



Written by [David Kelly](#) on December 8, 2023

Report: Majority of Americans Are Spiritual, Including Those Who Are Not Religious

A new Pew Research Center in-depth report, "[Spirituality Among Americans](#)," revealed that "7 in 10 U.S. adults describe themselves as spiritual in some way, including 22% who are spiritual but not religious."

The 95-page report released on Thursday found that:

- 83% of all U.S. adults believe people have a soul or spirit in addition to their physical body.
- 81% say there is something spiritual beyond the natural world, even if we cannot see it.
- 74% say there are some things that science cannot possibly explain.
- 45% say they have had a sudden feeling of connection with something from beyond this world.
- 38% say they have had a strong feeling that someone who has passed away was communicating with them from beyond this world.
- 30% say they have personally encountered a spirit or unseen spiritual force.



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It also found that, "Overall, 70% of U.S. adults can be considered 'spiritual' in some way, because they think of themselves as spiritual people or say spirituality is very important in their lives."

Seeking to define what "spiritual" meant to the 11,000-plus nationwide survey respondents, the report found that 27 percent "define 'spiritual' by mentioning beliefs or faiths associated with organized religion, such as belief in God (12%); Jesus, the Holy Spirit or elements of Christian theology (8%); or obedience to religious teachings (5%)."

The survey added that many also say the word "spiritual" is about being connected with nature, "such as mountains, rivers or trees – can have spirits or spiritual energies." Those spiritual connections could also be with other people or animals, and many believe that "spirits or spiritual energy can reside in certain objects, such as crystals, jewels or stones."

Pew admitted that the survey responses "illustrate the difficulty of separating 'spirituality' from 'religion' and suggest that for many Americans, there is no clear dividing line."

This was the first time that Pew had asked "many of these questions about beliefs, practices and experiences that may be viewed as spiritual, [so] we do not know whether they are more — or less —



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common today than they were in the past.”

However, Pew did cite previous research that found “a [decline in traditional religious beliefs and practices](#). That includes a drop in the shares of U.S. adults who say they [believe in God](#) with absolute certainty, [attend religious services regularly](#), pray daily and consider religion to be very important in their lives.”

Another Pew survey documented “[a decline since 2007 in the percentage of Americans who identify as Christian](#),” and Pew noted that “the evidence that ‘religion’ is being *replaced* by ‘spirituality’ is much weaker, partly because of the difficulty of defining and separating those concepts.”

The decline in the number of Americans in recent decades leaving the church or “organized religion” was highlighted in the survey results, with nearly one out of four Americans being spiritual but not religious.

[Reporting](#) on Pew’s report, Religion News Service stated:

“That label ‘spiritual but not religious’ really describes a kind of negative identity more than it describes a particular positive identity,” said Nancy Ammerman, a retired professor of sociology at Boston University who served as an adviser for the Pew study. “It describes people who are turned off by organized religion. The ‘not religious’ part of the identity is the real key to the identity.”

However, the Pew survey found that, on many questions:

“Spiritual but not religious” Americans — SBNRs, for short — are no *more* spiritual, on average, than U.S. adults who are both religious and spiritual. For example, large majorities in both groups say they believe “people have a soul or spirit in addition to their physical body.” Smaller majorities of both groups believe in the existence of “spirits or unseen spiritual forces.”

Regarding a belief in life after death, Pew shared that “71% of Americans believe in heaven, while somewhat fewer — 61% — believe in hell and 60% believe in both. These numbers have held steady in recent years. But there is less consensus about whether the dead have various powers, such as the ability to follow what is happening in this world and to watch out for loved ones who are alive.”

The survey found that “more than half of U.S. adults (57%) believe that in the afterlife, people definitely or probably can reunite with loved ones who also have died,” and that about half of respondents also “say that dead people definitely or probably can assist, protect or guide the living, ... be aware of what’s going on among the living, ... or communicate with people who are still living.”

And one out of four “U.S. adults believe it is definitely or probably true that the dead can be reincarnated,” defined in the survey as being “reborn again and again in this world.”

Pew’s report on Americans’ spirituality is broken down into the following topics:

- [Measuring spirituality](#)
- [Spiritual beliefs](#)
- [Spiritual practices](#)
- [Spiritual experiences](#)



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- [Who are 'spiritual but not religious' Americans?](#)



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