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AMERICAN ATTITUDES ON REFUGEES FROM THE MIDDLE EAST

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**Introduction and Moderator:**

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**Discussant:**

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## P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. MCCANTS: Hi everyone, welcome. Thank you for coming. My name is Will McCants. I direct the project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World here at Brookings. We're here to discuss the roll out and the findings of our new poll conducted by Shibley Telhami on American Attitudes on Refugees from the Middle East, which sadly is a very timely topic today given the tragedy yesterday and the political turmoil and discussion surrounding the role and value of refugees in our society and their link to international terrorism.

If you'd like to follow on line the hash tag is up there, it's #refugeecrisis.

Joining us today to talk about his poll and his findings is Shibley Telhami, who is a nonresident senior fellow in the project for U.S. Relations with the Islamic World and Anwar Sadat professor for peace and development at the University of Maryland.

The discussant today is Indira Lakshmanana, who is a contributor at POLITICO and The Boston Globe, and was previously with Bloomberg and The New York Times.

This is we are holding to kick off the next few days of a conference on the Syrian refugee issue. We have a public event tomorrow night with John McCain, David Ignatious, and others to discuss the politics surrounding the refugee issue. That will be on the record. And then the following day, on Wednesday, there will be an off the record program bringing together practitioners and policy makers to see if we can come up with some innovative ways for dealing with this problem.

But now I'd like to introduce to you Shibley and to ask him to share with us his findings. Shibley? (Applause)

MR. TELHAMI: Thanks, Will. Thank you all for coming. I'm sorry that this is taking place in the shadow of such horror in Florida.

What I'd like to do today is share with you some results of a recent poll -- I mean really recent. We actually finished the polling May 31, less than 2 weeks ago, and we turned it around very quickly. In fact, I want to thank the people who helped us turn it around so quickly so we can get it to you fast, particularly -- I'm just going to go through here and just mention -- first, my colleagues at the Program for Public Consultation, particularly Steve Kull, Evan Lewis, and Claire Ramsey, who have been really good partners in helping us sort through the data and been extremely instrumental. Always great to

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work with them, The Nielson Scarborough. We have Neil Schwartz and Scott Willoth -- I think Scott is here today -- helped us a lot with this also to get it out, as well as Jordan Evangelista who is a staffer there who helped. My assistant, Brittany Kaiser, provided huge assistance to get this out quickly. Shakia Cren and Cameron from Brookings were also helpful. So a lot of people really worked hard to get this out to you.

I also want to say that this particular poll is -- you can see the methodology basically through Neilson Scarborough, but I want to say that we have a large national sample of 845 adults, but we also have a large over sample of millennials, because we wanted to particularly also find out the attitudes of millennials, not only on this issue but other issues. So we have another 735 millennials, total actual millennials, including the ones in the national sample, 863. So when I'm speaking about the attitudes of millennials in this project I'm speaking with a lot more confidence than usual because of this over sample.

One other point to make with regard to this poll is that this is only a portion on refugees; however we have other sections which haven't analyzed -- a large section, in fact the larger section, on attitudes toward foreign policy, particularly the Middle East that we're releasing on July 11 here at 2:00 p.m., exactly 4 weeks from now. And that is going to be on how America has prioritized foreign policy, just on the eve of the conventions, and how they see Islam and Muslims, how the shifts are taking place over the past years, their views on the Arab-Israeli conflict, and broader issues. So we will release that on July 11 at 2:00 p.m. right here.

So let me turn to this particular poll which is, you know, designed to coincide with this workshop in the next two days on refugees from the Middle East. And just to start with the fact that we started with an initial statement telling people something about the refugees, basically how many the U.S. has absorbed globally since 2001, how many were from the Middle East, roughly 50,000, and how refugee is defined, and also something about the background checks that the U.S. government does routinely. And then after we give them that one statement we ask in general do you support or oppose the United States taking in refugees from the conflicts in Syria and other Middle Eastern countries after screening them for security risks.

And so here's what we get, we get 24 percent say strongly support, 35 percent say

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somewhat support. So we have 59 percent who say essentially support, but we do have a total of 41 percent between strongly opposed and somewhat opposed. So divided, but certainly a majority support accepting refugees from Middle Eastern conflict. Now, not surprisingly, when you break it down demographically you find the following: first of all millennials, defined by the way we're defining millennials in this survey is people is from 18-24, so if you're looking here the black are those 18-24 and the millennials support accepting refugees in larger numbers. So you can see if you add them up, 38 plus 30 -- 68 percent support. And if you look at a party divide, not surprisingly again, democrats are far more supportive than republicans. Altogether, if you add the first two blue lines of democrats you have 77 percent of democrats at least supporting somewhat accepting refugees while only 38 percent of republicans. The independents are in between, 56 percent support. So the divide across party line is very obvious. But here is an interesting one that goes beyond party since we now have three candidates still in the mix, and we asked them -- we divided them by those who support Trump, those who support Sanders, those who support Hillary Clinton, and you could look at this -- obviously -- Trump supporters are in the black and you can see that 56 percent strongly opposed and another 21 percent oppose somewhat, so 77 percent of Trump support oppose accepting refugees as opposed to, obviously, Hillary's supports and Sanders' supporters, there are very small differences, but generally more of them support accepting refugees from conflicts in the Middle East. And we have to keep that in mind that's the way we specified it.

Now what about from Syria specifically? And we are -- tomorrow -- obviously Brookings is going to be discussing this issue a little bit more intensively, do they have different attitudes if you limit it to Syria. And not really much. If you combine the somewhat and strongly you get 56 percent say yes, and then you get as opposed to 59 percent for general Middle East conflict, and 43 percent say no. And again you get millennials to be more supportive, you get democrats more supportive, and you get Trump supporters most opposed by and large, and very little difference among the supporters of Hillary and Sanders. In fact they're identical actually on this issue. So that's what we have on this issue. And I'm going to come back to this a little bit later on, you'll see why, comparing countries, refugees from different countries in the Middle East.

So you saw that a lot of people are opposing absorbing refugees, including across the

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board in totals, but particularly if you go beyond the divide. So we then ask those people who opposed accepting refugees, so which of the following concerns you most about absorbing refugees. So we basically -- this is only among those who say they don't want to accept refugees from Middle Eastern countries, so this is not all Americans (inaudible) into our sample. And so what we get is really interestingly a divide between those who are worried about terrorism, 46 percent, and those who are worried about the economic burden of accepting refugees. Almost the same number actually, the same percentages. So those who are opposing absorbing refugees are not all worried about terrorism, it's really half and half roughly, and nine percent say they're concerned about having more Muslims in the U.S. Now that number by the way is probably small because obviously unfortunately you'll see from other data people link Islamic terrorism, and so you're going to find more about the worries in terrorism related to this issue. But nonetheless, you know, you could see that the economic burden question appears to be a big one, more than we thought. And again, you know, the partisan divide is obvious on almost every issue, you know, with the republicans being more concerned about terrorism, with Trump supporters being more concerned about terrorism.

