

World & Nation

Direction of Catholic vote unclear in 1988 election

By Stephenie Overman

Washington (NC) — Catholic voters had been targeted as a swing group in this year's election, but when it was all over, pollsters couldn't agree over which way they'd swung.

Early in the 1988 campaign some had predicted a return to Catholics' traditional place in the Democratic ranks, while others saw a new pattern set by Catholic support for Ronald Reagan in both 1980 and 1984.

By the time the November 8 election rolled around, exit polls conducted by networks and newspapers disagreed over the Catholic contribution to the victory of George Bush over Michael Dukakis.

Pro-lifers, on the other hand, claimed a major role in Bush's victory after one exit poll found abortion to be a key issue among nearly a third of the electorate. Those who considered abortion key, according to the poll by ABC News, voted for Bush over Dukakis, 55-45 percent.

An NBC News-Wall Street Journal poll of more than 10,000 voters leaving voting booths found that overall, Catholics backed Dukakis by a 52-48 percent margin. According to an ABC exit poll of 22,000 voters, Dukakis received 54 percent of the Catholic vote, compared to 46 percent for Bush.

But the New York Times-CBS News exit poll of 11,645 voters around the nation found that Catholics voted for Bush by a 52-47 percent margin.

The final Gallup poll conducted just before the election showed Catholics favoring Bush by a tiny 48-47 percent margin. That survey was conducted November 3-6.

The final Harris poll, conducted November 2-7, showed that white Catholics —

the only breakdown given — preferred Bush by 51 to 46 percent.

Neither Gallup nor Harris conduct exit polls.

The differences in the results of the exit polls depend on factors such as which precincts were sampled, how questions were asked in each poll, and the number of Catholics in each sample group, according to Gallup spokesmen. The smaller the number of Catholics in each survey group, the larger the margin of error.

George Gallup, in a speech at the end of October to the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, said that "much of the Catholic vote remains soft" and predicted Catholics could be "the swing group in this year's election."

At about the same time Patrick J. Buchanan, former White House communications director, wrote a column calling Catholics, whom he described as the "largest religious minority in America," a swing vote too often overlooked.

He said Dukakis' convention acceptance speech resonated well with Catholic America, but that as the race wore on, Bush was able to paint the Massachusetts governor as anti-military and soft on crime, traits anathema to Catholics' with traditional, authoritarian backgrounds.

National Right to Life Committee officials, citing the ABC poll's findings that abortion was a key issue, said Bush's anti-abortion position gave him an advantage over Dukakis.

According to National Right to Life president Dr. John C. Willke, "there can be no question today that being pro-life helps

win elections."

Sandra Faucher, the organization's political action committee director, said abortion was "the No. 1 issue ... and those who cited abortion went for Bush."

Judie Brown, president of the American Life League, said Bush's victory "shows the revitalization of the pro-life movement over the past few years."

She said that the day after the election her organization began mailing out more than 250,000 petitions "which will allow grass-roots pro-lifers to ask the president-elect to display his pro-life convictions through his Cabinet and administration appointments."

Early in the race, polls and pundits had suggested a general Democratic resurgence and specific support for Dukakis among the Catholic population.

A survey conducted by Gallup in mid-May showed Catholics favoring a Democratic candidate over a Republican by a 49.7 to 29 percent margin.

Jim Castelli, director of church-state policy for People for the American Way, credited Catholics with putting Dukakis in the running in the first place. It was "really Catholics who nominated Dukakis," he said in an interview after the primaries.

Washington Post columnist Mark Shields wrote in June that support from Catholic voters made Dukakis' victory possible in key primaries. He said Catholics considered Dukakis, a Greek Orthodox, one of their own because of his immigrant background and that "Democratic victory could well hinge on whether the springtime appeal of a sometimes Greek Orthodox candidate to Roman Catholic voters will last."

But Bush actively wooed Catholics, hoping to extend the trend that Reagan began. He named a Catholic liaison, met with religious leaders and visited Catholic schools.

Dukakis also targeted Catholic voters, but a spokeswoman said the Democratic campaign used a grass-roots, rather than national, approach.

In 1980 Catholics favored Reagan over Jimmy Carter by a small margin. One poll reported a 47-46 percent margin, with 6 percent of the Catholic vote that year for third-party candidate John Anderson, while another showed 49-42 percent for Reagan, with 7 percent for Anderson.

