

# navigator\*

## FOCUS GROUP REPORT

Thursday, March 13, 2025

Independent and Soft Partisan Men  
and Women on the Comstock Act



# Methodology

On February 26, 2025, GBAO conducted three online focus groups among independent and soft partisan\* voters across various demographics—including a mix across education, gender, and race.



Men under 35 in Virginia who believe abortion should be legal but with some restrictions



White independent and soft partisan women in Georgia who believe abortion should be legal but with some restrictions



Democratic and Democratic-leaning women in Wisconsin who believe abortion should be legal in all or most cases

**navigator\***

*\*Soft partisans are defined as voters who do not identify strongly with either the Democratic Party or the Republican Party*

# Key Takeaways

- Abortion looms large in discussions about “rights”—particularly with women.
- The Comstock Act is virtually unknown, and few know specifics about abortion medication, including how safe it is.
- With more information, many are concerned about the Comstock Act’s lack of exceptions and disregard for potentially fatal miscarriages.
- Participants struggle to balance the idea of states’ right to ban abortion with the negative consequences of such a ban, leading some to want a national standard protecting abortion rights.
- Men and women differ on whether they think the Trump administration will utilize the Comstock Act to ban abortion medication.

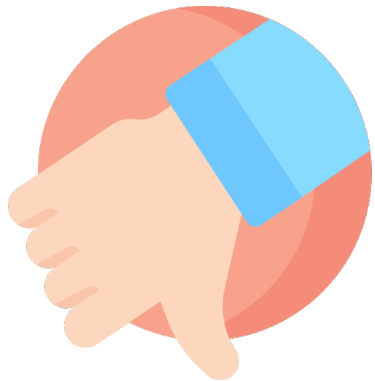
# There Is Widespread Pessimism on the Country's Direction

Moderator: "Fill in the blank: 'I feel [BLANK] is going well in the country today.'"

"Oh man, that's a tough one." – VA man, independent lean Republican

"I got to say something. It's ridiculous, the rents are so high; car insurance, it just keeps on going up and up and up. And if you want internet and/or cable, it's just like, **the increase every year, it's not going away because they're raising the prices, the costs.**" – GA woman, weak Democrat

"I'm sitting here trying to rack my brain. I'm like, well, it's not the cost of eggs." – GA woman, independent



"Nothing... I just can't think of anything to do with the government that I am in favor of right now." – WI woman, independent lean Democrat

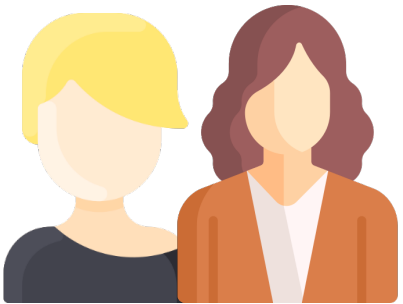
"I just think it's chaos right now. I think it's a divided country, and right now, I don't see anything favorable." – WI woman, independent lean Democrat

**navigator\***

# Abortion Mentioned Unprompted as a Recent Infringement on Rights, Although Men Are Far More Ambivalent

*Moderator: When you think about rights and freedoms, do you generally feel you have the same amount as previous years? Or do you have more or less? What makes you say that?*

**"As a woman, I guess, I'll rip the band aid off, I feel our freedoms are being attacked. And so, I do feel like we have less freedoms over ourselves when it comes to now versus years past. I just feel that our country's doing us a disservice."** – GA woman, independent



**"I think [abortion] should be a personal choice and the government should take their little paws out of it. Yes, have some standards, but this is a personal choice and a woman's choice, whatever your choice may be. And there doesn't need to be so much involvement is my personal opinion."** – GA woman, weak Republican

**"Roe v. Wade getting overturned I think is a huge [example of rights being infringed upon]."** – WI woman, strong Democrat

**"I mean, there's been a lot of controversy on the news, but I think from an overall standpoint, most people are the same."** – VA man, independent lean Republican

**"I mean, unless we're talking about maybe abortion and whatnot, but it's pretty much been the same amount of rights now [as] last few years."** – VA man, weak Democrat

**"I do feel like abortion is probably the only rights thing I can really think of because nothing else has really changed in the past few years. I can see we're all men here, so I guess that doesn't technically apply to us physically."** – VA man, weak Republican



