

Religion and America's Role in the World

Transcript of UN Foundation/Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly Briefing at the National Press Club

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Bob Abernethy: I am Bob Abernethy, executive editor and host of the PBS program Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly. Together with Tim Wirth, who is president of the United Nations Foundation, and with our colleagues we are here to discuss the results of a new national survey on religion and America's role in the world that we are releasing today. It was conducted last month by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research on behalf of both the UN Foundation and Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly. We wanted to take a closer look at the impact religion has on Americans' views of U.S. involvement around the world. What are our views on military and humanitarian intervention, international relief, national security, poverty, women's health, climate change, fighting global diseases, among many other important issues? What does religious faith have to do with those views?

I think the picture that emerged is really fascinating and newsworthy, especially against the background of a presidential campaign that raises questions about what our role in the world should be. For instance, from the survey: most Americans think that this country is exceptional, blessed by God, and that means we have a moral responsibility to play an active role in the world. At the same time, most Americans also say U.S. actions internationally sometimes do more harm than good. Anna [Greenberg] will have the numbers and the details in just a minute.

Before I present our panelists, who will discuss the survey findings, I want to introduce Tim Wirth and thank him and everyone at the UN Foundation for their partnership on this survey. Tim is a former U.S. congressman and senator from Colorado. He also served as the State Department's first Undersecretary for Global Affairs. As president of the UN Foundation since 1998, Tim has led its programs on issues ranging from the environment and women and population to children's health and peace, security, and human rights -- probably that's just a beginning.

Tim Wirth: The UN Foundation was established by Ted Turner ten years ago with a billion-dollar commitment, which began the big philanthropists' giving. It was a really important start for all of that. One of our primary concerns has been the engagement of the American people in support for US involvement around the world and particularly support for United Nations and UN causes, believing as we do that that the UN is a very effective institution when the US wants the UN to be a very effective institution. When the two work closely together it's a great synergy; when they don't, it's sort of a spiral downhill. So we are very concerned about where the areas of overlapping interest and support can be found. So when the opportunity came up to add to the very extensive research that we do ourselves—and we knew that Anna Greenberg and company were going to be doing this—we jumped on it and said we'd really like to be a partner in this. So we are very pleased to be here.

I don't have to tell all of you about the importance of the evangelical constituency. If you look at it in purely electoral terms, which I find myself doing, given my own background, you look down the center of the country and there are a hundred electoral votes. That's the basic mathematics of what drives a lot of this interest and drives a lot of the former stereotypes and the dramatic change in those stereotypes in the last twenty years. We've followed that in the ten years of our existence. It has

been extremely interesting to watch. This engagement began in a very narrow way, largely with support for Israel initially and then the beginning of support related to the AIDS program, quite narrowly defined, and poverty. Then in a more and more expansive and broad support for American foreign policy and American engagement in general, reaching out to what is called the Millennial Development Goals, maternal mortality, hunger, AIDs, TB and malaria, and so on. So we've watched this evolution of interest and concern among a whole variety of different evangelical groups, supporting what the United States did around the world and effectively supporting the US's relationship to the United Nations. So we've been especially interested now to see what does this actually look like? We are looking forward to getting the specifics from Anna. I have some thoughts about it. I read the data, and I was so interested in it, so we look forward to hearing from you.

Abernethy: Anna Greenberg, Kim Lawton, John Hamre, and Timothy Shah are here to talk about what we found out in this survey and what it means. Anna Greenberg is senior vice president of Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research in Washington. She has extensive experience polling on religion, women's health, education, and many other issues. She writes and speaks frequently on religion's role in public life. Kim Lawton is the managing editor and a correspondent for Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly. She has led the program's coverage of religion and politics this year and has worked on assignment in more than 25 countries around the world. John Hamre is president and CEO of the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington. He was deputy secretary of defense during the Clinton administration. He also serves currently as chairman of the Defense Policy Board. He has just flown back from Tokyo. Timothy Shah is adjunct senior fellow for religion and foreign policy at the Council on Foreign Relations and a senior research scholar at the Institute on Culture, Religion and World Affairs at Boston University. He speaks and writes widely on religion, global politics, and faith and world affairs. Let's begin with Anna. What did you find?

Greenberg: Being able to work on this wonderful partnership has been a privilege and honor for me. I am extremely interested also in hearing what the panelists have to say about what we found. We conducted a national survey among a thousand adults. We included an oversample of four hundred young evangelicals, so overall a survey of 1400 adults. If you are interested in having the survey results, we can send that to you, so you can have everything that we are talking about today. You can have all that data.

