

Young Republicans Support Religious Liberty — But They Also Care about Birth-Control Access

Young Republicans are generally positive about birth control. While they don't check their political views at the door on this issue — they generally oppose the Affordable Care Act and support the Supreme Court's decision in *Burwell v. Hobby Lobby* — young Republicans largely hold the view that increasing access to effective contraception has the potential to improve women's lives, lower health-care costs, and reduce the number of abortions in America.

Today, the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy released a report that I authored, analyzing a series of focus groups and a national survey of young Republicans aimed at understanding their attitudes toward birth control itself and toward a variety of public policies that have an impact on access to it. I was eager to understand whether the conventional wisdom — that Republicans are doing themselves political damage with their handling of some of the issues concerning birth control — held true among young people, or whether the situation is more complicated than that.

Birth control per se is generally not a politically controversial subject. Only 7 percent of U.S. respondents in a survey covering 40 nations told the Pew Research Center that contraceptive use is “morally unacceptable,” and only 9 percent of Millennials told the Public Religion Research Institute that the use of birth control is “morally wrong.” For all the heated rhetoric, there is an incredibly broad consensus among voters of all stripes that birth control is an acceptable thing.

Our research found that young Republicans are also broadly of the view that birth control is a good thing, with 57 percent saying that they hold a positive view of birth control and only 17 percent saying they hold a negative view. (Attitudes varied concerning specific forms of contraception; while birth-control pills were viewed quite positively, emergency contraceptives were viewed quite negatively.) Furthermore, young Republican women often noted that contraceptive pills can have other health effects besides pregnancy prevention and are often prescribed to address issues such as hormone imbalance.

Roughly two-thirds of young Republicans say that “every adult woman should have access to affordable, effective birth control because it gives people a chance to build families on their own terms.”

Our respondents saw a whole host of potential benefits to expanding contraceptive access, including reducing the incidence of abortion and reducing the costs related to unplanned pregnancies.

But the fact that young Republicans are generally positive about birth control doesn't mean they love the Democrats' policies on the issue. A significant majority oppose the Affordable Care Act. Many aren't sure that lack of access to affordable contraception is a serious problem, and think that those who don't use contraceptives are usually motivated by individual preference or religious views. In our focus groups, respondents were adamant that they're concerned about government spending and rising national debt. And while they're of the mind that health insurance ought to cover the full range of contraceptives, they think there should be room for religious exceptions and lean toward supporting the Supreme Court's decision in *Hobby Lobby*.

Essentially, what we heard from young Republicans is that birth control is a good thing, and that they want to see greater education about and access to effective forms of contraception. In focus groups and in the survey, our respondents said loud and clear that preventing unplanned pregnancy is about making sure people are educated and have the tools to be responsible. Even among Catholics and evangelical Christians, large majorities of respondents said they would support “providing more educational programs and campaigns for young adults about all methods of birth control.”

For young Republicans, being pro-birth control doesn't mean supporting every policy that Democrats put forward, and our respondents were clearly concerned about government overreach. They did think, however, that expanding access to birth control would have a number of very positive results.

There's a way to talk about birth control that neither dismisses it as morally wrong nor embraces the Left's agenda. The research shows that young Republicans' attitudes about birth control are more complex than the conventional wisdom might suggest, and that there is an opening for Republican politicians who want to change the conversation about the issue of contraception.