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RESEARCH AND COMMUNICATIONS

# **Catholic Voters' Views on Health Care Reform and Reproductive Health Care Services**

**A National Opinion Survey of Catholic Voters**

**Executive Summary**

**Conducted for Catholics for Choice**

**September 2009**



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A National Opinion Survey of Catholic Voters

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**Belden Russonello & Stewart** conducts survey, focus group and other research for non-profit organizations, foundations, political campaigns, the new media and others. BRS has provided hundreds of clients in the US and elsewhere with research and counsel to help them understand and communicate effectively with the public and their particular audiences since 1982.

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## I. Introduction

In the context of the heated debate about health care reform, Catholics for Choice asked Belden Russonello & Stewart to conduct a national survey of Catholic voters.

The survey explores Catholic voters' views on health care reform and their attitudes toward including health insurance coverage for reproductive health services, including abortion, as part of health care reform. The survey also examines Catholic voters' views about the appropriate role of U.S. Catholic Bishops in the health care debate and reactions to opposition by some Catholic Bishops to any health care reform plan that would include coverage for abortions.

This survey for Catholics for Choice is based on interviews with 923 Catholics who are registered voters, conducted from September 16 through 21, 2009. The national sample and interviewing were provided by Knowledge Networks using a random-digit-dial-based sample and administered on-line. The margin of sampling error for a random sample of 923 is  $\pm 3.2$  percentage points.

### Reading this Report

In reading the report, tables and graphs highlight selected survey findings and are expressed in percentages. The base for each table is all respondents (n=923) unless otherwise noted. In reading these data, when the percent sign (%) appears at the top of a column, the numbers add vertically; when % appears at the left of a row, the numbers add horizontally. An asterisk (\*) indicates less than 1%; a double hyphen (--) indicates zero. Due to weighting, rounding, omission of "don't know," "refuse," or other responses, percentages may add to more or less than 100%.



## II. Executive Summary

The fall 2009 Catholics for Choice/Belden Russonello & Stewart survey shows health care reform is among the top issues for Catholic voters. Catholic voters prove to be more progressive than U.S. Catholic Bishops, and to some extent, President Obama, when considering reforms to health care.

These voters, 47% of whom attend Catholic mass at least once a month, strongly support the creation of a government health insurance option for those who do not already have insurance. Catholic voters also want broad coverage – under either private insurance or government insurance – for a number of controversial procedures, including abortion. Unlike the leadership of the Catholic Church, most Catholic voters firmly disagree with the arguments being made by some U.S. Catholic Bishops that health care reform must be blocked entirely if abortion coverage is included as part of reform.

While they give high priority to reforming health care and strongly support a key element of Obama’s plan – a government health insurance plan – Catholic voters generally are *not* sold on what they perceive to be President Obama’s overall health care reform agenda.

### 1. Reducing health care costs is a top priority for Catholic voters.

Health care is among the top priorities for Catholic voters, second only to improving the economy (56% saying highest priority) and closely followed by resolving the war in Afghanistan (33%). Reducing costs is Catholics’ top health care priority for Obama (37% highest priority), followed by ensuring that everyone in the country is covered by health insurance (28%).

Social justice is an important concept for Catholic voters in the health care reform debate. Nearly three-quarters (73%) believe that reforming health care – “providing health care for people who need it” – is important because it is a matter of “social justice.”

## 2. Catholics take an expansive view of what health care reform and insurance should cover.

The poll reveals Catholic voters would like health care reform to include a government health insurance option and they also support insurance coverage for a broad array of services. These views are more progressive than the views of Catholic Church leaders, and to some extent, the Obama Administration.

- Three-quarters (73%) of Catholics support “a new government plan that would make health insurance available to people who do not already have it.”
- When tax dollars are involved, Catholic voters believe that caring for people in need should take precedence over allowing medical institutions to deny certain types of care based on religious objections. Two-thirds (65%) believe that hospitals or health clinics that receive taxpayer dollars should not be allowed to refuse patients certain medical procedures or medications based on religious beliefs related to the institution.

Catholics see many services related to reproductive health, including abortion, as basic health care services that should be covered by insurance. Half or more support health insurance coverage – whether it is private or government insurance – for:

- Routine check-ups for children (97%) and adults (96%);
- Care for pregnant women and follow-up care after the baby is born (95%);
- HIV/AIDS testing (86%);
- An abortion when a pregnancy poses a threat to the life of a woman (84%);
- The HPV vaccine, described in the poll as “the HPV vaccine, which is given to girls to prevent them from getting cervical cancer” (81%);
- An abortion when a pregnancy is due to rape or incest (76%);
- An abortion when a pregnancy poses long-term health risks for a woman (73%);
- An abortion when test results show a fetus has a severe, abnormal condition (66%);
- Contraception, such as birth control pills (63%);
- Condoms to prevent HIV/AIDS (51%); and
- An abortion whenever a women and her doctor decide it is appropriate (50%).

Even Catholic voters who oppose the government offering a health insurance plan are in support of health insurance coverage – government or private – for abortions in many circumstances, as well as for HIV/AIDS testing and the HPV vaccine.

