

Evangelicals in the Public Arena

Understanding Their Political, Moral, and Social Views



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1** Sixty-three percent (63%) of evangelical Protestants describe themselves as politically conservative, 24% are right in the middle, and 12% consider themselves to be politically liberal. Whites, higher-income evangelicals, and those 55 and older are more likely than others to be conservative.
- 2** There is no difference in the level of spiritual engagement evangelicals have according to their political beliefs. Liberals, moderates, and conservatives pray, attend worship, attend small groups, read and study the Bible, and consume Christian TV and radio with equal frequency.
- 3** Despite the issues often associated with left-wing politics, the majority of liberal evangelicals believe abortion is sin (62%), and even more categorize sex before marriage (70%), homosexual activity or sex (70%), and pornography (80%) as sinful.
- 4** Overall, conservative evangelicals view very liberal people in a far more negative light than liberal evangelicals view very conservative people. Conservatives are more likely to use terms such as immoral, radical, evil, and the enemy to describe liberals.
- 5** However, there is evidence that the very liberal and the very conservative may be about equally negative toward their political opposites. The challenge is that there are not enough very liberal people in the evangelical population to give us a robust sample of those individuals in this study.
- 6** Those who are right in the middle politically rarely have strongly negative views of the very conservative or very liberal.
- 7** When presented with 11 different public policy issues, the only issues a majority of evangelicals feel churches and church leaders should be very involved with publicly are abortion (54%) and what is acceptable in public expressions of religious faith (51%).

- 8 Evangelicals are divided over church/church leader involvement in public policy issues. Twenty-two percent (22%) would rather not see public involvement in *any* of the 11 issues. This, of course, means 78% do want public involvement in at least one issue—but evangelicals rarely agree on what issues warrant public involvement.
- 9 The more politically conservative evangelicals are, the more they call for churches and church leaders to be very involved in *every one* of the 11 issues we tested.
- 10 When evangelicals see something as a religious issue, they are more likely to call for churches and church leaders to be publicly involved in that issue. But of the 11 issues we tested, only one (what is acceptable in public expressions of religion) is considered to be mostly a religious issue by a majority of evangelicals (70%).
- 11 Election integrity/fairness (81%), gun laws/2nd Amendment (64%), free speech/1st Amendment (58%), and criminal justice/sentencing reform (54%) are all considered to be mostly political issues by a majority of evangelicals.
- 12 Racism/racial justice (68%), parental rights in public school decisions about individual children (64%), and transgender issues (60%) are all seen by a majority as mostly social issues.
- 13 Abortion is mostly divided between a religious issue (42%) and a social issue (36%). Antisemitism has a similar division (43% social, 38% religious). Donor privacy is more likely to be seen as a social issue (49%), followed by political (37%).

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INTRODUCTION

In the realm of American culture, society, and politics, evangelicals have emerged as a formidable and influential group. While they are often portrayed as a unified force in the public arena, it is important to understand that evangelicals encompass a vast spectrum of beliefs and values.

This research study aims to unravel the intricate tapestry of evangelical thought, revealing the diversity of opinions on topics such as abortion, election integrity, racism, antisemitism, free speech, censorship, and more.

Evangelicals agree that churches and church leaders should not just stand on the sidelines—but they certainly do not agree on when to enter the race.

Should pastors and churches speak up publicly about gun laws, abortion, or racial justice? Are those political issues, social issues, or religious issues? How many evangelical Protestants are politically liberal? What do evangelical conservatives, moderates, and liberals think of each other?

Can you think of more controversial areas for us to research?

Much has been written about evangelicals, politics, and various national issues. But there are two ongoing problems with much of this research:

- Definitions of “evangelical” that are quick and convenient, but not terribly accurate
- Quick questions about complicated issues that fail to explore all the nuance and complexity of those issues

12%
of evangelicals
are politically
liberal.

So, we decided to fix the first problem by utilizing the standard definition of “evangelical” used by the [National Association of Evangelicals](#) and others, and take a completely different approach to the second problem.

In our latest joint research study, [Infinity Concepts](#) and [Grey Matter Research](#) asked over 1,000 evangelical Protestants about where they stand politically, as well as what they think of people who do not share their perspectives.

We also explored 11 different contemporary issues with them:

- **FIRST:** Is each one more of a social, religious, or political issue?
- **SECOND:** How involved should Christian churches and church leaders be in public discussions and decisions about each issue?

We will cover each of these things in turn, in an attempt to bring some clarity to a fairly muddled understanding of evangelicals, politics, and public policy.

Overall Political Viewpoints

It is no secret that evangelicals tend to be much more conservative than the overall US population. What might surprise some people is that both liberals and moderates do exist within the American evangelical community.

When asked to describe their political beliefs, 63% call themselves politically conservative, including 24% who say they are very conservative. Twenty-four percent (24%) believe they are right in the middle between conservative and liberal. Just 12% consider themselves to be liberal, including only 3% who call themselves very liberal.

White (non-Hispanic) evangelicals are far more likely than others to call themselves either very conservative (28% to 13%) or conservative (27% to 19%). Non-white evangelicals are more likely than whites to say they are right in the middle (34% to 21%) or liberal (19% to 10%). Still, even among non-white evangelicals, 48% come down on the side of conservative, 34% right in the middle, and just 19% are liberal.

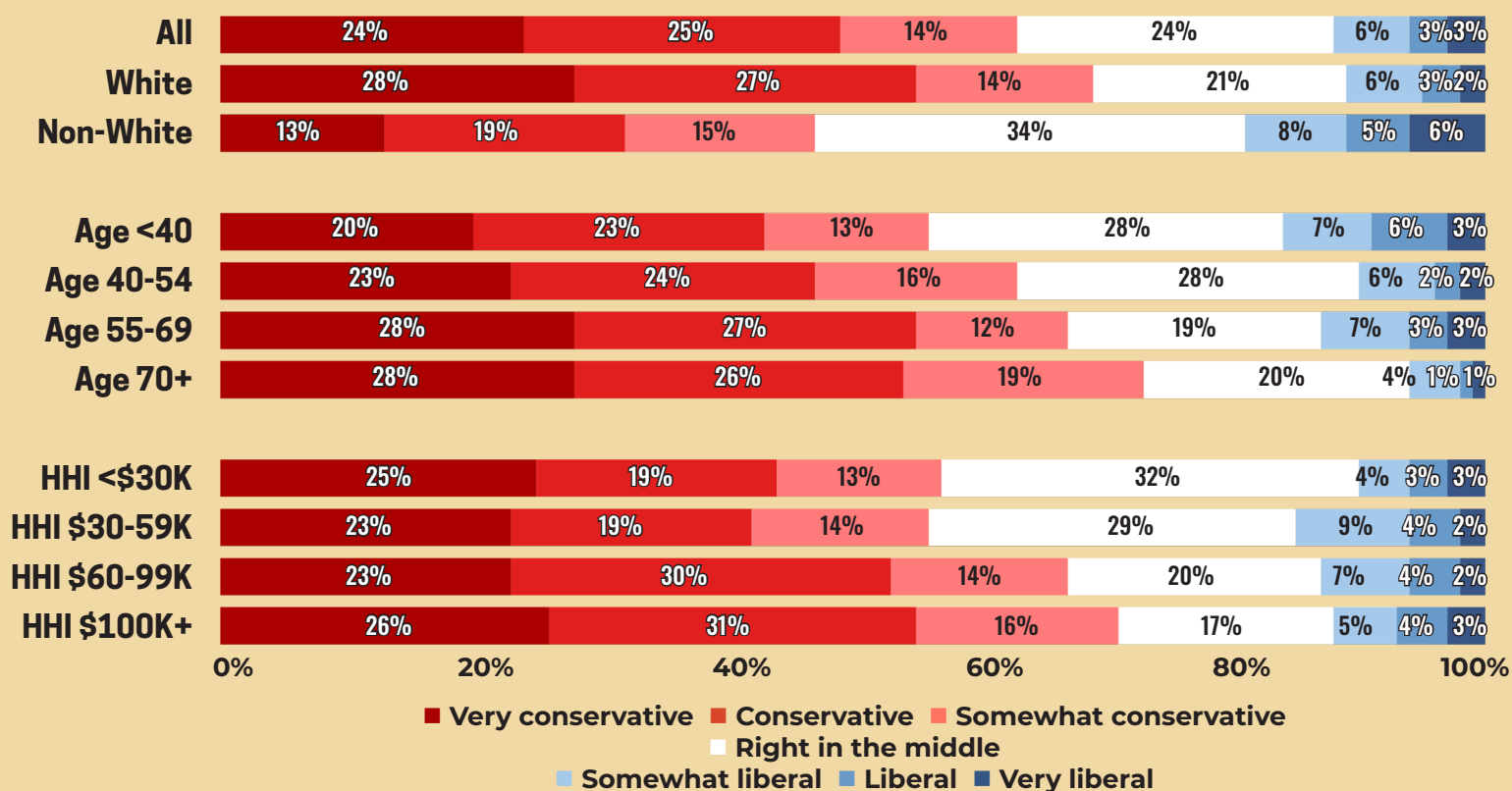
There is the same type of variation by age. Evangelicals 55 and older are more likely to be on the conservative side, while those under 55 are more likely to be right in the middle, or even liberal (although even among the youngest evangelicals, just 16% think of themselves as more liberal than conservative). [See graph on next page.]

