SHIFTING ABORTION FRAMES IN THE NEW YORK TIMES: A QUALITATIVE AND
QUANTITATIVE CONTENT ANALYSIS BEFORE AND AFTER DOBBS V. JACKSON WOMEN'S
HEALTH ORGANIZATION

A Thesis Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of Sociology
The Colorado College

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree Bachelor of Arts

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Fall 2022

On my honor I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid on this thesis.
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ABSTRACT

In Dobbs *v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* (2022), the U.S. Supreme Court reversed a nearly fifty-year precedent guaranteeing the constitutional right to abortion. This paper investigates how the New York Times reported on abortion before and after the Supreme Court's ruling using Etman's (1973) theory of framing. A quantitative and qualitative content analysis shows that journalists reported on abortion differently after the Dobb's decision but quoted similar populations of experts and citizens. Medical and inequality frames appear often in coverage. However, the results demonstrate an overwhelmingly political categorization of abortion. The pro-life, pro-choice dichotomy referring to the oversimplification of abortion as entirely good or bad was not identified. Through a cross time analysis, this study demonstrates the stable and salient aspects of abortion reporting. The results suggest that future coverage should incorporate more viewpoints in their reporting to better inform the public.

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On May 3rd, 2022, the online news outlet Politico released a leaked United States Supreme Court opinion draft written by Justice Alito. The ninety-eight-page majority opinion document describes a legal argument for overturning *Roe v. Wade* (1973). A few days later, on May 6th, 2022, the New York Times published thirty-seven articles that mentioned the word abortion. The articles encompassed many topics, including an opinion piece demanding respect for the pro-life viewpoint, a political perspective on how politicians' abortion stances might affect the midterm elections, a comedy show review, and a perspective written by a doctor on performing late-term abortions. Thus, even in the wake of a major legal event, discussion about abortion appeared to span many spaces. Journalists reporting on abortion must decide how to encompass these widespread categorizations in their reporting.

 The discussion of abortion in the United States shifts, expands, and concentrates on various issues. Journalists have the option of incorporating medical, economic, technological, political, personal, and structural themes into their reporting. How journalists frame their reporting shapes the public's perception, influencing policy, and affecting individuals' actions. The future of women's reproductive rights in the United States is shifting and news discourses potentially impact these changes.

This paper investigates a one-year time period, overlapping the Supreme Court's decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade* (1973) in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* (2022), a decision that returned abortion legislative authority to the individual states. A qualitative and quantitative content analysis examines the most prominent themes and actors used by the New York Times to contextualize abortion. Findings include discussions about the political, medical, and structural descriptions of abortion and the differences in pro-abortion and anti-abortion framing. The results demonstrate an overwhelmingly political categorization of abortion.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Abortion in the United States

Over the past fifty years, there has been a global trend toward liberating abortion rights (Women and Foreign Policy 2022). However, on June 24th, 2022, the United States joined a small set of countries moving towards government-sanctioned abortion barriers when the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* (1973) (Center for Reproductive Rights 2022). In Dobbs *v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* (2022)*,* the U.S. Supreme Court reversed a nearly fifty-year precedent guaranteeing the constitutional right to abortion.

Immediately following the ruling, thirteen states passed legislation banning or restricting abortion, with thirteen more states likely to pass similar bills in the future (Guttmacher Institute 2022; Kapadia 2022). These ratifications led to the closure of abortion facilities and disproportionately affected low-income people of color (Kaiser Family Foundation 2022). Following the Dobbs decision, researchers, citizens, and journalists are now engaging in many conversations about the future impacts of the Supreme Court verdict to overturn *Roe v. Wade* (1973). These conversations topics include a woman's right to privacy (Goodday et al. 2022), further increases in healthcare inequities (Guttmacher Institute 2022), questions over the legality of providing abortion services, the likelihood of contraception bans, and the impacts to the practice of in vitro fertilization (Davis 2022).

Despite the *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* ruling granting states abortion legislative authority, 62% of Americans believe that "most cases" justify access to legal abortion (Hartig 2022). In 1977, 36% of Americans favored abortion for any reason. In 2021, the number had increased to 54% percent, demonstrating a general trend toward favorable views on abortion (GSS Data Explorer 2021).

News Frames

 The news may alter an individual's understanding of abortion because of the media's ability to foster specific dialogue. Framing theory outlines the process of constructing, selecting, and excluding specific

narratives, which shapes actions and ideas. This paper employs Entman's (1993) theory of framing, defined as "to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described (52)." In other words, framing is the process of defining problems in a specific way.

Mass communication theorists employ framing to analyze how the news protects institutional powers by shaping conversations and influencing actions (Iyengar 1994). Frame analysis views the news as composed of symbols that indicate meaning to the reader through structure, word choice, included information, metaphors, and placement (Pan & Kosicki 1993). How reporters frame an issue influences opinions on topics and public policy. The news media sets specific frames that narrow the public opinions and options about a topic by encouraging the reader to view it in a specific way (Pan and Kosicki 1993).

