2024 ELECTION

Postmortem

BY DR. RYAN BURGE

John C. Danforth Center on
RELIGION AND POLITICS


VOTE

LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

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Religion and politics affect us all—even those who profess no religion and those who ignore all politics. No one escapes the influence and impact of religion and politics on society. And these terms do not escape each other either; the interaction of politics and religion changes both. How does one influence the other? How has it in the past? How *should* it now?

These enormous questions guide us at the John C. Danforth Center on Religion and Politics. Founded in 2010 at Washington University in St. Louis, the Danforth Center serves as an open venue for fostering rigorous scholarship and informing broad academic and public communities about the intersections of religion and politics in the United States.

Ryan Burge's work offers one model. This book contains a series of reports explaining how religion shaped the 2024 presidential election. Informed by serious scholarship but written for a broad audience, this book of postings from Ryan's Substack ***Graphs about Religion*** will be useful to anyone who wants to understand how American religion and American politics shaped one another in the most recent national election.

Ryan Burge joins many others at the Danforth Center who pursue the same breadth and depth of knowledge in their own ways, from their own disciplines. The Center exists to support and enhance outstanding scholarly research into how religion and politics have intertwined in the United States. We aim to distribute this scholarship widely—to students, scholars, journalists, and the general public—through courses, lectures, conferences, and workshops. In our online journal, ***Arc***, as well as in other publications and public commentary, we add history, knowledge, and context to current events and concerns. In all these ways and others, we provide an ongoing forum for discussion among people with widely different views about religion and politics, aiming to build understanding across religious, political, and cultural differences in a pluralistic society.

We hope you will explore all our offerings online and elsewhere, beginning with this book.

LETTER FROM THE AUTHOR

RYAN P. BURGE

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The 2024 presidential election marked one of the most consequential (and contentious) moments in recent American political life, and the months that followed offered a unique opportunity to step back and make sense of what actually happened. At the John C. Danforth Center on Religion and Politics at Washington University in St. Louis, part of our mission is to illuminate how religious identities, commitments, and institutions shape public life. This collection brings together my series of post-election analyses published in the weeks and months after November 2024, each one focused on a different facet of the electorate.

Across these reports, I draw on the best data available—primarily the Cooperative Election Study—to understand how various religious traditions behaved at the ballot box, how demographic groups shifted from previous cycles, and what patterns emerged within the broader story of American politics. Some of these findings confirmed long-running trends, such as the continued political polarization between religiously active and religiously inactive Americans. Others cut against conventional wisdom, particularly the growing complexity inside communities like Evangelicals, Black Protestants, and the religiously unaffiliated.

This work started out as a series of posts in my newsletter ***Graphs about Religion***; that language has been retained in this collected volume. The goal is simple: to give scholars, journalists, clergy, policymakers, and interested citizens a clear view of how religion shaped the 2024 election—and how those dynamics might influence the years ahead.

I am grateful to the Danforth Center for supporting work like this, which sits at the intersection of careful social-scientific research and public engagement. My hope is that this compilation will serve as a useful resource for anyone seeking to understand not just what happened in 2024, but why it happened and what it tells us about the future of religion and politics in the United States.

EVANGELICALS

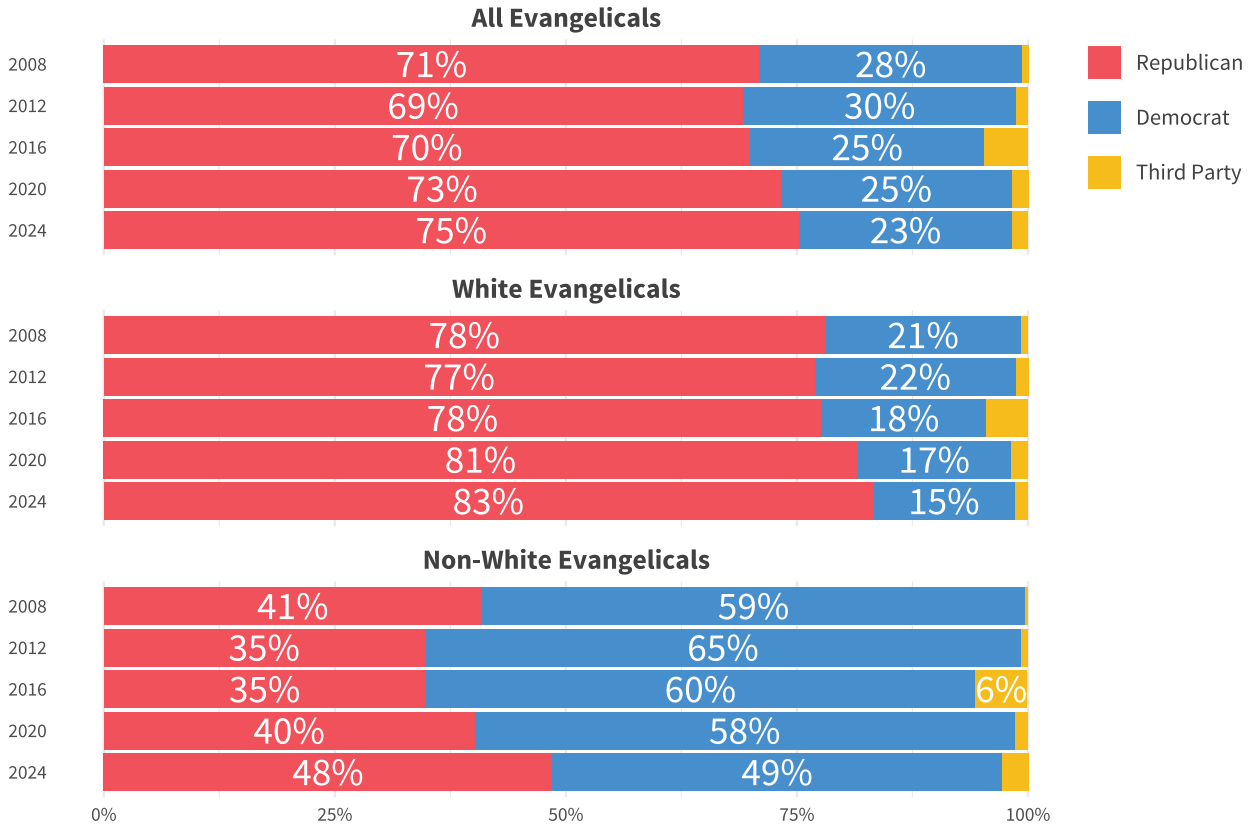
What in the world happened in the 2024 presidential election?

It's a question I've been asked by dozens of media outlets over the last six months. But I had a big problem: no reliable data that would aid me in answering such a question. The exit polls, no matter what anyone tells you, should not be considered gospel. There are a number of fundamental flaws in their design that make it impossible to rely on them to construct an accurate portrayal of what actually happened on Election Day. Their real purpose? To fill air time on Election Night while the major networks wait for the results to pile again across the United States.

But all that's changed now, and my goal over the next couple of months is to tell the story of the campaign between Donald Trump and Kamala Harris using data from the newly released Cooperative Election Study. The data indicates that 22% of all American adults align with an Evangelical denomination. Seventeen percent of the sample are white Evangelicals, and just over 5% are non-white Evangelicals. Among those non-white Evangelicals, 38% were Black and 28% were Hispanic.

Let's start by visualizing the results of the last five presidential elections among those three groups of Evangelicals.

Presidential Vote Choice among Evangelicals, 2008-2024



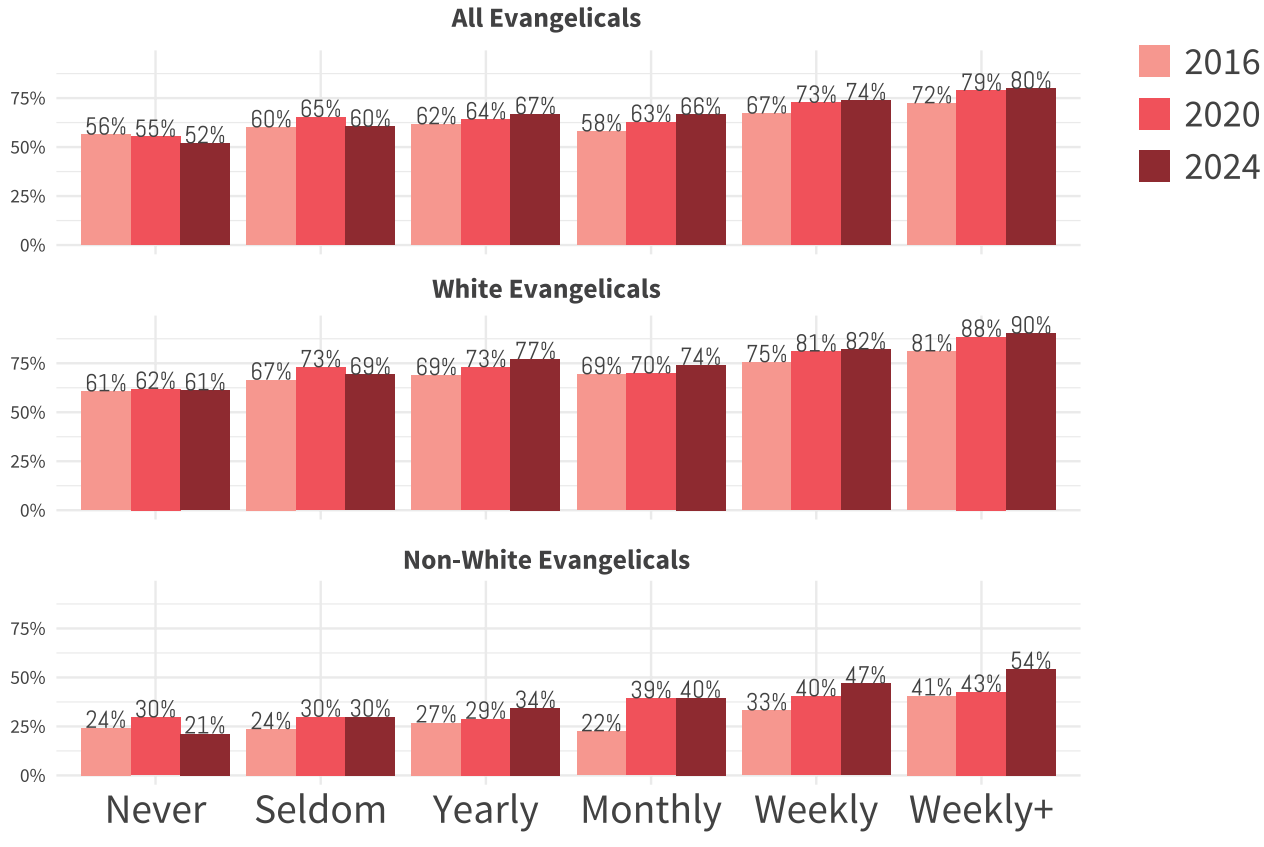
It should come as no surprise that Evangelicals overwhelmingly supported Donald Trump in 2024, because they gave him a tremendous amount of support in both 2016 and 2020. But it's noteworthy that Trump continued to make inroads among Evangelicals—his share of the vote went from 70% to 75% in the last three elections. The Democrats have not done well at all with Evangelicals. Their best effort was in 2012 when Obama got 30% of their votes. But Harris did slightly worse than Biden—23% vs. 25%. It's notable that Biden got the same share of the Evangelical vote as Hillary Clinton in 2016.

Of course, Trump's real base of support is specifically among white Evangelicals. In 2016, Trump's vote share was no different than McCain's in 2008 or Romney's in 2012—about 77%. But in 2020, Trump ran up the score just a bit—garnering 81% of the white Evangelical vote. The data from 2024 says he continued to win over the white Evangelical vote at 83%—the highest on record.

However, the breakdown of the non-white Evangelical vote may tell the story of the 2024 election when it comes to religion. Republicans have historically struggled with this group of voters. In 2008, Obama enjoyed an 18-point advantage, and that expanded dramatically in the next couple of election cycles. In 2012, the non-white Evangelical vote was D+30, and it was D+25 in 2016. But then in 2020, Trump managed to make some inroads—getting back to 40% and narrowing the gap to 18 points. But look at 2024—a huge shift. The non-white Evangelical vote was essentially split in 2024—Harris at 49% and Trump at 48%. Harris lost at least ten points with this constituency—a huge blow.

Let's dig one layer down now into religious attendance.

Trump's Vote Share among Evangelicals by Attendance, 2016-2024



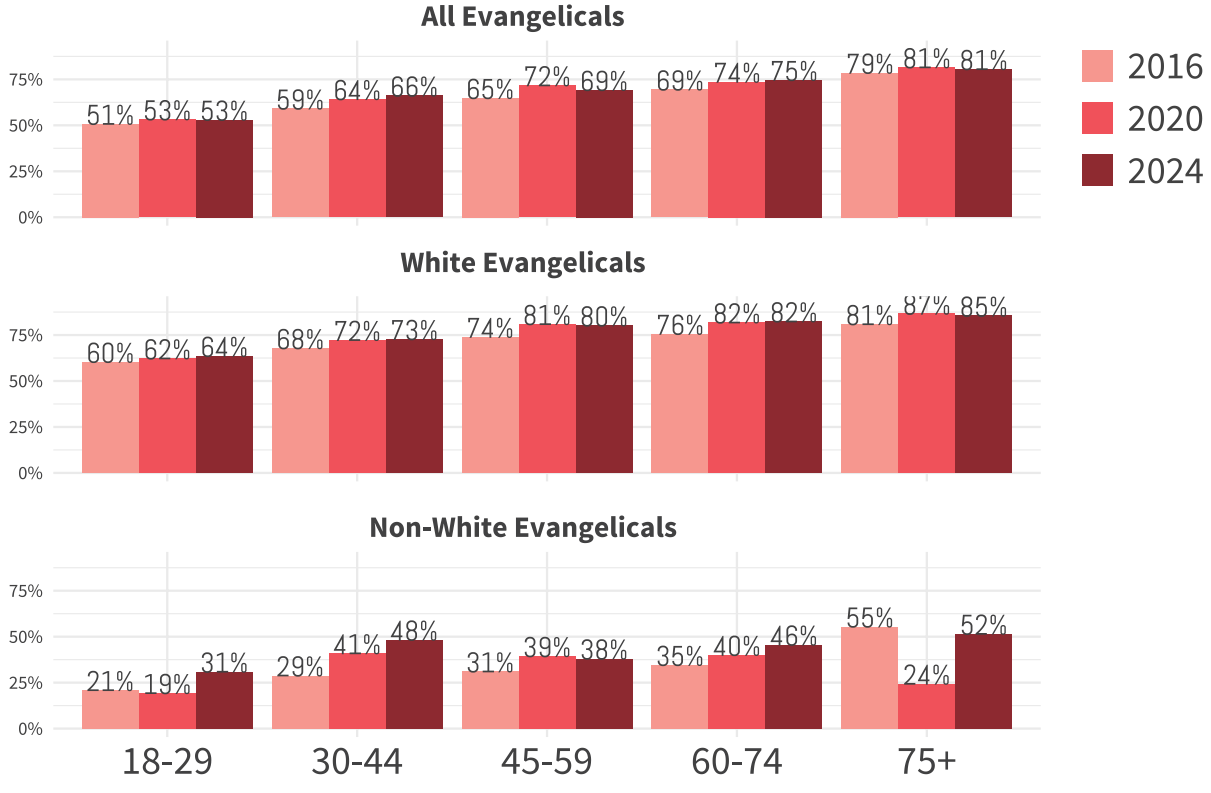
There's a lot going on in this graph, but I think that the big narrative is how Trump just continues to make gains among Evangelical voters. Between 2016 and 2020 he gained five points among yearly church attending Evangelicals, eight points among monthly church attending Evangelicals, seven points among weekly church attendees and eight points among those who attended church multiple times per week. However, Trump didn't actually lose ground with those who attend church less than once a year.

Here's a stat that will probably end up being quoted somewhere—90% of white Evangelicals who attended church multiple times per week supported Trump in 2024. That was a nine-point gain from 2016. The white Evangelical results just basically mirror the analysis from the entire Evangelical sample. He made gains at every attendance level from yearly on up. The only question I have when looking at this graph is: how high can he go with this group? Ninety percent is essentially unanimous in the world of public polling.

What about those non-white Evangelicals? I would direct your attention to the bottom right of the graph. Donald Trump made really sizable gains with the high attenders. Between 2016 and 2024, Trump's share went from 33% to 47% among non-white Evangelicals who attend church every week. He did 13 points better among those who attend religious services multiple times per week. But there are also increases among yearly attenders and monthly attenders, too.

Is this an age thing, though?

Trump's Vote Share among Evangelicals by Age Category, 2016-2024

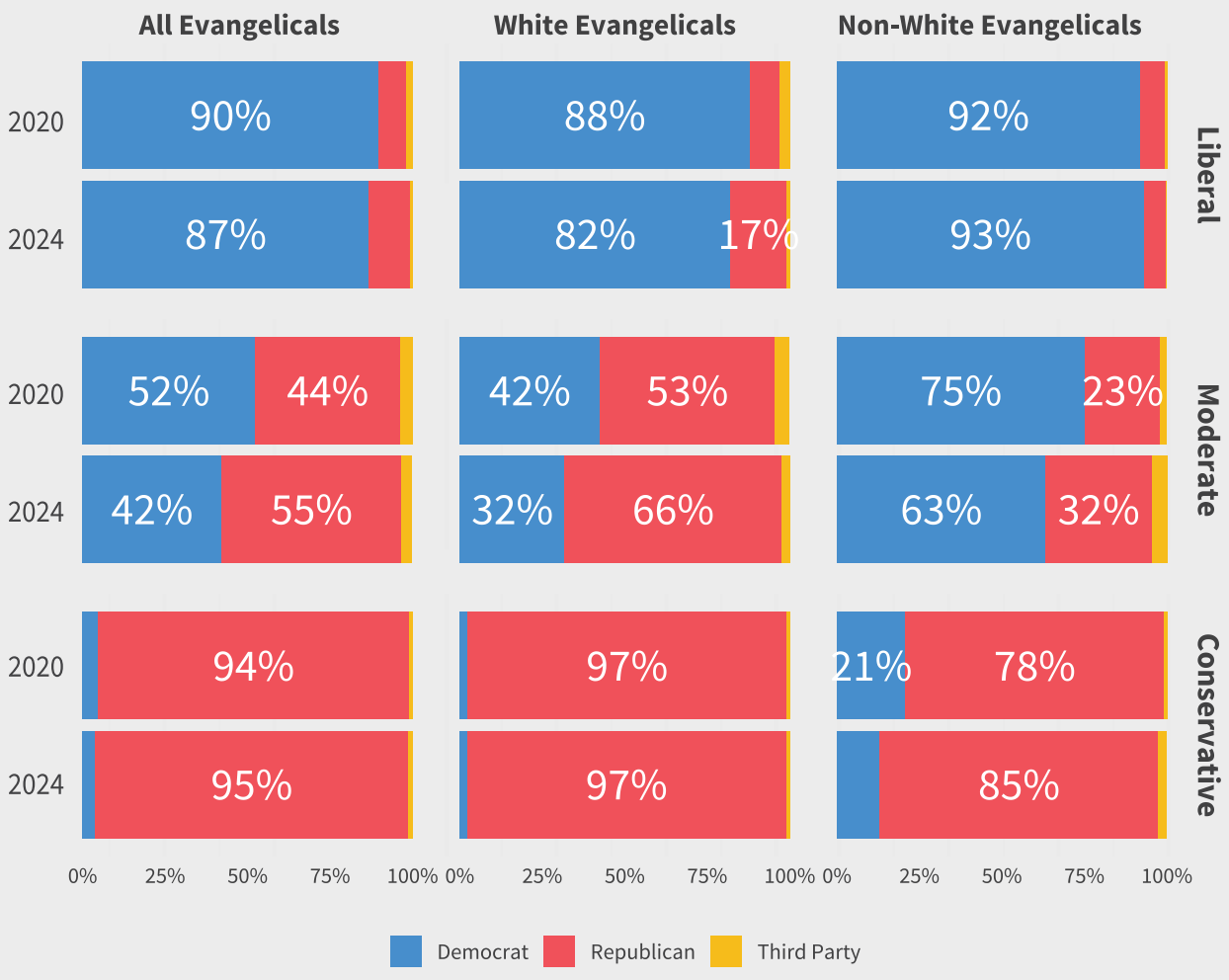


I'm not going to spend a lot of time describing the top two graphs here beyond this simple maxim—older Evangelicals are more pro-Trump than younger ones. Among white Evangelicals specifically, Trump got 64% of the 18-29 year group but did about 20 points better among those who were at least 75 years old. And it's a really smooth gradient—each bucket is slightly more Republican than the prior one, and it doesn't really deviate that much.

Now, the bottom set of graphs is incredibly interesting and should be insightful for political observers. We know that Trump saw big gains among non-white Evangelicals, but were they younger or older? In this analysis, I can specifically point to one age group—30 to 44 years old. Only 29% of them voted for Trump in 2016. In the 2024 election that jumped to 48%. Which is higher than both the 18-29 or 60-74 groups. But he also gained 11 points among that 60-74 group, too.

Now, there's been this narrative that I've seen bandied about a bit online that Trump's big wins were among people who identified as ideologically moderate. David Shor talked about it in a podcast with Ezra Klein. I had to see if that was especially the case with our Evangelical sample.

Presidential Vote Choice among Evangelicals by Political Ideology



It should come as no surprise that Trump did not do well with liberal Evangelicals—not that there were many of them, anyway. But the second row of bar graphs tells a compelling story about the 2024 result compared to four years earlier. Among white Evangelical moderates, 53% of them voted for Trump in 2020. That share rose to 66% in 2024. Among non-white Evangelical moderates, Trump's share also increased by nine percentage points.

Among white Evangelical moderates

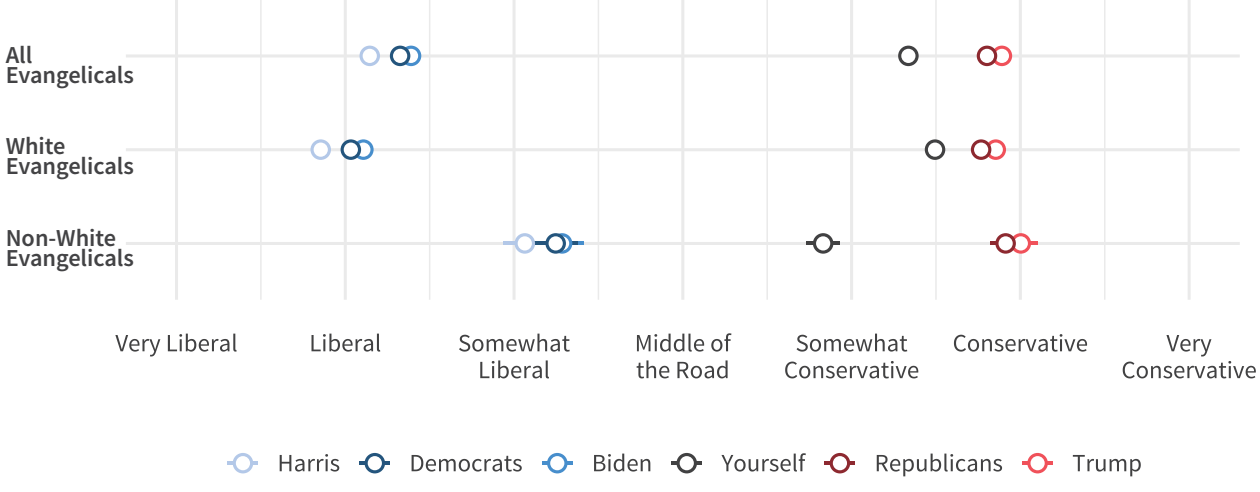
53% **VOTED FOR TRUMP IN 2020**

66% **VOTED FOR TRUMP IN 2024**

And there's more; look at the bottom row—especially for the non-white Evangelicals. In 2020, Trump only received the vote of 78% of non-white Evangelicals who identified as politically conservative. In 2024, that jumped up to 85%. At the same time, he won almost all the conservative white Evangelical vote (97%). That's what always surprises me about Trump—he makes gains in one area without really losing anywhere else. That's hard to do.

But let me offer you one more bit of analysis that may help explain the 2024 result. It's a series of questions that asks folks to place a bunch of people and groups on an ideological scale that runs from very liberal to very conservative. I am going to show you how Evangelicals placed Harris, Biden, the Democratic Party, Trump, the Republican Party and themselves on this scale.

Place the Following People or Groups in Ideological Space



> "I think this analysis provides a lot of empirical support for the narrative that spun out of Election Night—the Democrats have a big problem with non-white voters. What's stunning to me is that even though non-white Evangelicals didn't see the Democrats as being too extreme, they still threw a lot of support behind Donald Trump. One interpretation of this is that this voting bloc is not firmly in GOP control now—they still see the Democratic Party as fairly sensible and moderate."

One striking detail: Evangelicals saw Harris as more ideologically liberal than Biden. That's true among white and non-white Evangelicals alike. The differences weren't huge (usually about a quarter of a point on a six-point scale), but the data doesn't lie—Harris was seen as a liberal. It's also notable that Evangelicals saw Biden as slightly more conservative than the Democratic Party as a whole while Harris was slightly more liberal than the Democratic Party.

What about Trump? Evangelicals saw him as slightly more conservative than the GOP. The gap was incredibly consistent across all three of these groups. In each case, the mean score was about 6 on a scale from 1 to 7.

But also take note of where non-white Evangelicals put themselves on this continuum—much more moderate than white Evangelicals. They also tended to see the Democrats as significantly less liberal than their white Evangelical counterparts. Said another way—white Evangelicals have a much more polarized view of the major players in American politics compared to non-white Evangelicals.

Looked at broadly, I think this analysis provides a lot of empirical support for the narrative that spun out of Election Night—the Democrats have a big problem with non-white voters. What's stunning to me is that even though non-white Evangelicals didn't see the Democrats as being too extreme, they still threw a lot of support behind Donald Trump. One interpretation of this is that this voting bloc is not firmly in GOP control now—they still see the Democratic Party as fairly sensible and moderate.

How Democrats might win these voters back—that's a different story entirely.

Scan to view code for this post.

MAINLINE PROTESTANTS

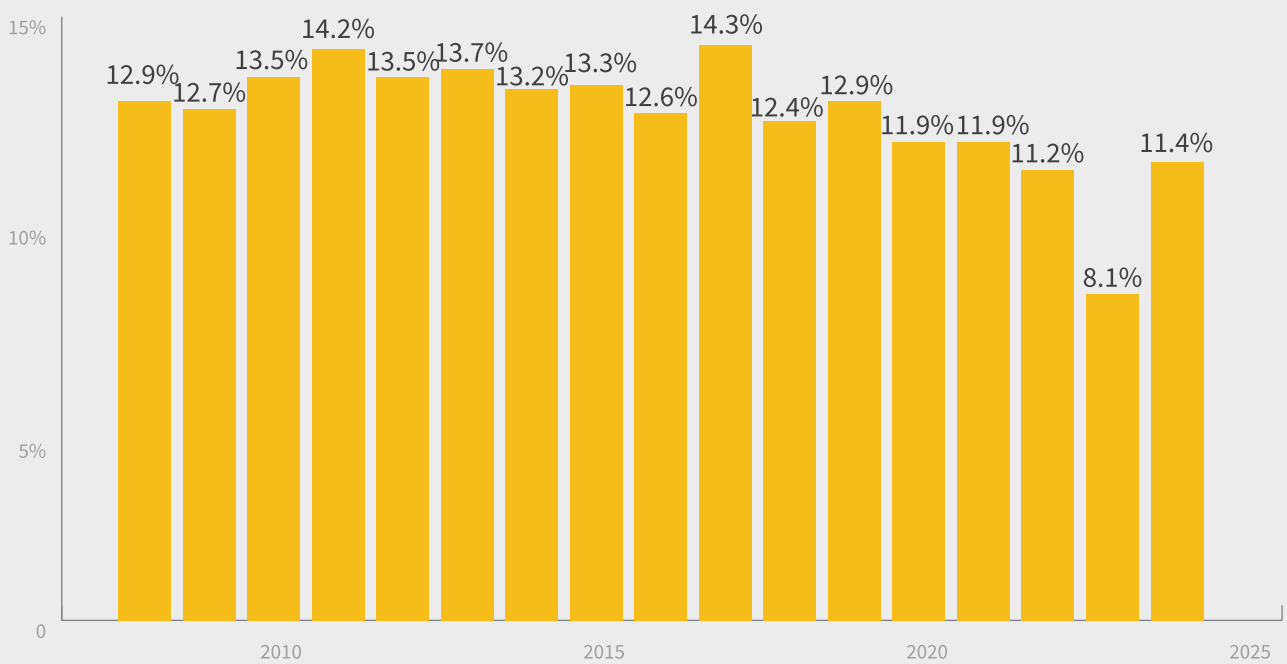
I give a few talks here and there to a whole bunch of different audiences. Some of them are really knowledgeable about the world of religion.

Think seminaries and religious studies departments. Others are given to groups of undergraduates or community groups. One of the things I have to figure out is what terms I need to explain and which ones I can just toss out and move along. If I had a dollar for every time I've had to spell "the Nones" during a presentation, I would be on track to retire before my youngest son would earn his high school diploma—for the record, he's in fifth grade.

The other term that I toss out a little too casually is "mainline Protestants." I am going to assume that you have chosen to subscribe to this newsletter because you have a decent interest in religion, generally speaking, and that you have a pretty good sense of what I mean when I use this term. But for those who don't know, here's the one-sentence description—the mainline is a Protestant tradition that is basically the less conservative version of Evangelical Christianity. It used to dominate American religion—there is some evidence that half of all Americans were members of a mainline church back in the 1950s.

Those glory days are most assuredly over, my friends. Let me just show you the share of the Cooperative Election Study sample that identifies with a mainline tradition between 2008 and 2024.

Share of the Sample That Is Affiliated with a Mainline Tradition



These estimates are a bit noisier than I would like to see, but I do think that they tell a fairly consistent story about what's happening with the mainline. It's pretty fair to say that the mainline was right about 12–13% of the sample between 2008 and 2014. It would rise a little higher or maybe dip just a bit but, the median was about 13% during this time period. Then, that percentage began to slide just a bit and was likely down to 12% by 2020, and then I think there's pretty strong evidence that it's closer to 11% now. (By the way, the estimate from 2023 is exactly why we can't build a narrative out of a single data point—it's just an outlier).

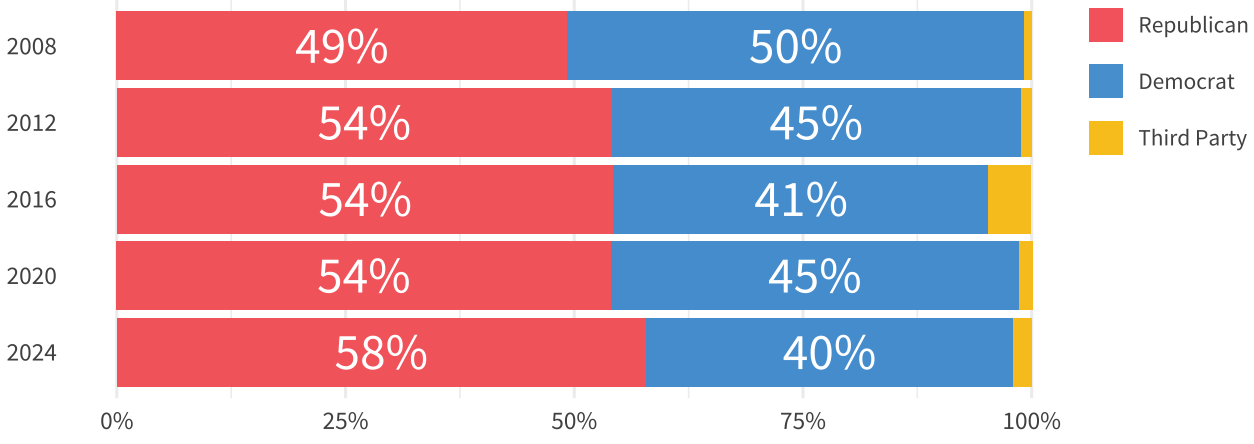
So, it's definitely a smaller group—about half the size of Evangelicals, for instance. Yet, there's this perception that you often read on social media about the mainline—it's an accusation that mainline Protestants are politically liberal. For the record, this thought almost always emerges from the keyboard of an Evangelical Protestant or a traditional Catholic. There are entire Twitter accounts that are dedicated to watching the livestreams of mainline church services to catch them saying or doing something that is far outside mainstream Christian orthodoxy.

However, I want to make this point exceedingly clear now—it's demonstrably, empirically, objectively false to use the term "liberal mainline." The only way that makes any kind of sense is if your definition of liberal is "less conservative than Evangelicals." Which essentially means that every other religious tradition in the United States is liberal. Let me show you exactly what I mean by analyzing how the mainline has voted in the last five presidential elections.

In 2008, the mainline was evenly divided between Barack Obama and John McCain. It was truly a 50/50 election. But that was the last time that was true. When Mitt Romney ran in 2012, he earned 54% of the mainline vote. When Donald Trump ran in 2016, he earned 54% of the mainline vote. When he ran again in 2020, he got exactly the same share—54%. The only thing interesting to note is that the mainline wasn't huge fans of Hillary Clinton; she received only 41% of ballots cast. That was (at that moment) a low point.

