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Los Angeles Times/Bloomberg

RELIGION A POSSIBLE HURDLE FOR ROMNEY'S 2008 BID

While resistance to the idea of electing a Roman Catholic or Jewish candidate to the presidency has largely faded away, many Americans would still feel reluctant to put members of other religions in the White House, according to the latest Los Angeles Times/ Bloomberg poll.

John F. Kennedy paved the way for Catholics in 1960, and while the survey found little resistance to the idea of a Catholic president, some Americans are still not comfortable with the idea of electing an evangelical Christian, a Jew, a Muslim… or a Mormon. So far no Muslim or Jewish candidates have thrown their hat into the ring for 2008, but Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney is putting together a campaign for the Republican nomination, and Romney is a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, the official title of the Mormon church.

Sen. Orrin Hatch (R-Utah), also a Mormon, indicated during his run for the presidency in 2000 that one of his motivations at the time was to make it easier for the next candidate of his religion to run for President. He cited a Gallup poll taken in 1999 which found 17% of Americans unwilling to vote for a well-qualified candidate of their party who also happened to be a Mormon. According to this latest survey, Romney may be facing an even greater level of resistance to electing a Mormon as president than Hatch did – nearly four in 10 nationwide indicated they were reluctant to vote for a candidate of that faith.

This latest survey asked a very generic series of questions: *"Just thinking about a candidate's religion, do you think you could vote for a _____ candidate for president, or not?"* Five faiths were tested - Jewish, Mormon, evangelical Christian, Catholic, and Muslim. More than eight in 10 said they would elect a Catholic, more than three out of four would have no problem with a Jewish candidate, two-thirds were fine with an evangelical Christian, but only a third said they would vote to elect a Muslim candidate.

	Mormon	Catholic	Jewish	Evangelical	Muslim
Yes	51	83	76	66	34
No	37	10	15	21	54
D/Know	12	7	9	13	12

There is nothing to indicate that numbers such as these, while certainly indicative of a basic level of resistance, are a real barrier to legitimate candidacy. Nor is there evidence to infer that a candidate's religion would trump other important voter criteria, such as trust, charisma, shared values, voting history on important legislation, or the candidate's stand on such things as abortion, gay marriage, and education. In fact, recent history proves that a charismatic candidate can overcome religious prejudice and go on to win the highest seat in the land. When John F. Kennedy was running for president of the United States in 1960, he was forced to address head-on the remaining prejudices in the country against electing someone of the Roman Catholic faith. A June 1960 Roper Organization poll of adults nationwide found 35% resistant to the idea of voting for a Catholic president, a number similar to the proportion found in this survey who are resistant to a Mormon one. At that time, anti-Catholic prejudice held that a president who

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was Catholic would be answerable to the Pope, rather than to the people of the United States. Kennedy addressed that issue directly, speaking to the Southern Baptist Conference in June 1960, and went on be elected the first Catholic president of the United States in November of that year. By 1988, the issue of a Catholic candidate had become largely moot – only 5% told an AP/Media General Poll taken in May of that year that they would be less likely to vote for a Catholic presidential candidate, and in this current survey, the number was one in 10.

A Mormon candidate today may face a variety of prejudices. There is an air of mystery about the church –it is secretive about its finances and operations, and its ceremonies are closed to non-Mormons. There is the issue of polygamy, which was banned by the church last century but which is still practiced in some areas. A polygamous Mormon community has recently been fictionalized in the HBO television series "Big Love." Blacks were barred from ordination in the church until the late 1970s and women are still excluded. Some view Mormonism as a sect or cult rather than a mainstream religion, due to additions the church has made to the generally accepted Christian scriptures.

Possibly the worst news for Romney is that fundamentalists, who play a strong role in Republican presidential politics, may be the most reluctant to elect a Mormon candidate. The survey shows that resistance to the idea rises in accordance with church attendance – half of those who attend church more than weekly said they would not vote for a Mormon candidate, while six out of 10 who attend church rarely or never said they would. Only 5% of this group said they wouldn't vote for an evangelical Christian. However, the most churchgoing were only negligibly more resistant to the idea of voting for a Jewish candidate.

