

President Trump Will Get Overwhelming Support from Conservative Christians in 2020 – But for Different Reasons than in 2016

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A key group of conservative Christian voters who helped secure Donald Trump's 2016 presidential victory is expected to support him in even higher, near-unanimous numbers in the upcoming election, but for very different reasons.

According to a new election survey by veteran researcher Dr. George Barna, it is likely that 96% of SAGE Cons (an acronym that stands for Spiritually Active Governance Engaged Conservative Christians) will vote for Trump based on his achievements of the past four years. Less than one-half of one percent of the group are expected to vote for Joe Biden, according to the new survey commissioned by the [Family Research Council](#) (FRC).

Although SAGE Cons represent only about 9% of the population, they are expected to have an outsized influence on the outcome of the 2020 Presidential Election. Dr. Barna has identified SAGE Cons as President Trump's single, most united body of supporters last election. In 2016 a whopping 91% of SAGE Cons voted and 93% of them voted for Trump.

Unlike four years ago when they cast their vote against his opponent, Hillary Clinton, because of her public policy positions, this new survey shows that SAGE Cons this election will cast their ballots for Trump based on his administration's record.

A separate survey earlier this year, the [American Worldview Inventory 2020](#) conducted by Dr. Barna and the Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University, found that nearly half of SAGE Cons possess a biblical worldview, making them more than seven times more likely than other adults to do so. They strongly hold to traditional biblical teachings, tend to be more politically conservative, and are highly likely to put their worldview into action when they vote.

The outcome of the 2020 election will likely be determined by worldview. As Dr. Barna, CRC Director of Research and veteran researcher and author of both surveys, said recently: "The 2020 election is not about personalities, parties, or even politics. It is an election to determine the dominant worldview in America."

The new FRC survey found that the key issues impactful the SAGE Con vote are similar to those that influenced them in 2016, but substantially different from the issues that are influencing other adults this year.

The key issues identified in the FRC survey suggest SAGE Cons vote with their biblical worldview in mind, including concern about the issues of life, religious freedom, and the importance of federal court appointments. The survey found that they rated America's morals and values as the sixth most significant issue influencing their vote in the election.

Perceptions of the Candidates

Four years ago, most SAGE Cons reluctantly voted for Trump, selecting him because they felt his opponent, Hillary Clinton, was a danger to America and stood for numerous things that conflicted with the beliefs of SAGE Cons. The chief differences driving that distaste for Clinton were her stands on abortion, the role of the U.S. Supreme Court and the types of nominees she would offer for confirmation, her desire to expand the reach and power of the federal government, and her views about religious freedom.

In a marked contrast from that prior election, Trump's SAGE Con support in 2020 is based upon what he has done during his four years in office. While there is still considerable frustration with his social media postings, SAGE Cons appreciate the Trump Administration's progress related to federal court appointments, support for pro-life policies, investments in the military and enforcement of the law, attempts to reduce the federal bureaucracy and the authority of the federal government, strengthening America's relationship with Israel, and support for the free market economy.

The conservative Christian group also favors the assets Trump brings to the job more than those offered in Biden. The survey revealed that a large majority of SAGE Cons viewed Trump as a hard worker (90%), patriot (89%), strong leader (89%), independent thinker (83%), tough-minded (82%), smart (76%), and knowledgeable (73%).

Accurate Descriptions Assigned to Donald Trump and Joe Biden				
	Concerning Donald Trump		Concerning Joe Biden	
Description	SAGE Con	Almost SAGE	SAGE Con	Almost SAGE
Hard worker	90%	78%	3%	7%
Strong leader	89	74	1	4
Patriot	89	74	3	6
Independent thinker	83	70	1	2
Tough-minded	82	68	1	2
Smart	76	60	2	5
Knowledgeable	73	54	3	8
Compassionate	63	45	9	13
Trustworthy	63	43	1	5
Presidential	53	44	2	6
Arrogant	33	44	36	28
Good character	29	22	3	7
Polarizing	27	34	40	30
Unifier	19	14	1	5
Disrespectful	11	20	40	31
Dishonest	4	2	10	60
Sexist	2	9	37	28
Incompetent	1	7	85	72
Mentally unstable	1	7	75	68
Racist	1	6	32	24
Too old	*	2	60	53
Senile	*	1	74	59
Tired ideas	*	1	65	52
Political Hack	*	1	61	48
* indicates less than one-half of one percent				
<i>Source: Family Research Council, N=1,600 SAGE Cons and N=900 Almost SAGE Cons, conducted September 2020.</i>				

In contrast, at least three out of every four SAGE Cons felt that Biden is incompetent (85%), dishonest (82%), mentally unstable (75%), and senile (74%). Fewer than one out of every ten SAGE Cons perceived Biden to be compassionate (9%) or a hard worker (3%), to have good character (3%), to be knowledgeable (3%), presidential (2%), smart (2%), an independent thinker (1%), a strong leader (1%), tough-minded (1%), trustworthy (1%), or a unifier (1%).

