

Cultural Research Center



American Worldview Inventory 2021

Release #1: America's Dominant Worldview Syncretism

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New Research: America's Dominant Worldview is Syncretism

The groundbreaking worldview research conducted by the Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University in 2020 revealed that just 6% of U.S. adults have a biblical worldview.

A new piece of groundbreaking research by the Cultural Research Center answers the question raised by the initial study: If American adults do not have a biblical worldview, what is the dominant worldview among the other 94%?

The simple—and surprising—answer is, there isn't one!

Based on half-hour-long personal interviews with a nationally representative sample of 2,000 adults, the CRC study found that the most common worldview might best be described as Syncretism. That's the summary name for a disparate, irreconcilable collection of beliefs and behaviors that define people's lives. It's a cut-and-paste approach to making sense of, and responding to life. Rather than developing an internally consistent and philosophically coherent perspective on life, Americans embrace points of view or actions that feel comfortable or seem most convenient. Those beliefs and behaviors are often inconsistent, or even contradictory, but few Americans seemed troubled by those failings.

Biblical Worldview Is Rare Yet the Most Common

One of the shocking outcomes from the research is that the biblical worldview, at a 6% nationwide incidence, was the most prolific of the seven worldviews tested. However, with 94% of Americans essentially rejecting the biblical worldview as their preferred way to think and live, placing first in a race in which few people crossed the finish line is hardly a victory.

The incidence of the other worldviews ranged from 2% of the public embracing secular humanism, to 1% of adults embodying each of postmodernism, moralistic therapeutic deism, and nihilism. While both Marxism (along with its offshoot, critical race theory) and Eastern Mysticism (also known as "New Age") receive a lot of media coverage, less than one-half of one percent bought into either of those worldviews.

The big winner, of course, was "none of the above." In total almost nine out of 10 U.S. adults (88%) have an impure, unrecognizable worldview that is a blending of ideas from multiple perspectives.

Segments and Worldviews

Because a worldview is a combination of beliefs and related behaviors, it is possible for people to possess a substantial number of beliefs or behaviors that reflect a particular worldview, but not a sufficient number of both to qualify as an adherent of that worldview.

An example is the biblical worldview. Although just 6% of adults have a sufficient number of beliefs as well as behaviors to qualify as having that worldview, a total of 11% of all adults have either enough biblical beliefs or biblical behaviors to meet part of the requirement of a biblical worldview, but lack the combination of both.

The Dominant Worldview Embraced by American Adults	
Dominant Worldview	% of Adults
Biblical Worldview	6%
Secular Humanism	2%
Moralistic Therapeutic Deism	1%
Postmodernism	1%
Nihilism	1%
Eastern Mysticism	*
Marxism	*
Syncretism	88%

Note: * indicates less than one-half of one percent.
 Source: *American Worldview Inventory 2021*, Cultural Research Center, Arizona Christian University, N=2,000, 2021.

Further, a substantial proportion of adults possess a moderately high number of beliefs or behaviors that meet various worldview specifications, but not quite enough to qualify as being a true adherent of that worldview. Examples of this include the fact that 38% of people have a moderately high number of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism beliefs and behaviors, yet just 1% are adherents of that perspective. Almost one seventh of Americans (15%) have a moderately strong postmodern approach to life but only 1% possesses a genuine postmodern worldview. Similarly, one out of seven adults (14%) has a moderately strong Secular Humanist worldview even though a mere 2% have adopted that worldview in full. About one out of 10 adults (9%) have a moderately strong set of beliefs and behaviors related to Marxism, Eastern Mysticism, or Nihilism, but an insufficient breadth of such beliefs and behaviors to qualify as being a true representative of any of those worldviews.

Percentage of U.S. Adults Who Lean Either Strongly or Moderately Toward Specific Worldview Beliefs and Behaviors	
Worldview Beliefs and Behaviors	% of Adults
Moralistic Therapeutic Deism	39%
Biblical Worldview	31%
Secular Humanism	16%
Postmodernism	16%
Nihilism	10%
Eastern Mysticism	10%
Marxism	10%

Source: *American Worldview Inventory 2021*, Cultural Research Center, Arizona Christian University, N=2,000, 2021.

