

CHAPTER 7

Ideology and Policy Issues

The relationship between the religious characteristics of Hispanics and their political views often closely mirrors the relationship between religion and politics among the general population. Hispanic evangelicals, for example, tend to be more conservative than Catholics and much more conservative than seculars when it comes to their political ideology, attitudes on social issues such as abortion and gay marriage, and views of the war in Iraq and sympathy for Israel. Frequency of church attendance also is closely correlated with more conservative views on these issues.

While evangelical identity and frequent church attendance are closely associated with conservative positions on some issues, the pattern does not hold for all issues. Views on the death penalty illustrate this point. Latino evangelicals, for instance, are no more likely than Catholics to express support for capital punishment, the politically conservative point of view on this issue. And among evangelicals and Catholics alike, frequent church attendance is associated with higher levels of opposition to the death penalty.

Religious differences among Latinos also are less evident on other issues. On economic issues, for instance, Hispanics generally support government guaranteed health insurance for all citizens. Latinos from a variety of religious backgrounds also largely support a larger government providing more services even if it results in higher taxes. At the same time, Latino Christians do not see government as the sole solution for social ills. Almost half of Latino Christians believe that social ills would take care of themselves if enough people were brought to Christ.

Religion is not the only factor that helps to explain the ideological orientation and policy views of Hispanics. Nativity, language and other factors also play a significant role. For instance, Latinos who are foreign born and those whose primary language is Spanish tend to have more conservative views on gay marriage and abortion. Those who were born in the U.S. and those whose primary language is English tend to be more liberal on those issues. But even when these demographic factors are taken into account, religious variables are often strongly related to views on social and foreign policy issues.

General ideology and social issues

Ideology

Hispanic evangelicals are significantly more likely than other Latinos to describe themselves as conservative. Latino Catholics, by contrast, are evenly divided across the ideological spectrum. Among both Catholics and

evangelicals, those who attend church frequently tend to be more politically conservative than those who attend church less often. These patterns closely resemble results from surveys of the American population as a whole.

Figure 7.1
Religion and Political Ideology

Among...	% who are...			
	Conservative	Moderate	Liberal	DK/ Refused
All Hispanics	32%	28%	25%	15%
Catholic	31	27	26	16
Attend at least weekly	36	23	24	18
Attend less often	27	30	28	14
Evangelical	46	27	17	10
Attend at least weekly	50	22	16	11
Attend less often	36	38	19	7
Secular	28	29	33	11
Non-Hispanics[†]	34	40	21	5
White	38	38	21	4
Catholic	38	42	18	3
Attend at least weekly	44	42	11	3
Attend less often	31	42	24	2
Evangelical	50	35	12	3
Attend at least weekly	60	30	8	3
Attend less often	36	44	18	3
Secular	9	43	42	6
Black	25	53	19	4

[†] Source: 2006 Pew U.S. Religion Survey

The 2006 Pew U.S. Religion Survey found that half of white evangelicals describe their political views as conservative or very conservative, compared with 38% among white Catholics and only 9% among white seculars. Seculars, on the other hand, are much more likely than any other group to describe their political views as liberal or very liberal.

As with Hispanics, the Pew survey finds a strong association between frequent church attendance and increased political conservatism among non-Hispanics, Catholics as well as evangelicals.

Gay marriage and abortion

The difference between Hispanic evangelicals and those who adhere to other religious traditions is also reflected in views on social issues such as gay marriage and abortion. While the overwhelming majority of Latino evangelicals (86%) oppose legalizing gay marriage, Catholics are more divided. A slight majority of Catholics (52%) say they are against gay marriage, but a significant minority (32%) favors it. Similarly, Latino evangelicals are more than 20 percentage points more likely than Catholics to say that abortion should be illegal in most or all circumstances. These differences, to a striking degree, also occur among the general population.

Figure 7.2
Evangelicals and Frequent Churchgoers More Conservative on
Gay Marriage and Abortion

Among...	% who...	
	Oppose gay marriage	Say abortion should be illegal
All Hispanics	56%	57%
Catholic	52	54
Attend at least weekly	56	63
Attend less often	49	47
Evangelical	86	77
Attend at least weekly	89	83
Attend less often	77	64
Secular	36	44
All non-Hispanics†	42	40
White	42	42
Catholic	36	44
Attend at least weekly	46	N/A
Attend less often	25	N/A
Evangelical	67	61
Attend at least weekly	74	N/A
Attend less often	55	N/A
Secular	16	14
Black	56	N/A

† Source for gay marriage item is 2006 Pew U.S. Religion Survey. Source for abortion item is December 2005 ABC News/Washington Post survey.

Just as religious affiliation helps shape the views of Latinos on these social issues, so, too, does church attendance. In the study, evangelicals who attend religious services at least once a week are significantly more likely to oppose gay marriage and abortion than evangelicals who attend church less often. The same is true among Catholics. Of the two issues, however, abortion is the one that reveals the greatest difference between weekly churchgoers and those who attend less frequently.

