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Coverage of Abortion in Select U.S. Newspapers

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Abstract

Background and Objectives: News coverage can shape public understanding of policy issues in important ways. In the last decade, many new state-level abortion restrictions have been passed, often based on claims about the safety of abortion care, yet little is known about recent news coverage of abortion. This study analyzes a sample of news on abortion in the U.S. and explores implications for reproductive health policymakers, practitioners, and advocates.

Methods: We analyzed a sample of news and opinion articles containing the term “abortion” published in three major U.S. newspaper sources in 2013 and 2016. The total sample was 783 unique pieces. We coded for story topics, references to fetal personhood, women’s stories, and basic abortion facts. Three trained coders conducted the coding, with intercoder reliability rates ranging from .777 to 1.0.

Findings: Most of the time abortion appears in the news, it is merely mentioned, rather than discussed substantively. Abortion is covered as a political issue more than a health issue. The personal experiences of people who get abortions are present in only 4% of the sample, and language personifying the fetus appears more often than women’s abortion stories. State abortion restrictions are newsworthy, yet basic facts on the commonality and safety of abortion are virtually absent.

Conclusions and Implications: This study suggests that news does not support public understanding of abortion as a common, safe part of reproductive health care. Such framing may undermine public support for policies that protect access to this common health care service.

Keywords

abortion; news media; content analysis; reproductive health policy

Abortion; news media; content analysis; reproductive health policy Abortion in the U.S. is common; almost one in four U.S. women will have one over their lifetime (Jones & Jerman, 2017). Abortion is also very safe, with a lower risk of morbidity and mortality than carrying a pregnancy to term (Raymond & Grimes, 2012) and a significantly lower complication rate than other outpatient medical procedures such as colonoscopy and wisdom tooth extraction (Upadhyay et al., 2015). Yet 45 years after *Roe v. Wade* legalized abortion in the U.S., the

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current climate for abortion is increasingly restrictive, with very little practical access to clinic-based abortion care in many parts of the country (Nash, Gold, Mohammed, Ansari-Thomas, & Cappello, 2018).

In this context, news coverage matters. Public discourse on abortion may affect the policy environment for abortion in important ways, including shaping how the public and policymakers understand the issue and possible policy responses (Coleman, Thorson, & Wilkins, 2011; Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes, & Sasson, 1992). Yet little is known about how U.S. news sources cover abortion. This study analyzes a sample of newspaper coverage of abortion in the U.S. to examine how this issue is covered, and explores implications for reproductive health practitioners and advocates.

BACKGROUND

A long history of communications research illuminates the power of the news to set public and policy agendas. Agenda-setting theory posits a positive relationship between the amount of news coverage given to an issue and the public's perception of that issue's importance (M. E. McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Many studies have concluded that news coverage is one of the most powerful predictors of public opinion and, by extension, national and local policy agendas (Rogers, Dearing, & Bregman, 1993; Son & Weaver, 2006).

Of course, it matters not just *whether* an issue is in the news, but *how* it is covered. In other words, in addition to agenda setting, we must consider the critical issue of framing in news media. Framing research analyzes how an issue is portrayed in news coverage, which may include what facts are covered, who is quoted, which perspectives are presented as being at the heart of the issue, and which are marginalized (Altheide, 1987; Gamson & Modigliani, 1989). Importantly, news coverage that reinforces individual responsibility for problems can undermine public support for governmental or other institutional solutions to those problems (Iyengar, 1991). Because news coverage can frame abortion in ways that shape public opinion and subsequently affect policy, it is important to understand how abortion is covered in the news.

Abortion has had a long presence in the news. A study of the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* found fairly stable numbers of stories on abortion since 1970, with increases during presidential election years (Perse, McLeod, Signorielli, & Dee, 1997). Framing analyses have documented the rhetoric of "choice" vs. "life" in news coverage of abortion (Condit, 1994; Hayden, 2009); these two themes remained the central frames of media narrative for 30 years after *Roe*.

