

The New Evangelical Voter: Populist and Skeptical

Defining the evangelical voter has always been a challenge. And nowadays, it's become even more complicated. Former GOP nominee for president Mike Huckabee says evangelicals don't just fit into one box anymore.

"I get so tired of hearing, particularly this line, 'Well, evangelicals are all ... ' and then fill in the blank," Huckabee tells CBN News. "Evangelicals are not all anything. Evangelicals are people with a lot of different views."

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Huckabee knows the playing field because when he first ran for president in 2008, his more populist tone resonated with evangelicals long before Donald Trump came along. "I was talking about working-class issues," Huckabee says. "At that time, it was a little bit too soon for the Republican Party to hear it."

Fast-forward to 2024 when headlines began declaring "Trump has Transformed Evangelicals" and Trump is "Connecting with a Different Type of Voter." It highlights the changes. They result from the former president's appeal to those who might not attend church regularly and are seen as anti-establishment and anti-elitist.

"I think it's fair that he's brought out a whole different segment of voters that have been really missing," says Chad Connelly, founder of Faith Wins. Asked whether evangelicals are part of that movement, he tells CBN News emphatically, "Absolutely it includes evangelicals."

Big Political Shifts for Evangelicals

A growing distrust of the federal government has helped drive this change. In 2017, 31% of white evangelical Protestants expressed trust in the government. Today, the number has dropped more than half to 15%.

Perhaps a more telling shift is the standard on the personal morality of a candidate. More than a decade ago, 30% of white evangelicals believed an elected official could commit personal immoral acts and still be ethical in their public life. That number has now skyrocketed to 72%.

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Then there's the contrast in education. Exit polls in this year's GOP primaries show that while Trump splits the college-educated evangelical vote, he wins more than two-thirds of those who didn't go to college.

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