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CATHOLICS AND THE 2020 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

Abstract

This article examines the role of Catholics within the 2020 presidential election in the United States. Although Catholics were once a crucial and dependable component of the Democratic Party's electoral coalition, their vote in more recent years has been much more splintered. Nevertheless, Catholics have been deemed to be an important "swing vote" in American politics today, as in recent presidential elections they have aligned with the national popular vote. This article therefore focuses on the part that Catholics played within the 2020 presidential election process. It addresses the level of political change and continuity within the ranks of Catholics over the past several elections, how they voted in the Democratic primaries during the initial stages of the 2020 presidential election, their level of support for different candidates over the course of the campaign, how they ultimately came to cast their ballots in the 2020 election, and the extent to which their voting patterns in 2020 differed from that of 2016.

Keywords: Catholics, partisan identification, presidential voting, racial/ethnic differences, Mass attendance

Introduction

The 2020 American presidential election was an unusually close election despite Joe Biden having captured 7 million more votes than Donald Trump. Its closeness derived from the small margin of victory Biden enjoyed in winning the four "toss-up" states that secured his victory – namely, Arizona, Nevada, Georgia, and Wisconsin. Biden's margin of victory in these four states was actually smaller than Trump's margin in 2016 when he carried the "blue wall" states of Pennsyl-

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vania, Michigan, and Wisconsin to seal his election.² However, the 2020 election was unusual for other reasons as well – the most important of which was that the election transpired during a pandemic, with a substantial number of votes being cast long before Election Day itself. And given that elections are governed at the state level, different rules prevailed as to when such absentee and mail ballots could be processed, opened, and counted, slowing the counting of ballots and the clarity as to which candidate had won the election.

This article examines the role of Catholics within the 2020 presidential election in the United States. While Biden is only the second Catholic to be elected president of the country, simply having a Catholic on the ticket of a major party does not necessarily guarantee that Catholics will vote for that party.³ Although Catholics were once a crucial and dependable component of the Democratic Party's electoral coalition, their vote in more recent years has been much more splintered. As a result, the notion of "a Catholic vote" whereby an overwhelming majority of all Catholics cast their ballots for the same candidate is misleading. Nevertheless, even though a "Catholic vote" no longer exists, Catholics may still have played an important role in the outcome of the 2020 American presidential election.⁴

First, Catholics constitute a sizable component of the American electorate. Although Catholics have historically comprised about a quarter of the American electorate⁵, they now represent about one-fifth of the electorate.⁶ But, even at this reduced level, their numbers make them an important component of the American electorate.

Second, the geographical location of Catholics contributes to their electoral importance in that substantial numbers of Catholics are found within many of the noted 2020 "battleground states." According to the Public Religion Research

2 In 2016, Trump carried the three "blue wall" states by a total of 77,744 votes. Biden carried the four noted states by a margin of 77,156 votes. In fact, Biden only carried Arizona, Georgia, and Wisconsin by a total of less than 45,000 votes. Had Trump carried these three states, the Electoral College vote would have ended in a 269 to 269 tie, throwing the election into the House of Representatives.

3 In fact, in every presidential contest since 2004, there has been at least one Catholic candidate on the presidential ticket, either as a presidential or as a vice-presidential nominee.

4 This statement mirrors the E.J. Dionne, Jr.'s well-known witticism that "there is no Catholic vote – and it's important". Quoted from: E.J. Dionne, Jr. "There is No Catholic Vote – And It's Important", in: *American Catholics and Civic Engagement*, Margaret O'Brien Steinfels (ed.), Rowman & Littlefield, 2004, p. 251.

5 Stephen T. Mockabee, "The Political Behavior of American Catholics: Change and Continuity", in: *From Pews to Polling Places: Faith and Politics in the American Religious Mosaic*, Matthew Wilson (ed.), Georgetown University Press, 2007, pp. 81-104; Lyman A. Kellstedt, and James L. Guth, Catholic Partisanship and the Presidential Vote in 2012: Testing Alternative Theories, *The Forum*, Vol. 11, No. 4, 2014, pp. 623-640; Mark J. Rozell, "Introduction: The 'Catholic Vote' in the USA", in: *Catholics and US Politics after the 2016 Elections. Understanding the "Swing Vote"*, Marie Gayte, Blandine Chelini-Pont, and Mark J. Rozell (eds.), Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2018, pp. 1-19.

6 Mark J. Rozell, "Introduction: The 'Catholic Vote' in the USA" . . . ; Mya Jaradat, "Are Trump and Biden Chasing a Voting Bloc that Doesn't Exist?", *Deseret News*, October 25, 2020. Available at: <https://www.deseret.com/indepth/2020/10/24/21525132/catholic-vote-2020-election-biden-trump-abortion-georgetown-george-mason-battleground-states> (accessed November 3, 2020).

Institute⁷, Catholics make up a substantial percentage of the voters in the “blue wall” states of Pennsylvania (28 percent), Wisconsin (25 percent) and Michigan (21 percent), as well as in the battleground states of Arizona (27 percent) and Florida (22 percent).

Third, Catholics constitute an important “swing vote” in American politics today⁸, as the Catholic vote in recent presidential elections has aligned with the national popular vote.⁹ A majority of Catholics backed Trump in 2016, Obama in 2012 and 2008, and Bush in 2004.¹⁰ And, in the important battleground states of 2016 (e.g., Pennsylvania, Ohio, Wisconsin, and Michigan), this mattered more as it helped determine the election’s ultimate outcome. Thus, although Catholics may no longer constitute a distinctive voting bloc, they nevertheless can still be an important “swing vote” within American electoral politics whose votes matter in close elections.¹¹

This article therefore focuses on the part that Catholics played within the 2020 presidential election process. It addresses the level of political change and continuity within the ranks of Catholics over the past several elections, how they voted in the Democratic primaries during the initial stages of the 2020 presidential election, their level of support for different candidates over the course of the campaign, how they ultimately came to cast their ballots in the 2020 election, and the extent to which their voting patterns in 2020 differed from that of 2016.

Catholics and American Politics: A Historical Overview

In assessing the role that Catholics played in the 2020 presidential election it is helpful to place their behavior within the broader context of prior elections. This wider perspective includes recognizing the political changes that have occurred within the ranks of American Catholics over the past half-century as well as the more immediate background of their political behavior in the preceding presidential election of 2016.

Given that partisan identifications provide the broader terrain upon which

7 Niraj Chokshi, “The Religious States in America, in 22 Maps”, *The Washington Post*, February 26, 2015. Available at: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/govbeat/wp/2015/02/26/the-religious-states-of-america-in-22-maps> (accessed November 3, 2020).

8 *Catholics and US Politics after the 2016 Elections. Understanding the “Swing Vote”*, Marie Gayte, Blandine Chelini-Pont, and Mark J. Rozell (eds.), Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2018.

9 However, Streb and Frederick have argued that Catholics are not an important “swing vote” in that “Catholics vote quite similarly to non-Catholics, and their partisan affiliations and views toward the two major parties are basically the same”. See: Matthew J. Streb and Brian Frederick, “The Myth of a Distinct Catholic Vote”, in: *Catholics and Politics: The Dynamic Tension between Faith & Power*, Georgetown University Press, 2008, p. 109.

10 Thomas Reese, “In 2020, ‘Nonexistent’ Catholic Vote Will Be Crucial – Again”, *Religion News Service*, October 29, 2020. Available at: <https://religionnews.com/downloads/media-assets-for-in-2020-nonexistent-catholic-vote-will-be-crucial-again/> (accessed November 3, 2020).

11 Mark J. Rozell, “Introduction: The ‘Catholic Vote’ in the USA. . . p. 14.

election campaigns battles are fought¹², a starting point for examining the political changes that have occurred among Catholics is to examine the partisan identification of Catholics over time. For many years, Democrats held a sizable edge over Republicans in terms of the partisan identifications of Catholics, and, as a result, Republican candidates fought an uphill battle in attempting to win votes among Catholics. However, in more recent years, the advantage that Democrats enjoyed among Catholics has severely eroded.¹³

This change can be seen in Table 1 which examines the partisan identifications of Catholics over twelve-year intervals of time between 1964 and 2012. In 1964, one year after the death of John Kennedy, Catholics were overwhelmingly Democratic in their partisan identifications, with 70 percent so identifying and with less than one-quarter identifying as Republicans. However, between 1964 and 1988, Catholics exhibited a clear movement away from the Democratic Party, as only a bare majority of Catholics (52 percent) identified as a Democrat in 1988 and as the percentage identifying as Republicans had nearly doubled from 22 percent in 1964 to 39 percent in 1988.

