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Revisiting Glenn, Three Decades Later

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Are Religious “Nones” Really Not Religious?: Revisiting Glenn, Three Decades Later

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Abstract

To examine the extent to which religious “nones” are actually not religious in their personal lives, data were analyzed from five recent U.S. population surveys—the 2018 General Social Survey, 2017 Values and Beliefs of the American Public Survey, 2012 Portrait of American Life Study, 2017-2020 World Values Survey, and 2018 Chapman Survey of American Fears. Consistent with some previous studies but contrary to widely-held assumptions, many individuals who report no religious affiliation or check “none” on surveys (as well as atheists and agnostics) display a wide variety of religious and spiritual practices and beliefs. Many attend religious services, pray, meditate, believe in God or a higher power, have religious experiences, and believe in heaven, hell, and miracles. Even though a growing proportion of people in the U.S. appear to be reporting no religious affiliation on surveys, there are many measurement-related, conceptual, and methodological reasons to question the assumption that these people are not religious, and scholars need to look more closely at the actual practices and beliefs of so-called nones. Further, use of phrases like religious none, no religion, and not religious to describe this group of individuals is inappropriate, inaccurate, and misleading since they may simply be institutionally unaffiliated or indeed affiliated but not with any of the list of categories provided. More focused research is needed before we will fully understand who the nones are, and whether religion is actually declining in the U.S., as well as around the world.

In 1987, Norval Glenn published an insightful essay mapping the trajectory of respondents reporting “no religion” on U.S. national surveys from the 1950s to the 1980s (Glenn 1987). He found that the number of individuals reporting no religion had increased during that time. However he cautioned readers not to be quick to attribute these numbers to secularization. Indeed, he went on, there were sufficient methodological and conceptual problems with the data that it was appropriate to call such a conclusion into question.

Research on this topic reemerged in the 2000s and has been a source of intense interest to academics, media, clergy, and the general public (Hout and Fischer 2014; Wilkins-Laflamme 2015; Lipka 2015a, 2015c; Cooperman and Smith 2016; Hout 2017; Scheitle et al. 2018; Strawn 2019; Burge 2020). Recent reports based on survey findings have argued that America is experiencing a decline in religious participation and an increase in the number of people reporting “no religion” or “not religious” on national surveys—the famous “religious nones” that have received so much attention (Baker and Smith 2009b; Funk and Smith 2012; Pew Research Center 2013, 2015; Alper 2018b; Smith et al. 2019). Numerous contemporary scholars (e.g., Voas and Chaves 2016; Brauer 2018; Voas and Chaves 2018) and public opinion leaders (Pew Research Center 2013; Lipka 2015d; Lipka 2016; Kotkin 2017; Kristian 2019) have not shared Glenn’s interpretation of the data. In fact, these trends are often presented as evidence that America is secularizing along the lines of Western Europe, and this narrative has led both scholars and commentators to ask if we are witnessing a major decline in religion in the U.S. and around the world (Bruce 2002; Brauer 2018; Norris and Inglehart 2011; Lipka 2015d; Voas and Chaves 2016, 2018; Kotkin 2017; Kristian 2019; Smith et al. 2019; Inglehart 2020).

Echoing Glenn, this interpretation of the data may be problematic for several reasons. Underlying many studies of religious affiliation, identity, and involvement (including media reports of findings) are methodological problems, misspecified conceptual models, and inaccurate or incomplete understandings of history and historical change that may understate the resilient nature of religion in the U.S. and around the world (Johnson and Grim 2008; Stark 2008, 2011; Zurlo and Johnson 2016; Lipka and McClendon 2017; Burge 2020). These points were made at an event entitled, “The End of Religion?,” held at the National Press Club (Goodrich 2015). The panel was well received by those in attendance (a full house), and this paper is an effort to provide some follow-up by examining this phenomenon using data from several recent national probability surveys. It will provide evidence that we may not be witnessing a rise of the “nones” if this group is assumed to be not religious, irreligious, atheist, or agnostic. Instead, many so-called nones appear to display a wide variety of religious and/or spiritual practices and beliefs. “Nones” may be more accurately described as individuals without a formal religious affiliation or who self-identity as having no institutional affiliation, or who, when faced with a list of religious affiliations, have simply checked “none of the above.”

To make this point, this study begins by providing a review of the literature on this subject. Next, results from analyses of data from five U.S. population surveys are summarized. Finally, the study concludes with a discussion of these findings and offers suggestions for follow-up research. To be clear, this study is not intended

as a referendum on secularization theory nor on any other mid-range or grand-theoretical perspective on religion. It is simply an effort to focus in on contemporary national survey data on the putative “nones,” in an effort to characterize the nature and extent of their religious beliefs and practices and to carefully disentangle their religious identity from the unaffiliated, atheists, agnostics, and others who are often grouped together, undifferentiated, as irreligious. To restate, our assertion is not that “nones” is inherently problematic in and of itself—it is a valid category and should not be discarded—but that many of the people being reported as nones are not really nones.

THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL BACKGROUND

Reported Trends Across Time

According to reports from numerous sources, the number and proportion of Americans identifying with a religion has been declining for several decades (Funk and Smith 2012; Lipka 2015a, 2015c, 2016; Scheitle et al. 2018; Smith et al. 2019; Smith et al. 2021). According to one report, four Americans are becoming unaffiliated for every one that moves in the opposite direction, from unaffiliated to affiliated (Lipka 2015a). Some have also argued that the number of self-described Christians and the frequency of church attendance are also declining, and that America is becoming more secular over time (Lipka 2015b; Voas and Chaves 2016; Smith et al. 2019).

These trends appear to be stronger among younger individuals and cohorts (Pew Research Center 2013; Hout and Fischer 2014; Lipka 2015a; Wilkins-Laflamme 2015; Smith et al. 2019). Around 35% of Americans born between 1981 and 1996 (i.e., millennials) report no religious affiliation, and this group is the most likely to be religiously unaffiliated even though older generations appear to be following a similar, yet weaker, trend (Lipka 2015c). However, while cross-sectional data invariably show lower religious participation among younger individuals, there is evidence that this may change once they reach adulthood and start families (Stark 2015), though this process is complex and some competing findings have been presented (Uecker et al. 2016; Schleifer and Chaves 2017). Cross-sectional analyses cannot reveal this phenomenon, which requires more sophisticated longitudinal analyses, such as disentangling aging, period, and cohort effects (Hayward and Krause 2013). In addition to younger individuals, white people may be more likely to report no affiliation over time (Funk and Smith 2012), and there may be variations by gender, geographic region, educational level, marital status, and childrearing as well (Strawn 2019).

