

May 20, 2009

Republicans Move to the Right on Several Moral Issues

No change in Democrats' attitudes about what is morally acceptable

by Lydia Saad

PRINCETON, NJ -- According to Gallup's annual "moral acceptability" measure, updated in May, Americans have inched to the right on a handful of the 15 issues rated, including divorce, use of animal fur in clothing, gambling, and embryonic stem-cell research. Public opinion about the moral acceptability of the other items is essentially unchanged, with no significant increases in support for traditionally liberal positions.

Recent Trend in Acceptance of Social Matters and Policies

% Morally acceptable

	May 8-11, 2008	May 7-10, 2009	Change
	%	%	Pct. pts.
Buying and wearing clothing made of animal fur	54	61	7
Medical testing on animals	56	57	1
Gay or lesbian relations	48	49	1
Cloning animals	33	34	1
Death penalty	62	62	0
Suicide	15	15	0
Polygamy, when one husband has more than one wife at the same time	8	7	-1
Married men and women having an affair	7	6	-1
Cloning humans	11	9	-2
Sex between an unmarried man and woman	61	57	-4
Having a baby outside of marriage	55	51	-4
Abortion	40	36	-4
Gambling	63	58	-5
Medical research using stem cells obtained from human embryos	62	57	-5
Divorce	70	62	-8

GALLUP POLL

Despite these slight changes, a majority of Americans continue to view divorce, gambling, and embryonic stem-cell research as morally acceptable, and acceptance of using animal fur for

clothing has only strengthened. The death penalty, premarital sex, and medical testing on animals also meet with Americans' approval, ethically.

Only about half of Americans consider having a baby outside of marriage, as well as gay or lesbian relations, to be morally acceptable. Nearly as many say these actions are morally wrong, making them the social issues tested on which there is the greatest disagreement.

Abortion, cloning (whether of animals or humans), suicide, polygamy, and extramarital affairs are all viewed as morally wrong by solid majorities of Americans.

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.

May 7-10, 2009

	Morally acceptable	Morally wrong
	%	%
Divorce	62	30
The death penalty	62	30
Buying and wearing clothing made of animal fur	61	35
Gambling	58	36
Medical research using stem cells obtained from human embryos	57	36
Sex between an unmarried man and woman	57	40
Medical testing on animals	57	36
Having a baby outside of marriage	51	45
Gay or lesbian relations	49	47
Abortion	36	56
Cloning animals	34	63
Suicide	15	80
Cloning humans	9	88
Polygamy, when one husband has more than one wife at the same time	7	91
Married men and women having an affair	6	92

GALLUP POLL

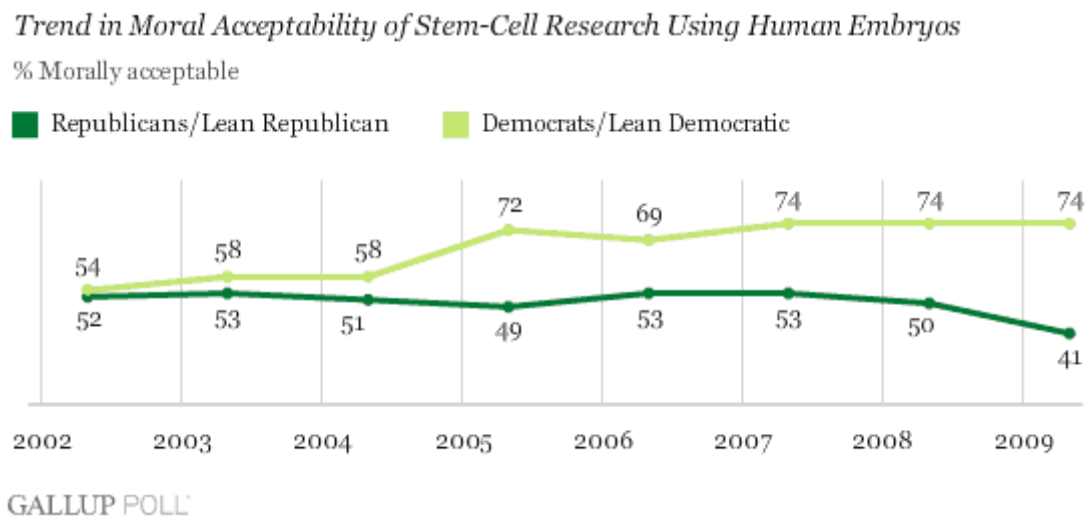
Republicans Adopt More Conservative Stances

[As Gallup recently reported with respect to Americans' shift toward the "pro-life" position on abortion](#), most of the uptick in support for conservative positions over the past year is the result

of Republicans (including independents who lean Republican) moving to the political right in their views. There have been no significant increases in conservative views among Democrats (including Democratic-leaning independents).

Over the past year, the percentage of Republicans saying embryonic stem-cell research is morally acceptable fell by nine points, from 50% to 41% -- a new low for Republicans on this issue since Gallup began measuring it in 2002. At the same time, acceptance among Democrats has held steady at 74%.