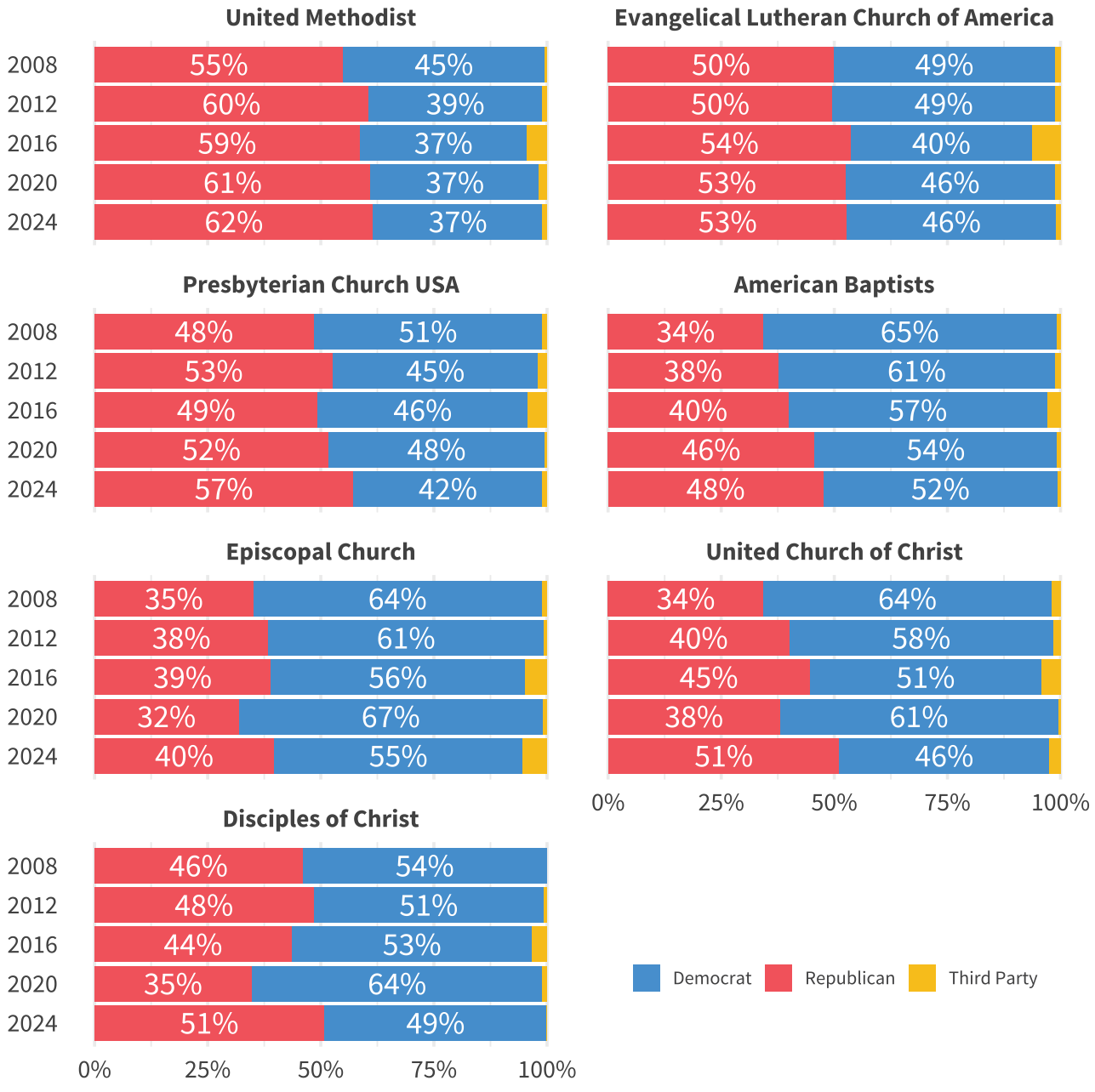
But look what happened in 2024—Donald Trump actually managed to make some real inroads with mainline Protestants, and he upped his vote share to 58%. In contrast, Kamala Harris did even worse than Hillary Clinton, receiving only 40% of the votes from mainline Protestants. So, in the last five election cycles the mainline vote has been: D+1, R+9, R+13, R+9, and R+18. Remember the reputation that exists about the politics of the mainline is that they are left-wing Democrats. That claim does not stand up to empirical scrutiny.

Presidential Vote Choice among Mainline Protestants, 2008-2024



Let me take this down one layer by showing you the voting patterns of each of the "Seven Sisters of the Mainline" over the last five election cycles.

Presidential Vote Choice among Mainline Denominations, 2008-2024



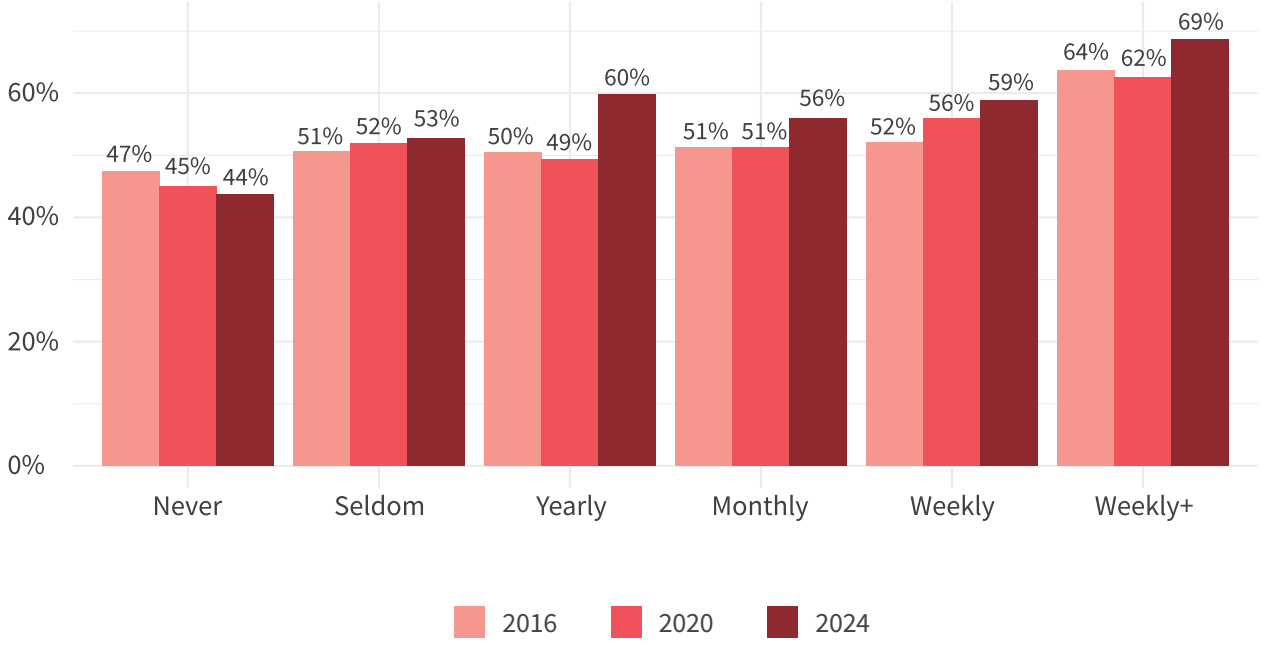
The largest mainline denomination, even after the schism, is the United Methodist Church. They still have nearly five million members (although that's down by more than half from the late 1960s). The United Methodist vote has been a majority Republican vote since 2008. They favored McCain by ten points in his matchup with Obama. But from there, the GOP has only done better. I think the best way to think about the United Methodist vote is that it's 60% Republican and slightly less than 40% Democrat. I also need to point out that even after the schism, the UMC vote did not become more left-leaning. All those Global Methodists leaving had no demonstrable impact on the percentages.

What about the other denominations? Well, I do need to direct your attention to the Episcopal Church, because they are a true outlier in that they are clearly a majority Democratic denomination. While the percentages do bounce around a bit, I think it's fair to say that in an average election, TEC votes split 60/40 for the Democratic Party. But also remember this—on an average Sunday in the United States, about 450,000 Episcopalians attend worship. That's about 1/10th the size of the Southern Baptist attendance.

What about the other denominations listed here? Many of them are incredibly politically divided. That's true for the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, certainly—they are 53/46. In the Presbyterian Church USA, you did see a pretty big shift to the right in 2024, but before that they were certainly a nearly evenly split vote in presidential elections. Do you see the point here? A lot of the major mainline denominations are about as purple as it gets in modern American politics.

But remember that prior graph that showed Trump actually making gains with the mainline? Let me show you where he was finding more support in 2024 compared to the prior two election cycles.

Trump's Vote Share among Mainline Protestants by Attendance, 2016-2024



There's only one level of attendance where Trump clearly did worse in 2024 compared to 2016; that was among those mainline Protestants who never attended. Even there, he only lost three percentage points. You can see a steady stair step of gains for Trump among monthly attenders (gaining five points), weekly attenders (up seven points), and those who attend more than once a week (up five points since 2016). In other words, Trump managed to really not suffer any losses among the mainline and really experienced some modest but key gains among the most religiously active in the tradition.

This is a point worth considering for a minute—Trump did better among mainline Protestants who went to church more often. If that whole trope that mainline church services are little more than DSA rallies, wouldn't it be the case that the most active would be the most liberal? Maybe, just maybe, the average mainline Protestant who occupies a pew every Sunday morning is significantly more conservative than they are given credit for in the online discourse.

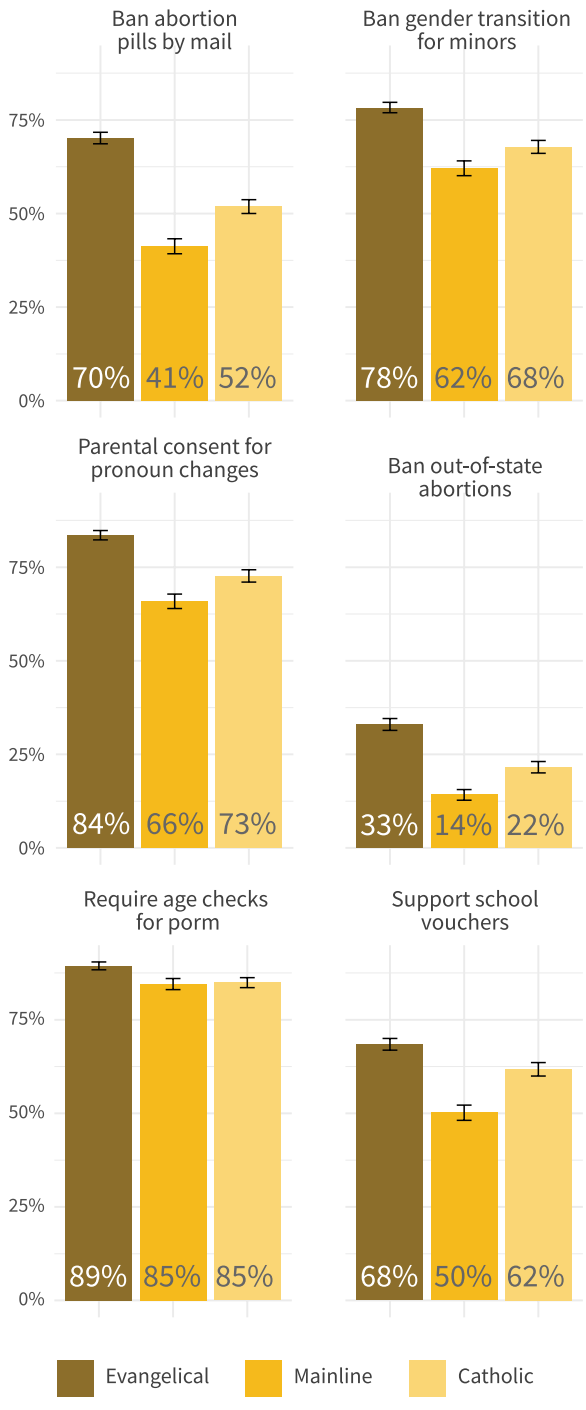
I can actually make that plain by showing you the results of a series of six questions that the CES added to the questionnaire this year that asked specifically about some hot button Culture War topics like abortion, transgender, and pornography. I am showing you how white Evangelicals, white mainline Protestants, and white Catholics felt about each.

When it comes to a ban on gender transition for minors, 62% of the mainline are in favor, compared to 78% of Evangelicals. Also, when asked if a school should seek out parental consent before calling a child a different set of pronouns, two-thirds of the mainline were in favor. That was just slightly below Catholics at 73% and Evangelicals at 84%.

On abortion, about 70% of Evangelicals favor a ban on shipping abortion pills through the mail—a sentiment that is shared by 52% of Catholics and 41% of mainline Protestants. So clearly some daylight there, but I wouldn't describe that as a chasm. And only a third of Evangelicals think that a woman should be punished for traveling out of state to seek an abortion. Which is higher than the mainline about 14% and Catholics at 22%.

But again, it's not like the mainline are just on the far left on this question.

Views of Social Issues among White Christians



Just for comparison, here's how the mainline differs from all white Democrats on these questions:

Ban gender transition for minors:
62% vs. 32%

Ban abortion pills:
41% vs. 12%

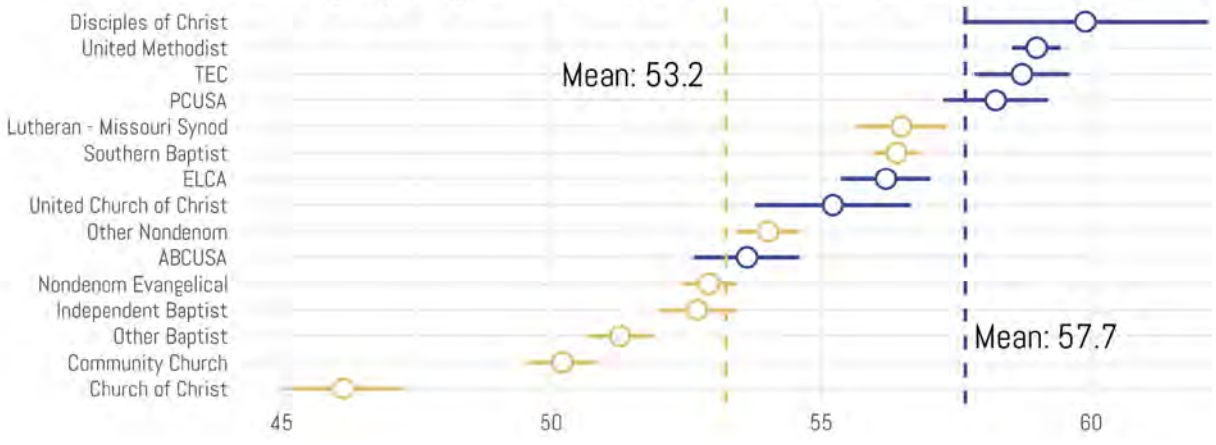
Age checks for porn:
85% vs. 68%

Parental consent for pronoun change:
66% vs. 31%

Ban out-of-state abortions:
14% vs. 5%

Support school vouchers:
50% vs. 25%

Mean Age by Religious Tradition, 2024—Blue Are Mainline Traditions



When it comes to the possibility of a law making online porn sites verify age before letting a user view content, 85% of the mainline are in favor, which is essentially the same as Evangelicals at 89%. And half of mainline Protestants support school vouchers, too. I just don't know how one could look at these results and call the average mainline Protestant a social liberal.

Again, if liberal means "not as conservative as the most right-leaning religious group in the United States," then the mainline is clearly liberal. If the measuring stick is comparing the average mainline Protestant to the average Democrat, then they are clearly right of center.

I think here's what a lot of people miss in this discussion—the mainline is full of relatively well educated, middle class, rural old white people. That's not what I would necessarily describe as the core of the Democratic Party right now.

I mean, the average adult member of the Disciples of Christ is 60 years old, which is statistically the same as the average United Methodist. If I calculated the mean age of all of the Seven Sisters, it's 57.7 years of age. That's about five years older than the average American in the 2024 Cooperative Election Study. And it's certainly older than a lot of Evangelical groups like non-denominational Christians.

When you think of the average mainline Protestant, it's not accurate to conjure an image of a thirty-something pastor wearing a rainbow stole and preaching a sermon about the non-binary nature of the Holy Spirit. Instead, it's probably a retired school teacher living in a small town in the upper Midwest. And, on average, that person voted for Donald Trump in 2024.

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BLACK AMERICANS, RELIGION, AND THE VOTE

So far, I've taken a really good look at how three Christian groups voted in the 2024 election—Evangelicals, mainline Protestants, and Catholics. But there's another group that I haven't examined yet—Black Protestants.

Whenever I post a graph that contains a category for Black Protestants, I always get a comment or two asking why they are their own group. Let me briefly answer that before diving into the data.

The Black Church in America is an entirely different culture than the average white Evangelical or mainline tradition. Anyone who has attended a worship service in a Black Church tradition knows that to be true. But beyond a difference in worship styles, there are many ways that the Black Church should be considered its own category. African-Americans were denied access to all kinds of institutions in the United States throughout most of American history—so the church became more than just a spiritual retreat. It was also the center of social and political life. That's why you see politicians often give speeches during a worship service at a Black Church—because those running for elected office had no other venue to speak to a large group of people.

nearly

95%

OF BLACK PROTESTANTS SUPPORTED OBAMA'S CANDIDACY IN BOTH 2008 AND 2012

Also, theologically and politically speaking—the Black Church does not fit into the Evangelical or mainline Protestant category. In some ways, Black Protestants look a whole lot like Evangelicals. They take a literal view of the Bible and have views of sexuality and gender that are decidedly conservative. So, let's just throw them in with the Evangelicals, right? Well, when it comes to the ballot box, the two groups could not be more different. Remember—83% of white Evangelicals voted for Donald Trump.

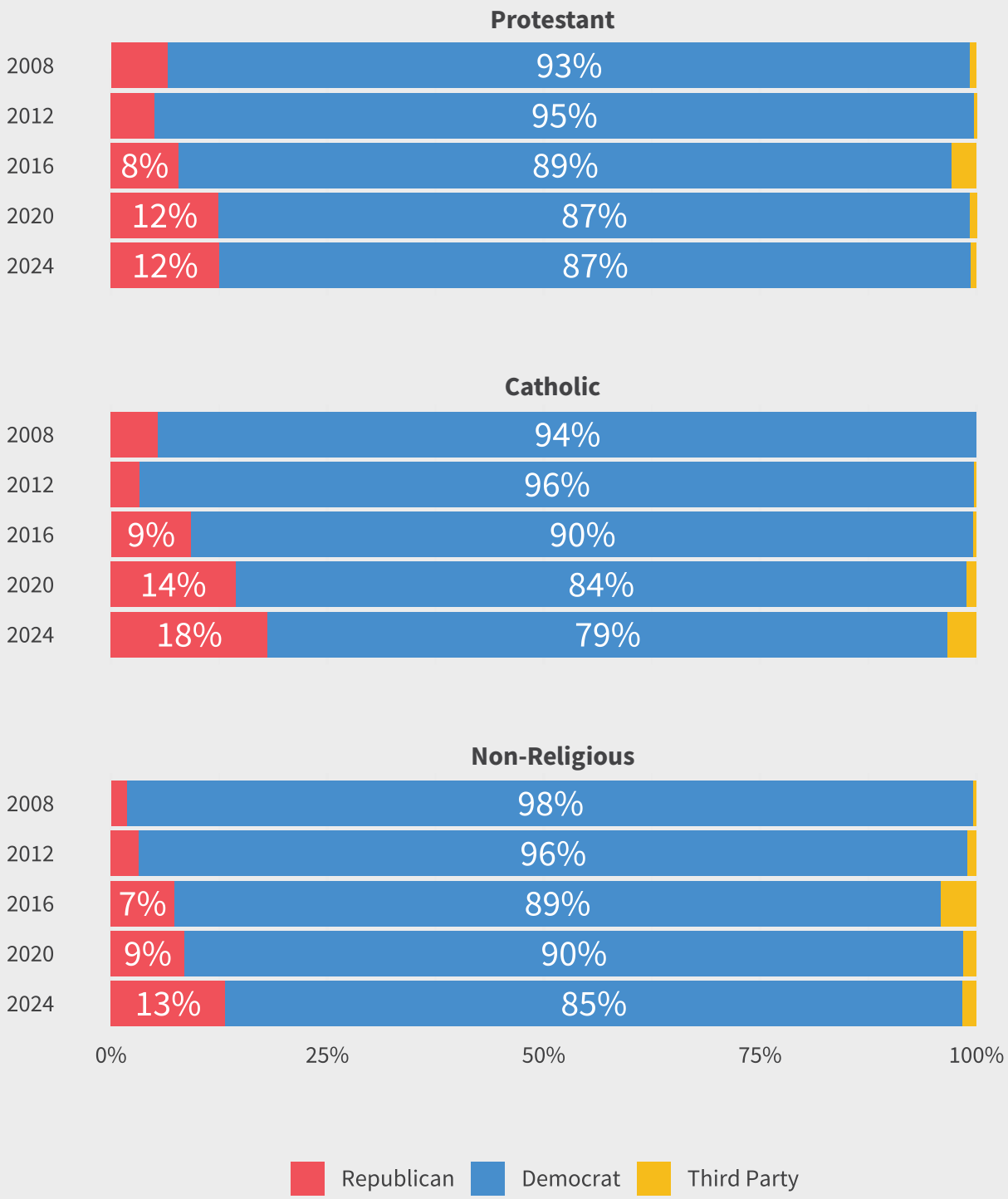
How did Black Americans vote in 2024? They certainly aren't big fans of the Republican Party.

Among Black Protestants, the Democrats receive nearly all their votes. That's historically been the case, and that's also true when looking at the last five presidential elections. When Barack Obama ran in both 2008 and 2012, nearly 95% of Black Protestants supported his candidacy. That number has dropped just slightly in the last couple of election cycles. About 8% of Black Protestants supported Trump in 2016, and that figure crept up to 12% in both 2020 and 2024.

Among Black Catholics, there's been a bit of a rightward shift, too. At least 90% of them supported the Democrats in 2008, 2012 and 2016. But only 84% of Black Catholics favored Biden in 2020, and then that went down to 79% when Kamala Harris was at the top of the ticket. And that same pattern repeats among non-religious African Americans. Near unanimous support for Obama, then a bit of rightward drift over the last three election cycles.

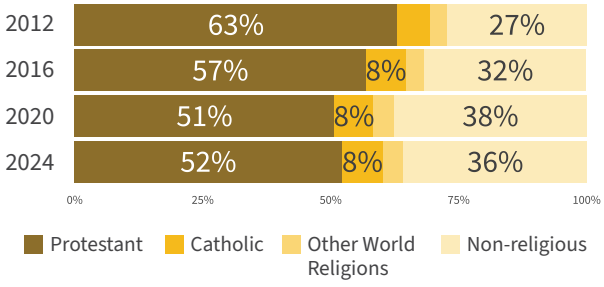
A couple things I want to point out here—religion matters very little among Black voters. Compare the electoral activity of Black Protestants and Black Nones—it's statistically the same. The other thing that jumps out is that the GOP is making some gains here, but they are relatively modest. Trump may have gained 4-5 points between 2016 and 2024. It's more than nothing, but not by much.

Presidential Vote Choice among Black Voters, 2008-2024



It may be helpful at this point to show you the religious composition of Black Americans. In 2012, 63% were Protestants and 27% were Catholics, with the remaining 10% being all other traditions. In the last twelve years, the Protestant share has dropped by about ten points, and almost all of that flowed into the non-religious. Today, a bare majority of Black people are Protestants, and 36% are non-religious.

Religious Composition of Black Respondents, 2012-2024

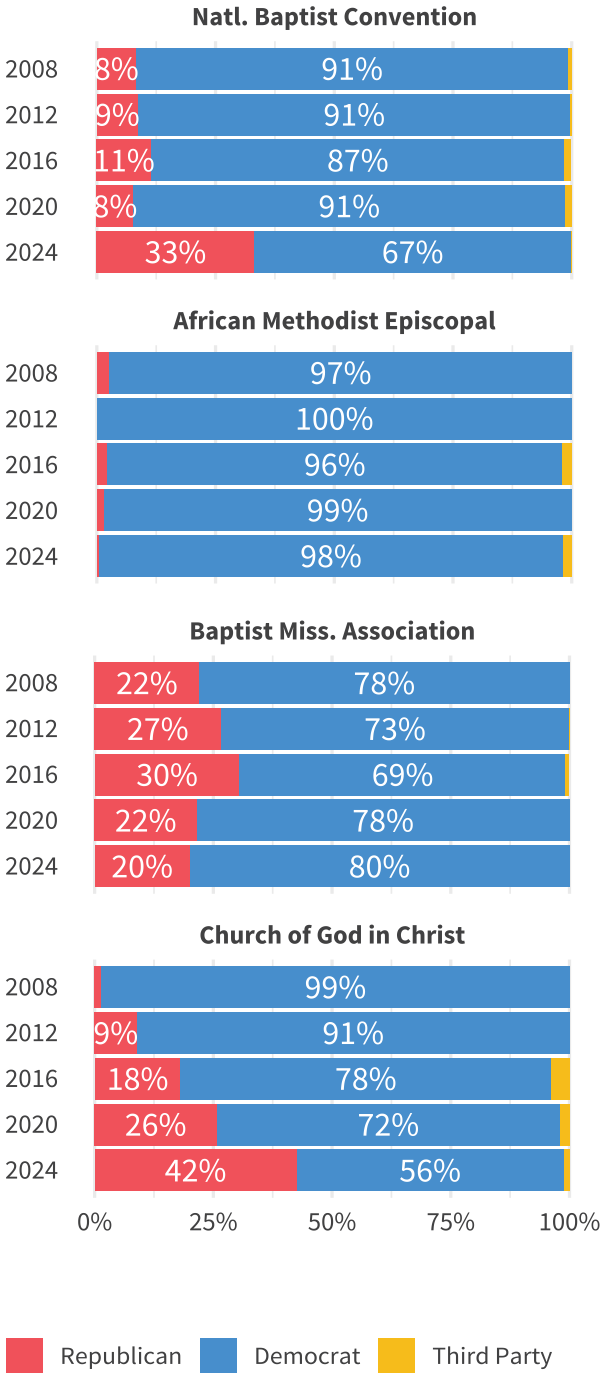


That's why the Catholic vote shares above don't really matter that much—only 8% of Black people are Catholics. So gaining 14 points among a group that's 8% of the Black population yields a shift in aggregate votes of about one percent. The fact that Black Protestants and Black nones have shifted a couple of points towards the Republicans results in real differences on Election Day.

Let me try and dig one layer and show you the voting patterns of four major Black Church denominations—the National Baptist Convention, the Baptist Missionary Association, the African Methodist Episcopal Church, and the Church of God in Christ.

First, a word of caution. These are not huge samples. For instance, there were only 65 AME respondents who said they voted in 2024, out of a total sample of 60,000 people. But this is about as good as I can do with the data that is available to me.

Presidential Vote Choice among Black Voters, 2008-2024



There's a whole lot of blue to be found. For instance, check the results from the AME respondents. In five different election cycles, I can find a total of four respondents who voted for the Republican. It may be the most politically unified denomination that I've ever seen in doing this data work for 20 years. For the Baptist Missionary Association, they've consistently been 75-80% for the Democrats. That was true before and after Donald Trump was on the ballot.

The National Baptist Convention is an interesting one. Historically speaking, about 90% of that denomination supported the Democratic Party. That was certainly the case in 2008, 2012, 2016, and 2020. But then in 2024, there was a big shift. Trump got a third of their votes. The sample size is about 150 respondents, too, which is very consistent over the last five surveys. And they weren't alone in this shift. Among COGIC respondents, they have been trending toward the GOP for a while now. Romney got 9% of their votes. Then Trump earned 18% in 2016, 26% in 2020, and 42% in 2024. To me, that's some evidence that suggests the Black Protestant vote is no longer uniformly Democratic.

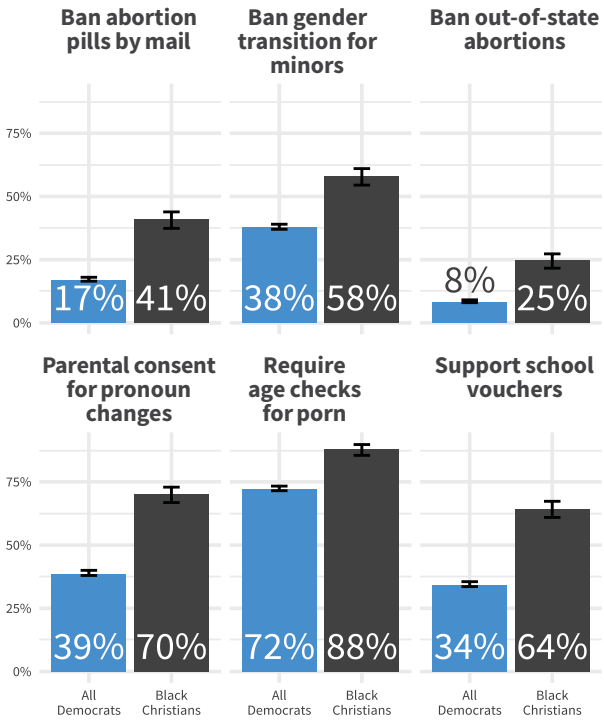
So why have there been cracks forming in the alliance between the Black Church and the Democratic Party? I have a theory—the Democratic Party has moved significantly to the right on social issues in a way that makes Black Christians feel alienated from the messages that they hear from DNC leadership.

Let me show you what I mean. I compared the views of the average Democrat with the views of the Black Christians in the sample.

You can see that there are huge gaps on all kinds of issues. On abortion, 41% of Black Christians want to ban abortion pills sent by mail—that's 24 points higher than the Democrats as a whole. While just 8% of Democrats want to criminalize women crossing state lines to seek an abortion, it's 25% of Black Christians.

When it comes to a ban on gender transition treatment for children, a solid majority of Black

Views of Social Issues among Black Christians and All Democrats



Christians are in favor—58%. That's 20 points higher than the Democrats as a whole. And 70% of Black Christians believe that school districts should seek parental consent before using a different set of pronouns for their child, compared to 39% of all Democrats. A Black Christian is 30 points more likely to support school vouchers and 16 points more willing to say that porn websites should be required to seek age verification before allowing access to visitors.

I think it's pretty evident to me from these results that the cultural norms of the median Democrat are far out of step with the average Black Christian (85% of which voted for Kamala Harris in 2024). This may be a potential reason why some voters have defected from the Democratic Party in the last couple of election cycles.

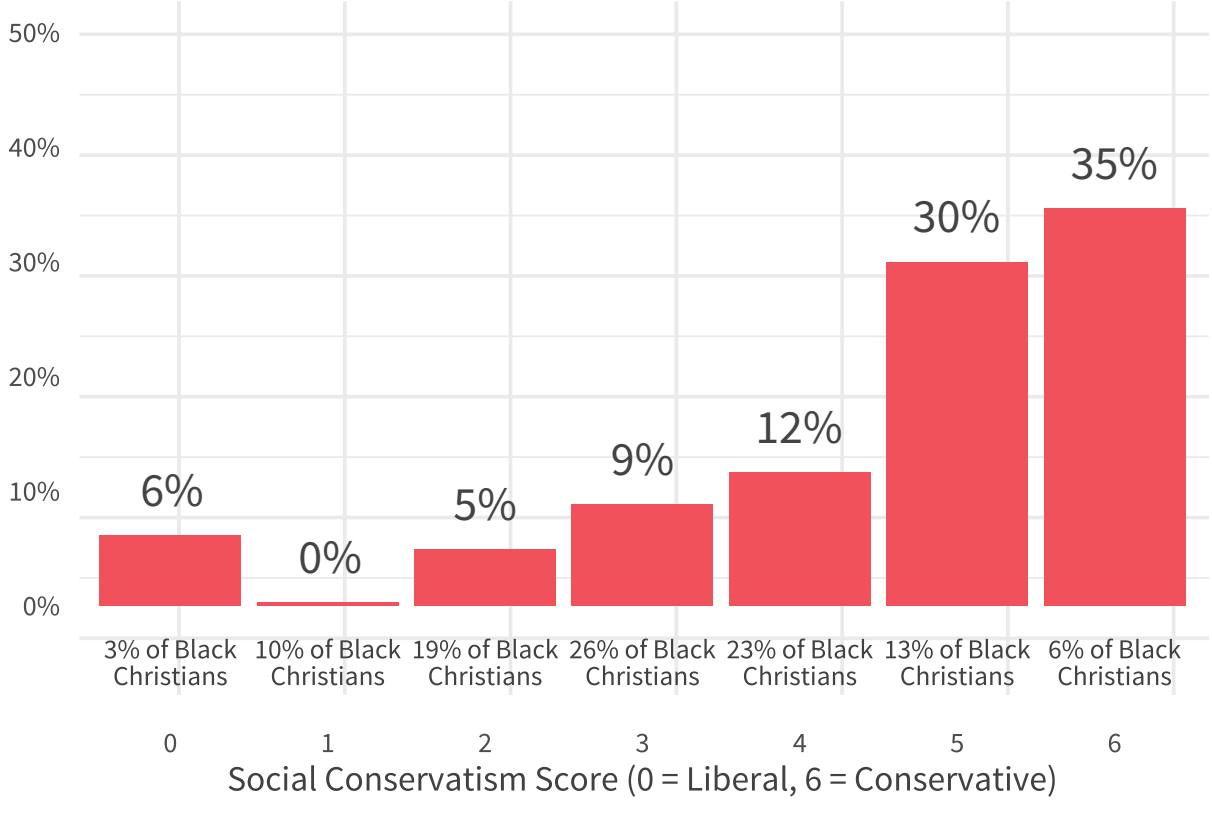
Let me try to make the case for this theory by showing you the graph below.

I created an index of social conservatism. A score of six would indicate agreement with all of the questions in the below graph. These are Black Christians who look a lot like white Evangelicals and traditional Catholics. A score of zero means as socially liberal as this scale allows. To help you understand the distribution of Black Christians on this scale, I put the percentage of the entire sample that fit into each bucket below the bars.

It should come as no surprise that those Black Christians who scored lower on the social conservatism index were less likely to vote for Donald Trump. But as those scores rose, so did Trump's support. He earned about 10% of the votes of Black Christians who scored a 3 or 4 on this index (which is half of the entire sample, by the way). Now about 20% of the sample scored at least a 5 on this 6-point scale, but Trump did very well with this group—he got nearly one third of their votes.

