

Survey: Four in 10 Americans support controversial contraception mandate

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(RNS) More than four in 10 Americans support the Obama administration's controversial contraception mandate, which requires nonprofits and businesses to provide birth control even if they have religious objections.

The poll from Public Religion Research Institute comes as the Supreme Court prepares to issue its decision in a challenge to the contraception mandate filed by the evangelical owners of the Hobby Lobby arts and crafts chain and a Mennonite-owned wood cabinetry business.

Churches and houses of worship are exempt from the mandate, but nearly 100 nonprofits, colleges and universities, and businesses run by people with religious objections to various forms of contraception have filed lawsuits over the mandate.

The poll found majority support for requiring publicly held corporations (61 percent) and privately owned corporations such as Hobby Lobby (57 percent) to provide contraception coverage at no cost to their employees. In addition, majorities of Americans said religiously affiliated hospitals (56 percent) and religiously affiliated colleges (52 percent) should be covered by the mandate.

The poll found less support (51 percent) for applying the mandate to privately owned small businesses; 53 percent oppose applying the mandate to all institutions, including churches and houses of worship, while 42 percent said it should apply to them.

A 2012 poll by the Pew Research Center found that 48 percent supported a religious exemption to the mandate, while 44 percent said businesses should be required to cover contraceptives like other employers. The PRRI poll asked a bit differently, asking whether institutions and businesses should be required to provide their

employees with health care plans that cover contraception or birth control at no cost. Pew asked whether those groups should be extended an exemption.

PRRI's poll also found that a majority (54 percent) of Americans believe that the right of religious liberty is being threatened in America, up from 39 percent two years ago. Republicans are twice as likely as Democrats (80 percent vs. 40 percent) to say that religious liberty is being threatened.

White evangelicals especially believe religious liberty is being threatened in the United States today, at 83 percent, compared to 55 percent of Catholics and 53 percent of white mainline Protestants.

While more than 50 percent of Catholics believe that public and private businesses should be required to provide employees contraceptive coverage, less than half of white evangelicals support the mandate.

In other findings, the poll found that even religiously unaffiliated Americans (58 percent) support public officials opening a meeting with prayer. Nearly 80 percent of Americans support allowing public officials to open meetings. The Supreme Court held last month that public officials could hold sectarian prayers.