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From: Anna Greenberg and Jennifer Berktoold

### **Re: EVANGELICALS IN AMERICA**

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As 23 percent of the American population, white evangelicals are an important part of the American mainstream whose collective voice is growing louder both in politics and in culture. In many respects, white evangelicals look like other Americans. They live all over the country, they are found in cities and small towns alike, they have friends outside of their churches, and a majority have at least some college education. They share concerns with the rest of the country about the cost of healthcare and having a secure retirement. Yet white evangelicals share a set of strongly-held beliefs about the role of religion in daily life, and they incorporate a set of religious behaviors based on these beliefs into their daily lives. It is these beliefs and behaviors that set them apart religiously and politically from the rest of the country.<sup>1</sup>

#### **Main Findings**

- White evangelicals hold a conservative set of religious beliefs about the interpretation of the Bible and salvation from personal faith alone. They are also deeply committed to their religious imperative to spread their faith.
- White evangelicals actively incorporate their faith into their daily lives, through formal activities like regular church attendance, but also through informal activities like Bible study, daily prayer, or talking about religion with their friends.
- White evangelicals are deeply committed to making a difference in their local community through volunteer work and charitable donations.
- White evangelicals are politically conservative. They are deeply concerned with the state of moral values in the country. However, they also articulate concerns

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<sup>1</sup> This memo is based on a survey of Americans, with oversamples of white evangelicals, African Americans, and Hispanics. The total sample size is 1,610 respondents and it has a margin of error of +/- 2.5%. The survey was conducted between March 16 and April 4<sup>th</sup> and employed random digit dial technology.



- about the economy consistent with other Americans, such as healthcare and retirement.
- White evangelicals rally around a foreign policy agenda that prioritizes safety and security at home over altruism and protection of other religious minorities abroad.
  - White evangelicals are deeply concerned with moral values and the protection of the family. They are extremely opposed to gay marriage and civil unions, but are mixed about the value of a Constitutional amendment that bans gay marriage.
  - White evangelicals steadfastly believe they are part of the American mainstream, but they believe the media are hostile toward their values and that it is a fight to get their voices heard by the American mainstream.

### **Who are Evangelicals?**

Taking a look at the demographic distribution of evangelicals in America reveals that they are a population that is difficult to pigeonhole. They are a diverse group, sharing many characteristics of Americans in general. For example, white evangelical Christians are not overly concentrated in the South, despite popular assumptions. Rather white evangelical Christians are evenly spread out throughout the country. Slightly less than a third (31 percent) of white evangelicals live in the Deep South, compared with 28 percent of the general population. Many also live in the East North Central (19 percent, versus 16 percent of the general population) and Pacific (14 percent, versus 16 percent of the general population) states.

White evangelicals do disproportionately live in smaller population centers, like small towns (31 percent) or rural areas (25 percent). This contrasts with Americans in general (22 percent in small towns and 18 percent in rural areas, respectively). Only about 9 percent of white evangelicals live in large cities (as opposed to 19 percent of the general population).

Like most Americans, most white evangelicals have attained at least some college education. About 22 percent of white evangelicals hold 4-year college degrees, compared with 27 percent of the general population. A quarter (27 percent) of white evangelicals have some sort of post-secondary education, compared to 26 percent of the general population.

White evangelicals are older than average: nearly a quarter of white evangelicals (23 percent) are 65 years or over, compared with about 16 percent of the general population. Many (27 percent, versus 18 percent of the general population) are retired.

Evangelicals come from many different Protestant denominations. Roughly 29 percent of white evangelicals are Baptist, and half of them (52 percent, or 16 percent of overall white evangelicals) are Southern Baptists. An additional 12 percent are Methodist. On the other hand, nearly a quarter of white evangelicals (24 percent) either don't know their denomination, call themselves "just Christian" or "just Protestant," or



are a non-denominational or inter-denominational Protestant.

<b>PROTESTANT DENOMINATIONS OF WHITE EVANGELICALS</b> <i>(Percent responding)</i>	
<b>Baptist</b>	29
<b>Other denominations</b>	22
<b>Just Christian/Just Protestant</b>	13
<b>Methodist</b>	12
<b>Non-denominational Protestant</b>	7
<b>Lutheran</b>	6
<b>Pentecostal</b>	4
<b>Presbyterian</b>	4
<b>Don't know</b>	4

Evangelicals in America are predominantly white or African American. About three quarters (74 percent) of evangelicals are white, 15 percent black. Hispanics, on the other hand, while predominantly Christian only make up 5 percent of the evangelical community. Hispanics remain (58 percent) largely Catholic, and an additional 12 percent are Pentecostal. In fact, among Protestants, Hispanics are twice as likely to be Pentecostal than whites (12 percent versus 6 percent).

Just as white evangelicals have many different Protestant denominations, they also come to their faith with a number of different Protestant identities. Roughly a quarter (24 percent) say they are fundamentalist, and another quarter say they are evangelical. An additional 5 percent say they are charismatic, and 10 percent prefer Pentecostal. Most interestingly though, as with their Protestant denomination, over a third of these Christians (34 percent) reject any such label, preferring to say they are none of these, or they don't know.