There have been few published analyses of U.S. news on abortion since the turn of the 21st century (Conti & Cahill, 2017; Pruitt & Mullen, 2005). A recent study of news in Great Britain found frequent use of negative and stigmatizing language when covering abortion (Purcell, Hilton, & McDaid, 2014). An analysis in the grey literature found that U.S. news on abortion was similarly dominated by stigmatizing language, including references to abortion as "murder" and assertions that it harms women, and descriptions of abortion providers and advocates as unscrupulous and profiteering. The more in-depth the coverage

of abortion was, the more likely it was to include stigmatizing language (Nixon et al., 2017). Accuracy of abortion coverage on TV news has also been examined recently. Media Matters' survey of TV cable news on abortion found that Fox News dominated cable news coverage of the topic, with stories mostly focused on abortion litigation and religion; the study also found more inaccurate than accurate statements about abortion on cable TV news (Kann & Tulbert, 2018). However, this study concentrated on accuracy of statements on federal policy issues, such as Congress's efforts to "defund" Planned Parenthood (efforts to prohibit Medicaid reimbursement to Planned Parenthood), rather than at the state level, where most abortion policy has been debated and passed in recent years.

In the period from 2011 through 2017, U.S. states enacted 401 abortion restrictions, accounting for more than a third of the restrictive abortion laws enacted since *Roe v. Wade* legalized abortion in 1973 (Nash et al., 2018). These laws are often based on claims about the safety and health impacts of abortion care (M. Sherman, 2016; Siegel, 2007), and focus on regulating the setting and delivery of abortion care. With this wave of regulation focusing on abortion safety, one might expect that U.S. news coverage of the issue would increasingly address abortion as a medical practice and present facts about its safety. Existing literature does not address these questions.

The current study grew out of earlier pilot analyses that examined news coverage of abortion after 20 weeks gestation (Woodruff, 2014) and of the FDA's decision to make emergency contraception available over the counter (Woodruff & Daffner Krasnow, 2015). These analyses documented a lack of women's own stories in news coverage, and in the case of abortion after 20 weeks, a significant focus on the rights of the fetus as opposed to those of the pregnant person. The current study was designed to explore these issues in a broader sample of newspaper coverage on abortion, in order to illuminate implications for public health policy and practice. This study aimed to address the following research questions: In what context does abortion most often appear in newspaper coverage? What is the relative emphasis on women's stories and "the fetus" in newspaper coverage of abortion? And what facts about abortion are included, and what is left out?

METHODS

To assemble the sample for content analysis, we searched the Nexis database for stories containing the word "abortion" in three major U.S. newspaper sources: the *New York Times*, the newspaper with the highest paid circulation in the U.S.² (Pew Research Center, 2018); the *Washington Post*, considered the "paper of record" for federal policy issues (Doctor, 2015); and the *Associated Press* wire service, which provides news stories to hundreds of local newspapers across the country ("Associated Press," 2018). These sources were chosen because a handful of major news sources have long been demonstrated to drive the content choices of smaller local news outlets, in a process known as intermedia agenda-setting (Golan, 2006; M. McCombs & Funk, 2011). Thus, targeting a few influential newspapers may approximate the topics and themes reflected in a broader set of news sources.

²Due to online news models changing the circulation reporting practices of various newspapers, the Alliance for Audited Media stopped publishing its regular authoritative assessment of newspaper circulation rates in 2015. Some analyses since then show *The Wall Street Journal* as having a higher circulation than *The New York Times*, but it is not available for search in the Nexis database.

