



Opinion Research  
Strategic Communication

## **2016 Survey of Catholic Likely Voters Conducted for Catholics for Choice**

A new national survey indicates that Democrat Hillary Clinton holds a slim lead among Catholic likely voters over Republican Donald Trump in the 2016 presidential race. The survey also reveals that most Catholics do not take their political cues from the Catholic hierarchy in the United States. This is evidenced by majorities of Catholic likely voters who support legal abortion and a requirement that health insurers include coverage for birth control and abortion. Catholic likely voters also generally oppose allowing Catholic hospitals the option to deny medical care because of the hospitals' religious views, a practice supported by the US Conference of Catholic Bishops.

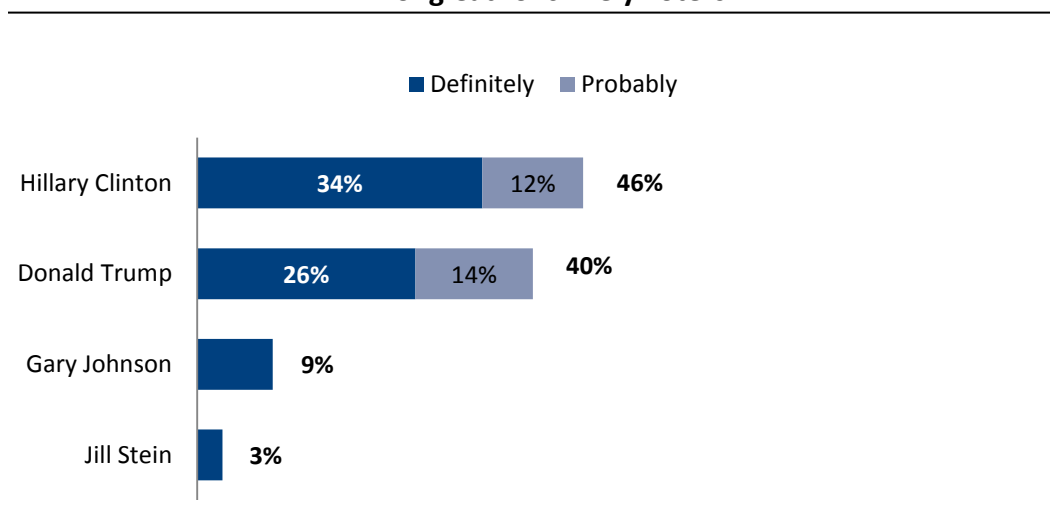
The survey of 1,105 Catholics who say they are very likely to vote in the 2016 presidential election was designed by Belden Russonello Strategists, and interviewing was conducted online September 8-13 using the GfK Knowledge Panel. The polling sample is probability-based and has a margin of error of plus or minus 3.2 percentage points. A detailed methodology is included in Appendix A; a topline questionnaire in Appendix B, and cross-tab tables in Appendix C.

## 1. The Catholic vote for president

In the race for president, Democrat Hillary Clinton has the support of 46% of Catholics across the US who are likely to vote in this election; Republican Donald Trump has the support of 40%; Libertarian Gary Johnson draws 9%; and the Green Party's Jill Stein has 3% of the vote, with only 3% undecided among the surveyed.

Clinton enjoys more “definite” support than Trump: 34% of Catholic likely voters say they will definitely vote for Clinton, whereas 26% will definitely vote for Trump.

### Current Choice for President Among Catholic likely voters



Q1. If the election for president were held today, would you vote for the Democrat Hillary Clinton, the Republican Donald Trump, the Libertarian Gary Johnson, or the Green Party's Jill Stein? Q2. Would you say that you will definitely vote for that candidate or you probably will vote for him/her? (*National survey of 1,105 Catholic likely voters, September 8–13, 2016*)

Among Catholic women, Clinton is running well ahead of Trump, 50% to 35%, whereas Trump holds a slight advantage among Catholic men 45% to 41%.

