About Catholics and Reproductive Health

Let’s face it: There are a lot of misconceptions about what Catholics believe about sexual and reproductive ethics, and the church hierarchy doesn’t represent the views of all — or even most — Catholics.

How do we know? Just look at the data.

- **68%** of Catholics support Roe v. Wade  
  *(Pew Aug. 2020)*
- **1 in 4** abortion patients is Catholic  
  *(Guttmacher 2014)*
- **98%** of Catholic women have used birth control  
  *(Guttmacher 2011)*

Anti-choice Catholics can be loud, but they are the minority in the church. We believe that the Catholic tradition’s teachings on social justice, human dignity, and the primacy of conscience compel us to support the right to reproductive freedom — and the facts in this brochure prove that we’re not alone.

*Unless otherwise indicated, statistics in this brochure refer to the United States*
75% of Catholics think abortion should be legal either in all circumstances or in certain circumstances (Gallup 2018)

68% of Catholics support Roe v. Wade (Pew August 2019)

1 in 4 abortion patients is Catholic (Guttmacher 2014)

65% of Catholics in 12 countries with high Catholic populations said abortion should be legal in all or some cases (Guttmacher 2011)

56% of Catholics think abortion should be legal in all or most cases (Pew August 2020)

1 in 4 abortion patients is Catholic (Guttmacher 2014)
The year that the Vatican codified a total ban on abortion into canon law

0

The number of times abortion is banned, shamed, or discouraged in the Bible

14%

The percentage of Catholics who agree with the hierarchy that abortion should be illegal in all cases
(Pew August 2020)

34%

The percentage of Catholics who have “a lot” of trust in clergy’s opinions on abortion
(Pew November 2019)

44%

The percentage of Catholics who have heard an anti-abortion homily in the past month
(Pew August 2020)
According to the hierarchy, “The Church has always taught the intrinsic evil of contraception, that is, of every marital act intentionally rendered unfruitful.” (Pontifical Council for the Family 1997).

But birth control serves many medical purposes, and for many people around the world — especially those who are poor or sick — access to birth control is a matter of life or death.
The Catholic laity’s support for marriage equality and divorce has increased in recent years, despite resistance from the hierarchy. We take this as a sign that the church, as the people of God, can evolve on matters of sexual and reproductive health, even if its leadership remains resistant to change.

44% of Catholics have lived with a partner without being married (Pew 2015)

61% of Catholics think that getting divorced is not sinful (Pew 2015)

1 in 4 Catholics has been divorced (Pew 2015)

Catholics who believe same-sex marriage should be legally recognized (Gallup 2020)

49% 2006–2010

59% 2011–2015

69% 2016–2020
47% of LGBTQIA+ adults are religious (UCLA 2020)

70% of Black LGBTQIA+ adults are religious (UCLA 2020)

76% of Catholics think the U.S. should be accepting of homosexuality (Pew November 2020)

68% of Catholics oppose laws that allow small businesses to turn away LGBTQIA+ customers (PRRI 2017)

56% of Catholics oppose anti-trans laws that stipulate which bathrooms people can use (PRRI 2017)
The Catholic hierarchy, including Pope Francis, often promotes gender complementarity: the belief that men and women should have separate and unequal roles in both church and society.

The laity’s support for women’s ordination demonstrates that they reject this idea.

59% of Catholics think the church should ordain women (Pew 2015)

ONLY 7% of Catholic women think the church shouldn’t ordain women as deacons (CARA 2018)
Latinx Catholics

In the United States, 76% of Latinx people identify as Catholic, culturally Catholic, or formerly Catholic, so the church has a particularly strong presence in Latinx communities (Pew 2015).

Many people assume that Latinx Catholics are more conservative, but when we look at the data, we see that Latinx Catholics also support abortion access.

57% of Hispanics who were born in the United States believe that abortion should be legal in all or most cases (PRRI 2019)

76% of Latinx Catholic voters describe birth control as healthcare rather than a religious issue (PerryUndem 2018)

85% of Latinx Catholics say they would support a loved one who had an abortion (PerryUndem 2018)

62% of Latinx Catholics do not want Roe v. Wade overturned (PerryUndem 2018)
CONSCIENCE AND DECISION-MAKING

For most Catholics, their consciences are their primary guide for making moral decisions.

73% say when answering difficult moral questions, they rely on their conscience “a great deal,” as compared to 21% on Catholic Church teachings, 15% on the Bible, and 11% on the pope (Pew Apr. 2016).

When making big life decisions, 84% of Catholics say they depend “a lot” on their own research, 39% depend a lot on personal reflection, 30% on professional experts, and 10% on religious leaders (Pew Apr. 2016).

By following their consciences — which are informed by their personal experiences and religious education — these Catholics follow tradition even when their conclusions differ from the hierarchy’s.

We trust Catholics to make moral decisions and determine their reproductive destinies.

Sources: All statistics listed in this brochure have been cited and are available online at catholicsforchoice.org/resources/Facts
Catholics for Choice — which serves the pro-choice Catholic majority — encounters, educates, and emboldens people of faith who support reproductive freedom.

Catholics for Choice believes healthcare is a human right — and that includes access to abortion.

Our faith calls us to affirm reproductive and religious freedom as essential to Catholic social justice.