

Protestant Pastors Support Romney Despite Mormon Faith

Three times more Protestant pastors plan to vote for **Mitt Romney** over **Barack Obama** in the upcoming presidential election. Romney's **Mormon** beliefs are a factor for only a small number of pastors who plan to cast their ballot for another candidate.

A survey conducted by LifeWay Research Sept. 26-Oct. 3 found that 57 percent of Protestant pastors plan to vote for Romney compared with 17 percent for Obama. Twenty-two percent are still undecided.

The breakdown is similar to what it was in 2008 when John McCain challenged Obama for the presidency. A survey conducted by LifeWay Research in October 2008 found that 55 percent of Protestant pastors planned to vote for McCain compared with 20 percent for Obama and 22 percent undecided.

The survey also found that Romney's Mormon background has had little to no influence on pastors' voting intentions. A majority of pastors (82 percent) who plan to vote for someone other than Romney say their decision was not at all related to his **Mormon** faith. And 60 percent of undecided pastors say their hesitation has not at all been influenced by Romney's faith.

"The historical significance of the first Mormon candidate nominated for president does not appear to alter pastors' political positions," says Scott McConnell, director of LifeWay Research.

A 2011 LifeWay Research survey revealed most pastors, some 75 percent, do not consider **Mormons** to be Christians. "If agreement on matters of faith was a necessity for pastors' voting decisions, Romney would have little support from

pastors," McConnell concludes. "In fact, Romney's Mormon faith has led very few pastors to select a different candidate or remain undecided."

The strongest indicator of voting intentions among pastors is their political party preference. Fifty-two percent of Protestant pastors identify as Republican, 16 percent as Democrat and 23 percent Independent.

Eighty-two percent of Republican pastors plan to vote for Romney, while 80 percent of Democratic pastors plan to vote for Obama. Forty-seven percent of Independent pastors plan to vote for Romney.

"Another strong indicator of voting intentions is whether the pastor self-identifies as mainline or evangelical," McConnell says. "Self-identified evangelical pastors are predominantly planning to support Romney."

Sixty-six percent of self-identified **evangelicals** plan to vote for Romney while 9 percent are for Obama and 22 percent are undecided.

Forty-four percent of mainline pastors plan to vote for Romney. Twenty-eight percent support Obama, and 25 percent are undecided. The Republican candidate, however, has gained support from mainline pastors since the last election. In 2008, only 36 percent of mainline pastors planned to vote for McCain. Thirty-seven percent supported Obama, and 24 percent were undecided.

Voting intentions also had regional differences. Pastors in the Northeast (28 percent) are more likely to vote for Obama compared to those in the South (14 percent) and West (15 percent).

Pastors in the South (60 percent) are more likely to vote for Mitt Romney compared to those in the Northeast (50 percent).

In 2008, it was younger voters who flocked to the polls to cast their ballot for Obama. In 2012, pastors age 18-44 (14 percent) are less likely to vote for Barack Obama than those age 55-64 (21 percent) and 65+ (23 percent). Twenty-six percent of pastors age 18-44 are still undecided.

“It’s clear pastors are not selecting a spiritual leader for the United States when they vote for president,” McConnell says. “They are selecting the leader of the executive branch of government. The study shows a significant majority of pastors prefer the direction, policies and values of **Mitt Romney.**”