Lower-income evangelicals (under \$60,000) are more likely to consider themselves moderate, while higher-income evangelicals are more likely than others to feel they are conservative (but not very conservative).

We can create a brief profile of evangelical conservatives, moderates, and liberals.

- Conservatives tend to be older—37% are 60 or older, and the median age is 54. Moderates and liberals tend to be younger (28% of moderates and 30% of liberals are 60+, and the median age for each group is 49).

Overall Political Viewpoints



*Some numbers (such as these) do not add to exactly 100% due to rounding.

- With their higher age, conservatives also are more likely to be married. Divorced and widowed are equally common among the three groups, but liberals and moderates are more likely to have never married (36% each, compared to 21% among conservatives).
- Conservatives tend to be white (80%). Among moderates, 64% are white, with 24% black. Among liberals, 60% are white, with 33% black.
- Conservatives tend to have higher incomes (median of about \$72,000, compared to \$52,000 for moderates and \$58,000 for liberals).

Where the three groups do not differ is in their personal spiritual engagement. The frequency of things such as church attendance, Bible reading, personal Bible study, small group involvement, and prayer is very similar among all three groups.

We created a **Spiritual Engagement Score**, which measures overall participation in spiritual activities. Full spiritual engagement would include daily Bible readership, weekly church attendance (in person or digitally), Bible study multiple times per week, small group attendance weekly, and daily prayer.

Overall spiritual engagement does not differ among liberals, moderates, and conservatives. In fact, frequency of participation in each of the five elements of the Spiritual Engagement Score is essentially the same for all three groups.

Conservatives are slightly more likely than liberals to give money, both to a church and to organizations outside of their church. Liberals, in turn, are more likely than moderates to give to both. This dynamic has also been commonly seen among Americans in general in research conducted by Grey Matter.

Among donors, conservatives on average give more generously than do others. The average conservative donor to church gives 3.2% of income to church, compared to 2.2% among moderates and just 1.6% among liberals. Among donors to nonprofits or ministries outside of church, conservative donors average 1.3% of their income, with liberals at 1% and moderates at 0.8%.

Use of Christian media (specifically Christian television programs, music, and radio stations) also does not vary. While it is entirely possible that what programs evangelicals listen to may vary by political belief, their frequency of consuming Christian media is the same among all three groups.

The social media they use is markedly similar. Facebook, Pinterest, Snapchat, and YouTube are equally likely to be used by all three groups, although liberals are more likely than others to use TikTok, X (formerly Twitter), and Instagram. Use of Truth is limited almost exclusively to conservatives, but only 5% of them use that platform.

Although social media use is similar, who they trust most for national news differs quite a bit. Here are the top news sources by Group:

CONSERVATIVES	MODERATES	LIBERALS
Fox News (34%)	Fox News (22%)	CNN (34%)
Newsmax (11%)	CNN (16%)	CBS News (14%)
ABC News (9%)	ABC News (16%)	NBC News (12%)

Denominationally, conservatives are somewhat more likely to come from Baptist churches or the Assemblies of God, while moderates and liberals are somewhat more likely to come from mainline denominational groups (Methodist, Lutheran, Christian/Churches of Christ, Episcopal). But the differences are not enormous—all three political beliefs can be found in non-denominational congregations, as well as in Church of God, Southern Baptist, Pentecostal, Foursquare Gospel, and other denominational families.

Liberals and moderates tend to be more loyal to their church and denomination—they have attended fewer different churches (in fewer different denominations) throughout their lives, they have been at their current church longer, and when they switch churches, they are more likely to stay within the same denomination (or stay non-denominational).

Conservatives tend to define a wider variety of things as sinful—they are more likely than liberals to define all of the following as sinful: getting drunk, being significantly overweight, gossip, sex before marriage, homosexual activity/sex, pornography, abortion, and not reporting some income on their tax returns. However, liberal evangelicals are far from permissive: a clear majority believe having an abortion is sinful (62%), as are cursing (71%), pornography (80%), homosexual activity or sex (70%), sex before marriage (73%), and getting drunk (61%).

This raises an important point about assumptions of what it means to be politically liberal. Liberalism is often identified with pro-choice, gay rights, and the sexual revolution (and certainly those positions receive far more support from the left than from the right). Clearly, those are not the areas of political liberalism that liberal evangelicals support. In fact, the majority reject those elements of liberalism. They are politically liberal while believing sex (of any kind) outside of marriage, porn, abortion, and other activities are sinful. At least in these areas, liberal evangelicals often share the beliefs of their conservative brethren.

Loons, Extremists, and Trolls

Given how similar evangelical liberals, moderates, and conservatives actually are, it is sad that there is so much enmity among them.

In 2014, Katherine Martin, a lexicographer with Oxford Dictionaries, used Oxford's New Monitor Corpus to identify the insults Americans most commonly use when referencing their ideological opposites. (The New Monitor Corpus rifles through thousands of websites looking for English-language text, such as articles, and stores them in a database that in 2014 contained over three billion words; Oxford uses the data to analyze how word use changes over time.) She found the most common insults liberals and conservatives threw at each other:

Top 10 Liberal Insults for Conservatives

- | | |
|--------------|------------|
| 1. Extremist | 6. Radical |
| 2. Ideologue | 7. Lunatic |
| 3. Nutjob | 8. Hack |
| 4. Idiot | 9. Thug |
| 5. Nut | 10. Zealot |

Top 10 Conservative Insults for Liberals

- | | |
|----------|--------------|
| 1. Hack | 6. Elitist |
| 2. Troll | 7. Extremist |
| 3. Idiot | 8. Shill |
| 4. Moron | 9. Radical |
| 5. Loon | 10. Fool |

While we did not test these exact words, we did ask conservative evangelicals how they view very liberal people, and liberal evangelicals how they view very conservative people. Moderates were randomly asked how they view the very conservative or very liberal.

As a group, evangelical conservatives tend to take a much dimmer view of very liberal people than evangelical liberals take of the very conservative. (To clarify, we asked them how they view people who are very liberal/conservative and did not specify whether those people were evangelical or not.)

