



A WORLD VIEW

Catholic Attitudes on Sexual Behavior & Reproductive Health

Catholics For A Free Choice

2004

This publication is dedicated to Charlotte Ellertson, the president and founder of Ibis Reproductive Health. Charlotte's vision and passionate commitment to women's well-being are an inspiration to all who work with her.



About This Report

The data presented in this report illustrate the variety of Catholic opinions and behavior around the world. Information was compiled from multiple sources including magazines, market research reports, peer-reviewed journals, statistical databases, reproductive health advocates, newspapers and Catholic reference books. Given this array of resources, survey questions and data collection procedures vary by study. For example, the multinational surveys are conducted in a coordinated fashion by government and academic institutions that use a standardized data collection methodology. They are conducted periodically to assess trends in people's attitudes, beliefs and behavior. Newspaper and television companies commission polls typically carried out by professional research firms to gauge the public's opinions about a specific topic or event. For example, several surveys referenced in this report occurred during a political campaign, and during current news reports of sexual abuse by priests.

The majority of information provided in this report comes mainly from surveys of Catholics, but also from surveys in which Catholics made up a portion of the study population. In many cases, surveys are designed to represent the population of interest, therefore researchers select people with varying socioeconomic characteristics, e.g., ages, ethnicities, education levels and incomes. Surveys can be conducted by telephone, mail or in person depending on the resources available and the timeframe of the study.

Each type of data collection methodology has limitations regarding the interpretation of results. For example, responses to an opinion poll conducted after a major news event can be influenced by the extent and content of recent news coverage. Surveys conducted by mail typically have lower response rates than phone surveys, and people who completed the survey might hold opinions different than those who did not participate in the study. The studies cited in this document are the most recent and reliable available for each subject and country.

Datasets Used In This Report

Demographic and Health Survey

The Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) are a large-scale survey program yielding nationally representative data based on individual interviews with women of childbearing age mostly in developing countries. Researchers and policy makers at the national and international levels rely upon DHS. DHS surveys are conducted by agencies in participating countries, using training, technical assistance and administrative support provided by Macro International. The United States Agency for International Development funds DHS efforts.

DHS surveys women between 15 to 49 years old. Unless otherwise noted, data refer to all women, regardless of marital status. Survey years and sample sizes are listed for each country.

General Social Survey, 2000

The General Social Survey (GSS) has been carried out annually by National Opinion Research Center since 1972, and is funded by the National Science Foundation. It is an omnibus survey of a representative sample of adults 18 years of age or older in the United States. The 2000 survey included 679 Catholics.

National Congregations Study, 1998

The National Congregations Study (NCS) surveyed a representative sample of religious congregations of all types around the United States. The study asked about several aspects of the institutional life of the congregation. National Opinion Research Center conducted the study with funding from Lilly Endowment, Smith-Richardson Foundation, the Louisville Institute, the Aspen Institute, and the Henry Luce Foundation. There were 299 Catholics included in the study.

International Social Survey Program, 1998

The International Social Survey Program (ISSP) was formed in 1983 for cross-national social science research. Researchers field general surveys of representative samples of people aged 18 and over, conducted by phone and in person. Data is centralized at the Zentralarchiv fuer Empirische Sozialforschung in Koeln, Germany. There were 15,061 Catholic respondents in the 1998 study sample.

National Survey of Family Growth, 1995

The National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG), sponsored by the National Center for Health Statistics, United States Department of Health and Human Services, is a multipurpose survey based on personal interviews with a national sample of 10,847 women ages 15 to 44 years in the civilian non-institutionalized population of the United States. Its main function is to collect data on factors affecting pregnancy and women's health. This survey sample included 3,124 Catholic respondents.



A World View

The Roman Catholic church has become the focus of significant controversy in recent years. Already contending with overwhelming dissent from followers regarding its positions on women as well as on sexuality, reproduction, and the family, the church has been struggling with explosive and continually recurring allegations of child sexual abuse by its priests and a heavily criticized position against the use of condoms as a way of reducing the transmission of HIV and the spread of AIDS.

The beliefs, feelings, and perceptions of these issues by Catholics worldwide are examined in detail in this report. While there are Catholics who wholly agree with and abide by the policies set forth by the church, there are many more who question its dictates as they relate to their personal lives and the role played by the church in public policy. Whatever paths Catholics choose to follow, what is evident in this report is that Catholics are not monolithic in their views, and more often than not disagree with the positions of the church on these issues. It is critical that those who develop public policy and those who serve Catholics as health care and social service providers are aware of these views. Such awareness will continue to move the church, along with the national and international communities, toward a greater understanding of its people.

Population Survey

There are approximately 1 billion Catholics across the globe and they make up 17 percent of the total population. Catholics dominate South and Central America, constitute a significant portion of Europe's population, and reside in large numbers in North America and Africa.

PERCENTAGE OF CATHOLICS WORLDWIDE		
	Catholics as % of total population	Catholic population, in millions
South America	87	297.5
Central America	85	145.1
Europe	40	280.1
Oceania	27	8.2
North America	25	76.8
Africa	16	130.0
Asia	3	107.3
World Total	17	1,045.0

Source: Data as of 2000 (most recent available): *2003 Catholic Almanac* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 2002) and the Vatican's *Statistical Yearbook of the Church* for 2000, which counts baptized Catholics on the basis of data reports by dioceses and other jurisdictions. The Vatican notes that regional totals do not include those in areas not surveyed (for example, China).

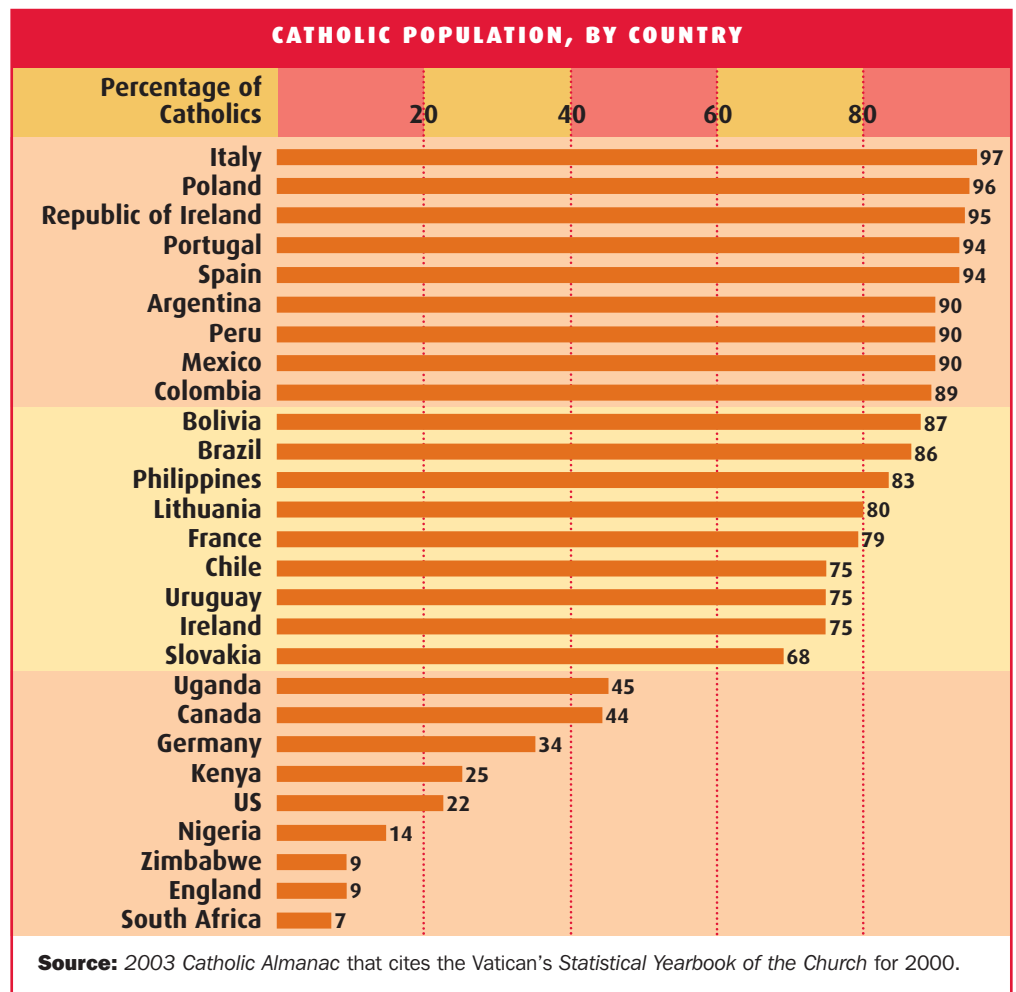
Church demographic data over the past three decades show that:

- The Catholic proportion of the total population continues to decline in South America (from 91 percent in 1976 to 87 percent in 2000) and recently began to decrease in Central America (from 87 percent in 1994 to 85 percent in 2000);

- North America’s Catholic population has remained at about 25 percent;
- The Catholic population in Africa has increased substantially (from 12 percent to 16 percent).

Source: 1997 *Catholic Almanac* and 2003 *Catholic Almanac* which cite the Vatican’s *Statistical Yearbook of the Church* for 1994 and 2000, respectively.

The heavy concentration of Catholics in South America and Europe is evident, as many countries in those regions have an almost entirely Catholic population. Catholic representation is also rather strong in Canada and countries of East Africa. In Asia, the Philippines continues to have a significant Catholic population.



The church’s global system of educational, health care and social service institutions includes:

- 61,800 kindergartens;
- 89,500 elementary schools;
- 35,600 secondary schools;
- 5,900 hospitals;
- 16,400 pharmacies;
- 14,600 homes for the aged, the handicapped, and lepers;
- 19,200 orphanages and nurseries; and
- 33,400 other social service centers and institutions.