Through analyzing television news, Iyengar (1991) found that when reporters classify news as individual "episodic" events, it leads people to attribute crimes as personal problems, while "thematic" news reports focusing on statistics, context, and social factors lead people to view problems as more societal. Studies retesting Iyengar's results found that thematic framing in the health field leads people to seek policy changes (Coleman, Thorson, & Wilkins 2011; Chapman 2001). Another study found that news articles stressing an individual's illness related to ibuprofen intake without data led participants to take less of the drug themselves (Shaffer et al. 2018). The scripts that journalists use to explain issues and define topics affects not only opinions but influences actions.

Abortion Frames

Journalists use a variety of frames to describe abortion and consistently report on the subject (Woodruff 2019). Among women's health issues, news sources highlight abortion frequently even over issues that women feel deserve greater attention (Barakso and Schaffner 2006). Literature about abortion framing in

the media most commonly focus on women's rights protests (Armstrong and Boyle 2011; Barakso and Schaffner 2006; Rohlinger 2002). Other abortion framing media studies discuss the subject's representation across different times, places, and political periods.

According to Entman (1993), a problem definition is composed of an issue and the most important actors. A study operationalizing Entman's framing theory emphasize the importance of issues and actors stating, "These two mark the content of the debate; that is, they define the central problem of a news story (Matthes & Kohring 2008:266)." Actors represents the individuals and groups referenced and quoted in a news article (Matthes & Kohring 2008). Issues refers to common events, topics, or discourses related to the topic. For example, a study examining how Colombian newspapers frame the topic of "femicide" or the" intentional killing of women" identified 15 actors and 15 central issues (Pröll & Magin 2022). Actors included individuals and group such as "politicians," "authorities," and "victims of femicide." Issues included topics such as "law," "pre-history of femicide," and "femicides in court."

Issues: Statistics around abortion rarely appear in the popular press, and sometimes lack accuracy, particularly with respect to the safety of the various medical procedures that comprise abortion (Pruit & Mullen 2005). Woodruff's study of abortion coverage from 2013 to 2016 found that reporters framed abortion politically more than through a health lens. During that time period, there were very few instances of medical statistics in the print news. Abortion overlaps with structural, medical, religious, political, and personal views. However, the Woodruff study is a good example, demonstrating how journalists favor specific frames, potentially limiting the abortion debate to particular viewpoints.

Many factors affect how journalists cover abortion. Abortion frames are not stagnant, and change based on the political ecosystem, technological advancements, and public acceptance of the issue (Perse et al. 1997). A longitudinal study found that between 1960 and 2020, the news generally accepted a more "educational and informational approach" that affirmed abortion rights (Rule 2022). Seemingly unrelated

events and strategic actions influence abortion reporting. Perse et al. (2009) found that during Presidential election years, stories about abortion increased. This increase might have affected the level of importance that the public felt about the issue. Furthermore, Rohlinger (2002) showed that abortion interest groups strategically plan events and hire managers with the intent of shaping news coverage. These studies exhibit that untargeted and targeted outside influences effect abortion news frames. Given the dynamic ways that journalists incorporate outside influences in their abortion reporting, the *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* case would be expected to alter how journalists frame this issue.

Actors: Who speaks on abortion matters because the media decides who counts as a legitimate voice (Ross 2007). By quoting specific individuals, journalists select which voices are involved in the abortion conversation.

Most studies evaluating who is afforded the opportunity to speak about abortion analyze gender. News sources often fail to represent women's opinions in areas that affect them. For example, a study analyzing abortion protest from 1960 through 2006 found that the news underrepresented the people whom the protests focused on the most, namely women (Armstrong & Boyle 2011). Another study found that women and men commented on abortion equally (Feltham-King and Macleod 2015).

However, since the Covid-19 Pandemic, a study analyzing the framing of women's issues found a trend towards "reexamining women's reproductive rights, highlighting inequalities in the U.S. healthcare system and uncertainty/fear among pregnant women and women's health professionals (Kempton and DiRusso 2022)." These findings suggest that in the wake of a pandemic, journalists might change how they communicate women's health issues, incorporating more varied narratives around women.

Since abortion spans many topics, the news may cite a wide variety of actors. A study analyzing how the news reported on a specific child after a publicized rape found that the press quoted a range of actors including the child, government, religious figures, and political parties (Taracena 2002). Interestingly,

Mason and colleagues found that women's health stories lacked health professional voices (Mason et al. 2018). The current study adds to the discussion about who the news quotes in relation to politics, medicine, and reproductive rights through studying the actors present to comment on abortion.

Breaking the Dichotomy

Journalists create false dichotomies out of complex issues. A study on South African gender representation found that news articles typically framed abortion as pro-choice or pro-life, creating a false dichotomy that leaves out more nuanced ideas around the issue (Feltham-King and Macleod 2015).

Most Americans' ideas on abortion appear more complex than simply pro-life or pro-choice. According to the Pew Research Center, "relatively few Americans on either side of the debate take an absolutist view on the legality of abortion (Hartig 2022)." While 73% of Americans believe abortion should be legal if the pregnancy threatens a woman's health, 53% of Americans believe abortion should be legal if a baby is likely to have disabilities or health problems (Hartig 2022). The difference in statistics demonstrates that the pro-life, pro-choice dichotomy prevalent in the news fails to encompass the whole debate around abortion. Many Americans support abortion in some instances such as rape or the endangerment of life but do not support abortion without restrictions.