This was a really interesting project. In some ways, what was really interesting was the differences among religious groups. But in some ways, where we saw consensus was equally interesting. What we found overall was that, despite a profound belief, 75 percent saying that the country's relations with the world was on the wrong track, almost the same percentage saying our country is on the wrong track, and some real ambivalence about whether our role recently has been positive or negative, in fact the country evenly splits on whether or not our presence has been positive or negative, but with a majority sort of in the center, so real ambivalence and, as Bob mentioned, the majority saying sometimes our involvement in the world does more harm than good. Despite all of this, and, by the way, strong feelings about our current engagements in Iraq and Afghanistan, we find very strong majorities favor the US having an active in the world.

Frankly, this was a bit of a surprise for me, particularly when we look at the politics of this presidential election, the politics of Iraq and the 2006 election. There has been a strong isolationist impulse, I think, coming out of people's views about preemptive military action in this war. But, in fact, when you look at the underlying

principles around what our country should be, what we ought to be, we actually see very strong support for a very strong interventionist role. Moreover, when we talk about what that role should be, we have a strong majority saying we have a moral obligation to be involved in the world.

It is wrapped up, by the way, in all sorts of other kinds of ideas about American exceptionalism. We have majorities of people saying that the United States is uniquely blessed by God. And we have majorities saying that the United States should serve as a Christian example to the rest of the world. What is particularly remarkable about those findings is that, while no doubt people who are more religious are more likely to say that we are uniquely blessed by God, that we should serve as a Christian example, and certainly people who are part of more conservative religious denominations—for instance, evangelical Christians—are more likely to say it, the fact is, with the exception of people who say they have no religious preference, people who are secular, majorities of everybody else in the country agrees with these statements. So this is a broadly held notion, that we are exceptional and that it has a religious dimension.

Now, what's really interesting in delving in more deeply into this notion of what America's role is—whether we should be interventionist or isolationist—we have a majority for an interventionist world view—some of the divisions: It turns out that evangelicals and other conservative religious groups—for instance, traditional Catholics—are more likely to say that we should play an interventionist role than more progressive or moderately religious. I think that Timothy [Shah] is going to talk about this. That actually represents a pretty interesting change. If you look historically at the evangelical community, it is a community that was pretty isolationist in the past. Now, I think some of this is linked to our current political situation and the foreign policy of the last eight years, so that evangelical Christians tend to be majority Republican, vote in very large numbers for Republican candidates—80 percent for George Bush, about 72 percent for John McCain now—so there is a very strong partisan piece to this. But the real question for me is, coming out of this election, particularly if Barack Obama wins: What happens with the evangelical community's perception of our role in the world—what it should be, whether it is positive or negative—because coming out of this past period, they clearly are more likely to say that our role has been positive, they are more likely to say that we should be involved in the world. It's not really a linear relationship. If you look at people who are non-Christian, that is a group that is relatively small but growing—we are becoming more religiously pluralistic—and if you look at people who have no religious preference, people who will not identify with a religion at all, that's another group that has been growing over time—about 20 percent of the country will not identify with a religious denomination or never goes to any kind of religious service—those two groups believe that we have had a negative presence in the world, unlike evangelical Christians who say positive, but are also likely to say that we should play an interventionist role. It is the middle that says we've been negative and we should get out. And you've got on both sides of the ideological spectrum support for a more interventionist world view, but different perceptions of whether or not our role has been positive or negative.

When you look at the question in general of what should our foreign policy look like, what should our priorities be, we asked an open-ended question: What are the most important issues facing the world today? We had a plurality—not a big one, 35 percent—saying conflict and violence. Obviously the war in Iraq and Afghanistan is part of that, but terrorism is also a big piece of that. But we also saw, right below that, a number of people talking about the world economy but also global interdependence and globalization. Now, this survey was done before the bailout and

the intensity of this worldwide economic crisis, and it may well be that, had we asked this question today, we would have had higher numbers talking about the world economy. By the way, below that is a concern about global resources, including natural resources, including energy. So there is a very strong sense among Americans that we are interdependent in really critical ways. Certainly we are affected by the violence and conflicts around the world, and how we manage that or a part of it is an issue of great dispute among many Americans. But the notion that we are sort of an island unto ourselves—that is not what people believe. They know that we are interdependent economically, in natural resources, etc. So when you look at the fact that people view conflict and violence around the world as one of the most important problems we're facing, it is not as a surprise that when you ask people to rank their foreign policy priorities, No. 1 by a pretty significant margin is keeping America basically safe and secure—whether that means dealing with the war on terrorism—a very high number on controlling the proliferation of nuclear weapons—the notion that we need to be safe and secure is people's No. 1 foreign policy priority. But just below that is a really strong interest in dealing with global humanitarian issues, including dealing with global disease and also dealing with issues of genocide in places like Darfur. What is really interesting is that there really isn't much difference if you look across different religious denominations or level of religiosity. There is a slight relationship, not a strong one, with people who are more religious saying we need to do things on world poverty and those kinds of issues. But, for the most part, there is real consensus around what our foreign policy priorities should be.

