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Direct Democracy and Candidate Choice: Evidence from Abortion Ballot Measures

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Abstract

Do ballot measures generate spillover effects on voters' choice of candidates? We examine this question by studying 16 abortion ballot measures in the 2022 and 2024 US general elections. Nationwide electoral returns show that the 2022 measures aided Democrats, but the 2024 measures aided Republicans. These effects are not explained by turnout. Instead, ballot measures incentivize voters to select candidates along margins other than the ballot measure issue. Survey data from 2024 show that moderate voters who preferred abortion rights and had the chance to vote on abortion ballot measures became more likely to vote Republican.

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1 Introduction

How does the opportunity to exercise direct democracy on a contentious issue affect the voting behavior of citizens? Ballot measures can have spillover effects on a voter's choice of candidates when the voter's preference on the ballot measure issue is ideologically misaligned with their other policy preferences. These misaligned voters may pursue ideological consistency by choosing a candidate who aligns with their own position on the ballot measure. However, they may also choose to separate the ballot issue from their choice of candidate and select a candidate whose other policy positions align with their own, despite misalignment on the ballot measure policy. As such, the partisan beneficiary of ballot measure spillover effects is both theoretically ambiguous and issue specific.

This paper empirically evaluates the spillover effects of abortion ballot measures (ABMs) in 2022 and 2024 on elections for the US House of Representatives and the US President. In June 2022, the Supreme Court overturned federal protections for abortion in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health,* deciding that, "The Constitution does not confer a right to abortion; *Roe* and *Casey* are overruled; and the authority to regulate abortion is returned to the people and their elected representatives." Since this decision, many states have turned to direct democracy to protect or restrict abortion access by including measures related to abortion on election ballots. In 2022 and 2024 combined, over $404 million was spent on campaigning about ABMs nationwide (Ballotpedia, n.d.-a; -b). As such, these measures are likely highly salient to potential voters and may affect voter behavior and thus the outcomes of same-ballot candidate contests. By focusing our analysis on a series of same-issue ballot measures within a narrow window of time, we can isolate the mechanisms via which ballot measures generate spillover effects.

Our empirical design uses a two-way fixed effects strategy to compare states with ABMs to states without, relative to their typical difference in election years prior to *Dobbs.* This analysis produces surprising results. We first confirm the results of Gardner, McCrary, and Spencer (2025), showing that the 2022 ABMs had no effect on turnout and decreased the Republican vote margin in US House elections. These findings support conventional wisdom that ABMs aid Democrats (Schnell, 2024). However, our results for the 2024 ABMs counter this perception. In 2024, states with ABMs experienced a 4.8-percentage point increase in Republican vote margin in House races and a 3.2 percentage point increase in Republican vote margin in the presidential race. These

results are robust to multiple sample definitions, concerns about pre-trends, and a range of policy, election, and demographic controls.

We evaluate possible mechanisms to explain the unexpected results in 2024. Perhaps it is the case that support for abortion access declined between 2022 and 2024. If this were the case, then there would be fewer supporters of abortion rights to mobilize in 2024, decreasing potential new votes for Democrats. Though some measures to protect abortion failed to pass in 2024 for the first time, we use an Oaxaca-Blinder decomposition to show that support for abortion rights increased from 2022 to 2024 after accounting for the different demographic and partisan composition of states voting on ABMs across the two elections.

We provide evidence that the positive ABM spillover effects for Republicans in 2024 were due to moderate voters who supported abortion rights voting to protect abortion access while simultaneously voting for Republican candidates. Using cast vote records from Maryland, we find that 13.47% of voters simultaneously voted for Donald Trump and to protect abortion rights.[1] Using electoral returns from 2024, we descriptively show that counties with a higher share of votes to protect abortion access experienced increases in Republican vote margins relative to previous elections. We support this descriptive evidence with results from the Cooperative Election Study. We analyze the effects of being able to vote on an ABM on reported votes for both House and presidential elections relative to non-ABM states and prior elections. Consistent with our main analysis, we find that respondents in ABM states in 2024 were 4.5 percentage points more likely to report voting for the Republican House candidate and 4.2 percentage points more likely to report voting for the Republican presidential candidate. We then disaggregate the sample according to respondents' self-reported ideology and opinion on abortion access. We find that the increase in Republican votes in ABM states is entirely concentrated among moderate voters who believe abortion should always be allowed.

These findings are consistent with ballot measures producing vote switching. In 2024, moderate voters who would have otherwise voted for Democratic candidates to protect abortion rights instead voted to protect abortion rights on the ballot measure while also voting for Republican candidates to align with their other policy preferences. This vote switching behavior in 2024 was likely aided by Republican candidates increasingly distancing themselves from the abortion debate in 2024 (Meisels, 2025), allowing these voters to minimize the cognitive

[1] In comparison, only 3.47% of voters simultaneously voted for Kamala Harris and to restrict abortion rights.

dissonance costs of voting for a candidate who does not support abortion. In contrast, suggestive evidence from 2022 indicates that voters were more likely to pursue ideological consistency around the salient ballot measure issue by aligning their ballot measure and candidate vote. This could be because moderate voters in 2022 who supported abortion were unwilling to vote for Republican candidates that, at the time, were more vocal in their support of abortion restrictions (Meisels, 2025).

This paper contributes to our understanding of voter choice under direct democracy. It is theoretically uncertain whether a ballot measure will make the issue more or less important in voters' choice of candidate. Some models argue that ballot measures help "define the electoral agenda," priming how voters evaluate candidates (Nicholson, 2005; Donovan et al., 2008). A ballot measure would thus make the measure issue more salient to voters when selecting a candidate. Increased salience of the measure issue may also increase the cognitive dissonance costs of voting for a candidate who does not align with one's stance on abortion access.[2] Others note that candidates represent a "bundle" of policy positions, and ballot measures enable voters to "unbundle" that policy from their choice of candidate (Besley and Coate, 2008; Schreiner and Stutzer, 2026). This would suggest that the ballot measure issue is less important in candidate selection when voting on the issue directly. Which effect dominates may depend on how prominently contentious ballot measure issues are featured in candidates' campaign platforms, as well as voters' need for cognitive consistency in their choices. Thus, the direction of ballot measures' spillover effects is theoretically uncertain and dependent on the specific issue and political environment in which voters exercise direct democracy. We are the first to our knowledge to empirically test the competing mechanisms via which ballot measures can affect candidate choice. Our empirical evidence is supportive of both mechanisms in explaining contrasting effects across 2022 and 2024.

This paper also builds on a large literature analyzing ballot measures in US elections (see for a review Matsusaka (2005), Smith and Tolbert (2007), and Childers and Binder (2016)). Relative to existing literature, we are the first to provide direct empirical evidence from election returns, cast vote records, and survey data showing that ballot measures induce voters to select

[2] Evidence on voters' need for cognitive consistency has been mixed: Brunner et al. (2011) find that positive economic shocks have a significant effect on non-economic ballot issues, while Coury (2023) finds that wildfire exposure does not meaningfully affect voters' support for non-redistributive, non-environmental policies.

candidates with whom they are misaligned on the ballot measure issue. Furthermore, our empirical results support the theoretical ambiguity of ballot measures' spillover effects, even within a single issue over a short period of time.

By focusing specifically on ABMs, we also contribute to the growing literature on the downstream effects of abortion policies. In addition to the fertility effects of abortion access (Dench et al., 2024; Myers, 2021; Myers and Ladd, 2020; Lindo et al., 2020, Myers, 2017), abortion policies have been demonstrated to affect health, socioeconomic, and family outcomes (Noghanibehambari et al., 2025; Crowe et al., 2025; Durrance et al., 2025; Gardner, 2024; Jones and Pineda-Torres, 2024; Durrance et al., 2024; Farin et al., 2024, Miller et al., 2023). Following a major change in the abortion access landscape post-*Dobbs*, we demonstrate how voting behavior changes when individuals have an opportunity to vote directly on access to abortion.

Ballot measures and ABMs specifically are of continuing importance in the current US political landscape. Four states will vote on ABMs in the November 2026 election (Ballotpedia, n.d. -c). The recent prominence of ABMs and other contentious ballot measure issues has led to a series of ballot measures related to direct democracy specifically. In August 2026, Missouri voted down a ballot measure that would make it more difficult to pass future measures (Ballotpedia, n.d. -d). In November 2026, at least five states will vote on ballot measures that would limit direct democracy (Ballotpedia, n.d. -e). For example, Idaho will vote on a ballot measure to prohibit citizen-initiated ballot measures that would legalize or decriminalize marijuana and narcotics. Our findings indicate that these ballot measures, and indeed, any future restrictions or expansions of direct democracy, can have spillover effects on candidate elections. We show that ABMs have had effects on congressional elections by a magnitude large enough to determine key races, and as a result, partisan majority in the House of Representatives.

However, this paper also highlights the need for careful empirical analysis of the spillover effects of ballot measures. Spillover effects in one election and on one issue should not be presumed to extend to other settings. This is especially notable in the case of ABMs. Current political strategy assumes that abortion is a winning issue for Democrats. Two days after the November 2022 election *The New York Times* headlined, "How Democrats used the abortion debate to hold off a red wave. (Lerer and Dias, 2022)" In the lead-up to the 2024 election, the Associated Press headlined, "Democrats hope Harris' bluntness on abortion will lead to 2024 wins (Long et al., 2024)" and "Abortion is on the ballot in nine states and motivating voters across the

US (Fernando et al., 2024)." Our results contrast with these prevailing opinions. In our prior work, we show that the *Dobbs* ruling and the abortion debate in general did not help Democratic candidates in 2022. Instead, Democratic advantages were concentrated in ABM states (Gardner et al., 2025). In this paper, we build on that research and show that even the Democratic advantage on ABMs is uncertain, and in fact, ABMs can decrease votes for Democratic candidates.

2 Abortion Ballot Measures

Since June 2022, citizens in 16 states have voted on ballot measures to amend their state's constitutional stance on abortion. Fourteen of these states had ABMs appear on the general election ballots in November 2022 and November 2024.[3] These ABMs differ along multiple dimensions, including (i) the process via which the measure was included on the ballot, (ii) whether the measure would protect or restrict abortion access in the state, (iii) the specific wording of the constitutional amendment, and (iv) the vote share needed to pass the measure. Table 1 describes the characteristics of these ABMs and their outcomes.

As shown in Table 1, most of these ABMs would protect the right to abortion in the state if passed. Three states voted on measures to restrict abortion. In 2022, Kentucky's ballot measure would have amended the constitution to say that there is no right to abortion in the state. Also in 2022, Montana voted on a "born alive" ballot measure that did not explicitly restrict abortion but was related to the debate around abortion by granting legal personhood rights to infants and fetuses born at any stage of development. Both measures failed to pass. In 2024, two competing measures appeared on the ballot in Nebraska – a measure to restrict and a measure to protect abortion. The measure to restrict abortion received a greater vote share (54.95% versus 49.01%) and was passed into law.

The ABMs that would protect abortion also varied in their wording and effects. For example, New York's ABM did not explicitly use the word "abortion," but banned discrimination based on "pregnancy outcomes, and reproductive healthcare and autonomy." Other states did not vote on unrestricted legal access to abortion but restored the pre-*Roe* legal status of abortion rights by guaranteeing a right to abortion up until fetal viability.

The outcomes of ABMs reflect a preference among voters to protect abortion rights. Of the 16 ABMs studied in this paper, all but 3 resulted in greater or reaffirmed access to abortion.

[3] Kansas voted on an ABM in an August 2022 primary election. Ohio voted on an ABM in November 2023.

Nebraska, as mentioned above, voted to restrict abortion in 2024 after voting on competing measures. A 2024 measure to protect abortion in South Dakota failed to pass after receiving only 41.41% of the vote, leaving the existing abortion ban in effect. In 2024, Florida also voted on a measure to protect abortion access that would have removed their existing 6-week abortion ban. While support for the measure received 57.17% of the vote, Florida requires that ballot measures receive a 60% vote share to pass, and the 6-week ban remained in place.

