

Fall 12-4-2023

## **Political Rhetoric and Latino Public Opinion: A Study of Abortion in the U.S.**

Fernanda Valdez  
fvaldezsalcado@gmail.com

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POLITICAL RHETORIC AND LATINO PUBLIC OPINION:

A STUDY OF ABORTION IN THE U.S.

A Thesis

by

FERNANDA VALDEZ

Submitted to Texas A&M International University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

December 2023

Major Subject: History & Political Thought

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Approved as to style and content by:

Chair of Committee, Simon Zschirnt

Committee Members, James Norris

Deborah Blackwell

Nilda Garcia

Head of Department, Simon Zschirnt

Major Subject: History & Political Thought

## ABSTRACT

Political Rhetoric and Latino Public Opinion: A Study of Abortion in the U.S. (December 2023)

Fernanda Valdez, B.A., Texas A&M University;

Chair of Committee: Dr. Simon Zschirnt

This thesis studies political rhetoric and Latino public opinion on abortion in the United States. Mainly, this thesis asks: Is political rhetoric on abortion shaping the Latino vote? This thesis conducted a content analysis of political rhetoric through speeches, interviews, debates, political advertisements, and social media accounts from Democratic and Republican gubernatorial candidates. The gubernatorial races studied in this thesis are those from California and Texas from 2010 to 2022. In the content analysis, this research accounted for words and phrases that referenced abortion and the type of arguments (reproductive rights-based and moral-based arguments) made in those references. Then, this study compared political rhetoric with the relative Democratic lean of the Latino vote. This thesis expected the relative Democratic lean of the Latino vote to decrease as the Republican Party increased its abortion references (H1) and moral-based arguments on abortion (H2). Ultimately, this study found support for H1 in only Texas while finding support for H2 in Texas and California. However, this study found that Texas Democrats politicized the issue more than their Republican counterparts. In other words, Republicans did not prioritize abortion as much as Democrats, and yet, the relative Democratic lean of the Latino vote has still decreased or, rather, has become less Democratic since 2010.

## DEDICATION

To my family, thank you for your unconditional love and kindness and for enduring my endless questions about anything and everything. To my sisters, thank you for being my best friends, examples, and joy in life. To my parents, I will forever be grateful to you both, and I especially want to thank you for encouraging me to pursue my dreams.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to express my deepest gratitude to my committee: Dr. Zschirnt, Dr. Garcia, Dr. Blackwell, and Dr. Norris. I am incredibly thankful for their kindness, generosity, and guidance throughout my graduate studies, especially during my thesis. I also want to give a special thanks to Dr. Garcia for listening to my worries, encouraging me to keep going, and being so generous with her kindness, patience, and knowledge. This feat allowed me to learn so much about the world and myself, and it was only possible with their encouragement and guidance. I can only hope to pass the same generosity to others one day. Lastly, and certainly not least, I would also like to extend my deepest gratitude to my family and friends whose love, support, and belief in me mean the world to me. I will eternally be indebted to your kindness.

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## INTRODUCTION

The abortion issue is undoubtedly one of the most contentious issues in the United States political arena. The procedure itself has seen tremendous change but likewise so has the debate surrounding it. However, one notable feature of abortion is that its legality has experienced a transformation (Mohr, 1978), along with how the political debate is presented to the public (Ziegler, 2009). Early forms of legislation concerning abortion during the early to mid-1800s in the U.S. showed concern over women's health and focused on the safety and protection from dangerous abortifacients (Mohr, 1978). Since then, legal status of abortion and its surrounding debate has come a long way from over a hundred years ago. Although the areas covered in the existing literature are relevant and vital to understanding the issue, there remains, however, a vagueness regarding how campaigns use political discourse and rhetoric regarding abortion to influence Latino voting behavior. Thus, this research asks, is political rhetoric on abortion shaping the Latino vote?

In order to address this question, this research is organized as follows. First, this study presents a brief background on the history and evolution of the political rhetoric concerning abortion in the U.S. The second section reviews the scholarship studying American public opinion, Latino public opinion, and attitudes on abortion. Following the literature, this paper presents the research design that will compare through a content analysis *political rhetoric* (the independent variable) with the *relative Democratic lean of the Latino vote* (the dependent variable) for both Texas and California gubernatorial races from 2010 to 2022. This study hypothesized that if the Republican Party increased its number of references on abortion and its moral-based argumentation, then

the *relative Democratic lean of the Latino vote* would also see a decrease. After observing speeches, interviews, debates, political advertisements, and social media content, this research finds support for both hypotheses. Ultimately, this paper aims to encourage a stronger focus on the words and language drive this debate on how it could influence voting behavior and decision-making both within and outside the political arena for the Latino population in the U.S.

## BRIEF BACKGROUND

As previously noted, early forms of legislation concerning abortion in the early to mid-1800s in the U.S. were concerned with protecting women against dangerous abortifacients, such as Connecticut's revised laws for "Crimes and Punishments" in 1821 (see for example Mohr, 1978). Mohr (1978) explains that the revision held the first statutory form of abortion legislation in section 14. Following its introduction into the legislative field in the U.S., the legality and morality concerning abortion is still surrounded in intense debate. At the heart of the debate remain the questions of who and when one can undergo the procedure and even if the procedure should be allowed at all. To add to the debate, however, it is noteworthy to address how the abortion issue functions within the political arena through rhetoric, and in particular, its relationship with Latino public opinion in the U.S. This is ultimately what this paper will aim to address.

In 1973, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled through *Roe v. Wade* (1973) that abortion fell under the right to privacy guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution (*Roe v. Wade*, 1973). As Ziegler (2009) argues, this ultimately marked a change in how political elites present the two sides of the debate to the public. Ziegler (2009) argues that the judicial decision ultimately reframed the abortion issue, which helped transform the coalitions and their arguments. Adams (1997) argues that the abortion issue has evolved slowly since *Roe v. Wade* (1973) according to the theory of issue evolution. However, the starting point of this slow transition was *Roe v. Wade* (1973), as Ziegler (2009) argues, after which the framing and arguments started to change on how the abortion issue was presented to the American electorate. Where the arguments used to take a population control

framework, the debate adopted a framework based on rights after the former sparked debate given its ties to discriminatory ideologies (Ziegler, 2009). Since then, the Democratic Party has become more socially liberal and favors the pro-choice position on abortion (Ziegler, 2009). Consequently, this allowed political elites to deliver arguments more engaging for racial and ethnic minorities that traditionally identify with the Democratic Party (Ziegler, 2009). In short, from an argument of population control, the abortion debate shifted to one concerned with rights (Ziegler, 2009).

Almost 50 years later in 2022, the U.S. Supreme Court decided in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* (2022) that the right to an abortion is nowhere in the U.S. Constitution, essentially overturning *Roe v. Wade* (1973). Ultimately, this decision returns power to the states to decide the legality of abortion within their state borders (Santamariña & Phillips, 2022). In the same year, the U.S. midterm elections were underway. The ruling of *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* (2022), coupled with the midterm elections, only redirected the spotlight once again to the issue of abortion in the United States (Krogstad et al., 2022). According to an Emerson Poll, abortion was the second most crucial issue for voters, with the economy being the top priority for voters (Mumford, 2022), and even Latinos saw this issue as a more important one than before (Krogstad et al., 2022), thus indicating that the debate is far from settled even 50 years after *Roe v. Wade* (1973).

Scholars have since studied how the issue of abortion relates to public opinion in the U.S. However, the literature mainly examines either the American public as a general whole without a specific racial and ethnic focus (Jelen & Wilcox, 2003; Adams,

1997; Killian & Wilcox, 2008; Carsey & Layman, 2006) or studies the main determinants of opinion on abortion within the Latino population (Ellison et al., 2005; Espinosa, 2008; Bartkowski et al., 2012; Holman et al., 2020). Nevertheless, one understudied aspect is the politicization of Latino public opinion on abortion in the U.S. It is crucial to understand the public opinion of the Latino population and how this translates through elections because the Latino population comprises 19% of the U.S. population (Lopez et al., 2022). From a population of over 9 million in 1970, the Latino population increased to just over 62 million in 2021 (Lopez et al., 2022) – a significant increase worthy of attention.

Moreover, when it regards religious identification, a majority of the Latino population identifies with some denomination of Christianity (*Chapter 1: Religious Affiliation of Hispanics*, 2014). As scholarship shows, there is a clear relationship between religion and Latino attitudes on abortion (Ellison et al., 2005). That is, there is a difference among the Latino population given its religious diversification in that, for example, Protestant Latinos are more conservative on abortion than Catholic Latinos (Ellison et al., 2005). Thus, in line with other scholars (Bartkowski et al., 2012), this proposal argues that the Latino population and its stance on salient issues in the U.S. should not be overlooked, especially since the importance of the issue also rose for Latinos in 2022 as previously noted (Krogstad et al., 2022).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

This thesis divides the literature review into three sections. In the first category, the scholarship mainly addresses overall American public opinion rather than having a racial or ethnic focus. The second category is literature that does focus on Latino public opinion. However, it only focuses briefly on abortion. The third and last section will explain the gaps that can be filled to better understand Latino public opinion in the U.S.

### ***General U.S. Public Opinion***

At the aggregate level, Jelen and Wilcox (2003) study the main dynamics of the abortion issue in the U.S., and as the scholars importantly note, abortion retains the ability to change political behavior amongst the American electorate to the extent of changing partisanship. The researchers also note that when it comes to studying the predictors of attitudes amongst the electorate, one of the strongest predictors of abortion attitudes is religion (Jelen & Wilcox, 2003). However, when studying these public opinions on abortion, words matter (Jelen & Wilcox, 2003). Even though individuals can easily create their opinions regarding abortion without expert knowledge (Adams, 1997), the researchers argue that the framing of the abortion issue does generate varying responses from individuals (Jelen & Wilcox, 2003). In addition, the researchers explain that given the power abortion has on the American electorate, the framing of abortion is even more critical, given that political campaigns could use abortion, amongst other contentious issues, to sway the electorate in their favor (Jelen & Wilcox, 2003). Thus, it is best if research refrains from overlooking the framing of the abortion issue.

Moreover, even though the demographics amongst the American electorate have changed since the time of *Roe v. Wade* (Jelen & Wilcox, 2003), it is also essential to understand that the political parties have also changed in their stance on issues like abortion since that time (Adams, 1997). As Adams (1997) discusses, the abortion issue facilitated a change in ideology within the two political parties in the U.S. (the Democratic Party and the Republican Party). Because of its consistent saliency and because it does not require expert knowledge to have a stance on the matter, abortion provides the ideal conditions to transform the parties (Adams, 1997). Thus, after studying congressional roll call votes from 1973 to 1994, Adams (1997) found that the two political parties did experience a change in which the Democratic Party increasingly sided more with the pro-choice side of the debate and the Republican Party increasingly sided more with the pro-life side of the debate by 1994. In other words, the critical takeaway from this finding is that the parties each became more united on the matter, which ultimately provides a more unambiguous indication of which side each party stands on the issue of abortion to the American electorate (Adams, 1997).

An explanation of this transformation could be that political self-interest in the form of reelection is at the forefront of the parties' evolution (Adams, 1997). By strategically using emotional cues on the issue, political elites could use the issue of abortion for political points (Adams, 1997). In order to make it easier for the electorate to identify with a party, the parties ultimately must provide clear cues on their stances on abortion (Adams, 1997). Additionally, Adams (1997) notes that because abortion is more of a moral than a technical issue, it is more probable that members of the electorate change their party identification rather than their stance on the abortion issue.

To further explore the matter of party switching, Killian and Wilcox (2008) take a closer view of abortion and party switching. According to Killian and Wilcox (2008), Adams (1997) is ambivalent regarding causality or how the electorate changes parties on the abortion issue. Killian and Wilcox (2008) attempt to fill that doubt and study the relationship between abortion attitudes and party switching in the U.S. from 1990 to 2004. They find that an issue evolution did take place with the issue of abortion (Killian & Wilcox, 2008). In other words, the public reacted to party cues on the issue and changed their parties according to their beliefs (Killian & Wilcox, 2008). A final point Killian and Wilcox (2008) clarify is that this area of study is essential to examine from a long-term point of view because it slowly evolves as per the theory of issue evolution.

Additionally, some, like Carsey and Layman (2006), argue that looking at party identification and policy preferences is much more complicated than the broader scholarship makes it out to be. In their study, Carsey and Layman (2006) align with Adams (1997) in arguing that political parties have become more polarized on abortion. However, Carsey and Layman (2006) argue that what is important to study is not whether individuals change their party identification or preferences but which individuals and to what extent. Carsey and Layman (2006) argue that individuals change their party identification based on issues only when they know the political party's stance on the issue and if they also find it important to them. In other words, it depends on the individual and how resolute they are with their opinions on issues like abortion and how they respond to the cues provided by the political parties (Carsey & Layman, 2006). Therefore, when it comes to abortion, it is interesting to study not only the most recent



debates, especially in the time after *Dobbs v. Jackson* (2022) and the midterm elections, but also to observe what this shows for Latino public opinion.

