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EVERYBODY

The Potency of Anti-Choice Attacks & Pathways to Victory

As of April 27, 2022

Latest Opposition Messaging and Opportunities for Response

2022 is set to be the most pivotal year for abortion rights and access in decades. In mere months, the U.S. Supreme Court is poised to decide on a direct challenge to *Roe v. Wade* in the *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* case and rule on the constitutionality of Mississippi's ban on abortion at 15 weeks. Meanwhile, given the Court's inaction on the Texas abortion ban, *Roe* has effectively been rendered meaningless in the state. Emboldened by that inaction, lawmakers hostile across the country have escalated a push for a barrage of bans and restrictions on abortion.

The anti-choice movement is using this moment to spread disinformation and distract from the harms that bans and restrictions cause. They are currently leaning into two distinct and highly potent message frames: One that positions 15-week bans on abortion as "commonsense," "reasonable," and conflated with abortion later in pregnancy, while claiming our side supports "infanticide" and "abortion up until the moment of birth." The second frame relies on false claims that Democrats are out of step with science and that we need to "modernize abortion laws" in order to "keep up with the science."

Research NARAL conducted with Swayable in March 2022 showed that **the current opposition frames are highly potent across race, age, and views on abortion**. However, we also learned that using an **empathy frame** when talking about abortion is one way we can respond to and get ahead of these narratives. As a multitude of research has shown, empathy is an extremely powerful value that effectively bridges the space between abortion bans and bans later in pregnancy, and as such will be critical to leverage in the coming months.

Despite the effectiveness of the science narrative (Oppo 2 in the chart below), using an "empathy" message effectively neutralized the opposition message and persuaded our key audiences on all major metrics. In particular, it increased the following two attitudes:

- Regardless of the state someone lives in, they should be able to access safe and legal abortion care.
- It is important to protect access to abortion care.

Content	Segment	Primary
		Access Safe and Legal Abortion ⓘ
Oppo 2/Empathy	Overall	65.9 ➔ +2.4
Oppo 2/Freedom	Overall	65.9 ➔ +0.2
Oppo 2/Calling out Rs Messaging	Overall	-0.5 ➔ 65.9
Frame 2 Oppo Message	Overall	-1.3 ➔ 65.9

(See Appendix for messaging language)

More information is needed to understand how to effectively combat the 15-week narrative. NARAL is currently in the field with Avalanche Insights for the next phase of this research to learn more. We aim to more deeply understand the emotional associations that voters have about access to abortion in this moment, and what is needed to build resonant messaging ahead of the Supreme Court's decision and the 2022 midterms. We plan to share those findings with allies and partners once completed.

Effectiveness of Values-Based Messaging in Key Battleground States

As states across the country introduce and pass abortion bans and restrictions, we went into the field in one of these states, Arizona, to determine public opinion and the resonance of our messaging at this moment. We found:

- The vast majority of voters (71%) in Arizona oppose making abortion illegal.
- **90% agree that “each of us should have the freedom to decide how and when we start or grow a family, free from political interference.”** This includes every Democrat (100%) along with 89% of Independents and 82% of Republicans. White (92%) and Latinx (87%) voters agree at nearly equal levels.
- **82% agree that “one-size-fits-all laws don’t work when people are making personal medical decisions.”** Large majorities of Democrats (91%), Independents (85%), and Republicans (74%) agree with this, as do 85% of white voters and 75% of Latinx voters.
- While only 18% of Republicans would only vote for a candidate that supports banning abortion, 58% of Democrats would only vote for a candidate that opposes banning abortion.

We also specifically tested messaging around the **15-week ban**:

- When asked which statement they agreed with more: **“When it comes to abortion care, patients and doctors should have the freedom to decide what is best for each person”** vs “Banning abortion at 15 weeks is a reasonable compromise,” 59% of respondents chose the former and only 25% indicated they agreed with the latter.
- The poll similarly found that 61% of respondents agreed more with the statement **“politicians shouldn’t try to control us and interfere with these personal medical decisions”** compared with 26% who agreed that “banning abortion at 15 weeks is a reasonable compromise.”

Key Overarching Narratives and Frames

A multi-year message research project conducted by NARAL in 2019-2020 and ongoing testing found and cemented a number of key values-based message frames for proactively discussing abortion:

- The **freedom** to decide, especially as a direct contrast to **control** and controlling politicians, provides a powerful and uniquely effective frame for uniting base and conflicted audiences.
 - Using a support frame, rather than an identity frame—e.g., “I will protect/respect your freedom to decide” over “I am pro-choice”—gives people space to see themselves on our side, even if they are not ready to claim a political identity.
- Most voters, even those who are conflicted on abortion, do not support **political interference in personal decisions** and do support freedom from political interference.

- It is critical to disrupt the persistent assumption of benevolence around restrictions by:
 - Putting any restriction in the context of the full scope of anti-choice efforts
 - Describing the motivations of anti-choice politicians (control, power, political gain)
 - Nudging people to think about the impact of restrictions (including criminalization)

As the anti-choice opposition moves to position abortion care at 15 weeks as “later abortion,” it will be important to keep in mind what we know about messaging regarding abortion later in pregnancy. Research done in partnership with EMILY’s List, Planned Parenthood, and Center for American Progress found that:

- We need to refute the false narratives of the opposition, clearly state the facts, lean into empathy, and expose their true motivations.
- The opposition intentionally conflates abortion later in pregnancy and infanticide. Stating the facts help dispel voters’ concerns, and it is vital to address and rebut false claims.
- The value frame of **parenting in difficult and complex circumstances** is key. Focusing on empathy, respondents want to respect other people’s personal decisions around parenthood and pregnancy—whether those decisions involve giving birth, placing a child for adoption, having an abortion, or choosing not to have children at all.

It is no coincidence that the Supreme Court is hearing a 15-week ban case to overturn *Roe*. The anti-choice opposition is deliberately working to shift public attention to 15-week bans while they pass a barrage of bans and restrictions to block access to care on the state level. It’s incumbent upon us to showcase that *Roe* has already fallen and to focus attention on current and impending bans vs. arguing what a decision on JWHO means for *Roe*.

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APPENDIX – SWAYABLE KEY MESSAGES

Opposition science message:

Our nation has a critical opportunity to modernize our laws and catch up with the great advances we’ve seen in science, technology, and medicine that indisputably shows the humanity of unborn children. Yet Democrats, supported by the abortion industry, continue to undermine science. They ignore the fact that the science around viability has changed, and they ignore studies that show abortion is dangerous to women. They continue to disregard human life and put women at risk.

Empathy response / inoculation message:

Every pregnancy is unique. I can’t know the circumstances of each person’s pregnancy, so I shouldn’t be making decisions for them. The idea that politicians should interfere in someone’s decisions about their family, especially about something as personal and complicated as pregnancy, is not only creepy, it’s also harmful. People seeking abortion care need compassion and support, not judgment and punishment. One-size-fits-all laws like abortion bans will only hurt people trying to make personal medical decisions for themselves and their families. That’s wrong. These politicians are overstepping their role and families don’t deserve to pay the price.