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Ariane G. Mitchum

University of Nevada, Las Vegas, mitchuma@unlv.nevada.edu

Michael Ian Borer

University of Nevada, Las Vegas, michael.borer@unlv.edu

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The Social Health of Nevada

Leading Indicators and Quality of Life in the Silver State

Religion and Spirituality in Nevada

Ariane Mitchum, *Department of Sociology, University of Nevada, Las Vegas*
Michael Ian Borer, *Department of Sociology, University of Nevada, Las Vegas*

Across the world, religion is integral to society insofar it shapes people’s thoughts, behaviors, and interactions. What exactly the term “religion” means, however, is far from clear-cut, as it continues to be a highly charged topic of discussion and debate, a subject that many hold dear and near to their hearts.

There seem to be just as many ways to define religion as there are groups and denominations that claim to hold the key to the “meaning of life” and even solve humanity’s woes. For many people, the word religion evokes shared ideas of church, gatherings, worship, prayer, music, traditions, and pilgrimages. Some of these images fit in with the “mainstream” meanings of religion, at least in terms of the practices of organized and institutionalized religion recognized in the United States. For other people, religion harbors meanings that go beyond the mainstream norms and that conflict with more familiar ideas of religion and religiosity.

Chapter Highlights

- Despite its rich religious history and diversity, Nevada actually ranks in the top 10 least religious states in the U.S.
- Protestant Christians are largest population represented in Nevada, but their percentages are significantly lower than national averages: 24% compared to 54% nationwide.
- Religion and spirituality have played various roles in Nevada in relation to politics, the prison system and law enforcement, medicine and healthcare, schooling and education, and community outreach.

How to Cite this Report

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The rich diversity of the U.S. population reflects the amalgam of conventional and unconventional religious belief systems that coexist on a day-to-day basis. For the most part, the adherents of broad types of belief systems appear to tolerate one another, at least enough to function in a civil manner under the banner of an overarching “civil religion” (Bellah, 1967). Still, the nation has its share of religious conflict, and there are many examples of believers with clashing ideas and practices who struggle to have their voices heard and defend their religious convictions. Although Americans enjoy the rights to religious freedom and diversity guaranteed by the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, conflicts exist over the interpretation of freedom *of* religion versus freedom *from* religion. And debates about the Christian origins of the U.S. – often fueled by a Christian majority that makes up some 80% of the U.S. population – provide plenty of fodder for the so-called “culture wars” (Hunter, 1991; Borer & Murphree, 2008; Borer & Schafer, 2011).

Conflicts over competing religious belief systems and worldviews do not necessarily imply social strife. Debates about the origins and the meanings of life and how they connect to our identities may foster healthy discussions and promote tolerance and pluralism. Motivated by presumed relations to a higher power or cause, religious groups have also been at the forefront of social activism and change. Though it is not always the case, conflicts between religious groups, and between religious groups and their secular counterparts, can lead to better understandings of diverse beliefs and practices and promote the social health of a nation, a state, and a community. Thus, we start with the proposition that religious diversity is central to the social health and well-being of human collectivities.

Does Religion Mean “Diversity”?

Our goal is to understand what religion means to different groups of people, the conflicts between those groups, and how that affects the social health of the nation and the state of Nevada. We begin by taking a closer look at the American religious landscape. How can we “observe” religious diversity in the U.S., what does religious diversity look like? One way to answer these questions is by tracking the trends reported by polls and surveys. Nationwide statistics on religion broadly gauge the “whos,” “whats,” “whens,” and “wheres” of religious beliefs and practices, but making sense of religious life based on opinion surveys presents researchers with serious methodological problems. “Lived religion” can also be gleaned from everyday conversations and interactions with individuals (see Ammerman, 2007). A valuable source for such data is newspaper articles that present lived experiences of religious and spiritual individuals and groups.

This report begins with an overview of the last five years (2006 – 2011) of people’s religious behaviors, opinions, and practices in the U.S., then it focuses on religion and spirituality in Nevada. Nationwide *and* Nevada-specific data on religion are used here to show religious activities on a large and small scale. Nevada is only one example among fifty that lets us judge what is going on in the U.S. This chapter of the Social Health of Nevada report draws on quantitative and qualitative data, including newspaper articles published in our state over the last five years, which illuminate key issues confronting Nevadans seeking religious and spiritual enlightenment. While we

do not offer definitive answers to the question of how religion contributes to Nevada's social health, we hope that our discussion will show the importance of this question and the need to gather and analyze systematically the data about religious institutions and practices in the Silver State.

The Place of Religion in the United States

We begin the data portion of this report by presenting relevant facts and figures from various national polls on religion. This is not comprehensive data by any means, but we nevertheless highlight here some common yet interesting points often explored in polling data about people's religious beliefs and attitudes. The facts presented here – numbers and percentages – are presented below. Figures such as tables and pie charts for some of the facts included in the report are provided in the Appendix at the end.

A December 2010 Gallup/USA Today Poll asks a national sample of Americans whether religion can answer today's problems, or whether religion is old-fashioned and largely out of date. 59% of respondents said they believe that religion can answer all or most of today's problems, while only 26% said that religion is old-fashioned and out of date. Identical polls conducted in the previous year yielded similar results: 57% of Americans believed that that religion could solve today's problems in December 2009, and 58% believed the same thing in May of 2010.

The polling data offer a clue on the centrality of religion in people's lives. In the "Millennials, Religion and Abortion Survey" (2011) that asked respondents how important religion is in their lives, 19% said it was the most important thing, 37% and 23% said it was very important or somewhat important, and 19% stated that religion was not too important or not important at all. Meanwhile, in a March 2011 Gallup Poll, a similar question was asked, and 66% of respondents affirmed that religion is an important part of their daily lives. The remaining 34% said religion was not an important part of their daily life ("Importance of Religion in One's Life", 2011). Three years earlier a Gallup Poll turned up similar results. In a 2008 daily tracking poll conducted by Gallup, 65% of respondents found religion to be an important part of daily life, while 34% did not (Newport, 2008).

