News



The White House was lit with the colors of the rainbow on June 26, 2015, after the Supreme Court ruling on same-sex marriage. (Courtesy of the White House/Pete Souza)

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A new survey finds that Americans continue to oppose the idea that small-business owners should be able to refuse products or services to gay or lesbian people due to their religious beliefs.

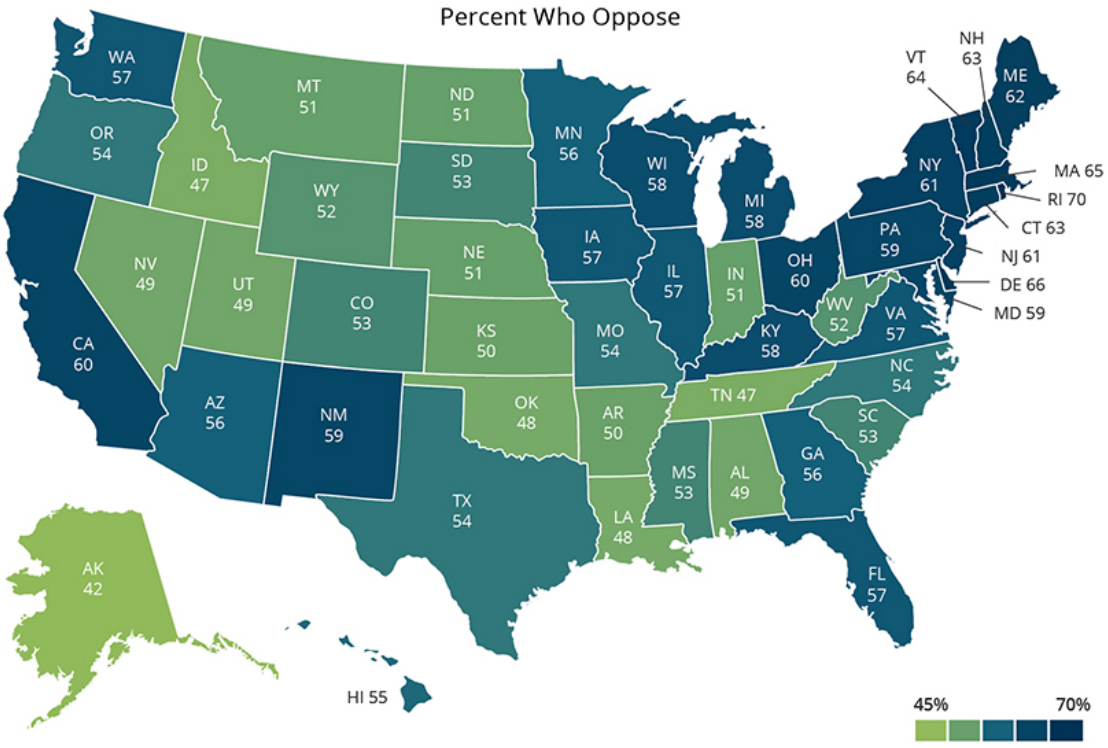
The survey by the Public Religion Research Institute follows up on findings released last week that show strong majorities within all religious groups also support nondiscrimination policies for LGBT Americans.

The findings, which are consistent with earlier opinion, suggest that last year’s U.S. Supreme Court decision in Masterpiece Cakeshop Ltd. v. Colorado Civil Rights Commission had little effect on notions about so-called service refusals. In that highly publicized case, the justices ruled that a Colorado baker had the right to refuse to bake a cake for a gay couple based on his personal religious objections.

The Public Religion Research Institute's latest release shows that about 57 percent of Americans opposed allowing small-business owners to refuse services to LGBT people if it would violate their religious beliefs, a modest but statistically insignificant decrease from 2016, when 61 percent said they opposed service refusals, and 2017, when 60 percent said they opposed them.

FIGURE 10. Opposition to Religiously Based Service Refusals of Gay and Lesbian People by State

Allowing a small business owner in their state to refuse to provide products or services to gay or lesbian people, if doing so violates their religious beliefs.



Sources: PRRI 2018 American Values Atlas.

“Opposition to Religiously Based Service Refusals of Gay and Lesbian People by State” (Courtesy of PRRI)

"The support we’ve seen on these questions has been pretty stable," said Public Religion Research Institute Senior Research Associate Maxine Najle. "The general public has been fairly supportive of LGBT issues for a while now. The differences are within the margin of error."

As in the past, majorities of most major religious groups broadly oppose religiously based service refusals, including 54 percent of white mainline Protestants, 66 percent of black Protestants, 52 percent of Hispanic Protestants and 55 percent of white Catholics.

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White evangelicals and Mormons were the outliers — 55 percent of white evangelicals and 54 percent of Mormons favored service refusals to gays and lesbians if doing so violates a business owner’s religious beliefs.

TABLE 1. Most Religious Traditions Oppose Religiously Based Service Refusals of Gay and Lesbian People

Allowing a small business owner in your state to refuse to provide products or services to gay or lesbian people, if doing so violates their religious beliefs.

Religious Tradition	Favor	Oppose
All Americans	**36**	**57**
Protestant	43	50
White evangelical Protestant	*55*	*37*
White mainline Protestant	*40*	*54*
Black Protestant	*28*	*66*
Hispanic Protestant	*37*	*52*
Other nonwhite Protestant	*43*	*47*
Catholic	36	57
White Catholic	*38*	*55*
Hispanic Catholic	*31*	*61*
Other nonwhite Catholic	*33*	*59*
Orthodox Christian	39	53
Jehovah's Witness	39	43
Mormon	54	40
Unitarian/Universalist*	14	83
New Age religion	26	69
Jewish	27	68
Buddhist	31	66
Muslim	25	60
Hindu	33	60
Other religion	35	57
Unaffiliated	27	66

Source: PRRI 2018 American Values Atlas.

Note: Sample size for Unitarian/Universalist is under n=100; interpret results with caution.

“Most Religious Traditions Oppose Religiously Based Service Refusals of Gay and Lesbian People” (Courtesy of PRRI)

Politically, the split was more distinct. Some 65 percent of conservative Republicans supported such refusals, compared with 44 percent of moderate Republicans and 35 percent of liberal Republicans. Democrats, by contrast, are united in their opposition to service refusals.

Younger Americans of all races were about 10 percentage points more likely than their older counterparts to oppose religiously based refusals. But Public Religion Research Institute pollsters noted that among white evangelicals, the differences in opposition to religiously based service refusals between younger and older generations were more modest (43 percent vs. 39 percent).

The survey also found regional differences. Not surprisingly, residents of the Northeast were more likely to oppose religiously based service refusals.

But in 10 states — Arkansas, Kansas, Alabama, Nevada, Oklahoma, Utah, Louisiana, Idaho, Tennessee and Alaska — slight majorities support religious vendors' right to refuse service based on their beliefs.

Most major metropolitan areas oppose religiously based service refusals, with three exceptions: Nashville, Tenn.; Las Vegas; and Raleigh, N.C., where opposition was more muted.

The survey found a more dramatic uptick in views related to same-sex marriage. Sixty-two percent of Americans say gay and lesbian couples should be allowed to marry legally, a nearly 10-point increase from 2015, when 53 percent said they favored same-sex marriage. The Supreme Court ruled in 2015 that same-sex couples have a constitutional right to marry.