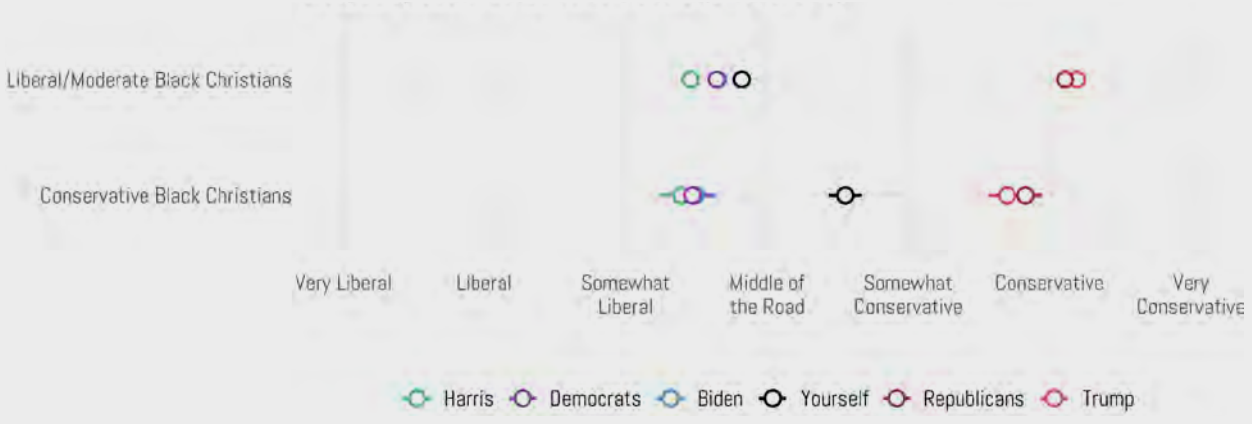
For reasons that I can't fully understand, there's a clear pivot point in this data between 4 and 5. Just moving up that one point on the scale means Trump gets nearly three times as many votes. So, when we talk about the voting patterns of Black Christians, I think it's helpful to sort those voters into socially conservative and socially moderate/liberal.

Trump Vote Share among Black Christians by Social Conservatism Index
With distribution of respondents shown below each bar



I think that comes into sharper focus when looking at how each of these two categories of Black Christians see the political world of the United States. Folks are asked to place a bunch of people and groups on a scale that runs from very liberal to very conservative. Here's what that looks like:

Perceptions of Ideological Space among Black Christians by Social Views
Grouped by social conservatism score (0-4 vs. 5-6)



Let me point out something really quick that may be easy to miss—if anyone calls Black Protestants politically liberal, they have no idea what they are talking about. In the entire sample, Black Protestants place themselves smack in the middle of the scale. They are the definition of "middle of the road." They are moderate Democrats. Those are just the facts.

But there are differences between these two types of Black Christians. Among those who score a 5 or 6 on the social conservatism scale, they are half a point right of center. Among those who score lower, they are just a bit to the left of the midpoint. But what strikes me as fascinating is where these two groups put Kamala Harris—it's the exact same spot. On a scale from 1 to 7, she's at a 3.5. Half a point left of center. Neither group sees her as super liberal.

But also notice that the social conservatives see the Republicans and Trump as more moderate than the socially moderates/liberals. I am just struck by how the social conservatives just see a political landscape that is not that polarized at all. And they place themselves near the midpoint between the Democrats and the Republicans. They feel pulled in both directions.

Is there a racial realignment happening in American politics? I don't know if I buy that when looking at these results. Yes, the Black vote has moved slightly towards the GOP, but it's in very small numbers. If that's due to the ascendance of Donald Trump, then it's likely that this will be a temporary blip. If it's because Black Christians are being drawn to the ideology of the Republican Party, then it's a whole different story.

Scan to view code for this post.

CATHOLICS

I get asked to talk to the media here and there. It used to be something that made me a bit nervous, but I learned this little trick that made things a lot easier—I would just memorize these little bite-sized data nuggets that I could toss out when asked a question that would provide enough of a structure to my response that I could build around that.

It's not like I am conjuring up an answer to a question on the spot; instead it's just recalling the results of a graph that I generated that stuck in my head for some reason.

The only problem with that approach is that I constantly have to update those little tidbits as the data begins to tell a different story about what is happening in American religion and politics. Let me give you a good example of that—"What's up with Catholics and their voting patterns?" My go-to response would have been something along the lines of, "Well, America looks like Catholics and Catholics look like America." I would prattle on about how the Catholic vote tends to be pretty close to 50/50 in most recent elections; however, there was a bit of evidence that the white Catholic vote was trending to the right over time.

The data from the 2024 Cooperative Election Study is out, and now I have an updated view of what actually happened with Catholics at the ballot box in November. Suffice to say that the old narratives just don't apply anymore.

The first data point that needs to be emphasized is that Catholics are not a 50/50 voting bloc anymore. That was certainly true in the elections of 2008, 2012, and 2016. The outcome never deviated by more than four percentage points, but those percentages began to tilt rightward in 2020 when it was Trump +5. But that may have just been a weird blip. However, once that result is seen in the light of the 2024 election, it's clear to me now—the Catholic vote is clearly in the Republican column. Trump got 56% of their votes compared to only 42% for Harris. That 14-point gap is nine points larger than the prior election.

How did Trump run up the score? Well, he continued to make big gains with white Catholics; there's no doubt about that. The white Catholic vote has been majority Republican for quite a while. It was R+13 in 2008 and R+16 in 2012. But in 2016 that margin moved to 19 points then 21 points in 2020. The results from 2024 indicate that Trump got 64% of the white Catholic vote, and now the electoral gap is a chasm at 29 points.

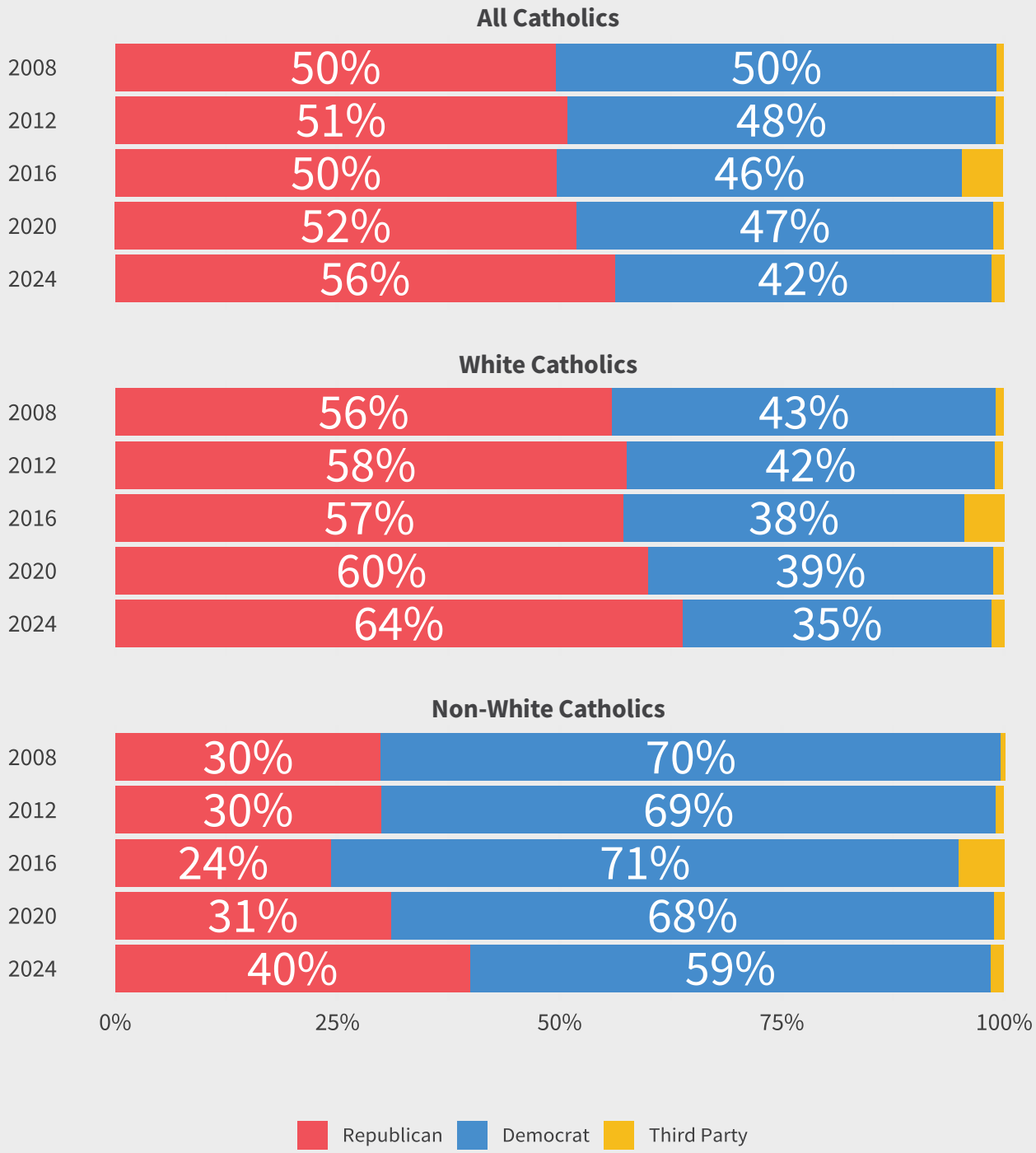
Trump gained

7 **POINTS WITH WHITE CATHOLICS**

16 **POINTS WITH NON-WHITE CATHOLICS**

Non-white Catholics had been relatively cool towards Trump in his two prior campaigns. Just 24% of them cast a ballot for the Republican in 2016—a low point. But then a shift began to happen. Trump garnered 31% of the non-white Catholic vote in 2020 and narrowed the margin to D+37 when it was D+47 four years earlier. But look at the 2024 result—Trump got 40% of the non-white Catholic vote, which is the largest share in the prior five elections, and Harris only got 59%. Between 2016 and 2024, Trump gained seven points with white Catholics and 16 points with non-white Catholics. That's unbelievable.

Presidential Vote Choice among Catholics, 2008-2024



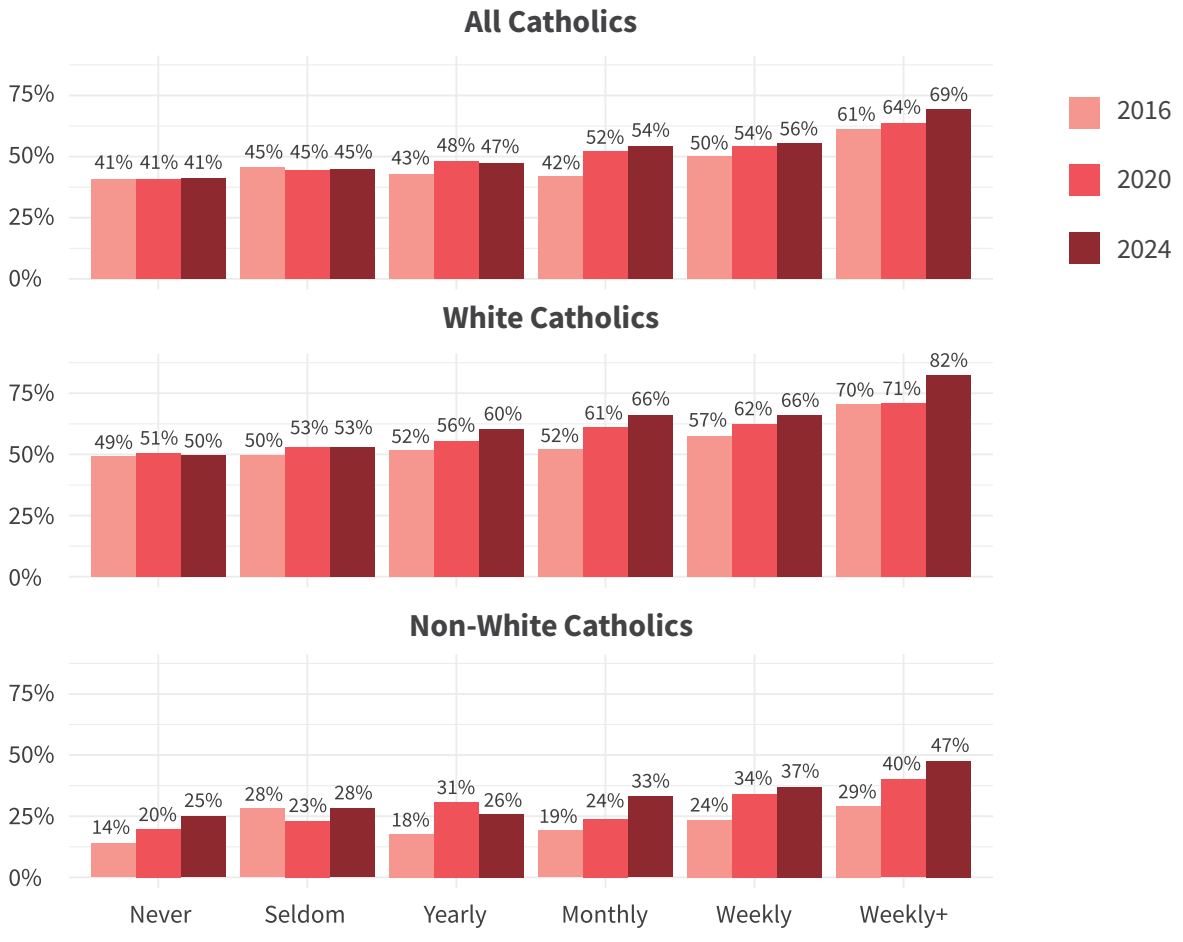
What about attendance? Did he draw in a lot of cultural Catholics, or did he run up the score with the really devout weekly attenders?

I think the clearest finding here is that Trump has really made no inroads with Catholics who don't attend Mass that much. He made zero numerical gains with Catholics who attend Mass seldom or never. Instead, the shift happened among the most active Catholics. For instance, between 2016 and 2024, Trump did six points better among weekly attenders and eight points better among Catholics who attended Mass multiple times per week.

But what does that look like broken down by race? Trump made big, big gains with white Catholics who attended Mass at least once a year. He gained 8 points among the yearly attenders, fourteen points among monthly attenders, nine points among weekly attenders, and a dozen points among white Catholics who were at Mass more than once a week. Think about this—82% of that latter category voted for Trump in 2024. That's near white Evangelical levels.

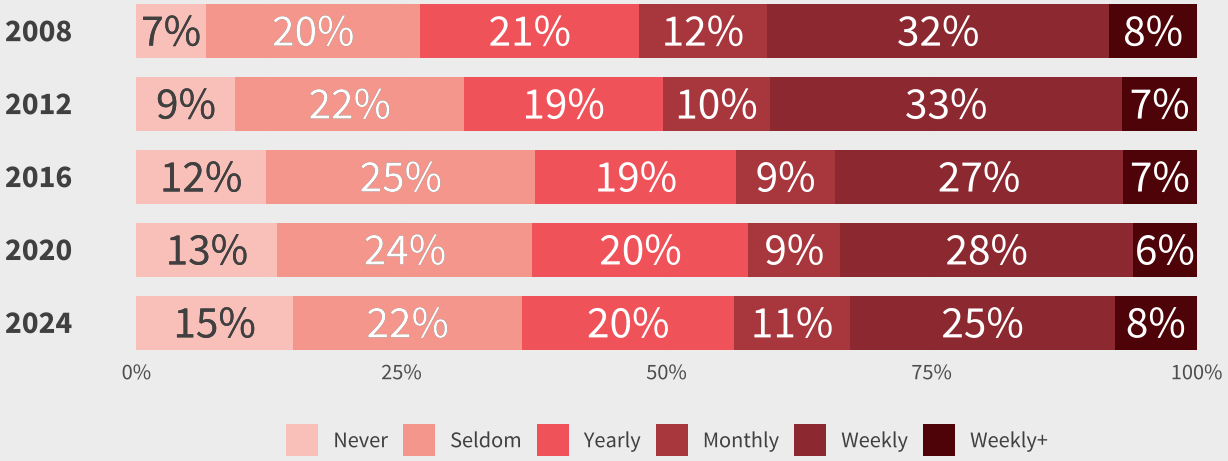
You can also see big shifts among non-white Catholics, too. Again, it's among the most religiously active. Among weekly attenders, just 24% voted for Trump in 2016. In 2024, that was up to 37%, and he gained a whopping 18 points among non-white Catholics who attended Mass more than once a week.

Trump Vote Share among Catholics by Attendance, 2016-2024



But here's a key point about Catholics—the vast majority of Catholics just don't attend that much. In the 2024 data, over 40% attended less than once a year, and only 27% indicated that they were weekly attenders. So making big gains among the most devout may not actually yield that many actual votes on Election Day. So, here's where the Republican candidates' votes came from in terms of Catholics and their attendance.

Mass Attendance of Catholics Who Voted for the Republican



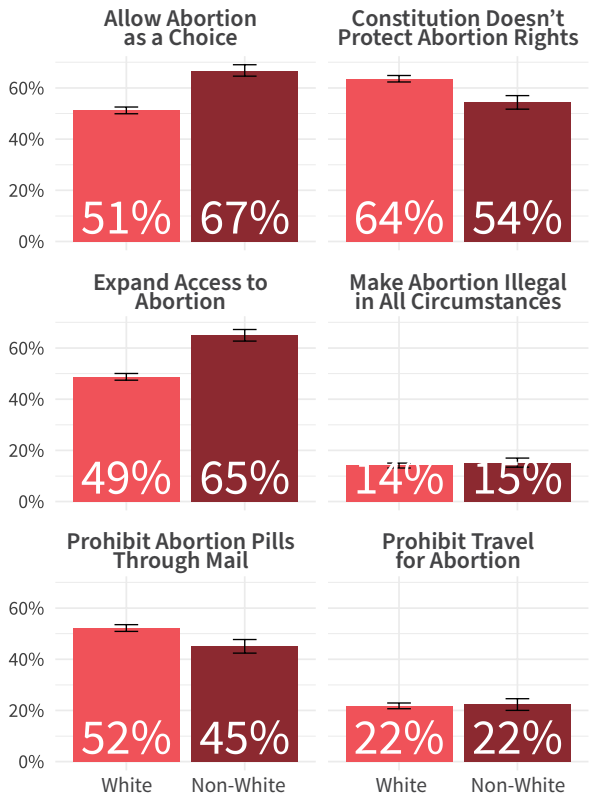
When McCain ran in 2008, 40% of all his Catholic votes came from weekly attenders, and that was true for Romney, too. Meanwhile the low-attending Catholics were about 30% of their coalition. But look how that shifted during the Trump elections. In 2016, 2020, and 2024, only a third of all Catholic votes for Trump came from weekly attenders. Look at the most recent result—37% of all Trump's votes in 2024 came from Catholics who attended Mass seldom or never. In contrast only 33% were from weekly attenders.

> "So making big gains among the most devout Catholics may not actually yield that many actual votes on Election Day."

What does it mean, practically speaking? It's certainly not a bad thing that Trump made significant gains among weekly-attending Catholics, but it didn't actually result in a lot more raw votes. Instead, the fact that he has managed to hold serve with the cultural Catholics is a really big deal. Getting 50% of their votes in 2016 and 2024 actually yields more votes because of the increasing number of low-attending Catholics.

Okay, so now we know that Trump continues to make incremental gains with Catholics of all racial backgrounds and attendance levels, but I wanted to poke around the "why" question a bit at the end of this post. And, of course, abortion is a fine place to start. The 2024 CES asked a lot of new and interesting questions about the topic, and I wanted to show you the Catholic responses to six of those.

Views of Abortion among Catholics in 2024



A majority of Catholics are pro-choice in the most basic sense. Among white Catholics, 51% favor abortion as a choice, and it's two-thirds of non-white Catholics. But once you get into the weeds of abortion policy, things tend to get a bit murkier. For instance, about 60% of Catholics believe that the Constitution does not provide a fundamental right to an abortion, and the Catholic Church is clearly evenly divided on the topic of whether women should be able to obtain abortion pills through the mail. It's notable that a slim majority of white Catholics are in favor of a ban on this (52%) compared to only 45% of non-white Catholics.

But the clear impression I get from this data is that the share of Catholics who are truly pro-life is not that large. For instance, just 15% of Catholics believe that abortion should be made illegal in all circumstances.

Additionally, less than a quarter of Catholics believe that it should be illegal for a woman to travel to a different state to seek out an abortion. And when asked if abortion access should be expanded by allowing more providers to offer the procedure, the Catholic view is pretty evenly divided, too.

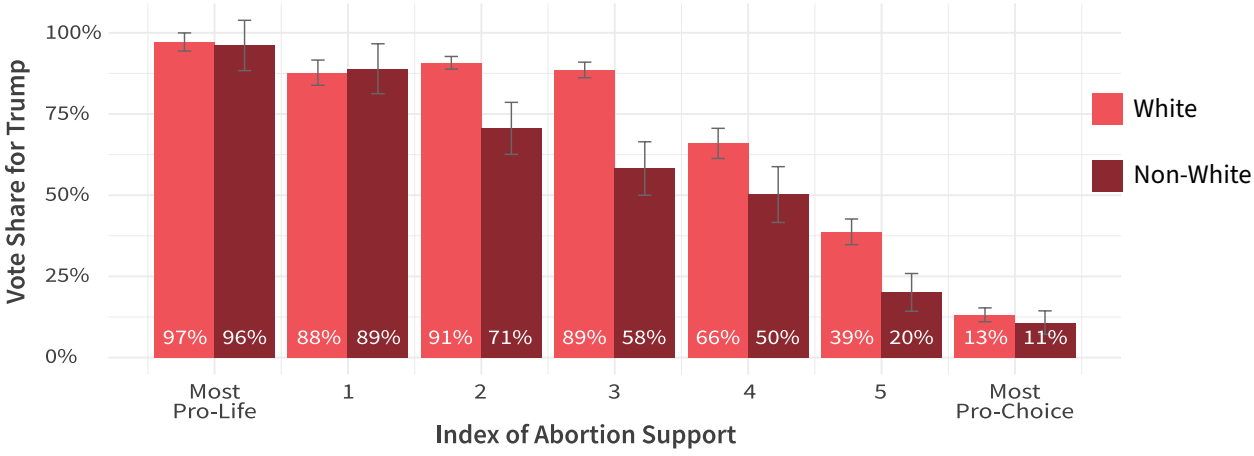
But there's no doubt in my mind that abortion was a key cleavage on Election Day. Here's how I know that—I created an abortion support scale based on the prior six questions. A score of six would mean support for expanded abortion access while a score of zero would need a consistent belief that abortion should be illegal and that any means to obtain one should be prohibited.

As you can clearly see—Donald Trump was the near unanimous choice among those who scored the lowest on this abortion access scale. He won at least 90% of those who scored a zero or a one. But as abortion support scores rose, Trump's vote share began to fall. For Catholics who expressed a great deal of support for abortion services, the Republicans did very poorly in 2024. There's no doubt that abortion is a primary cleavage in the Catholic electorate. But note the Catholic vote split on Trump support based on race, though. For instance, among those who were a 3 on this six point scale, 89% of white Catholics voted for the GOP compared to only 58% of non-white Catholics. There was a 20-point gap at the score of 2 or 4, too.

But here's what you need to know about distribution of scores in the Catholic electorate. Just 30% of all Catholics in this sample scored a 0, 1, or 2. In contrast, nearly 40% of all Catholics were in the 5 or 6 buckets on support for abortion access. In other words, there just aren't that many really pro-life Catholics in the electorate. In my estimation, the fact that Trump still managed majority support among those who scored a 3 or 4 on this scale is a big reason why he won in 2024.

However, at the end of the day, I really do think that Catholics were motivated to vote for Donald Trump for the same reasons as the rest of the electorate—economic concerns. I did a really simple calculation of Trump's vote share among Catholics by household income over the last three election cycles.

Support for Abortion Access Drove Down Support for Trump among Catholics in 2024



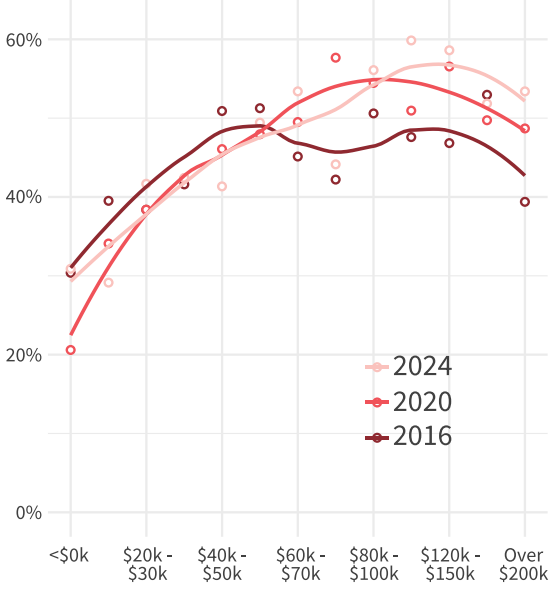
You can see that Trump performed essentially the same among Catholic voters who made less than $70,000 per year as a household in the last three elections. His share was about 25-30% of the poorest Catholics, but that ramped up to 45% among those making around $45,000 per year. But from that point, the estimates diverge quite a bit. You can see that the 2016 result is a clear outlier compared to the two more recent campaigns. Trump did not win majority support of Catholics who make over $100,000 per year in 2016.

However, in 2024 that was a group in which the Republicans did a whole lot better. Among Catholics making between $120K and $150K per year in 2016, about 48% of them voted for Donald Trump. In the 2024 contest, that was 10 points higher. That's a really consistent finding in these results, which does tell an interesting story about the inflation aspect of this last election cycle.

People at the bottom end of the economic spectrum tend to be hit hardest by inflation because they have less slack in their budget for groceries or gas. They were unmoved by this argument in 2024. Instead, it was the relatively well-off Catholics who gravitated toward Trump in big numbers in 2024.

My priors have been updated. The Catholic vote is clearly a Republican vote now. He made big gains with white and non-white Catholics. If the Democrats want to have any chance at all going forward, they need to figure out how to fix this huge problem.

Trump's Vote Share among Catholics by Household Income



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LATTER-DAY SAINTS

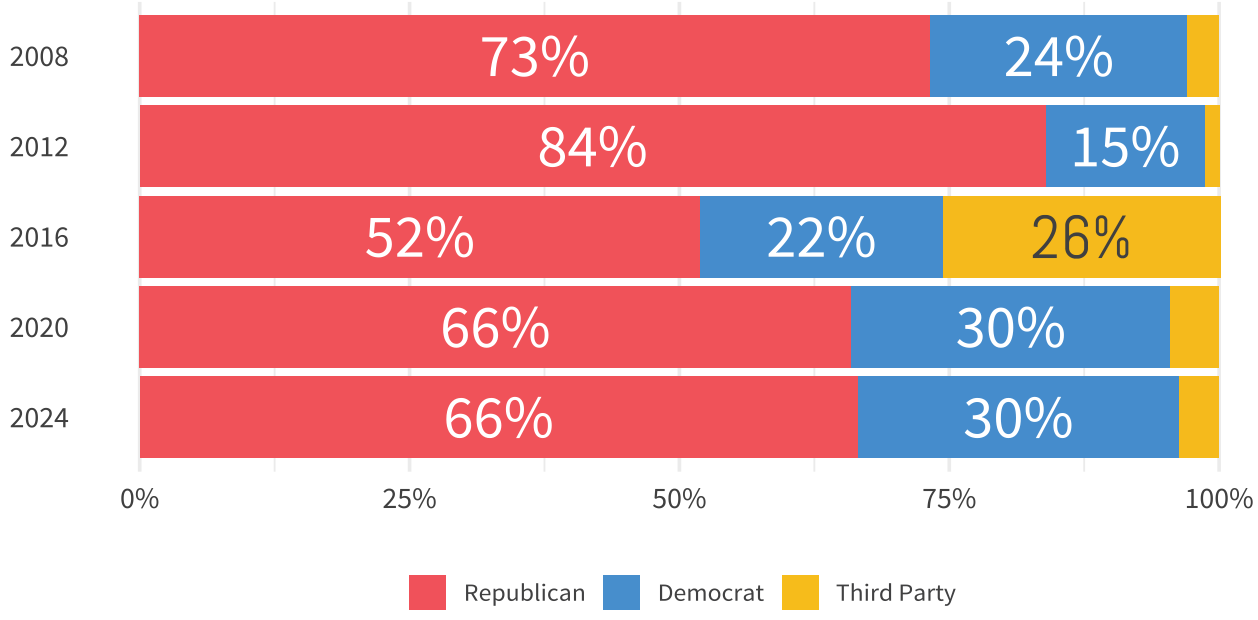
I've written about this before, but it's worth repeating here—whenever I tweet a graph that contains a couple of the largest religious groups (Evangelicals, Catholics, non-religious), the first question that comes in the comments is inevitably "Where are the Latter-day Saints?"

I can be hyperbolic at times, but I am not exaggerating this at all. It's this weird little sociological thing that only I can see because I'm one of the few who's analyzed data on smaller religious groups.

What makes this even more peculiar is that I rarely get comments asking about other very small religious groups like Jews, Muslims, Hindus, or Buddhists. I bet in the last five years on social media, I can count those types of comments on one hand. I've easily had 100x as many people asking about the LDS. For what it's worth, I've tried to figure out why this is the case and I can never find a satisfactory answer. My best guess is that LDS are both fastidious about record-keeping and just happy to see themselves being included in the conversation about American religion.

All that preamble to say that I know this post is going to get a lot of readers in places like Utah and Idaho because I am going to tell you all the story of what happened with the Mormon vote in the 2024 election and put it in the context of LDS voting patterns over the last five election cycles. Let's start where we always do—with vote choice since 2008.

Presidential Vote Choice among Latter-day Saints, 2008-2024



The LDS have not been turning out in huge numbers for the Democrats in a long time. Mormons were certainly no fans of Barack Obama—he only received 24% of their votes in 2008 and did even worse when matched up against Mitt Romney in 2012. But the 2016 election result was one that I think about a lot because the LDS were undoubtedly tepid about the possibility of Donald Trump as president. While 84% of Mormons voted for the Republicans in 2012, that dropped to 52% in 2016. But it's not like Hillary Clinton was beloved, either. Instead, a whole bunch of Latter-day Saints threw their support behind Evan McMullin, and he actually received more votes than the Democratic nominee.

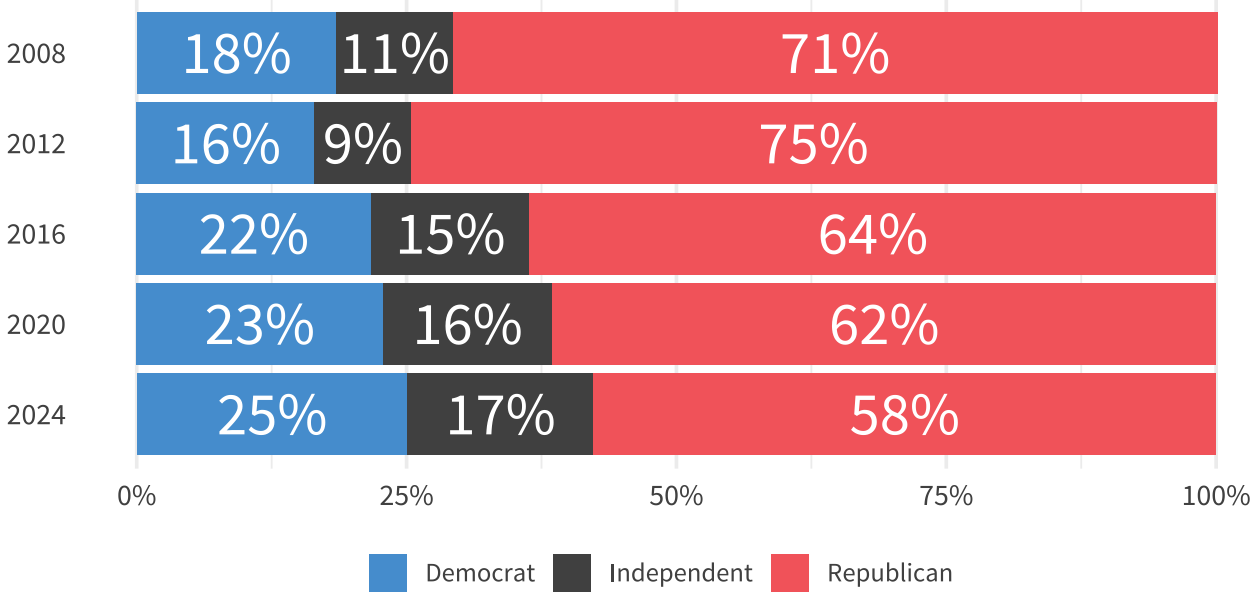
But 2020 and 2024 were different because there really weren't any viable third-party candidates—each was clearly a two-person race. So, Trump's share went from 52% to 66% in 2020, and then he got the exact same share in the 2024 contest. It's striking how nothing at all changed in the last two election cycles in the Mormon vote. But I just don't know what the LDS baseline is if we have a generic matchup between a replacement-level Democrat and Republican. I mean, McCain got 73%, but Trump did seven points worse. So does Trump underperform? I can't say for certain.

However, maybe looking at the partisan composition of Mormons may help shed some light on this.

This graph is interesting in light of the prior one. The conclusion, in my mind, is unmistakable—the LDS electorate is not so strongly tied with the Republican Party now. In 2012, three quarters of all Mormons said that they were affiliated with the GOP, and just 16% were Democrats. But in each subsequent election year, those numbers have shifted ever so slightly. In 2024, just 58% of Latter-day Saints were Republicans, and 25% were Democrats. Compared to 2012, the GOP is down 17 points, and the Democrats are up 9. But the share who are Independents has essentially doubled, too.

I would describe this as a very mixed portrait of results, really. In 2016, 64% of LDS were Republicans, but Trump only got 52% of their votes. In 2024, 58% were Republicans, but Trump got 66% of the vote. It seems that there's just a lot of slippage between partisanship and actual voting behavior happening here. I need to investigate that a bit more.

