

May 23, 2011

Americans Still Split Along "Pro-Choice," "Pro-Life" Lines

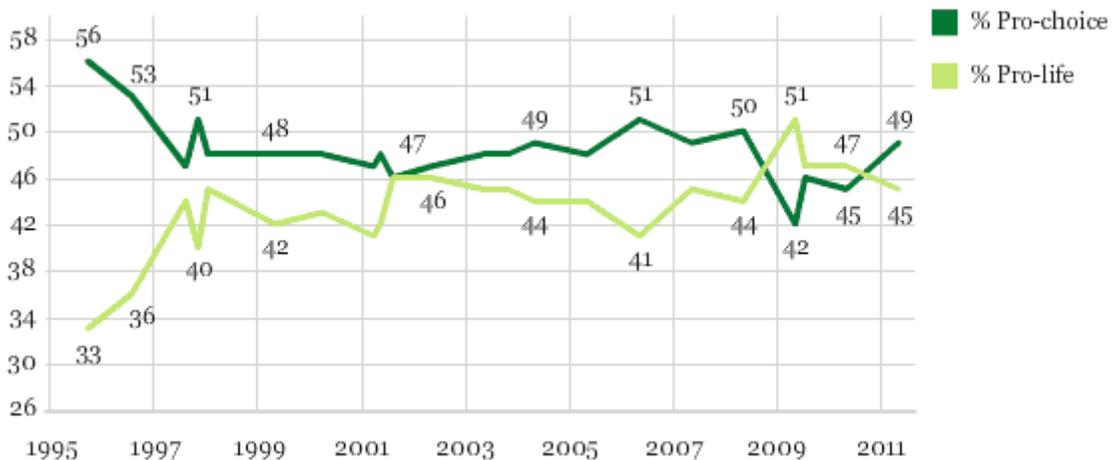
Majorities believe abortion is morally wrong, legal access to it should be restricted

by Lydia Saad

PRINCETON, NJ -- Americans are closely divided between those calling themselves "pro-choice" and those who are "pro-life," now 49% and 45%, respectively, in Gallup's 2011 update on U.S. abortion attitudes. This is similar to a year ago, when 45% were "pro-choice" and 47% "pro-life." However, it is the first time since 2008 that the "pro-choice" position has had the numerical advantage on this Gallup trend.

U.S. Adults' Position on Abortion

With respect to the abortion issue, would you consider yourself to be pro-choice or pro-life?



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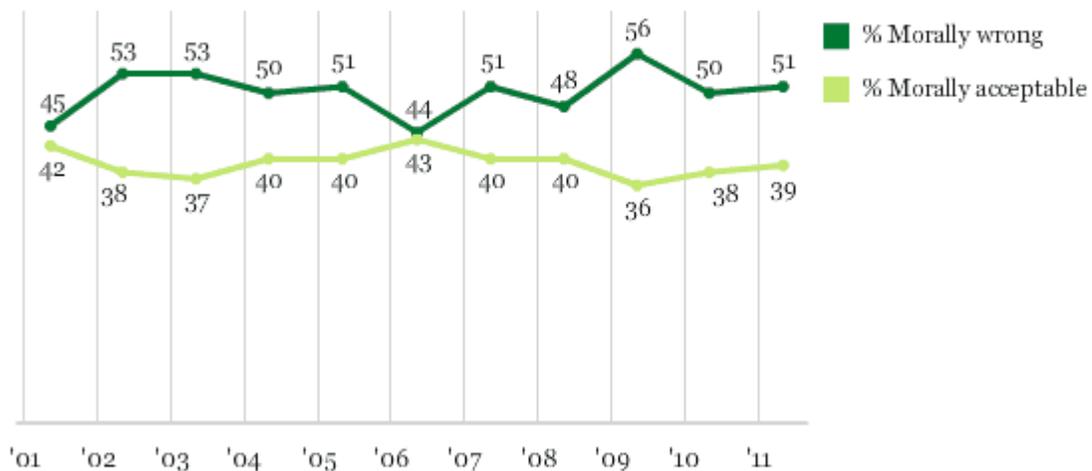
The current division on abortion contrasts with several points in the past, particularly in the mid-1990s and latter half of the 2000s, when at least half of Americans called themselves "pro-choice," as well as one occasion in 2009 when the majority was "pro-life."

Majority Says Abortion Is Morally Wrong

Gallup's 2011 Values and Beliefs survey, conducted May 5-8, finds a bit more public agreement about the morality of abortion. Just over half of Americans, 51%, believe abortion is "morally wrong," while 39% say it is "morally acceptable." Americans' views on this have been fairly steady since 2002, except for 2006, when they were evenly divided.

Americans' Views on the Morality of Abortion

Regardless of whether or not you think it should be legal, for each one, please tell me whether you personally believe that in general it is morally acceptable or morally wrong. How about -- abortion?