Coinciding with research on religious nones or unaffiliated individuals, other work suggests that Americans may be becoming more “spiritual” and less “religious” (Fuller 2001; Carey 2018; Parsons 2018). The relationship between these concepts, however, may not be a zero-sum game, as they appear to be “distinct but interdependent” (Marler and Hadaway 2002:297). Religiousness and spirituality are related to some degree, but they also have unique correlates (Zinnbauer et al. 1997; Saucier and Skrzypińska 2006). Both have a personal and

experiential component (e.g., God or a higher power), and religiousness often includes an organizational or institutional facet as well (Zinnbauer et al. 1997). Many individuals report being both spiritual and religious, but some do appear to be spiritual but not religious, and their numbers may be growing (Fuller 2001; Carey 2018; Parsons 2018).

Building on this idea, some scholars have conceptualized spirituality as a private alternative to organized religion, but this either/or distinction may not capture the true complexity of spirituality, which involves multiple dimensions including personal deities and various forms of naturalism and transcendence (Ammerman 2013:258). Spirituality may be linked with respective religious traditions, but some of those individuals who say they are spiritual but not religious may be seeking to disassociate themselves from the perceived undesirable aspects of organized religion (Levin 2009; Carey 2018). This conceptual work is important because it may allow scholars to determine whether the apparent rise in unaffiliated individuals is due to individuals becoming more spiritual (instead of secular) over time.

Proposed Causes and Explanations

Assuming, for now, that affiliation and religiosity are actually declining, there are at least three widely-cited explanations for this trend. First, demographic changes and generational replacement appear to be significant correlates of religious affiliation (Hout and Fischer 2014; Jenkins 2020). Possible factors include having a child, childhood religiosity (especially religious service attendance), and the religious preferences of one’s spouse (Baker and Smith 2009a). Delayed marriage and broad-based social disengagement may also play a role (Hout and Fischer 2002; Funk and Smith 2012), as well as gender, race/ethnicity, educational level, and geographic location (Strawn 2019). Changes in these and other demographic variables may explain some of the changes in religiosity that have been observed in recent decades.

Second, growing beliefs that religious organizations are too concerned with money, business, and power (and are too hierarchical in nature) have also been cited (Funk and Smith 2012; Lipka 2016). Religion-based scandals, such as sexual abuse and infidelity among religious leaders, may play a role as well (Thiessen and Wilkins-Laflamme 2017). Many individuals also oppose the social and political activities of religious organizations in areas like abortion and marriage, and this may lead to backlash against religion, leading to lower levels of religiosity and affiliation (Hout and Fischer 2002; Funk and Smith 2012; Hout and Fischer 2014; Thiessen and Wilkins-Laflamme 2017; Alper 2018b).

A third explanation—one that may be particularly problematic to arguments claiming that religiosity is declining—is that many unaffiliated individuals may simply be people who were only nominally religious in the past, but now feel more comfortable reporting no religion because of increasing social acceptance of being nonreligious (Cooperman and Smith 2016; Thiessen and Wilkins-Laflamme 2017; Scheitle et al. 2018). If true, the strength of the associations among religious affiliation, practices, and beliefs should be getting stronger over time, which

appears to be the case (Scheitle et al. 2018). These findings should be interpreted along with others showing that proportions of both atheists and active, convictional Christians appear to have remained relatively stable over time in the U.S. (Stark 2011; Hout and Smith 2015; Stetzer 2015). Therefore, it is possible that some of the observed increase in unaffiliated individuals may simply be the result of people who were not really religious in the first place becoming more likely to acknowledge this over time, while the truly religious may not have changed much (Schnabel and Bock 2017).

Conceptual, Methodological, and Historical Issues

Based on these findings, many scholars and laypeople now believe that religious affiliation, practices, and beliefs are declining, especially among young people. Some observers, as well, interpret this putative decline as indicating a rise in atheism. But, are religious “nones” really on the rise (Funk and Smith 2012)? Answering this question is complicated, and there are numerous conceptual, methodological, and historical issues and problems that need to be taken into consideration.

First, even though the number of individuals identifying with a religion on surveys appears to have decreased over the last few decades, accurately documenting these trends is challenging since many liminal individuals (perhaps 20% of the population) change their religious affiliations and identities across time (Lim et al. 2010; Hout 2017). Recent research suggests that about 42-44% of U.S. adults have switched their religious affiliation from one religion to another, or from being religious to not religious or vice versa (Heimlich 2009; Smith 2015). The percentage is 28-34% when those who switch from one Protestant group to another are excluded. While it is possible to interpret these findings as a decline in religious commitment, it can also be argued that some people care about religion and are willing to shop around to get the best “product” for their needs (Sherkat and Wilson 1995; Stark and Finke 2000; Stark 2008). Switching may actually be a healthy practice in religious marketplaces, not necessarily a sign of decline.

Second, as noted above, many nominally religious individuals appear to be dropping their weak identification with religion (Stetzer 2015; Cooperman and Smith 2016). In this case, the only thing that may have truly changed with these individuals is their answers to survey questions, not necessarily their religious practices or beliefs. Schnabel and Bock (2017:686) recently showed that “intense religion . . . is persistent and, in fact, only moderate religion is on the decline in the United States.” More specifically, their findings suggest that strong affiliation, praying multiple times a day, attending religious services multiple times a week, believing that the Bible is the literal word of God, and evangelical affiliation have remained quite stable since 1990. Even though the proportion of unaffiliated individuals has clearly increased, their findings suggest that this is primarily if not exclusively the result of declines in religiosity among those who were only moderately religious. The practices and beliefs of the intensely religious may not be declining at all.

Third, another problem is that nones are often conflated with being not religious (Stark 2008). For example, when respondents to the Baylor Religion Survey were asked about their religious affiliation, some who claimed no religion subsequently provided the name of a denomination, congregation, or both later in the survey (Dougherty et al. 2007). In addition, many unaffiliated individuals or nones do not consider themselves atheists; instead, they tend to be agnostics, deists, seekers, and skeptics (Kosmin et al. 2009). Therefore, it may not be accurate or appropriate to assume that they are not religious since there are many ways of being both religious and nonreligious (Alper 2018a), and multiple facets of religious life (e.g., organizational involvement, private religiosity, religious beliefs, spirituality, etc.) should be considered (Silver et al. 2014; Zurlo and Johnson 2016; Coleman and Jong 2021; Cox 2021). There are numerous categories of individuals who report “not religious” on surveys (e.g., atheists, agnostics, unchurched believers, etc.) (see Silver et al. 2014), and each displays distinct profiles of religious participation and social attitudes (Baker and Smith 2009a). Further, even secular individuals and atheists are concerned with the “nonsuperficial side of life,” such as a search for meaning, living a purposeful existence, and feeling a connection to something larger than themselves (Delaney 2016:134; Coleman et al. 2019).

