



BELIEF IN BRITAIN

**A LOOK INTO THE RELIGIOUS
AND SPIRITUAL LANDSCAPE
OF THE NATION**

INTRODUCTION

I commissioned this poll of 10,000 Brits representing the full breadth of religious and spiritual backgrounds across the country to help promote [*The Devils' Gospels: Finding God in Four Great Atheist Books*](#).

I expected the data to confirm what has been assumed for a long time: Britain is steadily becoming a more atheist country. The results are the reverse of what I was expecting.

The key findings are:

- 1)** Young people are both more spiritual and more religious than older people; they also report becoming more spiritual and more religious in the past five years.
- 2)** Atheism appears to be most popular among people in the 40s and 50s: younger people seem less interested.
- 3)** Nevertheless Britons young and old are highly critical of religion, and pessimistic about its outlook.

It changes the narrative. God is not on a one way ticket to oblivion. On the contrary: the longing to connect with something bigger than ourselves seems to be a human constant. What seems to change over time is how we try to make that connection. Until the 20th century most people in Britain tried to do it through



organised religion. This new report shows they increasingly don't.

Religion in Britain has largely been privatised. A small minority (11%) of people worship regularly and accept the authority of the leaders of their faith. A large minority claim to be atheist or non-believers with a cultural attachment to a religion (30%). For most Britons though it's something in between, they may use religious labels or even participate in religious services but with their own thoughts about the nature of God.

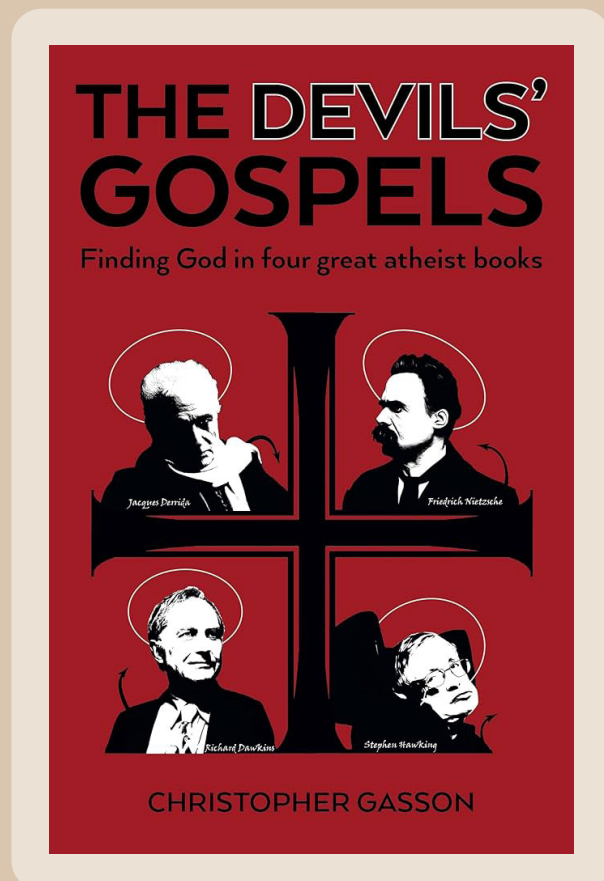
My guess is that this happened because of the sheer scale of the moral and cultural challenges thrown up by 20th century history. They fragmented the consensus around how we express our spirituality and nearly broke religion.

But not completely.

The OnePoll data seems to suggest that organised religion may now be on the way back. This is clearly true of Islam, which seems to enjoy overwhelming support among those born into the faith. It is also true of Christianity with the caveat that there is a lot more ambivalence towards the Church.

My reading of this is that, whether it is because of the epidemic of loneliness or the achievability of conventional material goals, people under the age of 35 feel not just more spiritual than their parents but more religious too. They are also unhappy with the privatisation of religion. They want God to be a shared experience again, but without the violence, abuses and power trips that come with organised religion.

That is what my book, *The Devils' Gospels*, is all about.



THE KEY FINDINGS ARE:

1.

Young people are both more spiritual and more religious than older people; they also report becoming more spiritual and more religious in the past five years.

2.

Atheism appears to be most popular among people in the 40s and 50s: younger people seem less interested.

3.

Nevertheless Britons young and old are highly critical of religion, and pessimistic about its outlook.

CONTENTS

OUR SAMPLE	6
SPIRITUALITY & RELIGION IN BRITAIN	8
POLITICS IN RELIGION	14
ATHEISM	16
SCANDAL & NEGATIVE PRESS	18
BOOSTING APPEAL	20
WHAT WE WANT FROM GOD	22
THE WAY FORWARD	24
CLOSING THOUGHTS	28

OUR SAMPLE

The 'Belief In Britain' sample contains a representative contingent of all levels of belief. For clarity in our findings we grouped our participants into the following:



NON-BELIEVERS:

Participants who consider themselves atheist, or recognise religion and religious holidays but only from a cultural perspective. They do not believe in a 'God'.



RELIGIOUS:

Participants who worship regularly and ascribe to a specific belief system. They may not recognise every aspect of their religion but respect the authority of their religious leaders.



UNCOMMITTED:

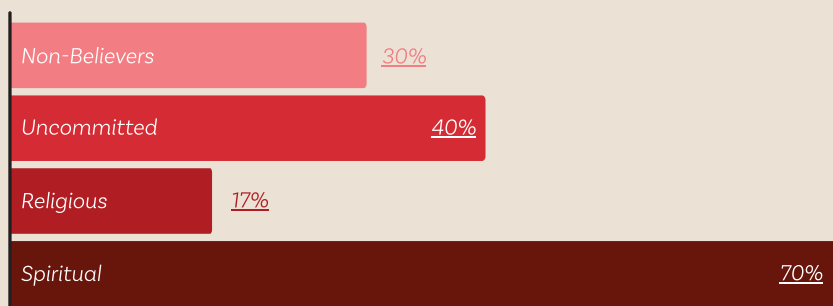
Participants who consider themselves religious or spiritual, but who do not ascribe to a specific belief system.



SPIRITUAL:

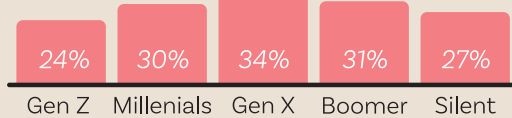
Participants who to varying degrees seek a deeper connection with the universe, nature, or a higher power, though this may extend beyond the confines of organized religion.

PARTICIPANTS IN SAMPLE BY GROUPING:

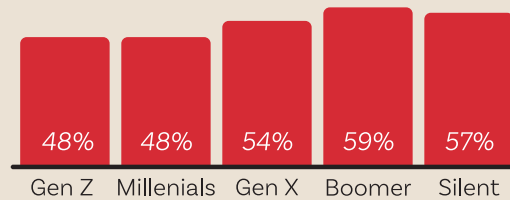


Survey carried out by OnePoll with 10,000 UK adults from December 2024- January 2025

