



Opinion Research  
Strategic Communication

## **Catholic Voters' Presidential Preference, Issue Priorities and Opinion of Certain Church Policies**

A national opinion survey of likely Catholic voters conducted for Catholics for Choice

Conducted September 18 to 24, 2012; Released October 12, 2012

### **Overview**

This memo highlights the findings from a national public opinion survey conducted for Catholics for Choice by Belden Russonello Strategists. The survey explored Catholic voters' presidential preference, issue priorities and opinion of certain church policies.

- In the presidential election, President Barack Obama held a slim lead over Mitt Romney among U.S. Catholics, as he did in most national polls of general election voters nationwide when the survey was conducted in late September. This survey ended just prior to the first Presidential debate. The Catholic vote has been a perfect indicator of which presidential candidate would win the most votes in every election since 1972, the year in which exit polls began keeping track of the Catholic vote.
- Catholics place jobs, public education, and health care at the top of their issue agenda and give a low priority to abortion and gay marriage.
- Majorities of Catholics disagree with criminalizing abortion and priests withholding communion from those Catholics who support legal abortion. A large majority does not feel a religious obligation to vote according to the recommendations of the U.S. Catholic Bishops.

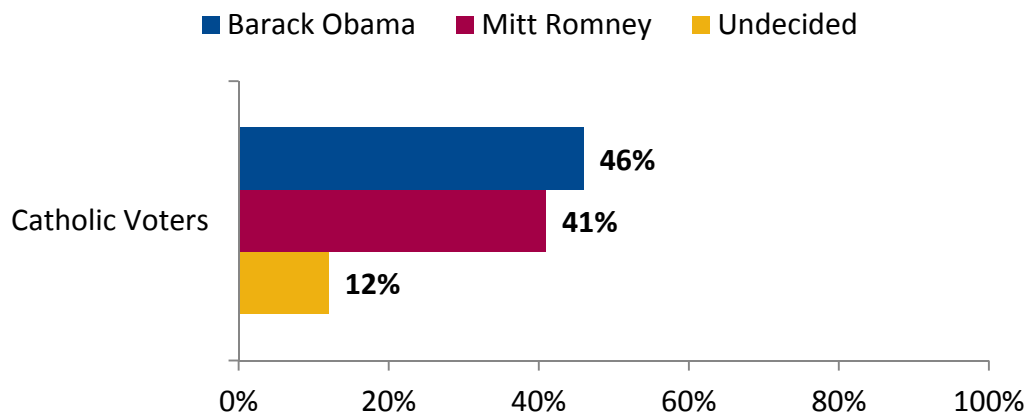
Belden Russonello Strategists LLC conducted the survey of 1,000 Catholic likely voters in the 2012 general election. This telephone survey used a national list of registered voters who had voted in either the 2008 or 2010 elections or those who had registered since 2010. Interviews were screened for likelihood of voting and Catholic identification. Interviews were conducted by telephone on September 18-24, 2012. The margin of sampling error for the survey is plus or minus 3.1 percentage points at the 95% level of confidence and is larger for subgroups within the survey.

## Findings

### 1. Among likely Catholic voters, President Obama holds a slight advantage over Republican candidate Mitt Romney in the 2012 presidential election.

Forty-six percent of likely Catholic voters support Obama while 41% support Romney and 12% remain undecided.

#### Catholic voters' current choice for president



Q1. If the election for president were held today, would you vote for [ROTATE: President Barack Obama/or/Governor Mitt Romney]? IF OBAMA OR ROMNEY: Would you say you would definitely or probably vote for him? IF UNDECIDED OR DK/REF: Do you lean more toward [ROTATE: Obama or Romney]?

