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**THE 1992 ELECTION AND  
THE POLITICS OF ABORTION:  
LESSONS FROM THE PAST,  
IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FUTURE**

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Report written by  
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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report is the third in a series of studies of electoral politics following the Webster decision. Collection of the data from the 1992 elections and production of this report was made possible by the generous support of: the John Merck Fund; the Huber Foundation; the Robert Sterling Clark Foundation; the General Service Foundation; the 777/Women Fund of the Tides Foundation; and the Joe and Emily Lowe Foundation. We are very appreciative of the generous support of each of these foundations and of their recognition of the value of research.

Many people were involved in the 1992 study and contributed enormously to its quality. Mark Schulman's comments about the survey instrument and the fine field work of Schulman, Ronca, and Bucuvalas, Inc. in the data collection process were essential for ensuring a sound study. Colleagues from the Center for Public Interest Polling (a unit of the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers University), Janice Ballou and Kim Downing generously contributed their expertise to the data collection and data analysis process. Sue Nemeth, Katherine Kleeman, Lucy Baruch, Felicia Rosenzweig, Barbara Crow, Ronnee Schreiber and Edith Saks read and commented on various drafts of the report and summary. Cliff Zukin provided valuable insight into the problems and pitfalls of polling in California. Kate Karpilow of the California Elected Women's Association for Education and Research was always willing to share her insight into California politics with us. Jay Crossen and Rochelle Brooks did a thorough and commendable job in researching California politics. Many thanks also go to Toby Walker and Julia Brootkowski who conducted many of the interviews in California. Finally, thanks also go to Felicia Rosenzweig, Michele Treadwell, Martha Casisa, and Alice Kleeman who provided technical support that was essential to the successful completion of the study.

Finally, we thank all the voters and the staff, activists, and operatives from party, candidate, and issue organizations who took the time to talk with us about their perspectives on the election and the politics of abortion. This study would not have been possible without your candor, your patience, and your insights.

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# INTRODUCTION

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Nothing captured the mood of the 1992 campaign season more than the sign that reportedly hung in the Clinton campaign war room: "It's the economy, stupid." The recession turned what had once seemed likely to be a Bush landslide into a competitive race for the Presidency. President Bush watched his near 90 percent approval rating of early 1991 plummet into the 30s as economic dissatisfaction rose and the memories of the Gulf War faded. Americans' fears of layoffs affecting themselves, family, friends, neighbors, and acquaintances were amplified by the gloomy economic messages that permeated the nightly news. This atmosphere made the issue of the economy central to the voters' lives, and the electorate expected political candidates to address the important economic issues for which it held incumbents responsible.

Yet as important as the economy was, voters *did* think about other issues, too. Whether or not they took other issues into consideration, the presidential election would have a profound effect on a wide range of policy issues beyond the economy. One of these issues was abortion.

The relevance of politics and elections for abortion policy was much clearer in 1992 than it had been in 1988, the last time the nation had elected a President. Since 1988, Supreme Court decisions had reduced constitutional guarantees of abortion access and had given elected officeholders at the state and national levels greater authority to restrict abortion. Moreover, this erosion had left a weakened *Roe v. Wade* standing with a slim 5 to 4 majority that could be reversed with the next Supreme Court appointment. Elections were important, therefore, because they would determine whether state and national governments could pass legislation restricting access to abortion; the presidential election was particularly important because the winner could determine the fate of *Roe v. Wade* with the next Supreme Court appointment.

This report focuses on the race for President nationally as well as elections in California for President, U.S. Senate, and (to a lesser extent) state assembly races. This report provides an in-depth look at the effects of the abortion issue on several election contests in order to explain the role it played in the electoral process and to speculate about what electoral politics may hold for abortion policy and cultural politics in the future. The races selected for this study were chosen several weeks prior to the election, before the outcome of each race was known.

The presidential race was selected because the winner would shape abortion policy through court appointments, executive orders, and by either signing or vetoing legislation. We chose to focus on California races for two reasons. First, California is the prize in the Electoral College, with more Electoral College votes (54) than any other state in the nation. With 20% of the Electoral College votes needed to win a presidential race, the response of Californians can either make it easier or difficult for a candidate to win on election day. Second, its two U.S. Senate races provided a unique opportunity to see how the same set of voters responded to the abortion issue when the contrast between the candidates was obviously much greater in one race than the other. One California U.S. Senate race pitted two self-described pro-choice candidates, Democrat Dianne Feinstein and Republican John Seymour, against one another; the second race was between two diametrically opposed candidates, pro-choice Democrat Barbara Boxer and pro-life Republican Bruce Herschensohn. The victors of these electoral contests would either vote for or against Court appointees and federal legislation such as the Freedom of Choice Act. Similarities and differences in the way voters and activists responded in the two California U.S. Senate races can provide valuable insight into the way abortion policy and cultural issues, more generally, affect elections.

Finally, we chose one assembly race in California which we could compare to assembly races statewide. State legislatures are obviously important because of their power to set abortion policy.

California, with its professional, high profile lawmakers, has one of the most visible state legislatures in the nation. If California voters lack information about where candidates stand on abortion policy, it is reasonable to presume that the voters may be even less informed in states where legislators have a lower media profile. We chose the 53<sup>rd</sup> district in the suburban Los Angeles area that was newly created by redistricting. The partisan balance between Democrats and Republicans was roughly even; pro-choice and pro-life groups made the district a priority, and most observers agreed that the issue would almost certainly be important in this highly competitive race between pro-choice Democrat Debra Bowen and pro-life Republican Brad Parton.

This is the third report in a series that has focused in-depth on post-*Webster* election contests in New Jersey (1989), Virginia (1989), Michigan (1990), and Pennsylvania (1990).<sup>1</sup> The 1992 elections were both a partial reflection of trends observed since the *Webster* decision and a harbinger of a new agenda. This report examines how voters with similar perspectives respond differently to variations in the political context — e.g., campaign messages and candidate strength. Thus, instead of simply tallying how many of those who cited the abortion issue as important in a particular race were pro-choice and how many were pro-life, we also looked at how many voters of a particular persuasion thought the issue was important. This allowed us to make more useful and valid assessments across different groups of voters so that, for example, someone in another very different state could find the results from the California races enlightening despite the fact that California is one of the most pro-choice states in the nation.

## METHODOLOGY

This study relies on data from two sources. First, we conducted telephone surveys of voters during the week prior to the November general election. Three separate samples of likely voters were surveyed: a national sample (n=788, margin of error=  $\pm 3.5\%$ ), a statewide sample of California voters (n=600, margin of error=  $\pm 4.0\%$ ), and a sample of voters from California Assembly District 53 (n=400, margin of error=  $\pm 5.0\%$ ).

Second, we interviewed 45 high-level staff and others involved in the campaigns, parties, and pro-choice and pro-life organizations by telephone or in-person during November and December 1992. The interviews were conducted as conversations, and all participants were assured that their names would not be used in the report. On average these taped interviews lasted 45 minutes.

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<sup>1</sup> See Debra L. Dodson, *Abortion Politics in State Elections: Comparisons Across States*, New Brunswick: Eagleton Institute of Politics, Rutgers University, 1991; Debra L. Dodson and Lauren D. Burnbauer, *Election 1989: The Abortion Issue in New Jersey and Virginia*, New Brunswick: Eagleton Institute of Politics, Rutgers University, 1990.



## THE ABORTION ISSUE IN THE CONTEXT OF THE ELECTION

For all the talk of the abortion issue and family values around the time of the conventions, the presidential candidates' fall campaign agendas did little to make the abortion issue of central concern to the voters. As one pro-life activist pointed out:

*We went through three presidential debates and the abortion issue never even came up.*

Activists on both sides of the issue seemed to agree on one thing — neither thought their candidate made the abortion issue a central issue in the fall campaign:

*It seems to me that it would have been helpful for him [President Bush] to have come forward out of his own campaign [to talk about the abortion issue], and not relied on us [pro-life groups] alone to carry the weight.... It's my impression that he didn't see the threat, that he didn't realize that the message wasn't coming out. (pro-life activist)*

*I understand that a campaign has got to have a message or a couple of messages and just keep hammering it home. But the fact that this [the abortion issue] was not a centerpiece of the Clinton message is one of the reasons why we were not seeing more of a national concern on this issue. [However], if [the race] had tightened up any more, I think he [Clinton] would have been ready to go more aggressively on this issue. (pro-choice activist)*

One Republican pro-choice activist echoed this theme in a much stronger way:

*[M]y own view is that women were abandoned by all three of these candidates in this election. They all targeted white men, middle-class men, the Reagan Democrats, if you will, or middle-class men on the Republican side as well.*

Although Clinton was clearly pro-choice and Bush was clearly pro-life, the two major party candidates spent very little time during the fall campaign talking about the abortion issue. (H. Ross Perot, who was viewed suspiciously by both sides, but who seemed to be more inclined toward the pro-choice side, said virtually nothing about the abortion issue after re-entering the race in the fall.) During the fall campaign, the media coverage of both major parties' nominees clearly suggested that they steered the agenda toward other issues, addressing the abortion issue when asked about it, but not making it a central theme.

When Clinton talked about the abortion issue, his approach could best be summed up as, "I'm pro-choice, not pro-abortion." His statements and those of his running mate, Al Gore, combined the post-*Webster* "keep government out of private decisions" with a theme of "reasonableness" and "tolerance" of some restrictions on abortion access such as parental notification and a ban on third trimester abortions.

In contrast, President Bush described his position on abortion as follows:

*I have long called for Roe ... to be overturned. I oppose abortion except when the life of the mother is threatened or when there is rape or incest.<sup>2</sup>*

At the same time, the themes the Bush-Quayle campaign used to address the issue included: saving the lives of the unborn, supporting "reasonable" restrictions, and characterizing the Clinton-Gore ticket as waffling.

Finally, the Perot campaign's abortion stand was probably best expressed by James Stockdale in the vice presidential debates when he said:

*I believe that a woman owns her body and what she does with it is her own business — period.... Let's get on past this and talk about something substantive.*

It was perhaps the last part of the Stockdale response rather than the first part that best characterized the handling of the abortion issue by the Perot campaign. Although Perot described himself as pro-choice, his lack of thoughtful consideration of the issue, his support for restrictions (such as spousal notification and parental consent), and his obvious dislike for dealing with the subject left some pro-choice activists uncomfortable with him and left many voters unsure about where he stood on the issue.

While Perot's position was vague on the question of the actual *policy* actions he would take if elected, the two major parties' candidates for President presented voters with a sharp contrast on the abortion issue and certainly one that would offer the voters a choice of policy agendas. It is for this reason that the report focuses primarily on the Bush and Clinton campaigns and how voters responded to their differences on this issue.

## THE CALIFORNIA RACES

In California, we looked at four campaigns: 1) the presidential race; 2) the U.S. Senate race between two self-described pro-choice candidates — John Seymour (R) and Dianne Feinstein (D); 3) the U.S. Senate race between pro-choice Barbara Boxer (D) and pro-life Bruce Herschensohn (R); and 4) the state assembly races, particularly the race in Assembly District 53 between pro-choice Democrat Debra Bowen and pro-life Republican Brad Parton.

California had been hit hard by the recession and defense cuts. As one activist observed:

*There is tremendous suffering in California.... [There] are the huge numbers of For Lease signs on businesses.... It's not just the homeless people that you see in urban areas.... There's a huge [number of] ... people who have been employed, 50 years old, with a family, and laid off.... And at 50 years old, how do you get trained for something [else]?*

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<sup>2</sup> *Abortion Report*, February 5, 1992.

*It's trying to find the basics in life.... It's, "How do I buy blue jeans for the kids to go to school, and shoes?" I'm not trying to paint a Grapes of Wrath kind of picture, but there is fear.*

Nevertheless, the economy was not the only factor shaping the political landscape in that state or the only issue on the voters' minds. The Anita Hill-Clarence Thomas hearings raised interest in and support for women's candidacies in this state which is the first to elect two women to serve in the Senate simultaneously. One Feinstein activist summed up his impressions:

*We had two women at the top of the ticket, and a lot of women running, particularly at the congressional level as well as the state assembly level. They were all pro-choice and vocal about it. That created an environment here [in California] that resulted in an echo chamber.... I think it all worked synergistically together.*

Despite the concern with jobs and the economy, one *Los Angeles Times* report observed that the abortion issue was a pervasive issue that seemed to spring up everywhere in the two Senate races. This was not accidental.

#### THE SEYMOUR-FEINSTEIN RACE

The Seymour-Feinstein race pitted a little-known, moderate Republican U.S. Senator, who had been appointed to fill a vacancy, against a woman who had become an icon in California politics. Feinstein had come very close to winning the 1990 gubernatorial race, and she had name recognition that any political candidate would envy. In short, she was a very strong candidate and a moderate Democrat who had honed her skills in a tough campaign for governor and had positioned herself well to run against a former state senator who Californians had not come to know well during his two years in Washington as their U.S. Senator.

Dianne Feinstein described her position as, "I have always been 100% pro-choice." She faced a Republican opponent, John Seymour, who described himself as "Pro-choice, pro-family, and pro-jobs."<sup>3</sup> Although Seymour, who had been appointed to fill the vacancy created when Pete Wilson became governor, favored parental consent and had voted to confirm Clarence Thomas, he was also a co-sponsor of the Freedom of Choice Act. Objectively, it seemed to many early in the race that the abortion issue would not really be an issue in the Feinstein-Seymour contest because the candidates were too similar on the issue.

However, the Feinstein campaign drew attention to the policy differences between the two candidates, so that what had seemed like small distinctions became large differences in practice. As one Feinstein activist noted:

*Choice was in every single speech. [For example,] speeches to the business round table about the economy would still have a paragraph on choice. And then, of course, since she*

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<sup>3</sup> Bill Stall, "Seymour Makes a Pitch to Women Voters," *Los Angeles Times*, July 8, 1992, pg. A3.

*was campaigning with Barbara Boxer the last two weeks [of the campaign], choice became a very dominant theme.*

First, Feinstein emphasized the fact that Seymour had switched positions. She labelled Seymour "Multiple Choice, Not Pro-Choice" and referred to the 18 anti-abortion votes he had cast in the California State Senate. Second, Feinstein pointed to his vote to confirm Clarence Thomas as indicating that he was not really a pro-choice voice:

*My opponent, John Seymour, caved in to pressure from the White House and radical anti-choice groups when he cast a key vote to confirm Clarence Thomas.<sup>4</sup>*

The Seymour campaign had a difficult time conveying a consistent message on his stand through the media. On the one hand, he did receive some coverage of his pro-choice activities at the Republican Convention in Houston, where he worked to change the platform. There, he expressed the following view:

*This is an issue that ... should not be in a party platform.... This is not in any way, shape or form anti-Bush.... I'm not trying to get him to change his position. I'm trying to change the Republican party.<sup>5</sup>*

On the other hand, some of the statements as reported in the media seemed to reinforce the image that Feinstein created for him on this issue:

*Seymour said he lost the CARAL [California Abortion Rights Action League] endorsement because he opposes abortion as a means of sex selection for a baby and because [he] think[s] a child maybe 13 or 14 years old should be required to at least notify one parent or at least sit down to talk to a licensed counselor before having an abortion.<sup>6</sup>*

One pro-choice activist summed it up this way:

*Dianne was successful in doing something that I don't think the choice movement has been overall successful in doing, and that is to define what truly is being pro-choice.... It could have been very much two pro-choice candidates running against one another, and she was able to take and really redefine the choice issue.... You're not pro-choice if you supported Clarence Thomas. You're not pro-choice unless you campaign and talk about [the abortion issue] openly.*

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<sup>4</sup> Bill Stall, "Seymour Makes a Pitch to Women Voters," *Los Angeles Times*, July 8, 1992, pg. A3.

<sup>5</sup> John Wildermuth, "Seymour to Fight GOP Brass on Abortion," *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 6, 1992, pg. A8.

<sup>6</sup> Gerry Braun, "Abortion Rights Group Snubs Seymour, Will Back Feinstein," *San Diego Union Tribune*, September 12, 1992.

Seymour did receive some organizational support from pro-choice Republicans. However, their visibility and resources were no match for the major bi-partisan pro-choice organizations or the California Democratic party. While Seymour lost the organizational advantages of pro-choice groups to his opponent Feinstein, he garnered little support from pro-lifers. Some pro-life activists stated clearly, "We did not work for him, but we did not work against him." Other pro-life activists, however, took a less benign view toward Seymour who had changed his position on abortion and, in the primary, defeated the pro-life candidate. Regarding Seymour in particular, and pro-choice Republicans in general, a pro-life activist declared:

*We don't want pro-abortion Republicans in our party. We don't want them.... We would rather have a pro-abortion Democrat than rot or decay within our own party.*

### THE BOXER-HERSCHENSOHN RACE

The Boxer-Herschensohn race for the open U.S. Senate seat pitted a strongly pro-choice woman who wanted to make abortion *an* issue (not *the* issue, however) against a pro-life man who many (but not all) felt preferred to downplay the issue and talk about other matters. Herschensohn opposed abortion except in cases of rape and incest, but his campaign attempted unsuccessfully to frame the abortion issue as a states' rights issue. One pro-life activist explained:

*Bruce [Herschensohn] is pro-life, but Bruce is a state's rights person. He wanted the overturning of Roe v. Wade for the same reason that many people who, if they were in state legislature, might vote pro-abortion, but in the federal legislature would vote against it because they want everything returned to the states.*

Although Herschensohn never used the abortion issue in his campaign ads, activist reports suggested that he was asked about it at most question-and-answer sessions, presumably by people who were Boxer plants. According to Herschensohn's campaign staff, pro-lifers were a source of support in Herschensohn's campaign organization, even though he preferred to talk about other issues.

*They [pro-life activists] didn't do anything wrong. They worked very hard. They walked precincts, they did events.*

Boxer's stand was described as follows:

*Supports full abortion rights, passage of legislation that would codify Roe v. Wade decision.<sup>7</sup>*

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<sup>7</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, "The Issues," October 25, 1992, pg. T3.

Boxer wanted to make abortion one of the campaign issues. As one pro-choice activist observed:

*Boxer wanted that [the choice issue] to be out there, front and center, in both the primary and the general. I mean, her first commercial started with the quote from Bruce Herschensohn about him being anti-choice and opposing Roe v. Wade.*

Pro-choice activists were involved in this race as well; some felt that their participation was at a level greater than their involvement in the Feinstein-Seymour race, which presented a less clear contrast. With both pro-choice and pro-life activists mobilized in this race, the potential was as high as could be expected in the middle of a recession for the abortion issue to be important.

Before continuing, however, it is important to point out that Boxer was a more controversial candidate for many than Feinstein, and that Herschensohn, perhaps having honed his talents as a radio commentator, was able to defend himself to some extent against charges that he was a right-wing extremist. According to one Democratic activist:

*Boxer attempted to define the campaign right after the primary as being one where there were clear definitions of who was who, and she attempted to paint him [Herschensohn] as an extremist. She did a really bad job of doing that, however.... I think Herschensohn came back and made himself seem pretty moderate.*

A pro-choice activist added to the picture:

*Barbara [Boxer] as a candidate was much less known than Dianne. She had never run statewide. She had the problems of being a member of Congress for ten years and the [bounced] checks and the whole bit. So as a candidate, she was a tougher sell than Dianne Feinstein was, who had come so close [to winning the gubernatorial race] just two years ago, and people knew her and had a favorable impression of her.*

### THE 53<sup>RD</sup> DISTRICT ASSEMBLY RACE

In designing this study, we also wanted to make sure to include one assembly race which could be a case study of how the abortion issue played out in state legislative races. Although we could have selected a legislative race in any of the states, we chose to focus on California because: 1) We could compare responses in this specific district to statewide responses to legislative races given in our statewide survey; and 2) California's professional and highly visible state legislature would seem conducive to Californians having better-than-average information about candidates and their stands on issues. Budgetary constraints precluded studying every interesting race in the state. We wanted to make sure that we examined one that fulfilled the following requirements: the abortion issue was being discussed; the race was as competitively balanced as possible, with strong candidates on each side; both pro-choice and pro-life activists were involved; it was a race for an open seat with neither candidate having an incumbency advantage; and party registration was sufficiently balanced so that neither side had a decided advantage. The race between Debra Bowen and Brad Parton in the newly-created 53<sup>rd</sup> Assembly District fit these requirements.

The Bowen-Parton race was a match between a moderate Democratic newcomer, Debra Bowen, and a conservative Republican mayor, Brad Parton. The conventional wisdom is that — at least as far as public debate was concerned — Bowen was more willing than Parton to raise the abortion issue on the campaign trail. Although her campaign recognized the importance of issues such as the economy, she attempted to make sure that the abortion issue was raised whenever she and Parton appeared together at debates. At the same time, Bowen worked hard to strangle Parton's appeal with attention to his religious beliefs and the issues that he had pursued after winning office as mayor — opposing a gay pride parade in the public park, criticizing the teaching of a New Age religion class in the local adult education program, and opposing adult magazines. She emphasized his mayoral record and the financial support his campaign received from donors associated with the Religious Right. Therefore, she attempted to raise questions in the voters' minds about a possible hidden agenda.

Both pro-choice and pro-life activists were involved in the 53<sup>rd</sup> Assembly District campaign. Pro-choice activists were working hard to target pro-choice women who would cross over to support a pro-choice candidate, and they worked to raise the visibility of the issue in the race. The general impression was that after the primary, Parton's pro-life supporters were rather careful in working for him in less visible ways, but the Religious Right made contributions of money and provided volunteers to work for his effort. The real question is whether the attention to his personal beliefs, the actions he had taken as mayor, and the sources of his campaign support hurt him more than they helped; according to Bowen supporters, they all tended to reinforce the message that Parton had a hidden agenda which he would work to enact after the election. This message had the *potential* to harm Parton in this district with highly educated voters who overwhelmingly saw themselves as opposing additional restrictions on abortion access.

## THE REPORT

The remainder of this report draws on the surveys of voters and interviews with campaign, party, and issue activists to examine the role of the abortion issue in the 1992 elections. Our approach uses the presidential race and the high profile California races as case studies for understanding how voters respond to the issue and how the political environment around them can affect that response. The analysis differs from traditional analyses based on exit polls in two ways: 1) first, we look more closely at what patterns lie under the numbers to account for variations in concern about the issue from one context to the next; and 2) we attempt to assess the impact of the issue on the support of activists and on campaign resources. Our report goes beyond a retrospective look at how this issue played in the 1992 elections. The report provides insight into the conditions that facilitate issue voting on abortion policy in the future and the factors that will effect voter response to a broader cultural/reproductive health agenda that is emerging as a result of the 1992 campaign season.

Two words of caution, however. First, the comparisons between the national sample and the California sample should not be automatically interpreted as suggesting that the rest of the country would look like California if the political environment were the same. These comparisons do allow us to look at how people with similar attitudes about the abortion issue may have responded differently because of the unique political environment in California compared to rest of the nation. Second, both the political context and the cultural agenda that were part of the environment of 1992 are in the process of

transformation. The Clinton presidency promises to lower the perceived threat to *Roe v. Wade* that helped mobilize pro-choicers following *Webster*. Simultaneously, it may well heighten a sense of threat among pro-life Americans, as cultural conservatives and the Religious Right undertake efforts to expand the range of cultural issues on the political agenda. These changes foreshadow a shift in the cultural agenda, as one pro-life activist explained:

*[I]t's not just pro-life anymore, it's pro-family organizations.... [Pro-family] would be abortion, prayer in school, homosexual rights — actually, homosexual special rights, which would fall into gays in the military — school choice, school vouchers, condom distribution, and sex ed.*

Whether the cultural politics in 1994 or 1996 focus solely on the abortion issue or whether they reflect a broadening and redefinition of the cultural agenda, the 1992 elections are important for what they say about the factors that enhance or diminish voters' political concerns about moral and cultural issues, debates, and conflicts.





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## FINDING 1

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Despite some pro-life efforts to reframe the abortion issue in terms of "reasonable restrictions" rather than "choice," the "choice" theme was effective in influencing the way that voters thought of abortion policy in assessing candidates. Nonetheless, Americans' ambivalence about abortion was as clear in 1992 as it had been in previous years. The election of a pro-choice President, the Supreme Court's failure to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, and the political battles over restrictions to ensue over the next four years, all raise questions about the framing of the abortion issue in the future.

Most voters are neither comfortable with the idea of additional government restrictions on abortion nor are they comfortable with abortion itself.<sup>8</sup> Majorities opposed additional government restrictions on abortion (Figure 1-1). Yet in the next breath, many of these same voters gave a mixture of pro-choice and pro-life responses to a battery of questions about abortion (Figure 1-2). The pro-life/pro-choice index, which is based on the number of pro-choice responses to seven questions,<sup>9</sup> indicates that many voters are not entirely comfortable with abortion. Only 20% of the national sample of voters gave consistent or near consistent pro-life responses (categories 0 and 1 on the pro-life/pro-choice index) to the battery of seven questions, while only 27% gave consistent or near consistent pro-choice responses (categories 6 and 7). California voters' attitudes were more consistent, but even in California (which is quite possibly the most pro-choice state in the nation), only slightly more than half gave either consistent or near consistent pro-choice responses (42%) or consistent or near consistent pro-life responses (12%). Thus, a majority of voters nationally and a sizable minority even in California could be considered part of the "mushy middle," a label given to those who have ambivalence about abortion policy.

