

GREENBERG QUINLAN ROSNER RESEARCH

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Religion and America's Role in the World

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Introduction

Since 9/11, America's role in the world has taken on an increasingly important part of our political discourse. Questions about the use of military force, commitments to nation building, the war on terrorism, humanitarian disaster relief, women's rights around the world, as well as our relations with other nations have sparked heated debates from the halls of Congress to college dorm rooms. People's views are informed by their values and personal experiences, as well as international events. While these values and experiences are relatively well understood, the influence of religious identity and engagement has not been explored in-depth.

In this first major study of religion and international affairs, we explore the role that religious worldviews play in shaping views about America's role in the world and foreign policy priorities. Main findings include:

- There is relative consensus about the role of the United States in the world; most believe that America has a moral obligation and responsibility to act as a leader on the world stage. Despite increasing religious diversity, a majority agree with the notion that our nation is blessed and that it should set a Christian example to the world.
- At the same time, Americans express ambivalence about whether or not we have a positive influence around the world and most agree that sometimes our involvement does more harm than good.
- The religious landscape has shifted with evangelical Christians now expressing the greatest support for an interventionist role, while more moderate religious groups like mainline Protestants and Catholics take a more isolationist posture.
- American's foreign policy priorities cannot be separated from the events of the past eight years. Concerns dominated by violence, conflict and preserving our nation's security take on greater priority than other international engagements.
- There is less consensus around the ideologically charged areas of foreign policy, particularly women's rights and environmental policy. While most support efforts to improve maternal health, people are more divided on lifting the "global gag rule," which would free up resources to organizations providing a full range of women's health services including abortion. Similarly, while most Americans support signing international treaties to combat global warming, the current economic crisis and gas prices produce some division regarding the urgency of the problem.
- Generational change may ultimately transform the public's views about the world. Younger evangelicals, for example, are different from adults in that they are more ecumenical in their view about America's influence, adopt a more inclusive definition of what it means to be "pro-life" and are more supportive of efforts to combat global warming. We also see a rise of people without any religious preference at all; this group, understandably, is more skeptical on whether or not America should set a Christian example in the world and less convinced of the nation's exceptionalism.

The following report is based on a national survey of 1400 adults, including an oversample of 400 young evangelical Christians ages 18 to 29.¹ The survey was conducted September 4-21, 2008, and carries a margin of error of +/- 3.1 percent.² This study explores how religion shapes people's perspectives about America's role in the world, both reactions to current policy and to future priorities and commitments. Broadly, we examine whether or not the US should take an interventionist or isolationist posture and rank a range of different forms of involvement around the world. We explore perceptions of the nation's "moral" responsibilities and gauge whether people see America as different than other nations in the world. Finally, we explore whether people's religious experiences and their engagement with the world lead to a different view of America's role and priorities.

Americans are not isolationists, but many believe we are not playing a positive role in the world

Americans believe the United States has an important role to play in the world, though that role is shaped by the events of the last eight years including September 11th, the Bush administration's foreign policy priorities, and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Most consider US relations with the rest of the world to be on the wrong track, and over three-quarters see the potential for American actions to cause more harm than good internationally. Americans are split on whether the United States' international actions are primarily positive or negative, though ultimately nearly all agree that America has a responsibility to stay engaged in world affairs.

- The majority of Americans believe the United States' relations with the rest of the world are in disrepair. Only one-quarter of Americans say recent relations are headed in the right direction, compared to two-thirds of Americans who say our relations are off on the wrong track.
- Most Americans are ready to be out of Iraq, especially those who believe the United States' international relationships are strained. More than half of Americans want to begin bringing troops home from Iraq (59 percent total agree, 51 percent strongly), while only 39 percent advocate a "stay the course" strategy (33 percent strongly). Among Americans who believe the country's foreign relations are off-track, 65 percent strongly believe the United States should begin reducing the number of troops it has in Iraq (73 percent total agree).

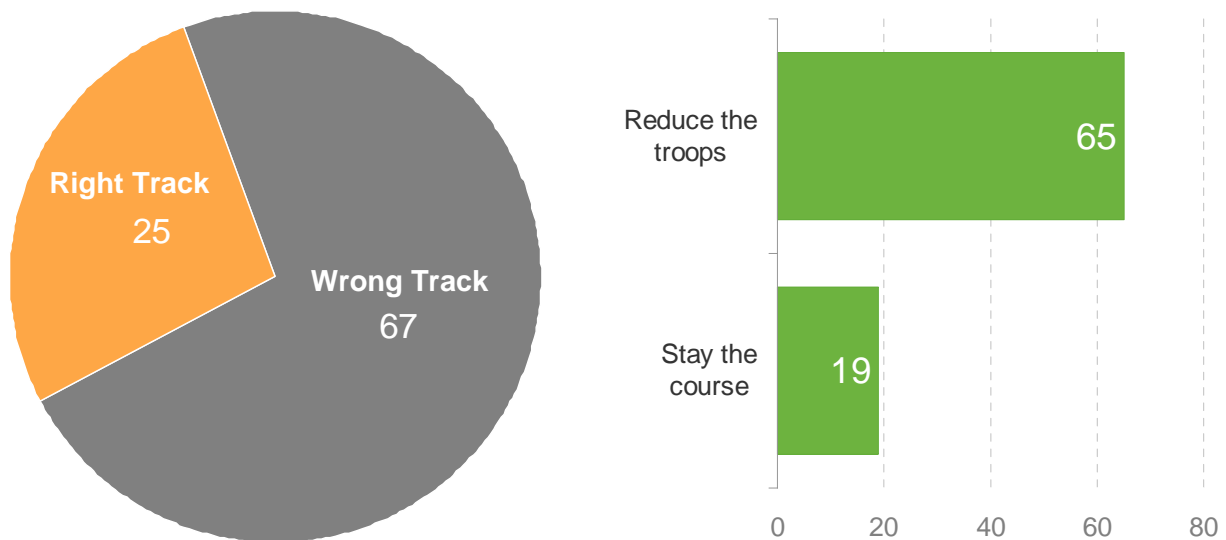
¹ Evangelical Christians are defined as Protestants or members of another Christian religion who identify as fundamentalist, evangelical, charismatic, or Pentecostal, or who indicated they are born-again Christians.

² Please see Appendix A for additional information on the survey methodology.

