

State of the First Amendment: 2013

A Project Sponsored by the First Amendment Center

The First Amendment Center has supported an annual national survey of American attitudes about the First Amendment since 1997. The “State of the First Amendment: 2013” is the 17th survey in this series. This year’s survey repeats some of the questions that have been asked since 1997 and includes new questions regarding rights extended to high school students and same-sex couples.

This report summarizes the findings from the 2013 survey, and where appropriate, depicts how attitudes have changed over time. The first section presents the survey methodology used to conduct the State of the First Amendment research. The second section highlights the key findings from the 2013 project. The final section presents the complete survey results, including question wording and trend data.

Survey Methodology

The First Amendment Center conducted a general public survey of attitudes about the First Amendment once again in 2013. The questionnaire was administered to a national sample of 1,006 American adults by telephone. The questionnaire was developed by Dr. Ken Dautrich, director of the STATS Group, and by Gene Policinski, chief operating officer of the Newseum Institute and senior vice president of First Amendment Center. The survey was conducted in May 2013.

Interviews were conducted under Dautrich’s supervision. The interviews were conducted by trained, professional interviewers through a computer-assisted telephone-interviewing system (CATI). The survey instrument and related survey protocols were field-tested and refined before interviews began. Interviews were extensively monitored to ensure quality standards.

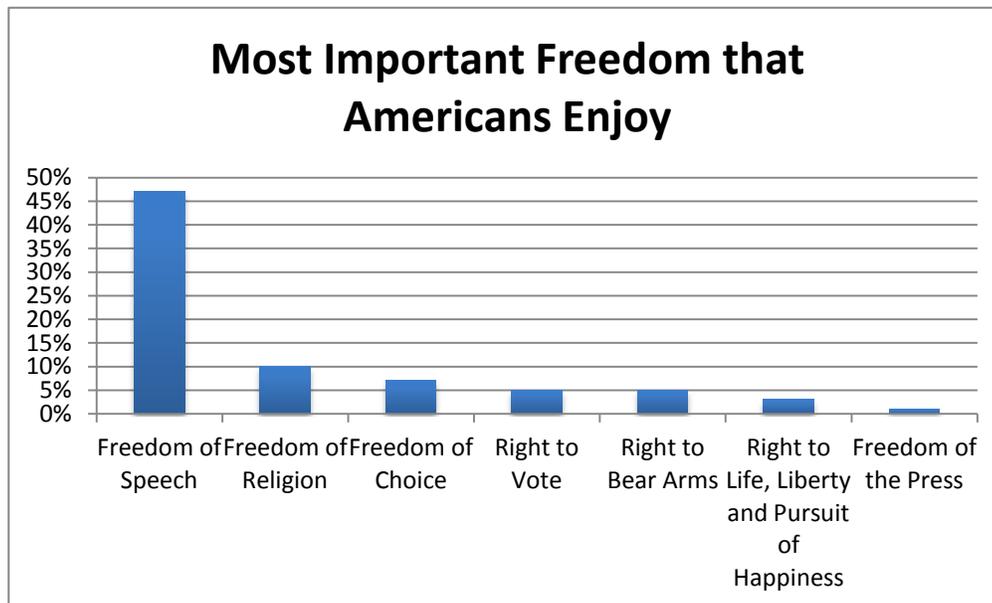
The national sample used in this survey included phone numbers in the contiguous 48 states. The sample was stratified to ensure that broad geographic regions were represented in proportion to their share of the total adult population in the United States. Within each of these regions, telephone numbers were generated using random-digit dialing, thus giving every phone number a chance of being selected. Once selected, each phone number was called at least four times to attempt to reach an eligible respondent. The RDD sample was supplemented with a national sample of cell phones to ensure cell-phone coverage. Within each household, one eligible respondent was interviewed.

The sampling error for the sample of 1,006 Americans adults is +/-3.2% at the 95% level of confidence. This means that there is only one chance in 20 that the results of a survey this size would differ by more than 3.2 percentage points in either direction in sampling another group.

