

Abortion and Politics: Majority support law to guarantee access; wouldn't stop pro-life candidates from running

Those who would ban abortion entirely also less likely to support spending programs for single mothers

November 28, 2022 – As a political and medical battle rages in the United States with the reversal of Roe v. Wade, Canada's status as [one of the few countries](#) in the world without a law guaranteeing or restricting access to abortion is the subject of renewed debate.

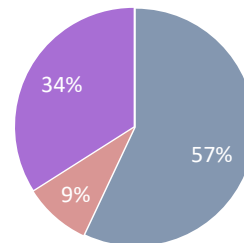
A new study from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute – the third of a three-part series canvassing issues and experiences around abortion in Canada – finds most in this country are seeking legislative clarity – but for differing reasons. Three-in-five (57%) say Canada needs a law to guarantee and improve access to abortion. This view is held by at least 61 per cent of all women, and half of men (51%). Nine per cent want a law for the opposite reason – to restrict access. The rest, one-in-three (34%) feel no law is needed.

Proponents of a law guaranteeing access argue that there are holes in the current system ([the first report](#) released in this three-part series found 16 per cent of women who say they had an abortion also say it was difficult to access). There is also significant support for a stronger social safety net among these proponents. Seven-in-ten (72%) who believe the government should guarantee access to abortion through legislation also say they would pay one to two per cent more in income tax for a program to support single mothers. This proportion drops to 56 per cent among those who would restrict access to abortions and 54 per cent among those who think the current system is fine.

This study explores other recent angles of the abortion debate in Canada. The Liberal and New Democrat parties have required candidates in recent elections to be pro-choice if they wish to run under their banners. Canadians are split on this measure: half say it's acceptable that candidates are barred from running if they are not pro-choice, half disagree.

Canadians are also divided over a Liberal 2021 campaign promise to revoke charitable status for anti-abortion organizations that provide "[dishonest](#)" counselling to women about their options and rights during pregnancy. Two-in-five (38%) would revoke their status, while a similar number (35%) would not.

If you were the justice minister and tasked with dealing with this, what would you do?
(All respondents, n=1,805)



- Introduce legislation to GUARANTEE access to abortion
- Introduce legislation to RESTRICT access to abortion
- No legislation is necessary – maintain the status quo

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.

CONTACT:

Shachi Kurl, President: 604.908.1693 shachi.kurl@angusreid.org @shachikurl
Dave Korzinski, Research Director: 250.899.0821 dave.korzinski@angusreid.org

More Key Findings:

- Four-in-five (79%) past Conservative voters believe it's unacceptable for party leaders to exclude pro-life candidates. Three-quarters of past Liberal (73%) and NDP (75%) voters disagree.
- More than half (56%) of Canadians support withholding federal health transfer payments to provinces that do not provide reliable access to abortion services, while 44 per cent oppose this.
- Half (48%) of past Conservative voters believe that the current system is fine and no law restricting or guaranteeing access to abortion is needed, the most of any group of past voters. Those who voted Conservative in last year's election are also the most likely to believe there should be a law restricting abortion, at 14 per cent.

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: Guarantee or restrict access?

Abortion in Canada has a lengthy legal history. The procedure was banned from 1869 until 1969, when the Liberal government of Pierre Trudeau introduced a law to allow it in a limited fashion. At the time, a committee of doctors would need to decide that the mother's health was in danger in order to sign off on an abortion. A 1988 Supreme Court Decision in the case of R. v. Morgentaler found that limiting access was unconstitutional and the procedure was decriminalized.

