



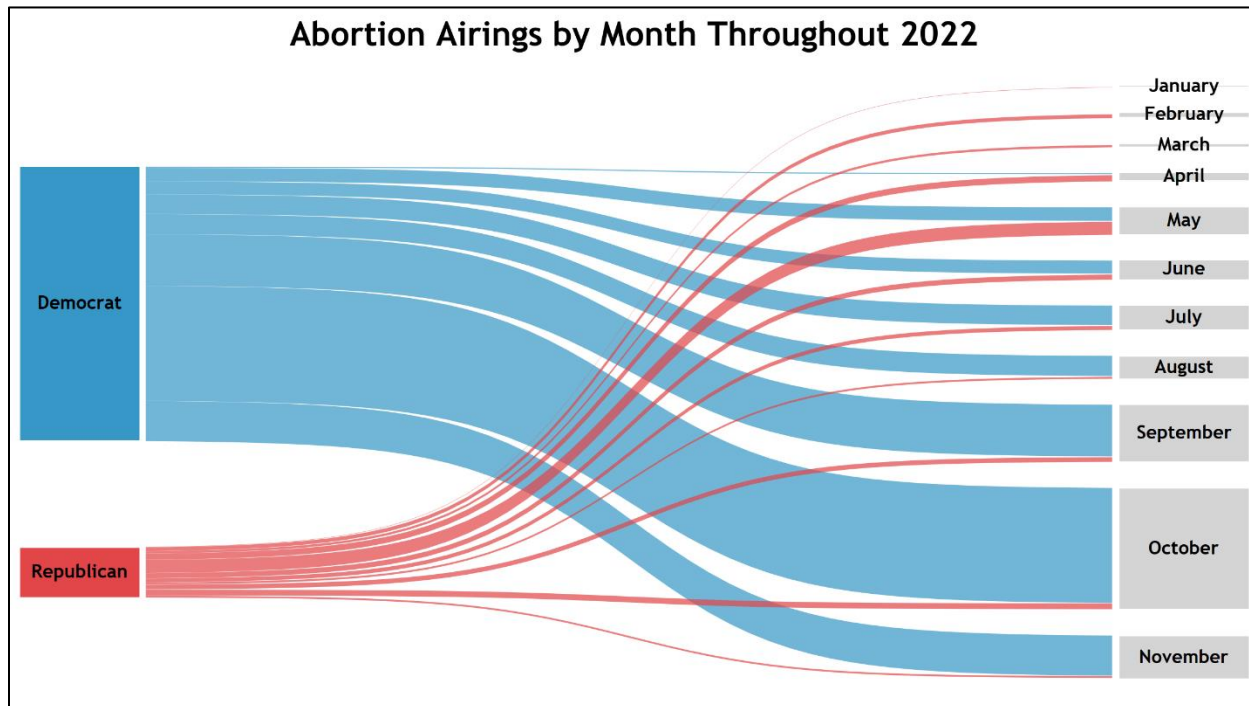
Abortion on the Airwaves: 2022 Midterms Messaging Analysis

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Introduction

The June 2022 Supreme Court ruling in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization* established the 2022 Midterms as the first national elections in a post-*Roe v. Wade* America by removing constitutional abortion protections. According to polls from Pew Research Center, less than half of voters saw abortion as a critical issue to their vote in 2016 and 2020.¹ Between 2019 and 2021, only 2% of all political broadcast ad airings mentioned abortion. In 2022, abortion ads saw 1.05M airings, marking a 500% increase over the 175K airings in 2020. Democratic abortion ad airings significantly increased following the *Dobbs* decision, as 91% of their total 864K abortion airings occurred after June. Meanwhile, Republicans aired 60% of their 143K abortion ad airings before the decision.