Fourth, many measures of religious identification such as Christian, Jewish, and Muslim are emic in nature, and have meaning from the perspective of the person or group; in contrast, many nonreligious categories such as no religion, none, and not religious are etic in nature (Lee 2014). The latter may simply be used to aggregate individuals who do not report a positive religious identification with a categorical listing of groups imposed from the outside by the researcher, and may not have meaning to the individuals themselves. This can be problematic when trying to interpret nonreligious categories and estimate their sizes in the population. Therefore, it is important to understand “what it is that generic nonreligious categories actually measure” (Lee 2014:467). At the present time, we do not conclusively know what they measure.

Fifth, there are also methodological problems with widely-cited surveys, including low response rates, ambiguous response categories (and coding of affiliation items), different modes of data collection (e.g., phone, online, interview, self-administered), and the overstating of results (Stark 2011; Kotkin 2017; Kennedy and Hartig 2019; Kristian 2019; Burge 2020; Smith et al. 2021).¹ In addition, religious nones are often grouped together with atheists and agnostics in research findings and media reports (Hackett et al. 2015) even though unaffiliated does not necessarily imply unchurched or not religious. Instead, it simply means not identifying a place of worship or religious identity from a list of established denominations or religious categories. Many of the religiously unaffiliated are clearly religious or spiritual in their private lives (Stark 2008; Lipka 2015a; Wilkins-Laflamme 2015; Cooperman et al. 2018; Cox 2021).

¹ According to Pew’s American Trends Panel (ATP), “the ATP consistently produces estimates that suggest the U.S. population is less religious, in a variety of way, than RDD telephone surveys indicate” (Smith et al. 2021). One must also take into account social desirability bias, mode effects, and differential nonresponse.

Sixth, the way that survey questions are presented and worded may also be important. In a recent study, Burge (2020) tried to determine why the proportion of respondents reporting no affiliation was different (23.3% and 31.3%, respectively) in the General Social Survey (GSS) and the 2018 Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES). The GSS asks, “What is your religious preference? Is it Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, some other religion, or no religion?” In contrast, the CCES asks, “What is your present religion, if any?” Options include Protestant, Roman Catholic, Mormon, Eastern or Greek Orthodox, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, atheist, agnostic, nothing in particular, or something else. As noted by Burge (2020:187), respondents do not have the same choices in the two surveys. He concluded that “the GSS approach to religious classification encourages marginally attached Protestants to choose a Protestant affiliation, while many of these same individuals identify as a religious ‘nothing in particular’ in the CCES’s measurement approach.” This could explain why the proportion is lower in the GSS compared with the CCES. In addition, the GSS uses in-person interviews while the CCES is an online survey, which means that social desirability bias may be at play as well.

Seventh, a few additional factors are worth considering. As briefly noted above, proportions of atheists and intense, practicing Christians appear to be somewhat stable across time, casting some doubt on a major decline in religiosity (Stark 2008, 2011; Hout and Smith 2015; Stetzer 2015). According to Stark (2008:177), data from multiple population surveys show that the proportion of the U.S. population that identifies as atheist was unchanged for at least 70 years, from the 1940s until the past decade, at about 4%. In addition, the number of religious congregations in the U.S. may be growing (Melton 2017). There is evidence that churches and other places of worship are substantially undercounted in existing religious censuses (Melton and Ferguson 2016a, 2016b), church membership appears relatively stable (and may even be increasing), and many new churches open each year (Stark 2008, 2011; Brauer 2017). Further, arguments about a decline in religion are not new. This same theme was a common feature of popular discourse as long ago as Colonial times and continues to the present day (Stark and Finke 2000; Bruce 2002; Warner 2010; Kidd 2019). If religion truly is on the wane in the U.S., the primary evidence appears to be with respect to mainline Protestantism, which has been in decline ever since the “mainline” category was first introduced in the 1950s. However, other sectors of American religion such as nondenominational Protestant churches, small informal organizations, and non-Christian religions such as Buddhism and Islam appear to be growing and thriving (Finke and Stark 2005; Rosson and Fields 2008; Thomas and Olson 2010; Brauer 2017; Chaves 2017), mirroring global trends (Johnson and Grim 2008; Zurlo and Johnson 2016; Lipka and McClendon 2017).

The Present Study

Even though a growing proportion of the U.S. population appears to be reporting no religious affiliation or responding with “none” on national surveys, there are conceptual and methodological issues, as noted, that may explain at least

part of these findings, and they may not indicate a major decline in religiosity. To address this matter, scholars need to look more closely at the actual practices and beliefs of unaffiliated individuals because religious identity is complex, may be liminal, and is difficult to measure (Dougherty et al. 2007; Hackett 2014). “Nones” may not be increasing if this group is defined as not religious, no religion, atheist, or agnostic. Many individuals who are routinely classified as nones say that religion is important to them, believe in God or a higher power, and are religious or spiritual in their private lives (Funk and Smith 2012; Lipka 2015a, 2015c; Cooperman et al. 2018; Fahmy 2018; Cox 2021), something also observed in global data (Wilkins-Laflamme 2015; Kosnác 2017; Sahgal et al. 2018).

The current study provides additional evidence in this area by examining the religious and spiritual practices and beliefs of individuals with and without a religious affiliation (as well as atheists, agnostics, and those who report being “spiritual”) using data from five U.S. population surveys. These surveys contain data on many different aspects of religion and spirituality for several thousand individuals in the contemporary U.S. Taken together, they provide a more detailed and rich description of the current state of religion and spirituality in the U.S. population compared with other studies on this topic. The findings shed light on the actual practices and beliefs of individuals who are routinely described as not religious or nones.

METHODS

Data and Measures

The analytic strategy takes the form of a replicated secondary data analysis (George and Landerman 1984), where findings from multiple surveys are presented and compared. The data sources used here were chosen because they drew on national probability survey sampling and contained relevant questions about religious affiliation, practices, and beliefs. However, each survey did not include identical questions, so many religious concepts were labeled and measured in different ways. For the purposes of this study, though, they are similar enough to enable broad comparisons across surveys. This underscores both the disadvantages and advantages of replicated secondary data analysis: measures may vary across data sources and thus should not necessarily be interpreted in exactly the same way, but the constructs underlying these measures may be similar enough to provide an additional layer of validation for a respective finding as not being due solely to the nuances of a particular item or survey.