■ Figure 1: American Foreign Relations

The State of American Foreign Relations

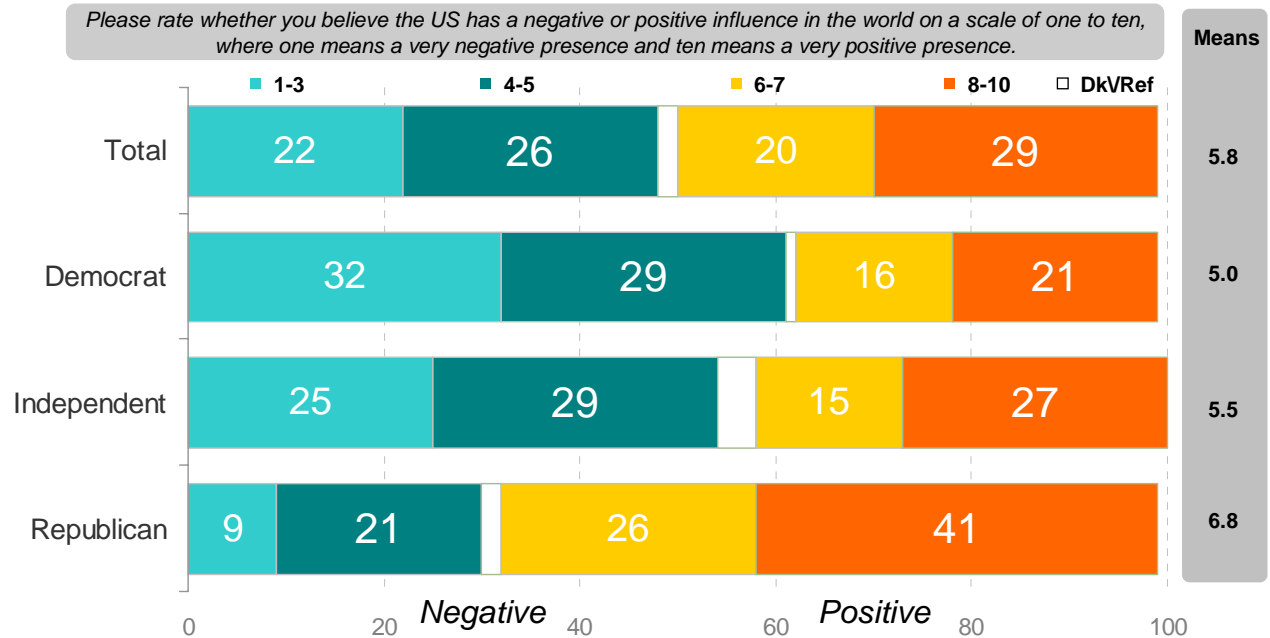
Thinking about recent United States relations with the rest of the world, would you say things are going in the right direction, or do you feel they have gotten pretty seriously off on the wrong track?



- Americans believe that the United States does not always have a positive impact abroad. When thinking about America's role generally, nearly 8-in-10 Americans say that the United States' involvement sometimes does more harm than good (79 percent agree, 44 percent strongly).
- Overall, Americans are equally split on whether the United States has a positive or negative impact on the world. Perceptions of whether or not America has a negative or positive presence in the world are shaped by partisanship and ideology, with Republicans (67 percent positive) and conservatives (60 percent positive) assessing a much more positive role and Democrats (37 percent positive) and Independents (42 percent positive) seeing our presence in a more negative light. Similarly, there are deep partisan and ideological divides over US involvement in Iraq and larger questions about whether or not the US should take preemptive military action in the case of potential threats.

■ **Figure 2:** American Influence Abroad

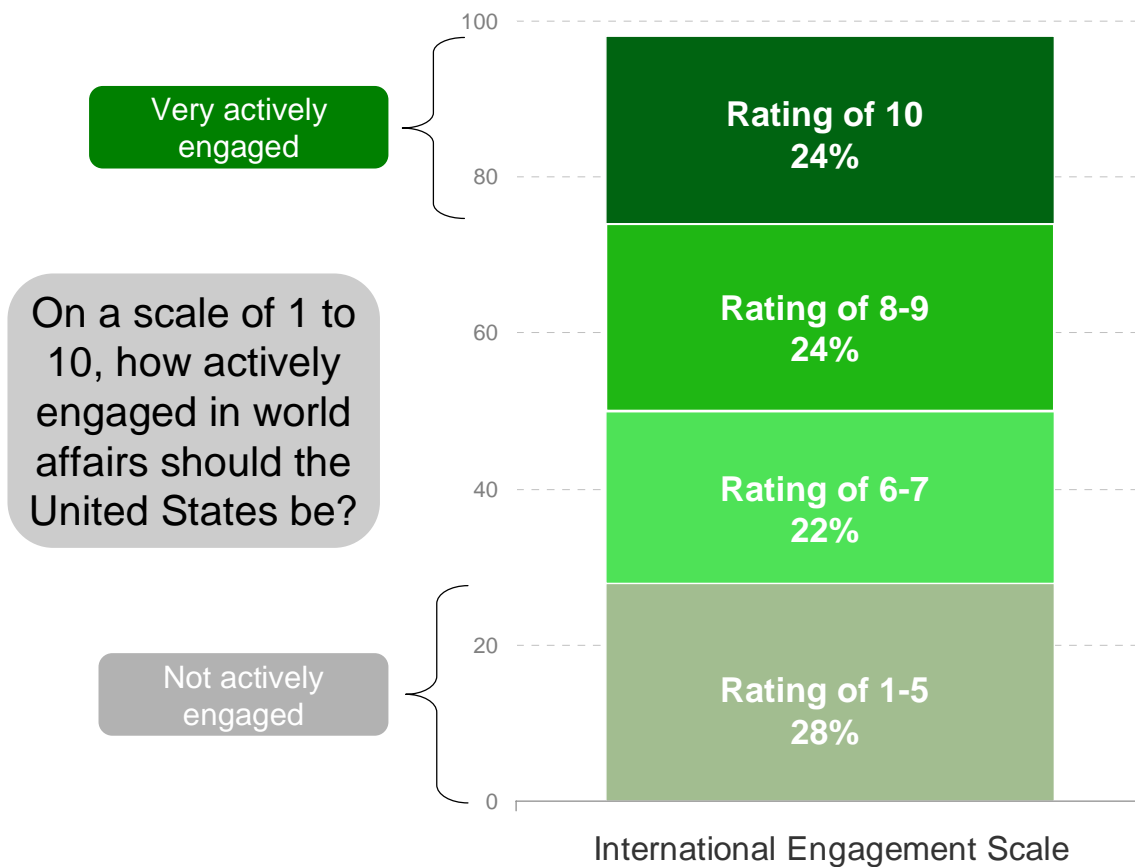
United States Influence Abroad



Despite this bleak view of America's relations with the world, the vast majority of Americans believe the United States should be engaged on the international stage. There are, however, disagreements across political and demographic lines around America's level of responsibility to be a leader in world affairs. Here again, more politically conservative Americans are more likely to agree that the US has a responsibility to be involved around the world. We see this same trend among more religious and religiously conservative Americans.

