



## Canadians' Attitudes Towards Abortion

Commissioned Research  
Conducted for:  
**LifeCanada**

October 2011

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**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

Introduction ..... 2  
Executive Summary ..... 3  
Legal Protection Of Human Life ..... 4  
Support for Legal Abortion by Stages of Pregnancy ..... 7  
Should Sex-Selected Abortions be Legal in Canada? ..... 11  
Funding for Abortions ..... 13  
Methodology Report ..... 16

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The survey was conducted on behalf of LifeCanada by telephone among a representative sample of 2,000 adult Canadians, between September 13 to 25, 2011. The survey was done in conjunction with Environics' National Omnibus survey.

The survey looks at Canadians' attitudes towards life issues, such as the point at which human life should be protected by law, support for legal abortion at stages of pregnancy, whether sex-selected abortions should be legal in Canada and funding for abortions.

The margin of error for a sample of 2,000 is 2.2 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. The reader is cautioned that margins of error for smaller subsamples are larger.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- When Canadians are provided with some information on the development of the foetus, and then asked at what point in human development should the law protect human life, a total of seven in ten say from conception on (28%), from two months on (17%), from three months on (17%) or from six months on (10%). Two in ten (20%) think human life should receive legal protection only at birth. Nine percent offer no opinion on this question.
- It is notable that the proportion of Canadians who think human life should be legally protected from conception on outweighs the number who think it should be protected only from birth on (28% vs. 20%).
- The survey finds that the view that human life should be protected at conception on is highest in Atlantic Canada (35%) and Manitoba/Saskatchewan (35%), and lowest in British Columbia (26%) and Quebec (25%), particularly in Montreal (20%).
- The view that human life should receive legal protection at birth is highest in Quebec (24%), particularly in Montreal (29%).
- When Canadians were asked whether abortion should generally be legal at the first, second and third trimester of a pregnancy, seven in ten (68%) think abortion should generally be legal in the first three months. This view is highest in Quebec (77%) and lowest in Atlantic Canada (55%).
- Six in ten (58%) say it should be *illegal* in the second three months. This view is higher in Alberta (67%) and Atlantic Canada (65%) and lowest in Quebec (50%). It is higher among women (62%) than among men (54%).
- Three-quarters (77%) say abortion should be *illegal* in the last three months. This view is lowest in Quebec (70%). It is higher among women (81%) than among men (73%).
- Canadians were informed about sex-selected abortions in other countries (e.g., India and China), which has led to a lack of women in these countries and related social problems, and told that India and China have banned such abortions. When asked if sex-selected abortions should or should not be legal in Canada, nine in ten (92%) Canadians think it should not be legal.

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- Overwhelming majorities across all regions and demographic subgroups think sex-selected abortions should not be legal in Canada.
  - When Canadians were informed that all hospital abortions and most abortions at private clinics are paid for through the taxpayer funded health care system, and then presented with three opinions on the funding of abortions, more than half (54%) think abortions should be financed using tax dollars, but only in medical emergencies, such as a threat to the mother's life or in cases of rape or incest. Three in ten (30%) think abortions should always be paid using the tax-funded health care system, while just over one in ten (13%) take the view that paying for abortions should be the individual's responsibility. Three percent offer no opinion.
  - Overall, the opinion that abortion should be funded using tax dollars only in cases of medical emergencies is the prevalent view across all of the country and nearly all demographic cohorts. Only among Bloc Québécois supporters do a plurality support public funding for all abortions. It is notable that there are no significant differences between men and women in response to this question.
  - The view that abortions should always be paid using the tax-funded health care system is highest in Quebec (36%), particularly in Montreal (40%) and lowest in Atlantic Canada (20%).
  - The opinion that abortions should be funded using tax dollars, but only in cases of medical emergencies is highest in Atlantic Canada (63%) and lowest in Quebec (50%) and British Columbia (49%).
  - The view that abortions should be a private responsibility does not vary significantly across the country.

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## LEGAL PROTECTION OF HUMAN LIFE

**Seven in ten Canadians think human life should be legally protected some time prior to the point of birth, including three in ten who think it should be protected from conception on.**

Canadians were informed that according to medical research, a fetal heart begins to beat about three weeks after conception, brain waves can be detected within two months after conception and that by two months all organs and body parts are in place.

When Canadians are then asked at what point in human development should the law protect human life, a total of seven in ten say from conception on (28%), from two months on (17%), from three months on (17%) or from six months on (10%). Two in ten (20%) think human life should receive legal protection only at birth. Nine percent offer no opinion on this question.

