# navigator.

## A Guide for Advocates

### How to Talk About Americans' Opposition to Abortion Bans

**Welcome to NAVIGATOR** – a project designed to better understand the American public's views on issues of the day and help advocates, elected officials, and other interested parties understand the language, imagery and messaging needed to make and win key policy arguments. This edition features findings from a national online survey of 1,113 registered voters conducted May 31-June 3, 2019. 113 additional interviews were conducted among political independents with no partisan lean.

Every month, we pick a few topics for exploration. The topics we select aren't meant to cover every issue area facing the progressive community, but rather to give actionable advice on how to talk about key issue areas. We'll be sharing our findings throughout the month, and in this volume we focus on:

**What are the best arguments progressives can make against abortion bans being passed in state legislatures across the country aimed at threatening *Roe v. Wade*?** Republicans may continue to pass abortion bans, but Americans are deeply skeptical or outright opposed. Progressives have a number of effective ways to further define what conservatives are doing, reinforce opposition, and lead the fight to protect women's reproductive rights – with the public firmly on their side.

# The public is hearing a lot about conservative abortion bans, and they don't like how it sounds.

In the last few months, state legislatures around the country – most notably, Alabama – have passed laws that severely restrict or ban abortion outright, in direct conflict with the U.S. Supreme Court decision *Roe v. Wade*.
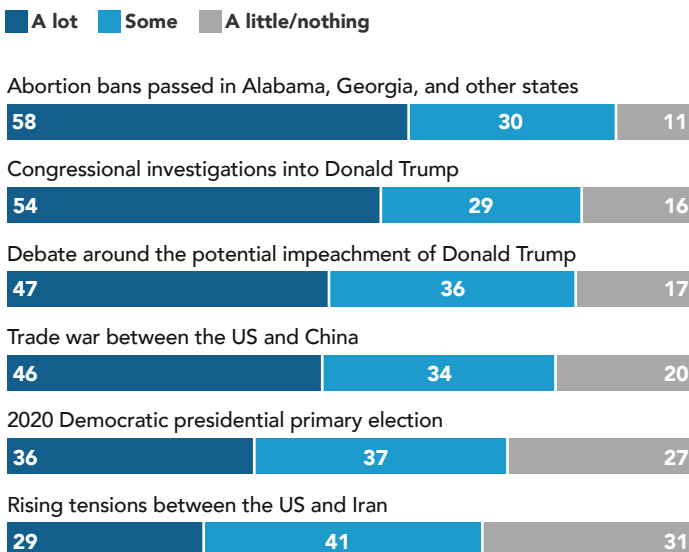
In the wake of these laws being passed, Navigator examined where Americans really stand when it comes to abortion. The public strongly opposes these bans and progressives have the chance to further consolidate opposition by making clear what the laws really mean for women in America today – taking away their basic rights and freedoms.

## Conservative moves against abortion rights are driving the national political conversation.

Abortion bans are top-of-mind across the ideological spectrum. Nearly all Americans (89%) say they have heard "some" or "a lot" about the abortion bans in recent weeks. That's more than report hearing about the debate around Trump's potential impeachment, the trade war between the US and China, and a slew of other topics. **And, as a result, 72% think the right to an abortion is at risk, including 83% of Democrats.**

The abortion bans are driving the conversation for Democrats, but also notably among Independents. A majority of Independents (53%) say they have heard "a lot" about these bans – nearly 20 points higher than the number of Independents saying they have heard about impeachment talk (34%).
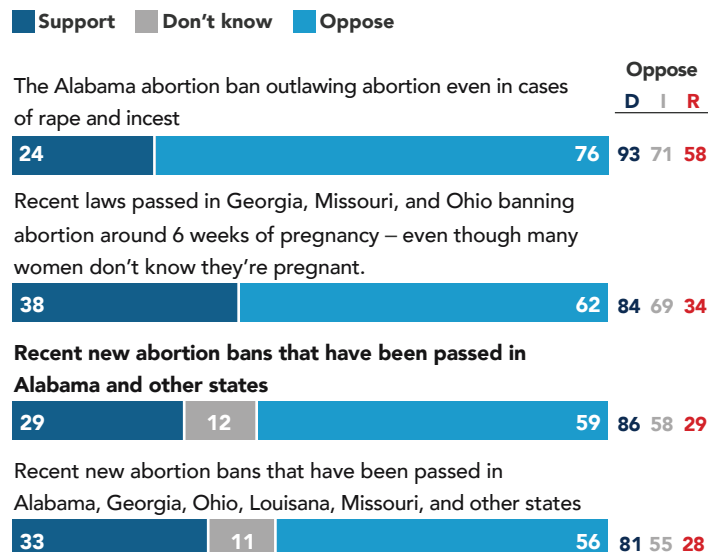
## Americans strongly oppose laws banning abortion, and adding detail heightens opposition.

