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Religion and Spirituality in East Asian Societies

A survey in Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and neighboring Vietnam finds many people don't identify with a religion but say they believe in unseen beings, venerate ancestors' spirits and engage in ritual practices

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About Pew Research Center

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How we did this

For this report, we surveyed 10,390 adults across East Asia and neighboring Vietnam. Local interviewers administered the survey in seven languages from June to September 2023. Interviews were conducted over the phone in four places: Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea and Taiwan. In Vietnam, interviews took place face-to-face.

This survey, funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts and the John Templeton Foundation, is part of the [Pew-Templeton Global Religious Futures project](#), a broader effort by Pew Research Center to study religious change and its impact on societies around the world.

The Center previously has conducted religion-focused surveys across [sub-Saharan Africa](#); the [Middle East-North Africa region](#) and many countries with [large Muslim populations](#); [Latin America](#); [Israel](#); [Central and Eastern Europe](#); [Western Europe](#); [India](#); [South and Southeast Asia](#); and the [United States](#).

When we designed the survey, we took several steps to help ensure that the questions would be culturally appropriate and that respondents would understand their intended meaning. We consulted with an advisory panel of academic experts on religion in Asia. We conducted cognitive interviews in Japan and Taiwan. (In cognitive interviews, respondents are asked to read a question aloud, to answer it, and to discuss their thinking.) The full survey questionnaire also was pretested in all five locations prior to fieldwork.

The questionnaire was developed in English and translated into six other languages. Professional linguists with native proficiency independently checked the translations. In questions about belief in “god,” translators were instructed to choose the most generic possible [word for god in each language](#) and to avoid terms that refer exclusively to the god(s) or goddess(es) of any particular religion.

Respondents were selected using a probability-based sample design. Data was weighted to account for different probabilities of selection and to align with demographic benchmarks for the adult population. This ensures that the surveys are representative of the broader public in terms of age, gender and education.

For more information, refer to the report’s [Methodology section](#) and the [full survey questionnaire](#).

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Fieldwork for the survey was conducted under the direction of Langer Research Associates and D3 Systems.

While the analysis for this report was guided by our consultations with the advisers, Pew Research Center is solely responsible for the interpretation and reporting of the data.

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Religion and Spirituality in East Asian Societies

A survey in Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and neighboring Vietnam finds many people don't identify with a religion but say they believe in unseen beings, venerate ancestors' spirits and engage in ritual practices

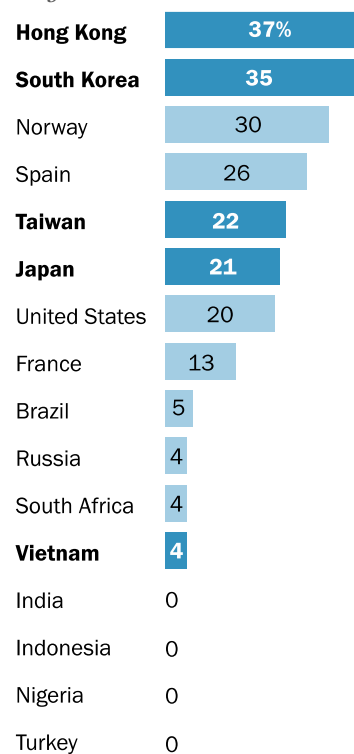
By some measures, East Asia seems like one of the least religious regions in the world.

Relatively few East Asian adults [pray daily](#) or say religion is [very important in their lives](#). And rates of disaffiliation – people leaving religion – are [among the highest in the world](#), according to a new Pew Research Center survey of more than 10,000 adults in East Asia and neighboring Vietnam.

Yet, the survey also finds that many people across the region continue to hold religious or spiritual beliefs and to engage in traditional rituals.

Religious disaffiliation in East Asia and Vietnam compared with select countries

% of adults in each place who say they have left their childhood religion and no longer identify with any religion



Note: Selected from 102 places surveyed by Pew Research Center since 2008. Those from past surveys are generally representative of regional patterns. For data and analysis of all 102 places, read “Religious switching in East Asia compared with the rest of the world” later in this report.

Source: Surveys conducted between 2008 and 2023. “Religion and Spirituality in East Asian Societies”

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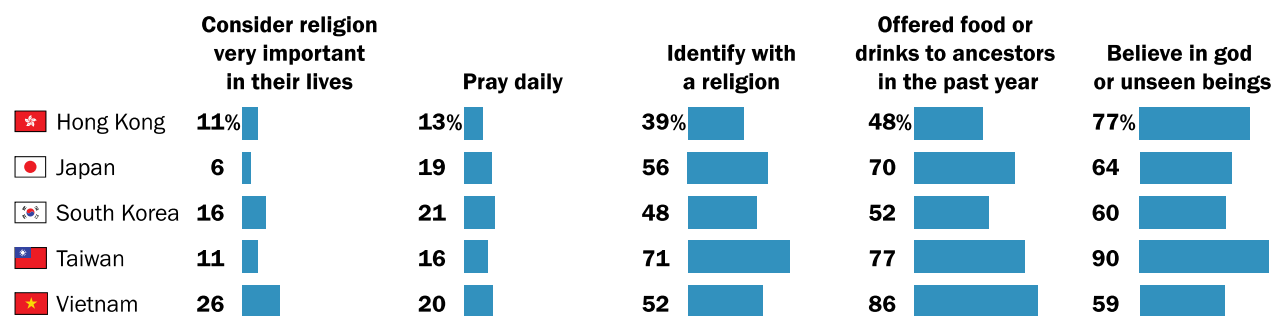
- A majority of adults surveyed in Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and Vietnam say they **believe in god or unseen beings**.
- Many also participate in **ancestor veneration rituals** with religious underpinnings. In Japan, for instance, 70% report that they have offered food, water or drinks to honor or care for their ancestors in the past 12 months. In Vietnam, 86% have performed this ritual in the last year.
- **Praying or offering respects to religious figures or deities** is fairly common. For example, 30% of adults in Hong Kong say they pray or offer their respects to *Guanyin*, [a deity associated with compassion](#), and 46% in Taiwan pray or offer respects to Buddha.

Large numbers of adults across the region – ranging from 27% in Taiwan to 61% in Hong Kong – say they have “no religion.” But even [among these religiously unaffiliated people](#), half or more leave offerings for deceased ancestors; at least four-in-ten believe in god or unseen beings; and a quarter or more say that mountains, rivers or trees have spirits.

In short, when we measure religion in these societies by what people *believe* and *do*, rather than whether they say they have a religion, the region is more religiously vibrant than it might initially seem.

Few East Asians consider religion very important in their lives, but many make offerings to ancestors and believe in god or unseen beings

% of adults in each place who say they ...



Note: Respondents were asked if they have offered food, water or drinks to honor or take care of ancestors in the past 12 months. Respondents were asked separately if they believe in god or if they think there are unseen beings in the world, like deities or spirits. “God” was translated into each language using as generic a term as possible, without referencing any specific religion’s god(s) or goddess(es).

Source: Survey conducted June 2-Sept. 17, 2023, among adults in five Asian publics. Read the Methodology for details.

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[Collecting data on religion](#) in East Asia is [a complex challenge](#). The [concept of religion](#) was imported to the region by scholars only about a century ago, and common translations of “religion” (such as [zongjiao](#) in Chinese, [shūkyō](#) in Japanese and [jonggyo](#) in Korean) often are understood to refer to organized, hierarchical forms of religion, such as Christianity or new religious movements – not to traditional Asian forms of spirituality.

The survey included a few questions that have long been used to measure religious observance in other parts of the world, such as how important religion is in people’s lives. But this report places more emphasis on new questions designed to measure beliefs and practices that are relatively common in Asian societies, including: [ancestor veneration](#); the presence of [spirits in the natural world](#); offering respects to [deities and religious figures](#); beliefs about [life after death](#); and [personal connections to religion](#) aside from identity.

The report is based on a major, regional survey of 10,390 adults in four East Asian societies (Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan) and neighboring Vietnam. The survey was conducted in seven languages from June 2 to Sept. 17, 2023. It builds on studies that Pew Research Center previously has published on religion in [China](#), [India](#), and [South and Southeast Asia](#).

More highlights in this Overview: [Religious switching in the region](#) | [Religious switching in East Asia compared with the rest of the world](#) | [Common beliefs and practices](#) | [How former Buddhists in East Asia compare with lifelong Buddhists](#) | [Other key findings in this report](#)

The rest of this report covers:

- [Chapter 1: Religious landscape and change](#)
- [Chapter 2: Religion as a way of life](#)
- [Chapter 3: Beliefs](#)
- [Chapter 4: Practices](#)
- [Chapter 5: Ancestor veneration, funerals and afterlife beliefs](#)
- [Chapter 6: Religion, politics and society](#)

How we define East Asia

Typically, East Asia is [considered to encompass](#) China, Hong Kong, Japan, Macau, Mongolia, North Korea, South Korea and Taiwan. In geopolitical terms, Vietnam is often categorized as part of Southeast Asia. But we surveyed Vietnam along with East Asia for several reasons, including its [historic ties to China](#) and [Confucian traditions](#). Moreover, [Buddhists in Vietnam](#) practice the same strain of Buddhism (Mahayana) found across East Asia.

Throughout this report, the term “East Asia” refers to Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea and Taiwan.

When discussing trends throughout the broader “region,” we include Vietnam.

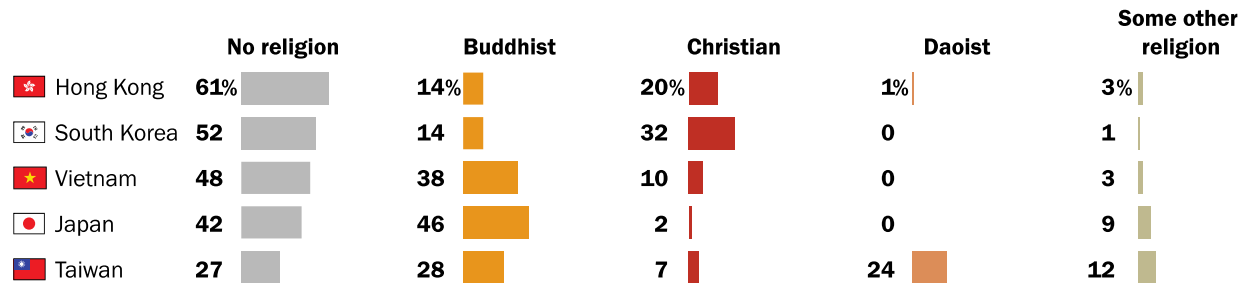
For legal and logistical reasons, we did not survey several other places that are generally considered part of East Asia. At present, China does not allow [non-Chinese organizations](#) to conduct surveys on the mainland, and public opinion surveys are not possible in North Korea. Conducting nationally representative surveys in Mongolia is difficult due to the nomadic lifestyle of a large part of its people. We did not survey Macau because its population is relatively small.

Religious switching in the region

Most people surveyed either have no religious affiliation or identify as Buddhist. Moreover, in South Korea and Hong Kong, substantial shares of adults identify as Christian, and Taiwan has a sizable number of Daoists (also spelled Taoists).¹

The most common religion in Hong Kong, South Korea and Vietnam is ‘no religion’

% of adults in each place who currently identify as ...



Note: “Some other religion” also includes those who selected “Muslim,” “Confucian,” “Local religions/Indigenous religions,” “Combination of religions,” and in Japan, “Shinto.” Don’t know/Refused responses are not shown.

Source: Survey conducted June 2-Sept. 17, 2023, among adults in five Asian publics. Read the Methodology for details.

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¹ According to Vietnam’s [2019 Population and Housing Census](#), 86% of its total population has no religion, a much larger share than the 48% of Vietnamese adults in our survey who identify with no religion. Vietnam’s census shows a far smaller share of Buddhists (5% of the overall population) than we measured (38% of adults). However, according to the U.S. State Department, [the Vietnamese census counts people as Buddhist](#) only if they have formally registered with the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha.

But religious identification in the region is undergoing a remarkable amount of change. Many people say they were raised with a different religious identity than the one they now claim.

The shares who have switched away from their religious upbringing to some other religion – or to no religion – range from 17% of adults in Vietnam to 53% each in Hong Kong and South Korea.

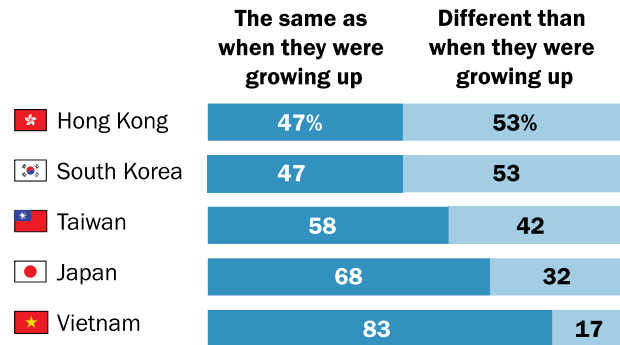
(We use the term “switch” rather than “convert” to indicate that the movement goes in all directions and does not necessarily involve any formal rite or ceremony.)

Rates of religious switching are based on movement *between* major world religious traditions, not switching *within* a tradition. For instance, switching between Christianity and Buddhism is picked up by these measures, but switching between Catholicism and Protestantism or between different branches of Islam is not.

We also count someone who has moved from a specific religion to no religious identity – or vice versa – as having switched.

53% of adults in Hong Kong and South Korea have changed their religious identity since childhood

% of adults in each place whose religious identity today is ...



Note: In this analysis, we measure switching between the following categories: Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu, “Other religions,” “No religion,” and those who did not answer the question. Source: Survey conducted June 2-Sept. 17, 2023, among adults in five Asian publics. Read the Methodology for details. “Religion and Spirituality in East Asian Societies”

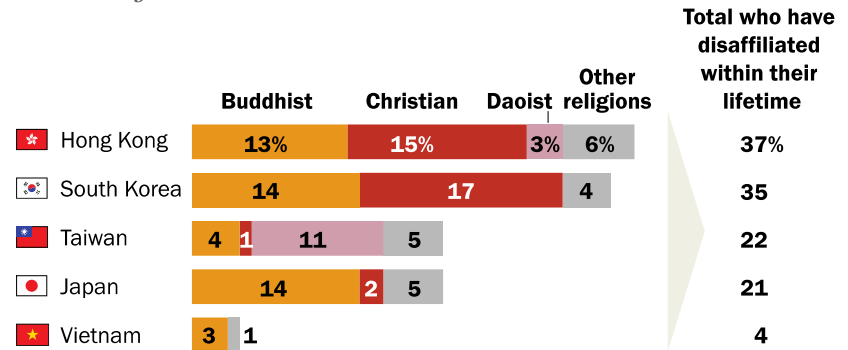
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The bulk of the switching is disaffiliation: Many East Asians say they were raised in a religion during their childhood and now identify with none. (This is much less common in neighboring Vietnam.)

The departures are mostly from Buddhism, Christianity and Daoism. For instance, 15% of adults in Hong Kong say they were raised as Christians but now have no religion. And 14% of South Korean and Japanese adults report that they were brought up as Buddhists but no longer identify with any religion.

Many in East Asia who no longer identify with religion were raised Buddhist

% of adults in each place who say they were raised ____ but now identify with no religion



Note: "Other religions" in this chart includes those who say they were raised Muslim; Confucian; following local or Indigenous religions, a combination of religions or some other religion; those who did not state their childhood religion; and in Japan, those who say they were raised "Shinto." Due to rounding, figures may not add to subtotals indicated.

Source: Survey conducted June 2-Sept. 17, 2023, among adults in five Asian publics. Read the Methodology for details.

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However, the high rates of religious switching do not arise exclusively from people abandoning religion. Roughly one-in-ten adults in South Korea (12%) and Hong Kong (9%) currently identify as Christian but were raised in a different religious tradition, such as Buddhism, or were raised with no religious identity.

Similarly, 11% of adults in Taiwan and 10% in Vietnam were raised outside Buddhism but now identify as Buddhist.

Still, on balance, the religiously unaffiliated population has had a *net gain* from switching in four of the places surveyed, drawing from every other religious group in our analysis.

In Hong Kong, for example, 30% of adults say they were raised without a religion, while 61% currently identify as religiously unaffiliated – a gain of 31 percentage points.

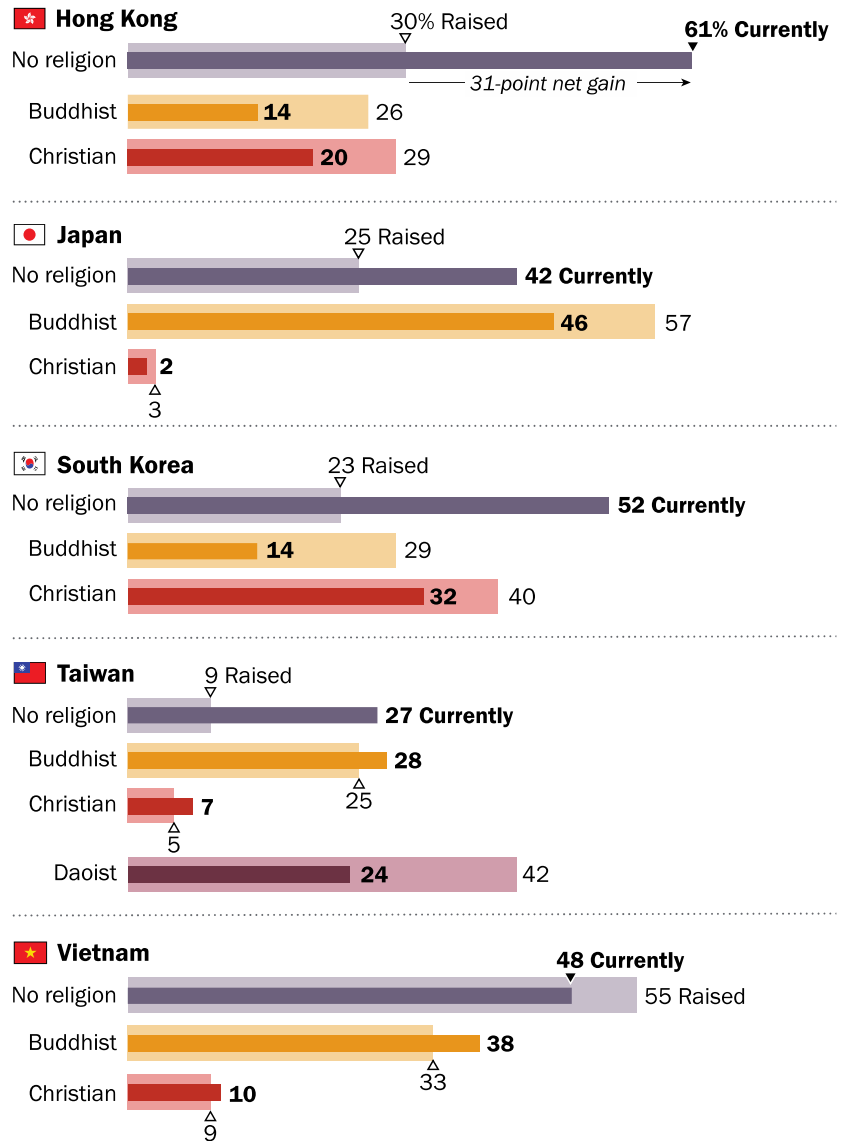
Vietnam is the only place surveyed where the unaffiliated population has experienced a *net loss* due to religious switching: 55% of Vietnamese adults say they were raised without a religion, while 48% identify with no religion today.

Meanwhile, Buddhists have experienced net losses from religious switching in Hong Kong, Japan and South Korea. For instance, 29% of adults in South Korea say they were raised Buddhist, but 14% say they are currently Buddhist – a 15-point decline.

On the other hand, Buddhists have seen slight *increases* due to religious switching in Taiwan and Vietnam.

Buddhism has lost adherents to ‘religious switching’ in Hong Kong, Japan and South Korea

% of all adults in each place who were raised as and currently identify as each religious affiliation group



Source: Survey conducted June 2-Sept. 17, 2023, among adults in five Asian publics. Read the Methodology for details. “Religion and Spirituality in East Asian Societies”

(Read more about religious switching in [Chapter 1.](#))

Religious switching in East Asia compared with the rest of the world

East Asian rates of religious switching (from 32% in Japan to 53% in Hong Kong and South Korea) are higher than Pew Research Center has measured in many other places.² For example, in our [previous surveys of religion across Asia since 2019](#) – including in Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Sri Lanka and Thailand – only [Singapore’s rate of religious switching](#) (35%) approaches the rates seen in East Asian societies.

