

Two NIDS “Day After” Surveys on Response of the Public to Extraterrestrials: Comparison of a Nationwide Roper Poll with an Online Survey that Asked Identical Questions

In 1999 NIDS contracted the Roper organization to conduct a nationwide survey of opinion that focused on the response of the public to extraterrestrials. The Roper organization polled 1971 demographically balanced people and the results of the poll were published in 1999. As a comparative exercise, NIDS subsequently asked the identical questions via an online questionnaire. 2046 people who were demographically *uncontrolled* submitted answers in the allotted time. There is widespread agreement that Internet surveys, especially conducted on specialty web sites, are wildly inaccurate in sampling public opinion. The purpose of this exercise was to evaluate the extent of the difference in attitudes to extraterrestrials between the public at large and the visitors to the NIDS web site. The actual wording of the survey questions can be found in the pie-chart presentation. The complete statistics and some analysis of the 1999 Roper survey can be found at: <http://www.nidsci.org/news/roperdayafter.html>

Some predictable differences and some surprises emerged from this comparison:

- In response to question 1: “ETs landed and you could choose who should make first contact?” a huge majority (86%) of the online responders chose either scientists (42%) or a private organization that has planned for such a contingency (44%). In contrast, only 49% of the public at large chose the scientists (29%) or a private organization (20%). Fully 20% of the public at large preferred the military to make first contact, while 4% of online responders preferred the military.
- In response to the question regarding “What are UFOs?” a surprisingly high percentage of online responders answered “I don’t know” (41%), higher than the public at large (32%). Equally surprisingly, exactly 25% of both the public at large and the online responders answered that UFOs are alien spaceships. Given the assumption that the people who visit the NIDS web site might have a greater interest/knowledge of UFOs than the general public, it surprised us that such a high percentage of the web site visitors answered that they did not know what UFOs are. This may be attributed to open-mindedness. Further, since the words “UFO” and “alien” are almost interchangeable in most media treatments of this topic, it surprised us that such a low percentage (25%) of people in BOTH surveys thought UFOs were alien spaceships.

- In response to the question: “If I believed that an advanced extraterrestrial life form had been discovered, how would it change my life style?” 16% of Roper nationwide respondents answered “Who cares”, while predictably, 2% of NIDS web site online people answered “Who cares.”
- Question 4 asked how much the respondents trusted the US government to disseminate information about advanced extraterrestrial life if they discovered it. Both surveys indicated a large majority of respondents who did not trust the government. A combined 71% respondents to the Roper survey said that the United States government would classify the information, move to suppress civilian sources from obtaining knowledge, or both. A combined 74% of the NIDS web site respondents said the same thing. There was a significant difference in the *degree* of suspicion between the Roper respondents and the online visitors: only 23% of the Roper respondents said the government would classify AND suppress, while 47% of the NIDS web site respondents said the government would do both.
- A large majority (75%) of NIDS online responders were “fully prepared to handle” undeniable evidence of the existence of advanced extraterrestrial life, while only 32% of the general public were that confident.
- 25% of the public at large thought that others would “totally freak out and panic” if undeniable evidence of extraterrestrial life were confirmed. Only 8% of the NIDS web site responders thought this. NIDS web site responders displayed either greater trust, greater confidence or greater complacency in their answers to these two questions than did the general public.