

Atheism and Electability: A Look at Current Opinions

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ATHEISM AND ELECTABILITY

ABSTRACT

Introduction

Most people in the southern U.S. take their religion and beliefs very seriously and non-believers are distrusted. One would almost certainly find that most atheists in the south would prefer their neighbors were Christian adulterers, thieves, or rapists than atheists. This study attempts to examine the prejudices and mistrust that seems to surround those who are non-believers. Specifically, this study seeks to answer these questions:

Review of Literature

According to the Pew Research Center, the number of people who identify as Christian dropped almost 8% from 2007-2014. In addition, those identifying as unaffiliated rose almost 7% (2015). Despite the fact that their numbers are growing, numerous studies show that atheists are still subject to much prejudice and discrimination in modern day America. These negative views range from the workplace to elected office and even the country's military, as Banerjee points out in a 2009 New York Times article about soldiers deployed in Iraq who were threatened and intimidated by their superior officer for being atheists. The literature suggests Gervais was correct when he said, "Scientific research yields inconsistent and contradictory evidence relating religion to moral judgments and outcomes, yet most people on earth nonetheless view belief in God (or gods) as central to morality, and many view atheists with suspicion and scorn."

Research design

The research was conducted using a quantitative survey consisting of 18 questions. The online survey combined three demographic questions, five qualitative and 10 quantitative questions in order to inform the researcher as to how being an atheist might affect a political candidate.

Data analysis

The data from the surveys was compiled by the instrument into an Excel spreadsheet. Quantitative numbers were tabulated by the instrument, qualitative answers were combined and evaluated using the data reduction method in order to gain understanding and find the main points of the results. The data obtained shows some similarities to the review of literature, in that those who are conservative Christians have a general bias against non-believers holding elected office. However, the results show that a majority of voters would vote for a candidate based on his/her platform over religious beliefs.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Overview

This research is designed in an effort to identify how religious identifying citizens feel about candidates for elected office who are non-religious and/or atheist. While many programs have been designed to personalize atheism and assist in understanding within the general public, such as the Freedom From Religion Foundation's "Face of an Atheist" campaign, atheists continue to be demonized, misunderstood, and marginalized within the United States. Eight states in the United States ban atheists from holding office.

Purpose of the Study

Many atheists feel that they must live "in the closet" when it comes to employment, community and family due to prejudices and in this way. Where many atheists have a "live and let live" attitude when it comes to religion, believers tend to judge non-believers. In the mayoral election in Nashville, TN, one of the candidates made national headlines for trying to "out" his opponent as an atheist, leading her to feel the need to affirm her faith. The purpose of the study is to confirm or debunk the belief that atheists can not be elected by answering the following questions:

1. Does American society in general expect elected officials to be religious in order to hold office?
2. Does being an atheist change the way someone is viewed by others, particularly those in a religion, even when the atheist is a moral person?
3. In general, will people vote for a candidate regardless of religion or atheism?

Selection of Sample and Demographic Data

The sample group for this study includes both men and women over the age of 21 who are of varying educational, economic, and social backgrounds. The instrument was made available to subjects in all areas of the United States and those of all religious backgrounds through a distribution on the researcher's Twitter and Facebook accounts. Using a varied sampling should give insight to the beliefs and feelings of Americans toward atheists.

Significance of survey

The significance of this survey is to provide the researcher with a better understanding of what exactly religious believers find objectionable about atheism, what impact these beliefs have at the polls, and whether they believe atheists are worse leaders than a Christian, even someone of another religion. This information could become a tool for atheist organizations to attempt a change in perception of these belief systems.

Assumption of the Study

It is assumed that the participants in the study respond in an open and honest manner. Also, it is assumed that those who identify with a particular religion are current and active members in that religion.

Limitations of the Study

This study does not address in detail the educational background, religious background, or source of personal beliefs of the participants. There were four questions offering a no opinion option to a yes or no question. In hindsight this option should not have been offered as it essentially gave the participants a reason not to answer.

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study the researcher has defined the following terms and may use some of the definitions interchangeably.

Religious- A person who identifies as Christian, Catholic, or any other religion which believes in the existence of a God or Gods.

Atheist- A person who is a non-believer in a higher power.

Non-believer- someone who doesn't believe in organized religion or a higher power. This may also be used to encompass other terms such as agnostic, unaffiliated, non-religious or questioning religion.

Good person- Someone who lives their life within a moral structure, obeys the law of the land and gives back to society.

Bad person- Someone who lives their life with no moral code, is not a law-abiding citizen, or spends their life taking from society.

Organization of the study

Existing research and literature on related subjects will be discussed in the review of literature. The survey results will be tabulated and analyzed then compared to this research in an attempt to clarify the results. Any conclusions reached will be presented, along with recommendations for further study.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

In the America of 2015, there are few boundaries left when it comes to holding political office. Throughout the states, elected office is held by women, immigrants, Catholics, Jews, Christians, African-Americans, and Mexican-Americans and a host of other minorities. While openly atheist elected officials exist, there are also atheists who do not run, or do not disclose their beliefs for fear of becoming unelectable. No fewer than seven states in the United States bar atheists from holding public office, which no doubt contributes to these high numbers. In fact, a recent poll by the Pew Research Center shows that nearly 50% of respondents would not vote for an atheist as president, and the majority of respondents would forgive a candidate who had an affair or other scandal before they would give an atheist their vote.

Much research exists about the preconceived notions held by those in the United States about atheists. One thing that is not directly addressed is the reason these preconceived notions exist and how they would affect the performance of public duties if an atheist were elected. In the book “One Electorate Under God,” the author includes the following quote from politician Mario Cuomo.

“Religion’s place in our government is dependent on legal precedents and social attitudes, which are complex, shifting, and sometimes contradictory. Even trying to define the basic words can be an adventure. Most non-lawyers, maybe even most lawyers, would assume that religion necessarily implies belief in a god, perhaps even implies monotheism. Not so. The word religion has been defined by the Supreme Court to include belief systems like secular humanism, Buddhism, ethical culture—belief systems that by and large reject the notion of God.” (Dionne, 15)

If such definition has been defined by the supreme court, then it would only make sense that atheists have the same rights under the law of the land as do all other religions, yet voters have hesitance with their candidacy and election. Therefore, the following literature was reviewed to reflect the framework of this study.

Review of Literature

In a 2014 study by the University of Kentucky, researcher W.M. Gervais studied how people viewed the morality or immorality of a person based on their beliefs. The study presented subjects with various moral and immoral conduct and asked the participants to identify if the person committing these acts was a non-believer or a member of one of 3 out of 11 religious groups that were varied by question. These questions asked subjects to judge the perpetrator of small and large crimes through 5 situational questions. Situations included serial murder, consensual incest, necrobetiality, cannibalism, and serial murder and were used to intuitively judge whether the criminal was associated with an atheist or other religion.

In the case of each of the five questions, atheists were considered to be likely to commit the crime in nearly half the responses. While I agree with the results of the study, the connecting question to me seems to be a bit leading in this study. The scenario is described then the question is asked “is Dax a. a teacher? Or b. a teacher who is....” with multiple choices like “non-believer, Jewish, Muslim, Christian.” I think this type of questioning leads to the choice of atheist by those who might not think it is ok to just answer “a teacher.”

In the article, “Who Has Religious Prejudice? Differing Sources of Anti-religious Animosity in the United States,” author George Yancy researches the stereotypes of who has religious prejudice and against whom. This study was also performed in an online survey and compared the feelings of identified religious groups toward other religions, including atheists

and non-believers. The survey found that from all groups, animosity is largest toward atheists. The most interesting thing, however, is that animosity toward Fundamentalists by other religious groups is significantly higher than toward other denominations of religion, higher than even Muslim. The article confirmed previous studies showing lack of acceptance of atheists in the United States, despite the increase of non-religious individuals over the past 20 years. In breaking down results, the research separated the three out-lying groups, Muslim, atheist, and fundamentalists, and showed specifically where their most/least support was. In doing so it was revealed that the results are dependent on the group assessed. He notes that religious individuals are less accepting of atheists but more accepting of fundamentalists. Southerners were less likely to accept atheists, older individuals more likely to accept fundamentalists, and whites were more supportive of atheists than fundamentalists. Those with anti-fundamentalist attitudes were actually highly educated and politically progressive. It is important to note that within this study of 1,669 people, nearly one quarter, 27.9%, expressed dislike for atheists, 11.4% for fundamentalist and 7.9% for Muslim. Every other group, Hindu, Jewish, Catholic, and Christian, received less than 3% of respondents with animosity.

