

God big in South, not so much in New England and Pacific Northwest: New Gallup results

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Want to be almost certain you'll have religious neighbors? Move to Mississippi. Prefer to be in the least religious state? Venture to Vermont.

A new Gallup Poll, based on more than 350,000 interviews, finds that the Magnolia State is the one where the most people—85 percent—say yes when asked “Is religion an important part of your daily life?”

Meanwhile, less than half of Vermonters—42 percent—answered that question in the affirmative.

Joining Mississippi in the top “most religious” states are other notches in the Bible Belt: Alabama (82 percent), South Carolina (80 percent), Tennessee (79 percent), Louisiana (78 percent) and Arkansas (78 percent).

New England predominates in the top “least religious” states. Following Vermont are New Hampshire (46 percent), Maine (48 percent), Massachusetts (48 percent), Alaska (51 percent) and Washington (52 percent).

“Clearly, states in the South in particular, but also some states in the Southwest and Rocky Mountains, . . . have very religious residents, and New England states in particular, coupled with states like Alaska and others, are irreligious,” said Frank Newport, editor-in-chief of the Gallup Poll.

Overall, Gallup researchers found that 65 percent of all Americans said religion is important in their daily lives. The total sample of 355,334 adults, including respondents with landline telephones and cellular phones, had a margin of error of plus or minus 1 percentage point. Some states had margins of error as high as plus or minus 4 percentage points.

Newport was surprised that one state—Utah—did not make the “most religious” list, given the state’s large Mormon population. “They apparently have two kinds of people in the state,” he said. “They have the very religious and devout Mormon population, but it also looks like they have a lot of nonreligious people.”

Mark Silk, director of the Greenberg Center for the Study of Religion in Public Life, said Gallup’s findings reflect research conclusions from the upcoming American Religious Identification Survey, which he is working on with other scholars.

“New England is now slightly ahead of the Pacific Northwest in terms of the high rate of unchurched people,” said Silk, coauthor of *One Nation, Divisible: How Regional Religious Differences Shape American Politics*.

“What we are finding . . . is a considerable drop in New England in the Catholic population,” said Silk, whose center is based in Hartford, Connecticut. It’s a matter of them moving away from the church, he said, not the region. —Adelle M. Banks, *Religion News Service*