



2025 American Worldview Inventory – Report #10

Americans’ Redefinition of Sinful Behavior Fuels Social Turbulence

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(GLENDALE, AZ) New research reveals a steady erosion in how Americans understand and define sin. Asked about 12 specific behaviors—each traditionally considered sinful—the majority of Americans now say only half still deserve the label “sin.” The new data from the [Cultural Research Center](#) at [Arizona Christian University](#) signals a dramatic shift in the nation’s moral compass, and builds on earlier reports documenting widespread confusion about the existence and nature of sin.

The new research from Dr. George Barna found that some behaviors, such as drinking, gambling, and working on the Sabbath, are rarely viewed as sinful, while others—like abortion, sexual fantasies, and cheating on taxes—split public opinion. Only six of the 12 behaviors were still widely regarded as sinful, mainly those related to speech, sexuality, faith, and drug use.

According to Barna, CRC Director of Research, the observed data patterns suggest the social turbulence common across the country for the past decade—reflected in significant changes in family structure, personal relationships, integrity and ethics, faith practices, and lifestyle choices—can be traced directly to shifts away from traditional, biblical views on sin.

This new report from the Cultural Research Center is the latest in the annual series of *American Worldview Inventory* studies. Prior *AWVI 2025* reports [here](#) and [here](#) on the nation’s views about sin showed that although most adults believe sin exists, there is widespread confusion and controversy—and often ambivalence—regarding what constitutes sin, who commits sins, what can or should be done about sin, and whether sin even matters. In addition, fewer than one out of five adults maintain a consistently biblical perspective on sin.

Sinful Behaviors

The six behaviors still considered by a majority of adults to be sinful practices related to speech, sexual behavior, faith, and drug use.

Lying, Deceiving, Manipulating

Of the dozen behaviors evaluated, the action the greatest number of people viewed as sinful was intentionally lying, deceiving, or manipulating people for personal benefit. Almost three-quarters of all adults (73%) labeled such action as sinful.

Adults associated with the Christian faith, regardless of their church ties, were more likely than other individuals to view such behavior as sinful. Their reactions ranged from 99% of adults with a biblical worldview and 96% of the theologically-identified born-again Christians seeing deception and manipulation as a sin, to 81% of Catholics agreeing with that assessment.

In contrast, only a minority of people who are atheists or agnostics (44%) portrayed intentional deception as sinful, partly because a large share of that segment (45%) does not believe there is such a thing as sin. For many within that group—and others who similarly dismiss religious faith as real or useful—it appears their distaste for lying and deception is more related to the personal vulnerability they could experience as the victim of such behavior rather than concerns about offending God, respecting moral boundaries, or any personal spiritual implications.

Adults under 50 years of age (67%) were significantly less likely than older adults (77%) to view lying and manipulation as sin, while Asians (59%) were also far less likely than adults from all other major racial or ethnic groups (73%) to characterize that behavior as sinful.

Abusing God's Name

Six out of 10 adults believe that using God's name irreverently is a sin. While more than seven out of 10 people from every Christian-oriented segment accept that view, only one out of every four atheists or agnostics holds that perspective. A comfortable majority of each generation says that abusing God's name is a sin, except for Gen Z (barely more than half hold that view). Similarly, every at least six out of 10 members of each major racial or ethnic segment calls misusing God's name a sin, except for Asians (less than half, just 46%).

Worshipping Beings Besides God

Roughly six out of 10 adults (59%) contend that worshipping a spirit or person other than the God of the Bible is sinful. The segments that were most likely to reject that notion were Gen Z (only 47% said it is a sin) and Asians (36%). Among the Christian-oriented segments, Catholics stood out as being substantially less convinced that idol worship is sinful (67%), while 80% or more of their Christian compatriots defined such worship as sinful. Blacks were much more likely than any other ethnic or racial segment to believe that idol worship is sinful.

Sexual Sins

Slightly more than half of adults (55%) contend that sexual relations with someone you are not married to constitutes sin. A minority of people in their 20s adopted that point of view, and only about half of Asians accepted that perspective. Atheists and agnostics were the segment least likely (22%) to regard such activity as sinful. While 72% of Protestant adults consider extra-marital sexual activity to be sinful, only 60% of Catholic adults embraced that thinking.

