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ABORTION
public opinion

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New AEI Study Shows Abortion Issue Is Not a Deciding Factor for Most Voters Americans are both pro-choice and pro-life

Campaign 2000, like previous elections, has spurred media interest in the abortion issue. Perhaps surprisingly, abortion is not a pivotal issue for the vast majority of voters, according to a new study of abortion attitudes released by the American Enterprise Institute in Washington, D.C., and the Roper Center at the University of Connecticut. Now in its second edition, *Public Opinion about Abortion* by Everett Carl Ladd and Karlyn H. Bowman is the most comprehensive and current collection of polls and trends available on the issue.

"The abortion issue is never far from the surface of our politics," says Bowman, a resident fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, "because so many candidates and activists feel passionately about it. The media cover their views. Most Americans, however, are both pro-life and pro-choice."

"They value the sanctity of life and the importance of individual choice," explains co-author Ladd, professor emeritus of political science at the University of Connecticut.

Public Opinion about Abortion, second edition, (AEI Press and Roper Center; August 9, 1999; \$9.95; 60 pages) includes complete trend data from the nation's major pollsters including Gallup, Louis Harris and Associates, CBS and the New York Times, NBC News and the Wall Street Journal on all aspects of the abortion debate. The authors include exit poll data that chart the views of voters in presidential elections on the issue. The new study shows that public opinion on abortion had remained remarkably stable since 1973 when the Supreme Court legalized abortion in its landmark decision, *Roe v. Wade*.

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Questions for Karlyn Bowman or Everett Carll Ladd, Authors of **Public Opinion about Abortion**

1. **How do Americans feel about abortion?** The issue of abortion reflects deep tension in the American people. Most Americans hold both pro-choice and pro-life sentiments at the same time. (pp. 2-3)
2. **How can Americans hold both pro-choice and pro-life sentiments at the same time?** Most Americans recognize the sanctity of human life and believe that abortion is morally wrong. However, they also place a high value on an individual's right to free choice. Large majorities support abortion only under certain circumstances and favor policies that place limitations on legal abortions. (pp. 7, 9-11)
3. **What kind of an abortion policy would most Americans favor?** The majority of the American people support legal abortion if the woman's health is in danger; if there is a strong chance of a serious defect in the baby; or if the pregnancy is the result of a rape. A majority of Americans also favor a requirement that doctors inform patients about alternatives to abortion; a twenty-four hour waiting period before an abortion is performed; spousal notification; and parental consent. (pp.8-10)
4. **Is there much public support for banning abortions altogether?** No, in most polls, six in ten or more of those polled would oppose a constitutional amendment to ban abortions. (p. 11)
5. **How much has public opinion changed since *Roe v. Wade*, the 1973 landmark Supreme Court ruling?** Public opinion on abortion has not changed dramatically since *Roe v. Wade*. None of the court decisions after *Roe v. Wade* has altered the basic configuration of attitudes on abortion. (p.1)
6. **Is abortion a significant issue for voters today?** Studies conducted by several survey organizations in the 1992 and 1996 elections strongly suggest that abortion is not a pivotal issue for the majority of voters. The Gallup surveys in particular show that, for a plurality of voters, a candidate's position on abortion would be just one of many important factors when voting. (pp.16-17)
7. **If abortion is not a pivotal issue for most voters, why does it get so much media coverage in political elections?** The abortion issue has been a focus of political campaigns in recent years as convention delegates and party activists tend to have views on issues that are stronger or purer than those held by the general population. As long as the majority of Americans do not want to outlaw abortion or to allow abortion to exist completely unrestricted, the abortion issue will continue to be hotly debated in the media. (pp. 16-17)
8. **Is there a gender gap between men and women on the abortion issue?** Men and women do not differ significantly on the abortion issue. A person's marital status produces stronger differences on abortion questions than does a person's gender. Married voters are much less accepting of the idea that abortion should be legal in all cases than are single voters. (p.14)