Now we shift to a question of moral obligation, which is apart from the question of whether or not the U.S. should accept more refugees, does the U.S. have a moral obligation to help refugees from the following countries, and we specified these three conflict countries that have been contributing a large number of refugees, Libya, Iraq, and Syria, to see whether they have some differentiation in their minds. And the bottom line of this -- and you'll see - is that Americans are really surprisingly divided -- I say surprisingly because -- I'll come back to some data that tells you why I'm surprised that they're so divided on moral obligation. I want you to read this question closely. It is saying does the United States have a moral obligation to help refugees. It's not a question of does the U.S. have a moral obligation to accept refugees. So we're talking about helping refugees, this is not about accepting refugees. And that's why it's a little bit surprising that it would be divided. It goes beyond the concern about not accepting them on American soil. And so when you look at the numbers you could see how divided they are. On Libya, only 49 percent say they have some or high moral obligation, 50 percent say we have no obligation. Divided right down the middle. With Iraq they have a little more obligation. The purple line is yes, you know, for some obligation or high obligation, 54 percent say they feel some

high or a lot of obligations, some higher or some obligation. And with Syria it's somewhere in between. Again, you know, within the margin of error the division again really pretty much divided down the middle on this issue.

Now again demographically it's really fascinating. So look at Trump supporters versus supporters of Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders. 77 percent of Trump supporters say they have no obligation to certainly -- this is toward Libya, refugees from Libya, while 66 percent for both Bernie Sanders and Hillary Clinton supporters who say we have some or high obligation. The same thing holds, you know, if you look at Iraq, 69 percent of Trump supporters say no obligation. With Syria 74 percent of Trump supporters we have no obligation.

Now when I say it's surprising, one reason I find it surprising is the following, is look at this question, how much of a role do you believe the 2003 Iraq war has played in the events leading to the emergence of the refugee crisis in Syria, significant role, small role, or no role. And look at the numbers, only 11 percent say no role. And a majority, 50 percent, say significant role. Another 31 percent say a small role. And if you take into account that particularly during this election year a lot of people are blaming the United States for the Iraq war, including Trump, who is either blaming George W. Bush initially or the decision by Obama to pull out early, but he is nonetheless blaming "the mess in the Middle East" to the Iraq war and blaming our leaders, whether it's Bush or Obama for that. And obviously democrats have generally held that the war has been devastating and blame George W. Bush for it more. So the U.S., obviously the public sees some kind of connection to the Iraq war, they think the Iraq war has had a devastating impact, and yet they only -- half of them don't think we have any moral obligation. So there's some disconnect here that needs to be unpacked. Maybe we could talk about it in the discussion.

So I want to go through a few other questions. How many refugees should the U.S. sponsor and resettle in 2017? We gave them a benchmark, and the benchmark was that the Obama administration is aiming to accept 10,000 this year. So they already have a rough number in their own head based on what the Obama administration is planning to absorb this year. And so we gave them an open ended question, just type up the number that you want -- we didn't give them numbers. And thanks to Neilson Scarborough, they're very good at dealing with open ended questions and tabulating it for us.

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So what we have here is the median number is roughly 15,000 -- actually 10,000 in the total -- 15,000 for democrats, 15,000 for independents -- I believe that's a typo in the end -- the total is 10,000 for the benchmark as well? Okay. But look at the median -- at the mean number, where people write any number you want. They're pretty high actually. I mean you have to take both of these numbers into account, the median and the mean, but for the total mean number, 58,928, more than 83,000 for democrats, even for republicans over 35,000.

In your estimation how many refugees have been arrested in the United States since 9/11 over terrorism charges? Now by the way there have been I believe over 800,000 refugees accepted during that period. This is global; this is not just the Middle East. And the correct answer, just in case you don't know it, is three. And actually maybe one or two are on tenuous charges. So that is it, three people were charged with accusations of planning terrorism since -- out of the hundreds of thousands refugees who came into the U.S. But what does the public think? And we didn't give them that information obviously. Only 14 percent said fewer than 5. So only 14 percent guessed this answer. Another 26 percent said less than 25, 30 percent said fewer than 100, and 28 percent said over 100. Obviously the public is overestimating the connection between terrorism and refugees. That's -- you can't be any clearer than that. It's very obvious and we can talk about, you know, why that is. And as you might guess again, you know, there's also a divide. It's still pretty -- the same trend holds across party divide, but republicans tend to think there are more than democrats and independents do. Look at the loss number, 36 percent of republicans think more than 100 compared to 23 percent for democrats, 25 percent for independents.

Here are some ways the United States might respond to the refugee crisis. Please tell us whether you support or oppose the following measures. Now here we give them options of how to deal with the refugee issue and see how they rank it on a scale. And then I'm going to give you the -- they rank it across the board in terms of support, what is the percentage of people who support the given option. The U.S. government should take more in, more refugees into the U.S. Meaning the U.S. government itself as an agent should do that. That's 47 percent support that. Individuals and community groups should sponsor more refugees in the U.S., so let's do on American soil, you get 60 percent who support that. Obviously they prefer nongovernmental organizations to do it, but they seem to be open to

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settling more on American soil. 60 percent say the U.S. should give financial support to charities helping refugees abroad, and 79 percent say the U.S. should send humanitarian professionals to help refugees abroad. So you could see that the options that are nongovernmental get the highest and the options that are not on American soil get the highest numbers.

You know, in some ways -- let's see, this is just a breakdown by party -- I'm going to skip that. If some of these Syrian refugees came to live in your state or community do you think they would be welcome? And this obviously is self-perception about assessment of their community or state, about whether it would be embracing or not. And we have 55 percent saying yes, 44 percent say no. Very divided on that. And you can see actually millennials don't make much of a difference here. Democrats, republicans -- democrats a little bit more hospitable, 61 percent say that they would be accepted and welcomed. But still nearly half of the rest also feel the same way.

As you may know American laws prohibit discriminating against people, including refugees, solely on the basis of their ethnic or religious background. Does this incline you to be more or less accepting of Syrian refugees in the U.S.? Now, okay, so what is this question about? I mean it was hard to figure out how you can ask a question saying we know -- we hear a lot that people are accepting more of Christian refugees or not so much of Muslim refugees, but people don't want to possibly admit that. That may be true, but it's hard to ask that directly. And so we asked more about whether they want to differentiate among people or not as a matter of whether that would matter all to them. And what we have is actually, you know, the vast majority, 72 percent, say it wouldn't make a difference, but 15 percent say they would be more inclined to accept if -- and 13 percent say actually this constraint, the Constitutional constraint makes them less accepting, not more accepting.

If the U.S. institutes a refugee policy excluding single men would you support the U.S. accepting more refugees? Now as you know, this is one of the things that have been talked about, so wanted to test it out, whether in fact people would then be more open to accepting refugees. And frankly we see 70 percent say it wouldn't make a difference, and 28 percent say yes, they probably would be more inclined. But when we looked at those 28 percent the overwhelming number of them were already people who were actually supportive of accepting refugees. And practically no one changed their mind. There were like less than three percent who ultimately changed their mind because of this thing. So it



really doesn't make much of a difference.

And based on what you've seen, heard, read, what do you think about Europe's response to the migrant crisis, and just sort of to see whether they think Europe is doing a good job, bad job.

European nations are doing too much, 20 percent, are doing as much as they can be expected to do, 36 percent, European nations should be doing more, 17 percent, don't know/can't say, 26 percent. So, you know, Americans are really divided on this, but more people think they are doing about as good as could be expected.