A 2010 Gallup Poll showed that 54% of Americans find religion to be very important in their lives, while 26% and 20% find religion to be fairly important or not very important, respectively. According to Gallup, these numbers are slightly down from the past two decades but are roughly equivalent to levels measured in the 1980s. That being said, the numbers today are a far cry from opinions expressed during the 1950s and 1960s. Americans had more positive views of religion in their lives nearly 60 years ago. The 1952 Gallup poll yielded the historic-high 75% of people claiming that religion was very important to them.

The December 2010 Gallup/USA Today Poll asked whether or not respondents think religion as a whole is gaining or losing its influence in America (Newport, 2010b). By 2007, nearly 70% thought religion was losing its influence, while more than 25% believed religion was increasing its influence. These numbers are not far off from the findings of the Pew Research Center ("Religion & Public Life Survey, 2010), where 67%

said religion is losing its influence and 23% said it is increasing its influence. This same survey conducted in July of 2010 invited respondents to reflect on how religious beliefs impact politics. 62% thought that religion is losing its influence on governments leaders and institutions (e.g., Presidents, Congress, and the Supreme Court). By contrast, only 23% of respondents believed religion was increasing its influence.

A February 2011 Gallup Poll (Newport, 2011a) gauged how Americans view the role of organized religion in the U.S. In this poll, 29% said that religions should have more influence, and 29% said that religion should have less influence. A touch more (39%) believed that organized religion's influence should be kept as it is now. When asked about whether or not they were satisfied with organized religion's influence in America, 58% of respondents said they were satisfied, while 36% were dissatisfied.

Religious Identity and Involvement in the U.S.

Religious identities tend to reflect levels of involvement in religious life and affiliation with religious institutions. What matter here is how often one engages in religious practices, how frequently one prays, and how intensely one believes in a higher power. A Gallup Poll (Newport, 2009) showed that Protestants or those who identify with non-Catholic Christians constituted 54% of the American religious population, the largest representation of any group. Catholic Christians comprised 24% of the survey, while Jews and Mormons each represented 2% of respondents across the country. Rounding out the survey results are the approximately 16% of Americans who claim to have no religious affiliation or who identify as atheist or agnostic. The religious "nones" are a growing category – membership in atheist/agnostic/humanist groups has been increasing throughout the U.S. and Nevada.

Gallup reports underscore how difficult it is to explain why residents in some states show higher degrees of participation in religious practices than in other, hypothesizing that such variability is due to local cultures (Newport, 2009). Gallup also notes that, since 1948, there has been a gradual increase in the number of Americans with no religious affiliation or religious identity. Americans have become less affiliated with organized religion in recent decades. Note, however, that this doesn't necessarily mean the decrease in the nation's "religious vitality," for many people settled for "designer," "mix-and-match," "Golden Rule-centered" belief systems.

Recent polls conducted by the Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion and Public Life offer more data on American's religious affiliations ("Religion and Public Life Survey", 2010). Nationally, the non-Catholic Christians representing the largest affiliated group in the U.S. are Evangelicals and Mainline Protestants, 26% and 18% respectively. Taken as a subset of Protestant tradition, Black Protestants represent 7% of the U.S. population. In addition to Jews and Mormons reported by the Gallup and Pew studies, the survey included Orthodox, Jehovah's Witness, Other Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, Other World Religion, and Other Faith, whose numbers ranged between 1% and less than 0.5%.

Another telling result of these surveys is that the unaffiliated and those who do not believe in God need not be atheists. In a 2009 Pew poll ("Not All Nonbelievers Call

Themselves Atheists”, 2009), of the overall 5% of American nonbelievers who said they do not believe in God or a universal spirit, only 24% actually identified themselves as atheists. To be sure, there are “pockets” in parts of the U.S. where people say they have no religious identity, namely in the Northeast and Northwest regions of the country. Oregon tops the list with 25% of its residents claiming no religious identity, followed by Vermont with 24%. Washington, Alaska, New Hampshire, Hawaii, and Maine each have at least 20%. On the other end of the religious-identity spectrum are Mississippi, Alabama, Arkansas, North Dakota, and Louisiana where only 6% of the adult populations claim no religious identity.

In Gallup’s May 2011 poll (Newport, 2011b), 92% of Americans said they believe in God, which is only a 4% decrease from the 1940s. This is remarkable in spite of the many changes throughout American society over this nearly 70-year time frame. As the Gallup poll indicates, belief in God remains high and relatively stable. When we break down demographically the 2011 group of believers, we find that young Americans between the ages of 18 and 29, people with postgraduate educations, politically liberal and independents, and those residing in Eastern U.S. regions are the least likely to believe in God compared to any other group within their corresponding categories. Those populations, however, are clearly the minority in the U.S.

Finally, religious service attendance and frequency of prayer are also topics that surveying or polling institutions can draw information about Americans’ religious behaviors. In May 2011, the Roper Center for public opinion compiled results from three different surveys that measured church attendance. The first, “Democracy Corps/Women’s Voices Vote Poll” (2011), found that 41% of respondents said they go to a religious service at least once a week, while 22% said that they hardly ever go. Second, in the “Associated Press/Gfk Poll” (2011), the numbers are slightly lower: only 32% said they attend religious services at least once a week, and 13% attend less often than a few times a year. Finally, in the Politico/George Washington University Battleground 2012 Survey, slightly more than half of respondents said they go to religious services at least once a week, while 8% indicate they only go on holidays.