### ***Latino Public Opinion in the U.S.***

As Sanchez (2006) points out, public opinion amongst the U.S. Latino population is an overlooked area of study, with the first surveys on this subject matter starting in 1979. As such, Sanchez (2006) studies group consciousness and public opinion within the Latino population. Group consciousness is when group members have closeness to the group and thus identify with it (Sanchez, 2006). Consequently, this closeness and identification with one another are reflected through collective action in the political atmosphere (Sanchez, 2006). However, little is known about the relationship between group consciousness and the Latino population (Sanchez, 2006). In his study, Sanchez (2006) finds that group consciousness is stronger when issues closely relate to the Latino population, such as immigration. Additionally, nativity also plays a significant role (Sanchez, 2006). Regarding more non-salient issues concerning the Latino population, however, Sanchez (2006) finds that abortion, for instance, mainly depends on religion. He uses abortion mainly as a cultural measurement for group consciousness and emphasizes religion or Catholicism primarily in addition to nativity as the main determinants for group consciousness (Sanchez, 2006).

When it comes to abortion and the Latino population, Bolks et al. (2000) examine the determinants of abortion attitudes for the Latino communities and, in particular, those of Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Cuban descent in the U.S. since these are the three largest Latino populations. Looking at religiosity, feminism, socioeconomic status,

and control variables in ideology and other subgroups, Bolks et al. (2000) aim to study if determinants for abortion attitudes are the same for Latino and non-Latino populations. They find they share the same variables determining their respective abortion attitudes (Bolks et al., 2000). Essentially, this study focuses more on determinants or predictors of abortion attitudes for the Latino population and establishes the issue as non-ethnic, which Sanchez (2006) reiterates.

In response to the scarce research on Latino public opinion and abortion, there is a small cluster of scholars (Ellison et al., 2005; Espinosa, 2008; Bartkowski et al., 2012; Holman et al., 2020) that recognize the oversight of the intersection of religion, abortion, and Latino public opinion and thus, make these areas a focus of their studies. Following Bolks et al. (2000), Ellison et al. (2005) also look at the three most prominent Latino populations - Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Cuban descent - in their study and investigate how these subgroups and religious involvement (religious affiliation and service attendance) relate to each other.

Specifically, Ellison et al. (2005) aim to study how religious involvement amongst the Latino population and their attitudes on the abortion issue are related. After analyzing data sourced from the Latino National Political Survey distributed in 1990, Ellison et al. (2005) find that, for the most part, Latinos side more with the pro-life or anti-abortion side of the debate. Their study also finds a clear relationship between religion and Latino attitudes toward abortion (Ellison et al., 2005). Furthermore, Ellison et al. (2005) find that among these subgroups, committed Protestants hold a more conservative stance on the issue when compared to their Catholic counterparts that

tend to show more leniency towards the issue. Although Ellison et al. (2005) do not offer a detailed explanation of this finding, they do explain that, in general, conservative Protestants with anti-abortion attitudes tend to have strong convictions over the Bible that see the biblical text perfect as is and as the ultimate authority over principles leading to strict, conservative stances on abortion (Ellison et al., 2005). Given these variations amongst these Latino populations, Ellison et al. (2005) highlight the importance of nativity that leads to variations amongst the subgroups within the Latino population and various policy preferences.

Espinosa (2008) also takes a closer view of religion and finds that most Latinos see the Catholic Church as a fair institution that treats all equally and that when it comes to abortion, a majority of the Latino population takes a conservative stance on the issue. This may stem from the Latino population aligning their stance with that of the church's. Espinosa (2008) thus confirms the positive relationship between religion and social issues such as abortion. Moreover, Bartkowski et al. (2012) compare Catholic and Protestant Latinos and argue that this is important to study because of the increased religious diversification amongst Latinos. Bartkowski et al. (2012) found that Latino Protestants were more conservative than Catholic Latinos.

Consequently, the Republican Party has made more effort to win them over because of their shared religious beliefs (Bartkowski et al., 2012). As such, Bartkowski et al. (2012) argue that the Latino vote cannot be taken for granted especially given its rapid population growth. To add to the scholarship, Holman et al. (2020) include the role of gender in the debate. They aim to understand how religiosity and gender interact with

each other to form a preference for abortion to highlight the importance of intersectionality. In their study, they find that religion has a more substantial influence on Latino men than women regarding abortion (Holman et al., 2020).

This specific cluster of scholarship questions how political parties in the U.S. can use this for political gain, as McDaniel and Ellison (2008) suggest. The diversity in the Latino population makes them less cohesive on social issues, which the Republican party would hope to use for their political gain (McDaniel & Ellison, 2008). However, they argue that because of the different worldviews between evangelical Latinos and Anglos, the Republican party has been unsuccessful in recruiting the Latino vote despite the Republican party's efforts through rhetoric to show their conservatism (McDaniel & Ellison, 2008). At least from 1983 to 2003, the party identification of Latinos was consistent (McDaniel & Ellison, 2008). Even in more recent years, the party identification of Latinos has remained relatively stable (Krogstad et al., 2022). However, the Pew Research Center finds it challenging to predict their party affiliation for the future because their views are weakly tied to the parties (Krogstad et al., 2022).

### **Gaps**

Although the literature presented above provides essential and extensive insight, some gaps remain worthy of further study. As Jelen and Wilcox (2003) discuss, words matter regarding abortion. Now that the political parties in the U.S. are more united within their parties on the issue of abortion and are strategic in how they provide cues to the electorate (Adams, 1997; Killian & Wilcox, 2008), it is worth exploring how this is achieved in order to gain the Latino vote and the most considerable advantage at the

polls. There is more reason to explore this issue following *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* (2022) and the 2022 midterm elections.

Furthermore, the literature with regards to Latino public opinion provides valuable knowledge mainly on the determinants that shape Latino public opinion on abortion and specifying how and which religions heavily influence the abortion issue in the community (Ellison et al., 2005; Espinosa, 2008; Bartkowski et al., 2012; Holman et al., 2020). Nevertheless, scholarship places little focus on how precisely this translates into elections. In other words, a gap in the literature overlooks how political elites politicize Latino public opinion on abortion through campaigns and rhetoric and for their political benefit at the polls, which is what this paper will aim to provide. Not only would the current literature benefit from a more updated review, but an extension of understanding how the political parties use the framing of abortion to move the Latino vote would better help comprehend Latino public opinion.

## METHODOLOGY

### *Research Design*

In order to study how political rhetoric shapes the Latino vote, this research studies gubernatorial elections from 2010 to 2022 in both Texas and California.<sup>1</sup> The independent variable (IV) for this research is *political rhetoric*. That is, the words and phrases political elites, in this case gubernatorial candidates, use in their campaign efforts. The dependent variable (DV) is the *relative Democratic lean of the Latino vote*. That is, how much more Democratic the Latino vote was in each gubernatorial election than the state's electorate as a whole. This was calculated as the difference between the Democratic percentage of the Latino 2-party vote and the Democratic percentage of the overall 2-party vote. Before continuing further into the research design, this paper must address one issue for further clarification, which is the usage of the terms "Hispanic" and "Latino." The issue of terminology or labels is a whole debate in and of itself (Lopez et al., 2022). The debate examines culture, country of origin, and even language to explore just what identifies someone as Hispanic or Latino (Lopez et al., 2022). Furthermore, the debate also pressures the U.S. Census Bureau to address and rectify this problem (Lopez et al., 2022). Because, however, this research uses data from the Pew Research Center, it will align its usage of the words with that of the

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<sup>1</sup> There is no exit poll data for the 2022 gubernatorial election in California. Edison Research, the institution responsible for the National Election Poll (NEP), did not conduct a statewide poll given that the 2022 California gubernatorial election was not a competitive statewide race with enough editorial interest. Therefore, this study uses the 2021 recall election for California as a proxy for 2022.

The 2021 recall election took place September 14, 2021 with a "yes" or "no" ballot. A "yes" vote was a vote to recall the incumbent Democratic governor, Gavin Newsom, while a "no" vote was a vote for him to remain as governor. Voters were also asked who should replace Governor Newsom if he were recalled. The vote for Larry Elder was used as a proxy for the Republican vote because Elder won the most votes from those who voted "yes" on recall.

institution, which uses the terms interchangeably and accounts for Hispanics or Latinos who say they identify as such.

Digressing to the research design, this study will first assess *political rhetoric*, the independent variable, through a content analysis of Texas and California gubernatorial races from 2010 to 2022. This period is ideal given that enough time has passed since *Roe v. Wade* (2022) to allow the political parties to unify in their argumentation and rhetorical strategies (Adams, 1997). Additionally, this period allows for a more updated analysis of the Latino population, the abortion issue, and the opportunity to provide more data resources and information since there is a lack of data for earlier time periods.

This research will compare the political discourse of the gubernatorial candidates from both major U.S. political parties – the Democratic and Republican parties. The demographical and geopolitical similarities drive the logic of this research to focus on both Texas and California. Aside from the fact that these border states have elected Republican and Democratic governors, respectively, for these years, both also have a sizeable Latino population, with California and Texas having the largest and second largest populations of Latino eligible voters, respectively (Stepler & Lopez, 2016; Natarjan & Im, 2022).

In order to unveil patterns and strategical approaches for rhetoric, this study conducted a content analysis of campaign speeches, interviews, debate, political ads, and social media content. This study narrowed the number of campaign events surveyed to those found in campaign YouTube channels, Cable-Satellite Public Affairs Network (C-SPAN), and Facebook and Twitter (now known as “X”) accounts. For

YouTube channels, this research created playlists of all relevant videos of campaign events, and accounted for those with abortion references. For C-SPAN, this study sorted videos of interviews, debates, and speeches for abortion references. Finally, for Facebook and Twitter accounts, this study used advanced search settings set for the campaign year and searches for the following words and phrases in social media content: abortion; pro-life; pro-choice; Planned Parenthood; reproductive rights; reproductive freedom; exceptions for rape and incest; women's right to choose; unborn lives; fetus; bodily autonomy; unborn children; sacred life; innocent lives; murder of unborn children; and fight for life.

First, this study checked each event for a message concerning abortion. To count a reference, the content must refer to abortion using the following words and phrases: abortion; pro-life; pro-choice; Planned Parenthood; reproductive rights; reproductive freedom; exceptions for rape and incest; women's right to choose; unborn lives; fetus; bodily autonomy; unborn children; sacred life; innocent lives; murder of unborn children; and fight for life. Additionally, a message must be directly sourced from the campaign as opposed to an editorial source discussing the campaign and the issue in order for it to count as a reference to abortion. Each reference was divided by state, party, and year.

Then, these messages were analyzed for meaning and language the candidates used in their discourse. To identify and measure these patterns, the references were categorized into two main groups: reproductive rights-based argumentation and moral-



based argumentation.<sup>2</sup> For reproductive rights-based argumentation, references were categorized under this group if they referenced the following words and phrases (with 1 being the least extreme and 6 being the most extreme language): 1) pro-choice; 2) reproductive freedom; 3) fetus; 4) bodily autonomy; 5) exceptions for rape, incest, and medical necessity; and 6) murder of women.<sup>3</sup> For moral-based argumentation, references were categorized under this group if they referenced the following words and phrases (with 1 being the least extreme and 6 being the most extreme language): 1) pro-life; 2) fight for life; 3) sacred life; 4) protection of innocent lives; 5) unborn children; and 6) murder of unborn children.<sup>4</sup> Some content included more than one type of reference and this was also accounted for in the categorization process. In addition, there were a few references were references to abortion, but were not in the categories mentioned above and thus, were categorized under “other.”

Moreover, this categorization process allows for a better understanding of whether candidates adhere to party platforms on abortion and as a way to measure how

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<sup>2</sup> This study uses “reproductive rights-based argumentation” as argumentation concerned more with women and their health, specifically their reproductive health and decisions regarding their reproductive health. This study uses “moral-based argumentation” as argumentation concerned more with the pregnancy itself and language alluding to morals and religion.

<sup>3</sup> 1) Pro-choice: exact wording or any references alluding to pro-choice including giving the option to women to decide in undergoing an abortion. 2) Reproductive freedom: exact wording or any reference alluding to women having the right or freedom over their reproductive health. 3) Fetus: exact wording or any reference alluding to a dehumanizing description of a pregnancy. 4) Bodily autonomy: exact wording or any reference alluding to the protection of a woman’s body. 5) Exceptions for rape, incest, and medical necessity: exact wording or any reference alluding to removing restrictions on abortion in these cases. 6) Murder of women: exact wording or any reference alluding to the dangers to women through the restriction of abortion.