Evangelical conservatives are far more likely than liberals to see the other side in a highly negative light. They are more likely to call their ideological opposites misguided,

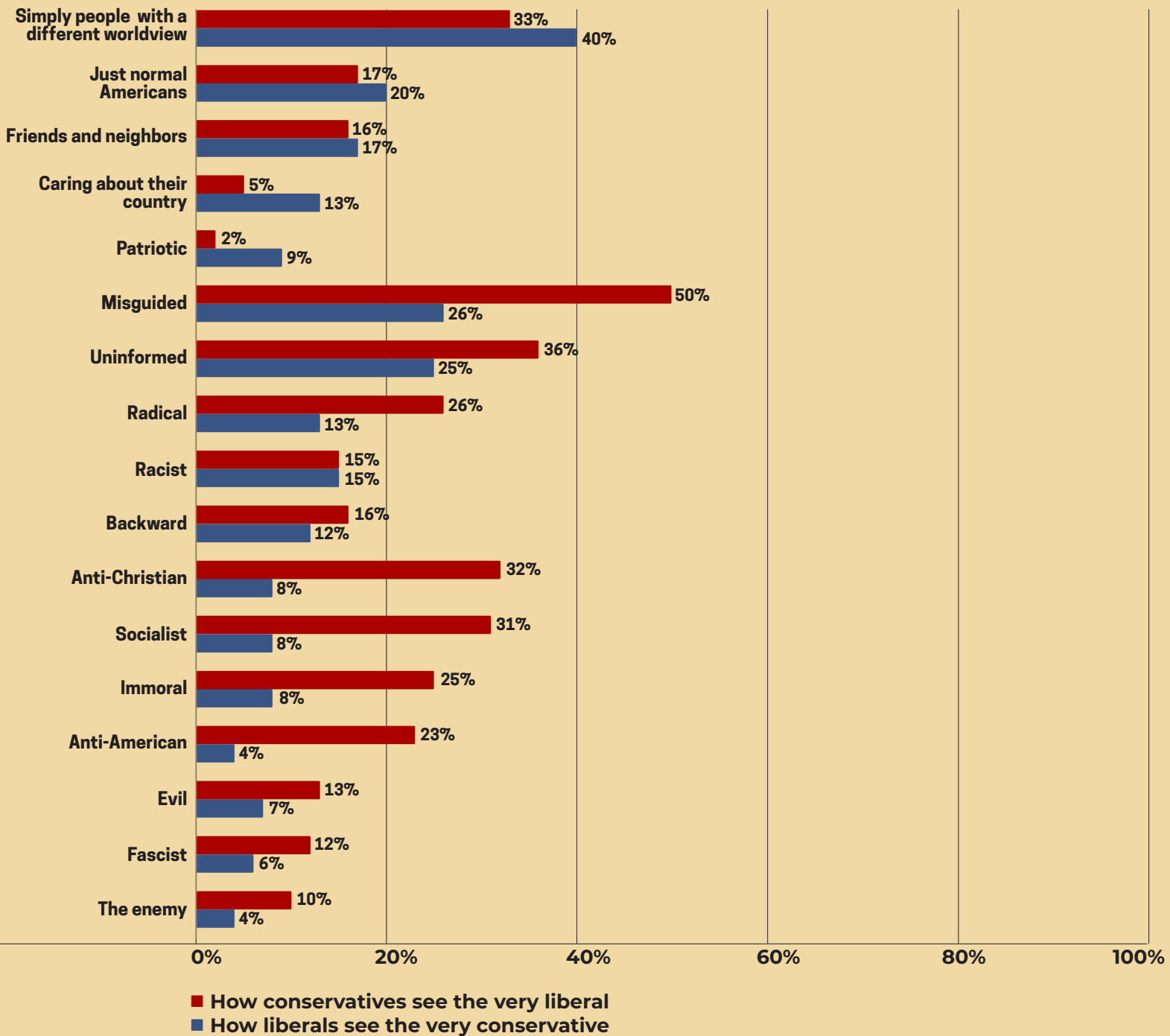
immoral, uninformed, radical, socialist, anti-Christian, anti-American, evil, and the enemy. Evangelical liberals are more likely than conservatives to see the other side as patriotic and caring about their country, as well as simply people with a different worldview.

But that is only part of the story.

The more people lean toward one side or the other—being very conservative or very liberal—the more likely they are to hurl invectives at those who are on the opposite end of the spectrum. Once again, the small number of evangelical liberals makes a full analysis of the data difficult. Among evangelical liberals, only 29% consider themselves to be very liberal, and the very liberal comprise less than 3% of all evangelical Protestants. Among evangelical conservatives, 38% consider themselves to be very conservative, and the very conservative comprise 24% of all evangelicals. The impact of very conservative viewpoints on the overall data for evangelicals is dramatically higher than the impact of very liberal viewpoints.

The small number of very liberal evangelicals in this study show very similar traits to the large number of very conservative evangelicals. They are about equally likely to use strong negative terms for their opposites, such as evil, racist, anti-Christian, or the enemy. The two groups at the far ends of the spectrum are about equally unlikely to use any positive terms for the other side. With a much larger sample size of the very liberal, it is likely we would see strong similarities between the two groups with full statistical confidence.

How Liberals and Conservatives See Each Other



At this point, however, we can only say that our hypothesis based on the limited data for liberal evangelicals is that **the far ends of the spectrum appear to be equally disdainful of each other.**

	How Very Conservative Sees Very Liberal	How Conservative Sees Very Liberal	How Somewhat Conservative Sees Very Liberal	How Somewhat Liberal Sees Very Conservative	How Liberal Sees Very Conservative*	How Very Liberal Sees Very Conservative*
Simply people with a different worldview	26%	31%	50%	46%	40%	26%
Just normal Americans	14%	18%	22%	15%	39%	8%
Friends and neighbors	13%	17%	21%	18%	27%	5%
Caring about their country	3%	5%	10%	10%	26%	3%
Patriotic	2%	1%	2%	8%	11%	6%
Misguided	56%	52%	38%	29%	29%	18%
Uninformed	46%	35%	22%	26%	29%	18%
Radical	31%	28%	15%	15%	9%	16%
Racist	20%	13%	11%	15%	4%	31%
Backward	19%	14%	13%	9%	11%	19%
Anti-Christian	40%	29%	21%	9%	--	18%
Socialist	39%	31%	19%	8%	10%	6%
Immoral	35%	21%	16%	7%	2%	18%
Anti-American	31%	22%	12%	6%	--	6%
Evil	17%	13%	7%	6%	4%	12%
Fascist	16%	13%	6%	9%	3%	4%
The enemy	15%	7%	5%	4%	--	10%
Any negative	71%	62%	46%	45%	39%	58%
Any strong negative (evil, racist, etc.)	56%	48%	33%	27%	16%	55%
Any positive	38%	47%	60%	56%	74%	37%

*Subsample sizes of under 40 respondents; directional data only.