We sampled for abortion news stories and opinion pieces published in these sources during two years, 2013 and 2016. Because newspapers traditionally cover different subjects on different days of the week (Tuesday's paper might have a "Health" section while Wednesday's includes "Food & Wine," for example), we used constructed-week sampling to generate a sample with equal representation of each day of the week. The goal of this process is to maximize sampling efficiency and randomization while controlling for weekly news patterns. Luke and colleagues demonstrated a bootstrap sampling method showing that six constructed weeks of sampling news content is sufficient to approximate an entire year's worth of health stories in newspapers (Luke, Caburnay, & Cohen, 2011). Because the initial search for 2013 coverage yielded no abortion stories on some dates, our search expanded to comprise eight constructed weeks of abortion stories published in 2013. The 2016 search yielded stories mentioning abortion on all original search dates, so six constructed weeks were included for 2016. The sampling process yielded 373 news and opinion pieces from 2013 and 410 pieces from 2016, for a total sample of unique pieces.

Ethnographic content analysis of news coverage is an iterative process incorporating elements of both qualitative and quantitative research. While traditional content analysis allows for verification of pre-structured content categories, the reflexive nature of ethnographic analysis allows for additional categories and findings to emerge throughout the study process (Altheide, 1987). Coding proceeds in multiple stages as relevant themes and observations are extracted from the data (Saldaña, 2015). In this case, the author first read through the entire sample to note major story topics, and noted varying representations of women's experiences of abortion as well as language personifying a fetus. She drafted coding variables based on these notes and created a coding instrument with definitions of each variable, as follows:

- "Coverage depth" was a rating of whether the story contained just a mention or two of abortion (coded as "mention"), or was more substantively about abortion (coded as "substantive").
- "Fetus as a person" was coded if the piece mentioned fetal personhood, fetal pain, "unborn child," "member of the human family," or other similar language characterizing the fetus as a person.
- "Fetal pain" was coded if the piece referred to the theory that fetuses feel pain before the third trimester of development; this included mentions in the title of a bill, e.g. the "Pain-Capable Unborn Child Act." For every piece that referred to fetal pain, we also coded for whether or not the piece included the fact that this theory is scientifically disputed rather than proven (Lee, Ralston, Drey, Partridge, & Rosen, 2005).
- "Woman's personal story": We coded whether each piece included a personal abortion story, defined as concrete details of any specific person contending with pregnancy decision-making or seeking abortion, whether or not that person was named, and whether it was a pregnant person sharing their own story or someone else describing a pregnant person's experience.

Key facts about abortion:

For the 2016 sample only, we coded for the presence or absence of basic facts about abortion, as confirmed by the best available scientific evidence. These facts were chosen because they counter common misperceptions about abortion (Kliff, Crockett, & Chang, 2016), yet they appear to be rare in news coverage (Nixon et al., 2017). The facts were defined as follows:

- Abortion is safe: Includes any reference to the fact that abortion is safer than childbirth/carrying pregnancy to term (Raymond & Grimes, 2012); safer than colonoscopy or having wisdom teeth out (Culp-Ressler, 2015); has a very low complication rate (Upadhyay et al., 2015; White, Carroll, & Grossman, 2015); etc.
- Abortion is common: Includes reference to the fact that 1 in 3³ U.S. women will have an abortion (Henshaw & Kost, 2008); 4 in 10 unintended pregnancies end in abortion (Jones & Jerman, 2014); etc.
- Later abortion is rare: Includes reference to the fact that 2/3 of abortions happen in the first 8 weeks of pregnancy; 9 out of 10 abortions happen in the first trimester (Guttmacher Institute, 2018); etc.
- Most abortion patients are already mothers: Includes reference to the majority of abortion patients being parents, including the fact that approximately 60% of women having an abortion have had at least one previous birth (Jerman, Jones, & Tsuyoshi, 2016).
- Many abortion restrictions pose barriers to abortion care: Includes reference to the fact that distance to clinic, waiting periods, and/or cost can impede, delay, or place a burden on women's access to abortion (National Academies of Sciences, 2018).
- The number of abortion providers is declining: Includes reference to the fact that the number of abortion providers in the U.S. is declining (Jones & Jerman, 2014); the majority of U.S. counties do not have an abortion provider (Jones & Kooistra, 2011); etc.

