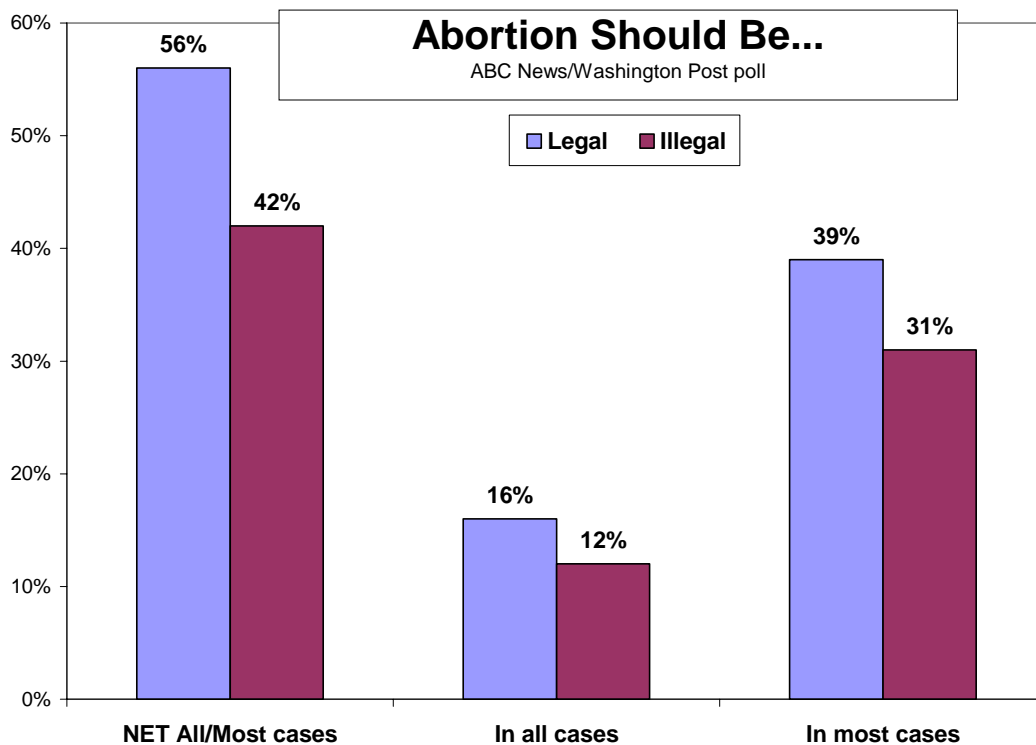


Views on Abortion Grow Less Polarized

Public opinion on abortion has taken a gradual and surprising turn – toward moderation.

