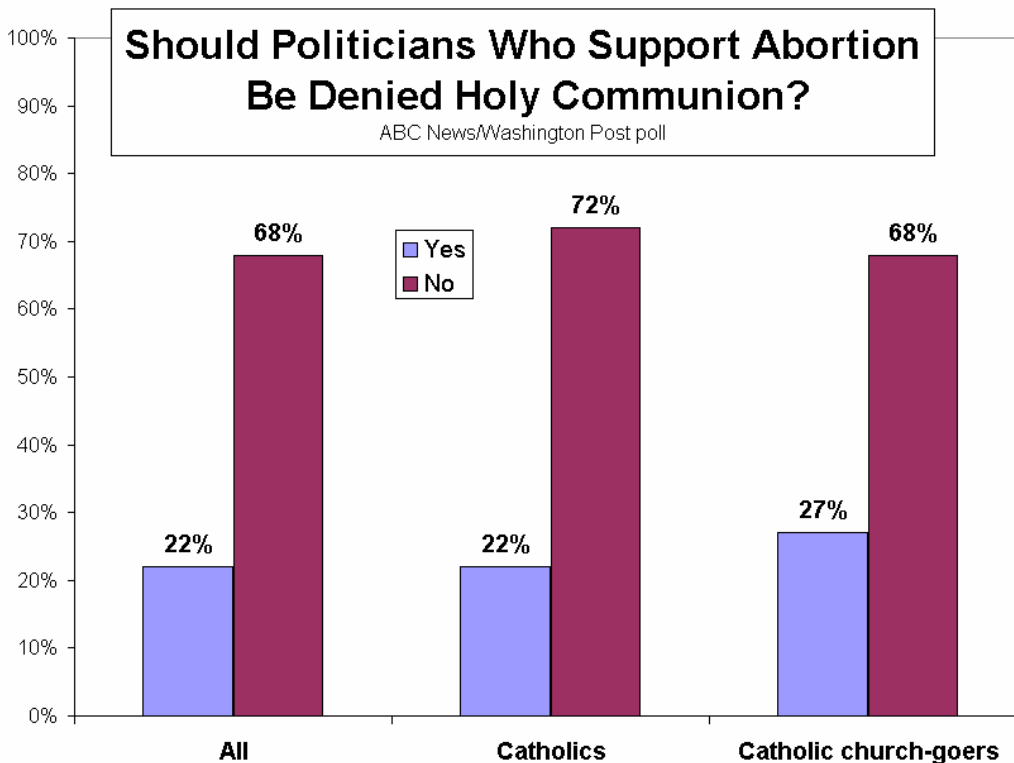


Most Say Church Leaders Should Steer Clear of Politics

Most Americans say religious leaders should not try to influence politicians' positions on the issues, and abortion is no exception: Nearly seven in 10 – including most Catholics – oppose denying Holy Communion to Catholic politicians who support legal abortion.

Sixty-eight percent of Americans oppose denying communion to such politicians; that includes 72 percent of all Catholics and a similar number of churchgoing Catholics. Even among Americans who oppose legal abortion, 57 percent reject the idea of denying communion to Catholic politicians who hold the opposite view.

These sentiments fit with broader public views: Nearly-two thirds of Americans say religious leaders in general should not attempt to influence politicians' positions on the issues. Again Catholics mirror the overall population – 65 percent share this view – although there are broad differences among other population groups.

