

AHA Pledge of Allegiance Survey

Final Report

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June 17, 2014

Overview

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Appendix: Survey Questionnaire

Background

Background

Situation

In September, 2013, Lifeway Research conducted a poll of 1,001 adult Americans about their attitudes towards the Pledge of Allegiance. Their poll found that only 8% of Americans felt the phrase “under God” should be removed from the Pledge, compared to 85% who felt it should not and 6% who were unsure. The Lifeway poll has been cited by Fox News Radio and other conservative media outlets as evidence that there is little support for removing “under God” from the Pledge.

Two issues bring into question the Lifeway Research poll results. First, Lifeway is a self-described “evangelical research firm.” As such, it appears to have an inherent bias in conducting research on religious attitudes. Second, there is likely to be little public awareness of the history of the phrase “under God,” which was added to pledge in 1954. An understanding of this history could have a significant impact on support for inclusion of “under God” in the Pledge.

As a result of these issues, the American Humanist Association commissioned The Seidewitz Group to conduct a new survey about the Pledge and related several related issues. This report provides findings from this new survey.

Background

Objectives

1. Identify support in the U.S. adult population for removing “under God” from the Pledge of Allegiance when Americans are informed about the history of this phrase.
2. Understand feelings about state-sponsored prayer and religious displays.
3. Identify attitudes about the morality of atheists compared to religious people.

Background

Methodology

- Brief, six-question online survey of 1,000 adult Americans conducted May 29, 2014.

Background

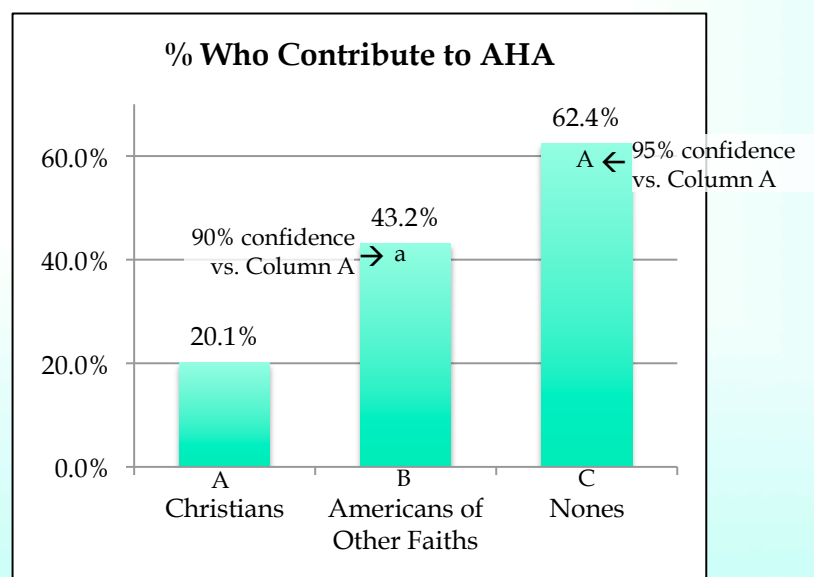
Sample

- Sample size of 1,000 provides 95% confidence in results, +/-3.1%.
- Sample drawn from Toluna's online market research panel of six million consumers.
- Data have been reweighted to match U.S. census demographics on age, gender, household income, region of the country, race and ethnicity.

Background

Reporting Note

- Throughout this report, a capital letter indicates a significant difference with 95% confidence and a lower case letter indicates a significant difference with 90% confidence.

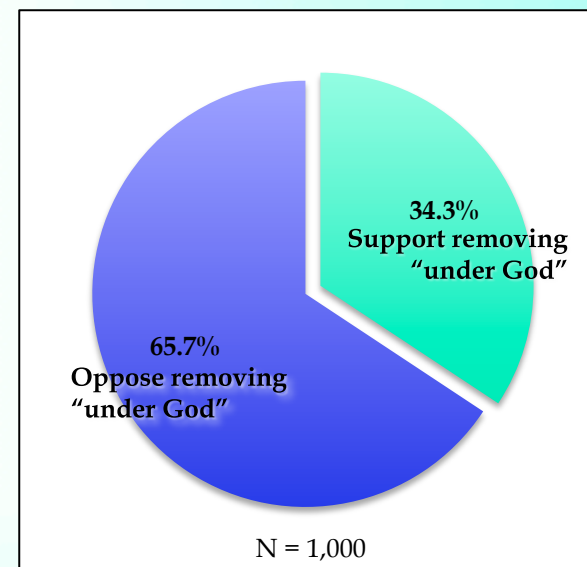


Key Findings – Pledge of Allegiance

Pledge of Allegiance

1. With just a small amount of education, more than one third of American adults support removing “under God” from the Pledge of Allegiance.

