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The Digital Battlefield: A Discourse Analysis of How U.S. Politicians Frame Abortion on Twitter (X)

Dijital Savaş Alanı: ABD Politikacılarının Twitter (X)'da Kürtajı Nasıl Çerçevelediğine Dair Bir Söylem Analizi

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ÖZ

Bu çalışma, ABD politikacılarının Roe v. Wade'in bozulmasının ardından kürtaj konusundaki duruşlarını dile getirmek için Twitter (X)'i nasıl kullandıklarını araştırıyor. Kongre'nin önemli Demokrat ve Cumhuriyetçi üyelerinden 232 tweet'i inceledik ve söylemsel çağruları ve çerçeveleme stratejilerini analiz etmek için söylem analizini kullandım. Sonuçlar, Demokratların genellikle kürtajı temel bir insan hakkı ve temel sağlık hizmetinin bir parçası olarak sunduğunu, tarihsel ve duygusal anlatıları içerdiğini ortaya koyuyor. Buna karşılık, Cumhuriyetçiler tabanlarını canlandırmak için genellikle kışkırtıcı söylemler kullanarak ahlaki ve mali muhafazakarlığı vurguluyor. Bu analiz, Twitter'in siyasi söylem için bir forum olarak oynadığı önemli rolün altını çizerek, kürtaj tartışmasında dilin ve çerçevelemenin derin etkisini gösteriyor.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Kürtaj, Çerçeveleme, Twitter/X, Politikacılar

ABSTRACT

This study explores how U.S. politicians utilize Twitter to articulate their stances on abortion following the overturning of Roe v. Wade. I examined 232 tweets from notable Democratic and Republican members of Congress, utilizing discourse analysis to analyse the rhetorical appeals and framing strategies. Results reveal that Democrats typically present abortion as a fundamental human right and a part of essential healthcare, incorporating historical and emotional narratives. In contrast, Republicans emphasize moral and fiscal conservatism, often using provocative rhetoric to energize their base. This analysis underscores Twitter's pivotal role as a forum for political discourse, demonstrating the profound impact of language and framing in the abortion debate.

Keywords: Abortion, Framing, Twitter/X, Politicians

ÖNEÇIKANLAR/HIGHLIGHTS

Democrats typically present abortion as a fundamental human right and a part of essential healthcare, incorporating historical and emotional narratives. In contrast, Republicans emphasize moral and fiscal conservatism, often using provocative rhetoric to energize their base.

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1. Introduction

In a historic ruling on June 24, 2022, the United States Supreme Court overturned the influential legal precedents set by its 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision, altering Americans' access to abortions throughout the country. Consequently, huge conflicts of opinion between politicians on Twitter regarding the abortion case erupted, revealing new strategies used by public figures to shape public opinion. People and political figures were divided into opponents and supporters concerning the abortion ban, and Twitter, in particular, became a space where opinions were shared, shaped, and influenced. In 2021, the total number of abortions was 625,978 in the United States, excluding states that are known for supporting abortion rights, notably California, New Hampshire, Maryland, and New Jersey (Kortsmit, 2023). With the Supreme Court majority decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, safe access to abortion was no longer guaranteed for women, and conservative states particularly hoped to see that number decrease with the federal legal invalidation of abortion rights (Chang et al., 2023).

In the digital era, Twitter has emerged as a crucial battleground for political discourse, particularly on polarizing issues such as abortion. This study delves into this phenomenon by analyzing the rhetorical strategies and language used by U.S. politicians on Twitter to discuss abortion. Given the historic contentiousness of abortion in the United States and its deep ties with both political and social dimensions, it explores not only the content of what politicians tweet but how they frame these tweets to shape the discourse around abortion. This analysis is framed through the lens of framing theory, providing a nuanced understanding of the digital platform strategies employed by politicians.

1.1. Understanding Abortion in the USA

Abortion is one of the most pivotal issues in the history of the United States. People have been debating abortion for a long time, taking stances based on a variety of logics ranging from medical to ethical to religious. As a conceptual term, abortion is the intentional removal of a developing fetus to terminate a pregnancy (Richards, 2006). "Abortion is a procedure to remove a dead fetus from the maternal organism, and it is considered a cultural trait and is found in all cultures of developed societies." (Meira, 2017). Another definition by Franjić (2019) defines abortion as the deliberate or natural ending of a pregnancy by removing embryos or fetuses from the uterus before they can survive outside the womb.

