

# The National Cultural Values Survey



# National Cultural Values Survey

America: A Nation in Moral and Spiritual Confusion

SPECIAL REPORT



# National Cultural Values Survey

## America: A Nation in Moral and Spiritual Confusion

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Americans often hear that we are engaged in a culture war. The Culture and Media Institute's National Cultural Values Survey (NCVS) clearly depicts who is on what side and what the conflict is all about: attitudes toward God and religion.

In conjunction with the professional polling firm of Fabrizio, McLaughlin & Associates, the Culture and Media Institute (CMI), a division of the Media Research Center, has conducted a nationwide survey of American cultural and moral values. NCVS also explores Americans' views on the media and media consumption habits. Fabrizio, McLaughlin & Associates interviewed 2,000 Americans aged 18 or more, with a margin of error of +/- 2.2 percent.

NCVS reveals that almost all the survey respondents, who are demographically representative of American adults as a whole, can be categorized in one of three values groups - Orthodox, Progressive, and Independent - and these demarcations are based on their views on the role of religion in everyday life.

The Orthodox, who represent just less than a third of American adults, are fundamentally religious in outlook. Virtually all the Orthodox believe in God, and they wish to see government policies reflect religious values. They see moral issues in black and white, right vs. wrong.

One sixth of American adults, the Progressives, are fundamentally secular and are opposed to religious values in government. While 53 percent of Progressives say they believe in God, 33 percent - four times the national figure of 8 percent - say they do not believe in God. Progressives believe in situational ethics: they see moral issues in shades of gray.

Nearly half of American adults, the Independents, do not fully accept either Orthodox or Progressive values. 91 percent of Independents believe in God, and they tend to side with the Orthodox on questions of politics and sexual morality. At the same time, they are "situational" in the way they view moral issues, and their opinions frequently lean toward Progressive opinions regarding honesty and character.

# Major findings

## I. Americans believe the nation is in moral decline, and that the news and entertainment media are major contributors to the slide.

- 74 percent, including majorities of every major demographic group, say they believe moral values in America are weaker than they were 20 years ago.
- 48 percent say moral values are *much* weaker than they were 20 years ago.
- 68 percent, including majorities of virtually every demographic group, say the media – entertainment and news alike – are having a detrimental effect on moral values in America.
- 64 percent agree the news and entertainment media exercise powerful influence over American moral values. In fact, the substantial majority (74 percent) who believe moral values are weaker than twenty years ago consider the media to be the second greatest influence on moral values after parents and families.

## II. Consensus remains high on the importance of classical virtues like industry, truthfulness, thrift, and charity.

- **Industry:** 88 percent believe in consistently doing their best on the job.
- **Truthfulness:** 51 percent say lying is always wrong, and 46 percent accept lying only to protect someone else's feelings.
- **Thrift:** A solid majority, 59 percent, believe in saving for the future even if it means making sacrifices now. An additional 38 percent will save when they can. Thus the great majority of Americans embrace the concept of delayed gratification.
- **Charity:** 94 percent of American adults believe in giving to others. 45 percent say they give regardless of their circumstances, and 49 percent say they help when they can. Religious beliefs exercise great influence over attitudes toward charity: religious people are far more committed to giving than secular people.

## III. But what happens when the rubber meets the road? While Americans say they believe in the classical virtues, they often fail to follow through. Significant numbers admit they are willing to act dishonestly in everyday life.

- 33 percent of American adults say they would cheat the government by working under the table while receiving unemployment benefits.
  - 25 percent admit they would cheat a restaurant that left items off a bill.
  - 25 percent believe the use of illegal drugs by adults is acceptable.
-

#### **IV. Personal and societal sexual moral standards are crumbling.**

- 16 percent say sex between unmarried adults is never wrong, and 49 percent more say it depends on the situation. 65 percent of Americans will excuse sex outside marriage.
- Only 67 percent believe premarital sex among high school kids is always wrong.
- Only 49 percent think homosexuality is wrong. A mere 14 percent say homosexuality is right, but 26 percent say it depends on the situation.
- 51 percent describe themselves as “pro-choice,” though only 8 percent believe abortion is “morally right.”
- 45 percent say divorce should be legal for any reason at any time.

#### **V. America is losing its fear of God.**

- 87 percent of Americans say they believe in God and 52 percent say they believe the Bible is God’s authoritative word.
- But only 36 percent believe people should live by God’s principles. 15 percent say they will live by their own principles even if they conflict with God’s principles, and 45 percent prefer to combine God’s teachings and their own values.
- In defiance of the Bible’s prohibition against taking innocent life, 51 percent describe themselves as “pro-choice,” and 53 percent are willing to tolerate physician-assisted suicide.
- 28 percent are willing to exclude religious principles from government simply because the principles are religious in origin. An additional 35 percent will exclude religious principles from government on certain issues.
- Regular churchgoing has dipped below 50 percent among American adults.

### **Conclusion**

America no longer enjoys cultural consensus on God, religion, and what constitutes right and wrong. The nation is in a cultural war, with two values groups, one religious and one secular, influencing the independent-thinking mass of the public. The religious Orthodox believe in living by God’s revealed morality, while the secular Progressives believe in writing their own moral code. Based on the survey data, departure from God’s moral precepts is the cause of America’s widely perceived moral decline.

Americans have clearly identified the media as primary culprits in the nation’s moral decline. If the media continue to singularly promote Progressive values and a secular worldview, while undermining Orthodox faith and values, reversing America’s moral decline will be very difficult. Americans who care about the nation’s moral condition should insist that the media strive to more fairly represent all views, including those of the Orthodox.

---

# National Cultural Values Survey

## America: A Nation in Moral and Spiritual Confusion

BY BRIAN FITZPATRICK  
SENIOR EDITOR, CULTURE AND MEDIA INSTITUTE

### Methodology and Survey Interpretation: The Three American Values Groups.

Is America engaged in a culture war? The Culture and Media Institute's National Cultural Values Survey (NCVS) finds no reason to doubt that a culture war is raging. NCVS clearly depicts who is on what side, and what the war is all about: attitudes toward God and religion.

NCVS examines the American public's moral values, attitudes and practices according to a variety of demographic categories. Most of the survey questions focused on values and morality, but the NCVS also gathered information about respondents' age, sex, ethnicity, education, employment status, income, marital status, family composition, religious beliefs, political philosophy, partisan loyalties, media consumption habits, and geographic location.