- Nearly a quarter of Americans (24 percent) say the United States should be very engaged in world affairs and 70 percent believe America should be at least moderately involved.

■ **Figure 3:** International Engagement Scale

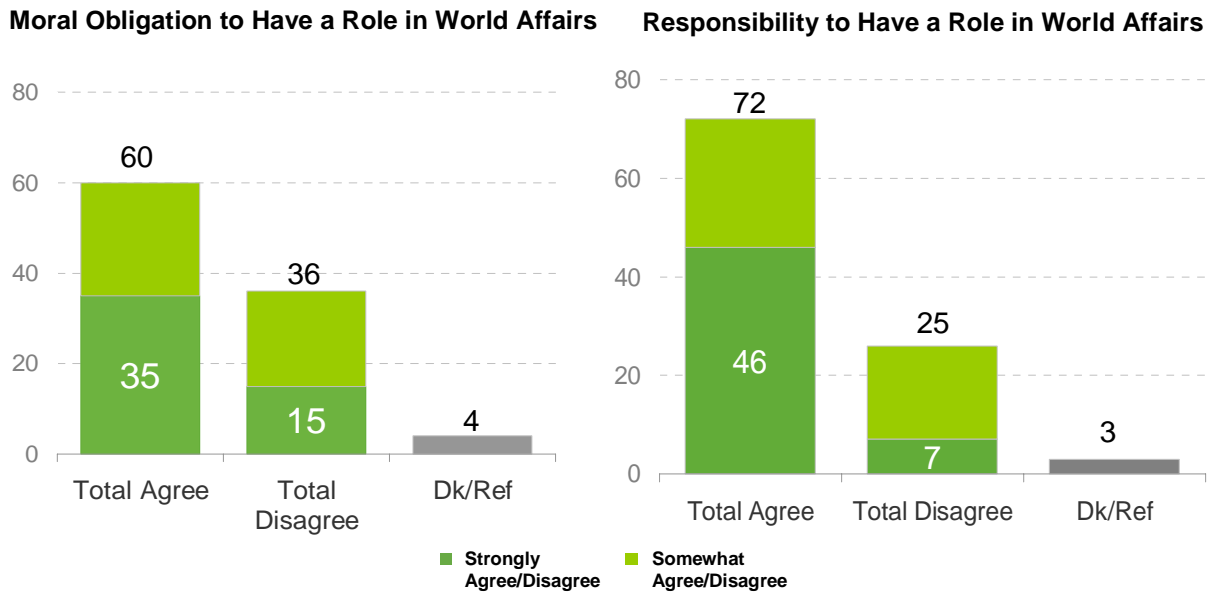


- Most Americans believe that the United States should be actively involved in world affairs because of an explicit responsibility or moral obligation to take a leadership role in the world. Nearly three-quarters of Americans agree that the United States has a responsibility (46 percent strongly agree) while nearly as many, though slightly fewer, agree with the characterization that the United States is morally obligated to be engaged in international affairs (60 percent agree, 35 percent strongly).

■ Figure 4: The United States' Role in World Affairs

The United States' Role in World Affairs

Please tell me whether you agree or disagree with the following statement



- Two-thirds of Republicans strongly agree that America has a responsibility to be involved in world affairs (84 percent total agree), sizably higher agreement than among Democrats and Independents (65 and 68 percent total agree respectively). Ideological liberals are less likely than moderates and conservatives to advocate such a role.

Overall, religiously active and religiously conservative Americans are more likely to believe that the US should be actively involved in world affairs – including support for the notion that the US has a moral obligation to play a leadership role on the international stage – than less religiously active Americans. Some of this difference is likely rooted in US current politics, with religiously conservative Americans, like evangelicals, being more supportive of our foreign policy in recent years.

- We see more positive views about America's role in the world among more religious Americans – 55 percent of people who attend services every week say America's influence has been positive compared to 44 percent of people who attend less frequently.
- Sixty-eight percent of people who attend services at least once a week say that America has a moral obligation to be involved in world affairs compared to 54 percent of people who attend less frequently.

- Evangelicals and traditional Catholics are more likely to believe the US is a positive presence in the world (58 and 53 percent positive, respectively) than liberal Catholics, mainline Protestants, and Americans who attend church only irregularly (37, 45, and 44 percent positive, respectively).
- We see an exception to this pattern – both perceptions of positive presence and strong support for an interventionist role - among liberal Catholics and people with no religious preference. Both these groups believe America has a negative presence in the world (61 and 54 percent negative, respectively). Even so, they both still support an active US role internationally (48 and 46 percent at least moderately active with a rating of 8-10, respectively).

■ **Figure 5:** Perception of America's Impact and Foreign Engagement

Foreign Engagement

	Positive/Negative presence*		Level of engagement [^]	
	Positive (6-10)	Negative (1-5)	8-10	10
Total	49	49	48	24
Traditional Catholic	53	40	50	23
Mainline Protestant	45	52	50	27
Evangelical	58	40	49	25
Liberal Catholic	37	61	48	15
Non-religious	45	54	46	22

* *Positive/Negative Presence Scale: Please rate whether you believe the United States has a negative or positive presence in the world on a scale of one to ten, where one is a very negative presence and ten is a very positive presence.*

[^] *Engagement Scale: On a scale of one to ten, how actively engaged in world affairs should the United States be, where one is not at all engaged and ten is very actively engaged in world affairs?*

“A City on a Hill:” Americans believe America is blessed and a Christian example to the world

Back in the Puritan period, John Winthrop invoked the notion that the early colonists were part of a covenant with God to create a holy community.³ More recently, Ronald Reagan famously referred to America as a “shining city on a hill” in his convention speech, to highlight American exceptionalism.⁴ It is a phrase that invokes a long history of Christian aspirations for the United States to represent both democratic and Christian values on the world stage. Even now, many Christians and non-Christians alike share this view of American exceptionalism. But while we

³ (1) John Winthrop, *A Model of Christian Charity*, sermon aboard the ship *The Arbella*, 1630. (2) The Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5:14.

