

Young evangelicals differ from elders on gays, similar on abortion rights

October 3, 2008

WASHINGTON (ABP) — A new poll says white evangelicals under 30 are just as opposed to abortion as their older counterparts, but more liberal in their views on same-sex marriage or civil unions for gays.

The survey, conducted for the PBS show *Religion and Ethics Newsweekly*, found that only 25 percent of white evangelical Christians in the United States believe that abortion should be legal in most cases. Another 46 percent support limits on abortion rights, while 25 percent believe it should be completely illegal.

The figures were similar among both older and younger evangelicals. But on that other hottest of hot-button issues in America's culture wars, homosexuality, the age groups differed significantly. One in four (26 percent) of white evangelicals aged 18-29 believe that gay and lesbian couples should have the same right to marry as heterosexuals.

That is two-and-a-half times as many as hold that view — only 9 percent — among their 30-and-older evangelical counterparts. Older white evangelicals are more open toward legal arrangements that provide most or all of the same protections and responsibilities as full marriage.

More than one-third of older evangelicals (37 percent) support legal recognition of civil unions. Nearly half of the older group (49 percent) said there should be no legal recognition of relationships between gays and lesbians, compared to 41 percent of those under 30.

The survey, conducted by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research, also found that young white evangelicals are less likely than the older generation to vote for John McCain for president.

While support for the Republican nominee is solid among white evangelicals — 71 percent compared to 23 percent for Democrat Barack Obama — McCain's support slips nine points among members of the under-30 group.

McCain still holds a winning margin among evangelicals aged 18-29, by a margin of 62 percent to 30 percent for Obama. Among evangelicals over the age of 30, support for McCain runs 73 percent compared to 22 percent for Obama.

Younger evangelicals are also more likely to rate Obama the more religious of the two candidates — 20 percent compared to 13 percent of older evangelicals. Fewer than half of young evangelicals (48 percent) said McCain is more religious, compared to 55 percent of older evangelicals.

The poll also revealed a generation split among evangelicals about Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin, picked as McCain's running mate in large part to excite conservative evangelical voters. Nearly two-thirds of older evangelical women (65 percent) expressed warm feelings toward Palin, compared to 46 percent of those under 30.

McCain's favorability rating is also lower for young evangelicals. Slightly more than half (54 percent) of those under 30 give McCain a positive rating, while 68 percent of those 30 and older view him warmly. President Bush is far less popular among younger evangelicals than their older counterparts.

More than half of 30-and-older evangelicals (57 percent) view Bush favorably, while only 39 percent of those under 30 gave him a positive review — approval figures approaching his historic lows among the U.S.

population at large.

The survey was conducted by telephone with 1,400 adults Sept. 4-21. Margins of error ranged from 3.1 percent to 5.5 percent, depending on age group.