

Religious belief highest in developing and Catholic countries

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c. 2012 Religion News Service (RNS) Belief in God is slowly declining in most countries around the world, according to a new poll, but the truest of the true believers can still be found in developing countries and Catholic societies.

The "Beliefs about God Across Time and Countries" report, released Wednesday (April 18) by researchers at the University of Chicago, found the Philippines to be the country with the highest belief, where 94 percent of Filipinos said they were strong believers who had always believed.

At the opposite end, at just 13 percent, was the former East Germany.

"The Philippines is both developing and Catholic," said Tom W. Smith, who directs the General Social Survey of the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago. "Religion, which is mainly Catholic, is very emotionally strong there."

The report covered data from 30 countries that participated in at least two surveys in 1991, 1998 or 2008.

In 29 of the 30 countries surveyed in 2008, belief increased with age: Belief in God was highest for those ages 68 or older (43 percent), compared to 23 percent of those younger than 28.

While overall belief in God has decreased in most parts of the world, three countries -- Israel, Russia and Slovenia -- saw increases. The report said religious belief had "slowly eroded" since the 1950s in most countries of the world.

Atheism and unbelief was most prominent in northwest Europe and some former Soviet states, with the exception of majority-Catholic Poland (just 3.3 percent).

The United States (60.6 percent) was ranked in the top five countries for people who said they knew God existed and had no doubts. Besides the Philippines, the other

countries were Chile (79.4 percent), Israel (65.5 percent) and Poland (62 percent).