



The American Panel Survey Brief Report

Religious Beliefs and Practice and Presidential Preference, January 2012

In January 2012, the panelists on The American Panel Survey (TAPS) were questioned about their religious practices and beliefs and their presidential preferences. As is well known, the U.S. is a very religious society. In our survey, 88.4 percent of respondents in the survey indicating that they believe in God or a higher power and 63.7 percent indicate that they attend religious services at least a few times each year.

TAPS panelists were asked five questions about their religious beliefs and practices:

- belief in God
- attendance at religious services
- frequency of prayer
- frequency of saying grace before meals
- feelings about the Bible

Panelists were also asked, “Which candidate, Barack Obama or Mitt Romney, are you more likely to vote for?” Parallel questions for Rick Santorum and New Gingrich produce similar results.

As Figure 1 shows, knowing that God exists does not produce a strong presidential preference for one candidate over the other (just barely statistically significant). The few non-believers and those who report believing in a higher power are far more likely to favor Obama.

Attendance at religious services separates Obama and Romney supporters more conspicuously. Figure 2 shows the presidential preference by frequency of attending religious services. Weekly church-goers are far more likely to support Romney than Obama.

Among believers, those who say prayers or grace daily break about evenly for Obama and Romney (Figures 4 and 5), but those who take the Bible as the actual word of God are more likely to support Romney than Obama (Figure 6).

Overall, adherents to formal religious attendance and doctrine are more likely to support Romney than Obama, but Obama gets nearly as much support as Romney from believers who pray and say grace daily.

The Survey

The American Panel Survey (TAPS) is based upon a national probability sample. As a panel, the survey returns to the same respondents each month, which allows for measuring change in attitudes among individuals over time and results in the accumulation of more data about the respondents than in most surveys. The typical monthly survey includes about 1600 respondents from a larger panel of 2100. The margin of error is 2.4 percent.

TAPS is a project of the Weidenbaum Center on the Economic, Government, and Public Policy at Washington University in St. Louis. The survey is implemented by Knowledge Networks of Palo Alto, California.

Additional information is available from the project director, Steven S. Smith, at taps@wustl.edu.

Figure 1. Belief in God and Presidential Preference, January 2012.

