



Center for International and Security Studies at Maryland
School of Public Policy, University of Maryland



Program on International
Policy Attitudes (PIPA)

Faith and Global Policy Challenges

**How Spiritual Values Shape Views
on Poverty, Nuclear Risks, and Environmental Degradation**

A Joint Study of the
Center for International and Security Studies at Maryland
and its Program on International Policy Attitudes

Fielded by Knowledge Networks
December 2011

STEVEN KULL
JOHN STEINBRUNER
NANCY GALLAGHER
CLAY RAMSAY
EVAN LEWIS
JONAS SIEGEL
KEVIN JONES
STEFAN SUBIAS



The Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) was established in 1992 with the purpose of giving public opinion a greater voice in international relations. PIPA conducts in-depth studies of public opinion that include polls, focus groups and interviews. It integrates its findings together with those of other organizations. It actively seeks the participation of members of the policy community in developing its polls so as to make them immediately relevant to the needs of policymakers. PIPA is a joint program of the Center on Policy Attitudes and the Center for International and Security Studies at Maryland (CISSM).

The Center for International and Security Studies at Maryland (CISSM), at the University of Maryland's School for Public Policy, pursues policy-oriented scholarship on major issues facing the United States in the global arena. Using its research, forums, and publications, CISSM links the University and the policy community to improve communication between scholars and practitioners.

Knowledge Networks is a polling, social science, and market research firm based in Menlo Park, California. Knowledge Networks uses a large-scale nationwide research panel which is randomly selected from the national population of households having telephones and is subsequently provided internet access for the completion of surveys (and thus is not limited to those who already have internet access).

Acknowledgements

Abe Medoff managed the production of the report, with contributions from Erin Hassey and Kristin Halsing.

This research was completed with support from the Skoll Global Threats Fund.

This page is intentionally left blank.

INTRODUCTION

Religious communities have long been involved in matters of public policy, from working to address global poverty to defining the terms of “just” military action. Yet, to a great extent, they have been slow to consider how their religious and moral convictions apply to the security challenges posed by the modern era, especially climate change and nuclear weapons. These newer challenges relate to more traditional public policy concerns of religious doctrines. For example, the deleterious effects of climate change are expected to disproportionately affect the poor. Likewise, nuclear war would have an extraordinarily destructive impact on civilian populations. And yet, the public discourse of religious thought has not fully considered the moral implications of these challenges.

Some religious thought leaders have tried to stimulate a broad discussion about how religious principles apply to international policy problems. To date, concepts such as “stewardship” and “creation care” are cited as rationales for organized religious involvement in a range of global issues, including climate change and nuclear weapons.

It remains unclear how these and other religious and moral concepts shape thinking about global policy challenges for different denominations and individuals. How many people recognize the connections between their spiritual beliefs and global policy challenges? And how do ideas about moral and religious responsibilities translate into beliefs about appropriate action by individuals, faith communities, and national governments? What are the similarities and differences in how these concepts are applied to different challenges such as climate change, global inequality, and nuclear weapons? Additionally, how do these responsibilities and actions square with the recommendations of policy experts, such as international treaties that proscribe or limit certain behaviors?

In an effort to understand how the general public and individuals with specific religious traditions think that their spiritual faith intersects with global policy challenges, the Center for International and Security Studies at Maryland (CISSM) teamed with the Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) to conduct a public opinion poll. This poll is part of a larger effort to engage faith communities in addressing these challenges. As national governments and civil society contend with these issues, the involvement of religious communities and the application of their convictions could prove decisive.

This research was completed with support from the Skoll Global Threats Fund.

METHODOLOGY

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. Initially, participants are chosen scientifically by a random selection of telephone numbers and residential addresses. Persons in selected households are then invited by telephone or by mail to participate in the web-enabled KnowledgePanel®. For those who agree to participate, but do not already have Internet access, Knowledge Networks provides a laptop and ISP connection. More technical information is available at <http://www.knowledgenetworks.com/ganp/reviewer-info.html>.

The sample included an oversample of 330 Catholics. This oversample permitted the study to do subgroup analyses with a total of 531 Catholics. However, for the sample as a whole, Catholics were subsequently downweighted so that the full sample reflects the general population.

Evangelical Protestants were also analyzed separately, but their representation in the sample (402) was large enough that oversampling was not required.

The general sample was also weighted by age, gender, ethnicity, education, region, urbanization, internet status and party identification. The subsamples of Catholics and Evangelicals were weighted for all of the population metrics mentioned above, except for party identification.

With a design effect of 1.741, the margin of error for the general population sample is +/-3.3%. The subgroup margins of error are approximately +/- 6.4% for Evangelicals and +/-5.7% for Catholics.

DEFINITION OF BELIEVERS

The major focus of this study is the relationship between spiritual obligations and policy preferences, so most questions were asked only to believers. Thus throughout this report the percentages cited are for believers, unless otherwise stated.

While the term “believer” has different meanings in different religious contexts, for the purposes of this study, believers were defined in the following way. 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 sample (i.e., with the Catholic oversample downweighted) said they did believe in God, while 14% said they did not.

All respondents were also asked whether they felt “there are spiritual obligations to act in certain ways,” or whether they did “not think in these terms.” Interestingly, a lower 67% said they felt there are spiritual obligations; 32% said they did not think in these terms.

Any respondent who either believed in God, or felt that there are spiritual obligations for behavior, was regarded as a believer for the purposes of the study—a total of 89% of the sample (since 4% did not believe in God but did feel that there are spiritual obligations). In the case of questions that used the term “God,” the 4% who said they did not believe in God were excluded; thus for those questions, believers constituted just 85% of the sample.

A small number of respondents identified themselves as associated with a religious denomination but said that they did not believe in God or spiritual obligations. These were not included as believers.

The 89% of the full sample that were believers were only slightly different from the full sample. They included slightly fewer young people: 20% were 18-29, compared to 22% in the full sample. They were slightly more likely to be women (53%, compared to 51% in the full sample). Politically, they were slightly more likely to be Republicans (36%, compared to 34%). They were not more likely to be very sympathetic to the Tea Party than the full sample, but they were a little less likely to be very unsympathetic (27%, compared to 30%). There were no differences for education.

In denominational terms, 30% of believers self-identified as Evangelical Protestants, 39% as non-Evangelical Protestants, 27% as Catholics, and 4% as religions other than Christianity.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Listed below are 10 key findings from the study. In addition to these specific findings, several general patterns are worth noting: A majority of believers, including majorities of Catholics and Evangelicals, see addressing global poverty as a spiritual obligation and see addressing the risks posed by nuclear weapons and global warming as moral imperatives, even if they do not initially associate these imperatives with spiritual obligations. The study finds little variation between Evangelicals and Catholics on these points. It also finds that a majority of all believers think that the United States should work cooperatively with other nations to reduce poverty, the risks of nuclear war, and the impact of environmental degradation, including the effects of climate change—findings that mirror earlier PIPA-CISSM studies of the general U.S. population.

