



DEMOCRACY CORPS

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Date: August 13, 2018

To: Friends of Democracy Corps

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The loyalist GOP Evangelical conservatives *Report from Trump-GOP project focus groups*

Democracy Corps' new project on the Trump-GOP began with focus groups with the Evangelical GOP women from the smaller towns outside Raleigh, North Carolina.¹ One-in-four Republicans identify as Evangelical and conservative. They are the quintessential values voters at the core of the GOP and President Donald Trump's base. Their conservatism is defined by their religious faith, which puts them on the defensive in a country that is increasingly liberal, secular, and politicized. In fact, the moderator intervened to assure them they did not have to be apologetic about their social conservatism.

For all Trump's unchristian behavior and style, the Evangelical GOP thank President Trump for sticking to his guns and to their social agenda and for appointing socially conservative judges. They welcome his pushing back against liberalism after eight years of Obama and the failure of the GOP establishment.

Because their values are under siege, the stakes for the Evangelical GOP in the off-year election are incredibly high, and they must vote to defend the Trump presidency.

The high stakes for social conservatives

The Evangelical GOP base voters are social conservatives. Their views are rooted in their religious faith and half said they discussed policy issues like abortion with members of their congregation. They were unambiguous in their opposition to abortion and choice. Several of these women said they could never vote for a candidate, even a Republican, who was pro-choice because it "went against my belief system." About half said that they were "torn" on the issue of gay marriage, but only because they questioned whether the government should "have their hands in" a religious institution like marriage in the first place. (Ironically, they pointed to how the government had criminalized interracial marriage as an example of why government should not interfere.) They all said that gay marriage was "against my religious beliefs."

¹ *Democracy Corps* conducted a focus group among white Republican and Republican-leaning independent women who self-identified as conservative and Evangelical in Raleigh, North Carolina on August 10, 2018. All these women voted for Donald Trump in 2016.



Being a conservative is a central part of their identity. These women came to understand that they were in our focus group to discuss politics, yet none called themselves Republicans. Instead, they defined themselves as conservatives many times throughout the evening and identified family members or friends as conservatives [or not] as well.

My son shares similar views, conservative views. But my daughter is - she went to UNC Ashford. I don't need to say anymore.

My daughter lives in Pennsylvania and her husband - they're very conservative also,

I have most of my friends and family on Facebook, they're all conservative and I think there's only about two cousins that aren't.

We quickly learned what motivated this tendency to identify the ideological basis for their views and the leanings of the other characters in their stories.

These Evangelical GOP women believe that they are now outnumbered by the secular-liberal younger generation and that their values are under assault from the mainstream media, educators, and Trump's opponents. A recent local news story about a man assaulting a child for wearing a Make America Great Again hat was illustrative of the threat.

It's the gentleman who yanked the hat off that 16-year-old boy and then dumped soda on it. I mean for what reason? He had on a MAGA hat. My child has a MAGA hat and he will not wear it out because, well, most of his friends are not conservative.

Because these Evangelical GOP base voters feel their values are under attack, they have made their worlds smaller by unfollowing those who disagree on social media, by making a rule of not discussing politics with some family members, and even by cancelling cable.

Their guards were up so much that the moderator eventually had to reassure them that they were in a room of likeminded people where they were free to speak their minds without apology.

Defending Donald Trump

The Evangelical GOP understand their values are going out of fashion and they are increasingly outnumbered, yet most said they felt hopeful about the future of the country because conservatives are led by a "president that's a fighter, and we haven't seen that for a long, long, long time." The GOP establishment has disappointed them again and again.

Finally, they feel that conservatives are "on a good roll." Part of this is psychological: after eight years of "feeling lost" under President Obama, Donald Trump is unapologetically defending their values and vision of America, which gives them hope. Part of this is about their policy agenda: they felt that the country was "turning away" from conservative policies during the Obama presidency, but now their "issues are actually being addressed." For these reasons it is



incredibly important for the Evangelical GOP to defend President Trump and to stop Democrats in November.

The Evangelical GOP women of Raleigh believe there has been a massive improvement in the country over the past year and a half. Just look at their postcards thanking Donald Trump at the end of the night! (See end of document.) Some pointed to the economy as evidence:

More people are working. And my 401k is doing fabulous.

As far as economics, just how the country seems to be progressing towards more jobs and things like that.

I do think he's a smart, as far as business, good businessman and everything because I think that is something we needed at the time to help in our economic growth. Since Bush, since everybody, it's just the jobs just seem like there wasn't any, and then how much job growth we've gotten over the last few months.

Another mentioned pointed to progress on the border: "I feel like issues are actually being addressed. That stuff isn't being skirted around. Issues, whether it's agreed up on or not, about the border and immigration."

The greatest improvement in their minds was in America's standing on the world stage. They attributed this entirely to Donald Trump's "strength" and "patriotism."

Well Obama took the apology tour and that was just bringing our country down across the board. So we really needed Trump to bring it back out from that. Our standing in the world has increased, whereas some people would say it has not but I believe that we are more respected because of the strength of Trump.

I think our country before Trump was almost a laughingstock and we'd never been that. So to have Trump be able to stand up to that image that was portrayed is completely opposite from what Hillary would've brought to the play.

He doesn't cave in to those that - I put down evildoers, those who make threats to him.

They believe that Donald Trump "cares about America truly" and once again, "Patriotism's back."

