

Barna Group

Knowledge to navigate a changing world

Religious Freedom 2015

Alliance Defending Freedom

Research conducted among U.S. adults 18 and older
August—September 2015

Research commissioned by
Alliance Defending Freedom, Scottsdale, Arizona

Research conducted by
Barna Group, Ventura, California

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Executive Summary

Context of the Research

When the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in June 2015 that same-sex marriage must be made legal in all 50 states, Chief Justice John Roberts read his dissenting opinion from the bench. He criticized the majority's ruling for undermining the democratic legislative process: "Five lawyers have closed the debate and enacted their own vision of marriage as a matter of constitutional law."¹

He was only the first American to question the legitimacy of the Court's decision. A few hours after the ruling, presidential candidate Mike Huckabee issued the following statement: "I will not acquiesce to an imperial court any more than our Founders acquiesced to an imperial British monarch. We must resist and reject judicial tyranny, not retreat."²

Kim Davis, the elected Clerk of Rowan County, Kentucky, was the first, but perhaps not the last, public official to be held in contempt of court and sent to jail for refusing to issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples. And there are at least half a dozen civil suits pending around the country against private business owners who, based on their religious convictions, have declined to provide their services for same-sex weddings.

These high-profile events presented an opportunity to measure Americans' current perceptions of the state of religious freedom against the findings of a Barna study of U.S. adults completed in 2012. Has concern about religious freedom increased or decreased, or stayed about the same? Do people of faith feel more or less urgency than three years ago about religious freedom? This research was conducted

¹"Roberts Dissent on Supreme Court Same-Sex Marriage Ruling," *The Washington Post*, June 27, 2015. <http://apps.washingtonpost.com/g/documents/national/robertss-dissent-on-supreme-court-same-sex-marriage-ruling/1606/> (accessed September 2015).

² Ahiza Garcia, "Mike Huckabee: I Will Not Accept Gay Marriage Ruling by 'Imperial Court'," Talking Points Memo, June 16, 2015. <http://talkingpointsmemo.com/livewire/mike-huckabee-gay-marriage-decision> (accessed September 2015).

Data Summary

The 2015 tracking research, commissioned by the Alliance Defending Liberty, reveals a rise in Americans' belief that religious freedom is worse today than 10 years ago. As one might expect, this view is especially prevalent among Christians, but there is significant upsurge even among Americans of other faiths (from 19% in 2012 to 32% in 2015) and among atheists, agnostics and the religiously unaffiliated (23% to 32%). Among all U.S. adults, 41 percent say religious freedom is worse than 10 years ago, compared to 33 percent just three years ago.

U.S. evangelicals are most likely among belief segments to assess religious freedom as having diminished over the past decade. Three-quarters say religious liberty is worse off, compared to six in 10 in 2012.

In addition, more practicing Christians in 2015 than in 2012 say religious freedoms are worse. This is especially true among Millennial and Gen-X practicing Christians, the generational segments which show the largest jump since 2012. Three years ago, 32 percent of Millennial practicing Christians and 40 percent of Gen-X practicing Christians said religious freedom had worsened. Today, 55 percent of practicing Christian Millennials and six in 10 practicing Christian Gen-Xers say so.

Millennial practicing Christians are also most likely to express the highest level of concern about the future of religious freedom. More than half say they are "very concerned" about it (56%), compared to just one in five in 2012 (19%). This is a significant jump, and may demonstrate the increased tension Millennial Christians are feeling as the cultural tides churn around them.

Three years ago, the two younger generations of practicing Christians were, like their non-Christian peers, *less* concerned than older generations about religious liberty. This is no longer the case. Among practicing Christian Boomers, the percentage who are "very concerned" about the future of religious freedom has remained the same since 2012 (48%)—and has dropped among practicing Christian Elders (from 44% to 31%). A majority in the younger generations, on the other hand, say they are "very concerned."

Interestingly, practicing Christian Millennials also show the largest increase when it comes to believing traditional Judeo-Christian values should be given preference in the U.S.—from one-quarter in 2012 (26%) to more than half today (55%). (Practicing Christians overall who hold this view increased from 35 to 51 percent.)

Likewise, practicing Christian Millennials are far more likely than other generations to say they would support an organization specifically focused on protecting the rights of Christians. Forty-one percent say they are likely to support "an organization that protects the rights of those who practice your religion,"

compared to one in three Gen-Xers (30%), one in five Boomers (20%) and 16 percent of Elders who practice Christianity. On this question, practicing Christian Millennials are somewhat similar to evangelicals, nearly half of whom say they are more likely to support an organization devoted to protecting Christians' rights (48%).

In a similar vein, more practicing Christian Millennials today agree with the statement "religious freedom has become more restricted in the U.S. because some groups have actively tried to move society away from traditional Christian values" than in 2012 (from 47% to 71%). Gen-Xer practicing Christians, too, saw a notable increase of this view in three years (from 45% to 72%), especially compared to older practicing Christians (64% to 69% among Boomers, 58% to 63% among Elders).

