

American Worldview Inventory 2020 – At a Glance

AWVI 2020 Results – Release #10: Worldview in the Millennial Generation

Millennials Have Radically Different Beliefs About Respect, Faith, and America

Previous findings from the *American Worldview Inventory 2020* show the rapid erosion of the biblical worldview in American culture—with only 6 percent of adults today possessing a biblical worldview, down from twice that (12 percent) in the mid-1990s.

But nowhere is this cultural shift more dramatic than among the youngest American adults, ages 18 to 36. The findings show a Millennial generation radically different in its worldview and beliefs from previous generations.

According to recent *AWVI 2020* findings from the Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University, Millennials increasingly—and robustly—reject the Christian faith, with only 2 percent possessing a biblical worldview. They are also discarding the most basic American values, such as respect for others and obligations of civic engagement, the study finds.

Veteran researcher Dr. George Barna called the most recent findings “troubling.” He explained, “The significantly divergent worldview perspectives and applications of the four generations—especially how different the Millennials are from their predecessors—suggests a nation that is at war with itself to adopt new values, lifestyles, and a new identity.”

Other findings from the *AWVI 2020*:

- Millennials are less tolerant and respectful of others than previous generations. Millennials generally are seen as “tolerant.” Yet the *AWVI 2020* findings show that Millennials—by their own admission—as far less tolerant than other generations. In addition, they are more likely to want to exact revenge when wronged, are less likely to keep a promise, and overall have less respect for others and for human life in general.
- Millennials are less enthusiastic about America. They demonstrate little awareness and interest in government and politics and are far less informed about current political conditions and events than either Busters (ages 37 to 55) or Boomers (ages 56 to 74). They are far more accepting of socialism than other generations.
- Millennials are increasingly distinct from other generations in the area of faith. Surprisingly, six out of ten Millennials (61%) consider themselves to be Christian. Yet when asked about their personal beliefs and faith practices, they differ significantly in many areas from other generations. For example, Millennials are significantly *less likely* to believe in the existence of absolute moral truth or that God is the basis of all truth; to believe that human beings were created by God, in His image, and that He loves them unconditionally; pray and worship regularly, or seek God’s will for their lives. Yet, Millennials are significantly *more likely* to wonder if God is really involved in their life, to believe that human life has no absolute value and to believe that having faith matters more than which faith they have.

Please see the full *AWVI 2020* Report #10: “Millennials and Worldview” below.

American Worldview Inventory 2020 Results
FULL Release #10: Millennials and Worldview

Millennials Have Radically Different Beliefs About Respect, Faith, and America

Dr. George Barna, Director of Research, Cultural Research Center

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Millennials have been singled out by many analysts as a generation disinterested in traditional American beliefs, values, and behaviors. The groundbreaking *American Worldview Inventory 2020* (AWVI 2020) from the Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University reported earlier this year that Millennials are far less likely than people of other generations to possess a biblical worldview. While an estimated 9% of adults in both the Elder and Boomer generations (defined as ages 75 and older, and those 56 to 74 years of age, respectively) have a biblical worldview, that figure drops to 5% among those in Generation X (ages 37 to 55) and a mere 2% among Millennials (ages 18 to 36).

The latest report drawn from the AWVI 2020 research underscores three specific dimensions in which the worldview of the youngest adult generation strays farthest from the national norms in areas of respect for people, civic engagement, and faith.

Respect for People

Millennials do not have as much respect for human beings as do adults from other generations.

That insight is based on a combination of beliefs and behaviors that distinguish the perspective of Millennials from that of older adults. For instance, Millennials are 15 percentage points less likely than Gen Xers to say they treat other people the same way they want to be treated, and are 28 points less likely than Baby Boomers to embrace that approach (known to Christians as the “Golden Rule”).

Millennials are also twice as likely as other people to say that the kind of people they always respect are those who hold the same religious and political views as they do. Despite their well-known advocacy of “tolerance,” they emerged from the survey as the generation that is the least tolerant—by their own admission—of people who possess different views than they do.

Further, Millennials also stood out as the generation that is most likely to acknowledge that they are “committed to getting even” with those who wrong them—in fact, 28 percentage points more likely than Baby Boomers to hold a vengeful point of view.

Millennials indicated that they have less respect for life, in general. For instance, they are less than half as likely as other adults to say that life is sacred. They are twice as likely to diminish the value of human life by describing human beings as either “material substance only” or their very existence as “an illusion”.

While most Americans believe that “people are basically good,” that point of view conflicts with the biblical teaching that human beings are sinful and need to be forgiven for and saved from the consequences of their sins. A far smaller proportion of Millennials believes that people are basically good, but their view is unrelated to the sinfulness of humanity. Their perspective is simply that people are less valuable creatures, neither made in the image of God nor imbued with value due to their creation by God and being loved by Him. America’s youngest generation simply accepts the existence of humanity without assigning any spiritual or innate value to the human race.

