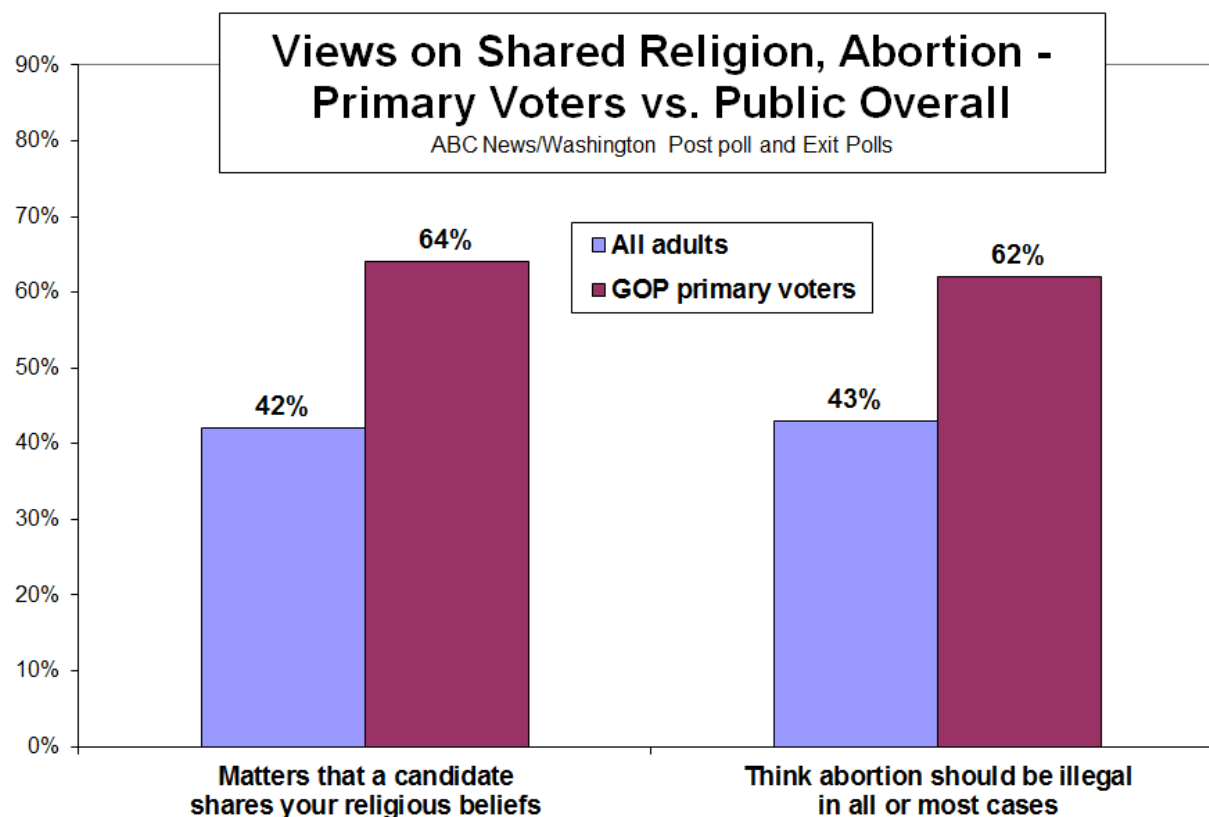


## **Link Between Religion and Politics is More Prevalent in GOP Primaries**

The link between religion and politics that's motivated many Republican primary voters this year is far less prevalent in public attitudes more broadly: Instead nearly six in 10 Americans express disinterest in whether a presidential candidate shares their religious views.

More than six in 10 in this ABC News/Washington Post poll also say political leaders should not rely on their religious beliefs in making policy decisions. And fewer than four in 10 say the country has gone too far in separating church and state; rather there's been a modest increase since the 1990s in the number who see too much mixing of religion and government.

In two other issues related to religious sentiment for some Americans, more than half of the public overall continues to support gay marriage (52 percent) and to back legal abortion in all or most cases (54 percent).



