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## Religion and Spirituality in Nevada

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## The Social Health of Nevada

*Leading Indicators and Quality of Life in the Silver State*

# Religion and Spirituality in Nevada

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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 the largest population represented in Nevada, but their percentages are lower than national averages: 35% compared to 47% 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 six years (2012 - 2018) 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, 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 May 2017 Gallup Poll asked a national sample of Americans whether religion can answer today's problems, or whether religion is old-fashioned and largely out of date. 55% of respondents said they believe that religion can answer all or most of today's problems, while only 34% said that religion is old-fashioned and out of date. Identical polls conducted in previous years yielded similar results: 58% of Americans believed that religion could solve today's problems in December 2010, and 57% believed the same thing in December of 2009 (Swift 2017).

The polling data offer a clue on the centrality of religion in people's lives. In the "Young Americans' Attitudes toward Politics and Public Service Survey" (2017) that asked respondents how important religion is in their lives, 47% said it was very important, 33% said it was somewhat important, and 17% stated that religion was not very important to them. Gallup's (2017) survey asked a similar question and found that 51% saw religion as very important in life, and 25% considered it not very important.

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 Gallup (2017) Poll where 73% said religion is losing its influence and 24% said it is increasing its influence.

A February 2017 Gallup Poll gauged how Americans view the role of organized religion in the U.S. In this poll, 5% said that religions should have more influence, 28% said that religion should have less influence, and 10% were dissatisfied but wanted religion to stay the same (Gallup 2017). Around half (52%) were totally satisfied with religions current standing in society. When asked about whether or not they were satisfied with organized religion's influence in America, 13% were very satisfied and 19% were very dissatisfied (Gallup 2017).

## **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 matters 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 showed that Protestants or those who identify with non-Catholic Christians constituted 48.5% of the American religious population, the largest representation of any group. Catholic Christians comprised 22.7% of the survey, while Jews and Mormons each represented about 2% of respondents across the country (Newport 2017). Rounding out the survey results are the approximately 21.3% of Americans who claim to have no religious affiliation or who identify as atheist or agnostic (Newport 2017). 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 offer more data on American’s religious affiliations (2014 Pew Religion Landscape Study). Nationally, the non-Catholic Christians representing the largest affiliated group in the U.S. are Evangelicals and Mainline Protestants, 25.4% and 14.7% respectively. Taken as a subset of Protestant tradition, Black Protestants represent 6.5% of the U.S. population. In addition to Jews (6%) and Mormons (1.6%) reported by this Pew study, 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. Vermont tops the list with 37% of its residents claiming no religious identity, followed by New Hampshire with 36%. Washington, Oregon, Alaska, Montana, Massachusetts, and Maine each have at least 30%. On the other end of the religious-identity spectrum are Mississippi, Tennessee, Alabama, and Louisiana where only 12-14% of the adult populations claim no religious identity (2014 Pew Religious Landscape Study). Since 2007, there has been a 6.7% rise in the number of U.S. Adults who identify as unaffiliated. In the same period, there was decline in the Christians population from 78.4% to 70.6% (2014 Pew Religious Landscape Study).

In Gallup's May 2011 poll, 87% of Americans said they believe in God, which is only 9% decrease from the 1940s. This is remarkable in spite of the many changes throughout American society over this nearly 70-year time frame (Gallup 2017). 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. Both Gallup and Pew's recent polls shed some light on contemporary attendance patterns. Gallup 2017 Poll found that 23% of respondents said they go to a religious service at least once a week, 12% reported attending about once a month, while 25% said that they seldom go (Gallup 2017). Pew Research Center's 2016 survey found slightly higher rates of attendance with 34% saying they attend religious services at least once a week, 35% stating they attend once or twice a month/few times a year, and 30% attending seldom or never (Pew Religion and Politics Survey, January 2016).

