

NARAL  
Pro-Choice Arizona  
Foundation



*Latina Perspectives on  
Reproductive Health and  
Justice in the  
Southwestern United States*

June 15, 2009

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## **Introduction & Executive Summary**

Despite somewhat persistent myths that Hispanics, are, as a whole more socially conservative than the rest of the U.S. population on the issue of abortion, the findings of a new study conducted by Bendixen & Associates (B&A), a public research firm in Miami, FL, shows that while Latinas have mixed feelings on this topic, they overwhelmingly oppose government intervention in reproductive decisions.

The research, commissioned by NARAL Pro-Choice America, was conducted to gather information regarding the views of the Latina populations of Arizona and New Mexico on the issues of reproductive rights and family planning. The first stage of the research was to conduct qualitative focus group research with registered Latina voters in each state. From April 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup>, 2009, B&A conducted two focus groups in Phoenix, Arizona, and two in Albuquerque, New Mexico. In each state, B&A conducted one English-language focus group with English-dominant Latinas, and one Spanish-language focus group with Spanish-dominant Latinas. The purpose of these focus groups was to ascertain a potential message and communications strategy on reproductive health and justice policies that will enable NARAL Pro-Choice America to effectively reach and engage the Latino community.

The findings of this qualitative research focused on the direction of the second and final state of this research: statewide polls of registered Latinas in both states. The quantitative data obtained through the statewide poll provides concrete data from a representative sample of the Latina population of Arizona and New Mexico and it is not unreasonable to assume that some of the conclusions from this study may be applicable to the Hispanic population in the United States.

Overall, the findings revealed great potential for outreach and messaging to these communities. One of the most promising findings of the research is this group's rejection of government intervention in private matters. While a majority of respondents believe abortions should be illegal (53%), most respondents (75%) adamantly reject government intervention in reproductive choices. This rejection of government control offers a unique opportunity for messaging around reproductive health and justice policies.

In addition, the research found that personal experience does not prove to be a major barrier to advancing a pro-choice position. For example, the differential in support of legal abortion amongst respondents who have had unplanned pregnancies and those who have not was a mere 4 percentage points. Moreover, although 92% of respondents have never had an abortion themselves, and 56% have never known anyone who has chosen to have an abortion, a whopping 75% still reject government control over abortion.

In response to questions about family planning and contraception, participants demonstrated openness to the concept of family planning and to the use and distribution of contraception. The majority of Latinas in Arizona and New Mexico have discussed family planning with their friends and others. Ninety-six percent of respondents say they believe family planning is a good thing and 76% have discussed how to avoid becoming pregnant with family or friends, 53% have discussed when to have children, and 51% have discussed how many children to have. Ninety-three percent of respondents believe contraception is a “good thing” – with the overwhelming majority (65%) stating that they have taken prescription contraception, and 85% approving of women’s use of daily oral contraceptives. Moreover, the majority of Latinas in these two states has received education on sex, contraception, and reproductive health in high school or college.

With regard to specific messages, two major findings emerged. Shifting the focus from abortion to prevention and planning with language such as “We should focus on educating people on better way to prevent unplanned pregnancies instead of concentrating on making abortion more difficult and dangerous to have” proved very effective. In addition, answers that supported legal abortion but included a personal disclaimer such as “While I am personally against abortion” were more convincing to those respondents who think abortion should be illegal.

The research also reveals a clear generational and cultural shift. Younger and more acculturated respondents were more likely to approve of legal abortion, pre-marital co-habitation, and sex. In the focus groups, participants used the concept of a “new time” to differentiate between this and older generations’ sexual attitudes. Overall, one can begin to see a trending away from strict social construction, and consequently, increased prospects for communication with this changing community.

The need for culturally competent messaging around reproductive health and justice policies is apparent, and NARAL is uniquely situated to meet this opportunity. Although many respondents had never heard of NARAL, when read NARAL’s mission, a majority of respondents had a positive reaction.

## **Methodology**

In order to collect the necessary data in the most comprehensive method possible, B&A designed a two-stage research methodology for this project. The first stage of the research was to conduct qualitative focus group research with registered Latina voters in each state. From April 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> 2009, B&A conducted two focus groups in Phoenix, Arizona, and two in Albuquerque, New Mexico. In each state, B&A conducted one English-language focus group with English-dominant Latinas, and one Spanish-language focus group with Spanish-dominant Latins. This qualitative research stage was followed by the final stage of the research – statewide polls with a

representative sample of all registered Latinas in both states. For a more detailed methodology, see Appendix I.

## **Demographics**

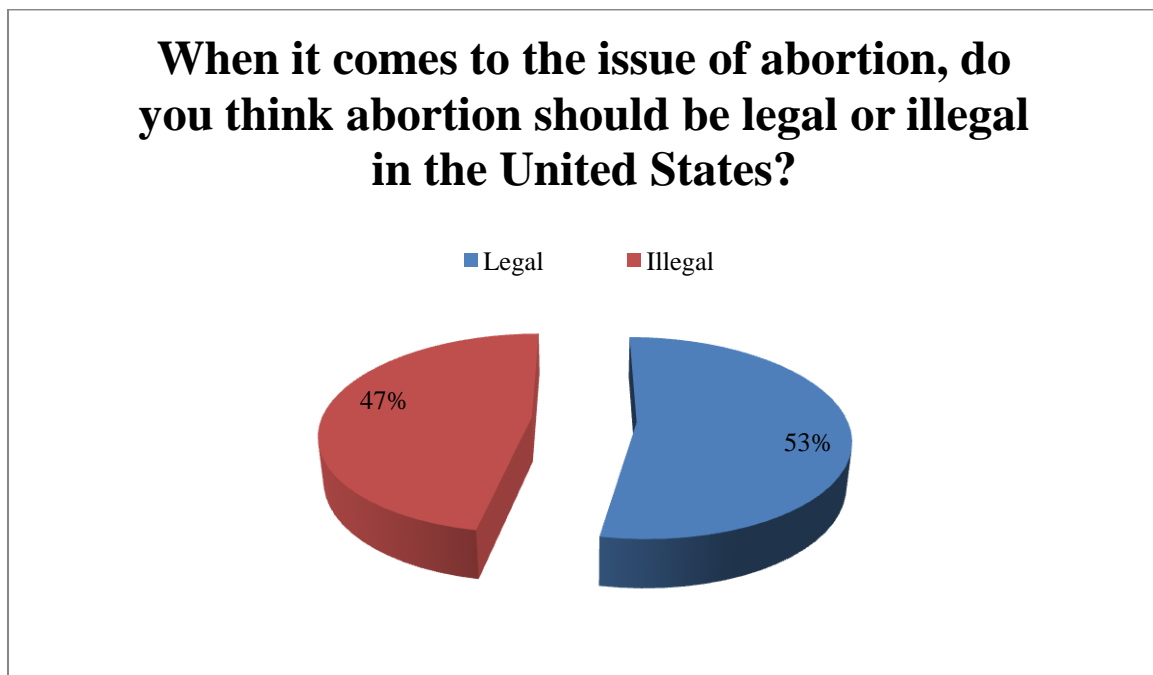
Participants for the new focus groups were selected to be representative in age and education of the Latina population of the Southwest. For the telephone survey, participants were selected to be representative of the Latina voting population in Arizona and New Mexico. For a more detailed description of the demographics, see Appendix II.

## Research Findings

### Key Findings:

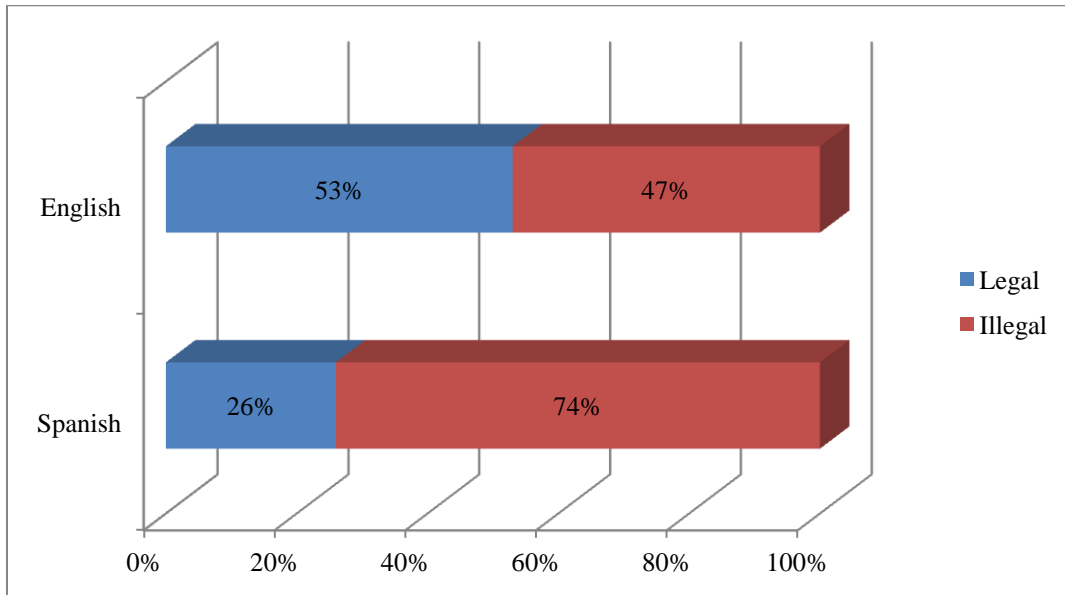
- 1. While many respondents believe abortion should be illegal, most respondents adamantly reject government intervention in reproductive choices.**

A majority of participants (53%) does not believe abortion should be legal (outside of extreme exceptions) while 47% believes it should be legal. These numbers differed by acculturation, language dominance, and education. A majority of English-dominant respondents (74%) believes it should be illegal. Likewise, a majority of respondents (59%) who have attended college believes abortion should be legal, whereas a majority of respondents (65%) with less than a high school education believes abortion should be illegal.



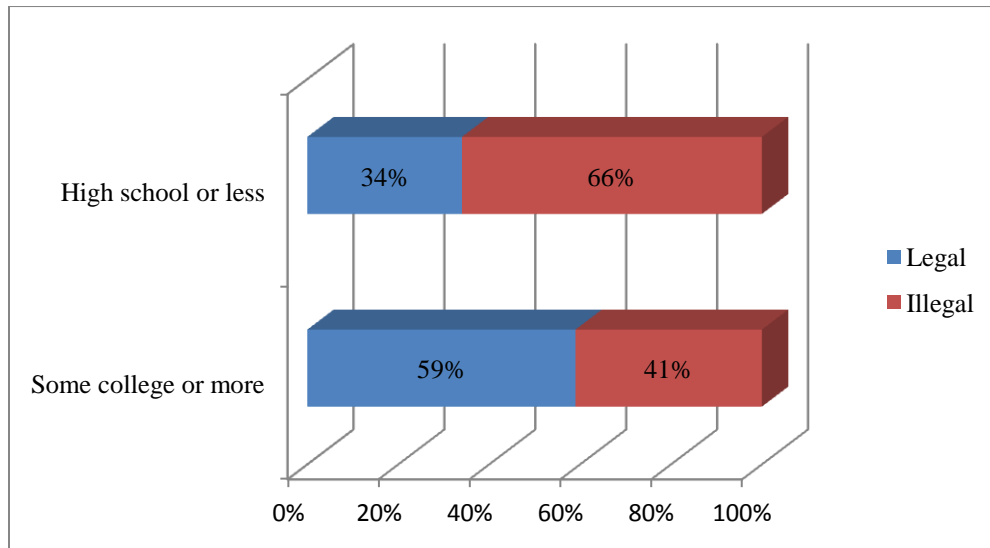
**When it comes to the issues of abortion, do you think abortion should be legal or illegal in the United States?**

