

## 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%)

### The Harris Poll® #11, February 26, 2003, 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.

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