Whether asked about as just the ban in Alabama (29% support/59% oppose) or as a group of bans across many states (33% support/56% oppose), majorities clearly oppose these laws, even before given any context of how restrictive they are.

After hearing more about what the Alabama law will do – ban abortion even in cases of rape or incest – opposition grows overall (24% support/76% oppose), across party lines (93% of Democrats, 71% of Independents, and 58% of Republicans oppose), and across even typically conservative demographics (e.g., 77% of non-college whites oppose). Whenever possible, Alabama should be at the forefront of communications around the abortion bans.

**In recent weeks, how much have you seen or heard about the following news items?**

◼ A lot   ◼ Some   ◼ A little/nothing

Abortion bans passed in Alabama, Georgia, and other states

| 58 | 30 | 11 |

Congressional investigations into Donald Trump

| 54 | 29 | 16 |

Debate around the potential impeachment of Donald Trump

| 47 | 36 | 17 |

Trade war between the US and China

| 46 | 34 | 20 |

2020 Democratic presidential primary election

| 36 | 37 | 27 |

Rising tensions between the US and Iran

| 29 | 41 | 31 |

**Do you support or oppose…**

◼ Support   ◼ Don't know   ◼ Oppose

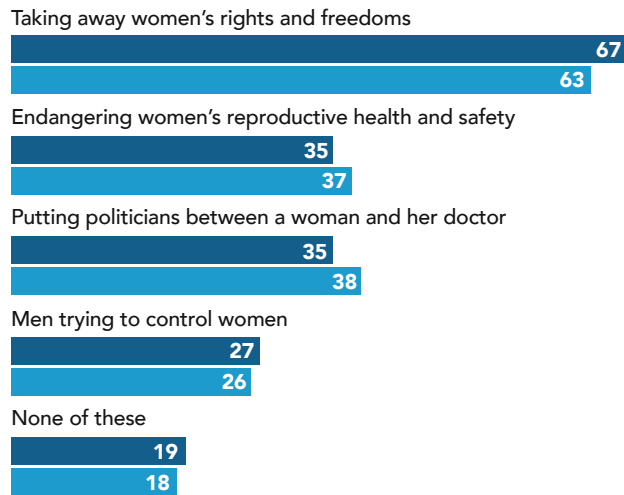|  |  | Oppose | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
|  |  | **D** | **I** | **R** |
| The Alabama abortion ban outlawing abortion even in cases of rape and incest | 24 / 76 | 93 | 71 | 58 |
| Recent laws passed in Georgia, Missouri, and Ohio banning abortion around 6 weeks of pregnancy – even though many women don't know they're pregnant. | 38 / 62 | 84 | 69 | 34 |
| **Recent new abortion bans that have been passed in Alabama and other states** | 29 / 12 / 59 | 86 | 58 | 29 |
| Recent new abortion bans that have been passed in Alabama, Georgia, Ohio, Louisana, Missouri, and other states | 33 / 11 / 56 | 81 | 55 | 28 |

# Biggest concern about the bans: they take away women's rights.

While recent abortion bans are already deeply unpopular, Navigator also identifies room to further define the bans and harden opposition. The best way to talk about the abortion bans is to tap into the public's concerns that they take away women's rights and freedoms. Americans find this framing much more salient than "attacking" or "endangering" women, particularly among a key group who support abortion rights, but oppose abortion for themselves. In addition, this rights-focused language is more effective than focusing on the politicians passing these anti-choice laws.

**The following are ways to describe the laws in Alabama and other states banning abortion. Which do you think best describes the laws in Alabama and other states banning abortion?\* (Based on respondents' top two choices)**

■ Total   ■ Support Abortion Rights, but Oppose for Themselves

Taking away women's rights and freedoms
- Total: 67
- Support Abortion Rights, but Oppose for Themselves: 63

Endangering women's reproductive health and safety
- Total: 35
- Support Abortion Rights, but Oppose for Themselves: 37

Putting politicians between a woman and her doctor
- Total: 35
- Support Abortion Rights, but Oppose for Themselves: 38

Men trying to control women
- Total: 27
- Support Abortion Rights, but Oppose for Themselves: 26

None of these
- Total: 19
- Support Abortion Rights, but Oppose for Themselves: 18

**These may sound similar, but if you had to choose, which of the following concerns you more about what the laws in Alabama and other states banning abortion do?\***

■ Take away women's rights   ■ Neither   ■ Attack women's rights

| | Take away women's rights | Neither | Attack women's rights |
|---|---|---|---|
| Total | 65 | 20 | 15 |
| Support Abortion Rights but Oppose for Themselves | 69 | 17 | 14 |

*\*This question was only asked among those who oppose any of the bans in question.*

## The Fault in Simplistic Measures of Abortion Attitudes

**There are many different ways to measure attitudes on abortion, but far too often the issue is presented as two equal opposing groups in America** – those who support abortion rights and those who don't. But that presentation could not be further from the truth.

