Ghosts, UFOs, and Other Paranormal Beliefs

We usually think of fairly ‘traditional’ beliefs when considering religion, such as belief in God or Heaven. However, many individuals in the United States hold supernatural or paranormal beliefs that do not fit into those traditional categories. This learning module will walk you through survey data examining some of these beliefs to see how many people hold them and who they are.

Open your web browser and go to the homepage for the Association of Religion Data Archives (www.theARDA.com).

Let us begin by looking at belief in ghosts. Search for “ghosts” in the search box in the upper right-hand corner. The results will be organized by the area of the ARDA’s website in which they were found.

1. In what areas of the ARDA’s website were results for “ghosts” found? (Hint: Look for the green icons that mark each area of results. The name of area will be to the right of these icons.)

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You should have found some results in the “ARDA Data Archives-Questions/Variables on Surveys” section. Look through these results and find the question from the Baylor Religion Survey (2007) - Instructional Dataset that asks whether a person believes that ghosts exist.

2. What is the label for this question? (Hint: It will be hyperlinked and to the left of the survey’s name. While they seem strange, these labels are simply short-hand names for survey questions.)

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3. If you had to guess, what percent of the U.S. population do you think “absolutely” believes that ghosts exist?

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Click on the name of the question. This will take you to the overall responses that people gave to this question.

4. What **percent** of the U.S. population say that they “absolutely” believe ghosts exists?

Let us explore this in more detail. Click on the “Analyze Results” link below the responses to the question. You will see a page with a pie chart and the same results you looked at on the previous page. Below this, though, are several tables looking at people’s responses broken down by various social and demographic categories.

5. Do you think men or women are more likely to believe in ghosts? Why do you think there might be a difference?

Find the table for the gender of the individual and fill in the following table with the percent of male and female respondents who gave each response.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Absolutely Not</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probably Not</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probably</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absolutely</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6. How does a person’s church attendance relate to their belief in ghosts? Fill in the following table and briefly discuss the findings.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Less than once a year</th>
<th>Once or twice a year</th>
<th>Several times a year</th>
<th>1-3 times a month</th>
<th>About weekly</th>
<th>Weekly or more</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Absolutely Not</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probably Not</td>
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<tr>
<td>Probably</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absolutely</td>
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7. Look at the other tables and describe some of the patterns you see in belief in ghosts.

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Let’s move on to another supernatural belief. As you did earlier, search for “UFO” in the upper right-hand corner. (Note: UFO stands for “unidentified flying object” and is usually associated with visitors from space).
Find the question from the Baylor Religion Survey (2007) - Instructional Dataset that asks for the level of agreement with the statement “Certain paranormal phenomena (such as UFOs and Ouija boards) are the work of the Devil.”

After you find it, click on the name of the question.

8. What percent of people strongly agree with this statement?

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9. Do responses differ by gender? How does this compare to what you found earlier concerning ghosts? If there is a difference, why do you think this is?

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10. How does a person’s worship attendance relate to their beliefs about UFOs and paranormal phenomena?

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You should have a good idea of how to search and move around within the ARDA’s website. Now it is time for you to do some independent research. Feel free to explore different surveys or different areas of the ARDA’s website.

Search for some other ‘non-traditional beliefs.’ Here are some examples you can use: New Age, astrology, horoscope, Bigfoot, Loch Ness Monster, dreams, haunted, psychic. If you search for something but do not find any results then try any synonymous terms. If you still do not find anything then it is possible that it has not been asked on any surveys.

Choose one of the questions you find and do some analysis. Be sure to address the following issues: How many people overall believe or practice the thing you are examining? How do
responses vary by other social or demographic characteristics? How does it relate to more ‘traditional’ religious beliefs or behaviors?

Print out any relevant tables or results you find and attach them to this module.

11. Discuss your findings below.

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12. Given what you have seen in this learning module what seems to be the relationship between traditional religious beliefs and practices and such non-traditional beliefs?

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