Moral Issues and Catholic Values

Knights of Columbus

October 2008
How the Survey Was Conducted
The study *Moral Issues and Catholic Values* reports the results of a national survey by the Knights of Columbus.

The survey was conducted by the Marist College Institute for Public Opinion.

Adults eighteen years of age or older who live in the contiguous United States were interviewed September 24th through October 3rd, 2008.

An oversample of American Catholics was also done resulting in a total of 813 interviews with Catholics nationwide.

Telephone numbers were selected based upon a list of telephone exchanges from throughout the nation. The exchanges were selected to ensure that each region was represented in proportion to its population.
The survey results for all Americans are statistically significant at ±2.5%. The margin of error increases for smaller sub-groups in the population.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Number of Interviews</th>
<th>Margin of Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Americans</td>
<td>1733</td>
<td>±2.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Registered Voters</td>
<td>1503</td>
<td>±2.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholics</td>
<td>813</td>
<td>±3.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Registered Catholic Voters</td>
<td>698</td>
<td>±4.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practicing Catholics</td>
<td>533</td>
<td>±4.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Registered Practicing Catholic Voters</td>
<td>474</td>
<td>±4.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-practicing Catholics</td>
<td>276</td>
<td>±6.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Registered Non-practicing Catholic Voters</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>±6.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Executive Summary
**The National Mood**

- Catholics and non-Catholics agree the country needs a moral makeover. 71% of U.S. residents think the nation’s moral compass is pointing in the wrong direction. A similar proportion of Catholics and practicing Catholics share this view.

**Who Are American Catholics?**

- Demographically, Catholics in the United States resemble the overall population. By slight margins, they are more likely to be married, to earn higher incomes, and have college degrees. The heaviest concentration of Catholics is in the Northeast which has 19% of the U.S. population but 30% of the nation’s Catholics.

- Latinos make up 25% of the Catholic population, but are only 12% of the American population.

- But, consideration of Catholics only as a whole masks the wide disparity between practicing Catholics and non-practicing Catholics. Practicing Catholics, that is, those who practice their faith regularly, make up 65% of American Catholics. Non-practicing Catholics comprise 35% of Catholics nationally.
Who Are American Catholics? (continued)

- American Catholic voters in 2008 tend to be more moderate and less liberal than American voters as a whole. A plurality of Catholic voters, 39%, are Democrats, and 45% describe themselves as moderate. Only 19% say they are liberal.

The Issue of Abortion: More Consensus than Division

- The polarizing labels of the abortion debate mask the consensus among Americans. Although 50% of U.S. residents nominally identify themselves as pro-choice, and 44% say they are pro-life, in fact, 84% of Americans believe abortion should be significantly restricted.

- In cases where an underage female is seeking an abortion, most Americans and Catholics say parents have the right to know regardless of their daughter’s privacy.

- 71% of registered voters nationwide would support a candidate who maintains that life begins at conception including half of the American electorate who say they would definitely vote for such a candidate.
**Same-Sex Marriage**

- 70% of Americans do not support same-sex marriage including 38% who advocate no legal recognition and 32% who favor civil unions. 68% of Catholics and three-quarters of practicing Catholics share this view.
- 70% of voters would support a candidate who would uphold marriage only between a man and a woman including a majority of the electorate who would definitely vote for such a candidate.
- 66% of registered Catholic voters and 70% of those Catholic voters who regularly practice their faith follow suit. This includes close to half of Catholic voters and 55% of registered practicing Catholic voters who say they would definitely vote for someone who defines marriage in this way.

**The Election Season: Values and Issues**

- 57% of American voters mention the nation’s financial situation as the critical issue facing the country today.
- A combination of both values and issues shapes voters’ perceptions of candidates running for public office. 73% of registered voters nationwide want a candidate who upholds religious liberties, and 63% are looking for a candidate who stands for Christian principles. Many voters also favor a candidate who will work to solve global warming, support universal health care, and work to establish school vouchers.
The National Mood
Catholics and non-Catholics alike agree that the country needs a new direction. 71% of Americans believe the country’s moral compass points down the wrong path. A similar proportion of Catholics -- 73% -- share this view.
Most Americans think the nation needs to be inspired. Only 22% of Americans are encouraged about where the country is going while 71% are discouraged. Catholics agree.
Two-thirds of Americans are upset about the country’s trajectory, and only about a quarter of U.S. residents are energized about the nation’s future.
American Catholics: Who They Are
Catholics closely reflect the overall U.S. population demographically.

