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THE RISE AND FALL OF HIGH-PROFILE ISSUES
IN MODERN AMERICAN POLITICS

by

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ABSTRACT

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New controversies in America's current political environment signal increased social uncertainty. By looking at changing public interest following a significant political event, this research provides an insight into how high-profile issues affect public awareness, political participation, and substantive views. With a focus on the topic of abortion, the project examines reactions to the U.S. Supreme Court's 2022 *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* decision as a case study to determine how high-profile issues impact public attitudes. A multi-method approach with regular opinion polls, entrance polls, exit polls, voter turnout data, news endorsements, and media usage patterns is used to examine shifts in public priorities and viewpoints. As the results show, Americans' political attention is usually short-lived, and the saliency of an issue is not stable over time, though issue attention can temporarily increase political participation.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iii
ABSTRACT.....	iv
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.....	vi
LIST OF TABLES	vii
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION: THE BEGINNING OF <i>DOBBS</i>	1
2. LITERATURE REVIEW	5
3. METHODOLOGY	8
4. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION	10
4.1 The Effects of a High-Profile Issue on Public Awareness.....	13
4.2 The Effects of a High-Profile Issue on Political Participation.....	17
4.3 The Effects of a High-Profile Issue on Substantive Views.....	18
5. CONCLUSION.....	24
Appendix	
A. MARTIN-QUINN SCORES FOR SUPREME COURT JUSTICES.....	26
REFERENCES	29
BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION.....	36

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure	Page
4.1	Quinnipiac University Poll Results (“Abortion” and “Gun Violence”) 11
4.2	YouGovAmerica Weekly Tracker of U.S. Registered Voters’ Saying “Abortion” is The Most Important Issue for Them. 11
4.3	Number of Articles that Mentioned the Term “ <i>Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization</i> ” (from April 16, 2022 to April 16, 2023) 12
4.4.	Google’s Web Searches for “ <i>Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization</i> ” 14
4.5.	Google’s Web Searches for “Abortion” (blue) and “Shooting” (red) 14
4.6.	Gallup Poll – Registered Voters’ Opinion on Abortion (1975 to 2022)..... 19
4.7.	Roper Center for Public Opinion Research – “Legality of Abortion” (1995 – 2023)..... 20
4.8	Marquette Law School Poll – National Approval Rating for the Supreme Court 23

LIST OF TABLES

Table		Page
4.1	FiveThirtyEight/Axios Poll Results for the Question: “In the past month, which of these topics have you seen a lot of in the news?”	13
4.2	Voter Turnout for Primary Election in Kansas in 2016, 2018, 2020, and 2022	17
4.3	Voter Turnout for 2022 Primary Elections in Different States	18
4.4	Abortion Attitudes with Specific Scenarios over Five Decades (Osborne et al., 2022)	21
4.5.	AP Poll – Abortion Attitudes with Specific Scenarios (July 2022)	21

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Abortion remains one of the most polarizing issues in the United States. Its history has evolved through many legal battles over the past decades, starting with the landmark *Roe v. Wade* decision in 1973 which initially recognized abortion as a woman's constitutional right. Since then, the right to terminate a pregnancy, at least until viability, has been protected as a privacy right under the Fourteenth Amendment's Due Process Clause. Later high-profile court cases such as *Planned Parenthood of Central Missouri v. Danforth* (1976), *City of Akron v. Akron Center for Reproductive Health* (1983), *Webster v. Reproductive Health Services* (1989), *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* (1992), *Stenberg v. Carhart* (2000), *Gonzalez v. Carhart* (2007) and *Whole Woman's Health v. Hellerstedt* (2016) were important landmark decisions in the continuous struggle of ideological differences regarding abortion legality. Among these cases, *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* (1992) is often mentioned for its "undue burden" test on states' abortion regulations, which prohibited states from "placing a substantial obstacle in the path of a woman seeking an abortion of a nonviable fetus." This decision, along with *Roe v. Wade*, successfully restricted the states' ability to prohibit abortion without a compelling interest—until these decisions were overturned by the most recent Supreme Court ruling on abortion.

Before getting to the Supreme Court's 2022 decision in *Dobbs*, it is beneficial to discuss the changes in the Supreme Court's composition within the years leading up to that decision. After the death of Justice Antonin Scalia in 2016, former President Trump

nominated Justice Neil Gorsuch to the Court. President Trump also nominated Justice Brett Kavanaugh following the retirement of Justice Anthony Kennedy in 2018 and President Trump nominated Justice Amy Barrett after the death of Justice Ginsburg in 2020. All three nominees were confirmed and joined the Court. These appointments shifted the Supreme Court toward a conservative majority and signaled a significant ideological transformation (See Appendix A for further details about the Martin-Quinn scores for Supreme Court justices). As expected, it did not take long for the issue of abortion to reappear on this Supreme Court's docket.

The *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* dispute started in 2018 with Mississippi's House Bill 1510, commonly known as the Gestational Age Act, banning abortion after 15 weeks "except in a medical emergency or in the case of a severe fetal abnormality." One day after Governor Phil Bryant signed the bill into law, Jackson Women's Health Organization sued Mississippi and its health officer, Dr. Dobbs, alleging a constitutional violation. The law was ruled unconstitutional in a U.S. District Court and the Fifth Circuit Court, which led Mississippi to file a petition for a writ of certiorari to the Supreme Court on June 15, 2020. Almost a year later, in May 2021, the U.S. Supreme Court "granted writ to address the question of whether all pre-viability prohibitions on elective abortions are unconstitutional" (Staley and Guo) and the Supreme Court heard oral arguments in December 2021. On May 2, 2023, Politico published what seemed to be the Court's draft opinion, in which five justices ruled in favor of Mississippi.