*By Language*



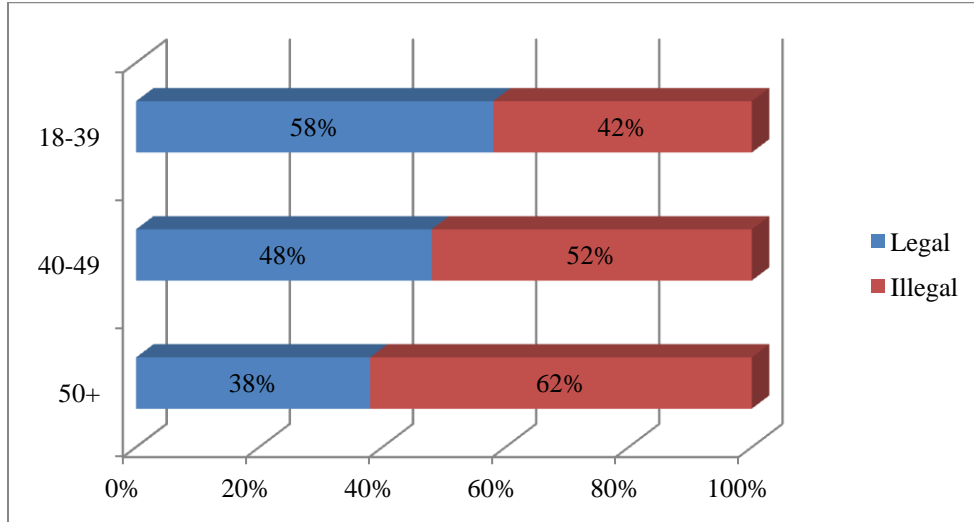
**When it comes to the issue of abortion, do you think abortion should be legal or illegal in the United States?**

*By Education*



**When it comes to the issue of abortion, do you think abortion should be legal or illegal in the United States?**

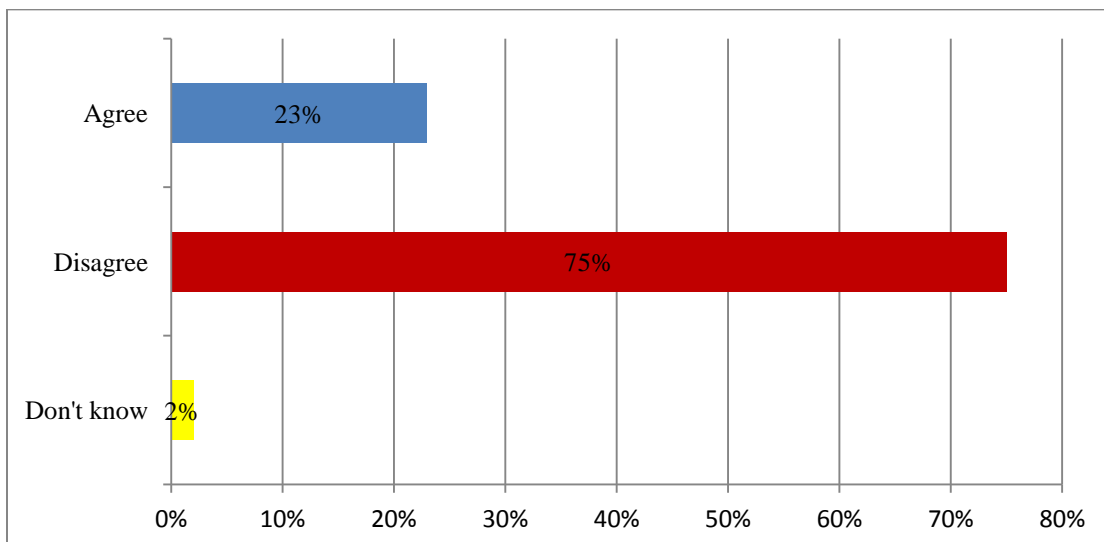
*By Age*



Despite the majority of overall respondents’ belief that abortion should be illegal, when asked who should decide if or when a woman can have an abortion – the government or women – an even greater majority of respondents (75%) rejected government involvement and preferred that the choice remain in the hands of individual women. Those numbers were even greater among respondents with some college education and those with a college degree, as well as English-dominant respondents. The findings from the focus groups echoed this discovery.

*Do you agree or disagree with the following statement?*

**The government should decide in which cases an abortion is legal.**





Focus Group Quotes

“The choice to have an abortion is personal.” Arizona, Spanish-dominant

“Children aren’t the government’s; they’re the woman’s.” New Mexico, Spanish-dominant

“I say ‘yes’ on principle that it should be illegal, but I don’t want the government to decide for me.” New Mexico, Spanish-dominant

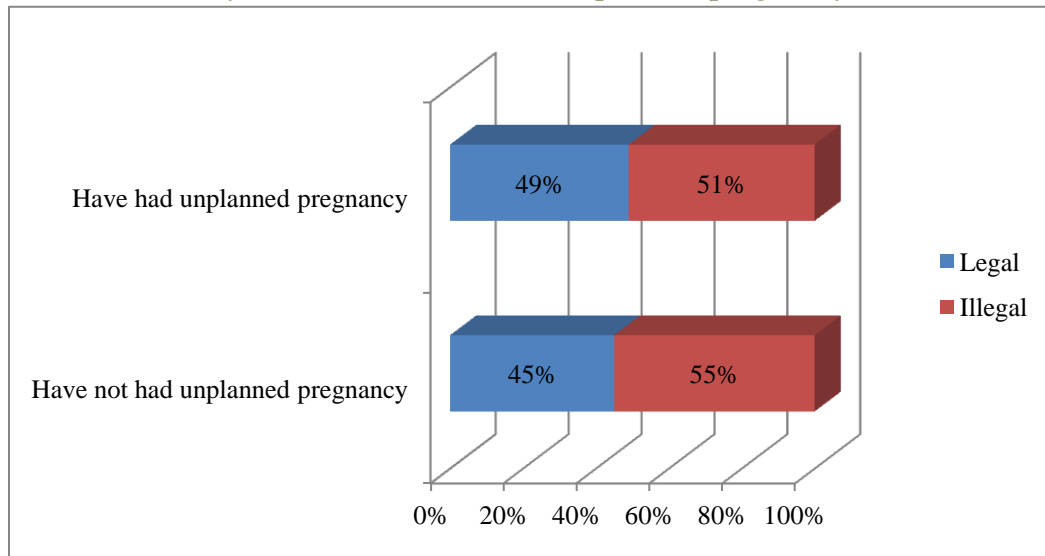
“If [abortion is] controlled by the government – what’s next? The type of birth control you have to use?” New Mexico, English-dominant

**2. Personal experience does not prove to be a major barrier to advancing a pro-choice position.**

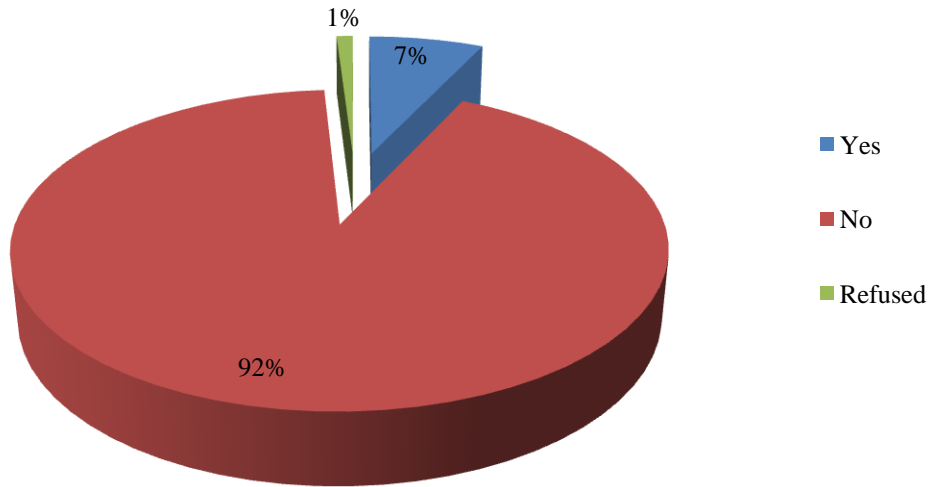
The polling showed that personal experience is not necessarily a barrier to advancing a pro-choice position. For example, the difference of support of legal abortion amongst respondents who have had unplanned pregnancies and those who have not was only 4 percentage points. Of respondents who have had an unplanned pregnancy, 49% believe that abortion should be legal, while 45% of those who have not had an unplanned pregnancy believe abortion should be legal. Additionally, 92% of respondents have never had an abortion themselves, and 57% have never known anyone who has chosen to have an abortion, yet a whopping 75% reject government control over abortion.

**When it comes to the issue of abortion, do you think abortion should be legal or illegal in the United States?**

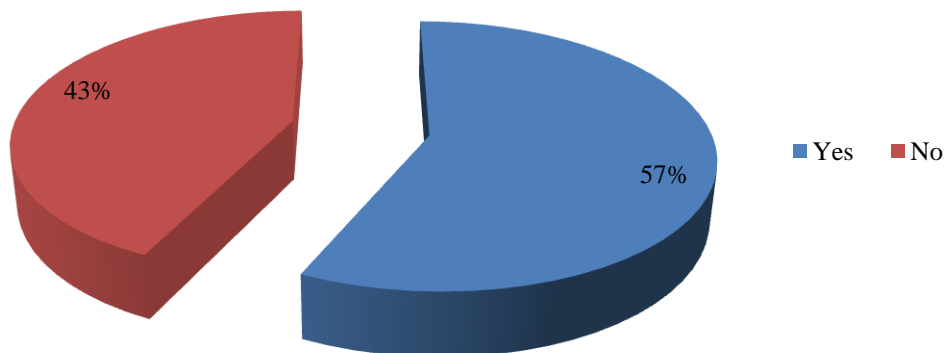
*By those how have had an unplanned pregnancy*



### Have you ever had an abortion?

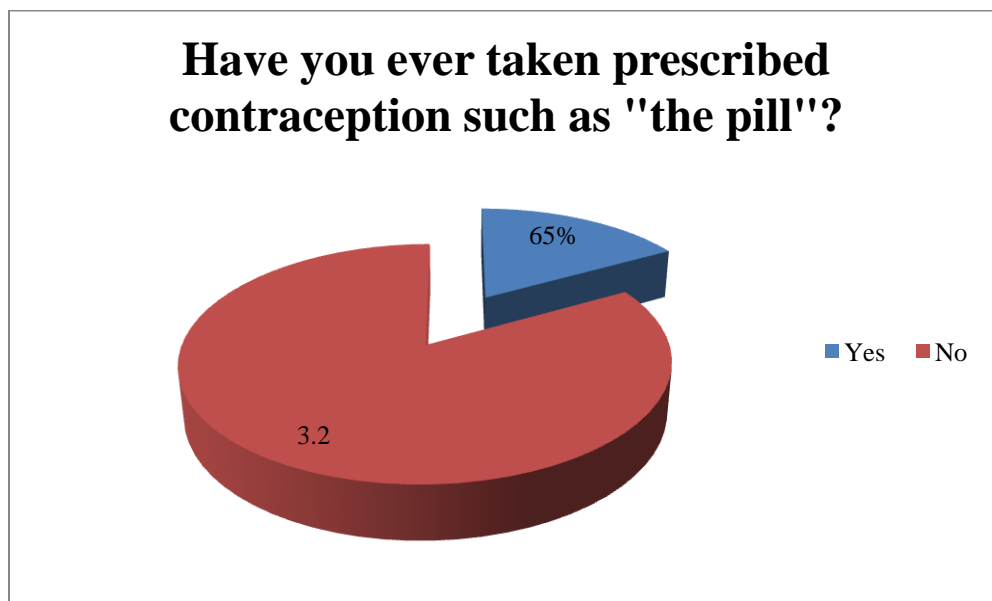
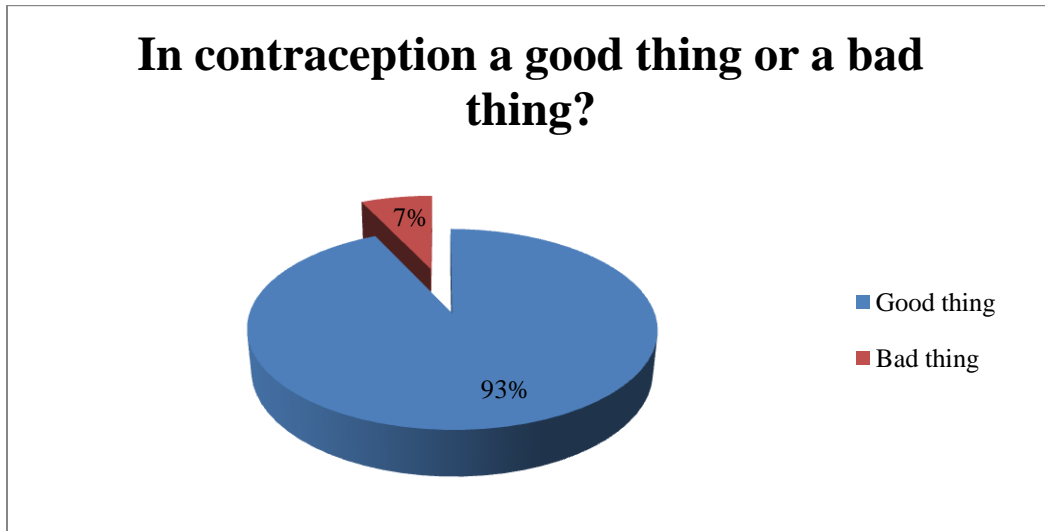


