



PUBLIC POLL FINDINGS AND METHODOLOGY

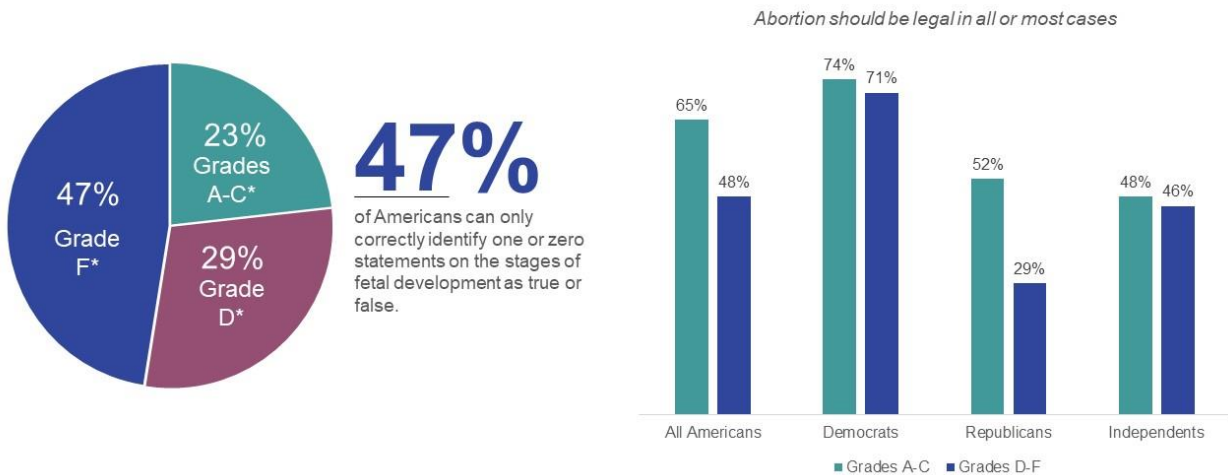
Americans with the highest level of knowledge on fetal development show strong support for abortion legality

Less than a quarter of Americans are well informed on the stages of fetal development

Washington, DC, November 30, 2021- With a number of states basing their abortion policies on varying points of fetal growth, a new Ipsos poll finds that Americans have a minimal understanding of the stages of fetal development as it relates to pregnancy. Given a series of true or false statements regarding different aspects of fetal development, less than a quarter of Americans can correctly identify the majority of statements as true or false. Knowledge levels were low even among the those saying they have prior education on the subject. Importantly, the poll also finds that the most well-informed American's are more likely to support abortion legality than those who are less informed.

Detailed Findings

Regardless of political ideology, **Americans with stronger knowledge of fetal development show stronger support for abortion legality** in all or most cases



**Respondents receiving grades A-C answered at least 3 of 5 true or false statements on fetal development correctly. Respondents receiving grade D answered 2 of 5 statements correctly. Respondents receiving grade F answered 1 or 0 of statements correctly.*

- American's level of knowledge on pregnancy and fetal development relates to their opinions on abortions, with the most well-informed American's showing stronger support for abortion legality than those less informed.
 - Given a series of five true or false statements regarding different stages of fetal development, nearly half of all Americans (47%) can only correctly identify one or zero statements. Twenty-nine percent correctly identify two statements and just twenty-three percent answer three or more correctly.

Grade	Total
5-3/5 correct: Grade A-C	23%
2/5 correct: Grade D	29%
1-0/5 correct: Grade F	47%

