

Roman Catholics & LGBT Justice Issues

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Executive Summary

Catholics in the American Religious Marketplace

- Catholics are the single largest denomination in the United States, accounting for about a quarter (24%) of the adult population and a slightly larger portion of the American electorate (26%).
- More than 1-in-10 Americans are former Catholics, people who were raised in the faith but who now profess a different religious affiliation or no affiliation at all. Nearly one-third (31%) of all Americans were raised Catholic.
- Despite losing a significant number of adherents the Catholic share of the U.S. population has held fairly steady over the last three decades due to high Catholic affiliation among recent immigrants; nearly half (46%) of all immigrants coming to the U.S. are Catholic.

Catholics as a Swing Constituency in Politics

- Catholics are perhaps the most important swing constituency in national elections. Catholics have been transitioning over the last four decades from a solid Democratic group to a swing constituency.
- Catholics are an important bellwether constituency. Across the past decade, every presidential candidate who won the Catholic vote has won the popular vote.
- In 2008, Democratic candidate Barack Obama is poised to do well among Catholics. Currently, Catholic registered voters are supporting Obama over John McCain 52% to 41%.

Catholic Views on LGBT Justice Issues

Catholics remain more accepting of homosexuality than every other Christian tradition in the U.S.:

- By a margin of 2 to 1, Catholics say that homosexuality should be accepted by society (58% compared to only 30% who believe it ought to be discouraged by society). In the general population, only a bare majority believes homosexuality should be accepted by society.
- While only 43% of Catholics currently support marriage equality, for the last decade Catholics have consistently exhibited lower levels of opposition to same-sex marriage than Americans overall.
 - A sizable majority (60%) of Catholics under the age of 30 say they favor same-sex marriage compared to just a quarter of Catholics age 65 or older. Interestingly, young Catholics are even more supportive of same-sex marriage than are young people overall (60% to 53%).
 - Support for same-sex marriage among Hispanic Catholics is significantly lower than among white non-Hispanic Catholics (32% vs. 43% respectively).
 - When Catholics were given a reassurance that no church would be forced to perform same-sex marriages against their consciences, support for marriage increased by 15 points to 46%.
- Six-in-10 Catholics support adoption by gay and lesbian couples who meet all legal qualifications.
- More than two-thirds of Catholics believe in key aspects of family recognition: that gay and lesbian couples in long-term committed relationships should have the same rights as married couples in the areas of hospital visitation, health insurance and pension coverage.
- Six-in-10 Catholics support the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA).

American Catholics: A Faith in Transition

American Catholics constitute a vital segment of America’s diverse and dynamic religious landscape. Overall, they account for about a quarter (24%) of the adult population and a slightly larger portion of the American electorate.¹ For over 30 years Catholics have accounted for about one-in-four American adults and have been a potent force in American politics. They remain the single largest denomination in the United States. However, the relative stability of the Catholic population hides considerable internal diversity and two sources of significant turbulence below the surface.

Two Key Dynamics: Native-Born Attrition and Hispanic Immigration

One of the hallmarks of American religious life is the high degree to which people engage in religious switching, choosing from a vibrant and varied religious marketplace. More than a quarter of Americans now belong to a different faith than the one in which they were raised. Moreover, every faith is simultaneously gaining and losing adherents. Among Catholics this religious switching is more pronounced. In fact, the Religious Landscape Survey, conducted by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, found Catholics to be the “biggest losers” in the American religious marketplace. More than 1-in-10 Americans are former Catholics, people who were raised in the faith but who now profess a different religious affiliation or no affiliation at all. In fact, 31% of all Americans were raised Catholic.

