

Obama has edge over Clinton with mainline Protestant Democrats: Catholics prefer Clinton

News in the [May 1, 2007](#) issue

White mainline Protestants who are Democrats or Democratic-leaning voters favored Senator Barack Obama (D., Ill.) slightly over Senator Hillary Clinton (D., N.Y.), 27 percent to 24 percent, as the party's nominee for president in a late March national survey. But white non-Hispanic Catholics preferred Clinton 33 percent to 12 percent over Obama, contributing to Clinton's early lead among Democrats.

Nearly a year before the most important primaries in 2008, Republican hopeful Rudolph Giuliani and Senator Clinton are the widely recognizable front-runners with key religious segments in the country, according to John Green, a senior fellow at the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life.

The Pew Forum, in announcing its Religion & Politics '08 Web site, analyzed the results under the direction of Princeton Survey Research Associates International, which conducted telephone interviews with a sample of 1,503 adults from March 21 to March 25.

Following Obama and Clinton as the choice by white mainliners to lead the Democratic ticket was former senator John Edwards, at 20 percent. Former vice president Al Gore, who has not announced his candidacy, was preferred by 17 percent. White, non-Hispanic Catholics preferred Gore (22 percent) and Edwards (21 percent) over Obama

Asked by the Century why Obama fared poorly among Catholic Democrats, Green said a definitive answer is hard to give at this point. "But one pattern is intriguing," Green added. "Among mainline Protestant Democrats, self-identified liberals prefer Obama to Clinton, and liberals are numerous enough in this group to tip the scales in favor of Obama," he said. "Among white Catholic Democrats, moderates are more common and they are solidly for Clinton, thus pushing Catholic Democrats in that

direction. It will be interesting to see if this pattern holds up in subsequent polls.”

According to exit polls in the 2006 midterm elections, 50 percent of white Catholics voted for Democrats—a slight shift away from the GOP in the 2004 presidential results.

White mainline Protestants who are Republicans or Republican-leaning favored Giuliani (38 percent) over Arizona senator John McCain (22 percent), with former Massachusetts governor Mitt Romney (7 percent) and former House speaker Newt Gingrich (6 percent) in a virtual tie for third, though Gingrich remains an undeclared candidate.

“We’re still early in the process, and it’s a time when name recognition plays a special role,” said Green. “We think these numbers are very interesting in that they provide a baseline by which candidates must react.”

The impact of campaign funds is about to be felt, likely shifting poll numbers, Green said, adding that the \$25 million raised by Obama in the first quarter this year (close to Clinton’s \$26 million) and the \$23 million raised by Romney will give them boosts.

“The major candidates are raising incredible amounts of money, and they’re going to spend that money trying to get their message out to these voters,” he said. “There’s a great capacity for people’s opinions to change as this money is spent.”

Among white evangelical Republican-leaning voters, Giuliani led McCain, 27 percent to 23 percent. Gingrich was third (7 percent) and Romney fourth (6 percent) in this key group of Republican voters.

White evangelicals gave 78 percent of their votes to President Bush in 2004 and 72 percent to Republican congressional candidates in 2006.