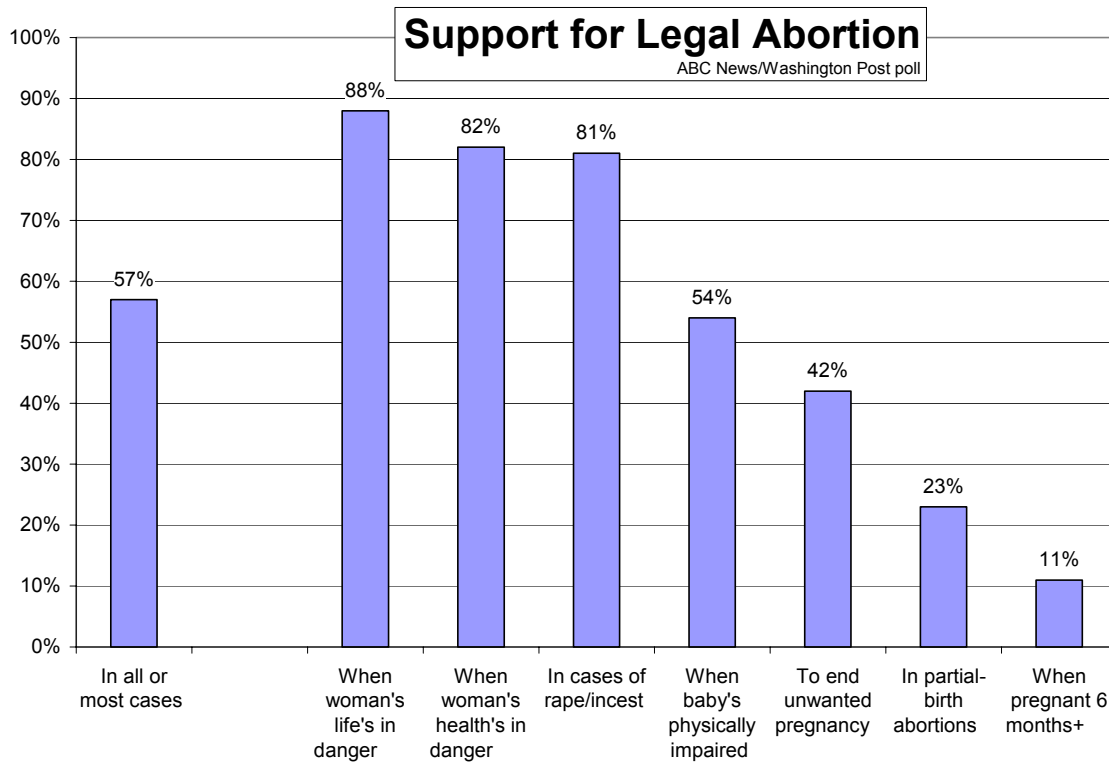


Public Support for Abortion Depends on Why it's Done

Thirty years after *Roe v. Wade*, public support for legal abortion is highly conditional: In some cases, such as to save the woman's life, it's overwhelming; but in others – notably, solely to terminate an unwanted pregnancy – most Americans oppose the procedure.

Generally, 57 percent in this ABC News/Washington Post poll say abortion should be legal in all or most cases, and 54 percent favor the U.S. Supreme Court's 1973 ruling that made it so. While 42 percent want the government and the courts to make abortions harder to get, more either support the status quo, or favor fewer restrictions.

Still, Americans long have been uneasy with the procedure and the reasons it's done – and these doubts remain. Eight in 10 or more say an abortion should be legal to save the woman's life, to preserve her health, or when the pregnancy was caused by rape or incest. A much smaller majority, 54 percent, supports legal abortion if there's evidence the baby will be physically impaired.



However, 57 percent oppose abortion solely to end an unwanted pregnancy – “if the woman is unmarried and does not want the baby.” And opposition soars to about seven in

10 or more for so-called “partial-birth abortions” or abortions conducted in the sixth month of pregnancy or later.

	Abortion should be	
	Legal	Illegal
In all or most cases	57%	42
To save woman's life	88	10
To save woman's health	82	14
In cases of rape/incest	81	17
When baby is physically impaired	54	40
To end unwanted pregnancy	42	57
In D&X/Partial-birth abortions	23	69
When pregnancy is 6 months+	11	86

These views, however, do not constitute a call for broad anti-abortion activism. Forty-one percent say the government and the courts should not alter the current availability of abortions, and an additional 15 percent say they should be easier to get; that leaves the 42 percent, cited above, who want abortions made harder to obtain.

WHY – Data on why women say they had an abortion are scarce, but a 1988 study cited by the Alan Guttmacher Institute found that few were done for health reasons or because the pregnancy was caused by rape or incest. Most women cited financial concerns or problems with their relationships, or said they weren’t ready to have a child.

Late-term and partial-birth abortions, which generate the greatest opposition, account for a tiny percentage of all abortions. 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 fewer than two-tenths of one percent are partial-birth abortions, according to a 2000 report by the Guttmacher Institute.