**No matter how we frame the question, strong majorities are in favor of abortion rights.** A majority of Americans label themselves pro-choice (55% pro-choice/39% pro-life) and believe abortion should be legal (54% legal/40% limited or illegal).

**Further, a tiny percentage of America holds extremely restrictive views.** Just 10% of Americans say "abortion should be illegal in all circumstances." Just 12% strongly support the Alabama law (compared to 56% who strongly oppose it).

**But it's important to note that many people support abortion rights, but would not consider an abortion for themselves.** Roughly one-third of Americans (36%) comprise a key group that are against abortion for themselves and their family, but think the government shouldn't prevent a woman from making that decision for themselves. This important group largely describes themselves as pro-choice (62%), but a third (34%) say they are pro-life, showing the fault in that label. These respondents are more likely than the average American to be Independents, Catholics, women under 55, and non-college women.

# Sharing information about specific abortion laws and what they will do can help bolster opposition.

Moving away from Alabama specifically and to the details of various proposed bans more broadly, we again see clear, pervasive support for abortion rights. There was no abortion regulation that was considered a good idea – from making rape and incest victims give birth, even if the victim is a child, to requiring women to carry a pregnancy to term when they know the baby won't survive, to imprisoning doctors who perform an abortion for up to 99 years.

Those saying these specific restrictions are bad ideas outpace opposition to the abortion bans generally. Moreover, they are considered bad ideas at higher rates among those personally against abortion but who do not think government should interfere in a woman's choice to have one.

## From bad to worse: additional specifics further drive opposition to conservative abortion policy.

**The following are abortion laws that some states have passed or are currently considering. For each, please indicate if you think the law is a good idea or bad idea.**

■ Bad idea: Total     ■ Bad idea: Support Abortion Rights, but Oppose for Themselves

Requiring women to carry a pregnancy to term even when they know the fetus will be stillborn
86
94

Requiring victims of rape and incest to carry a pregnancy to term, even if the victim is as young as 11 or 12
85
94

Requiring women to carry a pregnancy to term even when they know the fetus will not survive
84
91

Requiring women to view medically inaccurate information about the dangers of abortion
79
83

Allowing doctors who perform an abortion to be imprisoned for up to 99 years
76
89

Making a safe legal abortion more than a day's drive away from most women
71
79

Putting more restrictions on abortion providers than on any other kind of health care provider
62
72

In a language test asking respondents to select the words that best describe the abortion bans, "anti-women" (35%), "government overreach" (34%), and "oppressive" (32%) rise to the top overall. Other words work with different partisan affiliations – "dangerous" works well with Democrats, while "extreme" works well with Independents and Republicans. Notably, "government overreach" resonates significantly among those who are personally against abortion, but do not think government should prevent women from making that decision for themselves (45%). The same language test shows that Americans don't think words like "radical," "inhumane," "unsafe," and "reckless" are the right way to describe the bans.

| Top three words to describe the abortion bans | Words NOT in top three for any party |
|---|---|
| **Among Total:**<br>Anti-women (35%)<br>Government overreach (34%)<br>Oppressive (32%)<br>**Among Democrats:**<br>Anti-women (48%)<br>Oppressive (41%)<br>Dangerous (32%)<br>**Among Independents:**<br>Government overreach (37%)<br>Anti-women (32%)<br>Extreme (29%)<br>**Among Republicans:**<br>Government overreach (43%)<br>Extreme (41%)<br>Unfair (28%) | Anti-freedom<br>Out of touch<br>Cruel<br>Unsafe<br>Heartless<br>Radical<br>Alarming<br>Not based in medical science<br>Inhumane<br>Reckless |

*This question was only asked among those who oppose any of the bans in question.*

# When it comes to abortion rights, keep women's rights central, and focus on what's happening now.

Navigator looked at several potential messages to undermine Republicans' argument that the abortion bans are meant to protect the sanctity of life. Messages that focus on Republicans applying one-size-fits-all laws to personal situations they don't understand, and doing nothing to actually help women get the care they need perform best.