Intentional exposure to pornography was also deemed sinful to a slight majority of the adult public (55%). The only segments for which a minority labeled pornography usage as sinful were atheists and agnostics (21%) and Asians (41%). Catholics were the Christian-oriented group least likely (57%) to deem porn as sinful. An uncharacteristically large gap between men and women was recorded on this issue, with 58% of females deeming pornography use to be sinful compared to only 51% of men.

Illegal Drug Use

Using illegal, non-prescription drugs for recreational purposes was the remaining behavior of those examined to be considered sinful by a majority of the survey respondents (54%). Two-thirds or more of each Christian subgroup, except Catholics, described such drug use as sinful. There were only minor statistical fluctuations across demographic segments on this matter, although Asians (49%) were notably less likely than other non-white segments to characterize illegal drug use as sinful.

Split 50-50

Meanwhile, the country's adults were evenly split regarding the sinful nature of three of the 12 behaviors examined.

Abortion

Overall, CRC surveys over the past decade have tracked the inconsistency of people's views on abortion. In the past year, CRC research has found that one out of every six adults admitted to having been responsible for or somehow involved in facilitating an abortion. (The proportion among churchgoing adults is slightly higher than the national norm, although the research does not indicate if engagement in the abortion occurred before or since becoming a regular church attendee.) Further, half of all adults deem abortion to be morally acceptable, with an additional one-sixth not sure what they believe.

The current research revealed that half of adults (51%) said having or facilitating an abortion was sinful. The gap between the highest and lowest percentages on this issue were noteworthy. Adults with a biblical worldview (93%) and theologically-identified born-again Christians (79%) were the religious segments most likely to view abortion as sinful, while atheists and agnostics (19%) were the least likely to do so.

Among the demographic segments least likely to deem abortion to be sinful were LGBTQ adults (35%), Asians (38%), Gen Z (42%), adults from households earning \$200,000 or more annually (42%), and people who are single and have never been married (43%). Women were slightly less likely than men to consider abortion to be sinful (49% versus 53%, respectively).

Sexual Fantasies

Half of the nation's adults (50%) contended that entertaining sexual thoughts or fantasies about someone to whom you are not married is sinful. Relatively few atheists and agnostics (17%) considered such fantasies to be a sin. The youngest adults (four out of 10 who are 24 or younger) and Asians (38%) were among the demographic segments least concerned about sexual thoughts.

Catholics (54%) emerged as the Christian-related niche least likely to view sexual fantasies as offensive to God. Women were somewhat less likely than men to define sexual fantasies as sinful.

Income Tax Cheating

Just 47% stated that knowingly not reporting all income on tax returns qualifies as sin. The same groups that consistently rejected the behaviors evaluated as being sinful—young adults, Asians, atheists and agnostics, and Catholics—were once again the segments in their demographic or theological categories most likely to reject the behavior in question as sinful. While men and women were generally similar in their perceptions of the sinfulness of the dozen behaviors measured, women were significantly more likely than men to characterize tax cheating as sinful.

Majority Says: Not Sinful

Three of the behaviors evaluated in the survey escaped most people's characterization as sinful. Those included getting drunk (deemed sinful by 42%), gambling (40%), and working on the Sabbath Day (23%).

Drunkenness

Within the Christian community there were a wide berth of opinions about drunkenness. The population of self-identified Christians was split on the matter: half said drunkenness is sinful, half said it isn't. However, that statistic masks the essential difference: six out of 10 Protestants called being drunk a sin while just four out of 10 Catholics (39%) did. Other Christian subgroups likely to portray drunkenness as "sinful" included Integrated Disciples (90%), people who attend Evangelical (65%) or Pentecostal churches (66%), and theologically-identified born-again Christians (64%).

Not surprisingly, just 15% of atheists and agnostics claimed that drunkenness is sinful. Reactions to excessive drinking changed the typical age-group pattern of Gen Z being the most likely to reject the sinfulness of a behavior. In this case, Baby Boomers were the least likely to view getting drunk as sinful (37%), followed by Gen Z (39%) and Gen X (42%), while Millennials were the most likely to cite being drunk as a sin (47%).