Table 1. The Partisan Identifications of Catholics over Time (in percent)

	Democrat	Independent	Republican	Total	(N)
1964 ANES	70%	9	22	101%	(352)
1976 ANES	64%	11	25	100%	(543)
1988 ANES	52%	9	39	100%	(477)
2000 ANES	48%	11	41	100%	(454)
2012 ANES	48%	14	39	101%	(1,371)
2020 Nationscape	46%	14	40	100%	(26,395)

Sources: ANES: American National Election Studies, Nationscape Survey of 2019-2020 (data analyzed only from the months in 2020). Note: Those who "lean" toward a political party are included as a party identifier. Percentages are based on weighted data, but the N's reported are the unweighted number of Catholic respondents in the survey.

Catholics continued their movement away from the Democratic Party over the next twelve years, though at a much slower pace. Following the turn of the new millennium, less than half of Catholics identified as Democrats, but with no noticeable gain in Republican party identifications. Twelve years later, in 2012, the distribution of partisan identifications among Catholics basically mirrored the distribution found within their ranks in 2000, and the same remained true in

12 Herbert F. Weisberg and David C. Kimball, "Attitudinal Correlates of the 1992 Presidential Vote: Party Identification and Beyond", in: *Democracy's Feast: Elections in America*, Herbert F. Weisberg (ed.), Chatham House, New Jersey, 1995, pp. 72-111.

13 William B. Prendergast, *The Catholic Voter in American Politics: The Passing of a Democratic Monolith*, Georgetown University Press, 1999; Harold W. Stanley and Richard G. Niemi, *Partisanship, Party Coalitions, and Group Support, 1952-2000*, *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 36, No. 2, 2006, pp. 172-188; Matthew J. Streb and Brian Frederick, "The Myth of a Distinct Catholic Vote, in: *Catholics and Politics: The Dynamic Tension between Faith & Power*, Kristin E. Heyer, Mark J. Rozell, and Michael A. Genovese (eds.), Georgetown University Press, 2008, pp. 93-112.

the early months of 2020.¹⁴

This shifting nature of the partisan identifications among Catholics is important because the political perspectives of Catholics are shaped more by their party affiliations than by their religious affiliation.¹⁵ As a result, one finds that, on many specific policy issues, Catholics often adopt positions that are more aligned with the political party with which they identify than with the specific teachings of their church.¹⁶ Both the Democratic and Republican parties advance certain policies that embody teachings of the Catholic Church, with the Republican Party platform typically advancing opposition to abortion and the Democratic Party platform typically promoting social and economic justice issues (e.g., healthcare reform, immigrant rights). Thus, Republican Catholics tend to prioritize the issue of abortion over other issues on which the Catholic Church has taken a stand, while Democratic Catholics tend to emphasize other issues as taking precedent over abortion in church teaching.

However, the changes occurring among American Catholics is not limited to partisan changes as, over the past several decades, the racial and ethnic composition of those affiliated with the Catholic Church has also been changing. These latter changes stem from changing immigration patterns to the United States. The American Catholic Church has long drawn from an immigrant population coming to the American shores. In the early decades following WWII, the church was largely composed of families who had immigrated from European countries such as Ireland, Italy, Germany, and Poland, but in more recent decades it has largely drawn immigrants from Mexico, Central America, and South America.¹⁷ As a result, even though Catholics in America may share the same religious identity, the church today is highly diverse in terms of its ethnic and racial composition.

The changing racial and ethnic composition of American Catholics is shown in Table 2, revealing the declining percentage of whites and a corresponding growth of Hispanics within the Catholic church. In 1964, American Catholics were overwhelmingly white in their composition, with 96 percent of all Catholics

14 It should be noted that the data shown for the year 2020 are based on a massive sample of Catholics. After the turn of the millennium, new forms of survey data that involve far greater number of respondents have occasionally occurred. Given the far larger number of Catholics captured in these massive surveys, their availability enable analysts to assess subgroup differences among Catholics with far greater confidence that the differences observed are real differences and not simply a function of potentially unique differences evident among a small number of respondents. Hence, depending on availability and the questions asked, the present analysis will use these massive surveys whenever possible.

15 Michael Sean Winters, "The Catholic 'Votes' Will Still Pick the Next President", *National Catholic Reporter*, May 27, 2020. Available at: <https://www.ncronline.org/news/opinion/distinctly-catholic/catholic-votes-will-still-pick-next-president> (accessed December 22, 2020).

16 Gregory A. Smith, "8 Facts about Catholics and Politics in the U.S." *Pew Research Center, FactTank*, September 15, 2020. Available at: <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/09/15/8-facts-about-catholics-and-politics-in-the-u-s> (accessed December 22, 2020).

17 During the latter quarter of the twentieth century, the Catholic Church also benefitted from an influx of Asian immigrants, largely from the Philippines and Vietnam.

being whites. By 1976 the percentage of whites among Catholics had dropped to 91 percent, with the percentages evident for each racial and ethnic group remaining approximately the same in 1988 as they had been in 1976. However, by 2000, the influx of Hispanics within the American Catholic Church had become quite evident, as the percentage of Hispanics rose from 4 percent in 1988 to 16 percent in 2000. Over the next two decades, the percentage of Hispanics in the Catholic church in American nearly doubled to about 30 percent, while the percentage of whites declined to 60 percent.¹⁸

Table 2. The Changing Racial and Ethnic Composition of Catholics in the United States (in percent)

	White	Black	Hispanic	Other	Total	(N)
1964 ANES	96%	1	x	3	100%	(357)
1976 ANES	91%	4	5	1	101%	(544)
1988 ANES	90%	3	4	3	100%	(483)
2000 ANES	78%	2	16	4	100%	(459)
2012 ANES	72%	3	22	3	100%	(1,376)
2020 Nationscape	60%	4	30	7	100%	(33,918)

Sources: ANES: American National Election Studies, Nationscape Survey of 2019-2020 (data analyzed only from the months in 2020). Percentages are based on weighted data, but the N's reported are the unweighted number of Catholic respondents in the survey.

This racial and ethnic diversity among American Catholics has important political ramifications. Overall, white Catholics lean conservative on many policy issues and Republican in their partisan identifications, while Latino Catholics are more liberal than white Catholics on many policy issues as well as being much more Democratic in their partisan orientation.¹⁹ Thus, even though white Catholics have become more Republican in their partisan identifications over the past five decades, this partisan shift to the Republican Party among white Catholics has been offset by the Democratic partisan identifications found among the growing segment of Hispanic and other non-white Catholics.

The distribution of the partisan identifications of Catholics by their racial and ethnic composition is shown in Table 3. In the early months of 2020, a bare

18 Estimates assessing this changing racial and ethnic composition of Catholics can vary considerably, depending on the survey utilized. In fact, some surveys suggest that Hispanics constitute 40 percent of all Catholics in the United States. See more: Cary Funk and Jessica Martinez, "Fewer Hispanics Are Catholics, So How Can More Catholics be Hispanic?", Pew Research Center, *FactTank*, May 1, 2014. Available at: <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/05/07/fewer-hispanics-are-catholic-so-how-can-more-catholics-be-hispanic> (accessed January 11, 2021).

19 Mark M. Gray, "Catholics and the 2016 Elections", in: *Catholics and US Politics after the 2016 Elections. Understanding the "Swing Vote"*, Marie Goyette, Blandine Chelini-Pont and Mark J. Rozell (eds.), Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2018, pp. 209-218; Vincent Stine, "Is There a Catholic Vote and Does It Matter?", *Political Science Now*, June 25, 2020. Available at: <https://politicalsciencenow.com/is-there-a-catholic-vote-and-does-it-matter> (accessed December 20, 2020).

majority of white Catholics identified as Republicans (51 percent), while black Catholics and Hispanic Catholics overwhelmingly identified as Democrats (75 percent and 59 percent respectively). Clearly, then, the partisan identifications found among Catholics today are divided along racial and ethnic lines. Given this situation, rather than analyzing the Catholic vote in terms of being one religious group, research on the political attitudes and behavior of Catholics has frequently controlled for race and ethnicity within their ranks.²⁰

Table 3. The Partisan Identification of Catholics by Racial and Ethnic Composition: 2020

	White	Black	Hispanic	Other
Democrat	38%	75%	59%	45%
Independent	11	10	17	23
Republican	<u>51</u>	<u>15</u>	<u>24</u>	<u>33</u>
Total	100%	100%	100%	101%
(N)	(19,750)	(1050)	(7748)	(1753)

Source: Nationscape Survey of 2019-2020 (data analyzed only from the months in 2020).