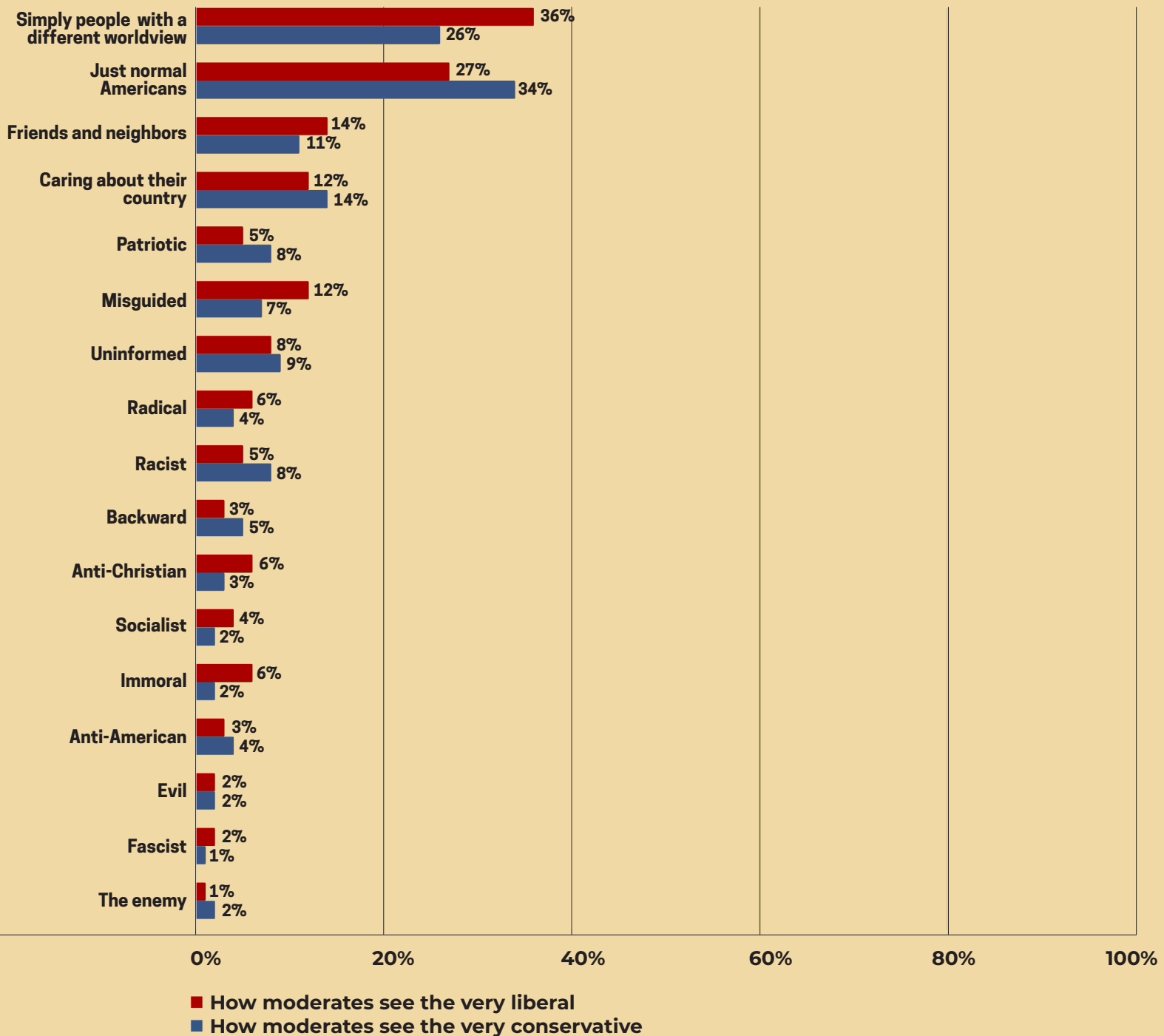
When looking at all conservatives and all liberals, 51% of the liberal data comes from those who are only somewhat liberal, and who have far less negativity toward very conservative people than do those farther on the left. But just 22% of the conservative responses come from those who are only somewhat conservative, and who have far less negativity toward very liberal people than do those farther on the right.

Among evangelicals, the conservatives are often more conservative than the liberals are liberal, leading to a higher level of negativism toward the opposite viewpoint.

Those who refuse to identify as either liberal or conservative—who say they are right in the middle—do not tend to have strongly negative thoughts about the very conservative or very liberal. **Evangelicals who are right in the middle politically tend to see both ends of the spectrum in relatively benign terms**—simply people with a different worldview, just normal Americans, etc. They are more likely to see the very conservative as just normal Americans while seeing the very liberal as simply people with a different worldview. This suggests middle-of-the-road evangelicals are more likely to see conservatism as relatively “normal” while liberalism is “different.”

Only 11% who are right in the middle will use any strongly negative term like *evil* or *racist* to describe the very conservative. In fact, just 18% will use any negative term at all for the very conservative, while 64% employ positive terms such as *patriotic* or *just normal Americans*. They feel much the same way about the very liberal—14% use a strongly negative term to describe those on the far left, while 19% use any level of negative term, and 62% have at least one positive description of them. “Right in the middle” apparently does really mean “right in the middle” for these evangelicals.

How Moderates See the Very Liberal and Very Conservative



Church and Church Leader Involvement in Public Policy

We also presented 11 different public policy issues to evangelicals and asked them two questions. First, how much involvement do they feel churches and church leaders should have publicly in discussions and decisions on each issue? Second, do they see each issue as mostly political, social, or religious?

The evangelical Protestant community is generally in agreement that churches and church leaders should have at least some involvement in public discussions and decisions about issues such as these. **Where they disagree, however, is on exactly which issues churches and church leaders should get involved.**

Evangelicals agree that churches and church leaders should not just stand on the sidelines—but they cannot agree on when to enter the race.

There are two issues on which a majority of evangelicals believe churches and church leaders should be very involved publicly (and those are with very slim majorities):

- Abortion (54%)
- Acceptable public expressions of religious faith (51%)

Public Policy Issues

- Transgender issues
- Abortion issues
- Election integrity/fairness
- Racism/racial justice
- Antisemitism
- Parental rights in public school decisions about individual children
- Donor privacy
- Public expressions of religious faith
- Free speech/censorship/1st Amendment
- Gun laws/2nd Amendment
- Criminal justice issues/sentencing guidelines

Five other issues have just under half of evangelicals calling for churches/church leaders to be very involved publicly:

- Free speech/censorship/1st Amendment rights (48%)
- Parental rights in public school decisions about individual children (46%)
- Antisemitism (45%)
- Racism/racial justice (45%)
- Transgender issues (42%)

The remaining four issues are less likely to see evangelicals calling for churches and church leaders to be very involved publicly:

- Election integrity/fairness (34%)
- Criminal justice/sentencing reform (32%)
- Donor privacy (32%)
- Gun legislation/2nd Amendment rights (30%)

