A Content Analysis of Republican Anti-Abortion

Rhetoric by Gender in Post-Roe America

By

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Authors Declaration

I, the undersigned, Caitlin Phillips, candidate for Master of Arts in International Public Affairs, declare herewith that the present thesis is exclusively my own work, based on my research. All sources have been properly credited in the text, notes, and the bibliography. I declare that no unidentified and illegitimate use was made of the work of others, and no part of the thesis infringes on any person's or institution's copyright. Furthermore, I declare that no part of this thesis has been generated using artificial intelligence (ChatGPT). I also declare that no part of the thesis has been submitted in this form as coursework for credits or to another institution of higher education for an academic degree.

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Abstract

This thesis sets out to examine the gendered dimensions of Republican anti-abortion rhetoric in the context of post-Roe America, by analyzing the legislative debates surrounding H.R. 8297, the Ensuring Access to Abortion Act of 2022. Following the Supreme Court's overturning of *Roe v. Wade* in 2022, this bill was one of two that attempted to grant federal protections for abortion, which anti-abortion Republicans stood firmly against.

By utilizing a qualitative content analysis of 15 speeches–10 delivered by Republican men and 5 by Republican women– this study seeks to uncover the differences and similarities in rhetorical strategies of the Republican Representatives who delivered the speeches. While many studies focus on the differences between the two political parties, Republicans and Democrats, it can also be valuable to understand the nuances of intra-party rhetoric, and highlight the role that gender, and political party's interpretations of gender can play in shaping abortion discourse within the party.

The results of the study find that the most frequent anti-abortion rhetoric from Republican men is based on fetal personhood, political polarization, and morality/religion, and the most frequently used rhetoric from Republican women is based on the fetal personhood, pro-woman framing. Overall, the Republican women in this study used the public health, rights frame, racism frame and pro women frame more frequently than Republican men, and Republican men used the morality/religion, fetal personhood, medical misinformation and political polarization frames more frequently.

Acknowledgement

To István, for his constant support during the duration of this program and this paper. I would not have been able to do this without him. And to Morgan, for sharing the highs and lows with me. Community is the most valuable thing we have. I would also like to thank my thesis advisor, Andrea Krizsán, for her support.

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Gender Distribution by Party
117th Congress (2021-2023)
House of Representatives Only

Republican Party

Total Membership | 213
Male | 181
Female | 32

0 20 40 60 80 100 120 140 160 180 200 220

Number of Members in the House Of Representatives

Democratic Party

Total Membership | 218
Male | 128
Female | 90

0 20 40 60 80 100 120 140 160 180 200 220

Number of Members in the House Of Representatives

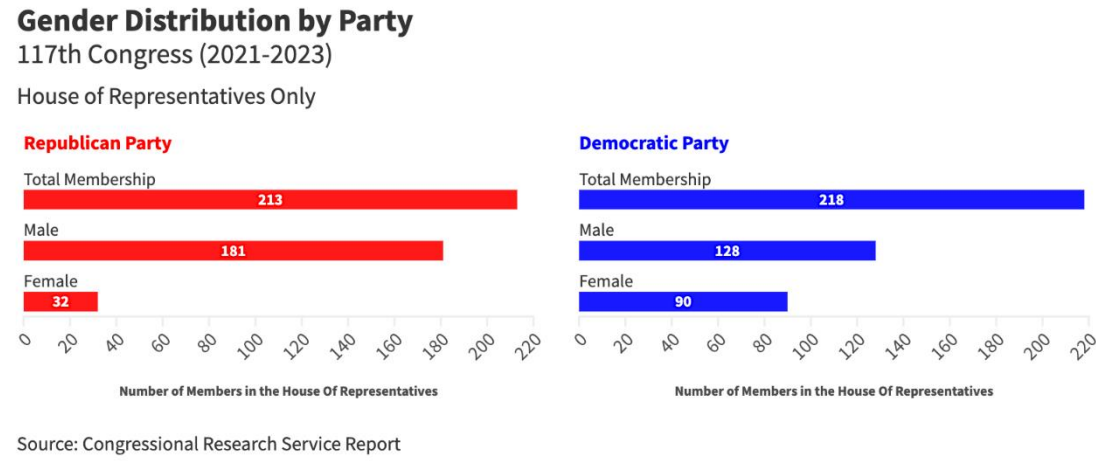Source: Congressional Research Service Report

Table 2. *Characteristics including Gender, Race, and Religion of extremist anti-abortion Republican legislators at the July 15, 2022 hearings for H.R. 8297, the Ensuring Access to Abortion Act of 2022.*

Variables		Members (N=15)
Gender	Female	5
	Male	10
Race	White	14
	Hispanic/Latinx	1
Religion (Self-Identified)	Christian	15
Endorsed by SBA PLA (A+ Classification)	Yes	15
	No	0
Co-Sponsor H.R.1011 "Life at Conception Act" 117th Congress (2021-2022) (Personhood Bill)	Yes	12 (5 Female, 7 Male)
	No	3 (Male)

Table 3. *Coding scheme applied to the data, created using a priori and emergent codes.*

Code	Words and Phrases
Morality/Religion	god, life, moral, morality, moral authority, praying, prayer, protect life, comparison to other country's policies
Fetal Personhood	human life, baby, unborn, unborn baby, child, unborn children, protect life, unborn child, person, child in the womb, young life, preborn
Public Health	healthcare, healthcare professionals, child abuse, parental involvement laws, trafficking, endangering minors, abusers, death
Medical Misinformation	viability, death, denying medical care, heartbeat, survive outside the womb,
Rights (state, constitution, and human)	fundamental rights, constitutional rights to life, liberty and happiness, human rights, state jurisdiction, constitution, state sovereignty, inalienable rights
Pro-woman	protect women, protect girls, save women from emotional or psychological damage, abortion is stressful, abortion is risky, abortion drugs are dangerous, pills should be used with directions, emotional procedure, coercion, dangerous procedure, consequences of abortion, force, abortion drugs, lack of contact or relationship between provider and patient, providers do not follow the FDA protocol, abortion industry, noncompliance of clinics and providers, medical supervision requirements

