

The Sacred Texts: Canadian perspectives on the Bible, Qu'ran, Torah, and their place in modern society

Majority see positive lessons in Bible, but many Christians believe it has dated views on sexuality, gender

December 21, 2022 – The holiday season is often a time to reflect on the positive aspects of one's life. As the calendar closes on a challenging year for many Canadians, there are many who say they are finding solace in religious teachings.

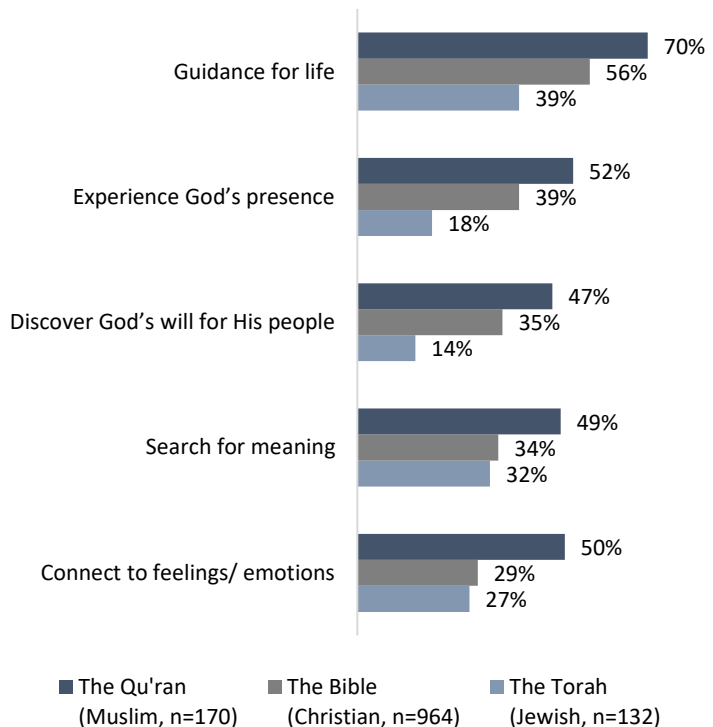
A new study by the non-profit Angus Reid Institute in partnership with [Cardus](#) finds comfort and being close with God as some of the top reasons regular readers of sacred texts such as the Bible, Qu'ran or Torah return to those books.

This is especially the case for Christians and Muslims in Canada. Two-in-five Christians say a main reason they read the Bible is to be closer to God (42%) or for comfort in their life (38%). Three-in-five Muslims say the same of the Qu'ran (63% "to be closer to God"; 61% "for comfort in my life").

Meanwhile, those engaged with the Bible and Qu'ran are most likely to say direction and advice is what they take away from reading those sacred texts. Seven-in-ten Muslims and more than half (56%) of Christians who have interacted with the Qu'ran or the Bible, respectively, in recent years say "guidance for life" is what stays with them. This is the case for fewer, but still two-in-five (39%), of Jews engaged with the Torah.

In the broader population, there are many Canadians – two-in-five – who believe sacred texts such as the Bible, Qu'ran and Torah offer good suggestions on how to lead a happy life. One-in-five (21%) go further and say the sacred texts are ageless in their truth. Two-in-five Canadians disagree, including one-quarter (26%) who call those sacred texts outdated and irrelevant and more than one-in-ten (13%) who believe they are actively harmful to Canadian society. Those who have

What do you take away from reading or studying the Bible/Torah/Qu'ran? (Among those 'engaged' with the sacred text)



METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute, in partnership with Cardus, conducted an online survey from Nov. 22-29, 2022 among a representative randomized sample of 4,016 Canadian adults who are members of [Angus Reid Forum](#). This included a national general population survey sample of 3,603 as well as an additional sample of 211 Muslims and 202 Jews. For comparison purposes only, a probability sample of this size would carry a margin of error of +/- 2 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. Discrepancies in or between totals are due to rounding. The survey was self-commissioned and paid for by ARI. Detailed tables are found at the end of this release.

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not recently engaged with the sacred texts are much more likely to believe the latter (20%) than those who have read them in recent years (4%).

There is ongoing reflection on the content of the Bible against the values of contemporary society. Among Canadians who identify or grew up as Christian, there are few that deny the Bible is showing its age when it comes to its views on gender, sexuality and race. More than half of Christian-identifying or Christian-raised Canadians say the Bible is dated when it comes to gender politics, with three-in-ten (29%) of that group saying it is “quite a lot” or “very much” sexist. There are also one-in-five (21%) former or current Christians who would call it homophobic and one-in-six (16%) who would call it racist. Those who are currently Christian are less likely to believe the Bible is discriminatory than those who were raised in the tradition but have no current religious identity.

More Key Findings:

- Three-in-five Christians (61%) and Jews (61%), and nine-in-ten (89%) Muslims, agree that “the scriptures of all major world religions teach essentially the same things.”
- More than half (54%) of Canadians have a Bible in their house. Two-in-five (39%) have engaged with one in recent years.
- Those who had engaged with a sacred text in recent years are more likely to have donated money to charity (68%) and volunteered their time (48%) than those who hadn’t read one of the Bible, Qu’ran, or Torah in recent years (53% and 33% respectively).

About ARI

*The **Angus Reid Institute (ARI)** was founded in October 2014 by pollster and sociologist, Dr. Angus Reid. ARI is a national, not-for-profit, non-partisan public opinion research foundation established to advance education by commissioning, conducting and disseminating to the public accessible and impartial statistical data, research and policy analysis on economics, political science, philanthropy, public administration, domestic and international affairs and other socio-economic issues of importance to Canada and its world.*

About Cardus

Cardus is a non-partisan think tank dedicated to clarifying and strengthening, through research and dialogue, the ways in which society’s institutions can work together for the common good.

Note: Throughout this report, sample sizes of religious groups are unweighted. For more information, see methodology notes at the end of the report.

