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Teaching the Children: Sharp Ideological Differences, Some Common Ground

*Wide Gaps over Teaching Faith,
Tolerance, Obedience*

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION
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About This Project

This report is part of a series examining political polarization in the United States. The project is based on a national survey of 10,013 adults nationwide, conducted January 23-March 16, 2014, by the Pew Research Center. Additional data used in this report was collected through the American Trends Panel (for more on the panel, see page 11 of this report). The project, funded in part through grants from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation and supported by the generosity of Don C. and Jeane M. Bertsch, is aimed at understanding the nature and scope of political polarization in the American public, and how it interrelates with government, society and people's personal lives.

Other reports in this series include: "[Political Polarization in the American Public](#)," released June, 12, 2014, and "[Beyond Red vs. Blue: The Political Typology](#)," released June 26, 2014.

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Teaching the Children: Sharp Ideological Differences, Some Common Ground

Wide Gaps over Teaching Faith, Tolerance, Obedience

As the public grows more politically polarized, differences between conservatives and liberals extend their long reach even to opinions about which qualities are important to teach children, according to a survey by the Pew Research Center.

People who express consistently conservative political attitudes across a range of issues are more likely than other ideological groups to rate teaching religious faith as especially important – and the least likely to say the same about teaching tolerance.

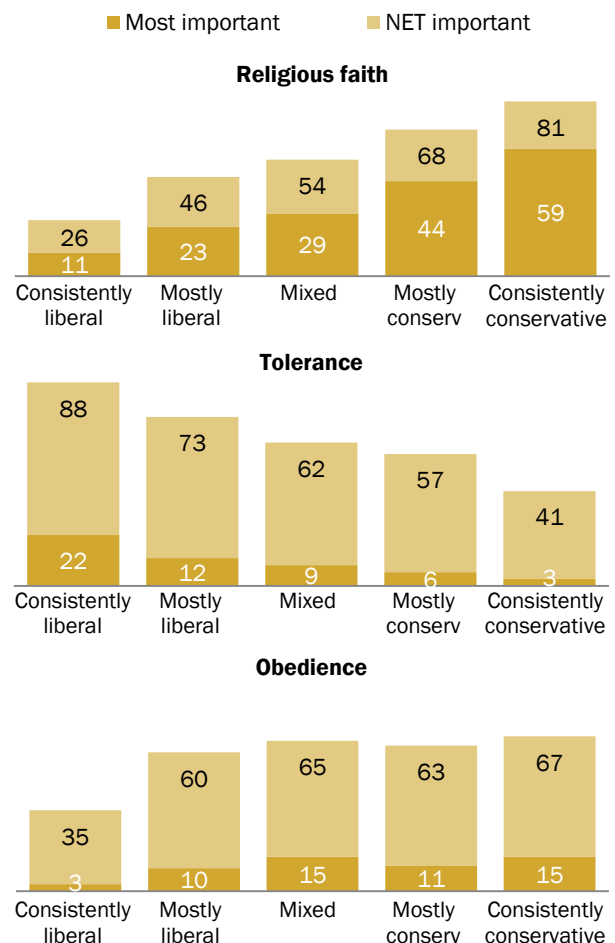
By contrast, people with consistent liberal opinions stand out for the high priority they give to teaching tolerance – and the low priority they attach to teaching religious faith and obedience.

These are among the key findings from a Pew Research Center survey conducted April 29-May 27 among 3,243 adults who are part of Pew Research's new [American Trends Panel](#), a nationally representative panel of randomly selected U.S. adults surveyed online and by mail.

The survey asked about the importance of teaching 12 different qualities to children, from responsibility and hard work to manners, persistence, tolerance and faith. Respondents were then asked to choose the three traits that are most important.

Conservatives Prioritize Teaching Faith, Obedience; Liberals Value Tolerance

% saying each is especially important to teach children...



American Trends Panel (wave 3). Survey conducted April 29-May 27, 2014.

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Among the public generally, responsibility is viewed most widely as important to teach children: 93% say teaching children to be responsible is “especially important” and 55% rate this as among the most important – the highest of any of the traits and qualities tested.

