Reproductive Rights, State Ballot Measures, and Voter Turnout

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Abstract of Dissertation

Reproductive Rights, State Ballot Measures, and Voter Turnout

In this dissertation, I develop a theoretical framework based on existing literature of how interest groups strategize, organize, and actions they take to advance or defeat state ballot measures in the U.S..The framework includes ways in which interest groups seek to persuade the public, frames they use, and strategies for advancing their interests.

Given that abortion is seen by many as a morality policy and, therefore, often strikes a moral chord with constituents that is different from other policy ballot measures, I examined interest groups behavior when abortion is on the ballot. In the research, I employed a mixed methods approach to examine how reproductive rights interest groups' strategies, organizations, and activities differ from those used in other ballot issues. I answer three research questions:

(1) To what extent did the presence of state ballot measures regarding abortion or reproductive rights between 2016 and 2024 affect voter turnout?

(2) In what ways, if any, did interest group strategies, organization, and activities to add measures to ballots and promote passage of ballot measures regarding abortion or reproductive rights differ from more traditional strategies employed to add measures to ballots and promote passage of state ballot measures?

(3) How did interest group strategies, organization, and activities to add measures to ballots and promote passage of ballot measures expanding/protecting abortion or reproductive rights vary pre and post the Dobbs decision?

I describe the background of abortion as a ballot issue in the United States, review relevant literature, ground my research questions, discuss results from both quantitative and qualitative findings, and propose areas of future study. My findings include a quantitative analysis of voter

turnout and a qualitative analysis of interest group strategies, organization, and actions throughout the entire ballot measure campaign process from conception to finalization. The contributions of my dissertation project are twofold. First, I show how voter turnout varied between 2016 and 2024 when there was a reproductive rights measure on the ballot, finding that overall and female voter turnout increased when an abortion or reproductive rights measure was on the ballot after the Dobbs decision. And second, I describe how the actions of reproductive rights interest groups differed from those of non-morality policy interest groups actions undertaken to advance state ballot measures. Ultimately, while I found many similarities between reproductive rights interest groups' and non-morality policy interest groups' strategies, organization, and activities, speaking with reproductive rights advocates in five states shed light into how reproductive rights interest groups operate and influences on them.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments ..... **iv**

Abstract of Dissertation ..... **v**

List of Figures ..... **viii**

List of Tables ..... **ix**

Chapter One: Introduction 1

Chapter Two: Theoretical Foundations 28

Chapter Three: Research Design and Methods 49

Chapter Four: Quantitative Findings 71

Chapter Five: Qualitative Findings 88

Chapter Six: Conclusion and Recommendations 117

References 136

Appendix A: Codebook 157

List of Figures

Figure 2.1 Citizen-Initiated Ballot Measures 30

Figure 4.1: Voter Turnout, 2016 - 2024 74

List of Tables

Table 1.1: State-Level Abortion Restrictions and Abortion or Reproductive Rights Measures .. 10

Table 2.1: Typical Strategies Undertaken by Non-Morality Policy Interest Groups to Secure Desired Outcomes of State-Level Ballot Measures 31

Table 2.2: Typical Ways Non-Morality Policy Interest Groups Organize Themselves to Secure Desired Outcomes of State-Level Ballot Measures 34

Table 2.3: Typical Activities Undertaken by Non-Morality Policy Interest Groups to Secure Desired Outcomes of State-Level Ballot Measures 36

Table 3.1: Ohio 2023 Issue 1 Ballot Language..... 59

Table 3.2: Maryland 2024 Question 1 Ballot Langue..... 60

Table 3.3: Montana 2024 Constitutional Initiative 128 Ballot Language 61

Table 3.4: Missouri 2024 Amendment 3 Ballot Language..... 62

Table 3.5: Arizona 2024 Proposition 139 Ballot Language 63

Table 3.6: Interview Protocol 65

Table 4.1: Descriptive Statistics (State by Year) 74

Table 4.2: Correlation Table 76

Table 4.3: Overall Voter Turnout 78

Table 4.4: Female Voter Turnout..... 81

Table 4.5: Male Voter Turnout 83

Table 5.1: How Reproductive Rights Interest Group Strategies Compare to Non-Morality Policy Interest Group Strategies When Advancing State-Level Ballot Measures 91

Table 5.2: How Reproductive Rights Interest Groups Organize Themselves Compared to Non-Morality Policy Interest Group Organization When Advancing State-Level Ballot Measures.... 99

Table 5.3: How Reproductive Rights Interest Group Activities Compare to Non-Morality Policy Interest Group Activities When Advancing State-Level Ballot Measures 102

Table 5.4: Ohio 2023 Issue 1 Ballot Language..... 111

Table 5.5: Montana 2024 Constitutional Initiative 128 Ballot Language 112

Table 5.6: Missouri 2024 Amendment 3 Ballot Language..... 112

Table 5.7: Arizona 2024 Proposition 139 Ballot Language 113

Chapter One: Introduction

Roadmap to the Chapter

In this chapter, I present the statement of the problem that this dissertation seeks to examine and an introduction to the dissertation. At a macro level, this dissertation is aimed to examine the similarities and differences between reproductive rights interest groups' strategies, organizations, and activities and those of non-morality policy interest groups. The topic of abortions differs from some other contested topics in elections because it falls under the realm of a morality policy (Mooney, 2001). Morality policies focus on what is right and wrong and just in society. They specifically include policies which "generate greater conflict over basic moral values than others" and ones in which people are less inclined to compromise over (Mooney & Schuldt, 2008, p. 212). In terms of abortion policy, this often means that constituents feel strongly about whether their state should support protections for safe and legal abortions or support restrictions on abortion within the state. To increase researcher understanding of how direct democracy, interest groups, and voters operate, this dissertation develops a framework for how non-morality policy rights interest groups operate according to the literature, and uses interviews with reproductive rights advocates to determine similarities and differences between non-morality policy interest groups and reproductive rights interest groups when advancing ballot measures. Additionally, this dissertation examines how the strategies, organizations, and activities of reproductive rights and pro-life interest groups may affect voter turnout in both midterm and presidential elections. Ballot measures provide constituents an active role in either protecting their right to an abortion or in restricting abortions in their state, an avenue for direct action. Because of the clear negative consequences that state-level abortion restrictions have for

childbearing people, ballot measures become a key instrument in protecting said childbearing people in states across the country.

In what follows, I discuss the statement of the problem followed by research gaps. I then introduce the dissertation, discussing a brief history of abortions, why the 2022 Supreme Court decision matters, what ballot measures are, what a morality policy is, and give brief definitions of abortion, reproductive rights, and reproductive justice.

Statement of the Problem

On June 24, 2022, the United States Supreme Court released its decision on *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* (Supreme Court Roe v. Wade, 1973) which overturned the national constitutional protections for abortion care. Simultaneously, it provided an avenue for individual states to enforce their own abortion restrictions and protections, creating laws that directly impact constituents seeking an abortion in individual states. Through the ballot measure process, state legislators and/or constituents are provided with the opportunity to propose laws, constitutional amendments, or questions in an attempt to change the state's constitution or state's laws. Interest groups and large organizations also play a role in creating and advancing or defeating ballot measures. However, very few studies have looked specifically at how these interest groups strategize, organize, and act when advancing or defeating ballot measures, and I was unable to find any studies which have examined reproductive rights interest group strategies, organization, and actions when it comes to ballot measure activities. Because we currently do not have a published understanding of how reproductive rights interest groups act, our current understanding lies with the interest groups themselves rather than with scholars and the general public. This lack of understanding of how specifically reproductive rights interest groups may act, strategize, or organize differently when seeking to advance or defeat ballot measures

compared to other interest groups focused on non-reproductive rights measures may potentially leave a hole in our understanding of interest groups, ballot measures, and the current day reproductive rights debate. Therefore, I seek to explore the gap in the literature on how reproductive rights interest groups may differ from other interest groups in advancing ballot measures through my dissertation.

Research Gaps

While ballot measures are a more direct avenue for advancing interest group priorities at the state and local level, little research on interest group strategy has been conducted in the public policy and political science fields, and I was unable to find any authors who have discussed interest group strategies for advancing or defeating abortion or reproductive rights ballot measures. Additionally, when examining scholarship in other fields, I was unable to find relevant information on how interest groups seek to advance or defeat any women's rights topics, specifically related to ballot measures, initiatives, and referendums. Current literature's lack of addressing how reproductive rights interest groups operate when advancing their interests through ballot measures, nor providing a clear framework for how non-morality policy interest groups operate when advancing or defeating ballot measures, leaves a hole in our understanding of interest groups and the framework they follow during their participation in direct democracy. I seek to fill this hole through this dissertation. Additionally, I seek to examine if the efforts put forward by reproductive rights interest groups yield higher voter turnout through a series of regressions. Literature on ballot measures' effect on voter turnout has been surprisingly debated. Therefore, through this dissertation, I seek to add additional understanding for how interest group operations may influence voter turnout when an abortion measure is on the ballot.

Introduction

Throughout the United States' history, citizens have been debating the right to and morality of abortion care. Dating back to 1847 when the American Medical Association (AMA) was formed, an organization comprised primarily of male doctors who had very little training in reproductive health, groups have been fighting for the criminalization of childbearing people and their healthcare providers for terminating an unwanted pregnancy (Mohr, 1979). From the late 1800s to the mid-1900s, all states had strict bans in place restricting childbearing people's access to safe and legal abortion, with a few exceptions in some states, such as in the case of saving the life of the childbearing person. From 1910 to 1966, abortion restrictions were taken to the utmost extreme, with abortions being illegal in all states. Rather than stopping abortions from happening, the law forced childbearing people seeking a wanted abortion to resort to other methods, such as self-managed abortions (SMAs) or obtaining the abortion illegally, resulting in high death tolls (Mohr, 1979). In fact, in 1930, almost one in five (18%) maternal deaths was a result of these unsafe and illegal abortions (Gold, 2003). In 1966, California was the first state to amend its laws, allowing abortions in hospitals if the hospital committee deemed it permissible, providing hope to activists seeking to change laws (Planned Parenthood, 2021). Between 1967 and 1973, four states legalized abortion (Alaska, Hawaii, New York, and Washington), and many others provided exceptions to the illegalization (Planned Parenthood, 2021). Thus, the debate over access to abortion altered and childbearing people gained increased access to safe and legal abortions.

In 1973, abortion laws changed for Americans when a Texas woman, Norma McCorvey, fought for her right to an abortion. In a historic case, *Roe et al. v. Wade*, the United States Supreme Court decided that the 14th Amendment protected the right of childbearing people to obtain an abortion up to fetal viability (Supreme Court Roe v. Wade, 1973). The court did not,

however, mandate that states open a certain number of clinics or provide any other assistance to make abortions more accessible to its constituents. In 1992, the Supreme Court's decision in *Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pennsylvania v. Casey* upheld childbearing people's right to an abortion. Casey, however, created a new burden in which laws that clearly prohibited abortion would be examined, but laws that added restrictions to childbearing people's access to abortions would not be (Supreme Court Planned Parenthood of Southeastern PA v. Casey, 1992; Planned Parenthood, 2021). Therefore, throughout the late 1900s and early 2000s, individual states began implementing state-level abortion restrictions to delay a childbearing person's access to a wanted abortion, but not explicitly prohibit it, also known as targeted regulation of abortion providers (TRAP laws). Additionally, states created trigger bans, providing that if *Roe* were ever overturned, bans would be automatically triggered to prevent childbearing people's access to abortion. On June 24, 2022, the United States Supreme Court released its decision on *Dobbs* v. Jackson Women's Health Organization, in which they ruled that the United States Constitution does not guarantee the right to an abortion, thus overturning *Roe v. Wade* and *Pennsylvania v. Casey* (Supreme Court Dobbs v. Jackson, 2022). Thus, the debate over access to abortion resumed, and childbearing people across the country lost the previously protected right to a safe and legal abortion.

Why the Supreme Court's Decision Matters

In order to understand the influence that these ballot measures have, one must first understand the consequences of state-level abortion restrictions. State-level abortion restrictions have negative economic consequences for childbearing people and their families, but not all childbearing people are experiencing these economic consequences to the same extent (Joyce et al., 2013). Wealthy individuals have the financial means to travel to receive a wanted abortion.

While not always convenient, they can afford to pay for childcare, transport themselves, take time off work, etc., a luxury that not everyone in the United States has (Joyce et al., 2013). Moreover, while some abortion restrictions are shown to decrease the number of abortions teens have, they are not shown to have reduced the number of teen pregnancies (Girma & Paton, 2013), showing that people may be unable to receive their wanted abortion and therefore must continue to carry their child to term. For example, prior to abortion access in all states granted via *Roe,* individuals seeking a wanted abortion could travel to New York to receive their abortion. However, not all individuals could afford this, and as the distance from New York became further and thus more inaccessible to many, abortion rates decreased. Abortion rates then plateaued across the country once the drive distance from New York reached 300 miles, where people realistically would likely fly to receive a wanted abortion (Joyce et al., 2013). Following the Supreme Court's decision on *Roe*, travel to New York to receive a wanted abortion decreased drastically, showing that individuals were traveling prior to receive a wanted abortion in New York (Joyce et al., 2013). Not all individuals have the financial means or knowledge available to travel to receive a wanted abortion, and oftentimes, by the time poor women living in restrictive states collect the financial resources to travel to receive an abortion, they have reached the state's gestational limit (Watson, 2022). Those unable to receive a wanted abortion or denied their wanted abortion are more likely to face economic hardships compared to those who received their wanted abortion (Foster et al., 2018). Furthermore, for vulnerable individuals currently living at the poverty baseline, being forced to carry an unwanted pregnancy makes them four times as likely to be living below the federal poverty level (Foster et al., 2018). Black, Hispanic, and poor women receive the majority of abortions in the United States and, therefore, are disproportionately being impacted by these restrictions and their negative consequences

(Watson, 2022). Ultimately, state-level abortion restrictions are clearly shown to have negative economic consequences for people denied a wanted abortion, and restrictions prevent many across the country from feasible access to a safe and legal abortion.

In addition to negative economic consequences, state-level abortion restrictions are also shown to increase maternal and infant mortality rates. Grouping states by restrictive, neutral, and protective of abortions in 1995 and 2017, Addante et al. (2021) found that when restrictions on abortion were in place and childbearing people had to jump through hurdles to receive a wanted abortion, states with restrictions had a higher mean maternal mortality ratio (MMR) than those without restrictions (Addante et al., 2021). But again, not all groups are experiencing state-level abortion restrictions in the same way and maternal mortality rates are higher in racial/ethnic groups than in white childbearing people. Specifically, Hawkin et al. (2020) found that by reducing the number of Planned Parenthood clinics in the mean state by 20%, "maternal mortality increased by 6%-15% across racial/ethnic groups, whereas gestational limits primarily increased maternal mortality among white women" (Hawkins et al., 2020, p. 172). Additionally, researchers have found that states with abortion restrictions have "(a) more low birthweight babies; (b) a greater infant mortality rate; (c) a lower rate of domestic infant adoptions; (d) a lower rate of child placement in foster care; (e) less financial assistance to unmarried mothers; (f) a higher child death rate; (g) a greater percentage of children in poverty; and (h) a larger percentage of children who have repeated a school grade" (Medoff, 2013, p. 168). In addition, states with at least one state-level abortion restriction have higher infant mortality rates compared to states with no state-level abortion restrictions (Pabayo et al., 2020). In conclusion, it is helpful to understand how state-level abortion restrictions are affecting childbearing people so that we can understand the salience around the topic. As childbearing people across the

country continue to have abortion restrictions placed on them, they will likely experience the negative consequences and may want to act.

Ballot measures provide constituents an active role in either protecting their right to an abortion or in restricting abortions in their state, an avenue for direct action. Because of the clear negative consequences that state-level abortion restrictions have for childbearing people, ballot measures become a key instrument in protecting said childbearing people in states across the country. Therefore, much attention has been drawn to state action on ballot measures since the passing of *Dobbs*. I am interested in learning what the literature says about ballot measures and interest group activities in order to hopefully identify if there is a difference in how reproductive rights interest groups seek to protect citizens from the negative consequences of state-level abortion restrictions and how non-morality policy interest groups operate when advancing ballot measures.

Since the *Dobbs* decision, states are provided the constitutional right to implement bans or protections for access to abortion. Individual states have implemented various state-level abortion restrictions including, but not limited to, abortions banned after a specified gestational limit (with 13 states banning abortion at conception), mandatory waiting periods, mandatory in-person counseling prior to an abortion, mandatory parental notification and consent, only allowing physicians to conduct abortions instead of all qualified health professionals, banning private health insurance, banning the provision of medication abortions through telehealth, and banning abortion providers from teaching sex education in schools (Guttmacher Institute, 2025). As of March 27, 2025, the Guttmacher Institute has classified 15 states as the most restrictive, three states as very restrictive, seven states as restrictive, five states as having some restrictions/protections, nine states as protective, seven states as very protective, and four states

as the most protective (Guttmacher Institute, 2025). With *Roe v. Wade* gone, childbearing people in many states have lost their right to a safe and legal abortion.

What is a Ballot Measure?

Ballot measures are proposed laws, constitutional amendments, or questions placed on state or local-level ballots aimed to provide constituencies a path of direct democracy (Hoesly, 2005). Ballot measures can be citizen-initiated, where constituents in a state or locality gather signatures to place a measure on the ballot, or legislative, where elected legislators vote to place a measure on the ballot (NSCL, 2025). Within the umbrella of ballot measures, citizen-initiated ballot measures can include either initiated constitutional amendments which seek to amend the state's constitution, initiated state statute which seek to amend the state's statute or state code, veto referendum which seek to reverse or maintain already enacted state laws, or a combination of constitutional amendments and state statute (Ballotpedia, 2025). In addition, legislatively referred ballot measures can include constitutional amendments and state statutes, as well as bond measures which can issue a bond to help fund the state's government and advisory questions which allow the state's legislators to gauge public opinion without making changes to the state's constitution or statute (Ballotpedia, 2025). Because ballot measures are state and local initiatives rather than federal, each state has its own laws and requirements for how its ballot measure process works (NSCL, 2025). Additionally, while some states allow for direct initiatives, others only allow indirect. Once enough signatures are gathered to meet the state’s threshold, direct measures are automatically placed on the ballot. Indirect measures however are instead sent to the state’s legislature where they can be approved or rejected or modified. If approved, the measure is automatically adopted into the state’s laws without public vote. If rejected, the measure is then placed on the ballot where its fate is determined by constituent vote.

Some states allow for modification in addition to placing the originally rejected measure on the ballot, another measure written by legislatures can also be placed on the ballot to compete with the original measure (NCSL, 2025).

Today, 24 states allow some sort of citizen-initiated ballot measure, either initiated constitutional amendments, veto referendums, state statute referendums, or a combination of the prior, while 49 states require legislative ballot measures for legislators to propose amendments to their state's constitution, excluding Delaware whose amendment process is entirely done by the state legislature and does not require voter approval (Ballotpedia, 2025; Delaware Gov, 2025). Additionally, since 2016, 19 states have had an abortion or reproductive rights measures on their ballots, some citizen-initiated and some legislative. While some measures have provided protections to abortion in the state, others have taken away childbearing people's access to abortion.

Table 1 lays out the Guttmacher Institute's classification aligned with which states have had ballot measures on reproductive rights in the years 2016 through 2024. A "for" measure means that it was in favor of abortion and reproductive rights while an "against" measure means that it was against abortion and reproductive rights. A "pass" means that the measure passed and is now law in the state and a "fail" measure means that the measure failed. Additionally, an asterisk represents being one of the 24 states that allow some sort of citizen-initiated ballot measure.

Table 1.1: State-Level Abortion Restrictions and Abortion or Reproductive Rights Measures

State Arrayed by Restrictions on Abortion	Had State Ballot Measure on Reproductive Rights								
Most Restrictive (n=17)	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Alabama			Against – Pass						
Arkansas*									
Florida*									For – Fail

Georgia									
Idaho*									
Indiana									
Iowa									
Kentucky							Against – Fail		
Louisiana					Against – Pass				
Mississippi*									
North Dakota*									
Oklahoma*									
South Carolina									
South Dakota*									For – Fail
Tennessee									
Texas									
West Virginia			Against – Pass						
Very Restrictive (n=2)									
Nebraska*									Against – Pass For – Fail
Utah*									
Restrictive (n=7)									
Kansas							Against – Fail		
Missouri*									For – Pass
North Carolina									
Pennsylvania									
Virginia									
Wisconsin									
Wyoming*									
Some Restrictions/Protections (n=4)									
Arizona*									For – Pass
Ohio*								For – Pass	
Nevada*									For – Pass
New Hampshire									
Protective (n=6)									
Alaska*									
Connecticut									
Delaware									
Hawaii									
Montana*									For – Pass
Rhode Island									
Very Protective (n=7)									
Illinois*									

Maine*									
Massachusetts*									
Michigan*							For – Pass		
New Jersey									
New Mexico									
Washington*									
Most Protective (n=7)									
California*							For – Pass		
Colorado*					Against – Fail				For – Pass
Maryland									For – Pass
Minnesota									
New York									For – Pass
Oregon*			Against – Fail						
Vermont									

* State allows citizen-initiated amendments
While Mississippi technically allows citizen-initiative amendments, the qualification of minimum number of signatures gathered in each of the five Congressional Districts cannot be met since the state was redistricted to four Congressional Districts following the 2000 Census. Therefore, while citizen-led measures are allowed according to the state's constitution, placing one on the ballot is impossible with today's number of districts (Quarles, 2021)
Source: Guttmacher Institute Interactive Map, 2026; NCSL, 2025

What is a Morality Policy and How is it Different From Other Policies?

The topic of abortions differs from some other contested topics in elections because it falls under the realm of a morality policy (Mooney, 2001). Morality policies focus on what is right and wrong and just in society. They specifically include policies which "generate greater conflict over basic moral values than others" and ones in which people are less inclined to compromise over (Mooney & Schuldt, 2008, p. 212). Beyond abortions, morality policies include topics such as assisted suicide, the death penalty, and same-sex marriage (Mooney, 2001; Mooney & Schuldt, 2008). The main difference between morality policies and other policies typically debated is that morality policies are largely impacted by differing beliefs stemming from differing backgrounds and religions (Mooney & Schuldt, 2008). Moral values impact how different people view the same issue, and what is seen as moral and just to one individual may be

viewed differently by others (Roh & Berry, 2008). Thus, constituents often feel strongly about their beliefs being the ones that laws should support. As a morality policy, abortion policy often means that constituents feel strongly about whether their state should support protections for safe and legal abortions or support restrictions on abortion within the state.

Ballot measures allow constituents access to direct democracy and provide legislators with an avenue to enable citizens to vote on policies to change their state's policies and even the state constitution. Citizens are provided with an avenue in which they can propose changes to laws and regulations in their state – providing them with the ability to effect change beyond simply voting for who represents them (McKay, 2019; Smith, 2002). While not all ballot measures are widely voted on, researchers have found an increase in the number of constituents voting when highly salient social morality policies are on the ballot (Biggers, 2010; LaCombe & Juelich, 2019). Because morality policies, such as state-level abortion restrictions, have consequences for individuals living in a particular state and invoke a strong feeling of justness in constituents, voter trends differ when a morality policy is on the docket (Roh & Haider-Markel, 2003). Ultimately, because people feel passionately about abortion and pro-life legislation and ballot measures since they are morality policies, I hypothesize that interest groups may strategize, organize, and act differently to invoke greater feelings in the public or increase the saliency of the topic when seeking to advance or defeat ballot measures on abortion opposed to a non-morality policy issue.

When seeking to achieve their desired goal of passing or defeating a ballot measure, interest groups will frame information that they provide to constituents differently in an attempt to persuade voters to vote their way (George, 2019; Seiders et al., 2021; Fisher, 2017). In public policy and public administration, framing theory suggests that groups will package large

amounts of information selectively and then will feed the headlines of this package to those they are trying to persuade - essentially thinking about how to frame or package the information to get one's desired outcome across and manipulate others into agreeing (Fisher, 2017). Frames help simplify and emphasize particular parts of information while ignoring others (Fisher, 2017). Because people feel so strongly about morality policies, selecting the correct frame to use when persuading the public can be vital to an interest group's strategy (George, 2019; Seiders et al., 2021; Fisher, 2017). Further, shifting the frame that an interest group is using can help persuade additional constituents to either agree or vote in higher numbers (Fisher, 2017). For example, if a reproductive rights interest group was seeking to strike down a restrictive ballot measure, they may choose to frame their advertisements to further strike the morality aspect with constituents saying that their rights are being restricted and that every constituent needs to vote to protect their right to an abortion. Interest groups oftentimes rely heavily on frames to help paint their position as the morally correct view when dealing with a morality policy. Thus, examining what frames interest groups use when seeking to advance abortion or reproductive rights ballot measures (a morality policy) may provide further insights into how interest groups strategize, organize, and act.

Difference Between Abortion, Reproductive Rights, and Reproductive Justice

Throughout this dissertation, the terms abortion and reproductive rights are used often. While abortion refers to the act of providing an abortion, reproductive rights is more encompassing. According to Loretta Ross (2017),

> "reproductive rights is a legal and advocacy-based model that is concerned with protecting individual women's legal right to reproductive health care services, particularly abortion (often called the pro-choice movement). It addresses the lack of legal protection and weak enforcement of laws to protect individual women's reproductive choices regarding health care services. The goals are to have legal

> protections for all individuals and to claim these protections as rights under the U.S. Constitution" (Ross, 2017, p. 55).

Reproductive rights interest groups are focused on protecting the right to an abortion and reproductive healthcare. Reproductive justice takes reproductive rights one step further, combining reproductive rights with social justice. According to Loretta Ross (2017),

> "reproductive justice is a movement-building and organizing framework that identifies how reproductive oppression is the result of the intersection of multiple oppressions and is inherently connected to the struggle for social justice and human rights. Reproductive justice argues that social institutions, the environment, economics, and culture affect each woman's reproductive life. Reproductive justice activists invoke the global human rights system as the relevant legal framework using treaties, [and] standards, [while] moving beyond the U.S. Constitution" (Ross, 2017, p. 55)

Further, reproductive justice includes three primary principles "(1) the right *not* to have a child; (2) the right to *have* a child; and (3) the right to *parent* children in safe and healthy environments" (Ross, 2017, p. 15). Additionally, "reproductive justice demands sexual autonomy and gender freedom for every human being" (Ross, 2017, p. 15). While none of the ballot measures examined in this dissertation are focused on reproductive justice, some interviewees discussed their movement within a reproductive justice framework rather than just within an abortion or reproductive rights framework.

Intellectual Puzzle

The intellectual puzzle I seek to solve through this dissertation is to gain a better understanding for how reproductive rights interest groups operate and how their strategies, organizations, and activities compare to those of non-morality policy interest groups. This hole left in the literature of how reproductive rights interest groups advance ballot measures restricts our understanding of how interest groups actually operate. Using quantitative and qualitative methods, I seek to understand if reproductive rights interest groups operate the same as other

interest groups when advancing ballot measures, despite having such a highly salient and controversial topic to endorse or reject. Does the saliency and controversy of abortion and reproductive rights make reproductive rights strategies, organizations, and/or activities differ from the framework devised? Also, do voters respond to the work by these reproductive rights interest groups by showing up at the ballot box in higher numbers than normal? Finally, I seek to understand if there are any other variables that influence reproductive rights interest groups when advancing ballot measures.

Brief Description of the Dissertation

In the following section, I provide an overview of this dissertation's research aims and questions, methods and data, delimitations and potential limitations, and contributions to the field of public policy and political science. Further discussion of the research designs and methods is in Chapter 3.

