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Abortion Attitudes on Presidential Candidate Support in California's 2024 Election

Intro:

Abortion is not just a policy position; it provides the basic ideological framework of the candidate and reflects how voters interpret representation. Political candidates' views are central to understanding how political outcomes shape disparities across California. At the policy level, abortion attitudes shape voter choice. As elected officials determine funding allocations, clinic access, and the reach of reproductive services, the presidential candidate can possibly alter the federal and state structure of abortion. Even when abortion may be constitutionally protected in California, distinct attitudes towards abortion among registered voters in California can determine their support for pro-choice, or pro-life political candidates. Negative attitudes toward abortion may produce stigma towards women's bodies, as it has severe "consequences for the psychological and emotional health of abortion seekers" (Soraindo and Lavelanet, 2022). Additionally, it may provide uneven health access across underserved communities, underaged women, and marginalized populations with limited access to healthcare. Hence, the issue of abortion may prove how voting for a candidate with pro-choice or pro-life attitude reflects the values in government.

Context & Significance:

During 1973, *Roe v. Wade* recognized the constitutional protection for abortion rights. The U.S Supreme Court held that the constitutional right to privacy was derived from the liberty guarantee of the Due Process Clause, which extends the woman's decision to have an abortion. The right of a pregnant woman to choose to have an abortion, only before the point of fetal viability, became a legalized procedure nationwide (U.S Const. amend. XIV). It served as a positive pivot for politics by expanding women's rights and eliminating many state and federal laws that previously criminalized and restricted abortion.

For nearly 50 years, abortion was an effectively legalized procedure across the United States. In 2022, the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* by banning abortion entirely to individual state governments. As a result, 13 states had enacted near total abortion bans, while 7 additional states limited abortion between 6 and 12 weeks of pregnancy, creating a sharply divided legal landscape across the country (Bell, et al. 2026). Through the decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, the U.S Supreme Court eliminated the federal right to an abortion in the first trimester. Nearly 180,000 fewer in person abortions were provided in states that implemented bans during the first 18 months after *Dobbs*, forcing patients to seek care elsewhere (WeCount, 2024). It allowed states to adopt abortion restrictions, where many states adopted substantially more conservative abortion policies that had been in force since *Roe v. Wade*.

Essentially, *Roe v. Wade* decision was the first time that the court recognized the importance of the constitutional right to privacy for women to decide their own bodily actions. However, the government retained the power to regulate abortion access of women, depending on the certain stage of pregnancy (Brennan Center for Justice, 2022). The abortion rights movement aimed to take action and fight for women to have legal access to medical and moral

support if they desired to terminate their pregnancy (Collins et al., 2026). “Pro-choice” has evolved into a political, legal, and social movement through women expressing their viewpoints across the nation, through promoting the belief that people have the right to control their own bodies without the fear of legal and social backlash (Neimann et al., 2026). For example, pro choice activists “emphasized how anticipated stigma shapes their behaviour in professional environments, such as academia, where they refrain from revealing their engagement in abortion-related activism” (Neimann et al., 2026). The primary criticism was towards the government, especially politicians that were believed to limit women and their personal health care decisions.

“Pro-life”, or the group of people who supported abortion to become illegal and inaccessible, opposed the fundamental ideology of the Abortion Rights movement (Suter, 2023). The pro-life community believes that “every life is precious” and greatly supports the idea that every life has a right to be born. The pro-life community sees a potential for a unique individual with their own future, which has a right to be born. Oftentimes, these beliefs stem from religious beliefs allowing them to see abortion as a violation of the sanctity of life as taught in their faith (Clarke, 2022). They offer many alternative options to abortion, such as the process of adoption to place unwanted children with caring families in loving homes (Clarke, 2022). Nevertheless, researcher Sofia Suter revealed that it was found that 31 states still allow for forced sterilization of some individuals with disabilities. (Suter, 2023)

This research is particularly relevant to California public policy as the state has positioned itself as one of the strongest protectors of abortion rights following the 2022 overturning of *Roe v. Wade*. California's implementation of California Proposition 1, which directly protects individuals' reproductive freedom within the state constitution, reflects the

distinctive public opinion on abortion and how it may directly influence state level policymaking. By understanding how abortion attitudes shape voter turnout, it can explain why California continues to support and elect presidential candidates who advocate for abortion rights. Subsequently, it can help us understand how such electoral preferences work to affect future legislation, funding for reproductive health care and California's role as a state in providing abortion access. Nevertheless, this study connects individual voting behavior to broader policy outcomes, such as reproductive rights and abortion access within California.