The potential power of the "choice" message to resonate with large numbers of voters is illustrated in Figure 1-3. With the exception of consistent and near consistent pro-lifers (categories 0 and 1 on the pro-life/pro-choice index), majorities at each point on the pro-life/pro-choice index said they opposed additional government restrictions on abortion. Conversely, the potential for parental consent or other popular restrictions, such as spousal notification, to appeal to voters, many of whom would consider themselves pro-choice, was apparent as well. About 3/4 of the likely voters supported parental consent legislation and about 2/3 supported spousal notification legislation. Indeed, parental consent was supported by a majority of likely voters at each point on the scale with the exception of category 7, the most consistent pro-choice voters; spousal notification won majority support at all points on the index except for the two most pro-choice points — categories 6 and 7 (Figure 1-4).

Despite their ambivalence, more voters appeared to think in terms of "choice" than in terms of specific restrictions when asked to judge which candidate was most likely to do what they wanted done

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<sup>8</sup> All analyses, unless otherwise noted are based on the response of likely voters — voters who said they definitely would or probably would vote in the November election.

<sup>9</sup> See Appendix for question wording. For the most part, a majority of those who scored 6 on the pro-life/pro-choice index supported parental consent but gave pro-choice responses to all other questions; those who scored 1 on the index typically gave pro-life responses to all questions with the exception of the question about whether abortion is a private decision.

Figure 1-1:  
Attitudes Toward Additional  
Restrictions on Abortion

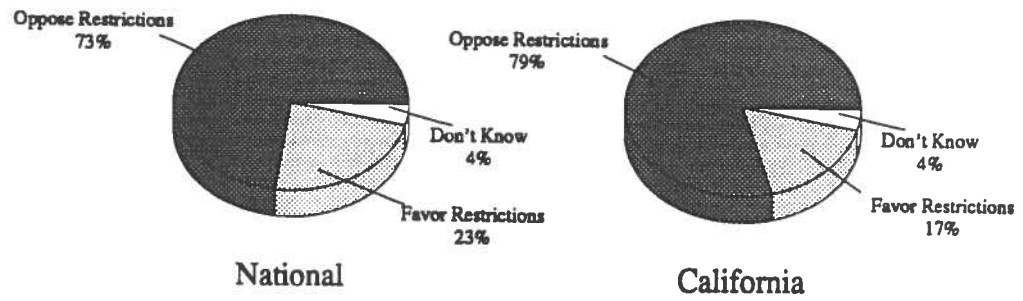


Figure 1-2:  
Pro-Life/Pro-Choice Index Scores

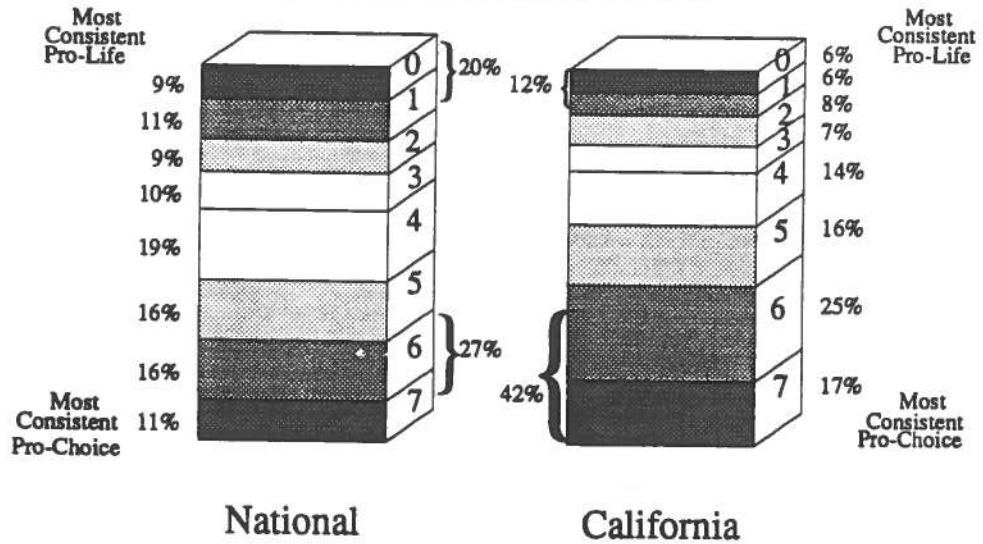


Figure 1-3:

### Attitudes Toward Additional Restrictions Given Pro-Life/Pro-Choice Index Score

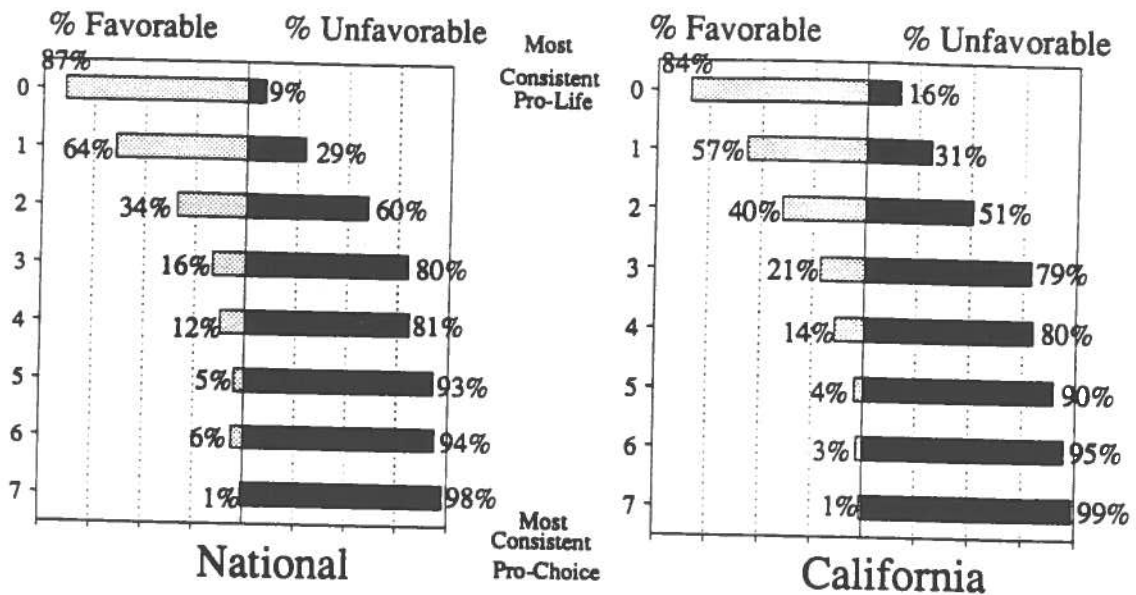
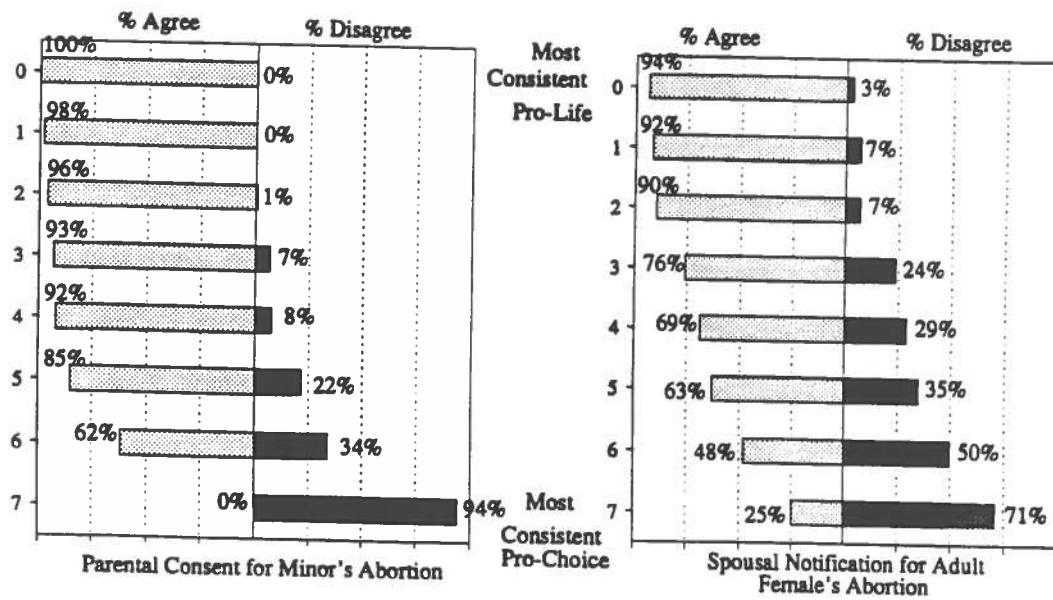


Figure 1-4:

### Attitudes Toward Parental Consent and Spousal Notification Given Pro-Life/Pro-Choice Index Score



on the issue.<sup>10</sup> Among likely voters who saw the abortion issue as important in the presidential race, those who favored additional restrictions on abortion overwhelmingly saw George Bush as closest to their stand and virtually none of those who opposed additional restrictions saw George Bush as more likely to do what they wanted on this issue (Figure 1-5). Considering that nationally those who saw themselves as opposing restrictions outnumbered those in favor of them by a 3 to 1 margin, this could explain why one Bush campaign activist conceded:

*The keep-government-out argument ... has leaned things in the Democratic [the pro-choice] direction.*

In each of the high-profile races examined, pro-choice candidates did a better job of reaching into the "mushy middle" and convincing voters that they saw eye-to-eye with them. For the most part in each of the races studied, more respondents at more points on the index viewed the candidate more clearly linked with the pro-choice side as more likely to do what they wanted done on the abortion issue (Figure 1-6).

The voters' perceptions of Seymour's and Feinstein's stands, however, do deserve comment. As noted earlier, both were self-described pro-choice candidates. While Feinstein secured the endorsement of the major bi-partisan pro-choice activists, Seymour was backed by Republican pro-choice groups and was a Senate sponsor of the Freedom of Choice Act. Some might say that Seymour's qualified pro-choice stand mirrored the ambivalence many Americans feel about this issue: he favored parental consent and he opposed what he considered to be litmus tests for judicial appointments. Yet within every group except the two most consistent pro-life categories on the pro-life/pro-choice index — categories 0 and 1 — voters saw Feinstein as more likely to do what they wanted done on the abortion issue. Indeed, voters generally saw the pro-choice Seymour, who had reservations, in about the same light on the abortion issue as they saw the strongly pro-life Herschensohn.

This was almost certainly due to three factors: 1) Seymour was relatively unknown to the voters of California; 2) one of his first actions as a U.S. Senator was to vote to confirm Clarence Thomas; and 3) his well-known opponent defined him by relying heavily on his vote to confirm Thomas, his recent switch to the pro-choice side, and, perhaps, by his party and gender.

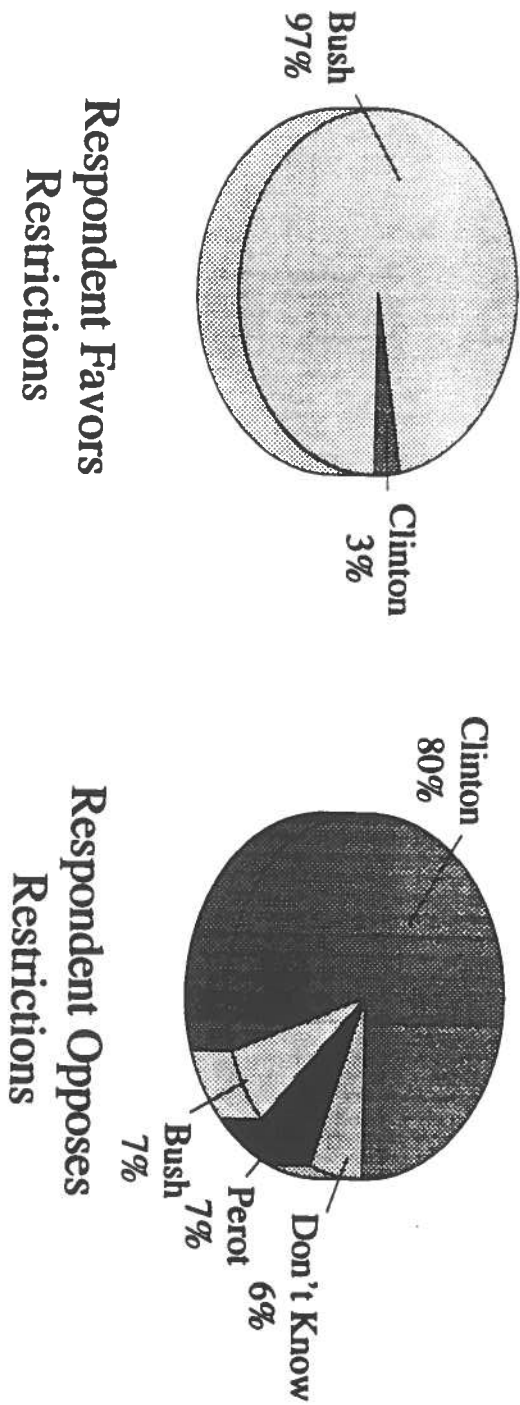
According to a Feinstein campaign activist, Seymour had difficulty defining his position on abortion:

*He got into the Senate right at the beginning of the debate on Clarence Thomas. It was his first public profile as a United States Senator, and his vote for Thomas in some ways labeled him as anti-choice right from the beginning. He was never able to shake [it].*

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<sup>10</sup> The 48% of the national sample and the 57% of the California sample who thought the abortion issue was a very important political issue (although not necessarily important in these specific races) were asked which of the three presidential candidates were most likely to do what they wanted done on the abortion issue. It is these individuals who see abortion as a very important political issue who are far more likely to be mobilized to vote on this issue.

**Figure 1-5:**  
**Candidate Most Likely to Do**  
**What Respondent Wants Done on**  
**Abortion--Voters Citing Issue as Important**  
**in the Presidential Race Only**



One moderate Republican activist thought Seymour's difficulties were partially beyond his control:

*The problem Senator Seymour may have faced in establishing an independent image from that which the national party and its presidential candidate promulgated represents a long-term challenge to any Republican candidate who differs from party doctrine on key issues.*

A Feinstein campaign staffer went further:

*[A] Republican man in this political environment is going to be guilty until proven innocent on choice.*

While the abortion debate was dominated by the theme of "choice" in 1992 (as has been the case since the *Webster* decision in 1989), there is no guarantee that this trend will continue in the future. The Supreme Court has made it clear for the time being that *Roe v. Wade*, albeit in a weakened form, has been upheld and that abortion can be restricted but not banned. The Clinton victory virtually assures that for the next four years no more Justices opposed to *Roe* will be added to the Court to provide a fifth vote that would overturn *Roe v. Wade*. (It is *highly* unlikely, however, that Clinton can make a sufficient number of appointments during his first term so that the Court would return to its 1973 seven to two majority favoring abortion rights.) In addition, the Clinton administration has reversed some executive orders restricting access to abortion counseling and family planning services, and Clinton will most likely sign, rather than veto, legislation such as the Freedom of Choice Act (FOCA) and legislation to restrict protests at abortion clinics — if these bills ever make it to his desk.

The result could be that public attention will focus less on the question of whether abortion will or will not remain legal, for it surely will in the short term. More attention may thus be directed toward legislative debates over specific, popular restrictions allowed under current Court decisions. This could make it easier to reframe the debate in terms of parental consent or waiting periods. These battles over restrictions will continue at the state level until and unless national action such as the Freedom of Choice Act bars such restrictions. Indeed, the Congressional battle over the Freedom of Choice Act is certain to center around amendments that would allow for state or national restrictions. This higher profile debate at the national level will provide pro-lifers with an opportunity to change the framing of the debate, just as it will pose a challenge to pro-choicers to sustain the "choice" theme.

Activists on both sides are aware of the opportunities and perils that lie ahead in the coming months and years. One pro-life activist observed:

*There's no hope [for overturning *Roe v. Wade*], and so [we] need to take this time to educate, to go for the restrictions which the American public seems to be very willing to do.... Making it [abortion] illegal, that is our long-term goal, but right now we need to just zero in on the restrictions.*



One pro-choice California Republican party activist acknowledged challenges ahead:

*If the right-to-life movement chooses to focus its efforts on a few restrictions rather than on banning abortion altogether, at least in their public pronouncements, that will make them appear more reasonable, which is problematic.*

But other pro-choice activists were more optimistic for a variety of reasons:

*I think ultimately that [the "Who Decides?"] message will not lose its effectiveness. I think the issue will change around it. We need to be able to respond to those changes. But ultimately it always comes down to who makes the decisions — government or the woman?*

*We're trying to expand what choice means. It means contraceptive choice; it means adoption as part of choice. There is no doubt that we are trying to find more common ground, and the battle is not going to be just over abortion any more.*

*[T]he point that does work is saying that none of these restrictions will make abortion less necessary. None of these restrictions stop unwanted pregnancy. And none of these restrictions are proposed by pro-choice people. It's the anti-choice forces who have said that these restrictions are their way of getting rid of abortion. And it just makes abortion less safe.*

The cultural agenda of the future will be different, yet its direction remains to be seen. Some, like this pro-life activist, predict it will expand to include a wider array of issues:

*[I]t's not just pro-life anymore, its pro-family organizations.... [Pro-family] would be abortion, prayer in school, homosexual rights — actually, homosexual special rights, which would fall into gays in the military — school choice, school vouchers, condom distribution, and sex ed.*

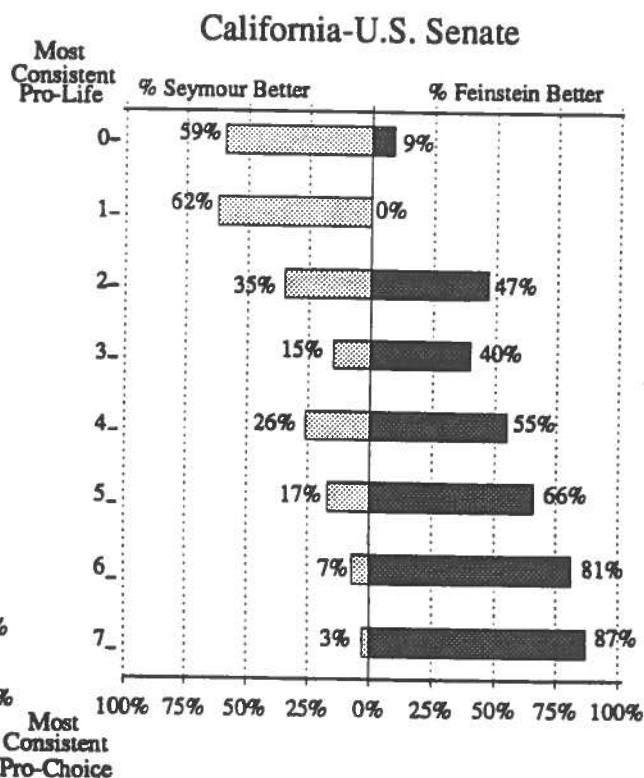
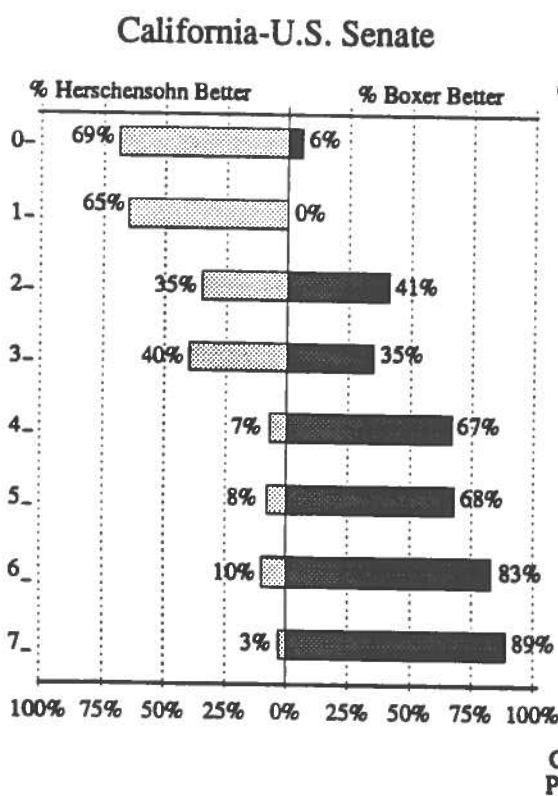
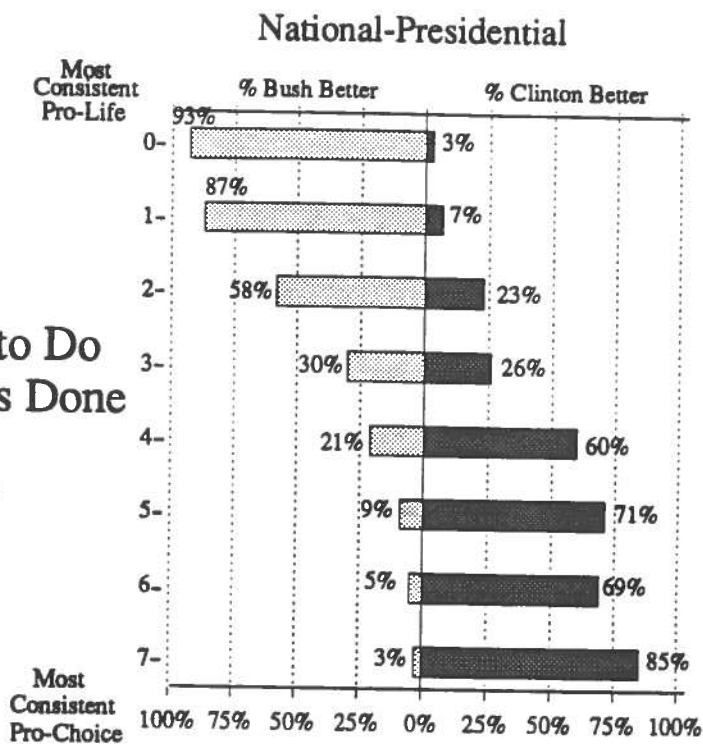
And it is not simply the pro-life activists who are predicting this change. One pro-choice activist predicted:

*There is no doubt the [abortion] issue is going to evolve into something else in the next two or four years. This is the last time you will see it presented exactly this way.*

If the 1992 election season teaches America anything about the politics of cultural issues, it should be that the ultimate shape and nature of public policy in this area will depend on the relative effectiveness of the two sides framing the issue agenda and mobilizing citizens to political action on these issues. The framing of the abortion debate and the repeated debate over cultural issues are not set in stone. As the most immediate concerns of the political agenda change, the side that has the resources and the political savvy to shape the political debate will potentially have an advantage over its opponent; their ability to cite statistics supporting their positions will make the media and politicians see their side as closer to the mainstream. Controlling the framing of an issue is critical on issues which may evoke ambivalence among

many Americans; however the side that succeeds in controlling the debate is not assured of winning on election day. To win, that side also needs a strong candidate who can build a winning coalition, and it needs to convince voters who are in agreement with its stands on cultural issues to consider those issues while casting their votes on election day.

**Figure 1-6:**  
Candidate Most Likely to Do  
What Respondent Wants Done  
on Abortion Given  
Pro-Life/Pro-Choice  
Index Score





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## FINDING 2

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The side that controls the framing of an issue may create a favorable political environment for its arguments, but its success neither guarantees that the issue will be an important voting issue nor that the side that wins in the public opinion polls will have a net advantage at the polls on election day. The importance of the abortion issue depends, in part, on: 1) whether candidates and/or activists talk about the issue so that voters are informed about issue differences between candidates; and 2) whether campaign messages, along with personal observations and experiences, convince voters that an issue is important.

That 73% of the voters said they opposed, rather than favored, additional government restrictions on abortion suggests that Clinton's pro-choice position should have been an electoral advantage for him in a debate dominated by the "choice" theme. However, a majority in a public opinion poll does not automatically translate into an election day majority for the pro-choice side or an election day defeat for those who support additional restrictions on abortion. Voters have to see the relevance of the issue to the race, see the differences between the candidates on the issue, and decide that these differences (rather than differences on other issues) are important to consider in casting their votes. Whether or not this occurs depends not only on the attitudes and perspectives of the voters but also on the effort devoted by candidates and activists to educating voters so that they recognize a difference between the candidates and see the abortion issue as important in a particular race.

