

Support for Abortion Laws

WASHINGTON - A new online survey conducted for the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops finds a majority of participants support at least some restrictions on abortion.

The survey conducted online Dec. 10-12 asked 2,341 people about the circumstances under which they would favor or oppose legal abortion and about what kind of regulations of abortion they would support or oppose.

Among its findings were that 78 percent favor requiring abortions be performed only by licensed physicians and that 72 percent favor requiring women seeking abortions be told of the potential physical and psychological risks and about alternatives such as adoption.

It found 11 percent think abortion should be illegal in all circumstances and 38 percent said it should be legal only under limited circumstances, such as in cases of rape or incest or to save the life of the mother. Forty-two percent said abortion should be legal for any reason.

Among those who said it should be legal for any reason, 9 percent would place no limits on abortion through all nine months of pregnancy, while 27 percent would allow unrestricted abortion only in the first trimester, and 6 percent through the first six months.

Among possible restrictions or regulations on abortion about which participants were asked:

- 47 percent said they strongly or somewhat strongly favor laws prohibiting the use of taxpayer funds for abortion.
- 58 percent at least somewhat strongly favor laws protecting medical personnel from being required to participate in abortions.
- Of an assortment of laws such as those requiring parental notification for minors who have abortions, or making partial-birth abortion illegal, only 11 percent of the

survey participants said they would not support any of the measures. Fifty percent of the participants said they would not oppose any of the six mentioned restrictions.

Between 5 percent and 9 percent of the participants in the survey declined to answer some of the questions. The survey questions on abortion were part of an omnibus questionnaire on a wide range of topics. Participants could click on “decline to answer” as they chose, said Deirdre McQuade, assistant director for policy and communications at the USCCB’s Office of Pro-Life Activities.

The news release from the USCCB noted that Harris Interactive, which fielded the study for the USCCB, said the data was weighted using a propensity scoring system to be representative of the total U.S. population on the basis of region, age within gender, education, household income, race/ethnicity and propensity to be on the Internet. Harris said no estimates of sampling error could be calculated, according to the USCCB release.

David Krane, vice president for public affairs and policy for Harris Interactive, told CNS that Harris considers such surveys to be at least as accurate as the traditional phone polling of random samples of the public. He said the database from which the survey participants were chosen includes several million people who have agreed to be part of occasional surveys on a range of topics.

“We know quite a lot about them based on their demographic profiles,” Krane said. He explained that Harris compares the results of their weighted method of choosing survey participants against other sources of information, such as census reports. Election results and exit polls also are used to compare whether Harris’ online participants represent the range of demographic variety and opinions of the overall U.S. population, he said.

“We take the position that it is as accurate as traditional surveys,” he said.

The findings are generally similar to those of other polls conducted recently. The Web site, www.pollingreport.com, compiles data from major poll releases, where the following results were presented.

A September survey by NBC News and The Wall Street Journal found 25 percent

said abortion should always be legal and another 24 percent said it should be legal most of the time. In that survey, 10 percent said it should be illegal without exception and 37 percent said it should be illegal with few exceptions.

A Time magazine poll released in August found 46 percent said abortion should be always legal in the first three months of pregnancy.

A 2005 survey by CNN/USA Today/Gallup found 69 percent favored laws requiring minors to get consent from their parents before an abortion. A 2006 Gallup Poll found 38 percent of Americans favored making abortion laws more strict; 20 percent wanted them to be less strict and 39 percent wanted them to be kept the same.