- The following information was provided to respondents before being asked about removing “under God” from the Pledge:
 - For its first 62 years, the Pledge of Allegiance did not include the phrase “under God.” During the Cold War, in 1954, the phrase “one nation indivisible” was changed to read “one nation, under God, indivisible.” Some people feel this phrase in our national pledge should focus on unity rather than religion.
- After seeing this information, 34% of Americans said they believed “under God” should be removed from the Pledge, vs. 66% who felt it should remain.
- This is a dramatic change vs. the Lifeway poll, which found that only 8% of adults believed “under God” should be removed from the Pledge.
 - The difference is most likely because of the information provided in the AHA survey; the Lifeway poll simply asked respondents if they believed “under God” should be removed from the Pledge. Research bias by Lifeway, which is a self-professed “evangelical research firm,” may have also contributed to Lifeway’s finding of minimal support for removing “under God.”

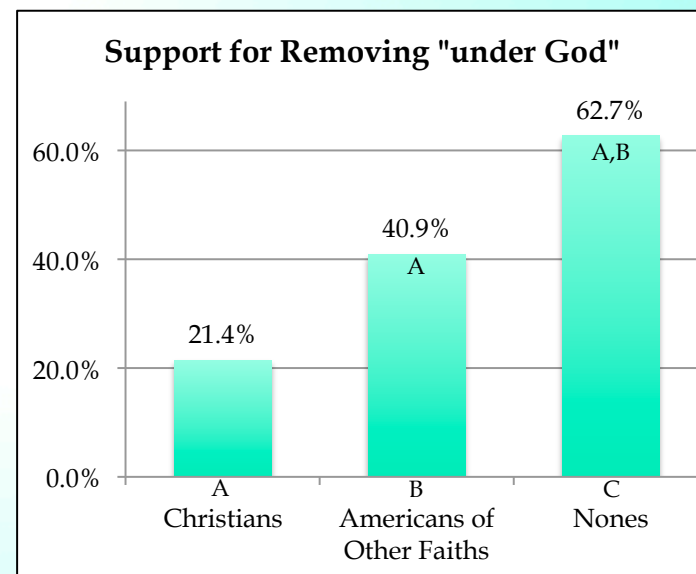


N = 1,000 Q2. Do you believe the Pledge of Allegiance should: Return to the unchanged version: "one nation indivisible"... Continue with the changed version: "one nation, under God, indivisible"...

Pledge of Allegiance

2. It is notable that 20% of Christians support removing “under God;” it is perhaps even more striking that 43% of Americans of other faiths believe “under God” should be removed.

- As expected, Nones overwhelmingly support removing “under God” from the Pledge.
 - Support was particularly strong among atheists, 90% of who said “under God” should be removed (caution: small base of only 41 atheists in the sample).
- While support among Christians is much lower, it is notable that slightly more than one in five believe “under God” should be removed from the Pledge. This is more than twice the support reported for the *entire population* in the Lifeway study. It suggests that even minimal education about the history of the Pledge can sway some Christians to support removing “under God.”
- Perhaps even more surprising is the support of Americans of non-Christian faiths. Americans who identify themselves as a member of a other religions (Judaism, Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism and other) are more than twice as likely as Christians to support removing “under God.”



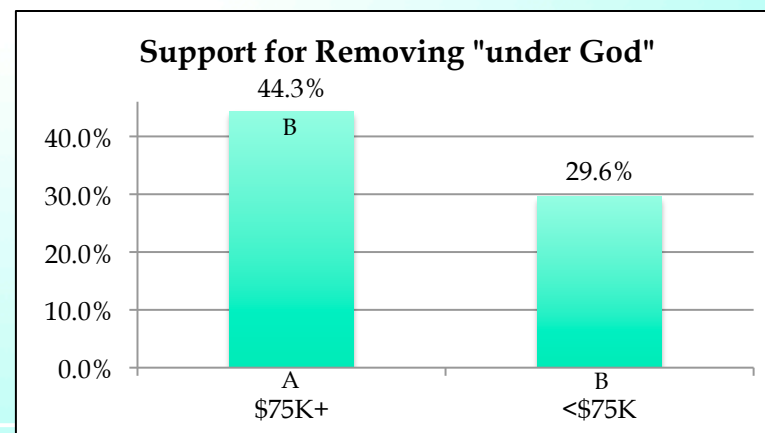
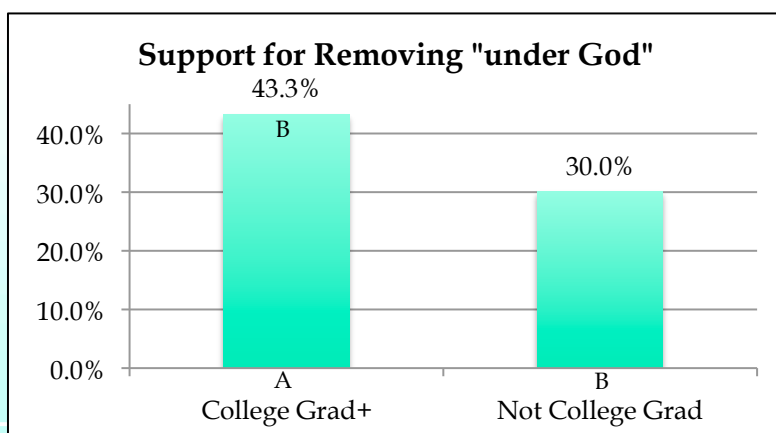
N for total sample = 1,000. N for Christians = 666, N for Americans of Other Faiths = 123, N for Nones = 211.

