

# THE IMPACT OF BODILY AUTONOMY ON BRAND MARKETING

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## SUMMARY

Over the last few years, we've seen women's rights specifically around bodily autonomy increasingly in the news. The United Nations defines bodily autonomy as a human right and as "[\[having\] the power and agency to make choices over our bodies and futures, without violence or coercion.](#)" Given that bodily autonomy is at the core of a woman's basic rights to equality, privacy, and bodily integrity, it is critical to understand what is at stake, how consumers feel about the issue, and the implications it has for other basic human rights.

As we discuss the issue in this report, it is also important to flag that despite the media focus, bodily autonomy extends beyond abortion. For example, the right for trans people to make decisions about their bodies is a bodily autonomy right, as is the right for women to wear or not wear a hijab. It is also a bodily autonomy right for people with disabilities to make independent decisions about their lives.

As a larger conversation continues to take shape over how brands have – or should – take a stand on social issues, we sought to understand the impact that the overturning of Roe Vs. Wade has had on people's sentiments on bodily autonomy, the role that the media plays on the topic, and the moral, financial, and reputational risks that brands face by not taking a stand on this important issue.

We recognize the effects that the Dobbs vs Jackson ruling will have on women and people with uteruses who are poor, Black, Indigenous, and/or live in rural areas. The medical, financial, and emotional turmoil that these communities will face in the years to come from forced birth are well-documented ([Center for Reproductive Rights](#)). This paper seeks to expand upon the impact to media and the responsibility of the private sector.

## INTRO

As legislation at both the state and national levels regarding women's rights and bodily autonomy are coming under scrutiny and attack - both in the United States and around the world - it comes at a time when consumers expect brands to weigh in on, and be advocates for, social issues more than ever before. With questions around what this means not only for women's rights, but also other critical human rights, we live at a time when people's views are changing about their stances on human rights and what they expect brands' stances to be.

*As a result, we wanted to understand:*

1

PEOPLE'S SENTIMENTS AROUND BODILY AUTONOMY IN CONTEXT TO POLICY, MEDIA, & THE PRIVATE SECTOR.

2

THE POTENTIAL ECONOMIC FALLOUT FROM THE LOSS OF REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS.

3

THE ROLE OF MEDIA & TECHNOLOGY IN BODILY AUTONOMY.

4

IF THERE IS FINANCIAL & REPUTATIONAL RISK FOR BRANDS ON THIS TOPIC – IN ADDITION TO MORAL LIABILITIES.

5

THE FUTURE OF THE "WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT CAMPAIGN" IF HALF THE COUNTRY HAS LOST THEIR RIGHTS.

## ABOUT THE STUDY

The Women's Rights & Bodily Autonomy study was deployed through the GroupM/Choreograph proprietary online survey "Audience Origin," consisting of 2,169 respondents. The primary objective was to gather the perspectives and views of communities who are often overlooked, but most impacted by the loss of bodily rights.

While not a nationally weighted study, the research has been conducted with a sample reflecting the diversity of our society with distribution amongst socioeconomic levels, age groups, genders, and varying identities across the U.S.

Field work was conducted between August 5 – 25, 2022 in English and Spanish. Due to the sensitive nature of this research, there was legal and ethical vetting. In addition to respondents receiving disclaimers and warnings about possibly triggering questions they also had the ability to opt out of the survey at any time.





# KEY FINDINGS

## KEY FINDING No.1

# PEOPLE & THE EXPERIENCE DIVIDE

As feelings of trust in public institutions erode, and concerns around privacy grow, consumers are turning to the private sector to help them. Consumers have higher expectations of ethical behaviors from the private sector than they do the public. We found that there are two key drivers impacting how people feel about brands and how their purchase decisions are changing:

### 1 HOW A BRAND'S LEADERSHIP BEHAVES, INCLUDING THEIR POLITICAL LEANINGS & BELIEFS:

People will actively change their purchase decisions if the leader of a company is making regressive statements about bodily autonomy.

### 2 HOW BRANDS SUPPORT THEIR OWN EMPLOYEES:

People are influenced by, and care about, how brands protect their employees and actively support their people.

