

American Worldview Inventory 2020 – At a Glance

CRC Survey Shows Dangerously Low Percentage of Americans Hold Biblical Worldview

March 24, 2020

The latest national survey about the worldview of Americans shows that although seven out of ten consider themselves to be Christian, just 6% actually possess a biblical worldview.

The inaugural groundbreaking *American Worldview Inventory 2020* was conducted by veteran researcher George Barna, Director of Research for the Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University. A pioneer in the field of worldview research, Barna called it the “most sophisticated nationwide survey of worldview conducted in the United States.” Other key findings from *AWVI 2020*:

- Only one-fifth of those attending evangelical Protestant churches (21%) have a biblical worldview, as compared to one-sixth of those attending charismatic or Pentecostal churches (16%). The study finds even smaller proportions in mainline Protestant (8%) or Catholic (1%) churches.
- The number of American adults holding a biblical worldview has declined by 50% over the past quarter century.
- Regarding the youngest adult generation the numbers are even more startling. A mere 2% of those 18 to 29 years old possess a biblical worldview.

“The fact that fewer than one out of five born-again adults hold a biblical worldview highlights the extensive decline of core Christian principles in America,” Barna said. Among the differentiating factors between the new study and previous research, he noted, is the more robust measurement of action.

“In the *American Worldview Inventory*, we measure not just beliefs, but also the *application* of those beliefs —our behavior — because people do what they believe. If you truly believe something, you integrate into how you live, and your lifestyle reflects those beliefs. As a result, our research always balances examining both what we believe to be true with how we translate such beliefs into action,” Barna explained.

The disturbing results from this new research emphasize the importance of carefully measuring and intentionally developing the biblical worldview, especially among younger people. The Cultural Research Center (CRC), which conducts strategic cultural research through a collaborative effort of the faculty and staff at Arizona Christian University, is facilitating cultural transformation in America through worldview education. CRC is the only institute conducting this kind of nationwide worldview research and is using those studies as the foundation for creating new resources for worldview training. CRC’s goal is to share its research findings with those who share a vision for Bible-driven cultural transformation. CRC is currently engaged in intentional biblical worldview training among all students at ACU. The initial report of the *American Worldview Inventory 2020* follows.

American Worldview Inventory 2020 – Initial Report

Dangerously Few Americans Possess a Biblical Worldview, Inaugural CRC Study Finds

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

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A new national survey about the worldview of Americans shows that although seven out of ten Americans consider themselves to be Christian, just 6% have a biblical worldview. The study was conducted in January by veteran researcher George Barna, Director of Research at the Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University. The survey was administered to a nationally representative sample of 2,000 adults.

The research, known as the American Worldview Inventory, is the first wave of what will be an annual survey conducted by the Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University. The assessment is based on 51 worldview questions, examining both beliefs and behavior. CRC is the nation's leading research organization studying worldview and cultural trends. Results from *AWVI 2020* will inform worldview training at Arizona Christian University and will be used to develop resources for ministry partners and other organizations that share the vision of cultural transformation through worldview.

Faith Connections

There are numerous worldviews for people to choose from, with a biblical worldview – which refers to consistently interpreting and responding to life situations based on biblical principles and teachings – just one of those options.

As might be expected, church alignments were directly related to worldview. People associated with Christian churches that have a “high view” of the Bible – i.e., believing that the Bible is the inspired, true word of God and is a reliable guide for life – were much more likely to have a biblical worldview than were people attending other types of churches. One-fifth of those attending evangelical Protestant churches (21%) have a biblical worldview, as do one-sixth of those attending charismatic or Pentecostal churches (16%). In contrast, much smaller proportions of people associated with mainline Protestant (8%) or Catholic (1%) churches – segments that typically place less trust in the reliability of the Bible – have a biblical worldview.

Born again Christians – a segment defined in part by their acceptance of scriptural exhortations regarding sin, grace, and salvation – were three times more likely than average to have a biblical worldview (19%). However, the fact that not quite one out of five born again adults holds a biblical worldview highlights the extensive decline of core Christian principles in America over the last several decades. Born again adults currently constitute about one-third of the national adult population.