Fabrizio, McLaughlin & Associates (FMA) conducted the survey December 4 through 8, 2006. FMA collected data from a total of 2,000 American citizens aged 18 or more, 1,000 by telephone and 1,000 over the Internet. The margin of error for the entire sample is +/- 2.2 percent at the 95 percent confidence interval.

The most effective way to describe the current American cultural situation is by analyzing the data according to Americans' personal values. According to the survey, 94 percent of Americans fit into one of three values groups: **Orthodox**, **Progressive**, and **Independent**. The principal factors defining these three categories are beliefs about God and the role of religion in everyday life (see appendix for demographic breakdown).

The **Orthodox**, 31 percent of the public, tend to be America's most religiously observant people. They believe in living by God's teachings, and consider deep religious faith to be the most essential ingredient for living a good and moral life. They are more likely to see moral issues in vivid black and white. Orthodox people believe it is right and proper to allow government to apply religious principles to government. Virtually all Orthodox believe in God.

The **Progressives**, 17 percent of the public, advocate a secularized approach to private and public life. They reject the notion that having deep religious beliefs is necessary for living a good and moral life. Progressives believe people should live their lives according to their own personal principles, even if those principles contradict God’s teachings. They see morality in shades of gray: morality is situational, not absolute. They tend to think of themselves as the final authority, rather than God or the law. Progressives think government should not be allowed to apply religious principles. 53 percent of Progressives say they believe in God, and 33 percent – four times the overall national figure of 8 percent – say they do not believe in God.

The **Independents**, 46 percent of the public, do not fully buy into either the Orthodox or the Progressive values systems. Their guiding principle is neither religious revelation nor secular ideology. To the Independents, religious beliefs are one of many ingredients needed to live a good and moral life. People should live by both their own values and God’s teachings. To Independents, whether government should be allowed to apply religious principles depends on the specific issue. 91 percent of Independents believe in God, and they generally side with the Orthodox on political and sexual morality issues. They generally respect the Biblical values our country was founded upon, and reject, for example, Progressive efforts to replace “Merry Christmas” with “Happy Holidays.” However, Independents tend to see moral issues in shades of gray rather than black and white absolutes, and they tend to view personal character issues similarly to Progressives. Their moral world view is consistent with the Progressive world view: their moral compass is their own judgment, not God’s revelation.

The tables that follow illustrate the NCVS questions that define America’s three values groups.

Living a Good and Moral Life

Which of the following statements regarding living a good and moral life comes closest to your opinion?

	Total	Orthodox	Independents	Progressives
Having deep religious beliefs is the most important ingredient to living a good and moral life	30%	82%	6%	0%
Religious beliefs are one of many essential ingredients to living a good and moral life	49%	17%	84%	13%
Having deep religious beliefs is not an essential ingredient at all to living a good and moral life	19%	1%	9%	86%

*Figures are percentages of all American adults, and percentages of adults within the three values groups.*



### Living by God's Principles

Which of the following statements regarding how people live their lives comes closest to your opinion?

	Total	Orthodox	Independents	Progressives
People should always live by God's teachings and principles	36%	92%	10%	2%
People should live their lives by a combination of God's teachings and a personal set of moral values	45%	8%	82%	17%
People should always live their lives by their own personal set of morals and values even when they contradict God's teachings and principles	15%	0%	4%	77%

*Figures are percentages of all American adults, or percentages of adults within the three values groups.*

### Beliefs about Religious Principles in Government

Which of the following statements regarding religion and government comes closest to your opinion?

	Total	Orthodox	Independents	Progressives
Allowing government to follow religious principles is wrong	28%	10%	16%	79%
Depends on the issue	35%	18%	59%	12%
Allowing government to follow religious principles is right	29%	67%	14%	5%

*Figures are percentages of all American adults, or percentages of adults within the three values groups.*



### Is Morality Black and White, or Gray?

Which of the following statements regarding right and wrong comes closest to your opinion?

	Total	Orthodox	Independents	Progressives
Every situation has a clear set of right and wrong behaviors and people should behave accordingly	42%	63%	36%	20%
Some situations don't have a clear set of right and wrong behaviors and people should act accordingly	50%	33%	58%	66%
In every situation, people should behave however they feel comfortable and not be tied down by subjective judgments of right and wrong	6%	2%	5%	13%

*Figures are percentages of all American adults, or percentages of adults within the three values groups.*

## I. Perception: the Nation is in Moral Decline.

*74 percent of adult Americans believe moral values in America are weaker than they were 20 years ago.*

Each of the major values groups concurs, from 84 percent of Orthodox to 74 percent of Independents to 57 percent of Progressives. Nearly half of all respondents, 48 percent, say moral values are much weaker than they were 20 years ago.

Virtually every demographic group identified in the NCVS, even 66 percent of people who never attend church and 51 percent of the most committed Progressives, agree that moral values are weaker.

What about America's youth? Two thirds of survey respondents, 66 percent, believe that young people have a weaker sense of right and wrong than young people of 20 years ago. This view is shared by 75 percent of Orthodox, 65 percent of Independents, and a 49 percent plurality of Progressives. Every group across the political spectrum agrees: 63 percent of Democrats, 73 percent of Republicans, 56 percent of liberals, and 74 percent of conservatives. Even 51 percent of people aged 18-24 agree.

