



The Hispanic Catholic Vote Matters

Donald Trump's political comeback in winning the 2024 election was historic. Catholic voters, especially whites and Hispanic men, were critical to winning President Trump's reelection to the White House as the first president since Grover Cleveland to win a second non-consecutive term.

President Trump achieved a decisive victory over his Democratic Party opponent, winning 3 million more votes in 2024 than in 2020, for a total of about 77 million in 2024. More than 156 million Americans voted, resulting in the second highest turnout in modern American history. (The 2020 election had the highest turnout.)

A closer look at the Catholic vote allows for greater understanding of Trump's 2024 victory, prospects for the Trump agenda, and future elections.

President Trump's election signaled the possibility of a party realignment. A clear majority of Catholic voters, as well as young men and non-negligible percentages of Muslim, Asian and black voters, decided that Trump was a better choice than his Democratic opponent, Kamala Harris.¹ Importantly, *Trump's reported 45 percent share of the Hispanic vote was unprecedented for a Republican and made a difference in swing states.*

The Trump campaign targeted men without a college education, who were concerned about the economy and the border. His outreach strategy included appearances on male-driven podcasts and at blue-collar venues. Trump's campaign suggested in various ways that Catholic values mattered to him. He selected the Catholic convert and recently elected Ohio Senator JD Vance as his running mate. Trump's campaign focused on Harris's poor record on religious freedom and her support of a right of convicted criminals in prison who

identified as transgender to have taxpayer-funded sex-change surgery.

The Trump campaign pounced on Harris's endorsement of transsexual surgery for prisoners. The campaign flooded the airwaves and social media with a brilliantly effective ad that left the Harris campaign reeling. In September, late in the race, the Trump campaign spent \$2.3 million to run a 30-second television spot in Arizona, Georgia, North Carolina and Wisconsin. In October, as Election Day approached, the campaign spent another \$61 million on advertising, a third of it going to attack Harris's stance on transgender rights. The spot appeared more than 600,000 times on social media aimed at the younger male audience.² There were several variations.

Shrewd Campaign Advertising

Trump's television spot had an impact reminiscent of Lyndon Johnson's famous "daisy ad" against his 1964 presidential opponent Barry Goldwater, which featured a young girl counting daisy petals right before a nuclear explosion.

One version of Trump's ad begins with Harris explaining, in a 2019 interview with the director of the National Center for Transgender Equality, that she supported taxpayer-funded gender surgery for prisoners. The ad then turns to an edited version of Harris standing next to former Energy Department official Sam Brinton, who is wearing a bright red dress and lipstick. (Brinton was fired from his government position for stealing women's luggage and their contents from airport baggage conveyors.) Next come photos of Harris side by side with the transgender Admiral Rachel Levine, head of the U.S. Public Health Service, and Harris with drag performer Pattie Gonia.

The spot ends with a photo of Trump with a group of men wearing hard hats. The voice-over declares, “*Kamala is for they/them. President Trump is for you.*”

The spot shifted attention away from the issue of “reproductive rights,” which Harris had made a central part of her campaign. Surveys showed that Catholics were divided on the abortion issue, but were more decided on the transgender issue, especially on taxpayer funds for surgeries.

Harris did not help herself with Catholic voters when she refused to consider religious exemptions for medical personnel asked to perform abortions. Then, she declined to personally attend the Al Smith Dinner hosted by New York Cardinal Timothy Dolan. Instead, she sent a message to the dinner via video.³ This was followed by her unwillingness to appear on Joe Rogan’s podcast, which has a huge and heavily male audience.

Trump’s campaign strategy paid off. Exit polls showed that he comfortably carried the Catholic vote, which had been almost evenly split with Biden in 2020. Catholic voters went for Trump in large majorities in North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin and Florida. Trump’s surprising 45 percent share of the Hispanic vote, up some 9 points from 2020, surely included many Catholics. About 43 percent of U.S. Hispanics identify as Catholic.

Historic Shifts in Voting

The shifts of Catholic and Hispanic votes proved crucial to Trump’s 2024 victory. In 2020, Biden was probably helped because he proclaimed his Catholic identity, even while rejecting the religious duty of Catholic politicians to oppose abortion and purported sex changes.

After seeing the 2024 election results, Chris Kofinis, speaking for the lobby group Catholic Vote, observed that “Catholic voters played a decisive role in the historic victory of Donald Trump and JD Vance.” He added, “These numbers are shocking and could prove to be the largest margin among Catholics in a presidential race in decades. Catholics proved again to be a critical voting bloc that cannot be ignored.”⁴

The shift among Catholic voters overall toward Trump may have been overstated in exit polls cited in earlier coverage of the 2024 election, including the January 2025 *Mindszenty Report*. The Public Religion Research

Institute’s more recent survey data for Catholics overall—with 53 percent saying they voted for Trump—is only 3 points higher than 2020 and 1 point higher than 2016. (Additional “verified voter” data available in the spring is believed to be more accurate than exit polls.) Still, *there is a clear trend of white Catholics strongly favoring Republican presidential candidates over the last three presidential elections. The Hispanic Catholic shift in 2024 was especially pronounced (roughly 12 points).*

Trump gains among Hispanic Catholics came in border states, especially in counties on the southern border. Many of these counties are made up of working-class Hispanics who were won over by Trump’s populist message. For example, in Maverick County, Texas, voters turned Republican for the first time in 50 years. The county is 95 percent Hispanic and predominantly Catholic. The county is home to Eagle Pass, right across the Rio Grande, a major crossing point for migrants illegally entering the United States.

