

Getting the Edge: Communicating and Winning on Reproductive Freedom

With the U.S. Supreme Court poised to overturn *Roe v. Wade* in its imminent decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization* and state lawmakers hostile to reproductive freedom ramping up their push to block abortion access through a barrage of bans and restrictions, 2022 is set to be the most pivotal year for abortion rights and access in decades. It is more important than ever for leaders who support reproductive freedom to speak out with powerful, proactive messaging that engages the vast majority of Americans who support reproductive freedom and pushes back against rampant disinformation.

The following memo, based on NARAL’s multi-year message research program and findings, provides recommendations for reclaiming the narrative, speaking out on key issues, and responding to opposition claims.

OWNING THE NARRATIVE

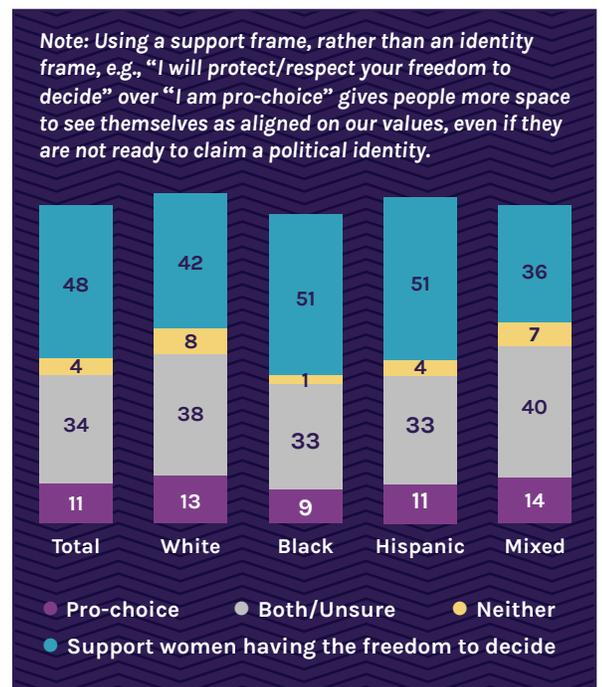
Shape the conversation around powerful values: Freedom vs. control

The freedom to decide, especially as a direct contrast to controlling politicians, provides a powerful and uniquely effective framework for conversations around accessing the full range of reproductive healthcare in the United States.

- When it comes to decisions around parenthood and pregnancy, I will always respect people’s freedom to make personal decisions and protect the freedom to decide.
- I, like most Americans, believe that personal decisions about pregnancy should be made by the person who is pregnant, with the support of the people she loves and trusts – not by politicians trying to control us.
- 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 – we should be helping people, not trying to control them.

Go on the 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 healthcare decisions they can for themselves and those they love.
- Once someone has decided to seek abortion care, I want them to be able to have access to safe and affordable medical care. I want them to be supported, not restricted by laws that dictate their decision or place unnecessary barriers on the process.



Call out anti-choice politicians, and demonstrate the danger of their agenda and motivations

- My out-of-touch opponent has stood with the Republican Party as they jammed through a barrage of abortion restrictions and worked in overdrive to ban all abortion care, controlling people’s decisions and criminalizing doctors who provide care for their patients.
- We are supposed to be passing laws that help people. Yet these abortion restrictions aren’t helping anyone—they’re about controlling and manipulating others for political gain, power, and self-interest.
- Abortion bans and restrictions are un-American. This country is supposed to be about having the freedom to make your own life.
- Have Republicans ever thought about what abortion restrictions mean for people’s lives? Some of these laws force doctors to lie to their patients; others could have someone thrown in jail after having an abortion or miscarriage. These laws aren’t about protecting people, they’re about controlling them.
- The people passing abortion bans 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 and food assistance programs.

KEY ISSUES

Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization and the end of Roe v. Wade

- *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* is a case about Mississippi's 15-week abortion ban that directly challenges *Roe v. Wade*. There is no path to upholding Mississippi's ban without ending the constitutional right to abortion as we know it.
- If *Roe* falls, 28 states are expected to move to ban abortion. As of March 2022, 13 already have "trigger bans" in place that would ban abortion automatically.
- Republican politicians will not stop here. Allowing states to ban abortion is just one step in their decades-long effort to criminalize people who provide and seek abortion care, and it is all in service of their ultimate goal – power and control.

Texas' SB 8 and the barrage of abortion bans spreading across the country

- Texas' vigilante-enforced ban on abortion at about six weeks, which is before many people even know they are pregnant, has rendered *Roe v. Wade* meaningless in the state. Since this ban (SB 8) went into effect, abortion care has been nearly impossible to access in Texas—a state that is home to nearly 7 million women. That is 1 in 10 women of reproductive age in the United States.¹
- The people most harmed by abortion restrictions are those who already face barriers to accessing the care they need—including women; people of color; those working to make ends meet; LGBTQ+ people; immigrants; young people; those living in rural communities; and people with disabilities.
- Texas' ban is one of the barrage of bans and restrictions pushed by lawmakers hostile to reproductive freedom across the country. Last year, states enacted over 100 restrictions on abortion—more than any year since *Roe* was decided.
- The barrage of bans, including SB 8 and the growing list of bans in other states, are all part of the anti-choice movement's push to end legal abortion.