More towards the bottom of people's foreign policy priorities are things that involve long-term commitment of resources, like nation-building or spreading democracy, or things that are more ephemeral like cultural exchanges. There is a very concrete sense to these foreign policy goals. And if you ask about the tactics, people are much more interested in short-term taking on a humanitarian crisis like a natural disaster or a famine, using economic sanctions or diplomacy to try to take on world conflict, and much more reluctance to use military or any kind of significant, long-term commitment, particularly given what the budget looks like, that involves commitment of resources.

Now, despite this consensus, there are some areas of disagreement if you look across religious groups. Not surprisingly, they tend to fall along the lines we've been talking about. There are areas of contention. Women's health, women's reproductive health in particular, is an area where we see some differences. So evangelical Christians and traditional Catholics and people who are more conservative religiously are less likely to support or make a priority of dealing with women's reproductive health. That's not separate from how they feel about abortion. If you look, for instance, at the Mexico City policy or the global gag rule, which says that federal dollars can't support international organizations that provide abortion services, even if they provide a whole range of other kinds of services—you actually have the country split (which surprised me actually) on whether or not that rule should be lifted—there will be a different outcome depending on who is elected President about whether or not that policy stays. I have no doubt, under an Obama administration, that policy will be lifted. But no doubt if you look at evangelical and more conservative religious Americans, their concerns about our involvement in reproductive health around the world is linked to abortion politics.

Another area where we see some disagreement is on global warming. There is actually a very high level of support for the notion that we should sign international treaties dealing with climate change—a different position than where this administration has been—but there is more skepticism among evangelicals, and it is

less of a priority among evangelicals—than it is for more progressive religious Americans. There is a big difference between younger and older evangelicals. (I'm going to let Kim talk about that.) Over the long term, that could be a very interesting change in the political landscape.

Then, finally, on the question of Israel, it's a relatively low priority for many Americans, but no doubt, for evangelical Christians, supporting Israel stands out as a higher priority.

So while we have this broad consensus around American security and the notion that we need to be involved around the world—particularly dealing with global disease and genocide, playing that positive role in the world—we have more contention around these more ideologically charged issues—issues that, I believe, are all going to be very important in the new administration.

I just want to conclude by saying that this is not static. The American religious landscape is dynamic. We have a growing percentage of people who do not identify with any religious faith at all. It's only about 6 percent now, but we have a growing group of non-Christians. As you can imagine, on the question of whether or not America should set an example as a Christian nation, a majority of non-Christians disagree with that. As we have more and more non-Christians in our country, a lot of these issues are going to become much more complex. We also have real differences among evangelicals. Twenty-five percent of this country is evangelical, but younger evangelicals, on some of these core issues, look pretty different than their parents. So while this is a situation that, on some level, is deeply rooted in our history—this notion of American exceptionalism—and then you have something that is rooted in the last eight years, which is evangelical support for being interventionist—we also have, I think, a series of demographic changes and sociological changes that are happening to our religious landscape that could fundamentally change these debates, probably not in the next five or ten years, but potentially in the next ten or twenty.

Lawton: I will talk briefly about one dimension of the survey. We have talked a lot about younger evangelicals. We decided to include that in this overall survey, in part because, as has been stated, evangelicals have been such a potent force in the American landscape in the last few years. This election cycle there was a lot of talk that younger evangelicals care about different things. They are very different than their parents. A lot of talk; very little hard data. So that's why we included that in our survey, because we wanted to find out what young evangelicals are thinking. We defined young evangelicals as 18 to 29. Some other people use other numbers, but that's what we chose in that age category. We found that young evangelicals are, indeed, less conservative than older evangelicals on a host of very interesting issues, but this is not a group of flaming liberals, at least not yet. That's important to say. I think some perhaps optimistic political operatives have overstated how many changes there are, but in this community, given its impact, even small changes over a period of time can have a big impact on the election. So we just wanted to keep that in mind. I'll highlight some of the issues. A lot of these are not in the final report, but they are in the survey. So if you want to see those numbers, we can get them to you.

The environment is one issue where there has been a lot of talk about how young evangelicals are concerned about the environment. We did find that they are more concerned than older evangelicals about issues like global warming. They are more likely to say that global warming is a higher priority and they are more supportive of international agreements and treaties to end global warming. In fact, 79% of younger evangelicals favor international treaties to stop global warming.

On the issue of abortion, younger evangelicals are just as solidly pro-life, they are just as much against abortion as older evangelicals. This is one issue where they are not more liberal than their parents. But they have a broader view of what the pro-life agenda should be. So we found 63% of younger evangelicals agree that poverty, disease, and torture are also pro-life issues. We found younger evangelicals are more likely than even Americans as a whole to name poverty, health care, fighting AIDs and other diseases as the biggest problems facing the world today, which was interesting.