Notably, there is agreement across the ideological spectrum regarding the importance of teaching many of these qualities:

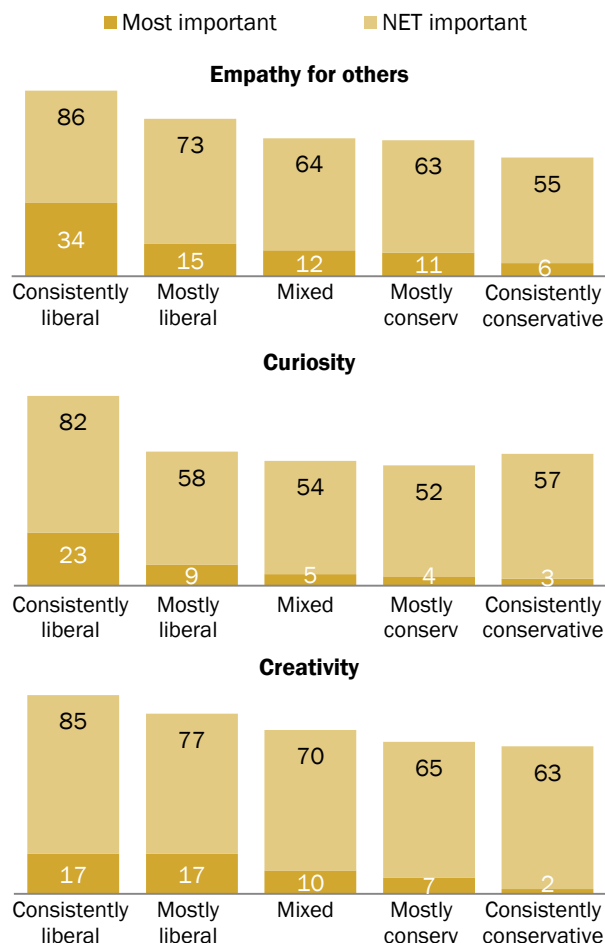
Responsibility ranks as the most important child-rearing value for every group – consistent conservatives, consistent liberals and those in between. Large majorities in all ideological groups also think it is important for children to learn independence, hard work and good manners.

The areas of ideological agreement and disagreement are revealing. For instance, “helping others” is widely valued as an important quality; three-quarters or more in every ideological group say it is important to teach children to help others. Yet “empathy for others” is more divisive. Fully 86% of consistent liberals say it is important to teach children empathy; far fewer consistent conservatives (55%) agree.

There also are ideological differences over the importance of teaching children curiosity and creativity. About eight-in-ten consistent liberals (82%) prioritize teaching children curiosity, compared with no more than about six-in-ten in any other ideological group. Majorities across all groups say it is important to teach creativity, though a higher share of consistent liberals (85%) than consistent conservatives (63%) views this as important.

Consistent Liberals More Likely to View Teaching Curiosity as Important

% saying each is especially important to teach children...



American Trends Panel (wave 3). Survey conducted April 29-May 27, 2014.

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The starkest ideological differences are over the importance of teaching religious faith. Among those who have consistently conservative attitudes across a range of political values, 81% think it is especially important for children to be taught religious faith, and 59% say it is one of the three *most* important of the 12 qualities included.

Only about half (54%) of those with mixed ideological views say it is important to teach children religious faith (29% say it is most important). Among those with consistently liberal views, just 26% rate the teaching of religious faith as especially important, and only 11% regard it as among the most important child-rearing qualities.

The relationship between ideology and opinions about the importance of teaching religious faith is partly, but not wholly, explained by the strong association between religious affiliation and ideological consistency. About four-in-ten (42%) consistent liberals are religiously unaffiliated, compared with just 6% of consistent conservatives. However, differences among ideological groups in these opinions hold even after controlling for religious affiliation and demographic factors.

The Pew Research Center's American Trends Panel

Earlier this year, the Pew Research Center released a major analysis of changes in the American electorate titled [*Political Polarization in the American Public*](#). The study, based on interviews with over 10,000 adults nationwide, tracked the growing [ideological consistency](#) and [partisan antipathy](#) expressed by Americans, and how these views correlate with people's [willingness to compromise](#), [relations with friends and family](#), and even [where they prefer to live](#).

In addition, roughly half of the survey respondents agreed to participate in follow-up surveys as part of an ongoing "panel." This allows for further exploration of the American political landscape today, and the factors associated with political ideology. The data presented here are based on online and mail interviews among 3,243 panel respondents who were presented with a list of 12 different traits and asked to check all that are "especially important to teach children." If more than three were selected, respondents were asked to choose the three that are the [most](#) important qualities to teach children.

How We Define "Ideological Consistency"

The measure of ideological consistency used in this report is a scale composed of 10 questions covering a range of political values including attitudes about size and scope of government, the social safety net, immigration, homosexuality, business, the environment, foreign policy and racial discrimination. This scale is discussed in more detail in the Pew Research Center's report on [political polarization in the American public](#) released earlier this year. Details on the scale can be found in that report's [appendix](#).

