

<http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1212/abortion-gun-control-opinion-gender-gap>

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Public Takes Conservative Turn on Gun Control, Abortion

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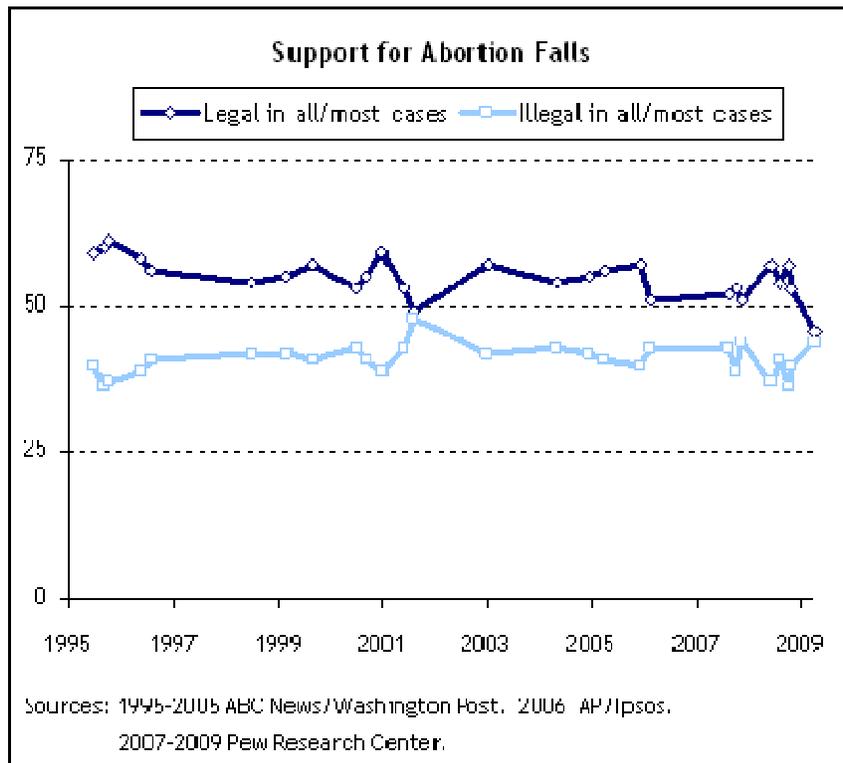
Public attitudes on a pair of contentious national issues -- gun control and abortion -- have moved in a more conservative direction over the past year. In both cases, the changes have been driven in part by relatively large shifts among men, while opinions among women have not changed very much.

For the first time in a Pew Research survey, nearly as many people believe it is more important to protect the right of Americans to own guns (45%) than to control gun ownership (49%). As recently as a year ago, 58% said it was more important to control gun ownership while 37% said it was more important to protect the right to own guns.

	Dec 1993	May 1999	Mar 2000	Apr 2000	June 2003	Feb 2004	Apr 2007	Apr 2008	Apr 2009
<i>More important to...</i>	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Protect gun owners' rights	34	30	29	37	42	37	32	37	45
Control gun ownership	57	65	66	55	54	58	60	58	49
Don't know	9	5	5	8	4	5	8	5	6
	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

The latest national survey by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, conducted March 31-April 21 among 1,521 adults reached on landlines and cell phones, also finds public opinion about abortion more closely divided than it has been in several years. Currently, 46% say abortion should be legal in most cases (28%) or all cases (18%); 44% believe that abortion should be illegal in most (28%) or all cases (16%). Since the mid-1990s, majorities have consistently favored legal abortion, with the exception of an August 2001 survey by ABC News/*Washington Post*.

The proportion saying that abortion should be legal in all or most cases has declined to 46% from [54% last August](#). The decline in support for legal abortion has come entirely in the share saying abortion should be legal in most cases (from 37% to 28%); 18% say abortion should be legal in all cases, which is virtually unchanged from last August (17%). Currently, 44% say abortion should be illegal in most (28%) or all cases (16%), up slightly since last August (41%).