Note: Those who "lean" toward a political party are included as a party identifier. Percentages are based on weighted data, but the N's reported are the unweighted number of Catholic respondents in the survey.

Likewise, previous research has shown that Catholics who attend Mass regularly tend to vote differently than those Catholics who are less regular in their religious attendance²¹: those attending more regularly tend to vote Republican, while co-parishioners who are less faithful in attendance tend to vote Democratic.²² Hence, scholars have also examined religious divisions within the ranks of Catholics when seeking to understand "'the Catholic vote,' or more properly, 'the Catholic votes'"²³

The 2016 Presidential Election

In the more immediate context of the 2016 presidential election, Catholics were highly divided among themselves as to how they cast their ballots. Initial results, based on exit polling, suggested that 52 percent of Catholics backed Trump, while 45 percent backed Clinton, with white Catholics supporting Trump over Clinton (60 percent to 37 percent) and Hispanic Catholics supporting Clin-

20 Stephen T. Mockabee, "The Political Behavior of American Catholics: Change and Continuity", in: *From Pews to Polling Places: Faith and Politics in the American Religious Mosaic*, Matthew Wilson (ed.), Georgetown University Press, 2007, p. 83.

21 Vincent Stine, "Is There a Catholic Vote and Does It Matter?..."

22 Lyman A. Kellstedt and James L. Guth, "Catholic Partisanship and the Presidential Vote in 2012: Testing Alternative Theories", *The Forum*, Vol. 11, No. 4, 2014, p. 628.

23 Ibidem.

ton over Trump (67 percent to 26 percent).²⁴

However, the later release of the massive 2016 Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES) data²⁵ suggested a narrower victory for Trump among Catholics. In data not shown, the CCES survey revealed that Trump garnered 49 percent of the Catholic vote compared to 46 percent by Clinton, with the divide between white and Hispanic Catholics being quite substantial (nearly three-fifth of white Catholics backed Trump nationwide, while two-thirds of Hispanic Catholics backed Clinton).²⁶

Likewise, the 2016 CCES study revealed, as expected, that Catholics voted differently in 2016 based on the frequency of Mass attendance. As shown in Table 4, the primary difference in Catholic voting was between those Catholics who reported that they attended Mass on a weekly basis and those who reported less frequent Mass attendance. Those Catholics who attended Mass less than weekly either evenly split their voted between Clinton and Trump or voted more for Clinton than for Trump, while among those who reported that they attended Mass on a weekly basis, Trump outpolled Clinton by a substantial margin (55 percent to 41 percent).

However, the racial and ethnic makeup of Catholics was more important than Mass attendance in shaping the votes of Catholics in 2016 as voting patterns based on Mass attendance varied substantially according to the racial or ethnic makeup of Catholics. Whereas Clinton overwhelmingly garnered the votes of weekly attending black and Hispanic Catholics (85 and 73 percent, respectively), weekly attending white Catholics overwhelmingly voted for Trump (63 percent) than for Clinton (33 percent).

Nevertheless, despite these differences, the National Catholic Reporter commissioned a series of surveys of Catholics around the time of the 2016 presidential election, with the sixth, and last, survey taking place in May 2017. This last survey included questions related to the 2016 presidential election and allowed for a comparative analysis of the religious attitudes and values of those Catholics who voted for Trump and those who voted for Clinton.²⁷

24 Jessica Martinez and Gregory A. Smith, "How the Faithful Voted: A Preliminary Analysis", *FactTank: News in the Numbers*, November 9, 2016. Available at: <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/11/09/how-the-faithful-voted-a-preliminary-2016-analysis/> (accessed November 30, 2020).

25 The survey included more than 64,500 respondents. The Cooperative Congressional Election Study is now known as the Cooperative Election Study.

26 The results of the well-established American National Election Studies Survey of 2016 that included far fewer respondents than the 2016 CCES survey, however, revealed that Catholics went narrowly for Clinton, 48 percent to 45 percent. See more: Michael J. O'Loughlin, "New Data Suggest Clinton, not Trump, Won Catholic Vote", *America*, April 6, 2017. Available at: <https://www.americamagazine.org/politics-society/2017/04/06/new-data-suggest-clinton-not-trump-won-catholic-vote> (accessed December 11, 2020).

27 Based on recall a half year later, among those Catholics who reported that they had voted in the 2016 presidential election, 43 percent stated they had voted for Trump, 48 percent for Clinton, with the remaining 9 percent indicating they had voted for third-party candidates. See more: William D'Antonio, "US Catholics Weigh in on 2016 Election in New Survey", *National Catholics Reporter*, November 1, 2017. Available at: <https://www.ncronline.org/news/politics/us-catholics-weigh-2016-election-new-survey> (accessed January 10, 2021).

Table 4. 2016 Presidential Voting of Catholics by Religious Mass Attendance

	Frequency of Religious Mass Attendance			
	Never	Seldom/Few Times a Year	Once or Twice a Month	Weekly
Presidential Vote Choice				
Clinton	47%	48%	50%	41%
Trump	47	48	44	55
Other	<u>5</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>4</u>
Total	99%	101%	100%	100%
(N)	(1095)	(3666)	(709)	(2746)
<hr/>				
White Catholics				
Presidential Vote Choice				
Clinton	41%	42%	43%	33%
Trump	54	54	52	63
Other	<u>5</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>4</u>
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%
(N)	(826)	(2842)	(641)	(2080)
<hr/>				
Black Catholics				
Presidential Vote Choice				
Clinton	96%	88%	62%	85%
Trump	4	12	38	14
Other	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>1</u>
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%
(N)	(55)	(111)	(50)	(160)
<hr/>				
Hispanic Catholics				
Presidential Vote Choice				
Clinton	63%	74%	71%	73%
Trump	33	22	21	26
Other	<u>4</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>1</u>
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%
(N)	(183)	(523)	(194)	(337)

Source: 2016 Cooperative Congressional Election Study

In the end, Catholics who voted for Trump and those who voted for Clinton not only shared very similar religious beliefs, but both groups were also “virtually identical in the importance they place on the Catholic Church in their lives.”²⁸ Thus, despite the fact they had voted for different presidential candidates, they nevertheless (1) held similar religious beliefs about the core aspects of their Cath-

²⁸ Ibidem.

olic faith, (2) shared similar values, (3) expressed equally strong attachment to the Catholic church, and (4) similarly agreed “that one can disagree with church teachings and still remain loyal to the church.”²⁹ Thus, it would appear that it was their differences in partisan inclinations rather than any differences religiously that drove the political choices of Catholics in the 2016 presidential election.

The 2020 Presidential Election

In many ways, the 2020 presidential election was a referendum on the way in which Donald Trump conducted himself as the President of the United States. Trump was an unconventional and highly controversial candidate for the Republican nomination in 2016,³⁰ and his presidency was marked by considerable controversy and partisan strife. Although several Republican politicians chose to challenge Trump for the 2020 GOP nomination, he was, as the sitting President, largely viewed to be the presumptive nominee of the Republican Party. Consequently, competition for the party’s nomination in the Republican presidential primaries was largely non-existent.

On the other hand, perhaps in anticipation of possible Democratic success in the 2020 presidential election, a host of political figures—28 in all—announced their candidacy to be the standard bearer of the Democratic Party in the 2020 presidential election. Not only was this large number of candidates highly unusual, but the Democratic Party also chose to inaugurate a substantial number of debates among the Democratic candidates well before the first presidential primary in New Hampshire on February 11, 2020. These debates started on June 26-27, 2019, and continued through March 15, 2020, with a total of 8 out the total 11 televised debates being held prior to the New Hampshire primary.

Given that presidential primaries have now become the principal means by which American political parties select their standard bearer in the presidential election,³¹ the presidential campaign now extends well beyond the general election campaign itself. Hence, to understand the role of Catholics in the 2020 presidential election more fully, one needs to begin with the early stages of the 2020 presidential campaign.

The Early Months of the Campaign

A year prior to Election Day, the Eternal Word Television Network (EWTN), an American cable network that televises Catholic-themed, around-the-clock, pro-

29 Ibidem.

30 See, for example, the discussion in: Corwin E. Smidt, *The Role of Religion in the 2016 Presidential Election*, *Zeitschrift für Religion, Gesellschaft und Politik*, Vol. 1, 2017, pp. 133-162.

