

'Pro-Choice' or 'Pro-Life'? In a debate often lacking nuance, 41% of Canadians are 'somewhere in between'

Half (52%) in Canada say abortion should be available at any time during a pregnancy

November 24, 2022 – It may often feel as though contemporary debates over abortion have fallen into a trap of simplicity in which the perspectives of Canadians about a complex issue are reduced to binary concepts: “pro-choice” or “pro-life”, legal or illegal, moral or amoral.

The latest research from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute finds that while a majority of Canadians are absolutists – either completely “pro-choice” (52%) or completely “pro-life” (8%) – a significant segment (41%) consider themselves somewhere “in between”.

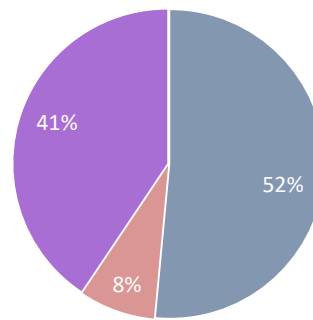
This diversity of view includes Canadians who have had an abortion themselves. Among these women, three-in-five (58%) identify as pro-choice, six per cent say they are pro-life, and 36 per cent sit somewhere along the middle of the continuum.

Among those in this “in between” group that eschews the polarities of the debate, just over one-third (36%) are comfortable with abortion until 15 weeks of pregnancy – about the point when a fetus develops a heartbeat. Another one-quarter (23%) say abortion is acceptable until the point of fetal viability, about 23 to 24 weeks. Some who claim to be in between profess they simply do not know at what point in a pregnancy abortion is or isn't acceptable (33%).

Other factors including gender, age, experience, and faith all influence perspectives on this issue, and are the focus of this second report in a three-part series looking at abortion in Canada.

To read *Part One*, which focused on respondents' personal experiences with either having an abortion or carrying an unplanned pregnancy through to term, [please click here](#).

Overall, would you describe yourself as:
(All respondents, n=1,805)



- Completely pro-choice
- Completely pro-life
- Somewhere in between these two positions

METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from Aug. 29-30, 2022 among a representative randomized sample of 1,805 Canadian adults who are members of [Angus Reid Forum](#). For comparison purposes only, a probability sample of this size would carry a margin of error of +/- 2 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. Discrepancies in or between totals are due to rounding. The survey was self-commissioned and paid for by ARI. Detailed tables are found at the end of this release.

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More Key Findings:

- Young women – those between the ages of 18 and 34 – are most likely to be completely pro-choice (65%) but also most likely to be completely pro-life (14%).
- Canadians who 'strongly agree' that faith is an important part of their life are most likely to voice pro-life views (40%). That said, the same number (39%) say that they are somewhere in between the two extremes, and one-in-five say they are completely pro-choice (21%).
- Canadians tend to prioritize the rights of the mother over the rights of the fetus. Three-in-five (58%) say that the viable fetus (after approximately 24 weeks) does not have equal rights to the mother, while 22 per cent believe that it does.

About ARI

The **Angus Reid Institute (ARI)** was founded in October 2014 by pollster and sociologist, Dr. Angus Reid. ARI is a national, not-for-profit, non-partisan public opinion research foundation established to advance education by commissioning, conducting and disseminating to the public accessible and impartial statistical data, research and policy analysis on economics, political science, philanthropy, public administration, domestic and international affairs and other socio-economic issues of importance to Canada and its world.

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Part One: Pro-life, pro-choice, somewhere in between

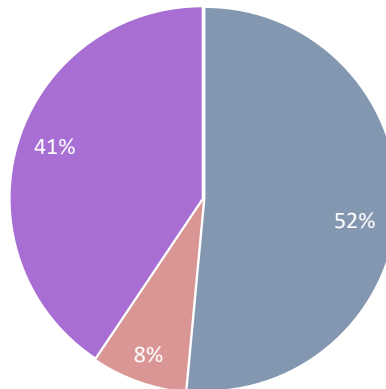
The ongoing debate over the ethics and legalities of abortion in Canada can be passionate but often overly simplified. Between protesters outside of abortion clinics and hospitals yelling at or harassing women attempting to access abortions in the name of their “pro-life” beliefs, or political parties requiring their members to attest to “pro-choice” positions – more nuanced views of millions of Canadians are often left out of the discussion.