We did find that younger evangelicals are very interventionist. They do believe that we need to be engaged in the world. Strong majorities—about 67% believe that the US has a moral obligation to be involved around that world. That is higher than even the general population. Also very high numbers, 80%, of young evangelicals said that the US should set the example as a Christian nation. But there was a dose of realism in there as well. Also very large numbers of young evangelicals, 82%, acknowledge that sometimes the US does more harm than good. So they want us to be involved very much but they also are very cognizant of the fact that that can be negative sometimes. We found some skepticism about the Iraq war. Fifty-eight (58) percent of young evangelicals agreed that we need to start reducing the number of American troops in Iraq. But young evangelicals are not wary of using the military. In fact, a very large number, 72%, three-quarters of young evangelicals said that the US should use military force to prevent potential threats before they occur: preemptive strikes. Some people recognized this as the Bush Doctrine. About three-quarters of young evangelicals agreed with that. Only 55% of Americans as a whole agree with that notion of preemptive strike. Now that is still a majority of all Americans, but significantly lower than in the young evangelical community.

We did find some very interesting generational issues within evangelicalism on gay issues. We found a majority, 58%, of young evangelicals said they support some form of legal recognition for same-sex couples, whether that is civil unions or even gay marriage. They were more likely to support civil unions, but that is very different than older evangelicals, who are very opposed to legal accommodations for same-sex couples. Again, theologically, we did find some differences. Young evangelicals, at this point in their lives, appeared to be less dogmatic on some theological issues. Only 36% agreed that Christians have a duty to convert people to Christianity. That's one of the hallmarks of evangelicalism, but only 36% of young evangelicals agreed that it was a duty. More than half agreed that Christians should be tolerant, that they have a duty to be tolerant to people of other faiths. And more than half also agreed that all religions have elements of truth in them. Now that may not extend completely to Muslims. We find in our survey, on our temperature scale, younger evangelicals were significantly cooler toward Muslims than Americans generally were. Indeed, 40% of young evangelicals said that they think violent conflict between Western countries and Muslim countries is inevitable. Forty percent agreed with that. That's about twice the percentage of the general population. But young evangelicals do seem to have an active faith. We found that about 40% have actually participated in missionary work, done things to spread their faith in some way or help people. And 15% of them did that outside the US. Now that may not seem like a huge percentage, but that is millions of young people who have been overseas to get involved in issues. One thing we did find is that, across the religious community, there are a lot of relationships internationally. When people have these relationships, when they've been exposed, they sometimes are more sensitive and aware of some of the issues. So that's a picture we found of young evangelicals.

In terms of raw politics, we did this survey about a month ago, so you're never quite sure how strong these numbers are. But we did find that the majority of young

evangelicals are supporting John McCain in this election. Sorry for all the Democrats who were claiming that they were all on their side. But young evangelicals were supporting John McCain at lower numbers than their parents. So the Democrats have made inroads, but this is not a group of flaming liberal Democrats at this point.

Hamre: I am quite a faithful follower of Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly. I greatly value it personally. What you didn't say about me is that I'm also a failed seminarian. I spent some time and realized that the church didn't need another insecure pastor.

This is a very interesting report. There are two things I'd like to observe. First, if you look at the data on page 14, which is where you get some granularity to how the various confessional groupings rate various issues, what you find is that they are very stable. The confessional communities don't really vary among themselves, or really from the unchurched. What it tells me is that the dominant independent variable here is political, not religious. I think that jumps out quite strongly. Conversely, if you look at the chart on page 10, which is the one that talks about a Christian character by faith, this is where you see the great divide between people of religion and people who do not consider themselves religious. A very large difference. To me, it is an underpinning of the central dilemma that we have with religion and public policy life. There is no question that individual citizens have a strong religious impulse and it informs how they look at the world. But the public policy ethic is dominated by the non-religious in this country. This is a problem because our government feels it's too dangerous to have conversations about religion. And so it doesn't have them. It means that we, as a country, as a government, really are quite unaware of how the religious impulse shapes our thinking and especially the thinking of other people in the world. The reason I think I was asked to be here was that at CSIS we've been doing a project for a couple of years on the importance of the religious impulse in foreign policy. What we found is that people in the American government don't understand it. Because of this dominance of agnosticism (I don't mean that negatively), this cultural dominance of agnosticism in our public policy life, which springs from the separation of church and state, has also meant that we have intellectual blinders. I think that really comes out quite clearly in this survey. It shows that people care deeply, from a religious impulse, about these issues. But the gap between the religious and the unreligious dominates the public policy landscape. It's really quite interesting.

Shah: I don't have a great deal to add to the already very astute interpretations and analyses of the survey figures. I think this is a fascinating survey on many levels, but despite the time I spent at the Pew Research Center, where my colleagues worked hard to help me to be able to interpret survey findings, I'm still no more able to interpret findings than I am tea leaves. So I am going to try to cast my remarks at a broader level and put these findings in a certain context.

