



The Associated Press-NORC
Center for Public Affairs Research

ATTITUDES TOWARD CLERGY AND RELIGIOUS LEADERSHIP

A new poll from The AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research explores Americans' views on clergy and religious leaders, their role in U.S. society today, and the influence they have on individuals' day-to-day lives. The results reveal a public with middling feelings toward religious leaders: 55% of adults say religious leaders have a positive impact on society, and 34% describe them as extremely or very trustworthy. Forty-seven percent would welcome the influence of clergy in their life.

These findings come in the wake of continued clergy sexual abuse scandals that have rocked the Catholic Church. Having a religious affiliation of any kind has a significant impact on attitudes toward religious leaders—the 76% of Americans 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 policy positions when it comes to same-sex marriage and abortion access. Frequency of church attendance also has a significant impact on attitudes among those with a religious affiliation.

Few adults overall consult clergy or other religious leaders when making important decisions in their life. Among those who have a religious affiliation, 30% say they consult a clergy member often or sometimes when making an important decision. Among those who attend church at least two to three times a week, however, this number jumps to 49%.

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.



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Three Things To Know

about The AP-NORC Poll on Religion
Among American Adults:

- 1) 55% say clergy members and religious leaders have a positive impact on society, fewer than those who say teachers (84%), medical doctors (83%), scientists (80%), and members of the military (75%) have a positive impact.
- 2) 49% of adults with a religious affiliation who regularly attend services seek counsel on important decisions, but that falls to 16% among religious people who don't attend as often.
- 3) Democrats and Republicans often diverge in their views on the role of clergy in society, though frequency of church attendance can mute this difference.

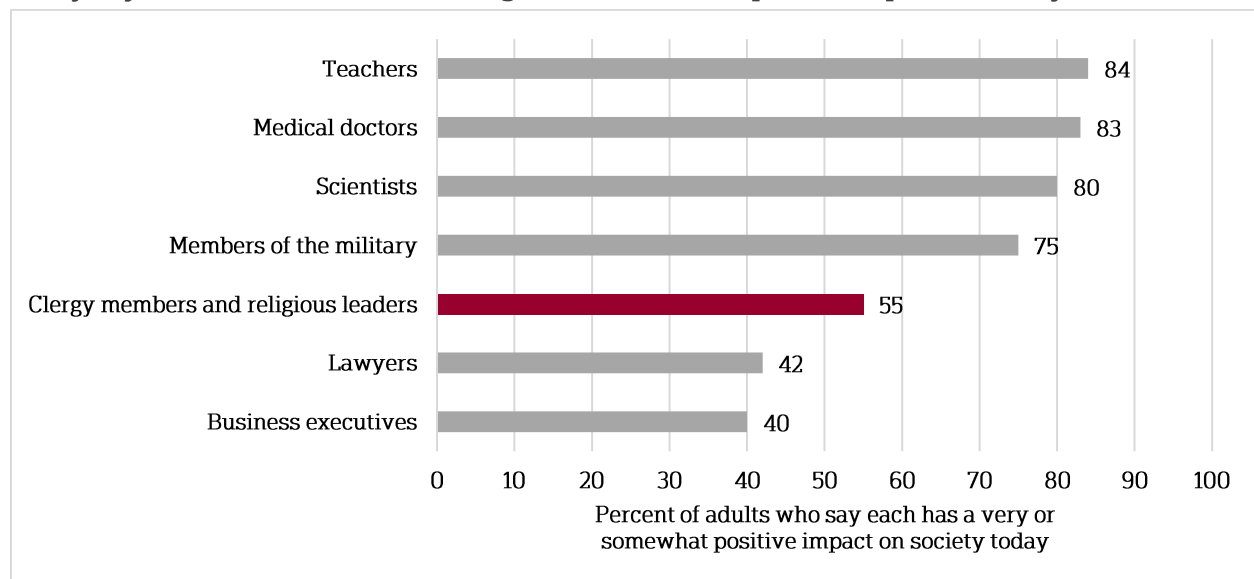
The study also takes a close look at the relationships between partisanship, religiosity, and views on clergy. It finds that while Republicans tend to hold more positive views toward the role of clergy in society and more restrictive views on who should be allowed to become religious leaders than do Democrats, religious service attendance can have a diluting effect on these differences. For example, when it comes to the type of individuals that should be admitted to the clergy, Democrats who attend religious services more frequently hold views more similar to Republicans than to those of Democrats who attend religious services less often.