<sup>4</sup> 1) Pro-life: exact wording or any reference alluding to protecting life. 2) Fight for life: exact wording or any reference alluding to engaging in the process to protect life. 3) Sacred life: exact wording or any reference alluding to the sanctity of life especially that of a the unborn. 4) Protection of innocent lives: exact wording or any reference alluding to protecting those without a choice. 5) Unborn children: exact wording or any reference alluding to the notion that a woman is pregnant with an unborn child since the moment of conception. 6) Murder of unborn children: exact wording or any reference alluding to the notion that undergoing an abortion is killing an unborn child regardless of the stage of pregnancy.

strongly parties delivered the abortion issue to the electorate. Additionally, including just the number of references will provide an incomplete picture of how rhetoric on abortion can shape the Latino vote. The number of references for one candidate could just be a result of responding to the opposition that is driving the abortion debate. Thus, choosing the language and kind of argumentation can give the candidate more control over the abortion debate and provides a broader understanding into what kind of language candidates prefer to use and how this has evolved over time.

Furthermore, this study broke down the number of references and type of references for each state, party, and year to account for trends. Some trends that this research observed were, for example, increases or decreases in number of references, cohesiveness within the party (or lack thereof), and types of references each party prefers. This study then compared these descriptive trends to the *relative Democratic lean of the Latino vote*. This study used data from state exit polls conducted by the Pew Research Center, CNN, and NBC broken down by race and ethnicity as well as official election data from the Texas Secretary of State and the California Secretary of State to calculate the Latino 2-party vote and the *relative Democratic lean of the Latino vote*.

### ***Limitations***

Although looking at words and language the candidates use can provide useful insight into the strategies candidates and parties use, it is also important to acknowledge limitations of this research design. For instance, this research design is set up with a more descriptive analysis as opposed to an experimental one and thus, has a lower validity due to the lack of manipulation of variables. Additionally, there is the potential question of reliability given the interpretation of discourse and context. In addition, the

narrowed scope of platforms messages this study sourced from could also limit the data collected. Of course, there are more messages and campaign events for each candidate that exist but availability limits access to those messages especially for the earlier campaigns. Perhaps future research can endeavor to acquire these. In the meantime, this study narrowed the scope to only include messages for campaigns found in the platforms mentioned earlier (YouTube, C-SPAN, Facebook, and Twitter). Despite these limitations, however, it is still well worth exploring these discourses and patterns to understand in more depth the question of how abortion shapes the Latino vote.

## EXPECTATIONS

Overall, this research does not expect to find a significantly large number of references to abortion in a way that one would see with other issues like the economy or immigration. However, that is why it is important to understand how a social issue like abortion can shape the Latino vote since it can add to the overall understanding of voting behavior amongst the Latino population in the U.S. Given the aforementioned arguments in the literature review on abortion, religion, and Latino studies, this research expects to see a decline in performance amongst the Latino population for the Democratic parties. That is, this study expects the Republican Party to increase its number of references on abortion and an increase in their moral-based rhetoric that will reflect a decrease in the *relative Democratic lean of the Latino vote*. In other words, this study hypothesizes the following:

*H1) If the Republican Party increases its number of references to abortion in their gubernatorial campaigns, then the relative Democratic lean of the Latino vote will decrease.*

*H2) If the Republican Party increases its use of moral-based argumentation, then the relative Democratic lean of the Latino vote will decrease.*

As Jelen and Wilcox (2003) note, religion is a strong predictor of abortion attitudes and framing matters. Furthermore, Killian and Wilcox (2008) establish that the public does react to party cues. Since the majority of the Latino population identifies with a denomination of Christianity (*Chapter 1: Religious Affiliation of Hispanics*, 2014) and Latinos are more pro-life (Ellison et al., 2005; Espinosa, 2008), the Republican

Party makes an effort to win their favor (Bartkowski et al., 2012) especially since Latinos are less cohesive on social cues (McDaniel and Ellison, 2008). Therefore, this research expects to find a more favorable outcome for the Republican Party. That is, while this research does not expect Republicans to win the Latino vote overall, it does expect the Republicans to use rhetorical strategies on the abortion issue that will see a share of the Latino vote becoming less democratic and thus, corresponding to conservative rhetorical strategies on abortion.

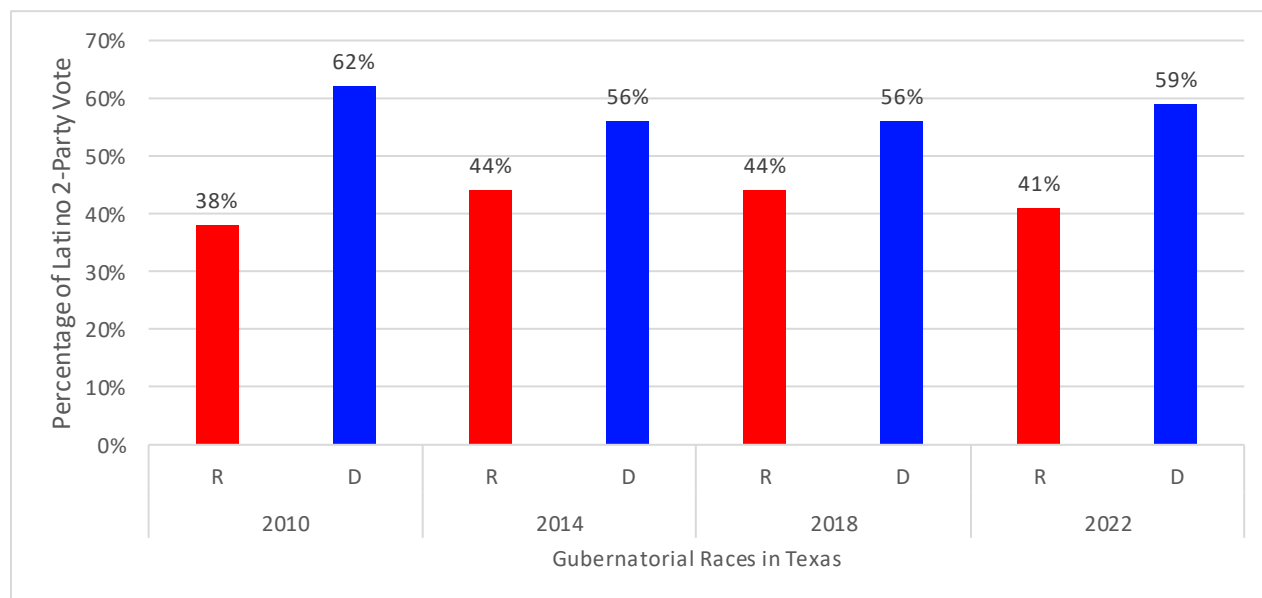
## CONTENT ANALYSIS

In this section, this study first explains the dependent variable – *relative Democratic lean of the Latino vote* – and how it has changed for both Texas and California. Then, this study focuses the independent variable – *political rhetoric* – by first discussing the number of abortion references and the types of argumentations for the Texas gubernatorial races and then for California. In short, this section looks at how each political party performed in their elections as well as what rhetorical strategies they adopted, and the trends this research found.

### ***Dependent Variable***

Before discussing the results of the content analysis, this study will first discuss the dependent variable – *relative Democratic lean of the Latino vote* – in order to compare the results discussed below. As Figure 1 shows, the Democratic Party in Texas has consistently won majorities of the Latino 2-party vote while the Republican Party has consistently earned, on average, 42% of the Latino 2-party vote during the elections from 2010 to 2022.

**Figure 1.** Share of Latino 2-Party Vote per Gubernatorial Race in Texas (2010 – 2022)

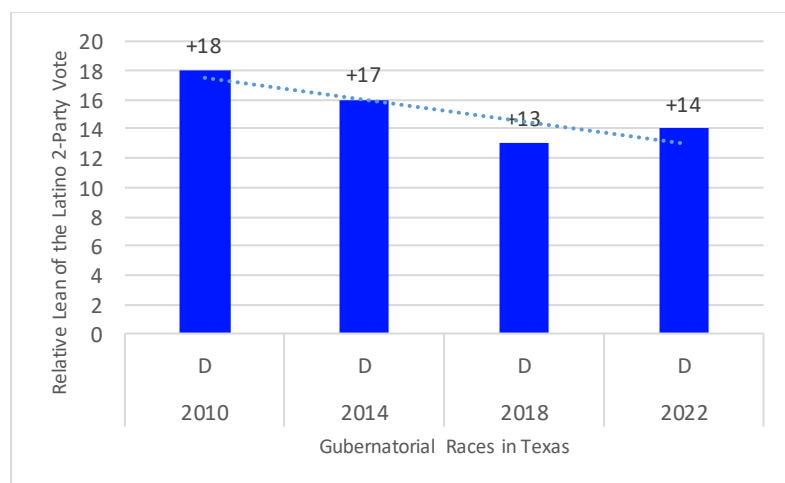


Source: by author from exit polls from CNN, NBC, and Pew Research Center (Lopez, 2010; Decision – 2014: Texas Governor, 2014; 2018 Midterms: Exit Polling – Texas, 2018; and 2022 Exit Polls – Texas, 2022).

Although these percentages indicate the popularity of the Democratic Party amongst the Latino vote, a better indicator to measure voting behavior is to look at the *relative Democratic lean of the Latino vote*. That is, it is best to measure the Latino vote against the overall statewide vote in order to observe and clarify whether the Latino vote has become relatively more or less Democratic in each state. This study did this adjustment for both Texas and California by calculating the difference between the Democratic percentage of the Latino 2-party vote and the Democratic percentage of the overall 2-party vote. After considering this adjustment, Figure 2 illustrates an overall, consistent decrease in Democratic lean of the Latino vote in Texas. In other words, although the Democratic share of the Latino vote has been high, it has become relatively less Democratic since 2010 despite a slight improvement in 2022. Thus, it will

be interesting to observe and compare the political rhetoric on abortion in Texas in both 2010 and 2022, where there is a 4-point difference.

**Figure 2.** Relative Lean of the Latino 2-Party Vote per Gubernatorial Race in Texas (2010 – 2022)

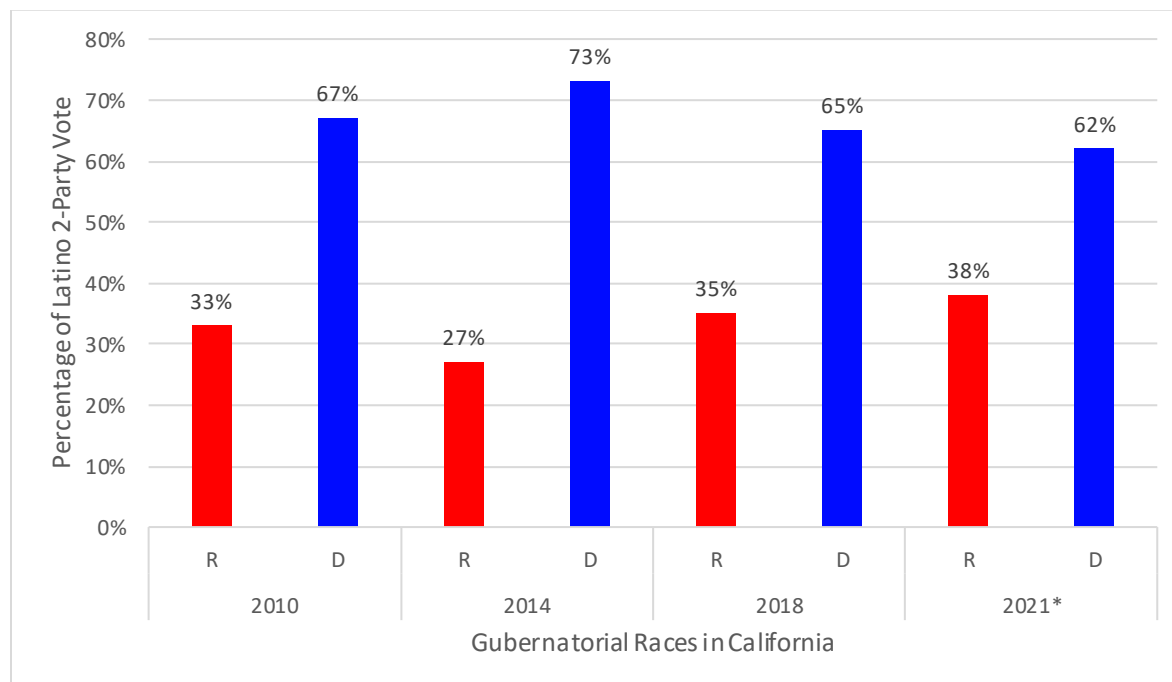


*Note: Relative lean of the Latino 2-Party Vote per Gubernatorial Race in Texas from 2010 to 2022.*

Like Texas, the California Democratic Party has also won the Latino vote as Figure 3 shows; but where Texas Democrats have won between 56% and 62% of the Latino 2-party vote, California Democrats have consistently won over 60%. In fact, 2014 saw the California Democratic gubernatorial candidate win 73% of the Latino 2-party vote as seen in Figure 3.