Despite losing a significant number of adherents, the Catholic share of the U.S. population has held fairly steady over the last three decades. The primary reason for this is immigration. Immigrants coming to the U.S., particularly those coming from Latin America, are disproportionately composed of Catholics.² In fact, nearly half (46%) of all immigrants coming to the U.S. are Catholic. Among the native born, Catholics comprise only about 1-in-5 Americans. The result has been a Catholic population that is becoming increasingly more diverse; nearly a quarter (23%) of all Catholics were born outside the U.S.³

| % who are... | All Catholics | Among Catholics ages... | | | |
|--------------|---------------|-------------------------|----------|----------|----------|
| | | 18-29 | 30-49 | 50-64 | 65+ |
| White | 65 | 47 | 60 | 75 | 82 |
| Black | 2 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| Latino | 29 | 45 | 34 | 19 | 13 |
| Other/Mixed | <u>4</u> | <u>5</u> | <u>4</u> | <u>4</u> | <u>3</u> |
| | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |

Source: Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, Religious Landscape Survey, 2007
 Due to rounding, figures may not add to 100.
 Results have been repercentaged to exclude nonresponse.

¹ Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, Religious Landscape Survey, 2007

² This is especially true of Mexican immigrants who account for the largest share of the foreign-born population. Close to three-quarters (72%) of all Mexican immigrants are Catholic.

³ Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, Religious Landscape Survey, 2007

The influx of foreign-born Catholics is having a significant effect on the ethnic composition of the Catholic population. Nearly 3-in-10 (29%) Catholics are Hispanic. However, ethnic diversity varies significantly by age. Among Catholics under the age of 30 nearly equal numbers are white (47%) as are Hispanic (45%). In contrast, among Catholics over the age of 65 the vast majority (82%) are white.

The ethnic transformation of American Catholicism has also had a marked effect on its geographic base. Historically, Catholics were predominantly found in the Northeast. However, as new Catholic immigrants arrive in the U.S. they are settling in greater numbers in the South and West. A majority of white Catholics are found in the Northeast (36%) and Midwest (31%). Among Hispanic Catholics about three-quarters live in either the South (32%) or West (42%). In the western United States Hispanic Catholics now constitute the majority of the Catholic population. These shifting demographic dynamics have resulted in an ethnic regionalism among Catholics and must be central to strategic thinking about this group.⁴

Catholics in Recent American Politics

Catholics are perhaps the most important swing constituency in national elections. Weighing in at approximately 26% of all voters in the last national election, Catholics have been transitioning over the last four decades from a solid Democratic group to a swing constituency.⁵ In 1960, approximately 7-in-10 (71%) Catholics identified as Democrats. By the Reagan years, only slightly more than half of Catholics identified with the Democratic Party. In 2004, Catholic identification with the Democratic Party fell further, reaching for the first time near parity between Democrats and Republicans (44% to 41% respectively).⁶ Four years later Democratic Party affiliation is rebounding, with 53% of Catholics now identifying as Democrat, compared to 34% identifying as Republican.⁷

Over the past decade, every presidential candidate who won the Catholic vote has also won the popular vote. Bill Clinton won a majority (53%) of the Catholic vote in 1996. Although Al Gore lost the election in 2000, he won a bare majority (50%) of the Catholic vote and the popular vote. In 2004, George Bush won a majority (52%) of the Catholic vote and the presidency over Catholic rival John Kerry. Finally, in 2006, Democratic House candidates nationwide received 54% of the Catholic vote, which helped sweep the new Democratic majority into power.⁸

⁴ Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, Religious Landscape Survey, 2007

⁵ National Election Pool Exit Poll, 2006

⁶ Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, "A Faith Based Partisan Divide," 2005

⁷ Pew Research Center for the People & the Press Combined Surveys, January – July 2008; Party identification includes respondents who said they were independent or something else but leaned toward one party or another.