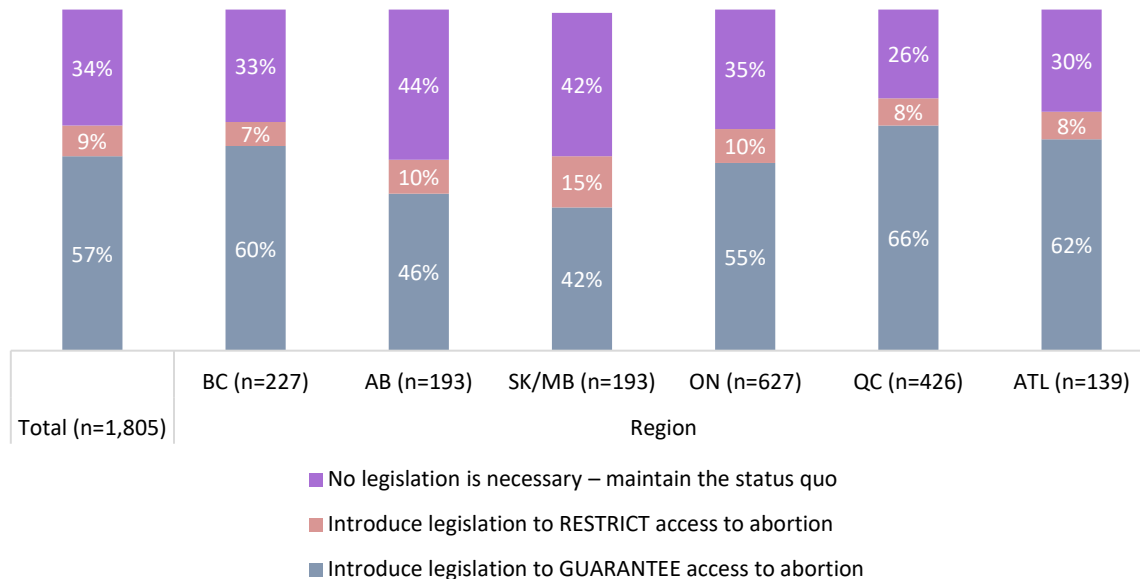
A Conservative government under then-Prime Minister Brian Mulroney attempted to pass a law in the early 1990s which would have restricted access, but this law [died in the senate](#). Canada remains [one of the few](#) nations in the world [without a law](#) either guaranteeing or restricting access to abortion.

Asked whether they feel this an acceptable situation, or if Canada needs a law, one-in-three (34%) are fine with the status quo. Three-in-five Canadians (57%) say that legislation should be introduced to guarantee access, while one-in-ten (9%) say that abortion should be restricted through legal means.

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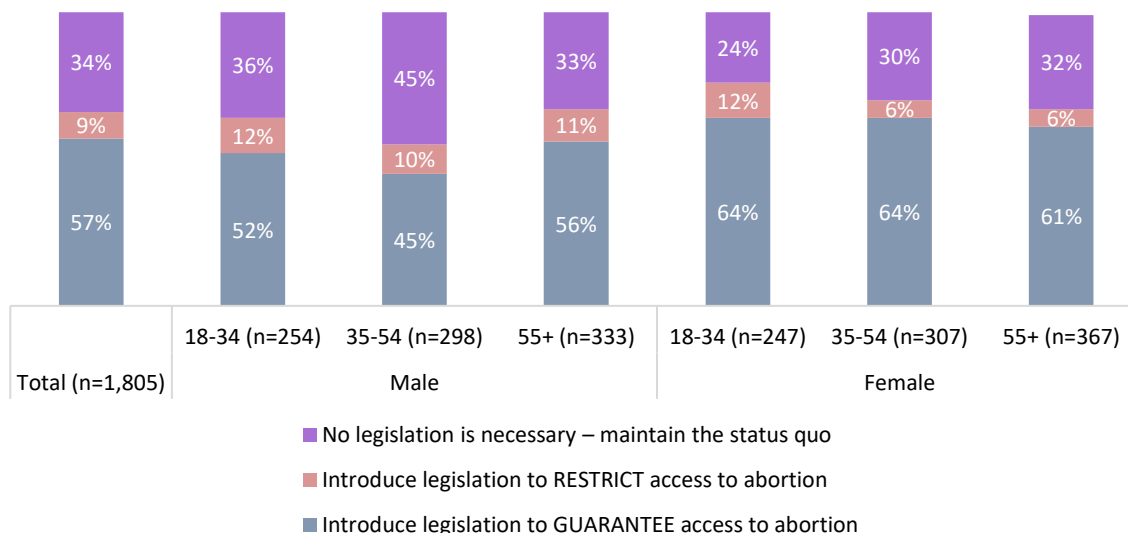


Having no law to ensure access has resulted in unreliable service in some parts of the country. A 2016 report [from the UN Human Rights Commissioner](#) called into question Canada's equality of access, and [recent data from the Angus Reid Institute found](#) difficult access for 16 per cent of Canadian women who reported having an abortion.