Honesty and trust are practical demonstrations of respect toward others. However, the survey also revealed that Millennials are less likely than any of the other three generations to claim that they keep the promises they make or to repay a loan. They are more likely than any of the other three generations to lie in order to protect their reputation or best interests.

When considered in combination, then, these points of view indicate that Millennials are the generation least likely to respect other people.

Disengagement from Christianity

A second and more obvious distinction between Millennials and other Americans is the generation’s robust rejection of the Christian faith. Surprisingly, six out of ten Millennials (61%) consider themselves to be Christian. While that is notably lower than the proportion among the other adult generations (81%), it is an unexpectedly lofty proportion given some of their other faith views and practices.

There is a long list of religious distinctions between Millennials and other generations. Compared to other adults, Millennials are significantly less likely to:

- Believe in the existence of absolute moral truth
- Be deeply committed to practicing their faith
- Contend that human beings were created by God, in His image
- Believe that God is the basis of all truth
- View the purpose of life to be knowing, loving, and serving God
- Consider the Bible to be a reliable source of moral guidance
- Believe that God loves them unconditionally
- Say they have a unique calling or purpose from God
- Seek to avoid sinning because it breaks God’s heart
- Possess a biblical view of the nature and character of God
- Confess their sins and embrace Jesus Christ as their savior
- Accept the Bible as the inerrant word of God
- Pray during a typical week

- Worship or thank God during a typical week
- Seek and pursue God's will
- Acknowledge and confess their sins each week
- Believe that Satan is real and influential
- Define success as consistent obedience to God

Compared to other adults, Millennials are substantially more likely to:

- Wonder if God is really involved in their life
- Believe that there is no absolute value associated with human life
- Believe that having faith matters more than which faith they have

Important Spiritual Differences—Millennials and Other Adults			
	Millennials	Other Adults	Difference (in points)
Pray during a typical week	48%	71%	23
Worship or thank God during a typical week	42	65	23
Seek to avoid sinning because it breaks God's heart	42	59	17
Possess a biblical view of the nature and character of God	38	55	17
Seek and pursue God's will each week	41	58	17
Acknowledge and confess my sins each week	40	57	17
Deeply committed to practicing my faith	47	63	16
Accept the Bible as the inerrant word of God	28	44	16
Human beings were created by God, in His image	45	59	14
Have confessed my sins and embraced Jesus Christ as my savior	23	37	14
God loves me unconditionally	60	74	14
Primary purpose of life: know, love, and serve God	18	31	13
God is the basis of all truth	31	44	13
Believe that Satan is real and influential	46	59	13
Wonder if God is really involved in my life	43	32	11
Have a unique calling or purpose from God	57	68	11
Source: American Worldview Inventory 2020; N=2,000 adults, 18 or older; conducted by Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University.			

The deterioration of the Christian faith in American society has been in progress for more than half a century. However, the pace of that dissipation greatly accelerated with the coming of age of the Millennials. During their teens and twenties, Boomers showed signs of turning their backs on the Christian faith but are now similar to Elders in their worldview, religious beliefs, and religious practices.

In comparison, there is actually a wider gap between Gen X and Boomers on these matters. But the faith gap between Millennials and their predecessors (i.e., Gen X and Boomers) is the widest intergenerational difference identified at any time in the last seven decades.

Important Spiritual Differences—Millennials and Boomers			
	Millennials	Boomers	Difference (in points)
Human life is sacred	19%	50%	31
Pray during a typical week	48	69	21
Worship or thank God during a typical week	42	61	19
Possess a biblical view of the nature and character of God	38	54	16
Seek to avoid sinning because it breaks God's heart	42	57	15
God loves me unconditionally	60	74	14
Wonder if God is really involved in my life	43	57	14
Human beings were created by God, in His image	45	59	14
Have confessed my sins and embraced Jesus Christ as my savior	23	36	13
Deeply committed to practicing my faith	47	60	13
Accept the Bible as the inerrant word of God	28	41	13
Primary purpose of life: know, love, and seek God	18	30	12
Seek and pursue God's will each week	41	53	12
Source: <i>American Worldview Inventory 2020</i> ; N=2,000 adults, 18 or older; conducted by Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University.			

Less Enthusiastic about America

Millennials, as a generation, have shown a relative disinterest in political engagement. Perhaps that will change as they age and assume other types of responsibilities (e.g., parenting, career ascendancy, community participation, home ownership).

For the moment, though, Millennials demonstrate little awareness and interest in government and politics. They are far less informed about current political conditions and events than either Boomers or Gen X. That lack of knowledge and awareness has been demonstrated in the comparatively undistinguished voting participation of the generation.