Abortion was performed in the United States before North America was colonized, with many native groups knowing how to induce abortions via abortifacient substances. During the colonization of North America, abortion laws were influenced by the controlling country's beliefs and decided by common-law courts (Whittum & Rapkin, 2022). Information regarding the implementation of antiabortion laws in the colonies is mostly derived from the case of Sarah Grovesnor, a young lady who passed away in 1742 due to complications arising from a surgical abortion. The defendants were charged with offenses related to abortion resulting in a person's death, rather than for conducting or obtaining an abortion (Dayton, 1991). In 1880, most states made abortions illegal, with legislation banning the procedure at any stage of a woman's pregnancy (Whittum & Rapkin, 2022). By 1910, all states, except Kentucky, had relegated abortion to the category of a criminal operation, allowing it only in circumstances when the mother's life was at risk (Dine, 2013)

At the beginning of the 20th century, the emergence of some social movements, such as feminism, had an impact on the social and legal view of abortion. Rossi and Sitaraman (1988) mention that American feminists joined the abortion reform movement later than others, and in the early 1900s, feminist activism mostly concentrated on securing the right to vote. They suggest that the resurgence of feminism started with the establishment of the National Organization for Women (NOW) in 1966. This organization aimed to increase possibilities for women in education, politics, and the workforce. Two years later, NOW included reproductive freedom in its agenda during a tumultuous annual meeting. As a result, some notable Catholic members withdrew from the group and then established

the Women's Equity Action League, which concentrated solely on economic matters (Rossi & Sitaraman, 1988). This leads us to today when, as Rossi and Sitaraman noted, the current stance on abortion focuses on providing access to legal abortions based on the woman's own evaluation of suitable reasons. They mention that an uncomfortable collaboration formed between medical supporters of reform and feminist advocates. The pairing was considered uncomfortable due to the feminists' rejection of the idea that physicians, as experts, should have the authority to approve or deny a woman's request for a legal abortion. In addition, they point out that according to feminists, physicians should act solely as consultants and abortion providers, rather than controlling access to the procedure (Rossi & Sitaraman, 1988).

Whittum and Rapkin (2022) relate that in 1965, two Texas lawyers—Linda Coffee holding a Bachelor of Law and Sarah Weddington holding a Juris Doctor—chose to challenge Texas' stringent abortion regulations. At the time, abortion in Texas was only allowed in cases when it was necessary to save a woman's life. This case was spurred by Norma McCorvey, often known as 'Jane Roe,' who sought an abortion for an unwanted pregnancy after putting two children from her previous pregnancies into adoption. In 1970, McCorvey sought legal representation from the two aforementioned attorneys to pursue an abortion for a pregnancy that she alleged resulted from a rape. Coffee and Weddington filed a lawsuit on her behalf against Henry Wade, the District Attorney of Texas; however, the case was ultimately appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court (Miller, 2008). In 1973, the Supreme Court ruling in *Roe v. Wade* legalized abortion across the United States (Joyce et al., 2013). However, the history of abortion as a contentious topic does not end there. *Roe v. Wade* was overturned on June 24, 2022, with the *Dobbs v. Jackson* case, which also overruled *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*—this is another case that occurred about 50 years after the first ruling. The *Dobbs v. Jackson* case upheld the constitutionality by the Mississippi legislation that prohibited abortions after 15 weeks. The bill was created to establish a legal foundation for reversing the *Roe v. Wade* decision, which prohibits banning abortion before the fetus becomes viable 24–28 weeks into pregnancy (Mane et al., 2022). All this to say that throughout the history of the United States, abortion has been a widely debated, hot topic.

2. Literature Review

2.1. X/Twitter as Platform

Twitter has evolved from a specialized service to a widespread phenomenon since it started in 2006. As of 2013, the platform reported having over 200 million active users who generate more than 400 million tweets daily. In addition, Twitter's success is expanding worldwide since it is now accessible in 33 languages and has notably improved its support for languages utilizing non-Latin characters (Weller et al., 2014). Moreover, X/Twitter has 237.8 million global monetizable daily active users in the last reported quarter, an increase from 229 million in the preceding quarter (Dixon, 2024). Conceptually, Twitter is a social media platform where users can post, read, and respond to text, image, and video messages with a maximum character restriction of 280 (Ramadani & Hilmiyah, 2019). In addition, Twitter is a postmodern platform that effectively reports on various events by sharing personal and impersonal, official and unofficial information (Palczewski, 2013).

Twitter is now a significant research tool for studying worldwide events. For instance, academic researchers now have free access to the entire archive of historical public tweets, enabling those with limited resources or time to study sociological data from the past (Ahmed, 2021). On the other hand, according to Papacharissi (2015), emotional expressions on Twitter now shape and define the platform's discussions, reflecting the current culture and atmosphere to some extent, and the popular microblogging service offers a compelling platform to study emotional connections and interactions in social movements, personal beliefs, and self-expression, especially in terms of its ability to support expressions of disagreement. Overall, Twitter has many dimensions reflecting societal views on various topics such as abortion, social movements, and political discourse.

2.2. The Role of Politicians' Tweets

Farmer (1984) defines a politician as a democratically chosen representative who holds a pivotal position in the formulation and assessment of policies. A politician is affiliated with a political party that seeks to acquire political influence by lawful techniques, usually by engaging in general elections to enact their proposed policies (Muhtadin, 2023). Moreover, a politician is actively involved in politics, holds sway over the general population, participates in governing at different levels, and is responsible for formulating government policies and procedures (Ferreyra, 2022). Therefore, this study focuses on politicians who are actively involved in political campaigns or debates on abortion, which is primarily senators and representatives in the American Congress.