Key Findings

- Americans were asked what they believed was the single most important freedom that citizens enjoy. The majority (47%) of people named freedom of speech as the most important freedom, followed by freedom of religion (10%); freedom of choice (7%); right to vote (5%); right to bear arms (5%); right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness (3%), and freedom of the press (1%).

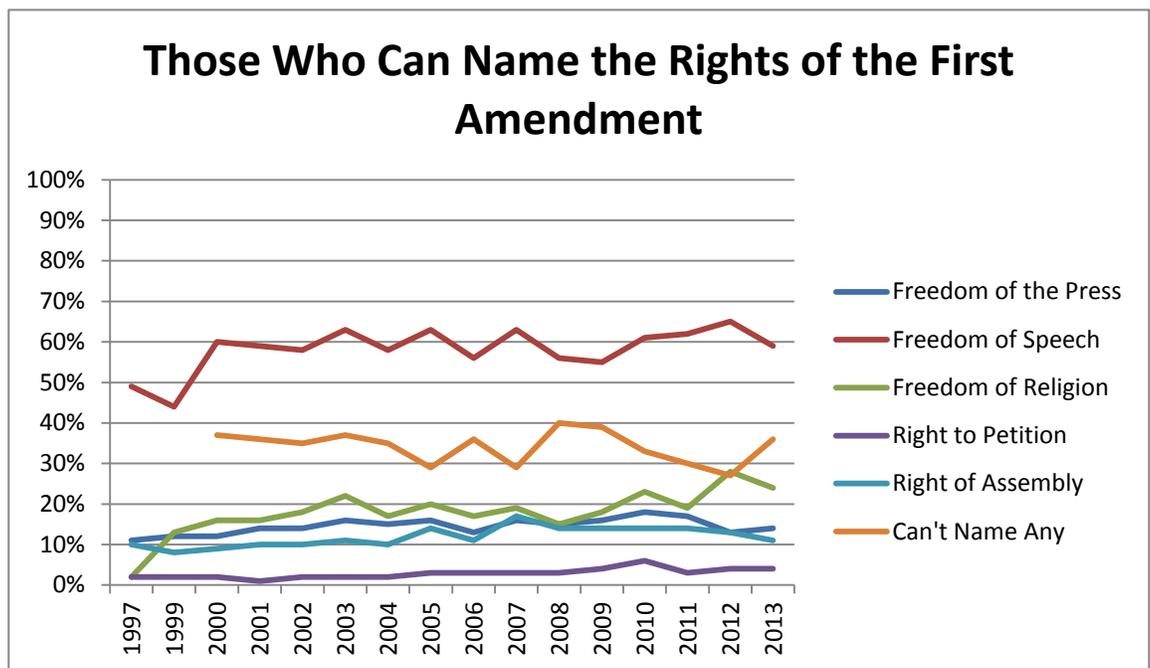
Women were twice as likely as men to name freedom of religion as the most important freedom. Thirteen percent of women named freedom of religion, whereas only 6% of men did.



- Asked to name the five specific freedoms in the First Amendment, 59% of Americans could name freedom of speech, followed by 24% who could name freedom of religion, 14% freedom of the press, 11% the right to assemble, and 4% the right to petition. Thirty-six percent of Americans cannot name any of the rights guaranteed by the First Amendment.

The percentage of Americans who can name these five First Amendment rights has generally increased over the years since the project began in 1997; however, the awareness of First Amendment rights has decreased overall this year.

Knowledge of freedom of religion, speech, and assembly decreased from 28% to 24%, 65% to 59%, and 13% to 11%, respectively, since last year. Those who could name freedom of press increased from 13% to 14% and those who name the right to petition remains the same at 4%.