In 2010, a Gallup Poll showed that church attendance in America increased when economic confidence at the time had also increased (Newport, 2010a). Even though the increase in numbers from 2008 to May of 2010 was slight, it showed that Americans were still attending some type of religious service, weekly or almost weekly. Gallup also polled people in 2010 about religious attendance and found that 35% report going to services at least once a week, while 25% said they seldom go. These numbers are virtually the same since the last two years of Gallup polling. Gallup also found the association between religious service attendance and membership in certain demographic and social groups. Among those more likely to attend are people with Republican and conservative political ideologies, blacks, older Americans, adults from the Southern U.S. region, married couples, and women.

Because prayer is thought to be a means of connecting with the “sacred,” however it might be defined, it figures prominently in many surveys and polls. In the Gallup/USA Today Poll of May 2010, respondents were asked whether or not they believe prayer is

effective only when someone prays regularly. 61% of the sample said that the frequency of prayer would have no impact on prayer's effectiveness. In a survey called "AARP, Miracles, Divine Healings, and Angels: Beliefs Survey" (2008), 80% of respondents indicated that they pray or meditate (outside of attending religious services) anywhere from once a week to every day. And similarly in the General Social Survey 2010, 76% of respondents said that they pray anywhere from once a week to several times a day.

With this broad picture in place, we can now explore how the situation in Nevada comports with the national trends.

The Importance of Religion in Nevada

The 2009 Pew Research Center Forum on Religion and Public Life study provided a state-by-state account of the role that religion plays in the United State ("How Religious is Your State?", 2009). Nationally, 56% of adults saw religion as very important in their lives, compared to 50% of Nevadans who identified religion as very important, which gave Nevada a ranking of 34th out of the 50 states. In 2008, a Gallup Poll Daily tracking yielded similar state-by-state numbers about the importance of religion in respondents' daily lives (Newport, 2008) – 54% of Nevadans said that religion is an important part of their everyday lives. In the bigger scheme of things, this number is not that impressive, for this placed Nevada in the top 10 least religious states. This is somewhat surprising since Nevada played a pivotal role in the founding of Mormonism, one of the fastest growing Christian denominations in and outside the U.S. Nevada continues to be the home of many Mormons, including such highly visible elected official as Harry Reid, the U.S. Senate Majority Leader.

Religious Identity and Involvement in Nevada

In the 2009 Pew study, respondents across the country were queried about their religious service attendance, frequency of prayer, and belief in God ("Not All Nonbelievers Call Themselves Atheists", 2009). With regard to worship service attendance, 39% of respondents nationally said they attend religious services at least once a week. In Nevada, that number drops to 30%, which ranks the Silver State 40th out of the 50 states. The national average of those who say they pray at least once a day is 58%, the same as Nevada's average, which puts our state at 25th out of the 50 states for frequency of prayer. Finally, 71% of respondents in this national survey said they believe in God with absolute certainty. In Nevada, the percentage drops to 63%, and this ranks the state 40th out of 50 in this category.

In the "Pew Forum U.S. Religious Landscape Survey" (2008), non-Catholic Protestant Christians collectively is still the largest group represented, even in Nevada, but their percentages are significantly lower than national averages: 24% compared to 54% nationwide. There are slightly more Catholics in Nevada (27%) than the 24% reported in the U.S. overall. Not surprisingly, due to the state's historical ties to Mormonism, Nevada's 11% representation far exceeds the 2% national average. In other areas where Nevada outranks the national trends are "Orthodox" (2% in Nevada); "Other Christian traditions" (1% in Nevada); Muslim (2% in Nevada); Hindu (1% in Nevada); "Other world religions" (1% in Nevada); and "Other faiths" (3% in Nevada). The percentage of

the unaffiliated is also higher in Nevada than throughout the rest of the U.S. – 21% compared to 16% nationally. The rest of the groups – black Protestant, Jehovah’s Witness, Jewish, and Buddhist – all fall below the national averages for their categories.

In the aforementioned 2009 Gallup poll on religious affiliation across the U.S., similar numbers are reflected for Nevadans (Newport, 2009). In the survey, Protestants and Other Christians outnumbered other religious groups in Nevada with 40.7%. Catholics again ranked second, with 26.7%, while Nevadan respondents who indicated either no religious preference or identified as atheist or agnostic all accounted for 19.4% of the sample. Finally, while their numbers are much smaller than these other groups with larger memberships, Nevadans with Mormon and Jewish affiliations represented 5.1% and 2.0% respectively, according to the 2009 sample.

Religion in Action in Nevada

Polls and surveys are not the only way to learn about people’s religious beliefs and practices. Newspaper stories and letters to the editor columns can help us hear the “heartbeat” of our nation, states, cities, towns, and neighborhoods. Although polls and newspaper materials are substantially different methods of gathering data, they serve similar and equally effective purposes – they give insight into what people are thinking and talking about. Over the last five years, the Nevada media covered a plethora of religious issues confronting our state. Nevada’s print and Internet-based newspapers, the primary sources for this section, certainly convey the religious concerns weighing on Nevadans’ minds.

We mentioned earlier that religion can intersect with many facets of people’s lives. In this chapter we focus on six broad issues discussed in Nevada newspaper media: (1) state- and national-level politics; (2) the prison system and law enforcement; (3) medicine and healthcare; (4) schools and education; (5) alternative-to-mainstream religions and belief systems; and (6) religious diversity and community outreach. Keep in mind that these are not mutually exclusive groupings; just as many aspects of our complex personal lives overlap, so do the dimensions of religious involvement.

