



GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY

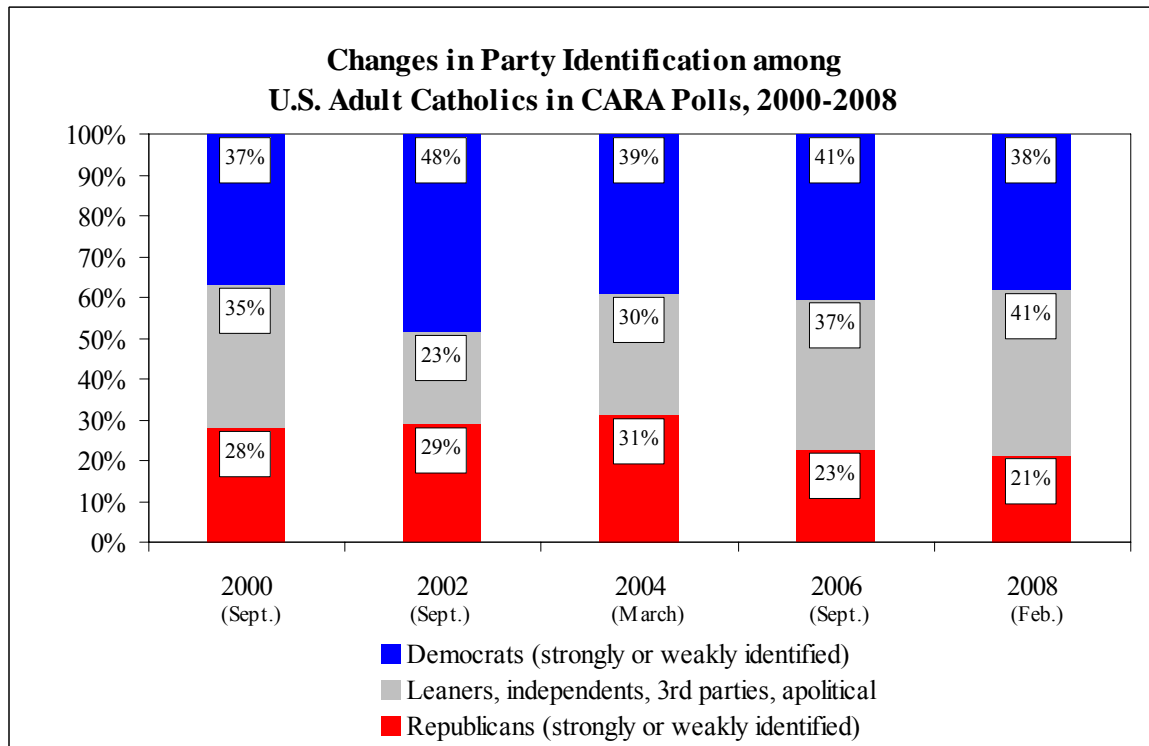
The Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate
Georgetown University
June 20, 2008

Election '08 Forecast: Democrats Have Edge among U.S. Catholics

The Catholic electorate will include more than 47 million potential voters in November and many say they do not identify with either major political party.

