



**Evolution and Creationism In Public Education:  
An In-depth Reading Of Public Opinion**

*Results Of A Comprehensive, National Survey*

Prepared For:

People For the American Way Foundation

**[www.pfaw.org](http://www.pfaw.org)**

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## **Executive Summary**

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### Background

For decades, there has been an ongoing debate in the United States regarding how public schools can best teach about the origins and development of human beings. Teaching scientific theories on this topic without challenging the religious beliefs of many Americans is no simple task. Recently, this debate has intensified in various states and localities throughout the nation.

The current issue: whether or not to include “Creationism” in the public school curriculum as an alternative explanation to (or instead of) Evolution. The Kansas State Board of Education has taken a major policy step by voting last year to delete Evolution from its new state science standards. Other states may follow suit. In other areas, the issue surfaces in other ways. In Rochester, New York, for example, a controversy has erupted over attempts to create a publicly funded charter school that will reportedly include the teaching of creationism in its science classes. And in Tangipahoa Parish, Louisiana, the school board has just voted to ask the U.S. Supreme Court to overturn a lower court ruling that found their anti-evolution, pro-religion disclaimer in science textbooks to be unconstitutional. Perhaps not since the Scopes Monkey Trial of the 1920s has so much public attention been paid to this issue.

What does the American public think about this? People For the American Way Foundation commissioned DYG, Inc. to fully explore public opinion regarding this debate.

### Methodology

A representative, national survey of 1,500 Americans was conducted by telephone for this study. The interviews were conducted from November 3 to 12, 1999. Each interview lasted about 15 minutes, and was devoted exclusively to this issue. A follow-up telephone interview of a subset of initial respondents was conducted in mid December.

An RDD (Random-Digit-Dial) sampling methodology was utilized to ensure that the results are projectable to the American public as a whole. Sampling error for a sample of this size is  $\pm 2.6\%$  at the 95% confidence interval.

### Main Findings

The main findings of this study can be summed up as follows:

In science, emphasize Evolution:

- The overwhelming majority of Americans (83%) want Evolution taught in public schools. While many Americans also support the in-school discussion of religious explanations of human origins, the majority do not want these religious explanations presented as “science”. They would like these Creationist ideas to be taught about in separate classes other than science (such as Philosophy) or taught as a “belief”. Only a minority of the public (fewer than 3 in 10) wants Creationism taught as science in public schools.

Evolution is compatible with a belief in God:

- A substantial majority of Americans (about 7 in 10) believe the scientific Theory of Evolution is compatible with a belief in God – one does not preclude the other.

Need for a national approach:

- According to most Americans (66%), the issue of whether or not to teach Evolution in the public schools is too important to leave to individual localities to decide. They endorse a national approach.

A majority of Americans disapprove of the 1999 Kansas B.O.E. decision:

- A majority (60%) reject the 1999 Kansas State Board of Education decision to delete Evolution from its state science standards. Less than 3 in 10 (28%) support the move.

## Context For Understanding The Main Findings

In the study, we probed the public's thinking about this issue beyond what may be thought of as the main "headline" findings. The survey reveals the following *context* that should be kept in mind when thinking about public opinion on this issue.

The public has only limited familiarity with the issues involved. While it is clear that Americans are unequivocal about the views outlined above, it is also clear that their knowledge about Evolution and Creationism is neither deep nor detailed.

Most Americans, by their own account, are not that familiar with Creationism. In fact, half say they have never previously heard of "Creationism." Further, those who are familiar with it do not agree on precisely how to define it: there is a schism between those who hold a "strict" definition (meaning a literal reading of Genesis) versus those who hold a "loose" definition.

Americans are also unclear about precisely what the Theory of Evolution really is. Although just about all Americans have heard of Evolution, fewer than half say they are very familiar with it. Further, roughly one in three hold an incorrect definition of Evolution (believe Evolution states humans evolved directly from apes).

Many Americans are also unclear about Evolution's scientific status. Although most Americans want Evolution to be taught in the public schools, most are not sure that the theory, as they understand it, is fully accurate or proven. Americans who lack a college education show the least certainty about Evolution.

As a result of the public's lack of deep and detailed knowledge of these issues, their views about how exactly public schools should approach them (the specifics of what should be taught in the classroom) are not fully formed.

A second important contextual point is what we term the “post-modernist” influence. For about a third of Americans, their fundamentalist religious beliefs drive their support for including Creationism in the public school curriculum. However, for most Americans who would like to see some mention of God or a Divine role in the development of humans, along with the teaching of Evolution, it is not primarily religion behind their opinions. It is much more of what can be called a Post Modernist perspective (a “Hey, you never know” mentality). This perspective is characterized by a wide tolerance for many different beliefs, since no single belief is seen as the final and complete answer to any issue. Also, many parents want their children to be exposed to a wide range of views. Their reasoning is, “our kids should be given enough information so, when they grow up, they can make up their own minds.”

