



Catholic Social Justice in the Voting Booth

2024 Toolkit



Catholic Social Justice and the Call to Participation

Catholic social teaching is clear: **Every person has a distinct right and responsibility to participate in community and pursue the common good.** If we cannot build a society where all people can thrive together in community, justice cannot be achieved.

In a representative democracy like the United States, **the call to participation also means voting.** Catholics are called to grapple with the complexities of the two-party system and live out the values of Catholic social justice in the voting booth.

Being a Catholic Voter in a World of Partisan Politics

For years, the hierarchy has preached that to be a Catholic voter, one must be aligned with a particular political party and a particular issue. But early in his papacy, Pope Francis lamented the singular focus on one issue, stating clearly that a “new balance” was needed among the church’s teachings.

“The church’s pastoral ministry cannot be obsessed with the transmission of a disjointed multitude of doctrines to be imposed insistently,” he said. “Equally sacred,” he later wrote in his apostolic exhortation *Gaudete et Exultate*, “are the lives of the poor, those already born, the destitute, the abandoned and the underprivileged” (para. 101). In other words, **commitment to advancing the common good can be nuanced.**

A justice-minded view of the world requires **looking beyond a singular issue.** We are Catholic voters based on a multitude of issues, seeking to **center the needs of the most vulnerable** and build a world where all can choose to live in safe, healthy communities. We do not live single-issue lives.

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I do not believe that just because you're opposed to abortion, that that makes you pro-life. I think in many cases, **your morality is deeply lacking if all you want is a child born but not a child fed, not a child educated, not a child housed.** And why would I think that you don't? Because you don't want any tax money to go there. That's not pro-life. That's pro-birth. We need a much **broader conversation on what the morality of pro-life is.**

— Sister Joan Chittister, OSB



The State of Abortion Access Since *Roe* Fell

This November marks the first presidential election since the *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* case that overturned *Roe v. Wade*.

A lot has changed — some states have expanded or protected access to abortion in response to losing federally protected reproductive freedom, and some have implemented bans and restrictions that make abortion harder, if not impossible, to access.

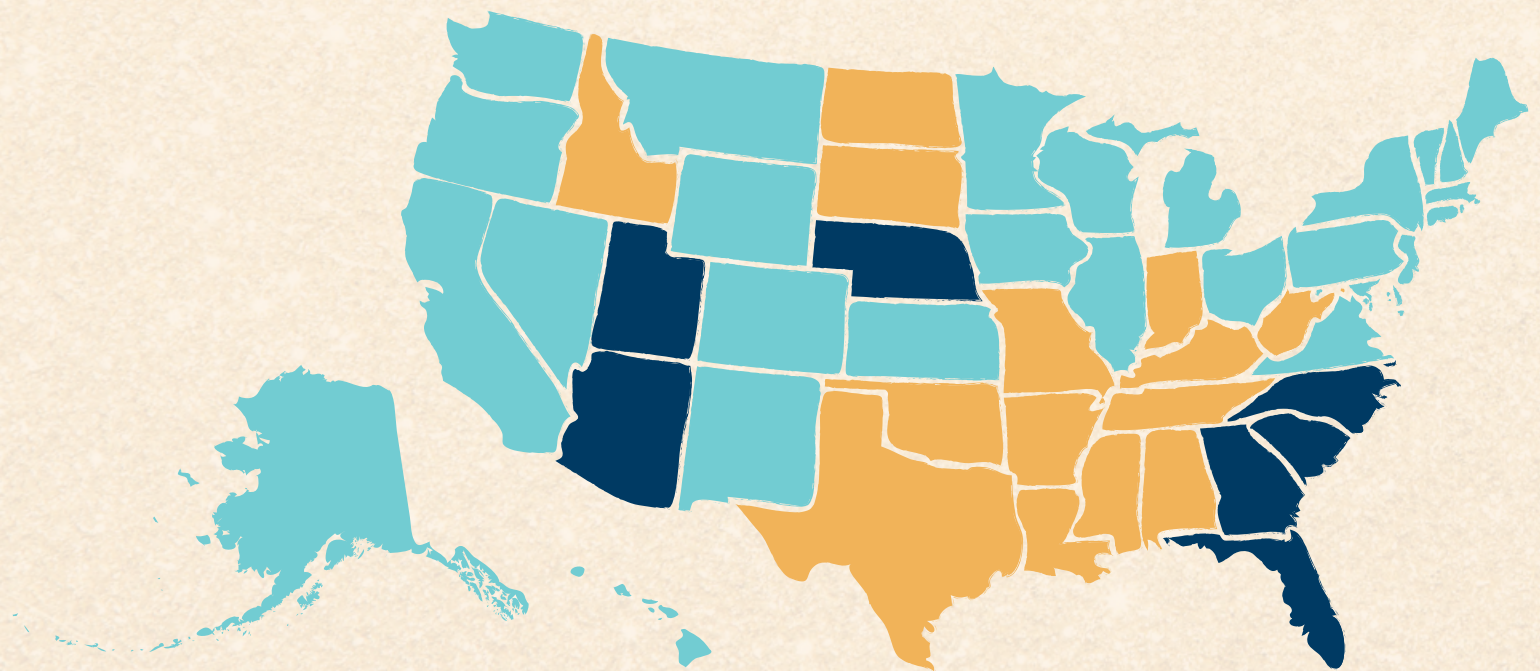
Statewide Abortion Bans and Restrictions

