

# *MILLENNIAL PERSPECTIVES ON POVERTY AND OPPORTUNITY*



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## Executive Summary

### Introduction

*Shared Justice*, an online journal for young adults and an initiative of the [Center for Public Justice](#), commissioned a survey on Millennial (18-29) attitudes and opinions towards poverty and opportunity in America and perceptions of the success of both government and non-profit programs that assist people in getting out of poverty. The major findings are:

### **Evangelical Millennials are Less Convinced There is a Lack of Opportunity in America Today**

Evangelicals<sup>1</sup> are less convinced that opportunity is declining in America than Millennials as a whole. Only 13% of Evangelicals thought it was “*harder today*” for a child who grows up poor to get out of poverty as an adult, compared to 44% of all Millennials.

Evangelical Millennials have a similar view to all Millennials on whether it is easier today (20% and 17% respectively) – but they are far more likely to see the opportunity for a child who grows up in poverty to get out of it as an adult as about the same as ten years ago. 67% of Evangelicals responded that it was “*about the same as ten years ago*” compared to 39% of all Millennials.

### **The Importance of Marriage Before Children is Least Essential in the Pathway Out of Poverty, Millennials Say**

Research from the Brookings Institution shows that children in families where a parent graduated from high school, works full time, and gets married before having children have a 98% chance of getting out of poverty.<sup>2</sup> This established opportunity sequence is a clear pathway out of poverty. As such, *Shared Justice* asked Millennials how essential they thought each of these three activities was to getting out of poverty.

Overall, 96% of Millennials said working full-time was “*essential*” or “*somewhat essential*” and 95% said the same about graduating high school. Regarding getting married before having children though, 76% indicated it was “*essential*” or “*somewhat essential*.” However, of those who just said “*essential*,” overwhelming majorities of all Millennials said working full time (77%) and graduating high school (80%) were “*essential*,” but only 46% of all Millennials said the same about marriage before children.

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<sup>1</sup> Please see Appendix A for a definition of “Evangelical” used throughout this report.

<sup>2</sup> Haskins, R & Sawhill, I; *Creating an Opportunity Society*, Brookings Institution Press, Washington DC, p.70.

This lower percentage of Millennials who see marriage before children as essential, in light of the research, suggests this could be a barrier to more children getting out of poverty as adults.

65% of Evangelicals though, responded that not having children before marriage was “*essential*,” compared to 47% of all Millennials. This particular group, and more generally the people who attend church regularly, place the highest importance on this social norm.

Evangelicals can play a significant role in highlighting the importance of marriage before having children as a key component of the success sequence, allowing more people to get out of poverty.

### **Non-Profit Anti-Poverty Programs Enjoy Stronger Support Overall and Are Supported on a Broader Bipartisan Basis than Government Anti-Poverty Programs**

Surveyed during the 2013 federal government shutdown, only 38% of Millennials viewed government anti-poverty programs as either “*very successful*” or “*somewhat successful*.” The number who viewed non-profit programs as either “*very successful*” or “*somewhat successful*” was 56%.

Attitudes toward government anti-poverty programs were strongly tied to political perceptions, with both self-identified Republicans and conservatives more likely to say government programs were “*not at all successful*” and both self-identified Democrats and liberals far less likely to say programs were “*not at all successful*.”

Non-profit programs, though, enjoyed strong bipartisan support, with similar percentages of Republicans, Democrats, liberals and conservatives seeing them as both “*very successful*” and “*somewhat successful*.” Further, Evangelicals and college graduates were the strongest supporters of non-profit programs.

In light of these findings it seems efforts to engage a broad array of Millennials in anti-poverty programs may have greater success if these programs are developed by non-profits rather than by government.

### **Conclusion**

Evangelicals are not persuaded of declining opportunity in America. Yet, because of their views on the importance of marriage before children and its importance to the success sequence, they can play a key role in poverty alleviation.

These efforts are likely to be more successful if all Millennials, and particularly Evangelicals, are engaged in the work of a broad array of institutions, including churches and both religiously based and non-religious non-profits. Additionally, government policy must ensure these diverse institutions can develop such programs, including on a religious basis, so everyone can play a part in pursuing justice for all.