### Has anyone you know chosen to have an abortion?

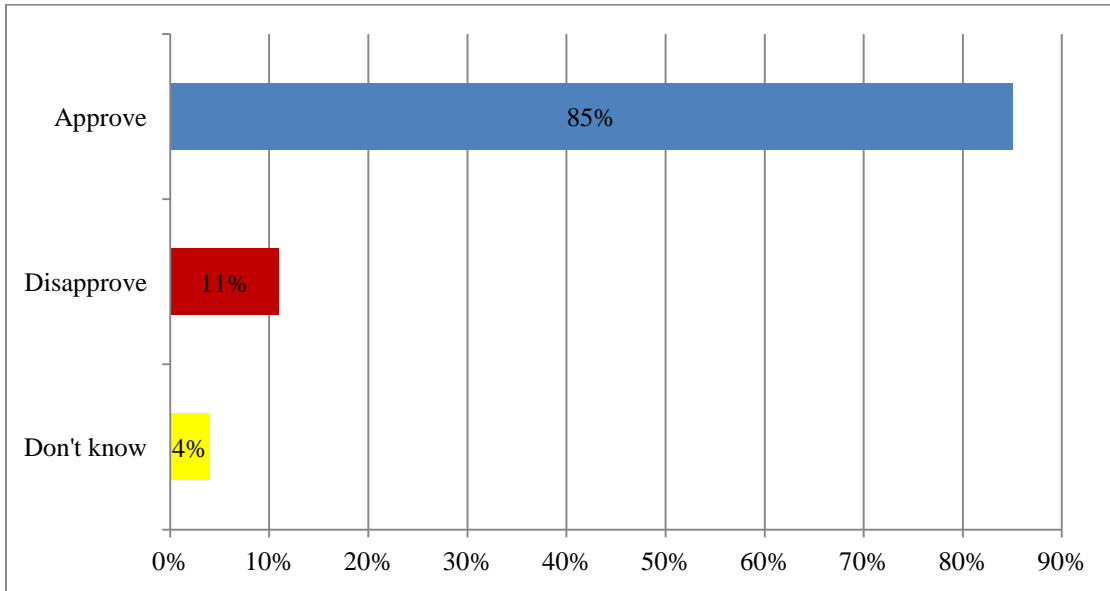


### 3. Participants demonstrated openness to the use and distribution of contraception.

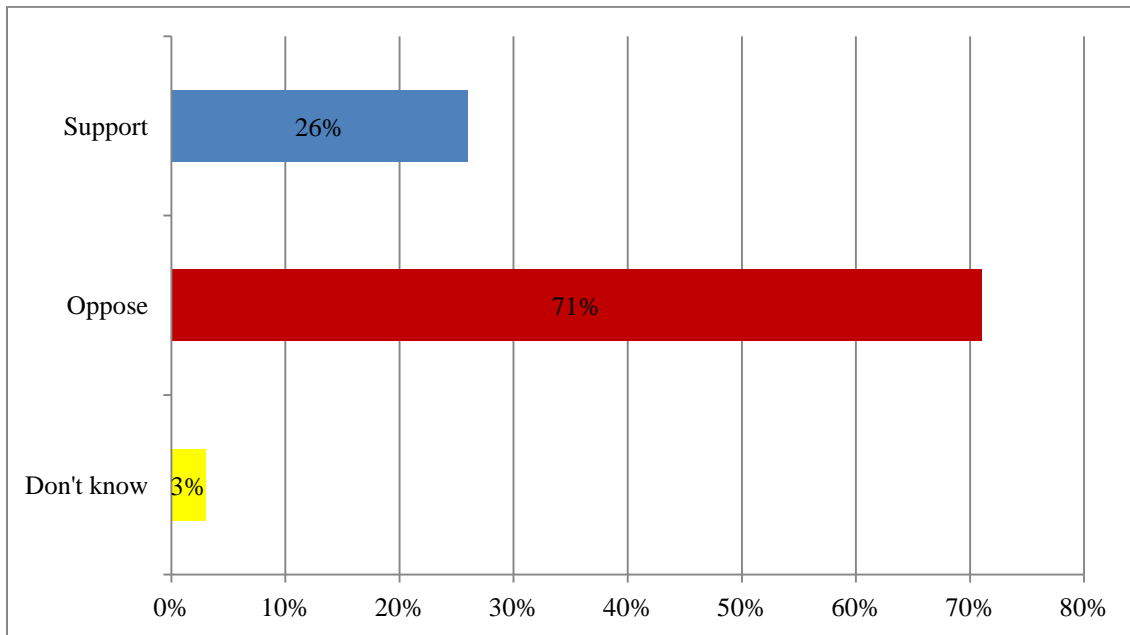
Ninety-three percent of respondents believe contraception is a “good thing” – and an overwhelming majority (65%) state that they have taken prescription contraception. When asked, “Do you approve or disapprove of women taking “the pill” /birth control?” an overwhelming majority (85%) approved, and 71% of respondents opposed state laws that allow pharmacists to refuse to fill a prescription for contraceptive pills.



**One of the ways to prevent unplanned pregnancies is for the woman to take a prescribed contraception, “the pill” /birth control daily. Do you approve or disapprove of women that take the “pill” /birth control?**

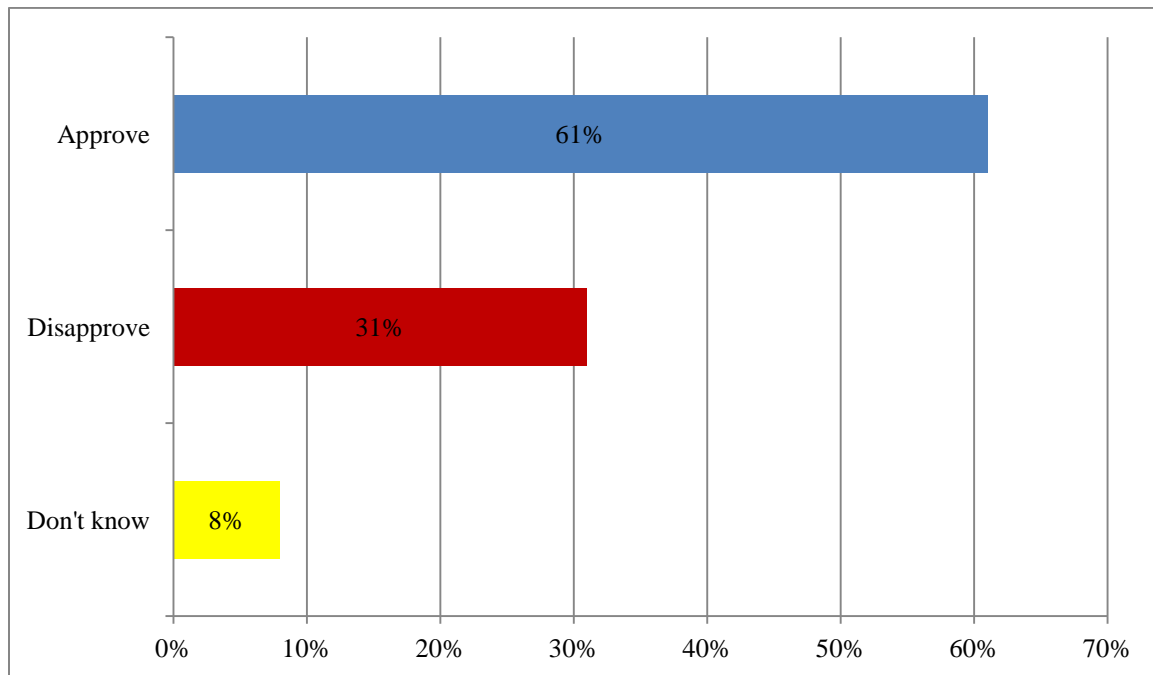


**Some states have laws that give pharmacists the right to refuse filling a prescription for contraception pills. Do you support or oppose this?**



When asked about emergency contraception/the “morning-after pill” 61% of respondents approved of women using it to avoid unplanned pregnancy, while 31% disapproved.

**Another method of contraception / birth control is emergency contraception, or taking the so-called “morning-after pill.” Do you approve or disapprove of women that take the “morning-after pill” to avoid unplanned pregnancies?**



In the focus groups, participants freely admitted to using contraception in their own family planning, and explained that while use of contraception is against their respective church’s teachings, this is one area where a practical necessity allows them to break with their church. In addition, most participants believe that contraceptives, including the daily pill and emergency contraception, should be available to all women. Furthermore, participants supported the availability of over-the-counter emergency contraception to women over the age of 17, regardless of circumstance.

Focus Group Quotes

*“With respect to family planning, I think it’s very good. I think it’s something that in the past didn’t exist. It’s close to religion. A lot of people didn’t use contraceptives because it’s against their religion and because of that a lot of couples, a lot of families were destroyed. A lot of people aren’t prepared psychologically or economically.”* Arizona, Spanish-dominant

*“You could avoid a lot of abortions.”* Arizona, Spanish-dominant

*“If it keeps kids from having babies that can’t take care of them, then yeah I approve.”* New Mexico, English-dominant

*“I tell [my children] to be careful because if they have kids then they’re not capable of taking care of them. And if you give them space, they might get pregnant.”* New Mexico, Spanish-dominant

*“I think they should just take care of themselves [by using contraception] and that’s what matters.”* New Mexico, Spanish-dominant

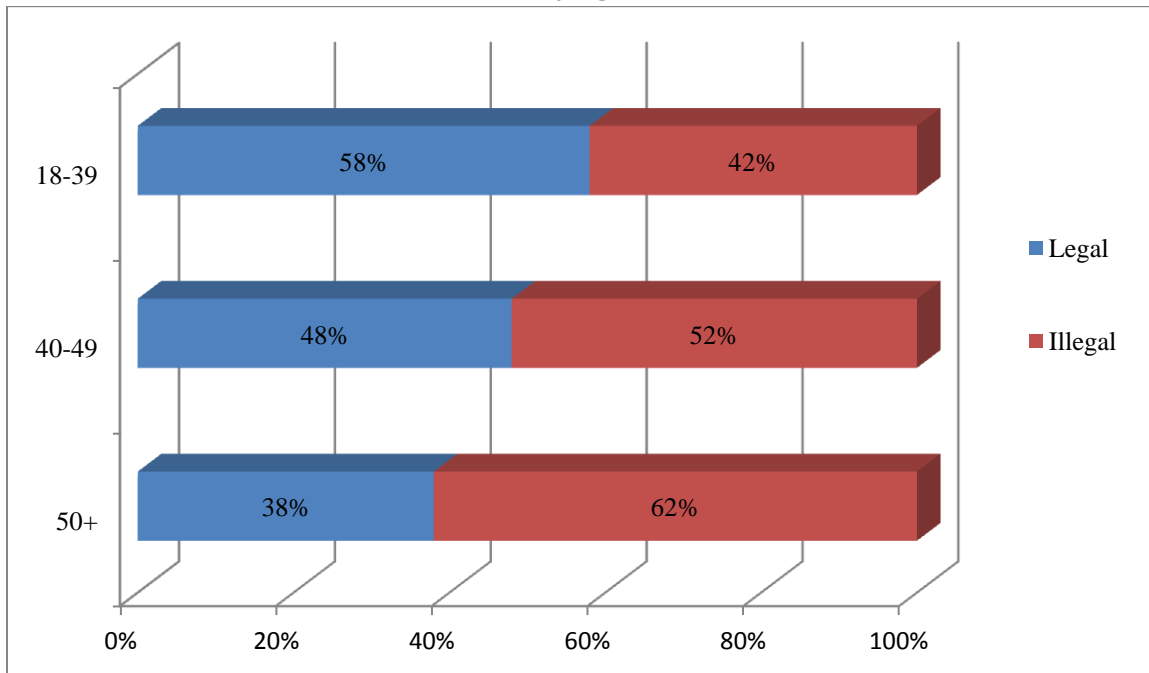
*“You should be able to take the pill to not have children that you don’t want.”* New Mexico, Spanish-dominant

**4. In terms of sexual discretion and lifestyle choices, a clear generational and cultural shift emerges.**

Throughout the research, nearly every social question revealed a divide by age and acculturation. For example, a majority (58%) of respondents 18-39 years old support legal abortion, whereas a majority (48%) of respondents 40-49 and a majority (62%) of respondents 50+ believe abortion should be illegal.

