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## AP poll looks at feelings on declawing, debarking

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LOS ANGELES (AP) — Cats scratch and dogs bark. Is declawing or debarking the answer?

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The ASPCA opposes declawing, debarking, defanging, ear cropping and tail docking — any elective surgery done to conform to breed standard or eliminate undesirable behavior — except in extreme circumstances. For example, the health of a cat owner may be at risk if the owner has an immune system disorder or illness that leaves them susceptible to serious infection if scratched.

Ninety percent of pet owners oppose removing a dog's vocal cords. Forty-seven percent would favor a law making the procedure illegal, while 44 percent would oppose a law.

Last July, Massachusetts became the first state to ban elective devocalization surgeries for cats or dogs. Violations are punishable under the state's animal cruelty laws. Virginia lawmakers are considering a similar measure.

Of dog owners who took part in the poll, only 1 percent reported having the procedure done on their pet. There was no difference between dog owners and others who were asked if it was OK — 89 percent who own dogs said no.

Veteran dog trainer and behaviorist **Jonathan Klein** of Culver City, Calif., would support a state ban on debarking because even though 90 percent sounds like a lot, it still means that for every 900,000 dog owners who oppose it, there are 100,000 who would not, he said.

"Devocalization needs to stop, but we have to approach it through education," said Klein, who has trained nearly 7,500 dogs over the past 23 years.

Debarking is a quick fix, but a good trainer can achieve the same result by working with a dog to find the cause instead of just looking at symptoms, he said.

"Dogs bark for so many reasons that are beneficial to us," Klein said. Without the ability to bark, dogs can no longer communicate with humans or other animals.

Many vets refuse to do debarking surgery. "Good for them," Klein said.

The AP-Petside.com Poll was conducted Oct. 13-20, 2010, by GfK Roper Public Affairs and Corporate Communications. It involved landline and cell phone interviews with 1,000 pet owners nationwide. Results for all pet owners have a margin of sampling error of plus or minus 4.0 percentage points.