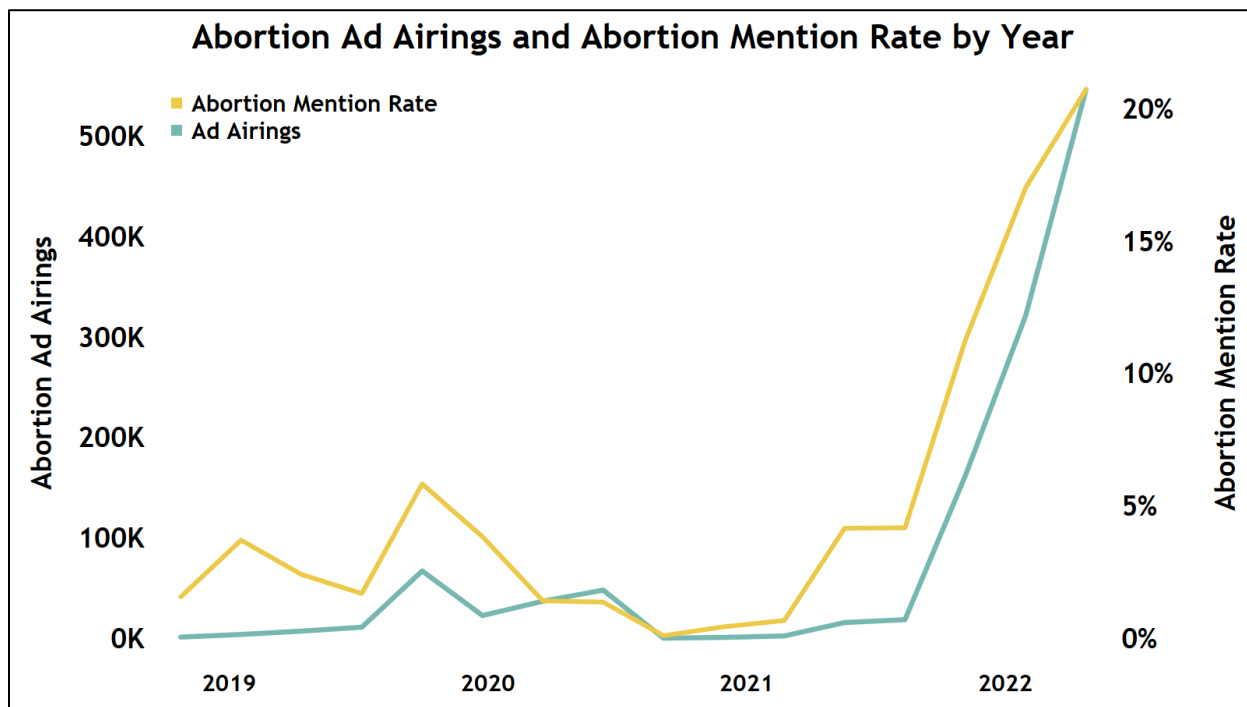


Abortion became the issue with the most airings by Democratic advertisers and ranked 14th for Republican advertisers in 2022. Six states held ballot initiatives surrounding abortion in 2022, with ad spending targeting Michigan and Kansas’ initiatives surpassing \$63M. Between July and Election Day, Democratic advertisers had 755K broadcast airings mentioning abortion, compared to only 52K by Republican advertisers. Implications of the leak and subsequent *Dobbs* decision greatly influenced political ad messaging trends around the country as abortion became the second most talked about issue in 2022 political ads.

¹ “Top Voting Issues in 2016 Election,” *Pew Research Center*, July 7, 2016, <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2016/07/07/4-top-voting-issues-in-2016-election/>; “Important Issues in the 2020 Election,” *Pew Research Center*, August 13, 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2020/08/13/important-issues-in-the-2020-election/>.

Abortion Ad Messaging Before the Reversal of *Roe v. Wade*

From 2019 to 2021, only 2% of all political ad airings mentioned abortion, ranking as the 21st, 24th, and 26th most mentioned issue respectively. After ranking no higher than 21st since 2019, abortion became the second most mentioned issue in 2022 political ad messaging with 1.05M airings, trailing only taxation at 1.28M.



Between January and April 2022, abortion ranked as the 15th most mentioned issue in political ads across the country, ranking 9th for Republican advertisers and 28th for Democrats. In the first four months of the year, Republicans aired over ten times as many abortion ads as Democrats: 36.2K to 3.5K. Seven percent of Republican’s total airings between January and April mentioned abortion. Examples included incumbent Alabama Governor Kay Ivey [stating she passed the strongest pro-life legislation in the country](#) and Republican issue group Honor Pennsylvania criticizing Republican Senate candidate Mehmet Oz for [previously attacking pro-life legislation](#). Prior to April, incumbent Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel was the only Democratic advertiser to [air an abortion ad](#) in 2022.

Forty-five Republican advertisers ran abortion ads in April, compared to only ten Democratic advertisers. After not surpassing 1% between January and March, Democratic ad abortion mention rate reached 4% in April. In an ad first airing on April 26, Andrea Salinas (D) [referenced the potential of *Roe v. Wade* being overturned](#) during the OR-06 primary. The ad stated, “we’re about to lose our right to choose.”

On May 2, Politico published a leaked draft of the majority opinion to overturn *Roe v. Wade* (1973).² The pending decision would remove constitutional abortion protections. Following the draft opinion’s publication, abortion mention rate increased significantly. The day after the leak, the ACLU released a digital ad [explaining the potential ramifications of the leaked opinion's adoption](#). Other pro-choice groups, such as Planned Parenthood and the National Women’s Law Center, also directly

