

ATTITUDES OF AZERBAIJANI YOUTH TOWARDS RELIGION IN OPINION POLL

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Abstract

The location of Azerbaijan at the crossroads of cultures brought about the basis for religious freedom and tolerance, as well as the emergence and development of new religious movements from time to time. Azerbaijan has a very unique culture. Natural, historical integration of the world's leading cultural systems has taken place in this land for many centuries. In this territory, the cultures that formed the modern world civilization such as Zoroastrianism, Turkic, Iranian, Caucasian, Jewish, Christian, Islamic, East, West, Slavic, socialism, etc. were created and the models of culture and progress that are visible for the development of the world were established.

Keywords

Religion, religious radicalism, religious threat, sociological survey, research method.

Citation: Agayev T. (2024). Attitudes of Azerbaijani youth towards religion in opinion poll. *Social Issues*, 2(2), 106-114. <https://doi.org/10.30546/SI.2024.2.2.203>.

1. Introduction

Religion serves humanity. A person is a human being who always wants to learn and know by nature and needs faith. So, although science and technology are developing rapidly, people can not find answers to everything with the achievements of science. In whatever form it is, in one or another case, a person turns his face to something - a being stronger than himself, a desire to trust, a supreme being at a time when his hopes are upset from everywhere, in a situation where no one can help him. The concept that expresses this notion is religion. Especially, our young people should be very careful in such matters. The reality is that today a number of circles are making great efforts to alienate Muslims from their religion, national identity, lineage and roots. Max Müller (1823-1900), a German philosopher and specialist in the history of religion, notes that the need to worship something is a brother to man. This need existed even in the least developed and developed peoples, tribes living a primitive way of life in caves. No matter how far back we go in ancient times, we do not come across a nation without religion. There is no place where we do not witness a temple, a church, a mosque or the remains of a temple.

2. Main body

In modern Azerbaijani society, the attitude of young people towards religion cannot be assessed unambiguously. In our country, there is close cooperation with various institutions, including youth organizations, in the fight against religious radicalism.

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Young people play an important role in the combat against religious superstition, religious radicalism and extremism. In this period, there was a need to protect young people from foreign influences, to educate citizens in the field of religion in accordance with the interests of national statehood, as well as to use innovative and operational technological opportunities in the implementation of this activity.

Despite some theories about the demise of religions in the 20th century, religion has come a long way from its modern stage. In the modern world, religion has become a subject of debate between the forms of religious fundamentalism (a conservative direction that insists on the immutability of dogmatics and religious doctrines) and modernism (another direction that sets the task of renewing religion and adapting it to modern realities). One of the important reasons for this is that in a significant part of the world, including Azerbaijan, religion has a dialogue ability aimed at the revival of traditional values in response to the call of modernity, political and economic crises, social and religious upheavals and in some cases unjust wars.

The claims of materialist philosophers, who assumed and claimed that all human needs would be satisfied as a result of the high level of development of science in the 19th century, were not justified by the failure of materialism. Although a number of attempts have been made in this century to eliminate the enmity between different sects of Islam and to reconcile the contradictions between their views, unfortunately, it can't be said that that this has been achieved unequivocally.

The initial sociological prediction about the future of religion did not come true. Nevertheless, Comte's positivist idea, the prediction of the replacement of religion by science, dominated public consciousness until the first third of the 20th century. The second sociological theory and in fact the second similar prediction about the disappearance of religion, the Marxist prediction with forms of religion as "false consciousness" also failed to prove itself. The third and the most discussed is M. Weber's "loss of sanctity" theory. He predicted the inevitable conflict between religion and modern pragmatic consciousness and the unconditional victory of the latter.

At present, the "holy beginning" continues to exist and religion in this form is constantly present in people's lives as a special phenomenon. It embodies social experience. Religion is not an illusion or a misrepresentation of the world that can not be dispelled by true scientific knowledge. This feature was emphasized by the famous sociologist E. Durkheim. History is related to the development of science and culture.