31 This situation arose following the 1968 presidential election in which Hubert Humphry became the nominee of the Democratic Party without entering a single presidential primary that year.

gramming, conducted their first of four presidential election surveys of Catholics in relationship to the forthcoming presidential election. The results of the survey suggested that Catholics were largely, and rather equally, divided in terms of where they stood in relationship to the re-election campaign of Donald Trump.³² Thus, one year before Election Day, 34 percent of Catholics indicated that they were sure to vote for Trump, while 38 percent revealed that they would never vote for him. And, while 10 percent indicated that there was a good chance they would vote for Trump, a similar percentage (9 percent) stated that it was unlikely they would vote for him, with the remaining 9 percent indicating it was possible that they might vote for Trump.

Yet, when pitted against possible Democratic opponents, the Catholics surveyed consistently expressed greater support for each of the major Democratic candidates than for they did for Trump in the various “head-to-head” competitions posed. While the percentages varied depending on the specific Democratic candidate pitted in opposition to him, Trump consistently received a lower percentage of support than his hypothetical challenger. Thus, for example, while 52 percent of the Catholics surveyed said they supported Biden, only 39 percent indicated that they supported Trump (the corresponding percentages for Sanders and Trump was 54 percent to 39 percent, respectively).³³

The results of this first EWTN survey also exhibited the expected differences among Catholics based by the race and ethnicity.³⁴ White Catholics were rather equally divided in terms of their likelihood of voting for Trump (37 percent stated they were confident that they were going to vote for him, while 36 percent reported that they would never vote for him). However, a majority of black and Hispanic Catholics (59 percent and 52 percent, respectively) revealed that they could never vote for Trump, with only about a quarter of Hispanic Catholics (27 percent) and a fifth of black Catholics (19 percent) stating they were very likely to vote for Trump. Likewise, whereas white Catholics were somewhat more likely to indicate that they would vote for Trump over some major Democratic candidate,³⁵ black and Hispanic Catholics were overwhelmingly supportive of any Democratic candidate over Trump.³⁶

The initial contest of the 2020 presidential election was the Iowa Caucuses,

32 See: <https://www.ewtnnews.com/poll-1.asp> (accessed January 20, 2021). Some statistics are drawn from the “Crosstabs Data Report” which provides a link to an Excel file reporting these data.

33 At this early state in the campaign, Biden and Sanders were the two strongest Democratic candidates among Catholics, although each of the major Democratic candidates still fared better than Trump in terms of support among Catholic voters.

34 The results from the first ETWN survey of Catholics can be found in Table 8, along with the results from the second, third, and fourth ETWN surveys.

35 For example, in a head-to-head competition with Biden, 48 percent of white Catholics supported Trump while 42 percent supported Biden.

36 Among black Catholics, 15 percent supported Trump while 75 percent supported Biden. Rather similar results were evident among Hispanic Catholics, as 24 percent supported Trump as opposed to 70 percent who favored Biden. At this early state in the campaign, Biden and Sanders were the two strongest Democratic candidates among Catholics, although each of the major Democratic candidates still fared better than Trump in terms of support among Catholic voters.

which occurred on February 3, and the second EWTN survey of Catholics³⁷ was conducted just prior to the Iowa Caucuses. The results of this second survey basically mirrored those of the first survey taken several months earlier. Once again, Catholics remained evenly split in terms of their likelihood of voting for Trump in the 2020 general election, as 34 percent indicated that they were sure to vote for Trump, while 36 percent said they would never vote for him.³⁸ And, just as in the initial survey, both Biden and Sanders outperformed Trump in head-to-head competition (as Biden and Sanders garnered the support of 51 and 50 percent of Catholics, respectively, versus Trump's 40 and 41 percent, respectively). Likewise, once again, white Catholics were far more supportive of Trump than were non-white Catholics. For example, white Catholics supported Trump over Biden (52 to 41 percent), while the reverse was true for Hispanic Catholics (with 67 percent supporting Biden and 22 percent supporting Trump).

Given the problems linked with determining the winner of the Iowa caucuses,³⁹ there was still no clear winner in Iowa when New Hampshire voters went to the polls on February 11 to participate in their state's presidential primary. The New Hampshire primary, the first in the nation, yielded Bernie Sanders a close win in the Democratic primary,⁴⁰ while the next state primary, the South Carolina Primary held on February 29, saw Biden score an overwhelming victory in the Democratic primary.⁴¹ Thus, at this early stage of the nomination process, it appeared that the contest to be nominee of the Democratic Party was far from over.

Nevertheless, a few days after the South Carolina primary and just a few days before the "Super Tuesday" primaries (the day in which 14 states held their presidential primaries), a momentous change occurred in the unfolding of the 2020 presidential election when two of the major Democratic candidates (Pete Buttigieg and Amy Klobuchar) withdrew from the race and endorsed Biden. In part, given these endorsements, Biden won 10 of the 14 Democratic primaries held on Super Tuesday. The next day, on March 4, Mike Bloomberg dropped out of the race, with Elizabeth Warren doing so the following day. Thus, less than a month after the New Hampshire primary and with other state presidential pri-

37 This survey was conducted from January 28 to February 4, 2020. The Iowa caucuses were held on February 3. Once again, some statistics reported here are drawn from the "Crosstabs Data Report" which provides a link to an Excel file reporting the data. See: <https://www.ewtnnews.com/poll-2.asp> (accessed January 20, 2021).

38 Similarly, 12 percent of those Catholics surveyed indicated that there was a good chance they would vote for Trump, while 8 percent stated that it was unlikely they would do so, with the remaining 10 percent indicating it was possible that they might vote for Trump.

39 For a discussion of the problems with the Iowa caucuses in 2020, see: Kate Payne, "As New Hampshire Goes to the Polls, Outcome for Iowa Democrats Still Uncertain", *Iowa Public Radio*, February 11, 2020. Available at: <https://www.iowapublicradio.org/2020-elections/2020-02-11/as-new-hampshire-goes-to-the-polls-outcome-for-iowa-democrats-still-uncertain> (accessed January 20, 2021).

40 Sanders received 25.6 percent of the vote in the Democratic primary compared to Pete Buttigieg's 24.3 percent, with Joe Biden finishing fifth at 8.2 percent of the vote.

41 Biden received 48.4 percent of the vote, compared to Sanders 19.9 percent and Buttigieg's 8.2 percent of the vote.

maries still stretching several additional months into June, the contest to be the Democratic Party's presidential nominee was largely over—with Joe Biden the likely nominee. Nevertheless, Bernie Sanders continued to challenge Joe Biden in the weeks that followed, with Sanders only dropping out of the race on April 8, 2020.

How then did different religious groups within the Democratic Party view the chances of their party's major candidates in beating Donald Trump in the fall election? Table 5 presents the results of surveys conducted by the Associated Press of 2020 Democratic primary voters in the states of Arizona, Florida, and Illinois for the presidential primaries held on March 17, 2020.⁴² When these Democratic primary voters were asked whether either Biden or Sanders could beat Trump in the forthcoming presidential election, far more Democratic voters, regardless of their particular religious affiliation, believed Biden had a far better chance than Sanders of winning the presidential election. As can be seen in Table 5, nearly twice as many Democratic primary voters thought Biden could definitely beat Trump than thought that Sanders could definitely do so (43 percent versus 24 percent, respectively).

However, Catholics were no more likely than those of other religious affiliations to believe that Biden had a better chance of doing so than Sanders, with 44 percent of all Catholics and 46 percent of all Protestants believing that Biden could definitely beat Trump in the forthcoming presidential election.⁴³ And, in data not shown in Table 5, white Catholics were more likely than Hispanic Catholics to believe that Biden could definitely beat Trump (48 percent to 39 percent, respectively) and nearly three times more likely to believe that Biden rather than Sanders could definitely beat Trump (48 percent versus 17 percent), while Latino Catholics were nearly twice as likely as white Catholics to say that Sanders could definitely beat Trump in November (30 percent versus 17 percent, respectively) and only somewhat more likely to believe that Biden as opposed to Sanders could definitely beat Trump (39 percent versus 30 percent, respectively).

42 Unfortunately, while the AP survey was conducted over time and included 17 different states, the question of the religious affiliation of the respondent was only asked in the surveys done for the presidential primaries held on March 17, with Democratic primary voters being surveyed within the states of Arizona, Florida, and Illinois. For more general information related to the methodology of how these surveys were conducted, see: <https://www.ap.org/en-us/topics/politics/elections/ap-votecast/methodology> (accessed January 20, 2021).

