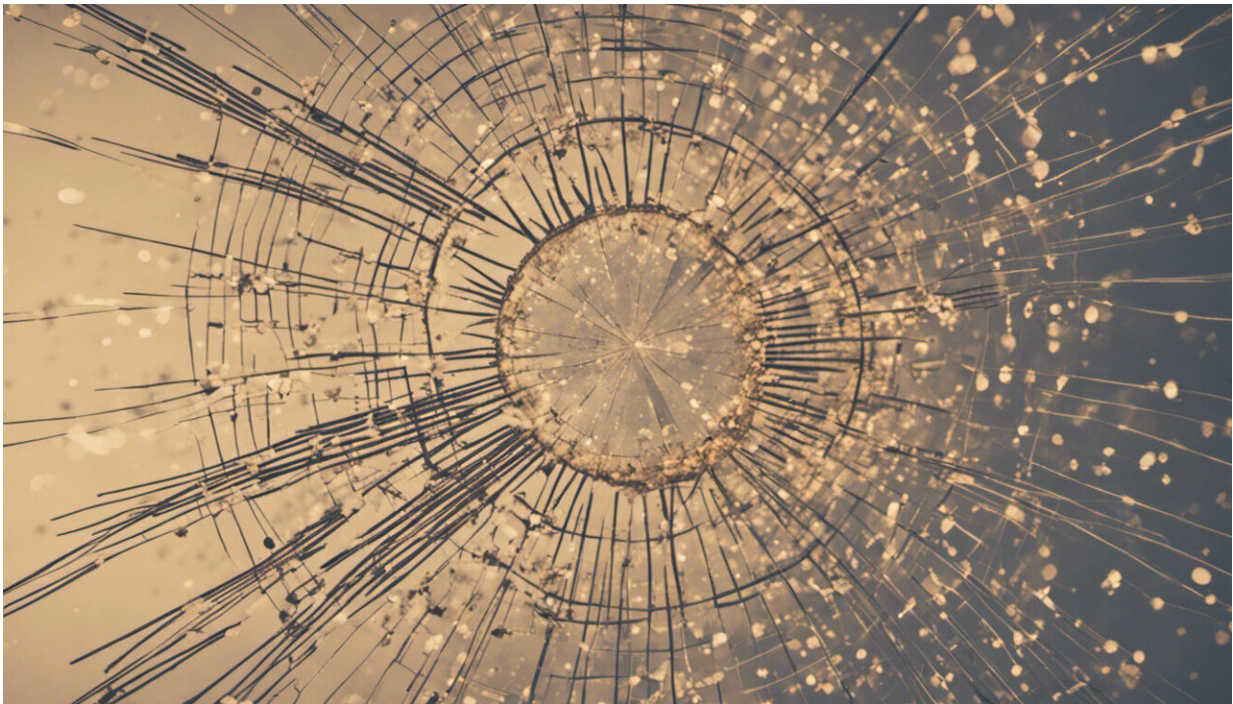


How many people actually believe in astrology?

April 28 2017, by Nicholas Campion



Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

Astrology and horoscope columns are a familiar feature of tabloid newspapers, women's magazines and the web. They claim, controversially for some, that there is a meaningful relationship between celestial and terrestrial events, especially human affairs.

Astrology as we know it now, linking planets to the 12 zodiac signs in order to manage life on Earth, was devised in the [Middle East and classical Greece](#) between the fifth and first centuries BCE. It was largely transmitted to the 21st century [via the Islamic world](#).

These days, astrology arouses vilification from two corners. On one side are evangelical Christians who regard it as seriously misleading at best, [and Satanic at worst](#). On the other, sceptics denounce the idea that our destiny may lie in the stars [as fraudulent](#) and [even harmful](#).

If such claims are true, it's important to work out how many people believe in astrology, and why. The time is ripe for some serious investigation.

Meanings and belief

Just how many people believe in astrology and why they still do – even when their own experiences prove otherwise – is a curiosity for many. But in order to answer these [questions](#), we need to first develop more fluid categories of [belief](#) and disbelief. We cannot simply say that followers of astrology wholly believe in it, or that others completely disbelieve. It is a complex question, [even for professional astrologers and researchers](#).

Evidence suggests that [over 90% of adults](#) know their sun (zodiac) signs. Some surveys also [indicate](#) that well over half agree that the signs' character descriptions are a good fit: Arians are energetic, Taurians stubborn, and Scorpians secretive, for example.

To find out what the most involved "believers" – that is, those who are dedicated followers or professionally involved in astrology – think, I distributed questionnaires to public groups and astrology conferences from 1998 to 2012. The purpose of this [recently published research](#) was

specifically to establish how many people believe in astrology, and why. Most published figures for belief in astrology are derived from Gallup polls taken in Britain, Canada and the US between 1975 and 1996 – to which around [25% of adults](#) polled answered "yes" to questions such as "do you believe in horoscopes?".

We might expect that all practitioners and students of astrology would say they believe. However, when I put the question to delegates at a British Astrological Association conference, just 27% said "yes" – about the same as the general population. When I asked the astrologers who didn't "believe" for their reasons, they replied that astrology is no more a matter of belief than television or music: it is real, so has nothing to do with belief. Or to put it another way, people only believe in things which don't exist. Which is why public surveys on belief can come up with misleading results.

Valued advice

During my research, I followed an [established method](#) of asking a series of questions on attitudes and activity, while avoiding mention of belief altogether. The picture which emerged is much more complex than the simple binary distinction between belief and disbelief suggests.

In one of my groups – of mostly male students aged 18 to 21 – I found that 70% read a horoscope column once a month and 51% valued its advice. Other questions produced a huge variation: 98% knew their sun sign, 45% thought it described their personalities, 25% said it can make accurate forecasts, and 20% think the stars influence life on Earth. The higher figures are close to [previous research](#) which showed that 73% of British adults believe in astrology, while the lowest figures are similar to those found by Gallup's polls.

I asked other questions about the students' behaviour as well as their

attitudes. Nearly half (45%) confessed to finding out potential or actual partners' sun signs so they could manage their relationships better, and 31% had read their predictions for the year ahead.

What became clear from all my surveys is that when we ask questions about personal experience, meaning and behaviour – such as valuing an astrologer's advice or finding out partners' signs – positive responses are about twice as high, if not more, than when we ask for statements of objective fact (such as "does astrology make accurate forecasts?").

My samples were small, and each one represented a snapshot of a particular group, which makes it difficult to generalise. But all suggest that when we ask a variety of questions we arrive at different answers. How many people believe in astrology? It could be 22%. It may be 73%. The difference between the two figures is what I call the "belief gap", the zone of doubt and uncertainty between deep and shallow commitment.

So why do people believe in astrology? The problem we have is in establishing reliable research. If we can't actually get to first base and find out how many people believe in it, then attempts to establish why people find it meaningful – a better word than belief – get stuck.

This article was originally published on [The Conversation](#). Read the [original article](#).

Provided by The Conversation

Citation: How many people actually believe in astrology? (2017, April 28) retrieved 23 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2017-04-people-astrology.html>

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