It is notable that the proportion of Canadians who think human life should be legally protected from conception on outweighs the number who think it should be protected only from birth on (28% vs. 20%).

Large majorities across the country and across all demographic groups believe that human life should receive legal protection some time prior to birth.

Looking at opinion for legal protection of human life at different points in human development, the survey finds that the view that human life should be protected from conception on is highest in Atlantic Canada (35%) and Manitoba/Saskatchewan (35%), and lowest in British Columbia (26%) and Quebec (25%), particularly in Montreal (20%). This view is higher among women (30%) than among men (25%). It is notable that this view is not significantly different across age groups. This view is higher among those with lower education and lower household income. Looking at political affiliation, support is higher among Conservative Party supporters, especially compared to supporters of the Green Party and the Bloc Québécois.

Support for the view that human life should be protected from two months on does not vary significantly across the country or across demographic subgroups. It also does not differ significantly based on political affiliation.

Support for the view that human life should be protected from three months on does not vary significantly across the country. It is higher among women (19%) than among men (15%). It does not differ significantly based on political affiliation.

Support for the view that human life should be protected from six months on is lower in Atlantic Canada (3%). This view is higher among Canadians aged 18 to 29 (13%) compared to those aged 60 and older (7%). It does not differ significantly based on political affiliation.

The view that human life should receive legal protection only from the point of birth is highest in Quebec (24%), particularly in Montreal (29%). This view is higher among men (25%) than among women (16%). It is notable that this view does not vary significantly across age groups. Looking at political affiliation, support is higher among Bloc Québécois supporters.

### Human life should be legally protected ...

September 2011

	%
At conception	28
From 2 months on	17
From 3 months on	17
From 6 months on	10
At birth	20
DK/NA	9

### Human life should be legally protected ...

By political affiliation September 2011

	Con	Lib	NDP	BQ	Green Party	Undecided
	%	%	%	%	%	%
At conception	33	28	24	14	19	32
From 2 months on	20	15	16	22	17	11
From 3 months on	15	20	17	16	24	13
From 6 months on	8	7	12	13	14	9
At birth	16	23	23	31	20	19
DK/NA	7	6	8	4	6	15

*Q.5 This question concerns the development of human life before birth. According to medical research, a fetal heart begins to beat about three weeks after conception. Brain waves can be detected within two months after conception. By two months all organs and body parts are in place. In your opinion, at what point should the law protect human life?*

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## SUPPORT FOR LEGAL ABORTION BY STAGES OF PREGNANCY

**Seven in ten Canadians think abortion should generally be legal in the first three months of pregnancy. However, six in ten think abortion should be *illegal* in the second three months and three-quarters think it should be *illegal* in the last three months.**

When Canadians were asked whether abortion should generally be legal at the first, second and third trimester of a pregnancy, they are much less inclined to think abortion should be legal after the first trimester.

Seven in ten (68%) Canadians think abortion should generally be legal in the first three months; one-quarter (26%) think it should be illegal.

A much smaller proportion of one-third (33%) think abortion should be legal in the second three months; six in ten (58%) say it should be illegal.

Only 16 percent think abortion should be legal in the last three months; three-quarters (77%) say it should be illegal.

Related tracking from a U.S. Gallup survey found Americans even less supportive of late-term abortions. Six in ten (62%) Americans thought abortion should be legal in the first three months; 35 percent said it should be illegal. One-quarter (24%) thought it should be legal in the second three months; 71 percent said it should be illegal. Only 10 percent felt abortion should be legal in the last three months; 86 percent thought it should be illegal.

Majorities across all regions and demographic groups think abortion should generally be legal in the first three months. This view is highest in Quebec (77%) and lowest in Atlantic Canada (55%). This view is lower among Canadians aged 60 and older, those with lower education and lower income. Looking at political affiliation, the view that abortion should be legal in the first three months is higher among Green Party and Bloc Québécois supporters, especially compared to Conservative Party supporters

Majorities in nearly all regions and demographic groups think abortion should generally be *illegal* in the second three months. This view is higher in Alberta (67%) and Atlantic Canada (65%) and lowest in Quebec (50%). It is higher among women (62%) than among men (54%). It is also higher among those with lower education. It is notable that this view is not significantly different across age groups. Looking at political affiliation, the view that abortion should be *illegal* in the second three months is highest among Conservative Party supporters, especially compared to supporters of the Bloc Québécois.



