have predominantly negative view of religion

Across 15 Western European countries, median % who have _____ views toward religion

<i>Among...</i>	Negative	Mixed	Positive
Christians	18%	29%	51%
<i>High commitment</i>	1	10	89
<i>Moderate commitment</i>	10	27	64
<i>Low commitment</i>	35	43	21
Religiously unaffiliated	67	27	6
<i>Believe in God/higher power</i>	55	31	15
<i>Do not believe</i>	78	21	2

Note: Respondents were asked four questions about religion. For each of the four questions, respondents who expressed a positive view (e.g., agree religion gives meaning and purpose to their life, or disagree that religion causes more harm than good) received a score of 1, while those who expressed a negative view (e.g., agree science makes religion unnecessary in their life, or disagree that religion helps them choose between right and wrong) 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 positive views toward religion, scores of minus 2 to minus 4 are coded as negative, and scores of minus 1 to 1 are coded as mixed.

Religious commitment is measured as an index of the following individual practices: attendance at religious services, importance of religion in one's life, frequency of prayer and belief in God. See Appendix A: Scaling and regression analysis for more details. Source: Survey conducted April-August 2017 in 15 countries. See Methodology for details.

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

The 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.

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.
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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.

‘Spiritual but not religious’ Europeans more likely to believe in astrology, meditate

% 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”	Meditate	Consult horoscope/tarot cards or fortune-teller
Both religious and spiritual	41	37	30	34	30	26	25	20
Religious but not spiritual	48	18	25	20	22	19	14	14
Spiritual but not religious	43	55	40	52	38	29	45	28
Neither religious nor spiritual	28	19	18	14	12	9	11	9

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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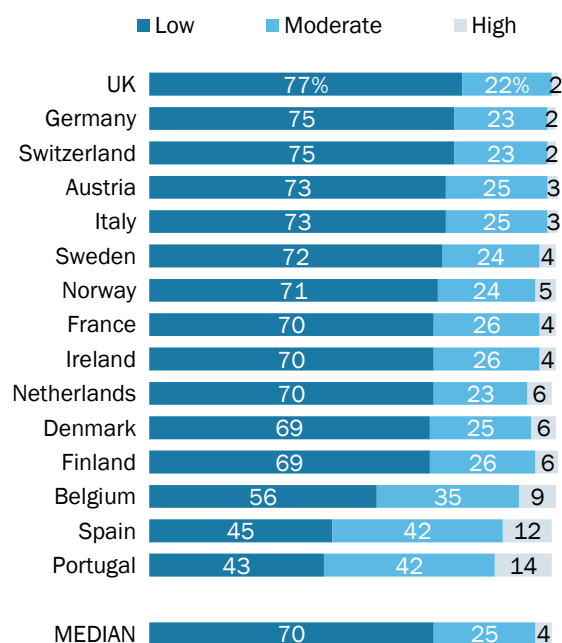
These eight measures were combined into an overall scale of alternative (i.e., Eastern, New Age or folk) beliefs and practices. Those who say they believe in or practice at least six of the eight items are categorized as having high levels of engagement with alternative beliefs and practices, while those who affirm two or fewer items are coded as relatively low on the scale. Others are categorized as moderate.²¹

Throughout Western Europe, very few respondents display high levels of these alternative beliefs and practices. Majorities in nearly every country say they observe two or fewer of the eight items tested, including roughly three-quarters in the United Kingdom (77%), Germany (75%) and Switzerland (75%). In fact, substantial shares of respondents in several countries say that they do not engage in *any* of these beliefs and practices: In Italy (40%) and Austria (35%), for example, more than a third of adults say they do not engage in any of the Eastern, New Age or folk beliefs and practices mentioned in the survey.

Consistent with their overall low levels of religious belief and practice, European men show lower levels of engagement with these alternative beliefs and practices than do women. For example, just over half of men (54%) in Spain score low on the scale, compared with 37% of Spanish women. And the shares of men in Denmark (39%) and Norway (40%) who do not observe any of these beliefs and practices are larger than the comparable shares of women (25% and 23%, respectively).

Few people across Western Europe show high levels of engagement with alternative beliefs and practices

% who have ___ levels of engagement with Eastern, New Age or folk beliefs and practices



Note: The survey asked about eight beliefs and practices often associated with Eastern, New Age or folk religions: belief in fate, astrology, spiritual energy, yoga as a spiritual practice, reincarnation and the evil eye, and whether people practice meditation or consult horoscopes, tarot cards or fortune-tellers. Those who say they believe in or practice at least six of the eight items are categorized as having high levels of engagement with alternative beliefs and practices, while those who say they believe in two or fewer items are categorized as low on the scale. Others are counted as "moderate." People who responded "don't know" or who refused to answer each statement were coded as nonbelieving for the purpose of this scale. See Appendix A: Scaling and regression analysis for details. Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.

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

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²¹ For more information about how this scale was developed, see Appendix A: Scaling and regression analysis.

The picture is more mixed when it comes to differences by education. In several countries, adults with less than a college degree are more likely than college-educated adults to believe in fate, astrology or the evil eye, and more likely to say they consult horoscopes or tarot cards. But the reverse is true for meditation and yoga: College-educated respondents are *more* likely than their less-well-educated peers to say they meditate or believe in yoga as a spiritual practice.

Age patterns also vary. For example, in Belgium, young adults (under 35) are more engaged with alternative beliefs and practices than their elders, while in Switzerland and the UK, younger people score *lower* on the same scale.

In most places, Christians score low on the scale of alternative beliefs and practices, and there are no consistent differences among Christians depending on their levels of religious commitment.

Religiously unaffiliated Europeans show even lower levels of engagement with Eastern, New Age or folk beliefs and practices than do Christians. But the subset of “nones” who believe in God or a higher power are more likely than unaffiliated people who do not believe in any higher power – and more likely than Christians – to engage in alternative beliefs and practices.

Religiously unaffiliated Europeans who believe in God or a higher power are more likely than other ‘nones’ to engage in alternative beliefs and practices

Across 15 Western European countries, median % who have low/moderate/high levels of engagement with Eastern, New Age or folk beliefs and practices

Among ...	Level of engagement with nontraditional practices		
	Low	Moderate	High
Christians	68%	28%	4%
<i>High commitment</i>	64	30	6
<i>Moderate commitment</i>	63	33	6
<i>Low commitment</i>	72	25	2
Religiously unaffiliated	79	18	4
<i>Believe in God/higher power</i>	52	36	12
<i>Do not believe</i>	91	8	1

Note: The survey asked about eight beliefs and practices often associated with Eastern, New Age or folk religions: belief in fate, astrology, spiritual energy, yoga as a spiritual practice, reincarnation and the evil eye, and whether people practice meditation or consult the horoscope. Those who say they believe in or practice at least six of the eight items were categorized as having high levels of engagement with alternative beliefs and practices, while those who say they believe in two or fewer items are categorized as low on the scale. Others are counted as “moderate.” People who responded “don’t know” or who refused to answer each statement were coded as nonbelieving for the purpose of this scale.

Religious commitment is measured as an index of the following individual practices: attendance at religious services, importance of religion in one’s life, frequency of prayer and belief in God. See Appendix A: Scaling and regression analysis for more details. Source: Survey conducted April-August 2017 in 15 countries. See Methodology for details.

