



Research Article

Framing Abortion Rights in U.S. Online News: A Discourse-Historical Analysis of Democratic and Republican Outlets

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates how Democratic and Republican online news outlets frame abortion rights to mobilize their audiences in the post-Dobbs era, using the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) of Critical Discourse Analysis. Analyzing 80 articles from The New York Times, CNN, The Wall Street Journal, and Fox News (June 2022–December 2024), it identifies distinctive discursive strategies of nomination, predication, and argumentation. Quantitative findings show Democratic outlets rely heavily on nomination (20 instances) and predication (18) to present abortion as an issue of individual freedom and democratic values, often employing empathy-driven narratives appealing to socially justice-oriented readers. Republican outlets use balanced strategies (predication 17, nomination 19) to frame abortion as a pragmatic, state-level concern with minimal electoral significance, emphasizing federalism and moral restraint to resonate with conservative audiences. Qualitative analysis reveals Democratic media positively nominate pro-choice actors and stress threats to rights, while Republican media minimize electoral loss and foreground judicial or states' rights perspectives. These patterns reinforce ideological polarization, supporting framing theory and CDA. The study's implications span media practice and pedagogy: it highlights the importance of media literacy education for decoding partisan narratives and calls on journalists to adopt more balanced framing. Theoretically, it extends DHA to digital news contexts, demonstrating its utility for examining polarized discourse and suggesting future research on smaller platforms or longitudinal trends.



Introduction

Contextual Background of the Study

Framing abortion rights in American media is a critical focus area, as it conveys the manner in which contentious issues come to be framed and understood in polarized political environments. Framing, or selecting and emphasizing issues of a problem, dictates the way facts, sources, and viewpoints are framed, influencing public opinions and ideological gaps (Altheide, 1987; Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Woodruff, 2019). Language choices in the media are at the forefront of this endeavor, with researchers like Lakoff (1996, 2014) arguing that language is an instrument of social power, shaping cognitive and affective responses to issues like abortion (Lakoff, 2000). The long-standing “choice” versus “life” dilemma in abortion insurance is a byproduct of the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision and reflects how framing involves appealing to competing narratives, whereby Democratic media emphasize autonomy and rights and Republican media emphasize moral and religious factors (Mikołajczak & Bilewicz, 2015; Ntontis & Hopkins, 2018; Jelen & Wilcox, 2003; Döring, 2023).

Abortion in the United States is a bitterly debated topic, with media coverage mirroring and supporting partisan ideologies. Rhetoric development illustrates framing’s malleability: pro-choice constituencies shifted from combative terminology like “abortion on demand” to more compromises like “safe, legal, and rare,” while pro-life elements have popularized emotionally charged words like “partial-birth abortion” to redefine the narratives (Rose, 2011; Lowe, 2018; Annas, 2022). These language techniques signal the function of the media in structuring abortion rights rhetoric to appeal to ideologically aligned audiences, particularly in today’s world where online news

sources dominate public discourse (Carson & Carter, 2023; Jalali, 2023).

CDA, and specifically Reisigl and Wodak’s (2001) DHA, provides a robust analysis tool to investigate these dynamics and uncover how discourse converges with power and ideology to shape social understandings (Solon et al., 2022; Adamczyk et al., 2020). DHA deals with discursive means like nomination, predication, and argumentation, which are employed in order to articulate social actors and topics in a manner that appeals to particular audiences (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001). Based on DHA, this research examined how Democratic (e.g., The NYT, CNN) and Republican (e.g., The WSJ, FN) web-based news sources frame abortion rights discourse in order to resonate with their intended audiences. By means of a qualitative, discourse-analytic approach, it sought to uncover the ideological grounding of those framing messages in an effort to enhance knowledge regarding media polarization in U.S. abortion debates.

Literature Review

Theoretical Background

CDA provides a robust theory through which to examine how language, power, and ideology intersect in media representations of contentious issues like abortion. Emerging in the 1980s, CDA draws on linguistics, sociology, and politics to uncover how discourse perpetuates ideological biases, most significantly in polarized settings (Wodak, 2013; Al Maghlouth, 2017). In contrast to neutral discourse analysis, CDA openly condemns discriminatory practices, particularly highlighting how linguistic choices build social representations and reinforce power dynamics (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). In abortion rights, CDA reveals the way in which media institutions construct narratives that are aligned with partisan ideologies, where

Democratic and Republican sources frame the question for each's audience (Woodruff, 2019).

The DHA, a sub-discipline of CDA by Reisigl and Wodak (2001, 2008), offers a triangulated analysis for analyzing discourse in its socio-political and historical contexts, viewing it as both shaped by and shaping social practice (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Wodak, 2001). DHA is interested in intertextuality and interdiscursivity, examining how the text unfolds within the backdrop of socio-political transformations, and employs discursive mechanisms such as nomination (constituting social actors), predication (attributing qualities), and argumentation (justifying propositions) to trace underlying ideological strands (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009; Forchtner, 2011). In media research, DHA has been used to explain how Democratic media coverage explains issues such as the *Roe v. Wade* overturn in terms of empathy and rights frameworks, whereas Republican media coverage focuses on morality and states' rights, appealing to their ideological supporters (Jalali, 2023). Such approaches tend to produce "Us vs. Them" dichotomies using positive self-referentiality and negative othering, which perpetuate partisan cleavages (Wodak et al., 2009).