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Notes on Methodology

Part One: Canadians and the sacred texts

Prevalence of the Bible, Torah, Qu’ran in Canadian homes

Three-in-five (59%) of Canadians have a sacred text in their home, whether that is the Bible, Torah, Qu’ran, Bhagavad Gita, Guru Granth Sahib or something else. More than half of Canadians (54%) have a Bible in the home. Other sacred texts are less prevalent.

Older Canadians, and especially women over the age of 54, are more likely to have a Bible in the home. The Qu’ran is a much more likely to be on the bookshelf in the homes younger Canadians, including visible minorities and immigrants ([see detailed tables](#)).

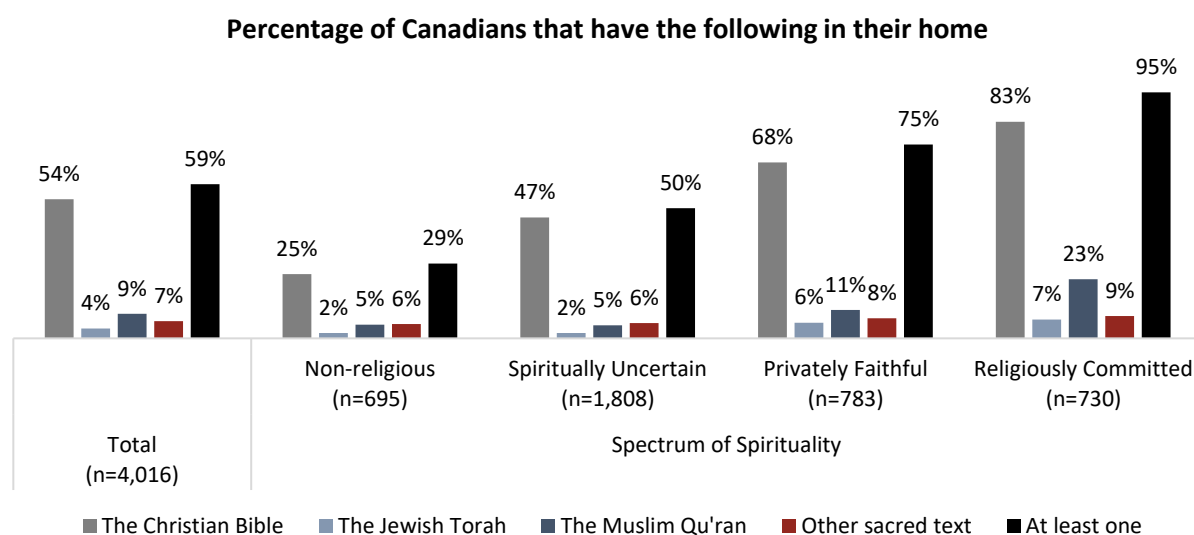
Percentage of Canadians that have the following in their home							
	Total (n=4,016)	Male			Female		
		18-34 (n=553)	35-54 (n=657)	55+ (n=737)	18-34 (n=549)	35-54 (n=684)	55+ (n=816)
Christian Bible	54%	48%	51%	54%	46%	52%	66%
Jewish Torah	4%	4%	5%	3%	6%	2%	3%
Muslim Qu’ran	9%	13%	11%	7%	11%	10%	6%
Other sacred text	7%	11%	8%	4%	8%	6%	4%
At least one	59%	55%	58%	57%	56%	58%	69%

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Since 2017, the Angus Reid Institute and Cardus have measured Canadians' faith and spirituality using an index of questions related to this topic and their attitudes, beliefs and activities. The result is the Spectrum of Spirituality, which identifies four groups along a continuum of faith and religiosity: Non-Believers, Spiritually Uncertain, Privately Faithful and Religiously Committed. For an in-depth look at what defines each group, [visit our release here](#).

Nearly all (95%) of those defined as Religiously Committed by the spectrum have a sacred text in the home. Three-in-ten (29%) of the non-religious say they have a Bible, Torah, Qu'ran or other sacred text at home:

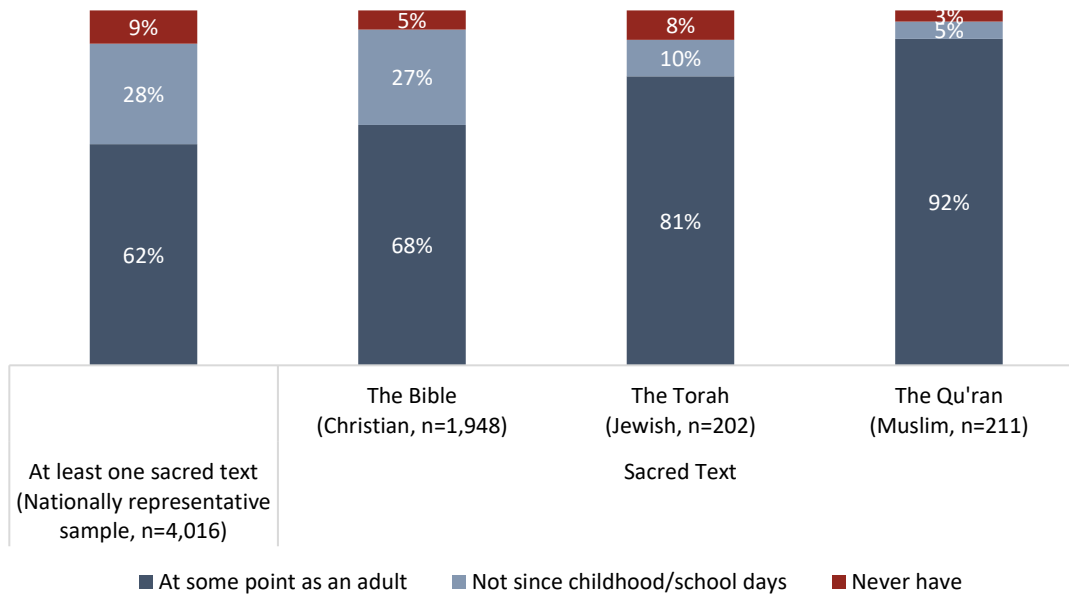


Having one at home is one matter, picking up and engaging with it is another. Three-in-five (62%) Canadians say they have read, heard or otherwise engaged with one of the sacred texts during their adult lives. For three-in-ten (28%), they have not interacted with a sacred text since their school days. One-in-ten (9%) have never engaged with a Bible, Qu'ran or Torah at any point in their life.