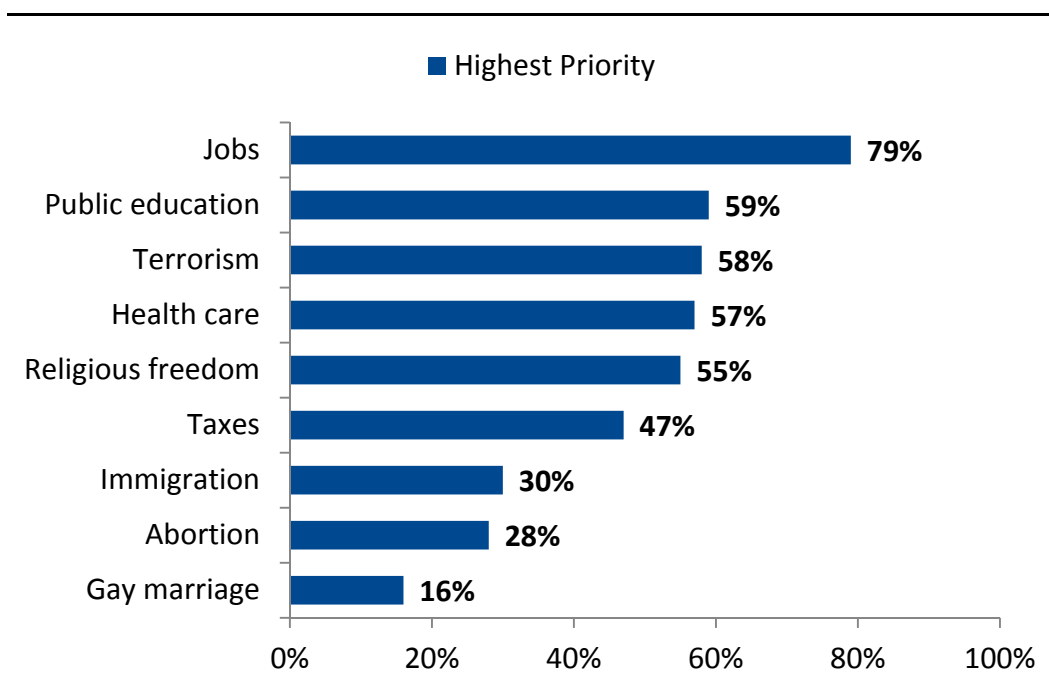
- President Obama has opened large leads among Latino (60% Obama, 23% Romney), low-middle income (\$25-50K, 58% Obama, 34% Romney), and young (18-29, 57% Obama, 29% Romney) Catholic voters. Obama also leads with Catholic women (50% Obama, 37% Romney).
- Romney is winning among Catholic voters who are white (47% Romney, 41% Obama), men (45% Romney, 40% Obama), and have incomes over \$75,000 (50% Romney, 43% Obama).
- The vote is split among those Catholics who attend mass regularly. Forty-five percent of those who attend church weekly or more support Romney while 42% support Obama.

### 2. Catholic voters and the rest of Americans have the same top priority: jobs.

A strong majority of Catholic voters (79%) wants the next President to make jobs his

highest priority. Jobs are the most important issue for Catholics of different genders, ages, ethnicities, education, and income levels. The issue even has nearly equal support among Catholics of different political ideologies (80% liberal, 78% moderate, 80% conservative) and parties (80% Democrat, 77% independent, 80% Republican).