On questions for which comparable data are available, results among all adults are far different from those found by exit polls in the Republican presidential primaries to date:

- In the 10 states in which the question has been asked, 64 percent of Republican primary voters have said it matters to them that a presidential candidate shares their religious beliefs. Among all Republicans in this national survey, that drops to 53 percent; among all Americans, 42 percent.

The number in the primaries includes 32 percent who say that shared religious beliefs matter “a great deal” to them, peaking at 47 percent in Mississippi, 46 percent in Alabama and 43 percent in Tennessee. Nationally, among all Republicans, it’s 23 percent; among all adults, 17 percent.

- In the 12 states where exit polls have asked it, 62 percent of Republican primary voters have said abortion should be illegal in all or most cases, rising to about seven in 10 in Mississippi, Alabama, Oklahoma and Tennessee. That compares with 56 percent among all Republicans nationally, and 43 percent among all adults.

CHURCH/STATE – In response to another question, not asked in the exit polls, 36 percent of Americans say the country has gone too far in keeping religion and government separate, leaving 60 percent who instead say it’s either struck a good balance (34 percent) or gone too far in mixing religion and government (25 percent). The latter is up by 7 points from a 1994 poll, while “good balance” is down by 6.

At the same time, more see too little confluence of church and state than too much, by 11 points.

There’s a 2-1 division in this survey, produced for ABC by [Langer Research Associates](#), on whether political leaders should or should not rely on their religious beliefs in their policy decision-making. Thirty-one percent say they should do so; 63 percent say not. Preference to keep religious beliefs out of policy decisions has ranged from 55 to 66 percent in ABC/Post polls since 2005.

While the latter two questions have not been asked in exit polls, results among population groups also show divisions, sharpest among evangelicals white Protestants and conservative Republicans compared with others. Desire for political leaders to rely on their religious beliefs peaks at 50 percent of evangelical white Protestants and conservative Republicans; it’s 27 percent among all others.

Similarly, the view that the separation of church and state has “gone too far” is expressed by 61 percent of conservative Republicans and 58 percent of evangelical white Protestants; that falls to about half as many other adults. (Conservative Republicans account for 16 percent of all adults; evangelical white Protestants for 17 percent. They overlap; a third of conservative Republicans are also evangelical white Protestants.)

On the abortion and gay marriage questions, support peaks among liberal Democrats, at 77 and 74 percent, respectively. They’re about as different from all other Americans on these issues as

are conservative Republicans on their side. On the church/state questions, there's less difference among liberal Democrats vs. others than there is among conservative Republicans. (Liberal Democrats account for 14 percent of the population, about the same share as their political opposites.)

	Politicians should rely on relig. beliefs	Want candidates who share relig. beliefs	Abortion: legal	Gay marriage: legal	Church-state separation: too far
Evangelical white Protestants	50%	75	32	22	58
All others	27	35	59	58	32
<i>Difference</i>	<i>23 points</i>	<i>40</i>	<i>27</i>	<i>36</i>	<i>26</i>
Cons. Reps.	50	63	28	26	61
All others	27	38	59	58	31
<i>Difference</i>	<i>23 points</i>	<i>25</i>	<i>31</i>	<i>32</i>	<i>30</i>
Lib. Dems.	21	31	77	74	23
All others	33	43	51	49	38
<i>Difference</i>	<i>12 points</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>26</i>	<i>25</i>	<i>15</i>

While differences are sharpest using religion, ideology and partisanship as a filter, there are some others as well. For example, support for gay marriage peaks at 61 percent among adults under age 40, falling to 40 percent among those 65 and older.

Also notable are the results among political independents, key swing voters in national elections. They resemble Democrats much more than Republicans on the church-state related questions in this survey, a result that suggests general election challenges for a more religiously aligned candidate such as Rick Santorum. In a head-to-head matchup, Santorum leads Obama by 17 points among registered voters looking for a candidate who shares their religious beliefs. Among the nearly six in 10 who say this doesn't matter, Obama leads by an identical 17 points.

**METHODOLOGY** – This ABC News/Washington Post poll was conducted by telephone March 7-10, 2012, among a random national sample of 1,003 adults, including landline and cell-phone-only respondents. Results have a margin of [sampling error](#) of 4 points for the full sample. The survey was produced for ABC News by [Langer Research Associates](#) of New York, N.Y., with sampling, data collection and tabulation by Abt-SRBI of New York, N.Y.

