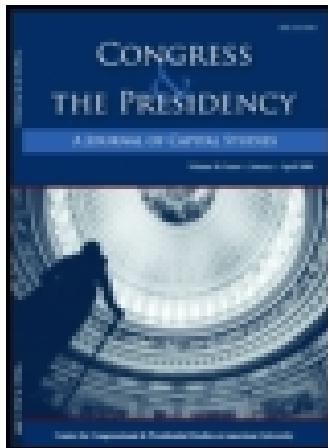


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Issue Voting in U.S. Senate Elections: The Abortion Issue in 1990

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Abstract

Most studies of Senate elections have used aggregate data to examine the sources of electoral success. These studies have shown that incumbency, challenger quality, and candidate spending are important sources of electoral outcomes. Yet research also suggests that issues matter in Senate elections. In this study, we show that the abortion issue was an important source of vote choice in some of the 1990 Senate elections.

According to one strand of democratic theory, elections play an important role in the making of public policy. For most citizens, campaigns provide a unique opportunity to choose between candidates who may offer alternative policy positions (Franklin 1991; Wright and Berkman 1986). While the role of issues in voting choice remains a matter of scholarly disagreement (Asher 1992), certain elections, such as those for president or U.S. senator, offer the possibility of highly visible contests in which there is a genuine opportunity for authentic policy-based choices (Abramowitz 1980, 1988; Abramowitz and Segal 1992).

Most studies of Senate elections have used aggregate data to examine the broad predictors of outcomes. Researchers have focused on the role of incumbency and the quality of candidates, especially challengers (Abramowitz 1988; Hinckley 1970; Squire 1989; Stewart 1989), on campaign spending (Jacobson 1983; Stewart 1989), on presidential popularity (Abramowitz and Segal 1986; Campbell and Sumners 1990) and other macro-level characteristics.

These aggregate studies suggest that issues play a role in Senate elections. Abramowitz (1988) showed that senators whose ideology was inconsistent with that of their constituencies stood an increased chance of losing. Other studies that use individual data have shown even stronger effects. Wright and Berkman (1986) also reported that candidate's policy positions affected Senate election outcomes in 1982. They found that voters' general ideology and evaluations of the president's handling of the economy were significant factors in predicting their Senate vote choice. Franklin (1991) also finds that issues matter in Senate elections, although he notes

that some campaign strategies may serve to reduce the clarity of the choice presented to voters by the candidates.

These latter results suggest that issues play an important role in Senate elections. Yet none of them investigate the role of specific issues in these elections. Abramowitz (1988) and Franklin (1991) used liberal-conservative self-identification of respondents (and ADA, ACA, and ACU scores for incumbents); Wright and Berkman (1986) constructed a scale that reduced a series of concrete issues to a single liberal-conservative dimension. Because issues in Senate elections are state specific, and because there is little available data to allow a systematic examination of issue voting in Senate elections, little research has examined the role of non-economic issues in Senate voting.

Yet some non-economic issues seem plausible candidates for policy voting in Senate elections, because they are what Carmines and Stimson (1980) call "easy" issues. Easy issues are characterized by their long presence on the political agenda, their focus on ends rather than on means, and their large symbolic component. Abortion is a clear instance of such an issue. Abortion has been on the national agenda since the 1960s, and has been highly salient since the *Roe v. Wade* decision. The debate is entirely focused on whether and when abortion should be allowed, not on technical methods of preventing unwanted pregnancies. Abortion has a large symbolic component, which condenses attitudes toward several highly emotional concerns, including feminism, religion, and the sanctity of life (Fried 1988; Staggenborg 1987).

No matter how intense a voter's preference on an issue, she or he cannot vote that issue unless the candidates offer a clear choice between divergent positions. Candidates often have an incentive to blur their positions on highly divisive issues in order to avoid alienating large segments of the electorate (Page and Brody 1972; Page 1978). Research has shown that Senate campaigns can clarify or obfuscate issue differences, depending on the strategies adopted by the candidates (Franklin 1991).

Issue voting on abortion should be most common in states where the candidates took clearly divergent positions. Of course, voters perceive candidate differences more clearly when campaigns emphasize them, so the abortion issue should matter more in states in which both campaigns emphasized the issue. Finally, although Senate challengers are frequently experienced and well-funded, some are not able to mount credible campaigns. Issue voting on the abortion issue will be greater in states where the challenger raised enough money to make the voters aware of the candidate's issue positions.