The nationwide poll was conducted May 17-20, 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. The margin of sampling error is plus or minus 4.1 percentage points.

FEWER ADULTS SAY CLERGY HAVE A POSITIVE IMPACT ON SOCIETY TODAY THAN DO TEACHERS, DOCTORS, SCIENTISTS, AND MEMBERS OF THE MILITARY.

Fifty-five percent of Americans believe clergy members and religious leaders have a positive impact on society, far fewer than the three-fourths of Americans who say teachers, medical doctors, scientists, and members of the military do. About 4 in 10 say lawyers and business executives have a positive impact.

A majority of Americans believe that religious leaders have a positive impact on society.



Question: Thinking about each of the following professions, would you say their impact on society today is mostly positive, mostly negative, or neither positive nor negative?

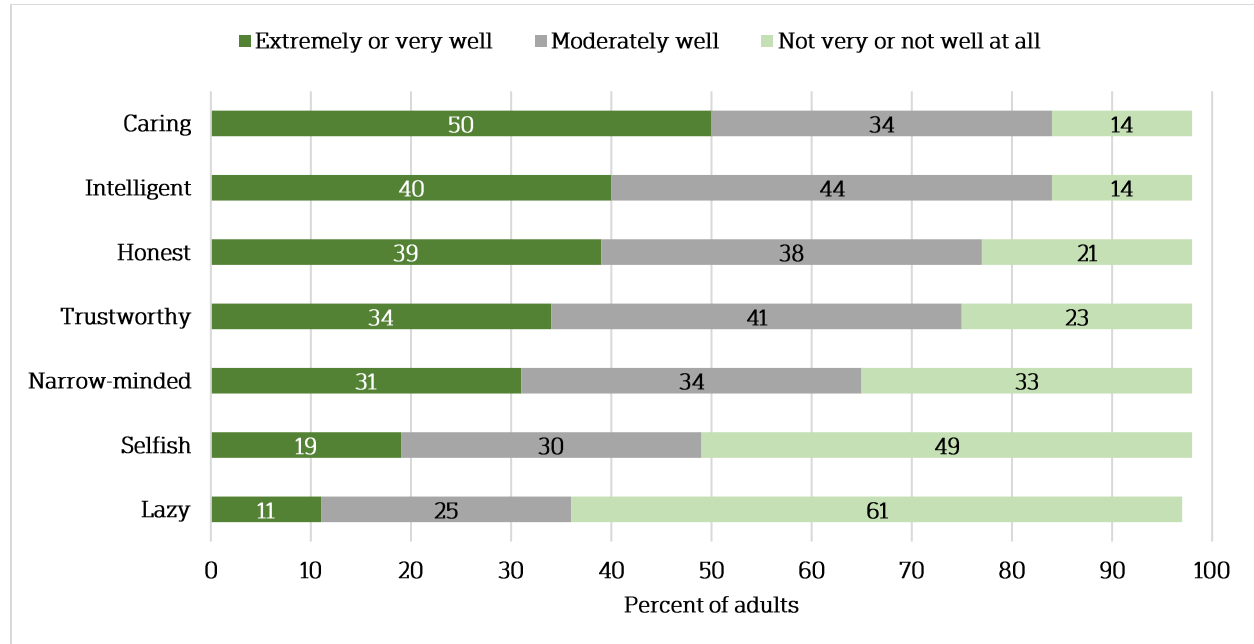
Source: AP-NORC poll conducted May 17-20, 2019, with 1,137 adults

Adults who have a religion view the impact of clergy members and religious leaders more favorably. Those with a religion are twice as likely to say clergy have a positive impact (62% vs. 32%). Among adults with a religion, those who attend religious services at least two to three times a month are more likely to say clergy have a positive impact than those who attend less frequently (77% vs. 51%).

Older adults and women are also more likely to say members of the clergy have a positive impact on society.

When it comes to specific personality traits, half of adults say that clergy are caring, but fewer say the positive traits of honesty, intelligence, and trustworthiness describe clergy and religious leaders extremely or very well. Only small numbers say negative traits like selfishness, laziness, and narrow-mindedness describe clergy members well.

