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## **Abstract**

Calvo and Rosenstone use 1989 Pilot Study data to examine the reframing of the abortion debate in light of the Webster v. Reproductive Health Services Supreme Court decision. The authors argue that the Webster decision shifted the abortion controversy from a debate over general rights to a debate over state regulatory policy. They believe this shift is important because the patterns of public opinion differ across these two issue frames. Supporters of a woman's right to abortion without restrictions greatly outnumber those who want to prohibit abortion under all circumstances. The public, however, splits evenly on the question of instituting specific state-level restrictions on abortions, such as controlling teenage access and limiting federal funding of abortions. Moreover, Calvo and Rosenstone find that shifts in the framing of the abortion debate alter not only the overall distribution of public opinion, but also the social, religious, and political cleavages that divide the American public on abortion. Specifically, they find that: (1) While levels of religiosity sharply divides public opinion on abortion in the expected direction, religious cleavages are greatly muted when the abortion debate shifts from general rights to state abortion access restrictions. (2) Socio-economic, age, and regional cleavages over general abortion rights all but evaporate when the abortion question is reframed in terms of state policy. (3) The determinants of public opinion on abortion varies dramatically as the issues at stake change. (4) While no partisan division exists over the general principle of a women's right to an abortion, Republicans are twice as likely as Democrats to support state restrictions on abortion. (5) Strict "pro-choicers" are significantly more engaged and electorally active than strict "pro-lifers," but this distinction again shifts as the focus of the abortion debate moves from general rights to state funding and parental consent questions.

**The Re-Framing of the Abortion Debate**

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## The Reframing of the Abortion Debate

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The Supreme Court, in *Webster v. Reproductive Health Services*,<sup>1</sup> fundamentally reshaped abortion policy in the United States. Although the deeply divided Court stopped short of overturning *Roe v. Wade*,<sup>2</sup> (which guarantees a woman's right to an abortion during the first two trimesters of pregnancy), the Court abandoned the "rigid trimester structure" of *Roe* and held constitutional provisions of a Missouri law that restrict access to abortion. In doing so, the Court continued its trend of chiseling away at a woman's right to abortion, not by overtly denying that right, but by upholding the constitutionality of a statute that severely limits the ability of women to exercise that right.<sup>3</sup> As Justice Blackmun put it in his acerbic dissenting opinion:

a plurality of this Court implicitly invites every state legislature to enact more and more restrictive abortion regulations in order to provoke more and more test cases in the hope that sometime down the line the Court will return the law of procreative freedom to the severe limitations that generally prevailed in this country before January 22, 1973.

*Webster* reshaped abortion politics in the United States in equally fundamental ways. The Court's 5-4 decision reframed the abortion debate from one over competing fundamental rights over privacy, moral freedom, and human life, to a debate over the kinds of regulations states should construct to limit access to abortion. *Webster* also moved the abortion battle from the halls of the U.S. Congress to the nation's fifty state legislatures.

Specifically, in *Webster* the Court upheld a 1986 Missouri statute that:

Declares that "the life of each human being begins at conception," and that "unborn children have protectable interests in life, health, and well-being";<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> July 3, 1989

<sup>2</sup> 410, U.S. 113 (1973).

<sup>3</sup> In *Beal v. Doe*, 432 U.S. 438 (1977), *Maier v. Roe*, 432 U.S. 464 (1977) and *Peolker v. Doe* 432 U.S. 519 (1977) the Court ruled that states have no constitutional obligation to pay for non-therapeutic abortions. In *Bellotti v. Baird*, 443 U.S. 622 (1979), the Court allowed states to require minors to obtain parental consent so long as there is an alternative procedure such as letting the minor seek a judge's approval. In *Harris V. McRae*, 448 U.S. 297 (1981), the Court held that the federal government and the individual states are not obligated to pay even for medically necessary abortions sought by women receiving welfare.

<sup>4</sup> Mo. Rev. Stat. §§ 1.205.1(1), (2) (1986)

Requires that prior to performing an abortion on any woman a physician has reason to believe is 20 or more weeks pregnant, the physician must ascertain whether the fetus is viable by performing "such medical examinations and tests as are necessary to make a finding of the gestational age, weight, and lung maturity of the unborn child";<sup>5</sup>

Prohibits the use of public employees and facilities to perform or assist abortions not necessary to save the mother's life, and prohibits the use of public funds, employees, or facilities for the purpose of "encouraging or counseling" a woman to have an abortion not necessary to save her life."<sup>6</sup>

In rendering its opinion, the Court also took the unusual step of announcing that it would be considering three new cases during its 1989-90 term that focus on other state regulations of abortion. *Hodgson v. Minnesota* challenges a state law requiring a teenager to notify both parents before being able to receive an abortion and prohibits judicial exemption even when it would be in the woman's best interest.<sup>7</sup> *Turnock v. Ragsdale* tests an Illinois statute requiring clinics that provide abortions during the first trimester to meet medical standards similar to those mandated for operating rooms in hospitals. Upholding this Illinois statute would dramatically restrict the availability abortions, 87 percent of which are performed in clinics or doctors' offices rather than hospitals. The Constitutionality of "informed consent" laws, which would force a would-be patient to receive graphic information about fetal development and abortion before being permitted to receive an abortion, are also likely to be challenged.<sup>8</sup>

In short, the Court has transformed the abortion debate from a battle over fundamental rights to a battle over state restrictions of the use of public facilities, public employees, and public funds for abortions and abortion counseling, fetal viability tests, parental consent for teenagers, and new, strict standards for abortion clinics, all designed by their proponents to deny women access to abortion.

Our purpose is to examine some of the political consequences of the Court's reframing of the abortion debate. What is the nature of public opinion on abortion as the controversy shifts from being a debate over rights to a debate over state regulatory policy? As the debate is reframed are the

<sup>5</sup> Mo. Rev. Stat. §§ 188.029 (1986)

<sup>6</sup> Mo. Rev. Stat. §§ 1898.205, 188.210, 188.215 (1986)

<sup>7</sup> *Ohio v. Akron Center for Reproductive Health* questions the constitutionality of a state law requiring physicians to notify parents before performing an abortion on a minor. Thirty-two states have enacted laws requiring some type of parental involvement in a minor's decision but only five states have statutes that the federal courts have ruled constitutional. About 9 percent of all teens aged 13 to 19 get pregnant each year with two-thirds of these pregnancies ending in abortion or miscarriage (Zelnik and Kantner 1981). About two-thirds of all women who receive abortions each year are between the ages of fifteen and twenty-four (Henshaw et al. 1981).

<sup>8</sup> In *Thornburgh v. American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists*, 416 U.S. 747 (1986), the Court invalidated Pennsylvania's informed consent statute because of its "anti-abortion character."

social and political cleavages that underlie the battle also restructured? What are the likely political consequences of these changes?

Our analysis relies upon several data sets but draws most heavily upon the 1989 National Election Studies Pilot Study conducted by the Center for Political Studies. The 614 people interviewed by telephone between July 6 and August 8, 1989 and reinterviewed two months later were a subsample of respondents to the 1988 National Election Study, itself a random sample of citizens of voting age.<sup>9</sup> Questions about people's opinions on abortion and about awareness about the Webster decision appeared on both waves of the 1989 survey.

#### Public Awareness of the Webster Decision

The Webster decision made an extraordinarily big impression on the American public. Eight out of ten Americans (81.3 percent) interviewed by the National Election Studies within the five weeks following the Court's ruling reported they had "heard or read a story about a U.S. Supreme Court decision this summer on abortion." Nearly six out of ten Americans (56.1 percent) could describe to the interviewer what the Court held with most of these respondents doing so with a high degree of precision.

