

JULY 29, 2013

## Widening Regional Divide over Abortion Laws

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# Widening Regional Divide over Abortion Laws

While the balance of opinion toward abortion nationwide has remained largely steady over the past 20 years, there are widening disparities in public attitudes on the issue across different regions of the country.

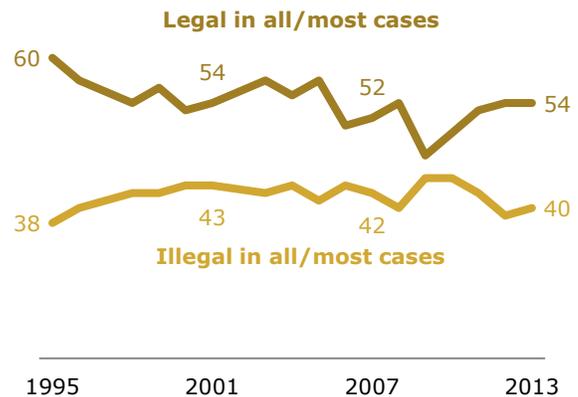
Opposition to legal abortion is highest in parts of the South – including Texas, which recently passed sweeping new abortion restrictions. The South Central region is the only one in which opposition to legal abortion has significantly increased since the mid-1990s. By contrast, support for legal abortion remains highest in New England – and the gap between New England and South Central states has widened considerably over the past two decades.

The new national survey by the Pew Research Center, conducted July 17-21 among 1,480 adults, finds that just over half of all Americans (54%) say that abortion should be legal in all or most cases. Fewer (40%) say it should be illegal in all or most cases. At the national level, public views on abortion have changed little over the last few years, and the balance of opinion has remained largely consistent for most of the past two decades (see: [Views on Abortion, 1995-2013](#)).

This month Texas joined 12 other states, mainly in the South and Midwest, that have banned abortions at no later than 22 weeks of pregnancy. (The new Texas law bans abortions at 20 weeks. Some of these other laws are temporarily blocked by court injunction.) In polling conducted in 2012 and 2013, about

## Abortion Views Hold Steady

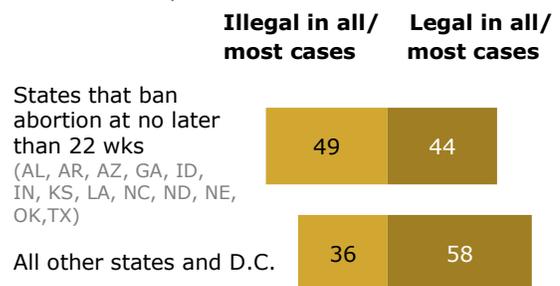
Percent who say abortion should be...



PEW RESEARCH CENTER July 17-21, 2013. Data from 1995-2005 from ABC News/Washington Post polls; data for 2006 from AP-Ipsos poll. Trend lines show aggregated data from polls conducted in each year. 2013 figures are based on one poll.

## State Restrictions and Views about Legal Abortion

Percent who say abortion should be ...



PEW RESEARCH CENTER July 17-21, 2013. Based on aggregated data from three surveys conducted in 2012 and 2013. See appendix for classifying states by abortion laws.

half (49%) of the residents of these 13 states believe abortion should be illegal in all or most cases. By comparison, in the other 37 states and the District of Columbia, just 36% agree, while 58% say abortion should be legal in all or most cases.

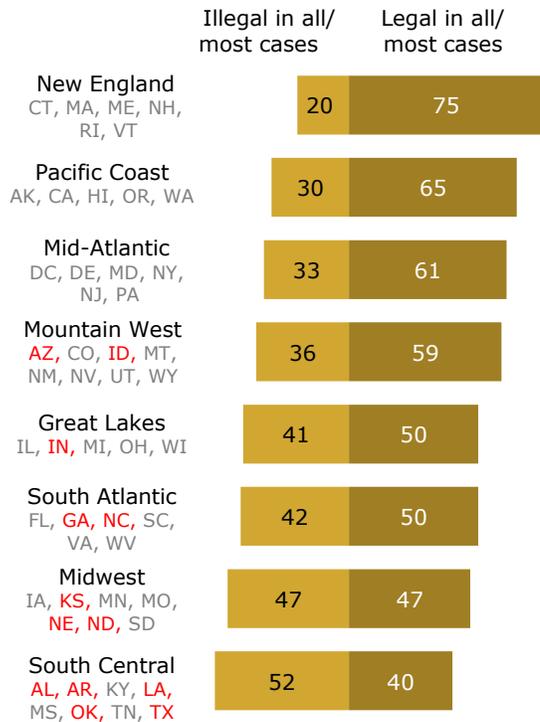
These differences reflect a broader regional divide. New England residents are most likely to favor legalized abortion. Fully 75% say abortion should be legal in all or most cases, while 20% say abortions should be illegal in all or most cases. Roughly two-thirds (65%) in the Pacific Coast region, and solid majorities in the Mid-Atlantic (61%) and Mountain West (59%) also favor legal abortion.