Of course, religion is not the only factor that helps shape Hispanics’ views on social issues like abortion and gay marriage. Previous Pew surveys of the Hispanic population have shown that there are broad differences in attitudes toward abortion and homosexuality among Latinos across generations and depending on the extent of their English-language abilities. The segments of the population that tend to be the most conservative on these social issues are the most recently arrived immigrants and those for whom Spanish is the dominant language.¹ Indeed, a statistical analysis of data from a 2002 survey of Latinos conducted with the Kaiser Family Foundation shows that the acquisition of English language abilities is a key variable in explaining the gradual shift of views on social issues, as well as other matters, in the Latino population.²

¹Pew Hispanic Center/Kaiser Family Foundation 2004 National Survey of Latinos: Politics and Civic Participation; Pew Hispanic Center/Kaiser Family Foundation 2002 National Survey of Latinos.

²Survey Brief: Assimilation and Language, March 2004, Pew Hispanic Center/Kaiser Family Foundation.

Figure 7.3
Views on Social Issues by Country of Origin, Language, Generation and Education

Among Hispanics...	% who...	
	Oppose gay marriage	Say abortion should be illegal
All Hispanics	56%	57%
Country of Origin		
Puerto Rican	48	50
Mexican	56	58
Cuban	63	45
Dominican	56	59
Central American	63	67
South American	54	54
Language		
Spanish dominant	60	68
Bilingual	56	51
English dominant	49	38
Generation		
1st generation	61	65
2nd generation	46	43
3rd+ generation	54	42
Education		
Less than HS	61	69
HS/some college	53	50
College graduate	51	37

This study confirms that Latinos whose primary language is Spanish tend to be more conservative than others on abortion and gay marriage. Similarly, those who were born in the U.S. have more liberal views on gay marriage and abortion compared with immigrants. Country of origin also plays a role. Central Americans, for instance, stand out for their conservatism on both abortion and gay marriage. Cubans tend to be more conservative than some other Latinos in their views on gay marriage but more liberal when it comes to abortion.

But even after these important demographic factors are taken into account, religious affiliation and behavior are still closely related to views on gay marriage and abortion. For instance, even after controlling for language ability, country of origin, generation and education, statistical analysis reveals that Latino evangelicals are significantly more conservative on both issues compared with Catholics. Catholics, in turn, are more conservative than seculars in their views on gay marriage, although not in their views on abortion. Frequency of religious attendance, too, is associated with more conservative views on social issues, especially among Catholics.

Foreign policy

Hispanics' views on foreign policy issues also resemble those found in the general population. Latino evangelicals, for instance, are more supportive of the war in Iraq than are other Latinos. Nearly half of evangelicals say that using force against Iraq was the right decision, compared with 31% among seculars and 27% among Catholics. Previous Pew polling reveals similar differences among the population as a whole.

Figure 7.4
Views on Foreign Policy Issues by Religion

Among...	% who ...	
	Say using force in Iraq was right choice	Sympathize more with Israel than Palestinians
All Hispanics	31%	33%
Catholic	27	27
Evangelical	49	62
Secular	31	30
All non-Hispanics[†]	44	45
White	48	46
Catholic	50	47
Evangelical	60	59
Secular	29	N/A
Black	22	N/A

[†]Source: 2006 Pew U.S. Religion Survey. The 2006 Pew U.S. Religion Survey was conducted in July of 2006, roughly the same time at which the survey of Hispanics was conducted (August-October 2006). The figures reported here should not be construed as reflective of current opinions regarding Iraq, but rather are illustrative of the relationship between religion and views on foreign policy.

The divide between evangelicals and Catholics on the war in Iraq is even more pronounced among Latinos than it is among the general population, even after controlling for partisanship. Support for the war is 28 percentage points higher among Latinos who are evangelical and Republican than among Catholic Republicans, and 16 percentage points higher among evangelical Democrats than among Catholic Democrats.

Hispanic evangelicals, like their white counterparts in the general population, are very supportive of Israel. More than six-in-ten (62%) support Israel over the Palestinians, far more than among Latino Catholics or seculars (27% and 30%, respectively). Indeed, the gap between Hispanic evangelicals and Hispanic Catholics on this question is roughly three times as large as the gap between white evangelicals and white Catholics. These differences may reflect the importance of the fate of the Jewish people for evangelical theology, which foresees a prominent role for Israel — and the Middle East region more broadly — in the events that eventually will accompany the battle of Armageddon and the end of the world.

About one-third of Latinos (34%) say they sympathize with neither Israel nor the Palestinians, while 18% express no opinion on the matter. Evangelicals are less likely than other Latinos to express no opinion on this question or to say they support neither side in the conflict.

The death penalty

While evangelical identity and frequent church attendance are closely connected with conservative positions on social issues such as gay marriage and abortion, this pattern does not hold for all issues. For example, Hispanic evangelicals, who stand out for their conservatism on gay marriage and abortion, are no more likely than Catholics or seculars to favor the death penalty for people convicted of murder. In fact, evangelicals are slightly more likely than Catholics to oppose capital punishment.

