REPUBLICAN WOMEN AND THE IMPACT OF THE

POST-DOBBS ELECTORAL ENVIRONMENT

ON CANDIDATE SUCCESS

by

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ABSTRACT

The political environment in America experienced a phenomenal change in the summer of 2022 when the Supreme Court decided to overturn the federally protected right to abortion, instead turning it to the states to legislate. This study answers the following questions: Are the political contextual factors that typically affect Republican women still relevant today, given the current abortion climate post-Dobbs? Republican women have been consistently underrepresented in elected office, but recently more conservative women are being elected and taking on women's issues which are increasingly relevant among many voters. By relying on an extensive examination of the academic literature of factors that normally affect Republican women, my study was conducted to test the hypothesis that the impact of the district, political, and contextual variables in the post-Dobbs electoral environment uniquely impacts the electoral success of Republican women. The Dobbs decision came about in the midst of the midterm elections in full swing for Congress, offering a unique opportunity to observe how Republican women approached one of the more divisive and polarizing issues today. In reality, the electoral environments for the 82 female Republican candidates for the House of Representatives revealed that while incumbency, campaign expenditures, and partisanship of districts were all significant, there were political contextual factors that differed across districts and uniquely impacted electoral success. Based on the inferential statistics, I infer these changes in the electoral environments are due to the contemporary abortion climate that exists from the Dobbs decision. There are limitations to this study due to the timely nature of the Dobbs decision and the time of this study being conducted. However, this study demonstrates the importance of examining the ways in which important social and political issues can manifest uniquely for Republican women, and if the implications may impact the slow but continual electoral success of this underrepresented population.

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INTRODUCTION

Each January for the past few years, the Pew Research Center claims it is once again the year of the woman, and the headline following the Congressional elections has consistently communicated the same message that the newest Congressional class represents the most women elected to serve. Democratic women have been consistently dominating political institutions compared to Republican women; however, while the "118th Congress has a record number of women" once again (Leppert and Desilver 2023), the most recent Congressional class elected to serve from January of 2023 until 2025 also represents the most diverse group of Republican women that has ever been elected to serve. On the heels of a midterm season featuring the highest number of female candidates participating in general elections, the Supreme Court's decision in Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization case in June 2022 brought abortion to the forefront of political discussion in unanticipated ways for many Americans as well as politicians and candidates who found themselves in the midst of campaigning for the upcoming midterm elections. Many Democratic politicians, both elected and prospective candidates, have capitalized on the polarizing national debate of abortion. And while Republicans have found electoral success in championing pro-life rhetoric, the new landscape of abortion politics today has left some Republicans stumped on how to tackle the issue within the traditionally conservative party ideology. For Republican women in particular, women's issues have been governed and championed more heavily by Democrats, so female Republican candidates were met with the challenge of establishing a strategy on how to balance the growing division among many Americans on abortion, adhering to Republican Party ideology, and factoring in their own districts and constituencies. While some states had a variety of pre-Dobbs restrictions or legislation in place, the Supreme Court's decision shifted the focus more significantly on individual states and elections since

the issue no longer rested heavily into the hands of nine Justices. Consequently, as a result of this ruling, many politicians were pushed to establish a stance on abortion, if they hadn't already. There are 435 state representatives elected to serve in the House every two years, and each of their congressional districts can differ uniquely as a result of demographics and factors that vary across each district. In light of the recent abortion climate relative to the Dobbs decision, examining how candidates have reacted to the national flare of attention to the issue can impart a better understanding of how abortion has manifested uniquely throughout the country and to what extent the electoral environments for Republican women may differ in terms of the normal district, political, and contextual factors that have been at play.