The most convincing pro-choice message is one providing context for why a woman might need an abortion – sometimes a woman gets a diagnosis that a pregnancy is threating her life or that the fetus won't survive – and explains Republicans are interfering in personal situations they don't understand by trying to apply one-size-fits-all laws to complex and personal health care decisions. This was one of five framings that bested a conservative "sanctity of life" argument by at least 24 points and won over 70% of the key bloc of Americans who support abortion rights, but oppose abortion for themselves.

Another strong pro-choice message is one that reinforces the belief that Republicans are trying to take away women's rights: rather than helping women access care, they're taking away a woman's right to make decisions about her body and her future (64% overall, 77% among that key bloc).

While they still win against the Republican argument, this survey shows that suggesting Republicans are trying to take us backward with these abortion bans (61% overall, 66% among that key bloc), or playing politics is less effective (62% overall, 74% among that key bloc).

**Even if you don't agree with either side completely, who do you find more convincing:**

Those who say the recent laws banning abortion in Alabama and other states show the Republican Party is interfering in personal situations they don't understand. In some cases, a woman gets a diagnosis that a pregnancy is threatening her life or that the fetus is dying and won't survive, yet Republicans want to apply one-size-fits-all laws to complex and personal health care decisions.

Those who say the recent laws banning abortion in Alabama and other states show the Republican Party is the only party committed to protecting the sanctity of life.

Total

| 69 | 31 |
|----|----|

Support Abortion Rights, but Oppose for Themselves

| 84 | 16 |
|----|----|

Those who say the recent laws banning abortion in Alabama and other states show the Republican Party doesn't understand the challenges women face. Instead of helping women access affordable, quality reproductive care or maternity care, they are making decisions for women about their bodies and their futures while at the same time taking away access to birth control.

Those who say the recent laws banning abortion in Alabama and other states show the Republican Party is the only party committed to protecting the sanctity of life.

Total

| 64 | 36 |
|----|----|

Support Abortion Rights, but Oppose for Themselves

| 77 | 23 |
|----|----|

Those who say the recent laws banning abortion in Alabama and other states show the Republican Party is playing politics. Instead of representing all of their constituents, they're taking an extreme position on abortion in order to get big checks from ultra-conservative donors that they think will help them win elections.

Those who say the recent laws banning abortion in Alabama and other states show the Republican Party is the only party committed to protecting the sanctity of life.

Total

| 62 | 38 |
|----|----|

Support Abortion Rights, but Oppose for Themselves

| 74 | 26 |
|----|----|

Those who say the recent laws banning abortion in Alabama and other states show the Republican Party wants to take us backward. *Roe v. Wade* established the legal right to an abortion nearly 50 years ago and these laws undo progress and put women's lives at risk.

Those who say the recent laws banning abortion in Alabama and other states show the Republican Party is the only party committed to protecting the sanctity of life.

Total

| 61 | 39 |
|----|----|

Support Abortion Rights, but Oppose for Themselves

| 66 | 34 |
|----|----|

# navigator.

navigatorresearch.org

GLOBALSTRATEGYGROUP
LEAD THE WAY℠

G B A O

## About Navigator

In a world where the news cycle is the length of a tweet, our leaders often lack the real-time public-sentiment analysis to shape the best approaches to talking about the issues that matter the most. Navigator is designed to act as a consistent, flexible, responsive tool to inform policy debates by conducting research and reliable guidance to inform allies, elected leaders, and the press. Navigator is a project led by pollsters from Global Strategy Group and GBAO along with an advisory committee, including: Andrea Purse, The Hub Project; Arkadi Gerney, The Hub Project; Christina Reynolds, EMILY's List; Delvone Michael, Working Families; Felicia Wong, Roosevelt Institute; Mike Podhorzer, AFL-CIO; Jesse Ferguson, progressive strategist; Navin Nayak, Center for American Progress Action Fund; Ron Klain, Revolution; and Stephanie Valencia, Latino Victory Project; Symone Sanders, progressive strategist; Melanie Newman, Planned Parenthood.

To learn more about Navigator: http://navigatorresearch.org/

## About the Study

Global Strategy Group conducted a public opinion survey among a sample of 1,113 registered voters between May 31-June 3, 2019. 113 additional interviews were conducted among political independents with no partisan lean. The survey was conducted online, recruiting respondents from multiple opt-in online panel vendors. Respondents were verified against a voter file and special care was taken to ensure the demographic composition of our sample matched that of the national registered voter population across a variety of demographic variables.

**For press inquiries contact:**
press@navigatorresearch.org