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

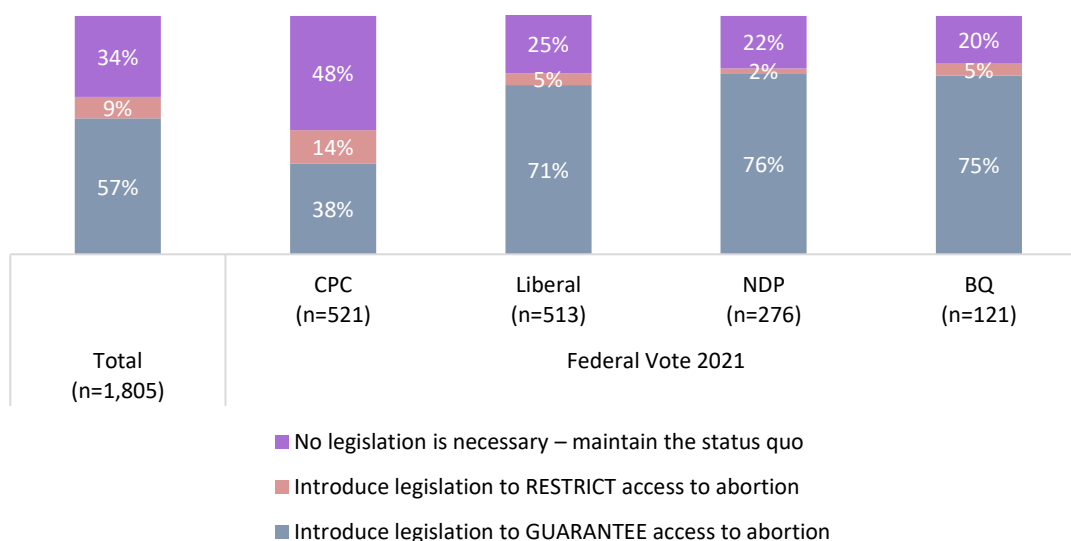
At least three-in-five women across all age groups would like to see Canada introduce a law to guarantee access to abortion. This is a more common view among women than men in all comparable age groups. That said, young women are also among the most likely to support restricting the procedure:

If you were the justice minister and tasked with dealing with this, what would you do?



Politics is a strong driver of opinion on this issue: at least seven-in-ten past Liberal (71%), NDP (76%) and Bloc Québécois (75%) voters support legislation to guarantee access to abortion. Past Conservative voters' opinions are more split. Half (48%) in that group believe no legislation is necessary, the most of any group of past voters. Two-in-five (38%) want a law to guarantee access to abortion. A minority of past CPC voters – but more than among other party supporters (14%), would restrict access:

If you were the justice minister and tasked with dealing with this, what would you do?