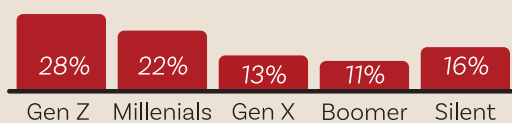
GENERATIONAL SPLIT OF RELIGIOUS VIEWS



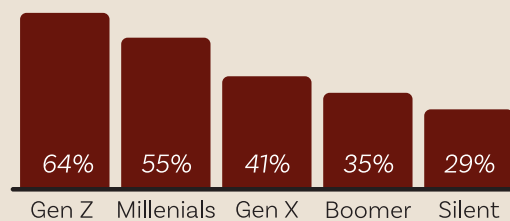
NON-BELIEVERS



UNCOMMITTED



RELIGIOUS



SPIRITUAL

64%

OF GEN Z WOULD DESCRIBE THEMSELVES AS SPIRITUAL
COMPARED TO ONLY **35% OF BOOMERS**

THOUGHTS FROM CHRISTOPHER GASSON

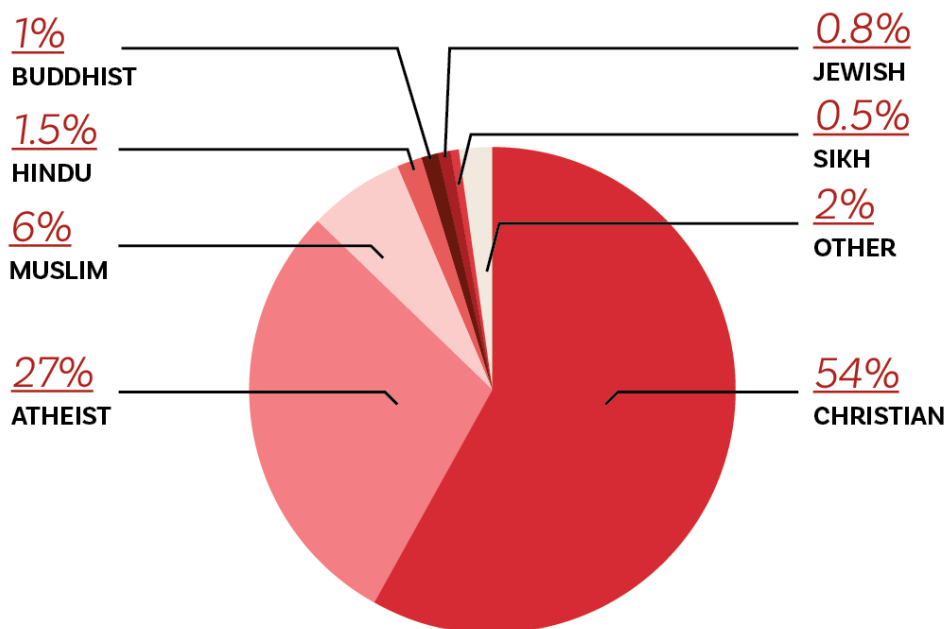
“What is surprising is that young people seem more inclined spirituality than old people. This could be because of societal change: the financial crisis, Covid, the epidemic of loneliness all might encourage young people to look beyond the material world for meaning. It could also be because no one ever asked this question before: young people might simply be more idealistic.



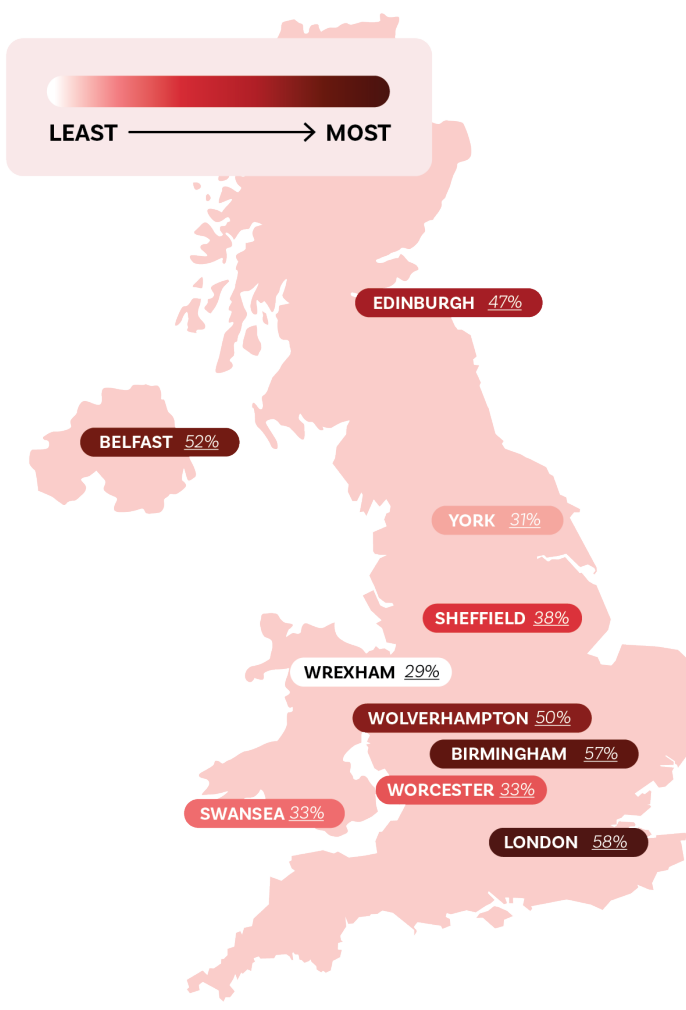
SPIRITUALITY & RELIGION IN BRITAIN

Let's take a look now at the spiritual and religious 'topography' of Britain, and how this has changed over recent years. From these trends we can make some predictions about how this spiritual landscape will continue to shift.

RELIGIOUS DISTRIBUTION IN THE UK



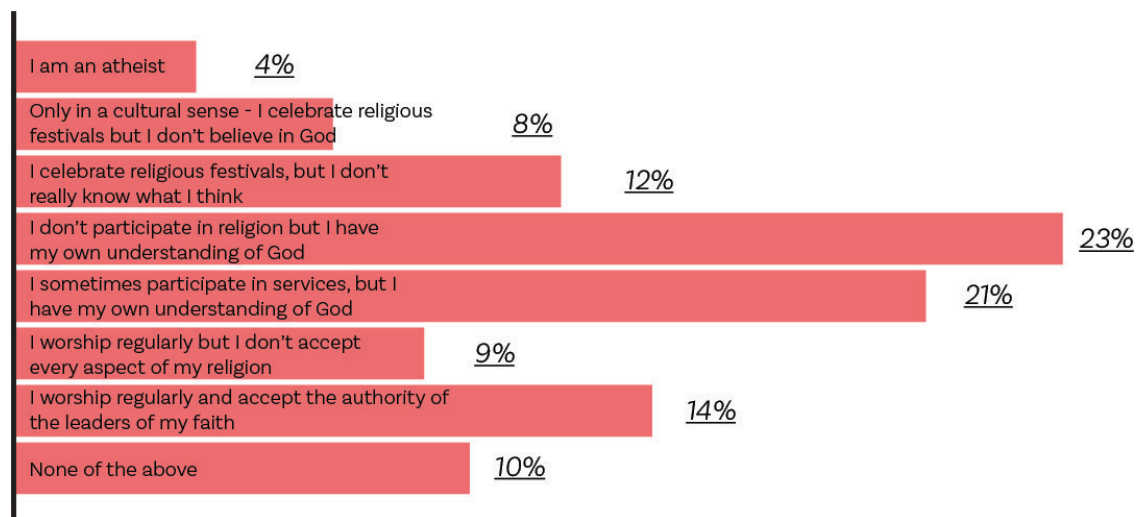
THE UK'S MOST AND LEAST SPIRITUAL CITIES



THOUGHTS FROM CHRISTOPHER GASSON

“The largest proportion of Christians (43%) have their own idea of God while a further 9% don’t accept every aspect of the religion. This suggests that the church’s interpretation of God is at odds with the majority of Christians’ understanding of God. It seems to imply that church leaders should listen more if they want to win back their flocks”

MOST CHRISTIANS DON'T FOLLOW THE CHURCH'S LINE ON GOD



YOUNGER PEOPLE EMBRACE THEIR SPIRITUAL SIDE

When asked to consider if they had become more or less spiritual in recent times, it was younger Brits who felt the greatest change. Post-Millennial and Generation-Z participants were most likely to consider themselves ‘Very spiritual’, with those in their mid 20s to mid 30s most likely to have experienced an increased presence of religious or spiritual influence in their lives over the last five years.

Older Brits meanwhile experienced little to no change in their religious beliefs, with our contingent of ‘Silent Generation’ participants saying they have felt their spiritual or religious dedication decrease as they have gotten older.

THOUGHTS FROM CHRISTOPHER GASSON

“Around 70% of Britons say that they are in some way spiritual. My guess is that the result would be the same if you had asked the question 100 years ago or 1000 years ago.”