Half of Americans say clergy and religious leaders are caring. Small minorities say they are selfish or lazy.



Question: Thinking about your own experiences, please tell me how well you think each of the following traits describes clergy members and religious leaders.

Source: AP-NORC poll conducted May 17-20, 2019, with 1,137 adults

Adults who have a religion are more likely to describe clergy members as intelligent, honest, trustworthy, and caring, while those without a religion are more likely to describe clergy members as selfish. Among those with a religion, those who attend religious services at least two to three times a month are more likely to believe members of the clergy are intelligent than those who don't attend frequently (61% vs. 37%). Frequent attenders are also more likely to say clergy are caring, honest, and trustworthy. Those who don't attend frequently are more likely to say clergy are narrow-minded.

HALF OF AMERICANS HAVE BEEN INFLUENCED BY CLERGY OR RELIGIOUS LEADERS IN THEIR LIFE; SLIGHTLY FEWER WELCOME THE INFLUENCE.

Overall, 55% of Americans say clergy members or religious leaders have had a lot or some influence in their life, and 45% say they've had not much or no influence at all.

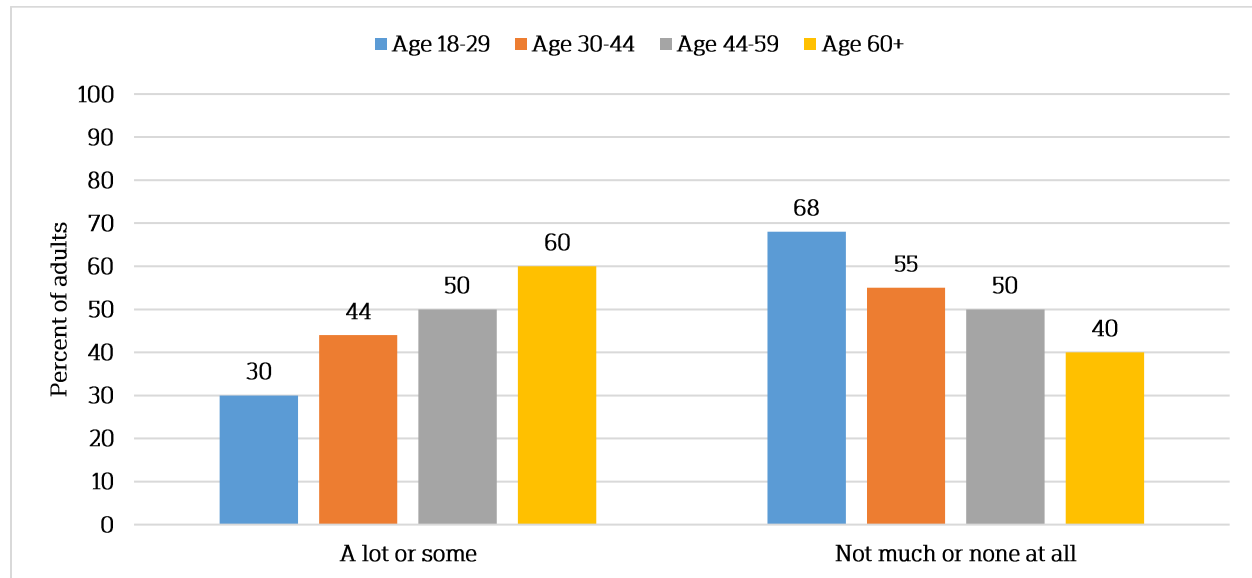
Those with a religious affiliation are more than twice as likely to say clergy have had an influence (63% vs. 26%). Among adults who have a religion, those who attend services regularly are nearly 40 percentage points more likely to say clergy members or religious leaders have influenced their life (85% vs. 47%).

Slightly fewer adults want clergy in their life. Just under half (47%) say they want clergy members to have a lot or some influence in their life. Among parents of children under the age of 18, just over half (52%) say they want clergy members to have a lot or some influence in their child's life.

The desire for influence increases among those who have a religion: 59% want clergy to have a lot or some influence in their life, and 41% want clergy to have not much or no influence at all. Just 7% of adults with no religious affiliation want clergy to have an influence in their life.

In addition, older adults and women are more likely to say they want clergy to have an influence in their life.

