

Immediate Release – July 8, 2019**NEW AP-NORC POLL REVEALS A SKEPTICAL PUBLIC WHEN IT COMES TO ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF RELIGIOUS LEADERSHIP IN THE COUNTRY**

Among adults with a religious affiliation, only 3 in 10 regularly consult religious leaders when making important decisions in their lives.

CHICAGO, July 8, 2019 — Fifty-five percent of Americans say religious leaders have a positive impact on society and 34 percent describe them as extremely or very trustworthy, according to a recent survey conducted by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. Yet, these percentages are much smaller than the roughly three-quarters of Americans who believe that teachers, doctors, scientists, and members of the military positively influence society today.

Forty-seven percent say they would welcome the influence of clergy in their life. But few adults overall consult clergy or other religious leaders when making important decisions in their life. Among those who have a religious affiliation, 30 percent say they consult a clergy member often or sometimes when making an important decision.

This poll is the first Associated Press (AP) content funded through a [\\$4.9 million dollar grant](#) from the Lilly Endowment Inc. to the Religion News Foundation and three media organizations: AP, Religion News Service, and The Conversation. It is one of the largest investments in religion journalism in decades. The 18-month grant is part of the Lilly Endowment's support for efforts that strengthen public understanding of religion. As part of the initiative, The AP-NORC Center will produce several polls over the next year focusing on religion and faith.

Twenty-one percent of adults say they would be extremely or very likely to consult religious leaders about volunteering or charitable donations, or concerning their relationships. Fewer than 10 percent would be likely to consult about medical decisions, work life, family planning, political activity, financial decisions, or sex and sexuality. Among parents, 18 percent would be likely to seek advice on child rearing and 16 percent would be likely to seek advice on their child's education.

"These survey results help break down Americans' complex attitudes about religious leaders following continued clergy scandals," said Trevor Tompson, director of The AP-NORC Center. "The findings reveal public acceptance to expanding the clergy ranks to include women, people who have been divorced, gays, and those with liberal policy views."

Having a religious affiliation of any kind has a significant impact on attitudes toward religious leaders. The 76 percent who identify with a religion are more likely to believe clergy have a positive impact on society and are also more likely to hold conservative positions on some social policies.

Among those who have a religious affiliation, about 8 in 10 say they support their faith allowing women and people who are divorced to become members of their clergy. Fewer say a gay man or someone with liberal leanings on hot-button issues should be allowed. However, those with higher levels of education are more likely to say women, gay people, and divorcees should be allowed to become a member of the clergy. Women and adults under age 60 are also more likely to say gay men should be allowed.

Those who have a religion hold more conservative policy positions about same-sex marriage and abortion. Overall, 49 percent of adults strongly or somewhat support same-sex marriage in their state, 26 percent somewhat or strongly oppose it, and 24 percent neither favor nor oppose. Forty-four percent of adults with a religion say they support same-sex marriage, compared with 69 percent of adults without a religion.

About the Study

This survey was conducted by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research from May 17 to 20, 2019, using the AmeriSpeak Panel®, the probability-based panel of NORC at the University of Chicago. Online and telephone interviews using landlines and cell phones were conducted with 1,137 adults age 18 and over representing the 50 states and the District of Columbia, with 1,023 via the web and 114 via telephone. Interviews were conducted in both English and Spanish, depending on respondent preference. The final stage completion rate is 18.9 percent, the weighted household panel response rate is 32.1 percent, and the weighted household panel retention rate is 89.1 percent, for a cumulative response rate of 5.4 percent. The overall margin of sampling error is +/- 4.1 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level, including the design effect. Among adults with a religious affiliation, the overall margin of sampling error is +/- 4.6 percentage points. Among adults with a religious affiliation who attend church services at least two to three times a month, the overall margin of sampling error is +/- 7.0 percentage points. Among adults with a religious affiliation who attend church services less often than two to three times a month, the overall margin of sampling error is +/- 5.7 percentage points. Adults without a religious affiliation have an overall margin of sampling error of +/- 8.4 percentage points. The margin of sampling error may be higher for other subgroups.

Once the sample has been selected and fielded, and all the study data have been collected and made final, a poststratification process is used to adjust for any survey nonresponse as well as any noncoverage or under- and oversampling resulting from the study-specific sample design. Poststratification variables included age, gender, census division, race/ethnicity, and education. Weighting variables were obtained from the 2018 Current Population Survey. The weighted data reflect the U.S. population of adults age 18 and over.

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The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research

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The two organizations have established The AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research to conduct, analyze, and distribute social science research in the public interest on newsworthy topics, and to use the power of journalism to tell the stories that research reveals.

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