

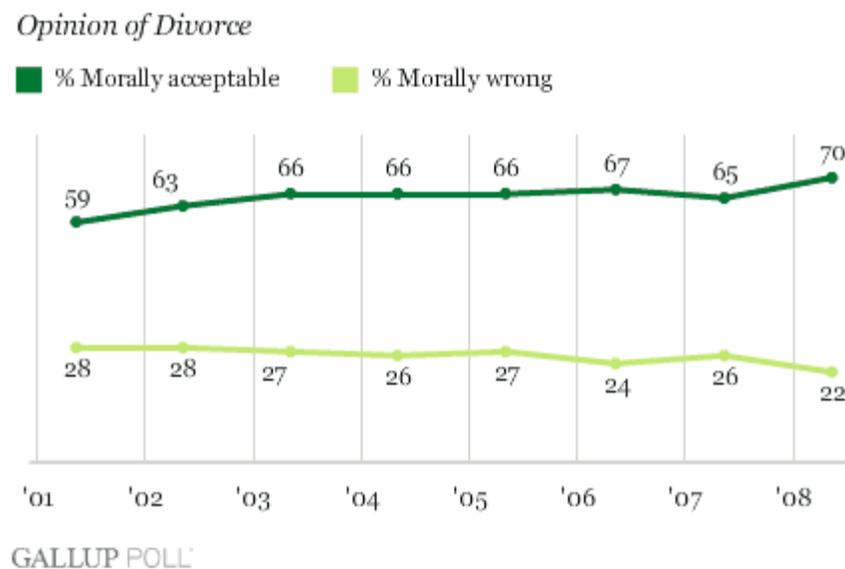
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## Cultural Tolerance for Divorce Grows to 70%

Along with polygamy, extramarital affairs are one of the least accepted acts

by Lydia Saad

PRINCETON, NJ -- More Americans than ever believe divorce is morally acceptable, with the percentage who say this jumping to 70% in Gallup's 2008 Values and Beliefs survey, up from 59% in 2001, and breaking the previous high of 67% in 2006.



Notably, while divorce tops Gallup's 2008 list of 16 ethical issues rated for moral acceptability, one of the main reasons many couples seek divorce -- because one or both spouses have had an extramarital affair -- is at the bottom.

Tolerance for divorce is comparable to public acceptance of gambling, the death penalty, embryonic stem-cell research, and premarital sex. However, married men and women having an affair is tied with polygamy in last place, and ranks just slightly below cloning humans and suicide in perceived moral acceptability.

*Next, I'm going to read you a list of issues. Regardless of whether or not you think it should be legal, for each one, please tell me whether you personally believe that in general it is morally acceptable or morally wrong.*

|  | <b>Morally acceptable</b> | <b>Morally wrong</b> |
|--|---------------------------|----------------------|
|  | <b>%</b>                  | <b>%</b>             |
| Divorce  | 70                        | 22                   |
| Gambling   | 63                        | 32                   |
| The death penalty  | 62                        | 30                   |
| Medical research using stem cells obtained from human embryos      | 62                        | 30                   |
| Sex between an unmarried man and woman                             | 61                        | 36                   |
| Medical testing on animals   | 56                        | 38                   |
| Having a baby outside of marriage                                  | 55                        | 41                   |
| Buying and wearing clothing made of animal fur                     | 54                        | 39                   |
| Doctor-assisted suicide  | 51                        | 44                   |
| Homosexual relations   | 48                        | 48                   |
| Abortion   | 40                        | 48                   |
| Cloning animals  | 33                        | 61                   |
| Suicide  | 15                        | 78                   |
| Cloning humans   | 11                        | 85                   |
| Polygamy, when one husband has more than one wife at the same time | 8                         | 90                   |
| Married men and women having an affair                             | 7                         | 91                   |

Gallup Poll, May 8-11, 2008

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### **Trend in Acceptance of Divorce**

Since 2001, acceptance of divorce has risen across society, and, as a result, it is now considered morally acceptable by a majority of nearly every major demographic category of Americans. This is a shift from 2001, when fewer than half of adults aged 65 and older, Republicans, self-described political "conservatives," and highly religious Americans thought divorce was acceptable.