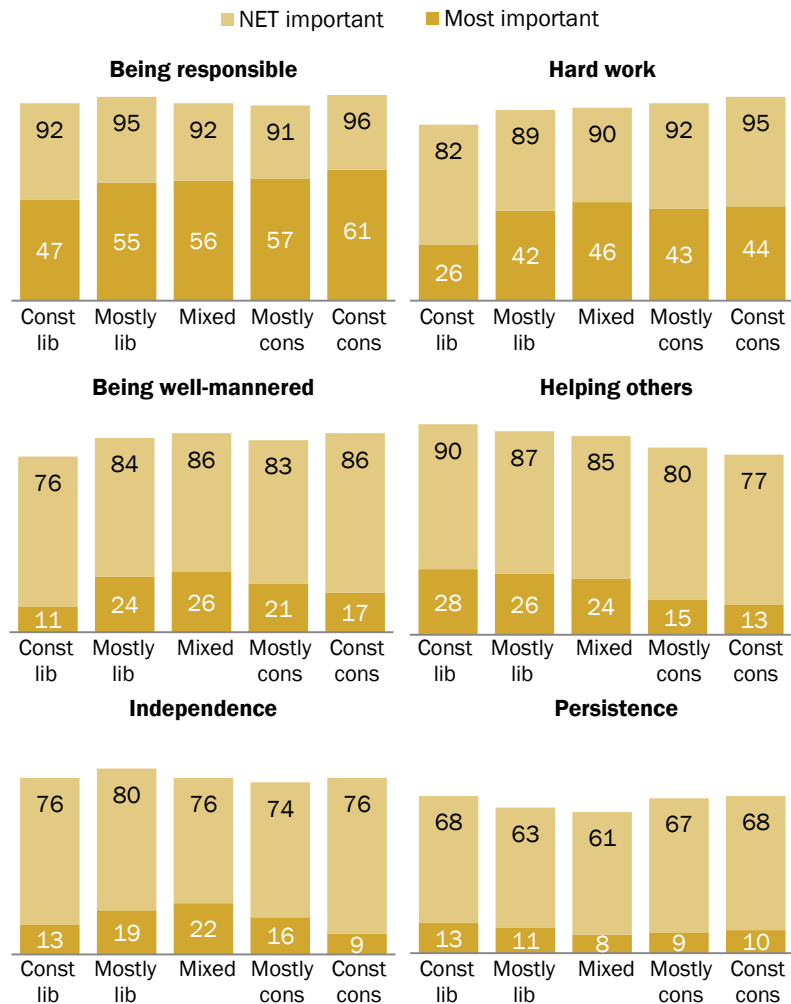
Responsibility, Hard Work, Manners, Other Traits Widely Valued

Of the 12 values asked about, there is general agreement about the importance of six. Nine-in-ten or more in all ideological groups see responsibility as important, and it ranks as one of the most important qualities to instill in children across the ideological spectrum. Similarly, hard work and good manners are viewed as important qualities to teach children by clear majorities in all ideological groups (though, compared with other groups, consistent liberals are less likely than others to rate these qualities as one of the three most important qualities).

And helping others is seen as important by three-quarters or more in all groups. However, 90% of consistent liberals view this as important, compared with 77% of consistent conservatives. Independence and persistence are valued by about equal majorities across the ideological spectrum.

Majorities across Groups Prioritize Teaching Responsibility, Hard Work, Good Manners

% saying each is especially important to teach children ...



American Trends Panel (wave 3). Survey conducted April 29-May 27, 2014.

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Ideological Divides on the *Most* Important Values to Teach Children

Across the ideological spectrum, responsibility is viewed as the single most important value to teach children: Asked to choose the top three *most* important values (of 12), “being responsible” takes the top position among all ideological groups.

But the rank order of other traits differs by ideology. Among consistent conservatives, religious faith is tied with responsibility for the top slot; each is regarded by about six-in-ten consistent conservatives as one of the most important values to teach children (61% being responsible, 59% religious faith). And religious faith ranks second among the mostly conservative, with 44% saying it is among the most important. Religious faith is a much lower priority for the other groups.

For consistent liberals, empathy for others ranks as the second most important value to pass along to children: 34% say this. Empathy ranks far lower (eighth or ninth) among other ideological groups (15% or fewer in each of these groups name it as one of the most important values). Similarly, helping others rates higher for those on the left of the political spectrum: 28% of consistent liberals, along with similar proportions of those who are mostly liberal (26%) or ideologically mixed (24%) say it is one of the most important values children should learn (compared with 15% or fewer of those in the two conservative groups).

Hard work is ranked in the top five among all ideological groups; it is named by four-in-ten or more of all groups except consistent liberals (26% of whom say it is one the most important values to instill).

Responsibility Tops List of Child-Rearing Values Across Ideological Groups

% saying each quality is one of the three MOST important to teach children...

| Total % | Consistently liberal % | Mostly liberal % | Mixed % | Mostly conservative % | Consistently conservative % |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Being responsible 55 | Being responsible 47 | Being responsible 55 | Being responsible 56 | Being responsible 57 | Being responsible 61 |
| Hard work 42 | Empathy for others 34 | Hard work 42 | Hard work 46 | Religious faith 44 | Religious faith 59 |
| Religious faith 30 | Helping others 28 | Helping others 26 | Religious faith 29 | Hard work 43 | Hard work 44 |
| Helping others 22 | Hard work 26 | Being well-mannered 24 | Being well-mannered 26 | Being well-mannered 21 | Being well-mannered 17 |
| Being well-mannered 22 | Curiosity 23 | Religious faith 23 | Helping others 24 | Independence 16 | Obedience 15 |

American Trends Panel (wave 3). Survey conducted April 29-May 27, 2014. “Most important” is the share selecting each quality as one of the (up to three of 12) most important to teach children. Data is ranked by the percent most important for each group.

