

BELDEN RUSSONELLO & STEWART

RESEARCH AND COMMUNICATIONS

Secular and Security-Minded: The Catholic Vote in Summer 2008

**A National Opinion Survey of Likely Catholic
Voters**

Executive Summary

Conducted for Catholics for Choice

August 2008

Introduction

Catholic voters, who make up 25% of the American electorate, show little interest in so-called values issues to help them decide who should be the next president, according to a survey of 1,033 Catholic voters conducted July 8 to 15, 2008. Instead, they want the next president to focus on the basics of improving the economy, ending the war in Iraq, and keeping the country safe from terrorism.

For the last nine presidential elections, the Catholic vote has been a classic swing vote in American presidential politics, changing from support for the Democratic candidate to the Republican and back again. In every presidential election since 1972, the candidate who won the Catholic vote has won the popular vote nationwide, making the Catholic vote a reliable indicator of where American voters will land on Election Day.

The national survey reported here is the third pre-presidential survey of Catholic voters that Belden Russonello & Stewart has conducted for Catholics for Choice (CFC). The results of the BRS/CFC Catholic voter surveys in October 2000 and June 2004 tracked closely with the way Catholics voted for president in November of those years.

The 2008 survey explores a diversity of issues, including Catholic voters' presidential preference, attitudes toward economic and national security issues, the war in Iraq, immigration, and social issues including abortion, pharmacist refusals to fill prescriptions for birth control, gay marriage, and abstinence-only education. The survey also investigates Catholic voters' opinions of the Catholic hierarchy's involvement in political issues. Some questions track attitudes from the 2004 survey.

Crosstab tables and a questionnaire with total percents are available.

The margin of sampling error for a random sample of this size is ± 3.1 percentage points, and ± 5.7 percentage points for the Latino oversample. The demographic characteristics of the sample have been weighted statistically to bring age, race and region into their proper proportions for likely Catholic voters based on 2004 exit poll data.

Summary Analysis

A new national survey of Catholic voters reveals that Catholics are currently splitting their vote for president between Barack Obama and John McCain, but united in their aversion to mixing religion and politics.

Tight race for President

At this point in the presidential race, 42% of Catholics would vote for Democrat Barack Obama and 40% would vote for Republican John McCain, with one in six (17%) undecided. McCain holds a slim lead among white Catholic voters (44% to 37%), while Obama is winning the Latino Catholic vote by a huge margin (61% to 23%). Latinos make up one in six Catholic voters.

The youngest voters, ages 18 to 34, prefer Obama over McCain 47% to 41%. When younger voters are combined with voters slightly older, the vote splits by gender: Catholic women under 45 years old go with Obama (48% to 37%) while men under 45 tend toward McCain (46% to 41%).

National and economic security over so-called values issues

The top priorities for the next president, according to Catholics, should be first and foremost improving the economy (68% saying it should be one of the highest priorities), followed by protecting the U.S. from terrorism (54%), resolving the war in Iraq (50%), making health care more affordable (48%), and protecting Social Security (47%). While still a top concern, terrorism worries Catholics considerably less now than it did in June 2004 before the last presidential election (11 percentage point drop from 65% to 54%).

The next tier of priorities also reflects practical domestic needs, including improving public education (34%) and cutting taxes (34%).

Less important priorities for Catholic voters are advancing civil liberties (26%), promoting moral values in the country (25%), deporting illegal immigrants (23%), addressing global warming (22%), protecting a woman's right to choose abortion (18%), promoting human rights (17%) and advancing gay rights (6%).

Differences according to candidate preference: The priorities of Catholic voters differ somewhat according to whom they support for president. Obama supporters' top priorities are improving the economy, resolving the war in Iraq and making health care more affordable, in that order. McCain supporters' priorities are protecting the U.S. from terrorism, improving the economy and cutting taxes.