Those who identify as Christian, Jewish or Muslim are more likely to have engaged with their respective sacred text recently. However, those who identify as Christian are more likely than Jews or Muslims to say they haven't picked up a Bible since they were in school.

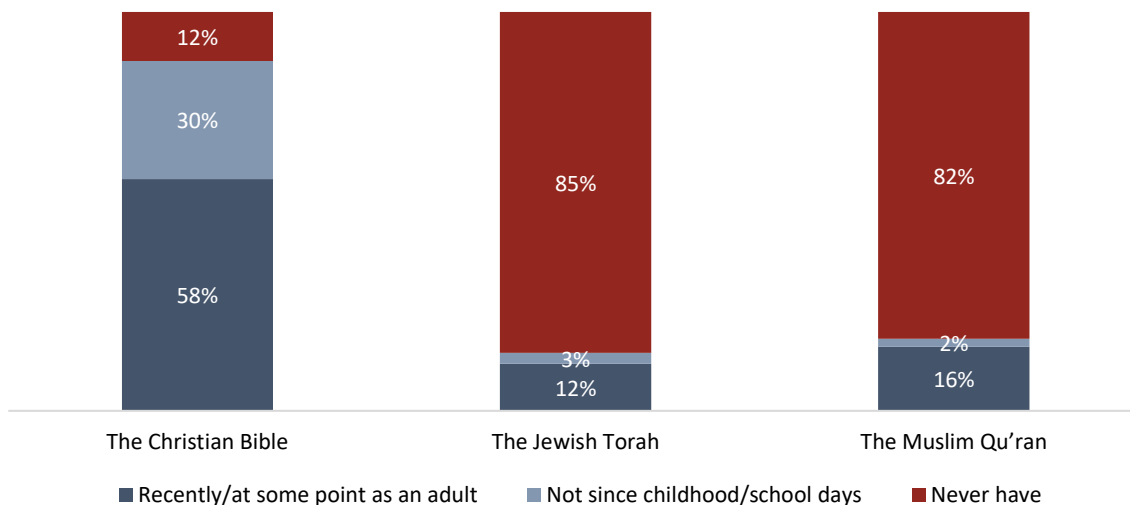
While Jews and Muslims are minorities within the broader Canadian population – [around one per cent and five per cent respectively](#) – and are weighted as such when it comes to the nationally representative sample, this survey used a boosted sample of both populations in order to more accurately capture the opinions and experiences of those groups. When referenced, note that these sample sizes are unweighted to represent the number of interviews performed. For more information, see notes on methodology at the end of the report.

When, if ever, was the last time you read or engaged with:



For most Canadians, the sacred text they have read is the Bible. Three-in-five (58%) Canadians say they have engaged with one at some point as an adult. One-in-ten (12%) say the same of the Torah, while one-in-six (16%) have read a Qu'ran during their adulthood:

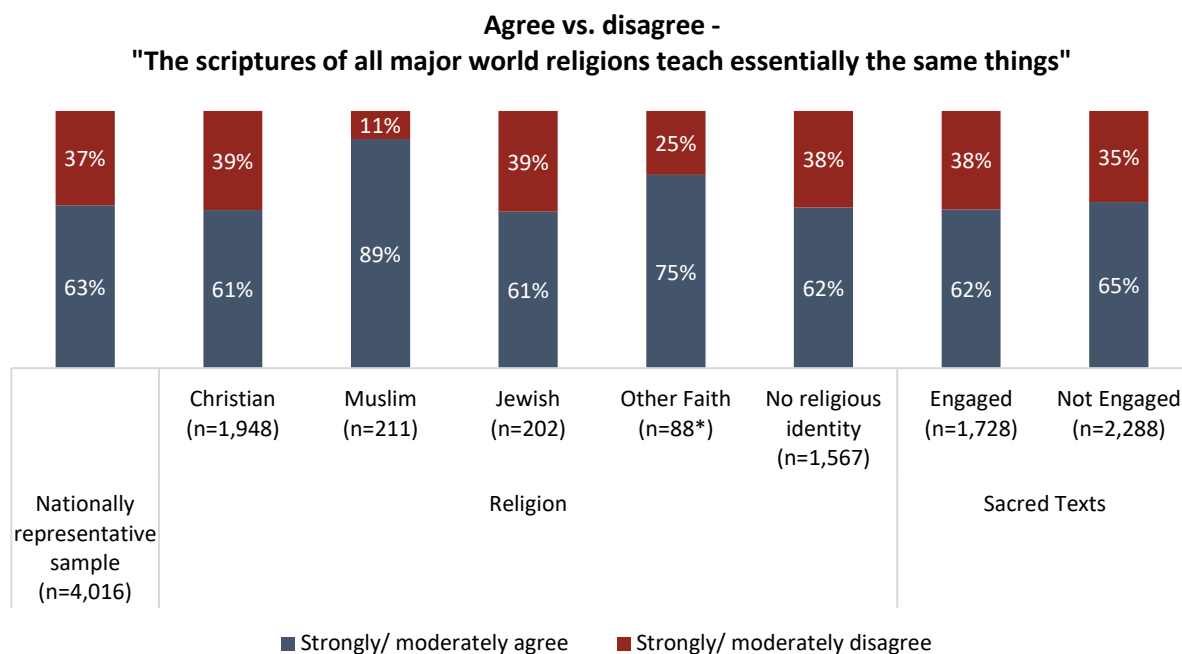
**When, if ever, was the last time you read or engaged with:
(All respondents, n=4,016)**



Majority across religions agree the scriptures of all religions teach the same things

Three-in-five (63%) Canadians believe the scriptures of all religions teach the same things. This belief is held at similar levels among those who have engaged with at least one sacred text in recent years (62%) and those who have not (65%).

