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Knowing Someone Who Has Had an Abortion Correlates with Increased Support for Abortion Rights

By Arielle Swernoff

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Introduction

Abortion and bodily autonomy are human rights, and these rights are currently being rolled back in the United States. Since 2011, states have passed hundreds of restrictions on abortion care, including Indiana's nearly total abortion ban in August, and the anti-choice/forced birth movement secured a major victory earlier this summer when the Supreme Court overturned the constitutional right to an abortion with its decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*.

Abortion restrictions and bans have devastating impacts on pregnant Americans, their families, and their communities. According to the groundbreaking Turnaway Study, conducted by researchers at the University of California San Francisco, people who sought and were denied an abortion were more likely to live in poverty, struggle to cover basic household expenses, experience bankruptcy and low credit, remain in contact with a violent partner, and suffer from health problems than those who received a wanted abortion. In addition, if the people denied an abortion already had children, these children were less likely to hit developmental milestones.

Restrictions and bans have a greater impact on Black, brown, and low-income people, young people, queer and trans people, immigrants, and people who are incarcerated. These individuals face additional barriers to accessing abortion care, which is often costly and may require traveling long distances.

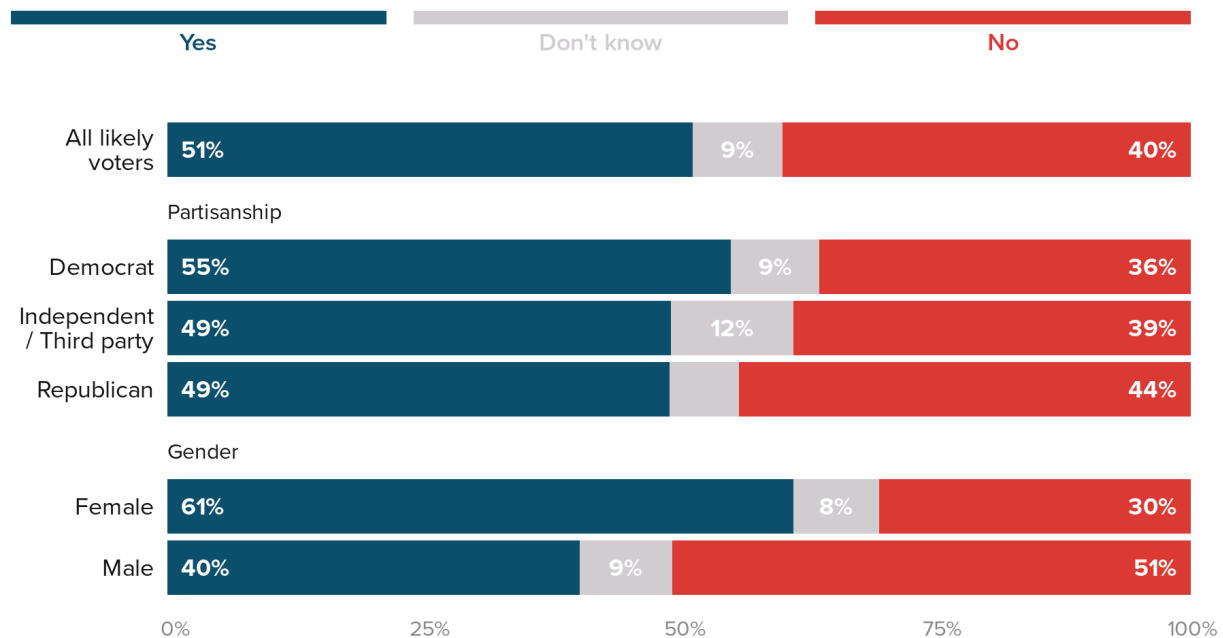
Data for Progress recently surveyed likely American voters on their attitudes toward abortion rights and the Supreme Court. Critically, we find that support for abortion rights is higher among people who personally know someone who has had an abortion. However, the majority of people who don't personally know someone who has had an abortion also support abortion rights.

We also find, consistent with previous polling from both Data for Progress and other outlets, that the majority of American voters support protecting abortion rights. Additionally, our polling finds that people want a federal law protecting abortion rights, as well as limits on the power of the Supreme Court.

Among national likely voters surveyed, 51 percent of individuals report personally knowing someone who has had an abortion. Women are more likely to say yes to this question than men, with 61 percent saying they know someone who has had an abortion, as compared to 40 percent of men.

About Half of Voters Report Knowing Someone Who Has Had an Abortion

Do you personally know someone who has had an abortion?



