

# Canadian Public Opinion on Abortion

A survey of 1,007 Canadians

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## 1.0 Executive Summary

Abacus Data's survey of 1,007 Canadians over the age of 18 found a majority of Canadians (59%) support legally protecting human life before birth. Despite this, Canadians generally support the right of women to choose to have an abortion. Nonetheless, a majority of Canadians (52%) said we should not be afraid of an open debate about the issue.

Ultimately the debate separates parties along issues of both funding and regulation. With over half of NDP supporters in favour of public funding and only around one third of Conservatives in support, their stances are clear. Almost no NDP supporter is willing to make abortions illegal compared to 15% of Conservatives who believe this should be the case.

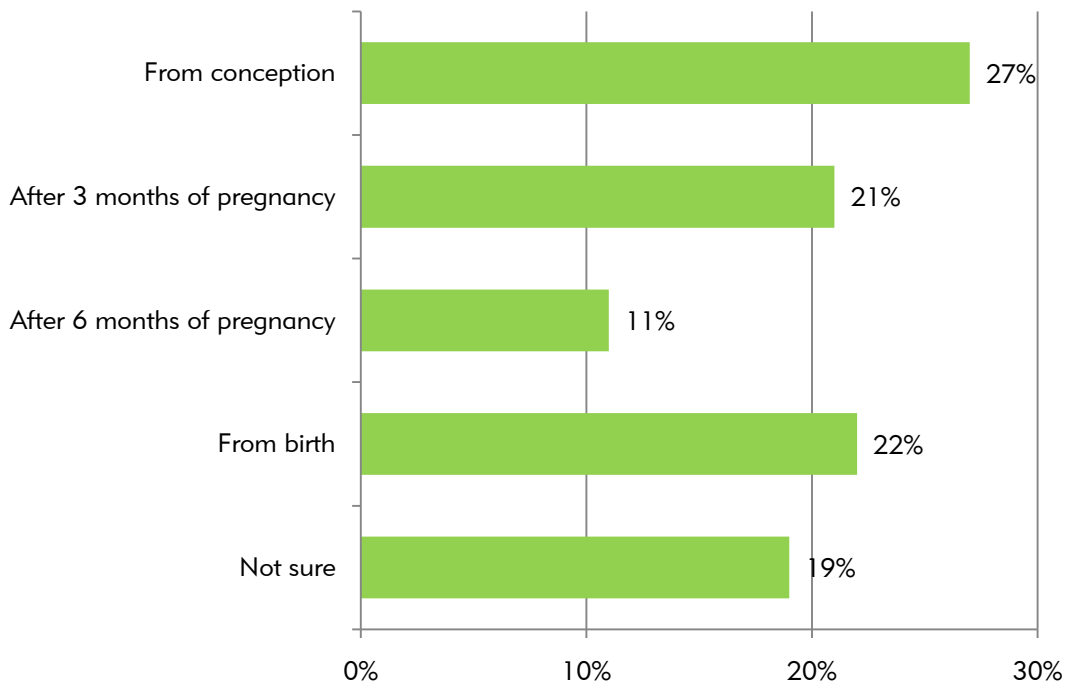
Although demographic and regional divisions are apparent, in only some cases are divided parties willing to openly debate the issue or reconsider public health funding.

### 1.1 Key Findings

- 59% of Canadians surveyed believed that human life should be legally protected in some way before birth. 27% of Canadians believe that human life should be protected from the moment of conception, 32% believe human life should be protected during pregnancy, while 22% believe it should be protected after birth.
- When asked about their position on abortion, 52% said they support the right of a woman to make choices about their body, 17% support abortion in only extreme circumstances, 18% are opposed to abortion but recognize the right of individuals to make their own choices, and 8% believe abortion should be illegal.
- 45% of Canadians think that abortions should be entirely funded by public health care while 42% believe the procedure should be paid for by the patient or by the public system in only extreme circumstances.
- 52% of Canadians said they are not afraid of a public debate about abortion while 26% believe it is an issue that should be left alone.

## 2.0 Legally Protecting Human Life

When do you believe human life should be legally protected?  
(n=1,006, weighted)



Atlantic Canadians are more likely to believe that human life should be protected from conception than respondents from other parts of the country. Over four in ten Canadians from Atlantic Canada would agree that human life should be legally protected beginning at the point of conception compared with 27% in Alberta and Ontario.

There were clear generational divides over when respondents believed human life should be protected. Twenty percent of respondents aged 18 to 29 believed that human life should be protected at the moment of conception compared with 39% aged 60 and over.

The most notable distinction here was among Conservative Party supporters, of whom 64% believed legal protection should start before the point of birth, compared with 56% of NDP supporters.