Medication abortion care: A safe, effective option for ending an early pregnancy

- Medication abortion care is a safe, effective option for ending an early pregnancy. It was approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) more than 20 years ago.
- People who are pregnant should be able to have medication abortion care prescribed by their healthcare provider and then be able to receive their medications in the way that makes the most sense for them, whether that is at a health center, their local pharmacy, or delivered to their home.

RESPONDING TO OPPOSITION CLAIMS

Note: When responding to opposition claims, never begin by accepting their inaccurate or bad-faith premise. Instead, pivot to correct information and lead with your values. Then, re-center the person who is pregnant and their lived experience, calling out your opponents selfish, politically-motivated agenda.

Claims about "infanticide"

The opposition falsely asserts that abortion is equivalent to infanticide and that advocates want abortion "up until the moment of birth." This is not how medical and reproductive care works, and these claims push a false narrative as a distraction to mislead voters. It is vital to quickly correct disinformation.

- **Do not repeat the disinformation.**
- **Quickly correct disinformation/misinformation and pivot to core message:** This is incorrect, that's not how medical care works. Infanticide is already illegal. What's important to remember is...
- **Call out the motivations of those spreading disinformation:** That disinformation is being spread by people whose goal is to interfere with people's personal medical decisions.

¹Guttmacher Institute, "Impact of Texas' Abortion Ban: A 14-Fold Increase in Driving Distance to Get an Abortion." 2021.

Claims about abortion later in pregnancy

The opposition makes a range of false and misleading claims about abortion later in pregnancy, often conflating it with “infanticide” as mentioned above, and parroting inaccuracies about the frequency and circumstances surrounding abortion later in pregnancy. It’s critical to state the facts, and re-center empathy and compassion for the person who is pregnant.

- Most of us try to live our lives without interfering in other people’s personal decisions. We know that someone may end a pregnancy for different reasons. We cannot make their decisions because we haven’t walked in their shoes. Someone might face a web of barriers—including restrictions, travel distance to a clinic, or not being able to afford care—that can push abortion care out of reach or later into a pregnancy.
- Sometimes, someone gets a tragic diagnosis of a serious health complication that threatens their life or health. Other times, a family learns later in a pregnancy there is a very serious fetal diagnosis or the baby is dying and can’t survive for long. When families are making difficult, complicated, personal medical decisions, one-size-fits-all laws don’t work.
- We can all agree that the decision about whether, when, or how to become a parent is one of the most important decisions we make in our lives. Everybody should have the freedom to make their own decision with those they love and trust, based on what is best for their lives, families, and circumstances.

Claims about “science” and co-opting science messaging

The opposition falsely claims that overturning Roe is about “modernizing our laws to reflect the science” and that scientific advancements justify abortion bans. It’s important to debunk these claims by citing experts, calling out one-size-fits all bans, and emphasizing that every pregnancy is unique.

- **Question their credibility:** Neither science nor medical expertise back up disinformation about abortion.
- **Pivot to an empathy frame:** The reality is that every pregnancy is unique and complex. That’s why one-size-fits-all bans and restrictions on abortion endanger pregnant people and prevent providers from offering the best healthcare to their patients.
- **Call out anti-choice motivations:** Republican politicians have spent decades spreading medically inaccurate and often dangerous disinformation about pregnancy and abortion care. They have passed countless abortion bans and restrictions that take away people’s freedom and are dangerous to their health. Republican politicians don’t care about science—they care about scoring political points.

Claims about vaccines and co-opting reproductive rights language

The opposition and anti-vaxxers regularly co-opt language from the reproductive health, rights, and justice movements like “my body, my choice” in their efforts to spread vaccine hesitancy. Generally, we recommend ignoring these claims and avoiding semantic arguments that can confuse your audience and distract from the core issue. However, should you need to respond, we recommend the below:

- Efforts by anti-mask and anti-vaccine activists to co-opt the symbols and language of the reproductive health, rights, and justice movements are an attempt to distract from how dangerous and unpopular their agenda is.
- During this public health crisis, it’s critical that we focus on protecting the health and safety of our families and communities.
- Unlike coronavirus, pregnancy isn’t contagious. The decision about whether, when, or how to become a parent is one of the most important – and personal – life decisions we make. We need to ensure that each of us has the freedom to make these personal decisions, including the decision to seek abortion care.

Key Words When Defining our Side and Describing our Values	Key Words When Describing Restrictions and Defining the Opposition
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reproductive freedom • The freedom to decide • Personal decisions • Empathy and compassion • Safe, accessible, supported • Equity and justice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Controlling • Self-interest and political gain • Invasive/Intrusive • Politically motivated • Political interference • Taking away options • Criminalizing doctors and patients