## Question 1 – Perspectives on Poverty & Opportunity

### Introduction

*“The challenge is that economic inequality is more morally justifiable when there is also opportunity, what economists would call social economic mobility, so that people who start off near the bottom can make progress over their lives and go up the ladder of opportunity. And the disturbing thing is that that seems to be increasingly stalled in American life.*

*So you have inequality but you also have stalled mobility. And when you have both of those things it’s particularly disturbing from a moral perspective. Because in the absence of mobility, inequality is a caste system.”*

- Washington Post columnist Michael Gerson in an interview with *Shared Justice*

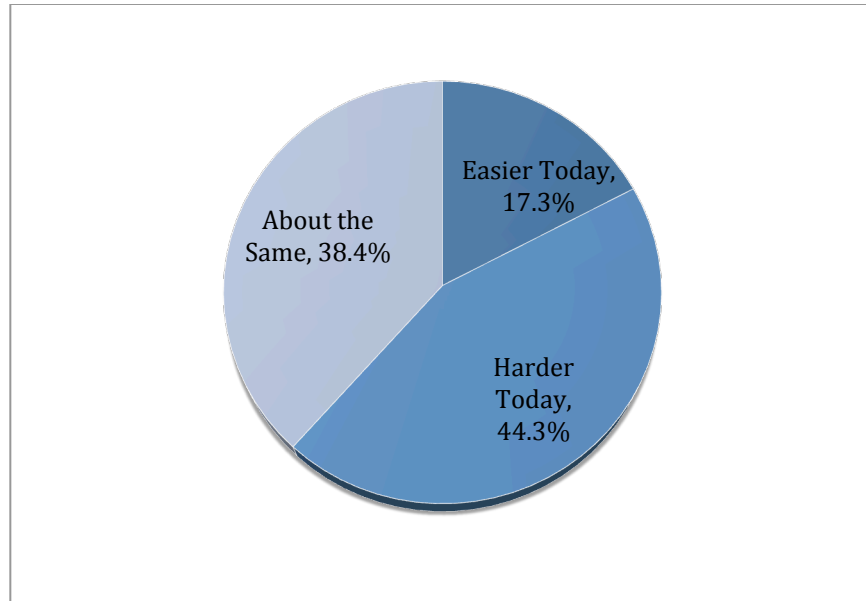
### Topline Findings

- **Nearly a majority** (44%) of all Millennials think it is “*harder today*” for a child who grows up poor to get out of poverty as an adult. 38% said it was “*easier today*” and 17% said it was “*about the same as ten years ago*.”
- This attitude varied by region, with Millennials in the South (10%) and the Northeast (11%) **least likely** to say it was “*easier today*” and those in the Mid West **most likely** (24%) to say it was “*easier today*.”
- Evangelicals were **less likely** (13%) to think it was “*harder today*” and **more likely** (67%) to see a child’s chances of getting out of poverty as an adult as “*about the same as ten years ago*.”
- Millennials who are married were **less likely** (35%) to say it was “*harder today*” and those who were unmarried were **more likely** (47%) to say it was “*harder today*.”
- Liberals were **more likely** (51%) to say it was “*harder today*” and conservatives were **less likely** (37%) to say it was “*harder today*.” There was no statistically significant difference between Republicans and Democrats on this question.

## Survey Question

*“Compared with ten years ago, do you think it easier today or harder today for a child who grows up poor to get out of poverty as an adult? Or do you think it is about the same?”*

### All Millennials



**Table 1.1 – Geographic Differences**

		Total	North East	South	Mid West	West
<b>Easier Today</b>		<b>17.3%</b>	11.1% ▼	9.8% ▼	23.7% ▲	20.1%
<b>Harder Today</b>		<b>44.3%</b>	52.2% ▲	47.6%	38.0% ▼	43.9%
<b>About the Same</b>		<b>38.4%</b>	36.7%	42.6%	38.4%	36.0%

[“▼▲” denotes statistically significant differences at the 95% confidence interval.]

**Table 1.2 – Religious Differences<sup>3</sup>**

		Total	Evangelicals	NEBACS	Notional	Other Faiths	Atheists
<b>Easier Today</b>		<b>17.3%</b>	19.8%	21.6%	15.7%	31.0% ▲	7.5% ▼
<b>Harder Today</b>		<b>44.3%</b>	13.4% ▼	42.8%	47.1%	41.0%	51.4% ▼
<b>About the Same</b>		<b>38.4%</b>	66.8% ▲	35.6%	37.3%	28.0%	41.1%

[“▼▲” denotes statistically significant differences at the 95% confidence interval.]

<sup>3</sup> Please see Appendix A for the explanations of the different religious groups.

