

JUNE 9, 2017

US Abortion Attitudes Stable; No Consensus on Legality

AMERICANS: ABORTION SHOULD BE LEGAL ONLY UNDER CERTAIN CIRCUMSTANCES

50%

GALLUP, MAY 3-7

by [Lydia Saad](#)

Story Highlights

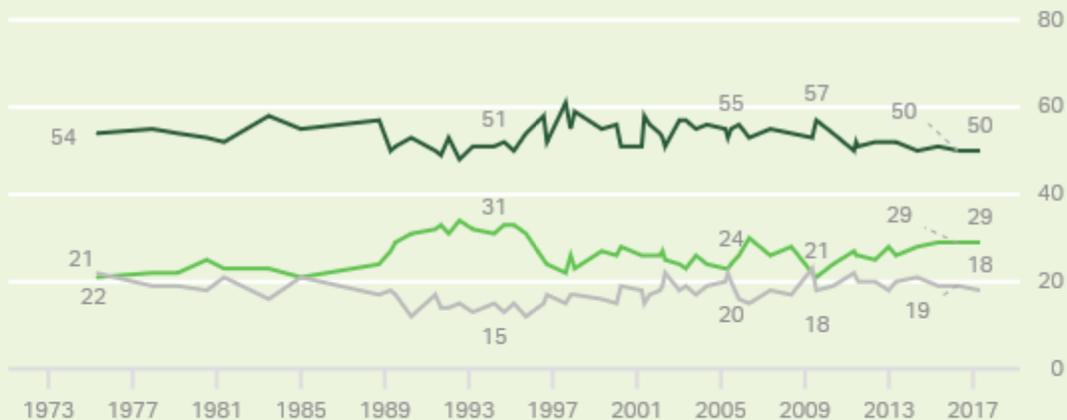
- Most Americans favor legal abortion, but many of these want limits
- Public closely split over whether abortion is morally acceptable
- Record percentage of Democrats, 71%, identify as "pro-choice"

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- Stability remains the name of the game in U.S. abortion attitudes. Half of Americans say abortion should be "legal only under certain circumstances," identical to a year ago, while 29% still say it should be legal in all circumstances. The smallest proportion -- 18% this year vs. 19% in 2016 -- say it should be illegal in all circumstances.

Americans' Views on the Legality of Abortion

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

■ % Legal under any circumstances ■ % Legal only under certain circumstances
■ % Illegal in all circumstances



GALLUP

The dispersion of abortion views today, with the largest segment of Americans favoring the middle position, is broadly similar to what Gallup has found in four decades of measurement.

Also, as is the case today, more Americans typically have thought abortion should be completely legal than completely illegal. The proportions have varied from a 20-percentage-point advantage for the always-legal position in 1994 to a virtual tie at several points. This year's 11-point edge for the always-legal position is similar to its average nine-point lead across the full trend.

