
Attitudes to Abortion and Roe vs. Wade Are Now Almost Identical to Attitudes in 2005 and 2006

Modest majority still supports Roe vs. Wade and only 21% are opposed to abortion “in all circumstances”

ROCHESTER, N.Y. – August 11, 2009 – Earlier this year some polls reported that support for abortion rights and the Roe vs. Wade Supreme Court decision had declined significantly. A new Harris Poll appears to refute this conclusion. It finds that support for Roe vs. Wade has declined somewhat since the last time we asked these questions in 2007, but that the modest majority in favor of Roe vs. Wade (51% to 44%), is now actually slightly higher than it was in 2006 (49% to 47%) or 2005 (52% to 47%). Furthermore, the relatively small, if vocal, 21% minority who would like abortion to be illegal *in all circumstances* is virtually identical to what it was in 2005, 2006 and 2007.

These are some of the results from The Harris Poll, a new study of 1,010 U.S. adults surveyed by telephone between July 7 and 14, 2009 by Harris Interactive.

Other interesting findings in this Harris Poll are:

- The 57% to 36% majority of Democrats who support Roe vs. Wade is very similar to the 59% to 39% majority of Republicans who oppose it. It should be noted, however, that almost 40% of supporters of both parties disagree with the positions generally taken by their elected representatives.
- The decisive swing vote that provides the modest majority in support of Roe vs. Wade is provided by the 57% to 38% majority of independents, whose attitudes on this issue are virtually identical to those of Democrats.

Attitudes to abortion may be described better by the replies to two other questions than by their support or opposition to Roe vs. Wade:

- Almost equal numbers, and less than a quarter of all adults, believe that abortion should be permitted *in all circumstances* (23%) and in no circumstances (21%). The 53% majority continues to believe that it should be permitted *in some circumstances*.
- Only relatively few people (14%) would like to make it easier to get an abortion. Most people would like it to be more difficult (41%) or favor no change (40%).

So What?

This Harris Poll finds that there has not been any dramatic change in public opinion on abortion over the last few years – contrary to the reports of some polls this spring. Our findings are virtually identical to what they were in 2005 and 2006, but that a modest increase in support for Roe vs. Wade in 2007 has now been reversed.

This poll also underlines two important political findings:

1. Large minorities of Democrats (36%) and Republicans (39%) disagree with the positions of most of their elected leaders on Roe vs. Wade.
2. Independents support Roe vs. Wade almost as strongly as Democrats, and is where abortion becomes a major election issue, it is likely to help Democrats win more independent votes.

**TABLE 1
ATTITUDES TOWARD ROE VS. WADE**

“In 1973, the U.S. Supreme Court decided that states laws which made it illegal for a woman to have an abortion up to three months of pregnancy were unconstitutional, and that the decision on whether a woman should have an abortion up to three months of pregnancy should be left to the woman and her doctor to decide. In general, do you favor or oppose this part of the U.S. Supreme Court decision making abortions up to three months of pregnancy legal?”

Base: All Adults

	1973	1976	1979	1981	1985	1989	1991	1992
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Favor	52	59	60	56	50	59	65	61
Oppose	42	28	37	41	47	37	33	35
Not Sure/ Refused	7	13	3	3	3	4	4	4

	1993	1996	1998	2005	2006	2007	2009
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Favor	56	52	57	52	49	56	51
Oppose	42	41	41	47	47	40	44
Not Sure/ Refused	3	7	2	1	4	4	5

Note: Percentages may not add up exactly to 100% due to rounding.

**TABLE 2
ATTITUDES TOWARD ROE VS. WADE – BY PARTY ID**

“In 1973, the U.S. Supreme Court decided that states laws which made it illegal for a woman to have an abortion up to three months of pregnancy were unconstitutional, and that the decision on whether a woman should have an abortion up to three months of pregnancy should be left to the woman and her doctor to decide. In general, do you favor or oppose this part of the U.S. Supreme Court decision making abortions up to three months of pregnancy legal?”

