

Cultural Research Center



American Worldview Inventory 2023

Release #1: Incidence of Biblical Worldview Shows Significant Change Since the Start of the Pandemic

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The COVID-19 lockdowns and lifestyle changes that began in early 2020 provided Americans with an opportunity to spend more time doing things their hectic, on-the-go lives precluded, such as reading the Bible. But it appears that as people's lives were substantially altered by the virus and government policies, Americans were not spending the extra time devoting energy to spiritual matters and worldview enhancement.

In fact, the first national study of Americans' worldview in the post-lockdown era found that the incidence of biblical worldview declined to a mere 4%—down one-third from the 6% recorded just months before the pandemic started in 2020. New research from the Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University shows that the benchmark worldview measure of American adults taken in January 2020 may prove to be the high-water mark for the foreseeable future. Americans tinkered with many things during the three lockdown years—from home-improvement projects to baking sourdough bread—but improving their worldview apparently was not one of them.

The research shows declines in biblical understanding throughout American society since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Compared to 2020, almost every demographic subgroup experienced a small decline in the proportion of those possessing a biblical worldview, according to the *American Worldview Inventory 2023*. The most noteworthy declines across the three years were recorded among born-again Christians (down six percentage points) and people from households earning \$60,000 to \$100,000 (down five points).

A worldview is the intellectual, emotional, and spiritual filter an individual uses to experience, interpret, and respond to reality. Everyone has a worldview. It is the basis of every decision an individual makes. The biblical worldview (also known as biblical theism) is one among numerous worldviews that exist. In the biblical worldview, people's ideas about all dimensions of life and eternity are based on biblical principles and commands.

Biblical Worldview Incidence

The 2023 incidence of biblical worldview is 4%, based on the tracking study of the worldview of adults across the nation. That is a seemingly small but noteworthy drop from 6% three years ago.

The *American Worldview Inventory* not only measures how many people are Integrated Disciples (i.e., people with a biblical worldview), but also identifies how many adults are Emergent Followers. These adults do not have a biblical worldview but are leaning in that direction, possessing a substantial

number of beliefs and behaviors that are consistent with biblical principles. The survey found that one out of every seven adults (14%) is an Emergent Follower—a significant decline from 25% in 2020.

The bulk of the population—82%—is in the World Citizen category. These are people who may embrace a few biblical principles, but generally believe and behave in ways that are distinct from biblical teaching. This group has grown substantially from the 69% identified in 2020.

The Shift in Biblical Worldview Incidence			
		National Incidence of Adults with a Biblical Worldview	
Worldview Segment	Segment Description	2020	2023
Integrated Disciples	Possess a biblical worldview based on scores related to beliefs and behavior	6%	4%
Emergent Followers	Possess a significant portion of a biblical worldview based on scores related to beliefs and behaviors, but not enough to qualify as having a biblical worldview	25%	14%
World Citizens	Possess a worldview other than a biblical worldview, but might have a few beliefs and behaviors that are consistent with biblical principles	69%	82%

Source: *American Worldview Inventory*, conducted in 2020 and 2023, by the Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University. Each study is based on a national sample of 2,000 adults, interviewed by telephone and online in January.

Some Groups Lost More Ground Than Others

The demographics of biblical worldview during this time period are instructive.

The subgroups of the nation that are most likely to possess a biblical worldview include: SAGE Cons (Spiritually Active Governance Engaged Conservative Christians), among whom one out of four (24%) have a biblical worldview; people whose beliefs qualify them as born-again Christians (13%); and those whose political ideology places them in the “consistently conservative” category. There were no other segments that reached double figures, according to the latest *AWVI 2023* data.