More information on all of these points, along with the supporting survey evidence, can be found in the main body of this report.

## **Background and Objectives**



## Background and Objectives

For decades, there has been an ongoing debate in the United States regarding how public schools can best teach the scientific theories about the origins and development of human beings without minimizing the religious beliefs of many Americans. Recently, this debate has intensified in various states and localities throughout the nation. The issue: whether or not to include “Creationism” in the public school curriculum either in conjunction with Evolution or, as some have proposed, as a replacement for the Theory of Evolution. Kansas has become “ground zero” for this current debate. The Kansas State Board of Education has taken a major policy step by voting last year to delete Evolution from its new state science standards. Other states or localities may follow suit with other anti-evolution or pro-creationism measures.

What does the American public think about this issue? This is no simple topic that can be answered with one “yes or no” survey question. There are many nuances that need to be explored. For example:

- How familiar are people with “Creationism” and “Evolution”? Are all Americans using the same definitions?
- Do people view this as a strict “either/or” issue, or do they believe the scientific theory of Evolution and a belief in God can coexist?
- How strongly held are people’s opinions on this issue? Are people’s minds made up, or are opinions still in the process of forming?
- Is this an issue the public believes should be handled locally, or one that warrants national direction?
- What are the key motivations behind people’s opinions? Are they religiously based, or a cry for more morality in the schools, or something else?

People For the American Way Foundation commissioned DYG, Inc. to find out exactly what was going on regarding this issue. We assembled a senior research team to tackle this complex issue, led by our Chairman Daniel Yankelovich.

## **Methodology**

## Methodology

A representative, national survey of 1,500 Americans was conducted by telephone for this study. The interviews were conducted from November 3 to 12, 1999. Each interview lasted about 15 minutes, and was devoted exclusively to this issue. A follow-up telephone interview of a subset of initial respondents was conducted in mid December.

An RDD (Random-Digit-Dial) sampling methodology was utilized to ensure that the results are projectable to the American public as a whole. Sampling error for a sample this size is  $\pm 2.6\%$  at the 95% confidence interval.

Many steps were taken during the course of the survey to ensure this study is as representative as possible, including:

- Numerous callbacks were made to each selected household, at different times of the day and different days of the week, to be certain that even the busiest Americans were included in the survey.
- Callback appointments were made if people were busy at the time of initial contact.
- Random selection was made within each household so that the interviews did not take place with only the person answering the phone.
- All interviewers involved in the project are trained and experienced professionals, and a supervisor was on hand during all interviewing sessions.

## **Teaching Evolution/Creationism In Public Schools**

## Teaching Evolution/Creationism In Public Schools

*Main Finding: The overwhelming majority of Americans (83%) want Evolution taught in public schools. While many also support the in-school discussion of religious explanations of human origins, they do not want these religious explanations presented as “science”. They would like Creationist ideas to be taught about in classes other than science (such as Philosophy) or discussed as a “belief”. Only a minority (fewer than 3 in 10) want Creationism taught as science in public schools.*

Since this is not a simple issue, we asked a series of questions in the survey to understand fully where Americans stand. The main questions were:

- What should be taught in public schools: Evolution, Creationism, or both?
- Should Creationism be taught about in science classes, in other classes, or what?
- Should Evolution and/or Creationism be taught as “scientific theory” or instead be taught as “belief”?

### Level 1: Teach Evolution

The vast majority of Americans, 83%, want the Theory of Evolution to be taught in the nation’s public schools. On this point there is no difference at all between all Americans and those with a child currently enrolled in a public school. Clearly, Americans in general, and parents in particular, believe Evolution should be part of the public school curriculum.

	All Americans %	Those with a child in public schools %
Believe Evolution should be taught in public schools	83	83

## Level 2: Be Sure Evolution, as Taught, Does Not Deny Religion

While most Americans want to keep Evolution in the public school curriculum, they are less clear about how they would prefer schools to deal with religious explanations for human origins. On this point, supporters of Evolution in the schools fall into many different subgroups, each with its own approach to the two questions.

- Importantly, most Americans do **not** take an absolutist position on this issue, meaning teach **only** Evolution (20% hold this position) or **only** Creationism (16% hold this position). Most support an approach that both teaches Evolution as scientific theory and also includes some discussion of religious explanations for human origins and development.
- That said, most of the public (66%) lean in the direction of placing the *scientific* stress on Evolution. This means that most support one of the following approaches:
  - Teach only Evolution (20% support).
  - Teach Evolution in science class with religious explanations taught in another class (such as Philosophy class) (17% support).
  - Teach Evolution as “scientific theory” in science class, but allow Creationism to be mentioned as a “belief” (29% support).
- Only a minority of Americans want **both** Evolution and Creationism taught as *science*, or want only Creationism taught at all.

See the next page for a detailed breakdown.