2a Did Support for Abortion Rights Decline Between 2022 and 2024?

The failure of 3 ballot measures to protect abortion in 2024 could reflect waning support for abortion rights. Across all ABM states in 2022 and 2024, 62.7% of voters voted to protect abortion in 2022 versus 60.2% in 2024. Despite three of the 2024 measures resulting in restricted abortion rights, the vote share gap across the two years is a modest 2.5 percentage points. However, even that gap may not reflect decreasing support for abortion rights since the demographic composition of the population voting on ABMs also varied across the two elections. It is unclear whether lesser support for abortion rights in 2024 is attributable to lower support within demographic groups or a shift towards a voter base with lower support ex ante.[4] We evaluate this with the following Oaxaca-Blinder decomposition,

$$\bar{Y}_{2024} - \bar{Y}_{2022} = [\beta_{2024}(\bar{X}_{2024} - \bar{X}_{2022})] + [(\beta_{2024} - \beta_{2022})\,\bar{X}_{2022}] \quad (1),$$

where $\bar{Y}$ is the mean vote share to protect abortion rights across counties in ABM states in the given year and $\bar{X}$ represents the mean of demographic characteristics.[5] The first term represents the "explained" portion of the gap in vote share to protect abortion rights across 2022 and 2024

[4] We might also wonder whether the outcomes and spillover effects of ABMs depended on whether a state's ABM was expected to have tangible effects on abortion access. However, it is difficult to classify, without the benefit of hindsight, the anticipated effects of an ABM on abortion access. For example, New York's ABM may now be viewed as inconsequential given abortion was already legal in the state in 2024. However, voters in New York may have viewed the ABM as critical for protecting abortion access in the state in the event Trump won the presidency and implemented a nationwide ban. Similarly, Florida's ABM may have legalized abortion in the state if passed. However, it is possible Florida's legislature would have found a way to circumvent that outcome, as was the case with Florida's Amendment 4 – restoring voting rights to felons – in 2018 (Brennan Center for Justice, 2024). We cannot know how voters perceived these possible scenarios and the relative importance of an ABM on their state's abortion policy.

[5] We define mean vote share to protect abortion rights consistently across states such that Y is share "yes" in states with measures that would protect abortion and share "no" in states with measures that would restrict abortion. Since Nebraska had two ABMs in 2024, we use votes on the ABM to protect abortion.

and the second term represents the "unexplained" portion. In other words, the first term is the portion of the vote share gap that is due to varying demographic composition of ABM states across 2022 and 2024, holding fixed voting patterns within these groups. The second term is the portion of the vote share gap attributable to changing vote patterns by demographic group. Results are shown in Table 2.

After accounting for differing demographic composition (the explained portion), we find that support for abortion rights was 0.03 percentage points *higher* in 2024 compared to 2022. 161 percent of the gap across the two elections can be explained by the fact that the population voting on ABMs in 2024 was more conservative, ex ante, than those voting on the measure in 2022, as measured by 2020 presidential vote margin. However, there was changing support for abortion protections among some demographic groups. For example, -12% of the gap is explained by a larger population share female in 2024. Holding fixed the effect that women voters had in 2022, we would have expected higher female population share in 2024 to narrow the gap between the two elections, not widen it. While these results do provide evidence of waning support for abortion rights within some demographic groups, the effect is not large enough to offset the ex-ante partisan lean.

Overall, the difference in vote share to protect abortion rights in 2022 and 2024 is explained by the differing demographic composition of ABM states across the two years, not waning support for abortion. Both the raw gap in vote share across 2022 and 2024 and the decomposition exercise confirm that overall support for abortion rights was roughly constant from 2022 to 2024.[6] Thus, in evaluating the spillover effects of ABMs we assume that the population's position on abortion rights is constant across the two elections.

3 Effect of Ballot Measures on Election Outcomes

3a Theoretical Relationship

ABMs may affect the outcomes of candidate contests in same-ballot elections via changes in behavior on both the extensive margin (whether to vote) and the intensive margin (how to vote). If ABMs produce differential turnout among people that are more likely to vote for one party, then

[6] Further confirming this pattern, national survey data from the Pew Research Center shows that 62% of the population agreed that abortion should be legal in all or most cases as of July 2022, compared to 63% in 2024. (Pew Research Center, 2026). There was only a 1 percentage point increase in agreement from April to July 2022 following the *Dobbs* ruling.

the outcomes of candidate contests may change. Donovan et al. (2009) argue that ballot measures make elections more salient to low-propensity voters, particularly in midterm years, leading to an increase in turnout. However, evidence on turnout effects in both midterm and presidential years is mixed (Smith, 2001; Tolbert et al., 2001; Garretson, 2014). Ballot measures may also decrease turnout. Augenblick and Nicholson (2016) show that voters are more likely to abstain from voting on a specific ballot item when it appears further down on the ticket. While they study choice fatigue in relation to the number of items on a ballot, it is also possible that heavy campaigning around a ballot measure can create a similar type of election fatigue and discourage turnout altogether. As such, the effects of ABMs on turnout, and as a result partisan vote margin, are theoretically ambiguous.

Vote switching, or changes on the intensive margin, in response to ABMs also have theoretically ambiguous effects on election outcomes. First, it could be that ABMs increase the salience of abortion such that people become more likely to vote for candidates whose views on abortion align with their own. Similarly, if abortion is more salient, then the cognitive cost of voting for a candidate with a differing abortion stance increases. We call the increased tendency to align one's candidate choice with their abortion opinion "vote alignment." For example, a hypothetical swing voter who supports abortion access but whose other policy preferences lean conservative may, in the absence of an ABM, vote for a Republican candidate. However, if ABMs increase the salience of abortion and, given traditional party positioning, the Democratic candidate supports abortion rights, this hypothetical voter might instead vote for the Democrat. This form of "vote alignment" is likely to increase Democratic votes and decrease Republican votes.[7]

While vote alignment predicts that ABMs would benefit Democratic candidates, ABM-induced vote switching may favor Republicans through a separate mechanism we call "vote separation." By giving voters the opportunity to directly express their policy preference on abortion, ballot measures may allow voters to separate the specific measure issue from their choice of partisan candidate. In this case, a conservative-leaning swing voter who supports abortion access may, in the absence of an ABM, vote for the Democratic candidate to protect abortion rights.

[7] We might imagine a hypothetical swing voter who instead is opposed to abortion rights, but whose other policy preferences lean liberal. However, this voter is rare in the population. 85% of Democrats and those who lean Democrat believe that abortion should be legal in all or most cases and are aligned with their party's position on abortion. In comparison only 59% of Republicans are aligned with their party's position on abortion: 41% of Republicans and those who lean Republican believe abortion should be legal in all or most cases (Nadeem, 2024).

However, an ABM allows them to support abortion rights directly while concurrently voting for a Republican candidate whose position on other issues better matches their own ideology.[8] In contrast to vote alignment, vote separation in response to ABMs is likely to decrease Democratic votes and increase Republican votes.

Existing research and news coverage support our theory of competing vote alignment and vote separation mechanisms associated with ABMs. Meisels (2025) shows that Democrats became more likely to campaign on abortion in 2024, while Republican candidates increasingly obfuscated their position on the issue. This would be consistent with Democratic candidates seeking to produce vote alignment and Republican candidates seeking to produce vote separation. In Florida in 2024, Republican women organized to support abortion rights on the ABM while simultaneously promoting Republican candidates (Carter, 2024; Sarkissian and Leonard, 2024). Also in 2024, the Trump campaign's political director told reporters that ABMs may allow voters to support abortion rights and then vote for the president based on other factors (Durkee, 2024). We test whether these anecdotes of vote separation in 2024 are supported by evidence from empirical data on election returns and survey data from the Cooperative Election Study.

3b Empirical Analysis

We use county-level election returns to create three main outcome variables to measure voting behavior: voter turnout (total votes / voting age population), Republican vote margin (Republican vote share - Democratic vote share) in House elections, and, in presidential years, Republican vote margin in the presidential election (Leip, 2025).[9] We compare consistently across midterm and presidential elections: 2024 election outcomes are compared to presidential elections in 2012, 2016, and 2020; 2022 election outcomes are compared to midterm elections in 2010 and 2014. We exclude 2018 from the midterm election comparison as it was the only midterm election in our sample with a sitting Republican president. Existing research shows that voting behavior in

[8] "Vote separation" is closely related to "issue unbundling" highlighted by Belsey and Coate (2008). The authors show that allowing citizens to initiate a ballot referendum on a policy issue can force parties to align more closely with the majority of voters on that policy issue. Even the *threat* of a citizens' initiative increases congruence between policy outcomes and public opinion. As noted by Schreiner and Stutzer (2026), this effect should only be present for candidates who otherwise would set the policy themselves. In the case of ABMs, this would be state-level representatives, as *Dobbs v. Jackson* left abortion policy to the states. We show that ballot measures can more broadly affect candidate choice, even federal candidates who would not otherwise determine the ABM policy.

[9] We limit our analysis to House and presidential election results. We do not consider Senate elections, since Senate elections occur only every 6 years and would exclude many counties from our analysis.

midterm elections tends to favor the non-presidential party (Tufte, 1975; Charles and Stephens, 2013; Jacobson, 2023).

We estimate the effects of ABMs using the following two-way fixed effects equation,

$$Y_{ct} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 * I(ABM_{ct}) + \beta_2 X_{ct} + \delta_{dt} + \gamma_s + \epsilon_{ct} \quad (2),$$

where Y_{ct} is county-year turnout or Republican vote margin. $I(ABM_{ct})$ indicates whether the county is in a state with a post-*Dobbs* ABM in that year. β_1 is the coefficient of interest and describes the effect of having the opportunity to vote on an ABM on election outcomes. γ_s are state fixed effects and δ_{dt} are census division-by-year fixed effects. Controlling for division-by-year fixed effects nets out any nationwide effects, such as changes in voting patterns in specific election years due to characteristics of presidential candidates, as well as differential regional trends in political opinions and behavior as documented in Cooper et al. (2025).

We also control for state-by-year and county-by-year factors with X_{ct}. In every regression, we control for whether the House election is uncontested with a Republican or Democratic candidate. In specifications with controls, we add a series of state-by-year controls, including whether the state was a presidential battleground in the presidential year analysis, whether there is a Senate election in the state that year, the number of other statewide ballot measures in each state's election, indicators for abortion-related ballot measures occurring in elections prior to *Dobbs,* and a categorical variable describing the abortion policy environment in each state at the time of the election.[10] These categories include whether abortion was banned, at risk of a ban, or safe from bans by nature of state law or legislative composition. We also control for a wide range of county-by-year characteristics, including the change in distance to the nearest abortion provider in the preceding year from the Myers Abortion Facility Database (Myers, 2026) and county-by-year demographic and socioeconomic characteristics.[11] For turnout, we weight by voting age population. For vote margin, we weight by total ballots cast. Standard errors are clustered at the state level.

[10] We categorize states' abortion policy environment following the method in Gardner et al. (2025) and making use of data from *The New York Times* abortion policy tracker (McCann and Schoenfield Walker, 2025).

[11] Demographic and SES controls include poverty rate, unemployment rate, real median income, population density, and population share college educated, white, Black, Hispanic, female, aged 18-29, 30-49, 50-64, and 65 plus.

Despite the inclusion of division-by-year fixed effects, we might be concerned that differential regional trends in political behavior are confounding results. To address this concern, our empirical analysis compares estimates across three geographic samples shown in Figure 1. First, we estimate equation (2) using data for the entire country.[12] Second, we re-estimate equation (2) using a control group comprised of states that directly border ABM states. Third, we estimate a version of equation (2) that makes use of the geography of Designated Media Areas (DMAs).

