Most in U.S. oppose religious exemptions to LGBT nondiscrimination laws

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WASHINGTON (RNS)—Most Americans oppose religious exemptions to homosexual nondiscrimination laws, according to a new survey.
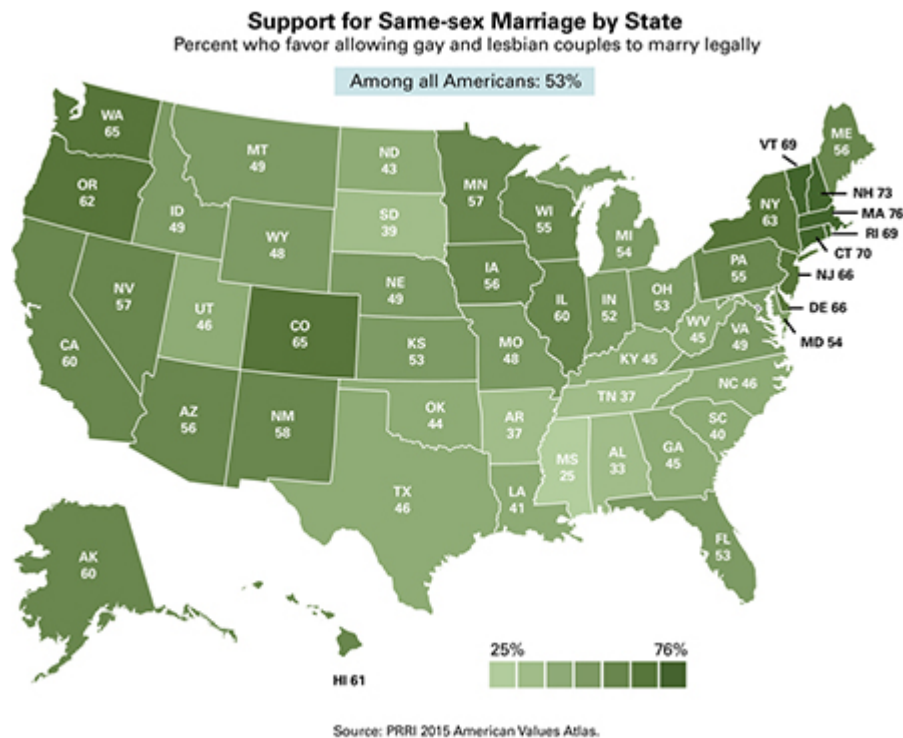
The report comes as a raft of bills before state legislatures would allow people to refuse service or accommodations to gays, lesbians, bisexual and transgender people based on their religious beliefs.

The Public Religion Research Institute, drawing on 42,000 interviews conducted in 2015, issued a new analysis of the American Values Atlas with a look at LGBT issues.

Key findings include:

- 71 percent, including majorities in all 50 states and 30 major metropolitan areas, support laws that would protect gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people from discrimination in jobs, housing and public accommodations.
- 59 percent oppose allowing small-business owners in their state to refuse service to gay and lesbian people if doing so conflicts with their religious beliefs.
- 53 percent of Americans support same-sex marriage, compared with 37 percent—including most evangelical Protestants and Mormons—who oppose it.

Even among groups that oppose same-sex marriage, support for protection from discrimination crosses all "partisan, religious, geographic, and demographic lines," said Robert P. Jones, the institute's chief executive officer.

Support for Same-sex Marriage by State
Percent who favor allowing gay and lesbian couples to marry legally

Among all Americans: 53%

WA 65
MT 49
ND 43
MN 57
VT 69
ME 56
NH 73
MA 76
OR 62
ID 49
WY 48
SD 39
WI 55
NY 63
RI 69
CT 70
NV 57
NE 49
IA 56
MI 54
PA 55
NJ 66
UT 46
CO 65
IL 60
IN 52
OH 53
WV 45
VA 49
DE 66
MD 54
CA 60
KS 53
MO 48
KY 45
NC 46
AZ 56
NM 58
OK 44
AR 37
TN 37
SC 40
MS 25
AL 33
GA 45
TX 46
LA 41
FL 53
AK 60
HI 61

25%   76%

Source: PRRI 2015 American Values Atlas.

This includes 57 percent of white evangelical Protestants, 72 percent of Mormons and 65 percent of African-Americans.

But support for anti-discrimination laws breaks down by party lines over religious exemptions, Jones said. The survey found 74 percent of Democrats but only 40 percent of Republicans oppose allowing small-business owners to refuse to provide products or services to gay or lesbian people if doing so violates their religious beliefs.