Practicing Catholics, that is, Catholics who regularly attend religious services, are more likely to be married, earn more than $50,000, and have a college education than Americans as a whole.
Although the Catholic community in the U.S. is made up of mostly white residents, one in four Catholics is Latino. Three in ten Catholics call the Northeast home compared with only 19% of Americans.
Catholics largely share the party identification and ideology of American voters. Registered practicing Catholic voters are somewhat more moderate and less liberal than American voters in general, and registered non-practicing Catholic voters are more moderate and less conservative.
Many Catholics Worship Regularly

44% of Catholics attend religious services at least once a week, and another 21% practice their faith once or twice a month.
The Issue of Abortion: More Consensus than Division
When asked to identify themselves as either pro-life or pro-choice, Americans divide. 50% think of themselves as pro-choice. 44% consider themselves to be pro-life.
But, When Asked More Specifically... There's Consensus

Most Americans -- 84% -- believe abortion should be significantly restricted.

This includes 60% who want, at most, to allow abortion only in cases of rape, incest, to save the life of the mother, or who think abortion should never be permitted.

Question wording: Which one of the following statements comes closest to your opinion on abortion:

- 8% Any time during pregnancy
- 8% During first 6 months
- 24% During first 3 months
- 32% Only in cases of rape, incest, or to save the life of the mother
- 15% Only to save the life of the mother
- 13% Never permitted

MOE ±2.5%
Most Pro-Choice Americans Want Restrictions

71% of pro-choice Americans want abortion significantly restricted.

This includes 43% who think abortion should be restricted to the first three months of pregnancy and 28% of pro-choice Americans who want to limit abortions only to cases of rape, incest, to save the life of the mother, or believe abortion should never be permitted.
When asked to identify themselves as either pro-life or pro-choice, Catholics, as a whole, divide. But, 59% of practicing Catholics identify themselves as pro-life compared with 65% of non-practicing Catholics who consider themselves to be pro-choice.
92% of practicing Catholics want to limit abortion.

This includes 72% who would limit abortion only to cases of rape, incest, to save the life of the mother or who believe abortion should never be permitted.
78% of pro-choice Catholics and 81% of pro-choice practicing Catholics would significantly restrict abortion.

Interestingly, 76% of pro-choice non-practicing Catholics agree that abortion should be significantly restricted.
77% of Americans believe parents have a right to know if their underage daughter is about to have an abortion. About one in five Americans believe the privacy of the daughter is more important.
71% of voters nationwide would support a candidate who maintains life begins at conception including half the electorate who would definitely vote for a candidate who holds this view.

Most Catholic voters and registered practicing Catholic voters agree and favor a candidate who maintains that life begins at conception.
Same-Sex Marriage
70% of Americans Oppose Same-Sex Marriage

70% of Americans do not support same-sex marriage including 38% who advocate no legal recognition and 32% who favor civil unions.

68% of Catholics and 75% of practicing Catholics share this view.

Even though a majority of non-practicing Catholics oppose same sex marriage, 46% believe same-sex couples should be allowed to marry.
70% of voters would support a candidate who would uphold marriage only between a man and a woman including a majority of the electorate who would definitely vote for such a candidate.

A comparable proportion of Catholic voters agree including 55% of registered practicing Catholics who would definitely support a candidate who believes marriage should be between a man and a woman.

Only 38% of non-practicing Catholic voters would definitely support such a candidate.
42% of voters nationwide would definitely support a candidate who supports civil unions between any two adults. Another 19% would support, with reservations, a candidate with this position.

Nearly two-thirds of registered non-practicing Catholic voters would definitely vote for a candidate who held this position.
Election Season:
Values and Issues
The economic crisis is on the minds of most registered voters in the U.S. 57% think the nation’s financial situation is the critical issue facing the nation today. Catholic voters agree.
Values Matter More to Catholics

A majority of Catholic voters -- 51% -- prefer a candidate who shares their values rather than one who maintains similar positions on the issues. 54% of practicing Catholic voters agree. However, the national electorate divides. 46% of registered voters want a candidate with similar values. 42% desire a candidate with whom they share the same views on the issues.