### Prioritization of issues

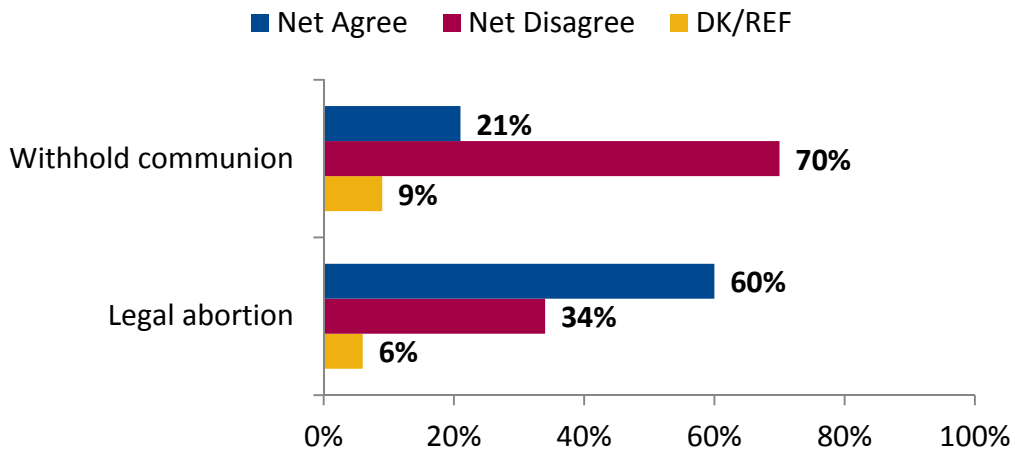


Using a 1 to 7 scale, how high a priority would you personally want the next President to give to each of the following issues? One means the lowest priority and seven means the highest priority {RANDOMIZE LIST} Q6: Jobs; Q10: Public Education; Q7: Terrorism; Q9: Healthcare; Q12: Religious Freedom; Q11: Taxes; Q8: Immigration; Q4: Abortion; Q5: Gay Marriage

3. **Abortion and gay marriage are low priorities for Catholics voters.** Only 28% of Catholic voters believe abortion should be the highest priority of the next administration. Gay marriage is even less of a priority than abortion among Catholics, with only 16% prioritizing the issue as the highest.
4. **Majorities of Catholic voters continue to support legal abortion.** Sixty percent of Catholic voters support legal abortion and 70% disagree with Catholic bishops who would withhold communion from parishioners who support legal abortion.
  - Majorities of Catholics voters of different genders, ages, ethnicities, education, and income levels support legal abortion.

- Denying communion for Catholics because they support abortion is very unpopular. There is not a single demographic group that would support the practice. It is even very unpopular among the most conservative Catholics voters: 65% of those who attend mass weekly or more, 60% of Republican, 58% of conservative, and 53% of pro-life Catholics disagree with this policy.

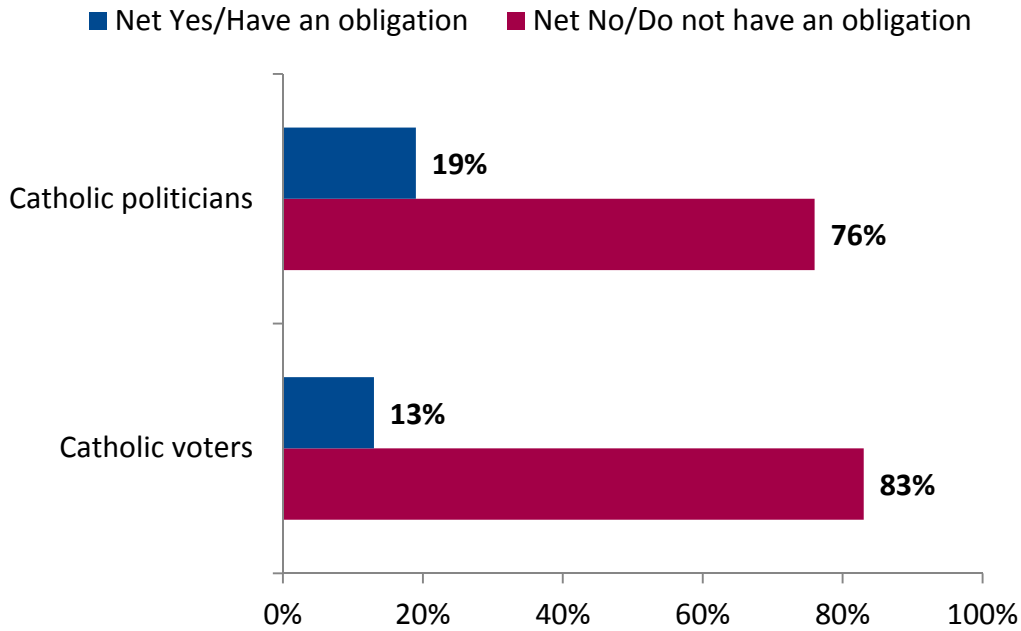
**Catholic voters’ opinion on abortion and withholding of communion**



Q13. Do you agree or disagree that it should be legal for a woman to have an abortion? (WAIT FOR RESPONSE) Is that strongly or somewhat? Q14. Some bishops have said they would withhold communion from Catholics who support legal abortion. Do you approve or disapprove of this? Is that strongly or somewhat?

