

# Polls find shifts by young evangelicals: Political migration

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Are evangelical young adults shifting away from the Republican Party and becoming more estranged from contemporaries because of how closely evangelical Christians are linked to “antihomosexual” views?

Indications that such is the case come from two recent, separate survey analyses. And a third group, taking a fresh look at “shared cultural values between progressives and evangelicals,” showed that the number of white evangelicals, of all ages, voting for Democrats equaled the number of black Protestants voting Democratic.

A new study from the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press suggested that while President Bush’s approval rating has fallen broadly, the drop in support is particularly significant among white evangelicals ages 18 to 29.

Young adult evangelicals in 2002 approved of Bush’s performance by an overwhelming majority (87 percent). But by this August, their rating of the president had dropped to 45 percent. Older white evangelicals showed a more gradual disenchantment, according to a Pew analysis posted online September 28.

The young evangelicals are still more conservative than their contemporaries, but those identifying as Republicans are fewer. “Republicans now have only a two-to-one advantage over Democrats among younger white evangelicals, compared with nearly a four-to-one edge in 2005,” wrote Dan Cox, a research associate.

In a different national survey by the Barna Group, based in Ventura, California, founder George Barna said September 24 that 91 percent of young non-Christians and 80 percent of young churchgoers say that “antihomosexual” describes Christianity. Barna opined that 16-to-29-year-olds “exhibit a greater degree of criticism toward Christianity than did previous generations.”

One of the most frequent criticisms is that homosexuality has been made “a bigger sin” than anything else, Barna said. The findings were based on surveys of a sample of 867 young people. From that total, researchers reported responses from 440 non-Christians and 305 active churchgoers.

The self-identification by conservative churchgoers as “Christians” may have damaged that label for young evangelicals, said David Kinnaman, Barna Group president.

His book *UnChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity* deals with the “antigay” findings and related challenges. “The antihomosexual perception has now become sort of the Geiger counter of Christians’ ability to love and work with people.”

Growing numbers of evangelicals—of all ages—have embraced environmental, poverty and peace issues, saying that those moral concerns are consistent with faith.

On October 10, Third Way, a Washington-based progressive think tank, released “Come Let Us Reason Together,” a 44-page document suggesting ways to bridge some longstanding differences between Americans.

The report proposed five cultural issues on which evangelicals and progressives could work together: affirming the dignity of gays and lesbians, reducing the need for abortion, placing moral limits on the treatment of human embryos, creating safe spaces online for children and promoting responsible fatherhood.

Randy Brinson, an evangelical coauthor of the report and the founder of Redeem the Vote, said that coming to agreement on a proposal about homosexuality was the most difficult and was accomplished “after a lot of discussion.”

Robert Jones, a progressive coauthor of the report, found that one-third of evangelicals are moderates who share some progressive values and that about one-fifth of evangelicals are progressive.

An appendix on voting trends in the report reads: “Democrats have rightly understood the importance of black Protestants to electoral success; our analysis indicates the often-overlooked but important role that evangelicals play as well.” For instance, in 2004, 14 percent of Democratic candidate John Kerry’s vote came from from white evangelicals, compared to 13 percent from black Protestants. In 2006,

11.3 percent of Democratic House candidates' votes were from evangelicals, compared to 11 percent from black Protestants.