Q2. Do you believe the Pledge of Allegiance should: Return to the unchanged version: "one nation indivisible"... Continue with the changed version: "one nation, under God, indivisible"...

Pledge of Allegiance

3. As expected, removing "under God" has greater support among more educated and more affluent Americans.

- Both education level and household income were found to be statistically significant predictors (95% confidence level) of support for removing "under God."
- The key cut on education level was a four-year college degree. Those with this level education or higher were significantly more likely to support removing "under God" from the Pledge than those with less education.
 - This is consistent with the findings of the Lifeway poll.
- The inflection point for household income was \$75K. Those at or above this level were almost 50% more likely to support removing "under God." Support increased at higher income levels.
 - Lifeway did not include household income as a demographic metric in their poll.

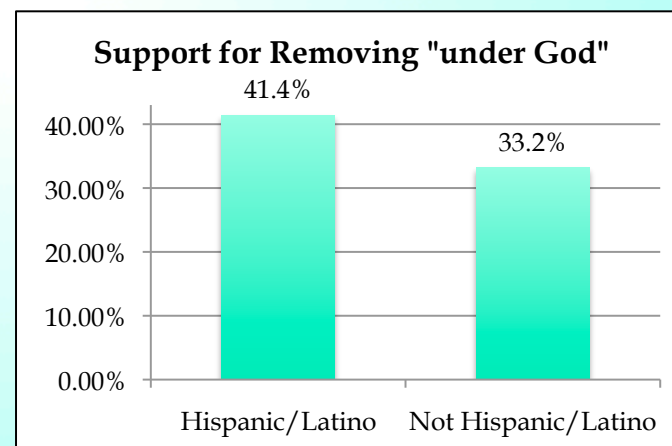
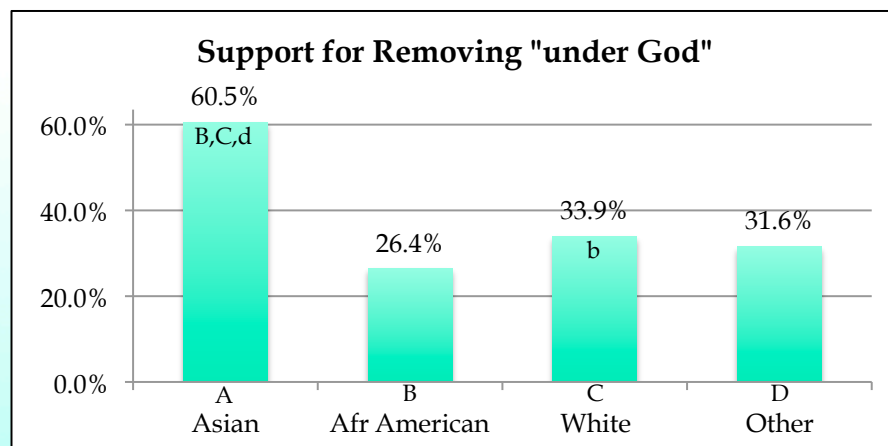


N = 1,000 Q2. Do you believe the Pledge of Allegiance should: Return to the unchanged version: "one nation indivisible"... Continue with the changed version: "one nation, under God, indivisible"...

Pledge of Allegiance

4. Asians were much more likely to support removing “under God” from the Pledge.

- Out of all demographic groups we tested, Asians were the only with a majority in support of removing “under God” from the Pledge. More than 60% of Asians supported removing the phrase.
 - African Americans were less likely than both Asians and whites to support removing “under God” from the Pledge.
- Hispanics had more support for removing “under God,” but the difference vs. non-Hispanics was not significant at either a 95% or 90% confidence level.