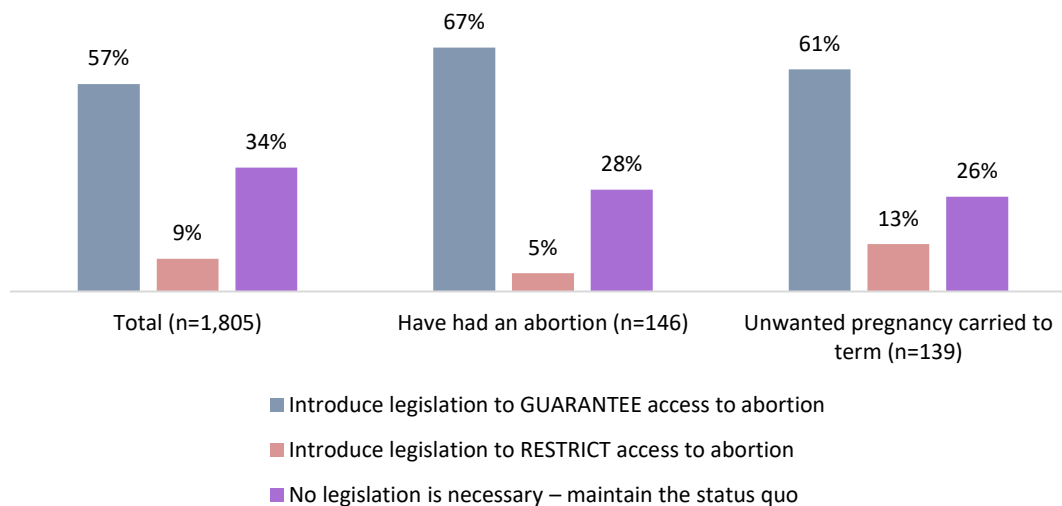


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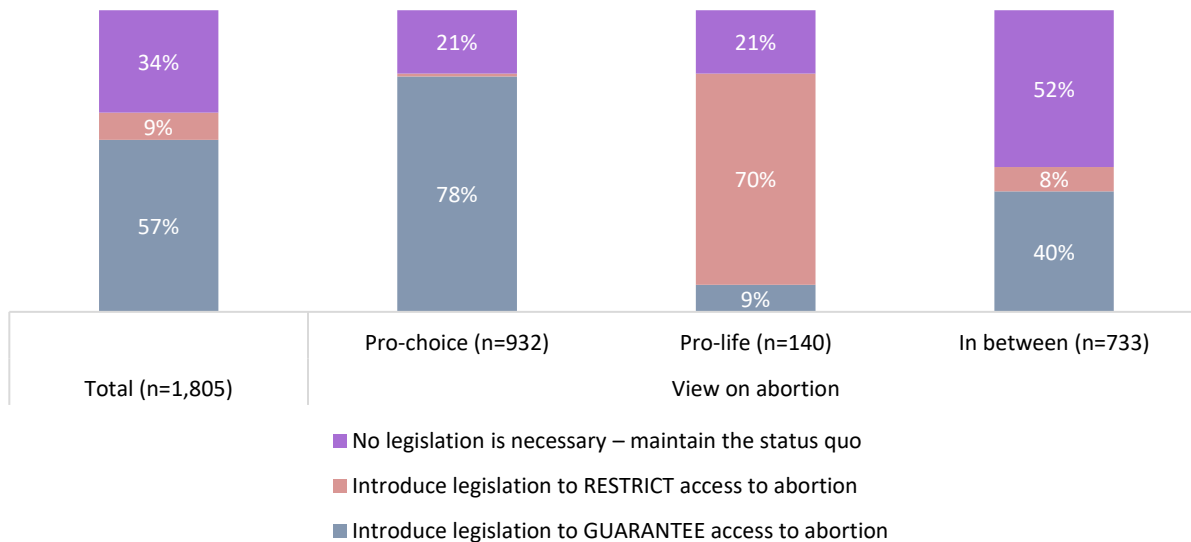
Two-thirds of Canadian women who have had a surgical abortion in their lifetime say Canada should codify access with a law, while three-in-ten (28%) are comfortable with the current system. A strong majority of women who have carried an unwanted pregnancy to term are similarly supportive of a legal guarantee, but are also more likely to say access should be legally restricted:

If you were the justice minister and tasked with dealing with this, what would you do?



Those who identify as pro-life or pro-choice are predictably divided on this question, though those who are somewhere in between these positions – two-in-five Canadians (42%) – are divided as to whether a law to guarantee access is worthwhile:

If you were the justice minister and tasked with dealing with this, what would you do?



Part Two: Does a “pro-life” stance extend to social policy?

Beyond the legalistic aspects of this discussion, there are social considerations. Why do women have abortions? Common reasons can be personal, based on preparedness of relationship stability, but are also sometimes financial. The prospect of being a single mother can be daunting, as this group is [among the most likely](#) in Canada to experience poverty.

There has been some discussion on this issue among the pro-life movement in the United States. Some [have argued](#) that with Roe v. Wade overturned by the U.S. Supreme Court, it’s time to advocate for better government support for women, children and families. However, there is much work to be done. [The New York Times found](#) states with abortion bans have some of the weakest social safety nets.

Notably, however, those most likely to support legislation restricting abortion are also least willing to see income taxes raised to improve the financial circumstances for single parents. The Angus Reid Institute asked a battery of questions about willingness to contribute one to two per cent more in income tax for social supports, finding this group noticeably less willing to create the conditions that might persuade some women who seek abortion for financial reasons to consider other alternatives:

Would you pay 1%-2% more in income tax for: (Percentage saying 'Yes' shown below)				
	Total (n=1,805)	View on abortion law		
		Law to Guarantee abortion (n=1,031)	Law to Restrict abortion (n=167)	No Law Needed (n=607)
Programs to support children of low-income mothers	64%	72%	58%	54%
Free lunches at elementary schools in your community	57%	66%	45%	46%
Universal access to contraception	50%	65%	20%	34%
A universal basic income of \$40,000/ year	47%	57%	28%	34%
A top up grant for minimum wage workers in your province	42%	50%	35%	30%

Part Three: Policy and politics

The politics of abortion are rarely far from the surface in Canada. New party leaders are almost certain to be asked to clarify their position on the issue. This summer, Conservative Party leader Pierre Poilievre said his government [“would not introduce or pass legislation restricting abortion.”](#) although, Conservative MPs will be allowed to [vote as they feel on matters of conscience](#).