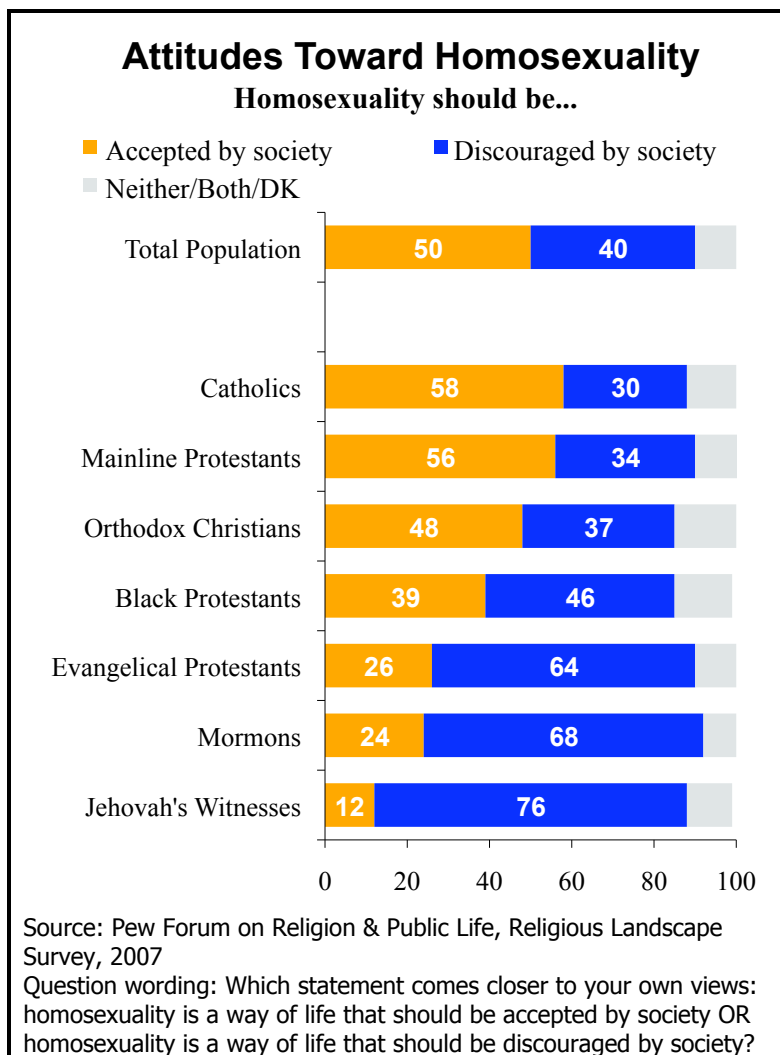
⁸ All voting data come from the National Election Pool Exit Polls, 1996-2006

In 2008, Democratic candidate Barack Obama is poised to do well among Catholics. Currently, Catholic registered voters are supporting Obama over John McCain 52% to 41%.⁹ Among Hispanic Catholics, Obama appears likely to soundly beat McCain. A recent survey released by the Pew Hispanic Center found that among registered Hispanic Catholics Obama leads McCain by more than fifty points (71% to 17%). The survey also found a sizable gap in partisan attachment. A majority (55%) of Hispanic Catholics identify as Democrat and only slightly more than 1-in-10 (13%) claim a Republican affiliation.¹⁰

Catholic Views about Homosexuality and Homosexual Behavior

Catholics remain more accepting of homosexuality than every other Christian tradition in the U.S. Overall, half of all American adults say that homosexuality should be accepted by society and four-in-ten say that homosexuality is a way of life that ought to be discouraged. Nearly twice as many Catholics say that homosexuality should be accepted by society than say it ought to be discouraged (58% to 30%). In contrast, majorities of evangelical Protestants, Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses and a plurality of black Protestants believe that homosexuality should be discouraged by society.¹¹ Interestingly, the proportion of Catholics today who believe that homosexuality should be accepted by society is roughly the same as it was in 2000 (62%).¹²

The greater acceptance of homosexuality among Catholics is also found in attitudes about sex between adults of the same gender. Catholics are less likely than other Christians to say that sexual



⁹ Pew Research Center for the People & the Press Survey, July 2008

¹⁰ Pew Hispanic Center, 2008 National Survey of Latinos: Hispanic Voter Attitudes, July 2008

¹¹ Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, Religious Landscape Survey, 2007

¹² Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, August 2000

relations between adults of the same sex is always wrong. Half of all Catholics say that homosexual sex is always wrong compared to more than three-quarters of white evangelical and black Protestants (76% and 77% respectively).¹³