The key findings of the study were:

1. Spiritual Obligations and Public Policy Issues.....5

A large majority of believers said that they see a spiritual obligation to seek to reduce poverty and hunger, about half see such an obligation to seek to prevent abortions, and just under half have this view of seeking to prevent innocent civilians from dying in a war. But when asked initially, only about one in five believers said they think in terms of a spiritual obligation to protect the environment or to reduce the risk of nuclear war.

2. Responding to the Idea of Stewardship of the Environment.....6

Though less than half of all believers and a bare majority of Evangelicals are familiar with the idea of a spiritual obligation to act as good stewards of the environment, when presented with this concept, three out of four believers embraced it. Most rejected the counter-argument that out of humility one should leave the environment in God’s hands. Among those who embraced the obligation to be good stewards, an overwhelming majority said that it applies to preserving the natural world as well as humans from the effect of environmental degradation. A majority of this group (4 in 10 of all believers) also said that the obligation to be a good steward of the environment includes the obligation to prevent nuclear war.

3. Caring for God’s Creation.....8

Four out of ten believers said that preventing environmental degradation is part of an obligation to protect God’s creation. However, an overwhelming majority said that it is an important goal. Further, when presented the affirmative argument that there is an obligation to care for God’s creation by supporting environmental laws and regulations, two out of three believers agreed.

4. Spiritual Obligations of Nations.....9

When presented the argument that nations have spiritual obligations, large majorities found the argument convincing. When presented with the counterargument that nations have only an obligation to protect their own citizens and national interests, views were generally divided, except that a modest majority of Evangelicals rejected it. If a nation fails to act on its spiritual obligations, only four in ten said that this would be a sin, but among Evangelicals, six in ten took this position.

5. America’s Spiritual Obligations.....10

When asked about America’s spiritual obligations a large majority endorsed the view that America has some such obligations, especially in regard to alleviating poverty. But less than half said it has such obligations related to protecting the environment or reducing the risk of nuclear war. Assessments of how well the U.S. is fulfilling its obligations varied by area.

6. Golden Rule in International Relations.....11

Two out of three believers—and the same number of non-believers—said that America should abide by the Golden Rule in its relations with other countries, while only a third said that this would impose too many limits on America’s options.

7. Binding International Agreements.....11

Overwhelming majorities approved of the U.S. entering into binding international agreements aimed at protecting the environment (including by reducing greenhouse gases) and reducing the risk of nuclear war, with support being especially high among Catholics. If a nation or the U.S. enters into such agreements, overwhelming majorities said it is obliged to abide by the agreement; however, just under four in ten said that this is a spiritual obligation as well as a legal obligation. If a nation, or the U.S. specifically, violates an agreement, a large majority said that this would be morally wrong—but only a small minority (highest among Evangelicals) said it would be a sin. If America were to violate such an international agreement, four in ten said that their church should speak out on this issue. One in three (four in ten among Evangelicals) feel that they personally would have a spiritual obligation to speak out against it.

8. Working to Prevent Nuclear War.....13

As discussed above, overwhelming majorities of believers endorsed binding international agreements to reduce the number of nuclear weapons, to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons, and to generally reduce the risk of nuclear war. When first presented arguments that included reminders of the possibility of cheating, still eight in ten believers supported negotiating an international agreement to lower the number of nuclear weapons on high alert. Initially a modest majority supported pursuing the elimination of nuclear weapons. When believers were presented arguments for and against an international regime moving toward elimination, in both cases highlighting the potential for evil, both arguments were found convincing, though the argument in favor of the regime was found more convincing. When finally asked to decide, seven in ten favored such a regime, substantially more than initially favored pursuing elimination.

9. Working to Prevent Climate Change.....16

Only a small minority of believers said preventing climate change is a spiritual obligation, and one in three said it is part of an obligation to protect God’s creation. Nonetheless three in four said it is an important goal to prevent climate change, and two thirds said there is at least a moderate risk that climate change could harm God’s creation. Eight in ten said it is an important goal to reduce their own carbon footprint, though only one in three said that this is part of an obligation to protect God’s creation. Seven in ten rejected the argument that reducing greenhouse gases would be too harmful to the economy in favor of the idea that in the long run it will help the economy through greater energy efficiency. Evangelicals are generally more skeptical about climate change and the need for action, but clear majorities of Evangelicals endorsed the need for action.

10. Perceptions of Scientific Consensus on Climate Change.....17

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. Not surprisingly, those who perceive such a consensus are more supportive of taking action on climate change. Interestingly, those who perceive such a consensus are also more likely to see it as a spiritual obligation.

FINDINGS

1. Spiritual Obligations and Public Policy Issues

A large majority of believers said that they see a spiritual obligation to seek to reduce poverty and hunger, about half see such an obligation to seek to prevent abortions, and just under half have this view of seeking to prevent innocent civilians from dying in a war. But when asked initially, only about one in five believers said they think in terms of a spiritual obligation to protect the environment or to reduce the risk of nuclear war.

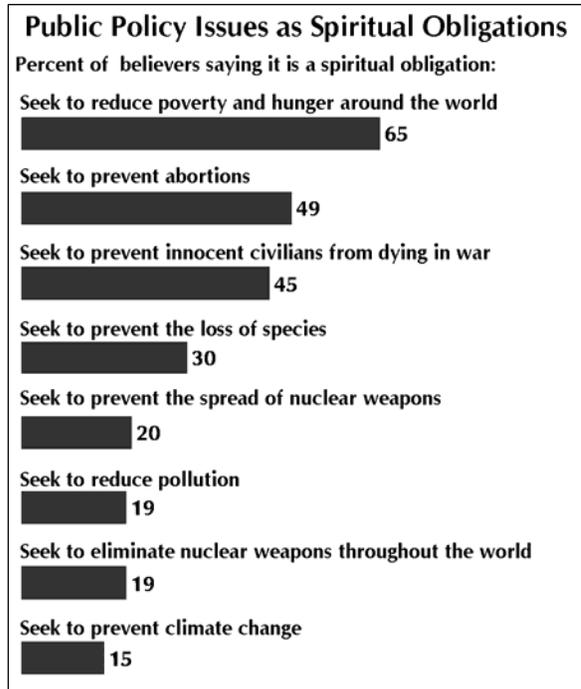
Early in the poll, believers were offered a series of eight different public policy issues and asked, for each one, whether they saw action as a spiritual obligation, or whether they “would not call it a spiritual obligation.” Thus a “no” answer did not mean that respondents saw no value or moral content in that line of activity, only that they did not see it in spiritual terms.

Overall, 76% saw at least one public policy objective from the list as a spiritual obligation, 62% saw at least two objectives as spiritual obligations, and 45% saw at least three.

By a large margin, mitigating poverty was most widely seen as a spiritual obligation. Two in three believers (65%) said they saw “seek[ing] to reduce poverty and hunger around the world” as a spiritual obligation, with Evangelicals higher at 75%.

On abortion, about half of believers (49%) thought that “seek[ing] to prevent abortions” is a spiritual obligation, with Evangelicals again higher at 70% (Catholics, 51%).

