



Opinion Research
Strategic Communication

The Views of Catholic Millennials on the Catholic Church and Social Issues

June 2015

Introduction

Catholics for Choice asked Belden Russonello Strategists to conduct research into the attitudes of young adult Catholics on major social and church-related issues. Young adults between the ages of 18 and 34 are known as the Millennial Generation because most of them were forming their views of the world around the turn of the millennium, in 2000. Much has been written about this generation because it offers clues about where public opinion is headed in the years to come.

BRS conducted a nation-wide survey from March 25–April 7, 2015 for Catholics for Choice. The survey consists of 819 Catholics born between 1981 and 1997, using a GfK Knowledge Panel sample, which is probability-based and web-enabled. The margin of sampling error for a probability sample of this size is plus or minus 3.5 percentage points. BRS followed the survey with two focus groups among Catholic Millennials in Chicago on May 5, 2015—one group with 18 to 25 year olds, and one with 26 to 34 year olds. The group discussions helped to explain and illustrate many of the findings in the survey.

The following report covers the survey and focus group results of young Catholics' opinions on a wide range of topics, including women's reproductive rights, rights of gays and lesbians, climate change, how Catholic hospitals deal with health care, immigration and the way Millennials relate to the Catholic bishops and the pope. We have included a brief overview, an analysis of the findings and three appendices: 1. cross tab tables; 2. a questionnaire with response totals; 3. detailed methodology; and 4. the verbatim responses of focus group participants.

Overview

If the Millennial generation of Catholics in the United States is any indication of where the Catholic flock is headed, the church's traditionalists should brace themselves, according to our 2015 BRS survey of American Catholics between the ages of 18 and 34. The survey brings to light a number of areas where the younger generation of American Catholics is at odds with the conservative church doctrine espoused by the Catholic hierarchy.

Millennial Catholics are in the mainstream of American public opinion on women's reproductive health and rights.

- This includes abortion, where opinions of Catholic Millennials track very closely to those of the entire US population.
- They say health insurance should include birth control—and it should be made available no matter where they work.

The young Catholics in the study also have strong beliefs about equality and individual freedom.

- They support making it legal for doctors to assist terminally ill patients end their lives.
- They endorse the right to marry for gays and lesbians.
- They favor greater equality in the workplace and they oppose institutions or individuals using religion as a reason to deny services or jobs to people.

Millennial Catholics have very positive views of Pope Francis, although in the focus groups, we found low levels of familiarity with the new pope among the younger participants.

Their enthusiasm for the pope runs contrary to their views on church policies that we tested.

- They believe church-sponsored programs should provide condoms to fight HIV & AIDS.
- They say women should have an equal role with men in the church.
- They reject the idea that they, as voters or elected officials, should be bound to vote as the bishops recommend.
- In concert with their progressive views, the Millennial Catholics disapprove of the bishops withholding Communion for divorced parishioners or those who support abortion rights and same-sex marriage.

The survey also covered several other issues briefly.

- Catholic Millennials are widely supportive of government providing basic food, shelter and medical care for people who cannot afford them.
- On the other hand, Millennials are split on the causes of poverty—be it a lack of willingness to work or circumstance beyond one's control.

- When it comes to helping those in other countries, the Catholic Millennials take a cautious approach. Most say the US should take a role in helping people in developing countries to overcome poverty, but only about one in 10 want the US to play a major role.
- A majority want the US to do more to prevent climate change.

The Millennial Catholics are generally in sync with one another, but there are some differences of note.

While a majority of both genders agree on all the issues, women are more likely than men to:

- approve of the government taking responsibility to care for the poor and of requiring health insurance to include birth control;
- oppose allowing Catholic hospitals to refuse to perform medical services on religious grounds; and
- support making same-sex marriage legal across the country.

The youngest Millennials—those under age 30—are particularly opposed to the bishops withholding Communion from Catholics who are divorced and remarried, as well as from Catholics who support same-sex marriage.

Greater numbers of Latino Catholic Millennials than whites want the United States to take an active role in the world. Specifically, Latinos are more likely to:

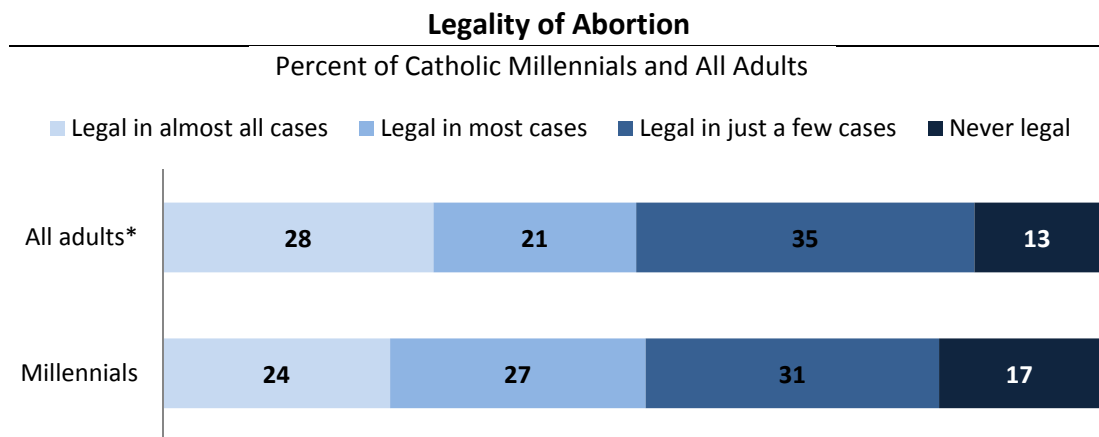
- believe we need to be doing more to combat climate change;
- help less-developed countries overcome poverty; and
- hold more restrictive views on abortion.

