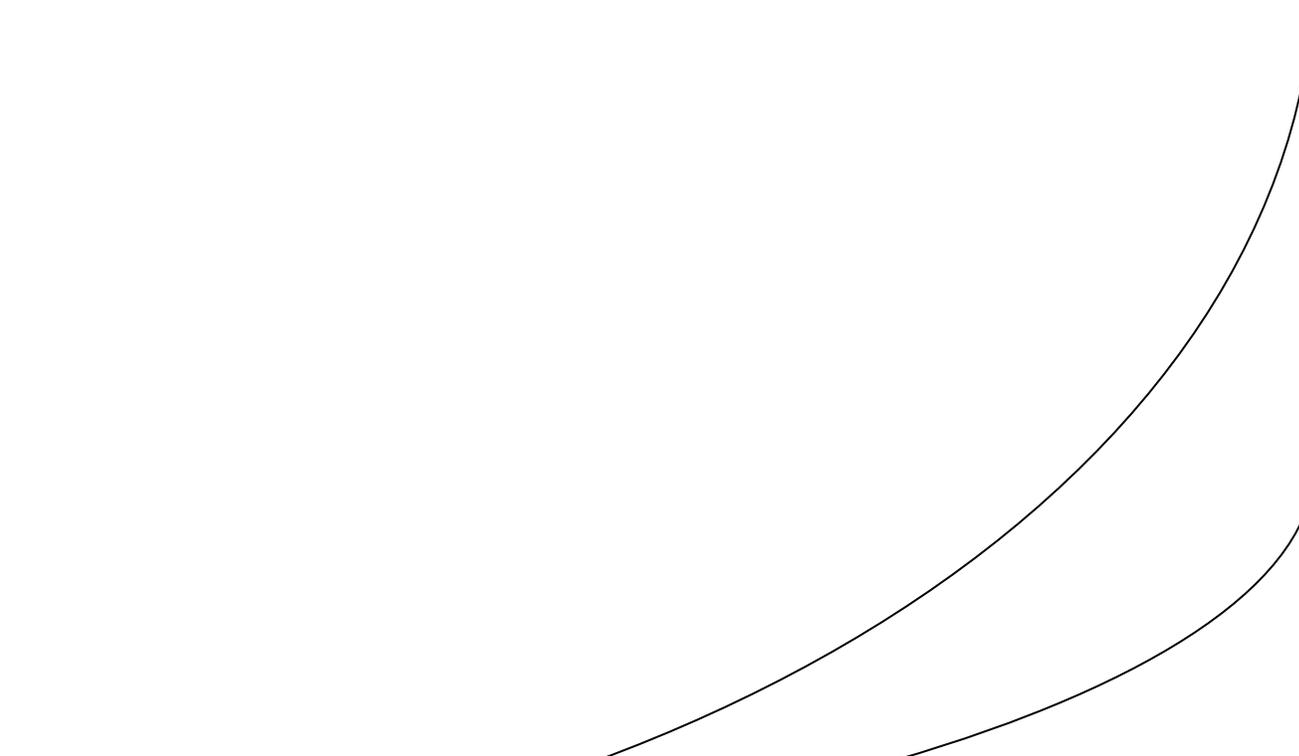


Young Evangelicals in the 2012 Elections

A Study Sponsored by Sojourners

16 October 2012

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1. Study Design and Audience

This pilot study sheds new light on the political behavior and civic engagement of young Christians in the United States. Who are young Christians? How do their political priorities mesh with the major American political parties? How do they fit into the fading Culture Wars? To give a data-driven answer to these questions, Sojourners fielded an Internet survey targeting young Christians. The data, gathered during May and June 2012, shows a community of young Christians who value public engagement, but question the trustworthiness of many major social institutions.