TREND – At 57 percent, support for legal abortion in all or most cases is about what it’s been on average in polls that have asked it this way since 1995. Most Americans eschew the extreme positions: Twenty-three percent want abortion legal in all cases, and 17 percent want it illegal in all cases. About a third say it should be mostly legal; a quarter, mostly illegal.

GROUPS – Age, education and religion each plays a strong role in informing people’s views on the issue. But despite conventional wisdom, sex does not. Indeed, as usual, men and women support legal abortion in roughly equal numbers: Fifty-four percent of men, and 58 percent of women, say it should be legal in all or most cases.

In the various conditions tested, moreover, men and women express virtually identical views:

	Favor legal abortion	
	Men	Women
In all or most cases	54%	58

To save woman's life	88	88
To save woman's health	82	83
In cases of rape/incest	80	81
When baby is physically impaired	53	55
To end unwanted pregnancy	43	40
In D&X/partial-birth abortions	28	19
When pregnancy is 6 months+	15	8

Younger, better-educated Americans and people who profess no religion are more likely to support legal abortion; Catholics are somewhat more supportive than Protestants. Opposition is highest among evangelical white Protestants.

Ideology and political partisanship are also strong factors. Sixty-three percent of Democrats and 69 percent of liberals support legal abortion; 55 percent of Republicans and 58 percent of conservatives oppose it. Independents and moderates are more apt to support it.

	Abortion should be	
	Legal	Illegal
Age 18-30	63%	37
Age 61+	41	56
HS or less	48	50
Some college+	65	34
Democrats	63	35
Independents	61	37
Republicans	44	55
Liberals	69	28
Moderates	62	37
Conservatives	42	58
Protestant	50	48
Catholic	59	40
Other	59	39
No religion	77	22
Evangelical	35	64
Non-evangelical	66	33
Evangelical white Prot.	33	67

'PARTIAL-BIRTH' – With control of both the House of Representatives and the Senate, it's expected the Republicans will move to ban "partial-birth" abortions, also known as dilation and extraction abortions. Congress has twice before passed such measures, both vetoed by then-President Clinton. George W. Bush has said he would sign the bill.

The 69 percent in this poll who say partial-birth abortions shouldn't be legal takes in majorities across demographic groups, including 60 percent of Democrats and 63 percent of liberals.

METHODOLOGY – This ABC News/Washington Post poll was conducted by telephone Jan. 16-20, 2003, among a random national sample of 1,133 adults. The results have a three-point error margin. Fieldwork by TNS Intersearch of Horsham, PA.

Analysis by Dalia Sussman.

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

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Results follow.

*= less than 0.5 percent

29. 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.
1/20/03	57	23	34	42	17	25	2
8/12/01	49	22	27	48	20	28	3
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

30. Would you like to see the government and the courts (make it harder to get an abortion than it is now), (make it easier to get an abortion than it is now), or (leave the ability to get an abortion the same as it is now)?

	Harder	Easier	Same	No opinion
1/20/03	42	15	41	2

31. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled in 1973 that a woman can have an abortion if she wants one at any time during the first three months of pregnancy. Do you favor or oppose that ruling?

	Favor	Oppose	No opinion
1/20/03	54	44	2
1/17/93	65	33	2
3/31/92*	55	38	8
9/15/91	60	36	4
7/1/91	58	39	3
7/24/90	56	39	5

*=Washington Post poll

32. I'm going to read some specific situations under which an abortion might be considered. For each, please say whether you think an abortion should be legal in that situation, or illegal.

1/20/03 - Summary Table

	Legal	Illegal	No opinion
a. When the woman's life is endangered	88	10	2
b. When the woman's physical health is endangered	82	14	4
c. When there's evidence the baby will be physically impaired	54	40	6
d. When the pregnancy was caused by rape or incest	81	17	2
e. When the woman is not married and does not want the baby	42	57	2
f. When the woman is in the sixth month of pregnancy or later	11	86	3
g. In late-term procedures known as dilation and extraction, or partial-birth abortions	23	69	8

Trend:

a. When the woman's life is endangered

	Legal	Illegal	No opinion
1/20/03	88	10	2
1/15/01	90	8	1
1/13/98	83	15	2
7/28/96*	88	7	5
4/13/89	89	8	4

b. When the woman's physical health is endangered

	Legal	Illegal	No opinion
1/20/03	82	14	4
1/15/01	85	14	1
1/13/98	79	19	2
7/28/96*	82	11	8

c. When there's evidence the baby will be physically impaired

	Legal	Illegal	No opinion
1/20/03	54	40	6
1/13/98	58	38	4
7/28/96*	53	37	10

d. When the pregnancy was caused by rape or incest

	Legal	Illegal	No opinion
1/20/03	81	17	2
1/15/01	83	16	2
1/13/98	78	20	2
7/28/96*	77	18	5

e. When the woman is not married and does not want the baby

	Legal	Illegal	No opinion
1/20/03	42	57	2
1/15/01	44	55	1
1/13/98	39	59	2

f,g. No trend.

*Gallup. No opinion and "depends" combined.

END