## **Segmenting The Public: Teaching About The Origins of Mankind**

### **66% Support Evolution-oriented Positions**

(Breakdown)

- 20% say teach only Evolution without any mention of Creationism at all.
- 17% say teach only Evolution in science class, however, religious explanations can be discussed in another class (outside of science class).
- 29% say Creationism can be discussed in science class, but discussed as a “belief”, **not** a scientific theory (while Evolution should be taught as a “scientific theory” in science class).

### **13% Support Treating Evolution and Creationism Equally**

- 13% say both Evolution and Creationism should be taught as “scientific theories” in science class.

### **16% Support Creationism-oriented Positions**

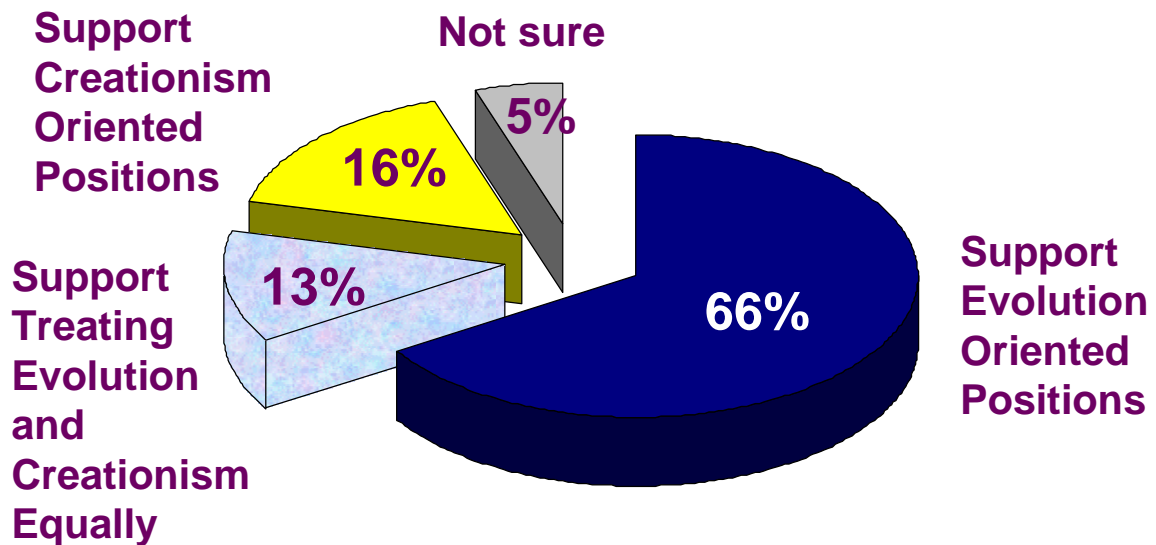
- 16% say teach only Creationism (with no mention of Evolution).

### **5% Are Not Sure**

(Breakdown)

- 4% say teach both Evolution and Creationism, but are not sure exactly how to do it.
- 1% have no opinion at all on the topic.

# Segmenting the Public: Teaching About The Origins of Mankind



(Among All Americans)



## Subgroup Differences

As one might expect, there are some significant subgroup differences on this issue. To sum up:

### Age

- Age is a key differentiator for this issue.
  - Young Americans, those aged 18 to 24, are **much** more Evolution oriented than are seniors (aged 70+). Generation Xers (25 to 34), Boomers (35 to 54) and Silents (55 to 69) fall in between.

### Education

- Education is also a differentiator for this issue.
  - Americans with greater educational attainment show more of an Evolution orientation than do those with less education (though the difference is less extreme than it is with age).

### Region

- There are differences by region, though they are generally small.
  - The Northeast is the most “pro-Evolution” while the South is the least, though the difference is only ten percentage points.

### Party ID

- While Republicans are slightly less Evolution oriented than are Democrats, the differences are relatively small.

	Age Groups					
	All Americans %	Young Adults (18-24) %	Gen X (25-34) %	Boomer (35-54) %	Silents (55-69) %	Seniors (70+) %
<b>Evolution-Oriented (Breakdown)</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>47</b>
✓ Teach Evolution only	20	26	17	20	18	21
✓ Teach only Evolution in science class, religious explanation for human development in another class	17	22	19	17	15	8
✓ Teach Evolution as “scientific theory”. Creationism can be discussed, but must be discussed as a “belief”	29	29	24	32	26	18

	Educational Attainment				
	All Americans %	High School or Less %	Some College %	College Grad %	Post Grad %
<b>Evolution-Oriented (Breakdown)</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>71</b>
✓ Teach Evolution only	20	17	17	24	24
✓ Teach only Evolution in science class, religious explanation for human development in another class	17	15	17	19	18
✓ Teach Evolution as “scientific theory”. Creationism can be discussed, but must be discussed as a “belief”	29	28	30	24	29

	Regions						"Bible Belt" %
	All Americans %	North east %	Central %	West %	South %		
<b>Evolution-Oriented (Breakdown)</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>61</b>		<b>62</b>
✓ Teach Evolution only	20	25	19	20	17		16
✓ Teach only Evolution in science class, religious explanation for human development in another class	17	20	17	15	16		16
✓ Teach Evolution as "scientific theory". Creationism can be discussed, but must be discussed as a "belief"	29	26	29	27	28		30

Note: See appendix for the states that comprise each region.

