

FOIA MARKER

**This is not a textual record. This is used as an
administrative marker by the William J. Clinton
Presidential Library Staff.**

Collection/Record Group: Clinton Presidential Records

Subgroup/Office of Origin: Public Liaison

Series/Staff Member: Alexis Herman/Ruby Moy

Subseries:

OA/ID Number: 5073

FolderID:

Folder Title:

Peter Hart Research Report

Stack:

S

Row:

29

Section:

5

Shelf:

11

Position:

1

September 19, 1994

SEP 19 1994

TO: Distribution List

FROM: Melanne Verveer

Attached is a Peter Hart Research report commissioned by People for the American Way on American attitudes toward values, religion and politics and the Religious Right Movement.

List:

Leon Panetta
Harold Ickes
Phil Lader
George Stephanopoulos
Bill Galston
✓ Alexis Herman
Joel Klein
Don Baer

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

This report presents the key findings of an in-depth survey conducted by Peter D. Hart Research Associates on behalf of People For the American Way. The findings are based on telephone interviews with a representative national sample of 1,002 registered voters. The statistical margin of error associated with a sample of this size at the 95% confidence level is $\pm 3\%$.

OVERVIEW

There is a strong feeling in America today that many of the nation's problems are the product of a decline in moral values. A substantial majority of Americans believe that the declining role of religion in our society is a serious problem for the country today, and three in four voters say they would be more likely to support a candidate who puts top priority on "returning to traditional moral values."

While much of the public shares a common view about the need to deal with the problem of values in America, voters are not of a single mind about which values in particular most need to be strengthened. And when the issue turns from the moral state of the nation to the question of what role government should play in promoting moral values, attitudes become much more complicated and divided. In dealing with this question, the public expresses strong concerns about the dangers of going too far in mixing religion and politics, and about allowing some people to use government to impose their own religious viewpoint on others.

These concerns are evident in voters' reactions to the Religious Right political movement, as represented by Pat Robertson and others. Despite the broad appeal of

candidates who stress traditional values, only 24% of the public say they would be more likely to support a candidate who was closely associated with right-wing religious groups and supported the positions of the Religious Right, while a plurality of 41% say they would be less likely to support such a candidate. In volunteered responses, voters who feel uncomfortable with the Religious Right most often say this movement would go too far in eroding the legitimate separation of church and state; additionally, these voters describe the Religious Right as being closed-minded and intolerant, and as wanting to impose its moral views on everyone else.

Even though many Americans might agree with the Religious Right's point of departure concerning the need to strengthen moral values, large majorities disagree with the movement's conclusions on specific issues, such as its agenda on making abortions illegal in most cases; teaching abstinence only in the public schools, to the exclusion of birth control and methods of disease prevention; and diverting funds from the public schools to help parents send their children to private or religious schools.

In the end, what Americans seem to want are leaders who understand the need for strong moral values in our society, but who also understand the dangers of using government and politics to impose moral and religious viewpoints on others. And despite the very strong concerns about morality that Americans express today, they do not want the political process to become a battlefield in a large-scale cultural and religious war. What Americans want now is what they have wanted in the past: mainstream leaders who provide common-sense solutions to the nation's pressing problems.

A CRISIS OF VALUES

Results from this survey underline the degree to which Americans are concerned by what they view as a crisis of values in our society. Nearly two-thirds of all registered voters, for example, describe "the declining role of religion in our society" as a very or fairly serious problem for the country today. By 74% to 7%, voters say they would be more rather than less inclined to support a political candidate who "put top priority on returning to traditional moral values." And by 51% to 34%, Americans say that the most serious problems in our society today stem mainly from a decline in moral values, rather than from economic and financial pressures on the family.

While there is a broad consensus about the need to strengthen values in our society, different people mean different things when they talk about moral and social values. When asked to volunteer the specific concerns that come to mind when they think about the moral or social values they would like to see in the country, far from speaking with a single voice, voters identify a variety of issues. Twenty-four percent mention the importance of families staying together and another 9% stress the importance of parents paying more attention to their children. Additionally, 18% mention the need for people to be more tolerant and respectful of others; 17% discuss personal standards such as integrity, discipline, and accountability; 14% mention the need for more religion; and 8% stress sexual abstinence.

We also asked voters to say which one of three value sets they consider to be the most important, with the following results:

	<u>All Voters</u> %
What we need to do in America today is encourage a return to our traditional moral values, like religion and the traditional family	32
What we need to do in America today is encourage stronger personal values, like individual responsibility and hard work	29
What we need to do in America today is encourage stronger community values, like contributing to the good of the community and respect for others	18
All equally (VOL)	20

Liberal and moderate white voters, along with voters in the Northeast, are most likely to stress personal values, while conservative whites and Southerners are most likely to stress traditional moral values.

THE PUBLIC REJECTS A "MORAL CRUSADE"

As concerned as they are about the moral climate in the country today, Americans also are concerned about the implications of injecting a moral crusade into politics and government.

When asked in very general terms to volunteer their feelings about the role religion should play in politics today, 40% respond with a positive answer, but 57% volunteer some concern or fear about mixing religion with politics and eroding the separation between church and state.

In answer to another question, a majority of 53% describe "people trying to use government to impose their own religious viewpoints on others" as a very or fairly serious problem for the country today.

While Americans hunger for strong moral values in our society, they also are clear about maintaining appropriate boundaries between religion on the one hand and government and politics on the other. Fully 80% of the public agree that "people in government should not let their private religious views be the most important consideration in public policy decisions." An even larger majority (89%) say political leaders should not question the religious faith of people they disagree with.

The public's ability to draw clear lines with regard to government's involvement in religious matters is most vividly displayed on the issue of school prayer. As other polls have shown, Americans generally are sympathetic to the notion of permitting prayer in public schools. By 53% to 22%, for example, voters say they would be more inclined to support a candidate who favored laws to allow organized classroom prayer in the public schools.

Public opinion on this matter changes dramatically, however, if the consequence of this sort of organized prayer is having school board officials or school administrators involved in selecting or approving the prayers to be used. Under these circumstances, even those who initially favor school prayer change their view and say by a margin of 52% to 35% that they would be opposed to it. (Among all voters, 22% would favor prayer in this case and 33% would oppose it.)

SKEPTICISM TOWARD THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT

Americans do not currently perceive the Religious Right to be a powerful political force in the country. Even so, a plurality of voters say they would have a negative reaction to a political candidate who is associated with the Religious Right.

Only 28% of the public say that "the increasing influence of conservative religious groups in the political process" is a serious problem for the country today. Just one in three voters voice concern about the growing influence of the Religious Right or radical right-wing groups within the Republican Party.

The best organized group within the Religious Right, the Christian Coalition, is unknown to the large majority of Americans, with nearly two thirds of the public saying they have not heard much about it.

Pat Robertson is somewhat better known to the public, with 72% saying they are familiar with who he is. When those who say they have heard of him are asked to volunteer their impressions of Pat Robertson, 33% express favorable impressions and 42% offer unfavorable ones.

It is interesting to note that those who are familiar with Pat Robertson say, by 50% to 26%, that it is legitimate to describe him as being "a leader of the Religious Right political movement." These same voters, however, say by 48% to 25% that it would be unfair to describe Pat Robertson as a "leader of the Radical Right political movement."

As for the Religious Right itself, the balance of public opinion is clearly more negative than positive, though many voters treat the movement as being irrelevant one way or the other. Of voters with a definite opinion either way, as opposed to those who

either say it would not make much difference or are not sure how they feel, 24% say they would be more likely to favor a candidate who was closely associated with right-wing religious groups and who supported the positions of the Religious Right, and 41% say these kinds of affiliations would make them feel less favorable toward a candidate.

In volunteered responses, the most frequent positive comments about a candidate of the Religious Right are that he or she would be a person of good morals and values, mentioned by 13% of voters. However, 21% of Americans say they would be concerned that a candidate of the Religious Right would go too far in eroding the proper separation between church and state, and another 13% say that Religious Right candidates would be too intolerant of other points of view or too prone to want to impose their values on everyone else.

The biggest gulf between the Religious Right and the mainstream of American public opinion, however, arises when questioning leaves the area of labels and generalities, and turns to specific issues. Three-fifths of all registered voters say, for example, that they would be more inclined to support a candidate who believes the choice on abortion should be left up to the woman, with few legal restrictions; 65% of Americans say they would have serious concerns about the Religious Right's support for making nearly all abortions illegal.

