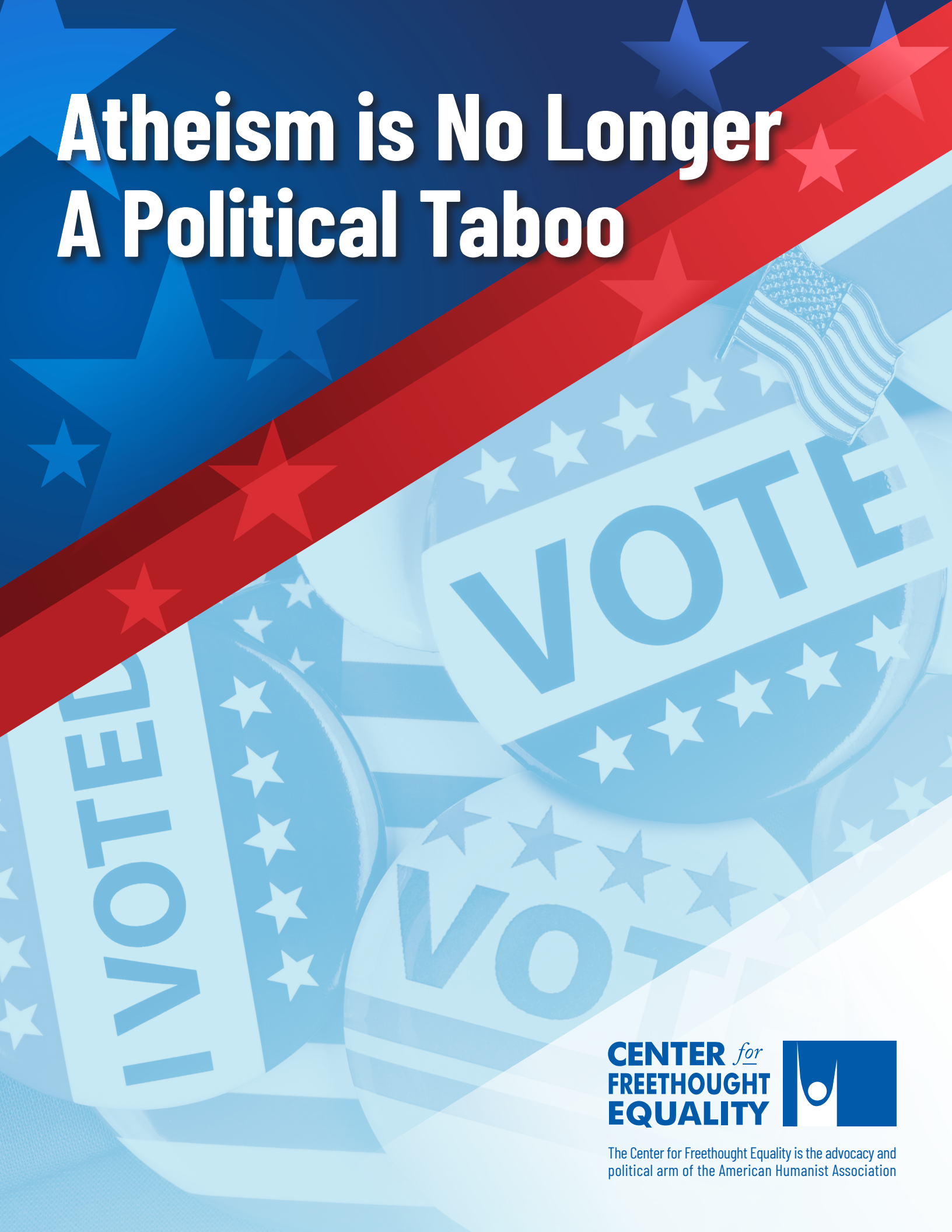


# Atheism is No Longer A Political Taboo



**CENTER** *for*  
**FREETHOUGHT**  
**EQUALITY**



The Center for Freethought Equality is the advocacy and political arm of the American Humanist Association

The US Constitution prohibits religious tests for public office<sup>1</sup>, however, being an atheist in politics has long been a powerful political taboo in our nation. Fortunately, research finds that this bias against candidates who don't believe in God has substantially diminished. Polls conducted by Lake Research Partners for the Center for Freethought Equality and American Humanist Association in 2022 and 2018<sup>2</sup> show that **being non-religious is no longer a barrier to a candidate's electoral success.**

**"Solid majorities of voters are prepared to vote for secular candidates who stand for most of the things they believe in and, frankly, are more preoccupied with other issues than candidate's religious faith or lack thereof."**

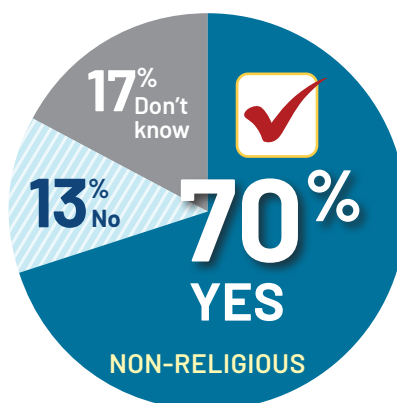
—LAKE RESEARCH PARTNERS



**The findings from the Lake Research Partners polls demonstrate that voters care more about a candidate's values and policy agenda than their personal religious practices.**

Most voters still prefer a candidate who believes in God over a candidate who does not (57 percent in 2022 compared to 60 percent in 2018); however, religion does not appear to be a priority in determining the voter's choice in candidates. When paired with policy stances, more than two-thirds of voters indicate a willingness to vote for a non-religious candidate who shares their policy goals.