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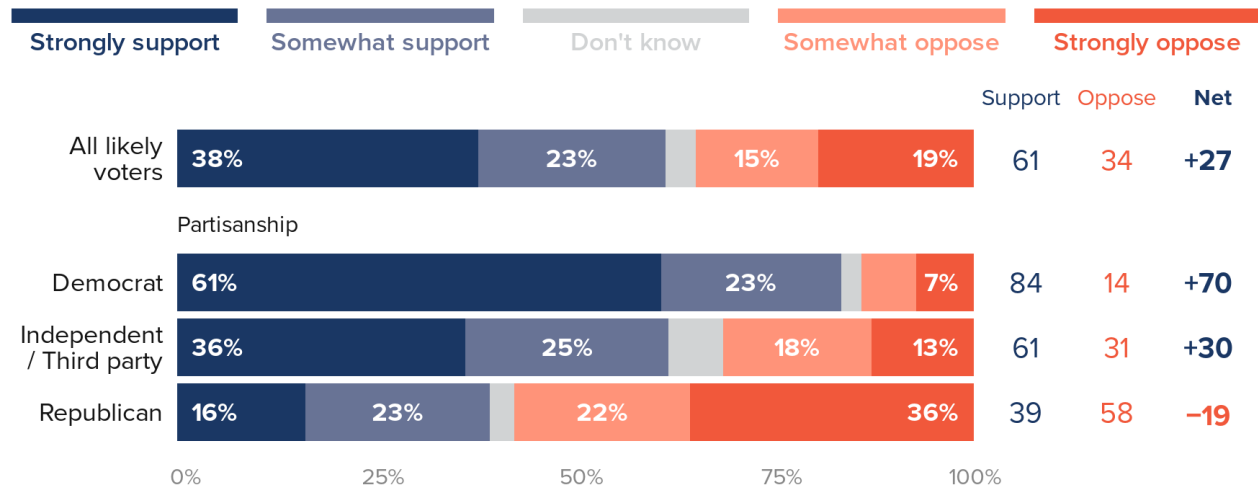
The answers to this question, in all likelihood, do not accurately show what percentage of American voters know someone who has had an abortion. In the United States, around 1-in-4 people who can become pregnant will have an abortion by the time they turn 45. People of all races, income levels, and geographies have abortions. It stands to reason that nearly every American personally knows someone who has had an abortion — even if they don't know it.

This polling question demonstrates, however, that many people who have abortions don't talk about them widely, possibly because of pervasive stigma about the procedure. Indeed, the Turnaway Study found that over half of people seeking abortions reported that they believed people in their community or people close to them would look down on them if they knew they had sought an abortion.

Asked whether they support or oppose the right to an abortion, 61 percent of national likely voters are in favor, a number that is consistent with other surveys of similar sample populations. A strong majority of Democrats (84 percent) and Independents (61 percent) support abortion rights, as well as nearly 40 percent of Republicans.

A Strong Majority of Democrats and Independents Support the Right to an Abortion

Do you support or oppose the right to an abortion?



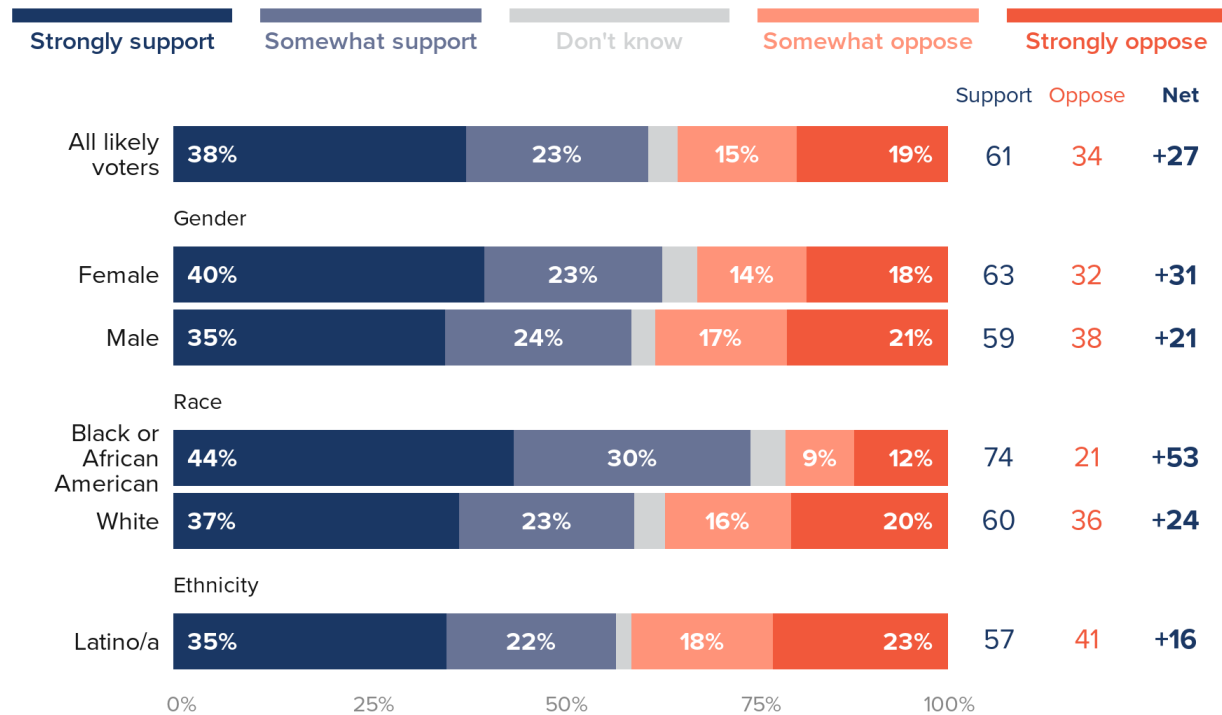
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In fact, in every demographic surveyed — with the exception of Republicans — a majority of voters support abortion rights, including women (63 percent), men (59 percent), voters over 45 (59 percent), voters under 45 (65 percent), voters with and without college degrees (68 percent and 57 percent, respectively), Black voters (74 percent), white voters (60 percent), Latina/o voters (57 percent), and voters who do and do not personally report knowing someone who has had an abortion (69 percent and 56 percent, respectively). When compared to all demographic groups surveyed, support for abortion rights is strongest among Black voters.