Political Polarization	radical, extreme, democrats misrepresenting facts, democrats don't want to save babies, democrats invoking god, democrats lack morality/reason, democrats have devolved, democrat's barbaric agenda
Racism	Minorities more likely to have abortions, genocide

Table 4. *Aggregated data comparing Republican anti-abortion rhetoric by gender.*

Indicators	Rep. Women (N=5)		Rep. Men (N=10)	
	Total Word Count	Aggregate Percentage	Total Word Count	Aggregate Percentage
Morality/Religion	1712	0.7	2225	0.9
Fetal Personhood	1712	0.87	2225	1.62
Public Health	1712	0.29	2225	.09
Medical Misinformation	1712	0.18	2225	.49
Rights (State/Constitutional/ Human)	1712	0.7	2225	0.67
Racism	1712	0.18	2225	0
Pro-Woman	1712	0.76	2225	0.18
Political Polarization	1712	0.5	2225	1.03

List of Abbreviations

U.S.   United States

NOW   National Organization

NARAL   National Association for the Repeal of Abortion Laws

NRLC   The National Right to Life Committee

C-SPAN   Cable-Satellite Public Affairs Network

SBA PLA   Susan B. Anthony Pro-Life America

Introduction

In 2022, the *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* decision was handed down by the Supreme Court. The ruling reversed both *Roe v. Wade* and *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, and ultimately ruled against a constitutional right to abortion, returning the issue to the states. From there, several states with 'trigger bans' in place were legally able to ban abortion immediately upon the overturning of *Roe,* while other states passed new restrictive abortion legislation, and others still took steps to enshrine abortion rights in their state constitutions.

Years of conservative judicial appointments, lobbying from the religious right, and an increasingly more extreme anti-abortion Republican Party all converged to make the *Dobbs* decision possible, and now the abortion debate has returned to the country's consciousness. As the fallout of the *Dobbs* decision is still being legislated across America, continued debate from Republicans and Democrats can provide insights about the future of abortion legislation in the United States (U.S.)

This thesis aims to compare and analyze intra-party anti-abortion rhetoric by gender, in order to identify similarities and differences in rhetorical themes and strategies used by Republican men and women. Therefore, this thesis has two guiding questions: *What are the gendered differences and similarities in Republican anti-abortion discourse? And how do contemporary Republicans frame anti-abortion arguments?* To answer these research questions, this thesis will use qualitative content analysis to compare speeches from Republican men and women during a House of Representatives debate in July of 2022 on a post-*Roe* pro-abortion bill, named the Ensuring Access to Abortion Act, or H.R. 8297.

This thesis hypothesizes that Republican men are more likely to use rights-based and moralistic arguments in their rhetoric about abortion, based on the role of patriarchy in the party that reinforce Republican men's support of family values, while Republican women are more likely to use a pro-woman and fetal personhood frame in their rhetoric about abortion (Reingold et al. 2021).

The thesis will begin by contextualizing the historical abortion debate in the U.S. as it pertains to the Republican Party and continue to outline the gender makeup of congress then and now. Then, the thesis will summarize and connect relevant literature to the research questions before detailing the methodological framework. The methodology section will address sampling, outline the study's participants, explain data collection and analysis, and reveal the thesis's limitations. Lastly, the results section will outline the findings of the content analysis.

Additionally, this thesis will use 'anti-abortion' and 'pro-abortion' to keep a neutral, analytical terminology, and will only use 'pro-life' or 'pro-choice' when analyzing or presenting data where a speaker has been quoted. From a gender identity perspective, this author acknowledges that the experience of unwanted pregnancy is not limited to people who identify as women. Still, throughout this thesis, women or woman will mainly be used to describe people facing unwanted pregnancy because the framing discourse regarding abortion by Republican Representatives is highly gendered according to cis womanhood. Additionally, this thesis categorizes speakers into male and female groups because the sample of representatives themselves take a binary view of gender and have self-identified as exclusively male or female.

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Contextualizing the U.S. Abortion Debate

For this thesis, which seeks to understand gender differences in political speech for contemporary Republicans, it is important to understand how the abortion debate began in the U.S. and how it has evolved, becoming inherently political. Therefore, this analysis will begin with a historical overview of abortion policy in the U.S. to contextualize and chronicle ideological and demographic changes within the Republican Party over time.

The political pro and anti-choice abortion debate as it exists in the U.S. today did not begin to take shape until the 1980s, when political and religious movements merged to mobilize support for the Republican Party (Balmer 2022). During the 1960s and beyond, there are two concurrent stories: one of growing abortion access and one of strong political and religious opposition to abortion. Beginning with the latter, years of Democrat-led governments and Republican scandals had led to record low support for the Republican Party (McKeegan 1993). Que the emergence of the new right, a conservative political movement that played a significant role in reshaping the Republican Party and influencing the abortion debate in the U.S. in the 1970s and beyond. New right leaders understood how to exploit the gender, class, and racial anxieties of religious conservatives, and mobilize voters through faith (Courtwright 2010). The new right connected social, economic, and religious conservatives throughout the country by championing the preservation of 'traditional family values' and rallying against abortion. They also fostered coordination between religious and political actors, including religious leader and televangelist Jerry Falwell. The Catholic Church also played a crucial role in bringing Christians into the political sphere and making the opposition to abortion a central issue during this time. The crux of the relationship between the church and the

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Republican Party became the 'pro-family' ideology – the tenants of which were anti-gay, anti-feminism, anti-abortion, and anti-divorce (Petchesky 1981).