### **3. Catholics part company with U.S. Catholic Bishops, rejecting arguments that health care reforms including abortion coverage should be opposed.**

Catholic voters reject the argument being made by some U.S. Catholic Bishops that Catholics are obligated to entirely oppose any health care reform plan that allows for the coverage of abortions. Sixty-eight percent of Catholics reject this argument, including 37% strongly. Even those who oppose Obama's health care reform agenda (53%) or oppose creation of a government health insurance plan (46%) largely reject the Bishops' argument that they are obligated to oppose health care reform entirely if coverage for abortion is included.

### **4. President Obama has not made a strong case for his ideas on health care reform.**

As national polls have shown, the general public is increasingly disapproving of President Obama's handling of the health care issue. Indeed, 48% disapprove and 48% approve of Obama's handling of health care in a September 2009 ABC News/*Washington Post* poll.<sup>1</sup> Catholic voters reflect this national ambivalence as they split 52% to 48% over whether they agree or disagree with President Obama's ideas on changing the nation's health care system.

While confidence is lagging for Obama's general ideas on health care reform, polling shows broad support for many of the policies that are part of the president's plan for health care reform. For example, in this survey 73% of Catholic voters support creation of a government health insurance plan. Recent polls of the general public show similar trends, with majorities of Americans in favor of creating a government health insurance plan.

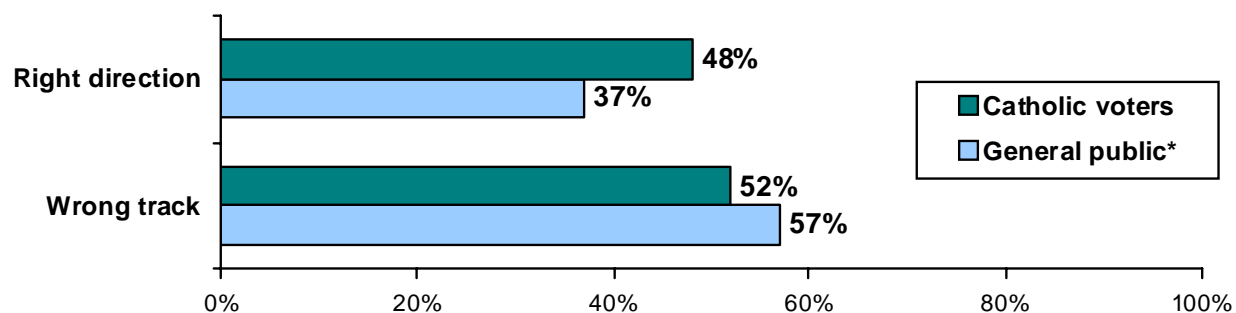
This seems to be a case of Obama failing to make an effective argument for the American public, including Catholics, about his ideas on health care reform. Data from this survey underlines the gap between support for key elements of Obama's plan and overall disagreement with the president's ideas: over half of Catholic voters who favor a government health insurance plan (54%) still disagree with Obama's ideas on how to change health care, even though a government health insurance option is a part of Obama's agenda.

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<sup>1</sup> ABC News/*Washington Post*: September 10-12, 2009. N=1,007 adults nationwide. MoE 3.5.