Older Americans are more likely to welcome the influence of religious leaders.



Question: How much influence do you want clergy members or religious leaders to have in your life?

Source: AP-NORC poll conducted May 17-20, 2019, with 1,137 adults

Among parents, similar trends emerge. Few parents with no religion want clergy to have an influence in their child's life (9%). Among those with a religion, 62% say they want clergy to have a lot or some influence in their child's life, and 38% want clergy to have not much or no influence at all.

FEW ADULTS CONSULT CLERGY OR OTHER RELIGIOUS LEADERS ON IMPORTANT DECISIONS OR ON VARIOUS ASPECTS OF THEIR LIFE.

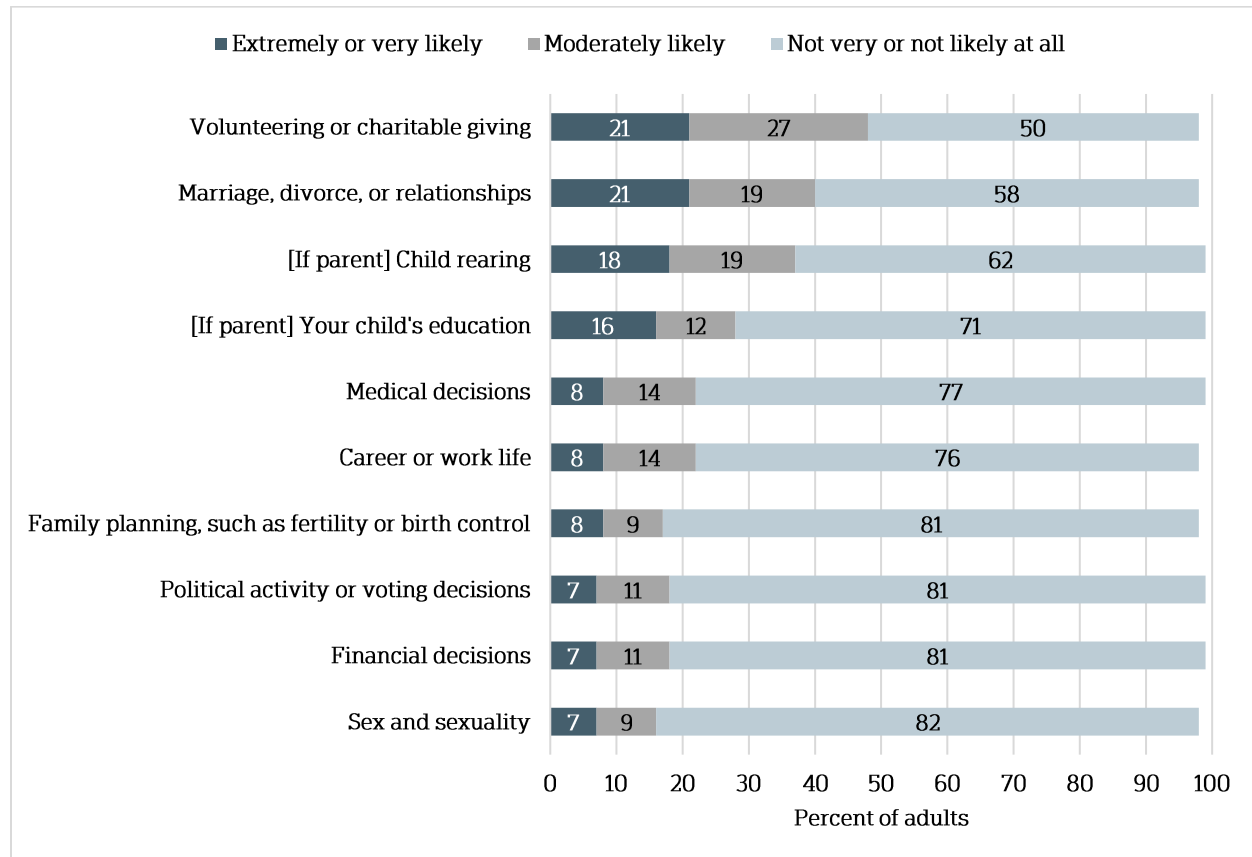
Twenty-four percent of Americans say they consult a clergy member often or sometimes when making important decisions, while 75% say they consult a clergy member rarely or never. Adults with a religion are more likely to consult a clergy member about important decisions (30% vs. 4%). Among those with a religion, those that regularly attend services are over three times as likely to seek consult from clergy members as those who attend less frequently (49% vs. 16%).

