

<http://www.gallup.com/poll/154799/Americans-Including-Catholics-Say-Birth-Control-Morally.aspx>

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Americans, Including Catholics, Say Birth Control Is Morally OK

Birth control has the broadest acceptance among 18 behaviors

by Frank Newport

PRINCETON, NJ -- Eighty-two percent of U.S. Catholics say birth control is morally acceptable, nearing the 89% of all Americans and 90% of non-Catholics who agree. The level of acceptability on this issue is far greater than that of the other 17 issues Gallup asked about this year.

Perceived Moral Acceptability of Birth Control -- by Religion

	Morally acceptable	Morally wrong	Depends on situation (vol.)/ No opinion
	%	%	%
National adults	89	8	3
Catholics	82	15	3
Non-Catholics	90	6	4

May 3-6, 2012

(vol.) = Volunteered response

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These data are from Gallup's May 3-6 Values and Beliefs survey, in which the issue of birth control was included for the first time. Birth control has become controversial in light of the pushback from some Catholic leaders and institutions on the portion of the 2010 Affordable Care Act that requires all institutions, including Catholic ones, to offer birth control as part of employee healthcare plans. The Obama administration has proposed a solution that offers such institutions a technical way around this

requirement, but on Monday a number of Catholic dioceses and institutions, including the University of Notre Dame and Catholic University, filed a lawsuit against the government regarding the requirement.

The issue involved here is the broad separation of church and state, not necessarily the morality of using birth control. Still, the current data show that the substantial majority of Catholics interviewed say birth control is morally acceptable. At the same time, when given a choice, 56% of Catholics in a Gallup survey conducted Feb. 16-19 said they sympathized with the views of religious leaders on the contraception-healthcare coverage debate, while 39% sympathized with the Obama administration's position.

Birth Control Most Widely Seen as Acceptable; Having an Affair, Least

The issue of birth control tops the list of morally acceptable behavior across the 18 issues tested this year. At the bottom of the list is the issue of "married men and women having an affair," which only 7% of Americans find morally acceptable. Having an affair has been at or near the bottom each year since Gallup began tracking these issues in 2001.

U.S. Perceived Moral Acceptability of Behaviors and Social Policies

Ranked by "Difference"

	Morally acceptable	Morally wrong	Difference
	%	%	Pct. pts.
Birth control	89	8	81
Divorce	67	25	42
Gambling	64	31	33
Buying and wearing clothing made of animal fur	60	35	25
Medical research using stem cells obtained from human embryos	58	33	25
The death penalty	58	34	24
Sex between an unmarried man and woman	59	38	21
Medical testing on animals	55	38	17
Gay or lesbian relations	54	42	12
Having a baby outside of marriage	54	42	12
Doctor assisted suicide	45	48	-3
Abortion	38	51	-13
Cloning animals	34	60	-26
Pornography	31	64	-33
Suicide	14	80	-66
Polygamy, when a married person has more than one spouse at the same time	11	86	-75
Cloning humans	10	86	-76
Married men and women having an affair	7	89	-82

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Americans' views on the moral acceptability of each issue held largely steady this year compared with last -- except in the case of the death penalty. This year, 58% of Americans say the death penalty is morally acceptable, down from 65% last year. The 58% reading is the lowest in Gallup's 12-year history of asking about the death penalty in this way. Gallup will update its longer-term trend question on the death penalty in October, which will help confirm whether the downturn in support seen in the current poll is part of a larger trend.

Major Differences Between Democrats and Republicans in Moral Acceptability of Issues

Democrats and Republicans have opposing reactions to a number of values issues, exemplifying the major differences between the two political parties in today's highly partisan world. The majority of

Democrats, versus less than half of Republicans, consider abortion, gay and lesbian relations, having a baby out of wedlock, embryonic stem cell research, and premarital sex morally acceptable. The majority of Republicans, but less than half of Democrats, find the death penalty and medical testing on animals to be morally acceptable.

Additionally, Republicans and Democrats differ significantly in their views of the morality of pornography, doctor-assisted suicide, suicide, and gambling (with Democrats more accepting), and the use of animal fur for clothing (with Republicans more accepting).

