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## Articles

### Polls and Politics: Is There a Moral Values Factor in Science?

By Turna Ray

The “moral values” factor of the 2004 election was the focus of an American Association for the Advancement of Science [post-election forum](#) in December. Kathleen Frankovic, director of surveys at CBS News, discussed the exit poll question that is fast becoming the prevailing explanation of how the election of 2004 was won.

The survey of 7,000 voters on election night as they left the voting booths asked, “Which issue mattered most in deciding how you voted for president?” When presented with specific choices, 22% of those polled picked “moral values,” over “economy/jobs” (20%), “terrorism” (19%), “Iraq” (15%), “health care” (8%), “taxes” (5%) and “education” (4%).

The resulting impact of the “moral values” factor was widespread. Journalists lamented missing the “moral values” story; Democrats faulted their election strategy for overlooking “moral values” voters; and Republicans used the 22% statistic as further evidence that Americans support increasingly conservative policies.

Many in the scientific community—challenged by the Bush administration’s interpretation of moral values in scientific policy to push abstinence-only sex education and limit the number of stem cell lines available for federally-funded research—see the “moral values” spin as putting Americans in opposition to science.

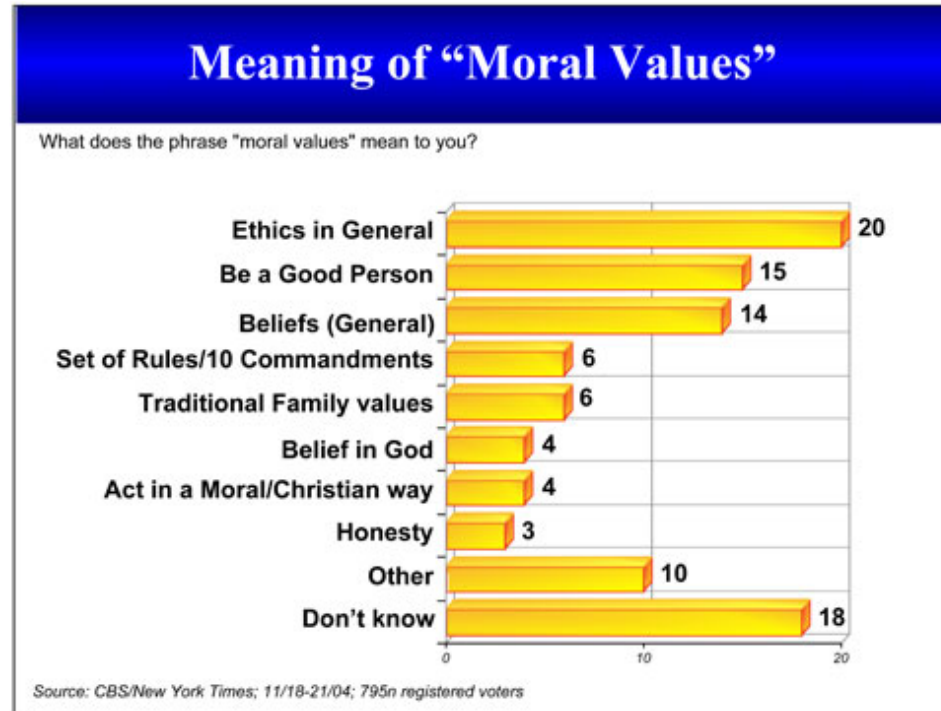
Frankovic suggested that many voters placed moral and religious values above scientific values. She cited polling questions exploring Americans’ opinions on evolution and creationism to note “a very intense belief” among 55% of those polled, as well as over a third of college graduates and post-graduates, that God created humans.

According to the polls, however, religiosity isn’t necessarily a marker for morality. Americans

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themselves are split on the matter in a 2002 survey by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press. Half of those polled said a belief in God is not needed to be moral.



“The public interpreted ‘moral values’ in a personal way, not a political way...They define it as a general belief system in being a good person,” said Chuck Rund, president of Charlton Research Company, a firm that conducts many of Research!America’s polls.

Outside of politics, however, it’s not all “gloom and doom” when it comes to the public’s belief in science. There is no conclusive data connecting Americans’ understanding of “moral values” to their belief in science, he said.

Rund pointed to the passage of Proposition 71 in California where many “red” districts support the \$3 billion ballot initiative for a 10-year project to advance stem cell research in the state. “In a state with budget deficits, the people voted for stem cell research,” said Rund. “This is a big change in how people think about health policy.”

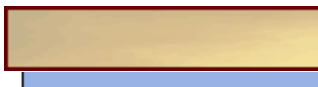
For more information about the impact of science and technology on the election, visit

[www.aaas.org/news/press\\_room/election](http://www.aaas.org/news/press_room/election). For more information on Research!America's public opinion polls, visit [www.researchamerica.org/polldata](http://www.researchamerica.org/polldata).

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