There was little attrition in public awareness and understanding of the decision over the subsequent two months. When asked about the Webster decision again in September 1989, 69.2 percent of the respondents still reported having heard about the decision; 44.3 percent could still accurately describe the Court's ruling.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> To ensure the representativeness of the pilot study sample, the 1988 NES respondents with the least political information (and who would be most susceptible to panel attrition), were oversampled. This made the political and demographic composition of the 1989 pilot study sample very similar to the 1988 National Election Study sample from which the respondents were drawn:

	Percent of 1988 NES Pre-Election Sample	Percent of 1989 Wave II Pilot Study Sample
Democratic party identification	47.0	45.1
Liberal self-identification	27.3	27.4
Support unlimited access to abortion	35.6	35.9
Follow government and politics most of the time	22.4	23.1
Some college or college degree	42.3	48.1
Family income of \$40,000 or more	25.3	24.9
Catholic	23.9	21.7
Protestant Fundamentalist	22.5	20.4

These data, as well as a description of the sample, are available from the ICPSR.

<sup>10</sup> Eighty percent of those who accurately recalled the Webster decision in July could still do so two months later.

Public awareness of the Webster decision is particularly striking when compared with information on other events that were prominent during the summer of 1989 (Table 1). Over 90 percent of the American public reported hearing or reading about the trial of television evangelist Jim Bakker and the sentencing of Marine Colonel Oliver North with over six out of ten Americans correctly recalling the facts in these cases. Once one moves away from the notoriety of Bakker and North to issues and events in the realm of politics, however, public awareness shrinks and consciousness of the Webster decision stands out. Only 69 percent of Americans recall the resignation of the Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives; 66 percent could recall hearing about the test flight or funding cutback for the Stealth Bomber; barely half could recall Soviet leader Gorbachev's dramatic arms control proposals made during his visit to France. Only about a third of the American public heard about Congress' revamping of the catastrophic health insurance program.

It is useful to contrast public awareness and recall of the Webster decision with the public's attentiveness to the Supreme Court upholding the constitutionality of the death penalty for teens and the mentally impaired. Only 17.9 percent of Americans could accurately recall the content of this very controversial ruling compared to 56.1 percent who could accurately recall the Court's decision in Webster.<sup>11</sup>

In short, the Webster decision and its political reverberations made a vivid impression on the American public.

#### Public Opinion on Abortion

As the abortion debate shifts from a battle over a fundamental principle to a battle over the regulations that states should construct to restrict access to abortion, the nature of public opinion changes as well. Figure 1 displays the distributions of public opinion on three different abortion questions that the National Elections Studies asked in its September 1989 survey. Only 7.6 percent of Americans take the position that by law abortion should never be permitted, while 31.2 percent think that the law should permit abortion only in the case of rape, incest or when the woman's life is in danger. About one in five Americans (21.1 percent) think that the law should permit abortions for reasons other than rape, incest or danger to the woman's life, but only after the need has been clearly established. Two out of five citizens (40.1 percent) believe that by law, a woman should always be able to

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<sup>11</sup> The public's awareness of the Webster decision surely comes, in part, from the salience of the abortion issue itself. For well over a decade, as in most countries, abortion has remained a hot topic of debate in the United States. The public's keen awareness undoubtedly also results from the media's intense coverage of the Court's decision. The morning of July 3rd both NBC and CBS interpreted their normally scheduled programming to report on Webster. The Webster decision was the lead story on all the network news programs and received front-page headlines in every leading newspaper in the country. For four days straight, the New York Times carried at least one front-page article about Webster and its consequences. For more on the nature and causes of public recall of news stories see Zaller and Price (1990).

Table 1

Recollection and Recall of News Stories by the American Public  
During July and September 1989

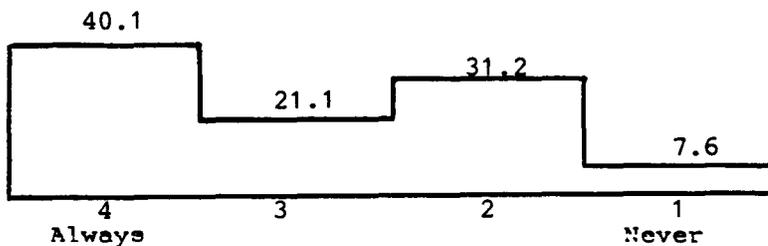
Story	* Who Said They Heard or Read About the Story	* Who Correctly Recalled the Story
The trial of TV evangelist Jim Bakker	93.5	61.9
Marine Colonel Oliver North receiving a sentence for his conviction in the Iran-Contra affair	92.5	66.7
A U.S. Supreme Court decision this summer on abortion	81.3	56.1
Resignation of Congressman Jim Wright	68.9	59.1
B2 Stealth Bomber (test flight and funding cutback)	66.0	51.6
Soviet leader Gorbachev making an arms control proposal during his visit to France	56.8	27.0
Proposals in Congress to change the government's catastrophic health insurance program	36.7	13.0
U.S. Supreme Court Decision on the Death Penalty	34.2	17.9

Figure 1  
Public Opinion on Abortion -- National Election Studies

Right to Abortion

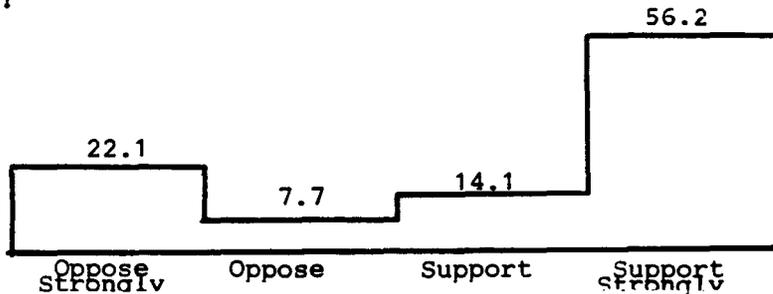
There has been some discussion about abortion during recent years. Which one of the opinions I am about to read you best agree with your view?

1. By law, abortion should never be permitted
2. The law should permit abortion only in case of rape, incest or when the women's life is in danger
3. The law should permit abortion for reasons other than rape, incest, or danger to the woman's life, but only after the need has been clearly established
4. By law, a woman should always be able to obtain an abortion as a matter of personal choice.



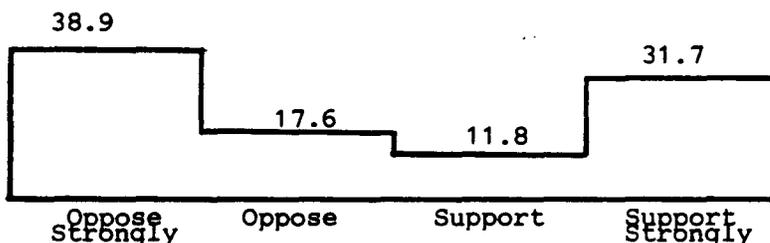
Parental Consent for Teenagers

Thinking now about the issue of abortion, do you favor or oppose a state law that would require parental consent before a teenager under 18 can have an abortion?



State Funding of Abortions

Would you favor or oppose a state law that would prohibit public spending on abortion?



obtain an abortion as a matter of personal choice.<sup>12</sup> In short, supporters of a woman's right to abortion without restrictions outnumber those who want to prohibit abortion under all circumstances by 5:1.