While they may eschew labels of formal denomination or formal identity, they rally around the concept of being born again. A strong majority (88 percent) of white evangelicals say they are "born-again Christian." This is much greater than Americans in general, where slightly less than half of which (48 percent) self-identify as born-again. Baptists and "just Christians" in particular overwhelmingly self-identify in this way (97 percent).

Among evangelicals, there is inherited religiosity, which is somewhat contradictory for a group that inherently believes they should spread their faith to others. About 63 percent say that at least one of their parents was a born-again Christian when they were growing up.<sup>2</sup> Half say that both of their parents were. One-third of white evangelicals are "converts," that is, neither parent was a born-again Christian when they were growing up. Being an evangelical is a largely non-immigrant phenomenon. Those

<sup>2</sup> This is perhaps less than expected. In the General Social Survey, for example, roughly 91 percent of Protestants say their mother was Protestant when growing up and 80 percent say their father was Protestant when growing up.



who are Americans and whose parents were Americans are more than three times as likely to be evangelical Christians as those who are immigrants (34 percent versus 11 percent). Among African-American evangelicals this proportion is even higher. Over three-quarters of African-American evangelicals (77 percent) say at least one parent was a born-again Christian during their youth.

### Religion and Daily Life

Evangelicals in America are committed to their faith and their Christianity, especially in their interpretation of the Bible. They reinforce their beliefs by making great effort to incorporate religion into every aspect of their lives, not only by attending church regularly but also by adding a host of informal religious activities to their daily routine. In this way they infuse even the most mundane events, such as eating, friendly conversation, or watching television, with spiritual meaning. But there is also evidence that they are not entirely closed off from others who do not share their faith. Not all of their friends go to their church, and many believe in a Heaven that is not exclusively for born-again Christians.

<b>ATTITUDES TOWARD THE BIBLE</b>					
<i>(Percent responding)</i>					
	<b>General population</b>	<b>White evangelicals</b>			
		<b>Total</b>	<b>Baptist</b>	<b>“Just Christ-ian”</b>	<b>Methodist</b>
<b>Bible is the literal word of God and is to be taken literally, word for word</b>	38	66	79	72	42
<b>Bible is word of God, but not everything should be taken literally, word for word</b>	43	29	18	26	51
<b>Bible is the word of men</b>	14	1	0	1	1

White evangelicals are much more likely than Americans in general to interpret the Bible literally. Over two-thirds of white evangelicals (67 percent) believe the Bible is the actual word of God and is to be taken literally, word for word. This view of the Bible is held by a majority of evangelicals in every demographic group, by age, gender, marital status, and income alike. Even a majority of white evangelicals with 4-year college degrees hold this view (57 percent). This contrasts greatly with 25 percent of people who are not evangelical, and 25 percent of those with college degrees, who believe in a literal interpretation of the Bible.

Baptists and evangelicals who identify as “just Christian” are much more likely than other members of other Protestant denominations to hold such conservative beliefs.



For instance, white evangelical Baptists and “just Christians” are much more likely to believe the Bible is the literal word of God than white evangelical Methodists (79 percent and 72 percent respectively versus 42 percent of white evangelical Methodists).

Another example of the very devout religious views of white evangelicals is in their attitudes toward salvation. While there are strong differences between the evangelical, Catholic and mainline Protestant faiths, what is striking is how much evangelicals agree, whereas there appears to be less consensus among other types of Christians. Evangelicals adopt a strict fundamentalist view of pure faith over charitable acts. An overwhelming majority of white evangelicals (84 percent) believe that personal faith in Jesus Christ is the only way to salvation, as opposed to gaining hope for salvation through other ways (13 percent). This view of salvation through personal faith contrasts strongly with the views of other types of Christians, like Catholics (38 percent) or non-evangelical Protestants (56 percent).

Evangelicals think very highly of their leaders. People like Franklin Graham and James Dobson, who enjoy little name recognition among the general population, are looked upon favorably by evangelicals. On a scale of 0 to 100, where 100 is very favorable, both leaders enjoy mean ratings of 77 and 76, respectively. In non-evangelical circles, these leaders are not well known. About 71 percent have never heard of them. Those that have rate them neutrally, each with a mean rating of 49. Christian leaders more known to the general public, like Jerry Falwell or Pat Robertson, are viewed more skeptically by evangelicals. Jerry Falwell is rated marginally unfavorably, with a mean rating of 46, and Pat Robertson is rated marginally favorably, with a mean rating of 55. Among non-evangelicals, these leaders are not liked. Jerry Falwell receives a mean rating of 26 and Pat Robertson receives a mean rating of 32.