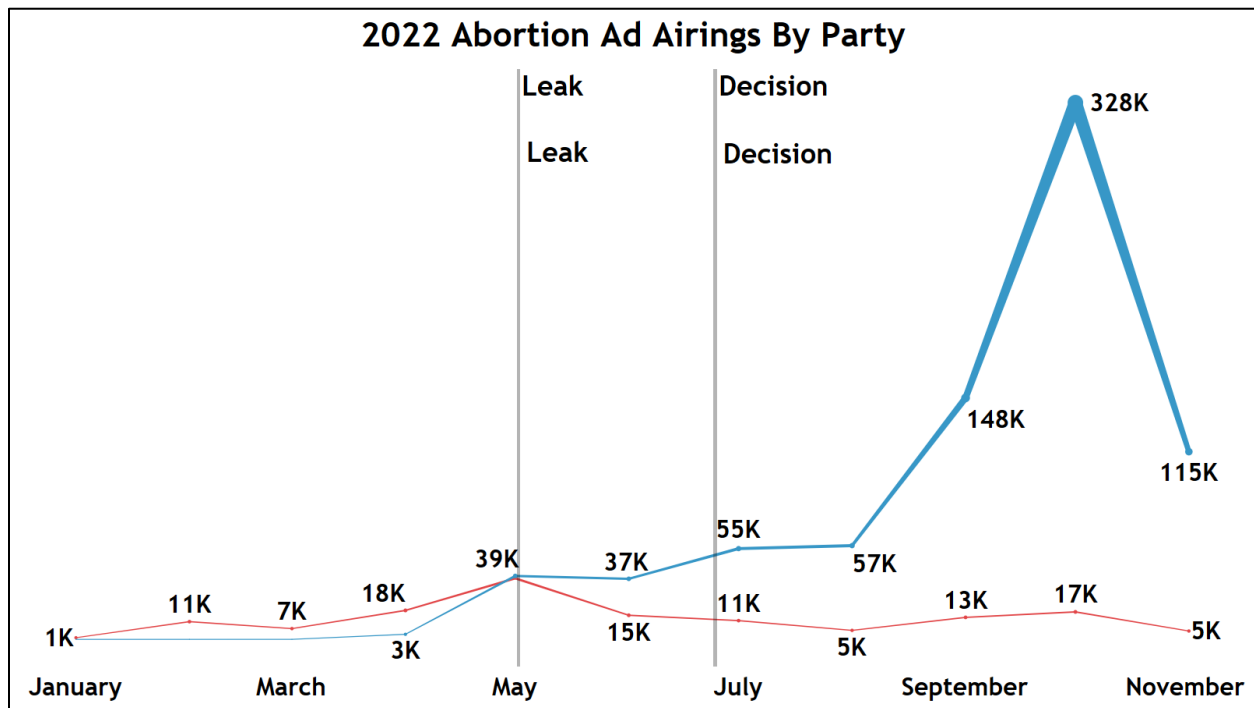
² Josh Gerstein and Alexander Ward, “Exclusive: Supreme Court Has Voted to Overturn Abortion Rights, Draft Opinion Shows,” *Politico*, May 2, 2022, <https://www.politico.com/news/2022/05/02/supreme-court-abortion-draft-opinion-00029473>.

mentioned the leak in their digital ads. Susan B. Anthony List Education Fund, a pro-life organization, released the first broadcast abortion ad mentioning the leaked opinion, [airing one week after the leak went public](#). The month of May marked the first time Democrats aired more abortion ads than Republicans on the year. Standing in front of the Supreme Court, Wisconsin Senate candidate Sarah Godlewski (D) aired an ad four days after the leak warning, [“Ron Johnson is going to get exactly what he wants: overturning *Roe v. Wade*.”](#)

Democratic gubernatorial candidates attacked their Republican challengers on abortion in the immediate aftermath of the leak. On May 4, Oregon hopeful Tina Kotek began airing an ad [emphasizing reproductive rights](#). In Pennsylvania, Josh Shapiro aired an ad accusing Doug Mastriano (R) of [wanting to ban abortion](#) on May 5. Other Democratic gubernatorial candidates releasing abortion ads within two weeks of the leak included [Gavin Newsom](#) (CA), [Kathy Hochul](#) (NY), and [Joe Cunningham](#) (SC).

The Impact of *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization* on Ad Messaging

On June 24, the Supreme Court officially handed down their ruling in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization*, overturning *Roe v. Wade*. Over the next two weeks, 50 Democratic advertisers and 21 Republican advertisers aired abortion ads. Sixteen Democratic advertisers mentioned the Supreme Court. No reference to the Court was made in Republican ads.