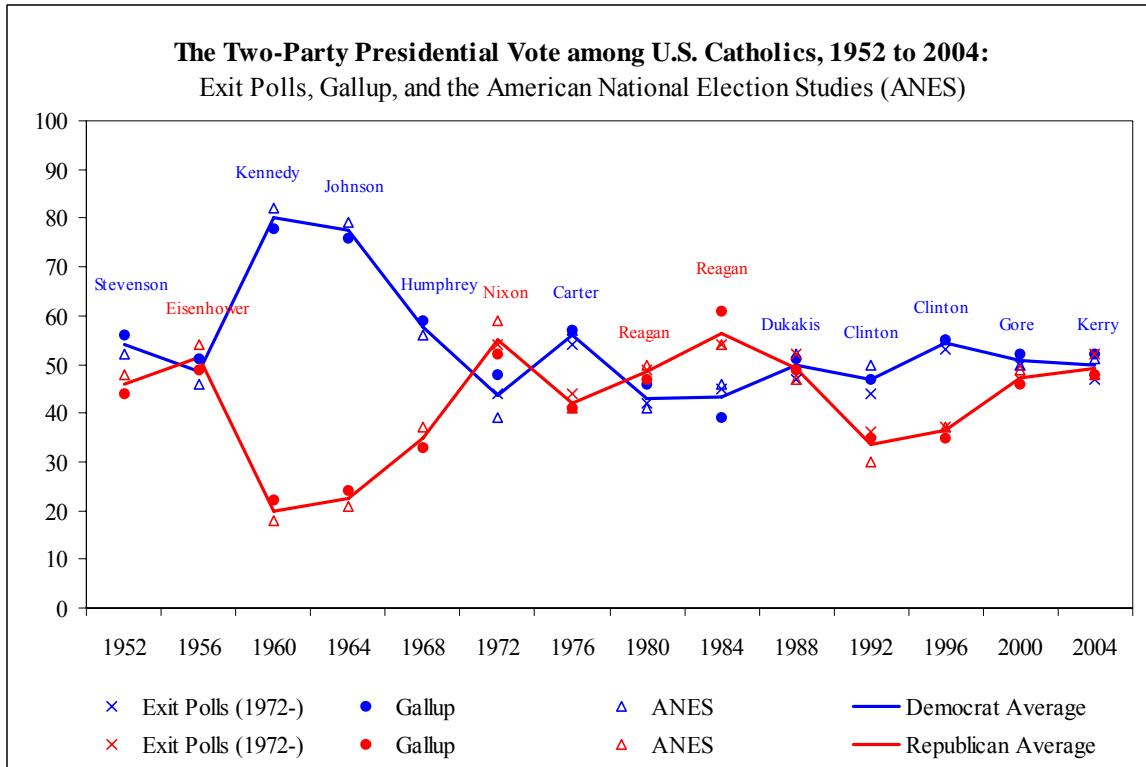
Numbering more than 47 million potential voters in the U.S. electorate, Catholics will likely be a popular target of both presidential campaigns. If Catholics stick to their current party identification when voting for president, Barack Obama would have a potential edge over John McCain among Catholics by more than 8 million (18 million Democrats to 10 million Republicans) according to survey data from the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) at Georgetown University.

Yet a majority of the Catholic electorate remains unaffiliated with either party, thus both campaigns will also be vying for a portion of the more than 19.5 million Catholics who say they are neither Democrats nor Republicans.



Fewer Catholics self-identify as Republicans in 2008 than in any previous election year since 2000 in CARA polls. Only 21 percent are either strongly or weakly affiliated as a Republican in 2008. By comparison, 31 percent identified as Republican in 2004.

As the figure below shows, the supposed decisive “swing nature” of the Catholic vote in American presidential elections is often overstated and has been based entirely in the results of exit polls.¹ A review of all available data, rather than exit polls only, indicate that Catholics have not had the near perfect winning streak in predicting the presidency that is claimed by many.



The figure above, showing the Catholic vote from 1952 to 2004, aggregates results from three widely respected sources: the American National Election Studies (ANES), Gallup polls, and exit polls (since 1976). The trend lines represent the average of these sources.

With close elections in both 2000 and 2004, the polls did not agree on a winner of the Catholic vote. In 2004, Gallup and the ANES estimated that Kerry won the Catholic vote (52 percent and 51 percent, respectively) and the exit polls estimated Bush as the winner among Catholics (52 percent).

¹ The accuracy of exit polls has come under increasing scrutiny during recent elections. With a greater percentage of voters being able to cast ballots before Election Day by mail, the electorate “at the polls” may be becoming less representative of all U.S. voters. Also, the quality of exit polls is heavily dependent on the survey methods used, and recent exit polls have relied on interviewers with little training and evidence indicates that some of these interviewers have not been selecting respondents on a random basis leading to error beyond normal variations attributable to random sampling.

All surveys have small margins of sampling error and the margin of victory among Catholics in this election was likely smaller than what could reliably be measured with survey research. The average of the three sources point to a slight edge for Kerry but in reality no one can be sure who Catholics were more likely to have voted for in 2004.

According to the polls, between 1952 and 2004, a majority of Catholics voted for the winner of the overall popular vote 71 percent of the time and voted for the Electoral College winner 64 percent of the time. In the past five elections, a majority of Catholics voted with the winning candidate only when Bill Clinton was on the ballot. They voted for losers in the Electoral College on three occasions: Dukakis in 1988, Gore in 2000, and Kerry in 2004. Since 1952, Catholics have voted for three Republicans who were either elected or re-elected as president: Eisenhower in 1956, Nixon in 1972, and Reagan in 1980 and 1984.