The *Dobbs* case, as decided by the Supreme Court, involved two separate decisions. The first was on Mississippi's 15-week provision. On that issue the Supreme Court decided 6-to-3 for Mississippi. Typically, a Supreme Court decision would stop at that point, having

considered the specific statute in dispute. The Supreme Court went further, however, and by a vote of 5-to-4 overturned the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision. According to a Supreme Court survey from Marquette Law School conducted in May 2022, just before the *Dobbs* decision was announced, Americans adults were evenly divided on the first part of the decision. Half (51%) thought the 15-week Mississippi law was unconstitutional and about half (49%) thought it was constitutional. On overturning *Roe v. Wade*, public opinion was less favorable, with 69% of American adults saying that *Roe v. Wade* should not be overturned and 31% saying that it should be overturned. Predictably, the split among Democrats and Republicans was large. On the 15-week part of the *Dobbs* decision, 75% of Democrats but only 19% of Republicans opposed the Mississippi law. On overturning *Roe v. Wade*, 94% of Democrats but only 35% of Republicans supported the Supreme Court's decision. These "partisan gaps" of 56% and 59%, respectively, are large.

Despite the public's largely negative views to the *Dobbs* decision, the Supreme Court eventually delivered its majority opinion along liberal-versus-conservative lines on June 24, 2022, with the majority decision holding that "The Constitution does not confer a right to abortion; *Roe* and *Casey* must be overruled; and the authority to regulate abortion must be returned to the people and their elected representatives" (Alito, 2022). This ruling opened the door to immediate and extremely strict abortion regulations. Not only were states with so-called "trigger laws" able to enforce their abortion bans and pre-*Roe* statutes right after the judgment went into effect, but more states also moved to ban out-of-state abortion and even abortion pills. Research to date suggests that the *Dobbs* decision will lead to "near certain effects" of increased surveillance and criminalization of activities

during pregnancy, denied abortion care, and delays in obtaining abortion care (Kimport, 2022).

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

As the American political environment grows more polarized and increasingly unstable, the need to further understand how the public processes controversial topics becomes extremely important. High-profile issues, such as abortion or a landmark Supreme Court decision on abortion, are assumed to have substantial impacts on public opinion due to their far-reaching implications on society. This research aims to examine whether those high-profile issues remain in public attention for a long period of time and whether they contribute to any changes in voting behaviors or issue opinions.

A great deal of research emphasizes the effects of public opinion on policies (such as Page et al., 1983; Wlezien, 1995; Burstein, 2003). All this research suggests that the public directly impacts the policymaking process. The literature on presidential behaviors (Page et al., 1987) found that presidents act favorably to public opinion while Villalobos and Vaugh (2009) recognized that public opinion affected a president's decision to politicize federal agencies. Even institutions like the federal courts, which might seem far removed from public opinion, make decisions that agree with majority public opinion about two-thirds of the time (Marshall, 2022).

The political effects of media have also been examined throughout the years. Ladd and Lenz (2009) observed that “news media exert a powerful influence on mass political behavior” and that “news media messages can be one of the most powerful influences on voting” (p. 405). Research from Spiering and Jacobs (2014) suggested that

as “voters appreciate attention in the form of being kept ‘up to date’ one might expect that interactivity is even more appreciated” (p. 231). Focusing on the topic of abortion, Perse et al. (1997) found that “newspaper coverage generally printed more abortion-related stories during presidential election years. This number tapered off for three years, until another presidential election. These findings reflect the general increase in news attention to social issues during elections” (p. 103).

The impact of abortion on American electoral politics has been studied extensively throughout the years. Cook et al. (1993) found that “abortion has become an important issue in state elections.... Voters considered the positions of gubernatorial candidates on abortion and were willing to cross party lines to support the candidates who supported their positions” (p. 198). Abramowitz’s study of the 1992 presidential election (1995) indicated that “abortion had the strongest effect of any of the policy issues included in the analysis, including the Gulf War, defense spending, affirmative action, and social welfare.... In fact, among these ‘aware and concerned’ voters, the influence of abortion attitudes far outweighed that of any variable except party identification” (p. 185).

Bolce (1988) studied electoral behaviors between 1976 and 1980 presidential elections and revealed “a substantial increase in public awareness of party and party abortion positions” and “the proportion of the electorate who could cast a reasonably intelligent vote on the issue-if they wanted to vote on that basis-was considerably larger” (p. 826). This suggested that high-profile issues such as abortion gather public attention and affect public knowledge. On the contrary, Granberg and Burlison (1983) examined the impact of abortion on the 1980 national election and found that “the abortion issue was hardly salient in the minds of most voters, and that although the major parties and

candidates held quite distinct positions on abortion in 1980, by and large these distinctions were not very apparent to the electorate” (p. 236).

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This research was conducted with a multi-method approach using secondary data sources. No experiments, surveys, individual interviews or focus groups were conducted. As it might indicate, a multi-method approach captures a wide variety of data, including polling, media coverage, events, and social media, described just below. This research utilizes polling data mainly from 2021 to 2023 and focuses on a case study of the *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* (2022) decision. There is also a brief comparison between the topic of abortion and gun violence to determine if the result for abortion is consistent with different high-profile issues, but abortion remains the focus of this research.

Polling data was used to analyze the public's immediate interest, concerns, and opinion such as priorities in upcoming elections, attitudes on the topic of abortion or Supreme Court's approval rating. Specific examples of opinion polls, which are publicly available, come from Gallup, Pew Research, YouGovAmerica, and iPoll. Voter turnout data and election results for the 2022 elections, gathered from the U.S. Elections Project and FiveThirtyEight, were used to capture any notable shift in voting behavior caused by the current political environment.

Media usage patterns are measured through Google Trends and Twitter Trending to gauge public reactions and online interactions following major events, particularly abortion and the *Dobbs* decision. This analysis measures the attention span of the American public on certain topics. News coverage and endorsements are also considered by looking

at the number of news articles about abortion or the *Dobbs* decision published within a certain time frame on U.S. major news outlets such as *The New York Times*, *Politico*, *NPR*, *Fox News*, *ABC News* and more to determine if media coverage has any effect on public opinion.

