



American Values Survey

Initial Report

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2006 AMERICAN VALUES SURVEY INITIAL FINDINGS

Executive Summary

The Center for American Values in Public Life at People for the American Way Foundation conducted in August 2006 a benchmark survey designed to provide a rigorous understanding of how Americans' religion and values impact political views and behavior. It is the most in-depth survey on religion, values, and politics in two years, including a large enough number of responses (2,502 plus additional over-sampling of African Americans and Hispanics) and rich enough religious demographics to provide a wealth of information. This report includes the Center's initial analysis of the data on religion, values and politics. Deeper and wider-ranging analysis of the survey's findings will continue in the coming weeks and months.

Findings Refute Claims about "Values Voters"

In recent years, pundits and political operatives have made many claims about "Values Voters" – supposedly a large percentage of the electorate predominantly concerned with ultraconservative positions on social issues like criminalizing abortion and denying gay couples the right to marry. This notion has endured in spite of public critiques of the flawed question on the 2004 national exit poll, which seemed to show that "moral values" were the top issue motivating voters. The AVS found:

Social issues such as abortion and gay marriage rank last in importance to the vast majority of Americans' voting decisions.

When given a list of concrete choices and asked which would be the most important to deciding their vote in the upcoming congressional elections, the public ranked abortion and gay marriage last out of eight choices – getting only five percent of the total. Even among evangelical Christians, only 10 percent say abortion and gay marriage will be the most important factor in determining their vote.

An overwhelming majority of Americans, including at least three-quarters of every major religious tradition, say issues like poverty and health care are more important than hot-button social issues.

More than seven times as many Americans (85% versus 12%) say that issues like poverty and affordable health care are generally more important than issues like abortion and same-sex marriage in contemporary American society. Even among evangelicals, less than one in five see abortion and same-sex marriage as more important.

When people think about "voting their values," more people think of the honesty, integrity, and responsibility of the candidate than any other values.

Americans have a wide range of things in mind when they think about voting their values:

The honesty, integrity, and responsibility of the candidate	39%
Eliminating poverty and guaranteeing access to health care	23%
Protecting personal freedoms and individual choices	21%
Keeping marriage between a man and a woman	9%
Working to restrict access to abortion	3%

Less than one in five evangelicals (19%) thought primarily in terms of these controversial issues, and almost equal numbers said that voting their values meant protecting personal freedoms and individual choices (18%).

Americans overwhelmingly believe religious leaders who focus on abortion and gay rights ought to bring religious teachings more to bear on themes like concern for others and the poor.

More than eight in ten Americans agree (82 percent) that too many leaders use religion to talk about abortion and gay rights, but don't talk about more important things like loving your neighbor and caring for the poor. This overwhelming support holds true across virtually every religious tradition.

Religious Centrists Largest Group by Far

While most public attention has focused on the activities of religious conservatives, the American Values Survey (AVS) found that half of Americans can be classified as centrist in their religious orientation, while 22 percent are traditionalists, 18 percent are modernists, and 10 percent are secular or nonreligious. This composite measure of religiosity, adapted from the work of scholar John Green, is constructed with a combination of questions on belief, behavior, and self-reported importance of religion.

Size and Permanence of Partisan “God Gap” Have Been Overblown

Much ink has been spilled over the “God gap” between the two political parties. In the 2004 presidential election, there was a 20-point Republican advantage among those who most frequently attend religious services, up from a 6-point gap in 1992.

But our 2006 data make it clear that it is simplistic and inaccurate to suggest Democrats have lost their ability to win support from religious Americans. Democrats appear poised to make dramatic gains across all major religious groups. Likely 2006 voters who attend church more than once a week favored Republicans by only three points; every other group, including those who attend church weekly, favors the Democrats.

Small Differences in Perceptions of Parties’ Hostility to Religion

Survey data showing a decline in public perceptions of the Democrats’ friendliness toward religion has generated additional commentary. But the consequences of this decline have likely been overstated. Although Republicans are more likely to be perceived as friendly to religion, Democrats are more likely to be perceived as neutral to religion. And those who view Democrats as neutral towards religion strongly support Democratic candidates in upcoming fall 2006 elections, 57% to 29%. We also found only a small difference between the number of Americans who view Democrats as unfriendly to religion (16%) and those who view Republicans as unfriendly to religion (13%).

Perceptions of the Party Values

By a wide margin, a majority of Americans see the Democrats as more concerned about the welfare of the middle class and protecting the freedoms of citizens to make personal choices. Republicans have a smaller advantage in being perceived as defenders of religious values. Republicans and Democrats are almost equally perceived as being concerned about standing up for what they believe in.

Swing Voters

Swing voters who are likely to vote in 2006 are leaning toward the Democratic Party by 27 points (50% to 23% with another 27% undecided). This represents a dramatic 40-point shift from 2004, when swing voters supported Bush over Kerry by 13 points (51% to 38%).

Swing voters are less religious than the general public. On nearly all religious measures such as prayer, belief in God, and formal religious attendance, swing voters are less religiously observant and less attached to religious organizations than either Democrats or Republicans.

PART I. RELIGION, VALUES VOTERS, AND PUBLIC LIFE

American Religious Affiliation and Religious Orientations

Since the 2004 presidential elections, much ink has been spilled over the so-called “Values Gap” and “God Gap” between the political parties, concepts that have been used to claim that citizens who bring their faith and values to the polls tend to vote Republican. The Center for American Values in Public Life at People for the American Way Foundation conducted a benchmark survey designed to provide a rigorous understanding of American religious orientations and to explore how these orientations affect both public opinion and voting behavior in the context of the 2006 election. The survey was conducted among a nationally representative sample of 2,502 adult American citizens (age 18 and up) from August 9-23, 2006. Additionally, the survey included two over-samples of 250 Hispanics and 250 African Americans.

This is the most in-depth survey on religion, values, and politics since studies conducted around the 2004 national election cycle. One key feature of the survey is its unusually rich set of religious demographics. Our approach draws on a methodology developed by political scientist John Green that constructs a composite “religiosity factor.” This religiosity factor identifies an individual’s religious orientation as traditionalist, centrist, or modernist based on a combination of belief (view of God and the Bible), behavior (religious attendance and prayer) and the self-reported importance of religion. For example, we can distinguish between traditionalist, centrist, and modernist religious orientations within each of the three largest denominational families (Evangelicals, Mainline Protestants, and Catholics).

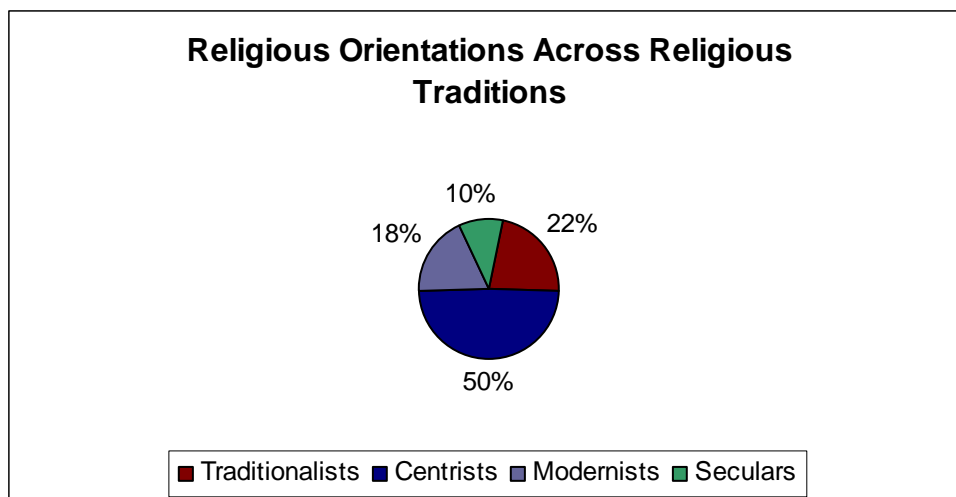
In our survey, we extended this method for identifying Christian subgroups to a cross-tradition inquiry that included non-Christian religious traditions. This new analytical tool allows us to see for the first time a more complete picture of religious orientations across the American religious landscape. As we show below, religious orientations, both within and across traditions, are correlated with distinctive opinions and behaviors and are critical for understanding the impact of religiosity on politics.

American Religious Affiliation	
Affiliation ¹	Population %
Evangelicals (All)	25.4
Traditionalist Evangelicals	11.1
Centrist Evangelicals	10.4
Modernist Evangelicals*	3.9
Mainline Protestants (All)	15.2
Traditionalist Mainline	4.7
Centrist Mainline	6.3
Modernist Mainline	4.1
Hispanic Protestants [^]	2.9
Black Protestants	10.4
Catholics (All)	18.0
Traditionalist Catholics*	3.3
Centrist Catholics	10.2
Modernist Catholics	4.5
Hispanic Catholics	7.8
Other Christians*	2.9
Jews*	1.3
Other Non-Christians*	2.3
Unaffiliated Believers*	3.6
Secular	10.4
<i>Total</i>	<i>100.0</i>
<i>Note: In all subsequent charts, the following symbols carry the same meaning:</i>	
<i>* n<100.</i>	
<i>[^] Over-sample.</i>	

¹ Throughout this report, “Evangelical” refers to White Evangelicals, “Mainline Protestant” refers to White Mainline Protestants, and “Catholic” refers to non-Hispanic Catholics.