At the same time, pro-abortion policy reform began to take shape in the U.S. for several reasons. First, the Thalidomide scandal became highly publicized, as a drug used to treat nausea in pregnant women was found to have caused severe birth defects (Planned Parenthood 2021). This scandal in combination with momentum from other social and women's movements, including the National Organization for Women (NOW) and the National Association for the Repeal of Abortion Laws (NARAL), helped garner more widespread support for abortion reform. From the late 1960s to the early 1970s several states repealed their abortion bans, with some also legalizing early elective abortion with minimal restrictions (Nossif 2000). For the first time in the U.S., abortion began to be viewed as both a women's issue and a political issue.

In 1973, the landmark Supreme Court ruling in *Roe v. Wade* proved to be a pivotal moment for women and abortion access, and a galvanizing moment for the new right. In the decision, the Supreme Court recognized the constitutional right to privacy as broad enough to encompass a woman's decision whether or not to terminate her pregnancy, making abortion more accessible across the nation (Roe v. Wade 1973). This decision also set a legal precedent that affected dozens of subsequent Supreme Court cases. As abortion rights began to expand, the Catholic church, whose position has always been staunchly anti-abortion, created organizations like The National Right to Life Committee (NRLC) in response, in order to advocate for the protection of human life, already using distinct phrasing, including 'unborn' to invoke the idea of fetal personhood.

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Although the anti-abortion movement had been overwhelmingly a battle fought solely by the Catholic church prior to the 1970s, it was successfully co-opted by the political new right and conservative, evangelical Protestants during the 1980s and beyond (McKeegan 1993). While Catholics were motivated by their belief that life begins at conception, the majority of evangelicals took a less extremist position initially, but still condemned the idea of 'abortion on demand' or the ability to have an abortion without restriction during the first few months of pregnancy (Williams 2015). Interestingly, 'abortion on demand' is still an argument used to disavow abortion rights by anti-abortion Republicans today.

By the 1980s, opposing abortion became a focal point of new right politics, as evangelical protestants grew more opposed to abortion and voted with those views in mind. Religious zealots, including Falwell, continued to link abortion with pro-family politics, using the fight to overturn Roe as a way to make the abortion debate a moral one (Williams 2015). During Ronald Reagan's first campaign in 1980, the Republican Party officially took an anti-abortion stance, calling for a constitutional amendment to ban abortion or "restore the protection of the right to life for unborn children" and called for the appointment of judges to the judiciary who "respect traditional family values and the sanctity of innocent human life" (Daynes and Tatalovich 1992).

This stance was crucial to gaining support from conservative and religious voters for Republican candidates.

From the 1970s to the 1980s, abortion went from being an issue outside of the political center, to an issue that defined and divided both parties in the U.S. Even though Republican voters in the 1970s largely held more supportive views towards abortion rights than their Democratic counterparts, Republican Representatives were found to be more anti-abortion

than their Democratic colleagues, thereby not reflecting the constituents they represented. By 1980, this was also true of the Republican President Ronald Reagan (Karol 2009; O'Brian 2020). The influence of the new right during this time also led to the appointment of four conservative-leaning Supreme Court Justices during Reagan's two terms as president in the 1980s. The appointments of these justices had a profound and lasting impact on abortion policy in the U.S., and many of the abortion regulations in place today are a product of this era. During this time, Republicans lobbied for restrictive abortion laws at the state and federal levels, including parental consent laws, mandatory waiting periods, and restrictions on public funding for abortions. Another landmark Supreme Court case in 1992, *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, brought some of these into fruition (Planned Parenthood v. Casey 1992). This case was the result of the same anti-abortion fervor as the Hyde amendment, which sought to ban the use of federal funds to pay for abortion, with a few exceptions. However, it went further by imposing restrictions on women seeking abortions, including informed consent and a 24 hour wait time before the procedure, parental consent for minors, spousal notification for married women, medical reporting requirements for abortion facilities, and clear medical emergency conditions that would exempt women from these requirements. In its decision, the Court reaffirmed the essential decision of *Roe v. Wade* that women have a right to choose, but they introduced the "undue burden" standard as the new test for evaluating abortion restrictions. This new standard allowed states to pass more restrictive abortion laws if they did not impose an undue burden on a woman seeking an abortion. The Court upheld all except the spousal notification provision, and essentially turned abortion back to the states. The result was a variety of different regulations on abortion in states across the country.

This case was one of several cases that laid the groundwork for future challenges to *Roe v. Wade*. This culminated in the 2022 *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* decision, where a majority of conservative justices, many appointed after the new right era

but influenced by its legacy, ultimately overturned *Roe v. Wade*, returning abortion rights to the states and fundamentally reshaping abortion access in the U.S.

Gender Makeup of Congress

When the pro and anti-abortion debate in the U.S. was coming into the mainstream, there were much fewer women than men in Congress. The 96th Congress began in 1979 and ended in 1981, and during this term, there were 16 women in total in the House of Representatives, and only 5 of those women were Republicans. So, out of a total of 435 members in the House, only 1.1% were Republican women, and Republican women only accounted for 3.2% of the party. At least at the beginning of the political abortion debate, women were significantly underrepresented in Congress and in their own parties, so the debate was largely had by men, most of whom were white (Center for American Women and Politics 2024; Congressional Research Service 2022).

