Reproductive Rights and Wrongs: Impact of Gender in Framing Political Decisions by Female Governors

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Framing Reproductive Rights

- Approach informed by gender, party, religion
- **Gender most influential** when party ideology and religious doctrine framed in opposition
- For Democrats, a ‘women’s issue,’ Republicans muted gendered aspect
- Democratic, Pro Choice, religious governors faced ‘forced choices,’ suffered consequences
- **(Dis) Connecting** personal and political
Women, Politics Reproductive Rights

- **Growing number** of women in politics, reaching higher levels of office
  
  31 total female governors total, record of 9
  
  1925    2 Women Governors
  1935-1967 0 Women Governors
  1994    4 Women Governors

- **US lags behind** other countries
  
  26 female heads of state worldwide
Women, Politics Reproductive Rights

- Glass Ceiling, Stereotypes
- Masculine and Feminine Issues
- Gendered Governing Styles
- Framing
Gender Gap - Reproductive Rights

• Genders differ on reproductive rights
  – Position
  – Importance
  – Voting Cue
Gender Gap - Reproductive Rights

- Women hold stronger positions on abortion than men

Do you strongly favor, favor, oppose, or strongly oppose, more restrictions on abortion?

- Strongly Favor
- Favor
- Oppose
- Strongly Oppose

![Bar chart comparing responses between women and men for different views on abortion restrictions.]
Gender Gap - Reproductive Rights

- More women consider abortion ‘very important’

Percentage rating abortion as ‘very important’

![Bar chart showing the percentage of women and men rating abortion as 'very important' overall, by age group (18-49 and 50+). The chart indicates that women have a higher percentage in all age groups compared to men.](image)
Gender Gap - Reproductive Rights

- Abortion more of a voting issue for women

Would you vote for a candidate who disagrees with you about abortion?

- Women Favor Restrictions
- Women Oppose Restrictions
- Men Favor Restrictions
- Men Oppose Restrictions
Social Significance

- Right to abortion, a **woman’s issue**, handled by **women in male dominated field**
- Topic representative of **challenges** faced by executive women
- Extent of female ‘**ownership’** of issue
- Governors are **role models** to upcoming generations
- **Real world policy** implications
The Governors

Jane Swift  
(R-MA)  
2001-2003

Judy Martz  
(R-MT)  
2001-2005

Linda Lingle  
(R-HI)  
2002-Present

Olene Walker  
(R-UT)  
2003-2005

M. Jodi Rell  
(R-CT)  
2004-Present

Sarah Palin  
(R-AK)  
2006- Present

RuthAnn Minner  
(D-DE)  
2001-2008

Janet Napolitano  
(D-AZ)  
2002-2008

Jennifer Granholm  
(D-MI)  
2003-Present

Kathleen Sebelius  
(D-KS)  
2004-2008

Kathleen Blanco  
(D-LA)  
2004-2008

Christine Gregoire  
(D-WA)  
2005-Present
Research Methodology

- **Phase 1- Media Content Analysis**
  - Official biographies, press releases, signing statements, voting records
  - Newspaper articles
  - Qualitative and quantitative analysis (approx. 375 publications)
Phase 1- Findings

• Approach informed by gender, party, religion

• Gender most influential when party and religion framed in opposition
  
  Gov. Christine Gregoire (D-WA) Pro Choice
  Gov. Jennifer Granholm (D-MI) Pro Choice
Gender

• For Democrats, a *women’s issue*
  Gov. Christine Gregoire (D-WA) Pro Choice
  “I am Pro Choice, I believe in a woman’s right to choose.”

• For Republicans, *gendered aspect muted*
  Gov. Olene Smith Walker (R-UT) Anti Abortion
  “I believe in the sanctity of life.”
Phase 1 - Findings

• Democrats more likely to personalize issue, some exceptions

Gov. Janet Napolitano (D- AZ) Pro Choice

_Napolitano said the pro life bill “represents undue government intrusion into the relationship between a woman and her doctor, her family, her religious counselor, or whomever else she wishes to consult in making this most difficult of personal and medical decisions.”_

Gov. Sarah Palin (R-AK) Anti Abortion
Phase 1- Findings

• Pro Choice religious Democratic governors faced ‘forced choices,’ suffered consequences

Gov. Jennifer Granholm (D-MI) Pro Choice

“(She) should be ashamed as a Roman Catholic to support the legal slaughter of innocent, unborn children.”
Phase 1- Findings

• Democrats disconnected personal and political
  Gov. Kathleen Sebelius (D- KS) Pro Choice

  Catholic faith teaches that “all life is sacred”
  “Personally, I believe abortion is wrong.
  However, I disagree with the suggestion that
  criminalizing women and their doctors is an
  effective means of achieving the goal of
  reducing the number of abortions in our
  nation.”
Phase 2 - Questionnaire

- Sent to all twelve governors, currently collecting responses
- **Unfiltered, direct response** through three open ended questions
- **Why?**
  - Inherent media bias
  - News forms our opinions
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1. In your political life, you are a member of the Republican/Democratic party. How would you describe your personal political philosophy, and how does that compare to the stated ideology of the party?

2. To what degree do you think your personal life and your gender influence your governorship? If you have religious affiliation, how extensively does your religious belief affect your policy positions and the way you govern?

3. For this study, we are specifically interested in how female governors treat the issue of reproductive rights. Please relay to us your stance on this topic, and discuss the factors that affected the development of your position as specifically as possible.