DMAs determine by location what advertisements are shown on broadcast and cable television. Using DMAs to select counties for our third sample has two main benefits. First, we maintain the benefits of a border county analysis such that the treated and control counties are geographically close and demographically similar, but we include a larger sample than if we limited the sample to only those counties on state border lines. Second, the geography of DMAs creates a natural experiment that allows us to control for the effects of television advertising in our analysis. The political ads that a voter sees on television will depend on their DMA, which can cross state boundaries. A voter in a border county may see ads related to an ABM in the neighboring state, even though they are not voting on an ABM in their own state. As such, a voter's exposure to TV ads on ABMs is exogenously determined by their DMA. While this approach does not allow us to control for political ads on social media, it does capture a large share of political advertising. In the 2024 election, the Wesleyan Media Project concluded that, "Television ads continue to dominate federal and statewide election campaigns," with over $4.5 billion spent in television and radio advertising (2024). Further, while advertisers can select more granular geographies for streaming advertisements, DMA can also be used to determine targeting of streaming ads.[13]

To create a comparison group of similar counties with identical television advertising, sample 3 includes only border counties in and next to ABM states that share a DMA. All counties in the sample are exposed to the same TV advertisements, including possible ABM campaign ads, but only counties within ABM states are "treated" and get to vote on the measure. For this analysis, we re-estimate equation (2) using DMA-by-year fixed effects instead of census division-by-year

[12] We exclude Alaska and Connecticut due to changing county geographic and congressional district definitions. We also exclude Kansas in the midterm analysis due to their August 2022 ABM.

[13] As of August 24, 2026, Netflix's advertising webpage stated: "Find audiences wherever they are. Where your viewers are located shapes what they see. From quiet suburbs to places best left undiscovered, Geo-targeting lets you connect with audiences by country, state, DMA, region or ZIP code." https://advertising.netflix.com/en-us/targeting#demographics-location

fixed effects. In addition to creating a more comparable control group, the DMA analysis allows us to isolate the effects of being able to vote on an ABM from being exposed to television advertising related to ABMs. Similar estimates across the three samples would suggest that results are robust to more narrowly defined control groups and that estimates are driven by the direct effects of having the opportunity to vote on an ABM, not the related television advertising. However, we note that as we restrict the sample, we also lose statistical power. A coefficient of a similar magnitude with lesser significance in the DMA sample may just reflect lower power in that sample.

We also test whether results in the full sample are robust to dropping observations with uncontested House races, controlling for whether the House race includes an incumbent candidate, controlling for whether the House race is considered competitive (Cook Political Report, 2026) and including county fixed effects as opposed to state fixed effects. For the midterm year analysis, we also document the robustness of results to including 2018 and to dropping states with ABMs that would restrict abortion access. For the presidential year analysis, we also show the robustness of results to dropping Nebraska, which had two ABMs, and dropping states that had ABMs in 2022. Finally, to assess whether state and division-by-year fixed effects are successful in controlling for differences between ABM states and control states, we conduct the covariate balance test proposed by Pei, Pischke, and Schwandt (2019).

3c Results

We find contrasting effects of ABMs across the 2022 and 2024 elections. Table 3 shows results for turnout. In 2022, we find no effect of ABMs on turnout across any sample, regardless of the inclusion of controls (Panel A). In 2024, counties in ABM states see a statistically significant decrease in turnout relative to controls (Panel B). Coefficients show an approximately 1.8 percentage point decline in turnout and are similar in magnitude across the three samples, though significance in the DMA sample relies on the inclusion of controls (columns (5) and (6)). While statistically significant, the magnitude of the turnout effects is economically modest. We find a 1.8 percentage point decline on a base of 57.2 percent turnout rate in presidential years.[14]

[14] For comparison, Barber and Holbein (2020) estimate that mandatory vote-by-mail increases turnout by 1.8 to 2.9 percentage points. They describe this as a modest effect on aggregate levels of voter turnout and note that, "These estimated effects are roughly equivalent to somewhere between one nonpartisan get-out-the-vote solicitation over the phone and one social-pressure mailer."

The effects of ABMs on partisan vote margin differ across the two elections and are meaningful in magnitude. Results are shown in Table 4. In 2022, counties in ABM states see a decrease of between 2.7 and 5.2 percentage points in Republican vote margin in House races (Panel A). These findings are consistent with results from Gardner et al. (2025), which uses a different empirical method to study ABMs. In 2024, we find the opposite effect: an increase in Republican vote margin in House races of approximately 4.5 percentage points (Panel B). We also find evidence of an increase in the Republican presidential vote margin in 2024, though coefficients are smaller in magnitude and not robust to the DMA sample restriction (Panel C).

Because coefficients are largely stable across the three samples, our preferred sample and specification includes the full country for greater statistical power and the full set of controls to account for differences across treatment and control groups (column 2 in Tables 3 and 4). In Appendix Figure A1, we show that these results are robust to alternative sample definitions and controls.

The key identifying assumption in equation (2) is that in the absence of ABMs, treated and untreated counties would trend similarly. To provide support for this assumption, we interact ABM status with prior election years to directly estimate pre-trends. We find no significant pre-trends (see Appendix Table A1).[15]

To test whether confounding differences across ABM states and control states are driving results, we perform a covariate balance test. For comparison across coefficients, we standardize all time-varying control variables. If state and division-by-year fixed effects are successful in netting out confounders, then regressing standardized covariates on an indicator for ABMs while controlling for fixed effects should produce null results. Appendix Figure A2 shows the results of this balance test for both the midterm and presidential analysis.

Of the 17 covariates, only 3 in midterm sample and 2 in the presidential sample fail the balance test.[16] Unbalanced covariates can bias estimates of β_1 in equation (2) if they are simultaneously related to the outcome variable, such that regressing the outcome on both the

[15] Note that our setting is robust to recent advancements in the difference-in-differences literature (see Roth et al., 2023 for a review). ABMs create a binary treatment with only one treated year in each specification and no post-untreated years. As such, bias created by staggered treatment timing or continuous treatment measures is not a concern.
[16] Note that we find no effect of ABMs on voting age population. Existing research has found that people might move out of states with abortion bans (Dench et al., 2025; Dench et al., 2026). While Table 1 shows that ABM states vary in their abortion status, to the extent we are concerned that migration due to abortion bans may confound effects, we find no evidence of any population changes large enough to explain effects on election outcomes.

unbalanced covariate and the treatment variable attenuates the coefficient on the unbalanced covariate and instead attributes the effect to the treatment variable. To test this, we repeat equation (2) alternatively including the unbalanced covariate, the treatment variable, and then both. Results are robust to this test, as shown in Appendix Table A2.

Finally, we note that magnitude of estimates we find in Table 4 are politically significant. In both 2022 and 2024, the magnitude of our estimates is large enough that the presence or absence of an ABM in a state could flip the partisan control of the House of Representatives. In 2024, Republicans won 220 seats in the House of Representatives, just 2 seats more than the 218 needed for control of the chamber. 4 seats in ABM states were won by Republicans by a vote margin of less than 4 percentage points. Our estimates imply that these seats may have been won by the Democratic candidate in the absence of an ABM, giving control of the House to Democrats. Similarly, in 2022, Republicans won 222 seats, only 4 seats more than the 218 needed to control the House. 14 seats in non-ABM states were won by Republicans by a vote margin of less than 4 percentage points.[17] Our estimates for 2022 imply that these seats may have been won by the Democratic candidate if those states had voted on an ABM that year, flipping control of the House.

4 Mechanisms

We evaluate the potential mechanisms which could explain the differing effects of ABMs on Republican vote margin in 2022 and 2024. Theoretically, ABMs could affect candidate contests by (1) motivating people who would otherwise not vote to turn out, (2) discouraging turnout by inducing choice or election fatigue, or (3) inducing people who vote to switch their vote to a different party, either via vote alignment or vote separation. Given that we find no increase in turnout across either election, we reject the idea that ABMs are turnout-motivating. Our finding of a decrease in turnout in ABM states in 2024 could be supportive of choice fatigue associated with ballot measures decreasing turnout. However, as noted above, the magnitude of this coefficient is modest. We find no evidence that the increase in Republican vote margin in ABM states in 2024 is due to differential turnout. In Appendix Table A3, we show that the decrease in turnout in 2024 is concentrated in Democratic counties, while the increase in Republican vote margin is

[17] Note that we conservatively use an effect size of 4 ppt to estimate the political significance of effects, even though our estimates are larger in magnitude.

concentrated in Republican counties.[18] In Appendix Figure A3, we show that there is no relationship between trends in turnout and trends in Republican vote margin in ABM states in 2024. As such, we more carefully evaluate the vote switching mechanisms in explaining the surprising increase in Republican vote margin in 2024.

4a Evidence from Election Returns and Cast Vote Records

If ABMs made voters more likely to select candidates whose position on abortion aligned with their own, then we would expect counties with more votes to protect abortion to swing more Democratic. In contrast, if ABMs allowed voters to separate their opinion on abortion from their candidate selection, then we would expect counties with more votes to protect abortion to either swing more Republican or have no change in partisan lean.

To evaluate these possible mechanisms, we first use county-level data to descriptively compare changes in partisan vote margin with ABM votes to protect abortion. Specifically, we calculate a county's change in Republican US House vote margin relative to prior elections. In 2024, we calculate the change in Republican vote margin relative to an average of Republican vote margins in prior presidential elections (2012, 2016, and 2020). In 2022, we compare to prior midterm elections with a Democratic president (2010 and 2014). We find that the relationship between county-level support for abortion access as measured by ABM vote share and change in Republican vote margin changes direction from 2022 to 2024. Figure 2 describes this relationship. In 2022, there is a negative association between the share of the voters supporting abortion access and the change in Republican vote margin relative to previous elections. Here, a 1 percentage point increase in votes to protect abortion is associated with a 0.115 percentage point decrease in the Republican vote margin relative to prior midterm elections. In 2024, the direction of the relationship flips: a 1 percentage point increase in votes to protect abortion is associated with a 0.055 percentage point increase in the Republican vote margin relative to prior presidential elections.

These results present suggestive evidence that the vote switching mechanism operated differently in 2022 and 2024. In 2022, support for abortion rights on ABMs is correlated with

[18] Note that we are otherwise cautious in interpreting the results of Table A3 due to the ecological inference problem: an increase in Republican votes concentrated in Republican counties could be attributable to voters of any ideology and partisan lean within those counties.

increased support for Democratic candidates (vote alignment), while in 2024 support for abortion rights on ABMs is correlated with increased support for Republican candidates (vote separation). As noted in the decomposition exercise in Section 2a, support for abortion rights on the ABMs is roughly constant across 2022 and 2022. The changing spillover effect across the two years cannot be attributed to changes in the level of support for abortion rights. Rather, it is the relationship between support for abortion rights and candidate choice within ABM states that is changing.

Our descriptive evidence coupled with our main findings indicate that vote alignment in 2022 led to an increase in Democratic votes, while vote separation in 2024 led to an increase in Republican votes. These results are consistent with a setting in which vote switching among moderate or conservative-leaning voters who support abortion rights dominate overall effects. Figure 2 may also support the idea that liberal-leaning voters against abortion rights aligned their vote with Republican candidates in 2022 and separated their vote to select Democratic candidates in 2024. However, the size of this group of voters in the population is sufficiently small such that the overall effect is driven by moderates who support abortion.

Data from Maryland's 2024 cast vote records provide further evidence of this pattern.[19] 13.47% of voters simultaneously voted for Donald Trump and to protect abortion rights on the ABM. In comparison, only 3.47% voted both for Kamala Harris and against abortion rights. Among Trump voters, 39.66% voted for abortion rights while among Harris voters, only 5.58% voted against abortion rights. Vote separation behavior is dominated by those who prefer abortion rights.

4b Evidence from Survey Data

To provide further evidence for the vote separation mechanism in 2024, we make use of survey data from the Cooperative Election Study (CES). The CES is a repeated cross-sectional sample of over 50,000 people surveyed nationwide from September to October in election years. In every survey year we study, respondents are asked to self-report their political ideology and whether they support or oppose the following proposal, "Always allow a woman the right to obtain

[19] Cast vote records are anonymized electronic records of actual ballots cast, allowing us to see individuals' choices in each race on the ballot. To our knowledge, of the ABM states we study, only Maryland makes this data publicly available online.

an abortion as a matter of choice." [20] In 2022 and 2024, 20% of conservatives, 65% of moderates, and 92% of liberals supported always allowing abortion. Once again, we see that almost all liberals are aligned with the Democratic party in their abortion opinion and thus are unlikely to vote switch in response to ABMs.