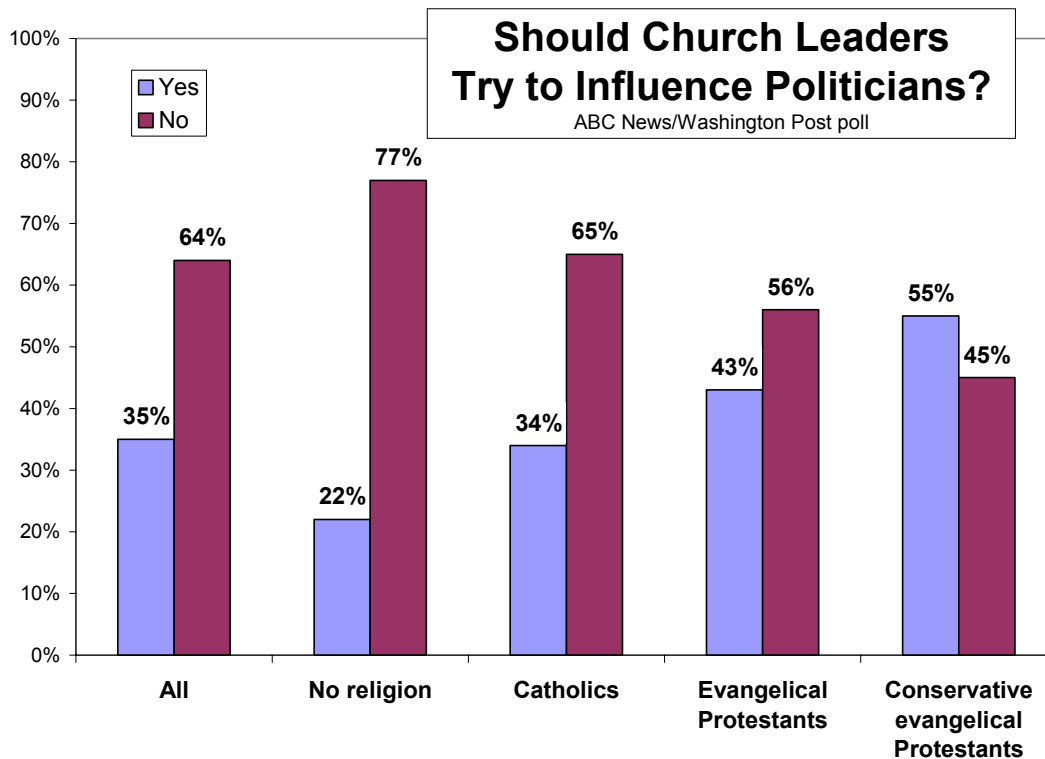


The nexus of religion and politics tends to draw increased focus in election years. George W. Bush meets Friday with Pope John Paul II in Rome. And in Washington, Cardinal

Theodore McCarrick is leading a task force of bishops examining, among other matters, whether Catholic politicians who differ with church teachings should receive communion. Bush's Democratic opponent, John Kerry, a Catholic, supports legal abortion.

Support for banning communion is highest, not among Catholics, but among evangelical white Protestants who describe themselves as political conservatives. In this group it's an even split: 41 percent support denying communion, 42 percent oppose it.

RELIGIOUS INFLUENCE – There also are wide divisions on the broader issue of whether religious leaders should try to influence politicians. Liberals, Easterners, senior citizens, Democrats and the non-religious are among those most likely to say no. Republicans and conservatives divide, while a majority of conservative evangelical Protestants favors such efforts.



These views play out in vote preferences: People who say religious leaders should try to influence politicians support Bush over Kerry by 21 points in a three-way matchup including Ralph Nader; those who disagree support Kerry over Bush by 11 points.

Should religious leaders try to influence politicians' positions on the issues?

	Yes	No
All	35%	64
Democrats	28	71
Independents	32	67
Republicans	48	50

Liberals	23	77
Moderates	29	69
Conservatives	49	49
No religion	22	77
Catholics	34	65
Non-evangelical Protestants	27	70
Evangelical Protestants	43	56
White Protestants:		
Evangelical	46	53
Church-going evangelical	53	46
Conservative evangelical	62	37

An ABC News/Washington Post poll probed the so-called “culture war” with another question last December: Fifty-four percent of Americans said a president should not rely on his religious beliefs in making policy decisions, while 40 percent said he should. This, too, revealed deep splits among population groups, but again with Catholics reflecting the broader majority’s view (60 percent said a president should not be influenced by his religious views). In contrast to evangelical white Protestants, most Catholics long have separated religion and politics in this way.