First, I want to say something about the implications of this study for understanding American evangelicals and how they relate to other Americans in terms of their foreign policy attitudes. Despite some of the interesting differences that Anna and Kim have pointed to with respect to evangelicals versus other Americans, I think the most overwhelming finding and the most interesting finding is really how uninteresting the overall results are. I mean by that not that the survey is uninteresting, but I mean that in the sense that evangelicals really don't look different from other Americans on most of the issues looked at in this survey. There are, of course, some important exceptions; for example, particularly the issue of federal funding of international organizations that are involved in abortion overseas. But, in general, with respect to the major issues in this survey: Is America blessed

by God? Does it have a unique role in the world? Should America be involved in the world and so on—the differences between evangelicals and non-evangelicals are very small; in general, no more than about ten percent on most of these issues. So that uninteresting finding, I think, is the most interesting result of this survey.

Of course, historically, in some periods, American evangelicals have not been in favor of active engagement abroad. Perhaps the most famous personification of this is William Jennings Bryan, who famously resigned from being Secretary of State in part over Woodrow Wilson's policy of going to war in World War I, William Jennings Bryan being, of course, an evangelical. American evangelicals were among the most ardent supporters of an isolationist policy between World War I and World War II, with more mainline Protestants, just as John Foster Dulles, for example, being a strong proponent of international engagement and activism. So that old story of evangelicalism being associated with isolationism really is just that—an old story; it's not the case any longer.

I thought I would spend my time talking about evangelicals, but given the fact that there aren't a lot of interesting differences, I actually want to shift and talk more broadly about what the survey says about Americans in general. I want to try to characterize the American attitude towards the international system and America's role in the world. I've organized my remarks around three familiar figures: Calvin, Hobbes, and the Blues Brothers.

First, John Calvin. I think one interesting result that emerges from this survey is that Americans are very Calvinist. Alexis de Tocqueville said famously that Americans are Cartesians without ever having read Descartes. I suppose you could say Americans are Calvinists with respect to their view of the world without necessarily ever having read John Calvin. I mean that in three ways. First, I think Americans, like Calvin and Calvinists, tend to have a sense that they are in a covenant, in a kind of special relationship, with God. They do feel that America has a certain kind of relationship with God, where God has, in a sense, elected and blessed America in a very special kind of way. So there is a sense of a covenant. There is also a sense of a calling, that America, just as Calvinists have emphasized historically, has a special vocation or calling in the world that is associated with America's founding principles. America's purpose was not simply to establish a bastion of freedom and equality for its own people, but America was to be, as quoted ad nauseam, "a city on a hill," as John Winthrop famously said in 1630, and Ronald Reagan has been quoted as saying, and Sarah Palin, most recently, was quoted as saying. In her debate with Joe Biden on October 2nd, she referenced that phrase, "a shining city on a hill." So America has had this sense of a calling. This, I think, is part of the broad American tradition, to have this sense.

A third aspect of this, though, is an element of criticism and of self-criticism, especially when non-Americans hear this talk of Americans, that we are a special people, or, in Lincoln's phrase, "an almost chosen nation," that we have this special relationship with God—other people get terrified. I'm sure some of our friends in the audience from other countries might be terrified at this finding that Americans think they have a special relationship with God. But historically and consistently, along with this sense that there is a covenant, a sense of calling, Americans also have a strong tradition of self-criticism, precisely on the basis that they have this special relationship with God. In other words, with this sense that they have a special calling comes an implicit criticism of America's actual conduct in the world. In other words, to the extent that American conduct falls short of this calling America deserves special criticism. That actually is found in John Winthrop's famous speech. I think of the phrase that was coined by Robert Bellah, the famous sociologist, "civil religion,"

in a famous essay in 1967. Some people think that this whole idea that America has a civil religion means that America can do whatever it wants and it's blessed by God. But actually, as Bellah pointed out, it comes with an implicit judgment on America's actual practice.

What the survey strikingly shows is that America and Americans overwhelmingly, evangelical and non-evangelical, hold these things in a remarkable tension. On the one hand, most Americans, as others have pointed out, believe that they have this special relationship with God, that they're especially blessed by God, that they should set a Christian example to other countries. But most Americans have an extremely critical view of America's actual conduct in the world. A large percentage, almost 50% of Americans in this survey say that the net impact of America in the world is negative, not positive. In other words, many Americans believe that they have this special relationship with God and a special covenant and calling and so forth, but they also believe that America, in fact, falls short and falls short pretty drastically. So that's Calvin.