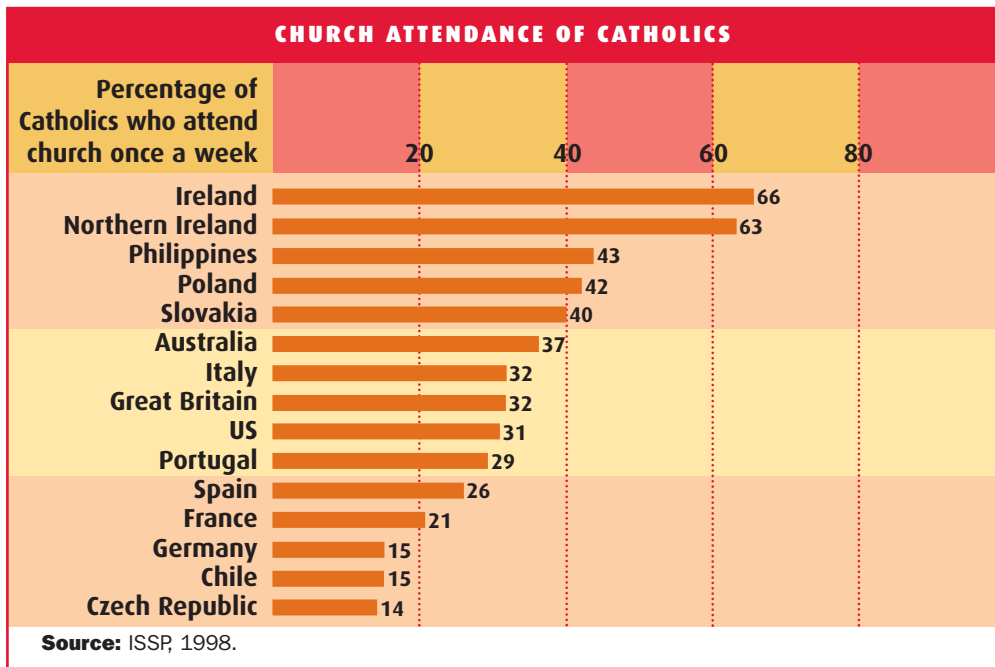
Source: 2003 *Catholic Almanac* that cites the Vatican’s *Statistical Yearbook of the Church* for 2000.

Mass Attendance

In many countries, church attendance has declined over the past decade. More specifically, younger Catholics are less likely than older Catholics to attend Mass regularly.

Around the world:

A 1998 international study reveals low weekly church attendance among Catholics in most countries, particularly in Western Europe.



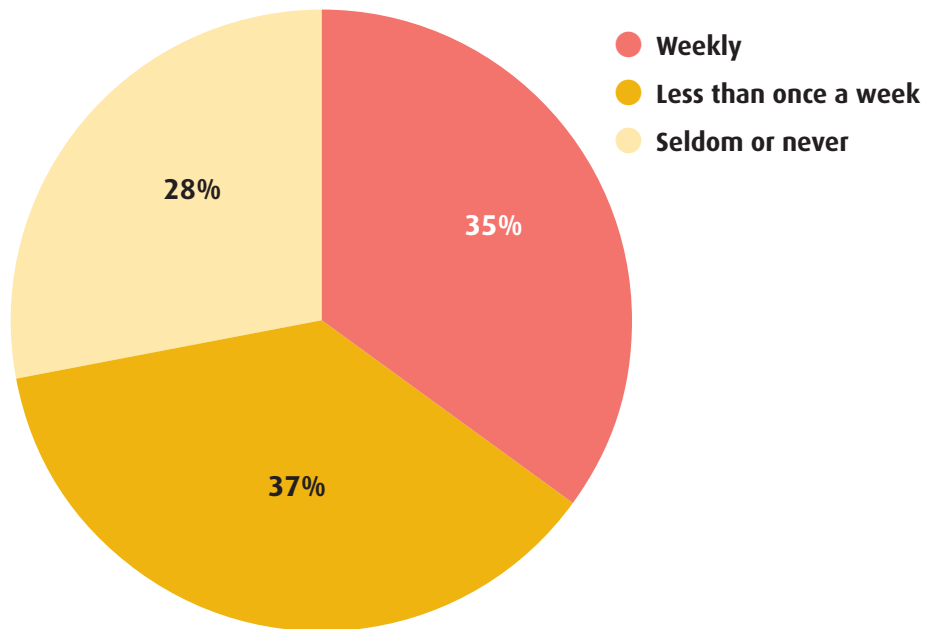
- BOLIVIA:** Only a little over 35% of Catholics attend Mass frequently.
Source: Nationwide poll of 1,500 Catholics over the age of 18, living in cities with 5,000 or more inhabitants, by Encuestas y Estudios Compañía, July and August 2003.
- CHILE:** 75% of Chileans self-identify as Catholic. Only 21% go to Mass regularly and 25% never go to Mass.
Source: National survey of 2,000 people conducted by Institute of Sociology of Catholic University, reported in *El Mercurio*, August 2, 2001.
- COLOMBIA:** While close to 90% of this country’s residents are Catholic, only 39% of these Catholics say they frequently attend Mass. 46% only go once in a while.
Source: Nationwide poll of 1,523 Catholics over the age of 18, by Napoleon Franco Compañía Limitada, September through October 2003.
- IRELAND:** Two-thirds of Irish Catholics report attending church weekly.
Source: Andrew M. Greeley, “Religion in the Emerald Tiger: The Irish Are Still Catholic, But Now On Their Own Terms,” *America*, March 12, 2001.
- ITALY:** About one-third of Italian adults go to Mass at least once a week.
Source: Doxa Survey of Italians aged 18 or older conducted in 1998, reported by Marchisio, R. and Pisati, M., “Belonging Without Believing: Catholics in Contemporary Italy,” *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 1999; 4(2): 236-255.

- 🌐 **MEXICO:** 87% of Mexican youth ages 12 to 29 consider themselves Catholic, however, 42% report they are practicing their faith and 45% report they are not.
Source: National Survey of 54,500 households with persons ages 12-29, reported in "Jovenes y Sexualidad," *La Jornada*, August 2, 2001.
- 🌐 **POLAND:** Although the church reports that 96% of Poles are Catholic, fewer than half attend Mass at least once a week.
Source: Andrzej Stylinski, "Polish Church Study Suggests Faith Unshaken After Decades of Capitalism," Associated Press, January 9, 2001.
- 🌐 **SPAIN:** Despite a majority Catholic population (94%), only 19% of Spaniards go to church regularly and 46% of Catholics admit that they "almost never" go to church.
Source: "Contradictions," *Economist*, April 12, 2003.
- 🌐 **UNITED STATES:** A survey of 1,000 likely Catholic voters conducted just before the 2000 presidential election found that 35% of respondents said they attended Mass weekly and an equal number (37%) said they attended Mass, but less frequently than once a week. Less than a third of respondents said they seldom or never went to Mass.

More recent figures indicate little if any real change in Catholics' report of weekly church attendance (38%). Twice as many Catholic women participate in weekly church attendance than men (49% vs. 26%, respectively).

Source: ABCNews/Beliefnet poll conducted Feb. 19-20, 2002, among a random sample of 1,008 adults.

PERCENTAGE OF US CATHOLIC VOTERS WHO ATTEND MASS, BY FREQUENCY



Source: Patti Miller, "Chasing Conservative Catholics," *Conscience*, Summer 2001.

Contraception

Despite overwhelming support for contraception by most Catholics in the US, the church prohibits the use of modern contraception in any form. This includes voluntary sterilization. Permissible birth control according to the Catholic hierarchy is limited to periodic abstinence (natural family planning), total abstinence, and breast-feeding. According to the *Catechism* of the Catholic church:

Periodic continence, that is, the methods of birth regulation based on self-observation and the use of infertile periods, is in conformity with the objective criteria of morality.... In contrast, "every action which, whether in anticipation of the conjugal act, or in its accomplishment, or in the development of its natural consequences, proposes, whether as an end or as a means, to render procreation impossible" is intrinsically evil.

Forbidden methods of birth control include condoms, which also serve as protection from sexually transmitted diseases, the act of withdrawal to prevent pregnancy, and contraceptive sterilization. However, many Catholics disagree with this position and are utilizing these and other modern methods of birth control. While some do so discreetly, more and more are doing so while making it known that these decisions should affirm freedom of choice.

The evolving lifestyles of women and families affect decisions on family planning and this is unmistakably evidenced in the following statistics. Even in a primarily Catholic region such as Latin America, the support is quite high among married women who approve of the use of modern means of contraception for family planning. In certain countries in Africa and the Philippines, areas with a majority Catholic population, the approval rating among married Catholic women is also quite high when it comes to family planning. Somewhat predictably though, the approval rating among husbands is not as high. In predominantly Catholic Mexico, more than half of women are currently using a modern form of contraception for family planning.

Country and Year	Catholic Sample Size	Whole Sample Size
SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA		
Kenya 1998	2,128	7,881
Nigeria 1999	1,456	9,810
Uganda 1995	2,994	7,070
ASIA (ever-married women only)		
Philippines 1998	10,857	13,983
LATIN AMERICA		
Brazil 1996	9,808	12,612

Note: The Philippines collected survey data in 2002 and Uganda conducted a survey in 2000/01, however, the data has not yet been released for analysis. A DHS survey has not been conducted in Brazil since 1996.

“[T]he Holy See should beware of losing the war for world opinion.”

—“The Vatican’s Achilles’ heel,”
Tablet (UK) editorial, July 10, 1999.

Catholic women’s use of modern methods of contraception increased substantially in Kenya over a five-year period. Use of contraceptive methods doubled in Nigeria during the 1990s.

