

The persistent God gap

By [David Heim](#)

November 9, 2012

The presidential election revealed that the “God gap” in electoral politics remains as large as ever—and is much larger than the gender gap that was often touted during the campaign. [Mark Silk summarizes](#) it:

Those who said they attend worship weekly preferred Mitt Romney by 20 points, 59-39. Those who said they attend less frequently went for Obama by 25 points. That compares to a male preference for Romney of seven points and a female preference for Obama of 11.

How fervently one practices one’s religion is—apart from race—still the best predictor of how one votes.

The turnout of white evangelicals for Romney was impressive, and it was not dampened by Romney’s Mormon faith. Perennial religious right activist Ralph Reed [plausibly claimed](#) after the election that evangelicals did all they could for Romney. According [to the Pew Forum](#), white evangelicals increased their slice of the total electorate to 24 percent, up from 21 percent in 2004 and 23 percent in 2008, and they gave 79 percent of their votes to Romney—up from the 73 percent they gave McCain in 2008.

Yet it appears that Reed and fellow evangelical activists were not able to deliver the votes in [crucial battleground states](#). In Ohio, for example, Obama sliced into the evangelical vote, garnering 29 percent of white evangelicals, suggesting that evangelicals have a different profile outside the Bible Belt. And though evangelicals in the swing state of Virginia went heavily for Romney (82 percent), they represented a smaller slice of that state’s electorate than in previous years.

Nationwide, the white Protestant share of the electorate declined to 39 percent, down from 45 percent in 2000, and the religiously unaffiliated vote climbed to 12 percent, up from 9 percent in 2000.