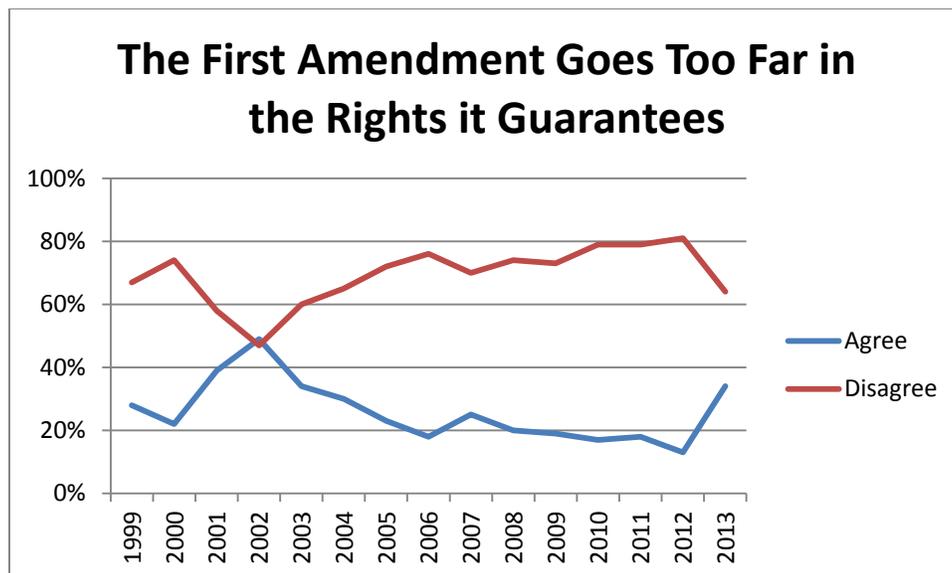


- The majority of Americans believes that the First Amendment does not go too far in the rights it guarantees. The gap between those who believe it goes too far and not too far has generally increased over time; however, this year there was a significant increase in those who claimed that the First Amendment goes too far in protecting individual rights.

In 2013, 34% state that the First Amendment goes too far and 64% say it does not go too far in protecting freedom. It is important to note that this survey was conducted in May, shortly after the Boston Marathon bombing. This jump in the percentage of individuals who think the First Amendment goes too far represents Americans' increased willingness to give up their rights and freedoms in return for greater security when they feel threatened. An even greater increase in willingness to trade freedom for security occurred after the September 2001 terrorist attacks, as shown in the graph below.

Higher percentages of young Americans tend to agree with the statement that the First Amendment goes too far in the rights that it guarantees. Forty-seven percent of 18-30-year-olds agree, while 44% of 31-45-year-olds, 24% of 46-60-year-olds and 23% of people over 60 agree that the First Amendment goes too far.

Additionally, African-Americans and Hispanics are more likely to say that the First Amendment goes too far in the rights it guarantees. Fifty-two percent of African-Americans and 50% of Hispanics agree, while only 29% of whites agree that the First Amendment goes too far.

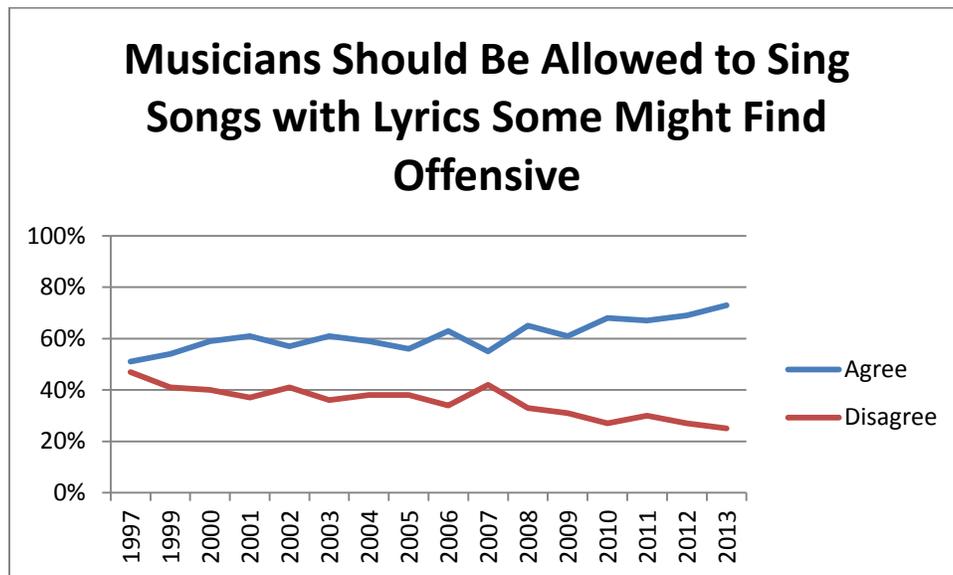


- Since 1997, Americans increasingly agree that musicians should be allowed to sing potentially offensive songs. Seventeen years ago 51% agreed and 47% disagreed with allowing musicians to sing offensive lyrics, while today 73% agree and 25% disagree.