PERCENTAGE OF CATHOLIC WOMEN WHO HAVE EVER USED OR ARE CURRENTLY USING MODERN CONTRACEPTION*					
	Kenya	Nigeria	Uganda	Philippines	Brazil
Ever used a modern method	41	20	19	34	70
Currently using a modern method	24	11	9	18	50

*Throughout this report, unless otherwise noted, data on developing countries come from the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS), explained in the note on page 1. All samples include women aged 15 to 49. Samples include women currently married, previously married and never married, except where noted in the table headings and except in the Philippines, which only includes ever-married women.

Married women in Catholic countries

Married women currently using a modern method

PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL MARRIED POPULATION			
	Colombia	Mexico	Peru
Percentage Catholic	89	90	90
Married women using modern contraception	64	60	50

Source: 2002 World Population Data Sheet, Population Reference Bureau.

🌐 **ARGENTINA** (90% Catholic): Between 1990 and 1999, 74% of Argentine women used some modern method of contraception.

Source: Human Development Report, United Nations Development Program, 2000.

🌐 **BOLIVIA** (87% Catholic): Approximately 70% of married Catholic women have used some form of modern birth control.

Source: Nationwide poll of 1,500 Catholics over the age of 18, living in cities with 5,000 or more inhabitants, by Encuestas y Estudios Compañía, July and August 2003.

🌐 **COLOMBIA** (89% Catholic): Over 90% of Catholics have used modern contraception at some point.

Source: Nationwide poll of 1,523 Catholics over the age of 18, by Napoleon Franco Compañía Limitada, September through October 2003.

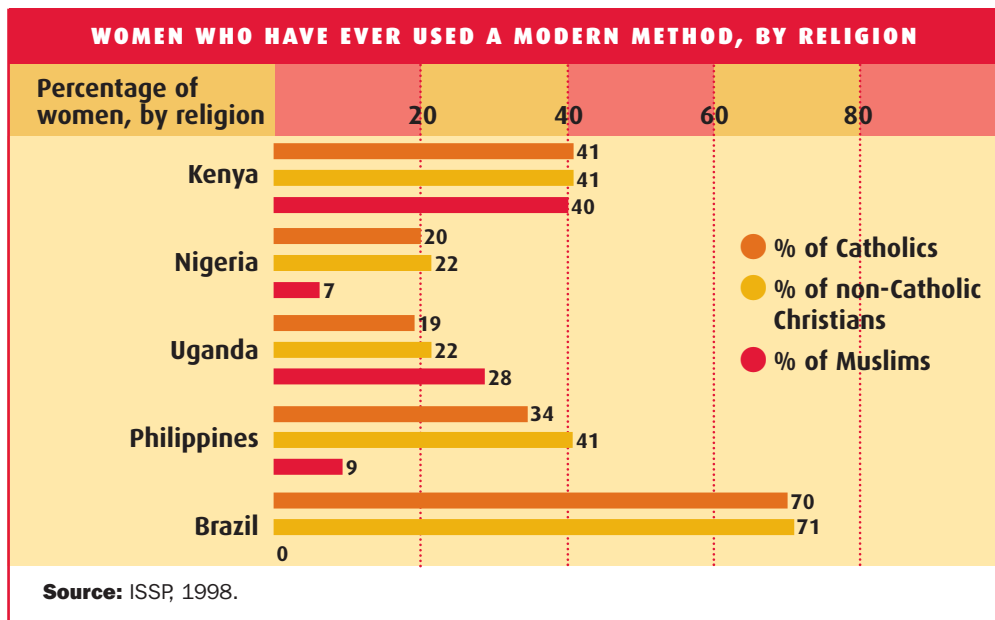
🌐 **CHILE** (75% Catholic): Between 1990 and 1998, the number of Chilean women using contraceptives increased from 19% to 26%.

Source: “Mujeres Chilenas. Estadísticas para el nuevo siglo,” SERNAM, INE, July 2001.

🌐 **PHILIPPINES** (83% Catholic): Preliminary results of a national study show that 15% of women reported using birth control pills and 11% were sterilized, two methods banned by the church.

Source: The Philippines National Statistics Office surveyed women aged 15 to 49. Results were reported by Agence France-Presse, May 9, 2003.

Contraceptive use by Catholics and non-Catholics



🌐 **UNITED STATES:** Catholic women are as likely as Protestant women to have ever used modern contraception (88% vs. 90%, respectively).

Source: NSFG, 1995.

Unmarried Catholics use contraceptives

PERCENTAGE OF UNMARRIED CATHOLIC WOMEN WHO ARE SEXUALLY ACTIVE, BY MARITAL HISTORY

	Kenya	Nigeria	Uganda	Philippines	Brazil
Never-married women	35	21	55	N/A	19
Widowed/seperated/divorced women	40	32	26	4	34

“Over 100 million women throughout the world cannot obtain family planning because they are poor, uneducated, or lack access to health care. Twenty million of these women will seek unsafe abortions. Some women will die, some will be disabled. We could prevent some of this needless suffering.”

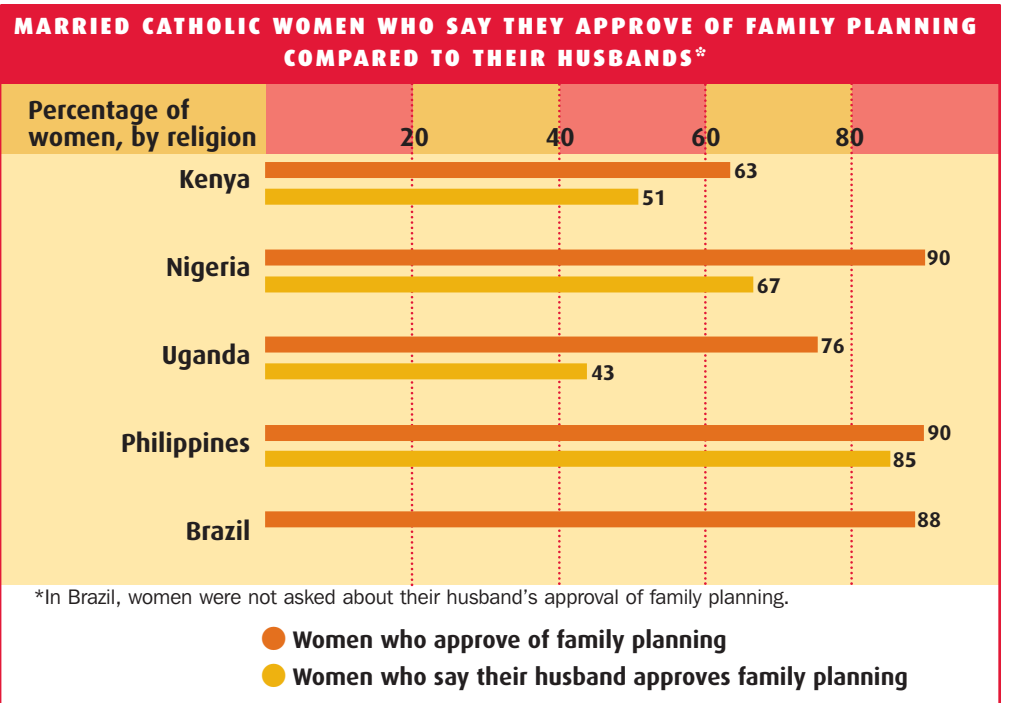
—Catholic US Senator Barbara Mikulski, February 25, 1997.

PERCENTAGE OF CATHOLIC WOMEN CURRENTLY USING A MODERN METHOD, BY MARITAL HISTORY					
	Kenya	Nigeria	Uganda	Philippines	Brazil
Never-married women	9	9	8	N/A	13
Widowed/seperated/divorced women	22	9	8	9	48

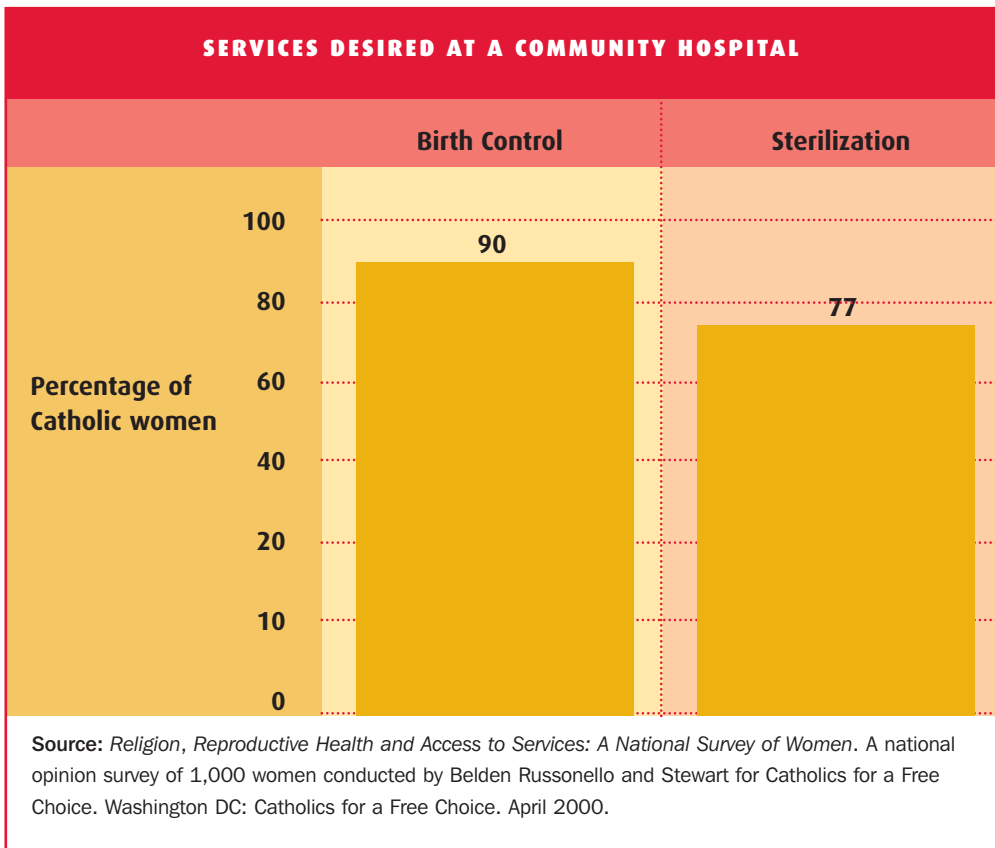
Women strongly support family planning

The Catholic hierarchy, both male and celibate, is twice removed from the impact of pregnancy. If sexually active, or even possibly non-sexually active Catholic women held positions of authority, the perceptions and use of family planning might influence changes in church doctrine.