#### DISABLED

Disabled people were

**1.5x**

more likely to say they

**feel depressed**

#### BLACK

Black people were

**1.5x**

more likely to

**feel violated**

#### NON-BINARY

Non-binary people were

**3x**

more likely to

**feel scared**

because of the decision of Roe vs. Wade being overturned



It is also critical to note that women’s issues around bodily autonomy impact more than women. We found that certain communities (such as disabled, non-binary, and Black people) have more nuanced sentiments as they see women’s bodily autonomy being taken from them, and fear of the ripple effects that these decisions have. Disabled people were 1.5x more likely to say they feel “depressed,” Black people were 1.5x more likely to feel violated, and non-binary people were almost 3x more likely to feel scared because of Roe vs. Wade being overturned.



*Today’s battle for bodily autonomy is history repeating itself as an extension of Civil, LGBTQ+ and Disability Rights movements that have been long fought."*

Even amongst men there’s a level of empathy and understanding. Fifty-eight percent of White men feel the reversal of Roe vs. Wade is setting women and those with uteruses back. This sentiment becomes even more amplified by Black men (75%) and Hispanic men (71%), who share in the history of lacking bodily autonomy and have first-hand knowledge of the impact it has on women and those who can get pregnant in their respective communities. Men benefit from abortion access by having better access to education and economic mobility when choice is on the table - especially men of color and low-income men who are often disenfranchised with the deep systemic barriers of education and poverty.

## LEVEL OF EMPATHY & UNDERSTANDING



Source: GroupM/Mindshare Custom Survey, Women’s Rights & Bodily Autonomy, Aug 2022.

### U.S. RANKS

21

OUT OF

34

DEVELOPED  
NATIONS WHEN  
IT COMES TO  
WOMEN’S  
PEACE, HEALTH  
& SAFETY

Eliminating Roe also presents a safety concern for many respondents. Seventy-two percent of all respondents and 74% of women respondents, expressed worry over the health risks that the reversal will have on women and people with uteruses. Currently the U.S. has the highest maternal mortality rate of any wealthy nation. In addition to health safety, over 50% of respondents agreed that violence against women is a pressing issue in society. Today, the U.S. ranks 21 out of 34 developed nations when it comes to women’s peace, health, and safety according to the 2021 Georgetown Women’s Peace & Security [Index](#). This comes with a global economic cost of approximately \$1.5 trillion (to give you an idea of scale, that figure is approximately the annual GDP of Canada).



Reproductive rights, or the lack thereof, has a strong correlation to financial and economic stability. As choice is eliminated, the need for social safety nets becomes greater. Disabled respondents and those with an HHI of under \$30K highlighted the desire for government support around childcare. Our research also found that getting ahead today was a pressing issue for Black (44%) and Asian (45%) women as pay inequity continues to hold these women back compared to their White counterparts (35%).

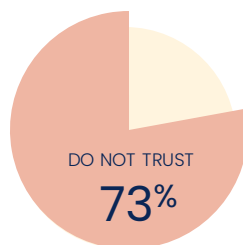
## GETTING AHEAD TODAY



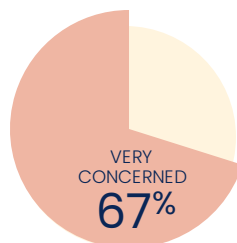
While there's an increased desire for social safety nets, almost two thirds of respondents (73%) do not trust government or elected officials making decisions about their body. The lack of trust in government is further demonstrated as one third of Americans (32%) rank major companies as a source for shaping society, comparable to the Supreme Court (32%) and higher than the federal government (31%), according to the [2022 Public Affairs Pulse Survey Report](#).

## TRUST IN GOVERNMENT MAKING DECISIONS

SUCH AS:  
VOTING RIGHTS  
GAY MARRIAGE  
ACCESS TO CONTRACEPTION



- 32% MAJOR COMPANIES SHAPING SOCIETY
- 32% SUPREME COURT
- 31% HIGHER THAN FEDERAL GOVERNMENT



- 92% NON-BINARY
- 89% LGBTQ+

The role of business in protecting the fundamental rights for all people has become increasingly imperative. Companies who support women and bodily autonomy rights are helping to keep women in the workforce, thus strengthening economic growth and innovation. In addition, businesses have better opportunities to thrive when society - inclusive of people and government - is healthy and functioning.