Tolerance of divorce continues to be higher among younger adults compared with those 65 and older. Also, conservatives show far less support than do self-described moderates and liberals. And barely half of Americans who say religion is very important in their lives believe divorce is morally acceptable, compared with virtually all non-religious Americans.

*Percentage Calling Divorce "Morally Acceptable"*

|                        | May 2001 | May 2008 | Change    |
|------------------------|----------|----------|-----------|
|                        | %        | %        | Pct. pts. |
| Men                    | 63       | 70       | +7        |
| Women                  | 56       | 69       | +13       |
|                        |          |          |           |
| 18 to 29               | 61       | 71       | +10       |
| 30 to 49               | 65       | 74       | +9        |
| 50 to 64               | 58       | 71       | +13       |
| 65 and older           | 43       | 57       | +14       |
|                        |          |          |           |
| East                   | 63       | 68       | +5        |
| Midwest                | 63       | 71       | +8        |
| South                  | 54       | 69       | +15       |
| West                   | 57       | 72       | +15       |
|                        |          |          |           |
| Republican             | 48       | 61       | +13       |
| Independent            | 69       | 74       | +5        |
| Democrat               | 59       | 72       | +13       |
|                        |          |          |           |
| Conservative           | 49       | 57       | +8        |
| Moderate               | 63       | 72       | +9        |
| Liberal                | 72       | 87       | +15       |
|                        |          |          |           |
| Protestant             | 53       | 65       | +12       |
| Catholic               | 60       | 75       | +15       |
|                        |          |          |           |
| Importance of Religion |          |          |           |
| Very important         | 47       | 55       | +8        |
| Fairly important       | 74       | 83       | +9        |
| Not very important     | 79       | 91       | +12       |

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**Other Findings**

Divorce is the only issue measured in Gallup's 2008 Values and Beliefs survey for which U.S. public opinion has changed to a significant degree over the past year. However, compared with 2001, Americans have also become more accepting of sex between unmarried men and women, and homosexual relations. (Changes of fewer than five percentage points are not statistically significant.) They have become less accepting of medical testing on animals, and the use of animal fur for clothing -- although the majority still support both.

*Percentage Calling Each Issue "Morally Acceptable"*

Based on national adults

|  | May 2001 | May 2008 | Change    |
|--|----------|----------|-----------|
|  | %        | %        | Pct. pts. |
| Divorce  | 59       | 70       | +11       |
| Sex between an unmarried man and woman         | 53       | 61       | +8        |
| Homosexual relations                           | 40       | 48       | +8        |
| Cloning humans                                 | 7        | 11       | +4        |
| Doctor-assisted suicide                        | 49       | 51       | +2        |
| Cloning animals                                | 31       | 33       | +2        |
| Suicide  | 13       | 15       | +2        |
| Married men and women having an affair         | 7        | 7        | 0         |
| Death penalty                                  | 63       | 62       | -1        |
| Abortion                                       | 42       | 40       | -2        |
| Buying and wearing clothing made of animal fur | 60       | 54       | -6        |
| Medical testing on animals                     | 65       | 56       | -9        |

Only items measured in both May 2001 and May 2008 are shown

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**Bottom Line**

People going through divorce often deal with a range of difficult emotions, including anger, sadness, trepidation, remorse, and a sense of failure. One issue becoming less and less a factor in that gut-wrenching mix is the sting of moral condemnation.

**Survey Methods**

Results are based on telephone interviews with 1,017 national adults, aged 18 and older, conducted May 8-11, 2008. For results based on the total sample of national adults, one can say with 95% confidence that the maximum margin of sampling error is  $\pm 3$  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.

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