Pew Research Center

FOR RELEASE OCT. 29, 2018

Eastern and Western Europeans Differ on Importance of Religion, Views of Minorities, and Key Social Issues

People in Central and Eastern Europe are less accepting of Muslims and Jews, same-sex marriage, and legal abortion

FOR MEDIA OR OTHER INQUIRIES:

Alan Cooperman, Director of Religion Research
Scott Gardner, Senior Researcher
Neha Sahgal, Associate Director of Research
Anna Schiller, Communications Manager
202.419.4372

www.pewresearch.org

RECOMMENDED CITATION

Pew Research Center, Oct. 29, 2018, "Eastern and Western Europeans Differ on Importance of Religion, Views of Minorities, and Key Social Issues"

About Pew Research Center

Pew Research Center is a nonpartisan fact tank that informs the public about the issues, attitudes and trends shaping America and the world. It does not take policy positions. The Center conducts public opinion polling, demographic research, content analysis and other data-driven social science research. It studies U.S. politics and policy; journalism and media; internet, science and technology; religion and public life; Hispanic trends; global attitudes and trends; and U.S. social and demographic trends. All of the Center's reports are available at www.pewresearch.org. Pew Research Center is a subsidiary of The Pew Charitable Trusts, its primary funder.

Acknowledgments

This report was produced by Pew Research Center as part of the Pew-Templeton Global Religious Futures project, which analyzes religious change and its impact on societies around the world. Funding for the Global Religious Futures project comes from The Pew Charitable Trusts and the John Templeton Foundation.

This report is a collaborative effort based on the input and analysis of the following individuals:

Research Team

Neha Sahgal, *Associate Director of Research*
Scott Gardner, *Senior Researcher*
Jonathan Evans, *Research Analyst*
Alan Cooperman, *Director of Religion Research*
Ariana Monique Salazar, *Research Analyst*
Kelsey Jo Starr, *Research Analyst*

Methodology Team

Patrick Moynihan, *Associate Director, International Research Methods*
Martha McRoy, *Research Methodologist*

Editorial and Graphic Design

Michael Lipka, *Editorial Manager*
Aleksandra Sandstrom, *Copy Editor*
Jeff Diamant, *Senior Writer/Editor*
Bill Webster, *Information Graphics Designer*

Communications and Web Publishing

Stacy Rosenberg, *Associate Director, Digital*
Anna Schiller, *Communications Manager*
Travis Mitchell, *Digital Producer*

Others at Pew Research Center who provided research guidance include Michael Dimock and James Bell.

This report is based on prior surveys reported in "Religious Belief and National Belonging in Central and Eastern Europe" and "Being Christian in Western Europe." For these projects, Pew Research Center received valuable advice from outside advisers. See the acknowledgments sections of each report for details.

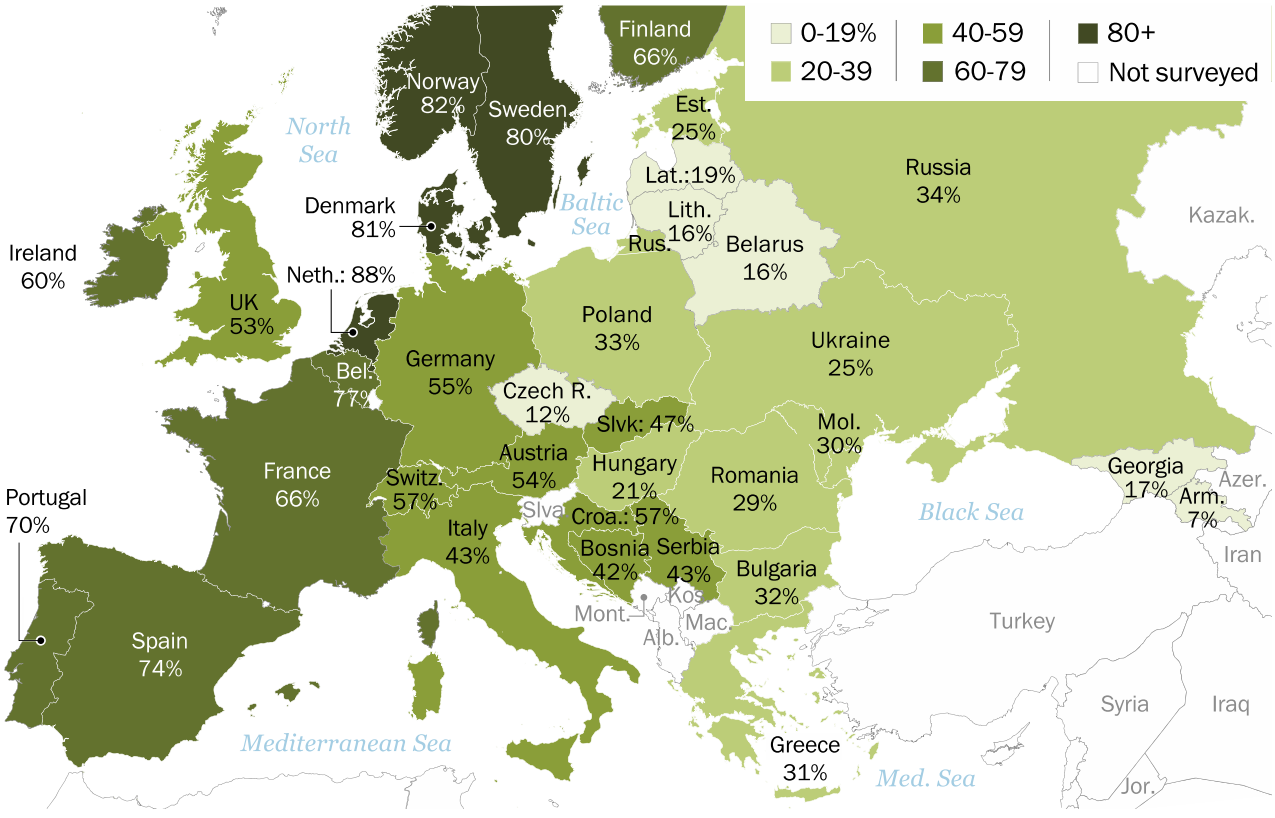
Eastern and Western Europeans Differ on Importance of Religion, Views of Minorities, and Key Social Issues

People in Central and Eastern Europe are less accepting of Muslims and Jews, same-sex marriage, and legal abortion

The Iron Curtain that once divided Europe may be long gone, but the continent today is split by stark differences in public attitudes toward religion, minorities and social issues such as gay marriage and legal abortion. Compared with Western Europeans, fewer Central and Eastern Europeans would welcome Muslims or Jews into their families or neighborhoods, extend the right

Vast differences across Europe in public attitudes toward Muslims

% who say they would be willing to accept Muslims as members of their family



Note: This question was not asked of Muslims.
Source: Surveys conducted 2015-2017 in 34 countries. See Methodology for details.
"Eastern and Western Europeans Differ on Importance of Religion, Views of Minorities, and Key Social Issues"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

of marriage to gay or lesbian couples or broaden the definition of national identity to include people born outside their country.

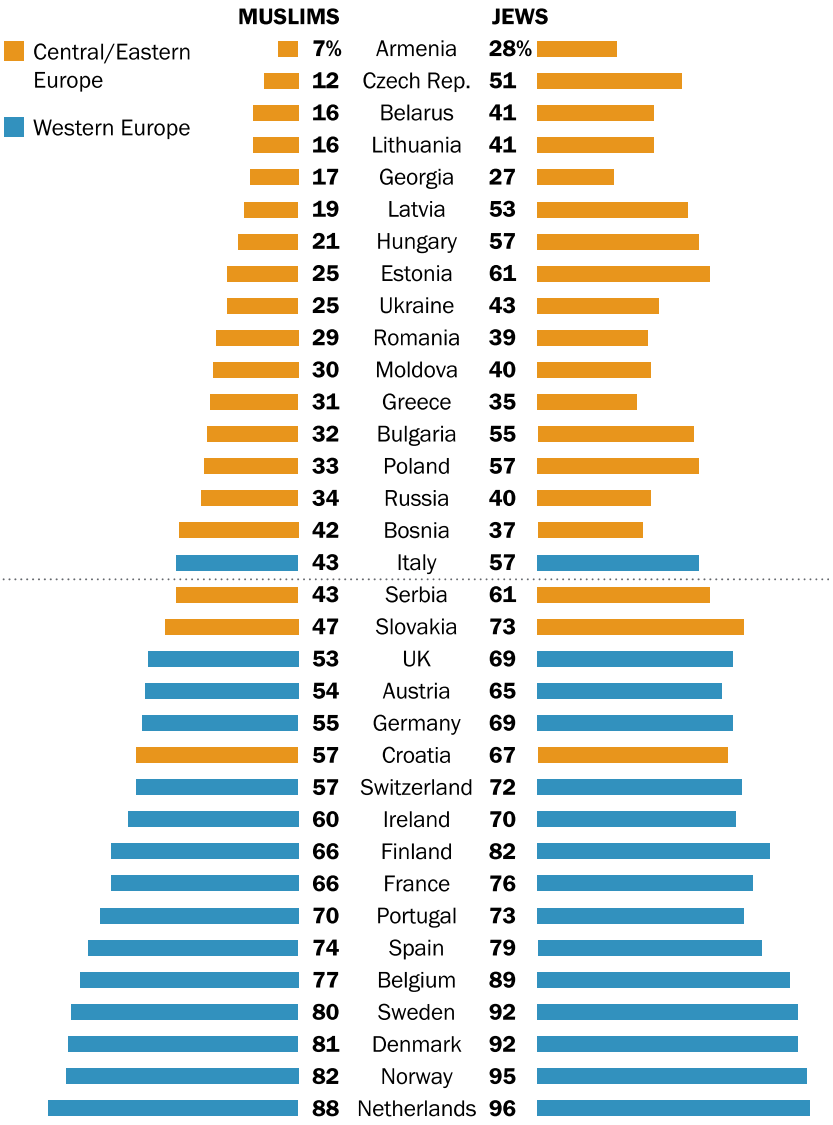
These differences emerge from a series of surveys conducted by Pew Research Center between 2015 and 2017 among nearly 56,000 adults (ages 18 and older) in 34 Western, Central and Eastern European countries, and they continue to divide the continent more than a decade after the European Union began to expand well beyond its Western European roots to include, among others, the Central European countries of Poland and Hungary, and the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