In a different humanitarian realm, 45% thought it a spiritual obligation to “seek to prevent innocent civilians from dying in war,” while 55% said they did not. Among Evangelicals, though, 51% saw this as an obligation and 49% did not.



Action on environmental issues was initially seen as a spiritual obligation by at most three in ten. Thirty percent felt that to “seek to prevent the loss of species” was a spiritual obligation. Nineteen percent felt this way about seeking to reduce pollution (though Evangelicals were higher at 23%), and just 15% felt this way about seeking to prevent climate change.

Action on issues of nuclear weapons was initially seen as a spiritual obligation by about one in five. Twenty percent saw seeking to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons as a spiritual obligation (with Catholics higher at 24%). Nineteen percent saw seeking to “eliminate nuclear weapons throughout the world” as a spiritual obligation (Catholics, 23%).

Though efforts related to the environment and nuclear war did not qualify as spiritual obligations for most believers, this does not mean most think that they should be ignored. Those who saw preventing abortions as a spiritual obligation (49%) were asked a follow-up question in which they were asked to choose between two positions, as follows:

A: Preventing abortions is so important that Christians should not use up limited resources by working on other issues like preserving the environment or preventing nuclear war.

B: While preventing abortions is very important, everything in God's creation is important. Christians should also strive to preserve the environment and prevent nuclear war.

By a three-to-one margin, those who saw preventing abortions as a spiritual obligation chose the second position that "Christians should also strive to preserve the environment and prevent nuclear war," while the first position that Christians should not work on issues other than abortion was endorsed by a quarter of this group.

Among believers overall, 22% saw preventing abortions as a spiritual obligation but did not see *any* of the areas regarding the environment or nuclear weapons as spiritual obligations. Yet within this group—which might have been expected to approve the idea that Christians should limit their efforts to the abortion issue—only three in ten did. Sixty-four percent of this group agreed instead that Christians should also put efforts into environmental and nuclear issues.

2. Responding to the Idea of Stewardship of the Environment

Though less than half of all believers and a bare majority of Evangelicals are familiar with the idea of a spiritual obligation to act as good stewards of the environment, when presented with this concept, three out of four believers embraced it. Most rejected the counter-argument that out of humility one should leave the environment in God's hands. Among those who embraced the obligation to be good stewards, an overwhelming majority said that it applies to preserving the natural world as well as humans from the effect of environmental degradation. A majority of this group (4 in 10 of all believers) also said that the obligation to be a good steward of the environment includes the obligation to prevent nuclear war.

When believers were initially asked how familiar they were with the idea of a spiritual obligation to act as good stewards of the environment, a little more than four in ten were somewhat (33%) or very (10%) familiar with this concept. Another 32% said they were not very familiar with it; a quarter (25%) said the idea was not at all familiar.

Believers were offered two arguments that tried to look at the environment from a divine perspective, and asked to evaluate how convincing they found each one. The first argument read:

We have a spiritual obligation to be responsible stewards of God's creation in our actions, and to support those with a spiritual calling to work to protect the environment. We cannot claim to love God while abusing his creation.

Two thirds of these believers (66%) found the argument convincing (20% very convincing). Among Evangelicals, this was 72% (28% very convincing).

The second argument was a rebuttal, stating that the first argument lacked humility:

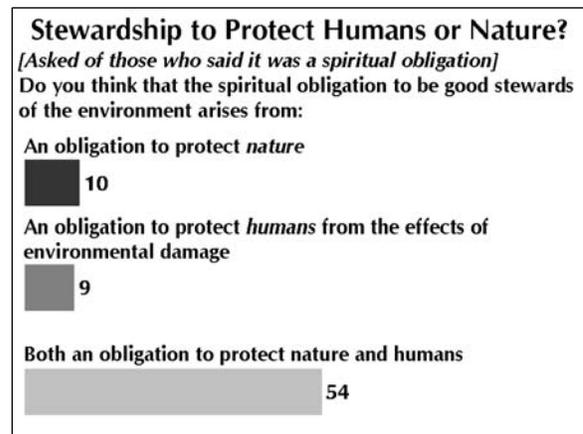
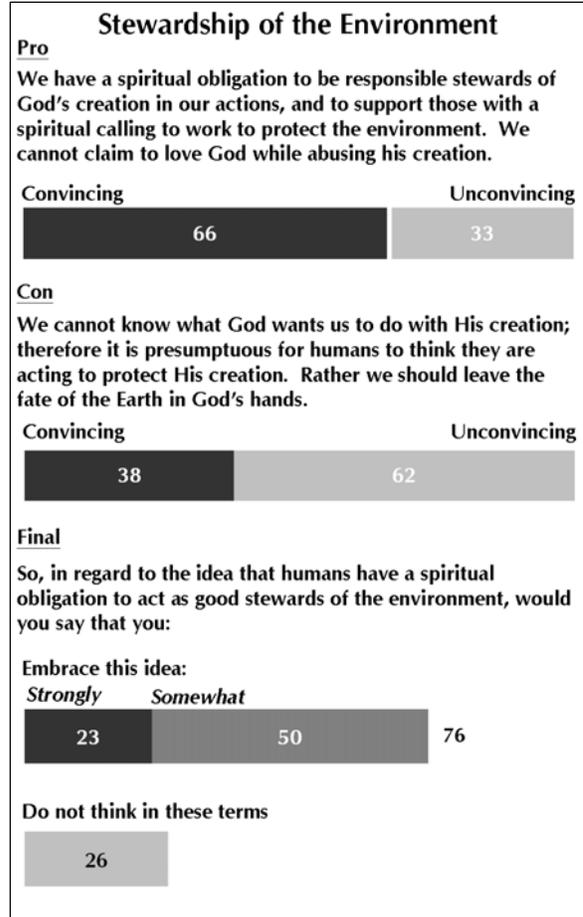
We cannot know what God wants us to do with His creation; therefore it is presumptuous for humans to think they are acting to protect His creation. Rather we should leave the fate of the Earth in God’s hands.

Only 38% of believers found this argument convincing, while a 62% majority found it unconvincing.

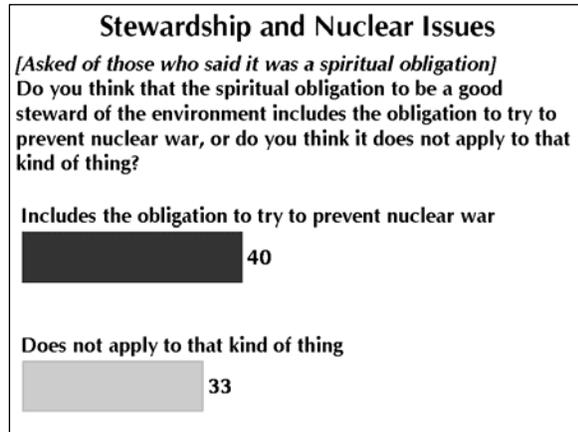
Finally they were asked whether they embraced “the idea that humans have a spiritual obligation to act as good stewards of the environment,” or whether they did not think in these terms. Seventy-three percent did embrace the idea (23% strongly); among Evangelicals this was 81%. A quarter (26%) said they did not think in these terms.