**Table 1.3 – Difference by Marital Status**

		<b>Total</b>	<b>Married</b>	<b>Unmarried</b>
<b>Easier Today</b>		<b>17.3%</b>	22.4%	16.0%
<b>Harder Today</b>		<b>44.3%</b>	34.8% ▼	46.8% ▲
<b>About the Same</b>		<b>38.4%</b>	42.8%	37.2%

["▼▲" denotes statistically significant differences at the 95% confidence interval.]

**Table 1.4 – Political Differences**

		<b>Total</b>	<b>Liberal</b>	<b>Conservative</b>	<b>Moderate</b>	<b>Republican</b>	<b>Democrat</b>
<b>Easier Today</b>		<b>17.3%</b>	13.5%	20.8%	17.4%	19.5%	16.4%
<b>Harder Today</b>		<b>44.3%</b>	51.3% ▲	36.8% ▼	44.4%	40.5%	46.6%
<b>About the Same</b>		<b>38.4%</b>	35.2%	42.4%	38.2%	39.9%	37.1%

["▼▲" denotes statistically significant differences at the 95% confidence interval.]

## Question 2 – Perceptions of the Success Sequence

### Introduction

*“You’ve got very poor education systems, disintegrating family structures across the working class – not just related to minorities – and you have disorganized, atomized communities that can’t confront problems. And when you have those three things you have serious challenges.”*

- Washington Post columnist Michael Gerson in an interview with *Shared Justice*

### Topline Findings

- The **vast majority** of all Millennials saw working full-time (96%) and graduating high school (95%) as “*essential*” or “*somewhat essential*” to getting out of poverty, and a **large majority** (76%) saw getting married before having children as “*essential*” or “*somewhat essential*.”
- However, the number who said getting married before having children was “*essential*” was only 46%, compared to 77% for working full-time and 80% for graduating high school.
- Catholics were **most likely** (87%) of all Millennials to say working full-time was “*essential*.”
- Those under 25 were **more likely** (50%) to say it was “*essential*” to get married before having children than those over 25 (40%).
- Evangelicals were **most likely** (65%) to say marriage before kids was “*essential*” and atheists were **least likely** (37%) to say it was “*essential*.”



## Survey Question

*“Looking at the list below, please indicate which of the following activities you consider to be essential for getting out of poverty ...”*

<b>Working a Full-time Job</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Essential (Total)</b>	<b>95.5%</b>
Essential	76.9%
Somewhat Essential	18.6%
<b>Not Essential (Total)</b>	<b>4.5%</b>
Not Too Essential	2.6%
Not At All Essential	1.9%

## Gender & Religious<sup>4</sup> Differences for “Working a Full-Time Job”

	<b>Total</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Other Faiths</b>	<b>Atheist</b>	<b>Catholic</b>
<b>Essential</b>	76.9%	77.6%	76.2%	65% ▼	71.7%	87.4% ▲
<b>Somewhat Essential</b>	18.6%	19.6%	17.6%	30.9% ▲	20.6%	12.6%
<b>Not Too Essential</b>	2.6%	2.3%	2.9%	2%	2.2%	0%
<b>Not At All Essential</b>	1.9%	0.5%	3.2% ▲	2.2%	5.5% ▲	0%

[“▼▲” denotes statistically significant differences at the 95% confidence interval.]

<b>Graduating from High School</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Essential (Total)</b>	<b>94.9%</b>
Essential	80.2%
Somewhat Essential	14.7%
<b>Not Essential (Total)</b>	<b>5.1%</b>
Not Too Essential	2.4%
Not At All Essential	2.7%

<b>Not Having Kids Before Getting Married</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Essential (Total)</b>	<b>76.2%</b>
Essential	45.6%
Somewhat Essential	30.6%
<b>Not Essential (Total)</b>	<b>23.8%</b>
Not Too Essential	15.7%
Not At All Essential	8.1%

<sup>4</sup> Only religious differences that had statistically significant results are included in this table.



### Age & Education Differences for “Not Having Kids Before Getting Married”

	<b>Total</b>	<b>&lt;25</b>	<b>25-29</b>	<b>HS or Less</b>	<b>Some College</b>	<b>College Grad</b>
<b>Essential</b>	<b>45.6%</b>	49.8% ▲	39.9% ▼	49.7%	45.1%	38.3%
<b>Somewhat Essential</b>	<b>30.6%</b>	28.5%	33.5%	25.0% ▼	31.1%	41.0% ▲
<b>Not Too Essential</b>	<b>15.7%</b>	13.2%	19.0%	17.0%	15.9%	12.6%
<b>Not At All Essential</b>	<b>8.1%</b>	8.5%	7.6%	8.3%	7.9%	8.0%

["▼▲" denotes statistically significant differences at the 95% confidence interval.]

