

What does the Speaker election tell us?

On Feb. 28, 2013, Pope Benedict XVI resigned. Soon after, the College of Cardinals met to elect one of their own as the new pope. Going into the election, two Italians were the front runners. But neither one could gain enough support to become pope. Then, the cardinals began to seriously consider other candidates. Eventually, after several rounds of voting, the cardinals elected a relatively unknown candidate from Argentina, who became Pope Francis. His election revealed something about the preferences of the members on the College of Cardinals: They wanted to elect a pope that was removed from Vatican politics and that was from Latin America, where the majority of Roman Catholics live.

The papal election that occurred 10 years ago has many similarities to the recent election of the Speaker of the House. In both cases, a small group of dignitaries were the voters (cardinals and members of the U.S. House). In both cases, strong opposition to the front runners prevented any of them from winning. In both cases, a surprise relatively unknown victor emerged.

As I already mentioned, the

Joe McGarrity



vote just as informative about the preferences of House Republicans? It is interesting to speculate what preferences may have been revealed by the speaker vote.

Some may argue that the election may signal that the Republican caucus wants to adopt more right-wing policies. After all, Speaker Johnson is very conservative. I do not buy that story because one of the early front runners was very conservative and he did not get elected. Instead, I think the House Republicans signaled that they wanted to return to a time of civility in politics. By all accounts, Speaker Johnson is polite and courteous. He hasn't spent his career demonizing his political opponents, like so many of today's prominent politicians have.

While I may just be engaging in wishful thinking, I do not

papal election revealed the unvoiced preferences of the cardinals – primarily that they wanted the church to increase its focus on the Catholics outside of Europe. Was the recent speaker

think so. I think many Americans are tired of the demagogues in politics and there is at least some evidence to support my contention. In recent elections, voters have rejected many of the most vitriolic candidates that Donald Trump endorsed. In the Republican presidential primary race, Nikki Haley has steadily gained support. I think a lot of her success comes from the fact that she can make her political points without resorting to mean-spirited name calling.

If the Republican House members do indeed want a more positive brand of politics, it is likely that they are being a conduit for their constituent's desires. After all, these House members want to get reelected. To do so, they must keep a close watch on what their constituents want and attempt to give it to them. If the Republican House members discovered their voters want a more civil brand of politics, then we should see voters express this desire in upcoming elections. This would be good news for Nikki Haley and bad news for Donald Trump.

Joe McGarrity is a Professor of Economics at UCA. He can be reached at joem@uca.edu.