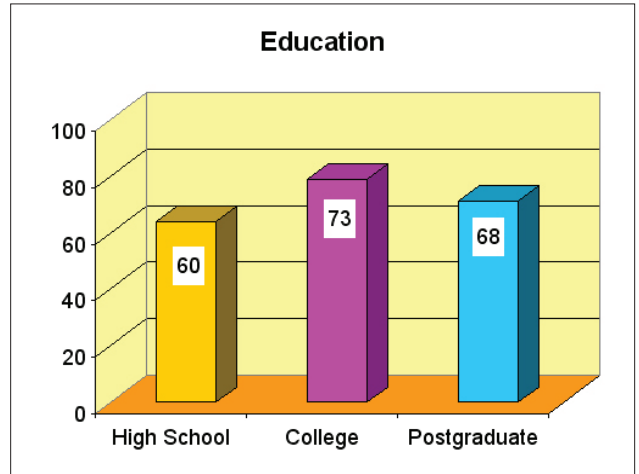
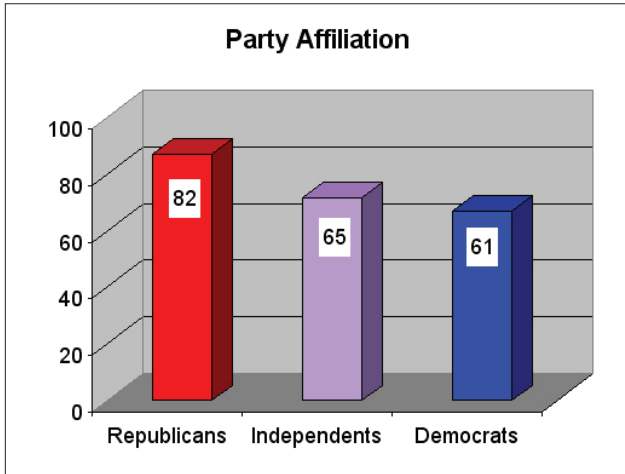
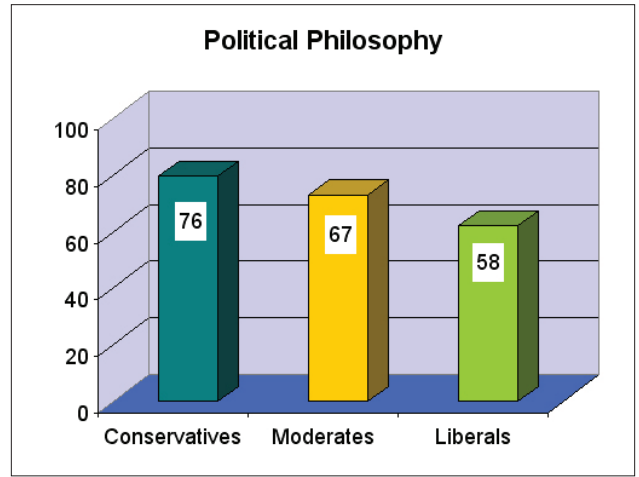
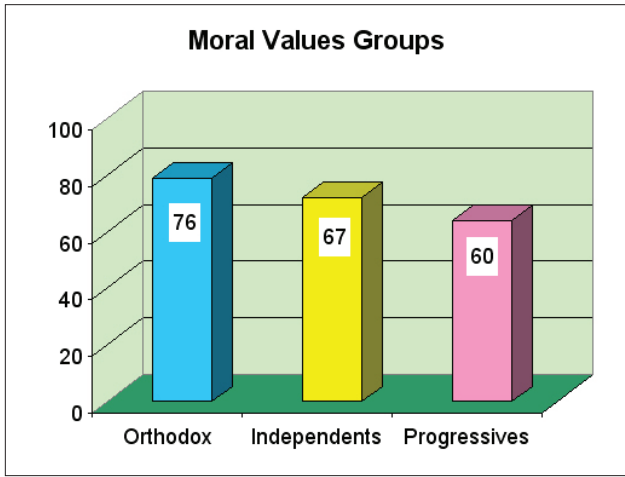
The only group that disagrees sharply about moral decline among the youth is people whose primary occupation is student. Only 39 percent agree, in sharp contrast to homemakers (75 percent). Maybe kids should listen to their moms more.

*68 percent of American adults say the media are having a detrimental effect on moral values in America.*

Majorities from virtually every demographic category agree that the media, both entertainment and news, are undermining America's moral standards. Americans place heavier blame on the entertainment media, but they hold the news media responsible as well. The following graphs display the percentages of people who say the media have a negative impact on values, by values systems, political philosophy, and partisan affiliation:



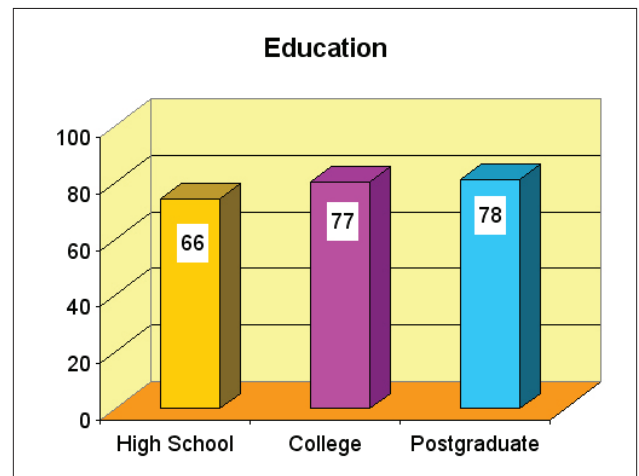
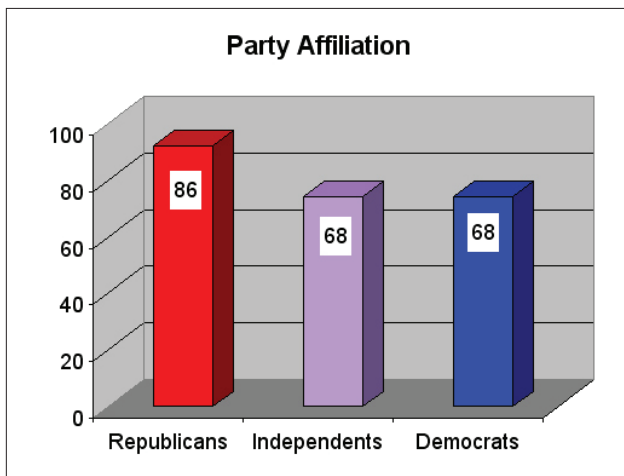
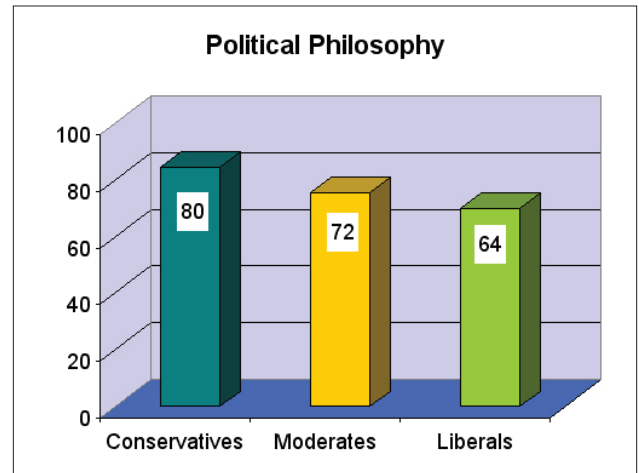
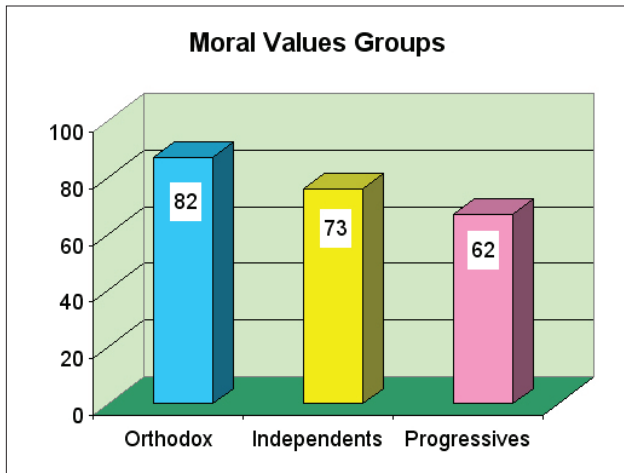
Percentages of People Who Believe the Media Have a Detrimental Effect on Moral Values