While a majority of blacks call drunkenness sinful (56%), Asians (34%) and whites (39%) were the least likely. Catholics (39%) were the Christian-related faith segment to have the least concern about being drunk. Atheists and agnostics were the least likely subgroup of the 80 subgroups examined in the research to view excessive drinking as a sin.

Gambling

The statistics related to perceptions about gambling were very similar to those related to drunkenness. In total, only 40% said gambling is a sin. The only segments for which more than six out of 10 viewed gambling as sinful were people who regularly attend Pentecostal churches (61%) or mainline Protestant churches (61%). A surprise regarding this issue was that less than one-third of Baby Boomers (31%) described gambling as sinful—the second-lowest proportion recorded (higher than only the 15% registered among atheists and agnostics).

Sabbath Day Observance

Less than one-quarter of all adults (23%) identified working on the Sabbath Day as sinful. The only segment for which more than one-third considered breaking the Sabbath to be sinful were adults who regularly attend an Evangelical church (37%). Interestingly, while people with a biblical worldview were typically far different than all other adults in their views on sin—and invariably the segment most likely to reflect biblical views on the behavior in question—just 32% of the Integrated Disciples described working on the Sabbath as a sin.

Which Behaviors Religious Segments Deem to be Sinful

Behavior	All 18+	Self- identified Christian	Atheist, Agnostic	Theolog- ically identified, born-again Christian	Pro- tes- tant	Cath- olic	Evan- gelical	Pente- costal	Indep/ Non- Denom	Main- line
Intentionally lie, deceive/manipulate for your personal benefit	73%	85%	44%	96%	88%	81%	88%	85%	89%	91%
Say/use name of God/Jesus irreverently	61	77	23	94	81	72	81	87	82	84
Worship a spirit or person besides God of the Bible	59	75	18	90	80	67	82	83	81	83
Sexual relations w/ person you are not married to	55	68	22	83	72	60	71	75	73	79
Use sexually explicit media	55	69	21	84	75	57	77	83	73	83
Use illegal, non-prescription drugs	54	65	24	78	70	58	75	77	67	76
Had or/facilitated an abortion	51	64	19	79	67	59	72	68	66	74
Sexual thoughts or fantasies of a person not wed to	50	62	17	78	67	54	70	77	64	72
Knowingly not reporting some income on taxes	47	57	20	70	63	52	69	65	61	69
Getting drunk	42	51	17	64	59	39	65	66	56	63
Gambling	40	49	15	60	56	39	60	61	54	61
Working on the Sabbath Day	23	28	7	29	30	24	37	29	28	32

Abbreviations: Indep./Non-Denom = Independent or non-denominational Christian church.

* = indicates less than one-half of one percent.

NOTE: The six columns of church-related data refer to the type of church the respondent attends most often.

Source: *American Worldview Inventory 2025*, conducted by the Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University, N = 2,000 adults, fielded May 2025.

Which Behaviors Adult Generations and Racial Segments Deem to be Sinful

Behavior	All 18+	Gen Z	Millennials	Gen X	Boomers	White	Hispanic	Black	Asian
Intentionally lie, deceive/manipulate for your personal benefit	73%	65%	69%	76%	77%	73%	71%	75%	59%
Say/use name of God/Jesus irreverently	61	54	61	61	65	60	64	69	46
Worship a spirit or person besides God of the Bible	59	47	58	59	59	59	56	68	36
Sexual relations w/ person you are not married to	55	44	56	53	58	53	56	64	49
Use sexually explicit media	55	52	58	54	53	53	59	61	41
Use illegal, non-prescription drugs	54	51	56	53	51	51	58	58	49
Had or/facilitated an abortion	51	42	53	53	48	50	53	55	38
Sexual thoughts or fantasies of a person not wed to	50	41	53	50	44	47	53	57	38
Knowingly not reporting some income on taxes	47	34	46	49	51	49	42	50	45
Getting drunk	42	39	47	42	37	39	45	56	34
Gambling	40	42	46	41	31	37	43	52	38
Working on the Sabbath Day	23	21	29	22	15	21	28	28	25

Abbreviations: Gen Z = adult portion born 2003-2007. Millennials = born 1984-2002. Gen X = born 1965-1983. Boomers = born 1946-1964.

Source: *American Worldview Inventory 2025*, conducted by the Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University, N = 2,000 adults, fielded May 2025.