In 1990, abortion was even more likely to produce an issue vote in Senate elections. The previous year the U.S. Supreme Court in *Webster v. Missouri Reproductive Health Services* allowed the state of Missouri to regulate access to legal abortion. More importantly, the Court seemed to invite further regulations by other states, and fully four justices favored a standard that would allow any state regulation of abortion that could be justified as "reasonable," a standard that would probably allow states to impose an outright ban of abortion. Although more recently the Court in *Casey v. Planned Parenthood* reaffirmed a constitutional right to abortion, this decision was announced well after the 1990 elections. Thus the 1990 Senate elections took place in a context of great uncertainty about the future of abortion politics.

Prior to *Webster*, pro-choice citizens were less likely than their pro-life counterparts to base their vote on the abortion issue, for they believed their access to abortion was guaranteed by the Supreme Court. After *Webster*, abortion rights groups began to mobilize pro-choice voters in state elections. Abortion was a source of vote decisions in a number of gubernatorial elections in 1989 and 1990 (Cook, Jelen, and Wilcox 1992; Dodson and Burnbauer 1990), and in at least one lieutenant governor's election as well (Cook, Hartwig, and Wilcox 1992).

Because the *Webster* decision allowed state governments to regulate abortion, the issue was most visible in gubernatorial elections (Cook, Jelen, and Wilcox 1993a). Citizens had good cause to consider the positions of gubernatorial candidates on abortion, for governors can propose legislation, order special sessions, and veto or sign abortion restrictions. In contrast, senators are not directly involved with state abortion regulation, and it is possible that abortion will be less important in Senate elections.

Yet several U.S. Senate elections in 1990 also focused partly on the issue. Although most legislative activity on abortion has occurred at the state level, the U.S. Congress has also addressed the issue. The Senate voted in 1990 on legislation that would have overturned the *Rust v. Sullivan* decision banning health professionals in family planning clinics that accept federal funds from discussing abortion with their patients, and on other abortion issues as well (Rovner 1991). As some states adopted stringent abortion regulations, pro-choice forces lobbied Congress for the passage of the Freedom of Choice Act, which would guarantee access to abortion to all women until the point of fetal viability, and would allow abortions after viability to save the life or health of the mother. Thus retrospective and/or prospective voting on the abortion issue was possible in 1990. Some Senate campaigns focused heavily on the abortion issue (Donovan 1990), providing voters with sufficient information on candidate positions to allow an issue vote.

In this paper, we will examine the role of the abortion issue in Senate voting in 1990. We will begin by identifying those Senate elections in which the abortion issue was most salient. Next, we will describe the distribution of opinion on abortion in states with Senate elections in 1990. Third, we will examine the role of abortion in vote choice using multivariate logistic regression.

THE DATA

The data for this study come from the exit polls conducted by Voter Research and Surveys for various television networks and major newspapers in 1990. Data are available in 42 of the 50 states, including 29 states with Senate elections. The abortion question in these surveys read: "Which of these statements comes closest to your view about abortion? (1) It should be legal in all circumstances, (2) It should be legal only in some circumstances, or (3) It should not be legal in any circumstances." Although the question provided a relatively narrow range of response options, other research shows that respondents are able to order themselves quite accurately on abortion questions with similar wording (Cook, Jelen, and Wilcox 1993b).

Two types of surveys were conducted. The short form included fewer questions, and was used in states in which there were no gubernatorial or Senate elec-

tions that were expected to be close. The data in the short surveys included several demographic variables, including race, sex, age, religious affiliation, family income, a dichotomous measure of approval of Bush's presidency, and a three-point partisanship measure.

The longer surveys also contained additional demographic variables, including education, marital status, whether the respondent is a member of a labor union, and whether the respondent attends church services at least monthly. In addition, the longer questionnaire contained a three-point measure of ideology, an item asking which two issues were the most important in deciding the vote, whether the respondent thinks the country is going in the right direction or off on the wrong track, an evaluation of the condition of the nation's economy, and an evaluation of the respondent's family's financial condition relative to two years ago (Voter Research and Surveys 1990).