Literature Review:

Abortion has always been a salient social and political issue, where more than six in ten Americans believe 60% of abortions should be legal in most or all cases (PewResearch, 2026). On the contrary, 38% of Americans claim that abortion should be illegal (PewResearch, 2026). Thus, abortion has produced a clash of political ideology and is continuing to play a big role in partisan coalitions. Looking back at the 2024 presidential election, the amount of popular discourse and media coverage increased the importance of the issue on abortion. Furthermore, it led to extreme views of partisan identification to be a longstanding attachment that comes prior to policy attitudes or policy positions taken by the party. The emotional loyalty to a specific party produces an unwillingness to compromise with the opposite party within the issue of abortion, economy, immigration, or foreign affairs in the election. (Biag, UC Santa Barbara).

Importance to California policy:

Ultimately, Proposition 1 had centered around whether the amendment would possibly alter California's viability standard (Bay Curious, 2022), rather than whether abortion should remain legal. During the discussion on Proposition 1, Republican Assemblymember James Gallagher had argued that it was rather unnecessary as California already had strong statutory

protections for abortion and contraception. Proposition 1 seemed to include a broad constitutional language that could potentially permit abortions at any stage of pregnancy (Bay Curious, 2022). Therefore, the lack of specific reference to fetal viability within the amendment raised concerns. However, it was rather important as federal changes may eliminate the historically long lasting 24 week viability law under California.

Although supporters of Proposition 1 believed in preserving the status quo, legal scholars had argued that the specific wording would open the door to that change policy to the viability standard (Bay Curious, 2022). However, medical professionals claimed the viability is unable to be determined by age alone. Many doctors that worked on Proposition 1 stated that the survival of a fetus depends on a variety of factors, such as maternal health conditions, diabetes, or access to medical resources (Bay Curious, 2022). Therefore, it was critical to allow doctors to exercise their own medical judgement rather than relying on a singular numerical threshold. By reflecting an ethical clinical practice, viability laws highlighted the controversy around when an abortion service could be provided and how decisions on abortion should be governed by legal standards. As it reflects a widespread belief that abortion should remain a fundamental right, public opinion polling indicated that approximately 71% of Californians supported Proposition 1 (Bay Curious, 2022).

Partisan identification remains increasingly influential within attitudes towards abortion. The growing polarization between Republicans, who lean more towards pro-life values and Democrats, who lean toward pro-choice values, have received considerable attention in the media. There are clear contrasts between the Democrat and Republican parties' positions of reproductive rights and health care. Most Republicans are opposed to abortion rights, with a minority that claim abortion should be legal in some cases (DiCamillio, 2022). For Republicans,

abortion is framed as a moral and religious issue that is derived from American history. Therefore, voters tend to follow other social identities to determine partisanship alignment and subsequently cause many other political outcomes, such as voting and abortion (DiCamillio, 2022). Historically, the abortion policies that led to the overturn of Roe v. Wade has aligned closer to the Republican party's decade long opposition, in which the decision impacts political behavior and opinion towards voting in the elections (Meisels, 2025). Abortion has become the motivating factor for many voters, as it determines the reproductive freedom of individuals while also reflecting the political landscape of the partisanship's candidacy.

Following historical revivalist patterns, there is a fundamental religious stake within American politics that influences politics. Democrats were more likely to incentivize on supporting the choice of the individual's body, but Republicans focused on the livelihood of the fetus (Biag, UC Santa Barbara). Even though many Americans hold the belief that abortion should be legalized, most states have placed restrictions for abortion rights after the overturn of Roe v. Wade (Siers et al, 2022) Californians have been overwhelmingly against the repeal of Roe v. Wade, where almost 72% of voters were in favor of legal abortion in 2023 (DiCamillio, 2022). Yet, the aftermath of Dobbs created an influx of individuals to begin attaching themselves to a political group that reflected strong pro-choice and pro-life views. During the 2024 presidential election, abortion was the top issue for only 14% of voters, as democracy and the economy were prioritized (DiCamillio, 2022). When President Biden had endorsed Kamala for presidential candidate, there were other subsequent concerns that felt more important than the issue of abortion at the time (Schneider, 2024). Hence, cues from Donald Trump were enough to move public opinion among Republicans on abortion, as messaging mobilized supporters.