<u>REPUBLICAN WOMEN AND THE CONTEMPORARY ABORTION CLIMATE</u>

Republican women remain significantly underrepresented in Congress; however, the 2022 midterm elections revealed not only a significant increase of Republican women competing in general elections but also a group that represents the most diverse group of GOP women elected to serve, relative to background, race/ethnicity, and political viewpoints. This has not been the case historically, and Fox and Lawless (2011) explain how irrespective of occupation, political competence or relevant experience, both Democratic and Republican women are less likely to perceive themselves as confidently qualified to pursue elected office compared to men of a similar stature, thus serving as a perpetuating factor as to why full inclusion of women in electoral processes is "likely illusory" (p. 62). The authors go on to argue "Even though women perform as well as men on Election Day, women's historic exclusion from the political sphere may underscore their perceptions and work to women's detriment." (p. 62) In considering this fact, the increase of women, and specifically Republican women, seeking political office each election cycle can challenge the hindering perception of women appearing or believing themselves less qualified. Additionally, while

increased female participation is promising, women succeeding and subsequently serving in office is all the more impactful and can stimulate more female political engagement, whether encouraging voting or running for office, especially for women who are also members of an underrepresented minority group. Atkeson (2003) studies how the visibility of female candidates impacts political engagement, finding that "For women, and possibly other less-visible groups such as Latinos, Blacks, gays, or even the young, the contextual political environment can either stimulate or depress political engagement," but "when the contextual environment is diverse and viable cues are sent that politics is an acceptable and appropriate place, mobilization occurs" (p. 1053).

Therefore, while this presence of a more diverse female GOP class is likely promising for the continued increase of women serving in Congress, the proportion of the group is still staggeringly low compared to female representation among Democrats as the Republican party features less diversity among elected officials and the electorate in general. Beyond female candidates' own perceptions of their competency and engagement in politics, gender perceptions and belief stereotypes remain relevant factors among some voters when it comes to female candidates, female Republicans are often faced with additional assumptions of being more liberal-leaning than their male counterparts (Dolan 2010), serving as a juxtaposition for some voters when they are met with the decision of who to throw support behind. With this in mind, it is imperative to understand the unique challenges Republican women face, specifically candidates, in their districts and what factors facilitate and contribute to the success and electability of these women, and those that may not.

Using studies and statistics provided by the CAWP, Carroll and Sanbonmatsu (2013) provide extensive research and analysis on where women, particularly Republican women, are able to find electoral success and examine the role of gender, ideology, district data, partisanship, among other important factors to explain female representation overtime. This

research offers comprehensive explanations for the party imbalance as it relates to gender as well as identifies key factors that facilitate electability for Republican women. The authors point out that Democratic voters during the 2018 midterm elections were "very receptive to women candidates" in the House, but the following 2020 midterms also saw a substantial growth of GOP women elected with 30 women as did the 2022 elections even further with 35 now serving in the House (Pew Research Center 2022). The research of Carroll and Sanbonmatsu is highly relevant, though a bit dated, and although their research extends only to 2008, their analysis is applicable to today's political landscape and representation because despite the overall growth of women over the past decade, there is nonetheless gender disparity among the parties within Congress in general. Today, the 118th Congress captures that across both chambers of Congress, GOP women take up 44 out of the 540 seats (or 8%) while Democratic women occupy 109 seats (or 20%), and specifically in the House GOP women hold 16% of seats compared to the 43% of Democratic women. In their research, Carroll and Sanbonmatsu consider abortion in their analysis of female candidates and recognize its relevance in elections. But their research is understandably lacking the important consideration of the 2022 Supreme Court decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* that overturned almost four decades of federally protected access to abortion, and a factor which significantly is currently altering the electoral landscape for female candidates. With this in mind, I will be applying a new crucial element to female electability that–as a result of the ever-changing political climate– was not applied by these authors and many others. There are district, candidate and political contextual factors that can facilitate or hinder the electability of Republican female candidates and allow or inhibit flexibility on political issues. However, the Dobbs ruling has made district characteristics even more significant in predicting the likelihood of Republican women's electoral success.

This research examines how conservative women are navigating this challenging political climate and what the 2022 midterm elections can reveal about the behavior of these women.

