

The Hidden Social-Conservative Majority

BY GARY L. BAUER

Earlier this fall, the Family Research Council designed and conducted a poll to explore popular attitudes on questions of family life, government, and the relationship between them. We wanted to uncover some of the hidden dynamics that may have been at work in the 1992 election, and we hoped to find some surprises for people at all points along the spectrum of family issues.

We think we succeeded. Allow me to share with you some of our findings.

For openers, the liberal line that "the family is not declining, but merely changing" does not wash. Almost three quarters of Americans (72 percent) say that the changes that have taken place in family life over the past three decades "have been generally for the worse." Among the college-educated, this perception is shared by 91 percent.

There are also lessons here for political professionals, most of whom seem to share the media-generated notion that the reason the Republicans slumped in 1992 was that they were perceived as "intolerant" on family issues. The pros should relax — and re-tool. By a margin of 76 to 19 percent, Americans would rather live in a nation "that strongly upholds traditional family values" than in one "that is very tolerant of non-traditional lifestyles."

This preference is even more marked among groups that the Republican party supposedly longs to entice: 86 percent of African-Americans and 81 percent of Hispanics preferred "tradition" over "tolerance" in our poll. Even those who described themselves as atheist or unchurched broke 58 to 31 percent in favor of tradition.

Does this mean that libertarianism is dwindling among the American people? Not really. Asked to choose between "a state with lower taxes and fewer government services" and "a state with higher taxes and more government services," 61 percent go with the former.

Americans are a savvy lot: They prefer traditional to non-traditional

lifestyles, but they have also figured out that freedom, not government action, is the key to protecting traditional ways.

Those who believe that institutional substitutes for traditional parenting are the wave of the future had better duck this wave: 89 percent of dual-earner, married couples — those with the biggest incentives to prefer day care — believe, in fact, that "young children fare better when they are primarily cared for by their own parents."

Support for radical education reform is also high, though our poll

also shows support for divergent approaches. By percentages in the low sixties, government vouchers for private schools are favored by Catholics, Hispanics, and blacks, while Perot voters, middle-income professionals, and Protestants lean toward home-schooling, by slightly over 50 percent. Fortunately, many Americans — especially those with children at home — support **both** reforms. The politician who becomes the champion of real educational reform will be one who manages to fuse these two wings of the reform constituency.

For you political junkies, here's another interesting finding. Thirty-nine percent of the public — and 52 percent of Bush voters — would be less likely to vote for a Republican president in 1996 if the GOP candidate favors abortion and homosexual rights. Only 13 percent say a socially liberal GOP candidate would make them "more likely to vote Republican." (Forty-one percent say it would make no difference.) Furthermore, despite Ross Perot's own liberal positions on the social issues, his followers display above-average objections to the idea of the GOP nominating a social liberal.

So please put in perspective all those shallow analyses you hear that assume we are a nation of relativists with a tiny minority called "the religious right." The values that you and I stand for are very widely held in our society. Leaders who really grasp those values should be able to draw out and gel our latent social-conservative majority.

FOUR OUT OF FIVE AMERICANS CHOOSE TRADITION

ON THE HORIZON

- **New federal bioethics boards** may appear soon. Clinton administration, via National Institutes of Health, reportedly planning to establish review board for fetal experimentation regulations. Current law (45 CFR 46) prohibits research on living fetuses, but **does not cover embryos before implantation**. In wake of much-hyped "cloning" at George Washington University, review board could exploit this loophole to fund experiments on living embryos. Review board could also lay groundwork for a National Medical Ethics Board, advocated by Sen. Ted Kennedy (D-Mass.), **to prescribe ethical standards for entire nation**.

- New trend running toward **criminalizing domestic policy differences**. During 1980s, conservatives criticized liberal reliance on special prosecutors in Iran-contra probe as "criminalizing foreign policy differences" with administration officials. New FACE bill (See "On the Hill," page 2) and little-noticed provision of Clinton health proposal **aim now at private citizens and public dissent from liberal policies**. On FACE, pro-life efforts to exempt peaceful protest from harsh civil and criminal penalties were voted down on Nov. 18. On health care, Clinton plan would criminalize as "bribes" citizens' attempts to avoid waiting lists by using their own money for treatment.

- Look for **upsurge in legislative activity against child sexual abuse**. Recent highly publicized abductions and accusations stoking public outrage. Amendment added to Clinton crime bill in Senate on Nov. 17 applies U.S. child porn laws to production and trafficking overseas, **paralleling extension of U.S. anti-drug laws to overseas production** intended for our shores. International travel by U.S. citizens for purposes of having sex with anyone under age 16, **a staple of homosexual-oriented travel industry**, also facing new penalties. Crime bill faces House debate in 1994.