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There has been much debate about the relative size of a conservative Religious Right and progressive Religious Left, but there has been little consensus on how to measure these groups. Our cross-tradition measure of religious orientations revealed a remarkably balanced picture of religiosity in America. We found that half of Americans are Religious Centrists, and only 1 in 10 Americans are non-religious or secular. The remainder of Americans are fairly evenly divided between Religious Traditionalists (22%) and Religious Modernists (18%).



Certain religious orientations are more highly correlated with particular religious affiliation groups than others. Half of Religious Traditionalists are Evangelicals (50%), and more than half of Religious Modernists are constituted by a combination of Mainline Protestants (29%) and Catholics (27%). Religious Centrists, not surprisingly, are much more evenly distributed across affiliation; pluralities of every major religious tradition are Religious Centrists.

Religious orientations are also useful for understanding the effect of religiosity across a number of measures. For example, more than three times as many Religious Traditionalists as Religious Modernists are worried about public officials not paying enough attention to religion as opposed to being concerned about public officials who are too close to religious leaders (72% vs. 23%). Only 1 in 3 Religious Traditionalists support either same-sex marriage or civil unions (32%), while solid majorities of Religious Centrists (62%) and Modernists (79%) support them.

	Tradition- alist %	Centrist %	Modernist %	Secular %
Born again	80	46	15	0
Not enough attention to religion by leaders	72	46	23	14
Republican	40	29	20	13
Independent	21	27	38	42
Democrat	33	39	36	33
Support same-sex marriage or civil unions	32	62	79	82
Stricter environmental regulations worth the cost	56	74	78	81
Abortion always illegal	28	11	3	3

Uncovering the Truth about American Values and Politics

Over the last two years, pundits and political strategists have made many claims about “values voters”: voters who allegedly were galvanized by hot-button social issues such as same-sex marriage and abortion and handed the 2004 election to President George W. Bush. Despite a number of studies that have cast some doubt on this theory, it has proven remarkably enduring.

Four Findings about American Values and Politics

This survey found four truths about values voters that undercut these central claims of the values voters mythology. Specifically, we found:

1. Most Americans say that social issues such as abortion and gay marriage are the least important issues influencing their vote.
2. An overwhelming majority of Americans, including at least three-quarters of every major religious group, say that issues like poverty and affordable health care are more important issues in the country today than these controversial social issues.
3. When people think about voting their values, more people think of the honesty, integrity, and responsibility of the candidate than any other values.
4. More than 4 out of every 5 Americans think leaders should bring religious teachings to bear on broader themes like concern for others and the poor.

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1. Most Americans say that social issues such as abortion and gay marriage are the least important issues influencing their vote.

When asked about the most important issue influencing their vote, Americans ranked abortion and gay marriage dead last out of 8 choices. The top issue was the economy, with more than 4 times as many voters stating that this would be the basis of their decision (23% economy, compared to 5% abortion and gay marriage). The second and third most important issues—Iraq and terrorism—are both three times the percentage of these heralded “values issues.”

As the table demonstrates, there are some important differences between likely Republican and Democratic voters in 2006. Likely Republican voters rank abortion and gay marriage third among the eight issues, significantly higher than the general population, but even here only 13% rate these issues as most important. Terrorism and national security are overwhelmingly the most important issue for likely Republican voters (30%). For likely Democratic voters, jobs and economy (26%) slightly edge out the war in Iraq (24%) as the most important issue. Virtually none (1%) of likely Democratic voters ranked abortion and gay marriage as the most important issue. Swing voters mirrored the concerns of the overall public and also ranked abortion and gay marriage as the least important issues (4%) influencing their 2006 vote.

Most Important Issue in 2006 Vote					
<i>Thinking about the upcoming elections this year, which ONE of the following issue areas would be MOST important to you in deciding how to vote for a candidate for Congress?</i>					
	Total %	Vote/ Lean Dem 2006 %	Vote/ Lean Rep 2006 %	Swing Voter ² %	Evan- geli- cal %
Jobs and economy	23	26	17	24	18
War in Iraq	17	24	9	15	14
Terrorism and national security	15	7	30	14	18
Corruption in Washington	9	12	5	10	9
Medicare and social security	9	9	6	9	8
Health care	8	10	4	9	9
Illegal immigration	7	6	10	8	5
Abortion and gay marriage	5	1	13	4	10
None/DK	6	3	6	7	8

With the exception of Evangelicals, no more than 3% of any major religious group said that abortion and gay marriage were the most important issues in their vote (Black Protestants, Catholics, Hispanic Catholics, all 3%; Mainline Protestants, 2%), and only 1 in 10 Evangelicals made this claim. Again, with the exception of Evangelicals, economic issues ranked at least 19 points higher than abortion and gay marriage among all major religious groups. But even among Evangelicals, economic issues still outranked these cultural issues by a healthy 8 points.

Despite the rhetoric proclaiming the importance of these cultural issues to a large block of conservative voters, even among the most conservative respondents (Republicans, likely Republican voters in 2006, self-identified conservatives, Evangelicals, white southerners), no more than 13% of any identifiable group said that abortion and gay marriage were the most important issues in their 2006 vote.

² The swing voter category includes registered voters who are either political independents or political partisans who voted for the opposite party in 2004.

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2: An overwhelming majority of Americans, including at least three-quarters of every major religious group, say that issues like poverty and affordable health care are more important issues in the country today than these controversial social issues.

These findings stand up even when respondents were asked about the general importance of issues and were given a binary choice between issues like abortion and same-sex marriage and issues like poverty and affordable health care. More than seven times as many Americans (85% versus 12%) say that issues like poverty and affordable health care are generally more important in contemporary American society.

These opinions are relatively stable among virtually every demographic group. At least three-quarters of respondents in every religious group say that poverty and affordable health care are more important than abortion and same-sex marriage. Even among Evangelicals, less than 1 in 5 (19%) see abortion and same-sex marriage as more important issues. Hispanic Catholics are a notable here; despite their typically strong Democratic support (65% likely voting Democratic in 2006), slightly more Hispanic Catholics than Evangelicals think issues like abortion and same-sex marriage are more important than issues like poverty and affordable health care (22% versus 19%). Swing voters again mirror the larger public's views, with 86% vs. 12% agreeing that poverty and affordable health care are more important.

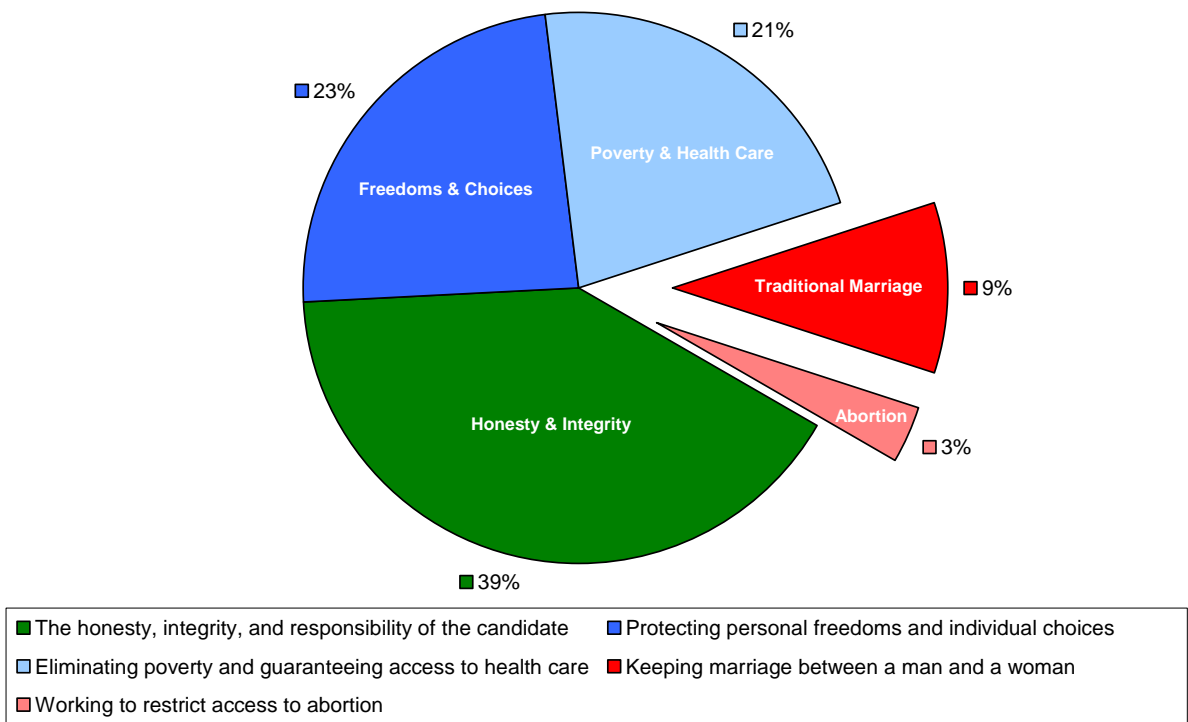
Most Important Issues in America Today			
<i>Which of these kinds of issues are more important in the United States today? Issues like...</i>			
	Abortion and same-sex marriage %	Poverty and affordable health care %	DK/ Neither %
Evangelicals (All)	19	77	4
Trad. Evangelicals	27	67	6
Cen. Evangelicals	16	81	3
Mod. Evangelicals*	5	94	1
Mainline Protestants (All)	7	91	0
Trad. Mainline	12	86	2
Cen. Mainline	3	95	2
Mod. Mainline	6	89	5
Hispanic Protestants^	30	68	0
Black Protestants^	6	92	1
Catholics (All)	11	86	3
Trad. Catholics*	18	81	1
Cen. Catholics	8	89	4
Mod. Catholics	12	84	4
Hispanic Catholics^	22	73	6
Jews*	10	90	0
Unaffiliated Believers*	13	79	8
Religious Trad. (All)	21	76	4
Religious Cen. (All)	12	86	3
Religious Mod. (All)	8	90	2
Secular	5	93	2
Democrat	6	93	1
Swing Voter	12	86	2
Republican	24	72	2
Vote/Lean Dem. 2006	5	94	1
Vote/Lean Rep. 2006	26	69	4
<i>Total</i>	12	85	3