Overall, half of Canadians do identify as “completely pro-choice”, telling the Angus Reid Institute they believe an abortion is acceptable at any time during a pregnancy, for any reason. On the other end of the spectrum, eight per cent say they are “completely pro-life” and believe that abortion is never acceptable except under exceptional circumstances where the physical health of the mother is in danger. Two-in-five (41%) say they don't identify with either side of this debate and find themselves somewhere in between:

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Overall, would you describe yourself as:
(All respondents, n=1,805)



■ Completely pro-choice ■ Completely pro-life ■ Somewhere in between these two positions

In Canada, there is no law to either guarantee or restrict abortion; it is largely governed by conventional medical practice, which allows abortion until approximately 23 weeks gestation.

Those who have personal lived experience with this issue are also far from unanimous in their views. Among women who have had an abortion three-in-five are completely pro-choice (58%) while more than one-in-three say their views are somewhere between the two ends of the time continuum.

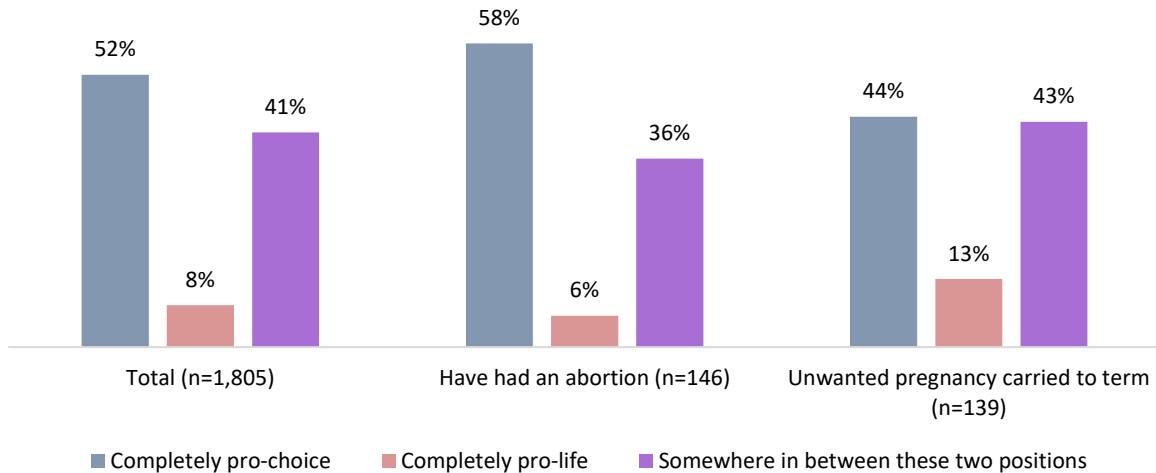
Related: [Abortion in Canada: Understanding the experiences and choices of women who've faced unwanted pregnancies](#)

Those who have carried an unplanned pregnancy to term are more likely to be completely pro-life, though most identify themselves in each of the two other groups.