**When it comes to the issue of abortion, do you think abortion should be legal or illegal in the United States?**

*By age*

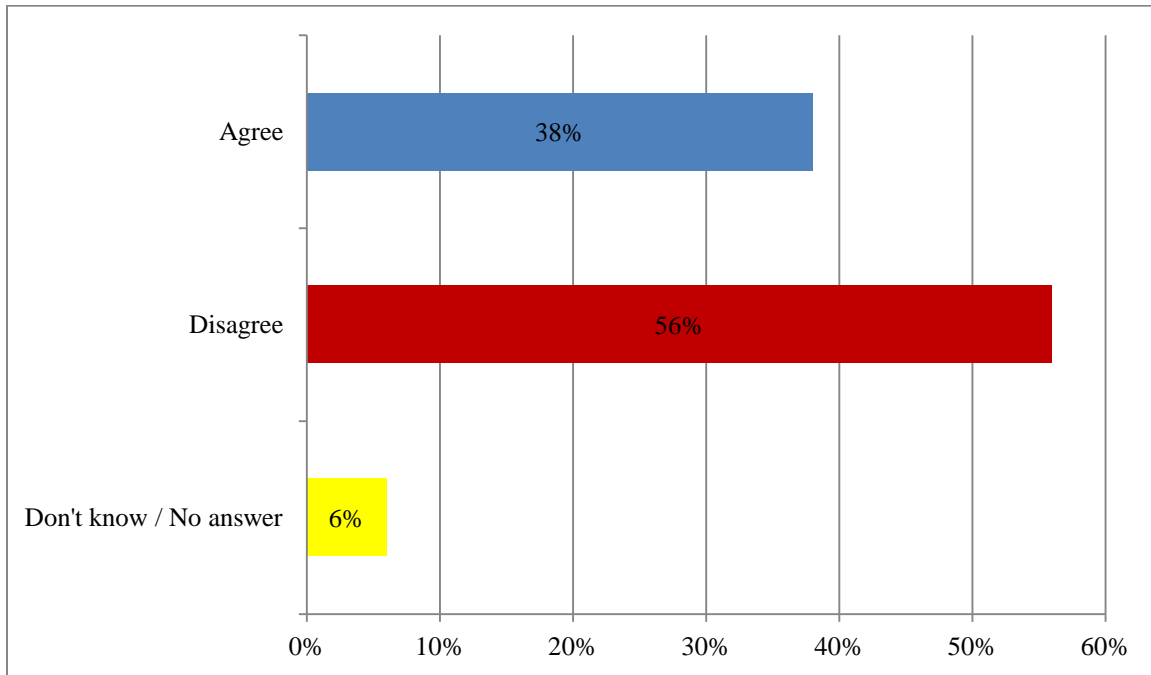


When asked whether they agreed or disagree that, “It is OK for a woman to lose her virginity before she gets married,” 56% of respondents disagree, 38% agreed and 6% did not answer. The divide was slightly smaller among English-dominant respondents (51% disagree while 43% agreed), and slightly greater among Spanish-dominant respondents (72% disagree while 23% agreed). Although the majority of both groups do not agree with pre-marital sex, there is still a significant cultural divide by language. In addition, younger women (18 to 49 years old) were the only group in which the majority (56%) approved of pre-marital sex.



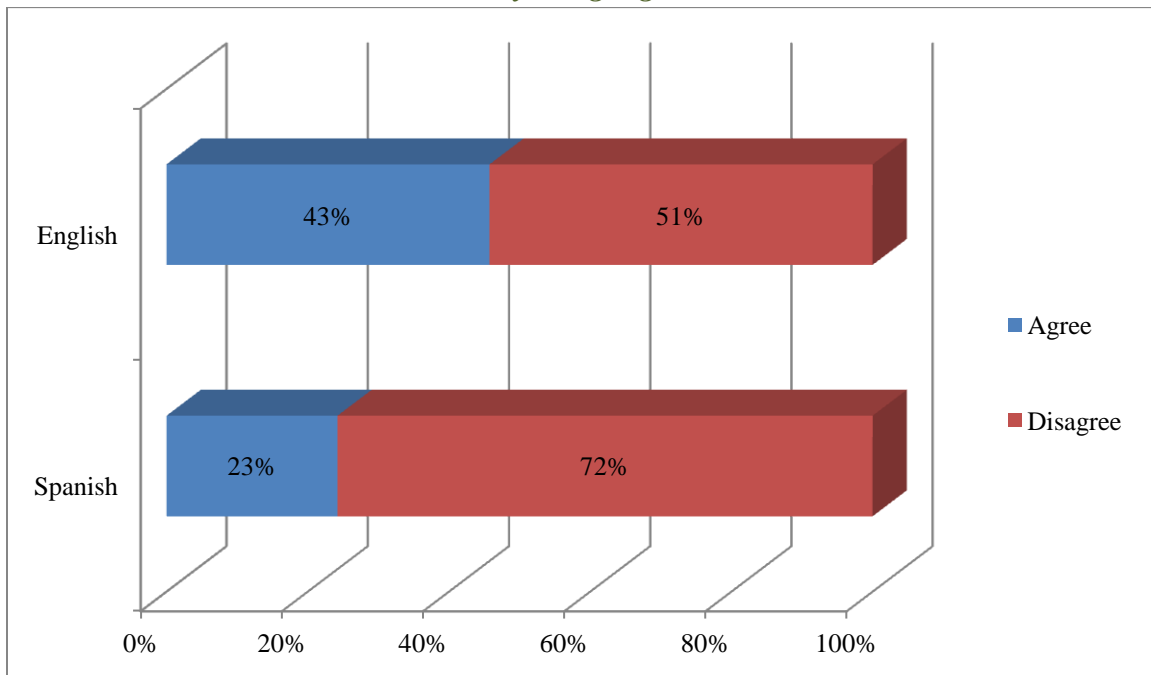
*Do you agree or disagree with the following statement?*

**It is ok for a woman to lose her virginity before she gets married.**



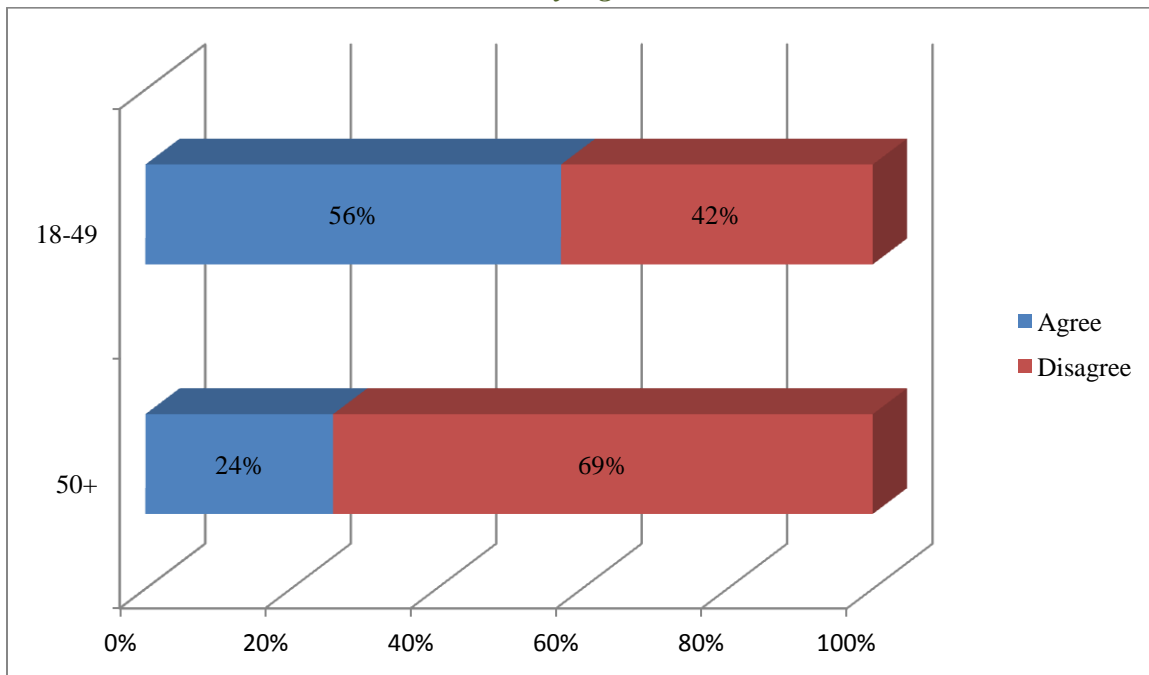
**Is it OK for a woman to lose her virginity before she gets married.**

*By Language*



**Is it OK for a woman to lose her virginity before she gets married.**

*By Age*



In the focus groups, participants used the concept of a “new time” to differentiate between this and older generations’ sexual attitudes. Older participants often used the expressions to signal that women today are more likely to engage in pre-marital sex, while younger participants used the expression to signal a lack of older generations’ acknowledgement around the reality of premarital sex. Many participants, older and younger alike, used these terms to explain changing attitudes around contraceptive use.

Focus Group Quotes

*“Now [family planning] is normal. Before it was taboo.”* Arizona, Spanish-dominant

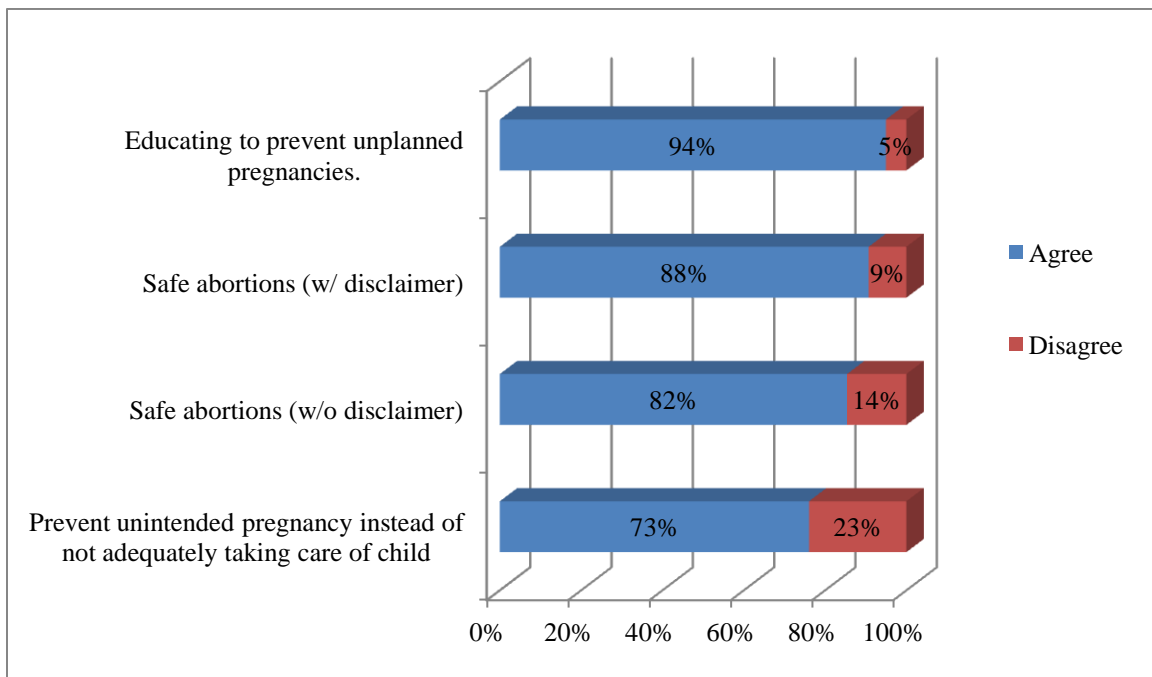
*“The Catholic church doesn’t accept your choice. On one hand, you want to live by your religion but on the other hand I want to protect myself.”* Arizona, Spanish-dominant

*“We’re in a time where ... you can see women dressed as men, or drinking or smoking, the old values which was our base – the girls they go into their boyfriend’s house as if it were their house – they don’t have respect. The youth are disoriented.”* Arizona, Spanish-dominant

**5. Of the messages tested, one message was by far the most effective: “We should focus on educating people on better ways to prevent unplanned pregnancies instead of concentrating on making abortion more difficult and dangerous to have.”**

Although other messages also received broad support, including messages emphasizing access to safe abortions (with an without a “personally pro-life” disclaimer), and messages emphasizing preventing unintended pregnancies to reduce incidences of inadequate childcare, the message shifting the focus from abortion to prevention and planning was the most well received.