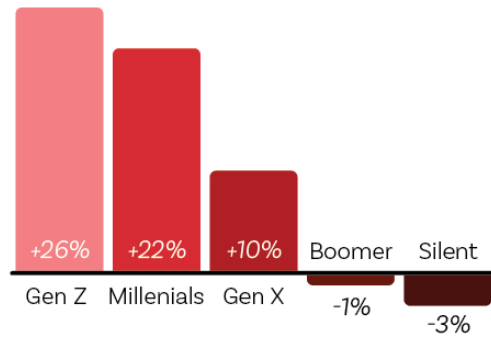
22%

OF BRITS THINK THERE IS THE POSSIBILITY OF SOMETHING BIGGER OUT THERE

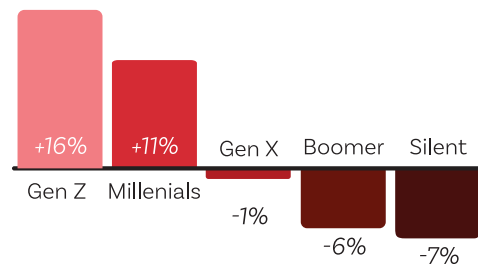
26%

OF BRITS THINK SENSE OF SPIRITUALITY HAS INCREASED IN THE LAST 5 YEARS

GENERATIONAL SPLIT ON HOW SPIRITUALITY HAS CHANGED OVER THE PAST 5 YEARS



YOUNGER PEOPLE REPORTED A NET INCREASE IN HOW IMPORTANT RELIGION IS TO THEM OVER THE PAST 10 YEARS



We also observed a clear tapering-off in ‘spirituality’ in older participants, with Brits less and less likely to openly call themselves ‘spiritual’ as they age, indicating that this label is something more readily accepted by the young. This might explain why 58% of our sample believe that the UK has become less religious over the past five years. Though those aged 45-54 are most likely to think there is the possibility of something bigger than themselves ‘out there’, even if they are unsure what this could be.

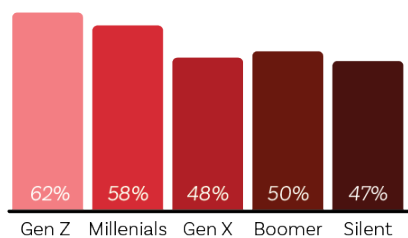


YOUNGER PEOPLE ARE MORE ENGAGED WITH RELIGION.

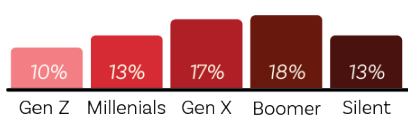
Post-Millennials, those Brits born after 1996, were identified as most likely to attend worship regularly as well as accept the authority of the leaders in their chosen faith. Almost 1 in 5 (18%) of our respondents aged 18 to 24 said they could be counted on to attend worship regularly, though this stat gradually drops off as we move through the older age groups until we reach just 6% for our older respondents.

Younger Brits are also more willing to hear arguments in favour of religion. This is in contrast to results of all older age groups, which proved more receptive to the ideas of atheism - and more sceptical towards the authorities of their given faith leaders. These findings paint a downward trend in religious engagement in older generations, particularly after the age of 45, where our sample begins to show the influence and appeal of religion in our lives begin to lose its lustre.

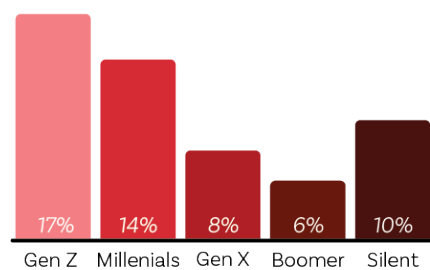
WILLINGNESS TO LISTEN TO ARGUMENTS IN FAVOUR OF RELIGION



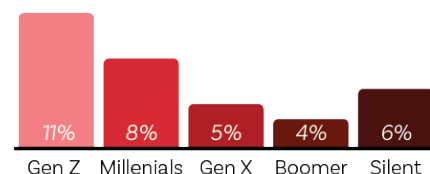
WILLING



UNWILLING



I worship regularly and accept the authority of the leaders of my faith



I worship regularly but don't accept every aspect of my religion

THOUGHTS FROM CHRISTOPHER GASSON

“The data on who worships most regularly is one of the most puzzling statistics that the survey pulled out. All the data on Church of England attendance seems to suggest that old people are much more active in church than Millennials and Generation X.

There are a number of ways in which this might be explained. The first is that young people are not attending Church of England services. They are going to mosques, Pentecostal and independent evangelical churches instead - an assertion our data seems to back up. The second is that it is wishful thinking: young people would simply like to think that they are more actively religious than they are.

The third possibility is that this data is merely a reflection of what has already been established elsewhere in the survey: young people are more religious than old people and atheism peaked with Generation X.”

TOP WAYS BRITS EXPRESS THEIR SPIRITUALITY



45%

ENJOYING NATURE



31%

MINDFULNESS



29%

CONNECTING WITH
OTHER PEOPLE



26%

ENJOYING MUSIC
OR ART



25%

MEDITATION



25%

EXERCISE



24%

GETTING INVOLVED
IN GOOD CAUSES



22%

PARTICIPATING IN
RELIGIOUS PRACTICES



10%

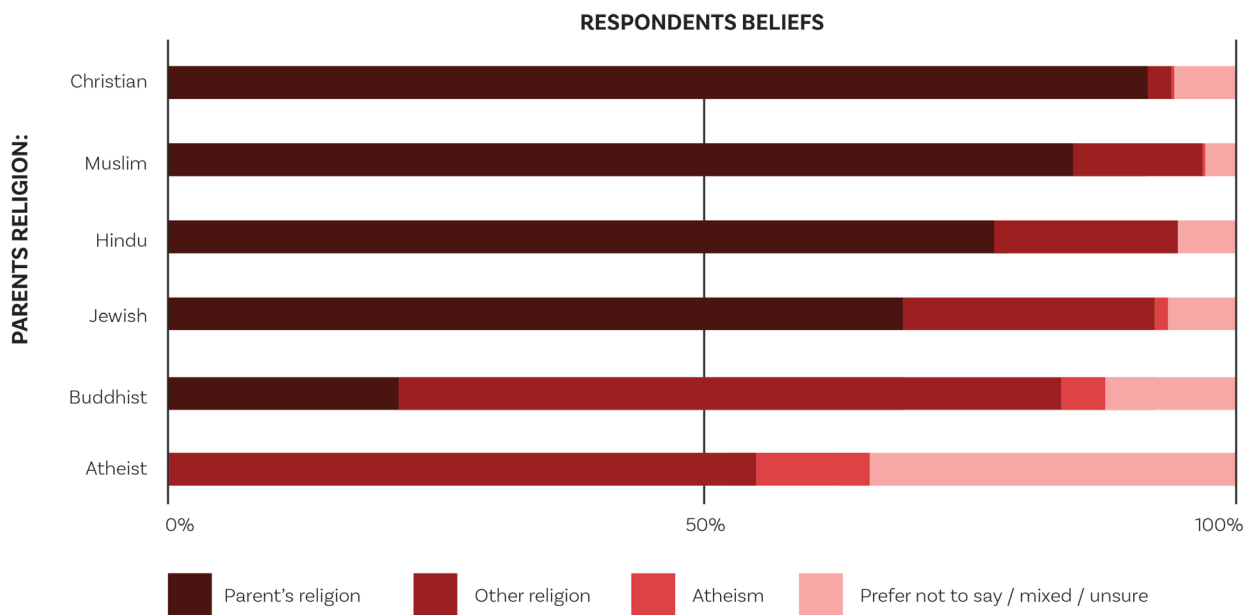
SUPPORTING A SPORTS
TEAM OR FANDOM

THOUGHTS
FROM CHRISTOPHER GASSON

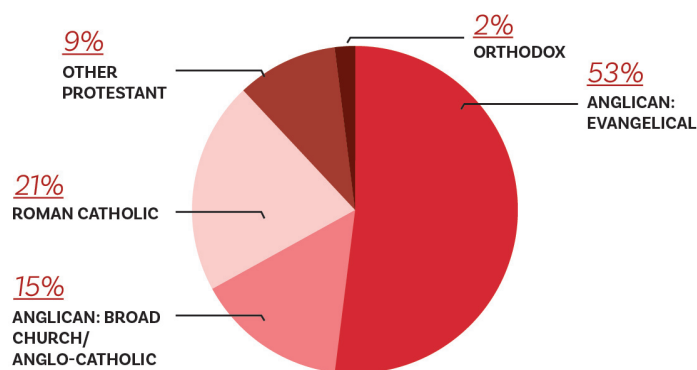
“This is an interesting challenge for the big religions. They were largely founded in the pre-modern period before “nature” became divided off and contrasted with the man-made environment. It means that the concept of enjoying nature doesn’t feature much in scripture or liturgy.”