The book *Atheists as "other": Moral boundaries and Cultural Membership in American Society*, the authors look at the distrust of atheists and give an opinion on some of the factors causing this distrust. In their research, they conclude that "distrust of atheists is driven by religious predictors, social location, and broader value orientations." The researchers hold the theory that although acceptance of religious diversity is increasing, this does not extend to those who are nonreligious. The study points to data from a 2003 survey showing that Americans feel atheists are the least likely of any belief system to share their vision of America. Additionally, the survey shows that they disapprove of their children marrying atheists over other marginalized

groups such as Muslims, immigrants, and homosexuals. This data is confirmed by a 2014 Pew research poll that shows nearly 50% of Americans would object to their child marrying an atheist. However, this study notes that “Loftis (2001) argues that political tolerance for a minority group is distinct from and varies independently of attitudes about the morality of members of that group and from feelings toward members of that group.” (215)

The study concludes that “atheists are at the top of the list of groups that Americans find problematic in both public and private life, and the gap between acceptance of atheists and acceptance of other racial and religious minorities is large and persistent.” Admittedly, the researchers state that respondents were replying to a hypothetical question rather than interacting with an actual person they know, which may have affected the results. Their conclusions also address the fact that many atheists “pass” in everyday life, unlike some other minority groups, and therefore are unable to identify as atheist. The researchers also call attention to the disparity between those self-identifying as religious compared to those who actually attend church. The researcher posits that within the American culture, the boundary is not so much about religious affiliation as it is the place of religion in our society’s history. “It is about an understanding that Americans share something more than rules and procedures, but rather that our understanding of right and wrong and good citizenship are also shared” (Hartmann and Gerteis 2005).

In conclusion, the review of literature makes it clear that there are, in fact, a number of preconceived notions that face any atheist, but particularly those seeking public office. Among those are general distrust, a fundamental difference with what people perceive to be the “Christian background” of America, the attitude that morality and religion are inextricably linked, and the perception that atheists are more likely to commit crimes than believers.

Therefore, this study will seek to obtain answers to the question of where these notions are born and why non-belief in religion should disqualify atheists from public office.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

Research Design

A qualitative approach to the research was chosen due to the nature of the information to be collected and the time allotted for the project. Due to the possibility of high emotions related to discussions about religion and atheism the survey will be conducted online. It is assumed that responders will be honest about their feelings and prejudices, and that the questions will be answered in a thoughtful and timely manner.

Selection of the Population

The researcher will use a random selection for participants in this survey with subjects who may or may not know the researcher. A link to the survey will be shared on social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and Google+. No specific participants will be invited to take the survey; however, the respondents will be asked to confirm their location as being within the southern United States. It is expected that some surveys will have to be eliminated because of this.

Variables

Dependent

Age

Religious Identity

Definition

16-20, 21-35, 36-45, 46-60, 60 and up

Buddhist, Catholic, Christian, Jewish,
Atheist, non-believer, other

Location	United States-Southern state, United States-Western state, United States-other, Canada, U.K., other.
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Independent

Survey Instrument

Definition

Qualitative structured interview questions about preconceived notions related to atheists.

Instrumentation

The survey consists of 12 questions as well as three qualifying questions based on age, location and religion of the participant. The form will have a mix of multiple-choice and open-ended questions to allow respondents to convey their true perceptions about the subject matter. These questions were reviewed by classmates as well as the instructor and revised accordingly. Questions on laws, concepts, opinions, and religious beliefs were included.

Procedures for Data Collection

The survey instrument was designed to collect information relative to the preconceptions about atheists and whether they are considered electable by the general public. The survey was built using Typeform and presented in an online format. A link to the survey was distributed shared by the researcher via Facebook and Twitter on Monday, Sept. 28 and was available through Friday, Oct. 2. Links on social media were promoted daily to encourage responders to the survey.

Procedures of Data Analysis

The data will be in two formats 1) quantitative demographic information and 2) qualitative responses to multiple choice and open ended questions. The data will be presented in narrative format.

CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

Introduction

The data resulting from this study is presented both in qualitative structured survey responses and quantitative information. The quantitative questions were presented in multiple choice format, with three demographic questions at the end of the survey. Open-ended qualitative questions were presented throughout the survey where clarification of yes or no questions would be beneficial to the research. The demographic information was organized and examined alongside other questions to determine the effect of religion, age, and geographic location on the respondent's answers. Gender was not included.

Data Analysis

The objective of this research study is to answer the question of whether voters are likely to vote for atheist or non-religious candidates, and how their own beliefs affect that decision. An 18 question survey was placed online and the link shared with 255 potential respondents on social media. Of those, 95 respondents completed the survey for a total response rate of 37%. Of those 18 questions, 10 were multiple choice, 5 were open ended, and 3 demographic questions which were also multiple choice.

Quantitative Demographic Data

Religious Affiliation

Fifty-seven of the participants, or 60%, identified as Christian. Three or 3% were Catholic. Two participants or 2% were Buddhist. Seven, or 7%, were atheists. Eight or 8% identified as non-believers. Eighteen, or 19%, were categorized as Other. There were no

participants who identified as Jewish. This is interesting because the surveys were performed online and after being shared with my core group, were distributed in wider circles. The statistics seem to be very close to what census data shows are the general religious makeup of the United States.

Age

Thirty-seven of the participants or 39% were between the ages of 23-35. Twenty-six or 27% were between the ages of 36-45. Twenty-two or 23% were between the ages of 46-60. Nine or 9% of participants were over the age of 60. It should be noted that 1 participant failed to record an age group. The sampling is surprisingly balanced between the age groups which will allow for any generational differences to be observed.

Location

Eighty-five participants, or 89%, live in the southern United States. Three or 3% of participants live in the western United States. Seven or 7% of participants live elsewhere in the United States. It was expected that the majority of responses would be located in the southern United States, and the study's intent was to focus on the "Bible Belt" area.

The following 9 questions address the main research topic and form the basis of the conclusion.

1. How much does religion affect your opinion of a political candidate running for office?
Forty-one, or 43% of participants, answered that it depends on the person. Thirty participants, or 32% say it does not affect their opinion at all. Twenty-four people, or 25% responded that religion affects their opinion a great deal.

2. How much does it affect your opinion of a candidate if they are of another religion than yourself?

Forty-eight participants or 51% answered that it depends on the person. Thirty-eight or 40% said it does not affect their opinion at all. Nine participants, or 9%, said it affects their opinion of a candidate a great deal.

3. Do you feel a religious background is necessary to be a good elected official or leader?
Seventy participants, or 74%, answered that no, religious background is not necessary. Eighteen participants, or 19% answered yes, they feel it is necessary. Seven, or 7%, had no opinion. The question should have been left at yes or no.

4. Is it your opinion that morals only come from religious belief?

Eighty-nine participants, or 94% answered no. Four participants, or 4% said yes. Two, or 2%, had no opinion. Again, should have been left at yes or no.

5. Do you feel religion is necessary to be a good person?

Only 94 of the 95 participants answered this question. Of those, eighty-three or 88% said not at all. Seven or 7% said a great deal and 4 participants, or 4% had no opinion.

6. Are you aware that Article VI of the constitution states that “no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States”?
Fifty-nine participants, or 62% said yes. Thirty-six, or 38% said no. This number is surprising.

7. There are currently laws on the books in seven states that bar atheists from holding public office. Do you agree with these laws?

Eighty-three, or 87% of participants, said no, they do not agree. Twelve, or 13% said yes.

8. If you discovered your preferred candidate is an atheist, would it keep you from voting for him or her?

Seventy-eight, or 82% of the participants, said if they agree with the candidate's platform it would not keep them from voting for the candidate. Ten, or 11%, said they would have to seriously consider their choice. Seven participants, or 7%, said this absolutely would keep them from voting for the candidate.

9. Do you think people with beliefs other than yours can be a good leader?

Seventy-eight, or 82% of respondents, answered yes they can be a good leader. Fourteen, or 15% said that it depends on the situation. Three, or 3%, said no a person with different beliefs could not be a good leader.