There are several studies concerning the role of politicians and Twitter. Enli (2017) examines the contrasting Twitter strategies employed by Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump in the 2016 US presidential election. Hillary Clinton's Twitter approach during the 2016 US presidential election adhered to theories of the professionalization of election campaigns, emphasizing controlled messaging and promotion. Donald Trump's Twitter strategy demonstrated de-professionalization and amateurism through less contact with followers and a more real and unrefined communication style. Another study by Enli and Naper (2015) evaluates how US presidential competitors, especially Obama during the 2008 campaign, used social media platforms such as Twitter beyond the early novelty stage. They examine how the theory of incumbent advantage, a prevalent characteristic in US elections, relates to politicians' usage of social media. This study found that the USA's prominent position in political marketing is based on its historical background and quick embrace of mass media technology (Enli & Naper, 2015), and the Obama campaign outperformed Romney's campaign in efficiency, attributed to prior experiences, a larger Twitter following, and effective social media tactics. Therefore, Twitter has grown into an essential instrument for contemporary political campaigns, affecting how politicians interact with the general voting public.

Returning to the case of Donald Trump, he employs Twitter as a marketing tool to establish a distinctive identity of himself as a superhero-like anti-politician celebrity, distinguishing himself from other political figures; however, this branding approach does not contribute to enhancing democracy, as it primarily revolves around criticizing the existing political system (Schneiker, 2019). Collectively, the studies provide a thorough methodology through content analysis (Enli, 2017; Enli & Naper, 2015; Schneiker, 2019) for examining the impact of social media on contemporary political campaigns. These studies emphasize the significance of strategic communication, engagement, and branding in the digital political environment. The studies about the role of politicians on Twitter informed the current study that Twitter is a venue in which politicians from different views find voices and use the platform for their own purposes. Hence, Twitter provides bountiful examples to explore discourse as it flows freely.

2.3. The Role of Politicians' Tweets Related to Abortion in the USA

People and organizations find social media, especially Twitter, as a place to express and exchange their opinions to seek to change some issues in society through motivating engagement on important matters. For example, Hunt (2019) suggests that social movement organizations can more easily gain allies, including famous people, to amplify their messages in the public arena due to the widespread usage of social media as a communication platform. Hunt's study investigates social media strategies employed by anti-abortion and pro-abortion groups on Twitter during the 2018 referendum on abortion. Moreover, Chang et al. (2023) investigate Twitter discussions related to the abortion rights debate, particularly following the Supreme Court's decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade*. They discuss hypotheses related to public opinion dynamics, polarization, and the impact of social media on motivating political participation. A comprehensive Twitter dataset of 74 million tweets was gathered to analyze the dissemination of pro-choice and pro-life viewpoints on the internet. Their research demonstrates the division and activation of supporters on both sides of the argument, and it evaluates current theories by presenting empirical evidence on the discourse dynamics following

the reversal of *Roe v. Wade*. It emphasizes the benefits of utilizing social media data for analyzing public opinion and discusses the drawbacks associated with potential biases in data collection and the representation of voices in the dataset.

Doan et al. (2022) analyze the Twitter pushback to Georgia's HB 481 abortion ban, emphasizing how users organized against the law to showcase a shared gender identity and widespread opposition to the measure. The authors used thematic content analysis on tweets to identify oppositional frames, revealing strong mobilization attempts, identity-based conversations, and overall rejection of the law. This study enhances comprehension of how social media influences activism and public discussions over contentious policies as it further exposes Twitter's ability to promote collective mobilization and the expression of identity in political activity. The study is strong due to its thorough examination of opposition framing and provides valuable insights into the complexities of internet activism. Yet, its dependence on Twitter data and the possibility of a biased sample pose constraints, indicating the need for caution when extending results to more people.

A methodological approach that appears throughout these studies involves combining large-scale data collecting (Chang et al., 2023; Doan et al., 2022; Hunt, 2019) with deep content analysis. Researchers collect tweets about a certain topic or event and use theme analysis to examine how social media users express their opposition or support, organize actions, and participate in digital activism. The methodology used is strong and includes both quantitative and qualitative data analysis techniques to offer a thorough understanding of social media's impact on political activism and public opinion around controversial topics such as abortion rights.

2.4. Discourse Analysis and Twitter on Abortion

Discourse analysis is a qualitative research approach investigating language use in different contexts, including written and verbal interactions, and other forms of text that communicate meaning. In addition, this approach examines the sociocultural and political context of communication, investigating the interplay of language with ideology and power dynamics (Rogers & Pini, 2012). Another instance, discourse analysis is an interdisciplinary study that studies language as a social semiotic practice. It examines how language produces and represents social reality, and it also explores themes of power and inequality from many theoretical viewpoints (Yazdannik et al., 2017).

