



**NATIONAL
WOMEN'S
LAW CENTER**

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Research Demonstrates that Centering Values in Abortion Messaging Makes a Difference

In 2025, Hart Research led a two-phase, national research project on behalf of the National Women's Law Center, focused on centering values when talking about abortion. The research involved both qualitative and quantitative components, included large sample sizes and significant oversamples of target audiences and target states, and focused on state lawmakers as messengers. The research demonstrates that values-based abortion messaging increases the public's support of abortion and of the messenger. The research also offers new insights, values, and messaging guideposts for state lawmakers and advocates.¹

Research Design

Phase 1: Qualitative Research

The qualitative research phase was designed as an ethnographic online "diary" project. Between May 28 and June 1, 2025, 30 base and persuadable constituents² from states that are considered protective, restrictive, or in the middle on abortion access³ individually answered open-ended questions and engaged in interactive exercises over the course of multiple sessions.

Phase 2: Quantitative Research

The quantitative research phase was a national online survey of 1,811 base and persuadable constituents with oversamples of Black, Latine, and AAPI respondents, as well as respondents in Florida, Maryland, Michigan, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, and Virginia. The survey was fielded from June 20-25, 2025.

The survey included three stages of message testing. All tested messages can be found in the Appendix.

¹ The 2025 project built on research undertaken in 2021 by Hart Research on behalf of NWLC in partnership with Keefe Singiser Partners and Conway Strategic. That [research](#) found that when federal lawmakers speak about abortion through the lens of values, particularly values around freedom, autonomy, justice, rights, and health or wellbeing, constituents are more supportive of both abortion and the messenger.

² Base constituents agree with the statement, "I personally support the right to abortion and believe it should be legal and available." Persuadable constituents agree with the statement, "I am personally against abortion, but I do not believe the government should prevent someone from making that decision for themselves."

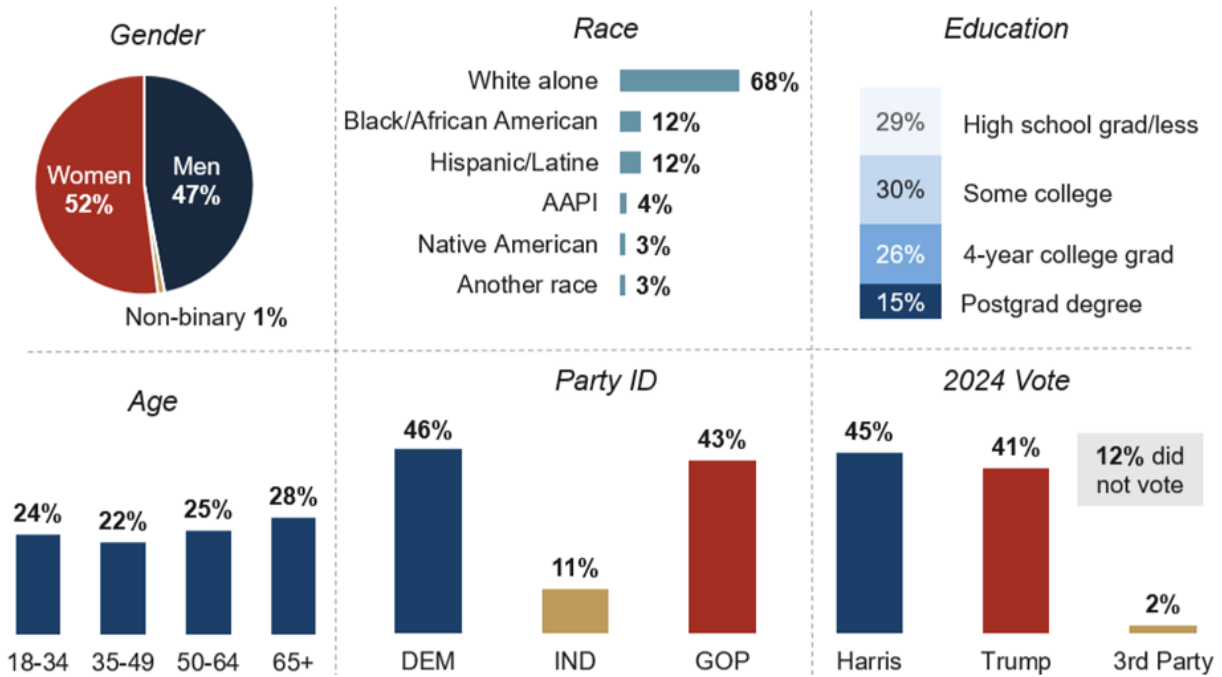
³ The categorization of states was based on the Guttmacher Institute's interactive map on state abortion policies, as of May and June 2025, avail. <https://states.guttmacher.org/policies/>