This is the highest recorded percentage of those who agree that musicians should be allowed to sing songs with lyrics that some people might find offensive.

Those under 45 are more likely to agree with this statement than older Americans. Seventy-eight percent of 18-30-year-olds agree, while 81% of 31-45-year-olds, 71% of 46-60-year-olds and 60% of people over 60 agree that musicians should be allowed to sing songs with lyrics some might find offensive.

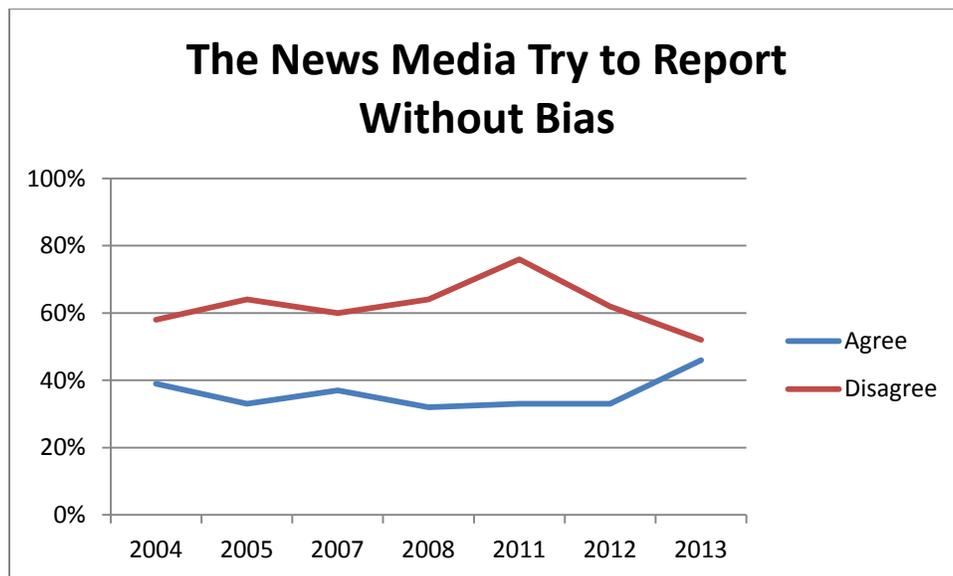
Americans who identify as liberal are more likely to believe that musicians have the right to sing potentially offensive lyrics. Eighty percent of liberals support the statement, compared with 71% of moderates and 71% of conservatives.



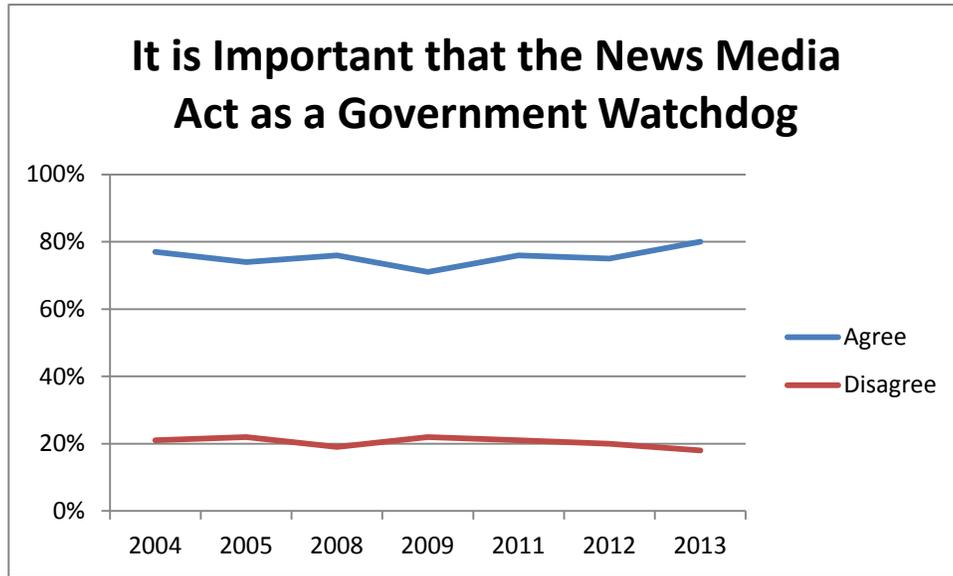
- Forty-six percent, the largest percentage yet, of Americans believe that the news media attempt to report news without bias. The percentage of individuals who typically agree with this statement has hovered around a third since the question was first asked in 2004.