### The Messages



## 6. Anti-abortion disclaimers make pro-choice messages more acceptable.

Answers that supported legal abortion but included a personal disclaimer such as, “while I am personally against abortion,” were more appealing to those respondents who think abortion should be illegal.

In the focus groups, when testing a variety of pro-choice messaging, participants appreciated acknowledgements that they “don’t like abortion.” This was echoed in broader discussions around access to safe care. Anti-choice participants often re-iterated their opposition to abortion before acknowledging that if abortion is legal, women seeking abortion procedures should have access to safe and quality care.

### Focus Group Quotes

*“I think they should be treated like people, not like animals, because either way, they’re going to have an abortion.”* Arizona, Spanish-dominant

*“If you educate women maybe that will cut down abortions.”* New Mexico, English-dominant

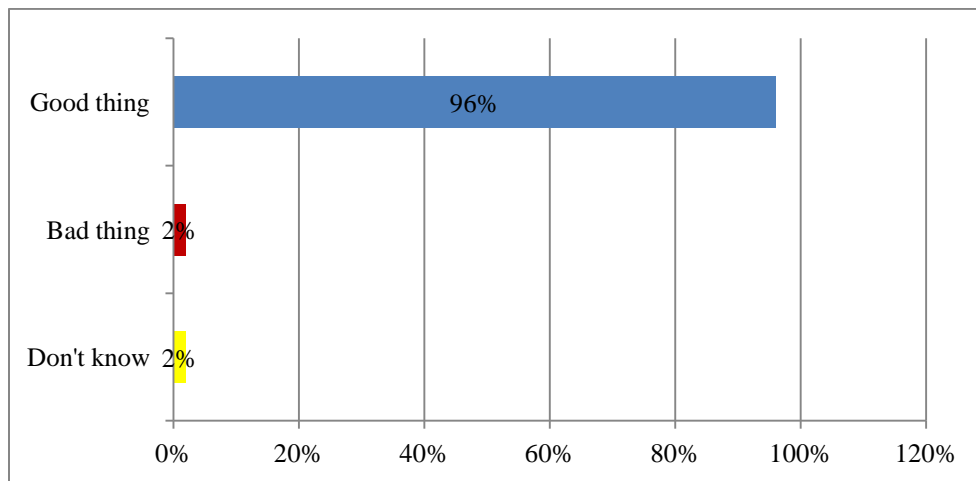
*“I don’t agree with abortion, but...if somebody was going to do it, I wouldn’t want them to hurt themselves.”* New Mexico, English-dominant

*“I wouldn’t want them to have the abortion...but if they’re gonna have one I don’t want them to have to die themselves too. That’s two lives that are lost.”* New Mexico, English-dominant

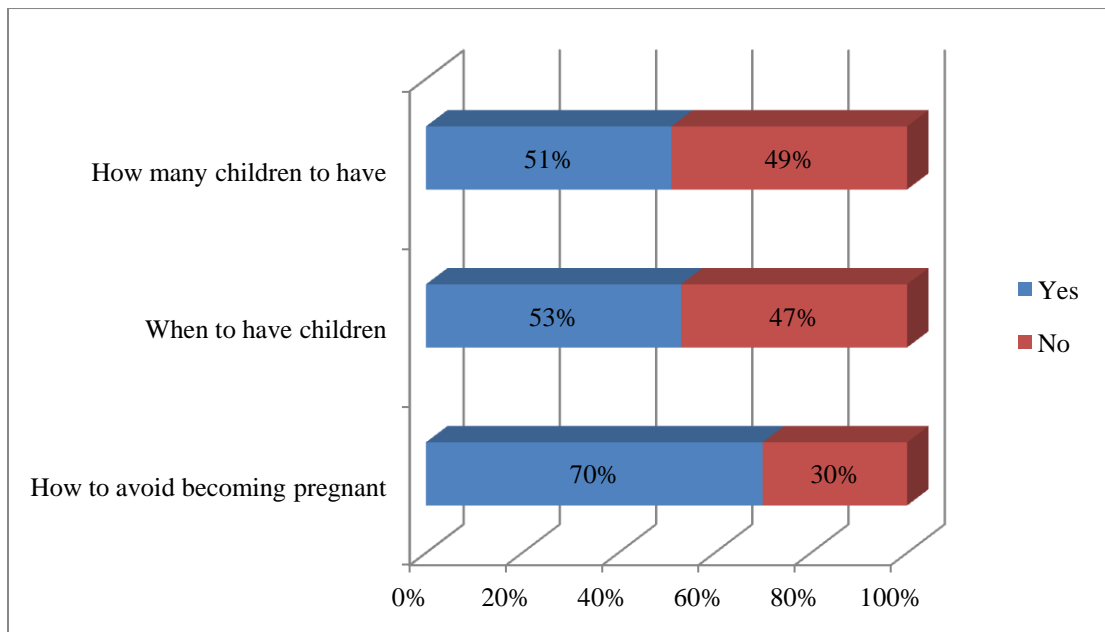
**7. The majority of Latinas in Arizona and New Mexico believe in family planning and have discussed the issue with their friends and others.**

Ninety-six percent of respondents say they believe family planning is a good thing. Seventy percent have discussed how to avoid becoming pregnant with family or friends, 53% have discussed when to have children, and 51% have discussed how many children to have. While most respondents have discussed family planning with family or friends, no one individual emerged as the go-to for a majority of respondents. However, family members generally emerged as confidantes.

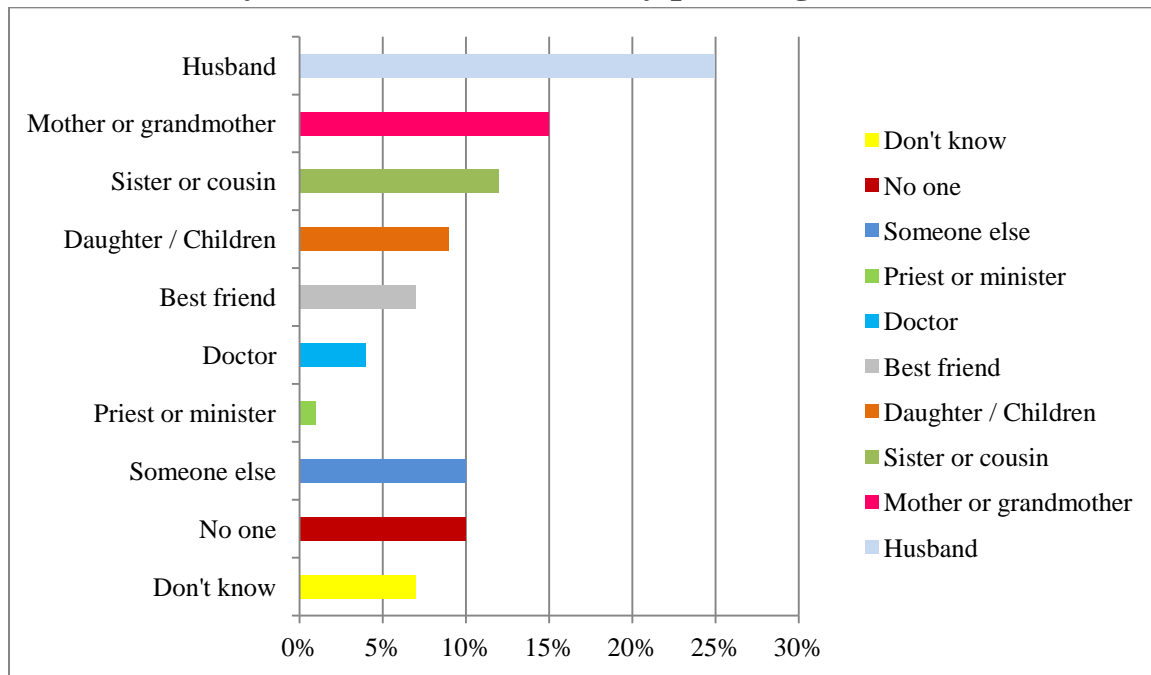
**Is family planning a good thing or a bad thing?**



**Have you discussed \_\_\_\_\_ with your family or friends?**



## Who have you discussed these family planning issues with most?



In the focus groups, many participants indicated that sisters or other female relatives were their likely sources of information. Participants also admitted that they did not actively seek out information before visiting their doctor for the first time, often as a result of an unplanned pregnancy. Moreover, it is often not until after that initial consultation with a doctor that participants start speaking with friends and family about family planning.

### Focus Group Quotes

*“I think it’s important ‘cause if you’re not financially ready, mentally ready, stable in a marriage or relationship, I don’t think you have much to offer that kid.”* New Mexico, English-dominant

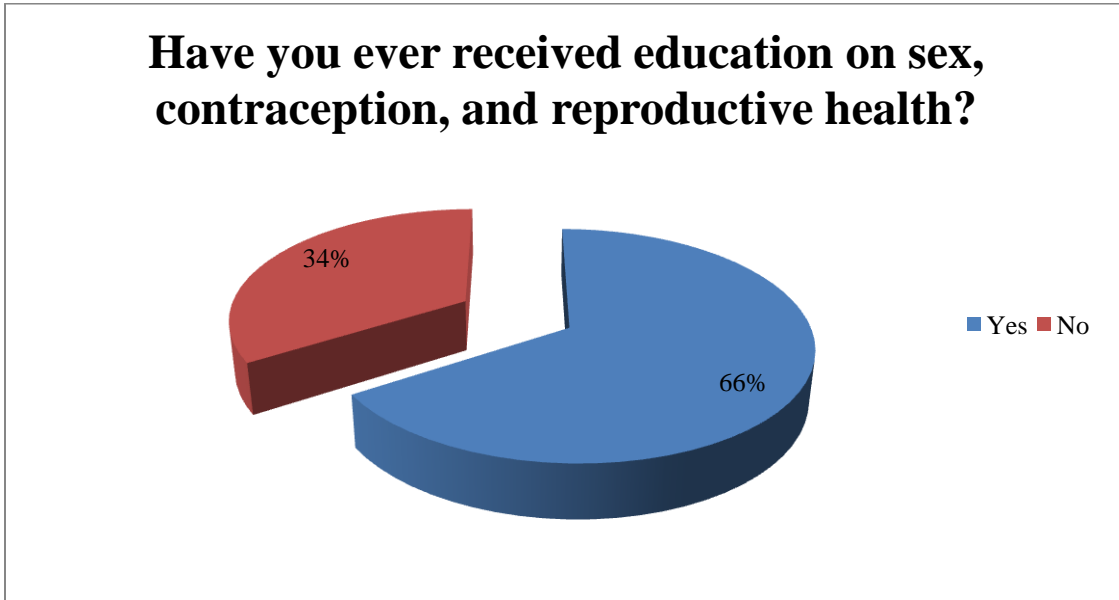
*“The person who helps with the first pregnancy, the first birth is the person who lets you know what kind of pills you can take, etc.”* New Mexico, Spanish-dominant

*“I had my first daughter at a young age and through that I learned there’s clinics out there that would have helped me with birth control. Through those clinics I learned a lot.”* New Mexico, English dominant