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6. Religion and society

Overall, fewer than half of respondents across Western Europe regularly take part in civic activities, such as participating in a performing arts group, charitable organization, church or religious group, sports club or any other community group or association. Across many of these activities, there is a clear link between religious observance and civic participation: Highly observant Christians are more likely than either Christians with lower levels of observance or religiously unaffiliated adults to participate not only in religious groups but also in charitable or volunteer organizations and other community groups. This suggests that *active participation* in a religious community, not just religious identity or belief alone, may be associated with higher rates of civic participation.²²

But, although highly committed Christians are generally more civically engaged than other Europeans, they are not more engaged in *every* kind of activity. When it comes to sports clubs or recreation groups, religiously unaffiliated adults and Christians with lower levels of religious commitment are more likely than highly committed Christians to participate.

Still, religious observance is tied to overall civic engagement, and many Western Europeans also see churches and religious institutions as having positive impacts on society. Majorities across the region say that religious institutions bring people together, strengthen community bonds and play an important role in helping the poor and needy.

In Western Europe, religious observance is connected with civic participation and social attitudes

Across 15 countries, median % who ...

	Religiously unaffiliated	Among Christians with ___ level of commitment		
		Low	Medium	High
Participate in a community group	18%	17%	19%	28%
Participate in a charitable or volunteer organization	14	11	21	28
Participate in a sports club	39	35	33	31
Say religion should be kept separate from government policies	82	66	55	39
Favor legal gay marriage	87	84	74	41
Favor legal abortion	87	87	79	47

Note: Respondents were asked if they spent at least an hour of their time in the past month participating in community groups/volunteer organizations/sports clubs. Religious commitment is measured as an index of the following individual practices: attendance at religious services, importance of religion in one's life, frequency of prayer and belief in God. See Appendix A: Scaling and regression analysis for more details.

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

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²² This finding broadly aligns with a large body of scholarship that has linked religious observance to higher levels of civic engagement. See for example, Putnam, Robert D. and David E. Campbell. 2010. "American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us."

Fewer, although still considerable shares, also agree with a series of negative statements about religious institutions. For example, in Portugal – the most religious country surveyed, by several measures – majorities say churches and other religious institutions focus too much on rules (74%) and are too concerned with money and power (66%).

In addition, Western Europeans generally favor keeping religion separate from government. Christians who show low levels of religious commitment are more supportive of separation of church and state than are highly observant Christians. But even compared with Christians who show low levels of religious commitment, religiously unaffiliated adults are especially likely to say religion should be kept separate from government policy.

There is less of a divide between “nones” and Christians with low levels of commitment when it comes to attitudes on gay marriage and abortion. Both religiously unaffiliated adults and Christians with low levels of religious observance overwhelmingly favor legal gay marriage and abortion. Highly observant Christians, meanwhile, are less likely to take these positions.

Most people say they do not spend time participating in civic groups

Generally, most Western Europeans say they have *not* spent an hour or more of their time in the past month participating in a civic organization such as a political party, religious group, charitable organization or community group, although roughly a quarter of adults in Portugal (27%) and Ireland (24%), and about one-in-five in the Netherlands (21%) say they have spent at least an hour of their time volunteering with a religious organization.

In some countries, sizable minorities say they participate in a community organization or neighborhood association. This includes about a quarter of adults in Finland (26%), Norway (25%), Denmark (24%), Sweden (24%), Belgium (23%) and Ireland (23%). There are similar levels of participation in other kinds of charitable organizations: About three-in-ten Dutch adults (29%) reported doing this in the past month at the time the survey was conducted.

Volunteering with a political party is less common: In nearly every country surveyed, roughly one-in-ten or fewer report spending an hour or more of their time in the past month working with a political party.

Roughly a quarter of adults in Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Ireland, Norway, Sweden involved with community groups

% who say, in the past month, they spent an hour or more of their time participating in a ...

	Political party	Religious group	Community group/ neighborhood association	Any other charitable organization
Austria	6%	12%	16%	18%
Belgium	6	13	23	27
Denmark	5	12	24	18
Finland	4	12	26	16
France	5	11	16	15
Germany	9	12	15	15
Ireland	8	24	23	19
Italy	5	19	14	16
Netherlands	14	21	22	29
Norway	11	19	25	27
Portugal	3	27	11	16
Spain	4	15	19	19
Sweden	6	12	24	18
Switzerland	7	12	17	16
UK	6	13	13	14
MEDIAN	6	13	19	18

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

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In addition to asking about volunteering with civic or charitable organizations, the survey also asked people if they had spent an hour or more of their time in the past month participating in recreational groups such as a sports club for themselves or their children, a performance or arts group (such as a choir or theater group), a literary discussion or study group (such as a book club), or a youth group (such as [Scouts](#)).

Of these activities, sports or recreational clubs appear to be the most popular. About a third or more of adults surveyed in most countries report that they recently participated in a sports or recreation club, including a majority of respondents in the Netherlands (56%). By contrast, medians of about one-in-ten people participate in performance or arts groups or in literary, discussion, or study groups. Even fewer adults participate in youth groups.

On the whole, highly observant Christians are more likely than less observant Christians and “nones” to be civically engaged. For example, highly committed Christians are more likely than others to be involved not only in religious groups, but also in charitable or volunteer organizations as well as community groups.

But highly committed Christians are *less* likely than unaffiliated respondents to participate in sports teams or recreational clubs, suggesting that for some nonreligious people in Europe, sports

Many Western Europeans participate in sports or recreation clubs

% who say, in the past month, they spent an hour or more of their time participating in a ...

	Sports or recreation clubs for themselves or their children	Performance or arts group	Literary, discussion or study group	Youth group
Austria	37%	12%	8%	5%
Belgium	46	18	8	7
Denmark	42	8	9	5
Finland	34	7	8	3
France	36	12	10	6
Germany	38	13	11	5
Ireland	36	14	14	9
Italy	24	10	9	7
Netherlands	56	13	9	6
Norway	38	11	12	7
Portugal	23	9	5	6
Spain	30	11	9	4
Sweden	37	10	9	6
Switzerland	32	13	11	5
United Kingdom	30	11	13	6
MEDIAN	36	11	9	6

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

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clubs could replace religious groups as a form of community engagement.²³ For example, in the UK, 22% of highly committed Christians say they are part of a sports or recreational club, compared with 39% of “nones.”

On balance, highly committed Christians are about as likely as “nones” or Christians with lower levels of commitment to be involved with literary discussion groups, such as book clubs.

Adults under 35 are less likely than older people to be involved in civic groups such as community or charitable organizations, but they are *more* likely to say they have spent an hour or more of their time with a sports club. And higher shares of college graduates than of adults with less education say they are involved in performing arts, community, sports, volunteer or literary discussion groups.

But even after controlling for age, gender and education, highly committed Christians are significantly more likely than those with lower levels of commitment and religiously unaffiliated adults to be involved in a wide range of community organizations. Conversely, religiously unaffiliated adults and Christians with low levels of commitment are more likely than highly committed Christians to be involved in sports clubs, even when holding other demographic factors constant.

Measuring religious commitment

In this chapter, religious commitment is measured on a scale combining four different measures: How important a person considers religion in their lives, how often they attend religious services, how often they pray and whether they believe in God. Christian respondents are classified as high, medium or low in their religious commitment based on their scores on the scale. See Chapter 3 or Appendix A for additional details on the scale.

Substituting the commitment scale with a simpler measure that uses attendance at religious services to classify Christians into churchgoing (that is, those who attend church at least monthly) and non-practicing (those who attend church no more than a few times a year) does not change the overall patterns described in this chapter.