## KEY FINDING No.2

# MEDIA, THE LOSS OF PRIVACY, & AN EROSION OF TRUST

Our research underscored a long-held truth that the media has failed in its coverage on this issue, which intersects with the eroding trust of media at large as privacy rights are stripped back.



*1 in 4 American women and people with uteruses will have an abortion by age 45 ([Guttmacher Institute](#)),*

An element of cultural shame surrounds all reproductive health for women. Period care isn't properly shown in media, miscarriages are talked about in hushed whispers, and breastfeeding is often sexualized. It shouldn't be surprising then that media's representation of abortion has a long history of being underpinned by stigma.

A NARAL study on media coverage around abortion found that the majority of abortion coverage only exists around legislation and 65% of all articles quote a politician. Just 8% of all articles feature a real woman's story and less than 11% quote medical research. These standards of media's representation of reproductive rights reinforce that it is a highly politicized topic and not an individual medical decision. ([NARAL](#))



**65%**  
of all articles  
quote a politician

JUST **8%**  
of all articles feature a  
real woman's story

LESS > **11%**  
quote  
medical research

Source: NARAL Study

Our research reinforces the issues with these media practices. Sixty-seven percent of people surveyed stated that media played a significant role in spreading inaccurate information regarding the reversal of Roe vs. Wade. Sixty-six percent of women, 69% of men, and 77% of non-binary individuals agreed with this statement. More than half of women (63%) and men (64%), say that media has a responsibility to educate people on bodily autonomy. This belief is more prevalent among LGBTQ folks (78%).

# DON'T TRUST HIGHLY CONSERVATIVE OUTLETS'

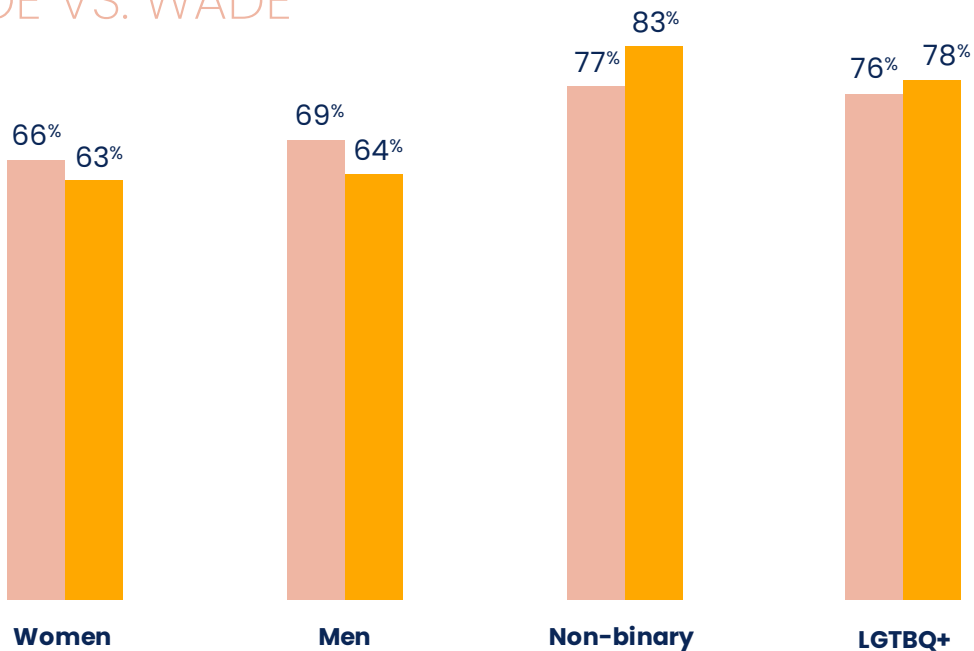
REPORTING ON BODILY AUTONOMY

= 1<sup>IN</sup> 2

ACROSS EACH OF  
THESE GROUPS



## MEDIA PLAYING A SIGNIFICANT ROLE IN SPREADING INACCURATE INFORMATION REGARDING REVERSAL OF ROE VS. WADE



MEDIA HAS THE RESPONSIBILITY  
TO EDUCATE PEOPLE ON  
BODILY AUTONOMY

THE IMPACT OF  
BODILY AUTONOMY  
ON BRAND  
MARKETING

The gap of traditional media covering bodily autonomy in an honest way has created a groundswell of Gen Z turning to their peers for information. We found that Gen Z was more likely to trust social media on the topic of bodily autonomy with 31% of them trusting the medium, whereas Boomers were the least likely with just 4% trusting the medium.