*73 percent of American adults say the entertainment media have a negative impact on moral values.*

43 percent describe Hollywood's impact as strongly negative. Here are the numbers, again expressed in percentages of people who say the entertainment media have a negative impact:

Percentages of People Who Believe the Entertainment Media Have a Detrimental Effect on Values



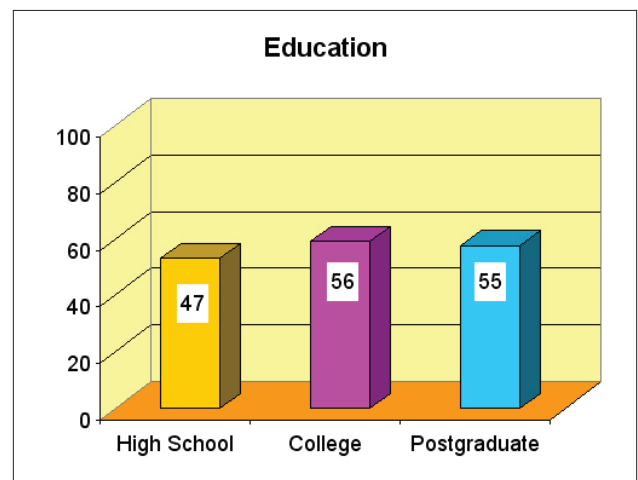
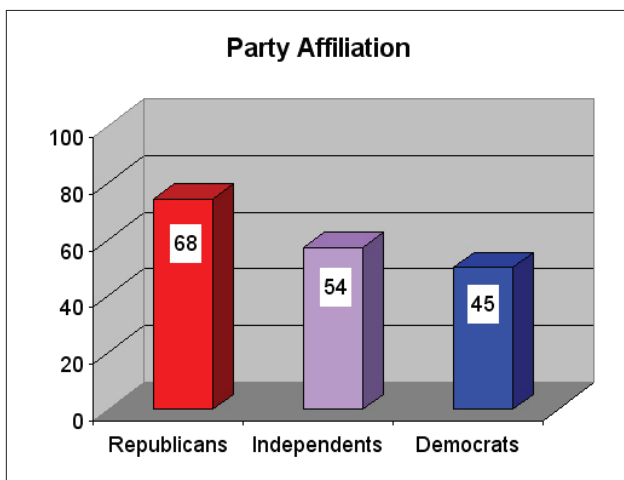
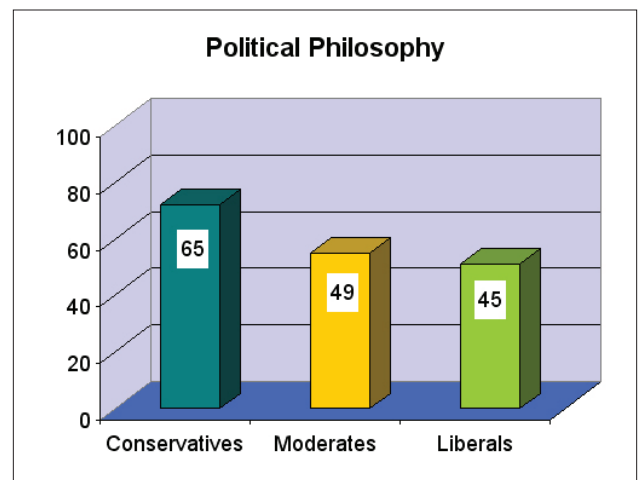
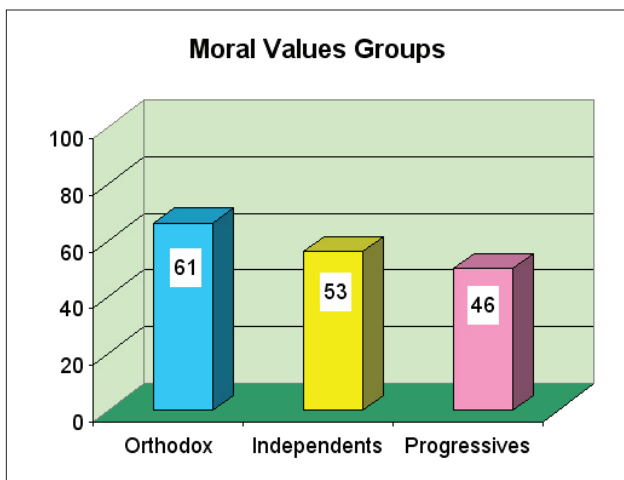
**54 percent believe the news media have a detrimental impact on moral values.**

The numbers on the news media are much lower than on the entertainment industry, mostly because of the influence of political ideology. But even among liberal groups, sizable pluralities agree that the news media is damaging American moral values.

Here are the numbers, expressed in percentages of those who say the news media are damaging moral values:



Percentages of People Who Believe the News Media Have a Detrimental Effect on Values



***64 percent of American adults agree the media are an important factor in shaping America's moral values.***

52 percent believe media are an important factor in shaping moral values, and an additional 12 percent say media are the most important factor in shaping values. Only 7 percent say the media are not a factor in shaping moral values. 73 percent of Orthodox think the media are an important factor, compared to 62 percent of Independents and 54 percent of Progressives.

The 74 percent of American adults who believe America's moral values are in decline say the media – not schools or churches – are the second most influential factor on American values. Only parents and family outrank the media.

Asked who is most responsible for American moral values being weaker than they were 20 years ago, 35 percent blame parents/families failing to teach proper values. 26 percent hold television/media most responsible. 57 percent blame parents/families for moral decline among young people, while 21 percent blame television/media.