More Men Back Gun Rights

A widening gender gap is now apparent on both abortion and gun control. [A year ago](#), a narrow majority of men (51%) said it was more important to control gun ownership, while 45% said it was more important to protect the right of Americans to own guns. Today, by 57% to 38%, men say protecting gun rights is more important.

By contrast, 60% of women say it is more important to control gun ownership, while 33% see protecting gun rights as more important. In April 2008, 64% of women said controlling gun ownership was more important compared with 30% who placed greater importance on protecting the right to own guns.

More Important to Protect the Right to Own Guns or to Control Gun Ownership?					
	April 2008		April 2009		<i>Change in protect rights</i>
	Protect gun rights	Control gun ownership	Protect gun rights	Control gun ownership	
	%	%	%	%	
Total	37	58	45	49	+8
Men	46	51	57	38	+11
Women	30	64	33	60	+3
White	41	54	50	44	+9
Black	21	75	20	72	-1
White men	51	45	64	31	+13
White women	32	62	37	56	+5
College grad	37	58	42	53	+5
Some college	41	56	48	47	+7
HS grad	38	56	48	45	+10
Less than HS	33	64	32	59	-1
Republican	59	38	65	31	+6
Democrat	23	73	26	69	+3
Independent	39	56	48	45	+9
East	32	62	31	63	-1
Midwest	37	57	48	47	+11
South	40	57	49	45	+9
West	39	56	46	48	+7

The balance of opinion among independents has changed substantially over the past year. In April 2008, a majority of independents (56%) said it was more important to control gun ownership; currently, independents are divided, with 48% saying it is more important to protect gun rights and 45% saying it is more important to control gun ownership.

Support for gun rights has increased by 11 points in the Midwest, nine points in the South and seven points in the West; in all three regions, opinion is now evenly divided over whether it is more important to protect gun rights or control gun ownership. By contrast, there has been virtually no change among those living in the East, where a substantial majority (63%) continues to say that controlling gun ownership is the greater priority.

Gun Ownership and Gun Control

As might be expected, people who say they have guns in their home are much more supportive of gun rights than are those who do not own guns. Overall, a third of Americans -- including 42% of men and 25% of women -- say they have a gun, rifle or pistol in their home.

Gender Gap over Gun Control - Among Gun Owners			
	Protect gun rights %	Control gun ownership %	DK %
Gun owner* (33%)	68	28	4=100
Men	75	21	4=100
Women	57	39	4=100
Not a gun owner (63%)	31	63	6=100
Men	41	53	6=100
Women	24	69	7=100

* Said they happened to have any guns, rifles or pistols in their home.

By a wide margin (68% to 28%), gun owners say it is more important to protect the right to own guns than to control gun ownership. The much larger share that does not have a gun in their home (63% of the public) places greater priority on controlling gun ownership by 63% to 31%.

There are substantial gender differences in views about gun control among gun owners and non-owners alike. Fully three-quarters of men who say they have a gun in their home (75%) believe it is more important to protect gun rights than to control gun ownership; a much smaller majority of women gun owners agree (57%). Similarly, most men who do not have a gun in their home (53%) say it is more important to control gun ownership. But an even higher percentage of women who are not gun owners (69%) place a greater priority on controlling gun ownership.

Abortion Support Slips

	Aug 2008		April 2009		<i>Change in Legal</i>
	<u>Legal</u> %	<u>Ill- legal</u> %	<u>Legal</u> %	<u>Ill- legal</u> %	
Total	54	41	46	44	-8
Men	53	42	43	46	-10
Women	54	42	49	42	-5
18-29	52	45	47	48	-5
30-49	55	40	50	41	-5
50-64	58	37	47	41	-11
65+	46	48	36	48	-10
<i>Among men</i>					
18-49	53	42	45	47	-8
50+	53	41	40	45	-13
<i>Among women</i>					
18-49	55	41	53	41	-2
50+	53	42	45	43	-8
Legal combines "legal in all cases" and "legal in most cases." Illegal combines "legal in all cases" and "legal in most cases."					

Currently, 43% of men say that abortion should be legal in most or all cases, while 46% say abortion should be illegal in most or all cases. In August 2008, a greater proportion of men said that abortion should be legal than illegal (by 53% to 42%).

