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***Hartford Courant* / CSRA Poll:
Nutmegs Look for Clear Separation Between Religion and Politics**

Residents of Connecticut are firm believers in secular politics, according to a new statewide survey sponsored jointly by the *Hartford Courant* and the Center for Survey Research and Analysis (CSRA) at the University of Connecticut. Nutmegers reject a host of ways that religion and politics could be combined, and they believe that religion already has too much influence politically – according to the *Courant* / CSRA survey a 44% plurality believe organized religion currently has too much influence on politics.

The Influence of Organized Religion in Politics

	<u>Connecticut</u> August 2007	<u>National*</u> March 2007
Too much	44%	32%
Too little	17	31
About right	32	29

This view makes residents distinct from Americans across the country. In addition to the half of Constitution state residents who feel religion has too much influence on American politics, 32% say organized religion's influence on politics is "about right," and only 17% feel religion's influence is not enough. In stark contrast to these views, Americans as a whole are evenly divided over the influence of religion. Only 32% feel religion has too much influence, 31% think it has too little influence, and 29% feel the balance is right, according to a *Newsweek* poll conducted earlier this year.

According to CSRA's research director, Professor Monika McDermott: "Connecticut is a very different place when it comes to religion and politics. Americans' views of the influence of religion are divided, but Nutmegers are decisive in their view that religion currently has too much influence on politics."

Religious Leaders and Politics

Consistent with the view that religion is too influential politically, Connecticut residents oppose political leaders becoming involved in both electoral politics and public policy. In the electoral realm, 70% of residents feel religious leaders should not encourage voters to support or oppose a particular candidate. Only 25% feel that religious leaders should do so.

The *Courant* / CSRA survey demonstrates that residents also oppose religious leaders trying to affect politicians' policy positions. Two-thirds (66%) believe leaders should not try to influence politicians' views on issues. Only 27% believe religious leaders should try to influence politicians' issue positions.

Even the most religious residents of the Nutmeg state oppose religious leaders taking these political actions. Among those residents who say religion is "extremely important" in their lives, 64% oppose religious leaders urging support or opposition to candidates for office. When it comes to political issues, 51% of the most religious feel religious leaders should not try to influence politicians, while 42% believe they should.

Should Religious Leaders Try to Influence Politics?

	Should NOT Influence Candidate Support	Should NOT Influence Pol's Issue Positions
<u>All CT residents</u>	70%	66%
<u>Importance of religion</u>		
Extremely important	64%	51%
Very important	71%	63%
Somewhat important	71%	81%

Professor McDermott explains: "It's clear that Nutmegers want to keep religious leaders out of electoral politics, and it has nothing to do with personal religious commitment. Even those who consider religion an integral part of their lives prefer religious figures refrain from electoral advocacy and issue lobbying."

Politicians and Religion

Connecticut residents are also clear about keeping religion out of government policy. Sixty-eight percent feel that politicians should not rely on their own religious beliefs to make policy decisions. Only 26% of residents support politicians mixing personal religion and policy.

More broadly, Connecticut residents believe in a strict separation of church and state. Sixty-seven percent would rather see a "high degree of separation between church and state" while 27% believe the government should "protect America's religious heritage."

Views on religion and political campaigning also send a secular message, according to the new *Courant* / CSRA survey. A slim majority – 53% – feel that politicians should not talk about their own religious beliefs when campaigning for office. On the other hand, 39% think politicians should talk about their religious beliefs while on the stump.

Nutmegers in general do not use their own religious beliefs to make voting decisions, which could explain their opposition to religion in campaigning. Over half – 54% -- say religion plays "no role at all" in their decisions of whom to support in elections. Religion plays a "minor" role for 28% of residents, and it plays a "major" role in the electoral decisions of 16% of residents.

The Role of Personal Religion in Elections and Support for Religion in Campaigns

Political candidates:	<u>Residents' Religious Beliefs in Vote Choice</u>	
	Major / Minor Role	No Role
Should talk about religious beliefs	56%	26%
Should NOT talk about religious beliefs	38	67

Among those whose religious beliefs do play a role (major or minor) in their vote choices, a 56% majority of support candidates' speaking about their religious beliefs in campaigns, while 38% do not. In contrast, among those for whom religion plays no role in electoral choices 67% oppose candidates mixing religious beliefs and campaigning.

"Opinions on religion in campaigns have a very practical slant" explains McDermott. "If you use your own religious beliefs as a tool in deciding whom to support, then you need to know the candidate's beliefs as well. On the other hand, if religious beliefs play no electoral role for you, then you'd rather not hear about them on the campaign trail."

This survey was conducted by the Center for Survey Research and Analysis (CSRA) at the University of Connecticut, among 488 adult residents of Connecticut from August 15 – August 21, 2007. The data are weighted according to U.S. Census figures for age and education in Connecticut, as well as by household selection probability. A random-digit-dial technique was used to select respondent households (sampling both listed and unlisted telephone numbers). Respondents were selected randomly within households. The margin of sampling error for the survey is ± 4.4 percentage points. Questions that may affect each other are separated throughout the survey.

**The national survey included in this release was conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates for Newsweek magazine, from March 28-29, 2007, among 1,004 respondents.*

Do you think political candidates should or should not talk about their religious beliefs as part of their election campaigns?

Should	39%
Should NOT	53
Don't know (vol.)	7
Refused (vol.)	1

Do you think religious leaders should or should not urge people to vote for or against a political candidate?

Should	25%
Should NOT	70
Don't know (vol.)	5
Refused (vol.)	0

Do you think religious leaders should or should not try to influence politicians in their positions on the issues?

Should	27%
Should NOT	66
Don't know (vol.)	6
Refused (vol.)	1

Do you think political leaders should or should not rely on their religious beliefs in making policy decisions?

Should	26%
Should NOT	68
Don't know (vol.)	6
Refused (vol.)	0

On another topic, do you think organized religion has too much influence on American politics today, too little influence, or about the right amount of influence?

Too much influence	44%
Too little influence	17
About the right amount of influence	32
Don't know (vol.)	6
Refused (vol.)	1

Which comes closer to your view: The government should take special steps to protect America's religious heritage or there should be a high degree of separation between church and state?

Should take special steps to protect religious heritage	27%
Should be a high degree of separation between church and state	67
Don't know (vol.)	5
Refused (vol.)	1

Do your beliefs play a major role, a minor role, or no role at all in determining who to support in an election?

Major role	16%
Minor role	28
No role at all	54
Don't know (vol.)	2
Refused (vol.)	0

How important would you say religion is in your own life - extremely important, very important, somewhat important, not very important, or not important at all?

Extremely important	26%
Very important	36
Somewhat important	21
Not very important	8
Not important at all	8
Don't know (vol.)	1
Refused (vol.)	0