**navigator\***

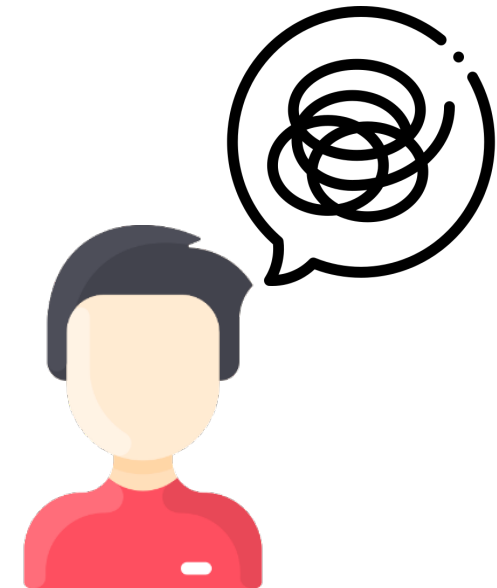
# Men Feel Their Opinions on Abortion Are Not Wanted, Leaving Them “Uncomfortable”

“I want to be there for people who are going through something that's really, really tough and they don't want to experience that kind of thing. But at the same time, I also see the other side where it's just like every life is a good life and is worth living. **And being a man and then being told that people really don't necessarily want to hear my opinion.**” – VA man, independent

“Some people are a lot more passionate about it than I am, along with just much more informed. **So, it's not a debate I'd like to jump into when I feel vulnerable to get kind of outsmarted.**” – VA man, weak Republican

“I don't know if our opinions matter as much, being guys. And I don't know if any of us are doctors or anything on top of that either. So, I don't know, **it's just a tough subject to wrap your head around and really have a strong opinion.**” – VA man, independent

“I know when a lot of women will complain; if you're more pro-life, they're not going to want to hear your opinion, because you're a guy and you're not in their situation.” – VA man, independent



**navigator\***

# Stories of Horrific Ramifications of Are Bans Breaking Through

*Moderator: What have you been hearing on the issue of abortion?*

"I'm following a story right now where a doctor in New York prescribed medication abortion for a patient in Texas through a telehealth visit, and I think it was Texas. Now, the governor in [Texas] wants to have that doctor extradited or brought to that state to face homicide charges for prescribing a medication abortion for someone that lives in a state where it's banned..." – WI woman, weak Democrat



"I believe it was something in the news a while back, where a woman was traveling across state [lines] to get the abortion, and I guess I believe she didn't make it, and she ended up dying while in the process of trying to travel across state [lines] to get the abortion." – WI woman, independent



"I've definitely seen on social media, maybe, I haven't heard any first-hand stories, but negative scenarios where someone in Texas would be needing an abortion because of their pregnancy, something was wrong with it, and it was going to kill the mother. But the doctors wouldn't operate so they both died, because they were afraid to do the abortion and get prosecuted as a result." – VA man, independent lean Republican

"Largely it's men in these governmental positions making these decisions for all women. And they're overriding medical science and what the doctors have to say. And the doctors are afraid to recommend this or perform that or do their jobs. And I think it's scary." – GA woman, independent lean Democrat

**navigator\***

# Most Are Disturbed by Proposals to Charge Women Who Get an Abortion With Murder

*Moderator: Several states are considering bills that would criminalize women who have an abortion, meaning they could be prosecuted with murder. What are your thoughts on this?*

**"I don't think that it should be murder.** I think you can make it illegal to do, but you don't need to charge someone with murder either. I think there's a limit for how illegal you can make something." – VA man, weak Republican

**"I think it's obviously very bad to try to charge someone with murder for something that was formerly legal in the United States up to two, three years ago.** So, I think this shift isn't great, especially when I'm pretty much in the middle on it and think it should happen; abortion, people should have access to it on the wholesale. So, I think it's a bad thing." – VA man, independent lean Republican



**"That's disgusting."** – WI woman, strong Democrat

**"That sounds very Handmaid's Tale."** – GA woman, weak Republican

**"There are a lot of other things that the government needs to worry about other than trying to push forth that kind of law."** – GA woman, weak Republican

**navigator\***



# Women Participants—in Particular—Are Dismayed by the Idea of Crossing State Lines to Obtain an Abortion

*Moderator: What if someone has to drive two or three states away to get an abortion? What do you think of that?*



"I don't think they should have to go out of state." – GA woman, weak Republican

"I think we're failing the women in our state... Sending a woman off to have to go to another state to someone that they don't know. You may not be able to have someone that would be as reputable as the specialist you're seeing. I just think it's a huge failure in our system." – GA woman, independent

"Not everyone has that privilege [to travel for an abortion]." – WI woman, weak Democrat

"You shouldn't have to drive X number of miles maybe by yourself to do something by yourself that's so traumatic." – WI woman, strong Democrat

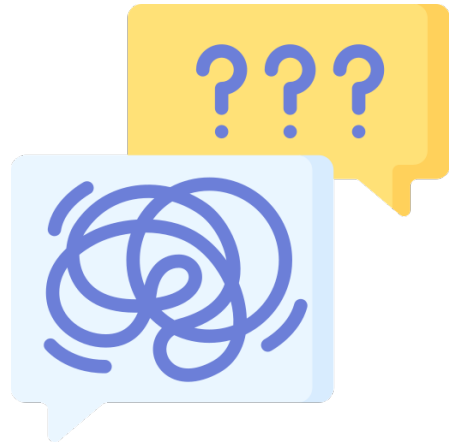
"Not everyone can afford that, right? Not everyone can afford to drive across state to get the medical attention they need." – WI woman, independent



