

**MEMO** Published April 26, 2024 • 4 minute read

# The Economic Realities of New Mothers in Abortion-Ban States



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A post-*Roe v. Wade* America has devastating consequences for women's health care and civil liberties. But it's also a significant economic issue. Taking away a woman's right to choose widens the economic gap between women living in states that currently ban abortions and the rest of the country. That's because economic supports in abortion-ban states—from minimum wages to labor standards—is significantly weaker than in other places.<sup>1</sup>

Below, we explore new analysis from the US Census Bureau's American Community Survey to uncover how new mothers were faring in abortion-ban states at the time Roe fell. The data shows three key findings:

New mothers in abortion-ban states are already less likely to be in the labor force, more likely to be the sole provider, and more likely to live below the poverty line.

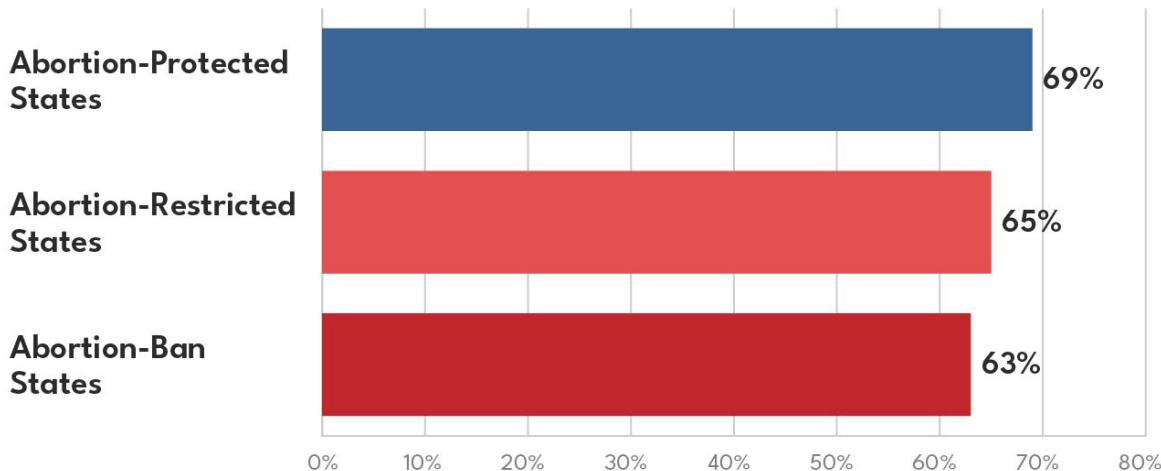
For the analysis in this memo Arizona is classified as an abortion-restricted state pending further legal clarity.

## 1. Less likely to be in the labor force.

While *Roe v. Wade* stood as the law of the land, female labor force participation rates grew 13 percentage points, from 44% in 1973 to 57% in 2022.<sup>2</sup> Now, that progress is in jeopardy since new mothers in abortion-ban states are more likely to not be in the workforce. **In 2022, 63% of new moms in abortion-ban states were in the labor force, compared to 69% of new mothers in abortion-protected states.**<sup>3</sup> And, in abortion-ban states, becoming a new mother drops the likelihood a woman will be in the labor force by over nine percentage points—higher than the seven percentage point decline seen in abortion-protected states.



### Labor Force Participation of New Mothers



**Source:** Author's analysis of American Community 1-year Survey data (2022). "Women 15 to 50 Years Who Had a Birth Past 12 Months by Marital Status and Poverty Status in the Past 12 Months." United States Bureau, American Community Survey. <https://data.census.gov/table/ACSDT1Y2022.B13010?q=B13010>. Accessed 11 Mar. 2024.

Many new mothers in abortion-ban states lack institutional support that can help them retain their jobs. No abortion-ban states have instituted comprehensive paid leave programs. And none have state refundable child tax credits.<sup>4</sup> This lack of support makes it even more difficult for women denied an abortion, who are typically younger and have lower incomes, to rejoin the workforce.<sup>5</sup>

There are also long-term implications. The landmark Turnaway study found that women who were denied an abortion were significantly less likely to be employed full-time even years later.<sup>6</sup> Access to legal abortion services also significantly impacts the employment opportunities of women of

color—with one study finding it increased the probability of Black women working at least 40 weeks a year by almost seven percentage points.<sup>7</sup>

## 2. More likely to be the sole provider.

New mothers in abortion-ban states are more likely to be single parents without a partner present. According to Census data, **26% of new mothers in abortion-ban states were single parents**, compared to 22% in abortion-protected states.<sup>8</sup>



Author's analysis of American Community 1-year Survey data "Women 15 to 50 Years Who Had a Birth Past 12 Months by Presence of or Unmarried Partner." United States Bureau, American Community Survey. <https://data.census.gov/table/ACSDT1Y2022.B13004>. 11 Mar. 2024.