Clinton enjoys a large lead, 18 points, among Catholic Millennials (ages 18–33), from whom she has the support of 47% compared to 29% for Trump. Clinton also leads among Generation X members (ages 34–49), 48% for Clinton compared to 38% for Trump. The two top candidates are nearly even among Baby Boomers (ages 50–68), with Clinton holding a slight advantage of 46% compared to 42% for Trump. Trump leads among the oldest voters (ages 69+): 53% for Trump and 40% for Clinton.

Ethnicity of the voter is an important variable among Catholics, as it is with the general electorate in this campaign. Trump leads Clinton by 13 points among white Catholics, 50% for Trump to 37% for Clinton, but Trump trails by 41 points among Latinos, attracting only 22% of the Latino Catholic vote compared to 63% for Clinton. Latinos make up about a quarter (26%) of Catholic likely voters.

## **2. Catholic vote is a secular vote**

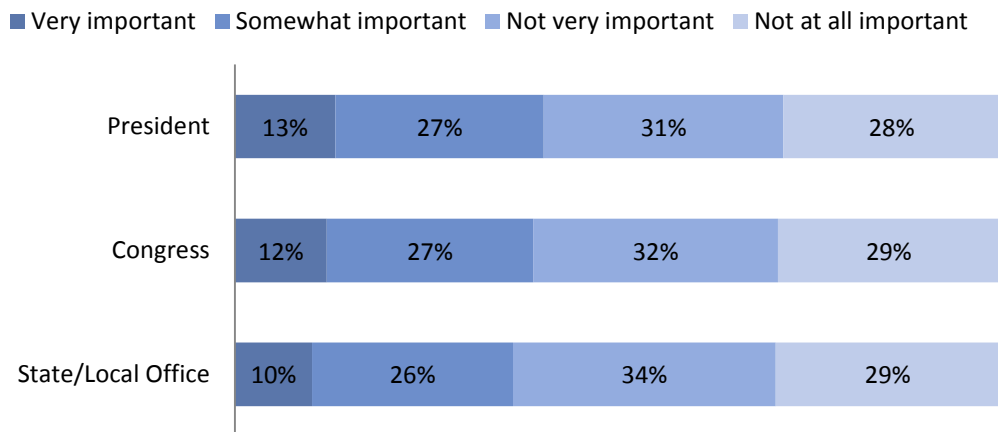
Overall, Catholic likely voters make up nearly a quarter of the entire US electorate. For the last 11 presidential elections, Catholics have been classic swing voters in American presidential politics, changing from support for the Democratic candidate to the Republican and back again. In every presidential election since 1972, the candidate who won the vote of Catholics has won the popular vote nationwide, making the Catholic vote a reliable indicator of where American voters will land on Election Day.

Over the past half century, Catholics have served as a microcosm of the overall American vote, because they have consistently represented mainstream concerns of economic and national security. The Catholic vote as a whole has been a secular one, not tied to the views of the Catholic hierarchy, and 2016 follows this same pattern.

The BRS 2016 survey finds that nearly six in 10 (59%) Catholic likely voters say the views of the Catholic bishops in the US are not very or not at all important to them when they are deciding for whom to vote for president. Four in 10 (40%) consider the bishops' views very or somewhat important.

Separating the politics of Catholics from that of the church hierarchy remains a theme as politics becomes more local. Sixty-one percent say the views of the bishops are not very or not at all important when they decide whom to elect to Congress. Thirty-nine percent say these views are very or somewhat important. In addition, 63% say the bishops' views are not very or not at all important when they make decisions about candidates for state and local offices, whereas 36% say these views are very or somewhat important.