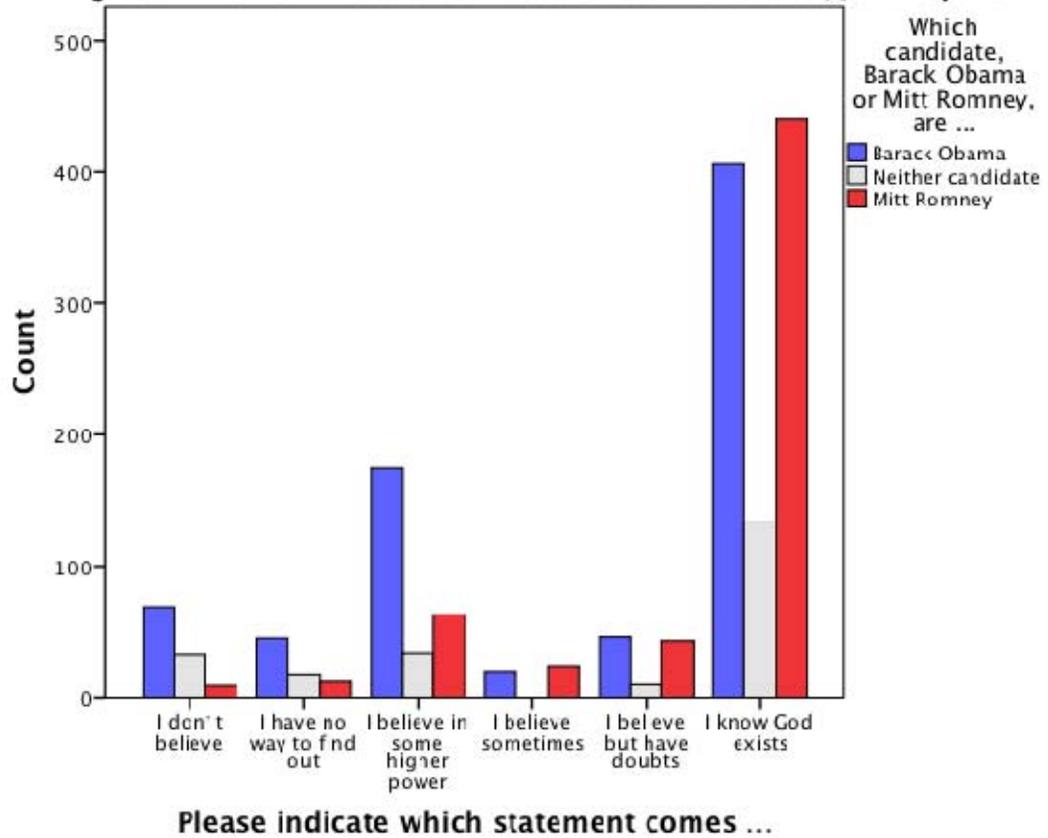


Figure 2. Frequency of Attending Religious Services and Presidential Preference, January 2012.

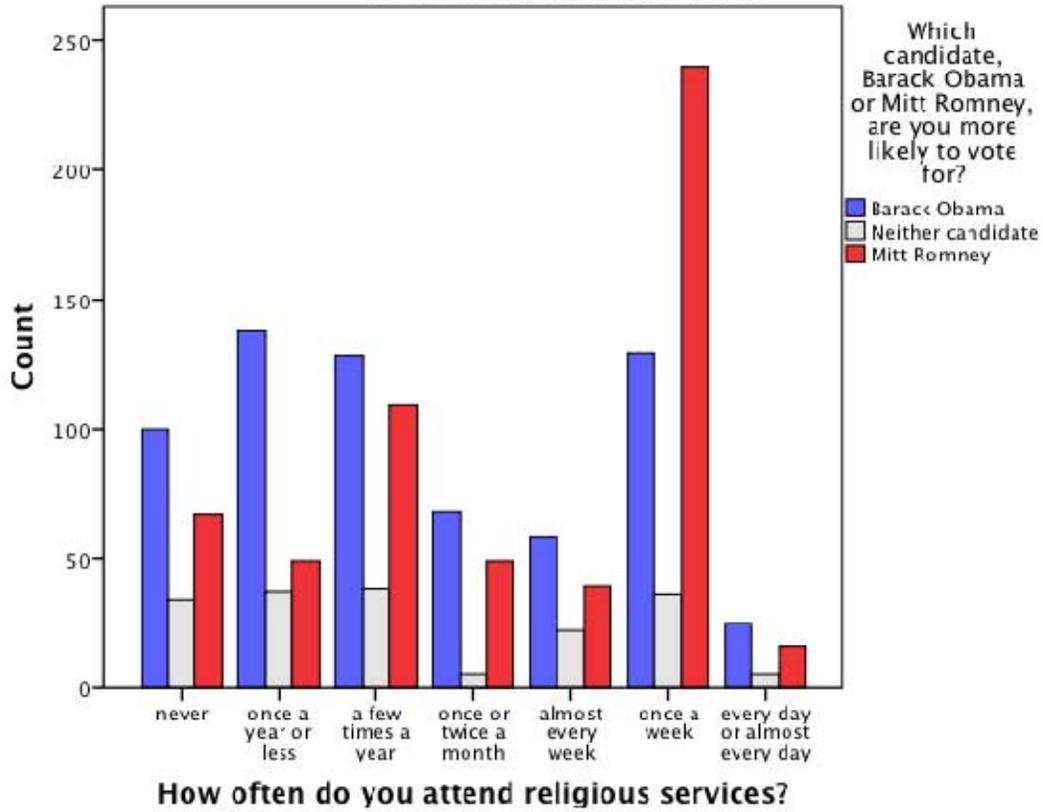


Figure 3. Frequency of Attending Religious Services and Presidential Preference, Excluding Non-Believers, January 2012.