It is clear that as believers worked through arguments about a spiritual obligation to be good stewards of the environment, they grew more inclined to endorse the idea of a spiritual obligation to act in this area. Of those who embraced the idea in this series, 62% had earlier said they did not feel that seeking to prevent the loss of species was a spiritual obligation; 74% had earlier said the same about seeking to reduce pollution; and 80% had said the same about seeking to prevent climate change. Thus a large majority of those who expressed comfort with the idea of environmental stewardship arrived at that view through deliberating and gaining greater familiarity with it.

Among those who embraced the idea of environmental stewardship, an overwhelming majority said that it applies to preserving the natural world as well as humans from the effects of environmental degradation. This group was asked: “Do you think that the spiritual obligation to be good stewards of the environment arises from an obligation to protect *nature*, an obligation to protect *humans* from the effects of environmental damage, or both—an obligation to protect nature and humans?” Only 9% of all believers said that there was an obligation, but it only applied to humans. Most believers said there was an obligation, and it applied to nature and humans (54%) or just nature (10%).



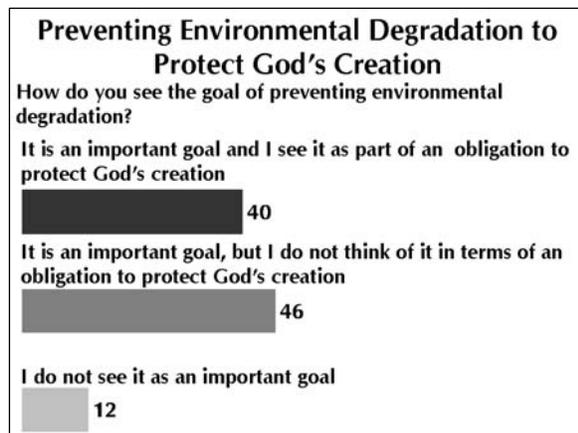
Those who embraced the idea of environmental stewardship were also asked about the relationship of nuclear issues to the environment: “Do you think that the spiritual obligation to be a good steward of the environment includes the obligation to try to prevent nuclear war, or do you think it does not apply to that kind of thing?” A majority of this group (40% of all believers) extended the obligation of stewardship to preventing nuclear war.



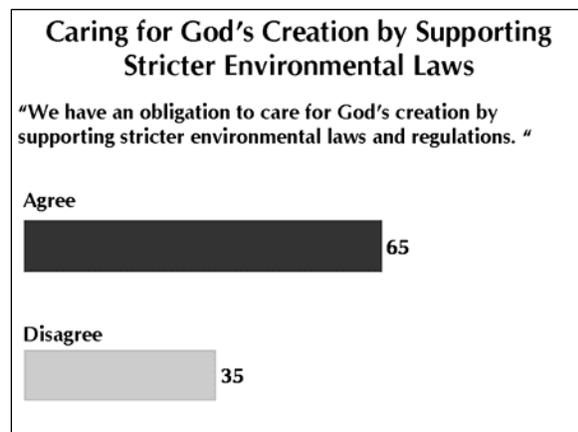
3. Caring for God’s Creation

Four out of ten believers said that preventing environmental degradation is part of an obligation to protect God’s creation. However, an overwhelming majority said that it is an important goal. Further, when presented the affirmative argument that there is an obligation to care for God’s creation by supporting environmental laws and regulations, two out of three believers agreed.

Asked about the goal of preventing environmental degradation and offered three choices, 40% said “it is an important goal and I see it as part of an obligation to protect God’s creation”; 46% said that it is an important goal, but they do not think of it in terms of such an obligation; and only 12% said they do not see it as an important goal. Four in ten (41%) Evangelicals saw it as an obligation to protect God’s creation, while the minority that did not see it as an important goal was a slightly higher 17%.



However, when presented with the affirmative argument that there is such an obligation, a majority agreed. Believers in God were presented the affirmative argument “We have an obligation to care for God’s creation by supporting stricter environmental laws and regulations” and asked if they agreed or disagreed. Sixty-five percent agreed (16% completely, 49% mostly), while 35% disagreed (11% completely, 24% mostly).



4. Spiritual Obligations of Nations

When presented the argument that nations have spiritual obligations, large majorities found the argument convincing. When presented with the counterargument that nations have only an obligation to protect their own citizens and national interests, views were generally divided, except that a modest majority of Evangelicals rejected it. If a nation fails to act on its spiritual obligations, only four in ten said that this would be a sin, but among Evangelicals, six in ten took this position.

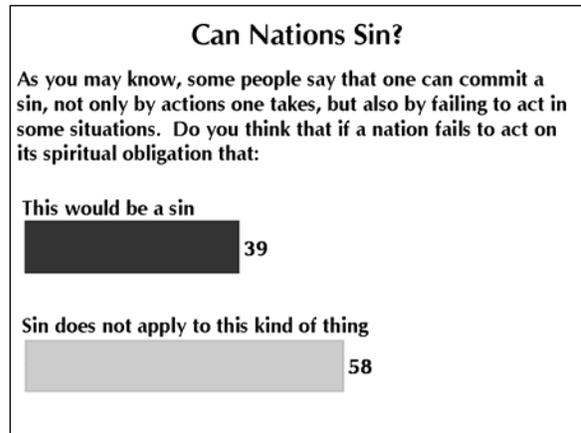
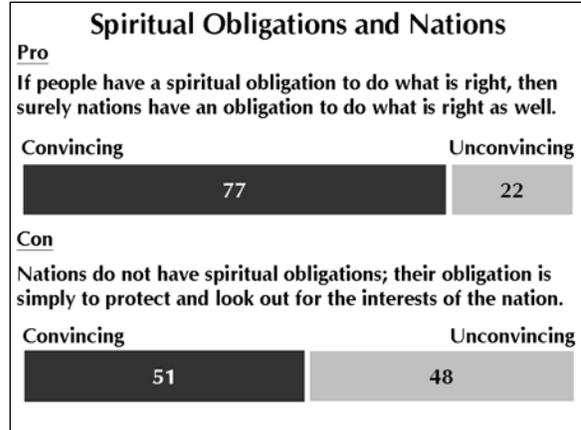
The study explored to what degree believers feel that, as a general principle, spiritual obligations apply, not only to people, but to nations.

First, they were presented the basic argument for equivalence between people and nations: “If people have a spiritual obligation to do what is right, then surely nations have an obligation to do what is right as well.” A very large majority of believers—77%—found this argument convincing. Among Evangelicals, 83% found the argument convincing.

Believers were then offered an argument that encapsulated the idea that nations have to operate on a moral plane different from that of individuals: “Nations do not have spiritual obligations; their obligation is simply to protect and look out for the interests of the nation.” The response to this argument was divided, but it certainly got a hearing, with 51% of believers finding it convincing, and 48% finding it unconvincing. Evangelicals responded differently: 54% found the argument unconvincing, and a lesser 44% found it convincing.