The continental divide in attitudes and values can be extreme in some cases. For example, in nearly every Central and Eastern European country polled, *fewer than half* of adults say they would be willing to accept Muslims into their family; in nearly every Western European country surveyed, *more than half* say they would accept a Muslim into their family. A similar divide emerges between Central/Eastern Europe and Western Europe with regard to accepting Jews into one's family.

In a separate question, Western Europeans also are much more likely than their Central and Eastern European counterparts to say they would accept Muslims in their *neighborhoods*.[1] For example, 83% of Finns say they would be willing to accept Muslims as neighbors, compared with 55% of Ukrainians. And although the divide is less stark, Western Europeans are more likely to express acceptance toward Jews in their neighborhoods as well.

Western Europeans more likely than Central and Eastern Europeans to say they would accept Jews, Muslims into their family

% who say they would be willing to accept _____ as members of their family



Note: These questions were not asked of Muslims and Jews, respectively.
Source: Surveys conducted 2015-2017 in 34 countries. See Methodology for details.
"Eastern and Western Europeans Differ on Importance of Religion, Views of Minorities, and Key Social Issues"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

[1] The share in each country who say they would be willing to accept Muslims or Jews as neighbors can be found here.

Defining the boundaries of Eastern and Western Europe

The definition and boundaries of Central, Eastern and Western Europe can be debated. No matter where the lines are drawn, however, there are strong geographic patterns in how people view religion, national identity, minorities and key social issues. Particularly sharp differences emerge when comparing attitudes in countries historically associated with Eastern vs. Western Europe.

In countries that are centrally located on the continent, prevailing attitudes may align with popular opinions in the East on some issues, while more closely reflecting Western public sentiment on other matters. For instance, Czechs are highly secular, generally favor same-sex marriage and do *not* associate Christianity with their national identity, similar to most Western Europeans. But Czechs also express low levels of acceptance toward Muslims, more closely resembling their neighbors in the East. And most Hungarians say that being born in their country and having Hungarian ancestry are important to being truly Hungarian – a typically Eastern European view of national identity. Yet, at the same time, only about six-in-ten Hungarians believe in God, reflecting Western European levels of belief.

In some other cases, Central European countries fall between the East and the West. Roughly half of Slovaks, for example, say they favor same-sex marriage, and a similar share say they would accept Muslims in their family – lower shares than in most Western European countries, but well above their neighbors in the East. And still others simply lean toward the East on most issues, as Poland does on views of national identity and Muslims, as well as same-sex marriage and abortion.

Researchers included Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, the Baltics and the Balkans as part of "Central and Eastern Europe" because all these countries were part of the Soviet sphere of influence in the 20th century. Although Greece was *not* part of the Eastern bloc, it is categorized in Central and Eastern Europe because of both its geographical location and its public attitudes, which are more in line with Eastern than Western Europe on the issues covered in this report. For example, most Greeks say they are not willing to accept Muslims in their families; three-quarters consider being Orthodox Christian important to being truly Greek; and nearly nine-in-ten say Greek culture is superior to others. East Germany is another unusual case; it *was* part of the Eastern bloc, but is now included in Western Europe as part of a reunified Germany.

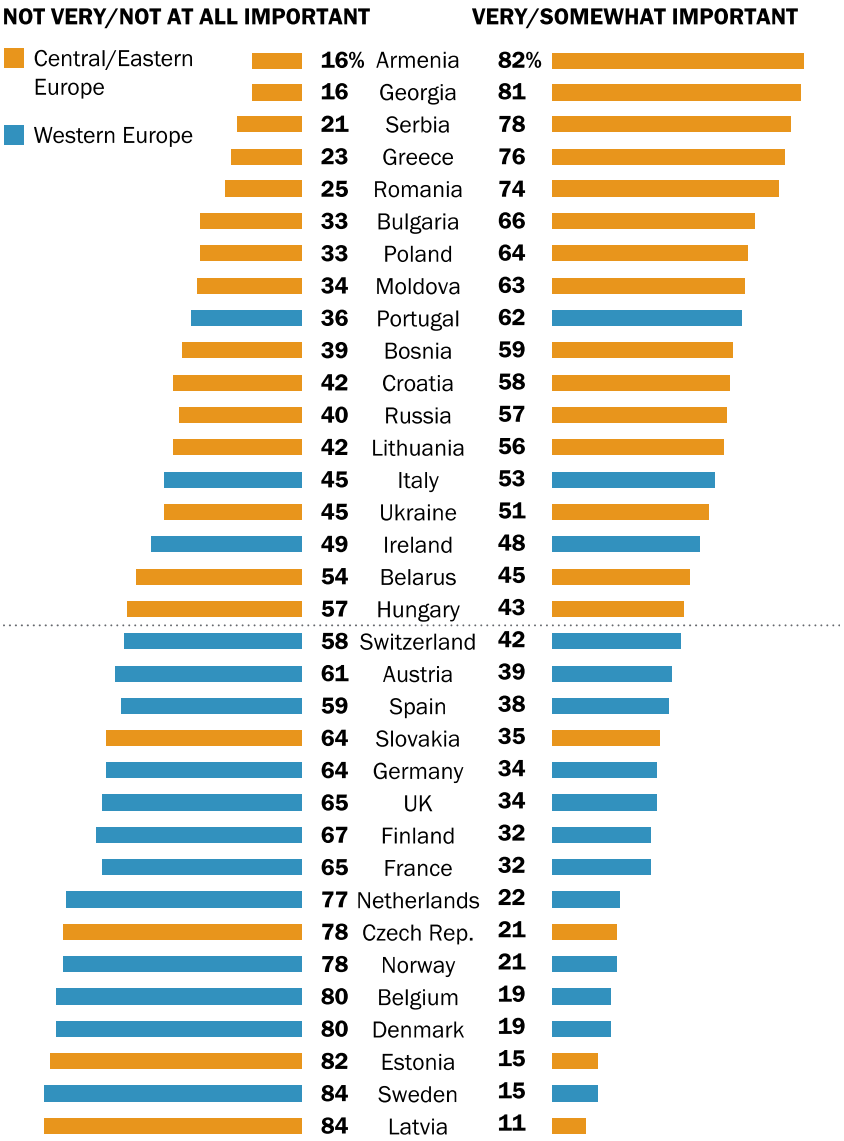
Attitudes toward religious minorities in the region go hand in hand with differing conceptions of national identity. When they were in the Soviet Union's sphere of influence, many Central and Eastern European countries officially kept religion out of public life. But today, for most people living in the former Eastern bloc, being Christian (whether Catholic or Orthodox) is an important component of their national identity.

In Western Europe, by contrast, most people don't feel that religion is a major part of their national identity. In France and the United Kingdom, for example, most say it is *not* important to be Christian to be truly French or truly British.