	All Americans %	Party ID		
		Rep. %	Ind. %	Dem. %
<b>Evolution-Oriented (Breakdown)</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>67</b>
✓ Teach Evolution only	20	16	20	24
✓ Teach only Evolution in science class, religious explanation for human development in another class	17	17	18	17
✓ Teach Evolution as "scientific theory". Creationism can be discussed, but must be discussed as a "belief"	29	29	28	26

## **Can Evolution and God Co-Exist?**

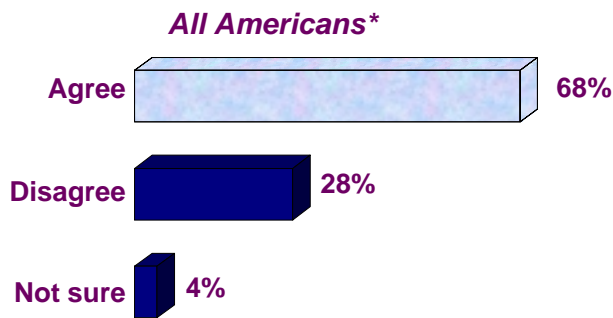
## Can Evolution and God Co-Exist?

*Main Finding: A substantial majority of Americans (about 7 in 10) believe the scientific theory of Evolution is compatible with a belief in God – one does not preclude the other.*

Over two-thirds of Americans are quite firm in the belief that Evolution can co-exist with the belief in God and the belief in a Divine role in human development. Most Americans feel the Theory of Evolution does not preclude a role for a Supreme Being in the origin and development of humans.

### Can Believe In Both The Theory Of Evolution And Divine Involvement

Question: *Agree or disagree: A person can believe in Evolution and still believe God created humans and guided their development?*



\* Americans who have heard of the term Evolution (95% of the total)

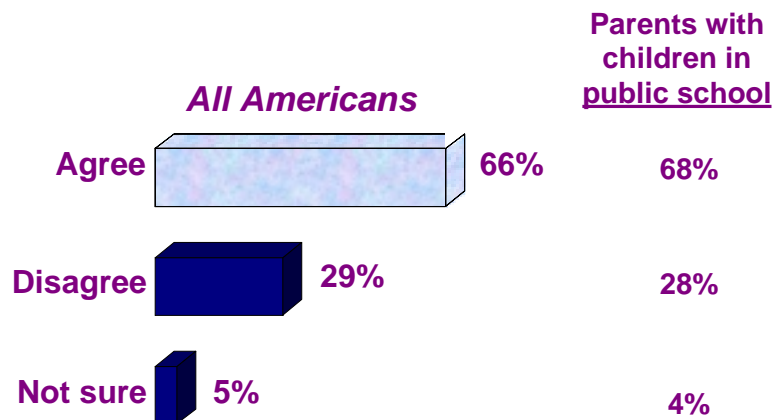
**Public Expresses A Preference For A National Approach**

## Public Expresses A Preference For A National Approach

***Main Finding:** According to most Americans, the issue of whether or not to teach Evolution in the public schools is too important to leave to individual localities to decide. They agree that a national approach is warranted.*

For the most part, Americans have traditionally favored local decision-making when it comes to education. However, this issue is a clear exception. Most Americans (two thirds) agree that there needs to be a national approach regarding whether or not to teach Evolution and/or Creationism in the public schools.

Question: *“Agree or disagree: Evolution is one of those issues that is too important to be decided by each and every school board across the country. There needs to be a standard, national approach to whether or not Evolution is taught in the public schools”*



Majorities of residents in all regions agree on the need for a national approach. This is true even in the “Bible Belt”.

		<i>Regions</i>				
	All Americans %	Northeast %	Central %	West %	South %	“Bible Belt” %
<b>Agree</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>64</b>
Disagree	29	26	33	26	29	32
Not sure	5	4	4	7	6	4

Note: See appendix for listing of states included in each region. The “Bible Belt” includes states from the South and Central regions.