<div align="center">WOMEN AS POLITICAL FIGURES</div>

In every election cycle, candidate success and electability have pointed to many factors that continue to evolve overtime and in conjunction with other variables. The results of any political election must not be boiled down to any one or two factors, rather a chorus of variables that vary from one voter to another, one district to the next, and candidate to candidate. To assume elections can be simplified in such a way would make one ignorant of the ways in which many kinds of variables interact with each other to reveal what is significant, and not, in an election. Voter demographics, media coverage of candidates, campaign expenditures, candidate personality, candidate partisanship, campaign platform and issue stance are among some of the abundant factors that must be considered during any given election in America today. Beyond this, electability of a candidate can also be influenced by other independent factors such as the state of the economy, current social climate, partisanship of the incumbent president, strength of opposing candidates, and even global conflicts. However, candidate gender has remained a uniquely impactful and relevant factor that has continued to plague elections differently overtime (Koch 1999, 2002; Dolan 2010, Meeks and Domke 2016). As more women are being elected to serve in political office and female representation has been somewhat more common compared to the past, the influence of gender-related beliefs and perceptions for female candidates can be lowered on the scale of relevant factors affecting voters during an election but cannot be written off as nonetheless significant.

Years of gender-related research in politics (see for instance Dolan 2004, 2010; Huddy & Terkildsen 1993; Koch 1999; Alexander and Andersen 1993; Meeks and Domke

2016) continues to reveal the unique ways in which female candidates and politicians can be subjected to different treatment and judgment when it comes to the evaluation of their capabilities and competence, relative to male counterparts, and in what ways this differs for Republican versus Democratic women. However, with the 118th Congress revealing not only an increase in overall female representation but also the most diverse group of Republican women elected, this new class of Republican women in particular provides an opportunity for deeper analysis into the unique factors at play in these most recent elections. These women who were elected by their constituencies in their respective Congressional districts are a nod to the importance of how different district factors may facilitate different kinds of leaders. More importantly is to examine the variety of factors that differ per election that can help uncover what kinds of districts (and the trends or patterns that exist) may be more receptive than others to different types of female candidates and why this may be. By identifying these factors that have been found as relevant for all Congressional elections, examining each relative to all female Republican candidates in 2022 can provide an understanding of the ways in which they may be facing unique challenges when it comes to electability as opposed to men and even Democratic women. On behalf of the slow but continual upward trend for a historically underrepresented demographic in government institutions, more research must be conducted to examine and understand what kinds of factors are present during the elections of these women and how they interacted with one another to facilitate an environment where female Republicans could be successful and also where they were not.

Instead of examining a national election where the demographics are referred to on a more national–potentially more generalized– scale, Congressional elections contrastingly allow for the analysis of a much smaller population and facilitate a clearer and more holistic understanding of the specific demographics that may prove significant and what kinds of districts are electing which kinds of candidates. A significantly more diversified Congress is

just one of the many politically significant events to occur in 2022, the already divisive and deeply polarizing issue of abortion found itself back among the most pinnacle issues faced by the country. The decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* (2022) uniquely manifested itself in a variety of ways but is significant because today, what was once the federally protected right guaranteed by the Supreme Court decision in the 1974 case of *Roe V. Wade* has now been passed on to individual states to legislate and enforce. Following the landmark 2022 decision, the midterm elections featured heavy discussion on the topic now that state leaders have absorbed the power to legislate the issue for their citizens. Candidates and their respective campaigns addressed the topic in different ways, especially since states across the U.S. differ greatly in the kinds of policies enacted after the Supreme Court's decision. Not only have women's issues been debated, legislated, and voted on by majority men in the legislature throughout time, Democrats– especially more moderate to liberal women–have consistently held the microphone for these issues. So, the steady increase of more Republican women elected in 2022 offers potential insights into how these female legislatures will strategize and govern women's issues that remain salient among many voters, particularly women. Abortion has been a political weapon to use against Republicans. But even still, the Republican Party has consistently been able to utilize anti-abortion arguments effectively to mobilize their supporters. However, Republican women, specifically candidates, are facing a vastly different political environment today as a result of abortion politics.

<div align="center">WOMEN AS ELECTABLE CANDIDATES</div>

In considering the factors that can affect any candidate's electability, women have faced nuanced hurdles in being elected linked to long-standing public opinion and gender stereotypes. Since the establishment of American democracy, women have been underrepresented—and initially absent—within political institutions. The early twentieth

century ushered in a new wave that allowed women to begin serving in political institutions, and since then, female representation has been steadily increasing and more women are being elected to serve in political office, especially in Congress. While women are being elected to serve, the proportion of those women in office relative to the U.S. gender distribution reveals a lack of representation. As provided by the United States Census Bureau, the 2020 census reveals that females account for approximately 50.8% of the US population. Contrastingly, the Pew Research Center conveys statistics on the current partisan gender divide, with women making up 29% (128 out of 439 total seats) in the House of Representatives. Despite increasing largely from 20% female in 2018, this proportion illustrates how political institutions are still not representative of the true gender demographics of the American population (Blazina and Desilver 2021; Desilver and Leppert 2023).