Similarly, 71% of all registered voters are favorable toward a candidate who supports comprehensive sex education that starts with abstinence, but also includes information on birth control and disease prevention; 67% of all registered voters say that the Religious Right's opposition to teaching public school students about birth control

methods used to prevent diseases and pregnancy gives them serious concerns.

In a clear rejection of the Religious Right's emphasis on vouchers, the movement's flagship education proposal, Americans would prefer by a margin of 66% to 28% to see a focus on improving the public schools, rather than instituting vouchers for private and religious education.

The survey further shows that a school board candidate who takes a more progressive approach to fixing what's wrong with education is far more appealing to the public than a candidate who takes the kinds of positions that are typical of Religious Right candidates. An important element of this result is that the public wants school officials to focus first and foremost on quality public education.

Plainly, the public is uncomfortable with the Religious Right's political agenda. Candidates facing Religious Right opponents cannot afford to let them escape the extremity of their positions by talking only in broad rhetorical terms about family values and moral decline. The more the debate focuses on the specifics of what the Religious Right wants to do, the less appealing the candidates of the Religious Right will be.

PETER D. HART RESEARCH ASSOCIATES, INC.
 1724 Connecticut Avenue, NW
 Washington, DC 20009
 (202) 234-5570

Interviews: 1002 respondents
 Dates: August 1-6, 1994

FINAL

Study #4122
 People For the American Way
 August 1994

47 Male
 53 Female
 [5]

AREA		TYPE	SAMPLE POINT			FORM	DATE
[6]	[7]	[8]	[9]	[10]	[11]	[12]	August [13] [14] 1994

I'm calling from Peter D. Hart Research, a national public opinion polling firm. We are conducting a survey on public affairs and issues facing the country, and I'd really appreciate the chance to get your opinions on a few questions. **(CHECK BELOW FOR THE CATEGORY OF RESPONDENT YOU ARE SUPPOSED TO ASK FOR, THEN SAY:)** Your number was selected at random, and in this household, I am supposed to speak with the (youngest/oldest)(man/woman) age 18 or over who is at home now.

PERSON TO ASK FOR

- ___ ASK FOR YOUNGEST
 ___ ASK FOR OLDEST

(REPEAT INTRODUCTION IF RESPONDENT IS NOT THE PERSON WHO FIRST ANSWERED THE PHONE.)

1. Are you currently registered to vote at this address?

Yes, registered	100	CONTINUE	[15]
Not registered	-	TERMINATE AND DO NOT	
Not sure	-	COUNT TOWARD QUOTA	

2. I am going to read you two statements about the problems facing our society today. Please tell me which one of these statements comes closer to your own point of view. **(READ STATEMENTS SLOWLY, ALTERNATING ORDER ON EVERY OTHER INTERVIEW.)**

Statement A: The most serious problems in our society today stem mainly from a decline in moral values.

Statement B: The most serious problems in our society today stem mainly from economic and financial pressures on the family.

Statement A/problems result from decline in moral values	51	[16]
Statement B/problems result from economic and financial pressures on the family ..	34	
Some of both (VOL)	13	
Neither (VOL)	1	
Not sure	1	

3. I'm going to read a list of things that some people might consider to be problems today. For each one, please tell me how serious a problem you feel it is for the country today--very serious, fairly serious, just somewhat serious, or not that serious. If you do not feel it is a problem at all, just say so. **(READ EACH ITEM.)**

	<u>Very Serious</u>	<u>Fairly Serious</u>	<u>Just Somewhat Serious</u>	<u>Not That Serious</u>	<u>Not A Problem At All</u>	<u>Not Sure</u>	
The increasing influence of conservative religious groups in the political process	15	13	21	24	23	4	[17]
The declining role of religion in our society	44	19	18	11	6	2	[18]
People trying to use government to impose their own religious viewpoints on others	38	15	17	14	12	4	[19]
(FORM A ONLY)							
Discrimination in housing and employment based on people's sexual orientation	25	17	22	15	15	6	[20]
(FORM B ONLY)							
Intolerance and discrimination against homosexuals and lesbians	25	17	20	18	14	6	[21]
(FORM A ONLY)							
Intolerance and discrimination against deeply religious Christians	23	16	22	19	16	4	[22]
(FORM B ONLY)							
Government hostility toward religion	25	15	16	18	20	6	[23]
(FORM A ONLY)							
The growing influence of radical right-wing political groups within the Republican Party	21	13	21	17	16	12	[24]
(FORM B ONLY)							
The growing influence of the Religious Right political groups within the Republican Party	20	14	17	18	19	12	[25]

(FORM A ONLY)

4a. There has been some talk lately about the "Religious Right" political movement and its impact on American politics.

What comes to mind when you hear about the "Religious Right?"

(PROBE:) Are there any specific people, groups, or issues you think of when you hear about the "Religious Right" and its political involvement?

(PROBE:) What do you feel are some of the positive and negative aspects of the "Religious Right" and its political involvement? [26-33]

Net Positive Aspects	17%	Net Negative Aspects	39%
Moral values, focusing on moral/family values, trying to instill moral values	6	Anti-abortion, pro-life groups	8
Doing what needs to be done, have good intentions, positive influence	3	Too militant, intolerant, radical, fanatics	7
Term is wrong, not a flattering term	2	Politics and religion don't mix	7
Need prayer in schools	2	Jerry Falwell/Moral Majority	4
Bringing country back to God, aware of the fact that people need religion in their lives	2	Trying to run our lives, expect everyone to follow and adhere to their values	3
		People who have a right to their own beliefs	9
		Don't know; no response	42%

(FORM B ONLY)

4b. There has been some talk lately about the "Radical Right" political movement and its impact on American politics.

What comes to mind when you hear about the "Radical Right?"

(PROBE:) Are there any specific people, groups, or issues you think of when you hear about the "Radical Right" and its political involvement?

(PROBE:) What do you feel are some of the positive and negative aspects of the "Radical Right" and its political involvement? [34-41]

Net Positive Aspects	11%	Net Negative Aspects	37%
People with high moral values	4	Too militant, intolerant, radical, fanatics	7
Term is wrong, makes them sound worse than they are, they are not a problem, they are not radical	2	Anti-abortion, pro-life groups	6
Favor gun control	2	Rush Limbaugh	5
		Jerry Falwell	3
		Pat Robertson	3
		Don't know; no response	54%

(BOTH FORMS:)

- 5a. Are you familiar with Pat Robertson and who he is, or is he someone you have not really heard that much about? **(IF FAMILIAR WITH ROBERTSON, ASK:)** Do you have favorable, neutral, or unfavorable feelings toward Pat Robertson?

Familiar With Pat Robertson

Favorable feelings	18	[42]
Neutral feelings	25	
Unfavorable feelings	21	CONTINUE
Not sure of feelings	8	SKIP TO Q.6a
<u>Not Familiar With Pat Robertson</u>	26	
<u>Not Sure If Familiar With Pat Robertson</u>	2	

(ASK ONLY OF RESPONDENTS WHO SAY THEY ARE FAMILIAR WITH PAT ROBERTSON IN Q.5a.)

- 5b. Why do you feel that way about Pat Robertson?

(PROBE:) Are there any other favorable or unfavorable impressions you have of Pat Robertson? **[43-50]**

Net Favorable Impressions	33%	Net Unfavorable Impressions	42%
A good man, a good Christian, decent, upright, 10 God-fearing man, honest		TV evangelist taking money from people, using religion to take money from the poor, in it for the money	8
Agree with what he stands for, shares my values, thinks as I do	9	Should use different approach, too pushy, trying to force his own point of view	7
His ministry does a lot of good work, good preacher	4	He is a man of God, shouldn't be a politician	7
Straight-shooter, tells it like it is	3	Manipulative, plays on people's emotions	5
Like him, doing a good job	3	Disagree with his viewpoints	3
-----		Has good things and bad things	4
-----		Don't know; no response	22%

(ASK ONLY OF RESPONDENTS WHO SAY THEY ARE FAMILIAR WITH PAT ROBERTSON IN Q.5a.)