With any Internet poll, it is important to understand exactly what group is sampled. We advertised our survey using Facebook, to users who were members of networks affiliated with The Council for Christian Colleges and Universities, as well as users who “liked” Campus Crusade for Christ, Young Life, The Navigators, or InterVarsity Christian Fellowship. We screened users who were under the age of 35, to zero in on those who came of age after the height of the Culture Wars. Given our recruitment strategy, this population is disproportionately evangelical, young, as well as more educated than the general population. With this in mind, the results below should be taken as giving insight into the college-educated slice of young, evangelical Christian America.ⁱ

2. Demographic Overview

Demographic Overview of Young Christian Sample	
Education Level	
High School or Below	3%
College	77%
Graduate Degree	18%
Marital Status	
Single	73%
Married	26%
Party ID	
Democrat	26%
Independent	11%
GOP	54%
Something Else	9%
Average Age (35 Was Survey Max)	24 Years Old

Gender	
Male	63%
Female	37%
Church Attendance	
Once a Week or More	92%
Twice a Month or Less	8%
Listen to Christian Radio Sometimes/Frequently	
	83%
Most Trusted News Source?	
“Something Else” or Don’t Know	36%
Fox News	18%
CNN	15%
The Daily Show	11%

3. Young Christians and Institutional Trust

One common way to measure attitudes towards political institutions is to ask participants to rate their level of confidence in those institutions. Young Christians in our sample show strong confidence in both churches and faith-based non-profits, with those non-profit organizations ranking highest in the entire survey. After these religious organizations, these young Christians had most confidence in the police, humanitarian organizations, colleges/universities, and public health organizations. It is interesting to note the bottom of the spectrum as well. The media and political parties check in lowest, with only 26/100 average confidence. This suggests that these young Christians are going to be skeptical of both the upcoming elections and the media coverage of them.

Young Christians and Confidence in Political/Social Institutions		
Institution	Mean Confidence Score (From 100)	World Values Survey Results for All Young Americans (% Under-30 years old with Some/A Lot of Confidence)
Churches	72	61
The Media	26	26
The Police	64	65
The Courts	52	57
The Government	38	38
Political Parties	26	18

Congress	30	21
Banks	42	28
Environmental Organizations	45	56
Women's Organizations	42	48
Humanitarian Organizations	64	NA
Faith-Based Non-Profits	77	NA
Public Health Organizations	54	NA
Colleges and Universities	55	NA

4. Young Christians and Church-State Relations

What do young Christians think about the appropriate relationship between church and state? How dedicated are they to values of pluralism that are associated with the millennial generation more broadly?

Results indicate that our sample of young Christians strongly favors protection for religious minorities, a pluralistic view of American identity, and limiting the role of partisan politics in the pulpit. A plurality, although below 50%, also wants to maintain a strict separation of church and state. At the same time, a comfortable majority of 61% thinks that religious non-profits should be eligible for governmental funding. These results show that worries of rising Christian theocracy find little support among young Christians in our sample. At the same time, these Christians clearly envision a role for religion in collaborating with state institutions.

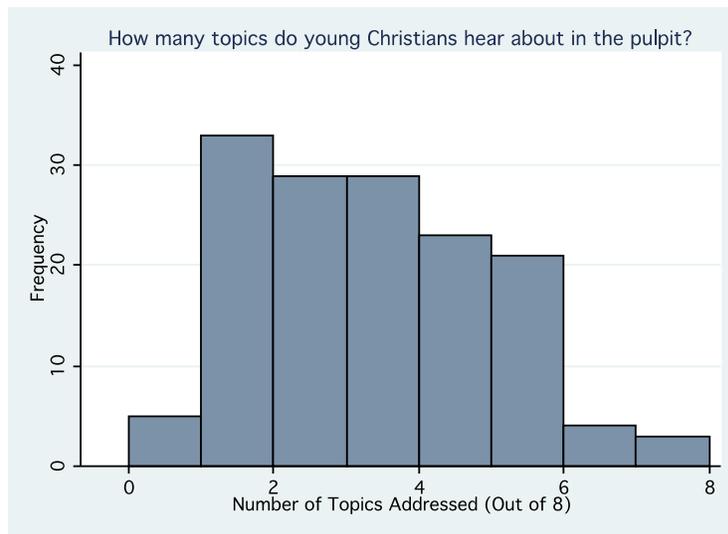
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
We must maintain a strict separation of church and state.	19%	28%	23%	19%	11%
America was founded on the idea of religious freedom for everyone, including religious groups that are unpopular.	62%	30%	2%	3%	1%