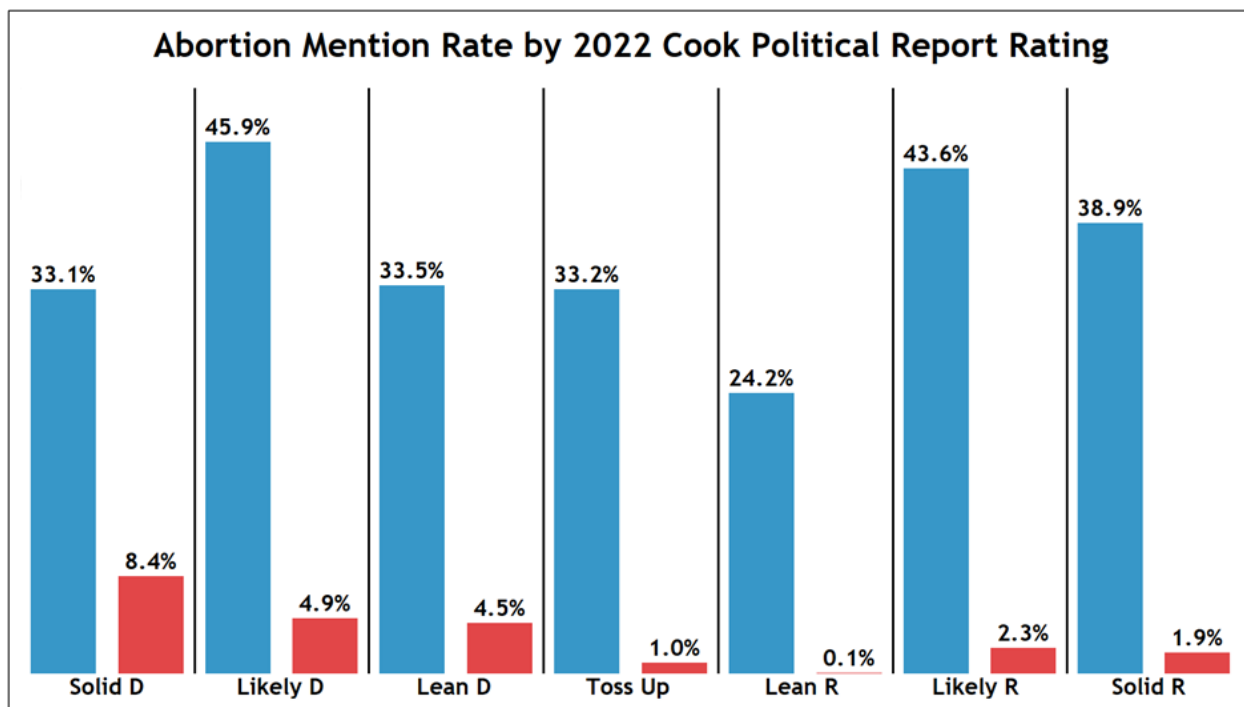
In the month after the decision, Democratic abortion ad airings rose by 49% and continued to grow leading to Election Day. In July, 51 different Democratic candidates ran abortion ads on broadcast, totaling 30K airings. Maggie Hassan (NH Senate) [stated "the Supreme Court \[took\] away a woman's most fundamental freedom"](#) and Susie Lee (NV-03) [mentioned her opponent's ties to Nevada Right to Life](#). In October, Democratic abortion ads aired 328K times, making up nearly 40% of their monthly airings.

2022 Abortion Mention Rate by Race Type and Party											
Senate											
Party	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November
Democrat	0%	0%	0%	1%	12%	16%	30%	11%	25%	29%	24%
Republican	0%	22%	10%	9%	12%	12%	3%	1%	5%	3%	2%
House											
Party	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November
Democrat	0%	0%	0%	8%	23%	23%	34%	33%	31%	41%	34%
Republican	0%	4%	2%	7%	11%	9%	4%	3%	0%	1%	1%
Governor											
Party	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November
Democrat	0%	0%	0%	4%	32%	29%	22%	38%	47%	39%	44%
Republican	3%	3%	2%	5%	11%	1%	3%	2%	2%	2%	2%

Democratic advertisers vastly outpaced Republican advertisers in abortion ad airings between July and Election Day: 703K to 51K. Coinciding with the leaked opinion, May marked the peak of Republican abortion ad airings in 2022 with nearly 38K. Their monthly abortion ad airings decreased significantly by June, and never surpassed 17K through Election Day. In 2022 House, Senate, and gubernatorial races, Democratic advertisers averaged a 32.2% abortion mention rate between July and Election Day. Meanwhile, Republicans averaged a 2.3% mention rate. Gubernatorial races had the largest difference in average abortion mention rate between Democratic and Republican advertisers at 35.8%. Democratic advertisers also held the advantage in House (32.8%) and Senate (21%) races after the *Dobbs* decision.

