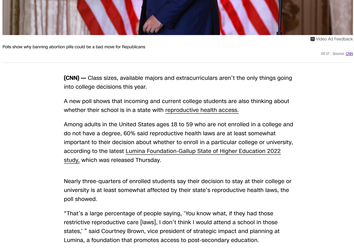


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Most adults value reproductive rights when deciding where to go to college, poll shows

By Madeline Holcombe, CNN

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(CNN) — Class sizes, available majors and extracurriculars aren't the only things going into college decisions this year.

A new poll shows that incoming and current college students are also thinking about whether their school is in a state with reproductive health access.

Among adults in the United States ages 18 to 59 who are not enrolled in a college and do not have a degree, 60% said reproductive health laws are at least somewhat important to their decision about whether to enroll in a particular college or university, according to the latest Lumina Foundation-Gallup State of Higher Education 2022 study, which was released Thursday.

Nearly three-quarters of enrolled students say their decision to stay at their college or university is at least somewhat affected by their state's reproductive health laws, the poll showed.

"That's a large percentage of people saying, 'You know what, if they had those restrictive reproductive care [laws], I don't think I would attend a school in those states,' " said Courtney Brown, vice president of strategic impact and planning at Lumina, a foundation that promotes access to post-secondary education.


Many enrolled students said reproductive health would at least somewhat affect their decision to stay at their college, the poll showed. Andy Sacks/The Image Bank RF/Getty Images

In June, the US Supreme Court's Dobbs ruling ended the federal right to an abortion. Legislation around reproductive health has since varied across the country; some states have restricted access to abortion, and others have moved to increase access.

"The reality of abortion being banned in all or most scenarios is a growing reality for many," said Brandon Crawford, an assistant professor of applied health science at Indiana University who wasn't involved in the survey.

"Although there was already significant variation in reproductive health policies across states, [Roe v. Wade] provided a 'floor' to legislation, meaning that abortion generally couldn't be banned before viability," Crawford wrote in an email. "With the Dobbs decision, that floor is gone."

Crawford and Indiana University professor of sexual health Kristen Jozkowski have been leading a multiyear study on US adults' attitudes on abortion. Much of the results don't surprise them, said Jozkowski, who also was not involved in the latest survey.

Their results have shown that abortion and reproductive health are more salient to younger generations but also point out more nuanced perspectives generally.

"We find that people may be more inclined to tolerate abortion than to necessarily support or oppose it, meaning that restricting it entirely, as many states have post-Dobbs, seems misaligned with the public sentiment," Jozkowski wrote in an email.

The new survey, which is part of Gallup and Lumina's work on pressing issues facing higher education, has gone out annually since the Covid-19 pandemic started in 2020. The data was collected from October 26 to November 17.

Questions were added with the recent developments on access to abortion, Brown said.

"If you go to a state that doesn't allow you to have autonomy over your body, then that that is not only not appealing, that is offensive to many women," she said.

More unity than division on the issue

The results show some similarity among demographics.

When asked whether they would be more likely to enroll in a college if it was in a state that allowed greater access to reproductive health services, most people said yes, Brown said.

Access to reproductive health care has become more challenging for women in the US, study shows

> "The overwhelming majority of every single subpopulation – women, men, older, younger and, most importantly, party identification – the overwhelming majority said, 'yes, greater access to reproductive health,' " she added.

That means respondents who identified as Republican as well as those who identified as Democrat showed a preference for attending a college in a state with less restriction on reproductive health. And it wasn't just the youngest cohort that felt that way, Brown said.

"The fact that 74% of Republican unenrolled adults say, 'I would consider enrolling a state that had greater access' is, I think, a really impressive number," she said.

A problem for states and individuals

Enrollment in colleges and universities has been dropping since 2017, and the problem has been getting worse – especially after the pandemic began, Brown said.

Since 2017, the US has seen a 14% decline in enrollment, she added.

The survey results may foreshadow a particular problem for states that are hostile to reproductive rights, Brown said. The data shows that students may be more likely to consider leaving their state for college or ruling out going to school in a state that otherwise would have been a contender.


The language we use to talk about pregnancy and abortion is changing. But not everyone welcomes the shift

> "That's a problem for the economic development in the states, because you want the students to learn about the local universities and then stay and get jobs in those states," Brown said. "Once they leave to go to another state to attend college or university, they're less likely to come back."

That can mean losing the educated talent that everyone is looking for, she added.

It's also a problem for the people who are already often disadvantaged in college enrollment and reproductive rights, including Black, Latino, Native American and low-income students, Brown said. "They are going to face more criminal charges, if it becomes criminal, or they don't they don't have the funds to actually leave the state and go to another state if they actually need health care.

"Basically, we're concerned about them being able to continue their college pathway if they're up against both legal as well as monetary barriers to taking care of themselves," Brown said.

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