To determine how many voters saw the abortion issue as important in the presidential race, we asked our respondents the following questions:<sup>11</sup>

*Lots of issues have been talked about during this campaign. We are interested in knowing which issues are most important to you. First, are there any issues in the election for President that are particularly important to you? [If yes:] What are the most important issues to you in the campaign for President? [Respondent may give up to five issues.]*

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<sup>11</sup> Our approach for determining the issues on the voters' minds differed in two ways from that used in the Voter Research and Surveys' (VRS) exit poll. First, we made it easier for a voter to admit that there really were no important issues. The initial inquiry regarding whether any issues were important invited those who truly had no issues of concern to admit that rather than being compelled to think of a relevant issue to justify their voting decision. The VRS exit poll does not use this filter question, and this omission may encourage people to mention issues when there truly may be no important issues or perhaps only one important issue. Second, we used an open-ended question to determine which issues were important while the exit poll provided the voter with a list of issues that were presumed to be important. By providing a list of issues to respondents, the exit polls can process the answers more quickly and cheaply (which is not unimportant when fast turn-around is needed), but it defines for the respondent a frame of reference. In so doing it runs the risk of putting words in the respondent's mouth and makes it easier for a respondent to give an answer when they may have no opinion. To avoid putting words into the respondents' mouths, we use an open-ended question which gives the respondent the freedom to use their own frame of reference in answering our question, just as they use their own frame of reference in deciding who to vote for in the voting booth. Probably as a result of using two different question formats, the results of our pre-election poll and the VRS exit poll sometimes differ. For more information about the differences between open-ended and closed-ended questions, see Donald P. Warwick and Charles A. Lininger, *The Sample Survey: Theory and Practice*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1975.

The same format was used to determine the issues of importance to voters in California's two U.S. Senate races and the State Assembly races — statewide and in the 53<sup>rd</sup> Assembly District. Overall, 13% of voters nationally mentioned the abortion issue as an important issue to them in the presidential race (Figure 2-1). Nationally, it was the fourth most frequently mentioned issue behind the economy/jobs/unemployment (58%), health care (23%), and the deficit (15%). This was a smaller proportion than had mentioned the issue as important in some high visibility post-*Webster* gubernatorial races.<sup>12</sup>

It is inadequate for voters simply to say that the abortion issue is important. Voters concerned about an issue must also have at least a rudimentary understanding of where the candidates stand on an issue and the differences between candidates' policy views. To determine basic awareness of the candidates' stands on the issue, we asked all voters whether or not they knew if each of the candidates favored or opposed additional government restrictions on abortion. Although majorities guessed the Clinton and Bush stands correctly, a surprisingly high number either guessed incorrectly or admitted they did not know where the two major parties' candidates stood on the issue; furthermore, a majority of voters had no idea where Perot stood on restrictions (Figure 2-2).<sup>13</sup>

To assess the extent and impact of information about candidates' stands on voters, a typology was created. This typology focuses on the major party candidates running in those races. Those voters who saw a difference between the two major parties' candidates are called "differentiators"; those who do not see a difference were "non-differentiators"; those who reversed the relative stands of the two candidates were called "confused." Using this typology, in combination with the respondents' own stands on whether they personally favor or oppose additional restrictions on abortion, gave us seven groups. (The first figure in parentheses indicates the proportion of voters in the national sample. The second, third, and fourth figures represent the proportion of voters in the California sample who fell into each group in the presidential race, the Seymour-Feinstein race, and the Boxer-Herschensohn race, respectively. California figures will be discussed later in this section.)

- *Differentiating Pro-Life*: Voter who favors additional government restrictions on abortion and views Bush/Seymour/Herschensohn as more favorable toward restrictions than Clinton/Feinstein/Boxer. (11%; 9%; 2%; 5%)

- *Non-Differentiating Pro-Life*: Voter favors additional government restrictions on abortion but is either unable to place both candidates on this issue or sees no difference between the candidates. Most of these voters are unaware of candidates' stands rather than unconvinced of differences. (10%; 7%; 14%; 10%)

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<sup>12</sup> In the gubernatorial elections previously analyzed in this series, 39% of Virginia voters (1989), 30% of Pennsylvania voters (1990), and 21% of New Jersey voters (1989) mentioned the abortion issue as an important issue to them in the race. In Michigan (1990), however, only 16% mentioned the abortion issue as important in the governor's race.

<sup>13</sup> Because of the uniqueness of the Perot candidacy, his avoidance of discussing the abortion issue or making direct appeals on the issue, and the confusion that surrounded his stand on the issue, the analysis of the impact of information about the candidates' stands on voting preferences focuses on Clinton and Bush.

- *Differentiating Pro-Choice*: Voter who opposes additional government restrictions on abortion and places Bush as more favorable toward restrictions than Clinton. (34%; 46%; 19%; 30%)
- *Non-Differentiating Pro-Choice*: Voter opposes additional government restrictions on abortion, but is either unable to place both candidates on the issue or sees no difference between the candidates. Again, most of these voters are unaware of candidates' stands rather than unconvinced of differences. (36%; 32%; 59%; 48%)
- *Uncertain*: Voter is unable to say whether he or she personally favors or opposes additional government restrictions on abortion. (4%; 4%; 4%; 4%)
- *Confused Pro-Life*: Voter favors additional restrictions on abortion but sees Clinton/Feinstein/Boxer as more favorable toward restrictions than Bush/Seymour/Herschensohn. (1%; 1%; 1%; 1%)
- *Confused Pro-Choice*: Voter opposes additional restrictions on abortion but sees Clinton/Feinstein/Boxer as more favorable toward restrictions than Bush/Seymour/Herschensohn. (3%; 2%; 1%; 1%)

The first five of the seven categories are the primary focus of this analysis. Despite the dominance of the "choice" theme in the political debate, the combination of political concern about the issue, information about the candidates' stands, and willingness to vote on the issue provided pro-lifers with encouraging results nationally in the race for president. The greater tendency of pro-life voters to mention<sup>14</sup> the abortion issue as important to them (Figure 2-3) reduced the initial electorate-wide 3 to 1 pro-choice advantage on the issue of additional government restrictions to a smaller 3 to 2 pro-choice advantage among "mentioners" (i.e., those who cited the abortion issue as important in the presidential race) (see Figure 2-4). Furthermore, pro-choicers' three to two advantage among mentioners nationally evaporated when it came to the voting decision because fewer pro-choice than pro-life mentioners were differentiators (i.e., aware of the differences between Bush and Clinton on the issue by 66% to 80%) and because pro-choice mentioners were somewhat less inclined than pro-life mentioners to vote for the "right" candidate (Figure 2-5). (The length of the bar indicates the difference between the proportion supporting the Republican candidate and the Democratic candidate. The bar width indicates the size of the voter group relative to others pictured within that specific graph.) As a result, the abortion issue was probably an even draw in the battle for voters between Clinton and Bush, with 42% of voters who cited the abortion

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<sup>14</sup> We use the label "mentioners" for those who mentioned the abortion issue in the open-ended question which asked the voter to cite the issues which were important to them in a particular race.

Figure 2-1:  
Percent Citing Abortion Issue As Important  
in Presidential Race

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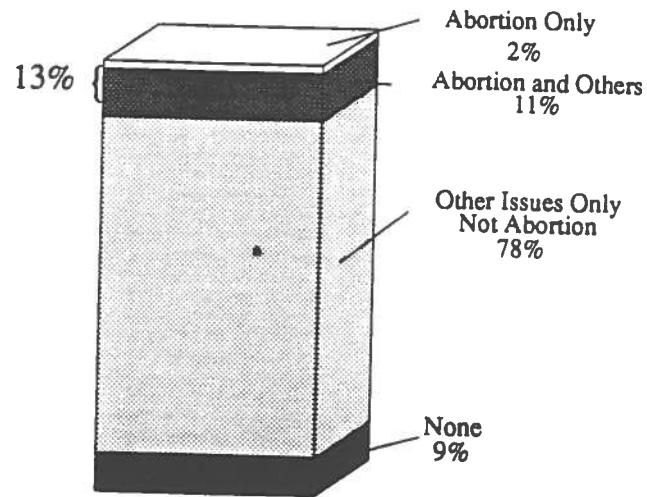


Figure 2-2:  
Voters' Perceptions of Presidential Candidates'  
Position on Abortion Issue

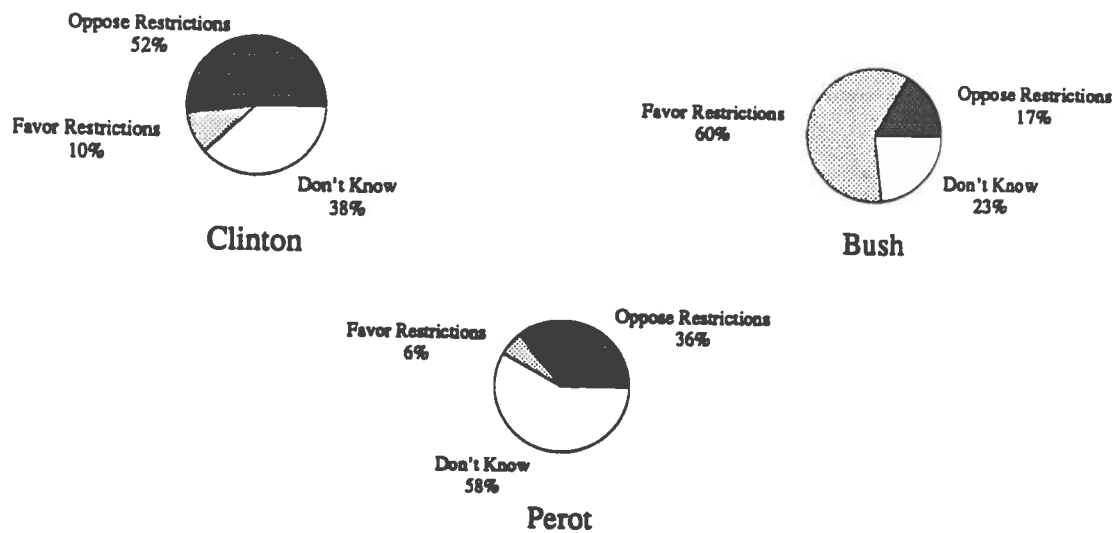




Figure 2-3:  
Percentage Citing Abortion Issue in Presidential Race  
by Attitudes Toward Additional Restrictions  
on Abortion

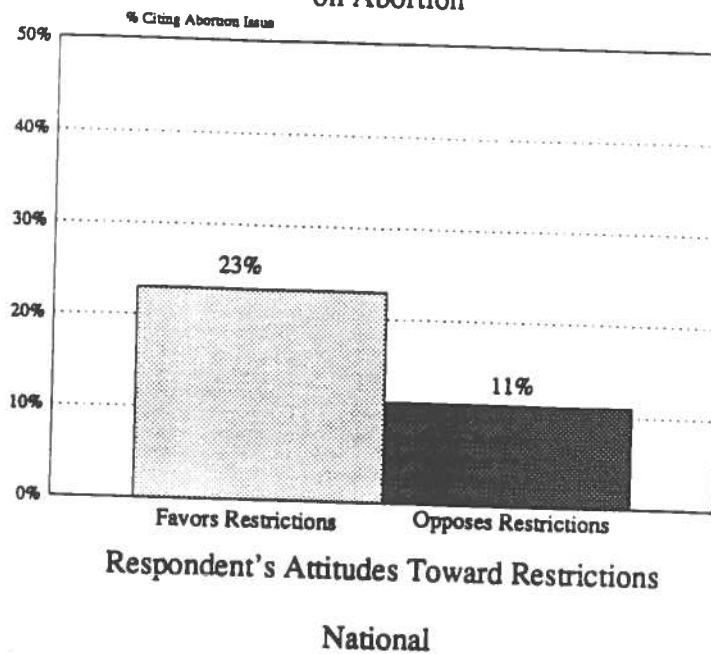
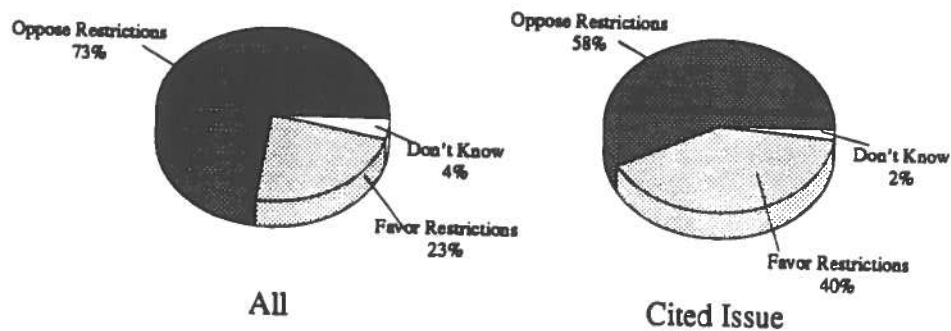


Figure 2-4:  
Attitudes Toward Additional  
Restrictions Among Voters  
All vs. Those Citing Abortion Issue  
in Presidential Race



issue voting for Clinton and 46% voting for Bush.<sup>15</sup> This roughly equal split in the presidential race was very much in line with how one Bush advisor saw the issue working nationally:

*Now if you focus on the label, pro-choice/pro-life, you find that pro-choice has the advantage almost two to one. If you focus on the policies, you find that it is only about a 20-point advantage. What we prefer to focus on is beyond just policy. Who are the voters that are going to vote just because of a candidate's position on the issue? What you find nationally is that it's a ... split on the two extremes.... It's a neutralizing effect. They cancel each other out.*

While this did seem to happen among voters in the 1992 national race for the presidency, the abortion issue is not always a wash in elections, and pro-life voters are not always more concerned about the abortion issue than pro-choice voters. A comparison between the national and California samples suggests that campaign messages crafted by candidates, activists, or parties can also have an impact on how many voters see the abortion issue as important and whether pro-choice or pro-life voters are equally likely to see abortion as an important issue.

California was mired in a deep recession. As one Democrat observed:

*California is not out of the recession. Things are getting worse rather than better.... We thought we were recession-proof. We had the best education system in the country, and now we are at the bottom. It's frightening what's happening in our neighborhoods. People are feeling it very, very personally, so they were ready for change on a level we'd never seen before.... And our own state budget crisis in California has made people so turned off to "politics as usual" that they were very open to a message for change.*

Despite the Golden State's high unemployment rate, California voters were slightly more likely than like-minded voters in our national sample to cite the abortion issue as important in the presidential race. It tied with health care (17%) for second place among important issues, behind jobs and the economy (60%). The California Democratic party and pro-choice groups set out to make the abortion issue a critical, albeit secondary, issue. When asked about whether or not Californians generally had more information about the issue in the presidential race, one California Democratic activist responded:

*I think we played it up a lot more [in California].... The national Clinton folks that came into California were more shy of the issue than I expected them to be [about making abortion an issue].... We were very, very aggressive on the abortion issue — doing a lot of media around it and a lot of mail and phone calling.*

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<sup>15</sup> These percentages differ somewhat from those of Voter Research and Surveys. This is largely attributable to the different questions used to determine important issues. The Voter Research and Surveys' exit poll question provides a list of options to the voter and the voter can check off the one or two issues of importance. In contrast, we used an open-ended question which forced the voter to think on his or her own of what mattered to them, without suggesting possible issues that "should" be important. (See Footnote 11 for additional methodological discussion.)

The Bush campaign in California took a different approach in light of public opinion in that state:

*The way we tried to deal with it [Bush's pro-life position] was to bring pro-choice Republican leaders to the forefront, especially in the post-convention period, and say, "Hey, there are other issues out there.... Who's going to raise your taxes and all that?"*

However, some pro-life supporters (but not all pro-life groups) reported undertaking their own targeted campaign and education efforts in California to reach pro-life voters in the presidential race as well as in other races. One pro-life activist described their activities in the presidential race in a very general way:

*Most of our money goes into what's called independent expenditures, and those consist of getting voter guides out to pro-life people, distributing pro-life slates, those types of things.*

Despite the reluctance of some pro-life activists to be more specific in describing what they had done in the race, one pro-choice activist was more than willing to confirm that the pro-life movement has had a strong presence in California:

*There were a couple of states where we were very conscious and aware that they were organizing. California was one of them.*

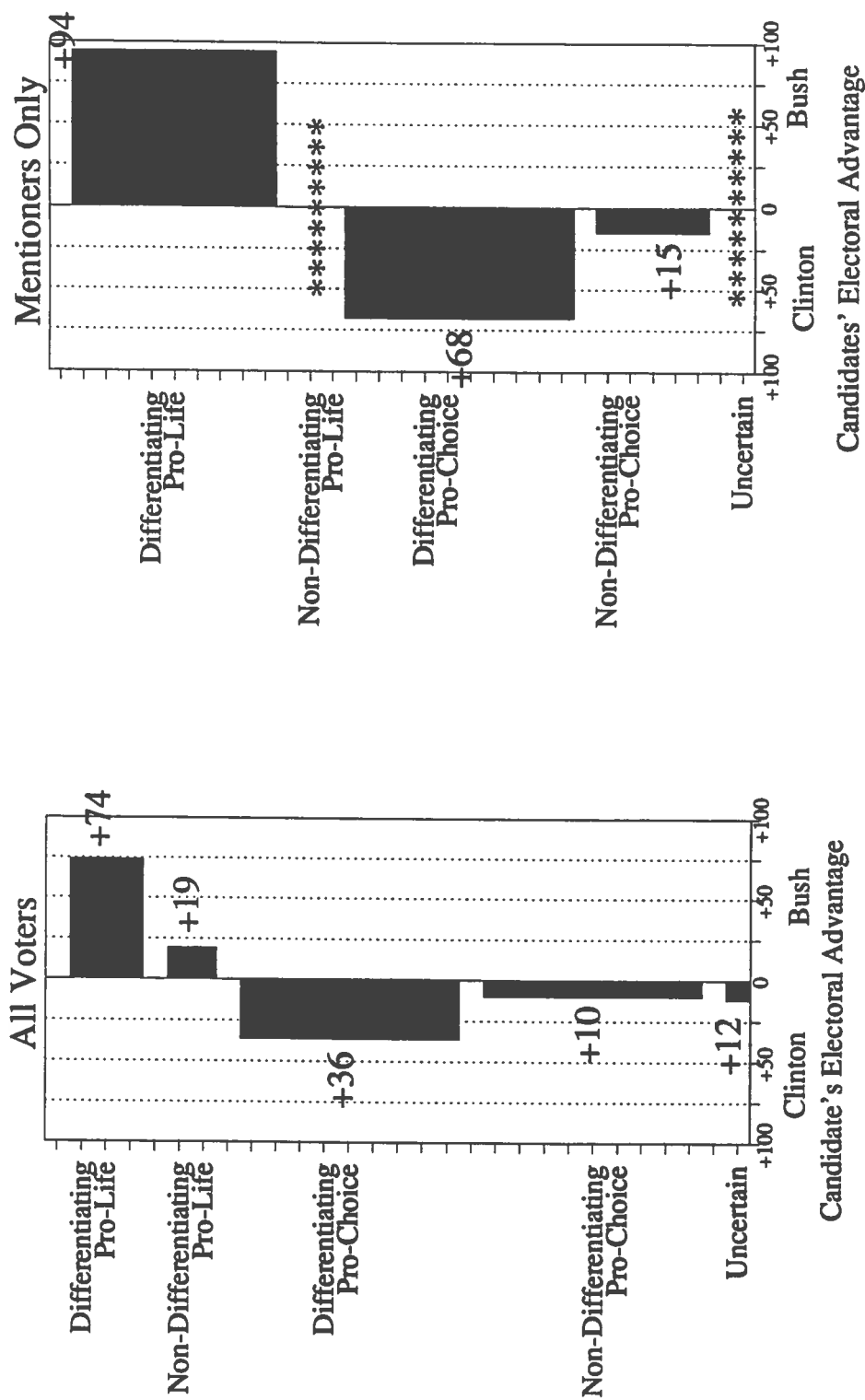
Overall, the abortion issue was given more attention in California than it was nationally. The more active efforts in California to emphasize Clinton's pro-choice stand may explain why a larger proportion of voters were differentiators and why the gap in pro-choice and pro-life concern over the issue in the presidential race closed in California. Indeed, pro-choice and pro-life Californians were equally likely to cite the abortion issue as important in the presidential race (Figure 2-6); this was not the case nationally (Figure 2-3).<sup>16</sup> The equalization occurred, in part, because consistently pro-life voters were somewhat less likely in California than nationally to cite abortion as an important issue (32% vs. 40%). In addition, consistently pro-choice voters in California were somewhat more inclined than was true nationally to cite the issue as important (34% vs. 25%). The high profile of this issue in California may explain why more voters were differentiators. Since differentiators are more inclined to vote for the "right" candidate, the higher proportion of differentiators in California than nationally (55% vs. 45%), and the higher proportion of pro-choicers among those differentiators (Figure 2-7), was an advantage for Clinton.

In California, it made a difference whether voters did or did not see a difference between Bush and Clinton on the issue. Bush had his strongest margin of victory among differentiating pro-life voters, just as Clinton did best among differentiating pro-choice voters (Figure 2-8). All together, 53% of California mentioners voted for Clinton, 28% voted for Bush, and 20% voted for Perot. Therefore,

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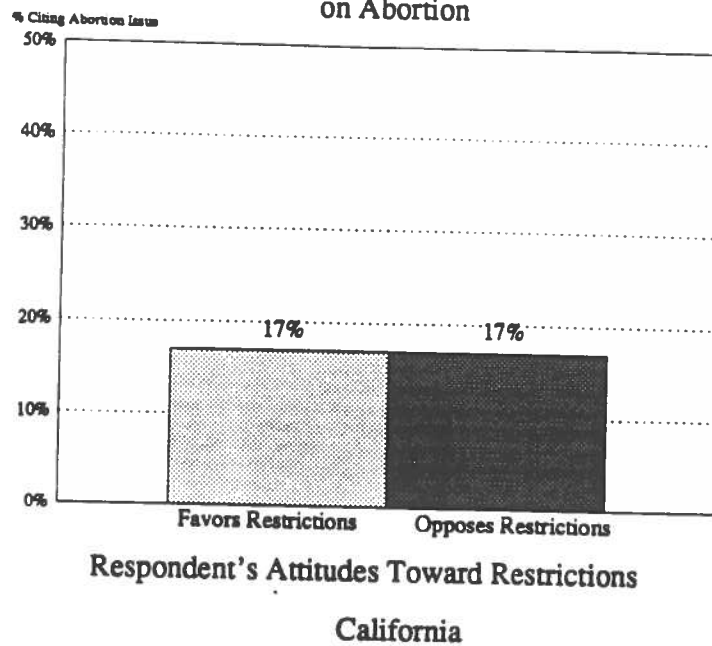
<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, this pattern among voters is not solely attributable to any tendency for Californians to be more consistent in their attitudes or more pro-choice than voters nationally. Even solidly pro-choice voters (those who scored 7 on the pro-life/pro-choice index) more frequently cited the abortion issue as important in California than nationally (34% vs. 25%); however, solidly pro-life voters were less likely in California than nationally to cite the abortion issue as important (32% vs. 40%).

Figure 2-5:  
Electoral Advantage for Major Parties' Presidential  
Candidates Among Voter Groups  
All Voters vs. Mentioners Only



\*\*\*\*\* Too few cases for analysis

**Figure 2-6:**  
**Percentage of California Voters Citing**  
**Presidential Race by Attitudes Toward Additional**  
**on Abortion**



**Figure 2-7:**  
**Proportion of Differentiators and**  
**Non-Differentiators - Presidential Race**  
**National versus California**

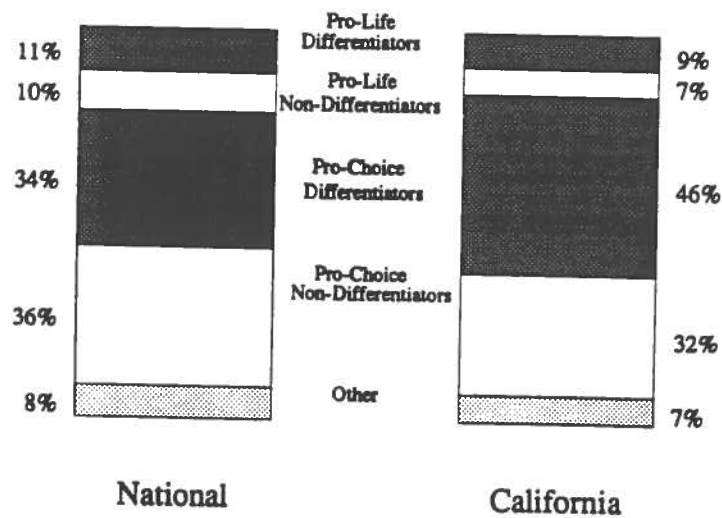


Figure 2-8:  
Electoral Advantage for Major Parties'  
Presidential Candidates Among Voter Groups  
California Voters Only

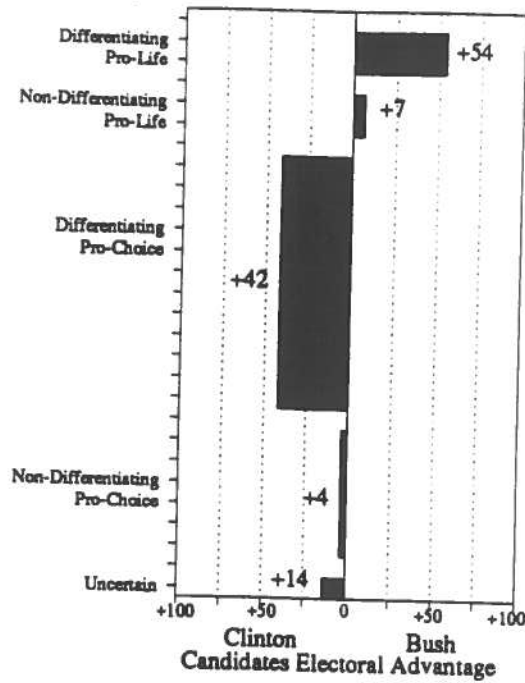
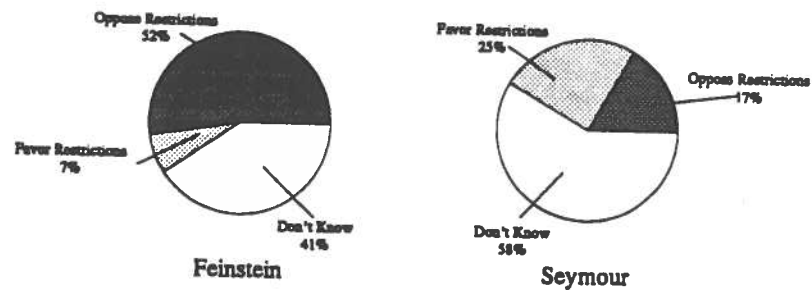


Figure 2-9:  
Voters' Perceptions of U.S. Senate Candidates'  
Positions on Abortion Issue  
Dianne Feinstein vs. John Seymour



educating voters on candidates' stands matters. Had the race in California been closer, this might have made a very important difference in who got the state's 54 Electoral College votes.