Believers were also asked whether it was appropriate to introduce the concept of sin into the behavior of nations. They were first reminded that for individuals there are sins of omission as well as commission and then asked whether if a nation fails to act on a spiritual obligation this would constitute a sin or if sin does not apply to this kind of thing. (see box).

Thirty-nine percent said that for a nation to fail to act on its spiritual obligation would be a sin, while 58% said that sin does not apply. Catholics were even lower with just 35% saying that sin would apply. However, Evangelicals held the opposite view: a 58% majority said such a failure would be a sin, and only 38% disagreed.



5. America's Spiritual Obligations

When asked about America's spiritual obligations a large majority endorsed the view that America has some such obligations, especially in regard to alleviating poverty. But less than half said it has such obligations related to protecting the environment or reducing the risk of nuclear war. Assessments of how well the U.S. is fulfilling its obligations varied by area.

Believers were asked to think about whether America has spiritual obligations and were offered six policy areas in which such obligations might apply.

Overall, seven in ten believers (69%) thought America had one or more spiritual obligations from this list, a majority (62%) named two or more; and 44% named three or more. A minority of 31% did not designate any spiritual obligations for America.

Poverty reduction, traditionally seen as a key source of spiritual obligation in Christianity, was so regarded by believers in the study. A 63% majority said it is a spiritual obligation for America to help "to reduce poverty in this country," and among Evangelicals, 75% said this.

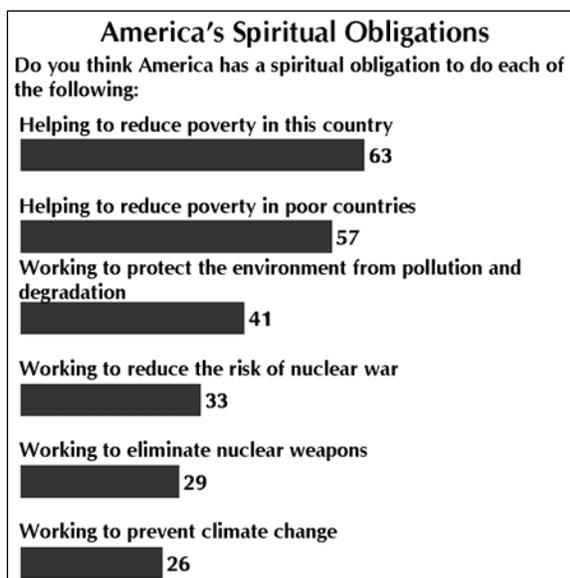
A majority—57%—saw it as a U.S. spiritual obligation to seek to reduce poverty abroad; among Evangelicals, this majority was ten points higher at 67%.

Less than half saw such obligations applying to protecting the environment. Forty-one percent saw a U.S. spiritual obligation in "working to protect the environment from pollution and degradation," while 58% said they would not call this a spiritual obligation. Only a quarter (26%) saw "working to prevent climate change" in this light.

On nuclear weapons, 33% felt that "working to reduce the risk of nuclear war" is a U.S. spiritual obligation; 41% of Evangelicals felt this way. "Working to eliminate nuclear weapons" was seen as a spiritual obligation by three in ten (29%; 33% among Evangelicals).

For each area that they felt involved a U.S. spiritual obligation, respondents were asked how well they thought America was living up to that obligation. On the environment, those who saw protecting the environment as America's spiritual obligation were roughly divided on how well it was being fulfilled; those who saw trying to prevent climate change as an obligation gave a negative appraisal. On nuclear weapons, those who saw working to reduce the risk of nuclear war as an obligation were positive about America's effort; those who saw working for elimination of nuclear weapons in this way were also positive by a lesser margin. On poverty, those who saw reducing poverty at home as a U.S. spiritual obligation were quite critical, but in regard to reducing poverty abroad, they leaned to the positive.

Overall, believers were more likely to say that America has an obligation to address a particular policy area than they were to say that they personally had such an obligation. It is unclear whether this effect was due to respondents' different views of the obligations of individuals and nations, or if they were affected by the arguments in favor of there being such a spiritual obligation to address these issues.



6. Golden Rule in International Relations

Two out of three believers—and the same number of non-believers—said that America should abide by the Golden Rule in its relations with other countries, while only a third said that this would impose too many limits on America’s options.

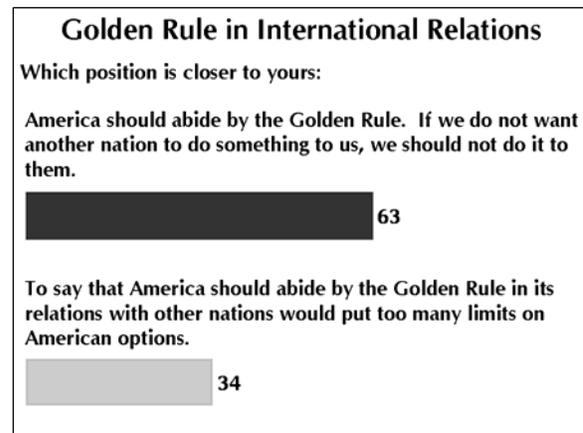
Most Americans, whether they are religiously inclined or not, see the reciprocity embodied in the Golden Rule as valid for conducting international relations and reject the idea that this would inordinately tie the hands of the U.S.

All respondents were offered two positions about whether the Golden Rule should be applied to America’s foreign relations and asked to choose between them.

Almost two thirds of believers—63%—chose the first position that America should abide by the Golden Rule (29% strongly). Thirty-four percent preferred the second position that this stance would be too limiting for the U.S.

Interestingly, there was no significant difference between believers and non-believers on this question—suggesting that the Golden Rule also resonates as an ethical guideline among most Americans, apart from religious belief.

Evangelicals were slightly more likely to *strongly* support America abiding by the Golden Rule (32%), but otherwise there were no differences across Christian groups.



Larger minorities among those over 60 years of age (39%), among Republicans (39%), and, especially, among those very sympathetic to the Tea Party (43%) thought that the Golden Rule would be too limiting. Even so, clear majorities of all these groups chose the position that America should abide by the Golden Rule in its foreign relations.

7. Binding International Agreements

Overwhelming majorities approved of the U.S. entering into binding international agreements aimed at protecting the environment (including by reducing greenhouse gases) and reducing the risk of nuclear war, with support being especially high among Catholics. If a nation or the U.S. enters into such agreements, overwhelming majorities said it is obliged to abide by the agreement; however, just under four in ten said that this is a spiritual obligation as well as a legal obligation. If a nation, or the U.S. specifically, violates an agreement, a large majority said that this would be morally wrong—but only a small minority (highest among Evangelicals) said it would be a sin. If America were to violate such an international agreement, four in ten said that their church should speak out on this issue. One in three (four in ten among Evangelicals) feel that they personally would have a spiritual obligation to speak out against it.

