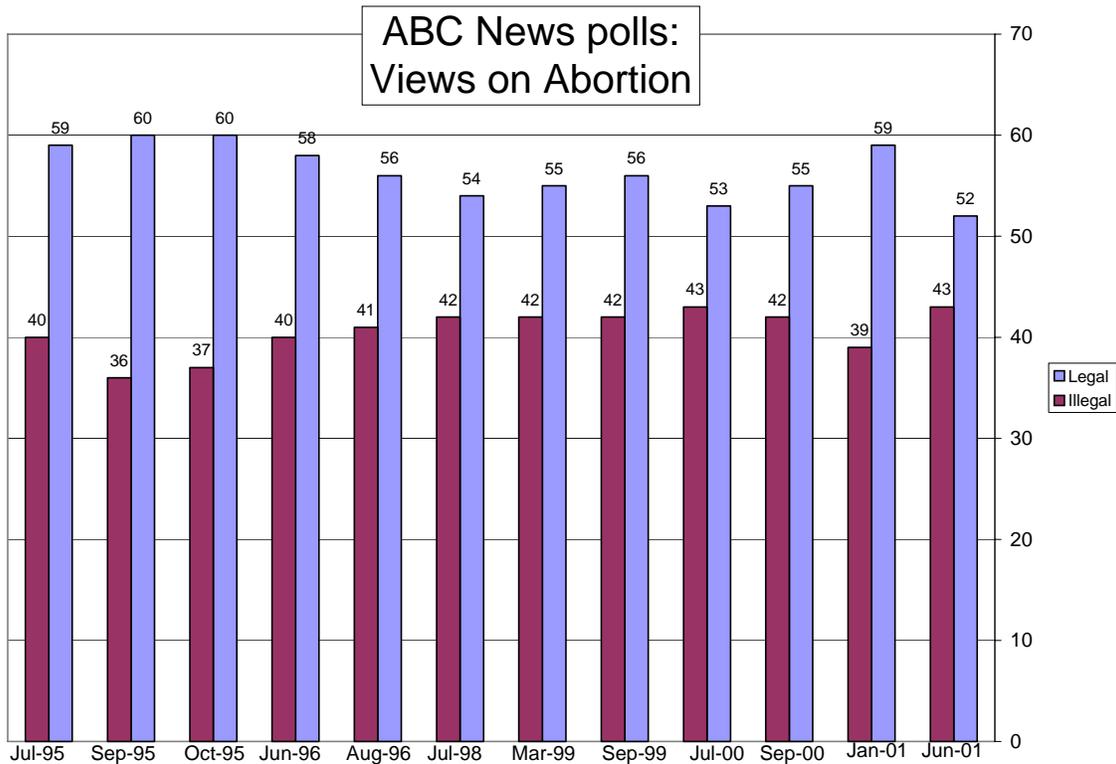


## **Support for Legal Abortion Wobbles; Religion Informs Much Opposition**

Public support for legal abortion, a bit wobbly in recent years, has slipped back to its lowest level in polls since 1995.

Fifty-two percent of Americans say abortion should be legal in all or most cases, down from 59 percent in January and about back to where it was (53 percent) last summer. Forty-three percent say abortion should be illegal in all or most cases.

Support for legal abortion has wobbled by around seven points, without clear direction, in polls by ABC News and others. That underscores public ambivalence on the issue: While large majorities say it should be legal in dire cases, most also have said abortions should be illegal when done solely to end an unwanted pregnancy.



**RELIGION** – This ABC News/Beliefnet poll finds that religious belief informs a substantial portion of opposition to abortion. Among people who oppose legal abortion,

half cite their religious beliefs as the main factor in their opinion. The other half divide among a range of influences, including their personal but non-religious views.

Support for legal abortion has other sources: Thirty-five percent of supporters cite their personal non-religious views, 22 percent their education, 10 percent their personal experience. Fewer than one in 10 supporters cite religious belief as the chief factor in their view.

Chief factors in views on abortion:	Among abortion	
	Supporters	Opponents
Religious beliefs	9%	50
Personal non-religious beliefs	35	19
Education	22	9
Personal experience	10	8
Things read/seen in the news	8	3
Opinions of family and friends	4	4
Something else	13	6

Among all Americans, 28 percent cite personal non-religious beliefs as the main factor in their opinion on abortion; 27 percent cite religious beliefs; 16 percent, their education. Compared to the much more recent issue of stem-cell research (see 6/26 analysis), fewer cite news reports as the main factor in their views, and more cite personal, non-religious beliefs.

**EVANGELISM** – Evangelism is a specific religious factor in views on abortion; indeed there’s a dramatic difference in opinions between evangelical white Protestants, who account for about half of all white Protestants; and their non-evangelical counterparts.

Specifically, among white Protestants who describe themselves as born-again or evangelical, 63 percent say abortion should be illegal in all or most cases. Among non-evangelical white Protestants, 66 percent say abortion should be generally legal.