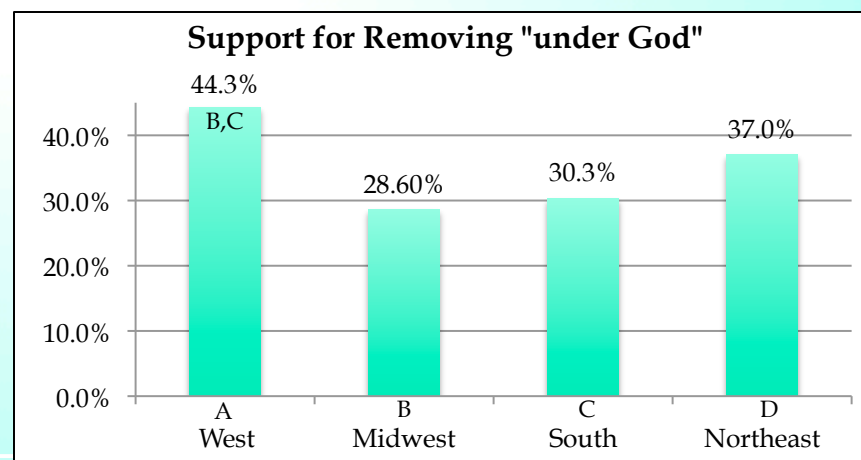
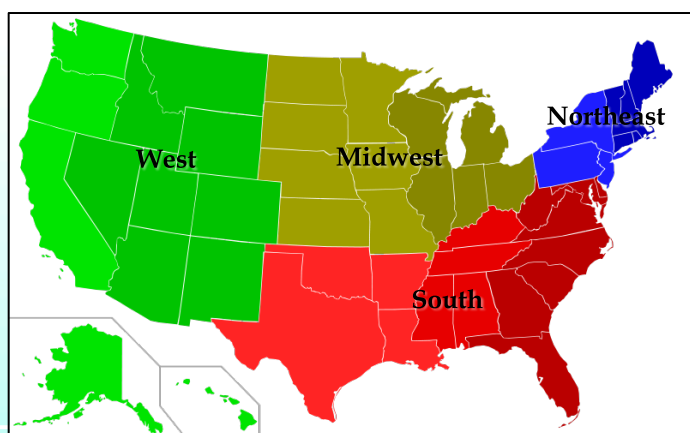


N = 1,000 Q2. Do you believe the Pledge of Allegiance should: Return to the unchanged version: "one nation indivisible"... Continue with the changed version: "one nation, under God, indivisible"...

Pledge of Allegiance

5. Living in a state in the West Region of the U.S. was also a predictor of support for removing “under God.”

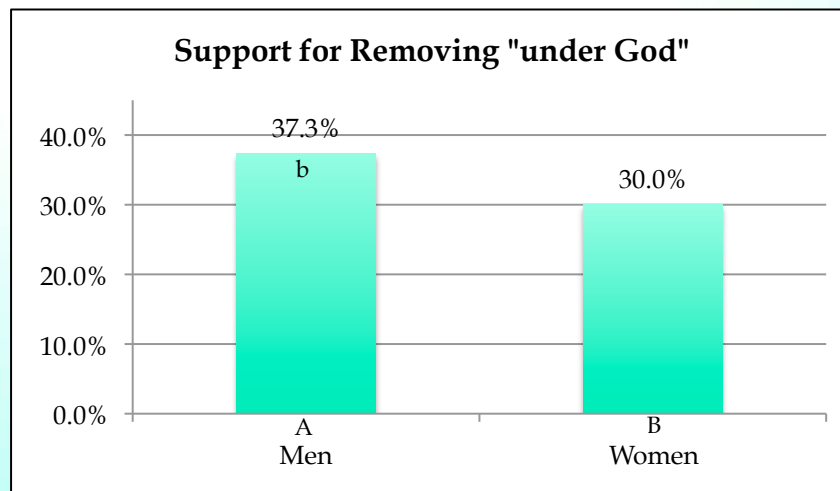
- This is not surprising, considering that the two highest population states in this region, California and Washington, have strong liberal voting records.
- The other largely liberal region in the U.S., the Northeast, had higher support for removing “under God;” however, this level of support was not statistically different from the South or Midwest at either a 95% or 90% confidence level.
- Interestingly, Lifeway did not report a statistical difference for support of removing “under God” across U.S. regions. However, it did find greater agreement in the West that requiring students to recite “under God” violates their rights.



N = 1,000 Q2. Do you believe the Pledge of Allegiance should: Return to the unchanged version: "one nation indivisible"... Continue with the changed version: "one nation, under God, indivisible"...