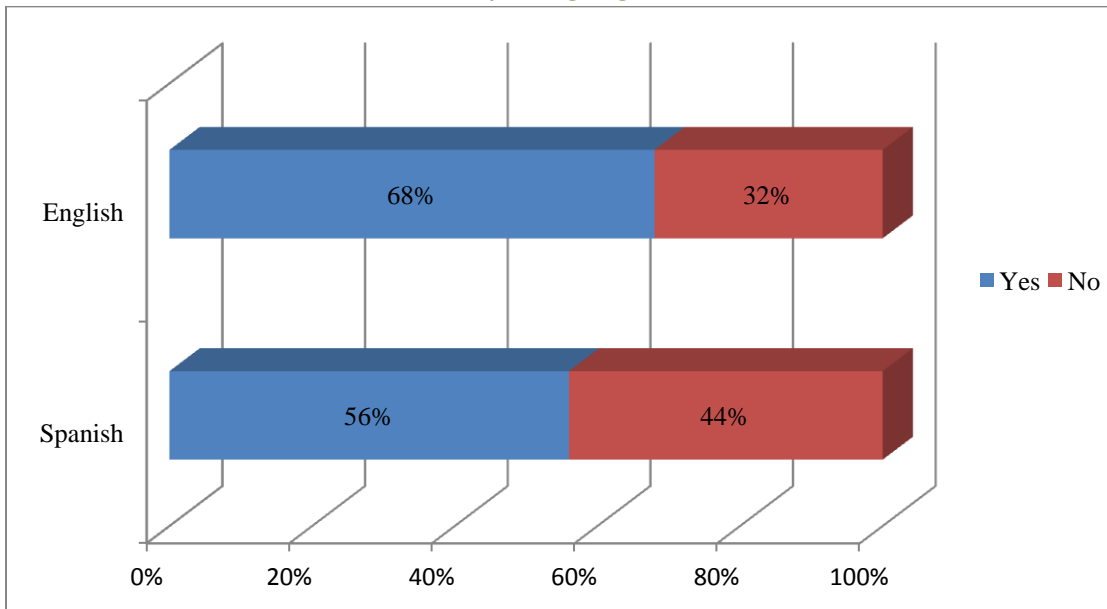
*“I have sisters older than me that I would ask.”* New Mexico, English-dominant

**8. The majority of Latinas in these two states has received education on sex, contraception and reproductive health in high school or college.**

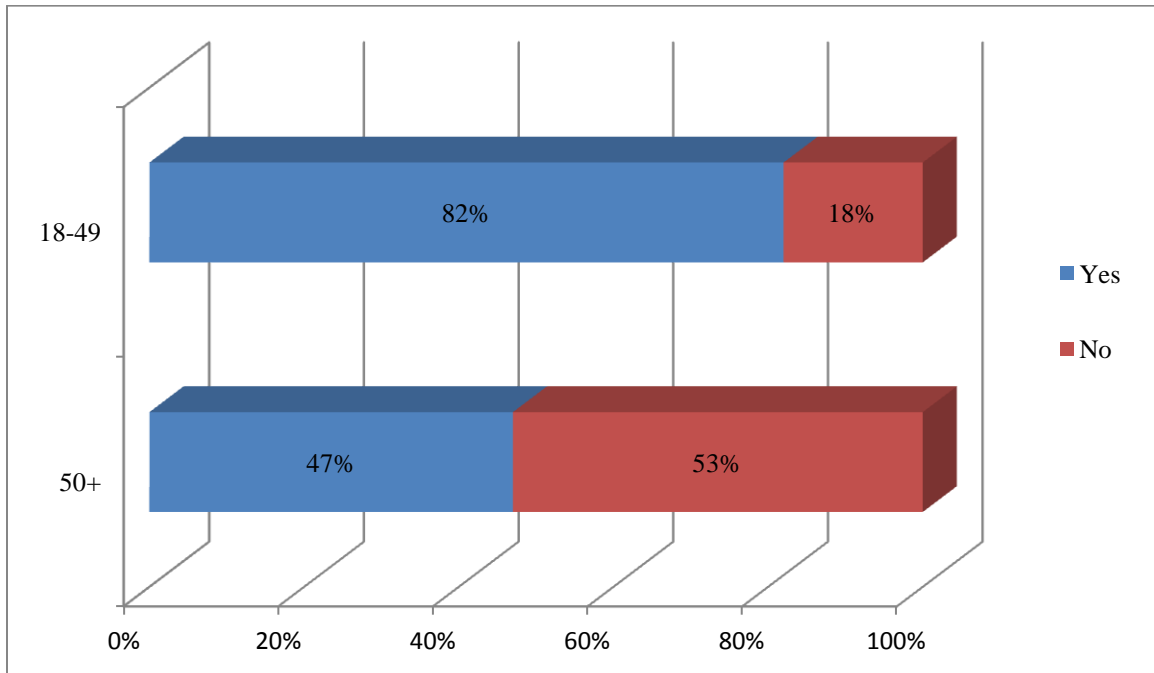
Sixty-six percent of respondents has received education on sex, contraception and reproductive health. The percentage is only slightly higher among English-dominant respondents (68%) but lower among Spanish-dominant respondents (56%). Young respondents (18-49) were almost twice as likely to have received education on sex, contraception and reproductive health as respondents over 50.



**Have you ever received education on sex, contraception, and reproductive health?**  
*By Language*



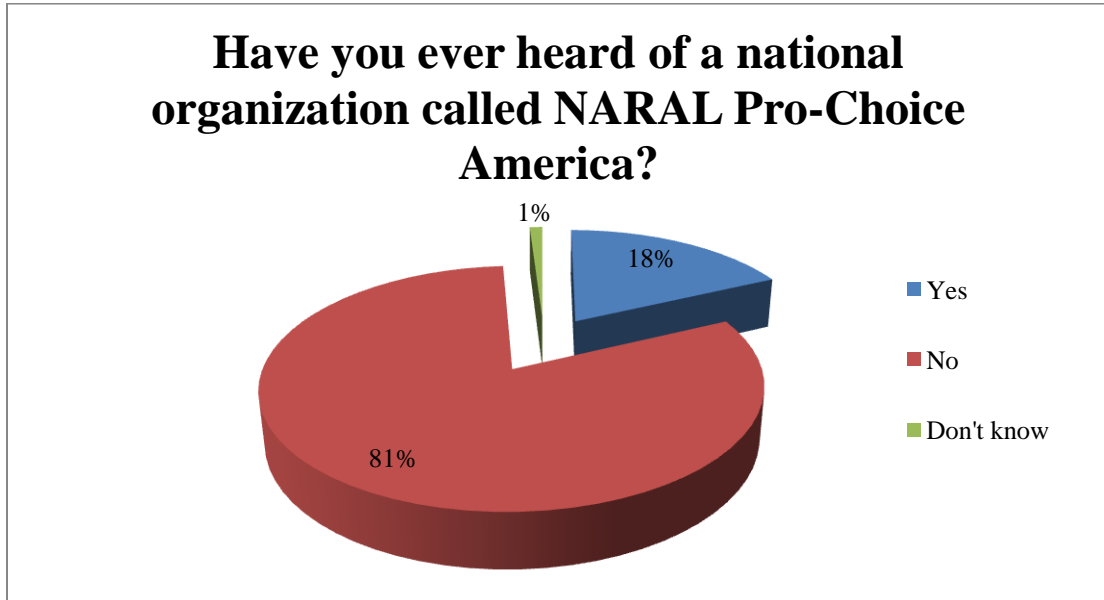
**Have you ever received education on sex, contraception, and reproductive health?**  
*By Age*



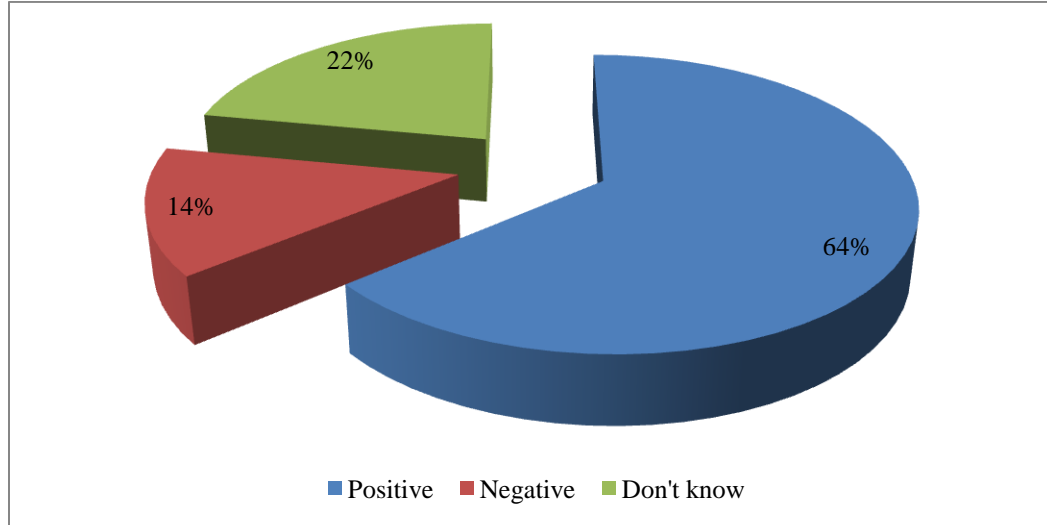


**9. The majority of Latinas in Arizona and New Mexico have a positive reaction to the mission statement of the NARAL Pro-Choice America Foundation.**

Although, a majority of respondents (81%) has never heard of NARAL, when read NARAL's mission, 64% of respondents had a positive reaction. When asked, "Do you have a positive or negative opinion of NARAL Pro-Choice America?" the majority of younger (18-49) and older (50+) respondents said they had a positive opinion, though younger women were more likely to have a positive opinion.

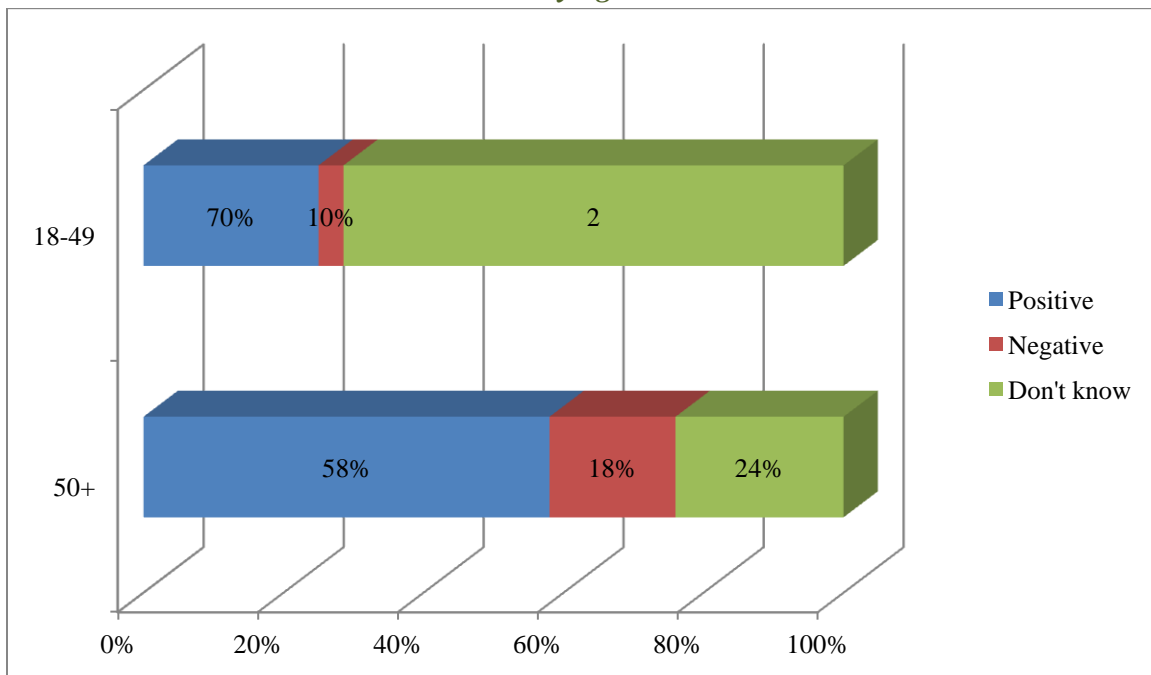


**NARAL Pro-Choice America is an organization dedicated to supporting and protecting a woman’s freedom to make personal decisions regarding reproductive choices through education, training, organizing, legal action, and public policy. Do you have a positive or a negative opinion of NARAL Pro-Choice America?**



**Do you have a positive or a negative opinion of NARAL Pro-Choice America?**

*By age*



## **Overall Conclusion and Recommendations**

This research offers several promising insights into Southwest Latina communities. With proper, culturally oriented messaging, there is enormous opportunity for NARAL and their community partners to communicate and engage this community on issues of reproductive health and justice policies. While many respondents believe abortion should be illegal, respondents' rejection of government intervention in reproductive choices represents NARAL with a compelling direction for pro-choice messaging to these communities. By framing the question of access to abortion as a question of government interference and intervention, NARAL is likely to make great inroads with these communities.

