

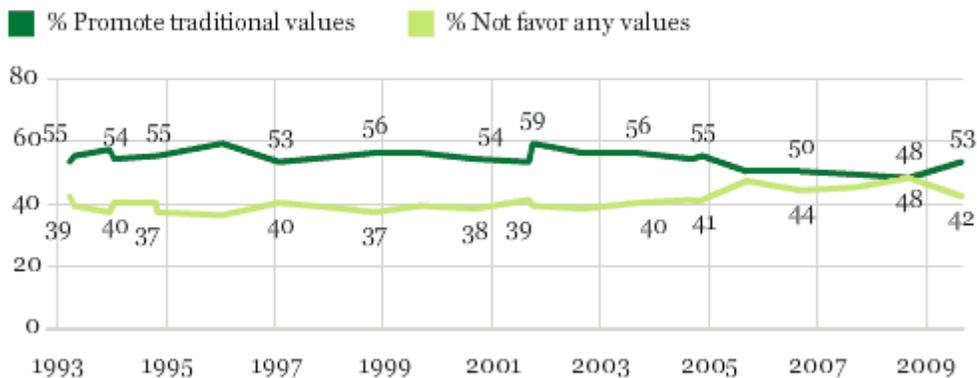
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Renewed Desire for U.S. Gov't. to Promote Traditional Values

Trend had been moving toward view that government should not favor any values
by Jeffrey M. Jones

PRINCETON, NJ -- Americans now show a clear preference for the government's promoting of "traditional values," a change from recent years, when the public's views were more divided, but a return to the prevailing view from 1993 through 2004.

Some people think the government should promote traditional values in our society. Others think the government should not favor any particular set of values. Which comes closer to your own view?



GALLUP POLL

"Independents' views show a dramatic turnaround, from a 55%-37% split against government-promoted morality last year to a 54%-40% division in favor of it today."

In this year's annual Gallup Governance poll, 53% of Americans say the government should promote traditional values, while 42% disagree and believe the government should not favor any particular set of values. Last year, Americans were divided right down the middle, with 48% taking each position. (The poll does not define what the term "traditional values" means; thus, respondents answer in light of their understanding of the term. The results by party and ideology discussed here suggest that respondents understand traditional values to be those generally favored by the Republican Party.)

The 2008 results marked the high point in the percentage opposed to a government role in promoting traditional morality since Gallup's initial measurement of this question in 1993. In contrast, the peak in favor of a government role in values (59%) came in October 2001, just after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, and at a time marked by heightened trust in government. (Gallup recorded a similar reading in January 1996.)

The shift in attitudes this year comes primarily from the political middle. Independents' views show a dramatic turnaround, from a 55%-37% split against government-promoted morality last year to a 54%-40% division in favor of it today. By contrast, Republicans' and Democrats' views have been relatively stable, with the former solidly in favor of the government's promoting traditional morality, and a majority of the latter opposed.

Views on Government Role in Promoting Values, by Political Party, 2008 vs. 2009

	Promote traditional values	Not favor any values	Gap in favor of promoting traditional values (pct. pts.)
Democrats			
2008	37%	60%	-23
2009	42%	54%	-12
Independents			
2008	37%	55%	-18
2009	54%	40%	14
Republicans			
2008	71%	28%	43
2009	67%	31%	36

GALLUP POLL

There has been a similar shift according to political ideology, with self-identified moderates moving toward favoring government involvement in promoting traditional morals; liberals' and conservatives' positions have been much more stable.

*Views on Government Role in Promoting Values, by Political Ideology
2008 vs. 2009*

	Promote traditional values	Not favor any values	Gap in favor of promoting traditional values (pct. pts.)
Liberal			
2008	26%	72%	-46
2009	28%	67%	-39
Moderate			
2008	39%	57%	-18
2009	51%	45%	6
Conservative			
2008	72%	25%	47
2009	68%	29%	39

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Bottom Line

Americans' views of the proper government role in promoting traditional values had moved in a more liberal direction since 2005, to the point that last year, as many said the government should not promote traditional values as said it should. If that trend had continued, 2009 would have marked the first time Gallup found more Americans preferring that the government refrain from actively promoting traditional values. Instead, Americans' attitudes reverted to a more conservative point of view on the matter. Now, Americans favor the government's promoting traditional values by an 11-point margin, similar to the double-digit margins favoring that view through much of the prior two decades.

Gallup has found several instances this year in which Americans' positions on policy issues -- including moral issues such as [abortion](#) and [stem cell research](#), but also [global warming](#), [defense](#), and [taxes](#) -- have changed. On most of these issues, the changes have been toward a more conservative point of view. This could reflect an adjustment or moderation in the public's policy preferences in response to the change from a Republican to a Democratic presidential administration. That is, people with more moderate or loosely held issue positions may be perceiving that government policy is moving (too far) in one direction, and may be attempting to "balance" this by moving their own positions in the other direction. The fact that most of the movement on the

"government role in promoting morality" question comes from independents and moderates is consistent with this possibility.

Survey Methods

Results are based on telephone interviews with 1,026 national adults, aged 18 and older, conducted Aug. 31-Sept. 2, 2009. For results based on the total sample of national adults, one can say with 95% confidence that the maximum margin of sampling error is ± 4 percentage points.

Interviews are conducted with respondents on land-line telephones (for respondents with a land-line telephone) and cellular phones (for respondents who are cell-phone only).

In addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of public opinion polls.