We use the CES to directly test for vote separation in 2024 among sub-groups of political ideology and abortion opinion. In every survey year, a follow-up post-election survey asks respondents who they voted for in each candidate election. [21] We use this data to construct binary variables for whether a respondent voted Republican in their US House and presidential election, respectively, conditional on voting and living in a district with both a Republican and Democratic candidate.

While there are known issues with using survey data to measure turnout (Ansolabehere et al., 2022, 2017), the presidential year rounds of the CES closely match election returns on partisan vote outcomes. However, we find that the CES estimates in midterm years diverge more from actual election returns, particularly in 2022 and in ABM states in 2022. Furthermore, while our analysis of 2024 ABMs in CES data reproduces our finding from election returns of an increase in Republican votes, we are not able to reproduce 2022 results using CES. These findings highlight the importance of using election returns as a primary data source when studying voting behavior, as opposed to survey data. In Appendix B: CES Data, we discuss known issues with the CES, compare CES estimates to election returns by year, and present full results for our CES analysis, including an analysis of midterm years and analyses using a sample of validated registered voters. Since our overall analysis of presidential year CES data reproduces our main findings, we proceed with disaggregating that sample by ideology and abortion stance. To directly test for evidence of vote separation, we estimate the following, individual-level logit regression,

$$\log\left(\frac{\Pr(Y_{it}=1)}{1-\Pr(Y_{it}=1)}\right) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 * I(ABM_{st}) + \beta_2 X_{ct} + \beta_3 Z_i + \delta_{dt} + \gamma_s + \epsilon_{it} \qquad (3),$$

[20] Respondents are asked to self-identify as very liberal, liberal, somewhat liberal, middle of the road, somewhat conservative, conservative, or very conservative. Due to sample size limitations, we consolidate to liberal (very liberal or liberal), moderate (somewhat liberal, middle of the road, or somewhat conservative), and conservative (conservative, or very conservative).

[21] In some cases, survey respondents voted early and report who they voted for in the initial survey. We make use of all available information to construct a respondent's vote.

where Y_{it} is equal to 1 if a respondent reports that they voted for the Republican candidate in election year *t*. As with our main analysis, we compare the 2024 election to 2012, 2016, and 2020. $I(ABM_{st})$ is equal to 1 if the respondent lives in an ABM state in 2024. X_{ct} includes state-by-year political controls and county-by-year socioeconomic controls, as with our main analysis.[22] Z_i are individual level controls for age, gender, race, and college attainment. Consistent with our main analysis, δ_{dt} and γ_s are census division-by-year and state fixed effects, respectively. We use individual survey weights and cluster standard errors at the state level.

β_1 represents the log-odds that a respondent who has the opportunity to vote on an ABM prefers the Republican House or presidential candidate, relative to observably similar respondents who do not get to vote on an ABM. To ease the interpretation of this coefficient, we compute the average marginal effect of $I(ABM_{st})$ such that the coefficients shown in Figure 3 can be interpreted as a percentage point change in the probability of voting for the Republican candidate.

We first run this analysis on the entire sample. We find that respondents who had the opportunity to vote on an ABM in 2024 became 4.5 percentage points more likely to report voting for the Republican House candidate and 4.2 percentage points more likely to report voting for the Republican presidential candidate. We then run this regression separately for self-identified conservatives, moderates, and liberals. The increase in propensity to vote Republican is entirely concentrated among moderates, who became 5.9 and 5.7 percentage points more likely to report voting Republican in the House and presidential races, respectively.

To further test our theory that the increase in Republican votes is due to vote separation, wherein those who prefer abortion rights vote to protect abortion on the ABM while voting for Republican candidates, we additionally disaggregate the sample by respondents' abortion stance.[23] The increase in Republican votes is completely attributable to moderate voters who support always allowing abortion. These respondents were 7.5 and 7.8 percentage points more likely to report voting Republican in the House and presidential races, respectively.[24]

[22] At the state level, we control for the current status of abortion restrictions in the state, pre-*Dobbs* abortion-related ballot measures, the number of other ballot measures, battleground status in presidential years, and the presence of a Senate election. At the county level, we control for the change in distance to the nearest abortion provider, unemployment rate, poverty rate, median income, and population density.

[23] Note that we do not further disaggregate the liberal sample since 92% of liberals believe abortion should always be allowed, such that the opposes always allow sample would be too small.

[24] We might also wonder if the increase in Republican votes in ABM states in 2024 was concentrated within certain demographic groups. Amos and Middlewood (2024) show that women were more likely to register to vote in Kansas following the *Dobbs* ruling. Hartig et al. (2025) also argue that voting patterns in young voters and Hispanic voters

Given the limitations described above, we would be hesitant in drawing conclusions from CES data alone. However, the descriptive evidence from national election returns and cast vote records from an ABM state, in combination with consistent CES results, present compelling evidence that ABMs in 2024 induced moderate voters who support abortion rights to vote for Republican candidates.

5 Conclusion

We find that the beneficiary party of ABM spillover effects changed across 2022 and 2024. In 2022, the Republican vote margin in US House elections decreased by 5.2 percentage points in counties with ABMs, while it increased by 4.8 percentage points in 2024. We show that differences in the effects of ABMs across 2022 and 2024 cannot be explained by waning support for abortion protections. Indeed, after accounting for demographic differences across states voting on ABMs in 2022 and 2024, we find that support for abortion protections increased over time.

We provide evidence of a vote separation mechanism in 2024, such that moderate voters who support abortion rights became more likely to vote for Republican candidates when given the opportunity to vote on an ABM. In contrast, descriptive evidence indicates that vote alignment was more common in 2022 – moderate voters chose Democratic candidates to align their candidate choice with their stance on the ABM. What could explain these differences in behavior across two concurrent election years? In 2024, Republican candidates increasingly distanced themselves from the abortion debate (Meisels, 2025). It could be that this facilitated vote separation, whereas 2022 voters avoided the cognitive dissonance cost of voting to protect abortion on an ABM while simultaneously voting for a Republican candidate that was prominently against abortion rights.

Overall, our analysis finds effects of ABMs that are inconsistent with commonly held perceptions in political strategy and campaigning. Leading up to the 2024 election, Democratic campaigning focused on direct discussion of abortion rights (Meisels, 2025; Long et al., 2024). This was likely in response to the impression that Democrats' success in the 2022 midterm was due to the focus on abortion following the *Dobbs* ruling (Lerer and Dias, 2022). However, Gardner et al. (2025) show that only ABMs, and not the broader salience of abortion policy, helped

changed in 2024. In Appendix Figure B1, we show that women and men in ABM states were both more likely to vote Republican in the presidential race. We estimate a positive, though in some cases statistically insignificant, probability of voting Republican for white, Black, and Hispanic voters. Across age groups, we find increases in Republican votes in all groups except those age 30 to 49.

Democrats in 2022. This, coupled with the findings of this paper that ABMs do not increase overall turnout and aided Republicans in 2024, question the widespread belief that abortion is a turnout-motivating issue and that focusing on abortion and related ballot measures is a winning strategy for Democratic politicians. Despite this, in recent months, Republican lawmakers in multiple states have brought forth legislation to restrict citizen ballot initiatives (Lieb et al., 2025). This is not the first instance of politicians seeking to leverage ballot measures for electoral gains. Prior research shows that 13 ballot measures on same-sex marriage in the 2004 presidential election increased votes for Republicans (Campbell and Monson, 2008; Donovan, Tolbert, and Smith, 2008). In response, Democrats promoted ballot measures in the 2006 midterms on issues such as the minimum wage that were expected to yield electoral gains (Hunter, 2006).

The evidence presented in this paper contradicts the idea that any one ballot measure issue is inherently beneficial to a particular political party. The spillover effects of a ballot measure can benefit any candidate depending on whether voters' opinion on the issue ideologically aligns with their other stances and depending on whether voters pursue vote alignment or vote separation in response to the ballot measure.

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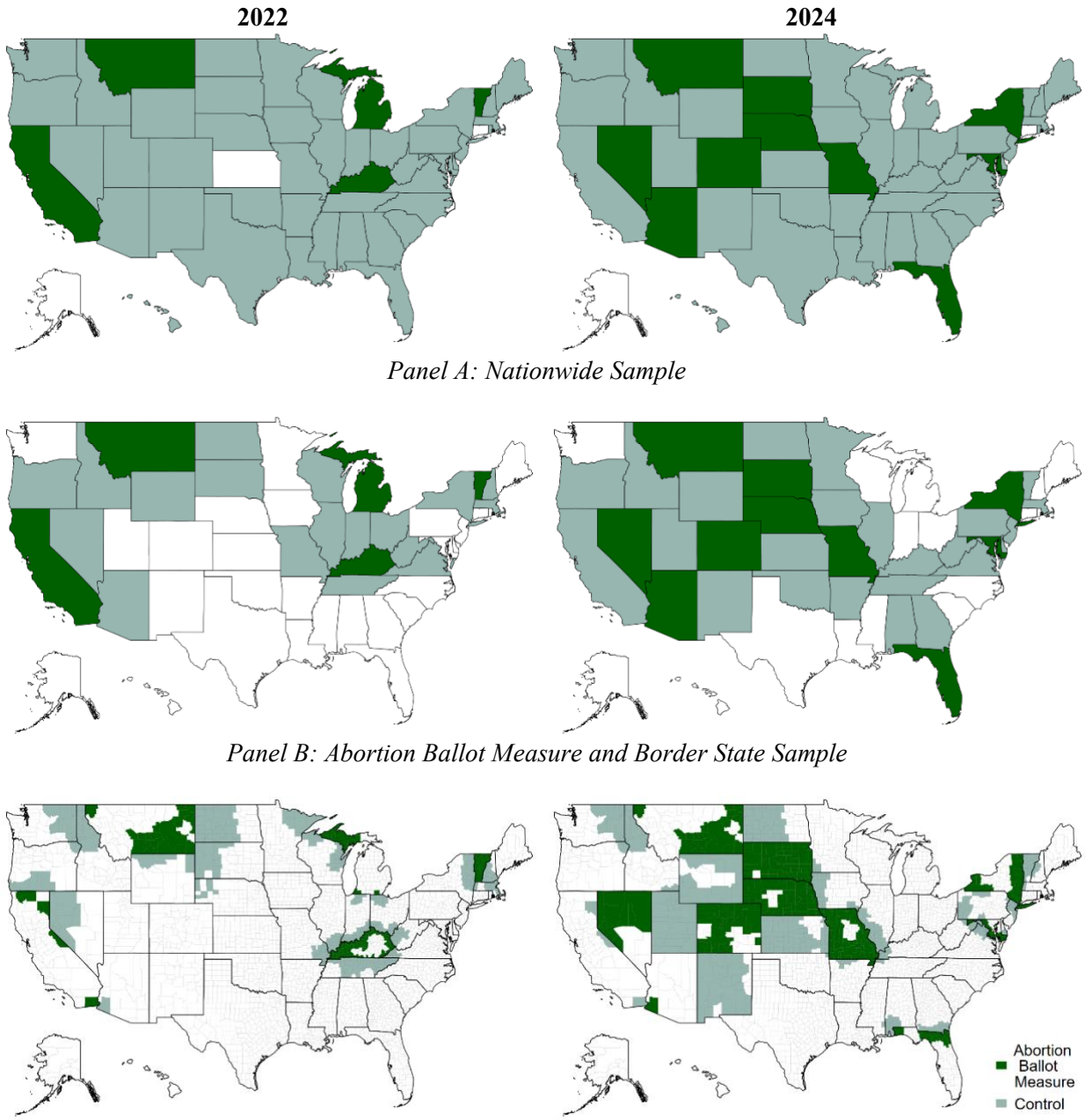
Figures and Tables