**navigator\***

# The Comstock Act Is Virtually Unknown

*Moderator: What, if anything, have you heard about the Comstock Act?*



"I've heard of it. [Moderator: What do you think it's about?] I don't want to get it wrong, because I'm not sure." – WI woman, weak Democrat

"No, I have not heard [of it]." – GA woman, weak Republican



"No, I haven't heard, no." – GA woman, weak Republican

**navigator\***

# In Initial Reactions, Participants Wonder How Criminalizing Mail Can Be Enforced

*Moderator: Let me read you something: "The Comstock Act of 1873 is a series of current provisions in Federal law that generally criminalize the involvement of the United States Postal Service in conveying, or sending, obscene matter, crime-inciting matter, or certain abortion-related matter." What does this sound like to you?*

**"I think it's going to be almost near impossible to regulate, because I mean, they're not going to rip open every package. And then people are already sending supplements through the mail. So, unless they have some kind of mechanism to detect specifically abortion pills, which I think is impossible... I mean, I don't think it's feasible..."** – VA man, independent lean Republican

**"To me, it sounds like they're limiting access to certain things they deem dangerous, but in my mind, not all those things are dangerous."** – WI woman, weak Democrat

**"I still do think it's a little vague and there's a lot of details [that] could really change the meaning of what you read to make it more extreme. Like exactly what material qualifies as what they listed especially."** – GA woman, weak Democrat

**"So, is it trying to hold the sender responsible for sending, I guess, what they would consider illicit material or the person delivering the mail or is it every level from the post general, from the sender to the postmaster to the postal carrier?"** – GA woman, independent

**"If they can't even get the mail delivered, are they really going to be able to enforce this law?"** – GA woman, independent lean Democrat

**navigator\***

# Many Are Unfamiliar With the Specifics of Abortion Medication

"I mean, I'm not super educated on the pill approach. I wouldn't have even thought of that as a way to do it, to be honest. Again, not top of my mind when I think about this issue." – VA man, independent

"I have never heard of them being sent through the mail before, so I just don't think that it's really used that much. I've heard of the abortion pills, certainly. I wasn't sure if it was typically given through the mail or actually you have to take it wherever... the clinic you're going to." – VA man, weak Republican



"I've not heard about [abortion medication], but it just doesn't sound real safe to me." – WI woman, independent lean Democrat



"I guess I don't really know that much about what it does, but I was going to say, I feel like if the people who would get it mailed to them are probably the people that don't have the resources to travel to a place where they could do it, which is why I think it would be pretty useful." – WI woman, strong Democrat

**navigator\***

# Top Messages Against Enforcing the Comstock Act

The Comstock Act has **no exception for rape, incest, or a woman's life or health**. It could prevent survivors of rape and incest and women whose health and lives are threatened from having any access to medication abortion.

The Comstock Act would prevent women who are suffering miscarriages from receiving the medication **many need to safely manage their miscarriage**, which if left incomplete, can cause severe infection, infertility, or even death. We'd see women rushed into emergency rooms bleeding out, women in sepsis whose organs are shutting down, and women with a ruptured uterus because of incomplete miscarriages caused by the banning of abortion medication.

# The Comstock Act Making No Exceptions for Rape, Incest, Or Medical Necessity is Highly Concerning to Most

"It would be mad if you were raped and couldn't have an abortion." – GA woman, weak Republican



"There should always be an exception. I don't think a woman if violated in that nature should be made to carry a pregnancy, a term if they don't want to. I think, one, it could put a burden on the system because if it does lead to welfare and government assistance. Two, it can go in the direction where the child is mistreated and abused because of how they were forced to be conceived. It's just a slippery slope." – GA woman, independent

"You would want abortion to protect against rape and incest and other really bad things happening." – VA man, independent lean Republican

"It's the most persuasive [reason not to support the Comstock Act] just because I have family, right, my mother and my sister. I want to be able to protect them in that kind of situation. That's why I'm not all the way to the right or whatever. It's just I want to look out for my family and the people that are close to me." – VA man, independent

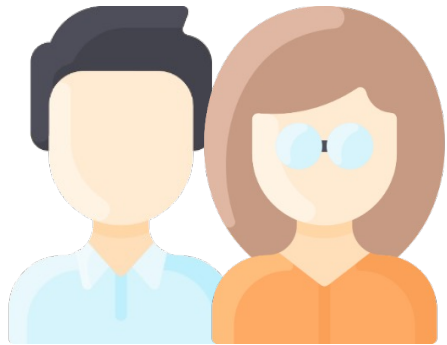


**navigator\***

# The Comstock Act's Disregard for Potentially Fatal Miscarriages Turns Off Many

"Women should have the choice. Their body can't control if it's trying to get rid of something. They can't control that." – WI woman, strong Democrat