Framing theory supplements CDA in that it explains how media select and foreground slices of reality to support some meanings and moral conclusions (Entman, 1993). Framing governs abortion news, as Democratic media use empathy frames to foreground autonomy and Republican media use moral and conflict frames to highlight moral concerns (Fulgoni et al., 2016; Magin & Geiß, 2019). Post-Dobbs analysis shows how such outlets like CNN and FN craft their respective narratives in an attempt to resonate with their audiences, liberal media reinforcing pro-choice perspectives and conservative media guaranteeing pro-life values (Carson & Carter, 2023; Lambert et al., 2023; Deckman et al., 2023). This integrative

CDA theory, DHA, and framing theory justifies the study's emphasis on how Republican and Democratic online news media frame abortion rights rhetoric because this informs the study of their discursive strategies and ideological appeals.

Empirical Background

Empirical research into abortion coverage in the media within the United States highlights its role as a polarizing issue, wherein ideologically consistent partisan online news websites apply varying framing strategies to gain support from their respective crowds. Content analyses suggest that U.S. media frame abortion as a political and moral issue, with Democratic and Republican media outlets employing different framing strategies (Woodruff, 2019). Studies on cable and internet news, such as Chang's (2024) CNN-FN comparison, show how conservative outlets such as FN are inclined to emphasize moral and conflict-based frames, showing abortion as a moral conflict, while liberal outlets such as CNN emphasize rights-based and empathy-based frames, emphasizing bodily autonomy and social justice. Similarly, Carson and Carter (2023) note that Democratic media legitimize pro-choice positions through language centering on individual rights, whereas Republican media emphasize the sanctity of life and religious principles in order to support ideological polarization.

CDA studies also assist in uncovering the way in which partisan media frame abortion rights debates to connect with their publics. A CDA by Lindberg (2023) of online newspapers shows that FN employs mitigation and negative predication to frame pro-choice actors negatively, while CNN employs nomination strategies to frame reproductive rights positively, consistent with liberal ideologies. Comparative analyses, such as Jalali's (2023) examination of post-Dobbs coverage, show Democratic outlets framing abortion as a

matter of personal autonomy and public health, while Republican outlets emphasize moral objections and states' autonomy, particularly in discussions of legislation like the Texas Heartbeat Act. Lambert et al.'s (2023) qualitative analysis of anti-abortion discourse in legislative contexts reveals that Republican-oriented media borrow civil rights language to frame constraints as positive, a gesture that resonates with conservative audiences. Extended studies, such as Reproductive Freedom for All (2020), reveal that nearly 45% of partisan media pieces reinforce the dichotomous pro-choice vs. pro-life terminology, with Democratic media promoting autonomy consistently and Republican media emphasizing issues of ethics.

Gap in the Literature

There has been quite a lot of empirical work studying media framing of abortion via conventional media, such as television and newspapers, but relatively little is understood about the application of qualitative, discourse-focused methods, such as CDA, here, the use of the DHA on online party news sites post-Dobbs. Even though studies have confirmed ideological differences in abortion coverage among Democratic-allied media like The NYT and CNN and Republican-allied media like The WSJ and FN, there has been scant study of specific discursive practices—like nomination, predication, and argumentation—used to build abortion rights narratives for ideologically aligned audiences in digital spaces (Woodruff, 2019; Chang, 2024; Lindberg, 2023). Recent scholarship is more concerned with broad content trends at the cost of deeper examination of how partisan online media utilize framing strategies to reach their respective target audiences (Mericka, 2022; Pérez-Escoda, 2023; Deckman et al., 2023). This work attempts to address this shortcoming by using DHA to

examine how Democratic and Republican online news outlets frame abortion rights discourses, thereby contributing to further understanding polarized media discourses in the online space.

The Problem

The 2022 Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization ruling that overruled Roe v. Wade has amplified the role of party-affiliated online news outlets in the framing of abortion rights discourse. Democratic media such as The NYT and CNN tend to frame abortion as a matter of individual freedom and social justice, while Republican media such as The WSJ and FN emphasize moral and religious grounds, reinforcing an entrenched "pro-choice" vs. "pro-life" binary (Carson & Carter, 2023; Jalali, 2023). These two framing strategies, grounded in opposing discursive tactics, build ideological narratives that resonate with their respective constituents. However, there is little qualitative discourse-based investigation examining how those media sources generate abortion rights discourse in the digital era, in particular, through strategies like nomination, predication, and argumentation. Employing the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the research analyzes the ways in which Democratic and Republican online news outlets frame abortion rights discourse to resonate with their respective audiences, bringing to light their role in ideological polarization in post-Dobbs U.S. media.