<b>FAVORABILITY OF RELIGIOUS LEADERS</b>				
<i>(Mean rating and percent identifying)</i>				
	<b>White Evangelicals</b>		<b>Non-evangelicals</b>	
	<i>Mean rating</i>	<i>Percent identifying</i>	<i>Mean rating</i>	<i>Percent identifying</i>
<b>James Dobson</b>	76.4	58	49.4	29
<b>Jerry Falwell</b>	45.8	69	26.1	68
<b>Franklin Graham</b>	76.7	51	49.2	29
<b>Pat Robertson</b>	55.0	81	32.4	64

The survey results indicate that white evangelicals are not especially dogmatic in their views, in that they would not deny non-born again Christians a place in heaven. Only half of white evangelicals believe that only born again Christians go to heaven. This attitude is stronger among those whose parents were born-again Christians growing up (57 percent versus 38 percent of those without born-again parents). Black evangelicals are even more open about heaven; only 42 percent believe that heaven is for born-again only. Surprisingly, only 29 percent of white evangelical Methodists believe that only born again Christians go to heaven.



Armed with this strict set of beliefs, evangelicals approach the real world with the goal of incorporating religion into their lives as often and as best they can. This can mean in both formal and informal forms of worship. Evangelical Christians are devout churchgoers. About 71 percent of white evangelicals attend church at least once a week.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, roughly 63 percent of black evangelicals attend at least once a week. This sets them apart from people with other faiths, such as Catholics (52 percent attend at least once a week), people with non-Christian faiths (32 percent), and people with no religious preference (11 percent). Moreover, evangelicals are nearly twice as likely as Americans in general to attend church more than once a week (35 versus 18 percent, respectively).

Contrary to popular belief, not all evangelicals attend mega-churches. Only 13 percent have congregations that are larger than 1,000, a proportion that is not different from those of Protestants who are not evangelical (14 percent). Evangelicals often attend congregations that are smaller than those of their other Protestant counterparts. One in five evangelicals attends a congregation with less than 100 people, compared with 12 percent of Protestants who are not evangelical. Among white evangelicals, the mega-church is largely an urban phenomenon; nearly a quarter (23 percent) of white evangelicals attend congregations with over 1,000 members, compared with 16 percent of those living in the suburbs, 15 percent in “exurban” areas, and only 6 percent of those in rural areas.

<b>AMERICANS ENGAGING WEEKLY IN INFORMAL RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES</b>		
<i>(Percent responding)</i>		
	<b>General population</b>	<b>White evangelicals</b>
<b>Attend an informal religious or prayer group</b>	21	38
<b>Talk about religion informally with your friends</b>	45	65
<b>Pray before meals</b>	57	78
<b>Read religious books, newspapers or magazines</b>	38	56
<b>Spend time in prayer or meditation</b>	69	87
<b>Read the (holy book)</b>	43	74
<b>Watch or listen to religious broadcasting</b>	32	55

For white evangelicals, there are many informal ways in which they incorporate religion into their daily lives, and it is in these ways in which they set themselves apart from other Americans. In the last 12 months, nearly three-quarters (74 percent) of white evangelicals report they read the Bible at least once a week (versus 43 percent of

<sup>3</sup> Due to social desirability effects, especially in a survey about religion, respondents may over report their actual attendance.



Americans in general). More than three-quarters (78 percent) say they pray before meals every day (versus 57 percent of Americans in general).

Among white evangelicals, Baptists and “just Christians” are more likely to incorporate religion into their daily lives than other types of evangelicals. For example, Baptists and “just Christians” are more likely to say they pray before meals every day (80 percent and 81 percent respectively versus 66 percent of evangelical Methodists). They are also more likely to say they read the Bible at least once a week (80 percent and 82 percent respectively versus 61 percent of evangelical Methodists).

There are strong differences in formal and informal religious activity by gender among white evangelicals. Women evangelicals are more likely to hold a literal interpretation of the Bible (71 percent versus 62 percent of men). Women evangelicals are somewhat more likely than their male counterparts to attend church services at least once a week (74 versus 69 percent). Women are also more likely to regularly incorporate religious informal activities into their lives, such as pray before meals daily (64 percent versus 58 percent) and read the Bible at least once a week (81 percent versus 68 percent).

For white evangelicals, religious activity is not only limited to personal behavior and formal church-going. They engage in their religion in a third way, through informal peer interaction. While this extra level of religious engagement tends to set them apart from the religious activities of the general population, frequently talking about religion with their friends aids in social reinforcement of their belief system. In the last 12 months, over a third (38 percent) has attended an informal religious or prayer group at least once a week (versus 21 percent of Americans in general). Nearly two-thirds of white evangelicals (65 percent) talk about religion informally with their friends on a weekly basis, compared with 45 percent of Americans in general. A quarter does so every day, compared with only 16 percent of Americans in general.

If they are not talking to their friends about religion, white evangelicals are surrounding themselves with religious media. More than half (56 percent) read religious books, newspapers, or magazines at least once a week, as opposed to 38 percent of the general population. Nearly a quarter (24 percent) does so every day (versus 14 percent of the general population). Many others watch or listen to religious broadcasting at least once a week (55 percent), as opposed to less than a third (32 percent) of the general population. About one in five white evangelicals (21 percent) do this daily, versus about one in ten Americans in general (11 percent).

Despite the intense religiosity of the group, in general evangelicals are no more likely than other Americans to find most of their friends in their congregation. About a quarter of white evangelicals (26 percent) say that all or most of their friends belong to their congregation (compared with 20 percent of the general population). However, those who are older are much more likely to derive their social circles from church. About 35 percent of white evangelicals 65 or over say all or most of their friends belong to their congregation, compared with only 19 percent of those between 18 and 40 years of age.