The importance of candidates and activists educating voters about the candidates' stands on the abortion issue is also clear from the voters' perceptions of the U.S. Senate candidates, Dianne Feinstein and John Seymour. As Figure 2-9 shows, a majority of voters thought Feinstein opposed additional restrictions on abortion. However, a majority of voters were uncertain whether Seymour favored or opposed additional restrictions on abortion. Of those who did venture a guess, more saw him as favoring restrictions. While some could point to his support for parental consent laws as justification for that perception, the fact is that most who saw him as favoring restrictions said that he favored *major* rather than minor restrictions. Thus, Feinstein's careful use of Seymour's record throughout the campaign, and the difficulty the lesser known Seymour had in defining himself for the voters, demonstrates that voters are less than fully informed about candidates' stands on these issues, but that campaign messages can go a long way toward shaping the views of voters about candidates' stands on abortion as well as perhaps on other cultural issues.

A comparison across races in California showed that voters were just as inclined (and sometimes more inclined) to see the relevance of the abortion issue to the presidential race as they were in races for Senate, state legislatures, and, probably, in most other races (Figure 2-10). The visibility of the race, public interest in the race, and the prominence of the issue in the campaign, rather than a sophisticated constitutional critique based on careful analysis of recent Supreme Court decisions, are often the driving forces behind voters' perceptions of the importance of the abortion issue in a race. Those who say that the abortion issue is just not something voters think about in an important race like the presidential contest, find no support for their assertion in these data. If the abortion issue is to be an issue for voters in an election year, then it is at least as likely to influence decision making in the presidential race as in any other race. The important question is whether the campaign messages mobilize primarily pro-lifers, primarily pro-choicers, or both sides.

The importance of campaign messages in providing information to voters about where candidates stand on the issue is quite clear if we compare the legislative race in Assembly District 53 with legislative races statewide. Only about 3% of voters in the California statewide sample cited the abortion issue as important in legislative Assembly races (and indeed, 64% could not think of an issue that was important). Furthermore, across the state, only 26% would even guess where the Democratic assembly candidate in their district stood, and only 22% attempted to guess where the Republican assembly candidate running in their district stood on abortion restrictions. However, the story was different in Assembly District 53. In that district, where pro-choice Bowen devoted a great deal of attention to the abortion issue, 14% of the voters mentioned the abortion issue as important. This is impressive since 61% of voters in that district could not cite an issue that was important in that race. These statistics are even more impressive because the 53<sup>rd</sup> Assembly District had been particularly hard-hit by the recession and defense cut-backs. Furthermore, in this district where one of the assembly candidates made the abortion issue a very prominent topic on the campaign agenda, voters were better informed than California voters in general about the legislative candidates' positions: 39% of voters were willing to place Parton on the issue (35% placed him correctly), and 45% were willing to place Bowen on the issue (with 42% placing her correctly).

The importance of the better-than-average level of concern with, and information about, the candidates' stands on the abortion issue is clear when we compare the voting preferences of various groups of voters. Pro-life Brad Parton had his greatest support among pro-life differentiators and pro-choice Debra

Bowen had her greatest support among pro-choice differentiators. However, recognition of the differences between candidates was particularly critical if pro-choice voters were going to vote for the "right" candidate on the issue (Figure 2-11). Debra Bowen carried pro-choice differentiators with a 66 point electoral advantage over Brad Parton, but her electoral advantage over Parton was only 14 points among pro-choice non-differentiators. Parton, too, did better among pro-life differentiators than among pro-life non-differentiators, but pro-life voters seemed more predisposed toward pro-life Parton, whether or not they knew where he stood on the issue.

In summary, the data show that many voters are often uninformed about where legislative candidates stand on the abortion issue. However, when candidates in these lower profile elections work diligently to make this issue important, voters are better informed and more likely to vote for the "right" candidate. Nevertheless, reaching voters and educating them on where the candidates stand is not easy. It takes effort by the candidates, activists, and resources—volunteers and money to inform voters. Whether these efforts to make the issue a high-profile public issue benefit the pro-choice or pro-life candidate will depend in-part on whether the voters lean toward the pro-life or pro-choice sides. In the 53<sup>rd</sup> District, they benefitted the pro-choice candidate since "mentioners" in the assembly race supported Bowen over Parton, 66% to 34%.

Figure 2-10:  
Percent Citing Abortion Issue as Important  
In Various Races--California Voters Only

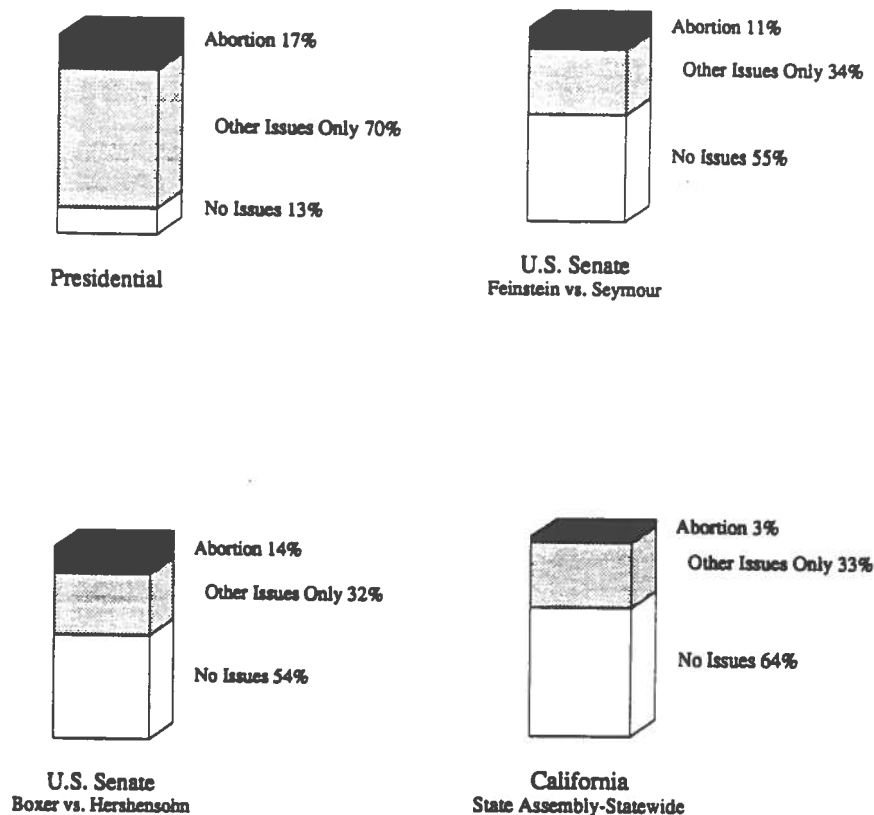
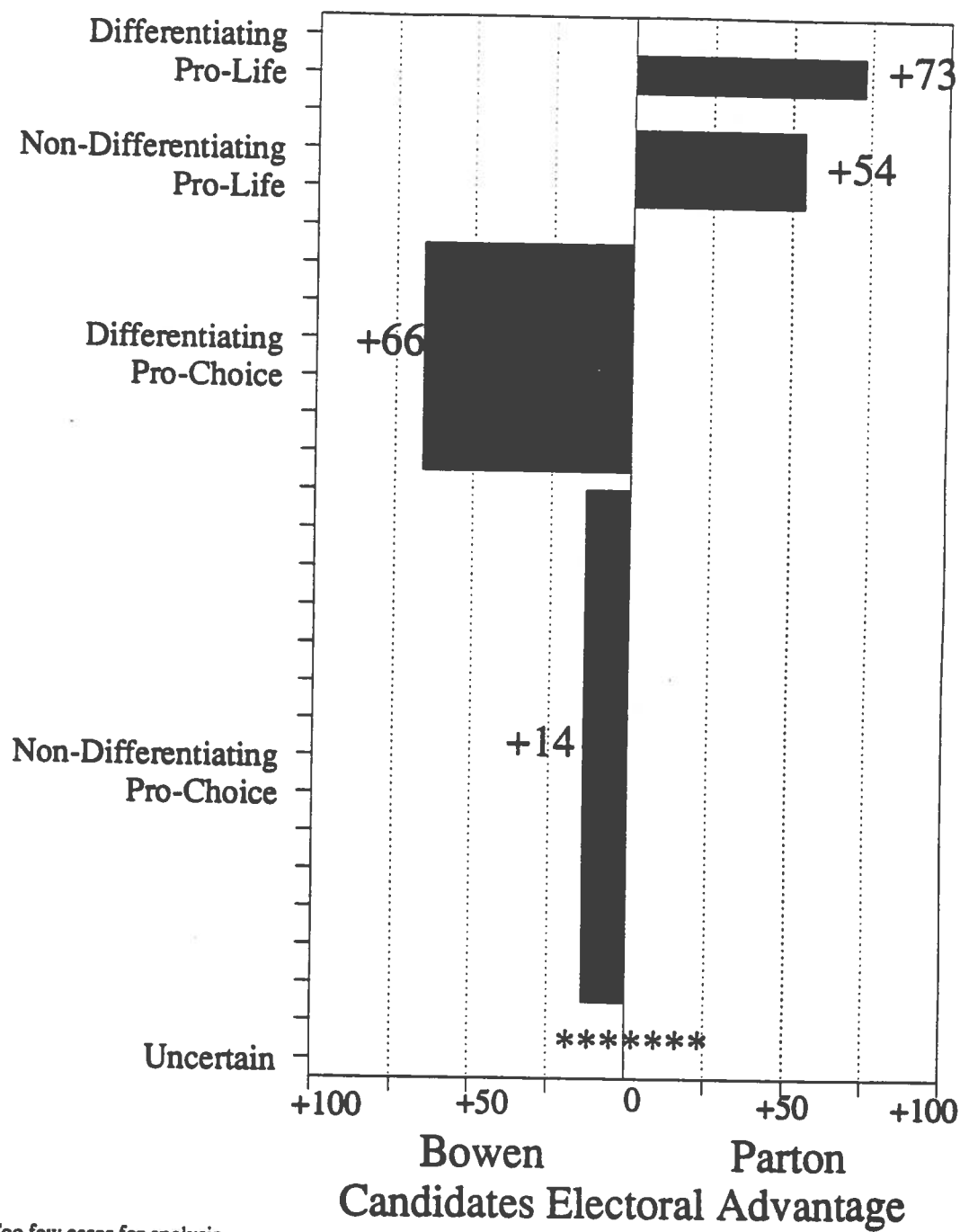




Figure 2-11:  
Electoral Advantage for 53rd Assembly  
District Candidates Among Voter Groups



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## FINDING 3

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In this era, where polls play such a significant role, all too often an issue's impact is judged solely in terms of the net advantage in votes. However, the abortion issue had an impact beyond its direct impact on voters. Specifically, some of the campaigns examined benefitted from resources that were made available to the campaigns because of their stand on the issue, from their ability to use the abortion issue to strengthen coalitions, and from a favorable political environment that had been created by the issue activists.

All too often, assessments of the abortion issue's impact (or any other issue's impact) on a campaign begin and end with exit polls, but as one Clinton activist noted:

*[When] you look at the role choice plays in an election, it's a little bit more subtle and complicated than the exit polls would suggest.... The issue is enormously motivating for pro-choice voters. Hordes and hordes and hordes of women activists came into the Clinton campaign in every state.*

Therefore, it is important not only to examine how the abortion issue affects elections via the voters, but also to examine the impact of the issue on activists' support for candidates and their involvement in campaigns. No one working for any of these candidates suggested that the availability of activist support, on one side or the other, caused their candidate to take one stand over another. "You play the hand you're dealt," as one Bush activist put it. There was a sense, though, that knowing the activists were behind them, working to support their efforts rather than leaving them alone to take the political heat for their stand, increased the candidates' comfort with their connection to the group and perhaps increased their commitment to action on the issue once in office.

Prior to the *Webster* decision, the pro-life movement developed a powerful image of political clout — an army of activists who could use their communication network to mobilize voters for and against candidates. Pro-life groups, as one activist explained, see campaign activity as an integral part of their overall strategy to change abortion policy:

*Before you can change public policy, you have to have pro-life people in office. So our third [prong of a three-prong effort] is through our political action committees to attempt to elect pro-life people to office who will help us to put those civil rights in place.*

Although the pro-choice mobilization following *Webster* has eroded that image, which once struck fear into the hearts of politicians, campaign staffers working for pro-life candidates, as well as pro-choice candidates, cited benefits of their candidates' alliances with the activists who focused on this issue.

In the presidential race and the California race between Boxer and Herschensohn, the major benefit of ties to pro-life activists was access to a pro-life/Religious Right communication network which could motivate volunteers and communicate targeted messages to their voters. One Bush activist explained:

*Your most effective voter groups are those who already have existing networks or organizations.... To the extent that you have any voter segment that is already organized for political purposes that supports you, you have an advantage.... Right-to-Life was an already active political organization. To that extent they were very effective for us.... You can't possibly get your message out to everyone who shares your view on a particular*

*issue.... If they [a group such as Right-to-Life] endorse you, every newsletter that they send out throughout the country has a big spread on so and so versus so and so: this candidate is wonderful, this candidate's terrible. And whether it's a "get out the vote" or a voter education piece, clearly those groups are the best voter groups to have.*

A pro-life activist in California explained the important role of the pro-life groups in the Herschensohn campaign:

*In the closing days [of the campaign] there was a rallying around Bruce Herschensohn. If you went into the campaign headquarters and ... you asked people why they were there, there were usually three different categories of volunteers within those campaigns — Republican federal women (sort of older women who have always been volunteers), and then there were ... pro-gun people, and the other (by far the largest) would be pro-lifers.... They were doing the stuffing of envelopes, the walking precincts, and all those kinds of things for Bruce Herschensohn.... And Bruce Herschensohn received ... more votes than John Seymour did.*

In general, pro-life activists focused on local, grassroots campaigning. One national pro-life activist characterized it this way:

*We did a lot of telephones. We covered every front. And we worked through groups that were willing to reproduce our literature, to encourage people to put it in their newspapers, you know, the grassroots to disseminate.*

Another pro-life activist discussed the large organizational effort which utilized a national grassroots distribution:

*We have a list of about 40 to 50 thousand churches that receive voter educational literature from us on an ongoing basis. So we mailed the voter guides to those churches that requested it. And then we also distributed it through our chapters. We have 721 chapters in all 50 states with about 350 thousand members. So we mailed to our members, we mailed to those churches, and we communicated with our chapters so that they could get out the voter guides.*

Far from a closely coordinated effort, the activities of pro-life groups were often carried out independently of the candidates' control; this was either because of the candidates' wishes or the groups' mode of operation. One pro-life activist described the relationship in the presidential race as follows:

*I think, pretty much, the pro-family groups did their thing and the Bush campaign did theirs. There was not a lot of coordination, it was not a hand-in-glove type situation.*

A Republican party insider who worked with the Herschensohn campaign had a slightly different perspective:

*You can't really direct them. The [pro-life] groups themselves decide who they are going to support and they just sort of do it.... I think it was important. And they didn't make a big deal about it; I think they didn't do what the pro-choice groups do. They didn't do any 800,000 person mailings, things like that. It was more of a grassroots, person-to-person thing. And it was regionally located in some of the key areas.*

Several pro-choice activists readily conceded that their pro-life opponents were well organized, particularly in certain states like California. One California pro-choice activist observed:

*[There is a] very strong [pro-life] institutional organizing force, communications network, both through the churches and through the Christian radio and television. And that's one of their biggest strengths, in addition to the bucks that they have here in California, these right-wing donors.... [T]hey will always be a force to be reckoned with, because they have the institutional base that is very, very easy to mobilize.*

It has been these benefits, along with the pre-*Webster* perception that only pro-life voters cast their ballots on these cultural issues, that made it seem politically safer to be pro-life than pro-choice only a few years ago.

But there were important differences between 1988 and 1992. For one thing, pro-choice activists had redefined the abortion debate as dealing with "choice" rather than with abortion. This made candidates feel more comfortable talking about the issue; they were more inclined to run on it, and choice increased the chances that a pro-life, rather than pro-choice, candidate would be put on the defensive. One Democratic activist commented:

*Even right after Webster there was a question of whether to include it [the abortion issue], how to deal with it, how to define it.... I think that it is a conspicuous omission these days if you don't define yourself on choice. That's how far the landscape has changed.*

A Clinton activist added:

*They [pro-choice activists] helped keep the issue defined as choice, as "Who Decides?" — politicians vs. you. Keeping the conversation at that level is enormously important.*

Second, pro-choice activists were a more visible presence in the campaigns than they had been four years earlier. This change was almost certainly a product of the post-*Webster* political climate and the increased resources — both volunteers and money — available to these groups because of the perceived threat. When asked how important the rejuvenation of the pro-choice movement had been in increasing the comfort level of being a pro-choice candidate, one Clinton activist responded:

*It was very important because it also, quite frankly, made elected officials across the board more comfortable with the issue.*

Another, a pro-choice activist, went further:

*One of the things that we learned from '88 was that everywhere Michael Dukakis went, there were anti-choice protesters, and it had a real chilling effect on his campaign, his candidacy. We decided we were going to try to turn that around this year. So the "Pro-Choice, Pro-Family" signs and the "I Vote Pro-Choice" signs we tried to get into their [Clinton campaign] events a lot to help create that kind of pro-choice visibility.*

Through public education and mobilization of pro-choice supporters, pro-choice groups helped the Clinton campaign effort to provide a counter-presence to pro-life protesters at rallies:

*[In] the presidential race, we certainly mobilized our membership. We sent out our pro-choice booklets and buttons and we had a whole lot of "Help Light the Way: Vote Pro-Choice" stickers. We did a whole mobilization around "30 Days to Save Choice." And we were involved with the presidential [race] in a substantive way.*

*[Pro-lifers] would mobilize their membership and our membership would be there with "Vote Pro-Choice" signs, just sort of to highlight the issue. And that was, I think, our benefit in this presidential [race], in that everywhere (we heard it from so many anecdotal stories), everywhere Clinton and Gore went, or their spouses, there would be NARAL people there, NARAL members who are pro-choice, pro-Clinton, "I Vote Pro-Choice" signs, things that brought the issue up and were there and showed them that whether they were in the back woods of Tennessee or wherever in L.A., there were NARAL members everywhere they turned, giving them the support for their position on the issue, but also highlighting the issue.*

Some Boxer campaign staffers tended to see pro-choice activist support as helpful in raising funds. To a lesser extent, activist support served as an emergency source of volunteers and was a way for the campaign to reach out to the membership of the organizations to both educate and mobilize them. But in addition, most likely as an indirect result of pro-choice mobilization efforts, numerous women volunteered to work for Boxer:

*Most of our volunteers were women.... A lot of [these volunteers] grew up before Roe v. Wade and knew what life was like and had been with friends who had to suffer the consequences of illegal abortions. They weren't going to let it happen again.... And young women [as well] who had grown up only with Roe v. Wade and couldn't conceive of someone taking away this right. I would say that [concern with abortion rights] was probably the major factor behind a lot of the women that we got in our [campaign] office.*

Although pro-choice efforts were seen as benefiting Feinstein, to a lesser extent than Boxer, their greatest impact at the activist level may have been in a third way. The abortion issue did for moderate Democrats what is sometimes the impossible: it helped ignite enthusiasm among some liberal Democrats

who might have otherwise been less than enthusiastic about their campaigns. In California, for example, a Feinstein campaign activist commented:

*The core Democratic constituency for us ... were Barbara Boxer Democrats who were more liberal than Dianne. In August ... when Barbara was 22 points ahead in the polls, we felt that we might need to ... pull out all those really liberal Democrats and make sure they voted. The fact that she [Feinstein] was so good on choice was comforting to them [liberal Democrats].... We felt it was important to get our message to them that Dianne is great on this [abortion] issue. You may not agree with her on the death penalty, but there are some other key critical issues where you would agree with her.*

The value of the abortion issue in forging a unified coalition was also clear on the Democratic side in the presidential contest. In 1988, it would have been difficult to imagine that liberal, Democratic, feminist women would have enthusiastically backed for President a member of the moderate Democratic Leadership Council. But the rousing welcome that Clinton received when he appeared at the Women's Caucus meeting one morning during the Democratic Convention certainly showed that it was possible. One pro-choice activist admitted that:

*In the end there were a lot of women, and I was certainly one of them, that the choice issue just locked in the presidential decision early on, and you just shut your eyes on all the other stuff.... In the end, it was about the Justices, and it was about I'm going to literally bite my lip and just support Clinton.*

A Clinton activist, when asked about the role of the abortion issue in forging a coalition among activists, replied:

*I think the choice issue did help to galvanize the groups, the women's groups that were active on behalf of candidates.... Those people were galvanized, no doubt, on the choice issue.... I think that the difference for the choice issue in '92 [vs. '88 was that] people saw the real threat — that if we didn't get a Democratic President in there that was concerned about appointments to the Supreme Court and making sure they were appointments that respected individual liberties, that they were going to lose that issue.*

Certainly, the greatest threat both sides face is that the other side will remain active while they become less active or useful to candidates who are their allies (either for lack of resources, grassroots involvement, or ability to generate interest). The Clinton administration seems unlikely to give the pro-life side a reason to pack up its bags and go home. As one pro-life activist put it, "It is going to be mobilization time." Indeed, when asked about the Freedom of Choice Act (FOCA), one pro-life leader responded:

*Oh, it's very much an open question still, and it's going to be very much a focus of our lobbying. That's the first item on our agenda.*

But lobbying was not the only activity some pro-lifers expected FOCA to generate:

*I've seen some movements on, for instance, to introduce computer databases into pro-life organizations that really don't have the money for [them] but [they] are determined to get sophisticated organizational strategies going.*

It seems more likely that pro-choice activists rather than pro-life activists will face difficulty sustaining their activity during the Clinton years. Pro-choice activists' ability to marshal increased resources this election year for work on behalf of candidates was due to abortion being a hot button issue after *Webster*. Pro-choice sympathizers who might not have been involved prior to *Webster* poured time and money into pro-choice groups because they saw a threat to a right they had assumed would always be available. However, a Clinton presidency could reduce these concerns for pro-choice voters, and in doing so it may diminish the time, money, or thought voters give to the issue in choosing which candidate to support in an election.

The question that remains unanswered is what value will candidates see in alliances with activists from the pro-life and pro-choice sides in two, four, or more years from now? Or, will candidates prefer to align themselves with groups that reflect broader-based issues or ideological movements? The answer to that question may have an impact not only on campaign agendas of the future but also on the type of candidates who gain a political advantage and win public office in the future.





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## FINDING 4

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Socially conservative and socially moderate Republicans are engaged in a battle over which of their sides is more electable. The party that ultimately wins elections must hold on to the partisan base and attract sufficient crossover votes to win in the general election. At first glance, the abortion issue seems to have had less impact than in some previous elections on Republican voters' support for pro-choice and pro-life Republican candidates. Nevertheless, there was some evidence that the abortion issue was changing the Republican base. Bush's 1992 support was lower among pro-choice women who had voted for him in 1988, and a large gender gap in Republican party identification occurred among pro-choice voters in California. At the same time, there was no evidence that pro-choice Democrats suffered sizeable losses due to pro-life Democrats defecting to pro-life Republican candidates because of the abortion issue.