THE ABORTION ISSUE IN 1990

Although it is generally easy to determine the positions of Senate incumbents on abortion, the positions of challengers or open-seat candidates are more difficult to determine.¹ To identify the Senate races in which the abortion issue was salient, we have totalled the contributions from political action committees that either wholly or mainly stress the abortion issue to major party candidates in these fifteen states. PACs that focus on the abortion issue, like all PACs, consider other factors in addition to candidate positions in making their decisions. Abortion PACs do not generally show a preference for incumbents (Bendyna 1992; Gunn 1992; Thomas 1992; Wilcox 1989), but they do consider the chances that a candidate might win. Nonetheless, several abortion PACs have long records of backing long-shot candidates (Wilcox 1988). Thus PAC contributions are a good starting point in identifying races in which candidates took divergent positions and both candidates raised sufficient funds to mount credible campaigns.

The data are presented in Table 1. These figures suggest that pro-life and pro-choice activists believed the Senate races in Iowa, Kentucky, Michigan, North Carolina, and to a lesser extent Texas were ones in which the two major-party candidates took divergent positions on abortion and had at least some chance of victory. Pro-life forces also invested heavily in candidates in Nebraska, New Hampshire, and Oregon, while the pro-choice PACs gave sizable sums to candidates in Colorado, Hawaii, Illinois, and Rhode Island and made a token contribution to Bradley in New Jersey.

We have supplemented the PAC data with interviews with PAC officials at NARAL and the National Right-to-Life Committee, with various other published reports of the campaigns (especially the *Almanac of American Politics*), and in some cases with interviews with the staff of the winning candidate. Among the Senate elections in our study, those in Iowa, Michigan, New Hampshire, North Carolina and Oregon involved candidates who prominently emphasized their widely divergent positions on abortion, those in Kentucky, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Nebraska, and Texas involved candidates with different positions and who generally discussed but did not emphasize the abortion issue, and the campaigns in Colorado, Hawaii,

TABLE 1
Pro-Life and Pro-Choice PAC Money in 1990 U.S. Senate Elections

	<i>Pro-Choice</i>		<i>Pro-Life</i>	<i>Outcome</i>
Alaska	\$ 1,000	(I, R)		R-66%
Colorado	\$32,892	(O, D)		R-56%
Hawaii	\$16,000	(O, R)		D-54%
Idaho	\$ 2,500	(O, D)	\$ 7,736	(O, R)
Illinois	\$15,000	(I, D)		D-65%
Indiana			\$ 2,000	(I, R)
Iowa	\$10,000	(I, D)	\$ 29,966	(C, R)
Kansas	\$ 500	(I, R)		R-74%
Kentucky	\$10,000	(C, D)	\$ 3,686	(I, R)
Louisiana			\$ 2,820	(I, D)
Maine	\$ 1,000	(I, R)		R-61%
Michigan	\$11,000	(I, D)	\$ 19,543	(C, R)
Montana	\$10,000	(I, D)	\$ 21,897	(C, R)
Nebraska			\$ 14,864	(C, R)
New Hampshire			\$ 16,847	(O, R)
New Jersey	\$ 1,000	(I, D)		D-50%
New Mexico			\$ 1,000	(I, R)
North Carolina	\$13,417	(C, D)	\$145,345	(I, R)
Oklahoma			\$ 1,480	(I, D)
Oregon			\$ 25,947	(I, R)
Rhode Island	\$26,000	(C, R)		D-62%
South Dakota	\$15,000	(C, D)	\$ 3,742	(I, R)
Texas	\$ 7,500	(C, D)	\$ 1,000	(I, R)
				R-60%

Total contributions to and independent expenditures on behalf of, candidates in each state. I = incumbent, C = challenger, O = open-seat candidate. D = Democrat, R = Republican.

Source: Data supplied by the Federal Election Commission.

Illinois, New Jersey, and Rhode Island did not involve candidates with sharply different views on abortion. Note that in only two states—Hawaii and Rhode Island—were there contributions by pro-choice PACs to Republican candidates. In both cases, these contributions were to pro-choice women who opposed men who had cast a number of pro-choice votes.² Some abortion PACs seek to support pro-choice women, regardless of the records of their male opponents.