According to some researchers and religious figures, there is no conflict between faith and knowledge. But all ages and peoples are familiar with debates about whether it is possible to strengthen mystical experience with scientific data. This dispute of religion is not with science, but with the ideology of scientism, which is accustomed to speak in the name of science.

In the 90s of the 20th century, the demand for irrationalism and mysticism emerged in the post-Soviet territory, contrary to A. Comte's predictions. The technocratic approach to the reform of the society, the modernization of the country at the cost of extreme impoverishment of the majority of the population, the neglect of not only moral, but also legal norms and the criminalization of society helped it. During the crisis period, when the old values and ideals lived by several generations of the Soviet people were discredited and a moral vacuum was created, intellectuals and the education system left the people's consciousness without support. The religious belief of many peoples is nothing but an inversion of yesterday's unbelief. Former communists and atheists became

believers overnight. Along with appeals to traditional faith and ethno-confessional identity, fascination with magic, the occult and exotic cults proliferated.

There are currently 4,500 religions and 7 billion people on Earth and only 1.5 billion of them are Muslims. 1 billion out of 1.5 billion, perhaps most, believe what they hear, not what they read. If we survey all Muslim societies and ask, “Why are you a Muslim?” most people will give the same type of answers: “My grandfather was Muslim, my parents are Muslim, the society and the environment are Muslim, etc”. If this mass of people who call themselves Muslims are asked, “What kind of thing is in religion or what do you understand about such a verse in the Quran?” they will only keep silent saying “I don't know” in front of such questions (Essa & Ali, 2010) (This is also the case with intra-religious sects and representatives of most sects)... What difference does it make if a person does not understand the essence of his religious belief as a Muslim, a non-Muslim, a Christian, a Jew, a Buddhist, a Jehovah's Witness or a shaman?!

Since churches and mosques in modern times are places where the name of God is mentioned and the duty of service is performed for religious people, as well as the house of worship of Muslims, when they take on the role of the organizer and protector of the personal, inner - spiritual life of young people, there are great hopes that a better understanding can be achieved between believers. At the same time, the attractiveness of the mosque, its activities in the field of charity, education, upbringing and human rights also play a positive role in this case. In other words, the unique “religionization” in Azerbaijani society, the influence of mosques and religious customs on the consciousness and behavior of young people is expanding. The important problem of the modern era of Azerbaijani society is not only the reorientation of the values of the young generation, but also the formation of a structure that includes vital values that will harmoniously combine national-mental characteristics and market orientation.

The main focus is on young people in strategies to combat religious threats and fanaticism in the society for the democratic development of modern Azerbaijan. The unity and solidarity of young people, who make up the majority of the country's population, around democratic values can contribute to the elimination of this problem. For this purpose, sociological researches on the topic “*Azerbaijani youth and religion*” (dedicated to the study of the place of religion and religious values in society) were conducted by “Opinion Monitoring Center” and a group of 4th-year students studying Sociology of BSU in Baku and BSU in May 2024.

Respondents (Baku city) and employees (BSU) selected for the survey were determined by a random sociological-mathematical method. 660 respondents aged 15-35 from Baku and 186 from BSU took part in the survey. As a whole, 57.3% of the young people who participated in the survey were men and 42.7% were women. 35.2% of the respondents had secondary education, 39.2% had higher education and 23.1% had incomplete higher education.

The conducted sociological researches showed that the religiosity of the vast majority of self-proclaimed religious people is slightly higher than the average level. Chart 1 delineates *the dynamics of the role religion plays in people's lives*. According to the results of the sociological research, 69.2% of the 846 (total figures) respondents believe that religion plays an important role in their lives. Only 26.9% of the young people participating in the survey said that religion does not play a significant role in their lives and 6.3% said that it does not play any role. However, it is noteworthy that Azerbaijan is a country that prefers multi-confessional and multicultural values, so it is somewhat difficult to conduct research on this topic.