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Curiosity is ranked among the most important qualities by about a quarter of consistent liberals (23%), but sits near the bottom of the list for conservatives (just 2% of consistent conservatives say it is one of the most important values to teach). Conversely, obedience, named by 15% of consistent conservatives, ranks last among consistent liberals among the most important traits to teach children (just 3% say this).

Gender, Age and Education Differences

Opinions about child-rearing vary by other characteristics as well, including gender, age, race, education, and religious affiliation. While the patterns across this set of 12 qualities are not always uniform, the differences by such background characteristics tend to be modest relative to those found on some half a dozen qualities among ideological consistency groups.

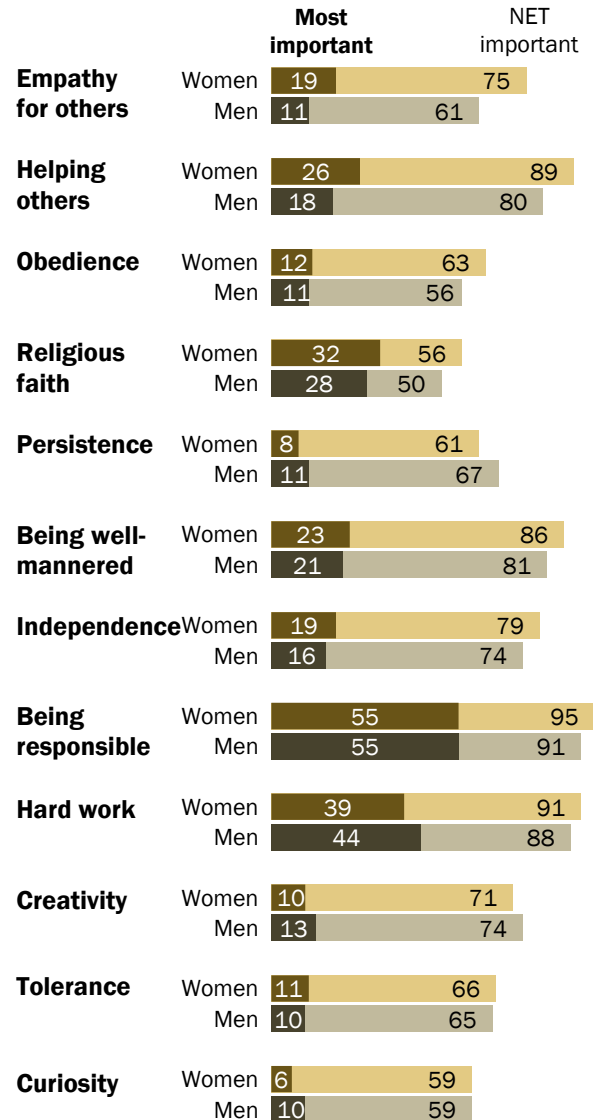
Gender

Men and women have similar value priorities for children for all but a handful of qualities. To the extent that there are differences, women are more inclined to prioritize helping others and empathy as important. A clear majority of women and men say that teaching children about helping others is important (89% and 80%, respectively for women and men) but women are relatively more inclined to say this. And 26% of women, compared with 18% of men, say it is one of the most important values to teach children.

Similarly, three-quarters of women (75%) say empathy is important and about two-in-ten (19%) consider it among the most important

Child-Rearing Values by Gender

% saying each is especially important to teach children



American Trends Panel (wave 3). Survey conducted April 29-May 27, 2014. N=3,243. Data is ranked by the difference in net important.

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qualities for children to learn. By comparison, a narrower majority of men (61%) say that teaching empathy is important and 11% consider empathy to be one of the most important qualities to teach children.

In keeping with other studies that find [women demonstrating a higher level of religious commitment](#), women give teaching children religious faith a somewhat higher priority than do men (56% of women rate this as important vs. 50% of men).

Age

Age gaps are evident on many of these values. Older adults are more inclined to prioritize teaching religious faith to the next generation, a pattern that is in keeping with the [growth of the religiously unaffiliated](#) among the younger generations. About two-thirds (65%) of those ages 65 and older say this is important to teach, and fully 41% regard it as one of the most important qualities to instill; by contrast, just 40% of those younger than 30 rate teaching religious faith as important and 17% name it as one of the most important qualities.