The data here are consistent with the theory that more women—including more Catholic women—might be inclined to use contraceptives if more of their husbands approved of it.



In a study of American women’s opinions of health services, Catholic women expressed strong support for access to birth control and sterilization procedures in community hospitals.



Disagreement with the church’s prohibition

AUSTRALIA: Only 2% of Catholic university students surveyed accept the church’s teaching on contraception, with 89% indicating it was a personal matter for the couple involved.

Source: Survey of 647 first and final year student teachers, reprinted from *AD 2000*, 2000; 13(4): 3.

BOLIVIA: 79% of Catholics believe adults should have access to birth control methods.

Source: Nationwide poll of 1,500 Catholics over the age of 18, living in cities with 5,000 or more inhabitants, by Encuestas y Estudios Compañía, July and August 2003.

CANADA: 68% of Catholics believe that the church should abandon its opposition to the use of contraception.

Source: A *National Post/Ottawa Citizen/Global TV/COMPAS* survey of 907 respondents, including 451 Catholics, July 13-16, 2002.

CHILE: Although 75% of Chileans are Catholic, only 14% disapprove of the use of contraceptives.

Source: National survey of 2,000 people conducted by Institute of Sociology of Catholic University, “Survey Shows Many Approve Divorce, Contraceptives,” *Santiago Times*, August 3, 2001.

🌐 **COLOMBIA:** 60% of Catholics in Colombia are in either total disagreement or in disagreement on some level with the church’s prohibition of contraception. Only 21% are in total agreement or agree on some level with the church on this issue.

Source: Nationwide poll of 1,523 Catholics over the age of 18, by Napoleon Franco Compañía Limitada, September through October 2003.

🌐 **MEXICO:** 91% of polled Catholics agree that adults should have access to contraceptives, including contraceptive pills, injectables, intrauterine devices and condoms, and 81% believe that adolescents should have access to these same contraceptives.

Source: Survey of 1,048 Catholics presented in “Poll on Catholic Opinion in Urban Areas of Mexico.” Prepared by Applied Statistics for Católicas por el Derecho de Decidir A.C., with the assistance of the Population Council of Mexico, June 2003.

🌐 **PHILIPPINES:** In a country that is 83% Catholic:

■ 94% said it is important “to have the ability to control one’s fertility or plan one’s family.”

■ 76% said they would support political candidates who speak out in favor of family planning.

Source: Pulse Asia poll of 1,200 respondents, reported in *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, March 16, 2001.

🌐 **SPAIN:** 55% of Catholics disagree with the church’s ban on contraception.

Source: Poll conducted by *L’Espresso* magazine, reported in *Catholic World News*, August 14, 1998.

🌐 **UNITED STATES:**

■ 61% of Catholics disagree with the church’s teaching on contraception.

Source: Zogby International conducted a survey commissioned by LeMonyne College and originally published in *USA Today*. Deal Hudson, “Sed Contra,” *Crisis*, January 1, 2002.

■ 60% of Catholic respondents agree or strongly agree that it is acceptable to give birth control pills to teenagers.

Source: GSS, 2000.

Emergency contraception

🌐 **BOLIVIA:** While there is no general response available from Bolivian Catholics regarding emergency contraception, 58% of Catholic women believe that public hospitals should supply emergency birth control pills.

Source: Nationwide poll of 1,500 Catholics over the age of 18, living in cities with 5,000 or more inhabitants, by Encuestas y Estudios Compañía, July and August 2003.

🌐 **CHILE:** 68% of the population favors the availability of emergency contraception.

Source: “Opiniones y percepciones sobre el derecho a elegir y la pildora del día despues.” *Opinion Publica* No. 3, Fundación Chile 21, October 2001.

🌐 **COLOMBIA:** 65% of Catholic women believe emergency contraception should be offered by health centers and public hospitals.

Source: Nationwide poll of 1,523 Catholics over the age of 18, by Napoleon Franco Compañía Limitada, September through October 2003.

MEXICO:

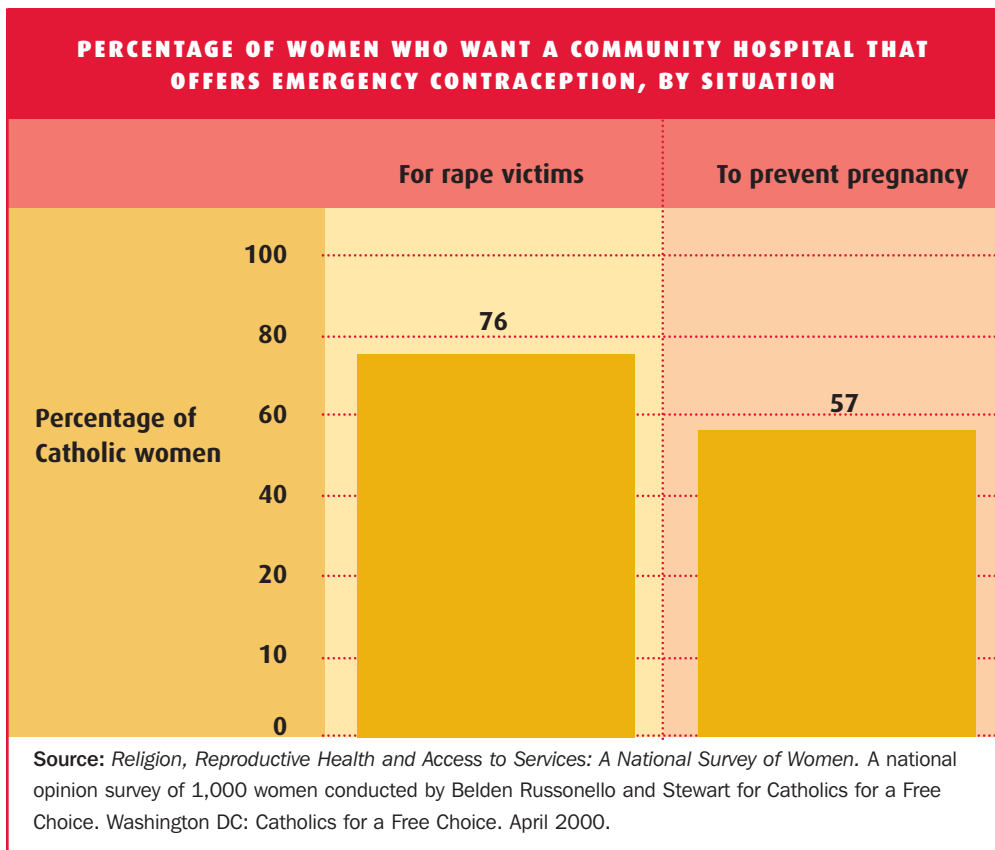
■ Among 907 people surveyed in Mexico (which is 90% Catholic), 91% report having a permissive attitude toward emergency contraceptive pills.

Source: Becker D, Garcia SG and Larsen U. "Knowledge and Opinions about Abortion Law Among Mexican Youth." *International Family Planning Perspectives* 2002; 28(4): 205-213.

■ More than four-fifths of urban Mexican Catholics (85%) think hospitals and public clinics should offer post-coital contraception to women who have been raped while 73% think it should be offered to women who have had unprotected sex.

Source: Survey of 1,048 Catholics presented in "Poll on Catholic Opinion in Urban Areas of Mexico." Prepared by Applied Statistics for Catolicas por el Derecho de Decidir A.C. with the assistance of the Population Council of Mexico, June 2003.

A strong majority of American Catholic women (76%) prefer to have a community hospital that offers emergency contraception for rape victims while more than half (57%) want a hospital that provides it to prevent pregnancy.



“The condom . . . question is not simply a matter of chastity but of justice.”

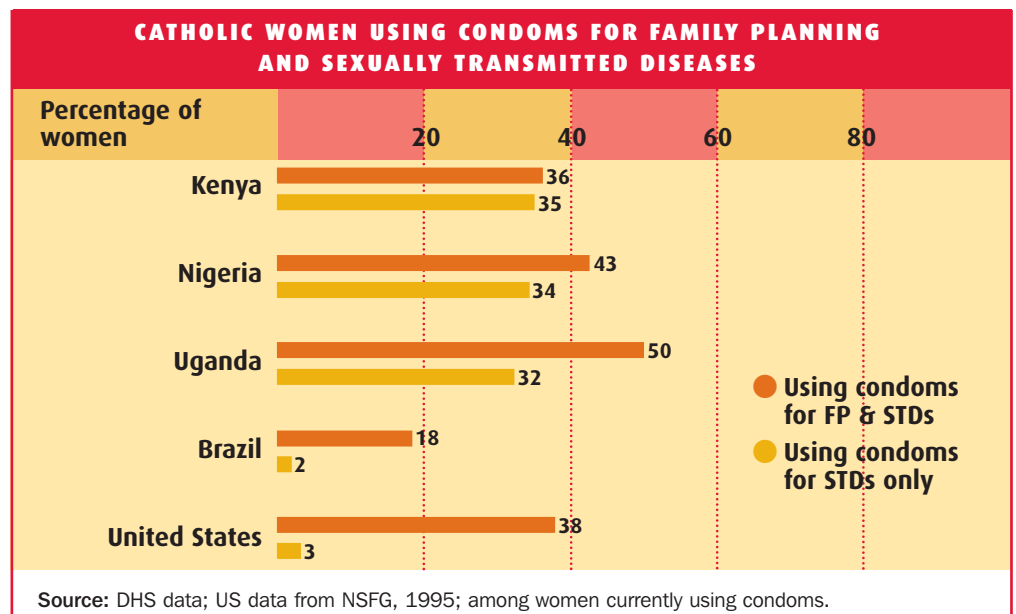
—Most Reverend Kevin Dowling, C.Ss.R., Bishop of Rustenburg, South Africa [“Let’s not condemn condoms in the fight against AIDS,” *U.S. Catholic*, November 2003.]