Although national surveys show a plurality of pro-choice sentiment, there is substantial variation across states (Norrander and Wilcox 1993). These differences alter the electoral context in which candidates must compete. In Table 2, we show the distribution of opinion in each of the states included in the exit polls in which a Senate election was held in 1990. In most states, a plurality of citizens supported abortion in some but not all circumstances. Indeed, such respondents, who we refer to as situationalists, were an absolute majority in 14 of the 29 states in the table. In Oregon, an absolute majority took a pro-choice position on abortion, and more than 40% of respondents in Colorado, Delaware, Hawaii, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, and Rhode Island took a pro-choice stand. In no state was there a pro-life majority, but pro-life respondents outnumbered pro-choice

voters in Kentucky, West Virginia and especially in South Dakota, where the pro-life advantage was large. In Alabama, Nebraska, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Wyoming, fewer than 30% of respondents took a pro-choice position.

Among the states on which the abortion PACs focused their attention, there are differences in public opinion. In Iowa, Michigan, Montana, North Carolina and Texas, pro-choice voters outnumbered pro-life voters by approximately 2-1, in Kentucky there was a slight pro-life advantage, and in South Dakota the pro-life edge was nearly 7-4.

In a few states, the surveys included a question on how salient the abortion issue was to the vote choice of the respondent. The item asked the respondents to select one or two issues that were the most important in deciding their votes. The lists included a number of national issues, as well as issues that were relevant for only that specific state. In each state, a number of respondents selected abortion as one of the two most important issues.

Among the states in which the candidates diverged on abortion and the issue was emphasized, abortion was quite salient in Iowa (31%) and Oregon (29%) and to a lesser extent New Hampshire (21%), but it was not salient to many voters in North Carolina (9%).³ Among the states in which the candidates differed on the issue but did not emphasize it, the saliency question was only asked in two states. Abortion was moderately salient in Minnesota (24%) and not very salient in Kentucky.

Among the states in which the candidates took similar positions, abortion was of moderate to low salience in Colorado (19%), Illinois (14%), and New Jersey (13%), and of very low salience in Hawaii (11%) and Rhode Island (7%).

Thus, there is some evidence that the abortion issue was more salient in Senate elections in states in which the candidates differ and emphasize the issue. The causal ordering of this relationship is unclear. It is possible that candidates chose to emphasize the abortion issue because of the distribution of abortion attitudes and their salience. It seems more likely, however, that most voters are responding to candidates and their campaigns.

Finally, we also show the percentage of all voters in each of these states who took a specific position on the abortion issue and indicated that abortion was one of the most important issues in determining their vote decision. This figure is the product of the size of the pro-life, pro-choice, and situationalist groups, and their relative propensity to cast an issue vote on abortion. In most states, there are more pro-choice than pro-life respondents who are willing to vote the issue.⁴ Note, however, that in each state there are a number of situationalists, who support legal abortion in some but not all circumstances, who also vote the abortion issue. Thus, there is substantial variation between the states in the distribution of abortion opinion, and in the importance of the abortion issue in vote choice in Senate elections.

Situationalist issue voters are sufficiently numerous to help determine the outcome in each state. How these situationalist issue voters select their candidates will vary with their actual position on abortion, and on those of the candidates. Other research suggests that most situationalists favor keeping abortion legal under circumstances of physical trauma such as danger to a woman's life or health, rape, or severe defects to the fetus (Cook, Jelen, and Wilcox 1992). In elections between a pro-life candidate and one that takes a strong pro-choice view, these voters are most

