News

Joe Biden seated in black mask holding papers

President Joe Biden speaks during a meeting with immigration advisers at the White House in Washington March 24, 2021. (CNS/Reuters/Jonathan Ernst)



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Joe Biden, the second Catholic president in U.S. history, has made no secret about his faith, and a new poll shows that the majority of adults in the country is well aware of his Catholicism. Yet like members of his own church, those surveyed are divided along party lines over just how authentic his faith is and whether or not he should be allowed to receive Communion.

A new poll, released on March 30 by Pew Research Center, found that 58% of adults know that Biden is Catholic, with 88% of Democrat or Democratic leaning respondents saying they think Biden is at least "somewhat" religious, compared to 63% of Republicans who say that Biden is "not too" or "not at all" religious.

The report noted that some Republicans volunteered that Biden is a "fake Catholic" or a "Catholic in name only," a line that has been echoed by the head of the U.S. bishops' conference pro-life committee, Archbishop Joseph Naumann, who has said that Biden "should stop defining himself as a devout Catholic" due to his support for

legal abortion.

Naumann, among other conservative U.S. prelates, have called for Biden to stop receiving Communion, and the U.S. bishops' conference is aiming to draft a document on "Eucharistic coherence," motivated by concern over Biden receiving Communion.

According to the data from Pew, 55% of Catholic Republicans believe Biden's views on abortion should disqualify him from receiving Communion, whereas only 11% of Catholic Democrats say he should not be allowed to receive the sacrament.

While a majority of Catholic Republicans believe that Biden's support for legal abortion disqualifies him from Communion, only a minority of respondents said that opposing church teaching on homosexuality, the death penalty or immigration should disqualify someone from receiving the Eucharist.

For example, 30% of Catholic Republicans said that Catholic politicians should be barred from Communion if they disagreed with the church about homosexuality, and 19% said that disagreeing with the church on the death penalty should be a disqualifier, whereas only 11% said disagreeing with church teaching on immigration should lead to a ban on receiving the Eucharist.

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By contrast, Catholic Democrats were less likely to say that disagreement on specific areas of doctrine should lead to a denial of the Eucharist, with only 12% of respondents saying Catholics who disagreed with the church on homosexuality should be denied Communion, 17% disapproving of Communion reception for those who disagreed with the church on capital punishment and 8% saying that it would not be OK to receive Communion for those who disagreed with the church's teaching on immigration.

In response to recent debates of Biden and Communion, several bishops have cautioned against politicizing the Eucharist.

"I do not see how depriving the president or other political leaders of Eucharist based on their public policy stance can be interpreted in our society as anything other than the weaponization of Eucharist and an effort not to convince people by

argument and by dialogue and by reason, but, rather, to pummel them into submission on the issue," said San Diego's Bishop Robert McElroy during a panel discussion last month.

Biden's local bishop in the nation's capital, Cardinal Wilton Gregory, has also made it clear that the president should not be denied Communion within the Archdiocese of Washington.

"I don't want to go to the table with a gun on the table first," said Gregory of his approach to Biden on areas upon which they disagree.

As for Biden's vice-president, Kamala Harris, most Americans could not identify her religious affiliation.

According to the Pew survey, two-thirds of U.S. adults say they are not sure of Harris' religious identity, with just 12% correctly saying that she is a Protestant. Harris, who was raised in a blended household of Christianity and Hinduism, considers herself a Black Baptist.

The latest findings from the Pew Research Center were conducted during the first week of March among 12,055 adults, 2,492 of whom were Catholics. The margin of sampling error is plus or minus 1.5 percentage points.