PARENTS RELIGION

RESPONDENTS RELIGION VS PARENTS RELIGION

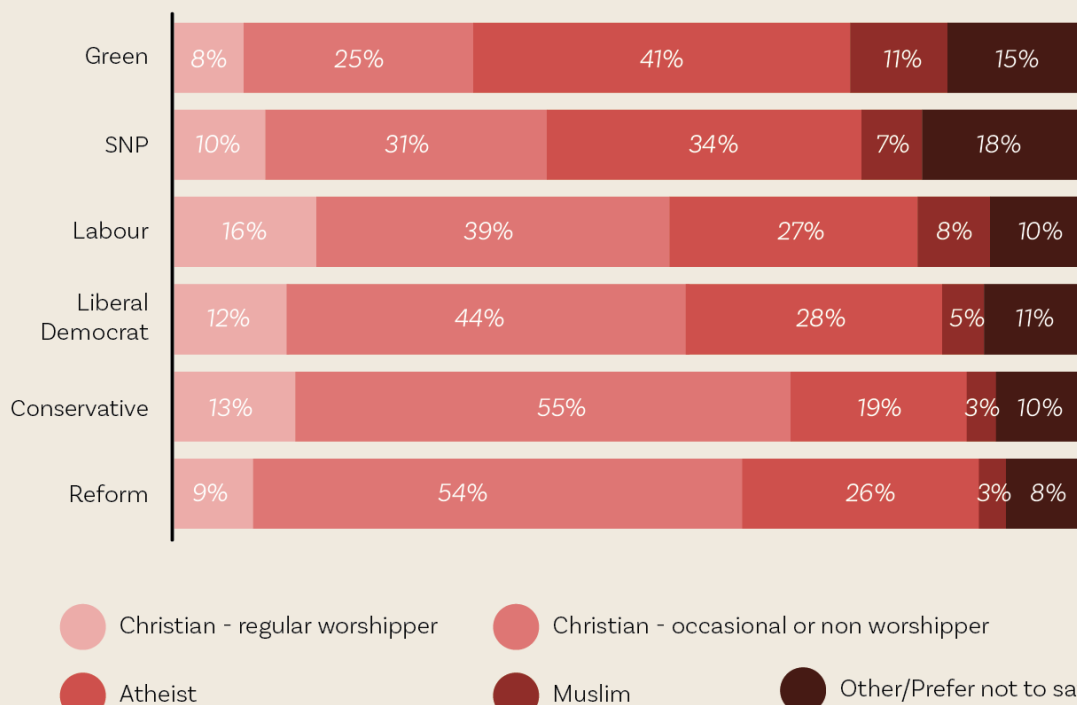


PARENTS DENOMINATION (CHRISTIANITY)

