

Majorities of U.S. Adults Favor Euthanasia and Physician-Assisted Suicide by More than Two-to-One

Most people with living wills do not want to go on life-support systems

ROCHESTER, N.Y., April 27, 2005 – More than two-thirds of U.S. adults think that the law should allow medical euthanasia for dying patients in severe distress who ask to have their lives ended. Two-thirds of the public would like their states to allow physician-assisted suicide as it is currently allowed in Oregon. Furthermore, most people feel that if they were unconscious and unlikely to recover they should not be kept alive on a life-support system. The majorities in favor of Euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide have increased over the last few years.

These are some of the findings of a new Harris Poll of 1,010 U.S. adults surveyed by telephone by Harris Interactive® between April 5 and 10, 2005.

The main findings of the survey are:

- A 70 to 29 percent majority of adults are in favor of a law that would “allow doctors to comply with the wishes of a dying patient in severe distress who asks to have his or her life ended.” This is an increase from the 65 to 29 percent majority who felt this way in 2001, but less than the 73 to 24 percent majority who did so in 1993.
- A 67 to 32 percent majority would like their states to allow physician-assisted suicide for terminally ill patients, where (as in Oregon) three very specific conditions are met. This is an increase from the 61 to 34 percent majority in favor of the Oregon law in 2001.
- A 64 to 35 percent majority disagrees with the 1997 Supreme Court ruling that “individuals do not have a constitutional right to doctor-assisted suicide.”
- Most people (72 percent) say that, if they had a living will, it would say that if they were unconscious, and, to a reasonable degree of medical certainty, they would not regain consciousness, they should be allowed to die and that food and water should be withheld or withdrawn.
- Fully 34 percent of adults report that they have living wills. The majority of these people (62 percent) say that their living wills state that they should not be put on life support systems.

**TABLE 1
ATTITUDES TOWARD EUTHANASIA – TREND**

"Do you think that the law should allow doctors to comply with the wishes of a dying patient in severe distress who asks to have his or her life ended, or not?"

Base: All adults

	1982	1987	1993	1997	2001	April 2005
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Yes, should allow	53	62	73	68	65	70
No, should not allow	34	32	24	27	29	29
Not sure	8	4	3	4	6	1

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

**TABLE 2
AGREE/DISAGREE WITH 1997 SUPREME COURT RULING**

"In 1997, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that individuals do not have a constitutional right to doctor-assisted suicide. Do you agree or disagree with this decision?"

Base: All adults

	1997	2001	April 2005
	%	%	%
Agree	32	32	35
Disagree	65	63	64
Not sure	3	4	1

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

**TABLE 3
FAVOR/OPPOSE LEGALIZING DOCTOR-ASSISTED SUICIDE BASED ON OREGON LAW**

"There is an Oregon law which allows doctor-assisted suicides for PATIENTS WITH LESS THAN SIX MONTHS TO LIVE. Doctors are allowed to help these patients end their lives –but only if – all of the three following conditions are met: 1) The patient requests it three times; 2) There is a second opinion from another doctor; and 3) There is a 15-day waiting period for the patient to change his or her mind. Would you favor or oppose such a law in your state?"

Base: All adults

	2001	April 2005
	%	%
Favor	61	67
Oppose	34	32
Not sure/refused	5	1

Note: The question asked in 2001 was slightly different. The question read "In 1994, people in Oregon voted on a proposition that would allow doctor-assisted suicides for PATIENTS WITH LESS THAN SIX MONTHS TO LIVE. Doctors would be allowed to help patients to commit suicide -- but only if -- ALL of the three following conditions were met: a) The patient requests it three times; b) There is a second opinion from another doctor; and c) There is a 15-day waiting period for the patient to change his or her mind. Would you favor or oppose such a law in your state?"

TABLE 4
DIRECTIONS YOU WOULD GIVE TO DOCTOR VIA A LIVING WILL IF YOU BECAME UNCONSCIOUS AND WERE UNLIKELY TO REGAIN CONSCIOUSNESS

“Lately in the news, there has been much talk about living wills. If you were filling out a living will, what directions would you give your doctor in the event you became unconscious, and, to a reasonable degree of medical certainty, you would never regain consciousness?”

Base: All Adults

	Total
	%
You would want your life prolonged as long as possible and nutrition and hydration should be provided.	23
You would want to be allowed to die so nutrition and hydration should be withheld or withdrawn.	72
Not sure/refused	4

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

TABLE 5
HAVE A WILL OR LIVING WILL

Q: “Do you have a will?”

Q: “Do you have a living will, which takes effect when a person is incapacitated and can no longer express his or her wishes?”

Base: All Adults

	Total	Age	Sex		Race		
			65+	Male	Female	White	Black*
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Have a will	45	83	43	47	51	25	17
Have a living will	34	60	27	39	36	16	27

* Very small base.

TABLE 6
WHAT LIVING WILL STATES

“What does or would this living will state?”

Base: Adults Who Have a Living Will

	Total	Aged 65+*
	%	%
Provide life support	3	4
Do not provide life support	62	71
It designates someone to decide for you	30	22
Other	3	2
Not sure/refused	2	1

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

* Very small base.

Methodology

The Harris Poll[®] was conducted by telephone within the United States between April 5 and 10, 2005, among a nationwide cross section of 1,010 adults (aged 18 and over), of whom 415 have a living will. Figures for age, sex, race, education, region and household income were weighted where necessary to bring the sample of adults into line with their actual proportions in the population.

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 3 percentage points of what they would be if the entire U.S. adult population had been polled with complete accuracy. Sampling error for the various sub-sample results is higher and varies. 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, interviewer bias, weighting by demographic control data and screening (e.g., for likely voters). It is impossible to quantify the errors that may result from these factors.

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

J23845

Q605, Q615, Q620, Q625, Q630

About Harris Interactive[®]

Harris Interactive Inc. (www.harrisinteractive.com), the 15th largest and fastest-growing market research firm in the world, is a Rochester, N.Y.-based global research company that blends premier strategic consulting with innovative and efficient methods of investigation, analysis and application. Known for *The Harris Poll*[®] and for pioneering Internet-based research methods, Harris Interactive conducts proprietary and public research to help its clients achieve clear, material and enduring results.

Harris Interactive combines its intellectual capital, databases and technology to advance market leadership through U.S. offices and wholly owned subsidiaries: London-based HI Europe (www.hieurope.com), Paris-based Novatris (www.novatris.com), Tokyo-based Harris Interactive Japan, through newly acquired WirthlinWorldwide, a Reston, Virginia-based research and consultancy firm ranked 25th largest in the world, and through an independent global network of affiliate market research companies. EOE M/F/D/V.

Press Contacts:

Nancy Wong
Harris Interactive
585-214-7316

Kelly Gullo
Harris Interactive
585-214-7172

Harris Interactive Inc. 4/05

***The Harris Poll*[®] #32, April 27, 2005**

By Humphrey Taylor, chairman of *The Harris Poll*, Harris Interactive.