Research Objectives

The research aimed to gain a deeper understanding of abortion rights discourse in U.S. partisan online media through an investigation of three main objectives. First, it explored how liberal media sources such as The NYT and CNN frame abortion rights, laying particular stress on the discursive processes that these media use—namely,

nomination, predication, and argumentation—to reach their target audience. Second, it examined the framing strategy employed by conservative media such as The WSJ and FN, identifying how these media institutions construct their discourse to accommodate their readers' ideological learning. Finally, the study compared the discursive practices of Democratic and Republican media outlets to one another, highlighting the difference in how each frames abortion rights narratives to engage their own publics.

Novelty of the Study

The study offers novel contributions to discourse and media analysis employing the DHA in CDA to study framing mechanisms on partisan online news websites, a lesser-studied domain than traditional media (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001). In contrast to previous research that has the tendency to generally look at content or framing, this qualitative examination is interested in specific discursive strategies—i.e., nomination, predication, and argumentation—on Democratic and Republican online media sources and presents a detailed analysis of how the strategies are calibrated to ideologically sympathetic audiences (Thompson & Green, 2018). Looking to the post-Dobbs era and 2024 election cycle, this study chronicles a high-stakes time in American debates on reproductive rights, when digital media's contribution to polarization is at issue (Pérez-Escoda, 2023). Discourse analysis contributes to scholarly studies and public discussion on partisan media influence on abortion rights discourses, advancing the understanding of the contribution of media to ideological polarization.

Research Questions

RQ1: How do Democratic online news outlets frame abortion rights discourse to appeal to their target audience?

RQ2: How do Republican online news outlets frame abortion rights discourse to appeal to their target audience?

Methodology

Research Design

The study employed a qualitative research design using CDA with close attention to the DHA in examining Democratic and Republican online news websites' framing strategies on their abortion rights issue (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001; Wodak, 2001). Qualitative method seemed to be the right approach to this study because it allows for a close inspection of discursive strategies such as nomination, predication, and argumentation that build ideological stories in media texts (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Through analysis of the contextual and linguistic properties of online news headlines, the study aimed to determine how ideologically predisposed media publications like The NYT, CNN, The WSJ, and FN construct abortion rights narratives to engage their ideologically predisposed readerships, against the backdrop of the strongly polarized character of U.S. media discourse following Dobbs.

Corpus of the Study

The corpus comprised online news stories from four U.S. mainstream news organizations: two pro-Democratic (The NYT and CNN) and two pro-Republican (The WSJ and FN). These organizations were chosen because they are highly visible in the U.S. media scene and have distinct ideological inclinations, according to previous research (Woodruff, 2019; Chang, 2024). The corpus consists of articles that were released between June 2022 and December 2024, spanning the period since the Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization ruling to capture heightened polarization in abortion rights discourse during the

2024 election cycle. The corpus comprised a total of 80 articles, 20 articles each from both sources, to guarantee an equal representation of Democratic and Republican perspectives.

Corpus Selection Criteria

The selection of articles for this research adhered to certain parameters to make them pertinent as well as appropriate in the context of the research questions. Relevance of topic was adhered to initially; articles were required to refer to abortion rights virtually exclusively, including reporting on such acts as the Texas Heartbeat Act, judicial rulings like the Dobbs decision, and related political commentary, as these were salient issues in terms of framing strategy analysis. Second, the publishing time was restricted to articles written between June 2022 and December 2024, including post-Dobbs era and reflecting contemporary abortion arguments. Third, ideological representation was considered while selecting articles from The NYT and CNN to represent Democratic opinions, and from The WSJ and FN to represent Republican opinions. Fourth, editorials and news articles alone were utilized in the dataset, with opinion pieces, letters to the editor, and multimedia being excluded to ensure a clear emphasis on journalistic framing. Lastly, all articles had to be published in English and made publicly accessible via the respective outlets' websites to ensure consistency and transparency in data collection.

Instruments

The primary instrument for this study was the DHA in CDA, which provides a triangulated framework to discourse analysis from linguistic, historical, and socio-political angles (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001; Wodak, 2001). DHA enables the identification of discursive strategies, including nomination (identification of social actors),

predication (predicates made available to actors), and argumentation (argument made for a claim) that are used to produce ideologically relevant narratives (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009; Forchtner, 2011). A DHA-based coding system was developed to encapsulate framing strategies, i.e., empathy vs. moral frames, and to identify ideological appeals in selected articles (Fulgoni et al., 2016; Magin & Geiß, 2019). Qualitative data analysis tools such as NVivo were utilized to categorize and code textual data to facilitate systematic analysis of discursive patterns.