TABLE 2
Abortion Attitudes in States with Senate Elections

	<i>Pro-Choice</i> %	<i>Situationalist</i> %	<i>Pro-Life</i> %	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>
Alabama	22	58	20	972	1.98
Colorado	47	40	13	1492	1.67
Delaware	45	42	12	1016	1.72
Hawaii	43	43	13	1769	1.70
Idaho	32	54	14	1512	1.83
Illinois	37	47	16	2953	1.79
Indiana	31	49	20	1083	1.89
Iowa	32	51	17	1655	1.85
Kansas	32	50	17	1561	1.85
Kentucky	20	54	26	1241	2.06
Maine	48	39	13	1387	1.64
Massachusetts	47	40	14	2178	1.67
Michigan	35	48	18	2151	1.83
Minnesota	35	49	16	1750	1.81
Montana	31	51	18	1404	1.87
Nebraska	29	48	24	1300	1.95
New Hampshire	44	42	14	1221	1.69
New Jersey	40	44	16	1078	1.76
New Mexico	31	49	20	949	1.89
North Carolina	31	52	17	2116	1.85
Oklahoma	30	53	17	1291	1.87
Oregon	55	33	12	996	1.56
Rhode Island	44	38	18	1452	1.74
South Carolina	27	57	17	1825	1.90
South Dakota	18	51	31	764	2.13
Tennessee	27	53	20	959	1.93
Texas	33	52	16	2687	1.83
West Virginia	22	54	24	965	2.02
Wyoming	27	57	16	855	1.90
	<i>Abortion Salient</i> %	<i>Pro-Choice Salient</i> %	<i>Pro-Life Salient</i> %	<i>Situationalists Salient</i> %	
Colorado	19	9	4	6	
Hawaii	11	5	2	3	
Illinois	14	5	3	5	
Iowa	31	10	10	11	
Kentucky	14	2	7	5	
Minnesota	24	8	8	9	
New Hampshire	21	11	6	5	
New Jersey	13	6	3	5	
North Carolina	9	2	1	6	
Oregon	29	15	5	8	
Rhode Island	7	4	2	1	

Percentage of respondents in each state in each cell.

Source: Voter Research and Surveys. 1992. General Election Exit Poll.

likely to support the pro-choice candidate (Cook, Hartwig, and Wilcox 1992). Yet in an election that pits a pro-choice advocate against a candidate who advocates parental notification and some limited restrictions on abortion, many will support the candidate who favors restrictions.

THE ABORTION ISSUE AND VOTE CHOICE

In Table 3, we present the results of multivariate logistic regression analysis for vote decisions in each state that had a Senate election and in which the longer version of the exit poll was used. The dependent variable is vote choice, coded as 0 for votes for the Republican candidate, and 1 for votes for the Democratic candidate. We excluded all respondents who cast votes for independent or third-party candidates. We include as independent variables a range of demographic variables, partisanship, general ideology, attitudes toward abortion, evaluations of the direction of the country, evaluations of the national economy, and evaluations of the respondent's personal economic fortunes over the past two years.

The results show that abortion was a very strong predictor of vote choice in all five of the states in which the candidates took divergent positions and emphasized the issue: Iowa, Michigan, New Hampshire, North Carolina and Oregon. Among the five states in which the candidates took distinct positions but did not emphasize the abortion issue, abortion was a very strong predictor of vote choice in two: Nebraska and Texas. In two of these states, Massachusetts and Minnesota, abortion was a weak but statistically significant predictor of vote choice. In Kentucky, although the candidates took distinctive positions and both pro-life and pro-choice PACs contributed to the candidates, the abortion issue was not emphasized and was not a significant predictor of vote choice. In the five states in which the candidates took similar positions on the abortion issue, Colorado, Hawaii, Illinois, New Jersey and Rhode Island, abortion was not a statistically significant predictor of vote choice.

In five of the six states in which abortion was not a significant predictor of vote choice, abortion PACs made a major effort on behalf of at least one candidate. In Kentucky, both sets of PACs were active in an election that saw a narrow victory by a vulnerable, first-term Republican incumbent. In Hawaii, pro-choice PACs backed a Republican woman with substantial contributions in an open-seat contest, and in Rhode Island they supported a Republican woman against an incumbent male Democrat. In Illinois, pro-choice PACs backed an incumbent Democratic man against a generally pro-choice Republican woman. In Colorado, pro-choice PACs backed a Democratic open seat candidate against a generally pro-choice Republican. In none of those elections was abortion stressed by the candidates, however, suggesting that although interest groups may perceive clear differences between candidate positions, unless those differences are emphasized in paid advertising or free media, voters are unlikely to be aware of them.