Condoms and HIV/AIDS

The Catholic church states that the only morally acceptable way to avoid HIV/AIDS is to abstain from sex outside of marriage, and to abstain from sex within marriage if a spouse is infected with HIV/AIDS.

There are approximately 42 million people across the globe living with HIV/AIDS. While the Catholic church claims to provide treatment for approximately 10 million individuals living with this illness, it does not support efforts to educate people about the effectiveness of condoms as a means of preventing the spread of the virus. Not one of the tens of thousands of social service agencies and hospitals controlled by the church is permitted to provide condoms or safe sex instruction to those who seek assistance. This prohibition applies to those of the non-Catholic faith who visit these facilities as well.

In the US, a significantly higher percentage of women use condoms for both family planning and as a means of protection from sexually transmitted diseases, as opposed to the percentage of women who use condoms solely for the purpose of protecting themselves from such diseases.



- BOLIVIA:** 39% use condoms despite opposition from the church.
Source: Nationwide poll of 1,500 Catholics over the age of 18, living in cities with 5,000 or more inhabitants, by Encuestas y Estudios Compañía, July and August 2003.
- COLOMBIA:** 46% of Catholics in Colombia have used condoms to protect against sexually transmitted diseases and pregnancy.
Source: Nationwide poll of 1,523 Catholics over the age of 18, by Napoleon Franco Compañía Limitada, September through October 2003.

🌐 MEXICO:

- Of Catholics polled in urban areas of Mexico, 94% believe that the government should promote the use of condoms to fight HIV.
- Half of recently surveyed Catholics have used condoms as a contraceptive method at some time.

Source: Survey of 1,048 Catholics presented in “*Poll on Catholic Opinion in Urban Areas of Mexico.*” Prepared by Applied Statistics for Catolicas por el Derecho de Decidir A.C. with the assistance of the Population Council of Mexico, June 2003.

Abortion

The Catholic church expressly prohibits abortion. It teaches this act is immoral at even the most rudimentary stages of embryonic development and even if a woman’s life is at risk. This dictate applies even in cases of sexual assault. The church also shuns the use of any procedure or substance that results in the expulsion of a preembryo not yet embedded in the womb. According to the *Catechism*:

Human life must be respected and protected absolutely from the moment of conception. From the first moment of existence, a human being must be recognized as having the rights of a person—among which is the inviolable right of every innocent being to life.... Direct abortion, that is to say, abortion willed either as an end or a means, is gravely contrary to the moral law.

The church distinguishes between “direct” and “indirect” abortion. Indirect abortion is defined as the killing of a fetus in the course of another medical intervention necessary to save a woman’s life; standard examples of this are hysterectomy to cure uterine cancer or repair of the fallopian tube in an ectopic pregnancy. While these procedures are infrequent, they do result in the indirect destruction of the fetus. However, the church bans direct abortion, which might include a woman’s need to terminate a pregnancy because it may threaten her life (e.g., when a pregnancy places life-threatening strain on a woman’s cardiovascular system).

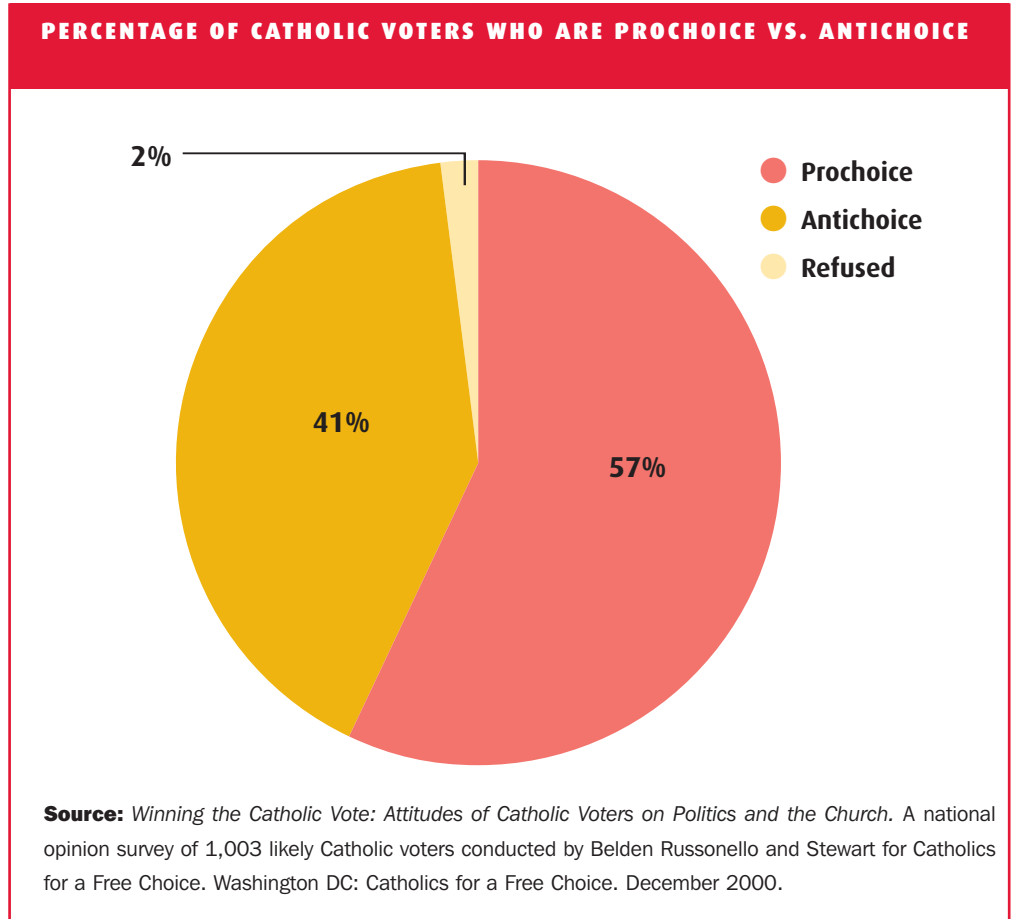
The church maintains that this decree should become civil law, and continually works to keep abortion illegal, and where it is legal, difficult to obtain. The *Catechism* continues:

The inalienable right to life of every innocent human individual is a constitutive element of a civil society and its legislation.... “As a consequence of the respect and protection which must be ensured for the unborn child from the moment of conception, the law must provide appropriate penal sanctions for every deliberate violation of the child’s rights.”

While international statistics tend to vary quite a bit on this issue, the majority of Catholics in the US are in favor of allowing a woman to make her own decision when it comes to abortion. Nationally, the majority of Catholics do not agree that abortion is wrong in all cases. However, in Poland, a country that is overwhelmingly Catholic, very few believe abortion is right, despite varying circumstances that may affect a woman’s need or want to do so. France proves to be the most progressive however, with the bulk of the population agreeing that abortion is not wrong at all or only wrong under certain circumstances.

Abortion should be legal

During the 2000 US presidential election campaign, Catholic voters were more likely to be prochoice than antichoice and a strong majority (66%) believed abortion should be legal.



BOLIVIA: 55% of Catholics feel abortion should be permitted under certain circumstances.

Source: Nationwide poll of 1,500 Catholics over the age of 18, living in cities with 5,000 or more inhabitants, by Encuestas y Estudios Compañía, July and August 2003.

COLOMBIA: 49% think a woman should have the right to an abortion under certain circumstances.

Source: Nationwide poll of 1,523 Catholics over the age of 18, by Napoleon Franco Compañía Limitada, September through October 2003.

ITALY: Although 97% of Italians are Catholic, 74% favor the use of RU-486.

Source: "Italian Roman Catholic Church Slams Abortion Pill," Agence France-Presse, October 30, 2002.

🌐 **Mexico:** In Mexico, where the population is 90% Catholic, abortion is permitted only under very specific circumstances and very few women are able to safely obtain the procedure legally. Obstetrical and gynecological residents surveyed agreed with each of the following statements:

- 89% say abortion is acceptable in cases of rape; and
- 91% say abortion is acceptable if pregnancy poses a serious threat to the woman's health.

Source: Gonzalez de Leon Aguirre D, Billings D. "Attitudes Towards Abortion Among Medical Trainees in Mexico City Public Hospitals," *Gender and Development*, 2001;9(2): 87-94.

- Over two-thirds of urban Catholics (70%) think abortion should be allowed in some cases or whenever a woman decides to have one.

Source: Survey of 1,048 Catholics presented in "Poll on Catholic Opinion in Urban Areas of Mexico." Prepared by Applied Statistics for Catolicas por el Derecho de Decidir A.C. with the assistance of the Population Council of Mexico, June 2003.

🌐 **United States:** American Catholics generally support access to abortion:

- Only 23% of US Catholics agree with the bishops' position that abortion should be illegal in all circumstances.