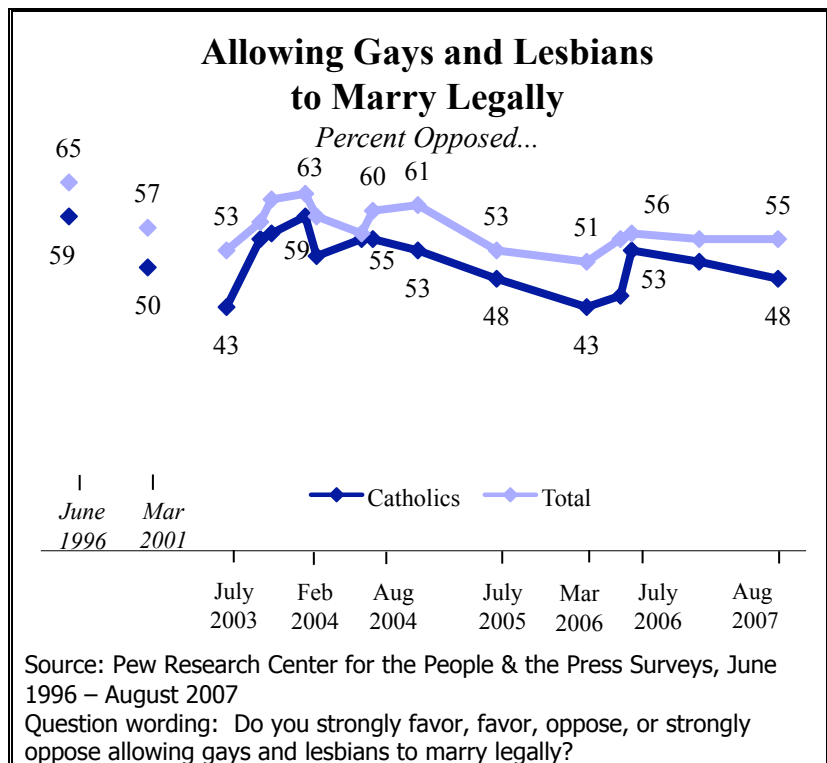
Among Catholics, there are stark differences in beliefs about sexual relations among same-sex couples. For instance, Hispanic Catholics are much more likely than non-Hispanic Catholics to say that same-sex sexual relations are always wrong (59% to 43%). There are also significant generation gaps. Among Catholics age 65 and older close to three-quarters (73%) say that sexual relations between adults of the same sex is always wrong. In contrast, less than half (39%) of Catholics under the age of 30 say sex between adults of the same gender is always wrong and nearly as many (36%) say that homosexual sex is not wrong at all.¹⁴

Catholics and Marriage Equality

Same-sex Marriage

Recent polling finds that Catholics are slightly more supportive of allowing gay and lesbian couples to marry than Americans overall. In 2008, a slim majority (51%) of Americans oppose same-sex marriage, while Catholics remain divided over the issue with slightly more opposing it than supporting it (46% to 43%).¹⁵

Catholics have consistently exhibited lower levels of opposition to same-sex marriage than Americans overall, a trend that goes back more than a decade.



In 1996, nearly two-thirds (65%) of Americans opposed same-sex marriage. Among Catholics, that ratio was slightly lower at about 6-in-10 (59%). In 2004, opposition to same-sex marriage spiked among the general public from 53% in July 2003 to 63% in February 2004. Catholic opposition increased even more dramatically from 43% to 59% during the same period. This shift was at least in part driven by a national

¹³ The General Social Survey, 2006

¹⁴ The General Social Survey, 2006

¹⁵ Pew Research Center for the People & the Press Combined surveys, May 2008 and June 2008

backlash against the Massachusetts Supreme Court ruling that declared the ban against same-sex marriage unconstitutional and was sustained by the politicization of the issue in the 2004 presidential elections. Since then, opposition among Catholics and the general public has fallen. In 2007, slightly less than half (48%) of Catholics opposed same-sex marriage, a level of opposition five points higher than its July 2003 low point (43%).¹⁶

