

Florida Southern College
Center for Polling and Policy Research

Public Policy Attitudes in America

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Executive Summary

As the U.S. Supreme Court prepares to hear a trio of cases concerning the ability of employers to discriminate against their employees on the basis of their sexual orientation or gender identities and President Trump's ban on allowing transgender recruits from joining the military is enforced, this survey presents results indicating registered voters in America are generally interested in these policy debates and supportive of expanding rights to members of the LGBTQ+ community.¹ Utilizing responses from approximately 1,300 registered voters in the United States, we find that about half of our participants (48 percent) say LGBTQ+ issues are important to them and that a plurality believes our elected leaders should spend more time on these policy debates.

When asked about specific policies, large majorities of registered voters believe it should be illegal for employers to discriminate against their employees because their sexual orientation, for businesses to refuse service based on a customer's sexual orientation, for landlords to refuse to rent based on the customer's sexual orientation, and for governments to refuse to marry people identifying as gay or transgender. Fifty-nine percent of respondents also believe transgender soldiers should not be prohibited from serving in the military and 53 percent would support amending the Civil Rights Act to include sexual orientation and gender identity as protected groups. Support for LGBTQ+ positions is most often found among Democrats, women, and those under the age of 45.

Finally, we find that a majority (53 percent) believe that members of the LGBTQ+ community are still discriminated against more than other people in America (with only 13 percent believing they are discriminated against less than others). Our respondents also express a great deal of support for prosecutor's decisions to file hate crimes charges against offenders who victimize people because they are gay or transgender.

¹ Liptak, A. (2019, April 23). Supreme Court to Decide Whether Landmark Civil Rights Law Applies to Gay and Transgender Workers. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/22/us/politics/supreme-court-gay-transgender-employees.html>

Military academies begin to follow military transgender ban. (n.d.). Retrieved May 8, 2019, from <https://www.apnews.com/acbff2fdaf6e48819ccbc4bcccea2180>

Authors

This survey is the culmination of a class project in which students selected the topic for this survey, designed their own questions, and worked with the Center for Polling and Policy Research to field responses and analyze results. The members of this class deserve special recognition for their outstanding work:

Cheyenne Charles
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Results

How Important are LGBTQ+ Issues to Voters?

Almost half (48 percent) of registered voters participating in this survey indicate LGBTQ+ issues are important to them. This feeling is held most strongly by Democrats (61 percent), women (55 percent), and those below the age of 45 (60 percent of those between the ages of 18 and 29 and 56 percent of those between 30 and 44). As Table 1 shows, only among Republicans and Independents does the number of people believing the issue to be unimportant outnumber those who think it is important.

Partisans and those below the age of 45 are the most clearly sorted on this question. Among Democrats, there is a 46 percent difference between those believing LGBTQ+ issues are important compared to those thinking they are unimportant. Among Republicans, there is a 40 percent difference with 55 percent believing these issues are unimportant and 13 percent stating they are important. Examining responses by age, we find that regardless of how old the respondent is, more people believe LGBTQ+ issues are important relative to unimportant. The gap in these beliefs is seen most prominently among younger respondents. There is a 43 percent gap among those aged 18 to 29, a 38 percent difference between those aged 30 to 44, only a 12 percent difference among the 45 to 60 group, and a 20 percent difference among those over the age of 60.

It should also be noted that when asked to list from the top of their heads the “most important problems facing the country today,” less than one-half of one percent volunteered an LGBTQ+ issue. Instead, the most frequently mentioned items included immigration, healthcare, racism and misogyny, the economy, President Trump, and political polarization. While most individuals do not think of LGBTQ+ issues when asked to list the “most important problems facing the country today,” when asked, almost half of these same respondents find these policies to be important.

Table 1: How Important are LGBTQ+ Issues to You?