Source: CBS/*New York Times* poll conducted July 2000; reported in "The Facts Tell the Story: Catholic and Choice." Washington, DC: Catholics for a Free Choice. 2000.

Abortion is not always wrong

A multinational study showed that few Catholics believe that abortion is always wrong, as follows:

Ireland: 40% **Italy:** 12% **Poland:** 31%

Source: Andrew M. Greeley, "Religion in the Emerald Tiger: The Irish Are Still Catholic, But Now On Their Own Terms," *America*, March 12, 2001.

Among US Catholics surveyed in the General Social Survey in 2000, respondents agree with each of the following statements:

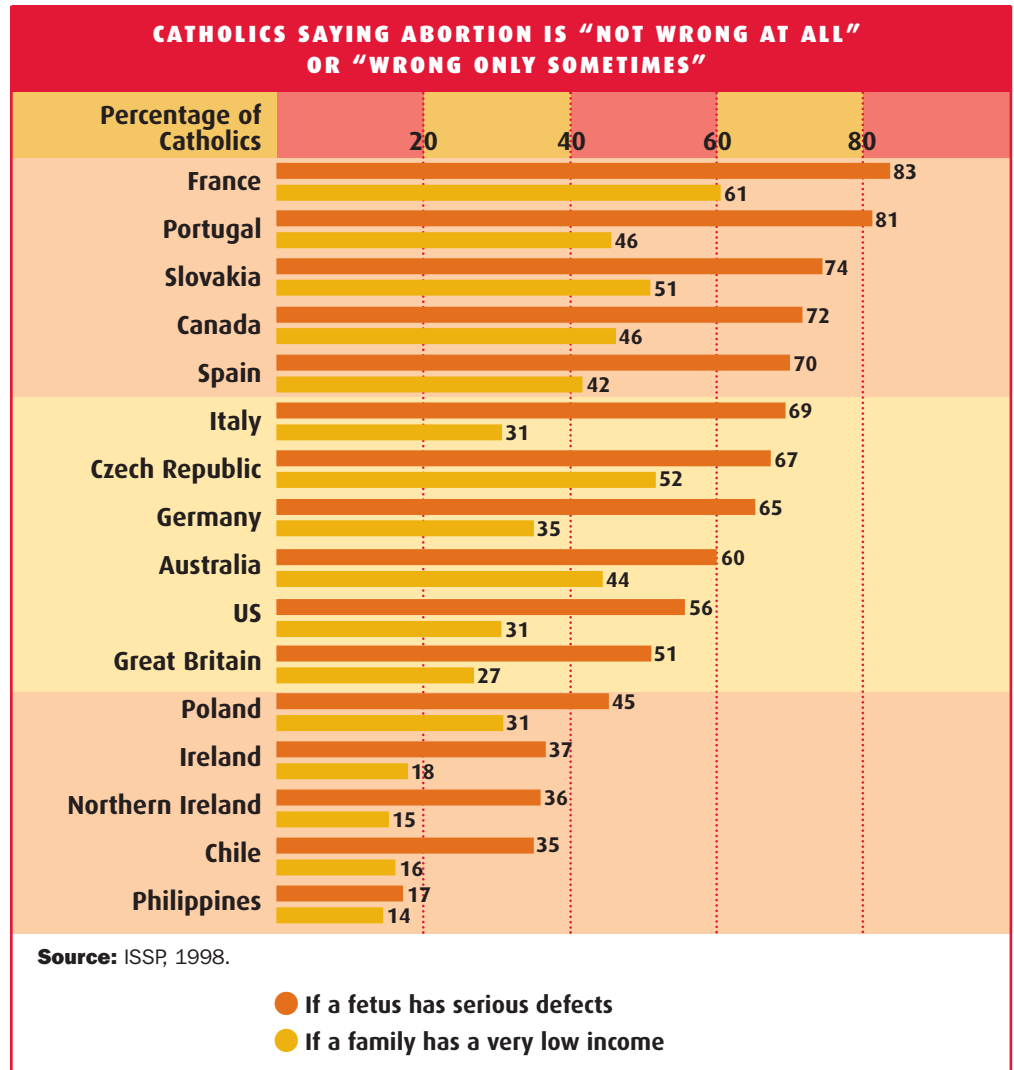
- 33% – abortion is acceptable for single women;
- 33% – abortion is acceptable for a woman who wants it for any reason;
- 34% – abortion is acceptable for a married woman who wants no more children;
- 35% – abortion is acceptable for a low-income woman who can't afford any more children;
- 75% – abortion is acceptable in cases of rape;
- 87% – abortion is acceptable if pregnancy poses a serious threat to the woman's health.

Source: GSS, 2000.

"It is well known that a significant number of Catholics have quite a liberal view of abortion. What is less well known is that those positions are well-grounded in Catholic teaching."

—Daniel Dombrowski, Catholic philosopher, "A Brief, Liberal, Catholic Defense of Abortion," *Conscience*, Spring 2002.

Around the world: Catholics in many countries do not condemn abortion when a fetus has a serious defect or when a family has a very low income.



Catholic women have abortions

Estimated annual abortion figures are as follows for South American countries:

Argentina (90% Catholic): 350,000–400,000;

Colombia (89% Catholic): 450,000; and

Peru (90% Catholic): 30% of all pregnancies annually end in abortion.

Source: "Mujeres del Mundo: Leyes y políticas que afectan sus vidas reproductivas." América Latina y el Caribe CRLP/DEMUS Suplemento 2000, p. 87.

Philippines (83% Catholic): "One out of every four women has had induced abortions" stated by Population Commission.

Source: "One in four women in the Philippines has had an abortion: survey," Agence France-Presse, December 13, 2001.

Cohabitation and Premarital Sex

The Catholic church teaches that couples who live together before marriage are partners in an illegitimate union that will most likely suffer the woes of infidelity and end in separation.

Catechism doctrine states:

Some today claim a "right to a trial marriage" where there is an intention of getting married later. However firm the purpose of those who engage in premature sexual relations may be, "the fact is that such liaisons can scarcely ensure mutual sincerity and fidelity in a relationship between a man and a woman, nor, especially, can they protect it from inconstancy of desires or whim." Carnal union is morally legitimate only when a definitive community of life between a man and a woman has been established....

The church portrays premarital sex as a shameful act and it remains rigid in its belief that sexual relations are only acceptable between a married couple.

Fornication is carnal union between an unmarried man and an unmarried woman. It is gravely contrary to the dignity of persons and of human sexuality which is naturally ordered to the good of spouses and the generation and education of children....

While the Catholic church's teachings are clear about what is an acceptable, moral lifestyle, many Catholic women have stepped outside of these directives and have lived with another outside of matrimony. In keeping with the progressive attitudes of such decisions, many Catholics across the globe feel that living together before marriage is satisfactory behavior among single adults. These attitudes are gaining adherents across the globe, but are more quickly progressing in some countries than others. For example, while a hefty majority of Catholics in Germany agree that cohabitation prior to marriage is an acceptable choice, minorities of Catholics in Australia feel this way.

In the US and abroad, most Catholics do not consistently consider premarital sex highly offensive or immoral behavior.

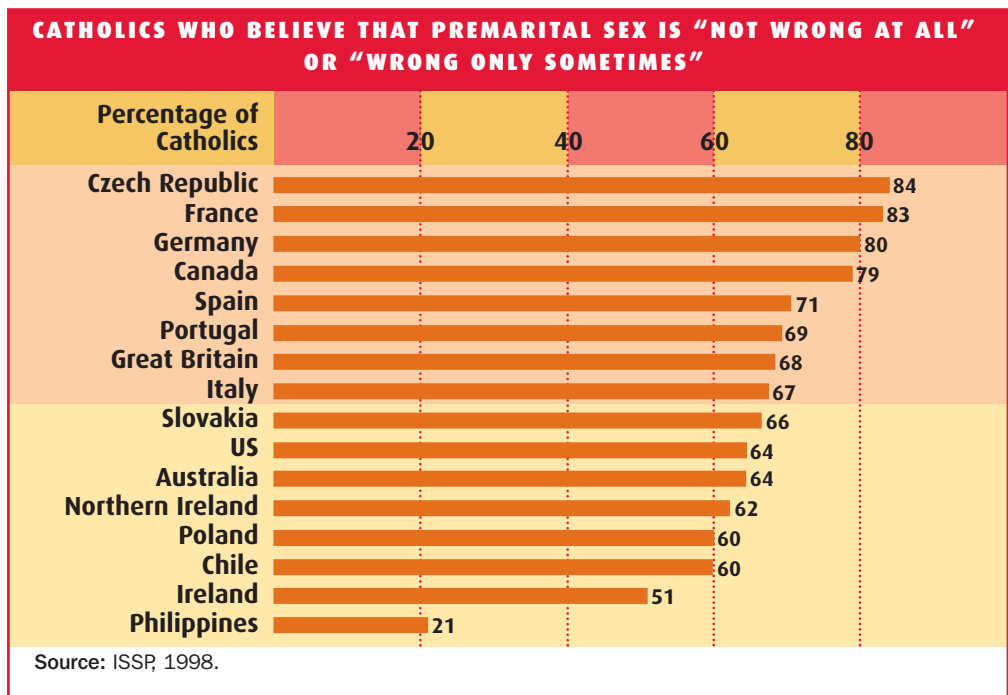
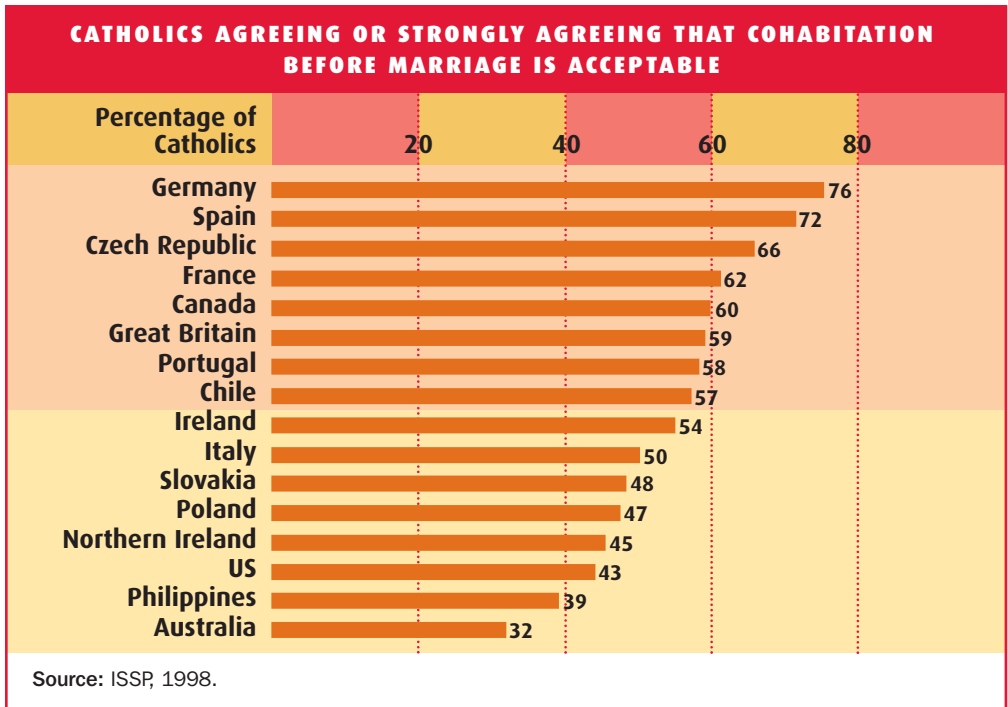
UNITED STATES:

- 40% of Catholic women have cohabitated outside of marriage.

Source: NSFG, 1995.

- 35% of Roman Catholic congregations have no special rules or norms regarding cohabitation of unmarried adults, for example, prohibiting them from participating in liturgical functions or assuming leadership roles in the community.

Source: NCS, 1998.



Divorce & Remarriage

Catholic dissent from church teachings on contraception and abortion belongs to a broader pattern of dissent on family life and gender roles. Many Catholics believe divorce should be legal and remarriage freely permitted. Religious symbolism is a factor in the church's refusal to recognize divorce and its judgment that remarriage is a sin indistinguishable from adultery.

Divorce is a grave offense against the natural law. It claims to break the contract, to which the spouses freely consented, to live with each other till death. Divorce does injury to the covenant of salvation, of which sacramental marriage is the sign. Contracting a new union, even if it is recognized by civil laws, adds to the gravity of the rupture: the remarried spouse is then in a situation of public and permanent adultery.

This position has made its mark in the laws of countries strongly influenced by the Catholic church. For example, divorce remained illegal in Chile until late 2003.

Catholics dissent from church teachings on divorce

🌐 **BOLIVIA:** 64% believe those who have been divorced should be allowed to remarry.

Source: Nationwide poll of 1,500 Catholics over the age of 18, living in cities with 5,000 or more inhabitants, by Encuestas y Estudios Compañía, July and August 2003.

🌐 **COLOMBIA:** 30% of Catholics are in disagreement with the church's views on divorce.

Source: Nationwide poll of 1,523 Catholics over the age of 18, by Napoleon Franco Compañía Limitada, September through October 2003.

🌐 **ITALY:** About 68% of Catholics believe that people who divorce and remarry in civil ceremonies should be admitted to communion.

Source: Poll conducted by *L'Espresso* magazine. "Italian Catholics Back Contraception, Cohabitation, Poll Says," *Catholic World News*, August 14, 1998.

🌐 **MEXICO:** A majority of urban Catholics believe that a person should be allowed to remarry after divorce.

Source: Survey of 1,048 Catholics presented in "Poll on Catholic Opinion in Urban Areas of Mexico." Prepared by Applied Statistics for Catolicas por el Derecho de Decidir A.C. with the assistance of the Population Council of Mexico, June 2003.

Limits of Church Authority

While the Catholic church has and continues to articulate standards of morally exact behavior in Catholic life, many followers believe they must be guided by their own conscience in their decision-making. Catholic teaching does encourage believers to follow their conscience after thoroughly weighing the doctrines of the church. Most Catholics believe this should apply to decisions regarding family planning, sexuality, and reproductive health as well. The majority of American Catholics believe they have the ability to

make up their own minds on critical issues like contraception and abortion, and should not permit the church to wholly regulate such aspects of their lives. The emerging lifestyles of women and families in the US and internationally call for greater decision-making in their sexual lives, with less regulation from the church. In predominantly Catholic Mexico, only one percent of those polled offered the church as the source where they obtained their most pertinent information relating to sex.

The *Catechism* states:

Conscience is a judgment of reason whereby the human person recognizes the moral quality of a concrete act that he is going to perform, is in the process of performing, or has already completed.... Conscience includes the perception of the principles of morality (synderesis); their application in the given circumstances by practical discernment of reasons and goods; and finally judgment about concrete acts yet to be performed.... Man has the right to act in conscience and in freedom so as personally to make moral decisions. "He must not be forced to act contrary to his conscience. Nor must he be prevented from acting according to his conscience, especially in religious matters."

Conscience is more important than church teaching

🌐 MEXICO:

- Only 2% of Catholics think the decision to abort an unwanted pregnancy should rest with the Catholic church while over half (53%) feel that it is mainly up to the woman and her partner.
- 86% say that a person can use a contraceptive method and continue to be a good Catholic.

Source: Survey of 1,048 Catholics presented in "Poll on Catholic Opinion in Urban Areas of Mexico." Prepared by Applied Statistics for Catolicas por el Derecho de Decidir A.C. with the assistance of the Population Council of Mexico, June 2003.

- 75% of Mexicans ages 12–29 say that religious beliefs do not influence their attitude toward sexuality. Only 1% cited the church when asked where or from whom they had received the most important information regarding sexuality.

Source: National survey of 54,500 households with persons aged 12-29, reported in "Jovenes y Sexualidad," *La Jornada*, August 2, 2001.

🌐 United States:

- Among Catholics, 11% believe that the locus of moral authority on practicing birth control should rest with church leaders while 61% believe that it should be in the control of individuals. And 57% believe it is possible to be a good Catholic without obeying teachings on divorce and remarriage.
- Over three-quarters of Catholics (77%) believe you can be a good Catholic without attending Mass every Sunday.

Source: William V. D'Antonio. "Trends in US Roman Catholic attitudes, beliefs, behavior," *National Catholic Reporter*, October 29, 1999; 36(12); 14.

- 71% of Catholic women agree that a doctor's decision about medical treatment should not be blocked by a hospital owner's religious beliefs.

- 83% of American women surveyed oppose the idea of exemptions from service provision based on conscience for pharmacists, while 79% believe that hospitals should not be exempt from service provision based on conscience.

Source: *Religion, Reproductive Health and Access to Services: A National Survey of Women*. A national opinion survey of 1,000 women conducted by Belden, Russonello and Stewart for Catholics for a Free Choice. Washington DC: Catholics for a Free Choice. April 2000.

Church teachings are outdated

- 🌐 **CANADA:** 74% of Catholics agree that “the doctrine of the Catholic church regarding things such as abortion, contraception and the marriage of priests is dated and out of sync with the times.”

Source: Leger marketing poll of 1,503 Canadians, May 22-26, 2002.

- 🌐 **UNITED STATES:**

- 64% of Catholics view the church’s teachings on sexual behavior as outdated.

Source: *USA Today/CNN/Gallup* poll of 256 Catholics conducted May 28-29, 2002.

- Of Catholics surveyed, 49% agree that church leaders are out of touch.

Source: William V. D’Antonio. “Trends in US Roman Catholic Attitudes, Beliefs, Behavior,” *National Catholic Reporter*, October 29, 1999; 36(12); 14.

The church has too much political power

- 🌐 **IRELAND:** Irish Catholics who feel that the church has too much power increased from 38% to 46% between 1991 and 1998.

Source: Andrew M. Greeley, “Religion in the Emerald Tiger: The Irish Are Still Catholic, But Now On Their Own Terms,” *America*, March 12, 2001.

- 🌐 **POLAND:** 56% of Catholics believe the church’s involvement in politics is too great.

Source: “Poland: Poll Scrutinizes Attitudes Toward Catholic Church,” *Relioscope*, August 21, 2002. Public Opinion Research Center poll originally published by RFE/RL, *Poland, Belarus, and Ukraine Report* 2002; 4(31).

- 🌐 **UNITED STATES:** 78% of respondents think that more shared authority with the laity is needed.

Source: LeMoyné College/Zogby International conducted a poll among 1,000 Catholics, November 2002. LeMoyné website (www.lemoyne.edu). (Accessed May 2003.)

The church has lost trust and confidence

- 🌐 **SPAIN:** When asked how much trust they had in the church and religious organizations, 9% of Catholics reported “a great deal of trust,” 31% said “a fair amount,” 35% said “little” and 22% said “none.”

Source: Survey conducted among a representative sample of 2,487 adults. “Actitudes y Creencias Religiosas,” Centro de Investigacion y Estadísticas, 2002.

“The Vatican’s position in contemporary global debate should be extremely humble. [It] does not represent the diversity of opinions within the Christian community. It does not even reflect the multiple voices of Catholics.”

—Amparo Claro, Latin American and Caribbean Women’s Health Network [Laura Flanders, “Giving the Vatican the boot,” *Ms. magazine*, October/November, 1999.]