These migrants created an economic crisis for already financially strapped border towns. As Dylan Corbett, executive director of HOPE Border Institute, a Catholic group serving immigrants, commented, “We cannot underestimate the economy as a factor in shaping the outcome of the election.”⁵

The final election returns stunned the Harris campaign, which had expected a close vote. In fact, Harris reportedly went to bed confident she was going to win the election, although the early returns suggested that she might be in trouble.

To say she was in trouble is an understatement. She failed to gauge where most voters stood and struggled to respond effectively to the key issues Trump ran on—the economy and immigration. Trump made her a punching bag on border security, reminding voters time and again in rallies that Biden had appointed her “border czar.” Not only was she weak on the issues; she appeared oblivious to the importance of the Catholic vote, which constitutes a fifth of the U.S. electorate.

How Religion Matters in Voting

Voters wear many hats: They are men and women, urban, suburban and rural, and vary in incomes, ages, education and marital status. Pollsters like to break these voters down by categories. “Religious” voters were divided along party lines in 2024.

For example, 6 in 10 Mormons supported Trump. Only a third supported Harris. The Mormon vote is especially important in Utah, but also matters in states such as Idaho, Nevada and Arizona, which have heavily Mormon populations.

Evangelical Christians, as expected, stuck with Trump (85 percent) as they did in 2016 and 2020. Harris won the Jewish and the non-religious votes overwhelmingly.

To put these numbers into perspective, the U.S. is still a significant majority Christian population (about 65 percent), with approximately 40 percent Protestant and 19 percent Roman Catholic. About 7 percent are Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist or Hindu.⁶

The Muslim vote fell off precipitously for Harris. Biden secured nearly 70 percent of this vote in 2020, but in 2024 only 20 percent voted for Harris. Amazingly, Green Party candidate Jill Stein beat both Harris and Trump by winning 53 percent of the Muslim vote.⁷ Obviously this Muslim vote for Stein represented a protest vote against both major parties.

Challenges for Both Parties

Jewish voters remained strongly Democratic in 2024 (66-79 percent according to various exit polls). There was a very slight uptick in Jews voting Republican. For many Republicans, Jewish loyalty to the Democratic Party remains perplexing.

Likewise, most black voters remain loyal Democrats. Harris overwhelmingly carried the black vote, as was expected, but even in this population, she showed a decline. In 2020, Biden won 89 percent of the black vote. In 2024, black support for Harris dropped to 85 percent, with men accounting for most of the change.

The Catholic vote mattered in 2024 and will matter in future elections. Although Catholics have not voted as a bloc since 1960 (when they solidly backed the first Catholic president, John F. Kennedy), younger Catholic men, especially those who attend Mass regularly, have become more Republican.⁸ Many Mass-attending Catholics see their country in decline as a result of Democratic leadership, with its support of unrestricted abortion and transgenderism and its attacks on Catholic organizations including the Knights of Columbus.

The Democrats' failure to win the Catholic vote arguably cost them the White House in 2024. It is hard to see how

Democrats are going to turn this around. It might help if they run a Catholic for president in 2028. At present, no one has emerged—Catholic or otherwise—to head the Democratic ticket in 2028. Over a quarter of the members of the U.S. Congress are Catholic, mostly Democrats. Maybe a Catholic Democrat in Congress will emerge as a presidential candidate.

Such a candidate will need to carefully thread the needle, much as Jimmy Carter did in 1976. A born-again Christian, Carter appealed to evangelical Protestants while winning the majority of Catholic voters.⁹ In 1980, Reagan swamped Carter with the Catholic vote—outdistancing him by nearly 11 points.¹⁰

Candidates matter, but so do issues. By making abortion, transgender rights, open borders, DEI (diversity, equity and inclusion), feminism and anti-family values the core of the party, the Democratic Party lost ground with many of its traditional constituencies in 2024.

Catholics are well represented in the leadership of the GOP—think JD Vance, Marco Rubio and Ron DeSantis. Trump's handling of the economy will probably decide the 2026 midterm elections and the 2028 presidential election. But *for now the GOP has a clear advantage with Catholic voters, swelled by an influx of Hispanic voters in 2024.*

How to Solidify Hispanic Support

The recent Hispanic shift to voting Republican is precarious. Many young Hispanics who voted Republican in 2024 did so as independents. Furthermore, many Hispanic voters are what pollsters call “low-propensity voters,” who don't pay close attention to politics. These voters are not fully aligned with the Republican Party and can turn Democrat with the right message and the right candidate. Democrats know this.

