Less than half of Americans know Romney's a Mormon

by Adelle M. Banks
October 27, 2011

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(RNS) Less than half of Americans know that GOP presidential candidate Mitt Romney is a Mormon, despite recent media attention focused on his faith, a new survey shows.

Just four in 10 Americans -- 42 percent -- identified the former Massachusetts governor as a Mormon, according to the Washington-based Public Religion Research Institute. That figure remains unchanged from July 2011, despite a flurry of media attention after an evangelical supporter of another GOP candidate, Texas Gov. Rick Perry, called Romney's religion a "cult."

The only group that showed an increased knowledge about Romney's religion was white evangelicals, whose knowledge of Romney's faith rose from 44 percent in July to 53 percent in mid-October.

"The increase in knowledge of Romney's Mormon faith among evangelicals is potentially problematic for Romney, since we know from our research that six in 10 evangelicals do not see the Mormon faith to be a Christian religion," said Daniel Cox, PRRI's research director.

"As more evangelical voters identify Romney as a Mormon, the question will be whether he can bridge the religious gap with shared political values."

Researchers found that Perry trails both Romney and rival Herman Cain among white evangelicals on measures of political affinity, but is relatively even withCain on measures of religious affinity. Just 8 percent of evangelical voters said Romney's beliefs are closest to their own.

The poll is based on a random sample of 1,019 adults, with a margin of error of plus orminus 3 percentage points.