⁴ Ronald Reagan, Republican National Convention, Dallas, Texas, 1984.

see relative consensus among religious groups around America's involvement in the world, we see much more religious polarization on this question of America's uniqueness and Christian character.

- Americans view their country as a nation set apart from others. Most Americans strongly believe that God has uniquely blessed America (61 percent total agree) and a similar number – 59 percent – believe that the United States should set the example as a Christian nation to the rest of the world. A substantial minority of Americans, 41 percent, say they consider America's culture to be better than others, agreeing with the statement "our people are not perfect, but our culture is superior to others" (21 percent strongly agree).
- People who strongly believe that America is blessed by God and should set a Christian example are also more likely to say that the United States is morally obligated to assume a significant role in world affairs. In other words, there is a relationship between perception of American exceptionalism and the importance of playing a role in the world.

■ **Table 6:** America's Responsibility in World Affairs (percent responding)

	Total	<u>Americans who strongly believe...</u>	
		God has uniquely blessed America	The United States should set the example as a Christian nation
Moral obligation to be involved in world affairs			
Agree	60	67	72
Disagree	36	30	27

Please tell me whether you agree or disagree with the following statement: The United States has a moral obligation to take a leadership role in world affairs.

- But there are very important differences in perceptions of America's special status depending on one's level of religiosity and religious identity. For example, many more people who attend church every week believe that America is blessed by God (80 percent agree) and that America should set an example to the world as a Christian nation (77 percent agree) compared to people attend services irregularly (48 and 49 percent, respectively).
- Evangelical Christians also share these principles; 86 percent believe America is uniquely blessed and 82 percent agree that America should be a Christian example. Not surprisingly, non-Christians and people who have no religious preference tend to disagree that America should set the example as a Christian nation. Half of non-Christians and 61 percent of non-religious Americans disagree compared to only 27 percent of Christians.⁵

⁵ Non-Christians are defined as survey respondents who indicated they identify with a non-Christian faith, not including people who are non-religious. "Non-religious" Americans and "secular" Americans refer to respondents who indicated they have no religious preference, or who are atheist or agnostic.

■ Figure 7: America's "Christian Character"

America's "Christian Character": By Faith

	Total	Evangelical	Catholic	Mainline	Regular churchgoer	Irregular churchgoer	No religion
God has uniquely blessed America.							
Agree	61	86	62	66	80	48	29
Disagree	34	13	30	32	17	46	61
The U.S. should set the example as a Christian nation.							
Agree	59	82	60	66	77	49	34
Disagree	36	16	34	31	19	47	61
Our people are not perfect, but our culture is superior to others.							
Agree	41	51	41	45	48	36	29
Disagree	56	46	54	52	48	61	69

The scope of American involvement: Security first, long-term commitments a lower priority

Americans have clear ideas about the scope of America's engagement abroad. The impact of September 11th and the war on terror remain with Americans, who place a heavy emphasis on security concerns, global conflict and violence, which are seen as the world's greatest problems. Other concerns like poverty, the environment and religious freedom take on a lower priority. Americans are hesitant to get involved in another long-term military venture on any issue, as well as any significant commitment of resources such as trying to improve living standards. Instead, they favor short-term aid missions in response to emergencies, diplomatic or economic pressure to solve international crises, and limited contributions in humanitarian aid.

- Americans cite violent conflict as the top problem facing the world. Thirty-five percent mention violence and international conflict, which includes the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan (17 percent), and terrorism (12 percent).
- Global and economic interdependence are also prominent concerns.⁶ Specifically, Americans mention the global economy, including its effect on the United States' economy. They also mention the distribution of natural resources as a concern. They worry about the US dependence on foreign oil, but also express concerns about overpopulation, food and water supplies, and the effects of global warming.
- Only 12 percent of Americans mention religious issues or moral degradation as the top problems facing the world. Issues of faith and religious freedom around the world are most important to individuals who attend religious services more than once a week (23 percent), but most Americans rank this issue low on their list of international problems. Even evangelical Christians (17 percent) are only marginally

⁶ Interviews for this survey were conducted September 4-21, 2008, as the nation's economic crisis began to unfold.

more likely than all Americans (12 percent) to cite a lack of religiosity and morals as a top concern in the world.

Figure 8: International Concerns

	Percent Mentioned
International Conflict /Violence (e.g. War in Iraq/Afghanistan, Terrorism, Crime, intervention, genocide, etc)	35
Economy (e.g. declining U.S. economy, gas prices, debt, cost of living, jobs, illegal immigration etc)	22
Natural Resources (e.g. foreign oil, oil dependency, food, clean water, global warming, etc)	16
Religious issues/morality (e.g. selfishness, lack of faith, religious extremists, abortion, homosexuality, etc)	12
Health (e.g. poverty, healthcare, AIDS/HIV, etc)	8
Governance (e.g. Bush, Republicans/Democrats, heads of state, corruption etc)	6
Other	9

**Open ended question. Percentages sum to more than 100% because multiple responses were permitted.*



- Americans believe that the most important foreign policy priorities relate to their security, which is not surprising given that a plurality believe violence and conflict are the world's biggest problems. Among the top policy priorities are controlling the proliferation of nuclear weapons (80 percent extremely/very important) and fighting global terrorism (78 percent extremely/very important). Preventing global disease (77 percent extremely/very important), stopping genocide (65 percent extremely/very important) and international relief for humanitarian disasters (69 percent extremely/very important) are nearly as important. But it is hard to find support for objectives that would require a significant, long-term investment of resources, such as improving the standard of living in developing countries (49 percent) or promoting democracy (39 percent extremely/very important) around the world.