Believers were introduced to the topic of international agreements and told that there is some controversy about the issue: “As you may know there is some discussion about whether or not it is a good idea for nations to work together to establish legally binding agreements, such as treaties, to address certain international problems.” They were then presented a list of various international

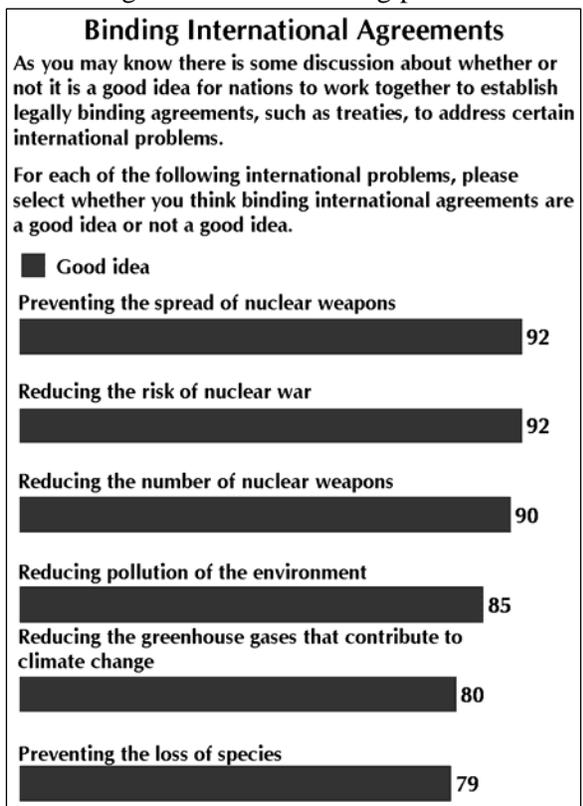
problems related to the environment and the potential for nuclear war, and for each, they were asked whether they thought a binding international agreement would be “a good idea or not a good idea.”

Overwhelming majorities of believers thought such agreements were a good idea for all of the areas presented, ranging from 79% to 92%.

In regard to the environment, 84% endorsed an international agreement on “reducing pollution of the environment” (Catholics 90%, Evangelicals 80%), and 79% endorsed one on “reducing the greenhouse gases that contribute to climate change” (Catholics 83%, Evangelicals 72%). On preventing the loss of species, 79% endorsed an international agreement (Catholics 87%, Evangelicals 74%).

Where nuclear issues were concerned, a very high majority (92%) said an agreement on “preventing the spread of nuclear weapons” was a good idea (Catholics 96%, Evangelicals 91%). For “reducing the number of nuclear weapons,” support in principle for an agreement was at 89% (Catholics 93%, Evangelicals 88%). And for an agreement on “reducing the risk of nuclear war,” support was again 92% (Catholics 95%, Evangelicals 92%).

Next, the question of whether nations, or the U.S. specifically, are obliged to abide by an agreement was addressed. Half of the sample’s believers were asked, “If a nation enters into an international agreement, do you think that abiding by the agreement is a purely legal obligation, a spiritual as well as a legal obligation, or not an obligation?” The other half was asked the same question regarding America, rather than nations in general.



An overwhelming majority said that abiding by the agreement is an obligation, though less than half thought it was a spiritual obligation. Interestingly, there proved to be no statistical difference in responses about nations in general and America specifically.

Only 7-8% said that they thought abiding by an international agreement was not an obligation. Nine in ten (90-93%) said that it was an obligation; 55-56% saw the obligation as purely legal, while 34-38% saw it as a spiritual obligation as well. Evangelicals were somewhat more likely to see abiding by an agreement as a spiritual obligation, at 43% both for the U.S. and for nations in general.

Believers were then asked how they viewed violations of international agreements (either by any nation or by America):

If a nation [or: America] enters into an international agreement and then violates that agreement, do you think that would be morally wrong; that would not only be morally wrong, but also a sin; or that morality and sin do not apply to this kind of thing?

Only a quarter (25% in both instances) said that morality and sin do not apply to this kind of thing. A clear majority of 57% (in both instances) called such a violation of an agreement morally wrong. Another 16-17% went further and said it was also a sin. Again, Evangelicals were somewhat more emphatic: They were 8 points higher in regarding a treaty violation as a sin, and 5-10 points lower in the view that morality and sin do not apply here.

To explore what form they felt these obligations might take in their lives, believers were asked about whether churches or individuals should make their voices heard regarding them. Asked, “If America were to violate an international agreement, do you think your church should speak out on this issue or should not be involved in this kind of thing,” four in ten (40%) said that their own church should speak out in that case. A higher 58% thought their church should not be involved. Evangelicals were 4 points more likely to think their church should speak out (44%).

More believers thought it was appropriate for their church to speak out than thought that they themselves had a spiritual obligation to do this. Asked about themselves, three in ten believers (31%) said that if America acts in violation of an international agreement they would have a spiritual obligation to speak out against it, while two thirds (65%) felt that spiritual obligations do not apply to this kind of thing. Evangelicals were more likely (42%), and Catholics less likely (26%), to see such a spiritual obligation to speak out. This lower number may be due to believers differentiating between collective and individual responsibility—or it may be due to the lack of a reference to spiritual obligation in the question that asks whether one’s church should speak out.

8. Working to Prevent Nuclear War

As discussed above, overwhelming majorities of believers endorsed binding international agreements to reduce the number of nuclear weapons, to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons, and to generally reduce the risk of nuclear war. When first presented arguments that included reminders of the possibility of cheating, still eight in ten believers supported negotiating an international agreement to lower the number of nuclear weapons on high alert. Initially a modest majority supported pursuing the elimination of nuclear weapons. When believers were presented arguments for and against an international regime moving toward elimination, in both cases highlighting the potential for evil, both arguments were found convincing, though the argument in favor of the regime was found more convincing. When finally asked to decide, seven in ten favored such a regime, substantially more than initially favored pursuing elimination.

As discussed above, overwhelming majorities of all believers endorse creating binding international agreements on nuclear issues. Ninety-two percent of believers favored an agreement on “preventing the spread of nuclear weapons” (Catholics 96%, Evangelicals 91%). For “reducing the number of nuclear weapons,” support in principle for an agreement was at 90% (Catholics 93%, Evangelicals 88%). And for an agreement on “reducing the risk of nuclear war,” support was again 92% (Catholics 95%, Evangelicals 92%).

For another set of questions, believers were presented a set of arguments that included calling attention to the possibility of another nation cheating. The possibility of an international agreement to lower the number of nuclear weapons on high alert was presented as follows:

Some people have proposed that the U.S. and the other nuclear powers could lower the risk of accidental nuclear war by having a verifiable agreement to lower the number of nuclear weapons each country has on high alert—that is, ready to fire on very short notice. Others

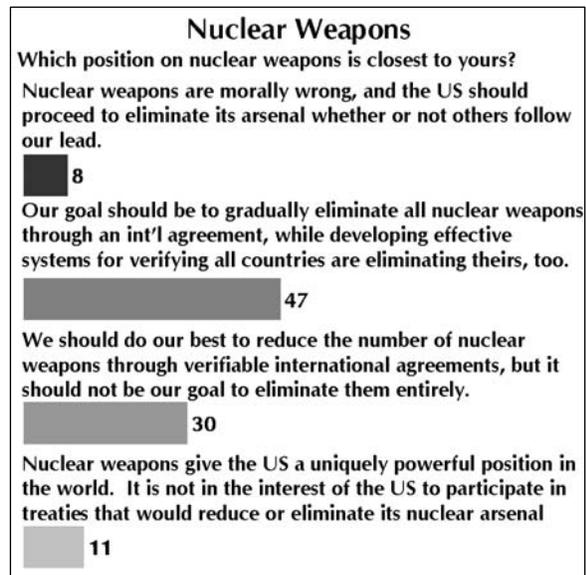
oppose this idea, saying it is too difficult to make sure that the other countries would not cheat.

