

# NOT ALL ABORTION POLLS ARE EQUAL

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on abortion surveys:

On September 25, the *Wall Street Journal* ran a lengthy piece on Joe Biden's Catholicism. It was quite informative. However, one of the items it mentioned was a Pew Research Center survey from 2019 that showed "56% of Catholics said abortion should be legal in all or most cases, compared with 61% for all U.S. adults." The journalists reported that accurately, however the poll was misleading.

The best way to learn what the public thinks about abortion restrictions is to ask several questions. Indeed, the more the better. This is costly, which is why such surveys are a rarity. But if we are to get an accurate grip on public sentiment, we cannot rely on polls that fail to get below the surface. The simpler and more generalized the questions, the more meaningless they are.

Since 1995, Pew has asked adults if abortion should be "legal in all cases"; "legal in most cases"; "illegal in most cases"; or illegal in all cases."

When respondents are asked if abortion should be legal or illegal, it is plausible to assume that what typically comes to mind are worst case scenarios. If abortion were totally illegal, there would be no exceptions for rape, incest, or the death of the mother. Fortunately, such instances are extremely rare, but the fact that they exist moves the needle in favor of opposing a complete ban. However, this is not an accurate index of public sentiment.

On June 13, 2018, Gallup found that 60% of respondents believed abortion should be legal in the first three months of

pregnancy; 28% said it should be legal in the second three months; and 13% said it should be legal in the last three months. Under current law, abortion is legal through term.

In 2019, a Marist poll found that 75% of Americans said abortion should be limited to—at most—the first three months. According to CBS News, a Marist poll in 2020 found that “65% of Americans are likely to vote for a candidate who believes abortion should be outlawed after the first three months of pregnancy; allowed only in cases of rape, incest, or to save the life of the mother; or not permitted under any circumstances.”

In short, the deeper a survey digs on the subject of abortion, and the more realistic the questions are, the more likely it is that the majority of Americans will conclude that although they do not want to make abortion totally illegal, they want it to be considerably limited in scope. The reason why an abortion is sought, and the trimester in which it occurs, are two issues that matter gravely. Polls that do not tap these verities are deficient. Indeed, they are misleading.