When the debate switches to state regulations governing abortion, so does public opinion. There is a clear consensus of opinion in support of state laws that would require parental consent before a teenager under 18 could have an abortion: fully 70.3 percent of Americans favor such a proposal with most favoring it strongly. Although on the general principle, proponents of abortion rights outnumber opponents by 5:1, when it comes to restricting teenage access to abortion, those favoring restrictions outnumber by 2:1 those who oppose such laws.

Public opinion is deeply divided, however, over whether state funds should be used to pay for abortions.<sup>13</sup> 56.5 percent of Americans oppose a state laws that would prohibit public spending on abortions; two out of three opponents hold their position strongly. The other half of the public supports laws that would prohibit publicly funded abortions with three out of four of the opponents feeling strongly about their position.

Other surveys, conducted shortly after the Webster decision, also reveal that the American public both supports a woman's right to abortion, and at the same time endorses state laws restricting access to abortion. A Gallup poll conducted for Newsweek (reported in Figure 2) finds that by a 2:1 margin Americans oppose overturning the 1973 Roe v. Wade decision establishing a woman's constitutional right to abortion. Yet, these same people favor a wide range of state regulations -- parental consent for teenagers, limiting the use of public funds or public facilities except to save a woman's life, fetal viability tests, and mandatory pre-abortion counseling -- all explicitly designed by their proponents to make it difficult for women to exercise their right to abortion. Only on the question whether public employees may perform, assist in or advise abortion did a majority of the public oppose new restrictions.

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<sup>12</sup> As part of a question wording experiment, a random half the respondents to the NES survey were asked the abortion rights question reported in Figure 1, the other half of the respondents were asked a question that more concretely framed the question in the language of the pre-Webster debate:

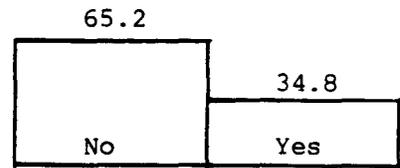
"There has been some discussion about abortion during recent years. Some Americans oppose abortion; they think of themselves as 'pro-life'; they believe that abortion is murder. Other Americans believe that a woman should have the right to an abortion; they think of themselves as 'pro-choice'; they believe whether or not to have an abortion must be the woman's choice, not the government's. Which one of the opinions I am about to read to you best agrees with your view on abortion?"

Kinder and Nelson (1990) find no difference across the two question wordings either in the distribution or stability of opinions.

<sup>13</sup> Since 1979, no federal funds have been used for abortion except when a woman's life has been in danger. Thirty-seven states also have laws that limit public funding of abortions.

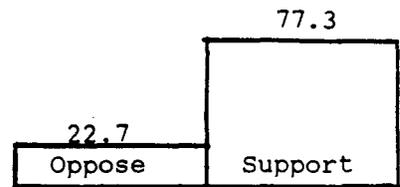
**Figure 2**  
Public Opinion on Abortion -- Gallup

The 1973 Roe v. Wade decision established a woman's constitutional right to an abortion, at least in the first three months of pregnancy. Would you like to see the decision overturned?

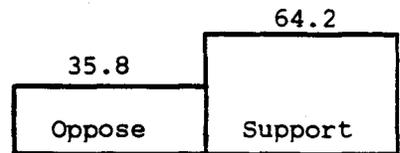


Would you support or oppose the following restrictions on abortion that may come before state legislatures?

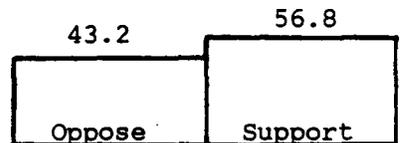
Teenagers must have parent's permission.



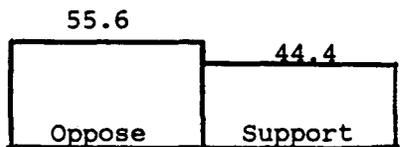
No public funds for abortion except to save a woman's life.



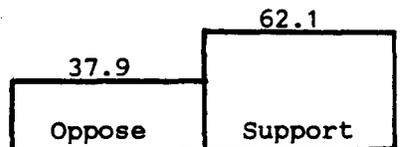
No abortions in public facilities except to save a woman's life.



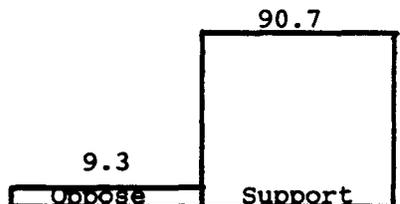
Public employees may not perform, assist in or advise abortion.



Medical tests must show fetus unable to survive outside the womb.



Women seeking abortions must be counseled on the dangers and on alternatives to abortion.



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Source: The Gallup Organization, July 6-7, 1989 for Newsweek. N=751.  
Respondents who said "don't know" or for whom a response was not ascertained have been removed from the analysis.

Parallel results were uncovered two weeks later in the New York Times / CBS News Poll and are reported in Figure 3. By nearly a 3:1 margin, the public endorses the principle that if a woman wants to have an abortion, and her doctor agrees to it, she should be allowed to have one. Yet, when it comes to state laws restricting abortion, public opinion is considerably more conservative. As in the Gallup data, respondents to the New York Times / CBS News Poll overwhelmingly support parental consent for teenagers and fetal viability tests. Although the public opposes prohibiting public employees or public hospitals from performing abortions and opposes laws that would make it difficult for private clinics to perform abortions, 10 to 15 percent fewer people oppose these restrictions than endorse the principle of a woman's right to abortion.<sup>14</sup>

In summary, along with the Court's reframing of the abortion debate from an argument over rights to a battle over state restrictions limiting access to abortion came a redefinition of the debate in the minds of the American public. When the issue is framed as a battle over rights, Americans strongly support the principle of a woman's right to abortion. When the issue is framed as a battle over state laws to restrict access to abortion, the public adopts a dramatically more conservative position -- one that invites the step-by-step erosion of a woman's right to abortion. In shifting the abortion controversy from a debate over rights to a debate over the various policies states should enact to regulate access to abortion, the Court not only invited states to enact regulations that would restrict, in various ways, a woman's right to abortion, it shifted the debate to a set of issues on which the conservative position generally prevails.

As one would expect from the differences in public opinion across the abortion questions, opinions concerning state restrictions are very weakly related to the general principle of abortion rights as seen in Table 2. Half the people who support the principle that "by law, a woman should always be able to obtain an abortion as a matter of personal choice," also support a state law that would require parental consent for a teenager to have an abortion. On the other side of the debate, one-third of the people who endorse the principle that "by law, abortion should never be permitted" oppose a state law that would require parental consent for teenagers. The general principle on abortion rights is only moderately associated with the specific application of that principle to teenagers.<sup>15</sup> (The Pearson correlation coefficient is .28; the Spearman rank order correlation is .32.)<sup>16</sup>

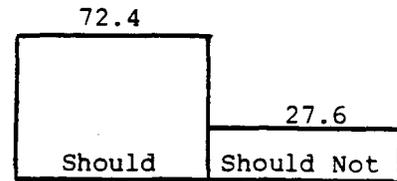
<sup>14</sup> The New York Times / CBS News Poll conducted between September 17-20, 1989 (N=1347) produced the same findings as the July survey.

<sup>15</sup> This is not a unique phenomenon. Many before us have uncovered the gap between the public's endorsement a general principle and its willingness to apply that principle to a specific situation. For a sampling see McClosky (1964) and McClosky and Brill (1983) on civil liberties; McClosky and Zaller (1984) on democratic norms; Kinder and Sanders (1987) on racial equality.