**Would you vote for a candidate who stood for most of the things you believed in, but does not believe in god or is non-religious?**



Lake Research Partners



**The decrease in bias against non-religious candidates is reflected in other research and may, in part, be the result of rapidly changing demographics.**

The decrease in bias against non-religious candidates is also reflected in Gallup polling. In 1958, Gallup first asked Americans if they would vote for a well-qualified presidential candidate who was an atheist—only 18 percent answered in the affirmative. Four decades later (1999), for the first time a slim majority said they would vote for an atheist presidential candidate. In their 2019 poll, 60 percent said they would vote for an atheist candidate.

The bias against non-religious candidates is diminishing and the reason may simply be demographics—the number of religiously unaffiliated Americans is growing rapidly. The Pew Research Center uses the shorthand of “nones” for the religiously unaffiliated, which includes people who identify as either atheist or agnostic and those who respond “nothing in particular” when asked their religious affiliation. According to Pew research, “nones” have grown from 16 percent of the U.S. population in 2007 to 29 percent in 2021. The percentage of “nones” is even

1 “...no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States.” —US Constitution Article VI, Section 3

2 The 2018 poll conducted by Lake Research Partners was funded by the Stiefel Freethought Foundation.

higher in Millennial and Generation Z populations so the religiously unaffiliated community will continue to grow. Pew projects that if recent trends continue, “nones” will approach or exceed the number of Christians in the United States by 2070. If you just consider Americans who identify as atheists and agnostics today, this community is as large as the Jewish, Muslim, Mormon, Orthodox Christian, Buddhist, Jehovah’s Witness, and Hindu communities combined!



**Support for non-religious candidates who share most of the policy stances of the polled voters is held by solid majorities across all major demographics**

Below is a graph from the 2022 Lake Research Partners poll showing support for non-religious candidates broken down by major

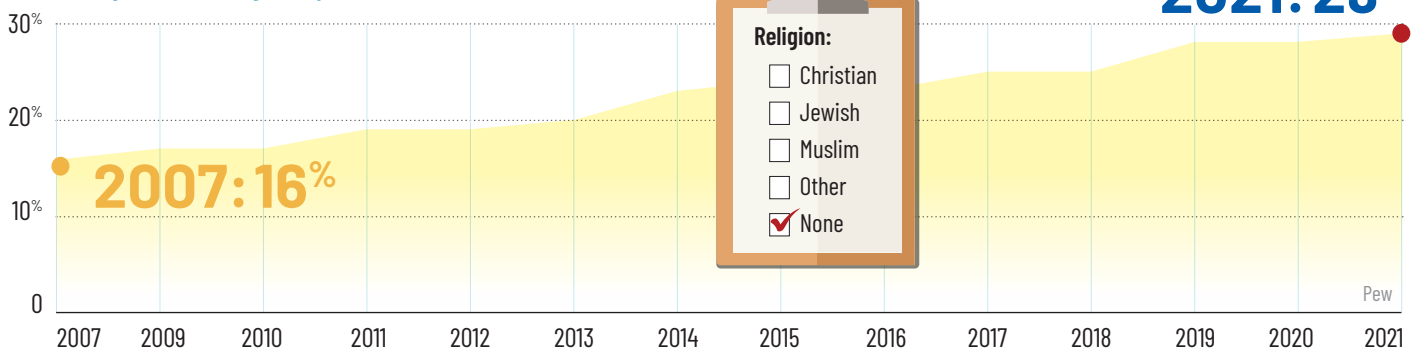
demographic characteristics. Strong majorities exist across all demographics for non-religious candidates who support the voter’s values and policy stances.