Across Race, Ethnicity, and Gender, Americans Support Abortion Rights

Do you support or oppose the right to an abortion?



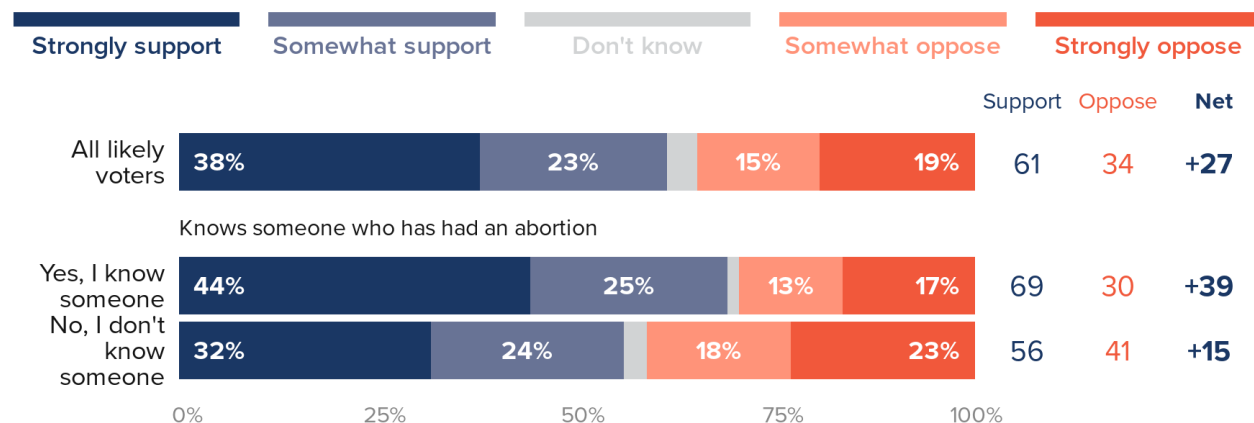
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Again, it is important to note that Data for Progress finds voters who personally know someone who has had an abortion are more likely to support abortion rights than those who don't. Sixty-nine percent of national likely voters who know someone personally who has had an abortion support the right to an abortion, compared to 56 percent of those who don't (and compared to 61 percent of voters overall). This points to the critical work of abortion storytellers, and groups such as We Testify and Shout Your Abortion, in destigmatizing abortion and increasing support.

Voters Support Abortion Rights, Regardless of Whether They Know Someone Who Has Had an Abortion

Do you support or oppose the right to an abortion?



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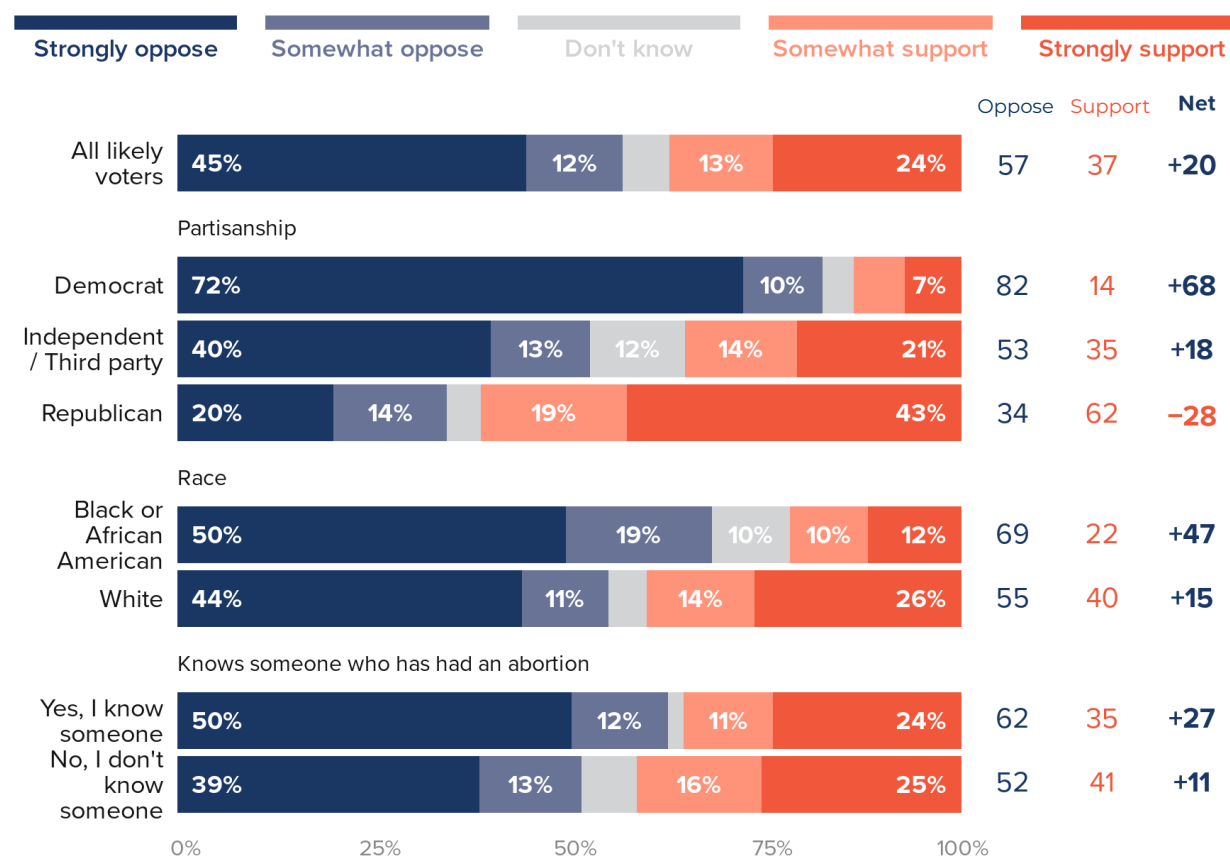
These results build on [previous](#) Data for Progress polling, which found that 68 percent of voters agreed with one of the following two statements: “I support abortions, and I think abortions should be legal in most cases,” and “I don’t personally support abortions, but I think abortion should be legal in most cases,” demonstrating that even those who don’t personally support abortion think the right should exist.

