

To: Interested Parties
From: Navigator Research
Re: Recent Focus Groups On Abortion
Date: June 17, 2022

Our recent focus groups in Pennsylvania, Texas, and Arizona suggests the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* could be a motivator for Democrats and some Republicans who support the right to have an abortion. Participants explain passionately how they would feel “disgusted” or “revolted” by such a change by the Court, and almost unanimously support term limits for Supreme Court Justices. Many are just learning about the rules in their own state, but a discussion about this leads only to increased concern.

Groups were conducted online June 15 by GBAO with women who support abortion rights—older Democratic women in Pennsylvania, Republican women in Texas, and younger Democratic women in Arizona. Focus groups are not statistically projectable.

- **At a moment when little seems to be going well, abortion is a top-tier issue for many.** As we typically see, the mood among most voters is sour. When asked what was going well in the country today, most participants struggle, citing inflation, gun violence, and divisiveness across all groups. “These questions are harder than I thought,” one says. “Emphatically—nothing” is going well, says another. Abortion rights—or a “*Roe v. Wade*” shorthand—come up organically by one or two respondents in each group as a top concern, with many others agreeing when probed it is a “top-three” issue for them. Those less motivated around this issue offer one of two reasons: they are “too old” to be affected by abortion rights or “there are too many other problems.”
- **In all groups, people explain the debate as between religion and rights.** As we discuss the debate in more detail, most see the divide along the lines of religious beliefs about “the sanctity of life” or “when life begins” versus “human rights” or “a woman’s right to decide for herself.” One Democrat in Pennsylvania defines the debate as “science versus religion.” And in Texas, a woman worried about due process for “peaceful” January 6th protestors explains abortion as “medical freedom,” similar to her view of COVID vaccines.
- **Democrats define Republicans’ position as more focused on “the fetus” than on children.** Democrats see the partisan divide on abortion very clearly—Democrats support abortion rights and Republicans are “pro-fetus,” but stand in the way of policies aimed at helping children succeed. Many point to Republican “hypocrisy” of opposing both abortion and care for underprivileged children. Republican participants, however, are more likely to see “both sides” as extreme on abortion.
- **While few are following the actions of the Supreme Court day-by-day, there is widespread awareness of the leak.** Most participants acknowledge the news of the leaked draft decision unaided, and have a sense of its contents. But across the groups, most note they had not heard much about the issue recently, as the school shooting in Uvalde, Texas is top of mind. So while sensing the threat, not many participants perceive abortion access to be currently curtailed, even in the Texas group where SB 8 has been in effect for months.

- **Women say they will be “angry,” “disgusted,” “disappointed,” and “revolted” if *Roe* is overturned.** Emotional responses to the overturning *Roe* are likely to be severe. One woman in Pennsylvania describes herself as disgusted, saying she’s “been fighting this cause since I was a teenager,” expressing disbelief that this was still being discussed. A younger Democratic woman in Arizona characterizes her likely feeling as “devastation” over “losing control over our bodies”. For many Democrats, the Court overturning *Roe* evokes a response similar to how they felt when Donald Trump was elected. Yet even Republican participants describe themselves as angry and frustrated, referring to overturning *Roe* as a “setback.”
- **Overturning *Roe* also seems like a “slippery slope” to the erosion of other rights.** The term “slippery slope” comes up in in each group as a concern about what might come next. Whether gay marriage, interracial marriage, or access to birth control—they are all similarly worrying. “If they can do this, what’s next?” asks one participant. Republicans are notably less concerned, however, than Democrats.
- **Participants believe overturning *Roe* will undermine confidence in the Court, and feel its best descriptors “conservative” and “imbalanced.”** An Arizona Democrat argues such a decision would create a lot of distrust across the board in both the Court and other institutions for failing to step up to protect abortion access. In the Republican group, one participant wonders if the Court should “watch their backs,” recalling the recent death threats facing Justices as “an indicator of how unstable the public is right now.” Additionally, in an exercise asking what term best describes the Supreme Court today, “imbalanced” and “conservative” were overwhelmingly the top choices.
- **Democrats and Republicans vary tremendously on what they think the Court will ultimately do, with several pointing to ulterior motives.** Among the Republican participants, many question the veracity of the leaked draft decision and whether it was even real, while others wonder if it was leaked by Democrats to “sow discord” in advance of the midterms. So when asked what they thought the Court would do, nearly all Republicans predict it will uphold *Roe*. Meanwhile some Democrats characterize the draft as a potential trial balloon to understand what reaction around the country might look like and so might take an alternate course depending on public opinion. Democrats predicting the Court would uphold *Roe* say they simply don’t want to believe it.
- **There is more work to do to explain how a federal law codifying *Roe* would work, and while most correctly note abortion access would be decided by the states, awareness of state laws is low.** Participants are not completely familiar with what impact a Court decision might have in their state. Democrats in Arizona and Pennsylvania are unsure whether their states had trigger law states, while Republicans in Texas are unclear of the state’s new, specific abortion restrictions. More discussion upsets Arizona and Texas participants in particular; one Texas woman calls her state’s law, “absolutely ridiculous.” Participants have a difficult time seeing how a variety of policy prescriptions such as expanding the Court, eliminating the filibuster, or passing a federal law to protect abortion access would be helpful—“they’ll just keep coming for it,” explains one. There is broad support across every group for term limits for Supreme Court Justices.
- **If the Court overturns a Constitutional right to an abortion, it could impact midterm motivation and voting decisions.** In Pennsylvania and Arizona, Democratic women say they would definitely vote in November, and describe themselves as unwilling to vote for any

candidate not supporting abortion rights. Among pro-choice Republicans, this is a harder question. One woman explains she is more likely to vote Democratic, another says she might not vote at all since she's "embarrassed" by her party's platform. Another Texas woman would want to research the Supreme Court's decision more, while one explains Republicans are ultimately more frequently aligned with her views.

- **In 50 years, Democrats hope the abortion debate is a long-forgotten controversy.** In a wrap-up exercise, participants were asked what they expected the debate around abortion to look like 50 years from now. One Arizona woman hopes people would look back and think it was "crazy" that anyone was even talking about banning abortion, and an Arizona participant wonders if those trying to reduce access would become "dumb idiots in the past" since "Trump was a stain on modern society."