

Supreme Decisions: Public's View of the Supreme Court

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But, Almost All Americans (93%) Say the Decisions of the Supreme Court are Influenced By Partisan Politics – Including a Quarter (26%) Who Say Politics “Almost Always Plays a Role” and 53% Who Say Decisions are “Sometimes Influenced” by Partisan Politics

The Supreme Court's Bush vs. Gore Election Decision is the One That Stands Out Most in the Minds of Americans



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New York, NY – Against the backdrop of recent media attention surrounding the nation's highest court, and the potential for a hearing on the imminent execution of Oklahoma bomber Timothy McVeigh, polling results show that almost two-thirds (64%) say that over the last year or so they approve of the actions of the Supreme Court. An even larger number (85%) say they have respect for Supreme Court Justices — including more than four in ten (45%) who say they have “a great deal” of respect.

Yet, despite enjoying the respect and approval of many Americans, almost all (93%) Americans think that the decisions of the Supreme Court are influenced to some degree by partisan politics. This includes more than one in four (26%) who say that partisan politics “almost always” plays a role in the Court's decisions while only 5 percent take the opposite viewpoint, saying the court is “completely independent”. Topping the list of decisions that

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most stand out in the minds of Americans is the Bush vs. Gore election case (mentioned by 29% of those surveyed) followed by abortion related decisions (13%).

These are the findings of an Ipsos-Reid/CTV/Globe and Mail poll conducted between May 1st to May 3rd, 2001. The poll is based on a randomly selected sample of 1,000 adult Americans. With a sample of this size, the results are considered accurate to within ± 3.1 percentage points, 19 times out of 20, of what they would have been had the entire adult American population been polled. The margin of error will be larger within regions and for other sub-groupings of the survey population. These data were statistically weighted to ensure the sample's regional and age/sex composition reflects that of the actual American population according to the most recent national Census data.

Two-Thirds (64%) Say they Approve of the Actions of the Supreme Court Over the Last Year and an Even Greater Number (85%) Say they Have Respect for Supreme Court Justices

Two-thirds (64%) of the American public say that generally speaking, over the last year or so — a timeframe that includes the controversial Bush vs. Gore election hearing — they approve of the actions of the Supreme Court. Only about three in ten (29%) say they disapprove. In addition to high levels of approval more than eight in ten (85%) say they have respect for Supreme Court Justices. A plurality (45%) say they have “a great deal” of respect and another four in ten (40%) say they have “a fair amount of respect”. In contrast, one in seven (13%) are on the other end of the spectrum, with 8 percent saying they have “not much respect” and 5 percent saying they have “very little respect” for Supreme Court Justices. These figures are in line with the respect the public has for judges in general, with 87 percent saying they respect judges.

- Men (68%) are more likely than women (60%) to say they approve of the actions of the Supreme Court but the sexes are equally likely to say they have respect for the Justices.
- Respondents aged 54 and younger are both more likely to respect the Justices (90%) and approve of the Court's actions (67%) than are respondents aged 55+ (76% and 56% respectively).

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While respect and approval run high, there is a widespread perception across the country (93%) that the decisions made by the Supreme Court are influenced to some degree by partisan politics. Most (53%) say the Court's decisions are “sometimes influenced” by partisan politics but a quarter (26%) say that “partisan politics almost always plays a role in Supreme Court Decisions”. Meanwhile, one in seven (14%) say that the court is “rarely influenced” by partisan politics. In contrast, only one in twenty (5%) think the Supreme Court is “completely independent from partisan politics”.

The Supreme Court's Bush vs. Gore Election Decision is the One That Stands Out Most in the Minds of Americans

When the public is asked to identify in their own words which one decision made by the Supreme Court over the last few years stands out most in their minds, the largest number (29%) say the Bush vs. Gore decision affecting the 2000 Presidential election. The second most frequently mentioned (13%) are abortion-related decisions followed by a number of



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specific rulings including: rulings related to seatbelts (3%), the Clinton impeachment (2%) and Elian Gonzalez (1%).

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