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Abortion rights USA

Abortion at the Center of American Politics

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Abortion is the center of American politics and likely to remain a principal issue through the 2024 election. Republicans have made the virtual elimination of abortion rights the leading edge of their political campaigns, their legislative agenda, and their judicial battles.

Every Republican candidate and politician make the restriction of abortion a major plank in their platforms and a slogan on the stump. The attack on women's right to abortion is an attack on women's health, on their family planning, on their careers and income, and on their full equality in American society. And there is also the question of whether the courts will be guided by science or by religion and politics.

The Republican strategy may ultimately prove a mistake since it has led women, independents, and Democrats to vote against them in larger numbers and created a new generation of young feminist activists.

Recent contradictory rulings on the use of mifepristone, the abortion pill, by two federal judges, one in Texas and one in Washington State, has now brought that issue before the Republican dominated and anti-abortion Supreme Court. Mifepristone now accounts for over half of all abortions and its elimination would have an especially devastating impact on women who live in the 13 states that have banned abortions and who can now illegally access the pills by mail-order—but without the support of a local physician. Abortion bans and restrictions have the greatest impact on Black, Latino, and low-income white women who do not have resources to travel to other states for abortion services.

Meanwhile in Florida the Republican dominated legislature passed and Governor Ron DeSantis signed a ban on abortions after six weeks of pregnancy, a date by which many women don't yet realize that they are pregnant. A candidate for the Republican presidential nomination, he has now set the standard for Republican legislation on abortion.

Polls, however, show that 61 percent (Pew poll) to 85 percent (Gallup poll) support women's right to abortion, though many Americans believe that there should be some restrictions on late-term abortion. In state referendums in the November 2022 elections, Kentucky rejected further abortion restrictions, Vermont restored abortion rights, Michigan made abortion a constitutional right, as did California. Kansas rejected abortion restrictions in August of 2022.

Evangelical Christians are the driving force behind the abortion issue. The National Evangelical Association states that "abortion on demand for reasons of personal convenience, social adjustment or economic advantage is morally wrong, and [the NEA] expresses its firm opposition to any legislation designed to make abortion possible for these reasons." Some state and federal legislators, including a few who are Evangelical preachers, have called for making abortion a crime. "The taking of a life is murder, and it is illegal," said Louisiana State Rep. Danny McCormick.

The abortion issue is fundamentally about patriarchy, about preserving male supremacy and female inferiority. The Republicans, the defenders of "traditional families and family values," not only oppose abortion, they also opposed contraception, as became clear in a July 2022 vote on the Right to Contraception Act, when 195 Republicans voted against.

The Democrats and Republicans position could not be more different. The Republican Party platform states that "the unborn child has a fundamental right to life which cannot be infringed," while the Democrats supports access to "safe and legal abortion." The Democratic Socialist of America supports women's right to abortion and has campaigned to defend it. Feminists in the far left in the United States historically raised the slogan, "Free abortion on demand!"

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Beyond the immediate issue, the Supreme Court's decision could set a dangerous prejudice if health care is determined not by scientists and doctors, but by politics and religion.

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