Base: All Adults

	Total	Political Party Identification								
		Republican			Democrat			Independent		
		2009	2007	2006	2009	2007	2006	2009	2007	2006
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	
Favor	51	39	45	37	57	63	55	57	61	56
Oppose	44	59	51	61	36	33	43	38	36	37
Not sure / refused	5	1	5	2	6	5	2	5	3	8

Note: Percentages may not add up exactly to 100% due to rounding.

**TABLE 3
ATTITUDES TOWARD ROE VS. WADE**

“In 1973, the U.S. Supreme Court decided that states laws which made it illegal for a woman to have an abortion up to three months of pregnancy were unconstitutional, and that the decision on whether a woman should have an abortion up to three months of pregnancy should be left to the woman and her doctor to decide. In general, do you favor or oppose this part of the U.S. Supreme Court decision making abortions up to three months of pregnancy legal?”

Base: All Adults

		Favor	Oppose	Not Sure/ No Answer
ALL ADULTS	%	51	44	5
GENERATIONS:	%			
Echo Boomer (18-32)	%	55	41	3
Generation X (33-44)	%	44	49	8
Young Baby Boomer (45-54)	%	62	34	4
Old Baby Boomer (55-63)	%	49	48	3
Matures (64+)	%	44	50	6
GENDER:	%			
Male	%	49	44	6
Female	%	52	44	5
RACE/ETHNICITY	%			
White	%	55	40	5
African American	%	35	58	8
Hispanic	%	40	58	3
EDUCATION	%			
High school or less	%	44	51	6
Some college	%	53	44	3
College graduate	%	60	32	8
Post grad	%	65	30	6
HOUSEHOLD INCOME				
Less than \$35,000	%	46	52	2
\$35,000 – \$49,999	%	44	56	*
\$50,000 – \$74,900	%	55	41	4
\$75,000 or more	%	59	33	7

**TABLE 4
FAVOR ABORTION IN ALL, SOME, OR NO CIRCUMSTANCES**

“In general, do you favor permitting a woman who wants one to have an abortion in all circumstances, some circumstances or no circumstances?”

Base: All Adults

	1985	1992	1993	1996	1998	2005	2006	2007	2009
Favor permitting abortion in:	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
All circumstances	26	29	30	25	23	23	24	25	23
Some circumstances	53	54	55	53	58	55	53	52	53
No circumstances	20	14	14	19	17	21	20	20	21
Not sure	1	3	2	4	1	1	4	2	4

Note: Percentages may not add up exactly to 100% due to rounding.

TABLE 5

FAVOR LAWS MAKING IT EASIER/MORE DIFFICULT TO GET ABORTION

“Do you favor laws that would make it more difficult for a woman to get an abortion, favor laws that would make it easier to get an abortion or should no change be made to existing abortion laws?”

Base: All Adults

	1992	1993	1998	2005	2006	2007	2009
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Making it more difficult to get an abortion	34	35	40	42	40	42	41
Make it easier to get an abortion	18	22	16	13	15	16	14
No change	44	39	39	42	40	38	40
Not sure	4	3	4	1	6	4	6

Note: Percentages may not add up exactly to 100% due to rounding.

Methodology

This Harris Poll was conducted by telephone within the United States between July 7 and 14, 2009 among 1,010 adults (aged 18 and over). Figures for age, sex, race/ethnicity, education, region, number of adults in the household, number of phone lines in the household were weighted where necessary to bring them into line with their actual proportions in the population.

All sample surveys and polls, whether or not they use probability sampling, are subject to multiple sources of error which are most often not possible to quantify or estimate, including sampling error, coverage error, error associated with nonresponse, error associated with question wording and response options, and post-survey weighting and adjustments. Therefore, Harris Interactive avoids the words “margin of error” as they are misleading. All that can be calculated are different possible sampling errors with different probabilities for pure, unweighted, random samples with 100% response rates. These are only theoretical because no published polls come close to this ideal.

These statements conform to the principles of disclosure of the National Council on Public Polls.

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