A team of three coders coded all pieces for news source, news date, story topic, and "coverage depth." All stories deemed to have "substantive" abortion content (more than just 1–2 mentions of abortion) were coded in more depth for story type, inclusion of woman's stories or language referring to the fetus as human, and (for the 2016 sample) the presence of key facts about abortion. We coded and revised the coding instrument until we reached adequate intercoder reliability rates for all variables (Krippendorff's $\alpha = 0.777$ for "fetus as a person" variable; for all other variables, Krippendorff's α was above 0.80 with a range of 0.803 – 1.0) (Hayes & Krippendorff, 2007). We analyzed the 2013 and 2016 samples both separately and together, to identify differences between the years as well as commonalities.

³The Guttmacher Institute's 2017 analysis of abortion incidence finds that the abortion rate has decreased, such that 1 in 4 U.S. women are now expected to have an abortion in their lifetime (Jones & Jerman, 2017). But at the time of this sample's publication in 2016, the figure of 1 in 3 was the most current estimate available, and was widely cited by abortion rights organizations and some news coverage.

RESULTS

The 2013 sample was split fairly evenly between the three news sources: 36% from the *Washington Post*, 34% from the *New York Times*, and 30% from the *Associated Press*. The 2016 sample was dominated by the *Washington Post*, with 53% of pieces, followed by 25% in the *Associated Press* and 22% in the *New York Times*. This likely reflects a changed business model at the *Post* after its acquisition by Jeff Bezos in late 2013, leading to an expanded online news presence with more rapid publication of news content (Kim, 2016).

For coverage depth, of 783 newspaper pieces including the word “abortion,” 494 (63%) were coded “mention only.” In these pieces, abortion was merely mentioned once or twice in a story that was primarily about some other topic. The remaining 289 stories (37%) mentioned abortion more than once or twice.

Table 1 lists the story topics in which abortion appears as a mention only. By far the largest category was politics; 50% of the stories where abortion is mentioned were about electoral politics. Such stories might contain a reference to candidates’ views on abortion (usually just a mention that a given candidate was “pro-choice” or “pro-life”), or a voter mentioning abortion as an issue they care about. Next most common were stories about Pope Francis (newly elected in 2013) and the Catholic church. The next set of pieces were in a category we called (using language from one of the news stories) “abortion and other hot-button issues”: stories where abortion was listed along with other controversial topics, such as gun control, same-sex marriage, or immigration, to illustrate America’s culture of political divisiveness. Some stories briefly referred to abortion in other countries; for example, a story on women’s rights in India contained one sentence mentioning that abortions for sex selection are on the rise in that country. Entertainment stories included book and movie reviews that might mention a character who had an abortion. Many stories on Texas’s HB2 (a package of abortion bills passed in July 2013) focused not on abortion but on State Senator Wendy Davis’s 13-hour filibuster. Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia’s death in February 2016 led to stories on his possible replacement, mentioning abortion as one critical issue for the Court. Some stories on the FDA’s decision to make emergency contraception (EC) available for sale without a prescription included a reference to abortion, as some EC opponents believe it is an abortifacient. (This belief is not supported by medical definitions.) Finally, a handful of stories each covered the Supreme Court’s June 2013 ruling on same-sex marriage (comparing it to the court’s *Roe v. Wade* ruling on abortion), efforts to “defund” Planned Parenthood, and the 2016 Zika virus outbreak.

All stories that mentioned abortion more than once or twice were included for more in-depth coding and analysis. This part of the sample, which we called “substantive” abortion stories, constituted 289 pieces. Most of these (69%) were news or analysis pieces; other story types included opinion pieces or columns (24%), letters to the editor (5%), and editorials by editorial boards (2%).