²³ Some commentators have argued that, at least in the American context, nonreligious people look toward [gyms such as CrossFit to fill spiritual and social needs](#) that previously may have been met by religious institutions. Communications professor Machael Serazio has pointed out that sports teams' followers often participate [in rituals and form kinship bonds that resemble religious behavior](#). Serazio further explores the connection between secularization and sports as “civic religion” in his article [“Just How Much Is Sports Fandom Like Religion?”](#)

Highly committed Christians more likely than ‘nones’ to volunteer with community groups, but more ‘nones’ engaged in sports clubs

% of _____ who say, in the past month, they spent an hour or more of their time participating in ...

	Community group or neighborhood association				Sports or recreation club			
	Religiously unaffiliated	Christians with low levels of commitment	Christians with moderate levels of commitment	Highly committed Christians	Religiously unaffiliated	Christians with low levels of commitment	Christians with moderate levels of commitment	Highly committed Christians
Austria	10%	13%	15%	30%	43%	38%	34%	35%
Belgium	21	23	24	37	45	48	51	30
Denmark	21	22	34	34	41	46	37	42
Finland	25	24	27	37	32	34	36	31
France	17	13	16	18	39	38	31	31
Germany	9	14	17	22	39	43	33	34
Ireland	23	17	21	32	46	31	33	33
Italy	12	10	15	14	31	26	23	19
Netherlands	20	22	29	27	57	59	60	48
Norway	21	26	27	33	42	35	43	26
Portugal	13	9	8	13	31	26	22	19
Spain	18	13	19	28	34	32	25	27
Sweden	23	23	26	33	35	39	38	31
Switzerland	11	20	15	24	42	29	30	23
UK	12	11	11	19	39	26	30	22
MEDIAN	18	17	19	28	39	35	33	31

Note: Religious commitment is measured as an index of the following individual practices: attendance at religious services, importance of religion in one's life, frequency of prayer and belief in God. See Appendix A: Scaling and regression analysis for more details.

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

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Many in Western Europe say churches have positive impacts on society

Most Western Europeans see churches and other religious institutions as having a positive role in their societies. Solid majorities in most countries agree that churches and other religious organizations “play an important role in helping the poor and needy” and that they “bring people together and strengthen community bonds.” And in several countries surveyed, roughly half or more of respondents say they agree churches and other religious organizations “protect and strengthen morality in society.”

The survey also asked whether people agree with three negative statements about churches and other religious institutions. On balance, more respondents agree with the positive statements than with the negative ones. For example, fewer than half of Germans say churches focus too much on rules (42%), are too concerned with money and power (39%), or are too involved with politics (34%).

Most say religious institutions help poor and needy, bring people together

% of people who agree with the following statements: “Churches and other religious organizations ...”

	Positive attributes			Negative attributes		
	Play an important role in helping the poor and needy	Bring people together & strengthen community bonds	Protect and strengthen morality in society	Focus too much on rules	Are too concerned with money and power	Are too involved with politics
Austria	58%	58%	50%	38%	40%	31%
Belgium	52	66	43	69	66	50
Denmark	73	75	49	57	46	42
Finland	86	76	64	61	48	47
France	50	50	41	47	45	39
Germany	59	53	43	42	39	34
Ireland	62	61	55	50	46	39
Italy	58	56	54	40	43	40
Netherlands	67	75	52	58	51	36
Norway	77	55	53	64	53	53
Portugal	67	71	67	74	66	52
Spain	81	68	54	48	41	37
Sweden	81	82	46	48	41	35
Switzerland	51	49	45	40	41	31
United Kingdom	50	45	39	41	42	34
MEDIAN	62	61	50	48	45	39

Source: Survey conducted April-August 2017 in 15 countries. See Methodology for details.
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Looked at another way, a median of 46% of Western Europeans agree with more of the positive statements about organized religion, compared with a median of 29% who agree with more of the negative statements. Others (median of 24%) agree with equal numbers of positive and negative statements about organized religion.

Only in Belgium is the share of people with a predominantly negative view of religious institutions (44%) larger than the share with a mainly positive opinion (33%). In France, these two figures are roughly equal (37% mostly positive, 35% mostly negative).

On the whole, people over 35 are generally more likely than younger adults to take positive views of religious institutions. The Netherlands is an exception to this pattern: Older Dutch people are *less* likely than young Dutch adults to have positive views of religious institutions.

On balance, Western Europeans tend to have more positive than negative views about religious institutions

% who agree with _____ statements about religious institutions

	More positive than negative	Equal numbers of positive and negative	More negative than positive
Austria	51%	24%	25%
Belgium	33	23	44
Denmark	50	22	28
Finland	55	20	25
France	37	28	35
Germany	46	26	29
Ireland	46	25	29
Italy	46	25	29
Netherlands	52	19	30
Norway	42	20	37
Portugal	41	25	34
Spain	60	16	24
Sweden	60	20	20
Switzerland	44	26	31
United Kingdom	40	28	32
MEDIAN	46	24	29

Note: The survey asked whether respondents agree with three positive statements about religious institutions (that they “protect and strengthen morality in society,” “bring people together and strengthen community bonds,” and “play an important role in helping the poor and needy”) and three negative ones (that religious institutions “focus too much on rules,” “are too concerned with money and power,” and “are too involved with politics”).

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

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Among Western Europeans, opinions about religious institutions follow a consistent pattern based on religious identity and observance.

Highly committed Christians are most likely to express positive views of religious institutions, while “nones” are least likely to do so. Christians who display low and moderate levels of religious observance fall between these two extremes.

To give one example, more than eight-in-ten Austrian Christians with high levels of religious commitment agree with more positive than negative statements about religious institutions (84%). Among moderately observant Christians in Austria, 64% share this view. But fewer than half of low-observance Christians (39%) express more positive than negative views of churches, as do just 15% of “nones” in Austria.

Few religiously unaffiliated adults take positive views of churches and other religious institutions

% who agree with more positive than negative statements about churches and other religious institutions

	Religiously unaffiliated	Christians with low levels of commitment	Christians with moderate levels of commitment	Highly committed Christians
Austria	15%	39%	64%	84%
Belgium	24	30	42	54
Denmark	38	50	62	73
Finland	33	52	67	80
France	16	34	46	63
Germany	18	36	63	76
Ireland	14	31	55	72
Italy	13	27	50	74
Netherlands	39	48	61	83
Norway	26	36	53	78
Portugal	16	34	40	56
Spain	47	54	68	79
Sweden	48	65	68	87
Switzerland	10	38	57	80
UK	12	38	52	80
MEDIAN	18	38	57	78

Note: The survey asked whether respondents agree with three positive statements about religious institutions (that they “protect and strengthen morality in society,” “bring people together and strengthen community bonds,” and “play an important role in helping the poor and needy”) and three negative ones (that religious institutions “focus too much on rules,” “are too concerned with money and power,” and “are too involved with politics”). Religious commitment is measured as an index of the following individual practices: attendance at religious services, importance of religion in one’s life, frequency of prayer and belief in God. See Appendix A: Scaling and regression analysis for more details.

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

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Sidebar: The role of Christianity and churches in Europe

While survey results show that Western Europeans tend to express positive views of churches and other religious organizations, focus groups in five countries revealed further insights into how adults think about the ways religious institutions and the broader society should interact.