<p>STAGE 1</p>	<p>Participants evaluated 3 out of 6 longer narratives they might hear from a hypothetical state lawmaker.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respondents rated how the statement would make them feel about their state elected official and whether they thought the official was “in step” or “out of step” with their views on abortion. • Respondents identified key words and phrases that resonated most via text highlighting exercises. • For any negative or “out of step” ratings, participants explained in an open-ended response why they had that impression. <p>Example of a longer narrative:</p> <p><i>Everyone should have the chance to live a safe and healthy life, and that includes being able to get an abortion and other reproductive healthcare. Abortion bans take that away and put people’s health and well-being at serious risk. As a state lawmaker, my job is to put people’s health and real-life needs first--not personal beliefs or politics.</i></p>
<p>STAGE 2</p>	<p>Participants evaluated short values-based statements a hypothetical state lawmaker might make. Respondents rated the importance of each statement and ranked their top 3 most important values for supporting protective abortion laws in their state.</p> <p>Example of a short, values-based statement:</p> <p><i>Everyone should have the opportunity to live a safe and healthy life. That means being able to get the full range of reproductive care, including abortion. Abortion bans take that away and put people’s health and well-being at serious risk.</i></p>
<p>STAGE 3</p>	<p>The researchers measured whether there was any post-messaging movement on respondents’ views of state lawmakers; perceived importance of laws ensuring people can access abortion in their state; and personal position on abortion being legal.</p>

Abortion Views

This survey focused on respondents who personally support the right to abortion OR who personally oppose the right to abortion but do not believe the government should prevent someone from making that decision for themselves. The sample excluded respondents who believe abortion should be illegal.

Demographics



Source: [Hart Research](#)

Overview of Findings

Respondents most fear the loss of rights, freedoms, and health and safety.

When it comes to abortion bans and restrictions, respondents most fear, among a list of values, the loss of rights, freedoms, and health and safety. Taking away rights is the top concern for every demographic group, across the political and ideological spectrum, and in protective, restrictive, and middle states.

“It makes me sad and angry that women are being told what to do about their bodies...a lot of women are at risk mentally and physically.” - Base constituent, Restrictive state, Female, 18-29, Hispanic or Latino

“I’m fearful of what right will be taken away next.” - Base constituent, Protective state, Male, 50-59, Jewish/White

Respondents want abortion policy to be guided by health and well-being, control of one’s body, and freedom.

When asked to rank up to three values that are most important in guiding our society and making decisions about abortion policy, respondents selected health and well-being, control of one’s body, and freedom. While health and well-being and freedom strongly resonate with base and persuadable constituents, control of one’s body resonates the most with base constituents.

“I think prioritizing health and wellbeing is crucial when it comes to making abortion laws. We need to consider the health impact on others in case of medical emergencies and put the mother’s health and wellbeing first. If we don’t, there could be a lot of mothers’ lives lost because we don’t value their health and don’t put them first.” - Base constituent, Middle state, Female, 30-39, White

“The freedom to make your own choices. What you do with your life and body is your choice and I don’t feel anyone should have the right to take that freedom away.” - Persuadable constituent, Protective state, Female, 40-49, African American or Black

“Being able to make decisions about your own body is a basic human right. When it comes to abortion, this control is especially important because it affects a person’s freedom, health, and ability to live with dignity. Without it, laws and policies can end up making deeply personal decisions for people, rather than letting them choose what’s best for their own lives.” - Base constituent, Restrictive state, Female, 18-29, Hispanic or Latino

Respondents are frustrated with toxic rhetoric on abortion and want elected leaders who show respect.

Respondents want their elected leaders to have a more respectful tone, even when they disagree. Even among persuadable constituents who express some support for additional restrictions on abortion, there is a strong sense that abortion rhetoric has become too divisive. Respondents want their leaders to prioritize real-life concerns over partisan agendas.

"I want my representative leaders to be well-spoken, respectful, and decisive. The values I want them to have include compassionate, reliable, and accountable. I am looking for the elected leaders to be able to communicate their positions and have the skills to listen to others, while being persuasive when working with the public and their peers." - Base constituent, Protective state, Male, 50-59, Jewish/White

"...I understand that this is a highly charged topic with varying opinions, but please take into consideration that we live in a country founded on freedom. On the ability to choose what we do without government interference. Please do not use your own agenda to force on to the people. Listen to others, and not just those on the same aisle as you. Listen and actually converse. See pros and cons." - Persuadable constituent, Protective state, Male, 30-39, Hispanic or Latino

"An elected official that represents me must be a servant leader. They must put their constituents' interest before their own. They must be able to understand and fight for the issues and needs of their constituents. They must be fair and just, and have morals, integrity and values of manners and respect." - Persuadable constituent, Restricted state, Female, 40-49, African American or Black

Respondents are widely concerned about abortion bans and restrictions and want laws ensuring state abortion access.