There is also a widespread belief in the similarity of the message of the scriptures of major religions among those who identify as belonging to those religions. Three-in-five Christians (61%) and Jews (61%), and nine-in-ten Muslims (89%), agree that the writings of the major world religions “teach essentially the same things”:



**Smaller sample size, interpret with caution*

Part Two: The experience of the ‘engaged’

Defining engagement with sacred texts

For this study, Cardus and ARI focused on the experiences of Canadians who are “engaged” with the Bible, Qu’ran and Torah. Researchers defined that as having read or interacted with that sacred text either in the last 12 months or “past few years”, but not more than five years ago.

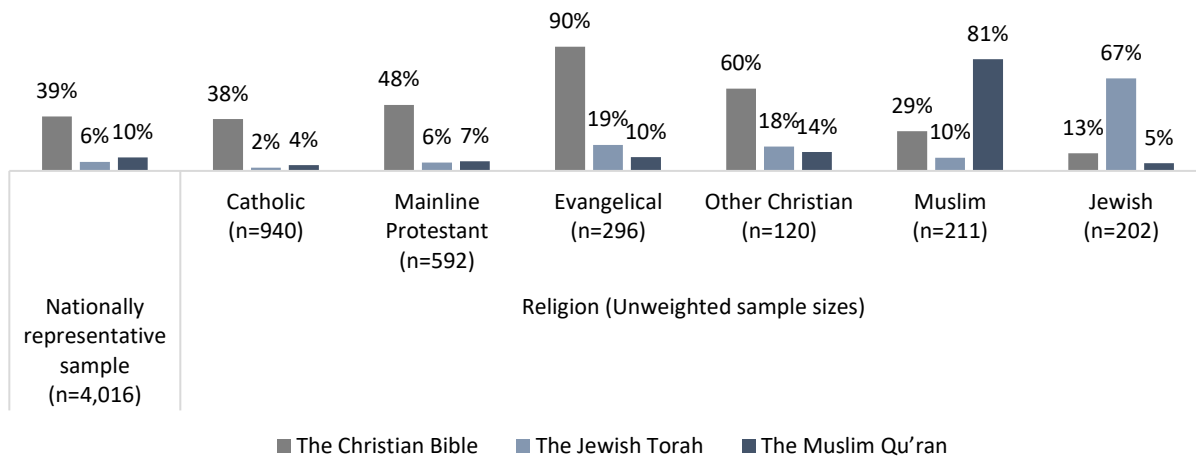
Two-in-five (39%) Canadians were defined as being “engaged” with the Bible for the purposes of this study, while 10 per cent and six per cent of Canadians were defined as “engaged” with the Qu’ran and Torah respectively.

This measure of engagement varied across religions. Four-in-five (81%) Muslims are considered “engaged” with the Qu’ran. Two-third (67%) of Jews are considered to be “engaged” with the Torah. Evangelical Christians are much more likely to have engaged with the Bible recently (90%) than those of other Christian sects:

CONTACT:

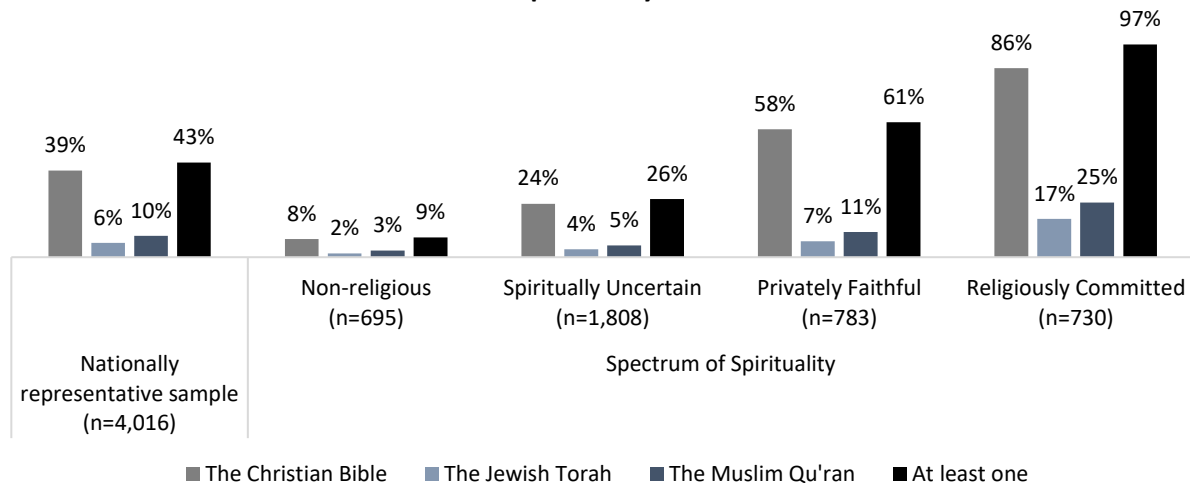
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Percentage who has engaged with the following sacred texts in 'past 12 months' or 'past few years'



Engagement increases significantly along the Spectrum of Spirituality. Nearly all (97%) of the Religiously Committed have engaged with a sacred text in recent years, including 86 per cent who have with the Bible. One-in-ten (9%) of the Non-religious say the same:

Percentage who has engaged with the following sacred texts in 'past 12 months' or 'past few years'



'To be closer to God' top reason for engaged Muslims, Christians to read sacred text

The sacred texts mean many things to many people, and for the engaged, there are myriad reasons they return to the Bible, Torah or Qu'ran. For engaged Christians and Muslims, being closer with God is one of the top reasons to study their respective sacred texts. Other widely cited reasons include for comfort and for wisdom.