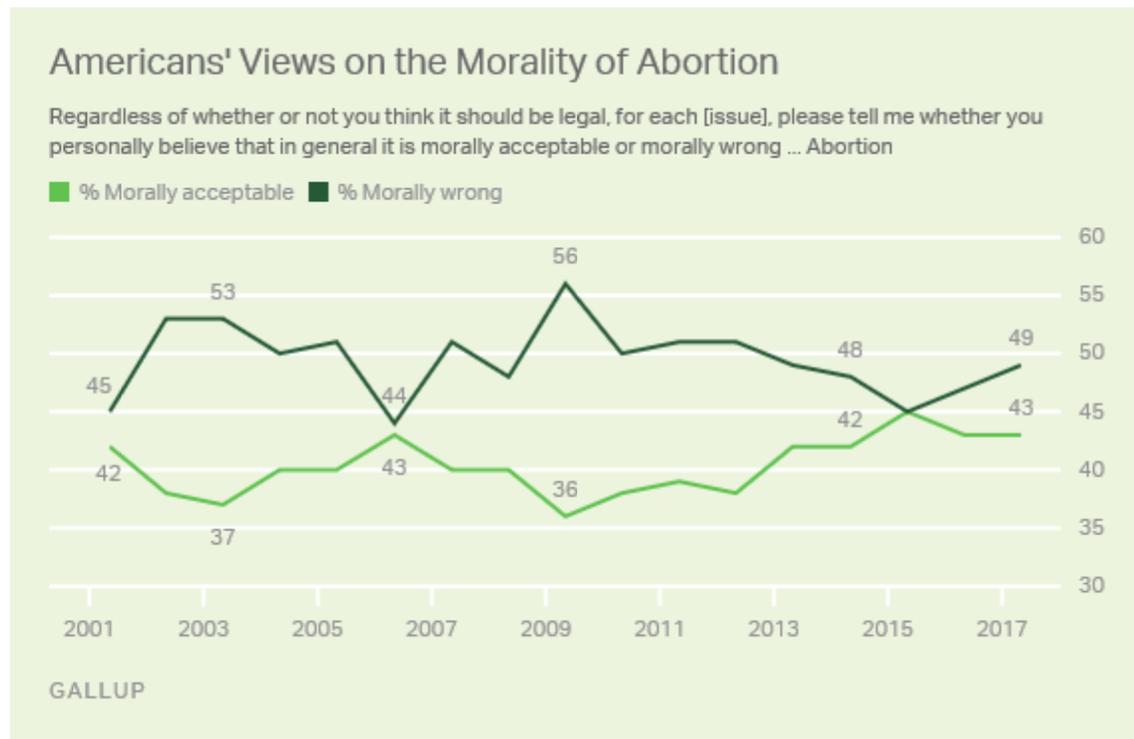
Gallup also asks those who say abortion should be legal in certain circumstances whether those should be most circumstances or only a few, and, by nearly a 3-to-1 ratio, they choose only a few, 36% vs. 13%. Thus, the slight majority of Americans (54%) favor curtailing abortion rights -- saying abortion should be illegal or legal in only a few circumstances. Slightly fewer, 42%, want access to abortion to be unrestricted or legal in most circumstances.

The 2017 results are based on Gallup's annual Values and Beliefs survey, conducted May 3-7.

Americans Closely Divided on Morality of Abortion, Abortion Labels

Americans' views on two other aspects of abortion -- whether it's moral and whether they consider themselves "pro-choice" or "pro-life" -- have also been steady over the past year.

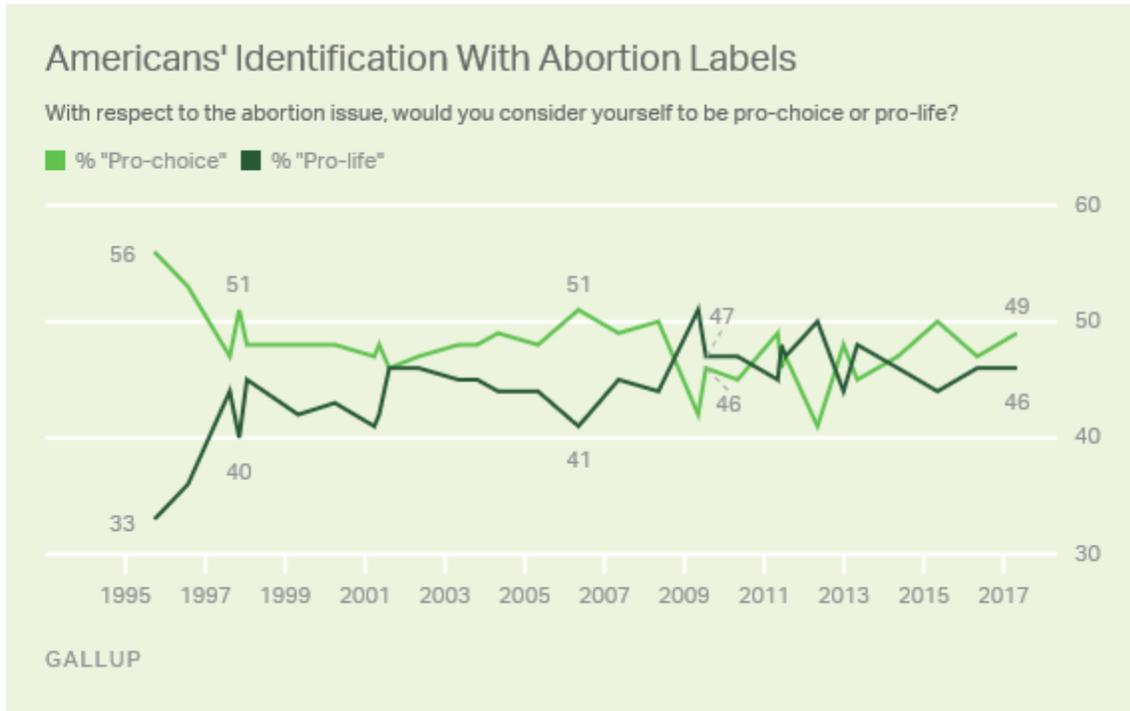
Slightly more U.S. adults today believe the procedure is morally wrong (49%) than morally acceptable (43%). This has also been the case in most readings since Gallup started tracking this annually in 2001.