Abortion Ad Messaging by Cook Political Report Race Rating

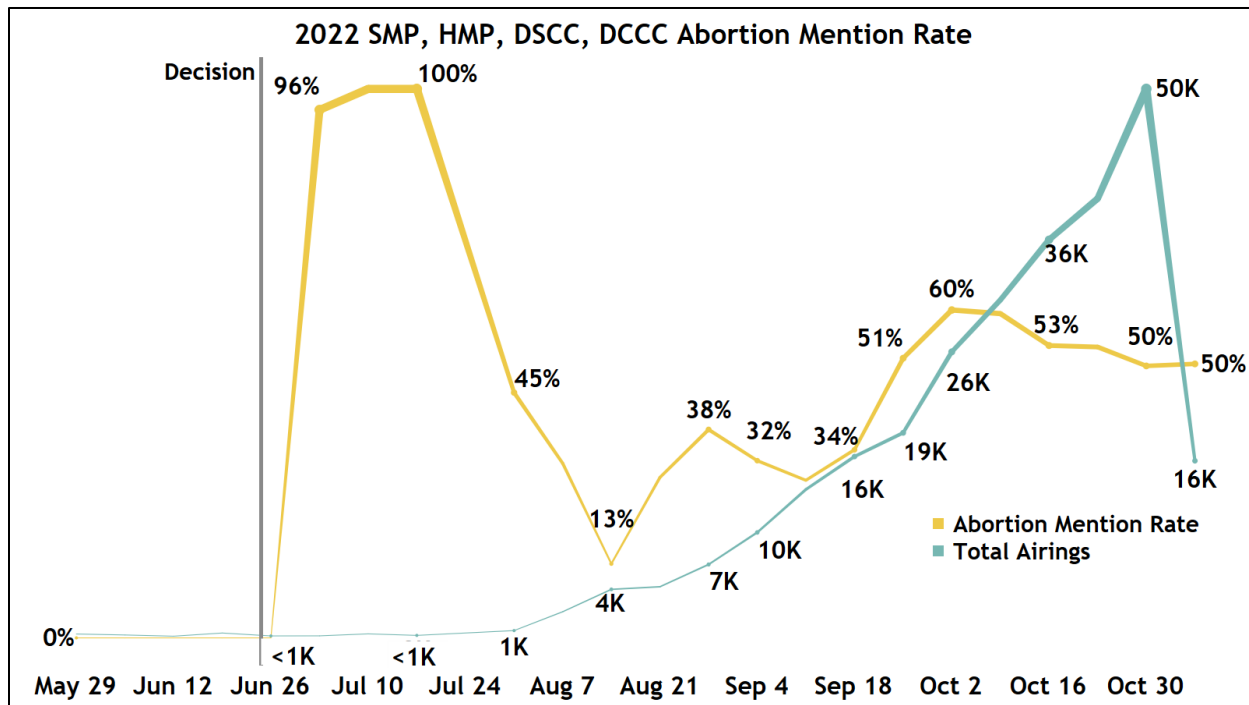
Democratic-leaning elections saw higher abortion mention rates than Republican-leaning elections according to 2022 Cook Political Report Race Ratings. In races rated Likely Democrat, Democratic advertisers mentioned abortion in 45.9% of their ads, the highest mention rate of any race rating. In Lean Republican races, Democrats had a 24.2% abortion mention rate, marking their lowest rate in any category. They did, however, have at least a 38.9% abortion mention rate in both Likely Republican and Solid Republican races.



Republican advertisers had at least a 4.5% abortion mention rate in Lean, Likely, and Solid Democrat races. Their highest abortion mention rate occurred in Solid Democrat contests. Two Republican candidates advocated their support for a woman’s right to choose in those races. Bob Stefanowski (CT Governor) had a 24% abortion mention rate and highlighted [his pro-choice position](#). Yuripzy Morgan (MD-03) had a 100% abortion rate, mentioning [her support of policies that give women choice](#). Republican advertisers did not have an abortion mention rate higher than 2.3% in any Toss Up, Lean Republican, Likely Republican, or Solid Republican races.

House and Senate Issue Group Messaging

In the weeks following the *Dobbs* decision, nearly 100% of airings from House Majority PAC (HMP), the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (DCCC), the Senate Majority PAC (SMP), and the Democratic Senatorial Congressional Committee (DSCC) were abortion ads. Between late September through Election Day, the four Democratic groups maintained at least a 50% abortion mention rate. During that period, the groups aired 166 unique abortion ads, compared to only 14 in 2020.



From September through Election Day 2022, 53% of HMP and DCCC’s 170K combined airings were abortion ads, a substantial increase from their 1% mention rate in 2020. In 2022, 42% of SMP and DSCC’s 91K combined airings mentioned abortion. During that time in 2020, less than 1% of SMP and DSCC’s total 180K airings were abortion ads. Overall, abortion was the top aired issue for SMP, HMP, DSCC, and DCCC.

On the Republican side, Senate Leadership Fund (SLF), Congressional Leadership Fund (CLF), the National Republican Senate Committee (NRSC), and the National Republican Congressional Committee (NRCC) only aired one total abortion broadcast ad: an [NRSC ad attacking AZ Senate incumbent Mark Kelly](#). The ad aired less than 1K times. In 2020, the four Republican groups aired 11 unique abortion ads with over 4K total airings. The four Democratic groups prioritized abortion messaging ahead of 2022 general elections, as they had 127K more abortion ad airings between September and Election Day than their four Republican counterparts.