They are, by far, the generation most enamored with socialism.

They are substantially less likely than all other generations to believe that great leaders empower people to fulfill their purpose. In their eyes, leadership greatness is reflected in attributes such as popularity and performance efficiency.

They are also the generation least likely to “do whatever is necessary for the good of the United States.” While a majority of Millennials say they would take such action, they were far less likely to make such a pledge than are people from each of the other generations.

Farther Apart from Previous Generations

The *American Worldview Inventory 2020 (AWVI)* included 56 questions related to beliefs and behavior. The two oldest generations among the nation’s adults, comprising citizens currently in their mid-fifties and beyond (i.e., Baby Boomers and Elders) were surprisingly similar in their views on most of the items tested. There were statistically significant differences between the two generations regarding just 12 of the worldview factors evaluated.

The generation born between Boomers and Millennials – known both as Gen X and Baby Busters – was statistically farther apart from Boomers than were the Elders. Overall there were 17 worldview elements for which there were statistically significant differences between Boomers and Xers.

In fact, adults in the Millennial generation were substantially different from Gen X much more often than Boomers differed from the generations born immediately before or after them. There were 39 items that were statistically different from the generations born immediately before or after the Xers and Millennials – far more than the combined number of significant differences between Boomers (i.e., Busters and Elders)!

The largest generational gap of all, however, was between Millennials and Boomers. Of the 56 variables studied, there were significant differences regarding 48 of those factors between Millennials and Boomers! Further, the size of the difference between Boomers and Millennials on those items was also larger than the magnitude of the differences between any other pair of generations.

Differences Reflect a Serious Problem

Dr. George Barna, who has been researching both faith trends and generational differences for more than four decades, found the survey results troubling.

“These profiles are profoundly disturbing,” Barna noted. “The significantly divergent worldview perspectives and applications of the four generations—especially how different the Millennials are from all of their predecessors—suggests a nation that is at war with itself to adopt new values, lifestyles, and a new identity. In other words, there is a war for worldview dominance. But, as the Scriptures remind us, a nation at war with itself cannot persist.

“The data also point out that America is losing its spiritual unity at a rapid pace,” the Arizona Christian University researcher continued. “Even a rudimentary understanding of the foundations of the American republic reminds us that unless the United States maintains spiritual unity under the hand of God, we will not be able to sustain the freedoms that have made this nation unique and desirable. The heart and soul of the nation pursue other gods and beliefs to our detriment as a nation.

“And a nation with an influential—and, indeed, its largest—generation reflecting indifference toward the overall health and well-being of the nation is one flirting with cultural decline.”

Barna went on to suggest that these conditions are a dire warning sign to cultural influencers, religious leaders, and parents that dramatic changes are in order if these patterns are to be transformed. He stated that parents of the youngest generation—comprised of those born after 2002—would do the country a great service by evaluating the worldview of their children and taking all necessary steps to intentionally and strategically shape that worldview to produce citizens who will love God, family, and country.

That evaluation would include studying the nature of the investment the parents are making in their child's life (e.g., moral, spiritual, emotional, character, values, etc.), the content of the child's formal education, the substance of the entertainment and information media to which they are exposed, and the moral and religious education and encouragement they receive.

About the Research

The *American Worldview Inventory 2020 (AWVI)* is an annual survey that estimates how many adults have a biblical worldview. The assessment is based on 51 worldview-related questions drawn from eight categories of worldview application, measuring both beliefs and behavior. *AWVI 2020* was undertaken in January 2020 among a nationally representative sample of 2,000 adults, providing an estimated maximum sampling error of approximately plus or minus 2 percentage points, based on the 95% confidence interval. Additional levels of indeterminable error may occur in surveys based upon non-sampling activity.

There are four adult generations referenced in this report. Millennials are people born from 1984 through 2002, representing people currently in the 18 to 36 age bracket. Gen X (aka Baby Busters) were born from 1965 through 1983. That places them in the 37 to 55-year-old age group. Baby Boomers were born from 1946 to 1964, making them 56 to 74 years old. Elders are a combination of the two oldest living generations. They were born prior to 1946, covering anyone 75 years of age or older.

About the Cultural Research Center

The Cultural Research Center (CRC) at Arizona Christian University [hyperlink] is located on the school's campus in Glendale, Arizona, in the Phoenix metropolitan area. CRC conducts nationwide research studies to understand the intersection of faith and culture and shares that information with organizations dedicated to transform American culture with biblical truth. Like ACU, CRC embraces the Christian faith, as described in the Bible, but remains inter-denominational and non-partisan. Access to past surveys conducted by CRC, as well as additional information about the Cultural Research Center, is available at www.culturalresearchcenter.com. Further information about Arizona Christian University is available at www.arizonachristian.edu.