

When science and faith collide, faith usually wins

by [Cathy Lynn Grossman](#) in the [May 28, 2014](#) issue

Believers don't buy the big bang, godless evolution, or human responsibility for global warming. Actually, neither do many Americans.

But a new survey by the Associated Press found that religious identity—particularly evangelical Protestant—was one of the sharpest indicators of skepticism toward key issues in science.

The survey presented a series of statements that several prize-winning scientists say are facts. However, research shows that confidence in their correctness varies sharply among U.S. adults. It found:

- 51 percent of U.S. adults overall (including 77 percent of people who say they are born-again or evangelical) have little or no confidence that “the universe began 13.8 billion years ago with a big bang.”
- 42 percent overall (76 percent of evangelicals) doubt that “life on Earth, including human beings, evolved through a process of natural selection.”
- 37 percent overall (58 percent of evangelicals) doubt that the Earth’s temperature is rising “mostly because of man-made heat-trapping greenhouse gases.”
- 36 percent overall (56 percent of evangelicals) doubt “the Earth is 4.5 billion years old.”

On the flip side, most people are pretty sure the “universe is so complex, there must be a supreme being guiding its creation”—54 percent of all Americans and 87 percent of evangelicals.

The survey of 1,012 adults, conducted March 20–24, has a margin of error of 3.4 percentage points.

“When you are putting up facts against faith, facts can’t argue against faith,” Duke University biochemist Robert Lefkowitz, who won a Nobel Prize in 2012, told the Associated Press. He called faith “untestable.”

A recent survey on “religious understandings of science,” by Rice University sociologist Elaine Howard Ecklund, found that the two worldviews are not always in opposition.

Ecklund’s study for the Dialogue on Science, Ethics, and Religion program at the American Association for the Advancement of Science compared views of 10,000 U.S. adults, including scientists, evangelicals, and the general public.

She found that nearly 36 percent of scientists have no doubt about God’s existence and that they are about as likely as most Americans overall (about one in five) to attend weekly religious services. —RNS

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