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Those are lesser reasons for engaged Jews to read the Torah. Instead, approaching half (46%) of Torah-engaged Jews say they return to the Torah because it's part of their religious community's life:

What are the main reasons why you read or study the Bible/Torah/Qu'ran? (Among those 'engaged' with the sacred text)			
	The Christian Bible (Christian, n=964)	The Jewish Torah (Jewish, n=132)	The Muslim Qu'ran (Muslim, n=170)
To be closer to God	42%	18%	63%
For comfort in my life	38%	18%	61%
For wisdom for my life and how I should act	38%	29%	48%
To learn about the nature of God	29%	12%	33%
For direction on how to treat others	22%	19%	32%
Part of my religious community's life	16%	46%	34%
You're supposed to read it	8%	13%	20%
Part of my current studies	4%	3%	3%
Other	9%	16%	5%
None of the above	7%	9%	2%
Can't say/ Not sure	10%	9%	2%

Those engaged with sacred texts take away 'guidance for life' more than anything else

More than half (56%) of engaged Christians and seven-in-ten (70%) engaged Muslims say they find guidance for life when they read their respective sacred texts. Fewer, but still two-in-five (39%) engaged Jews say the same. Experiencing God's presence is a significant experience for engaged Christians (39%) and Muslims (52%), as is discovering God's will (35%, 47% respectively). Engaged Jews are less likely to take away those feelings:

What do you take away from reading or studying the Bible/Torah/Qu'ran? (Among those 'engaged' with the sacred text)			
	The Christian Bible (Christian, n=964)	The Jewish Torah (Jewish, n=132)	The Muslim Qu'ran (Muslim, n=170)
Guidance for life	56%	39%	70%
Experience God's presence	39%	18%	52%
Discover God's will for His people	35%	14%	47%
Search for meaning	34%	32%	49%
Connect to feelings/ emotions	29%	27%	50%
Direction for society/ institutions	23%	20%	38%
Other	4%	13%	2%
None of these	8%	14%	4%
Can't say/ Not sure	9%	13%	2%

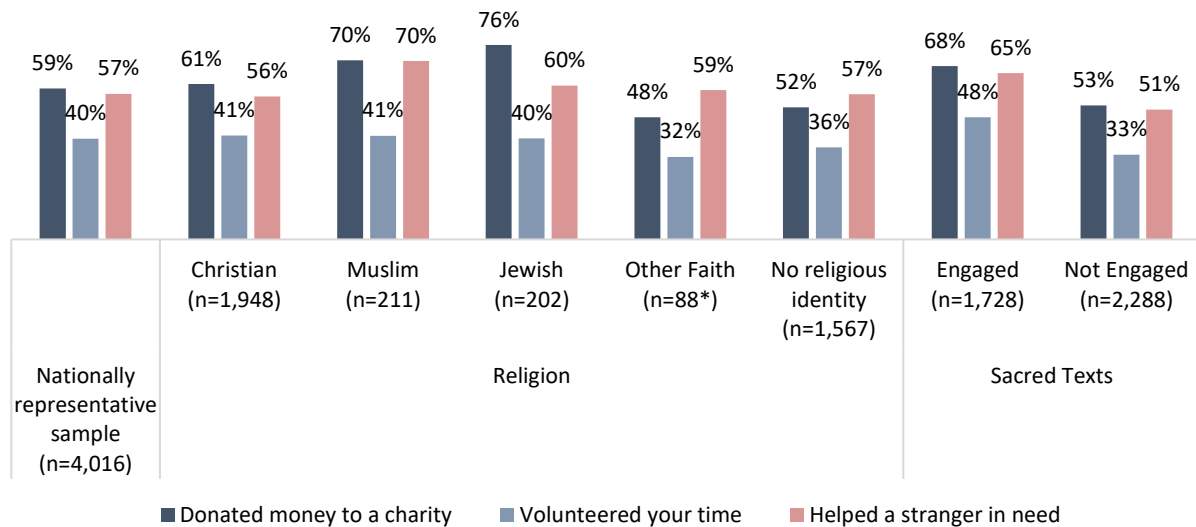
The 'engaged' more likely to have donated, volunteered in recent months

Three-in-five Canadians (59%) say they've donated money to a charity in recent months, while two-in-five (40%) say they've volunteered their time. Both of those figures are higher among those who identify as Christian, Muslim or Jewish than those who have no religious identity. As well, those considered engaged with a sacred text were more likely to report donating money (68%) and volunteering (48%) than those who had not read a sacred text in recent years (53%, 33% respectively):

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In the past couple of months have you:



**Smaller sample size, interpret with caution*

Part Three: Sacred texts and contemporary society

The sacred texts have offered wisdom and guidance for thousands of years, but how applicable are they to contemporary life? Canadians offer a variety of perspectives, with the faithful and non-practicing differing greatly on the value of sacred literature.