The overturning of *Roe v. Wade* (1973) would be expected to change how the news reports on the pro-life, pro-choice dichotomy. The protest paradigm states that the more a group challenges the status quo, the more negatively the news reports on it (Armstrong and Boyle, 2011). How a group aligns with norms changes how the media frames the group. Since, in some states, abortion is illegal or restricted while in others it is completely unrestricted, the status quo of abortion depends on a person's physical location more now than prior to the Dobbs decision. The varying status of abortion legality has the potential to expand the debate to encompass more viewpoints.

For the first time in 50 years, abortion in America is not considered a protected Constitutional right. Despite past legislation making it harder to obtain an abortion through lawful waiting periods and restrictive time periods, the *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* (2022) decision may result in widespread legislation with half of U.S states making it harder for people to access abortion care. This paper uses framing theory to examine how the news has constructed issues and ideas surrounding abortion over a one year period. Understanding how journalists frame abortion rights, issues, and dialogues over time gives insight into how the debate changes and stagnates in instances of differing access to abortion. The varying lenses used by Coleman and colleagues specifically looking at abortion found that even a journalist's word choice alters a person's opinion (Coleman, Thorson, and Wilkins 2011).

In the wake of the *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, the publication of news effects policy, sets agendas, and shapes public opinion (Mendes 2011; Pröll and Magin 2022). Furthermore, the longevity of the frames increases the impact they can have on a reader (Entman 1993). The purpose of this paper is to analyze how the Dobbs decision changed or fixed the framing of abortion in U.S. news. The research question are, (1) What central issues are present in abortion articles pre- and post-Dobbs? (2) What actors are present in abortion news articles pre- and post-Dobbs? (3) How do journalists discuss pro-abortion and anti-abortion sentiments pre- and post-Dobbs? (4) How do journalists frame abortion pre and post Dobbs?

By analyzing these questions through a qualitative and quantitative content analysis of news articles, the reality of abortion in a post-Roe United States is illuminated. The significance of framing depends not only on present narrative but also the omission of fact. A cross-time analysis allows for a comparison of frames.

METHOD

Using qualitative and quantitative content analysis, this project analyzes how the New York Times

reported on abortion before and after the *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* (2022)

Supreme Court decision.

Sample

A seven-week composite week sampling method was used to select news articles. Since news

organizations often publish certain article topics on specific days of the week, the composite week

sampling method, which is more efficient than other sampling methods, accounts for the variations of

news cycles by equally representing each day (Laar 2011; Riffe et al. 2011; Woodruff 2019).

The data consists of a yearlong time period prior to and after the release of the *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's*

Health Organization Supreme Court decision on June 24th, 2022. The first period (P1) included two

presidency and the leaked opinion that was authored by Justice Alito, which signaled an extremely high

likelihood that the court planned to overturn *Roe v. Wade*. It began on December 10th, 2021 and ended on

June 23rd, 2022. The second period (P2) began on June 25th and ended on November 18th, 2022. It

included the midterm elections which were held on November 8th, 2022.

The time periods attempted to cover an equal amount of time before and after the Dobbs decision and

were limited by the current date. P1 is one week longer than P2 since initially Justice Alito's leaked

opinion was treated as a third separate time period and later combined with P1.

The Nexis Uni database was used to identify all articles. This study focused solely on the New York

Times to analyze abortion discourses. The sample was limited to New York Times articles since past

research demonstrates that the paper sets the agenda for other local and national newspapers (Denham

2014; Golan 2006; McCombs and Funk 2011). The prevalence of social media has been shown to change

peoples' news consumption habits and might disrupt agenda setting commonly understood to originate from the New York Times (Feezell 2017; Gilardi et al. 2022). However, I selected the New York Times for its reputation and authority to report on abortion and many topics that overlap with the topic, such as medicine, politics, and business. I extended the sample from print news to include web-published articles since many Americans access news through digital devices, providing a sample that more accurately analyzes the news that citizens read daily (Shearer 2021). The unit of analysis was articles published in the New York Times on the predetermined sample days.

To be included in the analysis, an article needed to be longer than six-hundred words, mention abortion in the body of the article more than six times and be published in a non-entertainment section of the newspaper such as Business and US Politics. Letters to the Editor were excluded since contributors might have less authority than journalists or "expert" guests. Due to time constraints, I devised these perimeters to filter the sample to include news articles that covered abortion-specific topics in-depth.

Codebook

To create a qualitative and quantitative codebook, past research and the selected samples were considered. This practice follows the process of ethnographic content analysis, which "allows for the verification of pre-structured content categories" while also permitting "additional categories and findings to emerge throughout the study process (Woodruff 2019: 82)." An initial read-through of the sample was performed, and themes that occurred repetitively through open coding were noted. These themes were condensed, organized into a codebook, and compared to past literature.