10. Do you think an atheist could be a good leader?

Eighty-five, or 91% of participants, answered yes. Eight, or 9%, answered no.

Qualitative Data

The following is detailed information collected from the 6 open-ended questions posed in the online survey. The data is summarized in the response matrix (see data reduction table, Appendix A)

Qualitative Response Data

1. Based on their answer to question #5, "Do you feel religion is necessary to be a good person?", participants were asked to explain why they answered as they did. Responses from the 83 participants who answered "not at all" included recurring responses that their view of goodness is based upon acts of compassion, morality, and empathy. Some expressed that while religion can provide value in life, they believe morality and goodness stem from human nature, life experience, and kindness toward fellow humans.

One respondent summed it up by saying, “It’s not what you say or pray. It’s what you do to help your fellow man that counts.” Those who answered that it mattered “a great deal” started with one comment, “Religion is not the sole reason for being a good person, it’s just a good outline,” which was echoed in several other responses.

2. How would you feel if someone you think is a good person tells you they are an atheist?

The majority opinion, 74 participants or 77%, said their opinion of the person would not be changed. Comments that were repeated in the responses include that “a good person is a good person,” “wouldn’t matter if I like them” and “it’s their choice.” Twenty-one participants, or 22% voiced concerns for the person, and reflected that these concerns stem from their own personal beliefs. One participant noted that they would feel “disappointed and challenged,” and another noted that they think non-believers are “just being contrary.”

3. Describe what you think an atheist’s beliefs are.

Eighty-five, or 89% of the participants, said that they believe atheists are defined by their lack of belief in a higher power. Two participants answered that they don’t know what atheists believe, 3 answered that their beliefs are science-based, 2 believe atheists are anti-religion, 1 said they do not believe in the afterlife, 1 said it varies, and 1 said they have no beliefs at all. One participant who identifies as Christian commented “I cannot fathom what they believe.” One participant identifying as Other said “The term atheist

simply indicates that a person does not subscribe to a particular religion. It does not, however, imply that the person is in any way amoral or without spirituality.”

4. Based on the answer to previous question, where did you get that information?

Nearly 47%, or 45 out of 95 participants, said their information about atheists comes from friends, family or acquaintances in their lives. Twenty-four, or 25%, said that they have studied religion and belief systems either in school or on their own. Nine participants, or 9%, answered that their information came from “myself,” and interestingly 5 of the 9 identified as Christian. Fourteen participants, or 14%, said that they looked it up in the dictionary. Of those fourteen, all but one identified as Christian.

5. Do you agree with laws that bar atheists from holding office?

Eighty-five of the participants, or 89% of participants, say they do not believe atheists should be banned from holding office. Most of these cited the constitution and our nation’s separation of church and state as a reason for their opinion. Additional comments include “If a person can help run my state or has a vision for our country and can make a difference then why would what he or she do in private affect that?” Ten participants, or 10%, objected to atheists holding office, citing religion as a requirement to properly lead. Reasons stated by these ten participants, 100% Christian identified, are “I believe in God. Simple as that.” And “We are in a country that is supposed to be supported by God’s people.”

Summary

The data collected in this survey seems to show less bias than the researcher originally thought there might be. In the end, it is overwhelmingly the majority who say that atheists can be good leaders, they would vote for an atheist candidate, and that there should not be laws banning atheists from holding public office. Additionally, the 95 participants undoubtedly show an opinion that being a good person does not require religion and denying that the only source of morality is religion. After reading the review of literature, these results are all surprising. However, those who expressed distrust or dislike for atheists held conservative opinions on all the questions, and seemed unlikely to ever change those opinions simply due to their religious beliefs.

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The focus of this study was researching the preconceived notions about atheists and how that affects voters' thoughts on a candidate. A qualitative study was conducted using a random sample. The survey contained 18 questions including 3 demographic questions along with 10 multiple choice and 5 open ended response questions providing the quantitative data for the study.

The survey instrument that was used included a demographic section which provided quantitative data such as age range, religious identity and location of the research subjects. The demographic results followed expected patterns and provided additional support for the qualitative data.

Overview of Findings

Research Question One:

Does American society in general expect elected officials to be religious in order to hold office?

Results:

This survey shows that an overwhelming majority, 91%, think an atheist can be a good leader. When it comes to voting for an atheist, the results vary. Eighty-two percent said they would vote for their candidate even if the person was revealed to be atheist, but 11% said they would have to reconsider and 7% said they would absolutely not vote for that candidate. I think in general, leaders are not expected to be religious; however, people prefer to see religion in their leaders.

Research Question Two:

Does being an atheist change the way someone is viewed by others, particularly those in a religion, even when the atheist is a moral person?

Results:

Even those who believe goodness exists inherently find religion to be the best way to teach good morality. Others in this group believe that being good is not inherent and religion provides the background. The strongest statement of the seven in this category said simply “Jesus is the way, the truth and the light. I want my elected officials to believe the same.” Given the religious makeup of the respondents, there was the expectation that more comments like this would appear within the qualitative data.

Research Question Three:

In general, will people vote for a candidate regardless of religion or atheism?

Results:

The answers of the 10% who were against atheists in public office seem to corroborate the opinion in the Edgell, Gerteis, and Hartmann article. In that article, they question whether the boundary is not so much about religious affiliation as it is the place of religion in our society’s history, saying, “It is about an understanding that Americans share something more than rules and procedures, but rather that our understanding of right and wrong and good citizenship are also shared.” (Hartmann and Gerteis 2005) While the majority opinion in this survey shows that the constitutional ideal of church state separation is still important, it seems the 10% who dissent from that opinion do so on the grounds “that atheists are the symbolic representation of one who rejects the very fabric of American society,” as stated in the Hartmann article.

Implications

Whether or not an atheist or non-religious candidate can be elected is an important issue in today’s society, given recent uprising of the more conservative, fundamentalist religions. In the end, it is overwhelmingly the majority who say that atheists can be good leaders, they would

vote for an atheist candidate, and that there should not be laws banning atheists from holding public office. Additionally, the 95 participants undoubtedly show a majority opinion that being a good person does not require religion. After reading the review of literature, these results are all surprising to the researcher. However, the minority of the participants who expressed distrust or dislike for atheists had very strong negative opinions which did back up the review of literature completed for this study. This minority accounts for less than 13% of the group surveyed. Additionally, this group held the most conservative opinions on all the questions, and seemed unlikely to ever change their opinion of atheists based on religious beliefs.

Recommendations For Further Study

The findings of this study seem to be conclusive, however there is much to take into consideration when considering the effects of a person's religious beliefs and bias. This study attempted to personalize the word "atheist" by comparing their beliefs to that of someone of a different religion. Feedback from one participant was that the survey made him think and actually changed his answer by the end as to whether he would vote for an atheist. One recommendation for further study is to delve into the Christian population and what their feelings are about atheist teachers, professors, or other professions that provide leadership potential in a less personalized manner. More specifically, to break down the Christian category into denominations to determine which are staunchly anti-atheist.

Another recommendation would be to survey those who identify as atheist with a qualitative study on any prejudices they have experienced within their work life or personal life along with some quantitative questions on where their beliefs come from. Along with this, an interesting comparison might be the number of atheists who were raised as non-believers versus how many left a religious upbringing and what caused that break.

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Appendix A-Sample Survey

1. How much does religion affect your opinion of a political candidate running for office?
 - a. A great deal
 - b. not at all
 - c. depends on the person

2. How much does it affect your opinion of a candidate if they are of another religion than yourself?
 - a. A great deal
 - b. Not at all
 - c. Depends on the person

3. Do you feel a religious background is necessary to be a good leader?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. No opinion

4. Is it your opinion that morals only come from religious belief?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. No opinion

5. Do you feel religion is necessary to be a good person?
 - a. A great deal
 - b. Not at all
 - c. No opinion

6. Based on your previous answer, why or why not?

7. How would you feel if someone you think is a “good person” tells you they are an atheist?

8. In your words, describe what you think an atheist’s beliefs are.

9. Based on your previous answer, describe where you get this information?

10. Are you aware that Article VI of the constitution states that “No religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States”?
- Yes
 - No
11. There are currently laws on the books in seven states that bar atheists from holding public office. Do you agree with these laws?
- d
12. Based on your answer to the previous question, explain why or why not?

