

What exactly do Americans believe in when it comes to the paranormal, the occult, and "out-of-this-world" experiences? The Gallup Poll recently updated its audit of Americans' beliefs in a variety of these types of phenomena. The results suggest a significant increase in belief in a number of these experiences over the past decade, including in particular such Halloween-related issues as haunted houses, ghosts and witches. Only one of the experiences tested has seen a drop in belief since 1990: devil possession. Overall, half or more of Americans believe in two of the issues: psychic or spiritual healing, and extrasensory perception (ESP), and a third or more believe in such things as haunted houses, possession by the devil, ghosts, telepathy, extraterrestrial beings having visited earth, and clairvoyance.

Basic Beliefs

The list of 13 experiences tested in the poll is eclectic, ranging from Halloween- and occult-oriented phenomena such as ghosts and witches, to mental experiences such as ESP, clairvoyance, and psychic or spiritual healing.

Americans' overall beliefs in the experiences tested range from a slight majority who believe in the power of the human mind to heal the body, to a low of 15% who believe in the New Age concept of channeling or allowing a "spirit-being" to assume control of a body during a trance.

Here is the overall pattern of results:

For each of the following items I am going to read you, please tell me whether it is something you believe in, something you're not sure about, or something you don't believe in. How about -- [RANDOM ORDER]?

<i>2001 May 10-14 (sorted by "believe")</i>	Don't		
	Believe	Not sure	believe
	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>
Psychic or spiritual healing or the power of the human mind to heal the body	54	19	26
ESP or extrasensory perception	50	20	27
That houses can be haunted	42	16	41
That people on this earth are sometimes possessed by the devil	41	16	41
Ghosts or that spirits of dead people can come back in certain places and situations	38	17	44

Telepathy, or communication between minds without using the traditional five senses	36	26	35
That extraterrestrial beings have visited earth at some time in the past	33	27	38
Clairvoyance, or the power of the mind to know the past and predict the future	32	23	45
That people can hear from or communicate mentally with someone who has died	28	26	46
Astrology, or that the position of the stars and planets can affect people's lives	28	18	52
Witches	26	15	59
Reincarnation, that is, the rebirth of the soul in a new body after death	25	20	54
Channeling, or allowing a "spirit-being" to temporarily assume control of a human body during a trance	15	21	62

Belief in a Number of These Phenomena Is up Since 1990

Belief in several of these experiences has not changed significantly over the last 11 years. For seven experiences tested, however, there has been an increase in belief of more than five percentage points:

- Haunted houses
- Ghosts
- Witches
- Communicating with someone who has died
- Psychic or spiritual healing
- That extraterrestrial beings have visited earth
- Clairvoyance

There has been a significant downturn in belief in just one of the experiences tested: possession by the devil, in which 41% of Americans believe today, compared to 49% in 1990.

For each of the following items I am going to read you, please tell me whether it is something you believe in, something you're not sure about, or something you don't believe in. How about -- [RANDOM ORDER]?

<i>2001 May 10-14</i> <i>(sorted by "believe")</i>	Believe 2001	Believe 1990	CHANGE OVER TIME
	%	%	%
Psychic or spiritual healing or the power of the human mind to heal the body	54	46	+8
ESP or extrasensory perception	50	49	+1
That houses can be haunted	42	29	+13
<i>That people on this earth are sometimes possessed by the devil</i>	<i>41</i>	<i>49</i>	<i>-8</i>
Ghosts or that spirits of dead people can come back in certain places and situations	38	25	+13
Telepathy, or communication between minds without using the traditional five senses	36	36	+0
That extraterrestrial beings have visited earth at some time in the past	33	27	+6
Clairvoyance, or the power of the mind to know the past and predict the future	32	26	+6
That people can hear from or communicate mentally with someone who has died	28	18	+10
Astrology, or that the position of the stars and planets can affect people's lives	28	25	+3
Witches	26	14	+12
Reincarnation, that is, the rebirth of the soul in a new body after death	25	21	+4
Channeling, or allowing a "spirit-being" to temporarily assume control of a human body during a trance	15	11	+4