Question wording: If you had to choose, would you prefer: A candidate who shares your position on the issues, but does not share your values or a candidate who shares your values, but not your positions on the issues?
What Voters Want in a Candidate

A combination of both values and issues shapes voters’ perceptions of candidates running for public office.

73% of registered voters nationwide would definitely support a candidate who upholds religious liberties, and 63% want a candidate who stands for Christian principles. Many also look for a candidate who will work to solve global warming, support universal health care, and work to establish school vouchers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What Voters Want in a Candidate</th>
<th>Registered Voters</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>50% or more responded they would definitely vote for a candidate who would do each of the following:</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Uphold religious liberty and freedom of conscience</td>
<td>73%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Work to solve global warming</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stand for the Christian principles on which this country was founded</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support universal health care</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support vouchers to allow students to attend private, public, or religious schools</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uphold marriage only between a man and a woman</td>
<td>53%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Support embryonic stem-cell research</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintain that life begins at conception</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

MOE ±2.5%

Question wording: Would you definitely vote for, vote for but with reservations, or would you definitely not vote for a candidate who would do each of the following:
Catholic voters match many of the priorities of the national electorate. They prefer a candidate who will uphold religious liberties, tackle global warming, stand for Christian principles, support school vouchers, and work toward universal health care. Many practicing Catholics also favor a candidate who maintains life begins at conception.
## Issues with Less of a Consensus Among Catholics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Registered Catholics</th>
<th>Registered Practicing Catholics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fewer than 50% responded they would definitely vote for a candidate who would do each of the following:</td>
<td>Fewer than 50% responded they would definitely vote for a candidate who would do each of the following:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uphold marriage only between a man and a woman</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support the death penalty</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support civil unions for any two adults who want to live together</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leave the economy to adjust to market forces</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make it easier for religious groups &amp; institutions to compete for federal grants</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take a stand based on his religious principles</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consult with religious leaders for guidance</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide amnesty to illegal immigrants currently working in the U.S.</td>
<td>28%</td>
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| Support embryonic stem-cell research | 45% |
| Support the death penalty | 39% |
| Leave the economy to adjust to market forces | 38% |
| Make it easier for religious groups & institutions to compete for federal grants | 38% |
| Take a stand based on his religious principles | 38% |
| Consult with religious leaders for guidance | 36% |
| Support civil unions for any two adults who want to live together | 35% |
| Provide amnesty to illegal immigrants currently working in the U.S. | 27% |

**MOE ±4%**  
**MOE ±4.5%**

**Question wording:** Would you definitely vote for, vote for but with reservations, or would you definitely not vote for a candidate who would do each of the following:

- Although each of these issues is important to many Catholic voters, there is less consensus on them.
- Registered Catholic voters, as a whole, are more divided on the issue of traditional marriage, the death penalty, and civil unions.
- The issue of embryonic stem-cell research divides practicing Catholic voters.
Founded in 1978, the Marist College Institute for Public Opinion (MIPO) is a survey research center at Marist College in Poughkeepsie, New York. The Marist Poll has conducted independent research on public priorities, elections, and a wide variety of public issues.

Through the regular public release of surveys, MIPO has built a legacy of independence, reliability, and accuracy. Frequently cited by journalists, public officials, and policy experts, the Marist Poll has been recognized for fairness, accuracy, and timeliness. Its results are featured in print and electronic media throughout the world.
The Knights of Columbus is a Catholic men's fraternal benefit society that was formed to render financial aid to members and their families. Mutual aid and assistance are offered to sick, disabled and needy members and their families. Social and intellectual fellowship is promoted among members and their families through educational, charitable, religious, social welfare, war relief and public relief works.

The Knights of Columbus has grown from several members in one council to more than 13,000 councils and 1.7 million members throughout the United States, Canada, the Philippines, Mexico, Poland, the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Panama, the Bahamas, the Virgin Islands, Guatemala, Guam and Saipan.