

Political ‘God talk’ turns off many voters, LifeWay poll shows

February 3, 2012

WASHINGTON (RNS)—If there's one thing the fractious Republican field agrees on, it's that personal religious devotion is central to their campaign message.

Rick Santorum, Newt Gingrich, Mitt Romney and Ron Paul stress their faith on the stump. Romney plays up his religion, although he downplays his Mormonism because of lingering evangelical suspicion toward his church.

But a [LifeWay Research](#) survey indicates frequent use of "God talk" actually may be more likely to hurt rather than help a candidate's chances with voters.



Rick Santorum

According to an online poll conducted last September by the research arm of the Southern Baptist Convention, only 1 in 6 Americans (16 percent) said they are more likely to vote for a candidate who regularly shares their religious beliefs.

The poll showed 30 percent of respondents indicated they would be less

likely to vote for a candidate who prominently touts their religious beliefs and practices; 28 percent said it would have no impact; and 21 percent said it would depend on the candidate's religion.

The poll reinforces the conflicted feelings Americans have toward their politicians. A survey last year conducted by [Public Religion Research Institute](#) and Religion News Service found majorities of every religious group say it is important that a presidential candidate have strong religious beliefs. At the same time, respondents—including evangelical Christians—had a hard time identifying the religious affiliation of either President Obama or Romney.

The LifeWay poll found Americans who consider themselves to be "born-again, evangelical or fundamentalist" Christians are much more likely than nonreligious voters to support a candidate who deploys a very public piety on the stump, by a 28 percent to 11 percent margin.

Conservative Christians are more likely to say their support also "depends on the religion" of the candidate, the poll found—a factor that may matter more in the GOP primaries than the general election.

In the survey, respondents were asked: "When a candidate running for office regularly expresses religious conviction or activity, how does that impact your vote?"

The online survey of 2,144 Americans was conducted in September 2011 and has a margin of error of plus or minus 2 percentage points.