

Picking religion questions when survey space is limited

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Our guiding principles

- An independent, nonpartisan “fact tank”
- Strict nonadvocacy stance
- No commercial or market research
- Conduct opinion polling, demographic research, content analysis and other empirical social science research
- Promote a deeper understanding of issues at the intersection of religion and public affairs, among other topics

Research Question

- Those conducting surveys on non-religion topics often want to include questions on religion for reporting or for use as statistical controls in explaining social, political or economic attitudes.
- But which should you use if you only have space for one or two religion questions?

About the surveys

Africa

- 25,000+ interviews conducted across 19 countries
- Conducted Dec. 2008-April 2009
- Face-to-face

Predominantly Muslim Countries

- 32,000+ interviews conducted across 26 countries
- Conducted Oct. 2011-May 2012
- Face-to-face

United States

- 35,000+ interviews
- Conducted June-Sept., 2014
- Cell and landline

Latin America

- 30,000+ interviews conducted across 18 countries & Puerto Rico
- Conducted Oct. 2013-Mar. 2014
- Face-to-face

Central and Eastern Europe

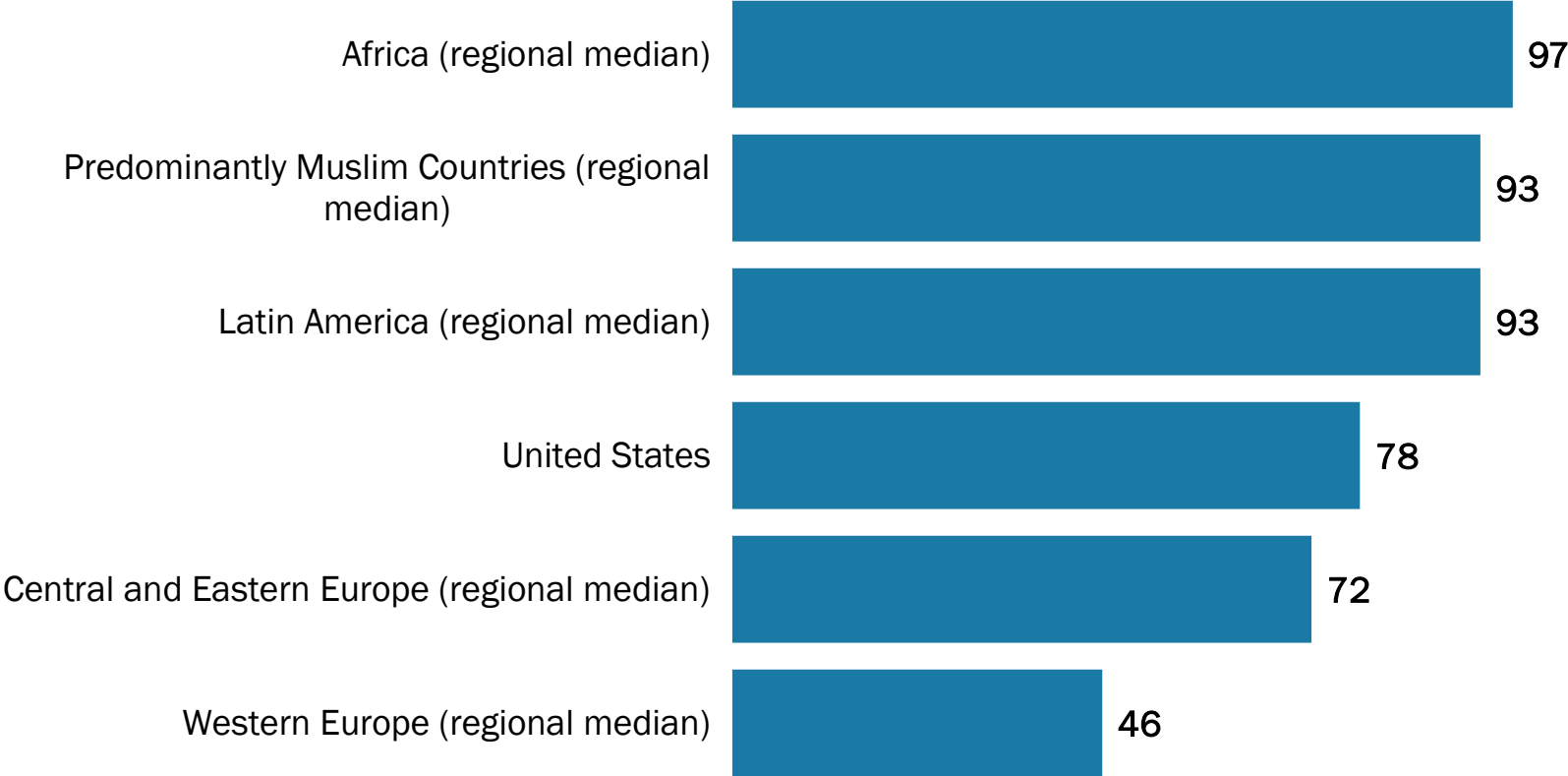
- 29,000+ interviews conducted across 18 countries
- Conducted June 2015-July 2016
- Face-to-face