Which people groups are most likely to lean toward specific worldviews, even if they do not fully embrace those beliefs and behaviors?

Biblical Worldview:

SAGE Cons (Spiritually Active Governance Engaged Conservative Christians), theological evangelicals, born-again Christians, political conservatives, and registered Republicans are the most likely to possess a Biblical Theism perspective.

Moralistic Therapeutic Deism:

Spiritual skeptics, LGBTQ adults, those not registered to vote, political liberals, and individuals who attend a predominantly black, or Catholic church are the most common adherents of this worldview.

Secular Humanism:

Spiritual skeptics, residents of the Western region of the United States, people 75 or older, and political liberals dominate those who support this life perspective.

Postmodernism:

Spiritual skeptics, residents of the northeastern and western states, people with a Bachelor's degree, and political liberals are the most common adopters of Postmodern beliefs and behaviors.

Why the Numbers Are Not Bigger

These outcomes beg the question as to why more Americans do not have a more dynamic and cohesive worldview. According to George Barna, who directed the research for the Cultural Research Center, one important reason is that Americans are not directly taught about worldview as part of their education.

"Worldview in America develops by default," he explained. "Very few schools have teaching that focuses directly on a person's worldview. Very few adults know what a worldview is, much less what the worldview alternatives are, how they differ, and which one they possess. We have been shocked at how few Christian schools, as well as religious congregations, directly address worldview issues."

Barna noted that in his more than 25 years of studying worldview in America he has discovered that people generally adopt worldview beliefs and behaviors that they encounter in arts and entertainment vehicles, in news reports, in political statements made by public leaders, and through conversations and experiences with people they trust.

"Worldview seems to be caught more than it is taught in the United States," he shared. "A school like Arizona Christian University, where every class is intentionally and strategically taught through a biblical worldview lens, is a real aberration. It takes years of holistic teaching, integration of thought and behavior, and reinforcement of appropriate choices before someone is likely to develop a biblical worldview."

Barna continued, "Knowing a few Bible verses, attending church services, and praying won't get the job done. Attending a Christian school that offers a chapel service and a Bible class won't accomplish the task. Going to church services that feature sermons drawn from biblical content is not sufficient to build a biblical worldview. Parents expecting their children to follow the Ten Commandments is not enough to developing a full-scale biblical worldview. All of those are token efforts that have proven inadequate toward developing an integrated body of beliefs and behaviors that enable someone to think like Jesus so they can then live like Jesus."

Barna suggested that the recent concern about worldview as the foundation of people's decision-making process is a hopeful sign that Americans—and especially conservative Christians—may be waking up to the importance of worldview development, especially among our youngest people. He cautioned, however, that it will be an uphill battle to get Americans to take worldview development seriously.

"Our studies show that Americans are neither deep nor sophisticated thinkers," the veteran researcher noted. "Americans have become selfish and emotion-driven, leaving logic behind. To promote a way of life that pushes us to think more clearly, consistently, and purposefully will take time and effort, and will be uncomfortable. Most people seem more interested in living a life of comfort and convenience than one of logical consistency and wisdom. Our children will continue to suffer the consequences of following in the unfortunate footsteps of their parents and elders. People who are willing to fight for a more reasonable way of thinking and acting can make a difference but it will be slow progress."

About the Research

The *American Worldview Inventory 2021 (AWVI)* is an annual survey that evaluates the worldview of the adults U.S. population. Begun as an annual tracking study in 2020, the assessment is based on several dozen worldview-related questions drawn from eight categories of worldview application, measuring both beliefs and behavior.

AWVI 2021 was undertaken in February 2021 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.

About the Cultural Research Center

The [Cultural Research Center \(CRC\) at Arizona Christian University](#) 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.