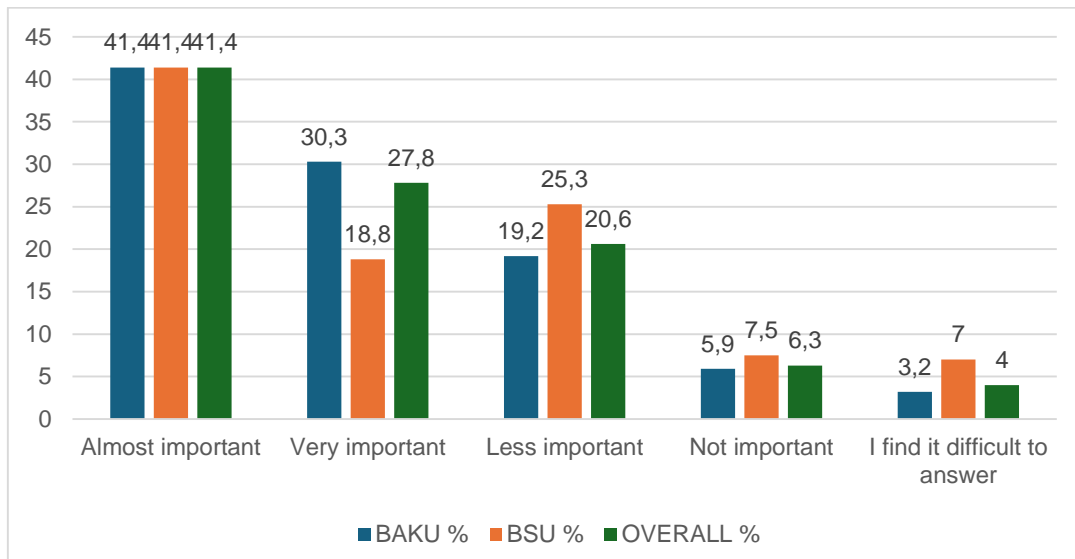


Chart 1. What role does religion play in your life?

Chart 2 shows the results of question “How do you treat people who have no relation to religion and generally avoid talking about religion?” as can be seen from the 2nd chart, 72% of the respondents answered the question: “I think it is normal, it's their choice”. 10.4% of the young people who participated in the survey stated that they have not met this type of people and 14.7% said that they do not consider this behavior to be normal. These answers show that most of the young people of our country have a tolerant view of religion.

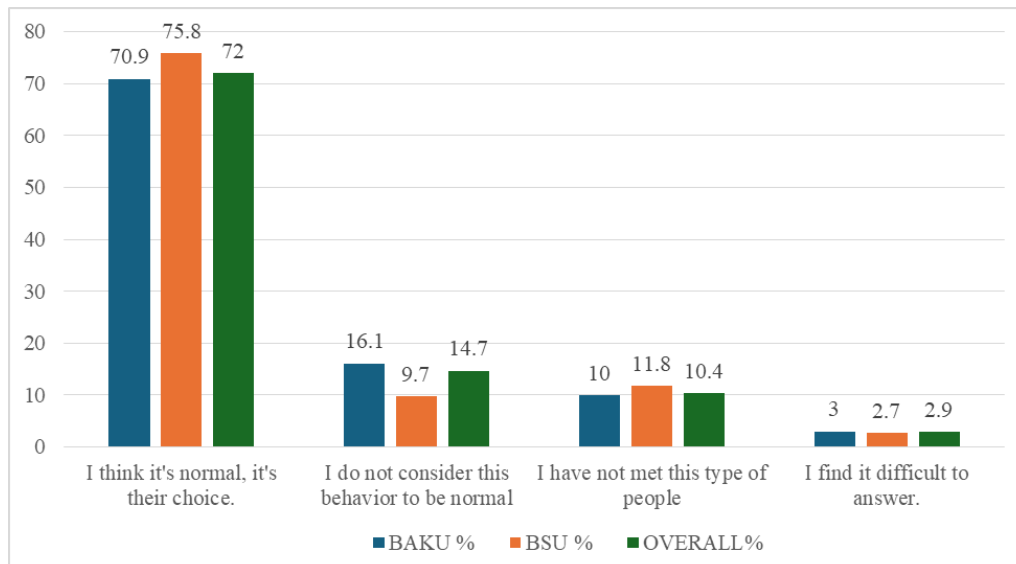


Chart 2. How do you treat people who do not have any religious affiliation and generally avoid talking about religion?