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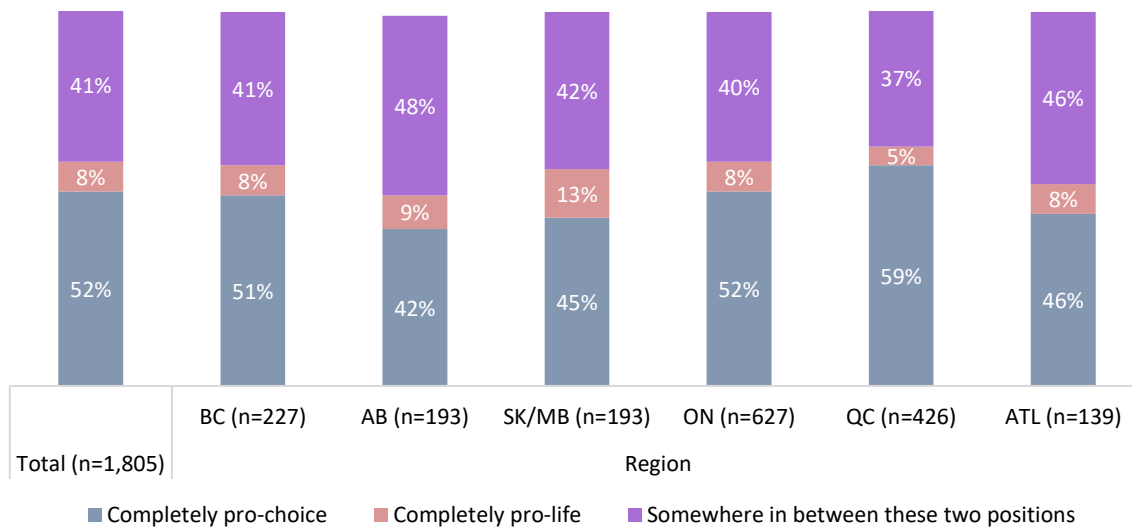
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Overall, would you describe yourself as:



Quebecers are most likely to identify as “completely pro-choice” with a strong majority (59%) of this view:

Overall, would you describe yourself as:



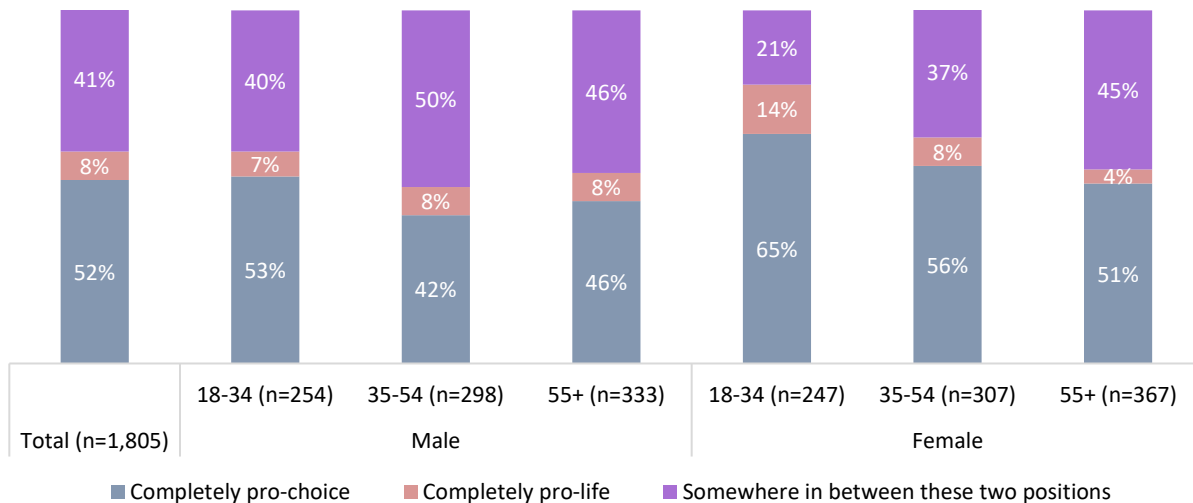
Young women most likely to identify as “completely pro-choice”

Women between the ages of 18 and 34 are notably most likely to be either “completely pro-choice” (65%) or “completely pro-life” (14%). Men between the ages of 35 and 54 are least likely to be completely pro-choice compared to other age and gender groups, as seen below:

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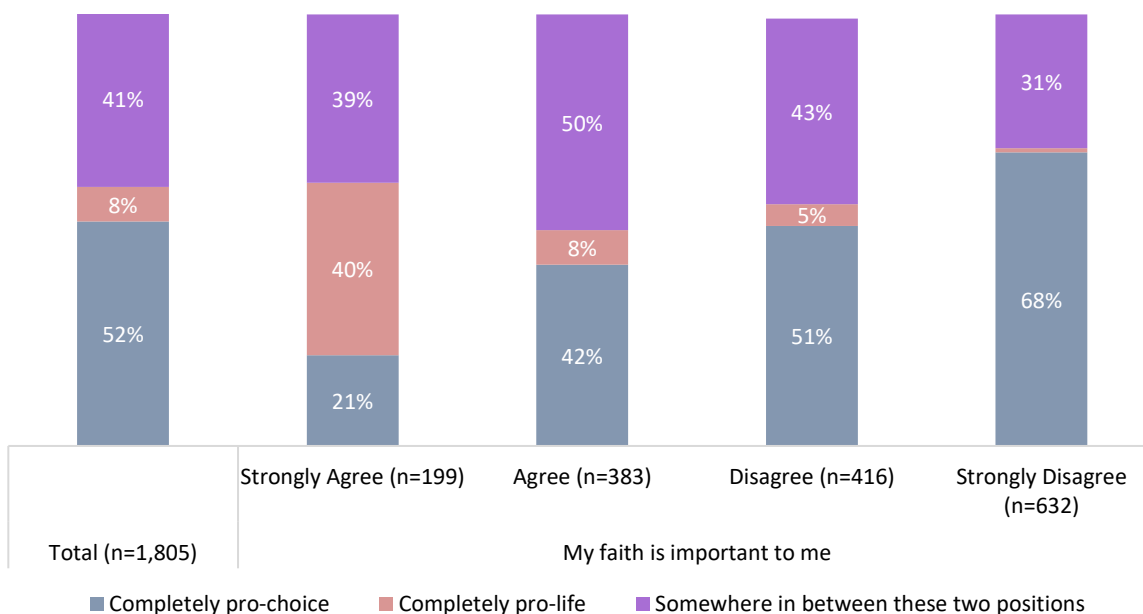
Overall, would you describe yourself as:



Faith a factor, but not one size fits all

Individuals who say religious faith plays an important role in their lives are not monolithic in where they situate themselves on the acceptability of abortion. As one may expect, this group is most likely to identify as completely pro-life (40%). That said, this stance does not represent the majority view among people of strong faith. Indeed, this demographic is just as likely to say its views are “somewhere in between”, while one-in-five (21%) identify as completely pro-choice:

Faith and Abortion



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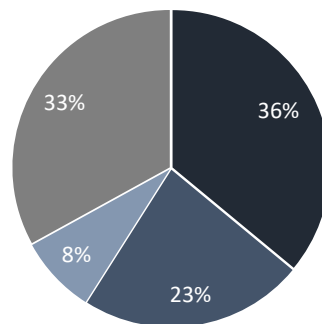
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Part Two: Understanding those “in-between”

Respondents who do not identify as either completely pro-life or completely pro-choice were asked to further define what “in-between” means to them. Among these respondents, about one-in-three (36%) say that they are comfortable with abortion until about 15 weeks, the point at when a fetus develops a heartbeat. Another one-in-four (23%) say they believe it is acceptable until the point of viability – the time when a fetus could survive outside the womb, generally considered to be about 24 weeks

A small group say abortion should be available after this, but again, do not go as far as to choose “at any time” in pregnancy.

**For those "Somewhere in Between" - Can you tell us at what point in a pregnancy abortion is acceptable to you, personally:
(n=733)**



