

Trump's anti-abortion stance helped him win in 2016. Will it hurt him in 2024?

00:00

I'm very **pro-choice**. I hate the concept of **abortion**. I hate it. I hate everything it stands for. I **cringe** when I listen to people debating the subject. But you still - I just believe in choice. But I am...

That's Donald Trump talking to NBC's Tim Russert on "Meet The Press" in 1999.

But you would not ban it?

No.

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At that time, Trump was the **quintessential New Yorker**, a real estate developer **flirting** with a presidential run. It was **the era of compassionate conservatism**. Surveys by the Pew Research Center showed about half of Americans thought abortion should be legal.

Trump didn't run for president in 1999. He would go on to host "The Apprentice" on NBC while his political ambition **simmered on the back burner**. A decade and a half later...

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I am officially running for president of the United States. And we are going to make our country great again.

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By then, his position on abortion had completely transformed. This is Trump during an MSNBC town hall moderated by Chris Matthews during the campaign.

01:09

How do you ban abortion? How do you actually do it?

Well, you know, you'll go back to a position like they had where people will perhaps go to illegal places.

Yeah.

But you have to ban it.

Do you believe in...

No, but...

Do you believe in punishment for abortion - yes or no - as a principle?

The answer is that there has to be some form of punishment.

For the woman?

Yeah. There has to be some form.

01:30

About half the country still supported a legal right to abortion at that point, but a key group of voters overwhelmingly opposed it - **white evangelical Christians**. And Trump needed their support. He got it after making statements like this in the third and final 2016 presidential debate moderated by then-Fox News anchor Chris Wallace.

01:50

Do you want to see the court **overturn** - you just said you want to see the court protect **the Second Amendment**. Do you want to see the court overturn **Roe v. Wade**?

Well, if we **put another two or perhaps three justices on**, that's really what's going to be - that will happen.

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Exit polling in 2016 showed nearly two-thirds of Christian voters chose Trump. **He put three Supreme Court justices on the high court during his term**, and in 2022...

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According to a **draft** Supreme Court majority opinion obtained by Politico, a decision has been made to overturn the landmark Roe v. Wade ruling. In the **leaked** document, Justice Samuel Alito writes in part, Roe was **egregiously** wrong from the start. It's your...

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Those conservative justices **delivered on** Trump's promise to end the **constitutional** right to an abortion in the United States. Now some Republicans in Congress are pushing for a federal ban on abortion. But as Trump tries to win back the White House, a strong anti-abortion stance might not help him beat Joe Biden.

CONSIDER THIS - opposition to abortion helped Donald Trump win in 2016. Now that the same position could be a political **liability**, will Trump's position evolve again?

From NPR, I'm Ari Shapiro.

[중간광고]

04:28

It's CONSIDER THIS from NPR. Since Roe v. Wade was overturned in 2022, **support for the Supreme Court decision guaranteeing a federal right to abortion has only grown.** More than half of Americans support Roe v. Wade. And **it's safe to say** **reproductive** rights will be **pivotal** in determining the outcome of the 2024 presidential election.

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Many people have asked me what my position is on abortion and abortion rights.

Former president and presumptive Republican nominee Donald Trump is clearly aware that his position here could determine whether he wins or loses this race.

My view is now that we have abortion where everybody wanted it from a legal standpoint, the states will determine by vote or legislation or perhaps both. And whatever they decide must be the law of the land - in this case, the law of the state.

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Trump made those remarks in a campaign video released last week on his Truth Social platform. Trump has never been consistent on reproductive rights. As president, he backed a federal abortion ban. Now white evangelical voters are **dismayed** to see him abandon that position. So where is Trump going on abortion rights, and does he have a core belief here, or is he purely making a political calculation? NPR Sarah McCammon covers reproductive rights, evangelical voters and former president Donald Trump. Good to have you here.

05:48

Yeah. Good to be here, Ari.

05:49

Before we get to the present day, what was behind the position we heard him take in that first clip of tape back when he supported abortion in 1999?

