

30<sup>th</sup> April 2013

## **New poll shows overwhelming public support for euthanasia, and probes reasons**

### **Overwhelming agreement that you have the right to chose when you die is driving support for euthanasia**

A YouGov poll commissioned for the final 2013 Westminster Faith Debate on assisted suicide this Thursday sheds light on the reasons people have for supporting or opposing a change in the law on assisted suicide – a change which would make it possible to help someone with an incurable disease die without risk of prosecution for doing so.

Support for such a change is overwhelming. Overall, the survey finds that 70% of GB adults support it with only 16% opposing it and 14% “don’t know.”

The poll probes the reasons for this high level of support. Respondents could tick as many reasons as they wished.

### **An individual’s “right to choose” counts most with those who support a change in the law**

A remarkable 82% of those who support a change in the law agree that “An individual has the right to choose when and how to die”.

Very high proportions also say that “It is preferable to drawn-out suffering” (77%) and “Those assisting suicide should not fear prosecution” (76%).

These reasons score more highly than the more pragmatic ones that were also suggested on the survey (see Appendix 1).

The high proportions citing these reasons show that opponents of the legislation are both clear and fairly unanimous about their reasons for doing so.

### **Patients’ vulnerability, not “Sanctity of Life”, counts most with opponents**

The survey also asked those who oppose a change in the law why they do so (see Appendix 2). Respondents could tick as many reasons as they wished.

For the minority who are opposed, the most popular reasons all have to do with the potential for harm and abuse of the person who dies and those who assist.

Almost 60% of those who are opposed to a change in the law agree that "Vulnerable people could be, or feel, pressured to die", 55% say that "It places too much of a burden on the person or people who help someone to die", and 48% think that "You can never build in enough safeguards."

Although it is often invoked by religious campaigners against euthanasia, "Sanctity of life" comes joint third in the list of reasons for opposition. It is cited by 48% of opponents.

### **Most religious people ignore their leaders and support a relaxation of the law**

An absolute majority of religious adherents – i.e. those who identify with a religious tradition – support assisted suicide. The only constituencies for which this is not true are Baptists, Muslims and Hindus. (See Appendix 3)

Adherents of all other traditions favour a change in the law. In doing so many are rejecting the official message given by their religious leaders.

- Anglicans are in favour of change by a margin of 57% - which is greater even than the general population at 54%. Only those who say they have those "no religion" show greater support – by a huge margin of 72%.
- Roman Catholics are in favour of change by a margin of 26%,
- Jewish people are in favour of change by a margin of 48%
- Although many Hindus don't know, those with a view are in favour of change by a margin of 8%.

Those who actively participate in a church or other religious group – rather than merely identifying with a religion – also support change (49% support, 36% against, 15% don't know; see Appendix 3 for a breakdown by tradition)

Those who say they have "no religion" are most likely to support a change in the law – 81% for, 9% against. The vast majority (87%) do so because they believe in a person's right to choose when to die.

### **Being strictly religious is the main factor which predicts opposition to assisted suicide**

The survey also gauged attitudes towards a number of other controversial topics of personal morality, including abortion, gender roles, the traditional family, and same-sex marriage. In relation to these issues, a number of different factors predicted "conservative" attitudes, including age (being older), gender (being male), voting intention (being Tory), and religiosity (being certain in belief in God, and taking authority from religious sources).

Assisted suicide is different. Here, the only factor which really makes a difference is being strictly religious. People who are strictly religious are those who take authority from religious sources - like scripture or simply "God"- rather than from relying on their own judgement, who believe in God with certainty, and who actively participate in a religious group. They account for around 9% of the population, and can be found in all religions, but their proportions are highest amongst Baptists and Muslims.

Amongst these strict believers, only a third of those expressing a view are in favour of a change in the law. That proportion is higher among Anglicans (42%) and lower among Catholics (28%), Baptists (27%), and Muslims (19%).

Unlike other opponents, the leading reasons that strictly religious people give for their opposition are that "human life is sacred" (80%) and that "death should take its natural course" (69%). These two more traditionally "religious" reasons overwhelm the other reasons.

There are, however differences between traditions. For example, highest concern for vulnerable people was expressed by strict Catholics (89%), whereas strict Muslims were much less likely to cite concern for vulnerable people (37%), and concentrated instead on "death taking its natural course" (83%) and the "sanctity of human life" (76%).

## Appendix 1

You said that you think the current law on euthanasia should be changed to allow assisted suicide in some circumstances. Which of the following best describes your view? Please tick all that apply

An individual has the right to choose when and how to die	82
It is preferable to drawn-out suffering	77
Those assisting suicide should not fear prosecution	76
It's happening anyway and regulation would improve safety and delivery	51
The national health and welfare systems cannot provide decent end of life care	35
Other/Don't know	2

## Appendix 2

You said that you think the current law on euthanasia should be kept as it is. Which of the following best describes your view? Please tick all that apply

Vulnerable people could be, or feel, pressured to die	59
It places too much of a burden on the person or people who help someone to die	55
You can never build in enough safeguards	48
Human life is sacred	48
Death should take its natural course	46
No-one can ever be certain that they really want to die, but the decision is irreversible	43
Other/Don't know	6

## Appendix 3

**\*\*Euthanasia is the termination of a person's life, in order to end suffering\*\***

Do you think British law should be kept as it is, or should it be changed so that people with incurable diseases have the right to ask close friends or relatives to help them commit suicide, without those friends or relatives risking prosecution?

### Adherents

Self identified religious tradition	None	Anglican	Roman Catholic	Presbyterian	Methodist	Baptist	Jewish	Hindu	Islam / Muslim	Sikh
Support change	81	72	56	61	62	43	69	36	26	69
Oppose change	9	15	30	24	23	45	21	28	55	14
Don't know	10	13	14	15	15	12	10	36	19	17

### People who actively participate in a church or other religious group

Religion of group	Anglican	Roman Catholic	Church of Scotland	Methodist/Baptist	Pentecostal	Jewish	Hindu	Islam / Muslim	Sikh
Support change	59	44	45	49	6	64	47	23	73
Oppose change	25	42	40	40	78	25	36	63	11
Don't know	16	14	15	11	16	11	17	14	17

## NOTES

All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all GB adults (aged 18+).

Sample sizes (top line weighted, bottom line unweighted) Total 4437

None	Ang- lican	Roman Catholic	Presby- terian	Meth- odist	Baptist	Jewish	Hindu	Islam / Muslim	Sikh	Other	Prefer not to say
1630	1519	391	108	121	60	82	48	106	24	100	207
1649	1261	354	90	96	58	162	92	201	49	185	192

Those we refer to in this briefing as 'religious' are those who identified with one of the following major religions or denominations e.g. Anglican, Roman Catholic, Hindu. Those we call 'non-religious' are those who answered 'none' to the same question about identification.

The Westminster Faith debates are organised by Charles Clarke and Linda Woodhead and supported by Lancaster University, the Arts and Humanities Research Council and the Economic and Social Research Council. They are designed to bring high-quality academic research on religion into public debate. [http://www.religionandsociety.org.uk/faith\\_debates-2013/](http://www.religionandsociety.org.uk/faith_debates-2013/)

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