The importance of the peace and prosperity: The Iraq war could be a decisive issue in dividing the Catholic vote, as 50% say that resolving the war is a top priority, and the two presidential candidates have different ideas on how to get this done. Currently Catholics lean more toward Obama's view than McCain's. When offered a choice between two positions, a majority (58%) supports a two-year timetable for bringing American troops home from

Iraq, while four in ten Catholics (42%) believe the U.S. should keep combat troops in Iraq as long as it takes to make the country stable.

Among the 30% of Catholic voters who say their presidential vote will be determined solely on a candidate's position on Iraq, far more (66%) believe that the U.S. should withdraw its troops within two years, than believe that the U.S. should stay in Iraq as long as needed to make the country stable (33%).

Voters not following the hierarchy's political views

Catholics may be listening carefully to the candidates but few are following the dictates of the Catholic bishops when it comes to politics. Seven in ten (70%) say that the views of Catholic bishops in the U.S. are unimportant to them in deciding for whom to vote and a similarly large proportion (73%) says they believe Catholic politicians are under no religious obligation to vote on issues the way the bishops recommend. While Catholic Republicans and Democrats and McCain and Obama voters disagree on national priorities, majorities of all of these voter segments agree that Catholics are not obligated to heed the bishops' recommendations.

Specifically on the abortion issue, seven in ten (69%) say they feel no obligation to vote against candidates who support abortion, and an equal number disapproves of denying communion to Catholics who support legal abortion (75%).

There is little difference in presidential preference by how often Catholics attend church. Regular church-goers—those who fill the pews at Mass every week or more—split 43% for McCain and 39% for Obama.

More telling than frequency of church attendance is the political ideology of the church-goer. Liberal church-going Catholics place improving public education (70% saying highest priority), resolving the Iraq war (68%) and improving the economy (64%) at the top of their wish list for the president. Moderates who are regular church attendees add making health care more affordable (61%) onto their top two issues of the economy (79%) and the war (65%). Conservatives who are regular church-goers hold somewhat different priorities, leading with protection against terrorism (71%), followed by concerns over the economy (64%), protecting Social Security (52%) and the war (50%).

Mainstream views

On a number of issues, Catholic voters mirror mainstream American public opinion.

- Catholic voters support keeping abortion legal (58% support), but are not ready to legalize gay marriage (58% oppose).
- They believe insurance companies should be required to cover and pharmacists required to sell birth control pills. Three-quarters of Catholics support requiring health insurance plans to cover birth control pills (75%).

Nearly eight in ten (78%) oppose allowing pharmacists to refuse to fill birth control prescriptions.