<sup>16</sup> Obviously, measurement error might be attenuating the estimated association between opinions (Achen 1975). The question on abortion rights (asked on both waves of the pilot survey) has a very high reliability of .80. After correcting for attenuation, the association between the abortion rights and the parental consent for teenage abortions question is still only .xx.

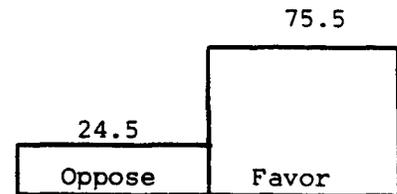
**Figure 3**  
**Public Opinion on Abortion -- The New York Times / CBS News**

If a woman wants to have an abortion, and her doctor agrees to it, should she be allowed to have an abortion, or not?

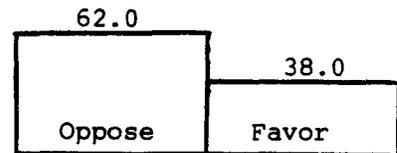


Here are some possible restrictions on abortion that are being debated in some states. Would you favor or oppose . . .

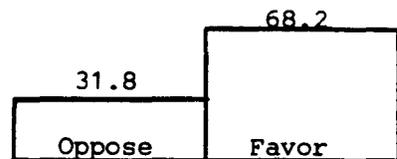
Requiring the consent of her parents before a girl 18 years of age could have an abortion?



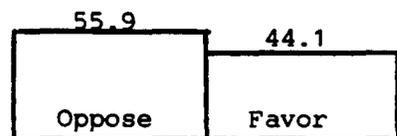
Prohibiting public employees or public hospitals from performing abortions?



Requiring a test to make sure that the fetus is not developed enough to live outside the womb before a woman could have an abortion?



Passing laws that would make it difficult for private clinics to perform abortions?



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 Source: The New York Times / CBS News Poll, July 25-30, 1989. N=978.  
 Respondents who said "don't know," who volunteered some other response, or for whom a response was not ascertained have been removed from the analysis.

Table 2  
Relationship Among Opinions on Abortion Rights and  
Opinions on State Laws Restricting Access to Abortion

State Law that Would Require Parental Consent for a Teenager to Have an Abortion	A b o r t i o n   R i g h t s			
	Always	When Need Is Established	Rape, Incest, in Danger Women's Life	Never
Strongly Oppose	35.0x	9.1x	10.4x	33.3x
Oppose	13.7	4.0	3.5	2.8
Support	15.9	22.2	10.4	0.0
Strongly Support	35.5	64.7	75.7	63.9
Total	100.1x	100.0x	100.0x	100.1x

Pearson correlation = .28  
Spearman correlation = .32

State Law that Would Prohibit Public Spending on Abortion	A b o r t i o n   R i g h t s			
	Always	When Need Is Established	Rape, Incest, in Danger Women's Life	Never
Strongly Oppose	48.2x	37.0x	28.2x	32.4x
Oppose	22.2	20.0	13.4	2.7
Support	13.2	16.0	9.9	2.7
Strongly Support	16.4	27.0	48.6	62.2
Total	100.0x	100.0x	100.1x	100.0x

Pearson correlation = .30  
Spearman correlation = .29

State Law that Would Require Parental Consent for a Teenager to Have an Abortion	State Law that Would Prohibit Public Spending on Abortion			
	Strongly Oppose	Oppose	Support	Strongly Support
Strongly Oppose	39.2x	13.1x	7.3x	11.8x
Oppose	9.1	11.9	9.1	3.5
Support	8.5	21.4	30.9	9.7
Strongly Support	42.2	53.6	52.7	75.0
Total	100.0x	100.0x	100.0x	100.0x

Pearson correlation = .30  
Spearman correlation = .30

Opinions on the general principle of abortion rights is also only moderately associated with the specific application of that principle to the indigent who must rely upon publicly funded abortions if they are to enjoy that right. Nearly one-third of those Americans who endorse the principle that "by law, a woman should always be able to obtain an abortion as a matter of personal choice," also voice support for a state law that would prohibit public spending on abortion. And, one-third of those Americans who endorse the principle that "by law, abortion should never be permitted" oppose a state law that would prohibit public spending on abortion. Here too the association between the two opinions is modest (Pearson correlation of .30; a Spearman rank order correlation of .29).<sup>17</sup>

In sum, the reframing of the abortion debate divides the American public in new ways that are only moderately related to the public's views about the general principle that should govern a woman's right to abortion.

Respondents' positions on the two questions concerning state restrictions on abortion are also only moderately related to each other (Table 2). Only half of those people who strongly oppose to a state law that would prohibit public spending on abortion oppose a state law requiring parental consent for a teenager to have an abortion; 1 out of 6 people who strongly support a state law prohibiting public spending on abortion oppose a law that would require parental consent for a teenager to have an abortion.<sup>18</sup>

Although the popular image is that the battle over abortion is one that pits staunch proponents of "pro-choice" head-to-head against staunch supporters of the "right-to-life," at the mass level few Americans are full heartily in either camp. Only 17 percent of Americans oppose parental consent for teenage abortion, and oppose prohibitions on public financing of abortions, and say that a woman should always be able to obtain an abortion as a matter of personal choice. On the other side of the battle stands only the 21 percent of Americans who support parental consent for teenage abortion, and want to prohibit public financing of abortions, and say either that abortion should never be permitted or should be permitted only in the case of rape, incest or when the woman's life is in danger. The remaining 62 percent of Americans have a mixed set of opinions -- staking out a "pro-choice" position on some questions and a "right-to-life" position on others.

#### Social and Religious Cleavages over Abortion

As the abortion issue moves from a debate over rights to a debate over state regulations governing access to abortion, not only does the distribution of opinion change, but so too do the social, religious, and political cleavages that divide the American public on abortion.

Deep religious cleavages divide public opinion on the question of a women's right to abortion (Tedrow and Mahoney 1979; Harris and Mills 1985). Catholics are 6.3 percent and members of Protestant Fundamentalist

<sup>17</sup> Corrected for measurement error, the association is still only .xx.

<sup>18</sup> Both the Pearson and Spearman correlations between responses to these two questions is .30; corrected for measurement error the coefficient only increases to .xx.

denominations are 9.8 percent more likely than other Protestants to endorse the position that abortion should never be permitted. Non-Christians are much more liberal -- 13.0 percent less likely to say that a woman should be denied the right to abortion (Table 3). People who believe that "the Bible is God's word and all it says is true" are 24.4 percent more likely say that abortion should never be permitted than those who do not hold to this literal interpretation of the Bible. Public opinion on the question of abortion rights divides very powerfully along lines of religiosity<sup>19</sup> with the most religious being 50.0 percent more likely than the least religious to say that abortion should never be permitted.

These religious cleavages are greatly muted when the abortion battle shifts from a debate over rights to questions of state policy restricting access to abortion. Here there is less to distinguish the opinions of the various religious groups from one another: on parental consent for teenagers only the views of non-Christians stand out as different; on the question of prohibiting public spending on abortion, only Protestant Fundamentalists have distinct opinions. People who believe that "the Bible is God's word and all it says is true" are only 11.7 percent more likely to endorse state laws requiring parental consent for teenagers and 9.2 percent more likely to want prohibitions against state spending on abortion -- a fraction of the divide over abortion rights. And finally, although religiosity still distinguishes those who support parental consent for teenagers and restrictions on state funding of abortion from those who do not, the cleavage is only half what it is on the issue of abortion rights.