- 5c. **(FOR BOTH ITEMS BELOW, ASK:)** If you heard someone describing Pat Robertson as being a leader of **(READ ITEM)**, would you consider this to be a legitimate description of him, or an unfair description that doesn't really fit Pat Robertson? **(MAKE SURE TO ALTERNATE ORDER OF ITEMS ON EVERY OTHER INTERVIEW.)**

	<u>Legiti- mate</u>	<u>Unfair</u>	<u>Some of Both (VOL)</u>	<u>Not Sure</u>	
The Religious Right political movement	50	26	2	22	[51]
The Radical Right political movement	25	48	2	25	[52]

(ASK EVERYONE)

- 6a. Are you familiar with an organization called the Christian Coalition, or is that something you have not really heard that much about? (IF FAMILIAR WITH CHRISTIAN COALITION, ASK:) Do you have favorable, neutral, or unfavorable feelings toward the Christian Coalition?

Familiar With Christian Coalition

Favorable feelings	10	[53]
Neutral feelings	10	
Unfavorable feelings	6	CONTINUE
Not sure of feelings	10	SKIP TO Q.6c
<u>Not Familiar With Christian Coalition</u>	60	
<u>Not Sure If Familiar With Christian Coalition</u>	4	

(ASK ONLY OF RESPONDENTS WHO SAY THEY ARE FAMILIAR WITH CHRISTIAN COALITION IN Q.6a.)

- 6b. Why do you feel that way about the Christian Coalition?

(PROBE:) Are there any other favorable or unfavorable impressions you have of the Christian Coalition?
[54-61]

Net Favorable Impressions	40%	Net Unfavorable Impressions	28%
Concerned with lack of values, fighting for moral values, dealing with the decline of morality	16	Disagree with things they support	7
I am a Christian	7	They have too much influence	5
Agree with their stands	7	Religion and politics don't mix	4
Accomplishments are good, have done good things	4	Too greedy, self-serving, fake	4
Have helped me, belong to it	3		
-----		Agree with some things they have done and disagree with some things they have done	4
-----		Don't know; no response	31%

(ASK EVERYONE:)

- 6c. Are you familiar with Jerry Falwell and who he is, or is he someone you have not really heard that much about? (IF FAMILIAR WITH JERRY FALWELL ASK:) Do you have favorable, neutral, or unfavorable feelings toward Jerry Falwell?

Familiar With Jerry Falwell

Favorable feelings	11	[62]
Neutral feelings	24	
Unfavorable feelings	32	
Not sure of feelings	8	
<u>Not Familiar With Jerry Falwell</u>	23	
<u>Not Sure If Familiar With Jerry Falwell</u>	2	

(FORM A ONLY)

7a. One issue that has been talked about lately is the role of religion in politics. In terms of your own way of thinking, what kind of a role do you think religion and religious groups should play in our political system? What are some of your thoughts about what role religion should play in politics today?

(PROBE:) What are some of the positive things about having religion and religious groups play more of a role in our political system?

(PROBE:) What concerns or fears would you have about religion and religious groups playing more of a role in our political system? Can you think of any examples where religious groups went too far in getting involved in the political system? [63-70]

Net Positive Things	40%	Net Concerns or Fears	57%
Political leaders should have the fear of God, leaders must be Godly to be able to run the country	15	Religion and politics don't mix, separation of church and state, stay out of politics	47
Religious groups should play any role they want, they have the same rights as anyone else	7	Fanatical religions, go too far	5
People need some type of religion, follow the golden rule, have basic moral standards	6	Go too far on abortion issue	4
Trying to bring God/religion into our lives, nation should move towards Christianity	5	Try to force their ideals on us	3
We need more Christian leaders	4		
		Don't know; no response	12%

(FORM B ONLY)

7b. Many people today talk about the importance of having strong moral and social values in our country. What specific values come to your mind when you think about the moral or social values you would like to see in our country today?

(PROBE:) Are there any other moral or social values that you think need to be strengthened in our country today? [71-74]

Families should stick together, family values	24%
More tolerance/respect towards people, the golden rule	18
More religion/prayer, go back to God, the Bible	13
Parents should pay more attention to children, love/care for them	9
Sexual abstinence	8
Don't know; no response	12%

(BOTH FORMS)

8. People talk about the importance of having strong values here in America. I am going to read you three statements on this subject, and then I'd like you to tell me which one of them comes closest to your own point of view. **(READ STATEMENTS SLOWLY, ROTATING ORDER ON EVERY OTHER INTERVIEW. IF RESPONDENT HAS A HARD TIME DECIDING AMONG STATEMENTS, ASK:) Well, which one of these would you pick as your top priority?**

Statement A: What we need to do in America today is to encourage a return to our traditional moral values, like religion and the traditional family.....	32	[75]
Statement B: What we need to do in America today is encourage stronger personal values, like individual responsibility and hard work	29	
Statement C: What we need to doing in America today is encourage stronger community values, like contributing to the good of the community and respect for others	18	
All equally (VOL)	20	
Not sure	1	

- 9a. Now I'm going to mention some things you could find out about a candidate for political office in your area. For each factor I mention, please tell me if this is something that would make you more likely or less likely to support that candidate. If I mention a particular factor that would not make much difference to you one way or the other, just say so.

(FOR EACH ITEM BELOW, ASK:) If a candidate for political office (READ ITEM), would this make you more likely or less likely to support that candidate, or would it not make much difference to you one way or the other? (ROTATE ORDER OF ITEMS ON EVERY OTHER INTERVIEW.)

	<u>Make More Likely To Support</u>	<u>Make Less Likely To Support</u>	<u>Would Not Make Much Difference</u>	<u>Not Sure</u>	
Emphasized the diversity of America and respect for people of different backgrounds, including gays and lesbians	31	32	32	5	[76]
Believed we have gone too far in forcing religion out of the public schools	47	29	22	2	[77]
Favored comprehensive sex education that starts with abstinence, but also includes information on birth control and disease prevention	71	12	14	3	[78]
Was closely associated with Radical Right political groups	9	58	20	13	[79]
Believed the choice on abortion should be left up to the woman, with few legal restrictions	59	27	9	5	[80]
Put top priority on returning to traditional moral values	74	7	15	4	[81]
Supported laws to allow organized classroom prayer in the public schools	53	22	21	4	[82]

ALWAYS ASK THIS ONE LAST:

Was closely associated with right-wing religious groups and supported the positions of the Religious Right	24	41	23	12	[83]
--	----	----	----	----	-------------

(FORM A ONLY)

9b. Why would you feel that way about a candidate who was closely associated with Religious Right political groups?

(PROBE:) What are some of the things that might make you more likely to favor a candidate who supports the positions of the Religious Right?

(PROBE:) What are some of the things that might make you less likely to favor a candidate who supports the positions of the Religious Right? [84-91]

Net Reasons More Likely to Favor	26%	Net Reasons Less Likely to Favor	39%
Candidate with good morals and values is better, more stable	13	Should be a separation of church and state, politics and religion don't mix	21
It's what I believe in, what I agree with	5	Try to push their ideals/views on everyone else	7
Need more religion, that what is our country needs right now	5	Too close-minded, intolerant	6
Would have God in his life	3	Too radical, militant, violent	6
Need prayer in the schools	2	Not trustworthy, have a hidden agenda	3
		People have a right to their own beliefs	6
		Makes no difference to me	3
		Don't know; no response	28%

(BOTH FORMS:)

10. I am going to read some statements that express different views regarding the involvement of religion in politics and public affairs. For each statement, please tell me if you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree with this statement.

	<u>Strongly Agree</u>	<u>Somewhat Agree</u>	<u>Somewhat Disagree</u>	<u>Strongly Disagree</u>	<u>Not Sure</u>	
(FORM A)						
Government should not favor one religion over another, but should encourage religion in general	67	21	5	6	1	[92]
(FORM B)						
Government should not favor one religion over another or encourage religion in general	60	23	8	5	4	[93]
(FORM A)						
Political leaders should not question the religious faith of people they disagree with	72	17	5	4	2	[94]
(FORM B)						
Religious leaders active in politics should not question the morality of people they disagree with	45	23	13	13	6	[95]
(FORM A)						
Political leaders should not claim to speak on behalf of an entire faith when they take positions on policy issues	68	17	5	6	4	[96]
(FORM B)						
Political leaders should not claim that God is on their side when they take positions on policy issues	61	13	8	13	5	[97]
(BOTH FORMS)						
People in government should not let their private religious views be the most important consideration in public policy decisions	59	21	7	10	3	[98]
Government should not concern itself with the morality of private activity, such as sexual orientation	42	23	12	17	6	[99]

11. When it comes to meeting the educational needs of the country, which one of the following approaches would you be more likely to favor: (a) doing what is necessary to improve the quality of education in the public schools, or (b) using tax-funded vouchers or tax deductions so parents can send their children to private or religious schools, instead of public schools?