## **Public Rejects Kansas Decision**

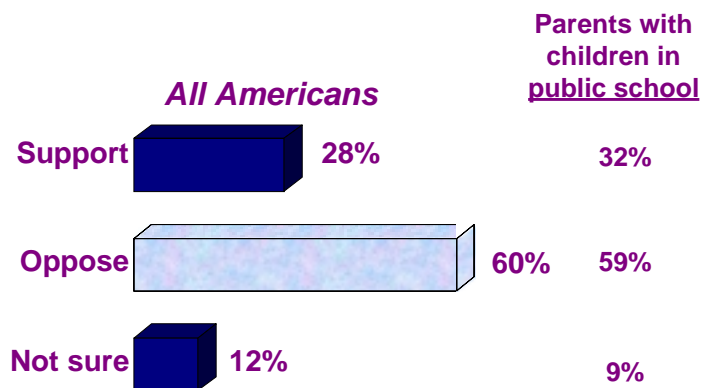
## Public Rejects Kansas Decision

*Main Finding: A majority of Americans (60%) reject the 1999 Kansas State Board of Education decision to delete Evolution from its state science standards.*

The catalyst for the current public debate in America on the issue of whether or not Evolution and/or Creationism should be taught in the public schools has been the recent developments in Kansas. Specifically, the Kansas State Board of Education voted in 1999 to delete Evolution from its new state science standards, thereby also deleting it from the state science assessment tests and, in effect, discouraging schools from teaching Evolution.

The American public clearly does **not** agree with this decision. A majority (6 in 10) oppose it, while less than 3 in 10 support the move. There is no statistical difference on this point between Americans in general and parents of children in public schools.

Question: *“The Kansas State Board Of Education has recently voted to delete Evolution from their new state science standards. Do you support or oppose this decision?”*



There are significant differences by subgroup on this issue. However, *no* group that we analyzed shows a majority supporting the decision. The groups most supportive, namely self described “very religious” individuals and Evangelical Christians, are essentially split (roughly half and half) on the issue.

<b>Groups most OPPOSED to the ruling</b>	<b>Groups most SUPPORTIVE to the ruling</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Better educated</li> <li>■ Younger</li> <li>■ Residents of the Northeast</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Less educated</li> <li>■ Older</li> <li>■ Self described very religious/Evangelical</li> <li>■ Residents of the South, Central and “Bible Belt” states</li> </ul>

### Subgroup Results

Question: *“The Kansas State Board Of Education has recently voted to delete Evolution from their new state science standards. Do you support or oppose this decision?”*

		<b>Educational Attainment</b>			
	All Americans %	High school or less %	Some college %	College Graduate %	Post graduate %
Support	28	<b>→34←</b>	29	23	19
Oppose	60	52	60	<b>→67←</b>	<b>→73←</b>
Not sure	12	15	11	9	8

		<b>Age</b>				
	All Americans %	Young Adults (18 – 22) %	Gen X (23-34) %	Boomers (35 – 54) %	Matures (55-69) %	Seniors (70+) %
Support	28	25	28	29	26	<b>→35←</b>
Oppose	60	<b>→71←</b>	63	59	57	52
Not sure	12	4	10	11	17	13

Note: Arrows indicate group showing greatest support and greatest opposition.

Subgroup Results - continued

Question: “The Kansas State Board Of Education has recently voted to delete Evolution from their new state science standards. Do you support or oppose this decision?”

	All Americans %	Region				
		Northeast %	Central %	West %	South %	Bible Belt %
Support	28	19	31	20	<b>→36←</b>	<b>→36←</b>
Oppose	60	<b>→69←</b>	58	67	54	55
Not sure	12	13	11	13	10	10

Note: See appendix for listing of states included in each region. The “Bible Belt” includes states from the South and Central.

	All Americans %	Religiosity	
		Very religious (self-described) %	Evangelical Christians (self-described) %
Support	28	<b>→45←</b>	<b>→47←</b>
Oppose	60	44	43
Not sure	12	11	10

Note: Arrows indicate group showing greatest support and greatest opposition.

**Note:**

Although the opinions discussed in the previous sections are quite clear, the following sections highlight how relatively ill-informed much of the public is regarding this issue. Specifically:

- Most Americans are not familiar with Creationism.
- Most Americans have heard of Evolution, but many do not fully understand the basics of the theory.

As a result, most of the public has not yet fully worked out in their own minds the specifics of how to best teach about Evolution in the classroom and, at the same time, allow religious beliefs to be discussed.

## **Creationism: How Well Understood?**

## Creationism: How Well Understood?

*Main Finding: Most Americans, by their own account, are not that familiar with Creationism. Further, those who are familiar with it do not agree on how to define it - there is a schism between those who hold a “strict” definition (literal interpretation of Genesis) versus those who hold a “loose” definition.*

As reported by the media, those who are opposed to teaching Evolution in public schools (or opposed to teaching it without alternatives) often cite Creationism (the Bible-based doctrine of human origins) as a viable alternative which should be taught in the public schools. This was a common theme heard in the Kansas debates.

How familiar is the public with Creationism? This is an important question that needs to be answered, and much previous polling on this issue has not taken the time to see just how much the American public knows about Creationism. According to our study, Creationism is clearly **not** well understood.

