

Catholic vote shifts in his favor of second Trump term

written by OSV News |



Economic concerns among voters likely played a key role in former President Donald Trump's defeat of Vice President Kamala Harris, analysts told OSV News. Early exit polls indicated economic concerns ranked among the top issues for voters, and that Catholic voters may have undergone a significant shift to the right since 2020.

According to multiple projections, Trump, a Republican, was elected to a second term in the Oval Office Nov. 5, four years after he lost his run for a second consecutive term.

John White, a professor of politics at The Catholic University of America in Washington, told OSV News the election result "validates James Carville's famous maxim, 'It's the economy, stupid!'"

"While democracy was named in the exit polls as the most important issue for voters, the economy ranked a close second," White said. "Inflation is a job-killer and it killed Kamala Harris' job prospects."

Trump's victory, White said, defied some conventional election metrics.

"The striking thing to me is how the results contradicted the signs that Harris was on track to win," White said. "Namely, the money she raised; the crowd sizes; the things that Donald Trump said and did; his abject character; and the modest leads that she had in the polls. Once

again, Trump over-performed in every way possible.”

Early data suggests that Catholic voters swung back to support Trump after narrowly supporting President Joe Biden, the nation’s second Catholic president, in 2020. An early exit poll by NBC accessed Nov. 6 indicated Catholics supported Trump over Harris 58 percent-40 percent.

“His overwhelming lead in the Catholic vote cannot be overlooked,” White said. “While his performance with white Catholics was not surprising, his performance with Hispanics was the best since George W. Bush in 2004. The Hispanic vote is no longer guaranteed for Democrats and the party has a lot of work to do with this group and others.”

Margaret Susan Thompson, an associate professor of history at Syracuse University’s Maxwell School of Citizenship & Public Affairs, who has studied the intersection of religion and politics in the U.S., stressed that early exit poll data is preliminary and subject to change, but several polls indicate Catholic voters did break for Trump — although the exact margin, and their motivation, requires further study.

“Is the relationship between being a Catholic and voting for a particular candidate, a causal one?” she said of what will be examined as the data becomes clear. “That is, I am voting for this candidate because of my Catholic beliefs, my faith has shaped my vote, or I happen to be Catholic and I happen to vote for this candidate, but there’s no direct relationship between the two?”

James Patterson, chair of the politics department at Ave Maria University in Naples, Fla., told OSV News that the 2024 outcome makes Trump’s 2020 loss seem “now like something of a fluke of the pandemic, rapidly changing voting methods in response to it, and Trump running a bad campaign” at that time.

“It is hard to remember, but after 2022, the leading GOP presidential nominee was Ron DeSantis,” Patterson said, arguing that after criminal prosecutions of Trump for his role in seeking to overturn the 2020 election results and other alleged misconduct, “the GOP rallied to Trump much more than they did before.”

“As for what Trump changed in his campaign this year, he was the only candidate talking about issues,” Patterson said. “He often exaggerates or misrepresents facts, but at least he brought up issues important to Americans, like inflation and immigration.”

As a member of the incumbent administration, Patterson argued, Harris “was stuck.”

“She could not be the incumbent because of Americans overwhelmingly thinking America is on the wrong track,” he said. “She could not even run as herself because she had taken some extreme positions.”