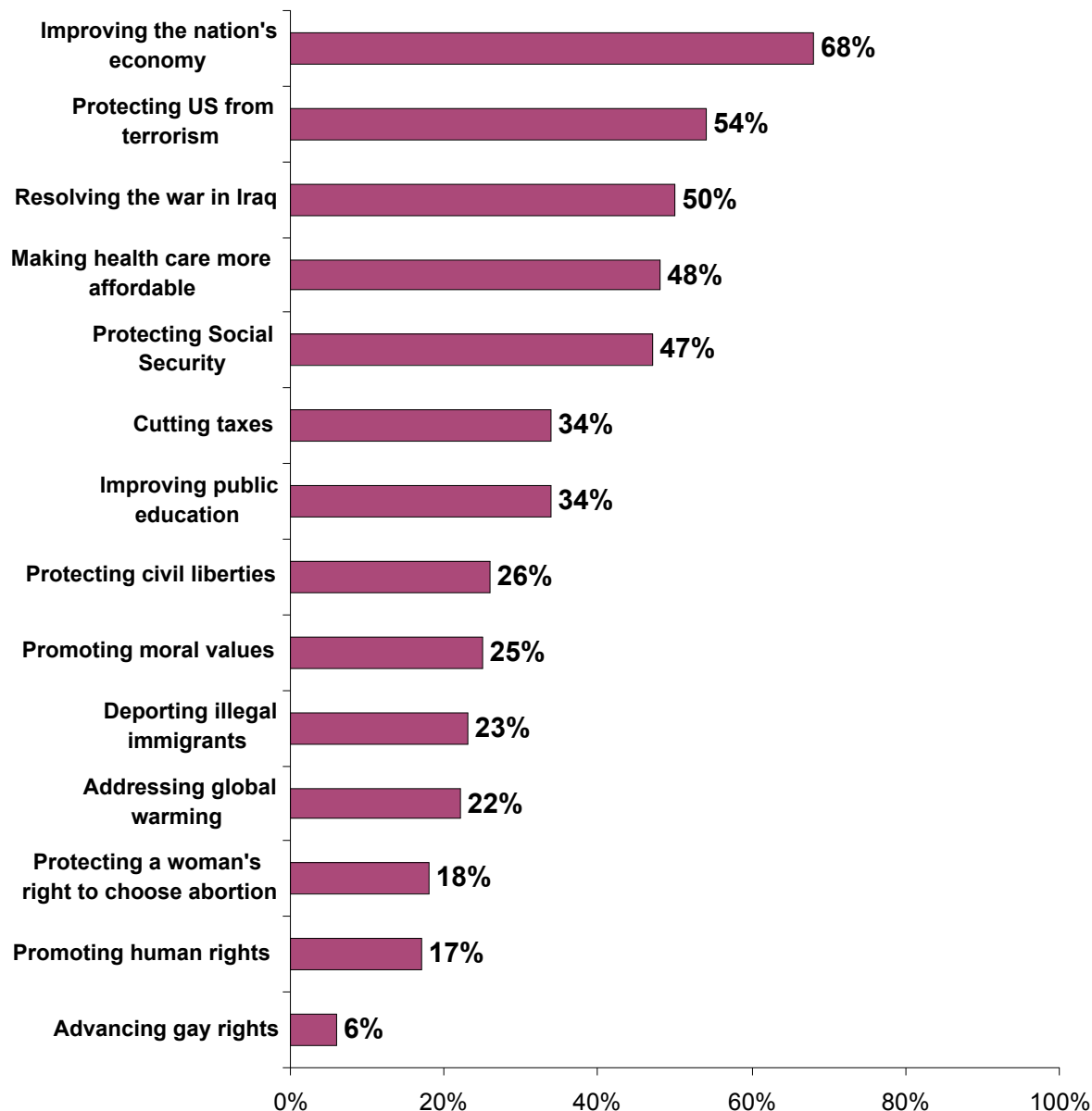
- Catholic voters do not approve of schools teaching abstinence only in sex education classes. Six in ten (64%) oppose requiring high school sex education programs to only teach abstinence.
- Catholic voters lean against paying for children of illegal immigrants to go to public schools here in the U.S. (53% oppose; 46% support), and against providing family planning funding to people overseas (55% oppose; 45% support).
- By a wide margin, they support decoupling science from religion and favor stem cell research with early human embryos (69% support), but they are divided on the idea of legal doctor-assisted suicide (50% support; 49% oppose).
- Catholic voters strongly support the death penalty for people convicted of murder (69% support), but oppose torture as official U.S. policy (54% oppose).

About the Report

In reading the report, tables and graphs in the text highlight selected survey findings and are expressed in percentages. The base for each table is all respondents (n=1,033) 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%.

