

# **According to one poll, majority is 'pro-life' Different results on question of whether abortion should be legal: Different results on question of whether abortion should be legal**

News in the [June 16, 2009](#) issue

Conservative groups are hailing—and some pro-choice commentators are questioning—a new Gallup poll that finds that a majority of Americans now describe themselves as pro-life.

The figures, released May 15 from a survey conducted May 7-10, show a self-described pro-life majority for the first time since Gallup started asking the question in 1995 as part of its annual Values and Beliefs Survey. Of the 1,015 adults surveyed, 51 percent described themselves as pro-life while 42 percent said they were pro-choice.

Last year, 50 percent of respondents described themselves as pro-choice, while only 44 percent said they were pro-life.

Groups opposed to abortion rights seized in particular on Gallup's analysis that President Obama's strong support for abortion rights—including rollbacks of some of the anti-abortion-rights policies of his predecessor—may have spurred a backlash.

Wendy Wright, president of Concerned Women for America, said: "This dramatic shift of more people becoming pro-life did not happen in a vacuum. In the last two decades, ultrasound [images] made people aware that abortion kills a baby, and women have been vocal about regretting their abortion.

"But the most significant development in the last year is that America has the most pro-abortion president in our history," she said. "Ironically, Obama's radical abortion

policies and nominees may have helped make America more pro-life.”

However, when it came to the separate question of whether abortion should be legal, the survey found that a majority of Americans—53 percent—believe that abortion should be legal “under certain circumstances.” That figure in Gallup polls has remained fairly constant— between around 50 and 60 percent of Americans—since 1975.

Some social scientists and other analysts have cautioned against placing too much emphasis on a single survey or on the labels of “pro-life” and “pro-choice.”

In a May 15 blog post analyzing the Gallup poll results on the *Atlantic Monthly* Web site, Chris Good pointed to other recent polls that found higher support for the “pro-choice” label—including a CNN/Opinion Research poll conducted in late April that found pro-choicers outnumbering pro-lifers 49 to 45 percent. That poll, Good noted, had a sample size almost double that of the recent Gallup poll.

“Look beyond the self-identification of ‘pro-life’ and ‘pro-choice,’” he urged. “The abortion debate in America is about policy, not about those words—they do not encapsulate, for instance, whether a majority want abortion to be legal for pregnant women whose lives [are] threatened by the pregnancy in the third trimester. Some people who call themselves ‘pro-life’ might say abortion should be legal in that case.”

Good pointed to other recent surveys by respected polling agencies that asked about abortion rights in different ways. For instance, an April poll by Quinnipiac University found 37 percent of Americans saying abortion should be “usually legal” and only 27 percent saying it should be “usually illegal.” *-Associated Baptist Press*