The majority of voters (57 percent) oppose the Supreme Court’s *Dobbs* decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade* and remove the constitutionally protected right to abortion. Opposition to the decision is particularly strong among Democrats (82 percent), Black voters (69 percent), and people who personally know someone who has had an abortion (62 percent).

A Majority of Voters Oppose the Supreme Court's Decision to Remove the Constitutionally-Protected Right to an Abortion

As you may have heard, the Supreme Court recently announced its decision on *Dobbs v. Jackson*. This decision effectively overturned the protected right to an abortion under the Constitution which was established by the 1973 Supreme Court case *Roe v. Wade*.

Do you support or oppose the Supreme Court's decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade*?



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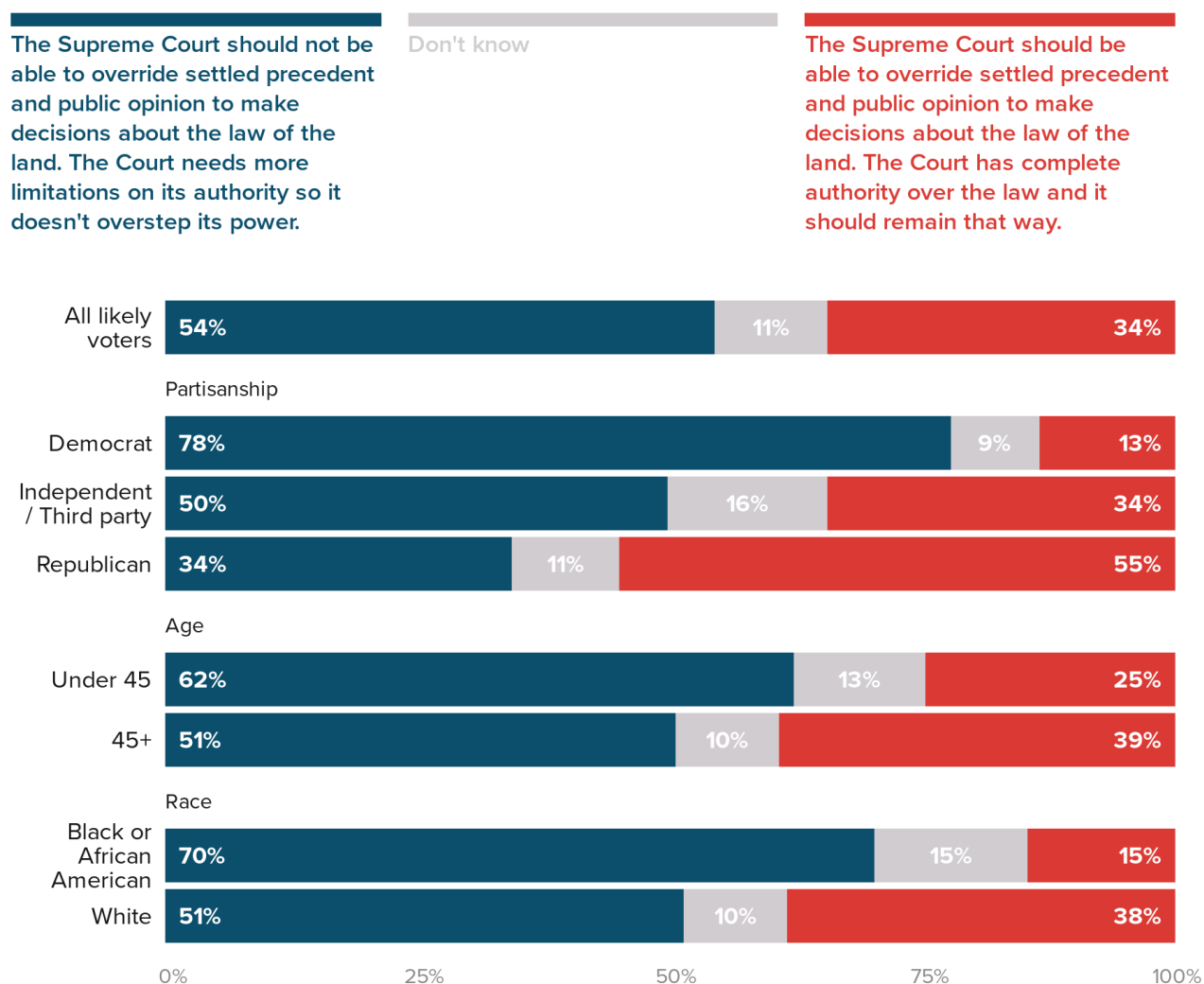
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The Supreme Court’s decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade* is unpopular among voters, most of whom support abortion rights, so we sought to find out whether the unpopularity of this decision influenced their views of the court’s legitimacy overall. When asked to think about the Supreme Court’s recent abortion decision, we find that a majority of voters (54 percent) think the court should have “more limitations on its authority so it doesn’t overstep its power,” compared to only 34 percent of voters who think the court should retain its authority to override settled precedent and even public opinion when making case decisions.