Pledge of Allegiance

6. Men were more likely than women to support removing “under God,” although the difference was less pronounced than with other demographic groups.
- The seven point difference between the two genders was less than the previously reported demographic differences and was only significant at a 90% confidence level (not at 95%).
 - Lifeway also reported that men were more likely to support removing “under God” from the Pledge.

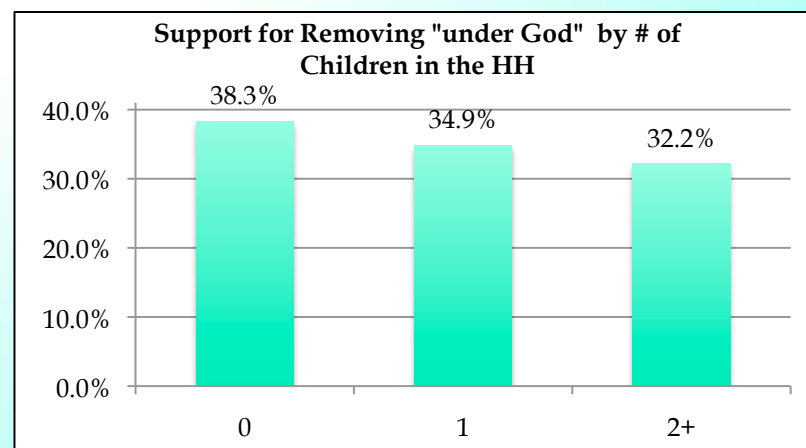
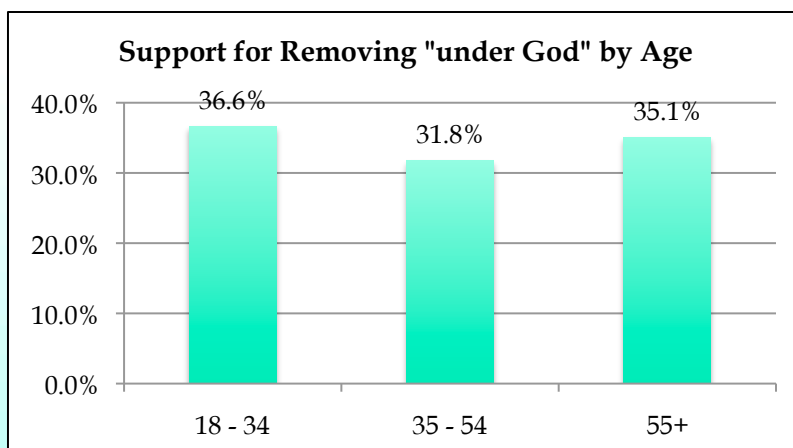


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Pledge of Allegiance

7. Somewhat surprisingly, there were not significant differences in support for “under God” across age groups.

- Support by age was fairly consistent, ranging from a 32% for 35 – 54 year olds to 37% for 18 – 34 years old. There were no significant differences across age groups.
 - This is at odds with the Lifeway poll, which found significantly greater support for removing “under God” among 18-29 year olds. This discrepancy may be due to the different age groupings in the Lifeway poll vs. the AHA survey.
- Number of children in the household was also tested; no significant differences were found based on this demographic.

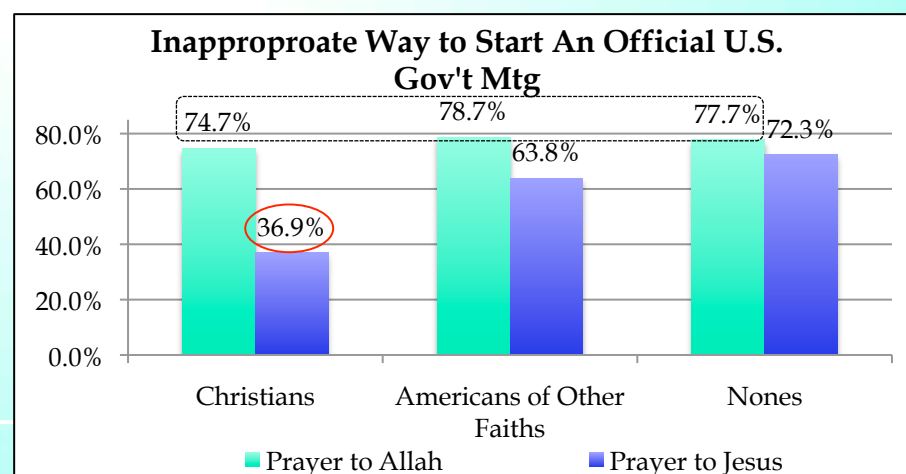
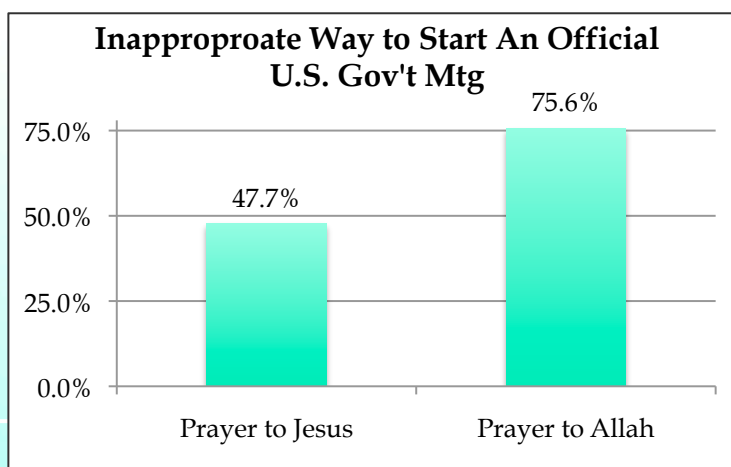