Figure 1: Sample Definitions



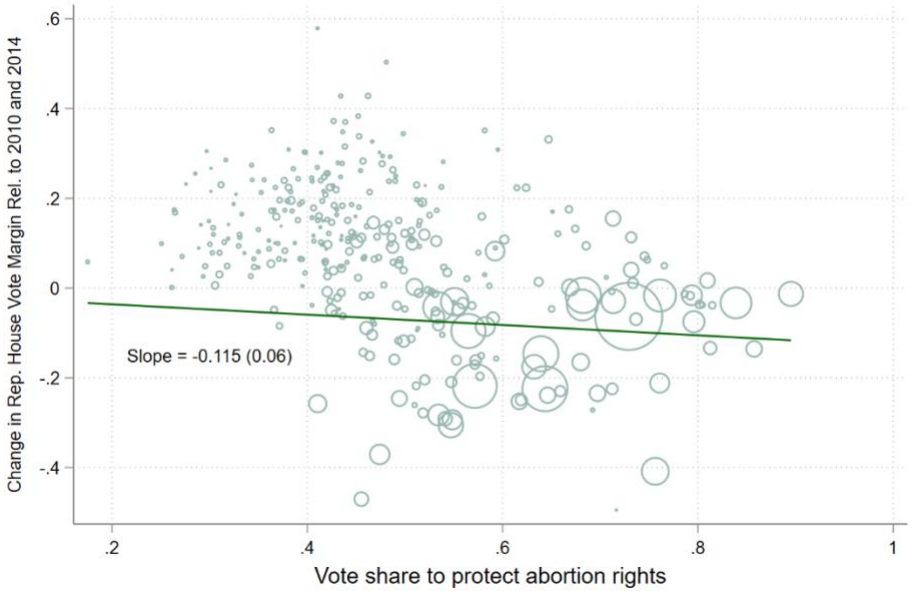
Panel A: Nationwide Sample

Panel B: Abortion Ballot Measure and Border State Sample

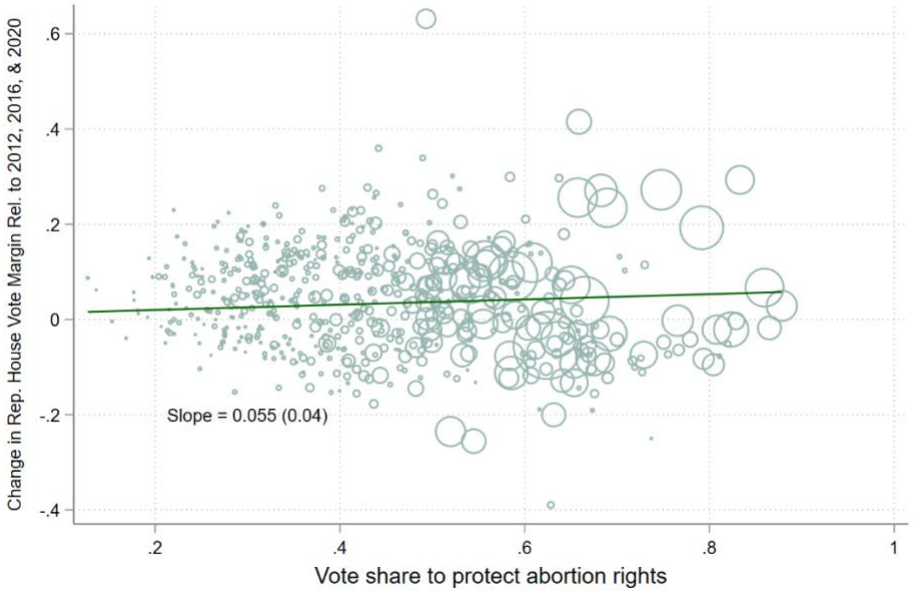
Panel C: Same-DMA Abortion Ballot Measure and Border Sample

Notes: This figure shows treatment and control counties for each of the three sample definitions used in Tables 3 and 4.

Figure 2: Vote Switching in Election Returns



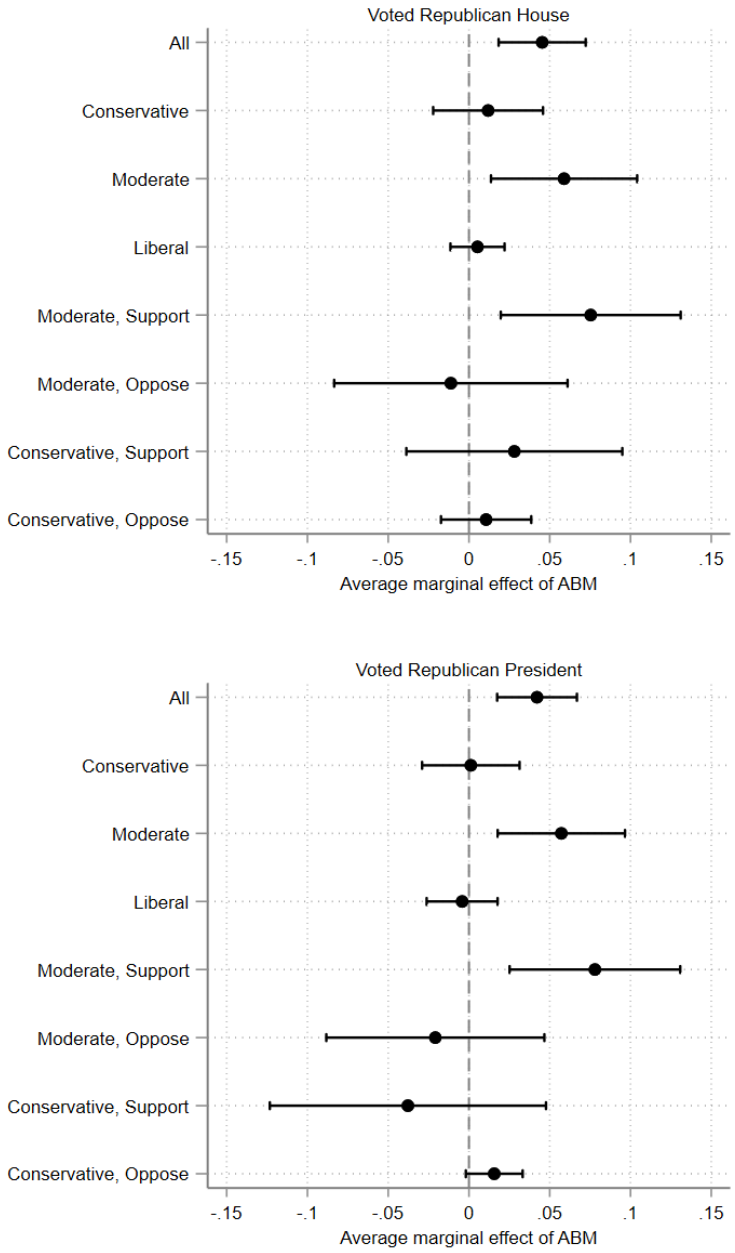
Panel A: Abortion Ballot Measures in 2022



Panel B: Abortion Ballot Measures in 2024

Notes: This figure shows the correlation between county-level ballot vote share to protect abortion rights and the change in Republican vote margin in House elections. Panel A shows results for 2022 where the change in vote margin is relative to average Republican vote margin in the 2010 and 2014 midterm elections. Panel B shows results for 2024 where the change in vote margin is relative to average Republican vote margin in the 2012, 2016, and 2020 presidential elections.

Figure 3: Vote Switching in Survey Data



Notes: This figure shows the effect of having the opportunity to vote on an ABM in 2024 on the probability of voting Republican in the House and presidential races. We present results for the full CES sample and for samples disaggregated by respondent's self-reported ideology and whether they support or oppose a policy proposal to "Always allow a woman the right to obtain an abortion as a matter of choice." Standard errors are clustered at the state level and 95 percent confidence intervals are shown.

Table 1: Abortion Ballot Measures

Year	State	Abortion policy status at time of election	Protect/ Restrict	Vote Share (%)	Pass Threshold	Measure Passed?	Ballot Initiative Process
2022	California	Legal	Protect	66.88	50	Y	Legislatively referred
2022	Kentucky	Banned	Restrict	47.65	50	N	Legislatively referred
2022	Michigan	Unenforced Ban	Protect	56.66	50	Y	Citizen-initiated
2022	Montana	Unenforced Ban	Restrict	47.45	50	N	Legislatively referred
2022	Vermont	Legal	Protect	76.77	50	Y	Legislatively referred
2024	Arizona	Banned after 15 weeks	Protect	61.61	50	Y	Citizen-initiated
2024	Colorado	Legal	Protect	61.97	55	Y	Citizen-initiated
2024	Florida	Banned after 6 weeks	Protect	57.17	60	N	Citizen-initiated
2024	Maryland	Legal	Protect	76.06	50	Y	Legislatively referred
2024	Missouri	Banned	Protect	51.06	50	Y	Citizen-initiated
2024	Montana	Unenforced Ban	Protect	57.76	50	Y	Citizen-initiated
2024	Nebraska	Banned after 12 weeks	Protect	49.01	50	N	Citizen-initiated
2024	Nebraska		Restrict	54.94	50	Y	Citizen-initiated
2024	Nevada	Legal	Protect	64.36	50	Y	Citizen-initiated
2024	New York	Legal	Protect	62.47	50	Y	Legislatively referred
2024	South Dakota	Banned	Protect	41.41	50	N	Citizen-initiated

Note: This table describes the characteristics of the 16 abortion ballot measures across 14 states that are studied in this paper. Two additional states had abortion ballot measures in off-cycle elections post-*Dobbs*: Kansas in August 2022 and Ohio in November 2023.

Table 2: Decomposing Support for Abortion Ballot Measures in 2022 and 2024

	(1) **2022 mean**	(2) **2024 mean**	(3) **Difference**	(4) **Explained**	(5) **Unexplained**
Vote share to protect abortion	62.72	60.22	-2.5***	-2.535***	0.03***
			(0.87)	(0.004)	(0.002)

	2022 mean	**2024 mean**	**Difference**	**Explained Share**
2020 presidential vote margin (Rep % - Dem %)	-16.1	-5.01	11.09***	161.44%
			(2.15)	
Poverty rate	12.32	11.91	-0.40	-3.91%
			(0.28)	
ln(Population density)	5.41	5.48	0.08	2.12%
			(0.12)	
Population share…				
Female	50.18	50.58	0.40***	-12.77%
			(0.08)	
Hispanic	25.46	20.82	-4.63***	-10.50%
			(1.14)	
Black	7.97	13.02	5.05***	-6.71%
			(0.69)	
White	54.11	59.56	5.45***	7.58%
			(1.53)	
18-29	15.86	15.19	-0.67***	11.42%
			(0.21)	
30-49	26.47	25.98	-0.49**	20.80%
			(0.20)	
50-64	19.07	18.68	-0.39***	3.39%
			(0.12)	
65 and older	17.12	19.85	2.73***	-74.13%
			(0.34)	
with college degree	34.68	37.15	2.47***	2.44%
			(0.76)	

Notes: This table shows the difference in demographic characteristics and vote share to protect abortion across counties with abortion ballot measures in 2022 and 2024 (columns 1 and 2), as well as the results of an Oaxaca-Blinder decomposition of the difference in mean vote share to protect abortion on ballot measures in the 2022 and 2024 election (columns 3 and 4). Results are weighted by number of ballots cast. * p<0.1, ** p<0.05, ***p<0.01.