The Republican party had a real challenge in 1992 — to hold together the Reagan/Bush coalition in a climate of growing dissatisfaction over the economy, decreased concern about foreign affairs in the post-Cold War era, and increased concern by both social moderates and social conservatives over cultural issues such as abortion. The way activists viewed this dilemma depended considerably on their ideological perspective. One pro-life activist saw it this way:

*You have to think of the Reagan coalition which Bush inherited as a three-legged stool. You have the social conservatives, ... the economic conservatives, ... and you have the defense and foreign policy conservatives.... When the Berlin Wall came down and you saw the downsizing of the military in the post-Cold War era, one of those legs was gone.... The Gulf War provided some temporary euphoria, but essentially that leg of the coalition was no longer a significant force. Then when he raised taxes, the other leg got kicked out which was the economic conservatives. So you had a one-legged stool. Now what ... some moderates, I think a small minority are saying is, "Here we've got a one-legged stool, let's kick that one out...." We ought to talk about how to add more legs, ... not how do we kick more people out.... And that's what happens when you remove the pro-family orientation of the party. You kiss roughly 20 million votes goodbye.*

A moderate Bush activist in California had a different perspective:

*[T]he Republicans' challenge is how do they promote unity in a party that seems to want to debate tremendously polarizing social issues that frankly have not been on the political radar screen before. And so we've got this infusion of Christian Republicans that frankly we should be happy to have because they're good workers and they do a lot for the party. Unfortunately, they've got this very narrow agenda that most of the general voting population doesn't want anything to do with.*

Another Republican voiced a different perspective:

*The Religious Right has done a very large amount of grassroots activity. I don't care how strong their grassroots activity can get. I still think they are only going to be a certain population, ... 15% or 20%, and then you are going to hit a ceiling and that's all you are ever going to get.... You're never going to win unless you broaden your base and bring in more people, you're never going to get elected President.*

One key to holding together the Reagan/Bush coalition was to keep Republicans within the partisan fold and to minimize GOP defections across party lines. Our previous research in selected gubernatorial races found that even though pro-life Republican candidates overwhelmingly carried Republican pro-life differentiators, Republican pro-choice differentiators usually divided their votes fairly evenly between the pro-life Republican and the pro-choice Democratic candidates.<sup>17</sup> Voter education was central to determining defection rates. In 1992, however, there was both good news and bad news for the two pro-life Republican candidates, George Bush and Bruce Herschensohn. The bad news for them was that their strength was weaker among pro-choice Republicans than among pro-life Republicans (Figure 4-1). The good news for them was they nevertheless carried pro-choice GOP voters by a substantial margin.

The lack of evidence of massive voter defections by pro-choice Republicans in the presidential race and in the California Senate races is very puzzling. Anecdotal evidence presented in the media suggested that pro-choice women were deserting their party. Furthermore, the Clinton campaign sought out prominent Republicans to give public endorsements to the Clinton candidacy. Six pro-choice Republican women who were supporting Clinton were featured at the Democratic convention; Boxer had Republicans for Boxer, and one national pro-choice activist pointed out:

*[O]ne of the central strategies for [us] in this election cycle was identifying Republican and Independent women who would cross over and vote for Clinton and for pro-choice Democrats.*

There are at least three explanations that could account for the disparity between the anecdotal evidence and what the survey data have shown in these races. One is that the mass defection of moderate Republicans was simply media hype. While our data can neither support nor refute such an explanation, there was a wide-spread feeling among pro-life activists that the media was biased against them:

*Blaming pro-life groups for the Republican losses is the chic liberal thing to do.... The media is very biased.*

Even a moderate Republican who thought the pro-life plank hurt the GOP saw media bias:

*I mean, they [the media] were absolutely gleeful in sticking it to the Republican party and its [convention] speakers.*

A second possible explanation for the disparity is that other factors such as trust and evaluation of character discouraged pro-choice Republicans from crossing party lines to support a pro-choice Democrat. Previous research has suggested that questions of candidate credibility, qualifications, or leadership ability can discourage voters from supporting a candidate with whom they may agree on the abortion issue. While this possibility was not mentioned in the activists' interviews, some data from our survey suggested problems for Clinton when it came to trust among GOP identifiers of all perspectives on the abortion issue. Indeed, only 10% of Republicans who were most strongly pro-choice — 6 or 7 on the pro-life/pro-choice index — said they trusted Clinton the most of the three candidates (Figure 4-2).

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<sup>17</sup> See Debra L. Dodson, *Abortion Politics in State Elections: Comparisons Across States*, 1991.

**Figure 4-1:**  
**Electoral Advantage for Candidates**  
**Among Republican Voter Groups**

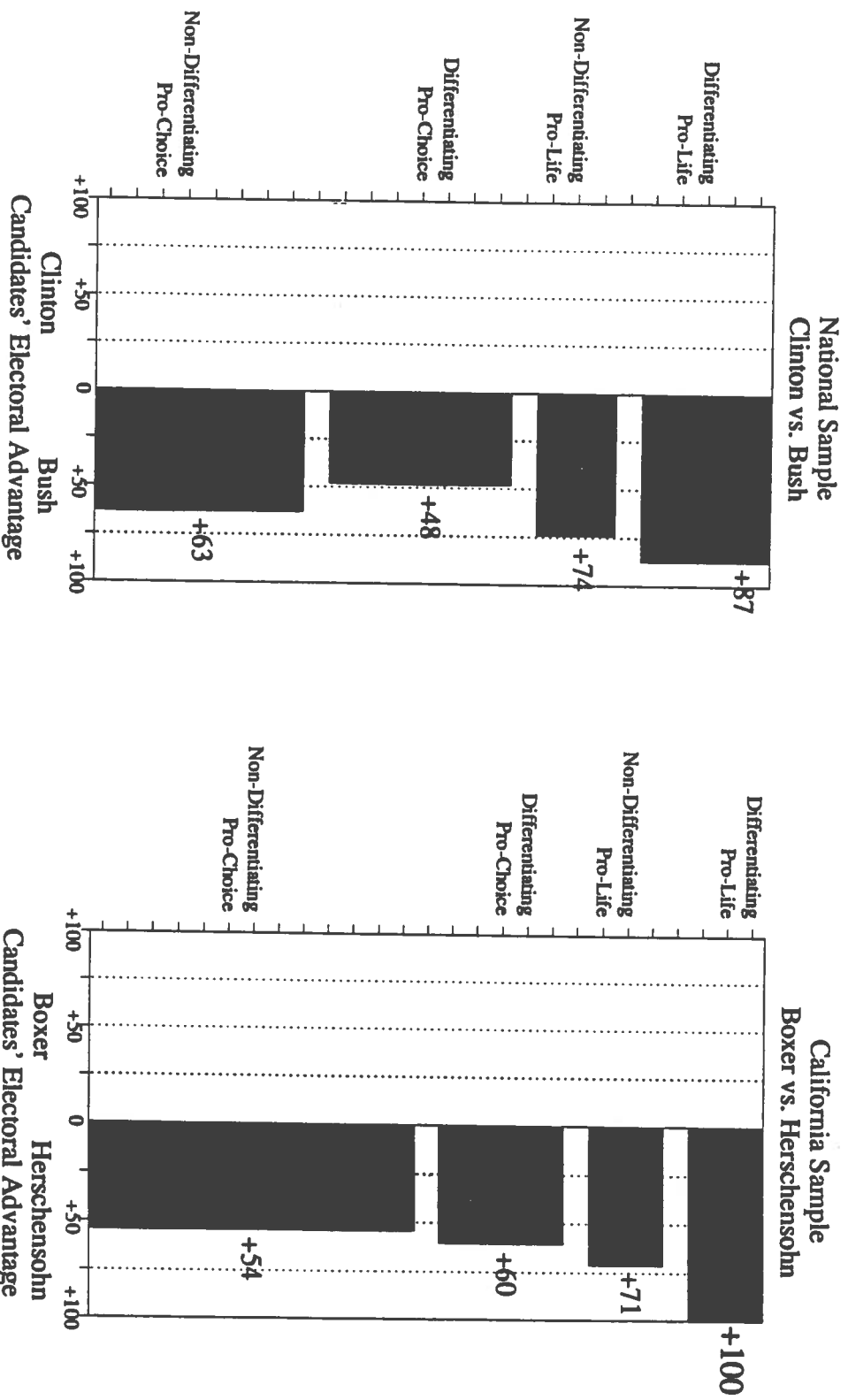
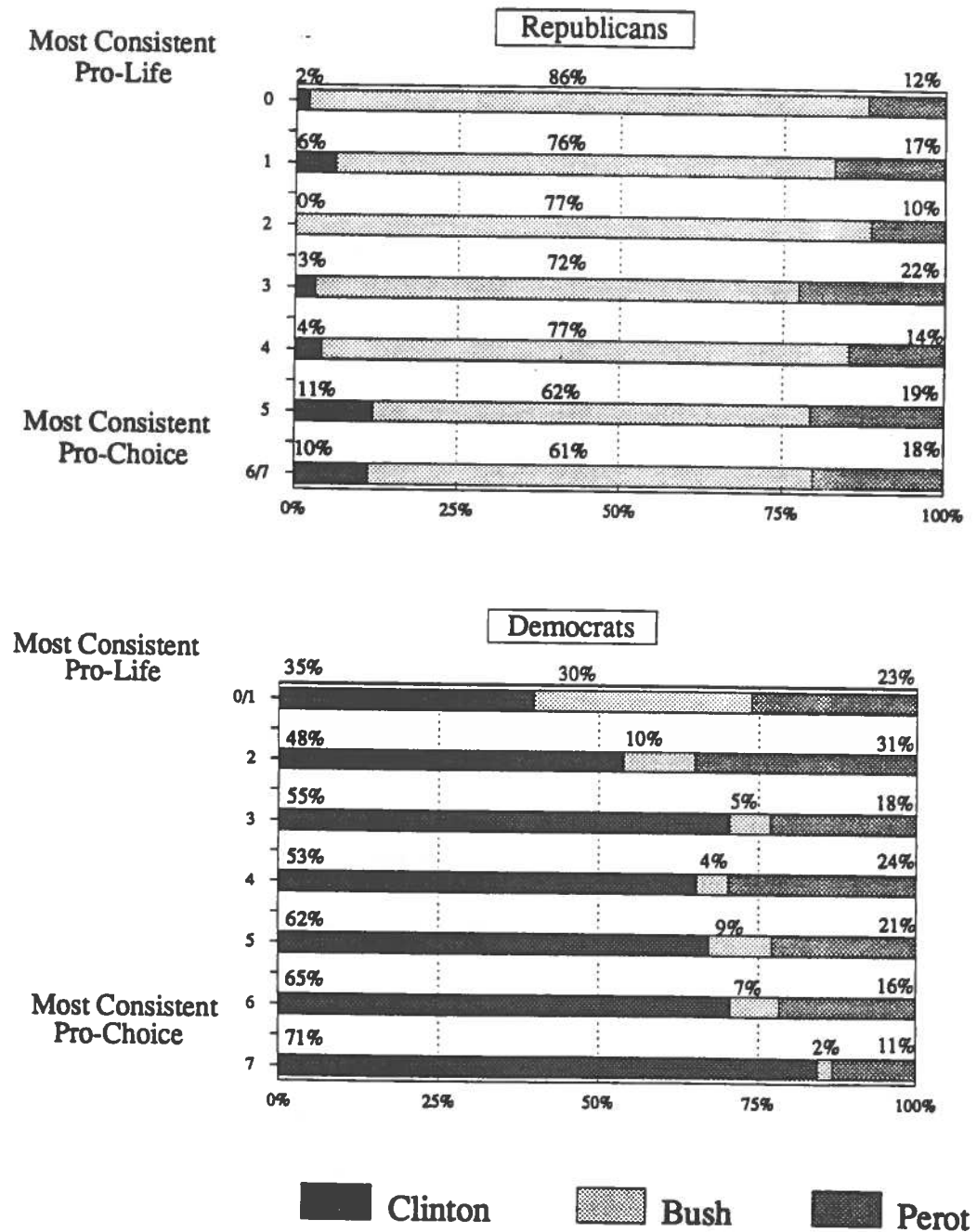


Figure 4-2:  
Candidate Trusted Most Given Party  
Identification and Pro-Life/Pro-Choice  
Index Score



The third possible explanation for the disparity is that small shifts may have occurred among party identifiers so that some social moderates who once classified themselves as Republicans now see themselves as Independents or even Democrats. One indirect piece of evidence of the impact of these social issues on the Republican/Bush coalition comes from analysis of the 1992 presidential vote among 1988 Bush voters. The Reagan coalition, which Bush had inherited in his 1988 run, was an amalgam of diverse interests that were united in their support of fiscal conservatism and strong defense, though divided over cultural issues such as abortion. Pro-life differentiators who had supported Bush in 1988 continued to support him in 1992. However, Bush's lowest electoral advantage among his previous supporters was among pro-choice voters. Indeed, the greatest drop-off between 1988 and 1992 in Bush supporters nationally was among pro-choice voters, particularly female pro-choice differentiators (Figure 4-3); they divided their support evenly between Bush and Clinton in 1992 even though they had given 100% of their support to Bush four years earlier. Whether these women were Democrats who were coming home or whether they were former Republicans who now had a new partisan home cannot be determined from our survey. However, the erosion of support among this small segment of women may be indicative of the challenge that faces future Republican candidates if cultural issues remain on the political agenda.

California, with the largest Congressional delegation and thus greatest number of Electoral College votes in the nation, also showed hints of a partisan alignment molded by these cultural issues. Specifically, a sizeable gender gap in partisanship was the product of male and female pro-choice voters having somewhat different partisan allegiances (Figure 4-4). Pro-life voters — male and female — were more likely to be Republicans than Democrats and there was no gender gap in their party preference. However, among California pro-choicers, women were overwhelmingly likely to be Democrats, but men were fairly evenly divided between the parties in their identification.<sup>18</sup> Several moderate Republicans made vague references to women leaving the GOP "in droves" which could explain why there was more than a 20 point gender gap in Republican party identification among pro-choicers. The most explicit story was this one from a Republican party activist:

*The professional ... [Republican] registrars, party campaign [activists] were going into precincts and finding they were getting negative registration flows. They would knock on a door and there would be a Republican who would say, "Oh, I'm glad you are here. I want to re-register" — as a Democrat or decline to state, or whatever. And finally they pulled the registrars out of the field because they were finding they would go into a precinct and they would come out with fewer Republicans than they had when they started. So obviously "choice" was driving that in relatively large part.*

This gender gap among pro-choice voters was not as strong nationally, as the graph shows. It is reasonable to think that many party leaders and potential candidates in either party would be disturbed by an erosion of the party's voter base. But it was also the case in California that Bush had greater difficulty keeping pro-choice Republicans — especially pro-choice differentiating Republicans. Indeed, in California, the Bush margin of victory over Clinton was noticeably lower among pro-choice GOP differentiators in

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<sup>18</sup> To determine partisanship, two questions were used. Those who identified with a party in response to the first question were assigned to that party. Self-declared independents in the first question who responded in the second question that they "leaned" toward either the Democratic or the Republican parties were assigned to that party.

**Figure 4-3:**  
**1992 Electoral Advantage for Major Parties'**  
**Presidential Candidates -- 1988 Bush Voters Only**  
**by Gender**

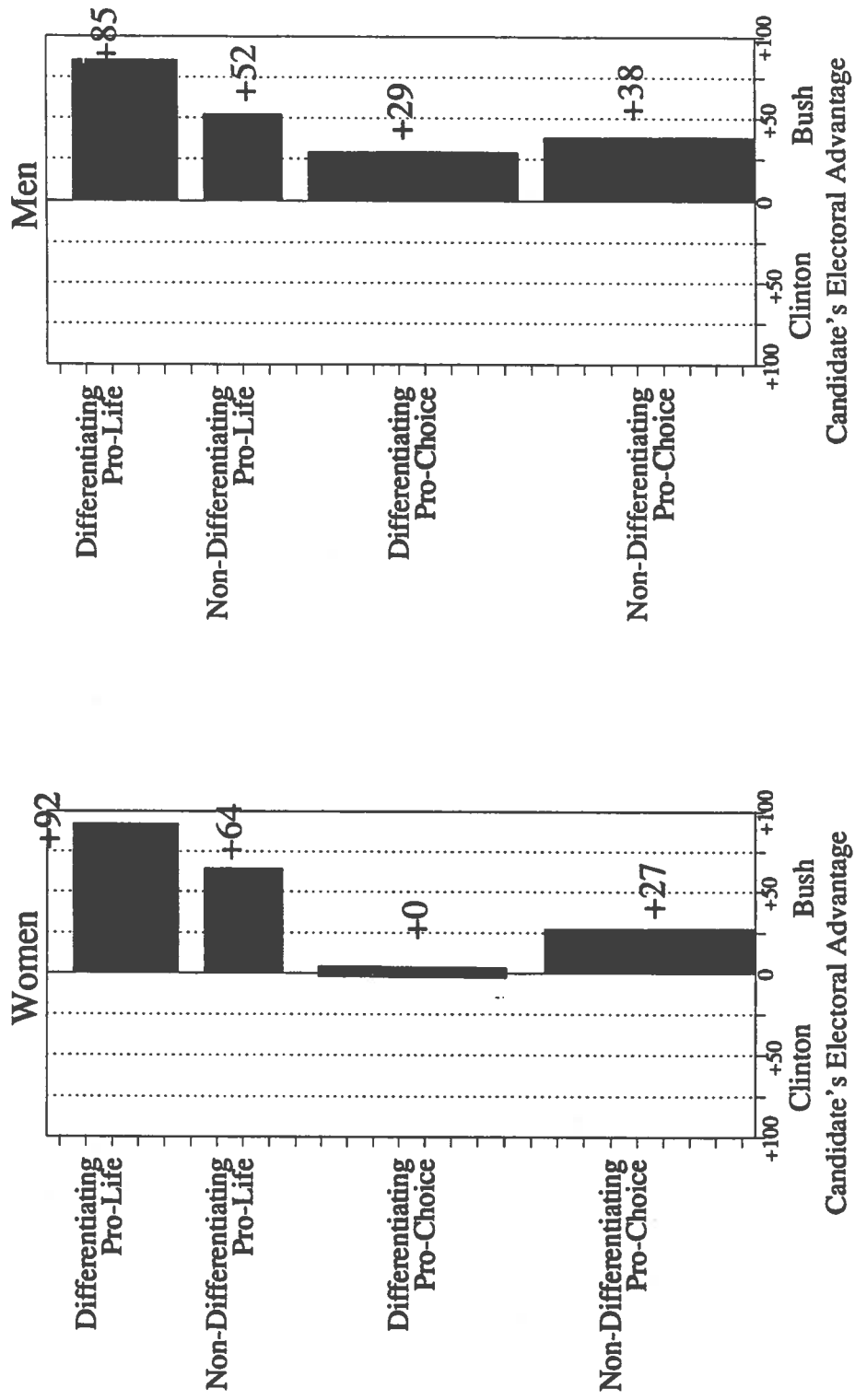




Figure 4-4:  
Party Identification of Women and Men  
Given Attitudes Toward Additional Restrictions  
on Abortion

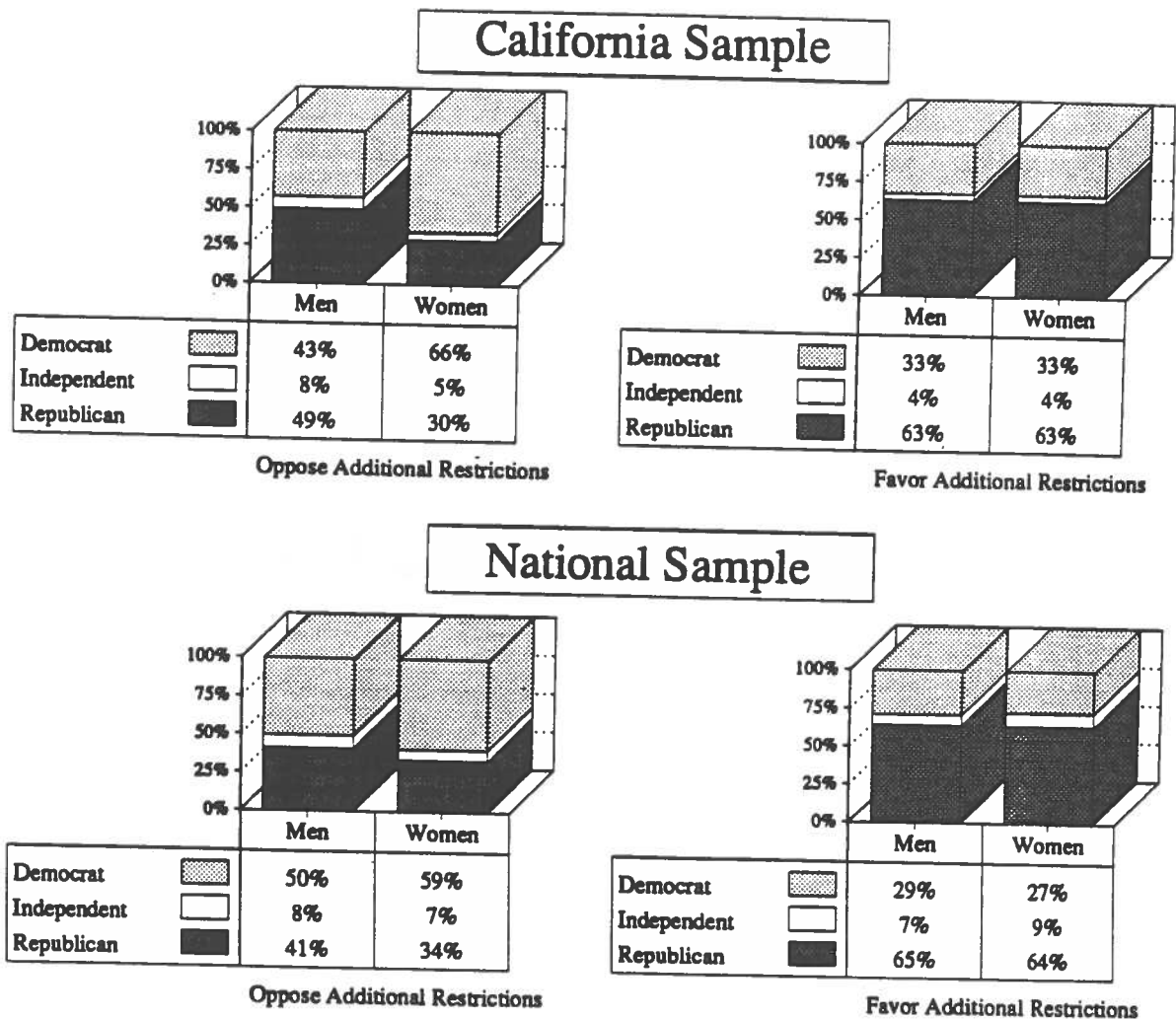
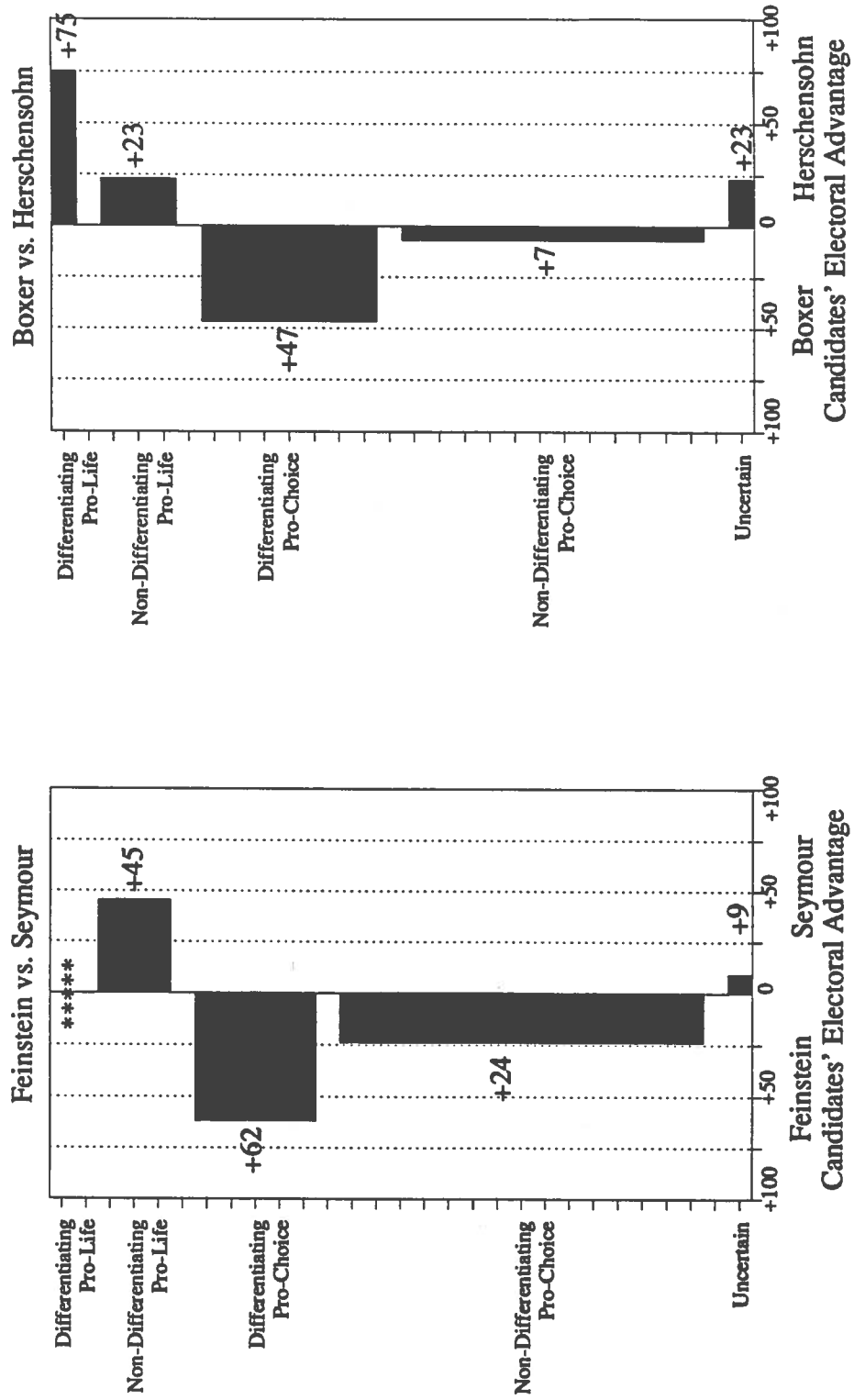


Figure 4-5:  
Electoral Advantage for California U.S. Senate  
Candidates Among Voter Groups



\*\*\*\*\* Too few cases for analysis

California than among pro-choice GOP voters who were non-differentiators. Bush's margin of victory over Clinton was eroded largely because many would-be Bush Republicans who were pro-choice differentiators went for Perot almost as often as they went for Bush. Only time will tell whether California could be leading the nation in a new trend — pro-choicers shifting away from calling themselves Republican and refusing to vote for pro-life Republicans — or whether these patterns are simply aberrations.

