

Where We Stand on Issues

JAMES J. ZOGBY

Politically, large majorities of African Americans, Hispanics and American Jews are Democrats. Asian Americans tend to be independent, while Italian and Arab Americans are evenly split between the two major parties.

Nevertheless, it appears from our polling that neither party identification nor stated political philosophy alone is enough to predict how individuals in the various ethnic communities will define their stances on several important issues.

In our survey, we covered 28 key policy questions and found the results to be quite revealing. For example, in seven areas, large majorities in all of the groups agree with positions that have traditionally been viewed as *liberal*. They agree on:

- Allowing patients to sue HMOs
- Using the federal surplus to provide health insurance for uninsured
- Increasing of the minimum wage by \$1 in two years
- The need for new gun control laws
- The United States unilaterally banning nuclear weapons
- The United States paying back dues to the United Nations
- The federal government imposing strict regulations and fines on polluters

On several other issues, however, majorities in almost all of the groups agree with what have been described as *conservative* positions. There is wide agreement on:

- The policy of school vouchers
- Parental notification of girls under 17 who seek an abortion
- Treating children 14–16 as adults if they commit a crime involving a gun
- The need for the death penalty
- Opposition to racial preferences in hiring and college admissions
- Favoring states setting education policy, not the federal government
- Allowing individuals to invest part of their payroll taxes in retirement accounts

There are other areas where there are differences among the six ethnic groups surveyed. (For a closer look at where the six groups stand on some of the major issues of the day, see Table 1).

Issues

a. Providing parents with school vouchers so their children can attend any school they choose.

Providing school vouchers to parents is a very popular issue among Hispanic Americans. More than 80% say they support providing parents with school vouchers. Close to 75% of Asian Americans are for vouchers. Also, almost 70% of African Americans, Italian Americans and Arab Americans support the voucher system. Slightly over 50% of Jewish Americans are in support.

b. There should be a law allowing patients to sue their HMO (Health Maintenance Organization) if they are denied treatment.

Jewish Americans, along with Hispanic Americans, are most supportive of this empowerment for patients, with 90% favoring this position. Close to 89% of Arab Americans, 86% of Italian Americans, and 85% of African and Asian Americans agree that there should be laws allowing patients to sue their HMOs.

c. Using the government surplus to provide health insurance for the working poor and children.

There is a broad consensus on this issue. Close to 93% of Hispanic Americans, more than 90% of African Americans, and almost 90% of Asian Americans favor using the budget surplus to provide healthcare coverage for the poor. Nearly nine in ten Jewish and Arab Americans, along with 85% of Italian Americans are also in favor of the government using the surplus to take care of the healthcare needs of the working poor and children in America.

d. Increasing the minimum wage by \$1 an hour over the next two years.

An increase in the minimum wage is a top priority of all the groups with more than four in five supporting an increase.

e. Prosecuting teenagers 14 to 16 as an adult if they have committed a violent crime using a handgun.

Again, there is broad agreement on this issue. Italian, Arab, and Jewish Americans are slightly more likely than the other three groups to want tough laws when dealing with 14 to 16 year-old offenders who use a gun when committing violent crimes. Also,

ANNUAL EDITIONS

Table 1 Issue Support (Agreement)

Issue	Italian	African	Hispanic	Jewish	Asian	Arab
School vouchers	67.0	70.0	83.0 ²	<i>52.0</i> ³	74.0	69.0
Allow patients to sue HMO	86.0	86.5	89.5	90.0	74.5	89.0
Use surplus for health insurance ⁴	84.0	93.5	93.5	86.5	89.5	86.5
Increase minimum wage by \$1 in 2 years	82.5	94.0	92.5	85.0	88.0	80.5
Treating 14–16 year-olds as adults if used a gun	85.0	74.0	78.5	81.5	80.0	83.0
\$1,000 campaign contribution limit	70.5	63.0	<i>58.5</i>	75.0	66.0	69.5
New gun control laws	<i>69.5</i>	78.0	82.0	83.5	88.0	76.0
Death penalty	78.5	<i>64.0</i>	73.0	67.5	75.5	71.5
Flat tax	55.5	43.0	47.5	<i>34.5</i>	40.0	50.0
School boards can restrict subjects taught	27.5	32.0	26.0	<i>19.5</i>	41.0	36.0
Racial preferences in hiring/college admissions	<i>11.0</i>	32.0	26.0	17.0	20.5	21.0
U.S. unilaterally ban testing of nuclear weapons	66.5	65.0	70.0	68	72.5	65.5
Government impose strict regulations/fines on polluters	93.5	92.0	95.5	92.5	92.5	92.5
Strengthening Social Security and Medicare	94.5	96.0	95.0	94.0	91.5	92.0
Allow individuals to invest part of payroll taxes	84.3	79.0	78.5	76.0	82.5	81.0
Active U.S. participation in global trade	71.0	<i>69.5</i>	83.0	76.5	84.0	79.5

² Bold numbers indicate groups that support a position to a much greater degree than other groups.

³ Italicized numbers indicate the groups whose support for a particular issue is significantly lower than the other groups.

⁴ Shaded categories are those where a near consensus exists among the groups.

