

New Poll Probes Citizens' Knowledge of Roe

BY Dave Andrusko

Sometimes it seems as if there are as many polls as there are grains of sand on a beach. It is not often that polls, especially on abortion, tell us something new. The poll released by REAL Women's Voices the day before its annual lobbying day does.

Here are a few of the highlights.

* 1,000 adults were surveyed and asked, "Which of the following statements most closely reflects your position on the issue of abortion?" 16% said abortion should be prohibited in all circumstances; 16% said legal only to save the life of the mother; and 22% said legal only in cases of rape, incest, or to save the life of the mother. This makes for a total of 54% taking a pro-life position versus 41% who took "pro-choice" positions. This is keeping with polls that ask other probing questions.

* But which categories of people fall in each camp? There are a number of subcategories, but the most interesting one is that 18-34-year-olds are among the groups most likely to identify with one of the three pro-life views. Noteworthy is that this is especially true for 18-34-year-old women!

* Conducted by The Polling Company/Women Trend, the poll also asked respondents what they considered their level of familiarity with *Roe v. Wade* to be. Nearly two-thirds (65%) said they were either very familiar (23%) with *Roe* or somewhat familiar (42%). Interestingly, this is more than twice the number (31%) who admitted they did not know much about the 1973 decision.

Then they were read a series of statements. How many were able to select the most accurate description from a menu of four choices? Only 29%.

As the executive summary explains, "This disconnect between what they believe and what is the truth is astonishing. While the correct explanation of the case was selected by more Americans than any other single *Roe v. Wade* description, it is important to note that a combined 50% thought the 1973 watershed ruling provided a much more narrow allowance for abortion than it really did. An additional 15% acknowledged they did not know what legal implications of the decision were for abortion rights."

"Choice" is a quintessentially American value. Given the word's exalted status, it's amazing that the percentage of those who say they are "pro-choice" on abortion is not staggeringly high.

Yet the poll reveals that when it comes to abortion, people hold views that are at odds with what they say they know (how familiar they are with *Roe v. Wade*) and with what "choice" actually stands for in the debate—support for abortion in essentially all circumstances throughout the entire nine months of pregnancy.

In addition, education is always power, but never more so than in the ongoing struggle over abortion. What makes this even more significant is that younger Americans—especially younger women—are already among the most likely to support the pro-life position.