The largest segment of people who describe themselves as Christian is Notional Christians – those who self-identify as Christian and who do not embrace eternal salvation through a personal confession of sin and accepting Jesus Christ as their personal savior. Notional Christians constitute 54% of U.S. adults

who describe themselves as Christian. Very few Notional Christians – only one-tenth of one percent – have a biblical worldview.

Groups More Likely to Live Biblically

Possessing a biblical worldview is more common among people with some college education (7%) than among those who never attended college (1%). People from households earning less than \$60,000 are less likely than those from households earning more than that amount to have a biblical worldview (5% versus 8%), and whites are slightly more likely than non-whites to have such a worldview (7% versus 4%, respectively). The study also showed that the younger a person was, the less likely they are to possess a biblical worldview: 9% of Americans 50 or older have a biblical worldview, compared to just 5% of those in their thirties and forties, and a mere 2% of those 18 to 29 years old.

There are geographic differences of note, as well. Only 4% of adults in the Northeastern and Western states have a biblical worldview compared to twice as many who live in the Midwest and South (8%). Of the five most highly populated states in the U.S. only residents of Texas (9%) exceeded the national average, while the incidence of a biblical worldview in the other four large states was below average (4% among residents of California and New York, and just 3% among those residing in Florida and Pennsylvania).

Not surprisingly, political leanings were related to peoples' worldview. Among adults who are politically conservative, 16% have a biblical worldview. That far exceeded the proportion among political moderates (3%) and liberals (1%).

Another hybrid segment is SAGE Cons – an acronym for Spiritually Active Governance Engaged Conservative Christians, who represent about 9% of the population. A group that is active in both politics and faith, they are credited with playing a pivotal role in putting Donald Trump in the White House in 2016. The survey revealed that nearly half of that group (44%) has a biblical worldview.

Some demographic qualities – such as gender, presence of young children in the home, and military experience – showed no relationship to whether or not a person has a biblical worldview.

Historical Context

Although peoples' worldview is perhaps the most critical factor in influencing character, values, and lifestyle, worldview assessment is not a widespread research focus. George Barna, who is a Professor at ACU as well as the Director of Research at ACU's Cultural Research Center, has been one of the pioneers in the field, engaging in such research for more than 25 years. Based on his past worldview studies Barna noted that the results of the current study continue the pattern he has seen developing.

"A quarter century ago we had as much as 12% of the adult population holding a biblical worldview," he explained. "Since that time, we have seen a steady reduction in the incidence. The current level – just 6%, which is literally half of the level when we started measuring this – is the lowest yet."

Arizona Christian University is dedicated to helping students develop a biblical worldview, teaching every class from a biblical worldview perspective. Barna explained that the university is committed to

graduating future leaders who have the ability to improve the worldview landscape of America by bringing a consistent biblical perspective into their profession, church, family, and relationships.

“In the American Worldview Inventory, we measure not just beliefs but also the application of those beliefs – our behavior – because people do what they believe,” noted Barna. “If you truly believe something, you integrate it into how you live, and your lifestyle reflects those beliefs. As a result, our worldview research always balances examining both what we believe to be true with how we translate such beliefs into action. That’s why we refer to someone with a biblical worldview as an integrated disciple: they have blended their intellectual acceptance of biblical principles into their physical application of those perspectives. In other words, they are integrated disciples of Jesus Christ because they have translated their ability to think like Jesus into ways of living like Him as well.”

A person’s worldview is important because it shapes how they make sense of and participate in the world around them. A worldview is the intellectual, moral, emotional and spiritual filter through which a person sees and responds to the world. “It is like the operating system of a computer,” Barna explained. “Your worldview is the accumulation of your most important beliefs and it informs every part of a person’s life – from values, morals and goals, to relationships, emotions, finances and ideology.” Because your worldview affects every decision you make, worldview also affects every area of influence in American culture, such as education, the family, religion and faith, government and politics, arts and entertainment, news and information media, and business and commerce.