The Issues: Shifts on Military Force, Taxes, and Immigration

According to CARA polls, Catholic attitudes on social, political, and moral issues have shifted during the Bush administration regarding two issues: the use of U.S. military force and taxes. Attitudes about immigration policy have also changed slightly and opinions regarding life and social justice issues have remained relatively stable.

Shifting Attitudes of Catholics: Social, Political, and Moral Issues, 2002 and 2006
 Percentage agreeing “Somewhat” or “Strongly” in CARA Polls

	2006	2002	Difference
The U.S. should be willing to use military force to overthrow governments that support terrorism against the U.S., even if it mean losing lives of U.S. service members	43%	63%	-20
There should be a tax increase for the wealthiest Americans	65	52	+13
The number of immigrants who are permitted to come to the United States should be decreased	54	60	-6
An equitable society can be achieved only if special attention is given to the needs of the poor	54	50	+4
All human life, from conception to natural death, is sacred. For this reason, the taking of life – whether through abortion, the death penalty or assisted suicide is wrong	41	45	-4
A woman should have the right to choose whether or not to abort an unwanted pregnancy	58	55	+3
Regardless of cost, the U.S. government should guarantee basic health care for all citizens	78	75	+3
Workers have a right to a living wage and the right to form and join labor unions	82	83	-1
I support the death penalty for people convicted of premeditated murder	67	67	--

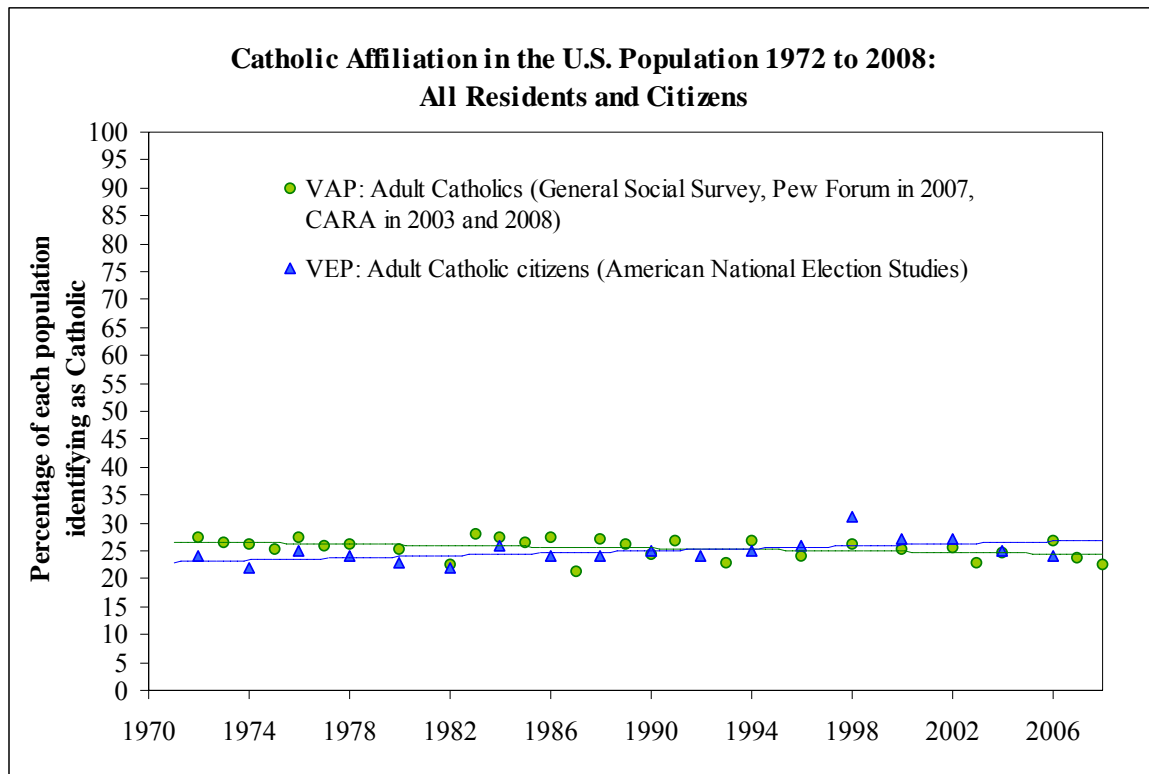
In 2002, before the Iraq war, 63 percent of adult Catholics agreed “somewhat” or “strongly” that “The U.S. should be willing to use military force to overthrow governments that support terrorism against the U.S., even if it mean losing lives of U.S. service members.” In 2006, only 43 percent agreed with this statement—a shift of 20 percentage points.