Differences among Catholics on Marriage Equality

Catholic opinion on marriage equality is not monolithic. Young Catholics are much more likely to support same-sex marriage than are older Catholics. A sizable majority (60%) of Catholics under the age of 30 say they favor same-sex marriage compared to just a quarter of Catholics age 65 or older. Interestingly, young Catholics are even more supportive of same-sex marriage than are young people overall (60% to 53%).¹⁷

There is a sizable gender gap among Catholics with women significantly more likely than men to favor allowing gay and lesbian couples to marry (49% to 37% respectively). Catholics with a college education are more likely to favor same-sex marriage than Catholics with lower levels of educational attainment.¹⁸

Ethnic differences are also evident.

Despite the young character of the Hispanic Catholic population, this group is significantly less likely to favor same-sex marriage than white Catholics (32% to 43%).¹⁹

| Catholic Views on Same-sex Marriage in 2008 | | | | |
|--|--------------|---------------|----------------|----------|
| | <u>Favor</u> | <u>Oppose</u> | <u>DK\Ref.</u> | <u>N</u> |
| Total Population | 39 | 51 | 10=100 | 3,509 |
| All Catholics | 43 | 46 | 11=100 | 734 |
| 18-29 | 60 | 37 | 3=100 | 110 |
| 30-49 | 44 | 45 | 11=100 | 223 |
| 50-64 | 44 | 43 | 13=100 | 219 |
| 65+ | 25 | 63 | 12=100 | 167 |
| Male | 37 | 55 | 8=100 | 346 |
| Female | 49 | 38 | 13=100 | 388 |
| <i>Attend religious services...</i> | | | | |
| Weekly or more | 33 | 57 | 10=100 | 330 |
| Monthly/yearly | 52 | 38 | 10=100 | 273 |
| Seldom/never | 47 | 39 | 14=100 | 126 |
| White non- | | | | |
| Hispanic | 43 | 48 | 9=100 | 592 |
| Hispanic* | 32 | 52 | 16=100 | 2,025 |
| Education | | | | |
| High school | 37 | 52 | 11=100 | 243 |
| Some college | 45 | 45 | 10=100 | 229 |
| College grad | 52 | 38 | 10=100 | 261 |
| Source: Pew Research Center for the People & the Press Combined surveys, May 2008 and June 2008 | | | | |
| *Hispanic Catholic numbers come from the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, "Changing Faiths, Latinos and the Transformation of American Religion," 2006 | | | | |
| Question wording: Do you strongly favor, favor, oppose, or strongly oppose allowing gays and lesbians to marry legally? | | | | |

¹⁶ Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, Surveys, June 1996-Aug 2007

¹⁷ Pew Research Center for the People & the Press Combined surveys, May 2008 and June 2008

¹⁸ Pew Research Center for the People & the Press Combined surveys, May 2008 and June 2008

¹⁹ Pew Research Center for the People & the Press Combined surveys, May 2008 and June 2008; Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, "Changing Faiths: Latinos and the Transformation of American Religion," 2006