Older adults (65 and older) also are somewhat more likely to prioritize obedience (68% say this is important, compared with 56% of those younger than 30).

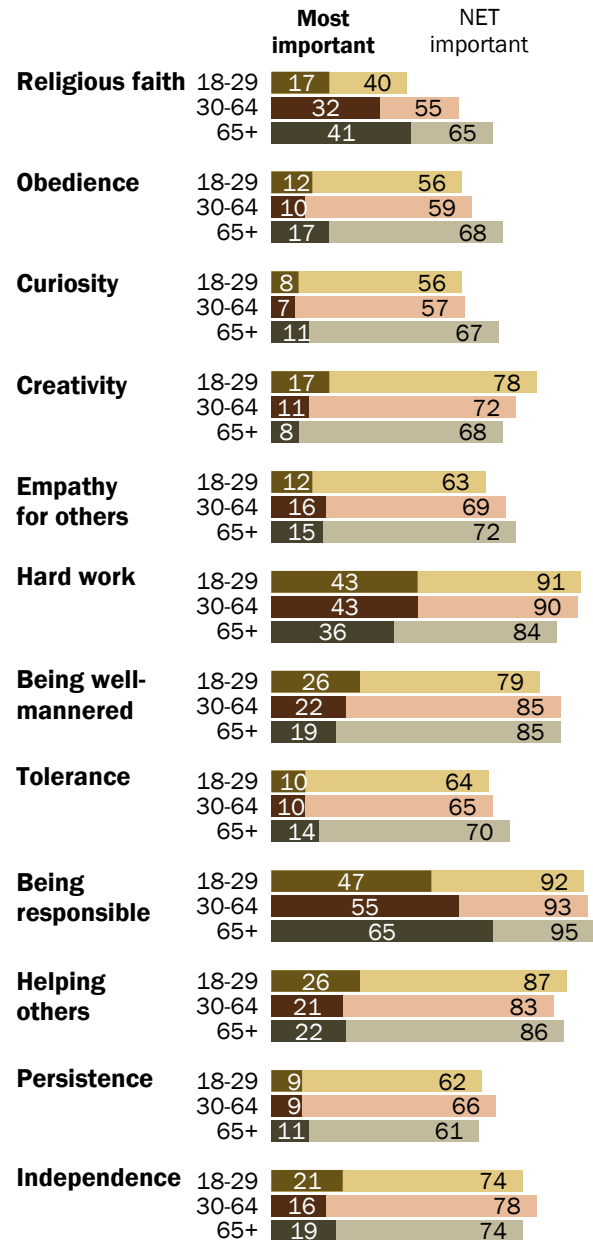
Younger adults place greater emphasis on creativity than their elders: 78% of those younger than 30 consider creativity important, and 17% say it is among the most important qualities for children to learn. By comparison

Child-Rearing Values by Education

% saying each is especially important to teach children

Child-Rearing Values by Age

% saying each is especially important to teach children



American Trends Panel (wave 3). Survey conducted April 29-May 27, 2014. N=3,243. Data is ranked by the difference in net important.

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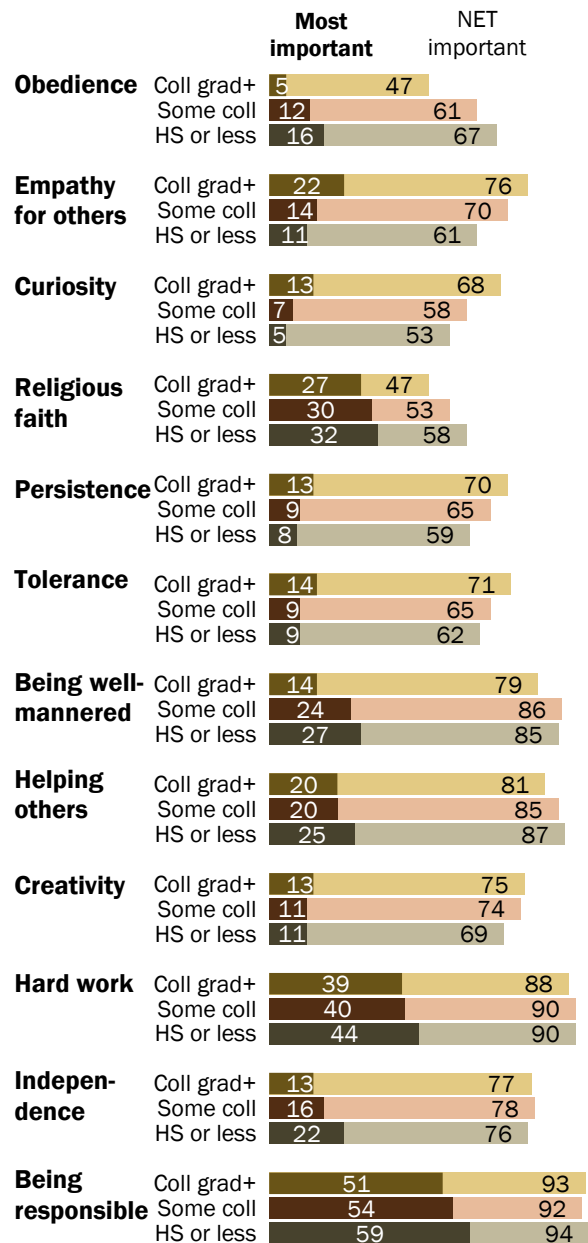
68% of those 65 and older say creativity is an important value to instill, and just 8% say it is among the most important. Although teaching responsibility ranks among the most important values for adults of all ages, older adults are more likely than younger ones to say it is one of the most important qualities to instill in children: 65% of those age 65 and older say this, compared with 47% of those ages 18-29.