Politics

News stories that appeared in print from 2006 show a tangible link between political issues and religious concerns of Nevadans, with certain themes and topics given sustained coverage in the state’s newspapers. Thus in 2006 and 2007, stories about the Department of Veterans Affairs initially denying a memorial for the late Sergeant Patrick Stewart because he identified as a Wiccan dotted Nevada newspaper headlines (Curtis, 2006; Whaley, 2006; Sonner, 2006; Pearson, 2007). The topic gained much attention as Roberta Stewart, widow of the fallen soldier, lobbied for her cause and fought for acknowledgement of her husband’s Wiccan faith and service to his country.

More prevalent than perhaps any other political topics were articles about candidates campaigning for office. Stories linking politics and religion pertaining to Senator Harry Reid, Senate-hopeful Sharron Angle, and Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney dominated Nevada politics (Blood, 2010; McGrath Schwartz, 2010; Myers, 2010). Often, Reid’s and Angle’s stories overlapped, as the two ran against each other for the

Nevada Senate and took pot-shots at each other's religious beliefs and convictions. While not a Nevada politician, Mitt Romney received some press in the Silver State, partly because of his affiliation with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints and their notable presence throughout Nevada (Haynes, 2007).

Other headlines related to religion and politics that have surfaced in the last five years include the following:

- Religious activists protested a bill through the Assembly Government Affairs Committee that would require churches to hire people regardless of belief or non-belief (Vogel, 2007)
- Former Nevada state senator and state Supreme Court nominee Lori Lipman Brown's took a stance as an atheist against opening prayers on Capitol Hill (Grove, 2005)
- Douglas County commissioners considered a resolution allowing invocations at the start of their regular meetings, invocations that extend to and accommodate the entire religious and non-religious community (Gardner, 2011)
- A Federal Appeals Court blocked construction of a massive gold mine project at the Cortez Hills mine in northeast Nevada, not only because it would be harmful to the environment, but also because it would ruin a mountain that is sacred to several area tribes (Sonner, 2009).

These are only a few news stories that highlight the intersection of politics and religion in Nevada. Religious conflicts are not always about religious beliefs and practices. They are often about political power and policies that can affect the way some people practices and enact their religious beliefs.

Prisons and Law Enforcement

Stories in the news related to the criminal justice system and religion underscore how religious issues touch upon all aspects of life in Nevada. Prison inmates' access to preferred religious services has been a top priority for Jane Foraker-Thompson, chaplain of several Nevada prisons (Costa-Landers, 2005). In the past, Christianity had been the dominant religious system available to inmates, but today more prison facilities recognize that prisoners subscribe to diverse belief systems and are entitled to a worship of their choose. Among the major headlines spotlighting the role of religion in prison are the following:

- A prison inmate filed a civil rights complaint against the Nevada prison system and accused the system of discriminating against him because he did not practice a "mainstream religion," Wicca (Dornan, 2005)
- An Orthodox Jewish inmate filed a class-action lawsuit against the Nevada Department of Corrections for violating his First Amendment right to have

kosher food after the department announced it would end kosher food options (Geer Thevenot, 2011a and 2011b)

- Howard Skolnick, director of Nevada Department of Corrections, has worked with American Indian inmates to ensure that they can hold sweat lodge ceremonies, which included access to tobacco for the ceremonial pipe (Vogel, 2006a; Dornan, 2009; Ryan, 2009).

These examples show how religion impacts the lives of prison inmates, but religion has also implicated the lives of law enforcement officers. Thus in 2007, Steven Riback, an Orthodox Jewish police officer, sued the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department for discrimination because their dress code policy would have prohibited him from wearing a beard and a yarmulke (Skolnik, 2007; Geer Thevenot, 2007). The issue was resolved, at least in Riback's case, just as they were in the above-mentioned cases. As the debate continues, we are reminded that concerns for religious expression remain vital in our state, even in the places removed from direct public scrutiny.

Medicine and Healthcare

For a long time, the biomedical model was the predominant framework for healthcare delivery. In time, this approach has been replaced by the biopsychosocial model, which opened the door to a more comprehensive healthcare practice focused on the whole person that took into account person's physical, mental, social, *and* spiritual needs. Religion and spirituality have become more salient issues in stories about healthcare in Nevada. Here are a few examples:

- Nevada physicians have attested to the role of spirituality in health and medicine by including programs and lectures about spirituality as part of education for doctors in training (Vogel, 2006b)
- Religious leaders have met to discuss that health care reform should be less political and more moral in scope (Spillman, 2009)
- MountainView Hospital came under fire after it had been alleged that the hospital intimidated nurses who opposed abortion on religious ground and who sought to unionize, the implication being that the local union favored abortion rights (Allen, 2009)
- Counselor and *Las Vegas Review-Journal* columnist Steven Kalas invited his readers to think of "healthy religion" as something that connects us all and that takes into account the whole person (Kalas, 2007a and 2007b).

As these examples suggest, even though religion and healthcare comprise separate spheres of life, they continue to intersect in the positive and negative ways just as they did in the previous areas.

Schools and Education

The Nevada education system faces the same problems as education systems across the country, including the controversy over the religious practices permitted in learning environments. Nevada schools face opposition from parents and community leaders on some contentious issues that dominated the national news in recent years: how teaching evolution in school may conflict with students' religious convictions; whether prayer and mention of God in the Pledge of Allegiance should be allowed in classrooms; if teaching the Bible as a literary document is appropriate, and so on. The heated debates surrounding these issues garner national attention because of their "universal" impact, but for the most part polemics remains local, reflecting the cultural climate in towns and places where it originates. The question of whether schools should public or private has added fodder to the debate.