2022 Abortion Ballot Initiatives

The 2022 Cycle saw six different abortion-related state ballot measures around the country, the most since 1986.³ Michigan and Kansas each saw millions of dollars in ad spending surrounding their respective abortion ballot measures. Michigan’s “Right to Reproductive Freedom Initiative” saw \$49.9M spent, becoming the most expensive ballot measure in the state’s history. Kansas’ “Value Them Both” abortion amendment saw \$13.8M in ad spending, accounting for 71% of all downballot spending in the state.

Michigan’s “Right to Reproductive Freedom Initiative,” sought to guarantee the statewide constitutional right to reproductive health.⁴ Seeing nearly \$50M in total spending, the proposal was the

³ “2022 Abortion-Related Ballot Measures,” Ballotpedia, https://ballotpedia.org/2022_abortion-related_ballot_measures.

⁴ “Michigan Proposal 3, Right to Reproductive Freedom Initiative (2022),” Ballotpedia, [https://ballotpedia.org/Michigan_Proposal_3_Right_to_Reproductive_Freedom_Initiative_\(2022\)](https://ballotpedia.org/Michigan_Proposal_3_Right_to_Reproductive_Freedom_Initiative_(2022)).

second most expensive race in Michigan during the 2022 Cycle, trailing only its gubernatorial race. Only two advertisers aired ads surrounding the issue: Citizens to Support Michigan Women and Children (\$26.2M in opposition) and Reproductive Freedom for All (\$23.7M in support). Citizens to Support Michigan Women and Children ran six broadcast ads and 15 digital ads, including several following the *Dobbs* decision.⁵ Reproductive Freedom for All's most aired ad directly mentioned [both the Supreme Court's *Dobbs* decision and its implications within Michigan](#). Six of Reproductive Freedom for All's seven unique ads referenced *Roe v. Wade*, accounting for 95% of their TV airings. Fifty-seven percent of Michiganders voted in favor of the initiative, guaranteeing the statewide constitutional right to reproductive health in the state. This marked a higher margin of victory than Democratic candidates Gretchen Whitmer (Governor) and Dana Nessel (Attorney General) received.



Citizens to Support MI Women and Children
Sponsored • Paid for by Citizens to Support MI Women and Children
ID: 732559734559476

The left has been handed a massive defeat at the hand of the Supreme Court. Now they're angry. They'll be coming for the right to life in Michigan with everything they have. It's up to YOU to stop them. You can be the defender of life Michigan needs, sign up now!

A HUGE WIN FOR LIFE ACROSS THE NATION BUT THE LEFT WON'T STOP NOW.
HELP PROTECT THE RIGHT TO LIFE IN MICHIGAN!

STOP THE ANYTHING GOES ABORTION AMENDMENT

FB.ME
The Left Won't Stop Now!
Protect the Right to Life in Michigan!

Sign up



Citizens to Support MI Women and Children
Sponsored • Paid for by Citizens to Support MI Women and Children
ID: 341146408224030

BREAKING NEWS: The Supreme Court has issued a historic ruling to protect life across the country! But we're not done yet. The Anything Goes Abortion Amendment poses a huge threat, and we need YOU to help stop it! Sign up now to learn more