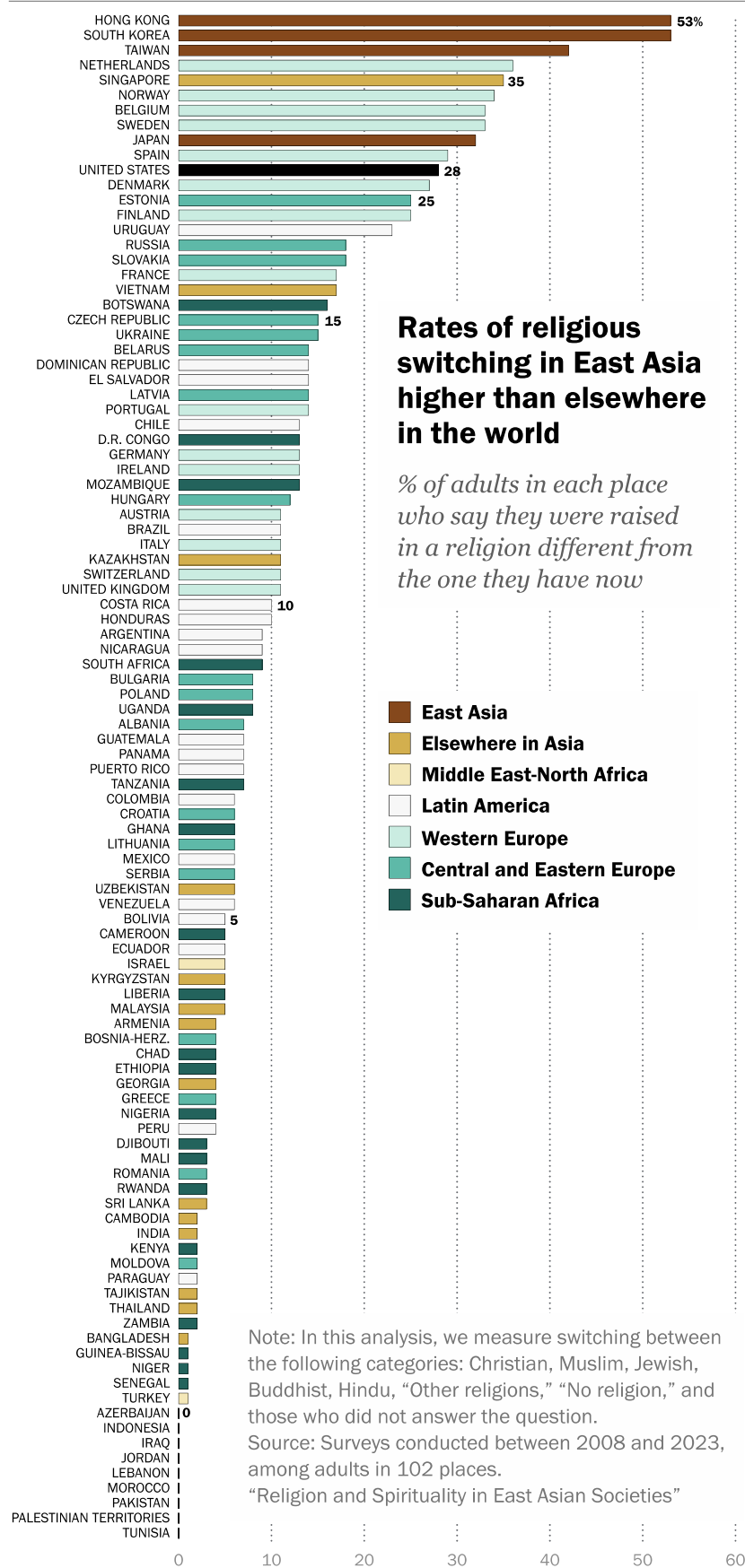
Even in [our 2017 survey of 15 countries in Western Europe](#) – a region where [decades of disaffiliation](#) have led to sharp growth in the number of religiously unaffiliated people – we did not find any country in which the switching rate exceeded 40%. (The highest was 36%, in the Netherlands.)

And in the United States, 28% of adults no longer identify with the religious tradition in which they were raised, according to [data we collected in summer 2023](#).

Religious switching is far less common in other parts of the world, such as Latin America and the Middle East-North Africa region.³

² For the purposes of this analysis, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia are included in Asia. These three Caucasus countries are located between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea in a border area between Europe and Asia.

³ In this analysis, we measure switching between the following categories: Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu, “Other religions,” “No religion,” and those who did not answer the question. If more detailed categories were used in the analysis (such as Catholic and Protestant, different Protestant denominations, or various schools of thought within Buddhism), the shares who are considered to have switched religions would increase. (As an example, read our 2015 detailed analysis of [religious switching in the United States](#).) We have analyzed switching at the level of major world religious traditions to allow for consistent comparisons around the globe.



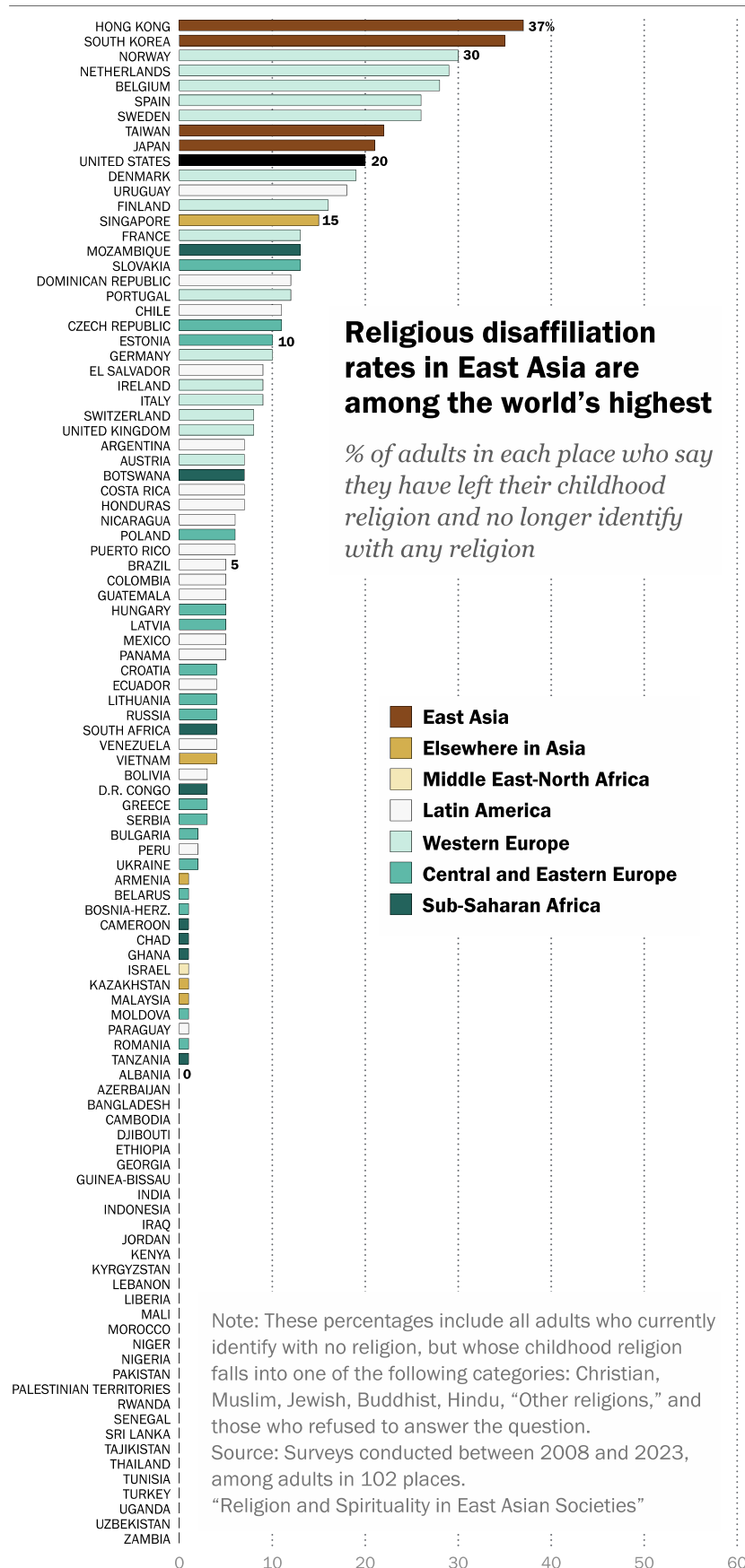
We also analyzed the data we have collected around the world since 2008 to see how *disaffiliation* rates in East Asia and Vietnam compare with other places.

Hong Kong (37%) and South Korea (35%) have the world's highest shares of adults who say they were raised in a religion but who no longer identify with one. They are followed by several Western European countries, including Norway (30%), the Netherlands (29%) and Belgium (28%).

Also high on the list are two other East Asian societies: Taiwan (22%) and Japan (21%).

In the vast majority of places we have surveyed over the years – including most locations surveyed in [Central and Eastern Europe](#), the [Middle East-North Africa](#) region and [much of sub-Saharan Africa](#) – roughly 5% of adults or fewer say they were raised with a religion but now have none. Of the five places we surveyed for this report, only Vietnam has a disaffiliation rate that low (4%).

(For information on when we conducted surveys in 102 countries and territories, go to [Appendix A](#).)



Common beliefs and practices

Pew Research Center’s religion surveys often ask, “How important is religion in your life?” We use this question as one way, among many, to measure the role that religion plays in people’s lives across geographies and over time.

Given the comparatively low rates of religious affiliation in some parts of East Asia, as well as the complexity of translating the word “religion” into some Asian languages, it is perhaps not surprising that relatively few people in the region say religion is “very important” to them.

In the five places we surveyed, no more than 26% of adults say religion is very important in their lives, including just 6% in Japan.⁴ [In other parts of the world](#) – including some neighboring Asian countries – surveys have often found much higher figures.⁵

However, many people who do not consider religion to be very important in their lives nevertheless engage in a variety of religious practices and hold a range of spiritual beliefs.

People in the region are more likely to engage with the spiritual world than to say religion is very important in their lives

% of adults in each place who say they ...

	Think karma exists	Have been visited by the spirit of an ancestor in a dream or some other form	Ever practice meditation	Pray daily	Consider religion very important in their lives
Hong Kong	76%	16%	22%	13%	11%
Japan	16	36	30	19	6
South Korea	48	40	59	21	16
Taiwan	87	36	34	16	11
Vietnam	75	42	16	20	26

Note: Darker shades represent higher values. Respondents were asked separately if they have ever felt that the spirit of an ancestor has come to visit them in a dream, or to be with them in any other form.

Source: Survey conducted June 2-Sept. 17, 2023, among adults in five Asian publics. Read the Methodology for details. “Religion and Spirituality in East Asian Societies”

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⁴ Pew Research Center was unable to survey in China due to Chinese government restrictions on foreign research organizations. However, the 2018 World Values Survey in China found that 13% of Chinese adults say religion is very important in their lives. Read our 2023 report [“Measuring Religion in China”](#) for more information.

⁵ In India, for example, 84% of adults say religion is very important in their lives, according to [our 2019-2020 survey there](#). In the six countries we surveyed [in South and Southeast Asia](#) in 2022, majorities of adults in all countries except Singapore say this. Even in Singapore, 36% of adults view religion as very important in their lives. Only in Europe have Center studies on religion found attitudes on this question somewhat similar to East Asia, with a median of 20% of adults across 34 European countries saying religion is very important in their lives, according to [our 2015-2017 surveys in Central/Eastern and Western Europe](#).

In Taiwan, for example, just 11% of adults say religion is very important to them, but 87% believe in karma, 36% say they have ever been visited by the spirit of an ancestor, and 34% say they ever practice meditation.

The spirits of ancestors have long been a focus of rituals in East Asia and neighboring Vietnam, and ancestor veneration remains widely practiced. Roughly half of adults or more in all the places we surveyed say they have recently offered food, water or drinks to honor or take care of their ancestors. This practice is common among Buddhists and people who do not identify with a religion.

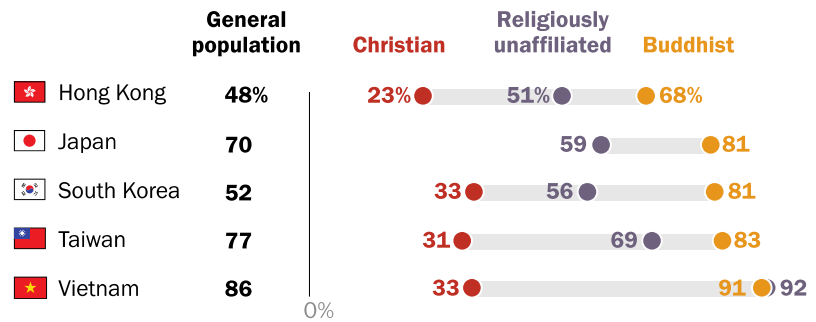
One particularly striking example: 92% of religiously unaffiliated Vietnamese adults say they have made an offering to ancestors in the past year.

These connections with deceased relatives are not always seen as one-way. In every place but Hong Kong, about four-in-ten adults say they have been visited by the spirit of an ancestor in a dream or some other form.

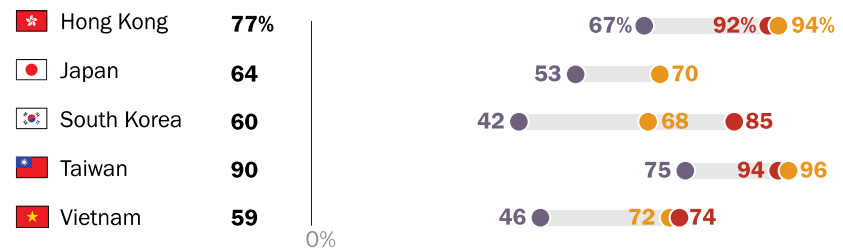
Most adults surveyed in all five places say they believe in god or unseen beings, like deities or spirits. While religiously unaffiliated adults believe in god or unseen beings at lower rates than Christians and

At least half of religiously unaffiliated adults in the places surveyed report recently offering food or drink to care for their ancestors

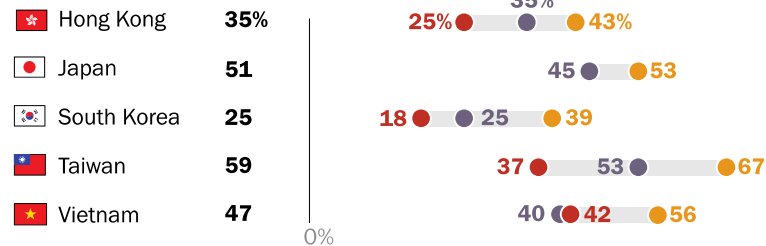
% of adults in each place who say they have offered food, water or drinks to honor or take care of their ancestors in the past 12 months



% of adults in each place who say they believe in god or unseen beings



% of adults in each place who say they think mountains, rivers or trees have their own spirits



Note: Respondents were asked separately if they believe in god or if they think there are unseen beings in the world, like deities or spirits. "God" was translated into each language using as generic a term as possible, without referencing any specific religion's god(s) or goddess(es). Japan's sample size of Christians is too small for analysis.

Source: Survey conducted June 2-Sept. 17, 2023, among adults in five Asian public. Read the Methodology for details.

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Buddhists do, at least four-in-ten unaffiliated adults in each place express these beliefs. In Taiwan, three-quarters of religiously unaffiliated people say they believe in god or unseen beings.

A sizable share of adults also view nature as a realm of invisible spirits. In Taiwan, Japan and Vietnam, about half of adults or more say they believe that mountains, rivers or trees [have their own spirits](#).

How former Buddhists in East Asia compare with lifelong Buddhists

As we have seen, there is a lot of religious disaffiliation in East Asia: 37% of adults in Hong Kong, 35% in South Korea, 22% in Taiwan and 21% in Japan say they were raised in a religion such as Buddhism, Christianity or Daoism during childhood but no longer identify with any religion today. (By comparison, only 4% of Vietnamese adults have disaffiliated.)

At the same time, a lot of people who say they have “no religion” nevertheless express some religious beliefs and say they engage in some traditional spiritual behaviors.

This raises the question: How meaningful is religious affiliation in Asia? Do the religious labels even matter?

The short answer is yes – the way people describe themselves *does* have meaning. Consider, for example, three categories of East Asians:

- Lifelong Buddhists (people who say they were raised as Buddhists and still consider themselves Buddhists)
- Former Buddhists, now unaffiliated (people who say they were raised as Buddhists but no longer identify with any religion)
- Lifelong unaffiliated (people who say they were raised in no religion and still don't identify with one)

There are enough people in all three categories in the four East Asian societies we surveyed – Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea and Taiwan – to allow for detailed analysis of each group. In all these places, lifelong Buddhists consistently report engaging in religious practices and holding religious beliefs at significantly higher rates than former Buddhists do. But there also may be some residual effect of a Buddhist childhood on the former Buddhists, who, on average, are somewhat more religious than the lifelong unaffiliated.

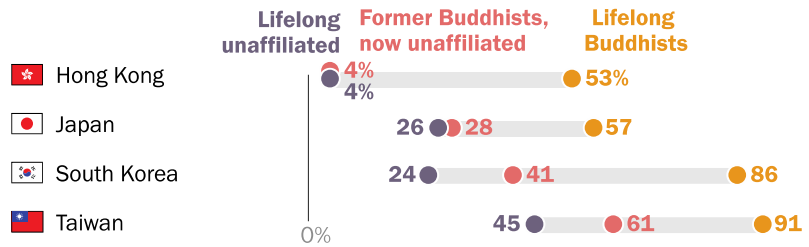
For instance, lifelong Buddhists in Taiwan are 30 percentage points more likely than former Buddhists to say they generally go to temples or pagodas (91% vs. 61%). The former Buddhists, in turn, are 16 points more likely to visit temples or pagodas than are Taiwanese who have been unaffiliated all their lives (61% vs. 45%).

Similar patterns appear on survey questions about venerating ancestors. While most people in all three categories say they have burned incense in the past 12 months to honor or take care of their ancestors, this activity is most common among lifelong Buddhists. In Hong Kong, 84% of lifelong Buddhists have burned incense for ancestors in the past year, while 65% of former Buddhists and 59% of the lifelong unaffiliated say they have done so.

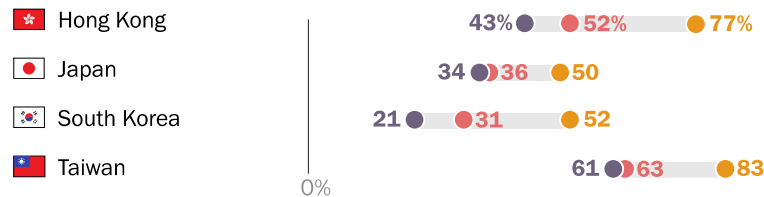
Moreover, in their concept of what Buddhism is, former Buddhists generally are closer to the lifelong unaffiliated than to lifelong Buddhists. A majority of Japan's lifelong Buddhists (57%) view

In East Asia, most Buddhist-to-unaffiliated switchers and lifelong religiously unaffiliated adults have recently burned incense

% of adults in each place who say they generally go to temples or pagodas



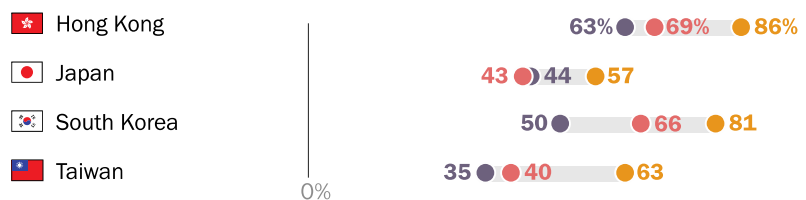
% of adults in each place who say they think rebirth exists



% of adults in each place who say they have burned incense in the past 12 months to honor or take care of their ancestors



% of adults in each place who say Buddhism is a set of ethical teachings to guide actions



Source: Survey conducted June 2-Sept. 17, 2023, among adults in five Asian publics. Read the Methodology for details.

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Buddhism as “a set of ethical teachings to guide actions,” while smaller shares of former Buddhists (43%) and the lifelong unaffiliated (44%) say this.

In short, how people describe their present religious affiliation and their childhood affiliation tends to correspond with their level of religious belief and practice.

Other key findings in this report

- At least one-fifth of adults in each of the four East Asian societies surveyed, as well as 79% of adults in neighboring Vietnam, report feeling that the spirit of an ancestor has come to their aid at some point in their lives. ([Chapter 5](#) has more information about interactions with ancestors.)
- Most people surveyed across the region say they feel a personal connection to the “way of life” of at least one religious belief or philosophy, even if it’s not exactly the same as their current religious identity. For instance, 34% of South Korean Christians say they feel a personal connection to the Buddhist way of life, and 26% of Buddhists in South Korea feel a connection to the Christian way of life. ([Chapter 2](#) discusses religion as a way of life and people’s affinity for multiple traditions.)
- Large shares of adults in all religious groups say Buddhism is “a set of ethical teachings to guide actions,” “a culture one is part of” and “a religion one chooses to follow.” ([Chapter 2](#) has more detail on how the survey respondents define Buddhism, as well as some beliefs and practices that Buddhists view as crucial to being “truly” Buddhist.)
- People across the region – Christians in particular – generally view religion as a positive force in their societies. ([Chapter 6](#) offers more information on the intersection of religion and society.)

1. Religious landscape and change

Most people in the five Asian societies surveyed either identify as Buddhist or say they have no religion. But substantial shares in South Korea and Hong Kong identify as Christian, and Taiwan has a sizable number of Daoists (also spelled Taoists).

Religious “switching” – changing from one’s childhood religion to a different religious identity in adulthood – is quite common [in Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea and Taiwan](#). Switching is less common in Vietnam.

People who were raised in a religion but no longer identify with *any* religion account for most of the switching in the region.

For example, in Hong Kong and South Korea, roughly half of adults say they have left the religion in which they were raised; many have given up Buddhism or Christianity and are now religiously unaffiliated.

In all five places, however, most people who say they were raised with “no religion” have retained that identity, remaining unaffiliated in adulthood.

Despite this region’s relatively high levels of religious switching, [public attitudes toward proselytizing](#) are mixed. Large majorities in Japan and South Korea say it is generally unacceptable for people to try to persuade others to join their religion. In Hong Kong, Taiwan and Vietnam, respondents are more supportive of conversion efforts.

