

Getting the Edge: Proactive Abortion Messaging to Seize the Debate

New findings from a year-long NARAL messaging research project finds that the freedom to decide— especially as a direct contrast to controlling politicians—provides a powerful framework for conversations around abortion in the U.S. This memo outlines high-level learnings and recommendations for key messengers coming out of the research, all of which resonate strongly with both Base and Conflicted voters.

1. LEAD WITH POWERFUL PHRASES THAT EMPHASIZE THAT THIS ISSUE IS ABOUT THE FREEDOM TO DECIDE

- When it comes to decisions around parenthood and pregnancy, I will always respect women’s personal decisions and protect the freedom to decide.
- I, like most Americans, believe that personal decisions about pregnancy should be made by the woman or pregnant person, with the support of the people she loves and trusts —not by politicians.
- I believe that the decision to have an abortion is not a political one, it is a deeply personal one. As a legislator, it’s not up to me to force someone to make one decision or another.

Note: Use a support frame, not an identity frame, e.g., "I will champion/protect/respect your freedom to decide" over "I am pro-choice."

2. GO ON OFFENSE BY DESCRIBING THE WORLD WE WANT TO CREATE

- I am working toward a world where each of us would not only be free to dream our best life, we would have the freedom to live it, as well.
- I want to see a world where people respect personal decisions around parenthood and pregnancy, where people can get accurate, unbiased medical information and make the best health care decisions they can for themselves and those they love.
- Once someone has decided to seek abortion care, I want her to be able to have access to safe and affordable medical care. I want her to be supported, not restricted by laws that dictate her decision or place unnecessary barriers on the process.

3. SHOW THE FULL SLATE OF RESTRICTIONS BEING PASSED, AND THE SELFISH MOTIVATIONS BEHIND THEM

- My out-of-touch opponent has stood with the Republican Party as they passed a barrage of abortion restrictions and continually sought to ban all abortion care, controlling women’s’ decisions and criminalizing doctors who provide care for their patients.
- Unlike my opponent, I believe legislators should be passing laws to help people, not to control them.
- All of these laws are about controlling and manipulating others for political gain. It’s about politics, power, money, and self-interest—not about ideology.

'Base: voters who say abortion should be legal and generally available, and that laws related to abortion access should be less strict or kept the same. Conflicted: voters who would not choose abortion for themselves but believe the government should not prevent people from accessing abortion care.



FREEDOM IS FOR EVERYBODY

- These laws are un-American. This country is supposed to be about having the freedom to make your own life.
- One-size-fits-all laws simply don't work when people are making personal medical decisions, such as the decision to have an abortion.
- Have Republicans ever thought about what these laws mean for people's lives? Some of these laws force doctors to lie to their patients; others could lead women to be thrown in jail after having an abortion or miscarriage. These laws aren't about protecting people, they're about controlling them.
- Politicians often pass these abortion laws in secret and under the radar, hoping that the majority of people who support the freedom to decide won't notice.
- The people passing these laws usually don't care what happens to babies after they're born. These are the same politicians who want to cut assistance programs like early childhood education or food stamps.
- It's egregious to be focused on outlawing something that most Americans believe should be a personal decision, as a pandemic ravages our communities and basic health care needs go unmet. What terrible priorities.

Key Words When Describing Restrictions	Key Words When Describing the Politicians Passing These Restrictions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Controlling • Taking away our options • Criminalizing women and doctors • Invasive, intrusive • Forced pregnancy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Controlling • Out of touch • Anti-freedom • Hypocritical • Manipulative

This messaging guidance is based on extensive qualitative and quantitative research conducted from November 2019 to July 2020, including 19 in-person and two online focus groups among a total of 246 Black, white, Hispanic and API voters in Arizona, Iowa, Michigan and North Carolina. The research also included a dial test survey of n1,473 voters from key audiences across the U.S., including:

- n340 Black women and men
- n329 Hispanic women and men
- n371 white women and men
- n327 Asian Pacific Islander women and men
- n106 mixed race women and men
- n256 Gen Z voters
- n147 voters who identify as LGBTQ
- n574 voters from battleground states