Consistent with the findings above, even the most conservative constituencies overwhelmingly reject abortion and same-sex marriage as the most important issue in America today: only 1 in 4 likely Republican voters in 2006 (26%) and only 1 in 5 Religious Traditionalists (21%) think abortion and same-sex marriage are more important than issues like poverty and affordable health care.

3. When people think about voting their values, more people think of the honesty, integrity, and responsibility of the candidate than any other values.

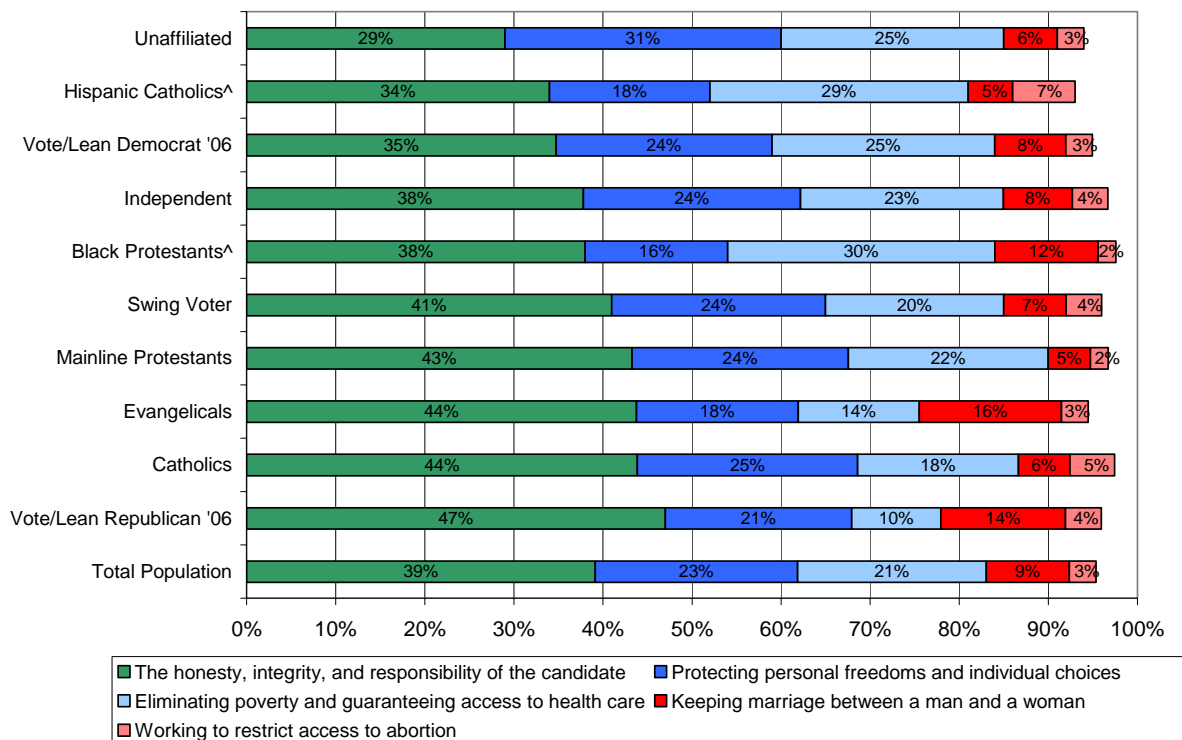
Americans have a wide range of things in mind when they think about voting their values. A plurality of four in 10 Americans indicated that voting their values meant focusing on the personal moral attributes of the candidate in terms of honesty, integrity, and responsibility. The bulk of the remaining respondents selected the values of protecting personal freedoms and individual choices (23%) and eliminating poverty and guaranteeing access to health care (21%). Only 12% of the public said they had same-sex marriage or abortion foremost in mind when voting their values (9% keeping marriage between a man and a woman, 3% working to restrict access to abortion).

What comes to mind when you think about voting your values?



These opinions were fairly stable across a range of demographic constituencies, as the following chart demonstrates. Evangelicals were the most likely to say that they thought about abortion and same-sex marriage when voting their values, but even among this group less than 1 in 5 (19%) thought primarily in terms of these hot-button issues. Significantly, roughly as many evangelicals said that voting their values meant protecting personal freedoms and individual choices (18%) and another 14% said that voting their values meant eliminating poverty and guaranteeing access to health care.

Meaning of 'Voting your Values' Among Demographic Groups



Partisan similarities and differences between likely Democratic and likely Republican 2006 voters are also informative. Both groups rank candidate attributes first. Both have similar proportions of respondents who think about voting their values primarily in terms of protecting personal freedoms and choices (24% likely Democratic voters, 21% likely Republican voters). But likely Republican voters stand out from virtually all other groups in the low proportion of respondents who associate voting their values with eliminating poverty and guaranteeing access to health care (only 10% compared to 21% of public and 25% of likely Democratic voters). Swing voters are five points lower (20%) than likely Democratic voters and twice as likely as Republican voters to think about these issues when voting their values. Like the public as a whole, swing voters rank keeping marriage between a man and a woman and restricting access to abortion last as issues that come foremost to mind when voting their values (7% and 4% respectively).

Religious orientations also provide a valuable lens for understanding American values. Religious Traditionalists, Centrists, and Modernists all ranked candidate attributes first (42%, 41%, 38% respectively), but each gave different rankings for their second choice. Religious Traditionalists ranked keeping marriage between a man and a woman second (18%); Centrists ranked eliminating poverty and guaranteeing access to health care second (23%); and Modernists ranked protecting personal freedoms and individual choices second (30%). Secular Americans ranked protecting personal freedoms and individual choices first (35%) and were the only group that did not rank candidate attributes the highest, ranking it second (29%) instead.

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4: An overwhelming majority of Americans think leaders ought to bring religious teachings to bear on broader themes like concern for others and the poor.

When leaders invoke religion in the public square, the overwhelming majority of Americans think religious values ought to be brought to bear on a broader range of issues like love of neighbor and caring for the poor.

More than 8 in 10 (82%) Americans agreed that leaders use religion to talk too much about abortion and gay rights, and not enough about values like love of neighbor and caring for the poor. This percentage is nearly identical to those agreeing that poverty and affordable health care are more important issues than abortion and same-sex marriage in American today.

This overwhelming support for broader religious discourse holds true across virtually every religious tradition. Even among evangelicals and Religious Traditionalists, at least 7 out of 10 agree (74% and 70% respectively). Among those who are planning to vote Republican in 2006, almost two-thirds (64%) agree. Swing voters agree in slightly greater numbers than the general public, with 85% agreeing.

The intensity of agreement on this question is also striking: 57% of liberals, 55% of Democrats, 54% of Black Protestants, 45% of the public, and even 40% of Religious Traditionalists *strongly agree* with this statement. There is also a noticeable 7-point gender gap in intensity of agreement; 48% of women strongly agree versus 41% of men.