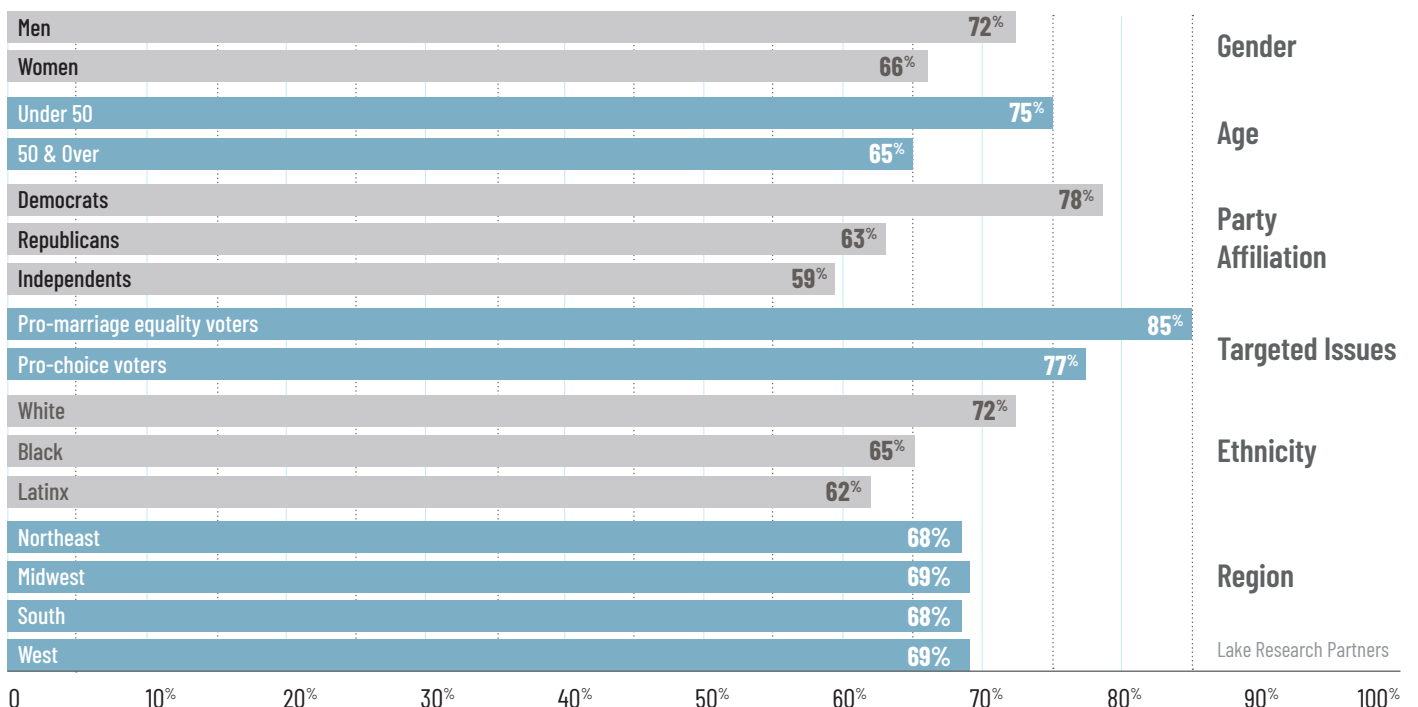
**The demise of the atheist political taboo is also reflected in the growth of the number of public humanist, atheist, agnostic and non-religious elected officials**

Prior to the 2016 election there were only 5 state legislators who publicly identified with the humanist and atheist community. As of 2023 there are now 72 state and federal legislators representing 30 states who publicly identify with this community. You can see a list of these elected officials at: <https://www.cfequality.org/secular-elected-officials>.

Percentage of the religiously unaffiliated in the United States



Percentage willing to vote for candidates who stand for most things they believe, but are “non-believers” or “non-religious.”





## CONCLUSION: Run for office and be your authentic self!

The findings from the Lake Research Partners polls and other research should encourage candidates and elected officials to be authentic about their religious beliefs. Discriminatory political attacks on non-religious candidates and elected officials may occur, but as revealed by this research, such attacks will probably not affect the outcome of an election and may, in fact, offend voters in both major political parties. People who have stayed out of the electoral arena because of the bias against humanists, atheists, agnostics, and the non-religious should be encouraged by these findings and run for public office.

As more and more candidates and elected officials identify with the humanist and atheist community the bias against this community will continue to diminish. Our political system depends on the active participation of all our citizens. The humanist and atheist community needs to be fully and openly engaged in our democratic process.

This engagement is especially important today. Increasing the number of public non-religious elected officials will encourage this community to be more active in politics. By increasing the political engagement of the humanist and atheist community, they can help counter the influence of White Christian Nationalists who are far too powerful and dangerous—as demonstrated in the January 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol—in our current political culture. The rapidly growing humanist and atheist community is the constituency that can help stop the White Christian Nationalist's anti-democratic, bigoted, anti-science, racist, misogynistic, xenophobic, and homophobic crusade.

As the humanist and atheist community becomes more engaged in the electoral arena, including serving in public office, our nation's public policies will reflect the values of this community to prioritize social, economic, and environmental justice using evidence-based solutions. Building political power for the humanist and atheist community will establish a more equitable and sustainable future for America.



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**RON MILLAR** is the coordinator for the Center for Freethought Equality and its affiliated political action committee (PAC). The Center for Freethought Equality is the political and advocacy arm of the American Humanist Association. Dr. Millar can be reached at [rmillar@cfequality.org](mailto:rmillar@cfequality.org).



View poll questions, top line results, and methodology for the 2018 poll at: <http://americanhumanist.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/LPR-Topline-Memo.pdf>

View the 2022 poll at: <http://americanhumanist.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/LPR-Topline-Memo.pdf>



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1821 Jefferson Place NW, Washington, DC 20036 | 202.238.9088x2012  
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