Limiting the court's authority is overwhelmingly popular among Democrats (78 percent), people under 45 (62 percent), and Black voters (70 percent).

Most Voters Would Prefer More Limitations on the Supreme Court's Authority When It Comes to Overriding Precedent

Thinking about the decision to eliminate the constitutionally-protected right to an abortion, which of these statements best describes your view on the Supreme Court, even if neither is exactly right?



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This polling reflects a broader trend of the waning legitimacy of the Supreme Court. Since the summer of 2000, Gallup has regularly tracked Americans' approval of the Supreme Court, with its most recent public polling conducted in September 2021. Gallup's September polling reflects the highest disapproval rating of the Supreme Court on record (53 percent).

Testing Unique Messaging Frames Offers Key Insights

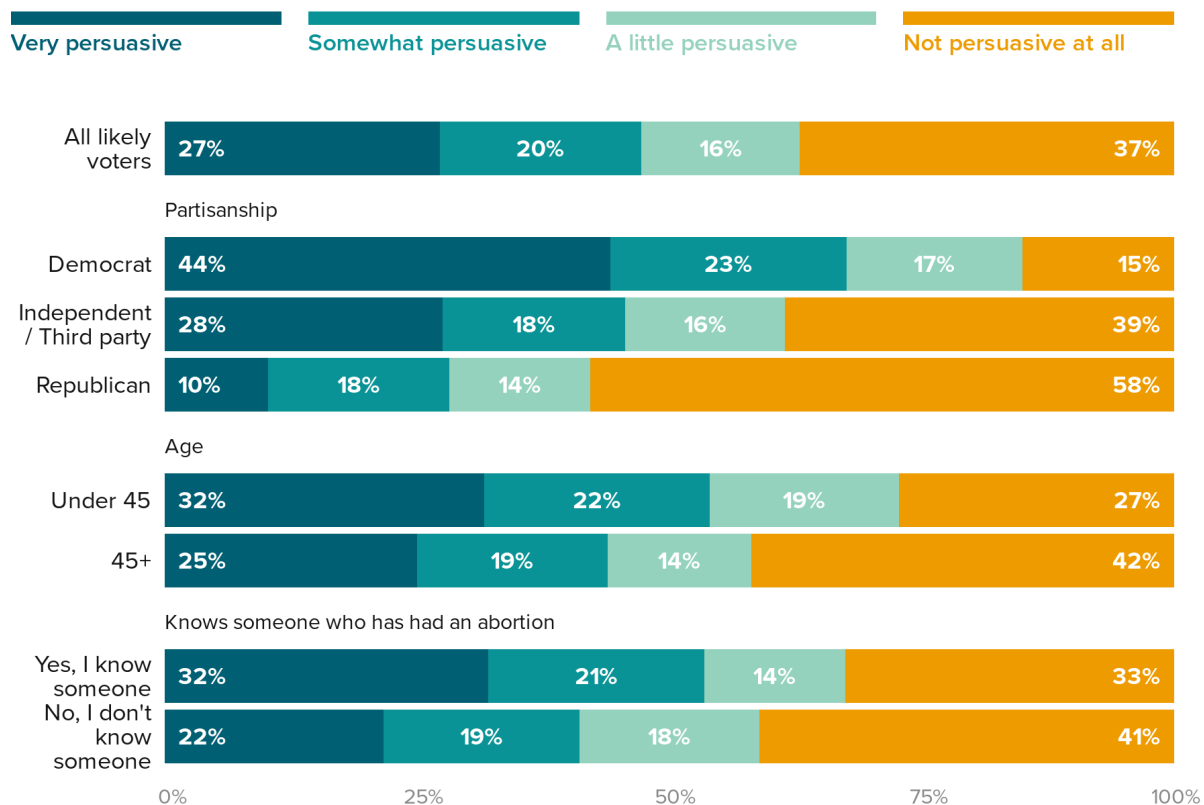
Data for Progress also tested several persuasive narrative frames about abortion: that abortion rights are important because they are a normal part of healthcare; that abortion means economic self-determination and the ability to make decisions about one's life; and that abortion means bodily autonomy and privacy, and the right to control bodies without government interference. [Mirroring previous testing](#), we find bodily autonomy framing to be most persuasive among voters.

ABORTION IS HEALTHCARE — While abortion is, unequivocally, a normal part of reproductive healthcare, we find this frame to be least persuasive among the ones we tested. When presented with the statement: “Abortion is healthcare. Abortions are a necessary and normal part of the spectrum of reproductive healthcare for patients,” 47 percent of voters find this framing either “very persuasive” or “somewhat persuasive.” This statement is more effective for Democrats (67 percent consider it persuasive), voters under 45 (54 percent), and people who know someone who has had an abortion (53 percent).

Nearly Half of Voters Consider the Idea of Abortion as Healthcare as a Persuasive Reason to Support Abortion Rights

For each of the following statements in support of the right to abortion, please indicate how persuasive or not persuasive this reason is:

— Abortion is healthcare. Abortions are a necessary and normal part of the spectrum of reproductive healthcare for patients.



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It's possible this framing is not as strong because, in the United States, healthcare is not a right, nor is it guaranteed to all. Abortion is healthcare — but without wide social acceptance of healthcare as a human right, this messaging might not resonate with as many voters.