And, among Catholics and evangelicals alike, frequent church attendance is associated with opposition to capital punishment — which is widely seen as a politically liberal point of view. Catholics who attend church at least once a week are more likely than Catholics who attend church less frequently to oppose the death penalty (46% vs. 36%), and evangelicals who attend church at least once a week are 11 percentage points more likely to oppose capital punishment than those who attend less frequently. The Catholic Church opposes the death penalty, and the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops has been campaigning since 1980 to end its use in the U.S.

Figure 7.5
Evangelicals No More Supportive of Capital Punishment than Others

Among...	% who ...	
	Favor death penalty	Oppose death penalty
All Hispanics	47%	42%
Catholic	47	40
Attend at least weekly	42	46
Attend less often	51	36
Evangelical	46	47
Attend at least weekly	43	50
Attend less often	54	39
Secular	48	42
All non-Hispanics†	64	27
White	68	24
Catholic	67	25
Attend at least weekly	63	30
Attend less often	71	21
Evangelical	73	16
Secular	62	33
Black	41	50

† Source: March 2006 Pew Research Center Survey

There is more support for capital punishment among the public as a whole than among Hispanics, with 64% of non-Hispanics expressing support for the death penalty.³ That survey also shows, however, that as with Hispanics, frequent church attendance is associated with increased opposition to capital punishment among white Catholics. (The survey included too few evangelicals who attend church less frequently than weekly to be able to assess the relationship between church attendance and views on capital punishment among non-Hispanic evangelicals.)

Economic issues

Regardless of religious tradition, Latinos take liberal views on economic issues, often in contrast to their conservatism on social issues.

More than two-thirds (69%) of Latinos support publicly funded health insurance for all citizens, for instance, even if this results in higher taxes. On this issue, there is virtually no difference between Latino Catholics and evangelicals. By contrast, Catholics in the general population are somewhat more likely than evangelicals to endorse publicly funded health care. Similarly, almost two-thirds (64%) of all Hispanics, including similar numbers of Catholics and evangelicals, say they would opt for higher taxes if the result were more government services.

Figure 7.6
Hispanics of All Religious Backgrounds Express Liberal Views on Economic Issues

Among...	% who say...		
	They favor government guaranteed health insurance	They would rather pay higher taxes for more government services	Poor people have hard lives due to lack of government services
All Hispanics	69%	64%	64%
Catholic	69	64	65
Evangelical	70	66	57
Secular	75	68	66
All non-Hispanics[†]	64	N/A	52
White	63	N/A	48
Catholic	69	N/A	52
Evangelical	58	N/A	42
Secular	64	N/A	60
Black	71	N/A	71

[†] Figures for the government-provided health insurance question come from a July 2005 Pew Research Center survey; figures for the question regarding the plight of the poor come from a March 2006 Pew Research Center survey.

³Source: March 2006 Pew Research Center Survey

Behind this support is the high level of sympathy Latinos express for the plight of the poor. Nearly two-thirds (64%), including large majorities of Catholics, evangelicals and seculars, agree that poor people have hard lives because government benefits do not go far enough; a substantially smaller majority (52%) of non-Hispanics agree with this statement. Fewer than one-in-three Hispanics, by contrast, say that poor people today have it easy because they can get government benefits without doing anything in return.

Differences of opinion on economic issues are not strongly related to nationality. Puerto Ricans express less support than other groups for government-guaranteed health care, and Cubans are less favorable than others toward a large government providing many services. But there are no consistent patterns that suggest nationality leads to consistently more liberal or conservative views on economic issues.

Figure 7.7
Views on Economic Issues by Country of Origin, Language, Generation and Education

Among...	% who say....		
	They favor government guaranteed health insurance	They would rather pay higher taxes for more government services	Poor people have hard lives due to lack of government services
All Hispanics	69%	64%	64%
Country of Origin			
Puerto Rican	62%	58%	68%
Mexican	68	65	63
Cuban	79	54	62
Dominican	77	68	73
Central American	70	64	71
South American	79	67	62
Language			
Spanish dominant	72	65	69
Bilingual	70	67	60
English dominant	62	56	57
Generation			
1st generation	73	65	67
2nd generation	65	66	59
3rd+generation	60	57	56
Education			
Less than HS	70	63	71
HS/some college	68	65	60
College graduate	73	64	53

Though Hispanics largely support an active role for government in providing for the needs of citizens, they do not see government as the only source of solutions for social and economic problems. Indeed, about half of Hispanic Christians (47%) believe that social ills would take care of themselves if enough people were brought to Christ. And while there are few differences across religious groups in views on economic policy issues, there are differences in level of support for the view that social ills would take care of themselves if enough people were brought to Christ. That view is held by a large number of Catholics (45%) but is particularly common among evangelicals (60%). Among Latino Catholics, regular church attenders are somewhat more likely to hold this point of view than those who attend less frequently). ■