European *Values* Study

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Pacte
Laboratoire de sciences sociales

Panorama of religious fact in France and Europe: major trends

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Informations about the *European values Study* (EVS): www.valeurs-france.fr
European Values Study

Informations about the *International Social Survey Programme* (ISSP) : www.valeurs-france.fr
www.issp.org

The main religion in each country still largely depends on the schisms of the 11th-12th centuries and the 16th century in the West. This shows that religion is largely inherited from generation to generation.

There is an Orthodox Europe, a Catholic Europe, a Protestant Europe, and even a Muslim Europe: Albania, Kosovo, Bosnia, Turkey, and minorities linked to immigration.

Some countries are bi-confessional, a legacy of a history in which each prince decided the religion of his people.

Many people feel religious in Eastern Europe, much less in Western Europe

Religious Europe



This map shows the major continuities, but partly masks the major trends in religiosity.

Source : Bréchon, Gonthier, *Atlas des Européens*, 2013

Pierre Bréchon, *Panorama of religious fact in France and Europe: major trends,* Ministerial Office Religious Affairs, Paris, 2023

In France, a mitigated image of religions

IFOP, France, 2023	2007	2009	2021	2023
Religions can help to transmit positive values to young people: respect for others, tolerance, generosity, responsibility…	-	**77**	68	66
All religions are equally valid *(= not is better)*	**62**	-	54	52
The message and values of Christianity are still relevant today	51	-	47	48
Religions can make a positive contribution to the major debates in society: bio-ethics, economic morality, the family…	-	51	47	47
Islam is compatible with the values of French society	-	-	-	32

Religions provide values (openness to others, source of morality), but are often considered to be of equal worth.

ISSP France 2018 :

- Christians have a much more positive image (56%) than Jews (34%) and Islam (24%).
- 39% have at least "some trust" in churches, compared to 47% twenty years ago.
- Sharp improvement in the image of atheists (from 36% in 2008 to 49% in 2018).
- Religions are sources of conflict and intolerance:
  - 64% say they bring more conflict than peace.
  - For 61%, strong religious convictions=too much intolerance.

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La « laïcité à la française » (French secularism) has become quite consensual

IFOP, France, May 2023	Entire France	Radical left	Socialist party	Ecolo-gistes	Presiden-tial party	Right Party	Radical right
The 1905 law must be kept as it is	**71**	68	**81**	**85**	**85**	63	67
Softening certain aspects	**21**	25	13	11	14	26	24
Abolish this law	**8**	7	6	4	1	11	9

- Two-thirds of French people want to keep the law as it is.

- There are few differences in terms of political orientation (see table) , but also according to age, qualifications or religious orientation.

- This law is a symbol of republican values: a neutral state, a state that must not differentiate between religions; freedom to believe or not believe for all individuals.

- But this apparent consensus can disappear on certain subjects, such as the place of Islam or clothing with religious connotations.

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Member of a religion : strong decrease (EVS, 22 pays comparables)

En %	Catholic countries	Protestant countries	Orthodox countries	Multi-confesionnel	Total
1990	77	66	78	74	**74**
1999	75	83	90	71	**77**
2008	72	61	92	68	**70**
2017	65	47	91	59	**62**
Variation 90-17	**- 12**	**- 19**	**+ 13**	**- 15**	**- 12**

- Religious affiliation is declining, particularly in countries with a Protestant tradition. A "precariousness" of the Protestant religion (Willaime), more open to modernity.
- We can speak of a process of "institutional secularisation", except in the East.

The place of religion in his/her life : not very important but relatively stable.

	1990-1993	1999-2001	2008-2010	2017-2020
Very or rather important (22 pays)	**51**	**49**	**48**	**47**
Nordic countries (4 pays)	32	36	27	27
Western Europe (5 pays)	41	37	38	37
Southern Europe (3 pays)	63	61	59	55
Eastern Europe in UE (10 pays)	64	64	63	65

Religion is much less important than family, work, friends and relationships, and leisure. It is not the core of life for Europeans.
Stability in the East, slight decline elsewhere.

In France, religious affiliation continues to decline in favor of indifference, or even rejection

EVS France 2018, *en % verticaux*	1981	1990	1999	2008	2018
Catholic, regularly practising	**17**	15	10	9	7
Catholic, irregularly practising	**12**	14	12	10	6
Catholic, non-practising	**41**	28	31	23	19
Other religions	3	4	5	8	**10**
No religion, but not atheist	18	29	30	33	**37**
No religion and « convinced atheist »	9	10	12	17	**21**

- Strong decline of Catholicism (de 70 % en 1981 to 32 % in 2018).
- Growth of Islam (6 %).
- Strong increase of no religion and « convinced atheists » (de 27% en 1981 to 58% in 2018).