Here are a couple of examples from Nevada where the place of religion in school became the focus of dispute:

- In 2008 a federal appeals court ruled that Clark County's school dress codes did not violate students' rights to free speech after a high school junior was suspended five times in 2004 for wearing a t-shirt that expressed her Mormon faith (Packer, 2008)
- In 2006, the Clark County School District "pulled the plug" on Brittany McComb's high school valedictorian commencement speech when she made references to "God," "the Lord," and "Christ." McComb and a civil rights group filed a federal lawsuit objecting to school administrators' insistence that her speech "amounted to proselytizing" (Planas, 2006; Mitchell, 2006; Koester, 2006).

Interestingly, only five days after McComb had attempted to deliver her commencement speech, the *Las Vegas Review-Journal* printed her full unedited speech (McComb, 2006). The *Review-Journal* printed McComb's speech in an unbiased fashion, and Nevadans were left to read and judge for themselves whether or not they thought her speech was overtly religious. Readers' response letters to the *Review-Journal* and to other Nevada newspapers was overwhelming, most of which came from people who jumped to the defense of McComb's First Amendment free speech rights.

Nonmainstream Religions and Belief Systems

The bulk of the religiously-themed materials published in the Nevada newspapers is devoted to the major religion systems, Christianity being the dominant one, with Judaism and Islam following suit. Yet we know from the survey data cited earlier in this report that the people of Nevada have widely diverse beliefs. Although numbers for alternative belief systems are not proportionate to the mainstream or dominant religions, they are important to the people who adhere to them. In the last five years, Nevada news stories focused on nonmainstream belief systems have included the following:

- Licensed clergyman and Druid priest Glenn Hall reviews misconceptions about the Celtic faith but stresses general acceptance of this belief system in Las Vegas (Padgett, 2006)
- Annie Lobert's Hookers for Jesus is a nonprofit organization that ministers to prostitutes, sex workers, porn actors, and anyone else in sex industries (Przybys, 2008)
- Members of the nonprofit organization Strip Church, a ministry of xxxchurch.com, visit workers in strip clubs, brothels, and "card flickers" on the Las Vegas Strip, sometimes initiating the meeting with free cupcakes (Padgett, 2010)
- Elko minister Reverend Kay Stewart clarifies that Religious Science is not the same as Scientology but a derivative of the early 20th century New Thought religion, which emphasizes altering one's thoughts for positive means (Dubach, 2006)
- Mel Lipman, president of the American Humanist Association and an atheist or non-theist, thinks nonbelievers are gaining recognition in society as a legitimate type of belief, although not a religion, coalescing around *nonbelief* in the existence of a god (Przybys, 2007).

Alternative forms of religion and spirituality can encompass everything from crystal shops and psychics to "indigenous" Native American religions. According to the Nevada Department of Cultural Affairs, there are 45 officially constituted Native American reservations and colonies throughout Nevada, which constitutes most of the Great Basin region.

Religious Diversity and Community Outreach

As some commentators contend, religion is more than a gathering of worshippers in a sacred building, evangelizing or ministering to people to facilitate their conversion. Religion can transcend cultural boundaries. This section exemplifies what religion looks like in "real time," how people practice religion and spirituality in communal settings. Here are some notable stories making round in the Nevada press:

- Saint Patrick's Episcopal Church and the North Tahoe Hebrew Congregation created a joint program to explore the relationships between Judaism and Christianity and to find common ground between both faiths (Redoglia, 2007)
- A Turkish-American group from the Pacifica Institute encouraged dialogue and friendship for cross-cultural awareness among Muslims, Christians, and Jews, via a "melting-pot" dinner (Morrison, 2009)

- The Interfaith Council of Southern Nevada worked with former mayor Oscar Goodman to create a program that would help homeless families and individuals make the move from transitional housing programs (Choate, 2007)
- The Jewish Family Service Agency, a non-profit organization, offers nondenominational services to the Southern Nevada community that include food pantry, emergency bill payment assistance, therapy, and other types of support to the Southern Nevada community (Padgett, 2007).

Nevadans have reached out to faith communities outside the Silver State. Thus in January 2006, a teenager from Summerlin, Nevada was transformed from being a self-centered drug user to a Hurricane Katrina relief volunteer in New Orleans, Louisiana (Morrison, 2007). The teen participated with a non-denominational church group that organized the trip, and he stayed for four months but returned shortly thereafter to continue helping to rebuild homes. In another example, an Elko, NV, couple said that being blessed, made them realize the need to give back to those less fortunate (Sents, 2008). Along with other volunteers from across the U.S. and other parts of the world, the Elko couple spent two years in Egypt assisting with charity group-sponsored projects that provide clean water, wheelchairs for the disabled, and training for doctors to perform neonatal resuscitation and corrective eye surgeries to poor communities in Egypt.

How to Improve Nevada’s Religious and Spiritual Vitality?

The religious and spiritual vitality of Nevada does not depend on consensus – everyone in the Silver State is not required to believe the same thing – but on diversity and pluralism. The *tolerance* of other belief systems and worldviews is a key sign of a healthy civil society. Nevada is home to a rich religious-spiritual landscape that features older religious (including indigenous Native American belief systems) as well as “alternative” spiritualities (including atheism, agnosticism, and secularism). The social needs these worldviews help meet bode well for the social health of Nevada. Below, we suggest how to foster the conversations engendering religious tolerance and spirituality in the Silver State:

- 1) **Create forums for inter-faith dialogues.** “Inter-faith” often refers to connections between leaders and adherents of the major world religions. To be truly inter-faith, underrepresented believers and non-believers must be invited to the table. The more voices the better. This will allow individuals to find similarities and differences among them, both of which are necessary for increasing the religious and spiritual vitality of the state.
- 2) **Provide public spaces for public displays of religiosity and spirituality.** Through parades, festivals, and rituals in public spaces, adherents can profess their faith and show others the intricacies of their beliefs via embodied practices rather than through “sacred” texts. This can help people see the religions of others in action and make those religions less threatening.