Table 3: Abortion Ballot Measures and Voter Turnout

Panel A: Midterm Year Turnout

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
I(ABM 2022)	0.0288	0.0206	0.0393	0.0143	0.000802	-0.0188*
	(0.0213)	(0.0258)	(0.0271)	(0.0324)	(0.0164)	(0.00942)
N	8994	8994	4269	4269	1422	1422
Outcome mean	0.368		0.366		0.399	

Panel B: Presidential Year Turnout

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
I(ABM 2024)	-0.0178*	-0.0215***	-0.0178*	-0.0213**	0.000314	-0.0134***
	(0.00951)	(0.00802)	(0.0103)	(0.00829)	(0.00665)	(0.00413)
N	12412	12412	8592	8592	3340	3340
Outcome mean	0.572		0.569		0.577	
Sample	All	All	Border	Border	DMA	DMA
Controls		X		X		X

Notes: This table shows the effect of living in a state with an abortion ballot measure in 2022 or 2024 on turnout (number of votes cast per voting age population) in the midterm (Panel A) and the presidential (Panel B) elections. Columns (1) – (4) include census division-by-year and state fixed effects. Columns (5) and (6) include state-by-year and DMA fixed effects. Specifications with controls include the full set of controls described in Section 3b. All regressions control for whether the House race was uncontested and are weighted by voting age population. Standard errors are robust and clustered at the state level.
* p<0.1, ** p<0.05, ***p<0.01.

Table 4: Abortion Ballot Measures and Election Outcomes

Panel A: Midterm Year Republican House Margin

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
I(ABM 2022)	-0.0271*	-0.0517***	-0.0292	-0.0459**	-0.0375*	-0.0369
	(0.0157)	(0.0115)	(0.0219)	(0.0195)	(0.0209)	(0.0387)
N	8955	8955	4269	4269	1422	1422
Outcome mean	0.0512		-0.00225		0.0893	

Panel B: Presidential Year Republican House Margin

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
I(ABM 2024)	0.0458**	0.0475**	0.0474**	0.0451*	0.0458*	0.0431
	(0.0209)	(0.0208)	(0.0214)	(0.0223)	(0.0240)	(0.0256)
N	12380	12380	8560	8560	3340	3340
Outcome mean	0.00406		-0.0274		-0.0106	

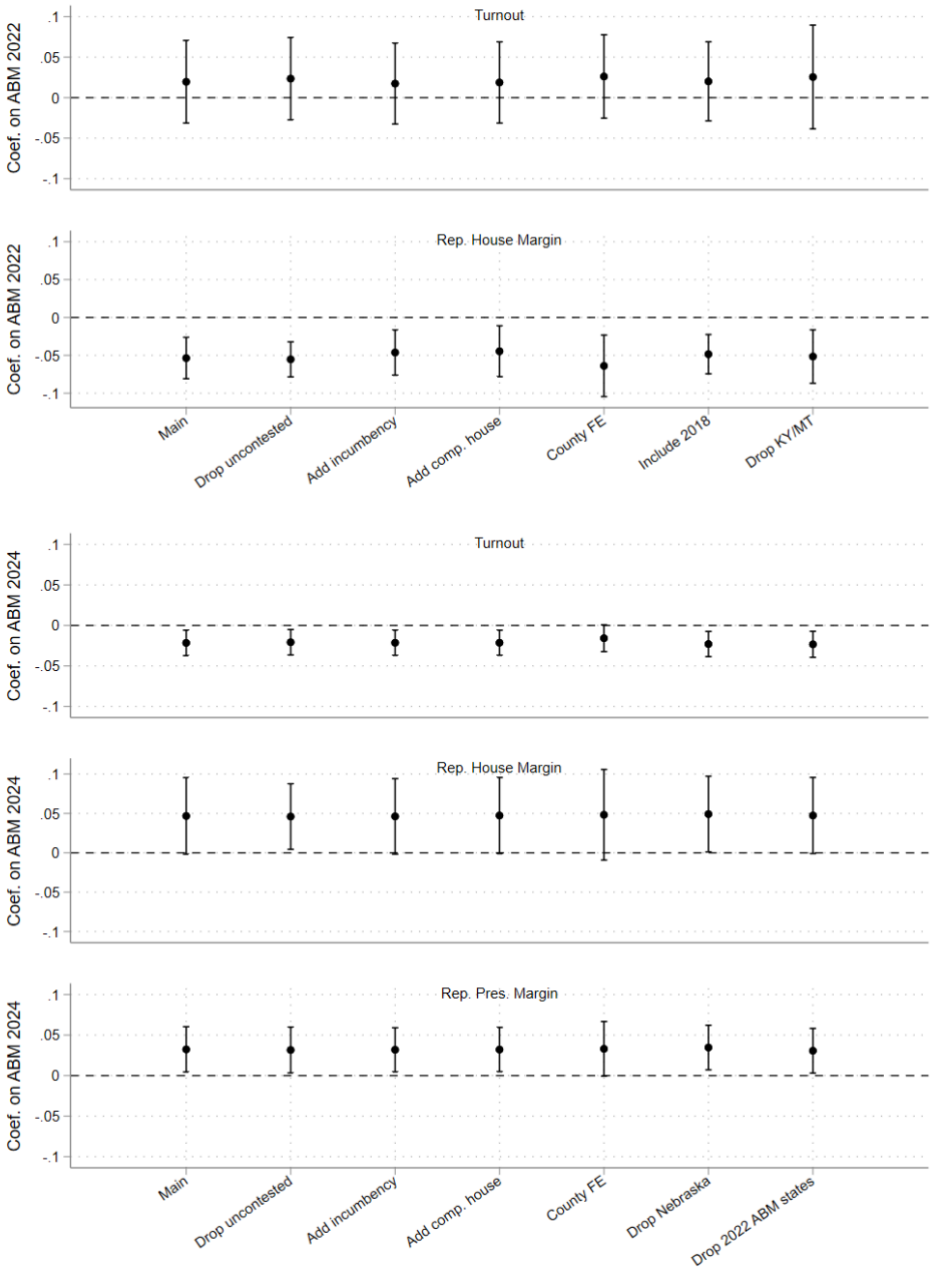
Panel C: Presidential Republican Margin

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
I(ABM 2024)	0.0518**	0.0324**	0.0472***	0.0247	0.0133	0.0171
	(0.0200)	(0.0144)	(0.0172)	(0.0152)	(0.0143)	(0.0158)
N	12412	12412	8592	8592	3340	3340
Outcome mean	-0.0185	-0.0185	-0.0448	-0.0448	-0.0318	-0.0318
Sample	All	All	Border	Border	DMA	DMA
Controls		X		X		X

Notes: This table shows the effect of living in a state with an abortion ballot measure in 2022 or 2024 on the Republican vote margin (Republican vote share – Democratic vote share) in midterm year House races (Panel A), Presidential year House races (Panel B), and the Presidential race (Panel C). Columns (1) – (4) include census division-by-year and state fixed effects. Columns (5) and (6) include state-by-year and DMA fixed effects. Specifications with controls include the full set of controls described in Section 3b. All regressions control for whether the House race was uncontested and are weighted by total ballots cast. Standard errors are robust and clustered at the state level. * p<0.1, ** p<0.05, ***p<0.01.

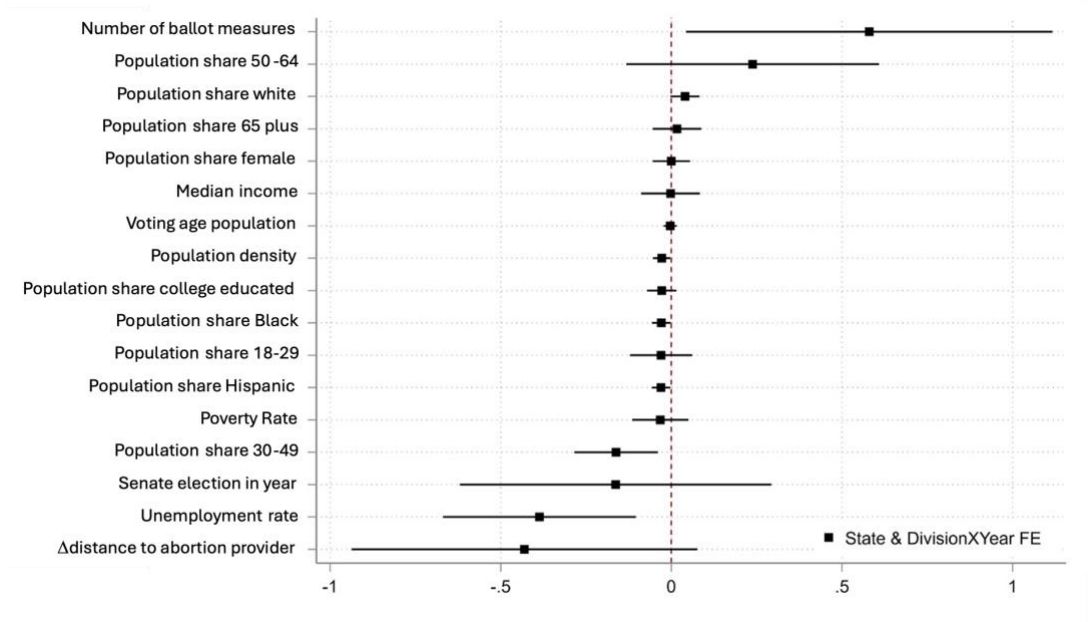
Appendix A: Additional Figures and Tables

Figure A1: Robustness Checks

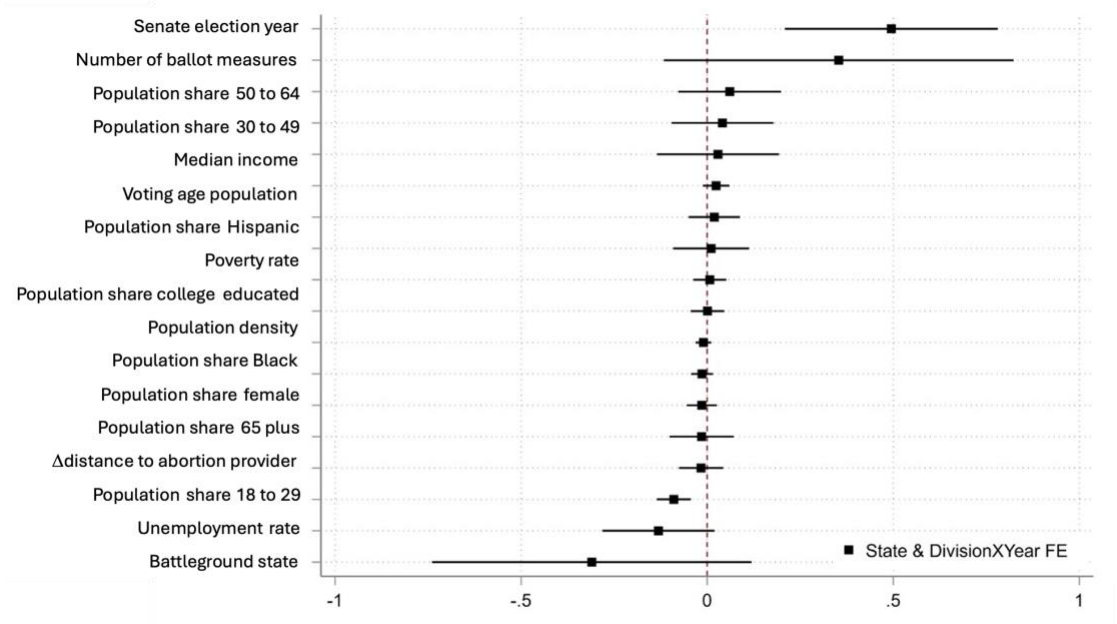


Notes: This figure shows that results of Tables 3 and 4 are robust to dropping counties with uncontested house races, controlling for if a House race has an incumbent running, controlling for whether a House race is competitive, including county fixed effects instead of state fixed effects, including 2018 for midterm regressions, dropping states with Restrict ballot measures for midterm elections (KY and MT), dropping Nebraska with two ABMs for presidential regressions, and dropping 2022 ABM states for presidential regressions. All regressions include the full sample, full set of controls, census division-by-year fixed effects, and are weighted with standard errors clustered at the state level. 95% confidence intervals are shown.