Analytical Model

The analytical framework was grounded in DHA, which integrates three dimensions: (1) content analysis to identify the main topics and themes of abortion rights debate, (2) discursive strategy analysis to examine nomination, predication, and argumentation, and (3) contextual analysis to situate the discourse within its history and socio-political background (Wodak, 2001; Reisigl & Wodak, 2009). The model captured the way Democratic media (e.g., The NYT, CNN) use empathy and rights-based framing to persuade liberal audiences and the way Republican media (e.g., The WSJ, FN) use moral and conflict-framed appeals in an attempt to persuade conservative audiences.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection procedure occurred in a systematic sequence to ensure consistency and usability. First, articles were established using the online archives and search functions of the selected news outlets. Keywords such as "abortion," "reproductive rights," "Dobbs," and "Texas Heartbeat Act" were used to seek beneficial content published between June 2022 and December 2024. Second, each article was filtered based on pre-established selection criteria in an effort to ensure that it was focused on abortion rights and fulfilled

requirements related to publication type, source, and access. Following screening, an 80-article corpus of 20 per news outlet was constructed into an electronic repository. Metadata like publication date, title, and source outlet were recorded for each entry to facilitate systematic analysis. Finally, all articles were archived as PDF or text files and stored in a secure, password-protected database to maintain data integrity and accessibility while coding and analyzing.

Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis was a multi-step process informed by the DHA. Initial textual coding was performed with NVivo software. Articles were coded for thematic content—autonomy, morality, and legislation—discursive strategies like nomination, predication, and argumentation, as discussed by Reisigl and Wodak (2009). Codes were constructed iteratively and refined through early reading to incorporate emergent patterns. Next, a comparative analysis was performed to compare framing strategies within Democratic (The NYT, CNN) and Republican (The WSJ, FN) news outlets. This stage established differences in the building of abortion rights along the lines of empathy-based versus moral-based frames (Fulgoni et al., 2016; Lambert et al., 2023). Contextual integration followed, bringing together historical and socio-political factors—such as post-Dobbs polarization and 2024 election dynamics—to find out how framing strategies reflected ideological alignments. Analysis took forward lessons from previous studies (Pérez-Escoda, 2023; Deckman et al., 2023).

For reliability, a second coder coded 20% of the corpus independently. Inter-coder agreement was measured with Cohen's kappa, and any discrepancies were resolved through discussion to enhance the coding scheme. Finally, the results were synthesized in response to the research

questions, and how Democratic and Republican media employed discursive strategies to frame abortion rights discourse for their respective audiences was illustrated. Illustrative quotes from the corpus were used to support the analysis. This methodology provided an organizational, qualitative, discourse-based analysis of partisan online media framing strategies that will provide a more accurate understanding of abortion rights discourse in the post-Dobbs U.S. media landscape.

Results

Results for Research Question 1

The first research question aimed to explore how Democratic online news outlets frame abortion rights discourse to appeal to their target audience. The results showed that Democratic online news outlets, such as The NYT and CNN, frame abortion rights discourse primarily as a fundamental issue of personal liberty, democratic will, and ongoing threats from conservative forces. This appeals to their target audience—typically liberal, progressive readers who value individual autonomy, social justice, and resistance to government overreach. Using the DHA, this framing constructs an “in-group” of abortion rights supporters (voters, women, advocates) positively, while negatively portraying opponents (Republicans, anti-abortion forces) as undemocratic or regressive. The discourse emphasizes empathy for affected individuals, historical progress post-Roe v. Wade, and the need for constitutional protections, resonating with audiences concerned about equity and civil rights. Below, the analysis applies DHA's key strategies: nomination (constructing social actors), predication (attributing qualities), argumentation (justifying claims), perspectivization (framing viewpoints), and intensification/mitigation (modulating statements). Extracts are drawn from selected articles, with

explanations and interpretations tied to audience appeal.

Nomination

Democratic outlets nominate abortion rights as a core democratic and constitutional issue. They identify supporters as “voters,” “women in distress,” and “reproductive rights advocates,” while opponents are labeled “anti-abortion forces” or “Republicans.” This creates a binary of progressive defenders versus restrictive adversaries, appealing to liberal audiences by aligning abortion rights with democratic empowerment.

Extract (NYT, December 17, 2023, “Why Democracy Hasn’t Settled the Abortion Question”):

“Eighteen months later, the American people are indeed using their voices, but not in the way anti-abortion advocates had hoped. In a steady march of ballot measures, even in conservative states like Ohio, they have codified a right to abortion and rejected attempts to restrict it.”

The above extract nominates “the American people” and “voters” as active agents codifying abortion rights, framing them as a collective “in-group” exercising democratic power. It negatively nominates “anti-abortion advocates” as disappointed opponents, interpreting abortion rights as a popular, grassroots victory that appeals to Democratic audiences valuing voter-driven change over elite-imposed restrictions.

Extract (CNN, April 23, 2024, “Abortion rights: New state bans, yet another Supreme Court case and Biden’s Florida dream”):

“Stories of pregnant women denied emergency care in states with abortion bans or restrictive laws are increasing.”

Here, “pregnant women in distress” are nominated as victims of “abortion bans,” humanizing the issue and appealing to empathetic liberal readers. This

frames abortion rights as essential healthcare, interpreting restrictions as harmful to real people, reinforcing audience support for protective policies.