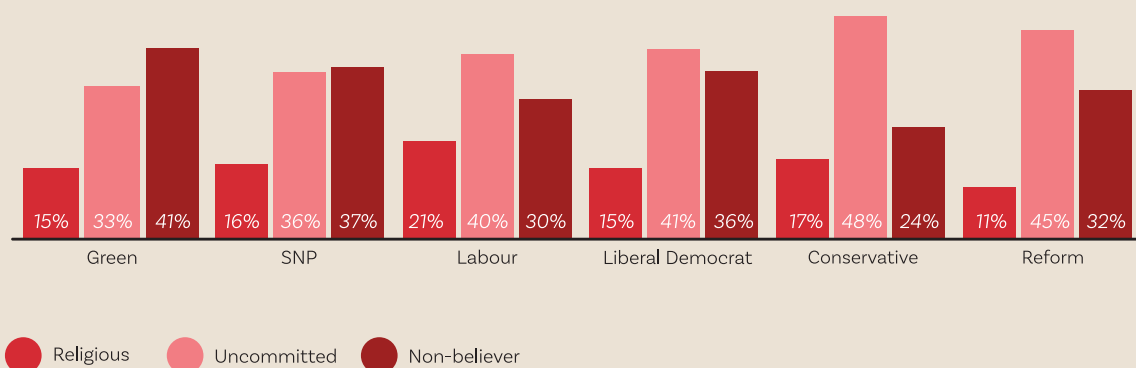


POLITICS IN RELIGION

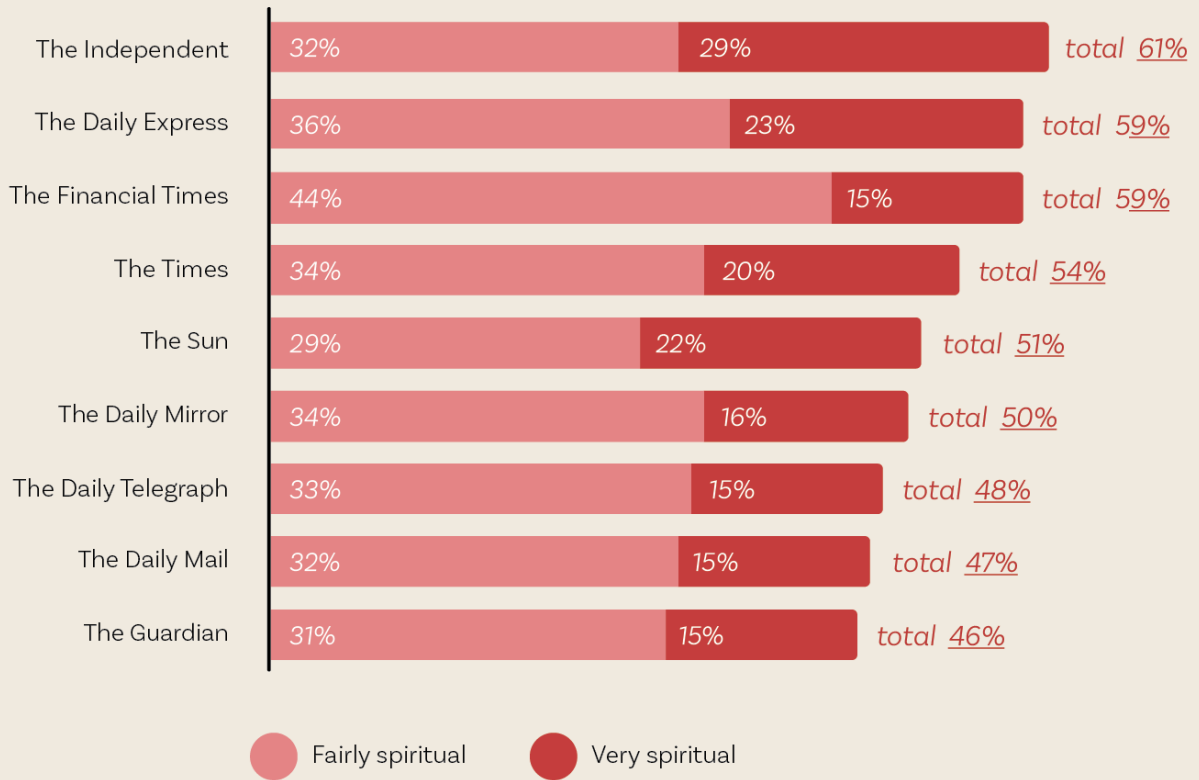
RELIGIOUS DISTRIBUTION BY POLITICAL PARTY



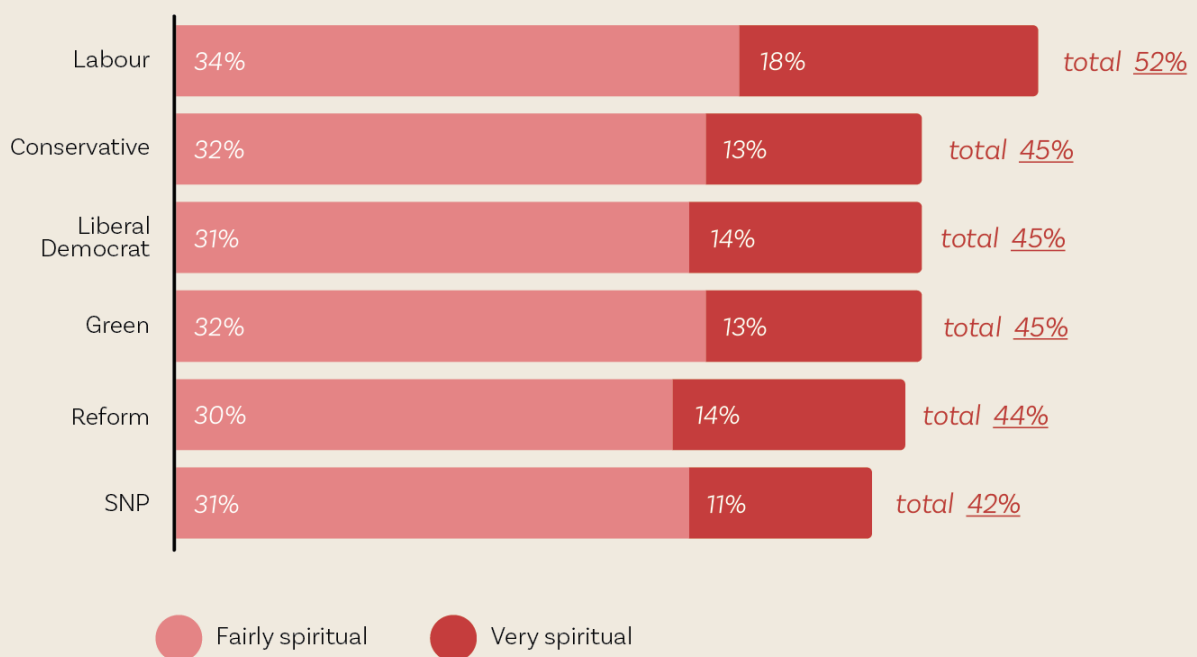
RELIGIOUS VIEWS BY POLITICAL PARTY



SPIRITUALITY BY MAIN SOURCE OF NEWS



SPIRITUALITY BY POLITICAL PARTY



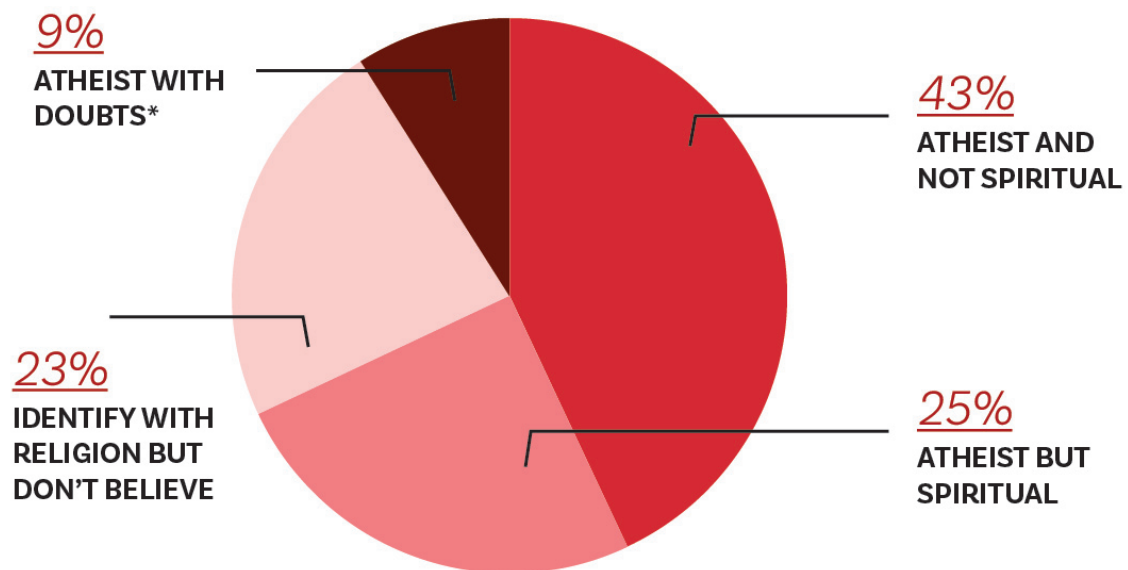
ATHEISM

THOUGHTS

FROM CHRISTOPHER GASSON

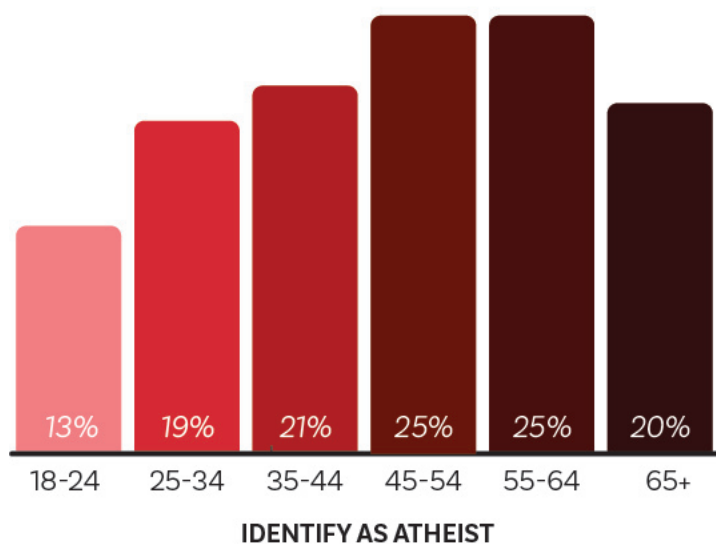
Atheism is a messy concept. Not everyone who doesn't believe in God identifies as atheist, and not everyone who identifies as atheist altogether rejects the idea of God. Furthermore many atheists see themselves as "spiritual" people. It seems to suggest that while people struggle with the existence of a supernatural God, they are still engaged with some of the things that religion has traditionally offered: a sense of meaning, belonging, and value in life.

ATHEISM HAS FUZZY EDGES



*includes those who identified with atheism rather than a particular religion, but also said that they had their own thoughts about god or worshipped regularly

ATHEISM SEEMS TO REACH A PEAK AMONG 45-65 YEAR OLDS



THOUGHTS FROM CHRISTOPHER GASSON

“Why should atheism peak between the ages of 45 and 65? The baby boomers – those now aged between 60 and 80 – gave up on church going, but they didn’t by and large become atheists. There must be a reason why atheism rather than apathy was more attractive to this 45 to 65 age group. My guess is that 9/11 changed things. Whereas before people might have felt that religion was misguided but benign, after that event more people might have become concerned that it was actively dangerous. This seems to have been the inspiration for the New Atheism movement, and people who were in the 25-45 age group at the time might have been more open to changing their mind about the nature of religion than older people.”



SCANDAL & NEGATIVE PRESS

The surprising uptick in spirituality and religiosity in younger generations cannot be attributed to the public image of religious foundations. Three in five Brits said their attitudes to religion has been affected by the revelation of scandals in recent years - and the media coverage that followed.

As a result, 45% of those surveyed point to the questionable behaviour of religious institutions as a major deterrent. Religion is also used to justify acts of violence around the world - a fact which did not escape 45% of our sample who find this off-putting.

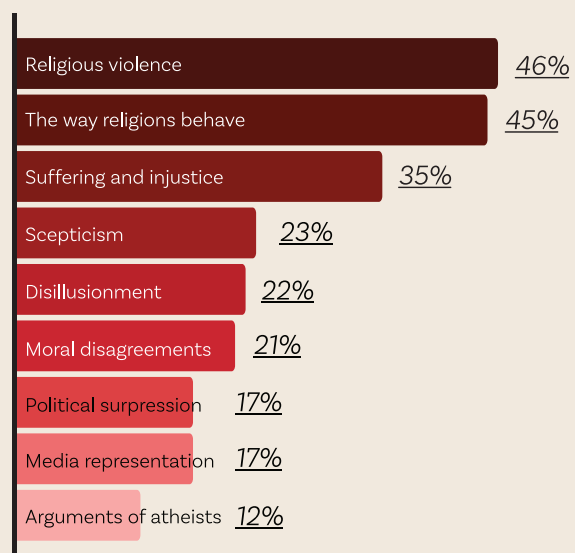
As a result of personal views and wider negative press, 37% think religion is viewed negatively in the UK, with this view most likely to be held by the boomer generation.

THOUGHTS FROM CHRISTOPHER GASSON

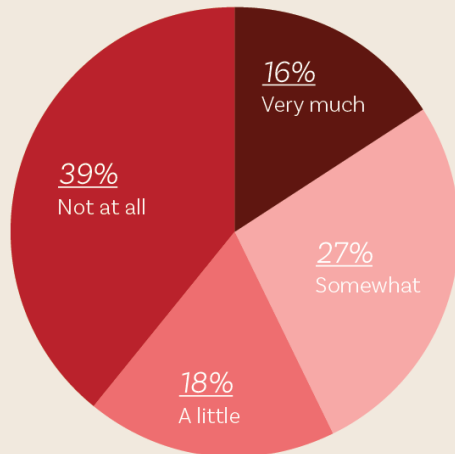
“Religious deterrents fall into two categories: objections to the church’s actions (e.g., violence, disillusionment, moral

conflicts, political suppression, and negative press) and objections to belief in God (e.g., the problem of evil, skepticism, and atheistic arguments). Most challenges in recruiting and retaining members are largely self-inflicted.”