Sin As a Predictor of Culture

Barna has been digging deep into the intersection of culture and faith since the 1980s. After analyzing the new data on lifestyle, faith, and points of view regarding the commission of sins, he suggested that recent changes in people's characterizations of sinful behavior are closely tied to the moral decay of society.

“Unfortunately, parallel long-term tracking data related to the behaviors that people consider to be sinful does not exist,” the ACU professor and bestselling author lamented. “However, there appears to be a clear and moderately strong link between generational differences of opinion related to sin and the ongoing redefinition of morality in American society.”

The researcher explained, “If you follow the response patterns of the groups that are increasingly influential in American society, you can see the moral redefinition unfolding. The adult portion of Gen Z is currently less than 10% of the adult population, but when all the members of that generation are 18 or older, that group will be nearly four times their current proportion of the total adult population. Add to that the fact that the atheist and agnostic percentage of the nation's population today is about one-quarter of all adults, remains one of the fastest growing religious segments in the United States, and one that will likely continue to grow in the next decade or two. A third piece of the cultural puzzle is the Asian-American population, which has also been a rapidly growing segment, and will continue to grow steadily in the coming years.”

“In other words, some of the major growth drivers of our population are people groups that reject biblical morality,” Barna continued. “As we seek to understand why America is being transformed from a Bible-honoring, traditional morality population to one that is more laissez-faire or even aggressively secular in its views of right and wrong or sin and virtue, the demographic curves provide important insights. Three influential subgroups are moving the culture toward their preferred worldview, which is at odds with biblical morality. And those subgroups have cultural momentum on their side.”

To drive home the point, Barna specified the dominant perspectives of those segments.

“Together, a majority of those groups approve of lying for personal benefit, sex on demand, abortion, idolatry, and various lifestyle vices. Their will is not monolithic—there are other population segments larger in size, or which possess considerable counter-balancing influence. However, the trajectory of the three segments indicates they have considerable favor and impact within today's society. Those who ignore the cultural influence they wield do so at their own peril.”

Barna summed up his observations by stating that unless the Christian Church—both as an accumulation of individual believers as well as a coalition of religious institutions—becomes more engaged in the intentional determination of the moral and spiritual framework of American society, traditional biblical morality will be a historical footnote within a couple of decades.

“Our national moral code is increasingly being shaped by cultural rather than spiritual forces,” he said. “If Christians in America want a nation based on biblical morality, they must be clearer and

more assertive in teaching, evaluating, and modeling of the biblical worldview and its resultant lifestyle choices. As matters stand now, the biblical worldview is poised to lose what little ground it currently occupies in America, including an increased loss of influence related to our national morality.”

About the *American Worldview Inventory*

The data in this report are part of the *American Worldview Inventory (AWVI)*, an annual nationwide survey that examines a wide variety of aspects of the worldview of U.S. adults. The current worldview research was generated in two waves of surveys fielded during the first half of 2025. The *American Worldview Inventory 2025* is the sixth year of the annual surveys.

The data reported in this report were collected in the second of those two waves, conducted in May 2025, among a national, demographically-representative sample of 2,000 adults (age 18 or older). The survey contained 97 questions and the average duration of the survey experience for respondents was 20 minutes. The sample was constructed from among the members of a national research panel managed by Braun Research and Fulcrum as part of the Lucid national panel of survey respondents. A probability sample of this size would have 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 both sampling and non-sampling activity.

The *American Worldview Inventory 2025: A National Study for Strengthening the Worldview of Americans* from Dr. George Barna is designed to examine trends in American beliefs about God, truth, sin, and salvation. It seeks to understand key aspects of American faith and to provide practical insights for building a stronger biblical worldview in our nation. This major research from the Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University is intended to describe and understand the nation’s current worldview landscape and to guide improvements. In total, there will be 12 reports released from the *American Worldview Inventory 2025*.

Begun as an annual tracking study in 2020, the *American Worldview Inventory (AWVI)* is based on several dozen worldview-related questions that fall within eight categories of worldview application, measuring both beliefs and behavior. The same questions are asked in each of the worldview incidence studies conducted by the Cultural Research Center (CRC), facilitating reliable tracking data from year to year. Additional worldview-related research is part of the *AWVI* project, allowing researchers at CRC to look beyond incidence data, digging deeper into an array of worldview components toward understanding the genesis of existing worldview and how to more effectively move people toward a biblical worldview.

