

America Divided: Merry Christmas or Happy Holidays?

It's no great revelation that Americans are divided over what greetings businesses should use during the December holiday season. But in case you had any doubts, a PRRI/RNS Religion News Survey has made it official.

Forty-nine percent of Americans say stores should use "merry Christmas" this holiday season, compared to 44 percent who say that they should use more generic "happy holidays" or "season's greetings" out of respect for people of different faiths. The survey reveals large religious, partisan and regional differences over the appropriateness of different holiday greetings.

"Celebrations of the birth of Jesus in Christianity have always blended the explicitly religious with elements of the contemporary culture," says Robert P. Jones, CEO of PRRI. "That roughly equal numbers of Americans both read the story of the birth of Jesus from the Bible and the story of Santa Claus in *'Twas the Night Before Christmas* is a continuation of that tradition."

Here's how it breaks down demographics-wise:

- A majority of white evangelical Protestants (69 percent) and white mainline Protestants

(57 percent) support stores using “merry Christmas.” A majority of Catholics (55 percent), however, support stores using more generic greetings like “happy holidays.”

- Nearly two-thirds (64 percent) of Republicans also support saying “merry Christmas” as opposed to more generic greetings. In contrast, nearly 6-in-10 (58 percent) Democrats say stores and businesses should be using “happy holidays” or “season’s greetings” out of respect for people of different faiths.
- A majority of Americans living in the Midwest (56 percent) and the South (54 percent), and a plurality (49 percent) of those living in the West say stores and businesses should greet customers with “merry Christmas,” while nearly 6-in-10 (58 percent) Americans living in the Northeast say businesses should use more generic greetings.

What about you? Do you say “merry Christmas,” “happy holidays” or something else?