DETERRENTS TO RELIGION



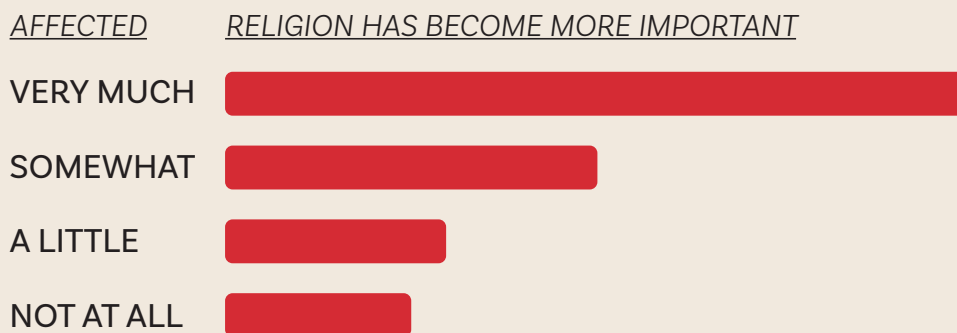
HOW MUCH HAS YOUR ATTITUDE TO RELIGION BEEN AFFECTED BY THE REPORTING OF RELIGIOUS SCANDALS IN THE MEDIA IN THE LAST 10 YEARS?



63%

OF GEN Z'S ATTITUDE TO RELIGION HAS BEEN AFFECTED BY RELIGIOUS SCANDALS REPORTED (COMPARED TO 34% FOR BOOMERS)

Those most affected by the reporting of the scandals are more likely to say religion has become more important to them:



THOUGHTS FROM CHRISTOPHER GASSON

“On the face of it this data is contradictory. It seems to suggest that although young people claim to have been affected by the reporting of church scandals, they don't seem to have been put off religion as a result. I doubt that it means that this is an example of all publicity being good publicity. Rather it might mean that young people whose faith might be developing feel most hurt by the reported abuses of the church.”

BOOSTING APPEAL

If religious groups wish to boost their appeal in the UK, 32% of our sample said they need to be more present and supportive in local communities. And 31% said claims of abuse need to be tackled head-on with honesty and effective preventative measures.

Curiously those who said that they were most affected by religious scandals were also more likely to say that religion had become more important to them over the past decade. This may be because they felt most hurt by the reporting.

55%

OF GEN Z HAVE BEEN AFFECTED BY REPORTING OF RELIGIOUS SCANDALS IN THE MEDIA

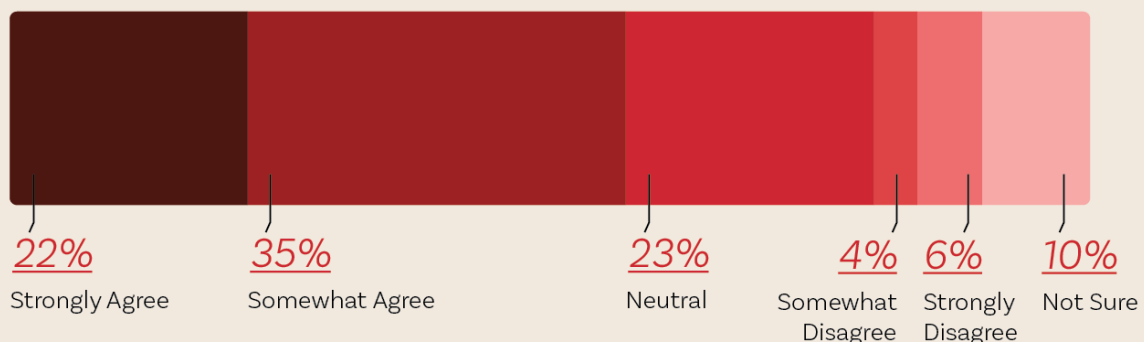
19%

OF BRITS THINK RELIGION SHOULD HAVE MORE IMPACT ON UK SOCIETY AND LAWS

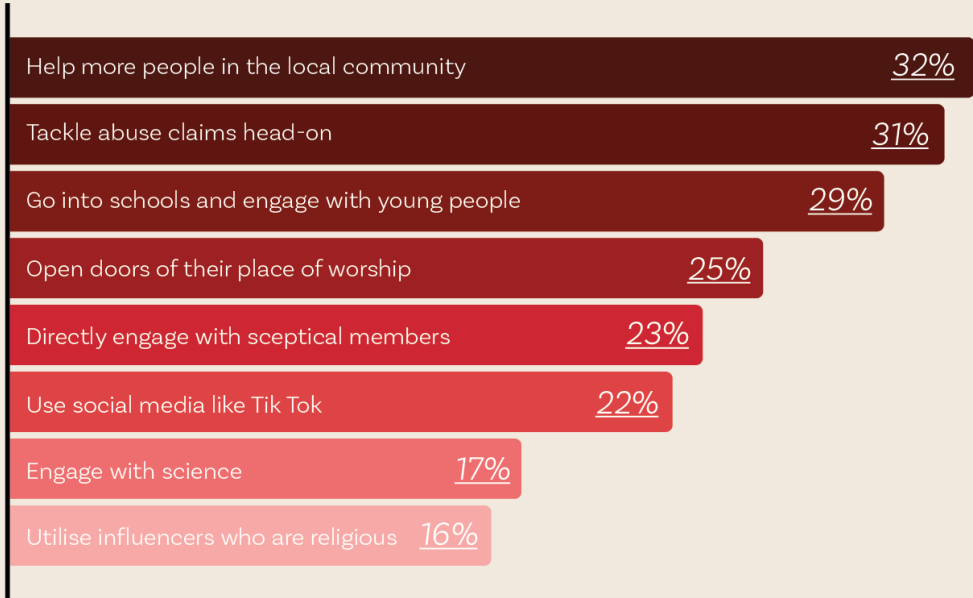
Religious groups can also feel closed-off or exclusive, and 35% of respondents think religions could attract more members by being more open. It is clear from our study that there is interest in spiritualism and religion in younger generations, and 29% think more can be done by religious groups in UK schools to engage with the next generation.

Though the expectations we have about the reach and limitations of religious groups on our society is a complex issue, Brits are wary of the consequences of overreach of any religious group. Only 19% of Brits think religion should have more impact on shaping UK society and laws, and 36% think religion should have less impact.

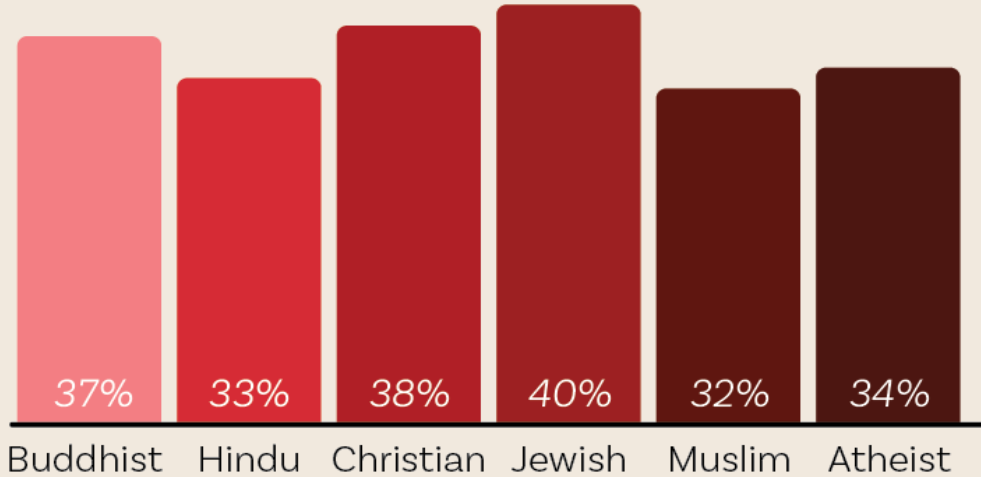
RELIGIONS MUST MODERNISE IN ORDER TO APPEAL TO YOUNGER PEOPLE



HOW BRITS THINK RELIGIONS COULD BOOST APPEAL TO YOUNGER PEOPLE



Being more open to discussion and change is a good way for religions to attract more members



WHAT WE WANT FROM GOD

A fifth of our respondents hold atheist views, but what would it take to increase our faith in God?