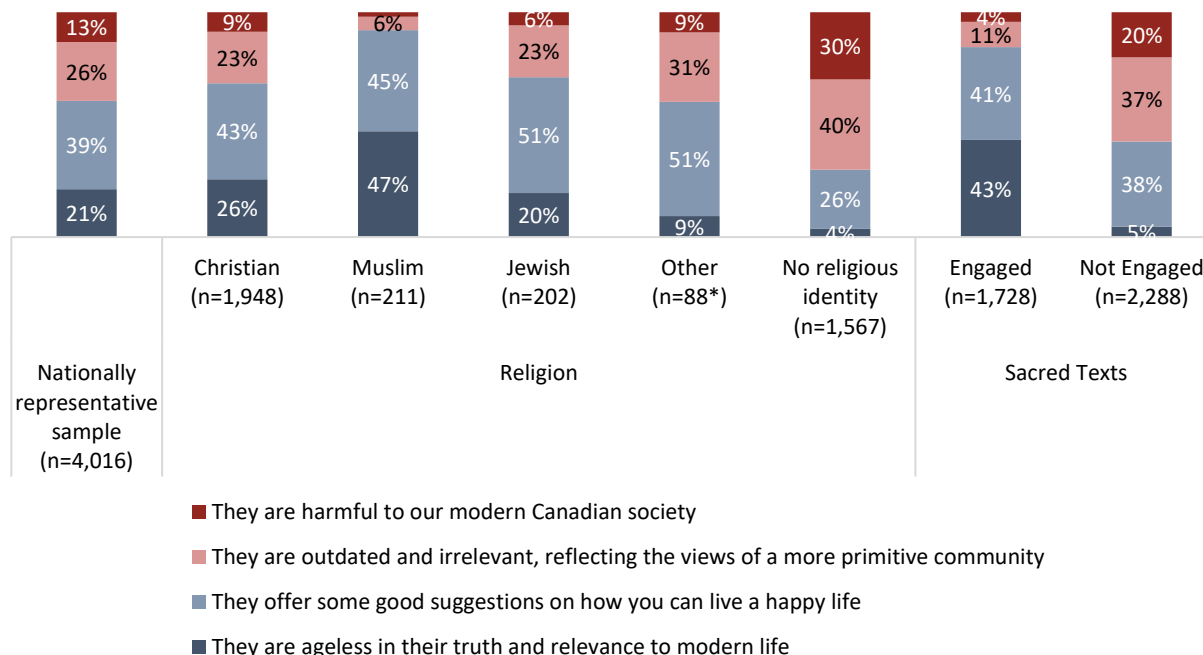
Plurality of Canadians feel sacred texts offer ‘good suggestions’ for happy lives

Asked to describe the value or applicability of sacred texts, Canadians offer a mixed review. For one-in-five (21%) including nearly half of Muslims (47%) the stories and wisdom are “ageless in their truth and relevance” even in this modern society. Two-in-five (39%) are less vehement about the value they find in these words, but overall feel that the lessons offer good suggestion that can help one throughout life:

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Which of the following most closely fits with your view of the Bible's/Torah's/Qu'ran's place within contemporary society?**



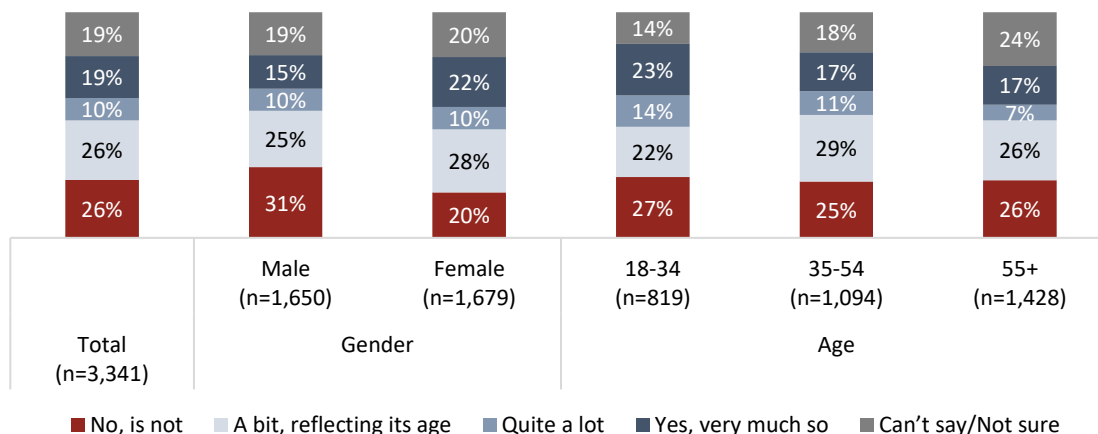
**Smaller sample size, interpret with caution*

***Those engaged with sacred texts were shown the sacred text they were engaged with, others were shown "these sacred texts"*

Is the Bible sexist, racist or homophobic?

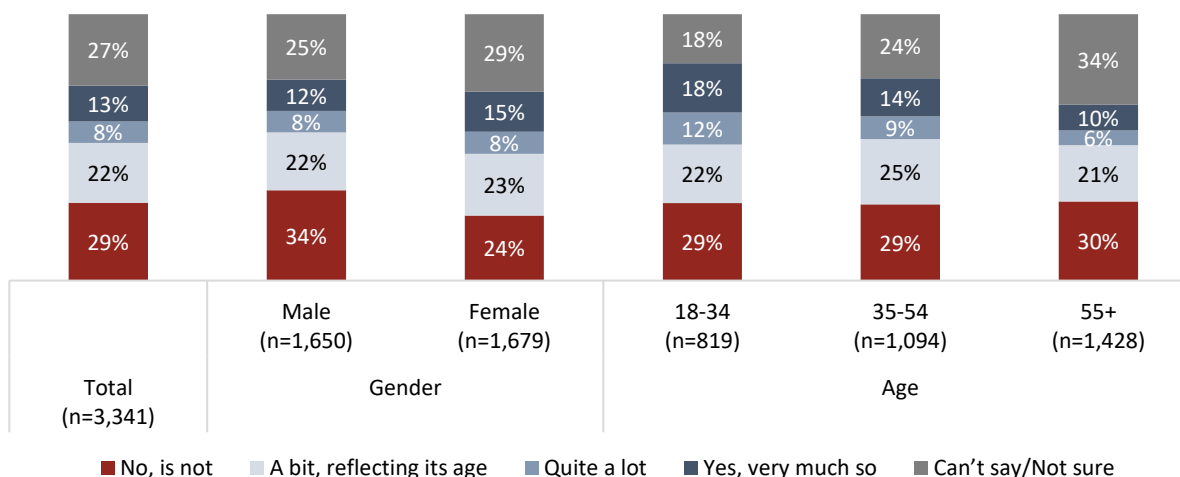
Society has changed rapidly over the past decade, century, and millennium. As such, the messages recorded in ancient texts are often subject to criticism with a modern lens. Those who were raised Christian or identify in this way currently were asked to appraise the Bible with this critical view. Overall, one-quarter (26%) disagree that the Bible contains sexist messages – a view more common among men (31%) than women (20%). Others agree that it is to varying levels:

**In your view, is the Bible: Sexist?
(Among those raised or identifying as Christian)**



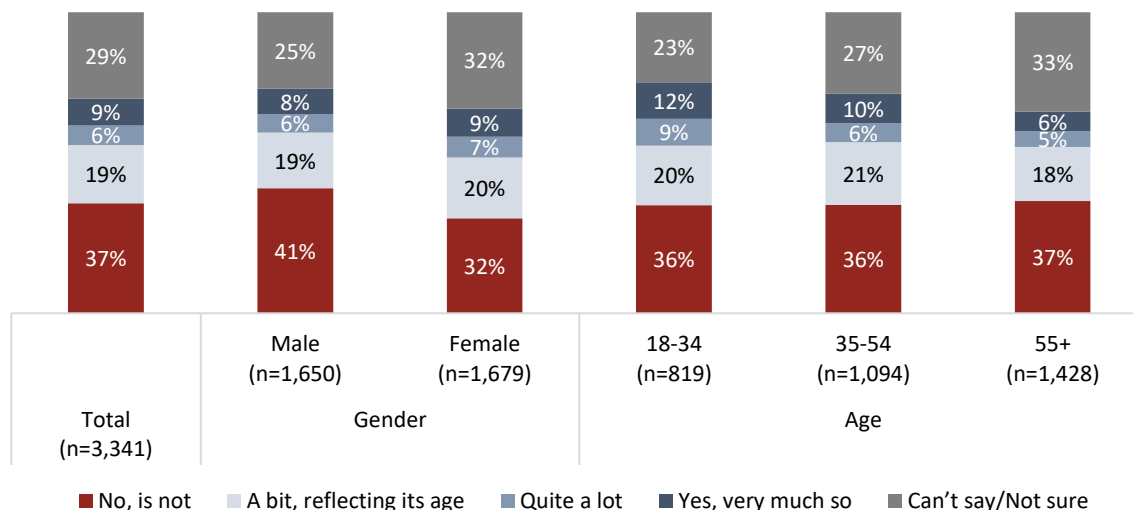
The same question was then asked about the Bible and homophobia. This subject has been the matter of considerable debate and criticism in recent decades as views of sexuality and gender have evolved. The modern conversation is certainly far removed from the time of the Apostles, and two-in-five Canadians (43%) feel that the messaging in the Bible can be viewed as homophobic. Three-in-ten (29%) disagree, again with a disparity among men and women, while many say they don't know enough to say:

**In your view, is the Bible: Homophobic?
(Among those raised or identifying as Christian)**



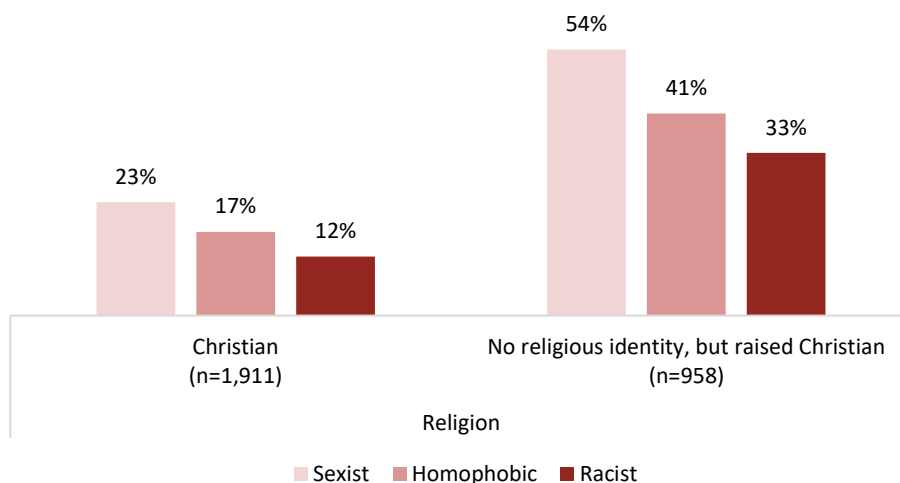
Christians are least likely among these three different questions to feel that the Bible is racist. Here nearly two-in-five (37%) say it is not, while three-in-ten (29%) are unsure.

In your view, is the Bible: Racist?
(Among those raised or identifying as Christian)



Those who have left their Christian beliefs behind are much more critical of the content of the Bible than those who continue to practice:

Percentage who believe the Bible is 'quite a lot' or 'very much so' the following:



Majority believe Bible, Qu’ran should not be part of standard school curriculum

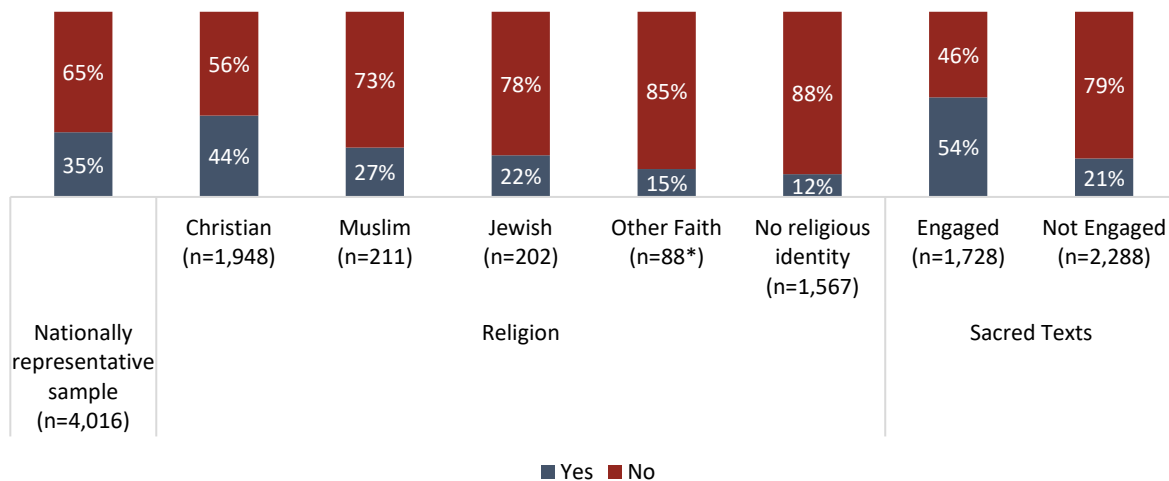
Another contemporary debate about religion in modern Canada is the role of religious education. Comparative religious studies are not a significant portion of the public-school curriculum in the country – if it is taught at all. For most Canadians, including those who practice their own faith, this is the ideal path.