Western Europe

- 24,000+ interviews conducted across 15 countries
- Conducted April-Aug., 2017
- Cell and landline

Religion's importance varies widely around the world

% who say religion is very/somewhat important in their life



**ARE THERE ONE OR TWO QUESTIONS THAT CAN BE
USED CONSISTENTLY AROUND THE WORLD?**

Approach

- **Regional logistic regression models predicting:**
 - Support for legal gay marriage
 - Support for legal abortion
 - Thinking homosexual behavior is immoral
 - Thinking abortion is immoral
- **Tested religion questions that have been included around the world:**
 - Importance of religion in individual's life (religious salience)
 - Religious service attendance
 - Prayer
 - Belief in God
 - Religious affiliation
 - Fasting
 - Donating funds to religious organization (e.g. tithing, zakat)
 - Belief in the evil eye
 - Belief in reincarnation
- **Controlling for age, gender, education, satisfaction with country's direction, personal economic situation, country fixed effects**

Africa: morality of abortion

	Full model	No religion variables
Base predicted probability	50%	76%
<i>Relative influence of each factor on the likelihood of a respondent to say that abortion is morally wrong</i>		
Belief in God	+14	
Religious salience	+11	
Daily prayer	+9	
Monthly attendance	+3	
Christian (vs. unaffiliated)	-11	
Muslim (vs. unaffiliated)	-12	
Pays tithing/zakat	+5	
Fasts	+4	
Believes in evil eye	+4	
Believes in reincarnation	-1	
Male	+2	+2
Young (18 to 34)	-1	-1
Educated	-4	-2

Note: Affiliation with tribal religion or other religion/don't know/refused also included in models 1 & 3.
 Source: Survey conducted Dec. 2008-April 2009 in 19 African countries.

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Africa: morality of abortion

	Full model	No religion variables	Only affiliation
Base predicted probability	50%	76%	72%
<i>Relative influence of each factor on the likelihood of a respondent to say that abortion is morally wrong</i>			
Belief in God	+14		
Religious salience	+11		
Daily prayer	+9		
Monthly attendance	+3		
Christian (vs. unaffiliated)	-11		+4
Muslim (vs. unaffiliated)	-12		+6
Pays tithing/zakat	+5		
Fasts	+4		
Believes in evil eye	+4		
Believes in reincarnation	-1		
Male	+2	+2	+2
Young (18 to 34)	-1	-1	-1
Educated	-4	-2	-2

Note: Affiliation with tribal religion or other religion/don't know/refused also included in models 1 & 3.

Source: Survey conducted Dec. 2008-April 2009 in 19 African countries.

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Africa: morality of abortion

	Full model	No religion variables	Only affiliation	Only salience	Only God
Base predicted probability	50%	76%	72%	60%	58%
<i>Relative influence of each factor on the likelihood of a respondent to say that abortion is morally wrong</i>					
Belief in God	+14				+19
Religious salience	+11			+17	
Daily prayer	+9				
Monthly attendance	+3				
Christian (vs. unaffiliated)	-11		+4		
Muslim (vs. unaffiliated)	-12		+6		
Pays tithing/zakat	+5				
Fasts	+4				
Believes in evil eye	+4				
Believes in reincarnation	-1				
Male	+2	+2	+2	+1	+1
Young (18 to 34)	-1	-1	-1	-2	-2
Educated	-4	-2	-2	-4	-4

Note: Affiliation with tribal religion or other religion/don't know/refused also included in models 1 & 3.

Source: Survey conducted Dec. 2008-April 2009 in 19 African countries.

