

The Religious and Other Beliefs of Americans 2003

Many people believe in miracles (89%), the devil (68%), hell (69%), ghosts (51%), astrology (31%) and reincarnation (27%)

by Humphrey Taylor

That very large majorities of the American public, and almost all (but not all) Christians believe in God, the survival of the soul after death, miracles, heaven, the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the Virgin birth will come as no great surprise. What may be more surprising is that half of all adults believe in ghosts, almost a third believe in astrology, and more than a quarter believe in reincarnation – that they were themselves reincarnated from other people. Majorities of about two-thirds of all adults believe in hell and the devil, but hardly anybody expects that they will go to hell themselves.

These are some of the findings of a Harris Poll of 2,201 U.S. adults surveyed online between January 21 and 27, 2003, using the same methods used by Harris Interactive® to forecast the 2000 elections with great accuracy.

The survey also found that women are more likely than men to hold both Christian and non-Christian beliefs. African-Americans are more likely than whites and Hispanics to hold Christian beliefs, as are Republicans. The level of belief is generally highest among people without a college education and lowest among those with postgraduate degrees.

- The 90% of adults who believe in **God** include 93% of women, 96% of African-Americans and 93% of Republicans but only 86% of men, 85% of those with postgraduate degrees, and 87% of political independents.
- The 84% of those who believe in the **survival of the soul after death** include 89% of women but only 78% of men, 86% of those without a college degree but only 78% of those with postgraduate degrees.
- The 84% of the public who believe in **miracles** falls to 72% among those with postgraduate degrees, and rises to 90% among women and 90% among African-Americans.
- The 82% who believe in **heaven** includes 89% of women but only 75% of men and falls to 71% among people aged 25 to 29 and those with postgraduate degrees.

On almost all the beliefs that are central to Christianity, there is a general pattern with:

- Higher levels of belief among women than among men.
- Lower level of belief among people aged 25 to 29.
- Higher levels of belief among people with no college education and lower levels of belief among those with postgraduate education.
- Higher levels of belief among African-Americans than among whites and Hispanics.

Other interesting findings include:

- 68% of the public believes in the **devil**, and 69% believe in **hell**.
- 51% of the public, including 58% of women, and 65% of those aged 25 to 29 but only 27% of those aged 65 and over believe in **ghosts**.
- 31% of the public believes in **astrology** including 36% of women and 43% of those aged 25 to 29 but only 17% of people aged 65 and over, and 25% of men.
- 27% believe in **reincarnation**, that they were once another person. This includes 40% of people aged 25 to 29 but only 14% of people aged 65 and over.

What Christians and Non-Christians Believe

One of the more intriguing findings is that not all people who call themselves Christians believe all the conventional Christian beliefs. For example, one percent of Christians do not believe in God, 8% do not believe in the survival of the soul after death, 7% do not believe in miracles, 5% do not believe in heaven, 7% do not believe in the Virgin birth and 18% do not believe in hell.

Even more surprising is that some people who say they are not Christian believe in the resurrection of Christ (26%) and the Virgin birth, Jesus born of Mary (27%).

Life After Death

Most of the 84% of the public who believe in the survival of the soul after death are optimists. Almost two-thirds (63%), including 75% of Christians, expect to go to heaven. Only 1% expect to go to hell. Six percent expect to go to purgatory while 11% expect to go somewhere else and 18% don't know.

Humphrey Taylor is the chairman of The Harris Poll[®], Harris Interactive.

TABLE 1
ELEVEN BELIEFS – BY SEX AND AGE
 “Please indicate for each one if you believe in it, or not.”

	All Adults	Sex		Age					
		Male	Female	18 – 24	25 – 29	30 – 29	40 – 49	50 – 64	65+
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
God	90	86	93	84	82	91	90	91	95
Survival of the soul after death	84	78	89	85	88	81	86	82	84
Miracles	84	77	90	86	85	82	85	83	82
Heaven	82	75	89	83	71	83	84	80	85
The resurrection of Christ	80	73	86	76	68	81	82	81	84
The Virgin birth (Jesus born of Mary)	77	70	83	76	60	79	80	78	80
Hell	69	65	73	74	63	69	72	66	68
The devil	68	64	73	68	62	72	72	68	62
Ghosts	51	45	58	58	65	55	57	48	27
Astrology	31	25	36	37	43	37	23	32	17
Reincarnation	27	23	30	30	40	30	25	26	14

TABLE 2
ELEVEN BELIEFS – BY EDUCATION, RACE AND PARTY
 “Please indicate for each one if you believe in it, or not.”