There are social-economic cleavages over abortion rights (Tedrow and Mahoney 1979; Shribaan 1989), but these too all but evaporate when the debate shifts to questions of state restrictions on access to abortion. The very rich are 22.6 percent more supportive of a woman's right to abortion than are those living in poverty; people with post-graduate degrees are 22.2 percent more supportive of this right than are people with 8 years or less of education. There is no income or education divide over the question of parental consent for teenagers. There is a small cleavage by education (and none by income) on prohibiting public spending on abortion.

Age divides the population over the question of abortion rights with the elderly being 12.4 percent more opposed than are eighteen-year olds to women having the right to abortion. Age does not divide Americans on the issue of parental consent for teenagers or on prohibitions against public financing of abortion.

There is a regional cleavage over the question of abortion rights with people who live in the northeast or in the west being 8.4 percent more likely to support a woman's right to an abortion than people living in other parts of the country. No regional cleavage exists on the question of state laws that would limit public funding of abortions.

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<sup>19</sup> Our measure of religiosity is comprised of three items: frequency of church attendance; frequency of prayer; and the amount of guidance that religion provides in day-to-day living. The inter-item correlations among these items range between .59 and .70; the scale has a reliability of .85.

Table 3  
Social and Religious Cleavages on Abortion

Cleavage	Oppose Abortion Rights	Require Teenage Parental Consent	Prohibit Public Spending
<b>Religious denomination</b>			
Non-Christians	-.130 (.047)	-.226 (.058)	
Catholics	.063 (.040)		
Protestant Fundamentalists	.098 (.022)		.134 (.052)
Believe in literal interpretation of the bible	.244 (.029)	.117 (.038)	.092 (.039)
Religiosity	.500 (.043)	.227 (.059)	.276 (.061)
Education	-.222* (.055)		-.148 (.071)
Income	-.226 (.061)		
Age	.002 (.001)		
Region (northeast and west)	-.084 (.031)	-.071 (.039)	

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\* The cell entry is the unstandardized, bivariate, regression coefficient obtained from regressing the column variable onto the row variable, except for religious denomination which included all three denominations in the same equation. The standard error of the coefficient appears in parenthesis. All variables, other than age, have been recoded to the zero-one interval. A blank cell indicates that the coefficient is indistinguishable from zero.

In summary, as public discussion over abortion shifts away from a heated debate over the principles governing a woman's right to an abortion to a debate over the specific policies that states might enact to restrict access to an abortion, the deep religious and social cleavages that divides public opinion are muted.

### The Causes of Public Opinion on Abortion

The causes of public opinion on abortion also change as the battle is reframed from a general debate over rights to a debate over state restrictions of those rights. We examined several possible causes of public opinion on abortion: the social and religious cleavages discussed in the previous section; gender; race; partisanship; and a set of core political values that might also shape people's views on abortion.<sup>20</sup> These political values include: support for the general principle of equality of opportunity (Feldman 1983 1987); a belief in moral traditionalism -- "preference for traditional patterns of family and social organization that reflect a reverence for the past and a resistance to change" (Conover and Feldman 1986); the belief that women should have an equal role with men in running business, industry and government; a belief in personal autonomy -- self-reliance, a willingness to adhere to one's own standards, independent mindedness (Markus 1990); and belief in a limited government (Markus 1990).

To sort out the marginal effect that each variable has on public opinion on abortion requires that the effect of all the other variables be held constant. To do so, we estimated three equations -- one for each of the three abortion questions that appeared on the National Election Studies 1989 pilot survey. The ordinary least squares estimates appear in Table 4.

The most important message to take away from Table 4 is that the causes of public opinion on abortion vary dramatically as the particulars of the political issue change as indicated by the checker-board pattern of coefficients across the three equations.<sup>21</sup> Other things being equal, women are about 8.1 percent more supportive than are men of abortion rights, but when it comes to requiring teenage parental consent or prohibiting public spending, no gender differences can be found. Catholics are 9.3 percent more likely to oppose abortion rights than are non-Fundamentalist Protestants, but Catholicism does not produce distinct views of either parental consent for teenagers or prohibitions on public funding. Protestant Fundamentalists stand out on proposals to prohibit public spending on abortion, but not on abortion rights or parental consent. Non-Christians are considerably more liberal on parental consent, but no more so than other groups on abortion rights or state laws restricting public funds for abortion. Those who embrace a literal interpretation of the Bible are 9.5 percent more likely to oppose abortion rights, but are not more likely than those who do not share their view of the Bible to support state restrictions on abortion for teenagers and the poor.

<sup>20</sup> For a sampling of research done linking views on abortion rights to social values see Granberg and Granberg (1980); McCuthon (1987); and Jelen (1988).

<sup>21</sup> Other variables, such as race, age, education, income, region, self-identification as a liberal or conservative, and the viewership of religious programs on television failed to have a significant impact on any of the three abortion attitudes.

Table 4  
Causes of Public Opinion on Abortion

Independent Variable	D e p e n d e n t    V a r i a b l e		
	Oppose Abortion Rights	Require Teenage Parental Consent	Prohibit Public Spending
Women	-.072* (.029)		
Catholics	.093 (.033)		
Protestant Fundamentalists			.089 (.050)
Non-Christians		-.181 (.055)	
Belief in Literal Interpretation of the Bible	.095 (.031)		
Religiosity	.341 (.051)		.184 (.072)
Belief in Moral Traditionalism	.170 (.081)	.292 (.102)	.211 (.119)
Belief in an Equal Role for Women in Gov't & Business	-.129 (.048)	-.116 (.065)	
Belief in Equality of Opportunity	-.121 (.077)	-.140 (.112)	-.178 (.118)
Belief in Personal Autonomy	-.132 (.051)		
Belief in Limited Government			.128 (.068)
Republican Party Identification		.116 (.065)	
Constant	.452 (.076)	.944 (.087)	.488 (.103)
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.319	.095	.086
Standard Error of the Equation	.278	.388	.411
Number of Cases	435	443	423

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\* The cell entry is the unstandardized regression coefficient obtained from regressing the column variable onto the row variables. The standard error of the coefficient appears in parenthesis. All variables have been recoded to the zero-one interval. A blank cell indicates that the coefficient is indistinguishable from zero.

Religiosity contributes a lot (34.1 percent) to the propensity of people to oppose abortion rights; it has about half that effect on opinions on restricting public funding; it matters not at all when it comes to views on parental consent for teenagers.

For many political issues, partisanship is a powerful predictor of public opinion (Campbell et al. 1960; Converse and Markus 1979). Not so on abortion. One's party identification has no significant impact on views about abortion rights or attitudes towards state spending on abortion. Strong Republicans are only about 11.6 percent more likely to support teenage parental consent than are strong Democrats.\*\* (We have more to say about the partisan cleavages over abortion in a moment.)

In contrast to partisanship, political values play a powerful role in structuring opinions on abortion, but which political values matter and by how much depends on how the debate is framed. People who embrace traditional moral values are 17.0 percent more likely to oppose abortion rights, 29.2 percent more likely to support parental consent for teenagers, and 21.1 percent more likely to support prohibitions on public financing of abortions. People who most strongly believe that women should have an equal role with men in running government, industry, and business are 12.9 percent more likely to support abortion rights and 11.6 more likely to oppose parental consent for teens. But, belief in the equal rights of women plays no role in structuring opinion on the question of the public funding of abortions. People who are most supportive of the principle of equality of opportunity are about 12.1 percent more likely to support abortion rights, 14.0 percent more likely to oppose parental consent for teens, and 17.8 percent more likely to oppose restrictions on public financing of abortions. Those who strongly embrace the idea of personal autonomy are 13.2 percent more likely to support the right to abortion than those who strongly oppose this principle. Yet, ideas about personal autonomy are totally unrelated to opinions on parental consent or publicly funded abortions. Belief in a limited government has nothing to do with opinions on abortion rights or on parental consent for teens, but people who are most supportive of the idea of limited government are 12.8 percent more likely to favor state laws that would prohibit public spending on abortion.

