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## Obama Made Gains Among Younger Evangelical Voters, Data Show

By [LAURIE GOODSTEIN](#)

President-elect [Barack Obama](#) succeeded in chiseling off small but significant chunks of white evangelical voters who have been the foundation of the [Republican Party](#) for decades, a close look at voting patterns reveals.

The change reflects a broader shift among religious voters in every category. Mr. Obama made gains among Catholics, Jews and mainline Protestants, compared with the Democratic presidential nominee in 2004, Senator [John Kerry](#) of Massachusetts.

But the big question was whether Mr. Obama could appeal to evangelicals — born-again Christians, who make up about a quarter of the electorate and have been largely Republican stalwarts.

Early in the campaign, he mobilized a team led by the Rev. Joshua DuBois, a Pentecostal pastor, who focused on reaching out to politically moderate evangelicals, Catholics and mainline Protestants.

“The Obama campaign really made a decision to target their efforts to moderates,” said Mara Vanderslice, founder and director of the Matthew 25 Network, a political action group that ran advertisements on Christian radio for Mr. Obama. “Their plan was never to go after people who’d been voting Republican for 20 years.”

“There never was an aggressive outreach effort to white Southern Baptist evangelicals in the South; that wasn’t the focus,” added Ms. Vanderslice, an evangelical Christian who was Mr. Kerry’s director of religious outreach.

Campaign workers contacted individual ministers, even those they knew would not necessarily vote for Mr. Obama, and mailed copies of his speeches on faith and politics to thousands of them.

For some, the campaign arranged meetings or phone calls with Mr. Obama, a first-term senator from Illinois. The goal, organizers said, was to humanize him as a person of genuine faith, so that even those pastors who opposed him would be hesitant to attack him publicly.

The campaign also visited about 10 Christian colleges in swing states, often staging events with Donald Miller, a bestselling author popular with younger evangelicals and an Obama supporter. And campaign workers organized more than 900 “American values house parties,” in which Obama supporters invited members of their church to talk politics.

The payoff was both generational and geographic. Mr. Obama doubled his support among young

white evangelicals (those ages 18 to 29) compared with Mr. Kerry. The increase was almost the same for white evangelicals ages 30 to 44.

“There is definitely a generational division,” said David P. Gushee, professor of Christian ethics at Mercer University and author of “The Future of Faith in American Politics: The Public Witness of the Evangelical Center.”

“Young evangelicals,” Dr. Gushee said, are “attracted to a broader agenda” beyond abortion and homosexuality, that includes the environment, poverty, human rights and torture.

Nationwide, most white evangelicals remained in the Republican camp despite misgivings they voiced about the depth of Senator [John McCain](#)’s commitment to a conservative social agenda. Mr. McCain, of Arizona, held 74 percent of the white evangelical vote, compared with 24 percent for Mr. Obama — a gain of only three percentage points over Mr. Kerry.

But in most of the swing states where Mr. Obama’s campaign concentrated, like Colorado, Florida, Indiana, Michigan, Pennsylvania and Virginia, his gains over Mr. Kerry in 2004 among white evangelicals were larger.

Mr. Obama improved his standing by 10 points among white evangelicals in Colorado. The state is home to what many consider to be the capitol of evangelical America, Colorado Springs, where dozens of conservative megaministries like Focus on the Family have their headquarters and employ tens of thousands of people.

He also did well with Catholics, who make up about a quarter of the American electorate, winning 54 percent of that vote compared with 45 percent for Mr. McCain. Most of the Catholic boost for Mr. Obama came from Hispanic Catholics, who are now 6 percent of the electorate.

Mr. Obama, a member of the United Church of Christ, a Protestant denomination, managed to increase his share of the Catholic vote by seven percentage points over Mr. Kerry, who is a Catholic.

*Megan Thee contributed reporting.*

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