■ **Figure 9:** Foreign Policy Priorities

Foreign Policy Priorities

<i>Foreign policy priorities...</i>	Extremely Important	Extremely/Very Important
Controlling nuclear weapons around the world	38	80
Fighting global terrorism	37	78
Fighting global disease, like Aids and tuberculosis	29	77
Working to prevent genocide in countries like Sudan	25	65
Combating global warming and other environmental threats	23	59
Contributing to international relief efforts for famines and natural disasters	23	69
Providing women in developing nations with maternal and reproductive health care	22	60
Promoting religious freedom in other nations	19	53
Supporting Israel	18	46
Helping to improve the standard of living in less developed nations	15	49
Strengthening the United Nations	15	47
Promoting democracy in other nations	12	39

- Americans are less interested in building democracy or fostering cultural exchanges, although many people believe that the US should set an example as a Christian nation. Perhaps jaded by the challenge still facing the United States in Iraq, a minority of Americans consider promoting democracy in foreign nations to be a serious priority. Only 39 percent say it is an extremely or very important policy priority (12 percent extremely important).
- However, Americans are supportive of fostering cultural exchanges around the world, even if they do not highly prioritize spreading democracy. In terms of spreading other American values, over three-quarters of Americans (78 percent) support fostering cultural exchanges with other nations.
- Americans also have views about strategies for international involvement. They favor short-term emergency aid missions to help with medical crises and natural disasters over longer-term investment in reducing poverty and diplomacy as well as sanctions over military intervention. While most favor taking on genocide, it is a lower priority than dealing with disasters and epidemics, particularly when coupled with military action.

■ **Figure 10:** Support for International Action

Support for Foreign Policy Actions

<i>Now I am going to read you a list of potential international situations, and I would like you to tell me whether, in general, you favor or oppose the action by the United States.</i>	Strongly Favor	Total Favor
Providing medical supplies and medical staff in the event of an epidemic in another nation	65	92
Sending search and rescue teams, medical staff, and other aid in the event of a natural disaster	63	90
Imposing economic sanctions to pressure a country to stop human rights abuses	54	81
Intervening diplomatically, such as leading negotiations and imposing economic sanctions, to stop genocide	51	77
Signing international agreements or treaties that take steps to reduce global warming	50	77
Supporting efforts to provide women in developing nations with maternal and reproductive health care	48	83
Fostering exchanges of culture and ideas across nations around the world	42	78
Intervening militarily to stop genocide or ethnic cleansing in another nation	40	69

Religion and foreign policy priorities

Across the religious spectrum there is a general commitment to international involvement. This commitment even extends to specific foreign policy priorities. For nearly all faiths and levels of religious engagement, security is paramount. Similarly, nearly all faith groups are more supportive of short-term than long-term commitments, and diplomacy is preferable to military engagement.

Figure 11: Foreign Policy Priorities by Faith

I am going to read you some things America is doing around the world. Please tell me whether it is extremely important, very important, somewhat important, just a little important, or not very important for American foreign policy.

	Total	Wh Evang	Catholic	Mainline	Irregular churchgoer	No religion
Controlling nuclear weapons around the world						
Extremely important	38	41	38	32	39	38
Extremely/Very important	80	86	82	76	80	81
Fighting global terrorism						
Extremely important	37	40	39	31	35	33
Extremely/Very important	78	85	79	76	75	69
Fighting global disease						
Extremely important	29	24	25	25	30	30
Extremely/Very important	77	71	79	73	77	79
Prevent genocide in countries like the Sudan						
Extremely important	25	25	22	25	24	25
Extremely/Very important	65	65	62	67	66	66
Combating global warming						
Extremely important	23	17	22	17	26	31
Extremely/Very important	59	43	59	61	63	63
Contributing to international relief efforts						
Extremely important	23	26	20	21	21	26
Extremely/Very important	69	70	67	66	68	70
Providing women with reproductive healthcare						
Extremely important	22	17	23	18	22	23
Extremely/Very important	60	53	55	59	61	68
Promoting religious freedom in other nations						
Extremely important	19	27	16	16	15	13
Extremely/Very important	53	67	43	50	46	48
Supporting Israel						
Extremely important	18	29	13	11	15	15
Extremely/Very important	46	65	34	45	41	41
Improving the standard of living in less developed nations						
Extremely important	15	15	17	10	14	19
Extremely/Very important	49	47	45	47	46	53
Strengthening the United Nations						
Extremely important	15	15	15	15	15	13
Extremely/Very important	47	42	44	52	48	43
Promoting democracy in other nations						
Extremely important	12	15	9	9	10	11
Extremely/Very important	39	48	38	36	34	34

Despite this broad consensus on the relative ranking of priorities for international engagement, there are some differences on specific foreign policy issues around faith. These areas tend to be more ideologically charged and controversial.

Significant support for dealing with women's health, but impacted by religion

Americans favor the United States' efforts to provide aid to help women gain access to better maternal and reproductive healthcare; religion and beliefs about abortion, however, temper support.

- Overall, Americans favor supporting women's maternal and reproductive health in developing countries. Among the most supportive are African Americans (67 percent strongly favor) and Hispanic Americans (58 percent strongly favor), single women (66 percent strongly favor), and young people ages 18-29 (57 percent strongly favor).
- Faith and beliefs about abortion limit support among some groups. Traditional Catholic Americans (35 percent strongly favor), Catholics who attend church regularly (33 percent strongly favor), and white evangelical Christians (39 percent) are much less supportive than mainline Protestants (52 percent strongly favor) or people without a religious preference (54 percent strongly favor) in investing in women's maternal and reproductive health. Clearly this is related to views about abortion – Americans who oppose abortion in all circumstances are also more likely to oppose investing in women's maternal and reproductive health care, probably because they believe these programs may also provide abortions or referrals for abortion.