Religious composition

In three places surveyed, the religiously unaffiliated are the largest group: Most adults in Hong Kong (61%), and roughly half in South Korea (52%) and Vietnam (48%), say they have no religion.⁶ Substantial shares in Japan (42%) and Taiwan (27%) say the same.

Buddhists also are prevalent in the region. We find that 46% of Japanese, 38% of Vietnamese and 28% of Taiwanese adults identify as Buddhist, while 14% in both Hong Kong and South Korea are Buddhist.

Christians are not the largest religious group in any of the five places surveyed, although roughly one-third of South Koreans identify as Christian, as do 20% of Hong Kongers and 10% of Vietnamese adults.

In Hong Kong, 61% have no religion, while the rest are mostly Christian or Buddhist

% of adults in each place who identify as ...

	No religion	Buddhist	Christian	Daoist	Some other religion
Hong Kong	61%	14%	20%	1%	3%
South Korea	52	14	32	0	1
Vietnam	48	38	10	0	3
Japan	42	46	2	0	9
Taiwan	27	28	7	24	12

Note: "Some other religion" also includes those who selected "Muslim," "Confucian," "Local religions/Indigenous religions," "Combination of religions," and in Japan, "Shinto." Don't know/Refused responses are not shown.

Source: Survey conducted June 2-Sept. 17, 2023, among adults in five Asian publics. Read the Methodology for details.

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Overall, the religiously unaffiliated, Buddhists and Christians account for roughly 90% of adults or more in four of the places surveyed. In Taiwan, those three religious groups make up 62% of adults, and an additional 24% are Daoist.

⁶ The religious identification question in this survey asked: "What is your religion, if any? Buddhist; Catholic, Protestant or other Christian; Muslim; Daoist; Confucian; Local religions/Indigenous religions; No religion; or Some other religion." In Japan, "Shinto" was also listed as an answer option. (In Vietnam, we began the question with "Regardless of how the government records your religion, ...") People who answered "No religion" are categorized as having no religion or as being religiously unaffiliated. This question was worded slightly differently in Asia than in some other Pew Research Center surveys – particularly [our U.S. surveys](#) – which don't offer a "No religion" option but, instead, offer three separate choices – atheist, agnostic and "nothing in particular" – that are combined into a "religiously unaffiliated" category. In this report, we refer to people with "no religion" and the "religiously unaffiliated" interchangeably.

Types of Buddhism

We did not ask respondents to say which of the [three major strands](#) of Buddhism they follow, though past research has shown that Mahayana Buddhism is [prevalent in Japan, South Korea and Vietnam](#). Mahayana, which originated in China, [teaches its followers to strive](#) to become *bodhisattvas*, or “wisdom bodies,” who work toward enlightenment for themselves and all beings. The other major strands of Buddhism – Theravada and Vajrayana (also known as Tibetan Buddhism) – are more prevalent in places such as Thailand, Sri Lanka and Nepal.

Evangelical Christians

Adults who self-identify as Christian were asked a follow-up question: “Would you describe yourself as a born-again or evangelical Christian?”

About half of Christians in South Korea say they are born-again or evangelical. Smaller shares of Christians in Vietnam (44%) and Hong Kong (36%) give the same answer.

In South Korea, older Christian adults are more likely than those under 35 to say they are evangelical (54% vs. 38%). Christians without a college degree, as well as South Korean women, also are more likely than their counterparts to describe themselves as born-again or evangelical.

In Taiwan, only 8% of Christians describe themselves as born-again or evangelical.

Christians also were surveyed in Japan, but the number of Christians in our sample of Japanese adults is too small to allow their characteristics or views to be analyzed and reported separately.

51% of South Korean Christians say they are born-again or evangelical

% of Christian adults in each place who identify as born-again or evangelical

South Korea	51%
Vietnam	44
Hong Kong	36
Taiwan	8

Note: Sample size is too small to analyze Christians in Japan.
Source: Survey conducted June 2-Sept. 17, 2023, among adults in five Asian publics. Read the Methodology for details.
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How religious identity differs by age

Younger adults (ages 18 to 34) are consistently more likely than older adults not to identify with any religion. In Taiwan, for instance, younger adults are almost twice as likely as older adults to be religiously unaffiliated (41% vs. 22%).

Younger adults also tend to be less likely than older adults to identify as Buddhist.

Among Christians, there are no wide age gaps except in South Korea, where 25% of younger adults and 35% of older ones identify as Christian.

In some Asian publics, older adults are more likely than younger adults to identify as Buddhist

% of adults in each place who identify as ____, by age

		No religion	Buddhist	Christian	Daoist	Some other religion
Hong Kong	Ages 18-34	74%	4%	18%	0%	3%
	35+	57	17	21	1	3
	DIFF	+17	-13	-3	-1	-1
Japan	18-34	51	37	3	0	7
	35+	39	48	1	0	9
	DIFF	+12	-12	+1	+0	-2
South Korea	18-34	69	5	25	0	1
	35+	47	17	35	0	1
	DIFF	+22	-12	-9	-0	+0
Taiwan	18-34	41	19	5	26	9
	35+	22	32	8	24	13
	DIFF	+19	-13	-2	+2	-4
Vietnam	18-34	52	35	10	0	2
	35+	46	40	10	0	4
	DIFF	+7	-5	+1	+0	-2

Note: "Some other religion" also includes those who selected "Muslim," "Confucian," "Local religions/Indigenous religions," "Combination of religions," and in Japan, "Shinto." Don't know/Refused responses are not shown. Statistically significant differences are highlighted in **bold**. Differences are calculated before rounding.

Source: Survey conducted June 2-Sept. 17, 2023, among adults in five Asian publics. Read the Methodology for details.

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Religious switching

When demographers study [how a society's religious mix is changing](#), they typically consider five factors that drive change over time: religious switching (the voluntary choices people make about which religious groups they belong to, if any); age structure (differences in the age and sex composition of groups); fertility rates (how many children are born to women in different religious groups); mortality rates (whether people in some religious groups live longer than others); and migration rates (how many people in each religious group are moving into and out of a particular place).

This report does not attempt to measure differences in fertility, mortality or migration between religious groups. However, we measured religious switching by asking respondents two separate questions:

- What is your religion, if any?
- Thinking about when you were a child, in what religion were you raised?

The responses to these two questions allow us to calculate what percentage of the public has left a religious group (or “switched out”) and what percentage has entered (or “switched in”).

Switching can go in multiple, and partially offsetting, directions. In Hong Kong, for example, 26% of adults say they were raised as Buddhists, but just 14% currently identify as Buddhist. This is because 17% of adults in Hong Kong were raised as Buddhists but now identify with some other religion (or with no religion), while 4% were *not* raised as Buddhists but have entered Buddhism as adults.

On balance, the survey finds that religious switching has resulted in an overall (or “net”) loss to Hong Kong’s Buddhist community of 12 percentage points, after rounding to the nearest integer.

Net gains and losses for each religious group

Across the region, the religiously unaffiliated population generally has experienced the biggest net gains from religious switching, drawing large shares from every other religious category in all places except Vietnam.

In South Korea, for example, 23% of adults surveyed say they were raised without a religion, but 52% currently identify as religiously unaffiliated – a gain of 29 points. This is because 35% of South Koreans have left their childhood religion to join the ranks of the unaffiliated, while just 6% who were raised unaffiliated have joined a religion.

Only in Vietnam is this pattern of net growth among the religiously unaffiliated reversed. There, the share who claim no religious identity has *fallen* 7 points between respondents' childhoods and today (55% vs. 48%).

Meanwhile, Buddhism has experienced net losses in Hong Kong, Japan and South Korea. For instance, 57% of adults in Japan say they were raised Buddhist, while 46% are currently Buddhist – a net loss of 12 points (after rounding). This is because people who were raised Buddhist have left the community at a higher rate than people have entered Buddhism from other religious backgrounds. While 17% of Japanese adults were raised Buddhist but no longer identify as Buddhist, just 6% have switched into Buddhism after being raised in some other religious tradition.

In several Asian societies, religious switching has led to increases for the unaffiliated

% of all adults in each place who were raised in, left, entered and currently identify with each group

		Their childhood religion	Leaving group	Entering group	Current religion
Hong Kong	Buddhism	26%	-17	+4	=14%
	Christianity	29	-17	+9	=20
	No religion	30	-6	+37	=61
Japan	Buddhism	57	-17	+6	=46
	No religion	25	-4	+21	=42
South Korea	Buddhism	29	-20	+5	=14
	Christianity	40	-19	+12	=32
	No religion	23	-6	+35	=52
Taiwan	Buddhism	25	-8	+11	=28
	Daoism	42	-21	+3	=24
	No religion	9	-3	+22	=27
Vietnam	Buddhism	33	-4	+10	=38
	No religion	55	-11	+4	=48

Note: Only groups with the largest shares leaving and entering each group are shown. Due to rounding, figures may not add to subtotals indicated.

Source: Survey conducted June 2-Sept. 17, 2023, among adults in five Asian publics. Read the Methodology for details.

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In Taiwan and Vietnam, on the other hand, Buddhism has experienced slight net *increases* due to religious switching.

Also in Taiwan, Daoism has shrunk dramatically due to switching: 42% of adults say they were raised Daoist, compared with 24% who identify as Daoist today.

The percentages who identify as Christian have fallen over people's lifetimes in Hong Kong (net loss of 9 points) and South Korea (down 8 points).

Retention rates or 'stickiness'

Another way of measuring religious change is to look at retention rates: What percentage of all the people raised in a group remain in that group today? This is sometimes referred to as how "[sticky](#)" a group is.

Across the region, among survey respondents who say they were raised without a religion, most still do not identify with any religion today. Retention rates among the unaffiliated range from 64% in Taiwan to 84% in Japan.

Retention rates for Buddhists vary widely. Most people raised as Buddhists continue to identify with Buddhism in Vietnam (87%), Japan (70%) and Taiwan (67%). But far fewer have stuck with Buddhism in Hong Kong (37%) and South Korea (32%).

Meanwhile, Christians have relatively low retention rates in Hong Kong (40%) and South Korea (51%) but a higher rate in Taiwan (63%) and an exceptionally high rate in Vietnam (95%).

Across the region, most people who have left their childhood religion tend to be unaffiliated, no longer identifying with any religion. (Switching from having a religion to having no religion is often called *disaffiliation*. For figures on disaffiliation across Asia and other parts of the world, turn to [the Overview of this report](#).) In Vietnam, for instance, 13% of people raised Buddhist have left Buddhism, and most of them (10% of all people raised Buddhist) now have no religion; 2% have become Christian and 1% identify with other religious groups.

Conversely, among those who were raised without a religion and have taken on a religion in adulthood, most have become either Buddhist (as in Vietnam) or Christian (as in South Korea.)

Across East Asia and Vietnam, the retention rates of religious groups vary widely

% of adults in each place who were raised ____ and currently identify as ...

Among those raised ____		Still identify with their childhood religion	Buddhist	Christian	Other religions	No religion	NET No longer identify with their childhood religion
Hong Kong	Buddhist	37%	--	9%	5%	49%	63%
	Christian	40	5%	--	2	53	60
	No religion	79	6	14	2	--	21
Japan	Buddhist	70	--	1	4	25	30
	No religion	84	9	1	6	--	16
South Korea	Buddhist	32	--	17	1	49	68
	Christian	51	6	--	0	43	49
	No religion	72	7	19	1	--	28
Taiwan	Buddhist	67	--	4	11	18	33
	Christian	63	10	--	7	20	37
	Daoist	51	12	3	8	26	49
	No religion	64	21	4	11	--	36
Vietnam	Buddhist	87	--	2	1	10	13
	Christian	95	2	--	0	2	5
	No religion	80	17	1	2	--	20

Retention rate: In Hong Kong, 37% of people raised Buddhist are still Buddhist.

Note: Due to rounding, figures may not add to 100% or subtotals indicated. "Other religions" includes respondents who declined to answer the question about their current religion.

Source: Survey conducted June 2-Sept. 17, 2023, among adults in five Asian publics. Read the Methodology for details.

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Which groups have the biggest shares of new entrants?

Yet another way of looking at religious change is to consider which religious groups have the largest percentages of new entrants, sometimes called an “accession rate.”

In general, the religiously unaffiliated are more likely than other groups to be composed of newcomers. For example, in Japan, 49% of the unaffiliated were raised in some religious community, while just 12% of Japanese Buddhists were raised outside Buddhism.

Once again, Vietnam bucks the trend. While 9% of Vietnam’s unaffiliated adults grew up with a religion, 25% of Vietnam’s current Buddhist adults were raised outside Buddhism. And most of these converts to Buddhism say they grew up unaffiliated.

Across the region, at least half of all Buddhists and Christians were raised in the religious community they identify with today.

In Taiwan and South Korea, 15% of Christian adults were raised Buddhist

% of adults in each place who currently identify as ____ and were raised ...

		Raised in their current religious group	Buddhist	Christian	Other religions	No religion	NET Raised in religious group different from current group
<i>Among those who currently identify as ____</i>							
Hong Kong	Buddhist	69%	--	10%	9%	12%	31%
	Christian	56	11%	--	12	20	44
	No religion	39	21	25	14	--	61
Japan	Buddhist	88	--	1	6	5	12
	No religion	51	34	4	11	--	49
South Korea	Buddhist	65	--	16	7	12	35
	Christian	64	15	--	7	14	36
	No religion	32	27	33	8	--	68
Taiwan	Buddhist	60	--	2	32	7	40
	Christian	50	15	--	30	6	50
	Daoist	87	5	1	7	1	13
	No religion	20	16	4	59	--	80
Vietnam	Buddhist	75	--	1	1	23	25
	Christian	86	5	--	2	7	14
	No religion	91	7	0	1	--	9

Accession rate: In Hong Kong, 31% of Buddhists say they were raised outside of Buddhism.

Note: Due to rounding, figures may not add to 100% or subtotals indicated. "Other religions" includes respondents who declined to answer the question about their childhood religion. In Taiwan, most of those raised in "Other religions" were raised as Daoists.

Source: Survey conducted June 2-Sept. 17, 2023, among adults in five Asian publics. Read the Methodology for details.

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Persuading others to switch

People across East Asia and Vietnam express widely differing views on whether proselytizing (i.e., seeking religious conversions) is acceptable.

Most adults in Japan (83%) and South Korea (77%) say it is unacceptable for a person to try to persuade others to join his or her religion. This includes vast majorities of the religiously unaffiliated and Buddhists in both places. Most Christians in South Korea (70%) also oppose proselytization.

People in Taiwan and Vietnam are more divided about conversion efforts. In neither place do a majority say such efforts are acceptable or unacceptable.

Hong Kong is the only place surveyed where a majority of respondents say it is *acceptable* to proselytize (67%).

Most in Japan and South Korea oppose proselytizing efforts

% of adults in each place who say it is ____ for a person to try to persuade others to join his or her religion

	Acceptable	Unacceptable
<i>Among all adults in ...</i>		
Hong Kong	67%	29%
Japan	11	83
South Korea	21	77
Taiwan	44	46
Vietnam	48	46
<i>Among the religiously unaffiliated in ...</i>		
Hong Kong	63	33
Japan	9	87
South Korea	14	84
Taiwan	47	48
Vietnam	40	50
<i>Among Buddhists in ...</i>		
Hong Kong	63	36
Japan	13	79
South Korea	25	73
Taiwan	43	45
Vietnam	47	49
<i>Among Christians in ...</i>		
Hong Kong	82	13
South Korea	29	70
Taiwan	60	29
Vietnam	83	16
<i>Among Daoists in ...</i>		
Taiwan	40	54

Note: Other/Both/Neither/Depends on situation/Don't know/Refused responses are not shown.

Source: Survey conducted June 2-Sept. 17, 2023, among adults in five Asian publics. Read the Methodology for details.

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Attending Christian and Buddhist schools

Most adults throughout the region say they did *not* attend any school with a religious affiliation during the course of their education.

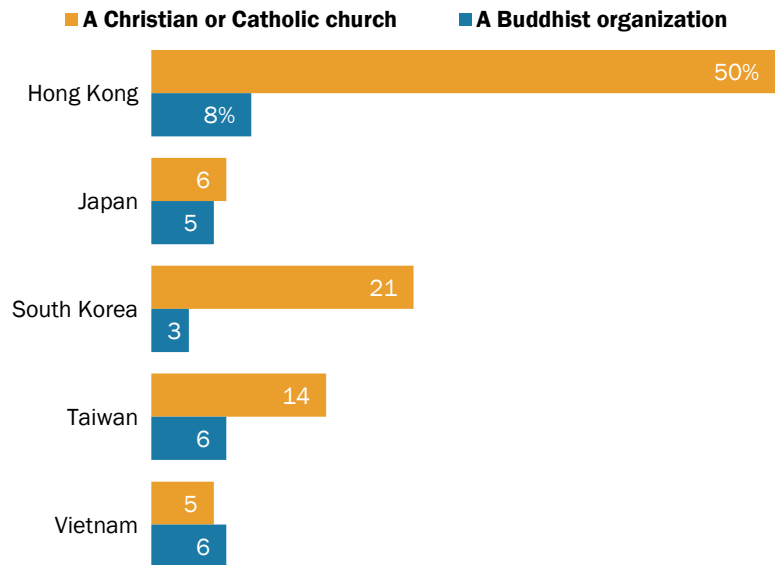
Hong Kong is an exception, with half of adults there saying they have attended a school associated with a Catholic or other Christian church. (This may be in part due to a large increase in church-run public education [starting in the 1960s](#). Government statistics in 2022 showed that about half of primary school students in Hong Kong [attended a school associated with a Catholic or other Christian church](#).)

In general, it's more common for people in the places surveyed to have attended a school with Christian connections than one associated with a Buddhist organization.

In addition, Christians are more likely to have attended Christian schools than Buddhists are to have attended schools with Buddhist ties. For instance, 22% of Taiwanese Christians attended a school associated with a Christian or Catholic church, while 10% of Taiwanese Buddhists ever attended a school connected to a Buddhist organization.

Adults in Hong Kong are especially likely to have gone to Christian schools

% of adults in each place who say that, at any point during their education, they attended a school associated with ...



Note: In some parts of Asia, the term “Christian” is sometimes used in lieu of “Protestant.”
 Source: Survey conducted June 2-Sept. 17, 2023, among adults in five Asian publics. Read the Methodology for details.
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2. Religion as a way of life

While many people in East Asia and Vietnam [do not formally identify with a religion](#), most say they feel a personal connection to the “way of life” of at least one religious tradition or spiritual philosophy.

Most commonly, people in the region – including the religiously unaffiliated – feel personal connections to Buddhism and local or Indigenous religions. In South Korea, a majority also feel connected to the Confucian way of life.

Moreover, adults in the region often express an affinity for multiple traditions. In Japan, for example, 55% of adults say they feel a personal connection to [at least one religious or philosophical tradition besides their own](#).

To measure this, we posed a series of questions, asking separately about Buddhist, Christian, Confucian, Daoist (also spelled Taoist) and local/Indigenous religions’ ways of life. (In Japan, we also asked about the Shinto way of life.)

Except in the case of the local/Indigenous religions item, we avoided using words such as “religion” or “religious tradition,” in part because many people do not consider Confucianism to be a religion. Moreover, we chose phrases like “personal connection” and “way of life” to capture people who might not relate to the word “religion” or formally identify with an organized belief system but who, nonetheless, feel an affinity for the way of life that these traditions or philosophies represent.

This series of questions also helps to gauge the effect of religious switching, by showing the shares of people who have left their childhood religion but [continue to feel a connection to it in adulthood](#).

Many South Koreans feel an affinity to Confucianism

% of adults in each place who say they feel a personal connection to the ____ way(s) of life

	Buddhist	Local/Indigenous religions'	Christian	Confucian	Daoist
Hong Kong	23%	27%	23%	10%	11%
Japan	48	44	17	17	11
South Korea	43	29	39	59	22
Taiwan	47	53	17	35	48
Vietnam	53	16	11	3	6

Note: Darker shades represent higher values. Respondents in Japan were also asked about the “Shinto” way of life, but results are not shown in this table.

Source: Survey conducted June 2-Sept. 17, 2023, among adults in five Asian publics. Read the Methodology for details.

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In this chapter, we also discuss what adults in East Asia and Vietnam consider Buddhism to be – a culture, a set of ethical teachings, an ethnicity, a religion or a family tradition – as well as the behaviors and attitudes that Buddhists say would disqualify someone from being truly Buddhist.

Feeling connected to one or more religions or philosophies

Among the region's large shares of religiously unaffiliated adults, a fair number express a personal connection to at least one religious or philosophical "way of life."

At least a third of religiously unaffiliated adults in South Korea, Japan and Taiwan say they feel a personal connection to the Buddhist way of life, and roughly one-quarter or more feel connected to a local or Indigenous religion's way of life.

In South Korea, 58% of the religiously unaffiliated express a personal connection to the Confucian way of life.

People who formally identify with a religion are even more likely to say they feel a personal connection to that tradition's way of life.

Among Buddhists across the region, at least six-in-ten say they feel a personal connection to the Buddhist way of life, including 95% of Vietnamese Buddhists who say this. (The percentage of people *inside* a group who say they feel a personal connection to the group's way of life may be an indicator of the intensity of their sense of belonging.)

