

# Views on sexual freedom and religious freedom divide Americans

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NASHVILLE (BP)—From cohabitation and same-sex marriage to birth control and bathrooms, Americans can't seem to agree about what is right and wrong regarding sex, and their views often are rooted in faith, according to a LifeWay Research study.

Those disputes can end up in court, in highly divisive and controversial cases. This week, the U.S. Supreme Court agreed to hear the case of a Colorado baker who refused to make a cake for a same-sex wedding.

## **When faith and sexuality clash, which side should prevail?**

About half of Americans (48 percent) say religious freedom is more important than sexual freedom when the values are in conflict, the LifeWay Research survey said. A quarter (24 percent) say sexual freedom is more important, and a slightly higher percentage (28 percent) aren't sure.

"It's clear Americans value religious liberty," said Scott McConnell, executive director of LifeWay Research. "But when it comes to sex, they aren't sure religion should have the final word. That's especially true for younger Americans and those who aren't religious."

LifeWay Research's study is based on new analysis of a survey of 1,000 Americans. Researchers wanted to get a big-picture look at how Americans view conflicts between religious views and sexuality, McConnell said.

## **Divided by geography, religious beliefs and demographics**

Men (30 percent), those in the Northeast (33 percent), Hispanic Americans (31 percent), and those 18 to 44 (30 percent) are more likely to favor sexual freedom over religious freedom. So are nones, those with no religious affiliation, at 49 percent.

Southerners (53 percent), those with evangelical beliefs (90 percent), Protestants (68 percent), African-Americans (58 percent) and those 55 and older (55 percent) are more likely to favor religious freedom over sexual freedom.

Researchers also asked Americans to indicate if the freedom they selected is always more important or usually more important. One in 10 Americans say sexual freedom always matters most. Fourteen percent say sexual freedom usually matters most. Thirty-one percent say religious freedom always matters most, and 17 percent say religious freedom usually matters most. About a quarter (28 percent) are not sure.

Americans with evangelical beliefs are more likely to say religious freedom always matters most (74 percent). So are those who attend religious services at least once a month (56 percent).

Nones (22 percent) are more likely to say sexual freedom always matters most. So are those who attend services less than once a month (13 percent) and those from non-Christian faiths (15 percent).

## **Faith or hate?**

One other major question for LifeWay Research: Do Americans think religious believers are motivated by hate or faith in disputes over sexuality?

About half say faith (49 percent) is the main motivation. One in five (20 percent) say hate. Almost a third aren't sure (31 percent).

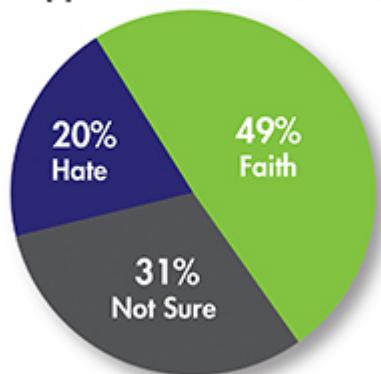
Researchers found a range of responses, based on demographics and

beliefs, to the question: "What do you think motivates sincere religious believers who oppose sexual freedom?"

- Those with evangelical beliefs: faith (77 percent), hate (3 percent), not sure (20 percent)
- African-Americans: faith (61 percent), hate (11 percent), not sure (32 percent)
- Christians: faith (58 percent), hate (13 percent), not sure (29 percent)
- Ages 45-plus: faith (54 percent), hate (15 percent), not sure (32 percent)
- Southerners: faith (53 percent), hate (18 percent), not sure (29 percent)
- Those without evangelical beliefs: faith (44 percent), hate (23 percent), not sure (33 percent)
- Ages 18-44: faith (44 percent), hate (25 percent), not sure (30 percent)
- Attend services less than once a month: faith (42 percent), hate (25 percent), not sure (33 percent)
- Nones: faith (29 percent), hate (34 percent), not sure (36 percent)

Among Americans:

**In general, what do you think motivates sincere religious believers who oppose sexual freedom?**



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Many Americans believe in disputes over sexuality and faith—such as cases of a Christian baker who won't make a cake for a same-sex wedding—religious believers are motivated by their faith, but others are skeptical, McConnell noted.

"About one in five Americans—often those who aren't religious—suspect these disputes are driven by hate," he said. "And a third aren't sure. That's concerning."

LifeWay Research conducted the study Sept. 27-Oct. 1, 2016, using the Web-enabled KnowledgePanel, a probability-based panel designed to be representative of the U.S. population. Initially, participants are chosen scientifically by a random selection of telephone numbers and residential addresses. Persons in selected households are then invited by telephone or by mail to participate in the web-enabled KnowledgePanel. A laptop and Internet connection is provided at no cost to those who agree to participate but do not already have online access.

Researchers used sample stratification and weights for gender, age, race/ethnicity, region, metro/non-metro, education and income to reflect the most recent U.S. Census data. The completed sample is 1,000 surveys, which provides 95 percent confidence the sampling error does not exceed plus or minus 3.1 percent. Margins of error are higher in subgroups.