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Young Evangelical Christians and the 2008 Election Survey Results

To: Interested Parties

From: Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research, Inc.

A recent survey¹ conducted for Religion and Ethics NewsWeekly finds that young white evangelical Christians are less supportive of John McCain for president than their older counterparts. Although McCain maintains a solid winning margin among white evangelical Christians on the ballot, white evangelicals ages 18-29 are less supportive of his candidacy and express less favorable impressions of McCain than older white evangelical Christians.

Key Findings

McCain is solidly winning white evangelical Christians on the ballot. White evangelical Christians support McCain 71 percent to 23 percent over Barack Obama, and two-thirds (66 percent) have favorable impressions of McCain. Likewise, Obama suffers from more unfavorable impressions from white evangelical Christians; fifty percent rate Obama “coolly” and only 35 percent give him a favorable rating.

Young evangelical Christians are less likely to support McCain’s candidacy. Although McCain maintains a winning margin over Obama among younger evangelical Christians ages 18-29, his support shrinks by 9 points among this group; McCain still wins young evangelicals overall, but the margin closes to 62-30 McCain compared to 73-22 McCain among white evangelical Christians over the age of 30.

Young white evangelicals also give McCain lower favorability ratings. Slightly over half, 54 percent, of white evangelical Christians under the age of 30 give McCain a positive favorability rating versus 68 percent of white evangelicals over age 30. Presented another way, McCain garners a mean rating of 56 (out of 100) from the younger set compared to a mean of 67 from those over 30.

¹ Please see Appendix A for selected data tables and Appendix B for more information on the methodology of the survey.

White evangelical Christians are more likely to believe that McCain is more religious than Obama. Over half of white evangelicals (54 percent) say McCain is the more religious candidate compared to 32 percent of Americans overall. However, a large percent of Americans (including white evangelicals) say they are not sure which candidate is more religious; thirty-one percent of Americans and 23 percent of white evangelicals say they do not know. Younger white evangelicals are slightly more likely than older white evangelicals to choose Obama as more religious, however only 20 percent of the younger set choose Obama (compared to 13 percent of white evangelicals over age 30).

George Bush is even less popular among younger white evangelicals. Fifty-seven percent of white evangelicals over age 30 give George Bush a warm rating but those under 30 seem more disenchanted, giving him a mean rating of 43 (out of 100) and with only 39 percent rating him favorably.

Young white evangelical women are less positive about Sarah Palin. White evangelical women under age 30 give Sarah Palin surprisingly low favorability ratings, with only 46 percent rating her warmly. This dissent contrasts sharply with white evangelical women over age 30 who are among her most ardent supporters; 65 percent of older evangelical women rate Palin warmly.

A majority of young white evangelical Christians support legal recognition of civil unions or marriage for same-sex couples. Fifty-eight percent of young white evangelicals support some form of legal recognition of civil unions or marriage for same-sex couples; a quarter (26 percent) support the full right for same-sex couples to marry. White evangelicals over age 30 are less supportive: forty-six percent favor some legal recognition, but only 9 percent of older white evangelicals favor full marriage rights.

White evangelicals are still solidly pro-life on the issue of abortion, and younger white evangelicals are no exception. Only a quarter (25 percent) of white evangelical Christians overall believe abortion should be legal in all or most cases. Another 46 percent allow for very limited abortion rights, saying it should be illegal in most cases, and 25 percent believe it should be illegal altogether. Younger white evangelicals are no exception; they oppose abortion rights in equal numbers to white evangelicals over age 30.

Appendix A: Selected Data Tables

Table 1: Favorability Ratings (percent responding and mean scores on a scale of 1-100)

Favorability Ratings ("Thermometers")

	Total (Adults 18+)	White evangelical Christians ages 18-29	White evangelical Christians ages 30 and older
George Bush			
Warm (%)	33	39	57
Cool (%)	56	48	29
Mean	38	43	59
John McCain			
Warm (%)	45	54	68
Cool (%)	40	31	18
Mean	49	56	67
Barack Obama			
Warm (%)	51	28	36
Cool (%)	34	59	48
Mean	56	35	41
Sarah Palin			
Warm (%)	38	52	60
Cool (%)	36	25	17
Mean	49	59	68
Joe Biden			
Warm (%)	37	13	25
Cool (%)	27	41	40
Mean	54	35	42

** Now, I'd like to rate your feelings toward some people and organizations, with one hundred meaning a very warm, favorable feeling; zero meaning a very cold, unfavorable feeling; and fifty meaning not particularly warm or cold. You can use any number from zero to one hundred, the higher the number the more favorable your feelings are toward that person or organization. If you have no opinion or never heard of that person or organization, please say so.*

■ **Table 2:** Presidential Vote and Candidate Religiosity (percent responding)

Presidential Vote and Candidate Religiosity

	Total (Adults 18+)	White evangelical Christians ages 18-29	White evangelical Christians ages 30 and older
Presidential Vote			
Barack Obama	49	30	22
John McCain	43	62	73
Undecided/other	6	7	4
More religious candidate			
Barack Obama	28	20	13
John McCain	32	48	55
Equally religious/ Don't know	40	31	32

* Presidential vote question text: Thinking about the elections this year, if the election for president were held today and the candidates were: Democrat Barack Obama and Republican John McCain, for whom would you vote, John McCain or Barack Obama?

* Religious candidate question text: Which candidate for President do you think is more religious - Democrat Barack Obama or Republican John McCain?

■ **Table 3:** Attitudes about Same-Sex Marriage and Abortion (percent responding)

Attitudes about Same-Sex Marriage and Abortion

	Total (Adults 18+)	White evangelical Christians ages 18-29	White evangelical Christians ages 30 and older
Legal recognition of civil unions/marriage for same-sex couples			
Gay and lesbian couples should have the same legal right to marry as do a man and a woman.	30	26	9
Marriage under the law should only be between a man and a woman, but there should be domestic partnerships or some other legal rights that would give same-sex couples many of the benefits and protections of marriage.	36	32	37
There should be no legal recognition of a relationship for gay or lesbian couples.	29	41	49
Don't know/refused	4	-	6
Opinions about abortion rights			
Legal in all cases	19	8	8
Legal in most cases	31	18	17
Illegal in most cases	32	48	46
Illegal in all cases	13	25	25
Don't know/refused	5	1	5

* Which one of the following statements do you most agree with when it comes to the issue of gay marriage?

* Do you think abortion should be legal in all cases, legal in most cases, illegal in most cases, or illegal in all cases?

Appendix B: Methodology

Greenberg Quinlan Rosner designed and administered this survey conducted by professional interviewers. The survey reached a total of 1400 adults, 18 years or older, including an oversample of 400 evangelical Christians ages 18-29. The survey was conducted September 4-21, 2008. The margin of error is +/- 3.1 percent for the total survey sample, +/- 4.1 percent for white evangelical Christians, and +/- 5.5 percent for white evangelical Christians ages 18-29. Evangelical Christians were defined as Protestants or members of another Christian religion, and who identified as fundamentalist, evangelical, charismatic, or Pentecostal or who indicated they were born-again Christians.

Telephone numbers for the 1000 adult respondents in the base sample were generated by a random digit dial process, thereby allowing access to all listed and unlisted phones. The oversample of young evangelical Christians employed a multi-modal design. One hundred of the young evangelical Christians in the oversample were reached using an age-predicted random digit dial process and interviewed over the telephone. The remaining 300 young evangelical Christians in the oversample were drawn from an opt-in web panel that is designed to be demographically representative at a national level. However, Internet panels, like this one, use non-probability based sampling methods, by necessity, and these results need to be considered with that limitation in mind.