Why are Women Underrepresented?

Scholars have researched heavily into gender disproportionality in politics (see for instance Fox and Lawless 2005, 2011; Lawless and Pearson 2008) as well gender and electoral success (Dolan 2010; Huddy and Terkildsen 1993; Lawless and Pearson 2008; Dolan et al. 2020) and discovered various factors that are relevant, including candidate-specific characteristics, including campaign funding, candidate quality, personality, and more, contribute to the success of a candidate; however, voter-specific characteristics have an obvious influence as well, ranging from voter's gender, political experience, educational attainment, as well as gender beliefs and stereotypes actively employed on candidate evaluations. Public opinion on gender representation in political office can greatly impact voter behavior, and voters who support equal representation in government are more likely to support a female candidate, through campaign donations, volunteering, and individual vote, while those who do not prioritize equal representation are more likely to vote for the male (Dolan 2010, p. 70).

As more women assume positions of power in the political sphere, research has aimed to disavow the belief that sexism is a primary tool for evaluating female candidates, but studies performed over the past few decades maintain that gender stereotypes about both male and female figures still persist in the public's opinion and ultimately influence their vote, nonetheless. However, these stereotypes are more significantly and negatively impacting for women, especially evident in elections with two women or when a female is challenged by a male (Alexander and Andersen 1993; Carroll and Sanbonmatsu 2013; Dolan et al. 2020), while voters are less inclined to evaluate candidates based on gender when male candidates are challenging one another (Koch 1999; Alexander and Andersen 1993). Based on this research, it is clear that gender is more relevant for women candidates, sometimes hindering a candidacy if applied in a negative way that leads voters to doubt capabilities.

As more women run for political office, more research displays a direct link between public opinion on the personality, physical attractiveness, even choice in attire of a female candidate to her capabilities, likability, and competence as a leader (Sigelman et al. 1987, p. 48), and new coverage of female candidates tends to feature more negative commentary relative to male candidates (Kahn 1994), especially with the dominance of social media and news outlets which can foster a toxic environment for negative discussion of candidates, particularly seen with female candidates campaigning at the national level such as Hillary Clinton, Sarah Palin, and Kamala Harris (Schlehofer et al. 2011; Koch 1999). This link operates as an unfortunate source of negative commentary disproportionately impacting female candidates. And while sexism and gender stereotypes may not be harming women as extensively as 40 years ago– if one measures this by the increase of female political participation– gender perceptions are still at play in elections as voters implicitly–or explicitly–evaluate the abilities of female candidates based on characteristics linked to gender.

Public Opinion and the Impact of Gender Stereotypes

Among the most significant and influential factors in candidate electability is public opinion, and specifically the way voters attribute ability and competency to politicians for handling various issues. But particularly for public opinion of female candidates, they are uniquely impacted by gender stereotypes and assumptions used to evaluate competence and candidate viability, sometimes to the detriment of a candidacy. For example, as observed in past national elections where a female candidate is present, some voters may link feminine characteristics to perceptions of weakness or lacking toughness, determining these women ill-fit to serve as Commander-in-Chief. When it comes to positions of power, the 2020 presidential election is the first to successfully elect a woman vice president; however, before this–and maybe still today– envisioning a female is not the first tendency simply because voters have been socialized to see and experience only male presidents. Beyond this, the lack of female representation can heighten a belief that women are not capable of holding such a position, as visibility mentioned previously is a relevant factor in attributing competence to a field or career (Atkeson 2003). Not only can these internalized gender roles coincide with voters' perceptions of female leaders compared with men, but this can also dissuade women from seeking political office and simply discourage the public to vote for a female candidate (Fox and Lawless 2011).