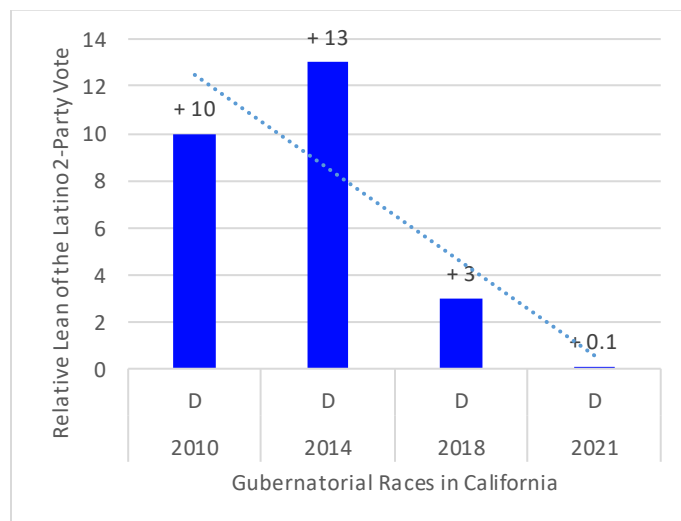
**Figure 3.** Share of Latino 2-Party Vote per Gubernatorial Race in California (2010 – 2021)



Source: by author from exit polls from CNN, NBC, and Pew Research Center (Lopez, 2010; Decision 2014 – California Governor, 2014; 2018 Midterms: Exit Polling – California, 2018; and California Recall Exit Polls, 2021).

After adjusting for the *relative Democratic lean of the Latino vote* in California, there is an even more significant decrease in Democratic lean amongst the Latino vote (Figure 4). For instance, between 2010 and 2014, California Democrats saw an increase in the relative Democratic lean of the Latino vote of 4 points. However thereafter the relative Democratic lean of the Latino vote declined substantially (to only 0.1% more Democratic than the overall electorate in 2021).

**Figure 4.** Relative Lean of the Latino 2-Party Vote per Gubernatorial Race in California (2010 – 2021)



*Note: Relative lean of the Latino 2-Party Vote per Gubernatorial Race in California from 2010 to 2021.*

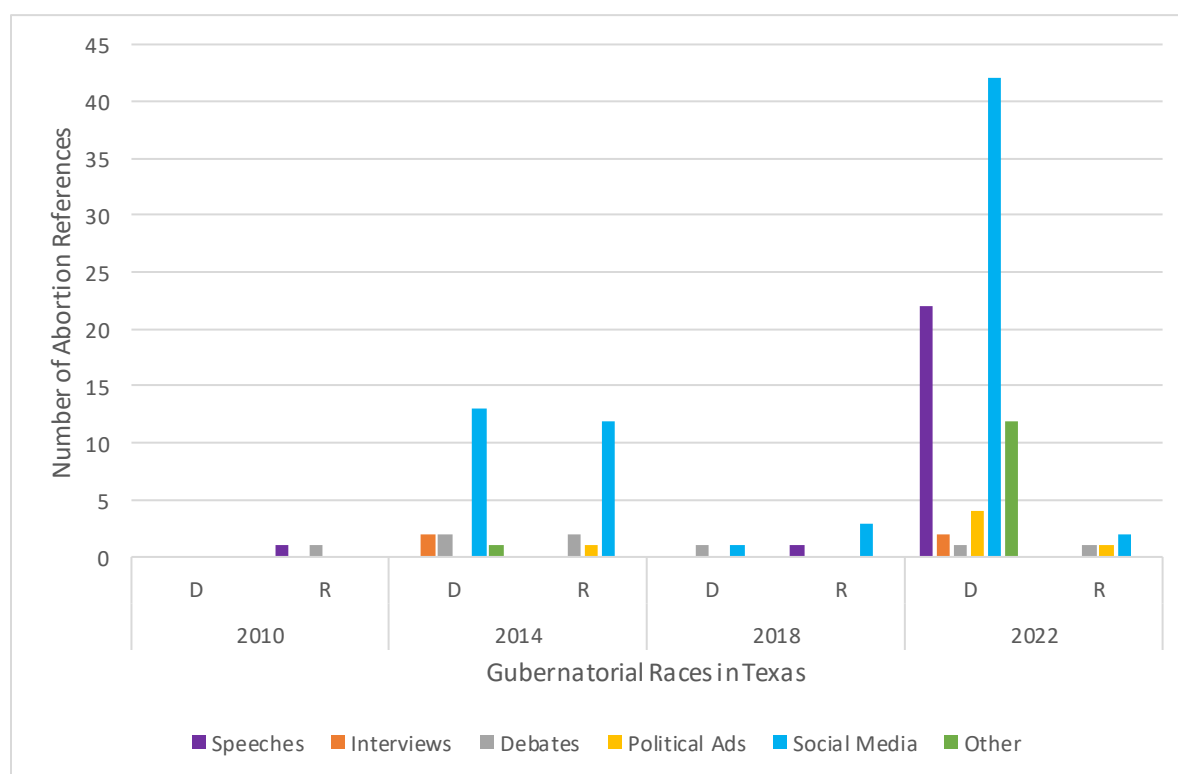
### ***Independent Variable***

#### **Texas: Number of References**

As Figure 5 illustrates, there is an overall increase of references concerning abortion during the gubernatorial campaigns in Texas, from a total of 2 references in 2010 to a total of 87 in 2022. However, when comparing political parties, the Democratic Party leads in the number of references thanks to their campaigns in 2014, with 18 references, and 2022, with 83 references. In 2010, Bill White, the Democratic candidate, did not refer to abortion since his campaign focused more on education. His Republican counterpart, on the other hand, Rick Perry, made only two abortion references – one at the Southern Republican Leadership Conference and the other in the Texas Republican primary gubernatorial debate (Cable Satellite Public Affairs Network, 2010a; Cable Satellite Public Affairs Network, 2010b). This performance from both parties in 2010 is unsurprising given the economic environment and focus on efforts to recover from the

2008 financial crisis. In other words, the major issues at this time were economic problems rather than social policies such as abortion, for example. Ultimately, Rick Perry won the gubernatorial election with 55% of the Texas vote (Office of the Texas Secretary of State, 2010).

**Figure 5.** Number of Abortion References per Gubernatorial Race in Texas (2010 – 2022)



*Source: by author from political speeches, interviews, debates, political ads, social media, and other sources like videos.*

In 2014, there is a clear and significant increase in the number of references for both political parties, with Wendy Davis, the Democratic candidate, making 18 references and Greg Abbott, the Republican candidate, making 15 references. This performance of the Democratic Party should come as no surprise given that Davis spearheaded the debate on abortion after becoming famous for her 13-hour long Texas

Senate filibuster to advocate for a more liberal outcome as a Texas senator (Rocha et al., 2018). This made her well known as an advocate for more liberal policies regarding abortion and led to a responsive strategy from Greg Abbott. This is why observing the type of references is important because one can see how candidates choose to argue abortion. In the end, however, Greg Abbott won the gubernatorial race with 59% of the vote while Wendy Davis earned 39% of the vote (Office of the Texas Secretary of State, 2014).

In 2018, there was a decrease in the number of references from both parties. Neither candidate made a significant emphasis on abortion in their campaigns compared to their predecessors. Lupe Valdez, the Democratic candidate, and Governor Greg Abbott, the Republican incumbent, focused more on other social issues like gun reform and immigration (Svitek, 2018). In November of 2018, Governor Abbott won his reelection campaign with 56% of the vote while Lupe Valdez earned 43% of the Texas vote (Office of the Texas Secretary of State, 2018).

More recently in 2022, on the other hand, Beto O'Rourke, the Democratic candidate, significantly increased the number of abortion references, unlike his Republican counterpart, Governor Abbott. O'Rourke spearheaded the issue relentlessly much like Wendy Davis. Even still, O'Rourke surpassed Davis' efforts with 83 references compared to her 18 references. O'Rourke also used all communication platforms to deliver his abortion arguments to voters while Abbott only used 3 platforms – social media, debates, and political advertisements. The Texas political atmosphere in this time experienced the surprising U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson* (2022) ultimately giving the power to decide the legality of abortion back to the states

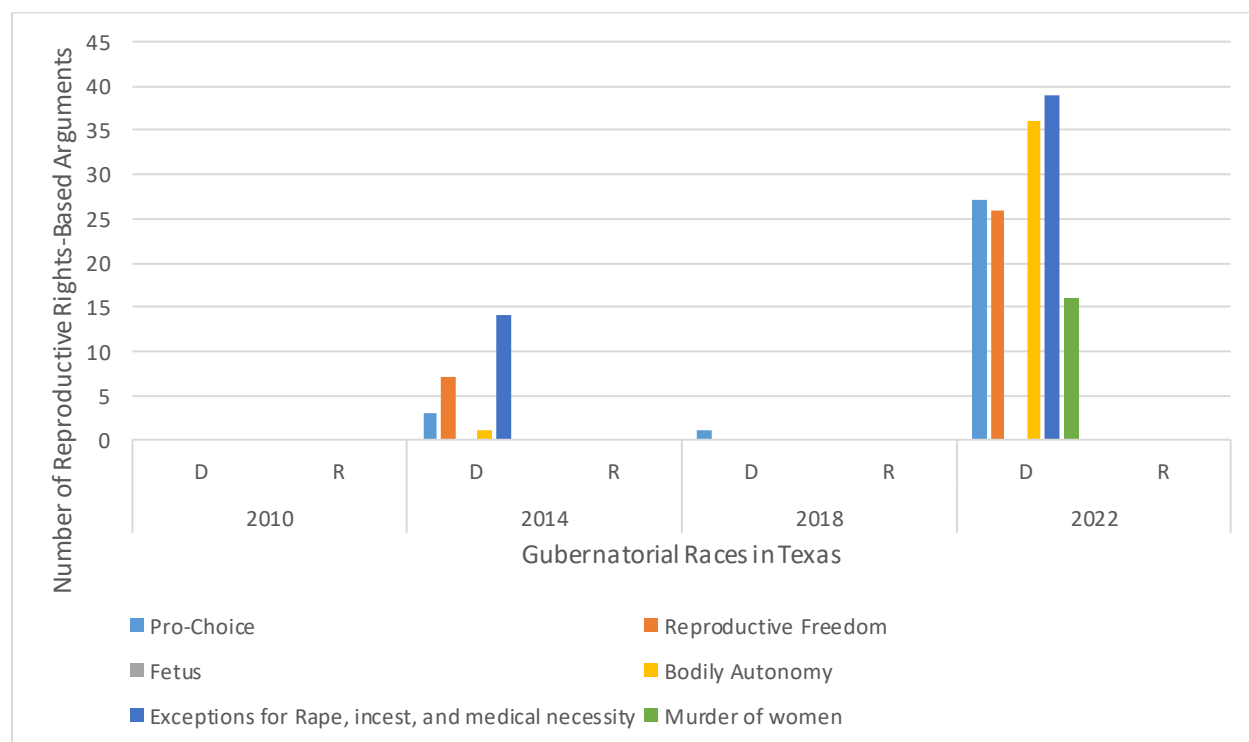
and leading to renewed and heightened interest in abortion (Santamariña & Phillips, 2022; Krogstad et al., 2022). In the end, Greg Abbott won reelection once again with 55% of the vote while Beto O'Rourke earned 44% of the vote (Office of the Texas Secretary of State, 2022).

In sum, there is a general increase in references on abortion led mostly by the Democratic Party. The Democratic Party saw a spike in abortion references in 2014 followed by a decrease in 2018 and then its highest increase in 2022. On the other hand, the Republican Party only slightly increased its references with 2 references in 2010, a spike of 15 references in 2014, down to 4 references in 2018, and 4 references again in 2022. In other words, the Republican Party remains consistent in their references by staying as low as possible compared to their Democratic counterparts that fluctuate more throughout. In addition, the Democratic Party used the most variety in communication platforms. However, it was not until 2014 when campaigns began using social media as their main communications platform. Overall, the Democratic Party outperforms the Republican Party in the count of abortion references in their Texas gubernatorial campaigns.

### **Texas: Type of References**

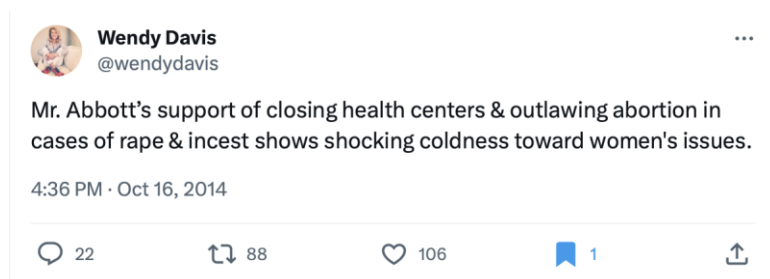
Although considering the number of messages on abortion is important, it is also noteworthy to explore the kinds of arguments and specifically, the language candidates use in their campaigns. For Texas, Figure 6 illustrates that the Democratic Party preferred to use arguments concerning reproductive rights while the Republican Party abstained from the argumentation type completely. Additionally, there is an overall increase in this type of language that is noticeable from 2014 to 2022.