31% of atheists stated that they hold their view because there is no evidence of the existence of God, and God is not needed to explain the world whilst. 30% feel justified by the negative impact religion perpetuates in our world; as a source of suffering and a justification for violence.

When asked for the strongest arguments for a God, a quarter (27%) of respondents stated they felt yearning to connect with something bigger than ourselves that cannot be explained by evolution alone. And 21% were influenced by their belief in an afterlife - and if life after death exists, then believing in God makes sense.

When asked what the attributes of a God they could most easily believe in would be, respondents threw out some surprising answers. The most popular answer was a 'A Comforting God who helps me through life's difficulties', with nearly a quarter of respondents (23%) choosing this answer. 'A God of Creation who made the world' (19%) and 'A God of Love that grows out of human connection' (18%) wrapped up the top three. Interestingly, the top three varied depending on respondents' religious views with the majority of Muslims citing a 'God of Creation' (30%) as their top choice followed by 'A God of Truth that has complete knowledge and understanding of the world' (23%). For Christians, 'a God of Comfort' was by far the most popular with a third (33%) picking this option.

TOP ARGUMENTS AGAINST BELIEF

No evidence of God's existence	<u>31%</u>
Religions are the cause of so much suffering	<u>30%</u>
A God should not let bad things happen in the world	<u>25%</u>
Religion must be the product of culture	<u>22%</u>
When you die, that is the end of it, so believing in God is pointless	<u>19%</u>

TOP ARGUMENTS FOR BELIEF

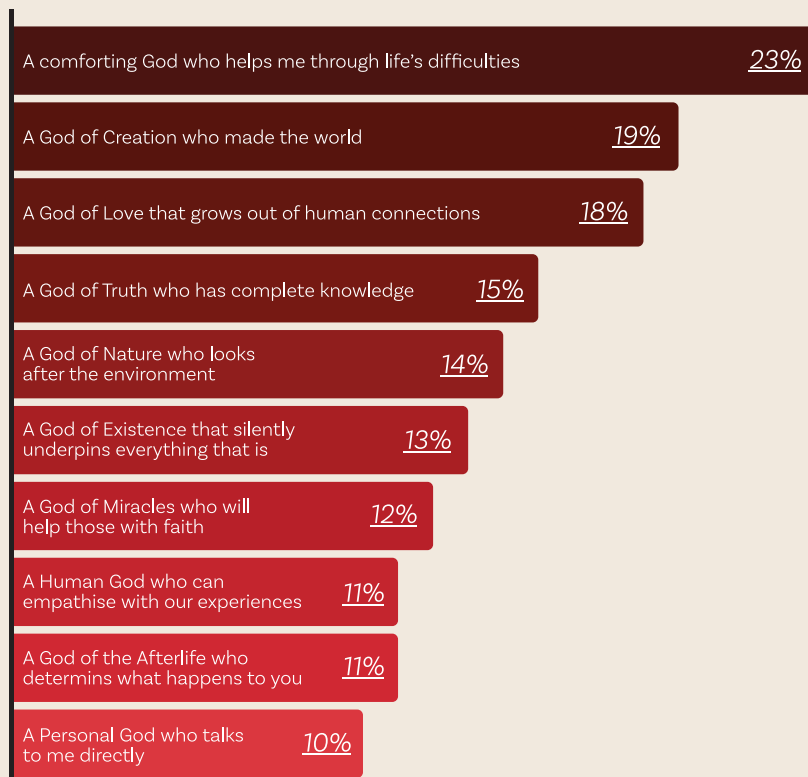
We have a yearning to connect with something bigger	<u>27%</u>
There is a life after death, believing in God makes sense	<u>21%</u>
There is an underlying meaning/purpose to life	<u>21%</u>
God is the best explanation of how everything began	<u>18%</u>
If you have direct experience of the working of God you know God exists	<u>12%</u>

THOUGHTS
FROM CHRISTOPHER GASSON

“Overall 73% of respondents found arguments against the existence of God, but only 62% found arguments in favour. This might suggest that atheism is winning the argument, but it doesn’t seem to matter. What people most want out of God is emotional connection and support. On the one hand this means that religion is unlikely to be extinguished by reason. On the other hand, it also means that what religions do is likely to be more important than what they say when it comes to attracting new members.

That said people still think God should be metaphysically responsible for everything, even if the traditional benefits of belief: miracles, the afterlife and divine judgement seem to be of secondary importance.”

WHAT ARE ATTRIBUTES OF A GOD YOU COULD MOST EASILY BELIEVE IN



THE WAY FORWARD

The results of our study paint the picture of a nation divided on the role of religion in their lives and society. But there are reasons to be hopeful that these gaps between the secular and the spiritual can be bridged.

THE FUTURE OF CHRISTIANITY IN THE UK

Our study focuses on the UK, where Christianity is the dominant religion. More than half of respondents (54%) identified as Christian, compared to 21% atheist and six per cent Muslim. However only 23% of Christians reported worshipping regularly compared to 50% of Muslims.