Large majorities across all regions and demographic groups think abortion should generally be *illegal* in the last three months. This view is lowest in Quebec (70%). It is higher among women (81%) than among men (73%). It is notable that this view is not significantly different across age groups. Looking at political affiliation, the view that abortion should be *illegal* in the last three months is highest among Green Party and Conservative Party supporters, especially compared to supporters of the Bloc Québécois.

Opinions on the legality of abortion at various stages of pregnancy vary somewhat with views on when human life should receive legal protection. Large majorities of those who think human life should be protected at conception think abortion should be *illegal* in the first, second and last three months of pregnancy. Large 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 a majority think it should be *illegal* in the last three months.

### Opinions on whether abortion should be generally legal at different stages of pregnancy

September 2011

	%
<b>First three months</b>	
Legal	68
Illegal	26
DK/NA	6
<b>Second three months</b>	
Legal	33
Illegal	58
DK/NA	9
<b>Third three months</b>	
Legal	16
Illegal	77
DK/NA	7

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**Opinions on whether abortion should be generally legal at different stages of pregnancy**

By political affiliation September 2011

	<b>Con</b>	<b>Lib</b>	<b>NDP</b>	<b>BQ</b>	<b>Green Party</b>	<b>Undecided</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>First three months</b>						
Legal	62	69	77	81	80	59
Illegal	34	25	17	15	16	30
DK/NA	4	6	6	4	4	10
<b>Second three months</b>						
Legal	26	39	37	54	37	30
Illegal	69	54	53	41	56	54
DK/NA	5	6	9	5	7	16
<b>Third three months</b>						
Legal	12	13	18	34	13	17
Illegal	84	79	76	60	85	70
DK/NA	4	7	6	6	3	13

**Opinions on whether abortion should be generally legal at different stages of pregnancy**

By opinions on when law should protect human life September 2011

	<b>At conception</b>	<b>From 2 months on</b>	<b>From 3 months on</b>	<b>From 6 months on</b>	<b>At birth</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>First three months</b>					
Legal	28	74	95	94	86
Illegal	66	22	3	5	12
DK/NA	6	4	2	1	2
<b>Second three months</b>					
Legal	9	17	29	68	69
Illegal	86	80	62	27	26
DK/NA	5	3	10	6	5
<b>Third three months</b>					
Legal	5	6	12	17	42
Illegal	90	92	83	80	52
DK/NA	5	2	5	3	5

*6 Thinking generally, do you think abortion should generally be legal or generally illegal during each of the following stages of pregnancy...first three months...second three months...last three months?*

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## SHOULD SEX-SELECTED ABORTIONS BE LEGAL IN CANADA?

**Nine in ten Canadians think sex-selected abortions should *not be legal* in Canada.**

Canadians were informed that males far outnumber females in a number of countries, such as China and India. This is partly the result of what are called “sex selection” abortions in which families choose to abort girl babies because boys are more highly valued. The lack of women can lead to a number of social problems. India and China have banned such abortions.

When asked if sex-selected abortions should or should not be legal in Canada, nine in ten (92%) Canadians think it should not be legal, while only five percent think it should be legal.

Overwhelming majorities across all regions and demographic subgroups think sex-selected abortions should not be legal in Canada.

Overwhelming majorities of Canadians of all political affiliation think sex-selected abortions should not be legal in Canada.

The view that sex-selected abortions should not be legal in Canada is at an overwhelming majority level regardless of views on when human life should receive legal protection. However, it is still higher among those who think human life should be protected at conception than among those who think it should be protected at birth.

### Should sex-selected abortions be legal or not legal in Canada?

September 2011

	%
Should be legal	5
Should not be legal	92
DK/NA	3

By political affiliation September 2011

	Con	Lib	NDP	BQ	Green Party	Undecided
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Should be legal	2	8	6	4	7	4
Should not be legal	96	88	91	94	92	91
DK/NA	1	4	3	2	1	5

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## Should sex-selected abortions be legal or not legal in Canada?

By opinions on when law should protect human life September 2011

	At conception	From 2 months on	From 3 months on	From 6 months on	At birth
	%	%	%	%	%
Should be legal	1	2	5	8	11
Should not be legal	98	96	93	89	85
DK/NA	1	2	2	3	4

*7 Males far outnumber females in a number of countries, such as China and India. This is partly the result of what are called “sex selection” abortions in which families choose to abort girl babies because boys are more highly valued. The lack of women can lead to a number of social problems. India and China have banned such abortions. Do you think sex-selected abortions should or should not be legal in Canada?*

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## FUNDING FOR ABORTIONS

**More than half of Canadians think abortions should be financed using tax dollars, but only in emergency situations, such as a threat to the mother's life or in cases of rape or incest.**

Most Canadians support funding abortions via tax dollars, but only in emergency situations. There continues to be far less support for public funding of all abortions, or for the view that all abortions should be paid for by individuals.

