The Abortion Social Movement: Balance of Power and Trends

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Brief History

• While the most relevant developments have occurred in the last 50 years, state laws concerning abortion date back to 1821.

• Illegal abortions were still frequent, although the number declined as the Comstock law was passed, which essentially banned birth control devices and information.

• Important events leading to legalization:
  • Women’s Rights organizations begin to address abortion
  • Reversal of the American Medical Association’s anti-abortion stance (1960)
    • *Griswold v. Connecticut* (1965)
  • *Roe v. Wade* (1973): anti-abortion laws are ruled *unconstitutional, in violation of the 14th amendment.*
  • Legalizes first trimester abortions in all cases.
• Groups materialized and rallied around both sides, with the National Right to Life Committee (NRLC) being formed immediately after the decision and forming a backbone of the pro-life movement.

• The decision also served to politicize the conflict, with Democrats generally taking a pro-choice stance and Republicans adding a pro-choice plank to their party platform in 1980.

• Hyde Amendment (1977), attached to an appropriations bill, banned government-funded abortions.

• In 1983, the Supreme Court upheld Roe v. Wade by striking down a number of state and local restrictions on access to abortion services.

• In July 1989, the Supreme Court upheld provisions of a Missouri anti-abortion statute in Webster v. Reproductive Health Services.

• 1990’s: Partial birth abortion.
Previous Research

- Susan Staggenborg, *The Pro-Choice Movement*
  - Identifies a number of major events and factors that lead to growth on both sides of the issue.
  - Other important factors: internal factors, effects from other organizations.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Major Event</th>
<th>Changes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Before 1973</td>
<td>Abortion illegal</td>
<td>Prochoice movement begins to expands slowly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976-1983</td>
<td>Hyde amendment passed</td>
<td>Pro-choice groups rapidly grow, Reproductive Rights (multi-issue) groups formed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983-1989</td>
<td><em>Akron v. Planned Parenthood</em></td>
<td>Pro-choice movement grows, rapid Pro-life expansion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989, 1990's</td>
<td><em>Webster v. Reproductive Health Services</em></td>
<td>Rapid pro-choice expansion, &quot;battle intensifies&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Previous Research, cont…

• Singh and Lumsden, Minkoff, McCarthy: Organizational ecology perspective
  – Generally, a movement expands slowly, expands quicker as it becomes “legitimized” and resources become available, levels off when the density reaches a population limit, and may eventually decline as groups compete for resources

• Political Opportunity: McCammon, Baumgartner and Leech, Soule et al.
Hypothesis

• This research will look at the founding rates of both pro-life and pro-choice groups and:
  – Staggenborg’s five periods
  – likelihood of founding compared to the density of the previous year (resources)
  – major court cases, Congressional hearings addressing abortion, and relevant Congressional Quarterly articles
  – New York Times articles about abortion
  – Public opinion
  – Abortion rates
Hypothesis cont…

• I hypothesize that the abortion social movement will be follow a pattern much like the one described by Singh, Lumdsen, and other organizational ecologists. Furthermore, because most abortion groups seek to change public policy, I believe that both pro-life and pro-choice groups will be affected by political opportunity. Finally, I believe that major events, such as the four events cited by Staggenborg, will strongly influence founding rates.
Methods and Data

- Founding rates were compiled using The Encyclopedia of Associations online edition.
  - published yearly, since 1965, and contains descriptions of a number of types of organizations
  - Keywords: “abortion” “reproductive rights”
  - 116 groups were found, all relevant
  - Groups were split according to:
    - Pro-choice, Pro-life or neutral (only one entry)
    - Founding date, 26 had no date (as listed in description or on web-site)
    - Whether the group engages in advocacy related activities, clinical, or both
    - Whether the group was single or multi focused
Methods and Data

• Measures of the number of Congressional hearings and Congressional Quarterly articles were compiled using databases from the *Policy Agendas* project.