Frames: The codebook contained ten qualitative parent codes. I used seven of the parent codes in this paper: breaking dichotomy, dichotomy, law consequence, politics, obtaining an abortion, rights, and technical description. The other three codes contained article specific themes that occurred rarely outside of a few specific reports such as the code global. Politics, defined as mentions of political parties, national politics, or state-level politics about abortion, was coded the most frequently and included six sub codes.

The codes attempted to be mutually exclusive and exhaustive. However, as only a single person performed the coding, inter-coder reliability to confirm that the codebook contained all critical elements with specific definitions could not be performed.

Central Issue: Each title and first paragraph were considered to analyze the central issue. Only one initial frame was analyzed since the first part of the article may shape a reader's perception throughout the reading. Each article was coded as one of eight issues. The codes included themes such as the various branches of government, global trends, and national movements. For example, articles centered on an individual's experience with accessing, deciding, providing, or proximity to abortion were coded as 'lived experience.'

Actors: Through reading past literature and the sample, I found eleven applicable central actors. The actors were coded when quoted directly within an article. Direct quotations included interviews and words from other sources such as Tweets, press releases, and other articles. Each person was only counted once per article but could be counted multiple times if mentioned across different news stories. Actor codes were determined based on the initial read through of the sample and encompassed most people asked to comment on abortion such as medical experts, legal figures, and politicians.

All quantitative data was accessed using STATA. A Pearson's Chi-square test was used to look for a relationship between time period and central issue. A mean comparison test between two groups was used to look for a relationship between time period and each actor.

The terms pro-abortion and anti-abortion are used throughout the paper since the articles included few instances of specifically including pro-choice/pro-life phrases. Pro-abortion refers to any mention, reference, allusion, or recognition of the need for abortion including performance of abortions with

restrictions. Anti-abortion refers to any mention, reference, allusion, or recognition of complete

opposition to abortion.

FINDINGS
Quantitative Analysis

The first and second research questions used quantitative metrics to identify the central issues and actors present in the sampled abortion articles. The final sample consisted of 131 articles. The first time period (P1) (n = 49) and second time period (P2) (n = 82) differed by 33 articles.

<u>*RQ1: What central issues are present in abortion articles pre- and post-Dobbs?*</u>

The central issue most often observed in P1 was 'other,' occurring 26.5% of the time. The 'other' articles included titles about individual events such as 'How My Father, Ronald Reagan, Grappled with Abortion (Davis 2022)' and 'Sarah Weddington, Who Successfully Argued Roe v. Wade, Dies at 76 (Seelye 2021),' as well as information about abortion access in articles with titles such as 'F.D.A. to Weigh Over-the-Counter Sale of Contraceptive Pills (Stolberg & Seelye 2022) ' and 'Common Questions About Abortion Access as Court Ruling Nears (Plambeck et al. 2022).' In P2, only 5% of the articles fell in the 'other' category, a much smaller percentage than in P1.

In P1 and P2, the central issue of 'legislation and election consequences' appeared often: 24.5% and 20.73% respectively. However, the topics varied in their scope. In P1, the articles mostly appeared after the leaked draft and often speculated about a "post-Roe" future. The titles included phrases such as "America is not ready (Editorial Board 2022)," "tear America apart (Goldberg 2022)," and "Pills could be next (Belluck & Stolberg 2022)." In P2, the articles contained a wider variety of discussions such as how the decision might affect an individual's choice of employer and state-specific reporting. The articles contained speculative language about the future such as the article, 'Confrontation over First Amendment May Loom in Post-Roe Fight (Peters 2022)' as well as reporting on existing events such as the article, 'Overseas Abortion Pills Blunt the Effects of Bans (Bhatia et al. 2022).'

In P2, 'election' was the central issue of the majority of articles (37.8%). Within this category, 54% of the articles referred to a specific state or state politician in the titles. The other 46% focused on ideas such as messaging and voter turnout.

In P1, the central issues were more equally distributed. While, in P2, the data is positively skewed. In P2, the central issue 'election' and the next highest appearing central issue 'legislation and election consequences' differed by 14 articles. A relationship was found between time period and central issue: χ^2 (7, N =131) = 24.18, $p < .001$. The effect size was moderately large, $\varphi c = 0.43$. See Table 1.

Time Period		Election	Global	Legislation and Election Consequences	Lived Experience	National Politics	Other	Religion	State Legislation	Total
Pre-Dobbs	n	5	3	11	1	8	13	1	7	49
	%	10.20	6.12	24.5	2.04	16.33	26.53	2.04	14.29	100
Post-Dobbs	n	31	1	17	3	12	4	0	14	82
	%	37.80	1.22	20.73	3.66	14.63	4.88	0.00	17.07	100
Total	n	36	4	28	4	20	17	1	21	131
	%	27.48	3.05	21.37	3.05	15.27	12.98	.76	16.03	100

Table 1: Chi-Square analysis of articles central issue based on time period

RQ2, Actors: What actors are present in abortion articles pre- and post-Dobbs?

A two group mean comparison test, accounting for unequal sample sizes, found no differences in the frequency of 'actors' between P1 and P2. Politicians appeared the most often across both time periods. In P1, 47 politicians were quoted, and in P2, 112 politicians were quoted totaling 159 mentions across the two periods. 'Religious actors' appeared the least often in both time periods (n=8).