The majority of Gen Z's trust in social spaces is being driven by a confidence in the democratization that social media can offer, not in the platforms themselves where trust is very low; 57% of Gen Z surveyed believe that creators on social media speak about bodily autonomy in a more progressive way than mainstream media. As one person surveyed said,

“

*Some content creators are working for positive change – regardless of the untrustworth[i]ness of the available \*platforms\* they're forced to utilize.”*

While still relatively low trust exists across all media, the stronger confidence in social spaces poses moral, legal, and societal concerns. Individuals are actively being prosecuted for now-illegal abortions based on their social media interactions and there is growing apprehension around how health data can be weaponized. When you combine a lack of media and tech literacy with this higher confidence in social spaces, it means that today's brands and marketers must contend with even greater moral challenges around the issues of data ethics and online privacy.

## GEN Z

more likely to trust social media on the topic of bodily autonomy with

**31%** of them trusting the medium

## BOOMERS

least likely with just

**4%** trusting the medium



KEY FINDING No.3

# BRANDS & THE DEATH OF THE EMPOWERMENT CAMPAIGN

There is ample third-party research that demonstrates the link between reproductive rights and a healthy economy. People won't apply for jobs in states with abortion bans ([Perry Udem](#)), women become poorer, national GDP would be higher, and pre-Dobbs state-level restrictions cost economies billions a year ([Institute for Women's Policy Research](#)).



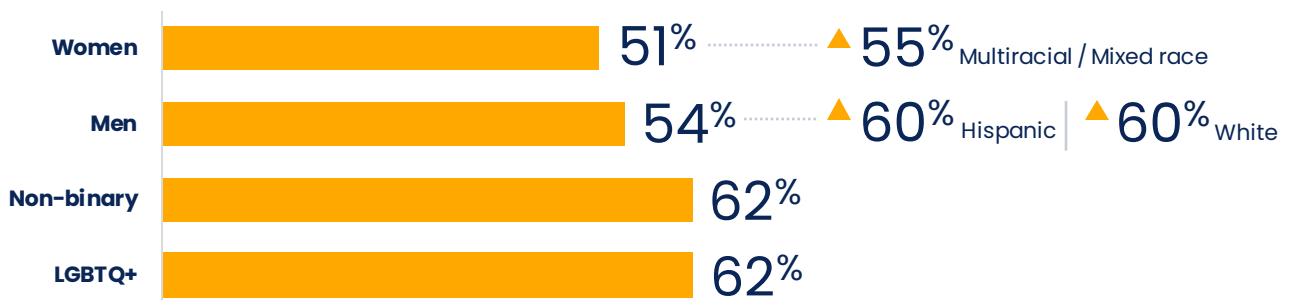
*Simply put, reproductive rights are good for people and they are good for businesses."*

Our data bolsters this point that there is a direct correlation of reproductive rights with business growth. The Supreme Court's decision on Dobbs vs. Jackson came in June 2022, yet by the time we surveyed people in August, already 25% of all respondents said they were changing their purchasing decisions because of Roe. Of note in particular, The LGBTQ+ community (43%), Hispanic men (41%), and non-binary individuals as a whole (46%) are most likely to say **they were changing their purchasing decisions** because of the overturning of Roe.