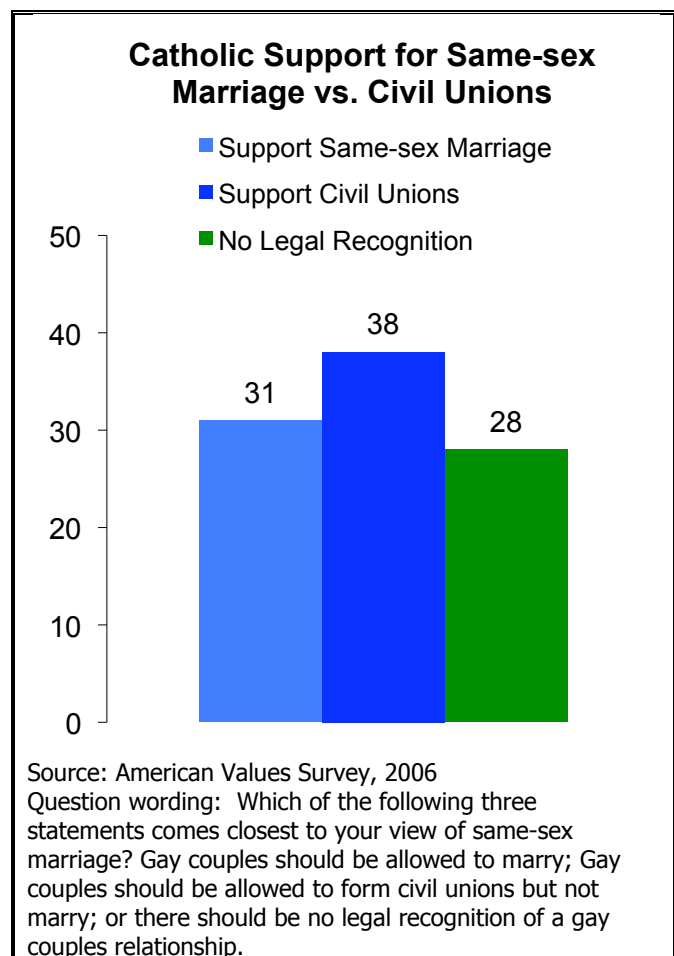
Civil Unions

Civil unions garner significantly more support than same-sex marriage. A majority (51%) of the public and 6-in-10 Catholics favor allowing gay couples to enter into legal arrangements that provide them with many of the same rights as married people. Yet while public support for civil unions has only increased modestly over the last five years, among Catholics support for civil unions has risen dramatically. In 2003, fewer than half (46%) of Catholics favored civil unions, today a solid majority do (60%), a 14-point increase in just five years.²⁰

The Importance of Context in Marriage Equality Attitudes

Two insights serve as evidence that Catholic attitudes on the issue of same-sex marriage and civil unions are contingent upon context.

First, support and opposition to same-sex marriage fluctuates considerably depending on whether a civil unions option is offered as a direct alternative in the same question. When Catholics are only asked about support for same-sex marriage, they are nearly divided on the issue, with 46% opposing it and 43% favoring it. In the American Values Survey (AVS), respondents were asked to choose between three options: support for same-sex marriage, support for civil unions, and no legal recognition of a gay couples' relationship. When Catholics were provided with the civil unions alternative along with marriage, opposition to some legal recognition was significantly lower (28%). The American Values Survey also found that Catholic support for same-sex marriage was lower (43% to 31%), indicating that at least some support found for same-sex marriage in questions without a civil unions alternative is soft.



²⁰ Pew Research Center for the People & the Press Survey, July 2003 and May 2008

Second, there is some evidence that there is an important link between support for same-sex marriage and concerns about religious liberty. When Catholics were given a reassurance that no church would be forced to perform marriage ceremonies against their consciences, support for same-sex marriage increased 15 points from 31% to nearly half (46%). Among the general public, this religious liberty assurance moved support 12 points from 28% to 40%.²¹

Catholics Views on Adoption

A majority (52%) of Americans oppose allowing gay and lesbian people to adopt children, and roughly 4-in-10 (42%) favor the idea. Catholics are divided over the issue with nearly half (49%) favoring adoption and slightly fewer (44%) opposing it.²² When asked whether gay and lesbian people who meet all legal qualifications should be able to adopt children, support among Catholics jumps 10 points to 59%.²³ As with attitudes on same-sex marriage, younger Catholics are more supportive of adoption rights than older Catholics. However, there are no significant differences in attitudes on adoption between Hispanic and white non-Hispanic Catholics. Male and female Catholics are also equally as likely to support allowing gay and lesbian people to adopt children (59% to 60% respectively), although women are more emphatic in their support than men.²⁴