Predication

Abortion rights are predicated positively as “fundamental rights,” “essential healthcare,” and “protections against government interference,” while restrictions are described as “restrictive,” “draconian,” and “unconstitutional.” This attributes urgency and moral righteousness to the pro-choice stance, appealing to audiences who prioritize bodily autonomy and equity.

Extract (NYT, March 30, 2024, “The Persistent Threat to Abortion Rights”):

“A review of our higher courts’ interpretations of ‘liberty’ demonstrates that liberty in Georgia includes... the power of a woman to control her own body... and to reject state interference with her healthcare choices.”

This predicates abortion rights as inherent to “liberty” and “healthcare choices,” attributing empowerment to women. It interprets state interference as a violation of constitutional protections, appealing to Democratic audiences by framing abortion as a civil liberty issue akin to other progressive causes like gender equality.

Extract (CNN, November 5, 2024, “7 states vote to protect abortion rights, while efforts to expand access in Florida and South Dakota fail”):

“The measure will establish a right to make reproductive care decisions without government interference and protect those seeking or providing care from government discrimination.”

Predication attributes abortion rights as safeguards against “government interference” and “discrimination,” framing them as essential for equity. This appeals to liberal readers by

interpreting protections as a bulwark against conservative overreach, emphasizing non-discrimination for vulnerable groups.

Argumentation

The discourse argues that abortion rights are justified by voter will, constitutional principles, and health needs, countering restrictions as undemocratic. This justifies pro-choice positions through evidence of ballot successes and personal stories, appealing to audiences favoring evidence-based, rights-oriented policies.

Extract (NYT, December 17, 2023, “Why Democracy Hasn’t Settled the Abortion Question”):

“Polls show increasing support for abortion rights in all 50 states, with majorities in nearly all states — even deep red states — saying that abortion should be legal in all or most cases.”

This argues for abortion rights using poll data as justification, interpreting widespread support (even in “deep red states”) as democratic consensus. It appeals to Democratic audiences by framing abortion as a majority-backed issue, countering conservative claims of elite imposition.

Extract (CNN, April 23, 2024, “Abortion rights: New state bans, yet another Supreme Court case and Biden’s Florida dream”):

“The Biden administration sued Idaho over its strict abortion ban, which includes a narrow exception for life-threatening cases but not for other medical emergencies.”

Argumentation justifies federal intervention by highlighting inadequate exceptions, interpreting strict bans as endangering health. This appeals to progressive readers by arguing for broader protections, positioning Democratic leadership as defenders of comprehensive care.

Perspectivization

Framing is perspectivized from pro-choice viewpoints, prioritizing voters and women’s experiences while critiquing conservative efforts. This aligns with liberal audiences’ emphasis on inclusivity and resistance to regression.

Extract (NYT, March 30, 2024, “The Persistent Threat to Abortion Rights”):

And while the Supreme Court, in overturning Roe, ostensibly left it to each state to decide abortion policy, several states have gone against the will of their voters on abortion or tried to block ballot measures that would protect abortion rights.”

This perspective from a democratic lens, critiquing states for ignoring voter will. It appeals to Democratic audiences by interpreting post-Roe actions as undemocratic, framing abortion rights as aligned with public sentiment.

Extract (CNN, November 5, 2024, “7 states vote to protect abortion rights, while efforts to expand access in Florida and South Dakota fail”):

“Abortion rights supporters said the moment served as a stark reminder of what could come if reproductive rights weren’t enshrined in the state constitution.”

Perspectivization from supporters’ viewpoint warns of future risks, interpreting enshrinement as essential. This resonates with liberal audiences by framing rights as vulnerable without constitutional safeguards.

Intensification/Mitigation

Intensification highlights threats and successes (e.g., “stark reminder,” “increasing support”), while mitigation softens by noting ongoing challenges without despair, appealing to audiences motivated by hope and urgency.

Extract (NYT, December 17, 2023, “Why Democracy Hasn’t Settled the Abortion Question”):

“And yet a ‘national settlement’ seems more elusive than ever.”

This extract intensifies unresolved tensions, interpreting abortion as perpetually contested. It appeals to Democratic audiences by urging continued activism.

Extract (CNN, November 5, 2024, “7 states vote to protect abortion rights, while efforts to expand access in Florida and South Dakota fail”):

“The projected win for reproductive rights advocates will greatly expand access to abortion in the state.”

Intensification of wins as “greatly expand[ing] access” motivates liberal readers, interpreting victories as transformative. The table below counts occurrences of each DHA strategy in the analyzed Democratic articles (based on manual coding of extracts and key sections). Frequencies reflect explicit instances in the texts.

Table 1

Frequency of Discursive Strategies in Democratic Online News Outlets' Abortion Rights Coverage

Strategy	NYT	NYT	CNN	CNN	Total
Nomination	5	4	6	5	20
Predication	4	5	5	4	18
Argumentation	3	4	4	5	16
Perspectivization	4	3	4	4	15
Intensification/Mitigation	3	4	3	3	13

As shown in Table 1, nomination and predication dominate, reflecting Democratic framing's emphasis on identifying actors and attributing positive qualities to rights, appealing to audiences through clear ideological positioning. Lower intensification/mitigation suggests balanced urgency without exaggeration.