	All Respondents	Partisanship			Gender		Age			
		Republicans	Independents	Democrats	Male	Female	18-29	30-44	45-60	Over 60
Very Important	15.23	6.47	9.66	32.83	10.98	18.36	22.08	16.6	13.59	10.86
Important	32.77	6.9	15.29	28.18	28.38	36.73	37.66	39	25.84	34.29
Neither Important nor Unimportant	25.62	15.02	17.67	17.68	27.87	23.82	19.05	23.94	28.95	27.14
Unimportant	10.38	26.25	12.62	9.39	12.5	8.61	10.82	8.11	9.8	12.57
Very Unimportant	12.46	27.28	15.97	5.8	16.55	9.04	6.06	9.65	17.15	12.86
Don't Know/No Opinion	3.54	18.07	28.8	6.13	3.72	3.44	4.33	2.7	4.68	2.29

We also asked respondents how they believe elected officials should spend their time, specifically, should elected officials spend more or less time on LGBTQ+ issues? Table 2 shows that 38 percent of registered voters believe more time should be spent on these issues, 28 percent believe less time should be spent, and 24 percent believe the same amount of time should be spent on LGBTQ+ topics. The most substantial gaps emerge among Republicans, who at a rate of 48 to 17 percent, want less time spent on LGBTQ+ issues and Democrats, who by a 46 percent margin believe more time should be spent.

Table 2: How Much Time Should Our Elected Leaders Spend on LGBTQ+ Issues?

	All	Partisanship			Gender		Age			
	Respondents	Republicans	Independents	Democrats	Male	Female	18-29	30-44	45-60	Over 60
Much More Time	11.83	5.84	8.25	18.25	9.46	13.92	20.35	13.13	8.24	10.00
A Bit More Time	25.96	10.95	22.22	38.42	22.80	28.12	32.47	31.66	20.49	23.43
The Same Amount of Time	24.19	26.03	22.86	23.68	25.00	23.67	18.18	21.24	29.62	23.71
A Bit Less Time	7.91	10.95	10.16	4.56	8.28	7.60	6.93	7.72	8.46	8.00
Much Less Time	19.82	37.23	21.59	6.32	25.34	15.21	11.26	16.22	23.39	23.71
Don't Know/No Opinion	10.29	9.00	14.92	8.77	9.12	11.48	10.82	10.04	9.80	11.14

Attitudes Toward Public Policies

The second section of this survey focuses on attitudes toward existing policies and proposals, specifically what actions taken by public and private actors should be considered legal, what respondents think about the ban on transgender soldiers serving in the military, and how much support is there for amending the Civil Rights Act to include sexual orientation and gender identity. We begin by asking a battery of questions about respondent’s support for laws prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation:

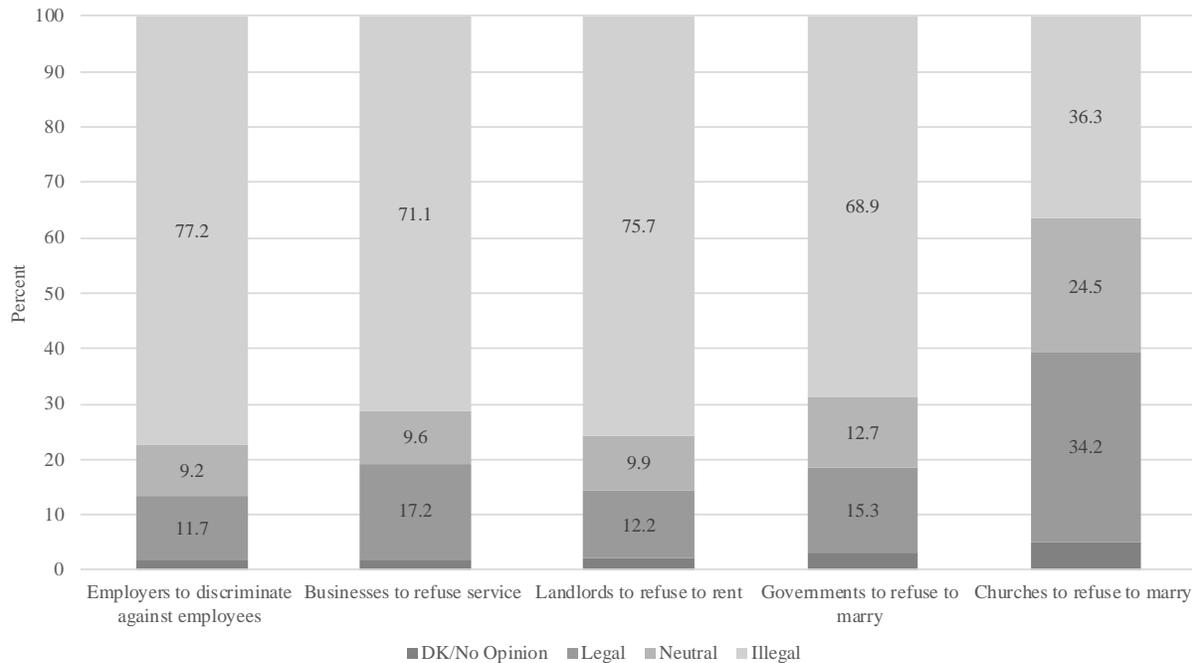
Now, we would like to get your views on some issues being discussed in the country today. Sexual orientation is a topic that makes many people uncomfortable, but the government often makes policies concerning gay and transgender rights. We’d like to know how you feel about some of these policies. There is no right or wrong answer, and you can choose not to answer the question for any reason. Should it be legal or illegal for:

- 1. Employers to discriminate against employees based on their sexual orientation*
- 2. Businesses to refuse service based on the customers sexual orientation*
- 3. Landlords to refuse to rent based on the customers sexual orientation*
- 4. Governments to refuse to marry people identifying as gay or transgender*
- 5. Churches to refuse to marry people identifying as gay or transgender*

Respondents answered by indicating if they thought the practice should always be legal, sometimes be legal, if they were neutral on the issue, if they thought it should sometimes be illegal, or if it should always be illegal. Figure A reports the results of these questions, combining those who answered the policy should “always” and “sometimes” be legal and those that responded “always” and “sometimes” illegal (those who did not choose to respond or indicated they had no opinion are omitted from the graph).

With the exception of one policy, a strong majority believe each of these actions by employers, businesses, landlords, and governments should be illegal. Seventy-seven percent of people say it should be illegal for employers to discriminate against employees based on their sexual orientation, 76 percent said it should be illegal for landlords to refuse to rent to someone based on their sexual orientation, 71 percent indicated it should be illegal for businesses to refuse service based on the customers sexual orientation, and about 69 percent said it should be illegal for governments to refuse to marry people identifying as gay or transgender. Only in the case of churches is public opinion split with about equal numbers believing it should be legal – or illegal – for churches to refuse to marry people identifying as gay or transgender.

Figure A: Should It Be Legal or Illegal For . . .



Examining responses to these questions by party identification, Democrats consistently respond that each of these activities should be considered illegal. With the exception of their attitudes toward requiring churches to marry people who are gay or transgender, over 80 percent of Democrats agree that all other scenarios should “always” be considered illegal. Republicans were more varied in their responses to these questions. Over half of all Republicans believe that it should be illegal for employers to discriminate against their employees based on their sexual orientation and for landlords to refuse to rent to gay or transgender tenants. Almost half of Republicans (48 percent) believe it should be illegal for businesses to refuse service based on the customers sexual orientation. Turning to the marriage questions, 45 percent of Republicans believe it should be illegal for governments to refuse to marry people identifying as gay or transgender and 23 percent believe it should be illegal for churches to do the same. Independents react to these questions more similar to Democrats than Republicans, with almost 70 percent (or more) identifying each scenario as illegal with the exception of church marriages.

We also asked about banning transgender soldiers serving in the military. Using a survey experiment, we test if respondents who see the word “transgender” responded differently than those who see its definition. Therefore, half of the participants were asked, “If someone has a gender different from what was assigned at birth, should they be barred from military service” and the other half were asked, “If someone is transgender, should they be barred from military service?”. We find no statistical or substantive difference between people’s responses to these question wordings – being exposed to the word transgender did not make people more (or less) likely to respond positively – or negatively – to this question. Responses to each of these questions are combined and presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Should Transgender Soldiers Be Prohibited from Serving in the Military?