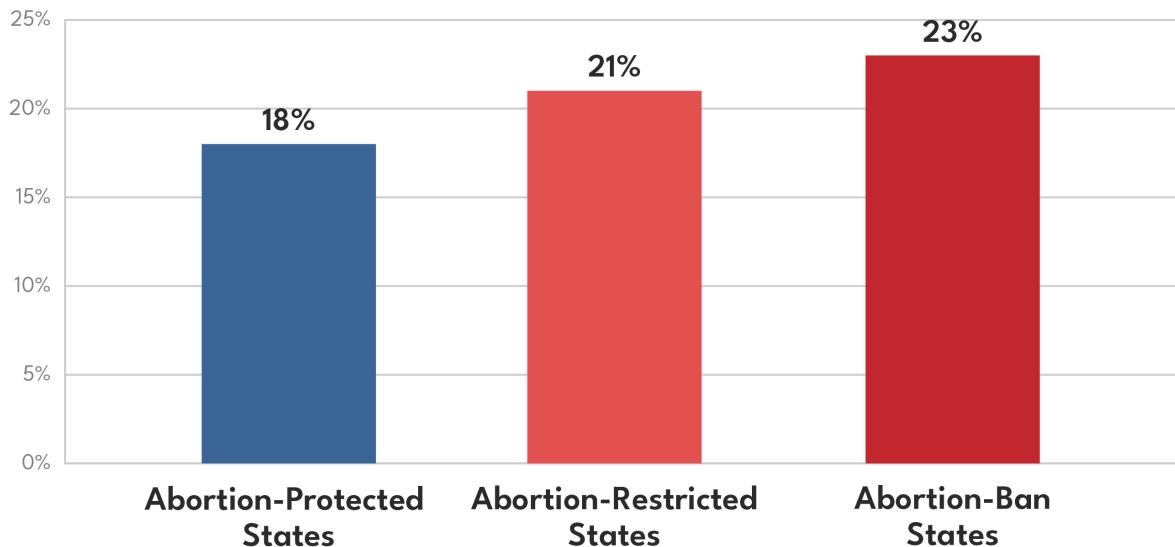
Women who have been denied abortions are already more likely to bear the economic burden alone. One study found that the majority of women denied abortions did not live with the fathers of their children, and very few received any sort of financial support.<sup>9</sup> Some women also may end up financially dependent on unsafe partners—one survey found that a third of women sought abortions because of partner-related issues such as domestic violence.<sup>10</sup>

Single mothers already face some of the steepest barriers to economic security in this country. A staggering 40% of single-mother-headed households face food insecurity, and single mothers in abortion-ban states on average have a median income of just \$32,000 a year.<sup>11</sup> Abortion bans will only heighten the hurdles single mothers in this country face—especially since many of these states have some of the weakest social safety nets in the country.<sup>12</sup>

## 3. More likely to live in poverty.

As a result of the issues above, new mothers in abortion-ban states are more likely to be in poverty. **In 2022, 23% of new mothers in abortion-ban states lived below the poverty line, compared to 18% in abortion-protected states.**<sup>13</sup> To put this into perspective, if poverty rates for new mothers in abortion-ban states were on par with abortion-protected states, 52,000 fewer new mothers (and their babies) would be living below the poverty line.

## Share of New Mothers Living in Poverty by State Type



**Source:** Source: Author's analysis of American Community 1-year Survey data (2022). "Women 15 to 50 Years Who Had a Birth Past 12 Months by Marital Status and Poverty Status in the Past 12 Months." United States Bureau, American Community Survey. <https://data.census.gov/table/ACSDT1Y2022.B13010?q=B13010>. Accessed 11 Mar. 2024.

Further, abortion bans and restrictions disproportionately hurt poorer women.<sup>14</sup> Lower-income women are five times more likely to experience unplanned pregnancy—in part because they have less access to affordable contraceptive care.<sup>15</sup> And while some women living in abortion-ban states may choose to travel to another state to receive care, those with lower incomes are the least likely to have the financial means to do so.<sup>16</sup>

Women seeking abortions are also typically already mothers—60% have at least one child already and 50% have two or more.<sup>17</sup> The fall of Roe will likely force even more women into poverty or increase the burdens of families already trying to make ends meet.

## Conclusion

The ability for a woman to access all forms of reproductive health care, including an abortion, is deeply intertwined with her economic life and future. With new mothers in abortion-ban states already facing greater barriers to financial security, abortion bans will push women living in these places further from economic opportunity.

When women lack the ability to exercise control over their bodies, it directly impacts not only their economic well-being, but also that of local, state, and national economies. With abortion rights

front and center in several state elections this fall, as well as in the presidential race, the importance of ensuring safe access to abortion cannot be understated.

## ENDNOTES

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Method Note: The definition of abortion ban, abortion restricted, and abortion protected states are based on data from "Tracking Abortion Bans Across the Country." New York Times, Updated 8 Jan. 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2022/us/abortion-laws-roe-v-wade.html>. Accessed 11 Mar. 2024.

Abortion ban states are those defined as having an outright ban on abortion. These states include: Alabama, Arkansas, Idaho, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, West Virginia.

Abortion restricted states are those where abortion restrictions seem reasonably stricter than Roe. These states include: Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Nebraska, North Carolina, South Carolina, Utah.

Abortion protected states are states where abortion is legal and if there are limits, they fall reasonably in line with what Roe. These states include: Alaska, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, District of Columbia, Hawaii, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Montana, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, Wisconsin, Wyoming.

The surveys used in this analysis provide economic data on Women aged 15 to 50 years old who had a birth in the past 12 months. For the sake of this memo we categorize the population from these surveys as "new mothers."

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