

Nearly Two-thirds of U.S. Adults Believe Human Beings Were Created by God

Opinions are divided about evolution theories

Earlier this year, the State Board of Education in Kansas reignited an old debate – whether or not creationism should be taught in public schools – and shone the spotlight on a new theory, intelligent design. While many in the scientific community may question why this issue has been raised again, a new national survey shows that almost two-thirds of U.S. adults (64%) agree with the basic tenet of creationism, that "human beings were created directly by God."

At the same time, approximately one-fifth (22%) of adults believe "human beings evolved from earlier species" (evolution) and 10 percent subscribe to the theory that "human beings are so complex that they required a powerful force or intelligent being to help create them" (intelligent design). Moreover, a majority (55%) believe that all three of these theories should be taught in public schools, while 23 percent support teaching creationism only, 12 percent evolution only, and four percent intelligent design only.

These are some of the results of a nationwide Harris Poll of 1,000 U.S. adults surveyed by telephone by Harris Interactive[®] between June 17 and 21, 2005.

Other key findings include:

- A majority of U.S. adults (54%) *do not* think human beings developed from earlier species, up from 46 percent in 1994.
- Forty-nine percent of adults believe plants and animals have evolved from some other species while 45 percent do not believe that.
- Adults are evenly divided about whether or not apes and man have a common ancestry (46 percent believe we do and 47 percent believe we do not).
- Again divided, 46 percent of adults agree that "Darwin's theory of evolution is proven by fossil discoveries," while 48 percent disagree.

Factors such as age, education, political outlook, and region appear to guide views on this debate.

- In general, older adults (those 55 years of age and older), adults without a college degree, Republicans, conservatives, and Southerners are more likely to embrace the creationism positions in the questions asked.
- Those with a college education, Democrats, independents, liberals, adults aged 18 to 54 and those from the Northeast and West support the belief in evolution in larger numbers. However, among these groups, majorities believe in creationism.
- Despite the significant numbers who believe in creationism, pluralities among the

demographic subgroups examined still believe all three concepts (evolution, creationism, and intelligent design) should be taught in public schools.

TABLE 1

DID HUMANS DEVELOP FROM EARLIER SPECIES?

"Do you think human beings developed from earlier species or not?"

Base: All Adults

	March 1994	June 2005
	%	%
Yes, I think human beings developed from earlier species.	44	38
No, I do not think human beings developed from earlier species.	46	54
Not sure/Decline to answer	11	8

Note: Percentages may not add up exactly to 100% due to rounding

TABLE 2

PLANT AND ANIMAL DEVELOPMENT FROM OTHER SPECIES

"Do you believe all plants and animals have evolved from other species or not?"

Base: All Adults

	June 2005
	%
Yes, I believe plants and animals have evolved from some other species.	49
No, I do not believe plants and animals have evolved from some other species.	45
Not sure/Decline to answer	7

Note: Percentages may not add up exactly to 100% due to rounding.

TABLE 3

DO MAN AND APES HAVE COMMON ANCESTRY?

"Do you believe apes and man have a common ancestry or not?"

Base: All Adults

	July 1996	June 2005
	%	%
Yes, apes and man do have a common ancestry.	51	46
No, apes and man do not have a common ancestry.	43	47
Not sure/Decline to answer	5	7

Note: Percentages may not add up exactly to 100% due to rounding.

TABLE 4

DARWIN'S THEORY OF EVOLUTION PROVEN BY FOSSIL DISCOVERIES?

"Please tell me whether you agree or disagree with the following statement: Darwin's theory of evolution is proven by fossil discoveries."

Base: All Adults

	January 2004	June 2005
	%	%
Agree (NET)	43	46
Strongly agree	19	15
Somewhat agree	24	30
Disagree (NET)	51	48
Somewhat disagree	16	19
Strongly disagree	35	29
Not Sure/Decline to answer	6	6

TABLE 5

WHERE HUMANS COME FROM

"Which of the following do you believe about how human beings came to be?"

Base: All Adults

	June 2005
	%
Human beings evolved from earlier species.	22
Human beings were created directly by God.	64
Human beings are so complex that they required a powerful force or intelligent being to help create them.	10
Not sure/Decline to answer	4

TABLE 6

EVOLUTION IN THE CLASSROOM

"Regardless of what you may personally believe, which of these do you believe should be taught in public schools?"