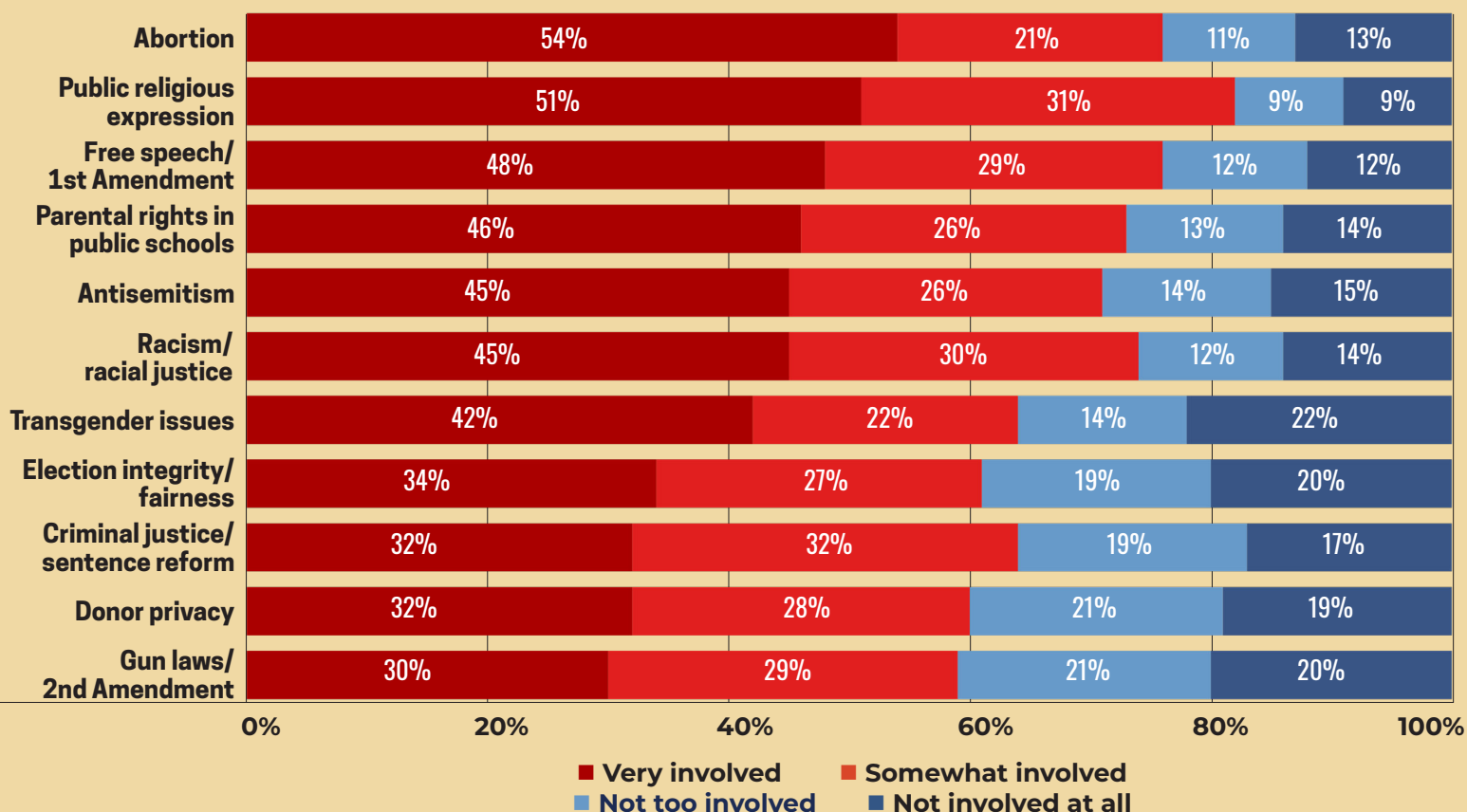
For many evangelicals, the question is not whether churches and church leaders should be involved in public discourse and decisions about these issues, but only to what extent. **A clear majority call for churches and church leaders to be at least somewhat involved in every single one of these areas.**

The area in which the fewest evangelical Protestants want to see churches and church leaders involved is gun laws/2nd Amendment. Only 41% want churches and church leaders to be not too involved or not involved at all in public discussions and decisions on this issue.

It is important to keep in mind that discussions and decisions *about* each of these issues do not speak to what side of each issue evangelicals are on. For instance, we did not explore whether evangelicals want churches and church leaders to call for more gun laws or more gun rights.

Each of these issues is complex and nuanced, and a full understanding of evangelical positions could take a detailed study on each issue. We sought to understand whether evangelicals believe churches and church leaders should enter public discourse or stay on the sidelines on each of these issues, not what their position on those topics should be.

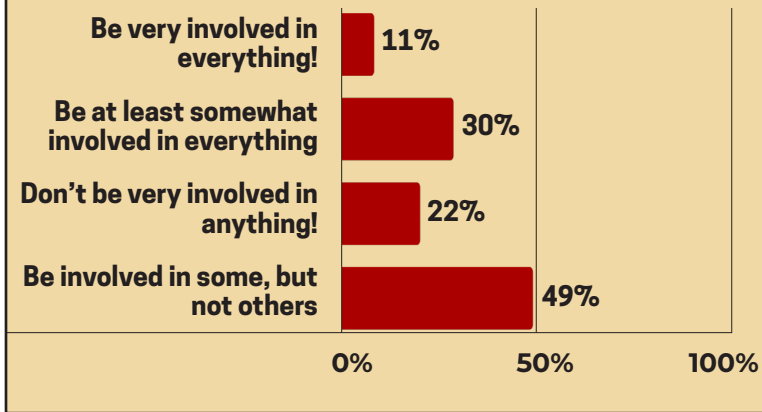
How Involved Should Churches/ Church Leaders Be In Public Discussions and Decisions?



While the findings on each issue may seem to suggest an evangelical call for action on many of these issues, **the evangelical community is, in fact, deeply divided on just when and to what extent churches and church leaders should be publicly involved.**

Just one out of every nine evangelical Protestants (11%) feels churches and church leaders should be very involved publicly on all 11 of these issues. In fact, only 30% feel they should be even somewhat involved in all of these issues. And nearly one out of every four evangelicals (22%) would like to see churches and church leaders not become very involved in *any* of these issues.

How Involved?



For example, 42% of the evangelicals who feel churches should be very involved in transgender issues do not want to see churches very involved in election integrity/fairness issues. In turn, 28% of those who want churches to be very involved in election issues do not want them to be very involved in transgender issues.

Thirty-two percent (32%) of evangelicals want churches to be very involved publicly regarding both racism/racial justice issues and antisemitism. Thirteen percent (13%) want high involvement with antisemitism but not with racism, and just as many (12%) want it the other way around. Forty-two percent (42%) do not want strong public involvement by churches/church leaders with either issue.

Similarly, just 22% of evangelicals want churches/church leaders very involved publicly with both gun laws/2nd Amendment and election integrity/fairness. Twelve percent (12%) call for strong involvement with election issues but not gun issues, while 7% want it the other way around. Fifty-nine percent (59%) do not want strong involvement in either issue.

Who Wants What

There is also demographic variation in which issues evangelicals want to see churches and church leaders involved in publicly. In general, the older the person, the more likely he or she is to want churches involved everywhere.

Three out of ten evangelical Protestants call for churches and church leaders to be at least somewhat involved publicly in every single one of these 11 issues. But this is more common among evangelicals 70 and older (36%), falling to 32% in the 55 to 69 age range, 30% among those 40 to 54, and just 24% among evangelicals under 40.

Where the youngest evangelicals are less likely than others to want to see churches very involved publicly are abortion (48% to 56%), what is acceptable in public expressions of religious faith (45% to 53%), parental rights in public school decisions (37% to 50%), antisemitism (34% to 49%), and election integrity/fairness (26% to 37%).

There is also some variation by race/ethnicity. Non-white evangelicals are more likely than non-Hispanic whites to want churches and church leaders to be very involved in racism/racial justice (54% to 41%), election integrity/fairness (45% to 30%), criminal justice/sentencing guidelines (43% to 29%), and gun laws/2nd Amendment (39% to 26%).

Arguably, all four of these issues have a heavier impact on minority populations—especially the black population, which comprises a majority of non-white evangelical Protestants in the US:

- Voter suppression has long been a particular concern of black voters
- Gun deaths are dramatically higher in the African-American community than for any other racial/ethnic group
- Pew Research Center finds that “Black Americans are far more likely than whites to say the nation’s criminal justice system is racially biased and that its treatment of minorities is a serious national problem”

- Pew also finds “About eight-in-ten blacks (78%) say the country hasn’t gone far enough when it comes to giving black people equal rights with whites, and fully half say it’s unlikely that the country will eventually achieve racial equality”

One very consistent finding is that the less spiritually engaged evangelicals are (not reading and studying the Bible, attending worship services, praying, or attending small groups regularly), the less likely they are to call for churches and church leaders to be publicly involved in these various issues.

For almost all 11 issues we tested, **those with low or no spiritual engagement are more likely to want churches to stay out of these issues.** As those with no/low spiritual engagement are not regularly attending worship services, it is not that they want *their* church to be uninvolved; they just want *all* churches to be uninvolved.

There are no dramatic differences according to whether evangelicals are moderately, highly, or fully engaged in these spiritual activities, but the disengaged are nearly twice as likely as those with at least moderate spiritual engagement to say churches and church leaders should not be engaged in *any* of these 11 issues (32% to 17%).

