

*On the Cusp of Change*

# What to Know about Public Opinion on Abortion in 2022

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## Introduction

Over the next several months, abortion rights and access are likely to undergo a seismic shift in the United States. In 2021, state lawmakers across the country proposed 663 restrictions to rights and access, including enacting 108 anti-abortion laws in 19 states. Texas used SB 8 to ban most abortions in the state, a law that continues to stay in effect. In 2022, the Supreme Court, representing a newly 6-3 conservative majority, is very likely to rule either to overturn *Roe v. Wade* or rule in a way that allows states to ban or severely restrict abortion access.

On the cusp of a radical change, PerryUndem conducted a national survey to examine the state of the electorate on abortion policy and awareness of the shifting landscape. We also peek into the future and explore how voters might react to a reality in which abortion becomes illegal and / or inaccessible in many states across the country.

PerryUndem has spent years studying opinion on abortion, including talking to thousands of voters across the country in qualitative research and conducting dozens of surveys on the topic. This survey is multi-dimensional and provides a broader account of opinion than typical surveys on the topic.

The survey was conducted among a total of n = 1,972 voters nationwide, using YouGov's online panel, from December 20, 2021 to January 4, 2022. The survey includes oversamples by race and ethnicity for a total of n = 408 Black voters, n = 406 Latina/o/x voters, and n = 408 Asian American / Pacific Islander voters. The survey was administered in English and Spanish.

We used the survey to explore these research questions:

- Are voters aware of the state of abortion rights and access?
- What's behind voters' views on abortion?
- Do voters envision needing access to abortion care?
- What are voters' views toward recent restrictions, such as 6-week and 15-week bans?
- What do they think is driving elected officials to restrict and ban abortion?
- Are voters aware of the Supreme Court deciding on a case this year?
- How might a Supreme Court ruling that restricts abortion or overturns *Roe v. Wade* affect voters, including in the 2022 midterms?
- How might voters respond to radical changes in the abortion access landscape over the next few years?
- Finally, what are the views of 18- to 44-year-olds – those of reproductive age – whose lives are the most impacted by these policies?

Following is a snapshot of findings.

For more details, please see our full [report](#).

## Key Findings

- **Voters are not knowledgeable about the state of abortion rights and access.** The Supreme Court case has not broken through to most voters (only 19% have heard “a lot” about it). Most do not know the laws on abortion in their state. Despite elected officials in every state proposing restrictions on abortion in the past year, just 22% of voters say they’ve heard about this in their own state.
- **They do, however, have a sense that rights and access are at risk.** Seven in ten voters (70%) say they feel the right to abortion is at risk, which is up 12 points from a survey we conducted last summer. Analysis suggests that news about the Texas abortion ban (SB 8) is likely responsible for the increase – 37% say they’ve heard “a lot” about this ban. Notably, anti-abortion voters are less likely than others to have heard about SB 8 (26% have heard “a lot”).
- **Most don’t think it’s “very likely” that the Supreme Court will overturn *Roe v. Wade* (17%) or allow states to severely restrict access (28%).**
- **That said, they also don’t think it’s *unlikely*.** Majorities feel the chances are 50-50 or better that the Supreme Court will overturn *Roe* (76%) or allow states to severely restrict access (86%).
- **A restrictive Supreme Court ruling is likely to trigger strong negative emotions across a swath of the electorate.** We asked voters how they would feel if the Supreme Court ruled to allow states to ban or severely restrict abortion access. Negative emotions around anger, disgust, fear, outrage, fury, betrayal, and devastation outweigh the number of strong positive emotions (e.g., elation and feeling overjoyed).
- **Majorities of voters are likely to see a restrictive Supreme Court ruling as a regression on women’s rights as well as society overall.** Two-thirds of voters (67%) say abortion rights and access are important parts of women’s rights. About six in ten (59%) say a Supreme Court ruling that overturns *Roe* or allows states to ban or severely restrict abortion would be a “step backward for women’s rights.” Nearly the same proportion (57%) says such a ruling would be a step backward on “progress in our society.”