Base: All Adults

	June 2005
	%
Evolution only: "Evolution says that human beings evolved from earlier stages of animals."	12
Creationism only: "Creationism says that human beings were created directly by God."	23
Intelligent design only: "Intelligent design says that human beings are so complex that they required a powerful force or intelligent being to help create them."	4
All three	55
Neither	3
Not sure/Decline to answer	3

TABLE 7

SUMMARY OF KEY QUESTIONS ABOUT HUMAN EVOLUTION– BY EDUCATION

Base: All Adults

	All Adults (n=1,000)	Education			
		H.S. or Less (n=407)	Some College (n=339)	College Grad (n=157)	Post Grad (n=75)
	%	%	%	%	%
Human Development from Earlier Species					
Yes	38	32	35	46	60
No	54	59	56	46	33
PLANT AND ANIMAL DEVELOPMENT					
Yes	49	44	48	55	65
No	45	48	45	39	32
MAN AND APES HAVE COMMON ANCESTRY					
Yes	46	46	41	53	57
No	47	47	50	39	40
DARWIN'S THEORY OF EVOLUTION PROVEN BY FOSSIL EVIDENCE					
Yes	46	40	44	55	64
No	48	51	51	39	34
HUMAN EVOLUTION					
Belief in evolution	22	17	21	31	35
Belief in	64	73	66	48	42

creationism					
Belief in intelligent design	10	6	10	15	17

TABLE 8

SUMMARY OF KEY QUESTIONS ABOUT HUMAN EVOLUTION – BY PARTY ID AND POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

Base: All Adults

	All Adults (n=1,000)	Party ID			Political Philosophy		
		Republican (n=391)	Democrat (n=439)	Independent (n=170)	Conservative (n=538)	Moderate (n=103)	Liberal (n=359)
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
HUMAN DEVELOPMENT FROM EARLIER SPECIES							
Yes	38	27	48	36	25	40	56
No	54	65	44	53	65	52	37
PLANT AND ANIMAL DEVELOPMENT							
Yes	49	37	61	47	38	50	65
No	45	58	33	42	53	46	31
MAN AND APES HAVE COMMON ANCESTRY							
Yes	46	30	61	44	37	36	63
No	47	62	32	47	56	52	31
DARWIN'S THEORY OF EVOLUTION PROVEN BY FOSSIL EVIDENCE							
Yes	46	37	55	43	36	40	62
No	48	58	40	45	58	43	35
HUMAN EVOLUTION							

Belief in evolution	22	16	27	25	16	22	32
Belief in creationism	64	73	58	57	75	63	48
Belief in intelligent design	10	9	11	7	7	4	

TABLE 9

SUMMARY OF KEY QUESTIONS ABOUT HUMAN EVOLUTION – BY AGE AND REGION

Base: All Adults

	All Adults (n=1,000)	Age			Region			
		18-34 (n=258)	35-54 (n=374)	55+ (n=340)	Northeast (n=213)	Midwest (n=220)	South (n=349)	West (n=218)
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
HUMAN DEVELOPMENT FROM EARLIER SPECIES								
Yes	38	46	38	29	52	37	28	41
No	54	46	53	61	38	57	64	50
PLANT AND ANIMAL DEVELOPMENT								
Yes	49	51	50	46	63	47	41	51
No	45	45	44	46	28	48	54	42
MAN AND APES HAVE COMMON ANCESTRY								
Yes	46	57	45	39	60	43	40	44
No	47	37	48	52	32	50	52	48
DARWIN'S THEORY OF EVOLUTION PROVEN BY FOSSIL EVIDENCE								
Yes	46	57	48	35	58	43	36	52
No	48	41	44	58	37	47	56	47

HUMAN EVOLUTION								
Belief in evolution	22	25	25	16	30	17	17	28
Belief in creationism	64	60	59	73	52	72	71	56
Belief in intelligent design	10	11	9	9	13	9	8	10

Methodology

The Harris Poll[®] was conducted by telephone within the United States between June 17 and 21, 2005 among a nationwide cross section of 1,000 adults (aged 18 and over). Figures for sex, race, education, and region were weighted where necessary to align them with their actual proportions in the population.

In theory, with a probability sample of this size, one can say with 95 percent certainty that the overall results have a sampling error of plus or minus 3 percentage points of what they would be if the entire U.S. adult population had been polled with complete accuracy. Sampling error for the sub-sample results (as shown in the tables above) is higher and varies. Unfortunately, there are several other possible sources of error in all polls or surveys that are probably more serious than theoretical calculations of sampling error. They include refusals to be interviewed (nonresponse), question wording and question order, interviewer bias, weighting by demographic control data and screening (e.g., for likely voters). It is impossible to quantify the errors that may result from these factors.

These statements conform to the principles of disclosure of the National Council on Public Polls.

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