Among those who have consulted a clergy member or religious leader when making important decisions, 43% say it was extremely or very valuable, 40% say it was moderately valuable, and 16% say it wasn't very or wasn't valuable at all.

One in five adults seek advice from clergy when it comes to volunteering or giving charitable donations, or concerning their relationships. Fewer are likely to consult clergy about their medical decisions, finances, or other day-to-day decisions. Among parents, 18%¹ are likely to seek advice on child rearing, and 16% are likely to seek advice on their child's education.

¹ All respondents were asked about child rearing. This issue brief reports the numbers only among parents.

One in five Americans consult religious leaders on their charity work or relationships. Fewer consult religious leaders on other topics.



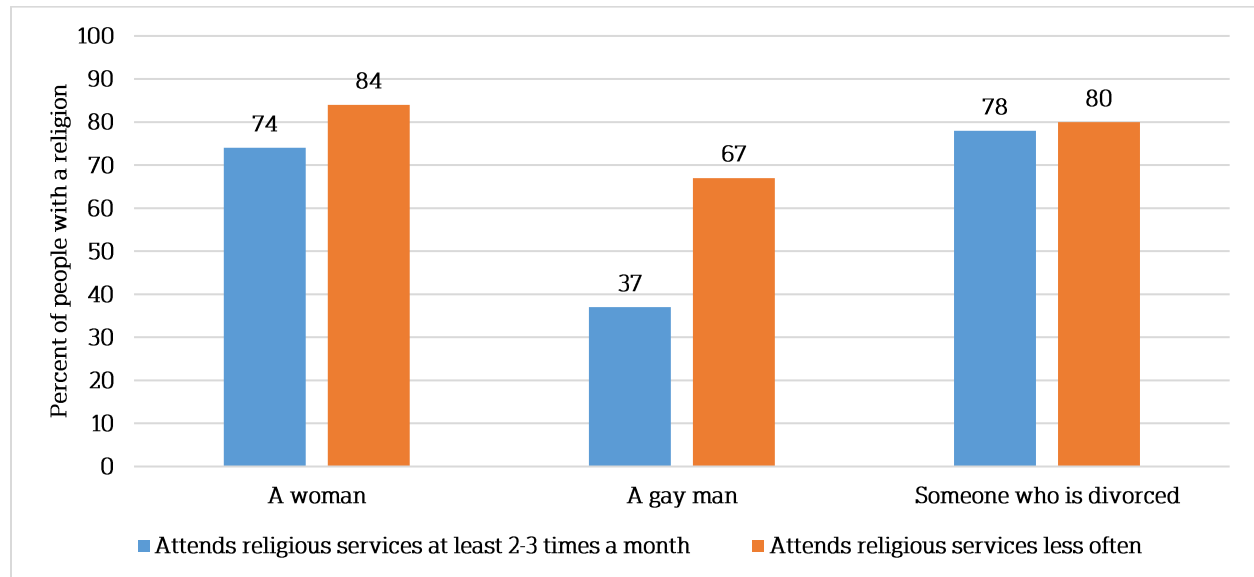
Question: How likely are you to consult a clergy member or religious leader about each of the following areas of your life?
 Source: AP-NORC poll conducted May 17-20, 2019, with 1,137 adults

A MAJORITY OF ADULTS WHO IDENTIFY WITH A RELIGION ARE OPEN TO SOME DIVERSITY IN THEIR RELIGIOUS LEADERS.

Among adults with a religion, a large majority say their faith should allow women and people who are divorced to become members of the clergy (80% and 79%, respectively). There is more division when it comes to allowing gay men to become members of the clergy, with 55% of adults saying they should be allowed.

Those who attend church more often are less likely to say women and gay men should be allowed to become a member of the clergy.

Among those with a religion, frequent attenders are less likely to say their faith should allow women and gay men to become clergy.



Questions: Do you think your faith should allow each of the following to become a member of the clergy, or not?

Source: AP-NORC poll conducted May 17-20, 2019, with 1,137 adults

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.