13. If you discovered your candidate is an atheist, would it keep you from voting for him/her?
- Absolutely
 - Not if I agree with the candidate’s platform
 - I’d have to seriously consider before voting
14. Do you think people with beliefs other than yours can be a good leader?
- Yes
 - No
 - Depends on the situation
15. Do you think an atheist could be a good leader?
- Yes
 - No
 - Depends on the situation

Thank you for your answers. In order to properly analyze the results, I have to know a few things about you. All answers are confidential.

16. How do you identify with regard to religion? (choices)
- Buddhist
 - Catholic
 - Christian
 - Jewish
 - Atheist
 - Non-believer
 - Buddhist
 - Other

17. What is your age?

- a. 16-20
- b. 21-35
- c. 36-45
- d. 46-60
- e. 60 and up

18. Where do you currently reside?

- a. United States-Southern state
- b. United States-Western state
- c. United States-Other
- d. Canada
- e. U.K.
- f. Other

Appendix B-Data Reduction Matrix

Question # > Respondent # v	6. Based on your answer to Q5 (do you feel religion is necessary to be a good person), why or why not?	7. How would you feel if someone you think is a "good person" tells you they are an atheist?	8. Describe what you think an atheist's beliefs are.	9. Where did you get that information?	12. Based on your answer to Q11 (Do you agree with laws that bar atheists from holding office?) why or why not?
1	I feel religion is just a placebo that keeps people from thinking about their true nature. If you do good things in hopes of a reward, then you are just Pavlovian, not Moral. Good people come from all walks of life and all religions. It's not what you say or pray it's what you do to help your fellow man that counts. People need to stop talking and start doing!!	The same. A good person is a good person. Many bad people are in religion.	Only in the 'belief' that there is no higher power.	Personal observation, personal study.	Because the constitution states "All not covered in this Constitution is relegated to the states." Being that this is covered in the constitution, the laws themselves are unconstitutional, not to mention (in my opinion) small minded and arrogant. If a person can help run my state or has a vision for our country and can make a positive difference than why would what he or she does in private affect that.
2	I think there are many good people without religion, and many bad people who are religious.	I'd feel they didn't need any religious influence to be a good person.	It really depends on the individual. I don't think there is a set of atheists beliefs just that a God is not part of there's.	Me...	
3	People can be good or bad both with and without religion. And personally I've had worse experiences with the claimed religious people of this world. Good decisions and bad decisions are made by both people of faith and without faith. No religious belief can make a good person.	Wouldn't matter if I like them.	non-religious, non-gods	study	everyone who is a citizen should be able to hold office
4	Being a good person comes from your surrounding how you were treated during your life education helps too if you served in a armed service and it can change during your life too In my opinion, kindness and empathy are the keys to being a good person. If a person's religious background helps them on these fronts— more power to them. If on the other hand, a person's religious background makes them less inclined toward kindness and empathy I feel it is a detractor.	I think it's great they have the courage and smarts to claim it.	To each their own. I've heard different views from different atheists.	Interactions with atheists.	It's against the law.
5		Fine. I only have an issue if others beliefs are forced on me or I am being told I'm wrong for my beliefs.	God does not exist.	A dictionary.	Anyone the public elects to hold office should be able to serve regardless of religion.
6		No problem	Doesn't believe in a higher been no gods	Education	If you can do the job or if your elected to do a job knowing God or others gods has nothing to do with it
7		It may reinforce my growing feeling that many of the most kind people are without religious tribalism. I would appreciate their courage, as many people in our society are prejudiced against atheists.	An atheist does not believe the universe is controlled by an anthropomorphic God character.	My years of reading and talking with people about religions and philosophies.	Our country should be living up to the ideal of the separation of church and state.
8	A moral compass is not implemented by design of religion. Empathy, compassion, and morality are not dogmatic, but personal, and can be possessed by anyone regardless of religion, nationality, race, or other bias. I've met many religious people and they were not very nice and I've met many non-religious people that I trusted more than the religious people.	It would not change my opinion of them at all.	I think atheism, much like any religion, has variations. However, the base of atheism is that there is no "greater being", "god", or "master creator". Someone who doesn't believe there is a higher deity. That we are just people living our lives and when we're gone. We're gone.	Personal relationships and base study/knowledge.	Protections for Religion and AGAINST religion are Constitutional, and all laws in the US should be based on Constitutional law. Any violation of the Constitution is strictly against the foundations of this country.
9	You can be a good person and not be religious	It wouldn't change anything	No belief in a higher power	Atheist friends	Atheists should have the same rights as any.
10	I know hypocritical religious people. I believe you can be a good person whether you're religious or not.	Doesn't change my opinion of them if their actions prove they are a good person, their religion or lack of wouldn't matter.	Lack of beliefs in any God	From friends who are atheists	Just shouldn't be a qualification. No reason.
11		Indifferent	Does not believe in religion	Friends that are atheist	I don't believe religion and laws should be combined. Too many Americans have different beliefs
12	I believe in pluralism and separation of church and state.	That's great	Secular Humanism	What people have said	Freedom of religion protects everyone no matter what their beliefs are.
13	Religion is an excuse for some people to act badly and say it is for a moral cause, an easily corrupted structure. Rather, a respect for the laws that govern society tempered with humanist compassion are qualities that make for good lawmakers and governors. Those qualities are often found in people regardless of their religion.	I would not care. I am agnostic myself and cannot judge people based on their religious preferences. Religion, or conversely the lack of faith, are personal choices and experiences, and someone else's journey is not my own.	Skepticism that any deity exists. Hopefully, an open mind to science and discovery of explanations for things that are currently unexplained. Rejection of structured religious mores based on their harm to themselves, other people known to them, or entire groups of people. Some are belligerent jerks about it, but you find that in any belief system.	Philosophy class, reading, Unitarian universalist church, my friends.	Because of that constitution thing
14	If a person tells me that without religion they would be an immoral criminal/bad person, then I'm immediately wary of that person. Morality stems from the basic human need to be compassionate, not from a book. Love and compassion are natural human states	No different at all	They do not believe in any sort of supernatural power	A diverse friend base, extensive personal reading of books and internet posts, and studying philosophy as my college major	It's hypocritical. These are populist laws originally designed to enrage and energize a specific voter base against a straw man argument.
15	Religion can become almost "cult-based" with many followers causing a politician to base his platform on the opinions of this collected group rather than from the constituents for which they would serve.	Luckily, we have choices in this country including those of religious affiliations or none. Being a good person to me means treating people well and fairly.	They don't believe in any sort of supernatural power	The dictionary	Barring a person from holding public office based on their absence of belief in a supernatural power is ignorant and old-fashioned
16	Some religious people are bad and some are good. Some people who practice no religion are bad and some are good. Some people use religion to will hatred and prejudice.		Atheists, in my opinion, do not believe in an all-knowing higher power guiding the lives of many. Rather they prefer to base their lifestyles on quality of life and treating those as they would like to be treated - equally and fairly.	Personal observations from having lived in many areas of the country have afforded me to see life on many cultural, financial, and cultural levels.	It is none of our business how a person holding a public office conducts their personal lives and vice versa.
17		Cool. That's just fine with me.	They don't believe in God. They don't believe in the devil. They're actions are truly dictated by no religious motivation. Good deeds come with no strings attached.	I think it's pretty common sense.	Separation of church and state. It's easy.