Although pro-choice activists, and particularly pro-choice Republicans, see the GOP as setting itself up for a general election defeat if pro-life Republicans dominate the process, there is an important question as to whether pro-choice Republicans can win. Pro-life Republicans pointed out repeatedly that pro-life U.S. Senate candidate Bruce Herschensohn came much closer to defeating his Democratic opponent than did pro-choice (with reservations) John Seymour. However, the real difference in the California voters' support for Seymour and Herschensohn was among pro-choice voters — pro-choice voters (differentiators and non-differentiators alike) actually gave pro-life Herschensohn a larger margin of victory than they gave pro-choice Seymour (Figure 4-5). This suggests that one Republican perspective was closer to the mark — at least when a Republican and a Democratic pro-choice candidate face one another:

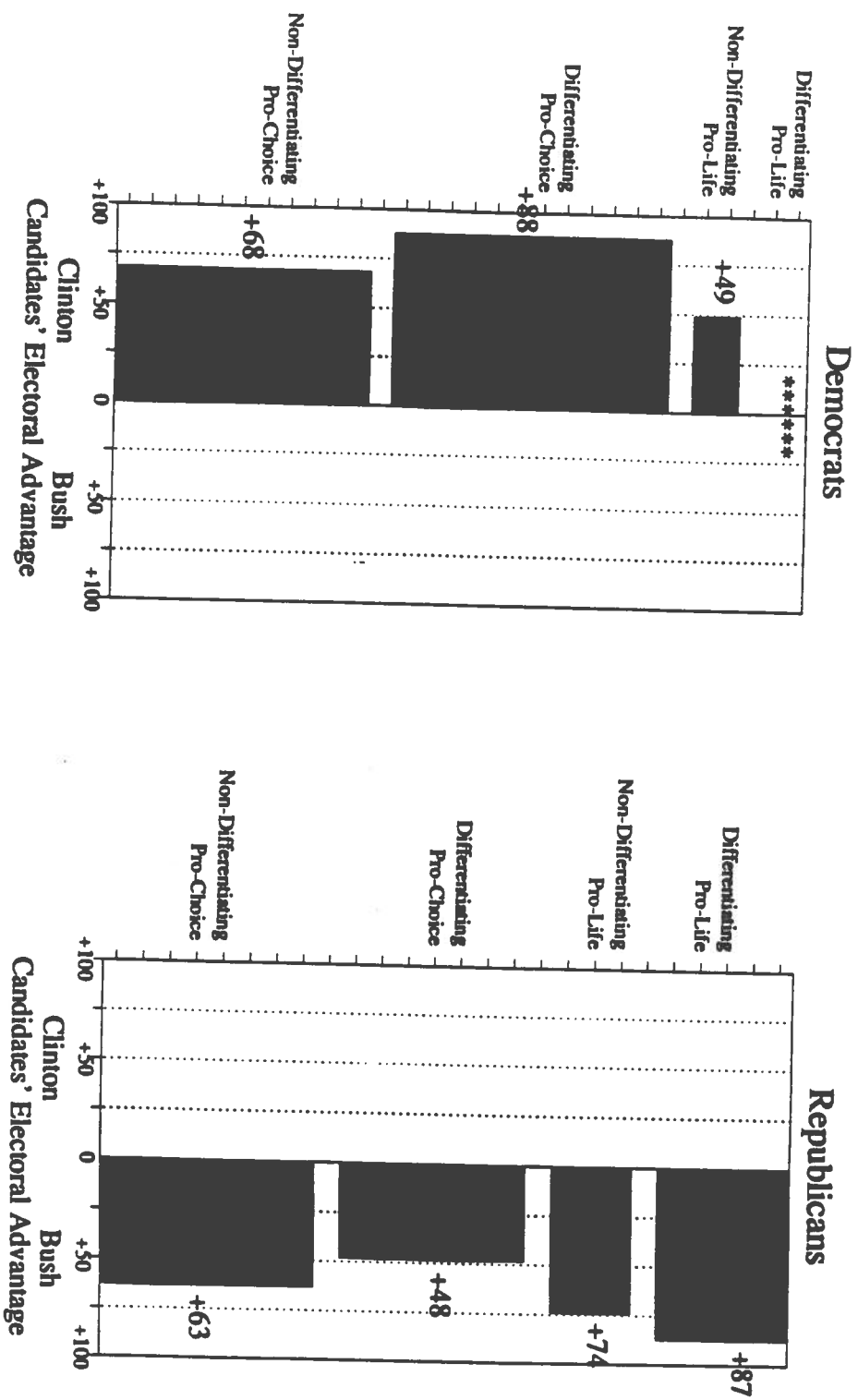
*Although the pro-lifers may still be concerned [about abortion], ... they'll always be Republican.*

Seymour's disadvantage was probably also that he was running against the well known and moderate Dianne Feinstein rather than against the less well known and more liberal Barbara Boxer.

Although some had predicted that President Bush (along with other pro-life Republicans) would benefit from defections by pro-life Democrats, there was no strong evidence of this in our sample. Clinton had his weakest support among pro-life Democrats, but there was no evidence that this was attributable to his pro-choice stand (Figure 4-6). For one thing, those who said they favored additional restrictions on abortion were a much smaller proportion of the Democratic party than of the Republican party (14% vs. 34%). Furthermore, Democratic pro-lifers were less likely than pro-life Republicans to be differentiators, that is, to actually know where the candidates stood on the issue (30% vs. 65%) and to think the abortion issue was an important issue in the presidential race (10% vs. 31%). While this could be interpreted as indicating that pro-life Democrats are unconcerned about this issue, it may also mean that the pro-life Democrats who cared about the issue have now become Republicans. One pro-life activist suggested:

*The other thing that is happening is that most of the Reagan Democrats ... who voted for Reagan and Bush in the last three cycles are no longer Reagan Democrats. They're Reagan Republicans. And so you saw less movement among those conservative Democrats because there are in fact few of those kinds of Democrats.*

**Figure 4-6:**  
**Electoral Advantage for Major Parties' Presidential**  
**Candidates Among Voter Groups by Party**



\*\*\*\* Too few cases for analysis



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## FINDING 5

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The Religious Right's church-based communication network facilitated the mobilization of pro-life campaign volunteers and voters. Pro-life voters who attended religious services regularly were by far the most likely to cite the abortion issue as important in the presidential race. However, the 1992 campaigns suggest that the political effectiveness of the Religious Right in the future depends in part on what they do and in part on the effectiveness of their political opponents in framing the debate and mobilizing cultural moderates and liberals.

Pro-life leaders and their culturally conservative allies interviewed saw the Religious Right as being unfairly singled out by the media and others for doing precisely what other segments of society have done — organizing to ensure that their voices are heard in the political system. One leader of an association considered part of the Religious Right described his group's primary objective as follows:

*To provide Christians with the same voice in government that African-Americans have through the NAACP, union workers have through the AFL-CIO, and business has through the Chamber of Commerce. It is designed to mobilize ... that constituency [Christians] so they are effective citizens.*

Not all of those whose groups or candidates have been connected with the Religious Right acknowledge its existence or see themselves or their cause as a part of this movement. One Herschensohn campaign insider, whose candidate was seen as supported and aided by the Religious Right, was asked about the strength of the Religious Right in the Republican party and replied:

*I don't know any members of the Religious Right. I know Republicans. Jerry Falwell — I've never seen him out here, so I couldn't tell you.*

Others such as these pro-life activists had similar impatience with being linked with the Religious Right:

*The media was very successful in painting anyone who took a pro-life position as a radical, right-wing crazy — probably religious.*

*It [Religious Right] is an inaccurate description of the types of people that are involved in the pro-life movement. There are people of all faiths and of no faith that are involved and working hard.*

Some pro-life activists thought that churches were not a particularly efficient network through which to reach pro-life voters:

*Not all churches are pro-life. You have the Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights.... So they [pro-choice activists] may .... envy that some people in individual churches work hard for the pro-life movement, but at the same time they [pro-choice activists] have their organizations, and in some cases they have their churches and they have their places where pro-abortion people tend to be.*

*The church structures themselves are terrible. There is a real misconception that somehow the pulpits are out there endorsing candidates and on Sunday morning you come in and find out who to vote for. That is not happening, but these people [pro-choice activists]*

*are not in church, so they do not realize what is really happening. There are a number of ways [to mobilize church members] that do not involve the church leadership, because the church leadership is ... afraid to help. They don't want to upset their tax-exempt status. (In fact, they don't even know what their legal rights are so, therefore, they stay away from doing what they are even legally allowed to do.) So there are ways to do that [reach conservative Christians], through home fellowship groups that many of these evangelical groups have. There are lots of ways to meet those voters. The liberal Republicans are correct — that [church membership] is an enviable constituency.*

While the pro-life and allied organizations, activists, and candidate staffers may have disagreed over who the Religious Right was and whether their own organizations were a part of that movement, it was clear that churches were an important, although not necessarily exclusive, mechanism through which to target the public education efforts and political strategies of these various groups.

Given the different legal constraints under which the pro-life groups worked, organizations used diverse strategies to target conservative Christians. Some efforts centered around churches and their members either directly or indirectly. One activist involved in a Religious Right organization explained:

*We printed and distributed a total of about 50 million voter guides in the primary and general elections.... We have a list of about 40 to 50 thousand churches that receive voter education literature from us on an ongoing basis. And then we also distributed it through our chapters.*

A California pro-life activist highlighted his group's grassroots activity for the following reason:

*[T]here are some pro-life individuals that are able to give a lot of money, ... we always seem to be outgunned by the so-called women's groups and other pro-abortion organizations.*

He added:

*[Communication through churches on Sunday] goes on, but ... you'll find that even in those churches that have a record as being pro-life, not everyone in that congregation will share that view. At the same time you wouldn't be hitting all the people that you want to be able to get to, so you'd still have to do more work than just waiting for that Sunday morning to come along and pass out [information] at the pro-life churches.*

Another pro-life activist addressed the strategy of targeting the church networks:

*[They are] centers for where people gather.... We use every group of people we can find! Any group that supports [our] values — and there are different kinds of conservative religious groups, prayer groups, church groups, whatever — any place where we can find people that hold those fundamental values.... And of course, there are large numbers of churches that are very hostile to the pro-life approach. So, it isn't just churches that we reach.*



Although pro-choice activists often saw the goals of the Religious Right quite differently than pro-lifers and other cultural conservatives did, many pro-choicers envied the advantage that their opponents had in the existing infrastructure of conservative fundamentalist and evangelical churches; one campaign activist referred to them as "an invisible army." Another activist commented:

*They did videos in the churches, they did massive organizational efforts ... and it was the church [activity], it was mailings, it was phone banks.*

At least some pro-choicers wished they had the mainline Protestant denominations behind their cause to the same extent that they felt cultural conservative groups had the support of fundamentalist and evangelical churches:

*The mainline Protestant churches, 95% of whom are pro-choice, believe in the separation of church and state, so they don't get involved.... If you look at ... both the National Council of Churches and the World Council of Churches, they get very involved in foreign policy issues. But they do not get involved in domestic issues, which is a shame. That marriage [between pro-choice supporters and mainline denominations] would be a positive one. They have a huge network.... Where [else] could we meet, galvanize, distribute literature, hand out edicts, collect nickels and dimes the way the other side does?*

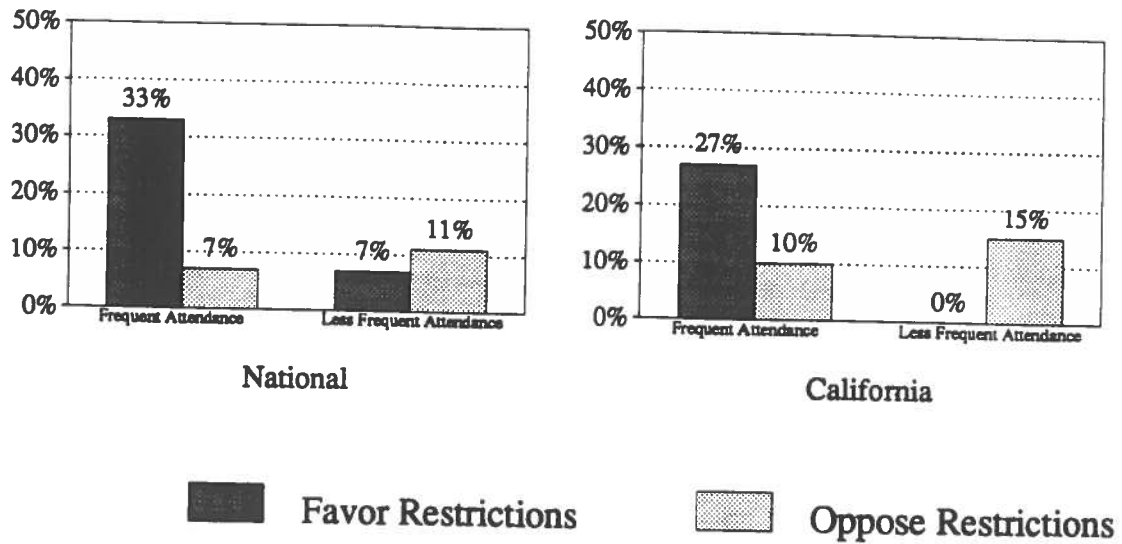
Pro-life voters who frequently attended religious services (about 1 out of 6 voters in the national sample) were markedly more likely to cite the abortion issue as an important issue in the presidential race than was true of any other group of voters (Figure 5-1a). Pro-lifers who did not attend religious services frequently and pro-choicers regardless of attendance were by far less likely to think of this issue as important in the 1992 presidential election. The data do not reveal why this trend occurs. It may be due to targeted communication efforts or it may be that these pro-life frequent attenders are just more determined to act on the issue, but the pattern is striking in this high profile national race. This same pattern was repeated among California voters in the presidential race.

However, this higher level of commitment to the issue among pro-life frequent attenders was not evident in every race. In California's Boxer-Herschensohn U.S. Senate race, pro-life frequent religious service attenders were not much more inclined than other voters — less frequent attenders or pro-choice voters — to mention the issue as important (Figure 5-1b). The reason for the difference in the voters' responses between these races can only be a matter of speculation particularly since the Herschensohn race was such a high priority for cultural conservatives. It may be that concern about this most visible of all cultural issues — abortion — could be influenced by the visibility of the race and the relative attention that activists devote to the various races in their efforts to target their sympathetic voters.

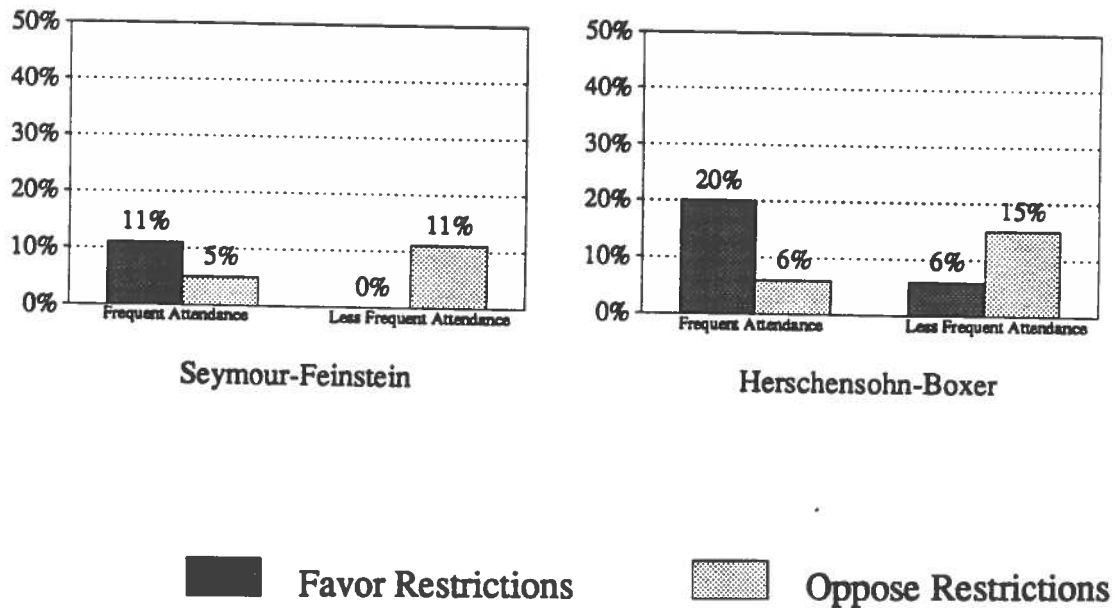
The 1992 campaign season made it clear that the cultural agenda which has been dominated by the abortion issue in recent years will be transformed. One Republican pro-life activist reminded the interviewer:

*Remember, it's not just pro-life anymore, it's pro-family organizations. A lot of conservative groups would come on the bandwagon.*

**Figure 5-1a:**  
**Percentage Citing Abortion as Important in Presidential**  
**Race by Religious Attendance and Attitudes Toward**  
**Additional Restrictions**



**Figure 5-1b:**  
**Percentage Citing Abortion as Important in California**  
**Senate Races by Religious Service Attendance and**  
**Attitudes Toward Additional Restrictions**



The expectation is that the Religious Right will play an important role not only in mobilizing its own but also will play a key role in framing the terms of the new political debate. We will discuss this process of redefining the agenda in the last part of the report.

A second aspect of the struggle to frame the issues of this newly transformed cultural agenda may have less to do with the specifics of agenda items and more to do with the meaning and implications of the involvement of the Religious Right in politics. As noted earlier, leaders of several groups associated with the Religious Right disliked the idea of being labelled as a part of that movement. One pro-choice activist saw reluctance as a manifestation of the political battles on the horizon:

*What is interesting is these people now are fighting tooth and nail not to be called the Religious Right anymore. They want to be called social conservatives because they need to hang on to the imprimatur of respectability.*

Even one pro-life activist expressed concern about the linking of the pro-life and cultural conservative perspectives more generally with religion:

*The Religious Right has got to realize that politics is one thing, church is another. We welcome them, we want them. I disagree with very little of what they say. But this is not a revival meeting; it's a political party. We can't have a certain brand of religion any more than the left ... [could be run] by the union, the gay community, by radical feminists.*

This dimension of framing the debate occurred in several California legislative contests where candidates highlighted their opponents' ties to the Religious Right and made these ties an issue in the general election. Rather than shaping messages purely in terms of the abortion issue, the pro-choice candidate in the state legislative race we focused on cast her net widely to include a variety of different issues under a broader label — religious intolerance. A Bowen campaign activist thought:

*[I]t was important to use abortion as the most important example of [Brad Parton's] right-wing fundamentalist agenda. And we had to use that as an issue because voters do fear hidden agendas.*

This concept of a hidden agenda is central to the concept of the "stealth candidate" — a label that evolved from successes of cultural conservative candidates in some very low profile races in California in 1990. Indeed, Brad Parton was accused of being a stealth candidate because of his alleged ties to the Religious Right, his mayoral record, and what some alleged as his reluctance to talk about the abortion issue clearly. A California pro-choice activist explained the concept of the "stealth candidate" this way:

*The Religious Right in 1990 ran 116 candidates for some of the smaller things like school board, community college board of trustees, water districts, harbor districts.... Most [two-thirds] won. Those candidates had a lot of things in common. One, they were all endorsed by the California Pro-Life PAC and they sent out a slate mailing which is how we first learned about it. Two, they never mentioned their anti-choice leanings at any candidate forum, if they even attended a candidate forum, which was unusual.... They relied solely on one very effective thing and that was organizing through the fundamentalist churches in San Diego.*

The thoughts of pro-life and culturally conservative activists varied widely in our interviews about this concept of a stealth candidate:

*I heard one of the Christian Coalition people saying, "We run a campaign like a stealth operation. We sneak up on the voters." Well, that is horrendous.*

*We call it "Clintonizing" [what others call the stealth candidate].... "Clintonizing" is like portraying a very liberal man as a moderate. That's what the conservatives are going to have to do. They are going to have to portray themselves as not as right[-wing] as they are. When you said "stealth" I didn't understand.... It's "Clintonizing."*

*We don't encourage pro-life candidates to make it [abortion] a top issue, because once they do, or if they are identified as a strong pro-life candidate, they have to worry about editorials.... So whether or not you want to call them "stealth," there is no reason for them to open themselves up to that kind of abuse.*

One pro-life activist defended those accused of such tactics in this way:

*Stealth candidates — what does that mean? That they don't talk about abortion at every single forum. I've never seen a candidate try to hide their views on this issue. In fact, I know there was one candidate who was criticized for talking to the Chamber of Commerce about taxes and then talking to another group of pro-lifers about being opposed to abortion.... You should talk to your audience.*

Campaign resources as well as strategic decisions about the framing of an issue determine the ability of candidates to educate voters about where they and their opponents stand. This is especially true if one candidate seeks to obfuscate his/her stand on a particular issue. One Democratic activist saw it this way:

*The pro-choice groups become a very important instrument for weeding those people [stealth candidates] out. If the candidate spends their time and money trying to push them out of the closet on the issue, then they get nailed as "single issue" or they waste a lot of valuable resources on a single issue as opposed to being able to talk about the economy and other issues.... The really anti-choice ones [candidates] don't want to talk about the choice issue. They want to get in [office] first.*

The success of candidates, whether they are "stealth" or otherwise, to downplay an issue depends on whether their opponents — candidates and/or activists — have the desire and the resources to bring these issues to light and place them on the campaign agenda.

While there was some dispute about whether or not the socially conservative candidates were running away from their connections or downplaying them, successful efforts to use candidates' connections with the Religious Right against them required money for campaign materials and publicity and careful planning to ensure that the right message was being sent. Again, an example from the Bowen-Parton race illustrates how Bowen used the abortion issue:

*[The abortion issue was] the cornerstone to expose Parton's right wing agenda.... Debra [Bowen] knew that in [each of the three] public appearances they made together that she had to bring it up. And once we saw how he responded, she needed to do it more and more, because his responses never had any credibility ... he really waffled.... He used words like "choice", "a woman's choice". And then he said, "But I'm pro-life." ... [N]ot only is this guy anti-choice;... this guy is an anti-abortion fanatic. We could not have painted a picture of him being a right-wing fundamentalist or exposed the fact that he [was] a right-wing fundamentalist with a right-wing agenda if he was pro-choice.*

Whether socially conservative candidates eventually come to view support from the Religious Right as a political positive or negative will depend in part on the relative effectiveness of cultural conservatives and cultural moderates/liberals. Success for either side relies on each side's ability to frame this newer, broader agenda and to define the groups behind the agenda so that their message resonates with the American public and mobilizes their respective sympathizers to political action. Many lament the prominence of the cultural/moral political issues on the political agenda. Nevertheless, so long as elected officeholders have the authority to pass laws that affect abortion access and other cultural issues, electoral politics will affect public policy passed on these issues. In many cases, the extent to which campaign messages provide voters with the information needed to make informed choices about whether or not to cast issue votes on abortion or other cultural issues will be determined by the resources — volunteers and financial — dedicated to this effort. The existing infrastructure of the Religious Right and their pro-life allies provide cultural conservatives with a clear advantage in reaching voters through targeted efforts. As the cultural agenda and the abortion debate change, whether or not pro-choice activists can match or exceed their opponents' effectiveness will have a profound impact on public policy and electoral politics in the future.

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## FINDING 6

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In making the case that the GOP should abandon its pro-life plank, pro-choice Republicans can point both to erosion of support for Bush among pro-choice women who had backed him in 1988 and to the gender gap in party identification in California which suggests that some pro-choice women could be drifting away from the Republican party. Nevertheless, pro-choice Republican activists attempting to "take back" their party will face two serious obstacles: 1) Pro-choice Republican voters are less likely than their pro-life counterparts to see the abortion issue as an important political issue in the elections; and 2) pro-life Republicans have more effective organizational networks through which to mobilize their supporters.

