

Romney's faith could be a problem in GOP primary

by [David Gibson](#) in the [December 27, 2011](#) issue

If Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney can secure the nomination, his Mormon faith shouldn't be an obstacle for voters in the general election, according to a recently released survey.

That nomination may be a big "if." The survey from the Pew Research Center shows that white evangelical Protestants—the heart of the GOP primary electorate—are most likely to know that Romney is a Mormon and least likely to support him.

That news came as polls showed Newt Gingrich emerging as Romney's chief rival for the nomination, and as the focus turned to the Iowa caucuses in early January. The Hawkeye state's Republican Party is dominated by the kind of conservative Christians who view Romney's Mormonism with suspicion.

The Pew survey of 1,576 registered voters, conducted November 9–14, shows that while 54 percent of Republicans and those who lean Republican believe that Mormons are Christian, just 35 percent of white evangelicals agree with that statement. Some 53 percent of white evangelicals say Mormonism is not Christian. Just 17 percent of them say they will back Romney in the primaries, as opposed to 23 percent of all GOP voters.

On the other hand, the poll also shows that evangelical opposition to President Obama is strong. Nearly nine in ten of those who say Mormons are not Christians would back Romney over Obama. Romney's "religion has implications for his nomination run but not for the general election, should he be nominated as his party's standard-bearer," the Pew report

says. —RNS