Research Aims and Questions

My goal in writing this dissertation is to examine if reproductive rights interest groups and non-morality policy interest groups follow similar or different strategies, organizations, and activities when advancing ballot measures. I also aim to examine if methods employed by reproductive rights groups led to increased voter turnout in 2016 to 2024 election years. I examine the years 2016 through 2024, during which time the U.S. Supreme Court overturned Roe v. Wade. Interest groups have used ballot measures as an attempt to enshrine the right to an abortion or restrict the right to an abortion in their state. My research aims to speak with representatives from interest groups in various states across the country which have had an abortion or reproductive rights ballot measure after the Dobbs decision and examine if their

strategies, organization, and activities are similar to or different from non-morality policy interest groups.

My three research questions and sub questions which I answer through this dissertation are:

1) To what extent did the presence of state ballot measures regarding reproductive rights between 2016 and 2024 affect voter turnout?
    a) How did voter turnout vary across states when ballot measures proposed expanding/protecting reproductive rights versus ballot measures that proposed restricting the rights?
    b) To what extent did the presence of state ballot measures regarding reproductive rights raise or lower voter turnout pre- and post- *Dobbs* decision across states?
2) In what ways, if any, did interest group strategies, organization, and activities to add measures to ballots and promote passage of ballot measures regarding abortion or reproductive rights differ from more traditional strategies employed to add measures to ballots and promote passage of state ballot measures?
3) How did interest group strategies, organization, and activities to add measures to ballots and promote passage of ballot measures expanding/protecting abortion or reproductive rights vary pre- and post- *Dobbs* decision?

Through examination of my three research questions and sub questions, I aim to address the gaps in the existing literature surrounding interest group strategies, organizations, and activities when advancing ballot measures. Through this dissertation, I shed light onto how interest groups think and how reproductive rights interest groups differ from other non-morality policy interest groups. I expand the literature on how the *Dobbs* decision has played a role in

interest group thoughts and actions and how voter turnout has varied as a result of their strategies and activities. While not generalizable to other morality policy ballot measure interest group strategies, organizations, and activities, the following dissertation offers valuable insights into how Ohio, Maryland, Montana, Missouri, and Arizona interest groups strategized, organized, and acted in their 2023 and 2024 abortion ballot measures.

Methods and Data

To best answer my research questions, I use a mixed methods approach, employing both quantitative and qualitative methods. Public policy and public administration scholars identify mixed methods approaches as well-rounded, seeking to fill the gaps left by one method with the other and thus hopefully helping improve the quality of the results and knowledge produced (Hendren et al., 2018). I use a quantitative lens to examine my first question and sub questions, while my remaining two questions are best examined through a qualitative lens. This is because my first research question and sub questions seek to examine the relationship between ballot measures on reproductive rights and voter turnout, a question best answered through data and regressions. My following two research questions are asking about strategies that interest groups use, questions that are best answered through speaking with people directly.

I first begin with the quantitative section of research in Chapter 4, examining to what extent the presence of state ballot measures regarding reproductive rights between 2016 and 2024 affect voter turnout. Because there are other variables that play into voter turnout, I ask my two sub questions, exploring how voter turnout varied when ballot measures proposed expanding/protecting reproductive rights vs voter turnout when ballot measures proposed restricting reproductive rights, and exploring how voter turnout varied pre- and post- *Dobbs* when there was a state ballot measure regarding reproductive rights present. Specifically, I

narrow my search of reproductive rights measures to 2016-2024, six years before *Dobbs* and two years after to account for all measures after *Dobbs* and provide insight into voter turnout when *Roe* was being threatened prior.

To answer the research question and sub questions, I ran multiple regressions examining the effect of abortion or reproductive rights ballot measures on voter turnout. The baseline model used was:

$$\text{Turnout} = \beta_0 + \beta_1(\text{RestrictiveMeasurePreDobbs}) + \beta_2(\text{RestrictiveMeasurePostDobbs}) + \beta_3(\text{ProtectiveMeasurePostDobbs})$$

Next I used models to control for other variables of interest and changed out racial categories in each model. Models in columns two through five discussed in regression results in Chapter 4 are as follows:

$$\text{Model 2: Turnout} = \beta_0 + \beta_1(\text{RestrictiveMeasurePreDobbs}) + \beta_2(\text{RestrictiveMeasurePostDobbs}) + \beta_3(\text{ProtectiveMeasurePostDobbs}) + \text{Controls} + \text{Control for White} + \varepsilon$$

$$\text{Model 3: Turnout} = \beta_0 + \beta_1(\text{RestrictiveMeasurePreDobbs}) + \beta_2(\text{RestrictiveMeasurePostDobbs}) + \beta_3(\text{ProtectiveMeasurePostDobbs}) + \text{Controls} + \text{Control for Hispanic} + \varepsilon$$

$$\text{Model 4: Turnout} = \beta_0 + \beta_1(\text{RestrictiveMeasurePreDobbs}) + \beta_2(\text{RestrictiveMeasurePostDobbs}) + \beta_3(\text{ProtectiveMeasurePostDobbs}) + \text{Controls} + \text{Control for African American} + \varepsilon$$

$$\text{Model 5: Turnout} = \beta_0 + \beta_1(\text{RestrictiveMeasurePreDobbs}) + \beta_2(\text{RestrictiveMeasurePostDobbs}) + \beta_3(\text{ProtectiveMeasurePostDobbs}) + \text{Controls} + \text{Control for Asian} + \varepsilon$$

In column six, I used state and year fixed effects to examine the relationship between voter turnout and abortion or reproductive rights ballot measure presence. My fixed effects model used in column six where (*s*) was state and (*t*) was year was:

$$\textit{Model 6: } \textit{Turnout}_{st} = \beta_{0st} + \beta_1(\textit{RestrictiveMeasurePreDobbs}_{st}) + \beta_2(\textit{RestrictiveMeasurePostDobbs}_{st}) + \beta_3(\textit{ProtectiveMeasurePostDobbs}_{st}) + \varepsilon_{st}$$

I ran regressions for overall voter turnout, male, and female voter turnout. As a robustness check, I varied measures of racial groups as a control to examine the impact on

turnout for different racial groups, and I used state and year fixed effects. The dependent variable, Turnout, is the percent of voters who voted in a specific state in a specific election year, and the independent variables are dummy variables for BallotMeasure (1= the state had an abortion or reproductive rights ballot measure, 0 = no) and PostDobbs (1 = post-Dobbs, 0 = no). I also included the following controls: a dummy variable for Gubernatorial or Senate race (1 = yes, 0 = no), a dummy variable for presence of election-day registration (1 = yes election-day registration, 0 = no), percent of state population with a high school degree, real per capita personal income in each state in each year, state political lean (percent that voted for the Republican Senate nominee in a certain year), and variables for racial groups (percent of state population that identify as white, black, Asian, and Hispanic). Appendix A provides a codebook for all variables.

For the qualitative aspect of the paper I discuss in Chapter 5, I interviewed key reproductive rights interest groups to understand if the way interest groups have approached reproductive rights on ballot measures with regard to strategy, organization, and actions has differed from what the literature tells us how other interest groups promoting the passage of non-reproductive rights state ballot measures strategize, organize, and act. Specifically, I sought to understand if reproductive rights interest group strategies, organizations, and actions align or differ from other interest groups. I examined interest groups' operations and methods throughout their entire ballot measure process, beginning with identifying that a ballot measure should be created or defeated and ending with a successful or unsuccessful campaign. I also sought to understand if their strategies have changed at all after the *Dobbs* decision and the right to a safe and legal abortion was no longer protected nationally.

After struggling to find research participants to interview, I ended the dissertation having interviewed 14 people from five different states - Ohio (n=5), Maryland (n=4), Montana (n=1), Missouri (n=2), and Arizona (n=2). While I would have preferred speaking with more people in each of these states as well as speaking with reproductive rights activists in other states that had a ballot measure, each of the interviewees interviewed provided valuable insights into interest group activities and the ballot measure process. While my criteria for interview participants was any person with direct involvement in the abortion or reproductive rights campaign, my final interviewees were all leaders within their organizations. I used semi-structured interviews as opposed to other interview formats to allow for interviewees to veer slightly off-topic if relevant to the conversation while also allowing for some structure to the interview. Using the semi-structured format made the interview process more relaxed for participants and helped provide valuable insights into their strategies, organization, and activities not specifically addressed in closed-ended questions (Adams in Newcomer et al., 2015).

Reflecting on what the literature tells us about how interest groups organize, strategize, and act to advance or defeat ballot measures, I was left searching for answers on how reproductive rights interest groups may differ. I examine this gap in the literature through both quantitative and qualitative analysis.

Policy Implications for Theory and Practice

In the following section, I discuss both policy implications for theory and practice from my findings.

Theory

This dissertation's findings can be helpful for literature on interest groups and direct democracy. In this dissertation, I explored how reproductive rights interest groups' strategies,

organizations, and activities may be similar to or different from those of non-morality policy interest groups. Compiling a framework for how non-morality interest groups operate when advancing or defeating a ballot measure can provide scholars with a clear framework for how the literature says interest groups operate. Interviewing 14 reproductive rights leaders across five states can further provide scholars with an understanding of how on the surface, interest groups operate similarly when advancing ballot measures, but diving deeper there are other variables at play. While these emergent variables may be relevant for non-morality topics as well, none of the literature discussed them. Therefore, this dissertation provides scholars with a better understanding for how interest groups operate when participating in direct democracy. Finally, theory on whether voter turnout was influenced by ballot measures in presidential elections years was not extremely decisive. This dissertation provides further analysis on how ballot measures do influence voter turnout in elections, including those in presidential years.

Practice

This dissertation's findings have practical implications as well. As policymakers decide whether or not in their state to allow citizen-led ballot measures, they must remember that while a clear form of direct democracy for citizens, national political parties and national organizations may be playing a major role. The ballot measure process is not always as it seems and while being "citizen-led", ballot measures may more broadly reflect the interests of larger players. Additionally, reproductive rights coalitions can use this dissertation's findings as a warning of national involvement if their state has not yet had a ballot measure. Advanced warning may provide an opportunity for local reproductive rights interest group activists to have a say in wording of the measure. Ultimately, while more research should be done to further examine

interest groups and ballot measures, lobbying issues at the state-level may be majorly dominated by national forces.

Potential Limitations

This dissertation has a few key limitations which I list below.

Interest Group Framework

To start, we cannot be certain that the interest group framework created in Chapter 2 and discussed again in Chapter 5 is a completely accurate representation of how interest groups strategize, organize, and act when advancing or defeating non-morality policy ballot measures. While I read through the literature available and relevant to interest group motivations and actions, there was not much literature that informed how interest groups operate. Therefore, despite using the information found and asking reproductive rights interest group members about their strategies, organizations, and activities when advancing ballot measures, we cannot be 100% certain that this is how interest groups actually operate when advancing or defeating ballot measures. Additionally, it is important to remember that the framework sets up a series of strategies, organizations, and activities that interest groups partake in, but even if utilized by interest groups during some ballot measure campaigns, all may not be used for every campaign. Strategies, organizations, and activities may differ by campaign, likelihood of winning, and by controversy and saliency surrounding the topic. Therefore, the framework may not be able to be generalized to all interest group models for advancing or defeating ballot measures.

Quantitative

Limitations for the quantitative analysis discussed in Chapter 4 are as follows. There may be threats to validity and reliability which may influence the dependent variable and therefore results. These threats may include overfitting models, omitted variable bias, or statistical

conclusion validity caused by the low sample size. Additionally, results cannot be generalized because they show voter turnout and election results in a narrow, very turbulent period of time for reproductive rights. Finally, while I did my best to research how other scholars selected variables of interest to control for, and used the same variables, there still could be changes in the environment or year that impacted voter turnout which were not accounted for.

Qualitative

Limitations for the qualitative analysis discussed in Chapter 5 are as follows.

Sample Size and Generalizability

Due to the sensitive nature of reproductive rights post-*Dobbs*, I struggled greatly with finding people to interview. My criteria for interview participants was anyone directly involved in their state's abortion or reproductive rights ballot measure campaign. Specifically, I sought to interview any person with direct knowledge of how interest groups operated when advancing or defeating a reproductive rights measure. However, despite trying various avenues for collecting participants, my final interview sample size is quite small. Potential interviewees that I reached out to oftentimes did not respond to my request to be interviewed. Ideally, the research findings would have benefited from a larger sample size to increase understanding of how interest groups operate when advancing or defeating abortion or reproductive rights ballot measures. Additionally, but along the same lines, it would have benefited the research to understand how reproductive rights interest groups operate, as well as how pro-life interest groups operate. Therefore, my findings cannot be generalized to all interest groups working on an abortion ballot measure nor can they be generalized to reproductive rights interest groups working on an abortion ballot measure in any other state besides the ones discussed. Additionally, because of the rapidly changing abortion restrictions and protections post-Dobbs, strategies, organization,

and actions of interest groups are not generalizable to a different time period. Therefore, while the findings are extremely interesting and useful for learning about how reproductive rights interest groups operated in Ohio, Maryland, Montana, Missouri, and Arizona leading up to and during their 2023 and 2024 abortion or reproductive rights ballot measures, the results are not able to be generalizable.

Interview Questions and Selection Bias

Finally, while interview questions were based on the relevant literature, interviewees were asked specific questions to answer. However, if there was a gap in the literature, specific questions may not have been addressed. I tried to counter this potential limitation by using a semi-structured interview format and allowing interviewees to talk freely about their experiences working on reproductive rights ballot measures. However, if a relevant strategy, organization, or activities was omitted in my questions, interviewees may have simply not remembered to discuss it during the interview. Additionally, there is a threat to selection bias with most of my interviewees having self-selected or were found via snowball sampling. Therefore, despite efforts to expand my interviewee sample size, there may be selection bias in interviewees interviewed.

Organization of the Dissertation

The purpose of this dissertation is to examine how reproductive rights interest groups' strategies, organizations, and activities may differ from or be similar to those of non-morality policy interest groups. I seek to advance both theoretical and practical implications of interest groups, ballot measures, voter turnouts, and emergent factors which may have otherwise not been discovered through the following chapters of this dissertation. In the chapter above, I stated the problem and research gaps. I then began my introduction where I laid out the current

reproductive rights situation in the United States, discussed why the Supreme Court decision mattered, explained what a ballot measure is, discussed what a morality policy is, and gave brief definitions of reproductive rights and reproductive justice. I then discussed the intellectual puzzle that I seek to examine through this dissertation before discussing how specifically I address it through research questions and methods. Finally, I discussed theory and policy implications and potential limitations.

The following five chapters are outlined as follows.

Chapter 2

In Chapter 2, I review relevant literature on direct democracy, ballot measures, and interest group strategies, organization, and activities. I use the literature to create a framework for how interest groups operate when advancing or defeating ballot measures. I then discuss mobilization and voter turnout literature to examine what the literature says about how interest group strategies and activities influence voter turnout.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 presents my methodological approach to examine my research questions. I begin by discussing the quantitative methodological approach for examining research question one and its sub questions. I include discussion on variables of interest, data sources used, and my analytical strategy. I then discuss my qualitative methodological approach to examine research questions two and three. I include discussion on my outreach strategy, an overview of the reproductive ballot measures I interviewed people about, analytical approach, and interview protocol. I then discuss ethical considerations, study delimitations, and study limitations before concluding.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 presents my quantitative analysis and findings. In this chapter, I discuss a correlation matrix, variables descriptive statistics, and multiple regressions run. I then use these findings to make claims about how interest group strategies, organization, and activities on ballot measures may influence voter turnout in both presidential and midterm election years.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 presents my qualitative analysis and findings. In this chapter, I discuss reproductive rights interest groups' strategies, organizations, and activities when advancing abortion or reproductive rights ballot measures. I then compare how reproductive rights interest groups operate with the framework created in Chapter 2 of how non-morality policy interest groups operate. Finally, I discuss four findings that emerged during the interviews I conducted. While not necessarily exclusive to reproductive rights interest groups, the emergent findings section of this chapter reveals multiple findings worth discussing and examining further in future research.

Chapter 6

Finally, Chapter 6 presents my concluding chapter for this dissertation. In this chapter, I discuss my research objectives and research questions as well as five key findings discovered through this dissertation. I then discuss policy implications for theory and practice, research limitations, and areas for future research before concluding the dissertation.

Chapter Two: Theoretical Foundations

This dissertation utilizes a few main bodies of literature to form a theoretical foundation for how interest groups operate. I begin the following literature review by discussing direct democracy, ballot measures, and interest group strategies, organization, and actions. Ballot measures are a clear form of direct democracy. They provide an avenue for citizens to express their wants and if enough citizens agree, theoretically ballot measures should reflect citizen interests, and therefore so would state constitutions. Interest groups use ballot measures to advance their own interests, sometimes aligning with constituent's interests, maybe sometimes not. The first section of this chapter discusses how interest groups advance their priorities through ballot measures and lays out the debate on whether their actions should be considered a form of direct democracy. I then discuss the theoretical foundation behind mobilization and voter turnout. Increased voter turnout when there is the presence of ballot measures has been discussed by various researchers, which I discuss in this section.

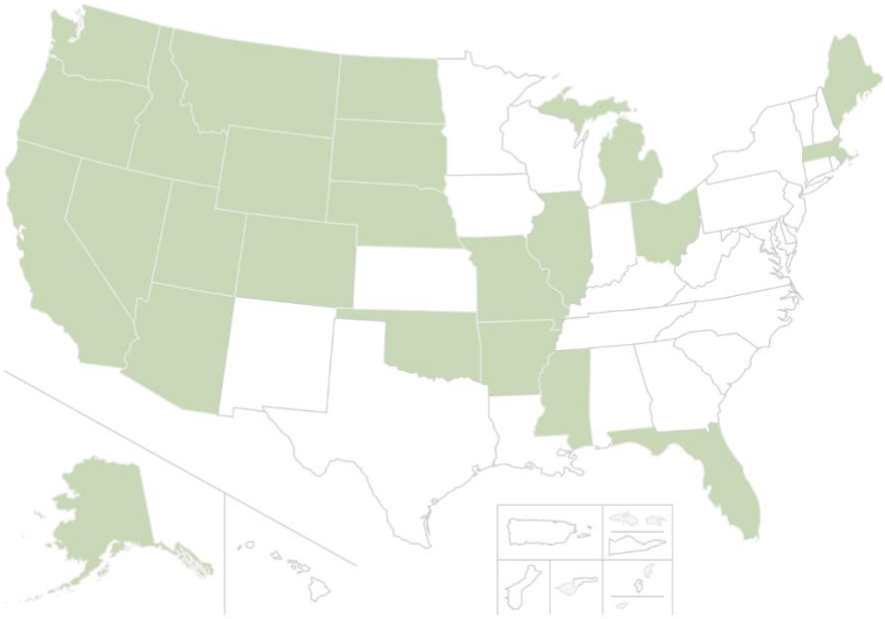
Ultimately, I plan to use this chapter to examine the literature on ballot measures, interest groups, and voter turnout. Through this literature review, I devise a framework for how interest groups operate when advancing ballot measures on non-morality policies. Understanding what the literature says about ballot measures and interest group strategies, organization, and activities, we can begin to decipher what the literature does not include. Then by using this dissertation to examine the gap in the literature, we can advance theoretical and practical understanding of how interest groups operate and what factors influence them.

Direct Democracy, Ballot Measures, and Interest Group Strategies, Organization, and Actions

Many public administration and public policy experts ground their theories about interest group activities and ballot measures on the mechanism of direct democracy in the United States.

Direct democracy began in the United States through a series of voter attempts to gain power. Dating back to the 1600s, colonists sought to influence local laws even before the United States became a country, and this trend continued once the United States was formed and states began having their own laws (Strano et al., 2025). The movement to integrate direct democracy through ballot measures began in South Dakota in 1898 following the push from a coalition in an attempt to diminish monopoly power (Strano et al., 2025; Hoesly, 2005). Progressives wanted to find a way to influence the state's government and laws while bypassing the elected representatives altogether, and therefore, convinced South Dakota to adopt direct democracy (Hoesly, 2005). Shortly after, western states led the charge in integrating ballot measures, seeing direct democracy and citizen involvement as a way to stop railroad and other large corporation influence in government (Strano et al., 2025). Other Midwest states joined the movement and by the early 1900s, 20 states had adopted and integrated direct democracy through ballot measures into their rule making process (Strano et al., 2025). Today, 24 states allow for some type of citizen-initiated ballot measure, illustrated in Figure 2.1.

Figure 2.1: Citizen-Initiated Ballot Measures



(Source: NSCL, 2026)

Since ballot measures provide citizens with an immediate form of direct democracy, they also provide the same to interest groups. Interest groups are any grouping of people, typically formally organized but not necessarily, who "seek to influence public policy" (Thomas, 2025). Therefore, by definition, all citizen-initiated ballot measures are brought to the ballot by interest groups (Adams, 2012). Seen as a way for citizens and interest groups to advance their policy agenda directly without having to gain Congressional support at a federal level, interest groups oftentimes strategize advancement and takedown opportunities of ballot measures.

While ballot measures are a more direct avenue for advancing interest group priorities at the state and local level, very little research on interest group strategy has been conducted in the public policy and public administration fields, and I was unable to find any authors who have discussed interest group strategies for advancing or defeating abortion or reproductive rights ballot measures. Additionally, when examining scholarship in other fields, I was unable to find relevant information on how interest groups seek to advance or defeat any women's rights topics,

specifically related to ballot measures, initiatives, and referendums. Research has shown that interest group formulas and strategies do not necessarily yield the same results when replicated in other states (Laposata et al., 2014). Therefore, I believe this lack of generalizability will likely hold for interest groups working on abortion or reproductive rights ballot measures, a gap in the literature that I seek to fill with this dissertation.

Only a few authors have written papers describing interest group strategies for advancing or defeating ballot measures. Drawing upon the existing research, Table 2.1 lays out the strategies, Table 2.2 lays out the organizing, and Table 2.3 lays out the actions that interest groups typically take when seeking to advance and defeat ballot measures. While the operational strategies taken to defeat ballot measures are mostly the same as those to advance them, there are some differences.

Strategy

In the following section, I discuss strategies taken by non-morality policy interest groups when advancing or defeating ballot measures. Table 2.1 describes non-morality policy interest group strategies discovered through literature. Column one shows the various strategies that non-morality policy interest groups utilize, in chronological order of how they are typically utilized according to the literature. Column two includes check marks for strategies that non-morality policy interest groups partake in when advancing a ballot measure and column three includes check marks for strategies non-morality policy interest groups use when defeating a measure according to the literature.

Table 2.1: Typical Strategies Undertaken by Non-Morality Policy Interest Groups to Secure Desired Outcomes of State-Level Ballot Measures

Strategies	To Advance Measure	To Defeat Measure
Have clear priorities of objectives	✓ (Rosenstein et al., 1974)	✓ (Rosenstein et al., 1974)

Recognize that a ballot measure is the best way to advance priorities	✓ (Laposata et al., 2014)	
Recognize that an interest group is seeking to propose a ballot measure that goes against advancing one's own priorities		✓ (Laposata et al., 2014)
Determine if wanting to amend, create, or veto referendum	✓ (Rosenstein et al., 1974; Stratmann, 2005)	
Determine if want to try to defeat opposition's strategy or if want to propose own measure (take care as the latter may confuse constituents)		✓ (Rosenstein et al., 1974; Stratmann, 2005)
Determine if going to take positive or negative strategy - Positive: staying positive and trying to persuade people why your priorities are correct - Negative: talking negatively about the priorities that the opposition is taking	✓ (Rosenstein et al., 1974; Stratmann, 2005; Hugh-Jones, 2010)	✓ (Rosenstein et al., 1974; Stratmann, 2005; Hugh-Jones, 2010)
Consider what framing strategy to use - i.e., how to condense relevant data on the topic and what and how specifically to show constituents	✓ (Fisher, 2017; Seiders et al., 2021; George, 2019)	✓ (Fisher, 2017; Seiders et al., 2021; George, 2019)
Consult legal experts on priorities	✓ (Laposata et al., 2014)	✓ (Laposata et al., 2014)
Form a campaign team and create a strategy in an attempt to stay ahead of the opposition. Include well-versed lobbyists on this team. Try to be proactive throughout process instead of reactive	✓ (Laposata et al., 2014; Clark & Liebig, 1996; Rosenstein et al., 1974)	✓ (Laposata et al., 2014; Clark & Liebig, 1996; Rosenstein et al., 1974)

Throughout the literature, it was clear that to have a successful ballot measure in a non-morality policy campaign, there must be a clear strategy. While each interest groups' main priorities change based on their specific measure, interest groups discuss the need for a clear strategy and clear objectives (Rosenstein et al., 1974). After an interest group has determined what they want their ultimate goal to be, they must then determine if a ballot measure is the best way to advance their priorities (Rosenstein et al., 1974; Stratmann, 2005). Although a ballot measure may sometimes be the best way, depending on the composition of the state's legislature and support for the measure, interest groups may instead attempt a different way to advance their priorities, such as trying to get the legislature to pass a measure. When interest groups do not think they have enough support to pass a measure themselves, they may instead attempt to strike down an opposing measure and therefore, while not directly achieving their desired outcomes, helping advance their priorities slightly (Rosenstein et al., 1974; Laposata et al., 2014). For

example, in Rosenstein et al.'s (1974) campaign, they did not feel that they had enough votes to pass a fluoridation ballot measure in Oregon, so instead they worked against an anti-fluoridation ballot measure campaign. While defeating the anti-fluoridation campaign did not directly achieve their desired results, it did help advance their fluoridation priorities (Rosenstein et al., 1974). The tobacco industry took a different approach, attempting to make it harder for ballot measures to pass. As tobacco control programs began using ballot measures to create and pass smoking legislation, the tobacco industry attempted to change the threshold for ballot measures. They thought that if a tobacco control measure were to appear on the ballot, they would not be able to gain the majority of votes, so instead they sought to increase the barriers to placing a measure on the ballot, such as requiring petition signatures to be registered voters, and increasing the voting threshold needed for a measure to pass (Laposata et al., 2014).

After an interest group has set clear priorities and objectives and has determined that a ballot measure is the best way for them to advance their priorities, interest groups must then determine if they will take a positive or negative stance, determine what framing strategy to use, consult legal experts, and create a strategy to try to stay ahead of the opposition. Determining a positive or negative stance requires the interest group to decide if they are going to debate with the opposition and, if so, how they will go about it (Rosenstein et al., 1974; Stratmann, 2005; Hugh-Jones, 2010). A positive perspective is one where the interest group tries their best not to debate with the opposition, only responding if "refusal would be interpreted as a conspiracy to keep facts from the public" (Rosenstein et al., 1974). On the other hand, taking a negative perspective would allow the interest group to openly attack the opposition's priorities (Rosenstein et al., 1974). Interest groups must also determine their framing strategy. Frame "simplify and condense this information, giving weight and saliency to particular attributes of an

issue, while deemphasizing others; and they define problems, diagnose causes, and suggest possible remedies" (Fisher, 2017). By creating a framing strategy, interest groups determine how they want to share information with the public. The interest group must then determine how much information to share with the public and what specifically to share in order to provide a clear picture of the measure and need without confusing the public (Fischer, 2017). Finally, interest groups must consult legal experts and attempt to stay ahead of the opposition and be proactive in advancing their measure (Laposata et al., 2014). It is important to note that all of this must be done while considering the role of timing. Without proper timing, a measure that might otherwise pass, may fail (Rosenstein et al., 1974; Stratmann, 2005).

Organization

In the following section, I discuss organizing approaches taken by non-morality policy interest groups when advancing or defeating ballot measures. Table 2.2 describes non-morality policy interest group organization discovered through literature. As in Table 2.1, column one shows the various ways non-morality policy interest groups organize themselves, in chronological order of how they are typically formed according to the literature. Column two includes check marks for how non-morality policy interest groups organize themselves when advancing a ballot measure and column three includes check marks for how non-morality policy interest groups organize themselves when defeating a measure according to the literature.