In contrast, in Iowa, Michigan, New Hampshire, North Carolina, and Oregon the candidates took clearly divergent positions that were widely publicized. In Iowa, abortion became one of the most important issues in the election, and our analysis shows that abortion was a decisive issue. Because the logistic regression coefficients

TABLE 3
Abortion in Senate Elections: Multivariate Results

	<i>States in which candidates diverge and issue is emphasized</i>				
	<i>IA</i>	<i>MI</i>	<i>NH</i>	<i>NC</i>	<i>OR</i>
Party	-1.39**	-1.21**	-1.35**	-.77**	-.32**
Ideology	-.52**	-.50**	-.78**	-1.30**	-.35**
Approve Bush	-1.52**	-.23**	-1.23**	-1.44**	-.64**
National Economy	.17	.14	-.31	-.57**	-.69**
Personal Finances	-.08	.14*	-.14	.20	-.26*
Abortion	-.65**	-.46**	-.56**	-.74**	-.46**
Right Track	-.21	.21	.38	-.05	-.33
Sex	.23	.28**	-.14	.29*	-.33*
Race	.80	1.35**	.47	2.88**	1.79
Education	-.11	.08	.07	.51**	-.21*
Income	.05	.10	-.00	-.03	.08
Union	.37	.56**	.86	.51**	-.02
Church Attend	-.22	-.09	-.20	-.31*	-.33
Married	-.30	-.02	.01	-.14	-.64**
Percent Predicted Correctly:					
Democrats	80	80	66	82	71
Republicans	78	69	90	88	76
All	79	75	83	86	74
N	1364	1691	949	1732	790
	<i>States in which candidates diverge but issue is not emphasized</i>				
	<i>KY</i>	<i>MA</i>	<i>MN</i>	<i>NE</i>	<i>TX</i>
Party	-.98**	-1.02**	-1.45**	-1.06**	-1.37**
Ideology	-.42**	-.37**	-.74**	-.37**	-.45**
Approve Bush	-1.07**	-.94**	-1.14**	-.79**	-1.25**
National Economy	-.26*	.06	.11	.04	.11
Personal Finances	-.00	.07	-.07	.06	-.05
Abortion	.04	-.12	-.25*	-.26**	-.39**
Right Track	-.08	.00	-.66**	.39*	-.77**
Sex	-.31*	.18	-.22	-.07	.09
Race	1.59**	.46	1.13**	-.69	.97**
Education	.05	.23**	.09	-.13	.08
Income	.06	.01	-.05	-.09	-.13
Union	.04	.56**	.88**	.11	.29
Church Attend	-.19	-.19	-.19	.10	-.29*
Married	.15	.02	-.26	.02	-.06
Percent Predicted Correctly:					
Democrats	75	77	82	79	75
Republicans	77	67	82	69	88
All	76	73	82	75	83
N	1004	1731	1483	1028	2096

TABLE 3. (*continued*)

	<i>States in which candidates take similar positions</i>				
	<i>CO</i>	<i>HI</i>	<i>IL</i>	<i>NJ</i>	<i>RI</i>
Party	-1.08**	-1.24**	-1.10**	-1.18**	-.94**
Ideology	-.93**	-.44**	-.35**	-.59**	-.19*
Approve Bush	-1.05**	-.93**	-.68**	-.65**	-.50**
National Economy	.22	-.06	-.05	.22	-.31**
Personal Finances	-.23*	.13	-.19	.13	.09
Abortion	-.19	.11	-.14	-.19	.04
Right Track	.40*	-.19	-.14	.02	-.03
Sex	.10	-.19	.04	.12	-.02
Race	.29	-.25	1.35**	.09	-.02
Education	-.07	-.19**	.02	-.02	-.08
Income	-.27**	-.12	-.11	-.13	.00
Union	.49**	.54**	.10	.15	.09
Church Attend	.11	.03	-.01	.15	.15
Married	-.37*	-.25*	.02	-.00	-.25
Percent Predicted Correctly:					
Democrats	70	83	82	72	80
Republicans	83	66	63	75	51
All	77	75	76	74	68
N	1232	1396	2361	901	1153

Unstandardized coefficients from logistic regression.

* $p \leq .05$.

** $p \leq .01$.

are unstandardized, it is difficult to compare the impact of variables within an equation. Moreover, there is no widely accepted procedure for producing standardized coefficients. We transformed the coefficients for partisanship and for evaluations of the state economic conditions into probabilities (not shown), and compared the impact of these variables on vote choice.⁵

The impact of the abortion issue was higher for abortion in Iowa than for evaluations of the national economy, of the respondents' financial situation, and of the direction of the country. Abortion was also a better predictor of vote choice than general ideology. Only partisanship and evaluations of Bush's presidency were more powerful predictors of vote choice. In New Hampshire, only partisanship, evaluations of Bush's presidency and general ideology were more important. In Michigan, abortion was a stronger predictor than approval of Bush's presidency, and was about as important as general ideology. Only partisanship was a stronger source of vote choice.