Canadians were informed that, in Canada, all hospital abortions and most abortions at private clinics are paid for through the taxpayer funded health care system. When presented with three opinions on the funding of abortions, more than half (54%) think abortions should be financed using tax dollars, but only in medical emergencies, such as a threat to the mother's life or in cases of rape or incest. Three in ten (30%) think abortions should always be paid using the tax-funded health care system, while just over one in ten (13%) take the view that paying for abortions should be the individual's responsibility. Three percent offer no opinion.

Overall, the opinion that abortion should be funded using tax dollars only in cases of medical emergencies is the prevalent view across all of the country and nearly all demographic cohorts. Only among Bloc Québécois supporters do a plurality support public funding for all abortions. It is notable that there are no significant differences between men and women in response to this question.

The view that abortions should always be paid using the tax-funded health care system is highest in Quebec (36%), particularly in Montreal (40%) and lowest in Atlantic Canada (20%). This view is higher among those with higher education, particularly those with a university degree (43%) and Bloc Québécois supporters (50%).

The opinion that abortions should be funded using tax dollars, but only in cases of medical emergencies, is highest in Atlantic Canada (63%) and lowest in Quebec (50%) and British Columbia (49%). This view is higher among Conservative Party supporters, especially compared to Bloc Québécois supporters.

The view that abortions should be a private responsibility does not vary significantly across the country. This view is higher among those with less than a high school education.

Opinions on funding of abortion vary somewhat with views on when human life should receive legal protection. The view that abortions should always be paid using the tax-funded health care system is

higher among those who think human life should be protected some time after conception. Support for funding abortions using tax dollars but only in cases of medical emergencies is higher among those who think human life should be protected from two months on or before. The view that abortions should be a private responsibility is greater among those who think human life should be legally protected at conception.

### Preferred view on funding of abortion

September 2011

	%
Abortions should always be paid using the tax-funded health care system	30
Abortions should be financed using tax dollars but only in medical emergencies, such as a threat to the mother's life or in cases of rape or incest	54
Paying for abortions should be the individual's responsibility	13
DK/NA	3

By political affiliation September 2011

	Con	Lib	NDP	BQ	Green Party	Undecided
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Abortions should always be paid using the tax-funded health care system	21	36	36	50	35	24
Abortions should be financed using tax dollars but only in medical emergencies, such as a threat to the mother's life or in cases of rape or incest	62	48	53	37	54	57
Paying for abortions should be the individual's responsibility	16	15	8	11	10	12
DK/NA	2	1	3	2	2	7

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**Preferred view on funding of abortion**

By opinions on when law should protect human life                      September 2011

	<b>At conception</b>	<b>From 2 months on</b>	<b>From 3 months on</b>	<b>From 6 months on</b>	<b>At birth</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
Abortions should always be paid using the tax-funded health care system	9	27	39	46	46
Abortions should be financed using tax dollars but only in medical emergencies, such as a threat to the mother's life or in cases of rape or incest	67	64	50	46	42
Paying for abortions should be the individual's responsibility	22	8	9	7	10
DK/NA	2	1	1	1	2

*Q.8 In Canada, all hospital abortions and most abortions at private clinics are paid for through the taxpayer funded health care system. When it comes to the funding of abortions, which of the following three opinions is closest to your own ...?*

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## METHODOLOGY REPORT

The results are based on omnibus questions placed on an Environics' National Omnibus survey, conducted with a representative sample of adult Canadians between September 13 and 25, 2011.

### 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			
	2006 Census* %	Weighted N=2,000	Unweighted N=2,000	Margin of Error
CANADA	100	2,000	2,000	+/- 2.2%
Atlantic Canada	8	148	250	+/- 6.2%
Quebec	24	487	500	+/- 4.4%
Ontario	38	766	500	+/- 4.4%
Manitoba/Saskatchewan	4	130	250	+/- 6.2%
Alberta	10	204	250	+/- 6.2%
British Columbia	13	265	250	+/- 6.2%

\* Canadians aged 18 years or over in 2006, 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

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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.