Differences by Subgroup

Belief in these phenomena shows significant differences within major demographic and belief groups of the American population:

- *Age*

There are interesting differences in belief in these varied experiences by the age of the respondent. Younger Americans -- those 18-29 -- are much more likely than those who

are older to believe in haunted houses, in witches, in ghosts, that extraterrestrials have visited earth, and in clairvoyance. There is little significant difference in belief in the other items by age group. Those 30 and older are somewhat more likely to believe in possession by the devil than are the younger group.

- *Gender*

Women are slightly more likely than men to believe in ghosts and that people can communicate with the dead. Men, on the other hand, are more likely than women to believe in only one of the dimensions tested: that extraterrestrials have visited earth at some point in the past.

- *Education*

Americans with the highest levels of education are more likely than others to believe in the power of the mind to heal the body. On the other hand, belief in three of the phenomena tested goes up as the educational level of the respondent goes down: possession by the devil, astrology and haunted houses.

- *Importance of Religion*

Perhaps not surprisingly, the major difference in belief in these phenomena by importance of religion focuses on the devil: 55% of those who say religion is very important in their daily lives say they believe in devil possession, compared to just 14% of those who say religion is "not very" important to them. Religion is also correlated to belief in extraterrestrials: Those for whom religion is very important are less likely to say they believe in beings from other worlds that may have visited this planet than are those who are less religious.

For each of the following items I am going to read you, please tell me whether it is something you believe in, something you're not sure about, or something you don't believe in. How about -- [RANDOM ORDER]?

	AGE						GEN- DER		EDUCATION				IMPORTANCE OF RELIGION	
	Total %	18- 29	30- 49	50+ %	M	F	Post- grad	Col- lege Only	Col- lege	High Some Sch.	Less	Very	Fair- ly	Not very
		%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Psychic or spiritual healing or the power of the	54	49	56	54	53	55	65	57	57	48	55	50	58	

human mind to
heal the body

ESP or
extrasensory
perception

50 48 50 50 47 52 52 53 48 49 50 48 48

Telepathy, or
communication
between minds
without using
the traditional
five senses

36 33 36 37 38 34 41 38 36 35 35 37 41

Clairvoyance,
or the power of
the mind to
know the past
and predict the
future

32 42 33 26 33 31 29 27 34 34 32 33 32

That people
can hear from
or
communicate
mentally with
someone who
has died

28 36 30 20 24 31 25 28 27 29 28 30 20

Channeling, or
allowing a
"spirit-being"
to temporarily
assume control
of a human
body during a
trance

15 22 16 10 13 17 14 12 15 17 16 15 11

Reincarnation,
that is, the
rebirth of the

25 25 22 28 25 24 22 19 21 30 24 25 26

soul in a new
body after
death

That people on
this earth are
sometimes
possessed by
the devil

41 36 42 44 39 43 32 35 41 46 55 28 14

That
extraterrestrial
beings have
visited earth at
some time in
the past

33 48 31 29 38 29 25 29 36 35 28 40 41

Astrology, or
that the
position of the
stars and
planets can
affect people's
lives

28 32 26 29 26 30 16 20 29 33 28 30 28

That houses
can be haunted

42 58 44 32 40 44 33 37 41 48 43 42 38

Ghosts or that
spirits of dead
people can
come back in
certain places
and situations

38 46 44 29 34 43 36 39 38 40 39 39 36

Witches

26 34 30 16 27 24 22 24 30 24 26 24 27

Survey Methods

The results reported here are based on telephone interviews with a randomly selected national sample of 1,012 adults, 18 years and older, conducted May 10-14, 2001. For results based on this sample, one can say with 95 percent confidence that the maximum error attributable to sampling and other random effects is plus or minus 3 percentage points. In addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of public opinion polls.