- Most Catholic voters do not feel bishops’ recommendations should influence their vote or Catholic politicians’ votes once elected.** Four out of five Catholic voters (83%) feel no obligation to vote the way bishops’ recommend and three-quarters of Catholic voters (76%) do not believe Catholic politicians are obligated to vote the way bishops desire.

**Obligation to vote in accordance with bishops' recommendations**



Q2. Do you believe Catholic voters have an obligation to vote only for candidates who are recommended by the Catholic bishops or not? WAIT FOR RESPONSE. Do you feel that way strongly or somewhat? Q3. Do you believe that politicians who are Catholic have an obligation to vote on issues the way Catholic bishops recommend or not? WAIT FOR RESPONSE. Do you feel that way strongly or somewhat?



## Appendix: Crosstab Tables

### Catholic voters' presidential preference, issue priorities and opinion of certain church policies

Appendix: Crosstab Tables,

October 2012

## Appendix: Crosstab Tables

### Vote for President

Q1. If the election for President were held today, would you vote for [ROTATE: President Barack Obama/or/Governor Mitt Romney]? IF OBAMA OR ROMNEY: Would you say you would definitely or probably vote for him? IF UNDECIDED OR DK/REF: Do you lean more toward [ROTATE: Obama or Romney]?

	Obama	Romney	Undecided
<b>Total</b>	<b>47%</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>12</b>
Men	40%	45	12
Women	50%	37	12
18-29	57%	29	14
30-39	50%	36	12
40-49	41%	49	8
50-64	47%	41	11
65+	46%	37	15
White	41%	47	11
Hispanic	60%	23	16
White men	36%	51	10
White women	45%	43	11
Latino	58%	25	16
Latina	62%	21	16
<HS/HS grad	43%	38	17
Some college	48%	38	12
4-yr degree or higher	46%	45	8
HH income: \$25K or less	51%	33	16
\$25-\$50K	58%	34	7
\$50K-\$75K	45%	41	13
\$75K	43%	50	6
Married	42%	45	11
Single	55%	29	15
Liberal	84%	6	8
Moderate	54%	29	15
Conservative	14%	75	10
Democrat	88%	4	7
Independent	40%	39	19
Republican	9%	86	5
Church attendance:	42%	45	11
Weekly+			
Monthly/yearly	52%	37	10
Never	48%	29	19
Support legal abortion	57%	31	11
Abortion illegal	29%	57	12



## Appendix: Crosstab Tables

### Catholic Voters' Obligation to Vote in Accordance with Bishops

Q2. Do you believe Catholic voters have an obligation to vote only for candidates who are recommended by the Catholic bishops or not? WAIT FOR RESPONSE. Do you feel that way strongly or somewhat?

	Net yes	Net no	Strongly yes	Somewhat yes	Somewhat no	Strongly no
<b>Total</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>67</b>
Obama	14%	85	7%	6	16	68
Romney	13%	82	7%	6	17	66
Undecided	8%	86	5%	3	14	72
Men	14%	82	7%	7	16	66
Women	12%	84	7%	5	16	68
18-29	15%	84	10%	5	17	67
30-39	23%	74	14%	9	12	61
40-49	11%	85	3%	8	18	67
50-64	9%	86	5%	4	13	73
65+	11%	84	6%	4	18	66
White	12%	83	7%	6	15	69
Hispanic	14%	84	7%	7	16	68
White men	14%	81	7%	7	15	66
White women	11%	85	7%	4	14	71
Latino	13%	88	8%	5	16	72
Latina	15%	81	7%	8	16	64
<HS/HS grad	15%	82	7%	8	16	66
Some college	14%	81	8%	6	20	62
4-yr degree or higher	11%	86	6%	4	14	72
HH income: \$25K or less	16%	79	8%	8	19	61
\$25-\$50K	16%	80	8%	8	18	62
\$50K-\$75K	14%	80	7%	7	19	61
\$75K	9%	89	5%	4	12	76
Married	14%	83	7%	7	16	68
Single	8%	87	4%	3	18	68
Liberal	8%	88	4%	4	15	73
Moderate	13%	84	7%	6	15	69
Conservative	14%	81	8%	7	18	63
Democrat	13%	84	8%	5	16	69
Independent	12%	85	6%	5	15	70
Republican	14%	80	6%	8	18	63
Church attendance:	17%	79	9%	8	17	62
Weekly+						
Monthly/yearly	9%	89	5%	4	16	73
Never	2%	91	2%	--	11	80
Support legal abortion	8%	90	5%	3	15	75
Abortion illegal	22%	73	12%	10	18	55