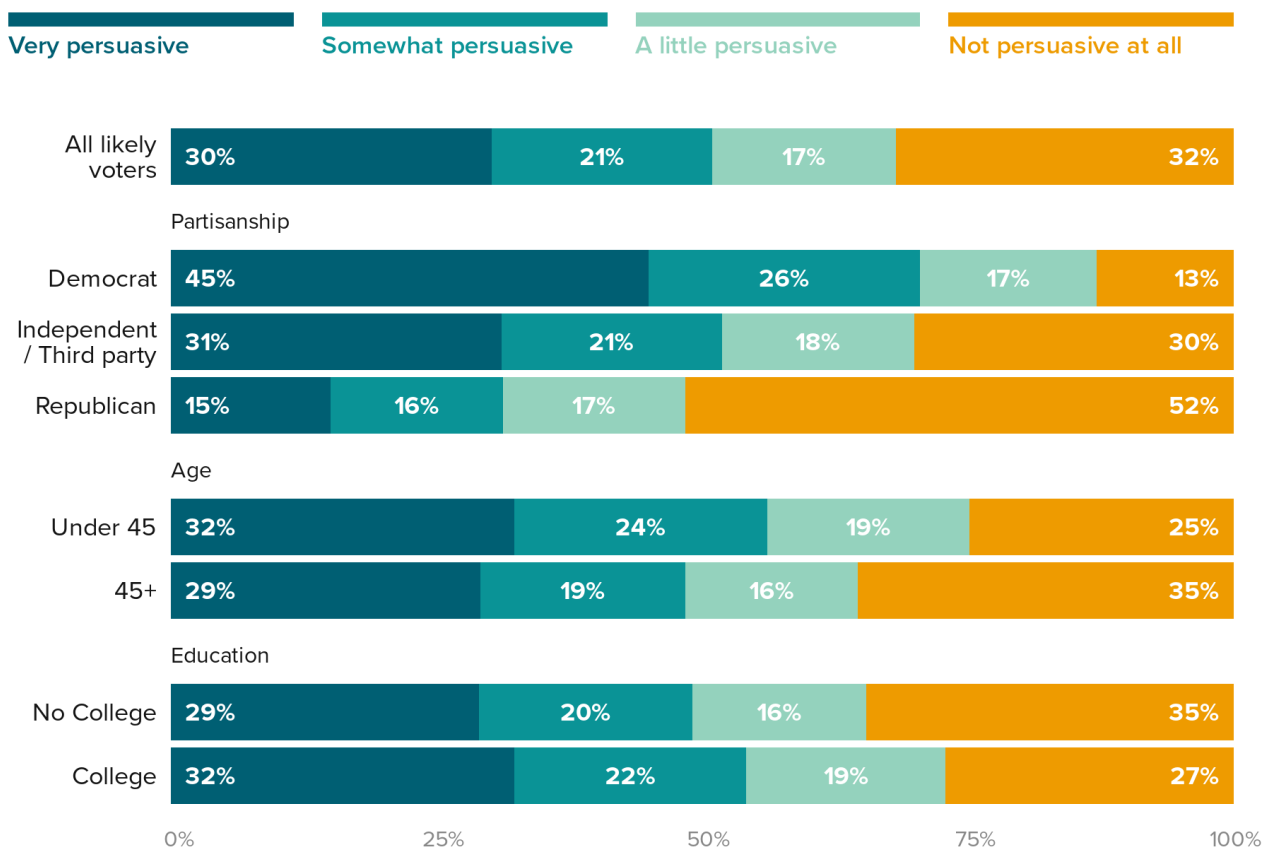
ABORTION IS ABOUT ECONOMIC SELF-DETERMINATION — When presented with the statement: “Abortion means economic self determination and the ability to control the circumstances of one’s life. Abortion allows people to make decisions about their future,” a majority of voters (51 percent) say this framing is “very persuasive” or “somewhat persuasive.”

Fifty-four percent of college-educated voters find this statement persuasive, as do 56 percent of voters under 45. Reproductive rights particularly strike home for young voters, who are likely considering their future or current family plans and how the recent Supreme Court decision may impact those plans.

Voters Are Persuaded to Support Abortion Rights When Considering Abortion's Role in Economic Self-Determination

For each of the following statements in support of the right to abortion, please indicate how persuasive or not persuasive this reason is:

— Abortion means economic self-determination and the ability to control the circumstances of one's life. Abortion allows people to make decisions about their future.