Education

Child-rearing values are also associated with education. College graduates tend to place a somewhat higher priority on teaching children empathy, curiosity, tolerance and persistence. Compared with college graduates, those with no more than a high school education tend to put more emphasis on teaching children obedience, religious faith and being well-mannered.

For instance, two-thirds (67%) of those who have not attended college say teaching obedience is especially important; that falls to just 47% among those with a college degree (and just 40% of the subset of this group with a post-graduate degree).

Conversely, 68% of college graduates say teaching curiosity is important, compared with about half (53%) of those with a high school education or less. There are similar differences in views of the importance of teaching empathy (76% of college graduates vs. 61% of those with no more than a high school education.)



American Trends Panel (wave 3). Survey conducted April 29-May 27, 2014. N=3,243. Data is ranked by the difference in net important.

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Race and Ethnicity

Though whites, blacks and Hispanics generally agree on the importance of teaching most values, there are some differences, most notably on the importance placed on instilling religious faith.

About seven-in-ten (69%) African Americans say it is especially important to teach children religious faith, with 41% ranking faith as one of the three most important values to teach. By contrast, about half of whites (51%) and Hispanics (54%) say teaching children religious faith is important, and just 30% of whites and 26% of Hispanics say it is among the most important values to teach children.

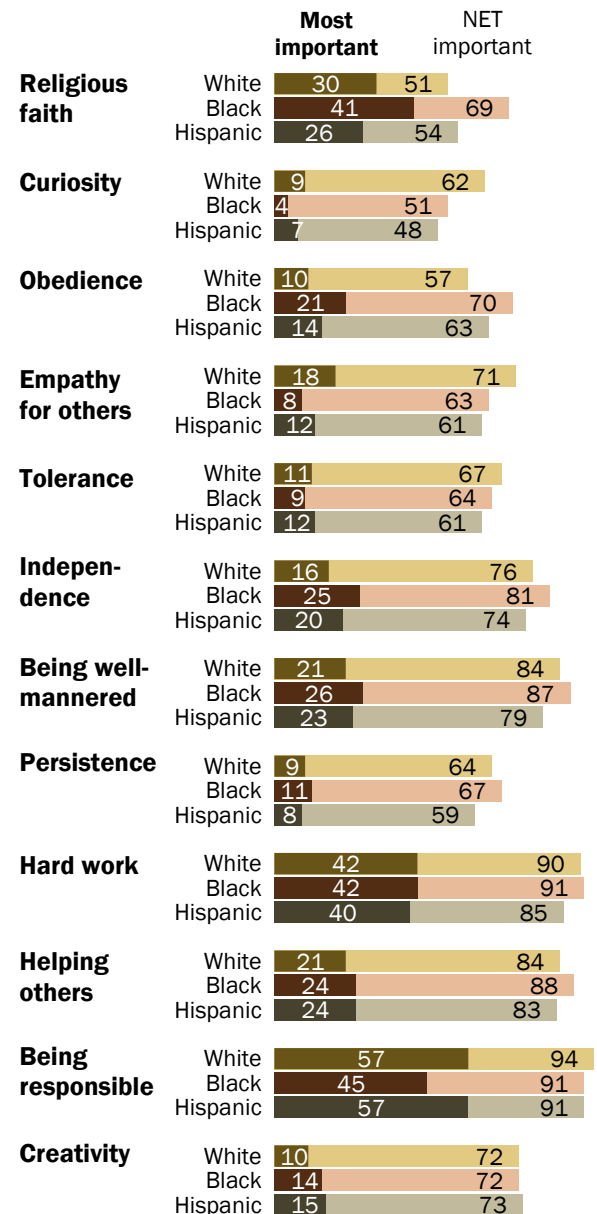
The greater importance blacks place on teaching children religious faith reflects the [higher levels of religious practice and commitment among African Americans compared to the public as a whole](#).

Blacks are also somewhat more likely than whites to place importance on teaching children to be obedient—70% say this is important, compared with 57% of whites.

