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VOTERS SAY WE CAN PRAY IN PUBLIC MEETINGS

By a wide margin, American voters say it's OK to have prayer in official, public meetings. In the most recent national survey by Fairleigh Dickinson University's PublicMind, 73% percent of voters say "prayer at public meetings is fine as long as the public officials are not favoring some beliefs over others." Just one-quarter (23%) say "public meetings shouldn't have any prayers at all because prayers by definition suggest one belief or another." Republicans are significantly more likely to favor public prayer (88%-10%) than Democrats, but even Democrats by a large margin say prayer should be allowed (60%-36%). The national survey showed no significant differences between men and women, whites and nonwhites, or in different age groups.

"This has always been a praying nation, despite its very secular Constitution," said Peter J. Woolley, professor of comparative politics at Fairleigh Dickinson University. "People generally see generic prayer as harmless, if not uplifting, not as something that is oppressive."

The US Supreme Court will rule soon on the case of *Town of Greece vs. Galloway*, sparked by the practice in the New York state's town of Greece to use rotating clergyman to offer prayers at council meetings, and those clergymen were overwhelmingly Christian, as were their prayers. Since the lawsuit was filed in 2008, the town has become more diverse in its prayers and participants.

"An overwhelming number of Americans are upset by two things," said Woolley, "not being allowed to pray, and someone insisting that that only their prayer is legitimate."

The university-based research center conducted the national poll as part of its *Project on Popular Constitutionalism*, designed to assess voter attitudes about the Constitution and its competing values. The Project focused on three prominent cases considered by the highest court this year: *Michigan v. Bay Mills Indian Community*, *Town of Greece v. Galloway*, and [*McCutcheon v. Federal Election Commission*](#). Fairleigh Dickinson University's national poll of 883 registered voters was conducted by telephone with both landline and cell phones from December 9 through December 15, 2013, and has a margin of error of +/- 3.3 percentage points.

Methodology, questions, and tables on the web at: <http://publicmind.fdu.edu>

Radio actualities at 201.692.2846

For more information, please call 201.692.7032

Methodology

This national survey by Fairleigh Dickinson University's PublicMind was conducted by telephone from December 9 through December 15, 2013 using a randomly selected sample of 883 registered voters. One can be 95 percent confident that the error attributable to sampling has a range of +/- 3.3 percentage points. The margin of error for subgroups is larger and varies by the size of that subgroup. Survey results are also subject to non-sampling error. This kind of error, which cannot be measured, arises from a number of factors including, but not limited to, non-response (eligible individuals refusing to be interviewed), question wording, the order in which questions are asked, and variations among interviewers.

PublicMind interviews are conducted by Opinion America of Cedar Knolls, NJ, with professionally trained interviewers using a CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing) system. Random selection is achieved by computerized random-digit dialing. This technique gives every person with a landline phone number (including those with unlisted numbers) an equal chance of being selected.

Landline households are supplemented with a separate, randomly selected sample of cell-phone respondents interviewed in the same time frame. The total combined sample is mathematically weighted to match known demographics of age, race and gender.

Tables

<i>There is a case about praying in town councils and other meetings with public officials. Have you heard about this case, or not?</i>												
		Party			Gender		Race		Age			
	All	Dem	Ind	Rep	Men	Wom	White	Non white	18-29	30-44	45-59	60+
Have heard	37%	32	37	44	37	38	39	31	34	29	39	44
Haven't heard	62%	67	63	54	62	61	60	69	66	70	60	54
DK/Ref (vol)	1%	1	-	1	1	1	1	1	-	1	1	1

<i>Some say...[rotate]...public meetings shouldn't have any prayers at all because prayers by definition suggest one belief or another. Others say prayer at public meetings is fine as long as the public officials are not favoring some beliefs over others. Which comes closer to your view?</i>												
	All	Party			Gender		Race		Age			
		Dem	Ind	Rep	Men	Wom	White	Non white	18-29	30-44	45-59	60+
Prayers should not be allowed	23%	36	18	10	24	22	24	17	22	21	26	21
Prayer should be allowed	73%	60	75	88	72	74	72	77	75	69	71	77
DK/Ref (vol)	4%	4	7	2	4	5	4	6	2	10	3	2

Exact Question Wording and Order for US Supreme Court Series

USSC 1A One case is about allowing Indian Tribes to buy land to build casinos. Have you heard about this case or not?

- 1 Have heard
- 2 Have not heard
- 8 DK/Refused (vol)

USSC 1B. Some say...ROTATE... since Indian Tribes are nations and have the right to run casinos on their own land, they can also buy new land and have the same right. Others say...ROTATE... Indian Tribes are nations and have the right to run casinos on their own land, but they can't buy new land and claim the same rights. Which comes closer to your view?

- 1 Can buy new land and claim the same rights
- 2 Cannot buy land and claim the same rights
- 8 DK/Refused (vol)

USSC2A. There is a case about how much money people can give, not to candidates, but to other political organizations. Have you heard about this case, or not?

- 1 Have heard
- 2 Have not heard
- 8 DK/Refused (vol)

USSC2B. Some people say... ROTATE... Congress cannot limit how much money you give to a political group because such a limit is a limit on your free speech. Others say... Congress has to limit how much money you can give to a political group so other people's free speech is not overwhelmed by some people's money. Which comes closer to your view?

- 1 Congress cannot limit contributions
- 2 Congress CAN limit contributions
- 8 DK/Refused (vol)

USSC3A. There is one case about praying in town councils and other meetings with public officials. Have you heard about this case, or not?

- 1 Have heard
- 2 Have not heard
- 8 DK/Refused (vol)

USSC3B. Some say... ROTATE... public meetings shouldn't have any prayers at all because prayers by definition suggest one belief or another. Others say... prayer at public meetings is fine as long as the public officials are not favoring some beliefs over others. Which comes closer to your view.

- 1 Prayer shouldn't be allowed
- 2 Prayer can be allowed
- 8 DK/Refused (vol)

Sample characteristics

Gender

Male	49
Female	51

Age

18-34	26
35-54	36
55+	36
Refused	1

Race/Ethnicity

White	72
Black/African-American	11
Latino or Hispanic	11
Asian	2
Other/refused	4

Party identification

Democrat/Lean Democrat	43
Independent/DK/refused	22
Republican/Lean Republican	35