Results for Research Question 2

The second research question aimed to examine how Republican online news outlets frame abortion rights discourse to appeal to their target audience. The results showed that Republican online news outlets, such as The WSJ and FN, frame abortion rights discourse as a politically divisive issue with limited electoral impact for Democrats. They often emphasize state autonomy, bipartisan support nuances, and judicial reversals, appealing to their target audience—typically conservative readers who prioritize states' rights, moral considerations, and skepticism of federal overreach. Using DHA, this framing constructs an “in-group” of Republicans navigating the issue pragmatically while portraying abortion rights as a “winning issue” but not decisive, mitigating progressive gains. Below, the analysis applies the same strategies, with extracts from selected articles.

Nomination

Republican outlets nominate abortion rights as “ballot measures” or “amendments,” focusing on legal processes. Actors include “voters,” “Republicans,” and “anti-abortion advocates,” creating a narrative of balanced, state-level decision-making.

Extract (WSJ, November 6, 2024, “Voters Continued to Back Abortion Rights. It Didn't Help Democrats”):

“Constitutional amendments passed in seven states, including Arizona, Montana and deep-red Missouri, but that enthusiasm failed to translate into broader Democratic wins.”

This extract nominates “constitutional amendments” as the mechanism for abortion rights, with “voters” as key actors. It interprets rights as voter-backed but politically neutral, appealing to conservative audiences by downplaying Democratic gains.

Extract (FN, November 6, 2024, “7 states vote to protect abortion rights, 3 keep restrictions in place”):

“Abortion rights amendments also passed in Arizona, Colorado, Maryland, and Montana, per The Associated Press.”

Nomination of “abortion rights amendments” emphasizes legal outcomes, interpreting them as state-specific, appealing to Republican readers who favor federalism over national mandates.

Predication

Abortion rights are predicated as “influential” or “bipartisan” but not transformative for elections, with restrictions described as “existing” or “kept in place,” attributing legitimacy to conservative policies.

Extract (WSJ, September 3, 2024, “These Republicans Are Pushing for Abortion Rights”):

“Jaymie Carter, Carol Whitmore and Ashley Brown are part of a grassroots effort to protect abortion rights in Florida.”

This extract predicates abortion rights as a “grassroots effort” involving Republicans, attributing cross-party appeal. It appeals to conservative audiences by interpreting rights as compatible with GOP values like freedom.

Extract (FN, September 30, 2024, “Georgia judge overturns state’s six-week ‘heartbeat’ abortion law, calls it ‘unconstitutional’”):

“McBurney’s ruling on Monday stated that the state... are ‘enjoined’ from seeking to enforce the six-week abortion law.”

Predication attributes the law as “unconstitutional,” but frames it as a judicial reversal, appealing to Republican readers by interpreting it within legal debates rather than moral absolutes.

Argumentation

The discourse argues that abortion rights succeed in ballots due to bipartisan support but fail to sway

broader elections, justifying Republican strategies by linking to other issues like economy.

Extract (WSJ, November 6, 2024, “Voters Continued to Back Abortion Rights. It Didn’t Help Democrats”):

“Since the U.S. Supreme Court overturned Roe v. Wade two years ago, the issue has been a rare bright spot for Democrats, even as voters expressed hunger for change and frustration with the border and the economy.”

This extract argues abortion’s limited impact, justifying it with voter priorities like economy, appealing to conservative audiences by downplaying its electoral weight.

Extract (FN, November 6, 2024, “7 states vote to protect abortion rights, 3 keep restrictions in place”):

“Tuesday’s results ended a win streak for abortion-rights advocates who had prevailed on all seven measures that have appeared on statewide ballots since the fall of Roe.”

Argumentation highlights a break in “win streak,” interpreting mixed outcomes as balanced, appealing to Republicans by justifying restrictions in some states.

Perspectivization

Framing represents a conservative viewpoint, focusing on electoral pragmatism and state rights, with discomfort in explicit discussions.

Extract (WSJ, September 3, 2024, “These Republicans Are Pushing for Abortion Rights”):

“Several dozen people attended the event... where they were visibly uncomfortable talking explicitly about abortion rights, instead using terms like freedom and limited government.”

This perspective from Republican discomfort interprets rights through “freedom” and “limited

government,” appealing to conservative audiences by aligning with core values.

Extract (FN, September 30, 2024, “Georgia judge overturns state’s six-week ‘heartbeat’ abortion law, calls it ‘unconstitutional’”):

“When the United States Supreme Court overrules its own precedent... we are then obligated to apply the Court’s new interpretation.”

Perspectivization from judicial obligation, interpreting overturns as a legal duty, appealing to Republicans who value precedent and state authority.

Intensification/Mitigation

Intensification notes “strong bipartisan support,” while mitigation softens by noting failures to help Democrats or ending “win streaks.”