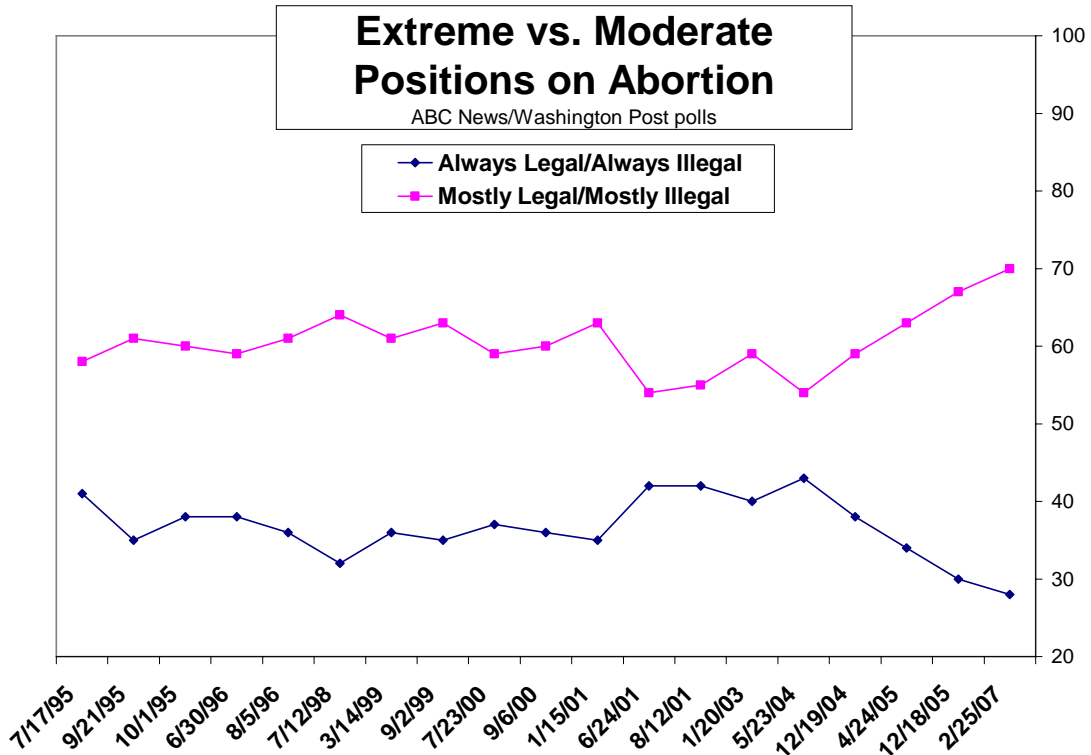
Basic opinions are unchanged: Fifty-six percent of Americans say abortion should be generally legal and 42 percent say it should be generally illegal, almost precisely matching the averages in ABC News/Washington Post polls since 1995.

But more now take the middle two positions – that abortion should be legal in most cases, but not all; or illegal in most cases, but not all. Seventy percent take one of those two views, the most ever – 39 percent on the “mostly legal” side, 31 percent “mostly illegal.”



That leaves 28 percent who now take the more extreme positions – that abortion should be legal or illegal in all cases (16 and 12 percent, respectively) – the fewest ever in ABC/Post polls, down from a high of 43 percent in 2004, and nine points below the long-term average.

The number of Americans who say abortion should be legal in all cases, 16 percent, is down 11 points from its peak of 27 percent in 1995. At the same time, the 12 percent who say abortion should be flatly illegal is down eight points from its high, 20 percent in 2001 and 2004. As these have fallen, “mostly legal” and “mostly illegal” responses have risen.



GROUPS – The trend toward the middle since 2004 has occurred disproportionately among some groups, including women, evangelical white Protestants and Catholics.

Women and men have essentially the same views on abortion – at the extreme and moderate positions alike – and both have shifted toward the center. Among women, compared to mid-2004, 19 percent fewer now take one of the two more extreme positions – that abortion should be legal in all cases (now 17 percent, down from 26 percent) or that it should always be illegal (now 11 percent, down from 21 percent.)

The change among men has been less pronounced, with 12 percent fewer taking either more extreme stance. Twelve percent of men say abortion should be illegal in all cases, down from 20 percent; and 16 percent say it should be legal in all cases, compared with 20 percent in 2004.

	Women		Men	
	Now	2004	Now	2004
Legal in all cases	17%	26	16	20
Illegal in all cases	11	21	12	20

RELIGION – Evangelical white Protestants, the most broadly anti-abortion group, also have moved toward the center: Fifteen percent now say abortion should be illegal in all cases, down from 31 percent in 2004.

Among Catholics, preference for abortion to be legal in all cases has declined from 26 percent in 2004 to 10 percent now – with a corresponding rise in the number who say it should be legal in most cases, but not all.

	Evangelical white			
	Protestants		Catholics	
	Now	2004	Now	2004
Legal in all cases	6%	11	10	26
Illegal in all cases	15	31	13	17

PARTY – While partisan differences remain sharp, there is a trend toward moderation on both sides of the aisle. Democrats are more likely than Republicans to think abortion should be legal in all cases (22 percent vs. nine percent) or most cases (45 percent vs. 30 percent), while Republicans are almost twice as likely to say abortion should be illegal in most (40 percent vs. 21 percent) or all (18 percent vs. 10 percent) cases.