While younger evangelicals may not look to the church for their friends as much as their older counterparts, this does not suggest they take their faith less seriously. White Generation X evangelicals are more likely than those from the Silent generation to regularly attend an informal prayer group (42 percent versus 33 percent) and as likely to attend church regularly (74 percent versus 75 percent). They are actually more likely than those of the Silent generation to believe in a literal interpretation of the Bible (76 percent versus 68 percent).

Those in the suburbs engage in different sets of informal activities than those in living in other areas, such as rural communities, suggesting that geography plays a role in community engagement and religious practice. They are less likely to engage frequently in traditional behaviors such as praying before meals (55 percent versus 65 percent), and they are less likely to read the Bible regularly (64 percent versus 81 percent). However, they are more likely to regularly attend an informal prayer group (48 percent versus 39 percent).

### **Spreading the Faith and Doing God's Work in their Local Communities**

Evangelical Christians believe they must evangelize. They must spread their faith and try to convince others to accept Jesus into their lives. In the survey, we see that not only do white evangelicals believe strongly in their religious mandate, they indeed follow through by talking to friends, family, and in some cases anyone who will listen, about their faith. Often, their talk can be in discussion or debate with non-believers. In addition to talking to others, we also see strong indications that evangelicals believe in making a difference in the communities in which they live through volunteerism and community outreach. They prefer to engage in their local communities rather than undertaking projects to spread the gospel elsewhere in America and around the world. But what they do not give in personal time they give in money. Evangelicals contribute often to charitable organizations committed to the cause.

There is nearly universal agreement in the evangelical religious mandate to spreading the faith, and the evidence shows that in this regard white evangelicals practice what they preach. Nine out of ten white evangelicals agree that it is important to spread their faith, and 81 percent of white evangelicals agree that it is important to convert others. Most of them say they follow through with their actions, though this is impossible to verify. Nearly three-quarters (73 percent) of white evangelicals have, at least one time in their lives, attempted to convince someone to accept Jesus into their life. These attitudes toward spreading the faith are not shared as strongly among non-evangelicals. While there is agreement among non-evangelicals that it is important to spread their faith (57 percent), only 38 percent feel that it is important to convert others. Only a third (35 percent) have ever tried to convert someone to their faith.

White evangelicals often talk to others about their faith in Jesus Christ. About 19 percent say they do it every day. Roughly 83 percent say they do it at least once a month. Often the targets of such discussions are young people. More than two-thirds (67



percent) of white evangelicals say they have told teens or adults explicitly about how they could become a Christian at least once in the last two years. Slightly under a third (31 percent) have done this five times or more. And while their discussion is just talking about the role of Jesus in their own lives or how Jesus can make a difference in someone else's life, sometimes their religious discussions can take the form of debate or active discussion with non-believers. In the last two years, about 56 percent has tried to defend a biblical worldview to non-Christians.

Usually, white evangelicals talk to people who are close to them about accepting Jesus: friends (68 percent), family members (63 percent), and children (59 percent). However, the desire to convert others often transcends boundaries of friendship and kin. About 41 percent of white evangelicals have attempted to convert co-workers, and over a third (38 percent) have attempted to convert strangers.

<b>PEOPLE WHOM WHITE EVANGELICALS TALK TO ABOUT ACCEPTING JESUS</b> <i>(Percent tried)</i>	
<b>Friends</b>	68
<b>Family</b>	63
<b>Children</b>	59
<b>Co-workers</b>	41
<b>Strangers</b>	38
<b>Others</b>	15
<b>Never tried to convert anyone</b>	27

White evangelicals are committed to community involvement. Fully 86 percent of white evangelicals strongly agree that the best way they can spread their faith is by setting a good example for others to follow, though this is similar to the general population (76 percent). Thus, in addition to talking with others about religion, many white evangelicals are actively involved in their communities through volunteer work. White evangelicals are more likely than Americans in general to say their religious faith has led to them to volunteer in their community (64 percent versus 55 percent). While evangelicals volunteer for secular organizations roughly as much as others, about 60 percent have volunteered for a church program in their community in the last two years (versus 45 percent of non-evangelical Christians and 28 percent of people who are not Christian).

In addition to making a difference in their local communities, evangelical Christians enthusiastically sponsor charity organizations. In some ways they are not unlike other Christians. A strong majority of both donate money to their church (85 percent and 83 percent, respectively) and to organizations that help needy people (84 percent). However, evangelicals are substantially more likely to donate money to charity organizations that help spread the gospel. Nearly three-quarters (74 percent) have given money or time to such an organization in the last two years, 40 percent have given money or time more than 5 times (compared with 42 percent of non-evangelical Christians and 27 percent of people who are not Christian).