Over the years, women's representation in the House of Representatives has experienced significant growth. In the early 1980s, the number of women in the House was relatively low, for both parties. The number of women Representatives in the house saw a dramatic increase after 1993, when a record-breaking 47 women were elected to the House of Representatives. But, this is also where women's representation in the two parties began to deviate. As the number of Democratic women in the House has grown substantially over the past thirty years, the number of Republican women in the House has grown only slightly (Pew Research Center 2021).
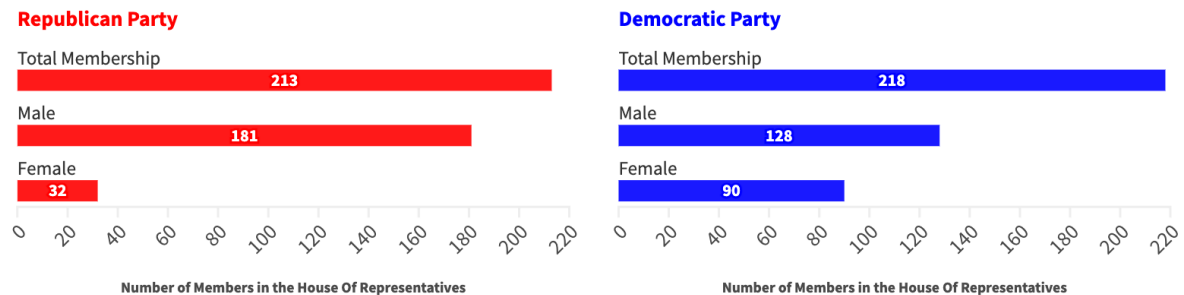
More recently, the 117th Congress which began in 2021 and ended in 2023 set a new record with 122 total women in the House of Representatives, and of those, 32 were Republicans and 90 were Democrats, as shown in the table below.

Table 1. *Gender makeup of the 117th Congress by Party, where Republican women only make up 7.4% of Representatives.*

Gender Distribution by Party
117th Congress (2021-2023)
House of Representatives Only

Republican Party

Total Membership 213
Male 181
Female 32

Number of Members in the House Of Representatives

Democratic Party

Total Membership 218
Male 128
Female 90

Number of Members in the House Of Representatives

Source: Congressional Research Service Report

(Congressional Research Service 2022)

Understanding why the number of women in the Republican Party has not grown as rapidly or consistently as in the Democratic Party is crucial to comprehending the gendered differences in the abortion debate among Republicans. This disparity in representation speaks to larger themes within the Republican Party's culture that emphasize traditional gender roles under the guise of family values, espouse a more conservative ideology, and condemn identity politics (Wineinger 2022b). Further, growing political polarization in the party and between parties in the past several years has only worked to deter ideological moderates away from office. This has had a negative impact on Republican women, who have consistently been found to be more moderate than their male counterparts (Thomsen 2015). Essentially, the Republican Party is doing little to attract or retain ideologically moderate women, and as a result, Wineinger also acknowledges that contemporary Republican women who have been elected have become more conservative and more ideologically aligned with Republican men, creating a greater chasm between the ideologies of Democratic and Republican women as compared to the 1990s. These dynamics are crucial for understanding the rhetoric and

policy positions Republican men and women adopt, particularly on salient issues like abortion. While Republican men and women might have the same ideologies, their expression of these ideologies could be hindered by larger social dynamics at play within the party.

Since the 1980s, Republicans have aligned with the anti-abortion movement and Democrats have aligned with the pro-abortion movement, but while Democratic women have grown in numbers and strength over time, being explicitly associated with pro-abortion movements and rights expansion, Republican women have not grown as substantially, and have leaned more fiercely into the party's more extremist anti-abortion rhetoric. This has caused two things: calls that Republicans, even Republican women, are anti-woman, and the mobilization of Republican women around a partisan gender-identity (Wineinger 2022a).

Although Republican women seem to defy strict interpretations of gender roles by the nature of their work, within the party, they are upholding these very systems. Many newly elected Republican women have aided the party's shift to the far-right, including highly visible Representatives like Marjorie Taylor Greene and Lauren Boebert, who advocate for extreme positions on abortion and a myriad of other issues. Their positions in the party work to reinforce patriarchal norms, arguing in favor of a return to 'traditional, family values' or more plainly, anti-feminist white-supremacy.

This far-right shift has also raised questions about representation in the Republican Party. Is it truly substantive and aligned with public opinion? In the same year that the Dobbs decision passed, a Gallup poll showed that the majority of Republicans, 66% favored legal abortion under certain circumstances, while only 24% of Republicans took the more extreme view that abortion should be illegal in all circumstances (Gallup 2023). Further, a Pew Research study from 2019 found that one-third of Americans who identify as Republican or as Republican-

leaning independents do not agree with their party on abortion (35%) (Diamant 2020). While public opinion seemed to support abortion under certain circumstances, by 2019 there were no more vocally pro-abortion Republicans in the House of Representatives (Peterson 2019). This mirrors the ideological shift right that the party has experienced, and for these reasons it is essential to examine how anti-abortion rhetoric has been used by Republicans, particularly how these narratives are framed differently by men and women within the party.

Literature Review

Anti-abortion rhetoric has evolved from the 1980s, when it entered the more mainstream political discourse, to now. Early anti-abortion rhetoric focused on the morality of abortion, likely due to the religious actors involved in the movement, including evangelical Christians and the Catholic church. The fetal personhood frame emerged from these moral and religious considerations about abortion, and it worked to vilify women who have abortions and present them as perpetrators. In the time between *Roe v. Wade* in 1973 and *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* in 1992*,* anti-abortion groups lobbied consistently for a constitutional amendment that would establish fetal personhood. While these efforts were not successful, the fetal personhood framing still remained prominent, and was even reinforced through ideas about fetal pain, which are still being used in contemporary anti-abortion debates (Halva-Neubauer and Zeigler 2010). Still today, religion and morality are extremely important lenses through which anti-abortion Republicans frame the issue. In 2022, Pew Research found that evangelical Christians are still the most opposed group to abortion, with nearly 75% agreeing that abortion should be illegal in most or all cases. Further, 86% of white evangelicals were said to believe that life begins at conception and that the fetus is therefore a person with rights (Mitchell 2022). Common rhetoric or themes associated with the fetal personhood frame for those in the anti-abortion movement then and now include substituting the term

fetus with variations for the term unborn – including unborn children, unborn life, children in the womb, unborn human life (Woliver 2002). Medical misinformation or misrepresentation are also related to these frames but can be classified separately as well. A narrative analysis on anti-abortion legislation debates from Georgia found that misrepresentations of medical science were consistently used to push an anti-abortion narrative – legislators and other speakers directly appropriated language relating to viability, defining death, and child development, and oversimplified more complex medical truths (Evans and Narasimhan 2020). Examples for this language could include 'heartbeat bills' which reinforce ideas about fetal personhood, and language like "abortion on demand up until birth" which is often used by anti-abortion actors to elicit a strong moral response, even though it is not factually accurate, and the majority of abortions occur within the first trimester, according to the CDC (Kortsmit 2022).