Improve quality of the public schools	66	[100]
Vouchers/deductions for private and religious schools	28	
Both equally (VOL)	3	
Not sure	3	

(FORM A)

- 12a. Do you favor or oppose allowing teacher-led prayer in the public schools, if most, but not necessarily all, students want it?

Favor prayer	57	CONTINUE	[101]
Oppose prayer	29	FORM B--SKIP TO Q.13a	
Depends (VOL)	7	FORM A--SKIP TO Q.14a	
Not sure	7		

(FORM B)

- 12b. Do you favor or oppose allowing organized, student-led prayer in the public schools, if most, but not necessarily all, students want it?

Favor prayer	68	CONTINUE	[102]
Oppose prayer	23	FORM B--SKIP TO Q.13a	
Depends (VOL)	5	FORM A--SKIP TO Q.14a	
Not sure	4		

(BOTH FORMS--ASK ONLY OF RESPONDENTS WHO SAY THEY FAVOR SCHOOL PRAYER IN Q.12a OR Q12.b:)

- 12c. And would you favor or oppose this kind of prayer in the public schools if (READ ITEM, REPEAT FOR EACH ITEM AND ROTATE ITEMS.)

	<u>Favor Prayer</u>	<u>Oppose Prayer</u>	<u>Depends (VOL)</u>	<u>Not Sure</u>	
It meant that school board officials or school administrators would be involved in selecting or approving the prayers to be used	35	52	7	6	[103]
There were a risk that the school system would have to pay large legal fees to defend itself against lawsuits from opponents of school prayer	47	40	4	9	[104]
The prayers offended the religious beliefs of some students who had different religious faiths	46	36	10	8	[105]

(FORM B ONLY--ASK EVERYONE:)

13a. Now I would like to describe a candidate in a local school board election and get your reaction. (READ DESCRIPTION SLOWLY.)

"This candidate's top priority is giving parents greater control over their children's education. In this regard, the candidate favors giving parents more power to remove textbooks and other materials they find objectionable. This candidate also believes we need to restore religion and morality to the public schools, and opposes course material that might lend respect to the homosexual lifestyle. On the issues of AIDS and birth control, the candidate wants courses that teach abstinence only, not birth control, and opposes making condoms available to students in the public schools."

Based on this description, how much do you think this candidate would appeal to you--a great deal, quite a bit, some, just a little, or not much at all?

A great deal of appeal	19	[106]
Quite a bit of appeal	14	
Some appeal	18	
Just a little appeal	10	
Not much appeal at all	38	
Not sure	1	

(FORM B ONLY)

13b. Why do you feel that way about this candidate?

(PROBE:) What are some of the things about this candidate that would appeal to you?

(PROBE:) What are some of the things that would give you doubts or concerns about supporting this candidate? [107-114]

Net Favorable Impressions	50%	Net Unfavorable Impressions	41%
Agree with the candidate's ideals	15	Not teaching birth control is not a realistic approach, shouldn't teach abstinence only	17
Abstinence courses	11	Parents shouldn't have the power to remove books from school, teachers should be allowed to select books/materials they want to use	10
Sex education doesn't belong in schools, should be taught at home	7	Kids need to be taught about diseases, AIDS	8
Parents should have more control, parents have the right to decide what their kids should be taught	6	Candidate is imposing his views on the public	5
Religion in schools	3	Disagree with his stand on homosexuals	4
		Don't know; no response	10%

(FORM B ONLY:)

- 13c. Now I would like to describe another candidate in a local school board election and get your reaction. **(READ DESCRIPTION SLOWLY.)**

This candidate puts top priority on improving public schools and raising the academic performance of all school children, and therefore supports establishing meaningful academic standards. When it comes to sex education, this candidate believes we need to stress abstinence, but also believes we must face reality and arm our kids with information about birth control and disease prevention. This candidate says schools should teach children about the importance of respecting others and settling problems without violence. This candidate also believes that religious instruction is best done by parents and religious leaders, not by teachers and administrators.

Based on this description, how much do you think this candidate would appeal to you--a great deal, quite a bit, some, just a little, or not much at all?

A great deal of appeal	52	[115]
Quite a bit of appeal	27	
Some appeal	13	
Just a little appeal	3	
Not much appeal at all	4	
Not sure	1	

(FORM A ONLY--ASK EVERYONE:)

- 14a. Recently, some people have criticized the growing political influence of the Religious Right and organizations led by religious figures who take very conservative positions on issues.

When you hear people criticizing the Religious Right, do you think they are mainly raising legitimate concerns about this movement, or do you think they are just raising exaggerated fears and being biased against religious people?

Legitimate concerns	21	[116]
Exaggerated fears	61	
Some of both (VOL)	8	
Not sure	10	

(FORM A ONLY:)

- 14b. Let me read you a statement in response to the criticisms of the Religious Right, and then I'd like to get your reaction.

(READ STATEMENT SLOWLY:) "Attacks against the so-called 'Religious Right' are an example of anti-Christian bigotry and part of an effort to stigmatize Christians. At a time when homosexuals and feminists have a lot of political power, Christians need to be heard, but liberals are trying to assign Christians to an inferior status and deny them a place at the table."

(AFTER READING STATEMENT, ASK:) How convincing do you personally think this statement by supporters of the Religious Right is--very convincing, fairly convincing, just somewhat convincing, or not really convincing?

Very convincing	18	[117]
Fairly convincing	16	
Just somewhat convincing	22	
Not really convincing	36	
Not sure	8	

(FORM A ONLY:)

- 14c. Now let me get your reaction to a statement that opponents of the Religious Right might make about why the political influence of the Religious Right is a legitimate concern today.

(READ STATEMENT SLOWLY:) "The leaders of the Religious Right are misusing religion to argue for extreme right-wing political positions that have little public support. For example, they want to end legal abortion, reduce support for public education, and stop the schools from addressing public health issues such as AIDS prevention. The Religious Right promotes intolerance and division in our society, by arguing that there is only one right moral or Christian position on political issues. Government should not take sides in favor of a particular religious viewpoint, but this is what would happen if the Religious Right had its way."

(AFTER READING STATEMENT, ASK:) How convincing do you personally think this statement by opponents of the Religious Right is--very convincing, fairly convincing, just somewhat convincing, or not really convincing?

Very convincing	20	[118]
Fairly convincing	17	
Just somewhat convincing	23	
Not really convincing	33	
Not sure	7	

(BOTH FORMS:)

15. Please tell me which one or two of the following items, if any, would bother you the most about the leaders of the Religious Right and their political influence. **(READ CHOICES SLOWLY, ALTERNATING ORDER OF ITEMS ON EVERY OTHER INTERVIEW.)**

A) They are trying to use government to impose their religious views on the whole country	19	[119]
B) They are intolerant of people who live in ways they do not approve of	20	>
D) They take extreme, right-wing positions on many issues ..	9	
E) They go too far in mixing religion and politics	23	
F) They wrongly claim to speak for all moral and religious people	26	
All equally (VOL)	14	
None (VOL)	8	
Not sure	7	

16. Getting to the end of this survey, let me read you several concerns people have raised about the Religious Right and its positions on issues. For each one I read, please tell me how much that criticism of the Religious Right would concern you—a great deal, quite a bit, some, or little. (READ EACH ITEM AND REPEAT CHOICES. ROTATE ORDER OF ITEMS ON EVERY OTHER INTERVIEW.)

	Concerns A Great <u>Deal</u>	Concerns Quite A <u>Bit</u>	Concerns <u>Some</u>	Concerns <u>Little</u>	Not <u>Sure</u>	
(FORM A ONLY)						
The Religious Right favors taxpayer-supported voucher plans that would take funding away from the public schools and divert it to private and religious schools	36	16	18	28	2	[120]
(FORM B ONLY)						
If the Religious Right had its way, almost all abortions would be illegal and women would lose their freedom of choice	46	19	13	20	2	[121]
(FORM A ONLY)						
The organized school prayer proposals by the Religious Right would give government officials the power to decide which prayers students should say	47	18	16	16	3	[122]
(FORM B ONLY)						
Because it believes that only abstinence should be taught, the Religious Right opposes teaching public school students about birth control methods used to prevent diseases and pregnancy	44	23	15	15	3	[123]
(FORM A ONLY)						
The Religious Right opposes proposals that set rigorous academic standards for our schools, making it impossible to improve educational achievement	40	18	18	15	9	[124]
(FORM B ONLY)						
The Religious Right opposes laws that are designed to stop discrimination against gays and lesbians	29	15	24	26	6	[125]
(FORM A ONLY)						
The Religious Right opposes many environmental laws because the laws conflict with their interpretation of the Bible	33	15	21	23	8	[126]
(FORM B ONLY)						
The Religious Right wants the power to censor certain books from public schools and libraries	47	17	19	14	3	[127]
(FORM A ONLY)						
The Religious Right wants the government to regulate the content of movies, TV shows, and the arts	38	14	19	26	3	[128]
(FORM B ONLY)						
The Religious Right wants creationism taught as an alternative to evolution in public school science classes	31	13	24	29	3	[129]

FACTUALS: These last few questions are for statistical purposes only.