General Social Survey (GSS) data have been collected by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) since 1972. In-person interviews of approximately 90 minutes in length were conducted for the 2018 U.S. survey, whose responses were analyzed here. The sampling procedures drew on a list-assisted sampling frame covering 72% of the population, as well as secondary sampling units for the remaining areas, with a response rate of 59.5%. The final sample used here consisted of 2,123-2,333 respondents based on complete data for each variable

separately.² Several religion variables were analyzed using these data.³ Affiliation was measured with dummy variables indicating having a religious affiliation, no affiliation, and self-reported atheist and agnostic. Religious service attendance, prayer, beliefs about God, belief in life after death, and having had a religious experience were also examined. (Additional information is available on the GSS webpage: gss.norc.org/About-The-GSS.)

The 2017 Values and Beliefs of the American Public Survey (VBAPS) data were collected using an address-based methodology and a simple stratified sample design. Gallup collected these data with mail surveys and the response rate was 13.6%. The final sample consisted of 1,187-1,197 respondents. Several religion variables were analyzed using this sample. Affiliation was measured with dummy variables indicating having a religious affiliation, no affiliation, and self-reported atheist and agnostic. Other measures included religious service attendance, prayer, meditation, subjective religiosity, subjective spirituality, beliefs about God, and beliefs about heaven and hell. (Additional information and a detailed comparison with the 2016 GSS are available at: www.baylor.edu/baylorreligionsurvey.)

The 2012 Portrait of American Life Study (PALS) is a national-level panel study focused on religion in the U.S., with a particular focus on capturing ethnic and racial diversity. PALS seeks to understand the impact of religion in everyday life, and ultimately the connections between religious change and other forms of change in individuals and families over the course of their lives and across generations. PALS currently includes two waves (collected in 2006 and 2012), and the most recent wave was analyzed here. Its response rate was 53.0%. The final sample consisted of 1,173-1,198 respondents. This study included measures of affiliation and spirituality (having a religious affiliation, atheist, agnostic, and spiritual), service attendance, prayer, subjective religiosity, and belief in heaven, hell, and miracles. (Detailed information is available at the following website: www.thearda.com/pals.)

Data from the 2017-2020 World Values Survey (WVS) were also examined. Fieldwork for the 7th wave (which was analyzed here) was conducted from mid-2017 to early 2020. Data were collected from 77 countries and societies on all inhabited continents around the globe, ranging from Albania, Australia, and Argentina to the U.S., Vietnam, and Zimbabwe, as well as through surveys conducted in collaboration with the European Values Study. Nationwide representative sample designs with sample sizes from 1,000-3,200 respondents were employed in each country. The final U.S. sample analyzed here had a weighted cumulative response rate of 15.7% and a survey completion rate of 48.3%, and consisted of 2,505-2,586 respondents. The measures of religion analyzed using these data included affiliation (three dummy variables indicating religious person, not a religious person, and atheist), attendance, prayer, and beliefs about life after

² Sample size is reported as a range of numbers due to use of listwise deletion of missing values in the present analyses.

³ Detailed information on response categories for the religious indicators in each of the six surveys can be found in the Appendix.

death, heaven, and hell. (Additional information is available at the study’s webpage: www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSDocumentationWV7.jsp.)

The Chapman Survey of American Fears (Wave 5), which was collected in 2018, is a national survey that includes measures of religion and politics. It was designed to examine the extent to which Americans fear or worry about life events, governmental policy, crime and victimization, natural and human-made disasters, and different spaces, among other outcomes. The sample was selected from the SSRS Probability Panel and provides nationally representative and projectable estimates of the adult population 18 years of age and older. The sample was post-stratified and balanced by key demographics such as age, race, sex, region, and education. The sample size for this study was 1,190, and approximately 45% of those who were invited agreed to participate. The survey included measures of affiliation, service attendance, subjective religiosity, and belief in God and hell. (Additional details can be found at: <https://www.thearda.com/Archive/Files/Descriptions/CSAF2018.asp>.)

Data Analysis

Data analyses were conducted in two stages. Percentages of affiliated and non-affiliated individuals (as well as religious identities such as religious, atheist, agnostic, and spiritual) were calculated for each survey. Second, differences in various religious practices and beliefs were examined for respondents of these surveys, across categories of religious affiliation and/or identity. Since simple univariate and bivariate analyses were conducted, listwise deletion was used for missing values instead of more sophisticated techniques like multiple imputation.⁴

RESULTS

Table 1 reports religious affiliation and identity statistics in the five surveys. The percentage of individuals reporting a religious affiliation was 76.71%, 84.63%, 80.06%, and 67.39% in the GSS, VBAPS, PALS, and Chapman, respectively. Non-affiliated individuals (no religion or none) represented 23.29%, 15.37%, and 20.35% of the GSS, VBAPS, and Chapman, respectively. Based on separate questions about belief in God, 32.67% were classified as atheist or agnostic in the GSS, 26.89% in the VBAPS, 8.07% in PALS (note: the combined percentage of atheist, agnostic, and spiritual-only individuals in PALS was 19.94%), and 12.26% in the Chapman. The WVS did not include a detailed affiliation question, but 55.32% reported being a religious person, while 35.17% said not religious and 9.51% identified as atheist. In the PALS, 11.87% reported being spiritual but not committed to a particular faith.

⁴ All results reported here are based on analyses of unweighted raw data. The findings were substantively unchanged, however, when rerun using weighted data.

Table 1. Religious affiliation and identity in five U.S. population surveys

Religious Affiliation and Identity	2018 GSS	2017 VBAPS	2012 PALS	2017- 2020 WVS	2018 Chapman
Affiliated	76.71	84.63	80.06	-	67.39
Not Affiliated (No Religion, None)	23.29	15.37	-	-	20.35
Atheist	4.70	8.51	4.19*	9.51	6.72
Agnostic	27.97	18.38	3.88		5.54
Religious Person	-	-	-	55.32	-
Not a Religious Person	-	-	-	35.17	-
Spiritual	-	-	11.87	-	-

Notes. Cell entries are percentages.

*Includes self-reported “atheist” as well as individuals who “Don't think about religion.”