The story topics for the 289 substantive pieces are shown in Table 2. Stories on state abortion policies (Texas’s 2013 HB2 abortion clinic restrictions, Ohio’s 2016 ban on abortion after a fetal heartbeat is detected, and other states’ abortion policies) constituted

31% of the substantive stories. Pieces on electoral politics, especially coverage of the 2016 Presidential election and then-candidate Donald Trump's changing positions on abortion, comprised the second largest category, with 26% of substantive stories. All other topics each comprised 7% or less of the substantive stories. These included stories on efforts to "defund" Planned Parenthood; the Supreme Court's 2016 *Whole Woman's Health vs. Hellerstedt* decision; controversial abortion cases in Ireland, El Salvador, and Spain; the 2013 trial of Dr. Kermit Gosnell (convicted of murder for killing three babies who were born alive in botched abortions); and the Catholic church's views on abortion.

One third of the substantive abortion stories in our sample contained language personifying the fetus as a human being (Table 3). These included quotes from anti-abortion activists referring to "preborn babies" or "children who are aborted," and saying that abortion "puts an end to an innocent life." It also included some less dramatic language, such as, in an article about bills requiring cremation or burial of fetal remains, that "the aborted fetal tissue must be handled like a deceased person." We found nearly as many stories referring to fetal pain in 2016 as in 2013, but in 2013, only half of these stories included the fact that the theory of fetal pain before the 3rd trimester is not evidence-based; by 2016, 7 out of 8 stories referring to fetal pain also included the fact that this theory is disputed.

In contrast to the one third of stories that contained language personifying the fetus, only 11% of substantive abortion pieces (4% of the total sample) contained any reference to a woman's personal abortion story. Many of these 32 pieces portrayed women in tragic circumstances. The largest single type of story, appearing in ten pieces, described patients who were victims of Kermit Gosnell's botched abortions. Three pieces focused on Savita Halappanavar, who died of blood poisoning in Ireland after being denied an abortion for an incomplete miscarriage. Three pieces focused on "Beatriz," the pseudonym of a woman in El Salvador who was denied an abortion, despite her fetus having severe anomalies and the pregnancy threatening Beatriz's life. Some women's stories showed them acting as policy advocates. Three pieces covered Texas state senator Wendy Davis reading the stories of women seeking abortion under Texas's abortion restrictions, and two described how Ohio State Representative Teresa Fedor told the story of her abortion after a rape, in opposition to Ohio's fetal heartbeat bill. Other women's stories were represented in one or two pieces each, including women in Texas trying to find abortion care after implementation of HB2; a woman with Zika virus deciding to terminate her pregnancy; and a mother of a child with Down syndrome describing her decision-making about possible abortion after the prenatal diagnosis.

Finally, we coded the 2016 sample for the presence of basic facts on abortion. Results are shown in Table 4. Of the 144 substantive abortion pieces in our 2016 sample, only eight noted that abortion restrictions pose barriers to abortion care, and other abortion facts appeared in even fewer stories.

DISCUSSION

Our study finds that despite being a critical health service for women, abortion is not typically covered in U.S. newspapers as a health issue. Rarely included are facts that would help the public understand the context of abortion as a safe and common health care service.

In fact, not only is abortion not portrayed as a common women's health issue, most of the time it is in the news, it is not discussed in depth at all. In this study, abortion in the news primarily serves as a political or moral hot-button issue to illustrate the U.S.'s cultural divisiveness. This framing may reinforce superficial understandings of the issue and underscore deeply polarized public debate on abortion policies (Mouw & Sobel, 2001).