Time Period		Medical Expert	Political Expert	Law Expert	SCOTUS	Pro-Choice Group	Pro-Life Group	Politician	Citizen
Pre-Dobbs	n	19	19	28	13	12	10	47	29
	M	2.11	2.71	1.56	1.63	1.09	1.11	2.47	3.22
	SD	1.27	2.36	.70	.92	.30	.33	1.74	2.86
Post-Dobbs	n	27	58	37	6	19	17	112	77
	M	2.08	2	2.12	2	1.36	1.33	2.67	3.08
	SD	1.71	1.28	1.5	1	.63	.65	1.86	2.22
Total	n	46	77	65	19	31	27	159	106
	M	2.09	2.14	1.81	1.73	1.24	1.23	2.61	3.12
	SD	1.51	1.53	1.18	.90	.52	.54	1.81	2.37

Time Period		President	Religious	Other
Pre-Dobbs	n	8	3	14
	M	1.6	3	2
	SD	1.34	-	1.41
Post-Dobbs	n	10	5	24
	M	1	1	1.85
	SD	0	0	1.77
Total	n	18	8	38
	M	1.2	1.33	1.9
	SD	.77	-	1.62

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of actors based on time period
Note: Articles without present actor variable not included in calculations. Articles may include multiple actor variables per unit of analysis.

Qualitative Analysis

The third and fourth research questions used qualitative metrics to examine pro-abortion anti-abortion sentiments and identify major frames.

RQ3: How do journalists discuss pro-abortion and anti-abortion sentiments pre- and post-Dobbs?

Pro Abortion Sentiments: In P1, the conversation about accessing abortion depicted many frames that showed the abundance of different views and emotions that aligned with pro-abortion sentiments. One doctor reflecting on providing care noted that people elect to have abortions for many reasons, most broadly declaring that patients "don't want to carry this pregnancy to term (Block 2022)" The daughter of Ronald Reagan wrote an article breaking down her father's stance on the issue, describing the "tangle or emotion beneath the surface (Davis 2022)." A doctor learning to perform late term abortions recalls a mentor telling her that "nobody likes doing this (Block 2022)" and informs her patients that it is normal to feel sad during a procedure. These variety of quotes demonstrate that pro-abortion sentiments in P1 contained a diverse range of frames including political, medical, and lived experience sentiments.

After the Dobbs decision was finalized (P2), pro-abortion sentiments also contained a variety of frames but focused more on government themes. At times, this sentiment was reflected as a Democratic party issue. For example, Elizabeth Warren, a Democrat Senator said, "Democrats will stand up for letting the pregnant person make the decision, not the government (Glueck & Goldmacher 2022)" when contrasting party views with Republicans.

However, in P2, journalists focused more on the idea of legal "rights." Journalists concentrated on states codifying abortion in their constitutions, questions about the rights to privacy, and conversation around freedom of the body. At points, abortion became an entryway to discuss other large government questions. One activist summarized this point by saying, "It's not just about abortion… It's about a government's willingness to remove freedoms (Tully 2022)." Journalists captured quotes from many

citizens reflecting on their rights. The most common ideas surrounded the right to make personal decisions, politicians not having control over their health, and protecting freedom.

In P2, journalists often noted the publics' openness to abortion broken down by state or various demographic such as party affiliation or race. Most journalists focused on the relatively high percentage (around 60% of voters) who disagree with the Dobbs decision or supported abortion in specific circumstances. Interestingly, when reporting on pro-abortion sentiments journalists emphasized political party more than other demographic information and despite widespread political agreement in large areas of the country. In reference to the Kansas vote on abortion, one journalist noted, "What was striking, in fact, was the degree to which the picture was similar everywhere. From the bluest counties to the reddest ones, abortion rights performed better than Mr. Biden, and opposition to abortion performed worse than Mr. Trump (Astor & Cohn 2022)." The reporting on public opinion towards abortion was bi-partisan but not non-partisan.

In summary, pro-abortion sentiments in P1 included a diverse range of frames, that focused on adding nuance and emotional elements beyond the typical pro-choice narrative. In P2, pro-abortion sentiments transformed into a more contested issue, leading to debates about the meaning of various rights and partisanship.

Anti-Abortion Sentiments Pre- and Post-Dobbs: Prior to the *Dobbs v Jackson Women's Health Organization* (2022) Supreme Court case (P1), journalists framed Republicans candidates as supporters of abortion restrictions with few exceptions. The generalization allowed journalists to sometimes make statements about Republicans as a single group. For example, one journalist reported that "Today's Republican candidates and office holders are less willing to support exceptions for rape or even to protect the health of the mother (Baker 2022)." When quoting a source, another reporter stated that "It is Republicans across the country who are vowing to criminalize abortion (Askarinam 2022)." In reference to a Texas level court dispute over a six-week abortion ban that eventually led to the *Dobbs v Jackson*

Women's Health Organization Supreme Court case, Senator Bryan Hughes (in December 2021) called the ruling a "total victory for life (Goodman & Graham 2021)." Similar quotes of politicians prior to the overturning of Roe were found in multiple articles reporting from many states such as Louisiana, Florida, Kentucky, Oklahoma, and Mississippi. In these instances, the Republican party was generalized either through blanket statements or single politicians as completely supporting abortion restrictions.