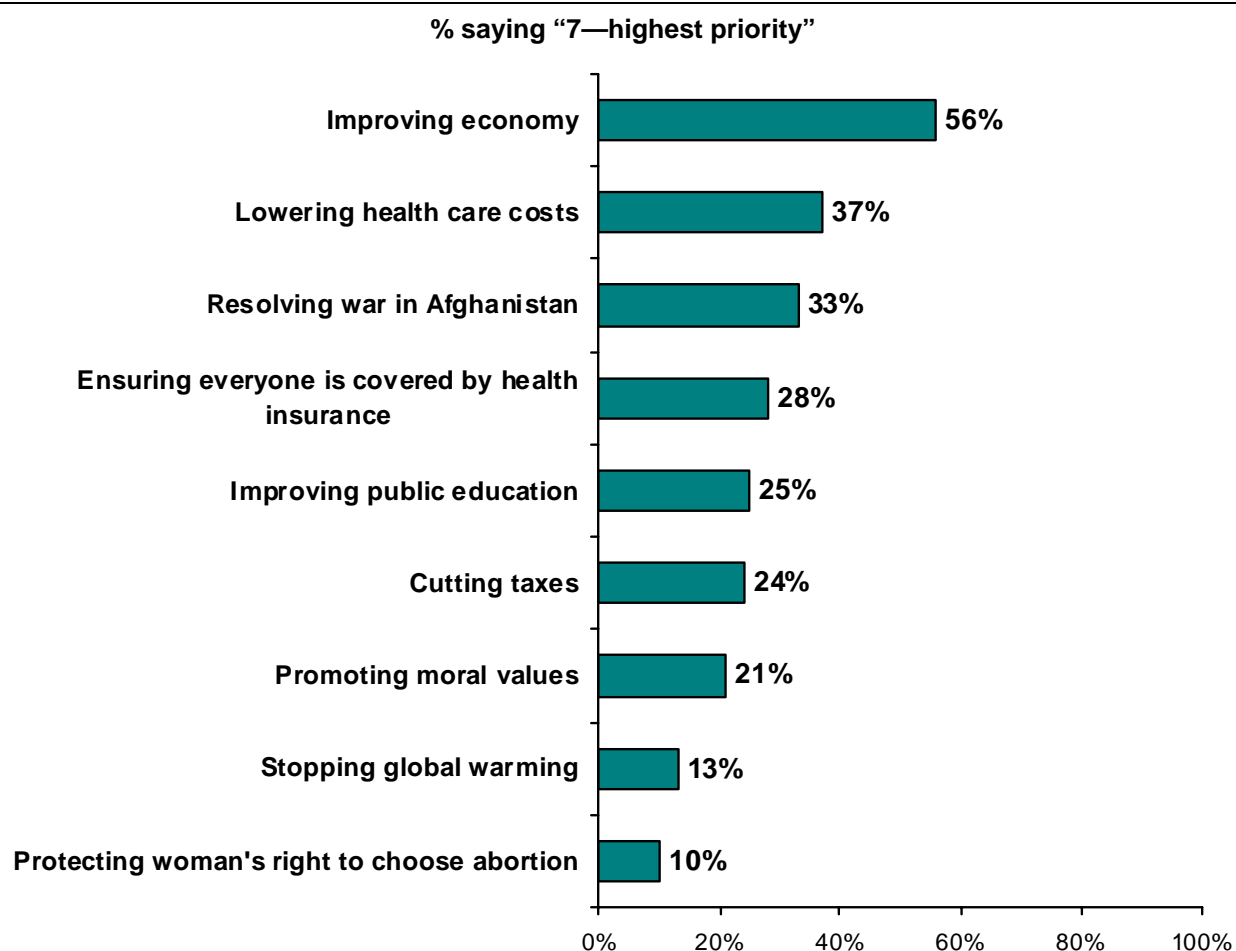
## Direction of the Country



Q1. Do you think things in this country are generally going in the right direction or are they off on the wrong track?

\*AP-GfK Poll: Sept. 3-8, 2009. N=1,001 adults nationwide. MoE  $\pm$  3.1.

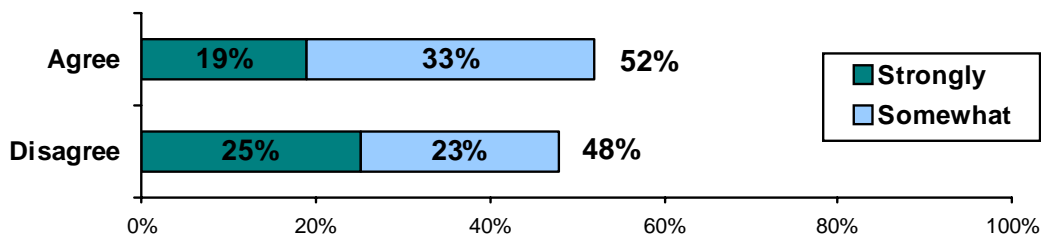
## Priorities for President Obama



Q2-10. Using this 1 to 7 scale, how high a priority do you think each of the following should be for President Barack Obama? ONE means the lowest priority and SEVEN means highest priority. Use any number from one to seven.

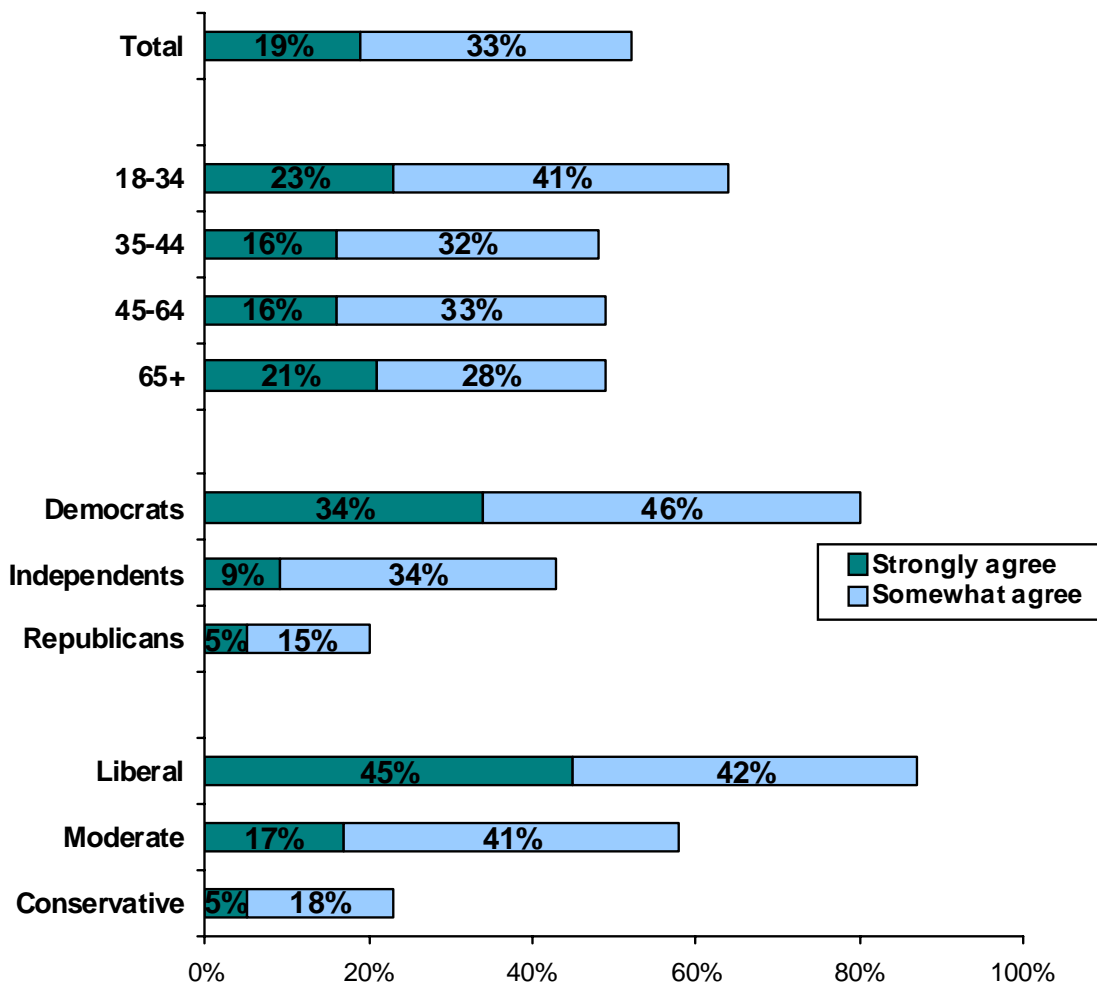
Q4. Improving the economy Q2. Lowering health care costs Q9. Resolving the war in Afghanistan Q3. Making sure that everyone in the country is covered by health insurance Q5. Improving public education Q6. Cutting taxes Q7. Promoting moral values Q10. Stopping global warming Q8. Protecting a woman's right to choose abortion