■ **Figure 12:** Women's Maternal and Reproductive Health

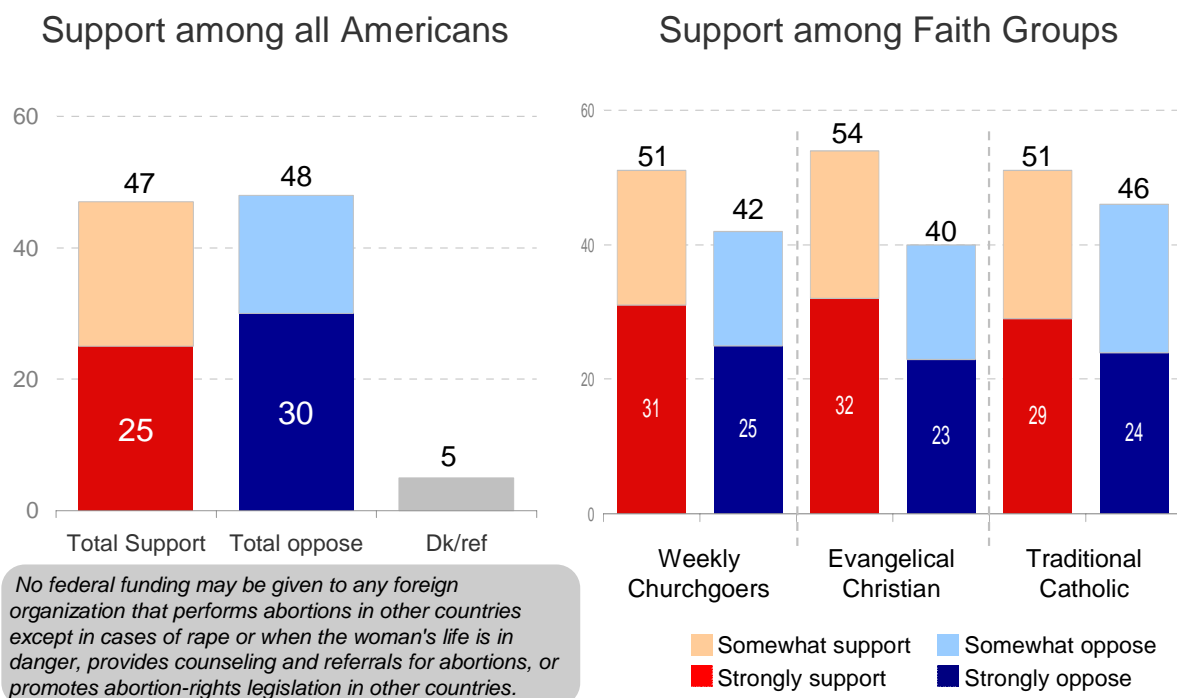
American Support of Women's Maternal and Reproductive Health

<i>Do you favor or oppose supporting efforts to provide women in developing nations with maternal and reproductive health care?</i>	Strongly Favor	Total Favor
Total	48	83
African American	67	88
Hispanic	58	86
Non-Religious	54	86
Mainline Protestant	52	87
Young white evangelicals	40	85
White evangelical Christians	39	81
Older white evangelicals	38	81
Traditional Catholics	35	75
Catholics who attend church	33	73

- The intersection of faith and women's rights is also apparent in reactions to the Mexico City policy (also called the Global Gag Rule), the federal policy that disallows any funding to international organizations that might provide abortions, regardless of their other activities. Americans are quite divided on this issue – 47 percent indicated that they support the policy and 48 percent say they oppose it.
- Evangelical Christians (54 percent in support), traditional Catholics (51 percent), and weekly churchgoers across all faiths (51 percent) are most supportive of the Mexico City Policy. Though, it is noteworthy that there is not a lot of intensity behind this position. Young evangelical Christians ages 18-29 more strongly support the Mexico City policy (69 percent support). Non-religious Americans (58 percent opposed) and people who favor broad abortion rights (67 percent oppose) tend to oppose it, while mainline Protestants and non-Christians fall roughly in the middle.

■ **Figure 13:** Support for the Mexico City Policy

Support for the Mexico City Policy



Support for efforts against global warming but tension around cost, and limited support from evangelical Christians

Support for an international effort to combat global warming finds favor among most Americans though it is a relatively low priority. Moreover, many are less willing to tackle global warming at

their wallet's expense, which may be a reflection of the recent rise in gas prices and other economic stress. Evangelical Christians, in general, are less supportive than most Americans of efforts to stop global warming despite the fact that some national evangelical leaders have focused on the importance of climate change.

- Over three-quarters of Americans favor the United States signing an international treaties to reduce global warming (50 percent strongly favor). At the same time, this support lacks some intensity; only half of Americans agree that global warming is an immediate threat that requires immediate action. Although Americans support efforts to ameliorate global warming in general, they are less supportive when there is a trade-off. For instance, Americans are nearly evenly split between whether reducing global warming is more or less important than reducing gas prices.

■ Figure 14: Global Warming

Global Warming: Gas Prices and Urgency

Now I am going to read you some statements about United States policies. Please indicate whether the first statement or the second statement comes closer to your own views .

	Strongly Agree	Total Agree
Global warming represents an immediate threat and we need to start taking action now.	45	52
OR		
Global warming represents a long-term threat and we need to study the problem before taking drastic action.	28	43
OR		
Reducing global warming is more important than lowering gas prices.	38	49
OR		
Lowering gas prices is more important than reducing global warming.	36	44

- Evangelical Christians, and especially evangelicals who attend church weekly, stand out on this issue for their lack of support. They are more likely to outright oppose an international agreement to reduce global warming than non-evangelical Americans (26 percent versus 18 percent opposed). Evangelical Christians are especially loathe to focus on reducing global warming at the risk of increasing gas prices or allowing them to remain at current high levels. While they are fairly evenly split about whether global warming requires immediate action (46 percent agree) versus a long-term threat that requires further study (50 percent agree), only 39 percent agree

that reducing global warming is more important than lowering gas prices, compared to 54 percent who say gas prices should be the higher priority of the two.

- Non-Christians (82 percent), mainline Protestants (82 percent) and liberal Catholics (84 percent) are among the most likely to favor an international global warming treaty. Groups who consider the reduction of global warming to be a higher priority include non-Christians (71 percent extremely/very important), liberal Catholics (67 percent), liberal Protestants (78 percent) and people who attend church less than weekly (63 percent).

