

CANADIANS BELIEVERS NOT BELONGERS

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Seven in ten (70%) agree "My private beliefs about Christianity are more important than what is taught by any church"

ANGUS REID WORLD WIDE

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Toronto, Ontario – An Angus Reid/Globe and Mail/CTV survey of Canadians released today indicates while the vast majority of Canadians believe in God (84%), just one in five (20%) attend church on a weekly basis. The vast gulf between belief and belonging is explained by the fact eight in ten (81%) agree “you don’t need to go to church in order to be a good Christian”. The largely privatised nature of faith in Canada today is also apparent in the finding that 70% agree “My private beliefs about Christianity are more important than what is taught by any church.” Canada is predominantly a Christian country. More than three quarters (77%) of Canadians identify themselves with a Christian church.

These are the findings of an Angus Reid/CTV/Globe and Mail poll conducted between April 11th and April 16th, 2000. The poll is based on a randomly selected sample of 1,500 adult Canadians. With a sample of this size, the results are considered accurate to within ± 2.5 percentage points, 19 times out of 20, of what they would have been had the entire adult Canadian population been polled. The margin of error will be larger within regions and for other sub-groupings of the survey population. These data were statistically weighted to ensure the sample's regional and age/sex composition reflects that of the actual Canadian population according to the 1996 Census data.

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While 84% believe in God, just 20% attend church weekly

Belief in God is one thing most Canadians agree on. A full 84% answered “yes” when asked, “Do you believe in God?” Agnostics appear to be rare. Just 2% said they were unsure about God. The remaining 14% do not believe in God. A pervasive belief in God does not translate into widespread attendance at religious services, however. Just one in five (20%) attend church, synagogue, mosque or temple once a week or more. Only an additional 13% attend at least once a month. Another three in ten attend occasionally (other than on special occasions such as weddings, funerals or baptisms), with 19% going a few times a year and 11% passing through the portals of a place of praise once a year or so. One third (36%) did not attend religious services in the past year.

- Those aged 55+ were much more likely to attend weekly (31%) than those age 35 to 54 (17%) or age 18 to 34 (15%). Belief in God showed a similar but less pronounced pattern, with belief most prevalent among those 55+ (89%) and somewhat lower among those 35 to 54 (85%) and 18 to 34 (79%).
- The Atlantic provinces show the highest level of belief in God (93%) and the largest percent of weekly attenders (28%).
- British Columbia stands out as the least religious province in Canada, with three quarters (75%) reporting belief in God and 18% attending church weekly.
- Quebecers stand apart in that they have high levels of belief (85% believe in God) but the lowest levels of church attendance (15%).
- Women are somewhat more likely to both believe in God (86% women vs. 82% men) and to attend church weekly (22% women vs. 18% men).

