

May 6, 2024

To: Reproductive Freedom For All
Fr: Molly Murphy, Nadia Perl, and Claire Ochroch; Impact Research
Re: Findings and Recommendations from Youth Voter QualBoard

A recent QualBoard with pro-choice 18-30-year-old likely 2024 voters who were not committed to voting for Biden or Trump reinforced that abortion will be a critical persuasion and turnout issue in the November election.

Participants were pessimistic about the 2024 presidential candidates, the major political parties, and the likelihood of politicians effectively handling issues such as inflation and the war in Gaza. This left them feeling unmotivated to vote and skeptical that election results would make any impact on their lives. They were not paying close attention to attacks on reproductive rights and assumed that if they hadn't heard about these issues from Trump, he wasn't focused on them.

They had a broad sense that Biden and the Democrats are pro-choice, and Trump and Republicans are pro-life. This is a good starting place, but it's critical to show that these aren't just policy positions—that abortion is a top policy priority for both parties and that what happens in November 2024 will determine the future of not just abortion rights, but contraception and IVF access as well.

Videos and messaging about Biden and Trump's diverging reproductive rights agendas were effective in showing that the candidates are focused on these issues, improving vote motivation, and convincing voters that Trump and the Republicans will take away reproductive rights if they win. They helped to show that Biden is more than a "lesser of two evils": he's a champion of reproductive rights.

On the positive side, the most effective messages highlighted Biden's statements and record and shared real stories of how abortion bans are hurting women. On the negative side, the most effective messages showed Trump's commitment to passing an extreme abortion ban and him in his own words talking about punishing women.

Together, these positive and negative messages changed the way participants thought about abortion and the election, and deprioritized other issues for them including Gaza. They showed Biden fighting for them on an important issue and brought reproductive rights to the top of their list of priorities, above economic and foreign policy issues where they don't see Biden as the right choice.

Findings and recommendations are based on a QualBoard conducted between April 23rd-25th, 2024, with N=21 likely 2024 general election voters in Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Michigan, Montana, Nevada, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin. These voters were 18-30 years old, believed abortion should be legal in some or all circumstances, and were not committed to voting for Biden or Trump in November 2024. Qualitative research should not be extrapolated to represent the views of all voters.

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This research is encouraging in the possibility to refocus young people on the importance of voting for Biden and Democrats in the upcoming election even in the face of their dissatisfaction.

Our key findings and recommendations are below:

Political Environment

- **Participants felt frustrated with their choices in the 2024 presidential election, which resulted in lower motivation to vote.** They generally had negative views of both Biden and Trump, which led some to look to third-party candidates. While a few had researched alternatives such as Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., most were not sure where to turn after rejecting Biden and Trump. This dissatisfaction made voters feel less excited about voting, though most said that they would vote out of duty or habit.

“I don’t know who I would vote for. I know that Trump and Biden haven’t done the best job so I wouldn’t vote for them, but I don’t know enough about the other candidates to choose.” – 28-year-old White Republican Man

“I would usually be at a 10 [in vote motivation], but part of me doesn’t even want to vote this time around because I don’t like either of the candidates... I will put someone, but it probably won’t be either of the main candidates at this point.” – 26-year-old White Independent Woman

- **Participants felt that the major parties and politicians didn’t represent their values.** When asked about the most important issues that have a personal impact on them, participants cited high costs of living, abortion rights, and war in the Middle East. They felt that there’s been nothing good happening on these issues, nothing gets done in Washington, and the parties just fight with each other. They said that elected officials are out for themselves and will do whatever special interests want.

“I feel excluded because things that were promised aren’t being done. We’re being treated as if there is nothing at all that [political parties] can do to listen to the people of the country.” – 24-year-old Black Democratic Man

“I feel like both parties are just competing in opposition to what each party is favoring. It seems like they are battling each other rather than working towards a common goal.” – 28-year-old Hispanic Independent Man

- **Participants didn’t believe the candidates would meaningfully address high costs of living.** They named inflation—especially in relation to groceries, housing, car payments, and tuition—as a top political issue that impacts them personally, and nearly all said the issue was very important to their vote choice. Participants wanted the next president to take on these problems head-on but didn’t believe it would happen. They hadn’t heard what the candidates had done or wanted to do about

inflation, which led them to assume neither Biden nor Trump had done much. Some felt that Trump would be more proactive on these issues, while others weren't sure.

