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In the past four decades, American attitudes have changed markedly on gay marriage, smoking, bullying and a host of other cultural issues.

But on Roe v. Wade, the 1973 Supreme Court decision that legalized abortion, public opinion today looks much as it did back then.

When it comes to American views on the legality of abortion, "the trend lines look about as flat as they can be," said Daniel Cox, research director at the nonpartisan Public Religion Research Institute.

Just a few years after the justices decided Roe, Gallup pollsters began asking Americans about abortion. In 1975, 54 percent said it should be legal only under certain circumstances; last year, that figure was virtually unchanged, at 52 percent. ...

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