How do you think the U.S. should deal with the Syrian refugees who are already in this country? And this of course -- I'm saying this because we've heard all kinds of unfortunate ideas out there in the discourse. And so you welcome them and help absorb them into American society or expel them? And so we have obviously 76 percent who say welcome them and help absorb them into American society and 21 percent who actually say expel them. And then when you look at this across demographics, you know, the same percentage roughly holds a little more -- millennials are certainly more welcoming than the rest. And along republican and democrat and independent lines you have more democrats than independent accepting them than republicans, but still the majority of the republicans say welcome them.

Now here is where a lot of the difference is, as you can tell, among those who support the candidacy of Donald Trump, about half say expel them, 48 percent, and 46 percent say absorb them. So they're completely divided, equally divided between expelling them and accepting them and welcoming them. And among the supporters of Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders, 91 percent say accept them and welcome them. So you think the U.S. should deal with -- okay, I'll just go through -- do you support the proposal for a total -- now, I have to preface this. This is of course the quote that's taken from Donald Trump when we know that the awful idea that he put out there for a total shut down of Muslims entering the United States until "our country representatives can figure out what is going on". So we put that quote exactly as it is because we wanted to be just accurate about what he has said, but we didn't say who said it. We just said, you know, what do you think? What do you feel about this proposal? And there's more by the way on this attitude towards the Muslim world, substantially more for the July thing because we haven't analyzed it yet, this huge amount of data on attitudes towards Islam and Muslims. And so

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surprisingly it's a really a high number of people who say yes, they support the proposal. Now I want to tell you that we have debated even putting this question as is here among us. And the reason why we debated it is to be fair to the question like that you have to have a set of other questions. Do you mean you're going to exclude like heads of state who are Muslim, do you mean you're going to exclude people whom you're trading with who are Muslim, do you mean you're going to exclude the Mayor of London. And when people start thinking about it they start changing their mind. As you know, even Trump himself said oh no, I don't mean that and no, I don't mean that, and no, I don't mean that. So keep that in mind. So don't over interpret this result. But nonetheless the initial inclination is really quite surprising, 38 percent say yes to this. And then when you break it down across different lines, you know, you find again millennials are the least inclined to say keep them out. You find a huge divide across parties with the -- look at the difference between the red and the blue on that, 61 percent say yes of republicans, 61 percent of republicans agree with that statement, 81 percent of democrats reject it. And look at the numbers when it comes to supporters of political candidates. So 80 percent of Donald Trump's supporters agree with this statement. Obviously this is his own statement, although we didn't say it, it's been obviously out there in the discourse.

Who would you like to see take the lead in addressing the needs of refugees once they are in the United States? Not surprisingly, most people would like to have charities and other nongovernmental organizations do it. 29 percent say the federal government, 17 percent the states. And across the party divide, again not surprising, you know, fewer republicans say the federal government or the state and more of them say charities. Now this should be on a scale, not when a scale, on a scale of 0 to 5, where 0 is not important and 5 is very important, how would you rate the following steps to deal with the Syrian refugees once they arrive? These are practical steps of how to deal with communities of refugees once they are in the United States of America and we give them this scale of 0 to 5. But we are going to show you not every single scale, just for time reasons, but the percentage of those who say very important, that this measure is very important, the percentage of people who rate these steps very important. So when you look at it 64 percent say English language training is very important, 46 percent say providing K-12 education is very important, job readiness, 33 percent, resettlement services, 31 percent. At the bottom is computer training programs. It's not that they don't think any of these have any

importance because it's a scale from 0 to 5, but these are the percentages who say these are very important.

One final question that I will end with, which is to see how they rate their own openness to refugees from different regions from the world. And we gave them several regions, South America, Central America, Africa, the Middle East, and East Asia. On a scale of 0 to 10 to see, you know, the degree of openness, where 10 is being very open and 0 is not being open, and then we got the mean for each of the options and the median. And so here's what we get, we get -- obviously the Middle East is the bottom. The mean for being open is 4.83 on a scale of 0 to 10 and all other options are over 5.68 or above with South America almost 6 percent. So clearly people are somewhat -- I don't want to make too much of it because again it's a scale -- appear to be somewhat less comfortable with refugees from the Middle East than from other parts of the world.

So I'll end with that and invite my colleagues to join me on the stage for a conversation. Thank you very much. (Applause)

MR. MCCANTS: All right. Thank you very much, Shibley. Indira is our discussant today, so I want to quickly turn it over to her to get her thoughts on what you just heard.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: Thank you so much. I just wanted to correct thing in my bio when you introduced me, I wrote a column for the International Herald Tribune for a couple of years, so I think that's what you were thinking of, but I never worked for The New York Times.

So I was really interested in the results of this poll and I think there were maybe two things in the poll that heartened me the most. One was the overall number of course that essentially 6 in 10 Americans say that they support taking in refugees from conflicts after they've been screened for security risks. But I was heartened also that there was very little support for expelling people once they were already here, and that amongst the things that people thought were very important for refugees was K-12 education. And what that says to me is that it's people who are looking at the future, they're looking at the children of the kids who are coming, so presumably they're not attributing any bad attributes to them and they're looking at the importance of the long run integration. It was something you didn't discuss in these slides, but one of the things in your report also shows that more Americans support a slow integration of refugees into American society rather than a fast one. And I'm not exactly sure what

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that means, if that's because people are being respectful of the home community from which these refugees come versus trying to make them American all at once. Maybe you have some thoughts on that, but I thought that was interesting.

I think that, you know, the release of this poll on a day like today after the Orlando horror is really important because as many of you who are following the political cycle know, Donald Trump immediately jumped out yesterday on Twitter and sort of took credit, saying I was right, thank you to all of you who said I was right, and I was right about this, and by which he meant that this is Islamic terrorism, and he also said see, I was right about the Muslim ban, the thing that Shibley put up at the end about how we should stop all Muslims from coming in. What I thought was curious about that actually Omar Mateen, the shooter in Orlando, was born in New York just like Donald Trump was born in New York. So I wasn't quite sure what he meant. Any kind of a ban wouldn't keep either of those men out of the United States (laughter), so I'm not -- maybe we should get one, I don't know. But I thought that that was interesting. And there is no question that people who already support Trump, not to mention those who are susceptible to those kinds of views, that's not going to mean anything to them, that's going to wash right over them, the fact that Omar Mateen was born in New York. I think they will basically combine it with this issue of refugees.

And that's another thing that was really striking to me about this was I would have -- I would love to see cross tabs in this, if you had them, between Americans who see terrorism, the threat of Islamic terrorism as their number one fear, crossing that with the people who then either supported or didn't support having refugees. And the reason I say that is because of course, you know, we had people who then said well what's your number one concern, and you had the people who said terrorism is my concern versus economic integration. But it would be really interesting to see if Americans who think, for example, that climate change is the biggest problem, or who think the economy is the biggest problem, whether they are more open to accepting refugees than people who think terrorism is the biggest problem, because those people are making a link in their head. And I don't know whether that is something that you looked at in this report.