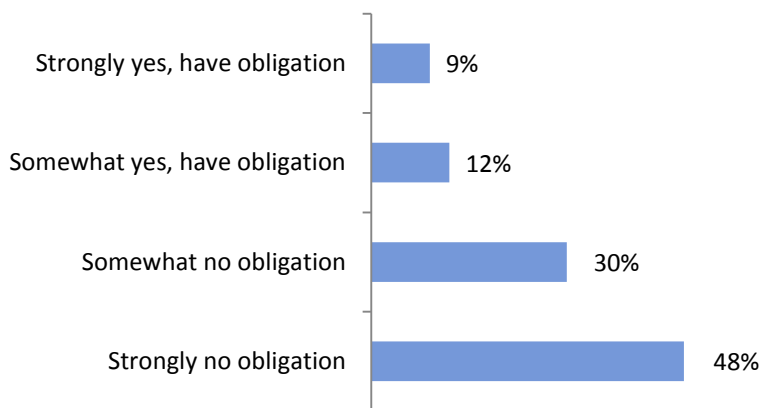
### Importance of Bishops' Views in Vote Choice Among Catholic likely voters



Q3a-c. How important are the views of the Catholic bishops in the US for you in deciding whom to vote for in an election? a. For president b. For Congress c. For local and state elections

In another statement of independence from the Catholic bishops, a large majority of 78% of the voters in the survey do not believe that “politicians who are Catholic have an obligation to vote on issues the way Catholic bishops recommend.” Twenty-one percent believe this obligation exists.

### Politicians' Obligation to Follow Bishops' Recommendations Among Catholic likely voters



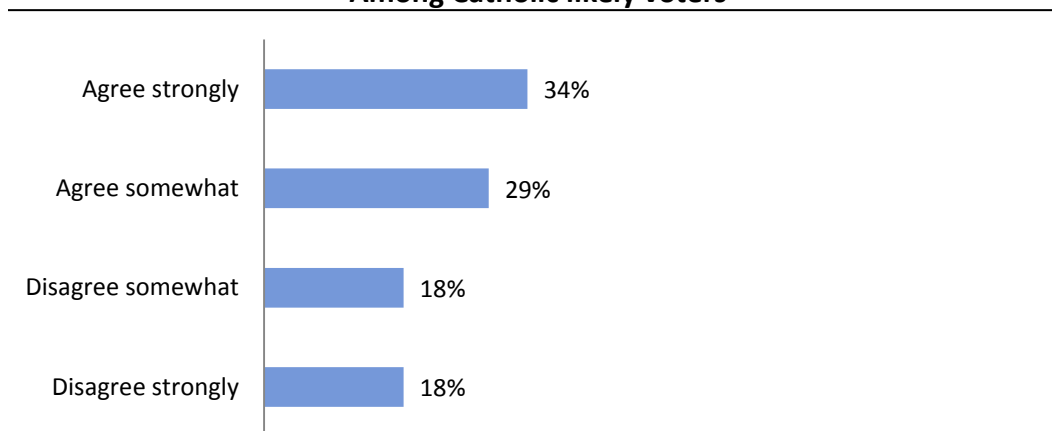
Q5. Do you believe that politicians who are Catholic have an obligation to vote on issues the way Catholic bishops recommend or not? Do you feel that way strongly or somewhat? (National survey of 1,105 Catholic likely voters, September 8–13, 2016)

### 3. Catholic likely voters at odds with the hierarchy on abortion, health care, and religious refusals

Catholic likely voters take positions on a number of issues that are contrary to the Catholic hierarchy's position in the US, including abortion, health care, and the practice known as religious refusal, which is the exemption of religious hospitals from legal requirements to provide certain services. More than six in 10 (63%) Catholic likely voters strongly or somewhat agree that "it should be legal for a woman to have an abortion in the United States." Thirty-six percent disagree somewhat or strongly.

A majority of every age, education level, and income group supports legal abortions in the US. Latino Catholic likely voters are more likely than whites to want to keep abortion legal. Sixty-seven percent of Latinos support legal abortion and 32% oppose it; among whites, 59% support and 40% oppose.