Faith-Based Non-Profits should be eligible to receive federal funding.	25%	36%	19%	8%	7%
Christian leaders should endorse political candidates in elections.	14%	15%	26%	20%	21%
America is a Christian nation.	13%	15%	19%	29%	23%

Another way to examine the mixing of church and state is to see how frequently young Christians hear about various political and social topics from clergy in their churches. Here again, the results show that explicitly partisan politics in pulpits is fairly rare. But other topics related to public life come up regularly, with poverty leading the way, alongside abortion and same-sex marriage. Smaller, but still significant, blocs of young Christians have heard about the environment or economic inequality in the past year.

Young Christians and Political Speech in the Pulpit	
Topic	Percentage Heard in Pulpit in Last Year
Supporting or Opposing a Particular Candidate or Party	5%
Budget Deficits	18%
Size of Government	10%
Abortion	55%
Poverty	73%
Protecting the Environment	27%
Same-Sex Marriage/Homosexuality	61%
Economic Inequality	37%

If we total up how many of these topics each young Christian reported hearing about within the past year, we get a sense of just how many different issues are arising in the same churches. While the most common category was just one issue, there is a wide spectrum within the contemporary Christian community. In 50% of churches, clergy talked about 3-5 of the social topics in the past year.



5. Young Christians and Civic Participation

Young Christians are clearly interested in and hearing about social issues. But to what extent are they actively participating in civic life? Some have worried that civic participation among the young is falling in recent years, while others hope that new forms of communication, like online organizing, open new pathways for young Christian citizenship. To examine this topic, we asked two sets of questions: How do young Christians participate? How important do they think different forms of participation should be for Christians?

The questions regarding participation show *wide* variation between types of civic activism. The two online strategies, signing petitions (71%) and using social media (77%) were widely reported. This may be typical for young people of any sort. What is less usual is the 89% who said they pray for elected officials. A fairly substantial portion (40%) also reported writing a letter or email to Congress; the use of email for this kind of lobbying is another way that younger Christians appear to bring technology into their civic engagement.

On more traditional measures, our sample showed lower, though still substantial, engagement. Just under one in four had joined demonstrations (21%) or acts of protest (23%) or “buy-cotts” (21%). Far fewer (2%) had participated in a strike.

Young Christians and Civic Participation		
Behavior	Percentage Engaged in Behavior in Last Year	Percentage who have done the activity among Under-30s in U.S. from 2006 World Values Survey
Signed an Online Petition	71%	51%
Attended a Peaceful Demonstration	21%	9%
Joined a Strike	2%	NA
Participated in Any Act of Protest	23%	NA
Prayed for Elected Officials	89%	NA
Used Social Media, like Facebook or Twitter, to advocate for a cause you care about	77%	NA
Wrote a Letter/Email to Congress	40%	NA
Participated in a “Buy-cott”	21%	NA

When asked what behaviors they see as important for Christians, the young Christians in our sample again showed broad support for civic engagement. Huge majorities prioritized personal participation through voting and volunteering at charities. A substantial majority placed importance on advocating for just laws. Only talking about politics with friends showed a weaker support base, although even here a majority favored the behavior. These results provide evidence that civic engagement is high among young Christians, and that these young adults see this engagement as a religious responsibility.