• “Major Court Cases” adapted from data found in *Understanding the New Politics of Abortion*, by Malcolm Goggin.
  – Includes cases all Supreme Court cases and other federal cases that set precedent
Methods and Data

- *The New York Times Historical Database* was used to produce a count of the same keywords (abortion, reproductive rights) for each of the years included in the study.
  - Only articles with citation or abstract containing a keyword were used

- Public opinion survey data was taken from *Public Opinion: Measuring the American Mind*, by Bardes and Oldendick, and *Public Opinion about Abortion* by Ladd and Everitt.
Methods and Data

- the annual account of abortions was obtained from a National Right to Life Council publication. The data was originally compiled by the Alan Guttmacher institute (an affiliate of Planned Parenthood) and is seen by both pro-life and pro-choice groups as a fairly accurate count of abortions.
Results

Foundings: Abortion Text Search

Pro-life Foundings
Pro-Choice
Pro-life Organizations: Advocacy vs. Clinical activities

Before 1960
1961
1963
1965
1967
1969
1971
1973
1975
1977
1979
1981
1983
1985
1987
1989
1991
1993
1995
1997
1999

Advocacy/CA
Clinical/CA
Pro-choice Groups: Advocacy vs. Clinical
Abortion related articles and founding rates

Number of Articles abortion
Reproductive Rights
Pro-life foundings
Pro-choice foundings
Government Attention and founding rates

Number of Hearings (Abortion)

CQ Articles: "Abortion"

Pro-life foundings

Pro-choice foundings
Public Opinion, cont...

Abortion Should Be Legal Under these Circumstances

Year

Percent Agree
100 90 80 70 60 50 40 30 20 10 0

- Mother's Health
- Rape
- Birth Defect
- Poor
- Single Mother
- No More Babies
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>Pro-life foundings</th>
<th>Pro-choice foundings</th>
<th>Pro-life (Advocacy)</th>
<th>Pro-choice (advocacy)</th>
<th>Pro-life (single-issue)</th>
<th>Pro-choice (single)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Annual Abortion Rate (1973-2000)</td>
<td>-0.0274</td>
<td>-0.0369</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>NY Times Annual Count</td>
<td>0.144</td>
<td>0.1743</td>
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<tr>
<td>Congressional Hearings</td>
<td>0.0813</td>
<td>0.1423</td>
<td>0.0797</td>
<td>0.1773</td>
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<tr>
<td>Congressional Quarterly Articles</td>
<td>-0.173</td>
<td>-0.0411</td>
<td>-0.1527</td>
<td>-0.046</td>
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<tr>
<td>Major Court Cases</td>
<td>0.0843</td>
<td>-0.0411</td>
<td>-0.1577</td>
<td>-0.046</td>
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<tr>
<td>Density (Pro-life)</td>
<td>-0.1069</td>
<td>-0.056</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Density (Pro-choice)</td>
<td>-0.1212</td>
<td>-0.0885</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;Abortion should always be legal&quot;</td>
<td>-0.3327</td>
<td>0.0949</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;Abortion should sometimes be legal&quot;</td>
<td>0.0058</td>
<td>0.0169</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;Abortion should always be illegal&quot;</td>
<td>0.3203</td>
<td>-0.1954</td>
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<td>Major Events (Staggenborg)</td>
<td>0.3799</td>
<td>-0.1765</td>
<td>0.4214</td>
<td>0.0711</td>
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<td>Major Events after 1973</td>
<td>0.3670</td>
<td>-0.1781</td>
<td>0.4184</td>
<td>0.1068</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conclusions

• The largest correlations were found with public opinion and Staggenborg’s measure of major events.

• Public opinion, three explanations:
  – Correlation could be a result of groups affecting public opinion
  – Groups are founded due to demand
  – Both public opinion and founding rates are responding to major events, or a third variable
Conclusions cont…

• Major events:
  – Pro-life groups strongly react to events
  – Pro-choice groups slower to react
  – Some literature has labeled the pro-choice movement as “being complacent”
Future Research

• Compare founding rates with a reliable measure of the Women’s Rights movement, and the “Religious Right”
  – Will test the theory of resource mobilization

• Create a better data set using hard-copies of each edition of the Encyclopedia of Associations
  – Account for organization mortality
  – More accurate measure of density