

The REAL buckle of the Bible Belt

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Superlatives come naturally to Texans. We like to talk about being the biggest and the best, the most and the greatest.

Reminds me of the old story about the boy from Back East who came out here to visit his cousin. All the way from the airport, the Texas side of the family bragged about the vastness of the Lone Star State and its superiority to everything else. When they finally arrived at the West Texas farmhouse, the visitor asked for directions to the bathroom. He found what he believed to be the right room, couldn't find the light switch and inadvertently fell into the indoor swimming pool. Trailing pools of water down the hall, he admitted his new-found appreciation for the grandeur of Texas: "I guess everything really is bigger and better in Texas. That's the most awesome bathtub I've ever seen."

OK, bad joke. But you've got to admit, Texans like to brag.

That buckle feels off-center

That's probably why Christians—especially Baptists—out here historically have claimed Texas is the buckle of the Bible Belt. We've always figured we're holier than y'all.

Well, the latest poll produced by the [Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life](#) debunks that notion. The [U.S. Religious Landscape Survey](#) clearly indicates that designation goes to ... (drumroll, please) ... [Mississippi](#) .

Yep, that's right. We're not even the notch on the belt next to the buckle. In fact, Texas ranks down on the list on most categories of quantifiable

religiosity. If you're getting a headache, take two aspirin, lie down and read a few chapters of Deuteronomy out of your King James Bible.

Mississippi tops the list of six of eight categories of conservative religious belief. In fact, the only time it comes in second place, Utah wins, and most Texans and [Mississippians](#) would agree the Mormons in Utah aren't exactly talking about the same thing when they answer the Pew people's questions.

Test of faith

Here's your [survey](#) :

1. Believes in God—absolutely certain. Mississippi, 91 percent; Texas, 77 percent.
2. Religion is “very important” in one's life. Mississippi, 82; Texas, 67.
3. Attends religious services at least once a week. Mississippi, 60; Texas 47.
4. Prays at least once a day. Mississippi, 77; Texas, 66.
5. Prays and receives answers to prayer at least once a month. Ol' Miss, 46; Texas, 39.
6. The word of God is literally true, word for word. Mississippi, 64; Texas, 42.
7. There is only one true way of interpreting their religion. Utah, 46; Mississippi, 39; Texas, 30.
8. Their religion is the one, true faith, leading to eternal life. Utah, 50; Mississippi, 35; Texas, 28.

Of course, questions of orthodoxy aren't ultimate tests of faithfulness. Jesus said, “... whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me” (Matthew 25:40). Jesus' brother James advised, “Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world” (James 1:27).

Another poll perspective

By the way, the latest Baptist Standard [editorial](#) takes a look at why so many Americans, including Baptists, agreed with this statement: “Many religions can lead to eternal life.”