A second very consistent finding is that **the more politically conservative evangelicals are, the more they want churches to be very involved in these issues.** This is true on every one of the 11 issues we investigated.

For example, on abortion issues, 73% of the very conservative want churches and church leaders to be very involved publicly. This falls to 59% when evangelicals call themselves conservative, 53% among the somewhat conservative, and 42% among those right in the middle. Only 36% of liberals want churches very involved in this issue.

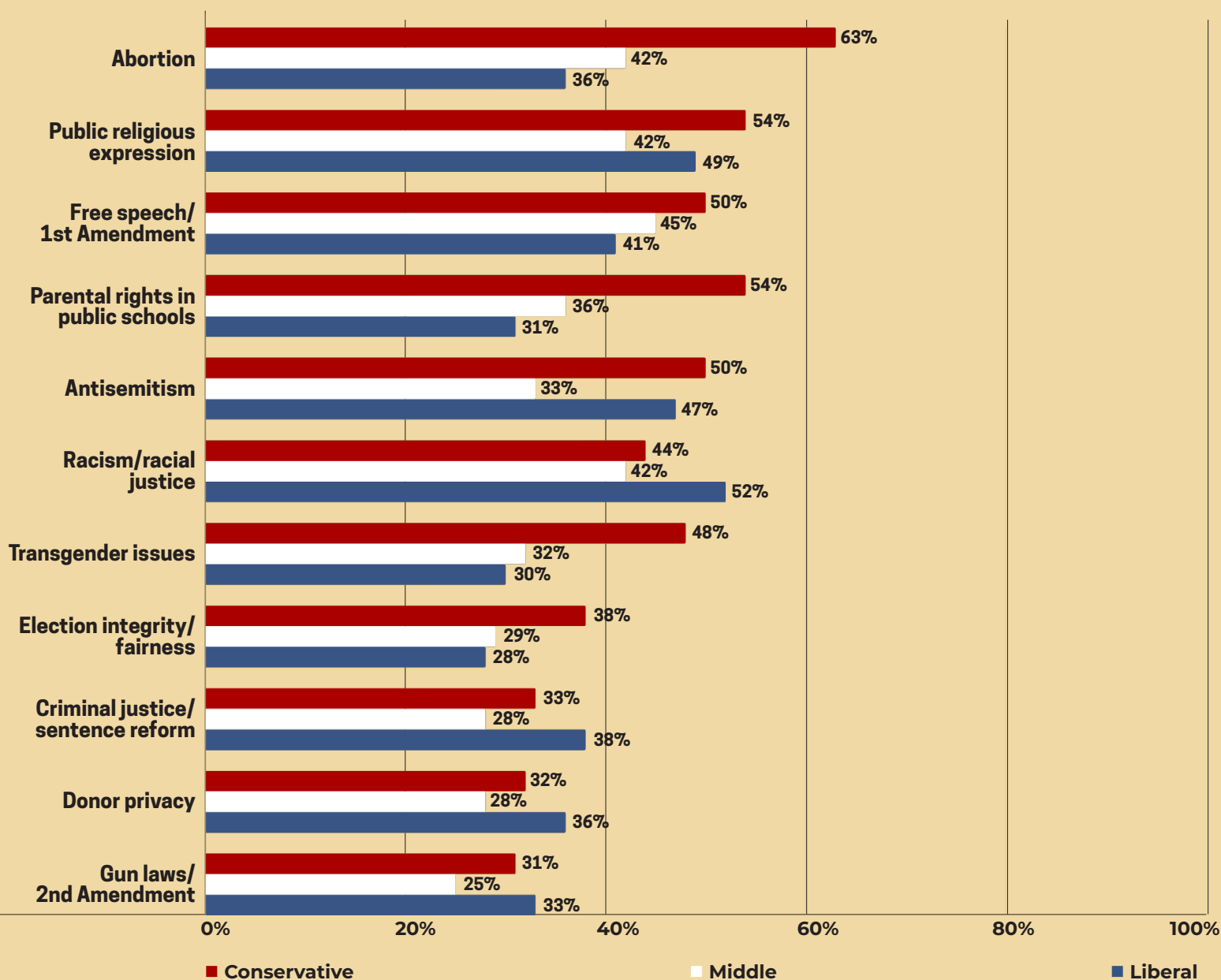
Similarly, on parental rights in public school decisions about individual children, calls for churches and church leaders to be very involved in the issue come from 63% of the very conservative, 50% of the conservative, 43% of the somewhat conservative, 36% of those right in the middle, and 31% of liberal evangelicals.

The more conservative evangelicals are, the more they want churches involved in these issues. The same *appears* to be true about the more liberal they are. Consistently, those describing themselves as very liberal are far more likely to desire church/church leader involvement than the liberal or somewhat liberal evangelicals. The problem

is that with the small number of liberal evangelicals, there are simply too few very liberal evangelicals in this study for us to draw sweeping conclusions on this matter. A reasonable hypothesis is that this would continue to prove true with a much larger study, but given the data, we cannot prove or disprove this hypothesis.

Calls for Churches/Church Leaders to be Very Involved Publicly

by Overall Political Position



What we can say is that for abortion, public expression of religion, free speech, parental rights in public schools, election integrity/fairness, and transgender issues, conservative evangelicals are more likely than moderates or liberals to want churches and church leaders publicly involved.

But when it comes to racism/racial justice, antisemitism, criminal justice/sentencing reform, donor privacy, and gun laws/2nd Amendment, the relatively few liberal evangelicals are at least as likely as the many conservative evangelicals to want churches publicly involved.

The question, of course, is whether liberals and conservatives would expect those churches and church leaders to come down on the same side of these issues.

Are These Religious Issues?

We asked evangelical Protestants whether they consider each of these 11 issues to be mostly political, social, or religious.

Seen as Mostly Religious Issue

- Acceptable public expressions of religious faith (70%)

Seen as Mostly Political Issues

- Election integrity/fairness (81%)
- Gun laws/2nd Amendment (64%)
- Free speech/censorship/1st Amendment rights (58%)
- Criminal justice/sentencing reform (54%)

Seen as Mostly Social Issues

- Racism/racial justice (68%)
- Parental rights in public school decisions about individual children (64%)
- Transgender issues (60%)

The following have no majority opinion:

	FIRST PLACE	SECOND PLACE	THIRD PLACE
Abortion	Religious (42%)	Social (36%)	Political (22%)
Antisemitism	Religious (43%)	Social (38%)	Political (19%)
Donor privacy	Social (49%)	Political (37%)	Religious (14%)

Although white and non-white evangelicals do not always agree on whether churches and church leaders should be publicly involved in these issues, they have nearly identical views on whether each of these issues is mostly religious, political, or social. Non-white evangelicals see the issues in largely the same light as white evangelicals—they just believe the Church should be more publicly involved in some of them.