Table 2 Abortion Position

	Italian	African	Hispanic	Jewish	Asian	Arab
Pro-choice in all instances	29.0	40.5	<i>23.5</i>	61.5	39.0	28.5
Pro-choice except for late-term abortion	24.0	12.5	10.0	17.5	12.0	16.5
Pro-life in all instances	8.5	8.5	16.5	<i>3.5</i>	7.5	7.0
Pro-life except for rape and incest	18.0	13.0	13.5	5.0	11.0	16.0
Pro-life except for life of mother	18.0	22.5	35.0	10.0	25.5	29.5
Total “pro-life”	46.5	54.0	64.5	<i>18.5</i>	43.5	52.0
Total “pro-choice”	53.0	53.0	<i>34.0</i>	79.0	51.0	45.5

80% of Asian Americans, 78% of Hispanic Americans, and 74% of African Americans favor tough prosecution of teenagers.

f. Putting a limit of \$1,000 on campaign contributions in all elections.

Jewish Americans lead the other ethnic groups in supporting limits on campaign contributions. Three in four (75%) support a \$1,000 cap on campaign contributions. They are closely followed by 71% of Italian Americans and 70% of the Arab Americans. More than 65% of Asian Americans, 64% of African Americans and 58% of Hispanic Americans also support the cap on contributions.

g. Passing new gun control laws.

There is significant support across the board for new gun control laws from all groups. Asian Americans are most in favor, while Italian Americans are least in favor.

h. Imposing the death penalty for particularly heinous crimes.

More than three in four (78%) Italians and Asians say they are in favor of using the death penalty as a punishment for terrible crimes. They are followed by about 70% of Jewish, Arab, and Hispanic Americans also in support. Although African Americans did

Table 3 Exceptions to Supporting Abortion

Issue	Italian	African	Hispanic	Jewish	Asian	Arab
Ban abortion except for life of mother	47.0	44.0	61.0	20.5	47.0	53.5
Notify parent if under 18 wants abortion	77.5	77.5	82.5	49.5	79.5	78.5

show support for the death penalty, they are the least supportive, with less than 65% agreeing with this method of punishment.

i. Revising the income tax code so that every individual pays a flat tax regardless of his/her income.

Close to 60% of Jewish Americans are opposed to a flat tax. More than half of Asian Americans, 48% of Hispanic Americans, and 40% of African Americans are also opposed to a flat tax. More than half of Italian Americans are in support.

j. Local school boards have a right to restrict the teaching of topics, such as evolution.

Localizing the authority over what topics are taught at the school board level is not a popular issue with these ethnic groups. More than 75% of Jewish Americans oppose allowing local school boards deciding what can and cannot be taught in schools. A majority of all other groups agree.

k. Racial preferences in hiring or college admissions.

Close to 70% of Hispanic Americans and more than 64% of African Americans oppose taking into account racial preference when hiring or admitting students to a college. In addition, 87% of Italian Americans, 80% of Jewish Americans, 76% of Asian Americans and 75% of Arab Americans are also opposed to racial preferences.

l. The United States should unilaterally ban underground testing of nuclear weapons.

Asian Americans and Hispanic Americans are most in support of a unilateral ban of nuclear weapons testing. More than 67% of Jewish Americans, 65% of Italian, Arab, and African Americans also support a unilateral U.S. nuclear test ban.

m. The government should impose stricter regulations and tax penalties on factories that release harmful pollutants into the air.

There is overwhelming support across the board for getting tougher with polluters, with more than nine in ten in each group supporting stricter regulations and penalties.

n. Strengthening the Social Security and Medicare Systems.

More than 90% of all groups showed strong support for a federal focus on these two important retirement benefits. African Americans and Jewish Americans are among the most supportive.

o. Allowing individuals to invest a portion of their Social Security pension in personal retirement accounts.

Again, there is strong support across the board for allowing private investment of Social Security funds.

p. Active United States participation in the global free trade agreements.

Asian (84%), Hispanic (83%) and Arab Americans (80%) are most supportive of U.S. participation in global free trade agreements. They are followed by Jewish (76%), Italian (70%), and African Americans (69%).

The Question of Abortion

Jewish Americans are the most pro-choice, with more than 60% saying that it should always be up to the woman whether she should get an abortion. Least pro-choice are Hispanic Americans.

The group with the most pro-life attitude is Hispanics—16.5% are opposed to abortion in all cases, and 64.5% define themselves as “pro-life” in particular cases. Between 43%–54% of Asian, Italian, Arab and African Americans term themselves pro-life. Only 18.5% of Jewish Americans would describe themselves as such.

a) Banning all abortions, except for the life of the mother.

More than 60% of Hispanic Americans are supportive of a ban on abortion, except in cases where the life of the mother is in danger. About 50% of Arab Americans support the ban, except for life of mother.

More than 75% of Jewish Americans are opposed to a ban except in cases of risk to the mother, followed by 50% of Italian Americans. Almost half (48%) of African Americans and 47% of Asian Americans are also opposed.

b) A physician should be legally required to notify parents of a girl under the legal age who requests an abortion.

More than four in five (82%) Hispanic Americans, close to 80% of Arab and Asian Americans, and 77% of African and Italian Americans all support the notion that a physician be legally required to notify the parents of a girl under the legal age who is seeking an abortion. Less than half of Jewish Americans support it.

From chapter 3 of *What Ethnic Americans Really Think: The Zogby Culture Polls*. Copyright © 2001 by James J. Zogby. Reprinted by permission of Zogby International.