

Should Donald Trump Have Signed That Bible?

If Donald Trump were the pope or another Christian leader, the majority of U.S. Christians likely wouldn't have minded that he signed a Bible.

Only 39 percent of Christians in the U.S. think it would be inappropriate for a pastor, priest or Christian leader to sign the cover of a Bible. Similarly, 35 percent think it would be inappropriate for the pope to do the same.

But a Morning Consult poll released Monday (March 18) shows nearly two-thirds (65 percent) of Christians in the U.S. found it inappropriate when Trump signed the covers of at least two Bibles earlier this month at a Southern Baptist church in Alabama while visiting a community recovering from a deadly tornado outbreak.

The poll comes after videos posted online showed people holding out their Bibles to the president and first lady Melania Trump to sign. Slate reported that a 12-year-old boy was the first to ask Trump to autograph his Bible. Other photos show the president's signature scrawled in large writing across the covers of a pair of Bibles.

Two-thirds (64 percent) of all U.S. adults, including non-Christians, view that action as inappropriate, according to Morning Consult.

More white evangelical Protestants in the U.S. – who overwhelmingly voted for Trump in 2016 and continue to largely support the president, according to the same poll – found it inappropriate (45 percent) than appropriate (35 percent).

But Ed Stetzer, executive director of the Billy Graham Center at Wheaton College near Chicago, said signing Bibles is not

unheard of in some Baptist circles in the South.

In fact, Stetzer said, he's been asked to sign many Bibles when he's appeared as a guest speaker. He generally tries to demur, and he wouldn't ask someone to sign his Bible, he said, though he also is conscious not to commit a "cultural faux pas" when visiting places where it may be more common.

"It's worth noting that sometimes there are regional customs that people follow, and that doesn't make them hillbillies or hicks," he said.

Stetzer tweeted at the time that the outcry over Trump signing Bibles was a "made up controversy." And a report from The Associated Press noted that presidents including Ronald Reagan and Franklin Roosevelt also signed Bibles, though those Bibles were inscribed privately with spiritual messages as gifts.

Historians told Morning Consult that what made Trump's actions different from previous presidents' was white evangelicals' embrace of "God and country," including Trump.

And most U.S. Christians said it would be inappropriate for any president (62 percent) or politician (71 percent) to sign the cover of a Bible, according to the poll.

Nearly two-thirds (64 percent) of respondents in the South found Trump signing the covers of Bibles in Alabama to be inappropriate, it said.

Trump voters were the least likely to report they found the current president signing Bible covers to be inappropriate, almost evenly split between 43 percent who approved the action and 42 percent who disapproved, it said.

The poll surveyed 2,201 adults March 12-15 in the U.S., according to Morning Consult. It had a margin of error of 2 percentage points. {eo}

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