A multi-method study draws widely on available data. Some limits remain. For example, as discussed below, patterns on other issues may vary from abortion. There is no certainty that future policy attitudes will reflect the case study here. Even so, a case study still provides valuable insights about the saliency of high-profile issues in the public eye, whether controversial topics actually affect voters' behaviors, and the linkage between public policymaking, public opinion, and elections.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 The Effects of a High-Profile Issue on Public Awareness

One of the most popular methods to measure public opinion is by conducting and examining scientifically sound public opinion polls. Modern polls effectively capture political priorities since many poll questions ask about the most important issue(s) that the respondent is concerned with. In polls conducted by Quinnipiac University Polling Institute, for example, U.S. adults are asked “In your opinion, what is the most urgent issue facing the country today: Russia's invasion of Ukraine, COVID-19 (coronavirus), inflation, climate change, health care, racial inequality, immigration, election laws, abortion, gun violence, or crime?” The percentage of respondents that considered abortion to be “the most urgent issue facing the country today” out of all the given choices fluctuates with the timeline of the *Dobbs* decision and jumped from 5% to 11% after the opinion leak, then dropped by more than half (to 5%) after a month, then slightly increased after the official *Dobbs* ruling (to 8%). There was also another rise in public interest closer to the midterm election (to 10%) but the survey conducted a couple of days after the election observed an expected fall (to 7%). This pattern of shifting public concern is also repeated with another high-profile issue. In the survey taken June 03 – 06, 2022, 17% of respondents considered gun violence to be “the most urgent issue” right after the Robb Elementary School Shooting that took the lives of 19 children and 2 teachers on May 24, 2022, but that percentage quickly dropped in the next couple of months (See Figure 4.1).

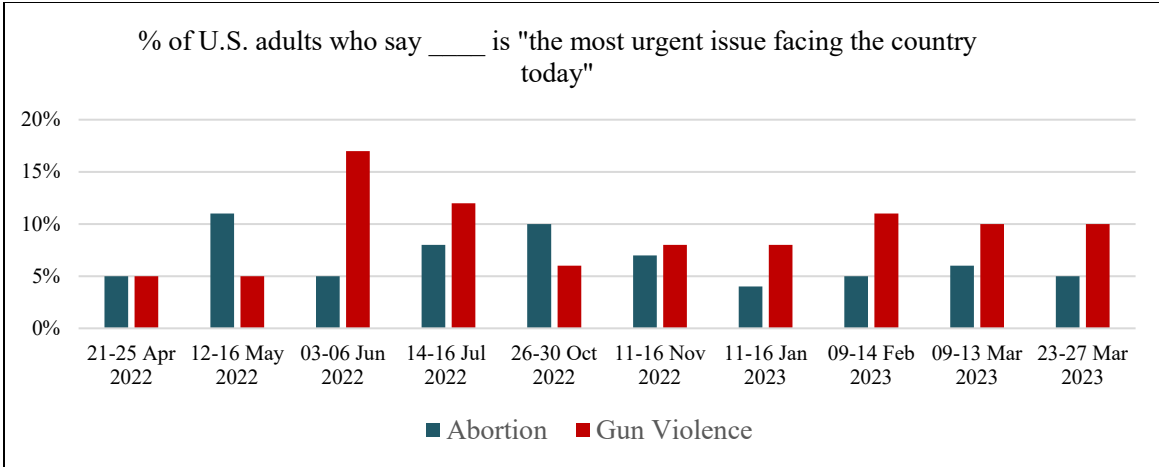


Figure 4.1 Quinnipiac University Poll Results (“Abortion” and “Gun Violence”)

These recent percentages are consistent with data from YouGovAmerica over the past five years (with the exception of 2020) showing that abortion is usually considered “the most important issues” only by 4-6% of U.S. registered voters. There were times when that percentage increased more than half (8-11%) within the last year, apparently due to the events surrounding the *Dobbs* decision, but the percentages returned to the normal range with the most recent data in 2023.

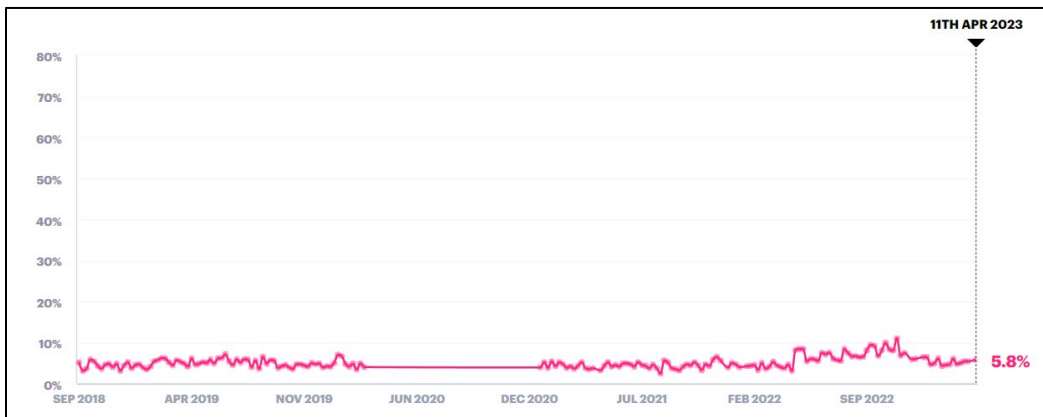


Figure 4.2 YouGovAmerica Weekly Tracker of U.S. Registered Voters’ Saying “Abortion” is The Most Important Issue for Them.

In this age of technological communication and publication, with 5.16 billion internet users worldwide (Statista, 2023), online news consumption has skyrocketed and became the most common method to get information. In a survey by Pew Research Center (2020), 86% of U.S. adults “get news from a smartphone, computer or tablet”, with 68% of them preferring to use a “digital platform” like news websites or apps. Because of this, it is understandable that high-profile issues will gather lots of attention as news articles begin to circulate. The news coverage for *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization* decision is examined through the number of search results from several major U.S. news sites.

