



Memorandum

From: George Barna
To: Kelly Shackelford, David Barton
Date: September 23, 2024
Re: Research on people of faith not voting

A national survey among a representative sampling of 1,000 adults was conducted by George Barna in September 2024 to determine how many “people of faith” were not likely to vote in the November 2024 presidential election. This memo summarizes the core findings of that research.

Number of Non-Voting People of Faith

One of the crucial findings from this study (and the survey that preceded it concerning the presidential election and the role of local churches in the race) is that enthusiasm for this election is lower than usual, and certainly lower than in 2020. A primary reason for that diminished interest is the public’s distaste for both major-party candidates (Donald Trump, Kamala Harris). Other significant reasons for the heightened disinterest include the aging out of Boomers and Elders (two generations that were highly involved in elections) and the emergence of the less-political Millennials and Gen Z; and the widespread expectation that the results of the election will be manipulated by illegal, behind-the-scenes activities.

Historical data indicates that turnout among the voting age population was 53.6% in 2012 (Obama-Romney); 54.6% in 2016 (Trump-Clinton); and 61.3% in 2020 (Trump-Biden).

Based on this survey, conducted approximately seven weeks prior to the election, if the election were held at the time of the survey the expected turnout would be 50% of voting age adults. Typically, for data from surveys conducted six to eight weeks before Election Day, that turnout figure will rise several percentage points, likely concluding in the 53% to 55% range. That would put the 2024 election squarely in line with the turnout levels of 2012 and 2016, but below that of 2020.

(Note: being classified as “likely to vote” in this report is based on a combination of factors that Metaformation has developed over the course of the past five presidential elections. Survey respondents are notorious for over-reporting their likelihood to vote. Measures of voting interest,

knowledge and intent have proven to effectively modify those inflated self-report statistics to arrive at a more reliable turnout estimate.)

A central objective of this survey was to determine how many “people of faith” would not vote in the 2024 election. Per the guidance of the client commissioning the survey, “people of faith” was defined in the survey as either someone who said they are “a person of religious faith” or who identified themselves as being associated with some recognized religious faith (such as Christianity, Judaism, Mormonism, Islam, etc.). In total, 79% of Americans qualified as a person of faith by describing themselves in one or both of those ways.

Among those classified as a person of faith, 51% indicated they were likely to vote, leaving 49% who are not likely to vote. If the survey statistics are projected on the basis of national population estimates (e.g. U.S. voting-age population of 268 million), we expect about 212 million adults to fit the “person of faith” category. If 49% of them do not turnout to vote in November, that would represent about 104 million eligible non-voters in the “people of faith” segment.

Within the people of faith segment are a variety of groups, each of which has its own likelihood of voting. Some of the more significant religious subgroups and their voting likelihood, if the election were to be held today, are listed below.

<u>Religious subgroup</u>	<u>Adult Population Incidence</u>	<u>Estimated 2024 G.E. Turnout</u>	<u>Estimated Number of Non-voters</u>
Theologically-defined born-again Christians	32%	52%	41 million
Attend a Protestant church	36%	52%	46 million
Attend a Catholic church	17%	58%	19 million
Attend an evangelical church	11%	53%	14 million
Attend a mainline Protestant church	13%	57%	15 million
Attend a Pentecostal/charismatic church	4%	50%	5 million
Attend a non-denominational Christian church	7%	46%	10 million
Self-identified Christian	66%	52%	85 million
Aligned with a non-Christian faith	9%	50%	12 million
Self-identified Christian, regularly attend church	31%	61%	32 million

Reasons for Not Voting

The survey asked people who indicated they were not likely to vote to describe some of their reasons for making that choice. The most common reasons were led by the explanation that they are simply not interested in politics and elections. That reason was given by two-thirds of non-voters (68%). Other reasons identified by more than half of the non-voters included disliking all of the major candidates (57%), feeling that none of the candidates reflect their most important views (55%), and believing that their one vote will not make a difference (52%). Half of the non-voters said they will avoid voting because the election has become too controversial for their liking (50%).

Slightly less than half of the non-voters gave other reasons such as believing the election outcome will be rigged (48%) and not knowing enough about the candidates to choose one (48%). About one-

third of the non-voters (36%) explained their abstinence by saying they believe the candidate they favor cannot win the election.

What can be done to get these people to vote? Toward that end, several scenarios were posed to non-voters and their reactions to each possibility were gaged. None of the scenarios generated a lift among even one out of five of these non-voters, suggesting there is no “magic bullet” (at least among the actions posed) that would motivate large-scale changed behavior. However, if even 10-to-15-percent of the non-voters could be stimulated to vote, that could increase turnout by millions of people – and potentially sway the outcome.

The most promising actions were as follows:

- A church teaching its congregants that voting is a biblical responsibility of every Christian would cause an estimated 17% of the people of faith who plan not to vote to actually participate on Election Day.
- If family or friends were able to convince the non-voting person of faith that voting is too important to not participate, about 14% of the non-voters said they would turnout.
- Another 14% claimed that if they perceived the race to be close enough that their vote might actually make a difference, then they would cast a ballot.
- The problem of distorted information is a major deterrent for about one in seven non-voters. That 14% claimed that if they received an unbiased, objective briefing about what each of the major candidates supports and opposes, they would be likely to vote.
- A guilt-based or fear-based strategy might impact one out of 10 voters. For instance, if an organization promised to make public the names of each person in their area who did not vote, they would feel compelled to vote.
- One out of 10 non-voters also said that if a religious leader they highly respect endorsed a Presidential candidate, then they could justify voting.

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