### President Obama's Ideas on Changing the Health Care System



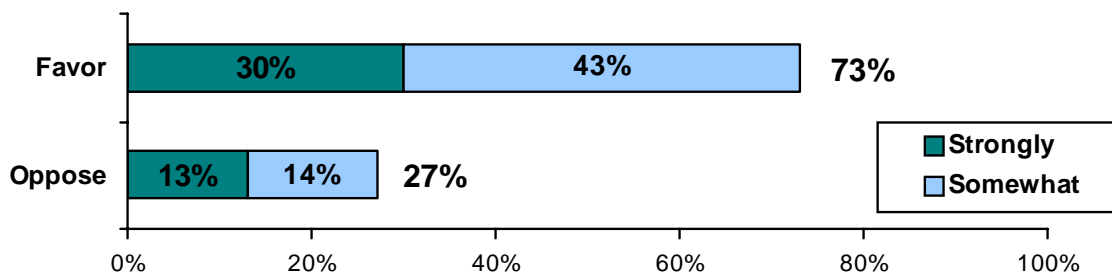
Q12. Do you agree or disagree with President Obama's ideas about how we should change the nation's health care system?

### Agreement with Obama's Ideas on Changing Health Care by Age and Political Affiliation



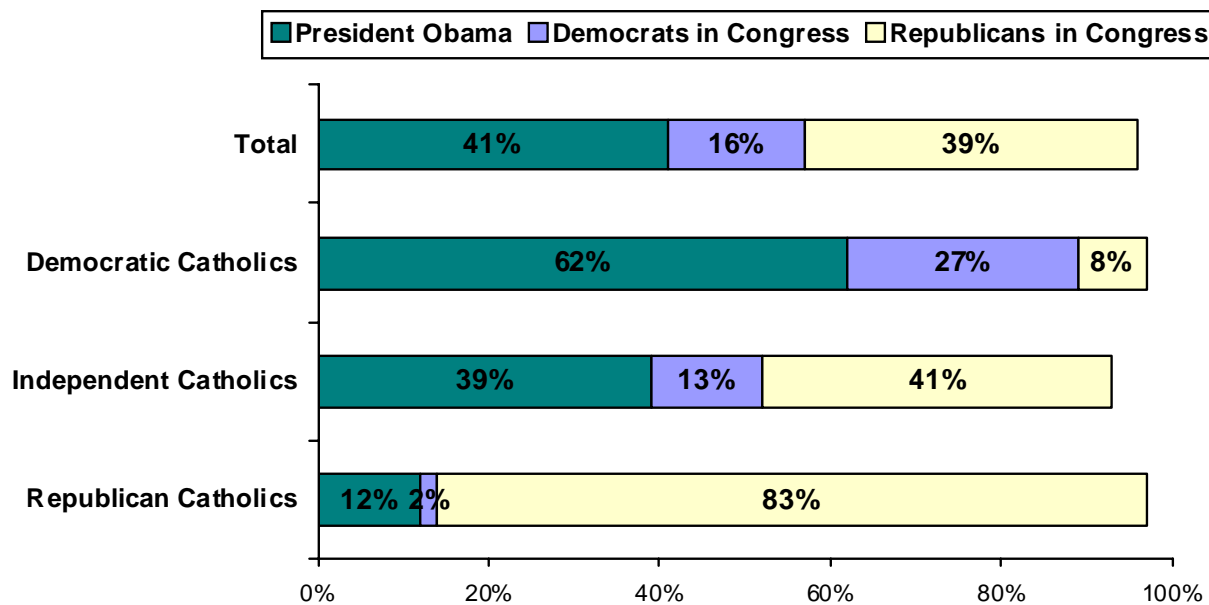
Q12. Do you agree or disagree with President Obama's ideas about how we should change the nation's health care system?