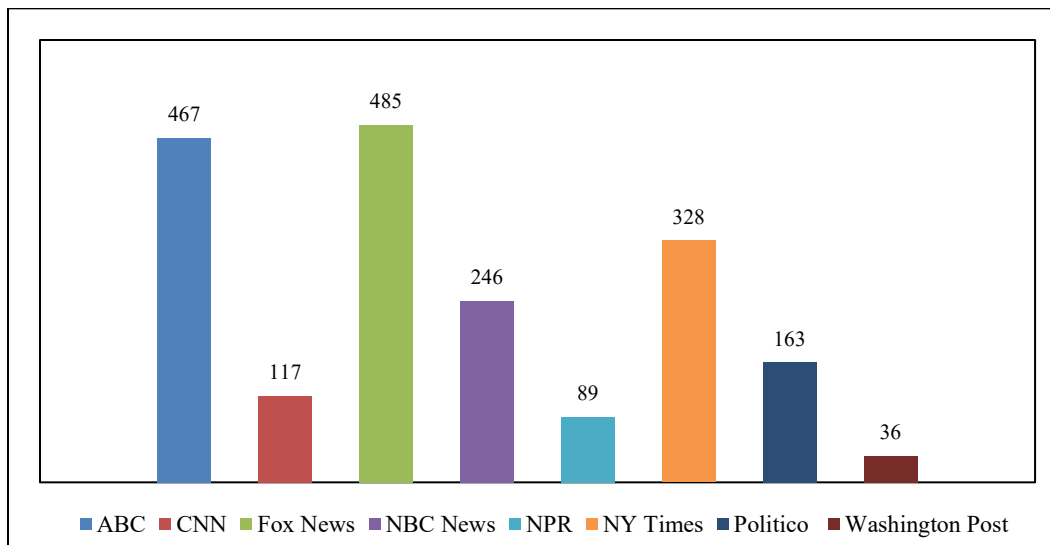


Figure 4.3 Number of Articles that Mentioned the Term “*Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization*” (April 16, 2022–April 16, 2023)

Over the past year, approximately five articles were released each day that mentioned the *Dobbs* decision in some capacity. This data did not distinguish whether it is related to the draft opinion or the official ruling itself and could not distinguish the number of articles that were published on May 02, 2022 (the date of the leak) or June 24, 2022 (the date of the decision). Despite these limitations, the data suggests that news coverage on

this landmark decision is rather insignificant compared to the number of articles that are typically released daily. For example, a *New York Times*’ spokesperson confirmed that “NYTimes.com publishes roughly 150 articles a day (Monday-Saturday), 250 articles on Sunday and 65 blog posts per day” (Meyer, 2016)—which makes the 328 articles per year seem underwhelming. Surveys by FiveThirtyEight found that the amount of news coverage on abortion decreased within a few months after the *Dobbs* ruling with the lowest recorded response to be during the week of midterm elections, which could mean news sites recognized the failing public interest over time and shifted their resources to other high-profile issues.

Table 4.1 FiveThirtyEight/Axios Poll Results for the Question: “In the past month, which of these topics have you seen a lot of in the news?”

Interview Date	% of respondents saying they have seen abortion a lot in the news in the past month
April 27 – May 05, 2022	23%
May 26 – June 6, 2022	53%
June 27 – July 05, 2022	69%
July 21 – August 1, 2022	63%
November 9 – November 11, 2022	53%
March 10 – March 13, 2023	32%

Another way to look into public interest on online platforms is to examine Google searches and Twitter trends. Since Google is by far the biggest search engine on the internet, public interest can be measured through the trend of Google web searches of specific terms and topics in the United States over the past 12 months. According to Google Trends, the numbers on the following figures “represent search interest relative to the highest point on the chart for the given region and time. A value of 100 is the peak popularity for the term. A value of 50 means that the term is half as popular.”

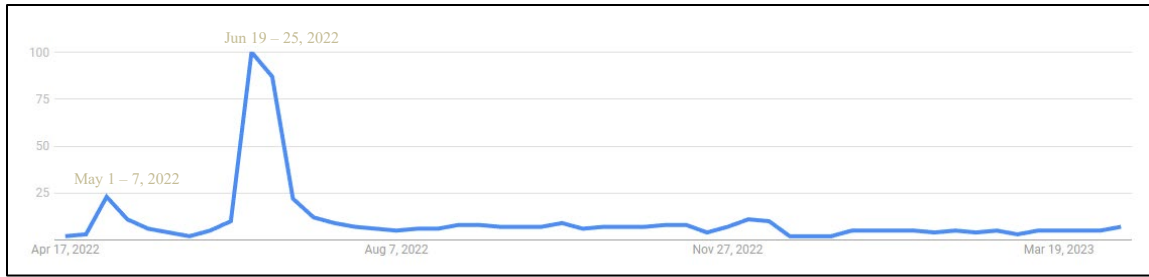


Figure 4.4 Google’s Web Searches for “*Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization*”

“Peak popularity” for the *Dobbs* decision happened within a week of the official ruling on June 24, 2022. There was also a small increase in searches around the time of the draft opinion leak on May 2, 2022. Both trends quickly decreased afterward.