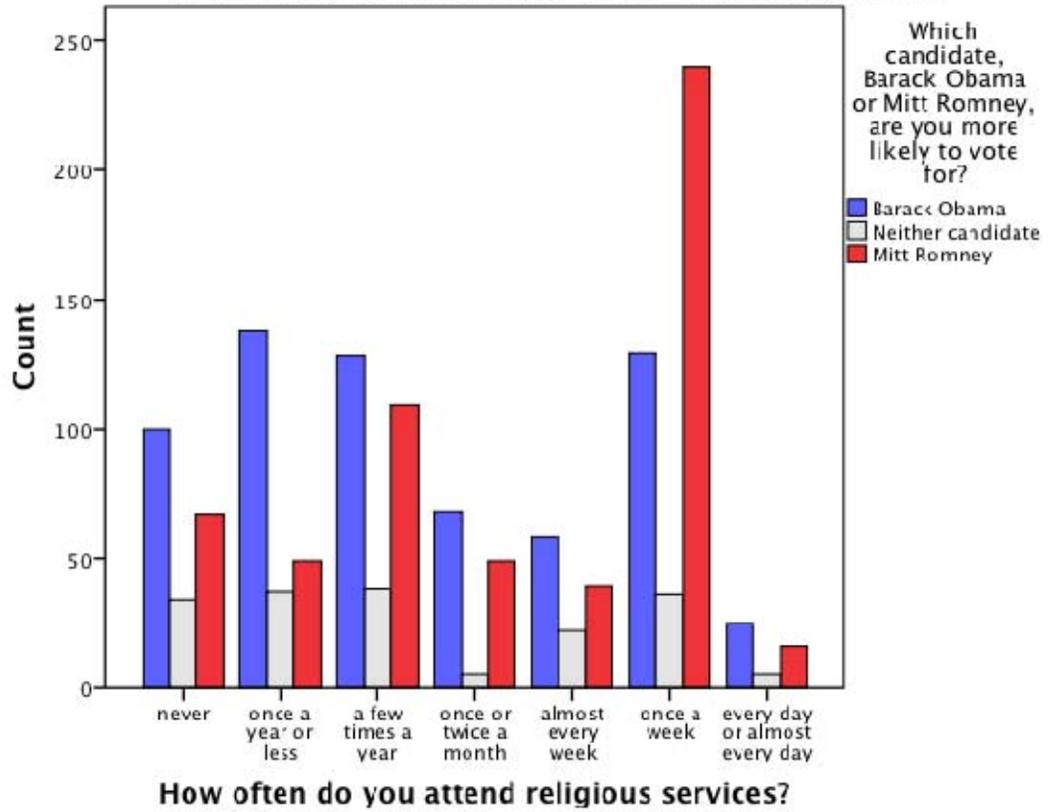


Figure 4. Frequency of Praying and Presidential Preference, Excluding Non-Believers, January 2012.