### Support for New Government Health Insurance Plan



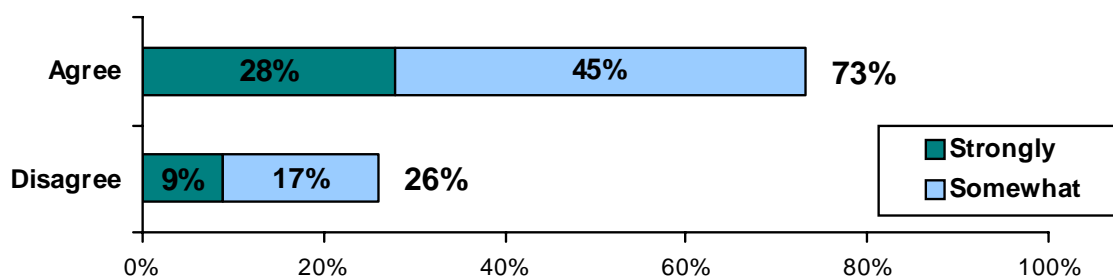
Q13. Would you favor or oppose a new government plan that would make health insurance available to people who do not already have it?

### Who do you Most Trust to Represent Your Best Interests in Changing Health Care



Q11. Who do you trust most to represent your best interests when it comes to making changes to our health care system: President Obama, [ROTATE: the Democrats in Congress, or the Republicans in Congress]?

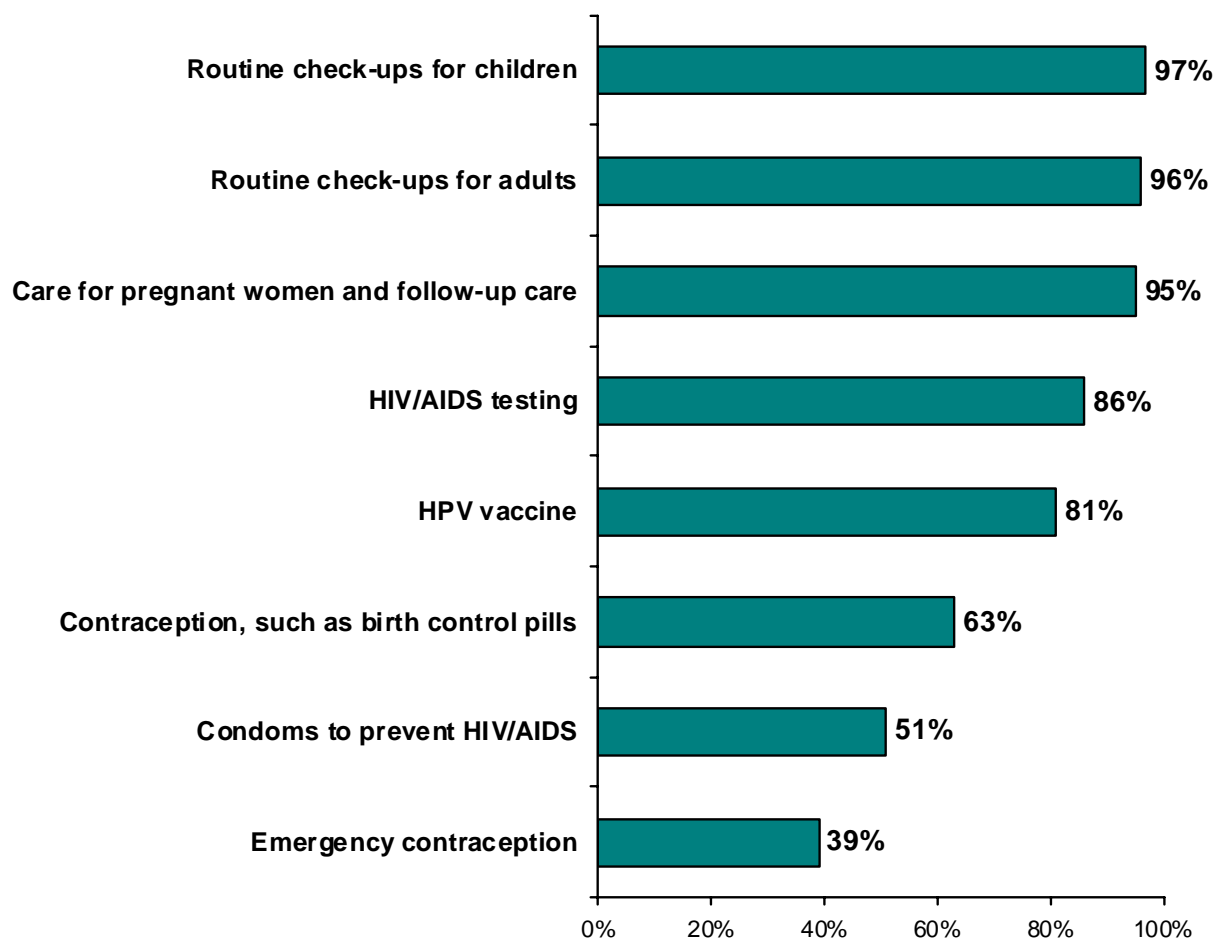
## Calling Health Care a Social Justice Issue



Q30. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? Providing health care for people who need it is important because it is a matter of social justice.