- Almost HALF of Americans say they have never previously heard of the term Creationism.
- Of those that have heard of the term, only about 4 in 10 of them say they are very familiar with it.
  - Meaning only about 2 in 10 of the American public, by their own account, say they are very familiar with the doctrine.

Methodology note: In the survey, respondents that had never heard of Creationism before were read the following definition, “*Creationism is the belief that states God created human beings in their current form. Creationism rejects the idea that human beings evolved from less advanced forms of life over millions of years.*” These respondents were given this definition so that they could answer questions about whether or not they wanted Creationism taught about in public schools.



### Ever Heard of Creationism?

Question: *Have you ever heard the term Creationism?*

	All Americans %
Yes	53
No	45
Not sure	2

### Familiarity

Question: *How familiar are you with Creationism?*

	Americans who have heard of Creationism (53% of the total) %	All Americans %
Very Familiar	41	22
Somewhat Familiar	39	21
Not that familiar	20	10
Never heard of Creationism	NA	47

Further, even among those who are aware of Creationism, there is no agreement on what it means. Many hold a fundamentalist definition of Creationism (a very literal reading of the Genesis story in the Bible), while others interpret it much more loosely.

Definition

Question: *Which of the following best fits your definition of Creationism:*

	Americans who have heard of creationism (53% of total) %	All Americans %
<b><u>“Strict” Definition</u></b> “Creationism means God created humans exactly as the Bible says, starting within the past 10,000 years or so with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden”	59	31
<b><u>“Loose” Definition</u></b> “Creationism means God created humans, but it does not necessarily mean it happened exactly as the Bible says it did”	36	19
Not sure	5	3
Never heard of creationism	NA	47

### View Of Accuracy

Among all Americans, only 27% would classify Creationism as an accurate account of how humans developed. Among those who have heard of the term, about half would classify it as accurate.

Question: *Which of the following best describes your view of Creationism:*

	Americans who have heard of creationism (53% of total) %	All Americans %
"A completely accurate account of how humans were created and developed"	31	16
"Mostly accurate"	21	11
(SUM: Completely/mostly accurate)	(52)	(27)
"Might or might not be accurate, you can never know for sure"	29	16
"Mostly NOT accurate"	7	4
"Completely NOT accurate"	8	4
Not sure	4	2
Never head of Creationism	NA	47

## **Evolution: How Well Understood and Accepted?**

## Evolution: How Well Understood and Accepted?

*Main Finding: Although just about all Americans have heard of Evolution, less than half say they are very familiar with it. Further, roughly one in three hold an incorrect definition of Evolution.*

*Although most Americans want Evolution to be taught in the public schools, most are not sure that the theory, as they understand it, is fully accurate or proven. Americans who lack a college education express the least certainty about Evolution.*

When it comes to Evolution, just about everyone (95%) has heard of the term, though a great deal of confusion and misinformation exists. For instance, a sizable minority (about one in three) believes Evolution means human beings evolved from apes (which, of course, is not what the theory says).

Specifically:

- Almost all Americans (95%) have heard of the term “Evolution”.
- Yet, less than half say they are “very familiar” with the term.
- A third of Americans who have heard of Evolution have an incorrect definition of it.

Question: *Have you ever heard the term Evolution?*

	All Americans %
Yes	95
No	5
Not sure	*

Familiarity

Question: *How familiar are you with Evolution?*

	Among those who have heard of the term (95% of the public)	All Americans %
Very Familiar	45	42
Somewhat Familiar	43	41
Not that familiar	12	11
Not sure	*	*
Never heard of Evolution	NA	5

Definition

Question: *Which of the following best fits your definition of Evolution with regard to human beings:*

	Among those who have heard of Evolution (95% of total) %	All Americans %
<b><u>Incorrect Definition</u></b> “Evolution means human beings have developed from apes over the past millions of years”	34	32
<b><u>Correct Definition</u></b> “Evolution means human beings have developed from less advanced forms of life over millions of years”	50	48
Means something else / Not sure	16	15
Never heard of Evolution	NA	5

An individual's definition of Evolution has a significant impact on his/her opinion regarding the Kansas State Board of Education ruling to eliminate Evolution from its science standards. Those with an incorrect definition of Evolution (humans evolved from apes) show a greater likelihood to support the Kansas State ruling (though still less than a majority) than those who have a correct definition (humans evolved from lower forms of life).

Question: *“The Kansas State Board Of Education has recently voted to delete Evolution from their new state science standards. Do you support or oppose this decision?”*

	Americans with an <b>incorrect</b> definition of Evolution (32% of public) %	Americans who hold a <b>correct</b> definition of Evolution (48% of public) %
Support	<b>→33←</b>	21
Oppose	55	<b>→70←</b>
Not sure	12	9

It appears that the more complete one's understanding is of Evolution, the more supportive one is of keeping the theory in science classes.

## Evolution: How Well Accepted?

Most Americans are not convinced that the Theory of Evolution accurately accounts for how humans were created and developed. The single largest response to the issue of Evolution's accuracy is that it "might or might not be accurate, you can never know for sure."