“As the next generation comes around, we deserve to live in an affordable country and be able to afford things like housing and essentials.” – 18-year-old White Independent Woman

“I think [Biden and Trump] wouldn't handle it well. As they didn't really address it during their terms.” – 24-year-old Black Democratic Man

- **Participants were concerned about the war in Gaza, and many reported hearing about it on social media.** Asked about issues they hear about the most, many talked about the war in Gaza. Some were concerned from a moral standpoint, others from a security standpoint—worried that the war could spread and more directly impact the safety of the United States—and others from an economic standpoint, expressing that the United States is spending too much money abroad.

Many said they were hearing news about the war, though others said they have heard less over time. While some felt that it was important for the next president to either support Palestine or keep the United States out of the war, other participants felt that the next president should focus on domestic issues first.

“I see a lot about the genocide happening in Palestine. It usually reaches me through the algorithm or someone else's Instagram story.” – 24-year-old Black Independent Man

“At the end of the day, we have our own problems here in this country to resolve first, before we help anyone else.” – 23-year-old Latino Democratic Man

- **Many participants felt that Biden and Trump would handle the war in Gaza similarly, with some saying Trump would do a worse job.** Many said that both candidates support Israel. They perceived Trump as the more vocal, aggressive candidate in general which led some to believe that Trump would get more involved in supporting Israel. They saw this as a negative given that participants either wanted to support Palestine or focus our spending on domestic issues.

“I think they handle it pretty similarly. They both support Israel, but Donald Trump would probably send over more aid to Israel and put more effort into the assault on Gaza, and he wouldn't have to be as quiet about it as Biden because his supporters would like his approach.” – 25-year-old White Independent Woman

- **Participants said political news comes their way on social media whether they seek it out or not.** Millennials were more likely to spend time on Facebook and YouTube while Gen Z used TikTok and Instagram. Across age groups, most said that political news reaches them on social media through the algorithm, their “for you” page, friends' posts, or accounts they follow. Some said they would seek out

news beyond social media on particular issues of importance to them.

Asked to share news that had popped up for them in the past day, participants shared information on all kinds of issues, mainly links to articles from mainstream news outlets or posts on social media. Several also shared links from news aggregators such as Google News, Apple News, and Reddit.

News tended to be informational in tone and focused on current events. Common topics included student protests about the war in Gaza (from Instagram, Twitter, AP, Fox, Apple News, and Google News), the TikTok ban in Congress (TikTok, Apple News, and CNBC), inflation (NBC, Reuters, The Hill), the SCOTUS homelessness case (Twitter and NPR), and the Trump trial in New York (Reddit and Apple News).

“Sometimes I will discover a topic on social media, but I then look up online (Google) to find out more information... Some creators seem pretty trustworthy on social media and seem to just report facts, but if it is a big topic, I always fact-check from multiple sources.” – 26-year-old White Independent Woman

“The political issues I see or hear the most about are the economy and LGBTQ rights. Most of this information I see off of my social media algorithms without having to look for it.” – 18-year-old Latina Democratic Woman

Opportunities for Reproductive Rights Advocates

- **At a broad level, participants knew that Biden and the Democrats support legal abortion while Trump and the Republicans don’t.** Nearly all participants felt this way, though there were questions about the details. While there is more work to be done—especially on Trump’s position, which generated the most confusion—this is a good starting place that lays the foundation for more detailed communications. Because they know Biden is pro-choice, it’s not a stretch to believe that he passed an executive order they hadn’t heard of; conversely, because they know Trump doesn’t support abortion, it’s easy to believe that he would try to ban it.