Table 2.2: Typical Ways Non-Morality Policy Interest Groups Organize Themselves to Secure Desired Outcomes of State-Level Ballot Measures

Organization	To Advance Measure	To Defeat Measure
Form central organization if interest group does not already exist	✓ (Laposata et al., 2014)	✓ (Laposata et al., 2014)
Invite members and accept donations from supporters	✓ (Laposata et al., 2014)	✓ (Laposata et al., 2014)
Appoint president and leadership	✓ (Laposata et al., 2014)	✓ (Laposata et al., 2014)

Set up local team - with campaign directors, media team, education committee - be sure to include subject matter experts on committees	✓ (Rosenstein et al., 1974)	✓ (Rosenstein et al., 1974)
Recruit organizations and nonprofits to join the cause	✓ (Laposata et al., 2014)	✓ (Laposata et al., 2014)
Consider joining a coalition with other like-minded interest groups	✓ (Lowry & Krummenacher, 2017; Lin & Patraporn, 2023)	✓ (Lowry & Krummenacher, 2017; Lin & Patraporn, 2023)
Encourage members to donate and invite new members to join	✓ (Laposata et al., 2014; Stratmann, 2006; Bowler & Hanneman, 2006)	✓ (Laposata et al., 2014; Stratmann, 2006; Bowler & Hanneman, 2006)
Ask organizations and nonprofits for endorsements	✓ (Laposata et al., 2014; Burnett & Kogan, 2015)	✓ (Laposata et al., 2014; Burnett & Kogan, 2015)
Train speakers for all public speaking events	✓ (Rosenstein et al., 1974)	✓ (Rosenstein et al., 1974)

After determining a clear strategy and setting objectives, non-morality policy interest groups organize themselves to best advance their priorities through a ballot measure. Often the first few steps in organizing themselves is by forming a central organization, inviting members to join and donate, and appoint leadership (Laposata et al., 2014). Additionally, interest groups are likely already members of a coalition consisting of other organizations with similar interests. If not already a member, interest groups may consider joining one to increase their membership, funding, and outreach when advancing or defeating a ballot measure (Lowry & Krummenacher, 2017; Lin & Patraporn, 2023). The coalition or the interest group themselves then often organize themselves into committees with outreach, communications, and policy top focuses (Rosenstein et al., 1974). Finally, either the coalition or the interest group will recruit others to join, ask for endorsements and train speakers and advocates to speak on the interest groups behalf to advance their priorities (Laposata et al., 2014; Burnett & Kogan, 2015; Rosenstein et al., 1974).

Activities

In the following section, I discuss activities taken by non-morality policy interest groups when advancing or defeating ballot measures. Table 2.3 describes non-morality policy interest group activities discovered through literature. As in Table 2.1 and 2.2, in Table 2.3, column one

shows the various activities that non-morality policy interest groups partake in, in chronological order of how they are typically utilized according to the literature. Column two includes check marks for activities that non-morality policy interest groups use when advancing a ballot measure and column three includes check marks for activities used when non-morality policy interest groups are defeating a measure according to the literature.

Table 2.3: Typical Activities Undertaken by Non-Morality Policy Interest Groups to Secure Desired Outcomes of State-Level Ballot Measures

Activities	To Advance Measure	To Defeat Measure
Send newsletters quarterly to members with updates on legislation, measures that have come out, and updates, etc.	✓ (Laposata et al., 2014)	✓ (Laposata et al., 2014)
Work with focus groups and poll people to get sense of public opinion and wording that resonates best with people to use when drafting ballot measure	✓ (Lee & Green, 2024; Laposata et al., 2014; Burnett & Kogan, 2015; Lin & Patraporn, 2023; Weller, 1998; Lorz, 1984)	
Work with focus groups and poll people to get sense of public opinion to understand the public's desires and current understanding of the issue - consider doing this multiple times		✓ (Lee & Green, 2024; Laposata et al., 2014; Burnett & Kogan, 2015; Lin & Patraporn, 2023; Weller, 1998; Lorz, 1984)
Distribute whitepapers to state's legislator to gain legislator support and get publicity for cause - seeking to sway public opinion	✓ (Laposata et al., 2014; Clark & Liebig, 1996)	✓ (Laposata et al., 2014; Clark & Liebig, 1996)
Draft measure	✓ (Clark & Liebig, 1996)	
Gain access to measure before it becomes public if possible and point out issues to try to make it fail - be sure to wait until timing is right (if you notice a mistake in oppositions strategy/on their measure, you may want to wait to point it out until it is closer to election day so that they cannot change it easily)		✓ (Laposata et al., 2014)
Gather signatures to get measure on ballot	✓ (Adams, 2012; Rosenstein et al., 1974)	
Testify in front of state legislator committee if possible	✓ (Laposata et al., 2014; Clark & Liebig, 1996)	✓ (Laposata et al., 2014; Clark & Liebig, 1996)
Publish reports to be seen by public	✓ (Laposata et al., 2014)	✓ (Laposata et al., 2014)
Hold conferences to gain support of other interest groups, organizations and nonprofits, and hopefully state legislative members	✓ (Laposata et al., 2014)	✓ (Laposata et al., 2014)

Create ads and gather as much attention as possible, debate on TV if necessary	✓ (Stratmann, 2005; Damore & Nicholson, 2013; Fisher, 2017)	✓ (Stratmann, 2005; Damore & Nicholson, 2013; Fisher, 2017)
Remain vigilant to what opposition is doing - critically scrutinize all actions and make sure you are addressing any major comments/issues	✓ (Rosenstein et al., 1974)	✓ (Rosenstein et al., 1974)
Hopefully have measure pass, otherwise regroup, create new marking plan, and try again	✓ (Laposata et al., 2014)	
Hopefully have measure fail, otherwise regroup, create new marking plan, and try to either have the measure taken away or amend the current law		✓ (Laposata et al., 2014)

Finally, the non-morality policy interest group either with help from their coalition or by themselves will partake in a series of activities to 1) get their measure on the ballot and 2) have their measure pass or 3) strike down a measure. These activities typically include some or all of the following: newsletters to membership, whitepapers to legislators, testifying to legislators, publishing reports, hosting conferences, and creating and running various forms of advertisements (Laposata et al., 2014; Clark & Liebig, 1996; Stratmann, 2005; Damore & Nicholson, 2013; Fisher, 2017). Interest groups oftentimes utilize pollsters and focus groups to best understand the constituencies wants and desires (Lee & Green, 2024; Laposata et al., 2014; Burnett & Kogan, 2015; Lin & Patraporn, 2023; Weller, 1998; Lorz, 1984). Using pollsters and focus groups is particularly important because "if an appealing wording confers an extra few percentage points of voter support, the advocacy group may be less reliant on advertising and other costly outreach efforts that attempt to shift voter support during the campaign" (Lee & Green, 2024). Using polling and focus groups to help write the ballot measure and messaging can help interest groups and their coalitions best understand what the constituents want and how best to pass their ballot measure or strike down the oppositions. The interest group or its coalition must then write the ballot measure or if fighting a measure, attempt to gain access to it to strategize accordingly (Clark & Liebig, 1996; Laposata et al., 2014). In order to get measures

on the ballot, the interest group must gather enough signatures, and then once on the ballot, continue campaigning support for the measure (Adams, 2012; Rosenstein et al., 1974). Ultimately, while activities to advance and defeat ballot measures are similar, both sides performing these activities at the same time can become costly and competitive in a tight race (Stratmann, 2005).

Other Goals

Additionally, while the ultimate goal of interest groups remains in their desire to pass or defeat a ballot measure to advance their desired objectives, interest groups may have more goals throughout the process. For example, an interest group may seek to have their opposition drain mass amounts of funds by advertising to a population that should be a shoo-in for their cause (Tolbert & Smith, 2006; Stratmann, 2005; Ortiz, 2005). By draining resources in states that should otherwise be easy wins for the interest group, opposing interest groups hope they then have less funds to use in battleground states (Tolbert & Smith, 2006). Therefore, it is imperative for interest groups to clearly strategize ways in which to achieve their desired outcome, whether that is to advance a ballot measure, strike one down, or to drain opposition resources and thus decreasing their resources for additional measures.

By nature, interest group activity at the state-level is more cumbersome and costly than at the local-level because interest groups at the local-level need to persuade fewer people and obtain fewer signatures to get the measure on the ballot. At the local-level, interest groups do not need to search for large organizations, nonprofits, or wealthy individuals to make large campaign contributions. Rather, interest groups will likely seek support from a larger number of smaller local organizations and nonprofits that have public trust in the area (Adams, 2012). Additionally, since local campaigns are often much smaller than state-level campaigns, interest groups

typically do not need as many personnel and can rely more on or solely on volunteers to help run their campaigns (Adams, 2012). While interesting insights into how interest groups operate at the local-level, abortion and reproductive rights ballot measures occur at the state-level.

Despite the number of state-level abortion restrictions increasing and interest groups clearly seeking ballot measures to advance their priorities at the state level, scholars have yet to examine strategies and responses behind getting protective or pro-life measures on the ballot or in defeating them. Specifically, I was unable to find any articles on how morality policies or women's focused ballot measures have been approached in the past by interest groups. Therefore, I propose examining this gap in the literature and exploring how reproductive rights interest groups strategize, organize, and actions they take to advance or defeat ballot measures. Additionally, I seek to examine how reproductive rights interest group strategies may differ from other interest group strategies using the framework compiled based on relevant literature in Table 2.

But Are Ballot Measures Constitutional?

To fully understand the landscape in which the literature on ballot measures and interest groups lies, one must also understand that while the ballot measure process clearly provides citizens with a path of direct democracy through an avenue where citizens can place measures on the ballot with enough signatures, the constitutionality of this path has been debated by scholars in the public policy and public administration fields.

While the ballot measure process was designed for constituents to have a direct say in lawmaking without having to go through lawmakers, in today's environment, this is not always the case. Some scholars have argued that the direct democracy process today is less used by constituents seeking to influence law but rather is used by large organizations and interest groups

claiming to share constituents' values but instead focusing on their own interests (Hoesly, 2005; Fisher, 2017). Because getting a measure placed on the ballot is the first step in the ballot measure process, organizations and interest groups sometimes falsify signatures to place the measure on the ballot and then strategize and organize to get the measure passed from there, directly opposing the ethicality of the process. Specifically, one study found that from 2017-2023, one-fourth of all signatures gathered to place measures on the ballot were invalid, meaning that they were either obtained fraudulently or did not meet the state's requirements and standards of an accepted signature (Ballotpedia, 2024). Additionally, in many states, the threshold for the number of signatures needed to get the measures on the ballot does not require a certain number from localities and rather just requires them from the state altogether, therefore sending scholars to believe that the measure may not be approved across all constituents in the state but is rather liked by a certain population in the constituency (Hoesly, 2005). Finally, when asked, constituents tend to sign petitions to get measures on the ballot because they have been asked to do so without paying attention to what the measures say. In fact, a California leading ballot measure petition circulation consultation said, "'They sign because we ask them to sign'" (Thomas, 1990, p. 132). Once measures are placed on the ballot, scholars have found that uninformed voters do not roll-off votes, meaning that they do not avoid voting on a measure just because they are uninformed, and they do not necessarily vote no as once believed (Rogers & Middleton, 2013; Fuller, 2014; Burnett et al., 2010). Rather, interest groups seek to persuade voters to vote in favor of their measure or to oppose their opponent's measure before election day and then seek to influence those uninformed voters on election day through confusing or leading ballot measure wording (Rogers & Middleton, 2013; Fuller, 2014). Therefore, the

process by which measures are placed on the ballot to begin and, later, the process by which interest groups seek to sway uninformed voters is questioned by many.

Further arguments against the ethicality of ballot measures as a form of direct democracy include controversial values that are sometimes promoted through this medium. Organizations and interest groups include those with racist, homophobic, and sexist views, sometimes proposing measures that continue discrimination within the state. Measures on the ballot that restrict minorities' rights oftentimes pass, while those to promote civil liberties more often fail (Gamble, 1997; Hoesly, 2005). In the past, three-quarters of measures that somehow restrict rights have passed while only one-third of all other measures have passed (Gamble, 1997), demonstrating that while passed measures may ultimately reflect constituents' preferences once placed on the ballots in an invalid way, they may also not always be ethical.

Ultimately, while public policy and public administration scholars discuss ethical concerns when it comes to ballot measures as a form of direct democracy, they seem to agree that ballot measures provide citizens with a path of direct democracy, which is good if regulated. Scholars argue for more tracking at the state level of ballot measures to decrease the number of restrictions on civil liberties, decrease the number of invalid signatures, and increase the difficulty of placing measures on the ballot to avoid measures that mandate state appropriations, thus taking the appropriation process away from elected officials (Hoesly, 2005; Thomas, 1990). So, while public policy and public administration scholars debate the ethicality of the ballot measure process, they all still agree that with some regulation, providing constituents with a path to direct democracy is positive for the state and its constituents.

Campaign Finance and Dark Money

Academic scholars and practitioners have debated the influence that campaign finance has on outcomes of ballot measures, candidate elections, and the formation of legislation (Stratmann, 2005). Scholars have found very little evidence to support claims that increased success in passage of ballot measures is caused by increased campaign expenditures, while politicians and those working in the political field argue that "money is important in politics" (Stratmann, 2005). Stratmann (2005) argues that scholars' difficulty in finding a connection is because of interest group strategy surrounding campaign finance. Rather than financing campaigns that they know they will win or lose, interest groups instead throw money at contested campaigns or campaigns where the outcome is likely unknown (Stratmann, 2005). In ballot measure campaigns, Stratmann argues that interest groups will fund advertising campaigns in areas with low levels of support rather than spending money on advertising to supporters they already believe will vote in favor of their measure (Stratmann, 2005). Others argue that money plays a pivotal role in the ballot measure process because signature gathering and running a campaign is expensive (Medvic, 2022). Medvic (2022) argues that without sufficient funds and large campaign spending, interest groups would not be able to gather enough signatures to even get a measure on the ballot (Medvic, 2022). However, he also agrees with Stratmann that "spending in support of ballot measures by economic groups (which consist of representatives of organizations such as corporations and which advocate for the economic interests of those organizations) has a negative effect on both the vote margin and the probability of success of those measures" (Medvic, 2022, p. 169).

Dark money refers to money which is unreported and therefore untraceable in campaigns (Medvic, 2022). Some interest groups, specifically those listed as 501(c) organizations, do not have to report contributions to the Federal Election Commission (FEC) and do not have a limit

on the amount of contributions they can accept (Medvic, 2022). Additionally, the use of dark money in campaigns has increased since the 2010 Supreme Court's ruling on Citizens United v. FEC (Hester, 2019). Leading scholars to further question the constitutionality of direct democracy and whether ballot measures are still a form of direct democracy with the increasing use of dark money in ballot measure campaigns (Hester, 2019).

Mobilization and Trends in Voting

In the following section, I discuss what the literature says about mobilization and trends in voting.

Mobilization

The term mobilization refers to the act of influencing a large number of people to perform an act or activity of interest (Rogers, 2008). When interest groups mobilize voters, they seek to use their supporters or members to act in a certain way. In advancing ballot measures, this would mean voting in favor of the measure while the reverse is true when trying to defeat a measure. However, mobilization is not free of costs and benefits for interest groups. Citing relevant literature, costs include time and resources to fundraise, create and implement a campaign strategy, and recruit others to join the campaign and vote in favor of the measure (Damore & Nicholson, 2013). Additionally, by devoting time and resources to a ballot measure campaign, another cost incurred to interest groups are costs that inhibit participation in other activities such as supporting an elected official or lobbying (Damore & Nicholson, 2013). Potential benefits include having your ballot measure win and therefore having the preferred policy, being on the winning side, and claiming credit for a successful outcome (Damore & Nicholson, 2013). These benefits are only potential benefits because they only are achieved if the interest group is successful. Benefits to the interest group which are likely achieved regardless of

success of the measure when mobilizing supporters include group maintenance, expansion opportunities, and resource extraction. While interest groups likely have support from others prior to becoming involved in a ballot measure campaign, mobilizing supporters grows this support and this relationship with like-minded people (Damore & Nicholson, 2013). Interest groups often are focused on specific areas of a topic. Mobilizing voters allows them to expand their outreach and potentially expand or transition their area of interest (Damore & Nicholson, 2013). Finally, mobilizing supporters during a ballot measure campaign will likely cause the opposition to do the same, therefore draining the time and resources they can put towards other measures and objectives (Damore & Nicholson, 2013).

Higher mobilization is found when interest groups mobilize over a social issue, including abortion, compared to a tax issue (Damore & Nicholson, 2013). This is because "from the perspective of disturbance theory, measures of this type convey an imminent threat to targeted populations and may motivate interests to counter-mobilize in hopes of defeating the proposed change to the status quo. In this regard, the perceived benefit of participation may greatly outweigh the costs" (Damore & Nicholson, 2013, p. 538). Finally, citizen-led ballot initiatives require more mobilization from interest groups than those that are legislative-led. In order to place a measure on the ballot, interest groups must gather enough support and signatures for the measure, likely forcing group mobilization (Damore & Nicholson, 2013). Additionally, citizen-led measures are more costly, as interest groups must navigate state-specific requirements and laws (Damore & Nicholson, 2013; Tolbert et al., 1998).

Trends in Voting

Researchers have identified a correlation between an increase in the number of laws overturned by Supreme Court decisions and a decrease in voter turnout in that year (Klinkner,

1993). While Klinkner does not identify a clear reason for this relationship, he hypothesizes this is likely due to judicial activism destabilizing groups that typically motivate participants to vote, such as various interest groups. For example, following the Supreme Court's decision on *Roe v. Wade* in 1973, pro-choice activists felt a sense of security that their objectives were protected and, therefore, demobilized large groups. This demobilization, Klinkner claims, likely reduced the number of pro-choice groups pushing participants to vote and overall reduced pro-choice voter turnout when combined with groups in similar scenarios (Klinkner, 1993). If Klinkner's analysis still holds, we would expect a decrease in voter turnout following the *Dobbs* decision from the pro-life movement. We would expect the pro-life movement to demobilize after successfully having *Roe* fall and therefore would not mobilize voters in the same way that they had prior to *Dobbs*.

However, the effect of ballot measures on overall voter turnout has been debated by scholars. While some argue that ballot measures can affect overall voter turnout in presidential elections (Campbell & Monson, 2008), others argue that there is no relationship between voter turnout and ballot measures (Everson, 1981; Magleby, 1984). More recent scholars have argued that presence of ballot initiatives increases voter turnout in midterm elections, but has no notable effect on voter turnout in presidential elections (Childers & Binder, 2012). Childers and Binder (2012) do find an increase in voter turnout in midterm elections when initiatives are on the ballot, and as the number of initiatives increase, so does voter turnout. Similarly to Klinkner, Childers and Binder argue that this increase in turnout is due to mobilization. Political campaigns ensue mobilization of voters, increasing voter turnout associated with this form of direct democracy (Childers & Binder, 2012). While Tolbert and Smith (2005) did find an increase in voter turnout in presidential years when there was an initiative on the ballot, they found a larger

turnout in midterm elections (Tolbert & Smith, 2005). They argue that the saliency of a ballot measure has a great effect on voter turnout in midterm elections. Highly salient ballot measures increase voter turnout in midterm elections because midterm elections are typically lower information than presidential elections. They therefore argue that the saliency of an issue does not have the same impact on a presidential election which typically has more sources of political information regardless (Tolbert & Smith, 2005). However, they do still find an increase in voter turnout in presidential elections with the presence of a ballot measure (Tolbert & Smith, 2005). Furthermore, presidential election years have higher voter turnout compared to midterm election years regardless of ballot measure presence due to higher levels of "media coverage, campaigning, and competitiveness" (Kimball, 2008).

Trends in voter turnout have also shown researchers that certain populations vote in elections at higher rates than others. Public policy researchers studying voter turnout tell us that since the 1980s, a higher percentage of women vote compared to men, a gap that has increased over time (Carroll, 2006; CAWP, 2024). Including race and ethnicity in voter turnout, the gender gap is largest amongst Black voters and has been consistently present since the 1980s for White and Hispanic voters, while there has not been a trend of women voting at higher rates than men for Asian American/Pacific Islander voters (CAWP, 2024). Additionally, college-educated women are more likely to report having voted than their male counterparts (Igielnik, 2020). The gap in voter turnout becomes larger when considering those who do not have 4-year college degrees, with women still reporting having voted at higher percentages (Igielnik, 2020). Cebula and Meads suggest that the gender gap in voter turnout is likely caused by "differential responses to the unemployment rate (by gender), median earnings (by gender), educational attainment (by gender), percentage of the population age 65 and more (by gender), the percent of each gender

that is divorced, as well (perhaps) as the existence of a woman Governor" (Cebula & Meads, 2008, p. 310-311). Interestingly, at the state level, researchers have found no increase in voter turnout amongst women when a woman is running for office (Broockman, 2014). Additionally, a higher percentage of White voters vote than their Black, Hispanic, and Asian counterparts. Specifically, looking at the 2018, 2020, and 2022 elections, "43% of White citizens who were age eligible to vote in all three elections did so … Black, Hispanic and Asian adults lagged far behind, with 27% of Black, 19% of Hispanic, and 21% of Asian age-eligible citizens voting in all three elections" (Hartig et al., 2023). Further, of these three elections, only 24% of White citizens did not vote in any election, while 47% of Hispanic citizens, 36% of Black citizens, and 31% of Asian citizens did not vote in any (Hartig et al., 2023). Examining trends in voter turnout in states with reproductive rights initiatives on the ballot may help shed light on how citizens respond and mobilize when their right to a safe and legal abortion is being threatened. Further, examining these trends may also provide insights into the sense of urgency when a morality policy is on the docket compared to other measures. Therefore, when examining if the presence of a ballot measure has an effect on voter turnout, it is important to consider differences between groups who vote at different rates traditionally.

Theoretical Contributions

In summary, following the overturn of *Roe v. Wade*, ballot measures have become a way for pro-choice interest groups and citizens to protect their right to an abortion. However, little is known about interest groups' ballot measure strategies, organization, and activities, and even less is known about how interest groups act to advance morality policy ballot measures. Therefore, through this dissertation, I explore how interest groups seek to advance their ballot measures. I examine whether interest group strategies, organizations, and/or actions may vary when

reproductive rights measures are on the ballot compared to those of non-morality policy interest groups. Additionally, I examine whether reproductive rights interest group's planning and actions increase voter turnout in both presidential and midterm elections. I seek to determine if voter turnout increases when there is an abortion or reproductive rights measure on the ballot across states in various years. Ultimately, the active role that ballot measures play in childbearing people's access to a safe and legal abortion determines my interest in examining how reproductive rights interest groups may differ from other interest groups in advancing or defeating said ballot measures. Therefore, I hope to contribute to theory on how interest groups operate when advancing non-morality ballot measures, how reproductive rights interest groups operate when advancing abortion or reproductive rights ballot measures, and how presence of an abortion or reproductive rights ballot measure affects voter turnout.

Chapter Three: Research Design and Methods

In the following chapter I discuss my research methods. In Chapter 4, I took a quantitative approach to answer my first research question and its accompanying sub questions:

1. To what extent did the presence of state ballot measures regarding reproductive rights between 2016 and 2024 affect voter turnout?
    1. How did voter turnout vary across states when ballot measures proposed expanding/protecting reproductive rights versus ballot measures that proposed restricting the rights?
    2. To what extent did the presence of state ballot measures regarding reproductive rights raise or lower voter turnout pre- and post- *Dobbs* decision across states?

I complement this with a qualitative approach, the findings for which are detailed in Chapter 5, where I examine my next two research questions:

2. In what ways, if any, did interest group strategies, organization, and activities to add measures to ballots and promote passage of ballot measures regarding abortion or reproductive rights differ from more traditional strategies employed to add measures to ballots and promote passage of state ballot measures?
3. How did interest group strategies, organization, and activities to add measures to ballots and promote passage of ballot measures expanding/protecting abortion or reproductive rights vary pre- and post- *Dobbs* decision?

Using a mixed methods approach allows me to fill some of the gaps left by one method with the other method. Mixed methods approaches are considered well-rounded by public policy scholars as they help improve the quality of the results and knowledge produced (Hendren et al., 2018).

I begin first with discussing my quantitative methodology where I explain variables of interest, data sources used, and regressions run. Next, I dive into my qualitative methodology where I describe my outreach strategy, interview participants, the abortion or reproductive rights ballot measure situation in each state of interest, my qualitative analytical strategy, and interview questions asked. Finally, I close the chapter by discussing ethical considerations, and study delimitations and limitations.

Quantitative Methods

In the following section, I describe the variables of interest, data used, and my quantitative analytical strategy.

Variables of Interest

In order to best answer my research questions and drawing from the relevant literature, my dependent variable for the quantitative analysis was turnout. I used overall voter turnout, male turnout, and female turnout to account for any changes that may occur when specifying gender. My independent variables were presence of a restrictive ballot measure before *Dobbs*, presence of a restrictive ballot measure after *Dobbs*, and presence of a protective ballot measure after *Dobbs*.

In determining what control variables to use, I drew from relevant literature, learning from scholars about what variables they have used in the past and the reasons why. Tolbert & Smith (2005) used presence of gubernatorial and Senate races, voter registration requirements, percent of population with high school degrees, per capita income, and state and ethnic diversity. Southwell & Paaso (2001) used presence of gubernatorial and Senate races, classification of being a "southern state," voter registration requirements, average number of schooling completed in each state, average household income, and percent of registered voters in each state indicating

party affiliation. Childers & Binder (2012) used party competition, presence of gubernatorial and senate elections, a competitiveness variable looking at the absolute margin of victory in races, a demographics variable using percent of foreign-born citizens, percent of nonwhite citizens, and an urbanization scale, as well as an institutional variable examining the expansion of women's suffrage and the adoption of the secret ballot. Following the most cited of these articles in the voter turnout, political science literature, I included all of Tolbert & Smith's (2005) variables. In addition to gubernatorial and Senate races, I also included the presence of a presidential election to account for the increase in turnout due to the increased saliency. Finally, along with looking at the percentage of the population with high school degrees or higher, I also examined the percentage with college degrees or higher as a robustness check.

Data Sources

To perform the quantitative part of my analysis, I gathered various data sources.

For my dependent variable, I gathered data on U.S. voter turnout by state for 2024, 2022, 2020, 2018, and 2016 from the Election Administration and Voting Survey (EVAS), a government-run survey collecting election data from all 50 states, D.C., and U.S. territories. I compiled data on total active registered voters, percent change of active registered voters from the election prior, total citizen voting age population (CVAP), percent change of CVAP from the election prior, total voter turnout, voter turnout as a percent of total active registrations, and voter turnout as a percent of CVAP for each election year of interest. The data were coded on a scale from 0-1, with 1 being 100% of people who could have voted having voted in the state in the year and 0 being 0% of the people who could have voted having not voted in the state in the year. Data were separated into three categories, overall voter turnout, female voter turnout, and

male voter turnout, all providing a decimal between 0-1 for voter turnout for each state in each year.

For my independent variables, I gathered data on all abortion or reproductive rights measures that were on the ballot since 2016. I tracked all states in which an abortion or reproductive rights measure was on the ballot, and coded whether they were during a general election or special election, whether they were before or after *Dobbs*, whether they were legislatively or constituently initiated, whether they were for or against reproductive rights, and whether they passed or failed. I collected this data from Ballotpedia which compiles all ballot measures for a topic and year in one place, and then I cross-referenced these data with various scholarly and news articles and official ballot measure text to ensure accurate data on all measures, and to ensure no measures were missed or wrongfully included. Ballot measures were then coded as dummy variables where: 1=yes abortion or reproductive rights ballot measure in state in year, 0=no abortion or reproductive rights ballot measure in state in year; 1=yes restrictive measure in state in year, 0=no restrictive measure in state in year; 1=yes protective measure in state in year, 0=no protective measure in state in year; 1=abortion or reproductive rights measure after Dobbs in state in year, 0=no abortion or reproductive rights measure after Dobbs in state in year.