43 While "other Christians" were the most likely to think that Biden could definitely beat Trump (as 50 percent thought so), it would appear that the term "Protestant" has little cultural currency for many religious blacks and other minorities, as only 28 percent falling within this category indicated that they were white and as more than one-half (53 percent) noted that they were African-Americans.

Table 5. The Assessments and Voting Behavior of Religious Groups in the 2020 Democratic Primaries

	Protestants	Catholics	Other Christians ¹	None	All
Believe Biden can beat Trump					
Definitely could beat Trump	46%	44%	50%	37%	43%
Probably could beat Trump	36	36	34	42	38
Probably could not beat Trump	13	13	8	13	12
Definitely could not beat Trump	<u>5</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>7</u>
Total	100%	100%	100%	101%	100%
(N)	(1155)	(1986)	(1562)	(2739)	(7442)
Believe Sanders can beat Trump					
Definitely could beat Trump	16%	23%	25%	28%	24%
Probably could beat Trump	32	37	46	37	38
Probably could not beat Trump	35	26	19	27	27
Definitely could not beat Trump	<u>17</u>	<u>14</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>11</u>
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
(N)	(1141)	(1967)	(1561)	(2718)	(7387)

Source: AP Votecast Survey of Democratic Primary Voters.

¹ Respondents who indicated that they are Christians but do not chose either the Protestant or Catholic label as designating their Christian faith.

To what extent, then, did Catholics voters within the Democratic Party help to secure Biden’s victory, or did support for Biden not really vary by religious affiliation within the party? In other words, did the fact that Biden was a practicing Catholic contribute to his securing greater support among Catholic Democrats than among Democrats of other religious faiths in Biden’s efforts to secure the nomination of the Democratic Party?

As can be seen from the Table 6, a majority of Catholics (58 percent) supported Biden in the presidential primary elections, more than doubling the level of support they gave Sanders (26 percent). Nevertheless, in the same presidential primary elections, Protestants gave somewhat stronger support to Biden than did Catholics (63 percent versus 58 percent, respectively). Consequently, while Catholics largely supported the Biden candidacy for the nomination of the Democratic Party, they did not do so to any greater extent than those affiliated with other religious faiths.

Table 6. Democratic Primary Vote Choice by Religious Affiliation controlling for Race and Ethnicity

Primary or Caucus Vote	Protestants	Catholics	Other Christians ¹	None	All
All					
Biden	63%	58%	56%	40%	52%
Sanders	18	26	27	42	31
Other	<u>19</u>	<u>16</u>	<u>17</u>	18	18
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	101%
(N)	(1174)	(2009)	(1605)	(2754)	(7542)
By Race and Ethnicity					
Whites					
Biden	61%	65%	54%	41%	52%
Sanders	18	19	25	42	29
Other	<u>22</u>	<u>16</u>	<u>22</u>	18	<u>19</u>
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
(N)	(794)	(1045)	(451)	(1757)	(4047)
Blacks					
Biden	69%	68%	61%	54%	61%
Sanders	19	22	25	28	25
Other	<u>12</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>14</u>	<u>18</u>	<u>14</u>
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
(N)	(292)	(104)	(848)	(386)	(1630)
Hispanics					
Biden	67%	47%	46%	38%	42%
Sanders	24	36	34	55	41
Other	<u>9</u>	<u>17</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>17</u>
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
(N)	(67)	(797)	(238)	(80)	(1535)

Source: AP VoteCast Survey of 2020 Democratic Primary Voters

¹ Respondents who indicated that they are Christians but do not chose either the Protestant or Catholic label as designating their Christian faith.

However, when broken down by race and ethnicity, it becomes clear that the overall level of Catholic support for Biden was diminished largely by the votes cast by Latino Catholics. Nearly two-thirds of all white and black Catholics supported Biden (65 percent and 68 percent, respectively), with about one-fifth having supported Sanders (19 and 22 percent, respectively). In contrast, less than half of Latino Catholics (47 percent) supported Biden, while more than one-third of their ranks (36 percent) cast their support to Sanders. And, Hispanic Catholics

voting in the Democratic primaries were 50 percent more likely than Hispanic Protestants voting in those primaries to support Sanders (36 percent versus 24 percent, respectively).

Thus, during the early months of the nomination process, Catholic voters appear to have been rather divided politically. At the beginning of the year 2020, about one-third of all Catholics indicated that they were sure they were going to vote for Trump in the fall, while approximately the same as the percentage of Catholics stated that they were sure that they would never vote for him. Still, in head-to-head competition with various potential nominees of the Democratic Party, the percentage of Catholics who reported that they would back the Democratic nominee always exceeded the percentage who said they would support Trump.

Those Catholics who participated in the Democratic presidential primaries overwhelmingly supported Biden over Sanders. However, they did not do so at levels that distinguished them from those who affiliated with other religious faiths, thereby confirming the contention that “the Catholic identity of politicians does not appear to mean much to most Catholic voters today”⁴⁴. At the same time, important differences were also evident among Catholics based on their ethnic and racial makeup. White Catholics differed from non-white Catholics in their level of likely support for, or opposition to, Trump. And, among those Catholics participating within the Democratic presidential primaries, white and black Catholics differed from Hispanic Catholics in their support for Biden as opposed to Sanders, with Hispanic Catholics being much more favorable to Sanders than non-Hispanic Catholics.

Catholics and the General Election Campaign

With the nomination of their respective parties secured, both Joe Biden and Donald Trump sought to mobilize Catholic voters to support their respective campaigns in the fall election. They sought to do this by two means (1) through the advancement of certain public policies, and (2) through party and organizational efforts that targeted Catholic voters.

Policy Issues. Each of the major political parties advance some policy proposals that are in conformity with the teachings of the Catholic Church, with other proposed policies standing in conflict with such teachings. The Church teaches that Catholics should care not only about matters related to the sanctity of life but also about matters related to social justice⁴⁵, with each major political party advancing and promoting certain policies than can appeal to Catholic voters as being consistent with Church teachings. The platform of the Republican

44 Mark J. Rozell, “Introduction: The ‘Catholic Vote’ in the USA”, in: *Catholics and US Politics after the 2016 Elections. Understanding the “Swing Vote”*, Marie Gayte, Blandine Chelini-Pont, and Mark J. Rozell (eds.), Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2018, p. 5.

45 *Ibidem*, p. 7.

Party typically advances policy positions that appeal to conservative Catholics through its opposition to abortion, promotion of school choice, defense of traditional morality, and protection of religious liberty. On the other hand, the platform of the Democratic Party generally advances policies that appeal to liberal Catholics through its promotion of a social gospel agenda that seeks to reduce economic inequality, shrink poverty, and address racial injustice. Thus, the teachings of the Catholic Church do not align perfectly with the agenda of either political party, and, as a result, the political inclinations of Catholics basically reflect the way they choose to prioritize issues⁴⁶.

The Efforts of the Major Parties. Given the political divisions among Catholics, neither political party seeks to maximize Catholic turnout.⁴⁷ Rather, both parties focus their efforts on mobilizing those Catholics most likely to vote for their party's candidate. In recent elections, this has meant white and religiously observant Catholics for the Republican Party and Hispanic and less observant Catholics for the Democratic Party.⁴⁸

Of course, this assumes that the campaign organizations of the two political parties choose to mobilize voters of religious groups. In 2016, the Trump campaign did reach out to Catholic voters through "Catholics for Trump" and other organizational efforts, but that was not necessarily true with the Clinton campaign. In 2016, John McCarthy led the Clinton's campaign religious outreach effort, but was primarily hired to court Irish and Catholic communities.⁴⁹ Thus, according to Michael Wear, Faith Vote Director of Obama's re-election campaign in 2012, the Clinton campaign in 2016 "virtually neglected direct engagement with many religious constituencies, refusing to ask people of faith for their vote while taking policy positions that made it easy for Trump to prey on their sense of embattlement"⁵⁰.

However, in 2020, both the Trump and the Biden campaign organizations sought to mobilize religious voters, including Catholic voters. Trump enjoyed a much earlier start in doing so than Biden. "Catholics for Trump," the official campaign committee, kicked off their efforts in April, 2020, while the official launch of "Catholics for Biden," the corresponding official committee of the Biden campaign, did not occur until September 3, 2020.

Catholics for Trump had six prominent co-chairs⁵¹ along with 28 other lead-

46 Ibidem.

47 Vincent Stine, "Is There a Catholic Vote and Does It Matter?", *Political Science Now*, June 25, 2020. Available at: <https://politicalsciencenow.com/is-there-a-catholic-vote-and-does-it-matter> (accessed December 20, 2020).