Through recent years, election times proved to show that partisan identification is more stable than ideological commitments. There tends to be arguments between partisanship rather than policy positions in the election, as voters' support for a candidate was solely derived from loyalty rather than agreement on abortion (Bankert, 2024). California voters utilize their candidates' positions on abortion as a clear indicator of underlying values. Ostensibly, the candidate's election can produce bigger problems in policy making, or the type of agenda that will be enforced in California. Abortion is rather associated with the candidates' and voters' moral, religious, and personal beliefs.

Therefore, voters will be more likely to be in support of candidates that reflect and align with their own attitudes and reject those who do not. Voters may support candidates who share their ideological or policy goals, even if that means condoning undemocratic beliefs and other policy regulations. Yet over 1-3 Americans have claimed that they would only vote for a candidate who shares their views on abortion (DiCamillio, 2022). While 46% of voters claim that they would consider a candidate's position on abortion as just one of many factors. (DiCamillio, 2022) Another poll's results found that 28% of people who believe abortion should be legal had voted for Trump (DiCamillio, 2022).

Research Methods: Theory, Hypothesis, and Causal Mechanism

Theory:

California voters typically use candidates' positions on abortion as a clear indicator of their broader political values and policy priorities (Meisels, 2025). The election of a particular candidate has the ability to produce significant implications for future policymaking that will be pursued within California. Nevertheless, abortion is associated with moral, religious, and personal beliefs. It makes it a political issue for many voters, where voters are more likely to

support candidates whose positions reflect and align with their own attitudes while rejecting those whose views conflict with their beliefs. Voters' "preferences depend on the intensity of the candidate's position", even when they disagree with those candidates on other issues or are willing to overlook other controversial positions (Jenke and Huettal, 2016). In this study, I seek to understand if a candidate's stance on abortion influences voter support. This relationship is further conditioned by voters' own abortion attitudes, which may strengthen support for candidates with similar views while decreasing support for candidates with opposing positions.

Hypothesis: I expect that voters in California who hold more pro-choice beliefs are more likely to support Kamala Harris than Donald Trump. I want to explore how voters' support for candidates is affected by their stance on abortion and how the political polarization surrounding the issue as well as the candidate's position might influence California's future policy landscape. A candidate's position on abortion is predicted to have a moderating effect based on the voter's personal beliefs, increasing support for candidates with similar beliefs and decreasing support for candidates with opposing beliefs.

Operational Hypothesis: California voters in the 2024 U.S. presidential election will be more likely to report support for a candidate if the candidate's position on abortion is consistent with the voter's own attitudes. This hypothesis will be tested with survey data from the American National Election Studies (ANES), which measures candidates' abortion positions as pro-choice or not pro-choice, respondents' own abortion attitudes, and respondents' self reported likelihood of voting for a particular candidate. The analysis will test whether alignment between candidate stance and voter attitude increases voter support among registered California voters in 2024. For instance, ANES includes measures such as, "Do you approve or disapprove of the way Joe Biden

is handling abortion policy?”, that provide insight into how evaluations of abortion policy may influence electoral preferences.

Null Hypothesis:

There is no relationship between a candidate's stance on abortion and voter support. Whether a candidate is perceived as pro-choice or not pro-choice does not significantly affect how California voters choose to vote in presidential elections.

Causal Mechanism:

Voters rely on a candidate's abortion position as a proxy for their other political values, and use that as a shortcut to find out if the candidate stands for things they agree with and care about. When voters perceive their own attitudes in a candidate's position on abortion, they are more likely to feel represented and to support the candidate more strongly. However, if the voter's attitudes and the candidates positions do not align, there may be distrust or opposition from voters. The abortion positions of candidates shape California voters' perceptions of political representation, and thereby their vote choice. When voters perceive alignment between their personal attitudes and a candidate's abortion position, they are more likely to feel represented and develop stronger electoral support. When there is a mismatch between voter attitudes and candidate positions, voters may experience distrust or opposition. In this way, a candidate's abortion stance influences perceptions of political representation, which in turn shapes vote choice among California voters.

