

Most Americans Ignore Planned Parenthood Undercover Videos

Over the past six months, a series of undercover videos focused on Planned Parenthood made national headlines, provoked outrage in Congress, and prompted investigations in about a dozen states.

Still, the reaction of most Americans is, “What videos?”

The videos show activists from the Center for Medical Progress (CMP) and Planned Parenthood officials discussing and negotiating possible payments for donated fetal remains. Leaders of the CMP say the videos show Planned Parenthood illegally selling fetal remains. Planned Parenthood denies that claim.

A phone survey of 1,000 Americans from Nashville-based LifeWay Research found 7 out of 10 are either not aware of the videos (43 percent) or have not spoken out after seeing them (27 percent). Among those who are aware of the videos, relatively few spoke out against Planned Parenthood.

“Given the serious accusations against Planned Parenthood—that they sold baby parts—it is surprising how few Americans responded,” said Ed Stetzer, executive director of LifeWay Research.

The survey was completed in September, at a time the videos received renewed attention during a debate among Republican presidential candidates.

LifeWay Research found that, overall, about 1 in 5 (18 percent) Americans spoke out against Planned Parenthood after the videos became public. One in 8 (12 percent) spoke in support Planned Parenthood.

Americans who are aware of the videos disagree on how to respond. About two-thirds either didn't say anything about them or supported Planned Parenthood. Only about a third spoke out against Planned Parenthood.

"The videos caught many people's attention, even prompting Hilary Clinton to call them disturbing, yet Americans remain quite divided on abortion," said Stetzer. "That division appears to be reflected even in their views on such videos."

Researchers found religion plays a role in how Americans responded. Self-identified evangelicals (29 percent) and Christians (23 percent) are more likely to have criticized Planned Parenthood. Nones—those who claim no religious affiliation—are more likely to have supported Planned Parenthood (17 percent).

Americans with evangelical beliefs (27 percent) and weekly churchgoers (also 27 percent) are more likely to speak out against Planned Parenthood than other Americans.

Researchers also found regional differences in responses. About a third of Midwesterners (34 percent) are unaware of the videos. That figure jumps to about half for Americans in the South (46 percent) and West (48 percent).

Midwesterners are also most likely to have spoken out against Planned Parenthood (21 percent) as well as in support of Planned Parenthood (17 percent). Southerners (20 percent) were more likely to have spoken out against Planned Parenthood than those from the Northeast (13 percent).

The largest differences in awareness of the videos occur across racial/ethnic groups. One out of 3 whites (32 percent) are unaware of the videos, but more than 6 in 10 African Americans (60 percent), Hispanics (66 percent), and people of other ethnicities (61 percent) do not know about them.

Among other findings:

- Men and women had similar responses to the survey, as did Catholics and Protestants.
- Americans over 65 (25 percent) are more likely to have spoken out against Planned Parenthood than those 18 to 24 (7 percent). Americans who are 18 to 24 (18 percent) are more likely to have supported Planned Parenthood than those who are 25 to 34 (9 percent), 35 to 44 (5 percent) or 55 to 64 (9 percent).

The reaction to the videos may provide a lesson to pro-life groups, said Stetzer.

While the videos seemed to connect with churchgoers, older and white Americans, and those in the Midwest and South, they missed younger Americans and those from diverse backgrounds.

“Through social media it is easy to assume everyone in America is having the same conversation,” Stetzer said. “But these results show that is not the case.”