N = 1,000 Q2. Do you believe the Pledge of Allegiance should: Return to the unchanged version: "one nation indivisible"... Continue with the changed version: "one nation, under God, indivisible"...

Key Findings - Other

Other Findings

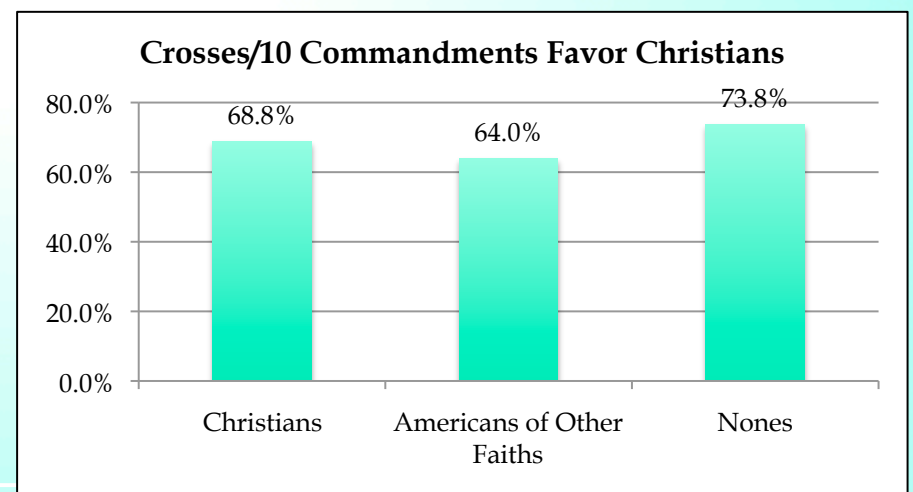
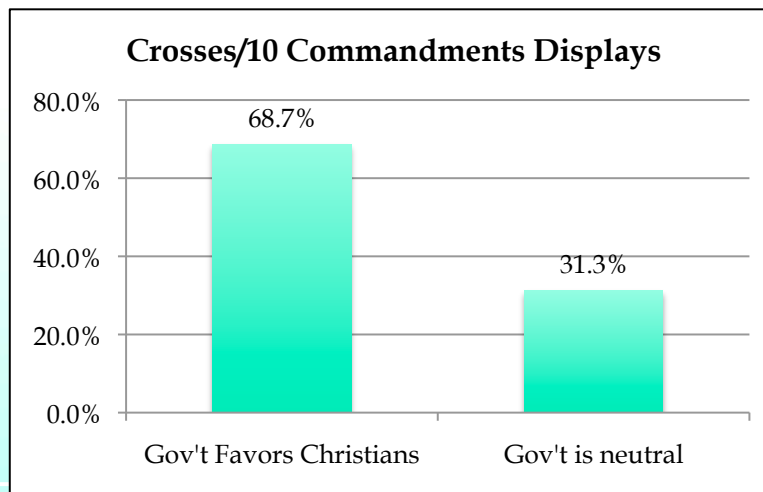
- Americans are more likely to feel it's inappropriate to open a U.S. government meeting with a prayer to Allah than to Jesus.
 - More than three quarters of Americans felt it was inappropriate to open an official U.S. government meeting with a prayer to Allah, but less than half felt it was inappropriate to open with a prayer to Jesus.
 - Not surprisingly, this bias was concentrated among Christians.
 - Christians, Americans of Other Faiths and Nones were in broad agreement that opening with a prayer to Allah was inappropriate (75%-79% felt this way across all groups).
 - However, Christians were far less likely to find it inappropriate to open with a prayer to Jesus. Only 37% felt it inappropriate to do so, compared to 64% of Americans of Other Faiths and 72% of Nones.
 - Nevertheless, it is notable that almost 50% of Americans and more than a third of Christians felt it inappropriate to open a government meeting with a prayer to Jesus.



