

SHORT READS | JANUARY 2, 2018

Meditation is common across many religious groups in the U.S.

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BY DAVID MASCI AND CONRAD HACKETT



(Aleksander Rubtsov/Getty Images)

In popular culture, meditation often is associated with Eastern spirituality and its secular offshoots, such as mindfulness. But substantial shares of Americans of nearly all religious groups – as well as those who have no religious affiliation at all – say they meditate at least once a week.

Americans tend to say they meditate regularly (40% do so at least weekly) or rarely, if at all (45% seldom or never do). There’s not much middle ground – only 8% say they meditate once or twice a month and only 4% say they do so several times a year. But these figures vary widely among different U.S. religious groups.

Frequency of meditation among U.S. religious groups

% of U.S. adults who meditate weekly or more often, by religion



Source: 2014 Religious Landscape Study, conducted June 4-Sept. 30, 2014.

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At the same time, many Christians, including 49% of evangelical Protestants, 40% of Catholics and 55% of members of the historically black Protestant tradition also say they meditate once a week or more, according to the Religious Landscape Study. Among some smaller Christian groups, the share of self-described meditators is somewhat higher. Six-in-ten Mormons and 77% of Jehovah's Witnesses say they meditate at least once per week. Both [Mormons](#) and [Jehovah's Witnesses](#) are encouraged by their churches to meditate.

Within Christianity, the practice of meditation or [silent contemplation](#) dates back to the Desert Fathers (early Christian monks and nuns who sought God in the quiet and solitude of the Egyptian wilderness) during the first centuries after the death of Jesus. Today Christians of various traditions still encourage meditation as a means to try to get closer to God. Eastern-style meditation, by [contrast](#), generally involves clearing the mind.

Some Christians and others may think of meditation as a form of prayer, given that there can be some overlap between the two practices. In addition to the question about meditation, the survey asked separately about prayer, finding that the more often someone prays, the more likely they are to say they meditate. Among those who say they pray at least weekly, for instance, 50% say they meditate regularly. By contrast, among those who rarely pray (less than a few times a month or never) only 17% say they meditate.

Roughly a quarter (26%) of religiously unaffiliated Americans – defined as those who identify as atheist, agnostic or “nothing in particular” – also say they meditate regularly. Even among self-described atheists, about one-in-five (19%) meditate weekly or more often, an indication that not all people who meditate do so for religious reasons.

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