

Study: South Up in Arms Over Abortion, North Demands Choice

While the balance of opinion toward abortion nationwide has remained largely steady over the past 20 years, there are widening disparities in public attitudes on the issue across different regions of the country, according to new survey findings from the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press.

Opposition to legal abortion is highest in parts of the South—including Texas, which recently passed sweeping new abortion restrictions. The South Central region is the only one in which opposition to legal abortion has significantly increased since the mid-1990s. By contrast, support for legal abortion remains highest in New England—and the gap between New England and South Central states has widened considerably over the past two decades.

The new survey, conducted July 17-21 among 1,480 adults, finds that just over half of all Americans (54 percent) say abortion should be legal in all or most cases. Fewer (40 percent) say it should be illegal in all or most cases. At the national level, public views on abortion have changed little over the last few years, and the balance of opinion has remained largely consistent for most of the past two decades (see “Views on Abortion, 1995-2013”).

This month, Texas joined 12 other states, mainly in the South and Midwest, that have banned abortions at no later than 22 weeks of pregnancy. (The new Texas law bans abortions at 20 weeks. Some of these other laws are temporarily blocked by court injunction.) In polling conducted in 2012 and 2013, about half (49 percent) of the residents of these 13 states

believe abortion should be illegal in all or most cases. By comparison, in the other 37 states and the District of Columbia, just 36 percent agree, while 58 percent say abortion should be legal in all or most cases.

These differences reflect a broader regional divide. New England residents are most likely to favor legalized abortion. Fully 75 percent say abortion should be legal in all or most cases, while 20 percent say abortions should be illegal in all or most cases. Roughly two-thirds (65 percent) in the Pacific Coast region and solid majorities in the Mid-Atlantic (61 percent) and Mountain West (59 percent) also favor legal abortion.