- 81% of respondents are concerned about efforts to ban or restrict abortion in the United States.
- 93% of respondents believe laws that help ensure people can access abortion in the state where they live are important (5 and higher on a 0-10 scale), with 67% assigning high importance to these laws (8-10 on a 0-10 scale).
- 87% of base constituents in protective states and 82% of base constituents in restrictive states see laws that help ensure people can get an abortion in the state they live as highly important (8-10 on a 0-10 scale).

Respondents recognize that anti-abortion lawmakers are out of step with their abortion views, and a majority sees lawmakers who support abortion access as in step with their abortion views, but there is opportunity for lawmakers.

- 63% see anti-abortion lawmakers in their state as out of step with their views on abortion, with 33% seeing them as *definitely* out of step.
- 59% see lawmakers who support abortion access as in their state as in step with their views on abortion, with 22% seeing them as *definitely* in step.
- State lawmakers who support abortion access have room to grow with base and persuadable constituents in their state.

Messaging Insights

Each values-based message is important to respondents and reflects well on the messenger.

- Each short values statement was deemed "important" by at least 87% of respondents and "very important" by at least 60% of respondents.
- Each longer narrative made at least 75% of respondents feel favorable towards a hypothetical state lawmaker and made at least 55% of respondents feel very favorable.
- Each longer narrative made at least 83% of respondents describe a hypothetical state lawmaker as "in step" with their way of thinking on abortion, with at least 50% of respondents describing them as "definitely in step."

All values resonate strongly with base constituents, while only a few are very important to persuadable constituents.

- Each of the short values statements resonated strongly with at least 75% of base constituents.
- More than 70% of base constituents would feel very favorable towards a hypothetical state lawmaker who speaks about abortion using freedom, safety, and/or autonomy narratives.
- Only four of the short value statements were rated as very important by over half of persuadable constituents –

compassion and dignity, faith, safety, and health and well-being.

- 43% of persuadable constituents would feel very favorable towards a hypothetical state lawmaker who speaks about abortion using a faith/compassion narrative.

The values of compassion and respect resonate across base and persuadable constituents.

- 96% of respondents rated the short compassion and dignity statement as important, with 68% of respondents rating it as very important.
- 36% of base constituents and 45% of persuadable constituents ranked the short compassion and dignity statement as one of the top three most important reasons to have laws ensuring people can get an abortion in the state where they live.
- When asked to highlight phrases that resonated with them, both base and persuadable constituents highlighted phrases like: “It’s not my place to judge,” “treating people with compassion and dignity,” and “respect people’s freedom to make decisions about pregnancy that are best for their own lives.”

Linking priority values to real experiences strengthens communication.

Personal stories of harm from abortion bans capture the public’s attention and amplify urgency and impact. When asked which types of stories about abortion catch respondents’ attention the most, the top three categories were:

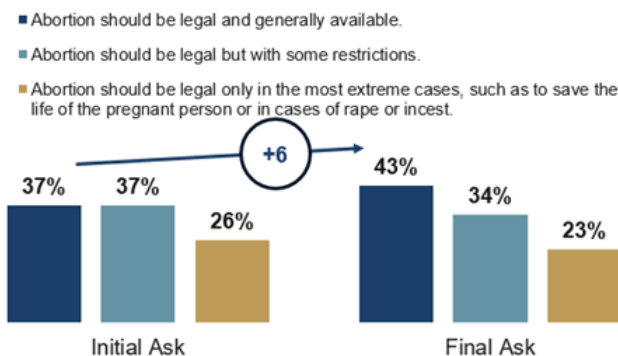
- Stories about patients whose health or lives were harmed because of abortion bans – 77%
- Stories about patients being forced to continue a pregnancy – 68%
- Stories about doctors being investigated or charged with crimes for trying to provide abortion care - 56%

Messaging Impact

Values-based messaging strengthens support of both abortion and the messenger across a range of audiences.

- Values-based messaging on abortion increases respondents’ personal support for legal abortion. This support increased the most among Black respondents ages 18-49, Black women, those who did not vote in 2024, dads, Independents, those ages 18-34, and AAPI respondents without college degrees.

Which of the following statements comes closest to your position on abortion?