There are several studies concerning Twitter on abortion in the USA. Fredenburg (2023) examines the utilization of "camping" as a coded form of communication to address abortion on Twitter after the Supreme Court's reversal of *Roe v. Wade*. The author uses critical discourse analysis (CDA) and theme analysis to demonstrate how digital activism utilizes coded language to navigate platform censorship and promote solidarity among abortion rights advocates. This study emphasizes the innovation and adaptability of digital activism in challenging communication settings, although its use of Twitter's public API and data anonymization methods might restrict the depth of its conclusions. In another study, Sharma et al. (2017) examine in-depth abortion discussions on Twitter, categorizing them based on ideologies and studying language and psycholinguistic indicators. The study shows the prevalence of anti-abortion rhetoric and offers insights into how cultural behaviors about abortion are expressed on the internet. It combines critical discourse analysis and computational approaches to uncover the subtle reinterpretation of abortion discussions on online platforms.

On the other hand, Allan (2021) examines how women address and resist abortion stigma using the #ShoutYourAbortion hashtag on Twitter, utilizing feminist standpoint theory and critical discourse analysis (CDA). The study highlights how social media platforms provide disadvantaged voices the opportunity to share their stories and challenge prevailing narratives, demonstrating the influential role of hashtags in digital feminist activism. While the study's strength lies in its focus on personal narratives and resistance, it could be enhanced by including a broader analysis of social media

platforms beyond Twitter, exploring whether similar dynamics and hashtag activism are effective on other networks like Instagram or TikTok. This would provide a more comprehensive understanding of digital feminist movements.

Collectively, these studies (Allan, 2021; Fredenburg, 2023; Sharma et al., 2017) reveal the complex relationship between Twitter and public discourse on sensitive issues such as abortion. These studies use CDA and feminist theory to illustrate how Twitter can both reflect and shape social norms, providing a platform for resistance, critique, and solidarity. By applying established theories to new contexts—such as the abortion debate on Twitter—these works incorporate feminist and critical race perspectives, enriching our understanding of digital activism. Therefore, the studies emphasize the importance of using more inclusive and intersectional approaches to analyzing abortion discourse and political communication.

In terms of how politicians employ their posts on Twitter related to abortion, a preliminary review of recent tweets from politicians demonstrates a variety of rhetorical methods. An example can be seen in a tweet posted by politician Ayanna Pressley from the Democratic Party on February 2, 2024, where emotive language was employed to effectively captivate their audience: “In case you need to hear it today: Abortion care is health care. It is a human right. We will never stop fighting to secure and protect our bodily autonomy and deliver true reproductive justice.” This tweet showcases affirming and empowering language, the contextualization of abortion within the larger context of human rights and healthcare narratives, and the push for ongoing activism are fundamental tactics aimed at shaping the audience's perception and inspiring them to engage in proactive measures.

On the other hand, a tweet by politician Marjorie Taylor Greene from the Republican Party on February 6, 2023 states the following: “The Grammy’s featured Sam Smith’s demonic performance and was sponsored by Pfizer. And the Satanic Church now has an abortion clinic in NM that requires its patients to perform a satanic ritual before services. American Christians need to get to work.” In her tweet, the emotional appeal has considerable importance as Greene endeavors to evoke sentiments of apprehension, outrage, and a sense of obligation within her audience, specifically focusing on Christian and conservative viewers who may align with her apprehensions regarding cultural and ethical trends. Pressley frames abortion as a human right, while Greene frames the issue as necessitating prompt involvement and opposition due to an opposition of Christian morals. The tweets serve as an illustration of employing pathos as a rhetorical approach to evoke a profound emotional reaction from the audience, a technique that has been recognized in our analysis, to insight a call to action in viewers. These instances emphasize the need for a more thorough, discourse analysis-based investigation to comprehend the complex methods by which politicians express their views. So far, there has been a lack of studies that explored the role of politician’s tweets on Abortion in the USA especially ones that use CDA. Therefore, this study aims to fill the gap in research as to how politicians employ their posts on Twitter related abortion.

3. Framing Theory

Erving Goffman developed the concept of frame analysis as a methodological approach to understanding how preconceived notions function in interpreting everyday events and the individuals involved in those events (Goffman, 1974). Framing theory has roots in several academic traditions, with researchers defining it at different analytical levels (Scheufele, 1999). Oliver et al. (2020) categorize framing methods based on two main factors: academic origins (psychological vs. sociological approaches) and explanatory models (applicability models vs. other effects models).

Framing has many conceptualizations in communication research. For instance, framing involves subtle alterations in the wording or presentation of judgment and choice issues (Iyengar, 1991). Additionally, frames are the core concepts guiding the selection, emphasis, and presentation of information, often based on implicit assumptions about the existence, significance, and relevance of

events (Gitlin, 2003). Cappella and Jamieson (1997) define framing as the method by which a story is crafted, including elements such as headlines, language, rhetorical strategies, and narrative structure. These definitions illustrate various applications of framing, with some researchers focusing on the words, images, and styles a speaker employs when communicating information to others (Druckman, 2001).

