

Letter from Evangelical Leaders to Polling and Political Directors of Media Outlets Represented in the National Election Pool

January 10, 2008

Dear Political and Polling Directors:

Religion is playing an unprecedented role in the 2008 presidential campaign; the need for accurate and thorough information about religious voters is difficult to overstate. Thus far, the National Election Pool's exit poll surveys have pigeonholed evangelicals, reinforcing the false stereotype that we are beholden to one political party.

Your entrance and exit polls at the Iowa caucuses asked Republican caucus-goers if they were "born-again or evangelical Christian(s)," but did not ask the same question of Democrats. This omission left a substantive hole in subsequent news coverage of the caucuses. Based on your polling, the public helpfully learned that born-again or evangelical Christians played a central role in Mike Huckabee's victory, but received no information about the impact of evangelical voters in the Democratic race.

As reported by numerous news organizations, candidates of both parties spoke explicitly of their religious faith while campaigning in Iowa and have robust faith outreach operations. By omitting the question of evangelical/born-again identification from the Democratic polls, you prevented the public from seeing the full picture of how the bipartisan courtship of evangelical voters affected the outcome of the first contest of the 2008 campaign and perpetuated the misperception that all evangelical Christians are Republicans.

No party can own any faith. Evangelicals have broadened their agenda to include care for the planet, the poor and the stranger, and as a result are increasingly diverse politically.

Your New Hampshire exit polls gathered much more detailed information about voters' religion but still asked only Republican voters if they were evangelical or born-again. The data revealed a significant difference between the voting patterns of Republican evangelicals in Iowa and New Hampshire. In Iowa, Mike Huckabee dominated, claiming 46 percent of evangelicals' support, with no other candidate receiving even 20 percent. In New Hampshire McCain, Romney and Huckabee split the evangelical vote almost evenly. The disparity of these results suggests that evangelical voters' behavior may not conform to expectations, which further shows the need to measure it in both parties.

With voters entering polling sites in Michigan, Nevada and South Carolina in the coming days and weeks and Super Tuesday following shortly thereafter, it is imperative for you to remedy the imbalance in your exit polling immediately. Evangelicalism is not a monolithic movement that fits neatly into one party. For the sake of accuracy and dispelling shopworn stereotypes, we urge you to allow all evangelicals an opportunity to be represented in your surveys and polling data.

Sincerely,

Dr. Joel Hunter, Senior Pastor, Northland A Church Distributed
David Neff, Editor, *Christianity Today*
Rev. Jim Wallis, Founder, Sojourners
Randy Brinson, Founder, Redeem the Vote
Paul Corts, President, Council for Christian Colleges and Universities
Dr. David P. Gushee, Distinguished university professor of Christian ethics at Mercer University
Brian McLaren, Author, Founding pastor of Cedar Ridge Community Church
Randall Balmer, Professor of American religious history at Barnard College, Columbia University
Glen Stassen, Lewis B. Smedes Professor of Christian Ethics at Fuller Theological Seminary

*Institutional affiliations are given for identification purposes only.