Analysis by Gary Langer.

ABC News polls can be found at ABCNEWS.com at <http://abcnews.com/pollingunit>.

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Full results follow.

1-40, 46 held for release or previously released.

41. Do you think a political leader should or should not rely on his or her religious beliefs in making policy decisions?

	Should	Should not	Depends (vol.)	No opinion
3/10/12	31	63	3	3
9/1/11	29	66	3	1
12/9/07	27	66	6	1
10/8/06	35	61	2	2
4/24/05	40	55	4	2

42. How much does it matter to you that a candidate for president shares your religious beliefs - does it matter a great deal, somewhat, not so much, or not at all?

	---- Matters -----			-- Does not matter ---			
	NET	Great deal	Smwt	NET	Not so much	Not at all	No opinion
3/10/12	42	17	24	58	17	41	1
2/4/12	38	18	20	62	16	46	*

43. In your view, has the country gone too far in keeping religion and government separate, gone too far in mixing religion and government, or has it struck a good balance in the area of the separation of church and state?

	Gone too far in keeping separate	Gone too far in mixing	Struck a good balance	No opinion
3/10/12	36	25	34	4
7/26/94*	36	18	40	6

\*NBC/Wall St. Journal

44. On another subject, do you think abortion should be legal in all cases, legal in most cases, illegal in most cases or illegal in all cases?

	----- Legal -----			----- Illegal -----				
	NET	All cases	Most cases	NET	Most cases	All cases	No opinion	
3/10/12	54	21	33	43	25	17	3	
7/17/11	54	19	35	44	30	15	2	
3/26/10	53	17	35	45	27	18	2	
11/23/09	54	19	35	43	28	16	2	
6/21/09	55	20	35	43	26	17	2	
9/7/08	RV	57	19	38	39	24	15	4
8/22/08	54	22	32	44	26	18	3	
6/15/08	53	18	35	44	28	16	3	
1/12/08	57	21	36	40	25	15	3	
12/9/07	53	18	35	44	27	17	3	
11/1/07	55	19	36	43	27	16	2	
7/21/07	56	23	34	41	28	14	2	
2/25/07	56	16	39	42	31	12	2	
12/18/05	56	17	40	41	27	13	3	
4/24/05	56	20	36	42	27	14	3	
12/19/04	55	21	34	42	25	17	3	
5/23/04	54	23	31	44	23	20	2	
1/20/03	57	23	34	42	25	17	2	
8/12/01	49	22	27	48	28	20	3	
6/24/01	52	22	31	43	23	20	4	
1/15/01	59	21	38	39	25	14	1	
9/6/00	RV	55	20	35	42	25	16	3
7/23/00	53	20	33	43	26	17	4	
9/2/99	56	20	37	42	26	15	2	

3/14/99	55	21	34	42	27	15	3
7/12/98	54	19	35	42	29	13	4
8/5/96	56	22	34	41	27	14	3
6/30/96	58	24	34	40	25	14	2
10/1/95	60	26	35	37	25	12	3
9/21/95	60	24	36	36	25	11	4
7/17/95	59	27	32	40	26	14	1

45. Do you think it should be legal or illegal for gay and lesbian couples to get married? Do you feel that way strongly or somewhat?

	----- Legal -----			----- Illegal -----			No
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	opinion
3/10/12	52	36	17	43	7	36	5
7/17/11	51	32	19	45	9	36	4
3/13/11	53	36	17	44	9	35	3
2/8/10	47	31	16	50	9	42	3
4/24/09*	49	31	18	46	7	39	5
6/4/06	36	24	13	58	7	51	5
8/28/05	39	NA	NA	58	NA	NA	3
8/29/04 RV	32	18	14	62	10	52	5
3/7/04	38	24	14	59	11	48	3
2/22/04	39	25	13	55	6	49	6
1/18/04	41	NA	NA	55	NA	NA	4
9/7/03	37	"	"	55	"	"	7

\*2009 "gay and lesbian" and "homosexual" wordings half sampled. 2005 "gay and lesbian", others "homosexual".

\*\*\* END \*\*\*