When it comes to religious leaders' beliefs about hot-button issues, Americans who have a religion are split. Fifty-four percent say a person who believes that sex before marriage is morally acceptable should be able to become a member of the clergy, 53% say the same about someone who believes same-sex marriage should be legal, and 48% say a person who believes abortion should be legal should be able to become a member of the clergy.

Among those with a religious affiliation, those who attend religious services more often are less likely to approve of someone becoming a clergy member if they believe same-sex marriage or abortion should be legal or that sex before marriage is morally acceptable, compared with infrequent attendees.

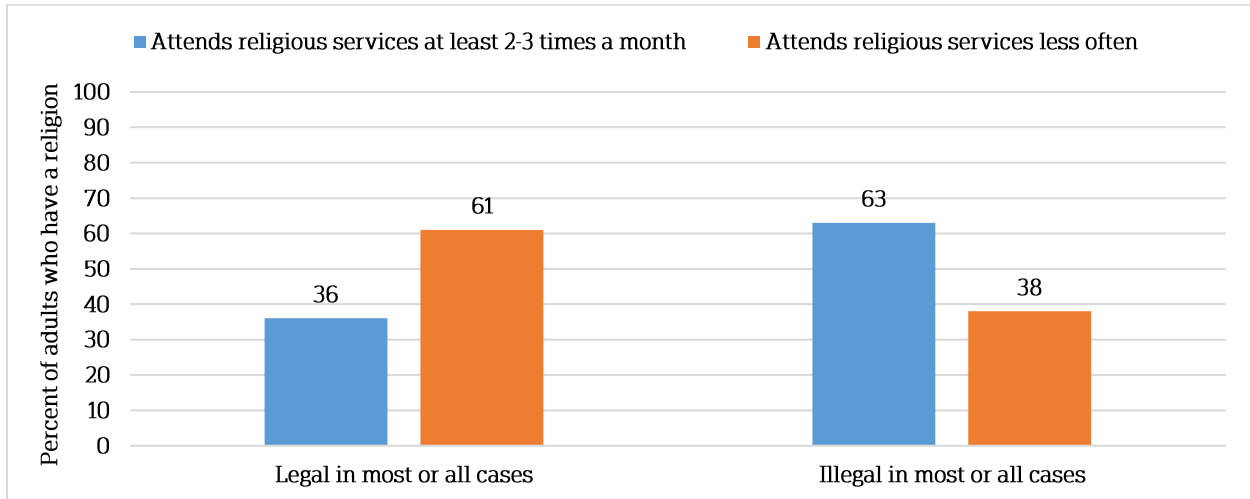
Adults younger than 50 with a religion are more likely than older adults with a religion to say their faith should allow someone who believes in same-sex marriage or someone who believes abortion should be legal to become a member of the clergy.

THOSE WHO HAVE A RELIGION HOLD MORE CONSERVATIVE POLICY POSITIONS WHEN IT COMES TO SAME-SEX MARRIAGE AND ABORTION.

Overall, 49% of adults strongly or somewhat support same-sex marriage in their state, 26% somewhat or strongly oppose it, and 24% neither favor nor oppose. Forty-four percent of adults with a religion say they support same-sex marriage compared with 69% of adults without a religion.

When it comes to attitudes toward abortion, 57% of adults say it should be legal in all or most cases, and 42% say it should be illegal in all or most cases. Those with a religion are more likely than those without a religion to say abortion should be illegal in at least some instances (49% vs. 19%). Among those with a religion, support for legal abortion increases as church attendance decreases.

Among adults who have a religion, those who attend church more frequently are less likely to support legal abortion.



Question: Which comes closest to your opinion on abortion? Abortion should be...