In France, stability of prayer

EVS France 2018, *in vertical %*	1999	2008	2018
At least once a week	19	22	24
Several times a year	15	14	13
Very rarely or never	**64**	**64**	**65**

20% of those who pray every week never attend a service: **sign of progress in individualised religiosity**.

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In Europe, religious attendance (at least once a month)

En % EVS, 22 same countries	Catholic countries	Protestant countries	Orthodox countries	Multi-confessional	Total
1990-1993	**43**	20	25	**31**	**35**
1999-2001	40	17	**39**	29	**34**
2008-2010	35	16	**39**	22	**29**
2017-2020	31	15	**40**	19	**26**
Différence 90-17	**- 12**	**- 5**	**+ 15**	**- 12**	**- 9**

Church attendance is also declining in Europe, except in the Orthodox countries, where it rose sharply between 1990 and 1999 (at the end of anti-religious policies in the countries of the ex-Soviet area) and has remained stable since then.

In Europe, decline of prayer (EVS, 22 same countries)

En % vertical	1999	2008	2017-2018	Différence 99-07
At least once a week	**43**	38	36	**- 7**
Several times a year	25	27	25	**0**
Very rarely or never	33	35	**39**	**+ 6**

Personal prayer, which is much less dependent on sociological pressure than religious attendance, is also on the decline.

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To fell religious, non religious, convinced atheist

Horizontal % (EVS, 22 same countries)	Religious	Non religious	Convinced atheist
1990	**65**	30	5
1999	**64**	30	6
2008	60	32	**9**
2017	56	32	**11**

Declining feeling of being religious, rising atheism.

Self-declared "convinced atheist " in 2017-2020 (EVS, 34 Europeans countries, en %)

Nordic countries		Western Eupope		Southern Europe		Eastern Europe UE		Eastern Europe non UE	
Total	**14**		**15**		**10**		**5**		**4**
Sweden	**20**	France	**23**	Spain	**15**	Slovenia	**14**	Belarus	**9**
Iceland	13	United Kingdom	**13**	Portugal	8	Czech Repu.	**14**	Russia	**7**
Denmark	12	Germany	**12**	Italy	7	Estonia	**9**	Serbia	**6**
Norvaye	9	The Netherlands	11			Hongary	**7**	North Macedonia	**3**
Finland	9	Switzerland	10			Slovaquia	6	Bosnia Herzegoniva	3
		Austria	6			Croatia	6	Albania	3
						Bulgaria	4	Montenegro	2
						Poland	3	Armenia	2
						Lithuania	2	Georgia	1
						Romania	1	Azerbaijan	1

Atheism is more developed in Western Europe and in the Nordic countries, particularly in France and Sweden. But also in Spain, Slovenia and the Czech Republic. Also very high in East Germany.
Very low in Eastern Europe, in Orthodox countries resistant to secularisation, but also in Poland and Lithuania, strongly Catholic countries.

The percentage of convinced atheists in Europe is 13% in the 18-29 age group, compared with 7% in the 60+ age group.

To fell religious, non religious or convinced atheist (2017-2020 – Europe, 34 countries)

In %	Germany	Norway	Switzer.	Italy	Netherlands	France	Spain	United King.	Poland	Russia	Bulgaria	Croatia	Romania	Total Europe
Religious	54	38	48	**78**	44	42	49	37	**86**	**76**	65	**84**	**85**	**62**
Non religious	34	**53**	**42**	16	**46**	35	37	**50**	11	17	31	10	14	**28**
Convinced atheist	12	9	10	6	10	**23**	**15**	13	3	7	**4**	**6**	**1**	**10**

→ Religious feeling remains strong in Easter Europe but also in Italy.

→ Norway, Great Britain, The Netherlands, Switzerland: many say they are not religious without being very opposed to religion.