**Figure 6.** Reproductive Rights-Based Argumentation per Gubernatorial Race in Texas (2010 – 2022)



Source: by author from political speeches, interviews, debates, political ads, social media, and other sources like videos.

In 2010, Bill White did not refer to abortion in his gubernatorial campaign at all and thus, there is no type of reference to account for. In 2014, Wendy Davis introduced not just the issue to gubernatorial races in this time frame, but also used a variety of language in her discourse and she strongly argued for “exceptions for rape, incest, and medical necessity” (Image 1).

**Image 1.**

*Image 1 (Davis, 2014)*

Messages like this one on social media platforms not only garnered strong opposition from individuals against abortion, but also gained strong opposition from some individuals from the Latino community in South Texas that can be seen in response to this specific Twitter (now “X”). For example, @Sierravidz tweeted that “[Davis] knows nothing of women’s issues today” (REDRGV, 2014).

For 2018, Lupe Valdez used one type of reference that is “pro-choice,” one of the much less extreme arguments, in her debate. However, in 2022, Figure 6 shows Beto O’Rourke used the most variety in his arguments including some of the more extreme arguments with regards to the “murder of women.” This campaign not only echoed the language used in 2014, but also amplified it with their number of references as well as the extremity of their rhetoric. O’Rourke made 39 arguments concerning “exceptions for rape, incest, and medical necessity;” 36 arguments concerning “bodily autonomy;” 26 arguments concerning “reproductive freedom;” 27 arguments concerning being “pro-choice;” and 16 arguments concerning the “murder of women” – the most extreme argument in this category. Image 2 illustrates one example of O’Rourke’s messaging on Twitter.

## Image 2



*Image 2 (O'Rourke, 2022b)*

In response to his overall messaging on the abortion issue, O'Rourke received the expected backlash from those with opposing views. Nevertheless, he shared in his campaign Twitter (now "X") account a personal testimonial from Victoria, TX of a Latina woman advocating for O'Rourke and his stance on abortion. She claimed that "[her] husband was going to vote for Abbott, and now he's going to vote for Beto with the whole abortion ban that Texas did" (O'Rourke, 2022a). This type of testimonial sends a certain message through his platform for the Latino community to give their support on his stance on abortion.

To summarize, the Democratic Party adhered to their party platform by using reproductive rights-based argumentation when presenting the abortion issue to the electorate with 2014 and 2022 being with the more varied collection of arguments. The Democratic gubernatorial campaign in 2014 introduced strong language, however, the Democratic candidate in 2022 echoed and amplified those arguments by introducing stronger rhetoric concerning the "murder of women."



Digressing onto moral-based argumentation in Texas, Figure 7 illustrates the Republican Party in Texas adhering to their conservative stance on abortion that focuses more on the moral aspect of abortion. For instance, in 2010, Rick Perry mentioned abortion arguments regarding the “protection of innocent lives” and “unborn children.” In 2014, the data shows a significant increase in uses of moral-based arguments with Greg Abbott using 6 references to being “pro-life” as well as briefly arguing once against the “murder of unborn children” – the first time this argument was made in this study’s timeframe. One example of Abbott’s more extreme messaging on abortion is on Image 3.

### Image 3.



Image 3 (Abbott, 2013)

He also tweeted in 2014 the following:

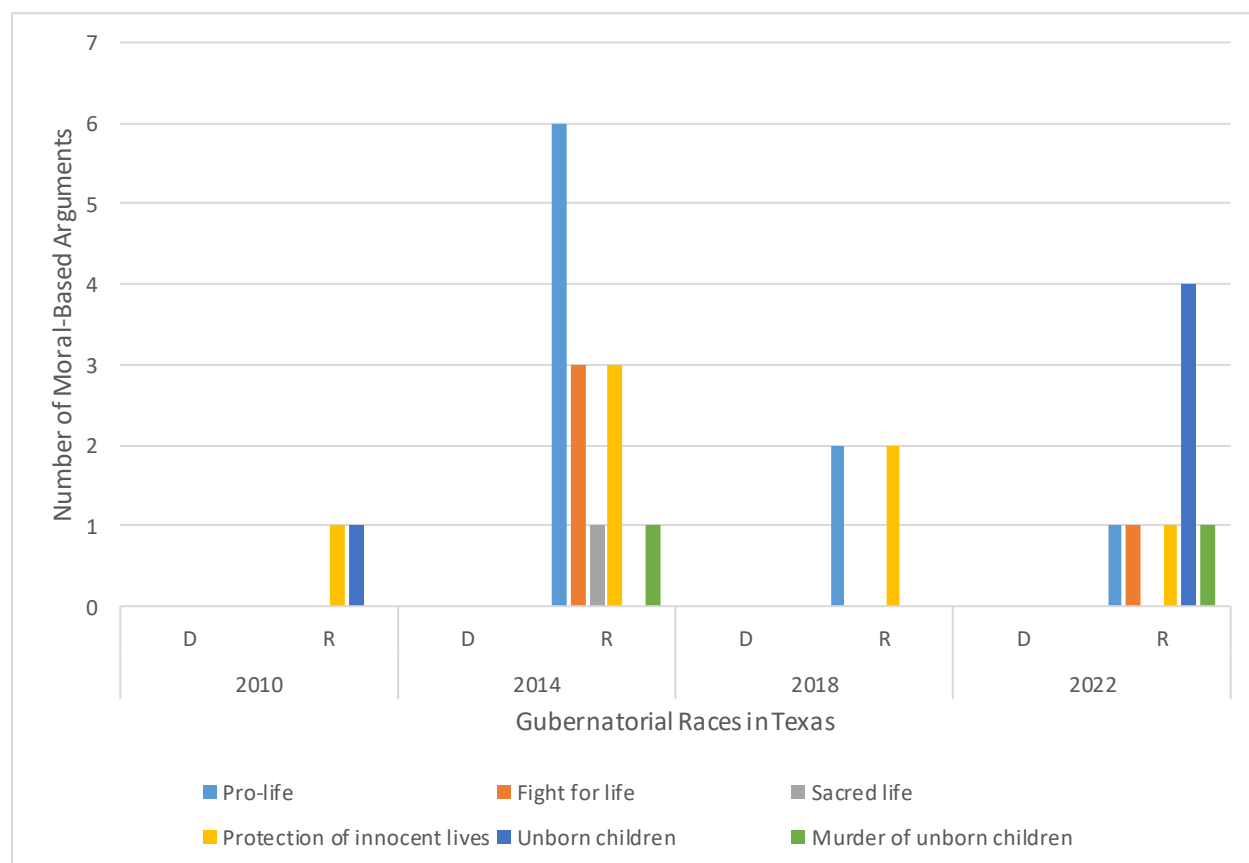
#### Image 4.



*Image 4 (Abbott, 2014)*

To this, Twitter users agreed with him and one user of Latino heritage that added to the conversation by saying that many Latinos in the U.S. “don’t know the good reality of the Republican Party” (Garza, 2014). In addition, of all the candidates in the gubernatorial races in Texas, only Greg Abbott explicitly stated his religious identification during his abortion arguments. For instance, in his two gubernatorial debates against Wendy Davis, Abbott said that he was “pro-life” and he is Catholic, thus clarifying how his religion shapes his stance on abortion (Cable Satellite Public Affairs Network, 2014a; Cable Satellite Public Affairs Network, 2014b).

Moreover, in 2018, Figure 7 demonstrates a decrease in use of moral-based arguments with “pro-choice” and “protection of innocent lives” being the only two types of arguments used.

**Figure 7.** Moral-Based Argumentation per Gubernatorial Race in Texas (2010 – 2022)

*Source: by author from political speeches, interviews, debates, political ads, social media, and other sources like videos.*

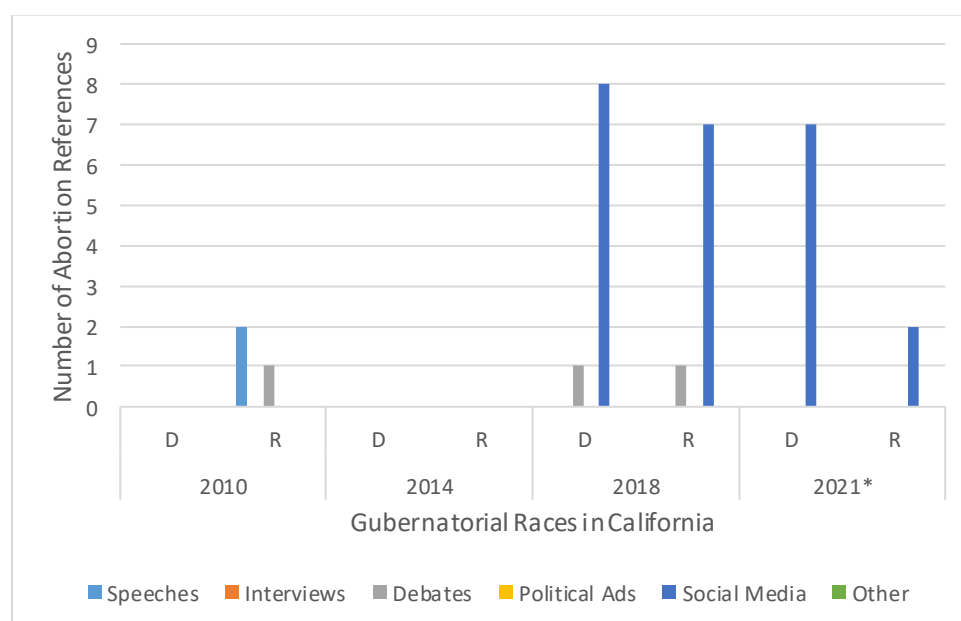
However, in 2022, there is a significant increase once again with arguments concerning “unborn children” being the most used. In short, Figure 7 illustrates once again how both parties adhered to their expected party platforms with the Democratic Party making arguments concerning reproductive rights and the Republican Party preferring moral-based arguments. Additionally, both parties used more extreme rhetoric in more recent elections.

### **California: Number of References**

One of the most noticeable features for California (Figure 8) is that California candidates

did not make as many references to abortion when compared to Texas. In 2010, Jerry Brown, the Democratic candidate that previously served as California governor from 1975 to 1983, made no abortion references in his gubernatorial campaign. On the other hand, Meg Whitman, the Republican candidate, made three abortion references in her campaign. Whitman is a former CEO of eBay and her campaign depended a lot on her experience as a business leader (Forbes, n.d.). As in Texas, the lack of abortion references overall is unsurprising given the economic climate in the years following the financial crisis. Despite Whitman's campaigning, however, Jerry Brown won the gubernatorial race with 54% of the California vote while Whitman earned 41% (Bowen, 2010).

**Figure 8.** Number of Abortion References per Gubernatorial Race in California (2010 – 2021)



Source: by author from political speeches, interviews, debates, political ads, social media, and other sources like videos.

In 2014, Jerry Brown ran for reelection against Republican candidate Neel Kashkari. Both candidates did not refer to abortion in their campaigns. Even though Kashkari's surprising pro-choice stance on abortion was well known, he did not refer to his abortion opinions during his campaign (Leiby, 2014). Instead, Kashkari campaigned on education reform and job growth, unsurprisingly given his financial background (Leiby, 2014). Although social media was already an established and prominent resource for political outreach, neither party referenced abortion in their campaign while Texas; on the other hand, saw the opposite with a significant increase in references especially through social media platforms. Evidently, these candidates in 2014 did not prioritize the issue to the same extent as their Texas counterparts. In the end, Jerry Brown won with 60% of the California vote while Neel Kashkari earned just 40% (Bowen, 2014).

In contrast, there is a noticeable increase in references to abortion from both parties in California in 2018. In addition, both parties preferred using social media to deliver their arguments on abortion. The only slight difference is Gavin Newsom, the Democratic candidate, making just one more argument compared to John Cox, his Republican counterpart. Ultimately, Gavin Newsom won his gubernatorial election with 62% of the California vote while John Cox only earned 38% of the vote (Padilla, 2018).