## II. Americans still believe in the classical virtues.

Americans agree on the importance of the fundamental virtues that define good character. However, the three moral values groups are not equally committed to the classical virtues. The Orthodox place the greatest emphasis on the virtues, and Progressives the least. Independents tend to lean closer to the Progressive positions than to those of the Orthodox.

**Integrity:** CMI asked American adults which was more important: doing the right thing, or doing what makes them look good in front of their friends. 87 percent said they would do what is right even if they are embarrassed in front of their friends. This includes 95 percent of Orthodox, 84 percent of Independents, and 87 percent of Progressives. Only 1 percent of respondents say doing the right thing is less important than looking good to their friends.

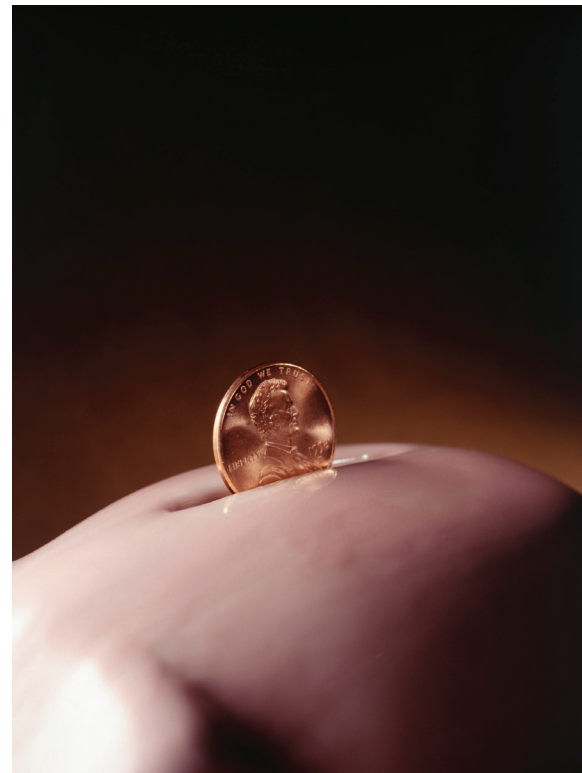
**Contentment over Greed:** 87 percent of American adults believe in being grateful no matter their circumstances, including 96 percent of Orthodox, 86 percent of Independents, and 74 percent of Progressives. Only 2 percent of Americans say they should strive for more no matter how much they have, rather than be grateful for what they have.

**Helping Others Selflessly:** 87 percent say they will help a neighbor or acquaintance in need even if they know the favor will not be returned, including 95 percent of Orthodox, 85 percent of Independents, and 79 percent of Progressives. Only 1 percent say they will help only if the favor will surely be returned. 82 percent will help a coworker with a project even if the coworker previously had refused to help them, including 90 percent of Orthodox, 80 percent of Independents, and 72 percent of Progressives.

**Industry:** 88 percent believe in consistently doing their best on the job, while only 3 percent are lackadaisical about the quality of their job performance. 95 percent of Orthodox believe in hard work, compared to 87 percent of Independents and 82 percent of Progressives.

**Thrift:** A solid majority, 59 percent, believe in saving for the future even if it means making sacrifices. This majority includes 71 percent of Orthodox, 54 percent of Independents, and 51 percent of Progressives. An additional 38 percent will save when they can. Only 2 percent say people should not worry about saving and spend what it takes to make sure they have what they want today. 48 percent believe in avoiding debt entirely, and 48 percent approach debt cautiously. Only 3 percent say it's okay to go into debt in order to get the things they want. In effect, at least 96 percent of Americans are open to the concept of delayed gratification.

**Charity:** 94 percent of American adults believe in giving to others. 45 percent say they make it a priority to help the needy and give back to the community regardless of their circumstances. 49 percent believe in helping when they can. Only 4 percent reject the necessity of charity.





While overall commitment to charity is very high, NCVS finds that some values groups clearly are more committed to charity than others. 62 percent of Orthodox, but only 37 percent of Independents and 35 percent of Progressives, believe in giving no matter their personal circumstances. 63 percent of weekly churchgoers make a point of giving, as do 50 percent of those who believe God created life on earth. In contrast, only 28 percent of people who never attend church and 34 percent of people who believe life evolved through forces of nature are committed to giving whatever their financial circumstances. Note to Hollywood: 47 percent of people in Flyover Country (the South and Midwest) and 49 percent of rural dwellers are committed to charity, as opposed to 39 percent of urban dwellers. Only 7 percent of Orthodox say they didn't make any charitable contributions last year; 31 percent of Progressives say they made no contributions.

The NCVS findings on attitudes toward charitable giving are consistent with the recently released Syracuse study on actual giving and the connection between charity and religious and political beliefs. In his November 2006 book, *Who Really Cares: The Surprising Truth About Compassionate Conservatism*, Arthur C. Brooks, Director of Nonprofit Studies for Syracuse University's Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, found that religious conservatives are far more charitable than liberal and secular people. In 2000, religious people gave an average of \$2,210 to charity, and secular people just \$642. Even excluding donations to religious organizations, religious people still gave \$88 more per year than secular people to nonreligious charities.

Charity: Attitudes and Practices by Values Group

	Total	Orthodox	Independents	Progressives
People should always feel obligated to help the less fortunate and give back to their communities	45%	62%	37%	35%
People should help the less fortunate and give back to their community only when they are in a position to help	49%	35%	59%	53%
People should not feel an obligation to help the less fortunate and give back to their communities	4%	2%	2%	10%
No actual contributions last year	16%	7%	15%	31%

*Figures are percentages of all American adults, and percentages of adults within the three values groups.*

**Truthfulness:** Fully 51 percent say lying is always wrong under any circumstances, and 46 percent accept lying only to protect someone or their feelings. 74 percent of Orthodox say lying is always wrong, compared to 43 percent of Independents and only 29 percent of Progressives. Only 1 percent say lying is an acceptable strategy to help accomplish your goals. Despite the expressed commitment to truth telling, however, survey results discussed later indicate that many Americans honor truthfulness largely in the breach.

**Keeping your word:** 86 percent say they will keep a promise to help a roommate to move to a new dwelling even if the roommate had previously broken the same promise. This includes 91 percent of Orthodox, 85 percent of Independents, and 83 percent of Progressives. Only 7 percent would retaliate by breaking their own promises, including 4 percent of Orthodox, 8 percent of Independents, and 10 percent of Progressives.

Promise keeping, like truthfulness, appears often to be honored in the breach. 53 percent believe in keeping promises no matter what, but 46 percent can excuse the failure to keep their word in situations where it’s “too difficult or inconvenient.” The latter group includes 31 percent of Orthodox, 54 percent of Independents, and 51 percent of Progressives.