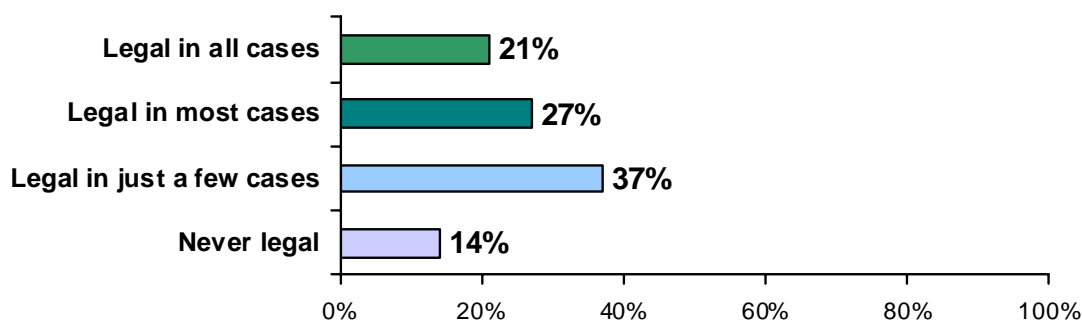
## Should Health Insurance Policies – Government or Private—Cover Services

% saying “Yes”



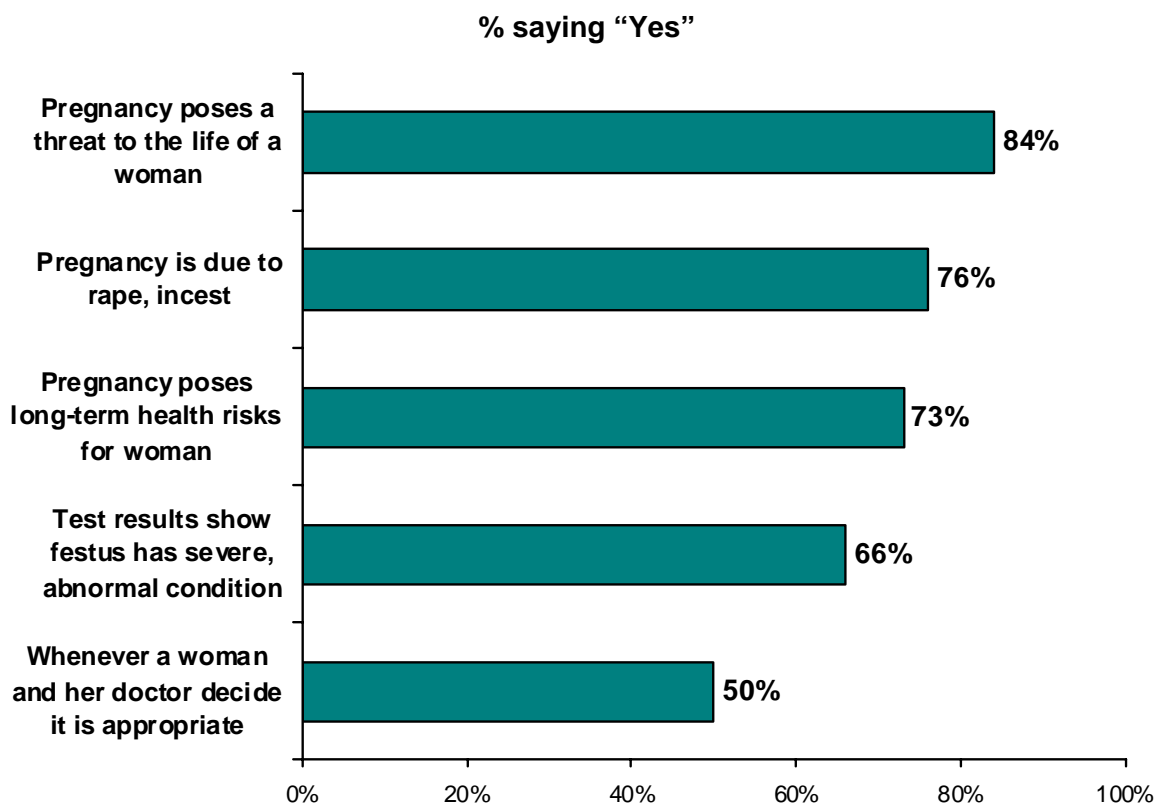
Q14-21. Do you think health insurance policies - whether they are private or government - should cover each of the following? Q20. Routine check-ups for children Q21. Routine check-ups for adults Q16. Care for pregnant women and follow-up care after the baby is born Q19. HIV/AIDS testing Q17. The HPV vaccine, which is given to girls to prevent them from getting cervical cancer Q14. Contraception, such as birth control pills Q18. Condoms to prevent HIV/AIDS Q15. Emergency contraception, also known as the morning after pill.