Just thinking about a candidate's religion, do you think you could vote for a _____ candidate for president, or not?"

	---------- Regularity of Church Attendance ----------				
	Never	Rarely	Monthly	Weekly	More
Mormon					
Yes	**60**	**60**	**53**	**51**	**36**
No	**28**	**27**	**35**	**41**	**50**
Don't Know	**12**	**13**	**12**	**8**	**14**
Catholic					
Yes	**82**	**90**	**75**	**89**	**72**
No	**5**	**7**	**19**	**6**	**17**
Don't Know	**13**	**3**	**6**	**5**	**11**
Jewish					
Yes	**77**	**82**	**68**	**76**	**74**
No	**9**	**14**	**21**	**18**	**18**
Don't Know	**14**	**4**	**11**	**6**	**8**
Evangelical Christian					
Yes	**59**	**66**	**60**	**72**	**79**
No	**22**	**20**	**30**	**19**	**5**
Don't Know	19	14	10	9	16
Muslim					
Yes	**34**	**33**	**36**	**27**	**34**
No	**51**	**51**	**52**	**62**	**60**
Don't Know	**15**	**16**	**12**	**11**	**6**

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The survey found Democrats and liberals split on the idea of voting for a Mormon, 43% of Democrats said they would and 42% said they would not, compared to independents who said they would by 54% to 33% and Republicans who were more open to the idea by 61% to 34%. Still, that is a third of Romney's own party who feels at least some resistance to his religious beliefs, and 36% of conservatives said they were as well.

Analysis by Jill Darling Richardson

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Results from the Los Angeles Times/Bloomberg Poll
National Poll (Religion)
June 24-27, 2006

Guide to Column Headings

ALL	All adults
REG	Registered voters
DEM	Self-described Democrats
IND	Self-described Independents
REP	Self-described Republicans

Note
This press release contains religion questions only. All other questions from this poll are published in earlier press releases.

(NEXT FIVE QUESTIONS ARE ROTATED)
Q36. Just thinking about a candidate's religion, do you think you could vote for a Jewish candidate for president, or not?

	ALL	REG	DEM	IND	REP
Yes	**76**	**78**	**72**	**74**	**83**
No	**15**	**14**	**18**	**14**	**11**
Don't know	**9**	**8**	**10**	**12**	**6**

Q37. Just thinking about a candidate's religion, do you think you could vote for a Mormon candidate for president, or not?

	ALL	REG	DEM	IND	REP
Yes	**51**	**53**	**43**	**54**	**61**
No	**37**	**35**	**42**	**33**	**34**
Don't know	**12**	**12**	**15**	**13**	**5**

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Q38. Just thinking about a candidate's religion, do you think you could vote for an evangelical Christian candidate for president, or not?

	ALL	REG	DEM	IND	REP
Yes	**66**	**65**	**53**	**69**	**81**
No	**21**	**22**	**28**	**19**	**13**
Don't know	**13**	**13**	**19**	**12**	**6**

Q39. Just thinking about a candidate's religion, do you think you could vote for a Muslim candidate for president, or not?

	ALL	REG	DEM	IND	REP
Yes	**34**	**34**	**30**	**45**	**31**
No	**54**	**53**	**56**	**42**	**61**
Don't know	**12**	**13**	**14**	**13**	**8**

Q40. Just thinking about a candidate's religion, do you think you could vote for a Catholic candidate for president, or not?

	ALL	REG	DEM	IND	REP
Yes	**83**	**83**	**76**	**86**	**89**
No	**10**	**9**	**14**	**8**	**6**
Don't know	**7**	**8**	**10**	**6**	**5**

How the poll was conducted

The Los Angeles Times / Bloomberg Poll contacted 1,321 adults, including nationwide by telephone June 24 through 27, 2006. Telephone numbers were chosen from a list of all exchanges in the nation, and random digit dialing techniques allowed listed and unlisted numbers to be contacted. Multiple attempts were made to contact each number. Adults were weighted slightly to conform with their respective census figures for sex, race, age, education and region. The margin of sampling error for both samples is plus or minus 3 percentage points in either direction. For certain subgroups, the error margin may be somewhat higher. Poll results may also be affected by factors such as question wording and the order in which questions are presented.

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