The question of support for broader public religious discourse goes to the heart of an emerging fault line among Evangelicals, between older leaders like Pat Robertson and James Dobson who insist Evangelicals ought to focus on same-sex marriage and abortion and others who support a wider range of issues like the environment and poverty. We found strong evidence that the narrow focus on social issues alone is not in step with evangelicals' concerns. Almost 4 of 5 Centrist Evangelicals (78%) and more than 9 in 10 Modernist Evangelicals (92%) favor a broader public religious discourse, and even a majority of Traditionalist Evangelicals (65%) agree. We also found, for example, that almost two-thirds of Religious Traditionalists and Evangelicals (65% and 66% respectively) agreed that "we have a moral obligation to care for God's creation by supporting stricter environmental laws and regulations, even if it means some economic costs." Moreover, when we asked self-identified "born again" respondents about Robertson and Dobson's leadership directly, 44% percent said that Robertson and Dobson did not speak for them well or at all, and fully 28% said these leaders did not speak for them at all.

Support for Broader Public Religious Discourse			
<i>Too many leaders use religion to talk about abortion and gay rights, but don't talk about more important things like loving your neighbor and caring for the poor.</i>			
	Agree %	Dis-agree %	Refused/DK %
Evangelicals (All)	74	20	6
Mainline Protestants	84	10	5
Black Protestants [^]	83	16	1
Hispanic Protestants [^]	77	19	1
Catholics	81	16	2
Hispanic Catholics [^]	74	22	4
Jews*	94	6	0
Religious Traditionalists	70	23	7
Religious Centrists	83	15	3
Religious Modernists	88	10	2
Secular	90	7	3
Democrat	88	10	2
Swing Voter	85	13	3
Republican	69	26	5
Vote/Lean Dem 2006	89	9	2
Vote/Lean Rep 2006	64	31	5
<i>Total</i>	<i>82</i>	<i>15</i>	<i>4</i>

Religion in Public Life: The Values Voter Context

We asked several questions that addressed the role of religion in public life. Americans are roughly evenly divided between those who worry about religion not having enough political influence and those who worry about religion having too much political influence. A solid majority of 3 in 5 Americans, however, believe both that political parties should not claim to represent all people of faith and that clergy should not promote candidates and issues from the pulpit.

Public Officials and Religious Leaders

One of the most illuminating questions asked whether respondents were more worried about public officials who did not pay attention to religion or about public officials who were too close to religious leaders. Although the national totals show that the U.S. is evenly divided on this issue, the following table demonstrates that there are deep religious and partisan divides.

There are divides both between religious traditions and within religious traditions. Evangelicals, Hispanic Protestants, Black Protestants, and Unaffiliated Believers have majorities worried about there being not enough attention to religion by public officials, while Catholics, Hispanic Catholics, Jews, and Secular Americans have majorities worried about officials being too close to religious leaders. Mainline Protestants are more evenly split on this issue. There are striking gaps between traditionalists and modernists *within* religious traditions; for example 76% of Traditionalist Evangelicals versus only 29% of Modernist Evangelicals are more worried about public officials who don't pay enough attention to religion, a 47 point gap.

Public Officials and Religious Leaders				
<i>What worries you more, public officials who don't pay enough attention to religion, or public officials who are too close to religious leaders?</i>				
	Not enough %	Too close %	None %	DK/Ref %
Evangelicals (All)	65	25	4	6
Traditionalist Evangelicals	76	14	3	6
Centrist Evangelicals	66	22	5	7
Modernist Evangelicals*	29	63	4	4
Mainline Protestants (All)	39	48	3	9
Traditionalist Mainline	56	34	2	9
Centrist Mainline	35	48	5	12
Modernist Mainline	26	65	3	6
Hispanic Protestants^	53	39	3	5
Black Protestants^	61	32	3	3
Catholics (All)	37	53	4	6
Traditionalist Catholics*	59	20	7	13
Centrist Catholics	37	55	4	3
Modernist Catholics	20	71	1	8
Hispanic Catholics^	33	49	11	7
Jews*	16	75	6	3
Unaffiliated Believers*	51	40	2	7
Religious Traditionalists	72	18	3	7
Religious Centrists	46	46	4	6
Religious Modernists	23	68	6	4
Secular	14	76	3	8
Democrat	36	58	3	4
Swing Voter	40	50	4	6
Republican	59	30	5	6
Vote/Lean Democrat 2006	36	58	3	4
Vote/Lean Republican 2006	59	30	5	6
<i>Total</i>	<i>44</i>	<i>46</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>6</i>

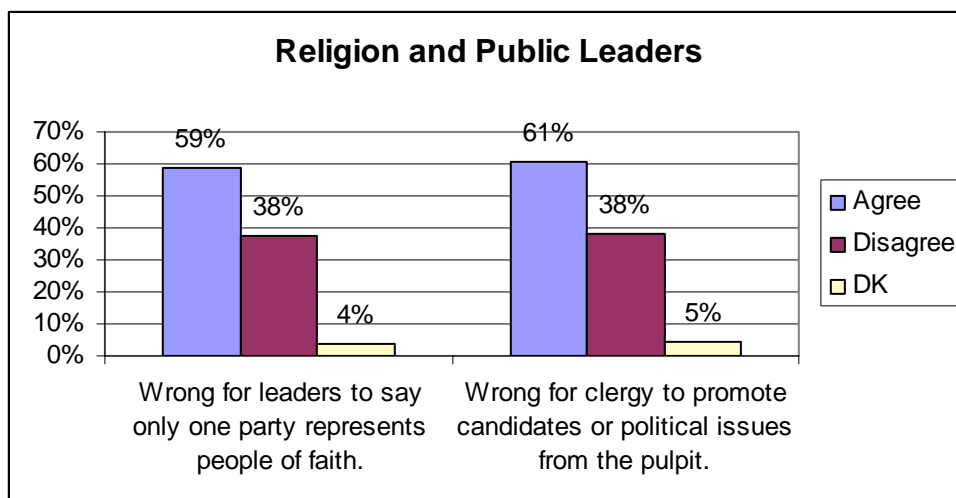
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These gaps can also be seen clearly in the cross-tradition religious orientations: Religious Centrists are evenly divided in their worries about public officials and religion; 4 times as many Religious Traditionalists worry about public officials not paying enough attention to religion (72% vs. 18%), while nearly 3 times as many Religious modernists worry about public officials who are too close to religious leaders (68% vs. 23%).

There are also noticeable differences in opinion on this question among a number of demographic characteristics. Men, younger respondents, those with a college degree, those with incomes over \$50,000, and those who attend religious services infrequently are more likely to worry about public officials being too close to religious leaders.

Political Parties and Religious Congregations

Two additional questions about political parties and religious congregations cast additional light on the role of religion in public life. These questions produced virtually identical topline results. Six in 10 Americans believe both that it is wrong for religious or political leaders to say only one political party represents people of faith and that clergy should not promote candidates and political issues from the pulpit.



On both questions, there are few partisan differences, with swing voters agreeing slightly more than the general public (62% agree first question; 65% agree second question). In terms of ideology, two-thirds of liberals agree with both questions (67% first; 66% second) while slight majorities of conservatives agree (53% first; 54% second).

In general, the first question on whether it is wrong for leaders to say only one party represents people of faith produces more differences on a number of demographic measures, indicating a wider range of opinion. Less frequent religious attendees, younger Americans, those with college degrees, and those with higher incomes were more likely to agree. Educational differences were especially pronounced, with 72% of those with a college degree agreeing compared to only 54% of those without a college degree. On the second question, there was a

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smaller range of opinion, but Mainline Protestants stand out for their strong agreement (70%) that it is wrong for clergy to promote candidates and political issues from the pulpit.

On both questions, Black Protestants and Hispanic Catholics have significantly lower levels of agreement compared to other religious traditions and the national average. Only a slim majority of Black Protestants agreed that it was wrong for clergy to promote candidates and political issues from the pulpit (50% to 46%). Hispanic Catholics were the only demographic group of any kind to have a majority disagree that it was wrong for leaders to say only one party represents people of faith (54% vs. 39%).

PART II: VOTING BEHAVIOR AND ISSUES

Religion and the Political Parties

2006 Vote and Religious Attendance: Closing the God Gap

In 2004, there was a linear relationship between vote for president and frequency of religious attendance; the more frequently one attended, the more likely one was to vote for President Bush. One of the most striking aspects of this trend was a 20-point Republican advantage among the weekly religious attenders, a gap that has consistently grown from a 6-point gap in 1992.