Both sets of focus groups – those composed entirely of Christians and those made up entirely of religiously unaffiliated adults – acknowledged their societies' Christian roots in a generally positive way. Participants in both kinds of groups felt that Christianity, while not perfect, provides a foundation of basic values and ethics that is valuable. Participants said Christianity can give children a moral framework as they mature, helping them become good citizens. (According to the survey, roughly half of Western Europeans feel that the religious institutions in their country protect and strengthen morality in society.)

"I think I'd agree completely that [the UK] does seem socially to be pretty secular, but I guess historically and institutionally it's Church of England, Christianity."

– 27-year-old atheist woman, United Kingdom

"[Our country] is Christian. I see it as a Christian ground. If we look at everything from the justice system, the law book to the practice within health care ... it is all built on Christian values. ... When I read magazines and talk to people, I still assume a Christian ground."

– 39-year old atheist man, Sweden

"I think [going to church] provides a good moral compass. It does teach you right and wrong. ... You take that throughout your life. I learnt quite a lot, I took quite a lot from Sunday school. ... When you go at a young age, I think it does make a big difference."

– 39-year-old Christian man, United Kingdom

"Maybe I made a mistake not to get [my children] baptized. I notice today that they lack the roots of our civilization. They don't have the culture they should have, because they did not follow this course. Not that it is baptism that gives it, but it's among other things religious education gives to children. This Bible, and especially the Old Testament, is extremely rich and brings all the roots of our civilization, and it is upon that that our societies were built. ... I hope that they will find [this] out when they are adults."

– 57-year-old "nothing in particular" man, France

"Although there are many people that may say they don't believe, they do learn about [religion]. In the end, religion instils values that get passed on to individuals. And I believe that in the end, whether they believe or not, have been educated in religion or not, the values are very similar."

– 31-year old Christian man, Spain

At the same time, the focus group discussions on Christianity's role in society were not all positive; many participants said they disliked Christian rules or teachings that they feel have not changed with the times, such as opposition to same-sex marriage. About half of Western European adults in the survey echoed this sentiment, saying that churches and other religious institutions "focus too much on rules."

Some adults in the focus groups discussed concerns with church teachings on abortion, gender roles and homosexuality. They said church positions on such social issues directly contradict both national attitudes and

their personal sentiments on abortion and gay marriage. And despite many seeing religion as a useful moral framework, focus group participants (both Christians and “nones”) tended to want religion and government to remain separate, echoing the survey’s findings.

“I was born and raised a Catholic. ... I probably lost faith when [my parents] told me they lost a child before he was christened and he wasn’t allowed a Catholic burial – completely refused from the church. So I thought that was just disgusting, so I kind of lost faith.”

– 30-year-old atheist man, United Kingdom

“You know, I think this does not fit with their philosophy: love thy neighbor, tolerance. And then they just contradict themselves like it’s nothing. I mean, to discriminate gays while telling people to love thy neighbor and to be tolerant, that just doesn’t go together, in my opinion. And that is why I thought to myself that I will not support this. That is just really phony.”

– 31-year old atheist woman, Germany

“I would say that [Christianity] supports heteronormativity in society. Above all there is a pretty outdated view of women and so on. Those are things that also inhibit the development of society.”

– 36-year old “nothing in particular” man, Sweden

“Whether the president is Catholic is not necessarily important, as long as his political agenda doesn’t favor Catholics.”

– 24-year-old Christian man, France

For details on the focus groups, including locations and composition, see Methodology.

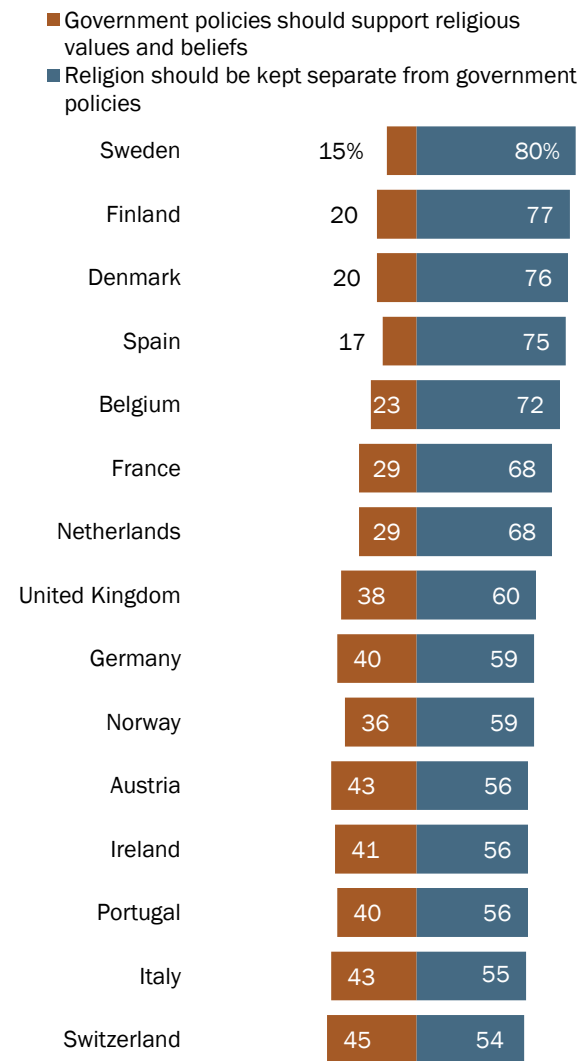
Most Western Europeans say government policies should be kept separate from religion

There is a clear consensus across most of the countries surveyed that religion should be kept separate from government policies. Still, substantial shares in several countries take the opposite view – that government policies should support religious values and beliefs in their country – including more than four-in-ten people surveyed in Switzerland (45%), Austria (43%) and Italy (43%).

People in predominantly Protestant countries are more likely than those in Catholic countries to favor separation of religion and government. A median of 76% in Protestant-majority countries say this, compared with a median of 56% in Catholic-majority countries.

Four-in-ten or more in Germany, Portugal, Ireland, Austria, Italy and Switzerland say governments should promote religious values

% who say in their country ...



Note: Don't know/refused responses are not shown.
 Source: Survey conducted April-August 2017 in 15 countries. See Methodology for details.
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Young adults (under 35) and college graduates are more likely than older people and those with less education to say religion and government should be kept separate. And men are more likely than women to say this, although majorities among both genders favor separation of church and state.

Western European “nones” are more likely than Christians, regardless of how observant they are, to favor separation of church and state. But among Christians, those with low levels of commitment are more likely than highly committed Christians to say religion and government should be kept separate.

Further statistical analysis shows that even after

accounting for age, gender, education and political ideology, “nones” are more likely than low-observance Christians to favor keeping religion separate from government policy.

Christians’ views on church-state relations vary based on levels of religious observance

% who say religion should be kept separate from government policies

	Religiously unaffiliated	Christians with low levels of commitment	Christians with moderate levels of commitment	Highly committed Christians
Austria	82%	64%	48%	31%
Belgium	80	69	68	55
Denmark	83	81	67	50
Finland	97	87	62	34
France	87	70	54	44
Germany	79	66	47	30
Ireland	81	64	49	41
Italy	89	66	46	39
Netherlands	82	66	63	37
Norway	79	52	45	32
Portugal	79	70	55	42
Spain	91	81	69	54
Sweden	92	78	71	50
Switzerland	77	57	43	37
UK	81	59	55	35
MEDIAN	82	66	55	39

Note: Religious commitment is measured as an index of the following individual practices: attendance at religious services, importance of religion in one’s life, frequency of prayer and belief in God. See Appendix A: Scaling and regression analysis for more details.

