



Canadians' Attitudes Towards Abortion

Commissioned Research
Conducted for:
LifeCanada

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

[Table of Contents](#)..... 1
[Introduction](#)..... 2
[Executive Summary](#) 3
[Legal Protection Of Human Life](#)..... 5
[Funding For Abortions](#) 8
[Methodology Report](#)..... 11

INTRODUCTION

The survey was conducted on behalf of LifeCanada by telephone among a representative sample of 2,002 adult Canadians between October 15 and 21, 2009. The survey was done in conjunction with Environics' National Omnibus survey.

The survey looks at Canadians' attitudes towards life issues, such as the point at which human life should be protected by law funding for abortions.

The margin of error for a sample of 2,002 is 2.2 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. The reader is cautioned that margins of error for smaller subsamples are larger.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- When Canadians are asked at what point in human development should the law protect human life, a total of more than half say from conception on (30%), after three months of pregnancy (17%) or after six months of pregnancy (8%). One-third of Canadians (34%) think human life should receive legal protection only from the point of birth. Eleven percent offer no opinion on this question.
- Interestingly, about three in ten each of Canadians support the view on one end of the spectrum that human life should be legally protected from conception on and on the other side of the spectrum that it should be protected only from birth on. Another one-quarter think it should be protected prior to birth but some months after conception.
- Long-term tracking data indicate that, since this question was first posed in 2002, majorities of Canadians have held the belief that human life should be legally protected some time prior to birth (at conception or after 3 or 6 months of pregnancy), with this view hitting a peak of 68 percent in 2004. The total proportion holding this view is essentially unchanged from 2008.
- Majorities across most of the country believe that human life should receive legal protection some time prior to birth, the only exception is British Columbia (49%). However, since 2008, there is a mixed pattern: this view is up in Manitoba (up 7 points) and Atlantic Canada (up 5), and down in Quebec (down 6) and Ontario (down 4).
- The survey finds that the view that human life should be protected from conception on continues to be highest in Atlantic Canada (41%) and the Prairies (34%), and lowest in British Columbia (23%). Support for this view also continues to be higher among women (35%) than among men (25%).
- The view that human life should receive legal protection only from the point of birth is highest in Quebec (41%), and lowest in Atlantic Canada (29%) and the Prairies (29%). This view is marginally higher among men (36%) than among women (33%).
- When Canadians are presented with three opinions on the funding of abortions, half (49%) think abortions should be financed using tax dollars, but only in medical emergencies, such as a threat to the mother's life or in cases of rape or incest. One-quarter (26%) think abortions should always be paid using the tax-funded health care system, while just two in ten (18%) take the view that paying for abortions should be a private responsibility, either out-of-pocket or using Blue Cross or other private health care plans. Seven percent offer no opinion. Since 2008, the proportion who believe all

abortion should be paid using the tax-funded health care system has declined by four points and the number who offer no opinion is up by three points.

- Overall, the opinion that abortion should be funded using tax dollars only in cases of medical emergencies is the prevalent view across all of the country and nearly all demographic cohorts. Only among Bloc Québécois supporters is opinion divided between public funding for all abortions and support for funding abortions using tax dollars but only in the cases of medical emergencies. Interestingly, there are no significant differences between men and women in response to this question.
- The view that abortions should always be paid using the tax-funded health care system is highest in Quebec (30%) and British Columbia (31%). Since 2008, this view is down sharply in Manitoba (down 23 points) and down slightly in Quebec (down 6).
- The opinion that abortions should be funded using tax dollars but only in cases of medical emergencies is highest in Atlantic Canada (54%) and Saskatchewan (56%), and lowest in British Columbia (44%). Since 2008, this view has increased slightly in Quebec.
- The view that abortions should be a private responsibility is highest in Manitoba (29%) and lowest in British Columbia (13%), and since 2008 is up considerably in the former (up 16 points) and down marginally in the latter (down 6).

LEGAL PROTECTION OF HUMAN LIFE

More than half of Canadians think human life should be legally protected some time prior to the point of birth, including three in ten who think it should be protected from conception on. This proportion is essentially unchanged from 2008.

Most Canadians continue to think there should be legal protection of human life at some time before the point of birth – ranging from those who think it should be from conception on to those who think it should be protected after six months of pregnancy.

When Canadians are asked at what point in human development should the law protect human life, a total of more than half say from conception on (30%), after three months of pregnancy (17%) or after six months of pregnancy (8%). One-third of Canadians (34%) think human life should receive legal protection only from the point of birth. Eleven percent offer no opinion on this question.