Finally, for my control variables, I used the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis's Bachelor's Degree or Higher by State and High School Degree or Higher by State to determine the percent of students in each state that met either having a bachelor's degree or higher or high school degree or higher in each year. The data were coded on a scale from 0-1, with 1 being 100% of people in the state in the year having a high school degree or higher and 0 being 0% of the people in the state in the year having a high school degree or higher, with the same coding for

bachelor's degree or higher. I also used the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis to find the per capita personal income by state for each of the years of interest. I used the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics' CPI (Consumer Price Index) Inflation Calculator to convert all dollars for each year to January 2024 dollars to find the Real Per Capita Personal Income for each state in each year. I used the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey to find estimates for each racial group by state and year. I then converted each of these estimates into percentages of specific racial groups within each state's total population. Following the literature's inclusion of racial groups, I included percent white non-Hispanic in tract (state), percent African American non-Hispanic in tract (state), percent Asian non-Hispanic in tract (state), and percent Hispanic or Latino in tract (state).

To determine political lean, I used percent of the state that voted for the Republican Senator in the Senate election. While I initially intended on using percent registered Republican, not all states require people to register or publicize the margin. I then planned to use percent that voted for the Republican Presidential candidate, but following interviews and learning about potential motives of national organizations which I discuss in Chapter 5, I chose to using percent of the state's population that voted for the Republican Senate candidate. In order to determine the percent of the population that voted for the Republican Senate candidate, I used CNN's Senate election results tracker for each year of interest. While I tried to use other sources, such as Associated Press, to determine the final percent, CNN was the only source I could find with data in all years of interest available. These data were coded as a decimal from 0-1, with 1 being 100% of people in the state in the year having voted for the Republican Senate nominee and 0 being 0% of the people in the state in the year having voted for the Republican Senate nominee. For my dummy control variables, I used CNN's Senate election results tracker and Governor

election results tracker to determine if there was a Senate or gubernatorial election in the year of interest. These data were coded as dummy variables where 1=yes presence of a governor's race in state in year, 0=no governor's race in state in year, and 1=yes presence of a Senate race in state in year, 0=no Senate race in state in year. Finally, to find election day registration laws for each state, I used Ballotpedia's same-day voter registration tracker which lists the year in which a statute on same-day voter registration was enacted or redacted, as well as the statute itself. I then cross referenced Ballotpedia's various sources including MIT's election lab to determine the accuracy of each election-day voter registration requirement in each state in each year. These data were coded as a dummy variable where 1=yes election day registration allowed in state in year, 0=no election day registration allowed in state in year

Analytical Strategy

To answer the research question and sub questions, I ran multiple regressions examining the effect of abortion or reproductive rights ballot measures on voter turnout. The baseline model used was:

$$\text{Turnout} = \beta_0 + \beta_1(\text{RestrictiveMeasurePreDobbs}) + \beta_2(\text{RestrictiveMeasurePostDobbs}) + \beta_3(\text{ProtectiveMeasurePostDobbs})$$

Next I used models to control for other variables of interest and changed out racial categories in each model. Models in columns two through five discussed in regression results in Chapter 4 are as follows:

$$\text{Model 2: Turnout} = \beta_0 + \beta_1(\text{RestrictiveMeasurePreDobbs}) + \beta_2(\text{RestrictiveMeasurePostDobbs}) + \beta_3(\text{ProtectiveMeasurePostDobbs}) + \text{Controls} + \text{Control for White} + \varepsilon$$

$$\text{Model 3: Turnout} = \beta_0 + \beta_1(\text{RestrictiveMeasurePreDobbs}) + \beta_2(\text{RestrictiveMeasurePostDobbs}) + \beta_3(\text{ProtectiveMeasurePostDobbs}) + \text{Controls} + \text{Control for Hispanic} + \varepsilon$$

$$\text{Model 4: Turnout} = \beta_0 + \beta_1(\text{RestrictiveMeasurePreDobbs}) + \beta_2(\text{RestrictiveMeasurePostDobbs}) + \beta_3(\text{ProtectiveMeasurePostDobbs}) + \text{Controls} + \text{Control for African American} + \varepsilon$$

Model 5: Turnout = β_0 + β_1(RestrictiveMeasurePreDobbs) + β_2(RestrictiveMeasurePostDobbs) + β_3(ProtectiveMeasurePostDobbs) + Controls + Control for Asian + ε

In column six, I used state and year fixed effects to examine the relationship between voter turnout and abortion or reproductive rights ballot measure presence. My fixed effects model used in column six where (*s*) was state and (*t*) was year was:

$$Model\ 6: Turnout_{st} = \beta_{0st} + \beta_1(RestrictiveMeasurePreDobbs_{st}) + \beta_2(RestrictiveMeasurePostDobbs_{st}) + \beta_3(ProtectiveMeasurePostDobbs_{st}) + \varepsilon_{st}$$

I ran regressions for overall voter turnout, male, and female voter turnout. As a robustness check, I varied measures of racial groups as a control to examine the impact on turnout for different racial groups, and I used state and year fixed effects. The dependent variable, Turnout, is the percent of voters who voted in a specific state in a specific election year, and the independent variables are dummy variables for RestrictiveMeasurePreDobbs (1= the state had a restrictive measure pre-Dobbs, 0 = no), RestrictiveMeasurePostDobbs (1 = the state had a restrictive measure post-Dobbs, 0 = no), and ProtectiveMeasurePostDobbs (1 = the state had a protective measure post-Dobbs, 0 = no). I also included the following controls: a dummy variable for Gubernatorial or Senate race (1 = yes, 0 = no), a dummy variable for presence of election-day registration (1 = yes election-day registration, 0 = no), percent of state population with a high school degree, real per capita personal income in each state in each year, state political lean (percent that voted for the Republican Senate nominee in a certain year), and variables for racial groups (percent of state population that identify as white, black, Asian, and Hispanic). Appendix A provides a codebook for all variables.

Qualitative Methods

In the following section, I describe my outreach strategy, interview participants, an overview of the abortion or reproductive rights ballot measures in each state of interest, my qualitative analytical strategy, and the interview questions asked.

Outreach Strategy

To answer my qualitative research questions and to understand the experiences of reproductive rights interest group leaders, I conducted 13 interviews with 14 different people. Each interview was one-on-one with the participant and me with the exception of one interview which included two participants. My goal in conducting the interviews was to understand if the way interest groups have approached reproductive rights on ballot measures with regard to strategy, organization, and actions has differed from how the literature tells us how other interest groups promoting the passage of non-reproductive rights state ballot measures strategize, organize, and act. Specifically, I sought to understand if reproductive rights interest group strategies, organizations, and actions align or differ from those employed by other interest groups. I also sought to understand if their strategies have changed at all after the *Dobbs* decision, i.e., when the right to a safe and legal abortion was no longer protected nationally.

Initially, I planned to use a case study approach to narrow the scope of my research, focusing specifically on Michigan, Florida, and Nebraska to allow me to narrow the scope of my research while providing a more thorough understanding of a specific scenario (Yin, 2014). However, I struggled to find research participants to interview due to the extremely sensitive nature of reproductive rights. Without connections to participants, I did not receive responses to emails, LinkedIn messages, or other forms of communication. Therefore, I instead took a purposive sampling approach followed by snowball sampling and self-selected purposive sampling approaches to interview people from as many states as possible. Rather than using a

case study approach and selecting participants myself, I used purposive sampling to allow any participant who fit the criteria of having worked on an abortion or reproductive rights ballot measure to participate (Patton, 1990). Purposive sampling was appropriate since I needed to target individuals with relevant experience. Purposive sampling allows the researcher to select specific people that they think would best provide rich and relevant information (Patton, 1990). Snowball sampling is where researchers ask participants they have interviewed to suggest other participants to interview (Patton, 1990). Snowball sampling is particularly helpful when interviewed participants may have connections or knowledge of a specific population who may otherwise be hard to connect with or know about. In my case, using snowball sampling helped me connect with individuals who may have been weary speaking to someone without prior knowledge of their intentions, and or to connect with individuals who were busy and may not have otherwise made time to be interviewed. Finally, a self-selected purposive sampling approach is when you select a subset of a group and then participants can volunteer themselves to be interviewed from within the group (Patton, 1990). For example, posting in specific forums or groups and then allowing members of that group to select themselves to be interviewed is self-selected purposive sampling. However, while extremely beneficial in helping me find research participants to interview, allowing participants to select themselves may lead to some selection bias which I discuss in the limitations section of this chapter.

I conducted 13 interviews with 14 participants from August-November 2025. Interviewees worked at advocacy organizations, reproductive healthcare organizations, lobbying firms, legal non-profits, and in state-level politics. At these organizations, interviewees worked as directors, lawyers, state congressional delegates, and lobbyists.

All interviewees were highly involved in their interest group working to pass protective ballot initiatives and state constitutional amendments in Ohio (5), Maryland (4), Montana (1), Missouri (2), and Arizona (2). Two were chosen by purposive sampling, two by self-selection purposive sampling, and 10 by snowball sampling.

State Selection

In the following section, I briefly discuss an overview of the abortion or reproductive rights ballot measure situation in each of the five states in which I conducted interviews. Speaking with reproductive rights interest group leaders from each of these five states offered insights into how interest group strategies, organization, and activities differed across states and from non-reproductive rights interest group strategies, organizations, and activities. Each state examined was the product of purposive and snowball sampling, but fits the criteria of having had an abortion or reproductive rights ballot measure between 2016 and 2024. While ideally I would have liked to have spoken with interest group members from states where there was a restrictive measure or in states that had a ballot measure before the Dobbs decision, state selection was a product of interviewee selection. All five of the ballot measures were constitutional amendments. Ohio, Montana, Arizona, and Missouri were all citizen-led ballot measures. Maryland's ballot measure was legislatively led. The following overview of each state selected is organized in the order of which I interviewed participants. Chronologically, Ohio's measure appeared on ballot measures first in November 2023, while the remaining four measures all appeared on the ballot during the November 2024 general election.

Ohio

Ohio differs from the other states examined because it was one of the first states after the *Dobbs* decision to have a reproductive rights ballot initiative. In November 2022, four states had

ballot initiatives on abortion or reproductive rights, California, Kansas, Kentucky, and Michigan. California and Michigan both had protective measures which passed, while Kansas and Kentucky had restrictive measures which failed. If following the trend post-*Dobbs* where majority Democrat states protected the right to an abortion while majority Republican states attempted to restrict the right, we would have expected Ohio to propose a ballot measure restricting reproductive rights. However, in November 2023, Ohio, which is viewed as a majority Republican state, had a protective reproductive rights ballot initiative. Ohio's governor is a Republican, both U.S. Senators are Republican, 10 of 15 U.S. House of Representatives members are Republican, and Republicans hold six of seven Ohio Supreme Court seats (Henry, 2024; Ballotpedia, 2026). Ohio's Issue 1 language that appeared on the ballot appears in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: Ohio 2023 Issue 1 Ballot Language

Proposed Constitutional Amendment
A Self-Executing Amendment Relating to Abortion and Other Reproductive Decisions
Proposed by Initiative Petition To enact Section 22 of Article I of the Constitution of the State of Ohio
A majority yes vote is necessary for the amendment to pass.

The proposed amendment would:

- Establish in the Constitution of the State of Ohio an individual right to one's own reproductive medical treatment, including but not limited to abortion;
- Create legal protections for any person or entity that assists a person with receiving reproductive medical treatment, including but not limited to abortion;
- Prohibit the State from directly or indirectly burdening, penalizing, or prohibiting abortion before an unborn child is determined to be viable, unless the State demonstrates that it is using the least restrictive means;
- Grant a pregnant woman's treating physician the authority to determine, on a case-by-case basis, whether an unborn child is viable;
- Only allow the State to prohibit an abortion after an unborn child is determined by a pregnant woman's treating physician to be viable and only if the physician does not consider the abortion necessary to protect the pregnant woman's life or health; and
- Always allow an unborn child to be aborted at any stage of pregnancy, regardless of viability if, in the treating physician's determination, the abortion is necessary to protect the pregnant woman's life or health.

If passed, the amendment will become effective 30 days after the election.

SHALL THE AMENDMENT BE APPROVED?
__ Yes
__ No

(Source: Ohio Secretary of State, 2023)

Prior to reproductive rights Issue 1 appearing on the November 7, 2023 ballot, Ohio's Senate placed a separate August Issue 1 on a special election ballot seeking to raise the threshold of votes needed for a constitutional measure to pass to a supermajority of 60% versus a 50% simple majority. By raising the threshold needed for the measure to pass, the move by a Republican held Senate and House was aimed to decrease the likelihood of reproductive rights Issue 1 passing. Reproductive rights advocates in the state fought the measure and it ended up failing on the August ballot with 57% no votes (Ingles & Kasler, 2023). Ohio's reproductive rights measure, Issue 1 was spearheaded by a coalition including Planned Parenthood, passed with 57.2% of the vote in November 2024 (Ingles, 2023).

Maryland

Maryland's 2024 reproductive rights ballot initiative was legislatively led and was the only legislatively led measure that I investigated. While Maryland's ballot measure process is led by constituents for veto referendums, state statues and constitutional amendments are required to be initiated by the legislature (Maryland Constitution, 2026). This also means that Maryland was the only state I investigated where testimony is required, sometimes by only the bill sponsor and sometimes by interest groups as well. The exact wording of Maryland's 2024 Question 1 language that appeared on the ballot appears in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2: Maryland 2024 Question 1 Ballot Langue

Constitutional Amendment (Ch. 245 of the 2023 Legislative Session) Declaration of Rights - Right to Reproductive Freedom
The proposed amendment confirms an individual's fundamental right to reproductive freedom, including but not limited to the ability to make and effectuate decisions to prevent, continue, or end the individual's pregnancy, and provides the State may not, directly or indirectly, deny, burden, or abridge, the right unless justified by a compelling State interest achieved by the least restrictive means. (Adding Article 48 to the Maryland Declaration of Rights)
__ For the Constitutional Amendment __ Against the Constitutional Amendment

(Source: Maryland State Board of Elections, 2024)

Maryland's governor is a Democrat, both U.S. Senators are Democrats, seven out of eight U.S. House of Representatives members are Democrats, and two of seven Maryland Supreme Court judges were appointed by Democrats (Maryland Government, 2026; Ballotpedia 2026). Given that Maryland is a majority Democrat state aiming to protect the right to reproductive freedom in their constitution, the measure passed in November 2024, with 76.1% of the votes (Maryland State Board of Elections, 2024).

Montana

Known as a majority Republican state, Montana interestingly has a very progressive state constitution. Montana's governor is a Republican, both U.S. Senators are Republicans, both U.S. House of Representatives members are Republican, and Montana's Supreme Court is nonpartisan (Montana Government, 2026). In 2022, constituents rejected Montana's LR-131, the Born Alive Infant Protection Act. The measure would have required health care professionals to take medical action to preserve the life of born alive infants (Montana Department of Justice, 2022). By rejecting the measure with 52.6% of the vote, constituents showed that they want to protect healthcare providers and not cause further harm to families whose infants are born alive but will not survive (NYTimes, 2022). By protecting healthcare providers through rejecting LR-131, Montanan's showed they likely would protect providers again when it came to abortion/reproductive rights measures. In November 2024, Montana constituents placed CI-128 on the measure, aimed to protect abortion in the state constitution. The exact wording of Montana's CI-128 language that appeared on the ballot appears in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3: Montana 2024 Constitutional Initiative 128 Ballot Language

A Constitutional Amendment Proposed By Initiative Petition
CI-128 would amend the Montana Constitution to expressly provide a right to make and carry out decisions about one's own pregnancy, including the right to abortion. It would prohibit the government from denying or burdening the right to abortion before fetal viability. It would also prohibit the government from denying or burdening access to an abortion when a treating healthcare professional determines it is medically indicated to protect the pregnant

patient's life or health. CI-128 prevents the government from penalizing patients, healthcare providers, or anyone who assists someone in exercising their right to make and carry out voluntary decisions about their pregnancy.

__ YES on Constitutional Amendment CI-128
__ NO on Constitutional Amendment CI-128

(Source: Montana Legislature, 2024)

Montana's CI-128 passed in November 2024, with 58% of the vote (Montana Secretary of State, 2024).

Missouri

As was the case with many majority Republican states, on June 24, 2022, following the *Dobbs* decision, Missouri began enforcing trigger laws restricting access to abortion in their state. Missouri's governor is a Republican, both U.S. Senators are Republican, six of eight U.S. House of Representatives members are Republican, and five of seven Missouri Supreme Court justices were appointed by a Republican governor (Missouri Government, 2026; Ballotpedia, 2026). Following the trend in many states to protect the constitutional right of abortion in their state, in November 2024, Missouri constituents placed Amendment 3 on the ballot. Amendment 3 was a reproductive rights constitutional amendment designed to protect abortion and diminish trigger bans. The exact wording of Missouri's Amendment 3 language that appeared on the ballot appears in Table 3.4.

Table 3.4: Missouri 2024 Amendment 3 Ballot Language

Constitutional Amendment

Do you want to amend the Missouri Constitution to:

- establish a right to make decisions about reproductive health care, including abortion and contraceptives, with any governmental interference of that right presumed invalid;
- remove Missouri's ban on abortion;
- allow regulation of reproductive health care to improve or maintain the health of the patient;
- require the government not to discriminate, in government programs, funding, and other activities, against persons providing or obtaining reproductive health care; and
- allow abortion to be restricted or banned after Fetal Viability except to protect the life or health of the woman?

State governmental entities estimate no cost or savings, but unknown impact. Local governmental entities estimate costs of at least $51,000 annually in reduce tax revenues. Opponents estimate a potentially significant loss to state revenue.

Fair Ballot Language:

A "yes" vote establishes a constitutional right to make decisions about reproductive health care, including abortion and contraceptives, with any governmental interference of that right presumed invalid; removes Missouri's ban on abortion; allows regulation of reproductive health care to improve or maintain the health of the patient; requires the government not to discriminate, in government programs, funding, and other activities, against persons providing or obtaining reproductive health care; and allows abortion to be restricted or banned after Fetal Viability except to protect the life or health of the woman.
A "no" vote will continue the statutory prohibition of abortion in Missouri.
If passed, this measure may reduce local taxes while the impact to state taxes is unknown.

(Source: Missouri Secretary of State, 2024)

Missouri's Amendment 3 passed in November 2024 with 51.6% of the vote (Missouri Secretary of State, 2024).

Arizona

Arizona has long been fighting over the right to an abortion in their state. In March 2022, HR 1164 was signed into law, putting a 15-week ban on abortion in the state and following *Dobbs*, access to abortion was almost completely gone in Arizona. After many legal battles between abortion advocacy organizations and the state, a 15-week ban on abortion still remained. In April 2024, the near-total ban on abortion almost returned, with a bill to repeal the ban passed in early May. In November 2024, Arizona Proposition 139 abortion ballot measure sought to enshrine the right to an abortion in the state's constitution. The exact wording of Arizona's Proposition 139 language that appeared on the ballot appears in Table 3.5.

Table 3.5: Arizona 2024 Proposition 139 Ballot Language

Proposed By initiative Petition Relating To The Fundamental Right To An Abortion
Official Title: Amending Article II, Constitution Of Arizona, By Adding Section 8.1; Relating To The Fundamental Right To An Abortion

Descriptive Title: Creates a Fundamental Right To Abortion. Limits the state's ability to interfere with that right before fetal viability. After fetal viability, abortions are allowed when necessary to protect the life or health of the pregnant individual. Prohibits laws penalizing a person for assisting an individual obtaining an abortion.

A "yes" vote shall have the effect of creating a fundamental right to abortion under Arizona's constitution. The State will not be able to interfere with this fundamental right before fetal viability unless it has a compelling reason and does so in the least restrictive way possible. Fetal viability means the point in the pregnancy when, in the good-faith judgment of a treating health care professional, the fetus has a significant likelihood of survival outside the uterus. Throughout the pregnancy, both before and after fetal viability, the State will not be able to interfere with the good-faith judgment of a treating health care professional that an abortion is necessary to protect the life or health of the pregnant individual. The State will not be able to penalize any person for aiding or assisting a pregnant individual in exercising the right to an abortion.

A "no" vote shall have the effect of not creating a fundamental right to have an abortion under Arizona's constitution, will leave in place current laws that restrict abortion before fetal viability, and will allow the State to further restrict or ban abortion in the future.

(Source: Arizona Secretary of State, 2024)

Arizona's governor is a Democrat, both U.S. Senators are Democrats, three of nine U.S. House of Representatives members are Democrats, and one of seven Arizona Supreme Court justices are Democrats (Arizona Judicial Branch, 2026; Ballotpedia, 2026). Arizona's Proposition 139 passed in November 2024 with 61.6% of the vote (Arizona Secretary of State, 2024).

Understanding the abortion and reproductive rights situation leading up to each state's ballot measure is crucial in understanding how each state differs. Differing Republican and Democratic breakdowns likely influence how interest groups have to operate. For example and discussed later in Chapter 5, Maryland interest groups were confident that their ballot measure would pass solely based on the composition of Republicans vs. Democrats in their state. Additionally, different protections and restrictions placed on abortion prior to the ballot measure impacted the urgency in which interest groups felt they had to operate to pass a ballot measure. Additionally, each state had unique ballot measure language which directly impacts which protections and restrictions and put on abortion in each state, another area of discussion I dive into deeper in Chapter 5.

Analytical Strategy

In order to best understand the literature and determine interview questions to ask, I group what the literature described as interest group strategies, organization, and activities into the three categories. I then used these categories to ask interview questions based on the literature. After conducting interviews, I summarized and analyzed interview findings by question and cross compared responses by respondents.

I used in-depth semi-structured interviews to allow interviewees to veer slightly off-question if relevant to the conversation, while also allowing for some structure to the interview. Using a semi-structured format makes the interview process more relaxed for participants and allows interviewees to provide valuable insights into their strategies, organization, and activities not specifically addressed in closed-ended questions (Adams in Newcomer et al., 2015). Exact questions were asked of all participants unless the participant answered the question while answering a previous question. Additionally, in a few cases, questions that arose during the interview were asked on the spot and were recorded in the notes. Using the semi-structured interview format allows for questions that arose during an interview to be asked, providing valuable insights into the ballot initiative process that might not have been able to be discerned if not asked.

Interviews were scheduled for 45 minutes, but ranged from 45 minutes up to an hour and a half depending on each interviewee's time, how the conversation was going, and their eagerness to continue sharing their experience. All interviews occurred over Zoom or Microsoft Teams if the interviewee preferred. Interviews were not recorded and only hand-written notes were taken following consent from interviewees.

Interview Protocol

Table 3.6 provides the interview protocol. In some cases, slight variations of questions were asked or additional questions were asked as follow up questions to emerging areas of interest. If an additional question yields an important response, it will be discussed in Chapter 5

Table 3.6: Interview Protocol

First, I'd like to start by asking you some questions pertaining to {Interest Group}'s strategies in advancing {Ballot Measure title}

1. What were (Interest Group) main strategy and main objectives in seeking to advance (Ballot Measure)?
2. How did (Interest Group) come to the conclusion that a ballot measure was the best way to advance reproductive rights priorities? Did (Interest Group) consider other vehicles to advance its priorities instead?

3. Did (Interest Group) derive any ideas or strategies from ballot measures in other countries? (AKA, is this transnational feminism at play?
4. How did (Interest Group) decide whether to take a negative stance, as in speaking negatively about what the opposition is presenting, or a positive stance, where representatives speak positively about how something else is better for constituents, when advancing a measure?
5. Does (Interest Group) strategize differently when the opposition takes a positive or negative stance?
6. What framing strategy did (Interest Group) use and how was this determined?
7. How did (Interest Group) stay proactive instead of reactive throughout the process?
8. How did (Interest Group) decide whether to appeal more towards the median voter and someone who is on the fence about whether or not they support a ballot measure vs. taking a more extreme approach and encourage clear liberals to vote in higher numbers?
9. How did (Interest Group) strategize about the use of AI, texting, and social media?
10. Did (Interest Group) strategize about any specific demographic of the constituency to appeal to or to encourage to vote?

Now, I'd like to move on to questions pertaining to {Interest Group}'s organization when advancing {Ballot Measure title}

1. How important is clear organization of committees when trying to advance (Ballot Measure)?
2. Was there a lot of overlap between members of committees? If so, did this help with cohesion?
3. Were organizations and nonprofits recruited to join (Interest Group) fight in advancing (Ballot Measure)? If so, did this help with the results of the measure?
4. Did (Interest Group) join or consider joining a coalition with other like-minded interest groups?

Now I'd like to discuss some questions pertaining to activities {Interest Group}'s utilized when advancing {Ballot Measure title}

1. How was the ballot measure written? Were polls or focus groups commissioned to randomly vary the ways a ballot measure was described in an attempt to figure out which working resonated best with voters? Was any AI used?
2. To what extent did (Interest Group) put efforts towards the following: newsletters to members, focus groups with the public, whitepapers for state legislators, testifying to state legislators, publishing reports for the public, texting the public, holding conferences for industry, interest groups, and state legislators, and creating ads or social media campaigns?
3. Did (Interest Group) put efforts towards any activities which I did not just mention which either greatly contributed or did not contribute to the advancement of (Interest Groups) strategy?

***Shifting gears, I'd like to discuss some quick background questions*:**

1. How many years have you been involved in working on state ballot measures? What about external lobbying?
2. Have you ever worked on advancing or defeating a ballot measure that was not on reproductive rights? Was this any different? How so?
3. Were (Interest Groups) strategy, organization, or actions changed because this is seen as a women's issue by some? Did the perception as a "women's issue" change the advertising strategy, etc.?
4. Following the Dobbs decision, have any of (Interest Groups) strategies, plans, and/or procedures changed?

Wrapping up, is there anything else you wish people knew about interest group strategies, organization, or activities when seeking to advance or defeat reproductive rights ballot measures?

While the literature discussed strategies, organization, and activities when advancing and defeating measures, after finalizing my sample of interviewees, questions were removed that were specifically addressing defeating measures. Since none of my interviewees worked on

defeating an abortion or reproductive rights measure, including questions on defeating measures did not make sense.

Ethical Considerations

A proposal of this dissertation was reviewed and approved by GWU's Institutional Review Board (IRB), number NCR256567. Prior to all interviews, participants were sent an interview protocol and were informed that it was an outline designed to steer the conversation, but that alterations or other questions may arise during the conversation. I provided interview participants with interview questions in advance so that they could not only get a sense of the questions I would be asking but because of the sensitive nature of the topic, to allow them to back out of the interview in advance or make them feel more comfortable if they decided to participate. I did not want to surprise my interviewees with questions. Rather I wanted to reassure possible interviewees that my intentions in interviewing them was for academic purposes and not to criticize their strategies, organization, or activities. Along with the interview protocol, all participants were sent an informed consent form which described all potential risks to participants as well as actions I have taken to protect their identity. Potential risks or discomforts included loss of confidentiality. Participants were not asked to sign the informed consent form to further protect their privacy, but at the beginning of each interview were asked for verbal consent. Participants were also told that their participation in the interview was voluntary and that they could stop the interview at any time. Participants were not given anything in return for their participation. Further, due to the sensitivity of the issue, participants were not asked to turn on their cameras if video calling, if they preferred a phone call that happened instead in one case, and I did not record any of the interviews. I did, however, ask all participants if they were okay with copious hand-written notes being taken and all agreed.

Study Delimitations

It is important when planning research to also determine what research is outside of the study's boundaries or scope. The purpose of this dissertation is not to understand the legal framework on which abortion in the United States resides or even the current laws and regulations of abortion policies across states, but rather is to understand how interest groups strategize, organize, and act to advance their interests. Additionally, any legal work done on abortion restrictions or protections outside of ballot measures, unless directly impacting a ballot measure of interest, are considered outside the scope of this research.