In P2, journalists sometimes described instances of Republican politicians strictly siding with abortion bans. However, most journalists included more nuanced language when describing the Republican stance on abortion. In the post-Dobbs era when Independent McMullin, a Utah politician running for Senate, stated that he was "pro-life" he did not mean that he favored abortion without restriction or even define if he thought abortion should be legal or not. This shows a decline in the consensus over the meaning of pro-life. The overturning of Roe emphasized fractures on abortion stances throughout the Republican party. Journalists often described the Republican party as fractured, in disagreement, or having a "lack of consensus (Lerer & Dias 2022)."

Reported on more through a strictly political viewpoint, anti-abortion findings differ from the pro-abortion findings. In P1, news articles discussed anti-abortion and Republicanism as complimentary. However, in P2, the news added more contextual background that disintegrated the concept of a fully pro-life political party. Journalists reporting on Republicans as less strictly anti-abortion in P2 might have resulted from shifting political strategy in the lead up to the midterm elections. The disagreement described by journalists stems from the varying policies passed in each state. Many journalists cited laws, restrictions, and (state) constitutional codifications from multiple states in a single article or even paragraph, leading to direct comparison of differences.

RQ4: How do journalists frame abortion pre and post Dobbs?

The news overwhelming framed abortion in political terms. Other frames include a discussion of how the medical sphere and inequalities in America interact with abortion.

Political Frames: Congruent with the findings from research question one and two which demonstrated that many abortion articles considered abortion through politics and legislations, the news mostly categorized abortion through the various branches of government.

In P1, journalists spoke about abortion in relation to government through the Judicial and Executive branches. These instances occurred mostly after the leaked draft authored by Justice Alito. The discourse included quotes from the Justices about the court's decisions such as Justice Sotomayor critiquing the court's decision to let a Texas law go into effect and quotes from President Biden decisions include discussion from journalist such as if the president should "take a series of executive actions to help women in Republican-controlled states obtain abortions if the Supreme Court eliminates a woman's right to end her pregnancy (Savage 2022)."

Penny Nance, the President of Concerned Women for America, recalled former President Donald Trump telling her to 'Pay attention, this could impact the midterms,' after he appointed three Supreme Court Justices to the Court. After the Dobbs decision, similar to Trump's prediction, the news focused primarily on elections. As journalists approached the midterm election in P2, the news shifted to include more partisan strategy about winning elections. Journalists often quoted how much the Democratic Party spent on political advertisement in phrases such as "Democrats and their allies spent more than $450 million on ads supporting abortion rights (Lerer 2022)." Furthermore, journalists grouped abortion in with other divisive voting issues. For example, phrases such as "This fall, voters will consider abortion alongside of inflation, education, crime, national security (Glueck & Goldmacher 2022)" and "On abortion, climate change, guns and much more, two Americas -- one liberal, one conservative -- are moving in opposite directions (Weisman 2022)," appeared often.

Journalists outlined Democrat and Republican shifting approaches to how to address abortion in their campaigns, often describing how much attention each party should give to abortion. One journalist after Kansas voted not to remove abortion protection stated that the decision, "quickly emboldened Democrats to run more assertively on abortion rights (Glueck & Goldmacher 2022)." On the Republican side, journalists often described a Republican strategy of attacking Democrats or staying silent on the issue. For example, one journalist reported, "Many Republicans also followed the Susan B. Anthony Group's playbook and portrayed Democrats as the true extremists. Saying that Democrats support "abortion on demand" has been a frequent Republican talking point (Hounshell 2022)."

The news often tried to delineate how important abortion was to voters. Journalists quoted voters such as college student Gianna Renzo, 19, saying, 'I'm excited to defend my reproductive rights… I see women my age who are typically from Republican families, and they're going to come over to the Democratic side'' and nurse Lupe Roginski, 43, who said she voted for a specific candidate because "he was pro-life (Knoll & Smith 2022)."

While abortion has always had a political tone, after the Dobbs decision, the frames shifted to include more party election strategy and focused less on the Supreme Court and President.

Medical Frames: Before and after the overturning of Roe, journalists often framed abortion in terms of medical care and disputes.

In P1, journalists most often discussed technical medical abortion nuances when it overlapped with the law. In one article a doctor said, "Laws that are written by nonmedical people… are dangerous and affect our ability to care for patients (Rabin 2022)." The articles addressed the complexities of the topic including what counts as an abortion, the relationship between cancer and abortion, the calculation of gestational weeks, and other technical debates that questioned blanket abortion bans. These topics

included the perspectives of care providers. However, people with lived experience were also quoted on the issue. For example, one article quoted a woman who needed an abortion to save her life. To illustrate the complexities that restrictive abortion bans do not consider, a patient was quoted saying, "menstruation is irregular for many... so recognizing pregnancy is difficult (Bokat-Lindel 2021)."