### 3.0 Views on Abortion

Overall, Canadians surveyed were far more likely to believe in a woman's right to choose when presented with four statements regarding abortion in Canada.

Over one in two Canadians (52%) said that they support the right of women to make choices about their own bodies while 17% said they support legal abortion but only in extreme circumstances.

Only 8% of respondents said they were personally opposed to abortion and felt that it should be illegal in Canada. Opposition to abortion was highest among seniors (12%) and among Conservative Party supporters (15%).

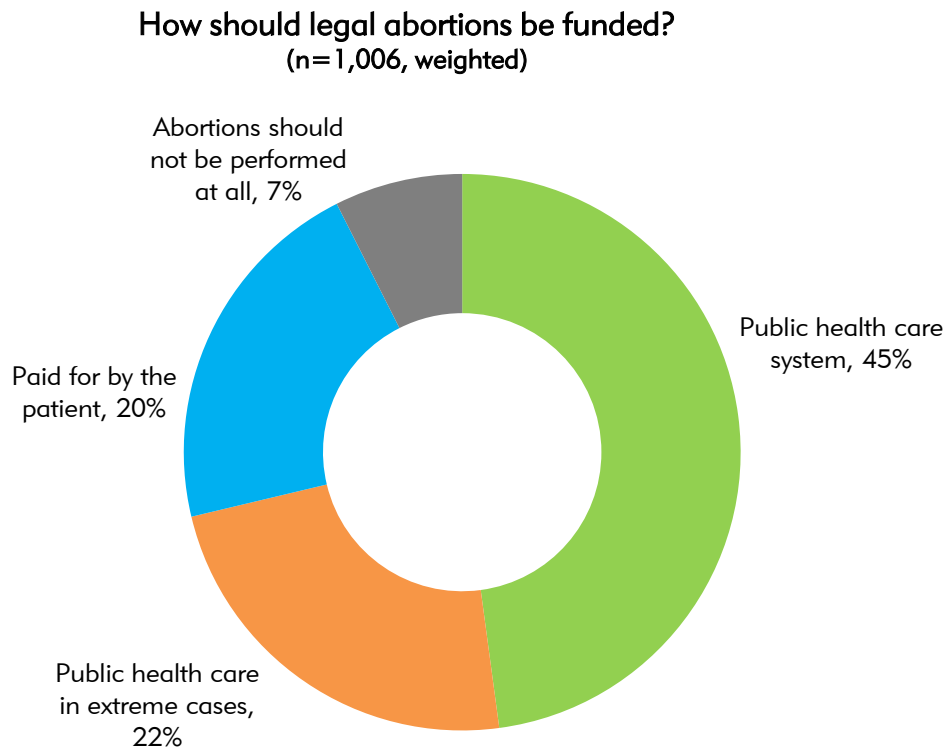
**Which of the following statements, if any, best represents your view on abortion?**  
(n=1,006, weighted)

| Position on Abortion  | Percentage |
|---|------------|
| I support the right of women to make choices about their own bodies                                   | 52%        |
| I support legal abortion, but only in extreme circumstances   | 17%        |
| I am personally opposed to abortion, but recognize the right of individuals to make their own choices | 18%        |
| I am personally opposed to abortion and feel that it should be illegal in Canada                      | 8%         |
| None of these   | 1%         |
| Unsure  | 4%         |

## 4.0 Funding Abortions in Canada

When it comes the funding of legal abortions, Canadians were more divided. Over four in ten Canadians surveyed (45%) believed that legal abortions should be covered entirely by the public health care system. Another 22% felt that the public health care system should fund them only in extreme cases while 20% believed that they should be paid for by the patient.

Thus, although a large percent respect a woman's right to choose, many do not think taxpayer funds should be used to pay for them.



Conservative Party supporters were less likely to believe that the public health care system should fund abortions than other party supporters. There was little variation on attitudes towards funding abortion across regions, gender, or age groups.