Analysis of the findings

Women’s reproductive rights

Millennial Catholics are in the mainstream of American public opinion on women’s reproductive health and rights. This includes the highly divisive topic of abortion, where opinions of Catholic Millennials track very closely to those of the entire US population.

- Among Millennial Catholics, 24% believe abortion should be legal in almost all cases and 27% say legal in most cases; three in 10 support legal abortion in just a few cases (31%); and under two in 10 say abortion should never be legal (17%).
- When BRS asked the same abortion question in a national survey of all adults—Catholics and non-Catholics—in 2012, we found the general public held about the same attitudes as Catholic Millennials. Among the general public, legal abortion is supported in all cases by 28%; in most cases by 21%; in just a few cases by 35%; and never by 13%.



Q17. Do you think abortion should be: Legal in almost all cases, legal in most cases, legal in just a few cases or never legal?

* All adults data are from 2012 Belden Russonello Strategist. National, all adult probability sample of N=1,003.

The Millennials in our focus groups explained their attitudes on abortion:

“ There are so many different situations where someone would want to get an abortion—and just having a blanket statement of, “You shouldn’t have an abortion,” it’s kind of just like throwing a lot of people under the bus. —Sean, 22-year-old male

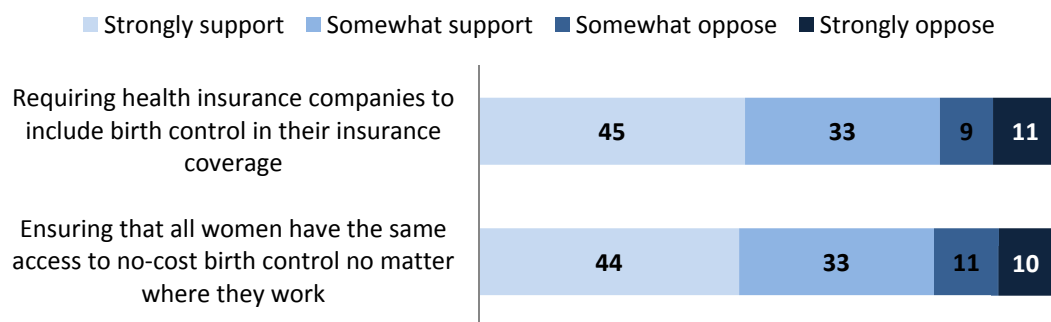
Almost the majority of all the clergy and everyone are going to be male, so the decision of what a woman should do with her body.... It's not like there are any Catholic women priests that could [weigh] in in the discussion so it seems to be not really.... I mean, you can have an opinion on it, but it's not really a religious issue, it is a gender issue. I think that they really shouldn't have an opinion if they don't have any personal stake in the decision. It *doesn't* affect any member of the church clergy in any way, I think. —Dan, 28-year-old male ”

When queried about contraception, we found the right of women to decide for themselves about reproductive health is a clear position among these Millennials.

- 78% want to require health insurance companies to include birth control in their insurance coverage.
- 77% of Millennial Catholics agree that all women should have the same access to no-cost birth control no matter where they work.

Support for Access to Birth Control

Percent of Catholic Millennials



Please indicate whether you would support or oppose each of the following: Q11. Requiring health insurance companies to include birth control in their insurance coverage; Q7. Ensuring that all women have the same access to no-cost birth control no matter where they work.

In the focus groups, the participants talked about the efforts to restrict access to birth control, including their disagreement with the Supreme Court decision in *Burwell v. Hobby Lobby*.¹ The younger focus group members (18-25) were not familiar with the Hobby Lobby decision; several of the older participants (26-34) did know some of the basic facts about the case.

“ For you to just limit me saying I can't have sex, and if I have sex I can't use a condom, or I can't get on birth control, you can't tell me because I'm not ready for children and I don't want an STD, so I mean, the whole outlook is... I never agreed with it. I could never agree with it, because it's basically not your choice. —Adarra, 21-year-old female

¹ *Burwell v. Hobby Lobby Stores, Inc.* 573 US ____ (2014)

I would never limit somebody's access to [birth control]. If they're working for your company and they're helping your company succeed and progress, you should be providing them any and all medical expenses that they need—or assistance in that. I feel like it shouldn't be your decision to say, "You can't have this," because some people need access to it. And birth control, yes, it is good for preventing pregnancy, but it has been proven to help other things for women as well. —*21-year-old male*

If I was working for someone, and then they told me, "Oh, your employer isn't covering your birth control," I would quit. But seriously, I rather... I would quit. For me it is like, why can't I take this medicine? Why do I have to pay full price for this medicine? You can't get a discount because you are working. You can't get Medicaid; you get health insurance. So, if your health insurance is not covering it, it means that you have to pay like... If you don't have insurance, I don't know if you have seen the prices of medication, but it is ridiculous. So I wouldn't even work for them. I would quit. —*Alexandra, 29-year-old female*

Using Hobby Lobby as an example: it's just a store; a craft store. I don't understand how you run a craft store with Catholic values. This is America, and a hundred percent of your employees won't be Catholic. So I guess.... I don't know. I guess this could be a discrimination twist as a way for you to try to kick out people who you don't think fit into that Catholic mold. I think that's kind of sick. —*Emily, 30-year-old female*

”

Strong support for individual freedom, equality and the rights of gays and lesbians

Millennial Catholics express strong beliefs in equality and individual freedom. They support making it legal for doctors to assist in suicide for the terminally ill, as well as the right to marry for gays and lesbians. They favor greater equality in the workplace, and they oppose institutions or individuals using religion as a reason to deny services or jobs to people.