Yet the 2024 election showed the possibility for Republicans to expand their Hispanic vote. The key is winning the Hispanic Catholic vote, especially young male Hispanics. As Heidi Schlumpf noted in the *National Catholic Reporter*, “The shift among Hispanic Catholics was larger than that of white Catholics or Hispanics.”¹¹ *Harris still won the Hispanic Catholic vote, but her double-digit decline in this demographic group from Biden's performance in 2020 caught many pundits by surprise.*

So while white Catholics are slowly becoming a base for the Republican Party, Hispanic Catholics also show potential for growth with the GOP. The 2024 shift of the Hispanic vote to Republican was especially significant in border counties, which suggests that Trump's call for border control appealed to these voters. The political science professor Ryan Burge believes that immigration played a larger role in growing the Hispanic Catholic vote than did abortion.¹²

Other observers see the economy as critical in the Hispanic Catholic shift. Pollster Drew Deckman, for example, maintains, "The economy is the most important issue for most Americans, but disproportionately for Hispanics."¹³

Republican gains in this bloc were clearly evident, but a realignment has not occurred. The Hispanic vote is up for grabs.

Old Democratic strategies won't work. Ruben Gallego, who won election to the U.S. Senate in 2024, presents a model for a successful Democratic campaign. Although his voting record in Congress, and previously in the Arizona legislature, was decidedly left-wing, Gallego presented himself as moderate, a family man, and strong on border control. He won handily in his campaign for the Senate.

If Republicans want to continue to make inroads into the Hispanic Catholic vote in the future, they need to stick with their message that GOP candidates represent their values and are committed to economic advancement of Hispanic communities. Melvin Soto, a Republican media strategist, made exactly this point when he told the press, "They [Hispanics] backed the candidate who supported

our families. . . . More importantly they back the candidate who was fearful of God and did not tell them they were not welcome because of their faith."¹⁴

Such messaging won the majority of the Catholic vote in 2024. Such messaging, along with a prosperous economy, should enable further Republican gains in the Hispanic Catholic vote in the future.

CMF now on Facebook!

Our readers who use Facebook are invited to visit the new Cardinal Mindszenty Foundation page for updates about our activities. Be sure to click on the "Follow" button.

¹ See Byron York's Daily Memo, "How Trump led the GOP from 2012 despair to 2024 triumph," *Washington Examiner*, June 2, 2025, drawing on a detailed new analysis by Catalist, a progressive voting data analytics firm.

² <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/09/25/us/politics/trump-ad-anti-trans-harris.html>; <https://www.cnn.com/2024/10/18/politics/trump-transgender-attack-ads-harris>.

³ <https://www.ncregister.com/news/trump-reelection-analysis>.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ <https://www.ncronline.org/news/catholic-voters-shift-toward-gop-includes-latinos-new-study-shows>.

⁶ <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2024/04/09/party-identification-among-religious-groups-and-religiously-unaffiliated-voters/>;

<https://www.statista.com/statistics/1411981/us-religious-identity-of-republicans-and-democrats-2023/>.

⁷ https://www.cair.com/press_releases/cair-exit-poll-of-muslim-voters-reveals-surge-in-support-for-jill-stein-and-donald-trump-steep-decline-for-harris/.

⁸ <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/there-is-no-catholic-vote-and-yet-it-matters/>.

⁹ <https://www.thecrimson.com/article/1976/11/3/many-factors-figured-in-carters-win/>.

¹⁰ <https://crisismagazine.com/vault/the-catholic-vote-does-it-swing>.

¹¹ <https://www.ncronline.org/news/catholic-voters-shift-toward-gop-includes-latinos-new-study-shows>.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ <https://www.thecatholicthing.org/2024/12/07/the-numbers-show-the-catholic-vote-still-matters/>.

Mindszenty Report Reprints

1 copy	\$1.50	20 copies	\$15.00
10 copies	\$8.00	50 copies	\$25.00
		100 copies	\$35.00

THE ARROGANCE OF TRANSHUMANISM. Some biomedical technologies raise troubling questions, notwithstanding their popularity in Silicon Valley. Ask for 7/25

DECLINING BIRTH RATES SHOULD WORRY US ALL. An exploration of long-term trends in birth rates around the world, their causes, and the need to restore a pro-natal culture. Ask for 6/25

The Mindszenty Report is published monthly by
Cardinal Mindszenty Foundation

7800 Bonhomme Ave.

St. Louis, MO 63105

Phone 314-727-6279

Subscription rate: \$25 per year

Outside the U.S.A. \$35

We accept credit card payments.

The Mindszenty Report is not copyrighted, and subscribers are invited to have it printed in their local newspapers.

Contributions to the Cardinal Mindszenty Foundation are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law.

Website: www.mindszenty.org

Email to orders.inquiries@mindszenty.org