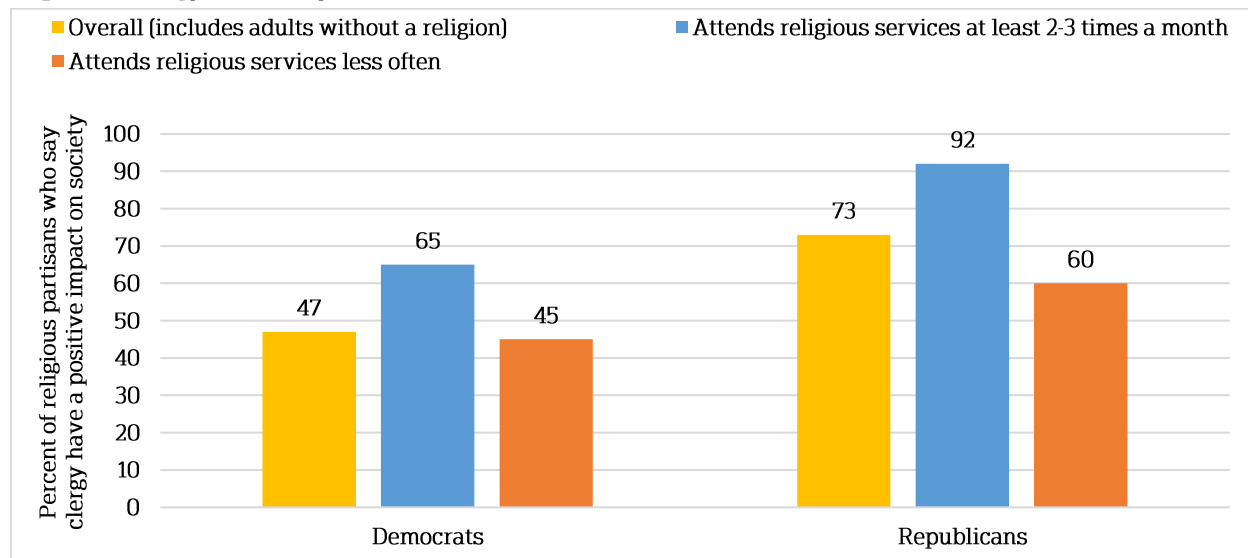
Source: AP-NORC poll conducted May 17-20, 2019, with 1,137 adults

RELIGIOUS SERVICE ATTENDANCE CAN MITIGATE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN RELIGIOUS DEMOCRATS AND RELIGIOUS REPUBLICANS.

While Republicans and Democrats often have diverging views on the role of clergy in society, frequency of church attendance can have a diluting effect.

Republicans overall are more likely than Democrats to believe clergy members have a positive impact on society. However, when looking just at partisans who have a religious affiliation, the frequency of religious service attendance impacts attitudes: those who attend church services at least two to three times a month are more likely to say clergy members have a positive impact compared to those who attend church services less often. Views of Democrats who attend church services with more regularity are more similar to Republicans overall than to Democrats who attend church services less often.

Religious Democrats hold similar views to Republicans overall when it comes to their views on the impact of clergy on society.



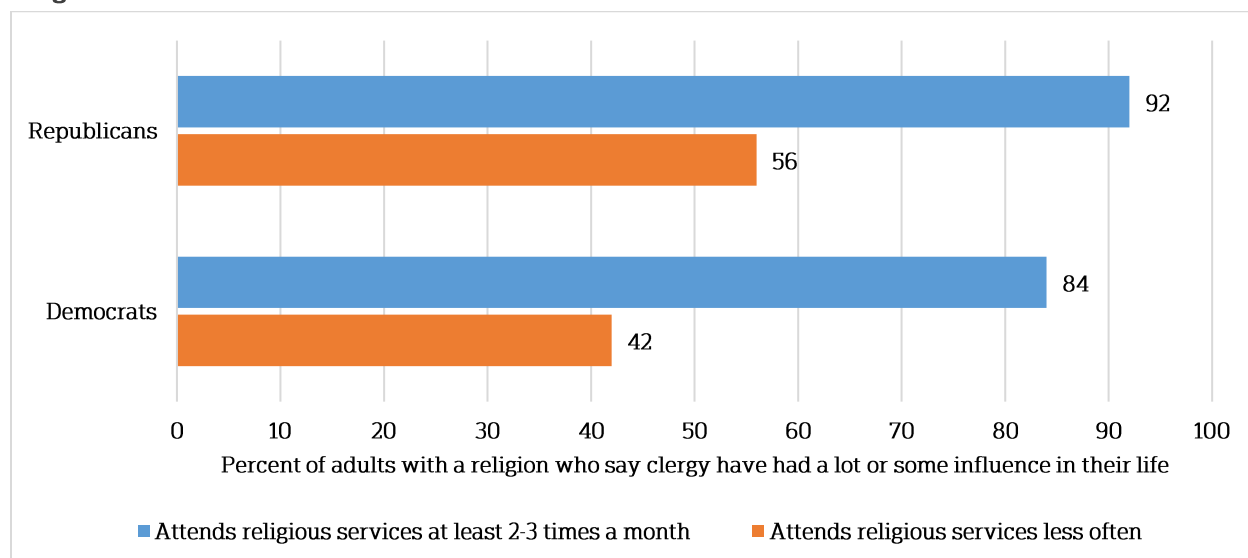
Question: Thinking about each of the following professions, would you say their impact on society today is mostly positive, mostly negative, or neither positive nor negative?