## Appendix: Crosstab Tables

### Catholic Politician's Obligation to Vote in Accordance with Bishops

Q3. Do you believe that politicians who are Catholic have an obligation to vote on issues the way Catholic bishops recommend or not?

	Net yes	Net no	Strongly yes	Somewhat yes	Somewhat no	Strongly no
<b>Total</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>60</b>
Obama	17%	80	8%	8	16	64
Romney	23%	72	13%	10	16	56
Undecided	13%	76	7%	7	15	61
Men	19%	76	10%	9	15	61
Women	19%	76	10%	9	16	60
18-29	16%	79	11%	5	20	60
30-39	25%	74	12%	12	12	61
40-49	16%	79	7%	9	19	60
50-64	20%	76	12%	9	14	62
65+	16%	76	6%	11	13	63
White	20%	76	11%	9	16	60
Hispanic	17%	78	7%	10	13	65
White men	20%	76	11%	8	17	59
White women	19%	75	10%	9	15	60
Latino	19%	77	6%	13	13	64
Latina	15%	79	7%	8	14	66
<HS/HS grad	21%	72	10%	10	17	55
Some college	20%	77	11%	10	21	55
4-yr degree or higher	17%	79	9%	8	12	67
HH income: \$25K or less	20%	75	10%	9	18	58
\$25-\$50K	22%	75	9%	13	16	59
\$50K-\$75K	21%	75	12%	8	22	53
\$75K	17%	81	10%	7	12	69
Married	20%	75	10%	9	16	59
Single	12%	84	8%	3	20	64
Liberal	13%	83	6%	7	15	68
Moderate	19%	76	10%	8	14	61
Conservative	22%	73	11%	11	18	54
Democrat	19%	77	9%	9	13	64
Independent	17%	79	11%	6	15	63
Republican	22%	73	10%	12	19	54
Church attendance:	25%	70	15%	10	18	52
Weekly+						
Monthly/yearly	13%	84	4%	9	16	68
Never	9%	84	4%	4	8	76
Support legal abortion	13%	83	6%	7	14	70
Abortion illegal	31%	63	17%	14	18	45

## Appendix: Crosstab Tables

### Desired Priorities of the President

Using a 1 to 7 scale, how high a priority would you personally want the next President to give to each of the following issues? One means the lowest priority and seven means the highest priority  
 {RANDOMIZE LIST} Q6. Jobs; Q10. Public Education; Q7. Terrorism; Q9. Healthcare; Q12. Religious Freedom; Q11. Taxes; Q8. Immigration; Q4. Abortion; Q5. Gay marriage