In North Carolina, although our results show that abortion was a strong predictor, general ideology is far stronger. Race is the second strongest predictor of votes (the Democratic challenger was black), and partisanship, approval of Bush, and education were all stronger predictors than abortion attitudes. To provide a sense of the magnitude of the impact of the abortion issue, our calculations suggest

that if two voters with identical profiles on partisanship, ideology, demographic variables, and all other variables in the model differed on the abortion issue, the pro-choice voter would have a 56% probability of voting for the Democratic candidate, and the pro-life voter would have only a 39% probability of casting a Democratic ballot.

CONCLUSIONS

Our data show that the abortion issue was an important one in several U.S. Senate elections in 1990. Although in each state partisanship was a far better predictor and in most states approval of Bush's presidency and general ideology were more strongly associated with vote choice, abortion was a better predictor of votes than evaluations of the national economy, of the respondent's personal finances, or of the direction of the country in several states. Moreover, attitudes toward abortion had an independent effect on vote decisions in a number of states, suggesting that the issue has the potential to influence the outcomes of close Senate elections. To the extent that Congress asserts jurisdiction over the abortion issue (for example, by passing a Freedom of Choice Act), then the abortion issue may prove even more potent in the future Senate elections.

Interestingly, in none of the states in which abortion was a significant issue in the Senate election did the positions of the candidates reverse those of the national parties, although the signs of the coefficients suggest that at least some voters perceived the pro-choice positions of the Republican candidates (both of whom were women) in Hawaii and Rhode Island. In several gubernatorial elections in 1990, a Republican pro-choice candidate defeated a Democrat who favored restrictions on abortion, or a Democratic pro-life candidate beat a pro-choice Republican. Research suggests that the voters were able to perceive this reversal of national party positions in Pennsylvania and Massachusetts, although not in Illinois (Cook, Jelen, and Wilcox 1992). Further research is needed to determine if voters respond to candidate positions that reverse those of the national parties in U.S. Senate elections.

Finally, these results suggest that Wright, *et al.* are generally correct in emphasizing the role of issues and ideology in Senate elections. Highly emotional, symbolic issues like the abortion controversy are relatively easy for voters to understand, and, given elite-level discourse on the issue, may be difficult for Senate candidates to obfuscate. The amount of attention devoted to abortion by the news media, and the high level of interest group activity occasioned by this issue, suggests that candidates and voters alike have incentives to pay attention to the abortion controversy. Thus, abortion is perhaps more likely than most issues to meet the conditions for issue voting, and may thus have an impact on election outcomes in a variety of settings.

Although it would be difficult to incorporate the abortion issue into aggregate models of Senate elections, these data show that accounts that focus primarily on economic conditions and presidential approval may miss important sources of Senate voting. Although many of the issues in Senate elections are idiosyncratic and apply only to one or two states, there are some national issues such as abortion that move votes in many states.

Notes

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¹When candidates take clear pro-choice or pro-life positions, it is possible to determine the position of the challenger from a variety of sources, including home-state newspapers, *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report*, and other sources. More nuanced positions are more difficult to determine, however, and when a candidate chooses not to campaign on the abortion issue these sources are not especially helpful.

²For example, on October 12, 1990, both men voted to table a requirement that recipients of federal funds notify a parent 48 hours before performing an abortion on a minor. Pell had voted in 1988 to refuse to allow federally-aided hospitals and schools to refuse to perform abortions, and Akaka had voted in that same year in the House not to bar the District of Columbia from using its own or federal money to pay for abortions. See Barone and Ujifusa (1989, 1991).

³The saliency question was not asked in Michigan.

⁴Of course, there are generally far fewer pro-life voters in these states. In most states, the pro-life contingent still has greater intensity, as indicated by a higher percentage of pro-life voters who indicate that the issue was central to their vote.

⁵It is possible to calculate the probabilities that individuals with various combinations of characteristics will vote for the Democratic candidate. To compare the impact of abortion with, for example, evaluations of the national economy, we calculated the difference in probabilities between pro-life and pro-choice voters, and compared the magnitude of that difference with that between those who believed that the economy was very strong and those who thought it very weak.

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