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One-in-three (35%) would like children in public schools to be exposed to the Bible in their curriculum, while 44 per cent of Christians say this:

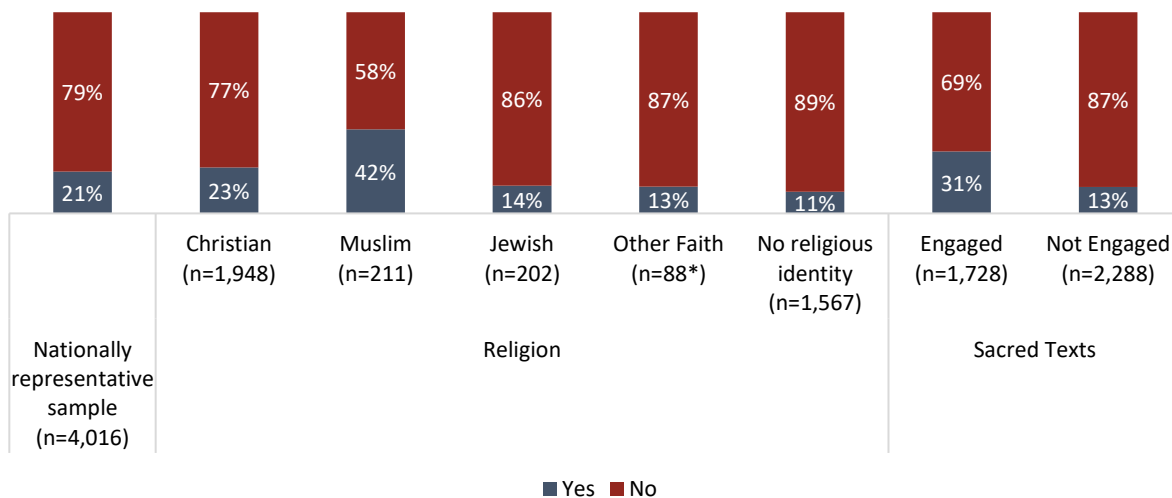
Do you believe that children in public schools should be exposed to the Christian Bible as part of the standard curriculum?



**Smaller sample size, interpret with caution*

A similar datapoint is noted when it comes to the Qur'an. One-in-five (21%) would work this into the curriculum for public schools, with Muslims twice as supportive than then general population but most disagreeing that this is necessary:

Do you believe that children in public schools should be exposed to other sacred texts such as the Qur'an through the curriculum?

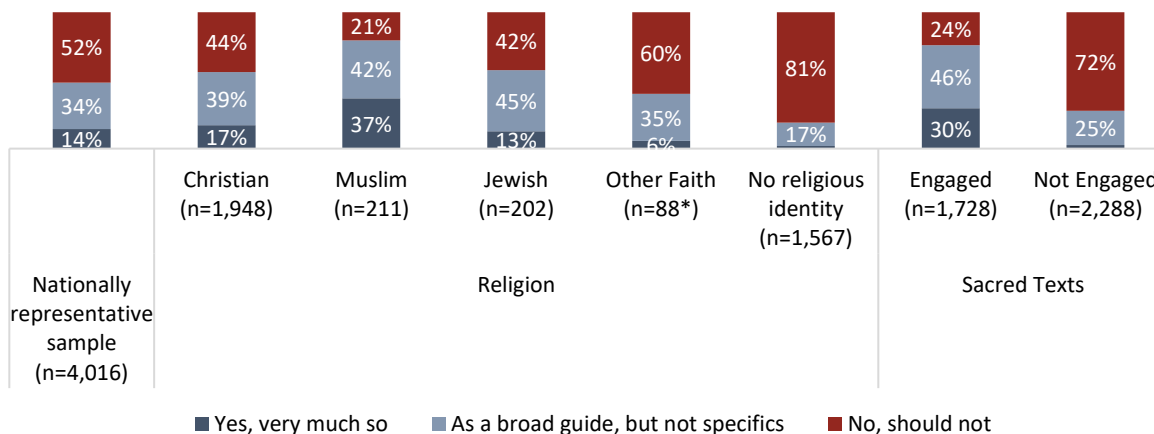


**Smaller sample size, interpret with caution*

Half of Canadians say sacred texts should not define laws, how we live together

While faithful Canadians undoubtedly draw value from sacred texts at a personal, family and community level, they are less convinced that these texts should contribute to laws and societal principles. That said, engagement with religious texts is a considerable factor in this view. Those who engage with sacred texts largely feel that scripture should act as a broad guide if not a definition for community organization. Seven-in-ten who are not engaged feel the opposite (72%):

Do you believe that what is taught in the Bible/Torah/Qu'ran should help define our laws and how we live together in society?**



**Smaller sample size, interpret with caution*

***Those engaged with sacred texts were shown the sacred text they were engaged with, others were shown "sacred texts such as the Bible and the Torah and the Qu'ran"*

Notes on Methodology

This survey includes an oversample of 211 Muslims and 202 Jews in order to ensure the views of members of those two religions could be more accurately analyzed. Both groups were then weighted to be closer to their relative proportions from the 2016 census for the nationally representative sample. Throughout the survey, religious identity samples are shown by their unweighted sample size. This is to more accurately reflect the number of respondents interviewed for each religion.

For detailed results by age, gender, region, education, and other demographics, [click here](#).

For detailed results by religion, sacred text engagement and the Spectrum of Spirituality, [click here](#).

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