Older Americans are more skeptical of news media attempts to report without bias. Only 35% of individuals over 60 say the news media report without bias, whereas 48% of 46-60-year-olds agree, 48% of 31-45-year-olds, and 49% of 18-30-year-olds agree with the statement.

Americans who identify as liberal or moderate are more likely than those who identify as conservative to agree that the news media attempt to report stories without bias. Fifty-one percent of liberals, 50% of moderates and 37% of conservatives support the statement.

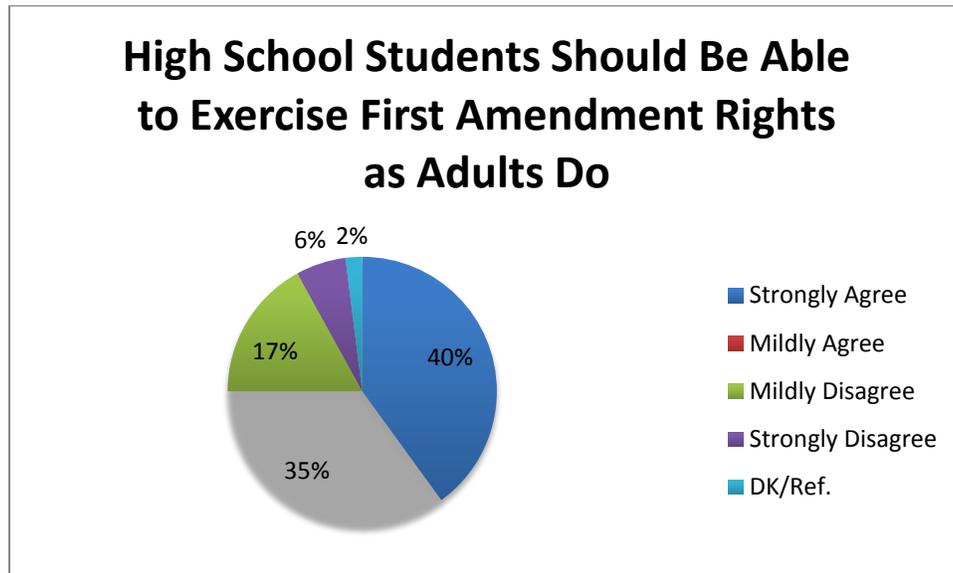


- Over the years Americans have overwhelmingly agreed that the news media should act as a government watchdog. In 2013, 80% of people agreed with this, while only 18% disagreed. This is the highest percentage of people who have agreed with this statement since the question was first asked in 2004.



- A solid majority of Americans, 75%, believe that high school students should be able to exercise their First Amendment rights just as adults do, while 23% of Americans do not think that high school students should be allowed these rights.