Since 2022, 21 states have instituted abortion bans and policies that are stricter than the standard set by *Roe v. Wade*. Fourteen states — **Alabama, Arkansas, Idaho, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, and West Virginia** — have banned abortion in nearly all circumstances, requiring patients to spend time and money to travel out of state to receive a legal abortion procedure.

An additional seven states have imposed gestational limits of 18 weeks or less.

This rarely allows people enough time to discern with their conscience and make a decision — let alone realize they are pregnant, navigate a complicated legal landscape, and make logistical decisions like finances, travel to a clinic, and time off work.

It is important to remember that we must do more than simply restore *Roe v. Wade*, because even before it was overturned, some states had implemented barriers like waiting periods, unnecessary medical procedures like ultrasounds, and counseling that still prevented people from receiving an abortion if they needed one.



States that have banned abortion in nearly all circumstances

States that have banned abortion anywhere from 6 to 18 weeks

Statewide Abortion Protections

There are states that have expanded and protected access to abortion. Six states — **California, Kansas, Kentucky, Michigan, Vermont,** and **Ohio** — voted on ballot measures addressing abortion in the state's constitution.

All the ballot measures since *Roe v. Wade* was overturned have adopted positions that would protect access to abortion or rejected provisions that would further restrict abortion. There are 11 states that also advanced legal protections for abortion access since *Dobbs* to further secure reproductive freedom.

Federal Threats and Opportunities

As states have implemented abortion laws and voters have considered ballot initiatives, the U.S. Congress has yet to pass legislation to either restore or expand upon the protections of *Roe*. At the same time, the Supreme Court continues to hear cases that further threaten our access to abortion and other human rights.

These continued legal challenges — even when there are favorable outcomes — demonstrate that *Roe v. Wade* was not the end of the anti-abortion crusade but the beginning.



Support for Abortion Access as a Catholic Voter

It is possible — even common — to be a Catholic who supports abortion rights. The stigma around abortion can make it hard for Catholics to talk about, and **the hierarchy would like us to think that most Catholics think abortion should be illegal, but that couldn't be further from the truth.** In the United States, 1 in 4 abortion patients identifies as Catholic (Guttmacher 2016), and **63% of Catholics think abortion should be legal in all or most cases** (PRRI 2023).

Catholics who believe abortion should be legal don't just exist: **We are the majority.** But if you find yourself with discomfort around abortion or even some of the messages that you have heard from parts of the pro-choice movement, you are not alone. Catholics for Choice unequivocally supports abortion access, but we created this voting guide to **help people of faith who believe abortion is a morally complex issue.**

When you go to cast your vote, you can reflect upon the full scope of politics today. **Your participation as a Catholic voter does not need to boil down to one singular issue prescribed by the hierarchy.**

Does Your State Have a Ballot Initiative That Would Expand and Protect Abortion Access?


We believe that reproductive justice and Catholic social justice are on the ballot in every election because lawmakers' decisions ultimately have a great impact on whether nurturing and sustainable environments will be available to those who are considering having children.

State constitutional amendments are at the forefront of our work to secure abortion rights in a post-*Dobbs* world, but we know that those who are fundamentally opposed to all forms of reproductive freedom will block them every step of the way. Ballot initiatives are where we see some of the most blatant examples of religious overreach by the Catholic hierarchy, who use the hard-earned contributions of parishioners to bankroll anti-abortion ballot campaigns, even though only 8% of Catholics agree with the hierarchy's position (PRRI 2023).