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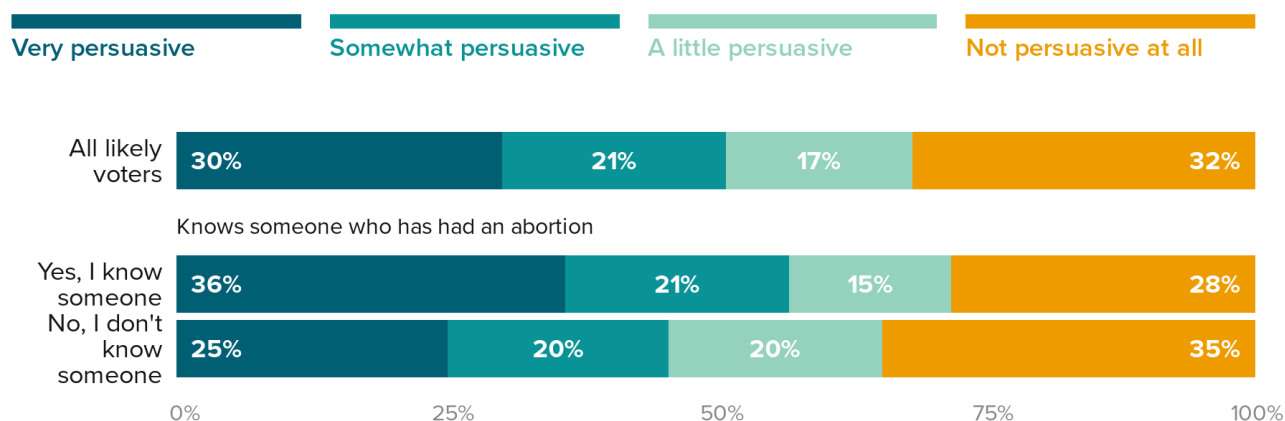
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In addition, 57 percent of people who personally know someone who has had an abortion find this statement “very persuasive” or “somewhat persuasive.” This aligns with important research done by the [Turnaway Study](#), which, among other things, asked people seeking abortions why they made that decision. [The most common category of response](#) was “financial reasons” (40 percent of abortion seekers), with patient responses including “don’t have the means” and “can’t afford to support a child.”

People Who Know Someone Who Has Had an Abortion Find Abortion's Role in Economic Self-Determination a Persuasive Reason to Support Abortion Rights

For each of the following statements in support of the right to abortion, please indicate how persuasive or not persuasive this reason is:

— Abortion means economic self-determination and the ability to control the circumstances of one's life. Abortion allows people to make decisions about their future.



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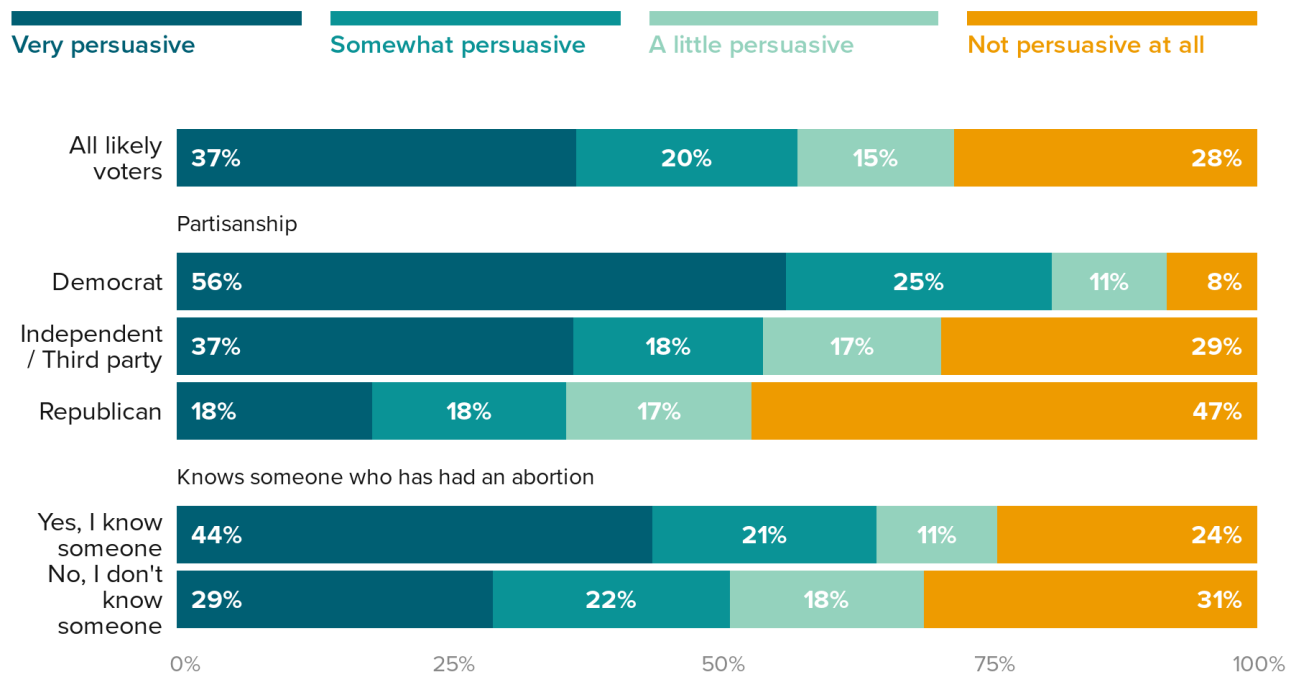
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ABORTION IS ABOUT BODILY AUTONOMY — The most persuasive message we tested is the statement: “Abortion means bodily autonomy and privacy. Abortion access means people have the right to control their bodies without government interference.” Fifty-seven percent of voters overall find that statement to be “very persuasive” or “somewhat persuasive,” as do 81 percent of Democrats, 55 percent of Independents, and 36 percent of Republicans. With the exception of Republicans, the majority of people in every category of voter we surveyed find bodily autonomy messaging to be either “very persuasive” or “somewhat persuasive,” including 65 percent of people who report knowing someone who has had an abortion.

Bodily Autonomy Is a Particularly Persuasive Framing for Supporting Abortion Rights

For each of the following statements in support of the right to abortion, please indicate how persuasive or not persuasive this reason is:

— Abortion means bodily autonomy and privacy. Abortion access means people have the right to control their bodies without government interference.