Study Limitations

This study has a few key limitations which I list here.

From a quantitative standpoint, there may be threats to validity and reliability including overfitting models or not accounting for important factors leading to omitted variable bias. In addition, the results simply show elections in a narrow period, and cannot be generalizable to the future. While I did my best to research how other scholars selected variables of interest to control for, and used the same variables, there still could be changes that impacted voter turnout which were not accounted for.

Additionally, as variables changed model to model, slopes also changed. This sensitivity of slopes demonstrates that the findings are not as robust as one would like. While variables were selected based off the relevant literature, additional variables were removed in an attempt to deal with multicollinearity, and variables were varied as a sensitivity analysis, because the slopes were so sensitive to which variables were included in the model, we should take these results with a grain of salt. The sensitivity in slopes shows that context matters a lot, and my main independent variables have different relationship with the variables seen in previous literature.

From a qualitative standpoint, the first main limitation that was discovered once the dissertation was in full swing was in finding people to interview. In order to understand how abortion/reproductive rights interest groups, strategies, organization, and activities in seeking to advance or DEFEAT ballot measures may differ from interest groups working to advance or defeat ballot measures unrelated to mortality policies, I wanted to interview experts from both the pro-choice and pro-life side. Additionally, I would have liked to have also interviewed interest group advocates who worked to strike down a restrictive ballot measure. Unfortunately, despite many attempts to speak with both sides, I was unable to find interview participants beyond the people I spoke with. Along with changing the states in which I interviewed people following challenges with finding participants, I also had to alter my research questions to only examine pro-abortion/reproductive rights interest groups. Because of this limitation and because the nature of the abortion/reproductive rights environment differs across states, these findings are not generalizable to other states, or even potentially to other years. Abortion laws and restrictions are changing day-by-day and therefore, reproductive rights interest group strategies, organization, and activities may also have to change.

Secondly, the sample that I did interview also has limitations. I recognize that my sample size is small, further increasing the threat to transferability. Additionally, there may be selection bias in that many of the people I spoke with were either found through snowball sampling or through self-selection (Parker et al., 2020). Because of this, many of the insights people shared may not be fully representative of the entire reproductive rights interest group population in their state, but rather represent a select group who worked closely together. Finally, ideally, I would have liked to have spoken with more reproductive rights interest group leaders or activists in Montana, Arizona, and Missouri to increase the sample size and gain a better understanding of

how reproductive rights interest groups strategize, organize, and act in these states when advancing ballot measures.

Conclusion

In conclusion, while the methods for answering my research questions may yield interesting results, one must remember ethical considerations and potential limitations of the research. Understanding how reproductive rights interest groups operate and how voters respond to their strategies, organizations, and activities helps inform our understanding of direct democracy, interest groups, and ballot measures. Using the quantitative and qualitative analysis outlined above helps us as researchers fill the gap left in public policy and political science research.

Chapter Four: Quantitative Findings

In this chapter, I answer my first research question and its accompanying sub-questions:

1. To what extent did the presence of state ballot measures regarding reproductive rights between 2016 and 2024 affect voter turnout?
    1. How did voter turnout vary across states when ballot measures proposed expanding/protecting reproductive rights versus ballot measures that proposed restricting the rights?
    2. To what extent did the presence of state ballot measures regarding reproductive rights raise or lower voter turnout pre- and post- *Dobbs* decision across states?

Examining voter turnout and specifically its relationship with reproductive rights ballot measures provides researchers with an example of how voter turnout may be impacted by interest group actions and activities in both midterm and presidential elections. Researching the effect of reproductive rights ballot measure on voter turnout can help expand current literature on how saliency and Supreme Court decisions impact voter turnout. If Klinkner's (1993) analysis holds, we would expect a decrease in voter turnout following the Supreme Courts overturn of *Roe*. However, this decrease in voter turnout likely caused by reduced mobilization of pro-life groups (Klinkner, 1993) may be offset by mobilization when measures are on the ballot (Childers & Binder, 2012). Additionally, Tolbert and Smith argue that increased saliency of a measure has a greater effect on voter turnout, particularly in a midterm election when political information is lower (Tolbert & Smith, 2005). Therefore, to expand current literature on voter turnout, mobilization, and saliency, I explore how the presence of a reproductive rights ballot measure affected voter turnout between 2016 and 2024.

In what follows, I discuss each of the regressions I have run to examine my research question and sub-questions and draw conclusions about what the data are telling us. I begin by providing summary statistics for variables of interest discussed in Chapter 3, including means and standard deviations for each variable. Next, I discuss the correlation matrix and how it led to decisions made, including the removal of certain variables to better align with relevant literatures inclusion and combining variables. I describe each of the 18 regressions run in three tables, drawing conclusions on what each regression tells us about how reproductive rights ballot measures between 2016 and 2024 affected voter turnout. Finally, I close the chapter by explaining the complexity of the impact of ballot measures on turnout.

In order to thoroughly examine the relationship between reproductive rights ballot measures and voter turnout, I have run multiple regressions. Each regression focused on turnout as the dependent variable. Because my model departs from earlier literature, I accounted for potential correlations by testing for multicollinearity. I subsequently refined the model specifications based on these findings. In each of the regressions presented here, I use overall voter turnout, female voter turnout, and male voter turnout to explore whether or not there is variation in voter turnout by gender when a reproductive rights ballot measure is present. As noted in Chapter 3, my independent variables are presence of a protective ballot measure, presence of a restrictive ballot measure, and presence of the reproductive rights measure after the Dobbs decision. And in line with previous literature, I have controlled for variables including presence of a governor or senate race, allowing for election day registration, percent of the population with a high school degree or higher, real per capita personal income, race, and political lean which I describe as the percent of the population that voted for the Republican Senate candidate.

Table 4.1 provides means across all states for each year for each of the dependent, independent, and control variables. While the average voter turnout varied by presidential and non-presidential election years, female voter turnout was consistently higher than male voter turnout in all years ranging from 2016 to 2024. Figure 4.1 shows a visual representation of how voter turnout varies by election year and by male and female turnout. As learned through the literature review, one would expect larger turnout during presidential election years due to the high levels of media coverage, campaigning, and competitiveness (Kimball, 2008). And while presence of ballot measures has a higher impact on voter turnout in midterm elections compared to presidential elections, the presence of ballot measures can also increase voter turnout in presidential elections (Tolbert & Smith, 2005).

Summary statistics also show an increase in reproductive rights ballot measures after the Dobbs decision, with 7.8% of states having a measure on the ballot in 2022 and 19.6% of states having a measure on the ballot in 2024. In 2024, Nebraska had two measures on the ballot, one protective and one restrictive, explaining the variation in means when adding the number of restrictive and protective measures by state.

Figure 4.1: Voter Turnout, 2016 – 2024

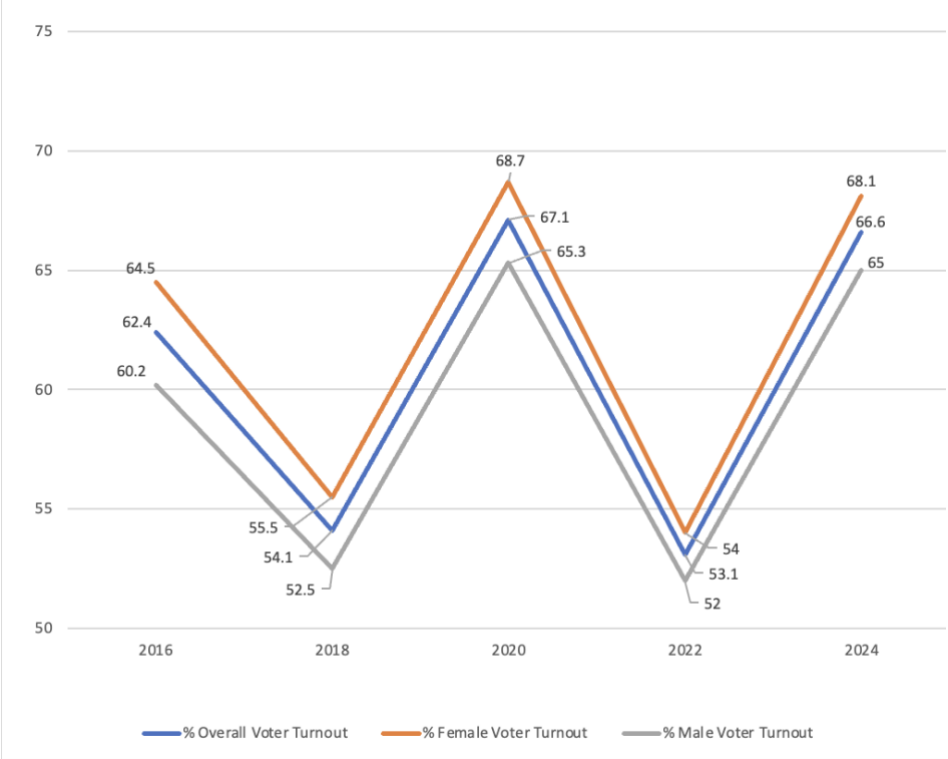


Table 4.1: Descriptive Statistics (State by Year)

n = 255 (50 states + DC for each of the five years)	2016	2018	2020	2022	2024	All Years
US Voter Turnout (% Voting of CVAP)						
Total	.624	.541	.671	.531	.666	.607
	(.053)	(.054)	(.056)	(.066)	(.055)	(.083)
Female	.645	.555	.687	.54	.681	.622
	(.054)	(.056)	(.059)	(.071)	(.056)	(.086)
Male	.602	.525	.653	.52	.65	.59
	(.053)	(.053)	(.056)	(.062)	(.056)	(.08)
Reproductive Rights Ballot Measure Presence						
Total	0	.059	.039	.078	.231	.078
	(0)	(.238)	(.196)	(.272)	(.425)	(.269)
Protective Measure (1=yes)	0	0	0	.059	.192	.051
	(0)	(0)	(0)	(.238)	(.398)	(.22)
Restrictive Measure (1=yes)	0	.059	.039	.039	.019	.031
	(0)	(.238)	(.196)	(.196)	(.139)	(.174)
Post- *Dobbs*?	0	0	0	.098	.231	.066
	(0)	(0)	(0)	(.3)	(.425)	(.249)
Governor/Senate Race?						
Presidential Race (1=yes)	1	0	1	0	1	.6
	(0)	(0)	(0)	(0)	(0)	(.491)

Governor Race (1=yes)	.235	.725	.216	.725	.212	.424
	(.428)	(.451)	(.415)	(.451)	(.412)	(.495)
Senate Race (1=yes)	.627	.686	.647	.686	.654	.659
	(.488)	(.469)	(.483)	(.469)	(.48)	(.475)
Election Day Registration						
Yes	.412	.314	.373	.431	.442	.396
	(.497)	(.469)	(.488)	(.5)	(.502)	(.49)
Education						
Average % of Population with Bachelor's Degree or Higher	.311 (.063)	.322 (.066)	.345 (.069)	.353 (.069)	.363 (.068)	.339 (.07)
Average % of Population with High School Degree or Higher	.89 (.029)	.899 (.026)	.909 (.025)	.912 (.024)	.914 (.023)	.905 (.027)
Real Per Capita Personal Income	62460.1 (10464.2)	64,575.6 (10,727.8)	68,748 (11,059)	71,119.4 (10,973.9)	70,788 (10,865)	67534.0 (11295.6)
Political Lean (Republican Vote for Senate)	.492 (.142)	.47 (.13)	.498 (.132)	.494 (.124)	.504 (.123)	.492 (.130)
Race						
White Non-Hispanic Population	.686 (.161)	.678 (.163)	.676 (.161)	.653 (.16)	.642 (.158)	.666 (.161)
African American Non-Hispanic Population	.11 (.11)	.110 (.105)	.109 (.105)	.106 (.101)	.102 (.098)	.108 (.102)
Asian Non-Hispanic Population	.040 (.054)	.043 (.054)	.043 (.054)	.044 (.052)	.047 (.053)	.044 (.053)
Hispanic or Latino Population	.117 (.102)	.121 (.104)	.121 (.103)	.128 (.105)	.137 (.102)	.125 (.103)

Multicollinearity occurs when two or more independent variables are so highly correlated that you are unable to isolate the impact of each separate variable within the regression, oftentimes leading to incorrect results of regressions (Kim, 2019). To combat multicollinearity one of the variables that is highly correlated with another is removed from the regression (Kim, 2019). Other ways to reduce multicollinearity include increasing sample size, fixing mistakes in coding or recording data, combining variables, or replacing variables (Kim, 2019). However, because I used datasets online to create my dataset and because I am using states and, therefore, have a set sample size, I excluded highly correlated variables from my regressions. After checking the simpler model, one can then check for robustness by accounting for additional factors (Kim, 2019). Table 4.2 shows the correlation table including all variables of interest with highly correlated variables highlighted in yellow. Following the correlation table and to align

with Tolbert & Smith's (2005) inclusion of a high school degree or higher variable, I excluded the bachelor's degree variable from the regressions and only included a high school degree or higher variable. Additionally, for the per capita income variable, I converted all dollars to 2024 dollars, accounting for inflation and therefore helping decrease the multicollinearity that initially arose when conducting the quantitative analysis. Finally, I excluded the dummy variable for the presence of a Presidential election due to its high correlation with my governor variable and to align with the Tolbert & Smith's (2012) exclusion of a presidential election variable.

Table 4.2: Correlation

	Female Turnout	Male Turnout	Overall Turnout	Pro Ballot Measure	Res Ballot Measure	Post Dobbs	State	Year	Presidential	Governor	Senate	Election Day Registration	Bachelor's degree	High School Degree	Real Per Capita Income
Female Turnout	1.0000														
Male Turnout	0.9650	1.0000													
Overall Turnout	0.8438	0.8282	1.0000												
Pro Ballot Measure	0.0809	0.0523	0.1040	1.0000											
Res Ballot Measure	-0.0566	-0.0261	-0.0247	-0.0417	1.0000										
Post Dobbs	0.0586	0.0508	0.0790	0.8958	0.2317	1.0000									
State	0.0799	0.0905	0.0259	-0.0461	-0.0327	-0.0470	1.0000								
Year	0.0872	0.1440	0.0084	0.2874	0.0139	0.3059	0.0103	1.0000							
Presidential	0.6679	0.6422	0.7379	0.0801	-0.0827	0.0462	-0.0050	0.0091	1.0000						
Governor	-0.2756	-0.2524	-0.2970	-0.0183	-0.0632	-0.0581	0.0687	-0.0207	-0.4990	1.0000					
Senate	-0.0323	-0.0067	-0.0261	0.0522	0.0808	0.0478	-0.0752	0.0079	-0.0406	0.0575	1.0000				
Election Day Registration	0.2649	0.2867	0.2319	0.0695	-0.0524	0.0572	-0.0219	0.0592	0.0328	0.0755	-0.0726	1.0000			
Bachelor's degree	0.2740	0.2878	0.2525	0.1151	-0.0700	0.0954	-0.0850	0.2740	0.0190	0.0354	-0.0679	0.3392	1.0000		
High School Degree	0.4135	0.4666	0.3239	0.0650	-0.0157	0.0865	0.1301	0.3325	-0.0204	0.1602	-0.0109	0.3904	0.4322	1.0000	
Real Per Capita Income	0.1495	0.1591	0.1660	0.1075	-0.0818	0.0897	-0.0850	0.2936	-0.0220	0.0312	-0.0681	0.3252	0.8528	0.3822	1.0000
Political Lean	-0.1349	-0.1241	-0.1261	-0.0237	0.0773	0.0032	0.1700	0.0627	0.0566	-0.0645	0.1330	-0.2773	-0.7054	-0.1176	-0.5630
White	0.2740	0.3061	0.2325	-0.0586	0.0903	-0.0135	0.3285	-0.0952	0.0035	0.1346	0.0464	0.0914	-0.2463	0.4563	-0.2329
African American	-0.0226	-0.0439	-0.1672	-0.0567	-0.0120	-0.0837	-0.2284	-0.0321	-0.0024	-0.1553	-0.0299	-0.2323	0.1473	-0.3721	0.0337
Asian	-0.1764	-0.1687	-0.1028	0.0208	-0.0760	-0.0058	-0.1661	0.0363	-0.0009	-0.0326	-0.0457	0.1543	0.2294	-0.0161	0.2756
Hispanic	-0.2573	-0.3018	-0.0641	0.1105	-0.0724	0.0758	-0.1313	0.0655	0.0022	-0.0455	-0.0204	0.0049	0.1310	-0.4550	0.1568

	Political Lean	White	African American	Asian	Hispanic
Political Lean	1.0000				
White	0.4054	1.0000			
African American	-0.1421	-0.4286	1.0000		
Asian	-0.4376	-0.6069	-0.0859	1.0000	
Hispanic	-0.2333	-0.6469	-0.1294	0.2277	1.0000

Each of the following three tables show results from the six separate regressions run for each dependent variable. The results column 1 shows the baseline regression run, including only

the dependent variable and independent variables, with no control variables included. Columns two through five show the results of the regressions including the control variables. Each regression is run with a singular control for each racial group to isolate the effect of each racial groups on voter turnout. Results column 2 includes percent White non-Hispanic, results column 3 includes Hispanic or Latino, results column 4 includes African American non-Hispanic, and results column 5 includes Asian non-Hispanic. Finally, results column 6 includes state and year fixed effects as a robustness check. Because the correlation table showed high multicollinearity between independent variables protective ballot measure and post-Dobbs, I combined the four conditions into variables with the following: pre-Dobbs, restrictive measure, pre-Dobbs, protective measure, post-Dobbs, restrictive measure, and post-Dobbs, protective measure. I created three dummy variables to address multicollinearity between the multiple variables, with the reference group being no measure at all.

Table 4.3 provides results from the first six regressions I ran, examining the relationship between overall voter turnout and ballot measure presence.

Table 4.3: Overall Voter Turnout

Dependent Variable: Overall voter turnout (% of everyone who voted)

	(1)		(2)		(3)		(4)		(5)		(6)	
	Coefficient (SE)	P>|t|	Coefficient (SE)	P>|t|	Coefficient (SE)	P>|t|	Coefficient (SE)	P>|t|	Coefficient (SE)	P>|t|	Coefficient (SE)	P>|t|
Pre-Dobbs, Restrictive Measure	0.054	0.247	0.070	0.078	0.076	0.063	0.077	0.057	0.072	0.973	-0.004	0.790
	(0.046)		(0.039)		(0.041)		(0.040)		(0.040)		(0.014)	
Post-Dobbs, Restrictive Measure	-0.091	0.212	-0.151	0.015	-0.134	0.037	-0.141	0.027	-0.144	0.021	0.009	0.685
	(0.073)		(0.062)		(0.064)		(0.063)		(0.062)		(0.022)	
Post-Dobbs, Protective Measure	0.052	0.075	0.050	0.046	0.038	0.146	0.041	0.109	0.038	0.126	-0.004	0.648
	(0.029)		(0.025)		(0.026)		(0.025)		(0.025)		(0.009)	
Governor Election (1=yes)			-0.083	0.000	-0.079	0.000	-0.081	0.000	-0.080	0.000		
			(0.011)		(0.012)		(0.012)		(0.011)			
Senate Election (1=yes)			0.001	0.899	0.001	0.962	0.000	0.971	0.002	0.888		
			(0.012)		(0.012)		(0.012)		(0.012)			
Election Day Registration (1=yes)			0.020	0.109	0.021	0.102	0.019	0.144	0.026	0.039		
			(0.013)		(0.013)		(0.013)		(0.013)			
High School Degree			0.721	0.012	1.561	0.000	1.212	0.000	1.291	0.000		
			(0.286)		(0.296)		(0.257)		(0.241)			
Real Per Capital Income			0.000	0.707	0.000	0.288	0.000	0.572	0.000	0.055		
			(0.000)		(0.000)		(0.000)		(0.000)			
Political Lean (% voted for Republican Senate Candidate)			-0.168	0.003	-0.085	0.121	-0.105	0.055	-0.153	0.007		
			(0.056)		(0.054)		(0.062)		(0.056)			
% White in Tract			0.191	0.000								
			(0.047)									
% Hispanic in Tract					0.076	0.271						
					(0.069)							
% African American in Tract							-0.114	0.063				
							(0.062)					
% Asian in Tract									-0.388	0.001		
									(0.116)			
Constant	0.586	0.00	-0.101	0.662	-0.720	0.005	-0.400	0.073	-0.441	0.033	0.565	0.000
	(0.007)		(0.230)		(0.255)		(0.222)		(0.206)		(0.013)	
Observations	255		255		255		255		255		225	
Adjusted R^2	0.012		0.301		0.258		0.265		0.287		0.932	

The baseline model, model one shown in column one, shows us that when state year does have a protective abortion or reproductive rights measure on the ballot in a post-*Dobbs* year, then that state year is associated with a 5.2 percentage point increase in overall voter turnout. Adding in control variables in regression two, column two, the magnitude of this relationship slightly decreases by .2 percentage points. However, the slopes for post-Dobbs restrictive measure become statistically significant once control variables are added to the baseline model. Negatively-signed coefficients suggest restrictive ballot measure introduced post-Dobbs may be associated with lower voter turnout. While the slopes change in each regression as the racial group independent variable included changes, the relationship shows between a 13.4 and 15.1 percentage point decrease in overall voter turnout in the state year when a there is a restrictive abortion measure in state year post- Dobbs. Prior to *Dobbs*, regressions two through four show that a state year having restrictive measures was associated with an increase in overall voter turnout in that state year. Reexamining research questions one and two after looking at the first

six regressions I ran looking at ballot measures effect on overall voter turnout, including control variables shows that prior to *Dobbs*, overall voter turnout increased in a state in a year when a restrictive measure was on the ballot in that state in that year while the opposite was true after *Dobbs*. Additionally, after *Dobbs*, voter turnout increased in a state in a year when a protective measure was on the ballot in that state in that year.

Interestingly, in regressions two through five, controlling for control variables and varying racial groups, presence of a governor's election in a state year is associated with a slight decrease in overall voter turnout in that state year (7.9 to 8.3 percentage point decrease) and presence of election day voter registration in a state in a year is associated with an increase in overall voter turnout in that state year. Looking at model two where we control for control variables and percent white in the tract, a state in a year having a 1 percent increase in the amount of the population with high school degrees or higher is associated with a 0.721 percent increase in overall voter turnout in that state in that year. Additionally, the magnitude of this relationship increases as we vary what racial group we are controlling for. In models two through five, we see a negative slope on the coefficient for political lean. Specifically, in model two, increasing the percent that voted for the Republican Senate Candidate in a state in a year by 1 percent is associated with a 0.168 percent decrease in overall voter turnout in that state year. Finally, looking at race variables included in Table 4.3, regression two shows us that a 1 percent increase in the percent of white people living in a state in a year is associated with a 0.191% increase in overall voter turnout in the state in the year. Models four and five show negative slopes for their racial groups. This negative association indicates potential barriers to voting. In model four, a 1 percent increase in the percent of African Americans living in the state in a year is associated with a 0.114 percent decrease in overall voter turnout in that state in that year and in

model five we see that a 1 percent increase in the percent of Asians living in the state in a year is associated with a 0.338 percent decrease in voter turnout in that state in that year.

Finally, model six shown in column six includes state and year fixed effects as a robustness check. Fixed effects models can explain a huge amount of variance because they allow us to control for all variables that stay constant within a specific category (Huntington-Klein, 2021). State fixed effects account for time-invariant differences across states and year fixed effects account for changes over time that may affect all states equally (Huntington-Klein, 2021). All of the ballot measure variables are statistically significant in my sixth model and are small in magnitude. The results suggest that state and year fixed effects have substantial explanatory power rather than ballot measure indicators. In other words, the state matters. States shape the environment in which people live and also shape whether or not there will be an abortion or reproductive rights ballot measure. Therefore, it is important to use qualitative tactics in addition to quantitative to understand state specific factors.

I next examined the relationship between voter turnout and reproductive rights ballot measure presence separately for women and men. Table 4.4 provides regression results when the dependent variable is female voter turnout.

Table 4.4: Female Voter Turnout

Dependent Variable: Female voter turnout (% of women who voted)

	(1)		(2)		(3)		(4)		(5)		(6)	
	Coefficient (SE)	P>|t|	Coefficient (SE)	P>|t|	Coefficient (SE)	P>|t|	Coefficient (SE)	P>|t|	Coefficient (SE)	P>|t|	Coefficient (SE)	P>|t|
Pre-Dobbs, Restrictive Measure	0.025	0.516	0.040	0.191	0.040	0.199	0.040	0.199	0.041	0.176	-0.011	0.514
	(0.038)		(0.031)		(0.031)		(0.031)		(0.030)		(0.017)	
Post-Dobbs, Restrictive Measure	-0.059	0.320	-0.112	0.021	-0.105	0.033	-0.096	0.052	-0.110	0.020	-0.025	0.342
	(0.060)		(0.048)		(0.049)		(0.049)		(0.047)		(0.027)	
Post-Dobbs, Protective Measure	0.041	0.085	0.038	0.051	0.039	0.049	0.034	0.089	0.028	0.140	0.011	0.312
	(0.024)		(0.019)		(0.020)		(0.020)		(0.019)		(0.011)	
Governor Election (1=yes)			-0.066	0.000	-0.063	0.000	-0.061	0.000	-0.066	0.000		
			(0.009)		(0.009)		(0.009)		(0.009)			
Senate Election (1=yes)			0.001	0.934	0.001	0.948	-0.001	0.951	0.001	0.889		
			(0.009)		(0.009)		(0.009)		(0.009)			
Election Day Registration (1=yes)			0.017	0.000	0.022	0.027	0.023	0.023	0.023	0.017		
			(0.010)		(0.010)		(0.010)		(0.010)			
High School Degree			0.998	0.000	1.190	0.000	1.620	0.000	1.380	0.000		
			(0.224)		(0.229)		(0.200)		(0.182)			
Real Per Capital Income			0.000	0.341	0.000	0.166	0.000	0.021	0.000	0.066		
			(0.000)		(0.000)		(0.000)		(0.000)			
Political Lean (% voted for Republican Senate Candidate)			-0.157	0.000	-0.109	0.010	-0.086	0.042	-0.172	0.000		
			(0.044)		(0.042)		(0.042)		(0.043)			
% White in Tract			0.140	0.000								
			(0.037)									
% Hispanic in Tract					-0.118	0.027						
					(0.053)							
% African American in Tract							0.104	0.031				
							(0.048)					
% Asian in Tract									-0.451	0.000		
									(0.087)			
Constant	0.583	0.000	-0.281	0.119	-0.359	0.071	-0.755	0.000	-0.482	0.002	0.566	0.000
	(0.005)		(0.180)		(0.197)		(0.173)		(0.156)		(0.016)	
Observations	255		255		255		255		255		225	
Adjusted R^2	0.056		0.357		0.332		0.331		0.385		0.847	

Examining the baseline regression run again in column one with the dependent variable being female voter turnout, we again see that when state year does have a protective abortion or reproductive rights measure on the ballot after the *Dobbs* decision, then that state year is associated with a 4.1 percentage point increase in female voter turnout. Including control variables and varying racial groups, while the magnitudes of this slope change, we continue to see a positive slope where when a state year has a protective abortion or reproductive rights measure on the ballot after *Dobbs*, female voter turnout is higher in that state year. Similarly to regression results found in Table 4.3., Table 4.4. shows that including control variables and varying racial groups in models two through five, as state year has a restrictive measure after the *Dobbs* decision, then that state year is associated with a decrease in female voter turnout.