The change among women has been more modest -- 49% believe abortion should be legal in most or all cases, down from 54% last August.

People older than age 50 -- both men and women -- express less support for legal abortion than they did in August 2008. Just 40% of men older than 50 say abortion should be legal in most or all cases compared with 53% last summer. Support for legal abortion among women older than 50 has fallen from 53% to 45%.

There has been little change in opinions among women younger than age 50: 53% say that abortion should be legal in most or all cases, which is largely unchanged from August (55%). Support for abortion has declined since last April among men under age 50 (from 53% then to 45% currently).

Abortion Opinions: A Closer Look

Between August and late October 2008, the proportion supporting legal abortion ranged from 57% (in mid-October) to 53% (in late October), before declining to 46% currently. Though opinion among some subgroups varied significantly across those surveys, some trends are apparent, aside from the falloff in support among men.

There has been notable decline in the proportion of independents saying abortion should be legal in most or all cases; majorities of independents favored legal abortion in August and the two October surveys, but

just 44% do so today. In addition, the proportion of moderate and liberal Republicans saying abortion should be legal declined between August and late October (from 67% to 57%). In the current survey, just 43% of moderate and liberal Republicans say abortion should be legal in most or all cases.

Among religious groups, support for abortion has steadily declined since August among white mainline Protestants (from 69% then to 54% currently). And just 23% of white evangelical Protestants now favor legal abortion, down from 33% in August and mid-October and 28% in late October.

The change has been less pronounced among white non-Hispanic Catholics: In August, 51% said that abortion should be legal in most or all cases; in both October surveys, 55% favored legal abortion. In the current survey, 49% of white non-Hispanic Catholics say that abortion should be legal while 42% believe it should be illegal.

Recent Trend in Abortion Opinions

	Aug 2008		Mid-Oct 2008		Late-Oct 2008		April 2009		<i>Aug 2008- Apr 2009 Change</i>
	Ill-		Ill-		Ill-		Ill-		
	Legal %	legal %	Legal %	legal %	Legal %	legal %	Legal %	legal %	
Total	54	41	57	36	53	40	46	44	-8
Men	53	42	57	36	50	42	43	46	-10
Women	54	42	58	36	55	38	49	42	-5
White	55	40	57	36	53	42	47	44	-8
Black	49	46	63	31	45	45	50	38	+1
18-29	52	45	57	40	50	47	47	48	-5
30-49	55	40	62	33	58	36	50	41	-5
50-64	58	37	61	31	53	40	47	41	-11
65+	46	48	44	44	45	39	36	48	-10
College grad+	64	31	63	32	61	33	58	33	-6
Some college	57	39	55	38	49	43	49	44	-8
HS or less	47	48	51	41	44	48	38	50	-9
\$75,000+	63	33	65	32	62	33	59	34	-4
\$30-\$74,999	54	42	58	36	55	40	46	47	-8
Less than \$30,000	49	46	53	40	46	46	41	46	-8
Republican	41	56	40	54	37	59	32	63	-9
Democrat	63	33	71	23	62	33	63	27	0
Independent	55	40	60	34	56	34	44	45	-11
Conserv Rep	31	66	32	63	27	71	25	71	-6
Mod/Lib Rep	67	31	60	34	57	38	43	49	-24
Cons/Mod Dem	54	41	65	29	53	41	58	32	+4
Liberal Dem	81	17	84	12	82	15	78	15	-3
Protestant	49	46	51	34	43	50	38	52	-11
Catholic	49	47	56	38	57	38	47	42	-2
Unaffiliated	72	23	78	16	72	21	71	20	-1
<i>Among whites</i>									
Evangelical Protestant	33	62	33	61	28	68	23	70	-10
Mainline Protestant	69	26	62	29	60	34	54	34	-15
Non-Hisp Catholic	51	44	55	38	55	40	49	42	-2
N=	2,905		1,500		1,500		1,521		

Legal combines "legal in all cases" and "legal in most cases."
 Illegal combines "legal in all cases" and "legal in most cases."

View the topline and survey methodology at people-press.org.