I also was interested in cross tabs about self-identification beyond millennial, republican, democrat, and age. And I was thinking about whether being a racial or ethnic minority, whether having a

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high education versus less education, and also whether being a self-described religious versus non-affiliated person, whether that had an effect. And I remember looking at a Pew poll that came out in fall looking at American attitudes towards refugees and I was struck that the people who had the most support were racial and ethnic minorities, were in favor of allowing refugees in, young people, which you show clearly with this millennial, highly educated people with college and professional degrees, and also, interestingly, Catholics as well as those who consider themselves religiously unaffiliated. In contrast, main line Protestants and Evangelical Protestants were against letting in refugees, a majority were against. So I thought that that would be interesting to know whether that was something that you looked at.

MR. TELHAMI: Yes. Thanks a lot for these comments. And yes, we have actually incredible demographics on religion, including all the different denominations spelled out, in part because I'm also writing a book on the Evangelicals in the Middle East. And I released a poll here in December on the Evangelicals in the Middle East and their attitudes. So we have a lot of data to compare, and you're right in previous on almost every dimension the ethnic one also matters. Minorities have different views on even broader issues on the Middle East, even on the Arab-Israeli issue. Certainly attitudes toward Islam in the previous poll and the one that we're going to show in July, we've done that.

But I want to say there are a couple of interesting demographics that we specifically analyzed here that are in the graphic, but I didn't talk about them. And not surprisingly, just if you ask -- we added some new demographics we didn't have in the past, for example, whether people had any relatives, even distant relatives living outside the U.S. It didn't matter where, it could be Canada, it could be Mexico, but outside the U.S. We asked questions about whether or not they had a passport to see whether people are inclined to be more international, whether they spoke a language other than English. It didn't matter what, it could be Spanish, it could be French, we didn't ask specifically about the Middle East. And we asked whether they knew any Muslims, well or not well, or not at all. And so if you look all these international dimensions we correlated those with the degree to which they're open to absorbing refugees, more refugees than the U.S. As you might expect, it works in every single location. Those who know no Muslims at all are the most opposed to refugees from the Middle East. Those who don't speak any foreign languages are more opposed to refugees. Those who don't have passports are more

opposed to refugees. So from all these dimensions --

MS. LAKSHMANAN: I was surprised of how many who had passports though were also opposed to refugees.

MR. TELHAMI: You're going to have people who are, of course, you know, in every single -- you know, everybody is diverse, no community -- but across the board the percentages go up. It's not that everybody who's going to have a passport is going to be open to it, or everybody who knows Muslims is going to be open to it. But the percentages go up dramatically, and you can see it throughout. So these things matter. And that's where we should go essentially because basically where's the fear coming from and where is also the sense of obligation coming from, because I'm worried. I mean the -- we all understand the fear, not about how people link it, but everybody can be frightened. We all feel frightened when have like the 9/11 attack or the horror that just happened in Florida. It's a question of how you analyze it, what you see. You can see that people don't fear the same thing; you could see that across the board. And number two, you know, why are some people feeling more moral obligation than not?

Now you mentioned the Christian groups. Now one of the questions I ask is -- that's a broad question, it's not linked to the refugees -- how people evaluate the golden rule of do unto others what you want done unto you. And I give them a scale of 0 to 10, with 10 being the single most important thing in my life and 0 it's not very important to it's not important at all. A scale of 0 to 10. Over 80 percent of Americans, over 90 percent of Evangelicals, think the golden rule is extremely important or the single most important rule of their lives, between 8 and 10. So I mean so here you are -- I mean forget about the responsibility for just -- just even as a general approach to life here we are, you know, do unto others what -- people have a sense of self that they're good, that they want to do good, that they want to do, you know, unto others what they want done to themselves. And then you add to that the fact that they feel some relationship between the horrific war in Iraq that has been so devastating in the region, for which they blame partly on our leaders, whether democrat or republican, they blame each other, but they blame American leaders for that devastation so that the part of the refugee crisis coming out of conflicts in the Middle East is deriving out of acts initiated by the United States. And the public believes that and yet only half say we have a moral obligation toward refugees. Now that's something that I think should make us

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think, you know, beyond the question of linking the terrorism and the fear and what explains the links in their own minds.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: I think you're quite right. And I think also the fact that -- you know, again I'm not sure if your cross tabs show this, but that other studies have shown that people who consider themselves atheists or non-practitioners of religion, and Catholics, those two groups together feel a high moral obligation to follow the golden rule on this issue of refugees, whereas Evangelicals as well as main line Protestants do not. And I don't know what the reason is for that. And I wonder is it about messaging to certain communities or is it simply about an overlay of political affiliations that those groups have.

MR. TELHAMI: We will control for that. We haven't done that specifically yet in terms of the denominations. But I could tell you that in the past in the poll that we did back in December we know that Evangelicals in particular were having mixed views on this issue. Remember early on in the primaries Ben Carson was leading before Trump took over. Ben Carson was leading in part because he appealed to the Evangelicals. And as you know they took a position -- Ben Carson, among others, took a position against admitting more refugees in the U.S., early on. And so they immediately felt heat from Evangelical and mainstream, with people going to them and saying we've got to find a way to help. And the way he chose to address that didn't quite work for him, was to go out to Jordan into a refugee camp to show that he cares, but doesn't want them in the U.S., but he wants to help them because his constituency was putting some heat on him and they were feeling some of the heat. So the issue obviously is that I happen to think that people care, they just -- but they want to rationalize and they want an easy way out. And if you don't push them to see the contradictions they prefer not to face them. And you've got to put out the moral responsibility in front of them over and over and over again, not go on the defensive. Because the more you go on the defensive and talk about fear, the more you allow them to rationalize.

And that's my own view of this, is that we don't do enough. I mean I don't blame the Obama administration for being reluctant to be engaged in wars in the Middle East. We've seen what that has brought. But we must do more than that, the refugee issue, we have a responsibility, it's an American responsibility in part because of our role in that world. It's not all our fault, but it's partly our fault. And

because we are also the greatest and richest nation on earth, for which we have a moral obligation regardless for which refugees. We don't put that up front and we don't confront people with it because people -- you know, all people -- I don't care whether they're Evangelical, mainstream, Christian, Muslim, Jews, everybody has a moral dimension to their lives. And as you can see from this poll about, you know, 80 percent of Americans think it's the -- you know they scored 8 to 10 on a scale as the single most important rule in their lives. And it means that they care, but they rationalize, like we all do, we all do, and we prefer to do that, it's the easy way out. But you've got to hammer it in and I don't think we do that enough in the discourse, to put it up front.

And thank you, Will, for organizing this conference the next two days because we do have a moral obligation to confront that issue.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: Well, I was honestly surprised at how close the numbers were on moral obligation, how the country was basically evenly divided 50-50 between people who think there is a moral obligation and people who think there isn't. And this again surprised me for the same reason that I would think that most Americans would at least save themselves, believe of themselves, whether or not it's true, that they're moral people and that they're good to other people. But the fact that it's divided 50-50 shows that they don't really -- at least half of the people feel they don't really have an obligation despite the fact that your numbers -- and you showed some of these slides -- show that particularly on the case of Iraq they feel that we are at fault and that our behavior in Iraq has caused the refugees there. And even with Syria, less so with Libya, but with Iraq and Syria I was surprised at how many people say yes, we bear some or a large part of responsibility for what happened, and yet that is not an equivalent to the number of people who say we have a moral obligation to do something about the refugees from that country.