- 3) **Offer incentives for “multi-racial” and “multi-ethnic” congregations.** Research has shown that multi-racial and multi-ethnic religious organizations decrease racial/ethnic stereotyping and inequality. Segregated congregations have continued to foster poor racial and ethnic relations in Nevada and across the U.S.
- 4) **Educate the public about religion and spirituality.** Because religion tends to be a “taboo” subject to discuss in public, it is often ignored or simply glossed over in K-12 public education. The situation is not much better in higher education in Nevada. Major public universities have religion or religious studies departments, yet neither exists in Nevada. University of Nevada-Reno has an interdisciplinary minor in religious studies, and University of Nevada-Las Vegas offers courses on religion through different departments such as Sociology, Anthropology, Political Science, and Philosophy, but UNLV offers no major or minor in religious studies.

Conclusion

On the one hand, some of the polling and survey data discussed in this report have shown that the Silver State ranks low on various factors of religious behaviors and attitudes in comparison to other states. Gallup’s 2009 Daily tracking poll, which showed that Nevada ranked among ten of the least religious states, seems to reinforce this fact. On the other hand, the data provided through newspaper articles have indicated that there are still many *active* believers of various religions, spiritualities, and belief systems in Nevada. Such a “paradox” does not necessarily mean that Nevada’s religious makeup is more splintered or less organized than any other state. Whether the data are national or statewide aggregates or individual cases in specific neighborhoods, such diversity strengthens Nevada overall. And, as we have indicated in the previous section, tolerance of and respect for various belief systems by Nevadans is necessary to bolster the social health of the state. Creating dialogues and public meeting spaces, as well as initiating cross-cultural interactions and more educational opportunities about people’s different beliefs have benefits that reach beyond the individual and can have a real, long-term impact on politics and policy.

We have shown how religion and spirituality are important parts of the social health of the U.S. and Nevada. Religions – old and new, mainstream and alternative, public and private – do not have an exclusive authority over morality, nor do they have all the answers to the questions about human existence. However, religion can strengthen communities by connecting human social order to a higher power outside of our individual selves. Morality and moral codes are not matters for some groups and communities and not others. They are necessary for maintaining civic order in a civil society that supports and encourages religious and spiritual diversity. Religious and spiritual vitality are byproducts of morality rather than the producers of it, and it stands to increase as tolerance of others and their beliefs gains ground in Nevada.

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Community Resources

One way of measuring religion and spirituality's ability to thrive in society is by seeing the number of institutions and organizations that exist within a community. In this report, we have focused primarily on some of the religious activities in Nevada, and perhaps more so within Clark County and cities throughout Southern Nevada (the region that has seen the most growth during the last decade). In the neighborhoods and communities of larger cities or metropolitan areas, there are hundreds of such organizations that people can inquire about, participate in, and, if so inclined, join through membership.

It would be impossible to list here every currently active religious or spiritual organization that is available to Nevada residents and visitors. What we have tried to provide, at least, is a small cross-section of the numerous and diverse facilities throughout Nevada. Some of the organizations and listed here are mentioned in this report, and along with the other organizations they all reflect Nevada's multi-dimensional religious and spiritual landscape. Such an array suggests that "there's something for everyone," even if an organization that represents a particular belief system is not listed here.

General and Faith-Based Organizations

Family Promise of Las Vegas is a non-religious, nonprofit organization that partners with interfaith congregations and engages the interfaith community in assisting homeless families:

<http://www.familypromiselv.com/>

Gurdwara Baba Deep Singh is a Sikh place of worship that serves the needs of people in Las Vegas, NV and surrounding areas:

<http://www.lasvegasgurdwara.com/index.php>

Hindu Temple of Las Vegas – Jain Center of Las Vegas serves as a Hindu/Jain place of worship and Indian cultural and educational center for the Las Vegas area: www.hindutemplelv.org

Interfaith Council of Southern Nevada promotes and encourages understanding and respect among all people and their traditions, cultures, philosophies, and communities throughout southern Nevada: <http://interfaithsn.org/>

International Network of Prison Ministries is a non-denominational Church providing rehabilitation and education and network of information on other prison ministries throughout the U.S.. Works in conjunction with various denominations and churches: www.prisonministry.net/ulcnv

Islamic Society of Nevada is an independent organization that promotes the practice of Islam and the building of an American Muslim identity in the United States and in Nevada: www.lvmasjid.us

Jewish Community Center of Southern Nevada offers programs and activities that emphasize Jewish culture, identity, and values to people of all ages and backgrounds: <http://www.jccsn.org/>

Jewish Family Services Agency provides social services to people throughout the greater Las Vegas community: www.jfsalv.org

Las Vegas Muslims is a blog about the Las Vegas Muslim community that includes happenings around the community all in one central place: www.lvmuslim.com

North Tahoe Hebrew Congregation – Community Center and Synagogue: www.tahoetemple.org

Pacifica Institute – Las Vegas is a nonprofit organization seeks to develop positive connections and mutual understanding within and across communities through projects covering social welfare, education, poverty, and conflict resolution: <http://www.pacificainstitute.org/>

Religious Alliance in Nevada (R.A.I.N.) provides a forum among communities of faith in Nevada: www.rainnv.org

Renown Health Spiritual Care of Reno provides spiritual care and support along with medical services: www.renown.org/SpiritualCare

Sierra Foundation – “Harmony within Diversity” was founded by the Turkish-American Community of Northern Nevada to promote understanding, friendship, and tolerance among cultures: www.sierraf.org

SGI-USA Buddhist Center is the American branch of the SGI network of more than 2,600 neighborhood discussion groups and nearly 100 centers throughout the U.S.: <http://www.sgi-usa-lasvegas.org/index.html>