N = 1,000 Q3. How would you feel if an official U.S. government meeting opened with a prayer to Allah? Q4. How would you feel if an official U.S. government meeting opened with a prayer to Jesus?

Other Findings

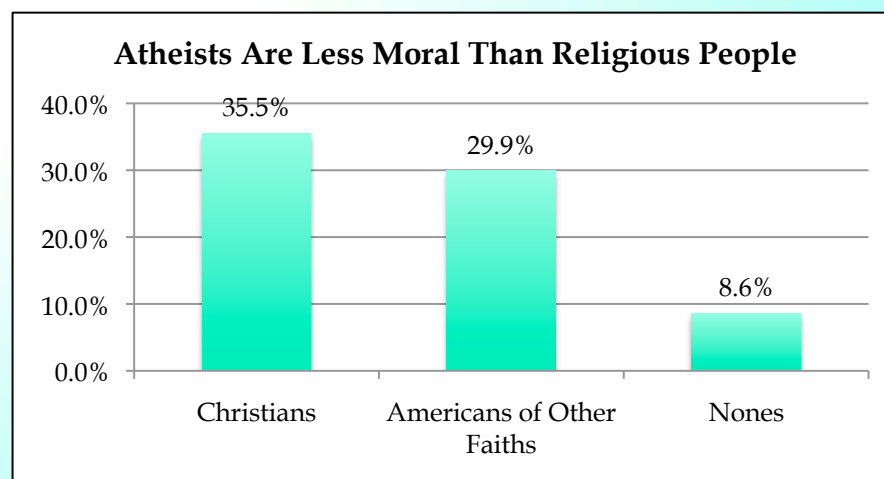
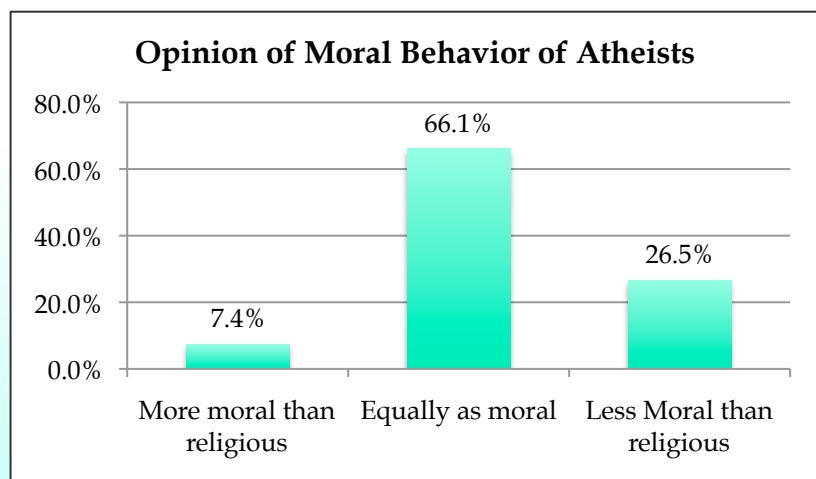
2. Americans overwhelmingly think non-Judeo Christians feel the government favors Christians when crosses and Ten Commandment displays are allowed on government property.
 - 73% of Americans felt displays of crosses and the Ten Commandments would lead to Muslims, other non-Judeo-Christians and nonreligious people to feel the government favors Christians.
 - This belief was fairly consistent across religious groups.



N = 1,000 Q5. How do you think Muslims, other non-Judeo-Christians, and non-religious Americans would feel if large crosses or Ten Commandment displays were allowed on government property?

Other Findings

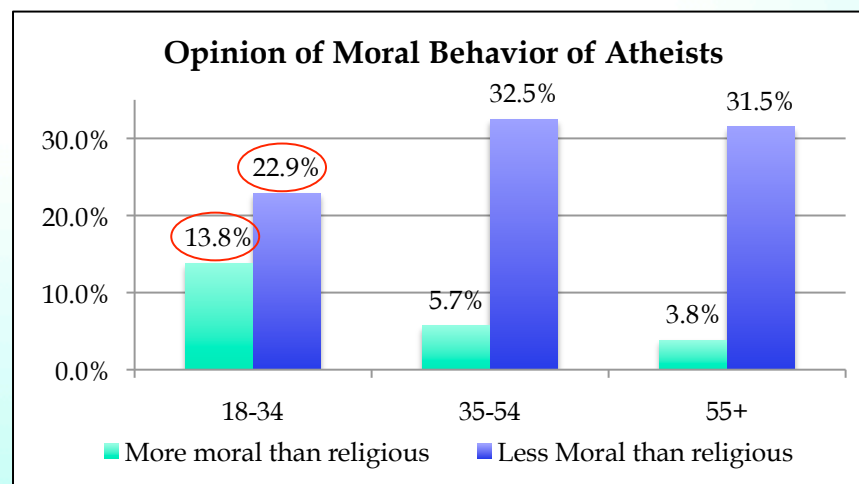
3. Most Americans think atheists are equally as moral as religious people; however, more than a quarter think they are less moral.
- 26% of Americans felt that atheists are less moral than religious people.
 - This appears to indicate that a large portion of the U.S. population has an inherent bias against atheists simply because of their belief system.
 - This bias is concentrated in Christians; more than a third of Christians feel atheists are less moral than religious people.



