

Perception of Religion's Role in Politics Varies by Issue

U.S. adults' perception of religion's role in politics varies significantly based on the issue in question, according to an Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research ([APNORC](#)) report released Sept. 11.

A recent survey asked respondents to answer the following question regarding 10 issues: "Overall, how much influence do you think religion SHOULD have on government policies concerning each of the following?"

Poverty was the only issue that a majority (57 percent) affirmed that religion should have "a lot/some" influence on government policy.

Responses on education policy were evenly split, with 49 percent of respondents saying religion should influence policy "a lot/some" and 50 percent saying "not much/none."

Three additional issues - abortion, health care and immigration - could be more evenly divided than the overall percentages indicate, given a plus-minus 4.2 percent margin of sampling error.

Regarding abortion, 45 percent of respondents said "a lot/some" and 54 percent "not much/none" about religion's influence on government policy.

Health care received 44 percent "a lot/some" and 55 percent "not much/none," and immigration 43 percent "a lot/some" and 56 percent "not much/none."

"A lot/some" responses for the other five issues - gun control, income inequality, LGBT issues, foreign policy and climate change - accounted for roughly one-third of responses, with "not much/none" representing around two-thirds.

Responses were mixed when asked about the influence of various religious groups in U.S. politics.

Thirty-nine percent said evangelicals have too much influence, while 36 percent said they have the right amount, and 22 percent felt they have too little.

Catholics received a similar response, with 38 percent “too much,” 42 percent “right amount” and 17 percent “too little.”

Views on Muslim groups were more evenly divided at 35 percent, 31 percent and 30 percent, respectively.

When asked about voting, 51 percent of white, born-again Christians said a candidate with strong religious beliefs was “extremely/very important” to them, with 35 percent saying it was “extremely/very important” that the person share their religious views and 43 percent that they share their views regarding religion in politics.

Non-white Protestants shared similar levels of preference at 47 percent, 39 percent and 30 percent, respectively.

By comparison, only 25 percent of Catholics said it was “extremely/very important” for a candidate to have strong religious beliefs, 17 percent for them to share their religious beliefs, and 27 percent that they share their views regarding religion in politics.

The survey also inquired about views regarding a charitable organization’s tax-exempt status vis-à-vis political endorsements.

“Tax exempt charitable groups, including churches and religious organizations, are prohibited from participating in any political campaign,” the report stated. “Most Americans oppose any change to this regulation. Thirteen percent favor allowing religious leaders to endorse political candidates without losing their tax-exempt status and 53 percent oppose the idea.”

The full report is available [here](#).