Looking at other variables that show high levels of statistical significance, we again see that female voter turnout decreases in a state in a year when there is a gubernatorial election in a state in a year across all models that include control variables (columns two through five). This is

likely because when looking at the summary statistics table above, a higher percentage of gubernatorial elections occur during midterm elections. In 2016, 2020, and 2024, only 23.5%, 21.6%, and 21.2% of the states held governor's elections respectively while in 2018 and 2022, 72.5% of states held governor's elections in each year. Therefore, while female voter turnout is lower in states in years when a governor's election is on the ballot, female, male, and overall voter turnout are lower during midterm elections compared to presidential elections. Across regressions two through five, female voter turnout increases in states in years significantly as the percent of the population with a high school degree increases. The magnitude of this relationship is highest in model four when controlling for the percent of the African American population in the tract. In this regression, a 1 percent increase in the percent of the population with a high school degree or higher in a state in a year is associated with a 1.62 percent increase in female voter turnout in that state in that year. Looking at racial groups, models two and four that include percent white and percent African American respectively have positive slopes while models three in five which include percent Hispanic and percent Asian respectively have negative slopes. A one percentage increase in the percent of whites in a state in a year is associated with a 0.14 percent increase in female voter turnout in the state in the year and a one percentage increase in the percent African Americans living in a state in a year is associated with a 0.104 percent increase in female voter turnout in the state in the year. On the other hand, a one percent increase in percent Hispanics living in a state in a year is associated with a 0.118 percent decrease in female voter turnout in that state in that year, and a one percent increase in Asians living in a state in a year is associated with a 0.451 percent decrease in female voter turnout in that state in that year. Interestingly, in regressions two, three, and five when controlling for percent white in tract, percent Hispanic in tract, and percent Asian in tract respectively, political

lean has a negative association with female voter turnout. While the magnitudes of this association vary with regression, increasing the percent that voted for the Republican Senate Candidate by one percent in a state in a year is associated with a 0.172 percent decrease in female voter turnout in the state in the year when including a control for percent Asian in tract.

Finally, Table 4.5 provides the regression results when examining the relationship between male voter turnout and a reproductive rights ballot measure before and after the Dobbs decision.

Table 4.5: Male Voter Turnout

Dependent Variable: Male voter turnout (% of men who voted)

	(1)		(2)		(3)		(4)		(5)		(6)	
	Coefficient (SE)	P>|t|	Coefficient (SE)	P>|t|	Coefficient (SE)	P>|t|	Coefficient (SE)	P>|t|	Coefficient (SE)	P>|t|	Coefficient (SE)	P>|t|
Pre-Dobbs, Restrictive Measure	0.031	0.387	0.045	0.111	0.045	0.120	0.045	0.119	0.046	0.102	-0.007	0.645
	(0.036)		(0.028)		(0.029)		(0.029)		(0.028)		(0.016)	
Post-Dobbs, Restrictive Measure	-0.021	0.705	-0.071	0.113	-0.065	0.148	-0.056	0.214	-0.069	0.116	-0.008	0.757
	(0.056)		(0.044)		(0.045)		(0.045)		(0.044)		(0.025)	
Post-Dobbs, Protective Measure	0.029	0.205	0.025	0.167	0.027	0.140	0.021	0.249	0.016	0.367	0.002	0.857
	(0.023)		(0.018)		(0.018)		(0.018)		(0.017)		(0.010)	
Governor Election (1=yes)			-0.059	0.000	-0.056	0.000	-0.054	0.000	-0.059	0.000		
			(0.008)		(0.008)		(0.008)		(0.008)			
Senate Election (1=yes)			0.005	0.570	0.005	0.583	0.005	0.588	0.005	0.530		
			(0.008)		(0.008)		(0.009)		(0.008)			
Election Day Registration (1=yes)			0.018	0.050	0.023	0.014	0.023	0.012	0.023	0.011		
			(0.009)		(0.009)		(0.009)		(0.009)			
High School Degree			1.098	0.000	1.229	0.000	1.672	0.000	1.447	0.000		
			(0.206)		(0.210)		(0.183)		(0.168)			
Real Per Capital Income			0.000	0.301	0.000	0.172	0.000	0.016	0.000	0.056		
			(0.000)		(0.000)		(0.000)		(0.000)			
Political Lean (% voted for Republican Senate Candidate)			-0.137	0.001	-0.096	0.014	-0.073	0.061	-0.149	0.000		
			(0.040)		(0.039)		(0.039)		(0.039)			
% White in Tract			0.126	0.000								
			(0.034)									
% Hispanic in Tract					-0.124	0.012						
					(0.049)							
% African American in Tract							0.102	0.021				
							(0.044)					
% Asian in Tract									-0.392	0.000		
									(0.081)			
Constant	0.550	0.00	-0.411	0.014	-0.443	0.015	-0.850	0.000	-0.597	0.000	0.526	0.000
	(0.005)		(0.165)		(0.181)		(0.158)		(0.144)		(0.015)	
Observations	255		255		255		255		255		225	
Adjusted R^2	-0.002		0.382		0.363		0.360		0.404		0.842	

I ran all six of the regressions, the baseline regression, four regressions with control variables and varying racial groups, and a final regression using state and year fixed effects, again with male voter turnout as my dependent variable. Looking at the baseline model in column one, none of the variables are close to significantly significant, and therefore, we cannot be certain that having an abortion ballot measure has an impact on male voter turnout. However, the results of this regression still have interesting findings including the relationship between

governor election and male voter turnout, election day registration and male voter turnout, high school degree and male voter turnout, political lean and male voter turnout, and racial groups and male voter turnout.

Regressions two through five when controlling for control variables and racial groups shows that when a state year does have a governor's election, then that state year is associated with a decrease in male voter turnout. While the magnitudes of this relationship vary slightly depending on which racial group we are controlling for, a state having a governor election in a state in a year is associated with a 5.9 percentage point decrease in male voter turnout in state year when controlling for percent white, a 5.6 percentage point decrease in male voter turnout in state year when controlling for percent Hispanic, a 5.4 percentage point decrease in male voter turnout in state year when controlling for percent African American, and a 5.9 percentage point decrease in male voter turnout in state year when controlling for percent Asian. Similarly, in regressions two through five, election day registration has a positive slope. Again, while magnitudes vary depending on which racial group is controlled for, a state allowing election day registration in a year is associated with a 1.8 percentage point increase in male voter turnout in the state in the year when controlling for percent white, and a 2.3 percentage point increase in male voter turnout in the state in the year when controlling for percent Hispanic, percent African American, and percent Asian. Showing that as registration requirements are loosened and people are able to register on the day of the election, male voter turnout increases. Additionally, as people become more educated, a one percent increase in high school degree or high in state year is associated with increased male voter turnout in state year across all models. Also notably, across models two through five, a one percent increase in political lean in state year is associated with a decrease in male voter turnout in state year. A one percentage increase in the percent of

whites in a state in a year is associated with a 0.126 percent increase in male voter turnout in the state in the year and a one percentage increase in the percent African Americans living in a state in a year is associated with a 0.102 percent increase in male voter turnout in the state in the year. On the other hand, a one percent increase in percent Hispanics living in a state in a year is associated with a 0.124 percent decrease in male voter turnout in that state in that year, and a one percent increase in Asians living in a state in a year is associated with a 0.392 percent decrease in female voter turnout in that state in that year.

Conclusion

We find in our baseline model, column one, in Table 4.3, when state year does have a protective abortion or reproductive rights measure on the ballot in a post-*Dobbs* year, then that state year is associated with a 5.2 percentage point increase in overall voter turnout. And when adding in control variables and varying racial groups, while the magnitude of this relationship slightly decreases by 0.2 percentage points, we see a relationship between overall voter turnout and post-*Dobbs*, restrictive measure. Negative coefficients signal that as that as state year does have a restrictive abortion ballot measure after the Dobbs decision, overall voter turnout decreases in that state in that year. We find a similar results when using female voter turnout as our dependent variable. Specifically, our baseline model in Table 4.4 shows us that when state year does have a protective abortion or reproductive rights measure on the ballot after the *Dobbs* decision, then that state year is associated with a 4.1 percentage point increase in female voter turnout. And similarly to regression results found in Table 4.3., Table 4.4. shows that including control variables and varying racial groups in models two through five, as state year has a restrictive measure after the *Dobbs* decision, then that state year is associated with a decrease in female voter turnout. And while examining male voter turnout as our dependent variable in

Table 4.5 did not yield the same results, it produced interesting findings for other variables, including the relationship between governor election and male voter turnout, election day registration and male voter turnout, high school degree and male voter turnout, political lean and male voter turnout, and racial groups and male voter turnout.

Relating regression results back to the literature examined, when controlling for our control variables and varying racial groups, finding a decrease in overall and female voter turnout when a restrictive measure is on the ballot after *Dobbs* aligns with Klinkner's (1993) mobilization theory. Klinkner found that after the U.S. Supreme Court overturned a law, voter turnout decreased. He theorized that this was due to decreased mobilization of the successful party. Relating Klinkner's theory to abortion and reproductive rights interest groups, we expected a decrease in pro-life voter turnout following the overturn of Roe v. Wade caused by decreased mobilization of pro-life groups. Our findings support this claim, with decreased overall and female voter turnout following when a restrictive measure is on the ballot after Dobbs and increased overall and female voter turnout when a protective measure is on the ballot after Dobbs. Given that no such association was found for male voter turnout, one could argue that his theory may have overlooked the role of gender in how voters react to the Supreme Court decision and interest group mobilization.

Ultimately, regressions are models that show relationships between variables, but cannot always explain the complexities that arise when examining how constituents react when confronting a ballot measure that supports or threatens their right to an abortion. While regressions are a great starting point for understanding how citizens react through voter turnout, it is also important to speak with constituents to really understand their thoughts and motives. While the regressions above help us answer our first research question and its sub-questions in

understanding how citizens may respond to interest groups strategies, organizations, and activities in passing or defeating ballot measures, readers should interpret the results with the understanding that the political and social conditions on which reproductive rights measures rest can alter and greatly change future responses to ballot measures and voter turnouts in return. In the next chapter, the voices of reproductive rights leaders on the ground addressing abortion policies are heard.

Chapter Five: Qualitative Findings

Speaking with reproductive rights interest group leaders provides researchers with direct experiences of how interest groups strategize, organize, and act when seeking to advance abortion or reproductive rights ballot measures. By learning about the experiences of reproductive rights interest group leaders interviewed as they sought to advance abortion or reproductive rights ballot measures in their respective states, we can 1) identify how reproductive rights interest groups' strategies, organization, and actions may differ from framework used by non-morality interest groups, and 2) uncover new findings that might not emerge without speaking with reproductive rights interest group leaders directly. Paying attention to the changing context surrounding their roles, I also sought to understand how interest groups operate when advancing an abortion or reproductive rights ballot measure and to assess if their strategies, structures, and/or activities changed before and after the *Dobbs* decision. Learning how reproductive rights interest groups operate can not only inform broader scholarship about how interest groups operate, but can also inform how interest groups focused on highly salient, highly controversial interests operate, specifically when advancing ballot measures.

In what follows, I discuss findings from 13 interviews I conducted with 14 people from August 1, 2025, to November 21, 2025. My two qualitative research questions that I examine are:

1. In what ways, if any, did interest group strategies, organization, and activities to add measures to ballots and promote passage of ballot measures regarding abortion or reproductive rights differ from more traditional strategies employed to add measures to ballots and promote passage of state ballot measures?

2. How did interest group strategies, organization, and activities to add measures to ballots and promote passage of ballot measures expanding/protecting abortion or reproductive rights vary pre- and post- *Dobbs* decision?

I begin by discussing similarities and differences between how reproductive rights interest groups strategize, organize, and act compared to non-morality interest groups to explore how reproductive rights interest group operations align with or differ from the literature. I continue the discussion of the framework developed through the literature review and compare how reproductive rights interest groups fit into this mold. I then discuss external pressures and specifically how the role of national influence, fetal viability, and dark money may influence state-level policies, before concluding. In sum, through this chapter I aim to increase the reader's understanding of how interest groups operate when advancing a highly salient, highly controversial ballot measure and expand scholarship on both interest groups and ballot measures.

Interviewees

In the following chapter, I discuss how my 13 interviews with 14 participants inform current scholarship on how interest groups operate when advancing ballot measures. Of my 14 participants, five were from Ohio, four were from Maryland, one was from Montana, two were from Arizona, and two were from Missouri. While each interview was scheduled for 45 minutes, most lasted about one hour and some lasted up to an hour and a half. All interviewees can be considered "interest group leaders". While some led branches of large organizations such as Planned Parenthood, others led smaller abortion funds or grassroots organizations. One participant was a state delegate and two led opposition movements against their state's ballot measures, which will be discussed further in the Emergent Findings section of this chapter. All interviewees considered themselves advocates for reproductive rights and some discussed

reproductive justice. All interviewees have focused their careers on abortion or reproductive rights – one interviewee transitioned from an abortion care provider to a reproductive rights ballot measure activist immediately following *Dobbs*. Interviewees from Ohio and Maryland led their state's ballot measure process. Interviewees in Arizona and Montana were initially coalition leaders on their states ballot measure process and then were silenced as Planned Parenthood took control from coalitions. Interviewees in Missouri initially were involved with Planned Parenthood until disagreements erupted and then became leaders in the fight against the measure. Ultimately, all interviewees were heavily involved in their states ballot measure process and fought hard for reproductive rights in their state. Interviewees volunteered themselves to be interviewed or were recommended by others through snowball sampling. While this dissertation would have benefited from the inclusion of more voices, difficulties in gathering research participants limited my sample size. Despite the limited sample size, I was able to draw conclusions about how reproductive rights interest groups operate from the interviews I conducted, which I discuss in the following sections. Further discussion of interviewee qualifications can be found in Chapter 3.

Framework and Transferability

To make sense of how reproductive rights interest groups may be similar or different from interest groups in the literature examined, I developed interview questions based on the key framework devised from the literature review. I then summarized and analyzed interview findings by question and cross compared responses by responded as well as how reproductive rights interest group responses are similar or different from the framework discussed in Chapter 2. I discuss results in the following sections and accompanying Tables 5.1-5.3.

Strategy

First, I focused my interview questions on reproductive rights interest group strategies when advancing their ballot measures to determine how they differ from non-morality policy interest groups. Table 5.1 compares reproductive rights interest group strategies with those discovered through literature. Column one shows the various strategies that non-morality policy interest groups use, in chronological order of how they are typically utilized according to the literature. Column two includes check marks for strategies that non-morality policy interest groups partake in when advancing a ballot measure and column three includes check marks for strategies that non-morality policy interest groups use when defeating a measure according to the literature. Column four adds check marks for how reproductive rights interest groups told me they strategize when advancing an abortion or reproductive rights ballot measure. Altogether, this table illustrates the similarities and differences between how non-morality policy interest groups and reproductive rights interest groups strategize. Because I did not speak with any reproductive rights interest groups attempting to strike down a restrictive ballot measure nor any pro-life activists attempting to strike down a protective ballot measure, some rows in column four are labeled "N/A".

Table 5.1: How Reproductive Rights Interest Group Strategies Compare to Non-Morality Policy Interest Group Strategies When Advancing State-Level Ballot Measures

Strategies	To Advance Measure	To Defeat Measure	Abortion/Reproductive Rights
Have clear priorities of objectives	✓ (Rosenstein et al., 1974)	✓ (Rosenstein et al., 1974)	✓
Recognize that a ballot measure is the best way to advance priorities	✓ (Laposata et al., 2014)		✓ (Described as the only way to protect reproductive rights in states)
Recognize that an interest group is seeking to propose a ballot measure that goes against advancing one's own priorities		✓ (Laposata et al., 2014)	N/A (Did not examine)

Determine if wanting to amend, create, or veto referendum	✓ (Rosenstein et al., 1974; Stratmann, 2005)		✓ (Determined by what the state-by-state laws are. In my interviewee's states, all were constitutional amendments. OH, MT, AZ, and MO were citizen-led and MD was legislatively-led)
Determine if want to try to defeat opposition's strategy or if want to propose own measure (take care as the latter may confuse constituents)		✓ (Rosenstein et al., 1974; Stratmann, 2005)	N/A (Did not examine)
Determine if going to take positive or negative strategy - Positive: staying positive and trying to persuade people why your priorities are correct - Negative: talking negatively about the priorities that the opposition is taking	✓ (Rosenstein et al., 1974; Stratmann, 2005; Hugh-Jones, 2010)	✓ (Rosenstein et al., 1974; Stratmann, 2005; Hugh-Jones, 2010)	✓
Consider what framing strategy to use - i.e., how to condense relevant data on the topic and what and how specifically to show constituents	✓ (Fisher, 2017; Seiders et al., 2021; George, 2019)	✓ (Fisher, 2017; Seiders et al., 2021; George, 2019)	✓
Consult legal experts on priorities	✓ (Laposata et al., 2014)	✓ (Laposata et al., 2014)	✓
Form a campaign team and create a strategy in an attempt to stay ahead of the opposition. Include well-versed lobbyists on this team. Try to be proactive throughout process instead of reactive	✓ (Laposata et al., 2014; Clark & Liebig, 1996; Rosenstein et al., 1974)	✓ (Laposata et al., 2014; Clark & Liebig, 1996; Rosenstein et al., 1974)	✓ (However, interviewees shared that is hard to stay proactive)

Throughout all interviews, it was clear that reproductive rights interest groups have clear priorities when passing a protective reproductive rights ballot measure, recognize that a ballot measure is the only way to enshrine their priorities in the state's constitution, and are either heavily involved with a coalition or recognize that there is a reproductive rights coalition in their state. All three of these findings align with how the literature discussed non-morality policy interest groups begin their strategy.

Interviewees shared their desire to have an abortion ballot initiative before the *Dobbs* decision, with eight interviewees explaining that the fall of *Roe* was the driving factor for the measure to be on the ballot more urgently. In Ohio specifically, one interviewee told me that having an abortion/reproductive rights ballot initiative in the state had been talked about for 20-25 years, but once *Roe* fell, the reproductive rights coalition in the state knew that they no longer had a choice and that they had to act (Interviewee B). Reproductive rights leaders across Ohio, Arizona, and Missouri saw a ballot initiative as the only way to fix bans and trigger laws that were imposed following *Dobbs*. However, while reproductive rights leaders felt that a ballot measure was needed to advance their priorities, they did not necessarily think that it was the best way. An Ohio interviewee told me that there was simply no way of getting a reproductive rights measure through the Republican legislature and that they were scared of going through the courts, saying that the Republican Ohio Supreme Court "may be less willing to agree that the state's constitution already protected abortion" (Interviewee D). Therefore, they and others in the coalition felt that their only option to advance their priorities was through a ballot measure. While an abortion ballot measure was talked about in Montana prior to *Dobbs*, the reproductive rights coalition was waiting for the right time to pass the measure. There was not the same sense of immediate urgency to pass a ballot initiative because, following *Dobbs*, Montana's constitution was still protecting the right to an abortion in the state. While their desire was also to explicitly protect reproductive freedom in Montana's constitution, prior to putting a measure on the ballot they wanted to 1) add more tribal leadership to the table, 2) include a gender equality statement in the measure, and 3) ensure a fetal viability clause was not included to avoid any restrictions on abortion.

Therefore, when asked about main strategies and main objectives in seeking to advance the reproductive rights measure in their state, abortion leaders had clear answers. While each answer was state dependent such as stopping the 6-week abortion ban in Ohio, stopping the 15-week abortion ban in Arizona, and stopping trigger laws in Missouri, the main underlying objective and strategy was to protect the right to abortion in their state. As abortion and reproductive rights were increasingly attacked after the *Dobbs* decision, reproductive rights interest groups sought to protect "individuals right and access to abortion, reproductive rights more broadly, and providers ability to perform an abortion" (Interviewee A). Other states' interest groups had similar sentiments, stating that their main strategies and priorities were to protect reproductive rights in their state. Despite not always agreeing with the measure put forward on the ballot in their state, reproductive rights leaders were adamant that the goal of a reproductive rights ballot measure should be to protect abortion in the state. Maryland is an outlier compared to the other four states, because Maryland's constituency is very heavily Democrat and abortion is already protected. Therefore, their goal was more to protect abortion in their state in the future, rather than to change current laws. One interviewee told me that despite being a very Democratic state and already having protective laws on abortion, their main reasoning for passing a ballot measure in the 2024 election was to enshrine abortion in the state's constitution if there were ever a federal ban. They said that "if there is ever a federal ban on abortion, having a constitutional amendment in Maryland will tie things up in court and buy people time. Providers can leave the state and overall people will just have more time, clinics will have more time to function because things will be tied up in court" (Interviewee F). Similarly to how literature explained non-morality policy interest groups have clear priorities when advancing or defeating ballot measures, reproductive rights interest groups described clear

priorities and objectives. Despite increased urgency within states to have an abortion or reproductive rights following the overturn of *Roe v. Wade,* strategies and objectives for the measures were determined long before *Dobbs*.

Reproductive rights interest groups also devised a framing strategy and whether or not to take a positive or negative stance similarly to non-morality policy interest groups. They also hired polling firms and experts to help determine their best strategy. Abortion is different from other topics which may have a ballot measure because people do not need to be taught what an abortion is. Rather, people feel that "abortion is personal" (Interviewee A). So when devising a framing strategy, multiple interviewees discussed how they focused on messaging that would not confuse people while "picking their battles" on which pro-life lies to extinguish. They wanted to inform people about the benefits and impacts of the measures rather than confusing them with the specific features. All interviewees mentioned wanting people to know how the specific ballot measure in their state impacted the people living in that state. In deciding whether to take a positive or negative stance, interest groups in Maryland, Ohio, Montana, and Missouri focused on clear messaging from real people, opposed to physicians explaining how the ballot measure would help them. To combat the negative or misleading statements that the opposition was putting out, advocates in all four of these states also released statements and factsheets outlining misinformation from the opposition and explaining how the measure would actually impact the constituency. When asked about how interest groups stay proactive during the fight for reproductive rights measures on the ballot, I quickly learned that opinions are mixed on whether or not this is possible given the immense amount of opinions and noise surrounding the measures. Some interest groups considered themselves proactive in legally adding protections which did not exist prior to the measure while others viewed the entire ballot measure process as

reactive, responding to rights being taken away post-*Dobbs*. Ultimately, when it came to strategizing, reproductive rights interest groups appeared to follow similar methods as the literature told us non-morality policy interest groups follow. However, this sense of chaos, reactivity, and rapidly changing laws that force decisions was not discussed in the literature on ballot measures and interest groups. Therefore, while we cannot be certain that it does not occur when advancing or defeating other measures, interest groups focused on abortion or reproductive rights may have to move quicker and remain more vigilant than others when it comes to advancing ballot measures because of how quickly abortion protections and restrictions are changing state-by-state.

Reproductive rights interest group leaders in Maryland and Ohio also discussed the use of tailored messaging throughout their campaign and attributed great success to the passage of the measure to it. Maryland's constituency is significantly more Democrat than Republican. In fact, as of January 2026, Democrats had 2.2 million active registrants, while Republicans had 1 million active registrants and 1 million remained unaffiliated (Maryland Board of Elections Voter Registration, 2026). However, rural Maryland's Allegany County and Garrett County are largely Republican, with the two counties having over a 2:1 ratio Republican to Democrat and over a 4:1 ratio Republican to Democrat respectively (Maryland Board of Elections Voter Registration, 2026). Therefore, Maryland reproductive rights leaders discussed the need to tailor messaging to specific demographics of the constituency, stating that what works in most of Maryland, won't work in Allegany and Garrett Counties. Tailoring their messaging to discuss the need for an abortion ballot measure in Democratic Maryland and the need to keep the government out of healthcare decisions in rural Maryland, is what caused the ballot measure to pass in all counties in Maryland aside from Garrett County where yes votes in favor of the

reproductive rights ballot measure had 48.8% of the vote according to the Maryland reproductive rights leaders I spoke with. Ohio reproductive rights interest group leaders also discussed tailoring their messaging and their outreach to specific demographics of the constituency. The Planned Parenthood interviewee explained how Planned Parenthood gives a score to every individual living in the state for how likely they are to support reproductive rights. They then made sure that people who scored highly were aware of the ballot measure and targeted voters whose scores were between 40-60 to persuade them to vote. The interviewee explained how anyone who ranked less than 37 on the Planned Parenthood score was never going to support the ballot measure and therefore Planned Parenthood did not reach out to them. Ohio interest groups also discussed different methods such as organizing on college campuses to encourage young voters to register and vote, as well as conducting activities such as door knocking, mail, and phone banking to overrepresent black voters in direct voter communication. Planned Parenthood's ranking and targeting is somewhat aligned with Stratmann's (2005) campaign finance theory. He argued that in ballot measure campaigns, interest groups spend a majority of their campaign money on advertising "in geographic areas where they believe they have to overcome a lot of negative sentiment, while they spend little in places where they know that voters will support the measure regardless of how much groups advertise" (Stratman, 2005, p. 1042). However, Planned Parenthood's strategy of ensuring those they know will support them vote and trying to persuade the middle group does not exactly align with Stratmann's theory. While Planned Parenthood was not spending campaign finances on trying to get those they know would support them to support them, they were spending campaign finances on making sure that their supporters knew about the campaign. Additionally, instead of advertising mainly in areas with negative sentiment, Planned Parenthood focused on the median group in their campaign and

ignored the low support potential voters. Ultimately, while interest groups in both states had different approaches to get people to vote for their reproductive rights ballot measure, both tailored their messaging to different audiences within the state, a strategy that was not discussed by literature on non-morality policy interest groups but one that is likely used or would be beneficial to use in all ballot measure campaigns.

Organization

Next, I focused my interview questions on how reproductive rights interest groups organize themselves when advancing their ballot measures to determine how they differ from non-morality policy interest groups. Table 5.2 compares reproductive rights interest group organization with those discovered through literature. As in Table 5.1, column one shows the various ways that non-morality policy interest groups organize themselves when advancing or defeating ballot measures, in chronological order of how they are typically organized according to the literature. Column two includes check marks for ways non-morality policy interest groups organize themselves when advancing a ballot measure and column three includes check marks for ways non-morality policy interest groups organize themselves when defeating a measure according to the literature. Column four adds check marks for how reproductive rights interest groups told me they organize themselves when advancing an abortion or reproductive rights ballot measure. Altogether, this table illustrates the similarities and differences between how non-morality policy interest groups and reproductive rights interest groups organize themselves. Because I did not speak with any reproductive rights interest groups attempting to strike down a restrictive ballot measure nor any pro-life activists attempting to strike down a protective ballot measure, some rows in column four are labeled “N/A”.