It is important for Christians to...	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Vote	60%	28%	10%	0%	2%
Volunteer for Charities	65%	26%	7%	0%	2%

Advocate for Better Laws	47%	37%	13%	0%	2%
Talk to Friends about Politics	22%	35%	23%	13%	5%

6. Young Christians and Political Priorities

If young Christians are involved in a range of civic participation, what are the issues that matter most to them? And how do they relate to the two major parties that dominate American politics? We already know that political parties were among the least trusted social institutions from Section 2. Asking young Christians to rank their political priorities going into the 2012 election season shows that in some ways they look a lot like other Americans: the economy matters. More than 60% listed economic issues, like jobs and the budget, as one of the two most important issues in deciding their 2012 vote. The other striking finding is the continuing importance of social issues to a large portion of the young Christian community we sampled. Four in 10 ranked social issues in the top two of their overall rankings, a share that is *far* greater than those who prioritize national security issues. This finding suggests that while the culture war institutions of the Religious Right may be fading, the social issues that drove those wars are alive and still matter to young Christians.

Young Christians and Political Priorities			
Topic	Percentage Who Rank Issue in Top 2	Average Ranking	Percentage who Rank Issue as Top in Akron University 2011 Ohio White Evangelical Survey
Economic issues such as jobs and gas prices	61%	2.4	44%
Budget issues such as gov't spending, taxes and the deficit	61%	2.4	28%
National security issues such as the War in Afghanistan and the war on terror	14%	4.4	8%
Social issues such as abortion and same-sex marriage	42%	3.3	16%

Immigration	8%	4.8	NA
The Environment	6%	5.0	NA
Other	7%	5.9	3%

With these political priorities in mind, how comfortable do young Christians in our sample feel with the choices offered by the two major American political parties? We assessed this in two ways. First, we asked how often young Christians found a conflict between their faith and their preferred political party. Second, we asked which political party more closely represented the subject’s views on a range of issues.

Results show that a large majority of young Christians see a conflict between their faith and the positions taken by their usually preferred political party. Nearly 3 in 4 report such a conflict frequently or sometimes, while only 7% never experience such a conflict. It is interesting to break down this result by partisanship. Democrats in our sample were somewhat more likely to report conflict, while Republicans were more likely to report never seeing a conflict. While it is difficult to know what particular issues drove this response, one would expect that the Democratic Party’s strong stance in favor of abortion rights has contributed.

Do your faith convictions ever conflict with positions taken by the party you usually support?				
	Frequently	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Total	23%	49%	18%	7%
Democrats	29%	54%	17%	0%
Republicans	17%	48%	24%	10%

In terms of particular policy issues, there is significant variation as to whether the young Christians in this sample preferred Democrats or Republicans. Republicans scored strongest on abortion, with a whopping 65-point advantage over Democrats on this touchstone culture war issue. Interestingly, on LGBT rights, the other issue that has played such an important role in the culture wars over the years, our sample is much more closely divided, with a statistically insignificant 5-point advantage for Republicans. Democrats fare best on issues of poverty at both the domestic (12-point advantage) and international (18-point advantage) levels, as well as protecting the environment (21-point advantage) and treatment of Muslim Americans (20-point advantage). It is also worth noting that on all issues,

particularly those related to foreign policy, there is broad dissatisfaction among young Christians with both political parties.

Young Christians and Partisan Issue Proximity			
Topic	Democrats	Republicans	Neither
Overall Party Identification	26%	54%	20%
Abortion	10%	75%	14%
Domestic Poverty	41%	29%	26%
International Poverty	41%	23%	25%
The Environment	50%	29%	17%
Rights for LGBT People	35%	40%	20%
Military Spending	21%	43%	30%
War in Afghanistan	23%	39%	32%
Immigration	38%	38%	16%
Treatment of Muslims in America	40%	20%	23%
<i>May not total to 100% due to those with no opinion.</i>			

ⁱ Within this population, we conducted 161 surveys, although the precise number of responses to each question varied slightly based on non-response. The population that met our screening standards, and thus could have been targeted by our Facebook ads, consisted of 600,000 users. This sized population and sample yields a margin of error of roughly 8%.