F1. In what age group are you--(READ LIST)?

18-24	9	[130]
25-29	10	
30-34	12	
35-39	9	
40-44	11	
45-49	8	
50-54	7	
55-59	7	
60-64	6	
65 and over	19	
Refused	2	

F2. What type of work do you do? What is the job called? (BE SURE TO CLASSIFY PROPERLY. WRITE JOB DESCRIPTION IN SPACE BELOW. IF RESPONDENT IS UNEMPLOYED, GET USUAL OCCUPATION.)

High-level professional ..	6	[131]	Farmer/rancher	1	[132]
Middle-level professional ..	11		Homemaker	8	
Executive, manager	3		Retiree	23	
Sales, proprietor	6		Student	5	
White collar worker	9		Other	1	
Skilled laborer	24		Not sure/refused	2	
Semi- and unskilled laborer	1				

(ASK OF ALL WOMEN.)

F3. Do you work outside the home or not?

Work outside the home	27	[133]
Do not work outside the home	22	
Not sure/refused	4	

(ASK EVERYONE.)

F4a. What is your religious preference? (READ CHOICES.)

Baptist	20		
Methodist	7	CONTINUE	[134]
Lutheran	6		
All other Protestants	22		
Catholic	24		
Jewish	2		
Muslim	-	SKIP TO	
Other	8	Q.F5	
None	8		
Refused	3		

(ASK ONLY OF PROTESTANTS IN Q.F4a)

F4b. Do you consider yourself to be a born-again Christian?

Born-again Christian	31	[135]
Not born-again Christian	21	
Not sure/refused	3	
Non-Protestants (Q.F4a)	45	

(ASK EVERYONE.)

F5. How important would you say religion is to you in your own life--the single most important thing, quite important, somewhat important, or not that important?

Single most important thing	26	[136]
Quite important	41	
Somewhat important	21	
Not that important	10	
Not sure	2	

F6a. Regardless of how you may be registered, how would you describe your overall point of view in terms of the political parties? Would you say you are mostly Democratic, leaning Democratic, completely Independent, leaning Republican, or mostly Republican?

Mostly Democratic	25	[137]
Leaning Democratic	11	
Completely Independent	25	
Leaning Republican	11	
Mostly Republican	22	
Not sure	6	

F6b. Thinking about your general approach to issues, do you consider yourself to be liberal, moderate, or conservative?

Liberal	19	[138]
Moderate	40	
Conservative	34	
Not sure	7	

F7. Did you vote in the November 1992 election for president among George Bush, the Republican, Bill Clinton, the Democrat, and Ross Perot, the Independent?

(IF "YES," ASK:) For whom did you vote--George Bush, Bill Clinton, or Ross Perot?

YES, VOTED

George Bush	30	[139]
Bill Clinton	36	
Ross Perot	14	
None (VOL)/not sure/refused	7	
<u>NO, DID NOT VOTE</u>	11	
<u>NOT SURE IF VOTED</u>	2	

F8. What is the last grade you completed in school? (DO NOT READ CHOICES.)

Less than high school	8	[140]
High school graduate	37	
Post-high school vocational training	5	
Technical school	2	
Two-year college graduate	17	
Four-year college graduate	18	
Postgraduate	9	
Not sure/refused	4	

F9. For statistical purposes only, we need to know your household income for last year. Will you please tell me which one of the following categories best describes your total household income for 1993? (READ CATEGORIES.)

Below \$20,000	21	[141]
\$20,000-\$35,000	28	
\$35,000-\$50,000	17	
\$50,000-\$65,000	10	
Above \$65,000	11	
Not sure/refused	13	

F10. What is your race--white, black, Hispanic, Asian, or something else?

White	80	[142]
Black	10	
Hispanic	5	
Asian	1	
Other	2	
Not sure	2	

WINNING THROUGH REASON, NOT FEAR:

10 RULES FOR MEETING THE CHALLENGE OF THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT

This memo outlines the key strategic findings from a national survey conducted by Peter D. Hart Research Associates on behalf of People For the American Way. The survey gauged voters' views on basic social and moral values and important public policy issues, and measured attitudes toward the Religious Right, its leaders, and its agenda. For the survey, a representative sample of 1,002 registered voters were interviewed by telephone between August 1 and 6, 1994.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report outlines ten "rules of engagement" to help those who are facing and dealing with challenges from the Religious Right. These guidelines are derived from People For the American Way's in-depth national survey, which reveals a complex battlefield. Relatively few voters today are drawn to the Religious Right, but neither do many fear its influence; much of the public embraces traditional moral and religious values, and voices concern over a perceived decline in these values, yet most people reject the specific policies advocated by the Religious Right in the name of those values.

Meeting the challenge of the Religious Right thus requires a strategy based on revealing and contesting its real agenda for the nation, rather than on questioning the legitimacy of the movement or sounding the alarm about its ostensible power. This is best done by moving the debate beyond questions of general values, to focus on specific issues and policies and spotlight the often

extreme positions taken by the Religious Right and its leaders. Voters do not object to the Religious Right's expressed values--many of which they respect--but they do object to its efforts to impose a narrow religious agenda on all Americans. This is the movement's principal point of vulnerability.

The public already is skeptical of the Religious Right, and the opportunity exists to expand and crystalize these doubts. The survey results indicate, however, that some tactics and strategies employed by Religious Right opponents have not been effective. This is why there are "don'ts" as well as "dos" included in the recommendations. Progressives only strengthen the Religious Right's hand when they exaggerate the threat posed by the movement, employ extreme rhetoric, or fail to respect the public's core values.

Ultimately, this is a fight to capture the **political mainstream**. Today, most voters do not feel represented by either progressives--who do not seem to share their concern over the nation's crisis of moral values--or the Religious Right--which does not respect their belief in the separation of church and state. Progressives need to change this dynamic by enlisting mainstream voters to form a solid majority opposed to the Religious Right and its political agenda.

Progressives can accomplish this if they acknowledge and address voters' deep concern over the nation's moral decline, speak to the issues that truly concern average Americans, and--most important--trust in people's reason rather than appealing to their fears.

The ten rules are as follows:

1. Do not focus the debate on the extent of the Religious Right's strength or exaggerate the "threat" it poses. It is not the Religious Right's existence--or its putative power--that Americans object to but rather what it wants to *do*.
2. Always remember that this is a fight for the mainstream, which will be won by addressing the concerns and values of ordinary Americans. Voters often feel left out of today's arguments between the Religious Right and progressives. This leaves both these sides on the margins, with the middle up for grabs.
3. When appropriate, criticize the Religious Right for trying to use government to impose its religious values on others, thereby mixing religion and politics in an inappropriate way. This is what most limits its appeal with voters.
4. Whenever possible, engage the Religious Right in fights over specific issue positions rather than general values, and force its leaders to defend their most extreme positions. Progressives can win on the issues, especially when they develop a competing agenda for change.
5. Speak to Americans' strong conviction that the nation is experiencing a serious decline in moral values. Avoid getting positioned outside the mainstream on questions of core values.
6. Highlight the limited range of values advocated by the Religious Right, and challenge its claim to speak for all moral and religious Americans.
7. Do not allow the Religious Right to define political differences as a debate over the importance or value of religion. Although Americans do not favor government promoting particular religious views, they do want more religion in their society.
8. Do not compromise your credibility by employing exaggerated language. Progressives' descriptions of the Religious Right must ring true to voters.
9. Reach out to less-educated and lower-income voters, who often do not have liberal social values.
10. Educate younger Americans about the Religious Right; they reject much of its agenda, but are also the least concerned about its influence.