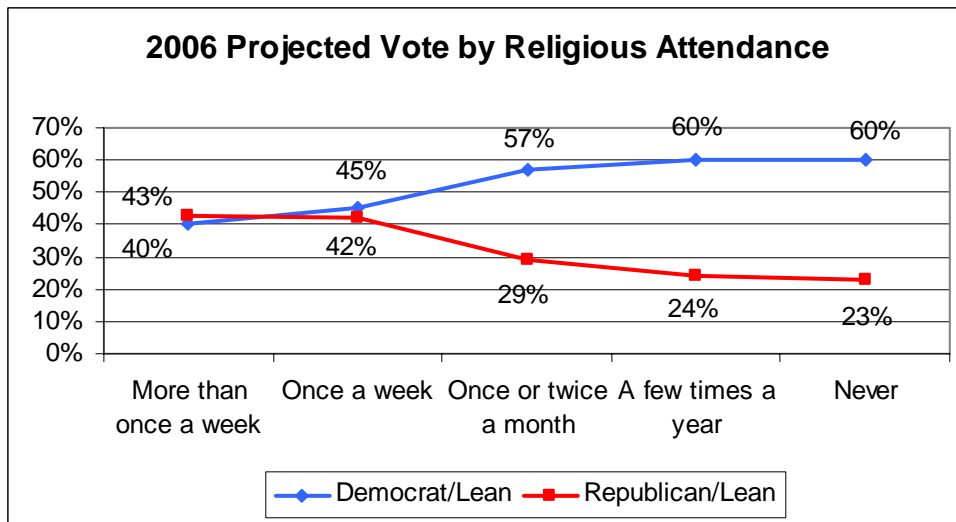
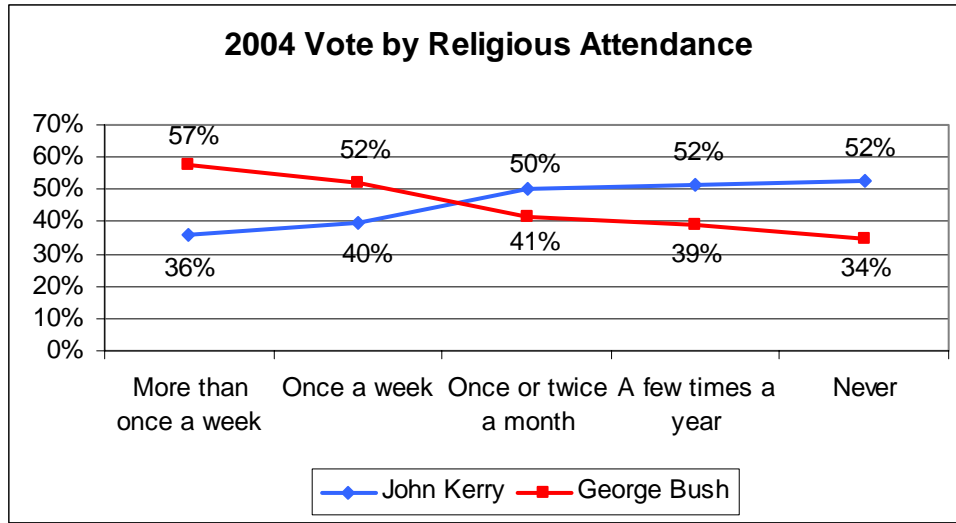
This finding led a number of commentators to speculate as to whether the alignment of religiously observant voters with the GOP in 2004 meant that Democrats had a problem with religious voters generally. While there have been some legitimate signs for concern for Democrats with regard to religious voters, the most alarmist of these claims were frequently based on overly simplistic analyses. For instance, according to the 2004 National Election Exit Pool poll, Kerry won 82% of Black Protestants and 58% of Hispanic Catholics, two very religious groups by almost any measure.

In 2006, Democrats seem poised to make significant gains across all major religious groups. Catholic support for Democratic candidates mirrors increased support for Democratic candidates in the population at large, while Mainline Protestants are just slightly less supportive than the public. Evangelicals are the only major religious group with majority support for Republican candidates (52%), although notably this support is down 15 points from their 67% support of President Bush in 2004.

A look at religious attendance shows a stark contrast between 2004 and 2006 among voters who attend religious services weekly or more than once a week. In 2004 Kerry faced a 20-point deficit among the most frequently attending religious voters; in 2006 this gap has shrunk to just a three-point advantage for Republicans, a 17 point shift. Voters in every other religious attendance category are leaning toward or voting for Democratic candidates this fall. In fact, in the middle religious attendance category, an important swing constituency, Democrats are doing 28 points better than Republicans among likely voters.

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The following two charts illustrate the striking differences between 2004 and the projected 2006 vote by religious attendance:



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2006 Vote and Religious Affiliation

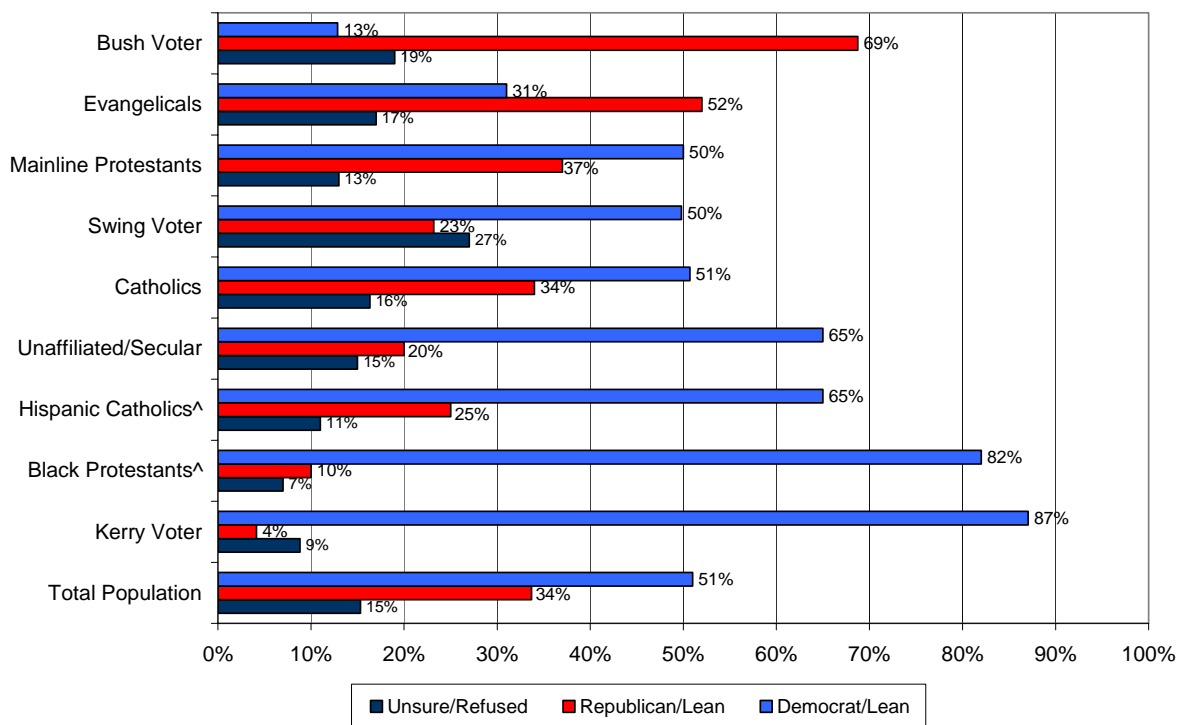
Most recent surveys show Democrats with about a twelve point lead (Gallup, 53% to 41%) in generic congressional match-ups indicating that the electoral prospects for the Democrats in 2006 are good. The findings from this August survey generally support this conclusion, although we found a higher 17-point lead for Democratic candidates over Republican candidates (51% to 34%, with another 15% undecided).

If only voters who have already committed to support either Republican or Democratic candidates (i.e., without leaners) are counted, the gap remains about the same (45% to 29% with another 27% undecided). Democrats do well among most demographic groups. Interestingly, 87% of Kerry voters are voting or leaning toward a Democratic candidate while only 69% of Bush voters are leaning toward or voting for a Republican candidate. Another 19% of Bush voters remain either undecided or uncommitted to voting at all in 2006 as compared to only 9% of Kerry voters.

Vote by Religious Affiliation and Orientation				
	2004 Presidential Vote		2006 Midterm Vote	
	Bush Vote %	Kerry Vote %	Republican Vote/Lean %	Democrat Vote/Lean %
	Evangelicals (25%)	67	25	52
Mainline Protestants (15%)	50	43	37	50
Hispanic Protestants (3%) ^{^*}	52	36	30	47
Black Protestants (10%) [^]	13	80	10	82
Catholics (18%)	47	47	34	51
Hispanic Catholics (8%) [^]	37	54	25	65
Jews (1%) [*]	30	47	25	60
Religious Traditionalists (22%)	58	35	44	38
Religious Centrists (50%)	48	45	35	51
Religious Modernists (18%)	36	54	26	59
Secular (10%)	29	50	16	68
<i>Total</i>	<i>47</i>	<i>45</i>	<i>34</i>	<i>51</i>

Democrats seem poised to win every major religious group in 2006 with the exception of Evangelicals and Religious Traditionalists. Among Evangelicals, Republican candidates hold a solid 20-point lead; among all Religious Traditionalists, however, the Republican advantage is only 6 points.