The following table lists percentages of the three values groups that answered affirmatively to questions measuring commitment to classical virtues. Orthodox people appear to be more committed to the virtues than the average, while Progressives appear to be less committed to classical virtues.

Commitment to Classical Virtues by Values Group

	Total	Orthodox	Independents	Progressives
Integrity – do the right thing	87%	95%	84%	87%
Industry – do your best at work	88%	95%	87%	82%
Truthfulness – lying always wrong	51%	74%	43%	29%
Always help a friend in need	87%	95%	85%	79%
Contentment over greed	87%	96%	86%	74%
Thrift – avoid debt	48%	53%	45%	45%
Thrift – save sacrificially	59%	71%	54%	51%

*Numbers are percentages of all American adults, and all adults within the three values groups, selecting the affirmative response to questions about classical virtues.*



### III. What happens when the rubber meets the road? Many Americans admit they are willing to act dishonestly in everyday life.

Can Americans still trust the word of the guy next door? Americans overwhelmingly believe in virtue and good character in principle, but they admit to falling short in the application. Situational ethics appear to have significantly eroded the morality of American behavior. A striking contrast exists between churchgoers and non-churchgoers. Progressives are clearly less committed to honesty and

personal responsibility, particularly in respect to obeying the law.

**Honesty:** 31 percent of Americans say they are willing to break the law. Only 65 percent say it's always wrong to break the law, including 82 percent of Orthodox, 63 percent of Independents, and 42 percent of Progressives. 26 percent say it's okay to break laws if they're outdated, or if nobody's hurt, including 13 percent of Orthodox, 30 percent of Independents, and 42 percent of Progressives. 5 percent of all Americans, and 10 percent of Progressives, believe that lots of laws are unnecessary and stupid and we should not obey them.

#### Willingness to Break the Law

Which of the following statements regarding obeying the law comes closest to your opinion?

	Total	Orthodox	Independents	Progressives
It is always wrong to break the law no matter what we may think of them	65%	82%	63%	42%
There are some laws that are ok to break because they are outdated or breaking them doesn't really hurt anyone	26%	13%	30%	45%
There are lots of laws that are unnecessary and stupid and we shouldn't obey them	5%	3%	5%	10%

Figures represent percentages of all American adults, or all Americans within each values group.

76 percent say they will admit a mistake regardless of the consequences, but 22 percent are willing to cover up or deny the mistake in order to protect themselves. This includes 12 percent of Orthodox, 26 percent of Independents, and 27 percent of Progressives. 12 percent of frequent churchgoers will protect themselves, contrasted to 25 percent of people who attend church infrequently or never.

70 percent of respondents say they would tell a restaurant if items are left off the bill, but 25 percent say they'd go along with friends who prefer to cheat the restaurant. 11 percent of Orthodox would go along with their friends, compared to 28 percent of Independents and a stunning 45 percent of Progressives. 6 percent of frequent churchgoers would cheat the restaurant, contrasted with 41 percent of people who never attend church. 28 percent of Democrats v. 17 percent of Republicans; 34 percent of liberals v. 18 percent of conservatives; and 34 percent of pro-choicers v. 16 percent of pro-lifers would cheat the restaurant.



### Cheating on a Restaurant Bill

You are out to dinner with a group of friends. When the check arrives you notice that several items are missing from the bill. Your friends say you should just pay the bill, and that it's the restaurant's own fault for making the mistake. What would you do?

	Total	Orthodox	Independents	Progressives
Tell the waiter and pay the right amount	70%	85%	66%	52%
Pay the smaller tab	25%	11%	28%	45%

*Figures represent percentages of all American adults, or all Americans within each values group.*

57 percent of respondents say they would come clean if they were ever unfaithful to their spouses. 34 percent say they would be willing to deceive their spouses. This includes 23 percent of Orthodox, 40 percent of Independents, and 40 percent of Progressives. 24 percent of people who attend church once per week would be willing to deceive their spouses, contrasted with 43 percent of people who infrequently attend church.

Only 56 percent of respondents say they wouldn't cheat the government on unemployment benefits. 33 percent admit they are willing to cheat by collecting benefits while also working under the table. Cheaters include 21 percent of Orthodox, 36 percent of Independents, and 49 percent of Progressives. Only 16 percent of frequent churchgoers say they would cheat the government, contrasted to 43 percent of people who never attend church.

### Cheating on Unemployment Benefits

You lose your job. Your friend's company is looking for someone to do temporary work. They are willing to pay the person in cash to avoid taxes and allow the person to still collect unemployment. What would you do?

	Total	Orthodox	Independents	Progressives
Take the job and cheat on taxes	33%	21%	36%	49%
Turn down the job and look for another job	56%	68%	54%	42%

*Figures represent percentages of all American adults, or all Americans within each values group.*

**Personal Responsibility:** 72 percent of Americans agree that people should always be reliable. 28 percent, however, think people should be reliable "when possible." These include 16 percent of Orthodox, 34 percent of Independents, and 29 percent of Progressives.

25 percent of Americans accept adult use of illegal drugs. 72 percent believe using illegal drugs is wrong, but 20 percent will tolerate illegal drug use in certain situations, and 5 percent say adults should be able to use any drugs they want, illegal or not. 89 percent of Orthodox oppose illegal drug use, as do 70 percent of Independents but only 47 percent of Progressives. 35 percent of Progressives accept situational use of illegal drugs, and 17 percent accept all drug use.

### Toleration of Illegal Drug Use

Which of the following statements regarding drug use comes closest to your opinion?

	Total	Orthodox	Independents	Progressives
Adults using illegal drugs is always wrong	72%	89%	70%	47%
Whether adults using illegal drugs is right or wrong depends on the drugs being used	20%	8%	24%	35%
Adults should be able to use any drugs they want even if they are illegal	5%	2%	4%	17%

*Figures represent percentages of all American adults, or all Americans within each values group.*

America's decline in accepting personal responsibility is most pronounced in the political sphere. A remarkable 52 percent of Americans say government should be responsible for providing retirement security for everyone; only 40 percent say people should plan and save for themselves and not depend on Social Security. 53 percent of Americans would prefer a government-run health care system with guaranteed coverage for everybody, including 45 percent of Orthodox, 56 percent of Independents, and 67 percent of Progressives.



## IV. Personal and societal sexual moral standards are crumbling.

Sexual moral standards are low in general, but especially among Progressives.