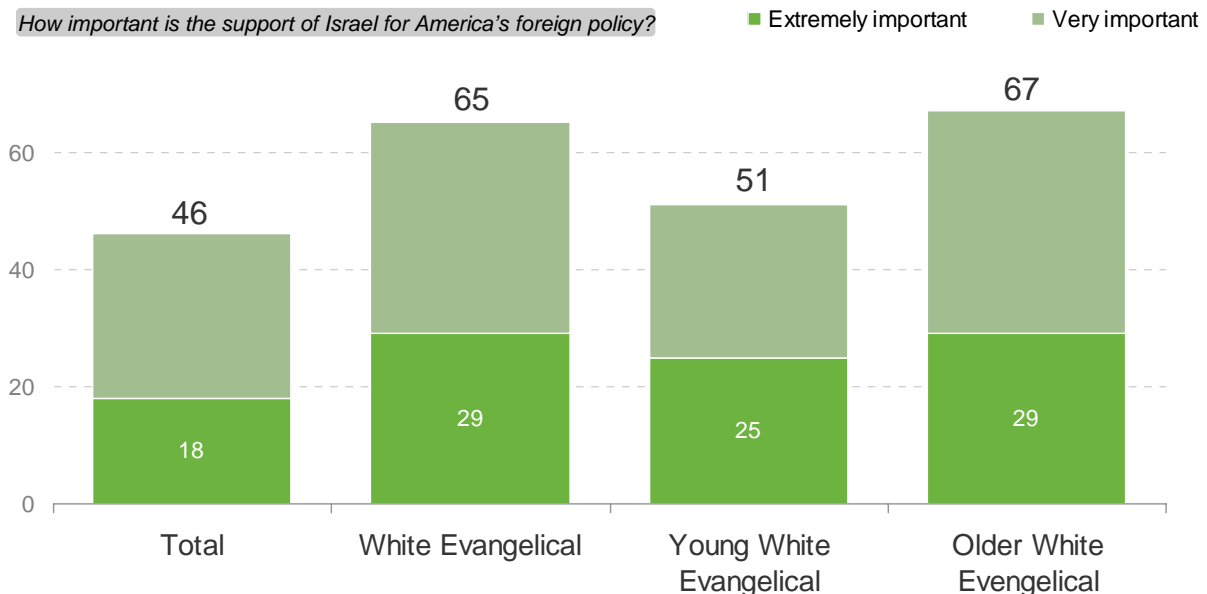
Support for Israel and religious freedom around the world

Support for Israel is a relatively low foreign policy priority compared to other issues for most Americans, including most faith groups.⁷ However, white evangelicals consider Israel a higher priority than other groups and stand out in their dedication to American support of Israel.

- Overall, white evangelicals are more likely than non-evangelicals to support America contributing to the protection of Israel, as well as having a hand in promoting religious freedom in foreign countries.

■ **Figure 15:** Support for Israel

Support for Israel



⁷ This survey is unable to reliably draw conclusions about Jewish Americans' support for Israel due to inadequate sample size. However, other qualitative and quantitative data indicate, not surprisingly, that Jewish Americans favor strong American support for Israel.

- Americans also tend not to consider promoting religious freedom around the world to be a terribly high priority for United States foreign policy. While just over half consider it to be extremely or very important, this issue still ranks below security concerns, humanitarian relief efforts, and even global warming and women's health care. This diffidence about international religious freedom is true among Catholics (43 percent), mainline Protestants (50 percent), non-Christians (52 percent), and secular Americans (48 percent). Weekly churchgoers and evangelical Christians prioritize it somewhat higher (62 percent and 66 percent, respectively), but still well under most other foreign policy priorities.

Emerging Trends

There are trends and changes in the American religious landscape that have the potential to change the way Americans view the world. First, younger evangelicals demonstrate – in most areas – a more progressive outlook than their adult counterparts. They are more likely to believe that we should take action on global warming and they take a more ecumenical and broad view of the world. Second, there are an increasing number of people without a religious preference in this country. They stand out as both sharing the commitment more religious Americans have towards international involvement. However, on policy grounds, they have very different views of current policy issues such as the war in Iraq, global warming and abortion rights.

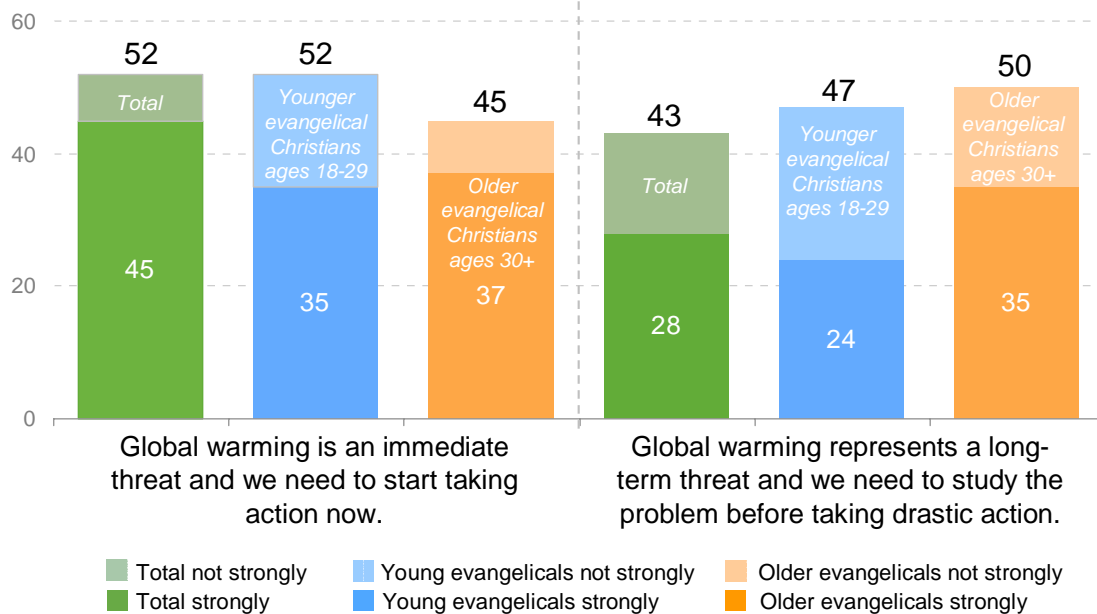
Young Evangelical Christians

- Many evangelical Christians do not consider global warming to be a pressing foreign policy priority (49 percent extremely/very important). However, young evangelicals (58 percent extremely/very important) are more likely to consider combating global warming a higher priority than older evangelicals (47 percent for ages 30 and over).
- More young evangelicals support an international agreement to end global warming than older evangelicals. Seventy-nine percent of the younger cohort favors a treaty compared to 70 percent of older evangelicals.
- Young evangelicals favor immediate action to ameliorate global warming. Older evangelicals say global warming is a long-term threat that requires more study.

■ **Figure 16:** Global Warming

Urgency About Global Warming Among Younger & Older Evangelicals

Please indicate whether the first statement or the second statement comes closest to your own views, even if neither is exactly right.



- There is also some evidence that younger white evangelicals may be slightly more ecumenical than older white evangelicals. On the principle that America should set the example as a Christian nation, younger white evangelicals are slightly more skeptical; three-quarters (77 percent) of young white evangelicals agree compared to 87 percent of older white evangelicals.
- The one area where young evangelicals (especially young white evangelicals) mirror older evangelicals is abortion. They are strongly pro-life (25 percent illegal under all circumstances), and young white evangelical Protestants are more likely than their older counterparts to support the Mexico City Policy. Seventy percent of younger white evangelicals ages 18-29 support the policy compared to only 53 percent of white evangelicals ages 30 and over.
- At the same time, young evangelicals have a broader definition of pro-life issues. Sixty-three percent agree that poverty, disease, and torture represent pro-life issues compared to 56 percent of older evangelicals.