Table 2 reports findings for religious practices and beliefs for individuals with different religious affiliations and identities. In all five surveys, members of all religious groups including those without an affiliation (no religion or none), atheists, and agnostics reported at least some religious service attendance compared with never.⁵ The percentages ranged from 14.55% for atheists in PALS to 94.74% for those with an affiliation in the Chapman data. These numbers included individuals who only attended for holidays or special occasions, so it is important to examine more frequent attendance as well. The percentages for monthly attendance or more were lower for all groups in all surveys, but the findings were still interesting. In the GSS, 7.04% of the unaffiliated, 6.42% of atheists, and 27.24% of agnostics reported monthly attendance or more. In the VBAPS, the numbers were 1.84%, 5.04%, and 23.57%, respectively. With respect to the other surveys, the percentages were 5.80%, 1.35%, and 1.64% for the unaffiliated, atheists, and agnostics, respectively, in Chapman. In PALS they were 1.82%, 0.00%, and 8.97% for atheists, agnostics, and self-reported spiritual individuals, and in the WVS they were 16.45% and 4.49%, respectively, for those who reported being not religious and atheist.

⁵ In some surveys, it was possible to compare atheists and agnostics. In all cases, agnostics showed higher levels of religiosity compared with atheists, but atheists still reported some religious practices and beliefs in all five surveys.

Table 2. Religious characteristics of individuals by religious affiliation and identity in five U.S. population surveys

Religious Characteristics	2018 GSS				2017 VBAPS				2012 PALS			
	Affil.	Not Affil.	Atheist	Agnostic	Affil.	Not Affil.	Atheist	Agnostic	Affil.	Atheist**	Agnostic	Spirit.
Any Religious Service Attendance	81.09	30.37	23.85	65.02	85.30	21.20	18.49	68.82	83.44	14.55	27.45	48.08
Monthly Service Attendance or More	50.37	7.04	6.42	27.24	54.39	1.84	5.04	23.57	53.28	1.82	0.00	8.97
Any Prayer	94.78	50.75	19.27	77.48	93.47	31.46	10.83	76.08	91.77	16.98	19.61	73.86
Weekly Prayer or More	84.84	37.13	12.84	58.07	75.38	13.15	4.17	41.18	68.54	5.66	0.00	37.25
Any Meditation	-	-	-	-	62.91	47.03	35.71	48.16	-	-	-	-
Weekly Meditation or More	-	-	-	-	41.55	25.57	22.22	23.53	-	-	-	-
Slightly/Somewhat Religious or More	-	-	-	-	90.09	15.79	6.72	72.66	-	-	-	-
Religion is Important	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	42.83	1.89	1.96	9.80
Slightly Spiritual or More	-	-	-	-	95.96	61.14	34.75	85.94	-	-	-	-
Believe in God*	98.76	83.62	-	-	98.08	57.08	-	-	-	-	-	-
No Doubt God Exists	64.82	19.96	-	-	70.18	6.39	-	-	-	-	-	-
God Probably/Definitely Exists	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Believe in Life After Death	87.27	57.96	19.23	75.00	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Believe in Heaven	-	-	-	-	93.27	25.57	3.97	80.67	84.41	11.32	5.88	43.14
Believe in Hell	-	-	-	-	87.70	30.14	18.25	72.12	69.61	13.21	1.96	29.61
Believe in Miracles	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	57.57	9.62	1.96	41.18
Had a Religious Experience	50.66	14.12	7.34	23.31	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Own Way to Connect with God	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Notes. Cell entries are percentages.

Affil. = Reported a religious affiliation.

Not Affil. = Reported “no religion” or “none” on the religious affiliation question.

Spirit. = “Spiritual.”

Rel. = “Religious person.”

*Combines all categories of an ordinal belief in God question other than “Do not believe in God.” These include “No doubts God exists,” “Some doubts God exists,” and “Believe in cosmic force/higher power.”

**Includes self-reported “atheist” as well as individuals who “Don’t think about religion.”

Table 2. Religious characteristics of individuals by religious affiliation and identity in five U.S. population surveys (cont'd.)

Religious Characteristics	2017-2020 WVS			2018 Chapman			
	Rel.	Not Rel.	Atheist	Affil.	Not Affil.	Atheist	Agnostic
Any Religious Service Attendance	85.52	46.14	14.69	94.74	70.98	45.95	67.21
Monthly Service Attendance or More	55.87	16.45	4.49	48.79	5.80	1.35	1.64
Any Prayer	97.82	64.52	15.57	-	-	-	-
Weekly Prayer or More	85.07	32.82	4.10	-	-	-	-
Any Meditation	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Weekly Meditation or More	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Slightly/Somewhat Religious or More	-	-	-	78.44	19.64	5.41	14.75
Religion is Important	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Slightly Spiritual or More	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Believe in God*	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
No Doubts God Exists	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
God Probably/Definitely Exists	-	-	-	92.05	54.02	12.16	40.98
Believe in Life After Death	83.99	51.48	11.57	-	-	-	-
Believe in Heaven	87.46	46.04	6.64	-	-	-	-
Believe in Hell	86.91	48.90	7.44	72.97	29.02	5.41	11.67
Believe in Miracles	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Had a Religious Experience	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Own Way to Connect with God	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Notes. Cell entries are percentages.

Affil. = Reported a religious affiliation.

Not Affil. = Reported “no religion” or “none” on the religious affiliation question.

Spirit. = “Spiritual.”

Rel. = “Religious person.”

*Combines all categories of an ordinal belief in God question other than “Do not believe in God.” These include “No doubts God exists,” “Some doubts God exists,” and “Believe in cosmic force/higher power.”

The findings for any prayer (compared with never) showed percentages ranging from 10.83% to 97.82%. This means that unaffiliated individuals, atheists, and agnostics sometimes pray. For weekly prayer or more, the percentages ranged from 0% for agnostics in PALS to 85.07% for religious individuals in the WVS. Interestingly, weekly prayer is relatively common even among individuals who are routinely referred to as non-religious: 37.13%, 12.84%, and 58.07% of unaffiliated individuals, atheists, and agnostics, respectively, reported praying weekly or more in the GSS. The percentages tended to be lower in the other surveys, but they were only 0% for agnostics in PALS. In the one dataset that included a measure of meditation (VBAPS), the findings were similar to prayer. Among affiliated individuals, the unaffiliated, atheists, and agnostics, 41.55%, 25.57%, 22.22% and 23.53% reported weekly meditation or more.

A couple of surveys also included measures of subjective religiosity and spirituality. In the VBAPS, 15.79%, 6.72% and 72.66% of unaffiliated individuals, atheists, and agnostics, respectively, reported being slightly religious or more, while 61.14%, 34.75, and 85.94% said they were slightly spiritual or more. In the PALS, 1.89% of atheists, 1.96% of agnostics, and 9.80% of those who are spiritual but not committed to a specific faith said that religion was important.

The findings also showed that many unaffiliated individuals reported believing in God. In the GSS, 19.96% of unaffiliated individuals said that they had no doubts God exists (83.62% had at least some belief in God or a cosmic force/higher power). Having no doubts that God exists was reported by 6.39% of the unaffiliated in the VBAPS.