We think these results have powerful implications for the political strategies that should underlie abortion politics in the post-Webster era and we will save our observations for the concluding section of the paper.

One final point. We can do a much better job explaining people's opinions on abortion rights than we can do explaining their views on parental consent and public spending for abortion as seen by comparing the standard errors of the equations reported at the bottom of Table 4. This result is very much consistent with the muted social cleavages discussed in the previous section. To the extent that the debate over rights has been the traditional

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\*\* This result is not an artifact of having controlled for intervening variables between partisanship and opinions on abortion. The bivariate coefficients between party identification on the one hand, and abortion rights and public spending on the other, are also tiny and insignificant; the bivariate coefficient between party identification and parental consent for teenagers is only .193.

way in which elites and ordinary citizens have framed the abortion controversy and questions about state laws restricting abortions are less familiar issues, then it is reasonable to expect that there are more sharply established social cleavages over the familiar frame than over the new one. Put differently, after two decades of debate the divisions over abortion rights are fairly clear. With parental consent and prohibitions on public funding we are observing issues that are politically fresher: issues on which people are just beginning to sort out where they stand; issues on which social groups have yet to play a powerful role in structuring people's opinions. If the post-Webster reframing of the abortion issue sticks, then over time, public opinion on state restrictions will become more structured and the political cleavages will become dramatic.

### Partisan Cleavages Over Abortion

Republican and Democratic strategists alike are wary of politics after Webster, fearing that the abortion issue will dominate the 1990 elections.

Some observers think that the abortion issue is particularly problematic for the Republicans. As journalist Tom Edsall writes: "for the GOP, a tough anti-abortion stand has been critical to the highly successful drive to win support among white evangelical and born-again voters and has helped it make inroads among older, conservative and often Catholic voters who have been inclined to vote Democratic" (1989:10). But, "the abortion issue could drive a stake through the heart of the Reagan coalition. . . . Religious conservatives and prosperous suburbanites are the Republican party's two core constituencies. No issue is better calculated to drive these groups apart than abortion" (Schneider 1989:2). The challenge facing the Republicans, is to manage this diverse coalition -- one that could easily splinter over abortion.

The abortion issue also presents a serious dilemma for the Democrats. Pollster and strategist Stanley Greenberg argues that "abortion is now the single strongest association with liberalism which implies, quite negatively, unwillingness to restrain personal excess and to take responsibility" (quoted in Edsall 1989:10). GOP pollster Frederick Steeper speculates that the "Republican Party has a better opportunity than the Democrats to take the middle ground. The Democrats are more locked into an absolute pro-choice position. . . . The Republicans can answer the pro-life people with a lot of restrictions and stake out the middle without being identified as backing an absolute abortion ban" (quoted in Edsall 1989:10).

It is important to recognize how quickly the Supreme Court's action in Webster reframed what now constitutes the middle-of-the-road position on the abortion debate. For Steeper, the middle is a "a lot of restrictions" all of which will have the defacto effect of limiting (and for some women denying) the right to abortion.

Although individual Republican candidates will undoubtedly take a variety of positions, President George Bush is nowhere even close to Steeper's "middle ground." Bush has endorsed an anti-abortion Constitutional Amendment; has directed his solicitor general to file a brief urging the Supreme Court to overturn *Roe v. Wade*; has vigorously opposed federal funding of abortions even

in the case of rape or incest; and has ignored recommendations from two national advisory panels to lift his ban on federally funded research involving fetal tissue.

Still other observers, like Republican strategist Richard Wirthlin, suggest that the abortion issue may turn out to be a political wash. Shortly after the Webster decision, a Wirthlin survey asked people about how they plan to vote in the 1990 Congressional elections and found that there was an insignificant change in aggregate preferences when respondents were told to imagine that the Republican was "pro-life" on abortion and the Democrat, "pro-choice" (Barns 1989:2046).

If the 1989 state elections can be interpreted as preliminary returns on how the abortion issue will cut politically in 1990 and beyond, Webster may have favorable political consequences for the Democrats. There is some evidence that the Webster decision mobilized pro-choice advocates in the Virginia and New Jersey gubernatorial elections. Voters in these two states were also more concerned with abortion than with either crime or taxes and people who gave priority to the abortion issue split 2:1 for pro-abortion rights Democratic candidates, L. Douglas Wilder in Virginia and James J. Florio in New Jersey (Germond and Witcover 1989:2776).

The political fallout of the abortion debate obviously depends on several factors: how the abortion issue is framed, the positions candidates take, whether the issue cuts through or parallels existing partisan coalitions, what other issues concern voters, and whether "pro-choice" or "pro-life" advocates are better mobilized. One can only guess how some of these factors will play out over time, but for others we can muster some evidence to evaluate the political consequences of the reframing of the abortion debate and we do so in the remaining sections.

The partisan cleavage on abortion also changes as the battle shifts from a debate over rights to a debate over state restrictions. There is no partisan division over the general principle of a woman's right to abortion. Both Democrats and Republicans alike are about equally likely to support a woman's right to abortion. But, as Table 5 also makes clear, both the Democratic and Republican parties are about equally divided on the question of abortion rights. In short, when the debate is over rights, partisanship is a cross-cutting cleavage. The party that advocates restricting a woman's right to an abortion is likely to lose about as much support from its own constituency as it will gain from the other party.

As the debate changes, so do the politics. Democrats and Republicans alike support state laws that would require parental consent before a teenager can have an abortion with Republicans being 16.5 percent more likely to do so. The divisions within the two parties are different than on the question of abortion rights: Republicans endorse parental consent by nearly a 4:1 margin; Democrats do so by less than 2:1. The partisan cleavage over this issue, produces a dilemma for the Democrats. If both parties were to endorse a parental consent law, there would be more disaffected Democrats than Republicans. On the other hand, if the Republicans were to endorse parental consent, but the Democrats were to oppose it, there would still be more disaffected Democrats than Republicans. Parental consent for teens is a better issue for Republicans than for Democrats.

**Table 5**  
**Partisan Divisions over Abortion**

Political Issue	Party Constituency*		
	Democrats	Independents	Republicans
<b>Woman's Right to Abortion</b>			
A woman should always be able to obtain an abortion	43.9	28.8	39.2
Permit abortion for other reasons after need has been established	20.8	25.4	20.1
Permitted only for rape, incest or when woman's life is in danger	27.6	35.6	33.8
Abortion should never be permitted	7.7	10.2	6.9
<b>Law to Require Parental Consent for Teenagers To Have an Abortion</b>			
Oppose a law	37.8	28.8	21.3
Support a law	62.2	71.2	78.7
<b>Law to Prohibit Public Spending on Abortion</b>			
Oppose a law	62.8	49.2	51.8
Support a law	37.2	50.8	48.2

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\* Democrats are people who refer to themselves as strong Democrats, weak Democrats, or independents who lean towards the Democratic party; Republicans are people who call themselves strong Republicans, weak Republicans, or independents who lean towards the Republican party; independents are people who do not identify with or lean towards either party.