Now Hobbes. My point there is that, again, we tend to think that the whole idea that a country that has a special relationship with God is somehow inherently dangerous. I think the interesting figure here is Thomas Hobbes, who famously talked about the Leviathan as its own final arbiter; that the world and individual nations needed some super-strong state to impose order in the world and essentially that might makes right. I think what's so interesting is that Americans don't really tend to have that view. Again, what runs through this survey is a powerful strain of criticism, not just of present American policy but of America's overall net influence in the world. In other words, Americans do not believe that US might equals global right. They do not believe that whatever we do in the world is blessed by God, just because America may have a special relationship with God.

Finally, the Blues Brothers. Those of you who remember this movie will remember that the Blues Brothers, Jake and Elwood Blues, in the movie of 1980, were raised in a Catholic home. They had this sense of calling to reorganize their band in order to save the Catholic home in which they were raised. Of course, the constant refrain in the movie is that Jake and Elwood were on a mission from God. Well, I think many Americans, in their sense of their relationship with the rest of the world, do really believe they are on a mission from God. But that mission should be no more scary than the actual mission than the Blues Brothers were on; that the religious heritage that most Americans have gives them a sense of a mission from God, but not in the sense that God is for us, no matter what we do; not in the sense of jingoism, but rather that God wants us, expect us, to be involved in the world in the sense of an activism, in the sense of an obligation. That's a very important thing, I think, to understand.

Abernethy: I'd like to invite you all to comment. John, would you like to begin?

Hamre: My personal sense is that a fair amount of this report is really a kind of referendum on the last eight years; that where religion played prominently in the president's public vocabulary, people reacted to that, either very positively or negatively. I think that jumps out quite significantly. It's very clear from the data that there's this strong underlying religious impulse, but it just doesn't look like it motivates actual policy choice. Maybe I'm not adequately studying it, or I can't appreciate all of that data. I'm wondering if that is the case, Anna, from what you see.

Greenberg: I agree. As I said at the beginning, there is a remarkable amount of consensus here around what our role in the world should be, what our policy

priorities should be, and what tactics we should be using as a nation in advancing the policy goals. I think you get to some important areas—what I call the ideologically charged issues—where you start having some more differences. That makes a fair amount of sense. I think we highlighted the evangelical piece because it is interesting in historical context and it is interesting in the context of the last eight years. We did a survey in 2004 for Religion & Ethics. We did an oversample of white evangelicals. What we noticed in 2004 was that evangelicals' foreign policy agenda was identical to the Bush administration's policy agenda. So things like religious freedom around the world and those kinds of issues were actually relatively low on their list of priorities. And that was true in this survey as well. I do think there are very big differences that do relate to being religious—whatever that might look like—and not religious. Let's keep in mind that about twenty percent of people do not identify with a religious denomination of any sort. So it's not an insignificant number of people. There I think we actually see pretty big differences around this question of American exceptionalism. And we also see some of the differences around ideologically charged issues. So, on the whole, I agree with you, but I do think there are some areas of pretty big difference that I think, again, depending on who is our next president, are actually going to be fairly significant policy fights.

Wirth: Four very quick observations on the data. First, I agree that this looks an awful lot like the extensive polling that we do. There is one other element in this, which Anna might want to comment on, that Americans really believe, as we are engaged around the world, we want to share the burden. That is a very strong feeling of cooperation. Second, the data on UN support looks just like our data today on support for the UN. It would be interesting to know what that looks like historically. Here it's about 45-50%. That's what America looks like. Historically, America has been at about 65%. With the debacle of the war in Iraq and the UN, support of the UN in the US tumbled and it stayed down. Third, on climate issues, it's very interesting to look at the activism of the young people in this study. They look like liberal elites. They really do. In our data on climate change, on no issue does there appear to be a stronger gap between elites and everybody else, a stronger gap between liberals and conservatives, Republicans and Democrats, than there is on climate change, saying it's very hard to govern on issues of climate change. But this group of young people does have the characteristic of liberal elites, not like everybody else. Finally, I think there is an opportunity in this. I haven't read the background on this, but the discussion of pro-life, it seems to me, is a real opportunity. Here you see a group of young people who are looking at the world in a lens that is broader than the narrow abortion lens which characterizes their seniors. If I read the data, pro-life also means health, it means opportunity, it means equity, as well as having the abortion issue in there. That may provide a political opportunity for the country to come together in some better way than it has so far in thinking about issues that are so-called "pro-life" or reproductive health or whatever. There may be in here an opportunity to redefine this question more broadly and get ourselves from the confrontation that has characterized the issue.

Abernethy: I want to take questions from you-all, but John wanted to make a comment.

Hamre: I wanted to ask Tim a question on the UN. If you look at the chart on page 13, which shows support for foreign policy action, it is remarkably strong on what Americans want to have happen on things like disaster relief, medical support, etc. Those are all the things that the UN does fairly well. I am wondering why is there a

disconnect between the goals that virtually all people want and not seeing the UN as really the agent for making it possible. Is that something that is an agenda you can move?