In P2, journalists also highlighted the new conflicts that arose for medical providers as a result of the Dobbs decisions. Similar to P1, nuances and complications that exposed oversights in abortion bans were popular frames used by journalists. However, most of the stories focused on actual complications resulting from interactions with the law. The article moved from speculative to reporting on specific complications and experiences stemming from legislation. Both doctors and patients were quoted about the inability of patients to access care. Specific stories of people in states with new abortion restrictions were emphasized. As one journalist said, "It's getting hard to keep track of all the stories of women being denied care for miscarriages or otherwise having their lives endangered because of abortion bans (Goldberg 2022)." The narratives especially emphasized complications that can occur later in pregnancy, defining terms such as arcania, amniocentesis or as phrased in an opinion piece, "there are certain white-knuckle benchmarks (Goldberg 2022)." The articles focused on the number of weeks that complication could occur, linking their narrative to abortion bans focused specifically on weeks.

One frame introduced post-Dobbs focused on care providers' confusion over how to follow the new abortion restriction. This frame similarly stems from medical interactions with the law and politics, and also includes providers' uncertainty about whether specific procedures were legal. This frame demonstrates the impact of shifting laws and restrictions on the delivery of healthcare. The decision whether to perform a medical procedure or not was described by journalists as "murky," "vague," and "confusing." This frame shows another consequence for patients in accessing care.

Inequality Frames: Inequality references in the first and second periods generally used similar frames. Many of the inequalities described pre-Dobbs became emphasized in the second period. The most prominent frames focused on racial, gender, and class inequalities. The articles framed abortion access as "different for different people (Bokat-Lindel 2021)." Since access to abortion already varied by state in P1, the consequence of abortion access and inequality were already well-established frames in the media. One professor who was quoted in reference to the period prior to overturning of Roe stated, "It's already happening (Miller & Sanger-Katz 2022)." Furthermore, since the Texas law banning abortion after six-weeks was already in effect during P1, journalists discussed patients traveling to access care. One journal article from P1 states, "In Oklahoma, about 60 percent of patients are now from Texas (Goodman and Graham 2021)." Journalists narrowed in on what groups of people lived farthest from care. The articles introduced abortion pills and telemedicine as possible ways to overcome the barriers. One journalist described these technological advancements saying, "The shift to telemedicine makes sense for practical reason… having an abortion with pills at home, which has the physical effects of miscarrying, is as safe and effective in the first trimester as going to clinic (Bazelon 2022)." However as one journalist explained, "…medication abortion cannot prevent the serious public health consequences of overturning Roe and Casey. Getting the pills requires knowing about them, awareness of pregnancy at an early stage, and the means to purchase them (Bokat-Lindell 2021)."

Most articles examining racial inequality framed the difference in terms of access to resources. In reference to low income and racially underserved groups, a journalist pointed out the barriers to traveling out of state, accessing doctors, navigating the process of obtaining abortion pills, and receiving advice from untrained medical helpers. As one journalist summarizes, "the overturning of Roe will reduce abortion access. The effect is likely to be largest among lower-income women and Black and Hispanic Women (Leonhardt, 2022)." and "Any abortion-related prosecution will overwhelmingly target Black and brown people who already live under disproportionate state scrutiny (Bokat-Lindell 2021)."

Some journalists also pointed to wealth inequalities for women accessing pre-natal care. One article publish post-Dobbs pushed back on this frame describing the barriers that all women will face when trying to find abortion care. Gender inequality was also a prominent frame, describing the potential for "two classes (Weisman 2022)" and different treatment of men and women under the law. Mr. Severino, the vice president at a conservative think tank, was quoted as saying, "I cannot see us living in two Americas where we have two classes of human beings in this country: some protected fully in law, some who are not protected at all… (Weisman 2022)"

DISCUSSION

This study considered the implications of the *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* decision on how the New York Times framed abortion through a quantitative and qualitative content analysis. The findings of this study reflect the interdisciplinary nature of abortion, spanning conversations about medical, structural, and political practices. Overall, I found that the *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* (2022) Supreme Court Decision which returned legislative authority to the states impacted how journalists writing for the New York Times reported on abortion.

The quantitative findings focused on how the New York Times defines abortion through Entman's theory of framing which breaks problem definition into two categories: central issues and actors.

The central issues most often identified in this study shifted from 'other' in P1 to 'election' in P2. In P1, the data is somewhat equally distributed. However, in P2, for every three articles at least one focused on elections. The shift towards 'election' as the most common central issue in P2 demonstrates that after the Dobbs decision, journalists solidified their articles to align more with a single framework. According to Entman's framing theory (1993), "Most frames are defined by what they omit as well as include, and the omissions of potential problem definitions, explanations, evaluations, and recommendations may be as critical as the inclusions in guiding the audience (54)." The New York Time's substantial framing of abortion at the center of the midterm elections might minimize the impacts of other issues important to understanding abortion such as religion or international abortion policy. By heavily concentrating on one lens, the media narrowly defined abortion discourses for the public.