Catholic Voters' Priorities for the Next President

(% saying "7" highest priority)

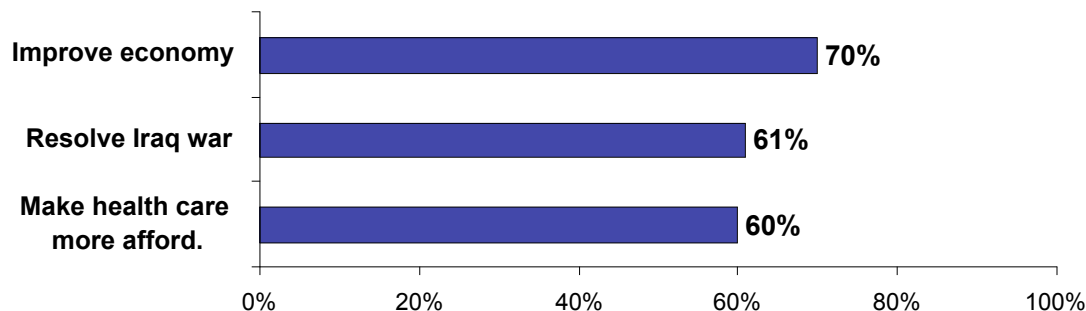


Q3-18. Using this 1 to 7 scale, how high a priority would you personally want the next president to give to each of the following issues? ONE means the lowest priority and SEVEN means highest priority. [RANDOMIZE]
 Q14. Improving the nation's economy. Q15. Making health care more affordable. Q11. Protecting the US from terrorism.
 Q10. Resolving the war in Iraq. Q4. Protecting Social Security. Q6. Cutting taxes. Q3. Improving public education.
 Q12. Protecting civil liberties. Q5. Promoting moral values in the country. Q17. Deporting illegal immigrants.
 Q16. Addressing global warming. Q8. Protecting a woman's right to choose abortion.
 Q9. Promoting human rights around the world. Q7. Advancing gay rights.

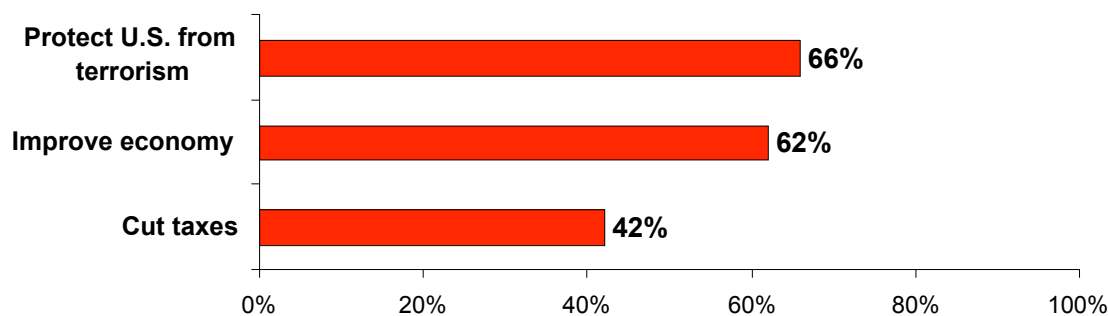
Top 3 Priorities for the Next President

(% saying "7" highest priority)

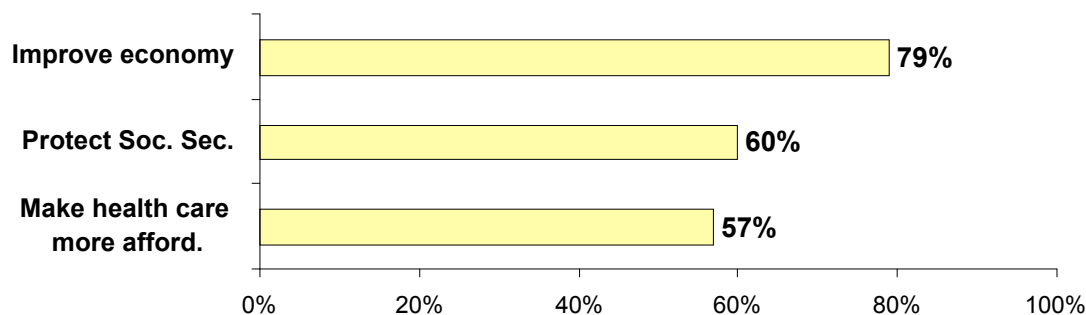
For Obama Supporters



For McCain Supporters



For Undecided Voters



Q1. If the election for President were held today, would you vote for: The Republican John McCain; The Democrat Barack Obama; Independent candidate Ralph Nader; Libertarian candidate Bob Barr? Q3-18. Using this 1 to 7 scale, how high a priority would you personally want the next president to give to each of the following issues? ONE means the lowest priority and SEVEN means highest priority. [RANDOMIZE] Q14. Improving the nation's economy.