## Legality of Abortion: Abortion Should Be...



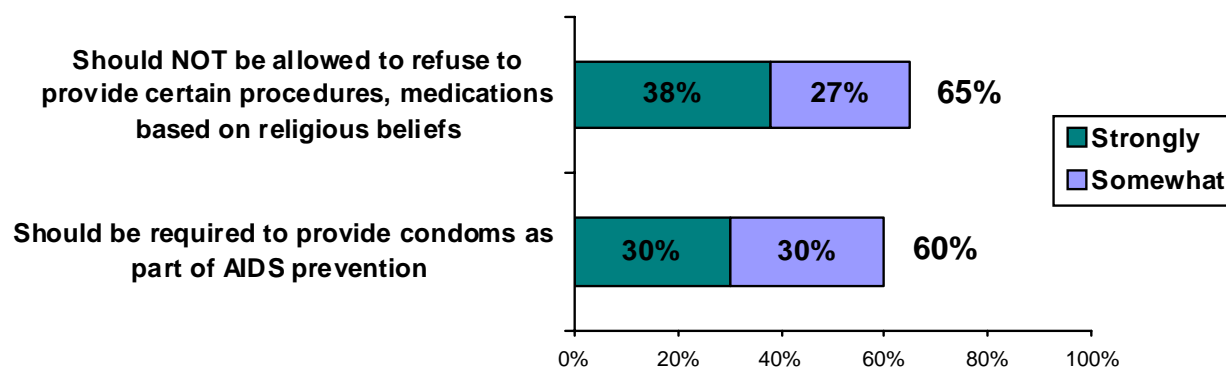
Q33. Thinking about abortion in general, do you think abortion should be legal in all cases, legal in most cases, legal in just a few cases, or never legal?

## Should Health Insurance Policies – Government or Private—Cover Abortions When....



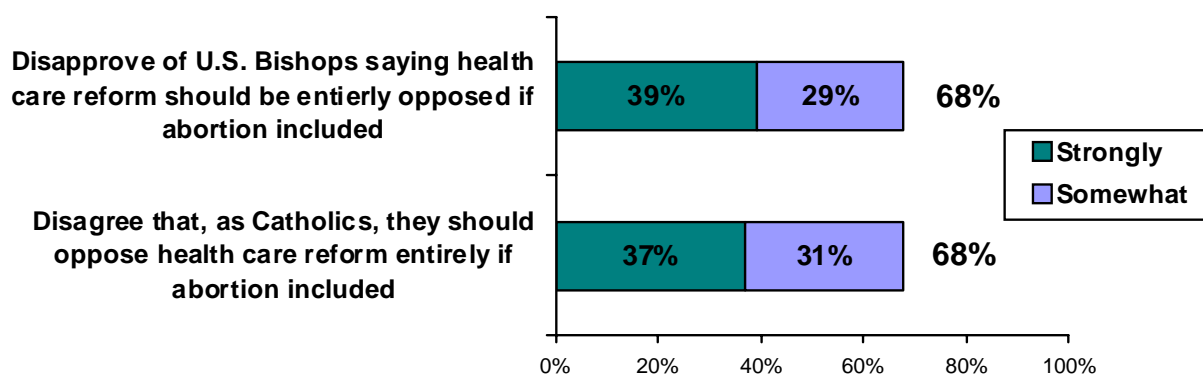
Q22-26. Do you think health insurance policies – whether they are private or government – should cover abortions under each of the following circumstances? Q24. When a pregnancy poses a threat to the life of a woman Q22. When a pregnancy is due to rape or incest Q23. When a pregnancy poses long-term health risks for a woman Q25. When test results show a fetus has a severe abnormal condition Q26. Whenever a woman and her doctor decide it is appropriate

## Hospitals and Clinics that Take Taxpayer Dollars...



Q31. Do you think that hospitals and clinics that take taxpayer dollars should or should not be allowed to refuse to provide certain procedures or medications based on religious beliefs? Q32. Do you think hospitals and clinics that take taxpayer dollars should or should not be required to include condoms as part of AIDS prevention?

## Opposing Health Care Reform Entirely If It Includes Coverage for Abortions



Q29. Do you approve or disapprove of U.S. Catholic Bishops saying that all Catholics should oppose the entire health care reform plan if it includes coverage for abortions? Q27. Do you agree or disagree with people who say that, as a Catholic, you should oppose the entire health care reform plan if it includes coverage for abortions?

## National Survey of Catholic Voters For Catholics for Choice

Interviewing conducted September 16 through 21, 2009.

N=923 Catholic registered voters nationwide

Margin of sampling error is  $\pm 3.2$  percentage points.

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Q1. Do you think things in this country are generally going in the right direction or are they off on the wrong track?	Right direction	48%
	Wrong track	52
	REF	--

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Using this 1 to 7 scale, how high a priority do you think each of the following should be for President Barack Obama? ONE means the lowest priority and SEVEN means highest priority. Use any number from one to seven.

[RANDOMIZE 2-10]

	Lowest Priority						Highest priority	REF
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Q2. Lowering health care costs	4%	3	6	14	15	21	37	*
Q3. Making sure that everyone in the country is covered by health insurance	10%	8	10	12	16	16	28	*
Q4. Improving the economy	2%	1	2	6	10	22	56	1
Q5. Improving public education	4%	2	5	20	22	21	25	1
Q6. Cutting taxes	6%	5	10	16	22	17	24	*
Q7. Promoting moral values	9%	9	9	20	18	15	21	*
Q8. Protecting a woman's right to choose abortion	27%	12	14	19	11	8	10	1
Q9. Resolving the war in Afghanistan	3%	4	5	14	19	21	33	*
Q10. Stopping global warming	13%	10	13	21	18	11	13	1

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Q11. Who do you trust most to represent your best interests when it comes to making changes to our health care system: President Obama, [ROTATE: the Democrats in Congress, or the Republicans in Congress]?	President Obama	41%
	Democrats in Congress	16
	Republicans in Congress	39
	REF	4

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Q12. Do you agree or disagree with President Obama's ideas about how we should change the nation's health care system?	Strongly Agree	19%
	Somewhat Agree	33
	Somewhat Disagree	23
	Strongly Disagree	25
	REF	--

