

# Ohio's November vote on abortion rights is overshadowing the U.S. Senate race. Where do the candidates stand?

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COLUMBUS, Ohio – With the March primary election fewer than six months away, the main political event in Ohio normally would be the Republican contest for the chance to try to unseat Democratic U.S. Sen. Sherrod Brown.

But the race is getting overshadowed by another election: the November campaign over State Issue 1, which would enshrine abortion rights in the state constitution and block Ohio's six-week abortion ban that's currently held up in court.

There are other reasons the Senate campaign has yet to heat up much. But Jai Chabria, a Republican strategist who ran U.S. Sen. JD Vance's successful campaign last year, said the ballot issues are a factor.

"I do think the ballot issues allow the campaigns to be more under the radar," Chabria said. "That's because the media is focused more on other things. That plus the presidential race will naturally take up more oxygen than last cycle."

But the November campaign also provides a natural runway for the Republican Senate candidates, who all oppose Issue 1, as anti-abortion activists and GOP party officials organize to try to defeat the measure. And as they look for support from [GOP primary voters who polling shows remain staunchly opposed to abortion](#), the Republican candidates, Sen. Matt Dolan, Secretary of State Frank LaRose and Cleveland businessman Bernie Moreno all say they plan to try to help defeat it. Democrats, meanwhile, are highlighting the Republican candidates' anti-abortion views, hoping it can help them this November and in November 2024.

With Issue 1 putting a spotlight on abortion, here are how the major Republican candidates and Democratic Sen. Sherrod Brown, stack up on the issue.

## Matt Dolan

In part by distancing himself from ex-President Donald Trump, Dolan has positioned himself as the relative moderate in the field. But he's also described a conservative personal viewpoint on abortion that he's said is informed by his Catholic faith.

Dolan said [in a 2020 candidate interview](#) that if Roe v. Wade were overturned, that he'd make sure any abortion bill doesn't interfere with sex education or birth control and retained exceptions for rape and incest.

Otherwise, he said, "I would vote with those two exceptions to ban abortion in Ohio." The position tracks with recent comments from ex-President Donald Trump, who has criticized abortion bans like Ohio's for not containing rape and incest exemptions.

As a U.S. Senate candidate, Dolan said in an email to [cleveland.com](#) and The Plain Dealer that he will work to protect the Hyde Amendment, which forbids federal funds from paying for abortion, and support a bill that would penalize doctors who do not provide care for infants that are born following a failed abortion, "while maintaining exceptions for rape, incest and the life of the mother."

But Dolan said he doesn't support federal legislation imposing an outright national ban on abortion.

"I think most Americans agree there should be reasonable limits on abortion and abortion policy will primarily be made at the state level," Dolan said.

As a state senator, Dolan cast votes against a couple high-profile abortion-related bills that he may be asked about during the primary.

Citing the bill's lack of a rape or incest exemption, he voted several times against the current "heartbeat" abortion law that bans the procedure six weeks into pregnancy, before many women know they're pregnant. The law temporarily went into effect after the U.S. Supreme Court overturned Roe v. Wade in June 2022 but has been on hold for about a year during an ongoing legal challenge in state courts.

Dolan also voted in December 2017 against a law that makes it a felony for a doctor to perform an abortion if a patient cites a Down syndrome diagnosis as a reason.

Dolan explained himself in a floor speech. He called the measure well-intentioned, but sad it unfairly gave extra protections to people with Down syndrome but not those with other types of medical issues.

He also said he was worried the law could unintentionally increase the number of abortions by discouraging doctors from talking with patients about positive outcomes for children with the disorder.

"If we're encouraging silence, that discussion won't happen," Dolan said. "And I worry that we will have more abortions, which is not the intended impact of this bill."

## Frank LaRose

LaRose has said that in the U.S. Senate, he would support legislation setting a national ban on abortion with an exemption for the life of the mother, but potentially not for rape or incest. The open question though is at what point in pregnancy the ban would take effect.

In a [June interview on NBC News' "Meet the Press,"](#) LaRose called Ohio's six-week ban "a good standard," but then also said there could be "room to negotiate" up to 20 weeks, which Republicans have debated as they look for a position that might be more palatable to the general public amid an election losing streak.

LaRose has touted his "100% pro-life voting record" while he served in the state Senate from 2011 through 2018. He sponsored the Down syndrome bill that Dolan voted against, defending it in his own floor speech.

Before the Heartbeat bill passed, LaRose opposed it, [with the Akron Beacon Journal reporting in 2014](#) that LaRose felt it wouldn't pass muster with the U.S. Supreme Court, a common Republican position at the time.

But he eventually voted in favor of it, [joining his Republican colleagues in December 2019](#) to overturn a veto of the bill from then-Gov. John Kasich.

## Bernie Moreno

Moreno, as someone who's never held elected office, has no voting record to analyze.

But he's staked out a very conservative abortion position during his brief political career, [telling Breitbart, the right-wing political website, in 2021](#) that he does not support exemptions for rape and incest.

During his current Senate campaign, Moreno has said he believes life begins at conception, but he's also expressed support for banning abortion nationally at 15 weeks, which he described as the most conservative abortion legislation that can clear the Senate, where at least some bipartisan or moderate support is needed for most measures to pass.

"I believe we should do more at the state level and much less at the federal level. But there is a role for the federal level here," Moreno said during a campaign event last month near Columbus.

## Sherrod Brown

Brown's current U.S. Senate website doesn't have an issues section. His campaign page in 2018, though, [said](#) he "believes a woman's reproductive health decisions are between her and her doctor, and he's repeatedly opposed efforts to take away that freedom."

But last year, Brown voted for the Women's Health Protection Act, legislation that supporters describe as codifying Roe v. Wade, but which opponents have described as far too sweeping.

In comments to reporters this week, Brown declined to say whether he might be willing to compromise on an abortion measure to potentially get a bill through the Senate. "It's way more complicated than that," he said.

But, he criticized the U.S. Supreme Court vote that allowed Ohio's heartbeat law to go into effect.

"I was very satisfied with Roe v. Wade. The court decision broke 50 years of tradition to meet an extreme political agenda. That's why I think this issue in November is going to pass," Brown said.

Brown has a long record of favoring abortion rights. There's perhaps only a single time he ran afoul of abortion-rights supporters, which happened early in his congressional career.

Shortly after taking office in 1993, voted to block Medicaid, the government health-care program for the poor and disabled, from covering abortion. Explaining his vote, Brown described it as a complicated issue. But, he said he didn't think his constituents wanted tax money to fund abortion.

"The pro-lifers are never going to like me," Brown told The Plain Dealer at the time. "And the pro-choicers may not trust me anymore."

Brown accrued a steady pro-abortion rights record after that, including voting multiple times against "partial-birth" abortion bans and blocking a vote that would let states ban Medicaid coverage for abortions in the case of rape and incest. His wife, columnist Connie Schultz, [has said publicly numerous times](#) that she researched Brown's record on abortion before she agreed to date him, proudly describing him as having a 100% voting record on the issue.