#### Belief that Abortion Should Be Legal Among Catholic likely voters



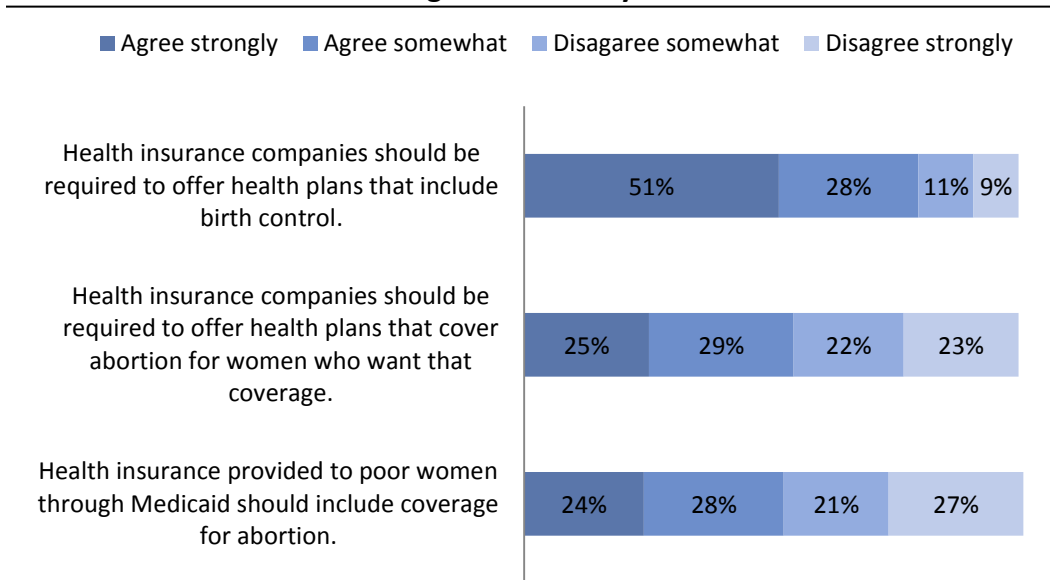
Q6a. Here are some questions about health care and reproductive health issues. Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements. a. It should be legal for a woman to have an abortion in the United States. (*National survey of 1,105 Catholic likely voters, September 8–13, 2016*)

Sixty percent of Catholic likely voters overall say that "deciding to have an abortion can be a morally acceptable position." Thirty-nine percent disagree.

Nearly eight in 10 (79%) agree strongly or somewhat that “health insurance companies should be required to offer health plans that include birth control,” and a majority (54%) think insurers should be required to offer plans “that cover abortion for women who want coverage.” Forty-five percent disagree.

Catholic likely voters are divided but lean toward support for including coverage for abortion under Medicaid. Fifty-two percent agree and 48% disagree that “health insurance provided to poor women through Medicaid should include coverage for abortion.”

### Women’s Health Issues and Coverage Among Catholic likely voters

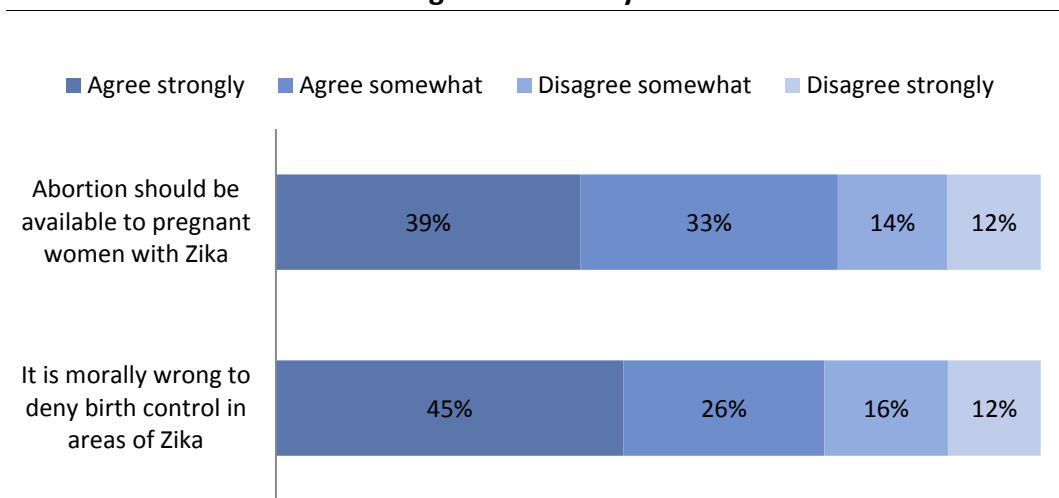


Q6b-e. Here are some questions about health care and reproductive health issues. Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements. b. Health insurance companies should be required to offer health plans that include birth control. c. Health insurance companies should be required to offer health plans that cover abortion for women who want that coverage. d. Health insurance provided to poor women through Medicaid should include coverage for abortion. (*National survey of 1,105 Catholic likely voters, September 8–13, 2016*)