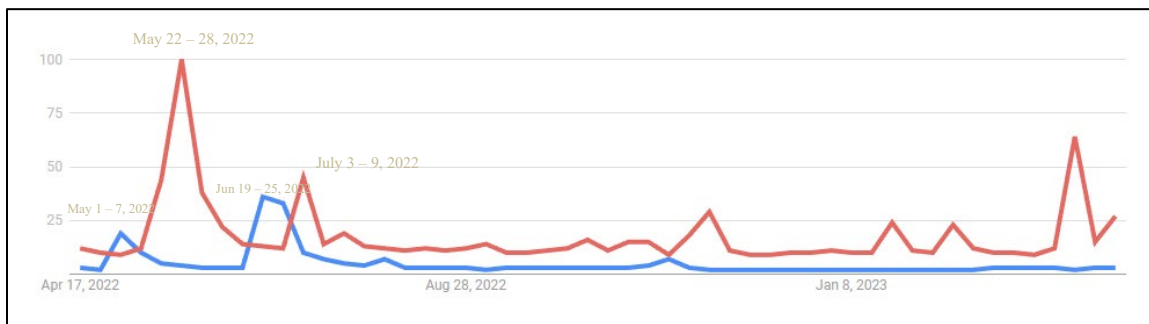


Figure 4.5 Google’s Web Searches for “abortion” (blue) and “shooting” (red)

Since Google categorizes “*Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization*” as a topic, it is not possible to compare it to a term. Therefore, to determine if the previous pattern applies to another high-profile issue, a comparison between “abortion” to “shooting” is included. From this figure, it is clear that web searches in the U.S. spike drastically following a major event, but quickly revert back to normal level. Since *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization* was about abortion, public interest in the general topic of abortion rose and fell at the exact time frame as interest in the Court case – after the opinion leak and the official ruling. On a different issue, we can see the “peak popularity” for the term “shooting” happened around the week of May 22–28, 2022 in

accordance with the Robb Elementary School shooting on May 24, 2022. Similarly, there was a slight increase in searches during July 3 – 9, 2022, which corresponded to the Highland Park parade shooting that wounded 48 and killed seven people on July 4, 2022. The quick increases in web searches for specific terms indicated rises in public interest after notable events caught people's attention. The sharp decreases in those same searches indicated that high levels of interest do not last over a week.

It would be a mistake to overlook social media usage when it comes to measuring public interest. Twitter has become an influential online platform that can even be used to observe political leaning for trending hashtags (Weber et al., 2012). Because of the short-term nature of Twitter trends, it is difficult to collect accurate data from Twitter itself from a year ago. Fortunately, Twitter Trending Archive is able to store the trends throughout the years down to specific dates. It observed that #SupremeCourt, #SCOTUS, #RoeVWade and #abortionrights were constantly trending on May 03, 2022 (right after the opinion leak) but disappeared the following day. Similarly, #RoeVsWade was consistently the most trending hashtag in the U.S. on June 24, 2022, but only appeared two times on the list of trends the day after (Twitter Trending Archive). This data, though imperfect, suggests that people look up information about high-profile issues to be up to date with current events but then lose interest quickly.

In examining different aspects of public interest on high-profile issues, it is evident that public interest quickly increases following a major event, whether measured through web searches or social media usage, which also leads to heightened public awareness on those issues and often through political prioritization. However, as the data has shown, heightened attention is extremely short-lived and usually lasts around a week. On abortion

the issue resurfaces in a couple of months. This pattern is similar to how the draft opinion leak, the *Dobbs* ruling, and midterm elections brought up the topic of abortion. Overall, the range of public attention to that issue remains short-term.

4.2 The Effects of a High-Profile Issue on Political Participation

Although public interest in high-profile issues fluctuates rapidly, the controversial nature of those issues has a considerable effect on voter behaviors. The 2022 midterm elections results provide great evidence to support this. As voter turnout reached 46.6%, the second-highest midterm turnout rate, many wonder what contributed to this number. It is possible that abortion might have been a crucial factor for the high turnout rate and the rare outcomes of these elections. Democrats were able to take control of the Senate, win two gubernatorial elections, and only narrowly lost control of the House—a clear disappointment for Republicans who predicted a “red wave” prior to election week. “Arguably, what truly made this midterm unique was abortion”—CNN reported, as their exit polls recorded 27% of voters claiming abortion to be the most important issue and these voters “overwhelmingly chose Democratic candidates for Congress” (Enten, 2022). This influence of abortion can also be seen with the midterm election campaign’s voter dynamics—when Democrats “used the abortion issue to mobilize women and their younger (Millennium and Gen-X) voters....; spent over \$214 million on TV ads that emphasized abortion.... (which) accounted for 45% of all the ad money spent by the party in October”. (Balogun and Okonofua, 2023, pp. 10-11).

On a smaller scale, we can also observe the effects of abortion on voter turnout with the 2022 Kansas primary election. The Kansas No State Constitutional Right to Abortion and Legislative Power to Regulate Abortion Amendment was on the ballot in Kansas as a

legislatively referred constitutional amendment on August 2, 2022—proposing an amendment to the Kansas state constitution to declare that it does not provide a right to abortion nor any funding for abortion, and providing that the state can pass laws outlawing abortion. This election was held 39 days after the *Dobbs* decision while the topic of abortion was still salient in public opinion. This election resulted in a much higher voter turnout compared to previous elections and compared to other states’ primary elections at the time.

Table 4.2 Voter Turnout for Primary Election in Kansas in 2016, 2018, 2020, and 2022

Year	Registered Voters	Participating Voters	Non-Participating Voters	Total Voter Turnout Percentage
2016	1,749,640	386,527	1,363,113	23.5%
2018	1,801,023	457,598	1,343,425	27.1%
2020	1,861,264	636,032	1,225,232	34.2%
2022	1,951,099	922,321	1,028,778	47.3%

Kansas was the first state to put abortion on its ballot since the June 24, 2022, *Dobbs* decision, which also gathered national attention. Roughly \$19.5 million dollars poured into the campaigns for this election with the pro-choice advocates outspending the pro-life interests by approximately \$3.5 million dollars (Ballotpedia). This additional funding—roughly twenty dollars per voter – doubtlessly created great public attention and mobilized voters otherwise unlikely to vote in a little-contested state primary election. Because of this heightened interest, public awareness of this issue remained high enough to mobilize Kansas voters. Nearby states that did not involve abortion in their primary elections observed much lower voter turnout.