In this study, I chose framing by focusing on the selection of words, presentation of information, and rhetorical tactics used by American politicians on their X (formerly Twitter) accounts. For example, Representative Nancy Pelosi tweeted: "Today, an extremist Republican-appointed judge recklessly ruled to block nationwide access to safe and effective abortion medication that has been on the market for decades. Republicans will never rest in their cruel, tyrannical quest to disrespect a woman's right to choose" (Pelosi, 2023). Here, Pelosi's language frames the issue as an ethical conflict, depicting the opposition as radical and indifferent to women's autonomy. By labeling the judge and Republicans as "extremist" and "tyrannical," Pelosi uses rhetorical strategies to undermine the opposition's position and present it as a moral transgression.

In contrast, Representative Lauren Boebert frames the abortion debate differently. She wrote: "We have one pro-life Democrat in the House. Every Democrat, except one, voted AGAINST giving babies medical care if they survive an abortion. Dems also always argue to trust the science. The science says these are babies, and they should receive the life-saving care they need" (Boebert, 2023). Boebert shifts the focus from women's rights to the rights of the unborn, using framing techniques that highlight the viability of infants and the withholding of care as a means to sway public discourse.

These examples illustrate how framing is used to influence public opinion, with politicians employing rhetorical appeals to emotionally engage their audiences and position themselves as morally and intellectually sound. This analysis demonstrates how American politicians on X frame abortion discussions and how these framing tactics shape the debate and influence public perceptions. By employing discourse analysis, the study gains deeper insights into the underlying mechanisms of digital political debates and the strategic use of language to promote political objectives and rally public support.

4. The Methodology

This study employs a qualitative methodology, specifically using discourse analysis, to investigate how U.S. politicians on Twitter present and discuss the topic of abortion. Discourse analysis was chosen for its effectiveness in uncovering the language techniques and societal implications present in political discourse. This approach allows for an in-depth exploration of how politicians frame and communicate their stances on abortion through tweets, focusing on the textual content rather than interactive features such as comments, reposts, and likes. The exclusion of these interactive elements was deliberate to maintain a focused analysis on the rhetoric and framing strategies employed in the tweets themselves. While interaction metrics such as likes and comments are crucial in measuring public engagement, the study aims to concentrate solely on the linguistic and rhetorical elements of the tweets to better understand the politicians' framing techniques.

A purposive sampling technique was used to select relevant tweets. Politicians with over one million followers who were actively participating in the abortion debate were chosen to ensure that the tweets came from prominent individuals likely to have a significant impact on public discussions. The sample includes both Democratic and Republican politicians to represent a wide range of political ideologies. The data set consists of 232 tweets: 127 tweets were collected from 11 Democratic members and 105 tweets from 8 Republican members. This selection was made to present a balanced perspective on the political discourse surrounding abortion. Tweets were chosen based on their relevance to significant political events or legislative acts addressing abortion rights. The focus on

these particular moments allows for an analysis of how key political figures use Twitter to shape public opinion during pivotal times in the abortion debate.

Data was gathered with meticulous attention to detail, spanning from June 24, 2022, to March 1, 2024. This timeframe was chosen because it follows the U.S. Supreme Court's decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, a period marked by significant political discourse on abortion. The analysis of the tweets was facilitated by NVivo, which enabled a systematic coding and thematic analysis process. NVivo provided a structured approach to categorizing and analyzing tweets based on emerging themes and rhetorical strategies. The dataset consists of publicly accessible tweets, ensuring adherence to ethical research norms and avoiding privacy concerns regarding data collection.

5. Results

This study identified several key themes related to how U.S. politicians frame the abortion debate on Twitter. Through thematic analysis, the tweets were coded to explore the ethical and legal paradigms that dominate the political discourse. The analysis revealed that Democratic and Republican politicians emphasize distinct moral and legal perspectives: Democrats tend to focus on reproductive rights and personal autonomy, while Republicans highlight the sanctity of life and fiscal conservatism. The following sections delve into three key themes in greater detail:

- Ethical and Legal Paradigms in the Political Discourse on Abortion
- Sociopolitical Engagement and Advocacy in the Abortion Debate
- Public Discourse and Narrative Framing in the Abortion Debate

5.1. Ethical and Legal Paradigms in the Political Discourse on Abortion

Within the political landscape, particularly on platforms like Twitter, the theme of "Ethical and Legal Paradigms" underscores the nuanced dialogue regarding abortion. U.S. politicians not only address the legal aspects of abortion but also frame their arguments around deeply ingrained ethical considerations, reflecting societal values and norms. For example, Democratic politicians, such as Representative Ilhan Omar, invoke the "right to abortion" as a cornerstone of bodily autonomy and fundamental human rights. This framing aligns with a broader interpretation of the U.S. Constitution, which emphasizes personal freedom and individual rights. Politicians like Nancy Pelosi often reference the anniversary of *Roe v. Wade* to contextualize this perspective, reinforcing the idea that reproductive rights are ingrained in the constitutional framework of the nation. Pelosi's tweets frequently evoke the sentiment of a historical struggle, leveraging the emotional weight of past victories to galvanize support for current legislative efforts, as seen in her call to "#TrustWomenRestoreRoe."