Blacks and Hispanics are somewhat less likely than whites to place curiosity or empathy on the list of important values to teach children: About half of blacks (51%) and Hispanics (48%) say curiosity is important, compared with 62% of whites. Most other values are seen as about equally important across racial and ethnic groups.

Racial and Ethnic Differences

% saying each is especially important to teach children



American Trends Panel (wave 3). Survey conducted April 29-May 27, 2014. N=3,243. Data is ranked by the difference in net important. The Hispanic sample in this report is predominantly native born and English speaking.

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Religious affiliation

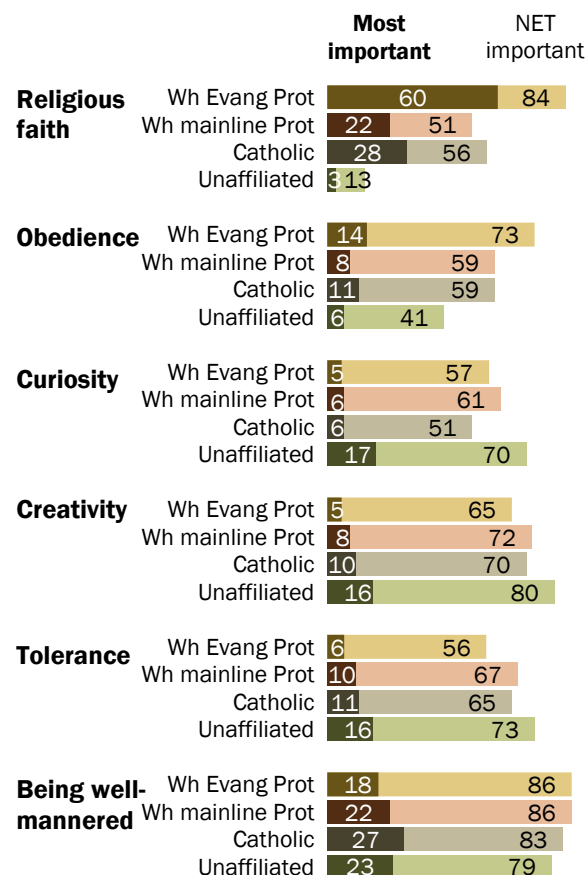
There are strong differences between those who are religiously affiliated and unaffiliated when it comes to the importance of teaching children about religious faith. Fully 37% of all those with a religious affiliation (and 60% of white evangelical Protestants) say that religious faith is among the most important qualities to teach children. By contrast, just 3% of those who are unaffiliated say religious faith is among the most important qualities to instill.

Though less stark, there are significant religious divides over the importance of teaching children some other key values. Those with religious affiliations—and particularly white Evangelical Protestants—are more likely than the religiously unaffiliated to prioritize obedience and being well-mannered, and somewhat less likely to say creativity, curiosity or tolerance is important.

On most other qualities, however, there are no or only modest differences between religious groups when it comes to values to instill in youth.

Religious Affiliation and Child-Rearing

% saying each is especially important to teach children



American Trends Panel (wave 3). Survey conducted April 29-May 27, 2014. N=3,243. Data is ranked by the difference in net important.

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About the American Trends Panel

The American Trends Panel (ATP), created by the Pew Research Center, is a nationally representative panel of randomly selected U.S. adults living in households. Respondents who self-identify as internet users (representing 89% of U.S. adults) participate in the panel via monthly self-administered Web surveys, and those who do not use the internet participate via telephone or mail. The panel is being managed by Abt SRBI.

Data in this report are drawn from the May wave of the panel, conducted April 29-May 27, 2014 among 3,243 respondents (2,906 by web and 337 by mail). The margin of sampling error for the full sample of 3,243 respondents is plus or minus 2.3 percentage points.

All current members of the American Trends Panel were originally recruited from the 2014 Political Polarization and Typology Survey, a large (n=10,013) national landline and cellphone random digit dial (RDD) survey conducted January 23rd to March 16th, 2014, in English and Spanish. At the end of that survey, respondents were invited to join the panel. The invitation was extended to all respondents who use the internet (from any location) and a random subsample of respondents who do not use the internet.¹

Of the 10,013 adults interviewed, 9,809 were invited to take part in the panel. A total of 5,338 agreed to participate and provided either a mailing address or an email address to which a welcome packet, a monetary incentive and future survey invitations could be sent. Panelists also receive a small monetary incentive after participating in each wave of the survey.