34% of Japan's religiously unaffiliated adults feel connected to the Buddhist 'way of life'

% of adults in each place who say they feel a personal connection to the ____ way(s) of life

	Buddhist	Local/Indigenous religions'	Christian	Confucian	Daoist
<i>Among the religiously unaffiliated in ...</i>					
Hong Kong	18%	21%	10%	8%	9%
Japan	34	35	13	13	6
South Korea	41	24	18	58	18
Taiwan	33	41	12	30	38
Vietnam	27	11	2	2	2
<i>Among Buddhists in ...</i>					
Hong Kong	64	45	11	19	16
Japan	61	48	18	18	14
South Korea	72	43	26	63	32
Taiwan	70	56	13	36	39
Vietnam	95	19	3	4	8
<i>Among Christians in ...</i>					
Hong Kong	7	26	74	11	6
South Korea	34	29	78	58	24
Taiwan	24	41	73	33	25
Vietnam	13	24	93	3	17
<i>Among Daoists in ...</i>					
Taiwan	39	59	9	33	72

Note: Darker shades represent higher values. Respondents in Japan were also asked about the "Shinto" way of life, but results are not shown in this table.

Source: Survey conducted June 2-Sept. 17, 2023, among adults in five Asian publics. Read the Methodology for details.

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Among Christians, about three-quarters or more feel a personal connection to the Christian way of life. (The attitudes of Christians in Japan are not broken out separately because the sample size is too small.)

Christians are less likely than Buddhists to feel a connection to local or Indigenous religions. In all places surveyed except Vietnam, at least four-in-ten Buddhists say they feel connected to an Indigenous or local religion's way of life.

Affinity for traditions besides one's own

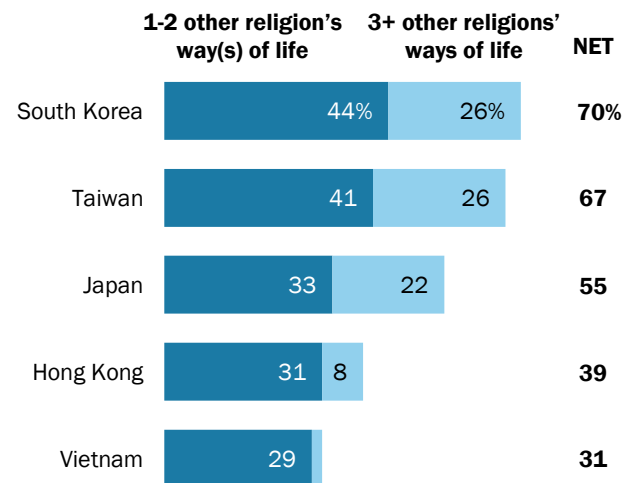
Taiwanese and South Korean adults are somewhat more likely than people in other places to feel a personal connection to some *other* religion's way of life. In Taiwan, 39% of Buddhists, 38% of the religiously unaffiliated and 25% of Christians say they feel connected to the Daoist way of life. In South Korea, majorities of Buddhists, Christians and the unaffiliated express [a personal affinity for the Confucian way of life](#).

More broadly, over half of all adults in South Korea (70%), Taiwan (67%) and Japan (55%) say they feel connected to *at least one tradition besides their own*, compared with smaller shares in Hong Kong (39%) and Vietnam (31%) who express similar connections.

Respondents in Japan were also asked whether they feel a personal connection to the Shinto way of life. Shinto is a set of [traditional Japanese](#) beliefs that can include the worship of gods and spirits known as *kami*. Though only 4% of adults in Japan identify Shinto as their religion, fully 27% say they feel a personal connection to the Shinto way of life. (In answers to a separate question, 38% of Japanese adults say they pray or offer respects to *kami*. [Read more on this in Chapter 4.](#))

Most South Koreans feel connected to at least one religion beyond their own

% of adults in each place who say they feel a personal connection to ...



Note: These figures show the percentage of respondents who feel a personal connection to the "way of life" of a religious or philosophical tradition *other than their own*. The figures include people without a religious affiliation who say they feel connected to one or more religions or philosophies. Those who say they do not have a personal connection to any religion, or who have a connection only to their own religion, are not shown. Most respondents could say they feel a connection with up to five ways of life, but Japanese adults were also asked about the "Shinto way of life." Due to rounding, figures may not add to subtotals indicated. Source: Survey conducted June 2-Sept. 17, 2023, among adults in five Asian publics. Read the Methodology for details. "Religion and Spirituality in East Asian Societies"

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Connections to one's former religion

Given the high rate of religious switching [in East Asia and Vietnam](#), we explored what happens to religious connections after people leave a formal identity behind. Specifically, we compared responses about personal connections among:

- Those who currently identify with a tradition;
- Those who were raised in that tradition but have since left; and
- Those who were not raised in that tradition nor identify with it now.

We consistently find a spectrum of attachments: People who no longer identify with a religion are *less* likely than those who do so currently to say they feel a personal connection to it. Still, people who were raised in a religion and have since left it are *more* likely to express a connection to that religion than are people who were not raised in it and who don't identify it as their religion today.

For example, 72% of South Koreans who currently identify as Buddhist say they feel a personal connection to the Buddhist way of life. Among South Koreans who were raised Buddhist but no

In East Asia and Vietnam, many feel connected to their childhood religion

% of adults in each place who say they feel a personal connection to the Buddhist way of life, among those who ...

	Currently identify as Buddhist	Were raised Buddhist, but now identify as something else	Were not raised Buddhist, and do not identify with it now
Hong Kong	64%	27%	14%
Japan	61	40	36
South Korea	72	50	35
Taiwan	70	53	36
Vietnam	95	65	23

% of adults in each place who say they feel a personal connection to the Christian way of life, among those who ...

	Currently identify as Christian	Were raised Christian, but now identify as something else	Were not raised Christian, and do not identify with it now
Hong Kong	74	17	9
South Korea	78	29	17

% of adults in each place who say they feel a personal connection to the Daoist way of life, among those who ...

	Currently identify as Daoist	Were raised Daoist, but now identify as something else	Were not raised Daoist, and do not identify with it now
Taiwan	72	61	33

% of adults in each place who say they feel a personal connection to local/Indigenous religions' ways of life, among those who ...

	Currently identify with local/Indigenous religions	Were raised in local/Indigenous religions, but now identify as something else	Were not raised in local/Indigenous religions, and do not identify with them now
Taiwan	84	70	50

Source: Survey conducted June 2-Sept. 17, 2023, among adults in five Asian publics. Read the Methodology for details.

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longer identify that way, 50% feel such a connection. And among all other South Korean adults, only 35% say they have a personal connection to Buddhism.

How many religions can be true?

We know from past research that the five places included in this survey [are very religiously diverse](#) compared with other countries and territories around the world.

Given this diversity – and the extent to which people feel connected to traditions outside their own – it is perhaps unsurprising that respondents in this survey are more likely to say that “many religions can be true” than to say that “there is only one true religion.”

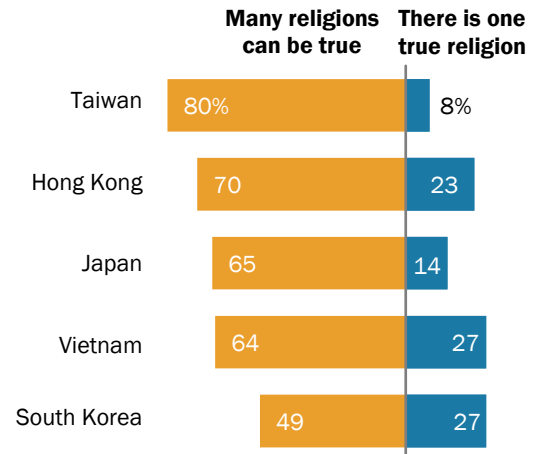
Among both Buddhists and the religiously unaffiliated, majorities in nearly all five places say that many religions can be true. But Christians are less likely to take this position.

In Taiwan, for example, roughly eight-in-ten Buddhists and unaffiliated adults – but only half of Christians – say that many religions can be true.

In general, younger adults and people with more education are more likely to say that many religions can be true. For example, the vast majority of Japanese adults under the age of 35 say that many religions can be true, compared with a slim majority of older Japanese adults (86% vs. 59%).

8 in 10 Taiwanese say many religions can be true

% of adults in each place who say ...



Note: Other/Neither/Depends on situation/Don't know/Refused responses are not shown.

Source: Survey conducted June 2-Sept. 17, 2023, among adults in five Asian publics. Read the Methodology for details.

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Personal importance of religion

When asked how important religion is in their lives, people in the region tend to say religion is either not very or not at all important to them.

In Taiwan, South Korea, Hong Kong and Japan, half or more say religion is not very or not at all important.

Only in Vietnam are adults more likely to say religion is important in their lives than to say it is *not* important (53% vs. 46%).

In no place surveyed do more than about a quarter of adults say religion is very important in their lives.

62% in Japan say religion is not important to them

% of adults in each place who say religion is ___ important in their lives

	NET Important	Very	Somewhat	Not very	Not at all	NET Not important
Japan	38%	6%	32%	38%	23%	62%
Hong Kong	44	11	33	32	23	56
South Korea	47	16	31	25	28	53
Taiwan	47	11	36	39	12	51
Vietnam	53	26	27	35	11	46

Note: Don't know/Refused responses are not shown. Due to rounding, figures may not add to subtotals indicated.

Source: Survey conducted June 2-Sept. 17, 2023, among adults in five Asian publics. Read the Methodology for details.

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Christians are the most likely to consider religion to be *very* important to them. About a third of Christians or more across the region say this, including two-thirds of Vietnamese Christians.

Far fewer Buddhists say religion is very important to them. However, many Buddhists surveyed say that religion is at least *somewhat* important in their lives.

The religiously unaffiliated are the group least likely in this analysis to say religion is very important in their lives. Still, between 11% and 30% of the unaffiliated in each place surveyed say religion is at least somewhat important to them.

In East Asia and Vietnam, Christians are the most likely to say religion is very important to them

% of adults in each place who say religion is ___ important in their lives

	Very	Somewhat	Not very	Not at all
<i>Among the religiously unaffiliated in ...</i>				
Hong Kong	1%	20%	42%	36%
Japan	1	12	45	41
South Korea	2	15	34	49
Taiwan	1	11	55	33
Vietnam	6	23	51	19
<i>Among Buddhists in ...</i>				
Hong Kong	17	61	20	2
Japan	9	48	33	10
South Korea	16	59	17	7
Taiwan	19	48	30	2
Vietnam	39	33	24	3
<i>Among Christians in ...</i>				
Hong Kong	35	47	15	3
South Korea	39	43	13	5
Taiwan	32	44	19	3
Vietnam	66	21	12	1
<i>Among Daoists in ...</i>				
Taiwan	5	49	41	4

Note: Darker shades represent higher values.

Source: Survey conducted June 2-Sept. 17, 2023, among adults in five Asian publics. Read the Methodology for details.

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Importance of religion around the world

In all four East Asian societies surveyed, fewer than two-in-ten adults say religion is very important in their lives.

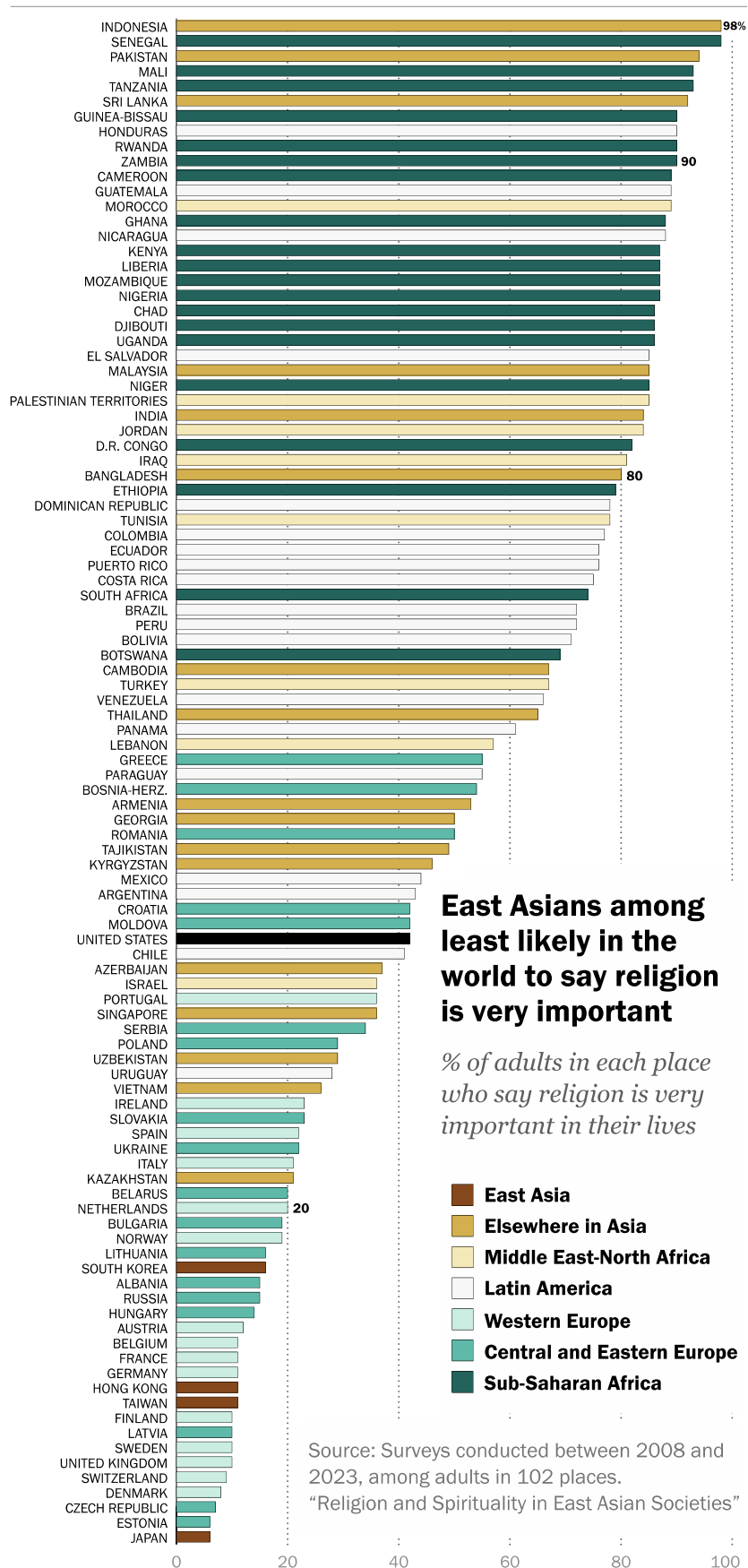
[Only in Europe](#) do similarly small percentages say this, according to surveys conducted by the Pew Research Center in 102 countries and territories since 2008.⁷ For instance, 11% of adults in Hong Kong and Taiwan say religion is very important in their lives – as do 11% of adults in Belgium, France and Germany.

Other parts of the world have much higher shares who say religion is very important. This includes majorities [across Africa](#) and [much of Latin America](#).

[In the United States](#), 42% of adults say religion is very important in their lives.

(For information on when we conducted surveys in various countries and territories, go to [Appendix A](#).)

⁷ For the purposes of this analysis, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia are included in Asia. These three Caucasus countries are located between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea in a border area between Europe and Asia.



What people say Buddhism is – and is *not*

Given that large shares of East Asians and Vietnamese adults identify with Buddhism or feel connected to its way of life, we wanted to explore what people in the region understand Buddhism to be.

Do they view Buddhism as a set of ethical teachings to guide actions? A culture one is a part of? A religion one chooses to follow? A family tradition one must follow? An ethnicity one is born into?

Across the region, large shares of adults in all religious groups – including overwhelming majorities of Buddhists in Hong Kong and Vietnam – say that Buddhism is a set of ethical teachings, a culture and a religion.

Buddhists are more likely than people in other religious groups to say Buddhism fits each description on the list. For example, roughly four-in-ten

Buddhists in South Korea say Buddhism is an ethnicity, compared with about a fifth of South Korean Christians who say this (43% vs. 18%).

In Vietnam, 48% of Buddhists say their religion can be described by *all five* statements – i.e., that Buddhism is a religion, a set of ethics, a culture, a family tradition and an ethnicity. Far fewer Buddhists in Taiwan (6%) and Japan (4%) say all five statements describe Buddhism; Taiwanese

For most in Hong Kong, Buddhism is a set of ethical teachings, a culture *and* a religion

% of adults in each place who say Buddhism is ...

	A set of ethical teachings to guide actions	A culture one is a part of	A religion one chooses to follow	A family tradition one must follow	An ethnicity one is born into
<i>Among the religiously unaffiliated in ...</i>					
Hong Kong	71%	69%	85%	23%	31%
Japan	45	70	44	7	24
South Korea	59	57	33	18	21
Taiwan	41	30	56	13	15
Vietnam	75	48	69	42	34
<i>Among Buddhists in ...</i>					
Hong Kong	86	81	93	51	46
Japan	57	78	47	18	41
South Korea	79	79	53	50	43
Taiwan	62	35	57	30	21
Vietnam	92	75	84	76	60
<i>Among Christians in ...</i>					
Hong Kong	71	64	87	24	32
South Korea	53	52	32	18	18
Taiwan	45	26	55	20	16
Vietnam	74	52	68	51	37
<i>Among Daoists in ...</i>					
Taiwan	60	33	57	20	19

Note: Darker shades represent higher values. Respondents were asked “Just based on what you know, do you think each of the following descriptions fits Buddhism, or not?” Source: Survey conducted June 2-Sept. 17, 2023, among adults in five Asian publics. Read the Methodology for details.

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Buddhists are least likely to describe Buddhism as an ethnicity, and Japanese Buddhists are least likely to call it a family tradition.

What can a person do and still be ‘truly’ Buddhist?

In addition to asking *all* respondents what Buddhism is, the survey asked those who identify as Buddhist whether certain beliefs or practices would disqualify a person from being “truly” Buddhist.

There is general agreement among Buddhists that **not respecting deities or spirits** would disqualify one from being truly Buddhist. Majorities of Buddhists in every place surveyed, ranging from 59% in Japan to 80% in Taiwan, say this.

Buddhists in Vietnam and South Korea are more likely than those elsewhere to say that several other beliefs or practices are crucial to being Buddhist. For example, 64% of Buddhists in Vietnam and 56% of Buddhists in South Korea say a person cannot be truly Buddhist if they do not have a Buddhist funeral. Fewer Buddhists in Hong Kong (43%), Japan (40%) and Taiwan (27%) say the same.

In East Asia and Vietnam, respecting deities or spirits is widely seen as necessary to being ‘truly’ Buddhist

% of Buddhists in each place who say a person CANNOT be truly Buddhist if they ...

	Do not respect deities or spirits	Do not believe in the afterlife	Do not have a Buddhist funeral	Do not pray	Never go to temple or pagoda
Hong Kong	70%	57%	43%	42%	44%
Japan	59	37	40	46	41
South Korea	67	62	56	66	49
Taiwan	80	49	27	32	35
Vietnam	76	61	64	61	58

Note: Darker shades represent higher values.

Source: Survey conducted June 2-Sept. 17, 2023, among adults in five Asian publics. Read the Methodology for details.

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Most Buddhists surveyed across the region say you cannot be truly Buddhist if you do not respect elders, including nearly nine-in-ten Vietnamese Buddhists who say this.

Fewer Buddhists say that you cannot be Buddhist if you drink alcohol. (Avoiding intoxicants such as alcohol is one of the [Five Precepts](#), a set of Buddhist teachings on morality for laypeople.)

Buddhists in the region are more divided as to whether one must respect where one lives to be truly Buddhist. Majorities in Vietnam (85%) and South Korea (64%) say a person cannot be Buddhist if they do not respect Vietnam or South Korea, respectively. In Taiwan, far fewer Buddhists – 41% – say respecting Taiwan is necessary to be truly Buddhist.

By contrast, clear majorities of Buddhists in all of the [South and Southeast Asian places we surveyed in 2022](#) said that respecting where one lives is key to being truly Buddhist.

Other than in South Korea, very few Buddhists in East Asia and Vietnam say that a person cannot be Buddhist if they make offerings to or worship ancestors. Even smaller shares of [Cambodian and Thai Buddhists](#) said this in our 2022 survey. (As discussed in [Chapter 5](#), ancestor veneration practices such as burning incense, offering flowers and lighting candles are very common among Buddhists in East Asia and Vietnam.)

Vast majority of Vietnamese Buddhists say you can't be 'truly' Buddhist if you disrespect Vietnam

% of Buddhists who say a person CANNOT be truly Buddhist if they ...

	Do not respect elders	Do not respect the place where they live	Drink alcohol	Make offerings to or worship ancestors
Hong Kong	78%	46%	36%	13%
Japan	55	43	17	14
South Korea	76	64	42	49
Taiwan	73	41	40	15
Vietnam	88	85	49	10

Note: Darker shades represent higher values. Respondents were asked if a person could be truly Buddhist if they do not respect their specific society. For example, Buddhists in Japan were asked if a person could be truly Buddhist if they do not respect Japan.

Source: Survey conducted June 2-Sept. 17, 2023, among adults in five Asian publics. Read the Methodology for details.

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Buddhists in the region are somewhat split about whether celebrating the Muslim festival of Eid is compatible with Buddhism. While six-in-ten Buddhists or more in Vietnam and South Korea say celebrating Eid would disqualify someone from being truly Buddhist, only about four-in-ten Taiwanese and Japanese Buddhists take that position.

Nowhere does a majority think Christmas celebrations stop someone from being truly Buddhist. However, Buddhists in South Korea – which has the largest share of Christians in its population among the places analyzed – are more likely than Buddhists elsewhere to say that celebrating Christmas would disqualify a person from being truly Buddhist.