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You know, obviously, I can't look into his mind and know exactly what was behind that position. But it doesn't seem all that surprising **given** the context. You know, in that same 1999 interview on NBC's "Meet The Press," Trump was asked about several issues, including same-sex marriage and about what was then a debate around gay people serving in the military. And he said he hadn't thought much about the first issue and essentially that he didn't see any issue with gay people in the military. But he noted that he had spent most of his life in New York City. And he said, essentially, on those issues and on the issue of abortion, he might look at it differently if he lived somewhere else in the country. He mentioned Iowa, for example.

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So by Trump's own account, he did not hold particularly socially conservative views. And while he certainly **tailors** his messages now to religious conservatives, particularly white evangelicals, there's pretty widespread agreement that he himself is not particularly religious. Even his white evangelical supporters say in polls, they don't see him as particularly **devout**. So describing himself as pro-choice at that time would seem to **fit into a larger profile of who Trump was and how he viewed himself**.

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OK. So let's talk about this latest position he has taken, where he says it should be up to the states, which made some anti-abortion group leaders and activists and politicians very upset. What was the reaction?

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Well, whatever else this might be, it appears to be a political calculation at minimum. I mean, we've seen what appears to be voter backlash in the past couple of years since the Dobbs decision overturned Roe v. Wade and allowed more than a dozen states to ban most or all abortions. Those bans have meant that women have been turned away for emergency abortions in some states like Texas. And some people haven't been able to access abortion in cases of rape.

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In several states where abortion has been on the **ballot**, voters have signaled support for abortion rights, and that includes some red states like Kansas and also Kentucky. So that's something that many Republican strategists are concerned about. But at the same time, Trump has been under pressure from some in the Republican base to go farther now that Roe has been overturned and support a national abortion ban. But by saying that he will instead leave the issue to the states, which is essentially the **status quo** at this moment, Trump appears to be trying to avoid strengthening Democrats' ability to **rally** their voters around abortion rights in November.

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Do you think that the white evangelical base that so supported his strong stance against abortion is going to punish him for taking this more **lenient** position?

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I don't like to make predictions, but on this one, I doubt it. And that's because the voters who are most motivated by opposition to abortion rights are very unlikely to vote for President Biden. The anti-abortion activists I've heard from in recent days have expressed some disappointment with Trump's position, with his refusal to say he would sign a national abortion ban. But, you know, the way they put it - I talked to Kristan Hawkins, for example, with the group Students for Life. The way she put it to me this week was that she can work with that position. And I think we have some sense of what that might mean, Ari, because Hawkins' group and others have been promoting the idea of using a federal law known as the **Comstock Act** to shut down access to abortion. Now, that's an anti-obscenity law from the 1870s that outlaws sending anything used to induce abortion through the mail. It's not been enforced in that way for decades. But Hawkins and other anti-abortion activists hope that a Trump administration, if Trump is elected, would use Comstock to restrict abortion access even in states where abortion is currently legal.

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Final thought - do you think we're going to continue to see Trump's position on abortion evolve?

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Trump has never been president during a time when Roe v. Wade was not the law of the land. And I think that's worth remembering because we haven't seen what he would do in that situation. Remember, of course, he was instrumental in overturning Roe through choosing three conservative Supreme Court justices, but Roe was overturned in June of 2022 - right? - well after Trump left office. So if he is elected in 2024, he will be under pressure from abortion rights' opponents to go farther, to use the power of the executive branch to restrict abortion in whatever way possible.

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Activists already are putting together plans to that end, which include pushing Trump to choose leaders of key agencies like HHS, FDA and the Department of Justice who would have the power to do things like restricting public funding for organizations that provide or refer people for abortions and also to restrict abortion pills and in some cases, prosecute people who they believe to be **facilitating** access to abortion, depending on how they might try to interpret the Comstock Act.

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So there are divisions over strategy and, to some extent, over ideology in the anti-abortion rights movement, and we can't know who might prevail if Trump were elected. We also don't know how he would view the political calculations involved in pushing for more abortion restrictions. But we do know that he would have quite a bit more power to restrict abortion if he were elected again.