In 2014, Justin Trudeau confirmed that Liberal MPs would need to commit to pro-choice views to run for the party. The NDP, under leader Thomas Mulcair, [said in 2014 anti-abortion candidates would not be allowed to run for the party](#), a policy that [has continued](#) under leader Jagmeet Singh.

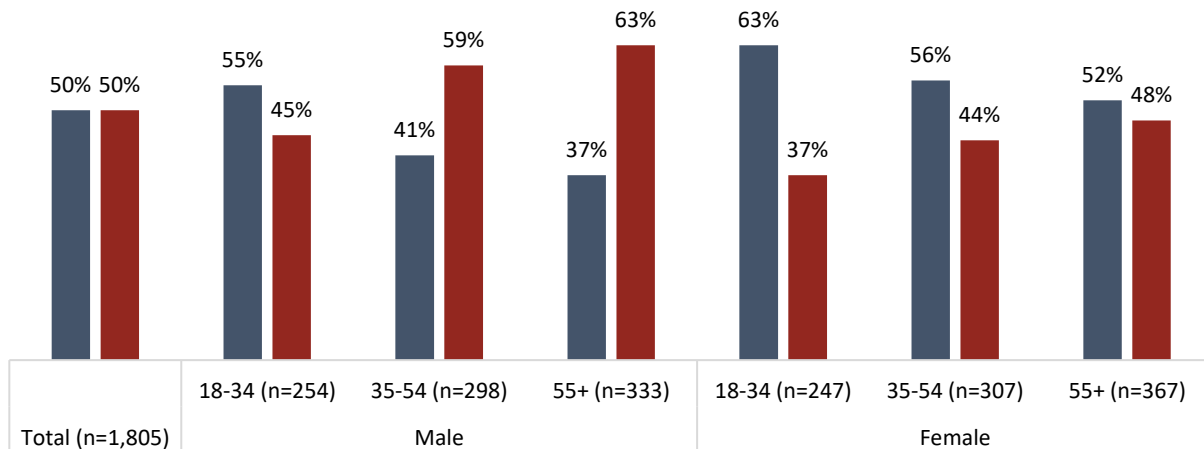
Is it acceptable for the Liberals, NDP to ban pro-life candidates?

Canadians are as divided as Trudeau and Poilievre on this issue. Half (50%) say that it is acceptable for a party to require a pro-choice position for members, while half (50%) disagree. Men over the age of 34 have the highest level of opposition, while women younger than 35 are most supportive:

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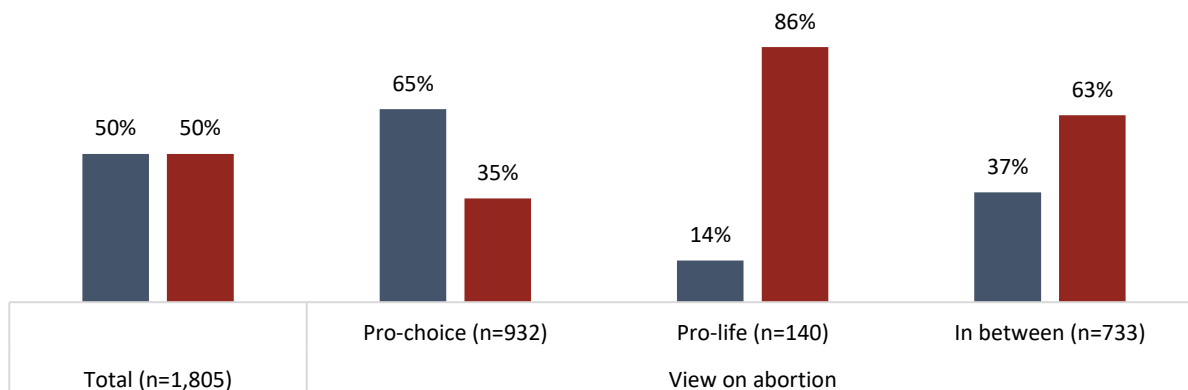
Which statement comes closer to your own point of view regarding this matter?