In regard to the reversal of Roe vs. Wade:

## DON'T TRUST BRAND STATEMENTS

THEY FEEL THEY'RE INAUTHENTIC AND JUST WANT MORE CONSUMERS





When it comes to the intersection of brand loyalty and bodily autonomy rights, the most influencing factors are leadership and company policy:

32%

of all respondents would **stop purchasing from a brand** if their CEO made regressive statements about bodily autonomy

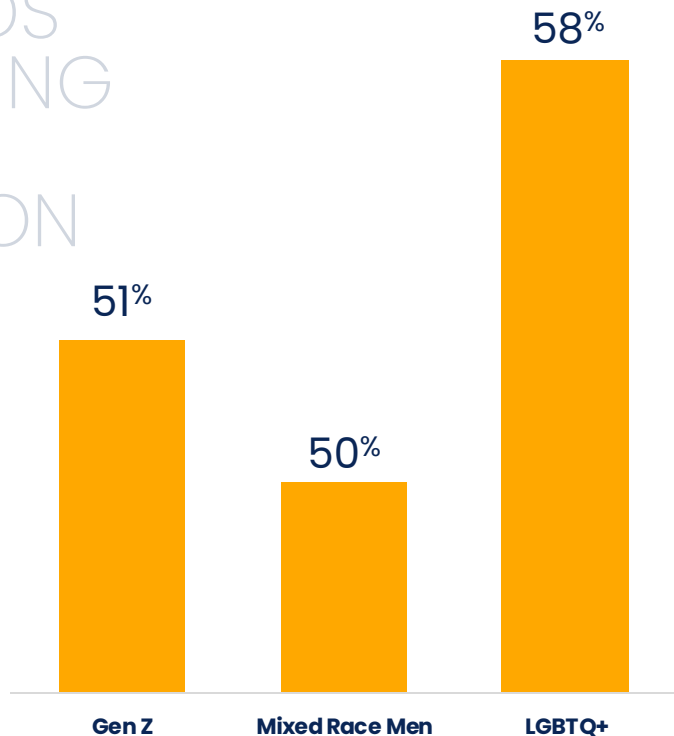
40%

of all respondents believe **brands should support employees through organizational policy**



Purpose marketing must evolve to be more intentional to meet the current state of legislative regression.

WANT BRANDS  
TO BE WORKING  
WITH NGOs  
AND ABORTION  
ADVOCACY  
GROUPS



## WHAT THIS MEANS FOR MARKETERS

*Regardless of what you think of bodily autonomy, research demonstrates when societies have more reproductive rights in their laws, economies do better."*

And most importantly – the [United Nations deems bodily autonomy a fundamental human right](#). No matter where you stand on certain issues as a marketer, as a brand, remaining silent can be costly, because bodily autonomy is a core issue that many people - women, men, LGBTQ+, communities of color, people with disabilities, and others - care deeply about according to our research.

Today, the business and private sector hold as much - and in some cases more - influence as government branches. The benefit to business leaders in ensuring constitutional freedom also aligns with having a healthy business ecosystem. Business thrives and ultimately does better, when people in a society believe that their democracy and government is working for them versus against them. Supporting democracy and constitutional freedoms puts businesses in a positive position.





## DEFINE YOUR BRAND VALUES.

Let it be stated that not every brand can or should take a stand on bodily autonomy or get involved in every human rights issue. However, the reality is that people's fears will reshape the marketing landscape requiring brands to get crystal clear on their values. Regardless of how your brand has behaved in the past, you can begin to make measurable and consistent change. It is critical, though, to start at defining your values and then mapping how they align with real societal issues.



## DON'T TALK ABOUT IT: BE ABOUT IT.

The reality of “empowerment” today is that many people have fewer rights than their parents did. Using feminism, racial, and queer advocacy as a marketing tool requires us to re-dimensionalize advertising with a purpose-focused lens. Brands have the economic, political, and social power to move the needle on issues – and an ad message may be tone deaf at best and cancelable at worst. Instead, brands need to find tangible action-based initiatives (e.g., investing in education, empowerment, and action through their investments, employee health offerings, the politicians they support, working with feminist media, etc.) that deliver real support and act with intention behind their purposes.



## TAKE ETHICS SERIOUSLY IN YOUR MEDIA & DATA STRATEGY

Privacy on the internet has never been assured in the information economy, while data has been weaponized against marginalized groups. The overturn of Roe Vs Wade further compounds privacy dynamics. Thus, the loss of privacy in the public sector will have far-reaching consequences. Brands have an immense responsibility to be vigilant and constant in re-evaluating the changing legislation to ensure compliance around the issues of data ethics and online privacy.

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