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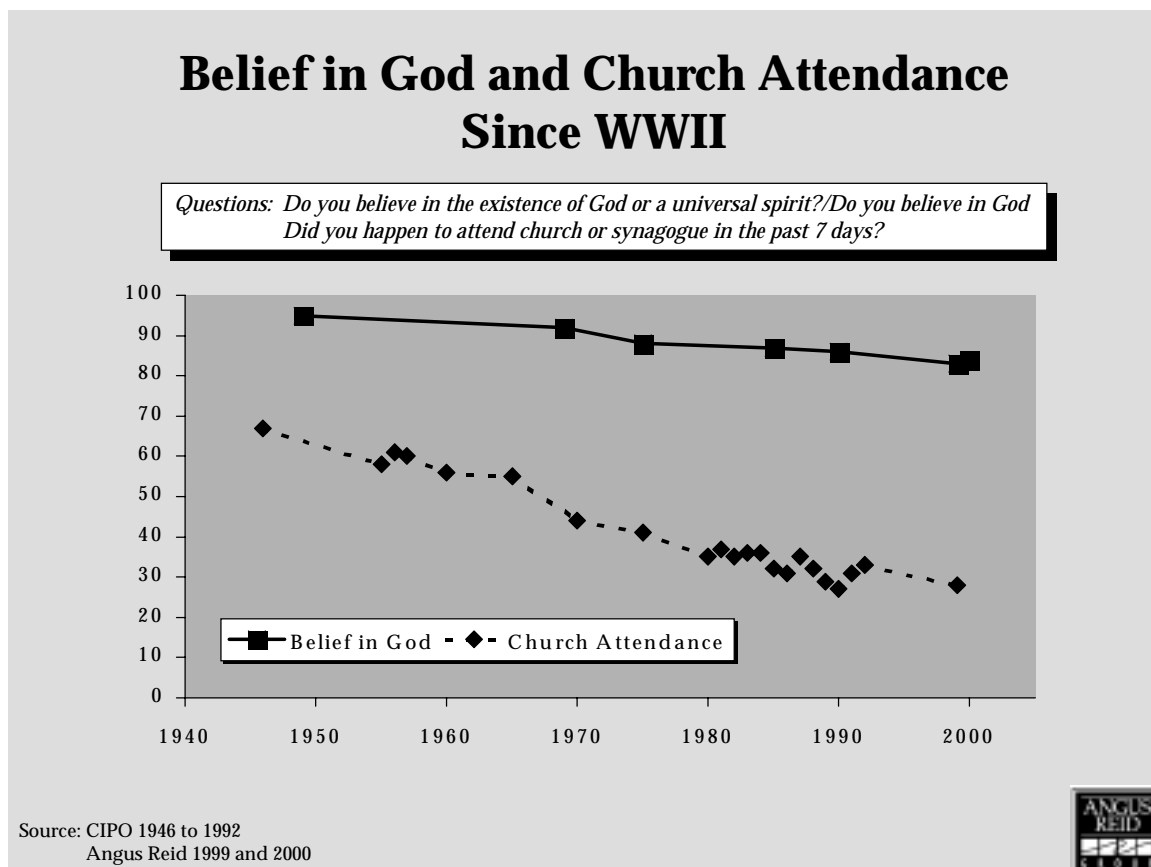
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Since WWII, Church attendance has plummeted while belief in God has remained stable

Belief in God was near universal (95%) in 1949 and declined somewhat until 1978 when it stabilised at just under nine in ten (88%), a figure not statistically different from our 2000 finding of 84%. Church attendance, however, plummeted precipitously—especially during the late sixties and early seventies—before leveling out in the mid-eighties. In 1946, a high of two thirds (67%) reported attending church in the past seven days. Attendance then slid quickly downhill during the tumultuous years between 1965 (55%) and 1980 (35%), before leveling out between 1989 (29%) and 1999 (28%). Measures of belief in God and church attendance were tracked by the now defunct Canadian Institute for Public Opinion between 1946 and 1992. The Angus Reid Group picked up this tracking in the late 1990s.



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Eight in ten (81%) agree “I don’t think you need to go to church in order to be a good Christian”

A full eight in ten (81%) Canadians agree “you don’t need to go to church in order to be a good Christian”, with 58% who "strongly agree" and another 23% who "moderately agree" . Just 10% "strongly disagree" with this assertion of the value of privatised faith with a further 7% who "moderately disagree". A remaining 2% could not or did not answer the question.

- Weekly church attenders were divided on this question. Half (49%) agreed and half (50%) disagreed. The remaining 1% had no opinion or were unable to answer. This belief in the value of private faith seems to drive church attendance (or the lack thereof). Eight in ten (79%) of those who attend once a month or more agreed church attendance was not a requirement of being a “good Christian”, as did 89% of those who attend a few times a year.
- Roman Catholics and those who identify with the Mainline Protestant churches (United Church, Anglican, Presbyterian & Lutheran) were equally likely to agree that church attendance was not a requirement of a “good Christian”(84% of Catholics and 86% of Mainline Protestants agree).
- Agreement with the statement “I don’t think you need to go to church in order to be a good Christian” was somewhat lower in Alberta (76%) and Manitoba/Saskatchewan (75%).

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Seven in ten (70%) agree “My private beliefs about Christianity are more important than what is taught by any church”

Further indication of the privatised nature of faith in Canada comes from the statement “My private beliefs about Christianity are more important than what is taught by any church”. Seven in ten (70%) agree with this statement, 45% "strongly agree" and 26% "moderately agree". Just 3% indicated that the statement did not apply to them and 1% were unable to answer.

- Weekly attenders of religious services were less likely to agree with this statement. However, even so, a clear majority of weekly attenders (62%) agreed with the proposition.
- Roman Catholics were slightly less likely to agree than were Mainline Protestants (72% of Catholics agree Vs 76% of Mainline Protestants).
- There were no notable demographic differences in the answers to this item.

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