Figure A2: Difference Between ABM and Non-ABM States



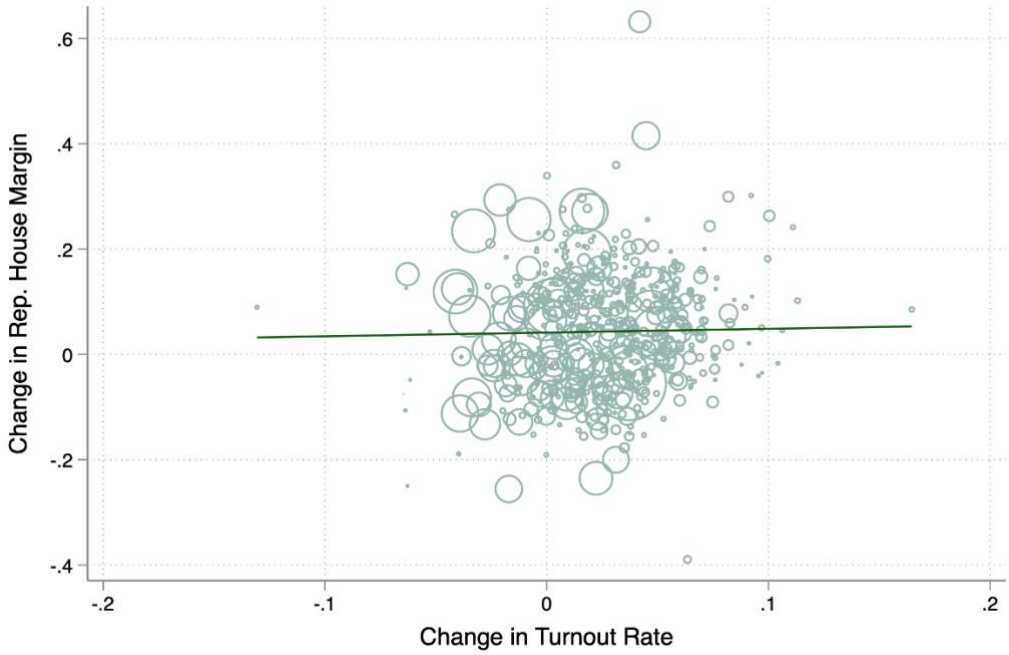
Panel A: Midterm Years



Panel B: Presidential Years

Notes: This figure shows the results of a balance test regressing control variables on the presence of an ABM including state and census division-by-year fixed effects. Non-binary control variables are standardized for comparable coefficients. 95% confidence intervals are shown.

Figure A3: Turnout changes in 2024 cannot explain partisan effects



Notes: This figure shows the relationship between change in Republican House margin in 2024 relative to 2012, 2016, and 2020 versus change in turnout across the same time period in states with a 2024 ABM. The slope coefficient is 0.071 (s.e. 0.175) and is not significant.

Table A1: Pre-trend Check

	Midterm Years		Presidential Years		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	Turnout	Rep. House Margin	Turnout	Rep. House Margin	Rep. Pres. Margin
I(2022 ABM State)* 2014	0.00551	-0.0434			
	(0.0181)	(0.0266)			
I(2022 ABM State)* 2022	0.0233	-0.0712***			
	(0.0305)	(0.0168)			
I(2024 ABM State)* 2016			0.00693	-0.0146	-0.00181
			(0.00476)	(0.0164)	(0.0196)
I(2024 ABM State)* 2020			-0.000840	0.0160	0.0224
			(0.00760)	(0.0181)	(0.0185)
I(2024 ABM State)* 2024			-0.0192*	0.0476*	0.0392**
			(0.00983)	(0.0256)	(0.0188)
N	8994	8955	12412	12380	12412

Notes: This table shows that the results in Tables 3 and 4 are robust to concerns about pre-trends. For the midterm year analysis, 2010 is the omitted year. For the presidential year analysis, 2012 is the omitted year. All regressions include the full sample, full set of controls, state and census division-by-year fixed effects, and are weighted with standard errors clustered at the state level. * p<0.1, ** p<0.05, ***p<0.01.

Table A2: Robustness to Unbalanced Covariates

	Turnout			Republican House Margin		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Panel A: Midterm Years						
I(ABM 2022)		0.0250	0.0206		-0.0538***	-0.0517***
		(0.0252)	(0.0258)		(0.0104)	(0.0115)
# of ballot measures	0.00259		0.00208	-0.00254		-0.00102
	(0.00160)		(0.00157)	(0.00275)		(0.00301)
Panel B: Midterm Years						
I(ABM 2022)		0.0205	0.0206		-0.0410***	-0.0517***
		(0.0258)	(0.0258)		(0.0144)	(0.0115)
Unemployment Rate	-0.000218		0.0000748	-0.00868*		-0.00960*
	(0.00131)		(0.00127)	(0.00483)		(0.00486)
Panel C: Midterm Years						
I(ABM 2022)		0.0224	0.0206		-0.0401**	-0.0517***
		(0.0244)	(0.0258)		(0.0181)	(0.0115)
Population Share 30-49	-0.00698***		-0.00690***	-0.0572***		-0.0574***
	(0.00149)		(0.00152)	(0.00715)		(0.00723)
N	8994	8994	8994	8955	8955	8955
Panel D: Presidential Years						
I(ABM 2024)		-0.0177**	-0.0215***		0.0450**	0.0475**
		(0.00796)	(0.00802)		(0.0200)	(0.0208)
Senate Election	0.00418		0.00600**	0.000581		-0.00370
	(0.00308)		(0.00263)	(0.00685)		(0.00698)
Panel D: Presidential Years						
I(ABM 2024)		-0.0207**	-0.0215***		0.0517**	0.0475**
		(0.00823)	(0.00802)		(0.0197)	(0.0208)
Population Share 18-29	-0.00565***		-0.00568***	-0.0300***		-0.0299***
	(0.000752)		(0.000752)	(0.00631)		(0.00632)
N	12412	12412	12412	12380	12380	12380

Notes: This table shows the stability of coefficients with respect to unbalanced covariates. All regressions include the full set of controls described in Section 3b. Standard errors are robust and clustered at the state level. * p<0.1, ** p<0.05, ***p<0.01.

Table A3: Heterogeneous Effects by Partisan Baseline

Panel A: Midterm Years

	Mean 2020 Pres. Margin (1)	Turnout (2)	R House Margin (3)
*I(ABM 2022) **			
I(Democratic 2020)	-0.468	-0.000686	-0.153***
		(0.0253)	(0.0226)
I(Lean Democratic 2020)	-0.138	0.0267	-0.0291
		(0.0266)	(0.0251)
I(Lean Republican 2020)	0.147	0.0410	-0.0118
		(0.0256)	(0.0232)
I(Republican 2020)	0.456	0.0217	0.0420**
		(0.0190)	(0.0187)
N		8994	8955

Panel B: Presidential Years

	Mean 2020 Pres. Margin (1)	Turnout (2)	R House Margin (3)	R Pres. Margin (4)
*I(ABM 2024) **				
I(Democratic 2020)	-0.578	-0.0614***	0.0615	0.0468
		(0.0138)	(0.0569)	(0.0517)
I(Lean Democratic 2020)	-0.126	-0.0183	0.0294	0.0243
		(0.0128)	(0.0266)	(0.0248)
I(Lean Republican 2020)	0.147	-0.00460	0.0476**	0.0147
		(0.00825)	(0.0217)	(0.0191)
I(Republican 2020)	0.463	0.0156*	0.0838***	0.0753***
		(0.00791)	(0.0259)	(0.0199)
N		12412	12380	12412

Notes: This table allows the effects of abortion ballot measures to vary according to the baseline partisan lean of a county, with bin cutoffs for baseline Republican presidential margin set at -0.3, 0, and 0.3. Columns (1) shows the mean 2020 Presidential Republican vote margin in treated counties within each baseline bin. Regressions in columns (2) - (4) include the full set of controls, state and census division-by-year fixed effects, and are weighted with standard errors clustered at the state level. * p<0.1, ** p<0.05, ***p<0.01.

Appendix B: Cooperative Election Study

The Cooperative Election Study (CES) is a multi-wave survey of around 50,000 individuals each election year. The survey gathers information on demographics, general political attitudes, voting intentions, and post-election voting behavior. In this section, we present descriptions about the suitability of the CES to describe voting behavior in specific elections as well as complete analytical results from our survey analysis.

Our primary analysis includes a sample of respondents who answered both the pre- and post-wave survey, which we refer to as the "full" sample. In addition, the study also includes a "validated" sample of respondents who were matched to a valid voter registration record. We employ survey weights in the analysis that correspond to the given sample. In the full sample, respondent weights are calculated such that they are representative of the state population. In the validated sample, weights are constructed so that the sample is representative of registered voters. Weights in both samples are calculated using a variety of demographic features as well as vote choice in presidential, Senate, and Gubernatorial races. Therefore, it is unclear ex-ante how well the CES estimates of vote choice predicts the results of House races. We provide estimates of the comparability of CES estimates and realized vote shares for Republicans in House and presidential elections across both the full and validated samples below.

B.1 Comparing CES estimates to administrative election returns

To assess the suitability of CES estimates of voting behavior, we compare the state-level CES estimated Republican vote share to election returns data from Leip (2025) in elections 2010-2024 excluding 2018[25]. We measure the error in CES Republican vote share as (Rep. vote share [CES] – Rep. vote share [official]), such that positive values indicate that the CES survey estimates are more Republican than the official results.

The median gap between CES estimated Republican vote share and official election results is small (<1 percentage point) in both House and presidential elections, as illustrated by Table B1. Unsurprisingly, the validated sample has overall less error on average than the full sample, but limiting the sample of CES respondents in this way only results in small improvements in the accuracy of the predicted Republican vote share. This leads us to prefer to use the full sample of

[25] We exclude the 2018 midterm election because it is excluded from our main analyses.

CES respondents in our main analysis, rather than limit the sample size for only modest gains in accuracy.

The close connection between CES and official measures supports the use of the CES to understand the effects of ABMs on vote choice. The variance, however, is much smaller for presidential elections than for House elections.

Although the gap between estimated and official vote shares is small across the entire samples, this difference is not identical across election years. In Table B2, we provide the mean difference between estimated and official Republican vote share by year. Among House elections, differences in the full sample range from 2 percentage points less Republican in 2022 to 1.4 percentage points more Republican in 2010.

Finally, we describe the error in CES estimates of Republican vote share in 2022 and 2024 ballot states in Table B3. In 2024, CES full sample estimates of vote share in ballot states was 1.4 percentage points less Republican than official election returns. This roughly matches the overall error in the CES sample in 2024 (0.9 percentage points less Republican). In 2022, however, CES estimates in ballot states are 2.3 percentage points more Republican than official returns – a divergence from the average in the entire sample in 2022 (2 percentage points less Republican). This could explain why our full sample CES results in Table B5 fail to replicate our finding from official election returns that the 2022 ABMs aided Democrats. This also highlights that 2022 CES results should be interpreted with caution.

B.2 Measuring turnout in the CES

In our primary analysis with the CES data, we exclude turnout as an outcome variable. Existing research shows that turnout estimates in survey data, including the CES, are often inaccurate (Ansolabehere et al., 2022, 2017). In the 2024 election, CES turnout among validated voters is estimated at 91.44%, while official election returns suggest that voter turnout among registered voters is closer to 74%[26]. Similarly, 2022 CES turnout is estimated at 79.92%, while election return data suggests a turnout rate close to 57% (Leip 2025).

However, for completeness, in Table B4 we provide estimated effects of ABMs on turnout in the CES using both the full sample of CES post-election wave respondents and the more limited

[26] These estimates for turnout in the Leip file are slightly different than the average turnout in our main analysis. In our main analysis, we measure turnout as votes/voting age population. To make turnout estimates comparable to CES estimates, here we use votes/registered voters.

sample of validated voters. Estimates are generally small and are statistically insignificant in both 2022 and 2024. The specification is identical to the individual logit specification in Equation (3) in the main text, where the outcome turnout is =1 if the respondent reports that they voted in the election.

We find no effects of ABMs on turnout as reported in the CES. Notably, even though turnout estimates are inaccurate in the CES, estimates of Republican vote share in the CES closely match election returns when using the prescribed weights, as shown in Table B.1.