48 Ibidem.

49 Sarah Pulliam Bailey, "Josh Dickson: The Evangelical behind Joe Biden's Outreach to Religious Voters", *The Washington Post*, January 8, 2021. Available at: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/religion/2021/01/08/biden-religious-advisor-josh-dickson/> (accessed January 21, 2021).

50 Michael Wear, "Why Democrats Must Regain the Trust of Religious Voters", *The Atlantic*, November 21, 2017, p. xx. Available at: <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/11/why-democrats-must-regain-faith-among-religious-voters/546434/> (accessed January 21, 2021).

51 Former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich; Mick Mulvaney, former acting White House chief of staff; Republican

ing Catholics as board members. Its mission was to “energize and activate the Catholic community” in support of President Trump to “ensure continued victories in pro-life issues, judicial appointments, and religious freedom.”⁵² In addition, the Trump campaign sought to diminish the typical advantage the Democratic Party held with Latino Catholics. Given that Latino Catholics tend to be “very traditional and very pro-life,” the Trump campaign thought that they were in a “good position to make a compelling case” for Latino Catholics to vote for Trump in 2020.⁵³ Nevertheless, despite its “official” standing, it is unclear just what the committee actually did in relationship to trying to court Catholic votes.⁵⁴

On the other hand, “Catholics for Biden” served as the official campaign outreach of the Biden-Harris campaign, though it was one of a number of groups that operated under a broader operation known as “Believers for Biden” led by Josh Dickson, an evangelical and former Republican.⁵⁵ According to Dickson, the efforts of “Catholics for Biden” was directed at “getting the message out to as many Catholics as possible that Joe Biden and Kamala Harris are the clear moral choice in this election”⁵⁶. And, while the Trump campaign in 2020 sought to advance the message that Democrats were hostile toward religion, Dickson attempted to counter that message by helping to put the spotlight on Biden’s religious faith at the Democratic National Convention and by underscoring Biden’s policy stances that had broad support among many faith leaders (e.g. on immigration, systematic racism, and climate change).

Biden also relied on his personal faith and Catholic heritage to build support among Catholic voters.⁵⁷ Accordingly, his campaign emphasized aspects of Catholic social teaching that stressed caring for the poor and vulnerable, contending that church doctrine is not focused solely on abortion, and that church teaching also “obligates them to welcome immigrants and refugees, and sup-

consultant Mary Joe Matalin; Matt Schlapp, chairman of the American Conservative Union; and, Alfonso Aguilar, president of the Latino Partnership for Conservative Principles.

- 52 This statement is taken from the Catholics for Trump website: <https://catholics.donaldtrump.com/> (accessed January 20, 2021).
- 53 Gingrich, as quoted in: Katie Glueck, “Trump and Biden Court Catholic Vote, in Very Different Ways”, *New York Times*, September 25, 2020. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/25/us/politics/catholic-voters-trump-biden.html> (accessed January 21, 2021).
- 54 When doing an internet search, I found no news stories discussing any activities of the committee that occurred over the course of the campaign. However, Catholics for Trump did have a Facebook page.
- 55 Catholics for Biden had 36 co-chairs, including Sen Tim Kaine D-VA, the Democratic nominee for vice president in 2016; Carolyn Woo, former president and CEO of Catholic Relief Services; and, Samantha Power, former U.S. ambassador to the United Nations. See more in: Dennis Sadowski, “In Final Drive to the Election, Campaigns Go All Out for the Catholic Vote”, *Catholic San Francisco*, September 24, 2020. Available at: <https://catholic-sf.org/news/in-final-drive-to-the-election-campaigns-go-all-out-for-the-catholic-vote> (accessed January 21, 2021); Christopher White, “Four Catholic-led Groups working against President Donald Trump’s reelection”, *National Catholic Reporter*, September 11, 2020. Available at: <https://www.ncronline.org/news/politics/four-catholic-led-groups-working-against-president-donald-trumps-reelection> (accessed January 21, 2021).
- 56 Dennis Sadowski, “In Final Drive to the Election, Campaigns Go All Out for the Catholic Vote” . . .
- 57 Matt Visser, “Biden reaches out to Catholics like himself, embracing a key group in big 2020 states”, *The Washington Post*, October 14, 2020. Available at: https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/catholics-biden-trump-coney-barrett/2020/10/13/330d5bba-0427-11eb-b7ed-141dd88560ea_story.html (accessed January 21, 2021).

port labor unions and welfare programs”⁵⁸.

The Efforts of Others. There were also other groups outside the official efforts of the party organization that tried to mobilize Catholic voters to support the two major candidates. One such organization was CatholicVote, which sought to mobilize Catholic voters to support Trump by embarking on a \$9.7 million outreach effort, primarily through mail, phone, and digital means. This effort sought to criticize Biden’s record on abortion, judicial appointments, religious freedom, school choice, and other political issues by revealing Biden’s “anti-Catholic record and policy agenda” by means of contrasting them to statements from “the Catechism of the Catholic Church, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, popes and church documents.”⁵⁹ And, according to Brian Burch, the president of CatholicVote, its campaign largely targeted voters (primarily regular Mass goers) in the crucial states of Pennsylvania, Michigan, Wisconsin, Arizona, and Florida.⁶⁰

In addition, various leaders in the Catholic Church also became involved in the political campaign either directly or indirectly. Biden’s stance of abortion placed him outside of church teaching on that matter, and, because of this, Biden was denied the Eucharist by a Catholic priest while campaigning in South Carolina.⁶¹ This action then led to a renewed public discussion within the Catholic Church about whether priests should deny communion to those politicians who disobey church teaching.⁶² And, while some Catholic bishops expressed support for the priest’s action as being consistent with the stated policy of his diocese and of canon law, other bishops did not—contending that the Eucharist should not be used as a political weapon.⁶³

Still, some Catholic priests did choose to join the political fray. In fact, some

58 Katie Glueck, “Trump and Biden Court Catholic Vote, in Very Different Ways”, *New York Times*, September 25, 2020. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/25/us/politics/catholic-voters-trump-biden.html> (accessed January 21, 2021).

59 In addition to Catholic Vote, two other Catholic organizations working to re-elect Trump were the Susan B. Anthony List (a pro-life organization) and Valor America (which seeks to flip Democrats, particular Hispanics, to vote Republican). For more information on these groups and their election efforts, see: Christopher White, “Four Catholic-led Groups working to reelect President Donald Trump”, *National Catholic Reporter*, September 10, 2020. Available at: <https://www.ncronline.org/news/politics/four-catholic-led-groups-working-reelect-president-donald-trump> (accessed January 21, 2021), and Dennis Sadowski, “In Final Drive to the Election, Campaigns Go All Out for the Catholic Vote” . . .

60 Katie Glueck, “Trump and Biden Court Catholic Vote, in Very Different Ways”, *New York Times*, September 25, 2020. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/25/us/politics/catholic-voters-trump-biden.html> (accessed January 21, 2021).

61 Michael Sean Winters, “The Catholic ‘Votes’ Will Still Pick the Next President”, *National Catholic Reporter*, May 27, 2020. Available at: <https://www.ncronline.org/news/opinion/distinctly-catholic/catholic-votes-will-still-pick-next-president> (accessed December 22, 2020).

62 Similar discussions arose when Kerry was the presidential nominee in 2004 and when Biden was the vice-presidential nominee in 2008. See: Kelsey Dallas, “How election season turns a sacred Catholic ritual into a politic weapon”, *Deseret News*, October 29, 2019. Available at: <https://www.deseret.com/2019/10/29/20938245/joe-bide-communion-faith-2020-election> (accessed January 21, 2021).

