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## Public Support for Stem Cell Research Increases to a 73 to 11 Percent Majority

In 2001, a Harris Poll reported that a 3-to-1 majority of Americans believed that stem cell research should be allowed. Three years later, a new Harris Poll finds that this majority supporting stem cell research has increased to more than 6-to-1. Other changes since 2001 include a substantial increase in the number of people who have seen, read or heard about the debate on stem cell research, stronger support for arguments in favor of stem cell research, and less support for arguments against it.

These results may explain the decision to feature the strong plea in favor of stem cell research by President Reagan's son, Ron Reagan, at the 2004 Democratic National Convention in Boston. As Democrats looked for issues where large majorities of the public supported their positions and opposed those of President George W. Bush, stem cell research must have caught their attention. In this new survey, the large majorities of the public who support stem cell research must look very attractive, particularly because large majorities of Republicans and Independents, not just Democrats, support the research.

Having said that, we should note that President Bush has not formally opposed all stem cell research. The law which he supported and signed restricted the use of federal funding (not other funding) for stem cell research to a small number of embryonic stem cell lines. It was a compromise which had the effect of restricting, but not eliminating, stem cell research. This may have helped to appease his conservative base, but it makes him vulnerable to criticism from the growing majority of stem cell research supporters.

These are some of the results of a nationwide survey of 2,242 adults interviewed online by Harris Interactive between July 12 and 18, 2004.

Downloadable PDFs of the Harris Interactive *Health Care News* are available at [http://www.harrisinteractive.com/news/newsletters\\_healthcare.asp](http://www.harrisinteractive.com/news/newsletters_healthcare.asp).

Those who say they have seen, heard or read about the debate on whether to allow stem cell research have increased from 68 percent in 2001 to 83 percent now.

**TABLE 1**

**Seen, Heard, Read About Stem Cell Research**

“Have you seen, heard or read anything about the debate on whether to allow the use of stem cells from human embryos to be used in medical research?”

Base: All Adults

	2001	2004
	%	%
Yes, seen, heard, read	68	83
No, have not/Not sure	32	17

The majority who believe that stem cell research should be allowed has increased from 61 percent in favor in 2001 to 73 percent in favor now. This majority support for stem cell research includes almost all Democrats with opinions (80%) and Independents (83%) and a large, if smaller, majority of Republicans (60%).

**TABLE 2**

**Should Stem Cell Research Be Allowed – By Party**

“Stem cells come from embryos left over from invitro fertilization, which are not used and normally destroyed. Many medical researchers want to use them to develop treatments, or to prevent diseases, such as diabetes, Alzheimer’s or Parkinson’s disease. On balance, do you think this research should or should not be allowed?”

Base: All Adults

	TOTAL 2001	TOTAL 2004	Party Identification		
			Republican	Democrat	Independent
	%	%	%	%	%
Should be allowed	61	73	60	80	83
Should not be allowed	21	11	18	5	7
Not sure/Refused	18	16	21	15	10

NOTE: Percentages may not add up exactly to 100% due to rounding.

Those who believe that “using stem cells from human embryos for research comes too close to allowing scientists to play God” have fallen sharply from 40 percent in 2001 to only 19 percent now. Those who believe that “allowing any medical research using stem cells from human embryos should be forbidden because it is unethical and immoral” have also fallen sharply from 32 percent to 15 percent over the last three years.

**TABLE 3**  
**Agree/Disagree With Four Statements About Stem Cell Research**

“Please indicate whether you tend to agree or disagree with the following statements.”

Base: All Adults

			Tend to Agree	Tend to Disagree	Not Sure/Refused
As long as the parents of the embryo give their permission, and the embryo would otherwise be destroyed, stem cell research should be allowed	2001	%	72	21	7
	2004	%	72	13	15
If most scientists believe that stem cell research will greatly increase our ability to prevent or treat serious diseases we should trust them and let them do it	2001	%	63	29	7
	2004	%	67	16	18
Using cells from human embryos for research comes too close to allowing scientists to play God	2001	%	40	53	7
	2004	%	19	57	24
Allowing any medical research using stem cells from human embryos should be forbidden because it is unethical and immoral	2001	%	32	60	8
	2004	%	15	63	22

NOTE: Percentages may not add up exactly to 100% due to rounding.

## Religion and Stem Cell Research

The level of opposition to stem cell research varies according to people’s religious beliefs. Those who describe themselves as “very religious” are much more likely to oppose stem research than those who are “not at all” or “not very” religious (23% vs. 4%). Born-Again Christians are more likely to oppose it than are other Christians (21% vs. 9%); and Catholics are somewhat more likely to oppose it than Protestants (15% vs. 10%).

However, clear majorities of all religious groups we analyzed think stem cell research should be allowed.

**TABLE 4**

### Should Stem Cell Research Be Allowed – By Religion

“Stem cells come from embryos left over from invitro fertilization, which are not used and normally destroyed. Many medical researchers want to use them to develop treatments, or to prevent diseases, such as diabetes, Alzheimer’s or Parkinson’s disease. On balance, do you think this research should or should not be allowed?”

Base: All Adults

	TOTAL	Catholic	Protestant	Other Christian	Born-Again Christian	All Other (Not Born-Again)-Christians
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Should be allowed	73	67	77	66	58	75
Should not be allowed	11	15	10	13	21	9
Not sure/Refused	16	18	12	20	21	16

	TOTAL	Very Religious	Somewhat Religious	Not at All/Not Very Religious
	%	%	%	%
Should be allowed	73	55	76	84
Should not be allowed	11	23	9	4
Not sure/Refused	16	22	16	11

NOTE: Percentages may not add up exactly to 100% due to rounding.

## A Methodological Note

Readers should note that the number of “not sures” are higher in this new survey than they were in 2001. This does **not** necessarily mean that more people are unsure now than they were in 2001. In this new survey, respondents were offered “not sure” as a possible response. In the 2001 survey, they were not told that this was a choice but they could still give it. The increase in “not sures” is probably a result of this change in the interview.

## Methodology – U.S. Survey

This research was conducted online within the United States between July 12 and 18, 2004 among a nationwide cross section of 2,242 adults (aged 18 years and over). Figures for age, sex, race, education, region and household income were weighted where necessary to bring them into line with their actual proportions in the population. Propensity score weighting was also used to adjust for respondents’ propensity to be online.

In theory, with probability samples of this size, one could say with 95 percent certainty that the results have a sampling error of plus or minus 2 percentage points of what they would be if the entire adult population had been polled with complete accuracy. Unfortunately, there are several other possible sources of error in all polls or surveys that are probably more serious than theoretical calculations of sampling error. They include refusals to be interviewed (non-response), question wording and question order, and weighting. It is impossible to quantify the errors that may result from these factors. This online sample was not a probability sample.

*These statements conform to the principles of disclosure of the National Council on Public Polls.*

## About Harris Interactive

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