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Q13. Would you favor or oppose a new government plan that would make health insurance available to people who do not already have it?	Strongly Favor	30%
	Somewhat Favor	43
	Somewhat Oppose	14
	Strongly Oppose	13
	REF	*

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Do you think health insurance policies – whether they are private or government – should cover each of the following? [RANDOMIZE 14-21]

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>REF</b>
Q14. Contraception, such as birth control pills	63%	36	1
Q15. Emergency contraception, also known as the morning after pill	39%	61	1
Q16. Care for pregnant women and follow-up care after the baby is born	95%	4	*
Q17. The HPV vaccine, which is given to girls to prevent them from getting cervical cancer	81%	18	1
Q18. Condoms to prevent HIV/AIDS	51%	48	1
Q19. HIV/AIDS testing	86%	13	1
Q20. Routine check-ups for children	97%	2	1
Q21. Routine check-ups for adults	96%	4	*

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Do you think health insurance policies – whether they are private or government – should cover abortions under each of the following circumstances?

[RANDOMIZE 22-26]

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>REF</b>
Q22. When a pregnancy is due to rape or incest	76%	23	1
Q23. When a pregnancy poses long-term health risks for a woman	73%	25	2
Q24. When a pregnancy poses a threat to the life of a woman	84%	15	1
Q25. When test results show a fetus has a severe abnormal condition	66%	31	2
Q26. Whenever a woman and her doctor decide it is appropriate	50%	50	1

Q27. Do you agree or disagree with people who say that, as a Catholic, you should oppose the entire health care reform plan if it includes coverage for abortions?	Strongly Agree	15%
	Somewhat Agree	16
	Somewhat Disagree	31
	Strongly Disagree	37
	REF	1

Q28. Do you think U.S. Catholic Bishops should or should <u>not</u> take a position either way on the health care reform legislation in Congress right now?	Strongly Should	19%
	Somewhat Should	23
	Somewhat Should not	26
	Strongly Should not	30
	REF	1

Q29. Do you approve or disapprove of U.S. Catholic Bishops saying that all Catholics should oppose the entire health care reform plan if it includes coverage for abortions?	Strongly Approve	16%
	Somewhat Approve	15
	Somewhat Disapprove	29
	Strongly Disapprove	39
	REF	1

Q30. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? Providing health care for people who need it is important because it is a matter of social justice.	Strongly Agree	28%
	Somewhat Agree	45
	Somewhat Disagree	17
	Strongly Disagree	9
	REF	1

Q31. Do you think that hospitals and clinics that take taxpayer dollars should or should not be allowed to refuse to provide certain procedures or medications based on religious beliefs?

Strongly should be allowed to refuse	15%
Somewhat should be allowed to refuse	18
Somewhat should not be allowed to refuse	27
Strongly should not be allowed to refuse	38
REF	2

Q32. Do you think hospitals and clinics that take taxpayer dollars should or should not be required to include condoms as part of AIDS prevention?

Strongly should be required	30%
Somewhat should be required	30
Somewhat should not be required	23
Strongly should not be required	17
REF	1

Q33. Thinking about abortion in general, do you think abortion should be legal in all cases, legal in most cases, legal in just a few cases, or never legal?

Legal in all cases	21%
Legal in most cases	27
Legal in just a few cases	37
Never legal	14
REF	1

Now here are a few questions to help us classify your questionnaire.

D1. Are you married, widowed, separated, divorced, or single-never married?

Married	57%
Widowed	6
Separated	1
Divorced	11
Single, never married	24
REF	1

D2. Do you consider yourself to be a [ROTATE: Democrat, Republican], an independent, or something else? If something else, please specify.

Democrat	43%
Republican	28
Independent	26
Something else	2
REF	1

D2B. [ONLY If D2="independent" or "Something Else"] Do you lean more toward [ROTATE] the Democratic Party or Republican Party?

Republican Party	15%
Democratic Party	12
REF	1

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D3. In terms of political outlook, do you usually think of yourself as [REVERSE ORDER]: Very conservative, somewhat conservative, middle of the road, somewhat liberal, or very liberal?	Very conservative	7%
	Somewhat conservative	28
	Middle of the road	43
	Somewhat liberal	17
	Very liberal	5
	REF	1

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D4. How often do you attend religious services: More than once a week, once a week, a few times a month, a few times a year, or never?	More than once a week	5%
	Once a week	30
	A few times a month	12
	A few times a year	36
	Never	16
	REF	*

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GENDER	Male	47%
	Female	53

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AGE	18-34	20%
	35-44	24
	45-64	35
	65+	21
	REF	--

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RACE	White	72%
	Black or African American	2
	Hispanic or Latino	22
	Other	4
	REF	--

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INCOME	Less than \$25,000	13%
	Between \$25,000 - \$49,000	24
	Between \$50,000 - \$74,000	21
	Between \$75,000 - \$99,000	15
	\$100,000 or more	26
	REF	--

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EDUCATION	Less than high school	7%
	High school graduate or GED	30
	Some college or associate degree	29
	College graduate with four-year degree	22
	Postgraduate study	12
	REF	--

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REGION	Northeast	31%
	Midwest	24
	South	23
	West	22

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Catholics for Choice shapes and advances sexual and reproductive ethics that are based on justice, reflect a commitment to women's well-being and respect and affirm the capacity of women and men to make moral decisions about their lives.

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