63 Lauretta Brown, “US Bishops Discuss Communion Denial in Light of Biden Incident”, *National Catholics Register*, December 3, 2019. Available at: <https://www.ncregister.com/news/us-bishops-discuss-communion-denial-in-light-of-biden-incident>, (date accessed : January 22, 2021); Peter Feuerhard, “Pastor’s denial of Eucharist to Biden stirs up recurring debate”, *National Catholic Reporter*, October 31, 2019. Available at: <https://www.online.org/print/news/people/pastors-denial-eucharist-biden-stirs-recurring-debate> (accessed January 22, 2021).

priests produced videos, used social media, and engaged in a war of words in support of the candidate they favored. A priest serving a Catholic church in La Cross, Wisconsin, went so far as to produce a video that included the statement: "You cannot be Catholic and be a Democrat"⁶⁴, while some practicing pro-life Catholics also lambasted Catholic bishops for their reluctance in withholding the Eucharist from pro-choice politicians.⁶⁵

Conclusion. Nevertheless, despite these various campaign efforts, it appears that the voting intentions of Catholics did not change much over the course of the campaign—at least as assessed by the ETWN surveys conducted between November 2019 and mid-October 2020. As shown in Table 7, the results of the third and fourth ETWN surveys basically mirrored the first survey done a year before the 2020 election. In November 2019, Biden received the support of 51 percent of all the Catholics surveyed, while Trump received 39 percent (with 10 percent remaining undecided). Nearly one year later, in October 2020, Biden received the support of 53 percent of all the Catholics surveyed, while Trump received 41 percent (with 6 percent remaining undecided).⁶⁶

Thus, in the end, it is likely that the effect that Biden's Catholicism had on Catholic voters ran in two different directions. While some Catholics undoubtedly liked Biden because of their shared religious affiliation, other Catholics did not because he was "not Catholic enough" given his deviation from Catholic doctrine on moral issues such as abortion and same-sex marriage"⁶⁷. Moreover, neither Biden nor Trump sought to maximize turnout among Catholics as a whole. Rather, each candidate sought to mobilize only those segments of the church that were most likely to vote for them. While the Trump campaign largely sought to mobilize white and religiously observant Catholics, the Biden campaign sought to mobilize Hispanic and less observant Catholics.⁶⁸

64 Mark Wingfield, "This year's tug of war over the Catholic vote and why it matters", *Baptist News*, September 10, 2020. Available at: <https://baptistnews.com/article/this-years-tug-of-war-over-the-catholic-vote-and-why-it-matters/#.YNSCleHkgdU> (accessed January 25, 2021).

65 JD Flynn, "Analysis: Will anything change on pro-choice politicians and holy communion?", *Catholic News Agency*, August 12, 2020. Available at: <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/45476/analysis-will-anything-change-on-pro-choice-politicians-and-holy-communion> (accessed January 25, 2021).

66 The 2020 ANES data also suggest that Biden retained a somewhat higher level of loyalty among his initial Catholic supporters over the course of the election campaign than did Trump. Among those Catholics who indicated that they preferred Biden in the pre-election survey, 97 percent reported that they voted for Biden in the post-election survey, with 2 percent indicating that they ultimately voted for Trump; in contrast, among those Catholics who said that they preferred Trump in the pre-election survey, 95 percent stated that they voted for Trump in the post-election survey, with 4 percent reporting that they voted for Biden.

67 Frank Newport, "Religious Group Voting and the 2020 Election", *Polling Matters*, November 13, 2020. Available at: <https://news.gallup.com/opinion/polling-matters/324410/religious-group-voting-2020-election.aspx> (accessed January 25, 2021).

68 Vincent Stine, "Is There a Catholic Vote and Does It Matter?", *Political Science Now*, June 25, 2020. Available at: <https://politicalsciencenow.com/is-there-a-catholic-vote-and-does-it-matter> (accessed December 20, 2020).

Table 7. Presidential Candidate Support among Catholics: 2019-2020

	All Catholics	Whites	Catholics Blacks	Hispanics
EWTN Poll #1 November 2019				
Trump	39%	48%	15%	24%
Biden	51	42	75	70
Don't know	<u>10</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>6</u>
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%
(N)	(2055)	(1393)	(129)	(392)
EWTN Poll #2 Jan 28 - Feb.4, 2020				
Trump	40%	52%	32%	22%
Biden	51	41	63	67
Don't know	<u>9</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>11</u>
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%
(N)	(1521)	(910)	(66)	(461)
EWTN Poll #3 Aug. 27- Sept. 1, 2020				
Trump	41%	49%	13%	31%
Biden	53	44	84	63
Don't know	<u>6</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>6</u>
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%
(N)	(1212)	(880)	(29)	(261)
EWTN Poll #4 Oct. 5-11, 2020				
Trump	41%	52%	27%	24%
Biden	53	42	65	68
Don't know	<u>6</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>8</u>
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%
(N)	(1490)	(1210)	(27)	(181)

Source: Eternal Word Television Network Polls.

The Catholic Vote on Election Day 2020

Given the results of ETWN polls, one would anticipate that Catholics primarily cast their ballots for Biden in Election Day. And, indeed, some evidence initially suggested that this was the case. As shown in Table 8, the results of exit polls conducted on Election Day indicated that Biden captured a majority of Catholic votes (52 percent versus 47 percent for Trump). However, while exit poll results have their unique problems,⁶⁹ exit polls in the 2020 president election had an additional problem. Due to the Covid pandemic, many states adopted an expanded system of early voting procedures to avoid large gatherings at the

69 For example, see: Nate Silver, "Ten Reasons Why You Should Ignore Exit Polls", *FiveThirtyEight*, November 4, 2008. Available at: <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/ten-reasons-why-you-should-ignore-exit/> (accessed January 25, 2021).

voting booths on Election Day. As a result, those who chose to vote on Election Day were distinctively different from those to cast early ballots.⁷⁰

Table 8. 2020 Presidential Voting of Catholics by Racial and Ethnic Composition According to Different Data Sources

	All Catholics	Whites	Catholics Blacks	Hispanics
2020 Exit Poll				
Presidential Vote Choice				
Biden	52%	x	x	x
Trump	47	x	x	x
Other	1	x	x	x
Total	100%			
2020 Cooperative Election Study				
Presidential Vote Choice				
Biden	48%	40%	84%	70%
Trump	50	59	14	30
Other	1	1	2	1
Total	99%	100%	100%	101%
(N)	(7603)	(5740)	(341)	(1553)

Source: Exit Poll, Edison Research, available at: <https://abcnews.go.com/Elections/exit-polls-2020-us-presidential-election-results-analysis>
x -data not reported

And, when one utilizes the Cooperative Election Study (CES) survey,⁷¹ with its massive sample size, the data suggest (as shown in Table 8) that Trump, rather than Biden, narrowly carried the Catholic vote in 2020 (50 percent to 48 percent).⁷² Not surprisingly, the CES results varied by the racial and ethnic composition of Catholic votes. Whereas nearly three out of every five white Catholics voted for

70 Grace Panetta, "Democrats Are Building a Big Lead among Mail-In and Early Ballots, But Republicans Could Dominate the Vote on Election Day", *Insider* October 15, 2020. Available at: <https://www.businessinsider.com/democrats-leading-in-early-vote-but-republicans-can-still-catch-u2020-10> (accessed January 21, 2021); Chiwaya Nigel, Jiachuan Wu, Elliott Ramos and Kanwal Syed, "Two Weeks until Election Day, Democrats Have a Big Lead in Early Voting", *NBCNews.com*, October 20, 2020. Available at: <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/2020-election/two-weeks-till-election-day-democrats-have-big-lead-early-n1243991> (accessed January 25, 2021).

71 The Cooperative Election Study was previously known as the Cooperative Congressional Election Study.

72 Based on an analysis of validated voters, the Pew Research Center found that Trump carried 50 percent of the Catholics vote compared to Biden's 49 percent. See: Ruth Igielnik, Scott Keeter, and Hannah Hartig, "Behind Biden's 2020 Victory: An Examination of the 2020 Electorate, Based on Validated Voters", *Pew Research Center*, June 2021, p. 14. Available at: <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2021/06/30/behind-bidens-2020-victory/> (accessed August 25, 2021). However, once again, the results of the ANES survey of 2020 deviated from the results of the 2020 CSES survey. The former study included far fewer Catholics than the latter study (N=1204 vs. N=7603, respectively). However, the ANES study suggested that 55 percent of Catholics voted for Biden compared to 43 percent for Trump, with 56 percent of white Catholics having supported Trump while 46 percent supported Biden.

Trump (59 percent), the overwhelming majority of black and Hispanic Catholic voters cast their ballots for Biden (84 percent and 70 percent, respectively).

When one compares the broader voting patterns among Catholics in the 2020 election with those in the 2016 election, one finds little difference in the percentage of votes cast for the candidates of the two major parties, both among Catholics as a whole and as well as among white and black Catholics.⁷³ On the other hand, Trump was able to garner a higher percentage of votes among Hispanic Catholics in the 2020 election compared to 2016 election (30 percent in 2020 compared to 24 percent in 2016).