Wirth: People view the UN predominantly as a political institution. They don't know that it is overwhelmingly a humanitarian institution that deals with refugees and food and health and that sort of thing. They don't understand that. What do they see? They see stories about the Security Council and they see political-military votes in the UN, and everything else disappears. You don't write stories about an airplane taking off on time and landing safely. This is that sort of thing. The UN is a remarkable institution, and how to do that has been a great frustration to us. It's a very good question, but it's a great frustration to us that support would be much stronger if people understood that the mission of the UN is so consistent with the mission of what most Americans want to do in terms of sharing the burden and being good Christians around the world and thinking about being their brother's keeper and so on. The consonance between the two is very significant, but the understanding is not.

Shah: One quick point about the younger evangelicals in response to some of what has been said by Kim and Anna, which is certainly right as far as it goes. It's worth pointing out that there is one respect in which younger evangelicals, as demonstrated by the survey, are actually much more conservative than older evangelicals; that is, on the question about whether there should or shouldn't be federal funding given to foreign organizations that perform abortions in other countries. This is on page 16 of the report that was handed out. Young evangelical Christians support not funding international organizations that perform abortions at the level of 70%. Older evangelicals are at 54% on that issue. So that is one respect in which, yes, there may be a broadening out of what it means to be pro-life among young evangelicals, but that does not mean that there is a change in terms of the fundamental opposition to abortion. In fact, you could argue that the data show a hardening in the position on abortion, at least with respect to international organizations. Assuming that there is a Democratic administration within a few months, one will see a major fight over just this issue, in part fueled by opposition to funding of abortion overseas by young evangelicals as well as older evangelicals.

Abernethy: Please give your name and the organization you represent.

Q: How much influence do evangelicals have on US foreign policy in general and US foreign policy in the Middle East in particular? And how would that change if Obama wins?

Lawton: Certainly, I think, because evangelicals have been such a potent support for the Republican Party, there has been over the last eight years an influence. How much influence is up for debate. Certainly, there has not been as much interaction with Obama's campaign, although more than previous. So I think that would represent somewhat of a change in terms of influence.

Shah: I personally think the claim that there is a kind of distinctive evangelical influence on the foreign policy of the Bush administration, both in general and in the Middle East in particular, is vastly overstated. The main architects of Bush foreign policy in the Middle East are not evangelical. The main engines of intellectual support for the policy have not been evangelical. Neoconservative think tanks and

neoconservative foreign policy people have been the main architects, not evangelicalism.

Greenberg: If you look at evangelicals on the ground, they are following as opposed to leading. I think that is partially reflected in the fact that things you think should be higher priorities for evangelicals aren't; for instance, promoting religious freedom around the world, protecting the rights of Christians. Those kinds of things that you'd say that would be a high priority because of their influence in the administration tends not to be the case. So I think they are following more than leading.

Q: We've done a bunch of similar research with one of your competitors, Anna. We've found a very real distinction between hunger and poverty, with massive support for hunger, especially among people of faith—evangelical Christians in particular but also Jews and Muslims, where we found a lot of unity around that. I'm wondering, because I didn't see it in the report, if there was any distinction from poverty for hunger. Disease, I see, and some of the others, but especially given some of the findings, I'm wondering if you tested for that.

Greenberg: We didn't look at those two issues separately. That being said, I think what you see is a pretty clear pattern around a very high level of support for what I am characterizing as short-term humanitarian relief, famine for that matter. If you look at the policy priorities, dealing with poverty in the developing world is a much lower priority. I interpret that to mean that the kind of investment of resources and what that requires is obviously much more significant than coming in and providing relief around a particular famine or some other kind of natural disaster where people are going hungry. So I think that our data probably support for what you found, though we did not test it directly.

Wirth: We took a look at that. It's a really interesting question. We've looked at this a great deal and have concluded that when you ask the American public for support for development, or poverty, or democracy-building, or whatever, support drops right off the table, because they've never seen a development, they've never seen a poverty. What is that? hey're very, very skeptical. But when you ask people to talk about the specifics of hunger, or to look at AIDS, or to look at malaria, the thermometer goes way up right away. So if you were thinking about how does the US behave, what do we say and what are we asking to support, what you try to build a political consensus around, the more specific it can be, as your question suggests, the more successful it is. People can relate to that. They don't know what these other things are. I think the data begins to suggest that here, too.

Q: On page 15, on the reproductive health question, were people told that reproductive health included abortion? Secondly, when you look down at the figures, it's a little confusing. You say "strongly favor, 48; total favor, 83." Are we supposed to infer that 15% oppose, because there is no "oppose" in here? Can you explain?

Greenberg: The answer is yes. We did not explain what reproductive health was, though in the question on Mexico City policy, we do explain what that policy is. It's specifically about funding organizations that also provide abortions. But on Figure 12, that is right: 15% would be in the "oppose" or "don't know" category overall on that question.