Does being pro-choice make California voters more likely to support Harris over Trump in the 2024 elections? To answer this question, I utilized an observational study by leveraging data on attitudes towards abortion and voting in the 2024 presidential election. I utilized data from

ANES, or the American National Election Study Time Series, that covered a total of 269 respondents, which provided analyses and complete responses for each variable. My unit of analysis was California respondents only, therefore it concluded all counties in California. The individual voters in California, which represented each observation as one respondent's attitude towards abortion and voting behavior in the 2024 presidential election. The time scope of this study is the 2024 election cycle to examine voter behavior during this time period in California.

For my independent variable, I measured how voters perceive a presidential candidate's stance on abortion policy. This variable examined whether a candidate is viewed as a pro-choice or pro-life and how that perception influences voter support. I measured this categorically through voter perception of the candidate's abortion stance (1=pro-choice, 0=pro-life/not pro-choice, 2=unsure). This variable helps determine whether abortion policy positions shape electoral preferences more strongly than other political issues. For my dependent variable, I measured whether California respondents supported Harris or Trump in the 2024 presidential election. This variable represents voter support through an individual's intended vote choice and allows us to examine whether abortion preferences influence support for a candidate. This helped analyze whether voters prioritized abortion policy positions over other political issues when deciding which candidate to support. Moreover, my control variables were age and gender. I looked at gender to understand the beliefs and attitudes on abortion and voting behavior to differentiate views between men and women. Additionally, I looked at age to understand how someone younger or older may view abortion and what is the likelihood of supporting a certain candidate based on that generalization.

Findings:

Using RStudio, this study analyzed data drawn from the 2024 American National Election Studies (ANES) to examine the relationship between abortion attitudes and presidential vote choice. The primary independent variable was respondents' views on abortion policy, measured through the survey question, "By law, when should abortion be allowed?" Descriptive analyses indicate notable differences in candidate support across abortion attitudes. Among respondents associated with Donald Trump, 11% believed abortion should never be permitted, 24.9% supported legality only in cases of rape, incest, or danger to the pregnant individual, 12.6% favored abortion when there is a clear need, and 48% viewed abortion as a matter of personal choice. Comparatively, among respondents associated with Kamala Harris, only 5.9% believed abortion should never be permitted, while 47.4% supported abortion as a personal choice and 20.2% favored legality when there is a clear need.

Additional ANES measures further demonstrated that abortion rights remained broadly supported among the sample, with 59.38% of respondents indicating that abortion should always be legal for any reason, compared to 20.93% who believed it should always be illegal with no exceptions. Due to the limited availability of recent data that compares Democratic and Republican abortion attitudes, my study relied only on voter placement and abortion attitudes to evaluate the relationship during the 2024 election cycle. Respondents with pro-choice attitudes reported greater support for Harris than Trump, although the differences across abortion attitudes were relatively modest.

For my design structure, I implemented a spearman rank order correlation. Even though there was a moderate positive association ($p=.512$), the relationship did not reach conventional levels of statistical significance ($p=.061$). However, California respondents that were women and nonbinary reported greater support for abortion rights, access, and reproductive freedom. They

also reported greater support for abortion access and were more likely to support Harris than men. Support for abortion access was highest among nonbinary respondents, followed by women, then men. Therefore, my study suggests that abortion was not a massive factor in considering voter choice in the 2024 presidential election. Other issues, such as democracy, economy, and foreign affairs could have interrupted the placement on abortion within the presidential elections.

Policy Implications/Suggestions:

The findings suggest that abortion attitudes remain an important factor in shaping political preferences among California voters, although they do not independently determine presidential vote choice. While respondents with more pro-choice attitudes were generally more likely to support Kamala Harris, the relationship was not statistically significant, indicating that other issues also influence electoral behavior. From a public policy perspective, California should continue to invest in accessible public data on reproductive health rights. After the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* and California Proposition 1, there has been significant public controversy and lack of information about current, or updated abortion laws. By expanding nonpartisan voter data, it could help mitigate misinformation and motivate registered voters to make more informed political choices. Additionally, lawmakers should continue pursuing to eliminate the limited access to reproductive health care for underserved communities, such as individuals with disabilities, or people of color. There exists still unequal access to health care services, which can produce barriers that disproportionately affect vulnerable populations.

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