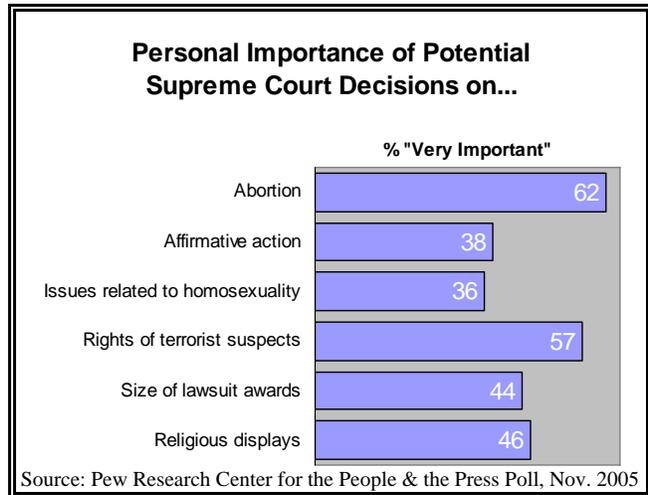




**THE PEW
FORUM**
ON RELIGION
& PUBLIC LIFE

**Abortion Seen as Most Important Issue for
Supreme Court**
Most favor legal abortion, but with more limits

On November 30, the Supreme Court will hear oral argument in the case of *Ayotte v. Planned Parenthood of Northern New England*, marking the first time in five years the court has taken up an abortion case. According to a recent poll by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, more than six-in-ten Americans (62%) say future Supreme Court decisions on abortion are “very important” to them personally. Nearly as many view future court decisions on the rights of suspected terrorists as important. Fewer people see issues such as religious displays on public property, tort reform and affirmative action as very important.



Nearly seven-in-ten evangelical Christians (69%) say that court decisions on abortion are very important to them, more than any other religious group. But abortion is important across the religious spectrum, with majorities of mainline Protestants, Catholics and seculars reporting that abortion decisions are very important to them.

Religion and the Salience of Supreme Court Decisions on Abortion

Abortion decisions are...

	Very impt	Fairly impt	Not too impt	Not at all impt	Don't know
	%	%	%	%	%
All	62	20	8	8	2=100
White evangelical Prot	69	17	6	6	2=100
White mainline Prot	55	23	13	7	2=100
White Catholic	59	24	9	7	1=100
Secular	58	19	5	14	4=100

Source: Pew Research Center for the People & the Press Poll, Nov. 2005

Other polling, conducted in July 2005 by the People & the Press and the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, reveals that Americans are somewhat ambivalent about abortion, much as they have been for the past two decades.

On the one hand, Americans overwhelmingly support keeping abortion legal. Fewer than three-in-ten (29%) favor overturning *Roe v. Wade*, and a mere 9% say that abortion should not be permitted under any circumstances.

Even among evangelicals, the most pro-life of religious groups, fewer than half (48%) favor overturning *Roe* and only 15% say abortion should not be permitted at all. Among Catholics, support for completely outlawing abortion stands at only 11%, while among mainline Protestants and seculars merely one-in-twenty say abortion should never be permitted.

At the same time, a majority of Americans say that there should be more restrictions on abortion than currently exist. Approximately one-in-four (23%) say that abortion should be available but with stricter limits, while 31% say that abortion should only be legal in cases of rape, incest or to save the woman's life. In addition, majorities favor requiring minors to get parental consent before obtaining an abortion (73%), say that it would be good to reduce the number of abortions performed in the U.S. (59%) and express moral concerns about abortion (with 41% saying abortion is sometimes immoral and 29% saying abortion is nearly always immoral).

On each of these questions, evangelical Christians stand out for their pro-life views; 86% favor parental consent laws, 79% say it would be good to reduce the number of abortions and 87% say that abortion is sometimes or nearly always morally wrong. Seculars, by contrast, stand out for their pro-choice opinions. Half of seculars (51%) reject the idea that reducing the number of abortions would be a good thing, and about as many (50%) say that abortion is not a moral issue.

Americans Support Legalized Abortion...					
	-----White-----				
	Evang		Mainline		
	<u>All</u>	<u>Prot</u>	<u>Prot</u>	<u>Cath</u>	<u>Secular</u>
<i>Abortion should be...</i>	%	%	%	%	%
Generally available	35	14	41	31	60
Avail., with more limits	23	17	30	23	23
Illegal except rape/incest/ or save woman's life	31	53	23	32	13
Not permitted at all	9	15	5	11	3
Don't know	<u>2</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>1</u>
	100	100	100	100	100
<i>Support overturning Roe?</i>					
No	65	48	81	62	82
Yes	29	48	13	32	14
Don't know	<u>6</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>4</u>
	100	100	100	100	100
...But With Reservations					
<i>Abortion is...</i>					
Not a moral issue	26	12	32	20	50
Sometimes immoral	41	38	44	44	36
Nearly always immoral	29	49	19	33	10
Don't know	<u>4</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>
	100	100	100	100	100
<i>Good to reduce abortions?</i>					
No	33	14	39	30	51
Yes	59	79	49	65	40
Don't know	<u>8</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>9</u>
	100	100	100	100	100
<i>Parental consent?</i>					
Oppose	22	11	24	17	25
Favor	73	86	71	80	67
Don't know	<u>5</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>8</u>
	100	100	100	100	100
Source: Pew Forum/Research Center for the People & the Press, July 2005					

The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life provides opinion leaders with timely, impartial information on issues at the intersection of religion and public affairs. As an independent, nonpartisan and non-advocacy organization, the Forum does not take positions on policy debates. The Forum functions as both a clearinghouse and a town hall. As a clearinghouse, it gathers and disseminates reliable information through polls and reports. As a town hall, it provides a neutral venue for discussion of important issues of religion and public life. Based in Washington, D.C., the Forum is a project of the Pew Research Center and is funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts. For more information, visit www.pewforum.org.