

What People Do and Do Not Believe in

Many more people believe in miracles, angels, hell and the devil than in Darwin's theory of evolution; almost a quarter of adults believe in witches

New York, N.Y. — December 15, 2009 — A new Harris Poll finds that the great majority (82%) of American adults believe in God, exactly the same number as in two earlier Harris Polls in 2005 and 2007. Large majorities also believe in miracles (76%), heaven (75%), that Jesus is God or the Son of God (73%), in angels (72%), the survival of the soul after death (71%), and in the resurrection of Jesus (70%).

Less than half (45%) of adults believe in Darwin's theory of evolution but this is more than the 40% who believe in creationism.

These are some of the results of *The Harris Poll* of 2,303 adults surveyed online between November 2 and 11, 2009 by Harris Interactive.

The survey also finds that:

- 61% of adults believe in hell;
- 61% believe in the virgin birth (Jesus born of Mary);
- 60% believe in the devil;
- 42% believe in ghosts;
- 32% believe in UFOs;
- 26% believe in astrology;
- 23% believe in witches
- 20% believe in reincarnation – that they were once another person.

None of these numbers have changed much since previous surveys in 2005 and 2007.

Religious Differences

There are very big differences between the beliefs of Catholics, Protestants, born-again Christians and Jews.

Catholics are more likely than all adults to believe in: God (94% compared to 82%); heaven (86% vs. 75%); that Jesus is God or the Son of God (90% vs. 73%); angels (83% vs. 72%); the survival of the soul after death (82% vs. 71%); the resurrection of Jesus Christ (87% vs. 70%); hell (70% vs. 61%); and the virgin birth (by 74% vs. 61%).

Catholics are also somewhat more likely than all adults to believe in Darwin's theory of evolution (51% vs. 45%).

Protestants are also more likely to believe in God (92%, %); that Jesus is God or the Son of God (91%); heaven (90%); angels (88%); the resurrection of Jesus (88%); miracles (87%); the survival of the soul (85%); the virgin birth (79%); the devil (77%) and hell (73%).

But Protestants are much less likely than all adults to believe in Darwin's theory of evolution (32%), ghosts (33%); astrology (20%); and reincarnation (13%). They are more likely than all adults to believe in creationism (56% vs. 40%).

Born-again Christians are much more likely than Catholics or all Protestants to believe in God (97%); heaven (97%); the Resurrection (97%); miracles (95%); angels (95%); the virgin birth (92%); the survival of the soul (91%); hell (89%); and the devil (89%).

Born-again Christians are also much more likely to believe in creationism (68%), and much less likely to believe in Darwin's theory of evolution (16%).

Jews are, of course, very unlikely to believe in the basic elements of Christianity. They are also less likely than all adults to believe in miracles (63%); heaven (48%); the survival of the soul (37%); angels (36%); hell (21%); and the devil (7%).

Jews are by far the most likely to believe in Darwin's theory of evolution (80%) and the least likely to believe in creationism (20%). They are also less likely than all adults to believe in ghosts (10% vs. 42%), UFOs (20% vs. 32%), astrology (19% vs. 26%); and witches (8% vs. 23%).

So what?

Two "big picture" findings are worth noting:

- Many people consider themselves Christians without necessarily believing in some of the key beliefs of Christianity. However, this is not true of born-again Christians.
- In addition to their religious beliefs, large minorities of adults, including many Christians, have "pagan" or pre-Christian beliefs such as a belief in ghosts, astrology, witches and reincarnation.

TABLE 1
WHAT PEOPLE DO AND DO NOT 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	Believe In		Change 2005-2009
					2005	2007	
God	%	82	9	9	82	82	-
Miracles	%	76	13	12	73	79	+3
Heaven	%	75	13	12	70	75	+5
Jesus is God or the Son of God	%	73	16	11	70	72	+3
Angels	%	72	15	12	68	74	+4
Survival of the soul after death	%	71	10	19	70	69	+1
The resurrection of Jesus Christ	%	70	17	13	66	70	+4
Hell	%	61	24	16	59	62	+2
The Virgin birth (Jesus born of Mary)	%	61	22	17	58	60	+3
The Devil	%	60	27	13	61	62	-1
Darwin's theory of evolution	%	45	32	22	N/A	42	N/A
Ghosts	%	42	38	20	40	41	+2
Creationism	%	40	30	30	N/A	39	N/A
UFOs	%	32	39	29	34	35	-2
Astrology	%	26	52	22	25	29	+1
Witches	%	23	59	17	28	31	-5
Reincarnation – that you were once another person	%	20	53	28	21	21	-1

Note: Percentages may not add up exactly to 100% because of rounding Note: N/A indicates this was not asked in 2005

TABLE 2
WHAT PEOPLE BELIEVE IN – BY RELIGION
 “Please indicate for each one if you believe in it, or not”

Base: All Adults

	Total	Religion			
		Catholic	Protestant	Jewish	Born-Again Christian
		%	%	%	%
God	82	94	92	79	97
Miracles	76	81	87	63	95
Heaven	75	86	90	48	97
Jesus is God or the Son of God	73	90	91	6	97
Angels	72	83	88	36	95
Survival of the soul after death	71	82	85	37	91
The resurrection of Jesus Christ	70	87	88	5	97
Hell	61	70	73	21	89
The Virgin birth (Jesus born of Mary)	61	74	79	5	92
The Devil	60	69	77	7	89
Darwin's theory of evolution	45	51	32	80	16
Ghosts	42	44	33	10	37
Creationism	40	37	56	20	68
UFOs	32	32	26	20	25
Astrology	26	26	20	19	21
Witches	23	22	23	8	27
Reincarnation – that you were once another person	20	19	13	18	14

Methodology

This Harris Poll was conducted online within the United States November 2 and 11, 2009 among 2,303 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.

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The Harris Poll® #140, December 15, 2009

By Humphrey Taylor, Chairman, The Harris Poll, Harris Interactive

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