To be sure, not every country in Europe neatly falls into this pattern. For example, in the Baltic states of Latvia and Estonia, the vast majority of people say being Christian (specifically Lutheran) is not important to their national identity. Still, relatively few express willingness to accept

Fewer people in Western European countries see religion as a key component of national identity

% who say it is _____ to be a Christian to truly share their national identity (e.g. to be "truly Armenian")



Note: In nearly all Central and Eastern European countries, the dominant Christian denomination was included in the question wording (Catholic, Orthodox or Lutheran). For example, in Russia, respondents were asked how important it is to be Orthodox to be "truly Russian." In Bosnia, respondents were asked about their own religious group, whether Muslim or Orthodox. Don't know/refused responses not shown.
Source: Surveys conducted 2015-2017 in 34 countries. See Methodology for details.
"Eastern and Western Europeans Differ on Importance of Religion, Views of Minorities, and Key Social Issues"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

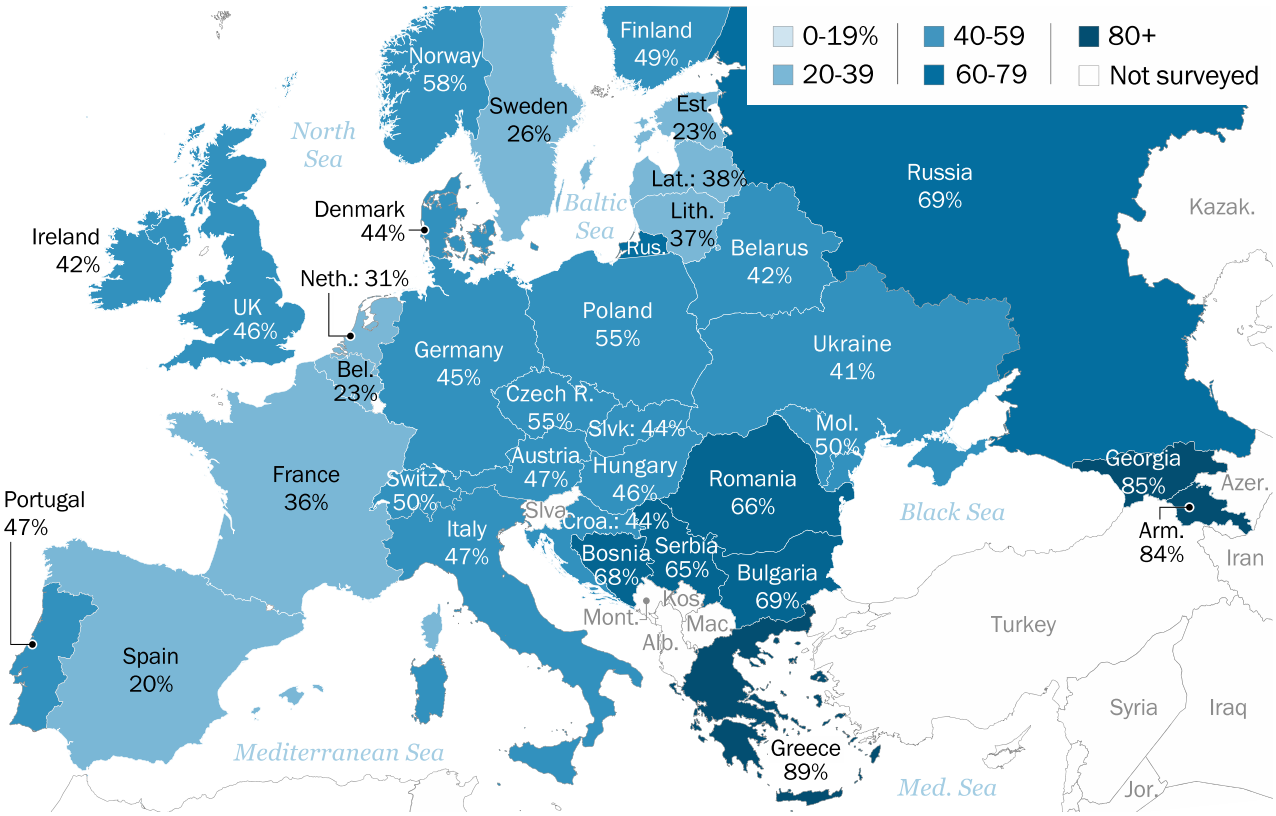
Muslims as family members or neighbors.

But a general East-West pattern is also apparent on at least one other measure of nationalism: cultural chauvinism. The surveys asked respondents across the continent whether they agree with the statement, "Our people are not perfect, but our culture is superior to others." While there are exceptions, Central and Eastern Europeans overall are more inclined to say their culture is superior. The eight countries where this attitude is most prevalent are all geographically in the East: Greece, Georgia, Armenia, Bulgaria, Russia, Bosnia, Romania and Serbia.

People in Central and Eastern Europe also are more likely than Western Europeans to say being born in their country and having family background there are important to truly share the national identity (e.g., to be truly Romanian; see page 26).

Eastern Europeans are more likely to regard their culture as superior to others

% who say they completely/mostly agree with the statement, "Our people are not perfect, but our culture is superior to others"



Source: Surveys conducted 2015-2017 in 34 countries. See Methodology for details.
"Eastern and Western Europeans Differ on Importance of Religion, Views of Minorities, and Key Social Issues"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Taken together, these and other questions about national identity, religious minorities and cultural superiority would seem to indicate a European divide, with high levels of religious nationalism in the East and more openness toward multiculturalism in the West. Other questions asked on the survey point to a further East-West "values gap" with respect to key social issues, such as same-sex marriage and legal abortion.

Sidebar: Differences over the meaning of 'European values'

Is Christianity a "European value?" What about secularism? And how about multiculturalism and open borders?

Leaders often cite European values when defending their stances on highly charged political topics. But the term "European values" can mean different things to different people. For some, it conjures up the continent's Christian heritage; for others, it connotes a broader political liberalism that encompasses a separation between church and state, asylum for refugees, and democratic government.

For the European Union, whose members include 24 of the 34 countries surveyed in this report, the term "European values" tends to signify what Americans might consider liberal ideals.[2] The "Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union" includes respect for cultural and religious diversity; prohibitions against discrimination based on religion and sexual orientation; the right to asylum for refugees; and guarantees of freedom of movement within the EU.[3]

These rights and principles are part of the EU's legal system and have been affirmed in decisions of the European Court of Justice going back decades.[4] But the membership of the EU has changed in recent years, beginning in 2004 to spread significantly from its historic western base into Central and Eastern Europe. Since that year, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia have joined the EU. In many of these countries, the surveys show that people are less receptive to religious and cultural pluralism than they are in Western Europe – challenging the notion of universal assent to a set of European values.

These are not the only issues dividing Eastern and Western Europe.[5] But they have been in the news since a surge in immigration to Europe brought record levels of refugees from predominantly Muslim countries and sparked fierce debates among European leaders and policymakers about border policies and national values.

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has articulated one strain of opposition to the EU's conception of European values, declaring in July 2018 that "Central Europe … has a special culture. It is different from Western Europe." Every European country, he said, "has the right to defend its Christian culture, and the right to reject the ideology of multiculturalism," as well as the right to "reject immigration" and to "defend the traditional family model." Earlier in the year, in an address to the Hungarian parliament, he criticized the EU stance on migration:

[2] In addition to the 24 EU countries surveyed, two additional ones in the survey – Serbia and Bosnia – are in various stages of "accession," the yearslong process of joining the EU. And in Ukraine, politicians have expressed plans to apply for membership in the future.
[3] The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union refers to "common values" in its preamble, which begins: "The peoples of Europe, in creating an ever closer union among them, are resolved to share a peaceful future based on common values. Conscious of its spiritual and moral heritage, the Union is founded on the indivisible, universal values of human dignity, freedom, equality and solidarity; it is based on the principles of democracy and the rules of law. It places the individual at the heart of its activities, by establishing the citizenship of the Union and by creating an area of freedom, security and justice."
[4] For more on how the European Court of Justice has handled these issues, see Ferraro, Francesca, and Jesús Carmona. 2015. "Fundamental Rights in the European Union: The role of the Charter after the Lisbon Treaty." European Parliamentary Research Service.
[5] A sampling of other topics that are said to divide Eastern and Western Europe, other than those included in this report, include sentiment regarding democracy; the importance of individualism in society, as opposed to collectivism; and overall economic well-being. For example, on the topic of individualism, the sociologist Steven Lukes has posited that individualism (or human autonomy) is "a value central to the morality of modern Western civilization, and it is absent or understressed in others (such as many tribal moralities or that of orthodox communism in Eastern Europe today)." Lukes, Steven. 1973. "Individualism."

“In Brussels now, thousands of paid activists, bureaucrats and politicians work in the direction that migration should be considered a human right. … That’s why they want to take away from us the right to decide with whom we want to live.”