**A WIN FOR LIFE!
BUT THERE'S STILL MORE TO DO.**

**Sign up and stop the
ANYTHING GOES ABORTION AMENDMENT!**

STOP THE ANYTHING GOES ABORTION AMENDMENT

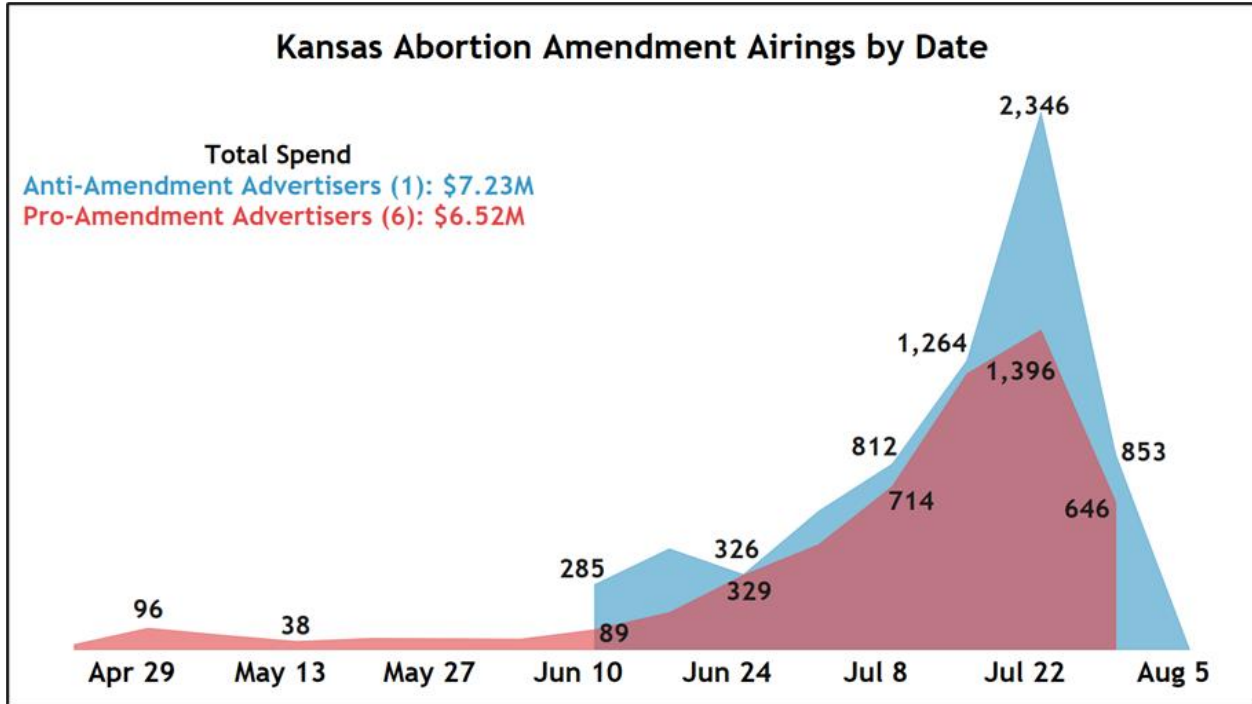
FB.ME
Help Defend Life in Michigan
Roe v. Wade Was Just The Start. Stop The Left's Radical Amendment!

Sign up

Kansas' "Value Them Both" amendment sought to eliminate the constitutional right to abortion within the state. The August 2 vote marked the country's first abortion-related initiative following the *Roe v. Wade* reversal. Ads supporting the "Value Them Both" amendment first aired in late April, while

⁵ Citizens to Support MI Women and Children, "A Huge Win For Life Across The Nation," Facebook, June 24, 2022, https://www.facebook.com/ads/library/?active_status=all&ad_type=political_and_issue_ads&country=US&id=341146408224030&view_all_page_id=111949174755365&search_type=page&media_type=all; Citizens to Support MI Women and Children, "A Win For Life," Facebook, July 15, 2022, https://www.facebook.com/ads/library/?active_status=all&ad_type=political_and_issue_ads&country=US&id=341146408224030&view_all_page_id=111949174755365&search_type=page&media_type=all.

opposition ads started on June 10. Kansans for Constitutional Freedom, the sole advertiser opposing the initiative, outspent the six advertisers supporting the amendment by \$710K.



Kansans for Constitutional Freedom’s most aired ad [called the proposed amendment a “government mandate.”](#) Their other ads highlighted the [lack of exceptions built into the amendment.](#) They had nearly 6K total airings, accounting for 47% of all airings surrounding the “Value Them Both” amendment. Of advertisers supporting the amendment, Value Them Both spent \$4.5M on ads. The four other groups to air broadcast ads supporting the amendment totaled \$1.8M. Within three weeks of the *Dobbs* decision, Value Them Both aired two new ads, including [one comparing Kansas abortion access to California.](#)

Kansans voted on the “Value Them Both” amendment on August 2, coinciding with the state’s primary elections. The 2022 primary saw more than twice as many voters than in 2018.⁶ The amendment was rejected by an 18% margin: 59% to 41%. Three months later, Laura Kelly (D) won the Kansas gubernatorial race by only 2%. In addition to Michigan and Kansas, four other states (California, Kansas, Montana, and Vermont) put abortion on the ballot in 2022. The pro-abortion option succeeded in each contest.

In California and Vermont, constitutional amendments passed by at least 66%. In Montana and Kentucky, ballot initiatives seeking to restrict abortion access did not pass, but the results were closer than in Michigan and

Statewide Voting Performances		
Kansas		
KS Abortion Measure	59%	41%
KS Governor	50%	47%
Michigan		
MI Abortion Measure	57%	43%
MI Governor	55%	44%
California		
CA Abortion Measure	67%	33%
CA Governor	59%	41%
Vermont		
VT Abortion Measure	77%	23%
VT Governor	24%	71%
Montana		
MT Abortion Measure	53%	47%
MT Presidential (2020)	41%	57%
Kentucky		
KY Abortion Measure	52%	48%
KY Presidential (2020)	36%	62%

⁶ Adam Edelman, “Kansans Vote to Uphold Abortion Rights in Their State,” *NBC News*, August 2, 2022, <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/2022-election/abortion-vote-kansas-may-determine-future-right-state-rcna40550>.

Kansas.⁷ Voting numbers supporting abortion access outpaced support for Democratic candidates in each state, suggesting abortion-related issues are not falling strictly on partisan lines.