Table 5.2: How Reproductive Rights Interest Groups Organize Themselves Compared to Non-Morality Policy Interest Group Organization When Advancing State-Level Ballot Measures

Organization	To Advance Measure	To Defeat Measure	Abortion/Reproductive Rights
Form central organization if interest group does not already exist	✓ (Laposata et al., 2014)	✓ (Laposata et al., 2014)	✓
Invite members and accept donations from supporters	✓ (Laposata et al., 2014)	✓ (Laposata et al., 2014)	✓
Appoint president and leadership	✓ (Laposata et al., 2014)	✓ (Laposata et al., 2014)	✓
Set up local team - with campaign directors, media team, education committee - be sure to include subject matter experts on committees	✓ (Rosenstein et al., 1974)	✓ (Rosenstein et al., 1974)	✓
Recruit organizations and nonprofits to join the cause	✓ (Laposata et al., 2014)	✓ (Laposata et al., 2014)	✓
Consider joining a coalition with other like-minded interest groups	✓ (Lowry & Krummenacher, 2017; Lin & Patraporn, 2023)	✓ (Lowry & Krummenacher, 2017; Lin & Patraporn, 2023)	✓ (Abortion coalitions exist in all states I interviewed people from - interviewees were all part of the coalitions)
Encourage members to donate and invite new members to join	✓ (Laposata et al., 2014; Stratmann, 2006; Bowler & Hanneman, 2006)	✓ (Laposata et al., 2014; Stratmann, 2006; Bowler & Hanneman, 2006)	✓
Ask organizations and nonprofits for endorsements	✓ (Laposata et al., 2014; Burnett & Kogan, 2015)	✓ (Laposata et al., 2014; Burnett & Kogan, 2015)	✓ (Somewhat)
Train speakers for all public speaking events	✓ (Rosenstein et al., 1974)	✓ (Rosenstein et al., 1974)	✓

I found that reproductive rights interest groups organize themselves and their coalition to best advance an abortion or reproductive rights ballot measure similarly to how non-morality

policy interest groups organize themselves. I found that prior to the *Dobbs* decision, there was an abortion/reproductive rights coalition in each state in which I interviewed people. Following *Dobbs*, I found that these coalitions grew, adding smaller grassroots organizations and abortion funds to join the fight for the ballot measure. However, despite all having coalitions, each states' coalition acted differently when advancing their reproductive rights ballot initiative. In Ohio, the coalition had an Executive Committee which included leaders of six organizations and required buy-in from each member of the coalition to have a member on the Executive Committee. The buy-in was $100,000 for smaller organizations and $150,000 for Planned Parenthood and ACLU Ohio, since they had more money to spend. Additionally, to have a member join the Advisory Committee and help oversee the Executive Committee, the buy-in was $1,000,000. While the Executive Committee were the only members who could vote on budget and hiring personnel, there were other committees within the coalition that helped advance the Executive Committee and Advisory Committee's priorities. These committees included: communications, policy to oversee polling and analysis of language, and field for managing staff and volunteers, all overseen by the Executive Committee. Montana's reproductive rights coalition is designed with a different approach in mind, specifically by not requiring a "pay-to-play" method. They feel that eliminating the "pay-to-play" method allows smaller grassroots organizations to be involved in decision making. Maryland's ballot measure was legislatively led, where coalition members equipped delegates with talking points and asked the delegates to "get the word out" about the measure (Interviewee K). Therefore, while all reproductive rights interest groups organized themselves in conjunction with their coalition, they all had separate ways of doing so – a discovery that was not discussed in the literature on non-morality policy interest groups.

However, coalitions do not always stick together and agree entirely on ballot measures. While infighting within coalitions was not discussed in the literature, we cannot be certain that this does not happen when advancing other ballot measures. I discuss the issue in further detail in the Emergent Findings of Interest section of this chapter, but in Montana, Missouri, Arizona and Maryland, the coalitions changed for their 2024 reproductive rights ballot measure. In Montana, Planned Parenthood withdrew from the coalition. In Arizona, smaller organizations were kicked out of their coalition for disagreeing on the measure. In Missouri, an underground coalition was formed to try to defeat the measure, where current members who were still involved with Planned Parenthood but disagreed with the measure and former Planned Parenthood leadership and interest group members worked together against the measure. In Maryland, there was a struggle for power. Specifically, while the Freedom in Reproduction-Maryland (FIRM) coalition led by Planned Parenthood claim credit for passage of Maryland's 2024 ballot measure, this is discredited by reproductive rights leaders in the state. While Planned Parenthood wanted a ballot initiative in Maryland in 2024, their lack of action to gather members for the coalition and organize testimony on the measure led to Reproductive Justice Maryland leading the charge in organizing and passing the measure. Ultimately, while each of the coalition's officially had leadership and organization, there was chaos within each of the coalitions.

Activities

I next focused interview questions on how reproductive rights interest groups act when advancing their ballot measures to determine how they differ from non-morality policy interest groups. Table 5.3 compares reproductive rights interest group activities with those discovered through literature. Finally, similarly to in Tables 5.1 and 5.2, in Table 5.3 column one shows the various activities that non-morality policy interest groups use, in chronological order of how they

are typically utilized according to the literature. Column two includes check marks for activities that non-morality policy interest groups partake in when advancing a ballot measure and column three includes check marks for activities that non-morality policy interest groups use when defeating a measure according to the literature. Column four adds check marks for activities reproductive rights interest groups told me they use when advancing an abortion or reproductive rights ballot measure. Altogether, this table illustrates the similarities and differences between activities non-morality policy interest groups and reproductive rights interest groups use when advancing a ballot measure. Because I did not speak with any reproductive rights interest groups attempting to strike down a restrictive ballot measure nor any pro-life activists attempting to strike down a protective ballot measure, some rows in column four are labeled "N/A".

Table 5.3: How Reproductive Rights Interest Group Activities Compare to Non-Morality Policy Interest Group Activities When Advancing State-Level Ballot Measures

Activities	To Advance Measure	To Defeat Measure	Abortion/Reproductive Rights
Send newsletters quarterly to members with updates on legislation, measures that have come out, and updates, etc.	✓ (Laposata et al., 2014)	✓ (Laposata et al., 2014)	✓
Work with focus groups and poll people to get sense of public opinion and wording that resonates best with people to use when drafting ballot measure	✓ (Lee & Green, 2024; Laposata et al., 2014; Burnett & Kogan, 2015; Lin & Patraporn, 2023; Weller, 1998; Lorz, 1984)		✓
Work with focus groups and poll people to get sense of public opinion to understand the public's desires and current understanding of the issue - consider doing this multiple times		✓ (Lee & Green, 2024; Laposata et al., 2014; Burnett & Kogan, 2015; Lin & Patraporn, 2023; Weller, 1998; Lorz, 1984)	N/A (Did not examine)
Distribute whitepapers to state's legislator to gain legislator support and get publicity for cause - seeking to sway public opinion	✓ (Laposata et al., 2014; Clark & Liebig, 1996)	✓ (Laposata et al., 2014; Clark & Liebig, 1996)	No

Draft measure	✓ (Clark & Liebig, 1996)		✓
Gain access to measure before it becomes public if possible and point out issues to try to make it fail - be sure to wait until timing is right (if you notice a mistake in oppositions strategy/on their measure, you may want to wait to point it out until it is closer to election day so that they cannot change it easily)		✓ (Laposata et al., 2014)	N/A (Did not examine)
Gather signatures to get measure on ballot	✓ (Adams, 2012; Rosenstein et al., 1974)		✓ (Along with canvassing for signatures and votes)
Testify in front of state legislator committee if possible	✓ (Laposata et al., 2014; Clark & Liebig, 1996)	✓ (Laposata et al., 2014; Clark & Liebig, 1996)	✓ (This only happened in MD – it is required for MD law)
Publish reports to be seen by public	✓ (Laposata et al., 2014)	✓ (Laposata et al., 2014)	✓
Hold conferences to gain support of other interest groups, organizations and nonprofits, and hopefully state legislative members	✓ (Laposata et al., 2014)	✓ (Laposata et al., 2014)	(Did not hold, but attended and spoke at conferences)
Create ads and gather as much attention as possible, debate on TV if necessary	✓ (Stratmann, 2005; Damore & Nicholson, 2013; Fisher, 2017)	✓ (Stratmann, 2005; Damore & Nicholson, 2013; Fisher, 2017)	✓
Remain vigilant to what opposition is doing - critically scrutinize all actions and make sure you are addressing any major comments/issues	✓ (Rosenstein et al., 1974)	✓ (Rosenstein et al., 1974)	✓
Hopefully have measure pass, otherwise regroup, create new marking plan, and try again	✓ (Laposata et al., 2014)		✓
Hopefully have measure fail, otherwise regroup, create new marking plan, and		✓	✓

try to either have the measure taken away or amend the current law	(Laposata et al., 2014)	(For some interest groups who were hoping for the measure to fail, drafting strategy for a new measure)

Reproductive rights interest groups appear to follow similar activities as non-morality policy interest groups when advancing their priorities through ballot measures. Interviewees discussed: the use of newsletters to engage with supporters and keep them informed; working with focus groups and polling people to best determine public opinion; drafting the measure; signature gathering; testifying to state legislatures in Maryland; publishing reports; creating ads across various platforms including on television, radio, mail, door-to-door canvassing, phone banking, and texting; and remaining vigilant about what opposition is saying and releasing statements and material to counter the opposing narrative.

Interviewees discussed various methods of gathering support for signatures and the measure as a whole. While only one activist I spoke with discussed printing and sending newsletters to engage with supporters, many others discussed using email communication to regularly update and engage supporters. They published letters and fact sheets for the public, some to explain the benefits of advancing the reproductive rights ballot measure and designed specifically to discredit the disinformation from the opposition (Interviewee G; Interviewee I). Interest groups utilized both paid and unpaid advertising, including television, digital ads (such as ads on Hulu and other streaming platforms), mail, radio, door knocking with volunteers, phone banking with volunteers, texting, and social media campaigns, consistent with activities of non-morality policy interest groups discovered through the literature. There was earned media where coalition leadership were invited to do interviews, press conferences, podcasts, national news, and nightly news, and could share their message more to a wider platform. While not discussed in the literature, reproductive rights leaders interviewed attributed door-to-door

canvassing as playing a major role in helping them advance the ballot measure. This included door knocking and asking people to vote as well as distributing flyers directly to people's houses. Additionally, while the reproductive rights interest groups that I spoke with did not hold conferences themselves, five interviewees across Ohio, Maryland, and Missouri did discuss going on the conference circuit and speaking at conferences. There were no whitepapers published and there was no use of AI due to the sensitive nature of reproductive rights. So, while reproductive rights interest groups appear to follow most of the same activities as non-morality policy interest groups when advancing ballot measures, some of the activities were not used. This could be because the activities were either not considered, seen as unbeneficial, or because they had the potential to violate a protection of the reproductive rights movement - AI violating anonymity.

Interest groups from every single state I spoke with discussed using polling firms and focus groups to best determine public opinion, consistent with how non-morality policy interest groups utilize polling. They shared stories about how in Ohio, the general public responded best to messaging from regular people instead of from physicians, and how stories about exceptional cases where people needed later term abortions for health reasons and were forced to leave the state made people want to vote yes to Issue 1 (Interviewee B). Interviewees also discussed using polling to draft the ballot measure language in all five states where I interviewed people. According to the pollsters, using the word "abortion" was a strong predictor of having people vote in favor of the measure while using gender language in the initiative gave the opposition an opportunity to twist the wording (Interviewee H). Interviewees also discussed using polling as a way to determine their outreach strategy, and specifically to determine where there is high voter turnout and where people who typically vote for Republican candidates may be willing to vote

for abortion (Interviewee E). Finally, interviewees in Montana, Missouri, and Arizona all discussed issues with polling, specifically citing framing issues and low margins between wordings where either would pass, but one imposed a restriction on abortion which I discuss further in the Emergent Findings of Interest section of this chapter. While the literature discussed the use of polling as a beneficial way for non-morality policies to advance their strategies, activities, and gain as much support for their measure as possible, some reproductive rights interest groups found polling to be inaccurate and detrimental to the reproductive rights movement.

Differences and Similarities Between Reproductive Rights and Non-Morality Strategies, Organization, and Activities

While the framework devised from the literature and answers to strategy, organization, and activity specific questions seem like reproductive rights interest groups and non-morality policy interest groups align, it may be more complicated than that. At the end of each interview, I asked all interviewees if they had worked on other ballot measures that were not related to reproductive rights and if so, how they differed. After asking each interviewee specifically about the difference between advancing a reproductive rights ballot measure and a non-morality policy ballot measure, the four interviewees who had worked on other measures explained that there are vital differences between the two.

The main difference between advancing reproductive rights ballot measures and non-morality policy ballot measures identified by reproductive rights leaders is the immense feeling of being personally invested in the cause. One of my interviewees who led Issue 1 in Ohio explained to me that "reproductive rights is more coalition and community led. In other campaigns, you care, but you're further away from the issue and the impact" (Interviewee A).

They further explained that in other ballot measure campaigns, outside people are brought in to help advance the measure, and therefore, extend the feeling of lack of personal connection. Whereas on reproductive rights campaigns, they explained that if Ohio's Issue 1 failed, they would have felt entirely responsible for Ohioans losing access to abortion, demonstrating the personal connection they felt with the measure and the weight that the measure has on people's lives. Another interviewee explained that reproductive rights ballot measures are extremely different from other ballot measures they have worked on because abortion ballot measures and the reproductive movement as a whole talks about "compromises on people's lives" (Interviewee J). They further explained this extends the sense of personal investment and responsibility in the measure because the activist wants to protect people and "denormalize compromise" (Interviewee J). In all of the literature that I reviewed on interest groups and ballot measures, there was no discussion of the immense feeling of connection that interest groups had with their ballot measure.

Another interesting difference between abortion/reproductive rights ballot measures and other ballot measures is the saliency of abortion. Multiple interviewees said that during their campaigns, constituents already knew what abortion was and had an opinion on whether they wanted it to be protected in their state. Interviewees then said that their job was mainly focused on eliminating any falsehoods in the voters' perceptions of what a reproductive rights ballot would do and providing ways in which the normal person could benefit from having abortion be legal in their state. One interviewee also explained this saliency as a difference between abortion ballot measures and others they have worked on. They explained that in other measures, the interest group has to spend more time explaining what the measure is since people do not necessarily have the same underlying understanding (Interviewee K). So, while the literature

discussed interest groups strategies and activities to inform voters about the measure, reproductive rights interest groups informed voters differently. Rather than providing information about what the measure is, they instead explained to the voter how the measure affects them.

External Pressures

In the following section, I discuss findings of interest that emerged through the interviews. While the findings emerged through interviews with reproductive rights ballot measure interest groups, these findings may not necessarily be unique to reproductive rights interest groups and, therefore, may be present when advancing a non-morality policy ballot measure. Additionally, these findings may be emerging because I am studying about interest groups and morality politics specifically related to ballot measures, an area of research that has not been studied much previously. Therefore, while these findings may be present non-morality policy ballot measures, they may also reflect the unique aspects of the study sample put together in this dissertation.

National Influence

As interviews progressed, a theme started to emerge of national influence on state abortion or reproductive rights ballot measures. While it had appeared that the reproductive rights coalitions wanted abortion ballot measures, I was also hearing comments like "abortion people didn't want to have a ballot initiative because it brings out the crazies. Speaker Michael Bush really was the one who wanted it" (Interviewee F). During my interview with the Montana reproductive rights interest group member, I was told explicitly about the national influence on reproductive rights ballot measures in the 2024 election. She told me that while the Montana reproductive rights coalition had been talking about having an abortion ballot initiative, they

were waiting to guarantee that their measure 1) had more tribal leadership at the table, 2) contained no fetal viability limit, and 3) included gender equality. Despite abortion being attacked at the national level and in various states across the country, abortion was protected in Montana, creating no immediate sense of urgency for their coalition to have a ballot measure in 2024. However, "big national democratic powers" took over and told the Montana coalition that they needed an abortion ballot initiative to help Jon Tester win his Senate election (Interviewee I). According to my interviewee, Democrats were observing that in other states that abortion ballot measures were passing, and thought that if Montana had a ballot initiative on abortion, more voters would show up to support the initiative and in turn, would also vote for Tester. While the coalition still said no in Montana, Planned Parenthood, both nationally and locally in Montana, secretly went behind the coalition's back and submitted the 2024 abortion ballot initiative. Ultimately, when the rest of the reproductive rights coalition in Montana discovered what Planned Parenthood had done, they decided to have a vote on whether or not Planned Parenthood could remain in the coalition, and in turn, Planned Parenthood withdrew themselves. This national influence in the 2024 election cycle also occurred in Arizona and Missouri. In Montana and Missouri, the Democratic Senate Nominee lost, but won in Arizona.

While not in discussion with ballot initiative literature, Anzia (2022) finds through her limited literature review (because she also notes that not much literature is available on interest groups at the state-level) that interest groups do get involved in local politics. Anzia discusses scenarios where large non-morality policy organizations became involved in local-level politics to advance their priorities though influencing local elections or housing development laws, showing that while not widely researched, there is national influence on state-level policies. Anzia suggests that the lack of research is not due to the influence of the findings but rather on

the lack of a clear network of other researchers studying national influence on local politics. Relating Anzia's (2022) discussion of national influence on local politics to my interview findings of national organization involvement on state-level ballot initiatives, it is clear that this level of national influence is present in non-morality politics. Therefore, while not discussed in any literature reviewed, national politics involvement in state-level politics signifies a likelihood of national politics also being involved in state-level ballot measures beyond the involvement found in this dissertation.

Fetal Viability

While noting that national players persuaded at least three states to have an abortion ballot measure when the state-level abortion coalition did not necessarily want one in that election cycle, it is important to note the impact that these measures had on reproductive rights in the state. In Montana, Arizona, and Missouri, Planned Parenthood, with help from the ACLU, wrote and submitted the abortion ballot measures following national influence.

Planned Parenthood does not provide abortions past fetal viability, even in states like Maryland whose laws allow for abortions throughout all stages of pregnancy (Planned Parenthood, 2024; Maryland State Board of Elections, 2024). Planned Parenthood used the same polling firm nationally to determine ballot measure language, a move that received a lot of criticism from interviewees. Interviewees explained that the polling firm asked leading questions and ignored results from other polls. They asked the public "at what point the government should be involved" instead of "should the government be involved," leading people to think there should be a point in which the government should be involved in healthcare decisions (Interviewee J). They also did not poll people on whether a measure that did not include fetal viability language would pass. In Arizona, interviewees that I spoke with conducted polling

themselves to determine if fetal variability language was necessary for the measure to pass. In their polling, they found that people overwhelmingly choose the no-limit clause over the fetal-viability clause - it won by 15 points (Interviewee L). Patient Forward also conducted their polling nationally, and while the difference between the no-limit and fetal-viability was closer, no-limit still won. However, when shared with Planned Parenthood, my interviewees were asked not to share the responses with the public because Planned Parenthood worried that it "would confuse voters" (Interviewee L).

Following the results of the polling and the fact that Planned Parenthood does not provide abortions after fetal viability, ballot measure language in Ohio, Arizona, Missouri, and Montana all included clauses on fetal viability. While seen as a pro- reproductive rights and abortion measure, including a clause on fetal viability adds a restriction on abortion. A fetal variability clause restricts people from being able to receive a wanted abortion after the point of fetal variability, generally around 24 weeks gestation, but can occur earlier depending on physician determination (KFF, 2026). Despite being quite uncommon with only 1% of abortions occurring after 21 weeks in the United States, individuals do sometimes need or want an abortion after 21 weeks gestation due to restrictions or barriers that delayed a wanted abortion from occurring within a shorter timeframe, or due to fetal or maternal medical concerns (KFF, 2026). Therefore, by restricting access to abortions in a state at fetal viability, states are forcing people to either carry an unwanted or unsafe pregnancy to term or are forcing people to travel to other states to receive an abortion. Tables 5.4 - 5.7 show each of the examined states ballot language with the fetal variability restriction highlighted.

Table 5.4: Ohio 2023 Issue 1 Ballot Language

Proposed Constitutional Amendment
A Self-Executing Amendment Relating to Abortion and Other Reproductive Decisions
Proposed by Initiative Petition To enact Section 22 of Article I of the Constitution of the State of Ohio

A majority yes vote is necessary for the amendment to pass.

The proposed amendment would:

- Establish in the Constitution of the State of Ohio an individual right to one's own reproductive medical treatment, including but not limited to abortion;
- Create legal protections for any person or entity that assists a person with receiving reproductive medical treatment, including but not limited to abortion;
- Prohibit the State from directly or indirectly burdening, penalizing, or prohibiting abortion before an unborn child is determined to be viable, unless the State demonstrates that it is using the least restrictive means;
- Grant a pregnant woman's treating physician the authority to determine, on a case-by-case basis, whether an unborn child is viable;
- Only allow the State to prohibit an abortion after an unborn child is determined by a pregnant woman's treating physician to be viable and only if the physician does not consider the abortion necessary to protect the pregnant woman's life or health; and
- Always allow an unborn child to be aborted at any stage of pregnancy, regardless of viability if, in the treating physician's determination, the abortion is necessary to protect the pregnant woman's life or health.

If passed, the amendment will become effective 30 days after the election.

SHALL THE AMENDMENT BE APPROVED?
__ Yes
__ No

(Source: Ohio Secretary of State, 2023)

Table 5.5: Montana 2024 Constitutional Initiative 128 Ballot Language

A Constitutional Amendment Proposed By Initiative Petition

CI-128 would amend the Montana Constitution to expressly provide a right to make and carry out decisions about one's own pregnancy, including the right to abortion. It would prohibit the government from denying or burdening the right to abortion before fetal viability. It would also prohibit the government from denying or burdening access to an abortion when a treating healthcare professional determines it is medically indicated to protect the pregnant patient's life or health. CI-128 prevents the government from penalizing patients, healthcare providers, or anyone who assists someone in exercising their right to make and carry out voluntary decisions about their pregnancy.

__ YES on Constitutional Amendment CI-128
__ NO on Constitutional Amendment CI-128

(Source: Montana Legislature, 2024)

Table 5.6: Missouri 2024 Amendment 3 Ballot Language

Constitutional Amendment

Do you want to amend the Missouri Constitution to:

- establish a right to make decisions about reproductive health care, including abortion and contraceptives, with any governmental interference of that right presumed invalid;
- remove Missouri's ban on abortion;
- allow regulation of reproductive health care to improve or maintain the health of the patient;
- require the government not to discriminate, in government programs, funding, and other activities, against persons providing or obtaining reproductive health care; and
- allow abortion to be restricted or banned after Fetal Viability except to protect the life or health of the woman?

State governmental entities estimate no cost or savings, but unknown impact. Local governmental entities estimate costs of at least $51,000 annually in reduce tax revenues. Opponents estimate a potentially significant loss to state revenue.

Fair Ballot Language:
A "yes" vote establishes a constitutional right to make decisions about reproductive health care, including abortion and contraceptives, with any governmental interference of that right presumed invalid; removes Missouri's ban on abortion; allows regulation of reproductive health care to improve or maintain the health of the patient; requires the government not to discriminate, in government programs, funding, and other activities, against persons providing or obtaining reproductive health care; and allows abortion to be restricted or banned after Fetal Viability except to protect the life or health of the woman.
A "no" vote will continue the statutory prohibition of abortion in Missouri.
If passed, this measure may reduce local taxes while the impact to state taxes is unknown.

(Source: Missouri Secretary of State, 2024)

Table 5.7: Arizona 2024 Proposition 139 Ballot Language

Proposed By initiative Petition Relating To The Fundamental Right To An Abortion
Official Title: Amending Article II, Constitution Of Arizona, By Adding Section 8.1; Relating To The Fundamental Right To An Abortion

Descriptive Title: Creates a Fundamental Right To Abortion. Limits the state's ability to interfere with that right before fetal viability. After fetal viability, abortions are allowed when necessary to protect the life or health of the pregnant individual. Prohibits laws penalizing a person for assisting an individual obtaining an abortion.

A "yes" vote shall have the effect of creating a fundamental right to abortion under Arizona's constitution. The State will not be able to interfere with this fundamental right before fetal viability unless it has a compelling reason and does so in the least restrictive way possible. Fetal viability means the point in the pregnancy when, in the good-faith judgment of a treating health care professional, the fetus has a significant likelihood of survival outside the uterus. Throughout the pregnancy, both before and after fetal viability, the State will not be able to interfere with the good-faith judgment of a treating health care professional that an abortion is necessary to protect the life or health of the pregnant individual. The State will not be able to penalize any person for aiding or assisting a pregnant individual in exercising the right to an abortion.
A "no" vote shall have the effect of not creating a fundamental right to have an abortion under Arizona's constitution, will leave in place current laws that restrict abortion before fetal viability, and will allow the State to further restrict or ban abortion in the future.

(Source: Arizona Secretary of State, 2024)

According to interviewees, fetal viability wording was an important signaling for Planned Parenthood. It shows the fingerprints of Planned Parenthood on the ballot measure. And even to the chagrin of the local reproductive rights coalitions in each state, Planned Parenthood imposed the wording. In Maryland, because Planned Parenthood did not write the ballot measure nor play a major role in their 2024 abortion ballot measure process, there is no fetal variability clause.

When met with criticism about the restrictive wording within the measures, there were a lot of surprisingly personal aggressive behaviors that took place among supporters on the same

side. Members that once worked in the same coalition as Planned Parenthood felt silenced, with one reproductive rights leader sharing that they were told that "if they spoke out against the initiative, there would be no more funding coming into the state" (Interviewee I). Reproductive rights advocates in Arizona were called an "anti-abortion group disguised" when they spoke out against the measure and were unwilling to sign NDA and non-disparagement laws requested by Planned Parenthood (Interviewee L). And in some cases, people were attacked on an individual level. One interviewee told me that after leaving Planned Parenthood due to disagreements over fetal viability language and speaking out publicly urging people to vote no on the measure, Planned Parenthood threatened her new job (Interviewee J). Finally, while disagreeing with fetal viability language in Ohio coalition reproductive rights leaders were told that they did not get a say because they did not contribute as much funds to the campaign (Interviewee C). Following the recurring theme throughout my interviews, an interviewee in Arizona summarized the views in saying that, "the public has so much trust in these legacy organizations (Planned Parenthood and ACLU) that they believe what the organizations are saying and that the measures put out by these organizations are good for them and their right to an abortion when this is not necessarily the case" (Interviewee L). While I do not know if similar aggressive behaviors occur within other ballot measure coalitions, perhaps it reflects the moral aspect and sense of personal investment and responsibility that comes along with an abortion or reproductive rights ballot measure campaign. More studies are needed to examine if this aggression occurs in other ballot measure campaigns.

Role of Dark Money

Finally, four interviewees talked about the role of dark money in their state's abortion ballot measure campaign. Specifically, they discussed the involvement of The Fairness Project.

The Fairness Project began using ballot initiatives to build labor party support and joined the abortion movement to help them do this. They have funded front end polling on many measures and are largely fed by dark money (Interviewee M). The Fairness Project was involved in asking reproductive rights leaders not to share poll results that showed that no fetal viability language was necessary to pass the measure (Interviewee L). While the support of The Fairness Project was mentioned on several occasions, there seemed to be hesitancy by interviewees to discuss their involvement in detail, signaling either a lack of knowledge or a fear of retribution. Ultimately, while likely not atypical in a ballot measure campaign, it appeared that some money was flowing into the states to influence abortion ballot measures with a great lack of transparency, an area of findings that would benefit from additional research.

Conclusion

Explicitly answering my research questions, interest group strategies, organization, and activities to add measures to ballots and promote passage or ballot measures regarding abortion or reproductive rights do not seem to differ much from more traditional strategies employed to add measures to the ballot and promote passage of ballot measures. Additionally, it was apparent through interviews that while nothing changed pre- and post- *Dobs* in terms of interest group strategies, organization, and activities, *Dobbs* gave an urgent push to put the measure on the ballot. These findings suggest that while from an outsiders perspective, reproductive rights interest groups follow similar strategies, organizations, and activities as those of non-morality policy interest groups when advancing ballot measures, reproductive rights interest groups may face different complexities that may not be present in non-morality policy ballot measures. Though it is possible that an interest group is proposing a ballot measure because of a Supreme Court overturn of a law, the high level of saliency and debate surrounding abortion and

reproductive rights while rapidly emerging abortion restrictions and protections are simultaneously adding a time crunch may very well make these findings unique to reproductive rights. Despite appearing like reproductive rights interest groups fit into the framework devised from the literature before and after Dobbs, reproductive rights interest group leaders feel that the two types of measures are "SO different" (Interviewee J). Interviewees discussed a sense of personal responsibility and involvement that they did not feel when working on other ballot measure campaigns. Potentially stemming from this sense of responsibility, emergent methods to gain support for their measures, such as tailored messaging and canvassing, were utilized by reproductive rights interest groups, but national power and aggressive behaviors were also at play. Further research is needed to determine if such behaviors occur within coalitions working on ballot measures not on reproductive rights, or even in other states not included in this study.

Chapter Six: Conclusion and Recommendations

In this chapter, I provide an overview of research objectives and key findings, then discuss limitations of my research, and conclude by highlighting areas for future research. Ultimately, this dissertation explored the similarities and differences between reproductive rights interest groups' strategies, organizations, and activities and those of non-morality policy interest groups. I also examined if these strategies, organizations, and activities by abortion and reproductive rights interest groups increased voter turnout.

