



March 12, 2010

NARAL Pro-Choice America Another Look at Reproductive Choice

To: Interested Parties
From: NARAL Pro-Choice America
Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research

A recently completed study¹ conducted for NARAL Pro-Choice America by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research found that despite some recent surveys suggesting a retrenchment on support for a woman's right to choose, the nation remains majority pro-choice; in fact, opinion about abortion is characterized more by stability than change. This research, which focused on the Millennial Generation (people under 30 years of age), also found that younger people are solidly pro-choice, though there is more intensity among anti-choice young people than pro-choice young people. Finally, the research also shows that even in a period of intense focus on the economy and an abortion debate in Congress, supporting a woman's right to choose can be an electoral asset for a candidate running for Congress.

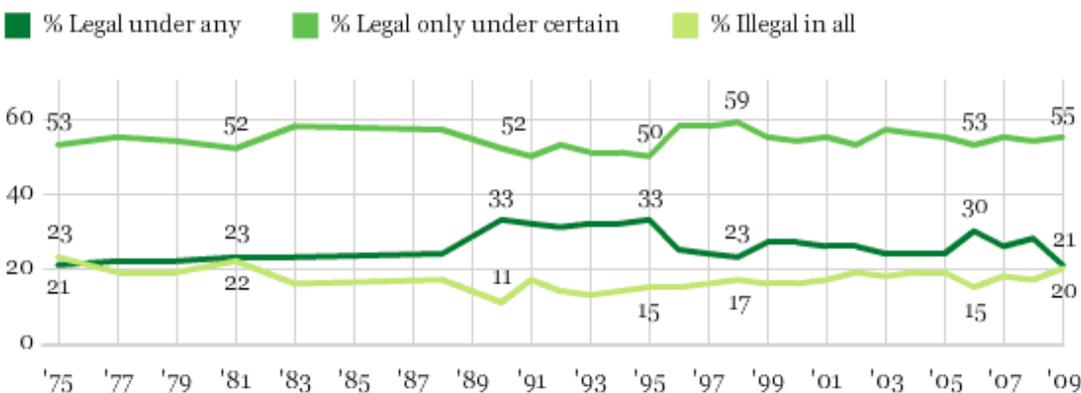
Stability of Support for a Woman's Right to Choose

Both Gallup and the Pew Research Center recently published studies suggesting some retreat on voters' support for a woman's right to choose. However, one data point does not make a trend and historically, views on this issue have been very stable. What is particularly striking is that the Gallup data shows that nearly the same percent of the population believed abortion "should be legal under any circumstances" or "legal only under certain circumstances" in their November 2009 survey as was the case in 1975 (76 percent and 74 percent, respectively).

¹ This memorandum reflects results from a poll of 700 voters and an oversample of 300 young people taken January 23-28, 2010. It follows a series of six focus groups among young people and young mothers conducted late last year. The margin of error is +/- 3.7 points at a 95 percent confidence level for the base sample and +/- 5.66 points for the youth sample. Note that for the youth oversample, we employed multi-modal sampling that included both internet and cell phone research.

U.S. Views on Legality of Abortion, 1975-2009

Do you think abortions should be legal under any circumstances, legal only under certain circumstances, or illegal in all circumstances?



Figures based on average of all polls conducted in each calendar year

GALLUP

The more recent Gallup survey also suggests a bit of a correction (48 percent consider themselves pro-choice, 45 percent consider themselves anti-choice in November 2009 compared to 42 percent pro-choice, 51 percent anti-choice in May 2009).² Long-term tracking from Democracy Corps of favorability towards pro-choice groups and anti-choice groups similarly shows no recent trend or change toward an anti-choice position.³

This new research shows numbers close to the historic average, with a small majority of voters supporting choice: 51 percent believe abortion should be legal in all or most cases; 44 percent believe abortion should be illegal in all or most cases.

Younger Voters Support a Woman’s Right to Choose

A solid majority—59 percent of young people—support a pro-choice position, 8 points higher than the overall average. Other research does not always show this generational dynamic. Some of this difference may be an artifact of the difficulty of adequately representing the views of young people in landline surveys.⁴ In this research, the sample includes interviews among young people from landlines, cell phones, and the web, which better captures a diverse and increasingly mobile population. Youth reached through landlines are more likely to be married, own a house, have a credit history, be less mobile, and less racially diverse, often resulting in a more conservative political outlook.⁵

² Data from <http://www.gallup.com/poll/126374/Republicans-Dems-Abortion-Views-Grow-Polarized.aspx>.

