



## Executive Summary: New Research on Measuring Evangelicals

Depending on how they are measured, evangelicals constitute between 7 and 47 percent of the U.S. adult population—a strikingly wide margin. National polls define evangelicals using one of three ways:

1. Denominational affiliation, as is done in the General Social Survey
2. Self-classification (“Would you call yourself an evangelical, or born-again, Christian?”), as is done in surveys from The Gallup Organization and the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press
3. Beliefs on specific religious issues, as is done by the Barna Research Group

Based on research being published this month in the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Rice University sociologist D. Michael Lindsay and Conrad Hackett, a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Texas, demonstrate that the profile of American evangelicals significantly depends on how pollsters define them. To prove their point, Hackett and Lindsay use a single set of survey data, the 1998 General Social Survey, that included questions using all three ways of defining evangelicals.

Since this is an election year, the most interesting finding relates to the percentage of evangelicals who lean or are strong Republicans. Depending on how one defines an evangelical using this data, the percentage varies ten percentage points.

Method of Defining an Evangelical	Percentage that Are Republican
Denominational Affiliation	59%
Self-Classification	53%
Beliefs on Specific Religious Issues	63%

The percentage of evangelicals who are Republican has changed over the last decade, but Hackett and Lindsay’s research reveal two major conclusions:

- ◆ The way one defines evangelicals matters little in terms of religious outcomes. There is remarkable continuity among evangelicals—however they are defined—in terms of religious beliefs about God, Jesus, the Bible, heaven, and hell. This affirms the major point of *An Evangelical Manifesto*, released in May of 2008 by a number of prominent evangelical leaders.
- ◆ Nevertheless, the way one defines evangelicals matters a great deal in terms of the group’s social and demographic profiles. In essence, determining if evangelicals support causes such as the environment or federal aid for the poor can only be accurately evaluated when one also considers what measures are used to define evangelicals. If one uses beliefs on religious issues (such as whether Satan exists) to define evangelicals, they will be noticeably more conservative in political outlook than if one uses self-classifications by the individual to define the group.