Since this is definitely going to reverberate throughout the political campaign, I printed out some of the things that the major candidates have said about the refugee issue. So Hillary Clinton has said that it's "not smart to summarily reject Muslim refugees". But it's interesting why -- she said this last November -- because of its potential impact on law enforcement. So she wasn't making the moral argument, she was making in a way a sort of terrorism argument, saying if you're in law enforcement and you want people in the communities that you're looking at and you want to get information from them, if



you want them to help you, then you shouldn't be sending a message that we don't want to take any Muslims whatsoever, that's not good for law enforcement. So I thought that was a curious reasoning that she gave, because it wasn't about sort of appealing to people's better selves, it was about no, we have to take refugees because if we reject Muslims then Muslims in Muslim communities in America aren't going to rat out the bad apples amongst them. I'm not saying that's the only time, but that's one thing she said. Then she also gave a speech last November at the Council on Foreign Relations where she said -- this is where she took a more moral position -- and she said turning away orphans, applying a religious test where you wouldn't take Muslims but you'd take Christians, slamming the door on every Syrian refugee, that is not who we are. We're better than that. And remember, many of these refugees are fleeing the same terrorists who threaten us. It would be a cruel irony indeed if ISIS can force families from their homes and also prevent them from finding new ones. So there she's sort of painting -- look, you know, we're together in this, we're all fleeing the -- they're fleeing the same enemy, we're fighting that enemy, we need to take them in. And then she also makes again another comment about we've always welcomes immigrants and refugees. We have made people feel that if they did their part and sent their kids to school there would be always a place for them in America.

I expect that she will make that case even more strongly in the general election and that she will try to contrast her position with that of Donald Trump as he seems to double down and dig in on this anti Muslim, anti-other position. We know of course that Donald Trump's biggest source of support is from working class white men. And so, you know, maybe he's just thinking that's worked for him in the past. He also has said, Donald Trump, that mosques in the U.S. should be surveilled for jihadist rhetoric, and he has also said that he's used wild numbers that aren't correct. So he has accused the Obama administration of wanting to take in 250,000 refugees, which as we know is 25 times the number. They're actually only intending to take 10 and we haven't gotten there yet. So he was referring to the report about one of the terrorists who carried out the attacks in Paris posing as being a Syrian refugee, and he said we shouldn't take in all those people, they're going to have big problems, that's just insane, terrible.

So I think we'll be hearing more of that from Donald Trump as well.

MR. MCCANTS: Shibley, I wanted to ask you a question about the numbers because it was interesting to me ---- this open ended question you asked was fabulous -- because it gives us a

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sense of where the American public is. And if you look at the averages they're above what is being proposed at 10,000 right now. But when you look at the median for both republicans and democrats it hovers around 10,000. And my question to you -- and Indira please jump in -- my question to you is did the Obama administration set expectations so low? I mean it struck me that this is the official number that has been put out and has it influenced people's thinking about what we can do. If the administration had said 100,000 would that be the number that people settled on?

MR. TELHAMI: That's a really excellent question. And I happen to agree with the general gist of what you're saying, that I think it was a low number that they put out there. And you can see how important it is because obviously that becomes the median in a way that against people are -- which people are throwing out numbers. People don't realize, for example, you know how many other countries have absorbed, that neighboring countries have absorbed, anywhere up to five million refugees surrounding Syria, how many Europe has absorbed. So the numbers that we're talking about are miniscule in comparison. And I think a stronger case could have been made. As you know a lot of us, many of us, some within the political process, including Governor O'Malley of Maryland when he was a candidate put out 100,000 target number, which I think is probably better. Yes, it influenced the discourse. The public has a sense just based on what we're talking about of exaggerated numbers that we actually accept as it is. They have much more toleration than we think. We see that -- you know, when you ask them a question out of the blue without giving them any background, how many refugees do you think have been involved or have been arrested for terrorism, how they overestimate this by a great deal. So yes, leadership has a role to play and that's why I think going back to the theme, whether it's on how many should we accept as the United States of America or do we have a moral responsibility as the United States of America. Going back to that theme you started with, yes that's the surprise it's only half feel an obligation, and it's not all due to our political leadership, but political leadership has a role to play in setting a tone or making the argument.

And what I worry about is that in the political campaign we haven't run the security issue because of the fear, so that even the refugee issue you're going to say it's better for our security if we do X instead of doing Y. You need to do that, it's important. Security is paramount and you have to make that argument. But that's not enough of an argument and you can't make that the core argument because

if you do you're playing into the hands of the opponents who want to grab you. You're just playing by the rules. You're not putting out on the table the moral dimension of the issue. That so happened to be completely separate anyway from the security. There's no tie-in as we could see from the numbers. But you have to make the case and yes, I think that we haven't made it forcefully enough. I think the Obama administration has not made it forcefully enough.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: It sounds like you're saying that Hillary Clinton needs to make it more forcefully in her campaign.

MR. TELHAMI: Yes.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: That she needs to make --

MR. TELHAMI: Yes, I am.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: She needs to underscore the moral element more.

MR. TELHAMI: Yes. Yes, I am.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: And, you know, she talks a lot about American exceptionalism as do a lot of mainstream candidates, and if one can talk about American exceptionalism and American responsibilities, for example, to provide a nuclear umbrella over our allies in Japan and Korea, or have a forward based force in Germany and throughout Europe, then don't we also have a moral obligation to do good, to take in people. So it sounds like you are saying she should make that a stronger case.

MR. TELHAMI: Yes. And she could do it on both -- I mean on that issue and the issue that we -- you know, the fact that we have a moral obligation toward any refugees given how big and rich we are. But separate from that, because of these events in the Middle East we have been part of these events. Yes, there are a lot of people who are responsible for or spread the blame, but we're part of these events. They don't come out of the blue sky; we were a key player in the events that led to these refugees crises. So we have an obligation about what we have done, not just about the pure theoretical moral obligation everyone has. So these are not detached from us.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: That's interesting because the comments that Bernie Sanders has made have largely been about how others need to take the lead, Arab countries need to take the lead, European countries need to take the lead, we don't need to take the lead. So I wonder, you know, it's almost as if Hillary Clinton's supporters are already the people who believe that this is our fault and we

have a moral obligation. If she's trying to appeal to Bernie Sanders' voters or Donald Trump voters, then how much room does she have in making the moral obligation case more strongly? I mean I wonder.

MR. TELHAMI: But let's differentiate between political intervention and military intervention in the Middle East and the humanitarian intervention to help refugees. Those are not the same. So I could take a position as saying look, we're not going to be able to solve the political problems in the Middle East, we're not going to be able -- certainly not by war, and therefore we shouldn't take the lead militarily to end the conflict in Syria or Yemen or Libya. But I could still say we have a high moral obligation to help the refugees and we need to do more. Those are not the same issue. And as I said I'm actually not an interventionist in my own outlook. I have not blamed the Obama administration for being reluctant to intervene militarily. I haven't seen military intervention work very well in the Middle East when the United States took the lead. So I don't have a problem with that as much. We can agree on the margins, we can disagree on the margins, but that's a separate question from our moral obligation for the millions of refugees that have emerged out of these conflicts and our responsibility, both purely and generally and specifically because we have been involved in these conflicts. And the emergence of that refugee problem cannot be separated in part from our own involvement in these conflicts.