	All Respondents	Partisanship			Gender		Age			
		Republicans	Independents	Democrats	Male	Female	18-29	30-44	45-60	Over 60
Always	17.40	36.98	13.97	4.74	20.78	14.06	10.82	16.6	18.71	19.71
Sometimes	10.97	17.52	11.43	5.44	13.18	8.75	11.26	11.58	10.69	10
Rarely	8.62	7.54	8.25	9.82	10.47	7.17	7.36	6.95	7.13	12.86
Never	50.45	20.19	48.57	74.04	44.76	55.95	61.04	52.9	46.55	48
Don't Know/No Opinion	12.56	17.76	17.78	5.96	10.81	14.06	9.52	11.97	16.93	9.43

Overall, 59 percent of all registered voters surveyed “rarely” or “never” believe transgender soldiers should be prohibited from serving in the military and 28 percent “always” or “sometimes” agree that this prohibition should exist. Breaking these results down further, only among Republicans do the number of people agreeing with this policy outnumber the people disagreeing. Among Independents, Democrats, men, women, and all age groups, more people disagree with the ban on transgender soldiers serving in the military than agree. The gap between these two beliefs is again most prominently found among Democrats, women, and those under the age of 45.

The final policy we examine is amending the Civil Rights Act to include sexual orientation and gender identity to the list of protected classes. Specifically, we ask, “should the Civil Rights Act be amended to add sexual orientation and gender identity to the list of protected classes?” Table 4 reports the answers we received broken down by partisanship, gender, and age. Overall, 53 percent of registered voters support amending the Civil Rights Act and 31 percent do not. Only among Republicans does the number of people not supporting amending the Civil Rights Act outnumber those supporting this change.

Table 4: Amend the Civil Rights Act to Include Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity?

	All Respondents	Partisanship			Gender		Age			
		Republicans	Independents	Democrats	Male	Female	18-29	30-44	45-60	Over 60
Yes	53.11	25.55	44.76	77.72	47.97	57.53	63.64	56.76	45.66	53.14
No	31.41	58.64	30.48	11.93	37.84	25.54	19.91	28.96	35.86	34.29
Don't Know/No Opinion	15.48	15.82	24.76	10.35	14.19	16.93	16.45	14.29	18.49	12.57

Discrimination and Hate Crimes

The final section of this survey asks respondents how much members of the LGBTQ+ community are discriminated against and what, in their estimation, should constitute a hate crime. Examining the discrimination issue first, we utilized a five-point scale ranging from “much more than most” to “much less than most” to ask respondents how much the LGBTQ+ community is discriminated against compared to other people in America.

Table 5: Compared to Other People in America, How Much do You Think Members of the LGBTQ+ Community are Discriminated Against?

	All Respondents	Partisanship			Gender		Age			
		Republicans	Independents	Democrats	Male	Female	18-29	30-44	45-60	Over 60
Much More than Most	20.97	9.98	19.05	30.18	17.40	24.10	22.08	17.76	19.82	24.29
Moderately More than Most	32.29	22.63	28.89	41.58	31.59	33.14	39.39	40.93	25.17	30.86
The Same Amount	25.15	31.87	30.16	17.19	28.72	21.95	24.24	23.55	28.06	22.86
Less than Most	6.76	12.17	6.03	3.51	8.28	5.60	6.49	3.86	8.24	7.43
Much Less than Most	5.85	10.95	5.71	2.11	6.76	5.02	2.16	5.79	6.46	7.43
Don't Know/No Opinion	8.97	12.41	10.16	5.44	7.26	10.19	5.63	8.11	12.25	7.14

Table 5 reveals that 53 percent of respondents believe members of the LGBTQ+ community are discriminated against “much more” or “moderately more” than most, 25 percent believe they are discriminated against the same amount as other people in America, and only 13 percent believe they are discriminated against “less than” or “much less than” most. Across none of the socio-political groups does the number of people believing members of this community are discriminated against less than most outnumber those believing they are discriminated against more than most. Table 5 also reveals a sizable portion of respondents believing the LGBTQ+ community is experiencing the same amount of discrimination as other groups in America. Thirty-two percent of Republicans agreed that the LGBTQ+ community is discriminated against the same amount as other people in America, along with 30 percent of independents, 29 percent of men, and 22 percent of women.