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

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Western Europeans overwhelmingly favor legal gay marriage

Western Europeans' preference for keeping religion and government policies separate is also reflected in their overwhelming support for legal abortion and same-sex marriage, even though these positions conflict with those of the Roman Catholic Church and some other Christian churches.

Support for same-sex marriage is highest in Sweden (88%), Denmark (86%) and the Netherlands (86%) – the [first country to legalize same-sex marriage](#), in 2001.

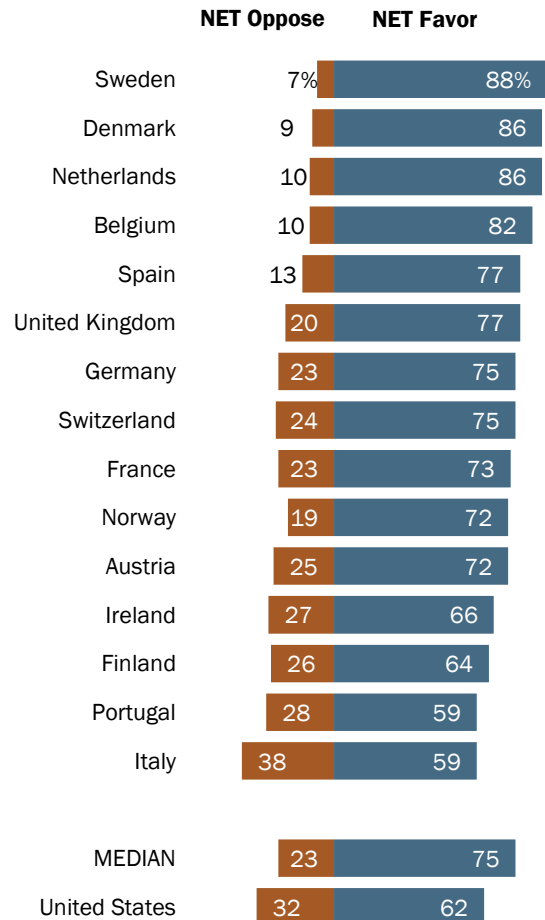
Western Europeans are generally more likely than Americans to favor gay marriage, though American attitudes on the issue have [shifted considerably in recent years](#). Currently, 62% of Americans favor legal gay marriage, compared with a median of 75% across Western Europe.

Still, some pockets of opposition remain in Western Europe. In Italy, for example, 38% of respondents oppose legal gay marriage, the highest share in the region taking that position. (Italy and Switzerland are the only countries surveyed where same-sex marriage has not been legalized, although both countries allow civil unions.²⁴) And in several other countries, including Switzerland, roughly a quarter of the public says gays and lesbians should not be allowed to marry legally.

Christians overall are somewhat less likely than religiously unaffiliated adults to favor allowing gays and lesbians to marry legally. However, even among Christians, large majorities across Western Europe

About one-in-four or fewer in most Western European countries oppose gay marriage

% who favor/strongly favor or oppose/strongly oppose allowing gays and lesbians to marry legally



Note: Don't know/refused responses are not shown.

Source: Survey conducted April-August 2017 in 15 countries. See Methodology for details. Results for the United States from survey conducted June 8-18, 2017.

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²⁴ A [December 2017 court ruling in Austria](#) legalizing same-sex marriage will take effect at the beginning of 2019.

favor legal gay marriage.

Highly committed Christians are much less likely than Christians with lower levels of observance to favor allowing gays and lesbians to legally marry. But there is little difference between “nones” and Christians with low levels of observance in the shares who say they either favor or strongly favor allowing gays and lesbians to legally marry.

That said, religiously unaffiliated adults are more likely than Christians with low levels of observance to say they *strongly* favor same-sex marriage.

Adults under 35, women and people with a college education are more likely than older people, men and those with lower levels of education to favor legal same-sex marriage.

Highly observant Christians are less likely to favor same-sex marriage

% who strongly favor/ favor allowing gays and lesbians to marry legally

	Religiously unaffiliated	Christians with low levels of commitment	Christians with moderate levels of commitment	Highly committed Christians
Austria	87%	87%	69%	34%
Belgium	88	85	81	57
Denmark	92	90	82	69
Finland	84	68	52	39
France	85	80	77	32
Germany	86	84	72	44
Ireland	87	86	67	35
Italy	83	78	60	35
Netherlands	95	91	90	60
Norway	83	80	68	39
Portugal	82	71	59	44
Spain	90	83	74	58
Sweden	94	90	91	64
Switzerland	89	80	75	41
UK	82	85	81	41
MEDIAN	87	84	74	41

Note: Religious commitment is measured as an index of the following individual practices: attendance at religious services, importance of religion in one's life, frequency of prayer and belief in God. See Appendix A: Scaling and regression analysis for more details.

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

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Western European adults overwhelmingly favor legal abortion

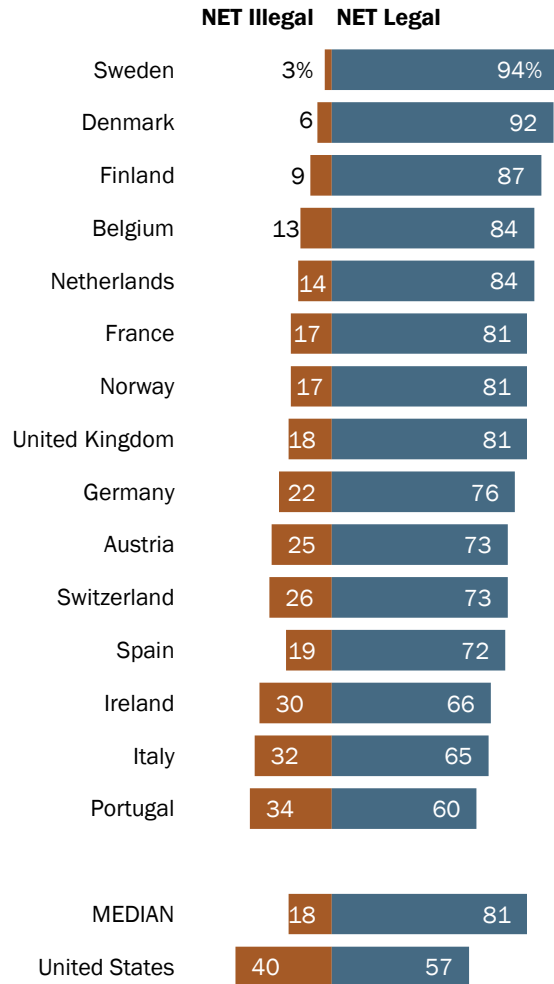
Majorities in every Western European country surveyed take liberal positions on abortion, saying they support legal abortion in all or most cases. (This also matches most [abortion laws in the region](#).) This includes nearly nine-in-ten or more in Sweden (94%), Denmark (92%) and Finland (87%).

Western Europeans support legal abortion at considerably higher rates than do Americans. As of 2017, a slim majority of Americans (57%) [say they favor legal abortion in all or most cases](#). By comparison, a median of 81% across Western Europe take this position.

Christians are somewhat less likely than “nones” to favor legal abortion. But even among Christians, a median of 75% across the 15 countries surveyed say abortion should be legal in all or most cases (compared with a median of 87% among religiously unaffiliated adults).

