

Research: Americans Say Christians Face Increased Persecution

A growing number of Americans believe religious liberty is on the decline and that the nation's Christians face growing intolerance.

They also say American Christians complain too much.

Those are among the findings of a new study of views about religious liberty from LifeWay Research. Researchers surveyed 1,000 Americans in September 2013 and September 2015 and then compared the results.

Two-thirds (63 percent) say Christians face increasing intolerance, up from half (50 percent) in 2013.

A similar number (60 percent) say religious liberty is on the decline, up from just over half (54 percent) in 2013.

Forty-three percent say American Christians complain too much about how they are treated, up from 34 percent in 2013.

"More Americans worry the U.S. has a hostile environment for religious liberty," said Ed Stetzer, executive director of LifeWay Research. "As this perception grows, some approve of it while others speak up against it."

Religious liberty has become an increasingly contentious issue in American culture—with disputes over birth control, same-sex wedding cakes, headscarves at work and prisoner's beards.

The more recent LifeWay Research survey found faith plays a key role in how Americans view the state of religious liberty.



Two-thirds of Christians (64 percent) and those of other faiths (65 percent) say religious liberty is on the decline. Self-identified evangelicals (71 percent) and those who attend worship at least once a week (70 percent) are most likely to agree.

Catholics (56 percent) and nonevangelicals (55 percent) are more skeptical. So are Nones (46 percent).

“Christians are particularly sensitive to what they see as intolerance towards their faith,” said Stetzer. “But they share a common concern with people of other faiths—that religious liberty in general is declining. And this perception is growing rapidly.”

Age also played a role in how Americans view the state of religious liberty.

Less than half (42 percent) of those 18 to 24 say religious liberty is on the decline. By contrast, 6 in 10 (62 percent) of those over 25 see a decline.

LifeWay Research also found non-Christians are less convinced that Christians face intolerance.

Less than half of those from other faiths (43 percent) and Nones (48 percent) agree when asked if intolerance toward Christians has increased.

By contrast, most Christians (70 percent), self-identified evangelicals (82 percent) and Protestants (74 percent) see more intolerance. So do two-thirds (76 percent) of those who attend services once a week or more.

Researchers found some signs that Americans are tired of arguments over religious liberty. A sizable number of Americans believe Christians' complaints about how they are treated are excessive.

Among them:

- 38 percent of Christians
- 39 percent of Americans of other faiths
- 59 percent of Nones
- 53 percent of those who rarely or never attend worship

American Christians face a challenge, as the nation becomes more secular, said Stetzer. Calls for religious liberty may fall on increasingly deaf ears in the future.

“Most people now believe Christians are facing intolerance. However, a surprisingly large minority perceives Christians to be complainers,” said Stetzer. “Both of those facts will matter as Christians profess and contend for their beliefs without sounding false alarms around faux controversies. It won’t be easy to strike that balance.”

LifeWay Research works with churches, denominations and networks who need input from their members for key decisions and new directions. Some of our ongoing research includes church leadership, theological issues, ethnic/multicultural issues, outreach/ evangelism/missions, worship, discipleship, emerging trends, and the beliefs and behaviors of both the church and unchurched. LifeWay Research will work with your organization to develop a survey that asks the questions you need to ask, so that you can quickly receive the input that you need. To discuss your research needs, contact @.