

Reproductive Policy: The Influence of a Congresswoman's Gender v. Her Party Affiliation

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Introduction

Reproductive policy has never been a clear-cut issue among the American public and legislators alike. Since the Supreme Court Case *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* (2022) overturned the precedent set by *Roe v. Wade* (1973), abortion has continued to remain a hot-button issue. In 2025 alone, the 119th Congress introduced upwards of 40 bills and resolutions that focused on reproductive healthcare (*Congressional Record Index*, 2025).

With 28.2% of the 119th Congress being made up of women, the role, if any, their gender plays in how they vote for these measures should be considered, as gender has heavily influenced conversations on abortion. However, reproductive care can also be a deeply partisan issue. This makes differentiating the influence of a congresswoman's gender versus her party affiliation more difficult to differentiate but all the more important to understand the relationship between the two, determining if one holds more weight in policy decision-making than the other. This leads to the research question this paper aims to explore: For congresswomen, does their party affiliation or their identity as a woman have a larger influence over how they view abortion and abortion policy?

Literature

Out of the 151 women in Congress, 110 of them are Democrats, leaving only 41 Republicans (*Women in the U.S. Congress 2025*, 2025). The question is how greatly their party then influences abortion policy. Planned Parenthood's Congressional Scorecard gives insight into this as they analyze each member of Congress's history on recent abortion policy and give them a score out of 100. The score is based on how similarly the lawmaker aligns with Planned

Parenthood's viewpoints and values, which are explicitly pro-choice and against abortion restrictions.

112 of the 151 women in Congress pass on this scorecard, and only 39 fail. On the scorecard, Senators Susan Collins (R-ME) and Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) were the only two to cross party lines. Both passed Planned Parenthood's assessment, with Collins scoring an 80 and Murkowski scoring a 60. All other women who passed were Democrats, scoring 100s (*Planned Parenthood Action Fund*, 2019). This partisanship in the legislature mirrors the public's views. Six out of 10 Americans believe abortion should be legal in "all or most cases," but only 41% of Republicans or conservative-leaning individuals hold this view as opposed to 85% of Democrats and liberal leaning individuals (Pew Research Center, 2024b).

When also considering gender as well as party, 45% of Republican women surveyed by Non-Profit KFF support a law that would guarantee abortion protection on a federal level. Similarly, 69% support laws supporting abortion in cases of rape or incest, even in states where restrictions are now in place, and 79% support laws protecting abortion for women facing a pregnancy-related emergency (Kirzinger et al., 2024).

Republican men are much more likely to stray from these viewpoints as only 19% of them identify as pro-choice and 21% think abortion is morally acceptable, as opposed to their female counterparts, where 23% identify as pro-choice and 27% think it is morally acceptable. The gap in belief based on gender is not unique to conservatives, as 47% of independent men say they are pro-choice in comparison to 62% of women. Independent women are also more likely to say abortion is morally acceptable, with 60% of them agreeing with that statement, contrasting the 45% of men who would say the same. With Democrats, this separation is much smaller, as the same percentage of men and women identify as pro-choice, but it still exists by a small

margin. 79% of Democratic men say abortion is morally permissible, whereas 80% of Democratic women say the same. (Saad, 2025)

The pool of women in Congress is a much smaller group, but it does remain reflective of American women's ideas on abortion policy as a whole. Women are more likely to be left-leaning, with 51% of them leaning Democrat and only 44% leaning Republican (Pew Research Center, 2024a). Although the numbers for women in Congress are more polarizing than those of the general public, the theme stays consistent; however, there are some caveats that may make the women in Congress less comparable to data about females in general. Because of this, even though both gender and party do impact views on abortion, when discussing policy, the party of a congresswoman would have more sway than her gender identity.

Data and Methods

Based on an analysis of the literature, the consistency of women, both in and out of Congress, supporting abortion access does support the idea that gender heavily influences stances on the subject, as seen through surveys done by Pew Research, Gallup, and KFF. Specifically, women are likely to support some form of reproductive healthcare protection regardless of party affiliation. Using these surveys, the conclusion that gender is more influential than party on opinions of abortion does not seem far-fetched, but this would be ignoring the caveats that come with being a representative. Whereas women may be prone to encouraging abortion access, Republican Congresswomen need to be voted into office by conservative men and women.

As seen in the Gallup polling, men are less likely to support abortion, and men also make up the majority of the Republican Party. This adjusts the way public opinion and party data can

be compared to Congress, as the minimal Republican women in the legislature are going to be more pro-life as they need to get elected by the party as a whole, not just women. A quantitative comparison of Planned Parenthood and congressional data, as well as the discussed survey results, will be needed to understand the results of the literature in regards to which more heavily influences congresswomen, their gender or party. This is where understanding the ways men differ in both parties on reproductive rights becomes crucial, because, as seen in the surveys, men, regardless of party, are more prone to being less supportive of abortion access. However, the gap between men and women drastically decreases when switching from party to party. A qualitative comparison of congressional makeup and Planned Parenthood's Scorecard will also prove helpful when analyzing the literature and drawing a conclusion.

Results

Overall, the need to appeal to voters or understand the type of candidates a party consistently elects qualitatively gives more sense to the fact that Republican women in Congress seem far more conservative on abortion policy than Republican women as a whole. Based on the polling from Gallup, an analysis can be drawn that Democratic women remain nearly identical on pro-choice ideology both in and out of Congress because it is an ideal that the party bases itself on. And although Republican men and women have large gaps in their support of abortion, this gap decreases in Congress because of Republican women's perceived loyalty to the party.

Qualitatively, the statistics on public polling are helpful as they show the general patterns of women and Republicans on abortion policy, but when using this as well as understanding the data on the makeup of Congress, Planned Parenthood's Congressional Scorecard becomes a far more helpful tool. Looking at a quantitative comparison of the fact that out of the 41 Republican

women in Congress, only two of them passed Planned Parenthood's Congressional Scorecard shows the value of party over self. When these women were elected into the legislature, they no longer became representative of women but rather representative of the Republican ideals they were elected based on. Democratic women showed the same when none of them swayed from their party, earning exactly a 100 on the Scorecard, leaving no wiggle room for views that strayed from their party.

Conclusion and Discussion

Overall, the discussion surrounding abortion will always be a polarizing one, constantly painted by the socioeconomic and political views and experiences of those who are talking about it. Topics such as this will always be framed by the social positions and experiences of the people debating them, but that does not mean that certain areas do not influence opinions and actions more than others. For women in Congress, two of the major players in this conversation are their gender and their party.

Women in Congress are more likely to be Democrats and vote in favor of policies that protect abortion access. However, based on the fact that almost every Republican woman in Congress sides with pro-life systems of belief and votes against pro-choice policy, in the instance of abortion, party affiliation plays a larger influential role than gender. This conclusion can be drawn based on the limited number of Republican women who crossed party lines on policy, while also considering the likelihood of abortion support through the lenses of party and gender. Republicans are consistently against abortion protection, and although those numbers may vary based on gender, the overall notion remains the same. Similarly, Democrats are consistently pro-choice, and those in Congress support policy accordingly. Notably, there are limitations in

these findings as the makeup of Congress changes throughout elections, policy belief isn't one size fits all, and publicly proclaimed views may not always line up with how someone votes.

Regardless, based on the findings presented in this paper, it can be concluded that for congresswomen, their party affiliation has a greater influence on how they vote for abortion policy than their gender does.

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