ABORTION – On abortion itself, 54 percent of Americans say it should be legal, about the average in polls since 1995. That includes 23 percent who say it should be legal in all cases, and 31 percent who say it should be legal in most cases.

Support for legal abortion is higher in the East (62 percent) and West (61 percent) than in the Midwest (52 percent) or South (46 percent). It jumps above 70 percent among liberals and non-evangelical white Protestants. Most Republicans, conservatives and evangelical white Protestants oppose it, peaking at 78 percent among evangelical white Protestants who attend church weekly (including four in 10 who are opposed in all cases).

Despite their church’s stand on the issue, Catholics support legal abortion at the same rate as the broader public – overall 55 percent say it should be legal in all or most cases. However, legal abortion is opposed by 55 percent of Catholics who attend church at least a few times a month.

While there’s not much of a gender gap on the issue of abortion among all Americans, there is among Catholics. Sixty-three percent of Catholic women support legal abortion; it’s 48 percent among Catholic men. Still, Catholic men and women alike broadly oppose denying communion to Catholic politicians who support legal abortion.

	Abortion should be	
	Legal	Illegal
All	54%	44
HS or less	48	49
Some college+	59	39

East	62	35
West	61	38
Midwest	52	46
South	46	51
Democrats	62	35
Independents	56	43
Republicans	40	59
Liberals	77	21
Moderates	60	37
Conservatives	34	64
No religion	68	30
Catholics	55	42
Non-evangelical Protestants	69	29
Evangelical Protestants	35	63
White Protestants:		
Evangelical	35	64
Church-going evangelical	20	78
Conservative evangelical	21	77
Catholics:		
Regular churchgoers	45	55
Not regular churchgoers	67	29

GROUPS – On average in ABC/Post polls the past year, Protestants have accounted for 48 percent of the adult population, Catholics 22 percent, other Christians 12 percent, those with no religion 13 percent and all others five percent. Among Protestants, 57 percent describe themselves as evangelical or born again (computing to 27 percent of all Americans), while 40 percent of Protestants are non-evangelical (19 percent of all adults).

METHODOLOGY – This ABC News/Washington Post poll was conducted by telephone May 20-23, 2004, among a random national sample of 1,005 adults. The results have a three-point error margin. Sampling, data collection and tabulation by TNS of Horsham, Pa.

Analysis by Dalia Sussman.

ABC News polls can be found at ABCNEWS.com at <http://abcnews.com/pollvault.html>.

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Full results follow.

32. On another subject, do you think abortion should be legal in all cases, legal in most cases, illegal in most cases or illegal in all cases?

	-----Legal-----			-----Illegal-----			No opin.
	NET	All cases	Most cases	NET	Most cases	All cases	
5/23/04	54	23	31	44	23	20	2
1/20/03	57	23	34	42	25	17	2
8/12/01	49	22	27	48	28	20	3
6/24/01	52	22	31	43	23	20	4
1/15/01	59	21	38	39	25	14	1
9/6/00 RV	55	20	35	42	25	16	3
7/23/00	53	20	33	43	26	17	4
9/2/99	56	20	37	42	26	15	2
3/14/99	55	21	34	42	27	15	3
7/12/98	54	19	35	42	29	13	4
8/5/96	56	22	34	41	27	14	3
6/30/96	58	24	34	40	25	14	2
10/1/95	60	26	35	37	25	12	3
9/21/95	60	24	36	36	25	11	4
7/17/95	59	27	32	40	26	14	1

33. Would you support or oppose the Catholic church denying communion to Catholic politicians who are in favor of legal abortion?

	Support	Oppose	No opinion
5/23/04	22	68	11

34. In general, do you think religious leaders should or should not try to influence politicians in their positions on the issues?

	Should	Should not	No opinion
5/23/04	35	64	1

END