

# People globally want leaders to stand up for believers

August 30, 2024

WASHINGTON (RNS)—A new Pew Research Center study revealed people around the globe favor leaders who stand up for their constituents with religious beliefs, even if the beliefs are not their own.

This survey was conducted between January and May of this year and reflects the data from nationally representative surveys of more than 53,000 respondents in 35 countries.

Residents of Indonesia, Bangladesh and the Philippines stood out as those who most desire national leaders who stand up for people with religious beliefs. Indonesia had the highest percentage of adults (90 percent) who say it is very/somewhat important.

Indonesians and Filipinos also placed at the top of countries where respondents wanted their leader to have strong religious beliefs of their own, along with Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa.

Indonesians and Bangladeshis were the most likely to say they want their leaders to share their beliefs. Both countries are majority Muslim.

Swedish adults were the least likely to say it's vital to have a prime minister with strong religious beliefs, with just 6 percent sharing that view.

In every country, the religiously unaffiliated were the least likely to say that leaders should stand up for people with religious beliefs.

# Young and old generally agree

While that may be expected, the survey presented a wrinkle: Though there is often an age gap when it comes to religiosity, younger and older adults largely agreed in Pew's survey that their president or prime minister should stand up for religious citizens and have a faith of their own.

The exception, said Jonathan Evans, senior researcher at Pew Research Center, is Latin America, where adults under 39 "are consistently less likely to say that each of these traits is important."

Evans said Pew found the United States stood out among wealthier nations in the findings: 64 percent of U.S. respondents said it is important to have a leader who stands up for religious beliefs, a larger percentage than other industrialized nations. Only 42 percent of respondents in Germany and 25 percent of respondents in France agree.

In the United States, two-thirds of respondents say it is important to have a leader at the national level who stands up for people with religious beliefs. Less than half of respondents believed it is essential for their leader to have strong religious beliefs or have religious beliefs that are the same as their own.

This finding has implications as the U.S. election approaches. Vice President Kamala Harris identifies as a Christian and grew up with a Hindu mother, while her running mate, Minnesota Gov. Timothy Walz, is a Lutheran who grew up in a Catholic home.

Former President Donald Trump identifies as a Christian and has drawn support from evangelical Christian voters. His vice presidential pick, U.S. Sen. JD Vance, is an adult convert to Catholicism.