Analysis of the Findings

In addition to the overall growth in concern about religious liberty, the big headline of this study is the massive shift in the views of younger practicing Christians, especially Millennials (18 to 31 years old). Just three years ago, these young adults expressed relatively little concern about issues related to religious freedom. Today, they are at least as concerned as their older counterparts—and on some questions, even more so.

Faith Segments | U.S. Adults and Evangelicals

	U.S. adults		Evangelicals	
	2012	2015	2012	2015
Religious freedom in the U.S. has grown worse in the past 10 years	33%	41%	60%	77%
Very concerned about religious freedoms becoming more restricted in the next five years	29%	27%	71%	68%
Agree that true religious freedom means all citizens must have freedom of conscience	90%	87%	95%	96%
Agree that religious freedom has become more restricted in the U.S. because some groups have actively tried to move society away from traditional Christian values	57%	51%	97%	96%
Agree that the gay and lesbian community is the most active group trying to remove Christian values from the country	31%	30%	72%	68%
Traditional Judeo-Christian values should be given preference in the U.S.	23%	26%	54%	76%
No one set of values should dominate the country	66%	72%	37%	25%

Faith Segments | Practicing Christians vs Other Faith and No-Faith Groups

	Practicing Christians		Other Faith		No Faith	
	2012	2015	2012	2015	2012	2015
Religious freedom in the U.S. has grown worse in the past 10 years	44%	52%	19%	32%	23%	32%
Very concerned about religious freedoms becoming more restricted in the next five years	42%	48%	15%	23%	6%	11%
Agree that true religious freedom means all citizens must have freedom of conscience	95%	91%	89%	88%	91%	75%
Agree that religious freedom has become more restricted in the U.S. because some groups have actively tried to move society away from traditional Christian values	72%	70%	34%	25%	29%	30%
Agree that the gay and lesbian community is the most active group trying to remove Christian values from the country	44%	49%	16%	16%	11%	13%
Traditional Judeo-Christian values should be given preference in the U.S.	35%	51%	10%	13%	7%	11%
No one set of values should dominate the country	65%	48%	85%	88%	85%	89%

Faith Segments by Generation | Millennials

	All Millennials		Practicing Christian Millennials	
	2012	2015	2012	2015
Religious freedom in the U.S. has grown worse in the past 10 years	25%	34%	32%	55%
Very concerned about religious freedoms becoming more restricted in the next five years	15%	25%	19%	56%
Agree that true religious freedom means all citizens must have freedom of conscience	89%	80%	99%	94%
Agree that religious freedom has become more restricted in the U.S. because some groups have actively tried to move society away from traditional Christian values	27%	42%	47%	71%
Agree than the gay and lesbian community is the most active group trying to remove Christian values from the country	26%	27%	38%	53%
Traditional Judeo-Christian values should be given preference in the U.S.	21%	21%	26%	55%
No one set of values should dominate the country	73%	79%	66%	45%

Faith Segments by Generation | Gen-Xers

	All Gen-Xers		Practicing Christian Gen-Xers	
	2012	2015	2012	2015
Religious freedom in the U.S. has grown worse in the past 10 years	29%	42%	40%	59%
Very concerned about religious freedoms becoming more restricted in the next five years	26%	28%	43%	51%
Agree that true religious freedom means all citizens must have freedom of conscience	90%	87%	97%	88%
Agree that religious freedom has become more restricted in the U.S. because some groups have actively tried to move society away from traditional Christian values	30%	51%	45%	72%
Agree than the gay and lesbian community is the most active group trying to remove Christian values from the country	27%	28%	46%	53%
Traditional Judeo-Christian values should be given preference in the U.S.	20%	26%	34%	51%
No one set of values should dominate the country	69%	72%	57%	44%

Faith Segments by Generation | Baby Boomers

	All Boomers		Practicing Christian Boomers	
	2012	2015	2012	2015
Religious freedom in the U.S. has grown worse in the past 10 years	38%	46%	46%	52%
Very concerned about religious freedoms becoming more restricted in the next five years	36%	28%	48%	48%
Agree that true religious freedom means all citizens must have freedom of conscience	90%	89%	96%	91%
Agree that religious freedom has become more restricted in the U.S. because some groups have actively tried to move society away from traditional Christian values	44%	54%	64%	69%
Agree than the gay and lesbian community is the most active group trying to remove Christian values from the country	31%	32%	42%	50%
Traditional Judeo-Christian values should be given preference in the U.S.	27%	29%	32%	46%
No one set of values should dominate the country	62%	70%	60%	54%

Faith Segments by Generation | Elders

	All Elders		Practicing Christian Elders	
	2012	2015	2012	2015
Religious freedom in the U.S. has grown worse in the past 10 years	40%	36%	55%	31%
Very concerned about religious freedoms becoming more restricted in the next five years	35%	25%	44%	31%
Agree that true religious freedom means all citizens must have freedom of conscience	89%	92%	91%	94%
Agree that religious freedom has become more restricted in the U.S. because some groups have actively tried to move society away from traditional Christian values	43%	60%	58%	63%
Agree than the gay and lesbian community is the most active group trying to remove Christian values from the country	41%	32%	50%	33%
Traditional Judeo-Christian values should be given preference in the U.S.	26%	34%	34%	29%
No one set of values should dominate the country	56%	63%	51%	70%

Definitions

“Practicing Christians” are self-identified Christians who have attended a church service in the past month and say their religious faith is very important in their life.