Most pro-choice and pro-life Republicans interviewed felt their own side reflected the true Republican position. The rallying cry of pro-choice Republicans fighting the pro-life plank at the Houston convention was, "Seventy percent of our party [is pro-choice and they] can't be wrong." One pro-choice Republican woman saw a pro-choice position as a natural Republican stand, "This is a Republican issue; individual liberty is the essence of the Republican party."

Pro-life Republicans, however, pointed to a number of factors as evidence that the pro-life position was the right position for the Republican party. One was the Republican victories in the previous three presidential elections in which Reagan and Bush won on platforms with pro-life planks. The other common argument was that a pro-life stand is simply a reflection of the views of the party itself:

*The reason why the party is pro-life is because the grassroots of the party are pro-life.... The precinct captains are pro-life. Most of the elected officials are pro-life.... This is a pro-life party. (pro-life activist)*

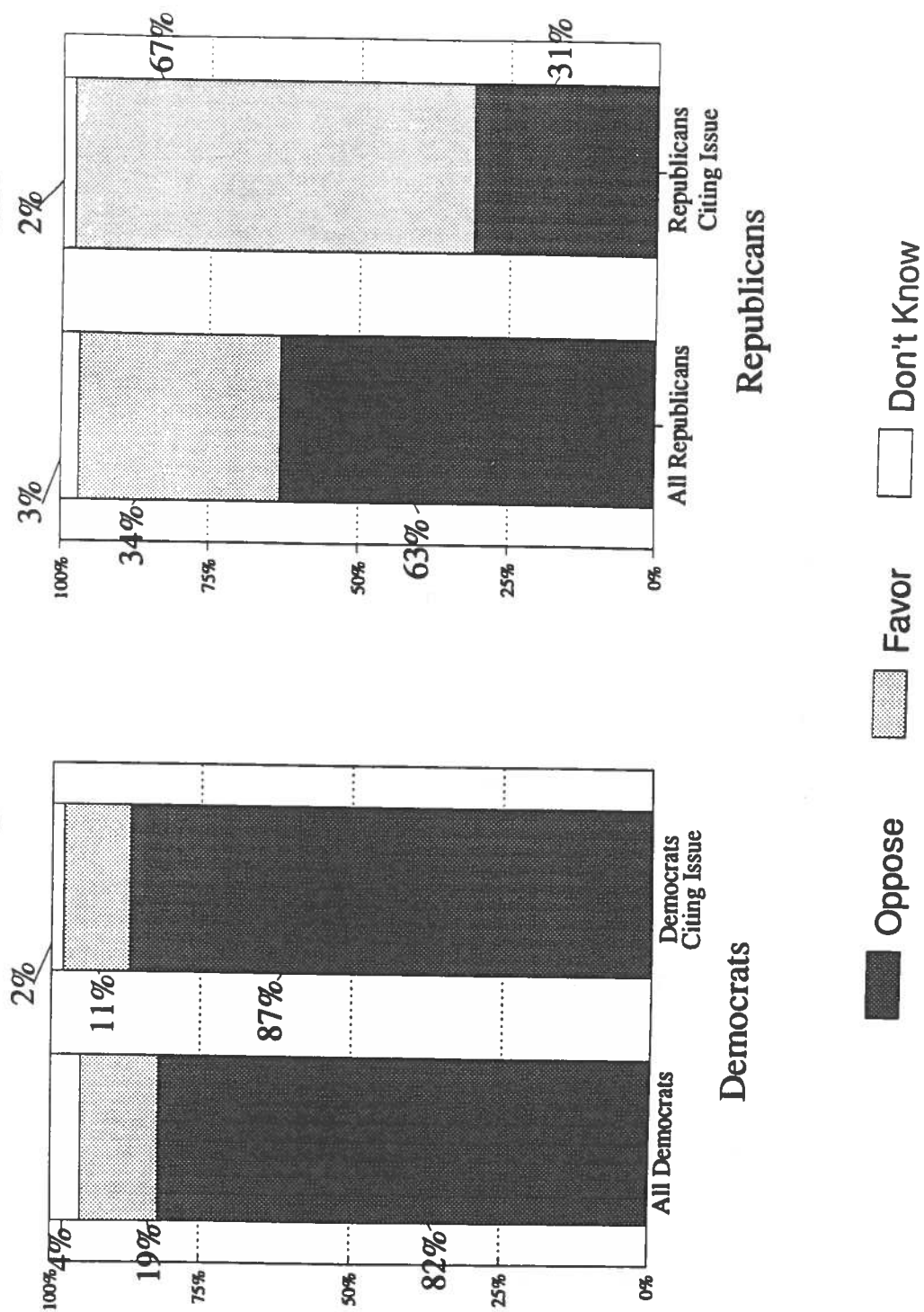
Others see the victory in the platform committee at the 1992 convention and the inability of pro-choice Republicans to muster enough votes for a floor fight at the convention as evidence that there is pro-life consensus on the issue:

*[Abortion] was not an issue.... All they [pro-choice Republicans] had to do was get 6 out of 50 states [to support the measure] ... to bring the abortion issue to the floor. They couldn't get over three or four. So what does that tell you? It was not an issue.... There were pro-life buttons everywhere. And the way the news media reported it, everybody in the Democratic party was pro-abortion, and half of the Republican party is pro-abortion. Not true. Just not true. (pro-life activist)*

Consideration of both the survey data and the interviews with campaign and issue activists suggest that there are elements of truth in the points made by each side. These data also suggest that there are two reasons that pro-choice Republicans will face obstacles in "taking back" their party and why pro-life Republicans have an advantage in the control of the GOP.

First, even though a majority of Republican voters said they opposed additional government restrictions on abortion, the pro-life voters seemed more concerned politically about the issue. When asked if they favored or opposed additional government restrictions on abortion, Republican voters were twice as likely to give a *pro-choice* rather than a *pro-life* response (Figure 6-1). However, the tables turn if we look *only* at Republican voters who said the abortion issue was important to them in the presidential race;

**Figure 6-1:**  
**Attitudes Toward Additional Restrictions by Party:**  
**All vs. Those Citing Abortion Issue in Presidential Race**





those GOP identifiers who mentioned the abortion issue as important were twice as likely to give a *pro-life* response to the question about restrictions. This does not happen among Democratic voters.

Some pro-choice Republicans see the discrepancy between general voter opinion and the political success of the pro-life forces within the GOP as a product of "moderates being too damn moderate." Others argue that it stems from the fact that pro-choice Republican moderates are Republicans because they are concerned about economic matters, not cultural/moral issues such as abortion. One pro-choice Republican recounted this story as evidence:

*There are still a lot of people in the Republican party (I don't mean operatives, because they know what's happening — I'm talking your average Republican voter out there, especially your businessman — and I emphasize man — type) who still don't get it. It was a meeting of very well-to-do Republican contributors. There weren't any people there from the Religious Right.... Someone brought the thing up [the Religious Right's agenda] and one of the men said, "Let's get down to the real issues. When are we going to get real estate moving again here?" They still don't get it. They think this is just a gnat at their picnic that they can just brush away.*

Another obstacle may be that Republicans are hesitant to support a Democrat, as this pro-choice activist's story suggests:

*[The Republican convention] had a very big impact in making activists out of pro-choice Republican women.... We really have never had a meeting just of Republicans in [our bi-partisan] organization [prior to this year]. It [the meeting of pro-choice Republican women] was such an interesting meeting; it was just like a support group. A lot of them were very uncomfortable about voting for a Democrat. They needed to talk it through with people and just sort it out for themselves, what it would mean and what would their families think. Some of their families were supporting them and others weren't. You know, these are grown women, but it was quite difficult.... They were very determined though; that convention really activated these women.*

One of the greatest challenges pro-choice Republicans face is appealing to voters who oppose restrictions in the abstract, but who are highly likely to feel ambivalence about abortion. More pro-choice Republicans than pro-life Republicans in the national sample expressed ambivalence about the abortion issue. Thirty-eight percent of Republicans who favored additional restrictions on abortion gave consistently pro-life responses (scoring 0) on the pro-life/pro-choice index. Pro-choice Republicans, however, were much more ambivalent than pro-lifers. Only 9% of Republicans who said they opposed additional government gave consistently pro-choice responses (scoring 7) on the pro-life/pro-choice index. Republican pro-choice activists were acutely aware of the ambivalence of the public and of many of their GOP sympathizers — voters and candidates alike:

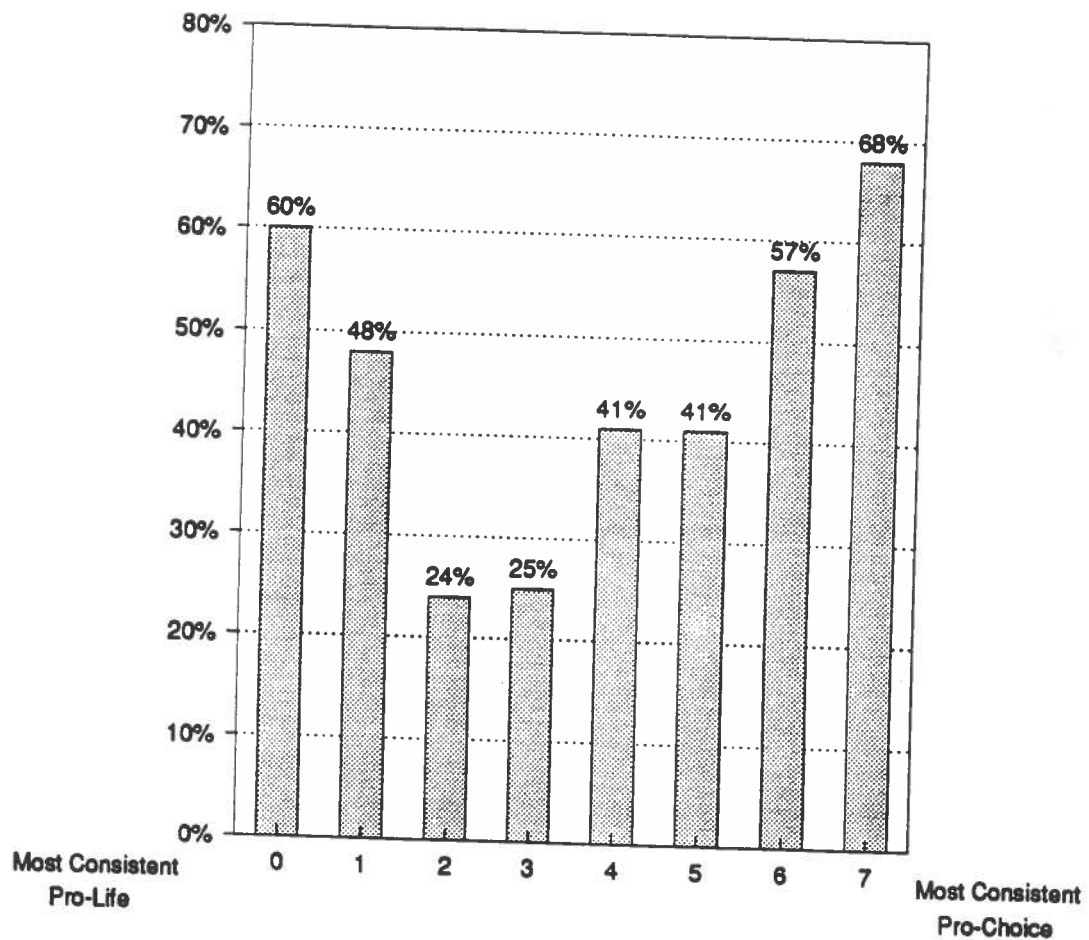
*The American people...fall somewhere in the middle.... And we endorse people who are not what some of the choice groups, the bi-partisan choice groups, would call 100% pure. We endorse people who have some question about funding. Because if a Republican is a fiscal conservative, he or she may also feel that fiscal conservatism should apply to government being out of funding abortion as well.... And there are many Republicans,*

*several of whom we endorsed, who were elected, who are still struggling with notification.... And I think the American people struggle with that.*

Ambivalence, however, creates a challenge that goes beyond framing the issue. Ambivalence — regardless of party — reduces both the likelihood that voters will see the abortion issue as important and the probability that they will acquire information about where candidates stand on the issue (Figure 6-2). This almost certainly makes the average pro-choice Republican voter less likely to seek out information about where the candidates stand on the abortion issue or to act on that information once it is acquired.

Figure 6-2:

Percent of Voters Who Are Differentiators  
Given Pro-Life/Pro-Choice Index Score



This ambivalence could explain, in part, why only 8% of pro-choice Republicans mentioned the abortion issue as important in the presidential race compared to about 31% of pro-life Republicans. Culturally conservative Republicans have an advantage because church-based networks of conservative Christians play a pivotal role in political mobilization within the Republican party. Socially moderate Republicans have no comparably strong counterpart; groups such as the Republican Mainstream Committee, the National Republican Coalition for Choice, WISH List, and Republicans for Choice are in the early stages of attempting to develop organizational structures to help culturally moderate Republicans win elections. Only time will tell whether these organizations will neutralize the advantage that cultural conservatives have:

*In the primaries, they [culturally conservative pro-life Republicans] can turn out the church vote without publicly taking on a high-visibility campaign with a focus on issues. (pro-choice Republican)*

There was evidence that some pro-choice Republicans could be at a disadvantage because they lack a structure of support. For example, there was a strong feeling among Republicans that John Seymour was disadvantaged by not being able to compensate organizationally for his rejection by bi-partisan pro-choice groups, pro-life groups, and pro-life GOP activists. The pro-life activists who were an important part of the Herschensohn campaign team did not support Seymour, as one Republican activist explained:

*There were Republican activists in the Christian Right group who basically refused to work for John Seymour because of his pro-choice position and even worse because he had changed his position. There is example after example.... That happened in a lot of places in the state.*

In the presidential race, it has been reported that culturally conservative Republicans in some states pressured pro-choicers to either resign from the delegation or to remain silent. However, there was no indication about how widespread this screening process was. One pro-choice activist noted:

*There were those states that let the pro-choice people stay, but they made it clear that they needed to be quiet while they were in Houston.... I do know two or three people myself who reported to me they were kicked off slates long before the convention.... There were other instances of people who actually were Bush delegates, who filed as Bush delegates, who were told that they wouldn't even be on the slate because, "You are pro-choice and we don't want any trouble and we know you're outspoken."*

Another activist, a Republican from California, discussed the pressure that was placed on pro-choice delegates to keep quiet on the issue:

*Our governor asked us, the pro-choice people, not to create or add to the floor fight.... The opinion we got from this (and this was strictly our interpretation of the governor's speech) was, "Bush has got a tough enough time as it is without a floor fight," and especially one on national television. So we have to present a unified front with respect for nominating the President. Put the choice issue on the back burner.*

The cultural conservatives' organizational advantage was the product of a lot of hard work and dedication to their cause. One pro-choice California Republican explained:

*They have (because they are ... willing to put in time and they're willing to go to the conventions and they're willing to spend their time) taken over those [Republican party] positions.*

Other Republican activists concurred:

*Moderate mainstream Republicans are not generally activists. They're the old silent majority. The right-wing religious people are very active. It is extremely difficult to challenge them.*

*They [the cultural conservatives] have that missionary zeal behind them. The moderates don't have that. They [the moderates] have to be able to find a volunteer corps they can stimulate.*

One pro-choice Republican was optimistic that this would change:

*[W]hile party moderates are by definition loyal or they wouldn't be Republicans any longer, on the issues like choice (and increasingly on some other issues), I think they've come to understand that while they may have moderate policy instincts, they have to be somewhat militant in their advocacy of those instincts. And it's a tough challenge for the people with centrist points of view, because on the one hand they reflect establishment values.... But on the other hand, they are no longer the ruling establishment of the Republican party, and to regain influence they have to practice anti-establishment politics.*

Some of the obstacles that pro-choice Republicans face could theoretically be overcome through assistance of the bi-partisan pro-choice groups. However, pro-choice Republicans tended to see these groups as somewhat biased in favor of the Democrats. One pro-choice Republican activist recounted that she had heard the following:

*[M]ale Republican pro-choice candidates say that [Republicans for Choice] is the first pro-choice PAC that has ever done a damn thing for them, because the national organizations are very oriented toward pro-choice Democrats and women, but not pro-choice Republican men.*

Another pro-choice Republican commented:

*The problems that are generated by major pro-choice organizations by virtue of their partisanship, I think, are one of several reasons there have to be strong pro-choice Republican organizations.*

Yet a California pro-choice activist from a bi-partisan group asserted:

*We've shown a real commitment to pro-choice Republican candidates. And, we get criticized for decisions like not supporting Pete Wilson or John Seymour, but we've also gotten a lot of support among rank-and-file Republicans, not the insiders, the rank-and-file people who don't have as partisan allegiance and institutional constraints.... But we were involved in several Republican primaries across the state, mostly Assembly primaries, where we had pro-choice Republicans against anti-choice Republicans.*

The cumulative effect of the political environment on voters has been to paint in the American electorate's mind a picture of the Republican party's candidates as generally favoring abortion restrictions and their Democratic opponents as generally opposing such measures (Figure 6-3). This could explain, as was noted earlier, why more people thought the little-known appointed Senator John Seymour took a pro-life rather than a pro-choice stand on abortion with 17% of California voters saying he opposed restrictions and 25% saying Seymour favored, usually major, restrictions on abortion (see Figure 2-9).

Interestingly, pro-choice Republican voters (and pro-life Democratic voters) are the most likely to say they don't know where their party's candidates stand on abortion restrictions. This could either be good news or bad news for Republicans (and Democrats) who want to change their party. It might be easier to keep these people within the party fold in order to gradually change the party's stand. Conversely, these voters' unwillingness to tag their party with a position contrary to their own could mean that they ignore cultural issues such as abortion and that they will be quite difficult to mobilize around such issues.

The Republican party faces a clear dilemma as it seeks to redefine itself in preparation for taking back the White House in 1996:

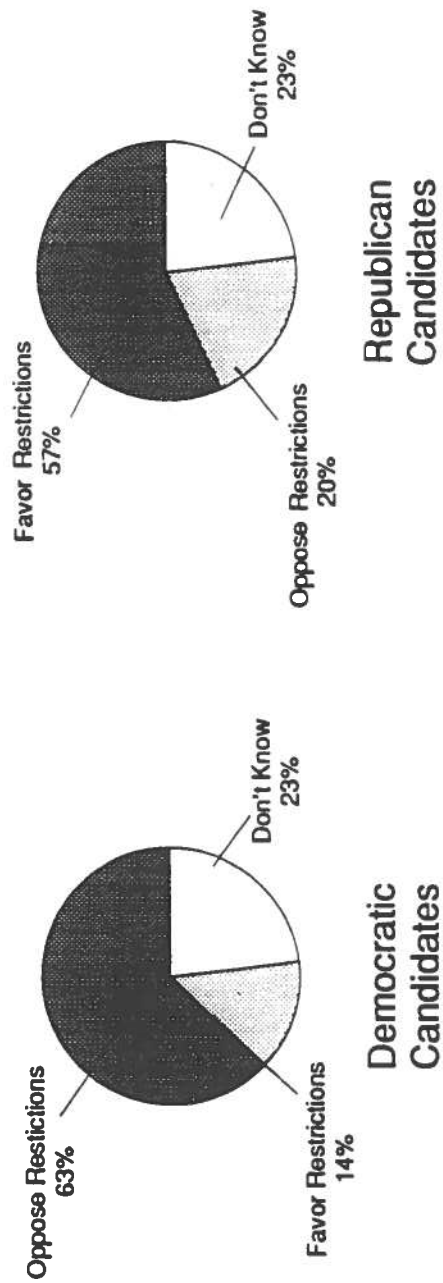
*As we look at a new leadership in the Republican party in the next four years, it is a complex problem in that the Christian Right is too large in numbers to ignore, but given their views and attitudes, many other Republicans or Independents don't want to share a party or candidates with them.... It's a little bit like the old adage by men about women: "You can't live with 'em, you can't live without 'em," in that the Republican party needs the support of anyone who wishes to call themselves a Republican.*

But as long as abortion policy and the broader array of cultural issues remain in the political arena, the Republicans will likely face the highly problematic situation that whoever gets elected will determine United States laws and public policy on this broad range of issues. For all the talk of the "Big Tent," those who care about issues such as abortion will almost certainly find it difficult to work with their opponents on this issue. There is a fundamental moral and ideological disagreement that makes compromise on this issue unlikely to appease either side, as the comments of this pro-life Republican activist illustrate:

*I want to rid the Republican party of the legislators that don't vote our way, but certainly not the people that might not agree with us.... I think we do have to be a big tent.*

Keeping the pro-life plank in the Republican platform is important for the credibility of the pro-life position. Both pro-choice and pro-life activists have pointed this out:

**Figure 6-3:**  
**Perceptions of Democratic and Republican Candidates'**  
**Stands in General Toward Additional**  
**Restrictions on Abortion**



*Having the pro-life perspective in the platform helps protect pro-lifers from being attacked as outside the mainstream of the Republican party. (pro-life activist)*

*I think the reason the Republican party is so important in this whole equation is that ... if they started a party tomorrow, the Christian Coalition party or whatever name they wanted to put on it, they cannot sell this message. (pro-choice activist)*

Although pro-choice Republicans may face obstacles in taking back their party, it is also possible that the Republican party may be substantially weakened if they leave. Keeping moderate Republicans within the "big tent" may be a challenge in the future; the concern of many of those who are activists and who happen to be pro-choice is policy. Some believe that the GOP has been fundamentally transformed and that the coalition that marked its success in the 1980s is gone forever:

*The irony in looking back on this is that if Reagan had not accepted this litmus test (and Bush also) as far as appointments to the Supreme Court [and] had the Supreme Court not made the decision it had made, you probably could have still found a way that moderates and the conservatives would have made some sort of alliance, because in retrospect the Supreme Court was saving the Republican party way back by allowing politicians to campaign vigorously against abortion, but nothing ever happened. Now it's happened. It's kind of like the toothpaste is out of the tube and we can never go back. (pro-choice Republican activist)*

There was a strong feeling among some pro-choice activists that the cultural conservatives were directly or indirectly driving contributors away from the Republican party:

*George Bush has traditionally relied (as is efficient to do in a presidential race) on raising the maximum amount of money which is permitted under the law in \$1000 contributions from 20,000 or so people. I think the fact that he pandered to the right probably hurt him with his donor base.*

*I am concerned that the tone of the convention actually hurt the WISH List because it turned people to the Democratic party. One woman from San Francisco who came to the convention and is a member of WISH List decided not to have a party for the WISH List because she was so upset at the homophobia... and the anti-choice rhetoric.*

*In particular women who have been stalwarts in raising money for the party have sat it out. One of our very visible Republican fundraisers from California went on national television and said, "I'm crossing over, and I'm not helping this ticket." A couple who have been extremely active in the Senatorial Trust, who have always earmarked ... this year didn't give any money to the Senatorial Trust nor did they do any party work in their state.... There was very visible fallout for the President.*

And even some who cared nothing about the abortion issue were finding themselves less than comfortable under the "Big Tent," as this story illustrates:

*There is one gentleman who comes from a very, very prominent and old Republican family.... [He] is not an ideologue in any sense of the word. He gives a lot of money — a lot of money — to the state party every year. The only thing he ever asks in return is that every four years he be sent to the national convention as a delegate. (He likes to go to the receptions, and he just sort of likes the excitement.) Well, this year, the extremists who have taken over the [state] party said to him, "You're out of here, mister." He wasn't one of them.*

How widespread these instances are is, of course, difficult to discern from anecdotal evidence just as it is also unclear as to the extent to which progressive Republicans may have blocked cultural conservatives from participation in the party. It is also uncertain just how much of any vacuum left by the disengagement of cultural moderates is being filled by cultural conservatives. However, what may ultimately determine the outcome of the struggle between the two factions is which side is more successful in: 1) mobilizing their supporters in primaries; 2) providing organizational support for their candidates in primaries and general elections; and 3) convincing pragmatic, non-ideological Republicans who care nothing about cultural/reproductive health issues that their side is the winning side.





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## FINDING 7

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The 1992 election season has begun a transformation of American cultural politics. First, the election of pro-choice Bill Clinton means, for the short term, less attention will be devoted to the possibility that abortion will be banned and more attention will be focused on debates over specific, and often popular, restrictions. Second, both pro-choice and pro-life groups and their allies have begun to expand the range of issues on the cultural/reproductive health political agenda. Although the "choice" theme and *Webster*-inspired mobilization have given pro-choice groups a political advantage in recent years, there is no guarantee that this will last. The relative ability of the pro-life and pro-choice sides to frame the debate and to mobilize voters in this new environment will have a profound impact on politics and public policy in 1994, 1996, and beyond.