While the fetal personhood frame was used in the beginning of the anti-abortion movement, there was a shift within the anti-abortion movement after the 1980s from a fetal personhood frame to a 'pro-life, pro-woman' frame (Rose 2011). This shift was likely used to help attract new supporters to the party. In 1981, the pro-woman frame grew from discourse that abortion is harmful to women both physically and psychologically, and that women need to be protected from these potential harms. This framing centers on women, not fetuses, and was given credibility through scientific language which helped to attract a broader base of support, including those who saw abortion as a health issue. Although historically, Democrats had been the party associated with women's rights, the use of the pro-woman frame by Republicans allowed them to claim that they too support women's rights and wanted to protect women (Reingold et al. 2021). Even though the pro-woman frame emerged, it did not replace the fetal personhood frame completely, as anti-abortion framing that casts woman as

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a secondary consideration against a fetus still exists in the party today. In fact, research suggests that the pro-woman frame is most likely to be used alone, but it does occur significantly alongside the fetal personhood frame (Roberti 2021). The operationalization of the contemporary pro-woman frame has two subsets, protection and education, according to Roberti. On one hand, Republicans and other anti-abortion actors see women as needing to be protected from: the emotional and psychological harm of abortion, the risk and stress of an abortion procedure, abortion drugs and providers themselves, and potential force or coercion by other actors. On the other hand, they also use education language to imply that women are simply uninformed about the issue, and through education they will be 'empowered' to decide against abortion. Educational language tries to both empower women and address their perceived ignorance by presenting the facts of abortion including the risks, realities, and consequences. The tool in this case that can be used by Republican Representatives is the law, which they can use to restrict access to abortion.

Other literature on abortion framing points to a rights-based approach. A study from Ferree et al. compares abortion discourse in Germany and the U.S. and emphasizes how the rights framework has been used by pro-abortion advocates to emphasize the rights of individuals, the right to privacy, and freedom of religion (Ferree et al. 2002). On the other side, anti-abortion activists use the same rights language, only they make claims about human rights for the 'unborn' and argue against constitutional rights for abortion and in favor of state's rights to restrict abortion.

As for the specific discourse utilized by Republican men and women, it's important to note that Republican men still greatly outnumber women in the House of Representatives. In addition to Republican men simply outnumbering women, Reingold et al. suppose Republican men's dominance on women's issues could be due to gendered ideological

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differences, where Republican women were thought to be more ideologically moderate, and therefore less likely to act on polarizing issues. Or, most compellingly, the patriarchal, religious and gendered norms within the party itself reward Republican men for their anti-abortion stances that promote 'family values' and so they are then more incentivized to act, and women are less likely, as they do not want to alienate co-partisans or be labeled anti-women (Reingold et al. 2021).

Literature on Republican intra-party abortion rhetoric by gender is more sparse, but Wineiger finds that Republican congresswomen have increasingly framed anti-abortion legislation through the pro-woman lens and have used their experiences as mothers and women to take conservative stances on a wide array of issues, including abortion (Wineinger 2022a). Further, Republican congresswomen used their own identities as Republican women to reject Democratic claims that Republican anti-abortion policies are waging a "war on women." This dynamic within the party is interesting because it calls Republican congresswomen to use their identity in a way that would normally be rejected by the party but is not because it aligns with the party's moral and patriarchal values.

Finally, a recent article from Hout et al. about abortion attitudes shows that while Americans disagree on abortion just as much now as they have previously, those attitudes can be much more clearly sorted by party lines now– meaning that Republicans are more strongly aligned with anti-abortion ideology and Democrats are more aligned with pro-abortion ideology (Hout, Perrett, and Cowan 2022). With this, political polarization between the two parties becomes an important part of the contemporary abortion debate and is prominent in speeches given or debates over abortion rights by both parties. Growing ideological conservatism in the Republican Party and growing support for pro-abortion policies in the Democratic Party

underlines this widening partisan gap in abortion attitudes in post-Roe America (Hartig 2022).

Methodology

This thesis utilizes a qualitative approach to content analysis based on the importance of the contextual nature of the political speeches being analyzed. The literature on content analysis is vast and includes both qualitative and quantitative methods. Early literature defines content analysis quite broadly as a "technique for making inferences by systematically and objectively identifying specified characteristics of messages" (Holsti 1969). Further, Krippendorf recognizes the potential for content analysis as a method of inquiry into symbolic meaning of messages, and critically, acknowledges the potential for content analysis to find multiple interpretations of text by considering diverse voices, alternative perspectives, and oppositional readings (Krippendorff 1980; 2013). Qualitative content analysis utilizes an inductive research approach where research questions are used to guide data collection, but space is allowed for the emergence of other potential themes and questions. (White and Marsh 2006). For this thesis, using qualitative analysis will allow the author to evaluate both implicit and explicit meaning in the speeches given by Republican Representatives, which is important and can determine how speech is coded or classified. This type of analysis helpful for exposing the nuanced and complex aspects of political speech that this thesis is evaluating.

