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A religious liberty index unveiled by the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty shows a comfort level among Americans with the degree of religious freedom they have in the country.

On a scale of 1 to 100, with 1 being worst and 100 being best, the Becket Fund's index has Americans at a composite score of 67.

More than 2,100 Americans were asked 21 questions across six broad areas, which the Becket Fund described as religious pluralism, religion and policy, religious sharing, religion in society, church and state, and religion in action.

"No dimension, nor any single question within a dimension, is supported by less than a majority of respondents," the report said. "Even in the dimension showing the lowest levels of support – the church and state dimension – a majority of

respondents side with a broad interpretation of religious freedoms."

Montse Alvarado, CEO of the Washington-based Becket Fund, said she was not surprised by the overall results.

"I was quite more surprised by some of the deeper data, some of the cross-sections, the intersection of religion and civil rights, the way millennials responded – to say they were the generation to most likely have felt religious discrimination," Alvarado told Catholic News Service in a Nov. 22 phone interview.

Respondents were asked whether they "completely accept and support," "mostly accept and support" "somewhat challenge and oppose" or "heavily challenge and oppose" the concepts broached in each of the 21 questions that made up the poll.

Answering one question, 70% of respondents supported to some degree the ability of religious organizations to make hiring decisions free from government interference. And 63% said they supported the freedom to practice one's faith in daily life or the workplace even when it imposes on or inconveniences others.

A majority of the respondents gave "completely accept and support" responses for a majority of the questions. The exception was religion and policy, where none of the six questions got majority "completely accept and support"; the closest was 46% for "the freedom for people to rely on their personal religious beliefs to guide their voting decisions – which candidates to vote for and how to vote on different issues."

In one question, 43% said businesses "holding unpopular views – or what some might consider repulsive or discriminatory views – deserve to be boycotted, harassed or even shut down." That number shrinks to 32% when replacing "business owners or private organizations" with "people of faith."

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Asked whether religion was part of the problem or part of the solution, 56% said the latter, but those numbers were buttressed by 65% of African Americans and 68% of Hispanics saying so. The percentage of nonblack, non-Hispanic respondents saying the same was not immediately available.

Breaking out responses among individual religious groups, Catholics included, was fairly scant in the 68-page Becket Fund report.

One instance noted that 73% of Catholics said they felt the freedom to preach the doctrine of their faith with others, which was a tick higher than the overall response of 72%. Bringing up the rear, at 45%, were atheists.

One question asked, according to the report, "whether public officials should be blocked or disqualified from serving based on their religious views, or lack thereof. Three-quarters of respondents agreed that public officials should not face the threat of being blocked or disqualified from public office for their religious beliefs or lack thereof.

"A notable group within this question's context are atheists, who were the first to face such religious tests for public office. On this question, atheist respondents followed the majority with 69% siding with the statement that elected officials should not face religious tests."

Catholics constituted 23% of all survey respondents. Christians of all varieties totaled 66% of all those surveyed. Self-identified Protestants made up 21%, and there were single-digit totals for evangelicals, Mormons, the Orthodox and Jehovah's Witnesses. But racking up 14% was a group described as "other Christians."

Those are "people who don't ascribe to a denomination," Alvarado said. They may be the people, she added, who say, "'I have my Bible at home, I believe in Jesus, not in any institution,' which is also interesting."

Millennials, she said, "don't identify with an institution. But it doesn't mean that they're not religious people. 'If you're registered at a parish, you must be Catholic.' Not necessarily. 'If you're registered at a megachurch, you must be a Protestant.' Mmm, not true," she told CNS. "Not belonging doesn't mean they don't have an attitude about religion."

Alvarado said the survey would be an annual event "for as long as I'm head of the Becket Fund. When we say annual, we mean it. When it's an index, you have to keep (asking) the same questions, or else it's no good."