In order to study the religious composition of the survey participants in Baku, a survey of “Which religion are you a representative of?” was conducted. 88.3% of the young people who participated in the survey stated that they believe in Islam and that it is a national and state tradition. 4.8% of the participants said they were deists, 1.3% were Christians and 2.6% were atheists (Chart 3).

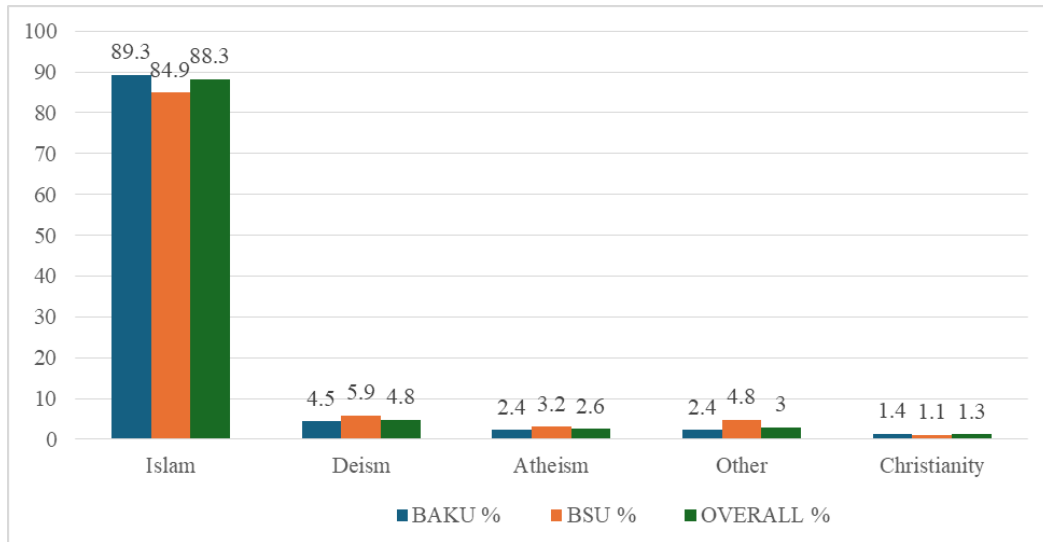


Chart 3. Which religion are you a representative of?

“Religion was created not only for worship, but also to control the masses”, a survey was conducted. 54.7% of the respondents chose the answer “Religion was created only for the worship God”. As can be seen from Chart 4, 26.2% of those who were asked for their opinion said yes, religion was created to control society and 19.1% said that they found it difficult to answer.

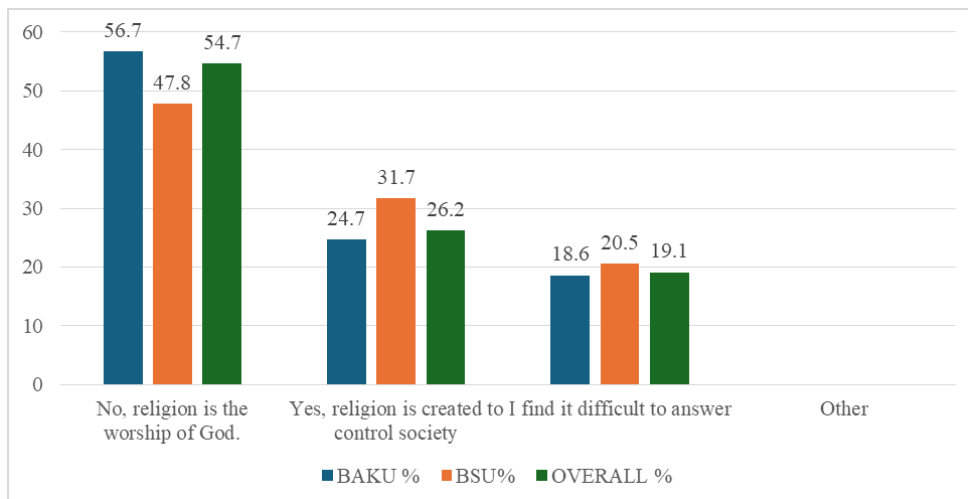


Chart 4. Some people believe that religion is created not only for worship, but also to control the masses. Do you agree with the idea?