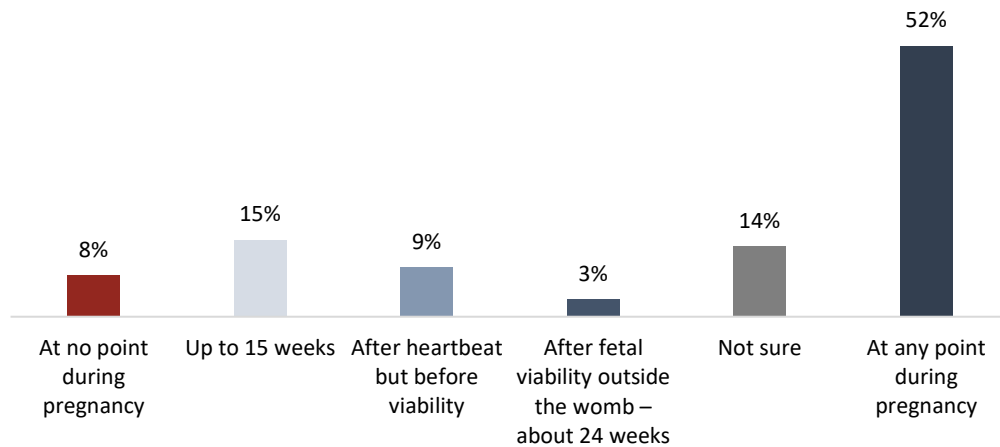
- From conception to the development of a fetal heartbeat – about 15 weeks
- After heartbeat but before viability
- After fetal viability outside the womb – about 24 weeks
- Not sure/Can't say

Overall, half (52%) identify as completely pro-choice and eight per cent as completely pro-life, with smaller segments identifying their level of acceptability in between the two ends of the spectrum:

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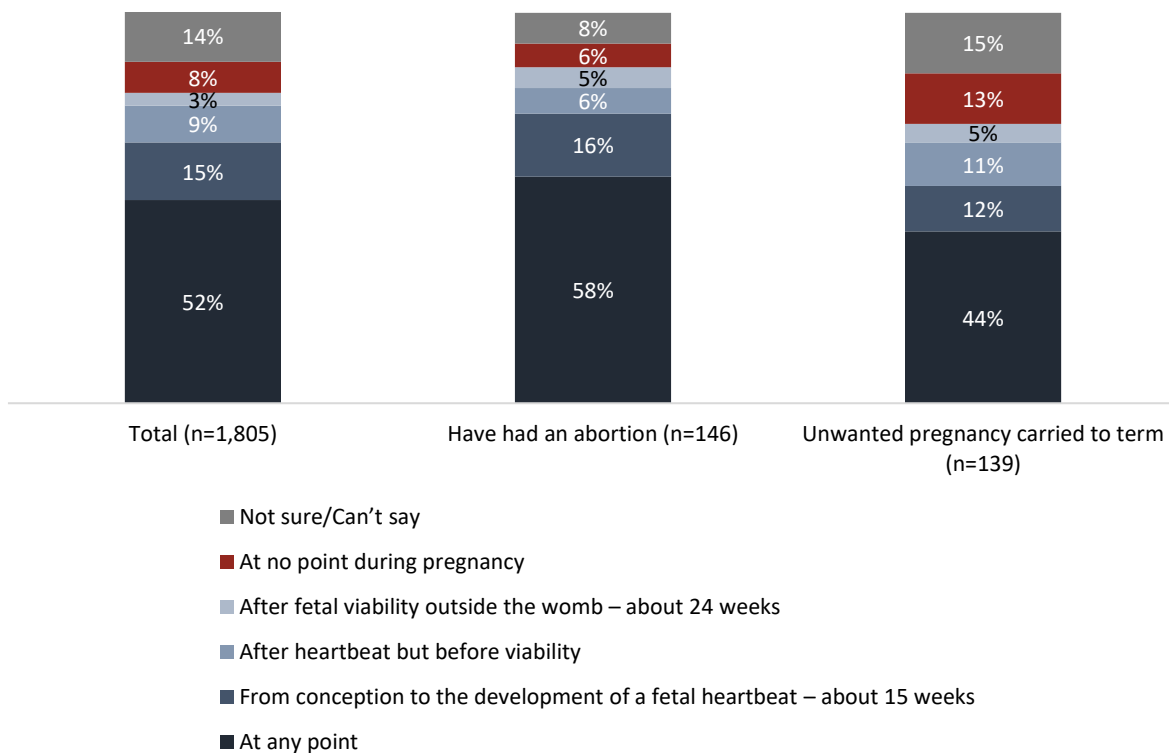
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**Canadian views of when abortion is acceptable
(All respondents, n=1,805)**