These voters also broadly support the availability of birth control and abortion in areas affected by the Zika virus. Seventy-two percent agree “abortion should be available to a pregnant woman who has contracted the Zika virus if she chooses to have one.” Twenty-six percent disagree.

In addition, 71% agree “it is morally wrong to deny birth control to women who live in areas where the risk of Zika infection is high.” Twenty-eight percent take an opposite view.

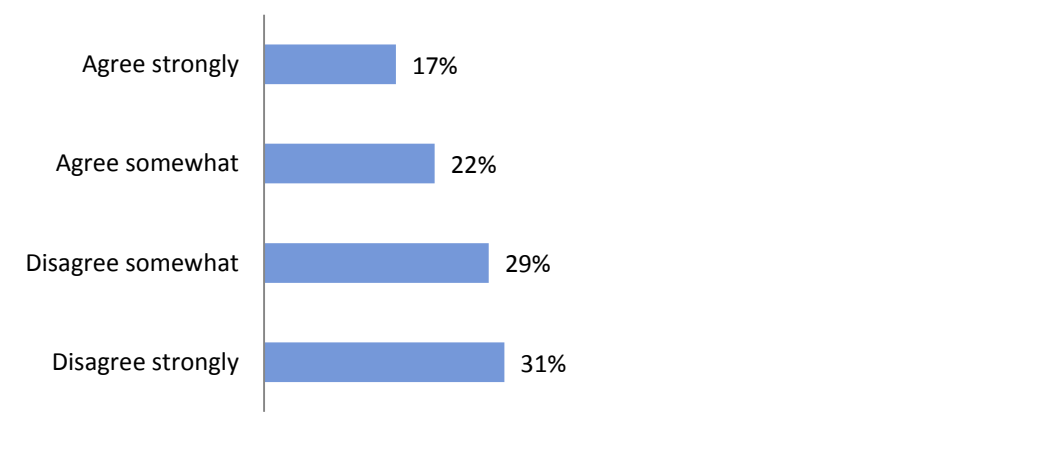
### Zika-related Reproductive Services Among Catholic likely voters



Q8a-b. As you may know, Zika is a virus that when contracted by pregnant women can cause serious and sometimes fatal complications involving the brain of the fetus. Do you agree or disagree with each of these statements? a. Abortion should be available to a pregnant woman who has contracted the Zika virus if she chooses to have one. b. It is morally wrong to deny birth control to women who live in areas where the risk of Zika infection is high. *(National survey of 1,105 Catholic likely voters, September 8–13, 2016)*

On the issue of religious refusals, six in 10 (60%) Catholic likely voters do not believe that “Catholic hospitals that take taxpayer dollars should be allowed to use religious beliefs as a reason to withhold certain medical procedures and medications.” Thirty-nine percent would allow such hospitals this exemption.

### Religious Refusals by Catholic Hospitals That Take Tax Dollars Among Catholic likely voters



Q6e. Here are some questions about health care and reproductive health issues. Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements: Catholic hospitals that take taxpayer dollars should be allowed to use religious beliefs as a reason to withhold certain medical procedures and medications. (*National survey of 1,105 Catholic likely voters, September 8–13, 2016*)

Across the country, there have been efforts in state legislatures to broadly exempt businesses and institutions from antidiscrimination laws in the name of religious liberty. When the religious refusal is not limited to health care, Catholic likely voters’ opposition grows. When asked if “companies and other institutions should be allowed to use the owners’ religious beliefs as a reason to deny services to employees or customers,” fully 70% of Catholic likely voters say no. Twenty-eight percent take the opposite view.

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