- It's acceptable for political party leaders to exclude potential candidates from running for their parties based on whether or not they are pro-choice
- It's NOT acceptable for political party leaders to decide if they only want pro-choice candidates to run for their parties

Disagreements are also evident among those who say they are completely pro-choice, completely pro-life, or somewhere in between those positions ([for full definitions of these positions, see part two of ARI's series on abortion](#)). Those who identify as pro-life feel strongest:

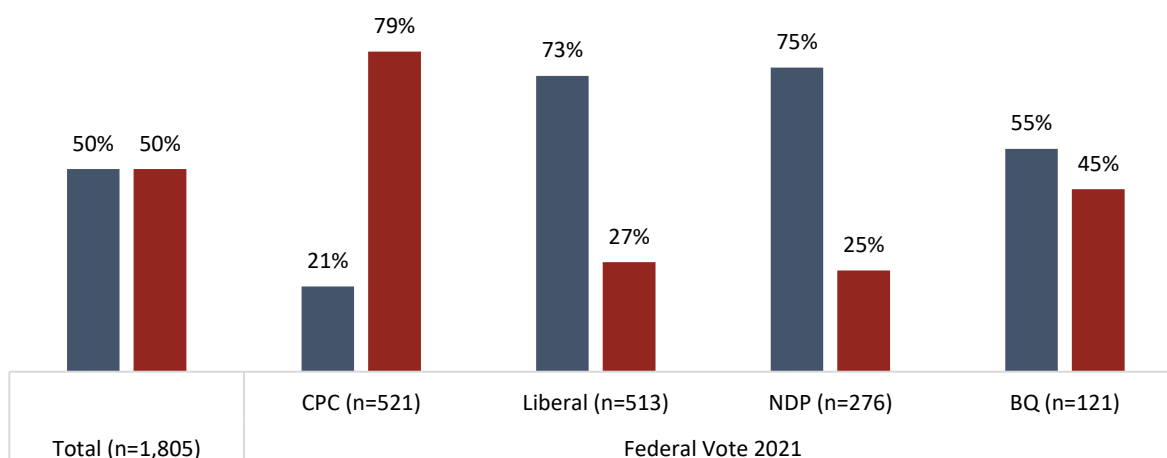
Which statement comes closer to your own point of view regarding this matter?



- It's acceptable for political party leaders to exclude potential candidates from running for their parties based on whether or not they are pro-choice
- It's NOT acceptable for political party leaders to decide if they only want pro-choice candidates to run for their parties

Those who supported the Liberals and New Democrats in the most recent federal election are most comfortable with their party requiring pro-choice affirmation – though it should be noted at least one-quarter of both segments feel this goes too far. Past Conservative voters largely disagree, while past BQ voters are split.

Which statement comes closer to your own point of view regarding this matter?



- It's acceptable for political party leaders to exclude potential candidates from running for their parties based on whether or not they are pro-choice
- It's NOT acceptable for political party leaders to decide if they only want pro-choice candidates to run for their parties

