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BROADEST-EVER SURVEY GIVES IN-DEPTH PORTRAIT OF MAINLINE CLERGY

Survey shows high support for activist government, growing support for LGBT equality Significant differences across mainline denominations on religious, political measures

Leading researchers on religion and politics today released the results of an in-depth survey of Mainline Protestant clergy political engagement during the 2008 election season, attitudes on social and economic issues, and the public role of the church. The Mainline Protestant Clergy Voices Survey (CVS), conducted by Public Religion Research, is the largest survey of mainline clergy in seven years, and the broadest ever in scope. Mainline Protestants, who make up 18 percent of all Americans and nearly a quarter of all voters, have been trending Democratic in recent years, but remain fairly evenly divided in their political behavior.

“Mainline Protestants are probably the most under-examined major religious group in the United States,” said Dr. Robert P. Jones, President of Public Religion Research. “That’s especially surprising when you consider that they occupy so much of the vital middle ground in American politics.”

Jones said that Mainline Protestants, once the religious bedrock of the Republican Party, are now an important swing constituency that has been moving slowly but steadily away from the GOP since the early 1990s. He said the new survey will be invaluable in helping us understand Mainline Protestants’ role in the American religious landscape by shedding light on the attitudes and political engagement of mainline clergy.

“Mainline clergy are highly educated, political interested, and socially engaged,” said Jones. “They are strong supporters of church-state separation, but they are also interested in being more personally involved on social and political issues.”

The CVS surveyed senior clergy from the seven largest mainline denominations: United Methodist Church, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, American Baptist Churches USA, Presbyterian Church USA, Episcopal Church, United Church of Christ, and Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). The survey found significant differences across the denominations on religious and political measures.

Among its findings on social and political issues:

- **Mainline clergy are much more likely to identify as liberal and Democratic than conservative or Republican.** Almost half (48%) of all mainline clergy identify as liberal, compared to about one-third (34%) who say they are conservative. A majority (56%) of mainline clergy identify with or lean towards the Democratic Party, compared to roughly one-third (34%) who claim a Republican affiliation, a 22-point gap. Clergy political leanings vary considerably by denomination. Three quarters (74%) of UCC clergy identify as liberal, compared to less than a third (32%) of ABCUSA clergy.

- **Mainline Protestant clergy are broadly supportive of government's role in addressing social problems such as unemployment, poverty and poor housing.** More than three-quarters (78%) agree that the federal government should do more to solve social problems, and more than 4-in-10 strongly agree.
- **Mainline clergy are strongly supportive of government action in the areas of health care and the environment.** More than two-thirds (67%) of clergy agree that government should guarantee health insurance for all citizens, even if it means raising taxes. And nearly 7-in-10 (69%) clergy say that more environmental protection is needed, even if it raises prices or costs jobs.
- **On a broad range of issues, mainline clergy affirm equality for gay and lesbian Americans.** Roughly two-thirds of mainline clergy support some legal recognition for same-sex couples (65%), passing hate crime laws (67%), and employment nondiscrimination protections for gay and lesbian people (66%). A majority (55%) of mainline clergy support adoption rights for gay and lesbian people.
- **Mainline Protestant clergy are strong advocates of church-state separation.** A majority (65%) of mainline clergy agree that the U.S. should “maintain a strict separation of church and state.” Mainline clergy are more worried about public officials who are too close to religious leaders (59%) than about public officials who do not pay enough attention to religion (41%).
- **Mainline clergy are more likely to publicly address hunger and poverty and family issues than controversial social issues.** More than 8-in-10 clergy say they publicly expressed their views about hunger and poverty often in the last year, and three-quarters say they addressed marriage and family issues often. Only about one-quarter (26%) say they often discussed the issues of abortion and capital punishment.

The survey also includes findings on religious measures, including clergy religious self-identification (mainline, evangelical, born-again), their views on the interpretation of scripture, and the relative importance of evangelism and social action.

Dr. John Green, Director of the Bliss Institute for Applied Politics at the University of Akron, served as advisor to the project and supervised its data collection. Green also participated in two of the earlier studies of mainline clergy in 1989 and 2001 upon which this new survey builds.

“This survey adds significantly to our knowledge and understanding of mainline clergy,” said Green. “Scholars of religion as well as journalists and interested activists will benefit from the information and insights it offers.”

The survey, which was conducted by mail, contained over 250 separate questions and generated 2,658 respondents with a response rate of 44%. The Mainline Protestant Clergy Voices Survey was funded by the Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund.

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