The purpose of this study is to examine general elections for female GOP candidates in their respective districts but considering prior research on gendered treatment present in national elections (Schlehofer et al. 2011) is helpful as women of all election levels are not immune from gender stereotypes and assumptions. Using this research as a base can facilitate a deeper analysis into how it may manifest at a localized level (meaning in congressional districts), as the lack of female representation exists at the national level just as it does with Congress; however, examining female GOP candidates who were both successful and

unsuccessful in midterm elections and their uniquely individual districts can give way to identifying any trends or factors that prove significant for the electability of these women. As explained by Dolan, Deckman, and Swers (2020), the unsuccessful run of Hillary Clinton in the 2016 presidential election is a testament to remind the public that "American women are far from monolithic in their political leanings" (p. xi).

Ample research exists on the specific stereotypes that the public have about men and women and the subsequent traits and abilities that are attributed to gender. Alexander and Anderson (1993) study why and how these stereotypes influence political support for women and overall voter behavior in election contexts, finding that voters utilize gender attitudes and roles to evaluate candidates when other information is lacking and when there is a female candidate in the race, as mentioned previously. Koch (1999) found that the public is less likely to employ stereotypes when more information about a candidate has been acquired (like with higher profile elections); however, educational attainment is also a factor in citizens' abilities to ascribe traits to issues based on gender. Furthermore, Koch argues that the "politically informed" are more likely to make these connections while less-educated citizens do not go as far as linking gender perceptions to issues (p. 90).

The consensus among many gender and political scholars is that voters perceive female politicians as kind, gentle, compassionate, motherly and more liberal, and assigned personality traits that coincide with the type of issues–more feminine tasks that utilize that natural femininity of women– believed to be suited best to women based upon these factors —policies such as education, healthcare, social welfare and race are all examples of issues attributed to female politicians based on believed gender traits (Alexander and Andersen 1993; Dolan 2010; Huddy and Terkildsen 1993; Kahn 1994; Koch 1999; Lawless 2004; Fox and Lawless 2011; Carroll and Sanbonmatsu 2013; Dolan et al. 2020). Contrastingly, men are perceived as more willing to take risks, assertive, intelligent and more emotionally suited for

difficult tasks categorized as more masculine tasks that correspond with masculine traits. Hence, men are often seen as having an advantage in addressing issues that pertain to the economy, crime, military, agriculture and security in general based on their gendered characteristics (Alexander and Andersen 1993; Dolan 2010; Huddy and Terkildsen 1993; Kahn 1994; Koch 1999; Lawless 2004; Fox and Lawless 2011; Carroll and Sanbonmatsu 2013; Dolan et al. 2020). Based on a sample of American adults in 2018, Pew Research Center concluded that the overall majority of the American public supports female leadership; however, between male and females, women in political leadership positions seen as displaying a higher ability of "serving as role models for children" and in "maintaining a tone of civility and respect" relative to men. If a female Representative is seen more as a role model as opposed to a leader who exhibits a willingness to perform more riskier tasks, topics of military intervention or foreign policy might be perceived as a task that men are significantly more equipped to handle. Gender stereotypes influence the belief in women being able to handle domestic but not so much foreign policy (Conway, 2001, p. 233).

While women's representation has continued to increase, voter attitudes and assumptions can be implicit or even explicit challenges to female candidates to prove their capabilities. As authors Boles and Durio (1981) explain, "Candidates often have a choice: they may adopt strategies that exploit voters' stereotypes about male and female candidates, or they may try to dispel stereotypes by acting in ways inconsistent with their traditional strengths," but by discussing their own issues priorities, while male candidates are afforded increased flexibility because voters are more assured in their candidacies, for women, stating important issues can sometimes only allow them to "dispel voters' doubts about their ability" (pp. 483-485). Female candidates can be cognizant and thus capable of challenging voters' gender-related assumptions on their abilities, but there are nonetheless political topics and issues that the public has determined as requiring more male competence versus female

competence, and vice-versa in some instances. As author Dolan (2018) argues, gender assumptions can manifest in two ways, with the first occurring among candidates themselves and their personality, to which the author describes as "*gender-trait* stereotypes," while the other deals with the particular policy issues and topics that are linked to gender, referred to as "*gender-belief* stereotypes" (p. 8). These stereotypes often function as additional hurdles for female candidates, and I will expound upon them and how they shape perceptions of competence and authority that differ based on gender.

