



Opinion Research
Strategic Communication

American Attitudes on Religious Exemptions: In Theory and Practice

A national opinion survey for the American Civil Liberties Union and Catholics for Choice

Conducted September 12 to 26, 2012; Released October 25, 2012

Overview

This memo highlights the results from a national public opinion survey conducted by Belden Russonello Strategists for the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and Catholics for Choice. Participants were asked about specific examples of denying reproductive health services for religious reasons, as well as the concept of religious exemptions in general.

- Despite vocal activism from a number of religious leaders in favor of exemptions that allow organizations and individuals to refuse reproductive health services on religious grounds, Americans reject the concept of religious exemptions. This attitude crosses religious and party lines.
- Americans also find unacceptable specific examples of reproductive health services denied for religious reasons, such as universities withholding contraception coverage or Catholic hospitals refusing to perform medically necessary abortions.
- Americans—including Catholics—believe that neither Catholic voters nor Catholic politicians have an obligation to vote according to the bishops' recommendations.

Belden Russonello Strategists LLC conducted a nationally representative survey of 1,003 adults via landline and cell phone between September 12 and 26, 2012. The margin of sampling error for the survey is plus or minus 3.1 percentage points at the 95 percent level of confidence and is larger for subgroups within the survey.

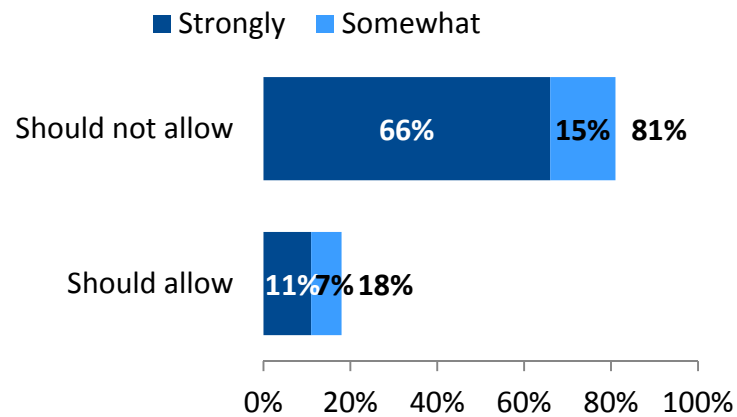
Findings

1. Americans reject the concept of denying services for religious reasons

Asked about the general concept of religious exemptions, the great majority of Americans (81 percent) says "the law should not allow companies or other institutions to use religious beliefs to decide whether to offer a service to some people and not others." In addition, the study

presented a number of specific examples of religious exemptions, each of which a majority says should not be allowed.

Use Religious Beliefs to Decide to Offer Services to Some and Not Others



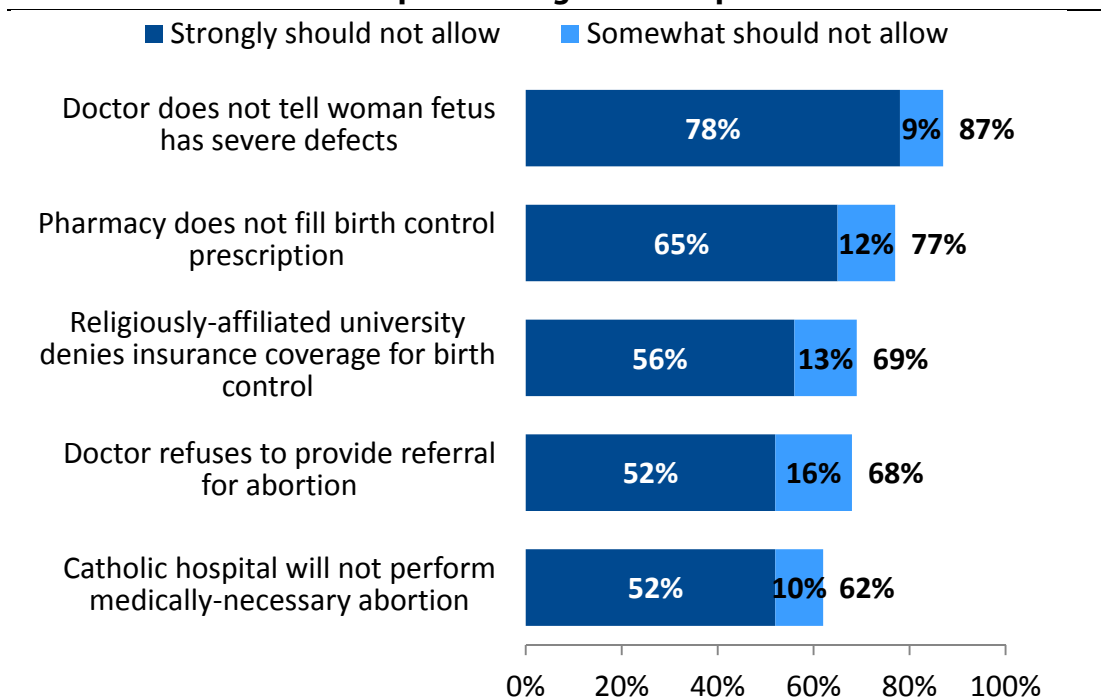
Q. In your view, should the law allow companies or other institutions to use religious beliefs to decide whether to offer a service to some people and not others? WAIT FOR RESPONSE: Do you feel that way strongly or somewhat?