At the other end of the spectrum, residents of the South Central states – ranging from Texas and Oklahoma to Alabama to Kentucky – express the least support for abortion. A majority (52%) in these states say that abortion should be illegal in all or most cases, while just 40% say it should be generally legal. There is also substantially more opposition to abortion in Midwestern states than in the country at large. In this region – ranging from Kansas and Missouri to Minnesota and North Dakota – as many say abortion should generally be illegal as say it should generally be legal (47%).

These regional differences are similar to the steep national divide over gay marriage. [A 2012 Pew Research Center analysis](#) found that same-sex marriage received broad support in New England and faced the most opposition in the South Central states.

## Wide Regional Differences in Attitudes about Abortion

Percent who say abortion should be...



PEW RESEARCH CENTER July 17-21, 2013. Based on aggregated data from three surveys conducted in 2012 and 2013. States that ban abortion at 22 weeks or earlier are in red. See appendix for classifying states into regions.

There are signs that this regional disparity may be widening over time, as views in the South have turned more strongly against abortion. In Washington Post/ABC news surveys conducted over the course of 1995 and 1996, 70% of New England residents generally supported legal access to abortion compared with 52% in the South Central region – an 18-point gap. This difference has nearly doubled to 35 points in Pew Research Center surveys over the past year-and-a-half, as support for legal abortion remains widespread in New England (75%), but has fallen to just 40% in the South Central states.

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### Growing Opposition to Abortion in the South

	1995-1996		2012-2013	
	Legal all/most %	Illegal all/most %	Legal all/most %	Illegal all/most %
New England	70	26	75	20
Pacific Coast	65	31	65	30
Mid-Atlantic	64	32	61	33
Mountain West	56	39	59	36
Great Lakes	53	41	50	41
South Atlantic	53	44	50	42
Midwest	55	42	47	47
South Central	52	45	40	52
New England- South Central Gap	<b>18</b> points		<b>35</b> points	

PEW RESEARCH CENTER July 17-21, 2013. Based on aggregated numbers from three surveys conducted in 2012 and 2013 and five surveys conducted by Washington Post/ABC News in 1995 and 1996. See appendix for classifying states into regions.

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## **Appendix:**

### Regional analysis:

The regional breakdowns used in this report are based on the U.S. Census regions and divisions, with two exceptions. MD, DE and DC are grouped in the Mid-Atlantic with NY, NJ and PA, instead of in the South Atlantic. The Census divisions of East South Central and West South Central are combined into a single South Central designation.

New England – CT, MA, ME, NH, RI, VT

Pacific Coast – AK, CA, HI, OR, WA

Mid-Atlantic – DC, DE, MD, NY, NJ, PA

Mountain West – AZ, CO, ID, MT, NM, NV, UT, WY

Great Lakes – IL, IN, MI, OH, WI

South Atlantic – FL, GA, NC, SC, VA, WV

Midwest – IA, KS, MN, MO, NE, ND, SD

South Central – AL, AR, KY, LA, MS, OK, TN, TX

### Analysis of state abortion laws:

These 13 states have laws that ban abortion at 22 weeks of pregnancy or earlier (for example, North Dakota has a law that bans abortion after six weeks): AL, AR, AZ, GA, ID, IN, KS, LA, NC, ND, NE, OK, TX. In AR, AZ, GA, ID, and ND these laws have been temporarily blocked by courts and are not currently in effect. The other 37 states and the District of Columbia do not ban abortions at 22 weeks, but may ban them after a later point or have other regulations concerning abortion or clinics that perform abortion. This analysis does not account for whether a state's law has exceptions for rape, incest or the life of the mother, and only uses the week limit that applies to women who do not qualify for an exception.

Sources: U. S. Census Bureau, [New York Times](#), Guttmacher Institute

## About the Survey

Some of analysis in this report is based on telephone interviews conducted July 17-21, 2013, among a national sample of 1,480 adults, 18 years of age or older, living in all 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia (750 respondents were interviewed on a landline telephone, and 730 were interviewed on a cell phone, including 382 who had no landline telephone). The survey was conducted by interviewers at Princeton Data Source under the direction of Princeton Survey Research Associates International. A combination of landline and cell phone random digit dial samples were used; both samples were provided by Survey Sampling International. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish. Respondents in the landline sample were selected by randomly asking for the youngest adult male or female who is now at home. Interviews in the cell sample were conducted with the person who answered the phone, if that person was an adult 18 years of age or older. For detailed information about our survey methodology, see <http://people-press.org/methodology/>.