<b>VOLUNTEERISM AND DONATIONS</b> <i>(Percent ever done)</i>			
	<b>White evangelical</b>	<b>Christian, not evangelical</b>	<b>Not Christian</b>
<b>Volunteered for a church program that services the local community</b>	60	45	28
<b>Volunteered for a local community organization not related to church</b>	51	55	52
<b>Given money or time to a [Christian/religious] organization to help spread the gospel in the U.S. or overseas</b>	74	42	27
<b>Given money to an organization that helps poor or needy people</b>	84	84	75
<b>Go on a religious mission in another country</b>	9	2	3
<b>Do a religious project in the United States</b>	35	20	16
<b>Donate money to your church or place of worship</b>	85	83	53

Yet in spite of their evangelism, volunteerism, and aggressive donation practices, evangelicals prefer to keep their personal efforts to spread the gospel close to home. In the last two years, about a third of white evangelicals report doing a religious project in the United States, and only 9 percent have gone on a religious mission in another country. Those self-identifying as “just Christian” were more than twice as likely as Baptists, and more than three times as likely as Methodists to go on a mission (15 percent versus 7 percent and 4 percent, respectively). College graduates were about twice as likely as their high school or some-college educated counterparts to do missionary work (13 versus 6 percent and 7 percent respectively).

### **Evangelicals as Part of Mainstream American Culture**

White evangelicals face an interesting tension between believing strongly they are part of the mainstream and exerting positive influence upon society while feeling hostility from the mass media and others in the “mainstream.” When we speak of “evangelicals under siege” or an “embattled minority,” there is some sense of attack and victimization though it is not overwhelming. While these devout Christians express a sense of persecution from the media, they do not choose to merely accept it. They think a great deal about their relationship with mainstream society, and they fight back, both as individuals and as a cohesive group. Socially they produce and patronize popular culture vehicles that expound on their beliefs. Many television and radio stations air exclusively



Christian, family-friendly programming. And recent movies such as “The Passion of the Christ,” books such as the best-selling “Left Behind” series, and Christian music, such as that from Jars of Clay, DC Talk, or Amy Grant, are examples of a Christian pop culture that is increasingly entering the American mainstream. In their homes, evangelicals avidly patronize these entertainment vehicles and limit their viewing of secular programming they deem offensive.

In spite of their exceptional lives, evangelical Christians steadfastly believe they are part of the American mainstream (75 percent agree). Approximately three-quarters (72 percent) believe that born-again or evangelical Christians have had at least some influence on American society. In general, Americans share this view as well, although perhaps not quite as strongly. Two-thirds (65 percent) agree that evangelicals are part of mainstream society, and about 60 percent acknowledge that evangelicals have had at least some influence on American society.

Yet evangelical Christians reflect a great deal about the relationship between their religion and society, and many are concerned. Evangelicals have strong concerns with moral values, especially with regards to children (71 percent are very worried that children are not learning values and respect). Moreover, over a third (36 percent) of evangelical Christians are very worried that society is becoming too secular, versus 26 percent of Americans in general. The disparity between the two numbers, however, suggests that evangelicals believe that the problem of declining moral values is something more than just a rise of secularism.

Even though most Americans agree that evangelicals are part of the American mainstream, white evangelicals do believe they are an embattled subgroup whose beliefs are given short shrift by others. A strong majority (74 percent) feels as though the mass media are hostile toward their moral and spiritual values. And a similar majority (77 percent) believe they must fight to have their voices heard by the American mainstream. Finally, a near majority (47 percent) believes that evangelical Christians are looked down upon by most Americans. Evangelicals who are more devout in their religious practices feel this more acutely. For example, about 57 percent of white evangelicals who attend church at least once a week feel looked down upon by others (compared with 45 percent of those who attend once a week and 33 percent of those who attend less than once a month). Evangelicals who are “converts,” too, feel looked down upon more than other evangelicals (56 percent versus 48 percent of those with born-again parents).

This stands in contrast to how those who are not Christian view themselves and the media and white evangelicals. They do not share this anger, nor do they see the evangelical struggle. Only 30 percent of white non-Christians feel the media are hostile toward their own personal beliefs, and only 38 percent believe evangelicals are looked down upon. Only 36 percent feel that evangelicals have to fight to have their voices be heard.



<b>ATTITUDES TOWARD EVANGELICALS AND MAINSTREAM SOCIETY</b>			
<i>(Percent agree)</i>			
	<b>Total</b>	<b>White evangelicals</b>	<b>White non-Christian</b>
<b>Evangelical Christians are looked down upon by most Americans</b>	39	47	38
<b>The mass media is hostile toward my moral and spiritual values</b>	52	75	30
<b>Evangelical Christians have to fight for their voices to be heard by the American mainstream</b>	55	76	36
<b>Evangelical Christians are part of mainstream American society</b>	65	77	57

Like many Americans, evangelicals are extremely worried about the state of moral values in this country. But in this sense, they are not so different from other Americans. About 71 percent are very worried that children are not learning values and respect. This is greater, but only somewhat greater, than the country at large, 63 percent of which are very worried about children and their values. Similarly, nearly two-thirds (65 percent) of white evangelicals are very worried about the amount of sex and violence on television, versus slightly less than half (49 percent) of Americans in general.