This final question asks people to identify what they believe should constitute a hate crime. Specifically, we ask:

Hate crimes are defined as “a traditional offense like murder, arson, or vandalism with the added element of bias” (FBI). However, the decision to prosecute an individual for a hate crime is often left up to a local prosecutor. Some people have questioned whether suspects should be charged with hate crimes when committing particular offenses. In which of these cases do you believe a suspect should be charged with a hate crime? If the suspect

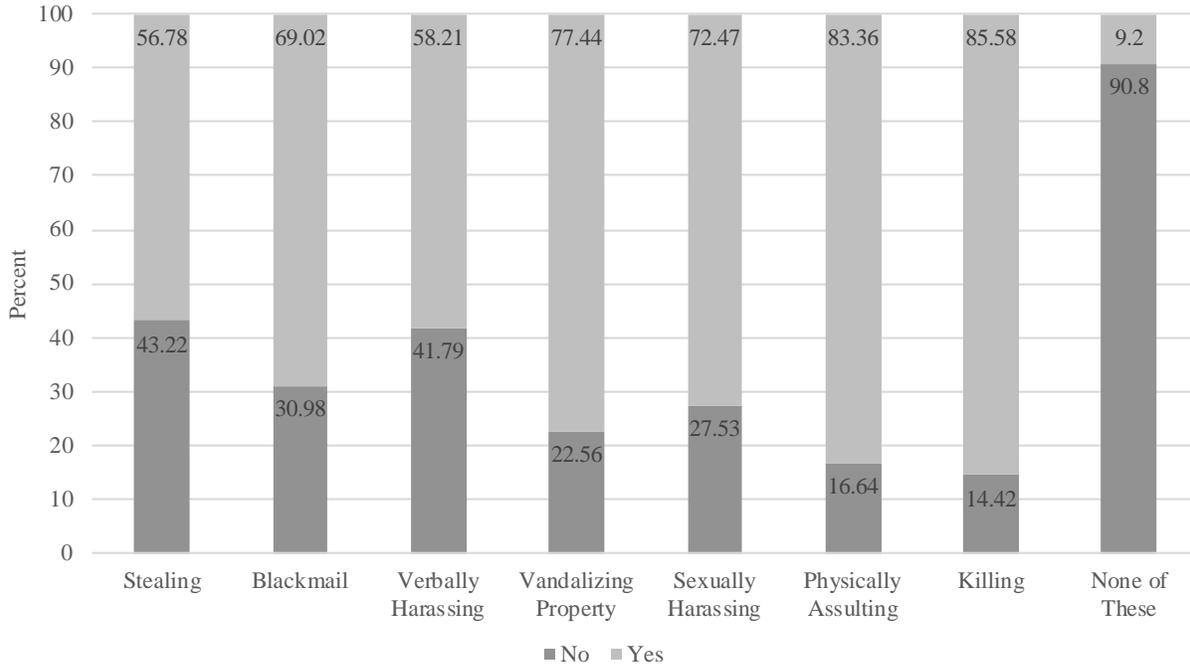
...