Q15. Making health care more affordable.

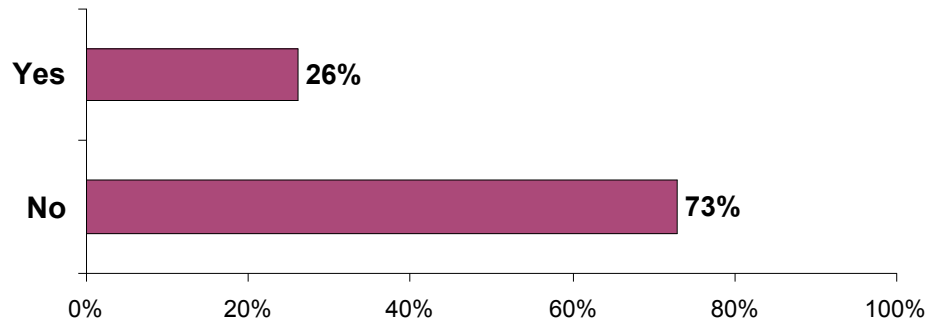
Q11. Protecting the US from terrorism.

Q10. Resolving the war in Iraq.

Q4. Protecting Social Security.

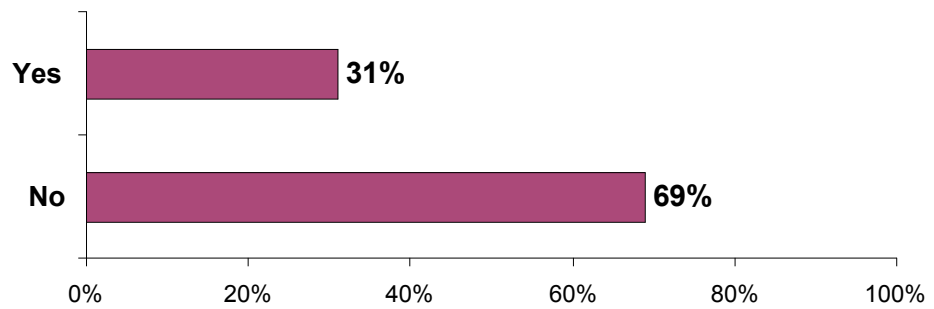
Q6. Cutting taxes.

Do Catholic politicians have an obligation to vote on issues the way Catholic Bishops recommend?



Q40. Do you believe that politicians who are Catholic have a religious obligation to vote on issues the way Catholic Bishops recommend? Is that strongly or somewhat?

Do you believe Catholic voters have a religious obligation to vote against candidates who support legal abortion?



Q41. Do you believe voters who are Catholic have a religious obligation to vote AGAINST candidates who support legal abortion? Is that strongly or somewhat?

Survey of Catholic Voters for Catholics for Choice

Interviewing conducted July 8 through July 15, 2008.
N=1,033 Catholic registered voters, likely to vote in 2008 presidential election
Knowledge Networks web-enabled interviews: n=833
Latino oversample telephone interviews: n=200

Margin of sampling error is ± 3.1 percentage points.
Margin of sampling error for Latinos (n=295 from KN and telephone sample)
is ± 5.7 percentage points.

2004 Tracking: N=2,239 (± 2.1) June 2 to June 10, 2004 of Catholic registered voters,
likely to vote in 2004 presidential election.

Percents may add to 99% or 101% due to rounding.

* indicates less than 1% , – indicates zero.

