

# AMERICANS DO NOT SUPPORT ROE v. WADE

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on the polling results of two surveys on abortion:

As a social scientist who has analyzed and written about polling data for many years, I am always taken aback when I encounter dishonest surveys. The latest example of this is a survey done by Gallup on the subject of abortion; it follows a pattern established by the Pew Research Center on this subject.

The survey results on abortion taken by these two polling institutions, both of which enjoy a good reputation, were recently cited by those worried that *Roe v. Wade* may be overturned.

In a *New York Times* op-ed article published on July 12, *Nation* magazine writer Katha Pollitt—she is known for saying abortion is a “positive social good”—cited a 2017 Pew survey showing that a large majority of Americans support *Roe v. Wade*’s legalization of abortion.

Also on July 12, the *Hill* ran a headline, “Poll Finds Strong Support for *Roe v. Wade*,” citing the results of a Gallup poll that was just released; similar headlines appeared in other media outlets on this survey.

Pew and Gallup dropped their standards in issuing these surveys. How? By taking a simple-minded approach to a complex issue.

Any poll that offers only two choices on an issue that most Americans have very mixed feelings about is dishonest. The researchers at Pew and Gallup know this to be true—they have even done surveys in the past that accurately tap how

conflicted the public is on abortion—yet they undertook a poll that made it impossible to reveal the nuances.

The Gallup poll that was released July 12 asked respondents, “Would you like to see the Supreme Court overturn its 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision concerning abortion, or not?” It found that 64% believe the ruling should stand and 28% want it overturned. In January 2017, Pew released its findings showing that the figures were 69% and 28%, respectively.

Last month I wrote a news release titled, “Majority Oppose *Roe v. Wade*.” According to the two polls I just cited, I must be wrong. But I am not. They are. To top things off, my proof comes by way of a Gallup poll released on June 11.

That poll found that 53% of Americans said abortion should be legal in only a few circumstances (35%) or in no circumstances (18%). This means that a majority of Americans reject abortion-on-demand, which is what *Roe v. Wade* rendered! Moreover, 48% said abortion is “morally wrong”; 43% disagreed.

My point is that by collapsing the survey responses to a “yes” or “no” on *Roe* does not get at the more nuanced responses that most Americans have about this issue. Most Americans do not think that abortion should be legal for any reason whatsoever, or for any time during pregnancy. Yet that is what *Roe* allows.

Just as misleading, the Pew survey mentioned by Pollitt shows that most Catholics think *Roe* should stand. But a more sophisticated survey shows the opposite.

In 2015, I commissioned a scientific survey of 1,000 Catholics; it was conducted by The Polling Company. I had a hand in crafting the questions (my doctorate is in sociology), all of which were designed to get at issues that the big survey houses refuse to query.

The survey found that 50% of Catholics identify as pro-life, and 38% as pro-choice. That was just the beginning. When the

data were disaggregated, more revealing results were found.

For example, 17% of all Catholics said abortion should be prohibited in all circumstances; 17% said it should be legal only to save the life of the mother; and 27% said abortion should be legal only in cases of rape, incest or to save the life of the mother. That's 61% who are mostly pro-life.

Among those who are pro-choice, only 5% said that abortion should be allowed for any reason and at any time. Another 4% said any reason was okay but there should be none after the first six months of pregnancy. And 17% said abortion should be legal for any reason, but not after the first three months of pregnancy. That's 26% who are mostly pro-choice.

Another way of looking at it is to consider how Catholics feel about the current law. Under *Roe*, abortion is effectively allowed for any reason and at any time. This makes us unique: No nation in the world has more liberalized abortion laws than the United States, including the Scandinavian countries. Now think about it: If only 5% agree with the current law, that means 95% of Catholics reject what *Roe* permits.

Pew and Gallup could also probe respondents more deeply on this issue—asking a series of related questions—so when they do not, they are dropping their standards, eliciting findings that distort the truth.

This is too serious an issue for polling houses not to dig deep, uncovering the qualified responses that most Americans have regarding abortion.