



# Canadians' Attitudes towards Abortion

*Prepared for:*  
LifeCanada

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## Executive summary

### Background

This survey was conducted on behalf of LifeCanada to look at Canadians' attitudes towards life issues, including the point at which human life should be protected by law and support for legal abortion at different stages of pregnancy.

The questions were asked as part of Environics' National Omnibus survey. Telephone interviews were conducted with a representative sample of 2,021 adult Canadians, between January 24 and February 5, 2013. The margin of error for a sample of 2,021 is plus or minus 2.2 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. The reader is cautioned that the margin of error is larger for subsamples of the total population.

Unless otherwise noted, all results throughout this report are expressed as a percentage. A more detailed description of the methodology used to conduct this study is presented at the back of this report, along with a copy of the questionnaire.

Key highlights from the research are presented below.

### Key findings

- Six in ten Canadians say human life should receive legal protection some time prior to birth, either from conception (23%) or from two (13%), three (14%) or six (10%) months of pregnancy on. More than one-quarter (28%) say human life should be protected only at birth, which is the current legal situation in Canada. (Twelve percent offer no opinion on this question).
- A majority in all regions and demographic groups say that human life should receive legal protection some time prior to birth. The view that the law should protect human life at conception is highest in the Prairie provinces (33%), while Quebecers are the most likely to say that human life should receive legal protection at birth (39%).
- Canadians' views on whether abortions should be legal or illegal varies depending on the stage of pregnancy in question. Seven in ten (71%) Canadians think abortion should be legal in the first three months of pregnancy. Opinions are divided about whether it should be legal (43%) or illegal (46%) in the second three months. Two-thirds (65%) of Canadians think it should be *illegal* in the last three months.
- Support for legal abortion at all three stages of pregnancy is strongest in Quebec, although even a majority (59%) of Quebecers believe it should be illegal in the last trimester. The view that abortion should be illegal in the first and second three months of pregnancy is higher in the Prairie provinces than the rest of the country.

## Detailed findings

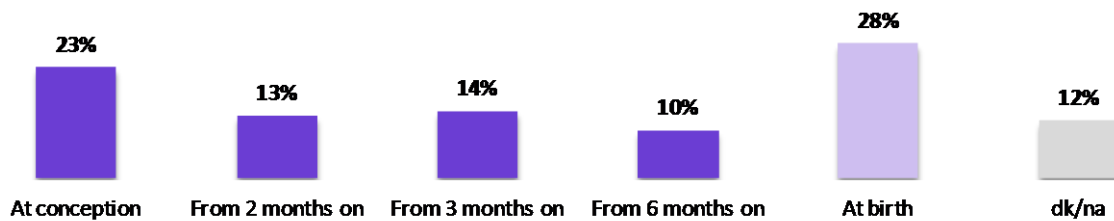
### Legal protection of human life

Six in ten Canadians say human life should be legally protected some time prior to birth, including almost one in four who say it should be protected from conception on.

As background to the first question, Canadians were informed that there is currently no legal protection for human life before birth and were told about some key developmental milestones (i.e., a foetal heart begins to beat about three weeks after conception, brain waves can be detected within two months after conception and by two months all organs and body parts are in place).

When Canadians are then asked at what point in human development the law should protect human life, a majority of six in ten (60%) say it should be some time before birth, although there is no consensus on whether the specific point should be at conception (23%) or from two (13%), three (14%) or six (10%) months on. More than one-quarter (28%) say human life should receive legal protection only at birth. Twelve percent offer no opinion on this question.

**Point at which law should protect human life**



Q. At the present time in Canada, there is no legal protection for human life before birth. According to medical research, a foetal heart begins to beat about 3 weeks after conception. Brain waves can be detected within 2 months after conception. By 2 months all organs and body parts are in place. In your opinion, at what point should the law protect human life?

A majority in all regions and demographic groups say that human life should receive legal protection some time prior to birth.

