

US believers favor international action on climate change, nuclear risk: poll

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Though most believers in the research do not consider addressing environmental and nuclear risks to be spiritual obligations, they do understand these issues as a part of "good stewardship," the study finds. Credit: Image: Wonderlane/Creative Commons

A majority of Americans professing belief in God favor cooperative international efforts to combat climate change and the spread of nuclear weapons - branding it a moral obligation - says a new public opinion poll conducted jointly by the University of Maryland's Center for International and Security Studies at Maryland (CISSM) and its Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA).

The nearly 1,500 Americans surveyed include large numbers of Catholics and Evangelicals.

The study, "Faith and Global Policy Challenges: How Spiritual Values Shape Views on Poverty, Nuclear Risks, and [Environmental Degradation](#)," also finds that a majority of believers consider addressing global poverty a "spiritual obligation," and think that the United States should work cooperatively with other nations to reduce it.

"This research challenges common political stereotypes that pigeonhole religious Americans as liberal or conservative on environmental and nuclear proliferation issues," says University of Maryland Public Policy Professor and study co-author John Steinbruner, who directs CISSM.

"These findings demonstrate the public's strong moral impulse to address global policy challenges - an impulse that if applied properly could break the current impasse on these issues," Steinbruner adds.

Though most believers in the research do not consider addressing environmental and nuclear risks to be spiritual obligations, they do understand these issues as a part of "good stewardship," the study finds.

"While for many believers there is a tenuous connection between their spiritual values and issues related to the environment and the risk of nuclear war, they are nonetheless very responsive to the idea that there is an obligation to protect God's creation, or to be good stewards of the earth," explains study co-author Steven Kull, director of PIPA.

SPECIFIC FINDINGS

STEWARDSHIP: 3 out of 4 believers embrace the idea that they have an obligation to act as good stewards of the environment; 4 out 10 believers say the obligation to be a good steward of the environment includes the obligation to prevent nuclear war.

ENVIRONMENTAL LAWS: 2 out of 3 believers agree that there is an

obligation to care for God's creation by supporting environmental laws and regulations.

BINDING INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENTS: Majorities of believers approve of the United States entering into binding international agreements aimed at protecting the environment (including by reducing greenhouse gases) and reducing the risk of nuclear war.

- 7 in 10 believers reject the argument that reducing greenhouse gases would be too harmful to the economy, instead favoring the idea that it will help the economy in the long run through greater energy efficiency.
- 8 in 10 believers support negotiating an international agreement to lower the number of nuclear weapons on high alert.
- A majority of believers support pursuing the elimination of nuclear weapons.

SCIENTIFIC CONSENSUS ON [CLIMATE CHANGE](#): Only four in ten (three in ten among Evangelicals) think that there is a consensus among scientists that urgent action on climate change is needed and that enough is known to take action. Those who perceive such a consensus are more supportive of taking action on climate change. Those who perceive such a consensus are also more likely to see it as a spiritual obligation.

SAMPLING ERROR

The poll was fielded from September 9 to 19, 2011 with a sample of 1,496 adult Americans. The poll was conducted using the web-enabled KnowledgePanel®, a probability-based panel designed to be representative of the U.S. population.

The margin of error for the general population is plus or minus 3.3

percent. The subgroup margins of error: for Evangelicals, plus or minus 6.4 percent and plus or minus 5.7 percent for Catholics.

'BELIEVERS'

At the beginning of the poll, all respondents were asked, "Would you say you believe in God or do not believe in God?" Eighty-five percent of the general answered they did believe in God, while 14 percent said they did not. When respondents were asked whether they felt "there are spiritual obligations to act in certain ways," or whether they did "not think in these terms," 67 percent said they felt there are spiritual obligations; 32 percent said they did not think in these terms.

Provided by University of Maryland

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