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"Women Deserve Better:" The Use of the Pro-Woman Frame in Anti-abortion Policies in U.S. States

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ABSTRACT

In US political discourse, anti-abortion framing traditionally focuses on the right to life of the fetus. However, a "pro-life, pro-woman" frame increasingly gained ground among anti-abortion advocates inside and outside of elected office throughout the turn of the 21st century. The pro-woman frame in contemporary anti-abortion discourse situates abortion as inherently harmful for women – both psychologically and physically – and insists that women deserve better than abortion. By introducing regulatory abortion bills that "educate" women about abortion or protect them from potential harm of abortion, anti-abortion lawmakers may claim they are advocates for women. Though social movement scholars document the shift in focus from the fetus to the woman in anti-abortion movement rhetoric, it is equally important to trace this frame transformation among anti-abortion legislators. To uncover the presence of the pro-woman frame, this article analyzes anti-abortion bills introduced in all 50 US states from 2008 to 2017. The findings indicate that the pro-woman frame is found throughout a majority of the bills, which marks a significant use and acceptance of the frame by US state legislators. This frame transformation represents a strategic tactic of anti-abortion legislators to soften political behavior and beliefs that are seen as hostile toward women, especially during a time where there is an unprecedented amount of anti-abortion bills introduced in the states.

Q KEYWORDS: Abortion reproductive justice issue framing

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).



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