The Partisanship of Latter-day Saints, 2008-2024



30% OF LDS IDENTIFY AS IDEOLOGICALLY MODERATE IN 2016

31% OF LDS IDENTIFY AS IDEOLOGICALLY MODERATE IN 2020

38% OF LDS IDENTIFY AS IDEOLOGICALLY MODERATE IN 2024

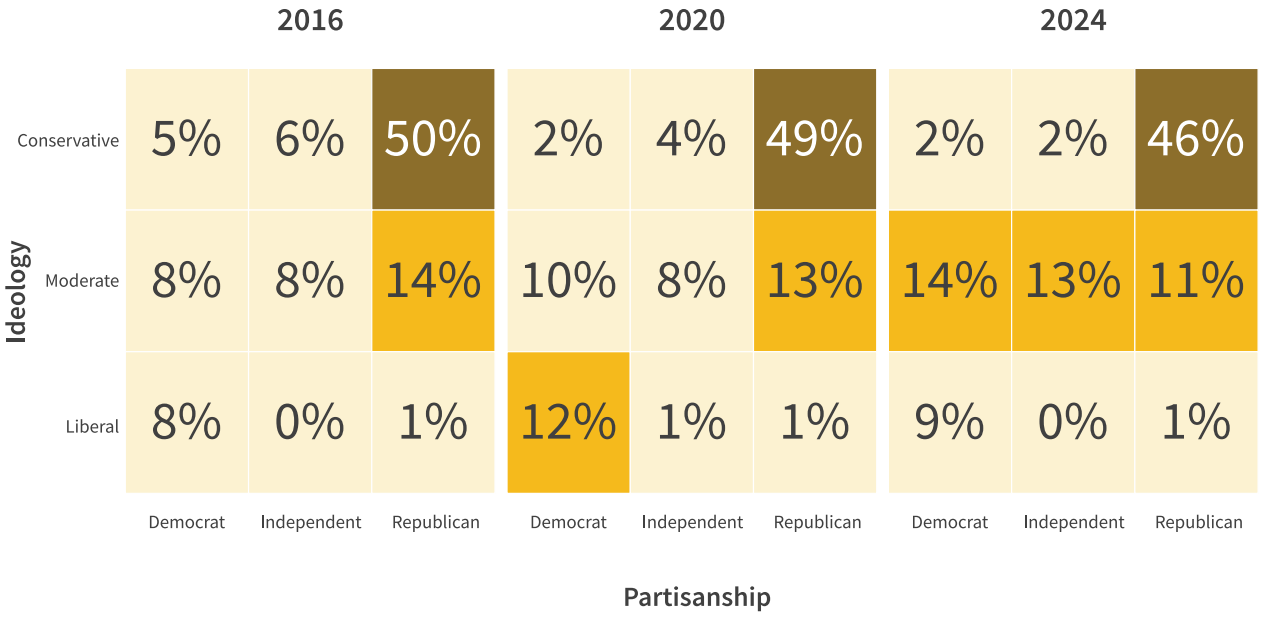
This is the partisanship and ideological composition of Latter-day Saints during the last three election cycles.

The top right square of the chart below shows conservative Republicans, and that's always been where a bunch of LDS place themselves. It was 50% of all of them in 2016, and it's still very high at 46% in 2024. So I don't see a lot of evidence of movement there. And there's just never been that many liberal Mormons in the electorate, either. It was 9% in 2016 and it's 10% now. So it's not like we are seeing a tectonic shift to the left.

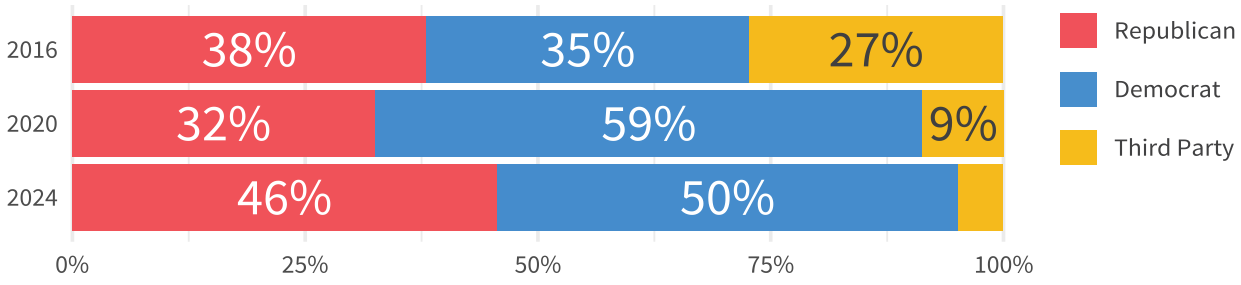
The only thing that really jumps out to me is the middle row of values—those are LDS who identify as ideologically moderate. It was 30% of the sample in the 2016 election and 31% in 2020, but then rose to 38% in the 2024 data. That's certainly a noticeable shift and most of it came from the 'conservative' row across the top—that went from 61% in 2016 to 50% in 2024.

Let's follow that thread just a bit more by looking at the voting behavior of just those Latter-day Saints who say that they are ideologically moderate. I've always had a hunch that this group of people are the "canary in the coal mine" when trying to understand religion and politics. Lots of people like to think of themselves as intellectually superior because they take a middle road, but an election is a binary choice. You've got to pick one side or the other, and that will tell you a lot about their political allegiance.

The Partisanship and Ideology of Latter-day Saints



Presidential Vote Choice among Ideologically Moderate LDS, 2016-2024



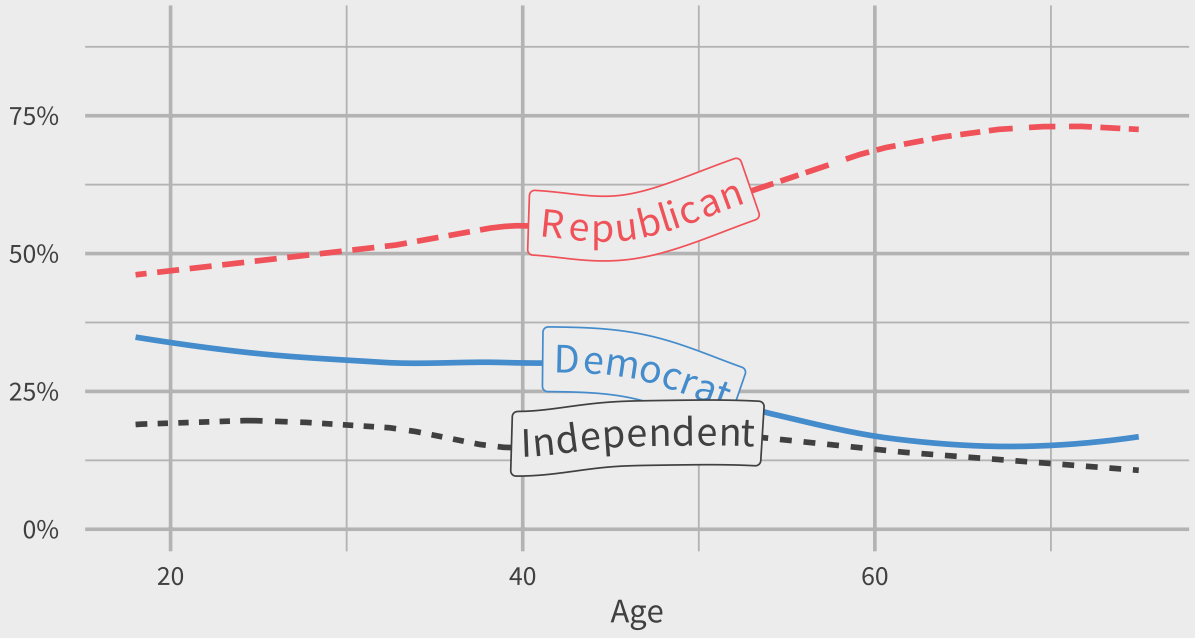
It should come as little surprise that a whole bunch of moderate Mormons favored Evan McMullin in 2016. In fact, that election was almost perfectly divided among Trump, Clinton, and the third-party candidates. From that one data point, I think it's reasonable to assume that LDS moderates were exactly that—electorally divided. However, the last two election cycles tell quite a different story.

In 2020, nearly 60% of moderate Mormons favored Biden. He bested Trump by 27 percentage points, and only a small handful supported third-party candidates. I think that's a pretty good data point to support the idea that moderate LDS were actually pretty heavily Democratic; they just didn't want to see themselves that way. However, the 2024 result throws a lot of cold water on that. Trump did 14 points better, and Harris did nine points worse. In essence, the moderate Mormon vote in 2024 was about as evenly divided as it could be. I really do think that this is the definition of a "swing voting bloc." It's not huge, of course. Remember that LDS are about 1% of the population, and about 30% of them are moderates. But it's still an interesting slice of the electorate.

But could all this be changing? I've written before about the fact that there's a pretty big generational divide in the Mormon church. More specifically, young Latter-day Saints don't seem so enamored with the modern Republican Party, while their parents are about as Republican as it gets. I used data from 2019-2021 to make that claim before, so let me see if that replicates using data from the last couple of years.

> "What do I make of religion and politics in the context of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints? The LDS are Republicans. They may be slightly more reluctant Republicans, but they are still going to be a solid GOP voting bloc for decades to come."

Partisanship Composition of Latter-day Saints by Age



This is the Cooperative Election Study's last three waves of data (2022, 2023, and 2024). The total survey sample size was 144,500, and of that about 1,600 identified as Latter-day Saint. And, to my great relief, the data here tells the exact same story as from my prior analysis. Among the youngest Latter-day Saints, the partisan gap is small. About half identify as Republicans and 35% say that they are Democrats—a 15-point difference. The trend lines run pretty much in parallel between 18- and 40-year-old Mormons.

That gap widens among older LDS voters. By the time you get to 55-year-old Mormons, about two-thirds of them are Republicans and only 20% are Democrats. The partisan gap is twice as wide here as it was among Mormons who were 30 years younger than that group. And then each line continues to move in opposite directions. Nearly 75% of retired Mormons are Republican, and less than 15% are Democrats.

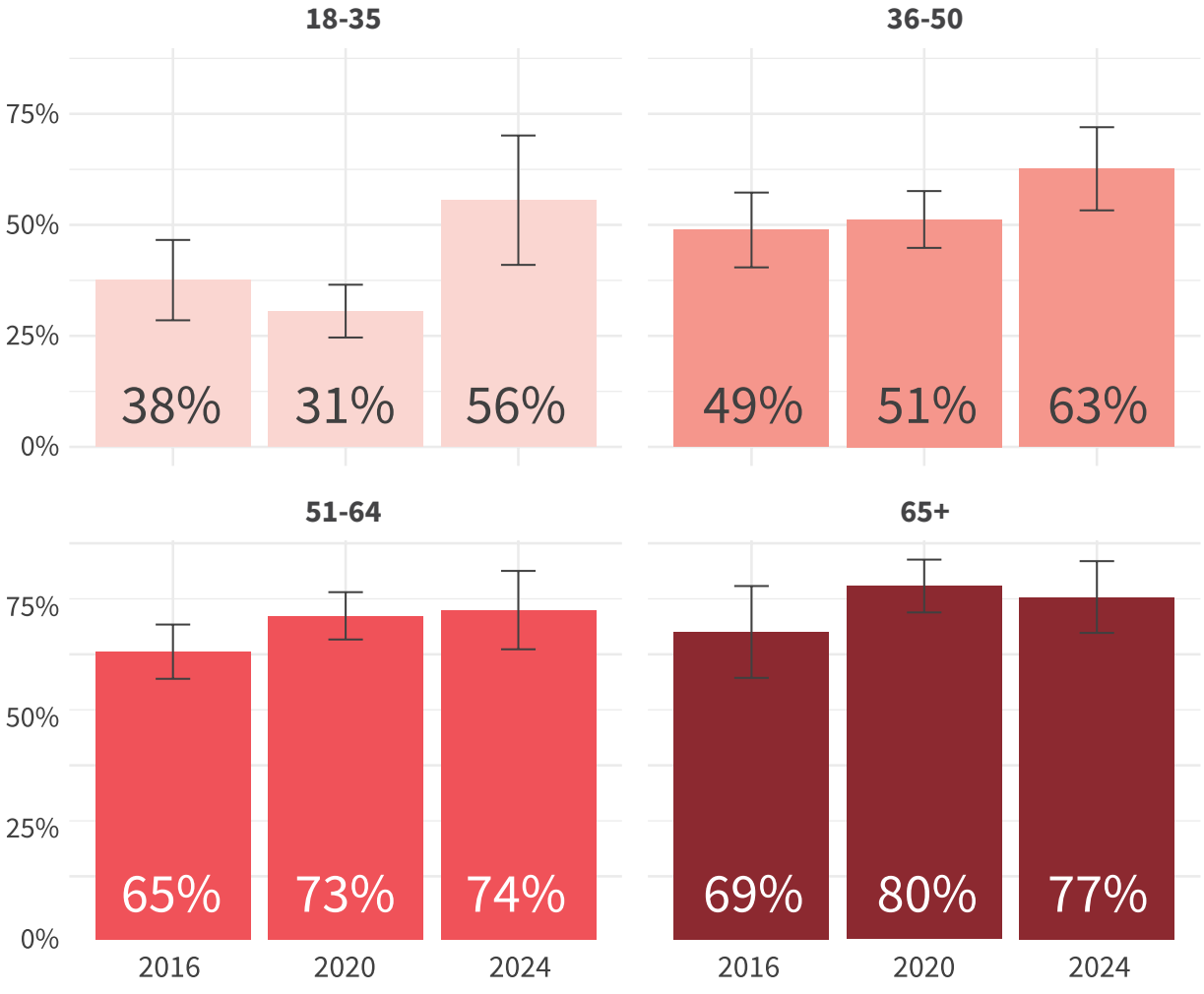
Does this actually show up in electoral behavior, though? While the prior graph would lead one to the conclusion that the GOP may have some big problems with the Latter-day Saint vote in future elections, this one should dampen those concerns quite a bit. Yes, younger LDS voters are less enamored with the Republican Party. In both 2016 and 2020, less than 40% of Mormons between the ages of 18 and 35 supported Donald Trump. But in the 2024 contest he did significantly better—earning 56% of their votes. That same general trend is also there for 36- to 50-year-olds—Trump's share increased in the 2024 contest compared to the prior two elections.

Older Mormons are big Trump supporters. That was slightly less true in the 2016 election, but from that point forward Latter-day Saints who are at least 50 years old have supported the GOP in huge numbers. In fact, this group of voters is as Republican as white Evangelicals on Election Day.

What do I make of religion and politics in the context of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints? The LDS are Republicans. They may be slightly more reluctant Republicans, but they are still going to be a solid GOP voting bloc for decades to come. I can maybe be convinced that Trump was a net negative in the 2016 election and possibly in the 2020 cycle, but I think by 2024 a big chunk of LDS had warmed to him.

You can see a couple of big shifts as evidence of this. Trump did a whole lot better with moderate Mormons in 2024 compared to their prior two election cycles. Additionally, he managed to make some big gains among younger Latter-day Saints, too. I know there are some in the exmo community who were hoping to see a true shift of the LDS toward the Democratic Party, but I just don't see that happening in this data or anytime soon.

Partisanship Composition of Latter-day Saints by Age



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JEWS

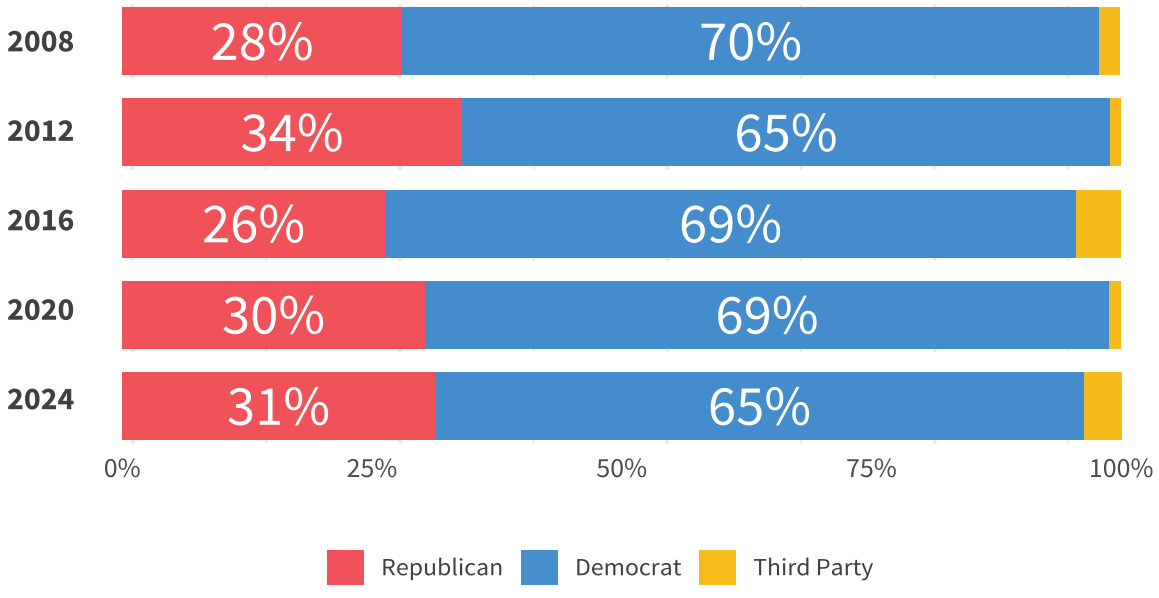
Not-so-fun fact among American religion and politics—it's almost impossible to accurately describe the voting patterns of any non-Christian group before 2008.

That's something that I don't think that the average person really understands about the kind of work that you see on this newsletter. I've written about this in a post a couple of months ago entitled "Why I Can't Tell You How Quakers (or Unitarians) Voted in 2024." To quickly summarize—20 years ago, survey sample sizes weren't that big. A total N of 3,000 was just gargantuan.

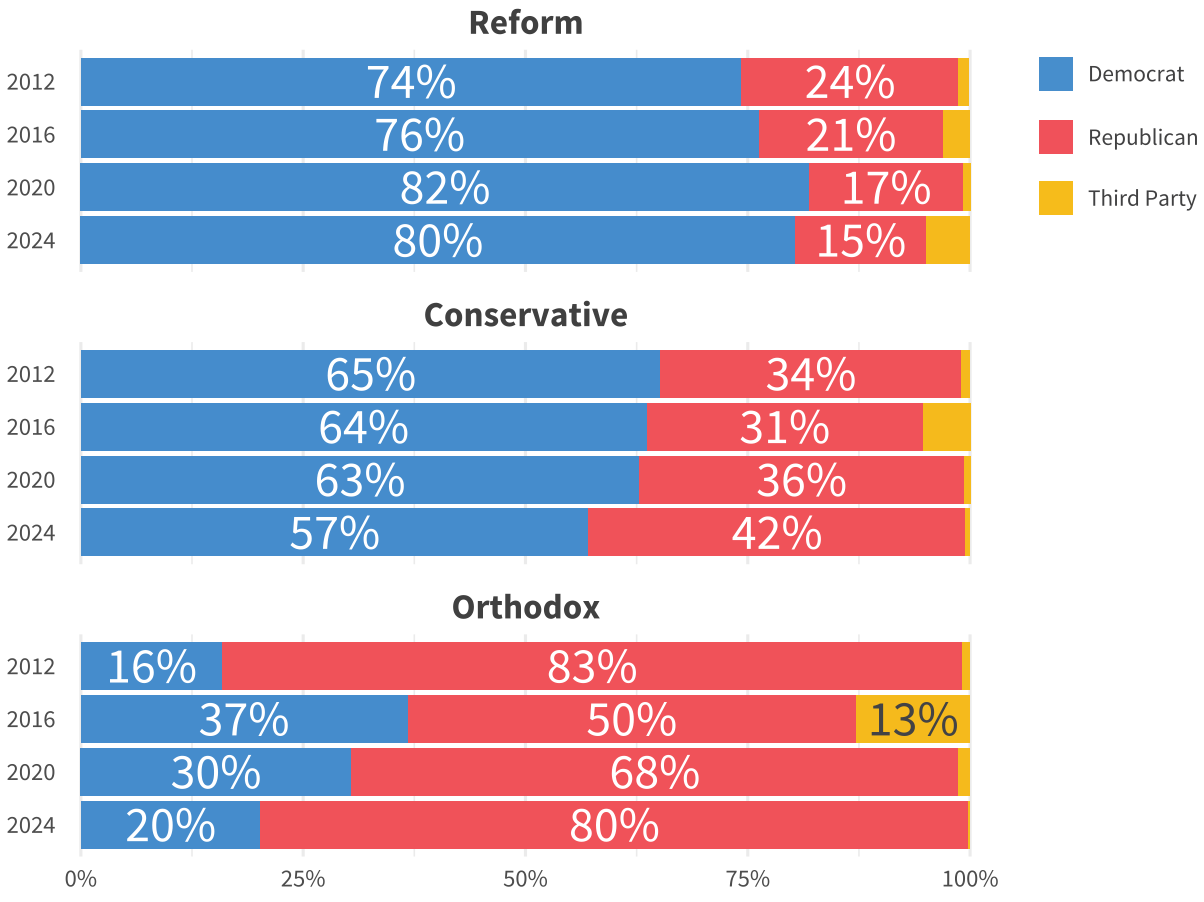
Here's why that's a problem. If a survey is doing a good job of random sampling, the share of respondents who are Jewish should be about 2%. It may wiggle up and down a bit, but that's a pretty good benchmark. Those horse race polls you see on the nightly news before an election? Their sample is almost always around 1,000. So, quick math here: 2% of 1,000 is 20 people. You can't extrapolate anything at all from a sample of 20 people. That's only slightly better than just asking random people on the street who they voted for and why.

Things have changed because we have the Cooperative Election Study now. The number of Jews in the sample in 2024? It was 1,319 (weighted). Yeah, there are more Jews in the CES than there are total respondents in most of the polls you see plastered on the screen when watching CNN or Fox News. And what's nice is that the samples have been that large now for about five election cycles. So, let me tell the story of Jewish voters at the ballot box since 2008.

Presidential Vote Choice among Jews, 2008-2024



Presidential Vote Choice among Jews, 2008-2024



Welp, this graph is certainly not the most dramatic data visualization that I have ever produced. I was pretty stunned to see just how steady the Jewish vote has been for the last 16 years. When Obama ran in 2008, 70% of Jews supported him. He did just a little bit worse in his reelection campaign in 2012, losing about five points of support. When Clinton was at the top of the ticket, she basically got back to that 70% mark, and so did Biden in 2020. The 2024 contest between Harris and Trump looked a whole lot like what happened in 2012—the Democrat got 65% and the Republican got about a third of the Jewish vote.

Maybe what stands out here is no matter how much the country has changed socially, religiously, and politically—none of that has really shifted the overall relationship between Jews and the Democratic Party. They put up four different candidates during this time period—none did worse than 65%, and none managed to move above 70%. For what it's worth, this is why it's hard to work in the media business. Your editor sends you a message about how <BLANK> may shift the Jewish vote in 2024 and they need 1,200 words about it tomorrow. Reporters have to file stories that their editors assign, even if there isn't really anything there.

Let me even go a layer beyond the Jewish vote and look at specific Jewish traditions. I can only provide estimates for three groups: Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox Jews because of smaller sample sizes. But I feel pretty good about these calculations because the sample sizes are almost always at least 100 respondents and oftentimes several hundred in a subgroup.

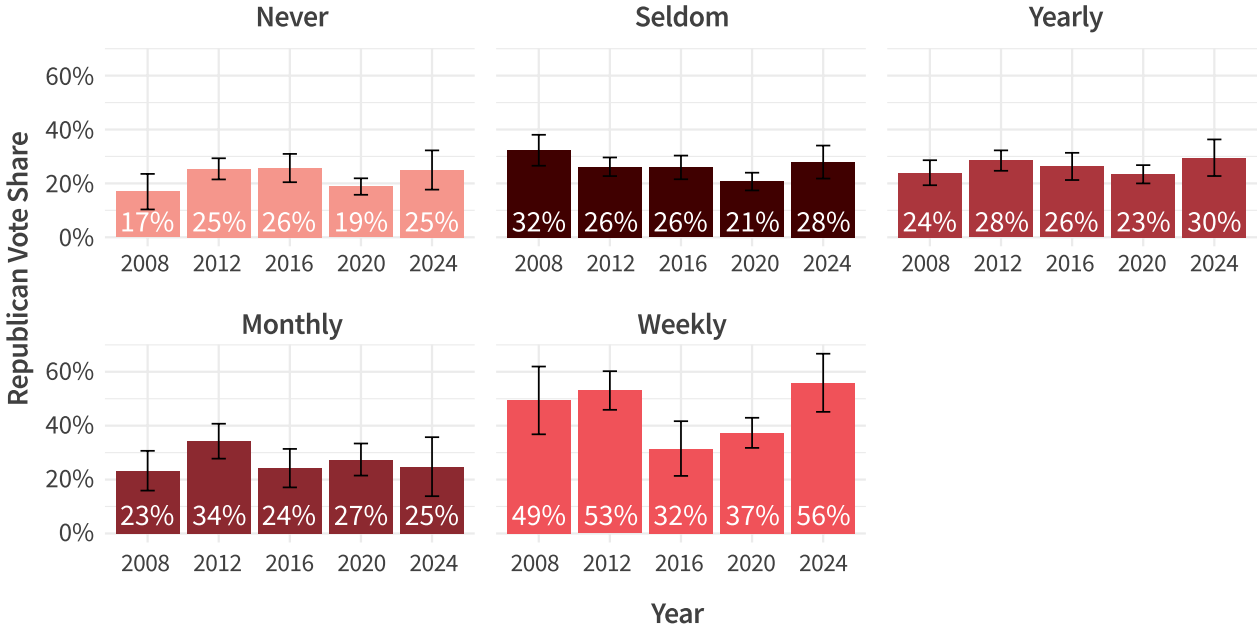
Argh, well, that's not super compelling either. Reform Jews are typically seen as the most left-leaning flavor of American Judaism, and that is certainly confirmed by looking at their voting patterns in recent years. About 75% of them voted for Obama in 2012 and Clinton in 2016. Biden and Harris have both done slightly better at 80% of the Reform vote. Conservative Jews are clearly less Democratic than their Reform cousins. And I do think that there's a bit of a story forming here, but it's pretty subtle—Trump received 42% of their votes in 2024, which was six points higher than in 2020 and up 11 points from 2016. It's still important to point out that Harris still bested Trump by 14 points among conservative Jews, but that gap narrowed.

The Orthodox numbers are harder to parse because there's just a lot of noise in the results. This is likely due to a smaller sample size. For instance, in a total sample of 60,000, there were just 100 Orthodox Jews. I mean, I think it's very fair to say that this group leans toward the GOP, but it's just hard to know for sure how big that margin is because of so much variation from election to election.

Of course, there's always this looming problem when talking about Jews in the United States. Is it an ethnic group or a religious group? Or is it both? There are clearly lots of Jews who don't go to synagogue that much. In the 2024 data, just over half of all people who identify as Jewish say that they attend religious services less than once a year, while just 13% are going to synagogue on a weekly basis. This could lead to some real differences at the ballot box. I've been writing about the fact that American religion is almost conservative by default now, but is that true for Jews as well?

My first look at this graph didn't lead to any really strong conclusions, if I were being honest. For instance, the voting pattern for Jews who never go to a house of worship is pretty boring. Somewhere between 20 and 25% of them vote for the Republican. There's no trend line moving in either direction there. That's also pretty evident when you look at the "seldom attenders." Republicans tend to get about a quarter of their votes.

Republican Vote Share by Religious Attendance among Jews



That was true for Romney and Trump. You see this with yearly attenders and monthly attenders as well. These four categories make up about 85% of Jews, and their voting behavior hasn't changed in any meaningful way.

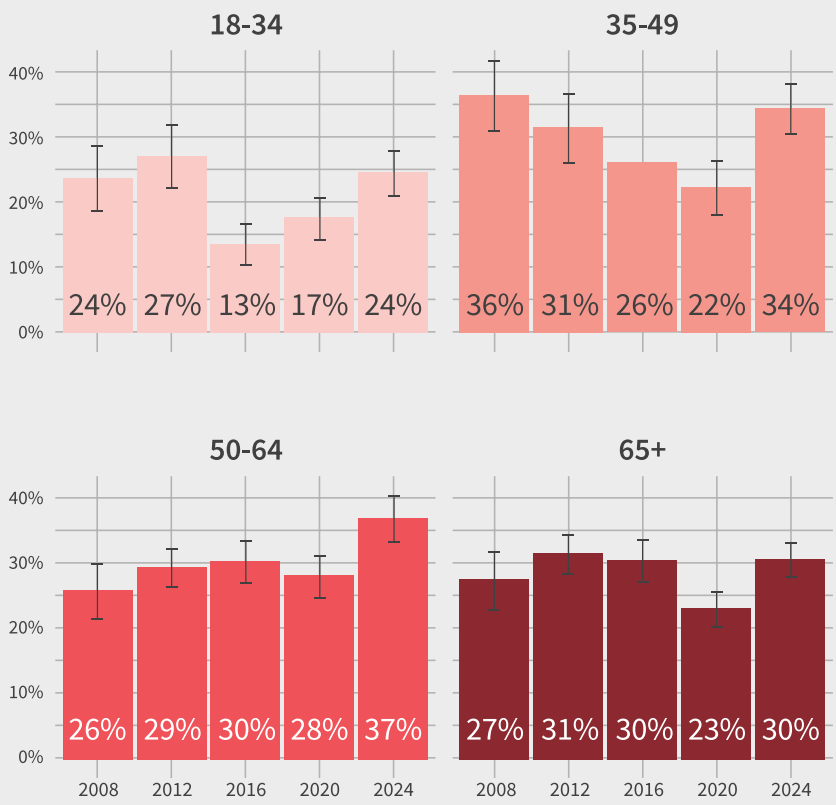
But look at the weekly attenders, though! Now we have a little story emerging that is worth keeping an eye on in the future. Both McCain and Romney managed to get about half the votes of the most religious active Jews. That's twice the share of those who are less active. But then Trump got on the ballot, and weekly-attending Jews were not too pleased.

About a third of them voted for him in 2016 and 2020. In 2024 that changed, and we returned to the norms from 2008 and 2012—about half of the most observant Jews voted for the Republican again. Whatever turned them off to Trump earlier has now dissipated.

Another thread that I wanted to pull on is in the area of age. There's a narrative bouncing around out there that Trump has made some big gains with young adults, and that seems like it could be a possibility for young Jews, too.

Republican Vote Share by Age among Jews

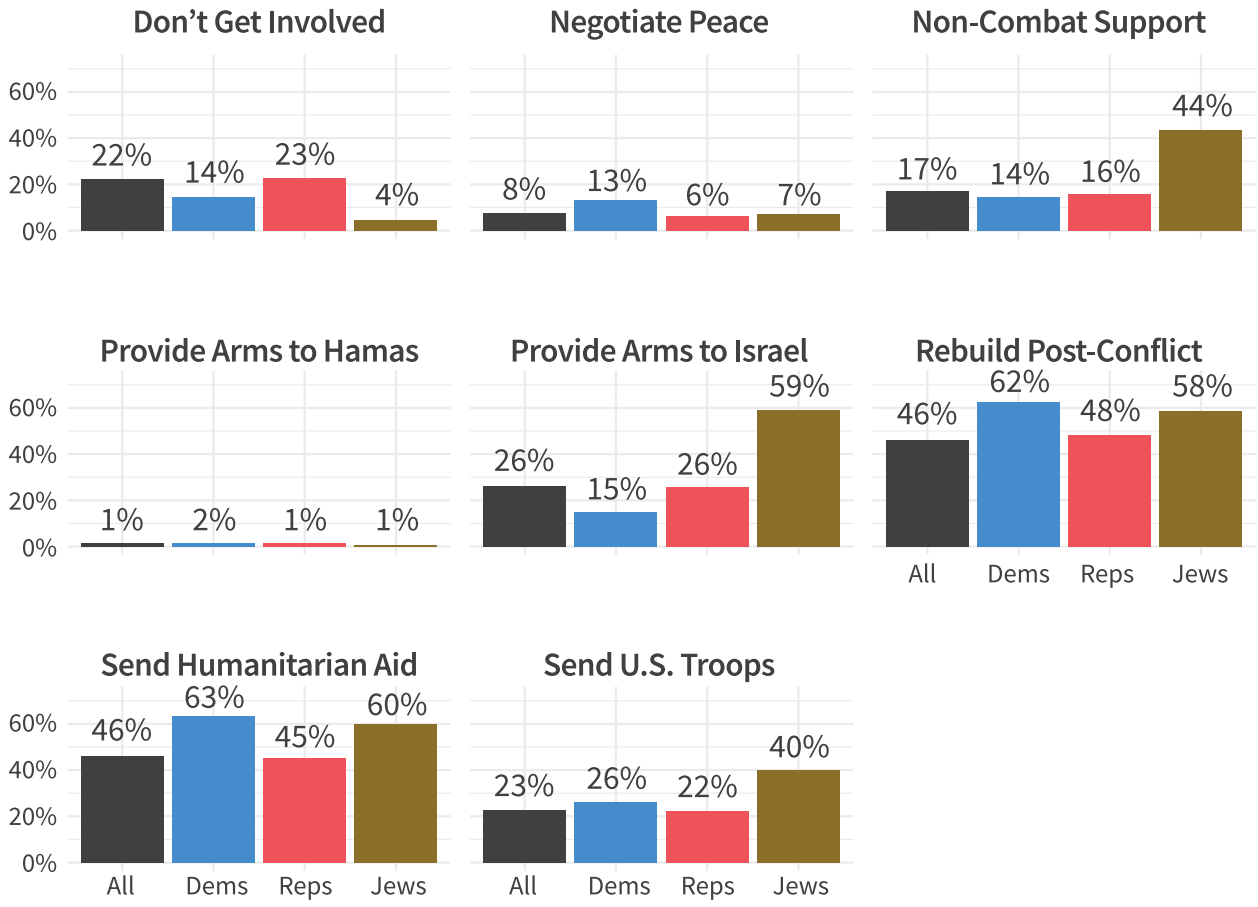
What really struck me here was just how little age impacts the vote choice of Jews. If you compare the voting patterns of Jews who were 18-34 years old to those who were at least 65, the gaps are incredibly small. This is definitely not a situation in which "old people are more conservative." The difference is maybe five percentage points across the last five election cycles. What I do want to call to your attention, though, is that Trump's support is clearly curvilinear with Jews—he did best with the 35-49 and 50-64 age groups. He did worse with the oldest and the youngest. That's worth thinking about a bit more.



One other thing that I didn't notice at first glance but emerged as I stared at this graph—Trump clearly made some significant gains between 2020 and 2024. In every single age group he improved his vote share in a statistically significant way. He was up seven points with the youngest Jews, 12 points among Jews 35-49, nine points among those 50-64 and seven points among the oldest Jews. There were a significant number of Jews who got over their aversion to Trump in the last couple of years.