Although they are few in number in Baku, there are young people who have changed their religion. In order to find out, a survey was conducted, “How do you think about people who change their religion?” 40.3% of the respondents said that they watched “well” and “mostly well”, 37.3% said that they watched mostly “bad” and 22.5% answered that they had difficulty answering (Chart 5).

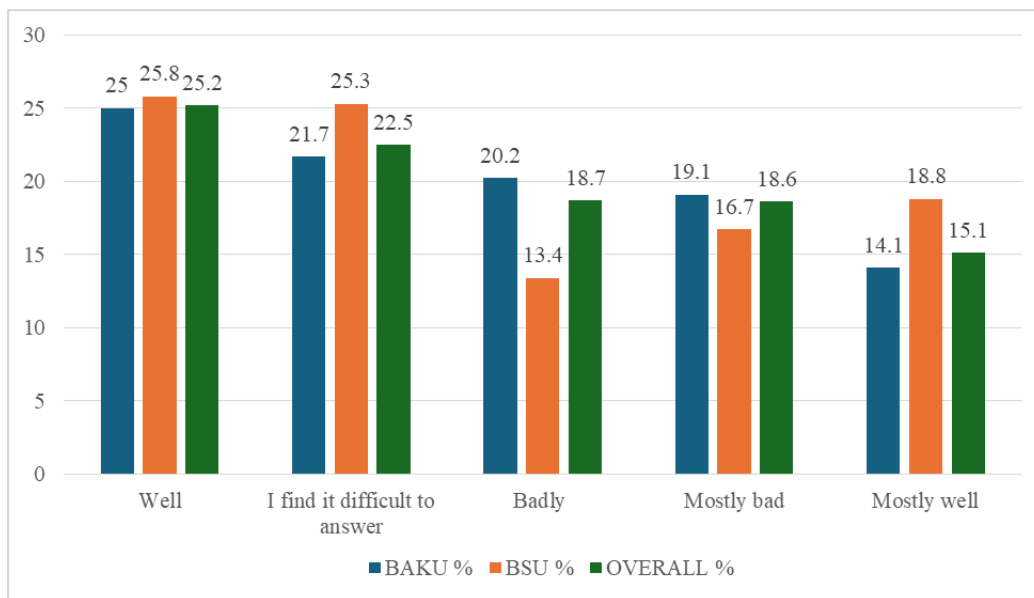


Chart 5. How do you think about people who change their religion?

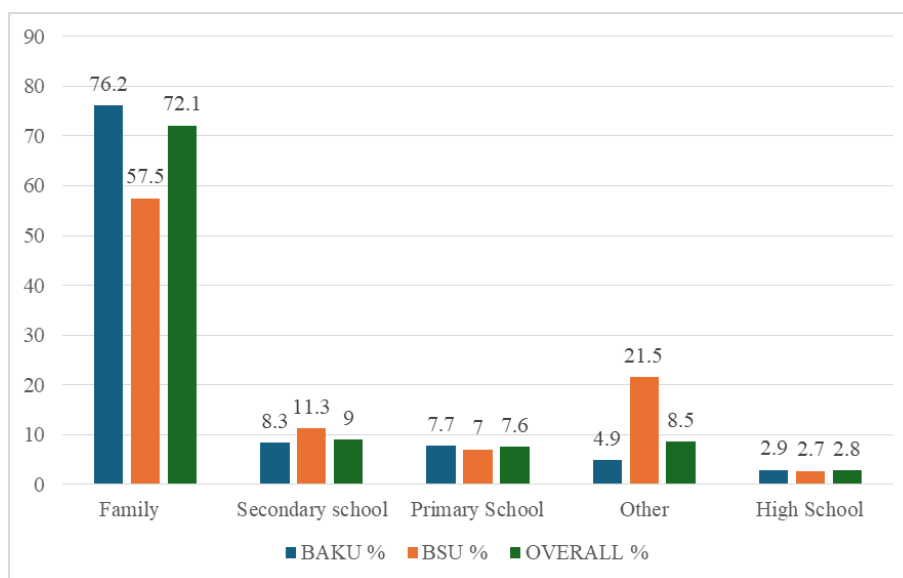


Chart 6. Where do you think religious education should begin?