But the 45 percent of Democrats who now say abortion should be legal in most, not all, cases is up from 35 percent since mid-2004, and the number of Republicans who say it should be illegal in most but not all cases is now 40 percent, up from 32 percent.

	Democrats		Republicans	
	Now	2004	Now	2004
Legal in all cases	22%	27	9	14
Illegal in all cases	10	19	18	26

RATIONALES – No single poll question can capture the complexity of views on abortion, and there’s plenty to explore in what “mostly” legal or illegal should mean. Previous ABC/Post polls have shown that attitudes on abortion are heavily dependent on rationales, with broad support for legal abortion in some instances (e.g., when the woman’s life or health are in danger) but majority opposition in others – notably, when abortions are done solely to end an unwanted pregnancy.

At the same time, in an ABC/Post poll in 2005, 61 percent said they wanted to see the Supreme Court uphold *Roe vs. Wade*, the decision that established current abortion law. And while 42 percent wanted the court to make abortions harder to get than they are now, the rest wanted the availability of abortions the same (45 percent) or less restricted (11 percent).

How abortion plays out in the 2008 presidential campaign – and whether the campaign itself increases polarization on the issue – remain to be seen. But the issue could be a contentious one particularly in the Republican primaries; 46 percent of Republicans say

they're less likely to back frontrunner Rudy Giuliani because he's been a supporter of legal abortion (and gay civil unions). Indeed 23 percent say that given his views on the issue there's no chance they'd support Giuliani. Even with moderating views overall, abortion remains a potent political issue.

METHODOLOGY – This ABC News/Washington Post poll was conducted by telephone Feb. 22-25, 2007, among a random national sample of 1,082 adults, including an oversample of black respondents. The results have a three-point error margin. Sampling, data collection and tabulation by TNS of Horsham, PA.

Analysis by Patrick Moynihan and Gary Langer.

ABC News polls can be found at ABCNEWS.com at <http://abcnews.com/pollvault.html>.

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Full results follow (*= less than 0.5 percent).

1-44. Previously released.

45. 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 -----			No opin.
	NET	All cases	Most cases	NET	Most cases	All cases	
2/25/07	56	16	39	42	31	12	2
12/18/05	56	17	40	41	27	13	3
4/24/05	56	20	36	42	27	14	3
12/19/04	55	21	34	42	25	17	3
5/23/04	54	23	31	44	23	20	2
1/20/03	57	23	34	42	25	17	2
8/12/01	49	22	27	48	28	20	3
6/24/01	52	22	31	43	23	20	4
1/15/01	59	21	38	39	25	14	1
9/6/00 RV	55	20	35	42	25	16	3
7/23/00	53	20	33	43	26	17	4
9/2/99	56	20	37	42	26	15	2
3/14/99	55	21	34	42	27	15	3
7/12/98	54	19	35	42	29	13	4
8/5/96	56	22	34	41	27	14	3
6/30/96	58	24	34	40	25	14	2
10/1/95	60	26	35	37	25	12	3
9/21/95	60	24	36	36	25	11	4
7/17/95	59	27	32	40	26	14	1
Average	56	21	34	41	26	15	3

	Always legal/ Always illegal NET	Mostly legal/ mostly illegal NET
2/25/07	28	70
12/18/05	30	67

4/24/05	34	63
12/19/04	38	59
5/23/04	43	54
1/20/03	40	59
8/12/01	42	55
6/24/01	42	54
1/15/01	35	63
9/6/00 RV	36	60
7/23/00	37	59
9/2/99	35	63
3/14/99	36	61
7/12/98	32	64
8/5/96	36	61
6/30/96	38	59
10/1/95	38	60
9/21/95	35	61
7/17/95	41	58
Average	37	61

END