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Evolution of beliefs in God (EVS, France, 2018)

En % vertical	1981	1990	2008	2018
To believe in God : oui	**68**	**62**	53	50
non	32	38	**47**	**47**
Believe in a personal God	**28**	**28**	18	21
Believe in a kind of spirit or life force	28	**34**	**34**	32
Doesn't know what to think	24	26	24	25
Don't think there is a God/life force	20	18	**24**	23
Importance of God in life : strong (7-10)	47	51	**55**	52
medium (5-6)	21	**23**	18	18
weak (1-4)	**32**	27	27	30

- Strong decline in belief in God, particularly a personal God, while belief in a spirit or life force God is increasing. Agnosticism stable. Non-belief in God on the rise.
- Importance of God in life: fairly stable.

Index of strong beliefs in God (EVS, France, 2018)*

In %	1981	1990	1999	2008	2017-2018
France	**33**	26	28	25	27

**Echelle de 6 à 26, ici positions 21 à 26.*

- Strong belief in God declines from 1981 to 1990. Stable after.

- It seems that beliefs are maintained better than affiliations and cultural practices.

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Europe : Trends in beliefs in God (EVS, 2017-2020, 22 countries)

En % vertical (EVS, 22 pays comparables)	1990	1999	2008	2017-2020
To believe in God : oui	**76**	77	72	66
non	24	23	28	**34**
Believe in a personal God	**39**	43	37	30
Believe in a kind of spirit or life force	33	31	31	**37**
Doesn't know what to think	16	14	15	16
Don't think there is a God/life force	13	12	15	**17**
Importance of God in life : strong (7-10)	45	48	46	44
medium (5-6)	20	18	18	17
weak (1-4)	36	35	36	39

- Decline in belief in God, particularly a personal God, while belief in a spirit God or life force is on the slow increase. Agnosticism stable. Non-belief in God on the rise.
- Importance of God in life: fairly stable.

Index of strong beliefs in God (EVS, 22 same countries, 2018)*

Vertical %	1990	1999	2008	2017-2020	Variation
Nordic countries	**33**	36	34	24	**-9**
Western Europe	**40**	42	37	35	**-5**
Southern Europe	**72**	73	67	60	**-12**
Eastern Europe	64	70	71	67	**+3**

* *Echelle de 6 à 26, ici positions 21 à 26.*

Significant decline almost everywhere, particularly in the South. Slight growth in Eastern Europe.

Strong beliefs in God (21-26) by geographical area and countries
(EVS, 2017-2020, 34 countries, *in %*)

Nordic countries		Western Europe		Southern Europe		Eastern Europe UE		Eastern Europe non-UE	
Iceland	**39**	Austria	**44**	Portugal	**68**	Romania	**79**	Azerbaijan	**94**
Finland	**35**	Switzerland	36	Italy	60	Poland	**73**	Georgia	**94**
Norvay	22	Germany	35	Spain	45	Croatia	**64**	Armenia	**92**
Denmark	19	United Kingdom	31			Lithuania	53	Albania	**91**
Sweden	19	France	28			Bulgaria	53	Bosnia	**86**
		The Netherlands	27			Slovaquia	49	Montenegro	**83**
						Hungary	45	North Macedonia	**81**
						Slovenia	34	Serbia	58
						Estonia	20	Russia	54
						Czech Rep.	19	Belarus	45
Total	**23**		**32**		**55**		**62**		**76**