18	Religion can be a source of values, but it is not the only source. Also how we tend to view someone else's "goodness" is based on their actions, which may or may not be congruent with his/her professed religious beliefs, if any.	Slightly sad just because I think a belief in something outside/beyond yourself can add value and greater meaning to your life, but I don't think less of them or their life or their value or "goodness."	I don't know. Other than not believing in any divinity, I don't think there is any unanimity among atheists. They are all different.	Knowing different atheists and common sense.	They are unconstitutional, unenforceable, and ill-advised. Everyone should be given an equal opportunity
19	Religion is not the sole reason for being a good person, its just a good outline. A good moral compass is necessary to be a good person. "Good" is a nebulous term as it can be defined differently by different individuals. What I define as good may not be considered good by others, while at the same time there are some broad strokes that most would define as good or bad.	Its their choice, I dont judge others.	They believe there is no God	My dad	
20	I think everyone sees "religion" in their own way and I've known way too many assholes from church.	It depends on how well I know the person. If it is a person I knew well and respected, I would know that they came by that decision with much thought.	There is no God or higher power directing human lives. They do not believe in a higher power, just take their moral values from something internal.	From conversations with atheists	Our country was founded on religious freedoms. That includes those that forgo formal religion. Just because someone does not believe in God does not mean they would not be the most qualified person.
21		I still think they are a good person.		The people I know.	
22	You can be a good person without religious influence. You can also be a terrible person and religious.	It's not something I would personally agree with but if they are a good person then, they are a good person.	Someone who believes there is no life after death, that there is no God. Seems like a very bleak lifestyle.	Personal beliefs, also from interactions with fellow peers.	If someone has no belief of an afterlife, why would they want to run a country full of people who need someone to have hope for a future.
23	The idea that believing in the existence of a supreme power is the only way to achieve morality is base. Humans consciously know right from wrong without guidance from whichever deity one might choose.	I have no "feelings" about it, its their choice and it doesn't effect me or my opinion of them.	Atheists have a wide range of beliefs but a baseline is a lack of a belief in a god or gods.	I have some friends who are atheist and who share their ideas and beliefs openly	Atheism does not make a person immoral or dangerous. These laws infer that atheist are without the moral fiber to hold the public trust. By turning away people because of their religious or non-religious beliefs, we are not going to make them become religious. If anything, it will only push them further away. Let people take office who are qualified to do what is required of them. There are good and bad in religious people and non religious
24	Religion does not make someone a good person	I would still love this person and pray for them. They can still be a good person without being religious.	Someone who doesn't believe in any God.	It's what I've been taught, what I've read, and what I've witnessed in friends who are atheist.	
25		Not bothered As a person who does believe in God, I feel it my responsibility to help them understand my beliefs and try to point them in that direction, but with that said, you can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink. I do have a few atheist friends that are good people and live in a Godly way whether or not they realize they are.	Science based beliefs	Personal experience	
26	It's free will, you have a choice to be good, I do feel you have to have someone in your life that is a good example so you know what good looks like.		I think it is someone who does not know God. It someone who believes in a higher power, but not religion. Much to some peoples beliefs they are not devil worshippers and automatically bad people.	Previous experience. I have atheist friends, GOOD people, who have had bad experiences for which they blame God.	Yes, I am a religious person, and yes I believe in God, but I am also a firm believer in separation of church and state. A person's personal beliefs about religions should not factor into what is right and wrong for our citizens. Since we have separation of church and state, it shouldn't matter what beliefs the individual has in order to hold office. It should be what the candidate can do for the people not what they do or don't do on Sunday
27	You can be a good moral person, even if you don't have any religious beliefs.	Considering I'm one myself and consider myself a good person, I would feel fine.	A person who doesn't believe in any God or deity. Don't believe in anything dealing with religion or god. Put in the dirt your just in the dirt.	From research and my own personal beliefs.	
28	You can learn & teach morals without religion. Because people with or without religion can still know the basis of right and wrong and still have good morals. I just feel that if you have God on your side you have a stronger understanding of why those things are right and wrong and are more apt to follow a moral code. However, having "religion" had nothing to do with one or the other	I would still think they were a good person, and pray for them .		Atheist friends word of mouth	
29	I find religion to be a moral compass. The teachings of the Bible for me show what is right and wrong has far as behavior.	I would still care for them...and pray for them. Hoping they found Christ if not through me then through something else	Not believing in a higher power	I have known atheists	Because we are in a country that is supposed to be supported by God's people
30	anyone can decide between right and wrong and what is hurtful to another. you don't have to have religion to know that.	Because of my religious beliefs, I worry about them and where they will go after they die. I have friends who are atheists, so while I worry about them, I still treat them as a friend just as I would my religious friends, just the same.	They believe in no higher power.	Based on information I have read. I can't pinpoint a specific source.	I feel as though this country was founded on religious beliefs "In God We Trust" and "One Nation under God", so if those ideals aren't upheld, then it is concerning to me.
31	There is great immorality exhibited by all religions.	If I already think they are a good person, then it doesn't really matter if they are atheist, I've already formed an opinion of them.	They do not believe in any God. Probably because no God is good enough, based off the few I know.	The few that I know are proud to be atheist. I'm proud to be Christian, but I'm also a private person. I don't believe it is necessary to just throw that kind of personal information out on Social Media.	I believe if the atheist has a proven track record of making good decisions, etc, he should be considered for office. Atheists pay taxes and have a right to participate in government
32	I feel like you can be a great person without religion, however, most great people I know are very religious.	Just fine with me Probably sad, since I am very religious and I believe you must be born again. However, it wouldn't change my opinion of them. I have a few atheist friends who I love very much.	Do the best we have with the now. No afterlife.	Just general belief	
33	Religion and being religious and having morals are different. You say you are religious or have religion and be not be a good person.	I would worry about them.	I feel like an atheist believes that there is no higher power at all. That they believe death is the end for everyone.	I think that's simply the definition of "atheist."	I don't think you have to be religious to do a good job. Though I do think it helps one's moral compass.
34	Everyone has good and religious people fall short. Judge less Love more.		Doesn't believe in God or a higher power.	Research and books that I have read.	I believe in God. Simpe as that.
35			No beliefs at all free as the wind.	Life	Everyone deserves a chance

