Study: The more people know about pregnancy, the more likely they are to support access to abortion

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A new study on public attitudes toward abortion laws finds that the more people know about pregnancy, the more likely they are to oppose

legislation that limits women's access to abortions—regardless of political ideology. The study also found that laws that limit access to abortion after 12 weeks did not have greater support than laws that limit access to abortion after six weeks.

"There is a tremendous amount of research on public attitudes toward abortion in the United States, but very little of that work has been done since the Dobbs v. Jackson decision in 2022 that overturned Roe v. Wade," says Steven Greene, co-author of the study and a professor of political science at North Carolina State University. "We wanted to ask questions that directly address the policy issues raised in state legislatures in the wake of Dobbs.

"Will people support a politician who promotes six-week bans? Will people support a politician who promotes 12-week bans? Do people who understand that these weeks are counted starting from a woman's most recent period view abortion laws differently from people who think that these weeks are counted from when a woman actually got pregnant?"

To explore these issues, the researchers surveyed 1,356 U.S. adults. The demographics of the study participants were broadly representative of the U.S. population. Politically, 43% of study participants were Democrats or leaned Democratic; 38% were Republican or leaned Republican; with the remainder being independent.

"We found that people who had a better understanding of pregnancy were more opposed to legislation restricting access to abortion," Greene says. "Basically, people who knew what a trimester was and who knew how we count the weeks of a pregnancy—that it's done dating back to a woman's last period, rather than to conception—are more likely to oppose laws limiting women's access to the full range of reproductive health care options."

The researchers also found that 12-week bans did not garner any more political support from study participants than the six-week bans.

"This suggests that efforts by some politicians to promote 12-week bans as a moderate, or compromise, position are likely not effective," Greene says.

"One possible take-away here is that efforts to educate the public on basic sex education may be a viable strategy for groups trying to build support for women's access to abortion."

A paper on the study, "Public Opinion on Abortion in Post-Roe America," was presented at the Southern Political Science Association Conference, which was held Jan. 10–13 in New Orleans. The paper was co-authored by Laurel Elder of Hartwick College and by Mary-Kate Lizotte of Augusta University. The researchers will be incorporating this work into a forthcoming book on the politics of abortion after Dobbs.

Provided by North Carolina State University