Southern Nevada Home Care & Hospice, <http://www.homecareprofile.com/featured/southern-nevada-home-health-care-&-hospice-id822316.html>

Southern Nevada Prison Ministries provides Christian outreach to the incarcerated, victims of crime, and their families: www.snvpm.org

St. Patrick's Episcopal Church, www.tahoeepiscopal.com/index.html

St. Rose Dominican Hospitals, San Martín Campus, http://www.strosehospitals.org/Patients_And_Visitors/220057

Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Las Vegas, www.uuclv.org

University of Nevada Las Vegas Interfaith Council, a group of students provide a forum of faith as a common bond among people: <https://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=45677047290>

Zen Center of Las Vegas, http://www.lasvegaszencenter.com/Welcome_to_Las_Vegas_Zen.html

Alternative Religion and Indigenous Spirituality Organizations

Amerindian, Inc. is a nonprofit, spiritual organization serving charitable, educational, and humanitarian needs to the Native American communities: <http://www.amerindian.org/>

Center for Spiritual Living Reno & Las Vegas was chartered in 1963 as a Church of Religious Science as a state and federally recognized nonprofit charitable organization. Member of the worldwide New Thought churches which combine science, religion, and philosophy: www.cslreno.org and www.csllv.org

Hookers for Jesus is a faith-based organization that addresses real issues of human sex trafficking, sexual violence, and exploitation in the porn and sex industry. Provides assistance to children, teens, and women as well as ministry outreach, community awareness, and transitional housing in the Las Vegas, NV area: www.hookersforjesus.net

Humanist Association of Las Vegas and Southern Nevada is a nonprofit educational organization that serves as a forum for humanists, atheists, agnostics, freethinkers in the Las Vegas, NV area: www.halvason.org

Las Vegas Baha'i Center Web site presents information about the Baha'i faith to the public and provides information meetings at the center at various locations in the Las Vegas Valley:

www.lvbahai.org

Las Vegas Pagan Pride – Unity in Diversity is a nonprofit organization that fosters pride in Pagan identity through education, activism, charity, and community in the Las Vegas Valley:

www.lvpaganpride.org

Lohan Spiritual & Cultural Center provides classes and lectures on various subjects and includes practices of Buddhism, Taoism, and Native American spiritual traditions:

<http://www.lohanscc.org/>

National Spiritualist Association of Churches hold services, meetings, workshops, classes, and events related to Spiritualism:

<http://www.nsac.org/Default.aspx?id=1.0>

Reno Freethinkers is a discussion, support, and community group that meets to promote and discusses freethought, skeptic, atheist, agnostic, secular, humanist, philosophy, and other related topics: www.renofreethinkers.org

Strip Church provides outreach ministry to West Coast strip clubs,

www.stripchurch.com

The Temple of Goddess Spirituality – Dedicated to Sekhmet,

www.sekhmettemple.com

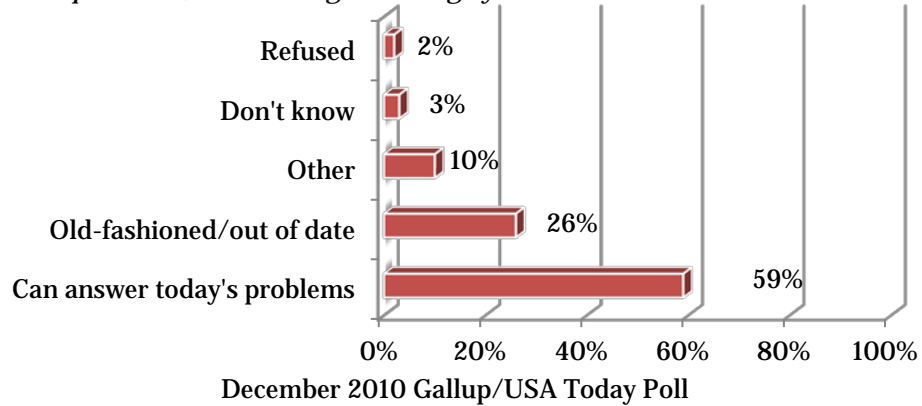
Appendix

The data in the charts and tables presented here correspond to some of the polls and surveys cited in this report and are indicated as such.

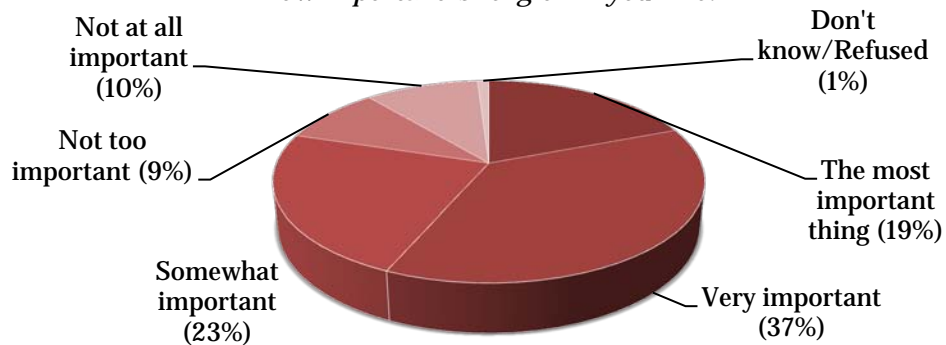
Religion in the United States

Religious Importance and Influence

Do you believe that religion can answer all or most of today's problems, or that religion is largely old-fashioned and out of date?