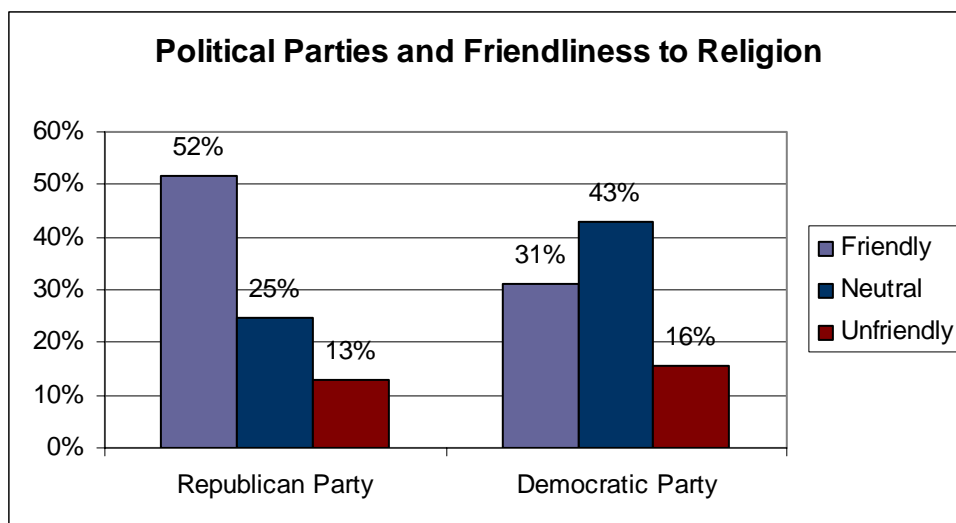
Likely Voters by Selected Demographic Groups 2006



Among swing voters Democrats are performing remarkably well. More than twice as many swing voters are leaning toward or committed to voting for Democratic candidates (50%) than Republican candidates (23%) in 2006. Democrats are performing slightly less well with men than women (5-point gap), but they hold solid leads among both men (48% to 36%) as they do with women (53% to 33%). Young likely voters (18 – 29), the only age group that Kerry won in 2004, are leaning heavily toward the Democrats in 2006 (57% to 33%). Democrats hold double-digit advantages over Republicans in every age category except 30-44, where Democrats hold a smaller 7-point lead (45% to 38%).

Perceptions of Political Parties' Friendliness to Religion

In addition to the correlation between higher religious attendance and Republican support, another trend that has supported the thesis that Democrats have a “God problem” is data on disparities between public perceptions of the two parties’ friendliness toward religion. Republicans have enjoyed a 20-point advantage in being perceived as friendly to religion. Previous research has shown that being perceived as unfriendly toward religion has important electoral consequences. In a country in which 45% attend religious services weekly or more, 81% believe in God, 64% pray daily, and 66% say religion is very important to their lives, it should come as no surprise that being perceived as unfriendly toward religion is an electoral liability.



While the sharp downward trend on friendliness to religion that other surveys have documented over the last few years ought to be viewed with some concern by Democrats, interpreting these numbers depends on the significance of the neutral category.³ For example, if the neutral category has negligible adverse electoral consequences, the 20-point Republican advantage on friendliness to religion is largely offset by the 18-point Democratic advantage on neutrality to religion; moreover, the number of Americans who view Democrats as unfriendly to religion (16%) is only slightly higher than the number of Americans who view Republicans as unfriendly to religion (13%).

We found that being perceived as neutral towards religion does not have direct adverse electoral consequences in terms of prospective 2006 vote. Likely voters who view the Democrats as neutral towards religion are strongly supporting Democratic candidates in upcoming fall 2006 elections 57% to 29%. Similarly, the party that is perceived as more friendly toward religion is not necessarily ensured majority electoral support. Even among likely voters who view the

³ According to Pew, the perceptions of Democrats as friendly to religion dropped from 42% to 26% between 2003 and 2006, while perceptions of Democrats as unfriendly to religion rose from 12% to 20% (Pew, “Many Americans Uneasy with Mix of Religion and Politics”, August 2006). Our data shows a slightly more favorable picture of Democrats.

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Republican Party as friendly toward religion, a slim plurality (44%) is supporting or leaning towards Democratic candidates in 2006.

In fact, the only category that adversely affects electoral prospects is being perceived to be unfriendly to religion. More than 8 times as many of those who perceive Democrats as unfriendly to religion are voting for the Republican candidate in 2006 (77% vs. 8%); likewise, more than 9 times as many of those who perceive Republicans as unfriendly to religion are voting for the Democratic candidate in 2006 (84% vs. 9%).

Perceptions of the friendliness and unfriendliness of political parties toward religion are also highly correlated to race, with whites more likely to view the Republican Party as friendly or neutral to religion (80%) and minorities more likely to view the Democrats as friendly or neutral to religion (Blacks 90%; Hispanics 75%).

Perceptions of Political Parties' Friendliness Toward Religion by Race						
	Friendly		Neutral		Unfriendly	
	Republican %	Democrat %	Republican %	Democrat %	Republican %	Democrat %
White	58	29	22	41	9	19
Black	35	49	35	41	25	7
Hispanic	35	24	26	51	22	12

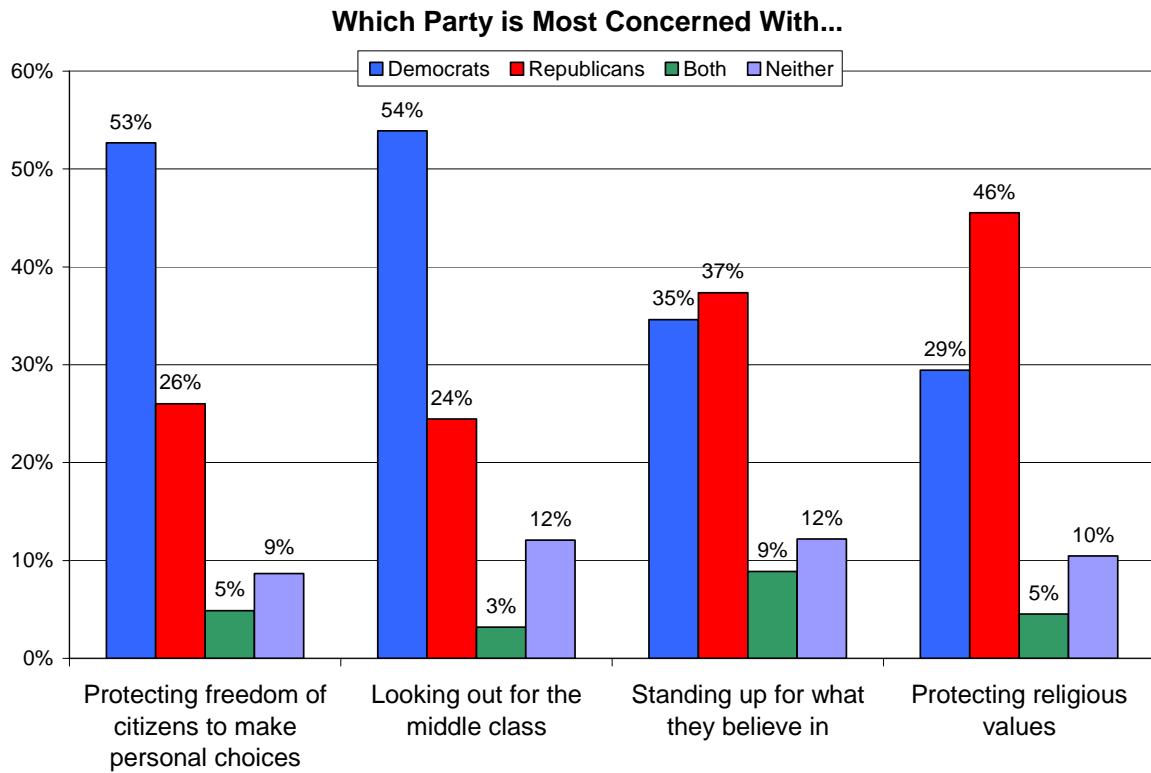
These racial correlations also hold up on views of parties' unfriendliness to religion. Among whites, twice as many view the Democratic Party as unfriendly (19%) as view the Republican Party as unfriendly (9%). Among the two largest minority populations, one-quarter of African Americans and 22% of Hispanics view the Republican Party as unfriendly toward religion, while only 7% and 12% respectively view the Democratic Party as unfriendly toward religion.

Finally, because of the amount of attention pundits have spent on Democrats' alleged "God problem," we asked the small minority (16%) of respondents who said the Democratic Party was unfriendly to religion a follow-up question to understand the roots of this perception. The most cited reason these respondents gave for why they thought Democrats were unfriendly to religion was a perceived hostility to public expressions of faith (33%). The second most cited reason was that the party supports policies respondents opposed for religious reasons, like abortion (28%). The remaining two categories—that the party does not respect people of faith (21%) and doesn't stand up against the culture of materialism, violence, and sex outside of marriage (11%)—accounted for almost one-third of the opinions driving perceptions of unfriendliness to religion.