**65 percent of Americans are willing to excuse sex between unmarried adults.** Only 32 percent believe that sex between unmarried adults is always wrong. 49 percent will accept it depending on the situation, and 16 percent say it's *never wrong*. 68 percent of Orthodox condemn sex between unmarried adults, while 78 percent of Independents and 95 percent of Progressives can accept it. Independents are even more likely than Progressives to view the morality of sex between unmarried adults as situational.

### Acceptance of Sex between Unmarried Adults

Which of the following statements regarding sex between unmarried adults comes closest to your opinion?

	Total	Orthodox	Independents	Progressives
Sex between unmarried adults is always wrong	32%	68%	18%	3%
Depends on the situation	49%	26%	64%	53%
Sex between unmarried adults is never wrong	16%	3%	14%	42%

Figures represent percentages of all American adults, or all Americans within each values group.

**16 percent of American adults respondents are willing to accept adultery.** 95 percent of Orthodox and 82 percent of Independents condemn it, but 37 percent of Progressives can tolerate adultery in certain situations.

### Views on Adultery

Which of the following statements regarding adultery comes closest to your opinion?

	Total	Orthodox	Independents	Progressives
Adultery is always wrong	83%	95%	82%	61%
There are some situations where adultery is understandable	15%	3%	16%	35%
Adultery is never wrong	1%	1%	0%	2%

Figures represent percentages of all Americans, or all Americans within each values group.



Only 67 percent of Americans believe premarital sex among high schoolers is always wrong. 90 percent of Orthodox and 65 percent of Independents condemn it, but 65 percent of Progressives accept high school sex under certain circumstances.

Acceptance of Sex Among High Schoolers

Which of the following statements regarding premarital sex among high schoolers comes closest to your opinion?

	Total	Orthodox	Independents	Progressives
Always wrong	67%	90%	65%	33%
Depends on the situation	25%	6%	28%	54%
Never wrong	4%	1%	3%	11%

Figures represent percentages of all American adults, or all Americans within each values group.

45 percent believe divorce should be legal at any time for any reason, while 48 percent would limit divorce to cases of adultery, abandonment or abuse.

40 percent of Americans think homosexuality is morally acceptable. 49 percent, including 83 percent of Orthodox, believe homosexual behavior is wrong. 26 percent of the overall sample will accept it depending on the situation, and 14 percent, including 45 percent of Progressives, think homosexual behavior is just fine. 61 percent of Americans continue to oppose homosexual marriage, while 33 percent (76 percent of Progressives) believe same-sex couples should be permitted to marry. 46 percent of Americans believe homosexual behavior is a choice, while 38 percent think homosexuality is an inborn trait.

51 percent of Americans describe themselves as “pro-choice” on abortion, and 44 percent as “pro-life.” Only 34 percent say abortion is wrong, including 66 percent of Orthodox, 23 percent of Independents, and 8 percent of Progressives. Only a tiny fraction, 8 percent, of Americans say abortion is right in any situation, but 56 percent say they will accept abortion depending on circumstances, so a total of 64 percent of Americans are willing to tolerate abortion.



The following table lists percentages of the three values groups that answered affirmatively to questions measuring commitment to traditional sexual morality. A sharp distinction between Orthodox and Progressive values groups is clear.

Commitment to Sexual Morality by Values Group

	Total	Orthodox	Independents	Progressives
Adultery is always wrong	83%	95%	82%	61%
Sex between unmarried adults is always wrong	32%	68%	18%	3%
Sex between high schoolers is always wrong	67%	90%	65%	33%
Couples should remain faithful to each other	81%	92%	78%	69%
Divorce is wrong	13%	26%	9%	4%
Pro-life	44%	74%	36%	10%
Homosexuality is wrong	49%	83%	39%	15%
No same-sex marriage	61%	88%	59%	20%

*Figures represent percentages of all American adults, or all Americans within each values group, who answered affirmatively to questions about moral values.*

## V. America is losing its fear of God.

87 percent of survey respondents say they believe in God; only 8 percent say they do not believe in God. 69 percent say they believe God created life on earth; only 22 percent say life on earth evolved through forces of nature. 52 percent say they believe the Bible is God's authoritative word, compared to 41 percent who believe the Bible is just a collection of stories.

Though the respondents say, by and large, that they believe in God and believe He has communicated to mankind, they are frequently unwilling to submit to His authority. Only 36 percent of respondents say people should live by God's principles. 45 percent believe in living by a combination of God's principles and their own, and 15 percent elevate their own principles above God's. Therefore, a total of 60 percent are willing to elevate their own wisdom and authority above God's under at least some circumstances. 68 percent do not believe that having deep religious beliefs is the most essential ingredient for living a good and moral life.

Homosexuality is a good illustration of drift away from submission to God's authority. 65 percent acknowledge that the Bible teaches that homosexual behavior is immoral; only 18 percent say the Bible supports or doesn't pass judgment on homosexual acts. Nevertheless, 38 percent say they think homosexuality is an inborn trait, rather than a chosen lifestyle, and 33 percent believe in same-sex marriage.

The drift away from Godly principles on sanctity of life issues is even more pronounced. Though the Ten Commandments condemn murder, and Western tradition has considered abortion a crime until only recently, 51 percent of respondents describe themselves as pro-choice, and 64 percent are willing to tolerate abortion under certain circumstances. 53 percent are willing to tolerate physician-assisted suicide.



Skepticism about religious involvement in government programs is widespread. 31 percent say programs accepting federal money should not be permitted to incorporate faith into their activities. 28 percent say it is flat-out wrong to allow the government to follow religious principles, and 35 percent say it depends on the issue – so 63 percent are willing to exclude religious principles from the law simply because they are religious.

Regular churchgoing has dipped below 50 percent in America. 12 percent of American adults attend church several times per year, and 38 percent attend rarely or never. 46 percent attend church a few times per month or more.

The following table lists percentages of the three values groups that answered affirmatively to questions about God and religion.

Attitude toward God and Religion by Values Group

	Total	Orthodox	Independents	Progressives
I believe in God	87%	100%	91%	53%
God created life on earth	69%	96%	68%	22%
The Bible is the authoritative word of God	52%	89%	43%	10%
Religion is the most important factor in forming my values	20%	44%	11%	2%
Living a moral and good life is the most important life goal	32%	50%	26%	16%
Deep religious beliefs are the most essential ingredient to living a good and moral life	30%	82%	6%	0%
People should always live by God's teachings and principles	36%	92%	10%	2%
Allowing government to follow religious principles is right	29%	67%	14%	5%

*Figures represent percentages of all American adults, or all Americans within each values group, who answered affirmatively to questions about God and religion.*

## Conclusion

America no longer enjoys cultural consensus about God, religion, and what constitutes right and wrong. Instead, America is embroiled in a culture war, with two distinct groups, one religious and one secular, influencing the independent-thinking mass of the public. The fundamental distinction between the Orthodox and the Progressive value groups is their attitude toward God: the Orthodox believe in acting on God's principles, while the Progressives believe in writing their own moral code.