### Religious Differences for “Not Having Kids Before Getting Married”

	<b>Total</b>	<b>Evangelicals</b>	<b>NEBACS</b>	<b>Notional</b>	<b>Other Faiths</b>	<b>Atheists</b>
<b>Essential</b>	<b>45.6%</b>	64.9% ▲	48.6%	42.6%	56.0%	37.0% ▼
<b>Somewhat Essential</b>	<b>30.6%</b>	25.6%	35.7%	32.6%	17.3%	30.2%
<b>Not Too Essential</b>	<b>15.7%</b>	9.5%	9.4%	16.8%	20.4%	19.8%
<b>Not At All Essential</b>	<b>8.1%</b>	0.0% ▼	6.2%	8.0%	6.2%	13.0% ▲

["▼▲" denotes statistically significant differences at the 95% confidence interval.]

### Political Differences for “Not Having Kids Before Getting Married”

	<b>Total</b>	<b>Republican</b>	<b>Democrat</b>	<b>Liberal</b>	<b>Conservative</b>	<b>Moderate</b>
<b>Essential</b>	<b>45.6%</b>	51.2%	40.8%	35.5% ▼	53.8% ▲	46.0%
<b>Somewhat Essential</b>	<b>30.6%</b>	33.3%	29.4%	34.1%	31.5%	27.8%
<b>Not Too Essential</b>	<b>15.7%</b>	10.8% ▼	19.2% ▲	20.9% ▲	6.8% ▼	19%
<b>Not At All Essential</b>	<b>8.1%</b>	4.8% ▼	10.6% ▲	9.5%	7.9%	7.3%

["▼▲" denotes statistically significant differences at the 95% confidence interval.]

## Question 3 – Perceptions on the Success of Government Anti-Poverty Programs

### Introduction

*“I believe that government should try to find ways, when it does things, necessary things, to work with and through civic institutions, instead of replacing and dismissing their role.”*

- Washington Post columnist Michael Gerson in an interview with *Shared Justice*

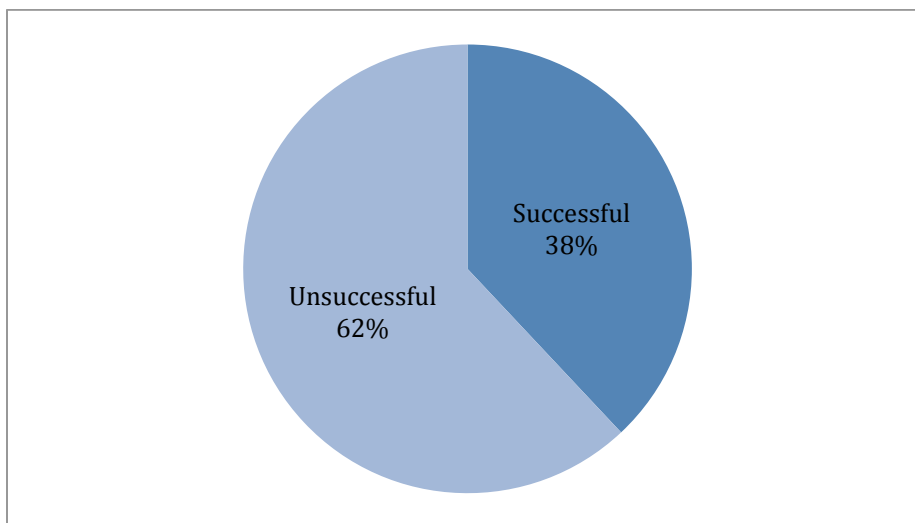
### Topline Results

- Men were **less likely** (30%) and women were **more likely** (41%) to see government programs as *“somewhat successful.”*
- College graduates (10%) were **less likely** than all Millennials (16%) to say government programs were *“not at all successful.”*
- Millennials in the South (22%) were **more likely** to say government programs were *“not at all successful”* compared to all Millennials (16%)
- Evangelicals (10%) were **far less likely** to say to say government programs were *“somewhat successful”* than all Millennials (36%).
- Political moderates (6%) were **most likely** to say government programs were *“very successful.”*
- Republicans (24%) and conservatives (28%) were **less likely** to say government programs were *“somewhat successful,”* and Democrats (44%) and liberals (49%) were **more likely**.
- Republicans (23%) and conservatives (23%) were **more likely** to say government programs were *“not at all successful,”* and Democrats (12%) were **less likely**.