For each of the following items I am going to read you, please tell me whether it is something you believe in, something you're not sure about, or something you don't believe in. How about -- [RANDOM ORDER]?

A. ESP or extrasensory perception

	Believe in	Not sure about	Don't believe in	No opinion
	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>
2001 May 10-14	50	20	27	3
1996 Sep 3-5	48	22	27	3
1990 Jun 14-17	49	22	29	--

B. That people on this earth are sometimes possessed by the devil

	Believe in	Not sure about	Don't believe in	No opinion
	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>
2001 May 10-14	41	16	41	2
1996 Sep 3-5	42	13	43	2
1991 Oct 24-27	37	18	45	--
1990 Jun 14-17	49	16	35	--

C. Psychic or spiritual healing or the power of the human mind to heal the body

	Believe in	Not sure about	Don't believe in	No opinion
	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>
2001 May 10-14	54	19	26	1
1990 Jun 14-17	46	20	34	--

D. Telepathy, or communication between minds without using the traditional five senses

	Believe in	Not sure about	Don't believe in	No opinion
	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>
2001 May 10-14	36	26	35	3
1996 Sep 3-5	35	24	39	2
1990 Jun 14-17	36	25	39	--

E. That houses can be haunted

	Believe in	Not sure about	Don't believe in	No opinion
	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>
2001 May 10-14	42	16	41	1
1996 Sep 3-5	33	19	47	1
1991 Oct 24-27	28	18	54	--
1990 Jun 14-17	29	17	54	--

F. That extraterrestrial beings have visited earth at some time in the past

	Believe in	Not sure about	Don't believe	No opinion
	%	%	in	%
			%	
2001 May 10-14	33	27	38	2
1990 Jun 14-17	27	32	41	--

G. Clairvoyance, or the power of the mind to know the past and predict the future

	Believe in	Not sure about	Don't believe	No opinion
	%	%	in	%
			%	
2001 May 10-14	32	23	45	*
1996 Sep 3-5	27	25	46	2
1990 Jun 14-17	26	23	51	--

H. Astrology, or that the position of the stars and planets can affect people's lives

	Believe in	Not sure about	Don't believe	No opinion
	%	%	in	%
			%	
2001 May 10-14	28	18	52	2
1996 Sep 3-5	25	22	52	1
1994 Dec 16-18	23	16	61	--
1990 Jun 14-17	25	21	54	--

I. Ghosts or that spirits of dead people can come back in certain places and situations

	Believe in	Not sure about	Don't believe in	No opinion
	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>
2001 May 10-14	38	17	44	1
1996 Sep 3-5	30	19	50	1
1991 Oct 24-27	28	17	55	--
1990 Jun 14-17	25	19	56	--

J. Reincarnation, that is, the rebirth of the soul in a new body after death

	Believe in	Not sure about	Don't believe in	No opinion
	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>
2001 May 10-14	25	20	54	1
1996 Sep 3-5	22	22	55	1
1994 Dec 16-18	27	20	53	--
1990 Jun 14-17	21	22	57	--

K. That people can hear from or communicate mentally with someone who has died

	Believe in	Not sure about	Don't believe in	No opinion
	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>
2001 May 10-14	28	26	46	*
1996 Sep 3-5	20	22	56	2

1994 Dec 16-18	28	21	51	--
1990 Jun 14-17	18	20	62	--

L. Witches

	Believe in	Not sure about	Don't believe in	No opinion
	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>
2001 May 10-14	26	15	59	*
1996 Sep 3-5	19	11	69	1
1991 Oct 24-27	16	13	71	--
1990 Jun 14-17	14	8	78	--

M. Channeling, or allowing a "spirit-being" to temporarily assume control of a human body during a trance

	Believe in	Not sure about	Don't believe in	No opinion
	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>
2001 May 10-14	15	21	62	2
1996 Sep 3-5	12	21	64	3
1990 Jun 14-17	11	22	67	--

* Less than 0.5%