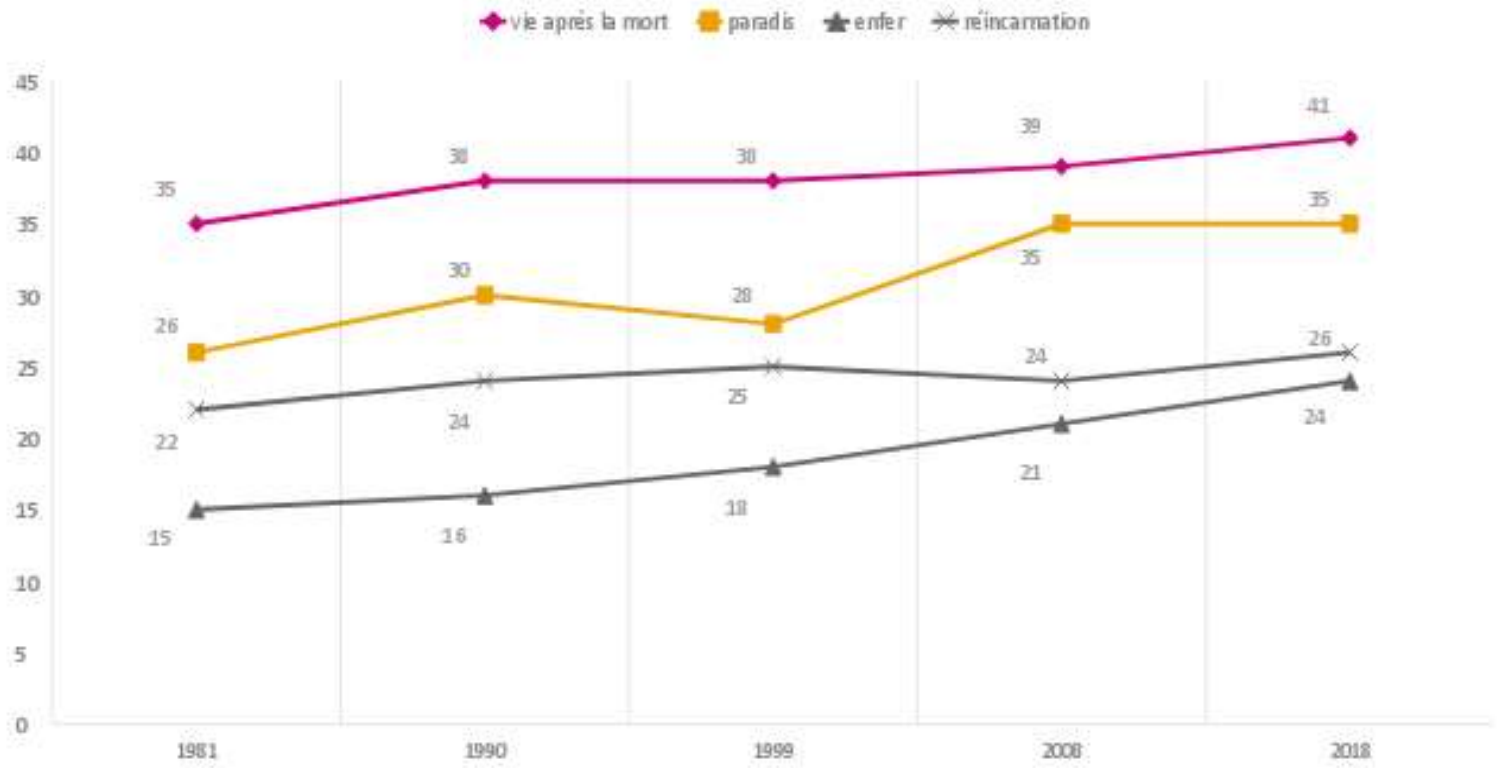
European mean : 47 % of strong beliefs in God.

Total Line: very strong differences from Nordic countries to Eastern Europe.

- Nordic countries : more beliefs in God in Iceland and Finland.
- Western Europe : more beliefs in God in Austria.
- Southern Europe : Spain less believing in God.
- Eastern Europe UE : Romania, Poland, Croatia, more believing.
- Eastern Rurope non UE : very high level of beliefs in God, except Belarus, Russia and Serbia.

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Beliefs in an extra-mundane future (France 2018)



Unexpectedly, these beliefs are increasing slowly but rather steadily, and have been higher among young people since 1990, while they have been lower among people aged 60 and over. This is probably a life-cycle effect, with young people more hopeful than their elders that life will go on. There is a psycho-religious hope for the future here. They are not rediscovering the great Christian story of salvation.

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Europe: Beliefs in an extra-mundane future (EVS, 22 same countries)*

En %	1990	1999	2008	2017-2020	Ecart 90-17
Belief in life after death	50	54	52	50	0
Belief in Paradise	46	47	47	44	-2
Belief in Hell	25	33	33	31	+ 6
Belief in réincarnation	26	22	23	26	0

**Dichotomous questions*

- Stronger belief in heaven than in hell, reflecting a rather optimistic view of the future.
- Weak evolution: a growing belief in hell

Beliefs in God and in an extra-mundane future according age en 2017-2020 (EVS 34 pays, en %)

Beliefs in…	18-24 years	25-34 years	35-49 years	50-64 years	65 et +	Total
… God	*62*	66	70	71	**77**	**70**
… life after death	50	52	52	48	47	**50**
… Paradise	43	46	46	43	47	**45**
… Hell	38	39	37	32	33	**35**
… Reincarnation	**34**	30	29	26	*19*	**27**

- Belief in God is stronger among older people than younger people, who are more secularised.
- In contrast, beliefs in life after death, heaven and hell are stable in all generations.
- Exception: reincarnation, a belief higher among young people.
- 23% of Europeans believe in God but not in life after death; and even 5% believe in life after death but not in God. This is a sign of the recomposition of beliefs.