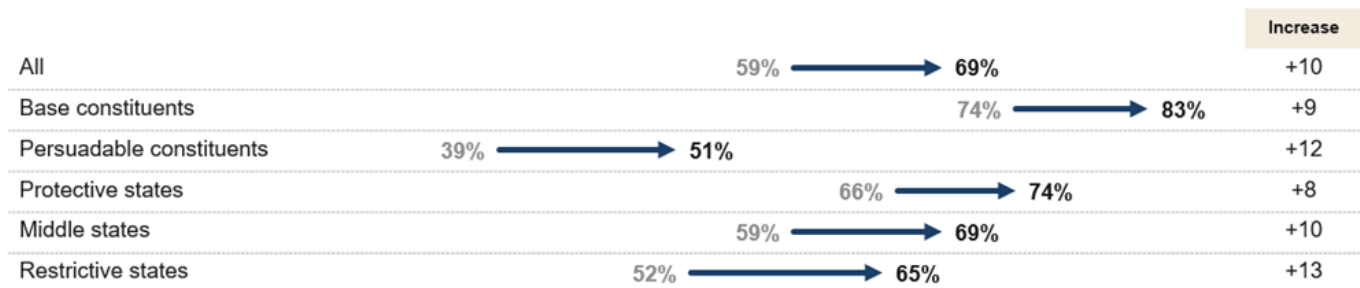
Abortion legal and generally available increases the most among:

- Black voters ages 18-49 (40% → 53%)
- Black women (44% → 57%)
- Didn't vote 2024 (28% → 39%)
- Dads (27% → 38%)
- Ages 18-34 (41% → 50%)
- AAPI noncollege (29% → 38%)

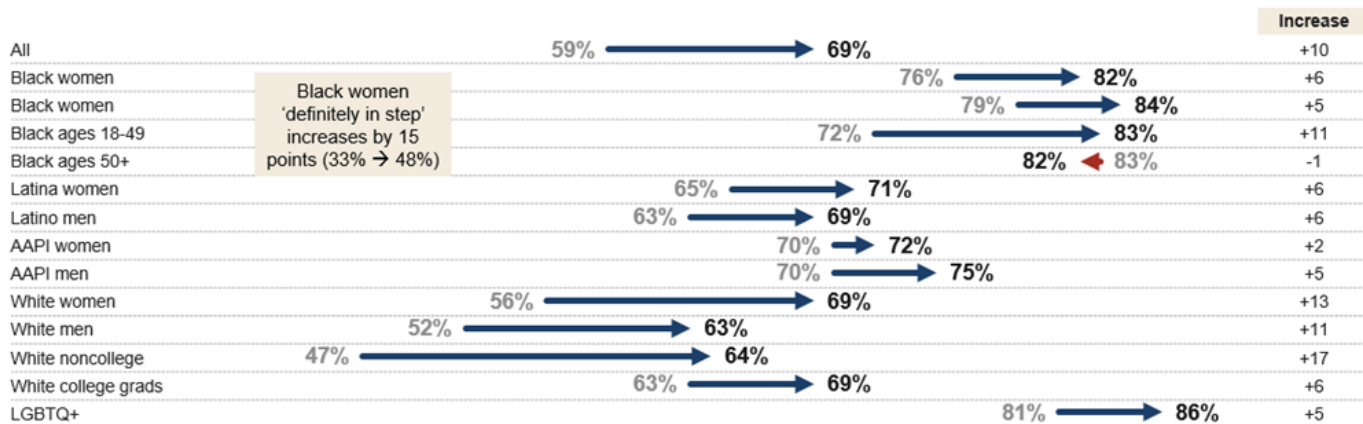
Source: [Hart Research](#)

- Values-based messaging on abortion increases perceptions that state lawmakers who support abortion access are in step with respondents’ views. It increases support among base and persuadable constituents, respondents in states with varying abortion protections and restrictions, and other demographic groups, especially White non-college educated respondents, White women, White men, and Black respondents ages 18-49.

% rate lawmakers who support abortion access in (STATE) as in step with own way of thinking on abortion
Pre Messaging to Post Messaging



% rate lawmakers who support abortion access in (STATE) as in step with own way of thinking on abortion
Pre Messaging to Post Messaging



Source: [Hart Research](#)

This research demonstrates that centering values in abortion messaging makes a difference to the public. State lawmakers and advocates can use values-based messaging on abortion to connect with their constituents, shift the narrative, and strengthen support for abortion access in their communities.

APPENDIX

Problem Statements

Participants in the qualitative research phase were asked to rank the below statements in accordance with this prompt: “Since *Roe v. Wade* was overturned in 2022, states have passed different bans and restrictions on abortion. People describe their concerns about these bans and restrictions in different ways. Rank the three of these that concern you most.”

