

Poll: Nearly Half of Americans Feel Abortion Is Immoral

As the 40th anniversary of the Supreme Court's *Roe v. Wade* decision approaches, the public remains opposed to completely overturning the historic ruling on abortion.

A new poll by the Pew Research Center finds that more than six in 10 (63 percent) say they would not like to see the court completely overturn the *Roe v. Wade* decision, which established a woman's constitutional right to abortion, at least in the first three months of pregnancy. Only about three in 10 (29 percent) would like to see the ruling overturned. These opinions are little changed from surveys conducted 10 and 20 years ago.

Decades after the Supreme Court rendered its decision on Jan. 22, 1973, most Americans (62 percent) know that *Roe v. Wade* dealt with **abortion** rather than school desegregation or some other issue. But the rest either guess incorrectly (17 percent) or say they do not know what the case was about (20 percent). And there are substantial age differences in awareness: Among those ages 50 to 64, 74 percent know that *Roe v. Wade* dealt with abortion, the highest percentage of any age group. Among those younger than 30, just 44 percent know this.

The latest national survey, conducted jointly by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press and the Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life from Jan. 9-13 among 1,502 adults, includes additional key findings:

- **Abortion Viewed as Less Important Issue.** Currently, 53 percent say abortion "is not that important compared to other issues," up from 48 percent in 2009 and 32 percent in 2006. The percentage viewing abortion as a "critical

issue facing the country” fell from 28 percent in 2006 to 15 percent in 2009 and now stands at 18 percent.

- **Religious Differences Regarding Overturning Roe.** White evangelical Protestants are the only major religious group in which a majority favors completely overturning the *Roe v. Wade* decision. Large percentages of white mainline Protestants, black Protestants and white Catholics say the ruling should not be overturned. Fully 82 percent of the religiously unaffiliated oppose overturning *Roe v. Wade*.
- **Morality of Abortion.** Nearly half of Americans (47 percent) say they personally believe that it is morally wrong to have an abortion, compared with 27 percent who say it is not a moral issue, 13 percent who find it morally acceptable and 9 percent who volunteer that it depends. About one in five (18 percent) say they personally believe that abortion is morally unacceptable yet also oppose the Supreme Court overturning its *Roe v. Wade* ruling.
- **No Gender Gap.** There are no significant gender differences in opinions about the *Roe v. Wade* decision, the importance of abortion as an issue or the morality of abortion.

The poll is part of a larger research package released by the Pew Forum to mark the 40th anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*. It includes a slideshow that illustrates public opinion on abortion, including trends from 1995 to 2012 and views by party identification, gender and age. The package also includes a legal analysis examining the landmark case and the history of other key abortion rulings of the U.S. Supreme Court, and a fact sheet that describes many religious groups’ official positions on abortion. The full set of resources is available on the Pew Forum’s website.