Various additional beliefs were also examined. Some unaffiliated individuals, atheists, and agnostics reported believing in life after death (GSS and WVS), heaven and hell (VBAPS, PALS, and WVS), and miracles (PALS). Some of these percentages were in the double digits. The GSS also asked about having a religious experience such as being born-again. In these data, 14.12% of the unaffiliated, 7.34% of atheists, and 23.31% of agnostics said yes.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

More than three decades ago, Glenn (1987) published findings suggesting an increase in the number of individuals reporting no religion on national surveys. However, he cautioned readers to be careful about interpreting these findings as support for secularization theory. In his words: “data on ‘no religion’ responses by themselves are inadequate indicators of the overall trend in religiosity” (p. 308), and furthermore, “are not conclusive evidence of secularization in this country in recent decades” (p. 311). Based on the findings described above, these statements appear to be as true today as they were when Glenn reported his findings. Even many self-described atheists and agnostics are religious and/or spiritual to some degree. According to the 2018 GSS, 6.42% of atheists and 27.24% of agnostics attended religious services monthly or more, 12.84% and 58.07% prayed weekly or more, 19.23% and 75.00% believed in life after death, and 7.34% and 23.31% reported having had a religious experience. The other surveys confirmed these findings to at least some degree, and also showed that many atheists, agnostics, and

people reporting no affiliation also meditated, reported that religion and spirituality were important, and believed in heaven, hell, and miracles. So, what do these findings mean for research in this area?

First, the unaffiliated should certainly not be conflated with being not religious or a “none” (Stark 2008; Cox 2021). The categories of unaffiliated, none, no religion, agnostic, and atheist should be clearly defined and measured in all research on this topic. Atheists are the least religious in most (but not all) cases and samples, but even this group on the whole is not completely secular or irreligious. Some unaffiliated individuals are religious and spiritual in a variety of ways, as are many agnostics and those who report being spiritual but not necessarily religious. Therefore, “none” appears to be an inaccurate and misleading description for many individuals who end up being included in this group by survey researchers. There may be many different types of non-religious individuals, just as there are religious ones, and scholars should address this issue (Baker and Smith 2009b; Silver et al. 2014).

Second, if nones are not irreligious, then what are the studies on the “rise of the nones” actually capturing? For a variety of reasons, measuring religious affiliation and identity is extremely difficult (Burge 2020). To begin with, documenting these trends is challenging since an estimated 20-40% of the population changes their self-reported religious affiliation/identity over time (Heimlich 2009; Lim et al. 2010; Smith 2015; Hout 2017). Interpreting these findings as declining religious commitment is one possible explanation, but it may also be the case that these are religious individuals who are searching for the best religion to meet their needs (Sherkat and Wilson 1995; Stark and Finke 2000; Stark 2015). In addition, many unaffiliated individuals may have only been nominally religious in the past, and simply dropped their identification with religion due to increasing social acceptance (Stetzer 2015; Cooperman and Smith 2016). It would be difficult to argue that these individuals have become less religious over time due to secularization or other processes. They simply changed their answers to survey questions, not necessarily their religious practices or beliefs.

Third, these trends may also be linked with the very observable decline in mainline Protestantism over the past half century, which coincided with a rise in conservative and evangelical religion (Iannaccone 1994; Perrin et al. 1997). Many nones or unaffiliated individuals may not have left religion, but may have simply left mainline religious denominations for a different type of religious experience (Stark and Finke 2000; Finke and Stark 2005). This phenomenon can be observed today in the rise of new religions and denominations, affinity groups, and house churches (Melton 2001; Barker 2007), as well as in the *chavura* and Jewish Renewal movements among young Jews. The latter may not be going to their parents’ synagogue, but they remain engaged—perhaps more meaningfully engaged—in Jewish spiritual life. The same may also be true of many former members of Roman Catholic and mainline Protestant churches.

Fourth, research on spirituality versus religiosity is also relevant here. While some have argued that spirituality is a personal alternative to organized religion, and that some people are dropping religion but keeping their spirituality, these two concepts are clearly related to some degree (Fuller 2001; Marler and Hadaway

2002; Carey 2018; Parsons 2018). The findings presented here show that individuals who report being spiritual but not committed to any particular religion still display some level of religious service attendance, prayer, and belief in heaven, hell, and miracles. While some of these individuals undoubtedly have lost some of their religiosity and kept their spirituality, the number of these individuals is not known, and it is not clear whether, or to what extent, this process helps us understand the rise of the individuals who are commonly described as nones. One thing is certain: many presumed nones display varying types and degrees of religiosity and spirituality, so they should not be included in that group. They may merely be unaffiliated, or unaffiliated with whatever lists of religions or denominations are included in respective surveys.

Fifth, for many individuals, religion is a central component of their social identity (Greenfield and Marks 2007; Mavor and Ysseldyk 2020). This applies not only to religious individuals, but to those who may not be religious as well. For some, “none” may be a salient identity. This may develop among individuals who: (a) feel that religious organizations are too concerned with money, business, and power (Funk and Smith 2012; Lipka 2016); (b) oppose the social and political activities of some religious organizations in areas like abortion and marriage (Hout and Fischer 2002; Funk and Smith 2012; Hout and Fischer 2014; Thiessen and Wilkins-Laflamme 2017; Alper 2018b); and (c) feel betrayed by scandals such as sexual abuse and infidelity among religious leaders (Thiessen and Wilkins-Laflamme 2017). These individuals may remain religious and/or spiritual in their private lives, but reject organized religion and develop an identity that is opposed to it, such as “none.” Currently, we do not know how common this is, so future research should attempt to disentangle individuals in this group from true nones and those who are not religious. The opposite scenario should also be examined—i.e., individuals who attend services or participate in organized religious activities even though they are not personally religious. It is possible that they are self-reported nones as well.

Given these findings, why has this theme of declining religiosity taken hold in public discourse in recent years? Part of the problem is rooted in superficial data analyses and overstated findings, accompanied by a constant barrage of media reports, which have fueled widespread belief in a process that may or may not actually be occurring (e.g., Schnabel and Bock 2017; Stone 2020). What are the underlying motivations for arguments supporting a decline in religiosity? The answer is not clear, but it may be rooted in the identification of those advocating for this with mainline Protestantism, which actually is in decline and has been for decades. The overall religious world may not be on its death bed as they assert, but *their* religious world may be, and this could bias perceptions and interpretations of research findings.