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A May 2022 Data for Progress [survey](#) also asked likely voters about abortion from the perspective of bodily autonomy, using a binary setup. We find that 71 percent of likely voters agree that women and their doctors should be able to control personal medical decisions without government interference, including 49 percent of Republican respondents. In contrast, only 46 percent of Republican respondents indicate the government should be able to make decisions about abortion.

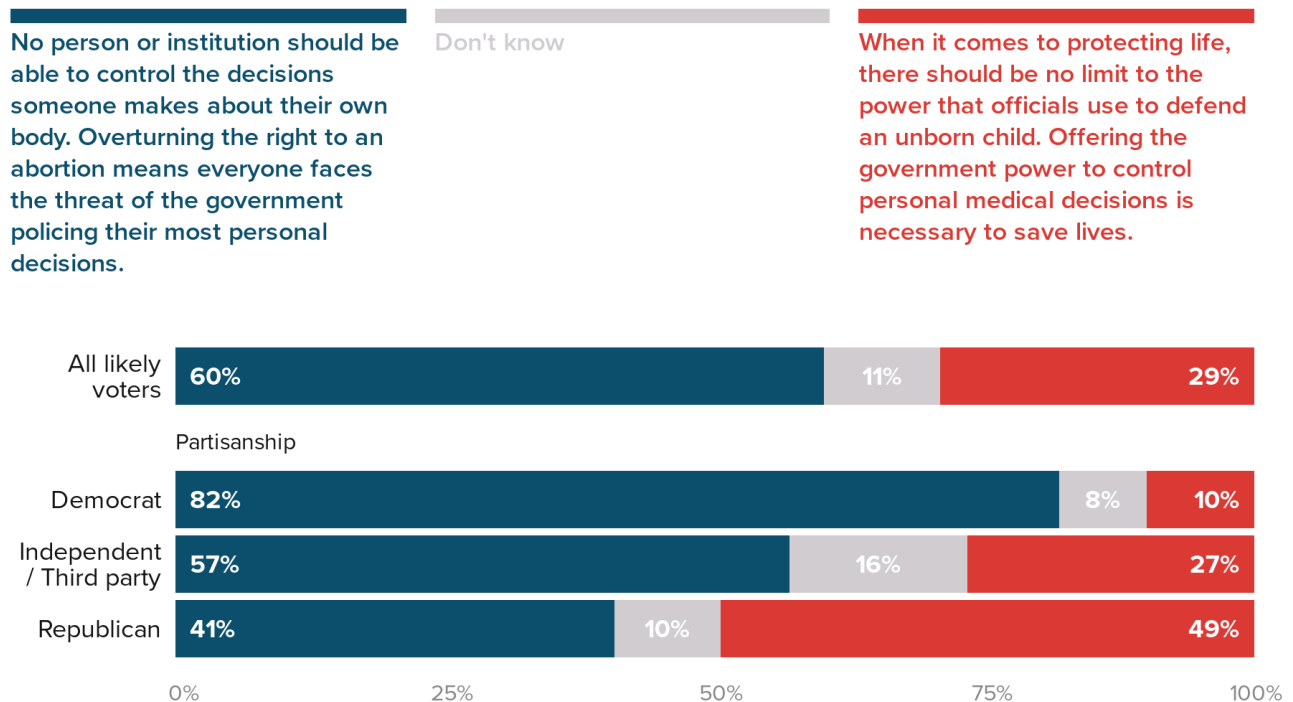
When pressed to make a binary choice between allowing or not allowing government interference in private medical decisions, this relatively stronger performance in Republican support for bodily autonomy suggests that emphasizing bodily autonomy as a singular choice — either the government respects individuals’ private bodily autonomy, or it does not — is a persuasive tool in reaching Republican voters.

A Majority of Voters Oppose Government Policing of Personal Decisions About Their Bodies

American voters overall are concerned about the rollback of abortion rights. Sixty percent of national likely voters agree with the statement: “No person or institution should be able to control the decision that someone makes about their own body. Overturning the right to an abortion means everyone faces the threat of the government policing their most personal decisions.” In contrast, only 29 percent agree with the statement: “When it comes to protecting life, there should be no limit to the power that officials use to defend an unborn child. Offering the government power to control personal medical decisions is necessary to save lives.” This effect holds true with Independents, 57 percent of whom support the pro-autonomy message. While a plurality of Republicans support the anti-choice message, 41 percent do believe that people should have control over their bodies, and the government shouldn’t police personal decisions.

Most Americans Agree the Government Should Not Be Allowed to Police Personal Decisions About Their Bodies

When thinking about abortion, which of these statements best describes your view, even if neither is exactly right?



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Takeaways

Polling shows us that abortion is popular. Most Americans support the right to an abortion, most oppose the Supreme Court's decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, most want increased limits on the power of the Supreme Court, and most want to preserve their rights to bodily autonomy. One critical insight from these findings is that people who personally know someone who has had an abortion are more likely to support abortion rights, reinforcing the importance of abortion storytelling for reproductive rights advocates.

Americans also respond favorably to the argument that it's important to protect abortion rights so that people can have bodily autonomy, that individuals should make decisions about their bodies without government interference. The abortion rights movement can use this data in building strong campaigns for reproductive freedom.

Arielle Swernoff (@ArielleSchw) is a Data for Progress Fellow, abortion fund volunteer, and self managed abortion advocate. She is currently studying for a Master's in Public Health at CUNY and works in the climate movement.