## Survey Question

*“Do you think government programs that try to help people get out of poverty are ...”*

### All Millennials



Government Programs	Total
<b>Successful</b>	<b>38%</b>
Very Successful	2.5%
Somewhat Successful	35.5%
<b>Unsuccessful</b>	<b>62%</b>
Not Too Successful	45.9%
Not At All Successful	16.1%

### Gender & Income Differences for Government Programs

	Total	Male	Female	< \$40k	\$40k to \$60k	> \$60k
<b>Very Successful</b>	<b>2.5%</b>	3.7%	1.4%	3.3%	0.0%	2.9%
<b>Somewhat Successful</b>	<b>35.5%</b>	30.3% ▼	40.8% ▲	42.9%	31.7%	31.3%
<b>Not Too Successful</b>	<b>45.9%</b>	47.0%	44.7%	35.6% ▼	49.4%	52.3% ▲
<b>Not At All Successful</b>	<b>16.1%</b>	19.0%	13.1%	18.2%	18.9%	13.4% ▼

[“▼▲” denotes statistically significant differences at the 95% confidence interval.]

### Religious Differences for Government Programs

		<b>Total</b>	<b>Evangelicals</b>	<b>NEBACS</b>	<b>Notional</b>	<b>Other Faiths</b>	<b>Atheists</b>
<b>Very Successful</b>		<b>2.5%</b>	6.5%	1.7%	3.7%	0.7%	1.8% ▼
<b>Somewhat Successful</b>		<b>35.5%</b>	10.2% ▼	38.8%	29.1% ▼	45.4%	41.4%
<b>Not Too Successful</b>		<b>45.9%</b>	61.0%	42.4%	49.6%	45.0%	42.0%
<b>Not At All Successful</b>		<b>16.1%</b>	22.3%	17.0%	17.5%	8.9%	14.9% ▲

["▼▲" denotes statistically significant differences at the 95% confidence interval.]

### Political Differences in Success of Government Programs

		<b>Total</b>	<b>Republican</b>	<b>Democrat</b>	<b>Liberal</b>	<b>Conservative</b>	<b>Moderate</b>
<b>Very Successful</b>		<b>2.5%</b>	2.1%	2.8%	1.4%	0.3%	5.5% ▲
<b>Somewhat Successful</b>		<b>35.5%</b>	24.3% ▼	43.7% ▲	48.6%▲	27.6% ▼	31.3%
<b>Not Too Successful</b>		<b>45.9%</b>	50.6%	42.0%	37.8%	48.9%	49.7%
<b>Not At All Successful</b>		<b>16.1%</b>	23.0% ▲	11.5% ▼	12.2% ▼	23.1% ▲	13.5%

["▼▲" denotes statistically significant differences at the 95% confidence interval.]

## Question 4 – Perceptions on the Success of Non-Profit Anti-Poverty Programs

### Introduction

*“Partnerships between government and civic institutions like churches and charities that meet human needs and try to create social capital are promising efforts.”*

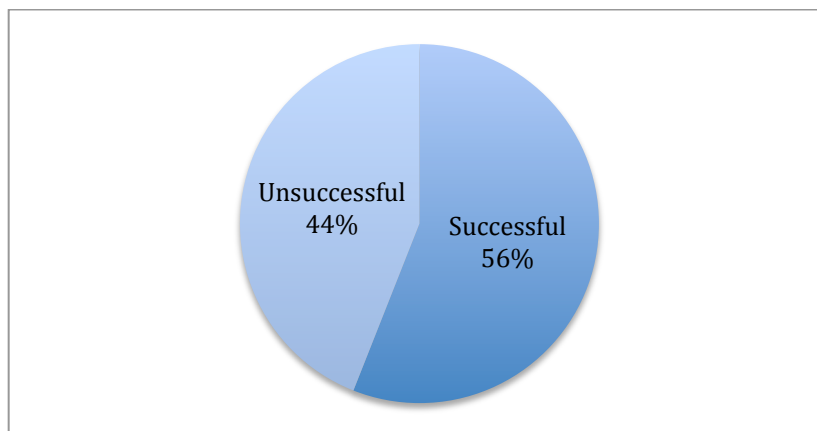
- *Washington Post* columnist Michael Gerson in an interview with *Shared Justice*

### Topline Findings

- Evangelicals (15%), practicing Christians (11%) and born-again Christians (9%) (please see Appendix A for the definition of these groups) were **more likely** to say non-profit programs were “*very successful*” compared to all young adults.
- Catholics were **less likely** (1%) to say non-profit programs were “*not at all successful*.”
- College graduates (61%) were **more likely** to say non-profit programs were “*somewhat successful*” and those who had completed high school or less (9%) were **less likely** to say non-profit programs were “*not at all successful*.”
- There were no statistical differences in the perceptions of Republicans, Democrats, liberals, conservatives, and moderates when it came to the success of non-profit programs.