Support for legal protection at conception is higher in the Prairie provinces (33%), among women (26% vs. 21% of men) and among those with lower levels of education and income. By comparison, the view that human life should be legally protected only at birth is higher in Quebec (39%) and among those with a university education and in the highest income bracket. Support for legal protection at other developmental stages does not vary substantially across regions or population segments.

Point at which law should protect human life  
By region

	BC	PRAIR.	ON	QC	ATL
At conception	20	33	25	17	21
From 2 months on	14	12	11	13	18
From 3 months on	12	12	15	14	14
From 6 months on	11	7	11	10	7
From birth	25	25	25	39	26
dk/na	18	12	14	7	14

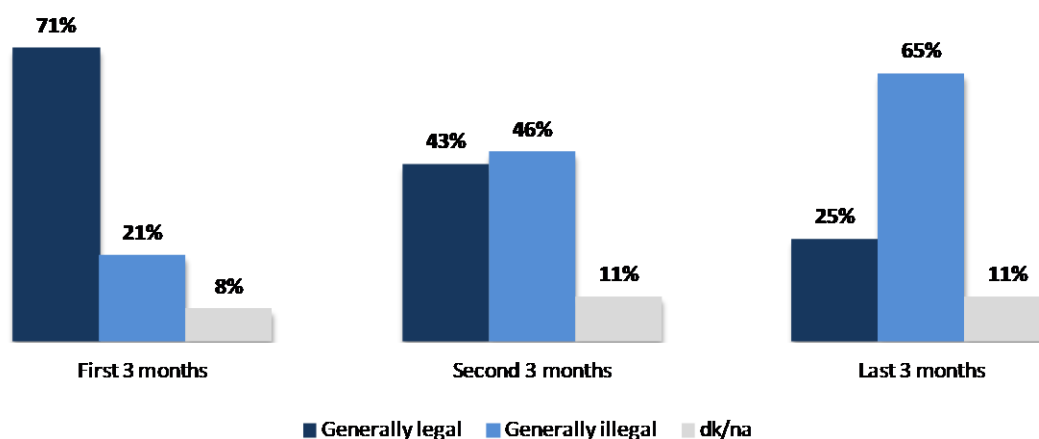
**Support for abortion by stage of pregnancy**

Seven in ten Canadians say abortion should be legal in the first three months of pregnancy. Opinions are divided whether it should be legal in the second three months, but two-thirds think it should be *illegal* in the last three months.

As background to the second question, Canadians were informed that, in Canada, there are no legal restrictions on abortion at any stage of pregnancy. When asked their opinion about whether abortion should or should not be legal, Canadians’ views vary considerably depending on the stage of pregnancy under discussion.

A majority (71%) of Canadians think abortion should generally be legal in the first three months; one in five (21%) think it should be illegal. Views are mixed about whether abortion should be legal in the second three months, with four in ten (43%) who say it should be and an almost equal proportion (46%) who say it should be illegal. A minority (25%) think abortion should be legal in the last three months; almost two-thirds (65%) say it should be illegal.

**Whether abortion should be legal or illegal at each stage of pregnancy**



Q. Currently in Canada there are no legal restrictions on abortion at any stage of pregnancy. Thinking generally, do you think abortion should generally be legal or generally illegal during each of the following stages of pregnancy?

Majorities across all regions and demographic groups think abortion should generally be legal in the first three months. This view is most common in Quebec (80%) and less common among Canadians aged 65 and older and those with less education and lower incomes.

Mixed opinions are evident across the country about whether abortion should be legal or illegal in the second three months of pregnancy. The view that it should be legal is higher in Quebec (54%), among men (46%) and among those with more education and higher incomes. The view that it should be illegal is higher in the Prairies (53%), younger Canadians (55% aged 18 to 29), women (49%) and those with less education and lower incomes.

Majorities across all regions and demographic groups think abortion should generally be illegal in the last three months. This view is more common among younger Canadians (77% aged 18 to 29) and those with less education and lower incomes, and is least common in Quebec (59%).

Opinions on the legality of abortion at various stages of pregnancy vary somewhat with views on when human life should receive legal protection. Majorities of those who think human life should be protected at conception think abortion should be illegal at all three stages of pregnancy. Majorities of those who think human life should be protected at birth think abortion should be legal in the first and the second three months, but just half say it should be legal in the last three months.