S1. Are you registered to vote at your current address?	Yes	100%
	No	--
	DK/REF	--
S2. Not everyone has a chance to vote in every election. Thinking about the presidential election in November, what would you say are the chances that you will vote in the election? Are you very likely to vote, somewhat likely, not very likely, not at all likely, or are you not sure?	Very likely	100%
	Somewhat likely	--
	Not very likely	--
	Not at all likely	--
	Not sure	--
	DK/REF	--
1. If the election for President were held today, would you vote for: [ROTATE MCCAIN AND OBAMA]	The Republican John McCain	40%
	The Democrat Barack Obama	42
	Independent candidate Ralph Nader	1
	Libertarian candidate Bob Barr	1
	Undecided	17
	DK/REF	*
PRESIDENTIAL VOTE INCLUDING LEANERS: 1. If the election for President were held today, would you vote for: [ROTATE MCCAIN AND OBAMA]	John McCain	48%
	Barack Obama	50
	Nader/Barr	2
	Undecided/DK	1
	REF	*
2. [IF UNDECIDED OR DK/REF] Are you leaning towards: [ROTATE MCCAIN AND OBAMA]		

Using this 1 to 7 scale, how high a priority would you personally want the next president to give to each of the following issues? ONE means the lowest priority and SEVEN means highest priority. [RANDOMIZE]

		Lowest Priority	1	2	3	4	5	6	Highest Priority	7	DK/ REF
Q3. Improving public education	2008	2%	2	5	13	22	22	34	*		
	2004	1%	2	3	13	20	26	34	*		
Q4. Protecting Social Security	2008	*%	2	2	11	15	23	47	*		
	2004	1%	2	3	10	18	22	43	*		
Q5. Promoting moral values in the country	2008	4%	5	11	18	20	16	25	*		
	2004	4%	6	8	17	19	17	28	1		
Q6. Cutting taxes	2008	4%	2	5	18	19	19	34	*		
	2004	4%	5	8	19	21	16	26	*		
Q7. Advancing gay rights	2008	38%	13	10	16	12	6	6	*		
	2004	42%	13	14	13	8	4	5	2		
Q8. Protecting a woman's right to choose abortion	2008	24%	7	11	16	13	10	18	*		
	2004	24%	9	10	16	14	10	16	1		
Q9. Promoting human rights around the world	2008	5%	7	13	24	20	14	17	*		
	2004	4%	7	12	26	22	13	16	*		
Q10. Resolving the war in Iraq	2008	1%	1	2	7	12	27	50	*		
	2004	1%	1	1	6	12	21	57	*		
Q11. Protecting the US from terrorism	2008	2%	1	2	9	11	22	54	*		
	2004	*	*	1	3	10	20	65	*		
Q12. Protecting civil liberties	2008	2%	4	5	23	21	20	26	*		
	2004	1%	3	7	21	24	20	24	*		
Q13. Keeping government out of private moral decisions	2008	5%	4	10	22	18	17	23	*		
Q14. Improving the nation's economy	2008	*%	*	1	4	6	21	68	*		
Q15. Making health care more affordable	2008	1%	2	5	9	15	20	48	*		
Q16. Addressing global warming	2008	9%	6	8	16	19	19	22	*		
Q17. Deporting illegal immigrants	2008	10%	8	13	15	15	14	23	*		
Q18. Fighting racism	2008	6%	7	13	25	17	15	17	*		

Q19. Which statement comes closest to your view? A. American troops should stay in Iraq as long as it takes to make the country stable. –OR– B: The U.S. should take all of our troops out of Iraq within two years, even if Iraq is not as stable as we would like. Do you feel that way strongly or somewhat?	Strongly A: As long as it takes	19%
	Somewhat A: As long as it takes	23
	Somewhat B: Out within two years	26
	Strongly B: Out within two years	32
	DK/REF	*

Now on a different topic:

		2008	2004
Q20. Do you agree or disagree that it should be legal for a woman to have an abortion? Is that strongly or somewhat?	Strongly agree	32	33%
	Somewhat agree	26	28
	Somewhat disagree	17	16
	Strongly disagree	25	22
	DK/REF	*	*

Do you support or oppose each of the following? Do you support/oppose that strongly or somewhat? [RANDOMIZE Q21-Q29, Q30 SHOULD ALWAYS BE LAST]

		Strngly support	Smwhat support	Smwhat oppose	Strngly oppose	DK/ REF
Q21. Making it legal for doctors to assist in the suicide of a terminally ill patient	2008	14%	36	24	25	*
	2004	18%	35	21	24	1
Q22. Making gay and lesbian marriage legal	2008	17%	24	20	38	*
	2004	13%	21	18	46	1
Q23. Allowing scientists to use stem cells obtained from very early human embryos, to find cures for serious diseases such as Alzheimer's, diabetes, and Parkinson's	2008	39%	30	15	17	*
	2004	34%	38	14	12	1
Q24. The US providing funding for voluntary family planning in developing countries	2008	13%	32	32	23	*
	2004	9%	32	32	27	1
Q25. Allowing children of parents who are in the US illegally to attend public schools	2008	20%	26	26	27	*
	2004	15%	29	27	29	1
Q26. Allowing pharmacists to refuse to fill prescriptions for birth control.	2008	12%	10%	23%	55%	*
Q27. Requiring health insurance plans that cover prescription drugs in general to also cover birth control pills.	2008	39%	36	14	10	*
Q28. Requiring public high school sex education programs to only teach about abstinence as the way to prevent pregnancy and disease.	2008	18%	18	28	36	*
Q29. The U.S. government policy stating that it is acceptable for the U.S. military to use torture in terrorism cases.	2008	13%	33	24	30	*
Q30. The death penalty for persons convicted of murder.	2008	39%	30	20	12	*
	2004	40%	31	15	13	1

If a candidate for President took a position DIFFERENT from yours on each of the following issues would it: Definitely make you vote against the candidate, maybe make you vote against the candidate or would it not change your vote?
[RANDOMIZE]

		Definitely make you vote against	Maybe make you vote against	Would not change your vote	DK/ REF
Q31. Abortion	2008	27%	34	38	1
	2004	27%	38	34	1
Q32. Marriage of gay and lesbian couples	2008	24%	34	42	*
	2004	29%	34	37	1
Q33. Situation in Iraq	2008	30%	42	27	*
	2004	27%	47	26	1
Q34. Immigration	2008	22%	43	34	1
Q35. The type of judges that should be appointed to the Supreme Court	2008	26%	34	40	*

Q36. In deciding your vote for President, how important is a candidate's religious affiliation or background to you?	Very important	10%
	Somewhat important	32
	Not very important	31
	Not at all important	27
	DK/REF	*

Q37. In deciding your vote for President, how important is it to you that a candidate practice his or her religion?	Very important	16%
	Somewhat important	36
	Not very important	26
	Not at all important	21
	DK/REF	2

Q38. In deciding your vote for President, how important is a candidate's racial or ethnic background to you?	Very important	6%
	Somewhat important	14
	Not very important	31
	Not at all important	48
	DK/REF	*

Here are some questions about Catholics and elections.

		2008	2004
Q39. How important are the views of the Catholic Bishops in the U.S. for you in deciding whom to vote for?	Very important	8%	7%
	Somewhat important	22	23
	Not very important	30	30
	Not at all important	40	40
	DK/REF	*	1

[RANDOMIZE Q40-42]

		2008	2004
Q40. Do you believe that politicians who are Catholic have a religious obligation to vote on issues the way Catholic Bishops recommend? Is that strongly or somewhat?	NET: Yes	26%	16%
	Yes, Strongly	5	
	Yes, Somewhat	21	
	NET: No	73	83
	No, Somewhat	32	
	No, Strongly	41	
DK/REF	*	2	