The last time Gallup found any substantial change among Republicans or Democrats in attitudes about stem-cell research using human embryos was in May 2005; at that time, Democrats' support increased by 14 points compared to the previous year. This may have reflected the enhanced partisan debate over the issue during the 2004 presidential campaign, with the Democratic presidential candidate, John Kerry, strongly supporting the research.

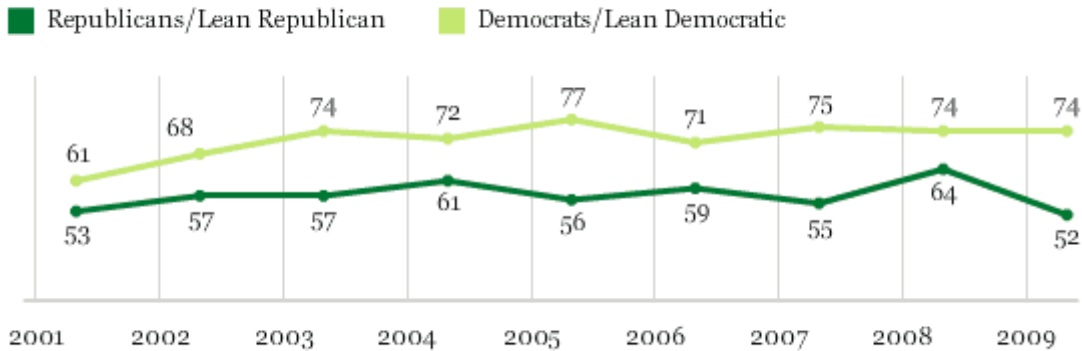


As for gambling, divorce, and use of clothing made of animal fur, the Republican rightward shifts since 2008 merely put Republican views back to where they were at other points in recent years.

While only 52% of Republicans today say divorce is morally acceptable, down from 64% a year ago, it is similar to their 55% approval in 2007, as well as 53% at the start of the trend in 2001.

Trend in Moral Acceptability of Divorce

% Morally acceptable

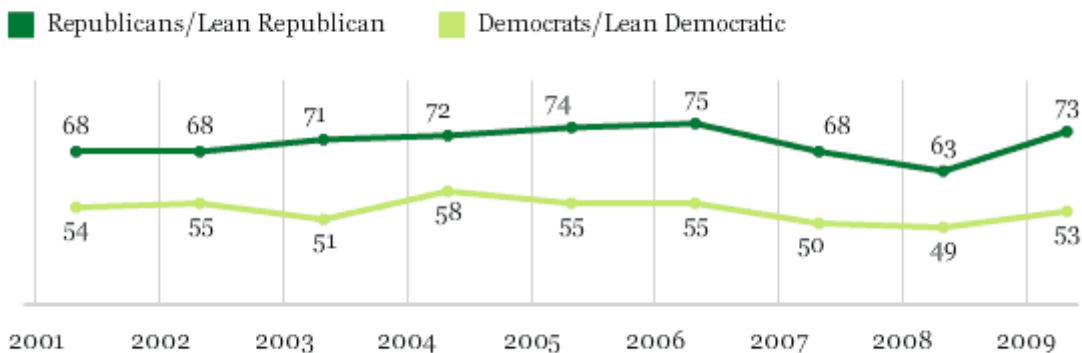


GALLUP POLL

The 10-point increase among Republicans since last year in the moral acceptability of using animal fur for clothing, from 63% to 73%, restores their attitudes to where they were three years ago.

Trend in Moral Acceptability of Buying and Wearing Clothing Made of Animal Fur

% Morally acceptable

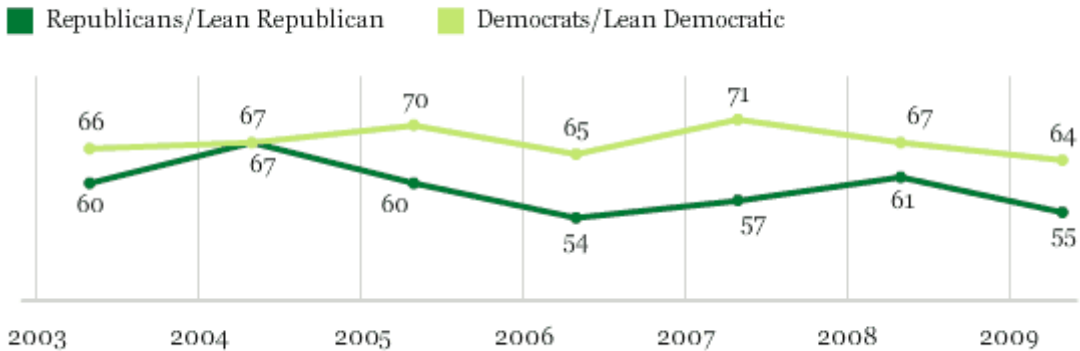


GALLUP POLL

Similarly, while Republican support for gambling has dropped by six points since May 2008, the 55% support for gambling today is consistent with Republican attitudes only two years ago.