Western Europeans more likely than U.S. adults to favor legal abortion

% who say abortion should be ___ in all or most cases



Note: Don't know/refused responses not shown.
 Source: Survey conducted April-August 2017 in 15 countries. See Methodology for details. Results for the United States from survey conducted June 8-18, 2017.
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Differences among Christians on this question emerge when looking at religious commitment: Highly observant Christians are considerably less supportive of legal abortion than are less observant Christians.

“Nones” and Christians with low levels of observance have similar views on whether abortion should be legal, although religiously unaffiliated adults are more likely than Christians with low commitment to say abortion should be legal in *all* cases.

In addition, college graduates are more likely than others to support legal abortion. Adults under the age of 35 also are more likely than their elders to support legal abortion.

Women and men, for the most part, express similar levels of support for legal abortion – except in Norway and Portugal, where *men* are more likely to support it. One possible explanation for the fact that women are *not* more likely than men to favor legal abortion is that women tend to show higher levels of religious observance, which goes hand in hand with more opposition to abortion.

Religious ‘nones’ and Christians with low levels of commitment both overwhelmingly support legal abortion

% who favor legal abortion in all or most cases

	Religiously unaffiliated	Christians with low levels of commitment	Christians with moderate levels of commitment	Highly committed Christians
Austria	87%	87%	70%	35%
Belgium	90	86	83	68
Denmark	93	96	91	73
Finland	93	93	86	57
France	92	88	79	46
Germany	86	86	73	48
Ireland	80	87	65	37
Italy	85	80	68	41
Netherlands	94	92	89	49
Norway	90	91	84	43
Portugal	76	72	63	47
Spain	87	81	69	42
Sweden	98	98	94	76
Switzerland	84	76	77	47
UK	83	88	83	50
MEDIAN	87	87	79	47

Note: Religious commitment is measured as an index of the following individual practices: attendance at religious services, importance of religion in one’s life, frequency of prayer and belief in God. See Appendix A: Scaling and regression analysis for more details.

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

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Appendix A: Scaling and regression analysis

Nationalist, anti-immigrant and anti-minority views (NIM) scale and regression analysis

Dependent Variable (NIM score)

The NIM scale includes 22 individual questions that can be broadly classified into three groups — three questions on nationalism, seven questions on immigration and 12 questions probing views of religious minorities.

Because some topics contribute more questions to the scale than others, individual questions are weighted such that each topic area contributes equally to the NIM. For example, the NIM includes three questions on nationalism and 12 questions on religious minorities; to correct for this discrepancy, each question on nationalism was weighted up, while each question probing attitudes toward religious minorities was weighted down. Total scores are scaled from 0 to 10.

Each question is dichotomized as follows. Scores increase by the amount noted below if a respondent says ...

Nationalism (each worth 1.11 points)

Cronbach's alpha = 0.61

Ordinal coefficient alpha = 0.72

1. It is very/somewhat important to have been born in [COUNTRY] to be truly [NATIONALITY] (e.g., to have been born in France to be truly French).
2. It is very/somewhat important to have [NATIONALITY] family background to be truly [NATIONALITY] (e.g., to have French family background to be truly French).
3. I completely/mostly agree with the statement, "Our people are not perfect, but our culture is superior to others."

Immigration (each worth 0.48 points)

Cronbach's alpha = 0.84

Ordinal coefficient alpha = 0.94

1. The number of immigrants to [COUNTRY] should be reduced.
2. Immigrants from Eastern Europe, such as those from Poland, are *not* hardworking.
3. Immigrants from the Middle East, such as those from Syria, are *not* hardworking.
4. Immigrants from Africa, such as those from Nigeria, are *not* hardworking.
5. Immigrants from Eastern Europe, such as those from Poland, are *not* honest.
6. Immigrants from the Middle East, such as those from Syria, are *not* honest.
7. Immigrants from Africa, such as those from Nigeria, are *not* honest.

Religious minorities (each worth 0.28 points)

Cronbach's alpha = 0.80

Ordinal coefficient alpha = 0.92

1. I am *not* willing, or don't know (or declined to answer) if I'm willing, to accept Muslims as neighbors.²⁵
2. I am *not* willing, or don't know (or declined to answer) if I'm willing, to accept Muslims as family members.
3. I am *not* willing, or don't know (or declined to answer) if I'm willing, to accept Jews as neighbors.
4. I am *not* willing, or don't know (or declined to answer) if I'm willing, to accept Jews as family members.
5. I completely/mostly agree with the statement, "In their hearts, Muslims want to impose their religious law on everyone else in [COUNTRY]."

²⁵ Further analysis of the data shows that those who do not give a clear response are more similar in their characteristics to those who say they are not willing than those who say they are willing.

6. I completely/mostly agree with the statement, “Due to the number of Muslims here, I feel like a stranger in my own country.”
7. I completely/mostly agree with the statement, “Jews always overstate how much they have suffered.”
8. I completely/mostly agree with the statement, “Jews always pursue their own interests and not the interest of the country they live in.”
9. Islam has teachings that promote violence.
10. All/most/many Muslims in the country support violent extremist groups
11. Muslim women who live in the country should not be allowed to wear *any* religious clothing.
12. Islam is fundamentally incompatible with the country’s culture and values.

For all 22 questions

Cronbach’s alpha = 0.88

Ordinal coefficient alpha = 0.95

For logistic regression analysis, the NIM score was dichotomized as follows:

NIM score of 0 to 5 = 0.

NIM score of 5.01 to 10 = 1.

Independent variables

1. Age (1 = ages 18-34; 0 = 35+/don’t know/refused)
2. Education (1 = College educated or more; 0 = Less educated/don’t know/refused)
3. Gender (1 = Men; 0 = Women)
4. Religious affiliation and observance:
 - a. Defined using church attendance: Each of the following categories was coded as a dummy variable.
 - i. Christians who attend church monthly or more

- ii. Christians who attend church no more than a few times a year
 - iii. Other religion/don't know/refused
 - iv. Religiously unaffiliated adults (used as the reference category)
- b. Defined using an index of religious commitment. (See details on creation of religious commitment index in Chapter 3 and results of the NIM regression using the religious commitment index on page 162.) Each of the following categories was coded as a dummy variable.
- i. Highly committed Christians
 - ii. Christians with moderate levels of commitment
 - iii. Christians with low levels of commitment
 - iv. Other religion/don't know/refused
 - v. Religiously unaffiliated adults (used as the reference category)
5. Political ideology: Recoded from seven-point scale.²⁶ Each of the following categories was coded as a dummy variable:
- i. Left (0 to 2 on a seven-point scale; used as the reference category)
 - ii. Center (3 on a seven-point scale)
 - iii. Right (4 to 6 on a seven-point scale)
 - iv. Don't know/refused
6. Satisfaction with the direction of the country today (1 = Satisfied with the way things are going in this country; 0 = Dissatisfied/don't know/refused).
7. Evaluation of personal economic situation as good (1 = Describes their personal economic situation as very or somewhat good; 0 = Describes their personal economic situation as somewhat or very bad/don't know/refused).
8. Self-assessed knowledge about the Muslim religion and its practices (1 = Knows a great deal/some; 0 = Does not know very much/nothing at all/don't know/refused).
9. Self-assessed knowledge about the Jewish religion and its practices (1 = Knows a great deal/Some; 0 = Does not know very much/nothing at all/don't know/refused).
10. Personally knows a Muslim (1 = Yes, know someone who is Muslim; 0 = No, do not know someone who is Muslim/don't know/refused).
11. Personally knows a Jewish person (1 = Yes, know someone who is Jewish; 0 = No, do not know someone who is Jewish/don't know/refused).