But in 1984 Reagan received a record percentage of the Catholic vote. Estimates of the Catholic vote for Reagan ranged from 54 percent to 61 percent.

Catholics have a long tradition of voting for Democrats.

In 1976 Catholics supported Carter by a 57-42 percent margin over Gerald R. Ford, according to the book "Presidential Elections."

Even in Richard Nixon's 1972 landslide, when he received 70 percent of the Protestant vote, Catholics supported him by just 52 percent, giving 48 percent of their votes to George McGovern.

In 1968, Catholics had backed Hubert H. Humphrey over Nixon 59-33 percent, with 8 percent going to George Wallace. In 1964 they backed Lyndon Johnson over Barry Goldwater by a 76-24 margin, according to "Presidential Elections."

And in 1960 they gave favorite son John F. Kennedy 78 percent of their votes and only 22-percent to Nixon.

John Kennedy's Catholicity: walking a political tightrope

By Laurie Hansen

Washington (NC) — Twenty-five years after the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, Catholic scholars say his election both allayed suspicions about Catholics and contributed to an overly strict interpretation of the separation of church and state.

Kennedy's election in 1960 and subsequent 1,000 days in office are still considered to be a momentous juncture in the history of U.S. Catholicism.

His aficionados worldwide, from the United States to Ireland, from Spain to Colombia, have named parks and libraries, barrios and scholarship funds for the first Catholic U.S. chief of state.

At campaign time, local, state and national political candidates of both parties quote him with abandon. An unending stream of Kennedy books and movies — some more complimentary than others — cannot satiate the public's appetite.

Kennedy proved to the nation that Catholicism was "no impediment" to doing the job, said Jesuit Father Avery Dulles, a Catholic theologian at Fordham University in New York.

"He maintained a correct attitude toward the Church in the sense of public acknowledgement of his faith, but when it came to making policy he also tried to keep his distance from his own Catholic Church," Monsignor John Tracy Ellis, a prominent Church historian, said.

According to Monsignor Ellis, the 35th president's views on church and state were in line with the U.S. tradition of keeping the

two separate — a tradition, he said, that has been invoked "from the dawn of the republic on."

But a televised campaign speech by Kennedy before the Greater Houston Ministerial Association in 1960 during which he tackled church-state issues head-on "gave the wrong impression of the connection between religion and politics," in the view of Father Dulles, a convert whose own family of Presbyterians included several noted statesmen.

His father was John Foster Dulles, secretary of state under President Eisenhower and a Presbyterian elder. Allen Dulles, his uncle, was director of the CIA. A great-grandfather, John Watson Foster, was secretary of state under President Benjamin Harrison. And a great-uncle, Robert Lansing, held the same post under President Woodrow Wilson.

In his speech to the Houston association, Kennedy assuaged the fears of Protestants concerned that his church would have undue influence on his policies by speaking of "an America where the separation of church and state is absolute."

Precisely as a result of the church-state separation, said Father Dulles, there is "room for a wide spectrum of philosophies about the human person and society, room for people in public life who stand within a variety of religious traditions."

He urged Catholic officials to walk a political tightrope — not ignoring that a majority of their constituencies may be non-Catholic, but at the same time

acknowledging that many values based on Church social teaching and reason can be "made broadly acceptable." He cited the Church's "just war" theory and opposition to slavery as examples.

In principle, said Father Dulles, this is also true of abortion. Though controversial in many circles, the Church position against abortion is based on natural law and a respect for life, which find sympathy from many Protestants and Jews, he said.

But today, said Father Dulles, statesmen

are discouraged from allowing religious values to affect their decision making. Interpreting the separation of church and state as "denying the Church a prophetic role" has created a vacuum in the public forum, he said.

At a time when the U.S. bishops have analyzed from a moral perspective and then boldly spoken out on issues of the day, from war and peace to the economy, the Catholic laity has been reluctant to follow suit, said Father Dulles.



President John F. Kennedy was assassinated November 22, 1963. To mark the 25th anniversary of the tragedy, a PBS special "JFK: A Time Remembered" is scheduled for Monday, Nov. 21, from 9 to 10 p.m. EST.

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