Even when abortion *is* covered substantively, politics dominates the coverage. Our analysis confirms prior observations that news coverage of abortion increases during Presidential election years (Perse et al., 1997). Our sample had significantly more stories in 2016 than in 2013, and electoral politics was the largest topic for substantive stories in 2016. While many of these stories devoted significant space to abortion, they tended to cover it superficially, instead emphasizing the controversy surrounding the issue. For example, the largest subgroup within this topic consisted of stories about then-candidate Trump's March 2016 comments that women who get abortions should have "some form of punishment" (a statement he later retracted), and how various demographics of voters might react. This kind of "horse-race journalism," which focuses on candidate positioning and voter polling data rather than more substantive policy issues, is common in coverage of electoral politics (Patterson, 2005; Pew Research Center, 2007). Our study suggests that abortion may have joined issues such as health care reform, climate change, and education in being covered more as fodder for discussion of partisan electoral strategy than as a policy issue in its own right (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997). Observers are concerned that such focus on strategy over substance may undermine citizens' ability to reach informed decisions about policy issues, and may fuel voter apathy (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Patterson, 2005).

Policies to address abortion at the state level appear to be covered in more policy depth: they make up 31% of substantive abortion coverage, the largest category overall. From an agenda-setting perspective, this represents a positive opportunity for reproductive health advocates; clearly the issue of abortion restrictions has taken hold on the media agenda and is considered newsworthy. We note that in 2016 this category of state abortion policies also included a few news stories on states' proactive efforts to protect abortion rights, rather than just restrictive state policies. This focus on proactive efforts may be a growing trend in news coverage as it is in state policy; further research is needed to explore this.

In our analysis, references to the fetus as a person outweigh women's own personal stories of unintended pregnancy and abortion. This balance may support the anti-abortion movement's strategy of promoting the fetus as the "vulnerable victim" of abortion (Halva-Neubauer & Zeigler, 2010).

Women's actual experiences of unintended pregnancy and abortion are rarely represented in newspaper coverage; only 4% of our sample included personal experiences of abortion. Fewer women's stories appeared in our 2016 sample than in 2013. This demonstrates that

women continue to be an “invisible abstraction” in mainstream news coverage of abortion (Gamson, 2002). When personal abortion stories do appear, they tend to focus on rare tragic cases where women die or suffer serious medical harm. While certainly these cases are newsworthy, when they are the dominant stories of abortion, this may underscore the perception that abortion is dangerous. Clearly, these cases make compelling, dramatic stories for news consumers, but they may also lead the public to misunderstand the reality of most patients’ experience with abortion.

These findings must be considered in light of several limitations. First, our sampling frame contained only three news sources. While they are among the widest-reaching newspaper sources in the U.S., we still cannot assume that their content is representative of other newspapers in the country. Second, to assemble our sample, we used the constructed-week sampling strategy, which was verified based on a study of health news. Given our finding that abortion is primarily covered as a political issue, not as a health issue, it is unclear whether this is the most appropriate sampling scheme for this topic. Future content analyses of abortion news should consider a variety of sampling strategies. Finally, while we compared news coverage in two different years, this analysis cannot identify broader trends in abortion coverage over time. More research is needed to explore the questions raised here over longer time periods.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE AND POLICY

In finding that the most wide-reaching newspaper sources in the U.S. largely represent abortion as a political issue rather than as a common reproductive health care service, this work suggests several important implications for practitioners and policymakers. First, those concerned about policy efforts to limit access to abortion must recognize that framing in the news likely reinforces inaccurate perceptions that abortion is unsafe and largely occurs under dramatic circumstances. To counter these misconceptions, reproductive health practitioners and advocates should emphasize the safety and commonness of abortion in all their communications.

Similarly, it is important for policymakers to understand that news sources alone will not provide an adequate understanding of the abortion issue in the U.S. Legislators and their staff who are concerned about reproductive health should connect with trusted research institutions and policy intermediaries to help fill the gap in understanding left by dominant news coverage.