Perceptions of Political Party Values and Swing Voters

Perceptions of Political Party Values

Most Americans have certain general conceptions about the two main political parties, the causes they champion, the issues they promote, and the values they espouse. By a wide margin, a majority of Americans see the Democrats as concerned about the welfare of the middle class and protecting the freedoms of citizens to make personal choices. Republicans by contrast have an advantage in being perceived as defenders of religious values. Republicans and Democrats are almost equally perceived as being concerned about standing up for what they believe in, although Republicans enjoy a slight advantage.



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On the question of looking out for the middle class, a key constituency for both parties, Democrats are favored strongly by 30 points. Democrats maintain an advantage across all income groups, and clear majorities in all groups except the \$75,000 - <\$100,000 category, where Democrats still enjoy a plurality of support (49%) and a 15 point advantage over Republicans.

Among certain demographic groups differences are more pronounced. For instance, Black Protestants associate concern about the middle class with the Democratic Party much more than the Republican Party, a 51 point gap. Swing voters also more strongly associate concern with the middle class with the Democratic Party (52%) than the Republican Party (18%), a 34-point gap. Significantly, 1 in 5 swing voters believe that neither party is looking out for the middle class.

Even among some of the most conservative groups, Democrats maintain a slight edge in their association with this value domain (conservatives, 6 points; Evangelicals, 6 points; Religious Traditionalists, 11 points).

Political Parties Looking out for the Middle Class					
<i>Which political party is most concerned with looking out for the middle class?</i>					
	Rep. %	Dem. %	Both %	Neither %	Dem – Rep Gap
Evangelicals	34	40	4	14	6
Mainline Protestants	25	52	3	14	27
Hispanic Protestants [^]	18	56	1	8	38
Black Protestants [^]	18	69	3	8	51
Catholics	25	54	3	13	29
Hispanic Catholics [^]	22	50	7	9	28
Jews*	23	68	0	7	45
Religious Traditionalists	32	43	5	13	11
Religious Centrists	25	55	3	12	30
Religious Modernists	17	61	2	12	44
Secular	18	62	2	11	44
Republican	56	22	5	13	-34
Swing Voter	18	52	4	20	34
Democrat	8	84	1	5	76
Vote/Lean Democrat 2006	9	81	1	7	72
Vote/Lean Republican 2006	57	18	4	15	-39
<i>Total</i>	<i>25</i>	<i>54</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>29</i>

The value domain most strongly associated with the Republican Party was concern about protecting religious values. Forty-six percent of Americans more closely associate the Republican Party with concern about protecting religious values, while only 29% associate the Democratic Party with this value domain. Again, associations vary among certain demographic groups, and as with friendliness to religion, they are highly correlated with race. Black Protestants associate protecting religious values more closely with the Democratic Party than the Republican Party (61% to 20%). Hispanic Catholics see the parties as virtually equal in being concerned with protecting religious values (34% Republicans, 35% Democrats).

Swing Voters

Swing voters represent one-quarter of the population (25%) and 32% of registered voters. Although many pundits argue that the turnout of each party's base is most important to the outcome of midterm elections, given the overall feelings of discontent with the direction of the country, it is likely that swing voters will have a substantial impact this year. In 2004, swing voters supported Bush over Kerry by 13 points (51% to 38%). In 2006, swing voters are leaning toward the Democrats by 27 points (50% to 23% with another 27% undecided). This represents a dramatic 40-point swing between 2004 and 2006. Because most swing voters maintain no official party affiliation and have minimal loyalty to either political party, they tend to be less reliable voters. However, in 2006, two-thirds of swing voters (67%) said they planned to vote, only slightly less than registered Republicans (73%) and Democrats (76%).

One way to understand who swing voters are is to examine the various religious traditions with which they identify. Most of the major religious traditions count about a quarter of their members as swing voters. Among the major religious groups, Catholics have the highest percentage of their members as swing voters (31%). This finding is consistent with long-term trends showing that this traditionally-Democratic group has been trending more Republican and is now almost evenly divided between the parties in terms of voting. Black Protestants have the lowest proportion of their members as swing voters (18%).

In terms of religious orientations, Religious Traditionalists are slightly less likely to be swing voters (22%). Religious Centrists and Religious Modernists both have roughly their share of swing voters (25% and 26% respectively). Fully one-third of Secular Americans are swing voters.

On nearly all religious measures such as prayer, belief in God, and formal religious attendance, swing voters are less religiously observant than either Democrats or Republicans. Forty-three percent of swing voters never attend religious services or go only once or twice a year (compared to only 37% of the public, 35% of Democrats, 15% of Republicans). Swing voters are also less attached to religious organizations than either Democrats or Republicans; seventeen percent are religiously unaffiliated (compared to 14% of the public, 12% of Democrats, 7% of Republicans).

Issues in 2006

Abortion and same-sex marriage were hot topics in the 2004 election; same-sex marriage initiatives were on the ballot in 11 states in 2004. In 2006 another 8 states will have same-sex marriage on the ballot. However, there is mounting evidence that most Americans do not want the 2006 elections to be another skirmish in the culture war and would prefer that leaders instead focus on the economy, national security, and the war in Iraq. There is also evidence that many Americans are looking for moderate positions on divisive social issues, and there are several issue areas of opportunity for progressives.

Social Issues

Not only are issues relating to gay marriage not particularly salient among voters in 2006, increasingly more Americans are adopting progressive attitudes when it comes to equal marriage rights for gay couples and adoption rights for gay people. Three-fifths of Americans support either civil unions or same-sex marriage for gay couples (61%). Young people (18-29) remain among the strongest supporters of marriage equality. Fully 45% of 18-29 year-olds support the rights of gay couples to marry compared to just 17 % of those over the age of 60.

Responses to a follow-up question on same-sex marriage indicate that concerns about protecting the rights of religious congregations to refuse to perform ceremonies for gay couples may be playing a surprisingly strong role in opposition to same-sex marriage. Of the 68% who did not initially support same-sex marriage (32% civil unions and 36% no legal recognition), almost 1 in 5 (18%) said that they would support allowing gay couples to legally marry if the law guaranteed that no church or congregation would be required to perform these marriages. In terms of the total population, this shift translates into a 12% increase in support (9% from the civil unions category and 3% from the no legal recognition category), bringing support for same-sex marriage up to 40% from 28%.

Support for Equal Marriage Rights for Gay Couples			
<i>Which of the following three statements comes closest to your view of Same-sex marriage?</i>			
<i>Follow-up: (If not supporting same-sex marriage, ask agree/disagree): If the law guaranteed that no church or congregation would be required to perform marriages for same-sex couples, I would support allowing gay couples to legally marry.</i>			
	Original Support %	With Assurance of Churches' Autonomy %	Difference %
Gay couples should be allowed to marry	28	40	12
Gay couples should be allowed to form civil unions but not marry	32	23	-9
There should be no legal recognition of a gay couples' relationship	36	33	-3

This guarantee has strong appeal among Hispanics, with 25% of Hispanic Catholics (23% of Hispanics as a whole) who were initially opposed to marriage equality saying they would support it with this assurance. This message was strong even among religious groups who are typically more conservative on this issue: 11% of Evangelicals and 15% of Black Protestants who initially opposed marriage equality agreed they would support it with this guarantee. In terms of religious orientations, this guarantee would convince 7% of Religious Traditionalists and fully 1 in 5 Religious Centrists who initially opposed same-sex marriage to support it.

Gay adoption, which some have argued would be the next frontier in the culture war, does not have the same polarizing effect as the issue of same-sex marriage. Swing voters support gay adoption by 6 points (51% to 45%). A majority of Democrats and Independents support gay adoption rights, 57% and 53% respectively compared to only 33% of Republicans. There is support for gay adoption among most major religious traditions: Catholics (57% to 38%), Mainline Protestants (54% to 41%), and Hispanic Catholics (50% to 46%). The three major exceptions are Evangelicals, Hispanic Protestants and Black Protestants who oppose gay adoption 68%, 66%, and 56% respectively. In terms of religious orientations, all support gay adoption with the exception of Religious Traditionalists who strongly oppose it 75% to 21%.

Another potentially divisive issue, stem cell research, also receives widespread public support. A majority of Americans (63%) supports conducting stem cell research that might result in new medical cures. Moreover, there is majority support for stem cell research across every major religious tradition with the exception of Evangelicals, but even among Evangelicals a plurality (47% vs. 44%) supports it. Clear majorities of all religious orientations support stem cell research (e.g., Religious Centrists, 61%) with the exception of Religious Traditionalists who oppose it 53% to 39%.