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. The 2016 General Social Survey (GSS) asked respondents how often they pray. In this survey, 30% stated they pray several times a day, 29% said once a day, 10% responded several times a week, and 15% never prayed. Pew's 2014 Religious Landscape Study found that 55% of U.S. adults pray at least daily, 16% pray weekly, and 23% pray seldom or never. 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 2014 Pew Research Center Religious Landscape study provided a state-by-state account of the role that religion plays in the United State. Nationally, 53% of adults saw religion as very important in their lives, compared to 44% of Nevadans who identified religion as very important. According to a Pew 2014 poll, Nevada ranks 35<sup>th</sup> along with California, Minnesota, and Rhode Island, out of the 50 states, with only 49% of adults Nevadans considered highly religious (Lipka and Wormald 2016). In 2016, a Gallup Poll tracking similar state-by-state numbers about the importance of religion in respondents'

daily lives found that only 27% of Nevadans were very religious. This number is not that impressive, placing Nevada in one of the 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 2014, respondents across the country were queried about their religious service attendance, frequency of prayer, and belief in God (2014 Pew Religious Landscape Study). With regard to worship service attendance, the older population grew at a faster rate than the younger population (U.S. Census Brief, Age and Sex Composition: 2010).

- Nationally, 36% of respondents said they attend religious services at least once a week, compared to 31% in Nevada;
- The national average of those who say they pray at least once a day is 55%, while Nevada's average is 48%;
- Nevada is ranked 40<sup>th</sup> among the other states, and about 15 percentage points higher than Vermont (32%) which has the lowest number for daily prayer;
- While 63% of respondents in this national survey said they believe in God with absolute certainty, in Nevada the percentage drops to 59%, and this ranks the state 37<sup>th</sup> out of 50 in this category.

According to the 2016 GSS national survey, 57% percent are certain that God exists. In these national and state level data, it is important to remember that a considerably higher number have belief in God with some doubts. Including those with doubts, 83% in the 2014 Pew Study and 73% of respondents in the 2016 GSS survey have absolute belief or belief with doubts.

In the "Pew Forum U.S. Religious Landscape Survey" (2014), non-Catholic Protestant Christians collectively is still the largest group represented, even in Nevada, but their percentages are significantly lower than national averages: 35% compared to 46.6% nationwide. There are slightly more Catholics in Nevada (25%) than the 21% reported in the U.S. overall. Not surprisingly, due to the state's historical ties to Mormonism, Nevada's 4% representation exceeds the 2% national average. However, this 4% representation of Mormons is a decline from 11% recorded in 2008. In other areas where Nevada outranks the national trends are Orthodox (1%), Jehovah Witness (1%), "Other Christian traditions" (1% in Nevada), Muslim (1% 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. – 28% compared to 23% nationally. The rest of the groups – black Protestant, Jewish, and Buddhist – all fall below the national averages for their categories (2014 Pew Religious Landscape Study).

In summary, Protestants outnumbered other religious groups in Nevada with 35%. Catholics ranked second, with 25%, while Nevadan respondents who indicated either no religious preference or identified as atheist or agnostic all accounted for 28% of the sample. Finally, while their numbers are much smaller than these other groups with larger memberships, Nevadans with Mormon and Jewish affiliations represented 4% and 2% respectively, according to this 2014 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 past years include the following:

- “Schools’ rejection of church flyers sparks backpack dispute,” and church threatens lawsuit (Delaney, 2018).
- “Leaders gather to pray at Las Vegas mayor’s faith initiative,” bringing together Christians, Jews, and Muslims (Erickson 2017)
- 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:

- “Satanic inmate sues Reno jail” for violating his rights to access food prescribed by his religion (Sonner, 2014)
- 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)
- “Some churches in Nevada and surrounding states made a “drastic pledge in the name of social justice: To stop calling the police” because of discriminatory and biased policing practices (Zauzmer, 2018)

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:

- "St. Rose hospitals in Las Vegas keep church tie," although switching to "secular control" (O'Reiley, 2012)
- Las Vegas "St. Rose (hospital) chaplains stress spiritual aspects of care" (Taylor, 2014).
- Mountain View 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 few examples from Nevada where the place of religion in school became the focus of dispute:

- “School apologizes for banning Jesus,” as student wished to use scripture verse in class assignment (Starnes, 2015).
- School voucher program, which also supports religious education, creates controversy because opponents said it “violates the state constitution’s prohibition on public money being used for religious purposes” (Whitaker, 2015).
- 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:

- Religion in Las Vegas takes many forms including, “Goddess Spirituality, Unification Churches, Scientology, Urantia, Santería, Druidry, and Kabbalah” (Oñoz-Wright, 2014)
- 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)
- Las Vegas church hosts “blessing of bikes” event celebrating Christian biker groups in the area.  
(<https://www.reviewjournal.com/life/religion/las-vegas-motorcyclists-gather-for-blessing-of-the-bikes-video/>)
- 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:

- Following the Las Vegas Shooting that killed 58 people, Muslims came together to help organize blood drives and join in vigils (Bharath, 2017).
- 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).
- Interfaith group and nonprofits in Las Vegas support legal changes to prevent sex trafficking (Przybys, 2013).
- 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 and the University of Nevada-Las Vegas both offer an interdisciplinary religious studies minor, which is a good start for students to become engaged with thinking thoughtfully and critically about religion.

## 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.lasvegsgurdwara.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](http://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/ulcnev](http://www.prisonministry.net/ulcnev)

***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](http://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](http://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](http://www.lvmuslim.com)

***North Tahoe Hebrew Congregation – Community Center and Synagogue***: [www.tahoetemple.org](http://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](http://www.rainnv.org)

**Renown Health Spiritual Care of Reno** provides spiritual care and support along with medical services: [www.renown.org/SpiritualCare](http://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](http://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](http://www.snvpm.org)

**St. Patrick’s Episcopal Church**, [www.tahoeepiscopal.com/index.html](http://www.tahoeepiscopal.com/index.html)

**St. Rose Dominican Hospitals, San Martín Campus**,  
[http://www.strosehospitals.org/Patients\\_And\\_Visitors/220057](http://www.strosehospitals.org/Patients_And_Visitors/220057)

**Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Las Vegas**, [www.uuclv.org](http://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](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](http://www.cslreno.org) and [www.cslglv.org](http://www.cslglv.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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://www.renofreethinkers.org)

***Strip Church*** provides outreach ministry to West Coast strip clubs, [www.stripchurch.com](http://www.stripchurch.com)

***The Temple of Goddess Spirituality – Dedicated to Sekhmet***, [www.sekhmettemple.com](http://www.sekhmettemple.com)

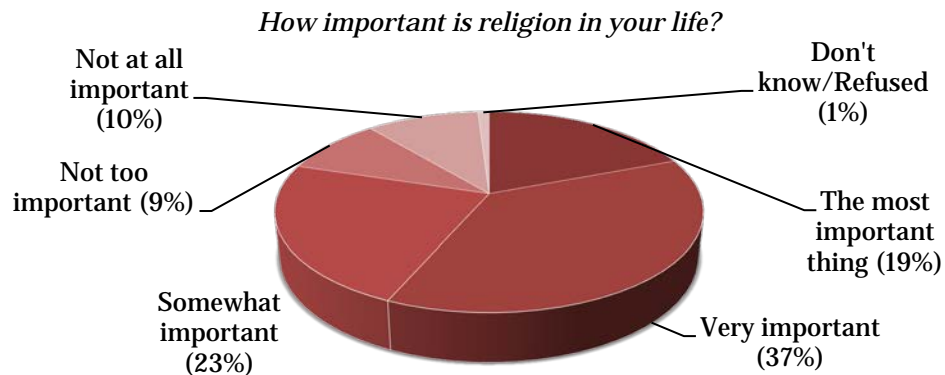
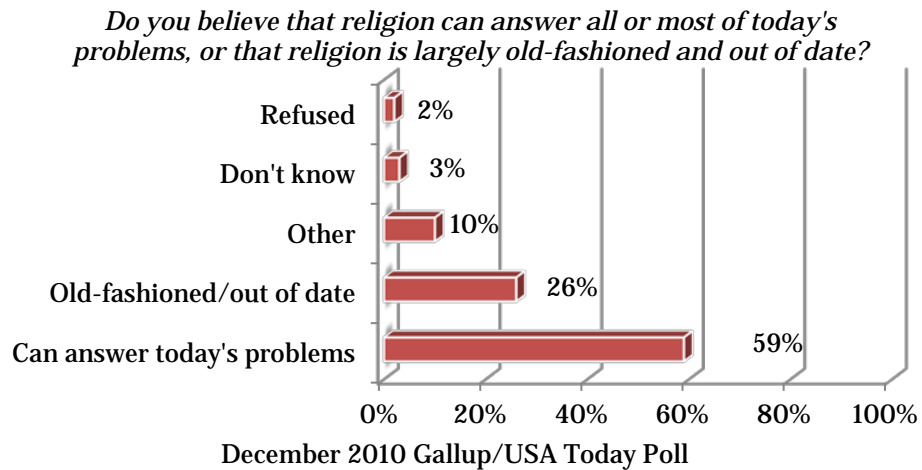