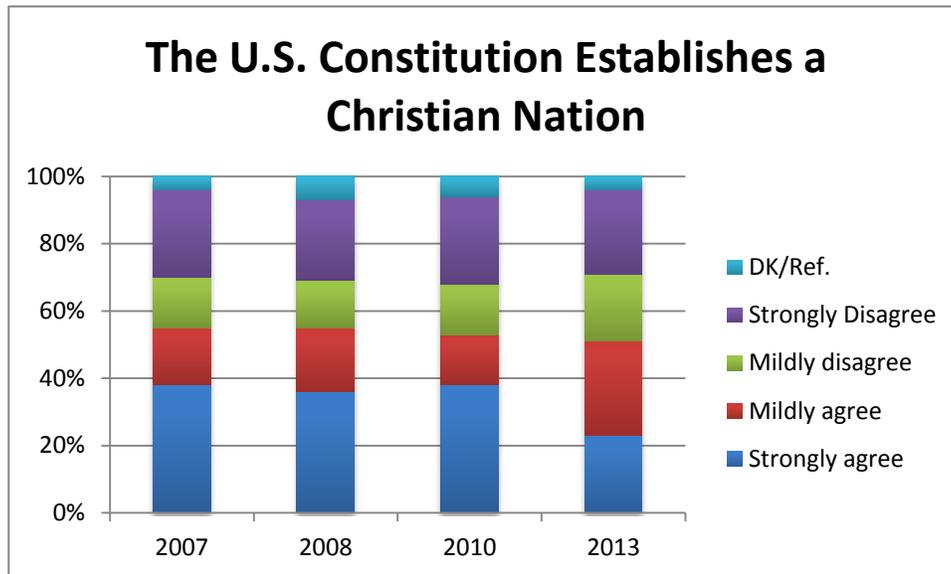
Higher percentages of young Americans say high school students should be able to exercise the same First Amendment rights as adults. Eighty-four percent of 18-30-year-olds agree, while 69% of 31-45-year-olds, 75% of 46-60-year-olds, and 75% of Americans over 60 support the rights of high school students.



- Asked whether they believe that the U.S. Constitution established a Christian nation, 51% of Americans agree while 25% disagree. The number of those who strongly agree with this statement has decreased and those who mildly agree has increased over the years since the question was first asked in 2007.

Americans who identify as conservatives are much more likely than others to agree that the Constitution establishes a Christian nation. Sixty-seven percent of conservatives, 49% of moderates and 33% of liberals agree that the Constitution established a Christian nation.

Additionally, Americans who consider themselves evangelical or born-again Christian are more likely than non-evangelical Christians to agree that the Constitution establishes a Christian nation. Seventy-one percent of evangelicals or born-again Christians agree, while only 47% of non-evangelical Christians support the statement.



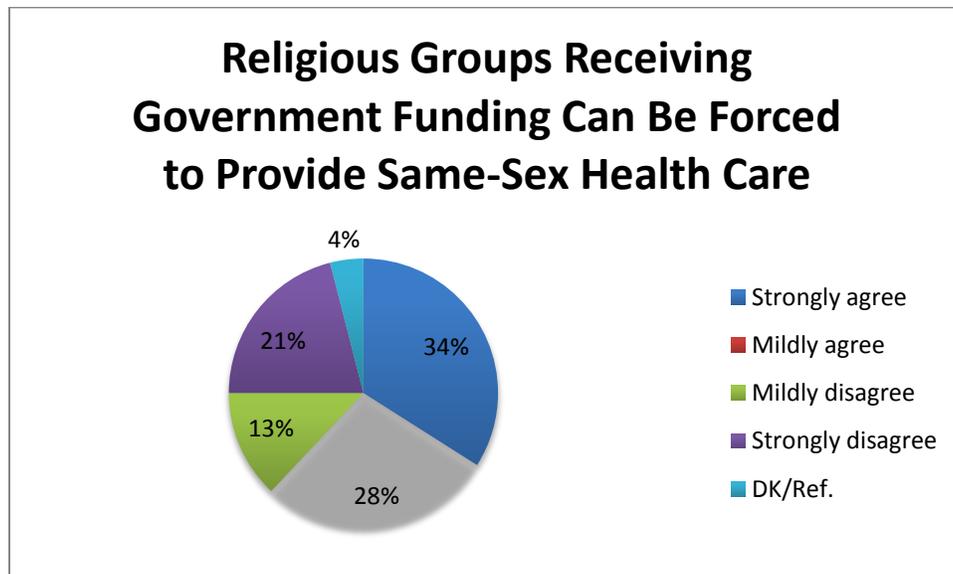
- The majority of Americans (62%) agree that if a religiously affiliated group receives government funding, then the government should be able to require the group to provide health-care benefits to same-sex partners of employees, even if the religious group opposes same-sex marriages or partnerships.