		2008	2004
Q41. Do you believe voters who are Catholic have a religious obligation to vote AGAINST candidates who support legal abortion? Is that strongly or somewhat?	NET: Yes	31%	24%
	Yes, Strongly	11	
	Yes, Somewhat	20	
	NET: No	69	74%
	No, Somewhat	26	
	No, Strongly	43	
DK/REF	*	2	

		2008	2004
Q42. Do you approve or disapprove of denying communion to Catholics who support legal abortion? Is that strongly or somewhat? 2004: Do you approve or disapprove of Catholic Bishops denying communion to Catholics who support legal abortion?	NET: Approve	24	22%
	Strongly approve	11	
	Somewhat approve	13	
	Net: Disapprove	75	76
	Somewhat disapprove	30	
	Strongly disapprove	45	
	DK/REF	1	2

Now I have a few questions to help classify your responses.

D1. Which of the following best describes the place where you live: large city, small city, suburb, town, rural area?	Large city	24%
	Small city	18
	Suburb	31
	Town	14
	Rural area	13
	DK/REF	*

D2. Are you: married, living with a life partner, widowed, separated, divorced, or single—never been married?	Married	54%
	Living with a life partner	4
	Widowed	5
	Separated	1
	Divorced	10
	Single, never been married	25
DK/REF	1	

D3. Do you consider yourself to be a [ROTATE ORDER: Democrat, Republican], an independent, or something else?	Democrat	44%
	Republican	33
	Independent	19
	Something else	3
	DK/REF	1

PARTY COMBINED: D3B. [IF D3=Independent or Something else] Do you lean more toward [ROTATE DEM/ REP] the Republican Party or more toward the Democratic Party? D3C. [D3=Dem or Rep] Do you consider yourself a: strong [Democrat /Republican] or a weak [Democrat/Republican]?	Strong Democrat	28%
	Weak Democrat	16
	Independent, lean Democrat	10
	Independent, no lean	*
	Independent, lean Republican	10
	Weak Republican	14
	Strong Republican	19
	DK/REF	2

D4. In terms of your political outlook, do you usually think of yourself as: [REVERSE LIST ORDER]:	Very conservative	11%
	Somewhat conservative	28
	Middle of the road	35
	Somewhat liberal	19
	Very liberal	5
	DK/REF	1

D5. 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	6%
	Once a week	27
	A few times a month	13
	A few times a year	36
	Never	18
	DK/REF	1

D6. [IF D5 MORE OFTEN THAN NEVER:] When you go to mass do you receive communion: almost always, some of the time, not very often?	Almost always	53%
	Some of the time	12
	Not very often	15
	DK/REF	1

RACE	White	80%
	Black or African American	3
	Hispanic	16
	Other	1
	DK/REF	--

D7. [IF HISPANIC/ LATINO; N=295] Now I want to ask you about your family's heritage. Are your ancestors: Mexican, Mexican- American or Chicano; Puerto Rican; Cuban; From another Central American country; From another South American country; Caribbean; or something else? [ALLOW MULTIPLE RESPONSES]	Mexican, Mexican-American or Chicano	58%
	Puerto Rican	8
	Cuban	4
	From another Central American country	3
	From another South American country	7
	Caribbean	4
	Something else	13
	DK/REF	3

AGE	18-34	26%
	35-44	23
	45-64	34
	65+	17
	DK/REF	*

EDUCATION	Less than high school	7%
	High school graduate or GED	27
	Some college or associate degree	30
	College graduate with four-year degree	24
	Postgraduate study	12
	DK/REF	*

HH INCOME	Less than \$25,000	13%
	Between \$25,000 - \$49,999	25
	Between \$50,000 - \$74,999	21
	Between \$75,000 - \$99,999	17
	\$100,000 or more	22
	DK/REF	1

GENDER	Male	47%
	Female	53

REGION	Northeast	26%
	Midwest	31
	South	20
	West	23