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Purposive Sampling and Participants

This thesis will utilize purposive sampling, which is a non-randomized, selective sampling technique. Purposive sampling will allow this thesis to select participants based on specific characteristics or criteria, including their political party, stance on abortion rights, and gender, which are all relevant for understanding the similarities and differences of Republican anti-abortion discourse by gender, and for understanding how contemporary Republicans in the House of Representatives frame their anti-abortion arguments. This sampling method will allow the thesis to include data most relevant to the narrow research objective. All of the subjects of this study have engaged in public debate in the House of Representatives over H.R. 8297 or the 2022 Ensuring Access to Abortion Act, which was debated in the House after the Supreme Court's *Dobbs* decision that overturned constitutional protections for abortion.

This thesis will analyze anti-abortion political speeches from 15 Republican Representatives who were serving as Congressional Representatives during the 117th Congress from 2021 to 2023. Out of the fifteen Representatives, five identify as women and ten identify as men. Representatives included in this study are Cathy Rodgers, Mayra Flores, Diana Harshbarger, Kat Cammack, Debbie Lesko, Robert Aderholt, John Joyce, Michael Burgess, Michael Cloud, Jodey Arrington, Russ Fulcher, Brian Mast, and Mike Johnson, Steve Scalise, and Greg Steube. During the debate over H.B. 8297, these Republican Representatives were the only ones to make speeches.

Data Collection

This thesis utilized videos made publicly available by the Cable-Satellite Public Affairs Network (C-SPAN) to gather speeches from the debate over H.R. 8297 or the 2022 Ensuring Access to Act, which was created in response to the Supreme Court's recent *Dobbs* decision ("U.S. House of Representatives House Session" 2022). During the House debate, members of the House of Representatives from both parties gave speeches ranging from thirty seconds to three minutes. The debate took place on July 15th, 2022, and included video footage of each speaker and their democratic counterparts. C-SPAN provided a transcription for the speeches, but to ensure accuracy, this author verified the accuracy of the scripts by hand. The scope of this thesis focuses solely on discourse from the Republican members of the House of Representatives, who during this debate, rose in opposition to the motion.

By collecting and utilizing data that was collected from the same period, meaning the same day and during the same debate over H.R. 8297, the author hoped to minimize external factors that could influence the data. This also allows for a more controlled analysis of the discourse, where all Representatives are debating and speaking about the same bill from an anti-abortion perspective. All speeches were made in opposition to H.R. 8297, which prohibits anyone acting under state law from interfering with a person's ability to access out-of-state abortion services (Fletcher 2022). Although the scope of the thesis is narrow, it does represent the more extreme anti-abortion views currently held by Republicans. The classification of the thesis population as extreme is based on several factors– each Representative in the study has an A+ scorecard endorsement from the non-profit organization and political action committee, Susan B. Anthony Pro-Life America (SBA PLA), whose sole mission is to "end abortion and the destruction of unborn human life" (Susan B. Anthony Pro-Life America 2024). The Susan B. Anthony National Pro-Life Scorecard evaluates every member of Congress with a rating from A+ to F, where A+ indicates a staunch anti-abortion legislator, and F indicates a pro-abortion legislator.

Additionally, 12 members of the study have explicitly co-sponsored federal personhood legislation during the 117th Congress, with H.R.1011 or the Life at Conception Act, where the summary of the Bill declares "the right to life guaranteed by the Constitution is vested in each human being at all stages of life, including the moment of fertilization, cloning, or other moment at which an individual comes into being" (Rep. Alexander Mooney 2021). Of the remaining three members who did not cosponsor H.R. 1011 during the 117th Congress, one, Representative Michael Burgess, has formerly sponsored federal personhood legislation in the 113th Congress, and all three have made public statements in an official capacity proclaiming their belief that life begins at conception (Burgess 2024; Scalise 2022; Fulcher 2024). Table 2 summarizes the perceived and self-identified all anti-abortion Representatives who spoke during the debate over H.R. 8297. The characteristics include their gender, race, religion, endorsement by SBA PLA, and whether they had recently sponsored federal personhood legislation or not. All 15 Representatives self-identified as Christian, and 14 out of 15 were white.

Table 2. *Characteristics including Gender, Race, and Religion of extremist anti-abortion Republican legislators at the July 15, 2022 hearings for H.R. 8297, the Ensuring Access to Abortion Act of 2022.*

Variables		Members (N=15)
Gender	Female	5
	Male	10
Race	White	14
	Hispanic/Latinx	1
Religion (Self-Identified)	Christian	15
Endorsed by SBA PLA (A+ Classification)	Yes	15
	No	0
Co-Sponsor H.R.1011 "Life at Conception Act" 117th Congress (2021-2022) (Personhood Bill)	Yes	12 (5 Female, 7 Male)
	No	3 (Male)

Data Analysis

This study utilized a priori and emergent coding, where predefined codes were established based on prior review of the literature, including that of Roberti, Halva-Neubauer and Ziegler, Evans and Narasimhan. While many of the code words and phrases had clearly determined terminology already based in the literature, some categories were missing. For this reason, emergent coding was useful for coding political polarization and racism. While the general literature on political polarization is wide, the specific language for political polarization and abortion depends greatly on the content and context of the speeches and in this thesis, they were mostly identified as attacks on the Democratic Party caused by clear ideological differences between Democrat and Republican Representatives. Further, the racist trope of abortion as Black genocide has roots in the fetal personhood frame, but ultimately

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presents Black women as unable to make their own decisions about abortion. This framing of Black women and abortion diverts attention from the systemic changes needed to address disparities in reproductive and is ignorant to real sources of damage to the Black community (Dobbins-Harris 2017).