With respect to the media, apocalyptic (or congratulatory, depending upon the source) news stories speak more to the source of the reporting than to the demographic reality of the U.S. As noted, the proportions of atheists and active (intense), practicing Christians appear to have remained relatively stable across time (Stark 2011, 2015; Hout and Smith 2015; Stetzer 2015; Schnabel and Bock 2017), the number of religious congregations may be growing (or remaining steady

at the very least), and many new churches and religions are started every year (Stark 2008, 2011; Brauer 2017). Nondenominational Protestant churches, small informal organizations, and several non-Christian religions also appear to be growing and thriving (Finke and Stark 2005; Rosson and Fields 2008; Thomas and Olson 2010; Brauer 2017; Chaves 2017).

Since the population continues to disengage from mainline Protestant religious denominations, it is no wonder that it seems like the end of the world to certain commentators, and the vanguard of a brave new world to others. But, again, many people are not necessarily leaving religion behind; some are simply voting with their feet as they have done throughout history. Some are changing their proverbial “religious channel” and perhaps cutting their “church cord,” much like there is a declining share of network (and now cable) TV viewers even though individuals are still plugged into something. If a decline in religiosity is indeed occurring, it may not be due to secularization as theorists understand the concept, but may indeed be due to a secularization of the cultural zeitgeist. While formal institutional religion seems to be less and less the arbiter of cultural mores and norms and of accepted morality (Chaves 1994), this may not necessarily be a function of identifiable disengagement from religious and spiritual participation. Rather, perhaps it is more of an indicator that the societal opinion leaders and cultural elites (at least those who still attend church or synagogue) go to congregations that have cast aside traditional values and modes of worship and have succumbed to the mainstream, mass-approved spirit of the times. This says more about the continuing decline of the mainline religious bodies than of any real evidence that religion more broadly is dying.

A brief note on secularization theory is warranted here. Based largely on findings from survey data, some scholars have argued that the U.S. is following a similar path of declining religiosity and increasing secularization as in other developed countries, particularly those in Western Europe (Voas and Chaves 2016; Schnabel and Bock 2017; Brauer 2018). This theory does appear to have some empirical support (Norris and Inglehart 2011; Funk and Smith 2012; Lipka 2015d; Lipka 2016; Voas and Chaves 2016). However, other data do not support this argument, especially when examined in countries around the world where religiosity appears to have increased since the 1970s, even in societies that are commonly assumed to be secular and non-religious like Russia, China, and parts of Europe (Johnson and Grim 2008; Stark 2011, 2015; Berger 2014; Zurlo and Johnson 2016; Lipka and McClendon 2017). Moreover, comparisons between secularization in Western Europe and in the U.S. may be flawed since the former may have never been very religious, and thus may not have actually secularized due to modernization (Stark 2011). Overall, secularization in the U.S. and around the world is still an ongoing, unresolved debate and the contribution of research on unaffiliated individuals to this discussion is not clear.

The present study has several strengths. First, it provides a fairly detailed, up-to-date review of research and theory in this area. Second, it provides detailed information about the religious and spiritual lives of several different types of putative “nones” including those with no affiliation, self-reported atheists and agnostics, and individuals claiming to be spiritual but not necessarily religious.

Third, it shows that these individuals display many different religious and spiritual practices and beliefs despite the fact that they are typically called not religious or irreligious. These labels are clearly inaccurate. Fourth, it presents results from five different, contemporary U.S. population surveys.

Like all research, this study also has several weaknesses. First, it relies on self-reports of all variables. It is possible that participants provided socially desirable responses to the religion questions in each survey. Second, the data are cross-sectional in nature, and this study does not examine changes across time. Future research should address this issue by examining longitudinal trends in the religious and spiritual beliefs of those with a religious affiliation and of nones, atheists and agnostics, and spiritual-but-not-religious individuals. Third, not all of the data sources analyzed here contain all of the important religion variables. Some had detailed data on religious tradition and affiliation, while others simply asked about being a religious person. Future research should attempt to address this weakness with alternative data sources, and also examine additional religion variables such as the reading of sacred texts, New Age beliefs and practices, and conservative-versus-liberal theological orientations, to name a few. Fourth, a detailed analysis of religious trends in non-Christian nations and among other religions such as Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, and Buddhism was not conducted here, but should be the subject of future research.

To conclude, even though a growing proportion of the U.S. population appears to be reporting no religious affiliation on national surveys, there are many measurement and conceptual caveats with this research, and scholars need to look more closely at the actual practices and beliefs of unaffiliated individuals to distinguish them from actual religious nones (Dougherty et al. 2007; Hackett 2014; Cox 2021). Consistent with previous research, the current findings show that many unaffiliated individuals, atheists, and agnostics attend religious services, pray, meditate, worship God or a higher power, and believe in heaven, hell, and miracles (Funk and Smith 2012; Lipka 2015a, 2015c; Cooperman et al. 2018; Fahmy 2018; Cox 2021). The use of words and phrases such as none, no religion, and not religious to describe this group of unaffiliated individuals is thus inappropriate, inaccurate, and misleading. We need more research in this area before we can make conclusive statements about the status and identity of the religious nones compared with those who are merely religiously unaffiliated (Funk and Smith 2012).

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Appendix I: Variable Coding

Table 1

- **Affiliated**
 - GSS: What is your religious preference? (1=Any religious preference; 0=None)
 - VBAPS: With what religious family, if any, do you most closely identify? (1=Any religious preference; 0=No religion)
 - PALS: Respondent's religion. (1=Christian; Muslim; Jewish; Roman Catholic; Mormon; Buddhist; Hindu; other; 0=Agnostic; atheist; spiritual; don't think about religion)
 - Chapman: Religion. (1=Any response other than nothing in particular, atheist, or agnostic; 0=Nothing in particular, atheist, or agnostic)
- **Not Affiliated (No Religion, None)**
 - GSS: What is your religious preference? (1=None; 0=Any religious preference)
 - VBAPS: With what religious family, if any, do you most closely identify? (1=No religion; 0=Any religious preference)
 - Chapman: Religion. (1=Nothing in particular; 0=Any other response)
- **Atheist**
 - GSS: Which statement comes closest to expressing what you believe about God? (1=I don't believe in God; 0=Any other response)
 - VBAPS: Which one statement comes closest to your personal beliefs about God? (1= I do not believe in God; 0=Any other response)
 - PALS: Respondent's religion. (1=Atheist or Don't think about religion; 0=Any other response)
 - Chapman: Religion. (1=Atheist; 0=Any other response)
- **Agnostic**
 - GSS: Which statement comes closest to expressing what you believe about God? (1=I don't know whether there is a God, and I don't believe there is any way to find out; I find myself believing in God some of the time, but not at others; While I have doubts, I feel that I do believe in God; 0=Any other response)
 - VBAPS: Which one statement comes closest to your personal beliefs about God? (1=I believe in God, but with some doubts; I sometimes believe in God; I don't know and there is no way to for me to know; I have no opinion; 0= Any other response)
 - PALS: Respondent's religion. (1=Agnostic; 0=Any other response)
 - Chapman: Religion. (1=Agnostic; 0=Any other response)
- **Religious Person**
 - WVS: Independently of whether you attend religious services or not, would you say you are...? (1=A religious person; 0=Not a religious person or an atheist)
- **Not a Religious Person**

