

Where do Americans look to solve nation's woes?

January 9, 2017

NASHVILLE (BP)—America has its problems and needs to talk, but few Americans agree on who best can lead a conversation about the nation's woes, a new study reveals.

Less than a quarter (23 percent) would turn to the office of the U.S. president. About one in 10 would turn to the nation's preachers (11 percent) or to college professors (10 percent), a survey by LifeWay Research shows.

"Almost no one would ask a musician or pro athlete, even though they often try to start public conversations," said Scott McConnell, executive director of LifeWay Research. "Musicians or athletes get a great deal of attention for their public statements about the issues, but few Americans seem to look to them as thought leaders."

Before the recent presidential election, LifeWay Research asked a representative sample of 1,000 Americans: “In America today, who is in the best position to generate a healthy conversation on challenges facing our society?”

Among Americans:

In America today, who is in the best position to generate a healthy conversation on the challenges facing our society?



Note: Does not equal 100% due to rounding.



LifeWayResearch.com

Members of the media (8 percent) fared slightly better than business leaders (7 percent) or members of Congress (6 percent). Few Americans look to professional athletes (1 percent) or musicians (less than 1 percent) to lead healthy conversations about the nation’s challenges.

The most common response: “None of these” (33 percent).

Among other findings:

- Southerners are more likely to look to the president (25 percent) than those in the Midwest (18 percent).
- People in the Northeast choose the media (11 percent) more than those in the South (5 percent).
- Younger Americans—ages 18 to 34—look to the media (12 percent) more than those 65 and older (3 percent).
- African Americans are the most likely ethnic group to choose local pastors (21 percent) and the president (37 percent).

- Hispanic Americans are the least likely ethnic group to choose the media (3 percent).
- Christians are more likely to look to pastors (16 percent) than Americans from other faiths (1 percent) or Nones—those with no religious preference—(2 percent).
- Christians (7 percent) are less likely to look to professors than those from other faiths (18 percent) or Nones (15 percent).
- Americans with evangelical beliefs have faith in pastors (36 percent) but little faith in the media (3 percent) or professors (3 percent) to guide such conversations.

Overall, the survey reflects the reality that Americans are fractured and divided, McConnell said. Few leaders can draw a wide, diverse audience.

“There’s a vacuum of public leadership in America,” McConnell said. “We know we have problems and that we should talk about them. But there’s no one who can bring us all together.”

LifeWay Research conducted the study Sept. 27-Oct. 1, 2016, using the web-enabled KnowledgePanel, a probability-based platform designed to be representative of the U.S. population.

Initially, participants are chosen scientifically by a random selection of telephone numbers and residential addresses. People in selected households then are invited by telephone or by mail to participate in the KnowledgePanel online. A laptop and Internet connection are provided at no cost to those who agree to participate but who do not have online access.

Researchers use 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, providing 95 percent confidence that the sampling error does not exceed

plus or minus 3.1 percent. Margins of error are higher in subgroups.