They were then asked whether or not they thought “the U.S. should...work with other nuclear powers to reduce the number of nuclear weapons on high alert.” A very high 82% said the U.S. should; only 15% thought the U.S. should not. This result is largely unchanged since 2007 (79%) and 2004 (82%). Among Catholics, support was 86%; Evangelicals were the same as the full sample (82%).

Respondents were given an even more extensive opportunity to hear varying arguments about whether the U.S. should pursue the elimination of nuclear weapons. They were first presented a trendline question with a list of four arguments and asked to choose which was closest to theirs.

The first two positions—both supportive of elimination—garnered a majority of 55% of believers, with 47% supporting gradual elimination with verification through an international agreement and 8% taking a nuclear pacifist position. Another 30% supported a goal of reduction, but without seeking elimination. Only 11% thought that the U.S. should simply not participate in treaties that would either reduce or eliminate nuclear weapons.

While Catholics and Evangelicals were no different than the general sample on nuclear pacifism, a higher 54% of Catholics supported the second option of gradual elimination through an international agreement, while Evangelicals were no different from the full sample in this regard. Evangelicals were a bit higher than the general sample in opposing international efforts at reduction (16%).



Believers were then taken through a series of questions in which they evaluated a “possible international agreement for eliminating all nuclear weapons.” The agreement was described as follows:

All countries with nuclear weapons would be required to eliminate them according to a timetable. All other countries would be required not to develop them. All countries, including the United States, would be monitored to make sure they are following the agreement.

Believers were asked to evaluate arguments for and against this agreement. Both arguments highlighted the potential for human evil. The argument against went as follows:

Even if we have a system for verifying that nations are complying, there will always be some evil leaders who will find a way to cheat. We should not pursue the goal of eliminating nuclear weapons.

Sixty-four percent found this argument convincing, but only 18% found it strongly convincing. More Evangelicals found it convincing—70% (22% strongly). Overall, 33% felt the argument was unconvincing.

The argument in favor of an agreement also discussed the issue of evil:

Given the potential for evil, the risk is too great that someday nuclear weapons will be used, creating untold destruction. We should work to reduce and ultimately eliminate nuclear weapons through an international agreement with an advanced monitoring system.

A somewhat larger majority of 75% found this pro argument convincing (23% very). Evangelicals were similar to the full sample (72%). Only 23% of believers found it unconvincing.

Finally, after having evaluated both arguments, believers were asked whether they would “favor or oppose an international agreement for eliminating nuclear weapons according to a timetable, with international monitoring.” Sixty-nine percent came down in favor of such an agreement, with Catholics slightly higher at 74% and Evangelicals slightly lower at 65%. Twenty-seven percent were opposed (Catholics 24%, Evangelicals 30%). Thus, though many were receptive to both arguments (for and against) to some degree, their final judgment was lopsided in favor of supporting an international agreement aimed at eliminating nuclear weapons.

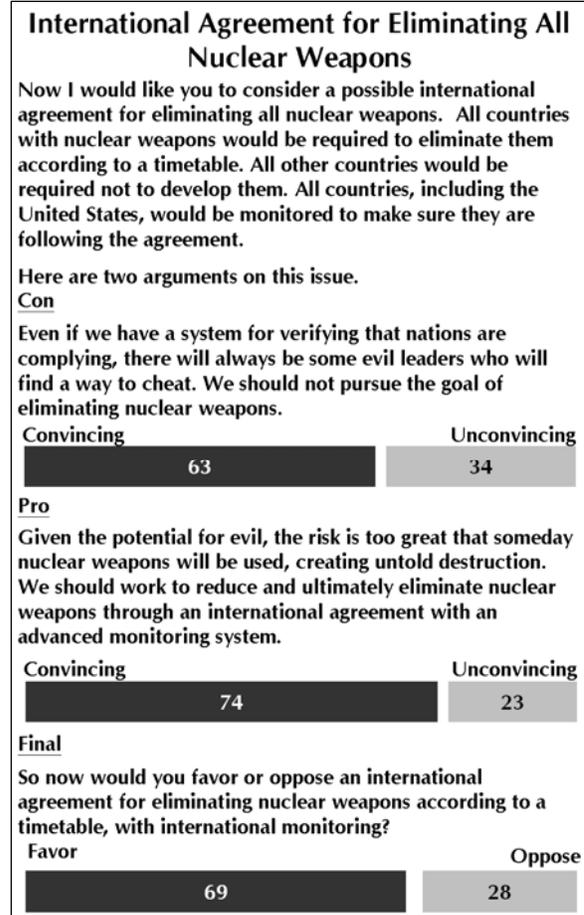
In especially striking results, support for pursuing elimination was 14 points higher than it was in response to the initial four-option question about how to approach nuclear weapons. Support was ten points higher among Evangelicals and 12 points higher among Catholics.

It should be noted that believers do show a propensity to defer to experts on nuclear weapons issues. Believers in God were presented two arguments and required to choose one or the other:

A: Nuclear weapons have the potential to destroy most of humanity, as well as God’s creation. Therefore it is appropriate for people with spiritual values to play a role in influencing how this nation deals with its nuclear weapons.

B: Questions about nuclear weapons are extremely complex and the stakes are very high. Therefore it is experts who should make nuclear weapons policy, while individuals should instead focus on raising the spiritual values of society in general.

When required to make a choice, 59% of believers decided in favor of deferring to expert opinion, while 36% chose the argument that people with spiritual values should play a role in nuclear weapons policy. The latter choice was higher among Evangelicals (41%).



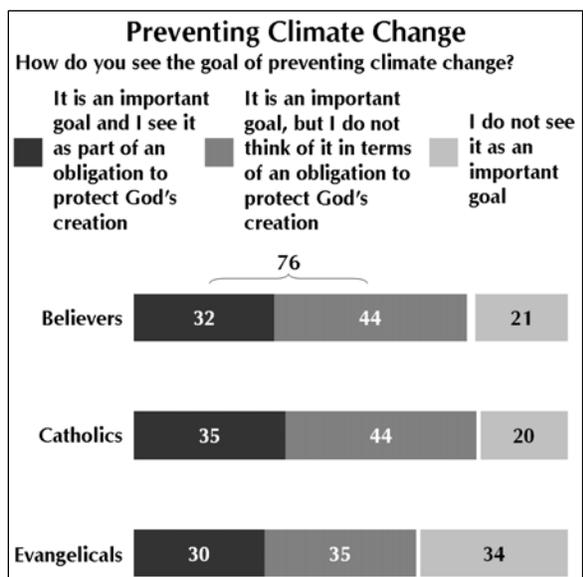
9. Working to Prevent Climate Change

Only a small minority of believers said preventing climate change is a spiritual obligation, and one in three said it is part of an obligation to protect God’s creation. Nonetheless three in four said it is an important goal to prevent climate change, and two thirds said there is at least a moderate risk that climate change could harm God’s creation. Eight in ten said it is an important goal to reduce their own carbon footprint, though only one in three said that this is part of an obligation to protect God’s creation. Seven in ten rejected the argument that reducing greenhouse gases would be too harmful to the economy in favor of the idea that in the long run it will help the economy through greater energy efficiency. Evangelicals are generally more skeptical about climate change and the need for action, but in regard to all options for action clear majorities of Evangelicals endorsed the need for action.