### View Of Accuracy

Question: *Which of the following bests describes your view of Evolution:*

	Among those who have heard of evolution (95% of total)	All Americans %
"A completely accurate account of how humans were created and developed"	6	5
"Mostly accurate"	23	22
(SUM: Completely/mostly accurate)	(29)	(27)
"Might or might not be accurate, you can never know for sure"	38	36
"Mostly NOT accurate"	9	8
"Completely NOT accurate"	22	21
Not sure	3	3
Never heard of Evolution	NA	5



### Impact of the Word “Theory”

For most Americans, Evolution is literally a “theory”, meaning it is not yet proven. In fact, roughly half of Americans believe it is far from being proven, while 4 in 10 believe it is close to being proven.

Question: *Do you agree or disagree with the following: Evolution is commonly referred to as the **Theory** of Evolution because it has not yet been proven scientifically?*

	Among those who have heard of evolution (95% of total) %
<b>Agree</b>	<b>74</b>
Disagree	20
Not sure	6

Question: *Would you say Evolution is far from being proven scientifically, or is it close to being proven scientifically?*

	Among those who have heard of evolution (95% of total) %
Far from being proven	49
Close to being proven	42
Not sure	10

Education has a large impact on whether or not one believes the Theory of Evolution is “far from being proven.” Over half of Americans without a college degree say Evolution is far from being proven, while half or more of those with a college degree say it is close to being proven.

Question: *Would you say Evolution is far from being proven scientifically, or is it close to being proven scientifically?*

	<b><i>Educational Attainment</i></b>			
	High school or less %	Some college %	College graduate (4+ years) %	Post graduate %
Far from being proven	<b>→55←</b>	<b>→55←</b>	42	30
Close to being proven	35	38	<b>→50←</b>	<b>→57←</b>
Not sure	11	8	8	13

The Theory of Relativity, as a point of comparison, appears to have much more support.

Question: *What about the Theory of Relativity, which was first proposed by Albert Einstein?*

	All Americans %
Far from being proven	9
<b>Close to being proven/proven</b>	<b>68</b>
Not sure	22

## **Certainty and Intensity**

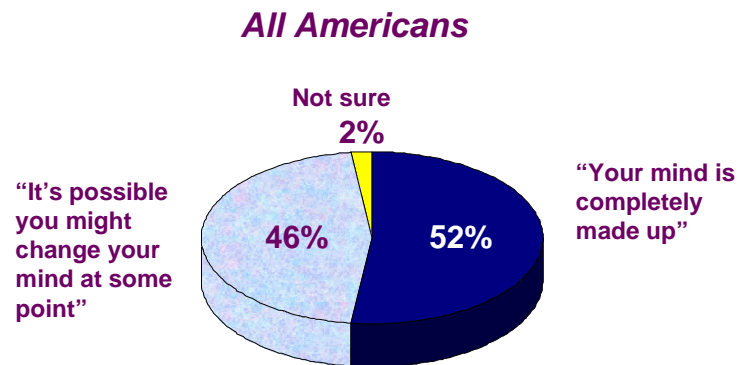
## Certainty and Intensity

***Main Finding:*** Almost half of Americans say they have not completely made up their minds on the issue of precisely how to deal with Evolution/Creationism in public schools. Yet, they also say the issue is important to them.

Almost half of Americans say that they have not completely made up their minds on this issue. This is not surprising, since, as mentioned earlier, a high proportion of Americans are not that familiar with Creationism, and at the same time many are confused regarding the Theory of Evolution.

### Certainty

Question: *How set are your opinions on the issue of teaching either Evolution or Creationism in public schools?*



Note: Identical results among parents with children in public schools.

### Intensity

Although many Americans say that their minds are not completely made up, they do feel strongly about the issue. 81% of Americans, and 86% of parents with children in public schools, say this issue is important to them.

*Question: How important is this issue to you, namely whether or not Creationism should be taught in schools?*

	All Americans %	Parents with children in public schools %
Extremely important	40	41
Somewhat important	41	45
Not that important	17	14
Not sure	1	*

## Certainty and Intensity By The Issue Groups

Interestingly, Americans who support teaching about **only** Creationism in the schools are the ones with the firmest and most intense opinions on this matter. Importantly, just over half of Americans who say Evolution should be taught and religious explanations for human origins should be taught about (in some form) say that they have not made up their minds completely. Hence, there is real room for movement on this issue.