- 61% support making it legal for doctors to assist terminally-ill people in ending their own life. By comparison, in 2013 a Pew Research survey reported 47% of the American public supported “doctor-assisted suicide,” with 49% opposed.²

“ [Doctors] are also, like I said before, playing the hands of God when they’re saving a life, so why can they not assist in taking a life that is by wish from the person? It’s not like they’re personally taking the life—it’s by the wish of the person. I’ve been learning and being exposed to it more. Not because it’s something I would ever believe in, not because it’s something I would ever want. But it is somebody’s choice if they feel that that is the best option, because they’re gonna sit there and suffer and have their family watch them suffer, and they’re basically gonna turn into nothing. To restrict somebody from that, if it’s possible and it could end their life in a more peaceful way, so be it.
—21-year-old male

I think in order to answer that question, you need to have somebody close to you suffer through something like that, and I think it would change your mind. I witnessed it and.... if that option was available, and say, that’s what my grandmother or my cousin chose to do, I would support it 100% instead of watching them suffer the way that they did and watching them deteriorate. I think once you moved through that, I think your viewpoint would possibly change. —Joe, 31-year-old male ”

- Over two-thirds (69%) of Millennial Catholics support making it legal in all states for same-sex couples to marry. The most recent Pew Research poll (2014) of all adults nationwide reports 52% support allowing gays and lesbians to marry legally, with 40% opposed.³

“ People haven’t realized the majority of America has started supporting [same-sex marriage]; I think it’s time that the rest of it also does the same. It’s not fair to limit others based off of your personal beliefs. —21-year-old male ”

- 79% of Catholic Millennials oppose allowing businesses to refuse to serve gay men and lesbians because of the religious views of the business owners.

² Pew Research Center, November 2013, “Views on End-of-Life Medical Treatments.” National, all adult probability sample of N=4,006.

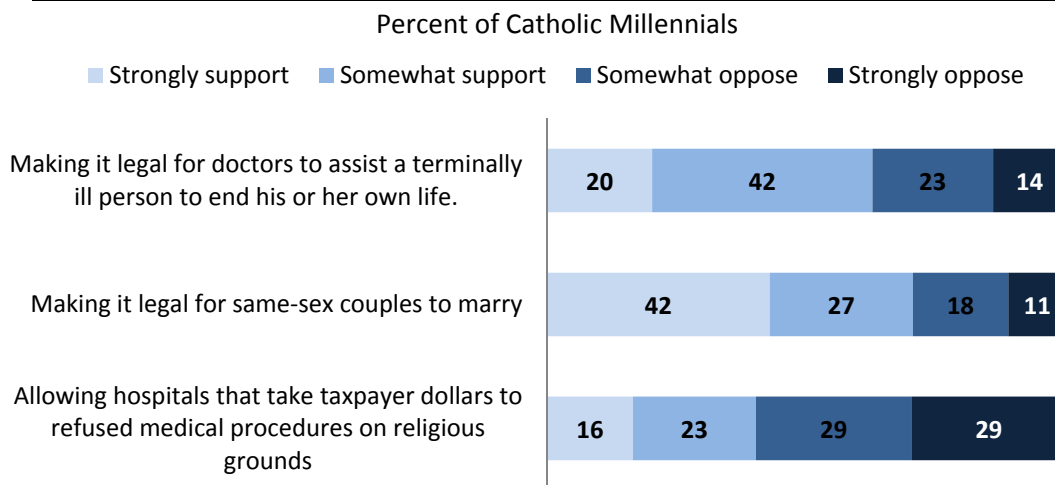
³ Pew Research Center, June 2015, “Changing Attitudes on Gay Marriage.” National, all adult probability sample of N=2,002.

Our focus group participants explained their views in terms of discrimination and being contrary to a compassionate response:

“ I think it is discrimination. What is next? Based off your race? Because that seems like the way we are going. —Joe, 31-year-old male

[Catholicism is] supposed to be a religion of compassion and of acceptance. But they’re not putting themselves in another person’s shoes, in that scenario. How would you feel if you were denied medical assistance based on your gender or your sexuality? I think it just leads to the same thing—the same backwards, hateful way of thinking as racism or sexism or something like that. —Sean, 22-year-old male ”

Views on Same-sex Marriage, Assisted Death and Hospital Funding



Please indicate whether you would support or oppose each of the following: Q6. Making it legal for doctors to assist a terminally ill person to end his or her own life; Q4. Making it legal in all states for same-sex couples to marry; Q5. Allowing Catholic hospitals or clinics that take taxpayer dollars to refuse to provide certain medical procedures or medications that the hospital opposes on religious grounds.

The Millennials’ views on fairness in employment extend to both a belief in equality between the sexes and disapproval of using religion to discriminate. Nine in 10 (91%) support requiring employers to pay men and women at the same rate for the same job.

Big majorities of Catholic Millennials also believe it should be illegal for Catholic institutions, such as churches, schools, hospitals or social service agencies, to fire or refuse to hire a person who is:

- Openly gay or lesbian (71% oppose);
- Supports abortion rights (75%);
- Uses birth control (79%);
- Undergoes artificial insemination in order to have a baby (80%); or
- Is in a couple, living together and unmarried (78%).