Another outcome that reflects the distinctive perspective of SAGE Cons from that of less conservative voting blocs is how they view Biden in comparison to Trump. By a gap of more than 30 percentage points they are more likely to consider Biden to be dishonest, sexist, incompetent, mentally unstable, racist, too old, senile, represents tired ideas, and is a political hack.

One of the most striking outcomes from the survey is how the image of Trump has shifted in the minds of SAGE Cons since he ran four years ago. A comparison of his attribute profiles in 2016 and 2020, among SAGE Cons, shows that his image has improved dramatically in terms of being considered trustworthy (e.g., a 44-percentage point improvement), smart, presidential,

a strong leader, and compassionate. Meanwhile, the proportion of SAGE Cons who label him as “arrogant” has dropped precipitously.

Perceptions of Donald Trump among SAGE Cons			
Perception of Donald Trump	2016	2020	Change
Trustworthy	19%	63%	+44 percentage points
Smart	35%	76%	+41
Presidential	15%	53%	+38
A strong leader	54%	89%	+35
Compassionate	29%	63%	+34
Tough-minded	70%	82%	+12
Arrogant	59%	33%	-26

Sources: Studies conducted among SAGE Cons by George Barna in September 2020 for Family Research Council, N=1,600; by George Barna in October 2016 for the American Culture & Faith Institute, N=2,000.

Candidate Preference

Elections are decided based on two factors: which candidate a potential voter favors (i.e., candidate preference) and whether the voter actually casts a ballot (i.e., voter turnout).

SAGE Cons are not waiting until the last minute to decide whom they will vote for in 2020. The survey discovered that 96% of the group had already made up its mind by Labor Day – and that more than two-thirds of them were highly unlikely to change their minds before they cast their ballots.

In total, it is likely that 96% of SAGE Cons will vote for Donald Trump, with Joe Biden slated to receive less than one-half of one percent of SAGE Con votes.

However, another segment of voters—referred to as Almost SAGE Cons—was also included in the survey and produced a slightly different perspective on the election. They do not qualify as SAGE Cons because either they are not quite as politically engaged or not quite as spiritually active as SAGE Cons—but they are on the precipice of qualifying. Almost SAGE Cons represent another 10% to 12% of the adult population.

Almost SAGE Cons are also largely in the Trump camp. However, they are neither quite as enthusiastic about Donald Trump nor quite as determined to vote.

Four out of five Almost SAGE Cons (ASCs) have made up their mind who they will vote for, with 76% opting for President Trump and 3% choosing Joe Biden. The rest are still deciding. The bigger challenge with ASCs relates to turnout. It is expected that ASC turnout will be in the 60% to 65% range—a strong showing by national historical standards, but far less substantial than is likely among SAGE Cons.

SAGE Cons and Worldview

Although SAGE Cons represent only about 9% of the population, they likely will have an outsized influence on the outcome of the 2020 Presidential election. Much of their voting behavior is attributable to their highly refined biblical worldview.

The *American Worldview Inventory 2020* from Dr. Barna and the Cultural Research Center presents a more detailed portrait of the SAGE Con segment of the American voting population.

According to *AWVI 2020* findings, SAGE Cons are more likely to possess a biblical worldview (44%) than the average American adult (6%). SAGE Con support for the more conservative presidential candidate is not surprising since their voting decisions are based on traditional biblical teaching. For instance, SAGE Cons have very different views from the population at-large on areas such as truth, politics and government, moral beliefs, and behavior.

Politically, adherence to biblical teaching has driven SAGE Cons to be far more conservative than the rest of the nation. Overall,

seven out of ten describe themselves as “very conservative” on fiscal and governance matters, more than eight out of ten are “very conservative” on social issues. In contrast, less than one out of four other adults describe their positions on such matters as “very conservative.”

On the matter of truth, SAGE Cons are twice as likely as other adults to believe that absolute moral truth exists; that God is the basis of truth; and that the Bible is the word of God, without errors. They are more than three times as likely to identify the Bible as the primary source of moral guidance for their life.

SAGE Cons are also more than twice as likely as all adults to contend that humanity’s common purpose is to know, love, and serve God (77% of SAGE Cons versus 29% of all U.S. adults); that life is sacred (81% versus 39%, respectively); to say that the marriage of one man to one woman is God’s plan for humanity, across all cultures (88% versus 38%); and to believe that the Bible is not ambiguous about abortion (83% of SAGE Cons, 43% of all adults). The conservative Christian segment is more than three times as likely as all adults to believe that success is best described as consistent obedience to God (71% compared to 21%).