Republicans articulate their stance through a lens of fiscal conservatism and legal rigor, as evident in Representative Lauren Boebert's assertion that taxpayer dollars should not subsidize abortion, suggesting a breach of the Hyde Amendment. This stance not only delineates a fiscal boundary but also intertwines with the moral conviction that public funds should not support what they consider ethically contentious procedures. Moral outrage is a palpable element in the discourse, as Republican tweets frequently characterize late-term abortions in terms that evoke deep ethical concerns. Senator Lindsey Graham, for instance, has critiqued policies he describes as "extreme, and out of line with the civilized world," (Graham, 2024 [@LindseyGrahamSC]) signaling a moral imperative to align with international norms on abortion. This narrative is further bolstered by scientific claims, as observed in the tweets of legislators like Marco Rubio, who have argued for the protection of life from conception based on scientific and ethical grounds, echoing the pro-life advocacy of figures like Rand Paul.

Legislative actions by Republicans aim to mirror their ethical paradigms. For example, Rubio's emphasis on decentralization of power aligns with the Republican valorization of state sovereignty in determining abortion laws. His statement following the Supreme Court decision to overturn *Roe*

v. Wade reflects this stance: "It only returned the debate over how to regulate it to elected state legislators," suggesting a return to democratic processes and state discretion. On the Democratic side, legislative action aims to enshrine *Roe v. Wade* within the legal code, as Bernie Sanders has urged, to forestall judicial interpretation's impact on abortion rights. Such calls for action represent a conviction that ethical rights, once judicially recognized, must be fortified through explicit legislation to withstand political fluctuations.

The Republican narrative sometimes juxtaposes ethical and fiscal concerns, with politicians like Boebert condemning the potential use of taxpayer funds for abortion services as a transgression of both fiscal responsibility and moral rectitude. Boebert's sharp rebuke of policies that would enable taxpayer-funded abortions abroad or for "illegal aliens" (Boebert, 2022 [@laurenboebert]) reflects a viewpoint that intertwines moral judgments with national and fiscal interests, reinforcing a party ethos that is sensitive to both ethical and economic considerations. Tweets from Republicans like Josh Hawley, which highlight legal inconsistencies or decry judicial overreach, suggest a landscape where ethical principles are under threat from a perceived partisan judiciary (see Hawley, 2022 [@HawleyMO]). Hawley's commentary on the lack of legal response to firebombings at pro-life organizations exemplifies this, linking the principle of equal justice under the law with partisan bias and moral concerns.

Democratic tweets often contain an undertone of defending constitutional rights against a backdrop of Republican legislation seen as regressive. The push for codification of rights, as championed by Democrats, is a bid to ensure that individual freedoms are not eroded by legislative changes—a concern encapsulated in the words of figures like Elizabeth Warren, who frequently calls for staunch opposition to policies that threaten established rights (Warren, 2022 [@ewarren]). The Republican critique, on the other hand, often includes sensationalized language to underscore the perceived extremity of the opposition's position. Ted Cruz's analogy comparing Democratic policies to the fictional character Thanos' genocidal actions underscores the use of hyperbole to emotionally charge the debate and align the opposition with moral extremism (Cruz, 2023 [@tedcruz]).

In summary, the ethical and legal paradigms theme illuminates the dualistic nature of the abortion debate. Democrats emphasize a rights-based framework grounded in personal autonomy and established legal precedents. In contrast, Republicans frame the conversation around moral imperatives, fiscal conservatism, and the sanctity of life, often advocating for legislation that echoes these values. Both parties leverage these paradigms not only to argue for their stance but also to mobilize their constituents and sway the undecided, showcasing the abortion debate as a reflection of broader ideological divides.

5.2. Sociopolitical Engagement and Advocacy in the Abortion Debate

In the current digital age, sociopolitical engagement and advocacy have transcended traditional platforms and have become a mainstay of social media, where politicians employ strategic communication to influence public opinion and rally support. On Twitter, the abortion debate offers a prime example of how legislators actively engage in advocacy, using the platform's immediate and expansive reach to shape the narrative around this contentious issue.