Disapproval of Hiring and Firing

Percent of Catholic Millennials



Please indicate if you think Catholic institutions (churches, schools, agencies, etc.) should be allowed to fire or refuse to hire a person because he or she: Q28. Is openly gay or lesbian; Q29. Undergoes artificial insemination (IVF); Q30. Supports abortion rights; Q31. Uses birth control; Q32. Is in a couple, living together.

“ I think that’s like a barrier—personal life and work, you can’t tell me what to do with my personal life, or at my home. I go to work but once I’m at home that’s my personal life.
—Rosa, 25-year-old female

Your race, your position, your social class, your personality does not affect your professional skillset. You cannot fire somebody for what they are. They are still capable of doing the job just as equal as anybody else. —21-year-old male

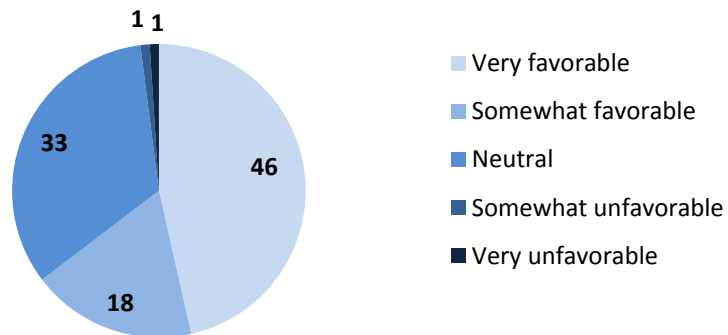
You’re prying into another’s personal life that you honestly have no control over. We all can believe in one religion, but that doesn’t mean necessarily you can believe in their views, or how they really see something. Just because I call myself Catholic does not mean that I go along with every view a Catholic goes along with. That just means that my religion just so happens to be Catholic. —Adarra, 21-year-old female ”

Connecting with the pope, but not bishops or church policies

Pope Francis enjoys a healthy, favorable image among the Catholic Millennials. Over six in 10 (64%) have a positive opinion of the pope, with 46% saying *very favorable* and 18% saying *somewhat favorable*. Only 2% hold an unfavorable view of Francis and 33% are neutral.

Opinion of Pope Francis

Percent of Catholic Millennials



Q19. Is your opinion of Pope Francis: Very favorable, somewhat favorable, neutral, somewhat unfavorable or very unfavorable?

A few of the focus group participants told us of specific positive things they have learned about Pope Francis.

“ I heard a story that he didn’t want to live at the Vatican; he wanted to be in a small apartment. He didn’t need all that, you know, opulence, so I thought that was kind of cool.
—Joe, 31-year-old male

I also saw a video of him, which was kind of humbling. He was washing the feet of prisoners. He went to a prison cell, like in prison, and he was just purifying them or something. So I thought that was pretty cool how he, you know.... He was out there, in a prison, washing the feet of prisoners. You know, he is like a humbling people kind of guy. —19-year-old male ”

However, the positive feelings the Catholic Millennials have toward the pope do not extend to his church’s orthodoxy. The widespread disconnect between the beliefs of Catholic Millennials and the traditional positions of the Catholic church point to a formidable challenge for the Catholic leadership as it attempts to define the church in the mid-21st century.

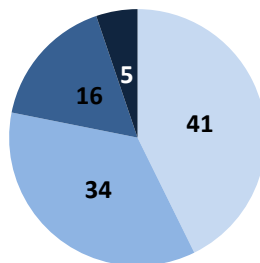
- 74% believe that Catholic church-sponsored programs should be providing condoms to fight the spread of HIV & AIDS—a practice the church has rejected worldwide.

- 75% of Catholic Millennials want women to serve an equal role as men in the Catholic church—a goal that remains elusive.

Support for Women in Leadership Positions and Condom Distribution

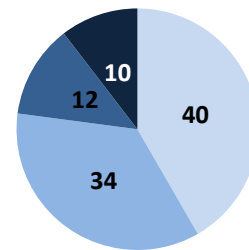
Percent of Catholic Millennials

Women serving an equal role as men in the Catholic church



■ Strongly support
■ Somewhat support
■ Somewhat oppose
■ Strongly oppose

Providing condoms under Catholic church sponsored programs to fight HIV & AIDS



■ Strongly support
■ Somewhat support
■ Somewhat oppose
■ Strongly oppose

Please indicate whether you would support or oppose each of the following: Q21. Women serving an equal role as men in the Catholic church; Q22. Providing condoms under Catholic church-sponsored programs to fight HIV & AIDS.

The women in our focus groups were enthusiastic about giving women an equal role in the church.

“ If it is all male, how is the church going to decide what happens to a woman? That is one of the big issues that I think is most important. Having a representative view of all things and having them not discriminating against half of the population, so that just seems like.... the church is limiting itself by just having exclusively males. —Angie, 27-year-old female

As someone who went to Catholic school and everything like that, we always had to go to confession, and it would always be a male. And it always seemed like he wanted.... It never seemed appealing to go and talk to somebody like.... So that seems like a very interesting point to bring up. Now I wonder if guys thought it was automatically comfortable or didn't care. —Laura, 34-year-old female

I think that they should have the same opportunity. But I think it'll take a really long time for it to be accepted. —21-year-old female ”

The Catholic Millennials object to a political role for the bishops:

- Over three-quarters do not feel they must follow the recommendations of the bishops when deciding for whom to vote (80%).
- A large proportion (77%) does not believe that politicians who are Catholic have an obligation to vote on issues the way that the bishops recommend.
- These Millennials broadly disapprove of Catholic bishops withholding Communion from Catholics who are divorced and remarried (78%), who support legal abortion (71%) or who support same-sex marriage (74%).