Without a doubt, the election of Bill Clinton and the defeat of George Bush brought joy to pro-choice activists and dismay to their pro-life opponents. In the short run, the next four years will give pro-choice supporters an opportunity to make striking policy gains:

*The '92 elections were just fabulous for the pro-choice movement, and with the election of Clinton, with the pro-choice success in Arizona and Maryland ballot measures, and with our success picking up seats in both the U.S. House and Senate, I think it gives us a real opportunity to move now and secure a right that has been so tenuous since the Webster decision. (pro-choice activist)*

*The first two days set everybody back because this [presidential election] was a huge loss.... It will have an impact on policy, you know, the Title X regulations, fetal tissue ban. We will probably have funding of abortions.... We have been very successful for twelve years in ... putting forward the pro-life policy agenda. That is going to change. (pro-life activist)*

The 20th anniversary of *Roe* lived up to at least some of the worst fears of pro-lifers and the highest hopes of pro-choicers. On his second full day in office, Clinton lifted the ban on abortion counseling at federally financed family planning clinics, ended restrictions on federally funded research using fetal tissue, revoked the prohibitions on U.S. support of international family planning programs, and repealed the ban on abortions paid for by private funds at military hospitals. In addition, he called for a review of the import ban on RU486. These may be only the beginning of such policy actions as Congress and the President consider matters such as FOCA, clinic protection legislation, and a national health care plan.

An assumption that abortion will remain legal under Clinton may make it more difficult for pro-choicers to keep "choice" as the dominant theme in the political debate over abortion policy and to maintain the level of public concern that has helped them undertake a variety of public education efforts since *Webster*. Their problem may only be compounded as state legislative and congressional battles over specific, and often popular, abortion restrictions such as parental consent and waiting periods, shift the discussion toward "reasonable restrictions." This presents potential opportunities for pro-lifers and problems for pro-choicers. Rather than making the relatively popular arguments in favor of "choice" and restricting government involvement in the decision to have an abortion, pro-choice groups may find themselves arguing against popular restrictions that many pro-choice voters are willing to accept. Indeed

many voters who opposed additional government restrictions also supported parental consent legislation and even spousal notification (see Figure 1-4).<sup>19</sup>

A shift in the framing of the issue could have an impact on candidates who would otherwise feel comfortable with a pro-choice stand. A Democratic activist explained:

*It will be more difficult if the issues such as parental consent and other issues like that crop up. If they crop up, it'll make it more difficult for certain people in marginal districts — who may be supportive of abortion but are probably not supportive of parental consent — to hold the line.*

Cultural conservatives and their opponents will struggle to define Bill Clinton based on his actions on abortion policy and most likely the other major cultural issue — gay and lesbian rights. The Clinton administration would prefer to be seen as supporting choice and wanting an America where "abortion is safe, legal, but rare." However, pro-life activists will attempt to shape a different image — an image of the radical pro-abortion president:

*As people find out how radical these proposals are [made by pro-choice activists and Clinton in the campaign] ... I think we stand a good chance of using it in the elections. That is going to be a primary thing we are going to do in the next four years — try to get that information out and hold Clinton up to accounting for his position.... [The] American public is going to begin to be aware of how radical these policies are.... It's going to play very well [for the pro-life side].*

Another pro-life activist observed:

*The Freedom of Choice Act ... says, "We, the federal government, declare that every one of you 50 states — I don't care what the consensus is in your state — may not restrict any abortion ... for nine months." The President has vowed to sign it. Some of his biggest contributors were abortion lobbyists.... They have a tremendous mental and emotional momentum from having a strong pro-abortion president in the White House for the first time.... This President has endorsed, essentially, abortion on demand.*

Whether or not the pro-life groups and their allies are successful in their efforts to define Clinton and his policies, this could have important implications for his administration. The framing of the abortion issue as "choice" rather than as "abortion on demand" has had an impact on public support for the two sides in this debate.

If Clinton's actions are seen as protecting "choice" rather than blocking reasonable restrictions, this will be an advantage for the Clinton administration. The overwhelming majority of Clinton voters

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<sup>19</sup> It is also important, however, to keep in mind that a shift from "choice" to "reasonable restrictions" is no guarantee that elections will become referenda on each and every restriction. Voters ambivalent about the abortion issue — those who give pro-choice answers to some questions and pro-life answers to other questions — will be very difficult to mobilize even if the framing of the issue changes. Ambivalent voters are currently less likely to see abortion policy as a politically important issue, to know even in the most general terms where candidates stand on the issue, or to act on that information if they do have it.

(86%) said they opposed additional restrictions on abortion and only a small minority favored additional restrictions. Furthermore, a majority of Perot voters (73%) and even a majority of Bush voters (57%) saw themselves as opposed to additional government restrictions on abortion. However, even many of the Clinton voters (as well as Perot and Bush voters) who saw themselves as opposed to government restrictions displayed ambivalence about the abortion issue. To the extent that the FOCA is seen in the relatively conservative terms of protecting individual freedom, Clinton has little to lose in the way of popular support from his base — those who voted for him in the past election. If, however, pro-lifers are successful in re-defining the FOCA as the "Kill Bill" (as one pro-life activist described it) or as legislation that prevents the enactment of "reasonable restrictions," this could chip away at Clinton's base. It also raises discomfort among those who say they oppose restrictions in the abstract, but who favor parental consent legislation or some other restrictions. Indeed, even though 86% of Clinton voters said they opposed, rather than favored, additional restrictions on abortion, only 20% of Clinton voters gave perfectly consistent pro-choice responses on the Pro-Life/Pro-Choice Index — that is, seven pro-choice responses to the seven questions about abortion policy.

It is not only the pro-choice activists and their allies who must be cautious about how the abortion issue and abortion policies are seen. Pro-life groups may have a particularly difficult time if the Supreme Court's recent decision for Operation Rescue in the *Bray*<sup>20</sup> case inspires more civil disobedience. Our pre-election poll showed that pro-life groups were more likely than pro-choice groups to be viewed unfavorably. Seventy percent of the national sample gave unfavorable ratings to groups that want to ban abortion, while 34% gave unfavorable ratings to groups that want abortion to remain legal. If the evening news shows increasing numbers of protestors being carried away by police, it could make it more difficult for pro-life activists to turn these numbers and their image around. As one sympathetic pro-life activist observed:

*I think the militant aspect of our movement, as well-meaning as it has been, has in many ways hurt us, because the media is so against us.*

A danger for pro-choice activists and an opportunity for pro-lifers is that: 1) Pro-choicers may have less reason to sustain their mobilization with a pro-choice President in office and with a focus on restrictions; and 2) pro-life supporters could be re-energized by their election defeat. This could help the pro-life side reverse its 1992 election losses by 1996, as both sides recognize:

*The first two days [after the election] set everybody back because this was a huge loss. But this week we have been ... inundated with calls from people saying, "We lost the presidency; it is going to be tough. What do we do now?" And they're calling; they're kind of depressed a little bit, but you talk for a few minutes and they get off the phone absolutely more determined than ever that this is not going to stop us.... Our [pro-life] people have been with us for twenty years. They are not going to give up now. We consider this a battle that we lost, but it's not the war. (pro-life activist)*

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<sup>20</sup> The Supreme Court ruled in the recent case *Bray v. Alexandria Women's Health Clinic* that law enforcement officials could not use a 1871 law which restricted the activities of the Klu Klux Klan to keep Operation Rescue from blocking abortion clinics.

*The downside [of the 1992 election] ... is that there's a potential that the re-awakening pro-choice majority in this country may think that the fight is finished now and they can go on to other issues. We really view the '92 election ... as a means to accomplish what the real end goal is: ... securing the right to choose ... and moving on to ... redefine in public policy what it means to be pro-choice. I think once we get the Freedom of Choice Act passed, what we will then be doing is looking at the public policies that give women genuine choices, making sure contraceptives are available, there's research on RU486 in this country, and there's good prenatal care and postnatal care, etc. (pro-choice activist)*

A pro-choice Democratic activist warned:

*Depending on what Clinton does with the gag rule, depending on what happens with the Court, maybe a collective sigh of relief will turn into complacency.*

The more the abortion debate centers on specific restrictions and the less it centers on the access of all women to legal abortions, the greater the potential that Americans who were activated by *Webster* may move on to other issues. One who saw it this way explained:

*What we found was that until you weren't talking about Medicaid recipients or minors and when you started talking about a repeal of Roe v. Wade then all the white ladies from [the suburbs] came out to march. It was like all of a sudden, "It was my rights they were going to take away." That is when people mobilize.*

Many middle class women who came out to work for the pro-choice side when they thought a ban on abortion was imminent might be re-activated as Washington begins to shape a national health care policy. This policy will likely define and guarantee basic health coverage for millions of Americans of *all* economic classes. There is little doubt that abortion, contraception, pre-natal testing, and other reproductive health care matters could become focal points in the battle over what insurance *can* cover and what it *must* cover. The potential for such a showdown is clear from the words of a spokeswoman for the National Conference of Catholic Bishops who warned:

*We want more than anything to support national health care. We could not support a health care bill that generally included abortion as a required service.<sup>21</sup>*

Since *Webster*, the abortion issue has been *the* hot issue at the top of the cultural agenda. However, the 1992 election season may have marked another prospect for change in the cultural battles in American politics. For many cultural conservatives, abortion was no longer the sole focus of their political dialogue. As one cultural conservative activist pointed out, for their constituency of evangelicals, "It [abortion] is one of a number of issues." Their educational efforts ranged from term limits to taxes to abortion to crime, drugs, and a balanced budget amendment. He added:

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<sup>21</sup> Robin Toner, "Anti-Abortion Movement Plans to Battle Clinton," *New York Times*, January 22, 1993.

*Most of our supporters are not single-issue voters. They're not single-issue activists. The evangelicals care about the same things that everybody else cares about. Whether or not their children are learning in school. Whether or not their neighborhood is safe. Whether or not their family is having its financial needs met.*

One pro-choice activist reiterated (albeit in a critical tone) what several leaders of the cultural conservatives have told us about the future shape of the agenda:

*They're now talking about backing off the abortion issue as their flagship issue and concentrating on attacking gays. We [pro-choice activists] will still use it [the abortion issue] because it is a clear centerpiece for everything they [cultural conservatives] are talking about. They are talking about ... taking rights away from gays, [but] they still have on their agenda to return women back to [the] Ozzie and Harriet [days].*

Whatever form it takes, the new politics of abortion will almost certainly be driven by a broader array of issues and groups:

*Conservative groups are starting to pull together. The Second Amendment people, the gun control people, are coming on board with the pro-life people. I know it's kind of a funny marriage, but conservatives are really kind of coming together and I think they'll do very well under a Democratic administration. (pro-life activist)*

Although "choice" and the legality of abortion were the major issues that pro-choicers pursued during the campaign season, the election of Bill Clinton provided pro-choice activists with the opportunity to increase the attention devoted to other reproductive health issues. As a result, the cultural conservatives are not alone in their efforts to shift the political agenda. Pro-choicers will likely not simply focus on legislative priorities directly related to abortion such as FOCA and (after the *Bray* decision) clinic-access legislation; they will also pursue a broader range of issues as well. Issues such as reproductive health care, sex education, and contraceptive access may be particularly important as the Clinton administration begins to shape a national health care package which could affect the health care services available to both the poor and the middle class.

*We're trying to expand what "choice" means. It means contraceptive choice, it means adoption as part of the choice. There is no doubt that we are trying to find more common ground, and that the battle is not going to be just over abortion anymore.*

Another pro-choice activist echoed this goal:

*This agenda will include issues such as ... passing a family medical leave [plan], allowing RU486.... [W]e need to create a society that enables people to make those real choices so it is not a choice between an unwanted pregnancy [and abortion], so that people can decide about family leave and all those issues, so that people have access to contraceptives, and so that contraceptive research is increased.*

How this will affect the pro-life movement and its public image remains to be seen, but it could place it in a somewhat uncomfortable situation:

*There are a lot of people in the pro-life movement who think contraceptives should be available and pushed and there are a lot that don't believe it should be used at all. So the general feeling of the pro-life movement then is, "Let's stop abortion — we're not going to worry about contraception." (pro-life activist)*

The political challenges to the pro-life and pro-choice sides and their allies are: 1) to be seen as the mainstream force fighting an extremist opponent; 2) to sustain mobilization of those who become involved because of the abortion issue; and 3) to draw those ambivalent about abortion to their side over broader cultural issues. In the long run, the relative success of the two sides in reaching these goals will depend in part on how their agenda is framed and which components, if any, become political issues in the minds of their supporters and the voters.

Take, for example, "family values." The vast majority of Americans would say they support family values. This central theme of the Republican Convention, however, evoked a firestorm of debate, with some arguing that the GOP was standing up for what was right. Others saw the way it was handled as an exercise in intolerance toward gays, women who assume non-traditional roles, and single mothers. The controversy that ensued shows that even this well-worn concept, "family values," is seen differently by different people and thus public response to it is sensitive to the way it is framed. This is even clearer if we compare responses to various questions dealing with this topic.

The Voter Research and Surveys' (VRS) exit poll found that 70% of voters said it was more important for government to encourage traditional family values than to encourage tolerance of non-traditional families. This might lead some to predict that comments at the GOP convention critical of the women's movement and of the changes in women's roles over the last generation would have had mass appeal. However, the vast majority of voters nationally (67%) thought that the women's movement had *not* gone too far in pushing for equality between the sexes, and there was a high correlation between attitudes about women's roles and attitudes toward abortion. In fact, Bill Clinton (who had been haunted by allegations of marital infidelity and who supported gay rights, women's rights, and took a pro-choice stand) virtually tied with George Bush as the candidate who best represented the family values voters thought important (35% vs. 37%). Once again, attitudes about who was best on family values in the VRS exit poll strongly paralleled views about abortion policy. The inconsistency in these answers — support for traditional family values (in the VRS exit poll) as well as support for the women's movement and for a presidential candidate accused by his adversaries of opposing these traditional family values — suggests that the politics of this new cultural agenda will have much in common with the politics of abortion: The winner of this battle will be the one who can both frame the issues so that they capture the hearts of the public and inspire their sympathizers to political action.

One pro-choice activist saw the increase in attention given by cultural conservatives to the gay rights agenda and the decrease in attention to abortion as a strategy that could help cultural conservatives score big political gains with minimal negative reaction:

*[M]y personal feeling is that in the next few years, the abortion issue is going to take a back seat, and the gay issue is going to be front and center. Because one thing they've learned is that most people are not reticent to speak out about their feelings on abortion.*



*But I can tell you privately, I know people who say, "Look, I am totally supportive of gays. I think they're getting a raw deal. But don't ask me to stand up and say this publicly." Because we are dealing with a lightning rod in this whole anti-gay thing.*

Cultural conservatives will not be the only ones who must define and frame the issues of their political agenda in a positive light. The good news for pro-choice activists is that many of the items on their reproductive health agenda are generally popular with the American public. For example, by a margin of 2 to 1, voters we surveyed agreed that contraceptives should be made more widely available, and by a margin of 5 to 1, likely voters supported increased access to pre-natal health care. Majorities of voters at all points on the pro-life/pro-choice index supported increased pre-natal care and majorities at all points except 0 on that scale (the solidly pro-life) supported increased access to contraceptives (Figure 7-1).

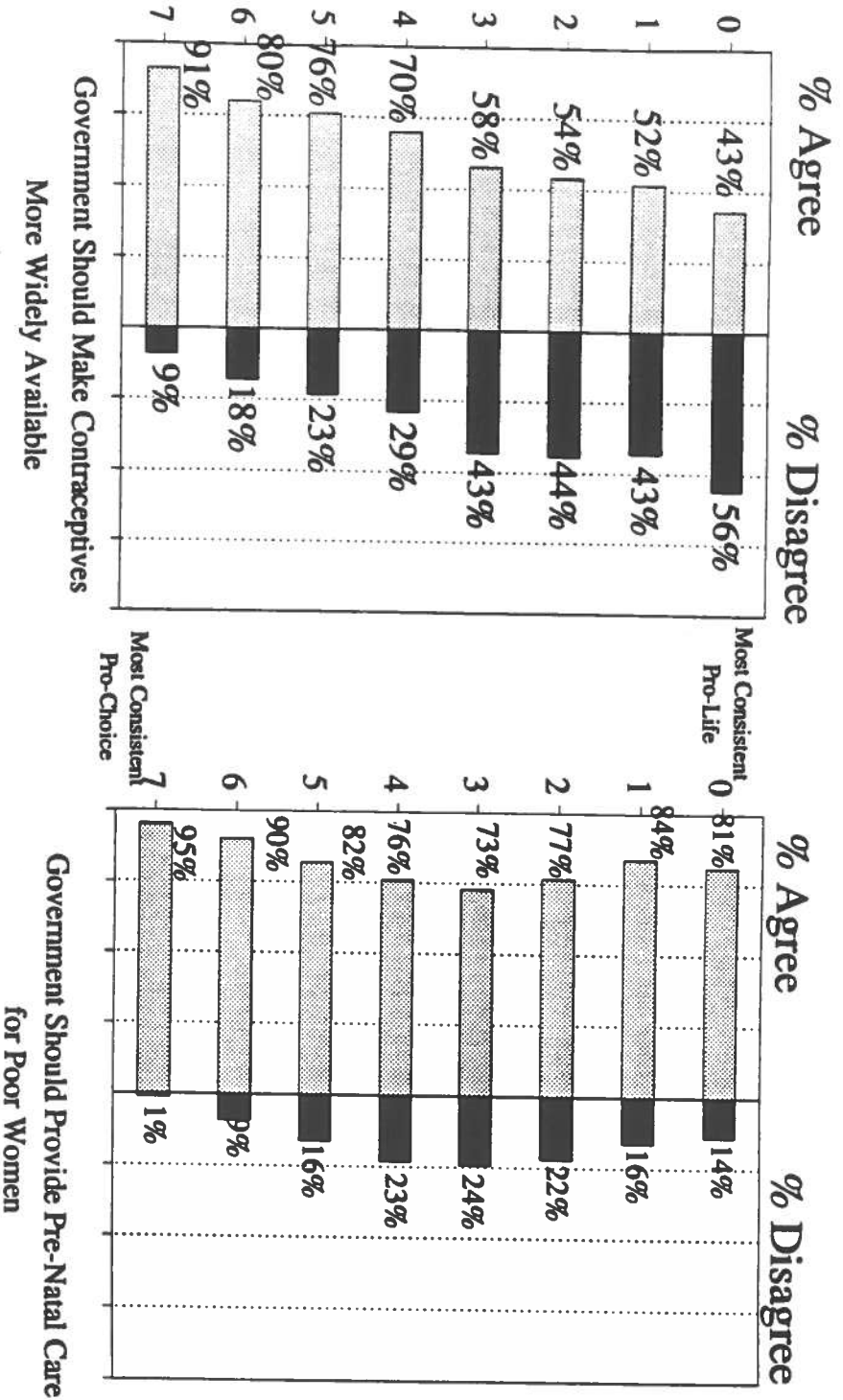
The problems for pro-choicers, however, are twofold. First, although these issues are not new, the political debate which will certainly surround their implementation could define them in a less positive manner. Furthermore, these reproductive health issues have never been effective in mobilizing large segments of cultural moderates or liberals in elections; energizing these people will require resources and significant effort. These issues, however, could easily become catalysts for mobilizing voters on the right who oppose some of these reproductive health issues:

*I would hope that the pro-choice Republicans, and pro-choice people in general, learn a very good lesson about Roe v. Wade, because what happened when Roe v. Wade passed, everyone thought, "Well, let's fold our tent." ... And I think people thought, "Well, we can go back to family planning and good contraceptive research, good sex education. This battle is over." Well, we found out that it wasn't. (pro-choice Republican)*

The future policy direction on the abortion issue as well as on the broader range of reproductive health and cultural issues will depend in part on the relative effectiveness of the two sides in framing their issue agendas and mobilizing their supporters. What activists do in the next four years and whether pro-life or pro-choice groups have adequate resources to construct effective strategies will have a profound impact on the political landscape of the 1990s and public policy after the 1994 and 1996 elections.

Figure 7-1:

# Attitudes Toward Increased Access to Contraceptives and Pre-Natal Care Given Pro-Life/Pro-Choice Index Score





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## CONCLUSION

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Cultural politics in the United States was transformed by the election of 1992. As pro-choice groups attempt to expand their "choice" agenda to include sex education, contraceptive access, pre-natal care, and other issues, they will encounter a competing cultural agenda of issues being pressed by pro-life groups and their allies — allowing "reasonable restrictions" on abortion, restricting "special rights" for gays and lesbians, advocating prayer in schools and questioning sex education in public schools. Virtually all of these issues are open to definition or redefinition in the minds of the voters. Regardless of the prominence of the abortion issue within the cultural agenda, the ability to frame the issues within this new agenda and then to mobilize supporters for political action is crucial for the future of abortion policy and politics.

Will the abortion issue remain a matter of "choice" or will it become a debate over "reasonable restrictions?" Will the issue of gay rights be framed as "human rights" or will voters view it as "special government imposed rights for gays?" Just as the "choice" theme with its emphasis on "keeping government out" of private decisions gave pro-choicers the "mainstream" image they needed, the relative ability of cultural conservatives and their opponents to frame these new issues will determine who voters see as "mainstream" four years hence and with whom candidates and officeholders feel comfortable making alliances.

Whether or not the abortion issue remains *the* prominent cultural issue in American politics, or whether it is displaced on the political agenda by a broader reproductive health agenda being advocated by pro-choice groups, or cultural issues of the Right such as gay and lesbian rights, sex education, or other matters, this is clear: the lessons learned from abortion politics since *Webster* provide valuable insight into cultural politics for the future. Indeed, abortion politics since *Webster* has shown that the challenge for both sides is to be more successful than their opponents in two areas: 1) framing the issues on this new agenda in the best possible light; and 2) mobilizing supporters for political action.

Framing the issue is the first battle; mobilizing the supporters is the second. Citizens have to see some reason to engage in political activity — to volunteer, to give money, or to vote on an issue. A Clinton Administration and the organizational network of the Religious Right bode well for cultural conservatives who need only point to Washington to find their "threat." Life may not be as easy for pro-choicers who will undoubtedly enjoy at least four years of an administration supportive of pro-choice policies. However, for pro-choicers there is the risk of complacency as supporters mobilized by *Webster* perceive the proposed restrictions as "not so bad"; or perhaps pro-choice supporters would be unlikely to see the debates that surround sex education, contraceptive access, or gay and lesbian rights as matters that affect their lives or abortion policy. Whether only cultural conservatives can muster sustained popular support to educate the public and mobilize political action or whether both sides can do so will shape public policy on abortion and a variety of other related issues. The answers to these questions will determine whether only one side or whether both sides in this cultural war will have the resources and the commitment to educate and mobilize supporters.

If voters are unaware of where candidates stand on the wide range of cultural issues, voters will be less inclined to vote for the candidate either side has deemed as "correct" on the issues. The importance of this information will undoubtedly be true as well for the reproductive health/cultural issues that have come on the political radar screen in the past year. If candidates fail to talk about these broader issues in campaigns (in order to avoid divisiveness) or if activists lack the resources to educate the voters or to support their preferred candidates, the issues, nevertheless, will remain in the political arena. It will simply be the case that voters will not have the information that allows them to have a voice on the issue through

the democratic process. The side that is better in winning elections will shape public policy on a variety of cultural issues. Which side — pro-choice or pro-life groups — is better at winning elections in the future will depend in part on which side has learned best from the political battles over abortion, so far the most visible of all of the cultural issues. Whether only cultural conservatives can muster sustained popular support for public education efforts and political action, or whether *both* sides can do so, will shape public policy on abortion and a variety of related issues. Each election provides an opportunity for the pendulum of political clout to swing in the opposite direction, as one pro-choice activist cautioned:

*It's kind of like with a movie star, you're as good as your last movie. We're as good as our last election. If we don't continue to do well, our perceived power will (and by perceived power I mean the way the media is doing the spin) really drop off. (pro-choice activist)*



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# APPENDIX

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The survey was introduced as a "public opinion survey of Americans, age 18 and over... on some topics currently in the news," by Rutgers University. If the respondent was not registered to vote at the current address, the call was terminated. This report is based only on data from respondents who were "likely" voters, replying that they definitely or probably would vote when asked the following question:

As of now, how likely are you to vote in the election for President this November? Would you say that you *definitely* will vote, that you *probably* will vote, you probably will *not* vote, or that you *definitely* will not vote in the upcoming election?

## ATTITUDES ABOUT ABORTION POLICY/REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH ISSUES

The following questions were used to determine the respondents' views on the abortion issue:

Would you say that you favor or oppose *additional* government *restrictions* on abortion? (If "favor additional restrictions"): Would you say that you favor *major* restrictions or *minor* restrictions?

Now, I'm going to read you several statements. After each one, please tell me whether you agree strongly, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat or disagree strongly with the statement. [Note: These seven responses were used to construct the Pro-life/Pro-choice Index. The score on the index indicates the number of pro-choice responses given to the seven questions.]

- 1) The law should require minors obtain parental consent before they can have an abortion.
- 2) The state should fund abortions for women who otherwise cannot afford them.
- 3) The government should pass laws giving more rights to the fetus and fewer rights to the pregnant woman.
- 4) The decision to have an abortion is a private matter that should be left to the woman to decide without government intervention.
- 5) Abortion is morally wrong.
- 6) Abortion should be prohibited under all or almost all circumstances.
- 7) Abortion should be allowed if another child would be a severe economic hardship for the family.

Do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Do you *strongly* agree, agree *somewhat*, *disagree* somewhat, or disagree *strongly*?

- 1) The law should require married women to notify their husbands before they can have an abortion.
- 2) The government should make contraceptives more widely available.
- 3) The government should provide health care for pregnant women who cannot afford it.