36	Behavior is learned at home, in social interactions and other relationships. Society defines what is good and just.	I'd pause for a second, primarily because I was brought up in a Southern Baptist environment. Then I'd move forward with our relationship until that person gave me a reason not to continue it.	You're born, you live, you die. It's natural.	General observations	Because those laws are unconstitutional and should be stricken from those states' statutes.
37	Religion helps us to define morality. You don't have to have the same opinion as me to be a good person. That's what religion is to me, just another opinion. There are no hard facts to support any one religion more than another. Things such as knowledge and compassion are what make a great leader.	I would feel they are lost and I will pray for them.	Atheists do not believe in God/ Higher Power.	It's in the dictionary.	
38	I don't think you need to be religious to be a decent human. I also don't think that just because you are religious you are by default a decent human. Some of the greatest and worst moments of our human history are inspired by religion.	I would feel completely indifferent. As long as they're a good person, that's all that matters to me.	True atheism I would say is the belief that there are no gods, no afterlife, nothing bigger in motion than human actions.	I used to consider myself an atheist. Now I'm not sure what I believe, but religion is not something that's important to me so I don't spend a lot of time pondering on it.	Religion should not dictate who you are. There are good Christians and there are good atheists.
39	I know several people who are atheists who are good people. While their beliefs are not for me, I do consider them good and kind people. Morals are what you were raised and taught with. Not something you learn through church. It doesn't take a god to make you know right from wrong number and to have a good heart. That's based on your character	It would not change my opinion of that person. I believe in God and I believe in free will. In the end, someone is probably wrong. It very well may be me.	I think they probably vary depending on the individual, but I would say the key part of all atheist beliefs is that there is no "God". They believe that we were not brought into existence, and through some natural phenomena became more than simply animals.	I would say that most of my information comes from my life experiences.	I don't think that being an atheist would change your ability to hold a political office, or your ability to perform the duties of that office. Government is supposed to be separate from church. If this is truly the goal, then why would someone's religion even come up in the qualifications for the office? I had no idea that there were any laws pertaining to this. I always assumed that if separation of church and state was a real thing, then there would be no laws that contradict this.
40	It is entirely possible for a person to develop a strong sense of morality without basis in religion or dogma. Furthermore, considering oneself "religious" in no way indicates morality or an inclination to do good. Being religious does not create someone's goodness, in fact being religious and being bad can be the same person. Good or rather moral character comes from your upbringing which may or may not be religious and your personal experiences and how you view and relate to the world	I always feel sad for them because they do not know the unconditional love of God that I know. I talk to them about the situation when the opportunity presents itself; however, I do not go about every conversation with that as a goal.	An atheist does not believe that there is a higher power. An atheist believes that we are born, we die, and that is it.	I looked up what an atheist actually was once when I was a teenager. Now, as an adult, I have a better grasp on the situation.	
41	I have met many good people who aren't religious. Although myself, I am a Christian.	I know atheists and have close friends who are atheists. They're still great people. Their religious beliefs do not effect me	The ones I know just do not believe in God. They believe in being a good person and doing the right thing and living their life in those manners	My friends I have spent a great deal of my life on a spiritual journey. Much of that journey has involved in-depth conversation with my peers, many of whom consider themselves to be atheists. I also do my fair share of reading on the topic of religion, or lack thereof, both in print and online in order to further my education on the subject.	There should be a divide in state and religion We are a nation without religious rule. Therefore, a person's personal set of religious, spiritual, or moral beliefs should in no way affect his or her eligibility as our nation's leader. The short answer, though, is simply that those laws are - by definition - unconstitutional.
42	I don't feel any certain way. However, as a Christian, I only believe that you get to heaven through salvation in Jesus Christ. Regardless, that does not change my opinion of someone or make me look at them differently.	I'd probably be relieved that someone whom I admire applies logical thought to his/her spirituality and doesn't require the threat of consequence as motivation to be good.	That varies widely. The term "atheist" simply indicates that a person does not subscribe to a particular religion. It does not, however, imply that the person is in any way amoral or without spirituality.	Reading of text during a religion education class at a public university. Also through discussions with friends who are atheists.	I do not believe that any citizen should be withheld from running and being elected to a public office by its constituents based on religion because there is clear religious freedom in this country that is protected by federal law
43	I would kind of feel heartbroken, but I wouldn't love them less or think differently of them. I have several friends whom are atheist, and I know this is such a typical answer...but I just pray for them and continue to be myself.	I don't feel any certain way. However, as a Christian, I only believe that you get to heaven through salvation in Jesus Christ. Regardless, that does not change my opinion of someone or make me look at them differently.	Atheist do not believe in any religion. They do not believe in life after your body dies.		When this country was founded they determined there should be separation of church and state. This I believe should be the case. I am a Christian, but I don't feel that religion should be a requirement to hold an office. If I allowed my beliefs to dictate my actions as an elected official I am obviously not representing the people well. NO I DON'T AGREE WITH THAT LAW.
44	I don't feel any certain way. However, as a Christian, I only believe that you get to heaven through salvation in Jesus Christ. Regardless, that does not change my opinion of someone or make me look at them differently.	I DON'T CARE.	I feel an atheist is someone who doesn't believe in a higher power. THERE BELIEFS ARE THERE OWN. They don't believe there is a savior. When we die, we die. Or we live on in another way.	From the research and speaking with my friends whom are atheist. ITS MY OWN.	
45	Being good is not inherent; a religious background gives one the foundation of "being good".	Fine, their choice I would think that he/she is blessed to be a good person and hope that someday He would be a part of his/her life.	Someone one said that an atheist says, "there is no God," and an agnostic says, "I hope there is no God."	From over hearing Oh, I read it somewhere.	It doesn't matter Fairness, I suppose...
46	A good person comes from how you are raised	Religion doesn't make you a good or bad person	someone that believes in a higher power but not necessarily a divine being	from networking with people	without a belief in a higher religious power this country was founded on there would be no morals
47	Right and wrong, good and bad, are not solely due to religion. A non-religious person knows the difference and can strive to live a good life without religion. Being taught right and wrong can come in many contexts other than verses from holy books. Religion has proven to make more bad than good.	I wouldn't think anything different. Might be closer to them.	They do not believe in a higher being.	Atheist friends.	Church and state should be separate. Religion should not be making the laws or ruling politicians. Largely due to the previously cited constitutional lack of religion requirements
48	The same as I felt before Congratulations, you can think for yourself		There is no God.	Unsure.	We are beyond the times of religious persecution yet some still cling to it
49			Science not falsehoods	Practicing atheist	

<p>52</p> <p>People can be decent without having Jesus in their lives, but none of us are good enough without Him. Therefore, people can have good qualities, but knowing the One True God makes a difference.</p>	<p>I would pray for them because ultimately being "good" is not enough.</p>	<p>I cannot fathom what they believe. I would be pretty arrogant to assume. It would be easier to tell what they do not believe, which is as follows: There is no "supreme being" that created life or the universe. There is no Heaven or Hell, just Earth. When we die, we are dead. The end.</p>	<p>I have no basis for beliefs of an atheist, I believe wholeheartedly in Jesus.</p>	<p>Barring the current social climate of separation of church and state, the founders of this country never meant for that to be taken to this level. They were running from the idea that one church could be a governing body, yet they were believers in the same God. We were a Judeo-Christian body til recently.</p>
<p>53</p> <p>While religion can be a good jumping off point, I feel you can also learn the difference between right and wrong by having strong role models and just trying to be a decent human being.</p>	<p>My opinion of them would not change.</p>	<p>I have several friends who identify themselves as Atheists and we talk about it.</p>	<p>One's religion is not a qualifying factor of one's ability to perform public office duties.</p>	<p>One's religion is not a qualifying factor of one's ability to perform public office duties.</p>
<p>54</p> <p>I know a lot of religious people who are hypocrites. I think it takes good parents and family to bring up a good person. Good examples far exceed religious training. A person's motivation for being a "moral" person and doing their best to serve others doesn't have to be the result of a religious background. Good people come from all kinds of backgrounds and upbringings. Conversely, just because someone says they are "religious" doesn't mean they are necessarily a good person. There is a difference between being religious and bring moral. Some of the most immoral people I have known were religious and the most spiritual never step inside a church. There are a lot of terrible people who claim to be "fine Christians". Standing in a garage doesn't make you a Mercedes any more than standing in a church makes you a Christian.</p>	<p>I'm good with that.</p>	<p>They believe in no god.</p>	<p>A dictionary.</p>	<p>Religious beliefs or no religious beliefs should not be a litmus test to hold office.</p>
<p>55</p> <p>That is their personal business and has no effect on whether they are a good person or not.</p>	<p>That is their personal business and has no effect on whether they are a good person or not.</p>	<p>They do not believe in God or other spiritual beings.</p>	<p>High school and college classes. Specifically philosophy and English classes.</p>	<p>A person should not be judged by others based on their personal beliefs. It has no bearing on how well they will perform their job.</p>
<p>56</p> <p>Love them where they are in their journey</p>	<p>Love them where they are in their journey</p>	<p>To live this life because it's the only one you get</p>	<p>Personal experiencr</p>	<p>Religion is not necessary to lead</p>
<p>57</p> <p>You can still be a good person without believing in God.</p>	<p>You can still be a good person without believing in God.</p>	<p>They don't believe in a higher power or an afterlife.</p>	<p>Atheists I've known.</p>	<p>Believing in God doesn't mean you'll do a good job. Sunday morning isn't usually a work day for public officials.</p>
<p>58</p> <p>I believe that one is a good person based on their behavior, not what religious dictates one has been subjected to. People come from all walks of life. You can be a kind hearted person, a person people trust and rely on, a person who looks around and sees what needs to be done or taken care of and never step foot in a church or profess faith in a higher being. There is scripture that says you will be judged on your goods works we r all born with a conscience not a religion</p>	<p>I would shake their hand, and give them a martini, or a Shirley Temple, whatever their fancy, and congratulate them on owning their beliefs.</p>	<p>There can be many levels to the adherence of atheism, but foundational is the belief that God, Gods, or an all-knowing, omnipotent spiritual guide does not exist. For me, I additionally don't believe in luck, an afterlife, reincarnation, souls or astrology.</p>	<p>Common sense and scientific exploration.</p>	<p>I would no more-so agree with a law that stated that one must be Christian, Muslim, Jewish, or Pagan to hold office than the exclusion of someone based on their lack of belief in ghost stories and imaginary leaders. It is irrational, inconsistent and discriminatory.</p>
<p>59</p> <p>It doesn't change who they are or I how feel about them. I will pray for them.</p>	<p>It doesn't change who they are or I how feel about them. I will pray for them.</p>	<p>They do Not believe in God they do however believe in the Big Bang theory. Science rules</p>	<p>General discussions with people and what I have read through he years</p>	<p>Why would being an atheist stand in his way of doing a job he was elected to do</p>
<p>60</p> <p>Happy they don't think I will judge them because of it</p>	<p>Happy they don't think I will judge them because of it</p>	<p>Do it for yourself because God is not going to do it for you</p>	<p>Atheist friends of mine</p>	<p>Right and wrong is in a person's heart not in a book Because religious preference should not matter in order to hold office.</p>
<p>61</p> <p>Morals can be taught without religion Because there are some people that do not need to be told by religion to be a good person. They just feel it and do it. It's called humanity.</p>	<p>Wouldn't be surprised</p>	<p>No belief in a god</p>	<p>I don't remember</p>	<p>Freedom of religion should refer to not only all religions but lack of religion as well.</p>
<p>62</p> <p>Being a good person doesn't require religion. Any one can choose to be good.</p>	<p>Would not bother me or change my opinion if I know/feel they are a good person.</p>	<p>No higher being, no life after death</p>	<p>Formed from hearing people speak of atheism and meeting atheists and listening to what their views are.</p>	<p>Religion has no place in government</p>
<p>63</p> <p>Goodness does not make one religious or non-religious. Some of the worst and most judgmental people I have ever known claimed to be religious. They were so mean to those they felt were beneath them because of color or religion. UGH</p>	<p>Good for them</p>	<p>They don't believe in the god others do.</p>	<p>Knowing a few</p>	<p>Just because someone is atheist it does not make them a good or bad person.</p>
<p>64</p> <p>Again, goodness does not mean a person is religious.</p>	<p>Again, goodness does not mean a person is religious.</p>	<p>An atheist does not believe in God.</p>	<p>Just talking with atheists.</p>	<p>There should be a complete and total separation of church and state</p>
<p>65</p> <p>Why does it matter??? Anyone can be a good person, know right from wrong, and NOT have to be religious. Then I would embrace them for the person they are regardless. God doesn't make you a good person. Your actions do.</p>	<p>Why does it matter??? Anyone can be a good person, know right from wrong, and NOT have to be religious. Then I would embrace them for the person they are regardless. God doesn't make you a good person. Your actions do.</p>	<p>That there is no higher being or power that is in control of the universe</p>	<p>Reading magazines and research</p>	<p>Because someone's religion or lack there of should have anything to do with their JOB</p>
<p>66</p> <p>I don't believe in organized religion. And I feel it has no place in politics</p>	<p>I don't believe in organized religion. And I feel it has no place in politics</p>	<p>I believe an atheist doesn't buy into that a "higher" power is in control. The person is.</p>	<p>My thoughts...and what I read</p>	<p>They are states and can conduct their affairs according to the populace within. The federal government is not a dictatorship and should not force the individual states on the jurisdiction left to the states. While I do not think it is a good policy, if they have that rule on their books, then that state's people should remove it, not a mandate. It is up to the states to make their own decisions. This is not the power of the federal government to make decisions for the states.</p>
<p>67</p> <p>Your actions determine what kind of person you are, not where or if you go to church. Good behavior is a learned response and parents as well as cultural backgrounds affect personality and behavior.</p>	<p>I would feel they are missing out on a greater purpose and feel sad for them, since I know that life extends beyond death.</p>	<p>A belief that a higher power does not exist and that our existence began from life mutations that evolved from random stuff coming together.</p>	<p>From the definition and origin of the word a-theist, not believing in a god at all, common sense. If someone does believe in some sort of higher power, that would be a god of sorts and therefore is not an atheist.</p>	<p>Observation of friends and acquaintances.</p>
<p>68</p> <p>Sad. Believing in a higher power helps with positive outlook.</p>	<p>Sad. Believing in a higher power helps with positive outlook.</p>	<p>The world is controlled by nature...and the creation was not a gift from God, but just a chance of nature.</p>	<p>Observation of friends and acquaintances.</p>	<p>Observation of friends and acquaintances.</p>