MR. MCCANTS: Shibley, I have a final question, then I want to throw it open to the audience, and that has to do with the demographic background of the people who oppose letting in refugees. Something that I noticed -- I wasn't sure if it was up on the slides or not, but it had to do with the age of people who oppose letting in the refugee. A lot of them tended to be older. And I wonder if age might be a better explanation than party identity, to what extent you saw those two things closely related or not. And then building on that, the other thing that really struck me was it was the younger respondents who were almost twice as likely to view the refugee threat as terrorism and not as economic threat. And it was the older voters who viewed it as an economic threat. And I would have thought, based on my own stereotypes, it would have been exactly the opposite, that it would be younger people -- particularly since you oversampled millennials that would be worried about jobs but it wasn't.

MR. TELHAMI: That's a mirage. Let me tell you why. Because what you're looking at -- remember when we asked that question was only among people who opposed -- and I repeated that -- who opposed absorbing refugees. The overwhelming majority of millennials supported absorbing

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refugees. So those millennials who opposed accepting refugees were very, very small. So when you divide them it's not going to be meaningful differentiation in the results by virtue of the fact they were very small. So that really doesn't tell you the story about the age.

MR. MC CANTS: Okay.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: May I ask Shibley one question?

MR. MCCANTS: Mm-hmm, sure.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: There was of course a democrat-republican divide on who should take the lead, the federal government versus NGOs and religious groups, and not surprisingly democrats for favoring the federal government taking the lead and republicans were favoring community groups.

MR. TELHAMI: Surprise, surprise.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: Yeah, no surprise there. But overall it seemed in terms of policy implications of what this means for the next president, the easiest thing to do in terms of getting it through Congress and having the approval of the American people, would be sending some sort of humanitarian corps of American doctors and nurses and other workers overseas, somehow more than what is already being done by Mercy Corps and other related groups, or sending more money. Because there was also I thought a surprising amount of support for sending more money overseas.

But do you think that whoever is elected is going to be willing to take a more difficult decision to stand up and say not only make the moral argument, but say no we actually have to open our doors and take more people? I mean one argument they could make is what a complete contrast this is from Europe. In Europe they're just arriving in Europe and showing up in refugee camps or placement centers as they are in Middle Eastern countries. Here, there's this whole two year process. There's nobody who's just showing up.

MR. TELHAMI: Yeah, I think -- you know I don't know obviously what will happen after the election. It's going to depend on who gets elected for one thing. But we know they've taken different positions on this issue, but between now and the election I don't see any political candidate taking a lead in forcefully proposing admitting larger numbers of refugees, just because they will rationalize it saying it's not going to make a difference between now and the election, why open that issue. We can make that decision afterwards. And probably go more on the softer side of helping refugees that are less

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controversial and letting people rationalize. And I think that's probably what I see coming in the political debate. But I do think that whoever gets elected, but especially if it's Hillary Clinton, I think this issue will be revisited, I think this issue will be revisited.

MR. MCCANTS: All right. I'm going to throw it open to the audience. I'm going to take a couple of questions. If you can please state your name and affiliation if you have any. Please wait for the microphone to come to you. The woman in the black, yes. Just wait for the microphone please.

QUESTIONER: Hi, my name is Sarah and I'm a freelance writer for NIAC, the National Iranian American Council. I wanted to ask you how do you explain the fact that the U.S. accepted hundreds of thousands of Iranian refugees after the deposition of the Shah at that time, and a country that yelled death to America, had Americans hostage, had brutal human rights records, but then now we have a similar situation now, we have such an aversion towards these similarly persecuted religious minorities, same groups of people, and even they accepted members of the monarchy, which was a completely radical case as well. So how would you explain this historical anomaly I guess?

MR. MC CANTS: Okay. More?

MR. TELHAMI: Yes.

QUESTIONER: Thanks very much, and as always thank you, Shibley, for giving us real information. I want to ask a question that -- it's not clear to me whether this can be intuited from your research or not, but I want to pose it to you anyway.

One of the most interesting things that Hillary Clinton has said -- we were reminded of this last week -- a group met with Jeffrey Goldberg who has done this remarkable piece on the Obama doctrine -- and he reminded us that one of the things that Hillary Clinton has been saying is that American does a lousy job of telling its story to itself and to others. And without expanding on that I want to ask whether the data that you talk about relative to the golden rule where the very high percentages of people, irrespective of the denominations that they are a part of and -- that there is this strong support for the golden rule. And I wonder whether the data in this poll suggests that it could be a winning strategy for Hillary Clinton despite Orlando. And let's face it, there's a pretty good chance this will happen before election time somewhere else in this country. Whether you think that could be a winning strategy, that despite the fear factor, despite all the stuff, that there is enough support in the American electorate for a

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leader who says, I know these are tough times, I know it's terrifying, but we're better than that, we need to -- fill in the blanks -- take refugees, et cetera.

MR. MCCANTS: Thank you. And one more right here in the black.

QUESTIONER: Hi. I'm (inaudible); I'm from the Truman Scholarship Foundation. I actually had a quick question about the civic integration of immigrants, refugees, and other new American populations. I'm curious what you think the role of immigrants, refugees, including undocumented immigrants. There are a lot of folks who are working in advocacy, are going to make a difference at the ballot box but also in community organizing and other kind of civic institutions.

MR. MCCANTS: Okay. So we have I think two related questions and then one about the community organizing and absorbing the refugees. The two that are related have to do with why in the past have Americans been more willing to accept refugees from Muslim majority countries than we see right now. And I'm even mindful of the fact, Shibley, if I'm not misremembering, that before the attacks in San Bernadino the American public polled higher in terms of support for refugees than they did after the attack. And I'm interested to see how the tragedy in Orlando plays out too.

And so, building on that, how does a politician then navigate this politics of fear because it is quite powerful and the wonky responses can tend to fall a little bit flat?

MR. TELHAMI: Do you want to start?

MS. LAKSHMANAN: Please.

MR. TELHAMI: So first of all, on the Iran refugees versus now, I mean of course it's a different time. I mean, you know, this is a post 9/11 world and really a lot has changed since then and I think that's probably the context in which we're operating right now as people create these linkages because of that fear.

But as to Gary's question, you know, I think it's a very important question because of what I said earlier about the people -- you know, we all have different tendencies. It's not like are there people who fear and people who don't fear, we all fear. It's not like I'm not afraid after I watch what happened in Florida for my kids, or you're not afraid. And it's not like the moral and immoral people, most people are also moral. I mean we're all divided, we're all having to make a decision, we're all having to balance these tendencies in times of crisis and the balance is tipped one way or the other. And it's tipped

one way or the other in part of how we process these issues. And that's why I think yes, leaders have to make us aware of that dimension of the self. The moral dimension, always put it up front. And you can't ignore the fear, its part of -- it's everybody. It's not just you only appeal -- oh, the independents or the republicans, they're the ones who fear, no, every democrat is also fearful. But it's just a question of how you relate that and you reconcile it with the other dimension that you have. And unless you put it out there it's very easy for us to forget -- in the moments of fear to forget the other dimensions.