In terms of the two abortion labels, 49% of U.S. adults consider themselves pro-choice on the abortion issue, while 46% consider themselves pro-life.

Again, this represents almost no change compared with a year ago and is consistent with the close division seen over the past decade. By contrast, in the earliest years Gallup asked this, in 1995 and 1996, there was greater attachment to the pro-choice

label, with 56% and 53%, respectively, identifying as such. Americans continued to prefer the pro-choice label over the pro-life label by a slight margin in most years through 2009, but the two have since been about tied.



Women Tilt Slightly More "Pro-Choice"

Women and men hold roughly similar positions on abortion, with the largest segments of both groups believing abortion should be legal in only certain circumstances and slightly more calling abortion morally wrong than morally acceptable.

At the same time, slightly more women than men take the always-legal position on abortion as well as call themselves pro-choice. These gender patterns are consistent with what Gallup has found in most of the past several years.

Summary of 2017 Abortion Views by Gender

	Men	Women
	%	%
LEGALITY OF ABORTION		
Legal in all circumstances	24	33

	Men	Women
	%	%
Legal in only certain circumstances	55	46
Illegal in all circumstances	18	18
MORALITY OF ABORTION		
Morally acceptable	43	43
Morally wrong	48	49
ABORTION POSITION		
"Pro-choice"	45	52
"Pro-life"	48	43

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Record Percentage of Democrats Identify as "Pro-Choice"

Abortion attitudes differ far more by political party than by gender, a finding seen across all three questions. The majority of Republicans think abortion should be legal in only certain circumstances, and solid majorities call it morally wrong and consider themselves pro-life. By contrast, the largest segment of Democrats say abortion should be legal in all circumstances, while solid majorities consider abortion morally acceptable and call themselves pro-choice.

Political independents fall between the two major parties on these measures, although they come a bit closer to Republicans than to Democrats in their choice of abortion labels.