Issues That Matter

The FRC survey revealed the issues that SAGE Cons identified as having the greatest influence on how they will vote in the 2020 election. Five issues, in particular, are driving the votes of SAGE Cons: abortion and reproductive rights (listed by 52%); religious freedom in the United States (43%); federal court nominations and appointments (43%); crime control/law and order (26%); and economic growth and stability (24%).

The research also points out that if the influence of all economic health issues were combined – i.e., combining economic growth and stability with economic matters such as tax policies, jobs and unemployment, and trade policies – economic health would jump from 24% to 34%, lifting it to fourth place in the priority rankings.

The political priorities of SAGE Cons have not changed much in the past four years. In 2016, the top priorities, in descending order of influence, were abortion, federal court nominations and appointments, religious freedom, crime control/law and order, and economic growth and stability. The only thing that has changed is the intensity of concern related to some of those issues. These faith-driven conservatives have apparently lost some of their sense of urgency about federal court appointments, but that energy has shifted toward religious freedom, crime control, and economic growth.

Almost SAGE Cons had a similar prioritization of critical issues but with lower proportions of respondents choosing each of the options. The top-ranked issues for ASC’s were abortion (listed by 44%); federal court nominations and appointments (34%); religious freedom in the U.S. (33%); economic growth and stability (26%); and crime control/law and order (25%).

The 10 Issues with the Greatest Influence On How SAGE Cons Will Vote		
Issue	SAGE Cons	Almost SAGEs
Abortion/ reproductive rights	52%	44%
Religious freedom in the U.S.	43	33
Court nominations and appointments	43	34
Crime control/ law and order	26	25
Economy – growth and stability	24	26
National values and morals	17	17
National security/ military/ terrorism	12	15
President Trump - job performance, perspectives	12	12
Gun policies	12	10
Federal deficit and government spending	11	12
Sources: Family Research Council, N=1,600 SAGE Cons and N=900 Almost SAGE Cons, September 2020.		

The issue priorities of SAGE Cons differ significantly from those of other high-profile voter segments. For instance, issues that

do not crack the Top Ten for the conservative Christian segment but are of widespread concern to other voter segments include healthcare policy, immigration policy, policing, education, and environmental care.

One of the implications of the survey's findings is that motivating turnout among SAGE Cons in 2020 is most likely to be successful if it is built on voter awareness of the differences in the positions of the major candidates related to those issues, and the long-term effects of those divergent policy approaches. SAGE Cons, more than most voting blocks, are driven by issues rather than candidate personalities.

Trusting the Polls

The FRC research was directed by veteran pollster George Barna. Currently serving as the Senior Research Fellow of FRC's Center for [Christian Ethics and Biblical Worldview](#), as well as the Director of Research at Arizona Christian University's Cultural Research Center, Barna has been engaged in political polling since 1976. When asked how to square the SAGE Con statistics with the blizzard of national surveys showing Joe Biden with a double-digit lead over Donald Trump, Barna offered his perspective.

"Remember, this was not a survey of the aggregate population of likely voters, only of the aggregate pool of SAGE Cons. They are not representative of the population at-large. One of the clearest indications of their different political perspective is that the state of America's morals and values was rated as the sixth most significant issue of influence. That's a concern that doesn't even appear on the radar of most voter segments," Barna pointed out.

"SAGE Cons are a unique portion of the larger population: more spiritually active and driven, more politically informed and active, much more likely to possess a biblical worldview that informs their thinking and choices, and reflecting an extremely high degree of consensus on a broad range of issues and beliefs. SAGE Cons are an important barometer of how the conservative Christian population will behave in the election."

Barna also commented on the controversy regarding whether the polls can be trusted in 2020.

"There does appear to be a 'hidden' Trump vote, probably in the range of four to eight percentage points," he explained, noting that several surveys he had conducted indicated such an undercount for the incumbent. "Once the Trump support base was alerted to such a 'hidden' base of Trump support, that awareness of the 'hidden' support seems to have generated momentum among other Trump supporters to either refuse to answer surveys, thus skewing survey samples, or to provide misleading answers to the candidate preference question, thereby skewing the measured response. Some conservative voters have described how unsafe they felt when asked to divulge their candidate preference to a researcher they did not know and had no reason to trust regarding confidentiality and security. The events in the streets lately have stoked those fears."

"Second," the Arizona Christian University professor continued, "there are a number of instances where the national media have misrepresented the incidence of party identification of the voting population, effectively skewing the survey results. In each case discovered so far, the proportion of Democrats has been unrealistically inflated, and the proportion of Republicans has been diminished, giving the Democrats a false advantage in the presidential preference estimates. Polls by CBS News, Fox News, CNN, You Gov, and Reuters, among others, have all released surveys based on samples with distorted proportions of party identification."