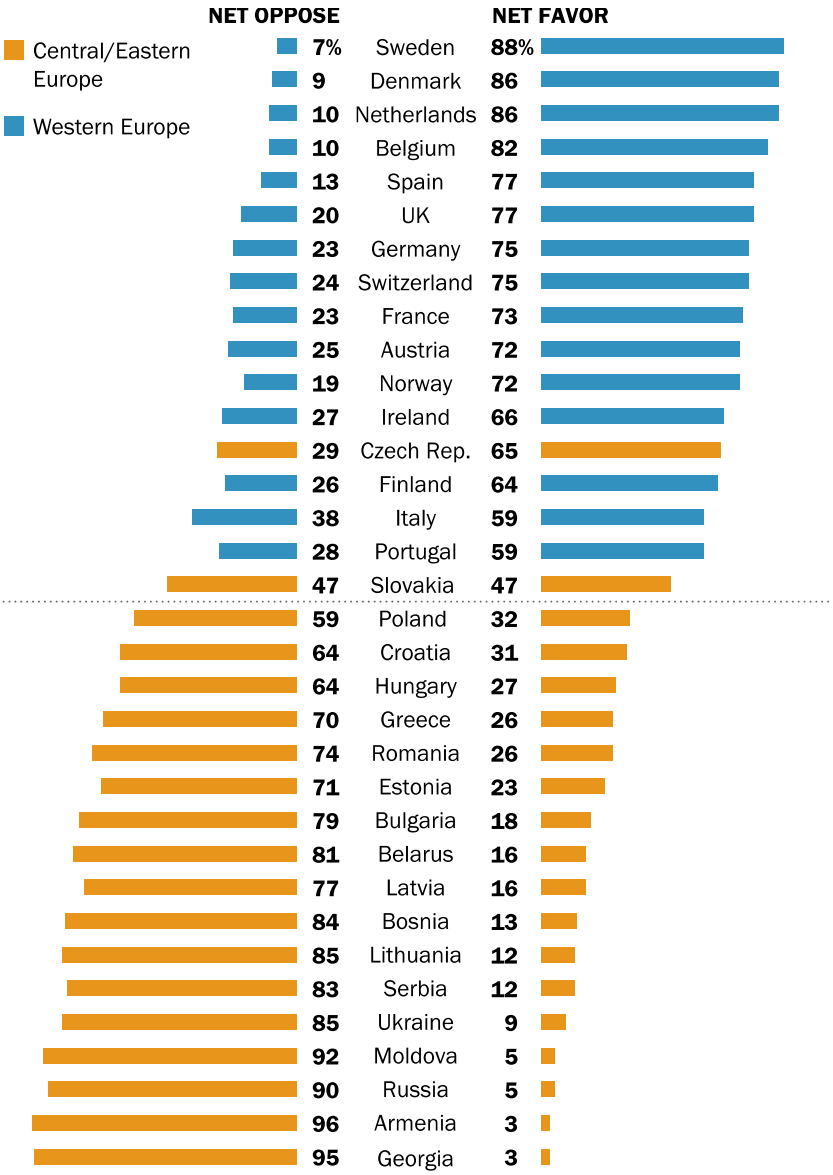
This is not to suggest that support for multiculturalism is universal even in Western Europe. Substantial shares of the public in many Western European countries view being Christian as a key component of their national identity and say they would not accept Muslims or Jews as relatives. And of course, the United Kingdom voted in 2016 to leave the European Union, which many have suggested came in part due to concerns about immigration and open borders. But on the whole, people in Western European countries are much more likely than their neighbors in the East to embrace multiculturalism.

Majorities favor same-sex marriage in every Western European country surveyed, and nearly all of these countries have legalized the practice. Public sentiment is very different in Central and Eastern Europe, where majorities in nearly all countries surveyed *oppose* allowing gays and lesbians to marry legally. None of the Central and Eastern European countries surveyed allow same-sex marriages.

In some cases, these views are almost universally held. Fully nine-in-ten Russians, for instance, oppose legal same-sex marriage, while similarly lopsided majorities in the Netherlands, Denmark and Sweden favor allowing gay and lesbian couples to marry legally.

Most Central and Eastern Europeans oppose same-sex marriage, while most Western Europeans favor it

% who say they favor/strongly favor or oppose/strongly oppose allowing gays and lesbians to marry legally



Note: Don't know/refused answers not shown.
Source: Surveys conducted 2015-2017 in 34 countries. See Methodology for details.
"Eastern and Western Europeans Differ on Importance of Religion, Views of Minorities, and Key Social Issues"

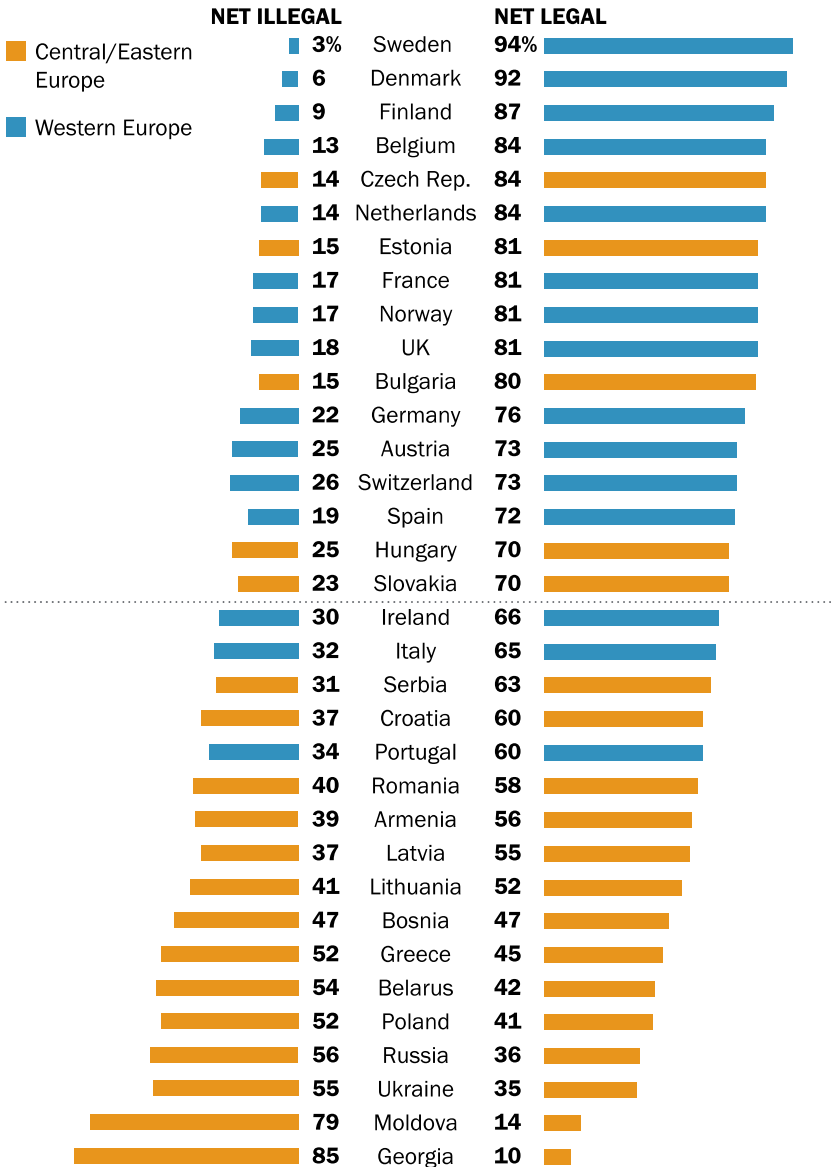
PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Even though abortion generally is legal in both Central/Eastern and Western Europe, there are regional differences in views on this topic, too.[6] In every Western European nation surveyed – including the heavily Catholic countries of Ireland, Italy and Portugal – six-in-ten or more adults say abortion should be legal in all or most cases.

But in the East, views are more varied. To be sure, some Central and Eastern European countries, such as the Czech Republic, Estonia and Bulgaria, overwhelmingly favor legal abortion. But in several others, including Poland, Russia and Ukraine, the balance of opinion tilts in the other direction, with respondents more likely to say that abortion should be mostly or entirely illegal.