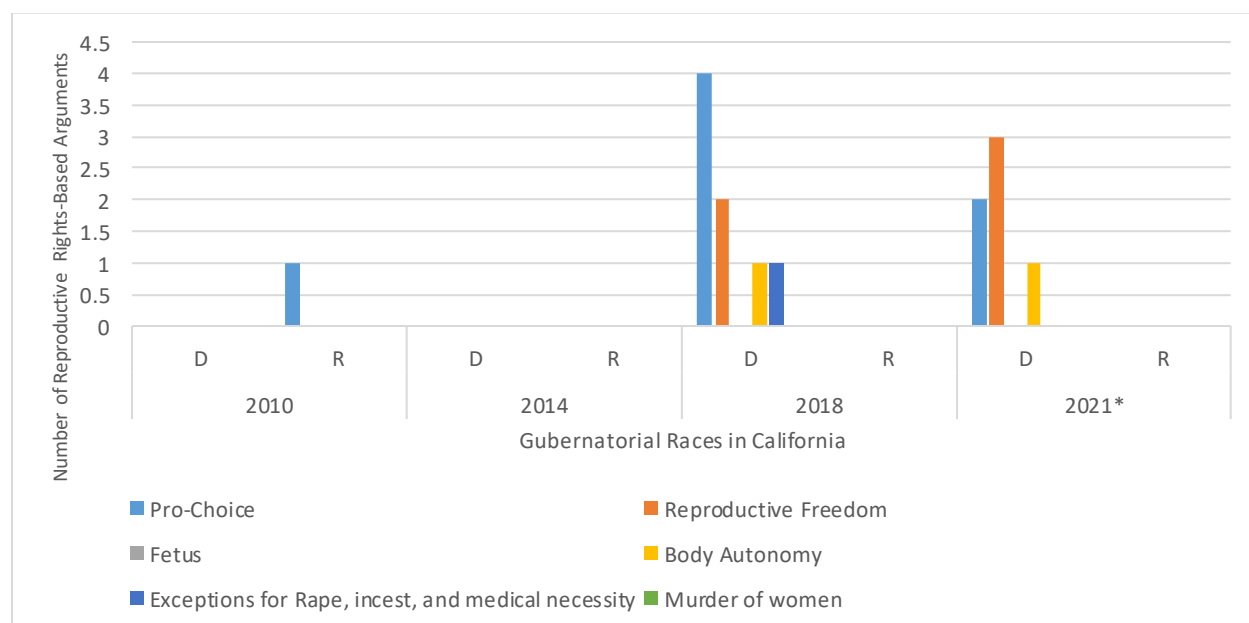
Finally, in 2021, Gavin Newsom and his opponent, Larry Elder, referred to abortion through just social media platforms with Newsom outperforming Elder who made just two references. Ultimately, Gavin Newsom won the special election and remained as governor of California with 62% of voters voting not to recall him (Weber, 2021). Based on this analysis, it is apparent that California does not prioritize the

abortion issue to the same extent as that of Texas during the last four gubernatorial races. It also shows that most candidates preferred social media as their main source for political outreach.

### California: Type of References

Although California candidates did not prioritize the abortion issue in the same way as Texas candidates, it is still, however, worthy to explore the kind of arguments California candidates used in their gubernatorial campaigns. Figure 9 demonstrates that the Democratic Party prefers reproductive rights-based argumentation with a majority of them referring to being “pro-choice” and in favor of “reproductive freedom.” None referred to arguments concerning restrictions or even the “murder of women.”

**Figure 9.** Reproductive Rights-Based Argumentation per Gubernatorial Race in California (2010 – 2021)



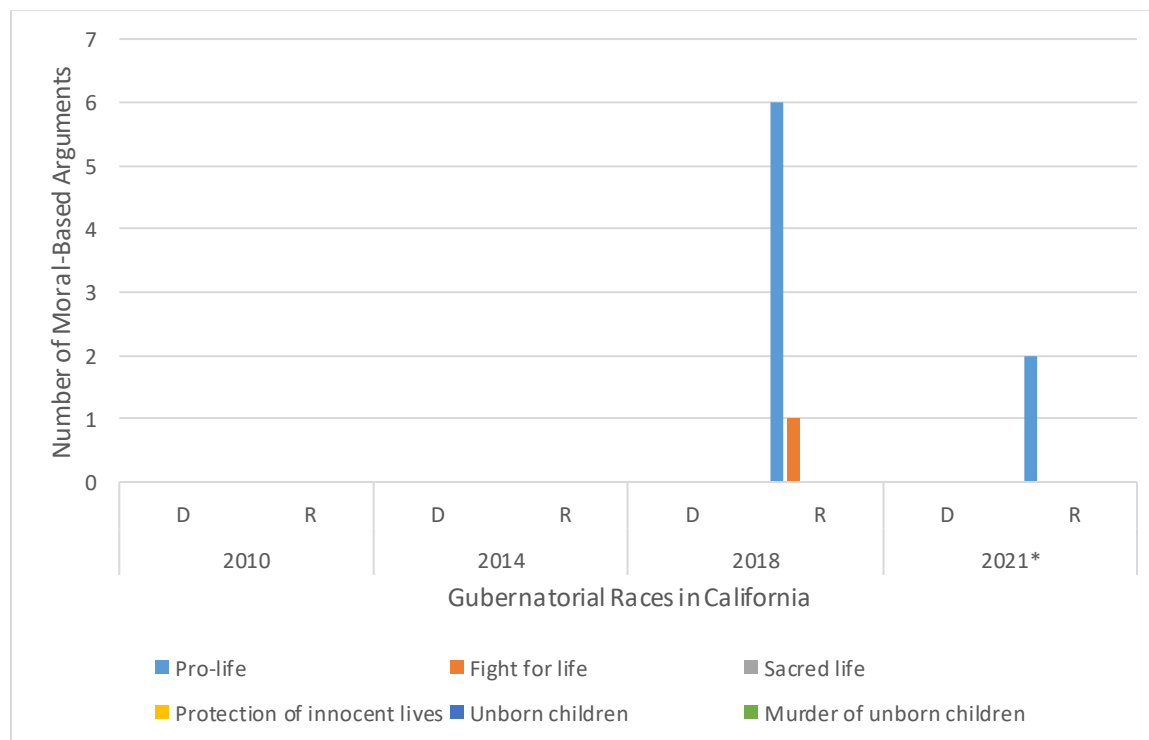
Source: by author from political speeches, interviews, debates, political ads, social media, and other sources like videos.

In 2010, Jerry Brown made no reference to abortion in his campaign and thus, this study did not mark a type of reference for him. Surprisingly, however, Meg Whitman took a more unconventional stance on the abortion issue in which she explicitly stated she was “pro-choice.” In other words, Whitman strayed from the expected Republican Party platform in openly acknowledging her more liberal stance on abortion.

In 2014, Jerry Brown made no reference to abortion once again as previously noted. His Republican counterpart, Neel Kashkari, also took a surprising stance on the abortion issue by being in favor of abortion rights similar to his predecessor, Meg Whitman (Leiby, 2014). However, unlike Whitman, Kashkari did not refer to abortion in his campaign.

In 2018, however, there is an increase in references on abortion with Gavin Newsom using a variety of reproductive rights-based arguments in his campaign in stark contrast to his predecessor, Jerry Brown. Newsom mostly used arguments concerning being “pro-choice,” with 4 references followed by arguments concerning “reproductive freedom,” and then “bodily autonomy” and “exceptions for rape, incest, and medical necessity” which was the most extreme type of argument he used. In 2021, Newsom once again used reproductive rights-based arguments with “reproductive freedom” the argument he mostly preferred. In short, Figure 9 illustrates the Democratic Party adhere to the expected party platform on the abortion issue, and also shows Meg Whitman, a Republican candidate, stray from her party briefly in 2010.

**Figure 10.** Moral-Based Argumentation per Gubernatorial Race in California (2010 – 2021)



*Source: by author from political speeches, interviews, debates, political ads, social media, and other sources like videos.*

Figure 10 demonstrates that the California Republican party used moral-based arguments in their abortion references. The Democratic Party stayed with their expected party platform while the Republican candidates in 2018 and 2021 stayed with their expected party platform (Meg Whitman strayed from her party’s platform as well as Neel Kashkari, except he did not campaign on abortion as mentioned earlier).

In 2018, John Cox referred to abortion in his campaign against Gavin Newsom and made it clear that he was a “pro-life” candidate with six references to this argument. In addition, of all the candidates in California, John Cox was the only one to express his religious identification (Image 5).



## Image 5



Image 5 (Cox, 2018)

In 2021, Larry Elder likewise used “pro-life” arguments, but not as much as his predecessor did. Overall, California lacks strong argumentation concerning the more conservative stance on abortion with moral-based argumentation compared to Texas. Instead, Figure 10 illustrates that the Republican Party in California is not as cohesive in their argumentation and prioritization of the abortion issue when compared to Texas. In short, California is not as extreme as Texas and used more general and vague arguments for abortion.

To summarize, this section first observed the *relative Democratic lean of the Latino vote* (DV) and described how it changed for Texas and California during the gubernatorial elections from 2010 to 2022. As discussed above, this has decreased

overall for both states, but this decrease being relatively more stable for Texas than California, which saw a spike in 2014 followed by a sharp decline in the years after. As far as rhetorical trends go, Democrats in Texas significantly politicized the abortion issue more than their Republican counterparts. For California, there was no significant politicization for the Democrats until 2018. Even still, both parties in California referred to abortion relatively the same number of times in 2018 and 2021 with Democrats referring to abortion slightly more than Republicans.

Exploring the language used, Texas Democrats adhered to their expected party platform stance on abortion with language alluding more to reproductive-rights based rhetoric. The same goes with Texas Republicans that pushed for moral-based argumentation. Texas Democrats mostly argued about “exceptions for rape, incest, and medical necessity” with “bodily autonomy” being second used and warning against the “murder of women” as the most extreme arguments used. Texas Republicans consistently argued for the “protection innocent life.” California Democrats, on the other hand, did not make as strong arguments as that of Texas while California Republicans saw Meg Whitman stray from the expected Republican Party’s platform on abortion. In short, Texas overall prioritizes and politicizes the issue more than its Californian counterpart.

## FINDINGS

This section compares the revelations from the content analysis (IV) with the *relative Democratic lean of the Latino vote* (DV) for both Texas and California in order to observe whether the results find support for the hypotheses:

*H1) If the Republican Party increases its number of references to abortion in their gubernatorial campaigns, then the relative Democratic lean of the Latino vote will decrease.*

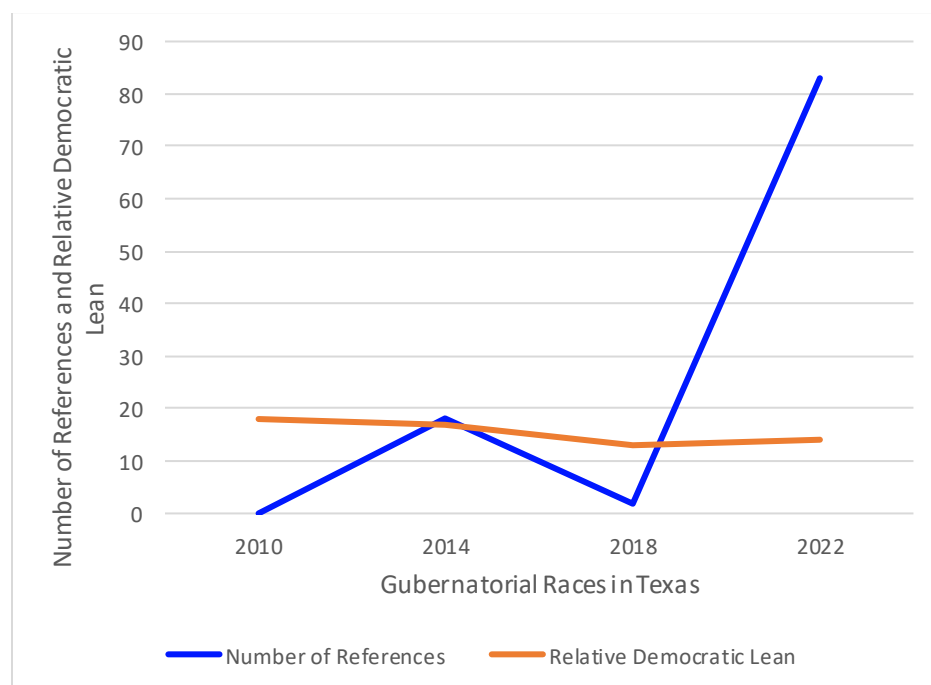
*H2) If the Republican Party increases its use of moral-based argumentation, then the relative Democratic lean of the Latino vote will decrease.*

First, this section will observe the results for H1 and then discuss the results for H2.

