

More Americans Believe in the Devil, Hell and Angels than in Darwin's Theory of Evolution

Nearly 25% of Americans Believe They Were Once another Person

ROCHESTER, N.Y. – December 10, 2008 – That very large majorities of the American public believe in God, miracles, the survival of the soul after death, the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the Virgin birth will come as no great surprise. What may be more surprising is that substantial minorities believe in ghosts, UFOs, witches, astrology, and the belief that they themselves were once other people. Overall, more people believe in the devil, hell and angels than believe in Darwin's theory of evolution.

These are some of the results of *The Harris Poll®*, a new nationwide survey of 2,126 U.S. adults surveyed online between November 10 and 17, 2008 by [Harris Interactive®](#).

Some of the interesting findings in this new Harris Poll include:

- 80% of adult Americans believe in God – unchanged since the last time we asked the question in 2005. Large majorities of the public believe in miracles (75%), heaven (73%), angels (71%), that Jesus is God or the Son of God (71%), the resurrection of Jesus (70%), the survival of the soul after death (68%), hell (62%), the Virgin birth (Jesus born of Mary (61%) and the devil (59%).
- Slightly more people – but both are minorities – believe in Darwin's theory of evolution (47%) than in creationism (40%).
- Sizeable minorities believe in ghosts (44%), UFOs (36%), witches (31%), astrology (31%), and reincarnation (24%).

Differences between Catholics and Protestants

There are no significant differences between the large percentages of Catholics and Protestants who believe in God, miracles, heaven and hell, that Jesus is the Son of God, angels, the resurrection of Jesus, the survival of the soul after death, the Virgin birth and the devil.

However, Catholics are more likely than Protestants to believe in Darwin's theory of evolution (by 52% to 32%), ghosts (by 57% to 41%), UFOs (by 43% to 31%), and astrology (by 40% to 28%). Protestants are slightly more likely than Catholics to believe in creationism (by 54% to 46%).

Which Religious Texts Are the "Word of God"

Slender majorities of all adults believe that *all or most* of the Old Testament (55%) and the New Testament (54%) are the "Word of God." However, only about a third of all adults (37% and 36%) believe that *all* of these texts are the word of God.

Interestingly, only 26% of all adults believe that the Torah is the word of God, even though it is the same as the first five books of the Old Testament. Presumably many people do not know this.

Religiosity and Religious Practice

Less than a quarter of Americans describe themselves as “very religious.” However, a large majority (68%) describe themselves as either very (23%) or somewhat (45%) religious.

A quarter (27%) of adult Americans claim that they attend church once a week or more often, compared with 36% who say they attend less than once a year or never (18% each).

A Note on the Methodology Used and How It Affects the Results

Other research has shown that when replying to a question administered impersonally by a computer, people are less likely to say they believe in God, or attend Church services when they really don't. It is generally believed that surveys conducted by live interviewers tend to exaggerate the numbers of people who report the socially desirable, or less embarrassing, behavior, and **that the replies given to an online survey such as this, are more honest and therefore more accurate.**

**TABLE 1
WHAT PEOPLE BELIEVE IN**

“We would like to ask you about various things some people believe in. Please indicate for each one if you believe in it, or not.”

Base: All adults

	Believe In	Don't Believe In	Not Sure
	%	%	%
God	80	10	9
Miracles	75	14	12
Heaven	73	14	13
Jesus is God or the Son of God	71	17	12
Angels	71	17	12
The resurrection of Jesus Christ	70	18	13
Survival of the soul after death	68	15	17
Hell	62	24	13
The Virgin birth	61	24	15
The devil	59	27	14
Darwin's theory of evolution	47	32	22
Ghosts	44	39	17
Creationism	40	31	29
UFOs	36	39	25
Witches	31	54	14
Astrology	31	51	18
Reincarnation – that you were once another person	24	53	23

Note: Percentages may not add up exactly to 100% because of rounding

TABLE 2
WHAT PEOPLE BELIEVE IN – BY RELIGIOUS ATTENDANCE AND RELIGION

“Next, we would like to ask you about various things some people believe in. Please indicate for each one if you believe in it, or not.”