Table 4.3 Voter Turnout for 2022 Primary Elections in Different States

State	Voter Turnout Percentage
Arkansas	25.9%
Colorado	26.4%
Missouri	23.7%
Oklahoma	23.4%
Texas	17.7%
Kansas	47.3%

This analysis indicates that high-profile issues do contribute to increased political participation, especially if major events happened close to an election. However, it is unlikely that this phenomenon reliably to predict voter turnout outcomes for other elections. As time goes on and public interest decreases, voters typically move on to a more current high-profile issue and rely on that to make voting decisions.

4.3 The Effects of a High-Profile Issue on Substantive Views

Abortion remains a polarizing topic for Americans. The debate over abortion legality has continued for decades, but despite legal actions and judicial decisions, public views on abortion remain relatively consistent over time. Many polls have captured different aspects of public opinion on abortion and offered valuable insights on how that opinion has changed. With polls dated back to 1975 from Gallup to the most recent polls in 2023 from Roper Center, Americans’ opinions on the legality of abortion did not shift significantly and mostly stay in a limited range. The most recent data from Roper Center around 2020–2022 indicated some small fluctuations, possibly in accordance with the events surrounding the *Dobbs* decision.

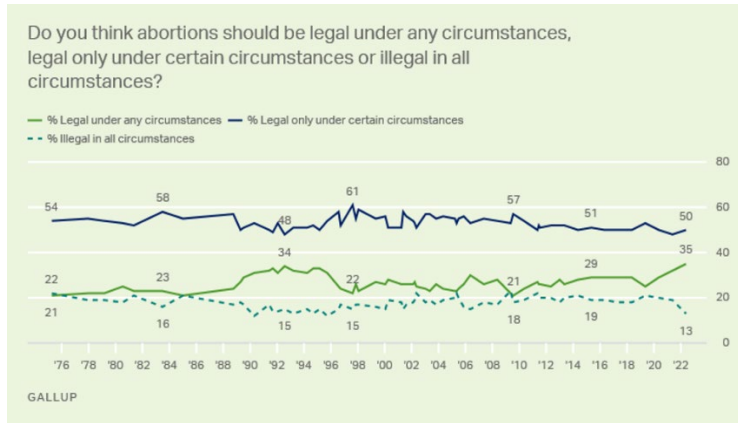


Figure 4.6 Gallup Poll – Registered Voters’ Opinion on Abortion (1975 to 2022)

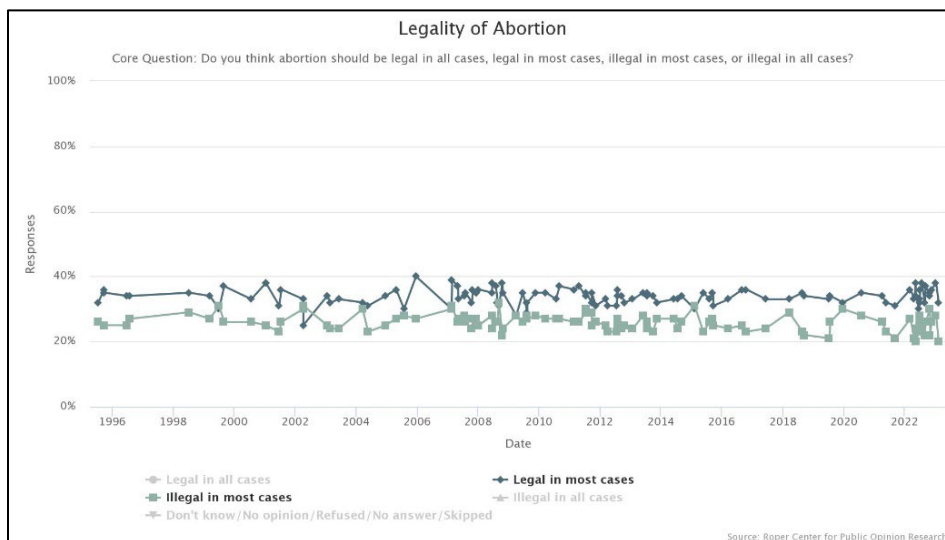
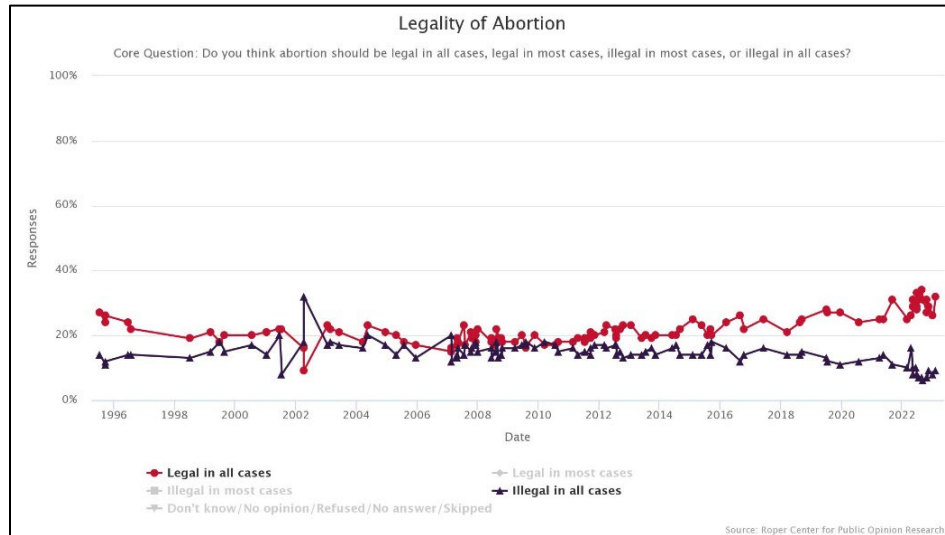


Figure 4.7 Roper Center for Public Opinion Research – “Legality of Abortion”
(1995 – 2023)

Despite a slight rise in the extreme opinions (as in abortion should be legal or illegal in any circumstance or in all cases), the trends are not consistent enough to indicate an overall shift in opinion. Research also shows that special circumstances do not make notable differences in public attitudes about abortion over time. If the abortion stems from

a medical reason or rape, approval rating tends to be higher when compared to abortions for purely personal reasons.