- Most Americans (68%) consider themselves to be Christians. Among these self-defined Christians, though, only 6% have a biblical worldview. Less than half of the self-defined Christians can be classified as born-again, defined as believing that they will go to Heaven after they die but only because they have confessed their sins and accepted Jesus Christ as their savior. Within the born-again population (just 33% of the adult population), a shockingly small proportion (13%) hold a biblical worldview.
- Age has a consistent correlation with biblical worldview incidence. The younger a person, the less likely they are to be an Integrated Disciple (i.e., have a biblical worldview). Among adults under 30, just 1% have a biblical worldview. The incidence rises to 3% among people in their 30s and 40s; 5% among those ages 50 to 64; and peaks at 8% among adults 65-plus.

- Men and women both had a 4% incidence.
- Whites (at 5%) were marginally more likely than non-whites (3%) to have a biblical worldview. The incidence among the three largest non-white segments was 4% among blacks, 3% among Hispanics, and less than 1% among Asians.
- People from the highest-income households were more likely than other adults to qualify as Integrated Disciples. Overall, 6% of people in homes earning beyond \$100,000 were Integrated Disciples, compared to 4% among people in the \$60,000-\$100,000 category and also 4% among people from households with a pre-tax combined income below \$60,000.
- Taking into account measurement error, college graduates were no more likely to have a biblical worldview (5%) than those who attended college but did not graduate (4%) and those who never attended any college (3%).
- Adults without children under the age of 13 living in their household were slightly more likely to have a biblical worldview than those adults who do have preteen children (5% compared to 3%).
- People living in regions of the country considered to be more religiously active had slightly higher levels of biblical worldview. Six percent of residents of the South and 5% of those living in the Midwest had a biblical worldview, compared to just 3% in the West and 1% in the Northeast.
- Socioeconomic status appears to have a limited influence on biblical worldview. The incidence among upscale adults (i.e. those who have at least a four-year college degree and whose annual pre-tax household income is above \$200,000), is 3%. Among adults with the lowest socioeconomic status (i.e. those who did not attend college and whose annual pre-tax household income is under \$40,000), 4% are Integrated Disciples.
- Education shows little correlation to having a biblical worldview. The incidence of biblical worldview among those who never attended college is 3%; among those who attended college but do not have a 4-year degree is 4%; and among those with a bachelor's degree or more, it is 5%.
- Among adults who are consistently conservative on political matters, 12% are Integrated Disciples. In contrast, just 2% who are consistently moderate on political issues and 1% of political liberals and progressives have a biblical worldview.

Compared to 2020

One of the most remarkable findings when comparing the worldview data from 2020 and 2023 is that almost every demographic subgroup experienced a small decline in the proportion of Integrated Disciples. While few of the changes during that time period reach the point of statistical significance and the declines could reflect measurement error that commonly occurs due to sampling and other research procedures), it is disheartening that only one subgroup among the 31 common segments examined experienced an increase in biblical worldview. The only exception to the trend was a single-percentage-point increase among Blacks, rising from 3% in 2020 to 4% in 2023.

The most noteworthy declines across the three years were recorded among born-again Christians (down six percentage points) and people from households earning \$60,000 to \$100,000 (down five points). A four-point decrease was noted among consistent conservatives, people with some college background, adults in the 50-64 age group, and Asians.

On the Verge of Extinction?

The results of the *American Worldview Inventory* are frightening for biblical Christians, according to George Barna, the creator of the *American Worldview Inventory* and director of the research for the Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University.

Biblical Worldview Incidence among Key Population Groups			
Population Segment	Integrated Disciples	Emergent Followers	World Citizens
All adults	4%	14%	82%
Sex:			
Male	4%	12%	84%
Female	4	16	80
Age:			
18-29	1%	5%	95%
30-49	3	10	87
50-64	5	18	77
65 or older	8	23	69
Ethnicity:			
White (non-Hispanic)	5%	15%	80%
Hispanic	3	12	85
Black	4	13	83
Asian	*	6	94
Region:			
Northeast	1%	9%	90%
Midwest	5	12	83
South	6	19	76
West	3	12	85
Education:			
No college	3%	14%	83%
Some college	4	13	83
College graduate (4-year)	5	14	81
Religious Faith:			
Self-identified Christian	6%	19%	75%
Not a self-identified Christian	*	3	97
Theologically-defined born-again Christian	13	31	56
Not a born-again Christian	*	4	96
Source: <i>American Worldview Inventory 2023</i> , conducted in January 2023 by the Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University. The survey was based on a national sample of 2,000 adults, interviewed by telephone and online. * Indicates less than one-half of one percent.			

