Opinion

Jana Riess

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May 1, 2018

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Most religious groups now support same-sex marriage being legal, according to a study released today from PRRI, the Public Religion Research Institute. The survey, which was based on more than 40,000 survey responses collected throughout 2017, finds that twice as many Americans now support same-sex marriage as oppose it, 61% to 30%.

Not surprisingly, support is strongest among members of religious groups that tend to be politically liberal, such as Jews (77%), the unaffiliated (80%), and Unitarians (an overwhelming 97%).

What is more surprising is how quickly support for same-sex marriage has grown among religious groups that are more politically diverse. Two-thirds of Catholics, Orthodox Christians, and white mainline Protestants now say they are in favor.

What's more, majority support now includes African Americans, whose support for same-sex marriage has increased from 41% in 2013 to 52% today. Hispanic Americans also saw double-digit increases, with support rising from 51% in 2013 to

61% today.

As support has grown, outright opposition has declined, the study shows.

Majorities of Americans in most states support same-sex marriage, with the exceptions all located in the South. Even in the handful of states that do not have more than 50% support for same-sex marriage, they also don't have 50% opposition; Alabama is now the only state in the Union where a majority of residents say they oppose same-sex marriage.

Support growing more slowly among Mormons and Evangelicals

While support is robust among most religious groups, white evangelicals and Mormons remain the only holdouts, and do not express majority support for same-sex marriage. 40% of Mormons and just 34% of white evangelicals say they are in favor.

On the other hand, "there is evidence that even these groups are trending toward majority support," says PRRI.

For one thing, opposition has decreased by double digits in both groups since 2013, and is now at 58% among white evangelicals and 53% among Mormons. A few years ago, opposition had broad support among both groups – 71% of evangelicals and 68% of Mormons said no to same-sex marriage.

For another, the trend lines are clear that younger evangelicals and Mormons are significantly more supportive than their elders. Among evangelicals, for example, twice as many young adults favor same-sex marriage (53%) as those over 65 (25%). Mormon Millennials also showed majority support (52%) compared to Mormons over age 65 (32%).

The study also points out that white evangelical Protestants and Mormons represent a declining "market share" in the American religious landscape today, as their numbers are dwindling or remaining stagnant in comparison to the rapid growth of secularism. While they may hold "outsized political influence," combined they represent fewer than one in five Americans today, says Robert Jones, PRRI's CEO.

Most Americans oppose the "baker exception"

The study also showed that six in ten Americans oppose the idea of religiously based service refusals, which is the issue at the center of a major Supreme Court case this year. The court is considering whether a Colorado cake baker should have the right to refuse service to LGBT couples who are getting married if doing so would violate his religious beliefs.

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Members of most religious groups said business owners should not get to choose which clients to serve. This was particularly true among black Protestants, 65% of whom say that business owners should not have the option of denying service to LGBT customers.

Again, Mormons and evangelicals are the outliers. In both groups, 53% say that business owners should have the right to refuse service to gay and lesbian couples.

On a separate question, every religious group had majority consensus for nondiscrimination measures that provide equal legal protections to LGBT people. The lowest was among white evangelical Protestants, at just 54% support, and the highest among Unitarians, at 95%.

Mormons, the study pointed out, are unique in the large gap that exists between their views on different, but related, issues.

"Only 40% of Mormons favor allowing same-sex couples to marry, yet nearly seven in ten (69%) support laws that would protect LGBT people from discrimination in housing, public accommodations, and employment—a 29-point gap," said the report. "Among no other major religious group is the gap on these two issues larger."

The margin of error for the entire sample is +/- 1.2 percentage points.