

Poll: White working class voters are still looking for a candidate, and still religious

by [Lauren Markoe](#)

September 20, 2012

c. 2012 Religion News Service

(RNS) The white working class, a potentially rich bloc of voters for Republicans or Democrats, hasn't settled on Mitt Romney or President Barack Obama, a new study from the Public Religion Research Institute shows.

"These white working class voters are not particularly enamored of either candidate," said Daniel Cox, PRRI's research director. "In terms of their favorability, they're both under 50 percent." Forty-four percent look favorably upon Obama and 45 percent upon Romney.

Released seven weeks before the election, the August survey found Romney with a double-digit lead over Obama among the white working class, which preferred the GOP candidate 48 to 35 percent.

But Cox points out that the gap narrows to statistical insignificance among women voters in this group, and in the Midwest and West, home of several swing states. The upshot for Romney and Obama?

If they want to woo this group, which makes up 36 percent of the nation according to the study, the campaigns may want to consider other findings of the PRRI poll.

Many common perceptions of the white working class are wrong, according to the survey -- such as the idea that they strongly identify with the Tea Party and tend to vote against their economic interests.

Regarding religion, while some previous studies and conservative commentators, including libertarian author Charles Murray, have concluded that these Americans are losing their faith, the PRRI survey says that 48 percent go to church at least once a month, compared to 50 percent of all Americans.

White working class Americans also say religion is important in their lives (60 percent) as much as Americans in general (59 percent).

And while some liberal-leaning commentators, such as writer David Love, have worried that the group has been conned into conscripting themselves into the culture wars, the PRRI survey shows that the white working class is divided on abortion and same-sex marriage, much like the rest of the country.

Half (50 percent) say abortion should be legal in all or most cases, the same percentage that opposes same-sex marriage.

The August survey was of 2,501 Americans, including 857 non-Hispanic white Americans without a four-year college degree, who hold nonsalaried jobs. It had a margin of error of plus or minus 3.7 percentage points for the findings on the white working class.