Therefore, the coding scheme that was developed and used to analyze these speeches has 8 broad codes: morality and religion, fetal personhood, public health, medical misinformation, Rights (state, constitution, and human), pro-woman, political polarization and racism. This coding method helped facilitate a more focused analysis of this specific content. After the speeches were checked to ensure the accuracy of their transcription, they were initially coded, and then read and re-coded for accuracy. After the speeches were coded, using color specific highlighting for each of the eight codes, the frequency of relevant words or phrases for each code were added to a spreadsheet where data for each Representative could be entered. Frequency data showed how many times a coded variable came up in any Representative's speech and another category showed the word count per speech. The words and phrases used to code each indicator are in Table 3 below. After every speech had been coded, and the data entered, the percentages for each Representative and code were calculated by dividing the frequency of the words by the word count of each individual speech. After each percentage was calculated, the results were split by gender, either male or female, to detect which codes and themes were most prevalent for each group. However, the sample of Republican women was N=5 and the sample of Republican men was N=10. In order to be able to accurately compare the data, the data from the Republican men and women were aggregated separately. Aggregating and normalizing the data made it much more interpretable and comparable based on gender within the party.

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Table 3. *Coding scheme applied to the data, created using a priori and emergent codes.*

Code	Words and Phrases
Morality/Religion	god, life, moral, morality, moral authority, praying, prayer, protect life, comparison to other country's policies
Fetal Personhood	human life, baby, unborn, unborn baby, child, unborn children, protect life, unborn child, person, child in the womb, young life, preborn
Public Health	healthcare, healthcare professionals, child abuse, parental involvement laws, trafficking, endangering minors, abusers, death
Medical Misinformation	viability, death, denying medical care, heartbeat, survive outside the womb,
Rights (state, constitution, and human)	fundamental rights, constitutional rights to life, liberty and happiness, human rights, state jurisdiction, constitution, state sovereignty, inalienable rights
Pro-woman	protect women, protect girls, save women from emotional or psychological damage, abortion is stressful, abortion is risky, abortion drugs are dangerous, pills should be used with directions, emotional procedure, coercion, dangerous procedure, consequences of abortion, force, abortion drugs, lack of contact or relationship between provider and patient, providers do not follow the FDA protocol, abortion industry, noncompliance of clinics and providers, medical supervision requirements
Political Polarization	radical, extreme, democrats misrepresenting facts, democrats don't want to save babies, democrats invoking god, democrats lack

	morality/reason, democrats have devolved, democrat's barbaric agenda
Racism	Minorities more likely to have abortions, genocide

Limitations

While this thesis aims to provide insights into the language and thematic differences between male and female Republican Representatives in their speeches on H.R. 8297, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the political speeches analyzed in this study were limited to those made publicly available by C-SPAN. The population of this study, sampled purposively, also focused only on a narrow group of Representatives from the Republican Party, all of whom could be classified as holding generally more extreme beliefs about abortion rights. This classification is based on each member's A+ scorecard endorsement from SBA PLA, and either their public statements explicitly stating that 'life begins at conception' or their co-sponsorship of federal personhood legislation. Next, this study does not aim to represent the full spectrum of discourse from Republicans on the topic of abortion, but it does aim to analyze the discourse among the population of the study, and for this reason, the findings may not be generalizable. Further, the speeches analyzed for this study were made within a specific time frame during a debate on the floor of the House of Representatives over H.R. 8297, which could impact the external validity of the study. The speeches were made on July 15, 2022, less than one month after Roe v. Wade was overturned. As political discourse evolves over time, it is possible that the rhetorical strategies used by Republican anti-abortion proponents may also change.

Results

The results section of this thesis will outline the themes and patterns in the data. All data was collected and aggregated in Table 4 below. To examine some of the speeches, this section will use specific textual examples based on the determined codes and explain why the text was chosen and how the code was operationalized.

Table 4. *Aggregated data comparing Republican anti-abortion rhetoric by gender.*

Indicators	Rep. Women (N=5)		Rep. Men (N=10)	
	Total Word Count	Aggregate Percentage	Total Word Count	Aggregate Percentage
Morality/Religion	1712	0.7	2225	0.9
Fetal Personhood	1712	0.87	2225	1.62
Public Health	1712	0.29	2225	.09
Medical Misinformation	1712	0.18	2225	.49
Rights (State/Constitutional/ Human)	1712	0.7	2225	0.67
Racism	1712	0.18	2225	0
Pro-Woman	1712	0.76	2225	0.18
Political Polarization	1712	0.5	2225	1.03

Republican Men

For Republican men, the data shows that the three highest aggregate percentages come from the fetal personhood, political polarization, and morality/religion codes in Republican men's speeches. While this thesis hypothesized that Republican men would use moralistic language, it underestimated how frequently Republican men would also utilize politically polarizing rhetoric as well as fetal personhood rhetoric. In both of Representatives Greg Steube and John Joyce's speeches below, the fetal personhood frame is reinforced through language, including referring to a fetus or 'unborn child' as a person and using the language of 'child' while referring to a fetus still in the womb.

"Certainly an unborn child is a person. What else could it be?" (Rep. Greg Steube)

"When I was in medical school, I learned about the development and journey of a child in the womb of the mother." (Rep. John Joyce)

Another speech sample from Representative Russ Fulcher combines codes of fetal personhood and political polarization. Within this statement, the Representative is trying to denounce the Democrat's moral legitimacy, and ascribe personhood to the 'preborn.'

"All too often [Democrats] will support taking life of the preborn by abortion, but not taking of life of convicted murderers by capital punishment." (Rep. Russ Fulcher)

Further examples of political polarization can be seen in speeches from Representatives Mike Johnson, Jodey Arrington, and Robert Aderholt, which all condemn Democrats and H.R. 8297.