“Biden supports abortion rights, from what I know. If he had full control, he would likely work to protect and maybe expand access to abortion services for women.” – 24-year-old Latino Independent Man

“In general, I think Democrats try to protect access. Republicans definitely want to outlaw abortion.” – 28-year-old White Republican Woman

- **After learning more, participants understood the stakes of this election for abortion and were equally motivated to support Biden’s efforts as to stand up to Trump’s.** After seeing videos of Trump and Biden talking about the issue—and even more after messaging—they were much more likely to say that abortion is a top priority for both Trump and Biden and that Trump and the Republicans will ban abortion, contraception, and IVF if they win in November. They were also much

more likely to rate their vote motivation as a 10/10. While they still said that inflation and the war in Gaza were important voting priorities, they weren't sure the candidates would do anything differently on those issues. Abortion gained a new level of importance once they understood that the outcome of the election would make a significant difference.

*“After seeing these statements and videos, abortion rights are extremely important for my vote, and I would vote for or against a candidate because of it.”
– 20-year-old White Democratic Woman*

“Hearing about what the topic of abortion means and what the laws around it can lead to (like it's not just abortion laws but abortion, IVF, birth control, and the kind of people we have in charge) tells me it is very important.” – 28-year-old White Republican Man

“I was kind of in the middle before, but the more I think about and read about things, the more I'm like, ‘I have opinions I'd like to be heard.’” – 27-year-old Middle Eastern Independent Man

- **There was strong opposition to restricting abortion, IVF, and contraception.** Participants who thought abortion should be illegal in most or all circumstances were excluded from the QualBoard, so it was no surprise that participants supported legal abortion—but we had not asked about IVF or contraception in the screener. Participants who were familiar with contraception and IVF were all supportive of them and opposed to the idea of banning them. They also saw the connections between these issues, asking why Republicans would want to ban IVF when it's about helping women get pregnant or why they would want to ban contraception when that would only increase the number of unwanted pregnancies.

“I'm shocked that there is potentially a leader who would not support contraceptive and IVF access, so I'll be keeping an eye out for the candidates' stances on this to determine my opinion of them and how I support them.” – 21-year-old Black Democratic Woman

“I don't understand why any side would want to limit access to birth control if they are also restricting access to abortion. It is basically them saying they want to force women to get pregnant and have the babies, otherwise they would be punished.” – 27-year-old White Independent Woman

- **Hearing Biden and Harris talk about abortion was persuasive and showed participants they prioritize the issue.** After watching a clip of Biden talking about the importance of protecting IVF and abortion access, participants commented that while Biden is not a compelling speaker in general, he did well in this speech and made compelling points. The clip helped clarify that Biden cares about abortion rights and will be significantly different than Trump on the issue. Many focused on the IVF element of the clip, which was new information to them and made them feel

even more like Biden is on the right side of these issues. After watching the video of Harris visiting an abortion clinic, participants said they want to hear from her more often and that she has extra credibility on the issue because she is a woman.

“I have seen other clips from this speech, and it was definitely one of Biden's good ones. I was slightly surprised to hear about the IVF story because I was not familiar with it. I generally agree with the President on everything he said here.” – 27-year-old Middle Eastern Independent Man

“[Harris] speaks so eloquently and with such class. I feel she is completely right. How does someone become so entitled that they feel they can tell another person what to do with their body when it has no other effects on anyone else except them.” – 22-year-old White Independent Woman

- **The Trump clip about the need to punish women for having abortions was powerful as well.** Many participants said the clip was clear and affirmed or built on their existing view that Trump was pro-life. They disagreed with the idea of punishing women and said this stance was an important reason not to vote for him. A few participants pointed out that the video was from 2016 and may not be an accurate reflection of his current views.

“I don't like that [Trump] says women should be punished for having an abortion. I don't think he understands what women have to go through and seems like he needs more knowledge on this issue.” – 20-year-old White Democratic Woman

“This video is from 8 years ago 2016. I believe his stance on abortion has changed since then.” – 22-year-old Black Independent Man

- **The personal story from a woman in Texas was impactful, and participants intuitively understood that these stories are not rare.** Participants said that the clip was both upsetting and motivating, reinforcing the importance of protecting abortion rights and voting against Trump. Nearly every participant agreed that lots of women are going through this experience, with some talking about the prevalence of issues that can arise during pregnancy and others emphasizing the difficulty of traveling out of state for care.