■ **Table 17:** Attitudes about Abortion and the Meaning of “Pro-Life” (percent responding)

Attitudes about Abortion and the Meaning of Pro-Life

	Total (Adults 18+)	Evangelical Christians ages 18-29	Evangelical Christians ages 30 and older
Abortion rights			
Legal in all cases	19	10	10
Legal in most cases	31	21	19
Illegal in most cases	32	43	43
Illegal in all cases	13	25	23
Poverty, disease, and torture are pro-life issues			
Agree	56	63	56
Disagree	37	36	36

** Do you think abortion should be legal in all cases, legal in most cases, illegal in most cases, or illegal in all cases?
Please tell me whether you agree or disagree with the statement: Poverty, disease, and torture are pro-life issues.

Americans with No Religious Preference

Approximately 19 percent of Americans state that they have no religious preference or that they consider themselves agnostic or atheist. Overall, their views about America's role in the world is not entirely dissimilar to that of other Americans. However, they do display some differences on select issues of foreign involvement and seem especially affected by post-9/11 foreign policy. Moreover, non-religious Americans are less comfortable with the idea that America inherently has a “Christian character.”

- Non-religious Americans, like religious Americans, prioritize security higher than most other foreign policy priorities. However, this group is especially influenced by the foreign policy of the past eight years. For instance, Americans with no religious preference are somewhat less likely to consider fighting global terrorism to be a top priority (69 percent extremely/very important) relative to all Americans (78 percent) and are much stronger advocates of withdrawing from Iraq; 65 percent of non-religious Americans advocate beginning to reduce the number of troops in Iraq, compared to 56 percent of Americans who are religious.
- Americans without a religious preference place a lower priority on promoting religious freedom around the world than other Americans (48 percent extremely/very important compared to 53 percent among Americans overall). However, they assign higher priorities to supporting maternal and reproductive health care for women in developing countries (68 percent extremely/very important compared to 68 percent among Americans overall).
- Not surprisingly, Americans without a religious preference tend to disagree that America should set the example as a Christian nation (61 percent disagree compared to 27 percent of Christians). However, it is striking that about a third (34 percent) of non-religious Americans agree that America should set the example as a

Christian nation. Moreover, 29 percent believe America is uniquely blessed by God – far fewer than Christian Americans (72 percent), but still a notable minority.

■ **Table 18:** American Exceptionalism Among Secular Americans

American Exceptionalism Among Secular Americans

<i>For each statement, please tell me whether you agree or disagree...</i>	Total	Christian	No religious preference
<i>God has uniquely blessed America.</i>			
Agree	61	72	29
Disagree	34	25	61
<i>The U.S. should set the example as a Christian nation.</i>			
Agree	59	69	34
Disagree	36	27	61
<i>Our people are not perfect, but our culture is superior to others.</i>			
Agree	41	46	29
Disagree	56	50	69

Conclusion

An increasingly religiously diverse public in America will have a considerable impact on how we conduct foreign policy and perceive our role in the world. The past eight years have forced the country to carefully consider its foreign policy priorities in the context of a post-9/11 world that is focused on security, the reality of a war that has stretched our military forces and impacted our relationships with the rest of the world, and our humanitarian role around the world following natural disasters or the outbreak of disease. For people of all faiths, the top foreign policy priority is to ensure America's security. But the world is now more interconnected than ever before, and Americans believe our nation has a responsibility to be engaged in world affairs and play a positive role no matter how they feel about the past. Where and how America will be involved will be shaped by people's values, including their faith, partisanship and ideology.

Appendix A: Methodology

Greenberg Quinlan Rosner designed and administered this survey for Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly and the United Nations Foundation. The survey reached a total of 1400 adults, 18 years or older, including an oversample of 400 evangelical Christians ages 18-29. The survey was conducted September 4-21, 2008. The margin of error is +/- 3.1 percent for the total survey sample. Evangelical Christians are defined as Protestants or members of another Christian religion who identify as fundamentalist, evangelical, charismatic, or Pentecostal, or who indicated they are born-again Christians.

Telephone numbers for the 1000 adult respondents in the base sample were generated by a random digit dial process, thereby allowing access to all listed and unlisted phones, and interviews were conducted by professional interviewers. The oversample of young evangelical Christians employed a multi-modal design. One hundred of the young evangelical Christians in the oversample were reached using an age-predicted random digit dial process and interviewed over the telephone by professional interviewers. The remaining 300 young evangelical Christians in the oversample were drawn from an opt-in web panel that is designed to be demographically representative at a national level. However, Internet panels, like this one, use non-probability based sampling methods, by necessity, and these results need to be considered with that limitation in mind.

Who We Are



Anna Greenberg

Senior Vice President

Anna Greenberg, Senior Vice President at Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research, advises campaigns, advocacy organizations and foundations in the United States.

Greenberg has extensive experience polling for non-profits and charitable foundations focusing on religion, women's health, rural issues, and education. She conducted ground breaking research on religion and values in public life and in-depth research on women's health for the National Women's Health Resource Center, the American Psychological Association and the Association of Reproductive Health Professionals. She directs the firm's work with the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and the Center for Rural Strategies and has helped shape and advance their research program on perceptions of rural America. Anna also provides brand guidance to Comedy Central, Cooper Hospital and strategic advice for TIAA-CREF.

Prior to joining Greenberg Quinlan Rosner, Greenberg taught at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government. In the spring of 2000, Greenberg accepted an invitation from the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press where she worked as a visiting scholar. She serves on the advisory board of the Boisi Center for Religion and American Public Life at Boston College and is a research fellow at American University's Center for Congressional and Presidential Studies.

A frequently quoted source on the topic of American politics, Greenberg has appeared on MSNBC, CNN, NBC, CNBC, NPR and the BBC. Her work has been published in a variety of publications, including Political Science Quarterly, The Chronicle of Higher Education, Women and Politics, The American Prospect, The Nation, Blueprint, The Public Perspective and The Responsive Community.

Greenberg earned a Bachelor's degree from Cornell University and a Ph.D. in Political Science from the University of Chicago

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