- WVS: Independently of whether you attend religious services or not, would you say you are...? (1=Not a religious person; 0=A religious person or an atheist)
- Atheist
 - WVS: Independently of whether you attend religious services or not, would you say you are...? (1=An atheist; 0=A religious person or not a religious person)
- Spiritual
 - PALS: Respondent’s religion (1=Spiritual; 0=Christian; Muslim; Jewish; Roman Catholic; Mormon; Buddhist; Hindu; agnostic; atheist; don’t think about religion; other)

Table 2

- Any Religious Service Attendance
 - GSS: How often do you attend religious services? (1=Less than once a year or more; 0=Never)
 - VBAPS: How often do you attend religious services at a place of worship? (1=Less than once a year or more; 0=Never)
 - PALS: This question is about how often you attend worship services, not including weddings or funerals. (1=Once or twice a year or more; 0=Never)
 - WVS: Apart from weddings and funerals, about how often do you attend religious services these days? (1=Less often or more; 0=Never)
 - Chapman: How often do you attend religious services at a church, mosque, synagogue or other place of worship? (1=Only on special occasions or more; 0=Never)
- Monthly Service Attendance or More
 - GSS: How often do you attend religious services? (1=About once a month or more; 0=Several times a year or less)
 - VBAPS: How often do you attend religious services at a place of worship? (1=Once a month or more; 0=Several times a year or less)
 - PALS: This question is about how often you attend worship services, not including weddings or funerals. (1=Once a month or more; 0=Several times a year or less)
 - WVS: Apart from weddings and funerals, about how often do you attend religious services these days? (1=Once a month or more; 0=Only on special holy days or less)
 - Chapman: How often do you attend religious services at a church, mosque, synagogue or other place of worship? (1=Once a month or more; 0=Several times a year or less)
- Any Prayer
 - GSS: About how often do you pray? (1=Less than once a week or more; 0=Never)
 - VBAPS: About how often do you spend time alone praying outside of religious services? (1=Only on certain occasions or more; 0=Never)

- PALS: In the past 12 months, how often have you typically prayed, not including before meals and at religious services? (1=A few times a year or more; 0=Never)
- WVS: Apart from weddings and funerals, about how often do you pray? (1=Less often; 0=Never, practically never)
- Weekly Prayer or More
 - GSS: About how often do you pray? (1=Once a week or more; 0=Less than once a week or less)
 - VBAPS: About how often do you spend time alone praying outside of religious services? (1=Once a week or more; 0=Only on certain occasions or less)
 - PALS: In the past 12 months, how often have you typically prayed, not including before meals and at religious services? (1=Once a week or more; 0=One to three times a month or less)
 - WVS: Apart from weddings and funerals, about how often do you pray? (1=Several times each week or more; 0=Only when attending religious services or less)
- Any Meditation
 - VBAPS: About how often do you practice meditation outside of religious services? (1=Only on certain occasions or more; 0=Never)
- Weekly Meditation or More
 - VBAPS: About how often do you practice meditation outside of religious services? (1=Once a week or more; 0=Only on certain occasions or less)
- Slightly/Somewhat Religious or More
 - VBAPS: How religious do you consider yourself to be? (1=Slightly, moderately, or very religious; 0=Not religious)
 - Chapman: How religious do you consider yourself to be? (1=Somewhat or very religious; 0=Not at all or not too religious)
- Religion is Important
 - PALS: How important is religion or religious faith to you personally? (1=Extremely important or by far the most important part of your life; 0=Very important or less)
- Slightly Spiritual or More
 - VBAPS: How spiritual do you consider yourself to be? (1=Slightly, moderately, or very spiritual; 0=Not spiritual)
- Believe in God
 - GSS: Which statement comes closest to expressing what you believe about God? (1=Any response other than I don't believe in God; 0=I don't believe in God)
 - VBAPS: Which one statement comes closest to your personal beliefs about God? (1=Any response other than I don't believe in God; 0=I don't believe in God)
- No Doubt God Exists

- GSS: Which statement comes closest to expressing what you believe about God? (1=I know God really exists and I have no doubts; 0=Any other response)
- VBAPS: Which one statement comes closest to your personal beliefs about God? (1=I have no doubts that God exists; 0=Any other response)
- God Probably/Definitely Exists
 - Chapman: Please indicate the extent to which you believe each of the following exists. God. (1=Probably or definitely exists; 0=Probably does not exist or definitely does not exist)
- Believe in Life After Death
 - GSS: Do you believe there is a life after death? (1=Yes; 0=No)
 - WVS: Which, if any, of the following do you believe in? Life after death. (1=Yes; 0=No)
- Believe in Heaven
 - VBAPS: How certain are you that you will get into Heaven? (1=Any response other than I don't believe in Heaven; 0=I don't believe in Heaven)
 - PALS: I believe in Heaven where people live with God forever. (1=Somewhat agree or strongly agree; 0=Neither agree nor disagree or less)
 - WVS: Which, if any, of the following do you believe in? Heaven. (1=Yes; 0=No)
- Believe in Hell
 - VBAPS: What is the extent of your fear of hell? (1=Any response other than I don't believe in hell; 0=I don't believe in hell)
 - PALS: I believe there is a Hell where people experience pain as punishment for their sin. (1=Somewhat agree or strongly agree; 0=Neither agree nor disagree or less)
 - WVS: Which, if any, of the following do you believe in? Hell. (1=Yes; 0=No)
 - Chapman: Please indicate the extent to which you believe each of the following exists. Hell. (1=Probably or definitely exists; 0=Probably does not exist or definitely does not exist)
- Believe in Miracles
 - PALS: I have experienced a supernatural miracle, an event that could not have happened without the intervention of God or a spiritual force. (1=Somewhat agree or strongly agree; 0=Neither agree nor disagree or less)
- Had a Religious Experience
 - GSS: Would you say you have been ‘born again’ or have had a ‘born again’ experience? (1=Yes; 0=No)