"I urge opposition to the other side's callous and barbaric agenda and their bill." "The other side of this debate has not only abandoned reverence, all reverence, all morality, all reason…" (Rep. Mike Johnson)

"My colleagues on the other side of the aisle's effort to create a national policy that allows for terminating a pregnancy at any stage for any reason is not only extreme and outside of mainstream America, it is wholly inconsistent with our values and founding principles of our great nation." (Rep. Jodey Arrington)

"My colleagues on the other side of the aisle have assembled a bundle of policies in an effort to undermine the enforcement of pro-life state laws." (Rep. Robert Aderholt)

Finally, morality/religion indicators were also found to be used more frequently by Republican men. Interestingly, in three cases coded under morality/religion, male Representatives take a moral superiority stance to condemn abortion laws in China and North

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Korea while simultaneously positioning the U.S. as a more moral and less radical place where abortion should not be available as proposed in H.R. 8297. Other moral arguments from Republican men included appeals to god, mentions of prayer to protect life, and the framing of abortion as murder.

"This abortion on demand legislation, taken together, will put us in the dubious company of the likes of China and North Korea, and only five other countries, that I guarantee you, do not have America's values." (Rep. Jodey Arrington)

"Under this package of bills that the house is taking up today, the United States would end up among just a handful of countries, including China and North Korea, in radical abortion on demand up until birth policy." (Rep. Steve Scalise)

"[H.R. 8297] places the U.S. on a short list with North Korea and China as countries with the most extreme abortion policies in the world. We don't want to be on a list with those two countries." (Rep. Robert Aderholt)

Interestingly, racism was not coded in any speeches made by Republican men, and the uses of the pro-woman frame and public health frame were substantially lower than their Republican women counterparts.

Republican Women

Based on the collected data, the two most frequent codes occurring across the aggregated sample of total Republican women's speeches are the fetal personhood, pro-woman codes. The third-most percentage is shared by both the rights and morality/religion code. This thesis hypothesized that Republican women were more likely to use pro-woman and fetal personhood framing in their anti-abortion discourse, mainly because of the complex dynamics of their role within an intensely patriarchal party. However, this thesis

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underestimated how frequently Republican women would use rights language, almost at the same rate as their Republican male counterparts.

In their speeches that were coded for the fetal personhood frame, Republican women use language including unborn child, baby, and human life. Representatives Diana Harshbarger and Cathy Rodgers exemplify this in their anti-abortion rhetoric below.

"I will always be a steadfast defender of an unborn child's right to live." (Rep. Diana Harshbarger)

"It legitimizes discriminatory abortions at any stage based on a babe's sex, race, or disability." (Rep. Cathy Rodgers)

Representative Kat Cammack uses both political polarization and fetal personhood framing as she denounces H.R. 8297.

"Under this bill that we are considering here today, you want to take the issue further than Roe ever did and take away the rights of children." (Rep. Kat Cammack)

In this thesis, the rights frame has been applied broadly to state's rights, constitutional rights, or human rights. In two speeches from Representatives Rodgers and Cammack, the focus of their anti-abortion argument centers on human rights, and the latter also involves an element of the fetal personhood frame. In addition, Representative Harshbarger's rhetoric has been added to show the use of moral/religious language.

*"Ending abortion is the human rights issue of our generation." (*Rep. Cathy Rodgers)

"Where were the rights of those young little girls that were murdered?" (Rep. Kat Cammack)

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"[The Dobbs] decision was an answer to nearly 50 years of prayer and decision that rights a wrong that was committed in the very same court almost half a century ago." (Rep. Harshbarger)

Finally, the pro-woman frame has been utilized much more in Republican women's speeches and several important code words and phrases can be found in speeches from Representatives Lesko, Harshbarger and Rodgers, including the concepts of protection, coercion, the idea that abortion is risky, and the mention of medical supervision requirements.

"That is not protecting women and girls. To make this bill even worse, this legislation eliminates medical supervision requirements for chemical abortion pills. The F.D.A deem these pills as high-risk drugs that can cause intense pain, excessive bleeding, infections and in some cases death." (Rep. Debbie Lesko)

"As a woman in Congress, I urge my colleagues to look at how this legislation puts at-risk minors and women in vulnerable positions." (Rep Diana Harshbarger)

"[H.R. 8297] overrides state laws that protect women from coercion." (Rep. Cathy Rodgers)

Conclusions

In conclusion, this thesis finds that the most frequent anti-abortion rhetoric from Republican men is based on concepts of fetal personhood, political polarization, and morality/religion. For Republican women, the most frequently used rhetoric is based on the both the fetal personhood, pro-woman framing. Overall, the Republican women in this study used the public health, rights frame, racism frame, and pro-woman frame more frequently than Republican men, and Republican men used the morality/religion, fetal personhood, medical misinformation and political polarization frames more frequently than Republican women.

Interestingly, the demographics of the study were more diverse than the actual gender and racial makeup of the Republican party. During the 117th congress, Republican women only made up 15% of the total membership of the Republican Party but were one-third of the speakers during debate over H.R. 8297. While the study would likely have had a more detailed comparison if there were equal Republican men and women represented, the aggregation of the data still allowed for comparison of Republican anti-abortion rhetoric by gender. The results indicate subtle but significant variations in the frequency of rhetorical strategies between genders, reflecting the complex social dynamics at play within the party. While the results of this study might not be generalizable to the Republican Party at large, they do provide insight into intra-party anti-abortion rhetoric.

Finally, this content analysis of Republican anti-abortion rhetoric by gender in post-Roe America reveals that many of the core frames or debates about abortion, including morality/religion and fetal personhood have remained the same since the origins of the debate, with the notable exception of the pro-woman frame which became more prominent in the 1990s, and certainly is used now, mainly by Republican women.

As the Republican Party continues to attract more conservative members over more moderate members, it will be interesting to see how or if this rhetoric will continue to be used by the party to justify their anti-abortion stance or how their rhetorical strategies will change.

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