RULES FOR ENGAGING THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT

1. Do not focus the debate on the extent of the Religious Right's strength or exaggerate the "threat" that it poses. It is not the Religious Right's existence--or its putative power--that Americans object to but rather what it wants to *do*.

It is important to recognize at the outset that Americans, by and large, do not fear the Religious Right or its influence. Just 28% of voters say that "the increasing influence of conservative religious groups in the political process" is a very or fairly serious problem for the country today, while two-thirds feel this is a just somewhat or not that serious a problem. The results are essentially the same when we ask about the growing influence of "Religious Right" or "radical right-wing" political groups within the Republican Party--34% of voters rate each of these as very or fairly serious problems. Furthermore, the public feels strongly that most of the criticisms leveled at the Religious Right are "exaggerated fears" (61%) rather than "legitimate concerns" (21%).

Why are most Americans not very concerned about the influence of the Religious Right? First, the public generally believes that people have a right to speak out and promote their viewpoint, a right that certainly extends to the leaders and members of Religious Right groups. Second, people do not see religious conservatives as having an extraordinary amount of influence today. The "barbarians at the gate" imagery and rhetoric sometimes employed by progressives does not make sense to most voters, and may even serve to reduce the credibility

of those who use it. Such language also can create the impression that progressives would prefer to silence certain people because of their religious or political views, which undermines any message based on the ideals of liberty and tolerance.

At the same time, most voters are not attracted to the Religious Right. For example, just 18% of voters express favorable feelings toward Pat Robertson--probably the most prominent national leader of the movement--while nearly half either hold a neutral (25%) or unfavorable (21%) view of him. Fully 41% of voters say that knowing a political candidate "was closely associated with right-wing religious groups and supported the positions of the Religious Right" would make them *less* likely to support that candidate, while only one-quarter (24%) indicate that this type of association would increase that candidate's chances of receiving their vote (another 23% say such a link would make no difference to them).¹

Most Americans do not support the Religious Right, but they also do not see it as a clear and present danger; they disagree with it much more than they fear it. Consequently, progressives are on stronger ground when contesting the Religious Right's *agenda* rather than its right to be in the political arena.

2. Always remember that this is a fight for the mainstream, which will be won by addressing the concerns and values of ordinary Americans. Voters often feel left out of today's arguments between the Religious Right and

¹ Throughout this memo, voters described as feeling "positive," "negative," and "neutral" toward the Religious Right or its candidate refers to those who say they are more likely (24%) to support a candidate closely associated with the movement, less likely (41%), and that it would not make a difference (23%), respectively.

progressives. This leaves both these sides on the margins, with the middle up for grabs.

Just as voters voice minimal worry over "the growing influence of the Religious Right within the Republican Party" (34% identify this as a very or fairly serious problem), they evince relatively little concern about alleged "intolerance and discrimination against deeply religious Christians" (39% very or fairly serious problem)--a frequent complaint from the Religious Right. In the public debate between the Religious Right and progressives, neither side is winning today. In the survey, we invited voters to respond to a sharp attack on the Religious Right, and also to a rejoinder.

Critique of the Religious Right

The leaders of the Religious Right are **misusing** religion to argue for extreme right-wing political positions that have little public support. For example, they want to end legal abortion, reduce support for public education, and stop the schools from addressing public health issues such as AIDS prevention. The Religious Right promotes intolerance and division in our society, by arguing that there is only one right moral or Christian position on political issues. Government should not take sides in favor of a particular religious viewpoint, but this is what would happen if the Religious Right had its way.

Defense of the Religious Right

Attacks against the so-called 'Religious Right' are an example of anti-Christian bigotry and part of an effort to stigmatize Christians. At a time when homosexuals and feminists have a lot of political power, Christians need to be heard, but liberals are trying to assign Christians to an inferior status and deny them a place at the table.

The public's response is, essentially, "a plague on both your houses." Fewer than four in ten voters find each statement convincing (37% and 34%, respectively), while majorities do not. Both sides in the debate often employ a "state of siege" rhetoric, but most people do not feel embattled and therefore think all of these threats have been exaggerated. The danger for progressives is not that they may lose this exchange, but that they will appear to be as intolerant--and as irrelevant--as the Religious Right itself often seems to be. Even worse, time spent arguing over who is more discriminated against, or who is more intolerant, is time *not* spent communicating effectively with the American public.

While Americans do not fear the Religious Right's influence or worry about "anti-Christian bigotry," they *do* care about the larger issues underlying the debate. A 53% majority of voters rate the danger of people using government to impose their religious viewpoints as a serious problem, while a somewhat larger majority (63%) express concern about the declining role of religion in society. Both of these issues are considered real and important problems.

These two questions together provide a useful portrait of the electorate. Only 18% of voters worry about people using government to impose religious viewpoints but *not* about religious decline--a group that, as we might expect, is very hostile toward the Religious Right and strongly embraces progressive positions. On the other side, 28% care about the decline of religion but not about the threat of government imposition--these voters hold very conservative social views and are supportive of the Religious Right. The arithmetic is straightforward:

progressives cannot win without gaining substantial support from the half of the electorate that is in neither camp.

These people in the middle are the non-combatants in the nation's culture wars. They are concerned about the possible use of government to impose religious views, but they also worry over religion's declining place in society. Their moral and social values are mostly moderate to conservative, yet they feel more negative than positive toward the Religious Right. Progressives must appeal to these mainstream voters, while maneuvering the Religious Right to the margins.

3. When appropriate, criticize the Religious Right for trying to use government to impose its religious values on others, thereby mixing religion and politics in an inappropriate way. This is what most limits its appeal with voters.

People's misgivings about the Religious Right arise primarily from its perceived desire to use government to implement a particular set of religious ideas, thereby imposing them on all Americans. When voters describe in their own words their feelings about a candidate associated with the Religious Right, one dominant concern emerges: that "politics and religion don't mix," and that this type of candidate endangers the proper "separation of church and state." In addition, some voters worry that such candidates would try to "push their ideals or views on everyone else."

In general, Americans are fundamentally uneasy about the prospect of mixing religion and politics.² When we ask people to offer their thoughts on the role that religion and religious groups should play in the political system, a considerable number (40%) see benefits to that involvement, yet notably more (57%) voice concerns that religion and politics will become too mixed. Most Americans believe that religious people have a right to express their political views, but many also have reservations when it comes to government potentially *acting* on those views.

Although "mixing religion and politics" and "using government to impose religious views" are closely related ideas, the former criticism appears to have somewhat greater intuitive appeal, especially among certain critical voter groups. It ranks especially high among swing voters who are neutral toward the Religious Right: 30% say "going too far in mixing religion and politics" is one of the things that most bothers them about the Religious Right and its leaders (compared to just 19% who feel this way about "trying to use government to impose their religious views on the whole country"). It also ranks as a higher-than-average objection among non-college-educated voters, older Americans, and liberal to moderate Republicans.

4. Whenever possible, engage the Religious Right in fights over specific issue positions rather than general values, and force its leaders to defend

² A recent NBC News/Wall Street Journal survey (July 1994) found that a 54% majority of Americans feel it is not appropriate "for religious groups to advance their beliefs by being involved in politics and working to affect public policy."

their most extreme positions. Progressives can win on the issues, especially when they develop a competing agenda for change.

When the Religious Right speaks to a legitimate area of public concern, it is important that progressives then offer a competing set of solutions; otherwise, the debate becomes the Religious Right's solution versus the status quo, giving the former a significant advantage. The survey explored one such area in depth--education--and the findings show that a coherent and attractive alternative can beat the Religious Right's approach decisively. The results also reveal that certain specific Religious Right positions are especially unpopular and dramatize its effort to use government to advance a narrow religious agenda.

Some aspects of the Religious Right education agenda and rhetoric have public appeal. Favoring organized classroom prayer, for example, helps a candidate (53% more likely to support) far more than it hurts (22% less likely to support), as does believing that "we have gone too far in forcing religion out of the public schools" (47% more likely, 29% less likely). However, people respond even more positively to many progressive messages. Voters feel overwhelmingly favorable toward a candidate who supports comprehensive sex education (71% positive, 12% negative). By better than two to one, they prefer an educational approach focused on "doing what is necessary to improve the quality of education in the public schools" (66%) over the Religious Right platform of providing vouchers "so parents can send their children to private or religious schools" (28%).