1. *Steals from someone because they are gay or transgender*
2. *Blackmails someone because they are gay or transgender*
3. *Verbally harasses someone because they are gay or transgender*
4. *Vandalizes someone’s property because they are gay or transgender*
5. *Sexually harasses someone because they are gay or transgender*
6. *Physically assaults someone because they are gay or transgender*
7. *Kills someone because they are gay or transgender*
8. *None of the above suspects should be charged with a hate crime*

Figure B shows that in all cases, a majority of respondents believe an individual should be charged with a hate crime for committing each of these acts; however, some types of offenses exhibit more support for a hate crime charge than others. Eighty-six percent of people believe someone who kills another person because they are gay or transgender should be charged with a hate crime and 83 percent believe that physically assaulting someone for the same reason should also result in this additional charge. Stealing from someone because they are gay or transgender exhibits the least support with 43 percent believing the offender should not be charged with a hate crime.

Examining these answers by the partisanship of the respondent, we find that all self-identified Independents and Democrats agree that all of the crimes listed should constitute a hate crime if they are committed because the victim is gay or transgender. Republicans also agree that in all but two of these scenarios (stealing and verbal harassment), the offender should be charged with a hate crime. Overall, there is broad support for the use of hate crime violations by prosecutors when it is known the victim is targeted because of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Figure B: In Which of These Cases Should Someone Be Charged With a Hate Crime if they Commit the Act Because the Person is Gay or Transgender?



Methodology

The Public Policy Attitudes in America Poll was conducted on Monday, April 15, 2019 using Survey Monkey's Audience product. We drew a sample of 1,327 registered voters in the United States, 1,290 of whom answered all of the questions. This survey was designed by students enrolled in the Social Consequences of Public Policy class at Florida Southern College, in consultation with their instructor, and funded by the Florida Southern College Center for Polling and Policy Research. All respondents represented to Survey Monkey that they are at least 18 years old, live in the United States, and are registered to vote in U.S. elections. All responses are collected electronically using computers or internet-connected cellular phones. All survey instruments and protocols were approved by the Institutional Review Board at Florida Southern College before implementation.

Survey Monkey's Audience product utilizes a non-probability sampling technique to produce a pool of respondents that broadly matches the characteristics of the United States population. Here, we asked Survey Monkey to provide us with a sample that closely matched the characteristics of registered voters. Women constitute 54.07 percent of our sample and men, 45.93 percent. Breaking respondents down by age, 17.92 percent are between the ages of 18 and 29, 20.09 percent between 30 and 44, 34.83 percent between 45 and 60, and 27.15 percent are 60 years old or older. Looking at the age of our respondents, 13.42 percent report earning between \$0 and \$24,999, 19.55 percent between \$25,000 and \$49,999, 17.53 percent between \$50,000 and \$74,999, 15.52 percent between \$75,000 and \$99,999, 10.78 percent between \$100,000 and \$124,999, 4.65 percent between \$125,000 and \$149,000, and 9.62 percent \$150,000 and above. Finally, 14.58 report being a strong Republican, 17.13 percent say they are more Republican than Democrat, 18.67 percent identify as being a Democrat more than a Republican, 25.31 percent report being a strong Democrat, and 24.31 percent report being close to neither Republicans nor Democrats.

Top-Line Results

All cells are percent values.

Question 1: What do you think are the most important problems facing the country today?
This is an open-ended response in which survey respondents could write whatever topics they considered most important. Most respondents entered more than one item that troubled them. Students at Florida Southern College coded these responses into several categories. Below, I provide basic summary statistics indicating the percent of times – out of all responses made – these topics appeared. This is not an exhaustive accounting of all items mentioned.

	Percent of all topics mentioned
Problems with our Politics	22.94
President Trump	6.54
Polarization of our political climate	5.43
Economy	18.08
General operation of economy	6.62
Income inequality	5.27
Public Policy Issues	41.98
Immigration	10.10
Healthcare	8.58
Society	17.00
Racism	6.94
Morality	2.79

The percent column will not add to 100 percent due to the method of calculation.