Question: *How set are your opinions on the issue of teaching either Evolution or Creationism in public schools?*

	<b>Americans who believe public schools should</b>		
	Teach only <b>Evolution</b> %	Teach Evolution <u>and</u> about Creationism (in some form) %	Teach only <b>Creationism</b> %
“Your mind is completely made up”	<b>→59←</b>	46	<b>→75←</b>
“It’s possible you might change your mind at some point in the future”	37	<b>→53←</b>	24
Not sure	4	2	1
	(20% of total)	(63% of total)	(16% of total)

Question: *How important is this issue to you, namely whether or not Creationism should be taught in schools?*

	<b>Americans who believe public schools should</b>		
	Teach only <b>Evolution</b> %	Teach Evolution <u>and</u> about Creationism (in some form) %	Teach only <b>Creationism</b> %
Extremely important	34	40	<b>→70←</b>
Somewhat important	34	47	25
Not that important	31	12	5
Not sure	1	1	1
	(20% of total)	(63% of total)	(16% of total)

## **The Post Modernism Influence**

## The Post Modernism Influence

*Main Finding: For a minority of Americans, it is their fundamentalist religious beliefs driving their support for including Creationism in the public school curriculum. However, for most Americans who would like to see some mention of God or a divine role in the development of humans, it is not primarily religion behind their opinions. It is much more of what can be called a Post Modernist perspective (a “Hey, you never know” mentality).*

Why do so many Americans support the discussion of religious explanations for the origins and development of humans, along with Evolution, in public schools? Most Americans feel this way **not** out of some fundamentalist, religious belief system, but rather what is better described as a “post modernist mentality”. This perspective is characterized by a wide tolerance for many different beliefs, since no single belief is seen as the final and complete answer to most issues. Those Americans believe it is good to expose students to several different ways of thinking about complex ideas (reflecting a “Hey, you never know” mentality). It is not due to a strict belief in the Bible.

However, among the minority of Americans who believe **only** Creationism should be taught, religious fundamentalism is the driving factor.



## Reasons Why Religious Explanations For Human Origins Should Be Taught About In Public Schools

Shown: % who find the reason to be " <u>very</u> convincing"	All Americans %	Americans who believe schools should teach Evolution <u>and</u> about Creationism %	Americans who believe schools should teach ONLY Creationism %
<p><b><i>(Post modernism argument)</i></b></p> <p>"Young people should learn to keep an open mind about different ways of looking at life"</p>	→67←	→75←	43
<p><b><i>(Post modernism argument)</i></b></p> <p>"Students should be exposed to both points of view so that when they are older they can make up their own minds"</p>	→60←	→74←	31
<p><b><i>(Moral argument)</i></b></p> <p>"Teaching Creationism will help instill children with a more solid moral base"</p>	43	48	→78←
<p><b><i>(Post modernism argument)</i></b></p> <p>"No one really knows how life developed, so why not teach alternative views"</p>	33	42	16
<p><b><i>(Fundamentalist argument)</i></b></p> <p>"Because if the Bible says something is true, then that's the truth and children should learn it"</p>	32	29	→75←

(63% of total) (16% of total)

**Appendix**  
**- Sample Profile -**

## Sample Profile

As the figures below show, our survey included a representative cross section of American society.

### ■ Attend church:

- 44% once a week or more
- 19% once or twice a month
- 14% less than once a month, but at least a few times a year
- 12% once or twice a year
- 11% never

### ■ Self Described religiosity:

- 33% very religious
- 52% somewhat religious
- 12% not that religious

### ■ Religious Denomination:

- 50% Christian (other than Catholic)
- 23% Catholic
- 2% Jewish
- 14% other
- 11% no religious affiliation

### ■ Children and related issues:

- 41% have children aged 17 or younger
- 30% have children who attend public school (72% of those with children under 17)

■ Race/Ethnicity:

- 77% white
- 21% non-white
- 2% refused

■ Gender

- 48% male
- 52% female

■ Educational attainment:

- 38% high school or less
- 28% some college
- 34% college graduate +

■ Party ID:

- 27% Republican
- 30% Democrat
- 25% Independent
- 13% Other
- 5% Not sure

■ Average age = 43.3 years old

## Regional Breaks

Regions were defined as follows:

Northeast: Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey

South: Delaware, Maryland, West Virginia, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Arkansas, Tennessee, Kentucky, Washington DC

Central: Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska, South Dakota, North Dakota, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, Iowa

West: New Mexico, Arizona, Utah, Colorado, Wyoming, Idaho, Montana, Washington, Oregon, Nevada, California

“Bible Belt”: West Virginia, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Arkansas, Tennessee, Kentucky, Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska, Indiana, Illinois – southern part of state, Missouri, Iowa

## FOR MORE INFORMATION...

Additional copies of this report can be ordered by calling (toll-free) 1-800-326-7329, or by downloading from our website:

**[www.pfaw.org/issues/education/creationism-poll.pdf](http://www.pfaw.org/issues/education/creationism-poll.pdf)**

For additional information on Creationism, please read People For the American Way Foundation's November 1999 report:

*Sabotaging Science: Creationist Strategy in the 1990s*

**[www.pfaw.org/issues/education/creationist-strategy.pdf](http://www.pfaw.org/issues/education/creationist-strategy.pdf)**