²⁶ As an experiment, the survey asked two different questions on political ideology: half the sample in France, Germany and the UK received a political ideology scale ranging from 0 to 6; the other half received a scale ranging from 1 to 7. The responses to the two scales showed minor differences, but for the purposes of this analysis the scale ranging from 1 to 7 was similarly grouped into left (1 to 3), center (4) and right (5 to 7).

12. All their close friends belong to their religion (1 = All their friends have the same religion as them; 0 = Most/some of them/hardly any of them/none of them/don't know/refused).
13. The country in which the interview was conducted in also was factored into the analysis. (Each country was coded as a dummy variable; UK was used as the reference category.)

Multicollinearity

Multicollinearity occurs when independent variables in a multiple regression model are highly correlated with one another, such that it is difficult to disentangle the independent effects of each item on a dependent variable. While there is correlation between variables included in these models, after running multiple tests, multicollinearity is not a significant concern for the model.

Alternative regressions

While this report shows results based on logistic regression models, we also tested the results using alternative regression techniques including:

- Ordinary least squares and Poisson regression on the unweighted 22-point NIM scale and on the weighted 10-point NIM scale.
- Ordered logistic regression for three variations of the weighted 10-point NIM scale: high, medium, and low NIM scores set at the 25-25-50 percentiles, 25-50-25 percentiles, and 33-33-33 percentiles.
- Nested modeling to account for country differences.

Key findings of the report are largely consistent across these models.

Religious commitment

This report frequently shows results based on religious services attendance. Christians who say they attend religious services monthly or more are categorized as church-attending, while those who attend no more than a few times a year are categorized as non-practicing.

In addition, statistical models presented in the study were tested using a more robust religious commitment scale/index combining four standard measures of religious engagement: belief in God, frequency of prayer and religious service attendance, and how important the respondent says religion is to their life.

Each of the four measures of religious engagement is recoded into three categories as follows:

1. Religious services attendance, aside from wedding and funerals (1 = More than once a week/once a week/once or twice a month; 0 = A few times a year/don't know/refused; -1 = Seldom/never,).
2. Religion's importance in the respondent's life (1 = Very important; 0 = Somewhat important/don't know/refused; -1 = Not too/not at all important).
3. Belief in God (1 = Absolutely certain belief in God; 0 = Fairly certain belief in God/not too certain/not at all certain/don't know/refused; -1 = Does not believe in God). Note that Muslims were not asked about belief in God – Muslim respondents are coded in the middle category for this question.
4. Frequency of prayer (1 = More than once a day/once a day; 0 = Occasionally/don't know/refused; -1 = Seldom/never).

Cronbach's alpha = 0.86

Ordinal coefficient alpha = 0.914.

Each respondent's religious commitment value was added and then subdivided into three categories: Low (-4 to -2), medium (-1 to 1), and high religious commitment (2 to 4). Excluding belief in God or adjusting the cut-point for religious service attendance (from monthly to weekly) made little difference to the overall distribution of the scale or its relationship to relevant dependent variables.

NIM regressions using religious commitment scale

The logistic regression model calculating predicted probability for scoring above 5 on the NIM scale was also tested using the religious commitment index. The results were nearly identical to the model that used church attendance as a proxy for religious commitment:

Change in predicted probability for scoring above 5 on the NIM scale using the religious commitment index as the dependent variable

Independent Variables	Change in predicted probability
Right-wing political ideology (vs. left)	+35
Christians with moderate levels of commitment (vs. unaffiliated)	+16
Christians with low levels of commitment (vs. unaffiliated)	+14
Highly committed Christians (vs. unaffiliated)	+12
Don't know/refused political ideology (vs. left)	+12
Political ideology at the center (vs. left)	+10
Male	+7
All friends belong to same religion as the respondent	+6
Familiar with Islam	+4
Young (ages 18 to 34)	-3
Familiar with Judaism	-5
Personal economic situation good	-5
Know a Jewish person	-7
Satisfied with country direction	-7
College educated (vs. less education)	-15
Other/don't know/refused religious identity	-16
Know a Muslim	-19

Note: The number shown is the difference in predicted probability of scoring above 5 on the 10-point Nationalist, anti-Immigrant and anti-Minority (NIM) scale, after controlling for other factors. Individual effects of each country are taken into account. Roughly 1,800 respondents across all 15 countries did not provide a political ideology.

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

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Attitudes toward religion scale/spirituality scale

The survey asked respondents if they agree or disagree with a battery of four statements about religion and four about spirituality. Responses are recoded such that negative views toward religion or spirituality are coded as -1, positive views as +1, and don't know or refused responses are coded as 0.

Attitudes toward religion

Cronbach's alpha = 0.65

Ordinal coefficient alpha = 0.77

1. Religion gives meaning and purpose to my life (1 = Completely/mostly agree; -1 = Mostly/completely disagree; 0 = Don't know/refused).
2. Religion helps me choose between right and wrong (1 = Completely/mostly agree; -1 = Mostly/completely disagree; 0 = Don't know/refused).
3. Overall, religion causes more harm than good (-1 = Completely/Mostly agree; 1 = Mostly/completely disagree; 0 = Don't know/refused).
4. Science makes religion unnecessary in my life (-1 = Completely/mostly agree; 1 = Mostly/completely disagree; 0 = Don't know/refused).

Spirituality

Cronbach's alpha = 0.65

Ordinal coefficient alpha = 0.78

1. I have a soul as well as a physical body (1 = Completely/mostly agree; -1 = Mostly/completely disagree, 0 = Don't know/refused).
2. I feel a connection to something that cannot be seen or measured scientifically (1 = Completely/mostly agree; -1 = Mostly/completely disagree, 0 = Don't know/refused).
3. When people die, that is the end; there is no life after death (-1 = Completely/mostly agree; 1 = Mostly/completely disagree; 0 = Don't know/refused).
4. There are no spiritual forces in the universe, only the laws of nature (-1 = Completely/mostly agree; 1 = Mostly/completely disagree; 0 = Don't know/refused).

An additive scale for each set of statements resulted in two nine-point scales, which were then subdivided into negative views toward religion/rejecting of spirituality (-4 to -2), mixed views

toward religion/spirituality (-1 to 1), and positive views toward religion/embracing of spirituality (2 to 4).

Eastern, New Age or folk beliefs and practices scale

Cronbach's Alpha = 0.66

Ordinal coefficient alpha = 0.80

The survey also asked about a variety of beliefs and practices that are often associated with Eastern, New Age or folk religions. These include:

1. Belief in the "evil eye", the idea that certain people can cast curses or spells that cause bad things to happen to someone (1 = Yes; 0 = No/don't know/refused).
2. Belief in reincarnation, that people will be reborn in this world again and again (1 = Yes; 0 = No/don't know/refused).
3. Belief in fate, the idea that the course of your life is largely or wholly preordained (1 = Yes; 0 = No/don't know/refused).
4. Belief in spiritual energy located in physical things, such as mountains, trees or crystals (1 = Yes; 0 = No/don't know/refused).
5. Belief in yoga, not just as exercise, but as a spiritual practice (1 = Yes; 0 = No/don't know/refused).
6. Belief in astrology, the idea that the position of the stars and planets can affect people's lives (1 = Yes; 0 = No/don't know/refused).
7. Meditate (1 = Yes; 0 = No/don't know/refused).
8. Consult the horoscope, tarot cards or see a fortune teller (1 = Yes; 0 = No/don't know/refused).