According to sociologists, historically people's religiosity was more related to tradition and religion builds its activity in two directions: First, on the rational level - knowledge, mind, logic, evidence and secondly, on the emotional level - heart, emotions,

feelings, etc. Taking both together is important in religious activity. Giving priority to emotion in this process leads to religious fanaticism and superstition. Different answers were given to the question “Where should the religious education about the elimination of such cases be started?” 72.1% of the respondents who took part in the survey answered that religious education should start from the family and 16.6% from high school. The dynamics of this process is reflected in Chart 6.

“It is known that in modern times, all societies are undergoing deep changes, their intensity is constantly increasing. It becomes more and more difficult for a person to find a foothold in such a social reality, to remain loyal to national mental and religious values. How has this process changed your attitude to religion in the last five years and more?” 56.1% of those who took part in this survey said that they are as religious as before and 17.4% said that they are more religious now. As can be seen from Chart 7, 15.4% of the participants said “I used to be a believer, but my faith has weakened now”, 5.6% said “I wasn't a believer before, but I believe now, 5.6% said “I didn't believe it before and I don't believe it now”.

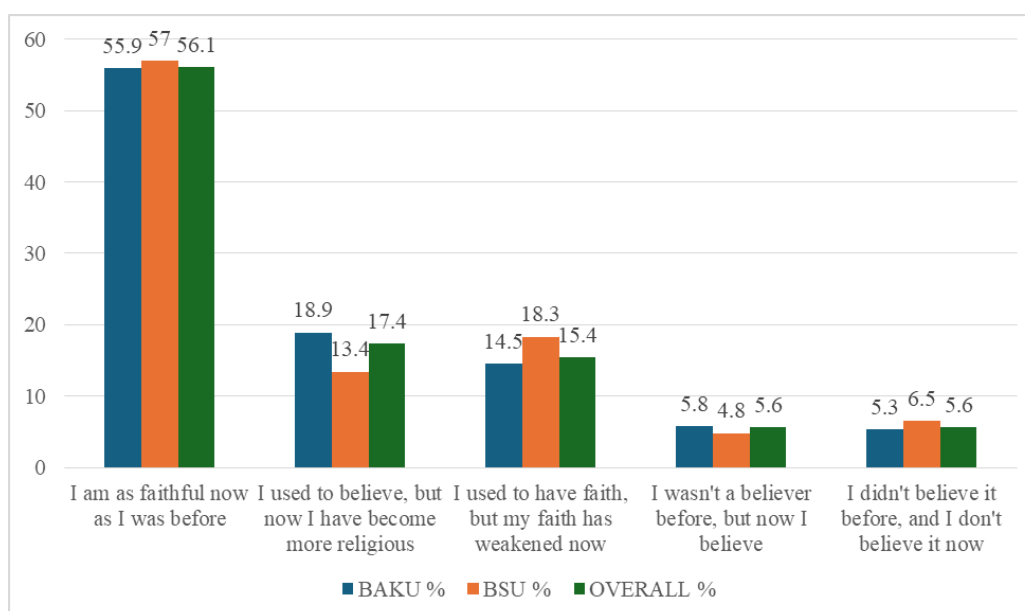


Chart 7. How has your attitude towards religion changed in the last 5 or more years?

Another important issue for the Azerbaijani society is “what religious education should reflect?” 70.2% of those who participated in the survey chose to provide general information about all religions and 22.9% chose the answers that only the teaching of the rules of the Islamic religion reflects the essence of religious education (Chart 8).