<i>% saying "highest priority"</i>	<b>Jobs</b>	<b>Public education</b>	<b>Terrorism</b>	<b>Healthcare</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>79%</b>	<b>59%</b>	<b>58%</b>	<b>58%</b>
Obama	78%	68%	53%	66%
Romney	80%	46%	66%	45%
Undecided	80%	63%	55%	56%
Men	77%	52%	56%	51%
Women	80%	64%	60%	61%
18-29	74%	66%	56%	54%
30-39	78%	57%	50%	52%
40-49	77%	53%	57%	49%
50-64	82%	58%	62%	59%
65+	81%	64%	63%	64%
White	80%	56%	57%	56%
Hispanic	77%	66%	63%	55%
White men	79%	50%	52%	49%
White women	81%	60%	60%	61%
Latino	77%	61%	66%	52%
Latina	77%	70%	60%	58%
<HS/HS grad	83%	66%	65%	60%
Some college	78%	60%	59%	57%
4-yr degree or higher	78%	53%	54%	54%
HH income: \$25K or less	79%	67%	60%	59%
\$25-\$50K	77%	60%	57%	61%
\$50K-\$75K	83%	56%	62%	57%
\$75K	78%	53%	54%	49%
Married	80%	57%	58%	56%
Single	75%	63%	55%	58%
Liberal	80%	66%	58%	70%
Moderate	78%	62%	54%	57%
Conservative	80%	49%	63%	48%
Democrat	80%	68%	55%	71%
Independent	77%	57%	58%	52%
Republican	80%	49%	63%	46%
Church attendance:	77%	59%	58%	56%
Weekly+				
Monthly/yearly	82%	59%	59%	57%
Never	79%	53%	57%	57%
Support legal abortion	80%	61%	58%	59%
Abortion illegal	77%	54%	59%	52%

## Appendix: Crosstab Tables

### Desired Priorities of the President (cont.)

Using a 1 to 7 scale, how high a priority would you personally want the next President to give to each of the following issues? One means the lowest priority and seven means the highest priority  
 {RANDOMIZE LIST} Q6. Jobs; Q10. Public education; Q7. Terrorism; Q9. Healthcare; Q12. Religious freedom; Q11. Taxes; Q8. Immigration; Q4. Abortion; Q5. Gay marriage

<i>% saying "highest priority"</i>	<b>Religious freedom</b>	<b>Taxes</b>	<b>Immigration</b>	<b>Abortion</b>	<b>Gay marriage</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>55%</b>	<b>47%</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>28%</b>	<b>16%</b>
Obama	52%	44%	27%	23%	20%
Romney	61%	52%	35%	33%	14%
Undecided	52%	47%	28%	30%	14%
Men	54%	44%	30%	28%	17%
Women	56%	50%	31%	27%	16%
18-29	46%	46%	30%	36%	25%
30-39	43%	41%	24%	25%	15%
40-49	50%	47%	25%	22%	13%
50-64	58%	49%	32%	28%	17%
65+	69%	50%	36%	28%	13%
White	56%	47%	29%	28%	17%
Hispanic	50%	43%	39%	28%	16%
White men	54%	45%	30%	28%	18%
White women	57%	48%	27%	28%	15%
Latino	50%	38%	34%	30%	14%
Latina	51%	48%	42%	26%	18%
<HS/HS grad	57%	51%	33%	32%	17%
Some college	60%	50%	36%	30%	20%
4-yr degree or higher	52%	44%	26%	23%	14%
HH income: \$25K or less	56%	45%	35%	36%	20%
\$25-\$50K	54%	49%	34%	32%	19%
\$50K-\$75K	65%	46%	30%	33%	17%
\$75K	48%	43%	22%	18%	10%
Married	56%	47%	31%	29%	15%
Single	53%	49%	25%	28%	20%
Liberal	53%	40%	27%	22%	20%
Moderate	50%	48%	28%	23%	15%
Conservative	62%	53%	37%	37%	16%
Democrat	55%	44%	28%	26%	21%
Independent	52%	46%	27%	23%	14%
Republican	59%	52%	34%	35%	14%
Church attendance:	63%	49%	33%	36%	17%
Weekly+					
Monthly/yearly	47%	45%	29%	18%	14%
Never	48%	46%	26%	21%	25%
Support legal abortion	51%	45%	29%	21%	16%
Abortion illegal	63%	49%	33%	39%	19%

## Appendix: Crosstab Tables

### Abortion Legality

Q13. Do you agree or disagree that it should be legal for a woman to have an abortion? (WAIT FOR RESPONSE) Is that strongly or somewhat?