The politics changes once again when the debate is reframed as an argument over state laws to prohibit public spending on abortion. Although Republicans are 11.0 percent more likely than Democrats to endorse limitations on public spending on abortion, both Democrats and Republicans are divided over the issue. But on this issue, the Republican party is more split than the Democratic party: Republicans are evenly divided over the issue whereas Democrats are split closer to 2:1 public in opposition to laws prohibiting public spending on abortion. On this issue, it is the Republicans that face the dilemma. If both parties were to oppose a law prohibiting public spending on abortion, there would be more disaffected Republicans than Democrats. But, if the Republicans were to endorse curtailments of public spending on abortion, and the Democrats were to oppose those curtailments, there would still be more disaffected Republicans than Democrats. The public financing of abortions question cuts better for the Democrats than for the Republicans.

When we shift from an analysis of coalitions defined by party identification to coalitions defined by how people voted in the 1988 presidential and Congressional elections (Table 6), the story line remains about the same with one notable exception: Both at the presidential and congressional level, Republican voters are 12 to 13 points less likely than Democratic voters to support a woman's right to abortion. Put differently, although party identification is a cross-cutting cleavage on abortion rights, presidential and congressional vote is not. Also apparent from Table 6 is the total lack of consensus on abortion rights within the Republican presidential and Congressional coalitions. There is discensus, to be sure, within the Democratic coalitions, but not nearly as severe as in the Republican camp. A debate over abortion rights presents a much more difficult challenge to the Republican electoral coalitions than to the Democrats'.

One way to make the Republican dilemma disappear is to shift the debate from the question of a woman's right to abortion into a debate over state laws requiring parental consent for teens. On this issue, there is strong consensus within both the Republican presidential and Congressional coalitions and equally important, greater consensus than within the Democratic coalitions. Reframe the debate into the a battle over public spending and the Republican dilemma reappears though the Democratic Congressional coalition too is nearly equally vulnerable on this issue.

#### Differences in Political Engagement and Mobilization

To understand the political consequences of the reframing of the abortion debate also requires attending to differential rates of political mobilization. Although both sides of the abortion controversy make considerable ruckus, are opponents of abortion rights really more politically engaged and politically mobilized than people who support a woman's right to abortion? If there are differences in political engagement and mobilization, how do these differences change with the Court's reframing of the abortion controversy?

To address this issue, we rely on a series of questions about political engagement and participation that our respondents were asked in the weeks surrounding the 1988 presidential election. For each position on the abortion

Table 6  
Divisions Within the  
Presidential and Congressional Party Coalitions  
Over Abortion

Political Issue	Vote in 1988* For President		Vote in 1988* For U.S. House	
	Dukakis	Bush	Democrat	Republican
<b>Woman's Right to Abortion</b>				
A woman should always be able to obtain an abortion	48.7	35.8	45.1	33.3
Permit abortion for other reasons after need has been established	22.4	22.8	23.8	21.7
Permitted only for rape, incest or when woman's life is in danger	23.0	34.0	25.6	37.2
Abortion should never be permitted	5.9	7.4	5.5	7.8
 <b>Law to Require Parental Consent for Teenagers To Have an Abortion</b>				
Oppose a law	38.1	22.1	32.7	25.0
Support a law	61.9	77.9	67.3	75.0
 <b>Law to Prohibit Public Spending on Abortion</b>				
Oppose a law	63.1	53.2	57.2	53.7
Support a law	39.9	46.8	42.8	46.3

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\* Deleted from this table are people who voted for a third party candidate, who did not vote, or who claimed to have voted but for whom voter turnout could not be validated.

debate, we calculated the level of political engagement and participation and display the results in Tables 7 and 8.

Citizens who believe that by law a woman should always be able to obtain an abortion as a matter of personal choice are significantly more politically engaged and are more active in electoral politics than are people who believe either that abortion should never be permitted, or that it should only be permitted in the case of rape, incest or when the woman's life is in danger. Supporters of abortion rights are about 6 to 7 percent more likely to follow what's going on in government and political affairs than are those who oppose abortion rights; they are more likely to read a daily newspaper; they are more informed about politics as reflected in their scoring 9.4 points higher on a battery of questions measuring political information.<sup>23</sup> People who support abortion rights are also more informed about the abortion issue itself, being between 13 and 20 percent more likely than other citizens to recall accurately what the Court decided in Webster.

When it comes to electoral politics, the same pattern holds: proponents of abortion rights are significantly more engaged than those who oppose abortion rights. Supporters of a woman's right to an abortion were 5.7 percent more interested in the 1988 campaigns, 9.6 percent more likely to have voted,<sup>24</sup> 6.3 percent more likely to have contributed money to a party, candidate, or political group, and 10.5 percent more likely to have engaged in campaign activities<sup>25</sup> in 1988 than were those who opposed abortion under any circumstances. If politicians fear the wrath of an angry electorate, then one would expect them to heed the call of the 40.1 percent of Americans who embrace abortion rights and out-participate the 7.6 percent of Americans who oppose these rights.

Why, then, if supporters of abortion rights out-number and out-participate those who oppose abortion, are legislators so timid about supporting a woman's right to choose? There are several possibilities. It may be that when legislators face a divisive issue like abortion, on which there is intense mobilization and little room for compromise -- despite the numbers, they are scared of the electoral consequences of adopting either position and do their best to straddle the issue. They may also feel that they will be punished regardless of what they do, so they ignore the conflicting constituent demands and vote the way they want to (Dexter 1956;

<sup>23</sup> The political information scale is comprised of nine questions asking about the jobs that various political figures hold and the party had the most members in the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate prior to the election. For background on this approach to the measurement of political information see Zaller 19xx.

<sup>24</sup> We rely here not on the respondent's reported turnout, but on a check of the official voting records in the respondent's city or town.

<sup>25</sup> We considered five campaign activities: whether respondents 1) talked to any people to try to show them why they should vote for or against one of the parties or candidates; 2) wore a campaign button, put a campaign sticker on her car, or placed a sign in their window or in front of their house; 3) went to any political meetings, rallies, speeches, dinners, or things like that in support of a particular candidate; 4) did any work for one of the parties or candidates; 5) contributed money to an individual candidate, a political party, or other group that supported or opposed candidates.

Table 7  
 Relationship Between Opinions on Abortion Rights  
 and Political Engagement and Participation in Politics

	A b o r t i o n   R i g h t s			
	Always	When Need Is Established	Rape, Incest, Women's Life in Danger	Never
<b>General Political Engagement</b>				
x who follow what's going on in gov't & public affairs some or most of time	65.6	58.5	58.7	59.5
Days/week read a daily newspaper	4.6	4.2	3.8	3.7
Score on a 100-point political information scale	52.0	47.4	43.1	42.6
<b>Engagement on Abortion Issue</b>				
x who correctly recall the Supreme Court's Webster decision	66.2	52.0	46.4	52.8
<b>Engagement and Participation in the 1988 Elections</b>				
x who were very interested in the 1988 political campaigns	35.4	31.7	30.5	29.7
x who voted in the November, 1988 election	69.1	72.6	64.2	59.5
x who gave money in 1988 to a party, candidate, or political group	17.1	12.9	13.9	10.8
x who engaged in one or more campaign activities in 1988	47.7	50.0	38.4	37.2
<b>Contacting Members of Congress</b>				
x who contacted a member of Congress to express an opinion	4.5	5.2	5.5	12.1

Table 8  
 Relationship Between Opinions on State Laws to Restrict Abortion  
 and Political Engagement and Participation in Politics

	State Law Require Parental Consent for Teens		That Would Prohibit Public Spending on Abortion	
	Oppose	Support	Oppose	Support
<b>General Political Engagement</b>				
x who follow what's going on in gov't & public affairs some or most of time	60.7	60.2	62.5	59.7
Days/week read a daily newspaper	4.5	4.0	4.2	4.1
Score on a 100-point political information scale	47.9	46.5	48.1	46.9
<b>Engagement on Abortion Issue</b>				
x who correctly recall the Supreme Court's Webster decision	62.6	53.4	61.0	51.7
<b>Engagement and Participation in the 1988 Elections</b>				
x who were very interested in the 1988 political campaigns	36.2	30.7	35.2	30.1
x who voted in the November, 1988 election	67.1	66.6	68.0	65.7
x who gave money in 1988 to a party, candidate, or political group	12.9	12.5	14.6	14.1
x who engaged in one or more campaign activities in 1988	46.4	41.7	44.9	42.7
<b>Contacting Members of Congress</b>				
x who contacted a member of Congress to express an opinion	3.0	5.9	5.3	6.1

Kingdon 1981). Another possibility is that the symbols of the "right-to-life" campaign are more vivid and intimidating than are the symbols that can be constructed around the cry for "pro-choice."