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- Sixty-five percent of Americans receiving a grade of A-C on fetal development knowledge support abortions being legal in all or most cases. On the other hand, 45% of Americans with grade D and 50% of Americans with grade F say the same. Furthermore, Republicans who are better informed on fetal development are more likely to support abortions being legal in all or most cases (52%) than are Republicans who are less informed (29%).
 - This same pattern holds when looking at abortion legality in different circumstances. Regardless of the varying circumstances for an abortion, such as the person does not want to have a child or a pregnancy is caused by incest or rape, Americans achieving grades A-C on fetal development stages are less likely than those achieving grade D to say abortions should be illegal always in these varying circumstances.
2. In general, Americans have a minimal understanding of the stages of fetal development as it relates to pregnancy. Less than a quarter are able to correctly recognize as true or false the majority of statements on the stages of fetal development.
- About one in five Americans say they have never learned about the stages of fetal development and pregnancy (21%). Even among those claiming to have a prior education on the subject, less than a third achieve a grade of A-C (28% those with a formal education, 29% those with an alternative education such as self-taught or through family). Additionally, while parents are more likely than non-parents to correctly identify at least three statements, still less than half are able to do so (30% parents, 22% non-parents).
 - Knowledge of abortion policy was overall better than knowledge of fetal development, though Americans show signs of confusion on this subject as well. Sixty-eight percent correctly believe abortion is legal, in at least some circumstances, nationwide. However, a quarter of Americans (24%) falsely believe most states have no restrictions on what point in pregnancy a person can have an abortion, and thirty percent don't know if this statement is true or false.
3. For the most part, Americans are not misinformed but instead are aware of their lack of knowledge. On the majority of statements given on aspects of fetal development, the largest share of respondents say they 'don't know' instead of incorrectly identifying it as true or false.
- Looking specifically at what aspects of fetal development Americans lack knowledge in, at least two in five say they don't know when a fetus' brain starts working (54%), when a fetus begins to practice breathing on its own (52%), when a fetus can feel pain (49%), or when a fetus has a strong chance of survival outside of the womb (38%), measures which are all used to determine abortion policy nationwide.
 - Americans are most knowledgeable about the development of the heart, with over three in five (63%) correctly identifying that a fetal heartbeat is usually first detected at six weeks of pregnancy. Republicans are more likely to correctly identify this statement as true (75%) than Democrats or Independents (both 58%).
 - In contrast, Americans are most likely to be misinformed on when a fetus can begin to feel pain. Forty percent of Americans incorrectly say that a fetus can feel pain by the start of the second trimester, around week 13 of pregnancy, while many doctors agree fetal perception of pain is unlikely before the third trimester¹. Americans who attend religious services at least once per week were the most likely to falsely believe this statement (68%), followed by Republicans (60%).

¹ "Facts are Important: Fetal Pain" *ACOG.Org*, The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, <https://www.acog.org/advocacy/facts-are-important/fetal-pain>. October 29, 2021.



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These are the findings of an Ipsos poll conducted between October 19–20, 2021. For this survey, a sample of 1,005 adults age 18+ from the continental U.S., Alaska, and Hawaii was interviewed online in English. The poll has a credibility interval of plus or minus 3.5 percentage points for all respondents.

For full results, please refer to the following annotated questionnaire:

Full Annotated Questionnaire

- To the best of your knowledge and understanding, please indicate whether each of the following statements are true or false.

Total True Summary

	Total (N=1,005)	Grades A-C* (N=249)	Grade D* (N=303)	Grade F* (N=453)
Abortion is currently legal, in at least some circumstances, nationwide in the United States (<i>True</i>)	68%	71%	76%	62%
A fetal heartbeat is usually first detected at 6 weeks of pregnancy (<i>True</i>)	63%	81%	88%	39%
A fetus can feel pain by the end of week 13 of pregnancy (Start of second trimester) (<i>False</i>)	40%	34%	62%	30%
A fetus begins practicing how to breathe, by inhaling and exhaling fluid with their lungs, around week 26 of pregnancy (<i>True</i>)	38%	72%	58%	9%
At 20 weeks of pregnancy, a fetus has a strong chance of survival outside of the womb (<i>False</i>)	30%	16%	42%	30%
A fetus' brain starts working around the second week of pregnancy (<i>False</i>)	25%	21%	42%	16%
Most states do not have any restrictions on what point in pregnancy a person can get an abortion (<i>False</i>)	24%	30%	24%	20%

*Respondents receiving grades A-C answered at least 3 of 5 true or false statements on fetal development correctly. Respondents receiving grade D answered 2 of 5 statements correctly. Respondents receiving grade F answered 1 or 0 of statements correctly.

