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"Popecraft": Reflections on the Pope's U.S. Visit ^[1]

Note from the CPD Blog Manager: *We asked several scholars of religion for their thoughts on the public diplomacy implications of Pope Francis' first visit to the United States. Below are their comments.*

"Popecraft, the Vatican's special brand of soft diplomacy, is a singular phenomenon. There is no other religious leader in the world today with sole and primary religious authority over 1.2 billion people, and billions of non-Catholics—including 65 percent of non Catholic Americans--admire the current pontiff. But more than religious adherence and popularity polls are required for diplomatic success. Thus far, Pope Francis' international efforts have succeeded when he provides cover for political leaders to do what they want to do. He brokered a détente between Cuba and the US because leaders of both nations wanted one. What's yet to be seen is whether the pope can persuade countries to act outside of their immediate self-interest. Will Europe and America open their borders to more Arab refugees? Will the US, China, India and other large nations take meaningful actions to deal with climate change? Will wealthy countries address the economic inequalities of globalization? Pope Francis' diplomatic chops have yet to be truly tested."



Diane Winston, Knight Chair in Media & Religion at USC Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism

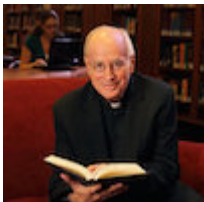
"Pope Francis' visit to Capitol Hill not only marks an historic moment for American Catholics, but it also comes at a significant time in American religious history, as the most rapidly growing religious demographic in the country is comprised of those unaffiliated with any specific religious tradition or denomination. By recalibrating the optics of Catholic doctrine, and by leading with a spirit of authenticity and empathy, Pope Francis has captured the imagination and attention of people of all faiths, and of atheists and agnostics as well. But he is still divisive in the political realm, as liberals are concerned about his position on same-sex marriage, birth control, and female ordination, while conservatives criticize his advocacy of environmental stewardship and his critique of unfettered capitalism. So in many ways, his visit to Capitol Hill represents an important moment where all

these trends, policies, and positions converge."



Varun Soni, USC Dean of Religious Life

"This Pope is a pope of surprises. He's also very hard to categorize in the typical binary grid that characterizes US politics. He's against abortion, gay marriage, the ordination of women, and artificial contraception--so he's no Democrat. He's in favor of systemic immigration reform, universal health care, care for the environment, the end of the death penalty, and a form of capitalism that helps most of all the poor--so he's no Republican. You'd think he'd be displeasing about everybody, but his approval rating is the envy of any politician. Either folks are not really listening to him, or the love and sincerity with which he speaks touches a lot of people."



Father James Heft, Alton M. Brooks Professor of Religion at USC Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences

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