	<b>Net agree</b>	<b>Net disagree</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>	<b>Somewhat agree</b>	<b>Somewhat disagree</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>60%</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>42%</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>21</b>
Obama	74%	21	57%	17	10	12
Romney	46%	47	28%	18	17	31
Undecided	53%	34	38%	16	13	21
Men	57%	36	40%	17	15	21
Women	62%	32	44%	18	11	20
18-29	63%	32	45%	18	11	21
30-39	59%	38	39%	20	11	27
40-49	60%	33	44%	16	15	18
50-64	63%	32	47%	16	13	19
65+	56%	34	35%	22	11	22
White	59%	34	41%	18	13	21
Hispanic	63%	33	47%	16	12	20
White men	55%	38	39%	16	16	23
White women	63%	31	43%	20	12	19
Latino	64%	33	45%	19	14	19
Latina	62%	33	48%	14	11	22
<HS/HS grad	55%	39	36%	19	13	26
Some college	59%	35	37%	22	13	22
4-yr degree or higher	63%	31	50%	14	13	18
HH income: \$25K or less	64%	30	42%	22	9	21
\$25-\$50K	64%	33	40%	24	12	21
\$50K-\$75K	56%	40	38%	18	14	25
\$75K	64%	31	50%	14	12	19
Married	59%	36	42%	17	13	23
Single	64%	29	42%	22	14	16
Liberal	80%	17	64%	16	9	9
Moderate	67%	26	45%	22	10	15
Conservative	41%	52	26%	15	18	34
Democrat	74%	22	55%	19	10	12
Independent	63%	30	44%	19	12	18
Republican	43%	52	28%	15	18	34
Church attendance:	49%	44	32%	17	14	30
Weekly+						
Monthly/yearly	70%	26	50%	20	14	12
Never	84%	12	70%	15	2	10

## Appendix: Crosstab Tables

### Withhold Communion from Abortion Supporters

Q14. Some bishops have said they would withhold communion from Catholics who support legal abortion. Do you approve or disapprove of this? Is that STRONGLY or SOMEWHAT?

	Net approve	Net disapprove	Strongly approve	Somewhat approve	Somewhat disapprove	Strongly disapprove
<b>Total</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>55</b>
Obama	13%	81	7%	6	16	65
Romney	30%	59	20%	10	13	46
Undecided	19%	69	10%	9	15	54
Men	24%	66	16%	8	14	51
Women	18%	73	10%	8	15	59
18-29	24%	75	15%	9	14	61
30-39	24%	73	9%	15	15	58
40-49	19%	69	11%	8	19	50
50-64	20%	72	13%	7	11	62
65+	19%	69	15%	4	15	55
White	22%	68	14%	8	14	54
Hispanic	18%	77	11%	7	13	64
White men	26%	65	18%	8	15	50
White women	20%	71	11%	9	13	57
Latino	22%	72	13%	9	13	59
Latina	15%	81	10%	5	14	67
<HS/HS grad	22%	69	13%	9	17	52
Some college	24%	69	15%	9	15	54
4-yr degree or higher	19%	72	12%	7	13	59
HH income: \$25K or less	18%	75	9%	8	19	57
\$25-\$50K	21%	73	12%	9	16	56
\$50K-\$75K	26%	68	16%	10	14	54
\$75K	19%	72	14%	5	12	61
Married	22%	69	14%	8	15	55
Single	18%	75	10%	8	13	62
Liberal	10%	81	5%	4	16	65
Moderate	19%	76	10%	9	15	60
Conservative	31%	58	22%	9	14	44
Democrat	16%	79	10%	6	16	63
Independent	18%	73	9%	9	14	59
Republican	29%	60	21%	9	14	46
Church attendance:	27%	65	18%	9	16	49
Weekly+						
Monthly/yearly	15%	77	8%	7	15	62
Never	13%	75	9%	4	9	66
Support legal abortion	11%	81	6%	5	13	69
Abortion illegal	39%	53	26%	12	19	34