For example, Catholic bishops and other Catholic-affiliated groups contributed more than \$14 million to their losing campaign to defeat Issue 1, the 2023 Ohio ballot initiative. But voters overwhelmingly approved the amendment that enshrined abortion rights into Ohio's constitution, including in Catholic dioceses like Cincinnati (which voted 52% yes), Cleveland (65.7% yes), Columbus (59.7% yes), and Youngstown (56.2% yes). Similarly, in the 2022 Kansas referendum, Catholic dioceses contributed two-thirds of the opposing campaign's \$5.4 million budget to fight a losing battle.

In 2024, the following states have ballot initiatives with massive implications for reproductive rights.


Florida

 Vote **YES on Amendment 4**, the Amendment to Limit Government Interference with Abortion. The ballot was affirmed by the Florida Supreme Court on April 1, 2024, the same day that the court allowed Florida's six-week abortion ban to move forward. In November, Florida voters will have the chance to affirm that abortion decisions should be made by a person and their doctor, not the government.

Maryland

 Vote **YES on the Maryland Right to Reproductive Freedom Amendment**, which would add a new article to the state constitution to establish a right to make “decisions to prevent, continue, or end one’s own pregnancy.”

New York

 Vote **YES on the New York Equal Protection of Law Amendment**, which would add language to the constitution to prevent discrimination based on a range of identities “including sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, pregnancy, pregnancy outcomes, and reproductive healthcare and autonomy.”

Colorado


 Vote **YES on the Colorado Right to Abortion and Health Insurance Coverage Initiative**, which would recognize the right to an abortion under the Colorado Constitution and allow the procedure to be covered by health insurance plans for state and local government employees.

Missouri


 Vote **YES on Amendment 3 and support Missourians for Constitutional Freedom**.

This amendment would enshrine reproductive freedom — including abortion, birth control, and pregnancy loss care — into the state constitution while allowing lawmakers to regulate it after viability.


South Dakota

 Vote **YES on Amendment G**, the Right to Abortion Initiative, to enshrine the protections of *Roe v. Wade* into the South Dakota Constitution.


Nevada

 Vote **YES on Question 6**, which would establish the right to an abortion in Nevada until fetal viability or if the life of the pregnant person is at risk.

Arizona

 Vote **YES on Proposition 139** and support Arizona for Abortion Access. This amendment would create a “fundamental right” to obtain an abortion anytime before viability, which is an open-ended term to be determined by physicians, but is generally about 24 weeks into pregnancy.

Montana

 Vote **YES on Constitutional Initiative 128**, which would amend the state constitution to “make and carry out decisions about one’s own pregnancy, including a right to abortion.



Since many states need to collect signatures from voters to get a ballot initiative on the ballot, the above is subject to change. For the most up-to-date information, scan this QR code.

Religious Overreach & Government Interference

Your vote helps hold our church and government officials accountable and foils their attempts to undermine the democratic process. In some states, like Arkansas, constitutional amendments about abortion were blocked from the ballot even after meeting the required deadlines. In other states, Catholic Bishops are funneling millions of dollars to fight against the right to abortion.

But one thing remains unstoppable: most voters support legal abortion access.

Reflection Questions as You Head into the Voting Booth

We have prepared some reflection questions for you as you think about how to cast your vote.

How am I feeling heading into the voting booth (filling out my mail-in ballot, etc.)? Am I enthusiastic about my vote, or do I feel like I must choose between the lesser of two evils? Whose voices are influencing my decision?

How am I showing up as a Catholic in public life? How does my role as a Catholic voter support or limit the religious liberty of others who don't share my faith?

Are there any issues on the ballot I should be aware of? How can I center the needs of the most marginalized in determining how to vote?

What are the issues weighing the most heavily on my heart? How will my vote affect the issues I value most deeply as a social justice-oriented Catholic, like racism, gender inequality and economic justice? What needs is God calling me to respond to in this moment?

Which candidate do I trust to best represent my values? Have they said anything about the issues I care most about? Do they have an actionable plan for addressing the issues of justice that I prioritize?

Is there anyone else I should share my voting discernment with? How can I make this decision in community? Is there anyone else who might benefit from my insights?

How will I vote to advance the common good?



Casting Your Vote

As Catholics, we have a right and responsibility to vote to advance the common good. We may feel like we are searching for the “perfect” choice, only to come up short. But we know that it is rare to find a perfect “aligns with all my values” candidate.

Our jobs, as Catholic voters, are to vote whenever possible and participate in our democracy. If we are committed to Catholic social justice principles, we must help create safe, healthy communities that make it possible for everyone to freely choose when, whether, and how to raise their families.