The views of those closest to the issue, who have either had an abortion or carried an unplanned pregnancy to term, are varied. Both groups are most likely to be open to abortion at any time in a pregnancy, but with considerable nuance, especially among the latter group:

Canadian views of when abortion is acceptable



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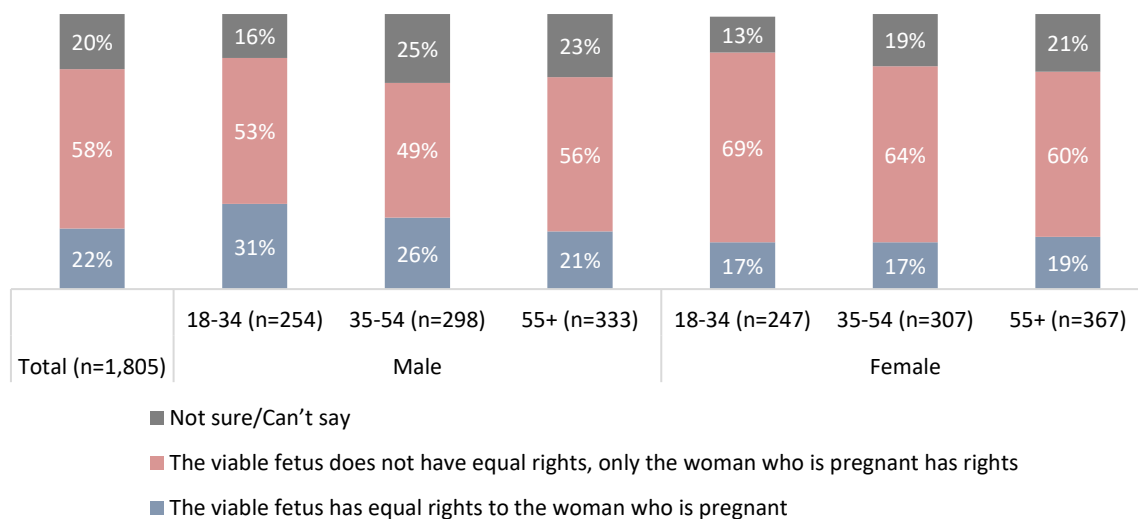
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Part Three: Viability and rights

Opponents of abortion often include the rights of the unborn child in their arguments. [Science, politics, and religion](#) are often in competition as to the correct definition of when life begins. Canadians in this study were asked specifically about a viable fetus. A fetus is considered viable around [23 or 24 weeks](#), but does it have rights? Angus Reid Institute researchers canvassed views.

One-in-five Canadians (22%) say that they would consider the rights of the fetus as equal to that of the mother at the point of viability in a pregnancy. Three-in-five (58%) say that even at this point the mother has rights that supersede the fetus. The former view is more prominent among men than women across all age groups, though all groups tend to agree that the rights of the woman take precedence:

Which is closer to your point of view?

