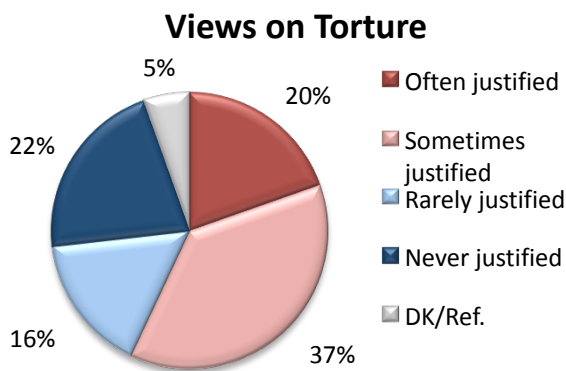




## New Poll of White Evangelicals Shows Faith, Golden Rule Influence Attitudes on Torture

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A new poll commissioned by Faith in Public Life and Mercer University and conducted by Public Religion Research demonstrates the conflicted attitudes on torture among white evangelical Christians in the South.



**Close to six-in-ten white evangelicals in the South say that torture can be often (20%) or sometimes (37%) justified in order to gain important information.** This compares to roughly half (48%) of the general public who believe that torture can be justified, according to a recent Pew Research Center poll (02/2008).

Despite high levels of religiosity, white evangelicals in the South are significantly more likely to rely on life experiences and common sense (44%) than Christian teachings or beliefs (28%) when thinking about the acceptability of torture.

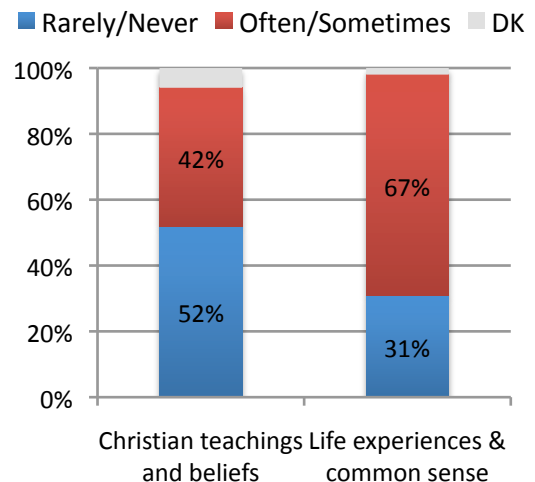
And only about one-in-twenty white evangelicals rely on the advice of government leaders when it comes to torture. These different sources of moral thinking lead to strikingly different attitudes.

**Among those influenced by Christian teachings, a majority (52%) oppose torture—14 points higher than white evangelicals in the South overall.** In contrast, among those who rely most on life experiences and common sense, less than one-in-three (31%) oppose torture.

**A majority (52%) agree with the Golden Rule argument against torture—that the U.S. government should not use methods against our enemies that we would not want used on American soldiers.** This movement represents a 14-point increase from the 38% of white evangelicals who initially said that torture is rarely or never justified. Appeals to three other moral and theological frames did not significantly influence views on torture.

### Different Sources, Different Attitudes on Torture

Torture can be justified...



**An appeal to the Golden Rule increases opposition to torture among every subgroup of white evangelicals.** For example, only about one third (34%) of white evangelicals who attend worship services more than once a week say torture is never or rarely justified, but a majority (50%) of this group was persuaded by the Golden Rule argument against torture. This represents a 16-point shift in opinion among the most frequent attending white evangelicals in the South.

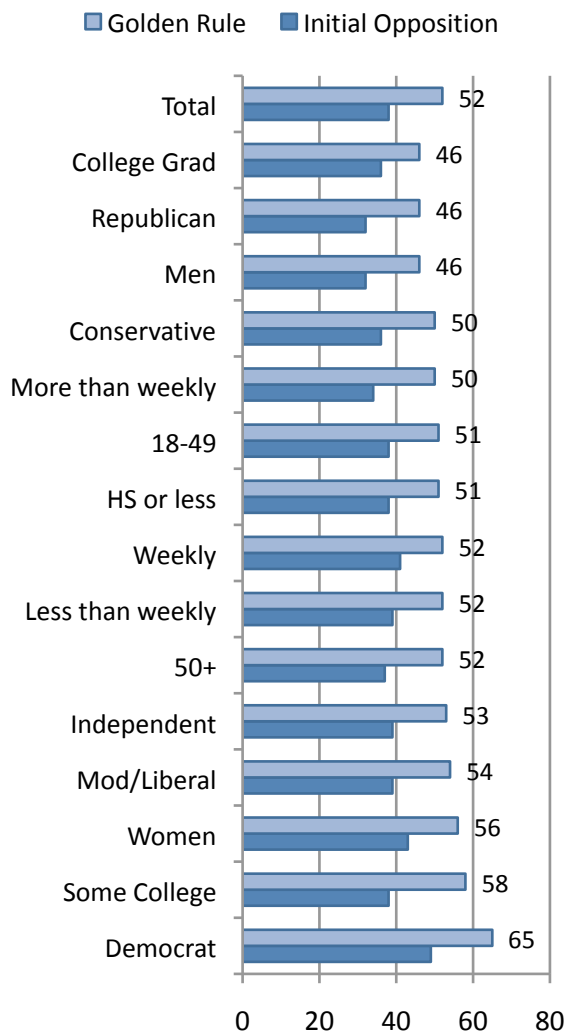
**Other Findings**

A majority (53%) of white evangelicals in the South believe that the government uses torture as part of the campaign against terrorism, despite repeated claims made by government officials that the U.S. does not engage in torture. Only about one third (32%) say that the U.S. does not use torture as a matter of policy.

Among white evangelicals in the South who are registered voters, 65% support Republican John McCain, 14% support Democrat Barack Obama, and 21% remain undecided. These findings are consistent with the recent Time Magazine poll (08/04/2008) that showed 66% supporting McCain, 17% supporting Obama, and 17% undecided among white evangelicals nationwide.

Two thirds of John McCain’s supporters say torture can often or sometimes be justified, compared to only 46% of Obama supporters and undecided voters.

**Difference in Opposition to Torture**



**About the Survey**

This survey was commissioned by Mercer University and Faith in Public Life and conducted by Public Religion Research. Results for this survey were based on telephone interviews conducted under the direction of Opinion Access Corporation among a sample of 600 white evangelical Christian adults, age 18 years or older in the southeastern United States. This region includes the following states: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia and West Virginia. The survey was fielded from August 14-22, 2008.

The margin of error for the total sample is +/- 4.5% at the 95% confidence interval. In addition to sampling error surveys may also be subject to error or bias due to question wording, context and order effects. The data was weighted using demographic weighting parameters derived from the Religious Landscape Survey. Conducted by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life from May 8 – August 13, 2007, the Religious Landscape Survey is a national survey of 35,000 adults with detailed information on religious affiliation and identity.