We also asked people to respond to two prospective school board

candidates, one with a Religious Right message and one with a mainstream progressive message:

Religious Right Candidate

This candidate's top priority is giving parents greater control over their children's education. In this regard, the candidate favors giving parents more power to remove textbooks and other materials they find objectionable. This candidate also believes we need to restore religion and morality to the public schools, and opposes course material that might lend respect to the homosexual lifestyle. On the issues of AIDS and birth control, the candidate wants courses that teach abstinence only, not birth control, and opposes making condoms available to students in the public schools.

Mainstream Progressive Candidate

This candidate puts top priority on improving public schools and raising the academic performance of all school children, and therefore supports establishing meaningful academic standards. When it comes to sex education, this candidate believes we need to stress abstinence, but also believes we must face reality and arm our kids with information about birth control and disease prevention. This candidate says schools should teach children about the importance of respecting others and settling problems without violence. This candidate also believes that religious instruction is best done by parents and religious leaders, not by teachers and administrators.

Voters react very differently to these two candidates: just 33% say that the Religious Right candidate has a great deal or quite a bit of appeal, while 79% feel that way about the progressive candidate. The biggest concern people volunteer about the conservative candidate's views is the focus on teaching abstinence to the exclusion of other birth control information--most voters do not find that stand realistic but rather feel that it puts young people at risk. In fact, the Religious

Right's opposition to teaching comprehensive birth control--thereby increasing the incidence of teen pregnancy and endangering young people's health--is the single most compelling anti-Religious Right argument tested in the survey. The focus on parental control also seems to have limited appeal: only a few of those positive toward the Religious Right favor this viewpoint, while a significant number of other voters worry about the prospect of parents removing books from the curriculum.

TABLE 1: MOST EFFECTIVE ARGUMENTS AGAINST THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT

	Concerns A Great Deal %	Concerns Quite A Bit %	Total Concerns %
Because it believes that only abstinence should be taught, the Religious Right opposes teaching public school students about birth control methods used to prevent diseases and pregnancy	44	23	67
If the Religious Right had its way, almost all abortions would be illegal and women would lose their freedom of choice	46	19	65
The organized school prayer proposals by the Religious Right would give government officials the power to decide which prayers students should say	47	18	65
The Religious Right wants the power to censor certain books from public schools and libraries	47	17	64
The Religious Right opposes proposals that set rigorous academic standards for our schools, making it impossible to improve educational achievement	40	18	58

On such issues as comprehensive sex education, reproductive freedom, and book censorship, the Religious Right's positions are outside the mainstream. Progressives need to expose such stands when they are hidden, and focus the debate on these specifics when Religious Right leaders try to limit the discussion

to more general issues such as "family values," "sexual responsibility," or "moral decline" (where they are on rhetorically stronger ground).

It is also important to note the progressive candidate's emphasis on raising academic performance through "meaningful standards." A major weakness of Religious Right candidates often seems to be their preoccupation with relatively peripheral issues while ignoring the real task at hand--in this case, improving the quality of education in the public schools. Progressives should not make this same mistake. A progressive agenda, for example, that promoted respect for diversity but failed to address the public's desire for higher academic standards would be much less compelling than the one tested in the survey. (In fact, a very effective anti-Religious Right argument--one of the few that resonates even among its supporters--is to reveal the movement's opposition to rigorous academic standards.) Whatever the issue, progressives want to be sure to advance agendas that seriously address the problems as voters understand them.

5. Speak to Americans' strong conviction that the nation is experiencing a serious decline in moral values. Avoid getting positioned outside the mainstream on questions of core values.

The voting public today believes that the nation is in the midst of a serious deterioration in moral values, and that this decline lies at the heart of many of the nation's social problems. A 51% majority of voters say that the most serious problems in our society today "stem mainly from a decline in moral values," compared to 34% who feel they stem "mainly from economic and financial

pressures on the family." Other survey research has shown that voters also identify declining values as the main culprit when it comes to specific issues such as violence, welfare, education, and even the economy. When presented with a hypothetical political candidate who puts "top priority on returning to traditional moral values," voters indicate by an overwhelming 74% to 7% that they would be more rather than less likely to vote for such a political figure.

It is its belief in and advocacy of traditional moral values that gives the Religious Right its primary appeal. Voters who point to a decline in values as the main cause of the nation's ills feel much more positive toward the Religious Right than do those who lean toward economic explanations. The top reason people offer for supporting a candidate associated with the Religious Right is that such a person would have "good morals and values." This reason ranks higher than the specific *religious* beliefs or practices such a candidate would presumably bring to office.

Leaders and candidates of the Religious Right are thus at their most persuasive when they point to the nation's moral decline. Progressives therefore should avoid debating *whether* there is a national moral decline--in the public's mind, this is not debatable--and instead should focus the discussion on specific solutions. People are inclined to accept the Religious Right's general diagnosis of declining values, but they often have a broader conception of which values need to be promoted and frequently reject the Religious Right's policy remedies.

Americans make an important distinction between moral and religious views, and they are much more comfortable with government promoting morality than religion. Voters strongly agree (59%) that government officials should not let their own religious views be the most important consideration in public policy decisions, but they are much less sure that "government should not concern itself with the morality of private activity, such as sexual orientation" (42% strongly agree). Similarly, 72% strongly feel that political leaders should not question the religious faith of those with whom they disagree, but only 45% report this same level of agreement that religious leaders active in politics should not question the *morality* of people with whom they disagree.

In a time of perceived serious moral decline, public discussions of morality--and even challenges to the moral content of an opponent's views--are not seen as inappropriate. Religious Right leaders therefore can be expected to talk as much as possible in a language of broad moral values, while progressives, where appropriate always will want to return the discussion to the narrowly *religious* basis of their opponents' views. As always, it is the possibility of government being used to implement these religious views, not the views themselves, that people object to.

One "traditional" moral value merits special attention: strong families. When people are given an opportunity in an open-ended format to describe the values they most want to see encouraged in America today, "family values" is mentioned far more often than any other item. There is great breadth to this sentiment: it

ranks first among both the young and the old, and among Catholics, born-again Christians, and other Protestants. Voters are extremely worried by the weakening of family structures that they perceive, and they see stronger families (and family values) as essential for improving the nation's social and moral health. Progressives would make a serious mistake to ignore, or appear to denigrate, these concerns, and should not shy away from expressing their own belief in strong families.

More generally, the progressive agenda needs to respect voters' basic moral values. An important part of the appeal of the progressive school board candidate's message, for example, is the support for teaching abstinence. A message that included sex education without accommodating the public's belief that abstinence is the most appropriate--though often an unrealistic--form of birth control for teenagers would generate much less support.

6. Highlight the limited range of values advocated by the Religious Right, and challenge its claim to speak for all moral and religious Americans.

While there is general agreement that the nation is experiencing a decline in values, Americans have a far broader conception than does the Religious Right of which values are important. Indeed, the other top reason voters have for objecting to the Religious Right--along with mixing religion and politics--is the sense that its leaders often claim (wrongly) to speak on behalf of all moral and religious people. This is an especially strong concern among voters who are

neutral toward the Religious Right, women, and people who say religion is an important part of their life.

The breadth of values embraced by the public is revealed when we ask what kind of values most need to be promoted in America today. There is no clear consensus: 32% of voters select *traditional moral* values, including religion and the traditional family; 29% say *personal* values, such as responsibility and hard work; and 18% emphasize *community* values, like contributing to the community and showing respect for others (another 20% refuse to choose, embracing all three).

As we might expect, people who support the Religious Right choose traditional moral values by a considerable margin. Those negative toward the Religious Right also voice a clear preference--for personal values such as hard work and responsibility. The swing neutral group offers a fairly mixed response, but shows more interest in personal than community values. What progressives need to remind people of is how *narrow* the Religious Right's conception of morality and values is compared to their own. This narrowness, in turn, reinforces concerns over the Religious Right's desire to use government to enact its agenda.

Many progressives emphasize tolerance and respect for *diversity*. The survey results would seem to indicate, however, that this does not do a good job of addressing the general concern over declining values. For example, a prospective candidate who emphasized "the diversity of America and respect for people of different backgrounds, including gays and lesbians" gains no political

benefit from that statement--31% of voters are positive toward such a candidate and 32% feel negative (compared to 74% positive and 7% negative for a candidate who espouses "returning to traditional moral values").