Comparison of Biblical Worldview Incidence among Key Population Groups, 2020 and 2023		
Population Segment	2020	2023
All adults	6%	4%
Sex:		
Male	6%	4%
Female	7	4
Age:		
18-29	2%	1%
30-49	5	3
50-64	9	5
65 or older	9	8
Ethnicity:		
White (non-Hispanic)	7%	5%
Black	5	4
Asian	4	*
Hispanic	3	3
Region:		
Northeast	3%	1%
Midwest	7	5
South	9	6
West	5	3
Education:		
No college	4%	3%
Some college	8	4
College Graduate (4-year)	7	5
Religious Faith:		
Self-identified Christian	9%	6%
Not a self-identified Christian	1	*
Theologically-defined born-again Christian	19%	13%
Not a born-again Christian	*	*
Source: <i>American Worldview Inventory</i> , conducted in 2020 and 2023, by the Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University. Each study is based on a national sample of 2,000 adults, interviewed by telephone and online in January. * Indicates less than one-half of one percent.		

“When you put the data in perspective, the biblical worldview is shuffling toward the edge of the cliff,” Barna said. “As things stand today, biblical theism is much closer to extinction in America than it is to influencing the soul of the nation. The current incidence of adults with the biblical worldview is the lowest since I began measuring it in the early 1990s.”

The veteran researcher cautioned, “Young people, in particular, are largely isolated from biblical thought in our society and are the most aggressive at rejecting biblical principles in our culture.”

“Facilitating a return to biblical thinking and living in America will take an intentional, strategic, and consistent effort by the remaining population that represents this biblical approach to life,” Barna explained.

Barna was especially disappointed that more Christian churches and schools are not emphasizing biblical worldview development. “People do not develop a biblical worldview randomly or by default,” he continued. “The impact of arts and entertainment, government, and public schools is clearly apparent in the shift away from biblical perspectives to a more experiential and emotional form of decision-making.”

“It will require parents, in particular, and cultural leaders who care about this matter to energetically and creatively persuade children and their influencers to embrace biblical principles as the foundation for personal decision-making,” he said.

But Barna has also noticed a recent uptick in attention being paid to worldview. “Biblical worldview is hardly a mass movement at this point, but there is some evidence indicating that more people are waking up to the concept, the importance, and the process of biblical worldview development,” he noted. “Perhaps the ugliness and heavy-handedness of cancel culture has stimulated greater interest in the potential benefits of adopting a worldview based on love and service in shaping both our culture and individual lives.”

About the Research

The data referred to in this report are taken from the *American Worldview Inventory (AWVI)*, an annual survey that evaluates the worldview of the U.S. adult population (age 18 and over). Begun as an annual tracking study in 2020, the assessment is based on several dozen worldview-related questions that fall within eight categories of worldview application, measuring both beliefs and behavior.

The *American Worldview Inventory* is the first-ever national survey conducted in the United States measuring the incidence of both biblical and competing worldviews. The current wave of worldview research was undertaken in January 2023 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 both sampling and non-sampling activity.

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 cultural transformation. Recent national studies completed by the Cultural Research Center (CRC) have investigated topics related to family, values, lifestyle, spiritual practices, and politics.

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 administration just prior to

graduation. The results of that student census enable the University to track and address the worldview development of its students.

CRC is guided by George Barna, Director of Research, and Tracy Munsil, Executive Director. Like ACU, CRC embraces biblical Christianity. CRC works in cooperation with a variety of Bible-centric, theologically conservative Christian ministries and remains politically non-partisan. Results from past surveys conducted by CRC and information about the Cultural Research Center are available at www.CulturalResearchCenter.com. Further information about Arizona Christian University is available at www.ArizonaChristian.edu.