50%

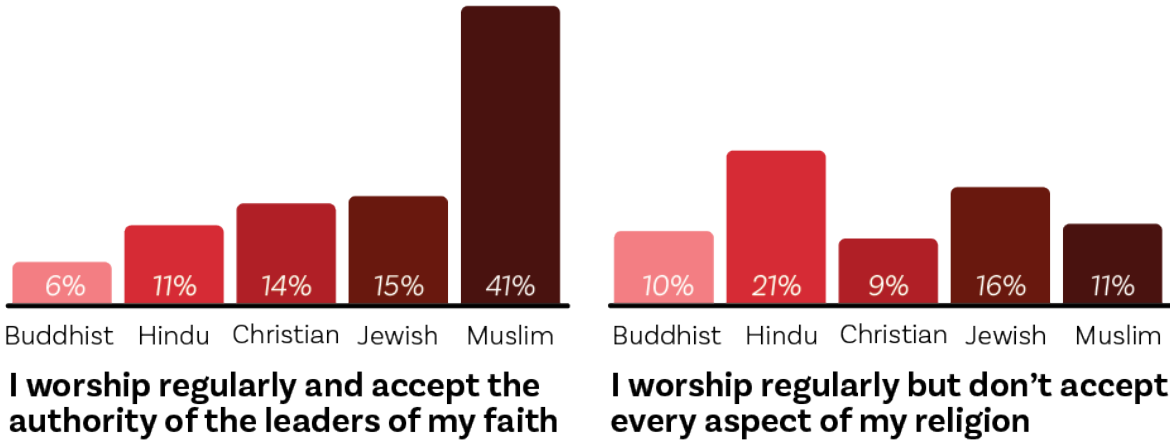
OF MUSLIMS WORSHIP
REGULARLY

23%

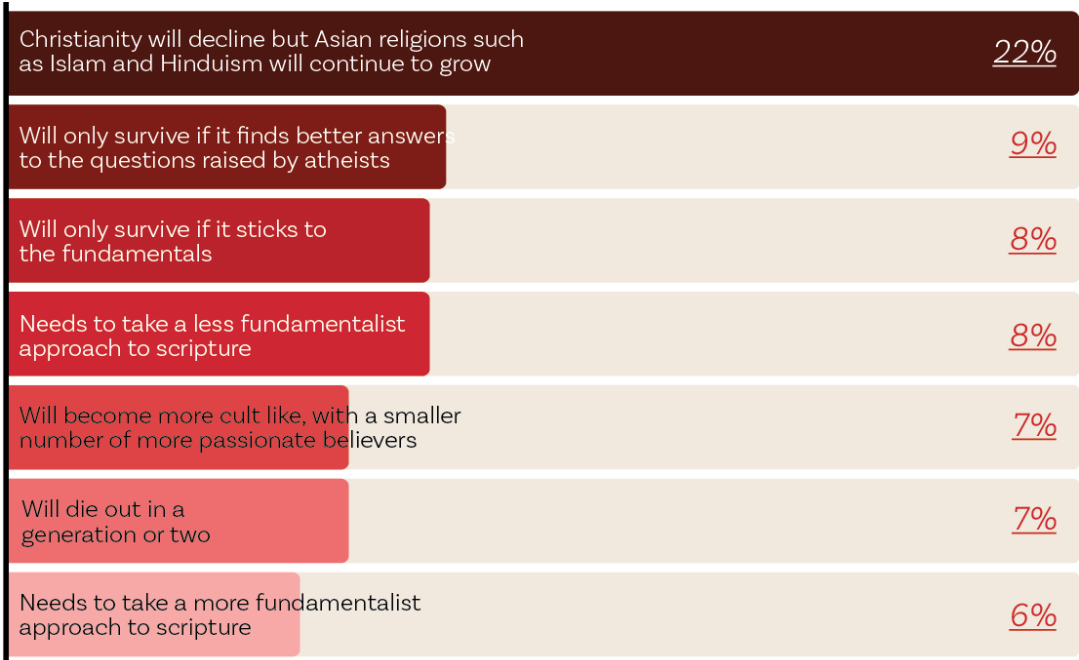
OF CHRISTIANS WORSHIP
REGULARLY



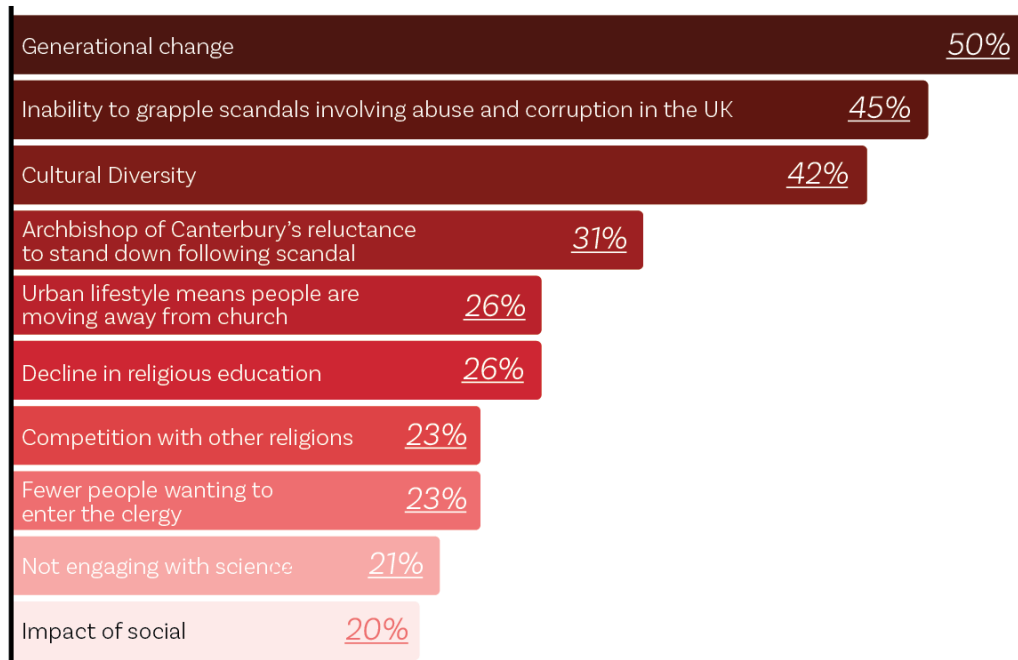
WORSHIPPING HABITS BY RELIGION



WHAT DO BRITS BELIEVE THE FUTURE OF CHRISTIANITY IN BRITAIN WILL BE?



REASONS CHRISTIANITY WILL LOSE FOLLOWERS IN THE NEXT 10 YEARS



PREDICTIONS OF CHRISTIAN DECLINE

Three in five (61%) of those surveyed think the next 10 years will see the Christian religion steadily losing followers in the UK, while Asian religions such as Islam and Hinduism gain ground, according to 22% of Brits. And when asked which religion they thought most likely to succeed Christianity as the dominant faith in the UK over the next 50 years, 38% of Brits stated Islam.

This predicted decline is attributed to a number of reasons including generational change (50%), increasing cultural diversity (42%), as well as the aforementioned scandals involving abuse and corruption (45%). The predicted decline of Christianity may also be attributed to a much more active and committed Muslim community, with a higher proportion of younger Muslims appearing more committed to their faith than Christians in the same age group.

63%

OF BRITS DON'T THINK CHRISTIANITY IN THE UK WILL DIE OUT

58%

OF BRITS BELIEVE THE COUNTRY HAS BECOME LESS RELIGIOUS OVER THE PAST 10 YEARS

TALKING ABOUT RELIGION

In our study we dedicated a section to uncovering how Brits talk about religion to see how open-minded we are, and how open we might be to changing our views on faith. These findings were encouraging, with 53% of our sample willing to listen to arguments which are in favour of religion, and only 15% admitting they would be unwilling to hear out a new perspective.

Only 15% of Brits have previously been persuaded by arguments presented by prominent atheists against religion, while 51% have not found these arguments persuasive in the past.

These figures demonstrate that the Report's findings are a current snapshot of an evolving issue, and one which will continue to develop so long as Brits remain open to other possibilities and willing to discuss their beliefs with others who may not always share their view.

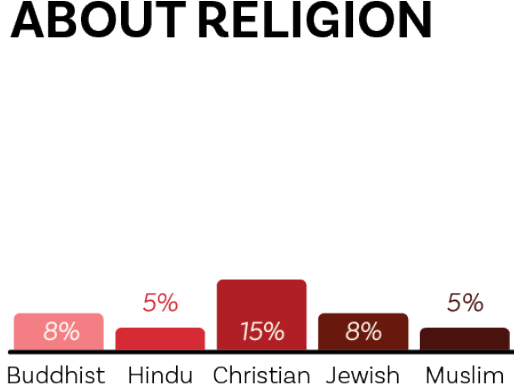
53%

OF BRITS ARE WILLING TO LISTEN TO ARGUMENTS IN FAVOUR OF RELIGION

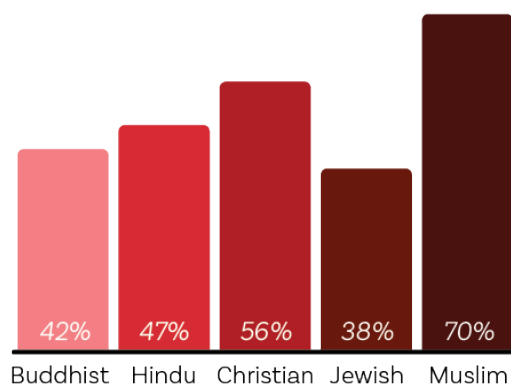
15%

OF BRITS WOULD BE UNWILLING TO HEAR OUT A NEW PERSPECTIVE

OPENNESS TO TALK ABOUT RELIGION



Feel like I can't talk about my religion to anyone



Feel comfortable to tell new people I'm religious



CLOSING THOUGHTS

“This study changes the narrative around the future of God in Britain. A religious revival may already be underway. The 18-34 age group feels a burgeoning sense of spirituality that is looking for a better outlet.

“The story that God was the product of an ignorance that we have been waiting for science to dispel is clearly wrong. People’s thoughts about God are primarily emotional. When asked what kind of God they wanted, the most popular response was “a comforting one”. When asked to choose the strongest argument for the existence of God, they said it was a “yearning to connect with something bigger than ourselves”. A need for comfort won’t make God exist. A yearning is a feeling, not an argument. But pointing out those facts doesn’t win many converts to atheism. What wins the most converts to atheism is religions behaving badly. When the Church does things that don’t seem to be right people stop wanting to be part of it.

“What I think is happening now is that

we have two generations of people (the Millennials and Generation X) growing up in Britain feeling emotionally bereft and struggling with conventional material life goals. After 17 years of economic stagnation, over-reliance on social media for human interaction, the isolations of Covid, and political divisions over Brexit and immigration, who would not want to soar above it all to embrace a new sense of meaning, connection and self worth?

“I am sure that this is an opportunity for all kinds of spiritual entrepreneurs, but I don’t think we should write off conventional Christianity just yet.

“I wrote the Devil’s Gospels to help people connect how they might feel about God with how they might think the Church. It approaches religion through the insights of atheist writers, using the strength and validity of their criticisms to offer a new understanding God. I hope that it will help you soar.

YOU CAN FIND OUT MORE AT
THEDEVILSGOSPELS.COM



BELIEF IN BRITAIN

A LOOK INTO THE RELIGIOUS
AND SPIRITUAL LANDSCAPE
OF THE NATION

THEDEVILSGOSPELS.COM