

Pew Research: Americans Mix Multiple Faiths
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The results of a new poll by the Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life show that the religious beliefs of the U.S. population do not fit neatly into conventional categories. Large numbers engage in multiple religious practices, mixing elements of diverse traditions and attending worship services of more than one faith or denomination. The results show that belief systems are strongly influenced by beliefs of Eastern religions and New Age such as reincarnation and astrology.

Though the US is an overwhelmingly Christian country, significant minorities profess belief in a variety of Eastern or New Age beliefs. These get mixed with Christian beliefs for many Americans. For example, 24% of the overall sample, and 22% of Christians, say they believe in reincarnation—that people are reborn in this world again and again. Similar numbers (25% overall, 23% of Christians) believe in astrology. Nearly three in ten of respondents say they have felt in touch with someone who has already died, almost one in five say they have seen or been in the presence of ghosts, and 15% have consulted a fortuneteller or a psychic.

Nearly half of the public (49%) says they have had a religious or mystical experience, defined as a "moment of sudden religious insight or awakening." This is similar to a survey conducted in 2006, but much higher than in surveys conducted in 1976 and 1994, and more than twice as high as a 1962 Gallup survey (22%). In fact, this year's survey finds that religious and mystical experiences are more common today among those who are unaffiliated with any particular religion (30%) than they were in the 1960s among the public as a whole (22%).

The report also shows that one-third of Americans (35%) say they regularly (9%) or occasionally (26%) attend religious services at more than one place, and most of these (24% of the public overall) indicate that they sometimes attend religious services of a faith different from their own. Among those who attend religious services at least once a week, nearly four-in-ten (39%) say they attend at multiple places and nearly three-in-ten (28%) go to services outside their own faith. Attending services at more than one place and across multiple religious traditions is even more common among those who go to religious services on a monthly or yearly basis, with nearly six-in-ten (59%) saying they attend at multiple places and four-in-ten attending services from outside their own faith at least sometimes. Three in ten Protestants say they attend services at denominations different from their own, and one-fifth of Catholics say they sometimes attend non-Catholic services.

The entire report can be accessed at: <http://pewforum.org/docs/?DocID=490#1>