

ABC/Post blog item – 11/19/13

Most Favor Independent Prosecutors in Military Sexual Assault Cases

Six in 10 Americans support letting independent prosecutors decide whether to place charges in sexual assault cases in the U.S. military, removing such decisions from the traditional chain of command.

With a vote on the issue pending in the Senate, 59 percent in a new ABC News/Washington Post poll favor the proposed change. Thirty-six percent instead prefer to keep authority over sexual assault cases within the usual channels.

Support for the change includes equal numbers of women and men, albeit more married women than single women, 65 vs. 53 percent. It's backed across the political spectrum, but by more Democrats and independents (about six in 10 in both cases), than Republicans (53 percent).

There's a larger difference ideologically: While about two-thirds of liberals and moderates alike support creating special prosecutors for military sexual assault cases, that declines to 48 percent of conservatives in this poll, produced for ABC by [Langer Research Associates](#).

Among other groups, preference for independent prosecutors is highest among college graduates (70 percent), dropping to 49 percent among those who haven't gone beyond high school. There's a sharp division between non-evangelical and evangelical white Protestants, 62 vs. 46 percent; the latter are more conservative politically. And support for the change ranges from 75 percent among strong critics of the Tea Party political movement to 44 percent of its strong supporters.

Prompted by controversies over the handling of sexual assault cases in the military, Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-N.Y.) sponsored the legislation, which would create an independent group of military prosecutors to consider whether to bring charges in such cases. Supporters say the change would ensure fair treatment and encourage victims to come forward; critics say it would undermine discipline by stripping commanders of their authority.

METHODOLOGY – This ABC News/Washington Post poll was conducted by telephone Nov. 14-17, 2013, in English and Spanish, among a random national sample of 1,006 adults, including landline and cell-phone-only respondents. Results have a margin of [sampling error](#) of 3.5 points, including design effect. The survey was produced for ABC News by [Langer Research Associates](#) of New York, N.Y., with sampling, data collection and tabulation by Abt-SRBI of New York, N.Y.

Full results follow:

When there's a case of alleged sexual assault in the military, do you think the decision whether or not to prosecute should be made (within the usual military chain of command) or should be made (by an independent group of military prosecutors created to consider these cases)?

	Within the usual military chain of command	Independent group of military prosecutors	No opinion
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