White evangelicals seem to pay as much attention to popular culture as the rest of Americans. On average, they watch 3.0 hours of television a day; Americans in general watch 3.1. But while these numbers do not greatly differ from the general population, their religion mandates they do something about the content on television they are unhappy with, translating their religious beliefs to interventionist behavior. White evangelical parents are very involved in their kids' lives, and they want to make sure their children are learning the right kinds of values. More than three-quarters (76 percent) of white evangelicals with families have prevented their children from watching television shows or movies with objectionable content, compared with 54 percent of the general population. Similarly, 61 percent of white evangelicals with families have prevented their children from playing violent video games, compared with 47 percent of the general population.

White evangelicals turn to their faith to help them control their own vices. For example, white evangelicals were almost twice as likely as those who are not evangelical to use their faith to abstain from alcohol (52 percent versus 23 percent). Among white evangelicals, those with more religious intensity, such as frequent church goers, were more likely to say they used their faith to abstain from alcohol (71 percent versus 34 percent of white evangelicals who attend church less than once a month).



### Evangelicals and Politics

As we would expect, white evangelicals are quite conservative politically. They share the conservative agenda of the current White House and are strongly supportive of President Bush’s re-election bid. They espouse pro-life positions, oppose gay marriage, and believe in doing what it takes to keep America strong as a foreign power. But there are some surprises as well. While a majority of white evangelicals oppose gay marriage, most would prefer to rely on state laws than amending the constitution. Less than half say that a candidate’s support for gay marriage would disqualify him or her from getting their votes.

About 69 percent of white evangelicals are Republican or lean Republican, and not surprisingly, this translates to strong support for George W. Bush’s presidential re-election bid. Among likely voters, Bush leads Kerry 51 percent to 44 percent. However, among white evangelicals who are likely voters, Bush has a commanding lead at 74 percent of the vote versus 23 percent for Kerry.

<b>POLITICAL PARTISANSHIP OF WHITE EVANGELICALS</b>		
<i>(Percent)</i>		
	<b>General population</b>	<b>White evangelicals</b>
<b>Strong Democrat</b>	19	10
<b>Weak Democrat</b>	18	9
<b>Independent-lean Democrat</b>	11	4
<b>Independent</b>	6	6
<b>Independent-lean Republican</b>	11	14
<b>Weak Republican</b>	14	20
<b>Strong Republican</b>	20	36

A strong majority (71 percent) believes that born again or evangelical Christians have had at least some influence on the Bush administration. Moreover, those white evangelicals who believe that evangelical Christians have had “a lot” of influence on the Bush administration are much more likely to say they will vote for Bush in 2004 (83 percent for Bush vs. 15 percent for Kerry).

Roughly 1 in 5 white evangelical likely voters are Democrats. Without the reinforcement of church and social ties, they are less engaged politically. White evangelical Democrats are a bit less likely to be registered to vote (81 percent versus 86 percent of Republicans), and are less likely to vote in major elections (64 percent versus 73 percent of Republicans).<sup>4</sup>

For evangelical Democrats, however, partisanship is more important than religion in deciding for whom to cast their vote. Half of white evangelical Democrats rate George

<sup>4</sup> As is the case with church attendance, self-reported estimates of intention to vote may be somewhat inflated due to effects of social desirability.



W. Bush unfavorably, compared with only 2 percent of white evangelical Republicans. Moreover, 79 percent of white evangelical Democrats believe the country is headed on the wrong track (versus only 27 percent of evangelical Republicans). These white evangelicals are for Kerry (71 percent). Black evangelicals too, traditional Democrats, are staunch Kerry supporters, with three-quarters saying they will vote for Kerry.

### Political Engagement

When it comes to political activity, white evangelicals look similar to the general American population. They are only slightly more likely to be registered, and demonstrate a past voting behavior very similar to that of the rest of the country. However, just as with actions in their daily lives, evangelicals look for issues and candidates that expound upon their beliefs. They are somewhat more likely to get involved politically if they see a candidate or an issue that forwards their religious agenda.

White evangelicals are slightly more politically engaged than Americans in general. They are slightly more likely to be registered to vote (82 percent versus 77 percent).<sup>5</sup> They also slightly more likely than Americans in general to report that they vote regularly (65 percent versus 61 percent respectively reported that they voted in both 2000 and 2002).

Among white evangelicals, those who attend church frequently are somewhat more likely to be Republican (63 percent, compared with 44 percent of those who attend less than once a month), and are more likely to support Bush (78 percent, versus 60 percent)

<b>RELIGIOUS FAITH AND THE IMPACT ON POLITICAL PARTICIPATION</b>		
<i>(Percent responding)</i>		
	<b>White evangelicals</b>	<b>Non-evangelicals</b>
<b>Boycott a product or company</b>	37	18
<b>Participate in an election campaign</b>	32	16
<b>Participate in an election campaign for a local candidate</b>	21	14

There is evidence to suggest that religion motivates white evangelicals toward political activism. For example, white evangelicals are more likely than non-evangelicals to say their religious faith has led them to boycott a product or company (37 versus 18

<sup>5</sup> Self-reported estimates of voter registration may be somewhat inflated due to effects of social desirability.



percent). Similarly, nearly a third (32 percent) of white evangelicals say their religious faith has led them to participate in an election campaign. This, too, is twice as high as non-evangelicals, only 16 percent of whom have participated in an election campaign because of their religious faith.

