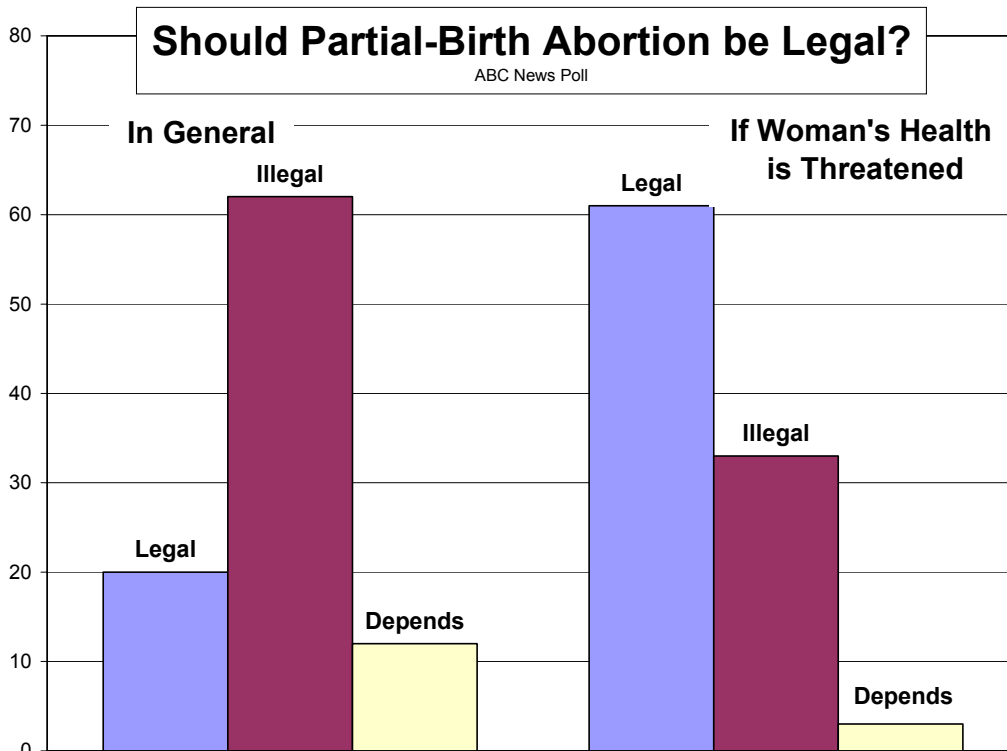


Most Americans Back Health Exception to 'Partial-Birth' Abortion Ban

While most Americans favor banning the procedure known as partial-birth abortion in general, most also say it should be legal if the woman's health is in danger – an exception that's absent from federal legislation working its way to George W. Bush.

Broadly, 62 percent in this ABC News poll favor banning this form of late-term abortion. But when opponents are asked a follow-up – what if it would prevent a serious threat to the woman's health – the numbers reverse, and six in 10 say it should be legal.

A conference committee is merging measures approved by the House and Senate, both of which would allow the procedure only if necessary to save a woman's life. The House rejected an amendment that would have extended the exemption "to avert serious adverse consequences to her health." Bush has said he'll sign the legislation.



In this poll, just 20 percent of Americans say partial-birth abortion should be legal in all cases. But, when the follow-up is asked, an additional 41 percent say they'd make an

exception when the mother's health is at risk – for a total of 61 percent who say it should be legal in that circumstance. One in three say it should be illegal nonetheless.

TRENDS – Several other recent polls have found majority support for a law banning partial-birth abortion (including an ABC News/Washington Post poll in January), but without asking about a health-of-the mother exception.

Support for that exception fits previous findings on the abortion issue. While views on abortion vary considerably depending on the circumstances, support for keeping it legal is broadest when the woman's life, or health, are at risk. Partial-birth abortion generates majority opposition in general, but as this poll shows, concern for the woman's health trumps that opposition for many Americans.

Partial-birth abortions are not common. Fewer than two percent of abortions are done after the fifth month, according to a 1999 report by the federal Centers for Disease Control; and a 2000 report by the Guttmacher Institute said that fewer than two-tenths of one percent of abortions are partial-birth abortions.

GROUPS – There are strong religious, ideological and political components to these views. There's also a difference between the sexes: Perhaps surprisingly, women are somewhat more likely than men to say partial-birth abortion should be illegal regardless of the mother's health, 37 percent to 28 percent.

Support for a ban runs highest among evangelical white Protestants, among whom 53 percent say the procedure should be illegal regardless of the woman's health. (That compares to just 20 percent among white Protestants who are not evangelicals.) Still, even among evangelical white Protestants, 43 percent say partial-birth abortion should be legal, at least to protect the mother's health.

Among ideological terms groups, conservatives divide about evenly on the issue – 48 percent say partial-birth abortion should be legal when the woman's health is at risk, 46 percent say it should be illegal. Among moderates and liberals alike, by contrast, about seven in 10 say it should be legal.

In terms of political allegiance, Republicans say the procedure should be legal to protect the mother's health by 55-42 percent, and independents by 58-34 percent. It's a much more lopsided 73-20 percent among Democrats.

	Views on partial-birth abortion	
	In general:	To protect woman's health:
	Legal-Illegal	Legal-Illegal
All	20-62	61-33
Women	18-68	58-37
Men	23-56	64-28
Dem	27-50	73-20

Rep	15-76	55-42
Ind	21-60	58-34
Protestant	20-64	60-35
White Evang. Prot.	12-76	43-53
White not evang.	28-51	76-20
Catholic	11-73	58-39
Other religion	23-59	63-33
No religion	31-47	64-23

METHODOLOGY – This ABC News poll was conducted by telephone July 16-20, 2003, among a random national sample of 1,027 adults. The results have a three-point error margin. Sampling, data collection and tabulation by TNS Intersearch of Horsham, Pa.

Analysis by Telis Demos.

ABC News polls can be found at ABCNEWS.com on the Internet at:
[http://abcnews.go.com/sections/us/Poll Vault/Poll Vault.html](http://abcnews.go.com/sections/us/Poll_Vault/Poll_Vault.html)

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Results follow:

1. Do you think the late-term abortion procedure known as dilation and extraction, or partial-birth abortion, should be legal or illegal?

	Legal	Illegal	Depends (vol.)	No opinion
7/20/03	20	62	12	5

2. (IF ILLEGAL, DEPENDS, DON'T KNOW) What if it would prevent a serious threat to the woman's health - in that case do you think the late-term abortion procedure known as dilation and extraction, or partial-birth abortion, should be legal or illegal?

NET All respondents

	NET	All cases	-----Legal----- If health threatened	Depends (vol.)	Illegal	No op.
7/20/03	61	20	41	3	33	3

END