I would be remiss not to mention the fact that the conflict between Israel and Hamas was certainly in the background of the 2024 election. How much it shifted votes among Jews is pretty hard to parse, but as mentioned previously—the aggregate totals didn't move that much. But the CES did ask a question about the conflict specifically. It gave folks a list of potential ways that the United States could intervene and they could select all that they agreed with. I am going to show you how four groups were thinking about the conflict—the entire sample, Democrats, Republicans, and Jews.

As you may know, there is a war between Israel and Hamas taking place in Gaza. What do you think the United States should do?



"So, what do I make of all of this? The Jewish vote is a Democratic vote. That was true in 2008 and it was also the case in 2024. The level of support has not materially changed, either. I do see some possible evidence that the most religiously engaged Jews warmed up to Donald Trump in 2024 but that just meant that they returned to their voting patterns in both 2008 and 2012."

22% **OF JEWS SAID THE U.S. SHOULDN'T GET INVOLVED WITH THE CONFLICT**

One thing needs to be made clear: the average American is not okay with the United States taking an isolationist position on the conflict. Just 22% said that we shouldn't get involved, and 96% of Jews think that the U.S. should do something. There were a couple of options that were clearly not popular with the public. Almost no one believes that supplying arms to Hamas is a good idea. But then that was also the case with the United States trying to negotiate peace between the two groups.

Okay, so the public does want the U.S. to get involved somehow, but not in those ways. What are some avenues that we should pursue? There's support for two paths forward: sending humanitarian aid and helping the region rebuild after the conflict is over. In both cases 46% of the entire sample were in favor. Note how little variation there is between those two options, too. Democrats tend to be about 15 points more likely to favor intervention compared to Republicans.

Where do the opinions of Jews stand in stark opposition to the rest of the country? Providing arms to Israel. In the entire sample just 26% supported this path forward compared to 59% of Jews. Jews were also 27 points more likely to say that the

96% **OF JEWS THINK THE U.S. SHOULD DO SOMETHING ABOUT THE CONFLICT**

U.S. should provide non-combat support than the average American. The last scenario with a huge gap was putting American soldiers in the conflict zone—40% of Jews supported this idea, which was about double the rate of the entire population.

So, what do I make of all of this? The Jewish vote is a Democratic vote. That was true in 2008 and it was also the case in 2024. The level of support has not materially changed, either. I do see some possible evidence that the most religiously engaged Jews warmed up to Donald Trump in 2024, but that just meant that they returned to their voting patterns in both 2008 and 2012. I just don't see any way you can look at these graphs and think that the Republicans have managed to crack the code of the Jewish vote, though.

Scan to view code for this post.

MUSLIMS

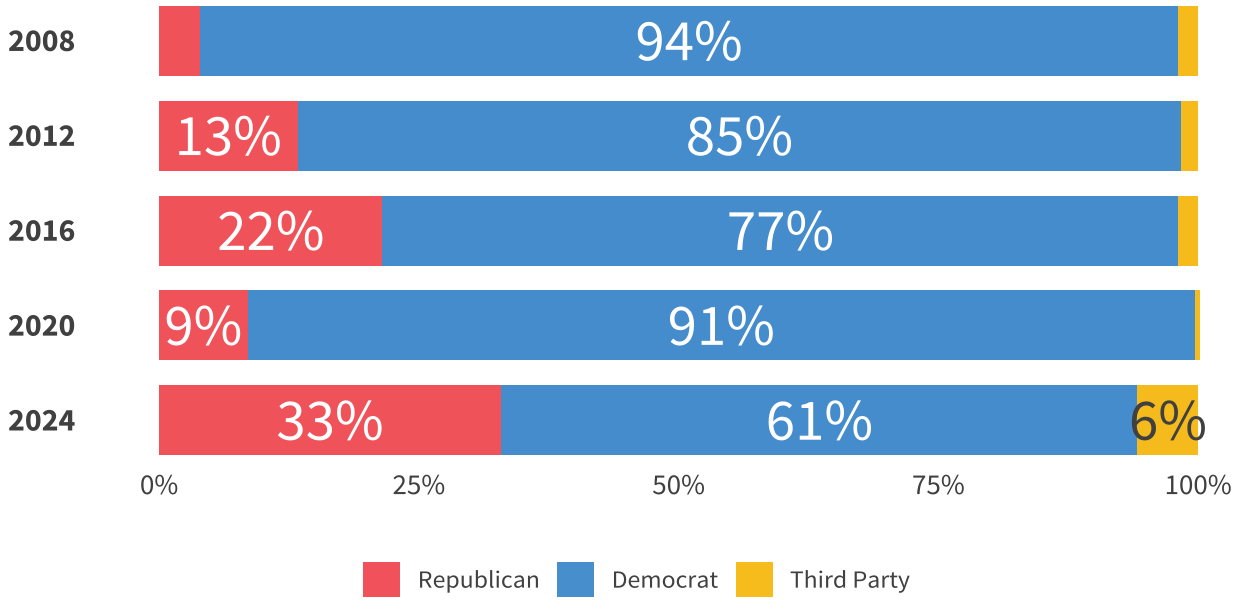
I'm gonna be honest here—the 2024 election wasn't chock-full of storylines about religion and politics.

A lot of the same battle lines that were drawn in 2020 (and 2016) were still there in the most recent contest for the White House. Trump wanted to restrict abortion, the Democrats didn't. Trump talked about a lot of gender issues, the Democrats tried not to talk about it so much. Trump did a pretty hamfisted job acting like he was a practicing Christian and that he was going to defend the Bible from the secular left. But he's been doing that kind of stuff since he burst onto the political scene years ago. The same old stuff—just in a slightly more updated package.

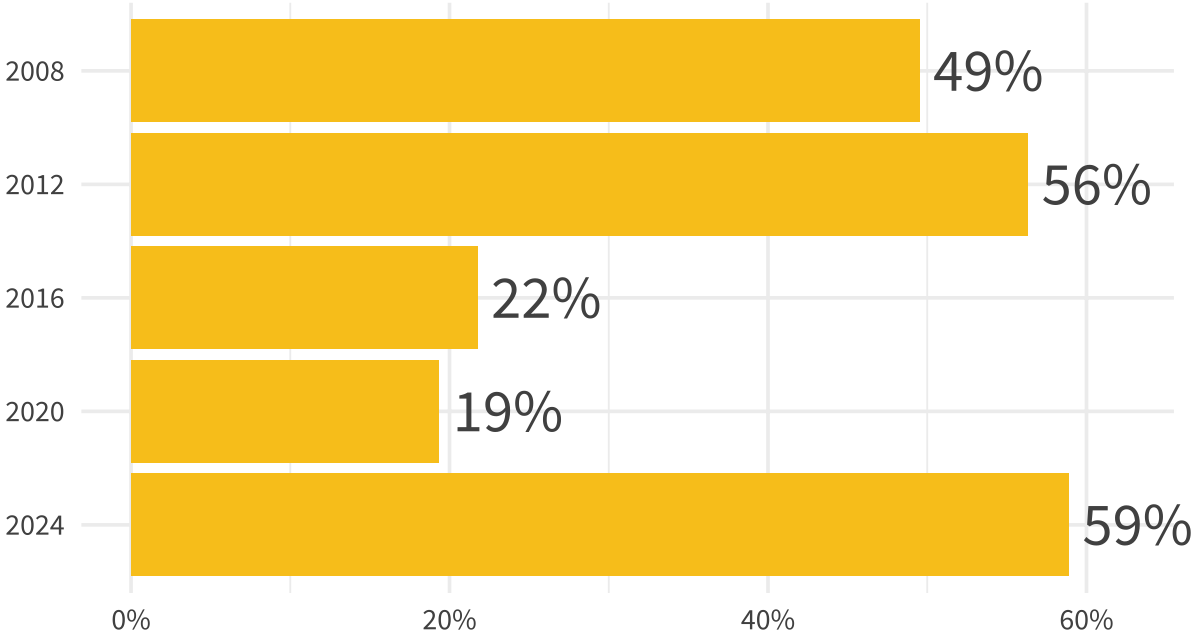
But I think that there was a single religious group that really could have shifted their votes significantly in 2024—Muslims. With the conflict between Israel and Hamas raging, the Biden administration did a pretty terrible job of listening to the concerns of Muslim Americans. *The New York Times* ran this headline, "Inside Biden's Broken Relationship With Muslim and Arab American Leaders," and *The Washington Post* wrote a similar story, "Biden's handling of Gaza shakes his support in the Black community." So, there was ample fodder for news stories about how Biden may lose his edge with Muslims, especially in Michigan, and that could end up shifting the entire election. (Which is funny in hindsight because Michigan didn't matter at all on Election Day.)

So, did that actually come to pass? Did Harris see a lot less support from the Muslim community compared to Biden four years earlier? Let me show you the data from the Cooperative Election Study in the last five presidential election years.

Presidential Vote Choice among Muslims, 2008-2024



Share of Muslims Who Indicated They Cast a Vote for President



The Muslim vote has always favored the Democrats. That was especially true in 2008, when Obama basically did not quite win all of their support, but pretty close—94%. He also did incredibly well in 2012 at 85%. Trump did manage to make some inroads in 2016, driving his share up to 22%, but then he really struggled in 2020 when Biden won 91% of the Muslim vote. So what happened in 2024? Well, this data does tell a pretty interesting story—the Muslim vote was 61% for Harris and 33% for Trump. That's easily the worst showing for a Democrat in the last five cycles. So maybe that whole narrative about mishandling the conflict didn't bear out at the ballot box.

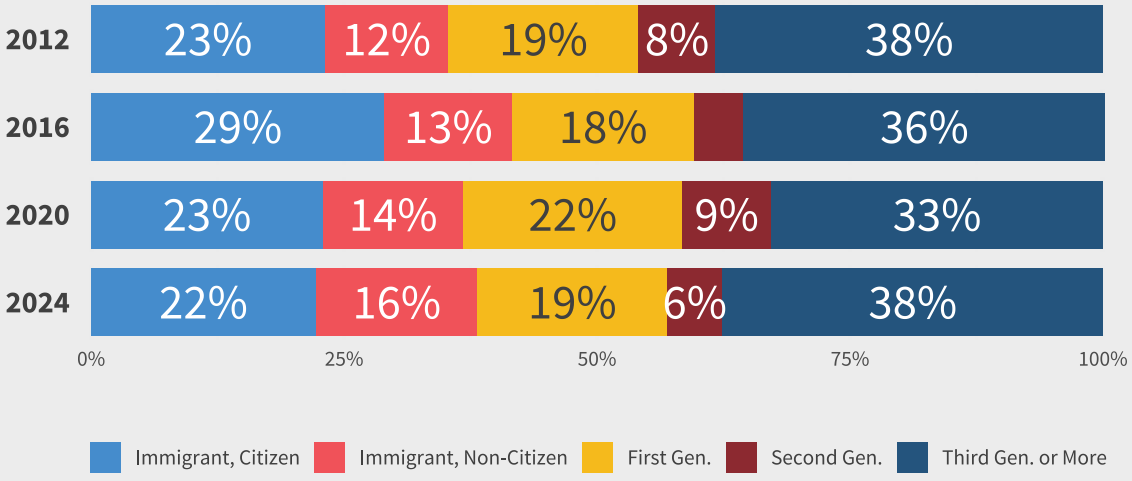
However, I need to take a methodological aside for a minute here. After sniffing around these numbers for a couple of minutes, I've come to a conclusion—Muslims are a really hard population to poll. There are two reasons for that. The first is pretty simple: a small sample size. As I wrote in my most recent book, *The American Religious Landscape*, only 1% of the U.S. population identifies as Muslim. Even if you have a huge sample (and the CES does), it's still going to be really hard to get your hands around a group where the N size is small.

So we're already starting with a small sample—in many waves of the CES, it's 500-600 respondents. But then we have to subset that to just Muslims who reported that they cast a ballot in the presidential election. I calculated that share, and the numbers are making me scratch my head quite a bit.

For instance, in the 2020 data there were a total of 525 Muslims in the sample (the entire survey was 61,000). But guess how many indicated that they cast a vote on Election Day? Just 101. That's a turnout rate of about 20%. That was also the case in the 2016 data, too. Now what's weird is that in 2008, 2012, and 2024, the turnout rate was just slightly above 50%. How do we go from 20% turnout in 2020 to nearly 60% turnout in 2024? I have absolutely no clue. The small sample size is playing havoc, but here's another possibility—immigration.

Immigrants who haven't become naturalized citizens cannot vote in presidential elections. So maybe what's happening is that a huge portion of Muslims are legally ineligible to vote. I can check that out pretty easily.

Immigration Status of Muslims, 2012-2024



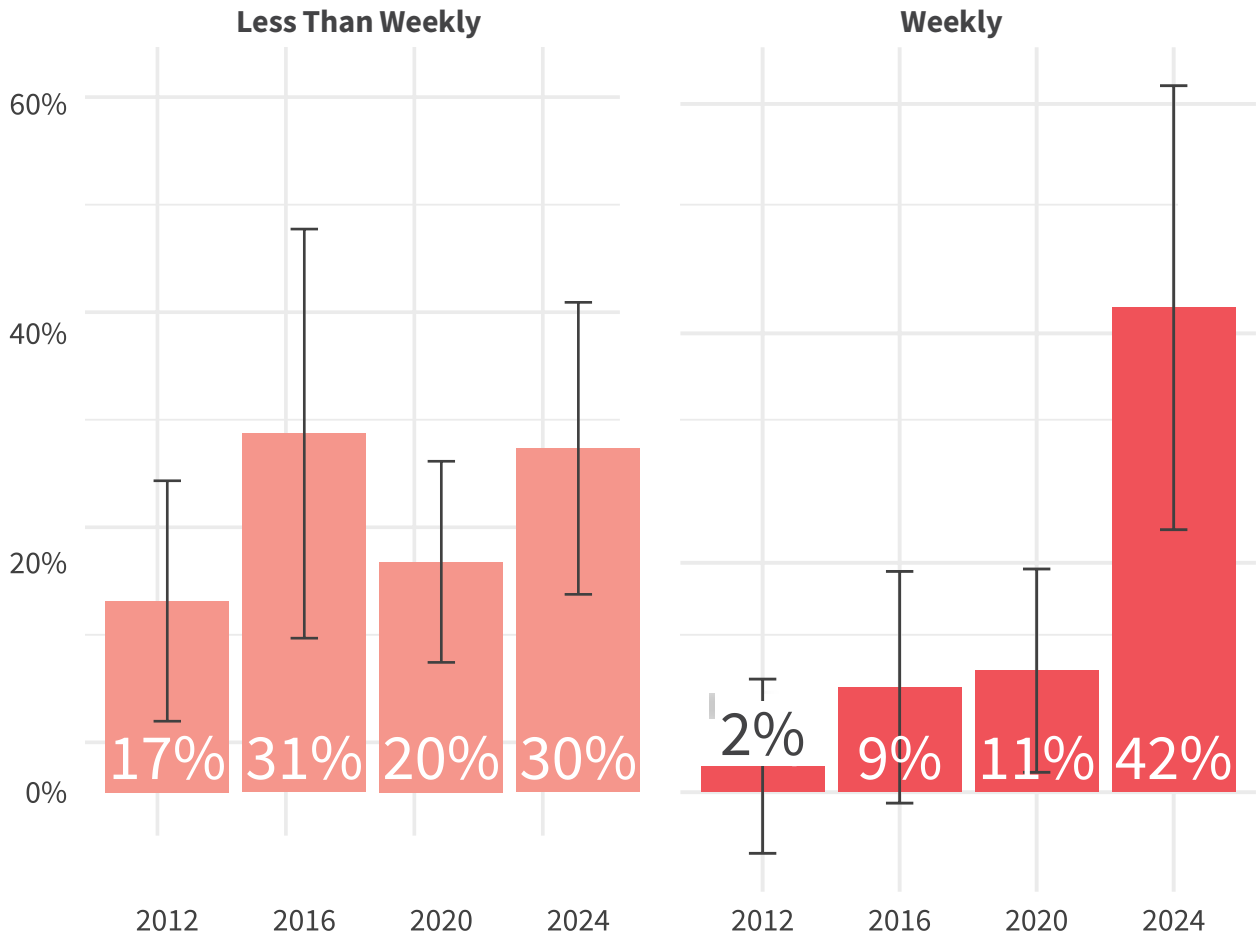
Welp, this wasn't any kind of "eureka" moment. Over the last four election cycles, the share of Muslims who were not eligible to vote because they weren't citizens was just about 15%. So that explains just a very small portion of the lower turnout we saw in 2016 and 2020. What's also striking to me is how the overall immigrant composition of Muslims hasn't changed that much over time. In fact, the results from 2012 look almost exactly like the results from 2024.

About 40% of Muslims in the United States have been here for at least three generations, while about the same share are immigrants themselves. So why this huge vacillation in turnout? Your guess is as good as mine. But let this be a lesson—even with an incredibly large dataset that was collected under the watchful care of some of the best survey administrators and public polling experts, we still can't really nail down what was happening with the Muslim vote.

> "I think they are telling a pretty interesting story about something I've written about a lot—religion in the United States is seen as increasingly conservative. That's true among Protestants, Catholics, and Latter-day Saints. But, if this data is any guide, it's also happening among American Muslims."

So, given that caveat, let me just show you one more bit of analysis that I can have just a bit of confidence in—Muslim votes by mosque attendance. I broke this into just two categories: weekly attenders vs. everyone else because of the small sample size that was mentioned above.

Republican Vote Share among Muslims by Mosque Attendance



I think there are two big takeaways from me on this graph. The first is that among those Muslims who are less religiously active, there's been no clear trajectory of their voting patterns since 2012. In 2012 and 2020 about 20% of these less active Muslims were Republican voters. It was 10 points higher in both 2016 and 2024. Why this see-saw pattern? I have absolutely no idea.

I think you can clearly see the huge deviation among the weekly-attending Muslims, right? In 2016 and 2020, Trump did very poorly with this group. He earned just 10% of their votes. But in 2024, the data from the CES indicates that 42% of weekly-attending Muslims cast a ballot for the Republican candidate. That was four times higher than the previous election. Is that really the case? Let me show you a bit of math: There were 60,000 people in the sample. Of that, 464 were Muslims. Of that the number who were weekly mosque attenders who recorded a vote for the president was 149. And this is the absolute best we can do with social science data. I know of no other data source (certainly not a publicly available one) that gets us any closer to the answer.

But if I get away from voting metrics a little bit and focus on questions that almost all the Muslims in the sample answer, that may help to round out the picture of Muslims and politics in 2024. For instance, looking at the partisan composition of Muslims over time can offer some nice insights into what is actually happening.

27% **OF MUSLIMS WERE REPUBLICANS IN 2024 JUST HALF WERE DEMOCRATS**

Before I had a whole lot of reservations in saying that the Muslim vote is shifting toward the Republicans, but this is some really strong secondary evidence that there is some movement afoot. At least three quarters of Muslims aligned with the Democrats in 2008, 2012, and 2016. But that shifted in a real and meaningful way in both 2020 and 2024. When Trump ran against Biden, the share of Muslims who said that they were Republicans rose to 20%—up 8 points since 2016. Then, that same thing happened again. 27% of Muslims were Republicans in 2024 and just half were Democrats.

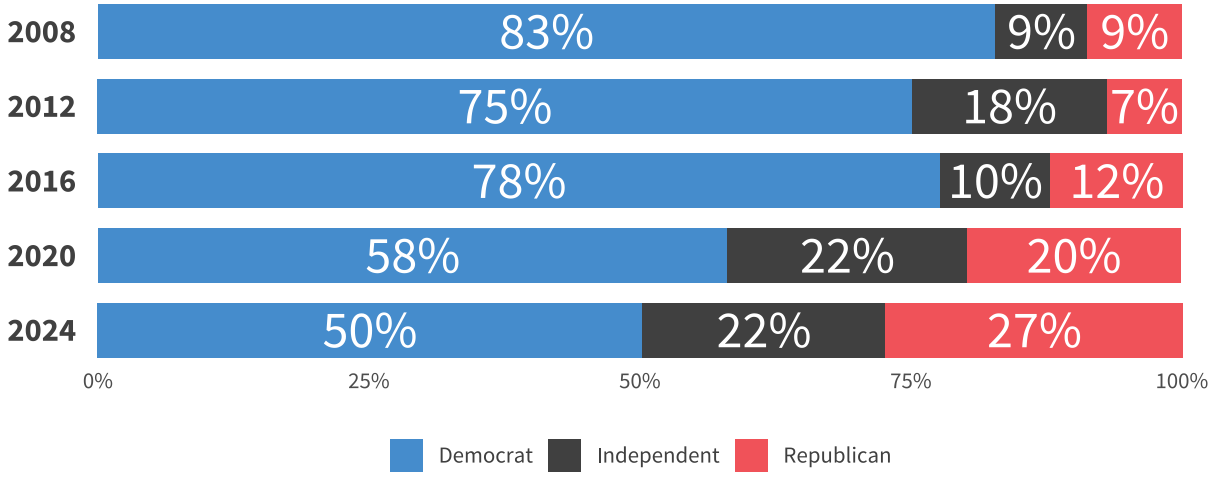
When comparing those results to 2008, the Democrats have lost 30 points among Muslims while the GOP has picked nearly 20 points.

The share of Muslims who are independent more than doubled to 22%. My thought process is this—the voting results are pretty hard to parse because of the aforementioned reasons. And, by itself, the data from 2020 on partisanship could have been a weird survey quirk. But seeing that same thing pop up in 2024 has convinced me—Muslims have gone from a deep blue to a much more purple hue.

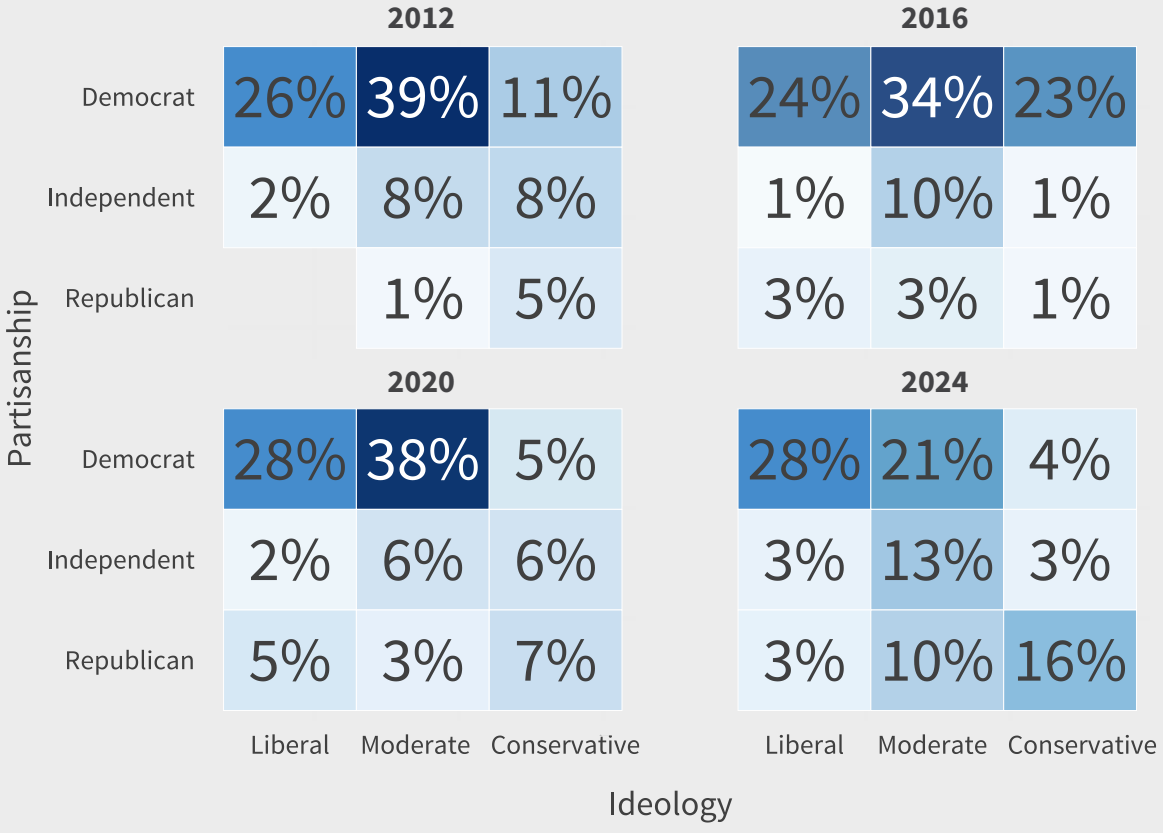
But there are two dimensions to the political worldviews of folks—partisanship and ideology. There can be moderate Republicans or liberal Independents. Looking at both dimensions can help draw a more accurate portrait of what's happening with the Muslim vote.

Given what we know from the prior analysis, it should come as no surprise that the top row of these heat maps (the Democrats) are where the biggest percentages can be found. But note which is the most popular square—in 2012, 2016, and 2020 it was moderate Democrats. They were 35-40% of the sample. That's a key point to remember—there's not a huge contingent of liberal Democrats hanging out in mosques. That gives me echoes of what we see with Black Protestants. They are overwhelmingly Democrats, but of the moderate flavor. But do you notice what happened in 2024? The moderate Democrats dropped to just 21%—down 17 points from 2020.

The Political Partisanship of Muslims, 2008-2024



Partisanship and Ideology among Muslims, 2012-2024



Where did all those Muslims go? Well, you can see a noticeable jump in moderate Independent Muslims—up to 13%. But there's also a big chunk in the bottom right corner—those are Republicans. In 2012, just 6% of Muslims said that they were moderate or conservative Republicans. It was 4% in 2016 and 10% in 2020. But in 2024, that figure was 26%. So this is not just a shift away from the Democrats, there's also some evidence of a growing number of conservative Republican Muslims.

Now let me temper this by saying something very simple, yet incredibly important: there aren't that many Muslims in the United States. According to the estimates from Pew, 0.4% of the population were Muslims in 2007, 0.9% in 2014, and 1.2% in the most recent data. There's no reason to think that there's going to be exponential growth of Muslims, especially given the changing immigration policy of the United States. In fact, I would be very surprised if Muslims were 3% of the population in 50 years. Thus, it's highly unlikely that there will ever be a national election where Muslims make the difference.

That's not to say that Muslims don't matter in the largest tapestry of American religion and politics. I think they are telling a pretty interesting story about something I've written about a lot—religion in the United States is seen as increasingly conservative. That's true among Protestants, Catholics, and Latter-day Saints. But, if this data is any guide, it's also happening among American Muslims. That's certainly something to keep an eye on.

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ATHEISTS AND AGNOSTICS

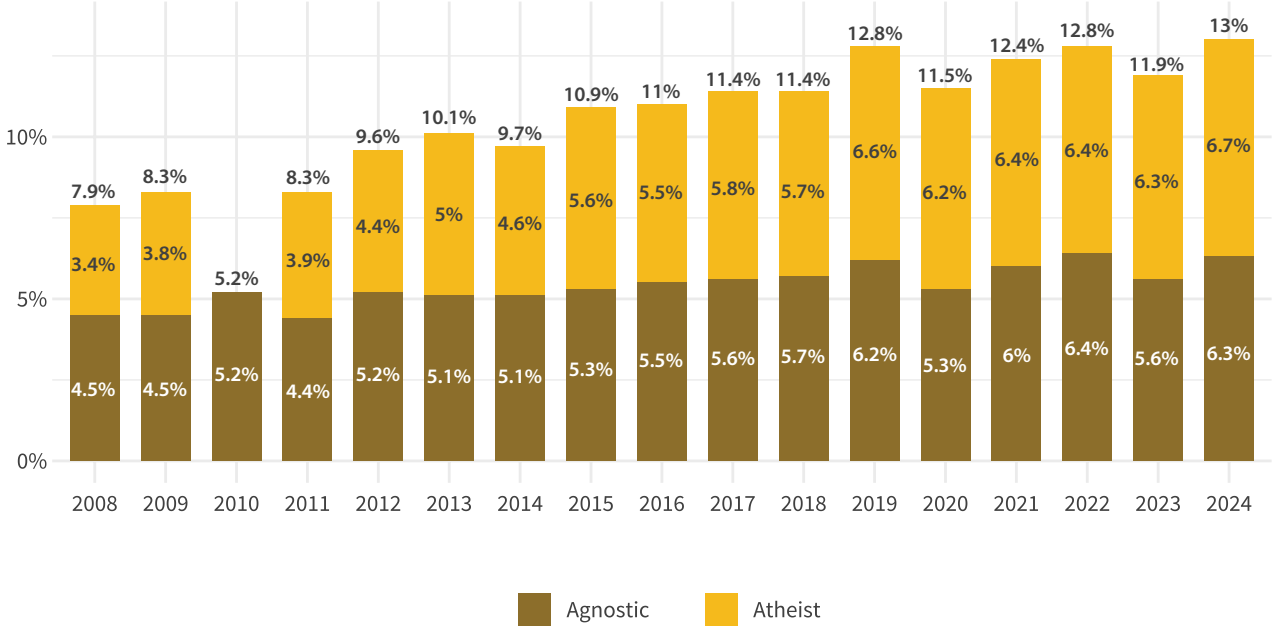
My first book was titled The Nones: Where They Came From, Who They Are, and Where They Are Going.

It was published—what feels like a lifetime ago—in 2021. I'm pretty proud of that little volume because it established my approach to thinking about non-religion in the United States. One of the points I make, which I hope will live on in scholarly discourse, is that the nones are not a homogeneous mass of people. There are clear subgroups within this label that need to be understood with much more granularity.

The three categories I used in that book were based on how the Pew Research Center asks about religious belonging. The survey gives people 12 options—the first eight are groups like Protestants, Catholics, LDS, Muslims, etc. Option 9 is atheist, option 10 is agnostic, and option 11 is "nothing in particular." I have an entire chapter entitled "Not All Nones Are Created Equal," where I go into detail about how those three groups differ.

One major bifurcation is between atheists/agnostics and the "nothing in particular" group. In their recent book *Secular Surge*, Campbell, Layman, and Green call the first two groups "secular" people, while those in the "nothing in particular" category are simply non-religious. Today, I want to describe how these secular people have voted in the last five election cycles. But before I get there, let's visualize the rise of atheists and agnostics since 2008.

The Rise of the Nones, 2008-2024



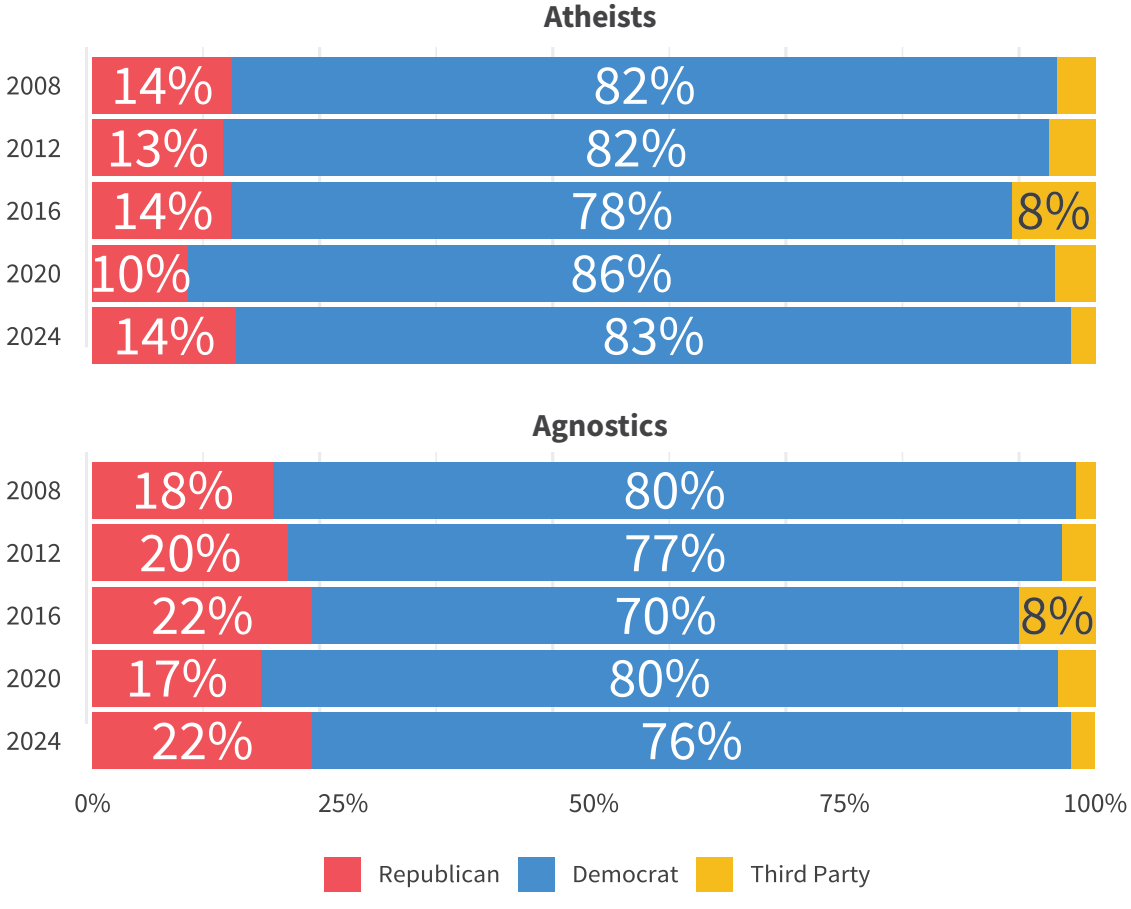
In 2008, just about 8% of the sample identified as atheist or agnostic. I know you're wondering about what happened in 2010—the CES just left off the atheist option. I don't really know why, but I did write an entire paper about it. Over time, however, the share of secular people slowly rose. It was clearly above 10% by 2015.

That said, the last couple of years have seen relative stability in the share of the country identifying as atheist or agnostic. It was 12.8% in 2019 but fell below 12% in both 2020 and 2023. The most recent estimate is right at 13%—the highest we've seen so far but not statistically different from the estimates in 2019 and 2022. I think it's fair to say that these two groups have experienced stagnant growth over the last five or six years.

So then the question is: how do they vote on Election Day?