- A fetal heartbeat is usually first detected at 6 weeks of pregnancy

	Total	Grades A-C	Grade D	Grade F
True (<i>correct</i>)	63%	81%	88%	39%
False	10%	14%	7%	9%
Don't know	27%	5%	5%	51%

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b. A fetus' brain starts working around the second week of pregnancy

	Total	Grades A-C	Grade D	Grade F
True	25%	21%	42%	16%
False (<i>correct</i>)	22%	66%	16%	3%
Don't know	54%	13%	42%	81%

c. A fetus can feel pain by the end of week 13 of pregnancy (Start of second trimester)

	Total	Grades A-C	Grade D	Grade F
True	40%	34%	62%	30%
False (<i>correct</i>)	11%	42%	2%	0%
Don't know	49%	24%	36%	70%

d. At 20 weeks of pregnancy, a fetus has a strong chance of survival outside of the womb

	Total	Grades A-C	Grade D	Grade F
True	30%	16%	42%	30%
False (<i>correct</i>)	32%	79%	35%	7%
Don't know	38%	5%	23%	63%

e. A fetus begins practicing how to breathe, by inhaling and exhaling fluid with their lungs, around week 26 of pregnancy

	Total	Grades A-C	Grade D	Grade F
True (<i>correct</i>)	38%	72%	58%	9%
False	10%	12%	11%	9%
Don't know	52%	16%	31%	82%

f. Abortion is currently legal, in at least some circumstances, nationwide in the United States

	Total	Grades A-C	Grade D	Grade F
True (<i>correct</i>)	68%	71%	76%	62%
False	13%	21%	13%	8%
Don't know	19%	9%	11%	30%

g. Most states do not have any restrictions on what point in pregnancy a person can get an abortion

	Total	Grades A-C	Grade D	Grade F
True	24%	30%	24%	20%
False (<i>correct</i>)	46%	61%	52%	36%
Don't know	30%	9%	24%	44%



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2. When you think about abortion, which of the following is closest to your personal opinion?

	Total	Grades A-C	Grade D	Grade F
Abortion should be illegal in all cases	23%	31%	18%	22%
Abortion should be illegal in most cases	29%	33%	27%	28%
Abortion should be legal in most cases	25%	19%	31%	24%
Abortion should be legal in all cases	10%	10%	12%	9%
Unsure	13%	7%	12%	17%
<i>Legal (Net)</i>	<i>52%</i>	<i>65%</i>	<i>45%</i>	<i>50%</i>
<i>Illegal (Net)</i>	<i>35%</i>	<i>28%</i>	<i>43%</i>	<i>33%</i>

3. In which of the following circumstances, if any, do you believe abortion should be legal or illegal?
Select all that apply.

a. When carrying a pregnancy to term endangers the health of the person

	Total	Grades A-C	Grade D	Grade F
Should be legal in week 1-13 of pregnancy (First Trimester)	37%	44%	38%	33%
Should be legal in week 14-26 of pregnancy (Second Trimester)	24%	35%	19%	22%
Should be legal in week 27-end of pregnancy (Third Trimester)	25%	37%	19%	23%
Should be illegal once the fetus is believed to have a chance of survival outside of the womb (i.e., point of viability, around week 24)	9%	8%	14%	7%
Should be illegal always	12%	11%	12%	11%
Not sure	22%	11%	18%	30%

b. The person does not want to have a child

	Total	Grades A-C	Grade D	Grade F
Should be legal in week 1-13 of pregnancy (First Trimester)	36%	45%	32%	33%
Should be legal in week 14-26 of pregnancy (Second Trimester)	17%	27%	12%	16%
Should be legal in week 27-end of pregnancy (Third Trimester)	10%	16%	8%	8%
Should be illegal once the fetus is believed to have a chance of survival outside of the womb (i.e., point of viability, around week 24)	9%	14%	7%	9%
Should be illegal always	28%	21%	40%	24%
Not sure	16%	6%	8%	25%



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c. The person does not want to be pregnant and/or give birth

	Total	Grades A-C	Grade D	Grade F
Should be legal in week 1-13 of pregnancy (First Trimester)	38%	47%	36%	35%
Should be legal in week 14-26 of pregnancy (Second Trimester)	15%	23%	11%	14%
Should be legal in week 27-end of pregnancy (Third Trimester)	12%	18%	8%	11%
Should be illegal once the fetus is believed to have a chance of survival outside of the womb (i.e., point of viability, around week 24)	9%	14%	9%	8%
Should be illegal always	28%	18%	39%	26%
Not sure	15%	8%	6%	23%