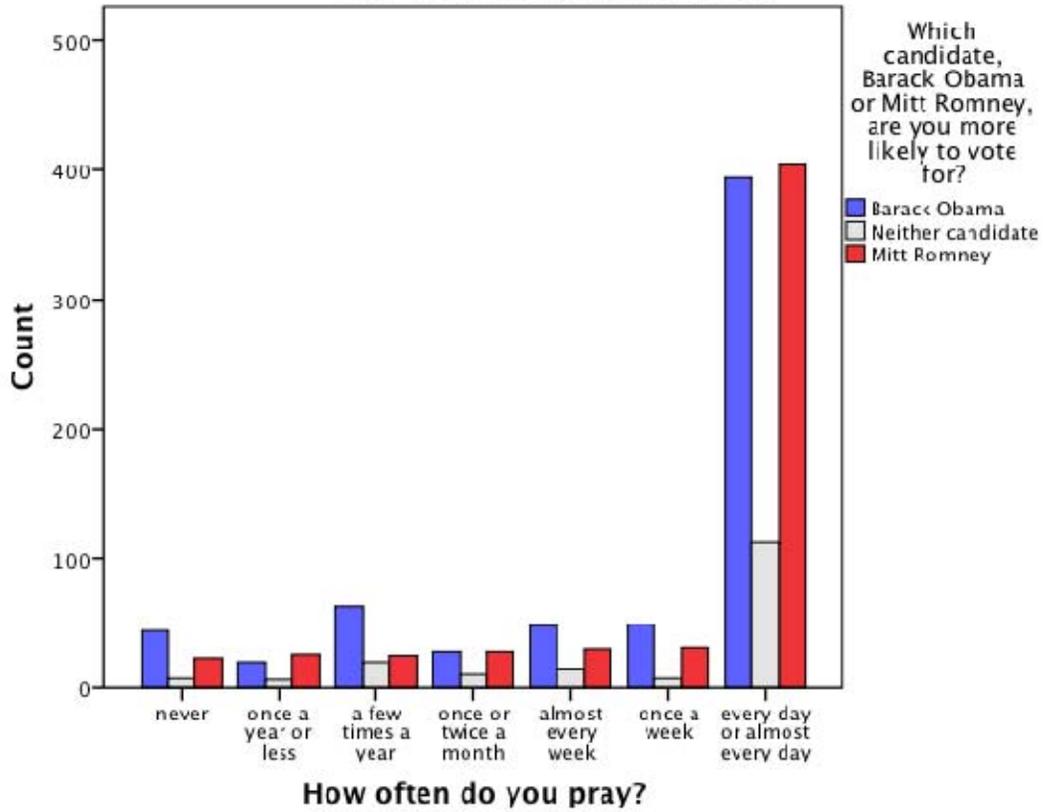


Figure 5. Frequency of Saying Grace and Presidential Preference, Excluding Non-Believers, January 2012.