The combined landline and cell phone sample are weighted using an iterative technique that matches gender, age, education, race, Hispanic origin and nativity and region to parameters from the 2011 Census Bureau's American Community Survey and population density to parameters from the Decennial Census. The sample also is weighted to match current patterns of telephone status and relative usage of landline and cell phones (for those with both), based on extrapolations from the 2012 National Health Interview Survey. The weighting procedure also accounts for the fact that respondents with both landline and cell phones have a greater probability of being included in the combined sample and adjusts for household size among respondents with a landline phone. Sampling errors and statistical tests of significance take into account the effect of weighting. The following table shows the unweighted sample sizes and the error attributable to sampling that would be expected at the 95% level of confidence for different groups in the survey:

<b>Group</b>	<b>Unweighted sample size</b>	<b>Plus or minus...</b>
Total sample	1,480	3.0 percentage points

Sample sizes and sampling errors for other subgroups are available upon request.

**PEW RESEARCH CENTER FOR THE PEOPLE & THE PRESS**  
**JULY 2013 POLITICAL SURVEY**  
**FINAL TOPLINE**  
**July 17-21, 2013**  
**N=1,480**

**QUESTIONS 1-3, 5, 7, 9-10, 20-27, 33-34 PREVIOUSLY RELEASED**  
**NO QUESTIONS 4, 6, 8, 11-14, 17-19, 28-32, 35-39**  
**QUESTIONS 15-16 HELD FOR FUTURE RELEASE**

**ASK ALL:**

On a different subject ...

Q.40 Do you think abortion should be **[READ] [PLEASE READ CATEGORIES IN REVERSE ORDER FOR HALF THE SAMPLE]?**

	Legal in all <u>cases</u>	Legal in most <u>cases</u>	Illegal in most <u>cases</u>	Illegal in all <u>cases</u>	(VOL.) <u>DK/Ref</u>	NET <i>Legal in</i> <i>all/most</i>	NET <i>Illegal in</i> <i>all/most</i>
Jul 17-21, 2013	20	34	24	15	7	54	40
Oct 24-28, 2012	23	32	25	13	7	55	39
Apr 4-15, 2012	23	31	23	16	7	53	39
Nov 9-14, 2011	20	31	26	17	6	51	43
Sep 22-Oct 4, 2011	19	35	25	16	5	54	41
Feb 22-Mar 1, 2011	18	36	26	16	4	54	42
Jul 21-Aug 5, 2010	17	33	27	17	7	50	44
August 11-27, 2009	16	31	27	17	8	47	45
April, 2009	18	28	28	16	10	46	44
Late October, 2008	18	35	24	16	7	53	40
Mid-October, 2008	19	38	22	14	7	57	36
August, 2008	17	37	26	15	5	54	41
June, 2008	19	38	24	13	6	57	37
November, 2007	18	33	29	15	5	51	44
October, 2007	21	32	24	15	8	53	39
August, 2007	17	35	26	17	5	52	43
<i>AP/Ipsos-Poll: February, 2006</i>	19	32	27	16	6	51	43
<i>ABC/WaPo: December, 2005</i>	17	40	27	13	3	57	40
<i>ABC/WaPo: April, 2005</i>	20	36	27	14	3	56	41
<i>ABC/WaPo: December, 2004</i>	21	34	25	17	3	55	42
<i>ABC/WaPo: May, 2004</i>	23	31	23	20	2	54	43
<i>ABC/WaPo: January, 2003</i>	23	34	25	17	2	57	42
<i>ABC/WaPo: August, 2001</i>	22	27	28	20	3	49	48
<i>ABC/BeliefNet: June, 2001</i>	22	31	23	20	4	53	43
<i>ABC/WaPo: January, 2001</i>	21	38	25	14	1	59	39
<i>ABC/WaPo: September, 2000 (RVs)</i>	20	35	25	16	3	55	41
<i>ABC/WaPo: July, 2000</i>	20	33	26	17	4	53	43
<i>ABC/WaPo: September, 1999</i>	20	37	26	15	2	57	41
<i>ABC/WaPo: March, 1999</i>	21	34	27	15	3	55	42
<i>ABC/WaPo: July, 1998</i>	19	35	29	13	4	54	42
<i>ABC/WaPo: August, 1996</i>	22	34	27	14	3	56	41
<i>ABC/WaPo: June, 1996</i>	24	34	25	14	2	58	39
<i>ABC/WaPo: October, 1995</i>	26	35	25	12	3	61	37
<i>ABC: September, 1995</i>	24	36	25	11	4	60	36
<i>ABC/WaPo: July, 1995</i>	27	32	26	14	1	59	40

**NO QUESTIONS 41-45, 53-54, 56-57, 59-60, 62, 65, 67, 72, 80-82**  
**QUESTIONS 46-52, 55, 61, 63-64, 68-71, 73-79, 83 HELD FOR FUTURE RELEASE**  
**QUESTIONS 58, 66 PREVIOUSLY RELEASED**