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Survey: Hispanics like Pope Francis and the Democratic Party

by Cathy Lynn Grossman by Religion News Service

Austin, Texas — A new survey of Hispanic political and religious values finds they're overwhelmingly Democrats who hold a largely negative view of the Republican Party.

But a Public Religion Research Institute survey released Friday at the Religion Newswriters Association conference finds that their religious profile is shifting:

- Today, 53 percent identify as Catholic, but 69 percent said they had a Catholic upbringing.
- The biggest area of growth is evangelical Protestantism. Thirteen percent told pollsters they are evangelical today, compared with 7 percent who said they had an evangelical upbringing.
- The second significant jump is out of religious identification altogether. While only 5 percent said they grew up with no religion, the share of Hispanics who check "none" for their current religious identification stands at 12 percent.
- Twelve percent identify now as mainline Protestant, and 6 percent identify with a non-Christian religion.

The 2013 Hispanic Values Survey of 1,563 Hispanic adults was conducted online in both English and Spanish between Aug. 23 and Sept. 3. It has a margin of error of plus or minus 3.7 percentage points.

The survey found that most Hispanics are delighted with Argentine-born Pope Francis, but they hold slightly less favorable views of the Catholic church. While nearly 69 percent look favorably on the pope, only 54 percent see the institution in a favorable light.

Hot buttons issues with conservative Christians -- abortion and same-sex marriage -- are not as critical to Hispanics. Topping their list of critical issues are jobs and unemployment (72 percent), followed by health

care costs (65 percent) and the quality of public schools (55 percent).

While a majority (52 percent) of Hispanics say "abortion should be illegal in all or most cases," it is cited as a critical concern by only 32 percent.

Only 22 percent cited same-sex marriage as a critical concern. Most Hispanics (55 percent) favor allowing gay and lesbian Americans to marry.

The survey found "bipartisan and cross-religious support for immigration reform among Hispanics." Even so, the American dream seems out of reach to many:

- 72 percent say the "U.S. economic system unfairly favors the wealthy."
- 60 percent say "Hard work and determination do not guarantee success for most people today."
- 72 percent agree the government should do more to reduce the gap between the rich and the poor.

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