Likewise, the 2020 CES study revealed, as expected, that Catholics voted differently in 2020 based on the frequency of Mass attendance. As shown in Table 9, there is a monotonic progression in the percentage of votes cast for Trump as one moves from those Catholics who report that they never attend Mass to those who attend Mass weekly. Whereas those who never or those who only attend rather infrequently voted for Biden (52 and 51 percent, respectively), those who reported attending Mass once or twice a month voted more for Trump than for Biden (53 percent to 46 percent). And, among those Catholics reporting that they attended Mass on a weekly basis, Trump outpolled Biden by a substantial margin (57 percent to 42 percent).

Of course, the percentage of those voting for Trump across increasing levels of Mass attendance varies according to the racial and ethnic makeup of Catholics—with far lower levels of reported Trump voting among black and Hispanic Catholics compared to white Catholics at the same level of Mass attendance. Nevertheless, this relationship between higher levels of Mass attendance and larger percentages voting for Trump in 2020 basically holds true across each of the three racial and ethnic groups of Catholics—though somewhat less so among black Catholics than among white and Hispanic Catholics.⁷⁴

73 Based on an analysis of validated voter, the Pew Research Center found that white non-Hispanic Catholics were somewhat more supportive of Biden (at 42 percent) than they were of Clinton in 2016 (39 percent), with Trump's level of support dropping from 59 percent in 2016 to 57 percent in 2020. See: Ruth Igielnik, Scott Keeter, and Hannah Hartig, "Behind Biden's 2020 Victory: An Examination of the 2020 Electorate, Based on Validated Voters", *Pew Research Center*, June 2021, p. 14.

74 Patterns among black Catholics are somewhat harder to assess. First, black Catholics, like other blacks in American society, overwhelmingly vote Democratic. As a result, the percentage of votes cast for the Democratic candidate does not deviate much by levels of Mass attendance. Second, the smaller number of black Catholics falling within the different levels of Mass attendance—particularly among those black Catholics who report that they typically attend Mass once or twice a month—are relatively small. Consequently, the resultant percentages are relatively "unstable" and are far more highly dependent on the unique characteristics of the respondents falling with the category.

Table 9. 2020 Presidential Voting of Catholics by Religious Mass Attendance

	Frequency of Religious Mass Attendance			
	Seldom/Few Never	Once or Times a Year	Twice a Month	Weekly
Presidential Vote Choice				
Biden	52%	51%	46%	42%
Trump	47	48	53	57
Other	<u>2</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>
Total	101%	100%	100%	101%
(N)	(1134)	(3621)	(709)	(2411)

White Catholics				
Presidential Vote Choice				
Biden	44%	44%	37%	34%
Trump	54	55	62	65
Other	<u>2</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%
(N)	(812)	(2622)	(519)	(1738)

Black Catholics				
Presidential Vote Choice				
Biden	95%	85%	95%	82%
Trump	5	12	5	14
Other	<u>0</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>5</u>
Total	100%	100%	100%	101%
(N)	(20)	(101)	(37)	(125)

Hispanic Catholics				
Presidential Vote Choice				
Biden	73%	67%	68%	63%
Trump	26	32	32	35
Other	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>2</u>
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%
(N)	(259)	(714)	(115)	(361)

Source: 2020 Cooperative Election Study

And, when one compares voting patterns related to Mass attendance in the 2020 election (Table 9) with that in the 2016 election (Table 4), one finds some interesting differences across the two elections. First, among Catholics as a whole, the percentage of votes cast for Biden exceeded the percentage of votes cast for Clinton among those Catholics who never or seldom attended Mass, with a bare majority casting their ballots for Biden (52 percent and 51 percent, respec-

tively). On the other hand, the percentage of votes cast for Trump among those who attended Mass on a weekly basis increased marginally across the two elections (from 55 percent in 2016 to 57 percent in 2020), but a major jump in Trump support was evident among those Catholics who reported that they typically attended Mass once or twice a month (increasing from 44 percent for Trump in 2016 to 53 percent in 2020).

This stronger relationship between levels of Mass attendance and presidential voting patterns in 2020 compared to 2016 holds true for both white and Hispanic Catholics. Among white Catholics, the major jump between 2016 and 2020 in voting for Trump occurred among those who attended Mass once or twice a month. As a result, a more monotonic pattern is evident in 2020 between levels of Mass attendance and voting for Trump among white Catholics, whereas in 2016 the major difference had been between those white Catholics who attended Mass on a weekly basis and all other white Catholics who attended less frequently.

Likewise, a stronger relationship between levels of Mass attendance and presidential voting patterns is also evident among Hispanic Catholics in 2020 compared to 2016. In 2016, the highest percentage of votes cast for Trump were found among those Hispanic Catholics who never attended Mass (33 percent) and those who attended on a weekly basis (26 percent). But, in 2020, those Hispanic Catholics who never attended Mass were the least likely to have voted for Trump (26 percent), with the percentage of votes for Trump increasing to its highest level among those Hispanic Catholics who attended Mass on a weekly basis (35 percent). In addition, major jumps in voting for Trump occurred between 2016 and 2020 among those Hispanic Catholics who seldom attended Mass and those Hispanic Catholics who attended Mass once or twice a month (basically from 21 or 22 percent in 2016 to 32 percent in 2020). As a result, a more monotonic pattern between increasing levels of Mass attendance and higher levels of voting for Trump is also evident in 2020 among Hispanic Catholics when compared to 2016.

Conclusions

Based on the analysis present here, several conclusions can be drawn related to the political behavior of Catholics in the 2020 presidential election. First, assessments of how Catholics voted in the 2020 presidential election can vary by the data source employed. Not only do the results of the 2020 exit polls differ from some post-election national surveys, but different national surveys yield different results as well. For purposes of this study, the primary data source employed was that of the 2020 Cooperative Election Study, given its large sample size and its ability to engage in more meaningful subgroup analysis among Catholics.

Second, while early polls suggested that Catholics were largely, and rather evenly, divided in terms of their support for, and opposition to, President Trump, these same polls largely suggested that Catholics preferred most Democratic candidates over Trump in various head-to-head matchups. Yet, in the end, it appears that Trump handily carried the Catholic vote in the 2020 presidential election.

Third, as a result of the 2020 presidential election, the status of Catholics as being an important swing vote in American elections has diminished. Although a majority of Catholics cast their votes behind the winning presidential candidate in the previous four American presidential elections, they did not continue to do so in the 2020 election: a majority of Catholics cast their ballots for Trump in 2020 despite Biden winning the 2020 presidential election.

Fourth, the political preferences of Catholics continue to remain deeply divided along racial and ethnic lines. As was the case in previous presidential elections, the votes of white Catholics deviated substantially from the votes cast by black and Latino Catholics. The votes of black and Latino Catholics were overwhelmingly Democratic in nature, while those of white Catholics were far more Republican than their black and Latino co-parishioners.

Fifth, previous presidential elections have revealed that the votes cast by Catholics were related to their level of Mass attendance, with those attending Mass on a more regular basis being more likely to cast a Republican ballot. Not only did this relationship continue to hold in 2020, but it became even stronger as a more monotonic relationship emerged in the wake of the 2020 election. Thus, the so-called “God gap” that is evident within American politics more generally also appears to be emerging more fully within the ranks of Catholics as well.

Finally, black Catholics overwhelmingly cast Democratic ballots in 2020 as they had in 2016, but Latino Catholics cast a higher percentage of Republican votes in the 2020 than the 2016 presidential election. Elections are won at the margins, with small shifts in vote totals among large groups altering the outcome of elections. Hence, any continuation of this shift, along with any further, increase in the level of Republican voting among Latino Catholics would represent an important change in the electoral terrain of American politics.

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Корвин А. Смиidt

КАТОЛИЦИ И ИЗБОРИ ЗА АМЕРИЧКОГ ПРЕДСЕДНИКА 2020.

Сажетак

У овом чланку истражује се улога католика у америчким председничким изборима 2020. године. Иако су некада католици били круцијална и важна компонентна изборних коалиција Демократске партије, последњих година њихови гласови се све више расплињују. Али и поред тога, католици представљају важан глас у америчкој политици, а у последњим председничким изборима били су део гласачког дела које нагиње ка националним популарним гласовима. Стога, овај чланак се фокусира на изборе из 2020. године и испитује ниво политичких промена и континуитета католика, како су гласали на примарним изборима у Демократској партији, њихов ниво подршке за различите кандидате за време кампање, како су на крају гласали и до ког нивоа се њихово гласање разликује у односу на изборе 2016. године.

Кључне речи: католици, партијска идентификација, гласање за председника, расне и етничке разлике, присуствовање служби