Although evangelicals are much more likely than Americans in general to give money to charitable organizations and to get involved politically, they are not any more likely to give money to a political organization or candidate. In this respect, they are very much like other Americans, motivated by their religiosity rather than their specific faith. Evangelicals are a little more likely than others to give money to a political organization or candidate if he/she is Christian (36 percent, versus 28 percent of Christians in general and 20 percent of non-Christians). On the other hand, evangelicals are slightly less likely to give money to a non-Christian political organization or candidate (28 percent, versus 31 percent of Christians in general and 41 percent of non-Christians).

<b>ENGAGEMENT IN POLITICAL ACTIVITIES</b>			
<i>(Percent reporting)</i>			
	<b>Non-Christians</b>	<b>Christians</b>	<b>White evangelicals</b>
<b>Given money or time to a Christian political organization or candidate</b>	20	28	36
<b>Given money or time to a non-Christian political organization or candidate</b>	41	31	28
<b>Written, called, or visited elected officials</b>	36	33	35
<b>Participated in public protests or demonstrations</b>	18	9	10

### **The Domestic Agenda**

White evangelicals firmly favor a conservative family values agenda and look skeptically upon organizations that typically are associated with liberal causes. However, on key economic issues such as jobs, healthcare, and retirement, white evangelicals share the same concerns as the rest of the country.

On domestic issues, white evangelicals share many of the same concerns as the rest of the country. They are very worried about keeping jobs in this country (54 percent very worried about jobs going overseas to countries like China, Mexico, and India, versus 51 percent of the general population), being able to maintain affordable health care (48 percent very worried, versus 53 percent), and having enough money for retirement (43 percent very worried, versus 47 percent).



<b>WORRIES FOR YOU AND YOUR FAMILY</b>		
<i>(Percent very worried)</i>		
	<b>General population</b>	<b>White evangelicals</b>
<b>Children are not learning values and respect</b>	63	71
<b>That you will not be able to afford the health care services you or your family need or you will lose your health insurance</b>	53	48
<b>We are spending too much money abroad while we have important problems here at home</b>	52	43
<b>Good paying blue-collar jobs are going to countries like China, Mexico, and India</b>	51	54
<b>Good paying jobs are going overseas</b>	50	50
<b>That the deficit is spiraling out of control</b>	50	43
<b>The amount of sex and violence on television</b>	49	65
<b>Your kids will not be able to get quality education</b>	48	39
<b>Having enough money for retirement</b>	47	43
<b>That the institution of marriage is under attack</b>	42	65
<b>That there is a growing inequality between rich and poor</b>	40	34
<b>You or your community may be affected by terrorism</b>	29	25
<b>That society is becoming too secular</b>	26	36

White evangelicals share with Americans in general concerns about the economy and retirement (not surprising since they are older). A quarter of white evangelicals identify the economy as a top concern, compared with 31 percent of Americans in general. Older evangelicals are as likely to cite retirement and healthcare (23 percent) as a top concern as they are moral values (20 percent).

Older evangelical women, in particular, are concerned with economic issues. They face more serious economic challenges, such as lower incomes. They are twice as likely as their male counterparts to have household incomes of under \$20,000 a year (25



percent versus 10 percent of young men and 9 percent of older men). Many identify as top concerns Social Security (27 percent) and healthcare (24 percent).

While “family values” top the list of the concerns of white evangelicals, it is worth pointing out that it is surprising that moral values are not more dominant. About 36 percent identify moral values as a top concern, compared with 21 percent of Americans in general. Moreover, while they express concern about values, other Americans share the same concerns: 71 percent are very worried that children are not learning values and respect, versus 63 percent of Americans in general.

Nonetheless, their opinions on traditional family values issues are striking. Two-thirds (67 percent) feel that abortion should be illegal in most or all cases, versus 45 percent of the general population. Nearly two-thirds (65 percent) are very worried that the institution of marriage is under attack, as opposed to 42 percent of the general population. White evangelicals are overwhelmingly opposed to allowing gay marriage (85 percent), and nearly three-quarters (74 percent) are opposed to civil unions, versus 61 percent and 51 percent of the general population, respectively.

In spite of their dislike of gay marriage, though, there is a fair amount of reluctance to amending the U.S. Constitution to banning gay marriage. This suggests that while they are strongly opposed to allowing gays to be married or even form civil unions, there is a certain reluctance to such permanent legislation. Over half (51 percent) of white evangelicals opposing gay marriage do not support such amending the constitution, saying that state laws are sufficient.