- Government control/intrusion: New state restrictions and bans on abortion are expanding government’s power and control over women.
- Lack of equity: Different states have different laws, so the ability to get an abortion completely depends on where you live and how much money you have.
- Rights/power: Our rights are under attack in every aspect of life. Abortion bans and restrictions take the power away from people to make decisions about their own bodies.
- Freedom: Abortion bans and restrictions take away the freedom every person should have to make decisions about their own bodies, lives, and futures.
- Inequality: Those who already face unequal barriers to care, especially young people, LGBTQIA+ people, and Black and Brown people, suffer the most from abortion bans and restrictions.
- Equality: Women/we cannot be truly equal if they/we do not have control over their/our own bodies and reproductive healthcare, including decisions about whether to have an abortion.
- Safety 1: Pregnant women’s/people’s health and lives are in danger when abortion is not accessible or available.
- Safety 2: Abortion bans restrict life-saving care for women/people experiencing pregnancy complications.

Longer Narratives

- Safety: Laws that limit or ban abortion make any pregnancy less safe. As we’ve seen in tragic cases across the country, when doctors are forced to deny care, it puts people’s lives at risk. No one should face serious health complications or death because of laws that interfere with personal medical decisions. In healthcare, patients must always come first.
- Respect Personal Decisions: Deciding whether or when to become a parent is one of the most personal decisions anyone can make. My job isn’t to make those decisions for the people I represent. It is to respect them and their freedom to make the decisions about pregnancy and abortion that are best for their own lives.
- Faith/Compassion: As a person of faith, I believe in treating people with compassion and dignity. We don’t know what someone else is going through, and every pregnancy is different. It is not my place to judge or punish someone for having an abortion. Every person should be able to make decisions about their pregnancy based on their own faith and conscience.
- Health and well-being: Everyone should have the chance to live a safe and healthy life, and that includes being able to get an abortion and other reproductive healthcare. Abortion bans take that away and put people’s health and well-being at serious risk. As a state lawmaker, my job is to put people’s health and real-life needs first--not personal beliefs or politics.
- Freedom/Control of own body: We aren’t truly free until everyone can make decisions about their own bodies, lives, and futures. Lawmakers should not have the power to deny abortion care or force someone to stay pregnant against their will. I believe our laws should protect people’s freedoms, not take them away--including the freedom to control their own bodies.
- Equity: Everyone should be able to make decisions about their own body, no matter who they are, where they

live, or how much money they earn. But abortion bans hurt some more than others. Black and Indigenous women are more likely to die during pregnancy and more likely to live in states with bans--so if they are forced to carry a pregnancy, they take on higher health risks against their will. As a lawmaker, I want to end these injustices and ensure everyone can make the healthcare decisions that are best for them.

Short Statements

- **Compassion and Dignity:** Let's treat everyone with dignity and respect, even if we don't agree with someone's decisions. We don't know everyone's circumstances, and every pregnancy is unique. It's better when we lead with compassion and let each person, not politicians, decide whether to have an abortion.
- **Health and Well-Being:** Everyone should have the opportunity to live a safe and healthy life. That means being able to get the full range of reproductive care, including abortion. Abortion bans take that away and put people's health and well-being at serious risk.
- **Safety:** Laws that limit or ban abortion make any pregnancy less safe. When doctors are forced to deny care, it puts people's lives and safety at risk. No one should be forced to risk their life or health to continue a pregnancy.
- **Faith:** Each person should be able to follow their own beliefs, faith, and conscience when they make decisions about pregnancy, abortion, and parenting.
- **Freedom:** We aren't truly free until everyone can make decisions about their own bodies, lives, and futures. Denying abortion care and forcing someone to continue a pregnancy against their will takes away their freedom.
- **Equity:** Abortion care should be available, accessible, and affordable, without barriers based on who you are, how much money you have, or where you are from. Everyone should have the ability to make reproductive healthcare decisions that are best for them.
- **Autonomy/Agency:** The decision about whether or when to become a parent is one of the most important life decisions we make. Every person should be able to make decisions about pregnancy, including abortion, without barriers, shame, or political interference.
- **Rights:** Our basic rights are being taken away, including the right of people to make their own decisions about their bodies and what's best for them. Everyone should be able to get an abortion, no matter what state they live in.
- **Control:** Abortion bans are about politicians trying to control people. People, not politicians, should have the power to make decisions about their lives, bodies, and futures.
- **Gender Equality/Women:** Women cannot be truly equal if they don't have control over their own bodies and lives. Banning abortion is about controlling women and returning to a time when women could not make decisions about their bodies and futures.