It is also clear that these communities are supportive of family planning and contraceptive use, and would likely be receptive to messaging around these issues. A focus on prevention over abortion rights is well advised. In addition, although anti-abortion disclaimers make pro-choice messages more acceptable, we do not recommend utilizing this approach, as it naturally weakens NARAL's long-term core message.

The generational and cultural shift identified in this report should inform the evolution of the messaging NARAL considers moving forward. Although younger and more acculturated Latinas are trending towards more socially progressive values, and can be message to in a more direct fashion, older and less acculturated Latinas still represent a significant portion of this voting bloc, and must also be considered when messaging around reproductive choice and family planning.

## Appendix I

### Focus Group Methodology

B&A and NARAL determined that although quantitative data would be necessary to accurately collect messaging assessment data, collecting qualitative data from the Latina voter population prior to administering the statewide survey would be very instructive in helping to guide the direction of the poll and determining the key issues and messages that would need to be quantified.

Therefore, a total of four focus groups were conducted. The first two groups were conducted in Phoenix, Arizona at the *West Group Research* on Thursday, April 16<sup>th</sup>, 2009. Participants for these two groups were recruited from the Phoenix DMA. The first group (conducted in Spanish) took place from 6:00 to 8:00 in the evening and all participants were Spanish-dominant Latina voters who live in the Phoenix DMA. The second group (conducted in English) took place from 8:00 to 10:00 in the evening and all participants were English dominant Latina voters who live in Phoenix DMA. The third and fourth groups were conducted in Albuquerque, New Mexico at *Sandia Market Research* on Friday, April 17<sup>th</sup>, 2009. Participants for this group were recruited from the Albuquerque DMA. The third group (conducted in Spanish) took place from 6:00 to 8:00 in the evening and all participants were Spanish-dominant Latina voters who live in Albuquerque DMA. The fourth group conducted in English) took place from 8:00 to 10:00 in the evening and all participants were English-dominant Latina voters who live in Albuquerque DMA.

In each location, the professional focus group facilities – *West Group Research* in Phoenix and *Sandia Market Research* MBC Research in Albuquerque – were hired to manage the recruiting process and the logistics of the focus groups (including screening participants, checking participant sin at the groups, recording the sessions, coordinating food for participants, translating the sessions when needed and ensuring that the groups ran smoothly overall). A screener was composed by B&A senior researchers and this screener was used to recruit all participants. The recruiting process was closely supervised by senior researchers from B&A in order to ensure accuracy. B&A instructed the focus group facility to recruit a total of 20 participants for each of their four groups. Every individual who was recruited for one of the group was screened to ensure that they were Latina, that they were registered to vote, that they lived in the proper area for the group they were being recruited for, and that they believe abortion should be legal at least in the case of rape or incest.

In each group, the objective was to get as much variation among participants as possible. To achieve this, 10 participants were selected to participate in each group (from the 20 pre-

screened recruits) in a way that allowed for considerable variation by age, religion, and town of residence.

### **Statewide Poll Methodology**

The second and final stage of the research was to conduct statewide polling of Latina voters in Arizona and New Mexico. A total of 600 interview (300 in each state) were conducted between May 13<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup>, 2009.

All interviews were conducted via landline telephone. The landline sample was selected based on a process called ethnic encoding. The ethnic encoding process allows for the identification of potential respondents using first and last name algorithms. By employing this method, sample selection does not depend solely on having a Hispanic surname. Instead, the ethnic encoding process tests first and last names of all potential respondents (all Arizona and New Mexico households with a listed telephone number). The first and last names are tested down to the syllable level. Any name that contains at least one syllable (in either the first or last name) signifying a high likelihood that the individual is Hispanic was selected. The ethnic encoding process yields a sample that is more comprehensive and therefore more accurate than the traditional Hispanic surname method.

For example, using the often-utilized Hispanic surname selection method, the name “Sergio Bendixen” would not be selected for the sample because the surname “Bendixen” does not indicate Hispanic heritage. However, using the more sophisticated ethnic encoding process, the name “Sergio Bendixen” would be included in the sample since “Sergio” contains syllables indicating a high potential that the individual is Hispanic. Once the sample list was compiled, it was then cross-referenced against the latest U.S. Census data available for the Arizona and New Mexico Hispanic population to be sure that it was representative in terms of income, education, and other demographic indicators for Hispanics in these two states.

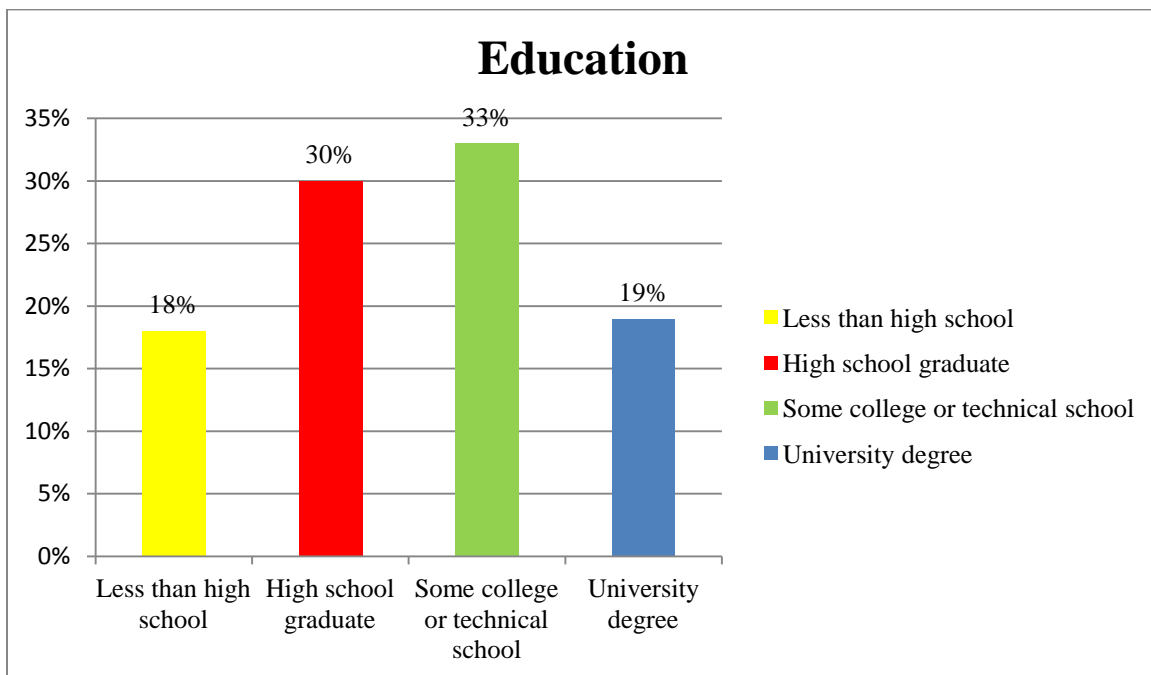
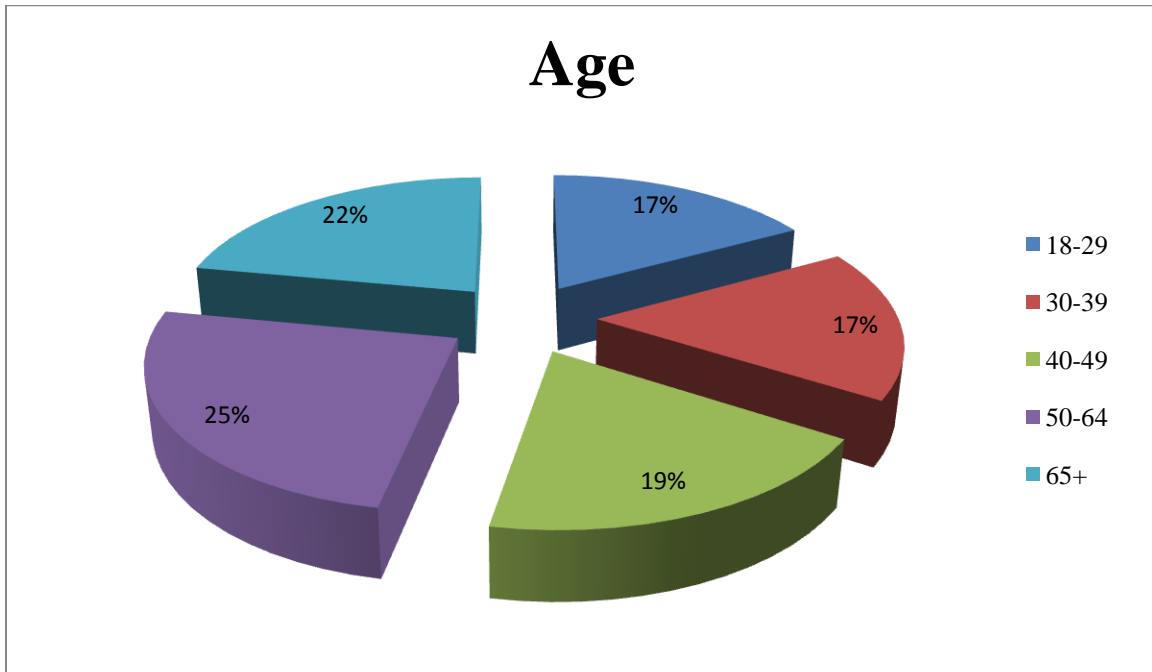
All interviews were conducted by professionally trained bilingual interviewers at a central location in using CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing). Interviewers began each survey in the language in which the telephone was answered, but all respondents were given the choice to continue the interview in either English or Spanish. B&A research staff oversaw all aspects of the interviewing process and monitored selected interviews at random on the first several nights in the field to be sure the survey instrument was functioning properly and the interviewers were adhering to the instrument.

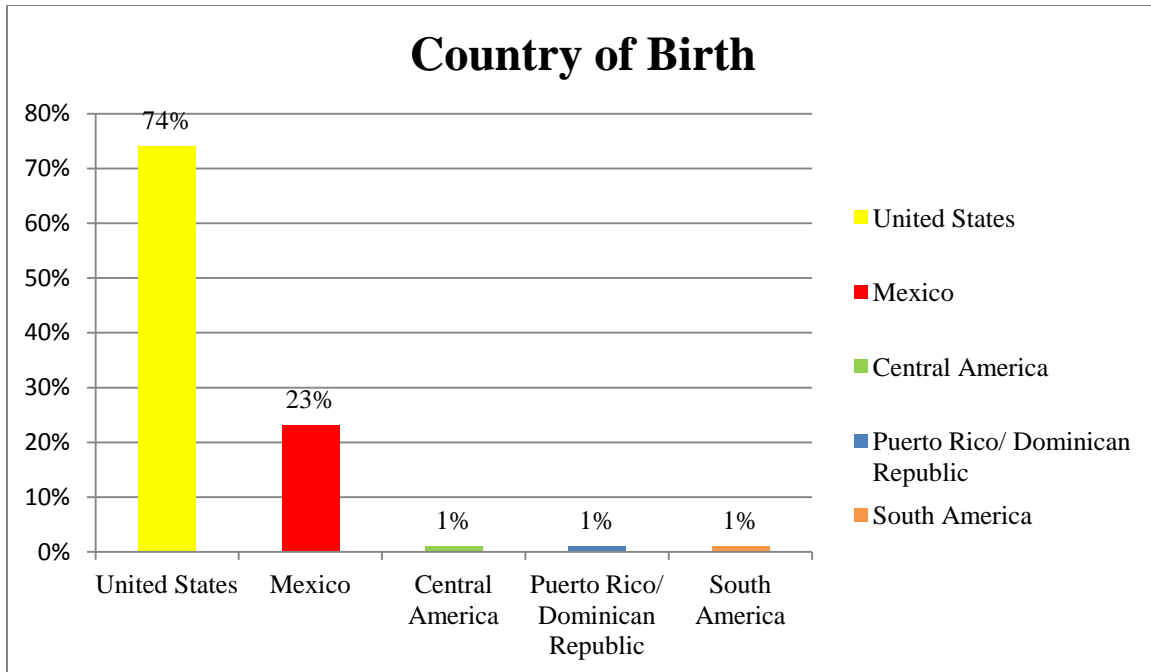
Once all of the interviews were completed, all data was entered into an electronic file and analyzed by researchers at B&A. The overall sampling error for the complete sample of 600 is  $\pm 4$  percentage points at the 95% percent level of confidence. This means that if the survey

was repeated an infinite number of times using the same methodology employed here, 95 percent of the time we would expect the results to fall within  $\pm 4$  percent of the results reported herein.