Looking Ahead

As the one-year anniversary of the *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* decision approaches, 14 states have placed strict restrictions on most abortion procedures. The prominence of abortion in political advertising has persisted into 2023. Wisconsin's Supreme Court race saw \$40M in ad spending and is currently 2023's most expensive non-presidential race. Janet Protasiewicz's victory provided a liberal majority in Wisconsin's highest court for the first time in 15 years.⁸ During the general election, abortion ads made up 36% of the total airings supporting Protasiewicz's candidacy, compared to only a 7% rate in airings supporting conservative candidate Daniel Kelly. The general election's abortion mention rate among Democratic advertisers outpaced that of Democratic advertisers in 2022 Wisconsin general elections by 9%. While Biden won the state by less than 1% in 2020 and the 2022 gubernatorial and Senate elections split to both parties, Protasiewicz won her election by 11%.

Abortion has already been featured as a prominent issue in President Joe Biden's reelection ad messaging this year. Two of his three broadcast ads mention abortion, targeting Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Michigan, North Carolina, Nevada, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin. As of June, his abortion mention rate is 59%. Notably, not one of the eight Republican advertisers airing Presidential broadcast ads have mentioned abortion.

The overturning of *Roe v. Wade* greatly influenced political ad messaging in the 2022 Midterms. Following the *Dobbs* decision, abortion becoming the top aired issue for Democrats in 2022 and the 14th most aired issue for Republicans. Over the next four months, Democratic advertisers ran over 900 unique abortion ads on broadcast, totaling over 670K airings. Republican advertisers aired 46 unique abortion ads with 23K total airings. Republicans seem eager to change their strategy on abortion messaging ahead of 2024. In April, RNC Chairwoman Ronna McDaniel promised that Republicans would respond to the issue head on this cycle, stating, Republicans were wrong to think they could "just talk about the economy and ignore this big issue [abortion]".⁹ On the Democratic side, Representative Suzan DelBene (WA-01) and Senator Gary Peters (MI), who head the House and Senate Democratic campaign arms respectively, vowed that fighting for abortion rights will remain central to their 2024 strategy.¹⁰ Such statements by both parties suggest that the implications from the *Dobbs* decision will continue to impact elections beyond 2022.

⁷ "2022 Abortion-Related Ballot Measures," Ballotpedia.

⁸ "Wisconsin Supreme Court Elections, 2023," Ballotpedia, https://ballotpedia.org/Wisconsin_Supreme_Court_elections,_2023.

⁹ Melanie Zanona, Annie Grayer, and Lauren Fox, "House Republicans Punt on National Abortion Ban amid Fears of 2024 Backlash," *CNN*, April 23, 2023, <https://www.cnn.com/2023/04/23/politics/national-abortion-ban-house-republicans/index.html>; Kelly Garity, "RNC Chair: Republicans Must Address Abortion Issue 'Head-On,'" *POLITICO*, April 30, 2023, <https://www.politico.com/news/2023/04/30/mcdaniel-republicans-abortion-issue-head-on-00094550>.

¹⁰ Katie Glueck, "Abortion Surges to the Center of the 2024 Campaign," *The New York Times*, April 22, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/04/22/us/politics/abortion-politics-2024-republicans-democrats.html>.

Methodology

AdImpact tracked more than 85,000 unique broadcast and digital political advertisements during the 2022 Midterm Cycle. "Abortion ads" explicitly mention abortion or include abortion-related issues. "Abortion mention rate" is the percentage of an advertiser's abortion ad airings out of the advertiser's total ad airings. The Cook Political Report's Race Ratings scores the competitiveness of each House, Senate, and gubernatorial election. [Ratings](#) consist of eight possible ratings: Solid Democrat, Likely Democrat, Lean Democrat, Democrat Toss Up, Republican Toss Up, Lean Republican, Likely Republican, and Solid Republican.

About Us:

AdImpact is a leading advertising intelligence (SaaS) company. We specialize in tracking and analyzing advertising data across various media channels, including traditional, digital, and emerging platforms. Our real-time monitoring captures over one billion TV ad occurrences daily. We maintain the industry's largest ad catalog consisting of over 1.2M unique creatives. Our coverage extends across all 210 designated market areas (DMAs), over 41,000 zip codes, and across more than 20 million IP addresses. Currently, we capture data and analytics for over 88,000 brands and advertisers. Our reliable real-time data and analytics empower users to monitor competitor ad occurrences, spending, messaging, and creatives, facilitating quick and informed decision-making.

In the political sphere, AdImpact collects electoral ad spending and occurrences from the federal to the local level. Leveraging the data to create user-friendly analytics for clients, AdImpact also collects rate-level data to provide deep insights and build rate forecasts to help buyers and media companies alike. AdImpact's political data is trusted by a full spectrum of political experts, from presidential campaigns to top-tier news outlets.

This report was compiled by Nate Schwartz, Sydney Beckham, Ethan Mort, Josh Getz, and Pat Custer.

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