“ I am not a Catholic voter; I am a voter who is Catholic. —*Emily, 30-year-old female*

I don't think any Catholic person should be obligated to practice Catholicism one way. They should be like. If you wanted to disagree with the bishop on something political you could... you should have that right. —*Sean, 22-year-old male*

They are representing a whole group of people that aren't... their communities are not all Catholics so they shouldn't be representing that religion for a whole community of other religions. —*Greg, 33-year-old male*

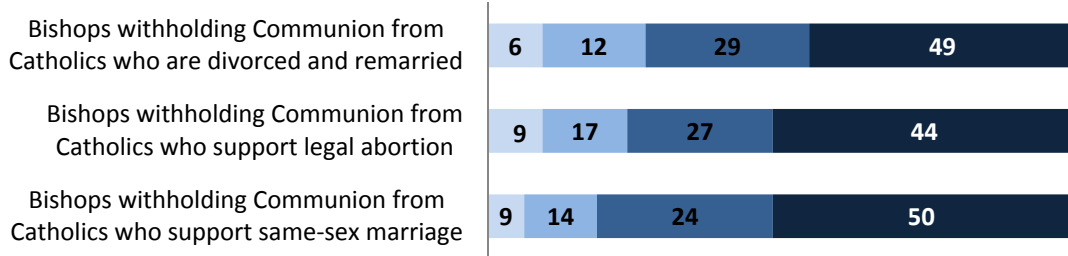
If I voted for somebody, whether it was a councilman or the president, I'm voting *for them* to make the decisions that need to be made, not for them to make their decisions based on somebody else. So they shouldn't be making decisions based of bishops' beliefs, they should be making them themselves because that is why I'm supporting them. —*21-year-old male*

They would have angry constituents. —*Angie, 27-year-old female* ”

Disapproval of Bishops on Divorce, Abortion and Same-sex Marriage

Percent of Catholic Millennials

Strongly support Somewhat support Somewhat oppose Strongly oppose



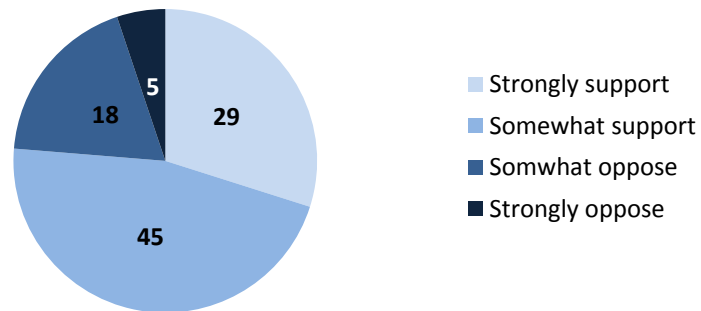
Please indicate if you support or oppose each of the following: Q23. Bishops withholding Communion from Catholics who are divorced or remarried; Q24. Bishops withholding Communion from Catholics who support legal abortion; Q25. Bishops withholding Communion from Catholics who support same-sex marriage.

A desire for an active government at home and limited American leadership internationally

Catholic Millennials take a broad view of government responsibility to help the poor, as three-quarters of the Millennials want the government to provide basic food, shelter and medical care for people who cannot afford them. On the other hand, Millennials are split on the causes of poverty. One half believes that people are likely to be poor because they are not willing to work hard, while the other half believes people are poor because of circumstances beyond their control.

Support for Government taking Responsibility for the Poor

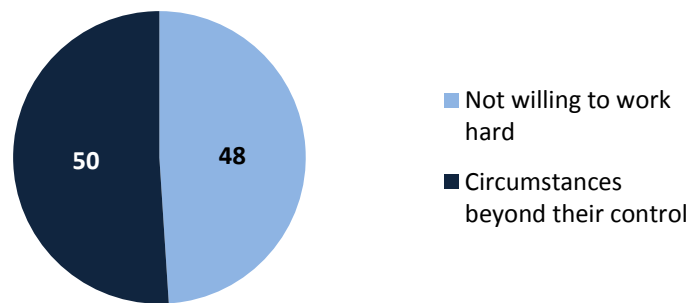
Percent of Catholic Millennials



Please indicate whether you would support or oppose each of the following: Q12. The government taking responsibility to provide basic food, shelter and medical care for those people who cannot afford them.

Reasons People are Poor in the US

Percent of Catholic Millennials



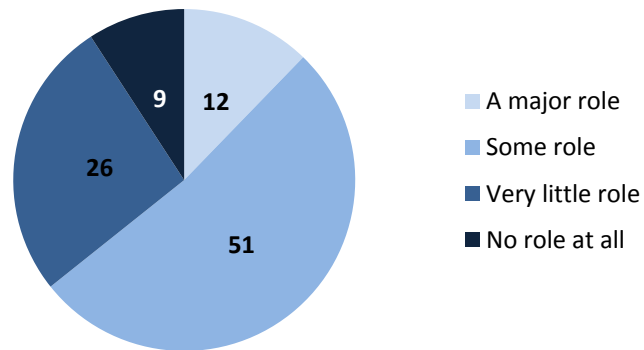
Q16. Do you believe that if people are poor in the US, it is more likely because they are not willing to work hard or more because of circumstances beyond their control?

When it comes to helping those in other countries, the Catholic Millennials take a cautious approach. A full 63% say the US should take a role in helping people in developing countries overcome poverty, but only 12% wanting the US to play a major role.

Their sense of responsibility extends to the issue of climate change. A majority of 59% believe the U.S. should be doing more to prevent global climate change.

What Role Should the US Play in Helping Developing Countries?