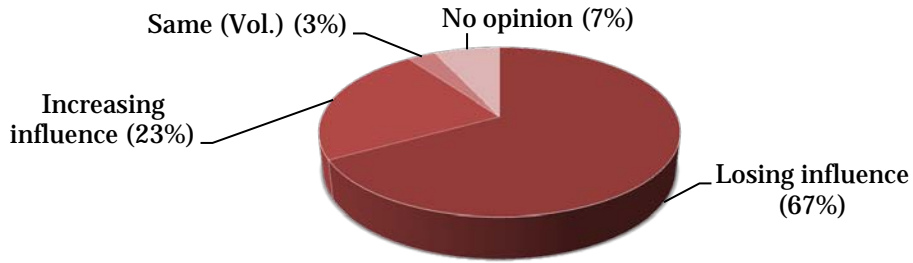


How important is religion in your life?



Millennials, Religion and Abortion Survey, April 2011

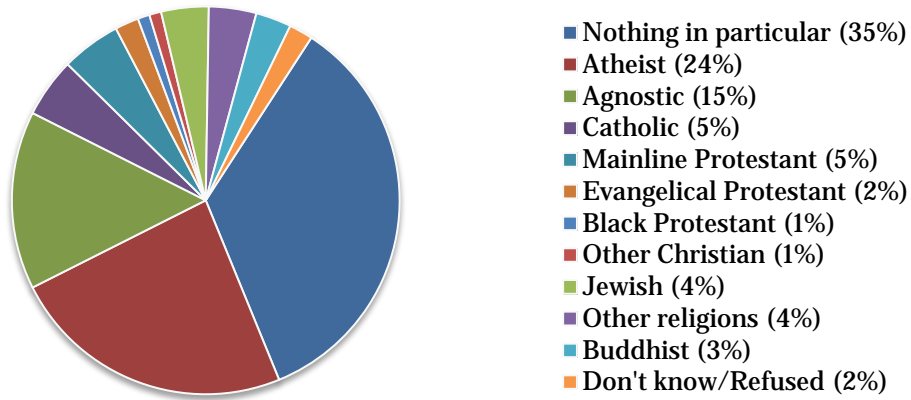
At the present time, do you think religion as a whole is increasing its influence on American life or losing its influence?



Pew Research Center for the People & the Press/Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life 2010 Religion & Public Life Survey, July 2010

Religious Identity and Involvement

Religious self-identification of the 5% of Americans who do not believe in God or a universal spirit



The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, 2009

Belief in God, by Demographic Categories
 Combined sample for two questions: "Do you believe in God?" and
 "Do you believe in God or a universal spirit?"

	<u>Belief in God (%)</u>
National adults	92
Men	90
Women	94
Age 18 to 29	84
Age 30 to 49	94
Age 50 to 64	94
Age 65+	94
High school or less	92
Some college	93
College grad	94
Postgraduate education	87
East	86
South	96
Midwest	91
West	92
Conservatives	98
Moderate	91
Liberals	85
Republicans	98
Independents	89
Democrats	90

Gallup, May 5-8, 2011

How often do you attend religious services – more than once a week, once a week, once or twice a month, several times a year, or hardly ever?

%	
15	More than once a week
26	Once a week
13	Once or twice a month
11	Several times a year
22	Hardly ever
6	Never (Vol.)
6	Don't know/Refused

Sample: National likely voters including oversamples of unmarried women, youth, and people of color
 Democracy Corps/Women's Voices. Women's Vote Poll, May, 2011

*Frequent^ Church Attendance, January – May 2010,
by demographic group*

	%
Conservative	55
Non-Hispanic black	55
Republican	55
65+	53
Black Hispanic	52
South	51
Married	48
Women	47
White Hispanic	46
Midwest	44
College graduate	44
Postgraduate	44
High school or less	44
SAMPLE AVERAGE	43
50 to 64	43
Some college	41
Non-Hispanic white	41
30 to 49	41
Moderate	39
Democrat	39
Men	39
Independent	38
East	38
West	37
Not married	36
18 to 29	35
Asian	31
Liberal	27

^Percentage saying they attend “at least once a week” or “almost every week”
Gallup Daily tracking

Religion in Nevada

Religious Importance and Influence

How Religious Is Your State? (July 2011)

	U.S. National Average	Nevada
Religion is very important in people’s lives	56%	50% (State rank: 34 th /50)
People who attend religious services at least once a week	39%	30% (State rank: 40 th /50)
People who pray at least once a day	58%	58% (State rank: 25 th /50)
Believe in God with absolute certainty	71%	63% (State rank: 40 th /50)

Data for importance of religion, frequency of worship attendance, frequency of prayer and certainty of belief in God from the Pew Forum’s 2007 U.S. Religious Landscape Survey.

*Top 10 Least Religious States
Is religion an important part of your daily life?*

State	% Yes
Vermont	42
New Hampshire	46
Maine	48
Massachusetts	48
Alaska	51
Washington	52
Oregon	53
Rhode Island	53
Nevada	54
Connecticut	55

Gallup Poll Daily tracking, January 2009

Religious Identity and Involvement

Religious Groups – Percentage of affiliated U.S. adults (July 2011)

Religious Tradition	U.S. National Average	Nevada
Evangelical Protestant Tradition	26%	13%
Mainline Protestant Historically Black Protestant Tradition	18%	11%
Catholic Tradition	7%	2%
Mormon Tradition	24%	27%
Orthodox Tradition	2%	11%
Jehovah's Witness Tradition	1%	2%
Other Christian Traditions	1%	< 0.5%
Jewish Tradition	< 0.5%	1%
Muslim Tradition	2%	1%
Buddhist Tradition	1%	2%
Hindu Tradition	1%	< 0.5%
Other World Religions	< 0.5%	1%
Other Faiths	1%	3%
Unaffiliated	16%	21%
Don't Know/Refused	< 0.5%	2%

“Not All Nonbelievers Call Themselves Atheists.” 2009. Pew Forum U. S. Religious Landscape Survey. Pew Research Center’s Forum on Religion & Public Life