Are Eid and Christmas compatible with Buddhism?

*% of **Buddhists** in each place who say a person CANNOT be truly Buddhist if they ...*

	Celebrate the Muslim festival of Eid	Celebrate the Christian festival of Christmas
Hong Kong	54%	27%
Japan	41	23
South Korea	62	46
Taiwan	43	25
Vietnam	69	38

Note: Darker shades represent higher values.

Source: Survey conducted June 2-Sept. 17, 2023, among adults in five Asian publics. Read the Methodology for details. “Religion and Spirituality in East Asian Societies”

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3. Beliefs

Some standard ways of measuring religious beliefs, such as asking about belief in god, are grounded in monotheistic religions – particularly Judaism, Christianity and Islam – that hold there is only one God.

Such metrics may miss key elements of religious and spiritual life in East Asia and Vietnam. So while we *did* ask about belief in god on this survey, over the past seven years we have consulted with [experts from the region](#) to develop measurement tools that capture a much wider range of religious and spiritual beliefs.

For instance, in Japan’s traditional Shinto belief system, *kami* are [spirits or deities that inhabit the land and imbue forces of nature](#) like the wind. To measure the prevalence of similar beliefs across the region, we devised separate questions asking whether spirits exist in the natural landscape (mountains, rivers or trees); the human-built landscape (houses or other buildings); and physical objects (crystals, jewels or stones).

We find that across the region, the belief that spirits inhabit mountains, rivers or trees is particularly widespread. Half of adults surveyed in Japan express this belief, as do 47% in Vietnam and 59% in Taiwan.

(For more information on the veneration of kami in Japan, refer to [Chapter 4](#).)

More broadly, most people in all the region’s major religious groups – Buddhists, Christians and Daoists (also spelled Taoists) – believe in the existence of unseen beings, like deities or spirits. But some religiously unaffiliated people also hold this belief: Across the region, the share of unaffiliated adults who say they believe in unseen beings ranges from 39% to 73%.

Overall, respondents in East Asia and Vietnam are more likely to say they believe in unseen beings, like deities or spirits, than to say they believe in god. Only in Taiwan does a clear majority of the public express belief in god.

Taiwanese adults also stand out as the most likely to hold several of the other beliefs measured in this survey, including belief in angels or helpful deities, fate, karma and miracles.

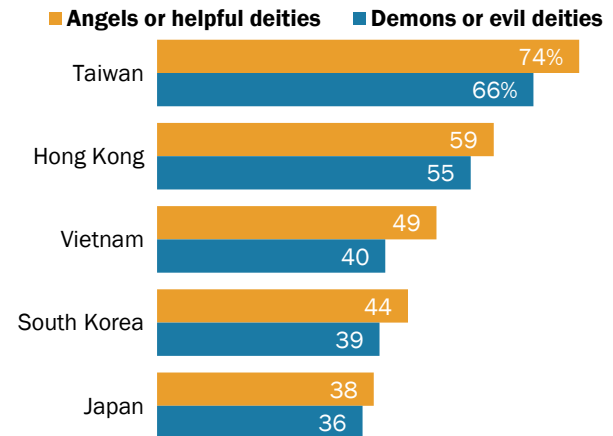
On balance, slightly larger shares tend to believe in angels or *helpful* deities than in demons or *evil* deities.

Women across the region are generally more believing than men. This aligns with a [common gender divide in religiosity](#) seen in many societies around the world.

(For information on beliefs about the afterlife – including rebirth, heaven, hell and more – go to [Chapter 5](#).)

Taiwanese adults are especially likely to believe in angels and demons

% of adults in each place who say they think ____ exist



Source: Survey conducted June 2-Sept. 17, 2023, among adults in five Asian publics. Read the Methodology for details. "Religion and Spirituality in East Asian Societies"

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Belief in unseen beings

In all the places we surveyed, at least half of respondents say they believe in “unseen beings in the world, like deities or spirits.” This belief is most common in Taiwan, where 85% say they think unseen beings exist.

Buddhists and Christians are more likely than religiously unaffiliated people to say they believe in unseen beings. In South Korea, for example, 80% of Christians and 62% of Buddhists say they believe in such beings, compared with 41% of the unaffiliated.

Still, in each of the places we surveyed, roughly four-in-ten unaffiliated adults or more say they believe in unseen beings. This includes solid majorities of the unaffiliated in Taiwan (73%) and Hong Kong (62%).

Belief in unseen beings is also very common among other religious groups in Taiwan. For example, 97% of Taiwanese who identify with local or Indigenous religions say they believe in unseen beings, as do 89% of Daoists.

Respondents who have completed higher levels of education are more likely than those with less education to believe in unseen beings, like deities or spirits. For example, almost eight-in-ten college-educated residents in Hong Kong believe in unseen beings, compared with 64% of those with less education.

Half of adults or more in East Asia and Vietnam believe in unseen beings

% of adults in each place who say they think there are unseen beings in the world, like deities or spirits

	General Population	Religiously unaffiliated	Buddhists	Christians
Taiwan	85%	73%	91%	81%
Hong Kong	69	62	83	81
Japan	57	49	62	–
South Korea	57	41	62	80
Vietnam	51	39	62	65

Note: “–” indicates sample size is too small for analysis.

Source: Survey conducted June 2-Sept. 17, 2023, among adults in five Asian publics. Read the Methodology for details.

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Belief in god

Views of whether god exists vary somewhat throughout East Asia and Vietnam. About seven-in-ten Taiwanese adults say they believe in god, while less than half of adults in South Korea (43%) and Japan (42%) say the same.

(The survey did not define “god,” and [translators were instructed to choose as generic a term as possible](#), avoiding terms that refer to a specific religion’s god(s) or goddess(es). We did this so we could ask the same question of respondents in different religious groups without necessarily implying a monotheistic god.)

Majorities of Christians throughout the region say they believe in god. Among Christians, belief in god is lowest in Vietnam (62%).

And among Buddhists, belief in god is widespread in Taiwan (87%), Hong Kong (82%) and, to a lesser extent, Vietnam (68%). Even though belief in god is not considered [an essential aspect of Buddhism](#), there is no significant difference between the rates at which Buddhists and Christians in these three places express belief in god.

Substantial minorities of religiously unaffiliated adults surveyed also say they believe in god. For example, 38% of Taiwanese respondents who identify with no religion say they believe in god.

In general, younger adults (ages 18 to 34) are somewhat less likely than older adults (35 and older) across the region to believe in god. But the opposite is true in Vietnam, where younger adults are slightly *more* likely than older adults to express belief in god (58% vs. 52%).

87% of Christians and Buddhists in Taiwan say god exists

% of adults in each place who say they believe in god

	General Population	Religiously unaffiliated	Buddhists	Christians
Taiwan	71%	38%	87%	87%
Vietnam	54	41	68	62
Hong Kong	54	34	82	88
South Korea	43	17	49	82
Japan	42	28	48	–

Note: “–” indicates sample size is too small for analysis. “God” was translated into each language using as generic a term as possible, without referencing any specific religion’s god(s) or goddess(es). Source: Survey conducted June 2-Sept. 17, 2023, among adults in five Asian publics. Read the Methodology for details. “Religion and Spirituality in East Asian Societies”

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Belief in god compared with belief in unseen beings

People throughout the region typically are more likely to say they believe in unseen beings, like deities or spirits, than in god.

This trend is largely driven by religiously unaffiliated people. In four of the five places we surveyed, the difference is at least 20 percentage points, with the widest gap in Taiwan: 73% of religiously unaffiliated Taiwanese adults say unseen beings exist, but only 38% believe in god.

Among Christians, these differences are generally much smaller and not statistically significant. In Hong Kong, though, the pattern is reversed: Slightly more Christians believe in god (88%) than in unseen beings (81%).

(Some survey respondents may consider belief in god to be part of belief in unseen beings, like deities or spirits.)

Religiously unaffiliated East Asians are far more likely to believe in unseen beings than in god

% of adults in each place who say they believe in the following

	Unseen beings, like deities or spirits	God	DIFF
<i>Among the religiously unaffiliated in ...</i>			
Hong Kong	62%	34%	+28
Japan	49	28	+22
South Korea	41	17	+24
Taiwan	73	38	+35
Vietnam	39	41	-2
<i>Among Buddhists in ...</i>			
Hong Kong	83	82	+1
Japan	62	48	+13
South Korea	62	49	+13
Taiwan	91	87	+4
Vietnam	62	68	-6
<i>Among Christians in ...</i>			
Hong Kong	81	88	-7
South Korea	80	82	-2
Taiwan	81	87	-7
Vietnam	65	62	+3
<i>Among Daoists in ...</i>			
Taiwan	89	79	+10

Note: Statistically significant differences are highlighted in **bold**. Differences are calculated before rounding. "God" was translated into each language using as generic a term as possible, without referencing any specific religion's god(s) or goddess(es). Source: Survey conducted June 2-Sept. 17, 2023, among adults in five Asian publics. Read the Methodology for details. "Religion and Spirituality in East Asian Societies"

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Belief in angels and demons

In addition to asking about belief in god and belief in unseen beings, the survey also asked respondents whether they believe in the existence of “angels or helpful deities” and, separately, in “demons or evil deities.”

Christians typically are more likely than Buddhists to believe in angels and demons. In South Korea, for example, more Christians than Buddhists say *both* that angels or helpful deities exist (69% vs. 54%) *and* that demons or evil deities exist (63% vs. 47%).

In all the places surveyed, one-fifth of the religiously unaffiliated or more say both kinds of deities exist.

Women are consistently more likely than men to express belief in angels and demons. For instance, 61% of women in Hong Kong say demons or evil deities exist, compared with 49% of men.

In most places surveyed, people are somewhat more likely to believe in angels or helpful deities than in demons or evil deities. In Vietnam, for example, 49% say angels or helpful deities exist, while 40% say demons or evil deities exist. This pattern mirrors results we have previously found across [South](#) and [Southeast Asia](#).

Daoists in Taiwan are more likely to believe in angels than in demons

% of adults in each place who say they think ___ exist

	Angels or helpful deities	Demons or evil deities
<i>Among the religiously unaffiliated in ...</i>		
Hong Kong	47%	45%
Japan	29	30
South Korea	25	21
Taiwan	53	48
Vietnam	38	31
<i>Among Buddhists in ...</i>		
Hong Kong	71	68
Japan	42	39
South Korea	54	47
Taiwan	84	75
Vietnam	56	47
<i>Among Christians in ...</i>		
Hong Kong	79	76
South Korea	69	63
Taiwan	82	77
Vietnam	77	60
<i>Among Daoists in ...</i>		
Taiwan	80	71

Note: Darker shades represent higher values.

Source: Survey conducted June 2-Sept. 17, 2023, among adults in five Asian publics. Read the Methodology for details.

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Belief in spirits inhabiting the physical world

Throughout the region, [natural forces](#) and [certain places](#) have long been considered to have spirits or [connections to divinity](#). To measure this, we asked a series of questions about whether mountains or other parts of nature; houses or other buildings; and objects like crystals or jewels have their own spirits.

Here's what we found:

- Respondents in all five places are most likely to say that **mountains, rivers or trees** have their own spirits. Large shares of people in Taiwan (59%), Japan (51%) and Vietnam (47%) express this view.
- Adults in those three places also are more likely than people in South Korea and Hong Kong to say that **houses or other buildings** have their own spirits.
- Nowhere do more than three-in-ten adults believe that objects like **crystals, jewels or stones** have spirits.

Half of Japanese adults say that mountains, rivers or trees have spirits

% of adults in each place who say that ___ have their own spirits

	Mountains, rivers or trees	Houses or other buildings	Certain objects, like crystals, jewels or stones
Taiwan	59%	30%	28%
Japan	51	28	19
Vietnam	47	33	25
Hong Kong	35	13	21
South Korea	25	15	9

Note: Darker shades represent higher values.

Source: Survey conducted June 2-Sept. 17, 2023, among adults in five Asian publics. Read the Methodology for details. "Religion and Spirituality in East Asian Societies"

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In general, Buddhists are more likely than Christians and unaffiliated people to say that each category listed has its own spirits.

And the religiously unaffiliated are somewhat more likely than Christians to say that objects like crystals have their own spirits, and to say the same about mountains, rivers or trees. For example, 22% of unaffiliated adults in Vietnam say crystals, jewels or stones have spirits, compared with 14% of Vietnamese Christians.

In most of the places surveyed, women are more likely than men to say that parts of nature, certain objects, and houses or other buildings have their own spirits. The sole outlier is Vietnam, where men and women are about equally likely to hold these beliefs.

Belief in fate

Majorities of adults across all major religious groups in the five locations say that fate exists. (The survey did not define the word, but [fate is often described](#) as the idea that important events, or even the overall course of one's life, are largely or wholly preordained.)

Buddhists across the region are particularly likely to say that fate exists.

As with other beliefs analyzed in this chapter, belief in fate differs by gender. Across East Asia and Vietnam, women consistently are more likely than men to say fate exists. In South Korea, for instance, 64% of women and 55% of men believe in fate.

In East Asia and Vietnam, most people believe in fate

% of adults in each place who say they believe in fate

	General Population	Religiously unaffiliated	Buddhists	Christians
Taiwan	83%	74%	90%	69%
Hong Kong	76	72	86	76
Vietnam	75	74	79	68
Japan	68	57	76	–
South Korea	60	56	75	58

Note: “–” indicates sample size is too small for analysis.

Source: Survey conducted June 2-Sept. 17, 2023, among adults in five Asian publics. Read the Methodology for details.

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Belief in karma

Belief in karma is very common among adults in Taiwan (87%), Hong Kong (76%) and Vietnam (75%), while South Koreans are more evenly split. (The survey did not define “karma,” but it is generally understood to mean that people will reap the benefits of their good deeds and pay the price for their bad deeds, often in future lives.)

Only 16% of Japanese adults say they believe in karma. Nearly three-in-ten Japanese adults declined to answer the question, far more than in the other places surveyed. This may indicate less familiarity with the term.

Three-quarters of Hong Kong residents believe in karma

% of adults in each place who say they believe in karma

	General Population	Religiously unaffiliated	Buddhists	Christians
Taiwan	87%	78%	96%	64%
Hong Kong	76	73	92	68
Vietnam	75	69	84	71
South Korea	48	47	73	40
Japan	16	15	15	--

Note: “--” indicates sample size is too small for analysis.

Source: Survey conducted June 2-Sept. 17, 2023, among adults in five Asian publics. Read the Methodology for details.

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In most places surveyed, Buddhists are the most likely to say karma exists. While this may be expected – since the concept of karma [has deep roots in Buddhist traditions](#) – majorities of Christians in Vietnam, Hong Kong and Taiwan also say karma exists. For example, 71% of Vietnamese Christians believe in karma. Many of the region’s religiously unaffiliated adults, including 78% in Taiwan, also believe in karma.

In Taiwan, belief in karma seems to be very common across the board, including among Daoists (92%) and followers of local or Indigenous religions (97%).

Belief in miracles

In all five places surveyed, at least half of adults say that miracles exist.

This view is especially common in Taiwan, where 83% of adults, including 74% of the religiously unaffiliated, believe in miracles.

In general, Christians are more likely to say that miracles exist, followed by Buddhists and the unaffiliated. In South Korea, for instance, 80% of Christians believe in miracles, compared with 64% of Buddhists and 55% among the religiously unaffiliated.

Respondents with more education are more likely than other adults to believe in miracles. In Hong Kong, 65% of college-educated adults say that miracles exist, compared with 55% of those with less education.

Christians in East Asia and Vietnam overwhelmingly believe in miracles

% of adults in each place who say miracles exist

	General Population	Religiously unaffiliated	Buddhists	Christians
Taiwan	83%	74%	86%	83%
South Korea	65	55	64	80
Japan	64	59	68	--
Hong Kong	58	46	71	85
Vietnam	52	44	56	78

Note: "--" indicates sample size is too small for analysis.

Source: Survey conducted June 2-Sept. 17, 2023, among adults in five Asian publics. Read the Methodology for details.

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4. Practices

Measuring East Asian and Vietnamese religious and spiritual practices [can be as challenging as assessing religious beliefs in the region](#). The metrics researchers typically use to study religious engagement in other parts of the world are designed primarily for Abrahamic religions – Judaism, Christianity and Islam – and fail to capture the breadth and depth of religious observance in the region.

For example, relatively few people in East Asia and Vietnam pray *daily* – far smaller shares than in [South Asia](#) and [Southeast Asia](#).

But many East Asians and Vietnamese say they pray at least occasionally, and substantial shares also say they [“pray or offer their respects” to Buddha and other religious figures or deities](#). Such prayers may be performed at particular times of year, such as [during holidays](#), or as needed [to bring luck or help fulfill a wish](#).

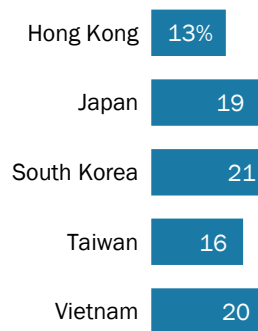
In each location surveyed except Japan, most Buddhists say they offer respects to *Guanyin*, a folk deity associated with compassion, as well as to Buddha. Almost all Christians say they pray or offer respects to Jesus.

Many people across the region also [visit temples, pagodas, shrines, churches or monasteries](#) and [keep altars in their homes](#) for purposes that may include venerating ancestors. (For more information on ancestor veneration, funeral rites and family gravesites, go to [Chapter 5](#).)

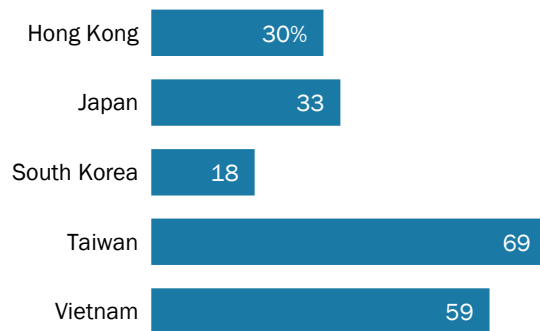
Home altars are particularly common in Vietnam, where nearly all adults have one. In the other places surveyed, no more than half of adults say they have a home altar, including just

Relatively few in region pray daily, but many pray or offer respects to Guanyin

% of adults in each place who say they pray daily



% of adults in each place who say they currently pray or offer their respects to Guanyin



Note: Respondents were asked about “Guanyin, Guanyi Bodhisattva or Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara.”

Source: Survey conducted June 2-Sept. 17, 2023, among adults in five Asian publics. Read the Methodology for details.

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6% of South Koreans. On the other hand, 59% of South Koreans say they meditate – by far the highest share in the five places surveyed.

As we found in previous surveys in South and Southeast Asia, Buddhists in this survey are generally more likely than Christians to have a [home altar](#), while Christians are more likely to [pray daily](#).

Religiously unaffiliated adults tend to pray or offer respects to Buddha (or Jesus) at much lower rates than Buddhists (or Christians) do. Still, more than four-in-ten religiously unaffiliated people in Vietnam and Taiwan pray or offer their respects to Guanyin, and more than half say they generally go to temples or pagodas.

Across the region, people with less education are, in general, more likely than adults with higher levels of education to engage in many of these spiritual and religious practices. However, people with less education are *less* likely to meditate or have their fortunes told.

Venerating religious figures and deities

Most Buddhists in each of the locations surveyed, except Japan, say they pray or offer respects to Buddha. Similarly, roughly nine-in-ten Christians or more in each society surveyed except Japan – where our sample of Christians is too small to be analyzed separately – say they pray or offer respects to Jesus Christ.

The survey did not ask respondents whether they consider either figure – Buddha or Jesus – to be a deity.⁸

“Offering respects” is commonly understood in the region as an act of worship or veneration. It can take a variety of forms, such as burning incense, offering food or drink, or making wishes to a deity. It is often expressed through gestures like [bowing one’s head or putting one’s hands together](#).

[Guanyin](#) – a folk deity associated with compassion and mercy who helps humans along the path to enlightenment – is also revered widely. Guanyin is an East Asian representation of the Buddhist [bodhisattva](#) Avalokiteshvara, and in most places across the region about as many Buddhists pray or offer their respects to Guanyin as to Buddha. In Taiwan, Buddhists are *more* likely to pray or offer respects to Guanyin (89%) than to Buddha (71%).

Over half of adults in Taiwan also pray or offer respects to *Guandi*, also known as *Guangong*, traditionally worshiped as a [god of war](#) in many parts of East Asia.

Respondents in Hong Kong, Taiwan and Vietnam were also asked about *Mazu*, a [Chinese goddess of the sea](#), whose worship spread over centuries along East and Southeast Asian coastlines. Two-thirds of Taiwanese adults say they pray or offer their respects to Mazu, including about eight-in-ten Taiwanese Buddhists and Daoists (also spelled Taoists), and nearly nine-in-ten followers of Indigenous religions who do so. Reverence for Mazu is less common elsewhere, although around half of Buddhists in Hong Kong and one-third in Vietnam say they pray or offer their respects to her.

Even among the region’s religiously unaffiliated people, substantial shares offer respects to certain figures. For example, roughly four-in-ten unaffiliated adults in Taiwan and Vietnam say they pray

⁸ Other research suggests that Buddhists generally believe Buddha to be [a historical person, Siddhartha Gautama](#), who achieved enlightenment after years of wandering and asceticism, though [Buddhist literature and art](#) are also replete with images and stories of his miraculous conception and birth. Biblical scholars generally view Jesus as [a historical person](#), born several hundred years after Buddha. Orthodox Christian theology holds that in addition to being fully human, Jesus was also fully divine – the [incarnated son of God, part of a divine Trinity](#).

