

SOME THOUGHTS ON THE CATHOLIC VOTE

Catholics are a quarter of the electorate, and they voted for President Barack Obama over Gov. Mitt Romney by the same margin as the total electorate, 50%-48%. Contrary to what many pundits said, this figure suggested that the bishops' campaign for religious liberty, waged against the Health and Human Services mandate, actually paid off: Obama got 54% of the Catholic vote in 2008 to John McCain's 45%.

Some commentators talk about the Catholic vote as if it were monolithic, and others say it doesn't exist. It would be more accurate to say there are four Catholic votes: practicing and non-practicing; white and Latino.

Among practicing Catholics, Obama received 42% to Romney's 57%; among non-practicing Catholics, Obama picked up 56% while Romney got 42%.

White Catholics gave Obama 40% of their votes while Romney earned 59%; Latino Catholics gave Obama 71% of their votes while Romney earned 27%.

From previous survey research published by the Pew Forum, we know that practicing Latino Catholics are less likely to support the Democrats than are non-practicing Latinos.

What this shows is that the more practicing a Catholic is, of any ethnic background, the less likely he is to support the more secular of the candidates.

Finally, there is a serious question whether non-practicing Catholics should be considered Catholic. By way of analogy, if someone tells a pollster that he is a vegetarian, but has long since abandoned a veggie-only diet, would it make empirical sense to count him as a vegetarian? Self-identity is an

interesting psychological concept, but it is not necessarily an accurate reflection of a person's biography.