Table 4.4 Abortion Attitudes with Specific Scenarios over Five Decades

(Osborne et al., 2022)

Please Tell Me Whether or Not You Think It Should Be Possible for A Pregnant Woman to Obtain a Legal Abortion if...	Approve (1978)	Approve (1988)	Approve (1998)	Approve (2008)	Approve (2018)
<i>Traumatic abortion</i>					
...there is a strong chance of serious defect in the baby?	82.0%	78.8%	78.6%	74.8%	77.4%
...the woman's own health is seriously endangered by the pregnancy?	90.6%	88.7%	87.9%	89.2%	90.0%
...she became pregnant as a result of rape?	83.2%	81.1%	80.1%	76.7%	79.5%
<i>Elective abortion</i>					
...she is married and does not want any more children?	40.3%	39.9%	42.3%	44.7%	51.4%
...the family has a very low income and cannot afford any more children?	47.4%	42.0%	44.3%	42.9%	49.3%
...she is not married and does not want to marry the man?	41.1%	39.4%	42.3%	41.2%	46.2%
...the woman wants it for any reason?	33.3%	36.1%	40.9%	42.4%	50.1%

Table 4.5 AP Poll – Abortion Attitudes with Specific Scenarios (July 2022)

In general, do you think your state should or should not allow a pregnant person to obtain a legal abortion if...	Should allow
...the child would be born with a life-threatening illness?	77%
...the person's own health is seriously endangered by the pregnancy?	89%
...the person became pregnant as the result of rape or incest?	86%
...the person does not want to be pregnant for any reason?	54%

Table 4.4 reveals that attitudes on abortion were consistent on abortion availability when accounting for special circumstances, with minor variations by decade. Data gathered after the *Dobbs v. Women's Health Organization* decision also did not show any significant change in public opinion on those similar circumstances. It is evident that substantive views regarding its legality are difficult to change and high-profile issues have little to none effects on them. Previous landmark decisions could not impact the trendline over the last 50 years, so it is highly unlikely that the *Dobbs* decision would be an exception.

Another aspect of substantive views that can be considered is public perceptions of the Supreme Court during the time of the *Dobbs* decision. Historically, the justices tend to enjoy higher approval ratings compared to the President and Congress, but according to a new survey by the Marquette Law School, public approval of the Court started to decrease in May 2022 (after the draft opinion leak) and hit a record low point of 38% after the *Dobbs* ruling. This drop of six percent is relatively large by American standards. When the decision was still receiving high public interest, the approval rating of the court was lower than normal, but it has started to return to its average prior to the decision.

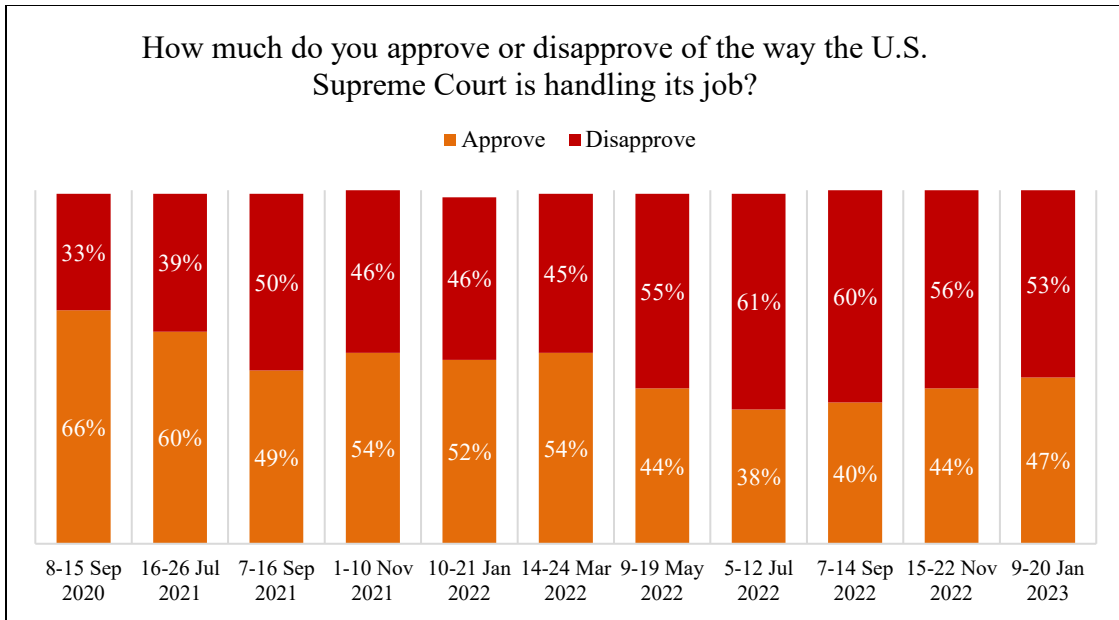


Figure 4.8. Marquette Law School Poll – National Approval Rating for the Supreme Court

Arguably, the usual positive perception of the Supreme Court resulted from the public’s substantive view about the Court. The unpopularity of the *Dobbs* decision did noticeably affect that perception but, similar to attitudes on abortion availability, it will be difficult to shift public opinion significantly in one way or the other for the long term. The approval rating of the Supreme Court will most likely continue to be steadily higher than the other two branches of government.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

In an age of instant gratification and reaction, people can quickly lose interest in political issues once they are no longer in the immediate news cycle. From the indictment of former president Donald Trump to the ban of abortion pills, to the alleged corruption of Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas, breaking news is being released daily. It is understandable that Americans have a hard time keeping up with past issues, especially when they are being bombarded with new information about another issue. As the public shifts its attention to a more current event, past issues fall in importance.

