

## Religious Beliefs and Political Issues

September 17, 2010

<http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1733/religious-beliefs-political-views-gay-marriage-abortion-immigration-environment-poverty>

### Overview

Substantial numbers of Americans continue to say their religious beliefs have been influential in shaping their views about social issues, including abortion and same-sex marriage. But far fewer cite religion as a top influence on their opinions about several other social and political issues, including how the government should deal with immigration, the environment and poverty.

Despite the fact that many religious leaders have been outspoken advocates for immigration reform, just 7% of adults who take a position on immigration say that religion is the most important influence on their views on this issue. About one-in-four churchgoers (24%) say the clergy at their

places of worship have spoken out about immigration, nearly the same as in 2006. About half of those who hear about immigration in church say their clergy are favorable to immigrants and immigration, but nearly one-quarter are hearing anti-

In contrast with the issue of immigration, 35% say religion is the top influence on their thinking about same-sex marriage, including fully 60% among those who oppose allowing gays and lesbians to marry legally. More than four-in-ten (44%) hear clergy speak out about homosexuality in church, with the overwhelming majority hearing negative messages about homosexuality. On the issue of abortion, 26% overall say religion is the most important influence on their opinion, including 45% among abortion opponents.

The death penalty is another issue on which a substantial number of Americans cite religion as a key influence. Nearly one-in-five (19%) say religion is the most important factor in their thinking, including about one-third (32%) among death penalty opponents. Just 13% of death penalty supporters say religion is the key influence on their opinion.

The vast majority of regular churchgoers (88%) say they hear about the issue of hunger and poverty from their clergy, but just 10% cite religion as

### Where Religion Matters Most – Views on Same-Sex Marriage, Abortion

% citing religion as most important influence on opinion	Among those whose positions on the issue are...		
	Total*	Liberal	Conservative
	%	%	%
Same-sex marriage	35	5	60
Abortion	26	9	45
Death penalty	19	32	13
Gov't assistance to poor	10	12	4
Immigration	7	8	5
Environment	6	6	9

PEW RESEARCH CENTER July 21-August 5, 2010.

\*Based on those with an opinion on each issue.

### Economy and Jobs Are Top Voter Concerns

% saying each issue is "very important"

90	Economy
88	Jobs
78	Health care
71	Terrorism
69	Budget deficit
68	Taxes
65	Financial system
62	Energy
59	Afghanistan
58	Immigration
57	Environment
43	Abortion
32	Same-sex marriage

PEW RESEARCH CENTER  
July 21-August 5, 2010. Q20.

Based on registered voters.

the top influence on their opinions about government's role in providing assistance to the poor. Nearly half (47%) say their clergy speak out on the environment, almost always to encourage environmental protection. But just 6% say their own views on the environment are shaped primarily by their religious beliefs.

These are among the key findings of a survey exploring religion's connection with opinions about current social and political issues. The survey was conducted July 21–Aug. 5 by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press and the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life. It interviewed 3,003 respondents reached on landlines and cell phones in both English and Spanish.

For most voters, the economy and jobs outpace all other issues in the election this fall, and religious voters are no exception.

As previously reported nine-in-ten voters (90%) rate the economy as very important, and 88% do so for jobs; the numbers are nearly identical among all major religious groups, including people who are unaffiliated with a religion. Health care also rates near the top, with 78% saying it will be very important. Terrorism, the budget deficit and taxes are also seen as important, especially by white evangelicals and black Protestants.

In contrast, hot-button social and cultural issues fall at or near the bottom of the list, even for relatively conservative religious groups such as white evangelical Protestants.

Though both issues are among the least important for evangelicals, abortion (61% very important) and same-sex marriage (46%) are more important to evangelicals than to other religious groups. About four-in-ten voters (43%) overall rate abortion as very important and about one-third (32%) say this about same-sex marriage.

White evangelicals also stand out for the relatively high importance they place on immigration: 67% say immigration is a very important issue, compared with 60% among Catholics, 56% among white mainline Protestants, 50% among the unaffiliated and 48% among black Protestants.

In contrast, hot-button social and cultural issues fall at or near the bottom of the list, even for relatively conservative religious groups such as white evangelical Protestants.

Though both issues are among the least important for evangelicals, abortion (61% very important) and same-sex marriage (46%) are more important to evangelicals than to other religious groups. About four-in-ten voters (43%) overall rate abortion as very important and about one-third (32%) say this about same-sex marriage.

White evangelicals also stand out for the relatively high importance they place on immigration: 67% say immigration is a very important issue, compared with 60% among Catholics, 56% among white mainline Protestants, 50% among the unaffiliated and 48% among black Protestants.

---

### Economy, Jobs Trump Social Issues in 2010

% saying each issue is "very important"	Economy		Immigration	Abortion	Same-sex marriage
	%	%	%	%	%
Total	90	88	58	43	32
Protestant	90	88	60	48	35
White evangelical	91	88	67	61	46
White mainline	88	86	56	30	20
Black Protestant	94	94	48	44	25
Catholic	92	91	60	43	24
White Catholic	92	89	59	43	23
Unaffiliated	89	89	50	32	27

PEW RESEARCH CENTER July 21–August 5, 2010. Q20.  
Based on registered voters.

---