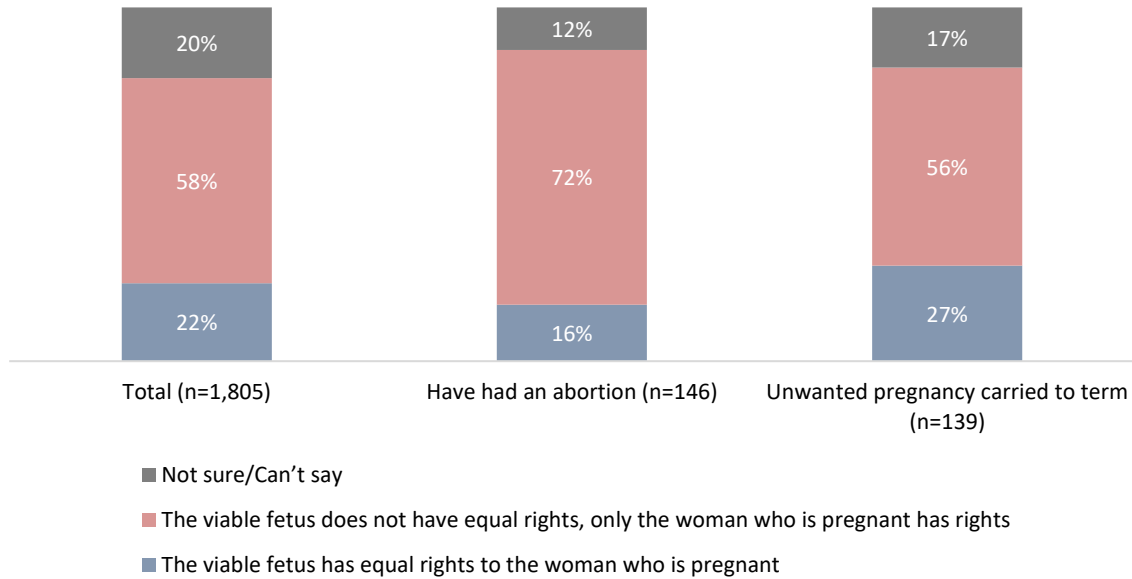


Both women who have had an abortion and those who have carried an unwanted pregnancy to term tend to agree that the rights of the woman are foremost in this discussion:

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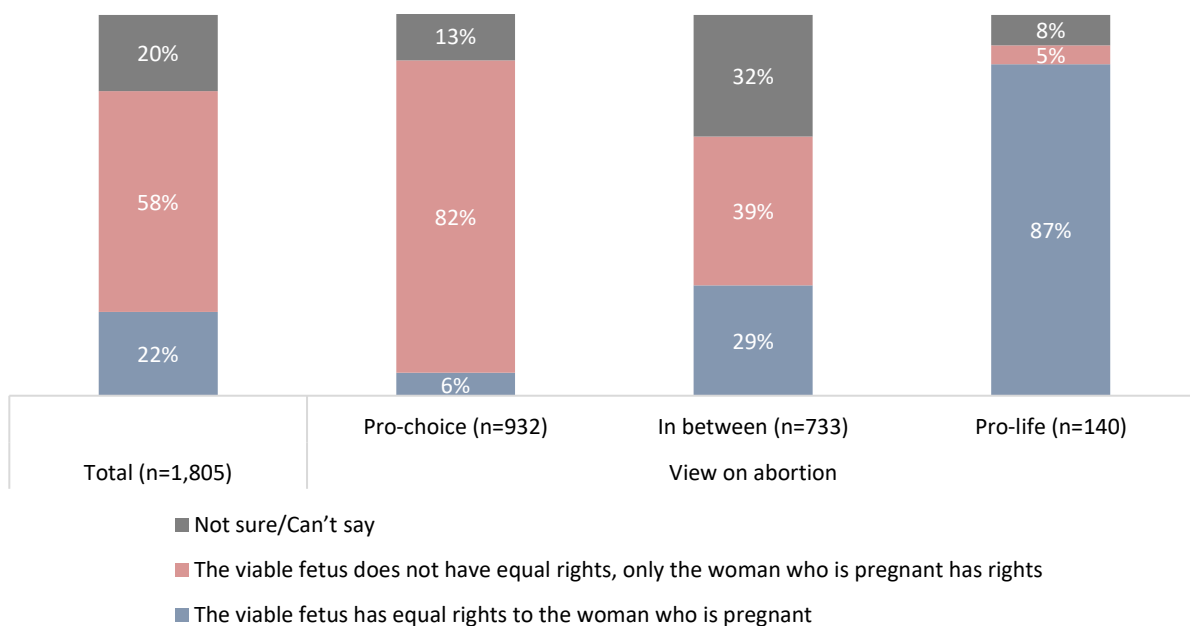
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Which is closer to your point of view?



Of note are the two-in-five Canadians who say they are in between being completely pro-life and completely pro-choice. While those on each side of the debate are more certain how they feel about the rights of the mother and the fetus, there is a lack of consensus among those in the middle:

Which is closer to your point of view?



For detailed results by age, gender, region, education, and other demographics, [click here](#).

For detailed results by proximity to abortion and unwanted pregnancies, [click here](#).

For detailed results by importance of faith, [click here](#).

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