Western Europe unified in support for legal abortion, Central and Eastern Europe more evenly divided

% who say abortion should be _____ in all or most cases



Note: Don't know/refused answers not shown.
Source: Surveys conducted 2015-2017 in 34 countries. See Methodology for details.
"Eastern and Western Europeans Differ on Importance of Religion, Views of Minorities, and Key Social Issues"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

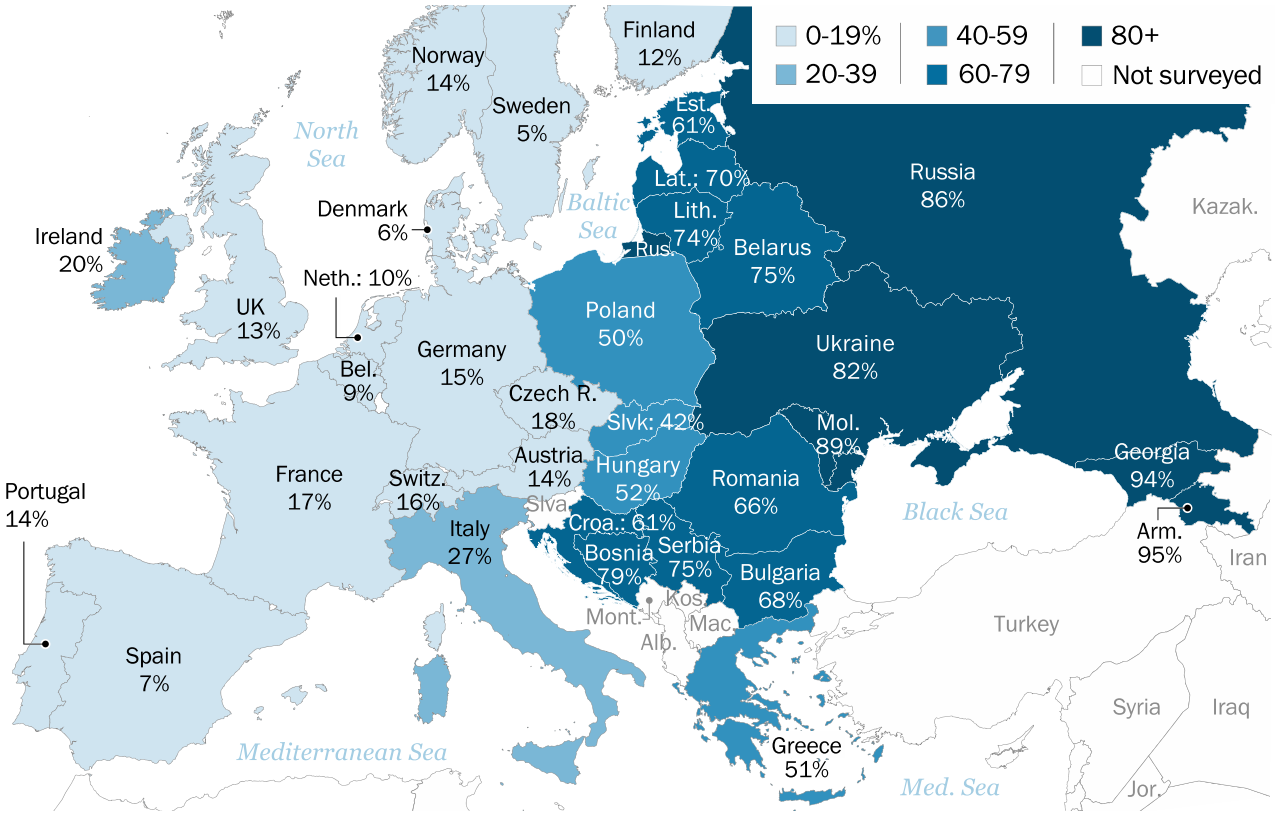
[6] A notable exception is Poland, where abortion is much more restricted. For a complete analysis of abortion laws in Europe and elsewhere, see "How abortion is regulated around the world."

Survey results suggest that Europe's regional divide over same-sex marriage could persist into the future: Across most of Central and Eastern Europe, young adults oppose legalizing gay marriage by only somewhat narrower margins than do their elders.

For example, 61% of younger Estonians (ages 18 to 34) oppose legal gay marriage in their country, compared with 75% of those 35 and older. By this measure, young Estonian adults are still six times as likely as *older* adults in Denmark (10%) to oppose same-sex marriage. This pattern holds across the region; young adults in nearly every Central and Eastern European country are much more conservative on this issue compared with *both* younger and older Western Europeans.

Young adults in Central and Eastern Europe largely oppose gay marriage

% of those ages 18 to 34 who say they oppose/strongly oppose allowing gays and lesbians to marry legally



Source: Surveys conducted 2015-2017 in 34 countries. See Methodology for details.
"Eastern and Western Europeans Differ on Importance of Religion, Views of Minorities, and Key Social Issues"

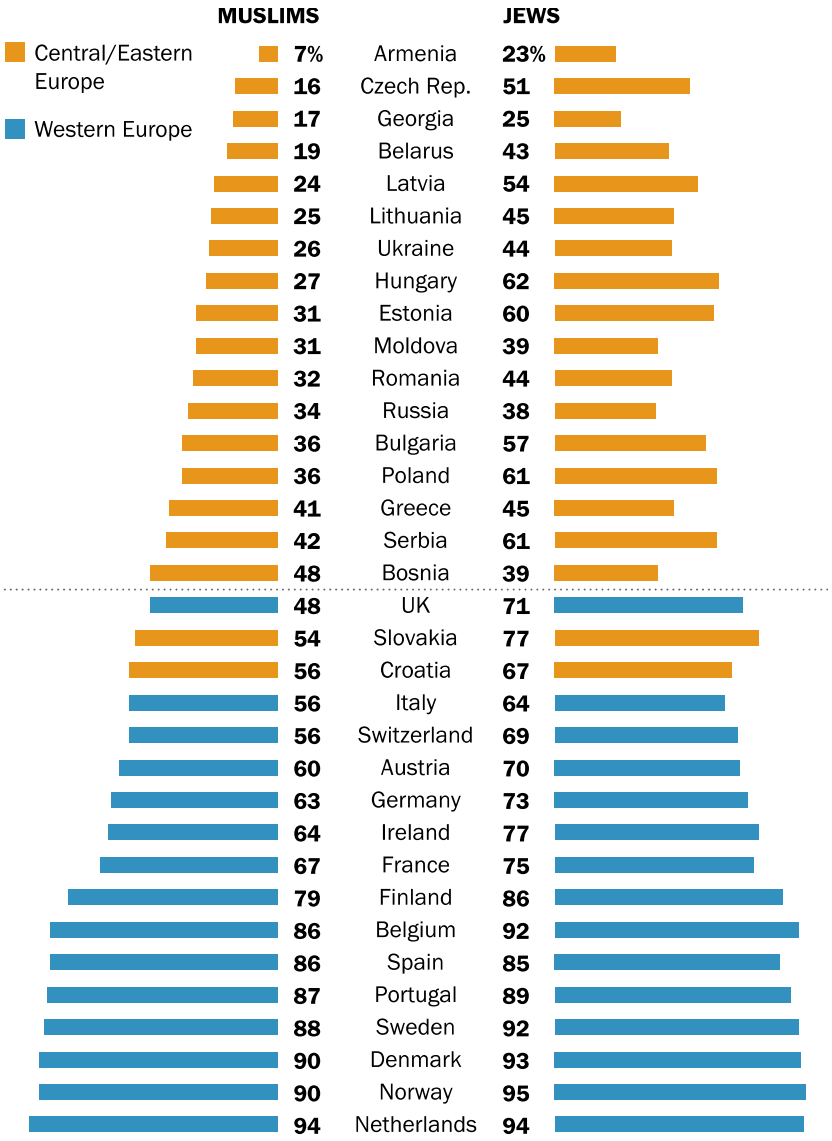
PEW RESEARCH CENTER

In addition, when it comes to views about Muslims and Jews, young adults in most countries in Central and Eastern Europe are no more accepting than their elders.

Consequently, those in this younger generation in Central and Eastern Europe are much less likely than their peers in Western Europe to express openness to having Muslims or Jews in their families. For example, 36% of Polish adults under 35 say they would be willing to accept Muslims in their family, far below the two-thirds of young French adults who say they would be willing to have Muslims in their family – mirroring the overall publics in those countries.

Even among young adults, relatively few in Central and Eastern Europe willing to accept Muslims in family

% of those ages 18 to 34 who say they would be willing to accept _____ as members of their family



Note: These questions were not asked of Muslims and Jews, respectively.
Source: Surveys conducted 2015-2017 in 34 countries. See Methodology for details.
"Eastern and Western Europeans Differ on Importance of Religion, Views of Minorities, and Key Social Issues"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

These are among the findings of Pew Research Center surveys conducted across Central and Eastern Europe in 2015 and 2016 and Western Europe in 2017.[7] The Center previously has published major reports on both surveys: "Religious Belief and National Belonging in Central and Eastern Europe" and "Being Christian in Western Europe." Many of the same questions were asked in both regions, allowing for the comparisons in this report. The Central and Eastern Europe surveys were conducted via face-to-face-interviews, while Western Europeans were surveyed by telephone. See Methodology for details.

The rest of this report will look at more cross-regional comparisons, including:

- Identification with Christianity has declined over time across Western Europe, but this is not the case in much of Central and Eastern Europe. In most countries in the East, the share of Christians has remained fairly stable in recent generations. And in a few countries, including Russia, Christians have increased as a percentage of the population.

- Compared with the rest of the world, the entire European continent has relatively low levels of traditional religious practice (e.g., church attendance, prayer), but they are slightly higher in Central and Eastern Europe than in the West. On balance, Central and Eastern Europeans also are more likely to say they believe in God, and to express some New Age or folk religious beliefs – such as that certain people can cast curses or spells that cause bad things to happen to someone (the "evil eye").