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Views on Legality Slightly More Polarized This Year

Gallup's longest-running measure of abortion views asks Americans if abortion should be legal under any circumstances, legal only under certain circumstances, or illegal in all circumstances.

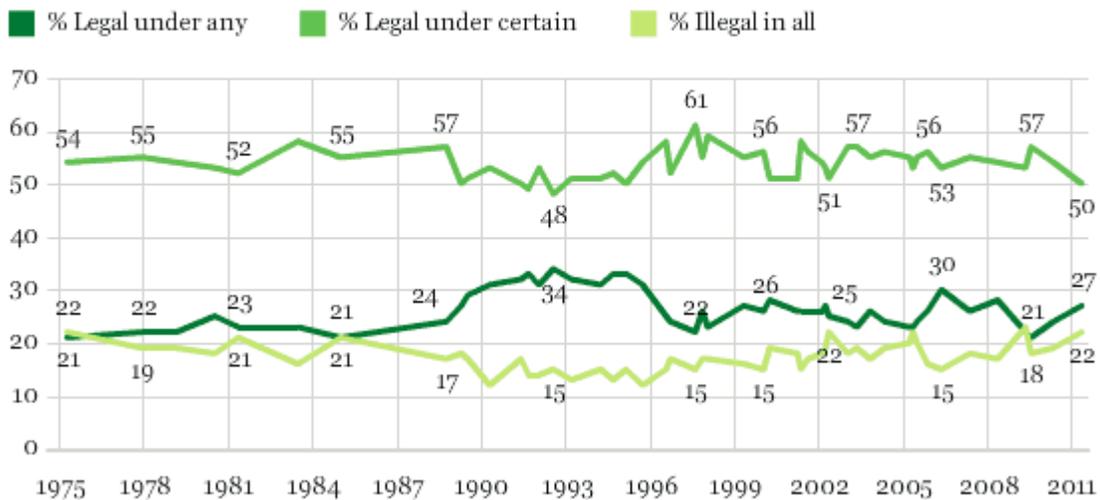
The plurality of Americans, 50%, continue to choose the middle position on this, saying abortion should be legal under certain circumstances, as majorities or pluralities have since 1975.

However, nearly as many, 49%, now hold one of the two more doctrinaire views. This includes 27% wanting abortion legal in all cases and 22% wanting it illegal in all cases.

The last time as many as 49% of Americans held one of the extreme views was in 1992. At that time, more than twice as many believed abortion should be legal rather than illegal in all cases, 34% vs. 15%.

Circumstances Under Which Abortion Should be Legal

Do you think abortions should be legal under any circumstances, legal only under certain circumstances, or illegal in all circumstances?



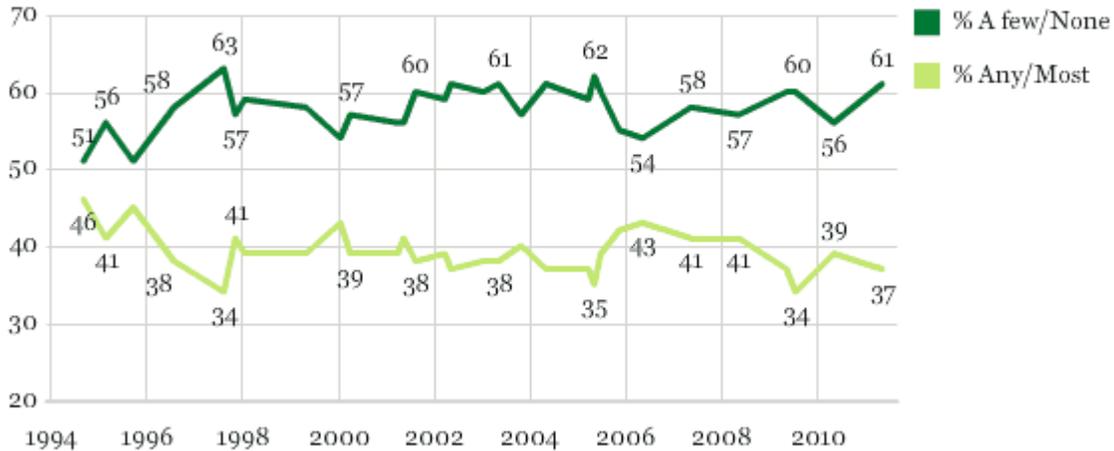
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Since 1994, Gallup has also asked those who think abortion should be legal under certain circumstances to say whether it should be legal in "most" or "only a few" circumstances. On this basis, Americans are rather conservative in their stance on abortion, with 61% now preferring that abortion be legal in only a few circumstances or no circumstances. By contrast, 37% want abortion legal in all or most circumstances.

Over the past two decades, Americans have consistently leaned toward believing abortion should be legal in only a few or no circumstances, although less so in the mid-1990s than since about 1997, when combined support for these has averaged close to 60%.

Summary of Circumstances Under Which Abortion Should Be Legal

Do you think abortions should be legal under any circumstances, legal only under certain circumstances, or illegal in all circumstances? (If legal under certain circumstances): Do you think abortion should be legal in most circumstances or only in a few circumstances?



