

Religion's Influence Waning, but More People Think Pastors Should Do This

Nearly three-quarters of the public think religion is losing influence in American life, but a growing number want religion to play more of a role in politics, according to a poll released on Monday.

The share of Americans who say churches and other houses of worship should express their views on social and political issues has gone up 6 percentage points since the 2010 midterm elections, to 49 percent from 43 percent, the Poll Research Center survey found.

Also, a growing minority of Americans, up to 32 percent from 22 percent in 2002, think churches should endorse candidates for political office, the poll found.

Overall, it showed 72 percent of Americans say religion is losing influence in the country, up 5 points from 2010.

"Some of this might be in reaction, perhaps, to the perception that religion is losing influence," said Jessica Hamar Martinez, a research associate for Pew.

The poll also found that a declining share of Americans see the Obama administration as friendly toward religion, to 30 percent from 37 percent in 2009.

The belief that the administration is unfriendly to religion rose by 19 percentage points since 2009 among both white evangelical Christians and white Catholics, the poll found. Leaders from both these groups have been vocal opponents of the Affordable Care Act's contraception mandate, which they say restricts religious liberty.

The poll also found that nearly half, or 47 percent, of U.S. adults, think that businesses, such as caterers and florists, should be allowed to reject same-sex couples as customers if the businesses have religious objections to serving them.

The survey questioned 2,002 U.S. adults between Sept. 2 and Sept. 9, and has a margin of error of plus or minus 2.5 percentage points.

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