Interestingly, about three in ten each of Canadians support the view on one end of the spectrum that human life should be legally protected from conception on and on the other side of the spectrum that it should be protected only from birth on. Another one-quarter think it should be protected prior to birth but some months after conception.

Long-term tracking data indicate that, since this question was first posed in 2002, majorities of Canadians have held the belief that human life should be legally protected some time prior to birth (at conception or after 3 or 6 months of pregnancy), with this view hitting a peak of 68 percent in 2004. The total proportion holding this view is essentially unchanged from 2008.

The current survey finds that there has been essentially no change in the proportion who think human life should be protected from conception on.

There has been a small decline of three points in the proportion who think human life should be protected after three months of pregnancy, but this view is still four points higher than the low point recorded in 2002.

There has been essentially no change in the proportion who think human life should be protected after six months of pregnancy. The number who hold this view grew from six percent in 2002 to 11 percent in 2003, but has shown a directional decline since 2007.

There has been essentially no change in the proportion who believe human life should be given legal protection only from the point of birth, but a directional change puts it at the highest level recorded since this question was first asked in 2002.

Majorities across most of the country believe that human life should receive legal protection some time prior to birth, the only exception is British Columbia (49%). However, since 2008, there is a mixed pattern: this view is up in Manitoba (up 7 points) and Atlantic Canada (up 5), and down in Quebec (down 6) and Ontario (down 4).

Looking at opinion for legal protection of human life at different points in human development, the survey finds that the view that human life should be protected from conception on continues to be highest in Atlantic Canada (41%) and the Prairies (34%), and lowest in British Columbia (23%). Support for this view also continues to be higher among women (35%) than among men (25%). It is also higher among those who live outside of large metropolitan areas (in communities with fewer than 100,000 inhabitants), and is now higher among Canadians aged 30 and older. Since 2008, this view has declined among Canadians aged 18 to 29 and those with the lowest education. Looking at political affiliation, support continues to be higher among Conservative Party supporters and is now also higher among NDP supporters; support for this view is up among NDP supporters, and down among Green Party supporters and undecided voters.

The view that human life should be protected after three months of pregnancy does not vary significantly across the country. However, this view is higher among men than among women, and is also higher among Canadians under the age of 60. Since 2008, this view has declined among women, both the youngest and oldest Canadians, and those with the lowest education. Looking at political affiliation, this view is higher among Green Party supporters.

Support for the view that human life should be protected after six months of pregnancy does not vary significantly across the country or across demographic subgroups. Looking at political affiliation, this view is higher among Bloc Québécois supporters.

The view that human life should receive legal protection only from the point of birth is highest in Quebec (41%), and lowest in Atlantic Canada (29%) and the Prairies (29%). This view is marginally higher among men (36%) than among women (33%). This view is higher among those who live outside of rural areas (in communities with more than 5,000 inhabitants), Canadians aged 18 to 29 and those with the lowest education. Since 2008, this view has increased among the last two groups. Looking at political affiliation, support is higher among Bloc Québécois supporters and, to a lesser extent, Green Party supporters. Since 2008, this proportion is up among undecided voters.

Human life should be legally protected ...

2002 – 2009

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
From conception on	37	31	33	30	31	30	28	30
After three months of pregnancy	13	21	24	19	23	21	20	17
After six months of pregnancy	6	11	11	11	10	11	9	8
From the point of birth	30	28	28	33	30	33	33	34
DK/NA	14	9	4	7	6	5	10	11

Q.5C In your opinion, at what point in human development should the law protect human life? Should it be ...?

FUNDING FOR ABORTIONS

Half of Canadians continue to think abortions should be financed using tax dollars, but only in emergency situations, such as a threat to the mother's life or in cases of rape or incest. Since 2008, support for public funding of all abortions has declined.

Canadians continue to be supportive of funding abortions via tax dollars, but only in emergency situations. There continues to be far less support for public funding of all abortions, or for the view that all abortions should be paid for by individuals or private insurance plans. Moreover, since 2008, support for public funding of all abortions has fallen slightly.

When Canadians are presented with three opinions on the funding of abortions, half (49%) think abortions should be financed using tax dollars, but only in medical emergencies, such as a threat to the mother's life or in cases of rape or incest. One-quarter (26%) think abortions should always be paid using the tax-funded health care system, while just two in ten (18%) take the view that paying for abortions should be a private responsibility, either out-of-pocket or using Blue Cross or other private health care plans. Seven percent offer no opinion. Since 2008, the proportion who believe all abortions should be paid using the tax-funded health care system has declined by four points and the number who offer no opinion is up by three points.