Venerating Guanyin is most common in Taiwan and Vietnam

% of adults in each place who say they currently pray or offer their respects to the following figures

	Guanyin	Buddha	Mazu	Guandi	Jesus Christ	Mother Mary	Kami	Confucius	Dalai Lama
<i>Among the religiously unaffiliated in ...</i>									
Hong Kong	22%	15%	11%	9%	10%	5%	--	5%	1%
Japan	19	20	--	4	7	6	25%	5	4
South Korea	11	17	--	1	8	4	--	2	2
Taiwan	43	23	43	35	12	6	--	19	5
Vietnam	44	45	11	6	2	2	--	3	6
<i>Among Buddhists in ...</i>									
Hong Kong	82	80	53	36	10	6	--	13	6
Japan	46	48	--	6	12	10	44	11	8
South Korea	73	80	--	8	8	12	--	15	9
Taiwan	89	71	79	61	14	10	--	28	9
Vietnam	89	88	33	23	4	5	--	12	20
<i>Among Christians in ...</i>									
Hong Kong	9	8	6	6	89	18	--	6	2
South Korea	4	7	--	8	88	24	--	3	2
Taiwan	17	12	17	11	93	26	--	13	2
Vietnam	13	11	8	4	93	88	--	4	7
<i>Among Daoists in ...</i>									
Taiwan	81	42	82	69	10	6	--	29	6

Note: Respondents were asked about “Guanyin, Guanyi Bodhisattva or Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara,” “Mazu, Goddess of the Sea,” and “Guandi or Guangong.” Respondents in Japan and South Korea were not asked about “Mazu.” “Kami” was asked only in Japan. Darker shades represent higher values.

Source: Survey conducted June 2-Sept. 17, 2023, among adults in five Asian publics. Read the Methodology for details. “Religion and Spirituality in East Asian Societies”

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to Guanyin, as do about one-in-five of the unaffiliated in Hong Kong and Japan. In Taiwan, a third of the religiously unaffiliated or more pray or offer their respects to Mazu and Guandi.

The survey also asked about paying respects to Confucius, the ancient [Chinese sage whose teachings form the core of Confucianism](#). While many experts do [not consider Confucianism to be a religion](#), its teachings on divine power, benevolence, loyalty and respect – especially for one’s parents, ancestors and social superiors – permeate East Asian spiritual traditions.

Praying or offering respects to Confucius is most common in Taiwan. For instance, roughly one-fifth of the island’s religiously unaffiliated adults say they do this, compared with 5% or fewer of

the unaffiliated elsewhere in the region. And Taiwan's Buddhists are about twice as likely as the other Buddhists surveyed to pray or offer respects to Confucius.

While Christians are more likely than other groups to pray or offer their respects to Mother Mary – believed by Christians to be [the mother of Jesus](#) – only in Vietnam do *most* Christians do this. (This could be related to the [prevalence of Catholics](#) in Vietnam's Christian population.)

In Japan (and *only* in Japan), we asked people about [kami](#). In the Shinto tradition, kami are deities or spirits often associated with particular parts of the natural landscape, such as a mountain or forest; the deified spirits of some human beings also are considered kami. Among Japanese Buddhists, 44% say they pray or offer their respects to kami, as do 25% of Japan's religiously unaffiliated adults.

Rates of prayer

We also asked respondents how often they pray, if at all. Frequent prayer is not common in the region. Across the five places surveyed, no more than 21% of people say they pray daily.

However, half or more in each place say they pray at least sometimes, including 85% in Taiwan and 71% in Vietnam.

Of the major religious groups, Christians are most likely to pray at least once a day. About half of Christians in Vietnam and South Korea say they do so.

While Buddhists are much less likely than Christians to pray daily, most do pray at least occasionally.

Far fewer of the region's religiously unaffiliated adults pray regularly. In South Korea, Hong Kong and Japan, most of the unaffiliated say they *never* pray.

Throughout the region, women are more likely than men to say they pray at least once each day. For example, 24% of Vietnamese women report that they pray daily, compared with 15% of Vietnamese men.

Few Buddhists, Christians and Daoists say they never pray

% of adults in each place who say they pray ...

	At least daily	Weekly	Monthly/ Less often	Never
<i>Among the religiously unaffiliated in ...</i>				
Hong Kong	2%	3%	29%	65%
Japan	7	3	26	63
South Korea	3	3	23	71
Taiwan	3	3	70	22
Vietnam	7	7	43	43
<i>Among Buddhists in ...</i>				
Hong Kong	17	6	45	32
Japan	29	9	34	27
South Korea	18	16	42	23
Taiwan	21	8	56	9
Vietnam	25	13	44	17
<i>Among Christians in ...</i>				
Hong Kong	42	22	27	9
South Korea	50	25	17	7
Taiwan	43	29	19	7
Vietnam	53	24	19	4
<i>Among Daoists in ...</i>				
Taiwan	14	10	67	7

Note: Don't know/Refused responses are not shown. Darker shades represent higher values.

Source: Survey conducted June 2-Sept. 17, 2023, among adults in five Asian publics. Read the Methodology for details. "Religion and Spirituality in East Asian Societies"

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Daily prayer around the world

In East Asia and Vietnam, no more than about two-in-ten people say they pray daily. [Many parts of Europe](#) have similarly low rates of daily prayer, according to Pew Research Center surveys conducted in 102 countries and territories around the world since 2008.⁹

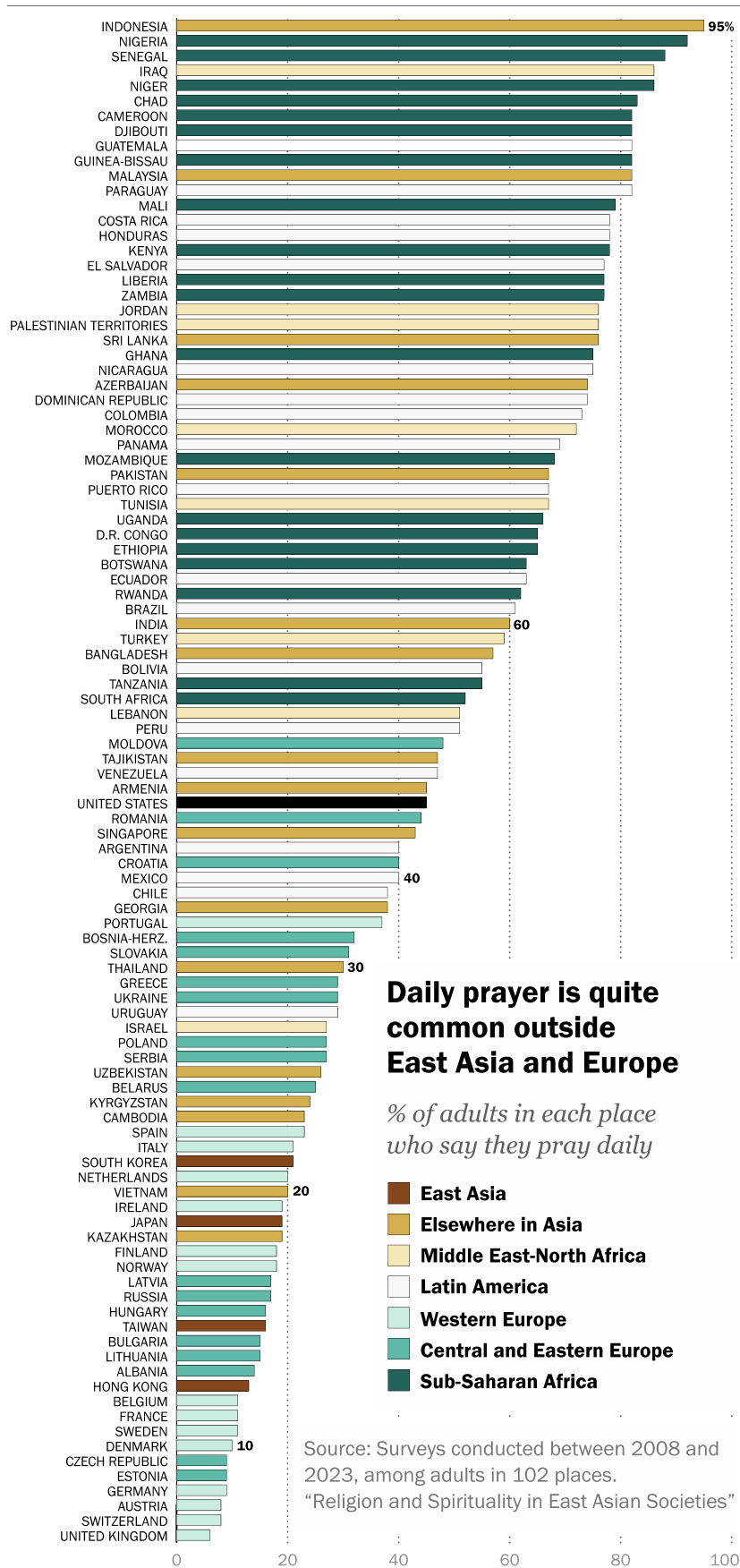
In South and Southeast Asia, however, adults are generally more likely to pray at least once a day. For example, six-in-ten [Indians say they do this](#), as do [almost all Indonesians](#).

People in [sub-Saharan Africa](#) and [Latin America](#) also are more likely than people in East Asia and Vietnam to say they pray daily.

[U.S. adults](#) are roughly twice as likely as adults in Japan, South Korea and Vietnam to report that they pray daily. In our international research, the United States is unusual because it is both a wealthy country – as measured by gross domestic product per capita – and has a [large percentage of people who pray daily](#).

(For information on when we conducted surveys in various countries and territories, go to [Appendix A](#).)

⁹ For the purposes of this analysis, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia are included in Asia. These three Caucasus countries are located between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea in a border area between Europe and Asia.



Visiting spiritual and religious sites

East Asia and Vietnam have a wide variety of sacred sites, ranging from [shrines](#) and [pagodas](#) to [monasteries](#) and places of scenic beauty, such as [sacred woods](#). People visit these sites for many reasons – to [make offerings](#), [meditate](#), [pray](#) or [just look around as tourists](#).

The survey asked respondents whether they “generally go to” a few kinds of religious sites: temples or pagodas; shrines; churches; and monasteries or places for meditation.

Most Buddhists say they generally go to temples or pagodas, including overwhelming majorities in Vietnam (91%), Taiwan (90%) and South Korea (85%). Many Buddhists across the region also say they visit shrines. And about a quarter of Buddhists in Vietnam, South Korea and Taiwan go to monasteries or places for meditation.

Half of the religiously unaffiliated or more in Vietnam and Taiwan say they go to temples or pagodas. A third of the religiously unaffiliated or more in Vietnam, Taiwan and Japan also say they generally visit shrines.

Most Christians surveyed say they generally go to church, including nearly all Christians in Vietnam (96%). Substantial shares of Vietnamese Christians also say they go to other religious or spiritual sites, including shrines (40%), monasteries or places for meditation (33%) and temples or pagodas (28%).

Vast majority of Daoists in Taiwan visit temples or pagodas and shrines

% of adults in each place who say they generally go to the following sites

	Temples or pagodas	Shrines	Churches	Monasteries or places for meditation
<i>Among the religiously unaffiliated in ...</i>				
Hong Kong	5%	3%	3%	2%
Japan	27	35	2	3
South Korea	30	8	5	4
Taiwan	53	40	12	4
Vietnam	63	53	13	9
<i>Among Buddhists in ...</i>				
Hong Kong	50	27	10	13
Japan	56	53	3	6
South Korea	85	32	6	25
Taiwan	90	72	15	23
Vietnam	91	66	23	26
<i>Among Christians in ...</i>				
Hong Kong	3	6	59	8
South Korea	20	30	81	13
Taiwan	22	17	79	11
Vietnam	28	40	96	33
<i>Among Daoists in ...</i>				
Taiwan	85	81	8	11

Note: Darker shades represent higher values.

Source: Survey conducted June 2-Sept. 17, 2023, among adults in five Asian publics. Read the Methodology for details. “Religion and Spirituality in East Asian Societies”

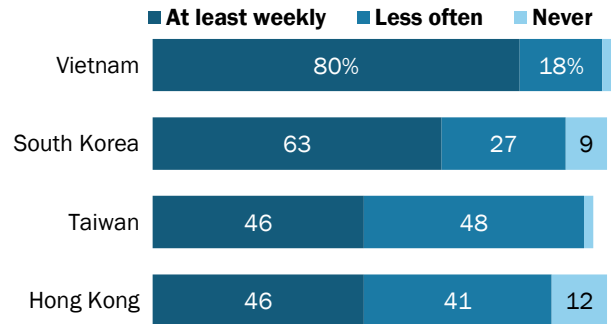
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We also asked Christians (and *only* Christians) how often they attend church services. Majorities of Christians in Vietnam and South Korea say they attend church at least weekly. In both Hong Kong and Taiwan, 46% of Christians report that they attend services once per week or more.

(In Japan, the number of Christians surveyed is too small to allow their answers to be analyzed and reported separately.)

80% of Christians in Vietnam attend church at least weekly

% of *Christian adults* in each place who say they attend church ...



Note: Don't know/Refused responses are not shown. Sample size is too small to analyze Christians in Japan.

Source: Survey conducted June 2-Sept. 17, 2023, among adults in five Asian publics. Read the Methodology for details.

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Home altars

Nearly all adults in Vietnam [have an altar in their home](#) (95%), compared with about half of adults in Japan and Taiwan. Far fewer in Hong Kong (25%) and South Korea (6%) say their home contains an altar.

In Vietnam, equally large shares of Buddhists, Christians and even religiously unaffiliated people say they have an altar in their home. By contrast, no more than 10% of any of these groups in South Korea say they have one.

(According to [a 2023 survey we conducted in the U.S.](#), Vietnamese Americans are also more

likely than most other Asian Americans –

including those with Korean and Japanese ancestry – to have an altar, shrine or religious symbols used for worship at home.)

Majorities of Buddhists in each of the places surveyed, except South Korea, have home altars. Except in Vietnam, altars are less popular among the unaffiliated and are rarely found in Christian homes.

In general, adults with less education are more likely than those with more education to say they have an altar in their home. The exception, again, is Vietnam, where adults with more education are slightly *more* likely than others to have a home altar, though both groups overwhelmingly say they do (97% vs. 93%).

Nearly all in Vietnam have a home altar

% of adults in each place who say there is an altar in their home

	General Population	Religiously unaffiliated	Buddhists	Christians
Vietnam	95%	95%	95%	93%
Japan	51	37	64	–
Taiwan	49	37	58	15
Hong Kong	25	21	56	11
South Korea	6	3	8	10

Note: “–” indicates sample size is too small for analysis.

Source: Survey conducted June 2-Sept. 17, 2023, among adults in five Asian publics. Read the Methodology for details.

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Meditation

Meditation is most common in South Korea, where a majority of adults say they practice it. In the other places surveyed, the share of people who ever meditate ranges from 16% in Vietnam to 34% in Taiwan.

In general, Buddhists are more likely than unaffiliated people to say they meditate. In Taiwan, for example, 41% of Buddhists and 28% of the unaffiliated say they meditate.

The share of Christians who ever meditate ranges from 21% in Vietnam to 60% in South Korea.

Respondents with higher levels of education tend to be more likely than those with less education to meditate. For instance, 42% of Taiwanese who have a degree beyond high school say they meditate, compared with 28% of those with less education.

Most South Koreans say they meditate

% of adults in each place who say they ever practice meditation

	General Population	Religiously unaffiliated	Buddhists	Christians
South Korea	59%	55%	74%	60%
Taiwan	34	28	41	30
Japan	30	31	27	--
Hong Kong	22	19	26	24
Vietnam	16	8	24	21

Note: "--" indicates sample size is too small for analysis.

Source: Survey conducted June 2-Sept. 17, 2023, among adults in five Asian publics. Read the Methodology for details.

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Reflecting on life and the universe

We asked two questions about respondents' personal reflections: How often do they think about the meaning and purpose of life, and how often do they feel a deep sense of wonder about the universe?

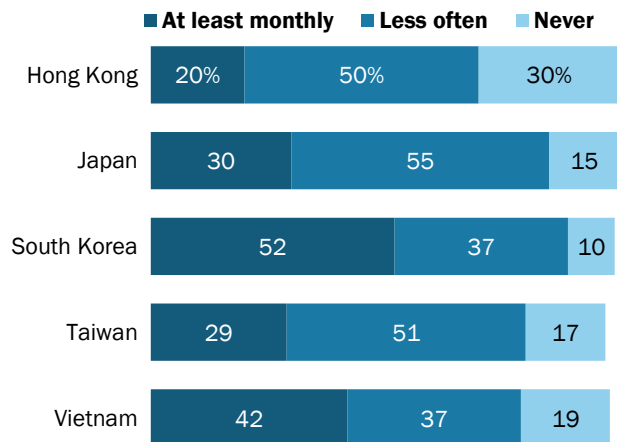
Majorities across the region say they at least sometimes think about the meaning and purpose of life. The share who report that they think about this *at least monthly* ranges from 20% in Hong Kong to 52% in South Korea.

Feeling a deep sense of wonder about the universe seems to be less common. In no place surveyed do more than 20% of adults say they feel such wonder at least monthly. In Vietnam, 52% say they *never* have this experience.

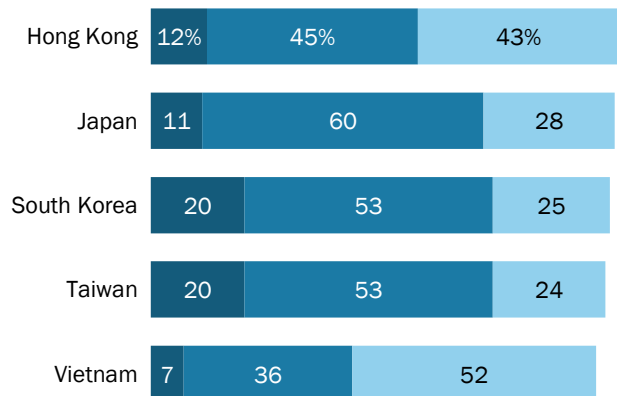
Christians are generally more likely than Buddhists or the religiously unaffiliated to say they think about the meaning of life or feel a deep sense of wonder about the universe. In South Korea, for example, 62% of Christians say they think about the meaning of life at least monthly, compared with 50% of Buddhists and 47% of the unaffiliated.

South Koreans think about the meaning of life more often than others

% of adults in each place who say they think about the meaning and purpose of life ...



% of adults in each place who say they feel a deep sense of wonder about the universe ...



Note: Don't know/Refused responses are not shown.

Source: Survey conducted June 2-Sept. 17, 2023, among adults in five Asian publics. Read the Methodology for details. "Religion and Spirituality in East Asian Societies"

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Fortunetelling

East Asian societies have [long-standing traditions of fortunetelling](#) with [roots in ancient shamanist practices](#).

But relatively few people in the five places surveyed say they consulted a fortuneteller in the last year. The practice is most common in South Korea, where 38% say they had their fortune told in the past 12 months.

Christians tend to be less likely than Buddhists or the religiously unaffiliated to consult fortunetellers. Only 3% of Christians in Hong Kong, Taiwan and Vietnam say they have had their fortunes told in the last year.

In all places surveyed, younger adults are more likely than older adults to go to a fortuneteller. For instance, 19% of Taiwanese ages 18 to 34 say they had their fortune told in the past 12 months, compared with 6% of older adults.

Women are also more likely than men to say they consulted a fortuneteller in the past year.

Among Christians, South Koreans most likely to go to a fortuneteller

% of adults in each place who say they have had their fortune told in the past 12 months

	General Population	Religiously unaffiliated	Buddhists	Christians
South Korea	38%	39%	50%	30%
Japan	17	16	18	--
Vietnam	14	16	15	3
Taiwan	10	8	10	3
Hong Kong	7	7	7	3

Note: "--" indicates sample size is too small for analysis.

Source: Survey conducted June 2-Sept. 17, 2023, among adults in five Asian publics. Read the Methodology for details.

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5. Ancestor veneration, funerals and afterlife beliefs

Ancestor veneration is important across East Asia and Vietnam. It takes many different forms and is tied to the traditional belief that ancestors' spirits remain in one's family and can intervene in human affairs.

Traditional ancestor veneration practices involve gravesite maintenance (or “tomb sweeping”); burning incense to honor ancestors; leaving offerings of food or drink at gravesites or ancestral altars, particularly during certain holidays; and making offerings of spirit money or other goods believed to be necessary to ensure the comfort and happiness of ancestors in the afterlife.

Across the region, 50% of religiously unaffiliated adults or more, as well as the vast majority of Buddhists, say they have burned incense for their ancestors in the past 12 months. In most of the five societies surveyed, a majority of Buddhists and unaffiliated people also say they have offered food, water or drinks to their ancestors in the past year.

Far fewer Christians engage in these types of activities, except in Vietnam. There, 86% of Christians say they have burned incense and 81% say they have offered flowers or lit candles in honor of ancestors in the past year. (According to historians, Vietnamese Christians were persecuted in the 19th century in part because Christianity was viewed as opposing the ancestor rites that were a cornerstone of Vietnamese society. Today, some Catholic authorities in Vietnam prefer to describe ancestor-focused traditions as veneration, rather than worship.)

In this survey, most respondents in Japan and Vietnam say they have a family gravesite, and majorities in both countries also say they look after the gravesite by cleaning it. Smaller shares in South Korea, Hong Kong and Taiwan have a family gravesite. But among people who *do* have a family gravesite, overwhelming majorities across the region say they visit it at least once a year.