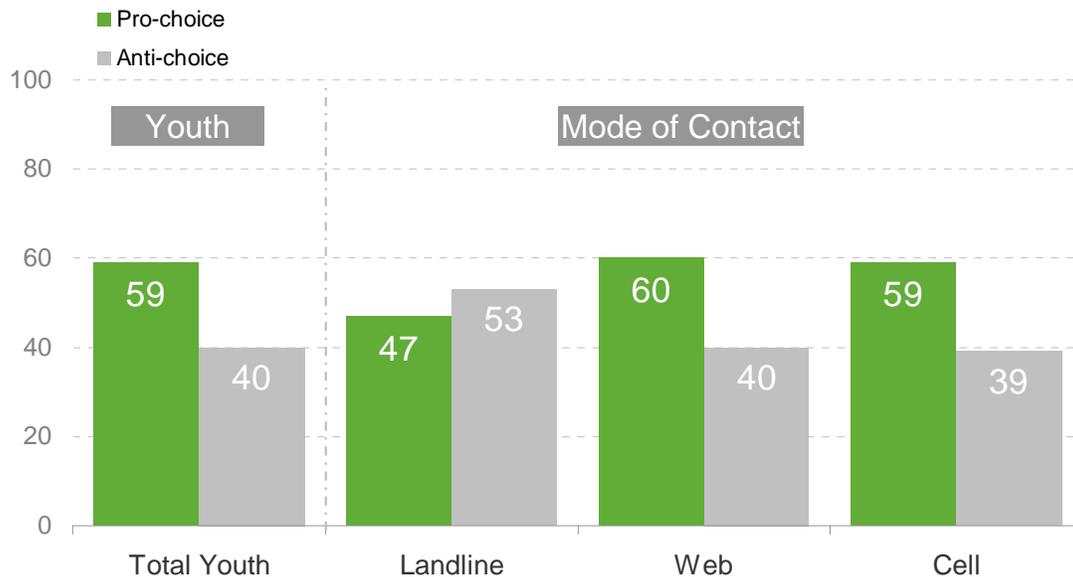
³ Data reflects the results of Democracy Corps national surveys taken from October 1999-January 2010.

⁴ More than half of people under 30 are not available to take interviews via a landline, either because they only have a cell phone or do not use their landline for outgoing or incoming calls. Young people who have landlines are more likely to be married, own a home, be less mobile, less racially diverse, and more politically conservative.

⁵ Gallup recently released a survey showing little generational difference on choice. Unlike some other studies, Gallup tracking has used a cell phone component for the last two years and generally does not observe the same modal effects we see below. The surveys from Greenberg Quinlan Rosner have consistently shown a significant modal effect.

Figure 1: Total Pro-choice and Anti-choice Among Youth by mode of Contact

Now let me ask you something a little different. Do you think abortion should be legal in all cases, legal in most cases, illegal in most cases, or illegal in all cases?



Choice in an Electoral Context

Whatever happens in 2010, the election is unlikely to become a referendum on a woman's right to choose. It will be fought over issues like the economy and health care. However, *when properly framed*, being pro-choice can provide a significant lift to a congressional candidate. This is particularly notable given the current debate over health care where anti-choice politicians seem capable of dictating terms to the Congress and country.

Overall, in this survey, likely voters prefer a generic Republican candidate over a generic Democratic candidate for Congress by a 44 – 41 percent margin. Voters similarly divide evenly when asked to choose between an unnamed “pro-choice candidate” for governor and an unnamed “pro-life candidate” for governor: 42 percent pro-choice candidate, 40 percent anti-choice candidate. This parity changes when we take the time to frame this issue carefully.

For this experiment, we provided unnamed Democratic and Republican candidates with an economic message, as well as a carefully considered pro-choice and anti-choice message. We allowed both the Democrat and the Republican to champion the pro-choice cause, while keeping the partisan economic message constant.

We used the following language:

Pro-choice message (prevention):¹ ***He supports a woman's right to choose to have an abortion and says that both sides of this debate should come together behind common sense suggestions to prevent unintended pregnancies and reduce the need for abortion, like birth control, sex education and increasing support for family planning services.***

Pro-choice message (situational):¹ ***He supports a woman's right to choose to have an abortion. He says there are many reasons a woman may consider abortion. She might have been raped, the pregnancy might threaten her life or health or she may not be able to care for another child. No one can know what these women are going through and every woman must make the choice for herself, without any interference by the government or politicians.***

Anti-choice message: ***He is pro-life and opposes abortion. He believes abortion is ending a life, plain and simple, and that every life is equal, has potential and deserves respect. He strongly supports alternatives to abortion, such as adoption, and will oppose any plans to provide taxpayer funding for abortion.***

Democratic economic message: ***(He) believes we need to do more to create jobs in this country, including investments in education, transportation and new green technologies.***

Republican economic message: ***(He) who believes that we need to focus more on small businesses and job growth through lower taxes, reducing the federal deficit and stopping the wasteful stimulus packages.***

¹ Split form question; half the respondents heard the prevention framework; the other half heard the situational framework. These responses are combined in the graph above.

For both the Democratic and Republican candidate, the pro-choice message delivers an electoral jump-start.

Figure 2: Pro-choice Candidate Favored