So yes, we need to put it out there and I think it should be made a case, and I think actually it is being made a case in the democrat candidate. I mean the bridges versus walls, what is that about? I mean that's a theme. It has to be hammered; it has to be made clear.

Now when it comes to events, just to go back to tie it into your point, Will, so what do people do when something horrible like this happens? Of course there's always a spike in public opinion. You know, people become more fearful and less accepting a little bit and we see that. But it really doesn't last most of the time. It just bumps. And so you look at it in the long-term. If you have it sustained over a period of time, then you're going to have some changes. 9/11 obviously was revolutionary in a sense because of the immensity of it. And I wonder, particularly now because we are in a political campaign, issues always matter, but frankly issues start mattering less because you embrace a candidate or a party over an ideology or a philosophy or an identity. So people have already figured out who they are. They are either anti Trump or pro Trump, for Hillary with the democrats or Sanders. And on many issues they don't have a strong opinion, they don't know much about the Middle East, they don't know much about Islam and Muslims. And so at some point they make a leap of faith and it's not about making necessarily a rationale argument, but linking themselves up to the world of Bernie Sanders or to the world of Hillary Clinton or to the world of Donald Trump. That's why the cues they get from these leaders matter a lot in the middle of a campaign. That's what people are focused on. They're linking themselves, their identity, to these people and philosophies and ideologies. And when they don't want to make an opinion or don't want to take the time to learn the issues and don't have a strong opinion, they're going to take the cues from them. And these cues matter a lot. And so I think leadership is central.

MR. MCCANTS: Indira, do you think in today's media environment though, when we're talking in particular about terrorism, doesn't it tend to push towards viewing things in one particular way?



I mean how can we have a sober kind of conversation when you're constantly seeing scenes of carnage on television? I mean I remember myself, if I'm taking myself out of terrorism stuff, and I'm thinking about the Ebola crisis. I mean the sober commentary from political leaders was totally lost on me. And I was submerged in the media and was freaking out. And it turned out the sober commentary was right, but I was mindful even in my own self, even though the rationale part of me knew better I succumbed. It is hard not to. So how can we have this kind of debate about the morality of these politics surrounding refugees when the media environment is such as it is today?

MS. LAKSHMANAN: I think it's an excellent point. I mean you of all people, you're the ISIS expert, you would know what the real threat is from ISIS and terrorism. But I think we are in a super charged media environment. We're sort of in a hothouse. We the country, but we in Washington particularly. But think about how much -- you know, I think that if this were the 1970s the old media would be able to sort of control the way that people think. You'd have Walter Cronkite and Roger Mudd and Eric Severide sort of saying something calming to people who turned on their TV at -- I don't know what it was, 6:30 at night, and they would all believe that and things were a lot calmer. Now with a sort of 24 hour news cycle where it's not just -- the cable is constant and the talk is incessant, but the Twitter never stops and, you know, every single medial platform you can think of, even if you're on Facebook and you're just trying to do something like post pictures of your kids, you can't help being bombarded by everybody's opinion and everybody's little nugget. So I think it is hard to control for what you're talking about.

I'm thinking about how you say that you couldn't sort of take in the sober analysis from leaders about Ebola and you still got freaked out. Funnily enough, when leaders like at the CDC are telling us to get more worried about Zika, we're not getting worried enough, as we can see with Congress not having passed the Zika funding. That's sort of an aside.

But, yes, I think it is human nature, particularly in the post 9/11 world, when you were answering that question about Iranian refugees after the 1979 revolution. But I think it is -- it's a post 9/11, a post CNN, a post Twitter world, and it's very hard to manage the message. And I think that one thing you were saying about how the voters do look to their candidates to sort of have made a decision for them if they don't have time to think about what it is. One thing that I thought was very interesting from your polling was how close Bernie Sanders and Hillary Clinton voters were on all of these issues. And I

think that for the democratic side that should be heartening in the sense that at least on the basis of this very important issue sort of mitigates toward party unity for November on these issues.

MR. TELHAMI: Well, there's actually an interesting article that came out in The Monkey Cage in The Washington Post last week by Chris Akin and a colleague of his arguing, and showing actually in detail in terms of data that Bernie Sanders followers are not any more liberal than Hillary Clinton's followers. And that if you look on issues they're not any more liberal, based on polling data like mine, but others, and that people -- it's more rationalizing.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: Personality.

MR. TELHAMI: And I think that's a debate, it's a debate. It's not something that -- but there's data supporting this just like we have data on other issues, not just on Middle East issues.

But I want to go back to Will's important point, though, which is so how do we -- we all get tied up on a horrific moment like now. I mean I couldn't sleep last night, we're all following it; we want to know every little detail. Just to see the devastation that people who -- the suffering, it just kills you. So how do you -- and it takes all your attention besides. So I wasn't even preparing for this poll last night because I was preoccupied with all the other stuff. So if I made some mistakes, that's probably why.

So we all get really tied in that moment and we all the fear, we all have the concern, the security concern. But yet -- I mean here is the positive side of this is that so you say everybody, no, I'm sorry, it's not everybody that shifts their minds. Because after all of that we do the polling and we still show 59 percent want to have refugees come in. After San Bernadino we do a poll and still more people have a positive view of Muslims than a negative view of Muslims. So let's not say everybody. A large number of people and we're all -- as I said, we're all divided yes. You're talking about the dimension of us who is -- that becomes preoccupied by it. But that's why you need a reminder. It's not an easy thing for politicians; I'm not suggesting that it is. And I don't think a politician could ever separate themselves from the moment or can ever forget about the fear the people have in moments like this. They have to start with that, but then they have to go beyond that. They can't just get trapped in that moment; they have to go beyond that.

MR. MCCANTS: Right. Okay. I'll take some more questions. The gentleman in the black blazer there.

QUESTIONER: Yes, thank you. My name is (inaudible), I'm a journalist in town. I'm struck by the numbers that you cited, 800,000 since 2001, 50,000 from the Middle East, 3 tied to terrorism and so on. That of course covers the Iraq war. I wanted to ask you, how many of those 50,000 were actually from Iraq, how many from the 50,000 -- if you have these figures, how many Iraqis have we accepted considering that the U.S. was a major player in the Iraq war?

And on Syria, considering that the fiscal year is about to be over next October and thus far we've only absorbed 2500, you know, how is what happened -- this horror that happened yesterday in Orlando likely to impact the Obama ability to fulfill his obligation to accept 10,000?

Thank you.

MR. MC CANTS: All right. Thank you. Yes, down here in the front. Wait for the microphone.

QUESTIONER: Hello, thank you so much for speaking today. My name is Alex and I'm interning at the Iraq Foundation.

So my question is how do we bridge the gap, right, because being that there has been recent attacks in Paris, in Belgium, and then Orlando, it was just like how do we -- and I'm in support of taking in refugees -- but how do you like bridge the gap between moral obligation and national security? Because I mean like you said the poll and everything else saying that having refugees is a huge national security risk, how do you bridge the gap between understanding moral obligation and national security? Because the United States does have a moral obligation to protect its citizens as well. So how do you bridge that gap?

MR. MCCANTS: Thank you. One more. The fellow with the beard. Wait for the microphone.