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Latin America: legality of abortion

	Full model	No religion variables	Only affiliation	Only salience	Only God
Base predicted probability	20%	7%	12%	12%	18%
<i>Relative influence of each factor on the likelihood of a respondent to say that abortions should be legal</i>					
Catholic (vs. unaffiliated)	-2		0		
Daily prayer	-2				
Monthly attendance	-2				
Religious salience	-4			-5	
Protestant (vs. unaffiliated)	-6		-7		
Belief in God	-9				-11
Believes in reincarnation	+5				
Believes in evil eye	+2				
Pays tithing	0				
Fasts	-3				
Educated	+11	+5	+8	+8	+10
Male	0	+1	+1	+1	+1
Young (18 to 34)	-1	0	0	0	0

Note: Affiliation with other religion/don't know/refused also included in models 1 & 3.

Source: Survey conducted Oct. 2013-Mar. 2014 in 18 Latin American countries and Puerto Rico.

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Latin America: legality of abortion

	Full model	No religion variables	Affiliation and salience	Affiliation and God	Affiliation, God and salience
Base predicted probability	20%	7%	15%	21%	22%
<i>Relative influence of each factor on the likelihood of a respondent to say that abortions should be legal</i>					
Catholic (vs. unaffiliated)	-2		-4	-6	-3
Daily prayer	-2				
Monthly attendance	-2				
Religious salience	-4		-5		-5
Protestant (vs. unaffiliated)	-6		-8	-11	-9
Belief in God	-9			-10	-9
Believes in reincarnation	+5				
Believes in evil eye	+2				
Pays tithing	0				
Fasts	-3				
Educated	+11	+5	+9	+10	+11
Male	0	+1	0	+6	0
Young (18 to 34)	-1	0	0	0	0

Note: Affiliation with other religion/don't know/refused also included in models 1 & 3.

Source: Survey conducted Oct. 2013-Mar. 2014 in 18 Latin American countries and Puerto Rico.

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Conclusions

- **In several regions, belief in God is the consistently best proxy for all other religion questions. However, the interpretation or relevance of belief in God can vary between regions. For example,**
 - In a Muslim context, asking about belief in God can be offensive or is often asked as part of Islam's first pillar – belief in one god, Allah, and his prophet Muhammed – which is double-barreled.
 - The regions included are predominantly Christian and Muslim, and in other religious contexts the impact may be different.
- **Salience of religion is frequently the second best proxy in each region (if not the best), and in no region yet tested does it not work.**
- **On its own, religious affiliation typically does not work as the proxy for overall religiosity.**
 - But when combined with salience or belief in God, it gets much closer to replicating the full model.

Future research

- Use data from other sources to see if within-region patterns hold
- Use data from other regions to see if general patterns hold in Asia (among non-Abrahamic faiths)
- Run models that include all regions at once

Contact Information

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Latin America: legality of abortion

	Full model	No religion variables	Only attendance	Only prayer
Base predicted probability	20%	7%	9%	9%
<i>Relative influence of each factor on the likelihood of a respondent to say that abortions should be legal</i>				
Catholic (vs. unaffiliated)	-2			
Daily prayer	-2			-3
Monthly attendance	-2		-3	
Religious salience	-4			
Protestant (vs. unaffiliated)	-6			
Belief in God	-9			
Believes in reincarnation	+5			
Believes in evil eye	+2			
Pays tithing	0			
Fasts	-3			
Educated	+11	+5	+6	+6
Male	0	+1	0	0
Young (18 to 34)	-1	0	-1	0

Note: Affiliation with other religion/don't know/refused also included in models 1 & 3.

Source: Survey conducted Oct. 2013-Mar. 2014 in 18 Latin American countries and Puerto Rico.

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United States: legality of abortion

	Full model	No religion variables	Only affiliation	Only salience	Only God
Base predicted probability	88%	50%	73%	79%	83%
<i>Relative influence of each factor on the likelihood of a respondent to say that abortion is morally wrong</i>					
Monthly attendance	+3				
Protestant (vs. unaffiliated)	-2		-29		
Catholic (vs. unaffiliated)	-2		-25		
Belief in God	-8				-34
Religious salience	-8			-33	
Daily prayer	-8				
Educated	+4	+15	+9	+7	+6
Young (18 to 34)	-2	+5	-1	0	+1
Male	-4	-1	-3	-3	-3

Note: Affiliation with other religion/don't know/refused also included in models 1 & 3.

Source: Survey conducted Jul.-Sep. 2014.

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