Overall, the opinion that abortion should be funded using tax dollars only in cases of medical emergencies is the prevalent view across all of the country and nearly all demographic cohorts. Only among Bloc Québécois supporters is opinion divided between public funding for all abortions and support for funding abortions using tax dollars but only in the cases of medical emergencies. Interestingly, there are no significant differences between men and women in response to this question.

The view that abortions should always be paid using the tax-funded health care system is highest in Quebec (30%) and British Columbia (31%). Since 2008, this view is down sharply in Manitoba (down 23 points) and down slightly in Quebec (down 6). This view is higher among those living in large metropolitan areas with 100,000 or more inhabitants, university graduates (36%), Canadians aged 45 to 59 (30%), and Bloc Québécois (42%) and NDP (38%) supporters. Since 2008, this view has declined among both men and women, Canadians aged 45 to 59, those living in the smallest communities (fewer than 5,000 inhabitants), and Conservative and Liberal supporters.

The opinion that abortions should be funded using tax dollars but only in cases of medical emergencies is highest in Atlantic Canada (54%) and Saskatchewan (56%), and lowest in British Columbia (44%). Since 2008, this view has increased slightly in Quebec. This view is higher among Canadians aged 30 to 44 and Conservative Party supporters.

The view that abortions should be a private responsibility is highest in Manitoba (29%) and

lowest in British Columbia (13%), and since 2008 is up considerably in the former (up 16 points) and down marginally in the latter (down 6). This view is higher among those living in smaller communities and Canadians aged 18 to 29, and is up slightly among the latter group. This opinion has declined among those with the lowest education.

Opinions on funding of abortion vary somewhat with views on when human life should receive legal protection. The view that abortions should always be paid using the tax-funded health care system is higher among those who think human life should be protected some time after conception. Support for funding abortions using tax dollars but only in cases of medical emergencies is higher among those who think human life should be protected from conception on. The view that abortions should be a private responsibility is greater among those who think human life should be legally protected prior to six months of pregnancy.

Preferred view on funding of abortion

October 2002 – 2009

	2002*	2003*	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Abortions should always be paid using the tax-funded health care system	23	25	26	29	31	32	30	26
Abortions should be financed using tax dollars but only in medical emergencies, such as a threat to the mother’s life or in cases of rape or incest	51	53	54	50	48	47	49	49
Paying for abortions should be a private responsibility, either out-of-pocket or using Blue Cross or other private health care plans	15	15	18	18	18	17	17	18
DK/NA	11	7	2	3	3	3	4	7

Q.6C When it comes to the funding of abortions, which of the following three opinions is closest to your own ...?

*In 2002 and 2003, the question was “When it comes to the use of public funds for abortions...which of the following options most closely conforms to your opinion?” with slightly modified response categories.

Preferred view on funding of abortion

October 2009

	Lib	Con	NDP	BQ	Green Party	Undecided
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Abortions should always be paid using the tax-funded health care system	30	18	38	42	34	23
Abortions should be financed using tax dollars but only in medical emergencies, such as a threat to the mother's life or in cases of rape or incest	45	57	46	45	42	47
Paying for abortions should be a private responsibility, either out-of-pocket or using Blue Cross or other private health care plans	18	19	12	12	19	19
DK/NA	7	6	4	1	5	12

Preferred view on funding of abortion?

By opinions on when law should protect human life

October 2009

	From conception on	After three months of pregnancy	After six months of pregnancy	From the point of birth
	%	%	%	%
Abortions should always be paid using the tax-funded health care system	14	29	39	33
Abortions should be financed using tax dollars but only in medical emergencies, such as a threat to the mother's life or in cases of rape or incest	58	47	44	48
Paying for abortions should be a private responsibility, either out-of-pocket or using Blue Cross or other private health care plans	21	22	14	15

Q.6C When it comes to the funding of abortions, which of the following three opinions is closest to your own ...?

METHODOLOGY REPORT

The results are based on omnibus questions placed on an Environics' National Omnibus survey, conducted with a representative sample of adult Canadians between October 15 and 21, 2009.

QUESTION DESIGN

The questions were designed by senior Environics researchers in conjunction with representatives from LifeCanada. The questions were pre-tested as part of the overall survey, prior to being finalized.