Evangelical white Protestants also are more than twice as likely as their non-evangelical counterparts, 39 percent to 16 percent, to say religion is the main influence in their view on the subject. Still, this means that even among evangelical white Protestants, most cite factors other than their religion as the main factor in their thinking on abortion.

**CATHOLICS** – Catholics, by contrast, look like the public at large in their views on abortion, despite the opposition from their church. Fifty-five percent of Catholics say abortion should be generally legal, and 28 percent say their religion is the main factor in their opinion on the subject – in both cases about the same as the population at large.

	Abortions should be	
	All/mostly legal	All/mostly illegal
All adults	52%	43
Evangelical white Protestants	34	63
Catholics	55	43
Non-evangelical white Protestants	66	33

	Main factor in your view on abortion	
	Religious beliefs	Other mention
All adults	27%	73
Evangelical white Protestants	39	61
Catholics	28	72
Non-evangelical white Protestants	16	84

IDEOLOGY and PARTY – Ideology and political partisanship, both of which would fit under “personal non-religious beliefs,” show at least as strong a role in views on abortion. Support for legal abortion ranges from 75 percent among liberals to 34 percent among conservatives; and from 59 percent among Democrats to 40 percent among Republicans.

	Abortions should be	
	All/mostly legal	All/mostly illegal
Liberals	75%	23
Moderates	57	39
Conservatives	34	63
Democrats	59%	37
Independents	59	36
Republicans	40	58

OTHER GROUPS – There are differences among other groups on abortion as well. Older, less educated, lower-income adults are more apt to say it should be illegal. And blacks are more likely than whites to oppose legal abortion. Older people and blacks also are more apt to cite religious beliefs as the main factor in their opinion.

RANGE – There’s a range of opinion within the categories of support or opposition for legal abortion. About a fifth of Americans take each of the more extreme views – that abortion should be legal in all cases, or illegal in all cases. Just under a quarter say it should be illegal in most cases, but not all. And 31 percent say it should be legal in most cases.

Evangelical white Protestants are among the groups most likely to say abortion should be illegal in all cases; 35 percent of them take that view. Again, though, this means that even among evangelicals, nearly two-thirds reject a complete ban on all abortions.

About half as many Catholics, 19 percent, support making abortion illegal in all cases, as do 11 percent of non-evangelical white Protestants.

	Abortions should be			
	Legal, all cases	Legal, most cases	Illegal, most cases	Illegal, all cases
All adults	22%	31	23	20
Evangelical white Protestants	13	21	28	35
Catholics	25	30	25	19
Non-evangelical white Protestants	25	42	22	11

TREND – Support for legal abortion has moved within an eight-point band since this question first was asked in July 1995, from 60 to 52 percent, with no clear pattern. Opposition has ranged from 36 to 43 percent. Averaging can help provide clarity: Support for legal abortion has averaged 56 percent in a dozen polls the last five years; opposition, 41 percent.

METHODOLOGY - This ABC News/Beliefnet poll was conducted by telephone June 20-24, 2001, among a random national sample of 1,022 adults. The results have a three-point error margin. Fieldwork by TNS Intersearch of Horsham, Pa.

Analysis by Gary Langer.

ABC News polls can be found at ABCNEWS.com on the Internet, at:  
<http://abcnews.go.com/sections/politics/PollVault/PollVault.html>

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Here are the full results (\*= less than 0.5 percent):

1-3. Released.

4. On another subject, do you think abortion should be legal in all cases, legal in most cases, illegal in most cases or illegal in all cases?

	-----Legal-----			-----Illegal-----			
	NET	All cases	Most cases	NET	All cases	Most cases	No opin.
6/24/01	52	22	31	43	20	23	4
1/15/01	59	21	38	39	14	25	1
9/6/00 RV	55	20	35	42	16	25	3
7/23/00	53	20	33	43	17	26	4
9/2/99	56	20	37	42	15	26	2
3/14/99	55	21	34	42	15	27	3
7/12/98	54	19	35	42	13	29	4
8/5/96	56	22	34	41	14	27	3
6/30/96	58	24	34	40	14	25	2
10/1/95	60	26	35	37	12	25	3
9/21/95	60	24	36	36	11	25	4
7/17/95	59	27	32	40	14	26	1

5. What's had the most influence on your opinion on the issue of abortion - (ROTATE) the opinions of your family and friends, things you've seen or read in the news, your education, your personal experience, your religious beliefs, (ALWAYS ASK NEXT) your personal non-religious beliefs, or (ASK LAST) something else?

6/24/01

	Family/ friends	News	Educ.	Exper.	Relig. beliefs	Non-relig. beliefs	Other	No op.
All	4	6	16	9	27	28	11	1
Support	4	8	22	10	9	35	13	*

Oppose

4

3

9

8

50

19

6

\*