An increasing number of Catholics support a tax increase for the wealthiest Americans; 65 percent agreed in 2006, up from 52 percent in 2002. Catholics have also become *less* likely to agree that the number of immigrants permitted to come to the United States should be decreased; 54 percent in 2006, down from 65 percent in 2002.

Majorities of Catholics support issues traditionally considered planks of the Democratic Party platform: universal healthcare, pro-labor policies, access to abortion, and social welfare programs for the poor.

In Detail: The Catholic Electorate of 2008

The percentage of the U.S. population (*i.e.*, the voting age population) and the U.S. citizen population (*i.e.*, voting eligible population) has held steady at about a quarter of each in recent decades.²



² In 1998, the ANES estimated that 31 percent of U.S. citizens self-identified as Catholic. This appears to be an outlier result that can be disregarded. The 1998 survey also measures a low-point for Protestant affiliation (51 percent). The 1998 results do not reflect those made in 1996 or 2000 studies, which are very similar to each other (26 percent and 27 percent, respectively).

According to the U.S. Census Bureau's International Data Base (IDB),³ at mid-year 2008, the adult population of the United States is expected to be 229,640,506. CARA's most recent poll in February 2008 indicated that 22.7 percent of this population self-identifies as Catholic. Thus, the 2008 Catholic voting age population (VAP) is estimated to be approximately 52,128,000. However, excluding those who will be ineligible to vote primarily due to citizenship status, the Catholic voting eligible population (VEP) is estimated to be approximately 47,697,000.⁴

Nearly four in ten adult Catholics (38 percent) reside in California, New York, or Texas—all states rich in Electoral College votes. However, California and New York are strongly expected to land in Obama's column and Texas in McCain's if recent election trends continue in 2008. State-level estimates of the Catholic voting age population point to several other key battlegrounds.⁵ The key Electoral College states where the Catholic vote could make a real difference are Florida, Ohio, and Louisiana. Also of potential importance are Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Maryland, New Mexico, Arizona, and Nevada. Between one-fifth and a third of the voting age population of each of these states is Catholic.

Many of the states where Catholics make up a large percentage of the population are expected to vote for Obama given recent election trends. These states include Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New Jersey, Connecticut, and Pennsylvania.

A Catholic Electorate Consistently Divided: Sub-Group Differences

Among Catholics who attend Mass at least once a week, Republicans are more numerous than in the Catholic electorate at large. However, weekly attenders are still more likely to be Democrats than anything else. Thirty-four percent of weekly Mass attending Catholics are Democrats and an additional 19 percent are not affiliated with a party but lean toward the Democrats (53 percent identifying or leaning as Democrats). Twenty-eight percent of weekly attenders are Republicans and an additional 17 percent lean toward being a Republican (43 percent identifying or leaning as Republicans).