The *American Worldview Inventory* is the first-ever national survey conducted in the United States measuring the incidence of both biblical and competing worldviews. Each year’s reports, released to the public at no cost via CRC’s website (www.CulturalResearchCenter.com), are also compiled in book form and produced at the beginning of each subsequent year, published by

Arizona Christian University Press. Those books are available at CRC's [Publications page](#) or on Amazon.

About the ACU Worldview Assessment

The [ACU Worldview Assessment](#) is a powerful online tool designed to measure and strengthen a person's worldview. Developed by Dr. George Barna and based on 40+ years of research, this 15-minute assessment reveals how a person's beliefs and behaviors align with biblical truth—and how to grow spiritually.

The ACU Worldview Assessment measures worldview beliefs and behaviors in five basic categories (Bible, Truth, and Morals; God, Creation, and History; Faith Practices; Sin, Salvation, and God Relationship; and Lifestyle, Behavior, and Relationships). It also evaluates the "Seven Cornerstones" of the Biblical Worldview. Dr. Barna's exhaustive worldview research shows that if these seven basic worldview concepts—or cornerstones—are in place, a person is far more likely to possess or develop a biblical worldview. Only the ACU Worldview Assessment identifies and measures these worldview-building basics.

The ACU Worldview Assessment is a *practical tool* for evaluating and improving worldview. And there is a specifically tailored version of the ACU Worldview Assessment for every need:

- **The ACU Worldview Assessment for Individuals** -Designed specifically for adults to identify their worldview and discover areas for spiritual growth and personal worldview development.
- **The ACU Worldview Assessment for Students** – Created by Dr. Barna in collaboration with ACU professors and other educational experts, to measure the worldview of students in grades 4, 8, and 12, using a pre- and post-test format. The student assessments are specifically designed for each grade level, making the questions age-appropriate and easier to understand, while maintaining the integrity of the results.

Dr. Barna's extensive research into childhood worldview development shows that an individual's worldview is essentially formed by age 13. This highlights the importance of strategic worldview training, especially in Christian schools, using the ACU Worldview Assessment to measure worldview development along the way.

- **The ACU Worldview Assessment for Churches, Ministries, and Groups** – This version of the assessment is designed for use by churches, ministries, and other groups of adults.
- **The ACU Worldview Assessment for Colleges and Universities** – Designed in a pre- and post-test format tailored for Christian colleges and universities to use each academic year to assess the worldview of their students, and understand the effect of their university's teaching and community on their student's worldview development.

Visit www.ACUWorldview.com to experience the ACU Worldview Assessment.

And learn more about the new assessment in our report, [“Arizona Christian University Unveils Groundbreaking Worldview Assessment from Dr. George Barna and the Cultural Research Center.”](#)

About the Cultural Research Center

The Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University in Glendale, Arizona, conducts the annual *American Worldview Inventory* as well as other nationwide surveys regarding worldview and cultural transformation. National studies completed by the Cultural Research Center (CRC) have investigated topics related to family, values, lifestyle, spiritual practices, and recent election-related activity and political views.

One of the groundbreaking efforts by CRC has been the worldview-related surveys conducted among the ACU student population. The first-of-its-kind *ACU Student Worldview Inventory* is administered to every ACU student at the start of each academic year, and a final time just prior to graduation. The results of that student census enable the University to track and address the worldview development of its students from a longitudinal perspective.

Research studies conducted by CRC are led by Dr. George Barna. Barna is a veteran of more than 40 years of national public opinion research, having previously guided the Barna Group (which he sold in 2009), and the American Culture and Faith Institute. His research findings have been the subject of more than 60 books he has authored or co-authored, many of which have become national bestsellers. His most recent bestseller is [*Raising Spiritual Champions: Nurturing Your Child's Heart, Mind and Soul*](#) (Arizona Christian University Press, 2023).

Like ACU, CRC embraces biblical Christianity. The Center works in cooperation with a variety of Bible-centric, theologically conservative Christian ministries and remains politically non-partisan. Further information about Arizona Christian University is available at www.ArizonaChristian.edu.