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Views Differ by Generation and Party, Not Gender

Men and women are nearly identical in their views about the legality and morality of abortion, as well as in the percentage labeling themselves "pro-choice" vs. "pro-life."

By contrast, adults 55 and older have somewhat more conservative views on abortion than do young and middle-aged Americans. This is most pronounced with respect to the abortion labels. Majorities of adults under 55 call themselves "pro-choice," while about half of those 55 and older are "pro-life."

Notably, adults 18 to 34 are neither more nor less supportive of abortion rights than those aged 35 to 54. This conforms to [a recent Gallup review of abortion trends by age](#), which shows younger and middle-aged adults' views converging since 2000.

Summary of 2011 U.S. Abortion Views -- by Gender and Age

| | Men | Women | 18 to 34 years | 35 to 54 years | 55 and older |
|--------------------------------------|------------|--------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|
| | % | % | % | % | % |
| "Pro-choice" | 49 | 50 | 51 | 53 | 45 |
| "Pro-life" | 46 | 44 | 42 | 43 | 49 |
| Morally acceptable | 40 | 39 | 44 | 42 | 34 |
| Morally wrong | 51 | 51 | 53 | 48 | 51 |
| Legal in any circumstances | 24 | 29 | 31 | 28 | 22 |
| Legal in most circumstances | 12 | 8 | 9 | 12 | 9 |
| Legal in only a few circumstances | 42 | 36 | 35 | 39 | 42 |
| Illegal in all circumstances | 19 | 24 | 24 | 19 | 22 |
| Legal in any/most | 36 | 37 | 40 | 40 | 31 |
| Legal in a few/none | 61 | 60 | 59 | 58 | 64 |

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Gallup finds much stronger distinctions in abortion views along partisan lines. Two-thirds of Republicans call themselves pro-life, while two-thirds of Democrats are pro-choice.

Independents' stance on abortion is closer to Democrats' than Republicans' stance, with 51% calling themselves "pro-choice" and 41% "pro-life."

Accordingly, Republicans and Democrats also differ in their views on the morality and legality of abortion. Nearly three-quarters of Republicans consider abortion morally wrong and nearly 8 in 10 say abortion should be legal in only a few circumstances or illegal in all circumstances. By contrast, just over half of Democrats believe abortion is morally acceptable and say abortion should be legal in all or most circumstances.

Political independents are evenly divided on the moral correctness of abortion, but they tilt fairly strongly toward restrictive abortion laws, with 60% saying abortion should be legal in a few or no circumstances.

Summary of 2011 U.S. Abortion Views -- by Party ID

| | Republicans | Independents | Democrats |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|------------------|
| | % | % | % |
| "Pro-choice" | 28 | 51 | 68 |
| "Pro-life" | 67 | 41 | 27 |
| Morally acceptable | 18 | 45 | 55 |
| Morally wrong | 74 | 44 | 36 |
| Legal in any circumstances | 13 | 29 | 38 |
| Legal in most circumstances | 5 | 9 | 15 |
| Legal in only a few circumstances | 45 | 42 | 30 |
| Illegal in all circumstances | 34 | 18 | 14 |
| Legal in any/most | 18 | 38 | 53 |
| Legal in a few/none | 79 | 60 | 44 |

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Bottom Line

Americans' views on abortion held fairly steady over the past year, with the public still sharply divided over the "pro-life" and "pro-choice" labels. Nevertheless, majorities of Americans indicate some reluctance about abortion on both moral and legal grounds. This is seen most strongly among Republicans and older Americans.

Survey Methods

Results for this Gallup poll are based on telephone interviews conducted May 5-8, 2011, with a random sample of 1,018 adults, aged 18 and older, living in all 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia.

For results based on the total sample of national adults, one can say with 95% confidence that the maximum margin of sampling error is ± 4 percentage points.

Interviews are conducted with respondents on landline telephones and cellular phones, with interviews conducted in Spanish for respondents who are primarily Spanish-speaking. Each sample includes a minimum quota of 400 cell

phone respondents and 600 landline respondents per 1,000 national adults, with additional minimum quotas among landline respondents for gender within region. Landline telephone numbers are chosen at random among listed telephone numbers. Cell phones numbers are selected using random digit dial methods. Landline respondents are chosen at random within each household on the basis of which member had the most recent birthday.

Samples are weighted by gender, age, race, Hispanic ethnicity, education, region, adults in the household, and phone status (cell phone-only/landline only/both, cell phone mostly, and having an unlisted landline number).

Demographic weighting targets are based on the March 2010 Current Population Survey figures for the aged 18 and older non-institutionalized population living in U.S. telephone households. All reported margins of sampling error include the computed design effects for weighting and sample design.

In addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of public opinion polls.

[View methodology, full question results, and trend data.](#)

For more details on Gallup's polling methodology, visit www.gallup.com.