

# 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 CALIFORNIA VOTERS  
WANT NO CHANGES OR FAVOR EASING  
EXISTING ABORTION LAWS. MOST  
WANT CANDIDATES FOR HIGH OFFICE  
AND THE NEXT SUPREME COURT  
NOMINEE TO HOLD SIMILAR VIEWS.**

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by Mark DiCamillo and Mervin Field

Thirty years after the U.S. Supreme Court's historic Roe vs. Wade ruling legalizing abortion, greater than two in three California voters either want no changes made to existing abortion laws (47%) or favor making abortions easier to obtain (21%). One in four voters (26%) support laws which would make it harder for a woman to have an abortion.

This division of sentiment is generally unchanged from measures taken since 1996. However, over the past twelve years, there has been a decline in the proportion who favor changing laws to make abortion easier to obtain, and an increase in those who want abortion laws to remain as they are.

The current poll, completed July 1-13, also assessed the relative importance that the abortion issue has to voters both in regard to candidate elections and whom the president chooses as his next nominee to the U.S. Supreme Court. The poll finds that, no matter where one stands on this issue, abortion is considered by large proportions to be very important to voters in both situations.

**Table 1**  
**Trend of opinions about abortion laws**  
**(among California registered voters)**

	<b>Make abortion easier to obtain</b>	<b>Make no changes</b>	<b>Make abortion harder to obtain</b>	<b>No opinion</b>
July 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	21%	45	27	7
1995	33%	38	26	3
1993	32%	39	23	6
1992	34%	39	23	4
1991	33%	39	22	6

**How sub-groups divide**

Democrats and Republicans, as well as conservatives and liberals, are far apart on where they stand on the abortion issue. Overwhelming majorities of Democrats (78%) and liberals (87%) want no changes made to existing abortion laws or favor legislation which would make it easier for a woman to have an abortion. By contrast, about one-half (47%) of Republicans and 51% of conservatives want to change laws to make it harder to get an abortion.

Men and women, as well as voters of the state's different race and ethnic groups, hold similar views with regard to abortion laws, with each group holding opinions that closely mirror the statewide public.

There are sizable differences, however, across different subgroups of the state's voters by religion. Voters with no religion preferences are the strongest advocates for keeping current state laws as they are or making abortion easier to obtain, with 94% taking either of these positions. On the other hand, greater than one in three Protestants (37%) support laws that would make abortions harder to obtain. Catholics are slightly less supportive than the statewide electorate of making abortion easier to obtain.

**Table 2**  
**Voter opinions about abortion laws – by subgroup**  
**(among California registered voters)**

	<b>Make abortion easier to obtain</b>	<b>Make no changes</b>	<b>Make abortion harder to obtain</b>	<b>No opinion</b>
Statewide	21%	47	26	6
<b>Party</b>				
(.44) Democrats	25%	53	15	7
(.36) Republicans	8%	39	47	6
(.20) Non-partisans/others	33%	47	12	8
<b>Political ideology</b>				
(.31) Conservative	11%	31	51	7
(.44) Middle-of-the-road	19%	55	19	7
(.25) Liberal	36%	51	7	6
<b>Region</b>				
(.26) Los Angeles County	23%	45	20	12
(.33) Other Southern CA	15%	52	27	6
(.22) San Francisco Bay Area	33%	49	17	1
(.19) Other Northern CA*	15%	40	40	5
<b>Gender</b>				
(.48) Men	21%	47	27	5
(.52) Women	20%	47	25	8
<b>Race/ethnicity</b>				
(.68) White non-Hispanic	22%	47	25	6
(.17) Latino*	17%	49	27	7
(.15) All other*	18%	48	24	10
<b>Age</b>				
(.31) 18-39	14%	51	26	9
(.49) 40-64	26%	44	26	4
(.20) 65 or older	18%	48	24	10
<b>Education</b>				
(.22) High school graduate or less	10%	44	38	8
(.35) Some college/trade school	24%	44	24	8
(.43) College graduate	24%	52	21	3
<b>Religion</b>				
(.48) Protestant	16%	40	37	7
(.21) Roman Catholic	15%	49	26	10
(.14) Other*	25%	59	9	7
(.17) No preference*	41%	53	5	1

\* Small sample sizes

**Abortion as an election issue**

About half (45%) of all voters statewide say it is very important and 38% say it is somewhat important for a candidate seeking a high state or national office to hold a position similar to their own on the issue of abortion. Half or more of those who would support relaxing abortion laws or who favor stiffening them say it is important for candidates to hold a position on abortion which squares with their own.

<b>Table 3</b>			
<b>How important is it for a candidate seeking high state or national office to hold a position similar to your position on abortion (among California registered voters)</b>			
	<b><u>Very important</u></b>	<b><u>Somewhat important</u></b>	<b><u>Not important</u></b>
Statewide	45%	38	17
<b><u>Position on abortion laws</u></b>			
Make abortion easier to obtain	50%	38	12
Make no changes	39%	39	22
Make abortion harder to obtain	55%	34	11

**Abortion important when selecting a U.S. Supreme Court Justice**

A majority of California voters (53%) also feel that it is very important that the next person nominated to the U. S. Supreme Court hold a position that is similar to their own on abortion. This majority expands to six in ten among both those advocating more lenient abortion laws (62%) and those at the other extreme who favor more restrictive abortion laws (60%).

<b>Table 4</b>				
<b>How important is it to you that the next person nominated to the U.S. Supreme Court holds a position similar to your position on abortion (among California registered voters)</b>				
	<b><u>Very important</u></b>	<b><u>Somewhat important</u></b>	<b><u>Not important</u></b>	<b><u>No opinion</u></b>
Statewide	53%	31	15	1
<b><u>Position on abortion laws</u></b>				
Make abortion easier to obtain	62%	28	10	*
Make no changes	47%	33	20	*
Make abortion harder to obtain	60%	30	10	*

\* Less than 1/2 of 1%

## **Information About the Survey**

### **Sample Details**

The results in this report are based on a statewide survey of 490 registered voters in California. The survey was completed during the period July 1-13, 2003 by telephone in English and Spanish.

According to statistical theory 95% of the time results from the overall sample would have a sampling error of +/- 4.5 percentage points. Findings from subgroups of the overall sample would have larger sampling error estimates. There are many 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 errors or omissions in interviewing or data processing. Extensive efforts were made to minimize such potential errors.

### **Questions Asked**

In respect to the issue of abortion, 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?

How important is it to you for a candidate seeking high state or national office to hold a position similar to your position on abortion – very important, somewhat important or not important?

How important is it to you that the next person nominated to serve on the U.S. Supreme Court holds a position similar to your position on abortion – very important, somewhat important or not important?