The ATP data were weighted in a multi-step process that begins with a base weight incorporating the respondents' original survey selection probability and the fact that some panelists were subsampled for invitation to the panel. Next, an adjustment was made for the fact that the propensity to join the panel varied across different groups in the sample. The final step in the weighting uses an iterative technique that matches gender, age, education, race, Hispanic origin and region to parameters from the U.S. Census Bureau's 2012 American Community Survey. Population density is weighted to match the 2010 U.S. Decennial Census. Telephone service is weighted to estimates of telephone coverage for 2014 that were projected from the January-June 2013 National Health Interview Survey. It also adjusts for party affiliation using an average of the three most recent Pew Research Center general public telephone surveys, and for internet use using as a parameter a measure from the 2014 Survey of Political Polarization. Sampling errors and statistical

¹ When data collection for the 2014 Political Polarization and Typology Survey began, non-internet users were subsampled at a rate of 25%, but a decision was made shortly thereafter to invite all non-internet users to join. In total, 83% of non-internet users were invited to join the panel.

tests of significance take into account the effect of weighting. The Hispanic sample in the American Trends Panel is predominantly native born and English speaking. In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

The Web component of the May wave had a response rate of 61% (2,906 responses among 4,740 Web-based individuals enrolled in the panel); the mail component had a response rate of 61% (337 responses among 553 non-Web individuals enrolled in the panel). Taking account of the response rate for the 2014 Survey of Political Polarization (10.6%), the cumulative response rate for the May ATP wave is 3.5%.

The accompanying table shows the unweighted sample sizes and the error attributable to sampling that would be expected at the 95% level of confidence for selected groups discussed in the report.

Sample Size and Margin of Error for American Trends Panel (Wave 3)

| | Weighted percent of sample | Unweighted sample size | Plus or minus ... |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------|
| Total | 100% | 3,243 | 2.3 percentage points |
| Consistently conservative | 9% | 353 | 6.8 percentage points |
| Mostly conservative | 18% | 578 | 5.3 percentage points |
| Mixed | 38% | 979 | 4.1 percentage points |
| Mostly liberal | 22% | 660 | 5.0 percentage points |
| Consistently liberal | 14% | 673 | 4.9 percentage points |

American Trends Panel (wave 3). Survey conducted April 29-May 27, 2014.

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Ideological consistency used throughout this report is based on a scale composed of 10 questions asked on Pew Research Center surveys going back to 1994 to gauge peoples' ideological worldview. The questions cover a range of political values including attitudes about size and scope of government, the social safety net, immigration, homosexuality, business, the environment, foreign policy and racial discrimination.

The scale is designed to measure how consistently liberal or conservative people’s responses are across these various dimensions of political thinking (what some refer to as ideological ‘constraint’). Note that where people fall on this scale does not always align with whether they think of themselves as liberal, moderate or conservative. (See [here](#) for more details on the relationship between self-identification and placement on this scale). Full details can be found in [Appendix A](#) of “Political Polarization in the American Public.”

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**PEW RESEARCH CENTER
 AMERICAN TRENDS PANEL WAVE 3
 APRIL 29-MAY 27, 2014
 TOTAL N=3,243
 WEB RESPONDENTS N=2,906
 MAIL RESPONDENTS N=337²**

OTHER QUESTIONS PREVIOUSLY RELEASED OR HELD FOR FUTURE RELEASE

ASK ALL:

KIDTRAIT In general, which of these qualities do you consider especially important to teach children?
[Check all that apply] **RANDOMIZE ITEMS**

ASK ALL WHO SELECTED MORE THAN ONE OPTION IN KIDTRAIT:

KIDTRAIT2 Of all the qualities you selected, which do you consider the most important to teach children?
*[Choose up to three]*³

| | Ranked most important ⁴ <u>KIDTRAIT2</u> | Important, Not most important <u>KIDTRAIT2</u> | NET Important <u>KIDTRAIT</u> | Not selected as important/ No answer <u>KIDTRAIT</u> |
|------------------------|---|---|----------------------------------|---|
| a. Independence | 18 | 59 | 77 | 23 |
| b. Hard work | 42 | 48 | 89 | 11 |
| c. Being responsible | 55 | 38 | 93 | 7 |
| d. Creativity | 11 | 61 | 72 | 28 |
| e. Being well-mannered | 22 | 62 | 84 | 16 |
| f. Helping others | 22 | 62 | 84 | 16 |
| g. Persistence | 10 | 55 | 64 | 36 |
| h. Religious faith | 30 | 23 | 53 | 47 |
| i. Obedience | 12 | 48 | 60 | 40 |
| j. Empathy for others | 15 | 53 | 68 | 32 |
| k. Curiosity | 8 | 51 | 59 | 41 |
| l. Tolerance | 11 | 55 | 65 | 35 |

² Question wording is that from the web version of the survey. Question wording was adapted for the paper questionnaire delivered by mail. All questions asked in both modes unless noted.

³ If respondent selected two items in KIDTRAIT, the respondent was asked to select up to two items. If respondent selected three or more items in KIDTRAIT, the respondent was asked to select up to three items.

⁴ Percentages for most important include respondents who selected only one item in KIDTRAIT.