

Poll Shows 'Merry Christmas' Greeting Slowly Fading Away in Secular Culture

Nearly half of Americans say stores and businesses should greet customers with "Happy Holidays" or "Season's Greetings" instead of "Merry Christmas" out of respect for people of different faiths, according to a poll released on Tuesday.

The issue has become increasingly political, with 49 percent of Americans supporting "Happy Holidays," up from 44 percent in 2010, according to the Public Religion Research Institute. A minority, 43 percent, prefer the specifically religious greeting.

"Americans seem to be turning a corner on the appropriateness of more inclusive holiday greetings during December," said Robert Jones, CEO of PRRI.

Opinions split along political lines: 61 percent of Republicans favor using "Merry Christmas" instead of "Happy Holidays," while 58 percent of Democrats say the opposite.

Among white evangelical Protestants, 62 percent would prefer that businesses use the religious greeting. However, most minority Protestants (55 percent), the religiously unaffiliated (58 percent) and half of Catholics (50 percent) favor the more generic greeting.

The answers also differ by generation. About two-thirds of young adults, ages 18-29, support stores using a non-religious greeting, as opposed to 39 percent of American seniors, the poll found.

Some conservative pundits have criticized the use of "Happy Holidays" as a sign that religious festivities have come under

secular attack. This year, Texas passed a “Merry Christmas” law, allowing public school students and staff to say “Merry Christmas” and sing Christmas songs without fear of punishment.

Gordon Billingsley, 58, of Overland Park, Kan., said he’s fine with any holiday greeting.

“Why should I be offended by someone who is choosing to be inclusive as they offer me a kindness?” Billingsley said. “It makes it no less kind, and it sort of gives me some hope that the spirit of the season can reach across our differences.”

The telephone and cellphone survey of 1,056 randomly selected adults was conducted from Dec. 4-12 and had a margin of error of plus or minus 3.1 percentage points.

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