- **With a restrictive ruling, we might witness backlash toward the Supreme Court among about half of the electorate.** Fifty-five percent of respondents say a restrictive abortion ruling would be the outcome of justices' personal political beliefs rather than the merits of the legal case. Close to half (47%) says such a ruling would make them feel less faith in the institution of the Supreme Court (24% say more faith; 29% say no difference).
- **A SCOTUS ruling is likely to be more mobilizing than deflating to voters.** More than one-third of respondents (37%) say they'd feel more likely to participate in the midterms as a result of a ruling that allows bans on abortion, compared to four percent saying they'd feel less likely to vote. Thirty-seven percent say that a restrictive SCOTUS decision would affect who they'd vote for in the upcoming elections. Among them, 75% say they'd be more likely to vote for a candidate who supports abortion rights and access (22% say they'd be more likely to vote for an anti-abortion candidate). Voters across every demographic group, including white men and those in rural areas, are more likely to say they'd move toward a candidate in favor of, rather than against, abortion rights.
- **Majorities of voters express concern about potential outcomes of a Supreme Court decision.** Two-thirds or more say it would be unacceptable for restrictions to result in people having to travel to different parts of the country for care (65%), waiting several weeks or months for appointments (72%), and lower-income people having less access than higher-income people (72%). Interestingly, a majority of Republican voters find at least one of these outcomes unacceptable. A majority of voters also say they'd be concerned about people losing their current rights on abortion (65%), people having to travel across state lines (65%), and abortion becoming illegal in their own state (61%). Seven in ten would be concerned if doctors (70%) and women (73%) are arrested for providing or having an abortion.
- **Why do they think state lawmakers are trying to ban or restrict abortion?** When given a list of potential reasons, voters are most likely to say that these lawmakers want to appeal to religious conservatives (62%) and because they only care about staying in power (56%). Fewer than half say the reason is that lawmakers want to protect the unborn (46%).

- **Voters intuitively understand what academics found when studying the outcome of not having abortion access.** Academic researchers have [studied](#) the effects of not having access to abortion. We asked survey respondents whether they think several outcomes are likely when women who decide to have an abortion can't get one and end up keeping the child. Majorities say financial hardships are likely effects, such as being more likely to need support from government programs (68%), raising the child alone without a partner (68%), and being more likely to experience an increase in poverty (55%).
- **Public opinion on abortion is driven by more – and less – than typical polling suggests.** Most public polling on abortion tends to be “tracking” – that is, measuring views over time on a handful of questions. Rarely do we see these questions validated, nor robust attempts at truly understanding opinion.
- **On the more side: Opinion is more than just a political stance.** Two-thirds of women of reproductive age (65%) say they can imagine a situation personally in which an abortion might be the best option for them.
- **Interestingly, 53% of voters of reproductive age say that, ideally, they'd want to have more children, but only 30% plan on doing so.** What's going into their decision-making? Being able to “take care of myself and my family as it is now” (70%), wages / income (64%), the state of society right now (61%), the “state of my mental health” (59%), and childcare costs (56%).

Additionally, 61% of women of reproductive age say motherhood changes a woman's life “completely” (31% say fatherhood changes a man's life “completely”).

- **Opinion on abortion is also related to sexist views around gender and power.** For example, fewer than half of anti-abortion voters agree they want there to be an equal number of men and women in positions of power (43% of those who want *Roe v. Wade* overturned v. 76% of those who want *Roe* to stay). About seven in ten anti-abortion respondents express resentment toward shifting gender norms or roles – agreeing that “these days, society tends to punish men just for acting like men” (69% of those who want *Roe* overturned v. 26% of those who want *Roe* to stay). Nearly six in ten (58%) women of reproductive age (18 to 44) say that lawmakers are trying to restrict abortion because “we live in a society where men still have more power than women.”

- **On the less side: Abortion is not linked to religious beliefs for most voters.** Two-thirds (66%) say abortion is not a religious issue for them personally. Even 40% of those who attend religious services regularly say that abortion is not about religion for them.
- **Additionally, contrary to conventional wisdom, most voters do not struggle with their feelings on abortion.** Is abortion a gray issue that includes many different circumstances? Yes. Do voters struggle with their “feelings on abortion – for example are you torn about how you feel on the issue?” No (77%).
- **Perhaps most radical and counter to prevailing assumptions, data suggest voters prefer individual control on this issue over regulation by law.** Most polls force respondents to choose a side on bans around 6 weeks, second trimesters, or 15 weeks. But, when we asked whether they want elected officials to regulate this issue in the first place, most say no – they want the individuals involved making decisions. For example, 64% say the decision to have an abortion, including the reasons and situations for having an abortion, should not be regulated by law. This is similar to the proportion found by a recent Washington Post / ABC News [survey](#).

## Conclusion

This year, anti-abortion state bills and a U.S. Supreme Court case challenging *Roe v. Wade* are poised to bring major change to the right to abortion as well as reduce access to care for millions of Americans. Across the country, recent policies and judicial decisions are contradicting the beliefs of voters, the majority of whom support the legal right to abortion and intuitively understand the harms that abortion restrictions inflict on individuals' health, financial stability and autonomy – though many remain unaware of the increasing threats to this right.

If the Supreme Court overturns *Roe v. Wade* this year and the ruling sparks increased public awareness of diminishing abortion access, we anticipate a robust public response that reflects voters' opinions on power, government control, bodily autonomy, pregnancy, families, and even patriarchy. For a majority of voters, we expect such a ruling would be seen as a major blow to women's rights and would translate to support at the ballot box in coming elections for candidates who support abortion rights and access.

For more information about this poll, please contact Tresa Udem, partner at PerryUdem, at [tresa@perryudem.com](mailto:tresa@perryudem.com).