d. When the pregnancy was caused by incest or rape

	Total	Grades A-C	Grade D	Grade F
Should be legal in week 1-13 of pregnancy (First Trimester)	49%	56%	53%	43%
Should be legal in week 14-26 of pregnancy (Second Trimester)	24%	35%	17%	24%
Should be legal in week 27-end of pregnancy (Third Trimester)	20%	29%	15%	18%
Should be illegal once the fetus is believed to have a chance of survival outside of the womb (i.e., point of viability, around week 24)	8%	8%	9%	7%
Should be illegal always	14%	10%	19%	12%
Not sure	14%	5%	7%	23%

e. When the child would be born with a terminal illness

	Total	Grades A-C	Grade D	Grade F
Should be legal in week 1-13 of pregnancy (First Trimester)	37%	42%	36%	34%
Should be legal in week 14-26 of pregnancy (Second Trimester)	24%	32%	18%	23%
Should be legal in week 27-end of pregnancy (Third Trimester)	21%	31%	17%	19%
Should be illegal once the fetus is believed to have a chance of survival outside of the womb (i.e., point of viability, around week 24)	9%	11%	10%	7%
Should be illegal always	15%	16%	18%	14%
Not sure	22%	9%	19%	31%



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- f. When the child would be a born with an illness that would have a severe negative impact on its quality of life

	Total	Grades A-C	Grade D	Grade F
Should be legal in week 1-13 of pregnancy (First Trimester)	37%	43%	40%	31%
Should be legal in week 14-26 of pregnancy (Second Trimester)	22%	29%	19%	21%
Should be legal in week 27-end of pregnancy (Third Trimester)	19%	30%	15%	16%
Should be illegal once the fetus is believed to have a chance of survival outside of the womb (i.e., point of viability, around week 24)	9%	10%	12%	7%
Should be illegal always	17%	14%	20%	16%
Not sure	22%	12%	13%	33%

4. Where, if at all, did you learn about the stages of pregnancy as it relates to fetal development?
Select all that apply.

	Total	Grades A-C	Grade D	Grade F
In high school or middle school	39%	46%	44%	33%
In college	12%	18%	14%	8%
Other educational setting	10%	14%	12%	7%
Through a healthcare provider	21%	28%	28%	13%
Self-taught	29%	37%	35%	22%
Through family	17%	17%	23%	14%
Through a religious organization	5%	8%	8%	2%
Other	6%	5%	7%	6%
Have never learned about the stages of pregnancy and fetal development	21%	5%	8%	36%
Formal Education (Net)	49%	59%	55%	40%
Alternative Education (Net)	55%	70%	70%	39%

5. How frequently do you attend religious services?

	Total	Grades A-C	Grade D	Grade F
More than once a week	5%	2%	9%	5%
Once a week	15%	15%	20%	11%
Once or twice a month	7%	7%	8%	6%
A few times a year	15%	17%	16%	14%
Seldom	19%	21%	21%	17%
Never	39%	38%	27%	47%
At least weekly (Net)	20%	17%	28%	16%
Seldom or never (Net)	34%	38%	36%	31%



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About the Study

These are the findings of an Ipsos poll conducted between October 19 – 20. For this survey, a sample of 1,005 adults age 18+ from the continental U.S., Alaska, and Hawaii was interviewed online in English.

The sample was randomly drawn from [Ipsos' online panel](#), partner online panel sources, and ["river" sampling](#) and does not rely on a population frame in the traditional sense. Ipsos uses fixed sample targets, unique to each study, in drawing a sample. After a sample has been obtained from the Ipsos panel, Ipsos calibrates respondent characteristics to be representative of the U.S. Population using standard procedures such as raking-ratio adjustments. The source of these population targets is U.S. Census 2018 American Community Survey data. The sample drawn for this study reflects fixed sample targets on demographics. Posthoc weights were made to the population characteristics on gender, age, race/ethnicity, region, and education.

Statistical margins of error are not applicable to online non-probability polls. All sample surveys and polls may be subject to other sources of error, including, but not limited to coverage error and measurement error. Where figures do not sum to 100, this is due to the effects of rounding. The precision of Ipsos online polls is measured using a credibility interval. In this case, the poll has a credibility interval of plus or minus 3.5 percentage points for all respondents. Ipsos calculates a design effect (DEFF) for each study based on the variation of the weights, following the formula of Kish (1965). This study had a credibility interval adjusted for design effect of the following (n=1,005, DEFF=1.5, adjusted Confidence Interval=+/- 5.0 percentage points).

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