SAMPLE SELECTION

The sampling method was designed to complete approximately 2,000 interviews within households randomly selected across Canada. The sample is drawn in such a way that it represents the Canadian population with the exception of those Canadians living in the Yukon, Northwest Territories or Nunavut, or in institutions (armed forces barracks, hospitals, prisons).

The sampling model relies on the stratification of the population by 10 regions (Atlantic Canada, Metropolitan Montreal, the rest of Quebec, the Greater Toronto Area, the rest of Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, the Greater Vancouver Regional District and the rest of British Columbia) and by four community sizes (1,000,000 inhabitants or more, 100,000 to 1,000,000 inhabitants, 5,000 to 100,000 inhabitants, and under 5,000 inhabitants). The final sample was distributed as follows.

	Sample distribution			
	2006 Census*	Weighted N=2,002	Unweighted N=2,002	Margin of Error
CANADA	100	2,002	2,002	+/- 2.2%
Atlantic Canada	8	148	250	+/- 6.2%
Quebec	24	487	502	+/- 4.4%
Ontario	38	767	500	+/- 4.4%
Manitoba	4	71	133	+/- 8.5%
Saskatchewan	3	60	117	+/- 9.1%
Alberta	10	204	250	+/- 6.2%
British Columbia	13	265	250	+/- 6.2%

* Canadians aged 18 years or over in 2006, excluding those in Nunavut, the Northwest Territories and the Yukon

Environics uses a sampling method in which sample is generated using the RDD (random digit dialling) technique. Samples are generated using a database of active phone ranges. These ranges are made up of a series of contiguous blocks of 100 contiguous phone numbers and are revised three to four times per year after a thorough analysis of the most recent edition of an electronic phonebook. Each number generated is processed through an appropriate series of validation procedures before it is retained as part of a sample. Each number generated is looked up in a recent electronic phonebook database to retrieve geographic location, business indicator and “do not call” status. The postal code for listed numbers is verified for accuracy and compared against a list of valid codes for the sample stratum. Non-listed numbers are assigned a “most probable” postal code based on the data available for all listed numbers in the phone exchange. This sample selection technique ensures that both unlisted numbers and numbers listed after the directory publication are included in the sample.

TELEPHONE INTERVIEWING

Interviewing for this survey was conducted at Environics’ central facilities in Toronto and Montreal. Field supervisors were present at all times to ensure accurate interviewing and recording of responses. Ten percent of each interviewer’s work was unobtrusively monitored for quality control in accordance with the standards set out by the Marketing Research and Intelligence Association (MRIA). A minimum of five calls were made to a household before classifying it as a “no answer.” From within each household contacted, respondents 18 years of age and older were screened for random selection using the “most recent birthday” method. The use of this technique produces results that are as valid and effective as enumerating all persons within a household and selecting one randomly.

COMPLETION RESULTS

A total of 2,002 interviews were completed between October 15 and 21, 2009. A sample of this size will produce a sampling error of plus or minus 2.2 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. The margin of error is greater for results pertaining to regional or socio-demographic subgroups of the total sample.

The effective response rate for the survey is five percent.¹ This is calculated as the number of responding participants (completed interviews, disqualifications and over-quota participants – 2,443), divided by unresolved numbers (e.g., busy, no answer – 22,971) plus non-responding

¹ This response rate calculation is based on a new formula recently developed by MRIA in consultation with the Government of Canada (Public Works and Government Services).

households or individuals (e.g., refusals, language barrier, missed callbacks – 25,079) plus responding participants (2,443) [R/(U+IS+R)]. The disposition of all contacts is as follows.

Completion results

Total sample dialled	59,384
UNRESOLVED NUMBERS (U)	22,971
Busy	1,143
No answer	8,232
Answering machine/voicemail	13,596
RESOLVED NUMBERS (Total minus Unresolved)	36,413
OUT OF SCOPE (<i>Invalid/non-eligible</i>)	8,891
Non-residential	571
Not-in-service	7,458
Fax/modem	862
IN SCOPE NON-RESPONDING (IS)	25,079
Refusals – household	12,971
Refusals – respondent	3,554
Language barrier	985
Callback missed/respondent not available	7,251
Break-offs (interview not completed)	318
IN SCOPE RESPONDING (R)	2,443
Disqualified	31
Quota filled	410
Completed	2,002
RESPONSE RATE [R / (U + IS + R)]	5%