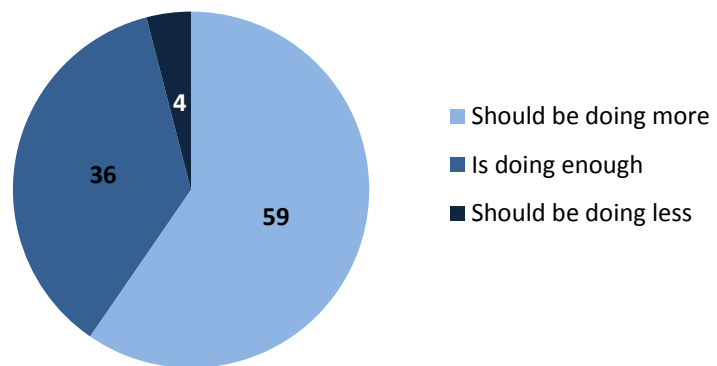
Percent of Catholic Millennials



Q14. What role do you believe the United States should play to help people in developing countries overcome poverty?

Views on US Role in Preventing Climate Change

Percent of Catholic Millennials



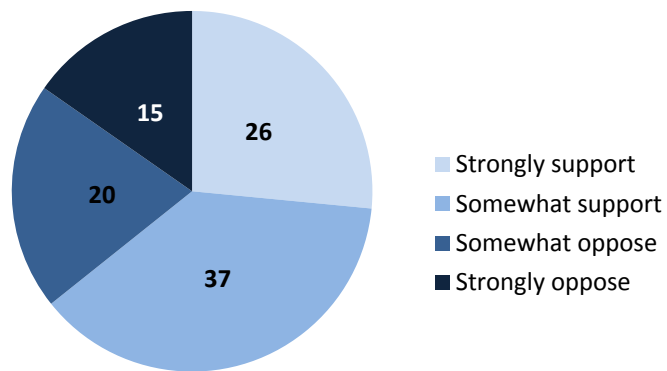
Q13. Do you believe the United States should be doing more, is doing enough, or should be doing less to prevent global climate change?

Torn on immigration

Overall, the Millennials are pro-immigrant, but there are severe differences in the perception of immigration between Latinos and whites. Overall, six in 10 want the US to provide a way for immigrants who are living here illegally to become citizens. Also nearly six in 10 believe that immigrants to the US generally end up being more of a benefit to our society, while four in 10 call them more of a burden. However, when we look separately at whites and Latinos, we find a deep divide: 81% of Latinos support a path to citizenship for immigrants who are in the US illegally, while among whites only 46% support and 53% oppose. Furthermore, whites are twice as likely to see immigrants as more of a burden (62%) than a benefit (37%); Latinos are four times as likely to see immigrants as more of a benefit (78%) than a burden (19%). (See bar graph on pages 20 and 21).

Support for Immigrants Living in the US Illegally Becoming Citizens

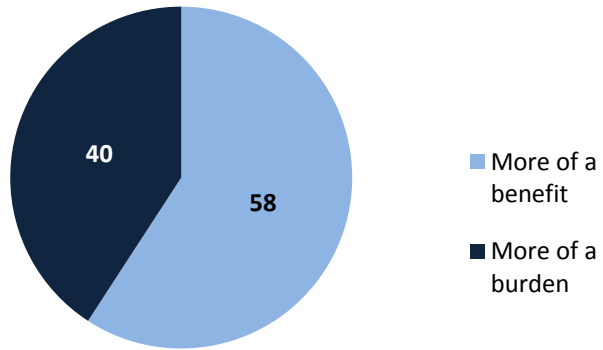
Percent of Catholic Millennials



Please indicate whether you would support or oppose each of the following: Q9. Providing a way for immigrants who are living here illegally to become citizens.

