Why Religion is at the Heart of America’s Identity Crisis

Robert P. Jones, Ph.D.
White Christian America

A metaphor for:

• the cultural and political edifice
• built primarily by white Protestant Christians,
• which set the tone for our national conversations and shaped American ideals.
The One Chart: White Christian Minority, Same-sex Marriage Majority

Percent of Americans who are white Christian vs. percent who favor same-sex marriage, 2004-2018

A Minority White Christian Country

The Decline of White Christians by Age

More Young Adults are Unaffiliated Today than in the Past

Religiously Unaffiliated by Age Cohort, 1986-2016

- 18-29
- 30-49
- 50-64
- 65+

The Decline of White Christian Subgroups, 2006-2017

Decreasing Proportions of White Christians by State

Percentage of White Christians by State, 2007
A Caveat:
The Ballot Box as Time Machine
White Christians as a Proportion of the Electorate (1992-2014)

With 10-year linear projection

General Elections
Midterm Elections
Linear (General Elections)


End of Life Bargaining:
From “Values Voters” to “Nostalgia Voters”
Trump Remains Popular with White Evangelicals

Favorability of Donald Trump Among White Evangelical Protestants, 2015-2018

Sources: PRRI Surveys, 2015-2018
White Evangelicals Grow More Accepting of Politicians’ Personal Indiscretions

Percent who say an elected official who commits an immoral act in their personal life can still behave ethically and fulfill their duties in their public and professional life.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2016</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Americans</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White evangelical Protestant</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White mainline Protestant</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unaffiliated</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: PRRI/RNS June 2011 Survey; PRRI/Brookings October 2016 Survey.
Our Divided, Dysfunctional Nation: Partisanship and Tribal Identity
Widening Religion Gap between the Parties


Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner? Partisanship in the Family

FIGURE 6. Sharp Partisan Divides Over Child Marriage Partner Choices
Percent who would be somewhat or very unhappy if their son or daughter married someone who...

- Identifies as transgender: 70% (Republican), 33% (All Americans), 25% (Democrat)
- Is the same gender as your son or daughter: 58% (Republican), 28% (All Americans), 10% (Democrat)
- Is a supporter of the Democratic Party: 35% (Republican), 3% (All Americans), 1% (Democrat)
- Belongs to a different religious group: 28% (Republican), 10% (All Americans), 3% (Democrat)
- Is a different race or ethnicity: 25% (Republican), 7% (All Americans), 2% (Democrat)
- Is a supporter of the Republican Party: 45% (Republican), 2% (All Americans), 0% (Democrat)

Negative Views of the Other Party

Do you feel that the policies of the following...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Republican Party (among Democrats)</th>
<th>Democratic Party (among Republicans)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Don't know/Refused</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move the country in</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are so misguided</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are somewhat</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misguided but</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not dangerous</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serious threat to</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The country</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: PRRI 2017 American Values Survey.
Stark Partisan Divides on the Ideal of Racial Diversity

FIGURE 8. Preference for Racial and Ethnic Diversity vs. Western European Majority in the United States

Statement A: A nation made up of people from all over the world.
Statement B: I would prefer the U.S. to be a nation primarily made up of people from Western European heritage.

Stark Partisan Divides on the Ideal of Religious Diversity

FIGURE 7. Preference for Religious Diversity vs. Christian Majority in the United States

**Statement A**: A nation made up of people belonging to a wide variety of religions.

**Statement B**: A nation primarily made up of people who follow the Christian faith.

![Bar chart showing preferences for religious diversity and Christian majority by political affiliation.](chart)

Since the 1950s, do you think American culture and way of life has mostly changed for the better, or has it mostly changed for the worse?

Source: PRRI 2016 American Values Survey.
U.S. Census projections show that by 2043, African Americans, Latinos, Asians, and other mixed racial and ethnic groups will together be a majority of the population. Do you think the likely impact of this coming demographic change will be...

- Mostly positive
- Mostly negative
- Refused

1950 or 2050? The Challenge of Re-Envisioning America
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