

Four in 10 Americans think clergy should endorse candidates

Adelle M. Banks Religion News Service | Sep. 20, 2008

WASHINGTON -- Four in 10 Americans believe that religious leaders should be permitted to endorse political candidates from the pulpit without risking their organization's tax-exempt status, a new survey by the First Amendment Center shows.

Twenty-two percent of respondents "strongly" agreed and 18 percent "mildly" agreed that religious leaders should be able to make such endorsements, which are currently prohibited by IRS regulations.

In comparison, 39 percent strongly disagreed, 15 percent mildly disagreed and 6 percent didn't know or refused to answer.

The finding was based on a new question in the Washington-based center's annual "State of the First Amendment" national survey.

When asked to name specific rights guaranteed by the First Amendment, just 15 percent mentioned religion, the lowest percentage to recall that topic since 2000.

Asked if Americans have too much or too little religious freedom, 6 percent said they had too much, 28 percent said they had too little and 62 percent said they had about the right amount.

Fifty-five percent strongly or mildly agreed that people should be permitted to say things in public that could be offensive to religious groups. Forty-two percent mildly or strongly disagreed.

Asked about freedom of worship, 54 percent said the concept applies to all religious groups regardless of how extreme their beliefs may be. In comparison, 29 percent said it was never meant to apply to religious groups that the majority of people consider to be extreme.

The national telephone survey of 1,005 respondents was conducted this summer has a margin of error of plus or minus 3.5 percentage points.

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