Summary of “Believe In”

Base: All adults

	Total	Attend Religious Services					Religion	
		At Least Weekly	Monthly	At Least Once a Year	Less Than Once a Year	Never	Catholic	Protestant
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
God	80	98	94	86	77	38	93	95
Miracles	75	94	93	73	71	39	88	86
Heaven	73	96	88	77	65	30	89	90
Jesus is God or the Son of God	71	98	83	75	66	24	91	91
Angels	71	96	79	72	66	34	85	87
The resurrection of Jesus Christ	70	97	85	73	60	24	88	91
Survival of the soul after death	68	88	77	69	63	40	83	79
Hell	62	90	74	60	51	26	78	79
The Virgin birth	61	89	83	58	47	20	78	81
The devil	59	88	69	55	54	24	74	77
Darwin’s theory of evolution	47	27	42	56	52	67	52	32
Ghosts	44	38	45	46	56	39	57	41
Creationism	40	64	46	35	32	13	46	54
UFOs	36	26	39	31	50	44	43	31
Witches	31	34	29	26	40	27	34	31
Astrology	31	28	32	31	39	27	40	28
Reincarnation – that you were once another person	24	18	25	23	33	25	26	21

TABLE 3
WHICH BOOKS REPRESENT THE WORD OF GOD

“To what extent do you believe that the following represents the word of God?”

Base: All adults

		All Is Word of God	Most Is Word of God	Some Is Word of God	None Is Word of God	Not Sure	SUMMARY	
							All/Most Is Word of God	Some/None Is Word of God
The Old Testament (texts used in the Christian religion)	%	37	18	15	14	16	55	29
The New Testament (texts used in the Christian religion)	%	36	18	15	15	16	54	29
The Torah (the texts used in the Jewish religion)	%	14	13	18	19	36	26	37
The Koran (texts used by Muslims)	%	5	4	18	36	36	9	55
The Book of Mormon (texts used by Mormons)	%	5	4	18	38	35	10	55

Note: Percentages may not add up exactly to 100% because of rounding

TABLE 4
HOW OFTEN ATTEND RELIGIOUS SERVICES

“Do you attend religious services . . .?”

Base: All adults

	Total	
	2007	2008
	%	%
Never	17	18
Less often than once a year	20	18
At least once a year	24	25
Once or twice a month	10	11
Every week or more often	25	27
Not sure	3	2

Note: Percentages may not add up exactly to 100% because of rounding

TABLE 5
HOW RELIGIOUS PEOPLE ARE

“Would you describe yourself as . . .?”

Base: All adults

	Total	
	2007	2008
	%	%
Very religious	21	23
Somewhat religious	49	45
Not very religious	19	17
Not at all religious	12	15

Note: Percentages may not add up exactly to 100% because of rounding

Methodology

This Harris Poll® was conducted online within the United States between November 10 and 17, 2008 among 2,126 adults (aged 18 and over). Figures for age, sex, race/ethnicity, education, region and

household income were weighted where necessary to bring them into line with their actual proportions in the population. Propensity score weighting was also used to adjust for respondents' propensity to be online.

All sample surveys and polls, whether or not they use probability sampling, are subject to multiple sources of error which are most often not possible to quantify or estimate, including sampling error, coverage error, error associated with nonresponse, error associated with question wording and response options, and post-survey weighting and adjustments. Therefore, Harris Interactive avoids the words "margin of error" as they are misleading. All that can be calculated are different possible sampling errors with different probabilities for pure, unweighted, random samples with 100% response rates. These are only theoretical because no published polls come close to this ideal.

Respondents for this survey were selected from among those who have agreed to participate in Harris Interactive surveys. The data have been weighted to reflect the composition of the adult population. Because the sample is based on those who agreed to participate in the Harris Interactive panel, no estimates of theoretical sampling error can be calculated.

These statements conform to the principles of disclosure of the National Council on Public Polls.

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