Still a third possibility is that although supporters of abortion rights out-participate opponents of abortion in the electoral arena, they may not do so when it comes to other activities directed at legislators. We have one piece of evidence that is consistent with this line of argument: 12.1 percent of the people who believe that abortion should never be permitted report having contacted their U.S. Representative to express an opinion on some issue compared to only 4.5 percent of those who believe that abortion should always be permitted as a matter of personal choice.<sup>25</sup> If Representatives use their mail and office visitors as a way to gauge which side of the abortion debate is more politically mobilized, then they are making a mistake about which side of the debate will most likely be out in force on election day (Converse, et al. 1965).

Finally, there is the matter of intensity. There is some a scattering of evidence suggesting that those who oppose abortion rights feel more strongly about the issue and are more likely to act upon that belief than those who support the right to abortion. For example, although in an April 1989 Wall Street Journal / NBC News Poll supporters of abortion rights outnumbered opponents by about 2:1, 75 percent of the opponents regarded the issue as very important compared contrasted to 51 percent of those who supported abortion rights (Shribman 1989). Parallel results were uncovered in a March 1989 Los Angeles Times Poll that showed that opponents of Roe v. Wade were more likely to claim they would switch their vote on the basis of the abortion issue than were supporters (Schneider 1989:59). Finally, although only 1 percent of the respondents to the 1989 NES Pilot Study cited abortion as the most important problem facing the country, all four of these respondents embraced the position that by law abortion should never be permitted.

Everything changes with Webster. The Supreme Court's reframing of the abortion issue from a debate over rights to a debate over the restrictions states should place on a woman's access to abortion, changes the political landscape by eliminating the advantage that the supporters of abortion rights have built up from their greater participation in politics. When citizens are reshuffled into opponents and supporters of state laws requiring parental consent and prohibiting public spending on abortion, opponents of these restrictions are not significantly more politically engaged or active than supporters (Table 8). When the political debate is over rights, those who embrace a woman's right to choose are more likely to follow what's going on in government and politics, read the daily newspaper, and be politically informed that those who favor a law that would prohibit abortion. But when the debate is over state restrictions, those who oppose restricting access to abortion are not more politically engaged or informed than those who support these

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<sup>25</sup> We are on very shaky ground here. The survey questions ask whether "you or anyone in your family living here" "ever" contacted the Representative or anyone in his/her office "to express an opinion." We do not know whether the respondent (or some other member of the family) did the contacting; whether the Representative was contacted about abortion; or whether the contacting was done before or after the respondent formed his or her current opinion on abortion.

restrictions. The same pattern holds in the electoral arena. When the debate is over rights, those who support a woman's right to choose were more interested in the 1988 political campaigns and more likely to have voted, contributed money and engaged in campaign activities than those who opposed abortion rights. When the debate switches to state restrictions, those who oppose parental consent and prohibitions on public funding of abortion do not outparticipate those who support these restrictive state laws.

Simply put, the Court's reframing of the abortion debate not only shifted the debate to questions with a more conservative public opinion, it shifted the debate in a way that erodes the political advantages that the supporters of abortion rights had gained from their greater participation in politics.

### The Politics of Rights

With Webster, the Supreme Court fundamentally recast abortion policy in the United States. Although the Court did not overtly challenge the right to abortion, it explicitly legitimated state barriers designed to deny women access to abortion. As Justice Blackmun argued in his dissent, the Missouri statute requiring fetal viability tests, "is an arbitrary imposition of discomfort, risk, and expense, furthering no discernible interest except to make the procurement of abortion as arduous and difficult as possible." This restriction, as well as the one preventing public employees and facilities from performing abortions do not fall equally on all women; especially burdened are those with the fewest resources.

The Supreme Court also reframed the abortion debate in profound ways. Prior to Webster the abortion issue was a debate over fundamental rights -- a debate that pitted views about individual freedom, autonomy, and privacy against the state's interest in protecting potential life. Webster obscures this debate by opening the door for new restrictions that are designed by their advocates to stop abortion, but mask as issues about state funding, promiscuous teenagers, the need for strict medical standards, and for informed consent. Democracy is not served by the deliberate obscuring of questions about fundamental rights.

The Court's reframing of the abortion debate has pervasive consequences on the nature of public support for abortion, on the social and ideological bases of that support, on the way the issue cuts politically, on its electoral consequences, and on the laws that are likely to be enacted governing abortion in the United States. The Court has shifted the debate to a set of issues on which the anti-abortion position is advantaged, it has helped resolve the political dilemma Republicans face on the abortion issue, it has diffused the political strength of abortion rights advocates by scattering to both sides of the reframed debate those citizens with the greatest capacity to influence political, social, and economic decisions -- those with the most education and greatest income and who are most likely to support abortion rights.

There are obvious consequences from the debate over abortion rights being sidetracked into a debate over state regulatory policy. As more and more states adopt regulations that make it difficult for women to obtain abortions, the reality of these statutes further legitimate the anti-abortion rights position, further reshape the debate in the conservative direction, and

further obscure the underlying issues. Over time, Americans will begin to think that fetal viability tests, the use of public funds and facilities, parental consent for teens, and strict medical standards are the real issues. We will forget that more fundamental principles are at stake. Over time, a debate over state regulations will gradually erode public support for a woman's right to abortion. People whose views on state regulations are inconsistent with their views on abortion rights will resolve this inconsistency by changing their mind, not about the regulations, but about the fundamental rights that women should enjoy. With more and more laws that restrict access to abortion, the gap between practice and the explicit denial of a woman's right to abortion will be narrowed. And this will happen without a public dialogue or legislative debate over the rights that are in jeopardy. Webster is a deceptive political scheme for denying women the right to abortion, for undermining public support for that right, and for paving the way for the Court's forthright overturning of Roe v. Wade.

For those who support abortion rights, the core of the post-Webster political strategy must be a re-reframing of the abortion issue back to a debate over rights.<sup>27</sup> As we saw earlier, many people who support a woman's right abortion do not recognize the inconsistency between that position and their support of restrictions that prevent teenagers and poor people from being able to realize that right. If the battle is going to be fought the maze of restrictions that states are going to try to enact to limit access to abortion, people need to understand that the right to abortion lies at the core of each of these issues. An essential component of the political strategy needs to be confronting people with their inconsistency. The abortion debate also needs to be turned into a discussion about equal opportunity, about equality for women, and the right to privacy and the autonomy of women to determine their own destiny. These are ideals that Americans overwhelmingly support, ideals that are all threatened by state laws designed to restrict abortion.

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<sup>27</sup> Part of Wilder's success with the abortion issue in Virginia may stem from his featuring his abortion-rights position within the framework of Virginia's historic concern for individual rights.

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