Research Objectives and Research Questions

This dissertation project had multiple objectives which I sought to answer through both quantitative and qualitative methods. My goal was twofold. First, I wanted to examine whether the strategies and activities taken by reproductive rights interest groups increase voter turnout. And second, I wanted to examine if reproductive rights interest groups and non-morality policy interest groups follow similar or different strategies, organizations, and activities to advance researcher knowledge of how interest groups operate, specifically those focused on highly salient, highly controversial morality policies. My analysis fills a hole in the current literature of how interest groups operate when advancing ballot measures. I began by using quantitative analysis to examine if voter turnout increased between the years 2016 and 2024 across states that had abortion or reproductive rights measures on their ballots. I then used qualitative semi-structured interviews to learn from the experiences of reproductive rights leaders in Ohio, Maryland, Montana, Missouri, and Arizona. I conducted 13 interviews with 14 participants and gained an understanding of how their 2023 and 2024 abortion ballot measures were conceived, strategized about, organized, and acted upon. Interest groups have used ballot measures as an attempt to enshrine the right to an abortion or restrict the right to an abortion in their state and

my research was designed to understand the methods by which they went about this. Ultimately, the goal of this dissertation was to expand the literature on how interest groups operate by creating an understanding of how reproductive rights interest groups operate.

Summary of Key Findings

In the following section, I briefly summarize my three key findings. Further discussion of Finding 1 (voter turnout) can be found in Chapter 4 (quantitative results), and further discussion of Findings 2 and 3 (reproductive rights interest groups and external pressures) can be found in Chapter 5 (qualitative results). While my key findings align with the existing scholarship, it is important to note that these findings cannot be generalized to all morality policy interest groups or even to reproductive rights interest groups beyond the people I interviewed. Additionally, it is important to remember that the ballot measures which I interviewed people on occurred in the 2023 and 2024 November elections, a time shortly following the *Dobbs* decision during which state abortion restrictions and protections were rapidly changing. Therefore, we cannot assume that findings would be the same if my research had been undertaken at a different time.

Finding 1: Voter turnout

Examining how presence of a state ballot measure regarding reproductive rights between 2016 and 2024 affected voter turnout, I found that overall voter turnout increased post-*Dobbs* when the measure was protective and decreased post-*Dobbs* when the measure was restrictive. Additionally, I found the same relationship between female voter turnout and presence of an abortion or reproductive rights ballot measure. These results may signify that Klinkner's (1993) findings on mobilization may hold. Klinkner's analysis suggested that following a Supreme Court decision overturning an existing law, voter turnout decreases. He theorized that this is due to the destabilization of groups that typically motivate participants to vote, including those of

interest groups, after a successful campaign. Following the Supreme Court's overturn of *Roe v. Wade*, we then would expect a decrease in voter turnout for pro-life groups. Along with finding increased overall and female voter turnout when a protective measure was on the ballot after the *Dobbs* decision, there was also decreased overall and female voter turnout in states with higher Republican political lean, agreeing with Klinkner's analysis. Ultimately, using quantitative analysis to examine ballot measures' effect on voter turnout showed us that there is an effect when an abortion or reproductive rights measure is on the ballot.

In addition to answering research question one and its two sub questions in Chapter 4, when controlling for control variables including racial groups, additional variables were found to increase overall, female, and male voter turnout in states in years 2016, 2018, 2020, 2022, and/or 2024. Presence of a governor's election in a state year is associated with a slight decrease in overall voter turnout in that state year (7.9 to 8.3 percentage point decrease) and presence of election day voter registration in a state in a year is associated with an increase in overall voter turnout in that state year. Controlling for control variables and percent white in the tract, a state in a year having a 1 percent increase in the amount of the population with high school degrees or higher is associated with a 0.721 percent increase in overall voter turnout in that state in that year. Additionally, the magnitude of this relationship increases as we vary what racial group we are controlling for. Controlling for control variables and varying racial groups, we see a negative slope on the coefficient for political lean. Specifically, when the dependent variable is overall voter turnout and when including percent white in tract as a control variable, increasing the percent that voted for the Republican Senate Candidate in a state in a year by 1 percent is associated with a 0.168 percent decrease in overall voter turnout in that state year. Finally, looking at racial group variables when the dependent variable is overall voter turnout, controlling

for percent white in tract shows us that a 1 percent increase in the percent of white people living in a state in a year is associated with a 0.191% increase in overall voter turnout in the state in the year. Controlling for percent African American in tract, a 1 percent increase in the percent of African Americans living in the state in a year is associated with a 0.114 percent decrease in overall voter turnout in that state in that year and controlling for percent Asian in tract, we see that a 1 percent increase in the percent of Asians living in the state in a year is associated with a 0.338 percent decrease in overall voter turnout in that state in that year.

Finding 2: How Reproductive Rights Groups Operate

Compared to the non-morality policy framework discussed in Chapter 2, reproductive rights interest groups appear to follow the same framework when advancing abortion or reproductive rights ballot measures. When asked about their specific strategies, organizations, and activities, reproductive rights leaders align very similarly with non-morality policy interest groups. However, there were a few key differences between the two groups that include personal connection, saliency of abortion, and a few activities not discussed in the literature.

Strategies, Organization, and Activities

In all interviews, interviewees discussed clear strategies and objectives for passing their abortion or reproductive rights ballot measure. All but one interviewee discussed how their coalition had been preparing to have a ballot measure for a while, even years before Dobbs in some cases. However, many interviewees explained that the driving factor to actually put a ballot on the measure in the year that they did was the Dobbs decision. Interviewees expressed a sense of urgency to push a ballot measure forward as reproductive rights were being threatened. While clear priorities and clear objectives were discussed in the literature, this sense of immediate urgency was not. Additionally, interviewees discussed their framing strategy when advancing

their ballot measure. Specifically, they talked about how their strategy was to not confuse voters and to "pick their battles" when responding to the opposition's false or misleading comments. When asked about how they stay proactive, many told me that because of the rapidly changing abortion restrictions and protections, advancing a reproductive rights ballot measure is more of a reactive process. Interest groups also discussed the need for tailored messaging to appeal to certain constituents differently. Overall, reproductive rights interest groups discussed similar strategies to how the literature talked about non-morality policy interest groups strategies.

Next, I asked interviewees about how they organized themselves to best advance their measure and found that while reproductive rights interest groups organize themselves in the same way, their coalitions do not always stick together. Reproductive rights interest group leaders also discussed setting up a leadership team, inviting members and accepting donations, setting up local teams, recruiting organizations to join the fight, and the establishment of coalitions. While not necessarily unique to reproductive rights interest groups, there was no discussion of coalitions removing members in the literature I examined.

I then asked interviewees about activities they used to best advance their measure. Interviewees discussed activities corresponding with the activities of non-morality policy interest groups including: the use of newsletters to engage with supporters and keep them informed; working with focus groups and polling people to best determine public opinion; drafting the measure; signature gathering; testifying to state legislatures in Maryland; publishing reports; creating ads across various platforms including on television, radio, mail, door-to-door canvassing, phone banking, and texting; and remaining vigilant about what opposition is saying and releasing statements and material to counter the opposing narrative. However, there were some differences discussed between reproductive rights interest groups and non-morality policy

interest groups that can expand our knowledge on how interest groups operate. Because of the sensitive nature of abortion and reproductive rights, no AI was used. There were also complaints about the polling used, where respondents discussed leading questions and ignoring other polling results. While likely the case in other ballot measure processes when using polling, this distrust in polling was not discussed in the literature about interest groups and ballot measures. Ultimately, while reproductive rights interest groups did seem to follow the framework developed in the literature review, there were some key differences discussed by interviewees.

Personal Connection

The most talked about difference between reproductive rights interest groups and non-morality policy interest groups found through interviews is the sense of personal connection that reproductive rights leaders have with abortion and reproductive rights. Reproductive rights leaders discussed feeling personally responsible not only for the success of the measure they were working on, but also for the health of people in their states. They felt like if the measure were to fail, they would have been the ones personally responsible for losing access to abortion care. Interviewees who worked on other measures described how this feeling is not the same in other ballot measure campaigns because oftentimes in other campaigns, you are brought in as an outsider and while you want the measure to go a certain way, you do not feel the weight of reproductive freedom on your shoulders. Scholars such as Rosenstein et al. (1974) discussed how their ballot measure would improve outcomes for constituents living in the state but also discussed readjusting expectations in case the ballot measure does not pass. Instead of adjusting expectations, reproductive rights interest group leaders discussed feeling like their measure had to pass and if it didn't, they would try again. While I am unable to say for sure, this feeling of being personally responsible may contribute to the aggressive behavior discussed in Finding 4.

Saliency of Abortion

The second difference found between strategies, organizations, and activities of reproductive rights interest groups and those not related to a morality policy is the saliency around abortion. Interviewees discussed that they worked to frame their measure differently to appeal to voters with already formed opinions on the issue. They explained that because abortion is so salient, people already know what it is and already have opinions formed about whether or not it should be allowed. Therefore, rather than spending time explaining what an abortion ballot measure is, interest groups framed their messaging to gain support from certain voters. For example, in Maryland interest groups used a "support the right to abortion" frame for those they knew supported abortion, and a "keep the government out of our healthcare decisions" for those they knew did not support abortions. Ultimately, reproductive rights interest group leaders attributed this change of framing to the success of the measure in multiple states.

Activities Not Discussed in Literature

Lastly, there were some differences between reproductive rights interest groups and non-morality policy interest groups in the activities they used. The literature discussed the use of holding conferences and distributing whitepapers to legislators, neither of which were utilized by the reproductive rights leaders I spoke with. And not discussed in the literature, but widely discussed in interviews, was the use of door-to-door canvassing. Interviewees attributed great success to door knocking and providing people with information about the measures directly from their doorstep. Learning first-hand about how reproductive rights interest groups strategize, organize, and act can better inform our understanding of how interest groups operate. Finding similarities between reproductive rights interest groups and non-morality policy interest groups

confirms our assumption that all interest groups act similarly when advancing ballot measures and finding differences expands our knowledge on how they operate.

Finding 3: External Pressures

The heavy role that national politics played in the campaigning on state ballots about abortion surprised me because of how it was not discussed in the literature. While Anzia (2022) discusses how some large interest groups do get involved in local politics, she did not discuss the role that national politics play in local politics. Again, while on the surface, it appeared that reproductive rights and non-morality policy interest groups followed similar strategies, organizations, and activities, after digging into ballot measures in Ohio, Maryland, Montana, Missouri, and Arizona, I know that this may not be the case. While future research is needed to be sure, the role that national politics have played in state-level abortion ballot measures may differ significantly from their role in non-morality policy measures.

Through conducting interviews with reproductive rights leaders, I learned that many of these reproductive rights leaders did not want a ballot measure in their state in the year that it occurred, or at least did not want the measure that was on the ballot. According to interviewees, the Montana, Missouri, and Arizona ballot measures were all placed on the measure because of the influence of national politics. Montana's reproductive rights coalition did not want an abortion ballot initiative because the right to an abortion was already being protected in their state. While a measure was broadly in discussion, it was not supposed to happen until more tribal leadership was involved, and they could ensure that the wording was the way they wanted it. However, because Jon Tester was on the Senate ballot and the national Democratic party wanted him to win his reelection, they told national and local Planned Parenthood that an abortion measure must be on Montana's 2024 ballot. The Democratic National Party had seen abortion

succeed in various states by the time the 2024 election came, according to my interviewee, and they thought that an abortion ballot measure would increase voter turnout and those extra voters would also vote for Tester. This same story was shared in Arizona and Missouri for their 2024 ballot measure. This level of national politics involvement leaves me to question whether the ballot measure process is a form of direct democracy representing what constituents actually want in their state, or if instead it serves as another opportunity for national politics to influence state policies.

National Organizations Involvement

In addition to national politics involvement in state-level ballot measures, I also discovered through interviews the strong role that national organizations played in influencing state-level ballot measures. Further these findings made me question whether these "pro-abortion or reproductive rights measures" really are in favor of the abortion and reproductive rights movement. While further research is needed to be sure, the role of national organizations, particularly the role of Planned Parenthood, may be very dissimilar from the role of interest groups in affecting the fate of ballot measures on different issues. While other scholars like Anzia (2022) have discussed, national organizations do sometimes get involved in state level-politics. However, scenarios researched include including local election or housing development laws. There is a lack of research on whether or not there is large national involvement of interest groups on morality-policy laws - an area that would benefit from future research.

Following the push from the national Democratic Party, Planned Parenthood, with the help of the ACLU, wrote and submitted abortion ballot measures without the support, or even knowledge of their coalition in some cases, in Montana, Arizona, and Missouri. These ballot measures included language on fetal variability, adding a restriction to abortion at around 24

weeks and sometimes earlier depending on the physician's assessment. Planned Parenthood included this language despite opposition from reproductive rights leaders in their states because 1) Planned Parenthood does not provide abortions past fetal viability even in states where law allows it, and 2) Planned Parenthood's polling firm used national polling data to convince them that ballot measures with fetal viability language would pass. Planned Parenthood then ignored other polling results showing that measures without fetal viability would also pass nationally and in some states, including Arizona, polled higher than using the restrictive language.

Aggressive Behaviors

I was surprised, because it was not discussed in the literature, to find that while on the surface, reproductive rights interest groups have the same or very similar interests as those in their coalition, there was a lot of aggressive behavior between those on the same side of the issue. Individual's jobs were threatened, funding was threatened, and reputations were attacked when reproductive rights leaders spoke out against the measure due to the fetal viability language. While I cannot be sure, this aggressive behavior may have been a result of the personal attachment to the measure expressed by leaders of Planned Parenthood and other reproductive rights leaders. While I did not find discussion of it in the literature, it would be interesting for future researchers to help fill the gap in if this aggression is specific to morality policies or occurs in other ballot measure campaigns.

Are these Reproductive Rights Measures?

While labeled as "abortion or reproductive rights" ballot measures in the press and earlier in the paper, the discovery of the weight of fetal viability language has made me question whether these are actually pro-abortion and reproductive rights. By adding a restriction on abortion, they did not help the pro-abortion and reproductive rights movement to some extent.

While yes, in certain states like Arizona, having a fetal viability ban allows more abortions to be performed in the state than a 15-week ban, there is still a ban on abortion. In other states like Montana, a ban on abortion is now in the state's constitution while there was no ban prior to CI-128. Ultimately, including fetal viability language has placed a ban on abortion in various states across the country, and therefore, in my eyes, perhaps should no longer be viewed as a pro-abortion or reproductive rights measure. Continuing Gamble (1997) and Hoesly (2005) conversation on the ethicality of direct democracy, including a restriction on abortion in what appears to be protective abortion measures may fall under their umbrella of misleading values supported through measures.

Policy Implications for Theory and Practice

In the following section, I discuss both policy implications for theory and practice from my findings.

Theory

This dissertation's findings can help inform the discussion and literature on interest groups, direct democracy, ballot measures, and voter turnout. I began by exploring how voter turnout can be influenced by ballot measures in both presidential and midterm elections. Adding another empirical analysis of how voter turnout is impacted by ballot measures helps expand the current debate on trends in voting. Finding that overall and female voter turnout increase in states in years when a protective abortion or reproductive rights measure is on the ballot after the *Dobbs* decision and overall and female voter turnout decreases in states in years when a restrictive abortion or reproductive rights measure is on the ballot after the *Dobbs* decision builds on Klinkner's (1993) analysis. He argues that after the Supreme Court overturns laws, there is a decrease in mobilization by the group who was in favor of the overturn (Klinkner, 1993). The

regression results presented in this dissertation support Klinkner's claim, with the overturn of *Roe v. Wade* decreased voter turnout for restrictive measures. While we cannot be certain that the decrease was not due to rising anger amongst the public as abortion access was being threatened, our results support Klinkner's findings of a decrease in voter turnout after a Supreme Court overturn.

I then explored in this dissertation, how reproductive rights interest groups' strategies, organizations, and activities may be similar to or different from those of non-morality policy interest groups. Compiling a framework for how non-morality interest groups operate when advancing or defeating a ballot measure can provide scholars with a clear framework for how the interest groups operate. Without a clear framework, scholars are left with a partial understanding of how interest groups actually operate when advancing or defeating ballot measures. Interviewing reproductive rights leaders across five states can further provide scholars with an understanding of how interest groups operate, specifically those working on advancing highly salient, controversial mortality policies. Current literature does not discuss how any morality policy interest group operates and therefore scholars do not have a published understanding of how they may be similar or different from non-morality policy interest groups. While on the surface, interest groups operate similarly when advancing ballot measures, diving deeper there are other factors at play for reproductive rights interest groups. While the involvement of national politics and national organizations is likely present in non-morality issues as well, I was unable to find literature discussing their involvement specifically on ballot measures. Therefore, this dissertation provides scholars with a better understanding for how interest groups operate when participating in direct democracy, thus advancing researcher knowledge and theory.

Practice

This dissertation's findings have practical implications as well. As policymakers decide whether or not their state should allow citizen-led ballot measures, they must remember that while such ballots provide a form of direct democracy for citizens, national political parties and national organizations may play a major, even undesired, role. The ballot measure process is not always as it seems and while being "citizen-led," ballot measures may more broadly reflect the interests of larger players. Additionally, reproductive rights coalitions can use this dissertation's findings as a warning of how national involvement may interfere. Advanced warning may provide an opportunity for local reproductive rights interest group activists to have a say in wording of the measure. Ultimately, while more research should be done to further examine interest groups and ballot measures, lobbying issues at the state-level are likely influenced by national forces.

Key Limitations

This dissertation has a few key limitations which I feel bear repeating here.

Interest Group Framework

To start, we cannot be certain that the interest group framework created in Chapter 2 and discussed again in Chapter 5 is a completely accurate representation of how interest groups strategize, organize, and act when advancing or defeating non-morality policy ballot measures. While I read through the literature available and relevant to interest group motivations and actions, there was not much literature that informed how interest groups operate. Therefore, despite using the information I found, and asking reproductive rights interest group leaders about their strategies, organizations, and activities when advancing ballot measures, we cannot be 100% certain that this is how interest groups actually operate when advancing or defeating ballot measures. Additionally, it is important to remember that the framework sets up a series of

strategies, organizations, and activities that interest groups partake in, but even if utilized by interest groups during some ballot measure campaigns, all may not be used for every campaign. Strategies, organizations, and activities may differ by campaign, likelihood of winning, and by controversy and saliency surrounding the topic. Therefore, the framework may not be able to be generalized to all interest group models for advancing or defeating ballot measures.

Quantitative

Limitations for the quantitative analysis discussed in Chapter 4 are as follows.

There may be threats to validity and reliability which may influence the findings. Threats to the statistical inferences include overfitting models, omitted variable bias, and the low sample size. Additionally, results cannot be generalized because they show voter turnout and election results in a narrow, very turbulent period of time for reproductive rights. Finally, while I did my best to research how other scholars selected variables of interest to control for, and used the same variables, there still could be changes in the environment or year that impacted voter turnout which were not accounted for.

While the results in Chapter four generally align with Klinkner's (1990) theory, it is vital to address the sensitivity of my primary explanatory variables to different model specifications. These sensitivities carry significant implications for both current scholarship and the future research agenda. Most notably, Klinkner's theory requires more rigorous testing that accounts for the diverse contextual drivers of voter mobilization and turnout, alongside the influence of the U.S. Supreme Court. Since my estimates fluctuated based on model design, advancing this field will require researchers to identify the specific moderating variables that shape how judicial decisions impact electoral participation.

Qualitative

Limitations for the qualitative analysis discussed in Chapter 5 are as follows.

Sample Size and Generalizability

Due to the sensitive nature of reproductive rights post-*Dobbs*, I struggled greatly with finding people to interview. Therefore, despite trying various avenues for securing interviews, my final interview sample size is quite small. In a perfect world, I would have interviewed more people from each of my five states as well as other states. Additionally, it would have benefited the research to understand how reproductive rights interest groups fighting a restrictive measure operate as well as how pro-life interest groups operate when advancing a restrictive measure or fighting a protective measure. Therefore, my findings cannot be generalized to all interest groups working on an abortion ballot measure, nor can they be generalized to reproductive rights interest groups working on an abortion ballot measure in any other state besides the ones discussed. Additionally, because of the rapidly changing abortion restrictions and protections post-Dobbs, strategies, organization, and actions of interest groups may not be generalizable to the future. Therefore, while the findings are interesting and useful for learning about how reproductive rights interest groups operated in Ohio, Maryland, Montana, Missouri, and Arizona leading up to and during their 2023 and 2024 abortion or reproductive rights ballot measures, the results may not be generalizable. Finally, I relied a lot on data from Planned Parenthood and the Guttmacher Institute to determine whether measures were protective or restrictive. In doing so, results of my interviews may be biased.

Interview Questions and Selection Bias

Finally, while interview questions were based on the relevant literature, interviewees were asked specific questions to answer. However, if there were a gap in the literature, specific questions may not have been addressed. I tried to counter this potential limitation by using a

semi-structured interview format and allowing interviewees to talk freely about their experiences working on reproductive rights ballot measures. But if a relevant strategy, organization, or activities was omitted in my questions, interviewees may have simply not remembered to discuss it during the interview. Additionally, there is a threat to selection bias as most of my interviewees were volunteers or were contacted via snowball sampling. Therefore, despite efforts to expand my interviewee sample size, there may be selection bias in interviewees interviewed.

Mixed Methods

While using a mixed methods approach is designed to strengthen the analysis by filling gaps left by one method with the other (Hendren et al., 2018), there are still limitations within the mixed methods examination. While I did use both quantitative and qualitative analysis in this dissertation, I used them to examine different areas of research. I used quantitative methods to assess whether voter turnout is affected by the presence of reproductive rights ballot measures before and after *Dobbs* in states and in years and I used qualitative interviews to assess how reproductive rights interest groups advance ballot measures. Therefore, while they both explore key areas of interest group literature, they do not necessarily fill the gap left by the other.

Recommendations for Future Research

In the following section, I discuss areas for further research based on gaps left in my examination of how reproductive rights interest groups strategize, organize, and act when advancing ballot measures, and how they compare to the framework created of how non-morality policy interest groups act.

First, because there is little literature on how interest groups operate when advancing ballot measures, and because very few authors have focused broadly on the entire operational strategy opposed to a niche area of interest, future research is needed to study how interest

groups operate when advancing ballot measures. It would be interesting to interview interest groups focused in multiple policy areas, some salient, some not, across the country and examine how they strategize, organize, and act when advancing ballot measures. Understanding how interest groups operate through learning personal accounts from reproductive rights interest group leaders can provide public policy and political science scholars with a better understanding of interest groups and campaigns to pass state ballot measures.

Next, it would expand our understanding of how abortion and reproductive rights interest groups operate compared to non-morality policy interest groups by interviewing activists who fought against abortion or reproductive rights measures, as well as reproductive rights activists who fought against a pro-life measure. As previous literature had suggested, strategies, organization, and activities change for non-morality policy interest groups when advancing or defeating a measure, and therefore, we would expect reproductive rights interest groups to also change their methods. Additionally, to increase understanding of interest group operations, it would be beneficial to continue this dissertation's research in other states and in other years. This dissertation focused on a very specific time period for a highly salient issue and only was able to cover a small number of states. Expanding the time period covered, and including more states would broaden our understanding of how reproductive rights interest groups operate.

Thirdly, interviewees discussed national politics involvement in their ballot measure as a strategy to have Democratic Senators win reelection. Interviewees in two states told me that big Dems strategy was to increase voter turnout by placing an abortion or reproductive rights measure on the ballot and, therefore, increase the number of voters who would vote for the Democratic Senate candidate. The Party's assumption was that people who vote in favor of the ballot measure will also vote in favor of the Democrat since their views on abortion align.

However, interviewees told me this was not the case, and that once people voted for the ballot measure, many then voted for the Republican candidate. According to my interviewees, once constituents felt that their right to an abortion was legal, their vote for the Republican would not affect their right to an abortion. It would be interesting to see if this sentiment is correct. Did people actually vote pro-abortion and then for the Republican candidate? Speaking with constituents in states with abortion or reproductive rights ballot measures and also Democratic nominees would shed light into their true thoughts and motives, therefore expanding our knowledge as public policy and political science scholars.

Finally, it was clear through interviews conducted that national politics and national organizations were very involved in Ohio, Montana, Missouri, and Arizona's ballot measure process. To increase our understanding of ballot measures and the motivations behind them, it would be interesting to learn the level at which national politics and national organizations get involved in state ballot measures beyond abortion and reproductive rights. It would be beneficial to our understanding of how interest groups operate, to learn how national politics and national organizations are involved in other measures. And it would be useful to conduct further research on the national/state interest groups' interactions to see if there is the same level of aggression between the two forces, or if that is unique to morality politics because people feel so personally invested in the campaign.

Conclusion

In conclusion, while not generalizable to all states or all issue areas, this dissertation revealed interesting findings into how reproductive rights interest groups strategize, organize, and act compared to non-morality policy interest groups methods. Through quantitative research, we discovered that overall voter turnout and female voter turnout is affected by the presence of

an abortion or reproductive rights ballot measure and that whether the measure is before or after the *Dobbs* decision also impacts turnout. Through qualitative analysis, this dissertation examines how reproductive rights interest groups actually strategize, organize, and act when advancing abortion or reproductive rights ballot measures. While there were many similarities between reproductive rights interest groups and non-morality policy interest groups, there also were a few differences found. Reproductive rights interest groups discussed door-to-door canvassing, and did not use whitepapers to legislators or AI in their campaigns. The dissertation also shed light into reasons for measures being on state-specific ballots, including both national politics and national organizations' heavy involvement. Ultimately circling back to discussion in Chapter 2 of the ethicality of ballot measures in direct democracy, it is interesting to think about whether more oversight should be in place when it comes to the ballot measure process. Do the ballot measures on abortion and reproductive rights examined really reflect the interests of individual state's constituents? Or do they instead reflect the interests of national politics and recognition for national organizations? National party priorities and dark money are not what proponents of direct democracy and ballot measures are likely anticipating, but is that inevitable?

Looking to the future, insights provided by this dissertation may help inform how interest groups operate and what influences them. Researchers and policymakers can use the framework provided here and findings from interviewees to better understand how the ballot measure process works. Interest group motivations in advancing a ballot measure may not always be what they seem. Underlying factors infiltrate the ballot measure process, and potential interference should be anticipated when deciding whether or not a state should allow ballot measures.

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Appendix A: Codebook

Variable	Code
Overall voter turnout	Percent of citizen voting age population (CVAP) that voted
Female voter turnout	Percent of female CVAP that voted
Male voter turnout	Percent of male CVAP that voted
Protective measure	Dummy Variable: 1 = yes protective abortion ballot measure in state in year
Restrictive measure	Dummy Variable: 1 = yes restrictive abortion ballot measure in state in year
Post-Dobbs	Dummy Variable: 1 = yes abortion/reproductive rights ballot measure was post-Dobbs, 0 = no
Governor race	Dummy Variable: 1 = yes governor race in state in year, 0 = no
Senate race	Dummy Variable: 1 = yes Senate race in state in year, 0 = no
Election-day registration	Dummy Variable: 1 = yes election-day registration is allowed in state in year, 0 = no
High school degree	Percent of population with high school degree or higher
Bachelor's degree	Percent of population with bachelor's degree or higher
Real per capita personal income	Real per capita personal income by state by year – converted to 2024 dollars
Political lean	Percent of voters that voted for Republican Senate candidate
White	Percent of White non-Hispanic population in tract
African American	Percent of African American non-Hispanic population in tract
Asian	Percent of Asian non-Hispanic population in tract
Hispanic	Percent of Hispanic population in tract
State	All 50 states plus D.C.
Year	2016, 2018, 2020, 2022, 2024