	All Adults	Education				Race		
		High School or Less	Some College	College Grad	Post Grad	White	Black	Hispanic
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
God	90	92	88	90	85	90	96	85
Survival of the soul after death	84	86	86	79	78	85	79	86
Miracles	84	89	84	77	72	84	90	81
Heaven	82	86	83	76	71	83	86	79
The resurrection of Christ	80	86	81	71	64	81	88	74
The Virgin birth (Jesus born of Mary)	77	84	78	65	60	78	78	72
Hell	69	74	73	60	53	69	77	69
The devil	68	73	74	58	52	69	76	63
Ghosts	51	56	53	43	36	51	43	59
Astrology	31	37	33	20	16	29	47	33
Reincarnation	27	28	31	24	17	25	29	33

	All Adults	Party I.D.		
		Republican	Democrat	Independent
	%	%	%	%
God	90	93	90	87
Survival of the soul after death	84	87	83	83
Miracles	84	87	82	82
Heaven	82	89	80	78
The resurrection of Christ	80	87	78	75
The Virgin birth (Jesus born of Mary)	77	86	73	72
Hell	69	82	63	65
The devil	68	79	62	65
Ghosts	51	42	54	56
Astrology	31	19	40	29
Reincarnation	27	18	31	30

TABLE 3
ELEVEN BELIEFS – BY CHRISTIANS AND OTHERS
 “Please indicate for each one if you believe in it, or not.”

	Total	Christian	Non-Christian
	%	%	%
God	90	99	58
Survival of the soul after death	84	92	63
Miracles	84	93	54
Heaven	82	95	44
The resurrection of Christ	80	96	26
The Virgin birth (Jesus born of Mary)	77	93	27
Hell	69	82	30
The devil	68	82	26
Ghosts	51	50	48
Astrology	31	27	35
Reincarnation – that you were once another person	27	21	40

TABLE 4
WHERE WILL YOU GO AFTER DEATH?
 “When you die, where do you think you will go – heaven, hell, purgatory or somewhere else?”

Base: Those who believe in survival of soul after death

	Total	Christian	Non-Christian
	%	%	%
Heaven	63	75	29
Hell	1	1	2
Purgatory	6	6	5
Somewhere else	11	6	32
Don't know	18	12	33

Methodology

The Harris Poll[®] was conducted online within the United States between January 21 and 27, 2003 among a nationwide cross section of 2,201 adults. Figures for age, sex, race, education and number of adults in the household 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.

In theory, with a probability sample of this size, one can say with 95 percent certainty that the results have a statistical precision of plus or minus two percentage points of what they would be if the entire adult population had been polled with complete accuracy. Unfortunately, there are several other possible sources of error in all polls or surveys that are probably more serious than theoretical calculations of sampling error. They include refusals to be interviewed (non-response), question wording and question order, interviewer bias, weighting by demographic control data and screening (e.g., for likely voters). It is impossible to quantify the errors that may result from these factors. This online survey is not a probability sample.

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

W18011
Q806, Q810

COPYRIGHT 2003 CREATORS SYNDICATE, INC.
ISSN 0895-7983

About Harris Interactive[®]

Harris Interactive (www.harrisinteractive.com) is a worldwide market research and consulting firm best known for *The Harris Poll*[®], and for pioneering the Internet method to conduct scientifically accurate market research. Headquartered in Rochester, New York, U.S.A., Harris Interactive combines proprietary methodologies and technology with expertise in predictive, custom and strategic research. The Company conducts international research through wholly owned subsidiaries—London-based **HI Europe** (www.hieurope.com) and Tokyo-based Harris Interactive Japan—as well as through the Harris Interactive Global Network of local market- and opinion-research firms, and various U.S. offices. **EOE M/F/D/V**

To become a member of the Harris Poll OnlineSM and be invited to participate in future online surveys, visit www.harrispollonline.com.

Press Contacts:

Nancy Wong
Harris Interactive
585-214-7316
nwong@harrisinteractive.com