Individual items were added to a nine-point scale and then subdivided into high (scores of 6, 7, 8), moderate (3, 4, 5), and low (0, 1, 2) levels of engagement with alternative beliefs and practices.

Appendix B: Methodology

Pew Research Center conducted surveys among 24,599 adults (ages 18 and older) across 15 countries in Western Europe. Interviewing was carried out under the direction of GfK Belgium by telephone (both cellphones and landlines) from April to August 2017. The questionnaire administered by survey interviewers was designed by Pew Research Center staff in consultation with subject matter experts and advisers to the project. The wording of several questions was subjected to cognitive testing, and the full survey questionnaire was pretested in all countries prior to fieldwork.

The surveys are nationally representative, with samples

of about 1,500 or more respondents in each country, allowing researchers to analyze the opinions of respondents by age, gender, education and religious affiliation (Christian or religiously unaffiliated). A combination of landline and cellphone random-digit-dial samples was used. Respondents in the landline sample were randomly selected by asking for the adult who has the next birthday. Interviews in the cell sample were conducted with the person who answered the phone, if that person was an adult 18 years of age or older.

The combined landline and cellphone sample are weighted using an iterative technique that matches age, gender, education and regional population distributions to parameters from the latest census data available for the adult population in each country. In the absence of census data,

Margins of error and sample sizes

	Margin of error (% pts.)	Total	Church-attending Christians	Non-practicing Christians	Religiously unaffiliated
Austria	±3.1	1,791	419	965	350
Belgium	±3.1	1,500	153	682	574
Denmark	±2.9	1,493	192	832	405
Finland	±3.0	1,498	174	1,009	298
France	±2.8	1,788	336	848	471
Germany	±2.7	2,211	417	1,113	594
Ireland	±3.3	1,499	447	761	230
Italy	±3.2	1,804	631	807	296
Netherlands	±3.0	1,497	241	409	718
Norway	±3.2	1,498	241	572	614
Portugal	±3.3	1,501	478	708	288
Spain	±3.3	1,499	323	642	484
Sweden	±3.1	1,493	149	663	600
Switzerland	±3.4	1,686	409	867	353
UK	±2.9	1,841	306	973	485

Note: Church-attending Christians are defined as those who attend church at least monthly. Non-practicing Christians are defined as those who attend less often. Religiously unaffiliated adults are defined as those who identify as atheist, agnostic or “nothing in particular.” This survey does not analyze the views of Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists and other smaller religious groups. A previously published analysis of data from this survey, “Five Centuries After Reformation, Catholic-Protestant Divide in Western Europe Has Faded,” used an older version of survey weights. Since then, Pew Research Center has improved the survey weights for greater accuracy, leading to slight differences in margins of error between the two publications. Please contact Pew Research Center for questions regarding weighting adjustments.
Source: Survey conducted April-August 2017 in 15 countries.
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large government surveys were used as benchmarks. The weighting procedure accounts for the fact that respondents who have both a landline and a cellphone have a greater probability of being included in the combined sample and adjusts for household size among respondents with a landline phone. The margins of error reported and statistical tests of significance are adjusted to account for the survey's design effect, a measure of how much efficiency is lost from the weighting procedures.

The study, funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts and the John Templeton Foundation, is part of a larger effort by Pew Research Center to understand religious change and its impact on societies around the world. The Center previously has conducted religion-focused surveys across [sub-Saharan Africa](#); the Middle East-North Africa region and many [other countries with large Muslim populations](#); [Latin America and the Caribbean](#); [Israel](#); [Central and Eastern Europe](#); and the United States.

More details about the project's methodology, including country-specific sample designs for this study, are [available here](#).

General information on international survey research at Pew Research Center is [available here](#).

Focus groups

In addition to the multi-country survey, Pew Research Center commissioned Ipsos MORI to conduct a series of focus groups in five Western European countries. Each focus group consisted of eight adults coming together for approximately two hours for a discussion led by a professional moderator. Participants were recruited, by telephone, from a variety of sources: re-contact questions at the end of pre-existing surveys, purchased sample lists and people who have opted in to be on vendor recruitment lists.

Potential participants were asked questions on topics such as their religious identification, religious practices, views on diversity and social circles, and then were chosen so that each focus group included a broad mix of backgrounds and opinions. People who work in journalism, public relations or market research and those who have participated in a prior market research study in the last year were excluded from recruitment.

Within each group's selected demographic composition, participants were balanced in terms of gender, age and education. In each group, no more than two people were economically inactive – that is, they were unemployed, students or retired.

Four focus groups were conducted in each location, with two focus groups on topics related to immigration and pluralism and two focus groups on topics related to religious identification, beliefs and practices. The countries were selected for their geographic diversity as well as their varied experiences with immigrants and refugees. The discussion in each group lasted approximately two hours. All participants were offered a financial incentive for participation and to cover out-of-pocket expenses.

Participation in the focus groups was voluntary. Complying with [ICC/ESOMAR Code of Conduct](#) and all applicable local laws, all information gathered from adults who took part in the focus groups was anonymized so it is not possible to identify them. During the recruitment stage and in advance of the groups, each participant voluntarily confirmed his or her willingness to take part in a focus group project, after having been informed of all aspects of the research that are relevant to their decision to participate. This included the general topics of discussion, the companies involved in the research, the confidentiality of participants' information and identities, how any data they provide will be used, and explicit notification that their answers would be recorded and transcribed for research purposes. All participants were reassured prior to the groups that they could withdraw from the research process at any time without penalty or loss of the incentive payment.

Western Europe focus groups

Location, date, topic and composition of each group

Location	Date	Topic	Group composition	
London, United Kingdom	Sept. 26-27, 2017	Religious identification, beliefs and practice	Adults ages 20-39 who identify as Christian	Adults ages 20-39 who identify their religion as atheist, agnostic or "nothing in particular"
		Immigration and pluralism	Native-born adults ages 20-39 who have some university education or more	Native-born adults ages 40-69 who have completed secondary school or less
Stockholm, Sweden	Oct. 2-3, 2017	Religious identification, beliefs and practice	Adults ages 20-39 who identify their religion as atheist, agnostic or "nothing in particular"	Adults ages 40-69 who identify their religion as atheist, agnostic or "nothing in particular"
		Immigration and pluralism	Native-born adults ages 20-39 who have some university education or more	Native-born adults ages 40-69 who have some university education or more
Madrid, Spain	Oct. 4-5, 2017	Religious identification, beliefs and practice	Adults ages 20-39 who identify as Christian	Adults ages 40-69 who identify as Christian
		Immigration and pluralism	Native-born adults ages 20-39 who have completed secondary school or less	Native-born adults ages 40-69 who have completed secondary school or less
Berlin, Germany	Oct. 9-10, 2017	Religious identification, beliefs and practice	Adults ages 20-39 who identify their religion as atheist, agnostic or "nothing in particular"	Adults ages 40-69 who identify as Christian
		Immigration and pluralism	Native-born adults ages 20-39 who have completed secondary school or less	Native-born adults ages 40-69 who have completed secondary school or less
Paris, France	Oct. 17-18, 2017	Religious identification, beliefs and practice	Adults ages 20-39 who identify as Christian	Adults ages 40-69 who identify their religion as atheist, agnostic or "nothing in particular"
		Immigration and pluralism	Native-born adults ages 20-39 who have some university education or more	Native-born adults ages 40-69 who have some university education or more

Source: Focus groups conducted September-October 2017 in five countries.
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