- Across the continent, Europeans mostly say religion and government should be kept separate. But this view is more widespread in Western Europe, while several Central and Eastern European countries are more divided. For instance, 46% of Romanians say their government should promote religious values and beliefs.

- In addition to the importance of religion to national identity, the surveys also asked about several other possible elements of national identity. People throughout the continent say it is important to respect national institutions and laws and speak the dominant national language to be a true member of their country, but Central and Eastern Europeans are especially likely to say that nativist elements of national identity – being born in a country and having family ancestry there – are very important.

[7] The surveys included interviews with Muslims, Jews and other religious minorities. However, the sample sizes in most countries do not allow for a detailed analysis of the attitudes of people in these groups.

Orthodoxy, Catholicism and Protestantism are each prominent in different parts of Europe

Christianity has long been the prevailing religion in Europe, and it remains the majority religious affiliation in 27 of the 34 countries surveyed. But historical schisms underlie this common religious identity: Each of the three major Christian traditions – Catholicism, Protestantism and Orthodoxy – predominates in a certain part of the continent.

Orthodoxy is the dominant faith in the East, including in Greece, Russia, the former Soviet republics of Moldova, Armenia, Georgia, Ukraine and Belarus, and other former Eastern bloc countries such as Serbia, Romania and Bulgaria. Catholic-majority countries are prevalent in the central and southwestern parts of Europe, cutting a swath from Lithuania through Poland, Slovakia and Hungary, and then extending westward across Croatia, Austria, Italy and France to the Iberian Peninsula. And Protestantism is the dominant Christian tradition in much of Northern Europe, particularly Scandinavia.

There are substantial populations belonging to non-Christian religions – particularly Islam – in many European countries. In Bosnia, roughly half of the population is Muslim, while Russia and Bulgaria have sizable Muslim minority populations. But in most other countries surveyed, Muslims and Jews make up relatively small shares of the population, and surveys often are not able to reliably measure their precise size.

In addition, all the Western European countries surveyed have sizable populations of religiously unaffiliated people – those who identify as atheist, agnostic or "nothing in particular," collectively sometimes called "nones." "Nones" make up at least 15% of the population in every Western European country surveyed, and they are particularly numerous in the Netherlands (48%), Norway (43%) and Sweden (42%). On balance, there are smaller shares of "nones" – and larger shares of Christians – in Central and Eastern Europe, though a plurality of Estonians (45%) are unaffiliated, and the Czech Republic is the only country surveyed on the entire continent where "nones" form a majority (72%).

Europe's Christians split among Orthodox, Catholics and Protestants

% who identify as ...

	Orthodox	Catholic	Protestant	None	Other/ DK/ref.
Orthodoxy most prominent Christian tradition					
Moldova	92%	0%	5%	2%	1%
Greece	90	0	3	4	3
Armenia	89	1	5	2	2
Georgia	89	1	1	0	9
Serbia	88	4	1	4	3
Romania	86	5	6	1	2
Ukraine	78	10	4	7	1
Bulgaria	75	1	3	5	16
Belarus	73	12	8	3	3
Russia	71	0	2	15	12
Bosnia	35	8	1	3	53
Latvia	31	23	23	21	2
Protestantism most prominent Christian tradition					
Finland	1	0	73	22	4
Denmark	0	4	58	30	9
UK	0	19	53	23	5
Norway	0	1	47	43	9
Sweden	1	2	46	42	9

	Orthodox	Catholic	Protestant	None	Other/ DK/ref.
Catholicism most prominent Christian tradition					
Poland	1%	87%	3%	7%	2%
Croatia	4	84	2	7	3
Italy	0	78	1	15	6
Portugal	0	77	4	15	4
Austria	1	75	5	16	4
Lithuania	3	75	15	6	2
Ireland	0	72	5	15	8
Slovakia	1	63	8	25	4
France	1	60	3	28	8
Spain	0	60	3	30	7
Hungary	0	56	20	21	3
Switzerland	0	55	19	21	4
Belgium	0	49	4	38	10
Germany	0	43	28	24	5
Czech Rep.	1	21	3	72	3
Christian traditions mixed					
Estonia	25	1	25	45	4
Netherlands	0	19	18	48	14

Note: Orange labels are Central and Eastern European countries. Blue labels are Western European countries. "Other/DK/ref." category includes many Muslim respondents, including a plurality in Bosnia. Figures may not sum to 100% due to rounding.
Source: Surveys conducted 2015-2017 in 34 countries. See Methodology for details.
"Eastern and Western Europeans Differ on Importance of Religion, Views of Minorities, and Key Social Issues"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Christian affiliation has declined in Western Europe

The lower Christian shares in Western Europe reflect how the region's religious landscape has been changing within the lifetimes of survey respondents.

While large majorities across the continent say they were baptized Christian, and most European countries still have solid Christian majorities, the survey responses indicate a significant decline in Christian affiliation throughout Western Europe. By contrast, this trend has not been seen in Central and Eastern Europe, where Christian shares of the population have mostly been stable or even increasing.

Indeed, in a part of the region where communist regimes once repressed religious worship, Christian affiliation has shown a resurgence in some countries since the fall of the USSR in 1991. In Ukraine, for example, more people say they are Christian now (93%) than say they were raised Christian (81%); the same is true in Russia, Belarus and Armenia. In most other parts of Central and Eastern Europe, Christian shares of the population have been relatively stable by this measure.

Large drops in Christian affiliation in Belgium, Norway, Netherlands, Spain, Sweden

% who were/are ...

	Raised Christian	Currently Christian	Change
Christian share has declined			
Belgium	83%	55%	**-28**
Norway	79	51	**-28**
Netherlands	67	41	**-26**
Spain	92	66	**-26**
Sweden	74	52	**-22**
Denmark	80	65	**-15**
France	75	64	**-11**
Portugal	94	83	**-11**
Slovakia	84	73	**-11**
Czech Rep.	34	26	**-8**
Finland	85	77	**-8**
Germany	79	71	**-8**
Ireland	88	80	**-8**
Italy	88	80	**-8**
Austria	86	80	**-6**
Switzerland	81	75	**-6**
UK	79	73	**-6**
Poland	96	92	**-4**
Greece	96	93	**-3**
Christian share relatively stable			
Lithuania	95%	93%	-2
Croatia	92	91	-1
Bosnia	44	44	0
Moldova	98	98	0
Romania	98	98	0
Estonia	50	51	+1
Hungary	75	76	+1
Serbia	92	93	+1
Bulgaria	78	80	+2
Georgia	87	90	+3
Latvia	73	77	+4
Christian share has increased			
Armenia	95	97	**+2**
Russia	65	73	**+8**
Belarus	83	94	**+11**
Ukraine	81	93	**+12**

Note: Orange labels are Central and Eastern European countries. Blue labels are Western European countries. Significantly significant changes are highlighted in **bold**.
Source: Surveys conducted 2015-2017 in 34 countries. See Methodology for details.
"Eastern and Western Europeans Differ on Importance of Religion, Views of Minorities, and Key Social Issues"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Meanwhile, far fewer Western Europeans say they are currently Christian than say they were raised Christian. In Belgium, for example, 55% of respondents currently identify as Christian, compared with 83% saying they were raised Christian.

What are the reasons for these opposing patterns on different sides of the continent? Some appear to be political: In Russia and Ukraine, the most common explanation given by those who were raised without a religion but are now Orthodox is that religion has become more acceptable in society. Another important reason is a connection with their national heritage.

In Western Europe, there are a variety of reasons why many adults who were raised Christian have become unaffiliated. Most of these adults say they "gradually drifted away from religion," though many also say they disagreed with church positions on social issues like homosexuality and abortion, and/or that they stopped believing in religious teachings.

Religious commitment particularly low in Western Europe

Not only is religious affiliation on the decline in Western Europe, religious commitment also is generally lower there than in Central and Eastern Europe.

This is not to say that Central and Eastern Europeans are very religious by conventional measures of religious behavior. Europeans throughout the continent generally show far less religious commitment than adults previously surveyed in other regions.[8]

That said, on balance, Central and Eastern Europeans are more likely than Western Europeans to say that religion is very important in their lives, that they attend religious services at least monthly, and that they pray every day.

For example, fully half or more of adults in Greece, Bosnia, Armenia, Georgia and Romania say religion is very important in their lives, compared with about one-in-ten in France, Germany, the United Kingdom and several other Western European countries. Similarly, roughly three-in-ten Slovaks, Greeks and Ukrainians say they pray daily, compared with 8% in Austria and Switzerland. Western Europeans also are more likely than their neighbors in the East to say they *never* pray (e.g., 62% in Denmark vs. 28% in Russia).

[8] Other parts of the world where Pew Research Center has conducted in-depth surveys of religious beliefs and practices include Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East-North Africa region and other countries with large Muslim populations, and the United States.