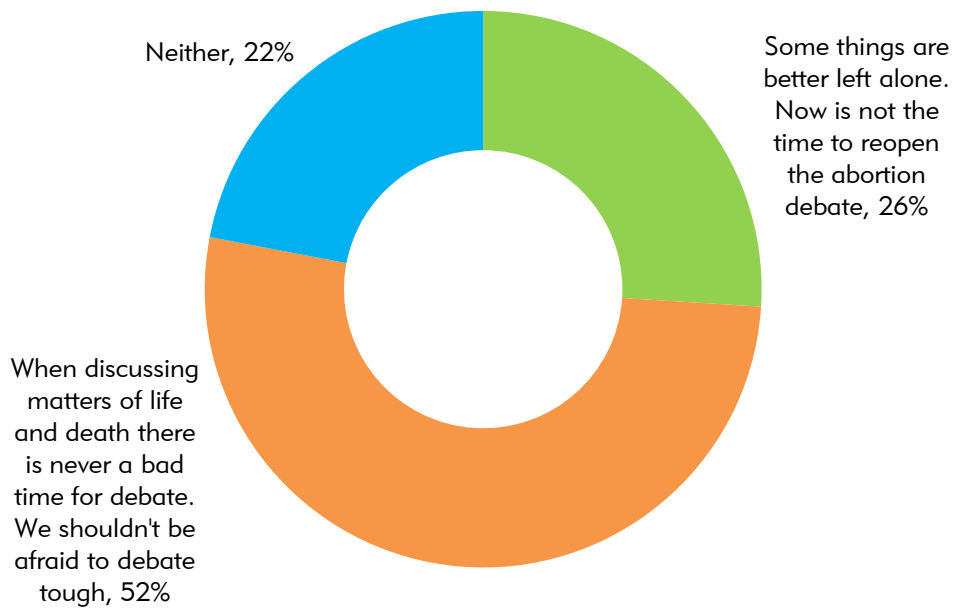
## 5.0 Debating Abortion in Canada

Even though there is some consensus in Canada about abortion, a majority of Canadians believe that we should not be afraid of debate when discussing matters of life and death. Only 26% of Canadians believed that some things are better left alone and now is not the time to reopen the abortion debate.

Liberal Party supporters were the least interested in discussing the abortion debate with 41% being open to debate. NDP (54%) and Conservative (52%) supporters were more willing to debate the issue.

Those with higher education are more likely to want to drop the debate (college/university 30%, university degree 27%) than those with high school education (19%).

**Which of the following statements, if either, comes closest to your view about the abortion debate in Canada?**  
(n=1,006, weighted)



## 6.0 Conclusion

Abacus Data's survey of 1,007 Canadians over the age of 18 found that views surrounding abortion in Canada are divided. The issue is one of many shades of grey and should not be considered a black and white issue.

A majority of respondents believe that human life should be protected before birth but another majority believe that the choice to have an abortion should be left up to the mother. Very few Canadians (8%) want an outright ban on abortion in Canada.

Also of significance is the finding that over half of Canadians are willing to openly discuss the abortion debate.

Although older Canadians (60+) were more likely to be opposed to abortion, their views on public funding are consistent with all other age groups. However, older Canadians were somewhat more likely to want to just leave the debate alone.

Those in Atlantic Canada feel strongly about the debate. They were most likely to believe legal human rights ought to be protected before birth and were most strongly opposed to abortions specifically.

The most significant divide was between the NDP and Conservative supporters. NDP supporters were more likely to favour public funding of abortions compared with Conservative supporters. Similarly, almost no NDP supporter believed that abortions should be illegal compared with the 15% of Conservative supporters who believe this should be the case.



## 7.0 Methodology

From April 28 to April 29, 2011, Abacus Data Inc. conducted an online survey among 1,007 randomly selected Canadian adults from an online panel of over 400,000 Canadians. The margin of error—which measures sampling variability—is comparable to +/- 3.2%, 19 times out of 20.

Results of the survey were statistically weighted by gender, age, region, language, and immigration status using census data from Statistics Canada and by past vote using Elections Canada results from the 2008 General Election. Totals may not add up to 100 due to rounding.

Steps were taken to ensure that the survey respondents were representative of the population over 18 years of age. Quotas were set to match the distribution of actual census data for age, gender, and province. Moreover, statistical weighting was applied to the data after the completion of the survey for age, gender, education, past federal vote, and region.

## 8.0 Survey Questionnaire

### Next, we have a few questions about abortion

Abortion is a controversial issue and there are many different positions and beliefs about it.

1. When do you believe human life should be legally protected?  
From conception  
After three months of pregnancy (first trimester)  
After six months of pregnancy (second trimester)  
From the point of birth  
Not sure
2. Which of the following statements, if any, best represents your view on abortion? [rotate statements]  
I support the right of women to make choices about their own bodies  
I support legal abortion, but only in extreme circumstances  
I am personally opposed to abortion, but recognize the right of individuals to make their own choices  
I am personally opposed to abortion and feel that it should be illegal in Canada  
None of these  
Unsure
3. How should legal abortions continue to be funded:  
Covered by the public health care system  
Only covered by the public health care system in extreme cases  
Paid for by the patient  
Abortions should not be performed under any circumstances
4. Which of the following statements, if either, comes closest to your view about the abortion debate in Canada? [rotate statements]  
Some things are better left alone. Now is not the time to reopen the abortion debate.  
When discussing matters of life and death there is never a bad time for debate. We shouldn't be afraid to debate tough issues in public.  
Neither