Large majorities in Vietnam engage in traditions to honor ancestors

% who say they have done each of the following in the past 12 months to honor or take care of their ancestors

	Burned incense	Offered food, water or drinks	Offered flowers or lit candles	Offered money or other things they may need in the afterlife
Hong Kong	57%	48%	58%	44%
Japan	79	70	78	19
South Korea	45	52	45	14
Taiwan	81	77	47	70
Vietnam	96	86	90	73

Note: Darker shades represent higher values.

Source: Survey conducted June 2-Sept. 17, 2023, among adults in five Asian publics. Read the Methodology for details.

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Throughout the region, people say it is important to follow traditional practices when planning a loved one's funeral. For example, about seven-in-ten adults in both Japan and Taiwan say that following traditional funeral rites is important.

The survey also asked about:

- [Cremating versus burying loved ones](#)
- [Belief in rebirth and karma](#)
- [Belief in heaven and hell](#)

Ancestor veneration rituals

In each of the five places surveyed, large shares of the population say they have done the following in the past 12 months to honor or take care of their ancestors:

- Burned incense
- Offered food, water or drinks
- Offered flowers or lit candles

In East Asia and Vietnam, these activities often occur at [gravesites](#) or [home altars](#), though the survey did not specify any location. (More about the prevalence of home altars can be found in [Chapter 4.](#))

Ancestor veneration rituals are [particularly common in Vietnam](#), where 96% of adults say they have burned incense in the past 12 months and 90% report that they have offered flowers or lit candles to honor their ancestors. In Taiwan and Japan, roughly eight-in-ten people surveyed have burned incense to honor ancestors in the past year.

Among the practices we asked about, the least common is offering ancestors “money or other things” that they may need in the afterlife. Still, majorities in Vietnam and Taiwan say they have made such offerings in the past 12 months.

Christians in East Asia, Vietnam generally less likely than others to engage in ancestor veneration rituals

% of adults in each place who say they have done each of the following in the past 12 months to honor or take care of their ancestors

	Burned incense	Offered food, water or drinks	Offered flowers or lit candles	Offered money or other things they may need in the afterlife
<i>Among the religiously unaffiliated in ...</i>				
Hong Kong	62%	51%	58%	49%
Japan	74	59	70	14
South Korea	50	56	43	11
Taiwan	72	69	34	61
Vietnam	97	92	91	81
<i>Among Buddhists in ...</i>				
Hong Kong	84	68	71	59
Japan	88	81	85	22
South Korea	75	81	71	35
Taiwan	87	83	58	72
Vietnam	98	91	93	80
<i>Among Christians in ...</i>				
Hong Kong	21	23	49	18
South Korea	24	33	36	8
Taiwan	29	31	52	25
Vietnam	86	33	81	18
<i>Among Daoists in ...</i>				
Taiwan	96	87	47	87

Note: Darker shades represent higher values.

Source: Survey conducted June 2-Sept. 17, 2023, among adults in five Asian publics. Read the Methodology for details.

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Generally, Buddhists are more likely than people with no religion to honor ancestors in these ways, and people with no religious affiliation are more likely than Christians to do so. But in Vietnam, a solid majority of Christians have burned incense (86%) and offered flowers or lit candles (81%) for ancestors in the past year.

Respondents ages 60 and older are somewhat more likely than younger adults to say they have burned incense and offered flowers or lit candles to honor ancestors in the past 12 months. And men are more likely than women to say they have burned incense for ancestors in the past year.

Communicating with ancestors

Fewer than half of respondents throughout the region say they have told ancestors about events in their lives during the past 12 months. This practice is most common in Vietnam (45%), Taiwan (38%) and Japan (37%).

Buddhists are generally more likely than Christians and the religiously unaffiliated to say they have spoken to their ancestors about what is happening in their lives.

Roughly a quarter of Hong Kongers say they talk to ancestors about their lives

% of adults in each place who say they have told their ancestors about events in their lives in the past 12 months

	General population	Religiously unaffiliated	Buddhists	Christians
Vietnam	45%	39%	51%	45%
Taiwan	38	26	44	34
Japan	37	30	44	–
Hong Kong	26	24	29	29
South Korea	19	14	39	17

Note: “–” indicates sample size is too small for analysis.

Source: Survey conducted June 2-Sept. 17, 2023, among adults in five Asian publics. Read the Methodology for details.

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We also asked respondents whether they have ever felt the spirit of an ancestor interact with them in certain ways, such as by helping them, punishing them, coming to visit them in a dream, or coming to be with them in any other form.

In most places surveyed, fewer than half of respondents say they have had these experiences. Feeling that an ancestor has *punished* them is particularly rare.

But Vietnam stands out on one measure: Nearly eight-in-ten Vietnamese adults say the spirit of an ancestor has ever *helped* them.

Buddhists across the region are more likely than the religiously unaffiliated and Christians to say they have felt spirits either help or punish them. For example, South Korean Buddhists (53%) are more than twice as likely as the religiously unaffiliated (22%) or Christians (20%) to say they have felt the spirit of an ancestor help them.

Also, women are more likely than men to say ancestors have visited them in a dream. And adults ages 60 and older are more likely than younger adults to report this experience.

Few in Asian societies surveyed believe ancestors have punished them

% of adults in each place who say they have ever felt that the spirit of an ancestor has ...

	Helped them	Punished them	Come to visit them in a dream	Come to be with them in any other form
Vietnam	79%	13%	40%	10%
Taiwan	38	9	31	14
Japan	35	10	28	21
South Korea	26	8	29	26
Hong Kong	22	4	12	8

Note: Darker shades represent higher values.

Source: Survey conducted June 2-Sept. 17, 2023, among adults in five Asian publics. Read the Methodology for details.

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Family gravesites

Family gravesites, which can include places [where cremated ashes are interred](#), are extremely common in some, but not all, of the five societies surveyed.

In Japan and Vietnam, more than eight-in-ten adults say they have a gravesite where the ashes or remains of deceased family members reside. In South Korea, just over half say this, while in Hong Kong and Taiwan, about one-in-three adults have family gravesites.

Among survey respondents

who report having a family gravesite, the vast majority say they (or others in their household) look after it by sweeping or cleaning it. For example, 28% of adults in Taiwan say they have a family gravesite, and most of these respondents (23% of all Taiwanese surveyed) say that someone in their household sweeps or cleans it.

Across the region, people are less likely to say they pay money to maintain family gravesites, though in Japan a majority of adults say they (or others in their household) pay for this upkeep.

Vast majority of East Asians and Vietnamese who have a family gravesite say they maintain it

% of adults in each place who say they ...

	Have a family gravesite where the remains of deceased family members reside	Look after a family gravesite by sweeping or cleaning it	Pay money to maintain a family gravesite
Japan	85%	79%	63%
Vietnam	84	81	30
South Korea	55	43	36
Hong Kong	31	26	21
Taiwan	28	23	24

Note: Darker shades represent higher values. The questions about gravesite care and maintenance were asked only of those who first said they have a family gravesite. However, the percentages shown here are based on the total adult population, including those who do *not* have a family gravesite.

Source: Survey conducted June 2-Sept. 17, 2023, among adults in five Asian publics. Read the Methodology for details.

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Most East Asians and Vietnamese who have a family gravesite say they visit it at least once a year. For example, in Taiwan, 28% of adults say they have a family gravesite, and 24% of all adults (or 86% of those who have a family gravesite) say they visit it once a year or more.

In Vietnam and Japan, where family gravesites are much more common, seven-in-ten adults or more say they visit theirs at least once a year. And in both places, roughly one-in-ten adults say they visit their family gravesite at least *monthly* (12% and 8%, respectively).

7 in 10 Japanese adults visit their family gravesite at least once a year

% of adults in each place who say they ...

	1. Have a family gravesite	2. And visit it ...			Do not have a family gravesite
		... More than once a year	... Once a year	... Less often/ Never	
Japan	85%	49%	22%	14%	14%
Vietnam	84	53	25	5	16
South Korea	55	33	13	9	44
Hong Kong	31	8	17	6	68
Taiwan	28	5	19	4	70

Note: The table shows the share of all adults who do each thing, although the question about visiting gravesites was asked only of those who first said they have a family gravesite. Due to rounding, figures may not add to subtotals indicated. Those who did not answer the question about having a family gravesite, or the question about frequency of visits, are not shown.

Source: Survey conducted June 2-Sept. 17, 2023, among adults in five Asian publics. Read the Methodology for details.

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How important are traditional funerals?

Although funeral rites vary across the region, most respondents in all five places surveyed say it would be at least somewhat important to follow tradition if they were planning a funeral for a family member or loved one.

In Vietnam, about nine-in-ten adults say this, including 68% who say it would be *very* important to follow traditional funeral rites and rituals.

Previous research has shown that [planning a parent's funeral](#) is among life's greatest responsibilities in Vietnam.

These funeral proceedings can last for quite some time, and they often are a joint effort with many members of the family and community.

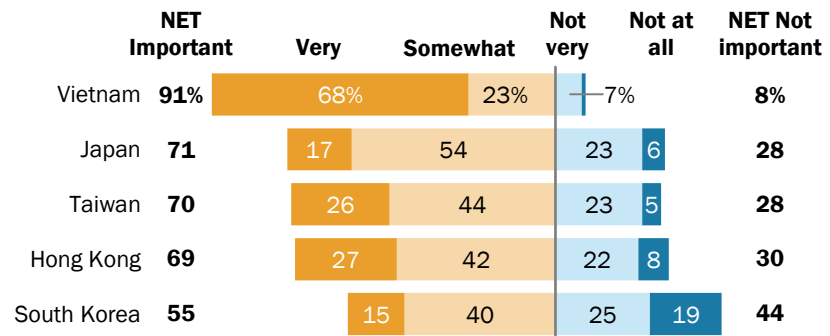
Generally across the region, Buddhists are more likely than Christians or adults without a religious affiliation to say it would be important to follow traditional rituals at a loved one's funeral. But even among Christians and the religiously unaffiliated, about half or more say it would be at least somewhat important to do this. For example, in South Korea, 71% of Buddhists, 49% of Christians and 54% of the religiously unaffiliated say this.

(For more on Buddhists' views about the importance of Buddhist funerals to Buddhist identity, read [Chapter 2](#).)

In several places across the region, women are more likely than men to say that traditional funeral rituals would be important. In South Korea and Taiwan, however, men and women are about equally likely to prioritize traditional rites.

44% of adults in South Korea say it is not important to follow traditional funeral rites

% of adults in each place who say it would be ___ important for them to follow traditional funeral rites if they were planning the funeral of a family member or a loved one



Note: Don't know/Refused responses are not shown. Due to rounding, figures may not add to subtotals indicated.

Source: Survey conducted June 2-Sept. 17, 2023, among adults in five Asian publics. Read the Methodology for details.

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Cremation and burial

In this region, the question of how to handle the remains of the dead is widely debated for many reasons, including concerns about [land scarcity](#) and [groundwater pollution](#), as well as [evolving funeral customs](#).

Survey respondents were asked how their family takes care of the remains of deceased family members. The options we gave were cremation, burial or “follow some other method.” People could select more than one option.

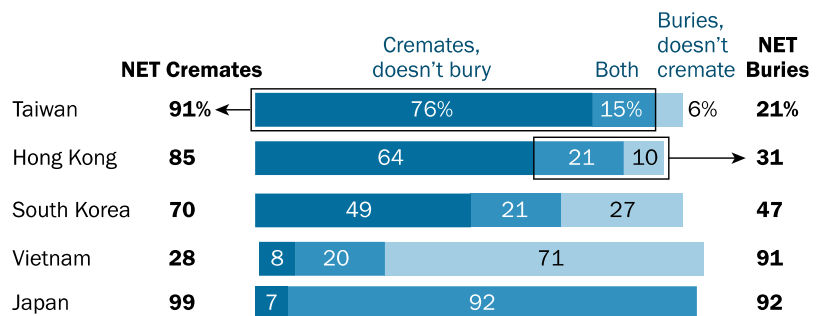
Large majorities in four of the surveyed places say they cremate deceased family members. Vietnam is the only place in the region where [burial is more common than cremation](#) (91% vs. 28%).

No more than 6% in any place say their family follows some other method.

In Japan, 92% of adults say their family *both* cremates *and* buries deceased family members. Far fewer adults in other places report choosing both cremation and burial for dead relatives.

In Japan, 9 in 10 say their family cremates *and* buries remains

% of adults in each place who say their family ____ their deceased family members



Note: Respondents were asked: “People have different ways of taking care of deceased family members. Which of the following practices does your family do? Cremate your deceased family members, bury your deceased family members, or follow some other method?” Respondents could choose any combination of the three options. Some other method/Don’t know/Refused responses are not shown. Due to rounding, figures may not add to subtotals indicated.

Source: Survey conducted June 2-Sept. 17, 2023, among adults in five Asian publics. Read the Methodology for details.

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Outside Japan, majorities say their family *either* cremates *or* buries dead relatives. In South Korea, 49% of respondents say their family cremates without burying, while 27% say their family buries without cremating.

Survey respondents who reported that their family cremates deceased relatives were then asked whether they scatter the ashes or keep them in “a particular location, like someone’s home, a temple or pagoda, or a gravesite.”

Keeping ashes in a particular location is the most common approach. Large majorities in Japan (92%), Taiwan (87%) and Hong Kong (74%) say they do this.

Few East Asian and Vietnamese families scatter deceased relatives’ ashes

% of adults in each place who say their family cremates dead relatives and ...

	Keeps the ashes in a particular location	Scatters the ashes
Japan	92%	3%
Taiwan	87	1
Hong Kong	74	8
South Korea	56	9
Vietnam	26	2

Note: Percentages based on total adult population. Respondents whose families cremate were asked “Does your family scatter the ashes of deceased family members OR do you keep them at a particular location, like someone’s home, a temple or pagoda, or a gravesite?”

Source: Survey conducted June 2-Sept. 17, 2023, among adults in five Asian publics. Read the Methodology for details. “Religion and Spirituality in East Asian Societies”

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Belief in rebirth and nirvana

The belief that humans are reborn in an ongoing cycle of suffering known as *samsara* is a [core teaching in Buddhism](#), and at least half of Buddhists in all five locations surveyed say they think rebirth exists.

Religiously unaffiliated adults are less likely than Buddhists to say they believe in rebirth. Still, significant shares of the religiously unaffiliated in Taiwan (56%), Hong Kong (52%) and Vietnam (49%) say they believe in rebirth.

In Taiwan, roughly eight-in-ten Daoists (also spelled Taoists) and followers of local or Indigenous religions also say they [believe in rebirth](#).

Across the region, women are more likely than men to say they believe in rebirth. In Japan, for example, 51% of women believe in rebirth, compared with 37% of men. Adults younger than 60 are also more likely than the region's older adults to say rebirth exists.

(Reincarnation is a related concept in Hinduism. Our 2019-2020 survey of [religion in India](#) found that 40% of Hindus in India believe in reincarnation.)

56% of the religiously unaffiliated in Taiwan believe in rebirth

% of adults in each place who say they think rebirth exists

	General population	Religiously unaffiliated	Buddhists	Christians
Taiwan	71%	56%	86%	32%
Vietnam	56	49	65	46
Hong Kong	54	52	82	35
Japan	44	35	50	–
South Korea	28	26	53	20

Note: “–” indicates sample size is too small for analysis.

Source: Survey conducted June 2-Sept. 17, 2023, among adults in five Asian publics. Read the Methodology for details. “Religion and Spirituality in East Asian Societies”

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Respondents also were asked whether they believe in [nirvana](#) – a term used in Buddhist teachings to refer to the state of liberation from the cycle of rebirth. Buddhists in Hong Kong (77%), Taiwan (59%) and South Korea (58%) are the only religious groups with a majority that believes in nirvana.

Across the places surveyed, the religiously unaffiliated and Christians are much less likely than Buddhists to believe in nirvana. For example, 48% of Vietnamese Buddhists say they believe in nirvana, compared with 20% of religiously unaffiliated Vietnamese adults and 17% of Vietnamese Christians.

(In every place but Hong Kong, sizable shares chose not to answer this question. This ranged from 16% in South Korea to 30% in Taiwan.)

48% of Hong Kongers believe in nirvana

% of adults in each place who say they think nirvana exists

	General population	Religiously unaffiliated	Buddhists	Christians
Hong Kong	48%	41%	77%	42%
Taiwan	41	25	59	20
Vietnam	31	20	48	17
South Korea	24	18	58	17
Japan	16	10	20	–

Note: “–” indicates sample size is too small for analysis.

Source: Survey conducted June 2-Sept. 17, 2023, among adults in five Asian publics. Read the Methodology for details.

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Belief in heaven and hell

Many world religions have concepts that can be understood as “heaven” and “hell,” even though religions may define or describe these places differently. For example, while [Christianity](#) describes heaven and hell as final destinations for souls of the dead, [Buddhism](#) teaches that heaven and hell are among the many temporary locations that a soul can be reborn into before escaping the cycle of rebirth.

In Hong Kong and Taiwan, clear majorities say they believe in both heaven and hell. In Vietnam, the public is more evenly divided, with 48% expressing belief in heaven and 55% in hell. Meanwhile, in Japan and South Korea, roughly four-in-ten adults believe in heaven, and somewhat fewer Japanese (32%) believe in hell.

In Vietnam, slightly more believe in hell than in heaven

% of adults in each place who say they think ___ exists

	Heaven	Hell
Taiwan	71%	70%
Hong Kong	61	59
Vietnam	48	55
South Korea	43	41
Japan	42	32

Note: Darker shades represent higher values.

Source: Survey conducted June 2-Sept. 17, 2023, among adults in five Asian publics.

Read the Methodology for details.

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Christians in the region typically are the most likely to say that both heaven and hell exist, though more Christians express belief in heaven than in hell.

Buddhists across the region are more likely than people who have no religion to believe in each concept. For instance, in Vietnam, the vast majority of Christians (86%) believe in heaven, compared with roughly half of Buddhists (53%) and a third of the unaffiliated (34%).

Our survey also finds that, in general:

- Adults under 60 are more likely than older adults to say they believe in hell. In Hong Kong, for instance, 63% of adults who are younger than 60 believe in hell, compared with 49% of older adults.
- Women are more likely than men to say that *both* heaven and hell exist.
- Christians who say they pray at least once a day are more likely than other Christians to say they believe in both heaven and hell.

Across East Asia and Vietnam, majorities of Christians believe in both heaven and hell

% of adults in each place who say they think ___ exists

	Heaven	Hell
<i>Among the religiously unaffiliated in ...</i>		
Hong Kong	48%	47%
Japan	33	26
South Korea	21	20
Taiwan	50	51
Vietnam	34	43

<i>Among Buddhists in ...</i>		
Hong Kong	73	78
Japan	48	37
South Korea	46	50
Taiwan	80	81
Vietnam	53	62

<i>Among Christians in ...</i>		
Hong Kong	88	74
South Korea	78	70
Taiwan	89	78
Vietnam	86	76

<i>Among Daoists in...</i>		
Taiwan	75	78

Note: Darker shades represent higher values.

Source: Survey conducted June 2-Sept. 17, 2023, among adults in five Asian publics.

Read the Methodology for details.

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6. Religion, politics and society

Even though many people in East Asia and neighboring Vietnam [do not see religion as important in their own lives](#), they generally hold positive views about the role of religion in society.

Solid majorities in Hong Kong, South Korea, Taiwan and Vietnam say religion helps society by giving people purpose and, separately, that it helps guide people to do the right thing. In Japan, about half of adults take these positions.

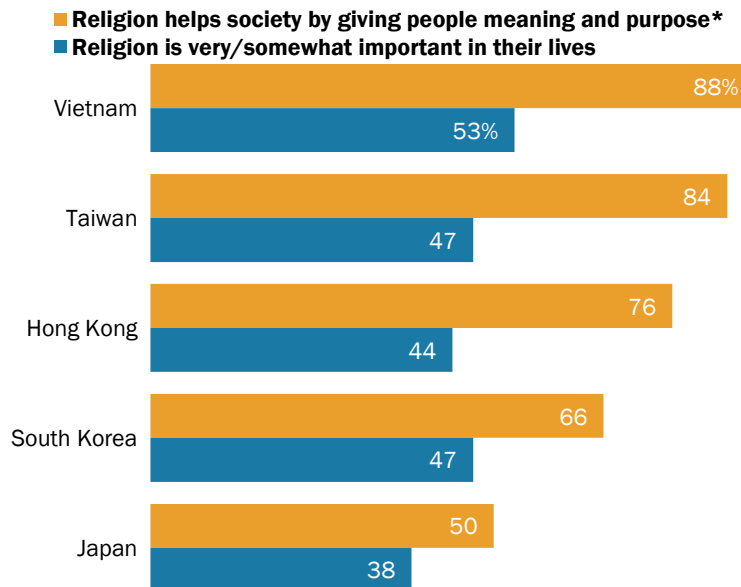
Negative views about religion's role in society are not as prevalent. Still, roughly four-in-ten people in Hong Kong, Japan and South Korea say religion encourages superstition and illogical thinking.

Relatively few people in the places we surveyed say religious leaders should be politicians, participate in political protests, or publicly express their political views. Buddhists, Christians and the religiously unaffiliated broadly agree on these topics.

We also asked about free speech, public criticism of authorities, and social change. In general, people in these societies are divided on whether it is more important to allow free speech or to ensure social harmony. But most support the right to publicly criticize their governments. For instance, roughly eight-in-ten adults in Hong Kong, South Korea and Taiwan say people who disagree with their government's actions should be able to speak out publicly.