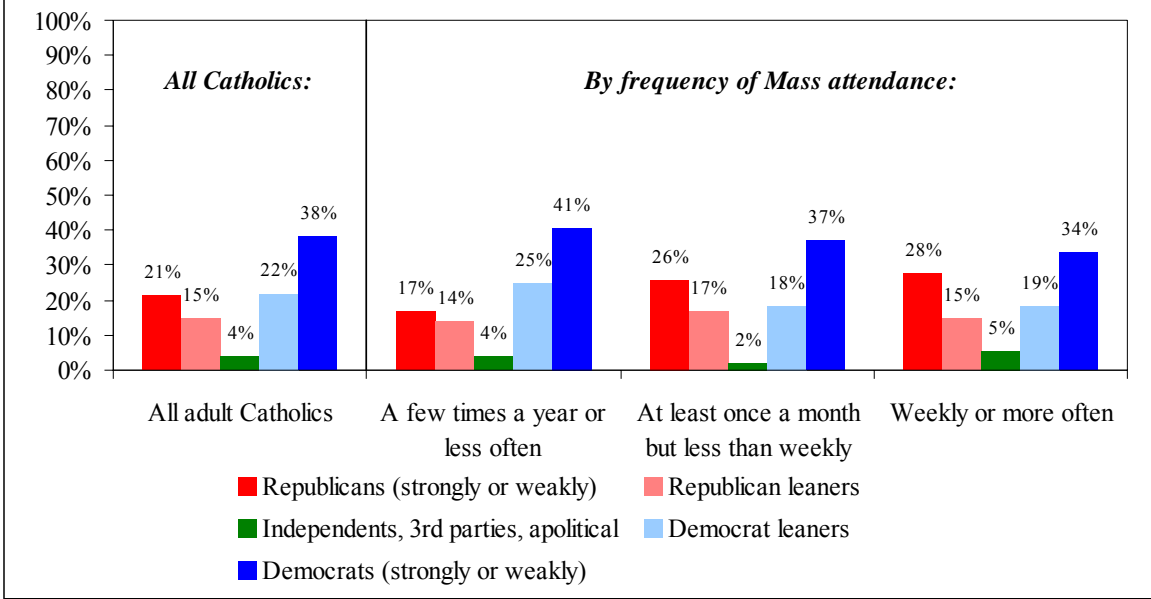
Thus, among Catholics attending Mass once a week or more often, Democrats have a 10 percentage point edge. Only 5 percent of weekly Mass attenders say they are independent, apolitical, or identify with a third party. Catholics who attend Mass less than weekly are even more likely to be a Democrat rather than a Republican.

³ See: <http://www.census.gov/ipc/www/idb/>

⁴ This estimate assumes that the U.S. VEP is 91.5 percent of the VAP similar to 2004 and 2006 estimates of Michael McDonald (see: http://elections.gmu.edu/Voter_Turnout_2006.htm) and that the Catholic percentage of the VEP is similar to that of the Catholic percentage of VAP (22.7 percent). The Pew Forum's 2007 U.S. Religious Landscape Survey estimates that 13 percent of the adult Catholic population is non-citizen and that Catholics make up 23.9 percent of the total U.S. VAP. Thus, the Pew data estimates a Catholic VEP of 47,749,150—very similar to what is estimated by the method described above.

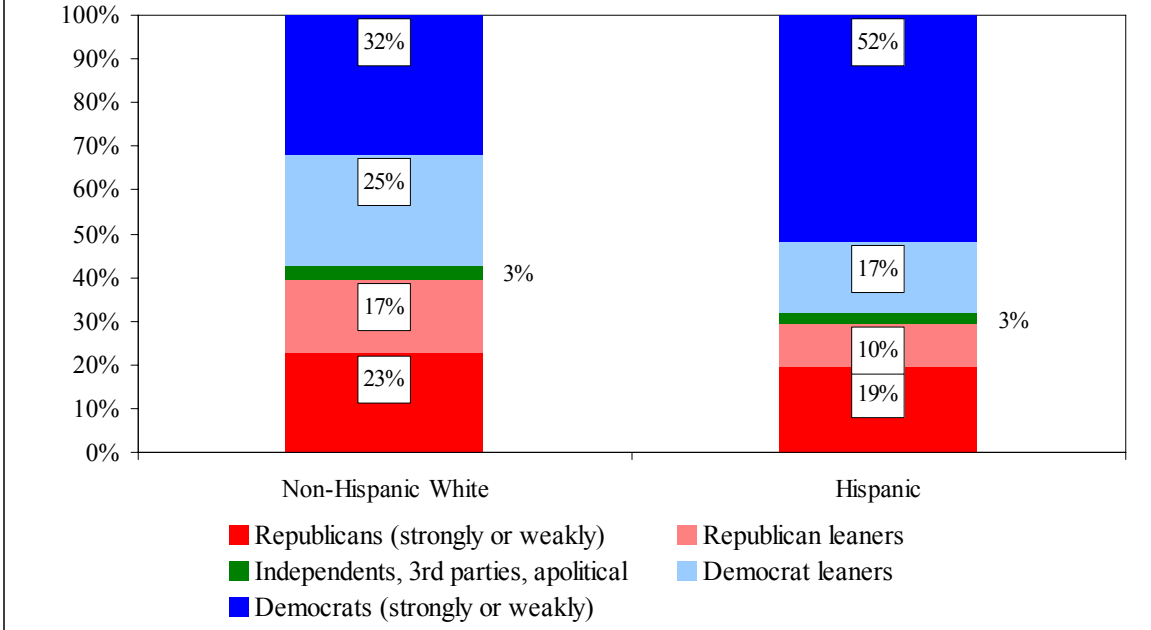
⁵ CARA aggregates state-level Catholic population percentages by averaging the estimates made by Catholic dioceses in *The Official Catholic Directory*, published estimates from the Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies (ASARB), results of the 2004 exit polls, and recent results of the Pew Forum's U.S. Religious Landscape Survey. These sources are highly correlated even though they include slightly differing counts. It is not possible to calculate estimates of Catholic VEP at the state level.