Immigrants More of a Benefit or a Burden

Percent of Catholic Millennials

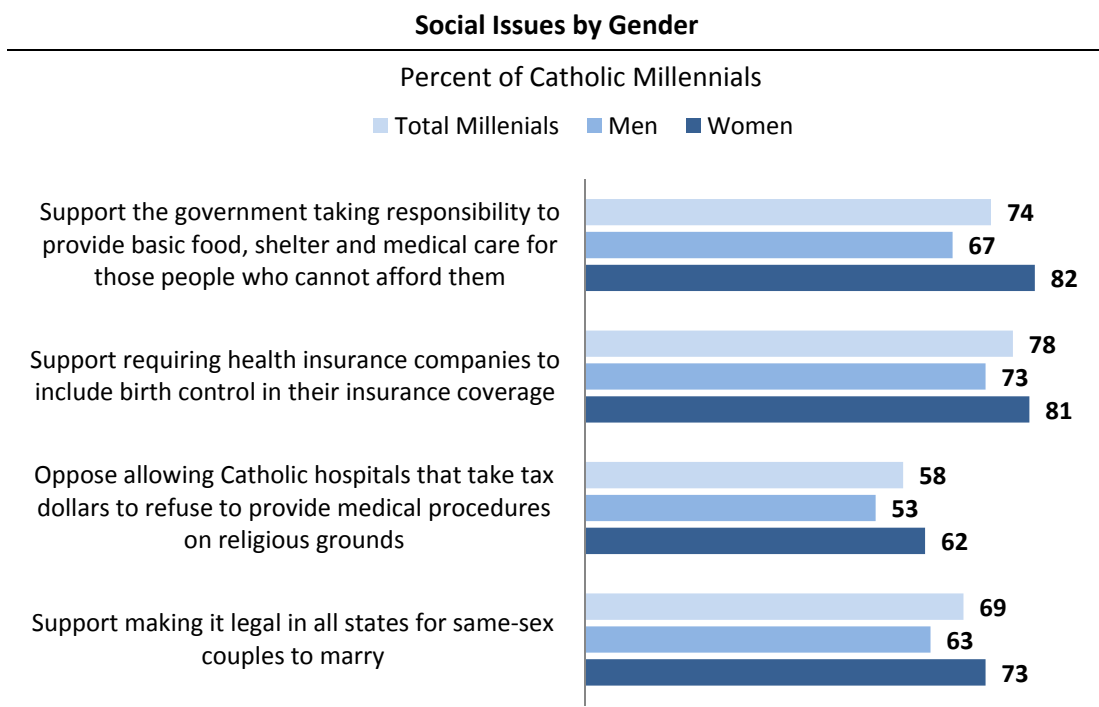


Q15. Do you believe that immigrants in the US generally end up being more of a benefit or a burden on our society?

Differences of opinions by gender, age and ethnicity

Catholic Millennials are a moderately cohesive group when it comes to their views on church-related issues, but they are not monolithic. The survey revealed several areas of divergence based on gender, age and ethnicity that are worth noting.

For example, while a majority of both genders agree on all the issues covered in the survey, Millennial women are more likely than men to approve of the government taking responsibility to care for the poor and of requiring health insurance to include birth control. In the same vein, women are also more likely to oppose allowing Catholic hospitals to refuse to perform medical services on religious grounds. Also, more women than men support making same-sex marriage legal across the country.

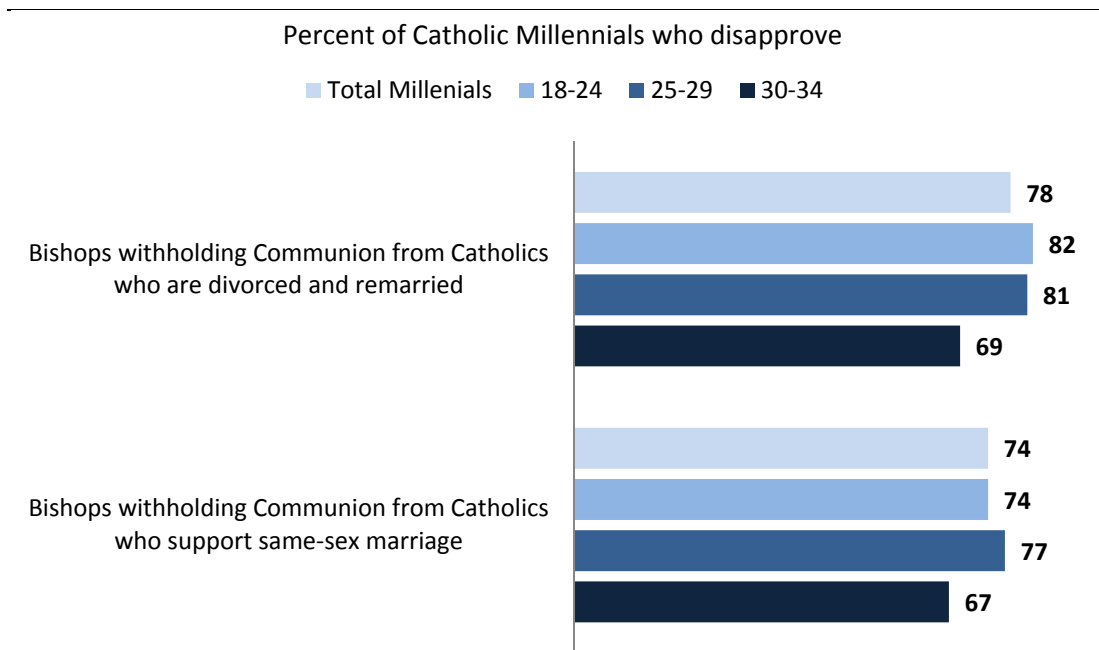


Please indicate whether you would support or oppose each of the following: Q12. The government taking responsibility to provide basic food, shelter and medical care for those people who cannot afford them; Q11. Requiring health insurance companies to include birth control in their insurance coverage; Q5. Allowing Catholic hospitals or clinics that take taxpayer dollars to refuse to provide certain medical procedures or medications that the hospital opposes on religious grounds; Q4. Making it legal in all states for same-sex couples to marry.

Age has a bearing on Millennials’ attitudes toward Catholic bishops. The youngest Millennials—those under age 30—are particularly opposed to the bishops withholding Communion from

Catholics who are divorced and remarried, as well as from Catholics who support same-sex marriage.