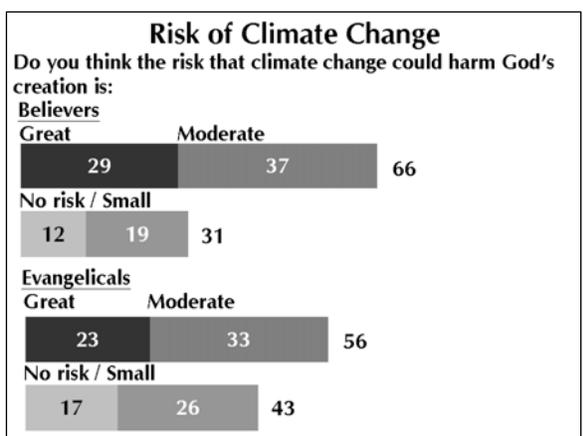
Few believers are inclined to see dealing with the problem of climate change as a spiritual obligation. Fifteen percent said they would call “seek(ing) to prevent climate change” a spiritual obligation, while 85% said they do not see this as a spiritual obligation.

Believers were also asked whether they saw preventing climate change as “an important goal and as part of an obligation to protect God’s creation”; or whether they felt it was an important goal but did not think of it in terms of such an obligation; or whether they did not see it as an important goal. Only 32% saw it as a spiritual obligation.

However, only one in five (21%) did not see preventing climate change as an important goal (with Evangelicals significantly higher at 34%). All combined, those who saw it as spiritual obligation and those who nonetheless felt it was an important goal total 76% of believers (Catholics 79%, Evangelicals 65%).



Further, two thirds of believers said there is at least a moderate risk that climate change could harm God’s creation, while three in ten (29%) saw the risk as great. Thirty-one percent said there was a small (19%) or no (12%) risk. A considerably higher number of Evangelicals were skeptical, with 43% saying the risk is small (26%) or nonexistent (17%), but a clear majority of Evangelicals—56%—did see a moderate risk or greater.



A very large majority of believers view reducing their own carbon footprint as an important goal, and a little over a third see it in spiritual terms as well. Asked “How do you feel about making efforts to reduce your own carbon footprint—the amount of greenhouse gases that are generated by the way you live?” 79% said that it was an important goal, while 36% also said they saw it “as part of an obligation to protect God’s creation.” Among Evangelicals, 71% saw it as an important goal, and

37% saw it in spiritual terms. Overall, only 18% said that reducing their carbon footprint was not an important goal (a higher 27% among Evangelicals).

A majority of believers rejects the idea that it would hurt the economy to reduce greenhouse gases; three in four think instead that reducing greenhouse gases would make the U.S. economy more competitive. Believers chose between two arguments:

Efforts in the United States to reduce the release of greenhouse gases will cost too much money and hurt the U.S. economy.

Or

The U.S. economy will become more competitive because these efforts will result in more efficient energy use, saving money in the long run.

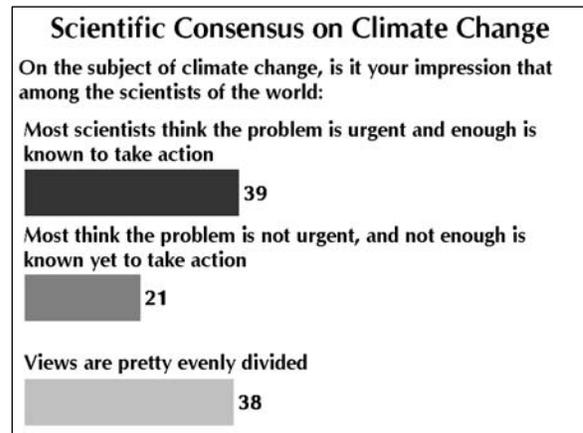
Seventy-two percent said the second argument—that the U.S. economy would become more competitive—was closer to their own opinion (Evangelicals, 63%). Only 24% said reducing greenhouse gases would hurt the U.S. economy.

10. Perceptions of 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. Not surprisingly, those who perceive such a consensus are more supportive of taking action on climate change. Interestingly, those who perceive such a consensus are also more likely to see it as a spiritual obligation.

Believers’ general understanding of the degree of consensus among world climate scientists is fairly low. This study repeated a trend-line question on views of climate change in the scientific community.

Only 39% of all believers said that most scientists think the problem is urgent and that enough is known to take action; among Evangelicals this was only 31%. About a fifth (21%) said that most scientists think the problem is not urgent and that not enough is known yet to take action. Almost four in ten—38% of believers (43% among Evangelicals) believed that scientists’ views are divided.



Not surprisingly, believers who perceive such a scientific consensus are more supportive of taking action on climate change. Among those who perceived scientific consensus, an overwhelming 94% said that it was an important goal to prevent climate change. But among those who perceived scientists as divided, a lesser 62% called preventing climate change an important goal. Among Evangelicals who perceive scientific division this was a lower 49%, while for Catholics it was 66%.

Interestingly, believers who perceive a scientific consensus are also far more likely to see acting on climate change as not only an important goal but also part of an obligation to protect God’s creation.

Among those who perceive a scientific consensus and see action as an important goal, 55% also perceive it as part of an obligation to protect God's creation (among Evangelicals 63%). Among those who perceive scientific division but nonetheless see action as important, only 32% see such action as part of protecting God's creation. Thus, the perception of scientific consensus not only increases the likelihood that believers will see action as important, but that they will see it as having spiritual import. It may be that the perception that there is a lack of consensus imbues the problem with a more mundane character, even when the believer is personally persuaded that there is a problem.

These patterns held true when believers were asked about making a personal contribution to dealing with climate change. Among believers who perceived scientific consensus, 93% said it was an important goal for them to make efforts to reduce their own carbon footprint (89% among Evangelicals). Among believers who perceived scientists as divided, though, only 71% felt making personal efforts was an important goal (62% among Evangelicals).

Likewise, believers who perceived a scientific consensus are more likely to see taking personal steps to reduce one's carbon footprint as having spiritual meaning. Among believers who perceived scientific consensus and saw action as necessary, 53% saw personal efforts as part of an obligation to protect God's creation. But among believers who thought scientific assessments are divided, but still thought that action is important, just 37% said efforts to reduce one's carbon footprint are part of an obligation to God's creation.