N = 1,000 Q6. What is your general opinion of the moral behavior of atheists? In general do you think atheists are:

Other Findings

3. Most Americans think atheists are equally as moral as religious people; however, more than a quarter think they are less moral. (cont'd)
- However, the bias is less pronounced among younger Americans.
 - Only 23% of Americans 18-34 said atheists are less moral, compared to more than 30% for older adults. Younger adults are also more likely to think atheists are more moral than religious people. This indicates that over time the bias against atheists should diminish.



N = 1,000 Q6. What is your general opinion of the moral behavior of atheists? In general do you think atheists are:

Conclusions

Conclusions & Recommendations

1. Educating Americans about the history of adding “under God” to the Pledge of Allegiance appears to be effective in increasing support for removing this phrase.
 - Providing just three sentences about the history of adding “under God” increased support for removing this phrase from 8% in the Lifeways poll to 34% in this survey.
 - Caution: Some of this increase may have been due to bias in Lifeway’s research (Lifeway is a self-described “evangelical research firm,” and therefore may be biased in its fielding and interpretation of research).
 - However, we did not note any major flaws in Lifeway’s polling methodology, so most or all of the increase in support for removing “under God” is probably due to the educational information provided.

Conclusions & Recommendations

2. Several demographic groups are particularly supportive of removing “under God” after education is provided.
 - The key demographic groups who were strongly supportive of removing “under God” were:
 - Asian-Americans
 - Americans with a four year college degree or more education
 - Americans from households with income of \$75K+
 - Residents of the Western Region of the United States.
 - Interestingly, age and gender were not strongly predictive of support for removing “under God.”
 - Men were only a little more likely than women to support removing “under God.”
 - Support for removing “under God” was fairly consistent across age groups. This differs from the Lifeway poll and is perhaps because of the information provided about the history of adding “under God” (which appears to have swayed all age groups equally).

Conclusions & Recommendations

3. A belief by one quarter of the U.S. population that atheists are less moral than religious people demonstrates the risk of discrimination and dehumanization based simply on an atheist American's belief system.
 - Dehumanization of and discrimination against subgroups are often the result of fear, misperceptions and lack of familiarity. The survey results suggest up to a quarter of Americans may believe negative stereotypes about atheists as a result of misperceptions and lack of familiarity.

Thank You!

Contact Information:

The Seidewitz Group

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Appendix: Survey Questionnaire

QUESTIONNAIRE

Q1. What is your present religion, if any?

1. Protestant Christian
2. Catholic
3. Mormon
4. Other Christian
5. Jewish
6. Muslim
7. Buddhist
8. Hindu
9. Atheist
10. Agnostic
11. Other
12. Nothing in particular/none

Q2. For its first 62 years, the Pledge of Allegiance did not include the phrase "under God". During the Cold War, in 1954, the phrase "one nation, indivisible..." was changed to read "one nation, under God, indivisible...". Some people feel this phrase in our national pledge should focus on unity rather than religion. Do you believe the Pledge of Allegiance should:

1. Return to the unchanged version: "one nation, indivisible"...
2. Continue with the changed version: "one nation, under God, indivisible"...

Q3. How would you feel if an official U.S. government meeting opened with a prayer to Allah?

1. I would feel this was an appropriate way to start a U.S. government meeting.
2. I would feel this was an inappropriate way to start a U.S. government meeting.

Q4. How would you feel if an official U.S. government meeting opened with a prayer to Jesus?

1. I would feel this was an appropriate way to start a U.S. government meeting.
2. I would feel this was an inappropriate way to start a U.S. government meeting.

Q5. How do you think Muslims, other non-Judeo-Christians, and non-religious Americans would feel if large crosses or Ten Commandment displays were allowed on government property?

1. They would feel like the government unfairly favors Christians.
2. They would feel like the government was neutral.

Q6. What is your general opinion of the moral behavior of atheists? In general do you think atheists are:

1. More moral than religious people.
2. Equally moral as religious people.
3. Less moral than religious people.