There's a whole lot of blue here, right? Both atheists and agnostics are clearly strong supporters of the Democratic Party. That was true when Obama was at the top of the ticket, and it remained the case when Harris ran against Trump in 2024. In a general election, I'd anticipate that about 80% of atheists would vote for the Democrat (whoever it is) and slightly fewer—maybe 75%—among agnostics.

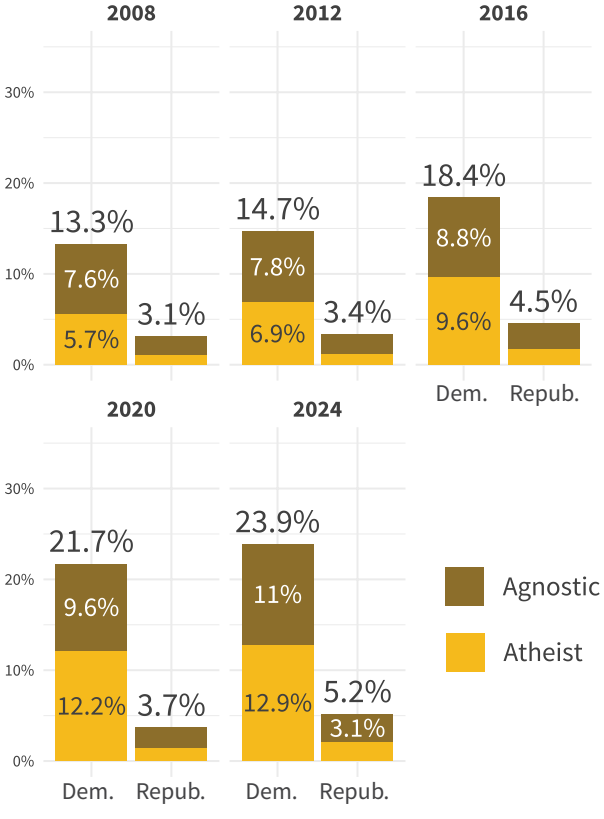
Presidential Vote Choice among Atheists and Agnostics, 2008-2024



There's also a consistent trend for both groups: the Democratic share in 2020 was the highest on record. Only 10% of atheists voted for Trump in 2020 and 17% of agnostics. But in 2024, there was a slight reversal. That year, 83% of atheists voted for Harris, while 14% supported Trump. That result is basically identical to what we saw when Obama was on the ballot in 2008 and 2012. Among agnostics, 76% voted for Harris and 22% for Trump—a modest shift to the right, similar to what we saw among atheists. But again, both groups remain deeply Democratic.

Beyond vote choice, it's important to understand how vital these groups have become to the Democratic coalition. In other words—any Democrat running for national office needs to take atheists and agnostics seriously, given their growing share of all votes cast.

Share of Party Votes from Atheists and Agnostics



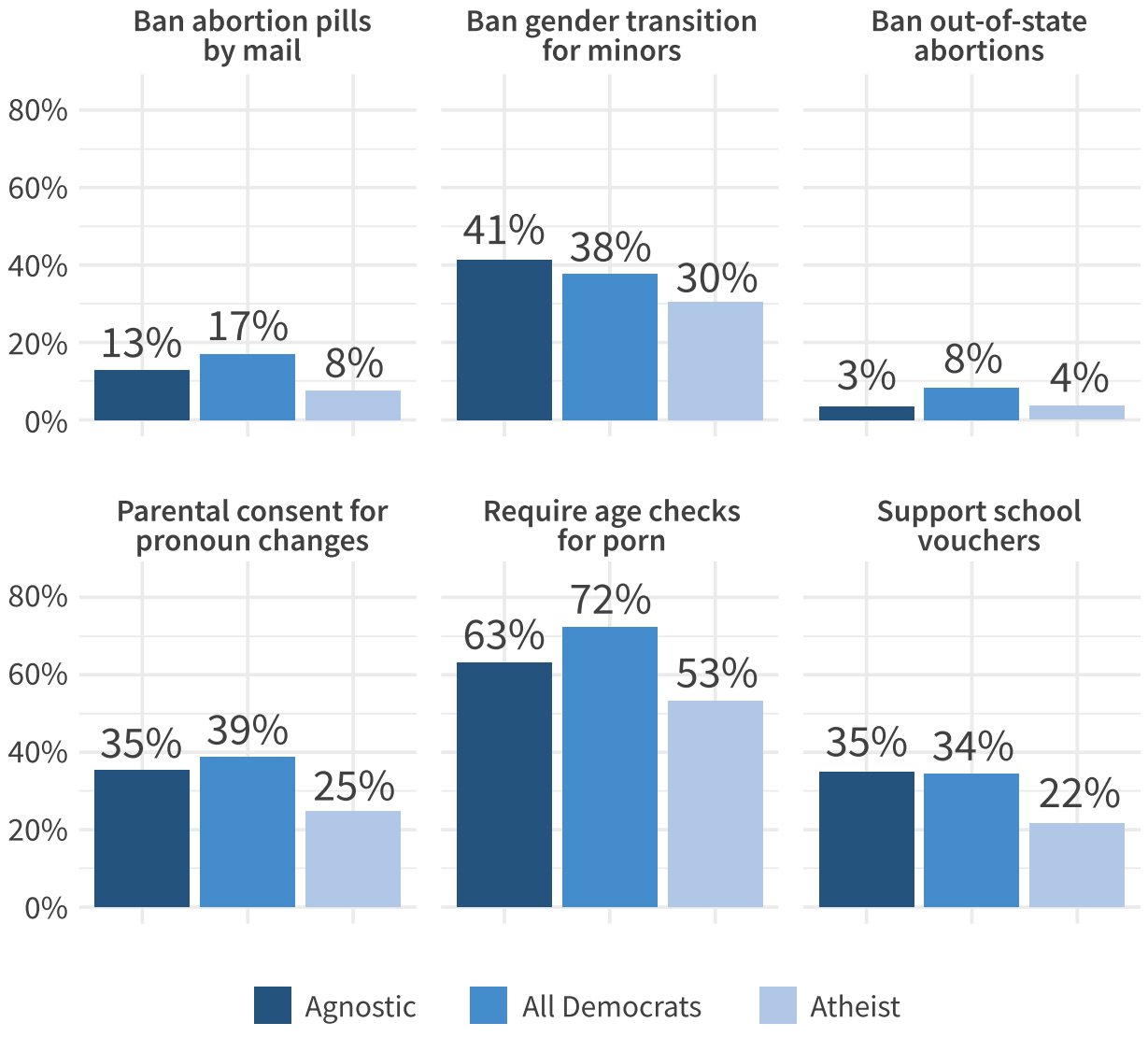
In 2008, about 13% of all votes for Barack Obama came from atheists and agnostics. For McCain, they made up just 3% of his coalition. Over time, the importance of secular voters has grown considerably. When Hillary Clinton ran in 2016, atheists and agnostics made up 18% of her total votes. That rose to 22% for Biden in 2020. In the most recent election, nearly a quarter of the Democratic coalition consisted of atheists and agnostics. That's nearly double their share from 2008. In short, a Democratic presidential candidate cannot win without securing 80-85% of this bloc.

> "What's become clear to me—and should be to Democratic strategists—is that atheists and agnostics are now a crucial part of the electoral coalition."

What about Republicans? I think it's fair to say that they can afford to ignore this constituency and suffer few electoral consequences. Between 2008 and 2020, only about 4% of Republican voters were atheists or agnostics. In 2024, that rose slightly to 5.2%, but it's still a tiny sliver. By comparison, white Evangelicals now make up about 40% of Trump voters. The GOP has no incentive to alienate that base to try and attract a small number of secular voters.

I'm also interested in how atheists and agnostics differ from other Democrats on social issues. My assumption has been that they're more liberal on abortion and gender/sexuality issues, but I wanted to see if the data supports that. So I looked at a battery of culture war questions and compared atheists and agnostics to the average Democrat.

Views of Social Issues among the Non-Religious Compared to All Democrats



My overall impression: there isn't a dramatic difference among the three groups. Among all Democrats, 17% support banning abortion pills by mail. That's four points higher than agnostics and nine points higher than atheists. Support is low across the board. There's also little appetite for banning women from traveling to another state to obtain an abortion. Generally speaking, pro-choice sentiment is orthodoxy on the left.

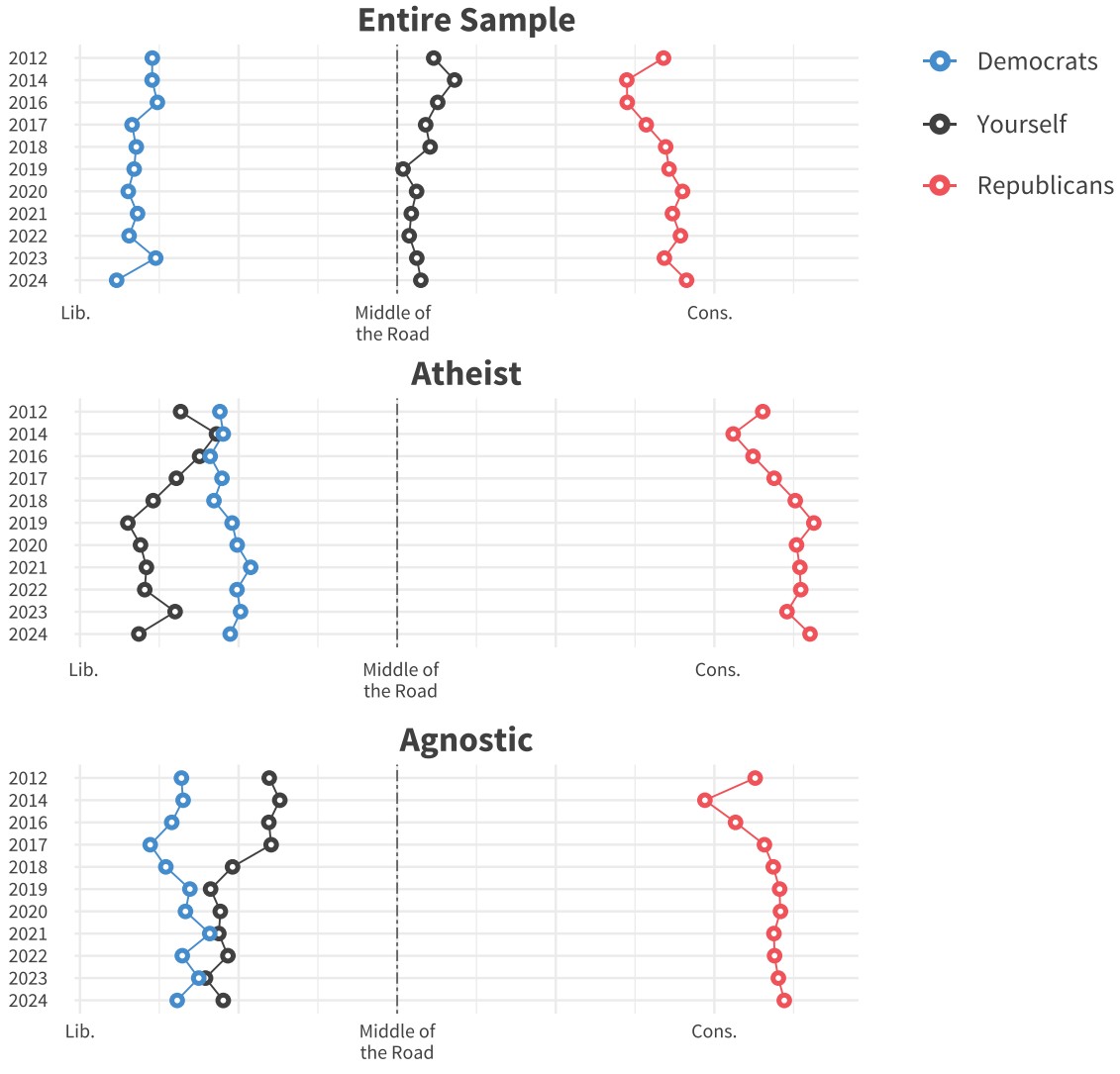
You *do* see bigger differences on gender identity. Atheists are about eight points less likely than average Democrats to support a ban on gender transition procedures for minors. In fact, these procedures are slightly *more* popular among atheists than among Democrats as a whole. And when it comes to allowing teachers to use a student's preferred pronouns without parental consent, atheists are significantly more liberal.

Overall, it's fair to say that the secular coalition inside the Democratic Party is more progressive than the median Democrat. It's not a chasm, but the difference is real. That helps set up the next point. Survey respondents were asked to place themselves, the Democrats, and the Republicans on an ideological scale from "very liberal" to "very conservative." Here's what that looks like from 2012 through 2024.

The top graph is the entire sample, which provides a baseline. The average American is just slightly right of center, though the trend has slowly shifted leftward over the last decade. You can also see where people place the two parties ideologically. These provide useful anchor points for interpreting how atheists and agnostics responded.

The average atheist stands out as a clear outlier. Atheists have been trending steadily left for years. In 2014 and 2016, they placed themselves close to the Democratic Party. But more recently, two things happened: atheists moved sharply left, and they perceived Democrats as moving toward the center. Atheists are the only group I've seen that views themselves as more liberal than the Democratic Party.

Place Yourself, Democrats, and Republicans in Ideological Space



What about agnostics? This graph highlights how they differ. Yes, they're more liberal than the average American and have also shifted left—particularly between 2017 and 2018. But unlike atheists, they view Democrats as more liberal and believe the party has moderated over time.

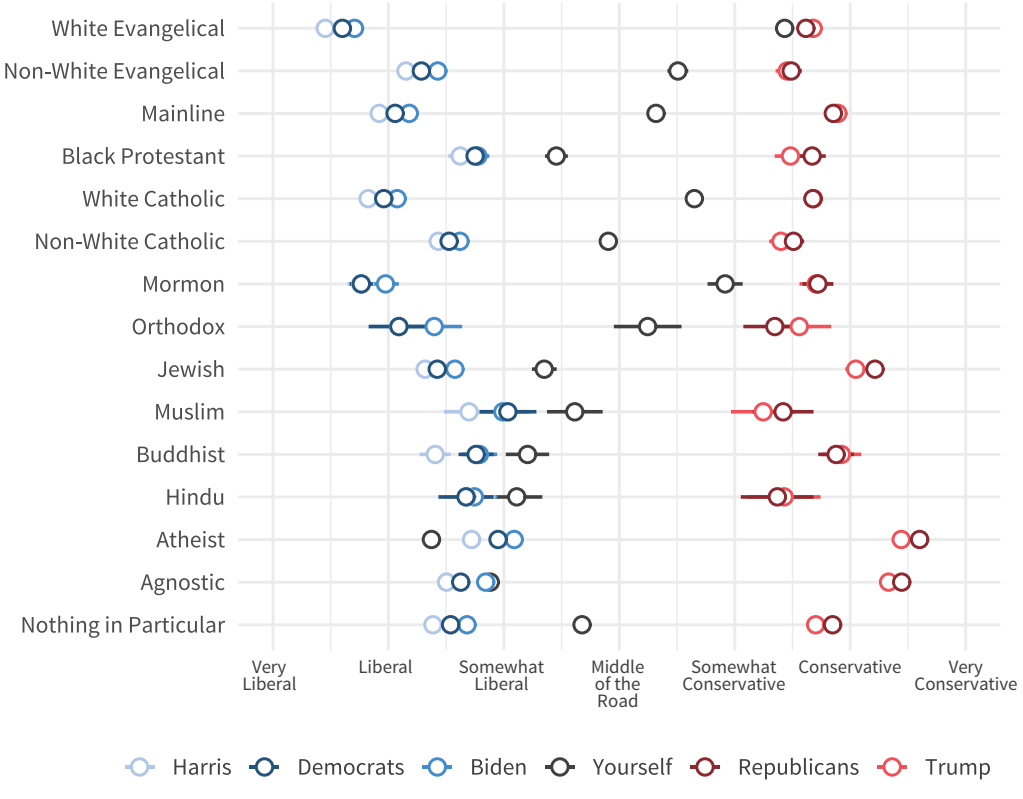
One thing is clear: atheists and agnostics view the U.S. political landscape very differently from nearly every other religious group. Here are the 2024 results for those two groups, along with where they rate Kamala Harris, Joe Biden, and Donald Trump.

See the black circles? That's where each group places itself ideologically. No circle is further left than atheists—and agnostics aren't far behind. Atheists rate themselves "left of Harris," Biden, and the Democratic Party. No other group does that. On the flip side, no group rates itself as more conservative than Trump or the GOP.

What also emerges is that atheists view Biden and the Democrats as fairly moderate, while seeing the GOP and Trump as extremely conservative—more so than any other religious group. Atheists have a sharply polarized view of U.S. politics. The only group that comes close is white Evangelicals—just in the opposite direction.

What do I take away from all this? I don't think we saw dramatic changes among atheists and agnostics in 2024. Harris may have done slightly worse, but the difference is marginal. What's become clear to me—and should be to Democratic strategists—is that atheists and agnostics are now a **crucial** part of the electoral coalition. Anyone hoping to win the White House from the GOP in 2028 needs to take them seriously—or risk losing again.

Place the Following People or Groups in Ideological Space



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NOTHING IN PARTICULARS

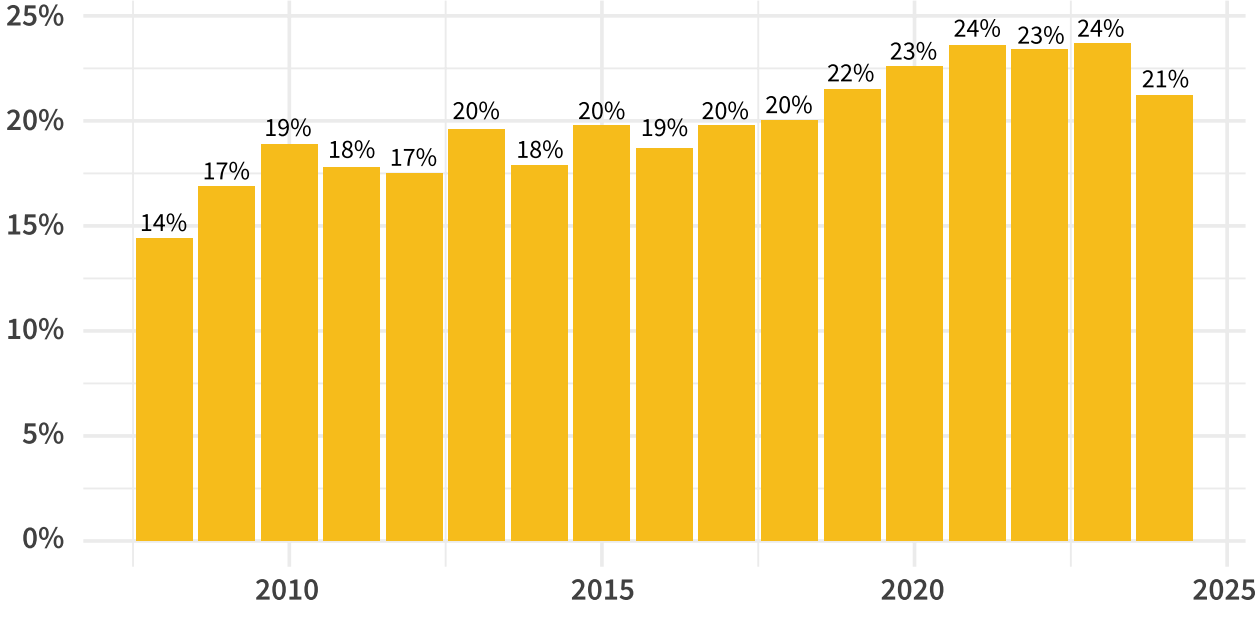
When I talk about the size of the "nones," I see this really interesting conflict play out among the scores of non-religious people in the United States.

Whenever I show a graph that indicates that people with the most education are the least likely to identify as atheist, agnostic, or nothing in particular, a lot of people from the first two categories get very upset with me. They slide into my DMs claiming my measurement is incorrect because it includes all three categories of non-religion. They want me to restrict my analysis to just atheists and agnostics. (And if you do that, the relationship flips: the most educated are more likely to identify as atheists or agnostics.)

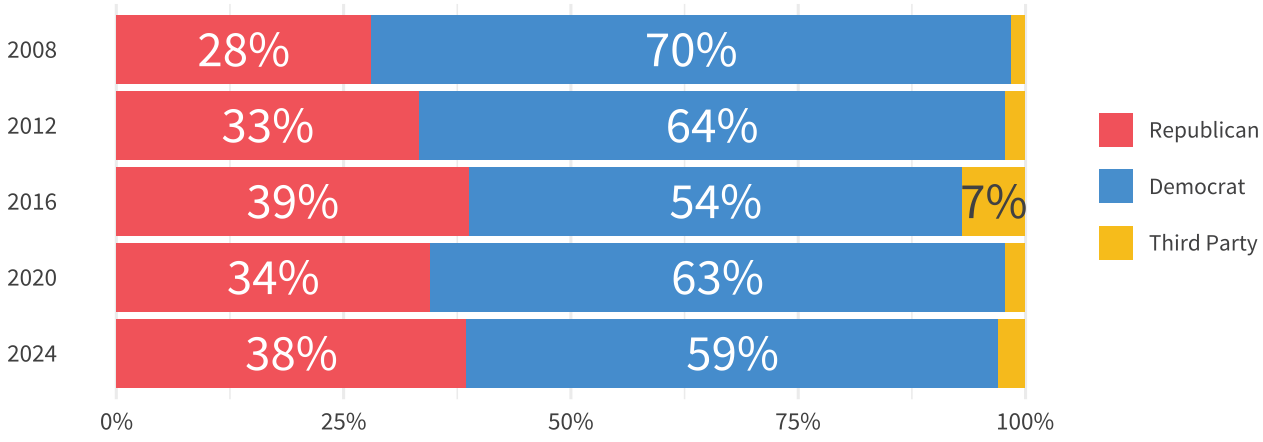
But when I make a graph showing the rise of the nones over time if I only include atheists and agnostics in my calculation, the share of nones has only risen to about 12% over time. If I throw the third category in there—the nothing in particulars—the nones are much, much larger. Somewhere between 30% and 35%. So, you can see the dilemma here. Many atheists want to include the "nothing in particulars" when it makes secularism appear more significant but want to exclude them in other analyses. Which is really par for the course among nothing in particulars because I think that they are the most overlooked, understudied "religious" group in the United States. And they absolutely have a huge impact on American politics.

It's important to give people a sense of this group's size, lest they assume I'm referring to a fringe element of the American religious landscape.

Share of the Population Who Are Nothing in Particular



Presidential Vote Choice among Nothing in Particulars, 2008-2024



In 2008, 14% of the sample said that they were nothing in particular. It rose quickly from there. I think it's fair to say that the correct percentage of nothing in particulars was likely about 20% of the general public from 2010 through 2018 or so. But then that figure began to rise again between 2019 and 2023. It's very fair to say that they were just slightly less than a quarter of the population during this five-year window. But the 2024 result is a bit of a head-scratcher—dropping back down to 21%. Is this a huge drop in the nones? We absolutely should not make such a claim based on a single data point. A 3-4 point drop in one year is just not realistic. Now, if the 2025 sample is 20% nothing in particulars, we can talk about this as a real trend.

However, I feel like I need to contextualize this result even more by comparing nothing in particulars to other religious groups. In the 2024 data, just 18% of the sample were Catholic. Yes, there are now more "nothing in particulars" than Catholics in the United States. And there are almost as many nothing in particulars as Evangelicals as well—21% vs. 22%. If you add up all the LDS, Orthodox Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists you get 6% of the country. Among people born in 2000 or later, the most popular response option is nothing in particular—it's 28% compared to only 22% who say that they are Protestants.

Do you see the point? It's astonishing to me that this group is not more well known by the average American.

So, it's this huge group—the data is incredibly clear on that fact. There may be 70 million people who identify as nothing in particular. That's a whole lot of potential voters, more than enough to sway an election. But what are their politics?

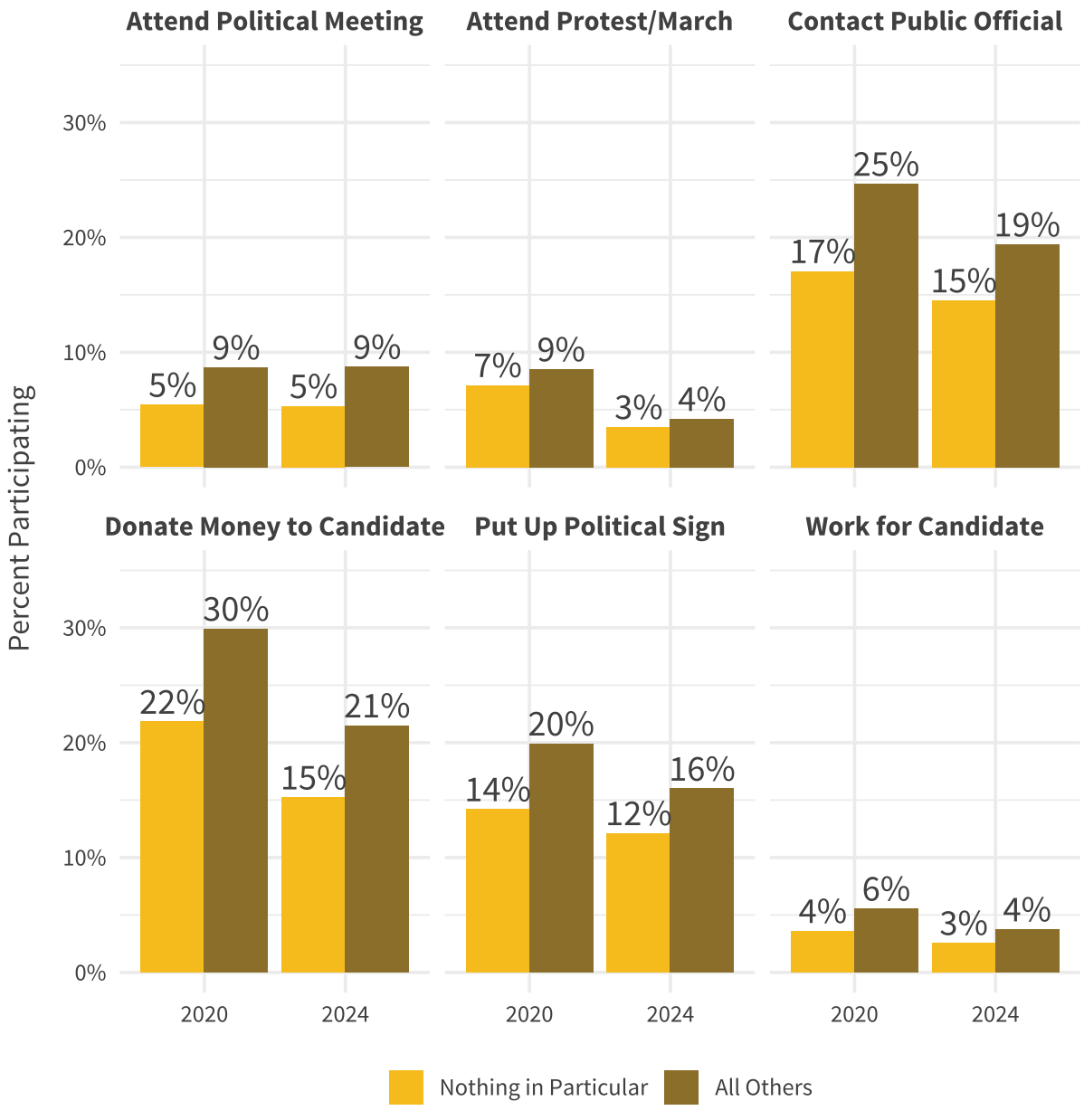
They are undoubtedly a left-leaning voting bloc. In 2008, 70% of them cast a ballot for Barack Obama—he bested McCain by 42 points among nothing in particulars. Now, it is fair to say that Republicans have made some inroads with this group over time. Romney improved by five points over McCain, and Trump gained another six in 2016. But I want you to look at the last couple of election cycles. Trump's share goes from 39% in 2016 to 34% in 2020 and back up to 38% in 2024. All those figures are better than the previous Republican nominees.

But notice the see-saw pattern? Trump did relatively well in 2016 and 2024. He didn't fare so well in 2020. And guess which election he lost? Now, I know that I can't say for certain if any one specific voting bloc really did throw the election to one party or the other, but it does seem really convenient to me that the nothing in particulars were five points more Republican in the two elections that Trump won compared to the 2020 contest with Joe Biden. Remember, these are a whole lot of raw votes to be had.

Yet, there's a caveat here that I would be remiss to not point out. Nothing in particulars tend to be a group that has historically been apathetic about the political process. That's actually a central theme of my book *The Nones*—nothing in particulars are largely disengaged from American society. That's something that also comes through in this Pew report. According to their data from the 2022 midterms, just 32% of nothing in particulars voted in the election compared to 50% of atheists, 49% of agnostics, and 51% of religiously affiliated Americans.

You can clearly see that their engagement lags behind in data from the Cooperative Election Study, too.

Political Activity by Year and Religious Affiliation



"If I were sitting at the DNC HQ and thinking about what happened in the 2024 election and why Harris didn't win the White House, I think one of the answers lies with this large group of nothing in particulars."

22% **OF NOTHING IN PARTICULARS DONATED TO A CANDIDATE IN 2020**

15% **OF NOTHING IN PARTICULARS DONATED TO A CANDIDATE IN 2024**

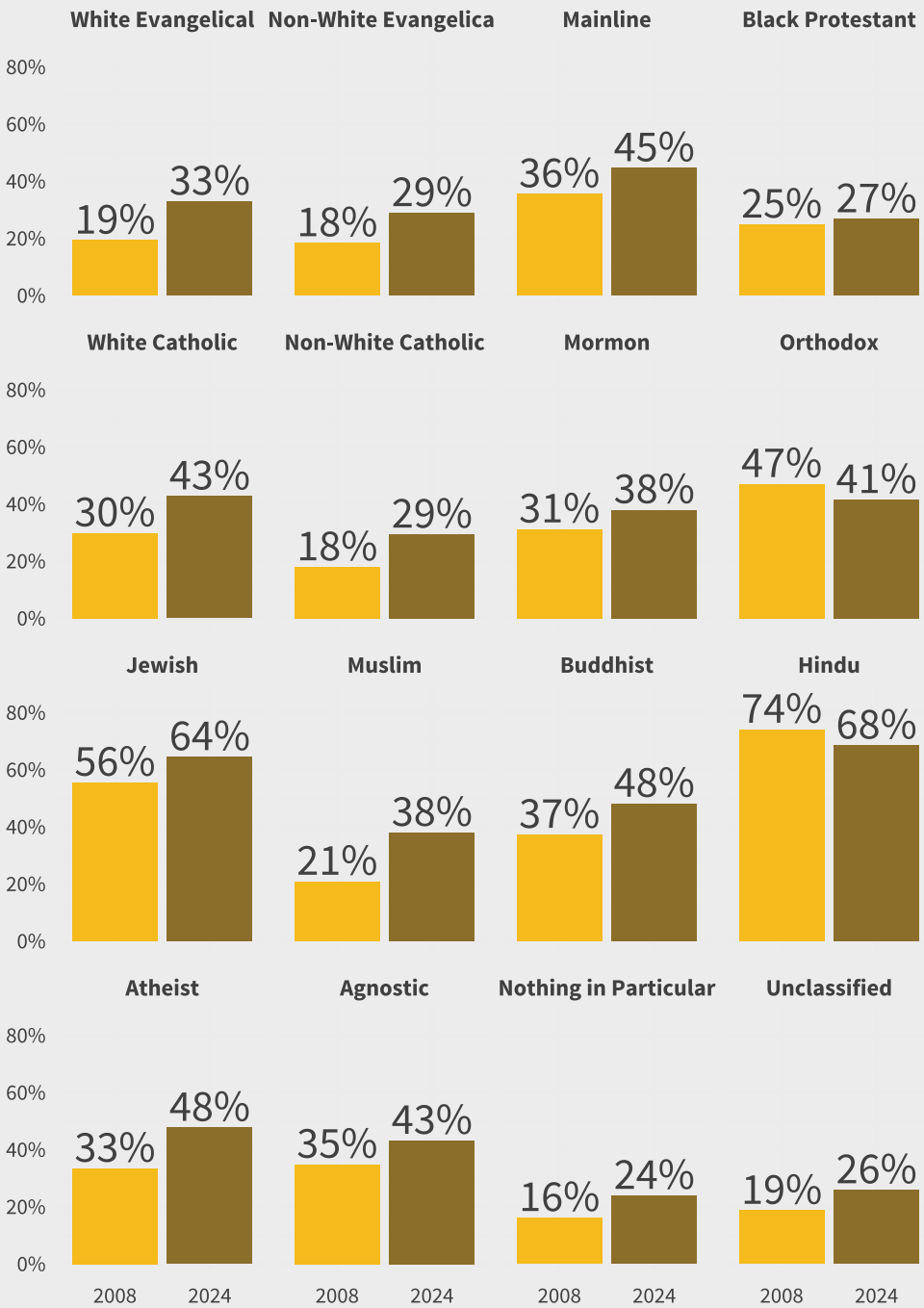
12% **OF NOTHING IN PARTICULARS PUT UP A POLITICAL SIGN IN 2024**

In both 2020 and 2024, a nothing in particular was about half as likely to attend a political meeting as a typical American. They were 8 points less inclined to contact a public official in 2020 and 4 points lower in 2024. Just 22% of them donated to a candidate in 2020, and that dropped to only 15% in 2024. Both much lower than the average citizen. You can see it all the way across the board—nothing in particulars just don't engage in very low-effort and low-cost political activities like putting up a yard sign or bumper sticker. Only 12% did so in 2024.

If I were sitting at the DNC HQ and thinking about what happened in the 2024 election and why Harris didn't win the White House, I think one of the answers lies with this large group of nothing in particulars. Trump managed to get back to that 38-39% threshold that he needed. Which was crucial for him, but I think the bigger problem here is turnout. Nothing in particulars were clearly disengaged with what was happening in 2024. Democrats need this group to show up in big numbers to have a chance in national elections. That just didn't happen.

