

To: Interested Parties
Fr: Celinda Lake, Geoff Garin, Rebecca Naser, Alysia Snell, and Cate Gormley
Re: Voters Attitudes toward Abortion Later in Pregnancy
Date: May 3, 2019

Republicans, led by President Trump, have been making false and incendiary claims about abortions that are performed later in pregnancy and post-birth palliative care. Our research shows there are strong messages among Independent voters¹ for confronting this Republican offensive and for winning the debate on the core policy question.

First, it is important to address and rebut the false claim that new laws are needed to stop doctors from killing babies who are born alive by making sure voters know that “killing a newborn is already illegal.” Sixty percent of voters, and 64 percent of Independent voters say this is a convincing reason why we do not need new laws.

Second, it is essential to clearly identify the situations in which these later-in-pregnancy abortions are performed. About two-thirds of voters (68 percent) and Independent voters (63 percent) say it is convincing to know that “abortion later in pregnancy usually involves a complication that seriously threatens the life or health of a woman, a baby that can’t survive, or both.”

Indeed, by 68 percent to 24 percent voters say they favor “allowing abortion later in pregnancy when something in a pregnancy has gone wrong such as a fetus that can't survive, danger to a woman's life or health, or other serious circumstances.” Among those with strong opinions, fully 51 percent favor and only 15 percent oppose. Among Independent voters, 72 percent favor, with 48 percent who strongly favor; 19 percent oppose with only 8 percent strongly opposed.

So, when having these debates about later-in-pregnancy abortion care, it is important to define exactly what anti-choice politicians and activists are proposing: they would make abortion illegal even in cases where something has gone seriously wrong with a pregnancy, including situations where the woman’s life or health is in danger or where the fetus cannot survive.

Our research identifies two message frames that move the debate to sympathetic grounds and connect with values that are important to voters overall as well as Independent voters.

The first of these key frames speaks to voters’ reluctance to interfere in another woman’s life because they can’t know her circumstances and they haven’t walked in her shoes. This message also speaks effectively to voters’ concerns about having certain politicians pass one-size-fits-all laws that interfere with complicated personal medical decisions.

Most of us try to live our lives without interfering in other people’s lives. We know that a woman may end a pregnancy for different reasons. We cannot make a woman's decisions because we haven't walked in her shoes. Tragically, sometimes a woman gets a diagnosis of a serious health complication that threatens her life or health. Other times, a family learns later in pregnancy there is a very serious fetal anomaly, or

¹ Defined as respondents who identify themselves as Independents or as not strong Republicans or Democrats.

the baby is dying and can't survive for long. When people are making difficult, complicated, personal medical decisions, one-size-fits-all laws don't work.

The second key message frame speaks to voters' dislike for politicians who interfere in other people's personal lives in order to score political points. This message has the virtue of defining the politicians who are proposing these new bans in a way that attacks both their approach and their motives.

It's wrong for politicians to interfere in people's lives like this, for political reasons. When it comes to abortion or pregnancy loss, legislators in Washington, DC and state capitals can't know what every family is going through. They are going to hurt real people going through complicated issues with their one-size-fits-all restrictions. The fact is, their real agenda is about banning abortion with no exceptions. That's wrong. These politicians are overstepping their role, and women and families don't deserve to pay the price.

Two other points emerge as being important with Independent voters:

- Abortions later in pregnancy occur rarely – in less than 2% of all abortions – and only in cases where something has gone seriously wrong with the pregnancy or other serious circumstances.
- “If laws like these pass, a woman will lose the freedom to decide with her doctor what is best in her own unique circumstance.”

At the end of the survey, after airing what the other side has to say as well as pro-choice messaging, Independent voters are much more favorable to “elected officials who support a woman's right to choose and oppose additional restrictions on abortion” (51 percent favorable, 24 percent neutral, 26 percent unfavorable) than they are to “elected officials who are pro-life and support additional restrictions on abortion” (22 percent favorable, 25 percent neutral, 54 percent unfavorable).

Methodology

Lake Research Partners and Hart Research Associates designed and administered this dial survey that was conducted online from April 15 – April 22nd, 2019. Real Language LCC provided linguistic consultation. The survey reached a total of 1,001 likely 2020 voters with oversamples of 100 African American and 100 Latinx voters. The sample of respondents was drawn from an online panel and screened to be likely 2020 voters. The base sample was weighted by gender, region, age, race, race by gender, choice stance, and choice stance by gender. The African American oversample was weighted by gender and educational attainment and the Latinx oversample was weighted by gender and age. The oversamples were weighted down into the base to reflect their proportion of the overall population. The margin of error is +/-3.1%.