

Voters' views of Mormonism still hamper Romney's campaign

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Mitt Romney's religion was a major stumbling block for his 2008 presidential aspirations, and remains so for his candidacy in 2012, according to David Campbell at the University of Notre Dame. Real time voter analysis of the 2008 primaries reveals that while the social barriers of race and gender were largely overcome during the last US presidential campaign, religious affiliation (in this case, the Church of Latter Day Saints) is still a significant hurdle. A new article in Springer's journal, *Political Behavior*, suggests that a "stained glass ceiling" remains an obstacle to Mitt Romney's 2012 bid for the White House.

Campbell's paper – split into four sections – examines why Romney was unable to break the religion barrier in 2008. The first part of the article describes the attitudes of Americans towards Mormons – an important example of a religious 'out-group'. The research finds that the religion remains unpopular and mysterious because of the relative social insularity of Mormons. Part two reviews published work to establish how Romney's faith might have worked against him in 2008, and the third section reveals voter-survey data that supports these findings. Finally, part four looks at the implications of these findings for the 2012 election, and for the future of religious tolerance in the US.

Campbell and colleagues find that voters who have no personal exposure to Mormons are most likely to be persuaded by both negative and positive information about Mormon faith, while voters who have sustained personal contact with Mormons are the least likely to be persuaded either way. Voters with moderate contact, however, react

strongly to negative information about the religion, but are not persuaded by opposing positive information. This last group of voters is the most problematic from Romney's perspective.

In the researchers' view, Romney failed to overcome the limitations on his candidacy based on his religion, in part because of the unpopularity of Mormons. These attitudes are driven largely by a lack of social contact between Mormons and other Americans, and in part because that low level of interaction allowed negative messages about Romney's religion to dissuade [voters](#) from supporting him, even when provided with opposing information.

The researchers conclude, "Given that the general perception of Mormons has not changed since 2008, and that there is no reason to think that Americans are more likely to have Mormons as close friends and family now, our results suggest that Romney's [religion](#) will remain a potential political stumbling block in this [presidential campaign](#), too."

More information: Campbell DE et al (2012). The stained glass ceiling: social contact and Mitt Romney's 'religion problem'. *Political Behavior*; [DOI 10.1007/s11109-012-9200-6](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-012-9200-6)

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