Progressives cannot afford, especially in today's environment, to concede the mantle of "values" to their opponents. An emphasis on the importance of strong families, the work ethic, and personal responsibility will resonate particularly well with voters, and the language of community also has some appeal. However, the point is not to portray progressive values as "better" than those of the Religious Right, but rather to highlight the terribly constricted nature of the Religious Right's moral vision. Progressives should challenge aggressively the Religious Right's claim to a monopoly on virtue, which already offends many voters, and remind the public of the multiplicity of values that the nation needs to encourage and strengthen today.

7. Do not allow the Religious Right to define political differences as a debate over the importance or value of religion. Although Americans do not favor government promoting particular religious views, they do want more religion in their society.

The public's concern about the Religious Right's approach to mixing religion and politics should not be mistaken for lessened commitment to religion or its role in American life. Americans place a great deal of importance on religion. When asked how important religion is in their life, two-thirds of voters indicate that it is either quite important (41%) or the single most important thing (26%) in their life.

In addition, a solid 63% majority of voters believe that the declining role of religion in our society is a very or fairly serious problem today. Obviously, progressives cannot hope to win the battle for public opinion in any given campaign without gaining the support of many people who care deeply about religion and worry about its decline.

TABLE 2: SHOULD GOVERNMENT PROMOTE RELIGION?

	Negative Toward Religious Right Candidate %	Neutral Toward Religious Right Candidate %
<u>Agree:</u> Government should not favor one religion over another, but should encourage religion in general	59	71
<u>Agree:</u> Government should not favor one religion over another or encourage religion in general	73	58

The public is ambivalent when it comes to the question of what role government should play in dealing with religious decline. People are uneasy with the idea of government involvement, yet they *are* concerned about the problem--at a minimum, voters certainly do not want their government to facilitate the decline of religion in any way.³ As shown in the previous table, people already opposed to the Religious Right are more attracted to the principle of government not promoting religion, but government promotion of religion is a plus for the crucial neutral swing voters. (Supporters of the Religious Right, of course, support

³ Twice as many Americans believe the country has already gone too far in keeping government and religion separate (36%) as feel that it mixes them too much (18%); a 40% plurality feel there is a good balance (NBC News/Wall Street Journal, July 1994).

government encouragement of religion.) This is why the Religious Right claims only to favor government promotion of religion *in general*.

This is not to say that Americans are comfortable with the notion of government promoting religion or religiosity; in fact, they have quite mixed feelings about it. However, the survey results suggest that, when possible, progressives should focus the discussion on ways in which the Religious Right promotes one *particular* set of religious values over others, rather than engage the movement's contention that government should be encouraging religion more generally. Voters overwhelmingly reject the former, while they are divided on the merits of the latter.

The best way to focus the discussion is to move from the general to the specific--a good example is the issue of school prayer--so that voters can see how efforts to promote religion in general can, in practice, turn into an imposition of one particular set of values. A majority of voters favor allowing school prayer, whether it is teacher-led (57%) or student-led (68%). This support declines substantially, however, when certain implications are made clear. Support drops dramatically if there is a risk of lawsuits (only 30% favor), if the prayer offends students of different faiths (29% favor), and, most of all, if school officials are "involved in selecting or approving the prayers" (22% favor). This last prospect--that government officials would gain the power to choose prayers--is a very effective argument against the Religious Right and even has a great deal of appeal among conservative voters.

8. Do not compromise credibility by employing exaggerated language. Progressives' descriptions of the Religious Right must ring true to voters.

Referring to politically active religious conservatives as "the Religious Right" is not the most negative terminology that progressives could employ. The survey results show, for example, that a candidate closely associated with "the Radical Right" turns away far more voters (9% positive, 58% negative) than one associated with "the Religious Right" (24% positive, 41% negative). There is no question that the word "radical" is a negative when applied to a political movement; this is also true of "extreme," "far," or any other label that defines a person or group as outside the mainstream.

The problem, however, with using this strong language when referring to the Religious Right--as opposed to when describing a hypothetical candidate in a public opinion poll--is that this is a real, existing political movement about which people already have an opinion. And voters do not consider "Radical Right" to be a fair description of this movement. We asked voters about the fairness of describing Pat Robertson as a leader of the Religious Right, and by two to one, they say that this is a legitimate description; but by the same margin, they feel that calling Pat Robertson a leader of the *Radical* Right is an unfair description that does not really fit him.

Attaching a stigmatizing label to one's opponents can be very effective politically, but for the label to work, it must be *plausible*. The term "Radical Right" fails this critical test. Some groups clearly can be tarred with the "extremist" or

"radical" brush--such as those who bomb abortion clinics or shoot doctors--but this tactic must be used with great care.⁴

9. Reach out to less-educated and lower-income voters, who often do not have liberal social values.

Progressives generally have been much more successful at rallying voters higher on the socioeconomic scale than at reaching less affluent Americans. White college-educated voters, for example, are much more negative toward a candidate backed by the Religious Right (59% negative) than are those without a college degree (35% negative). As can be seen in the following table, voters who feel negative toward the Religious Right are significantly more upscale than are voters in the swing neutral group.

Non-college-educated voters have less liberal views than do college-educated voters on many values-related questions. Though they are less worried about intolerance and discrimination against homosexuals and lesbians (37% of non-college-educated whites feel this is a very or fairly serious problem, and 45% of college-educated voters feel this way), they voice greater concern about the declining role of religion (65% non-college-educated, 56% college-educated). Non-college-educated voters feel much less positive toward a candidate who emphasizes the diversity of America than do college-educated voters (26% to 40%

⁴ Ironically, leaders of the Religious Right seem to be trying to relabel themselves, as well, as the "pro-family" movement (which suggests that they too understand the concerns over the church/state issue). Our guess is that this effort will fail; the religious foundations of this movement are central to what it is about, and neither journalists nor the public are going to ignore that.

positive, respectively), and they are more drawn than are college-educated voters to one who puts a priority on traditional moral values (79% to 60% positive, respectively).

TABLE 3: PROFILE OF ANTI-RELIGIOUS RIGHT AND NEUTRAL VOTERS

(Vertical percentages—i.e., 58% of neutrals have a high school education or less.)

	Negative Toward Religious Right Candidate	Neutral Toward Religious Right Candidate
	%	%
Percent with high school education or less	35	58
Percent who are four-year college graduates	38	14
Percent who are blue collar workers ¹	35	50
Percent who are upper-status white collar workers ¹	31	15
Percent with income below \$20,000	17	28
Percent with income \$50,00 or over	28	18

¹ Percentage of employed adults.

The best way to prevent less-educated voters from embracing the Religious Right, despite their conservative social leanings, is to address their concerns about the mixing of religion and politics. Non-college-educated voters cite this concern regarding the influence of the Religious Right more frequently than do college-educated voters, while being less upset over the movement's right-wing issue positions or its intolerance toward people whose behavior it disapproves of. In terms of specific issues, non-college-educated voters are especially worried by the idea of having government officials choosing school prayers and the Religious Right's opposition to rigorous academic standards (and they share college-educated voters' desire to protect a woman's right to choose an abortion). They

express less concern, though, over book censorship and the Religious Right's opposition to laws that protect gays and lesbians from discrimination.

10. Educate younger Americans about the Religious Right; they reject much of its agenda, but are also the least concerned about its influence.

One of the more disturbing findings in the survey is that younger Americans (18- to 29-year-olds) feel significantly less negative toward the Religious Right than do voters in all other age groups. This is somewhat surprising, because younger voters have progressive attitudes on many social issues; compared to older voters, they are more supportive of comprehensive sex education, less enthusiastic about school prayer, and are especially drawn to a candidate who emphasizes the diversity of America. The explanation for this discrepancy seems to lie in younger people knowing much less about the Religious Right and its true agenda, and thus having no reason to take a negative view. Only 50% of young people know who Pat Robertson is, for example, compared to 77% of voters in all other age groups.

TABLE 4: FEELINGS TOWARD RELIGIOUS RIGHT CANDIDATE, BY AGE

	Positive Toward Religious Right Candidate	Negative Toward Religious Right Candidate	Differential
	%	%	%
Age 18 to 29	32	30	+2
Age 30 to 44	24	43	-19
Age 45 to 59	25	41	-16
Age 60 and over	18	46	-28

Progressives therefore need to make special efforts to inform younger Americans about the Religious Right and its goals. The Religious Right's harshly judgmental character especially should be stressed when communicating with young people, as their top objection to the Religious Right is its intolerance toward people whose lifestyle it does not sanction. On specific issues, a disproportionate percentage of young voters are disturbed by the Religious Right's opposition to sex education and by the prospect of book censorship.