The biggest partisan divides come on views of the death penalty, abortion, and gay or lesbian relations, with gaps of 30 percentage points or more between Republicans and Democrats. The smallest differences are on cloning animals, birth control, and cloning humans.

Perceived Moral Acceptability of 2012's Most Controversial Issues -- by Party ID

% Morally acceptable, sorted by "Gap"

	Repub- licans	Independ- ents	Demo- crats	Gap, Republicans minus Democrats
	%	%	%	Pct. pts.
The death penalty	73	62	42	31
Medical testing on animals	69	50	48	21
Buying and wearing clothing made of animal fur	71	55	55	16
Cloning animals	32	37	32	0
Birth control	87	89	90	-3
Cloning humans	10	9	13	-3
Married men and women having an affair	3	10	8	-5
Polygamy, when a married person has more than one spouse at the same time	5	14	11	-6
Divorce	60	71	69	-9
Gambling	57	68	67	-10
Suicide	9	12	21	-12
Doctor-assisted suicide	33	51	49	-16
Pornography	21	32	39	-18
Sex between an unmarried man and woman	42	68	66	-24
Medical research using stem cells obtained from human embryos	44	57	72	-28
Having a baby outside of marriage	35	60	64	-29
Gay or lesbian relations	36	58	66	-30
Abortion	22	40	52	-30

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The relative position of independents on these issues varies. On some, including abortion, gay or lesbian relations, embryonic stem cell research, pornography, and the death penalty, independents' attitudes fall squarely between those of Democrats and Republicans. On others, including sex between an unmarried man and woman, doctor-assisted suicide, gambling, divorce, and cloning animals, independents are the most supportive of all partisan groups, at least by a slight margin.

Implications

Although Catholic leaders have protested the portion of the Affordable Care Act mandating that health insurance plans include payment for birth control, the average rank-and-file Catholic in the U.S. finds the

use of birth control morally acceptable. Catholic leaders are no doubt aware that many of their parishioners use birth control, but these data underscore the divide between official church teaching and Catholics' day-by-day behaviors.

Democrats and Republicans have long differed on their positions on these types of moral issues, and these data confirm how far apart partisans continue to be in this important election year. Although values concerns are seldom rated the most important issues in a presidential campaign, a candidate's positions on such issues can serve to motivate his party's base, and can help determine vote choice for the small segments of voters for whom values are very important.

The partisan divisions on these issues partly reflect the significant difference in religiosity between the two partisan groups. Republicans are on average significantly more religious than Democrats. In this Values and Beliefs survey, for example, 42% of Republicans report attending church weekly, compared with 29% of Democrats. Religious Americans are significantly less likely to find most of these moral practices acceptable than are those who are less religious.

Survey Methods

Results for this Gallup poll are based on telephone interviews conducted May 3-6, 2012, with a random sample of 1,024 adults, aged 18 and older, living in all 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia.

For results based on the total sample of national adults, one can say with 95% confidence that the maximum margin of sampling error is ± 4 percentage points.

Interviews are conducted with respondents on landline telephones and cellular phones, with interviews conducted in Spanish for respondents who are primarily Spanish-speaking. Each sample includes a minimum quota of 400 cell phone respondents and 600 landline respondents per 1,000 national adults, with additional minimum quotas among landline respondents by region. Landline telephone numbers are chosen at random among listed telephone numbers. Cell phone numbers are selected using random-digit-dial methods. Landline respondents are chosen at random within each household on the basis of which member had the most recent birthday.

Samples are weighted by gender, age, race, Hispanic ethnicity, education, region, adults in the household, and phone status (cell phone only/landline only/both, cell phone mostly, and having an unlisted landline number). Demographic weighting targets are based on the March 2011 Current Population Survey figures for the aged 18 and older non-institutionalized population living in U.S. telephone households. All reported margins of sampling error include the computed design effects for weighting and sample design.

In addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of public opinion polls.

[View methodology, full question results, and trend data.](#)

For more details on Gallup's polling methodology, visit www.gallup.com.