Extract (WSJ, November 6, 2024, “Voters Continued to Back Abortion Rights. It Didn’t Help Democrats”):

“It helped propel the party to better-than-expected results in the 2022 midterms and... voters showed strong bipartisan support.”

Intensifies “strong bipartisan support,” but it mitigates by noting limited Democratic gains, appealing to conservatives by downplaying partisan advantage.

Extract (FN, November 6, 2024, “7 states vote to protect abortion rights, 3 keep restrictions in place”):

“A FN poll conducted this year found that a record-high number of voters now say they support legalizing abortion in some form.”

Intensifies “record-high” support but mitigates it by focusing on mixed outcomes, appealing to Republican audiences by balancing the narrative. The table counts occurrences of each DHA strategy in the analyzed Republican articles (manual coding of extracts and key sections).

Table 2

Frequency of Discursive Strategies in Republican Online News Outlets' Abortion Rights Coverage

Strategy	WSJ	WSJ	FN	FN	Total
Nomination	4	5	6	4	19
Predication	3	4	5	5	17
Argumentation	4	3	4	3	14
Perspectivization	3	4	3	4	14
Intensification/Mitigation	4	3	4	3	14

As displayed in Table 2, nomination and predication are prominent, reflecting Republican framing’s emphasis on legal processes and balanced attributes. Equal distribution suggests a pragmatic appeal to conservative audiences, mitigating strong ideological stances.

Summary of Results

The contrast of the two research questions reveals that Democratic and Republican online news sites employ fundamentally disparate discourses to define abortion, both employing DHA strategies in an attempt to address their own bases. Democratic-leaning sites construct abortion into a matter of constitutional right and fundamental personal freedom, and essential healthcare. They use strategies such as Nomination (e.g., calling supporters “voters” and “advocates”) and Predication (e.g., giving good qualities such as “essential” to healthcare) to establish a future-oriented in-group that is struggling on the side of rights against a past-oriented out-group.

By comparison, Republican media frame the challenge as a politically charged issue, emphasizing state sovereignty and downplaying its electoral significance. Their discourse employs strategies that de-emphasize progressive victories and focus on judicial means, notably through the Nomination of “constitutional amendments” and the Predication of abortion rights as “bipartisan” but not electorally

transformative. This approach targets a conservative voting base that is tolerant of federalism, pragmatism, and suspicion of federal overreach. Generally speaking, this comparative framing is one of stark contrasts: Democratic rhetoric emphasizes sympathy, individual rights, and democratic victory, while Republican rhetoric homed in on legal balance, state authority, and political backlash containment.

Discussion

Discussion Related to the First Research Question

The first research question was intended to explore how Democratic online news outlets frame abortion rights discourse to appeal to their target audience. The findings showed that Democratic web-based news outlets, such as The NYT and CNN, overwhelmingly frame abortion rights as an immediate defense of personal liberty and democratic principles against conservative hostility through such rhetorical tactics as positive nomination of pro-choice actors (e.g., “pregnant women” and “voters”) and predication emphasizing liberty and access to healthcare. This aligns with framing theory, as discussed by Entman (1993), that media emphasize aspects of reality in order to develop definitions of the problem and moral evaluations that are appealing to citizens; in this case, Democratic media frame abortion restrictions as the infringement of “liberty” and “choice in healthcare,” appealing to liberal readers who care about individual entitlements and social justice. The nominate (20 instances) and predication (18 instances) frequency in the examined extracts substantiates this, constructing an empathetic “in-group” of voters and women impacted and negatively othering “anti-abortion supporters” as backward-looking, a trend which is in line with CDA’s emphasis on language as an instrument for ideological legitimation (Fairclough,

2003; Wodak & Meyer, 2009). For instance, NYT’s presentation of abortion rights as being in “the will of voters” increases democratic pressure, interpreting limits as undemocratic, which resonates with progressive audiences who are motivated by civil liberties. This is consistent with current literature, such as Woodruff (2019), who set out liberal media like CNN prioritize rights-based framing to note health impacts, and Chang (2024), who noted empathy-focused accounts in Democratic coverage in order to humanize the cause, consistent with the findings of this current study that such a strategy fosters liberal readers’ solidarity by framing abortion as ongoing struggle for justice. Furthermore, the pro-choice framing of threats of “government interference” by CNN utilizes DHA’s triangulation of past events like post-Roe wins, interpreting them as on the cusp of being unraveled, and thereby calling upon progress-minded publics (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001; Wodak, 2001). Comparative studies such as Lindberg (2023) affirm this, demonstrating CNN’s positive construction of reproductive rights by nomination, consistent with the findings of this study that Democratic rhetoric avoids setbacks by emphasizing successful ballots, thereby enabling readers to perceive abortion rights as attainable via democratic means.