Judicial appointments are the only area where they were more satisfied with Trump's performance, or where the stakes were as high. The Supreme Court is so important because of their feelings about abortion: "I mean because of our religious beliefs, *Roe v. Wade* is very important to me and, you know, having the people that are in place that feel as I do is a good thing for me." But that is just "one of many" issues in front of the court that they care about. Specifically, they also said they wanted to protect the Second Amendment.



Many in the base of the GOP held their noses and voted for Donald Trump because of the Supreme Court, including the husband of one of the women in the group. “My husband was unsure who he was voting for [...] and he didn't like either choice,” she explained, “but he said ‘You don't know how this can affect our country down the road after he's out of the office’ regarding nominating judges, and that was the - that's what convinced him to vote.” Their bargain paid off. They are thankful that Trump appointed a conservative like Neil Gorsuch to the Supreme Court and reacted enthusiastically to a video of Trump talking about his opportunity to fill a second vacancy.

[Judges] are there to interpret the law and not make their own laws according to what the party in charge wants. That's what Donald Trump is doing, [that is who] he's picking.

Really, instead of [the] Constitution in our country, there's a lot of activism going on. So sometimes it seems to me that politics are infused with these activist things. So, I think [Trump] was barking those sentiments at the conservatives he was speaking to there [at the rally] because those are the things that feel threatened and I think he was trying to say, had Hillary won, she might've put an activist judge rather than an institutional judge.

Ensuring Donald Trump's conservative nominees are appointed is one reason they said it was “more important” to vote for Republicans in the upcoming midterms: “I think we have a lot on the line with, we talked about the Supreme Court justices and all those kind of things and I think these people that we move into position are part of that plan.”

The Devil and Donald Trump

These Evangelical Christians admitted that Donald Trump sets a less than holy example. He is not a “Good Christian man” like Mike Pence. But they are willing to put up with those parts of the Trump package because he was appointing conservative justices to the Supreme Court, had the backbone to defend their conservative values and policy priorities, and had the patriotism to standup for America on the world stage.

They were not as enthusiastic as you might have expected while watching clips of Donald Trump talking about his accomplishments on the campaign trail because, like many other Republicans, these Evangelical conservatives have reservations about how Donald Trump expresses himself and his lack of self-control.

He's annoying. Drives me nuts.

He doesn't think before he speaks sometimes.

Sometimes he is repetitive.

He can be disrespectful, but the same time, you don't want someone who hesitates, you don't want someone who's going to be afraid to say what he thinks either.



Wish he didn't Twitter so much.

This is closely connected with their other major concern about Trump – his lack of humility: he “makes petty comments unnecessarily about trivial things and then I put his ego because it seems like sometimes it's too big, therefore he comments. I feel like it's an evil cycle for him.”

But Trump's style and shameless self-promotion can be helpful weapons in the culture wars. In the end, the women excused his braggadocious campaign stump speech because they think it helps him get around the unfair media coverage.

If he didn't toot [his own horn], who would?

True.

I agree with you.

That's true.

The media's not going to do that, at least not the liberal media.

This may allow him to be more successful than other politicians who are “too reserved” to lead this way: “When you have someone that's more soft-spoken that doesn't toot his own horn, the media's going to bash him either way.”

If you think these voters may pull back from Trump over his style and personality, their reaction to a video of Donald Trump's offensive remarks towards women will make you think again. They were quick to steer condemnation away from Trump and there was no erosion in their support.

I mean in the past Bill Clinton. I think he-I mean that was degrading to women and that's another example of [Trump] speaking what he's thinking but I'm neutral. I mean like I said, he doesn't actually mean anything. I'm, you know, confident.

And the thing is, if that's the worst that they could find on him is that they-he said something bad, not that he did something bad as opposed to sort of like what Bill Clinton did. He did something bad, you know.

His words get him in trouble and women happen to be the issue and so again, the media or whoever is going to hone in on that issue so it just happens to be amplified.

The Evangelical GOP made a deal with the devil, and they are all-in. In their postcards to Donald Trump, they thanked him for putting the country on the right track and said they were praying for him.



Post-session postcards to Donald Trump

Thank you for making America great again. Please continue with the action items promised at election. I like the patriotism that you are bringing back to America

Dear President Trump, I wanted to let you know how proud you have made me. Your love for this country stands out among other presidents – thank you so much for your salary donations – the VA is in great need of funds! Our family prays for you and your family – may God bless

Thank you for leading our country in the right direction. You are doing a great job. It is good to see the jobs and economy grow. So good you are not allowing the USA to be disrespected.

Dear Mr. President, Thank you for your hard work I pray that you continue in your efforts to help make America great. Always remember that your position is important because of our nation and its people not just on occupation. All of your actions and attitudes are seen. I pray grace and wisdom for you always

You have done a great job and “We the People” truly appreciate [you] Gods Blessings to you and your family.

Thank you President Trump for leading our country in a more positive direction. I look forward to voting for you again in 2020. You have made an HUGE difference and for the better.

Thank you for rooting for our country. Thank you for the support you give to our military and police who protect our country. Your strength as a leader will hopefully bring the US back to the highest standing in the world has us as a country who has gained the world’s respect

Dear Mr. President, I am grateful for the stance you’ve taken in our country to help make it great again. I appreciate the backbone and audacity you continually and tirelessly have. I am praying that you will continue to be surrounded by God’s best and that only decisions that have Him are made.