As shown in Figure 11, the Democratic Party overall substantially increased their number of abortion references with 0 references in 2010 to over 80 references in 2022. As the Texas Democratic Party increased their number of abortion references in 2014 (from 0 in 2010 to 18 in 2014), the *relative Democratic lean of the Latino vote* decreased slightly. As the Democratic Party increased the number of abortion arguments in 2022 to 83, the *relative Democratic lean of the Latino vote* increased, but by only 1 point. On the other hand, Figure 12 illustrates that the Republican Party only slightly increased their number of references. The Republican Party stayed relatively consistent in their number of references with a spike in 2014 being the only exception. Figure 12 illustrates a decrease in *relative Democratic lean of the Latino vote* in 2014 while at the same time

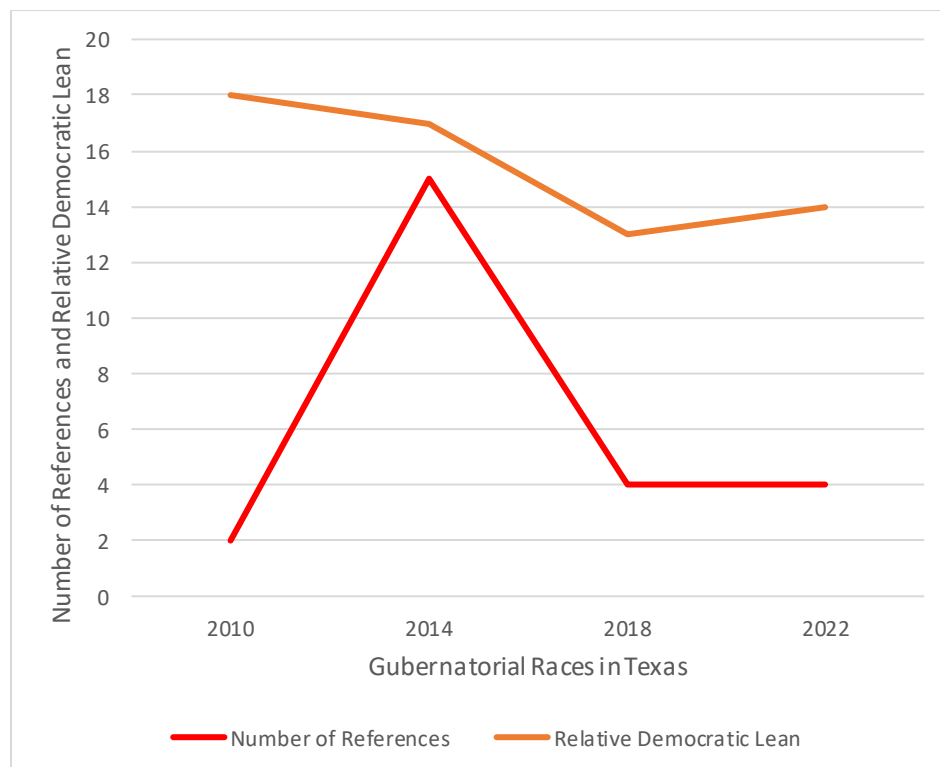
the Republican Party increased their number of abortion references. Yet, in 2018, this number of abortion references decreased for the Republican Party and remained the same in 2022 while the *relative Democratic lean of the Latino vote* decreased even more in 2018 and only slightly increased by 1 point in 2022. Overall, as the Republican Party slightly increase and remained relatively consistent in their number of references, the *relative Democratic lean of the Latino vote* generally decreased despite the Democratic Party's effort to substantially increase their references to abortion. Thus, this indicates support for H1 in Texas.

**Figure 11.** Number of References of Democratic Party and the Relative Democratic Lean of Latino Vote: Texas (2010 – 2022)



*Note: Number of abortion references made by the Democratic Party in Texas compared with the Relative Democratic lean of the Latino vote from 2010 to 2022.*

**Figure 12.** Number of References of Republican Party and the Relative Democratic Lean of Latino Vote: Texas (2010 – 2022)

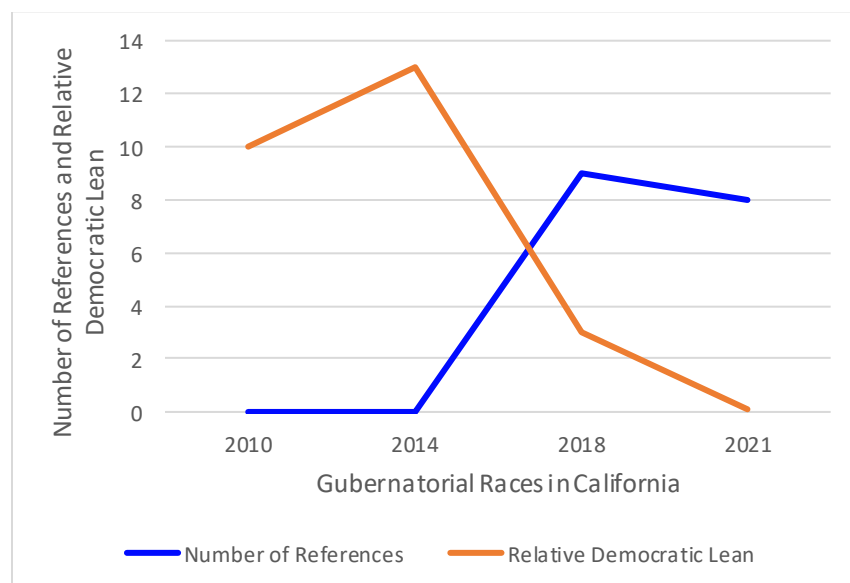


*Note: Number of abortion references made by the Republican Party in Texas compared with the Relative Democratic lean of the Latino vote from 2010 to 2022.*

As for California, Figure 13 shows that the Democratic Party relatively increased the number of abortion references with 0 references in 2010 and 8 references in 2021 while the *relative Democratic lean of the Latino vote* generally decreased. As the Democratic Party in 2018 increased their number of references, the *relative Democratic lean of the Latino vote* decreased. As for California Republicans, the Republican Party shows a fluctuation overall with a decrease in 2014, an increase in 2018, and once again a decrease in 2021 (Figure 14). As the references for the Republican Party increased in 2018, the *relative Democratic lean of the Latino vote* decreased, however,

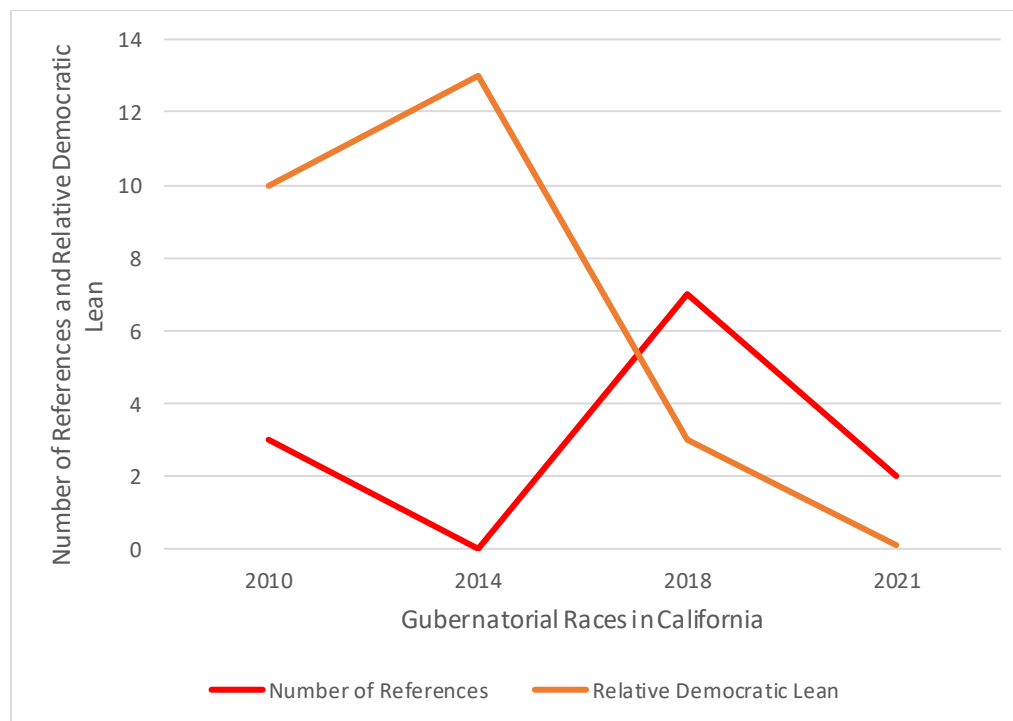
this continued in 2021 even though the Republican Party decreased their number of references (Figure 14). Nevertheless, the Democratic Party increased their number of references to abortion while the Republican Party fluctuated in their number of references. Overall, the *relative Democratic lean of the Latino vote* decreased in California as in Texas. In contrast to Texas Democrats, however, California Democrats do not outperform their Republican counterparts in terms of the number of abortion references (Figure 13). Instead, they both relatively refer to abortion in the minimal extent. In short, while the *relative Democratic lean of the Latino vote* decreased in California, Democrats increased their references while Republicans slightly decreased their references. Thus, this research finds no support for H1 in California.

**Figure 13.** Number of References of Democratic Party and the Relative Democratic Lean of Latino Vote: California (2010 – 2021)



*Note: Number of abortion references made by the Democratic Party in California compared with the Relative Democratic lean of the Latino vote from 2010 to 2021..*

**Figure 14.** Number of References of Republican Party and the Relative Democratic Lean of Latino Vote: California (2010 – 2021)



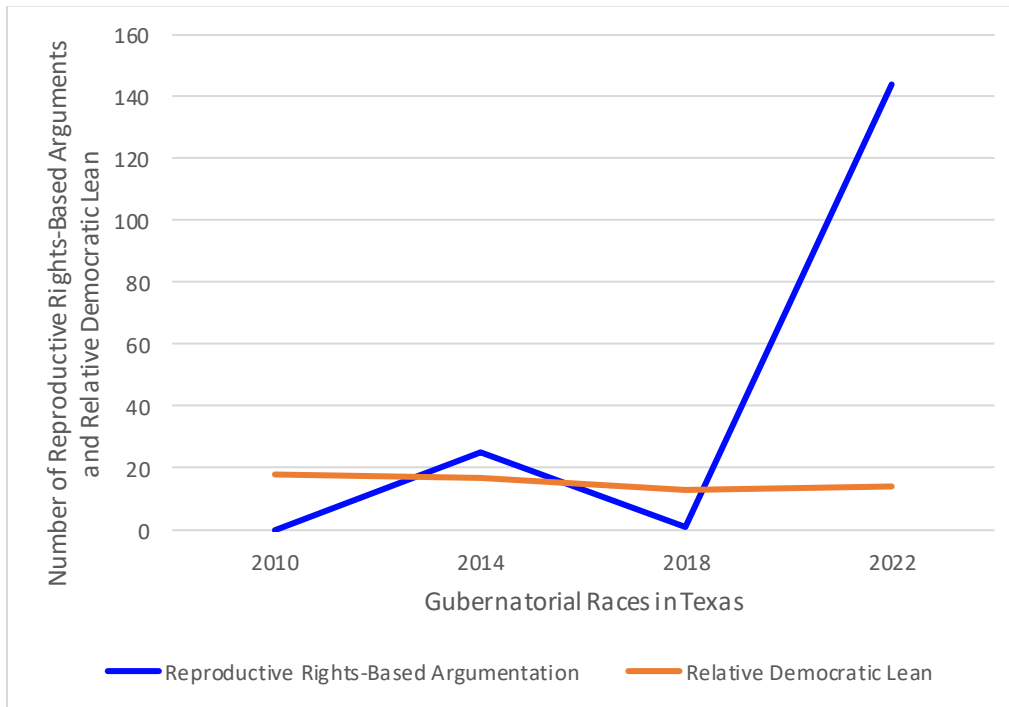
*Note: Number of abortion references made by the Republican Party in Texas compared with the Relative Democratic lean of the Latino vote from 2010 to 2021.*

As for the types of argumentations (H2), Figure 15 illustrates a general and substantial increase in reproductive rights-based argumentation for Texas Democrats while the *relative Democratic lean of the Latino vote* in Texas decreases. Figure 16 also shows a general increase in moral-based arguments for Texas Republicans while seeing an overall decrease in the *relative Democratic lean of the Latino vote* in Texas. Thus, this indicates support for H2 in Texas. For California, there is also an increase in reproductive rights-based arguments for California Democrats (Figure 17) and a general slight increase in moral-based arguments for California Republicans (Figure 18) while

seeing a relative decrease in *relative Democratic lean of the Latino vote* in California.

Therefore, this indicates support for H2 in California.