B.3 Additional CES results

First, we show in Table B5 and B6 that our primary CES estimates in Figure 3 are robust to limiting the sample to only validated voters. The coefficients shown in columns (1) and (3) below correspond to that of Figure 3. The coefficients shown in columns (2) and (4) show that these estimates are robust in the sample of validated voters. In general, we have a much greater degree of confidence in results that are similar across both the full and validated sample. We are hesitant to draw conclusions from sub-sample results that are highly sensitive to the chosen sample and weight. Results in the validated sample support our conclusion that the primary driver of the increase in Republican House margin within ABM states in 2024 is moderates who support always allowing abortion. We also provide estimates of the effect of ABMs by ideology and abortion opinion in 2022 but encourage caution interpreting these results because of the limitations of the CES in 2022 ABM states described in Section B.1 and our inability to match overall election return results in the 2022 sample.

Lastly, we explore the marginal effects of an ABM on voting behavior in 2024 across demographic groups. Figure B1 plots the coefficients and 95% confidence intervals for each group in the 2024 House and presidential elections, using the full sample of CES respondents. In House elections, there is a small difference in the effect of an ABM between men and women, such that men in ABM states are 6.1% more likely to vote for the Republican candidate while women are 2.8% more likely to vote Republican, but the coefficient among women is not statistically different from zero. In the presidential election, there is no difference in the behavior of men and women in ABM states. In both the House and presidential elections, the ABM is not associated with changes in voting behavior among voters aged 30-49, while younger and older voters are more likely to vote Republican. There are differences in the magnitudes of the coefficients across racial and

ethnic groups in the 2024 House elections, but estimates are noisy for Black and Hispanic voters. In the presidential election, there appear to be no differences across race/ethnicity.

Appendix Table B1: Distribution of CES error

	Difference in Republican vote share			
percentile	House	House (Valid)	Presidential	Presidential (Valid)
1%	-0.145	-0.128	-0.142	-0.103
10%	-0.063	-0.055	-0.062	-0.041
25%	-0.036	-0.025	-0.026	-0.017
50%	-0.008	-0.002	-0.009	-0.002
75%	0.017	0.023	0.010	0.012
90%	0.053	0.056	0.028	0.030
99%	0.202	0.181	0.082	0.067
Variance	0.0034	0.0031	0.0013	0.0009

Notes: Table describes the distribution of the difference between the CES estimated Republican vote share and the official Republican vote share from election returns data.

Appendix Table B2: CES error by year

		Avg difference in Rep. vote share		
year	House	House (Valid)	Presidential	Presidential (Valid)
2010	0.014	0.025		
2012	-0.014	-0.005	-0.011	0.000
2014	0.007	0.017		
2016	-0.004	-0.002	-0.006	-0.006
2020	-0.007	-0.004	-0.010	-0.003
2022	-0.020	-0.016		
2024	-0.013	-0.009	-0.010	-0.003
Total	-0.005	0.001	-0.009	-0.003

Notes: Table describes the mean difference between CES estimated Republican vote margins and the official vote margin from election returns data in each election year in the primary sample.

Appendix Table B3: CES error in ABM states

2022 Diff. in House Rep. Share			2024 Diff. in House Rep. Share		
Ballot State	Full Sample	Valid Sample	Ballot State	Full Sample	Valid Sample
CA	0.062	0.036	AZ	0.044	0.024
KY	0.038	0.019	CO	0.016	0.008
MI	0.025	0.012	FL	-0.022	-0.005
MT	0.029	0.071	MD	0.005	-0.041
VT	-0.040	-0.039	MO	0.018	0.004
			MT	-0.015	0.007
			NE	-0.043	-0.017
			NV	-0.073	-0.036
			NY	-0.020	-0.019
			SD	-0.050	-0.033
Total	0.023	0.020	Total	-0.014	-0.011

Notes: Table describes the difference between CES estimated Republican House vote margin and the official vote margin from election returns data by ABM state in the year of their ballot measure.

Appendix Table B4: The Effect of ABMs on Turnout (CES)

	(1) 2024	(2) 2024 validated	(3) 2022	(4) 2022 validated
I(ABM 2024)	-0.008	0.004		
	(0.009)	(0.008)		
I(ABM 2022)			-0.006	0.023
			(0.021)	(0.023)
N	161952	125834	113960	86524
ymean	0.9463	0.9144	0.8411	0.7992

Notes: Coefficient estimates from the individual logit specification in Equation (3), including the full set of controls. In the full sample, estimates are weighted according to the post-election survey weights. In the more limited sample of validated voters, a different validated voter weight is used. Standard errors are in parentheses. * p<0.1, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01.

Appendix Table B5: ABMs and Republican Vote Margin by Ideology

Panel A: Full Sample						
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	House 2024	House 2024 Valid	Pres 2024	Pres 2024 Valid	House 2022	House 2022 Valid
I(ABM 24)	0.045***	0.032**	0.042***	0.037***		
	(0.014)	(0.015)	(0.013)	(0.013)		
I(ABM 22)					0.030*	0.012
					(0.016)	(0.015)
N	148768	113564	152084	115339	94511	70361
ymean	0.4831	0.4890	0.4746	0.4833	0.5088	0.5167
Panel B: Conservative						
I(ABM 24)	0.012	0.011	0.001	0.004		
	(0.017)	(0.011)	(0.015)	(0.014)		
I(ABM 22)					-0.022	-0.052***
					(0.019)	(0.022)
N	44598	34973	45244	35326	32095	24708
ymean	0.8891	0.9079	0.8974	0.9173	0.9034	0.9252
Panel C: Moderate						
I(ABM 24)	0.059**	0.040*	0.057***	0.050***		
	(0.023)	(0.022)	(0.020)	(0.018)		
I(ABM 22)					0.006	0.001
					(0.030)	(0.021)
N	65298	48017	67294	49031	38703	27524
ymean	0.4057	0.4031	0.3871	0.3884	0.4249	0.4146
Panel D: Liberal						
I(ABM 24)	0.005	0.066***	-0.004	0.037*		
	(0.008)	(0.027)	(0.011)	(0.019)		
I(ABM 22)					0.005	-0.015***
					(0.015)	(0.006)
N	38742	30126	39415	30414	23682	17862
ymean	0.0444	0.0320	0.0366	0.0242	0.0503	0.0295

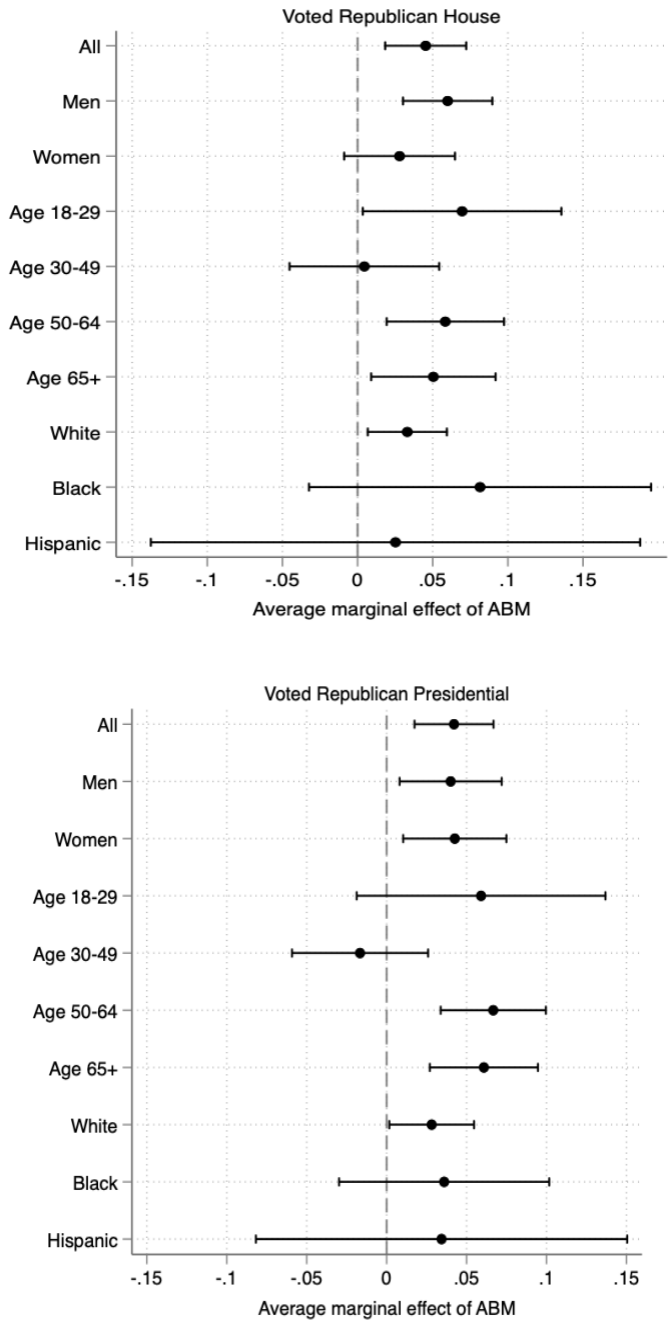
Notes: Table provides the coefficient estimates from Equation (3) in the full sample and the more limited sample of validated voters. Estimates are weighted by post-election survey weights in the full sample and by validated voter weights in the validated voter sample. Coefficients represent average marginal effects and describe the effect of an abortion ballot measure on the probability that a voter in a treated state votes for the Republican house or presidential candidate. Standard errors are in parenthesis. * p<0.1, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01.

Appendix Table B6: ABMs and Republican Vote Margin by Ideology and Abortion Opinion

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	House 2024	House 2024 Valid	Pres 2024	Pres 2024 Valid	House 2022	House 2022 Valid
Panel A: Conservative – Supports Always Allow						
I(ABM 24)	0.028	0.031	-0.038	-0.011		
	(0.034)	(0.053)	(0.044)	(0.068)		
I(ABM 22)					-0.090**	-0.039
					(0.042)	(0.052)
N	8913	6383	9113	6482	5932	4049
ymean	0.7413	0.7767	0.7433	0.7791	0.7837	0.8235
Panel B: Conservative – Opposes Always Allow						
I(ABM 24)	0.011	0.004	0.016*	0.006		
	(0.014)	(0.013)	(0.009)	(0.012)		
I(ABM 22)					0.007	-0.043**
					(0.016)	(0.021)
N	35685	28590	36131	28844	26152	20640
ymean	0.9255	0.9357	0.9357	0.9468	0.9333	0.9463
Panel C: Moderate – Supports Always Allow						
I(ABM 24)	0.075***	0.093***	0.078***	0.092***		
	(0.028)	(0.023)	(0.027)	(0.019)		
I(ABM 22)					0.030	0.004
					(0.035)	(0.032)
N	42395	31155	43701	31807	24548	17439
ymean	0.2847	0.2676	0.2614	0.2467	0.3178	0.2959
Panel D: Moderate – Opposes Always Allow						
I(ABM 24)	-0.011	-0.039	-0.021	0.010		
	(0.037)	(0.050)	(0.034)	(0.034)		
I(ABM 22)					-0.065	-0.018
					(0.051)	(0.055)
N	22903	16862	23593	17224	14155	10085
ymean	0.6058	0.6177	0.5946	0.6125	0.5878	0.5907

Notes: Table provides the coefficient estimates from Equation (3) in the full sample and the more limited sample of validated voters. Estimates are weighted by post-election survey weights in the full sample and by validated voter weights in the validated voter sample. Coefficients represent average marginal effects and describe the effect of an abortion ballot measure on the probability that a voter in a treated state votes for the Republican house or presidential candidate. Standard errors are in parenthesis. * p<0.1, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01.

Appendix Figure B1: The Effect of ABMs by Demographic Group



Notes: This figure shows the effect of having the opportunity to vote on an ABM in 2024 on the probability of voting Republican in the House and presidential races. We present results for the full CES sample and for samples disaggregated by respondent's demographic characteristics. Standard errors are clustered at the state level and 95 percent confidence intervals are shown.