“To hear a personal experience makes me want to support the right to choose even more.” – 24-year-old Black Democratic Man

“I think a lot of women go through this. Most Americans make under \$50,000 a year, so it would be very hard to afford an out-of-state trip just for medical care.” – 26-year-old White Independent Woman

Challenges for Reproductive Rights Advocates

- **Participants weren't sure about Trump's exact position on abortion or role in overturning *Roe v. Wade*.** A plurality thought that he would want abortion to be allowed only in cases of rape, incest, or if the woman's life is endangered. They expressed some hesitation about this point of view, with many saying they weren't sure exactly where he stood. Some thought he would want to ban abortion entirely, while others didn't know at all. A few said they had heard Trump wanted to leave decisions to the states, and a few mentioned his role in overturning *Roe v. Wade*.

"I believe Trump is pro-life, but I'm not certain to what extent." – 18-year-old Independent Hispanic Woman

"I hope he would still allow exemptions, especially when medically necessary for the mother." – 28-year-old White Independent Woman

- **Participants did not think abortion would be a top priority for Trump if reelected.** For most, this was because they hadn't heard him talking about it, couldn't remember what he'd said in the past, and couldn't think of anything he'd done on the issue. Participants who had heard Trump talking about it or remembered something he did, such as appointing pro-life justices to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, were more likely to say abortion would be at least somewhat a priority.

"Maybe he's waiting to be reelected, but it seems that he's not talking about it as much as Joe Biden is in his campaign." – 23-year-old Latino Democratic Man

"I think he is more focused on immigration, the economy, and other social issues." – 26-year-old White Independent Woman

- **While participants trusted Biden over Trump on abortion, they didn't think he had taken action.** Though some mentioned Biden speaking out on abortion issues at various moments throughout his term, participants couldn't think of anything he had done on the issue. They believe that since he was president when *Roe* was overturned, he could or should have done something to stop it. This aligned with the broader view that he hadn't accomplished much in general and made it hard for participants to believe he would be active and effective in protecting reproductive rights in a second term.

*"I like [Biden's] ideas though I am reluctant to put my full trust in him to return *Roe v. Wade*." – 27-year-old Black Democratic Woman*

"I think it is a priority for Biden, but I can't think of any examples." – 20-year-old White Democratic Woman

- **Most participants hadn't heard about IVF bans, contraception bans, state-level abortion bans, or the new Supreme Court case.** For many, *Dobbs* was the last

they heard about reproductive rights issues. Those who had heard about these issues recently cited states such as Arizona banning abortion, the IVF court case in Alabama, or the Supreme Court considering emergency abortions—but the vast majority hadn't heard anything on these topics. IVF and contraception were especially poorly defined. While everyone knew about the existence and function of contraception, there was less certainty about the basic goals and processes of IVF. Some people knew about it and others hadn't heard of it before.

“I have not heard anything recently regarding the Supreme Court and abortion.” – 22-year-old White Independent Woman

“No idea what [IVF] is.” – 23-year-old White Independent Man

“I have not heard much on birth control.” – 29-year-old Hispanic Democratic Man

- **Most participants did not believe that Trump and the Republicans would try to make contraception or IVF illegal nationwide.** Some of this stemmed from their lack of awareness of the issue: if they hadn't heard any controversy, jumping straight to a ban seemed like a big step. Most participants assumed that contraception and IVF are too popular and embedded in society to be banned.

“I do not see any purpose in this, and I haven't heard anything on this topic from either party.” – 29-year-old White Independent Man

“I believe that even if there is an attempt, this is not a ban that is widely supported enough to be put into action.” – 27-year-old Black Democratic Woman

- **There was confusion about whether it would be possible to ban abortion nationwide.** A plurality said that Trump and the Republicans would try but fail to ban abortion nationwide. While some said this effort would fail because it would be controversial politically, others didn't understand the concept of a national abortion ban in light of the *Dobbs* decision. They thought that banning abortion nationwide referred to banning it in each individual state, which seemed impossible to achieve.

