

# Most churchgoers hear politics from the pulpit

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WASHINGTON (RNS)—Most American churchgoers are hearing politics from the pulpits of their churches during this presidential election season, a new survey reveals.

Nearly two-thirds of the respondents (64 percent) to the Pew Research Center survey say their ministers spoke about at least one political or social issue in the spring and early summer.

And 14 percent said their pastors even spoke about a specific presidential candidate. That's even though churches can be stripped of tax-exempt status for endorsing or opposing a candidate under the Johnson Amendment, which both Donald Trump and the Republican Party platform have said they want to repeal.

But more than three-quarters of all recent churchgoers say the political talk happens "only sometimes, rarely or never,"

## Hot-button topics

Most often, it comes in the form of remarks on political or social issues, according to Pew.

Hot topics included religious liberty and homosexuality, with about 40 percent of recent churchgoers saying they'd heard about either one of those two topics. That was followed by abortion (29 percent) and immigration (27 percent) and, less frequently, environmental issues (22 percent) and economic inequality (18 percent).

Messages on religious liberty and abortion echoed positions traditionally

associated with political and religious conservatives: 32 percent said they had heard from their pastors that religious liberty is under attack, and 22 percent had heard messages against abortion.

Messages on immigration and the environment seemed more aligned with political and religious progressives: 19 percent heard comments welcoming immigrants, and 16 percent on the need to protect the environment.

Pulpit talk was more mixed on homosexuality: 20 percent heard critical views of homosexuality, while 12 percent heard messages encouraging acceptance of LGBT people. Another 7 percent of churchgoers said they had heard both sides from pulpits.

### **Some pastors endorse candidates**

A few recent churchgoers heard pastors endorse (9 percent) or oppose (11 percent) a presidential candidate from the pulpit, according to Pew. Despite some prominent endorsements from evangelical leaders for Donald Trump, more churchgoers have heard their pastors speak against the Republican candidate (7 percent against Trump compared to 4 percent against Hillary Clinton) or for his Democratic opponent (6 percent for Clinton, compared to 1 percent for Trump).

Black Protestants were most likely to hear about the candidates at church: 28 percent had heard messages supporting Clinton (compared to 2 percent supporting Trump) and 20 percent opposing Trump (compared to 7 percent opposing Clinton).

The survey was conducted online and by mail June 7-July 5 among a nationally representative sample of 4,602 adults, Pew reported.