

Poll: More confused about Obama's faith, oppose church politicking

August 19, 2010

WASHINGTON (ABP) — A new poll released by the Pew Research Center Aug. 19 shows a sharp uptick in the percentage of Americans who are confused about President Obama's faith. It also shows that a slight majority of Americans don't want churches involved in politics.

The [poll](#) of 3,003 American adults dealt with their political and religious views and was conducted between July 21 and Aug. 5. On Obama's faith, only 34 percent correctly answered that he was a Christian — down 14 points from the 48 percent who said he was when a similar survey was taken in March 2009.

(Graphic courtesy Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life)

A full 18 percent of respondents said they thought Obama was a Muslim — up from 11 percent who thought so last year.

And a plurality of respondents — 43 percent — said they didn't know what faith Obama practiced. That's up nine points from the previous survey.

The proportion of respondents who believed Obama was a Muslim tracked closely with their political views of him. Thirty-four percent of those who said they were conservative Republicans incorrectly identified Obama as a Muslim — up 16 points among that category of respondents from last year. And 30 percent of those who disapprove of the president's job performance

said he was a Muslim.

But not even a majority of Democrats correctly identified Obama's faith. Only 46 percent of self-described Democrats said Obama was a Christian, down from 55 percent last year. The percentage of Democrats who said they believed Obama was a Muslim was essentially unchanged from the previous survey.

The White House released a statement responding to the survey Aug. 19.

"President Obama is a committed Christian, and his faith is an important part of his daily life. He prays every day, he seeks a small circle of Christian pastors to give him spiritual advice and counseling, he even receives a daily devotional that he uses each morning," the statement said. "The President's Christian faith is a part of who he is, but not a part of what the public or the media is focused on every day."

Racial divide

The study also noted what it called "a wide racial divide in the perception that Obama is a Muslim," with the proportion of whites holding the perception rising from 11 percent to 21 percent since 2009, while there was essentially no change in African-American respondents' view of the question.

However, the study noted, "both blacks and whites are less likely today to say Obama is a Christian."

White evangelical Protestants were the most likely of any religious group to misidentify Obama as a Muslim. Twenty-nine percent of evangelical respondents said the president was a Muslim, up from 20 percent who held that view in 2009. But white mainline Protestants and Catholics were also much more likely to misidentify Obama's faith than they were last year.

The survey also showed that a slim majority — 52 percent — of Americans believed that churches should stay out of politics, while only 43 percent said houses of worship should speak out on social and political questions. While the 52 percent figure was essentially unchanged from the previous survey, the percentage supporting church political involvement dropped two points.

And the proportions are nearly the inverse of where they were on a similar question in 2001, when 51 percent of respondents favored church involvement in political and social issues while 43 percent opposed it.

-Robert Marus is managing editor and Washington bureau chief for Associated Baptist Press.