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Americans OK With Using Embryos in Medical Research 60% think such research is morally acceptable

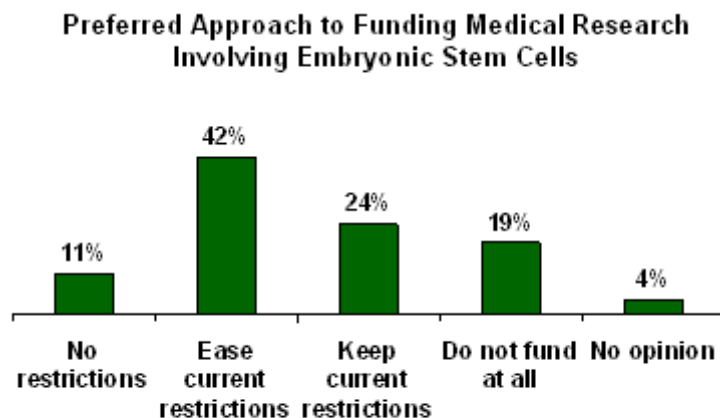
by Lydia Saad

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PRINCETON, NJ -- President George W. Bush has drawn a line in the sand over embryonic stem cell research, saying he will veto proposed legislation to expand funding for such research should it reach his desk. A bill passed Tuesday in the U.S. House of Representatives would permit federal funding for medical studies that utilize stem cells derived from surplus embryos lying fallow in fertility clinics.

"This bill would take us across a critical ethical line by creating new incentives for the ongoing destruction of emerging human life," Bush said. "Crossing this line would be a great mistake."

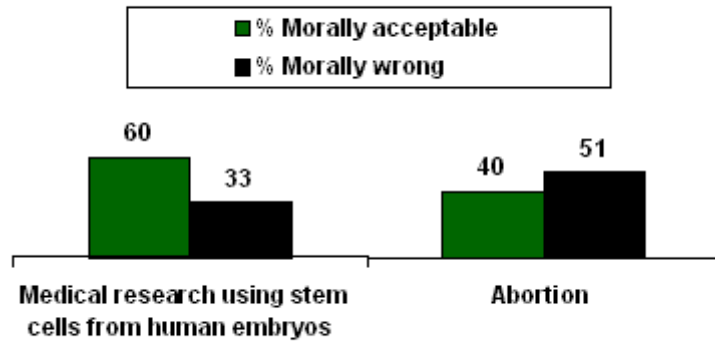
The ethical line so clear to Bush does not resonate with the majority of Americans. While about 4 in 10 adults agree with Bush's position, more than half the public agrees with the substance of the House bill. This includes 42% who would ease current restrictions on taxpayer funding of research involving human embryos, and 11% who would place no restrictions on such funding.



May 20-22, 2005

Unlike abortion, which is morally troubling to a majority of Americans, 60% of the public recently told Gallup that medical research using stem cells obtained from human embryos is morally acceptable; one-third disagrees.

Moral Acceptability of Issues



May 2-5, 2005

This finding is not particularly surprising, given that, though Americans are generally ambivalent about abortion, they are generally supportive of it being legal in the first trimester of pregnancy. According to a January 2003 Gallup poll, 66% of Americans believe abortion should be legal in the first three months of pregnancy. (Conversely, 68% think it should be illegal in the second three months, and 84% think it should be illegal in the last three months.)

If two-thirds of Americans are comfortable with abortion being legal in the first trimester, then it stands to reason that a majority would be comfortable with using discarded embryos for medical research.

Republicans and Democrats Disagree

According to the May 20-22, 2005, CNN/USA Today/Gallup poll, a majority of Republicans hold views consistent with Bush's anti-research position, while a majority of Democrats are in agreement with the pro-research position inherent in the House bill.

Nearly 6 in 10 Republicans (59%) prefer to maintain the current restrictions on stem cell research funding, or prohibit such funding altogether. Just over one-third of Republicans (36%) believe the funding restrictions should be eased or lifted. By contrast, 6 in 10 Democrats would like to see expanded funding opportunities, while about 4 in 10 (38%) would like the current restrictions maintained or strengthened.

Independents are nearly identical to Democrats in their preferences on this issue.

Partisan Preferences on Government Funding of Embryonic Stem Cell Research



May 20-22, 2005

Republicans are a bit further removed from Bush on the moral aspect of embryonic stem cell research. An equal number of Republicans -- 47% -- say such research is morally acceptable as say it is morally

wrong. However, Democrats are still much more supportive of the research; 72% consider it morally acceptable, while just 20% say it is wrong.

Mid-Level Attention Being Paid to the Issue

Americans are paying an average amount of attention to the current stem cell research debate, compared with Gallup's measurement of public attention to a wide variety of issues and stories that have been in the news over the past decade.

Approximately 6 in 10 Americans (58%) say they are following the debate very or somewhat closely. Another 27% are following it "not too closely," while just 15% are not following it at all. This is higher than the 42% paying close attention to the recent filibuster controversy, but lower than the 66% who closely followed the Terri Schiavo case.

Across 150 news attention measures taken by Gallup since 1991, the average percentage paying very or somewhat close attention has been 60%.

The current level of attention to the stem cell research funding debate is slightly higher than the attention paid the last time the issue took center stage in American politics in 2001. A Gallup poll conducted in August 2001 -- just a few days before Bush announced his decision to authorize government funding on a limited number of existing embryonic stem cell lines -- found 55% following the issue closely and 23% not following it at all.

Supporters of expanding federal funding of this research appear to be more energized in the current debate than are the detractors. By a 68% to 31% margin, those closely following the issue tend to be in favor of relaxing federal funding restrictions. By contrast, by a 53% to 39% margin, those not paying close attention tend to agree more with Bush's position.

Survey Methods

These most recent results are based on telephone interviews with a randomly selected national sample of 1,006 adults, aged 18 and older, conducted May 20-22, 2005. For results based on this sample, one can say with 95% confidence that the maximum error attributable to sampling and other random effects is ± 3 percentage points. In addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of public opinion polls.

9. *How closely have you followed the debate about government funding of stem cell research -- very closely, somewhat closely, not too closely, or not closely at all?*

	Very closely	Somewhat closely	Not too closely	Not at all	No opinion
	%	%	%	%	%
2005 May 20-22	12	46	27	15	*
2001 Aug 3-5	18	37	22	23	*
2001 Jul 10-11	9	29	28	32	2

* Less than 0.5%

10. *As you may know, the federal government currently provides very limited funding for medical research that uses stem cells obtained from human embryos. Which would you prefer the government to do -- [ROTATED: place no restrictions on government funding of stem cell research, ease the current restrictions to allow more stem cell research, keep the current restrictions in place, (or should the government) not fund stem cell research at all]?*

No	Ease current restrictions	Keep current restrictions	Not	No
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	restrictions			fund at all	opinion
2005 May 20- 22	11%	42	24	19	4
2004 Oct 9-10	14%	41	24	14	7