**Whether abortion should be legal or illegal at each stage of pregnancy**  
**By opinion about point at which law should protect human life**

	At conception (n=495)	From 2 months on (n=255)	From 3 months on (n=264)	From 6 months on (n=182)	From birth (n=572)
<b>First three months</b>					
Should be legal	35	75	88	92	88
Should be illegal	59	21	9	6	7
dk/na	6	4	3	2	5
<b>Second three months</b>					
Should be legal	13	23	42	73	71
Should be illegal	81	73	51	21	22
dk/na	6	4	7	6	7
<b>Last three months</b>					
Should be legal	8	10	17	31	49
Should be illegal	88	86	77	63	42
dk/na	4	3	6	6	8



# Research methodology

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The results are based on omnibus questions placed on Environics’ National Omnibus survey, conducted with a representative sample of 2,021 adult Canadians between January 24 and February 5, 2013.

### 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 stratification of the population by 10 regions (Atlantic Canada, Montreal CMA, the rest of Quebec, Toronto CMA, the rest of Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, Vancouver CMA 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**

	2011 Census* %	Weighted N=2,021	Unweighted N=2,021	Margin of Error
CANADA	100	2,021	2,021	+/- 2.2%
Atlantic Canada	7	146	210	+/- 6.8%
Quebec	24	490	503	+/- 4.4%
Ontario	38	782	654	+/- 3.8%
Manitoba/Saskatchewan	6	132	202	+/- 6.9%
Alberta	11	217	201	+/- 6.9%
British Columbia	13	253	251	+/- 6.2%

\* Canadians aged 18 years or over in 2011, 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. 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.



# Survey instruments

## **Life Canada 2013 Poll Questions – Abortion FINAL Questions**

### **NATIONALSAMPLE OF 2,000 CANADIANS (18 years plus)**

1. At the present time in Canada, there is no legal protection for human life before birth. According to medical research, a foetal heart begins to beat about 3 weeks after conception. Brain waves can be detected within 2 months after conception. By 2 months all organs and body parts are in place. In your opinion, at what point should the law protect human life?

**READ LIST – CODE ONE ONLY**

01 - At conception

02 - From 2 months on

03 - From 3 months on

04 - From 6 months on

05 - At birth

VOLUNTEERED

99 – Don't know/No answer

2. Currently in Canada there are no legal restrictions on abortion at any stage of pregnancy. Thinking generally, do you think abortion should generally be legal or generally illegal during each of the following stages of pregnancy?

**READ**

a. First three months

b. Second three months

c. Last three months

01 – Should be legal

02 – Should be illegal

VOLUNTEERED

99 - DK/NA

1. Au Canada, la vie humaine ne bénéficie présentement d'aucune protection juridique avant la naissance. Selon les recherches médicales, le coeur d'un fœtus commence à battre environ trois semaines après la conception. Des ondes cérébrales peuvent être détectées dans les deux mois suivant la conception. Dès le deuxième mois, tous les organes et toutes les parties du corps sont en place. À votre avis, à partir de quand la loi devrait-elle protéger la vie humaine?

[LIRE LA LISTE – NOTER UNE RÉPONSE]

01 – À la conception

02 – À partir de deux mois

03 – À partir de trois mois

04 – À partir de six mois

05 – À la naissance

**RÉP. SPONTANÉE**

99 – NSP/SR

2. Au Canada, il n'existe actuellement aucune restriction juridique à l'avortement, peu importe l'étape de la grossesse. De manière générale, pensez-vous que l'avortement devrait être légal ou illégal durant chacune des étapes suivantes de la grossesse?

[LIRE LA LISTE – NOTER UNE RÉPONSE POUR CHACUNE]

a. Premier trimestre

b. Deuxième trimestre

c. Troisième trimestre

01 – Devrait être légal

02 – Devrait être illégal

**RÉP. SPONTANÉE**

99 - NSP/SR