Disapproval of Bishops’ Stance on Divorce and Same-sex Marriage by Age

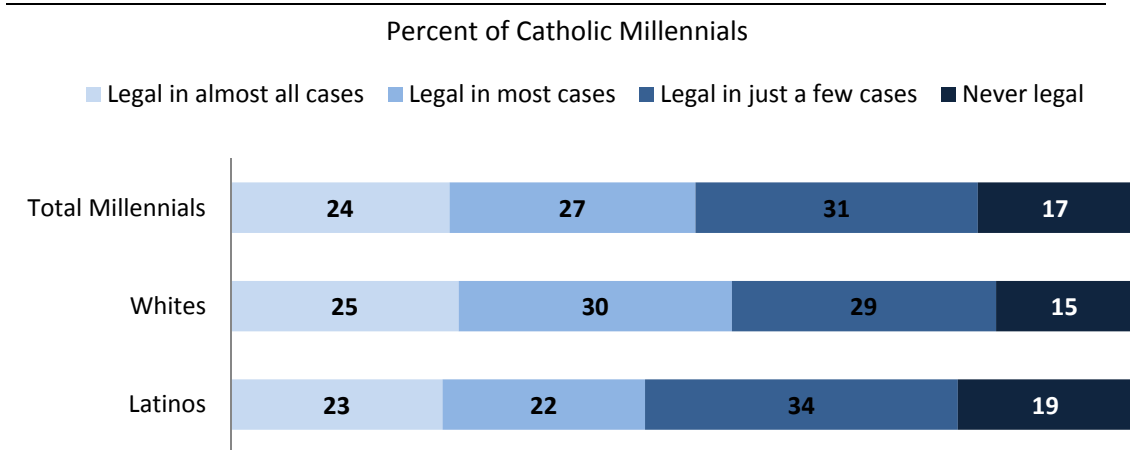


Please indicate whether you would support or oppose each of the following: Q23. Bishops withholding Communion from Catholics who are divorced or remarried; Q25. Bishops withholding Communion from Catholics who support same-sex marriage.

Ethnicity also reveals some differences, with greater numbers of Latino Catholic Millennials than whites who want the United States to take an active role in the world. Specifically, Latinos are more likely to believe we need to be doing more to combat climate change and to help less developed countries overcome poverty.

Like whites, Latino Catholics want to keep abortion legal, but are likely to be somewhat more restrictive. A plurality of whites wants abortion to be legal in most cases (30%), while a plurality of Latinos says abortion should be legal in just a few cases (34%). Roughly equivalent proportions of whites and Latinos say abortion should be legal in almost all cases (25% whites, 23% Latinos) or never legal (15% whites, 19% Latinos).

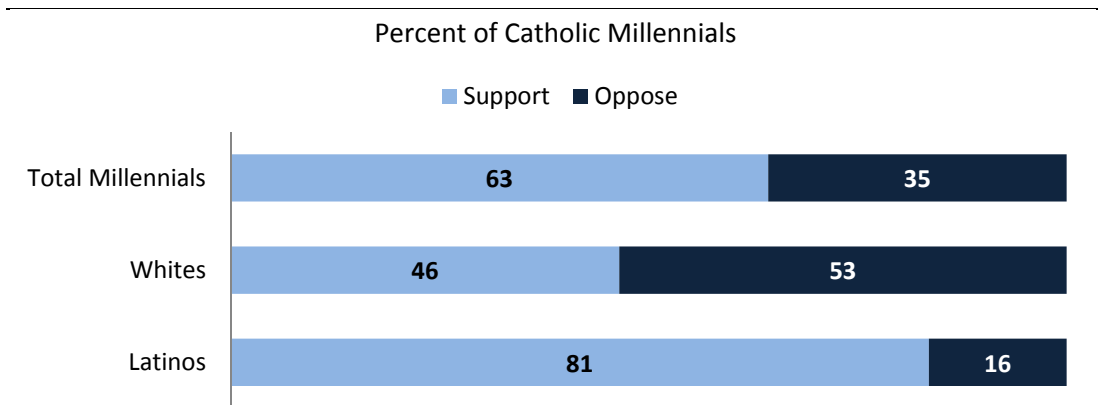
Legality of Abortion by Race/Ethnicity



Q17. Do you think abortion should be: Legal in almost all cases, legal in most cases, legal in just a few cases or never legal?

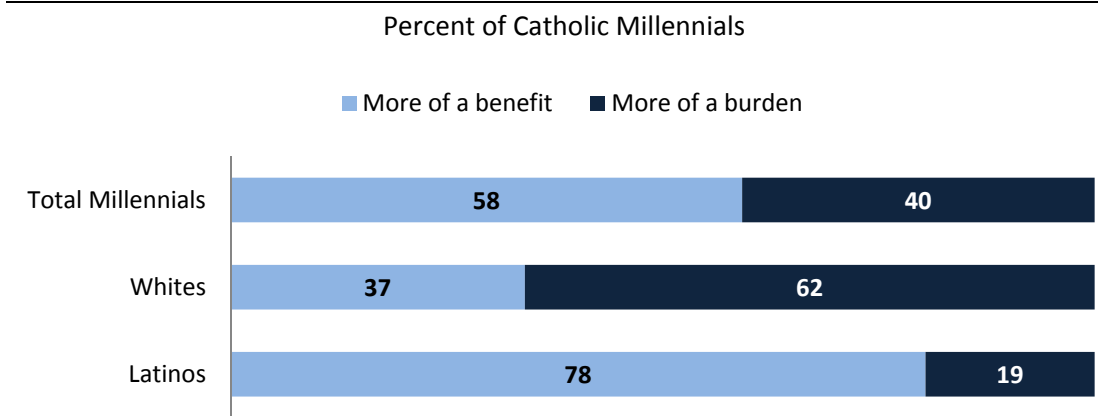
The widest divisions in the survey relate to the issue of immigration, with Latinos much more likely than non-Latino whites to take a pro-immigrant position. As noted above, 81% of Latinos support a path to citizenship for immigrants who are in the US illegally, while among whites only 46% support and 53% oppose. Whites are twice as likely to see immigrants as more of a burden (62%) than a benefit (37%); Latinos are four times as likely to see immigrants as more of a benefit (78%) than a burden (19%).

Support for Immigrants Living in the US Illegally Becoming Citizens by Race/Ethnicity



Please indicate whether you would support or oppose each of the following: Q9. Providing a way for immigrants who are living here illegally to become citizens.

Immigrants More of a Benefit or a Burden by Race/Ethnicity



Q15. Do you believe that immigrants in the US generally end up being more of a benefit or a burden on our society?