Overall, Central and Eastern Europeans are more religious than Western Europeans

% who say ...

	Religion is very important in their lives	They attend religious services at least monthly	They pray daily
Greece	55%	38%	29%
Bosnia	54	35	32
Armenia	53	34	45
Georgia	50	39	38
Romania	50	50	44
Croatia	42	40	40
Moldova	42	35	48
Portugal	36	36	37
Serbia	34	19	27
Poland	29	61	27
Ireland	23	37	19
Slovakia	23	31	31
Spain	22	23	23
Ukraine	22	35	29
Italy	21	43	21
Belarus	20	30	25
Netherlands	20	18	20
Bulgaria	19	19	15
Norway	19	16	18
Lithuania	16	27	15
Russia	15	17	17
Hungary	14	17	16
Austria	12	30	8
Belgium	11	11	11
France	11	22	11
Germany	11	24	9
Finland	10	10	18
Latvia	10	16	17
Sweden	10	11	11
UK	10	20	6
Switzerland	9	29	8
Denmark	8	12	10
Czech Rep.	7	11	9
Estonia	6	10	9

Note: Orange labels are Central and Eastern European countries. Blue labels are Western European countries.
Source: Surveys conducted 2015-2017 in 34 countries. See Methodology for details.
"Eastern and Western Europeans Differ on Importance of Religion, Views of Minorities, and Key Social Issues"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Substantial shares in Western Europe don't believe in God

Western Europeans also express belief in God at lower levels than people in Central and Eastern Europe, where large majorities say they believe in God – including overwhelming shares in several countries, such as Georgia, Armenia, Moldova and Romania. Among the Central and Eastern European countries surveyed, there are only three exceptions where fewer than two-thirds of adults say they believe in God: Hungary (59%), Estonia (44%) and the Czech Republic (29%).

By contrast, fewer than two-thirds of adults in most Western European countries surveyed say they believe in God, and in some countries with large populations of "nones," such as the Netherlands, Belgium and Sweden, fewer than half of adults believe in God.

Western Europeans also are less likely to say they are certain of their belief in God. Among the Western European countries surveyed, only in Portugal (44%) do more than three-in-ten say they are absolutely certain that God exists. But majorities in several of the Central and Eastern European countries surveyed express such certainty about God's existence, including in Romania (64%), Greece (59%) and Croatia (57%).

Belief in God more widespread in Central and Eastern Europe

% who say they ...

	Believe in God	*Believe in God, absolutely certain*	*Believe in God, less certain*	Do not believe in God
Georgia	99%	73%	24%	1%
Armenia	95	79	16	4
Moldova	95	55	40	3
Romania	95	64	30	4
Bosnia	94	66	28	4
Greece	92	59	33	6
Serbia	87	58	29	10
Croatia	86	57	29	10
Poland	86	45	38	8
Ukraine	86	32	51	9
Belarus	84	26	58	9
Portugal	83	44	38	13
Bulgaria	77	30	47	17
Lithuania	76	34	41	11
Russia	75	25	48	15
Italy	73	26	46	21
Latvia	71	28	41	15
Ireland	69	24	44	26
Slovakia	69	37	31	27
Austria	67	13	53	29
Spain	64	25	38	31
Switzerland	62	11	51	33
Germany	60	10	50	36
Hungary	59	26	33	30
Finland	58	23	34	37
UK	58	12	45	36
France	56	11	45	37
Denmark	51	15	36	46
Norway	49	19	30	47
Estonia	44	13	31	45
Netherlands	44	15	28	53
Belgium	42	13	29	54
Sweden	36	14	22	60
Czech Republic	29	13	16	66

Note: Orange labels are Central and Eastern European countries. Blue labels are Western European countries. Don't know/refused responses about belief in God or certainty of belief not shown. Muslim respondents in Western European countries were not asked this question.
Source: Surveys conducted 2015-2017 in 34 countries. See Methodology for details.
"Eastern and Western Europeans Differ on Importance of Religion, Views of Minorities, and Key Social Issues"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Majorities in most Central and Eastern European countries believe in fate

In addition to belief in God, Central and Eastern Europeans are more likely than Western Europeans to express belief in fate (that the course of life is largely or wholly preordained), as well as in some phenomena not typically linked with Christianity, including the "evil eye" (that certain people can cast curses or spells that cause bad things to happen to someone).

Majorities in most Central and Eastern European countries surveyed say they believe in fate, including about eight-in-ten in Armenia (83%) and Bosnia (80%). In Western Europe, far fewer people believe their lives are preordained – roughly four-in-ten or fewer in most of the countries surveyed.

Belief in the evil eye is also common in Central and Eastern Europe. This belief is most widespread in Greece (66%), Latvia (66%), Ukraine (60%), Armenia (59%), Moldova (57%), Russia (56%) and Bulgaria (55%).

In fact, the levels of belief in the evil eye across Central and Eastern Europe are comparable to those found in Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa, where indigenous religions have had a broad impact on the respective cultures. (See "Religion in Latin America: Widespread Change in a Historically Catholic Region" and "Tolerance and Tension: Islam and Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa.") In Western Europe, on the other hand, in no country does a majority express belief in the evil eye.

Central and Eastern Europeans more likely than Western Europeans to believe in fate

% who say they believe in ...

	Fate	Evil eye	Reincarnation
Armenia	83%	59%	26%
Bosnia	80	40	18
Moldova	75	57	21
Latvia	74	66	39
Georgia	73	52	11
Bulgaria	71	55	36
Serbia	71	41	26
Ukraine	71	60	27
Lithuania	68	51	32
Romania	68	44	22
Belarus	67	41	29
Croatia	64	30	22
Estonia	62	45	33
Portugal	60	48	31
Russia	60	56	28
Greece	59	66	20
Spain	59	33	24
Poland	56	25	17
Hungary	54	21	27
Belgium	49	23	24
Slovakia	45	48	31
Czech Republic	43	21	23
Finland	39	10	24
Netherlands	38	12	22
Sweden	37	9	19
Denmark	36	9	22
Austria	34	13	18
Ireland	34	19	20
Norway	34	16	18
France	31	20	18
Germany	31	13	15
Switzerland	28	17	19
United Kingdom	25	13	17
Italy	24	18	23

Note: Orange labels are Central and Eastern European countries. Blue labels are Western European countries.
Source: Surveys conducted 2015-2017 in 34 countries. See Methodology for details.
"Eastern and Western Europeans Differ on Importance of Religion, Views of Minorities, and Key Social Issues"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Levels of belief in reincarnation are more comparable across the region. In most Central and Eastern European countries surveyed, a quarter or more say they believe in reincarnation – that is, that people will be reborn in this world again and again. In many Western European countries surveyed, roughly one-fifth of the population expresses belief in reincarnation, a concept more closely associated with Eastern religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism than with Christianity.

Prevailing view across Europe is that religion and government should be separate

Europeans across the continent are largely united in support of a separation between religion and government. More than half of adults in most countries say religion should be kept separate from government policies, rather than the opposing view that government policies should support religious values and beliefs.

In seven Central and Eastern European countries, however, the view that church and state should be separate falls short of a majority position. This includes Armenia and Georgia – where the balance of opinion favors government support for religious values and beliefs – as well as Russia, where 42% of adults say the government should promote religion.

In Western Europe, meanwhile, majorities in nearly every country surveyed say religion should be kept separate from government policies.

Age differences are stronger in Western Europe than in Eastern Europe on this issue: Younger adults across most of Western Europe are more likely than those ages 35 and older to prefer separation of church and state. In Central and Eastern Europe, meanwhile, younger and older adults express roughly similar views on this question.

Western Europe more united in support of church-state separation

% who say ...

	Religion should be kept separate from govt. policies	Government should support religious values and beliefs
Sweden	80%	15%
Finland	77	20
Bosnia	76	22
Denmark	76	20
Czech Republic	75	21
Spain	75	17
Belgium	72	23
Slovakia	72	24
Poland	70	25
Croatia	69	27
Estonia	68	26
France	68	29
Netherlands	68	29
Hungary	67	28
Greece	62	34
Latvia	61	29
United Kingdom	60	38
Germany	59	40
Moldova	59	36
Norway	59	36
Serbia	59	36
Ukraine	57	36
Austria	56	43
Ireland	56	41
Portugal	56	40
Italy	55	43
Switzerland	54	45
Romania	51	46
Belarus	50	42
Bulgaria	50	42
Russia	50	42
Lithuania	47	43
Georgia	44	52
Armenia	36	59

Note: Orange labels are Central and Eastern European countries. Blue labels are Western European countries. Don't know/refused answers not shown.
Source: Surveys conducted 2015-2017 in 34 countries. See Methodology for details.
"Eastern and Western Europeans Differ on Importance of Religion, Views of Minorities, and Key Social Issues"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Europe split on importance of ancestry to national identity, united on importance of speaking national language

While majorities in most Central and Eastern European countries tie being Christian to being truly Serbian, Polish, etc. (see page 7), majorities in all of these countries view being born in their country and having ancestry there as important components of national identity.