**Party Identification among All U.S. Adult Catholics
and by Frequency of Mass Attendance, 2008**



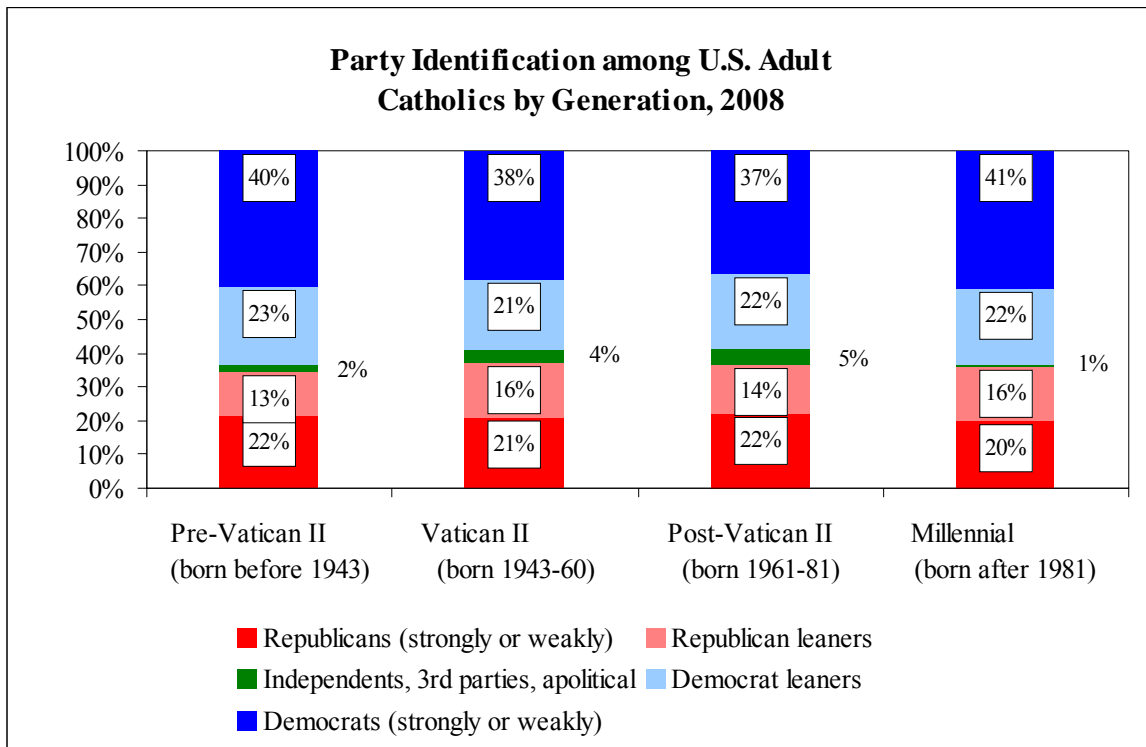
Democrats also have an important edge among non-Hispanic white Catholics, a subgroup who has historically been slightly more likely than Hispanic Catholics to affiliate with the Republican Party in recent elections.