Trend in Moral Acceptability of Gambling

% Morally acceptable

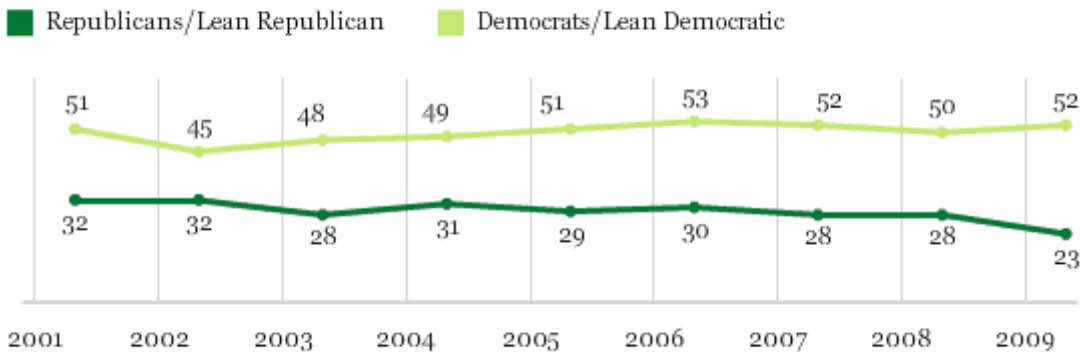


GALLUP POLL

Although in the May 7-10 Values and Beliefs survey, Gallup found a 10-point increase over last year (from 60% to 70%) in the percentage of Republicans calling themselves "pro-life," the same poll shows only a 5-point -- and not statistically significant -- decrease in the percentage of Republicans calling abortion "morally acceptable."

Trend in Moral Acceptability of Abortion

% Morally acceptable

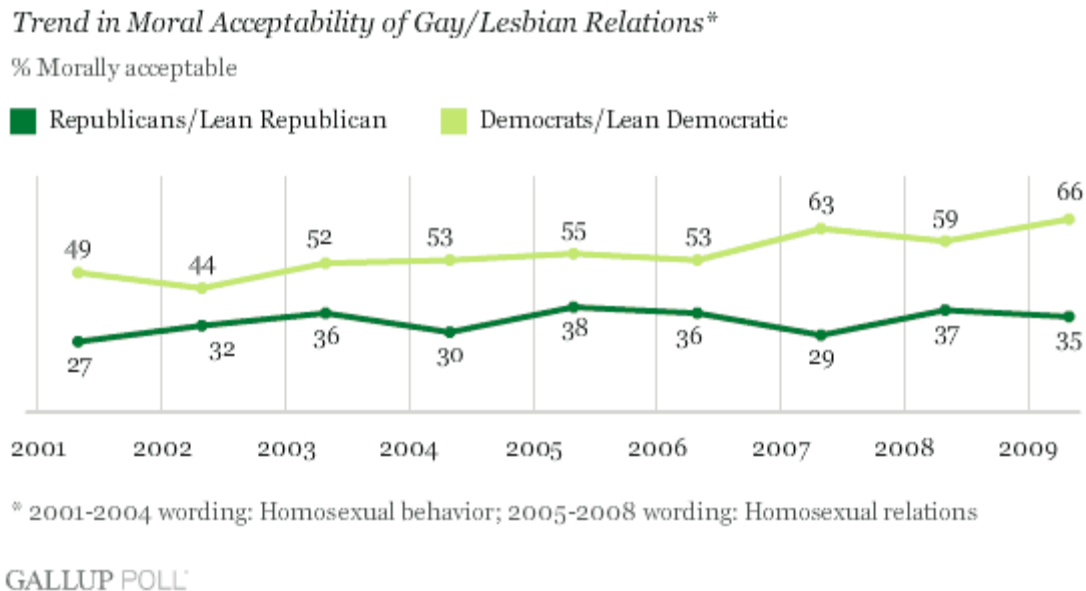


GALLUP POLL

Expanded Democratic Tolerance for Gay/Lesbian Relations

Since May 2008, Democrats' views have shifted on only 1 of the 15 issues. Gallup trends document a seven-point increase in the percentage viewing gay and lesbian relations as morally acceptable, from 59% to 66%. While the 2009 reading is technically the highest percentage of Democrats taking this position in the nine years of Gallup polling on the subject, it is similar to the 63% in 2007.

This year's change among Democrats is offset by a slight (though not statistically significant) decline in the percentage of Republicans viewing gay and lesbian relations as morally acceptable, as well as a larger drop in tolerance among the relatively small number of Americans who consider themselves politically independent with no leaning toward either party. As a result, there has been little change in the overall views of Americans on the issue.



Bottom Line

Americans' views about what is and isn't morally acceptable in today's culture have not changed dramatically over the past year. To the extent they have changed, they have moved slightly to the right on a handful of issues, almost entirely because of more pronounced conservative shifts among Republicans and Republican-leaning independents. This is particularly evident with respect to lower Republican support for divorce and embryonic stem-cell research, and increased Republican support for the use of animal fur in clothing.

Survey Methods

Results are based on telephone interviews with 1,015 national adults, aged 18 and older, conducted May 7-10, 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 ± 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.