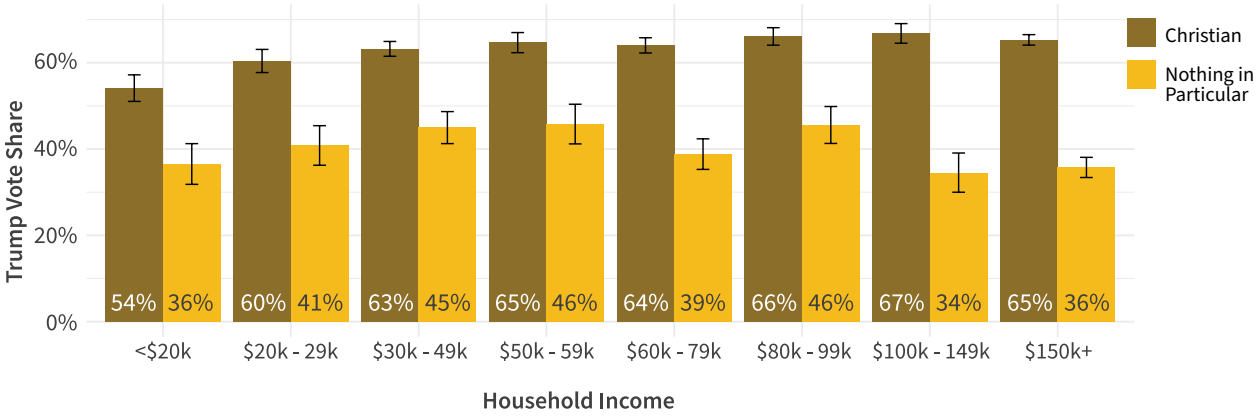
Of course there's a very good reason that nothing in particulars weren't incredibly tuned in to the political process in 2020 and 2024—their very low levels of educational attainment. One thing that we basically "know" in political science is that educated people are more likely to engage in political activity than less educated folks. And it just so happens that nothing in particulars have the lowest level of college degrees of any religious group in the sample.

Share with a Four-Year Degree



In 2008, just 16% of them had earned a four-year college degree. That was 2-3 points lower than Evangelicals and non-white Catholics. For reference, in the entire sample about a quarter had earned a bachelor's degree. This is also why I think it's methodological nonsense to lump nothing in particulars together with atheists and agnostics. Those latter groups have very high levels of education. It's like they are in different corners of the socioeconomic landscape compared to nothing in particulars.

Trump Vote Share by Religious Identity and Income (2024)



You also need to take note of the fact that nothing in particulars have never really managed to make up this education deficit. The share with a bachelor's degree only rose 8 percentage points between 2008 and 2024. It was 10 points in the entire sample. Even today, the nothing in particulars are the least educated "religious" group in the United States. They are nine points behind white Evangelicals and nearly 20 points behind white Catholics. An atheist in 2024 was twice as likely to have a bachelor's degree compared to a nothing in particular.

But I also tend to think that this is a reason that nothing in particulars could easily slip into being a Republican constituency in the future—having a lower level of education is strongly related to a lower level of household income. Trump made his campaign largely about the issue of inflation, which tends to be most acutely felt among folks at the bottom end of the socioeconomic spectrum. To test that, I broke the sample down into income categories and calculated Trump's vote share among all Christians and then the nothing in particulars.

What's undoubtedly true is that Christians felt much warmer toward Donald Trump than nothing in particulars, regardless of household income. In many cases the gap was about 20 percentage points. So, from this angle one could make the claim that being a Christian shifts the likelihood of voting for the Republican up by about 15-20 points. That gap is also bigger when comparing those at the top end of the income spectrum. Among folks making six figures, the gap expanded to 30 points, largely due to nothing in particulars shifting even further toward the left.

Also note the trend from left to right on the graph. For Christians, income stops mattering that much once you get to about $50,000 per year. At this point, two-thirds of Christian backed Donald Trump. That's not really the case for nothing in particulars—the trend line looks much more curvilinear. Among nothing in particulars, the middle incomes were the most Republican, and that figure started to slide once household income rose to about $60,000 or more.

In my view, "nothing in particulars" are the most fertile ground for future political campaigns. It's a group of disaffected, detached, and disengaged voters. There are also a whole lot of them. They seem pretty predisposed to voting for Democrats. I think in a general election they are D+25, but if that slips at all, the Republican has a chance to win. That's exactly what happened in 2024, when Trump narrowed the gap to just 21 points.

However, unlike atheists, Latter-day Saints, Jews, and Evangelicals, this is a group that is nearly impossible to find gathering anywhere. There's no National Association of "nothing in particulars." But if some political campaign or candidate could manage to activate this group in large numbers, they would almost certainly carry them to victory on Election Day.

Scan to view code for this post.

AGE, FAITH, AND THE VOTE IN 2024

Do the youths love Donald Trump?

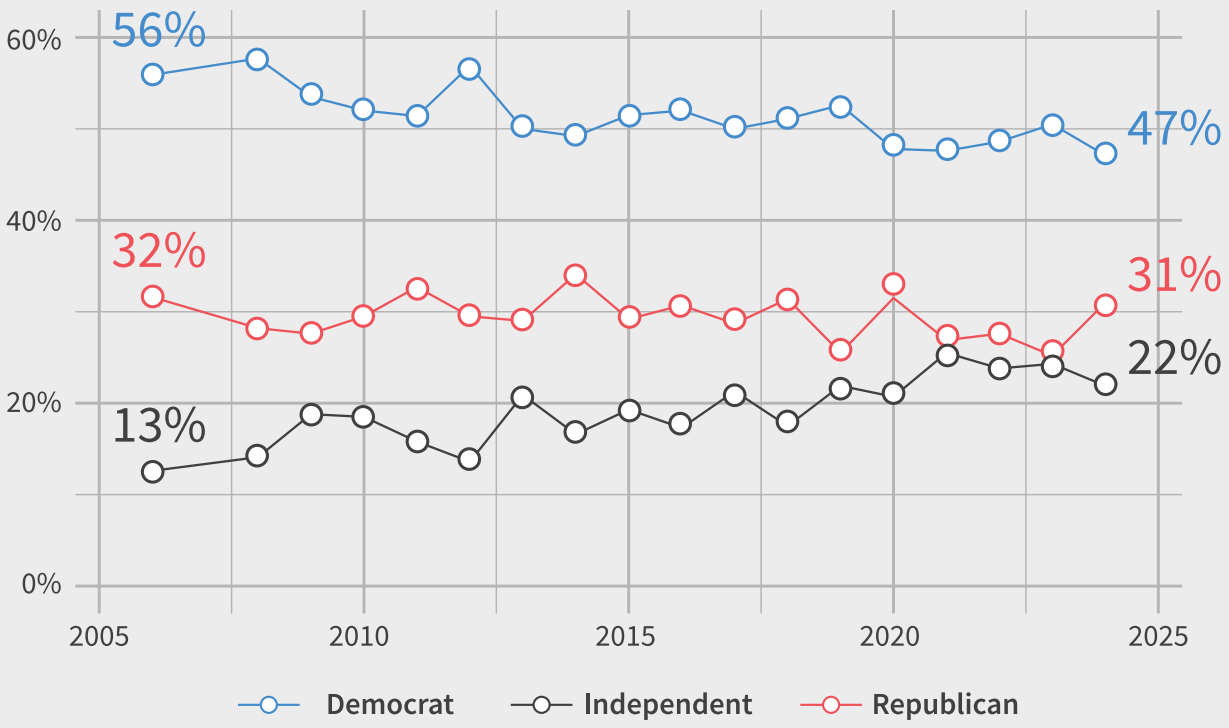
In 2016, that question seemed just impossible to consider. I mean, the data that came out right after Trump stunned Hillary Clinton indicated that young folks favored the Democrat by an 18-point margin. In fact, according to the exit polls, Trump actually did five points worse than Mitt Romney did in 2012. In some leaked documents to the *Miami Herald* in 2020, the Trump campaign called a lot of young voters "deadbeats" because of their paucity of political knowledge and their low likelihood of turning out on Election Day.

But the 2024 election cycle was something different entirely. In the days after Trump's resounding victory, Sara Pequeno of *USA Today* wrote, "Well, the secret is out. The world finally knows that Gen Z isn't so special after all and not the generation of progressives sent to save us from a second Trump presidency." The realization had finally set in for a whole crop of political observers—Trump was not kryptonite to Gen Z.

So, let's dig into that in the post today. And let's add race, gender, and religion to the mix, too. What kind of young folks warmed to Donald Trump in 2024? And what may that portend for the future?

First things first, let me show you how the partisanship composition of young adults has shifted since 2006. This includes only 18- to 29-year-olds.

The Political Partisanship of 18-29 Year Olds, 2006-2024

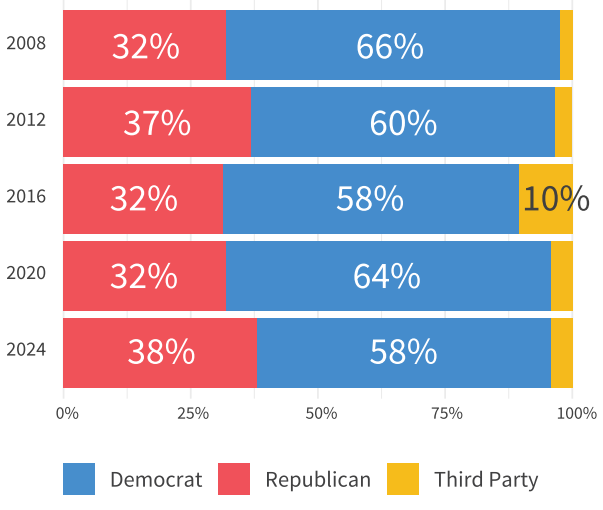


The first thing worth flagging is that the share of young adults who identify as Republicans has remained almost completely unchanged since the mid-2000s. It was 32% in 2006, and it was 31% in the most recent data. It bounces a bit, but nothing to write home about.

However, the same is not true for the Democrats. They've lost significant share in the last 18 years. When Obama got elected the first time in 2008, 58% of 18- to 29-year-olds were Democrats. It dropped below 50% by 2020 and has stayed there in the last few surveys. Today, 47% of young adults are Democrats—almost a 10-point drop. The independents have picked up those Democrat losses—going from 13% to 22%.

But, as I've said a bunch, all that doesn't matter at the ballot box. Elections offer a (functionally) binary choice. So, here's voting behavior since 2008.

Presidential Vote Choice among 18- to 29-Year-Olds, 2008-2024

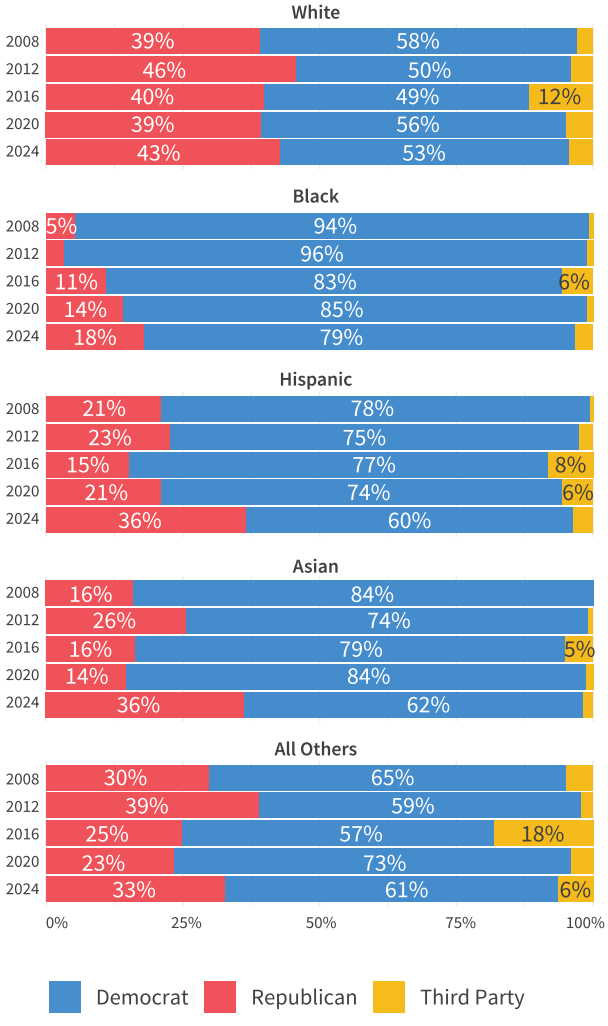


This is certainly not a staggering graph in terms of huge swings in the youth vote. I think it's very fair to say that in a general election over the last 15 years, about a third of young adults will support the Republican and about 60% will vote for the Democrat. Of course, there was a lot more third-party voting in the 2016 contest, but that was an aberration. In most elections, about 5% of twenty-somethings go third party.

There are two elections that deviate from this trend: 2012 and 2024. Which seems a bit odd. In both cases, the Republican did about five points better than average. Romney got 37% of young voters, and Trump was at 38% in his most recent campaign. But you can absolutely see the "Trump surge" among this demographic. Trump clearly made some gains. Harris' performance was six points worse than Biden and eight points worse than Obama in 2024.

One more look at this before we dig into the religion angle—I broke the youth vote down by race. I think this helps to clarify a bit of how these shifts happened.

Presidential Vote Choice among 18- to 29-Year-Olds, 2008-2024



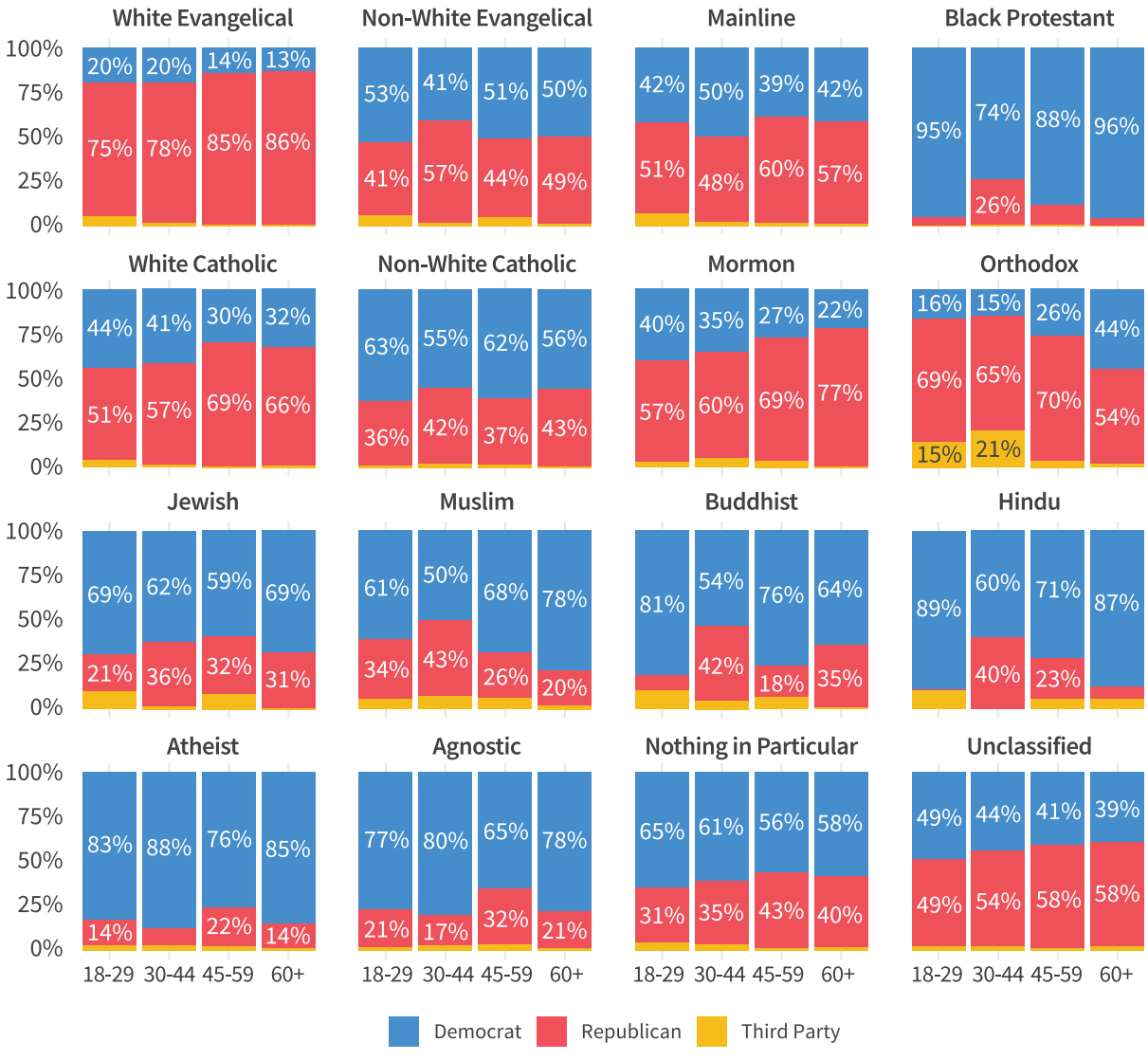
The huge upshot from this graph is that it wasn't young white people who became more comfortable with Donald Trump. I mean, he may have done 2-3 points better, but that's certainly not anything to write home about. Instead, it's young people of color who started trending toward the GOP in 2024. You can see it among young Black voters. In 2016, 11% voted for Trump. That rose to 14% in 2020 and then 18% in 2024. Those are some sustained gains.

The numbers for both Hispanic and Asian young people are really the headline here. About 20% of Hispanics cast their ballot for the GOP in a general election. Trump did really poorly in 2016 at just 15% of the Latino youth vote. But in 2024, he earned 36% of their votes. There's no doubt in my mind that Hispanics are a growing problem for the Democratic Party. But so is the Asian vote. About 36% of them supported Trump in 2024—20 points better than his prior two elections.

However, it's time to turn to religion. I've got 16 religious traditions, and I'm going to show you young adult voting patterns in every election since 2008. There's a lot of data to think through.

Presidential Vote Choice among 18- to 29-Year-Olds by Religious Tradition, 2008-2024

2024 Presidential Vote Choice by Religious Tradition and Age Group



The white Evangelical vote is pretty stable, I would say. About 75% of younger white Evangelical voters supported McCain in 2008. It was 75% for Trump in 2024. In 2016, Trump only received 69% of the young white Evangelical vote, though. So he has made some inroads there. The young white Catholic vote used to be noticeably tilted toward the Democrats, but in 2024, it was R+7. A complete reversal of 2020, which was D+7. Sample sizes for mainline Protestants are so small among young voters that it's hard to draw reliable conclusions.

I do need to point out that Trump's biggest gains were with young non-white Christians. He was up 15 points among non-white Evangelicals and 14 points among non-white Catholics. That tracks with what I described in the previous graph. It's just hard to see a larger religious group here where Trump clearly lost significant ground. He held serve with some and made inroads with others.

But let's talk about age differences inside each tradition now. Are young Christians more Democratic-leaning than older ones? This is just the result from 2024.

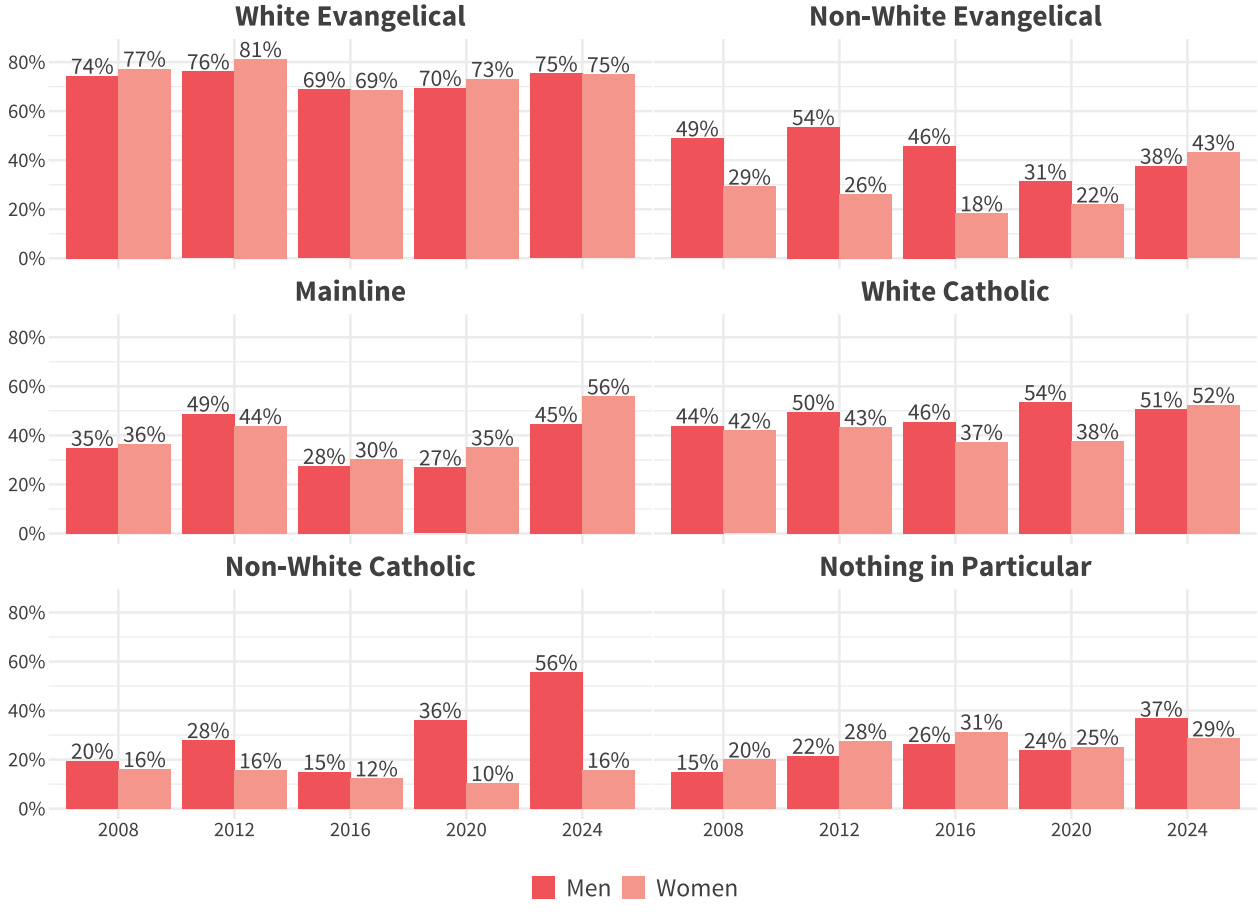
So, younger white Evangelicals are slightly less Republican than older ones. But the key word there is "slightly." About 75% of young white Evangelicals supported Trump—which is 8 points lower than Evangelicals as a whole. The white Catholic result shows a much starker generational divide. Only 51% of the youngest adults supported Trump. For older white Catholics, it was much closer to two-thirds support. The other huge finding is the Latter-day Saints. A young Mormon was nearly twice as likely as an older one to vote for Harris in 2024. I've written about this before—there's a huge partisan age gap among the Latter-day Saint community that's worth watching.

There are a couple of groups in the bottom two rows that are also worth mentioning. Older Jewish voters are noticeably more right-leaning than younger ones (about 10 points). Young Muslims are warmer toward Trump than older ones—that's a surprising reversal. But among the atheists and agnostics, there's really no difference there at all. However, for the other types of nones (nothing in particulars), there's some clear evidence that older folks tend to be more Republican.

And I couldn't finish this post without writing about the gender gap at the ballot box. One of the biggest religion stories right now is the fact that young men are just as religious as young women. Of course we don't have a great answer to that right now, but it does seem like politics could be a contributing factor. Young women are continuing their leftward drift, and young men are squarely in the "moderate" part of the ideological spectrum.

I can't show you every single religious group because the sample sizes just get way too small, but here's six of the biggest traditions.

Republican Vote Share among 18- to 29-Year-Olds by Gender and Religion



For white Evangelicals, there's essentially no evidence that young men and young women diverge at the ballot box in a noticeable way. That's not been the case at all in the last five presidential elections. But that's not true for non-white Evangelicals. In 2008-2020, young men were much more likely to vote for the Republican compared to young women. In some elections, the gap was 25 or more points. But in 2024, the gap actually reversed. The share of young non-white Evangelical women who voted for Trump went from 22% in 2020 to 43% in 2024. That's insane! Someone follow up on that, please.

In terms of the mainline, I don't even know what to make of these results. Young mainline men moved 18 points to the right, and young women moved 21 points. Again, we have to realize that there just aren't that many young mainliners out there. So, a big dose of skepticism there.

> "For non-white Catholics, the result is staggering. In 2016, 15% of young men voted for Trump and 12% of young women. In 2024, it was 56% of young non-white Catholic men and 16% of women. That's a forty-point jump for males."

But the Catholic sample is still pretty big, and we can have a bit more confidence in these results. For white Catholics, the big story for me is how the gender gap has disappeared. In both 2016 and 2020, men were significantly more likely to vote for Trump than women. However, in 2024 both were just above 50%. For non-white Catholics, the result is staggering. In 2016, 15% of young men and 12% of young women voted for Trump. In 2024, it was 56% of young non-white Catholic men and 16% of women. That's a 40-point jump for males. Just staggering.

I know that there's a whole lot here to parse through—age, race, gender, and religion. That's a bunch of moving parts. So, here's a few bullet points that really jump out to me.

1. **Overall, Trump made inroads among young adults in 2024. About five percentage points better than 2016 and 2020.**
2. **Those gains were entirely among the non-white sample. That was especially evident with Hispanic and Asian respondents.**
3. **When looking at religious traditions, you just don't see any examples of Harris gaining ground with younger voters.**
4. **There are huge age gradients in the vote among white Catholics and Latter-day Saints.**
5. **Trump made staggering gains among non-white Catholic men. Forty points in two election cycles.**

If you are a Democrat, I just don't know how you can look at these results and feel anything but despair. At best, some segments of the youth vote held steady in the last election cycle. But there are a whole bunch of examples of just the opposite—Trump taking away the Democrats' advantage.

However, with Trump exiting the stage in a couple of years and the Democrats not putting forth a clear front runner, who knows how much different this will look when I do the same bit of analysis in 2029.

RELIGION AND THE GENDER GAP

When you teach certain classes at the college level, you just know you are going to have to cover certain subjects.

Any introductory biology course should touch on photosynthesis, a class on philosophy should cover logical fallacies, and any course on American history has to spend way too much time talking about the constitutional convention. We also have concepts like that in political science.

If one were to teach any course on political behavior, it's almost universally the case that one class period should touch on the gender gap. It's pretty simple to explain—men tend to vote for Republicans and women favor the Democrats. I love teaching it because it's easy to throw together six or eight graphs that make that point incredibly straightforward. (I recommend this resource from the Center for American Women and Politics, which has collected a bunch of data, for what it's worth.) This isn't a finding that has a whole lot of caveats. Take an average man and find an average woman who matches him on demographic characteristics. The woman is going to be more inclined to vote for the Democrat, on average. Once that fact has been established, then you can get into the fun part of the discussion with the students: why is this a near universal truth in the United States?

The media has been toying around with the gender gap a whole lot in the wake of the 2024 election. *The Washington Post* published "The story behind the rightward shift of young men." *New York Magazine* asked "How Did This Become the Gender-Gap Election?" and *Vox* ran one with the evocative title, "This is why Kamala Harris really lost." They all are trying to understand how much gender drove Donald Trump to a second term. You can probably guess how I am going to try and add to this discourse—what about the gender gap when it comes to religion? If we compare just white Evangelical men and women, is it still there? What about atheists? Or Jews? Let me show you.

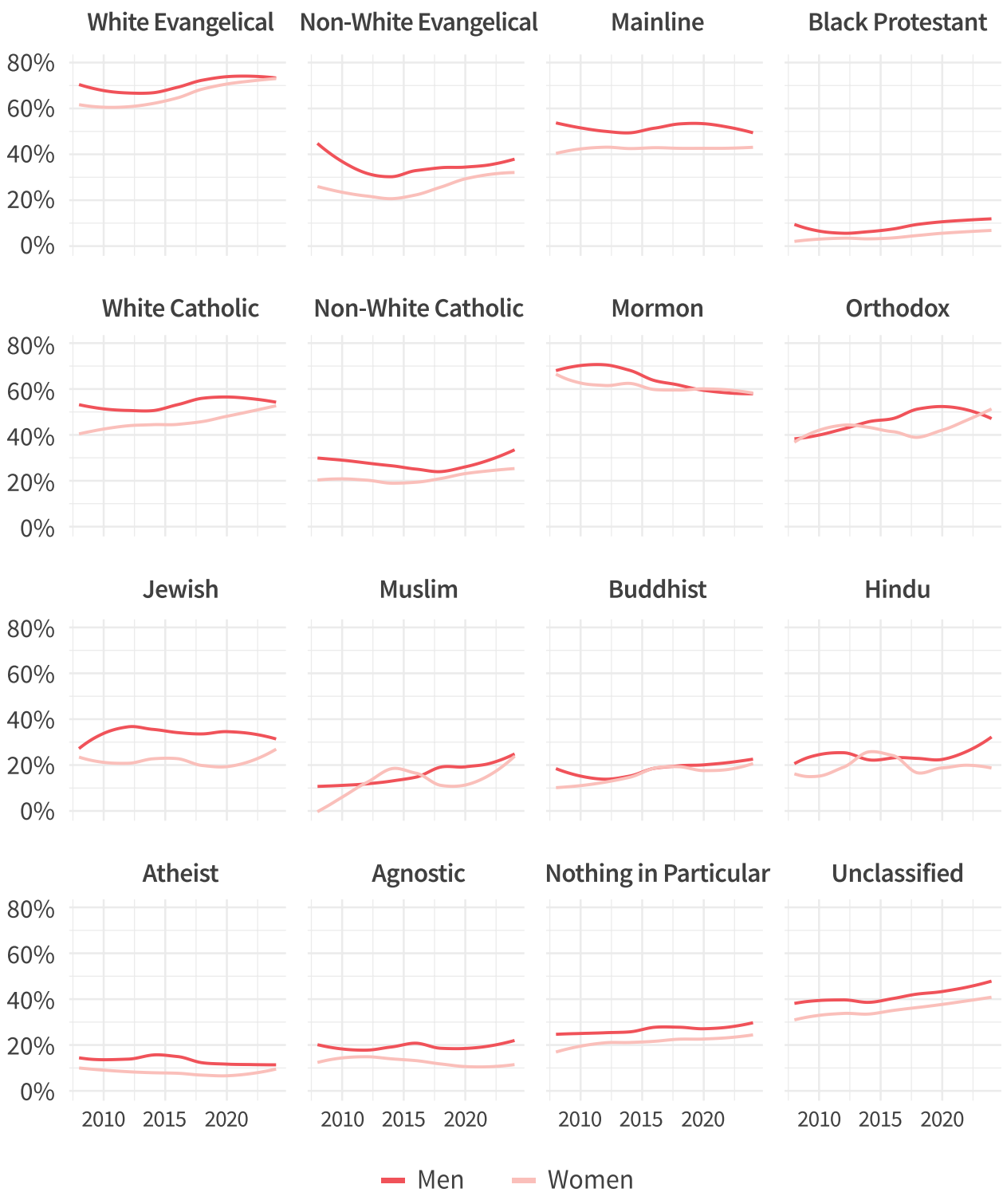
This is the share of each gender that identified Republican between 2008 and 2024, broken down into 16 different religious groups.

I think we are all going to be drawn to the top-left corner of the graph on the right—white Evangelicals. Men were slightly more Republican than women between 2008 and 2020. That gap has now disappeared. That's a very big deal. You also see a pretty similar phenomenon among white Catholics. The gender gap disappeared in 2024. For Latter-day Saints that's been the case for about five years now. Also notice how the share of Mormons who are Republicans has dropped just a bit in the last couple of years.

But there are a bunch of other groups with a pretty consistent gap. Non-white Evangelicals and Catholics fit this description. So does the mainline. Mainline men are 6-8 points more Republican than mainline women. The gap is particularly large among Jews, which is notable. Yet even among the nones—atheists, agnostics, and nothing in particulars—it's a rock-steady finding: women are less likely to be Republicans compared to men. When I say it's a near universal truth, this is what I mean. The gender gap cuts across religion.

Okay, given everything that I've written about how the religion gap is closing among young men and young women, I feel the need to do the same analysis above but break it down into a couple different age categories. I used the data from 2022, 2023, and 2024 to give me a large enough sample size to do this type of fine-grained analysis.