In East Asia and Vietnam, people are more likely to say religion helps society than to say it's important in their own lives

% of adults in each place who say ...



* Shares indicate those who say the statement describes their views either very or somewhat well.

Source: Survey conducted June 2-Sept. 17, 2023, among adults in five Asian publics. Read the Methodology for details.

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(In Vietnam we did not ask whether people should be able to criticize the government or whether religious leaders should participate in political protests.)

Across the region, many also think their society would be better off in the future if it is open to change, as opposed to sticking to its traditions and way of life. In Hong Kong, Vietnam and Taiwan, about half of adults say their society would benefit from being open to changes. People in South Korea and Japan are even more likely to express this sentiment.

Religion's role in society

In our survey, we asked people to respond to a series of both positive and negative statements about religion's value to individuals and to society.

Positive statements:

1. "Religion helps society by giving people meaning and purpose in their lives."
2. "Religion gives people guidance so that they do the right thing and treat other people well."

Many people across the region say these statements align "very well" or "somewhat well" with their own views.

In Vietnam (88%), Taiwan (84%) and Hong Kong (76%), the vast majority agree that religion helps society by giving people meaning and purpose. And similar shares say religion guides people to do the right thing and treat others well. In South Korea, about two-thirds of adults say these statements match their own views.

Japanese adults are the *least* likely to view religion's impact positively. Only about half of people surveyed in Japan say either statement describes their own position well.

Generally, Christians across the region are somewhat more likely than other groups to affirm these positive statements. In Hong Kong, for instance, 89% of Christians say religion guides people to do the right thing and treat others well, compared with 78% of Buddhists and 76% of the unaffiliated.

On balance, adults with more education are slightly more likely than those with less education to view religion's role positively. In Hong Kong, 83% of adults with at least a college education say religion helps society by giving meaning and purpose to people's lives, while 73% of those with less education take that position.

Two-thirds of South Koreans say religion helps society by giving people meaning and purpose

% of adults in each place who say each of the following statements describe their views *very/somewhat well*

	Religion helps society by giving people meaning and purpose in their lives	Religion gives people guidance so that they do the right thing and treat other people well
Hong Kong	76%	80%
Japan	50	51
South Korea	66	65
Taiwan	84	86
Vietnam	88	91

Note: Darker shades represent higher values.

Source: Survey conducted June 2-Sept. 17, 2023, among adults in five Asian publics. Read the Methodology for details. "Religion and Spirituality in East Asian Societies"

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Negative statements:

1. “Religion encourages superstition and illogical thinking in society.”
2. “Religion encourages violent and extremist thinking among people.”

Across the region, fewer than half of adults say these negative statements describe their views well. Still, roughly four-in-ten people in Hong Kong, Japan and South Korea say religion encourages superstition and illogical thinking.

Taiwanese and Vietnamese adults are the least likely to view religion negatively: Just 19% in Taiwan and 14% in Vietnam say religion encourages superstition and illogical thinking.

Even fewer in both places say that religion encourages violent and extremist thinking.

33% of Japanese adults say religion encourages violent thinking

*% of adults in each place who say each of the following statements describe their views **very/somewhat well***

	Religion encourages superstition and illogical thinking in society	Religion encourages violent and extremist thinking among people
Hong Kong	43%	28%
Japan	37	33
South Korea	42	37
Taiwan	19	6
Vietnam	14	10

Note: Darker shades represent higher values.

Source: Survey conducted June 2-Sept. 17, 2023, among adults in five Asian publics. Read the Methodology for details.

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Religious leaders in politics

What about the role of religious leaders in political life? The survey asked whether religious leaders should be politicians, talk publicly about which politicians or political parties they support, or participate in political protests.

Overall, relatively few people across the region say they want religious leaders to be involved in such political activities. And support is lowest for religious leaders *being* politicians.

Relatively few in East Asia and neighboring Vietnam say religious leaders should be involved in politics

% of adults in each place who say religious leaders should ...

	Talk publicly about what politicians or political parties they support	Participate in political protests	Be politicians
Vietnam	44%	--	34%
Hong Kong	41	39%	33
Taiwan	29	27	24
South Korea	23	29	15
Japan	25	18	14

Note: "Participate in political protests" was not asked in Vietnam. Darker shades represent higher values.

Source: Survey conducted June 2-Sept. 17, 2023, among adults in five Asian publics. Read the Methodology for details.

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People in Taiwan, South Korea and Japan are the least supportive of political involvement by religious leaders, while adults in Hong Kong and Vietnam are somewhat more supportive. For example, 24% of Taiwanese, 15% of South Korean and 14% of Japanese adults say religious leaders should be politicians, compared with about a third in both Hong Kong and Vietnam who say this.

(We also previously asked these questions [in South and Southeast Asia](#).)

Across East Asia and neighboring Vietnam, differences between religious groups on questions of political involvement are relatively modest.

But in South Korea, there are some partisan differences. Adults who feel closest to the liberal Democratic Party of Korea (DPK) are more likely than those who back the conservative People Power Party (PPP) to say religious leaders should talk publicly about what politicians or political parties they support (28% vs. 19%). DPK supporters are also more likely than PPP supporters to say religious leaders should participate in political protests (38% vs. 20%).

Free speech and social harmony

Our survey asked two questions about political speech and dissent:

1. Whether people who disagree with the government should be able to express their criticisms publicly; and
2. Whether people should be allowed to speak their opinions, even if they upset other people, or whether harmony with others is more important than the right to speak one's opinion.

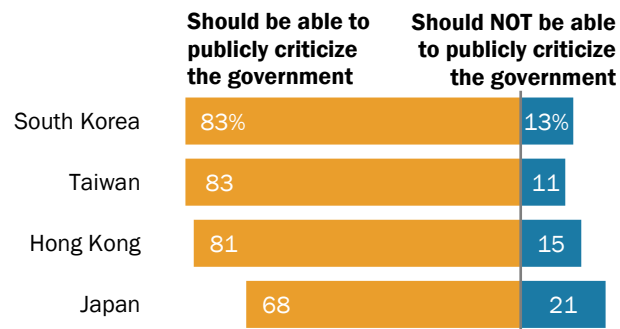
On the first question, most adults across the region say people who disagree with their government's actions should be able to publicly criticize it. Adults in South Korea (83%), Taiwan (83%) and Hong Kong (81%) take this position most strongly, while 68% of Japanese share the same view. (As previously noted, this question was not asked in Vietnam.)

In South Korea, religiously unaffiliated adults (88%) are more likely than Christians (80%) and Buddhists (75%) to say people should be able to publicly criticize the government if they disagree with its actions. A similar pattern prevails in Taiwan, where 87% of unaffiliated people, 79% of Buddhists and 78% of Christians support this position.

In Japan, supporters of the [ruling Liberal Democratic Party](#) (LDP) are considerably less likely than adults who feel closest to the Japan Innovation Party (Ishin) to say people should have the right to publicly criticize the government (58% vs. 79%).

81% of adults in Hong Kong say people should be able to publicly criticize the government

% of adults in each place who say that people who disagree with their government's actions ...



Note: This question was not asked in Vietnam. Other/Both/Neither/Depends/Don't know/Refused responses are not shown.
Source: Survey conducted June 2-Sept. 17, 2023, among adults in five Asian publics. Read the Methodology for details.
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People across the region are more narrowly divided on the question of whether free speech should be a higher priority than social harmony.

In South Korea and Vietnam, respondents are slightly more likely to say that people should be allowed to express their opinions publicly than to say that harmony with others is paramount (53% vs. 42% in South Korea; 52% vs. 44% in Vietnam).

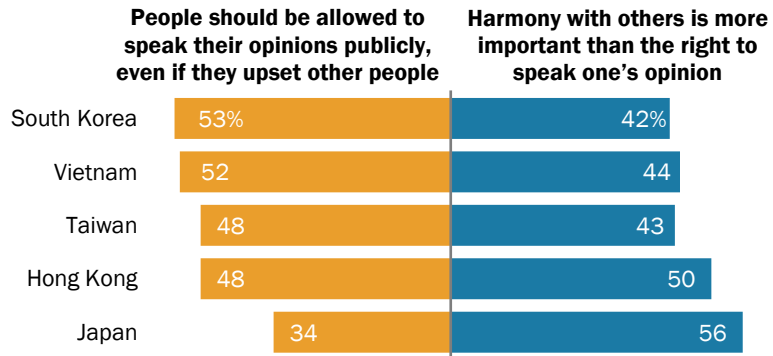
Residents of Hong Kong (48% vs. 50%) and Taiwan (48% vs. 43%) are roughly evenly split on this question.

Japan stands out as the only place surveyed where a majority take the position that harmony with others is more important than the right to speak one's opinion.

In Taiwan, partisanship also plays a role. Taiwanese who feel closest to the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) are significantly more likely than those who align with the more conservative Kuomintang (KMT) to say that people should be allowed to speak their opinions publicly, even if it upsets others (57% vs. 41%).

Some Asian societies split on whether it's more important to say one's opinion or to preserve harmony

% of adults in each place who say that ...



Note: Other/Both/Neither/Depends/Don't know/Refused responses are not shown.
Source: Survey conducted June 2-Sept. 17, 2023, among adults in five Asian publics. Read the Methodology for details.
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In all five places, younger adults (ages 18 to 34) are more likely than older adults to say people should be able to speak their opinions publicly, even if they upset other people. In Vietnam, for instance, this gap is 20 percentage points (64% vs. 44%).

In the four places we asked the question, younger adults also are more likely to say that people should be able to criticize their government, though majorities of older adults feel this way, too.

In Japan, there is a large gender gap among younger adults on the question about speaking one's opinion in public. Younger men are significantly more likely than younger women to prioritize the right to speak one's opinion, even if it disrupts social harmony (51% vs. 33%).

Adults with more education are more likely than those with less education to support speaking freely. For example, 59% of Hong Kongers with a college education say people should be able to speak freely even if it upsets other people, while 42% of those with less than a college education take the same position.

Across the region, young adults are more likely than older adults to say people should be allowed to criticize the government ...

*% of adults in each place who say that people who disagree with their government's actions **should be able to publicly criticize the government***

	Ages			Education		
	18-34	35+	DIFF	More education	Less education	DIFF
Hong Kong	88%	79%	+9	89%	77%	+12
Japan	76	66	+11	77	62	+15
South Korea	92	80	+12	91	76	+15
Taiwan	94	79	+15	92	76	+16

... and that it should be acceptable to speak one's opinion, even if it upsets others

*% of adults in each place who say that people **should be allowed to speak their opinions publicly**, even if they upset other people*

	Ages			Education		
	18-34	35+	DIFF	More education	Less education	DIFF
Hong Kong	66	43	+23	59	42	+18
Japan	42	32	+10	41	30	+11
South Korea	63	50	+13	55	51	+4
Taiwan	67	41	+25	58	40	+18
Vietnam	64	44	+20	62	45	+17

Note: Statistically significant differences are highlighted in **bold**. Differences are calculated before rounding. The question about publicly criticizing the government was not asked in Vietnam. For the purpose of comparing educational groups, we standardize education levels based on the UN's International Standard Classification of Education. In Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea and Taiwan, the lower education category is secondary education or below, and the higher category is postsecondary or above. In Vietnam, the lower education category is below secondary education, and the higher category is secondary or above. Source: Survey conducted June 2-Sept. 17, 2023, among adults in five Asian publics. Read the Methodology for details.

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Should societies be open to change?

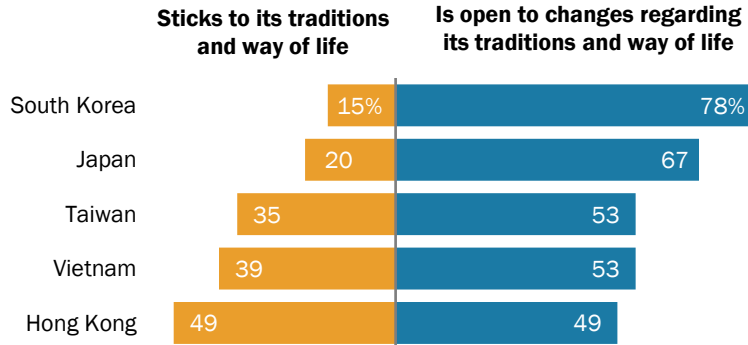
We also asked respondents whether their society would be better off in the future if it “sticks to its traditions” or “is open to changes.”

Most South Korean (78%) and Japanese (67%) adults say their societies will be better off if they are open to changes.

In Taiwan and Vietnam, about half of adults say their societies will be better off if they are open to change, but that is still the most widely held view. (Other respondents say they don’t know, decline to answer, or volunteer other responses.)

67% of Japanese adults say the future will be better if their society is open to change

% of adults in each place who say that where they live will be better off in the future if it ...



Note: Respondents were asked if their specific society will be better off in the future. For example, people in Japan were asked if Japan will be better off in the future. Other/Both/Neither/Depends/Don't know/Refused responses are not shown. Source: Survey conducted June 2-Sept. 17, 2023, among adults in five Asian publics. Read the Methodology for details.

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In Hong Kong, the public is evenly split: 49% say Hong Kong will be better off sticking to its traditions, and the same share say it should be open to change.

In all the places we surveyed, adults younger than 35 are more likely than their elders to express openness to changing traditions. In Japan, for example, 77% of younger adults express this attitude, compared with 64% of older adults. Still, in every society, roughly half of older adults or more take this position, topping out at 77% of South Koreans ages 35 and older.

Adults with more education generally are more likely than those with less education to say the future will be better if their society is open to change.

In East Asia and Vietnam, younger adults are more likely to say their societies would be better off if there is openness to change

*% of adults in each place who say that **where they live will be better off in the future if it is open to changes** regarding its traditions and way of life, by age*

	Ages 18-34	35+	DIFF
Taiwan	64%	49%	+15
Vietnam	61	48	+13
Japan	77	64	+12
Hong Kong	54	47	+7
South Korea	83	77	+6

Note: Respondents were asked if their specific society will be better off in the future. For example, people in Japan were asked if Japan will be better off in the future. All differences are statistically significant. Differences are calculated before rounding.

Source: Survey conducted June 2-Sept. 17, 2023, among adults in five Asian publics. Read the Methodology for details.

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Methodology

Pew Research Center conducted random probability-based surveys among a total of 10,390 adults (ages 18 and older) in five places: Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and Vietnam. Interviewing in Japan, South Korea and Taiwan was carried out under the direction of Langer Research Associates, and interviewing in Hong Kong and Vietnam was carried out under the direction of D3 Systems. In Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea and Taiwan, interviews were conducted via computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI). In Vietnam, interviews were administered face-to-face using tablet devices, also known as computer-assisted personal interviewing (CAPI). All surveys were conducted between June 2 and Sept. 17, 2023.

The surveys were designed to be representative of each adult population, with samples ranging from about 1,750 to 2,300 respondents in each of the places, allowing researchers to analyze the opinions of respondents by age, gender, education and religious affiliation.

The phone surveys were fielded using random-digit-dial (RDD) probability samples based on official numbering plans. In Hong Kong, Japan and Taiwan, respondents were reached on landline and mobile phones. In South Korea, the design was mobile phone only. On landline phones, [the Rizzo method](#) was used for within-household respondent selection. On mobile phones, interviews were conducted with the person who answered the phone, if that person was age 18 or older and the phone's owner. Up to seven attempts were made to complete each interview in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and South Korea; in Japan, up to five attempts were made. In Japan and Hong Kong, nonworking landline and mobile numbers were removed prior to fieldwork. In Taiwan, only nonworking landline numbers were removed.

In Vietnam, the survey was administered using random household selection. The sample was drawn using a multistage cluster design, proportionally stratified by region and urbanicity, and with selection of primary sampling units (PSUs) proportional to total population size. Interview teams were assigned to designated starting points, and they followed a predetermined skip pattern to contact a random selection of households. Within households, the CAPI device randomly

Sample sizes, margins of error and languages

	Unweighted sample size	Margin of error, plus or minus ...	Languages
Hong Kong	2,012	2.74 percentage points	Cantonese, English, Mandarin
Japan	1,742	2.75 percentage points	Japanese
South Korea	2,104	2.47 percentage points	Korean
Taiwan	2,277	2.64 percentage points	Hokkien, Mandarin
Vietnam	2,255	3.03 percentage points	Vietnamese

Source: Survey conducted June 2-Sept. 17, 2023, among adults in five Asian publics.
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selected a respondent to be interviewed from a detailed list of all adult household members. An estimated 11% of Vietnam’s population could not be accessed due to lack of security, language barriers, extreme remoteness, or restrictions by authorities.

The questionnaire was designed by Pew Research Center staff with efforts to ensure the questions would be culturally appropriate and respondents would understand their intended meaning. This included consultation with subject matter experts and project advisers. Early in the development process, eight cognitive interviews were conducted in Japan and Taiwan (four in each place) to test the wording of some questions and concepts. This qualitative work was overseen by Ipsos MORI. The [full survey questionnaire](#) was pretested in all five locations prior to fieldwork.

The questionnaire was developed in English and translated into six other languages. Professional linguists with native proficiency independently checked the translations. In questions about belief in “god,” translators were instructed to choose the most generic possible word for god in each language and to avoid terms that refer exclusively to the god(s) or goddess(es) of a particular religion. The final question wording in English and the other survey languages can be found below.

Samples were first weighted to account for differences in respondents’ probabilities of selection, then further raked to match sample distributions of age, gender, education and region (in Vietnam, region by urbanicity) to parameters from the latest census data available for each location. Statistical tests of significance are adjusted to account for the survey’s design (e.g., cluster sampling in Vietnam) and weighting applied (e.g., selection probabilities and raking to census parameters).

Pew Research Center’s website has more details on [location-specific sample designs](#) for this study and [general information about our international survey research](#).

Fieldwork dates and data collection methods

	Fieldwork dates	Data collection method
Hong Kong	June 23-Sept. 17, 2023	Mobile and landline phone
Japan	June 2-Sept. 13, 2023	Mobile and landline phone
South Korea	June 14-Aug. 3, 2023	Mobile phone
Taiwan	June 6-Aug. 4, 2023	Mobile and landline phone
Vietnam	June 21-Aug. 28, 2023	Face-to-face

Source: Survey conducted June 2-Sept. 17, 2023, among adults in five Asian publics.

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Translation of belief in god question

English: Do you believe in god, or not?

Cantonese: 您信唔信神?

Hokkien: 請問你有信神或是無信神?

Japanese: あなたは神を信じますか、信じませんか。

Korean: 선생님께서는 신을 믿으십니까? 믿지 않으십니까?

Mandarin (Hong Kong): 您是否相信神?

Mandarin (Taiwan): 請問您信不信神?

Vietnamese: Anh/Chị có tin vào thần linh hay không?

Appendix A: Sources

This appendix lists the survey sources used to measure [religious switching](#), [importance of religion](#) and [daily prayer](#) for adults in 102 countries and territories.

'Religion and Spirituality in East Asian Societies' (this report; fieldwork in 2023)

Hong Kong
Japan
South Korea
Taiwan
Vietnam

Various U.S. surveys (fieldwork in 2022-2023)¹⁰

United States

Religion in South and Southeast Asia (fieldwork in 2022)

Cambodia
Indonesia
Malaysia
Singapore
Sri Lanka
Thailand

Religion in India (fieldwork in 2019-2020)

India

Religion in Western Europe (fieldwork in 2017)

Austria
Belgium
Denmark

Religion in Western Europe (continued)

Finland
France
Germany
Ireland
Italy
Netherlands
Norway
Portugal
Slovakia
Spain
Sweden
Switzerland
United Kingdom

Religion in Central and Eastern Europe (fieldwork in 2015-2016)

Armenia
Belarus
Bosnia-Herzegovina
Bulgaria
Croatia
Czech Republic
Estonia
Georgia
Greece
Hungary
Kazakhstan
Latvia
Lithuania

¹⁰ For the United States, figures on religious switching were calculated using questions asked on the [American Trends Panel](#) in 2023. U.S. figures on the importance of religion and daily prayer were calculated using pooled data from the 2022 and 2023 [National Public Opinion Reference Survey](#).

Religion in Central and Eastern Europe**(continued)**

Moldova
 Poland
 Romania
 Russia
 Serbia
 Ukraine

Religion in Israel**(fieldwork in 2014-2015)**

Israel

Religion in Latin America**(fieldwork in 2013-2014)**

Argentina
 Bolivia
 Brazil
 Chile
 Colombia
 Costa Rica
 Dominican Republic
 Ecuador
 El Salvador
 Guatemala
 Honduras
 Mexico
 Nicaragua
 Panama
 Paraguay
 Peru
 Puerto Rico
 Uruguay
 Venezuela

Survey of the world's Muslims**(fieldwork in 2011-2012)**

Albania
 Azerbaijan
 Bangladesh
 Iraq
 Jordan
 Kyrgyzstan
 Lebanon
 Morocco
 Niger
 Pakistan
 Palestinian territories
 Tajikistan
 Tunisia
 Turkey
 Uzbekistan

Religion in sub-Saharan Africa**(fieldwork in 2008-2009)**

Botswana
 Cameroon
 Chad
 Djibouti
 D.R. Congo
 Ethiopia
 Ghana
 Guinea-Bissau
 Kenya
 Liberia
 Mali
 Mozambique
 Nigeria
 Rwanda
 Senegal
 South Africa
 Tanzania
 Uganda

Religion in sub-Saharan Africa

(continued)

Zambia