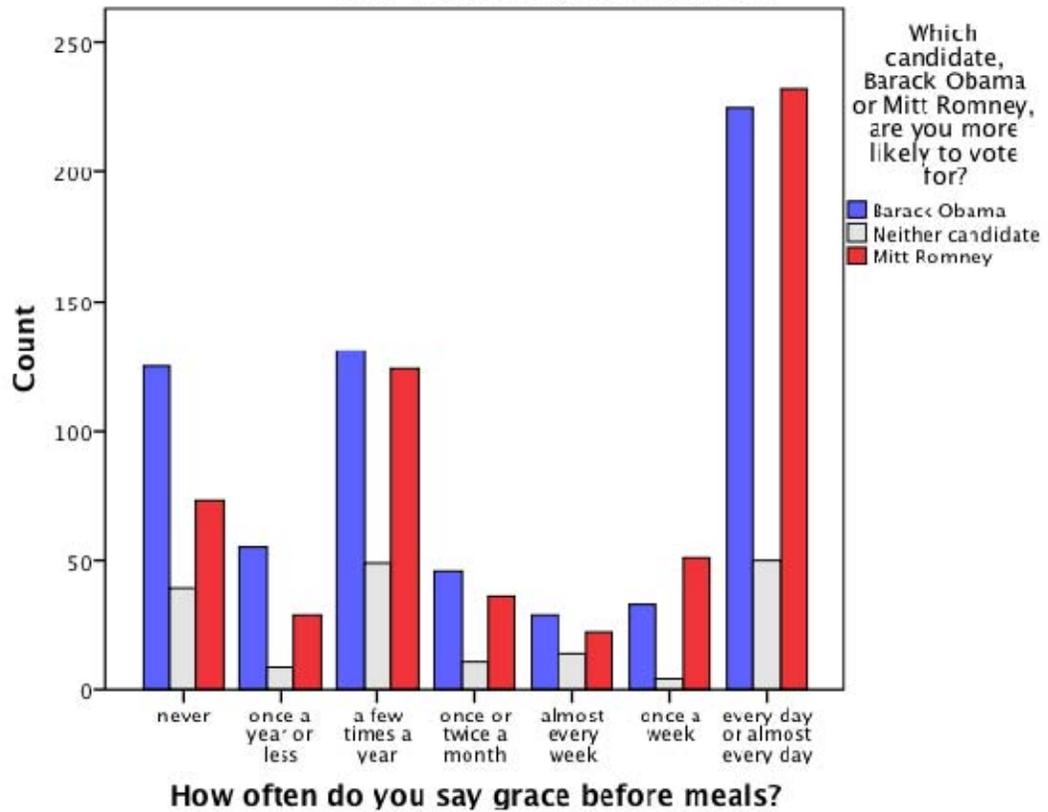
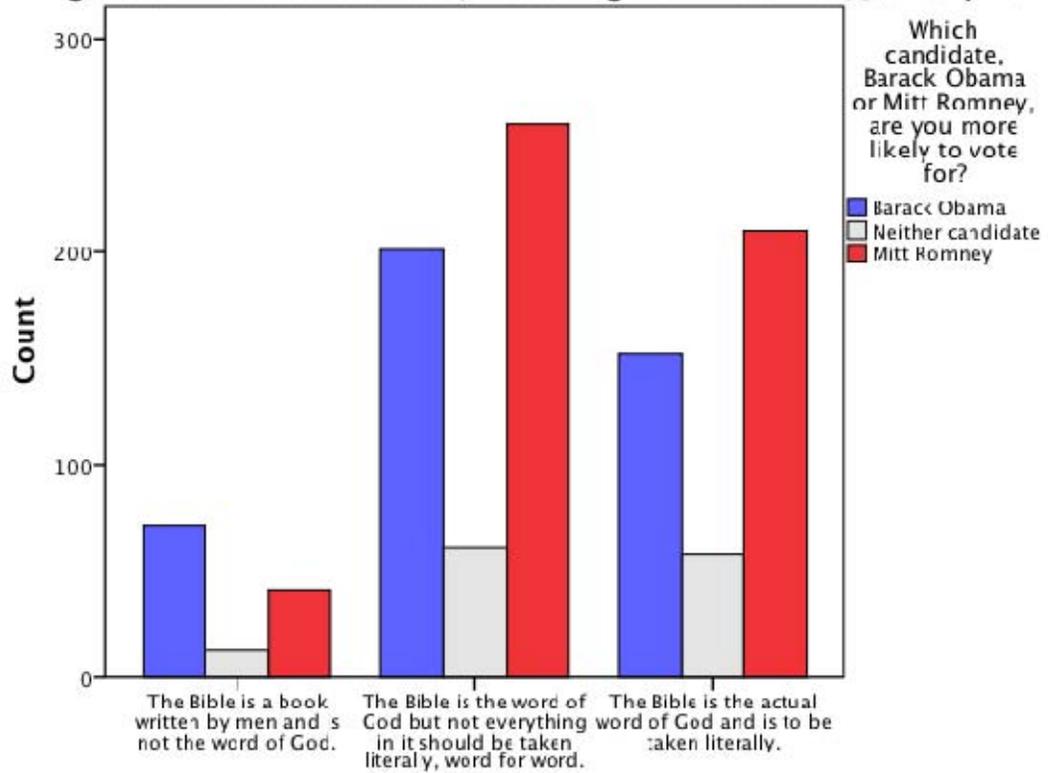


Figure 6. Views of the Bible, Excluding Non-Believers, January 2012.



Which of these statements comes closest to describing your feelings about the Bible?