## Survey Question

*“Do you think non-profit programs which try to help people get out of poverty are:”*



Non-Profit Programs	Total
<b>Successful</b>	<b>56.1%</b>
Very Successful	5.3%
Somewhat Successful	50.8%
<b>Unsuccessful</b>	<b>43.8%</b>
Not Too Successful	37.5%
Not At All Successful	6.3%

## Religion<sup>5</sup> & Education Differences for Success of Non-Profit Programs

	Total	Evangelical	HS or Less	Some College	College Grad
<b>Very Successful</b>	<b>2.5%</b>	14.7% ▲	6.5%	5.4%	2.8%
<b>Somewhat Successful</b>	<b>35.5%</b>	40.3%	45.6%	51.1%	60.5% ▲
<b>Not Too Successful</b>	<b>45.9%</b>	31.9%	38.9%	38.6%	33.0%
<b>Not At All Successful</b>	<b>16.1%</b>	13.1%	9.0% ▼	4.9%	3.7%

[“▼▲” denotes statistically significant differences at the 95% confidence interval.]

<sup>5</sup> Only religious differences that had statistically significant results are included in this table.

## Methodology

The data contained in this report originated through a research study conducted by the Barna Group of Ventura, California. The questions were commissioned by the Center for Public Justice. The Millennial Poll included 843 online surveys among a representative sample of young adults, ages 18 to 29, within the continental U.S. The survey was conducted from October 10-15, 2013. The sampling error for the Millennial Poll is +/-3.4 percentage points, at the 95% confidence level. The completion rate in the Millennial Poll was 38.1%.

This study used an online research panel called KnowledgePanel<sup>®</sup> based on probability sampling that covers both the online and offline populations in the U.S. The panel members are randomly recruited by telephone and by self-administered mail and web surveys. Households are provided with access to the Internet and hardware if needed.

Unlike other Internet research that covers only individuals with Internet access who volunteer for research, this process uses a dual sampling frame that includes both listed and unlisted phone numbers, telephone and non-telephone households, and cell-phone-only households. The panel is not limited to current Web users or computer owners. All potential panelists are randomly selected to join the KnowledgePanel; unselected volunteers are not able to join.

Email reminders were sent out to non-responders on day three of the fielding period. In every survey there are a variety of ways in which the accuracy of the data may be affected. The response rate is one such potential cause of error in measurement: the lower the response, the less representative the respondents surveyed may be of the population from which they were drawn, thereby reducing the accuracy of the results. Other sources of error include question-design bias, question-order bias, sampling error and respondent deception. Many of these types of errors cannot be accurately estimated.



## Appendix A

### Evangelicals

Evangelicals meet the born again criteria (described below) plus seven other criteria. These are: defined as:

- saying their faith is very important in their life today;
- believing they have a personal responsibility to share their religious beliefs about Christ with non-Christians;
- believing that Satan exists;
- believing that eternal salvation is possible only through grace, not works;
- believing that Jesus Christ lived a sinless life on earth;
- believing that the Bible is accurate in all that it teaches; and
- describing God as the all-knowing, all-powerful, perfect deity who created the universe and still rules it today.

Being classified as an Evangelical is not dependent upon church attendance or the denominational affiliation of the church attended. Respondents were not asked to describe themselves as “Evangelical.”

### Non-Evangelical Born Again Christian (NEBAC)

These are people who said they have made “a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important in their life today” and who also indicated they believe that “when they die they will go to Heaven because they had confessed their sins and had accepted Jesus Christ as their savior.” They do not meet all of the seven other criteria to be classified as an evangelical Christian.

Respondents were not asked to describe themselves as “born again.” Being classified as “born again” is not dependent upon church or denominational affiliation or involvement.

### Practicing Christian

Self-identify as Christian and say their religious faith is very important in their life and who attended a religious service or gathering in the past month.

### Notional Christian

Respondents who identify with the term “Christian,” but do not meet the born again criteria.

### Other Faith

Self-identify as a faith other than Christianity.

### No Faith

Self-identify as atheist, agnostic, or no faith.