One of the interesting questions for our society in the sociological survey was the direction of studying the influence of religion in eliminating harmful habits. 53.1% of the respondents stated that religion has an important influence in eliminating harmful habits and 34.3% said that it has a partial effect. Only 11.1% stated that religion has no influence in preventing harmful habits. The preference of young people for the idea that religion has significant influence in freeing them from harmful habits for society increases the role of religion in the process of transformation of national and moral values.

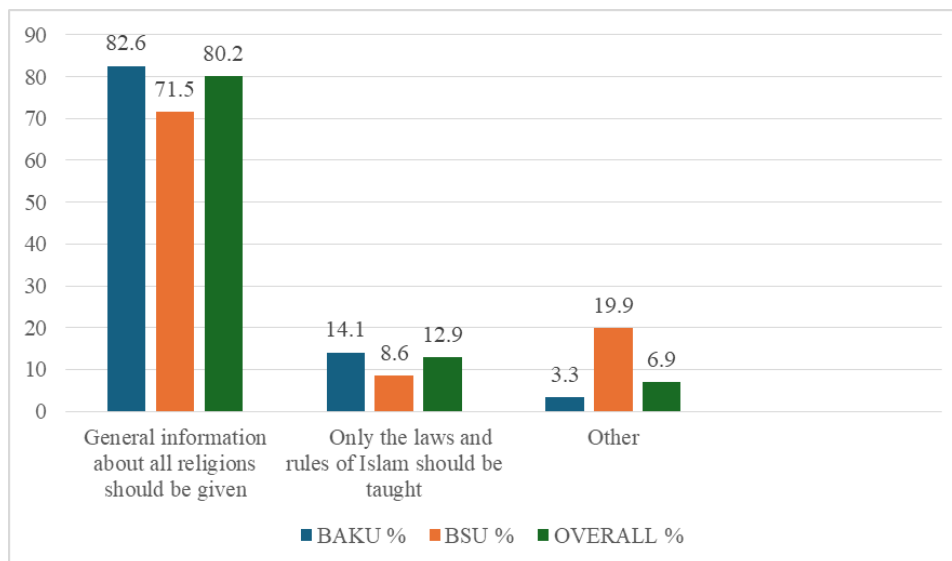


Chart 8. What do you think religious education should reflect?

3. Results

Although the majority of respondents in the city of Baku consider themselves “believers”, only 24.1% of them consider it important to strictly follow the procedures established by Islam: according to a 1998 ADAM Center survey, this number is 11.5%. Similar results were obtained in the survey conducted in 2023: 12% of the population of Azerbaijan regularly visit the holy temple and 22% regularly follow the instructions of their religion. By comparison, regular synagogue attendance among Jews living in the West is about 30% (ICM Poll) (Report 2022).

According to the Gallup Institute (1992-1999), the frequency of attending a church or synagogue in the United States is also relatively high: on average, 35% of respondents attend a church or synagogue at least once a week. The US also does not fit the simple scheme – “less money - more trust”. Seven out of ten Americans surveyed said they would die defending their god. A larger percentage of Americans say they study religious books (ICM Poll) (Paveley, 2024).

Therefore, our survey revealed that deep faith among the respondents is close to the average level. It is likely that some of the respondents perceive Islam as a specific culture (Cultural Muslims) that is part of their identity, rather than as a set of specific beliefs, ethical principles and religious procedures defined by the Qur'an.

Thus, in modern times, religion is considered as a way of national, cultural and individual identification. In our opinion, this trend is still relevant today. Sociology of religion has achieved very important successes in the direction of the theoretical development of religion in a relatively short period of its existence as a science. This field of science proposed several models expressing the main features of religion, defined its social functions, made religion an object of analysis as a social institution and examined the development trends by making a number of predictions about its future state not only in the Western world, but also in Azerbaijan. It turned out that the future of religion depends on how socially significant its contribution can be in the search for answers to the question of whether it will preserve the moral image of humanity.

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Received: 4 March 2024;

Accepted: 18 April 2024;

Published: 30 May 2024.