“Evangelicals” are self-identified Christians who have made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important in their life today and believe that when they die they will go to Heaven because they had confessed their sins and had accepted Jesus Christ as their savior. They meet seven additional belief criteria, which include saying their faith is very important in their life today; believing they have a personal responsibility to share their religious beliefs about Christ with non-Christians; believing that Satan exists; believing that eternal salvation is possible only through grace, not works; believing that Jesus Christ lived a sinless life on earth; asserting that the Bible is accurate in all that it teaches; and describing God as the all-knowing, all-powerful, perfect deity who created the universe and still rules it today. Being classified as an evangelical is not dependent upon church attendance or the denominational affiliation of the church attended. Respondents were not asked to describe themselves as “evangelical.”

“Other faith” indicates respondents who self-identify with a religion other than Christianity.

“No faith” indicates respondents who self-identify as atheist or agnostic, or who are religiously unaffiliated.

Generations: Millennials were born between 1984 and 2002; Gen-Xers between 1965 and 1983; Boomers between 1946 and 1964; and Elders in 1945 or earlier.

Methodology

This report is based on research conducted in OmniPoll, a shared cost research study conducted by Barna Research (a division of Barna Group). Organizations commission questions in OmniPoll on pay-per-item basis, while Barna Research includes a variety of demographic and theolographic variables for cross-tabulation purposes.

The main study was conducted online with a representative sample of 1,000 U.S. adults 18 and older between August 7 and August 21, 2015. The research also included parallel testing on key measures using telephone surveys, including interviews conducted among respondents using cell phones, to help ensure the representativeness of the online sample. Telephone interviews were conducted from September 3 through September 6, 2015 and included 200 interviews with U.S. adults, ages 18 plus. The sampling error associated with the combined sample of 1,200 interviews is plus or minus 2.7 percentage points, at the 95% confidence level.

The research was jointly commissioned by Barna Group and the Alliance Defending Freedom, which is a policy organization based in Scottsdale, Arizona.

Based upon U.S. Census data sources, regional and ethnic quotas were designed to ensure that the final group of adults interviewed reflected the distribution of adults nationwide and adequately represented the three primary ethnic groups within the U.S. (those groups which comprise at least 10% of the population: white, black and Hispanic).

Guide to Survey Data

Do you remember reading the results of a survey and noticing the fine print that says the results are accurate within plus or minus three percentage points (or some similar number)? That figure refers to the “range of sampling error.” The range of sampling error indicates the accuracy of the results, and it is dependent on two factors: 1) the sample size and 2) the degree to which the result you are examining is close to 50 percent or to the extremes, 0 percent and 100 percent.

You can estimate the accuracy of your survey results using the table below. First, find the column heading that is closest to your sample size. Next, find the row whose label is closest to the response percentages for a particular question from your survey. The intersection of the row and column displays the number of percentage points that need to be added to, and subtracted from, the result to obtain the range of error. There is a 95 percent chance that the true percentage of the group being sampled is in that range.

Result	100	200	300	400	500	600	800	1,000	1,200	1,500	2,000	2,500
05% or 95%	4.4	3.1	2.5	2.2	2.0	1.8	1.5	1.4	1.3	1.1	.96	.87
10% or 90%	6.0	4.3	3.5	3.0	2.7	2.5	2.1	2.0	1.7	1.6	1.3	1.2
15% or 85%	7.1	5.1	4.1	3.6	3.2	2.9	2.5	2.3	2.1	1.9	1.6	1.4
20% or 80%	8.0	5.7	4.6	4.0	3.6	3.3	2.6	2.5	2.3	2.1	1.8	1.6
25% or 75%	8.7	6.1	5.0	4.3	3.9	3.6	3.0	2.8	2.5	2.3	1.9	1.7
30% or 70%	9.2	6.5	5.3	4.6	4.1	3.8	3.2	2.8	2.7	2.4	2.0	1.8
35% or 65%	9.5	6.8	5.5	4.8	4.3	3.9	3.3	3.1	2.8	2.5	2.1	1.9
40% or 60%	9.8	7.0	5.7	4.9	4.4	4.0	3.4	3.1	2.8	2.5	2.2	2.0
45% or 55%	9.9	7.0	5.8	5.0	4.5	4.1	3.5	3.2	2.9	2.6	2.2	2.0
50%	10.0	7.1	5.8	5.0	4.5	4.1	3.5	3.2	2.9	2.6	2.2	2.0

Note that the above statistics only relate to the sampling accuracy of survey results. When comparing the results of two subgroups (e.g., men versus women), a different procedure is followed and usually requires a greater sample size. Further, there is a range of other errors that may influence survey results (e.g., biased question wording, inaccurate data tabulation)—errors whose influence cannot be statistically estimated.