For example, 83% of adults in Hungary and 82% of adults in Poland say it is "very" or "somewhat" important to have been born in their country to be "truly Hungarian" or "truly Polish." And 72% of Russians say it is important to have Russian family background to be "truly Russian."

On balance, adults in Western European countries are less likely to view these nativist elements as important to national identity. For example, majorities in Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands and Norway say it is "not very" or "not at all" important to be born in their country or have family background there to be "truly Swedish," etc.

But not everyone across Western Europe feels this way. In Portugal, for example, the vast majority of adults say that being born in Portugal (81%) and having a Portuguese family background (80%) are very or somewhat important to being "truly Portuguese." These sentiments also are widespread among adults in Italy and Spain.

Central and Eastern Europeans more likely than those in West to say birth, ancestry important to national identity

% who say _____ is very/somewhat important to truly share their national identity (e.g., to be truly Romanian)

	To have been born in the country	To have family background from that country
Romania	88%	87%
Bulgaria	85	79
Hungary	83	89
Poland	82	83
Portugal	81	80
Czech Republic	78	66
Russia	76	72
Greece	74	85
Belarus	71	73
Latvia	71	61
Lithuania	71	71
Bosnia	70	76
Italy	68	75
Georgia	67	90
Spain	66	59
Ukraine	65	69
Moldova	63	58
Croatia	62	70
Estonia	62	56
Armenia	60	92
Ireland	59	64
Serbia	59	83
Switzerland	58	61
United Kingdom	57	58
Slovakia	56	63
Austria	53	57
Finland	51	51
Belgium	49	42
France	48	53
Germany	48	49
Netherlands	41	38
Norway	41	40
Denmark	36	35
Sweden	22	21

Note: Orange labels are Central and Eastern European countries. Blue labels are Western European countries.
Source: Surveys conducted 2015-2017 in 34 countries. See Methodology for details.
"Eastern and Western Europeans Differ on Importance of Religion, Views of Minorities, and Key Social Issues"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

The two sides of Europe do not appear to be moving closer on these questions with younger generations. In fact, the opposite is true: In Western Europe, young adults (ages 18 to 34) are less likely than their elders to regard birthplace and ancestry as crucial to national identity, while in Central and Eastern Europe, young adults and older people are about equally likely to feel this way. In Spain, for example, only about half of adults under 35 (47%) say having Spanish ancestry is important to being Spanish, compared with 64% of older Spaniards. In Ukraine, meanwhile, young adults and older adults look very similar on this question (68% vs. 69%).

Concerning the importance of family background to national identity, there is a bigger gap between young adults in Western Europe and young adults in Central and Eastern Europe than between the adult populations as a whole.

In Western Europe, young adults less likely than elders to link ancestry with national identity; not so in East

% who say having family background in country is very/somewhat important to truly share their national identity (e.g., to be truly Danish) among those ages ...

	18-34	35+	Difference
Denmark	20%	41%	**-21**
Netherlands	25	43	**-18**
Spain	47	64	**-17**
Finland	41	54	**-13**
Germany	39	52	**-13**
Belgium	34	46	**-12**
France	45	57	**-12**
Ireland	56	68	**-12**
Switzerland	52	64	**-12**
Portugal	72	83	**-11**
Sweden	13	24	**-11**
Austria	50	59	**-9**
Italy	68	77	**-9**
Belarus	67	75	**-8**
Latvia	55	63	**-8**
Norway	35	43	**-8**
United Kingdom	52	60	**-8**
Slovakia	59	65	**-6**
Estonia	51	58	-7
Greece	82	87	-5
Lithuania	68	73	-5
Czech Republic	63	67	-4
Georgia	87	91	-4
Russia	69	73	-4
Armenia	90	93	-3
Bosnia	75	76	-1
Bulgaria	78	79	-1
Ukraine	68	69	-1
Poland	83	83	0
Romania	87	87	0
Serbia	83	83	0
Hungary	90	89	+1
Moldova	59	58	+1
Croatia	73	69	+4

Note: Orange labels are Central and Eastern European countries. Blue labels are Western European countries. Statistically significant differences highlighted in **bold**.
Source: Surveys conducted 2015-2017 in 34 countries. See Methodology for details.
"Eastern and Western Europeans Differ on Importance of Religion, Views of Minorities, and Key Social Issues"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

While public opinion on the importance of religion, birthplace and ancestry to national identity is different in Central and Eastern Europe than it is in the West, people throughout the continent largely agree on some other elements of national belonging. Adults in both regions say it is important to respect their country's institutions and laws and to be able to speak the national language to truly share their national identity.

In fact, overwhelming majorities of adults in every European country surveyed – East and West alike – say it is important to respect the laws of their country in order to truly belong. For example, 98% of Danes, 96% of Hungarians and 87% of Russians say it is important to respect their institutions and laws to truly be Danish, Hungarian or Russian.

And large shares in both Eastern and Western European countries say speaking the national language is important to sharing their national identity. For example, in the Netherlands, 96% of adults say speaking Dutch is important for being truly Dutch. And in Georgia, 92% of adults say it is important to speak Georgian to truly share their national identity. There are a few countries, however, where this sentiment is somewhat less common: Only about two-thirds of adults in Moldova, Finland and Bosnia say speaking the national language is important to truly belonging to their country, as do only 62% of Ukrainians and 54% of Belarusians. This may reflect the fact that multiple languages are spoken in these countries, including large numbers of Russian speakers in Moldova, Ukraine and Belarus.

Majorities across Europe say national language, laws key to identity

% who say _____ is very/somewhat important to truly share their national identity (e.g., to be truly Danish)

	To respect the country's institutions/laws	To be able to speak national language
Denmark	98%	93%
Finland	98	68
Norway	98	97
Netherlands	97	96
Hungary	96	98
Portugal	96	95
Sweden	96	89
Belgium	95	86
Bulgaria	95	97
Estonia	95	90
Romania	95	92
Austria	94	85
Czech Republic	94	95
Bosnia	93	69
Germany	93	86
Greece	93	89
Switzerland	93	86
Croatia	92	82
Georgia	92	92
United Kingdom	92	83
France	91	88
Ireland	91	82
Italy	91	87
Poland	91	94
Slovakia	90	92
Ukraine	90	62
Serbia	89	83
Moldova	87	66
Russia	87	86
Spain	87	89
Lithuania	85	92
Armenia	83	92
Belarus	82	54
Latvia	82	87

Note: Orange labels are Central and Eastern European countries. Blue labels are Western European countries. In several countries that have more than one official language, multiple languages were listed. For example, in Switzerland, respondents were asked about being able to speak French, German or Italian.
Source: Surveys conducted 2015-2017 in 34 countries. See Methodology for details.
"Eastern and Western Europeans Differ on Importance of Religion, Views of Minorities, and Key Social Issues"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Methodology

This analysis combines survey results from two previously published Pew Research Center reports on European attitudes: "Religious Belief and National Belonging in Central and Eastern Europe" and "Being Christian in Western Europe."

Surveys in Central and Eastern European countries were conducted face to face from June 2015 to July 2016 in 16 languages, with a nationally representative sample of about 1,400 or more adults in each country. More details on the methodology used in these countries, including margins of error and sample sizes, can be found here.

The surveys in Western Europe were conducted using landline and mobile telephone from April to August 2017 in 12 languages with a nationally representative sample size of about 1,500 or more adults in each country. More details on the methodology used in these countries, including margins of error and sample sizes, can be found here.

In addition, this report includes previously unpublished data from Slovakia. Interviews in Slovakia were conducted among 1,497 adults (ages 18 and older) via telephone in two languages (Hungarian or Slovakian) from April through August 2017. Interviewing was carried out under the direction of GfK Belgium using a combination of landline and mobile random-digit dialing.

The mode difference between the two survey waves (face to face vs. telephone) does not compromise cross-regional comparability since both sets of surveys were administered by interviewers and are similarly affected by interviewer effects, including the proclivity of respondents to give socially acceptable responses when talking to another person, sometimes referred to as "social desirability."[9] Research indicates that responses are more likely to differ between surveys that are *interviewer-administered* (either via telephone or face to face) and those that are *self-administered* (that is, when a respondent records answers to survey questions themselves, without the presence of an interviewer). None of the surveys analyzed in this report (either in Western Europe or in Central and Eastern Europe) were self-administered.

More details about the methodology used in both survey waves, including country-specific sample designs, are available here.

General information on international survey research at Pew Research Center is available here.

[9] DeLeeuw, Edith D. 2018. "Mixed-Mode: Past, Present, and Future." Survey Research Methods.