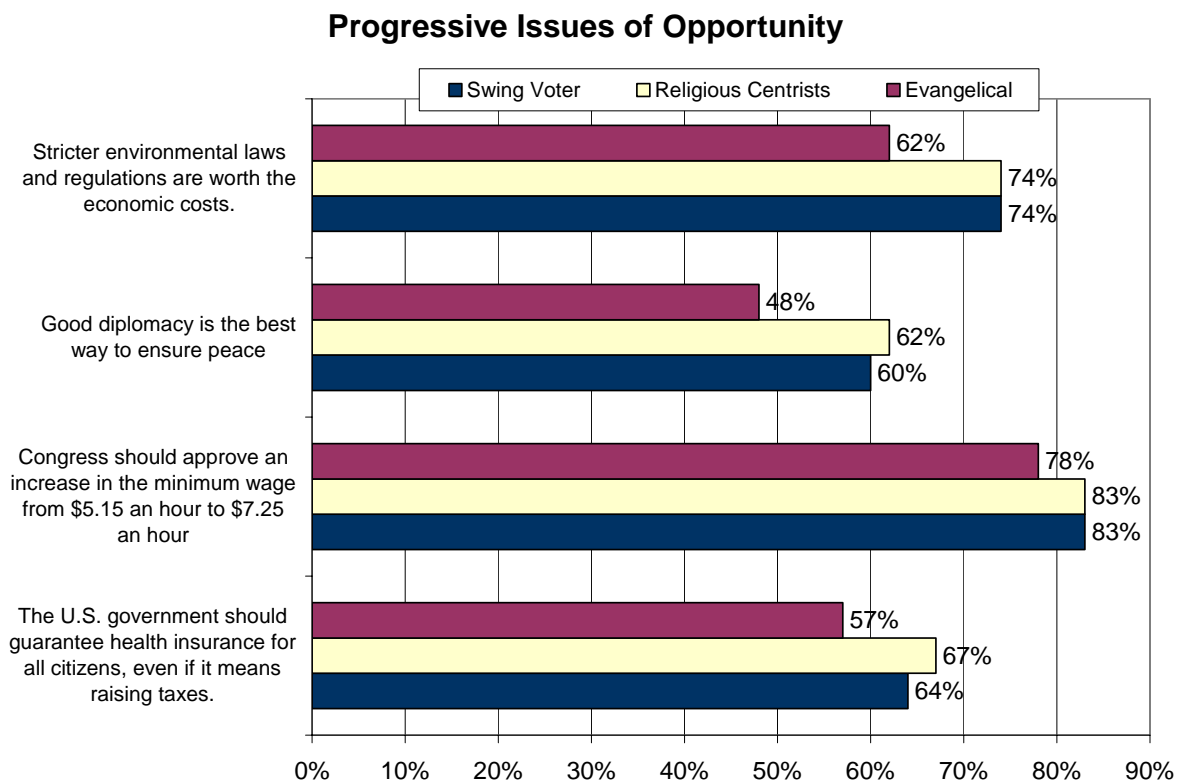
On the question of abortion, 37% of Americans believe it should be legal always or most of the time, 47% believe it should be made illegal except for rape, incest, and to save the life of the mother, and 13% believe that abortion should be completely illegal. Among Hispanic Catholics, support for abortion is low. Only 23% of Hispanic Catholics believe that abortion should be legal always or most of the time, while the majority (60%) believe that it should only be allowed in exceptional cases of rape, incest or if the life of the mother is threatened. It is worth noting

Support for Adoption by Same-sex Couples			
<i>Gay and lesbian people who meet all other qualifications should legally be able to adopt children.</i>			
	Agree %	Disagree %	DK/Refused %
Evangelicals (All)	29	68	3
Traditionalist Evangelicals	12	85	3
Centrist Evangelicals	34	62	4
Modernist Evangelicals*	60	39	1
Mainline Protestants (All)	54	41	5
Traditionalist Mainline	38	56	6
Centrist Mainline	58	37	6
Modernist Mainline	67	29	4
Hispanic Protestants^	29	66	5
Black Protestants^	41	56	3
Catholics (All)	57	38	4
Traditional Catholics*	29	64	7
Centrist Catholics	63	33	4
Modernist Catholics	67	31	2
Hispanic Catholics^	50	46	4
Jews*	81	16	3
Unaffiliated Believers*	51	47	2
Religious Traditionalists	21	75	4
Religious Centrists	51	44	5
Religious Modernists	66	32	3
Secular	69	24	7
Democrat	57	38	5
Swing Voter	51	45	4
Republican	33	63	4
Democrat/Lean	59	37	4
Republican/Lean	29	69	2
<i>Total</i>	49	47	4

again here that Hispanic Catholics and Hispanics generally still rank abortion fairly low on their list of important issues in 2006.

Progressive Issues of Opportunity

On most of the major economic questions of the day most Americans are highly supportive of the progressive agenda. The American public is strongly supportive of protecting the environment even if it entails greater economic costs; seventy-two percent of Americans support imposing tighter restrictions. By a 2 to 1 margin (60% vs. 26%) more Americans agree that good diplomacy rather than military strength is the best way to ensure peace. Eighty-three percent of Americans support raising the minimum wage from \$5.15 an hour to \$7.25 an hour, and 58% support this policy strongly. Sixty-five percent of Americans agree that government should guarantee health insurance for all citizens, even if it means raising taxes.



One clear area of opportunity for progressives is around environmental issues. Although all the major religious groups are generally supportive of stricter environmental laws, when the question of caring for the environment is placed specifically in a religious context some groups are even more supportive. For instance, 62% of Evangelicals support environmental protections generally but when asked whether we have “a moral obligation to care for God’s creation,” Evangelicals support increases by 4 points to 66%. Mainline Protestants and Black Protestants are also more likely to support protecting the environment when it is infused with religious language. Support among Mainline Protestants increases from 70% to 74%, and among Black Protestants from 71% to 78%.

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Support for Stricter Environmental Laws					
	<i>Stricter environmental regulations are worth the cost.</i>		<i>We have a moral obligation to care for God's creation by supporting stricter environmental laws and regulations, even if it means some economic costs.</i>		
	Agree %	Disagree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Support Difference
Evangelicals	62	31	66	27	4
Mainline Protestants	70	24	74	20	4
Hispanic Protestants ^{^*}	75	15	82	16	7
Black Protestants [^]	71	22	78	19	7
Catholics	76	18	72	22	-4
Hispanic Catholics [^]	80	17	80	17	0
Jews*	*	*	*	*	*
Religious Traditionalists	56	36	65	28	9
Religious Centrists	74	20	73	22	-1
Religious Modernists	78	19	76	19	-2
Secular	82	14	72	26	-10
<i>Total</i>					
<i>*Note: Split sample. Too small to compute.</i>					

Framing environmental policy in terms of a moral obligation to care for God’s creation is most effective with religious groups that have higher percentages of Religious Traditionalists, such as Evangelicals, Hispanic Protestants, and Black Protestants. Among some religious traditions there is a difference in the intensity of support when environmental issues are framed in this way. Hispanic Catholics who are supportive of environmental regulations generally become much stronger supporters if this issue is framed as a religious and moral imperative. Thirty-five percent of Hispanic Catholics believe strongly that stricter environmental regulations are worth the cost, but when asked whether they believed they had a moral obligation to support stricter environmental laws 43% agreed strongly, an 8 point jump. Black Protestants similarly move from 37% strongly agree to 44% strongly agree.

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About the Survey

Results of this survey were based on a telephone survey conducted under the direction of Braun Research, Inc., on behalf of the Center for American Values in Public Life at People For the American Way Foundation. The survey was conducted among a nationally representative sample of 2,502 adult American citizens (age 18 and up) from August 9-23, 2006. Additionally, the survey included two over-samples of 250 Hispanics and 250 African Americans. The over-samples were selected by selecting census tracts where the percentage of African Americans or Hispanics made up at least 30% of the population. For results based on the national sample, one can say with 95% confidence that the margin of error is $\pm 1.95\%$. One should keep in mind that sampling error is only one measure of error or bias in opinion surveys; question wording, sequencing and other difficulties can also affect outcomes.

Religious traditions were determined using a self-identified response to a religious affiliation question, a denominational affiliation question, and question to determine whether the respondent identified as a born-again Christian. Intra-tradition divisions (modernist, centrist and traditionalist) were determined by using a composite factor score that utilized three types of religious measures: religious beliefs, religious practices, and religious salience. Religious belief measures included belief in biblical literalism and belief in God. Religious Practice measures included frequency of prayer and attendance at religious services. A measure for religious salience was used to guide the cut-points for the religious orientation divisions.

About the Center for American Values in Public Life

The Center for American Values in Public Life is a resource center for advancing bold progressive ideas that are rooted in fundamental American moral and religious values. The Center is dedicated to a progressive vision of American public life that sees shared values in our diversity that have the potential to bring together a lasting progressive majority for a better America. The Center celebrates the vibrancy and pluralism of American public life and affirms an appropriate public role for religion that is consistent with the constitutional separation of church and state. The Center's research focuses on understanding the issues that are at the intersection of moral and religious values and the progressive movement. In addition to our own research, the Center provides analysis and commentary on relevant opinion surveys, highlights important developments at the intersection of religion, values, and progressive politics, and provides tools for integrating and translating findings into communications strategies.

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