"Sociopolitical Engagement and Advocacy" occurred the second-most frequently in the dataset for this study. Democratic politicians often frame their engagement in terms of continued struggle and advocacy for reproductive rights. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's tweets frequently underscore the importance of proactive measures that extend beyond voting. She advocates for organization and direct support to abortion funds, exemplifying the need for a multifaceted approach to activism. Her call to "organize, strike, fill coffers of abortion funds, open our homes" (Ocasio-Cortez, 2022 [@AOC]) serves as a robust call to arms, underlining the necessity for a grassroots response to the perceived threats to abortion rights. The advocacy extends to calls for legislative action, as seen in the tweets of Bernie Sanders, who demands an end to the Senate filibuster to codify *Roe v. Wade* and thus

solidify abortion rights in law (Sanders, 2022 [@BernieSanders]). This insistence on legislative recourse is a testament to the Democratic view that advocacy must be complemented by legal assurance to be enduring and effective.

Republican tweets, conversely, often focus on challenging the position of the Democrats and reinforcing their own stance on abortion. Senator Lindsey Graham, for instance, leverages public opinion data to critique the extremity of opposing policies, stating that the majority of Americans oppose late-term abortions. His legislative push, as articulated in his support for a "national minimum standard limiting abortion," aims to align U.S. policy with international norms, invoking a sense of ethical and cultural alignment with the "civilized world" (Graham, 2024 [@LindseyGrahamSC]). Political engagement is not just aimed at legislative outcomes but also at shaping cultural perceptions. Marjorie Taylor Greene's tweets offer a potent mix of religious expression and political advocacy. By presenting herself as a defender of faith-based values in the face of cultural shifts, she embeds her political stance within a broader cultural and moral framework. The juxtaposition of "singing hymns, praying, and worshipping God" with political activism reflects the integration of personal faith with public policy advocacy.

Moreover, Republican politicians often employ sensationalist language to bolster their position and denounce their opponents. Lauren Boebert's description of abortion as a "satanic ritual" (Boebert, ?? [@laurenboebert]). serves as a stark example of employing charged language to incite emotional responses and solidify a narrative that paints the opposition as morally bankrupt. In addition to direct policy critique and calls to action, Republican tweets sometimes include accusations of ethical misconduct or financial impropriety among their opponents, as seen in Boebert's allegations that opposition policies serve to "line the pockets" of political campaigns or fund lavish lifestyles, thereby framing the abortion debate within a narrative of political corruption and personal gain (Boebert, June 2023 [@laurenboebert]).

Public engagement on the issue of abortion also takes on the form of challenging the status quo. Tweets from Ted Cruz use political hyperbole to emphasize the perceived extremity of Democratic positions, likening them to the actions of the fictional villain Thanos (Cruz, 2023 [@tedcruz]). This type of engagement seeks not only to critique but also to mobilize the public against what is framed as an existential threat to societal values. The advocacy by Republicans often merges fiscal responsibility with moral imperatives. Rand Paul's emphasis on the rights of taxpayers not to fund abortion mirrors the Republican focus on intertwining ethical concerns with economic considerations, appealing to a constituency that values both fiscal prudence and moral clarity.

This theme demonstrates a deliberate blending of policy, culture, and morality, with each tweet crafted to serve as a rallying cry, a political critique, or a moral judgment. Democrats often highlight the need for solidarity, resilience, and legislative action to protect reproductive rights. In contrast, Republicans emphasize moral fortitude, cultural preservation, and fiscal integrity, calling for collective action to oppose what they view as radical shifts in abortion policy. Each tweet, whether a call to prayer from Greene or a critique of judicial overreach from Rubio, serves as a microcosm of the larger sociopolitical strategies employed by politicians. The diverse approaches to advocacy reflect not just differing policy positions but also divergent views on the role of government, the interplay between personal liberty and societal ethics, and the boundaries of political engagement.

In essence, the second theme underscores the dynamic nature of the sociopolitical landscape as it relates to abortion. It encapsulates the efforts of politicians to engage with the public in a way that transcends policy proposals, reflecting a complex web of cultural narratives, moral imperatives, and advocacy tactics that define the contemporary political approach to one of the most divisive issues facing American society.

5.3. Public Discourse and Narrative Framing in the Abortion Debate

The arena of public discourse is a battleground where the narrative surrounding abortion is continuously framed and reframed by politicians seeking to influence public opinion and steer policy directions. The power of narrative framing lies not just in presenting facts but in crafting stories that resonate with the public's values, fears, and aspirations. This is evident in the way U.S. politicians from both major parties engage with the topic of abortion on Twitter, a platform that offers a snapshot of the broader cultural discourse.

Democratic politicians, focusing on the protection of established rights and freedoms, often employ narrative framing that paints a picture of an ongoing struggle for liberty and justice. This framing positions them as guardians of personal autonomy against what they perceive as encroaching threats. For example, tweets from Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Bernie Sanders have evoked images of grassroots activism and legislative urgency to portray a relentless commitment to defending reproductive rights. Their narrative framing reinforces the idea that access to abortion is an indispensable part of healthcare and a non-negotiable human right, as Ocasio-Cortez's tweets often emphasize the need for community-driven support and direct action, painting a picture of solidarity and empowerment in the face of adversity.

