

THE FIELD POLL

THE INDEPENDENT AND NON-PARTISAN SURVEY
OF PUBLIC OPINION ESTABLISHED IN 1947 AS
THE CALIFORNIA POLL BY MERVIN FIELD

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TWO-THIRDS OF CALIFORNIANS REMAIN PRO-CHOICE. SUPPORT THE U.S. SUPREME COURT UPHOLDING THE ROE V. WADE DECISION SHOULD IT COME UP AGAIN FOR REVIEW.

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by Mark DiCamillo and Mervin Field

There has been little change in Californians' consistently pro-choice position about abortion laws over the past twenty years. Currently, 64% of this state's adults and 70% of its voters either believe there should be no change in existing abortion laws or feel that laws should be changed to make it easier for a woman to obtain an abortion.

A similar 63% majority of adults and nearly three in four (73%) of this state's registered voters want the current U.S. Supreme Court to uphold rather than overturn its 1973 Roe v. Wade decision should it come up again for review.

With regard to late-term abortions, 72% of California adults and 74% of voters support allowing this alternative if the health of the mother is in danger.

These are the findings from the latest *Field Poll* survey on the issue of abortion completed in late February.

Little change in California public opinion about abortion

Californians' sentiments with respect to the issue of abortion have remained stable over the past twenty years. For example, in 1987 the distribution of opinions among this state's residents was 27% believing that laws should be changed to make an abortion easier to obtain, 43% wanted to maintain the status quo allowing for abortion in the early stages of pregnancy, and 28% supported laws to make abortion more difficult to obtain.

In its regular updates of public opinion, including this one, *The Field Poll* has found majorities of between 64% and 75% of Californians favoring either no change in abortion laws or would support making abortion easier to obtain.

Table 1
Trend of California public opinion about abortion laws

	Make abortion easier to obtain	Make no changes to existing laws	Make abortion harder to obtain	No opinion
2006 (all adults)	21%	43	28	8
2006 (registered voters)	23%	47	22	8
2005*	23%	45	25	7
2004*	26%	45	22	7
2003*	21%	47	26	6
2002*	27%	41	23	9
2000*	28%	43	23	6
1998*	20%	46	29	5
1997*	24%	42	26	8
1996	25%	43	26	8
1995	29%	38	28	5
1993	31%	38	24	7
1992	34%	41	22	3
1991	33%	39	22	6
1987	27%	43	25	5

* 1997-2005 measures conducted among registered voters only. Previous measures conducted among all adults.

Sub-group differences

Sub-groups of the population more likely than others to favor making abortion more difficult to obtain include born-again Christians (44%), Latinos (40%), registered Republicans (40%), Catholics (37%), Protestants (33%), and those in the 18-39 age group (35%). However, even among these groups fewer than half take the “pro-life” position which advocates placing more restrictions on access to abortion.

Table 2
California public opinion about abortion laws – by subgroup
(among California adults)

	<u>Make abortion easier to obtain</u>	<u>Make no changes</u>	<u>Make abortion harder to obtain</u>	<u>No opinion</u>
Total adults	21%	43	28	8
<u>Registered voters</u>	<u>23%</u>	<u>47</u>	<u>22</u>	<u>8</u>
Democrats	34%	47	10	9
Republicans	10%	45	40	5
Non-partisans/others*	22%	51	14	13
<u>Gender</u>				
Male	25%	42	26	7
Female	18%	44	30	8
<u>Age</u>				
18 – 39	19%	42	35	4
40 – 64	22%	46	22	10
65 or older*	31%	37	24	8
<u>Race/ethnicity</u>				
White non-Hispanic	25%	49	21	5
Latino	12%	38	40	10
Other*	24%	37	28	11
<u>Religion</u>				
Protestant	24%	37	33	6
Catholic	12%	42	37	9
Other/no preference	29%	47	15	9
<u>Born-again Christian</u>				
Yes	23%	23	44	10
No	21%	50	22	7

* Small sample base.