Those who disagree tend to feel more strongly on this issue than those who agree with the statement. Twenty-one percent strongly disagree, while 13% mildly disagree.

Higher percentages of young Americans agree that religious groups receiving government funding can be forced to provide health care to employees in a same-sex relationship. Sixty-eight percent of 18-30-year-olds, 62% of 31-45-year-olds, 61% of 46-60-year-olds, and 56% of Americans over 60 support this statement.

Americans who identify as liberal supported the statement the most, followed by moderates and conservatives. Eighty-two percent of liberals, 65% of moderates and 44% of conservatives agree that the government should be able to force groups to provide health care to same-sex couples.

Additionally, non-evangelical Christians (66%) are much more likely than evangelical or born-again Christians (41%) to support the government's requiring federally funded religious groups to provide health care to same-sex couples.



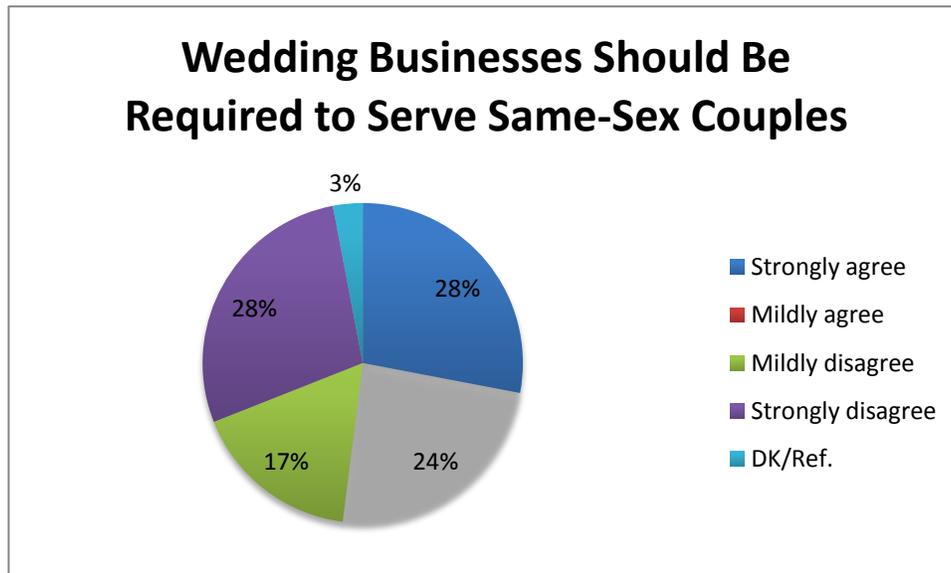
- A majority of Americans (52%) believes that a business providing wedding services to the public should be required to serve same-sex couples, even if the business owner objects to same-sex marriage on religious grounds.

Again, when individuals disagree with this statement they tend to strongly disagree. Twenty-eight percent of people strongly disagree, whereas 17% mildly disagree.

Younger Americans are more supportive of the statement that wedding businesses should be required to serve same-sex couples. Sixty-two percent of Americans 18-30, 55% of 31-45-year-olds, 51% of 46-60-year-olds, and 39% of people over 60 support the statement.