2. Majorities object to refusing to provide birth control on religious grounds.

Despite loud and persistent opposition from some religious leaders to the component of health care reform that requires employers to include contraception in their health insurance coverage, a large majority of Americans objects to religiously-affiliated universities refusing to provide insurance coverage for contraception. Even more Americans find unacceptable the idea of pharmacies refusing to fill birth control prescriptions.

- “A pharmacy does not fill a prescription for birth control because it goes against the owners’ religious beliefs” (77 percent say should not be allowed); and
- “A religiously-affiliated university denies its employees and students insurance coverage for birth control on the ground that birth control is a sin” (69 percent). An equal number of Catholics objects (68 percent), although much of the opposition to this health care provision came from Catholic leaders.

Examples of Religious Exemptions



Please tell me in your view if each of the following situations ought to be allowed or not. WAIT FOR RESPONSE. Do you feel that way strongly or somewhat? Q. A doctor does not tell a woman that her fetus has a severe defect because the doctor is afraid the woman might then consider having an abortion; Q. A pharmacy does not fill a prescription for birth control because it goes against the owners' religious beliefs; Q. A religiously-affiliated university denies its employees and students insurance coverage for birth control on the ground that birth control is a sin; Q. A doctor refuses to provide a pregnant woman a referral for an abortion because the doctor believes abortion is murder; Q. A Catholic hospital declines to perform an abortion that is medically necessary to protect the woman's health

3. Abortion-related examples meet with objections, especially refusing to provide information about the health of the fetus.

When it comes to abortion, nearly all say doctors should not be allowed to withhold information about a fetus's health for fear the woman may have an abortion, and majorities say doctors should not be allowed to refuse to make a referral for an abortion and that Catholic hospitals should not be allowed to refuse to provide medically-necessary abortions:

- "A doctor does not tell a woman that her fetus has a severe defect because the doctor is afraid the woman might then consider having an abortion" (87 percent say should not be allowed);

- “A doctor refuses to provide a pregnant woman a referral for an abortion because the doctor believes abortion is murder” (68 percent); and
- “A Catholic hospital declines to perform an abortion that is medically necessary to protect the woman’s health” (62 percent). Among Catholics, 59 percent say it should not be allowed.

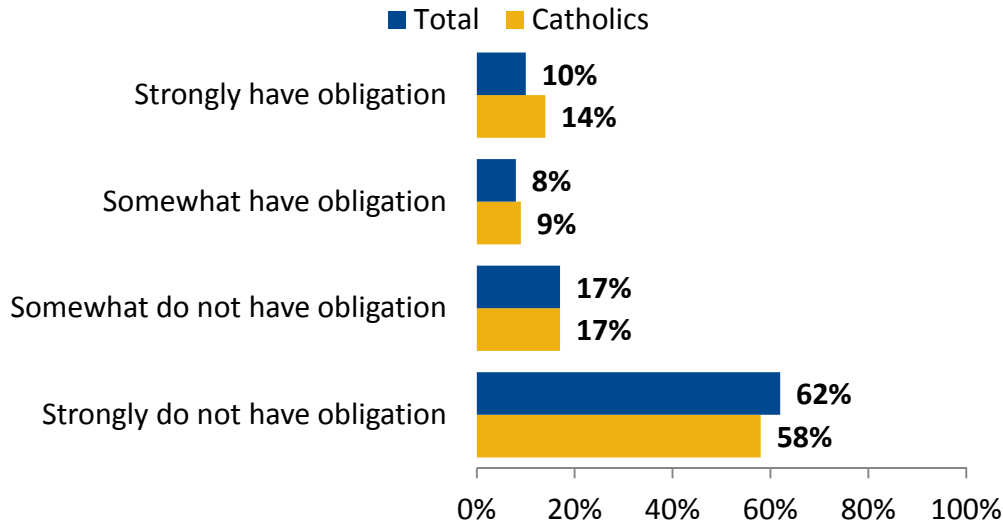
4. Opposition to religious exemptions crosses political and religious lines

As the table following this report shows, majorities of Democrats, Republicans, and independents say that each of these situations related to contraception and abortion should not be allowed, as do majorities of Catholics, Evangelical Protestants, Mainline Protestants, Non-Denominational Christians, and the unaffiliated.