Party Identification among U.S. Adult Catholics by Ethnicity, 2008



Thirty-two percent of non-Hispanic white Catholics are Democrats and an additional 25 percent currently lean towards the Democratic Party (57 percent identifying or leaning as Democrats). By comparison, 23 percent of non-Hispanic white Catholics are affiliated with the Republican Party and 17 percent currently lean Republican (40 percent identifying or leaning as Republicans).

The Republican Party has no generational advantages within the Catholic electorate either. There are few differences between Catholics who came of age before, during, or after the Second Vatican Council. The patterns of party affiliation among the oldest generation of Catholics, the Pre-Vatican II Generation (born before 1943), and the youngest, the Millennial Generation (born after 1981), are nearly identical.

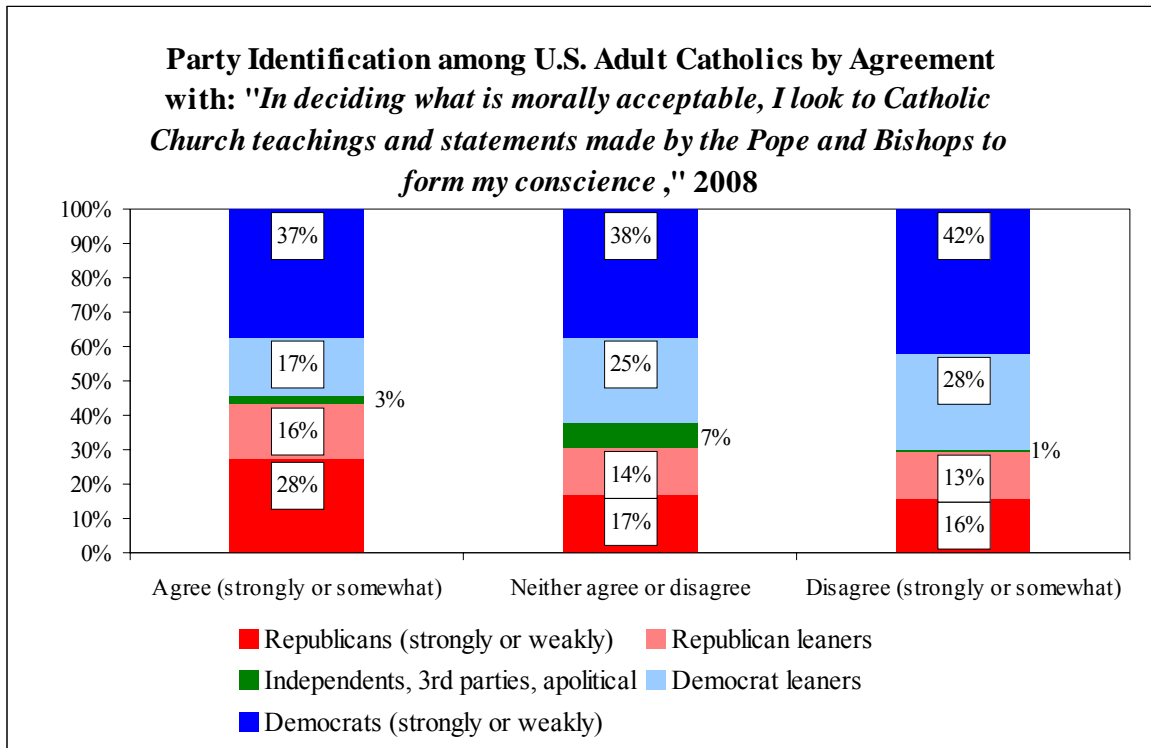
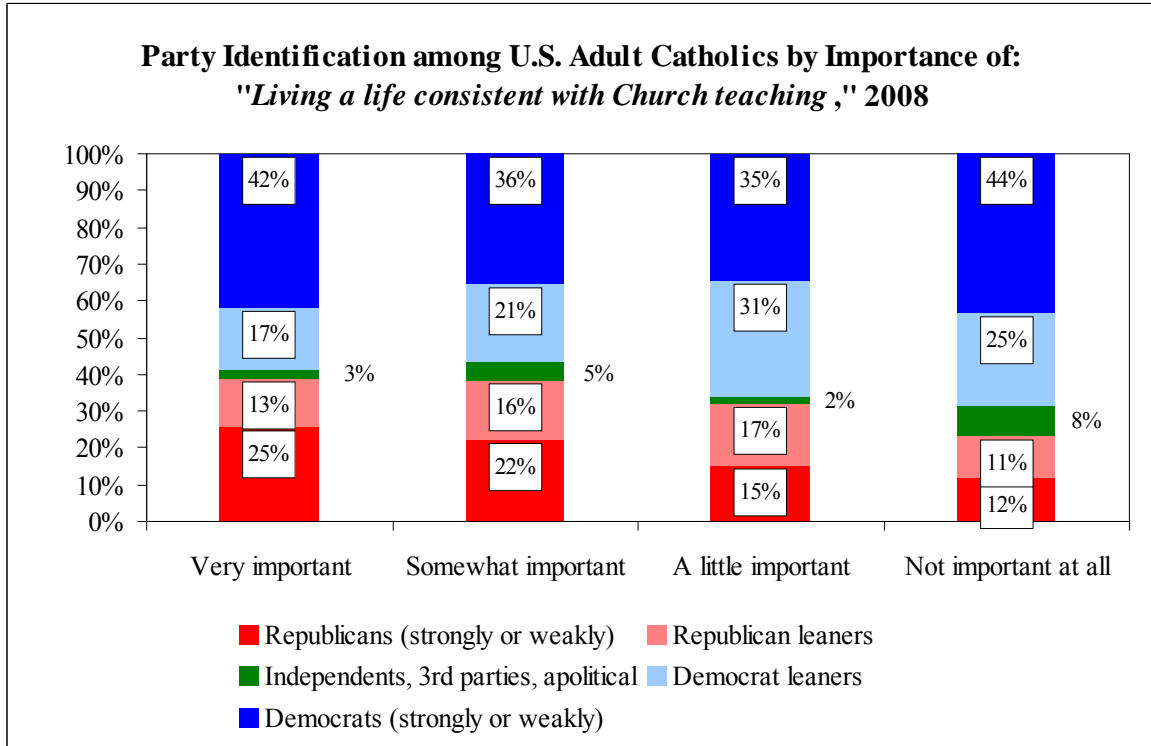