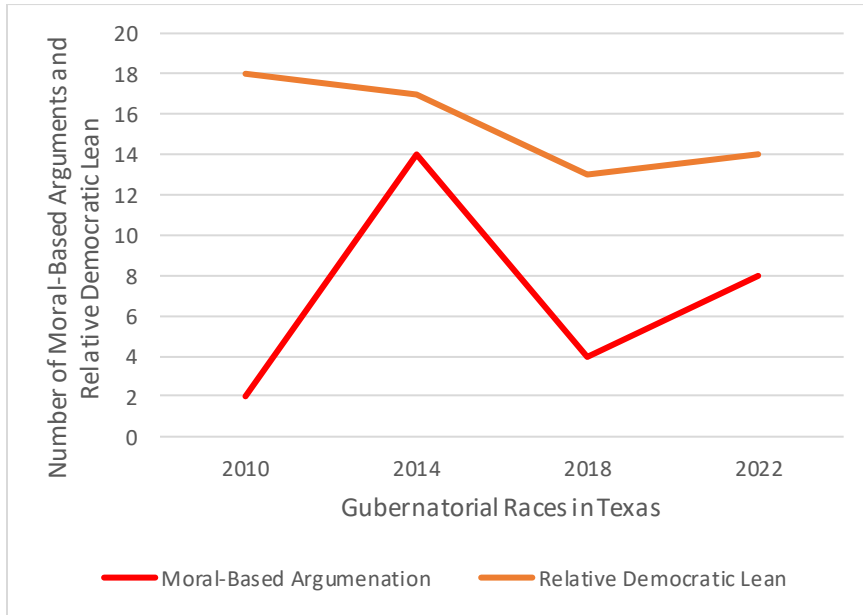
**Figure 15.** Number of Reproductive Rights-Based Arguments and the Relative Democratic Lean of Latino Vote: Texas (2010 – 2022)



*Note: Number of reproductive rights-based arguments compared to the relative Democratic lean of the Latino vote in Texas from 2010 to 2022.*

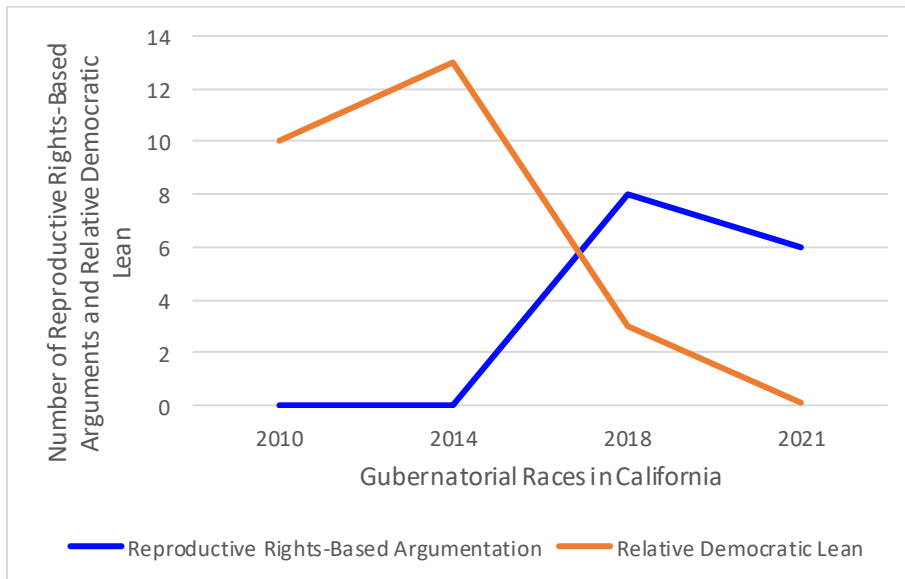


**Figure 16.** Number of Moral-Based Arguments and the Relative Democratic Lean of Latino Vote: Texas (2010 – 2022)



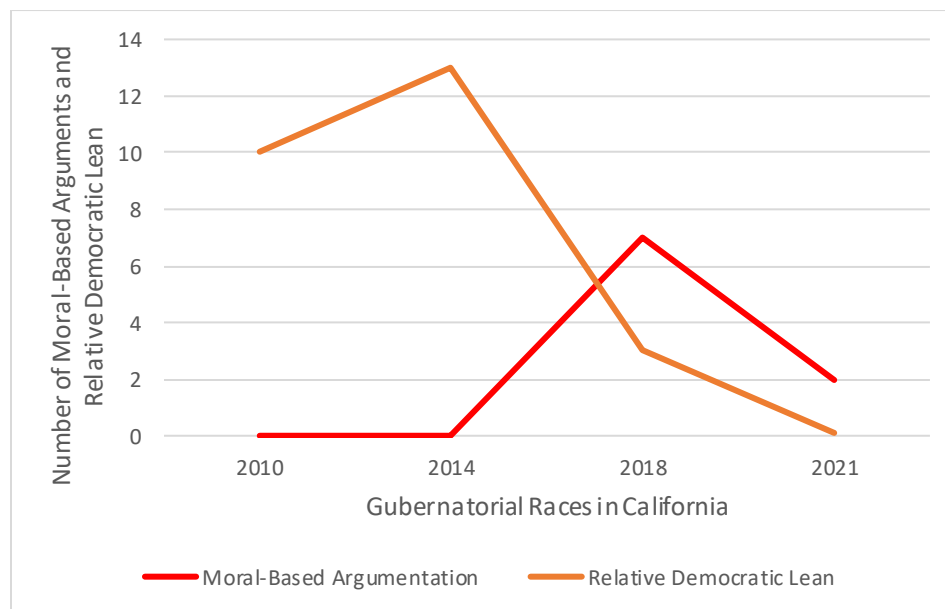
*Note: Number of moral-based arguments compared to thhe relative Democratic lean of the Latino vote in Texas from 2010 to 2022.*

**Figure 17.** Number of Reproductive Rights-Based Arguments and the Relative Democratic Lean of Latino Vote: California (2010 – 2021)



*Note: Number of reproductive rights-based arguments compared to thhe relative Democfratic lean of the Latino vote in California from 2010 to 2021. .*

**Figure 18.** Number of Moral-Based Arguments and the Relative Democratic Lean of Latino Vote: California (2010 – 2021)



Note: Number of moral-based arguments compared to the relative Democratic lean of the Latino vote in California from 2010 to 2021.

To summarize, this section compared the results from the content analysis on *political rhetoric* (IV) with the *relative democratic lean of the Latino vote* (DV). Upon comparing the variables, this research concludes that there is support for both hypotheses in Texas and support for only H2 in California. However, this study found that Texas, and more specifically, Texas Democrats are more active within the abortion debate than their Republican counterparts and even when compared to California in general. Despite Texas Democrats politicizing the abortion issue more, the overall *relative democratic lean of the Latino vote* has still decreased since 2010. In other words, Republicans have not politicized the abortion issue as much as Democrats and still, the *relative democratic lean of the Latino vote* has decreased. This indicates that

Democrats have not been able to consolidate their Latino base despite their increase in rallying for abortion rights in campaigns. In short, the Republican Party has not campaigned as much on the issue as their Democratic counterparts and there is still a decrease in the democratic lean of the Latino vote.

Overall, looking at the U.S. general population, the majority of adults in the U.S. have said that abortion should be mostly legal at least since 1995 when the Pew Research Center started polling public opinion on abortion (*Public Opinion on Abortion*, 2022). In 1995, 60% of adults in the U.S. said abortion should be legal and in 2022, this number stayed about the same (*Public Opinion on Abortion*, 2022). In other words, since 1995, most adults in the U.S. adopt a stance more favorable for abortion (*Public Opinion on Abortion*, 2022). California attitudes, in specific, reflect closer to the national average with 57% of adults in favor of abortion rights, according to the latest *U.S. Religious Landscape Survey* from the Pew Research Center in 2014 (*U.S. Religious Landscape Study: Views about abortion by state*, 2014). In the same survey, 45% of adults in Texas were in favor of abortion rights (*U.S. Religious Landscape Study: Views about abortion by state*, 2014). The survey also found that 43% of Latinos in California were in favor of legalizing abortion which is lower than the 57% of the general California population that favors abortion rights (*U.S. Religious Landscape Study: Views about abortion among Latinos by state*, 2014). As for Texas, the study found that 41% of Latinos in Texas were in favor of abortion, which is even slightly lower than the 45% of the general Texas population that favored abortion rights (*U.S. Religious Landscape Study: Views about abortion among Latinos by state*, 2014). In other words, fewer Latinos are in favor of abortion when compared to the general population in these two

states. Thus, it is unsurprising why the *relative Democratic lean of the Latino vote* is still declining despite the Democratic Party's efforts to politicize abortion in gubernatorial elections.

The question remains why the Democratic Party would champion abortion more in a conservative state like Texas. This question can baffle many including the Texas Tribune, which attributed this phenomenon in more recent times to the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* (2022) (Klibanoff, 2022). Since the Democrats held the presidency in 2022, Texas Democrats were set up to lose the vote overall in the 2022 midterm elections (Klibanoff, 2022). Despite this, however, Texas Democrats saw an opportunity after the U.S. Supreme Court's decision on *Dobbs v. Jackson* (2022) when a wave of new voters became motivated to rally against the Republican Party in places like Kansas (Klibanoff, 2022). Thus, Texas Democrats saw an opportunity to adopt the same offensive approach on abortion, and ultimately attack the Republican Party especially after the new restrictions on abortion in Texas – directly resulted from *Dobbs v. Jackson* (2022) (Klibanoff, 2022).

For Latinos, it is even more intriguing why the Democratic Party would campaign on the abortion issue despite knowing the Latino population is more conservative on the matter. In 2018, a debate mediator asked Lupe Valdez if Governor Greg Abbott was attempting to exploit the division between her and Latinos against abortion that was a result of her more liberal stance on the debate (KXAN, 2018). To this, Valdez replied that it was not going to be successful on his part to do so (KXAN, 2018). Although she didn't campaign much on abortion, this question demonstrates not only the relationship

between the Latino base and abortion, but also the struggle from both political parties to gain strength amongst the Latino base. Thus, one possible strategy behind the Democrats', especially Texas Democrats', efforts to campaign on abortion could stem from wanting to motivate new Latino voters to go to the polls regardless of their stance on abortion. As Adams (1997) suggests, perhaps using strong rhetoric on abortion could trigger an emotional response strong enough to motivate Latino voters to the polls and hopefully along the way this would lead them to consider other issues that could possibly align with the Democratic Party platform. Ultimately, if this is the case, then the decreasing *relative Democratic lean of the Latino vote* is indicative that perhaps such a strategy is not as effective as one could hope for.

Moreover, placing an increasing emphasis on abortion can prove problematic in times when the electorate prioritizes economic issues that are more likely to resonate with a broader electorate than a more specific social issue such as abortion. For example, in the 2022 midterms, there were two theories observed following the rightward shift of the Latino vote and the overturning of *Roe v. Wade (1973)*: either the reemergence of abortion in the spotlight would help the Democrats or the Republican Party would focus on inflation and crime to strengthen its Latino base (Mason & Bierman, 2022). Evidently, Texas Democrats did not see a successful gubernatorial race in 2022 with their efforts to capitalize on *Dobbs v. Jackson (2022)* and thus saw the *relative Democratic lean of the Latino vote* only slightly increase by one point. Thus, this illustrates how championing a more specific issue like abortion to win over the Latino vote could prove to be a more difficult and bold strategy for future campaigns.

## CONCLUSION

This thesis focused on the abortion issue that is one of the most controversial issues in the U.S. political realm. More specifically, this work explores the relationship between political rhetoric on abortion and the Latino vote in the U.S. This paper posits the question on whether political rhetoric on abortion shapes the Latino vote. To address this question, this study conducted a content analysis on speeches, interviews, debates, political advertisements, and social media of gubernatorial races in Texas and California from 2010 to 2022. This research hypothesized that the *relative Democratic lean of the Latino vote* would decrease (become less Democratic) as the Republican Party increased their number of abortion references as well as their moral-based arguments. After conducting the content analysis and comparison to the *relative Democratic lean of the Latino vote*, the analysis shows support for H1 in TX and support for H2 in both Texas and California. Ultimately, this investigation found that Texas Democrats politicized the issue more than their Republican counterparts did. However, this study found that Texas in particular prioritized the issue more than California. It also found that as Texas Democrats made efforts to spearhead abortion rhetoric, the *relative Democratic lean of the Latino vote* decreased as the Latino vote has become less Democratic since 2010.

Moreover, this research must also recognize the limitations of study. Although studying political rhetoric can provide useful insight into political strategies, this research has a lower validity given the lack of manipulation of variables. This study focused more on descriptive analysis rather than experimental analysis. In addition, because this research dealt with discourse and contextual interpretation of arguments, this study also

contains a potential question of reliability. Furthermore, this analysis narrowed the scope of messages this study sourced to that found in campaign YouTube channels, C-SPAN, Facebook, and Twitter accounts. Although this study has these limitations, it still finds it noteworthy to explore the question of political rhetoric and Latino voting behavior. Therefore, this research invites future investigations to consider the research question through another research design and to find other sources in which to gather messages on abortion to find a more expansive rhetorical pattern. Ultimately, this study's purpose is to encourage other to consider how political rhetoric can shape Latino voting behavior in the U.S. Although this is a specific feat, there is still much left to explore on how the Latino population performs in the political arena in the U.S. and particularly, how its responds to political rhetoric in more recent times.

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## VITA

Fernanda Valdez received her Bachelor of Arts in Political Science and a minor in Economics from Texas A&M University at College Station, TX in 2019. Her research experience is focused in political science. She worked as an undergraduate research scholar as part of the Aggie Research Scholars Program at Texas A&M University in Fall 2018. She was awarded the Lamar Bruni Vergara Graduate Fellowship in Fall 2023.

Contact info: [fvaldez@aggienetwork.com](mailto:fvaldez@aggienetwork.com)

(956) 740 - 3329