This research aims to measure the length of American's attention span on a high-profile issue such as abortion through the case study of the Supreme Court's 2022 *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* decision. Evidence shows that public interest in high-profile issues is short-lived, usually fading within a few weeks or months. For example, abortion gained huge interest on Google searches or Twitter trends during the week of the draft opinion leak and on the date of the *Dobbs* decision but could not maintain that level of interest afterward. Abortion was also considered the most urgent issue right after the occurrence of those events but quickly fell in people's prioritization the next month.

However, when an issue rises in importance in accordance with an election cycle, it can greatly influence American politics. With the near record-high voter turnout for the midterm election and the surprising victories for Democrats, as well as the great turnout rate for Kansas primary election compared to other states, abortion and the *Dobbs* decision created a more favorable outcome for Democrats and proponent of abortion rights. This phenomenon could have been influenced by the timing of the elections and by campaigning efforts that resulted from heightened interest in abortion.

Despite the increased political participation, the *Dobbs* decision failed to impact the American public's substantive views on abortion legality and availability. With the consistency of public opinion on abortion over the past decades, it is almost impossible for any event to create a significant change. Abortion attitudes seem deeply rooted in American culture and values. Similarly, despite its unpopularity, the *Dobbs* decision could not completely diminish the Supreme Court's stable approval rating, and only slightly decreased it for a few months. The public still has a relatively positive attitude for the Court, compared to other national institutions, which is also difficult to change.

Recognizing the nature of American short-term political attention on high-profile issues can help us make better informed political and strategic decisions. As this research shows, public awareness will be the highest within a few weeks or months after a major event, during which times political participation and interest may increase. Since issues rise and fall in importance within relatively short cycles, it is important to capture public interest at its peak to utilize that attention for voter mobilization, agenda setting, or issue development.

APPENDIX A

MARTIN-QUINN SCORES FOR SUPREME COURT JUSTICE

Term	Justice Name	Posterior Mean	Term	Justice Name	Posterior Mean
1987	AMKennedy	1.22	2018	BMKavanaugh	0.645
1988	AMKennedy	1.486	2019	BMKavanaugh	0.626
1989	AMKennedy	1.357	2020	BMKavanaugh	0.684
1990	AMKennedy	1.202	2021	BMKavanaugh	0.814
1991	AMKennedy	0.859	2018	BMKavanaugh	0.645
1992	AMKennedy	1.032			
1993	AMKennedy	0.873			
1994	AMKennedy	0.849			
1995	AMKennedy	0.739			
1996	AMKennedy	0.831			
1997	AMKennedy	0.826			
1998	AMKennedy	0.953			
1999	AMKennedy	1.09			
2000	AMKennedy	0.964			
2001	AMKennedy	1.058			
2002	AMKennedy	0.899			
2003	AMKennedy	0.768			
2004	AMKennedy	0.544			
2005	AMKennedy	0.499			
2006	AMKennedy	0.458			
2007	AMKennedy	0.411			
2008	AMKennedy	0.576			
2009	AMKennedy	0.516			
2010	AMKennedy	0.577			
2011	AMKennedy	0.296			
2012	AMKennedy	0.24			
2013	AMKennedy	0.069			
2014	AMKennedy	-0.227			
2015	AMKennedy	-0.267			
2016	AMKennedy	-0.045			
2017	AMKennedy	0.402			
1986	AScalia	1.392	2016	NMGorsuch	1.142
1987	AScalia	1.642	2017	NMGorsuch	1.073
1988	AScalia	1.817	2018	NMGorsuch	0.996
1989	AScalia	1.996	2019	NMGorsuch	0.953
1990	AScalia	2.153	2020	NMGorsuch	1.121
1991	AScalia	2.511	2021	NMGorsuch	1.049
1992	AScalia	2.547			
1993	AScalia	2.65			
1994	AScalia	2.892			
1995	AScalia	3.18			
1996	AScalia	3.403			
1997	AScalia	3.481			

1998	AScalia	3.468			
1999	AScalia	3.545			
2000	AScalia	3.544			
2001	AScalia	3.389			
2002	AScalia	3.088			
2003	AScalia	2.916			
2004	AScalia	2.721			
2005	AScalia	2.633			
2006	AScalia	2.59			
2007	AScalia	2.436			
2008	AScalia	2.324			
2009	AScalia	2.296			
2010	AScalia	2.123			
2011	AScalia	2.05			
2012	AScalia	1.733			
2013	AScalia	1.593			
2014	AScalia	1.524			
2015	AScalia	1.597			
1993	RBGinsburg	-0.211	2020	ACBarrett	1.219
1994	RBGinsburg	-0.448	2021	ACBarrett	1.347
1995	RBGinsburg	-0.534			
1996	RBGinsburg	-0.601			
1997	RBGinsburg	-0.732			
1998	RBGinsburg	-0.798			
1999	RBGinsburg	-1.251			
2000	RBGinsburg	-1.494			
2001	RBGinsburg	-1.615			
2002	RBGinsburg	-1.679			
2003	RBGinsburg	-1.757			
2004	RBGinsburg	-1.686			
2005	RBGinsburg	-1.569			
2006	RBGinsburg	-1.685			
2007	RBGinsburg	-1.684			
2008	RBGinsburg	-1.734			
2009	RBGinsburg	-1.689			
2010	RBGinsburg	-2.092			
2011	RBGinsburg	-2.375			
2012	RBGinsburg	-2.473			
2013	RBGinsburg	-2.47			
2014	RBGinsburg	-2.564			
2015	RBGinsburg	-2.68			
2016	RBGinsburg	-2.784			
2017	RBGinsburg	-2.84			
2018	RBGinsburg	-2.884			
2019	RBGinsburg	-2.876			

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Taylor is proud to be on the Dean's List for every semester and was recognized as a Luther Wayne Odom Scholar, Irving Dawson Scholar, and College of Liberal Arts Scholar. She also received the Award of Excellence for Highest GPA from the Department of Political Science. She looks forward to receiving an Honors Bachelor of Arts in Political Science with a minor in Law and Legal Studies and plans to attend law school in 2024.