Finally, this work illustrates the dearth of compelling personal stories that are necessary elements of news stories on health (Coleman et al., 2011; Major, 2009). Recognizing that journalists need to feature personal stories to “humanize” the issues on which they report, including abortion (Sisson, Herold, & Woodruff, 2017), reproductive health practitioners and advocates can sensitively promote the abortion experiences of those patients who are willing to share their stories. At the same time, those in the field must recognize the risks and threats too often experienced by women who go public their abortion stories, and actively work to support people who are willing to share their experiences in the media (R. B. Sherman, 2014). Practitioners can use the public health communications strategy of media advocacy

(Wallack, Woodruff, Dorfman, & Diaz, 1999) to help make stories of patients' personal decision-making and providers' delivery of caring, quality medical care more compelling to journalists.

CONCLUSIONS

This study illuminates important themes in U.S. news coverage of abortion. Newspaper coverage of abortion does not support a public understanding of the issue as a common, safe reproductive health care service. Abortion appears in public discourse as a political issue more than a health issue. Women themselves rarely appear in news coverage of abortion, and when they do, their abortion stories do not reflect typical patients' experiences of abortion in this country. If, as communication literature suggests, these news trends both reflect and reinforce public opinion, these findings have troubling implications for public understanding of the rights and needs of pregnant people to access this common health care service.

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Table 1:
Topics of news stories in which abortion is merely mentioned

n = 494; 63% of the overall sample; Krippendorff's $\alpha = 0.803$

Topic	In 2013 sample (n = 228)	In 2016 sample (n = 266)	Total (n = 494)	% of all "Mention " stories	% of Total sample
Electoral politics	84	163	247	50%	32%
Catholic church/Pope Francis	27	17	44	9%	8%
"Abortion and other hot-button issues"	15	19	34	7%	6%
International stories (mentions of abortion in China, India, Ireland, Poland, others)	19	8	27	5%	4%
Entertainment stories/reviews	11	7	18	4%	3%
Wendy Davis filibuster of Texas's abortion bills	13	0	13	3%	2%
Vacant Supreme Court seat	0	11	11	2%	2%
Emergency contraception	10	0	10	2%	1%
Supreme Court ruling on marriage equality	6	0	6	1%	1%
Efforts to "defund" Planned Parenthood	0	5	5	1%	1%
Zika virus	0	5	5	1%	1%
Others (3 or fewer stories per topic)	43	31	74	15%	9%

Table 2:
Topics of news stories in which abortion is covered substantively

n=289; 37% of the overall sample; Krippendorff's $\alpha = 0.878$

Topic	In 2013 sample (n = 145)	In 2016 sample (n = 144)	Total (n = 289)	% of all substantive stories	% of Total sample
State abortion policies	58	32	90	31%	11%
Electoral politics (Presidential race, etc.)	23	52	75	26%	10%
Efforts to “defund” Planned Parenthood	0	19	19	7%	3%
Supreme Court cases & vacant seat	8	11	19	7%	2%
International abortion stories (Ireland, Poland, Brazil, North Korea)	13	5	18	6%	2%
Criminal trial of Dr. Kermit Gosnell	14	0	14	5%	2%
Catholic/Pope Francis views on abortion	7	5	12	4%	2%
Other topics (3 or fewer stories per topic)	22	31	53	18%	7%

Table 3:
Fetal personhood and women's personal stories in substantive abortion stories

n=289; 37% of the overall sample; Krippendorff's α range = 0.777 – 1.0)

Reference to:	In 2013 sample (n = 145)	In 2016 sample (n = 144)	Total (n = 289)	% of all substantiv e stories	% of Total sample
Fetus as a person	48	47	95	33%	12%
Fetal pain	10	8	18	6%	2%
Fetal pain science is disputed	5	7	12	4%	2%
Women's personal stories of abortion	21	11	32	11%	4%

Note: More than one reference could appear in a single story.

Table 4:
Basic abortion facts appearing in substantive abortion stories (2016 sample only)

n=144 stories (Krippendorff's α range = 0.896 – 1.0)

Fact	n
Abortion is safe	1
Abortion is common	3
Later abortion is very rare	3
Most abortion patients are already mothers	0
Many abortion restrictions pose barriers to abortion care	8
The number of abortion providers in the U.S. is declining	4