

<http://www.gallup.com/poll/147842/Doctor-Assisted-Suicide-Moral-Issue-Dividing-Americans.aspx>

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Doctor-Assisted Suicide Is Moral Issue Dividing Americans Most

Pornography, gay relations produce biggest generational gaps

by Lydia Saad

PRINCETON, NJ -- Doctor-assisted suicide emerges as the most controversial cultural issue in Gallup's 2011 Values and Beliefs poll, with Americans divided 45% vs. 48% over whether it is morally acceptable or morally wrong. Having a baby out of wedlock and abortion also closely divide Americans. However, stronger public consensus exists on 14 other issues tested.

U.S. Perceived Moral Acceptability of Behaviors and Social Policies

Ranked by "Difference"

	Morally acceptable	Morally wrong	Difference
	%	%	pct. pts.
Doctor-assisted suicide	45	48	3
Abortion	39	51	12
Having a baby outside of marriage	54	41	13
Buying and wearing clothing made of animal fur	56	39	17
Gay or lesbian relations	56	39	17
Medical testing on animals	55	38	17
Sex between an unmarried man and woman	60	36	24
Cloning animals	32	62	30
Medical research using stem cells obtained from human embryos	62	30	32
Gambling	64	31	33
Pornography	30	66	36
The death penalty	65	28	37
Divorce	69	23	46
Suicide	15	80	65
Cloning humans	12	84	72
Polygamy, when a married person has more than one spouse at the same time	11	86	75
Married men and women having an affair	7	91	84

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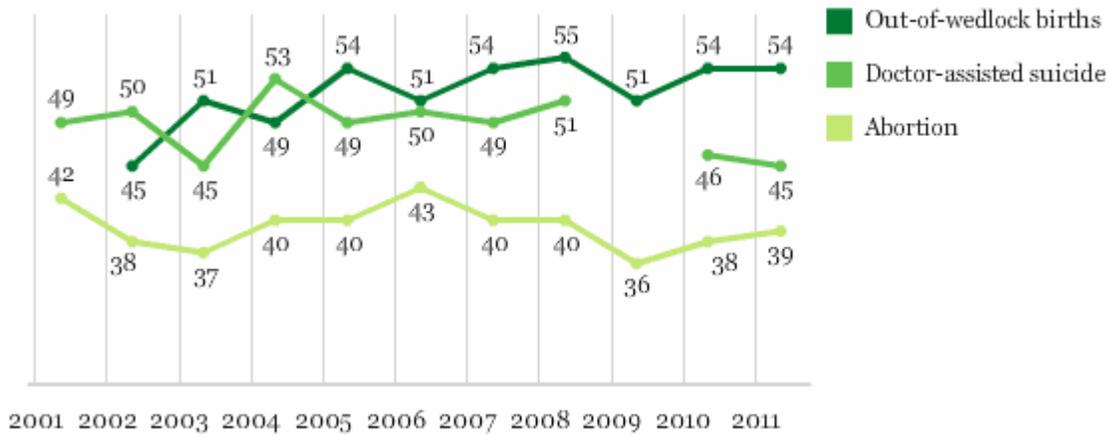
Americans are in broadest agreement about what behaviors are morally *wrong*. At least 8 in 10 U.S. adults interviewed in the May 5-8 survey say this about extramarital affairs, polygamy, cloning humans, and suicide. At least 6 in 10 say pornography and cloning animals are each morally wrong.

Widest agreement about what is morally acceptable, ranging from 60% to 69%, is found for divorce, the death penalty, gambling, embryonic stem cell research, and premarital sex. Also, 55% or better say medical testing on animals, gay/lesbian relations, and the use of animal fur for clothing are each acceptable.

The three most controversial issues -- doctor-assisted suicide, abortion, and out-of-wedlock births -- are the ones on which fewer than 15 points separate the percentage considering the issue morally acceptable from the percentage considering it morally wrong. Attitudes on each have been fairly stable in recent years.