Some of the most notable partisan differences among Catholics are related to the degree to which they say that they utilize Church teachings to form their political attitudes and decisions.

As the figure on the following page shows, the more important Catholics say that “Living a life consistent with Church teaching” is to them, the more likely they are to say they identify as Republicans. However, Democrats are more numerous among all sub-groups of response to this question.

A similar pattern of responses is evident among those who agree with the statement, “In deciding what is morally acceptable, I look to Catholic Church teachings and statements made by the Pope and Bishops to form my conscience.” Those who agree “strongly” or

“somewhat” with this statement are more likely than others to say they are Republicans. Yet here again, even among those who do agree, Democrats outnumber Republicans.



CARA Survey Details

Year	N	Margin of error	Fieldwork Provider	Mode	Sampling
2008	1,007	±3.1	Knowledge Networks	Self-administered	Probability
2006	1,892	±2.3	Knowledge Networks	Self-administered	Probability
2004	1,001	±3.1	Opinion Access	Telephone	Probability
2002	1,299	±2.7	Knowledge Networks	Self-administered	Probability
2000	1,200	±2.8	Issues and Answers	Telephone	Probability

Party identification is measured through a series of questions: “Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or what?” (if identifier): “Would you call yourself a strong Democrat/Republican or a not very strong Democrat/Republican?” (if non-identifier) “Do you think of yourself as closer to the Republican or Democratic party?” Those who do not affiliate with either party but who say they are “closer” to one party are considered “leaners.” These leaners often note an affiliation that is highly correlated with their current candidate/party preference.

About CARA

The Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) is a non-profit, independent and non-partisan research institution at Georgetown University. CARA researchers conduct applied social scientific research related to the Catholic Church in the United States. CARA was created in 1964 and has been affiliated with Georgetown University since 1989. CARA’s national polls of adult Catholic have been conducted annually since 2000. To date, CARA has conducted CARA's 19 national surveys of self-identified adult Catholics, including more than 21,000 respondents during the 2000 and 2008 period. For more information about this release contact Mark Gray at 202-687-0885 or mng34@georgetown.edu. For more information about CARA and the center’s research visit: <http://cara.georgetown.edu>.

Church Resources

Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship (November 2007)

A Statement by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB)

<http://www.faithfulcitizenship.org/>