69	Religion and goodness are not synonymous.	I would not be surprised	An atheist does not believe in the existence of god.	The bible, just kidding. Life and always learning.	Separation of church and state is a good idea. Titles like atheist or religious should have no bearing on hold a public office.
70	I think many religious people are very immoral in their actions, while many non religious people act very morally. Being a self-proclaimed religious person, doesn't necessarily equate being a "good person." People have done heinous things in the name of religion.	I'd think they were rational free thinkers	I think that an atheist doesn't believe in god, and probably not an afterlife. They believe in this material reality as the only observable truth that we can know. They differ from an agnostic in that an agnostic leaves open the possibility of there being a god, but believes that humans can't understand that reality.	Reading about religion and philosophy, and taking some college classes in religion.	I think they are outdated, ridiculous, and violate the separation of church and state.
71	Religion isn't an inherently good or bad thing; it is used by people, in my opinion, to understand the world around them. It isn't the ultimate authority on what is moral or correct.	I've known many good people who are atheists. Actions are more important to me than what religion someone claims to adhere to.	An atheist does not believe in the existence of God or a supreme being.	From atheists that I know or have known.	A person's ability to be an effective public official is not dependent on their religious beliefs.
72		I would feel no differently than if they had told me they were Mormon, or Islamic, or Christian, etc.	That there is no higher power - no God or God-like figure exists.	Atheists.	It goes against American Constitutional rights.
73		Same way	They believe in themselves	That is how I feel as someone who believes in something but not in religion, too human.	the main thing is if the person is honest and wants to work for the greater good, and that doesn't come from religious believes, it comes from the heart.
74	Because thousands of crimes have been committed in the name of God. Sometimes people take religious beliefs too extreme.	It would not change my opinion about him/her.	An atheist don't believe in the existence of a God.	Dictionary.	I don't think we should be bias for others people's beliefs.
75	I'm not religious and I'm good... Lol	Happens all the time. I'm ok with that...I'm a preacher's kid that has a healthy respect for Jesus and his teachings, but the bible is mostly bull shit...	In my experience atheists are more centered on their own spirit versus that of a religious figure...	Life experiences.	Since America is the melting pot of the world I don't think it's necessary for one to have strong religious beliefs in order to fulfill job duties.
76		So	No beliefs	Life exp	Separation church and state
77	Certain Values and morals define a good person	Doesn't bother me. My best friend is.	They do not believe there is a higher power.	Dictionary/facts	Behavior over beliefs
78	A person can be good for goodness sake. Empathy, honesty, and kindness do not depend upon religious study or training.	I would be just fine with that. I would especially like that they shared this information with me.	An atheist does not believe in the existence of a higher being.	I learned this through word of mouth and the dictionary.	Because religion doesn't define a persons morals and intelligence. I against discrimination of any kind, and I don't like states being more restrictive than than what is laid out in the Constitution.
79	Being a good person comes from within. It's your morals, character, and own beliefs. Religion can't create that. You do not have to be a religious person to have good morals. Treat people the way you want to be treated and have a kind word for people!	Being atheist does not take away from being a good person. I would get to know them better	They have different beliefs about higher powers, creation...	Atheist friends	It is not relevant to position/job performance
80		It would not change my opinion of that person.			
81	I don't believe religion is NECESSARY to be a good person. Truly "good people" don't need the restrictions of a religion to regulate their behavior... they are intelligent, reasoning, and self-disciplined to behave appropriately.	It doesn't bother me in the least... although I am curious why they believe as they do... just as I'm curious about any belief system.	An atheist doesn't believe in an active god/creator, or in some cases, no god/creator.	Religious studies when I was researching various religions of the world.	In recent years, religion has become more prevalent in politics, to a point where it's become a hindrance and detriment to the daily functioning of our public offices (see Kim Davis). I would like to see more non-religious people in public office with the hope that intelligence and reasoning will prevail.
82	A good heart comes from within not external influences	I'm ok with it. We can have differences of opinion and beliefs and still be friends.	There is no higher power than his or herself	Myself	Religion or absence thereof is not a qualifier for someone to run for office.
83	Jesus is the way, the truth, and the light. I want my elected officials to believe the same.	Disappointed and challenged.	Do not believe there is a God.	Did not look it up.	God is a requirement.
84	religion does not make the person good or bad. a sense of spirituality and humanity are factors in being good or bad	fine. It is there choice to believe there is no higher power but they can have compassion for humanity	the one qualifier for atheists is the belief there is no higher power. that two/jesus controls destiny, thoughts, etc	From hearing the definition of the word atheist over the years.	separation of church and state
85	I think of religions as traditions, something learned basically...	I think they're just being contrary.	My understanding is that an atheist does not believe in a higher power.		Because a contrarian isn't someone qualified for office.
86	Much of "morality" is based on cultural norms. Religion can be only a small part of that. Actually, more wrongs have been committed under the "guise" of religion. So a lack of religion may even provide more tolerance for others. You can be amazing with or without religion.	They are entitled to their own opinions.	An atheist believes there is no higher power or God.	From my sister who is an atheist.	This country was based upon tolerance for all without regard to any religion or lack thereof.
87	Though moral standards may form in individuals based on religious upbringing and standards, I don't believe morality forms through religion.	fine.	They don't believe in any higher power.	Education.	It's irrelevant.
88	More power to you.	More power to you.	They do not believe a higher power is needed to justify life.	Compilation from individuals I know who consider themselves atheists.	That's ridiculous. That's discrimination. I'd like to know for what reason these laws were created.