Moral Acceptability Trends for 2011's Most Controversial Issues

Percentage saying each is morally acceptable



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Partisans disagree widely on these issues, with majorities of Democrats accepting of all three issues, compared with, at most, barely a third of Republicans. Abortion is the most divisive of the three, with a 37-point Republican-Democratic gap.

Perceived Moral Acceptability of 2011's Most Controversial Issues -- by Party ID

% Morally acceptable

	Democrats	Independents	Republicans
	%	%	%
Out-of-wedlock births	65	60	35
Doctor-assisted suicide	51	50	32
Abortion	55	45	18

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Attitudes Stable Since 2010

Gallup measures Americans' views on the moral acceptability of a variety of issues each May. The trend was established in 2001, although new items have periodically been added to the list, including pornography this year.

Today's results are generally similar to those from 2010 for most issues. The only significant difference is a slight increase in the percentage viewing polygamy as morally acceptable, rising to 11% from 7%. However, this could reflect a change in wording this year. From 2003 through 2010, Gallup's question about polygamy described it as the practice of a husband having more than one wife at the same time. This year, the phrasing was gender neutral, describing it as a married person having more than one spouse at the same time.

Pornography, Gay Relations Produce Biggest Generational Gaps

Gallup finds significant differences by age in views about several of the behaviors tested. The largest generational difference is seen for pornography, something 42% of young adults consider morally acceptable, vs. 19% of those 55 and older.

Adults 18 to 34 are also more supportive than older Americans of gay/lesbian relations, premarital sex, out-of-wedlock births, gambling, polygamy, abortion, and cloning humans; they are less supportive of the death penalty and medical testing on animals.

U.S. Perceived Moral Acceptability of Behaviors and Social Policies -- by Age

% Morally acceptable, ranked by "Difference"

	18 to 34 years	35 to 54 years	55 and older	Difference, 18 to 34 minus 55 and older
	%	%	%	pct. pts
Pornography	42	29	19	+23
Gay/Lesbian relations	66	56	47	+19
Premarital sex	71	58	53	+18
Out-of-wedlock births	62	56	46	+16
Gambling	71	65	59	+12
Polygamy	19	8	8	+11
Abortion	44	42	34	+10
Cloning humans	18	10	9	+9
Cloning animals	36	32	28	+8
Embryonic stem cell research	66	59	62	+4
Doctor-assisted suicide	46	45	43	+3
Divorce	72	66	70	+2
Extramarital affairs	8	7	7	+1
Use of animal fur for clothing	55	57	56	-1
Suicide	14	13	19	-5
Death penalty	56	67	70	-14
Medical testing on animals	47	57	61	-14

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Bottom Line

Americans in 2011 widely view divorce, the death penalty, gambling, embryonic stem cell research, and premarital sex as morally acceptable. Even larger majorities are morally *opposed* to extramarital affairs, polygamy, cloning humans, and suicide.

With these issues seemingly settled, at least for now, several others generate enough disagreement to remain cultural flashpoints, with three -- physician-assisted suicide, out-of-wedlock births, and abortion -- appearing to be particularly divisive, and sparking divergent reactions by party.

Survey Methods

Results for this Gallup poll are based on telephone interviews conducted May 5-8, 2011, with a random sample of 1,018 adults, aged 18 and older, living in all 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia.

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 landline telephones and cellular phones, with interviews conducted in Spanish for respondents who are primarily Spanish-speaking. Each sample includes a minimum quota of 400 cell phone respondents and 600 landline respondents per 1,000 national adults, with additional minimum quotas among landline respondents for gender within region. Landline telephone numbers are chosen at random among listed telephone numbers. Cell phone numbers are selected using random-digit-dial methods. Landline respondents are chosen at random within each household on the basis of which member had the most recent birthday.

Samples are weighted by gender, age, race, Hispanic ethnicity, education, region, adults in the household, and phone status (cell phone only/landline only/both, cell phone mostly, and having an unlisted landline number). Demographic weighting targets are based on the March 2010 Current Population Survey figures for the aged 18 and older non-institutionalized population living in U.S. telephone households. All reported margins of sampling error include the computed design effects for weighting and sample design.

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.