Federal influence on provincial abortion policy

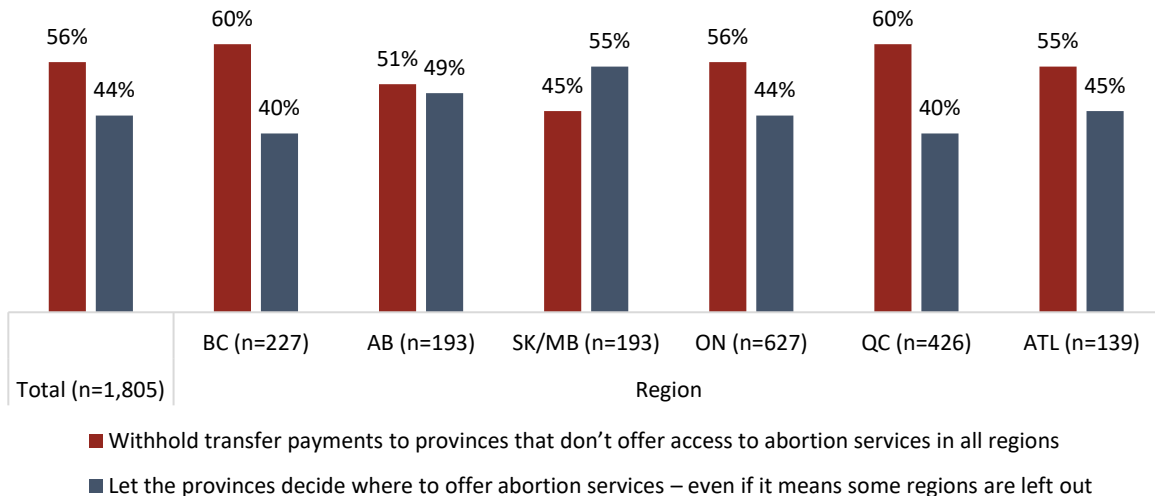
In July 2021, the federal Liberal government announced it would withhold federal health transfer payments to New Brunswick after that province's government passed a law to ban government funding for abortions outside of three approved hospitals. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau stated the government of New Brunswick needed "to keep up its obligations under the Canada Health Act" which includes offering universal access to health services.

More than half (56%) of Canadians, including three-in-five in Quebec and British Columbia say withholding such payments is acceptable, while just under half (44%) disagree, saying the issue of access should be left to the provinces to decide. That opinion is most common in Saskatchewan and Manitoba (for other demographic results, see detailed tables).

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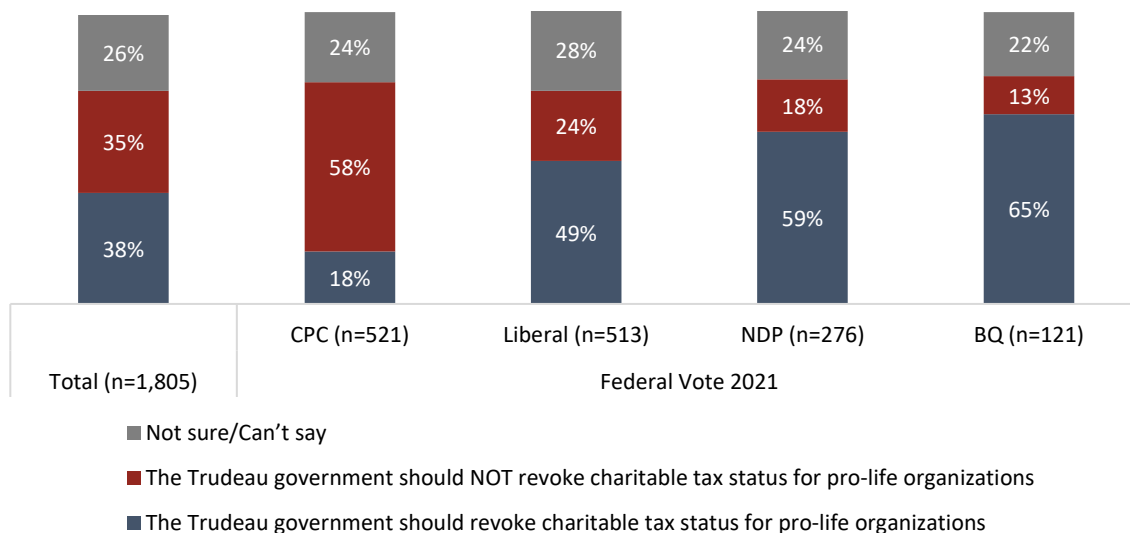
If the decision were up to you – what would you do?



Charitable status for pro-life organizations?

In 2021, the Liberal Party ran on an [election promise](#) to revoke charitable tax status for anti-abortion organizations that – according to the party – provides [“dishonest counseling to women about their rights and about the options available to them at all stages of the pregnancy.”](#) Canadians are deeply divided about this idea, with 38 per cent supporting it, 35 per cent opposing, and one-quarter (26%) unsure. Pluralities of past Liberal voters – and majorities of past NDP and Bloc Québécois voters – would be comfortable with this policy, while past CPC voters are overwhelmingly in opposition:

Which is closer to your own point of view:

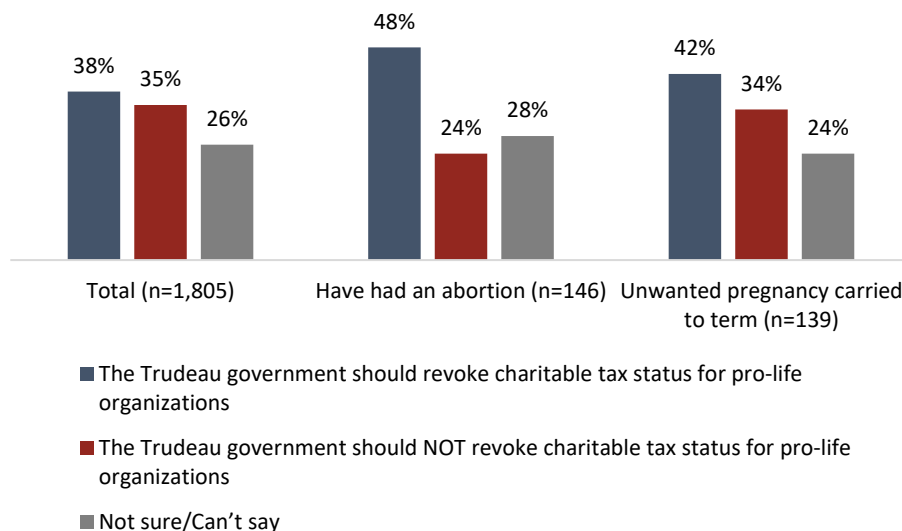


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Half of Canadian women who have had an abortion (48%) believe the government should revoke the charitable status for pro-life organizations, double the number who disagree (24%). Those who carried an unwanted pregnancy to term are more likely to believe pro-life organizations should keep their charitable status at one-third (34%). More (42%), however, would revoke it:

Which is closer to your own point of view:

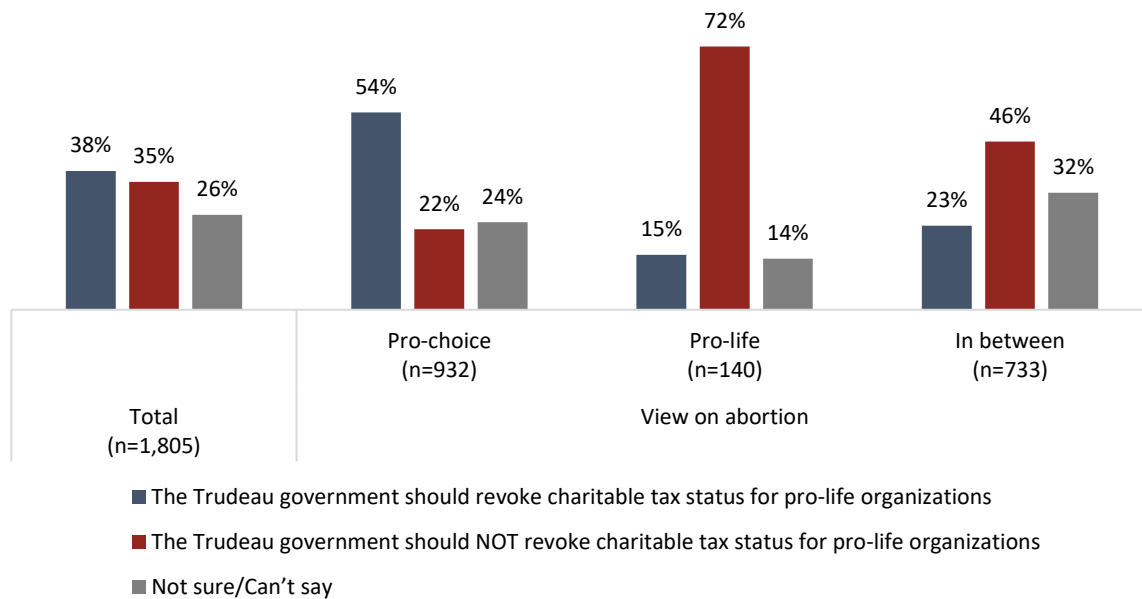


Three-quarters of those who say they are pro-life believe pro-life organizations should keep their charitable tax status. More than half (54%) of those who describe themselves as pro-choice disagree. Those whose views are in between pro-life and pro-choice are twice as likely to believe pro-life organizations should not have their charitable status revoked (46%) than support the Liberals' campaign promise (23%):

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Which is closer to your own 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 stance on abortion, [click here](#).

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