Share Who Identify as Republican by Religious Tradition and Gender



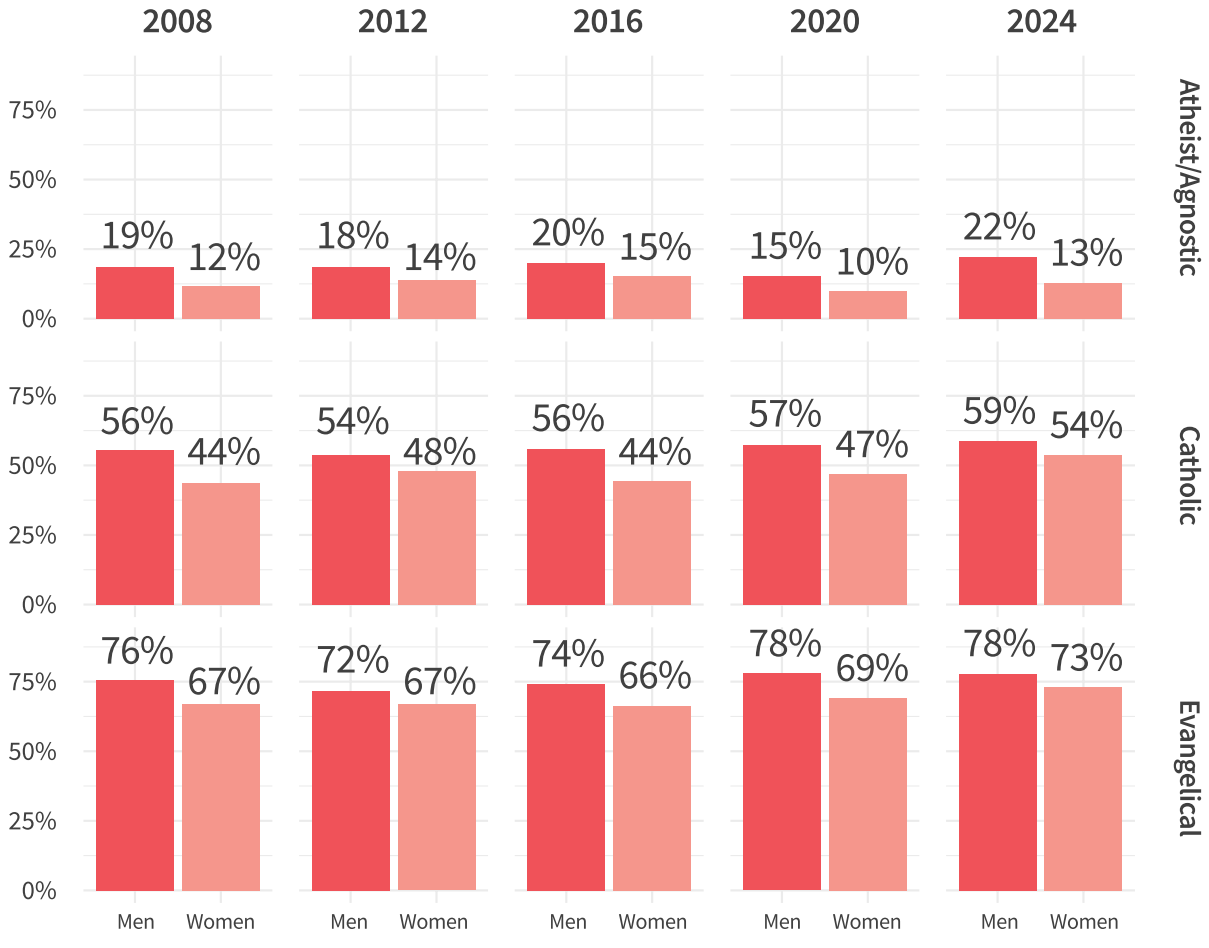
Share Who Identify as Republican by Age, Gender, and Religious Tradition

I want to point out the outliers first. These are instances in which women are more likely to be Republicans compared to men. I can find just a very small handful in this entire graph. Among white Evangelicals between the ages of 18-35, 68% of women are Republicans compared to 63% of men. Commence the think pieces there! Among Latter-day Saints between the ages of 51-64, there's a 10-point gap. There also may be one among Muslims between the ages of 36 and 50, but the sample size is a bit too small to be certain. Out of a possible 64 comparisons, women are more Republican in maybe three of them. That's the gender gap in action.

What else jumps out to me from this graph? The Republican bump among non-white Evangelical and non-white Catholic men in the middle age categories. That certainly raises some questions. You can also see how young Black Protestants tend to be more Republican than women of the same age. But you can also see how agnostic men are significantly more Republican than agnostic women of the same age. That's not so evident among the atheists in the sample.

However, partisanship is not always the best metric of such a thing—actually voting behavior could tell a more compelling story here. I analyzed the gender gap at the ballot box for atheists/agnostics, Catholics, and Evangelicals across the last five election cycles.

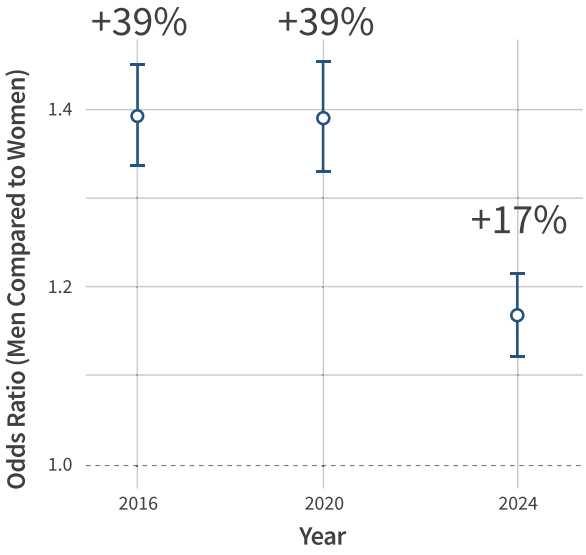
Republican Vote Share among Christians and Atheists/Agnostics by Gender (2008-2024)



Yeah, there's a clear and unmistakable gap in each and every comparison that I've put together. Men were significantly more likely to vote for the Republican whether it be McCain, Romney, or Donald Trump. The size of the gap does bounce around a little bit from election to election, though. For instance, among atheists and agnostics, the gap was five points in 2020 but then ballooned to nine points in 2024. Among Catholics and Evangelicals the gap actually narrowed in 2024—something I will circle back to in just a minute.

After I stared at this graph for a couple of minutes, I detected an interesting trend that is worth highlighting. In 2008, 44% of Catholic women voted for McCain. It was 67% of Evangelical women. In 2024, 54% of Catholic women supported Donald Trump. It was 73% of Evangelicals. In other words, Trump managed to win over a pretty significant share of Christian women in the prior 16 years. Ten points for Catholics and six points for Evangelicals. For men, his vote share was up three points among Catholics and two points for Evangelicals. Women are warming to Trump.

Odds Ratio of Voting for Trump (Men vs. Women)
Controlling for Age, Education, Income, and Race



But I wanted to sort out just how much more likely a man is to vote for the Republican compared to a woman. There's a simple way to do that—a regression analysis. I controlled for the most factors here: age, education, income, and race. Holding all those things equal—how big was the gender gap?

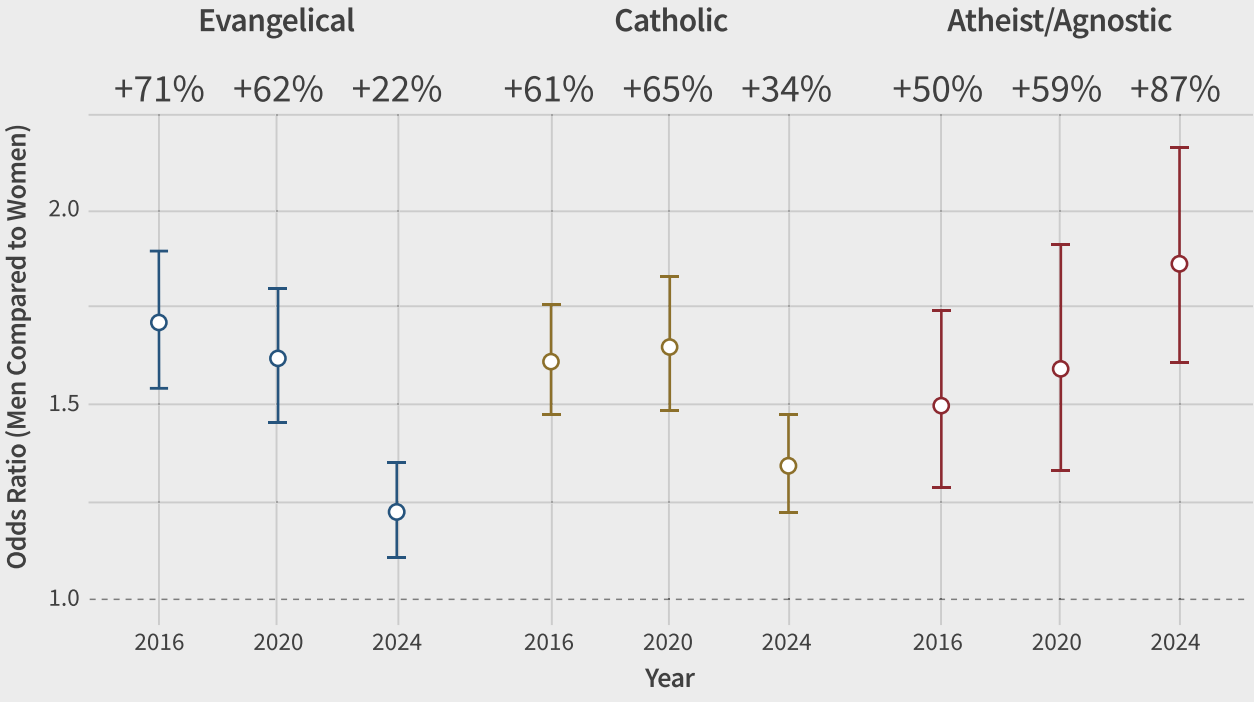
Here's what the data says—in 2016 and 2020, a man was 39% more likely to be a Trump voter compared to a woman. And remember this is much closer to an apples-to-apples comparison because we controlled for the most relevant predictive factors that could otherwise sway the vote one way or another. But then the 2024 result is even more interesting because it indicates the gender gap has been reduced by more than half. In the Harris vs. Trump matchup, a man was only 17% more likely to be a Trump voter. That's down 22 points from 2016 and 2020.

> "On average, a man is more Republican than a woman. That's true when looking at Protestants, Jews, or atheists."

Why was this the case? I think that the prior graph explains this result pretty well. Men's support of Republicans has held relatively steady over time. For women, they have shifted significantly toward the GOP. So, the gap is not that men and women are converging in the ballot box; it's the fact that women are looking more and more like men every election cycle.

But I can't just end it there, can I? Let me show you the exact same analysis; however, this time around I broke it down into three religious groups—Evangelicals, Catholics, and atheists/agnostics.

Odds Ratio of Voting for Trump (Men vs. Women)
Controlling for Age, Education, Income, and Race



I was pretty amazed at this result—the gender gap is narrowing in some ways, and it may actually be increasing for other groups. Among Evangelicals, it held steady at 60-70% more likely in both 2016 and 2020. But then in 2024, that changed. In the most recent election cycle, an Evangelical man was only 22% more likely to vote for Trump compared to an Evangelical woman. That's controlling for education, income, age, and race. For the Catholic subsample, you can basically see the same thing showing up—2024 was a deviation from the norm. Comparing 2020 to the most recent election indicates that the gender gap has dropped by half for Catholics.

But then look at that result for atheists and agnostics! While the Christian gender gap is narrowing, the data seems to suggest the exact opposite is the case for secular voters. In 2016, an atheist/agnostic man was 50% more likely to be a Trump voter than a similar woman. In 2020, it nudged up to 59% more likely. However, in the 2024 contest an atheist/agnostic man was nearly 90% more likely to be a Trump voter than a woman. Now, I do need to caveat this by saying that the differences in these three estimates are not statistically significant. These results are certainly suggestive of the fact that the gender gap is widening for secular voters.

So, is the gender gap really a thing when it comes to religion? Yeah, I think it's clearly still there. On average, a man is more Republican than a woman. That's true when looking at Protestants, Jews, or atheists. You can only find a handful of cases where it's reversed. But that last bit of analysis may be pointing to the fact that the gender gap might disappear for evangelicals in the next couple of election cycles.

Or that could possibly be a Trump thing? It's hard to know at this point.

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WHAT THE 2024 ELECTION REVEALED

The political parties in the United States are so incredibly different from each other. I think we all know that.

There are many vectors to explain this divergence. Certainly race plays a role. Republicans are a whole lot more white than Democrats. There's the geographic divide. The GOP is a party of rural America, and the Democrats tend to do much better in densely populated urban cores. You get the picture.

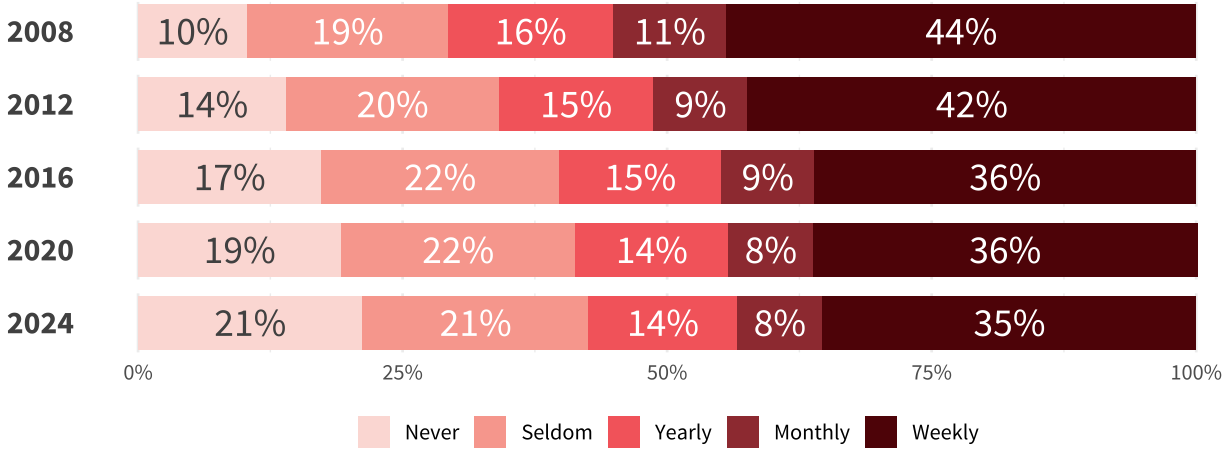
But, of course, the parties are also incredibly divided in the area of religion, as well. We've got a term for it: The God Gap. Simply put, religion in the United States (particularly white religion) is now Republican-coded. The Democrats, on the other hand, are the party of the "nones"—those with no religion. At least, that's what we think we know. That's how it seems always to have been. But is that for real? Well, we just had an election, and I've got new data. So let me show you how the religious composition of Trump's voters diverged from those who cast a ballot for Kamala Harris.

Let's start using a religious behavior metric—attendance at houses of worship. This is the breakdown in each of the last five presidential elections among voters who cast a ballot for the Republican candidate.

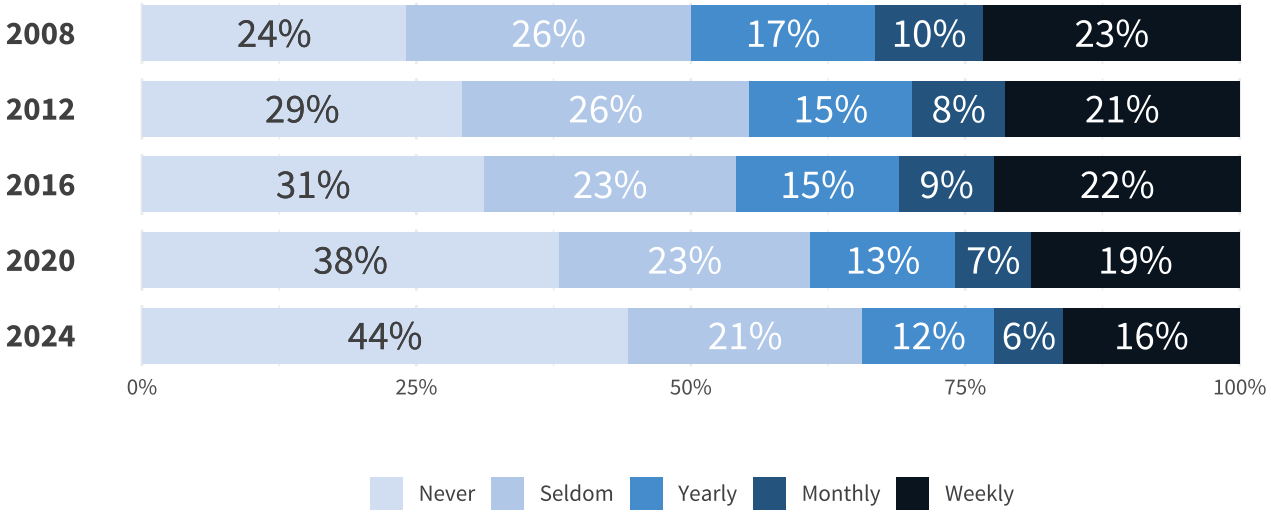
The GOP was highly religiously engaged back in the Barack Obama vs. John McCain matchup, in 2008. About 44 percent of McCain's voters reported attending a house of worship every week. In comparison, only 29 percent said that they attended church less than once a year. But that low-attending share has risen significantly in subsequent elections. In the last two cycles, the share of Republican voters who attend church never or seldom has risen to 42 percent. That's due almost entirely to the rise of the never-attending Republicans. They were only 10 percent of voters in 2008, and now they're around 20 percent. That's a pretty good data nugget—Republicans today are twice as likely to never attend a house of worship as they were in 2008.

And you can probably guess that attendance at the top end has also dipped. Weekly attendance dropped to 42 percent by 2012 and lost another 6 points by 2016. But what's really striking to me is that this share hasn't budged during Trump's three runs for the White House—it's been stuck at about 35%. The other thing worth noting is that the share of Republican voters who attend weekly hasn't really changed much; it's the more-than-once-a-week people who have started to disappear.

The Religious Attendance of Republicans



The Religious Attendance of Democrats



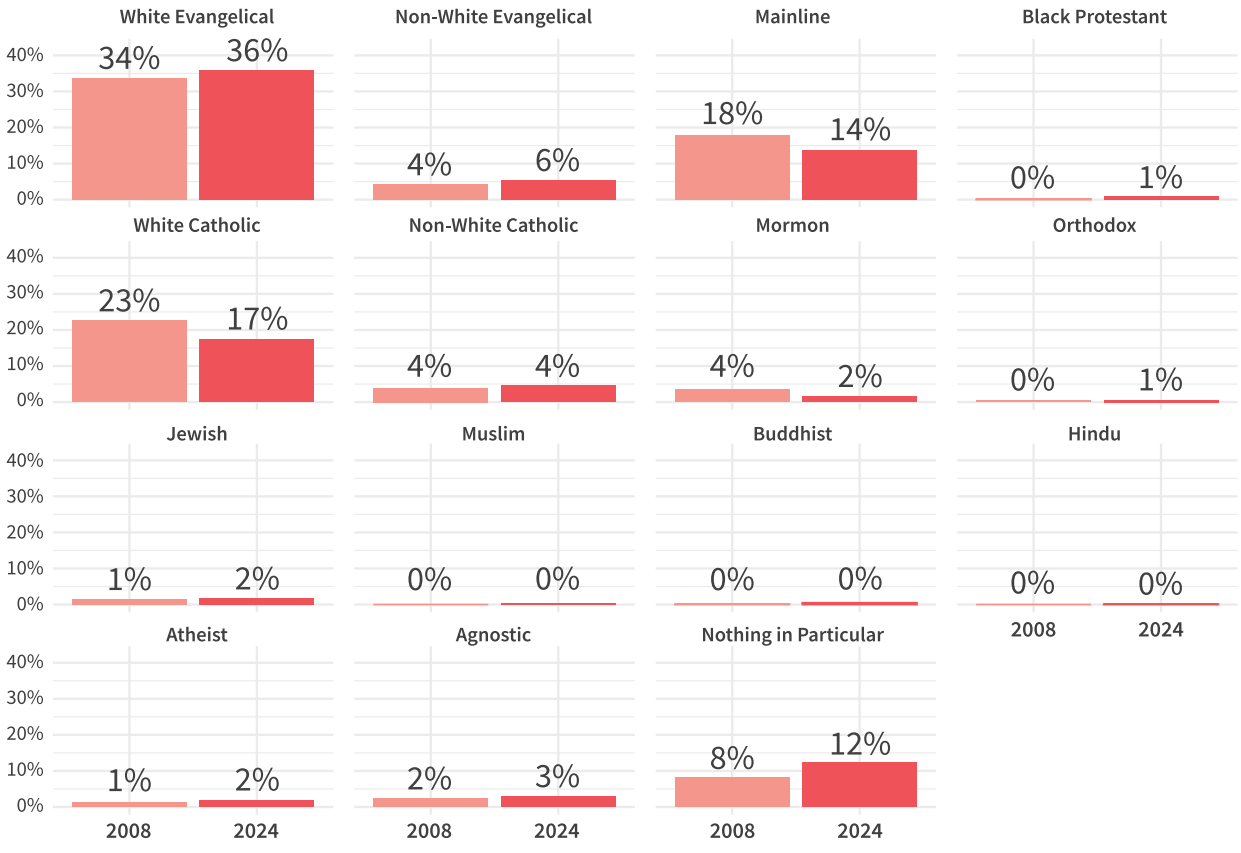
What about Democrats?

In 2008, half of Democratic voters were attending never or seldom, and just a quarter were weekly attenders. But those low attendees have really skyrocketed in the last couple of cycles. They accounted for more than 60 percent in 2020—and then look at those 2024 numbers! About two thirds of voters for Kamala Harris were attending a house of worship seldom or never. Among Trump voters, that figure was 42 percent.

And you can probably guess that there aren't a lot of weekly attenders left on the Democrats' side, either. In 2024, just 17 percent of Democratic presidential voters were weekly attenders. Let me put it to you this way: for every Harris voter who attended church weekly in 2024, there were about *four* Harris voters who attended *less than once a year*. If that's not the God Gap, I don't know what is.

"Let me put it to you this way: for every Harris voter who attended church weekly in 2024, there were about four Harris voters who attended less than once a year. If that's not the God Gap, I don't know what is."

The Religious Composition of the Republican Coalition



But let's also do this based on religious affiliation. If you want to see what the Trump coalition looked like in 2024, this is it. I also threw in this same analysis for when McCain was on the ballot, to get a sense of how things have shifted. In the graphs above, the red represents TK, and the blue TK.

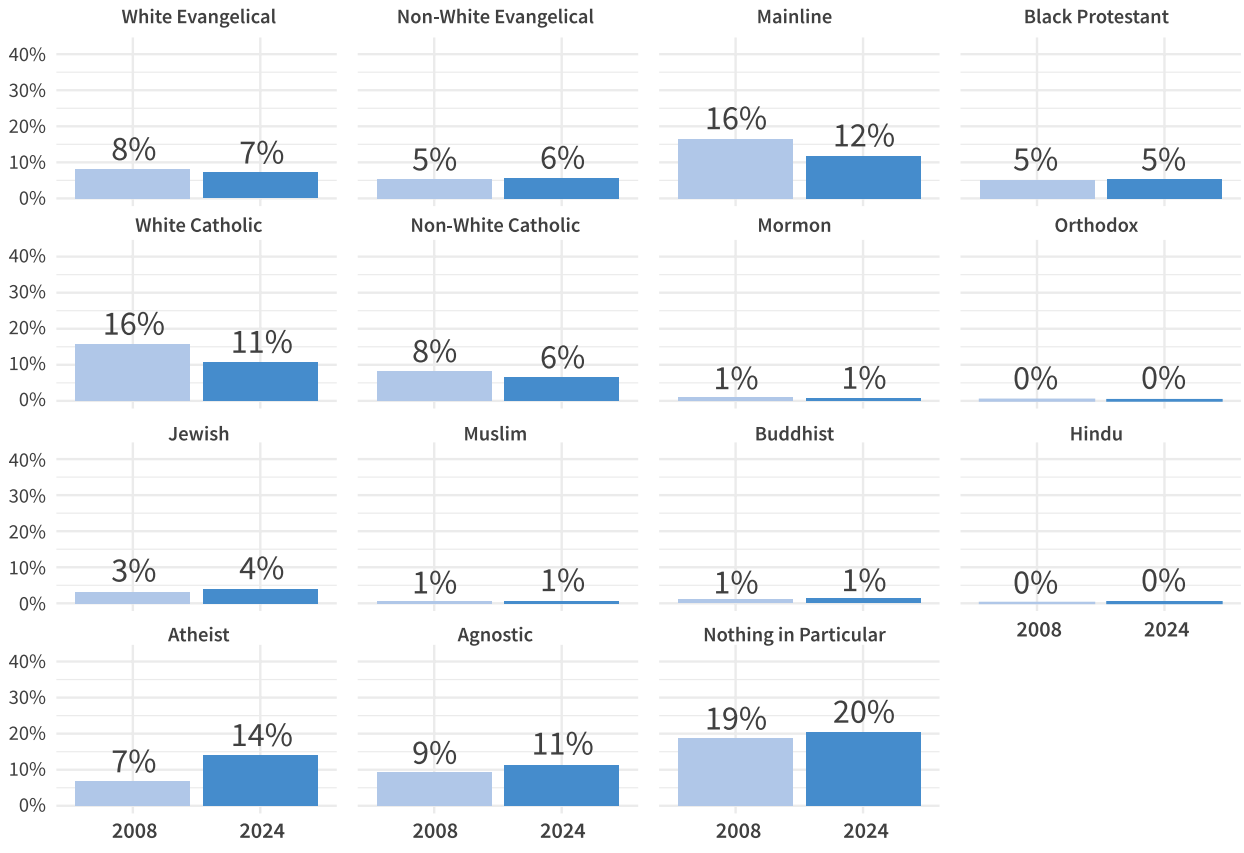
Here's the huge headline for me: Evangelicals are incredibly important to the GOP on Election Day. It's hard to overstate this fact. In 2008, 38 percent of all McCain's voters were Evangelical. When Trump won in 2024, 42 percent of his ballots came from Evangelicals. There is no more important voting bloc in the country than Evangelicals if you are Republican. It's basically impossible to win any race without their support. But other Christian groups are less important in recent years. The mainline share is down 4 points since 2008, and the white Catholic voters were six points fewer in 2024 than they were in 2008.

The only other group that really registers much at all are the "nothing in particular" people. They were 8 percent of McCain's votes, and Trump drove that up to 12 percent. But note that atheists/agnostics account for just 5 percent of all the GOP votes now, up two points since 2008. But that's really the whole ball of wax.

So let me make this exceedingly clear: the GOP is a party of Christians. About 80 percent of all Trump's votes came from Christians. To be even more specific, 70 percent came from white Christians. The GOP is the party of white Christianity.

What about the Democrats? Well, they certainly aren't running up the score with Catholics and Protestants. Again, red is TK, blue is TK.

The Religious Composition of the Democratic Coalition



I am pretty struck by how much stability I see across the top couple of rows, honestly. In 2008, about 13 percent of Obama's votes came from Evangelicals. It was 13 percent for Harris in 2024. Think about this simple fact for a minute—in absolute numbers, there were more Evangelicals who voted for Harris than mainline Protestants. That's just how small the mainline is now. Even if they were super liberal (and they aren't), there just aren't enough voters to really make a huge difference at this point. But it's also true that the Democrats have problems with the Catholic vote—white Catholics were only 11 percent of the Harris vote.

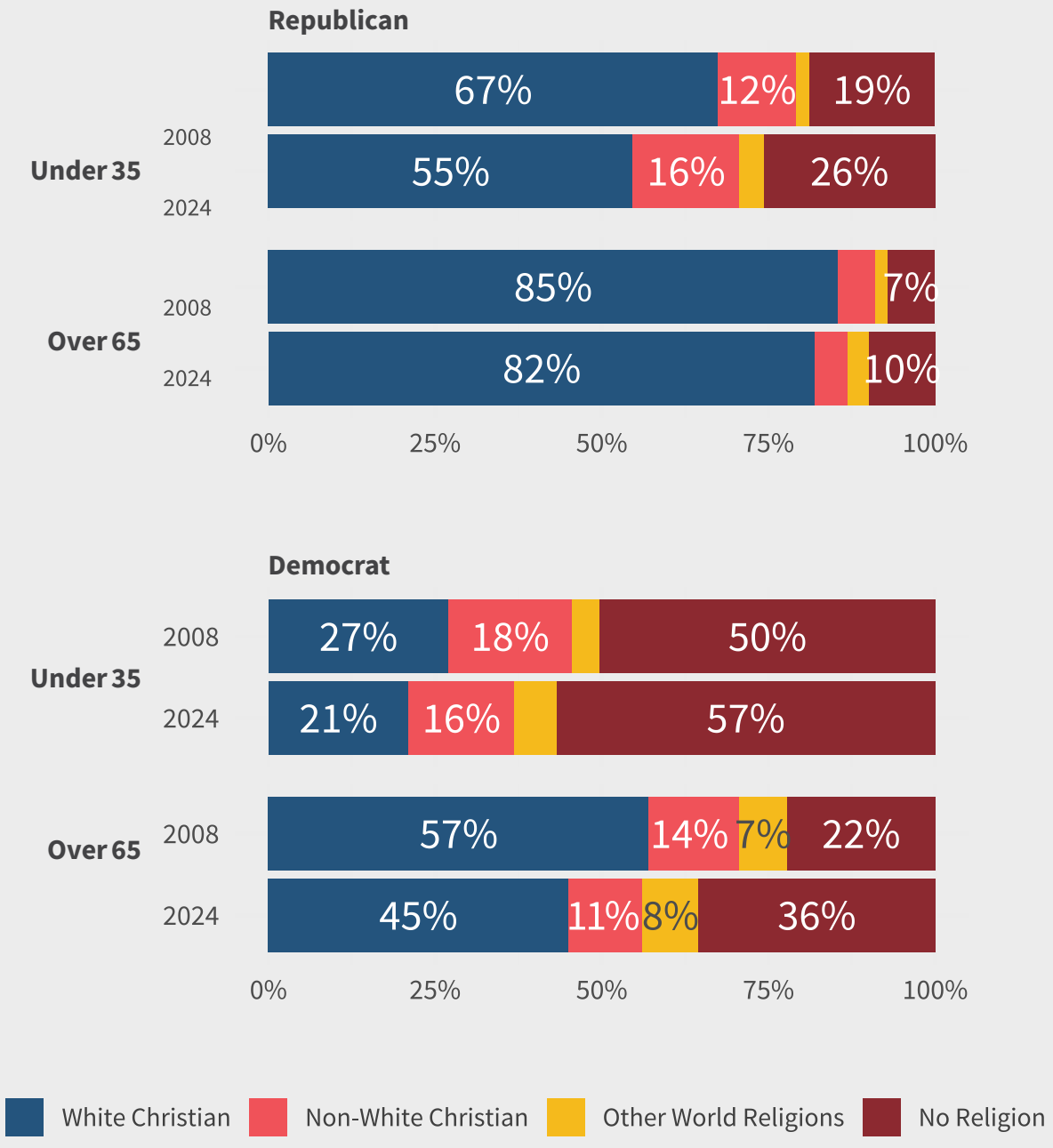
So, how do Democrats not get blown out in every election? It's the nones. That's the answer. There are a lot of nones, and they lean heavily toward Democrats. I want to make this point clear—atheists and agnostics were 16 percent of the Obama coalition. Now, they are about a quarter of the Democratic Party. If you throw the nothing in particulars in there, the nones make up 45 percent of all Democratic votes cast. That's up 10 points since 2008.

Let me just summarize this succinctly. The GOP vote is 80 percent Christian and 17 percent non-religious. The Democratic vote is 48 percent Christian and 45 percent non-religious.

That's the God Gap.

Let me go one layer deeper on this and show you the religious composition of both parties but break it down by voters under 35 and over 65. That will give us a sense of where the parties were a few decades ago and where they will be a few decades from now.

The Religious Composition by Vote and Age (2008 vs. 2024)



22% **OF OBAMA'S OLDER VOTERS IN 2008 WERE NON-RELIGIOUS**

36% **OF HARRIS VOTERS IN 2024 OVER 65 WERE NON-RELIGIOUS**

57% **OF ALL YOUNG HARRIS VOTERS WERE NON-RELIGIOUS**

The top left graph shows young Republicans in 2008 and 2024. Note how little the nones have risen between these two elections. They were 19 percent of McCain voters in 2008 and were 26 percent of Trump's coalition in 2024. In other words, there's not this huge wave of nones coming in the next generation of the GOP. Practically speaking, if I were running GOP campaigns, I wouldn't worry about reaching out to secular voters too much. There just aren't enough of them.

But also take note of the bottom left graph—there's been almost no religious shifting among older Republican voters. The white Christian share is incredibly high—still 82 percent in 2024. That's the core of the GOP in my estimation—old, white Christians. But also note that even a majority of young Trump voters were still white Christians in 2024. The GOP is the party of white Christianity.

The future of the Democratic Party is decidedly not among the white Christians. Just one in five voters under the age of 35 who voted for Harris were white Christians. That's down six points since 2008. In contrast, 57 percent of all young Harris voters were non-religious. That's 31 points higher than the young Trump voters.

Yet, I was also struck by how much the nones had risen among older Democrats, too. In fact, it was the largest increase in any of these four graphs. In 2008, just 22 percent of Obama's older voters were non-religious. In 2024, among voters over the age of 65 who supported Harris, 36 percent of them were non-religious. That's 10 points higher than Trump's young voters in 2024.

I think that both parties should take heed of these results, because both the Democrats and Republicans are going to face big structural problems in the future.

For its part, the GOP needs white Christians to win elections. The share of Americans who are white is dropping. The share of Americans who are Christians is the lowest it's ever been (but the number has plateaued). You can't win elections with a shrinking demographic group.

And the Democrats are the party of the non-religious and the non-Christian groups. But the problem there is that the nones aren't large enough to sway national elections right now. They might be in 15 to 20 years, but certainly not yet. A coalition of Muslims, Black Protestants, and atheists is not easy to hold together, either.

It seems that the two parties are trying to navigate some very significant demographic shifts in the population right now. Race is changing. Religion is changing. Society is changing. But we still go to the ballot box every two years. How the parties can build slightly bigger coalitions without alienating their base will dictate how many elections they win or lose.

Ryan Burge is professor of practice at Washington University in St. Louis and writes a newsletter about religion demographics.

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METHODOLOGY APPENDIX

The analyses presented throughout this volume rely primarily on data from the 2024 Cooperative Election Study (CES), one of the largest and most widely used academic surveys of the American electorate. The CES draws on a stratified sample of U.S. adults recruited through YouGov's online panel, with post-stratification weighting applied to ensure representativeness across key demographic, geographic, and political characteristics. With a sample size exceeding 60,000 respondents in presidential years, the CES provides unusually high statistical power for studying religious subgroups that are often too small to analyze reliably in other surveys.

In addition to its scale, the CES is distinguished by the availability of **validated voter data**. Whenever possible, the analyses in this volume make use of these validation files to distinguish between reported and verified turnout. This approach improves accuracy, particularly in understanding participation patterns across religious traditions and demographic groups.

The findings presented here rely primarily on **descriptive statistics**—proportions, means, confidence intervals, and simple cross-tabulations. This approach reflects the purpose of these reports: to document patterns in the 2024 electorate clearly and accessibly, rather than to estimate causal relationships or build predictive models. All results incorporate the appropriate **survey weights**, typically the CES "common post-weight," to ensure that estimates reflect the national adult population and, where voter-validated samples are used, the universe of validated voters.

Each chapter includes a **QR code** linking to the full R script used to generate the figures and tables. These links allow readers to replicate, extend, or modify the analysis using the same publicly available CES data. The intention is to maintain transparency and reproducibility while giving scholars, journalists, and students a clear path to explore the results in greater depth.

Taken together, the CES data, validated turnout files, weighting procedures, and fully replicable code provide a strong empirical foundation for the descriptive insights offered in this volume.


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