Question 2: Now, we would like to get your views on some issues being discussed in the country today. Sexual orientation is a topic that makes many people uncomfortable, but the government often makes policies concerning gay and transgender rights. We'd like to know how you feel about some of these policies. There is no right or wrong answer, and you can choose not to answer the question for any reason. Should it be legal or illegal for:

	Always Legal	Sometimes Legal	Neutral	Sometimes Illegal	Always Illegal	DK/ No Opinion
Employers to discriminate against employees based on their sexual orientation	5.4	6.3	9.2	7.3	69.9	1.8
Businesses to refuse service based on the customers sexual orientation	8.6	8.6	9.6	8.6	62.5	2.0
Landlords to refuse to rent based on the customers sexual orientation	6.6	5.6	9.9	6.4	69.3	2.2
Governments to refuse to marry people identifying as gay or transgender	11.2	4.1	12.7	4.3	64.6	3.2
Churches to refuse to marry people identifying as gay or transgender	28.2	6.0	24.5	5.4	30.9	5.0

(N = 1327)

Question 3: The next question is a survey experiment. Respondents were randomly assigned to see one of the two:

	Always	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	DK/ No Opinion	Total
If someone has a gender different from what was assigned at birth, should they be barred from military service?	16.7	11.8	8.6	49.8	13.1	100 (N = 663)
If someone is transgender, should they be barred from military service?	18.1	10.2	8.6	51.1	12.0	100 (N = 659)

Question 4: Should the Civil Rights Act be amended to add sexual orientation and gender identity to the list of protected classes?

	Percent
Yes	53.1
No	31.4
I don't know/No opinion	15.5

(N = 1318)

Question 5: Compared to other people in America, do you think members of the LGBTQ+ community are discriminated against:

	Percent
Much more than most	21.0
Moderately more than most	32.3
The same amount	25.2
Less than most	6.8
Much less than most	5.9
Don't know/No opinion	9.0

(N = 1316)

Question 6: Hate crimes are defined as “a traditional offense like murder, arson, or vandalism with the added element of bias” (FBI). However, the decision to prosecute an individual for a hate crime is often left up to a local prosecutor. Some people have questioned whether suspects should be charged with hate crimes when committing particular offenses. In which of these cases do you believe a suspect should be charged with a hate crime? If the suspect . . . (Select all you believe should be charged with a hate crime)

	Yes	No
Steals from someone because they are gay or transgender	56.8	43.2
Blackmails someone because they are gay or transgender	69.0	31.0
Verbally harasses someone because they are gay or transgender	58.2	41.8
Vandalizes someone's property because they are gay or transgender	77.4	22.6
Sexually harasses someone because they are gay or transgender	72.5	27.5
Physically assaults someone because they are gay or transgender	83.4	16.6
Kills someone because they are gay or transgender	85.6	14.4
None of the above suspects should be charged with a hate crime	9.2	90.8

(N = 1357)

Question 7: Next, we'd like to ask you about how the government and our elected leaders spend their time. How much time do you think elected leaders should spend on LGBTQ+ issues:

	Percent
Much more time	11.8
A bit more time	26.0
The same amount of time	24.2
A bit less time	7.9
Much less time	19.8
Don't know/No opinion	10.3

(N = 1302)

Question 8: How important are LGBTQ+ issues to you?

	Percent
Very important	15.2
Important	32.8
Neither important nor unimportant	25.6
Unimportant	10.4
Very unimportant	12.5
Don't know/No opinion	3.5

(N = 1300)

Question 9: How often would you say you go to religious services:

	Percent
More than once a week	7.7
Every week	14.2
Almost every week	6.5
Once or twice a month	7.8
A few times a year	24.7
Never	39.1

(N = 1298)

Question 10: In politics today, do you think of yourself as:

	Percent
A strong Republican	14.6
More Republican than Democrat	17.1
More Democrat than Republican	18.7
A strong Democrat	25.3
Not close to either Democrats or Republicans	24.3

(N = 1296)

Question 11: Which of the following apply to you?

	Yes	No
I identify as gay or transgender	5.3	94.7
I have close, personal, friends or family who identify as gay or transgender	49.3	50.7
I have distant friends, acquaintances, or family who identify as gay or transgender	54.0	46.0
I don't know anyone who identifies as gay or transgender	11.4	88.6
I do not wish to answer this question	6.0	94.0

(N = 1290)