The biblical worldview is based on truth claims and principles from the Bible informing a person’s beliefs and actions. America was founded on biblical worldview principles and that worldview prevailed in the U.S. into the twentieth century. Since the 1990s, however, the predominant worldview in America has been postmodernism, a secular worldview that opposes biblical truths.

According to Barna the shift away from the biblical worldview to secular worldviews – postmodernism, Marxism, secular humanism, and modern mysticism, in particular – is most clearly reflected in our values. Citing research he had conducted with historian David Barton, commonly held values in colonial America included civic duty, hard work, humility, faith, family, moderation and the rule of law. The prevailing values in America today are much different: acceptance, comfort, control, entertainment, entitlement, experiences, expression, freedom and happiness. This shift in values has facilitated a changing moral landscape.

Transforming America’s Worldview

The survey results indicate that there is ample room for growth in biblical worldview incidence. The breadth of research conducted over the years by Barna regarding worldview development suggests that people begin developing their worldview very early in life and continue to refine and integrate their worldview through their 20s. While there are many influences that affect the worldview people embrace, dominant influences are family, media messages, public policy, schooling, and peer influence.

Experts concur that because a worldview develops over a long period of time, and any intentional redirection of a person's worldview must be done strategically, growing the number of Americans who possess a biblical worldview will be a long-term process that must include a variety of influence agents.

Intentionally developing and carefully measuring worldview is not merely an academic exercise, as Dr. Tracy Munsil, Executive Director of the Cultural Research Center, pointed out.

“Unless America experiences a steady increase in people reflecting a biblical worldview in their lives, America's future is more likely to resemble that of nations characterized by moral and behavioral chaos,” warned Munsil, who is also an associate professor of political science at Arizona Christian University. “Alternative perspectives such as postmodern, Marxism, and secular humanism drive American thinking and lifestyles these days. What we experience in our nation today will not change until we replace the cause of the prevalent thinking and behavior. The cause is our worldview.”

Munsil pointed to survey data showing that Americans are consistently frustrated with the values, morals, and lifestyle choices that dominate American life these days. “Because you do what you believe, the only way to alter the typical daily experience in America – or to change the trajectory of our culture – is to address the cause of the problem. That means we need to establish a full throttle effort to restore knowledge, acceptance, and application of biblical truth throughout our nation,” Munsil continued. “It took roughly half a century for America to lose its Christian moorings, and it will take at least that long to restore them. There needs to be a sense of urgency about initiating that recovery immediately. The longer we wait, the harder it will be to successfully reintroduce biblical truth to a doubting population.”

About the Research

The American Worldview Inventory (AWVI) is the first wave of an annual series of surveys that estimates how many adults have a biblical worldview. The assessment is based on 51 worldview-related questions that are drawn from eight categories of worldview application. Those questions are divided into queries regarding both beliefs and behavior. In addition to the worldview questions, the survey also contains an array of demographic and theolographic questions. In total, the AWVI instrument incorporates 68 questions and took respondents an average of 16 minutes to complete.

AWVI was undertaken in January 2020 among a nationally representative sample of 2,000 adults. The survey included 1,000 interviews with a nationwide random sample of adults via telephone, plus another 1,000 adults interviewed online through use of a nationally representative panel of adults. A survey of 2,000 individuals is considered to have sampling error of approximately 2 percentage points, based on the 95% confidence interval. Additional levels of undeterminable error may occur in surveys based upon non-sampling activity.

About the Cultural Research Center

The Cultural Research Center (CRC) at Arizona Christian University is located on the school's campus in Glendale, Arizona. CRC conducts nationwide research studies to understand the intersection of faith and culture and shares the information with organizations focused on impacting the spheres of cultural

influence in order to transform American culture with biblical truth. Like ACU, CRC embraces the Christian faith but remains non-partisan and inter-denominational. Dr. Tracy Munsil serves as the Executive Director of the Center. More information about the Cultural Research Center is available at the Center's website, located at www.culturalresearchcenter.com, or contact us at: info@culturalresearchcenter.com