Where we really see differences is according to political perspective. **Conservatives are more likely than others to frame many of these issues as mostly religious issues.**

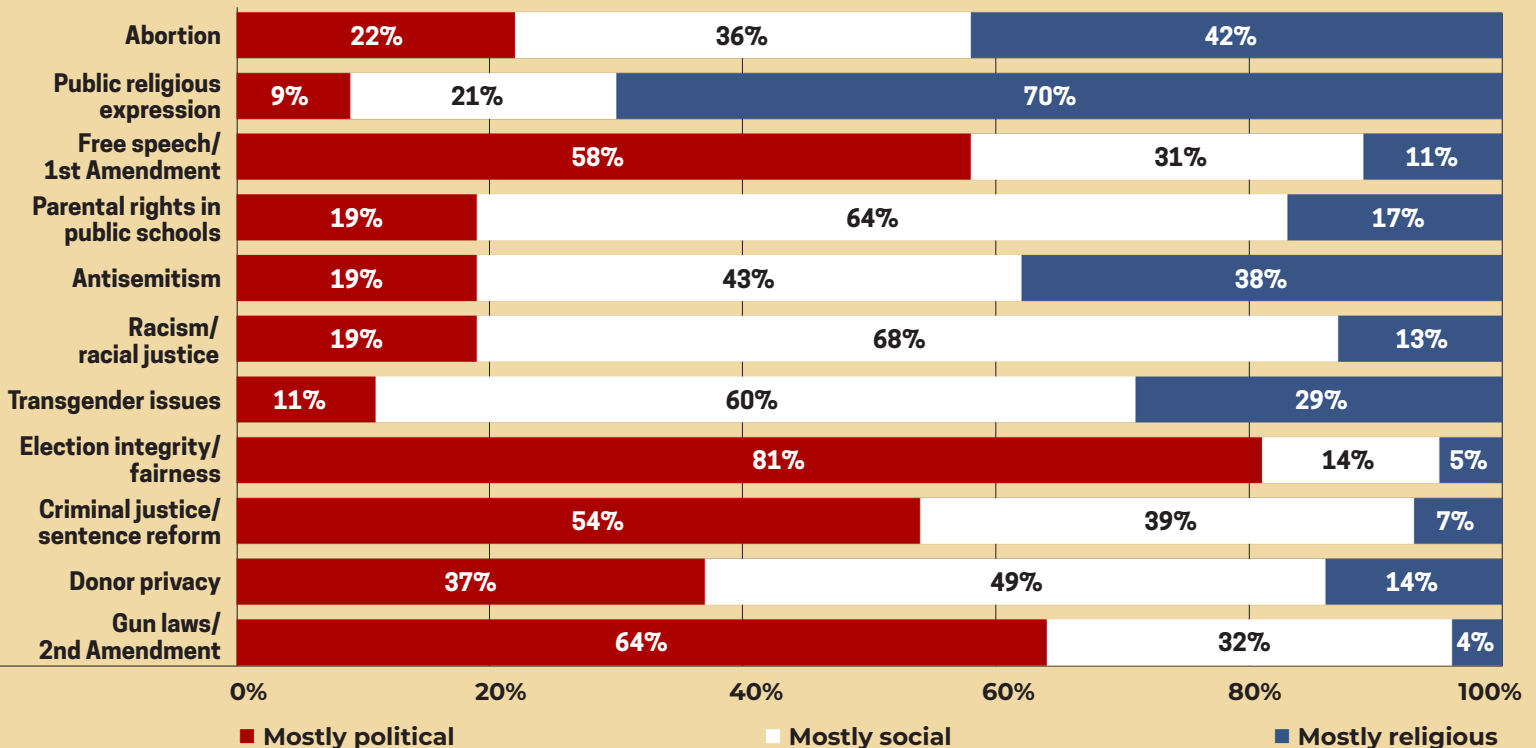
Not only that, but the more conservative an evangelical Protestant is, the more likely that person is to frame many of these as religious issues.

When we compare how evangelicals view each issue with whether they want churches and church leaders to be publicly involved in that issue, two things are very clear.

- **FIRST, when an issue is seen as a religious issue, rather than political or social, there is a much stronger call for churches to get involved.**
- **SECOND, not seeing an issue as mostly a religious matter does not stop many evangelicals from still desiring involvement from churches and church leaders.**

Both of these factors are true for every issue we examined.

What Type of Issues Are These?



Take racism/racial justice as an example. When evangelicals perceive this as mostly a religious issue, 59% want churches and church leaders to be very involved, which is far higher than among those who see this as either social or political. However, even among those who believe racism/racial justice is mostly a political issue, 41% still call for churches and church leaders to be very involved. The same is true for 43% of those who say this is mostly a social issue.

	Very Conservative	Conservative	Somewhat Conservative	Right In the Middle	Liberal
ABORTION ISSUES:					
- Mostly political	23%	16%	13%	27%	30%
- Mostly social	24%	37%	32%	44%	50%
- Mostly religious	53%	47%	54%	30%	20%
PUBLIC EXPRESSIONS OF FAITH:					
- Mostly political	7%	11%	6%	10%	14%
- Mostly social	16%	18%	24%	24%	25%
- Mostly religious	76%	71%	70%	66%	61%
FREE SPEECH/1ST AMENDMENT:					
- Mostly political	58%	56%	60%	57%	60%
- Mostly social	26%	31%	26%	37%	36%
- Mostly religious	15%	13%	14%	6%	4%
PARENTAL RIGHTS/PUBLIC SCHOOLS:					
- Mostly political	16%	20%	17%	23%	18%
- Mostly social	58%	61%	66%	67%	74%
- Mostly religious	26%	19%	17%	10%	8%
ANTISEMITISM:					
- Mostly political	20%	18%	12%	25%	17%
- Mostly social	34%	43%	49%	48%	45%
- Mostly religious	48%	40%	40%	26%	36%
RACISM/RACIAL JUSTICE:					
- Mostly political	20%	18%	12%	25%	17%
- Mostly social	62%	69%	72%	67%	76%
- Mostly religious	18%	13%	16%	8%	7%
TRANSGENDER ISSUES:					
- Mostly political	11%	13%	7%	11%	13%
- Mostly social	46%	56%	63%	71%	70%
- Mostly religious	43%	32%	29%	18%	17%
ELECTION INTEGRITY/FAIRNESS:					
- Mostly political	80%	84%	79%	79%	84%
- Mostly social	11%	12%	16%	18%	13%
- Mostly religious	9%	4%	5%	3%	2%
CRIMINAL JUSTICE/SENTENCING:					
- Mostly political	41%	57%	52%	65%	56%
- Mostly social	48%	36%	42%	31%	40%
- Mostly religious	10%	7%	6%	4%	4%
DONOR PRIVACY:					
- Mostly political	36%	38%	42%	39%	31%
- Mostly social	43%	49%	50%	48%	62%
- Mostly religious	21%	13%	8%	14%	8%
GUN LAWS/2ND AMENDMENT:					
- Mostly political	59%	66%	67%	61%	71%
- Mostly social	32%	31%	29%	36%	28%
- Mostly religious	9%	3%	4%	3%	1%

Abortion is another example. When evangelicals see this as mostly a political issue, 45% still want churches and church leaders very involved in public debate and decisions. It is very similar when abortion is viewed as mostly a social issue (40%). But this rises to 72% when evangelicals see abortion as mostly a religious issue.

This kind of disparity can be seen on every issue. When evangelicals see issues as either mostly social or mostly political, *not a single issue* is one on which a majority of evangelicals call for churches and church leaders to be very involved. **When evangelicals see issues as mostly religious, every single issue has a majority of evangelicals calling for churches and church leaders to be very involved.**

ISSUE	Get Very Involved
ABORTION ISSUES:	
- See it as mostly political	45%
- See it as mostly social	40%
- See it as mostly religious	72%
PUBLIC EXPRESSIONS OF FAITH:	
- See it as mostly political	45%
- See it as mostly social	38%
- See it as mostly religious	55%
FREE SPEECH/1ST AMENDMENT:	
- See it as mostly political	45%
- See it as mostly social	47%
- See it as mostly religious	67%
PARENTAL RIGHTS/PUBLIC SCHOOLS:	
- See it as mostly political	44%
- See it as mostly social	42%
- See it as mostly religious	65%
ANTISEMITISM:	
- See it as mostly political	30%
- See it as mostly social	42%
- See it as mostly religious	56%
RACISM/RACIAL JUSTICE:	
- See it as mostly political	41%
- See it as mostly social	43%
- See it as mostly religious	59%
TRANSGENDER ISSUES:	
- See it as mostly political	38%
- See it as mostly social	33%
- See it as mostly religious	62%
ELECTION INTEGRITY/FAIRNESS:	
- See it as mostly political	32%
- See it as mostly social	38%
- See it as mostly religious	62%
CRIMINAL JUSTICE/SENTENCING:	
- See it as mostly political	45%
- See it as mostly social	49%
- See it as mostly religious	63%
DONOR PRIVACY:	
- See it as mostly political	31%
- See it as mostly social	26%
- See it as mostly religious	52%
GUN LAWS/2ND AMENDMENT:	
- See it as mostly political	49%
- See it as mostly social	44%
- See it as mostly religious	60%

What Does It All Mean?