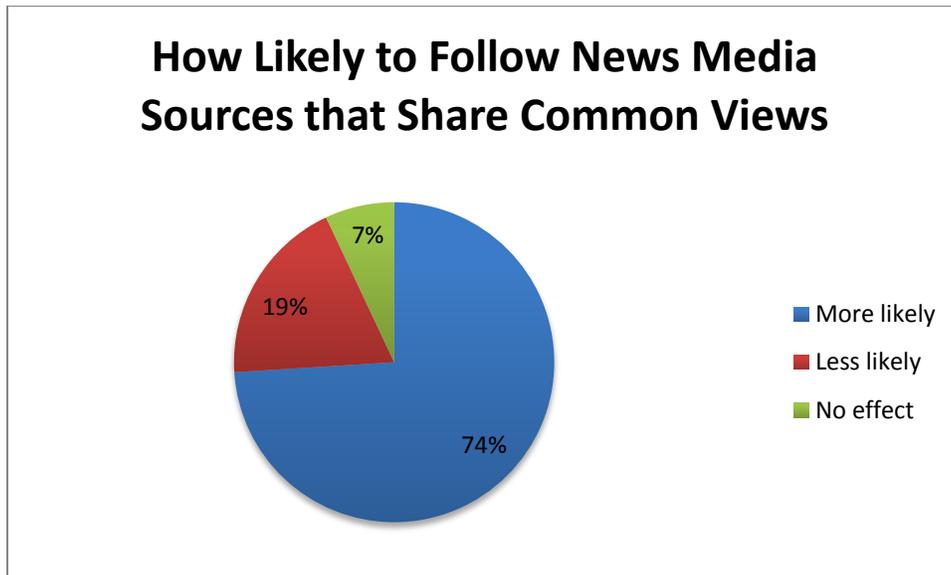
A strong majority (70%) of liberals agrees that government should be allowed to require wedding businesses to serve same-sex couples, while slightly more than half of moderates (56%) and a third (34%) of conservatives support the statement.

Non-religious (59%) and Catholic (61%) Americans are much more likely than Protestants (39%) to believe that the government can require wedding businesses to serve same-sex couples.



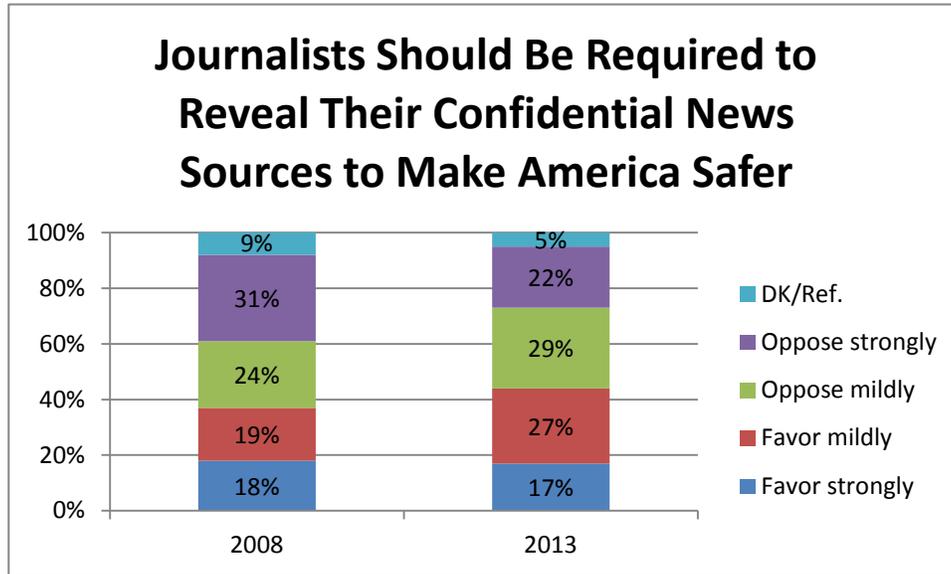
- An overwhelming number of Americans say they are more likely to get most of their news from a news media source that has similar political views to their own. Seventy-four percent say they are more likely, while only 19% say they are less likely.

Liberals and conservatives are much more likely than moderate Americans to follow a news media source that identifies with similar political views. Eighty-one percent of liberals and 79% of conservatives follow news media with similar views, compared with 69% of moderates.



- Americans are now relatively split over whether or not journalists should be required to reveal their confidential news sources in order to make the United States safer.

When the question was first asked in 2008, 37% favored requiring journalists to reveal their sources, while 55% were against it. This year the number of Americans favoring a requirement that journalists reveal their news sources jumped to 44%.



- In 2013, 65% of Americans agree that freedom to worship as one chooses applies to all religious groups regardless of how extreme or on-the-fringe their views, while 31% disagree. This is the highest percentage of Americans who have said the freedom to worship does not apply to extreme and fringe groups since the question was first asked in 1997.

