

Very religious students have some 'liberal' views: More progressive on gun control and death penalty

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Strongly religious college students have conservative views on sex, abortion, gay rights and drugs but more liberal views on gun control and the death penalty, a new study says.

UCLA's Higher Education Research Institute polled nearly 3,700 college juniors at 46 schools across the country and found that one-fifth of college students are "highly religious." A similar percentage said they have little interest in religion.

Those two groups have widely divergent views on a number of social issues, the study found. While 80 percent of the least religious students said they felt casual sex is acceptable, only 7 percent of the most religious students felt the same way. The least religious students were more than three times as likely to support legalized abortion, while highly religious students were more than twice as likely to support laws prohibiting homosexual relationships.

But highly religious students can be more liberal on other issues, the study found. Compared to those with little or no religious interests, a higher percent of highly religious students supported federal controls on handgun sales (75 percent to 70 percent), and they also were more likely to support abolition of the death penalty (38 percent to 23 percent).

Gary White, associate university chaplain at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, said those statistics were all consistent with what he's heard from students, with the exception of student support of gun control.

He said Catholic students on campus tend to have more strongly held views than other students. "When you have a strong, authoritative church body that has a very clear declaration on where it stands, they are more clear on the abortion issue or the

death penalty issue,” White said.

To determine their level of religiosity, students were asked whether they attended religious services, read sacred texts or joined a religious organization on campus. – *Religion News Service*