There are a number of lessons to take from our research findings.

For one thing, this is yet another reminder that **while evangelicals may be united by the fundamental spiritual beliefs that make them evangelicals, they are not by any means in one accord on many different subjects.**

As we have seen in previous research, evangelicals vary in their [giving](#), their [spiritual journeys](#), their [media use](#), and even their [theology](#). Now, in this report, we see that while a majority are politically conservative, over a third either lean liberal or are right in the middle. Only one out of four is very conservative politically. The reality is quite different from the typical media portrayal.

Another critical finding is that, among politically liberal evangelicals, the vast majority have more traditionally conservative viewpoints on abortion, sexuality, and other behaviors. While our purpose was not to explore in-depth what it means to be evangelical and liberal, it seems that while liberal evangelical Protestants may hold traditionally progressive positions on issues such as welfare, gun laws, foreign policy, economic policy, universal healthcare, immigration, and/or the environment, they often believe abortion, same-sex relationships, and any sex outside of marriage are sinful behaviors.

This is an important reminder that **many of the common stereotypes of both sides are simply wrong.** Being a conservative evangelical does not automatically make one a gun-toting, border-patrolling Donald Trump die-hard, any more than being a liberal evangelical makes one a pro-choice, LGBTQ+ supporting Joe Biden sycophant. Conservative and liberal evangelicals are equally engaged in spiritual activities; equally likely to be Bible-reading churchgoers. In many ways, they are more alike than different.

Assuming someone with different political beliefs opposes everything you stand for can make it much easier to see that person as an enemy. And make no mistake, some

evangelicals see the “other side” as just that. The more they skew to the far left or far right of the political spectrum, the more they see the opposite side in highly negative terms: anti-Christian, radical, immoral, evil, etc. The question that must be asked is whether this kind of rhetoric aimed at any group—including some fellow believers—is more helpful or harmful.

Also, note that inflaming political divisions within the Church has other impacts. As political viewpoints among evangelicals tend to vary according to age, race/ethnicity, and economic position, political disputes can also turn into hard feelings and divisions along these demographic lines, further dividing a Church that is already too often not in unity.

The diversity among evangelicals can be clearly seen when asking them whether churches and church leaders should be publicly involved in discussions and decisions about various issues. Evangelicals generally agree on the concept of church/church leader involvement in public policy but not on what issues that involvement should incorporate nor on what level of involvement is appropriate. Even on what is often considered a watershed issue for evangelicals, only a slim majority believe churches and church leaders should be very involved publicly on the issue of abortion.

A good example is election integrity/fairness. One-third of evangelicals want churches very involved in this, while an equal proportion want some involvement but not a lot. Four out of ten want little or no public involvement from churches on this issue.

Overall, just 11% of evangelicals call for strong church/church leader involvement in every one of the 11 issues we tested—and we did not even research perceptions about reparations, immigration, or dozens of other issues. **The perception of an army of evangelicals calling for a militant Church to have its hands in everything is simply a fallacy.**

And this does not even take into account *what side* of each issue evangelicals would want churches and church leaders to support publicly. How does a church or church leader navigate all of this successfully? Any position taken is likely to anger someone, as is not taking a position at all.

One thing we do clearly see is that **evangelicals are much more likely to call for church and church leader involvement when they see an issue as mostly religious.**

Pastors and teachers may be able to encourage church involvement in certain issues if they can clearly show how those issues are strongly related to faith. At the same time, they may be able to help reduce expectations of church involvement if they can show that an issue is a matter of social or political belief rather than a biblical position.

When evangelicals cannot agree on whether Israel is still God's chosen people, whether gifts of the Spirit such as tongues and healing are still active today, or whether smoking marijuana is a sin, it should be no surprise that there is diversity of thought on issues such as these. It is unlikely that evangelical Protestants will ever all be on the same page on these issues. So, if disagreement is to remain, **the key thing will be how evangelicals handle these disagreements within the Church.**

This research offers a profound reminder that within the tapestry of the evangelical community lies a rich diversity of perspectives, beliefs, and convictions. It dispels the stereotypes that too often permeate media portrayals and political discourse. The evangelical landscape is a world where conservative, moderate, and liberal evangelicals alike are engaged in spiritual pursuits while grappling with complex social and political issues.

As we navigate the terrain of disagreement within the Church, let us recognize that our differences need not divide us but rather can serve as catalysts for deeper engagement, empathy, and mutual respect. **May we forge a path forward with a spirit of humility and grace that transcends ideological divides and seeks to strengthen the bonds of fellowship within the Church, even in the face of disagreement.**

Methodology and Definitions

Researchers have defined “evangelical” in ways that have them representing 7%, 23%, and even 35% or more of American adults. For this study, we considered an evangelical to be someone who agrees strongly with all four of the following theological positions:

- The Bible is the highest authority for what I believe.
- It is important for me to encourage non-Christians to trust Jesus Christ as their Savior.
- Jesus Christ’s death on the cross is the only sacrifice that could remove the penalty of my sin.
- Only those who trust in Jesus Christ alone as their Savior receive God’s free gift of eternal salvation.

This is the definition favored by the National Association of Evangelicals, which [Grey Matter Research](#) and Lifeway Research helped create.

Further, we limited this study to exclude those who identify with a non-Protestant group, such as Mormon, Roman Catholic, or Orthodox. This is a study of evangelical Protestants, a group representing 23% of American adults, or about 59 million people.

The study was conducted online, through a blend of research access panels. Stringent quality control was used to eliminate any responses from bots, click farms, and disengaged or fraudulent respondents. A demographically representative sample was screened for evangelical beliefs and lack of non-Protestant affiliation. Data was gathered in late 2023 and early 2024. A total of 1,039 evangelical Protestants participated in this study.

ADDITIONAL REPORTS

from Infinity Concepts and Grey Matter Research

If you found this report beneficial, Grey Matter Research and Infinity Concepts offer additional reports on evangelical Protestants:

FUNDRAISING INSIGHTS:

- [The Generosity Factor: Evangelicals and Giving](#)
- [The Generation Gap: Evangelical Giving Preferences](#)
- [The Favorite Charity: Evangelical Giving Priorities](#)
- [The Sustainers: Exploring Monthly Donor Partnerships](#)
- [Race & Gender in Fundraising: Exploring Potential Bias Among Evangelicals](#)
- [Who Controls the Wallet: Giving Decisions Among Evangelicals](#)
- [Strategic Creative Design: Fundraising Advertising Among Evangelicals](#)

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- [The Spiritual Journey: How Evangelicals Come to Faith](#)
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- [The Congregational Scorecard: What Evangelicals Want in a Church](#)

ISRAEL INSIGHTS:

- [The Jewish Connection: Evangelicals and Israel](#)
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Company president Ron Sellers would be delighted to chat with you. Call him at **1-602-684-6294**, or meet him digitally at ron@greymatterresearch.com.

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Spiritual growth and maturity among American evangelicals is a mixed bag. Some are highly engaged and growing, while others have almost completely checked out. [Click here](#).

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Donors often claim they like to support small, local organizations. The reality is they generally favor massive global brands. And most people of faith do not favor supporting faith-based organizations. Learn what sets America's favorite charities apart in the minds of donors. [Click here](#).

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