Q: I think I understood you to say that the highest priority for most of the respondents in foreign policy was the safety and security of the country. But did it

reveal that people equated that objective with being activist and collaborative? Or was that something to be achieved first and then we would have the “luxury” of being activist in the world?

Greenberg: I don't think I can answer that question based on the survey. There is very strong support for the notion of using diplomacy as a way to be involved in the world, as opposed to military; stronger support for using economic tools—carrots and sticks—over military. So there is strong support, and we've seen this in other surveys as well, to be more activist in the use of diplomacy as a way of being in the world. But we didn't test the question that way that you're asking it.

Q: A few very quick things. First, seeing the exact questions and the numbers more broadly—are you going to post that? Should we ask individually?

Greenberg: That will be posted on all of our Web sites.

Q: Kim, since you flagged it, the McCain numbers between young evangelicals and older evangelicals, what was the gap?

Lawton: This was done in early September, the 4th-12th, so who knows how things have changed. Also, in these numbers, we separated out by race, because race is such a determinant in voting. We didn't in all the figures, but on this we do. Almost three-quarters (71%) of white evangelicals said they were going to support John McCain for president and 23% (this is evangelicals overall) said they were going to support Barack Obama. But when you look at the age margin, between the ages of 18 and 29, only 62% said they were going to vote for John McCain. So 71% of older and 62% [of younger] for John McCain, and 30% of younger evangelicals said they would vote for Obama.

Q: Anna, could you say just a word about non-Christians in this? First, I thought you just dropped them from the survey, but then you said something to indicate they are included. I'm not sure if someone who is a regular mosque- or synagogue-goer, are they under “regular church-goers” or not under regular church-goers? How did you deal with minorities? And is there a large enough cohort to tell us anything anecdotal? I know it wouldn't be statistically accurate with these numbers, but anything anecdotally about any noticeable differences between those two groups and the rest?

Greenberg: I wouldn't talk about anything statistically not accurate. There are two different issues here. There are people who are not Christian and they are of other faiths, whether it is Muslim or Jewish or Buddhist. That's about 6% of the sample. Then there are people who are “no religion” and that's about 20% of the sample. When we break things up into “regular” and “irregular”—and we shouldn't use the word “church-goers” but it's a kind of shorthand—it includes people of all faiths. Now, obviously, a small number of them are going to be non-Christians. So they are not dropped from this, but I don't think they would have a major impact on what the results looked like if you took them out because they are such a small percentage of the sample.

Q: Two questions relating to the statistics. The 20% that you mentioned, Anna, about those who have no religion, I assume that some of it is not related to a denomination and some of it is specifically atheist. Can you clarify?

Greenberg: People who say “I have no religious preference,” “I’m agnostic,” “I don’t know.” It’s a combination of all those groups. They are different, obviously, but for sample size purposes we put them into one category. They look pretty similar when you break them out on a lot of the measures that we looked at.

Q: So some of the 20% might be “believing” in something, but they just don’t...

Greenberg: The percentage of people who say they have no religious preference is lower than the number of people who say they don’t believe in God, because almost everybody says they believe in God. So there are people who have no religious preference who believe in God.

Q: Thank you. The other question was, when you talk about evangelicals, especially the younger and older, someone pointed out the statistic of the Mexico City policy citing young evangelicals versus old. But I see the statistic just says “evangelicals,” so I’m trying to figure out whether the comparison is to older and younger evangelicals, or younger evangelicals and evangelicals overall when you’ve made those comparisons.

Greenberg: We’re mostly comparing younger to older, but this is actually a really important point, and this is something that’s true in the overall population as well, which is to say, if you look at younger people, they are more progressive on lots and lots of cultural issues, like gay rights, than older Americans, but not on the issue of abortion. So if you look at people under thirty, about 52% say they are pro-choice, and that’s what it looks like in the overall population, and that’s what it looks like with older people, except for senior citizens. And we see a very similar pattern here. So, for instance, I think it’s stunning that a majority of young evangelicals favor some sort of legal recognition of same-sex marriage, mostly civil unions. And if you look at the older, they’re much less likely; a majority against any kind of legal recognition; and yet identical on abortion, and as Tim pointed out, on the Mexico City, even more supportive of that policy. We don’t have time to talk about it here, but I think there’s a larger conversation about why, when you look at this full range of cultural issues, abortion doesn’t seem to move, while everything else—whether it’s race or gay rights or immigration—all seems to look different when you compare older to younger.

Abernethy: I want to thank Tim Wirth and the UN Foundation again for collaborating with Religion & Ethics Newsweekly on this survey. Thanks to Anna Greenberg and to all our panelists for this discussion—to Kim Lawton, John Hamre, and Timothy Shah.