The morally absolutist Orthodox value system encourages people to lead lives consistent with the pillars of morality, such as honesty, personal responsibility, sexual restraint, and classical character virtues like industry, thrift, and charity. People who accept Progressive values are far more likely to disregard these fundamental elements of morality in their daily lives.

American adults agree overwhelmingly that America is in moral decline. Based on the survey data, departure from God's morality is the cause of America's widely perceived cultural decline. Progressive values, with their situational ethics and secular emphasis, have apparently made substantial inroads against America's traditional, religiously inspired cultural values. If more people adopt Progressive values, America can expect to experience even greater moral confusion.

The battlefield in America's culture war is the hearts and the minds of the Independents, who constitute nearly half the population. Almost all Independents believe in God, as the Orthodox do, but the Independents do not accept moral absolutes. Their moral relativism facilitates their leaning toward the Progressive view on many moral and character issues.

Reversing America's moral decline will require a renewed acceptance of Orthodox values, which implies increased acceptance of God's authority.

Most Americans agree that the media are a powerful, harmful influence in American culture. If the media continue to singularly promote Progressive values and a secular worldview, and continue to undermine Orthodox faith and values, America will find it difficult to reverse the serious moral decline perceived by so many people.

At the least, Americans should demand that the news and entertainment media treat long-held American values with respect. Americans who care about the nation's moral condition should insist that the media strive to more fairly represent all views, including those of the Orthodox.

## About the Culture and Media Institute

The Culture and Media Institute's mission is to advance, preserve, and help restore America's culture, character, traditional values, and morals against the assault of the liberal media elite. Founded in October 2006 with a challenge grant from the Templeton Foundation, CMI has already attracted attention from the Rush Limbaugh Show, Fox News Channel, CNN and many other news outlets.

Using the unique resources at Media Research Center, CMI is exposing media campaigns against the traditional values of faith, self-reliance, patriotism, marriage, decency, civic pride, gratitude, industriousness, and good manners. CMI staffers appear regularly on TV, radio and in print, and publish periodic reports as well as articles for outside publications.

CMI's staff is wielding a vital weapon in America's ongoing culture war: scientifically sound media studies, accompanied by lively commentaries. CMI's National Cultural Values Survey will serve as the foundation for a series of studies examining what Americans believe and how the media are affecting the nation's views on a range of issues.

---

The Culture and Media Institute  
A Division of the Media Research Center  
325 South Patrick Street • Alexandria, Virginia 22314  
(703) 683-9733 • [www.CultureandMediaInstitute.org](http://www.CultureandMediaInstitute.org)

L. Brent Bozell III, President  
Robert H. Knight, Director  
Brian Fitzpatrick, Senior Editor  
Kristen Fyfe, Senior Writer  
Colleen Raezler, Research Assistant



## About the MRC

Founded in 1987, the Media Research Center (MRC) is America's largest and most respected media watchdog group. Its mission is to create a media culture where truth and liberty flourish in America.

The Alexandria, Virginia-based organization brings balance and responsibility to the news media through its **News Analysis Division**, which documents, exposes and neutralizes liberal media bias; the **Business & Media Institute**, which audits the media's coverage of economic issues; **TimesWatch.org**, which monitors the New York Times; and **NewsBusters.org**, the MRC blog, which exposes liberal media bias 24 hours a day.

The MRC is also home to the **Cybercast News Service (CNSNews.com)**, an Internet news outlet that is dedicated to providing unbiased coverage of the news of the day.

In 2006, the MRC launched the **Culture and Media Institute** with a mission to advance and help restore America's culture, character, traditional values and morals against the assault of the liberal media elite.

Former CBS reporter and now best-selling author Bernard Goldberg says of the MRC, "The Media Research Center folks don't give the media hell; they just tell the truth and the media think it's hell."



Appendix: Demographic Information about America's Three Values Groups: Orthodox, Independents, and Progressives

		Total	Orth	Indep	Prog
What is your religion?	Protestant	54	74	52	23
	Catholic	22	14	29	17
	Atheist/Agnostic	7	1	4	32
	Mormon	2	4	2	1
	Jewish	2	0	2	6
	Muslim	0	1	1	0
	Other	4	3	3	5
Are you an evangelical or born-again Christian?	Yes	41	71	33	8
	No	54	25	60	88
How often do you attend organized religious services?	A few times a month or more	46	79	38	10
	Rarely or never	50	19	58	87
What was the last grade of formal education you completed?	High school grad or less	27	30	26	20
	Some college	33	31	36	33
	College graduate	22	19	21	27
	Post graduate degree	12	13	11	13
What is your main racial background?	White	70	69	71	71
	African American	11	13	11	6
	Hispanic	11	11	10	14
	Asian American	3	2	3	4
	Other	4	4	4	4
What is your age?	18 - 24	12	9	12	18
	25 - 34	18	15	17	25
	35 - 44	21	21	21	22
	45 - 54	17	17	17	14
	55 - 64	13	13	14	11
	65 - 74	10	11	11	4
	75+	8	12	6	5

Appendix: Demographic Information about America's Three Values Groups: Orthodox, Independents, and Progressives (continued)

		Total	Orth	Indep	Prog
What is your sex?	Male	48	42	50	53
	Female	52	58	50	47
What part of the country do you come from?	Northeast	19	11	21	28
	Midwest	24	24	26	21
	South	35	46	32	23
	West	21	19	21	28
Which political party are you affiliated with?	Democrat	39	30	41	48
	Independent	17	12	17	23
	Republican	31	44	29	14
Are you liberal, moderate, or conservative in your political beliefs?	Liberal	18	9	17	37
	Moderate	35	25	40	39
	Conservative	40	59	36	16



Culture and Media Institute  
A Division of the Media Research Center  
325 South Patrick Street  
Alexandria, Virginia 22314  
703.683.9733 • 800.672.1423  
[www.CultureandMediaInstitute.org](http://www.CultureandMediaInstitute.org) • [www.MRC.org](http://www.MRC.org)