5. Americans – including Catholics – are not persuaded that Catholic voters or politicians should vote according to the Catholic bishops’ views.

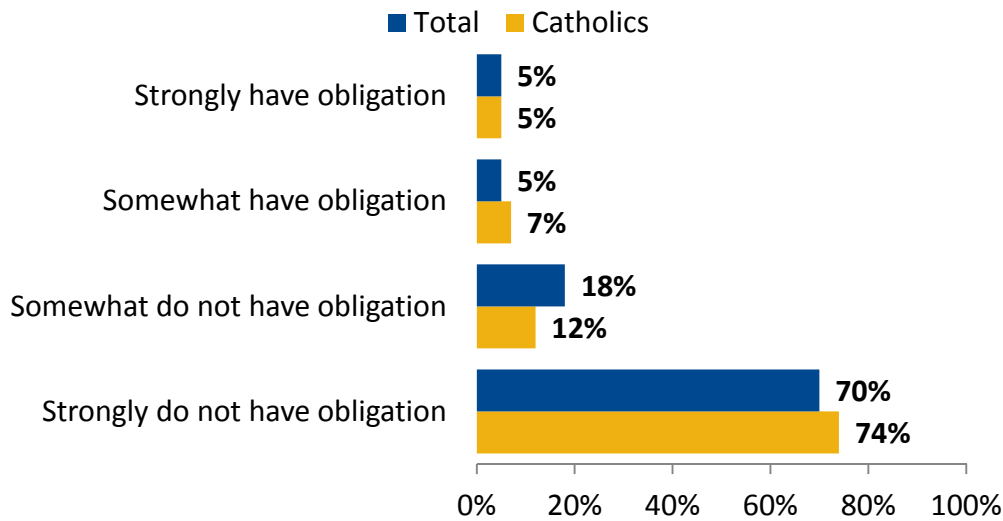
Among Americans overall, only 18 percent say that “**politicians who are Catholic** have an obligation to vote on issues the way Catholic bishops recommend” while 79 percent say they do not. Only 10 percent say that “**Catholic voters** have an obligation to vote only for candidates who are recommended by the Catholic bishops” and 88 percent say they do not. Among Catholics, only 23 percent say politicians have such an obligation and 75 percent say they do not (including 58 percent who feel strongly that they do not). Only 12 percent say voters have an obligation to vote according to the bishops and the vast majority (86 percent) says they do not, including three quarters (74 percent) who feel strongly that they do not.

Do *Politicians* Have Obligation to Follow Bishops' Recommendations?



Q. Regardless of your religious beliefs, 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?

Do *Voters* Have Obligation to Follow Bishops' Recommendations?



Q. 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?

Examples of Refusing Access to Contraception

Please tell me in your view if each of the following situations ought to be allowed or not. WAIT FOR RESPONSE. Do you feel that way strongly or somewhat? (RANDOMIZE). Q. A pharmacy does not fill a prescription for birth control because it goes against the owners' religious beliefs; Q. A religiously-affiliated university denies its employees and students insurance coverage for birth control on the ground that birth control is a sin

	Pharmacy will not fill birth control prescription		University denies insurance coverage for birth control	
	Allow	Not allow	Allow	Not allow
Total	22%	77	29%	69
Democrat	17%	81	21%	76
Republican	25%	74	38%	60
Independent	25%	74	28%	69
Catholic	22%	77	30%	68
Evangelical Protestant	25%	73	32%	67
Mainline Protestant	18%	82	27%	71
Non-denominational Protestant	24%	75	39%	59
No religion	20%	78	23%	74

Examples Involving Abortion

Please tell me in your view if each of the following situations ought to be allowed or not. WAIT FOR RESPONSE. Do you feel that way strongly or somewhat? (RANDOMIZE). Q. A doctor does not tell a woman that her fetus has a severe defect because the doctor is afraid the woman might then consider having an abortion; Q. A doctor refuses to provide a pregnant woman a referral for an abortion because the doctor believes abortion is murder; Q. A Catholic hospital declines to perform an abortion that is medically necessary to protect the woman's health

	Doctor does not disclose fetus' severe defect		Doctor refuses referral for abortion		Cath. hospital declines medical abortion	
	Allow	Not allow	Allow	Not allow	Allow	Not allow
Total	12%	87	29%	68	34%	62
Democrat	13%	87	19%	80	35%	63
Republican	15%	84	43%	56	36%	60
Independent	9%	90	31%	66	33%	66
Catholic	13%	87	31%	66	37%	59
Evangelical Protestant	20%	79	38%	60	40%	58
Mainline Protestant	10%	89	32%	65	29%	68
Non-denominational Protestant	7%	93	30%	67	35%	63
No religion	2%	95	16%	83	21%	76