Republican politicians, however, often frame the debate in terms of moral clarity and fiscal restraint. They use narrative framing that positions them as protectors of the unborn and champions of taxpayers' rights. The narrative employed by politicians like Rand Paul juxtaposes the ethical imperative to protect life with the responsibility to guard the public purse, crafting a narrative that appeals to both the moral and economic sensibilities of their constituents. Paul's stance on the use of taxpayer money to fund abortion reflects a broader Republican narrative that intertwines fiscal responsibility with moral judgment.

The use of sensationalism and emotional manipulation is a tool employed by both parties to bolster their narrative framing. Republicans like Lauren Boebert have used vivid language to capture public attention, referring to abortion as a "satanic ritual" (Boebert, February 2023 [@laurenboebert]) or an act that destroys the "nuclear family," seeking to evoke strong emotional reactions that galvanize their base into action. Similarly, the use of charged terms like "extremist" and "painful late-term abortions" by Lindsey Graham aims to provoke fear and anger, serving to frame the opposition's stance as not only extreme but also out of touch with mainstream values (Graham, 2024 [@LindseyGrahamSC]).

Narrative framing extends to the critique of opposition and the portrayal of one's own party. Democrats often highlight the need to counteract what they see as Republican efforts to roll back hard-won freedoms, while Republicans present themselves as resisting a perceived Democratic push towards policies that they argue go against the grain of societal norms and ethical standards. Tweets from Ted Cruz, employing political hyperbole, liken Democratic policies to apocalyptic actions, aiming to rally support for the defense of traditional values (Cruz, 2024 [@tedcruz]).

Both parties also leverage public discourse to point out inconsistencies and hypocrisies in each other's positions. Tweets from Josh Hawley highlighting legal inconsistencies serve not only to critique the judiciary but also to suggest a broader narrative of political bias that undermines the principle of equal justice (Hawley, 2022 [@HawleyMO]). This kind of narrative framing extends the conversation beyond the specifics of abortion to encompass concerns about the integrity of democratic institutions and the rule of law.

The engagement with cultural narratives is another aspect of narrative framing that is particularly pronounced in Republican discourse. Marjorie Taylor Greene's references to religious persecution and biblical justifications embed her political advocacy within a religious narrative, framing her position on abortion within a wider cultural context of faith and righteousness. This appeals to voters who see their cultural identity and values as being under threat, positioning Greene not just as a legislator but as a cultural warrior.

The public discourse on abortion is also framed in a way that aligns with or challenges global norms. Republicans, in particular, frame their position on abortion as being in sync with international standards, as seen in tweets from Lindsey Graham that call for policies in line with those of the "rest of the civilized world" (Graham, 202). This narrative framing is designed to challenge the perception that the Republican position on abortion is extreme or isolated, instead suggesting that it is the Democrats who are out of step with global consensus.

The use of narrative framing in the abortion debate on platforms like X/Twitter showcases how politicians from both parties not only present their policies but also seek to shape the cultural conversation around the issue. By weaving together ethical, fiscal, and cultural threads into their narrative tapestry, they aim to influence the broader discourse and sway public opinion in favor of their respective positions.

In conclusion, the theme of "Public Discourse and Narrative Framing" highlights the strategic use of narrative by politicians to shape the abortion debate. Whether it's Democrats invoking the fight for liberty and justice or Republicans emphasizing moral and fiscal integrity, the narratives spun are powerful tools in the ongoing effort to win hearts, minds, and votes.

6. Conclusion

The findings of this study highlight the sophisticated use of Twitter by U.S. politicians to engage with the abortion debate. Politicians employ a diverse array of rhetorical strategies and framing techniques to advocate for their positions, whether pro-life or pro-choice. The study reveals that the common words and phrases used carry significant connotations that resonate with ideological, ethical, and emotional underpinnings, thereby influencing public discourse dynamically. The types of rhetorical appeals identified illustrate the strategic manipulation of language to sway public sentiment and rally support, reflecting broader political tactics in the digital age. In conclusion, this study not only contributes to our understanding of political communication on social media but also underscores the impact of digital platforms in shaping public policy debates. It calls for a deeper understanding of the ethical implications of such discourse and the need for responsible communication by politicians in an increasingly polarized society.

6.1. Limitations and Future Research

The sampling did not cover all politicians' tweets regarding abortion, meaning that important figures' opinions and rhetoric may not be covered. In addition, the sample was collected manually. A follow-up study could broaden the sample further and possibly use software, such as Brandwatch to facilitate that process. This study focuses on tweets from politicians with over one million followers, which limits the scope to a relatively small number of high-profile figures. This selection criteria could omit influential discussions or alternative uses of the platform led by less-followed politicians who may also play crucial roles in shaping public opinion or policy on abortion. Further research is encouraged to explore the long-term effects of political framing on Twitter and its influence on public policy and electoral outcomes, particularly in exploring if other issues outside of abortion are met with a similar type of rhetoric. In addition, comparative studies across different digital platforms could provide a more comprehensive understanding of social media's role in political advocacy and engagement.

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