“The Vatican’s obstructive tactics on women’s rights at international forums have caused the Catholic church to lose credibility as a spiritual and moral force in the world.”

—Joanna Manning, author of *Is the Pope Catholic?* [Christopher Shulgan, “Canadians join move to oust Vatican from UN International coalition,” *National Post* (Canada), April 19, 1999.]

🌐 **UNITED STATES:**

■ 68% of Catholics say they have “only some” or “hardly any” confidence in organized religion.

Source: GSS, 2000.

■ 39% of congregations are *theologically* conservative, and the remaining 61% are either moderate or liberal.

■ 43% of Roman Catholic congregations are *politically* conservative; the remaining 57% are either moderate or liberal.

■ Only 27% of congregations are both theologically and politically conservative.

■ 55% of Roman Catholic congregations do not consider the Bible to be the literal and inerrant word of God. Among theologically conservative congregations, 51% do not consider the Bible to be the literal and inerrant word of God.

Source: NCS, 1998.

Religion has no place in politics

In the area of politics, the majority of Catholics do not believe it is appropriate for Catholic bishops to use the political stage as a platform for their moral stance.

The right to religious liberty is... a natural right of the human person to civil liberty, i.e., immunity, within just limits, from external constraint in religious matters by political authorities....It is a part of the church’s mission “to pass moral judgments even in matters related to politics....The means, the only means, she may use are those which are in accord with the Gospel and the welfare of all men according to the diversity of times and circumstances.”

The political community and the church are autonomous and independent of each other in their own fields.

In the US, the majority of Catholic voters questioned agree that leaders in the church should not attempt to influence their people on international or domestic political issues. In Mexico, a majority of Catholics think that during elections, the church should not be permitted to advocate for certain candidates based on the candidate’s religious affiliation.

🌐 **COLOMBIA:** 51% of Catholics say the church should not be involved in the political undertakings of the government.

Source: Nationwide poll of 1,523 Catholics over the age of 18, by Napoleon Franco Compañía Limitada, September through October 2003.

🌐 **MEXICO:** A recent poll shows that Catholics disagree with the church influencing politics.

■ Catholics overwhelmingly agree (81%) that the church should not have influence on the Mexican government.

■ 91% of Catholics say the Catholic church should not promote or disqualify certain candidates or political parties.

■ 90% believe a Catholic president should rule based on the diversity of opinion that exists in the country rather than on the teachings of the Catholic church.

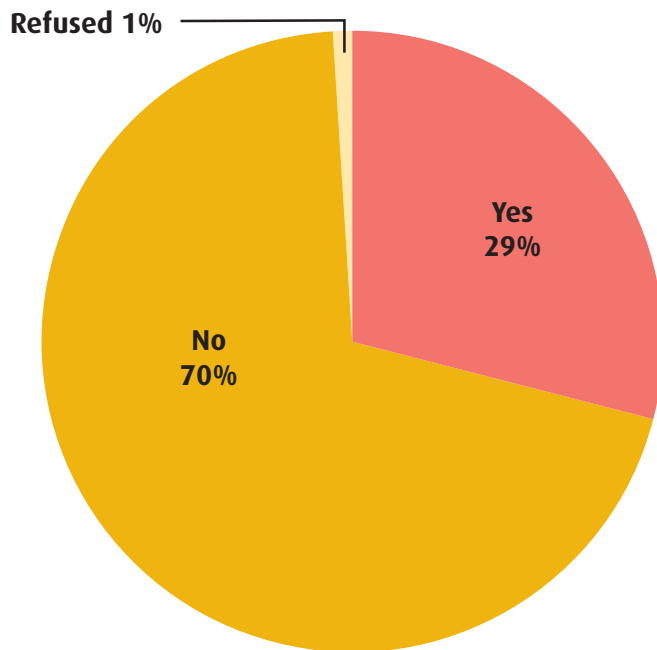
Source: Survey of 1,048 Catholics presented in *“Poll on Catholic Opinion in Urban Areas of Mexico.”* Prepared by Applied Statistics for Catolicas por el Derecho de Decidir A.C. with the assistance of the Population Council of Mexico, June 2003.

🌐 **UNITED STATES:** Catholics say it is not appropriate for religious leaders to influence domestic and international politics.

■ 51% of Catholic voters believed the Vatican should be treated as a nongovernmental organization, like all other religions that participate in the United Nations.

■ 70% of Catholic voters during the 2002 national election campaign did not believe that Catholic bishops should use politics to impose their moral opinions.

PERCENTAGE OF CATHOLIC VOTERS WHO DID NOT BELIEVE THAT CATHOLIC BISHOPS SHOULD USE THE POLITICAL ARENA TO ADVANCE THEIR MORAL OPINIONS



Source: *Winning the Catholic Vote: Attitudes of Catholic Voters on Politics and the Church.* Washington DC: Catholics for a Free Choice. December 2000.

Sex Abuse Scandal

Accusations of child sexual abuse perpetrated by Catholic priests have reached staggering proportions. While these accusations have recently become almost commonplace in America, the problem does not exist solely on US soil. Reports of sexual abuse in other countries are also increasing. Catholics irrefutably accept this predicament as the most severe crisis the church has ever witnessed. As a result of this calamity, weaknesses in the structure of the Holy See have come to light. Many Catholics feel the church has not addressed and is not currently addressing this tragedy in the proper manner. Lack of accountability and cover-ups of abuse, compounded with insufficient action to protect children has left many members of the faith disenchanted with the church's leadership and its teachings. The scandals have placed an overwhelming burden on the church financially, with settlements for victims reaching into the millions. The crisis has afflicted the institution spiritually, as many in the faith are losing confidence in the religion. The image of the Catholic church though, is hardest hit.

🌐 **IRELAND:** Three-fourths of Irish people believe that the church's response to reports of sexual abuse was inadequate. Over one-third of respondents claimed that the sex abuse scandal has affected their prayer life and attendance at church.
Source: Dublin's Royal College of Surgeons surveyed 1,000 Catholic adults reported in "90% believe church damaged by abuse," RTE Interactive News, November 6, 2002.

🌐 **UNITED STATES:**

■ As a result of the scandal in the Catholic church concerning abuse of children by priests, 39% of Catholics surveyed by a conservative Catholic periodical have less confidence in the moral teachings of the church. Furthermore, 52% of respondents are dissatisfied with the way the bishops have responded to the crisis.

Source: *Crisis* magazine survey of 1,000 Catholic respondents, 2002.

■ Seven out of 10 Catholics characterized the scandal as a "crisis" for the church.

Source: *Washington Post/ABC News/Beliefnet* poll of 1,086 randomly selected adults, including 503 self-identified Catholics conducted March 25-28, 2002.

■ 70% of Catholics think bishops who covered up sexual abuse by priests should resign.

Source: Quinnipiac University polled 1,347 people including 326 Catholics, April 1-9, 2002.

New Developments in Reproductive Health

Reproductive health technology has made significant strides, particularly in the areas of stem cell research and assisted reproduction techniques. Scientists claim that stem cell research is vital, as such research could lead to cures for illnesses like Alzheimer's, heart disease, diabetes and cancer. However, the hierarchy of the Catholic church rejects this research, characterizing it as immoral because it uses cells that are extracted from living embryos, which are destroyed during the process. Despite this stance by the church, the majority of Catholics in the US support stem cell research. Assisted reproduction techniques such as in vitro fertilization and artificial insemination are critical to women and families that desire children but are struggling with infertility. While the church is

against such “artificial” measures of impregnation, there are women of the Catholic faith who have sought such technologies, in hopes of conceiving.

Stem cell research

🌐 **UNITED STATES:** 61% of Catholics support embryonic stem cell research.

Source: The Harris Poll surveyed 1,011 adults July 12-16, 2001.

Assisted reproduction

🌐 **SPAIN:** One of every ten babies born in Spain (90% Catholic) was conceived through assisted reproduction.

Source: *El Mundo*, 26 April, 2002.

🌐 **UNITED STATES:** 10% of all Catholic women have sought medical help to become pregnant. The figure is comparable to non-Catholics.

Source: NSFG, 1995.

Conclusion

As this report plainly demonstrates, long-held traditional views by the Catholic hierarchy regarding contraception, abortion, marriage, divorce, and family planning have been and are continually being challenged by members of the faith. Unfortunately, the church does not acknowledge these opinions, and what is presented as the “Catholic position” on policies dealing with reproductive health is rather the position of a Catholic bishop, or a Catholic priest, or even the Catholic hierarchy—but as the data here show, it’s not always the position of the Catholic people.

Denying safe, modern, effective, and frequently necessary methods of birth control—some of which function as a means of preventing sexually transmitted diseases—in this era is dangerous. Such strongholds on women and families promise further division among the church and its members, and ultimately, society.

While certain countries presented in this report may not appear as progressive as others when it comes to family planning and sexual and reproductive health, the notion that individuals should be free to make their own choices regarding these matters is clearly the majority opinion. In a democratic society, opinions and personal beliefs must be heard, considered, respected, and acted upon when they are the majority view and not contrary to human rights; particularly regarding matters that directly affect women, whose bodies and lives are at stake.

As the 21st century forges ahead, freedom of choice in the Catholic church must advance as well. It is unjust for leadership in the church to press its views without considering the pros and cons of such doctrine among its people. Only when the church begins to listen to its followers will the institution develop into one that is unequivocally safe and just.



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Catholics for a Free Choice (CFFC) is a nongovernmental organization with special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the United Nations. It shapes and advances sexual and reproductive ethics that are based on justice, reflect a commitment to women's well-being, and respect and affirm the moral capacity of women and men to make sound decisions about their lives. Through discourse, education and advocacy, CFFC works in the United States and internationally to infuse these values into public policy, community life, feminist analysis, and Catholic social thinking and teaching.

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