“I think they will certainly try to make it illegal, but I doubt legislation could be passed in every state.” – 18-year-old Latina Independent Woman

*“Making a federal ban would go completely against what overturning *Roe v. Wade* did (leaving it up to the states), and thus also be unconstitutional according to the Supreme Court.” – 27-year-old Middle Eastern Independent Man*

- **Videos that were more informational in tone or centered celebrities generated more mixed reactions.** Participants liked the content of the RFA ad: they said it was informative, helped frame the stakes of the election, illustrated how many people are impacted by these issues, and showed the importance of making your voice heard. That said, many noted that the video wasn't as engaging as a personal

story. These participants said it was more logical than emotional, teaching them something instead of making them feel something.

The TikTok video of the woman talking about the importance of everyone being engaged on abortion issues generated similarly mixed reactions. Some liked the content, especially discussing the role of men in the reproductive rights movement and the focus on statistics such as that one in four women will get an abortion. Others found it less motivating than a personal story—while the information was useful, it didn't draw them in as much or make them feel as angry.

Some participants liked Billie Eilish's enthusiasm and the focus on how the government shouldn't regulate women's bodies. They said that it was important for celebrities to be involved with these issues to motivate the public. Several said they didn't care what celebrities have to say about political issues, that it was less motivational than a more personal story, or that the video was too vulgar to have an emotional impact. Aside from a few people who mentioned Olivia Rodrigo, most could not think of examples of celebrities or influencers talking about abortion.

"It wasn't exactly pulling on my heartstrings, but my logical side and really emphasized the implications of an abortion ban on the masses." – 21-year-old Black Democratic Woman commenting on the RFA ad

"It doesn't motivate me much either. But I am surprised by the statistic that every 1 in 4 women will get an abortion by age 45. I thought this statistic is useful to know the scale of this issue and how impactful the decisions of rulings about abortion are." – 22-year-old AAPI Democratic Man on the informational TikTok

"I don't personally resonate with celebrities endorsing political issues." – 28-year-old AAPI Democratic Man commenting on the Billie Eilish video

Recommendations - Biden Positive Messaging

- **Messaging about leaving decisions to women and health care providers, not politicians, resonated with participants.** There was pretty universal agreement with this message, as it was intuitive to participants that women and their healthcare providers are the most equipped to make these decisions.

<p>[TRUST] At no point in pregnancy is a politician more qualified to make decisions about your health than you and your health care providers. Joe Biden says that he trusts women need to be able to use their own judgment and consult with medical experts to decide if abortion is the right option for them.</p>
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"I 100% agree. Same thing as last time, if Cornell West or the other left candidates dropped out, this would be a reason I would vote for Biden." – 26-year-old White Independent Woman

“I support women's choice on when to have an abortion, and their healthcare providers are going to be in the best position to advise people looking to have abortions.” – 21-year-old Black Democratic Woman

- **Participants responded well to the Biden quotes and the idea that women get to decide.** They liked the general ‘my body, my choice’ theme and also the idea that we can’t go backward on these issues. The quotes helped reinforce that this is Biden’s point of view and that these issues are a priority for him.

[FREEDOM] Joe Biden says that women should have the freedom to decide what to do with their bodies. He said, “I believe a woman’s right to choose is fundamental” and that “if we want to go forward, not backward, we must protect access to health care—preserve a woman’s right to choose.”

“These statements corroborate his stance on abortion, so it does encourage me to support him.” – 22-year-old White Independent Woman

“Everything he said is so right, and everyone should stand behind him in wanting to make it available for all women” – 29-year-old Latino Democratic Man

- **Many participants didn’t know about Biden’s abortion executive order, so this message provided new information that they were very interested to hear.** It’s important to show that he has taken action on the issue, and the message made participants feel like protecting women is a priority for him.