In contrast to the change found regarding the framing of the central issue, no differences occurred in the number of times actors were quoted across the two time periods. Therefore, the main actors who comment on abortion remained relatively constant. An article by Conrad (1999) analyzing who journalists quote in genetics articles found that while journalists routinely seek experts for comments in their stories, they

define an expert through a narrow set of qualifications. Experts must be "knowledgeable," "connected to prestigious institutions," "articulate," and "return phone calls (Conrad 1999)." If these criteria similarly align with abortion reporting, journalists have a limited pool of sources available for comment. The limited criteria of who qualifies as having abortion expertise might explain the lack of difference between the central actors across the two time periods.

The qualitative aspects of this project added context and expanded on the findings from the quantitative analysis. Three central frames were identified through discourse analysis: politics, medical, and inequality. The results demonstrate that news coverage on abortion overwhelmingly focused on various political discourses before and after Dobbs. These findings align with Entman's (1973) idea that "many news texts exhibit homogeneous framing at one level of analysis yet competing frames at another (55)."

The political nature of the identified frame confirmed the phenomena described by Woodruff (2017), who analyzed abortion coverage from 2013 to 2016. Woodruff (2017) shows that journalists heavily focus on politics when mentioning abortion. However, Woodruff (2017) found that journalists rarely covered abortion as a women's health issue. This study found that the media does include medical framework to discuss abortion. However, many of the medical and inequality frames originated from political discussions about legislation or the impact of elections. Therefore, these frames were often used more as sub points stemming from political action. The differences between Woodruff's study and the present project might show that when journalist expand their frames, they still use politics to anchor stories. Through framing reproductive health as political, journalists expand the authority of policymakers over the expertise of medical professionals. In New York Times articles, politics appear to affect affects health outcomes, but the medical sphere has little influence over politics.

Despite, the overly political nature of abortion reporting, the pro-life, pro-choice dichotomy referring to the oversimplification of abortion as entirely good or bad was not identified in this study. Instead,

journalists incorporated Americans' somewhat favorable views on abortion in their reporting. Pro-abortion sentiments encompassed a variety of opinions showing the favorable, yet complicated views held by Americans on abortion. When focusing on anti-abortion sentiments, journalists concentrated their reporting more on politicians than citizens. While anti-abortion politicians' attitudes are not fully representative of public opinion, through encompassing statistics and quotes from citizens, journalists demonstrate this point. The wider frames used to discuss pro-abortion stances make sense given the narrow boundaries set by anti-abortion players who define anti-abortion as strictly prohibiting the procedure. Pro-abortion sentiments encompass room for descriptions of mixed feelings, late term abortion bans, and overlap with other American ideas about freedom and rights. One possibility for the lack of a pro-life, pro-choice dichotomy may be explained by the patchwork of abortion legislation present in the United States even prior to the release of the Dobbs decision. The differing policy could create a lack of a national status-quo, creating less opportunity to describe abortion as simply pro-life or pro-choice. The findings about the complexity of opinions on abortion are well documented by Crawford and colleagues (2022) who find that citizens' opinion on abortion are "complex," varied, and loosely associated with political party. Journalists reporting on pro-abortion and anti-abortion sentiments encompassed a large percentage of the nuances and complications felt by citizens.

Study Limitations and Future Directions

A large percentage of the articles identified in this study discussed abortion effects on midterm election. This finding aligns with Perse et al. (2009) who showed that during presidential election years, stories about abortion increased. Context and larger events effect abortion coverage (Perse et al. 1997; Rohlinger 2002; Rule 2022). A future study could expand on these findings by comparing the discourse of the 2022 midterm to past year's midterm elections. Isolating election coverage would allow researchers to examine if the topic of abortion post-Dobbs uniquely affected the 2022 election compared to other years and just

after the Roe v. Wade decision which protected abortion under the Constitution. Furthermore, studies specifically analyzing how the Dobbs decisions affected coverage should attempt to cover news reporting after the midterm cycle. Given the limited criteria used to identify abortion articles and limited sample size, the number of articles dedicated to midterm coverage might have affected the findings that abortion was covered mostly through a political lens.

The effects of the midterm on the present study also raises a larger contextual question about which outside influences most affect abortion coverage. This study originally attempted to include three time periods to isolate the effects that a leaked United States Supreme Court opinion draft written by Justice Alito had on abortion coverage. Due to vastly different sample sizes, this time period was eventually collapsed with P1. However, future studies should analyze which contextual events most shape abortion coverage.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the stable and salient aspects of abortion reporting. Through a qualitative and quantitative analysis, I identified that elections affect the already political coverage of abortion and discuss the ways that this frame limits journalists' ability to educate the public on other abortion issues. In an interview-based study asking journalists to share their thoughts on abortion reporting, Sisson and colleagues (2016) found that journalists often struggle on the best ways to report on abortion in terms of "neutrality," "angles," and "polarization." Given the large body of research on how the media represents abortion and journalist's own identification of difficulties with reporting on abortion, a larger effort should be made for collaboration among journalists and researchers. Researchers' ability to demonstrate and categorize pre-existing abortion conversation could help journalists better inform the public and incorporate more varied coverage in their reporting.

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