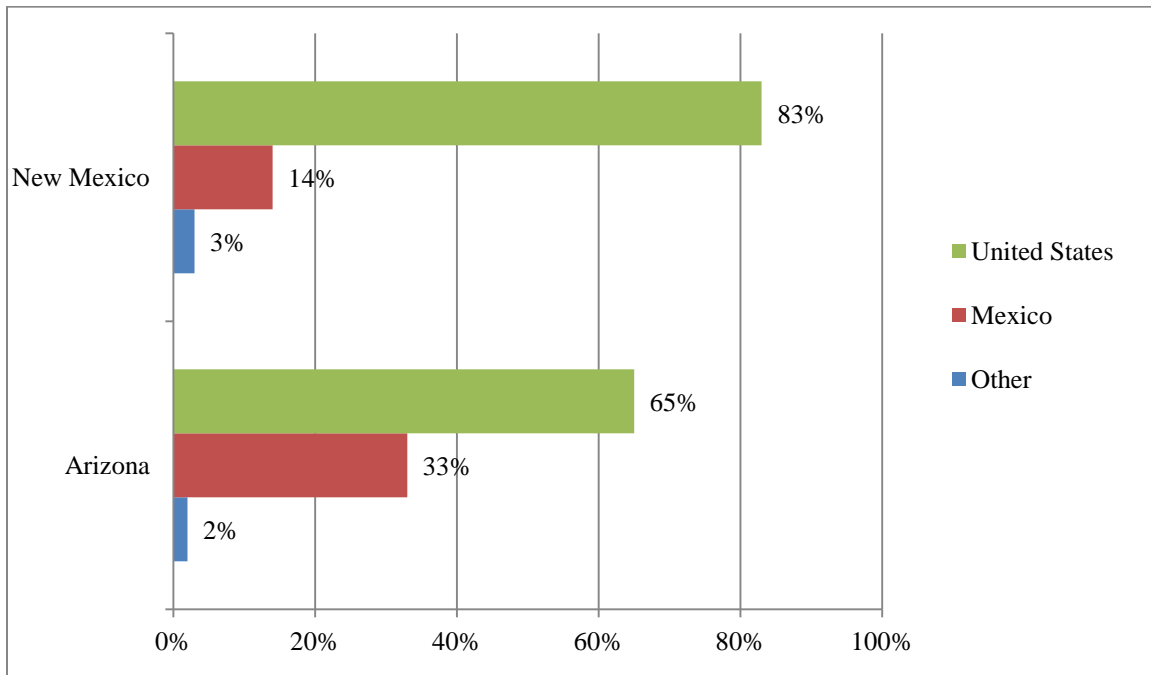
## Appendix II

### Demographics





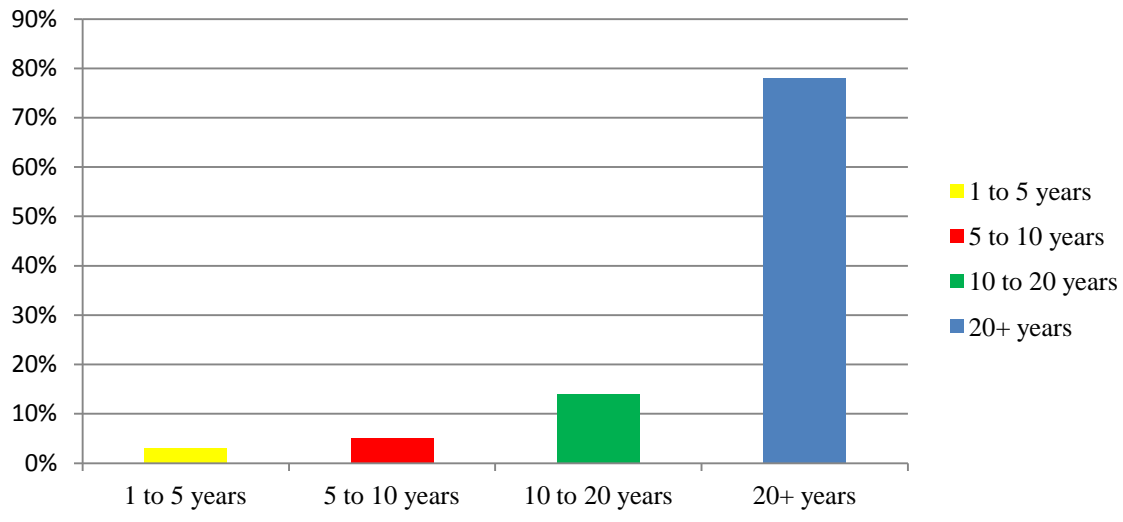
### Country of Birth *By State*



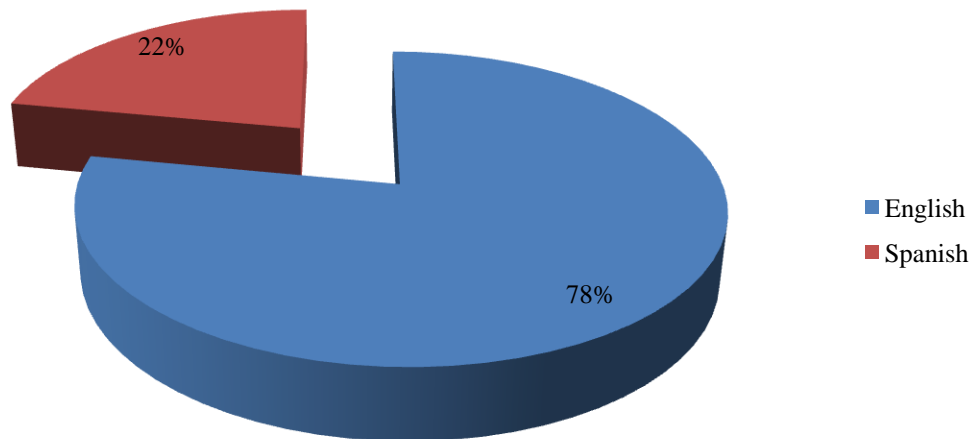


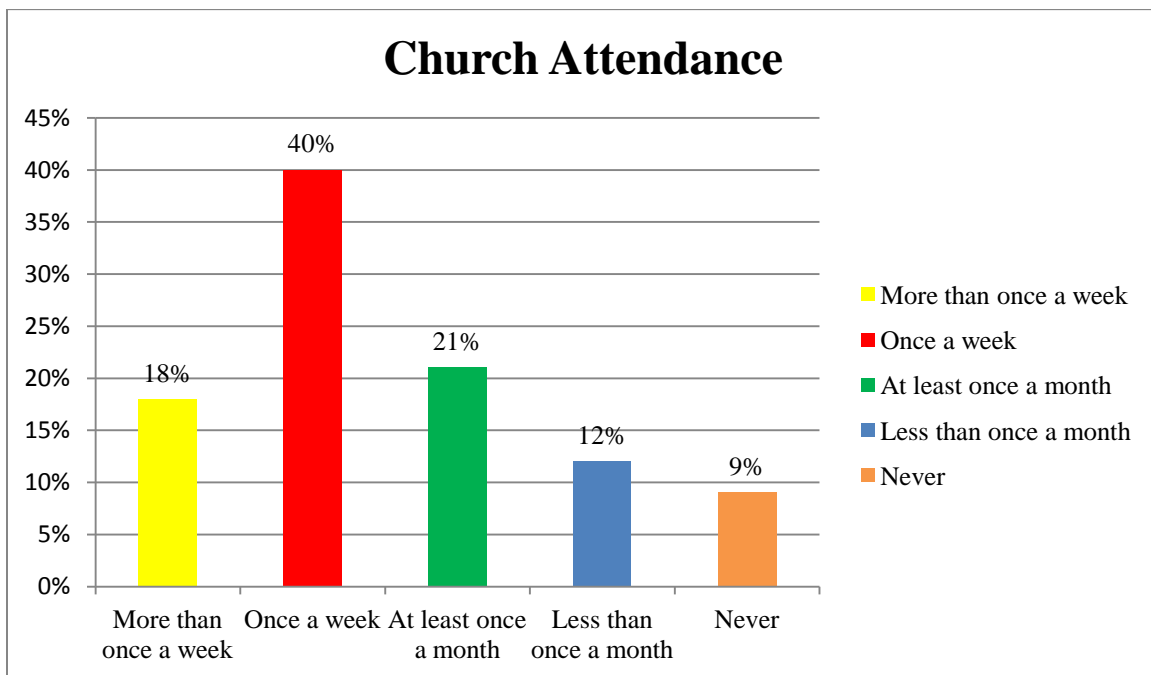
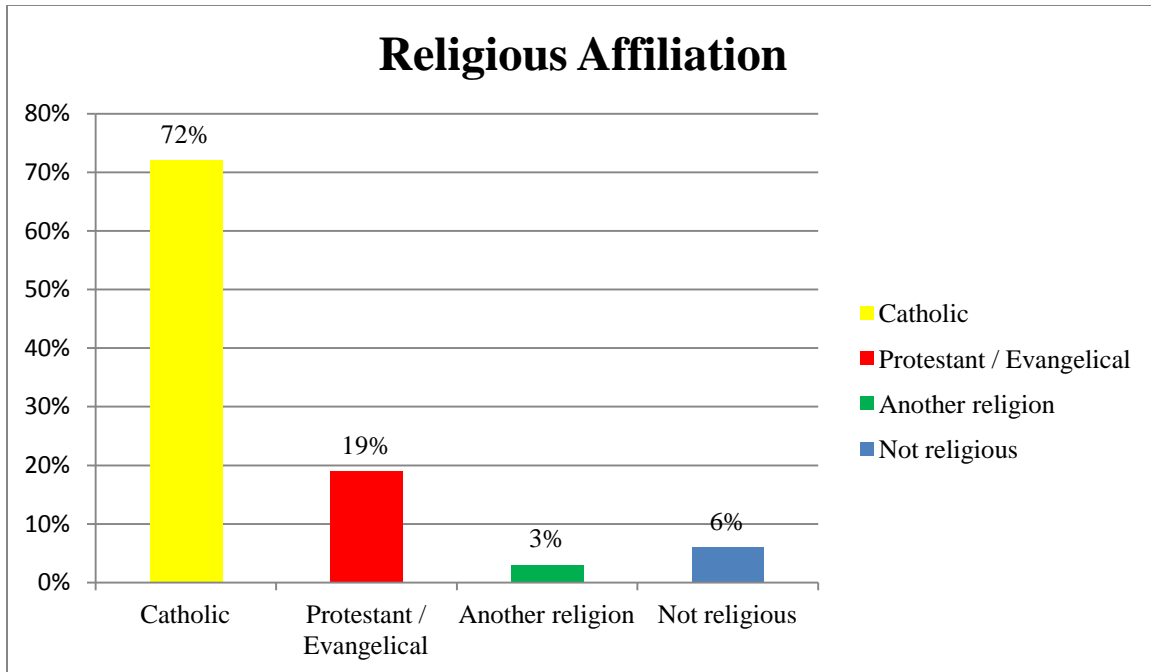


## Years in the United States Asked of those born outside the US



## Language of Preference





## Church Attendance *By Religion*