"I think in that case it's the obvious. If abortions aren't legal and a woman is in the middle, the pregnancy already is not viable, why put the woman's life at risk of infection, or infertility? Is the new agenda going to be, well, now you're infertile from a mishandled miscarriage, so now the government's going to pay for IVF to help conceive a new baby?" – GA woman, independent



"A lot of times you see arguments from people who are against abortion saying, well, you shouldn't have sex, it's a risk if you didn't want a baby. And in this case, it's like if someone's suffering a miscarriage, maybe they had sex to become pregnant, and they wanted a baby. So, there's no reason other than being an attack on women's rights to not provide them with the care needed. There's literally zero argument there I think from people opposed to that." – GA woman, weak Democrat

"It's a women's health issue on that. If the miscarriage is not even caused by abortion, if it's just a miscarriage and you're trying to handle that, you should be able to get whatever meds you need." – GA woman, weak Republican

"[Abortion medication] also protects the life of someone when there are dire consequences." – VA man, independent lean Republican

**navigator\***

# Mailing of Abortion Medication Raises Some Questions

“I think something like this where it's a big procedure, very life-changing for the individual, it should be in-person consultation with a doctor rather than over the internet.” – VA man, independent lean Republican

“I think the main concern is that you're not having any kind of visit and just some random person's shipping you a pill and hopefully it's the right pill and it does what you want it to do, but you don't know because it's not regulated...” – VA man, independent

“I've also heard a personal story about someone that I know who was pregnant and didn't want to have the baby. And she's young. And she ordered some pills online, abortion pills, which made her extremely ill... I think it's dangerous.” – GA woman, independent lean Democrat

“Before the rules I thought it should still be able to be sent. But yeah, I guess, one concern would be safety of it, if someone can tamper with it.” – GA woman, weak Democrat



“I think the person that is doing research or contemplating abortion should seek professional medical advice, and given different routes to work with, having that provider team assist that patient, getting them where they need to be safely. I just don't think abortion pills should be mailed.” – WI woman, strong Democrat



**navigator\***



# Some Participants Want a National Standard Protecting Abortion Rights

“Are there any other medical procedures that are banned in certain states and legal and others? I don't think there are, so I don't know why this would be one that should be standing out like that. It's a medical procedure, above anything.” – WI woman, independent lean Democrat

“There should probably be some kind of minimum rules and requirements where other states can build on things but not take things away. And that would probably need to be medically advised and then enforced in some way where there's clear-cut rules about life of the mother and at-risk pregnancies.” – VA man, independent lean Republican

“Well, for abortion, I do think there needs to be some sort of uniformity.” – GA woman, independent lean Democrat

“I know a lot of things are going state by state, even [the] Department of Education and all that is the state instead of the country votes on it. I don't really like that. I don't think it should be like that. It seems like it makes everything even more divided than it is.” – GA woman, weak Republican



**navigator\***

# Women More Likely Than Men to Believe the Trump Administration Will Use Comstock to Ban Abortion Medication

*Moderator: Do you think it's likely the Trump Administration will enforce the Comstock Act?*

"I don't think so. I think his priorities are elsewhere, but it's one of those things where I wouldn't be surprised if he would. I don't think he would..." – VA man, independent lean Republican

"I don't know. It seems like something I guess that could happen, but I just don't really think that that's something that [the] Trump administration would do... Abortion just hasn't seemed like a top priority for the administration so far." – VA man, weak Republican



"Yeah. I wouldn't be surprised. It's probably going to happen." – WI woman, independent lean Democrat

"I think it's extremely likely that he's going to try to use an executive order to put this law in place. He's basically going down his list and following the Project 2025 plan." – WI woman, weak Democrat



**navigator\***

# navigator\*

## 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: Jessica Floyd, The Hub Project; Christina Reynolds, EMILY's List; Mike Podhorzer, AFL-CIO; Jesse Ferguson, progressive strategist; Navin Nayak, Center for American Progress Action Fund; Stephanie Valencia, EquisLabs; and Melanie Newman, Planned Parenthood Action Fund.

## About the Study

GBAO conducted three online focus groups February 26, 2025, with independent and soft partisan men in VA, and independent and soft partisan women in GA and WI. Some quotes have been lightly edited for brevity. Qualitative results are not statistically projectable.

For Press inquiries contact:

[press@navigatorresearch.org](mailto:press@navigatorresearch.org)

To learn more about  
Navigator:

<http://navigatorresearch.org>

@NavigatorSurvey on Twitter

navigator\*