"Third, the media seem to indiscriminately report surveys regardless of whether they measure the views of all adults, of registered voters, or of likely voters. Those are different populations and will therefore produce significantly different outcomes; treating them as if they are the same is inappropriate. Further, because there is no agreed upon definition or proven method for estimating whom is likely to vote, studies of likely voters are not comparing the views of the same populations."

An issue that is often overlooked is the representative nature of the survey samples. "One of the foundations of a random or representative sample is that you generate a high enough response rate from the population being researched to have a reliable reflection of the whole," the Arizona Christian University professor explained. "These days, both telephone surveys and online surveys receive shockingly little cooperation from the public. Although that fact is rarely mentioned, low response rates significantly reduce the reliability of the results."

"Finally, consider the lesson learned in the polling of 2016," Barna concluded. "Many national polls accurately predicted the

national vote but predicted the wrong winner—because we don't elect a president based on the national vote count, but on the basis of Electoral College votes. Without breaking down the data state by state, we again run the risk of misdiagnosing where things stand—and may inappropriately affect peoples' motivation to vote."

Information about the Research

The FRC survey was conducted online in September 2020 among a national sample of 1,600 adults who qualified as SAGE Cons, and an additional 900 who were Almost SAGE Cons. The entire survey involved 69 questions and took respondents an average of 16 minutes to complete.

SAGE Cons is an acronym for **S**piritually **A**ctive **G**overnance **E**ngaged **C**onservative Christians. The survey criteria for classifying a respondent as a SAGE Con included being registered to vote; exhibiting above-average levels of attention to news about government and politics; identifying as conservative on fiscal and social issues; self-identifying as a Christian; meeting the "born-again" criteria (not self-report); and being deeply committed to practicing their Christian faith.

Almost SAGE Cons were individuals who met three-quarters of the SAGE Con qualifications.

The "likely voter" construct used in the FRC study was based upon a respondent being registered to vote; being "absolutely certain" to vote in the November election; having voted in the 2016 and 2018 General elections; and paying "a lot" or "quite a bit" of attention to news related to government and politics.

The [Family Research Council](#), which commissioned the research, was founded in 1983. It is a nonprofit research and educational organization dedicated to articulating and advancing a family-centered philosophy of public life. FRC provides policy research and analysis for legislative, executive and judicial branches of the federal government. It also informs the news media, academic community, business leaders, and the general public, through a biblical worldview, about family issues that affect the nation.

The research was designed, implemented, and analyzed by George Barna, who serves as the Senior Research Fellow at the Center for Christian Ethics and Biblical Worldview at FRC. He is also a Professor at Arizona Christian University and the Director Research at the Cultural Research Center at ACU. The author of more than 50 books, including numerous bestsellers, Barna has conducted surveys pertaining to government, elections, and politics for more than 40 years, including work on behalf of four past presidential candidates. He regularly researches issues related to worldview and cultural transformation through the Cultural Research Center. Barna analyzed the role that faith, and SAGE Cons specifically, played in the outcome of the 2016 election in his book, *The Day Christians Changed America*.

About the *American Worldview Inventory 2020*

The [American Worldview Inventory 2020 \(AWVI\)](#) is an annual survey that estimates how many adults have a biblical worldview. The assessment is based on 51 worldview-related questions drawn from eight categories of worldview application, measuring both beliefs and behavior. AWVI 2020 was undertaken in January 2020 among a nationally representative sample of 2,000 adults, providing an estimated maximum sampling error of approximately plus or minus 2 percentage points, based on the 95% confidence interval. Additional levels of indeterminable error may occur in surveys based upon non-sampling activity.

The six denominations that are considered to be part of the "mainline Protestant" denominations include American Baptist Church U.S.A.; Episcopal Church; Evangelical Lutheran Church in America; Presbyterian Church U.S.A.; United Churches of Christ; and United Methodist Church.

About the Cultural Research Center

The Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University is located on the school's campus in Glendale, Arizona, in the Phoenix metropolitan area. CRC conducts nationwide research studies to understand the intersection of faith and culture and shares that information with organizations dedicated to transform American culture with biblical truth. Like ACU, CRC embraces the Christian faith, as described in the Bible, but remains inter-denominational and non-partisan, and nothing in this survey research should be construed as an endorsement of any candidate or political party. Access to past surveys conducted by CRC,

as well as additional information about the Cultural Research Center, is available at www.culturalresearchcenter.com. Further information about Arizona Christian University is available at www.arizonachristian.edu.