[ACTIONS] Joe Biden signed an executive order to protect abortion, including guaranteeing the right to emergency medical care so that women can’t be punished for getting abortions when their lives are at risk and improving access to medication abortion.

“I agree with his stance on this matter, so it makes me more likely to support him. This is showing true care for women in this situation.” – 28-year-old White Republican Man

“Thus far, this statement I feel is one of the most important... A politician that is ensuring the safety of women is usually always going to gain my support.” – 22-year-old White Independent Woman

Recommendations - Trump Negative Messaging

- **Trump’s quotes about banning abortion, punishing women, and holding doctors legally responsible stood out to participants.** They came across as extreme and hostile toward women and quoting Trump directly instead of summarizing his statements improved credibility. They felt his stance was dangerous, dictator-like, and ignorant.

[TRUMP QUOTE] Donald Trump wants to criminalize abortion. He said, “There has to be some form of punishment” for women who get illegal abortions and that “you have to ban it.” He also said anyone who helps women get abortions should be “held legally responsible” and punished.

“I would be concerned for those who miscarry. Are they going to be accused of causing it because abortion wasn’t an option?” – 27-year-old White Independent Woman

“If I supported him at all, this would make me support him less. Seems going much further than even his party.” – 28-year-old AAPI Democratic Man

- **The message highlighting the devastating impacts of abortion bans also resonated with participants.** The concepts of preventable deaths of pregnant women and criminal prosecution stood out as extreme. They said these bans were disgusting, cruel, and awful.

[IMPACT] Abortion bans supported by Donald Trump and the Republicans have devastating impacts. Women who are near death, ten-year-olds who have been raped, and women who are carrying fetuses that has died have been denied abortions, and women who have miscarriages are facing criminal prosecution.

“I do not think this is fair, and I honestly think that this is cruel, so it makes me not support Trump.” – 20-year-old White Democratic Woman

“I already do not support Trump, but this is a good argument that gives specific examples.” – 27-year-old Middle Eastern Independent Man

- **Most participants opposed a national ban of any kind, and the lack of exceptions made them even more angry.** They thought this was too extreme. Participants expressed sympathy for people who have experienced rape or incest and talked about the importance of allowing abortion, especially in these situations.

[NATIONAL BAN] Donald Trump said he likes the idea of a national abortion ban and has promised to look at passing one if elected. Republicans in Congress have already written a plan for a national abortion ban without exceptions for rape and incest, and they will pass it if Donald Trump wins the election.

“All of this is so wrong, and he should be ashamed if he gets elected and decides to ban abortion, especially if someone is raped.” – 29-year-old Latino Independent Man

“He has to lose at all costs with statements like this.” – 26-year-old White Democratic Man

Recommendations – Future Research

- **Identify the most effective way to show that abortion is a top priority for both candidates and that the election will determine whether abortion is legal or not.** This research shows that it's possible to move voters on these topics and motivate them to vote based on abortion. Future research should explore the simplest, most straightforward way to achieve this goal.
- **Conduct a MaxDiff to provide better differentiate top messages.** Because almost all of the messages tested were compelling for voters, there are a lot of options and opportunities to make this case. Future polling should drill down to find which argument works best for persuasion and turnout target audiences. Using a MaxDiff will force respondents to compare messages to each other and highlight which combination of messages reaches the widest audience.
- **Figure out the best way to describe Trump's position on abortion.** Trump has taken several positions, and his latest efforts to appear moderate could make it more difficult to show his true intentions. Polling should explore how to succinctly describe Trump's position in a way that is believable regardless of his present comments.
- **Measure the additive value of contraception and IVF and whether these issues can be used to further personalize this issue or isolate voters from the GOP.** Polling should explore the degree to which voters doubt that these bans could happen and how to show voters that this is a real possibility that hinges in part on the results of the November 2024 election.
- **Test video content.** While the QualBoards indicated that videos of the candidates or women with personal experiences are most persuasive, future research should test that theory with a larger sample size.