<b>ATTITUDES TOWARD GAY MARRIAGE</b>		
<i>(Percent responding)</i>		
	<b>General population</b>	<b>White evangelicals</b>
<b>Favor</b>	30	10
<b>Oppose</b>	61	85
<b>Amend the Constitution</b>	35	42
<b>Enough to prohibit by law</b>	57	52

Furthermore, gay marriage is not a litmus test of political candidates for many evangelicals. Only half of white evangelicals (50 percent) say they would not vote for a candidate that does not share their views on gay marriage. While this is seemingly inconsistent with the white evangelical family values platform, it is consistent with other studies that have placed gay marriage relatively low on a list of domestic priorities such as the economy, health care, retirement and education. For example, in a recent poll from the Democracy Corps, respondents who were likely voters overwhelmingly chose a statement that prioritizes choosing a candidate over jobs and healthcare as opposed to gay marriage (70 percent versus 24 percent).<sup>6</sup> Consistent with this study, they found that 54

<sup>6</sup> Democracy Corps survey of 1004 likely voters, conducted March 16-21, 2004. Question wording: “Now I’m going to read you some pairs of statements. As I read each pair, please tell me whether the FIRST statement or the SECOND statement comes closer to your own views, even if neither is



percent of devout evangelicals would use gay marriage as a litmus test for selecting a candidate. Among African American evangelicals the number drops to 37 percent, suggesting there are limits of the platform of the religious right among African Americans.

### **The Foreign Policy Agenda**

White evangelicals prioritize the “strength” issues when it comes to the United States’ foreign policy agenda. In this way, their political attitudes seem to be more influenced by their political conservatism than the altruism of spreading their faith or doing God’s work abroad. When it comes to international priorities, they think first of those that will keep America safe from foreign aggression. Homeland security and the war on terrorism are the top priorities for white evangelicals, rather than reaching out to the disadvantaged or even protecting the rights of religious minorities such as Christians in other countries.

Foreign policy objectives such as keeping America’s military strong (42 percent extremely important) controlling biological, chemical and nuclear weapons around the world (35 percent extremely important) and fighting global terrorism (30 percent extremely important) are of critical importance to white evangelicals and considered higher priorities than activities that would protect the rights of other religious minorities (14 percent extremely important) or other altruistic acts, such as fighting global disease (21 percent extremely important), contributing to international relief efforts for famines and natural disasters (14 percent extremely important).

White evangelicals are much more decidedly pro-Israel than Americans in general, suggesting sympathy toward allies in the war on terrorism and democracies in the Middle East. Over half (55 percent) think it is extremely or very important we show support for Israel, compared with 40 percent of Americans in general. Evangelical Baptists are much more supportive of Israel than evangelical Methodists (66 percent versus 38 percent). There is also more support for Israel among fundamentalists (63 percent) and Pentecostals (67 percent) than self-identified evangelicals (55 percent) or those without such a Protestant identity (50 percent). This, however, is largely driven by their conservatism. Among white evangelicals, political conservatives are more than three times as likely to be supportive of Israel than moderate counterparts (25 percent versus 8 percent).

However, evangelicals are no different from the general population in their support of Palestinian rights: they offer slightly less support than the general population (21 percent versus 24 percent). This, again, is generally driven though their conservatism. White evangelical Democrats are more supportive of Palestine than

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exactly right. ‘This year, jobs and health care are more important to me than gay marriage when deciding on a candidate’ and ‘If a candidate is open to legalizing gay marriages, I’m against him no matter what.’”



evangelical Republicans (31 versus 18 percent), and are similar to Democrats in general (also 31 percent).

<b>IMPORTANT FOR AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY</b>		
<i>(Percent extremely important)</i>		
	<b>General Population</b>	<b>White Evangelicals</b>
<b>Keeping America's military strong</b>	33	42
<b>Controlling biological, chemical and nuclear weapons around the world</b>	33	35
<b>Fighting global terrorism</b>	29	30
<b>Fighting global disease, such as AIDS and tuberculosis</b>	27	21
<b>Combating global warming and other environmental threats</b>	16	9
<b>Sending troops into other countries that pose a potential threat to the United States</b>	15	18
<b>Promote human rights abroad, like religious freedom</b>	15	18
<b>Improving relations with our European allies and other major countries like Russia and China</b>	15	14
<b>Contributing to international relief efforts for famines and natural disasters</b>	14	14
<b>Support for Israel</b>	13	18
<b>Promoting democracy and freedom abroad, such as for religious minorities</b>	12	14
<b>Helping to improve the standard of living in less developed nations</b>	11	8
<b>Support for Palestinian rights</b>	4	3

### Conclusion

White evangelicals represent a diverse subset of Americans who are able with a powerful, consistent, and united voice to articulate the issues that are of most importance to them. Their interests tend to revolve around the interrelated issues of morality, family, national safety, and economic security. Their power comes from a daily personal commitment to their faith and by surrounding themselves every day with people and media that further inform, clarify, and reinforce their existing beliefs. They are deeply committed to their religious beliefs and determined to communicate them to the world.



To this white evangelicals add a great deal of community outreach, simultaneously trying to improve the areas in which they live, provide a good Christian example to others, especially their children, and abide by their religious mandate to spread the faith.

Yet underlying this all is a desire and a need to be recognized as part of the American mainstream. Evangelicals motivate each other by thinking of themselves, much as the first Christians did as an embattled minority, marginalized at best or persecuted at worst for their religious beliefs. While other Americans may not necessarily see them in this way, what is most important is that this is how evangelical Christians see themselves. And it is their shared profound dissatisfaction with aspects of the American mainstream that gives them cause to fight to be heard by the American mainstream.