<p>89 Religion should not dictate knowing right from wrong. I don't do something because some mysterious being is watching and will punish or reward me...I do it because I know it's right.</p> <p>90 Religion is personal preference, not morals.</p>	<p>Yay! Because it doesn't matter if they are an atheist or whatever. Someone I love actually did tell me that, I still love them!</p>	<p>An atheist doesn't hold the belief of a mysterious godlike being.</p> <p>There is no higher power.</p>	<p>Through my education: reading, school, research, friends.</p> <p>That is MY belief.</p>	<p>Religion should not matter in politics or government... ever.</p> <p>Discrimination.</p>
<p>91 I have known people with good values, morals, & character who were not particularly religious...also some are very private</p> <p>people develop the attributes that make them a good person from many things other than religion- their culture, parents, school etc.</p>	<p>I pray for them, as I cannot imagine getting the tough times without God</p>	<p>They do not believe in God or any other supreme</p>	<p>From my upbringing</p>	<p>I think that we have to be careful about the separation of church and state as who's religion are we going to accept as individuals. For instance, would YOU want a government based on Wicked principles or the Muslim teachings found in the Quran?</p>
<p>92 Morals are a code built into us, therefore religion can shape them, but there are fundamental right and wrong actions.</p>	<p>I wouldn't feel any different about them as a good person</p>	<p>they don't believe in any organized religion</p>	<p>society</p>	<p>politics and religion should be separate fundamentally</p>
<p>93</p>	<p>Wouldn't bother me.</p>	<p>They believe in the absence of a higher power and the theory of science to justify all things</p> <p>There is no big man in the sky watching us or puppeteering (that's totally a word) the humans. They believe you should be a good person because it's what you should do. Not because they don't want to go to hell.</p>	<p>A lifelong study of people</p> <p>From being friends with people that were not raised like me.</p>	<p>Your "faith" or "religion" should have no effect on ability to serve.</p> <p>We are talking about the law. Do what the law says and help carry out the law. Doesn't matter what religion or spiritual beliefs you have.</p>
<p>94 Atheism never started a war.</p> <p>95 Good morals or ethics don't just come for those that are religious.</p>	<p>I would feel ok.</p> <p>Fine. Personally held religious beliefs have no bearing on how I feel about them as a person.</p>	<p>That being a dick isn't cool & don't need God to tell them that.</p>	<p>The atheists that I know.</p> <p>blu=study-24 purple=acquaintances-45 red=dictionary-14 black myself-9</p>	<p>Separation of church & state.</p> <p>10- for law 85 against</p>

Appendix C-Quantitative Bar Charts

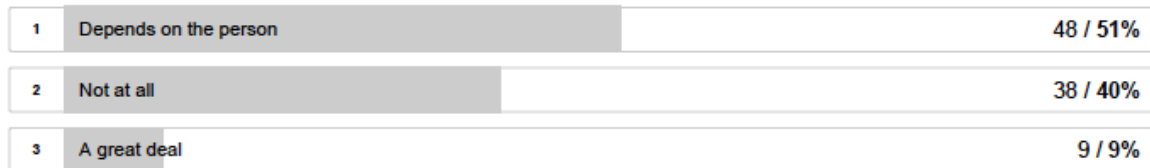
1. How much does religion affect your opinion of a political candidate running for office?

95 out of 95 people answered this question



2. How much does it affect your opinion of a candidate if they are of another religion than yourself?

95 out of 95 people answered this question



3. Do you feel a religious background is necessary to be a good elected official or leader?

95 out of 95 people answered this question



4. Is it your opinion that morals only come from religious belief?

95 out of 95 people answered this question



5. Do you feel religion is necessary to be a good person?

94 out of 95 people answered this question



2	A great deal	7 / 7%
3	No opinion	4 / 4%

10. Are you aware that Article VI of the constitution states that "No religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States"?

95 out of 95 people answered this question

1	Yes	59 / 62%
2	No	36 / 38%

11. There are currently laws on the books in seven states that bar atheists from holding public office. Do you agree with these laws?

95 out of 95 people answered this question

1	No	83 / 87%
2	Yes	12 / 13%

13. If you discovered your preferred candidate is an atheist, would it keep you from voting for him/her?

95 out of 95 people answered this question

1	Not if I agree with the candidate's platform	78 / 82%
2	I would have to seriously consider before voting	10 / 11%
3	Absolutely	7 / 7%

14. Do you think people with beliefs other than yours can be a good leader?

95 out of 95 people answered this question

1	Yes	78 / 82%
2	Depends on the situation	14 / 15%
3	No	3 / 3%

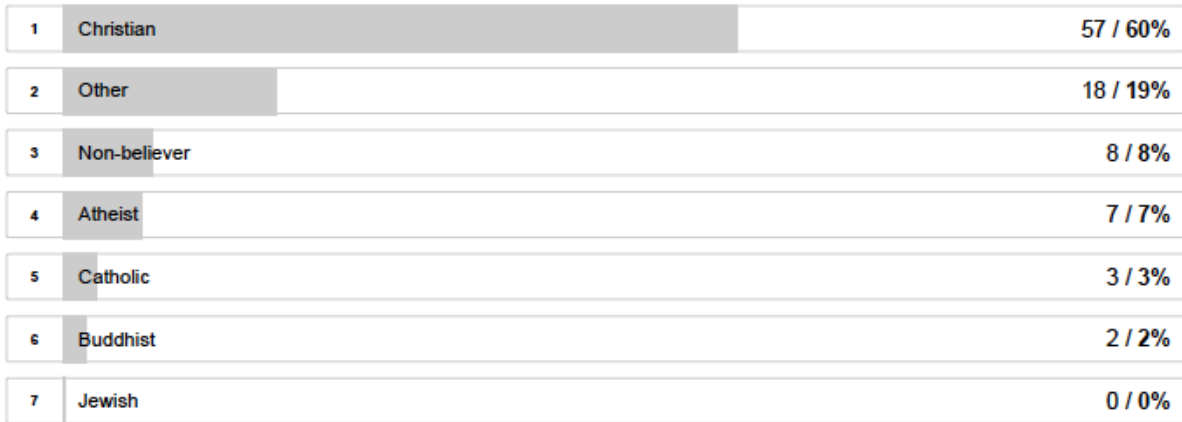
15. Do you think an atheist could be a good leader?

93 out of 95 people answered this question



16. How do you identify with regard to religion?

95 out of 95 people answered this question



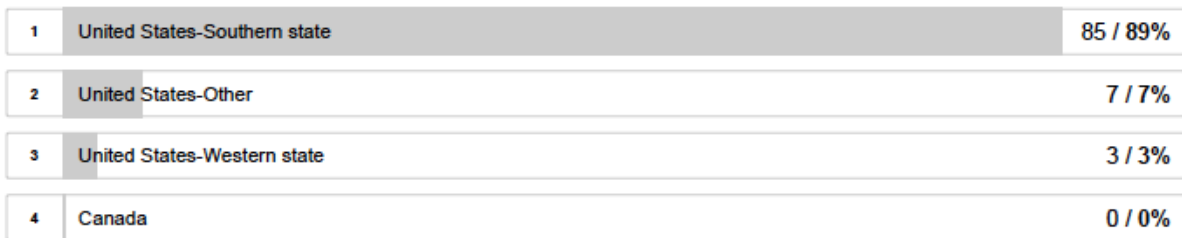
17. What is your age?

94 out of 95 people answered this question



18. Where do you currently reside?

95 out of 95 people answered this question



5	Other	0 / 0%
6	U.K.	0 / 0%