Source: AP-NORC poll conducted May 17-20, 2019, with 1,137 adults

A similar pattern holds when it comes to the influence clergy have had on Democrats' and Republicans' lives, who they believe should be allowed to become clergy, and their views on same-sex marriage and abortion.

Forty-nine percent of Democrats overall have been influenced by clergy compared with 69% of Republicans. Among partisans who have a religion, Republicans are more likely than Democrats to say they've been influenced by clergy in their life (73% vs. 58%). However, similar percentages of Democrats and Republicans who have a religion and who attend church at least two to three times a month say they've been influenced by clergy or religious leaders.

Frequent church attendees, regardless of party, are highly likely to have been influenced by clergy and religious leaders.



Question: How much influence have clergy members or religious leaders had in your life?

Source: AP-NORC poll conducted May 17-20, 2019, with 1,137 adults

Democrats are more likely than Republicans to say women (87% vs. 73%) and gay people should be allowed to serve (71% vs. 37%, respectively). Similar numbers of Democrats and Republicans who attend religious services two to three times a month or more say women should be allowed to become members of the clergy, while large differences remain when it comes to a gay person becoming a member of the clergy.

Democrats are more than twice as likely as Republicans to say that their faith should allow someone who believes that abortion (70% vs. 27%) or same-sex marriage (71% vs. 34%) should be legal to be clergy. Democrats are also more likely than Republicans to say someone who believes that sex before marriage is morally acceptable should be allowed to become a member of the clergy (67% vs. 42%). When looking at religious attendance, Democrats who attend religious services more frequently hold more similar views to Republicans than to Democrats who attend religious services with less frequency.

Among partisans who have a religion, Democrats are more than twice as likely as Republicans to favor same-sex marriage (63% vs. 25%). More than 7 in 10 Democrats who do not attend religious services regularly favor same-sex marriage compared with 48% of Democrats who do attend religious services regularly, 35% of Republicans who do not attend religious services regularly, and 17% of Republicans who do attend religious services regularly.

When it comes to attitudes toward abortion, Democrats are more than twice as likely as Republicans to say abortion should be legal in all or most cases (77% vs. 30%). For both Democrats and Republicans, support for legal abortion decreases as church attendance increases.

STUDY METHODOLOGY

This survey was conducted by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research and with funding from The Associated Press and NORC at the University of Chicago.

Data were collected using the AmeriSpeak Omnibus®, a monthly multi-client survey using NORC's probability-based panel designed to be representative of the U.S. household population. The survey was part of a larger study that included questions about other topics not included in this report. During the initial recruitment phase of the panel, randomly selected U.S. households were sampled with a known, non-zero probability of selection from the NORC National Sample Frame and then contacted by U.S. mail, email, telephone, and field interviewers (face-to-face). The panel provides sample coverage of approximately 97% of the U.S. household population. Those excluded from the sample include people with P.O. Box only addresses, some addresses not listed in the USPS Delivery Sequence File, and some newly constructed dwellings.

Interviews for this survey were conducted between May 17 and 20, 2019, with adults age 18 and over representing the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Panel members were randomly drawn from AmeriSpeak, and 1,137 completed the survey—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%, the weighted household panel response rate is 32.1%, and the weighted household panel retention rate is 89.1%, for a cumulative response rate of 5.4%. The overall margin of sampling error is +/- 4.1 percentage points at the 95% 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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ABOUT THE ASSOCIATED PRESS-NORC CENTER FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS RESEARCH

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- NORC at the University of Chicago is one of the oldest and most respected, independent research institutions in the world.

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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