

# American views of same-sex marriage divided by faith & friendship

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NASHVILLE, Tenn.—Americans who say they have gay or lesbian friends are twice as likely to agree gay marriage should be legal. Fewer than half of Americans say homosexuality is sinful. And evangelicals increasingly are at odds with American culture over same-sex relationships.

Those are among findings of a phone survey of 2,000 Americans about gay marriage from Nashville-based [Lifeway Research](#). Researchers found friendship and faith play an influential role in how Americans view gay marriage.

 Click image for larger view. “When it comes to support for gay marriage, a lot of it depends on who you know,” said Ed Stetzer, executive director of LifeWay Research. “Those who say they have gay or lesbian friends are the most open to gay marriage. Also, regardless of friends, evangelicals are more likely to consider homosexual behavior sinful.”

Currently, 37 states allow gay marriage—although ceremonies are on hold in some places, pending appeals. The Supreme Court will hear arguments soon that could make same-sex marriage legal nationwide.

## **Half of Americans believe gay marriage should be legal**

Overall, half (50 percent) of Americans agree with the statement, “I believe gay marriage should be legal.” That number jumps to six in 10 (60 percent) for Americans who say they have gay or lesbian friends. Among Americans who say they have no gay or lesbian friends, only a third agree gay

marriage should be legal.

Among faith groups, Catholics (56 percent) agree more than Protestants (40 percent) but less than the nonreligious (73 percent).

Evangelicals—those who identify themselves as a born again, evangelical or fundamentalist Christian—are least likely to support gay marriage. Less than a third (30 percent) say gay marriage should be legal. This compares to 38 percent of evangelicals who say they have gay or lesbian friends who agree gay marriage should be legal.

And two-thirds of evangelicals say sex between two people of the same gender remains sinful, whether it is legal or not. Among those who say they have gay or lesbian friends, 62 percent of evangelicals agree.

### **Non-evangelicals**

By contrast, six in 10 (59 percent) non-evangelicals support gay marriage. Just over a third (38 percent) say sex between people of the same gender is sinful.

“Culture is dramatically shifting on the issue,” Stetzer said. “Yet, evangelicals are the most resistant group to that change.”

The study confirmed Americans remain polarized over the question of gay marriage.

A third (36 percent) strongly agree gay marriage should be legal. A third (35 percent) strongly disagree. Few (6 percent) are unsure.

Researchers found similar responses to the statement, “I believe that sex between people of the same gender is sinful, regardless of its legality.” Just under half of Americans agree (46 percent), while the same number disagree. Seven percent are unsure.

## **Is homosexual behavior a sin?**

For comparison, LifeWay Research also conducted an online survey, asking 2,252 Americans, “Do you believe homosexual behavior is a sin?”

In 2014, three in 10 (30 percent) answered “yes.” More than half (54 percent) said no.

By contrast, 37 percent said yes in a similar 2012 survey, and 44 percent said yes in 2011. About four in 10 (43 percent) said homosexual behavior is not a sin in the 2011 survey, along with 45 percent in 2012.

Even if gay marriage becomes legal nationwide, few Protestant senior pastors are likely to officiate at same-sex weddings. Most see same-sex marriages as wrong, according to a LifeWay Research study of 1,000 Protestant senior pastors.

Eight in 10 (80 percent) disagree with the statement, “I see nothing wrong with two people of the same gender getting married.” That includes 74 percent who strongly disagree.

About one in five (18 percent) Protestant senior pastors agree, including one in 10 (11 percent) who strongly agree.

A 2010 LifeWay Research survey of pastors found similar results. In 2010, 83 percent disagreed.

“Church leaders have traditionally been seen as the champions of all things moral in society,” said Stetzer. “As public perceptions of morality change, pastors find themselves in an increasingly unpopular position.”

## **Survey methods**

Researchers conducted the phone survey of Americans Sept. 19-Oct. 5, 2014. The calling utilized Random Digit Dialing. Sixty percent of completes

were among landlines, and 40 percent among cell phones. Analysts used maximum quotas and slight weights for gender, region, age, ethnicity and education to reflect the population more accurately. The completed sample is 2,000 surveys. The sample provides 95 percent confidence the sampling error does not exceed plus or minus 2.4 percent. Margins of error are higher in sub-groups.

The online survey of adult Americans was conducted Sept. 17-18, 2014. Researchers invited a sample of an online panel demographically reflecting the U.S. adult population to participate. Analysts weighted responses by region, age, ethnicity, gender and income to reflect the population more accurately. The completed sample is 2,252 online surveys. Comparisons also are made to the following surveys that used the same methodology: 1,191 surveys Nov. 14-16, 2012 and 2,144 surveys Sept. 23-26, 2011.

The phone survey of Protestant pastors was conducted Sept. 11-18, 2014. The calling list was a stratified random sample drawn from a list of all Protestant churches. Each interview was conducted with the senior pastor, minister or priest of the church called. Responses were weighted by region to reflect the population more accurately. The completed sample is 1,000 surveys. The sample provides 95 percent confidence the sampling error does not exceed plus or minus 3.1 percent. Margins of error are higher in sub-groups.