Catholics and Family Recognition

Although fewer than half (43%) of Catholics support same-sex marriage, more than two-thirds (69%) believe that gay and lesbian couples in long-term committed relationships should have the same rights as married couples in the areas of hospital visitation, health insurance and pension coverage. Again, Catholics are more progressive on rights for gay and lesbian couples than most other Christian faiths. Among white evangelicals and black Protestants less than half (36% and 44% respectively) agree that committed same-sex couples deserve the same rights as married couples. White mainline Protestants are much more likely to agree (63%) than other Protestants but less likely than Catholics.²⁵

Catholics and Workplace Rights

In 2007, the Human Rights Campaign commissioned a survey that asked respondents about support for the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA). Specifically respondents were asked about support for a proposal that would make it illegal for employers to fire, refuse to hire or refuse to promote employees on the basis of a person's sexual orientation or gender identity. A strong majority (58%) of Catholics

²¹ American Values Survey, 2006

²² Pew Research Center for the People & the Press Survey, July 2006

²³ American Values Survey, 2006

²⁴ American Values Survey, 2006

²⁵ American Values Survey, 2006

supported ENDA while about 4-in-10 (39%) were opposed to the measure. This level of support was identical to the general public.²⁶

²⁶ Human Rights Campaign Survey, 2007

Conclusion: Strategic Insights

The findings in this report point to some promising strategic directions. In order to further refine these approaches, it may be necessary to conduct additional research in this area. The following represent some intriguing new insights into Catholic attitudes on LGBT justice issues.

- **The higher levels of acceptance of homosexuality among Catholics.** Catholics remain more generally accepting of homosexuality than every other Christian tradition in the U.S. This may suggest that a strategy of engaging Catholic laity may be fruitful even if the Catholic hierarchy remains entrenched on LGBT justice issues.
- **The Promise of Catholic Youth.** Catholic youth are more progressive than their counterparts in other Christian traditions. This finding may also suggest that a strategic focus on Catholic universities, especially those run by religious orders that enjoy some autonomy, may be effective. Additional research may shed light on the factors that lead Catholic youth to be more progressive on LGBT justice issues.
- **A laddering approach to issues.** Workplace rights, family recognition, and civil unions enjoy strong majority support among Catholics overall, while Catholics are evenly split on adoption. Catholics are also divided on marriage equality, with slightly more opposing marriage than supporting it. Moving forward on issues such as workplace rights where there is strong support may be a good strategy. It is possible that early success in these areas may set the conditions for incremental increases in support that lead to a tipping point, but more research needs to be done to understand how tightly these issues are bound together.
- **The link between religious liberty and marriage equality.** There is some evidence that there is an important link between support for same-sex marriage and concerns about religious liberty. When Catholics were given a reassurance that no church would be forced to perform marriage ceremonies against their consciences, support for marriage increased 15 points from 31% to nearly half (46%).
- **The potential of former Catholics.** With one in ten Americans being former Catholics, there is some possibility that outreach aimed at Catholics will resonate far beyond the current Catholic population. More research needs to be conducted to determine how active a Catholic worldview is among former Catholics.
- **The impact of the growth of Hispanic Catholics.** Nearly 3-in-10 Catholics are Hispanic, and among Catholic youth (18-29), nearly half are Hispanic. Any strategy aimed at the future of Catholics in America must take into account these shifting demographics.

Data Sources and Authorship:

Data Sources

The analysis in this report relies on data from a variety of sources, including surveys conducted by the Pew Research Center, the General Social Surveys, the American Values Survey and the National Election Exit Polls. The Pew Research Center is a nonpartisan, “fact tank” devoted to informing newsmakers, government officials and the media about important issues, attitudes and trends shaping the public debate. The General Social Surveys have been conducted by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago since 1972. These surveys provide longitudinal data on demographic characteristics and attitudes of the American public. The American Values Survey is a benchmark study dedicated to understanding the intersection between religion, values and politics, and includes a large battery of questions to help understand attitudes on gay and lesbian issues. The survey was conducted by the Center for American Values in Public Life at the People for the American Way Foundation.

Authorship

This report was developed for the Arcus Foundation by Robert P. Jones, Ph.D., and Dan Cox of Public Religion Research, a consulting firm specializing in research on religion, values and politics.