QUESTIONER: Hi, Indira, I absolutely love it when you fill in on NPR, so I'm voting for you to take over for Diane Rehm.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: That's really sweet. (Laughter; applause).

QUESTIONER: Anyway, I wanted to draw attention to your open ended question about how many refugees we should take in. I thought it was -- as you said it's a fascinating question because across party lines people wanted to accept more than what the Obama administration is accepting. So I

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was wondering -- and that obviously disconnects with a lot of the other polling -- so I was wondering how you can really account for that, and is that a lot of misinformation, or is that also Obama over exaggerating his role in helping refugees, which hasn't been very strong. Relative to Europe 10,000 refugees, which you can easily see inside a football stadium, is very, very little.

So I was wondering how you can account for that really startling disconnect?

Thanks.

MR. MCCANTS: Thank you. Okay. We'll take those questions. Shibley, you have your choice. We have a question about the number of refugees taken in from the Middle East, and then another one about policy gap and moral obligation.

MR. TELHAMI: First on the numbers from (inaudible) on -- I don't know the exact percentage of Iraqis out of the 50,000 since 2001, but I suspect it's the largest segment from the Middle East, so I'm not sure. But regardless, it's obviously too small, especially after the 2003 Iraq war and our involvement in that war. And clearly that's something that the U.S. hasn't done enough of and in comparison to almost everybody else. I mean we're talking -- when we say, you know, Iraq and Syria's neighbors have absorbed so many millions, millions of refugees. We're talking about tiny countries, we're talking about tiny countries like Jordan and Libya, and even Syria before it was devastated, accepted like 3-4 of a million of Iraqi refugees. Now obviously there are millions of Syrian refugees.

So we're talking about small, poor countries where the percentage of refugees is now a huge chunk of the population that have emerged in comparison to, you know, yes, a drop in the bucket for us. And that's true of the Syrian refugees. The aim is 10,000, but we're nowhere near that at this point. And so it's hard to know whether we're going to even reach that goal given the checks.

I'm not sure the issue of national security, moral obligation is as big as it is in practice. In the public mind it is big, so we have to deal with it, but here are the numbers. Again, with all the refugees that came from 800,000 only 3 were arrested on charges of terrorism. So it's not like -- we do a lot of checks. I think you have to do that, but the public thinks it is much worse than it is. And we have an obligation to put that information before them to see that there isn't the kind of tension they think there is. There's always some risk, you take a risk no matter what. But that's not what you have.

The last question was on numbers of refugees that the public wants. Now remember

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what happens here with those estimates, you have to be very careful how you interpret them because again we're starting with that 10,000 information that the administration put forth. So it becomes roughly the median for the population. Democrats have a higher median, 15,000, independents have 15,000. But it becomes the benchmark. But among those who are above that benchmark, there are a lot of people who think we should take as many as a half million, not just 60,000 or 70,000. And on the low end you might have people said 0. And so those average obviously have to be -- so we have as a consequence of that when you average it out the mean comes up to over 60,000 for the whole population, but you have to keep that in mind that you have a lot of people above the 10,000, but you have a lot of people below the 10,000. So you have to keep that in mind in terms of how you interpret the numbers.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: I was just going to say in the same way that Americans have wild misperceptions of how many refugees have actually been arrested for terrorism, or how many people are being taken in, I mean it's similar to the wild misperceptions we have of how much we spend on the foreign aid budget. I mean every single year when you ask Americans how much we spend on foreign aid, people have these wild numbers in their heads that are so far beyond what we actually give to, for example, the United Nations or we actually give through the State Department to foreign aid. So again I don't know if those go back to the same golden rule, that we think we're better than we actually are, that we think we're doing more for the common good than we are. And I think this brings us full circle back to the moral obligation of political leaders. So of the candidates, to stand up and say look, I'm a leader and not just go by polls and what he or she thinks is going to get them elected. We know that one of these major candidates pays a lot of attention to polls, the other one doesn't seem to pay that much attention to polls, but listens to his gut. But I would think that maybe it's their responsibility to stand up and say, you know, regardless of what you people think, this is what's right. And I'm your leader and that's why I'm going to tell you that this is right and be willing to take a stand.

I agree with you, I don't think that's very likely that we're going to see that before November because everyone is looking at their risk and what's the upside for them. There's not percentage in that.

MR. TELHAMI: It's not a high priority issue.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: It's not a high --

MR. TELHAMI: It's not a high priority issue.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: Terrorism is on the other hand, you know, and this fear of it. Even if you look at the gun deaths in America, the overwhelming -- the number one cause of gun death, as I understand it, and correct me if I'm wrong, is suicide. And terrorism is way down at the bottom of the list. And yet the fact that we have more than one mass shooting a day. But these aren't usually terrorist attacks; they're sort of wild attacks, domestic violence or whatever. So I think there also needs to be some truth telling, but I'm not sure that we're going to see any politician who is willing to sort of be the truth teller in an election year.

MR. TELHAMI: By the way, we have a question on prioritizing foreign policy issues. We haven't analyzed that yet. It's going to be in the July pack, but we have specifically asked them to rank all the different issues facing the U.S. and then tie it to their positions on other issues.

MR. MCCANTS: All right. We're winding down. I'll take two more quick questions. The gentleman down front here. Wait for the microphone please.

MR. DANZINGER: Thank you. I'm Raphael Danziger, a consultant to AIPAC. I think that there's really nothing new about this position of the public to accepting refugees. If you go back to the periods way before mass media, way before fears of terrorism, like in the 1930s, there was massive opposition to taking in Jewish refugees fleeing from Nazi Germany. Before that in the 1920s it was even more massive, perhaps opposition of public to taking in refugees. So in that sense I think the situation today is somewhat better than it was in those old days.

I'd like you to comment on that.

MR. MCCANTS: Thank you. And the gentleman in the blue blazer, quickly, right here, second row.

QUESTIONER: Hi, I'm Joe Jenkins, an attorney with Human Rights First. I think your point about the distinction between the moral imperative and security is well taken, but maybe there is an area where those are confluent. And I'm specifically talking about the special immigrant visa program made to bring over on visa Afghans and Iraqis who helped us out during the war. And I was wondering, do you know the opinion, the public opinion on that program, and if that's an entry way into some of the

things that we're talking about.

MR. MCCANTS: Okay. Thank you. So, Shibley, and then Indira, final thoughts.

MR. TELHAMI: So I'm sorry, the opinion on which program specifically?

QUESTIONER: Special immigrant visa program.

MR. TELHAMI: Yeah, I don't know the opinion on that. I don't have any information that. But, Rafi, thanks for pointing out the history of it. Obviously it's been up and down historically. And that's another study.

MR. MCCANTS: And, Indira, any final thoughts?

MS. LAKSHMANAN: Well, I'm just going to say then, you know, Rafi, from what you've told us we should be heartened that the top line number here is 59 percent who are supporting Middle East conflict refugees. Then maybe that's a positive in the end because it's higher than it was, you know, back in the 1930s as you say. And we all can't forget that Donald Trump uses this term America first foreign policy, but that term was used in the 1930s by American isolationists, Nazi appeasers, people who wanted to stay out of World War II. So there are some interesting echoes in that term.

MR. MC CANTS: All right. Thank you, Shibley, thank you, Indira. Please join me in thanking them. (Applause)

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