Strong support for upholding Roe v. Wade

Thirty-three years ago the U.S. Supreme Court, in its landmark Roe v. Wade decision, ruled that women in this country had a constitutional right to abortion. In recent years there have been a flurry of legislative proposals in some states to place greater restrictions on access to abortion. Most notably, last month the state of South Dakota passed a law that would essentially ban abortion except when the mother's life was in danger. It is expected that legal challenges to this law could find their way back to the U.S. Supreme Court, forcing it to revisit its 1973 decision.

The current survey asked Californians what they feel the current U.S. Supreme Court should do if it were to reconsider its Roe v. Wade ruling. Results show that 63% of California adults and 73% of voters favor the Court upholding its previous decision. This compares to 26% of adults and just 19% of voters who favor overturning the law.

Those subgroups who are most supportive of the Court upholding its Roe v. Wade decision are registered Democrats (89%), those affiliated with non-Christian religions or who have no religious preference (80%), non-partisans (75%), and white non-Hispanics (74%).

Table 3
Would you like to see the current U.S. Supreme Court
uphold or overturn its 1973 Roe v. Wade decision on abortion?
(among California adults)

	<u>Uphold</u>	<u>Overturn</u>	<u>No opinion</u>
Total adults	63%	26	11
<u>Registered voters</u>	<u>73%</u>	<u>19</u>	<u>8</u>
Democrats	89%	8	3
Republicans	53%	34	14
Non-partisans/others*	75%	17	8
<u>Gender</u>			
Male	62%	26	12
Female	64%	27	9
<u>Age</u>			
18 – 39	57%	33	10
40 – 64	69%	20	11
65 or older*	67%	21	12
<u>Race/ethnicity</u>			
White non-Hispanic	74%	20	6
Latino	41%	39	20
Other*	68%	25	7
<u>Religion</u>			
Protestant	62%	27	11
Catholic	48%	40	12
Other/no preference	80%	12	8
<u>Born-again Christian</u>			
Yes	51%	37	12
No	68%	22	10

* Small sample base.

Continued support for allowing late term abortions if a mother's life is in danger

One continuing controversy about the abortion issue has to do with whether the procedure should be allowed during the later stages of a pregnancy if a mother's health was in danger. When Californians are asked about this, a 72% majority of adults and 74% of registered voters favor allowing abortion in that situation. These results are similar to those found in previous *Field Poll* surveys conducted over the past ten years.

Table 4
**Approve/disapprove of abortion during late stages of pregnancy
if health of mother in danger**

	<u>Approve</u>	<u>Disapprove</u>	<u>No opinion</u>
2006 (all adults)	72%	21	7
2006 (registered voters)	74%	16	10
2005	73%	15	12
2002	70%	19	11
1998	78%	16	6
1997	78%	16	6

Note: All previous measures conducted among registered voters only.

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Information About The Survey

Sample Details

The findings in this report are based on a random sample survey of 500 California adults age 18 or older, including 343 registered voters. The survey was conducted by telephone February 12-26, 2006 in English and Spanish.

Telephone households were sampled using a random digit dial methodology, which randomly selects operating landline telephone exchanges within all areas codes serving California households in proportion to population. Within each exchange, a random sample of telephone numbers are created by adding random digits to the selected telephone exchange. This method gives each phone listing an equal chance of being selected and permits access to all landline telephone numbers statewide, both listed and unlisted.

According to statistical theory, 95% of the time results from the overall sample have a sampling error of +/- 4.5 percentage points.

There are other possible sources of error in any survey other than sampling variability. Different results could occur because of differences in question wording, sampling, or sequencing or through undetected omission or errors in interviewing or data processing. Extensive efforts were made to minimize such potential errors.

Questions Asked

Do you favor laws that would make it more difficult for a woman to get an abortion, favor laws that would make it easier to get an abortion, or should no change be made to existing abortion laws?

In 1973 the U.S. Supreme Court's Roe versus Wade decision established a woman's constitutional right to an abortion, at least in the first three months of pregnancy. Would you like to see the current U.S. Supreme Court uphold its 1973 Roe versus Wade decision on abortion or overturn this decision?

Do you approve or disapprove of allowing abortion in the later stages of pregnancy if the health of the mother were in danger?