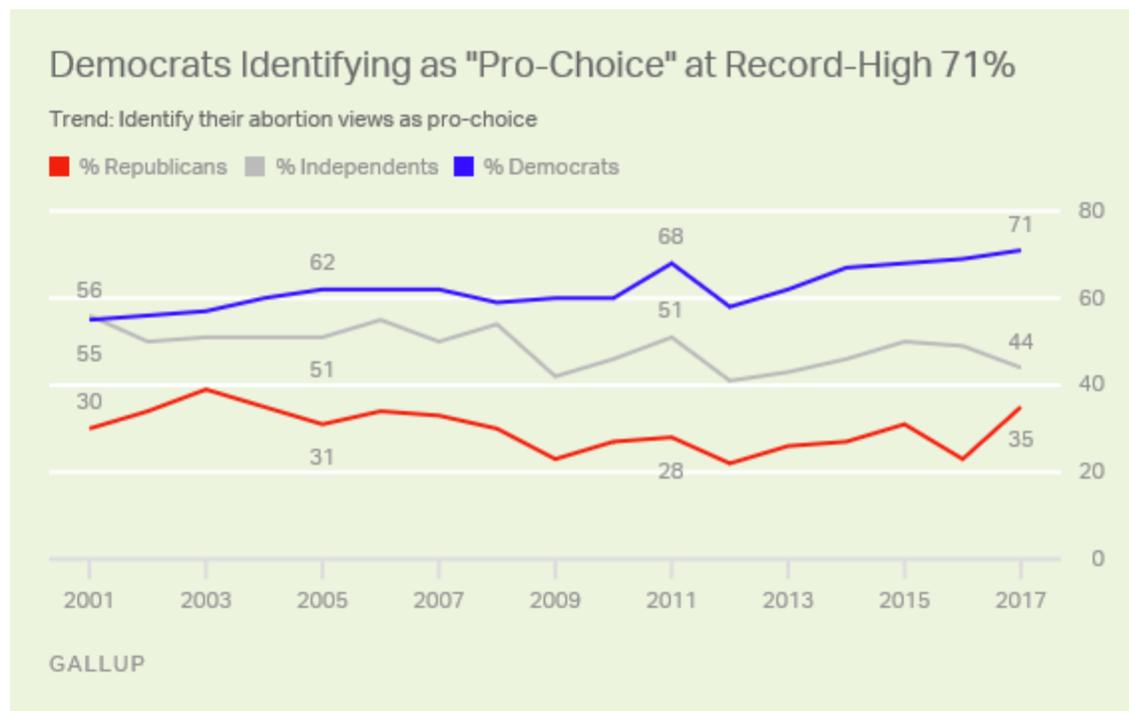
Record Percentage of Democrats Identify as "Pro-Choice"

	Republicans	Independents	Democrats
	%	%	%
LEGALITY OF ABORTION			
Legal in all circumstances	14	28	46
Legal in only certain circumstances	56	51	44
Illegal in all circumstances	28	17	8
MORALITY OF ABORTION			

	Republicans	Independents	Democrats
	%	%	%
Morally acceptable	27	42	61
Morally wrong	65	48	32
ABORTION POSITION			
"Pro-choice"	36	44	71
"Pro-life"	61	48	26

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The 2017 partisan differences are also in line with prior years, although Gallup trends chronicle a gradual increase in the percentage of Democrats calling themselves pro-choice since 2001. The 71% reading this year is the highest in the past 17 years. Meanwhile, the percentage who are pro-choice among independents has waned somewhat, and, although it has varied among Republicans, it is similar today to 2001.



Bottom Line

There is no consensus among the American public for making abortion completely legal or illegal. Rather, the largest segment falls in the middle, saying it should be legal but with restrictions. Nearly half of U.S. adults also consider abortion morally wrong.

This helps explain how the states have been able to pass a vast array of laws limiting when, where and how abortions can be performed. It also sheds light on how citizens can shift from electing a staunchly pro-choice president in Barack Obama to electing an avowed pro-life one in Donald Trump. For most Americans, the issue involves shades of gray, not black and white.

Americans' ambivalence on abortion is also seen in the nearly 50-50 division in their self-identification as pro-choice vs. pro-life. These views are not evenly disbursed nationally but reflect a blending of mostly pro-life Republicans and mostly pro-choice Democrats, groups that do anything but blend when it comes to abortion policy.

Historical data are available in [Gallup Analytics](#).

SURVEY METHODS

Results for this Gallup poll are based on telephone interviews conducted May 3-7, 2017, with a random sample of 1,011 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, the margin of sampling error is ± 4 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. All reported margins of sampling error include computed design effects for weighting.

Each sample of national adults includes a minimum quota of 70% cellphone respondents and 30% landline respondents, with additional minimum quotas by time zone within region. Landline and cellular telephone numbers are selected using random-digit-dial methods.

[View survey methodology, complete question responses and trends.](#)

Learn more about how the [Gallup Poll Social Series](#) works.

June 9, 2017 Gallup <http://www.gallup.com/poll/211901/abortion-attitudes-stable-no-consensus-legality.aspx>
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