Religious recompositions…

There is a great deal of religious recomposition and fuzziness in the articulation of affiliations, practices and beliefs. For example, according to the **ISSP survey in 2018 (27 countries in the world)**, among the 39% of Europeans who say they have 'no religion', a quarter (24%) say they feel 'religious', half (54%) 'non-religious' and the remaining quarter 'convinced atheists'.

And a specific question on God makes it possible to track down non-institutional religion through the statement: "**I have my own personal way of being in contact with God without needing churches or religious services**".

If we look specifically at **people who say they have no religious affiliation** (who usually do not believe in God), 29% of them in 2018 say they agree (completely or fairly) with this statement. So a good quarter of people who do not feel they belong to a religion express some form of belief in God. This is a form of recomposition, at a distance from the major religions.

En %	US	Chili	Slove.	Isra.	Switz.	Germa.	France	Russia	Slova.	Hung.	Bulga.	Total
Agree very much or somewhat	**63**	**59**	**50**	**46**	**42**	34	30	29	17	16	14	**29**
% of no religion	22	22	33	3	**35**	33	**53**	18	**35**	25	10	**29**

Source : *ISSP 2018 pour 11/27 countries.*

The differences between countries are strong, but difficult to explain. One explanation is the level of desinstitutionalisation of religions, particularly low in Eastern Europe.

Faithful to a religion or only spiritual? (ISSP, 27 countries)

What best describes you? *En %*	2018
I follow a religion and consider myself to be a spiritual person interested in the sacred or the supernatural	18
I follow a religion, but don't consider myself to be a spiritual person interested in the sacred or the supernatural	**28**
I don't follow a religion, but consider myself to be a spiritual person interested in the sacred or the supernatural	17
I don't follow a religion and don't consider myself to be a spiritual person interested in the sacred or the supernatural	**28**
Can't choose'	10

10% were unable to answer, while very few did not answer the various religious questions. This percentage indicates a difficulty in self-defining between concepts that some people probably find hard to distinguish. This question, which requires respondents to make an effort to situate themselves, is nevertheless very interesting for measuring a desinstitutionalised religiosity.

Two groups dominate, those who are neither religious nor spiritual (which is in line with the logic of secularisation) and the group of "religious non-spiritual ", which is rather surprising at first sight, but in the end quite understandable: these are in fact rather older devotees, with an average level of religiosity, and therefore followers who are rather traditional and conformist to their traditional religious universe.

More in a minority are the "religious spiritual" group, which is in fact the most religious, and the "non-religious but spiritual" group, corresponding to forms of recomposition of religion outside institutions (this is a young group with a high level of education).

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« Parallel beliefs", rather increasing...

In addition to common religious beliefs, the ISSP survey also measures “parallel beliefs”, sometimes referred to as “popular”, “heterodox” or “alternative”, by testing four assertions:
- “Good Lucky charms sometimes do bring good luck",
- "Some fortune tellers really can foresee the future”,
- "Some faithhealers do have God-given healing powers",
- "A person’s star sign at birth or horoscope can affect the course of their future".

En % ISSP, 2018	Slova-quia	Czech Rep.	Russia	Swit-zerland	Austria	Ger-many	New Zeland	France	Finland	Sweden	Total
Good luck charm	**60**	**53**	**52**	**50**	45	38	36	34	16	16	**41**
Fortune teller	**42**	**41**	**58**	34	**42**	25	35	33	17	13	**34**
Faithhealer	**48**	**48**	**59**	27	27	13	37	31	24	18	**33**
Zodial signs	**38**	**48**	**48**	**38**	36	23	28	34	15	11	**32**

Source : *ISSP 2018 for 10/27 countries*.

- Once again, there are major differences between countries. Eastern Europe seems very sensitive to these beliefs, despite 70 years of anti-religious ideology and despite a context of strong orthodox religion.
- The Scandinavian countries, on the other hand, strongly resistant, in line with their strong secularisation.
- There are few differences between social groups: women are slightly more believing, as people at the bottom of the social ladder or with secondary education.
- But people who never attend religious services are less believing.