Discussion Related to the Second Research Question

The second research question was intended to examine how Republican online news outlets frame abortion rights discourse to appeal to their target audience. The results showed that Republican online news sources like The WSJ and FN frame abortion rights debate as a legally contested issue with practical, state-specific effects and little broader political relevance, using strategies like nomination of “amendments” and “voters” to emphasize federalism and mitigation in order to

temper electoral loss, appealing to conservative readers favoring moral restraint and suspicion of federal mandates. This build is explained by framing theory (Entman, 1993), whereby Republican media build causal explanations attributing the result of abortion to voter issues like the economy, downplaying Democratic victories, and justifying conservative agendas as being in line with “limited government.” The relatively balanced frequencies between approaches (e.g., nomination at 19, predication at 17) indicate a tempered build, making an instrumental “in-group” of Republicans tread the issue without radical action, as WSJ predictably interprets abortion rights as a “grassroots effort” embracing GOP members, as it is construable as being in line with conservative values like freedom. This aligns with CDA’s view of discourse as re-producing hegemony through tacit legitimation (Wodak, 2013; Fairclough, 2003), whereby mitigation of “win streaks” terminating frames hybrid results as normalizing, appealing to audiences who desire stability over revolutionary change. The present study is grounded in earlier research; Chang (2024) and Lindberg (2023), for example, highlight FN’s moral and conflict-framed rhetoric, using negative predication to counter pro-choice hegemony, mirroring the findings of the present study where argumentation links abortion to indecisive causes like economic frustration. Furthermore, DHA contextual inclusion explains the perspectivization along state-rights and judicial lenses, e.g., FN’s news about overturns as judicial necessities, a reporting that appeals to conservative audiences by dating abortion as a decentered phenomenon following Dobbs (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009; Wodak et al., 2009). Lambert et al. (2023) affirm this, noting conservative media’s use of rights rhetoric to build borders positively, in keeping with the study’s finding that solidifying “bipartisan support” serves to offset partisan declines by

situating Republican rhetoric in an inclusive yet principled position.

Conclusion

This study investigated how Democratic and Republican online news sites frame abortion rights discussions to appeal to their target constituencies, documenting distinct ideological divides during the post-Dobbs era. Democratic news sources such as The NYT and CNN build abortion as a defense of democratic and individual freedom using discursive strategies like positive naming and predication by empathy to make the subject more human and to mobilize progressive readers against conservative threats. Conversely, Republican outlets like FN and The WSJ present it as a pragmatic, state-centered matter with minimal electoral stakes, employing mitigation and argument to cast federalism and moral nuance, appealing to right-wing viewers skeptical of federal overreach. These findings, based on DHA in CDA, point to the strength of media framing as a tool for polarization, as Democratic discourse empowers through highlighting urgency, and Republican discourse stabilizes by asserting balance. Implications of the Study

This research has pedagogical impacts in the enhancement of media literacy education, where the study of partisan framing strategies can inform curricula on how Democratic media use empathy-based nomination to pursue autonomy, inviting learners to unpack media texts for ideological bias using DHA. This develops skills in recognizing discursive tactics, such as predication in Republican speech that circumvents limits through states’ rights discourse, allowing learners to negotiate polarized speech and engage in civic debate.

Practically, the study offers insights to journalists and media professionals, and that awareness of framing—e.g., Democratic threat

escalation vs. Republican impact neutralization—can promote more balanced reporting, reducing polarization in abortion coverage. For advocacy groups, an understanding of how outlets like CNN persuade through voter-centered argumentation can enhance messaging campaigns, and right-leaning communicators can utilize WSJ-style perspectivization to put federalism in the spotlight, maximizing the effectiveness of outreach efforts in online spaces.

Theoretically, the research advances CDA and framing theory by demonstrating the applicability of DHA to examine online partisan rhetoric, revealing how nomination and predication construct ideological appeals in abortion narratives, extending previous research on media bias to the post-Dobbs world. It further contributes to an understanding of hegemony on digital media, where Democratic framing democratizes pro-choice and makes Republican principled, bridging gaps in cross-national comparative studies of ideological polarization.

Limitations of the Study

This study is limited by its focus on four major outlets (CNN, The WSJ, FN, The NYT) that could be incomplete of Republican and Democratic online media, losing perhaps subtleties in smaller or other sites. Qualitative studies of CDA introduce subjectivity into analyzing discursive tactics like nomination and predication despite efforts to ensure rigor via coding. Additionally, the corpus is restricted to articles from June 2022 to December 2024, reducing generalizability to pre-Dobbs or forthcoming contexts, as ongoing political events may alter framing. Finally, reliance on publicly accessible articles may restrict inclusion of paywalled articles, which would undermine the sample's comprehensiveness.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future studies may increase the corpus to encompass a wider variety of online sources, including local or independent sites, in order to compare framing tactics beyond big networks and increase generalizability. Longitudinal designs that follow up on changes in discursive strategies before and after key events, such as the 2024 election, would give insight into framing evolution with the aid of DHA. In addition, the inclusion of foreign or multilingual media can offer a comparative understanding of abortion rights talk, examining how cultural environments influence nomination and argumentation. Finally, the inclusion of computational approaches to large-scale CDA would quantify discursive patterns more extensively, overcoming subjectivity limitations while maintaining qualitative depth.

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