## Appendix

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.

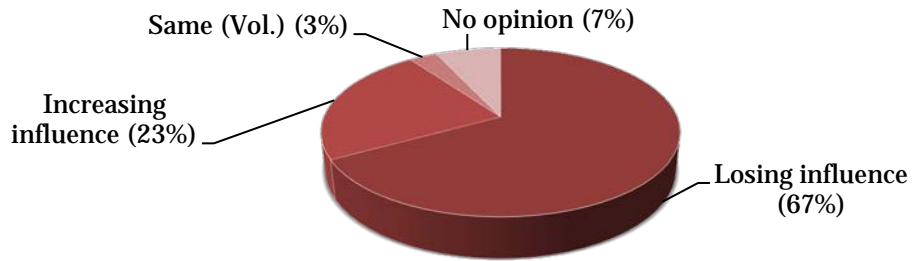
### Religion in the United States

#### ***Religious Importance and Influence***



Millennials, Religion and Abortion Survey, April 2011

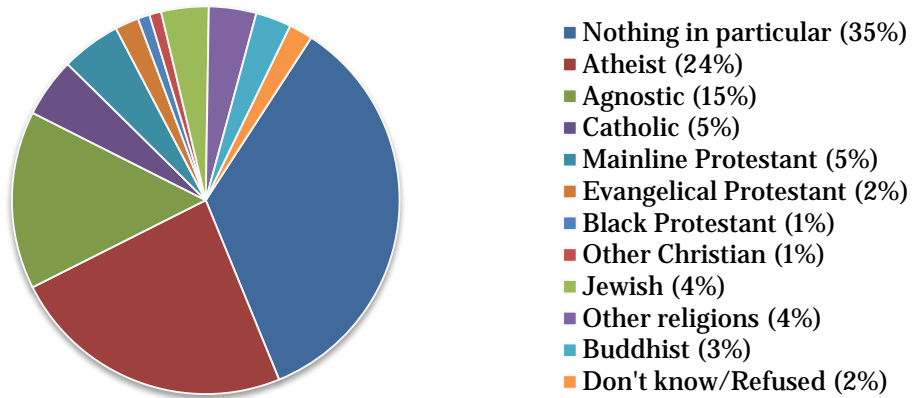
*At the present time, do you think religion as a whole is increasing its influence on American life or losing its influence?*



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?*

|          |                       |
|----------|-----------------------|
| <u>%</u> |                       |
| 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        |
| <b>SAMPLE AVERAGE</b> | <b>43</b> |
| 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)*

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

| <b>State</b>  | <b>% Yes</b> |
|---------------|--------------|
| 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)*

| <b>Religious Tradition</b>              | <b>U.S. National Average</b> | <b>Nevada</b> |
|---|------------------------------|---------------|
| Evangelical Protestant Tradition        | 26%                          | 13%           |
| Mainline Protestant                     | 18%                          | 11%           |
| Historically Black Protestant Tradition | 7%                           | 2%            |
| Catholic Tradition                      | 24%                          | 27%           |
| Mormon Tradition                        | 2%                           | 11%           |
| Orthodox Tradition                      | 1%                           | 2%            |
| Jehovah's Witness Tradition             | 1%                           | < 0.5%        |
| Other Christian Traditions              | < 0.5%                       | 1%            |
| Jewish Tradition                        | 2%                           | 1%            |
| Muslim Tradition                        | 1%                           | 2%            |
| Buddhist Tradition                      | 1%                           | < 0.5%        |
| Hindu Tradition                         | < 0.5%                       | 1%            |
| 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