Socio-demographic characteristics of atheists and religious people in 2017-2020

EVS, 34 countries	Western Europe		Nordic countries		Southern Europe		Eastern Europe UE		Eastern Europe non UE		Total	
	Atheist	Relig	Atheist	Relig.	Atheist	Relig.	Atheist	Relig.	Atheist	Relig.	**Atheist**	**Relig.**
Man	18	40	18	34	12	58	6	70	8	68	**13**	**54**
Woman	11	51	9	47	8	74	3	79	5	83	**8**	**68**
18-24 years old	22	32	21	25	10	54	8	68	15	69	**16**	**53**
25-34 years	16	37	19	30	15	55	5	69	5	72	**11**	**56**
35-49 years	15	42	15	36	13	59	5	73	4	77	**11**	**59**
50-64 years	15	47	9	47	10	68	4	78	4	79	**9**	**64**
65 years and +	11	57	8	54	4	81	4	81	4	83	**7**	**71**
ISEI very low	11	49	11	47	7	70	3	81	3	78	**6**	**67**
ISEI rather low	15	45	10	42	9	65	4	76	6	79	**9**	**65**
ISEI rather high	14	47	15	39	11	63	6	69	8	77	**11**	**58**
ISEI very high	18	42	15	37	18	54	8	67	10	72	**15**	**52**
Commune - 5000	14	51	7	53	4	78	3	82	5	78	**7**	**71**
5000-20 000	13	51	8	47	11	67	3	77	5	83	**9**	**66**
20 à 100 000	16	49	16	35	10	67	7	73	5	80	**10**	**64**
100 à 500 000	17	48	17	35	14	58	6	71	5	70	**11**	**60**
+ de 500 000	21	46	17	31	11	56	8	58	9	76	**13**	**61**
Services at 12 +	8	62	6	64	5	77	2	89	1	95	**6**	**75**
Rardly	12	39	9	43	9	57	2	71	2	88	**6**	**65**
Jamais	26	22	21	27	26	31	15	35	10	66	**18**	**43**

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Values of atheists, non religious and religious in 2017-2020 (EVS, 34 pays)

En %	Convinced atheist	Non religious	Religious	Total
Strong individualisation	**79**	69	*38*	**51**
Strong individualism	*42*	47	51	**49**
Man-woman Egality +	**75**	67	*44*	**54**
Sens of collective duty	*30*	32	**53**	**45**
In favour of a liberal family	**65**	56	*30*	**41**
Trust to others +	58	60	52	**55**
Member of associations	45	45	38	**41**
Strong altruism	54	51	54	**53**
Trust in institutions +	30	35	**45**	**40**
Self-placement on the left	**39**	28	*17*	**22**
Strong nationalism	**48**	55	**69**	**63**
Positive perception of immigrants	**58**	53	44	**48**
Valuing work	*31*	35	**50**	**44**
Wish to participate in decision-making	**59**	53	44	**48**
Valuing freedom of expression	**55**	49	*36*	**41**
Structured European identity	31	38	**55**	**48**
Involved in political/social life	**60**	54	*43*	**48**
Tolerance towards incivilities	**62**	52	43	**47**

Convinced atheists are more individualised, more in favor of equality and a liberal family, a little more confident in others and members of associations, more leftist, more open to immigrants, in favor of political liberties, more involved in public life, more tolerant of incivilities.

Religious people are in favor of duties, more conformist and traditional, more valuing order and work, more nationalists but also more in favor of UE…

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Conclusions

- France is one of the most secular countries in Europe: The Catholics are only one third of population, non-religious and convinced atheists being very numerous. Muslims are slowly growing.
- Europe's religious panorama is very much divided:
    - between Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox and Muslim Europe,
    - according the level of religiosity, much higher in Eastern Europe and lower in the Nordic countries and in Western Europe.
- Institutional religion is eroding sharply, with a decline in religious practice and attendance at religious services.
- Beliefs in God are also falling, but more slowly. Belief in a life-force God is growing, while belief in a personal God is declining.
- Religious beliefs are increasingly blurred, with individuals distancing themselves from the dogmas of the major religions. Recompositions can be observed, with the "spiritual" – often very undefined - sometimes replacing the religious. Parallel beliefs and mystical-esoteric practices are developing (such as parallel medicine or yoga).
- Europeans are more or less religious depending on whether they are male or female, young or old, rich or poor, urban or rural, and whether or not they were religiously socialised in their youth.
- The religious or non-religious positions of individuals strongly influence their value system.

Pierre Bréchon, *Panorama of religious fact in France and Europe: major trends,* Ministerial office Religious Affairs, Paris, 2023

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