Gender and Competence

Women may have some attributes that some men may not be perceived to have, but when it comes to what voters value more of their political leaders and the issues that matter, gender is considered a relevant indicator of favorability because the policy areas that women are often perceived as weak or less capable in handling are often those which are prioritized in politics for many voters during elections. For example, the public may favor a female for the Secretary of Education but a male for Secretary of Defense or Secretary of Treasury. But when considering a candidate for the legislature (and even more so with executive elections), candidates are being elected to handle all kinds of policies, and when it comes down to a female or male, military or economic policy may take precedence over what Shapiro and Mahajan (1986) determine as "compassion" issues that women are more equip at handling– children, poverty, the elderly and unemployed (Huddy and Terkildsen 1993; Dolan 2004). Therefore, male candidates may hold the advantage over females if voters place higher value in political leaders being able to handle the tougher, more masculine issues (Huddy and Terkildsen 1993; Kahn 1994; Lawless 2004; Dolan 2010). While voters may believe a woman more competent in some issues like education or reproduction rights, the evaluations of the issues that attract the belief of male competence–the military or economy– are more important to voters (Dolan 2010).

Additional research has garnered information on when female candidates attempt or are perceived as having more masculine traits and if - and to what extent- this is a strategy elicits more support for female candidates from voters who value traits that coincide with male leaders. Studies on perception of elected females versus elected male politicians (Dolan 2010; Huddy and Terkildsen 1993) found that women were evaluated more highly in comparison to their male counterparts when they present themselves as having masculine and feminine characteristics. In taking account elections that featured a female candidate, Huddy and Terkildsen (1993) argue that "both male and female political candidates feel compelled to adopt at least some positions or traits thought typical of the other gender," and while men may attempt to appear more sympathetic or soft, female candidates in more public state or national elections found favor when they "stressed their toughness and aggressiveness, typically masculine qualities" (p. 120).

Other scholars argue that gender stereotypes may not be primarily to blame for lack of female representation or participation and assert instead that the ability to appear as both masculine and feminine can be valuable when it comes to the public's attribution of gender-related characteristics to the issues they coincide with. (Alexander & Anderson 1993; Boles and Durio 1981). When voters believe female candidates to be capable in handling issues like terrorism or the economy, the openness to support increases greatly for their candidacy and "the desire for greater gender balance in government" (Dolan 2010, p. 85). Fox and Lawless (2011) attempt to debunk this, arguing female politicians who display seemingly masculine characteristics of "confident, assertive, and self-promoting" can appear "undesirable" (p. 60).

Additional research seeks to illustrate how citizen's perception on candidate's issue positions is also heavily influenced by partisanship, rather than solely gender beliefs or stereotypes (Koch 1999, 2001; Dolan 2004, 2010; Carroll and Sanbonmatsu 2013). Blind to gender, voters will still assign candidates' attention or value to issues based just on a party

label. For example, issues such as environmental or welfare policies are those which voters presume lower priority for Republican candidates but higher for Democrats (Koch 1999). Other authors assert that when voters lack valuable knowledge on a candidate *besides* gender, many are likely to utilize gender stereotypes as a means of evaluation, often painting female candidates as more liberal than men; however, these stereotypes impact perceptions differently depending on the candidate's party and can result in Republican women appearing less extreme than Democratic women. For the GOP women though, appearing more liberal is often not an advantage as Republican voters may find liberal assumptions a point of confusion and concern if they cause conflict with conservative ideology. Therefore, the intersection of gender and partisanship elicit more negative consequences for female Republican candidates specifically. With this in mind, liberal-leaning perceptions do not negatively impede Democratic women as significantly as they do for Republican women, meaning consideration of this is more crucial to understanding the behavior and electability of GOP women in particular.

Gender and Authority

Beyond the ideas of competence and capability in addressing issues, the very idea of authority is also linked directly with a candidate's identity, meaning voters can implicitly grant candidates and political figures the authority to speak on issues based on their understanding, own experiences, or identity that aligns with corresponding issues. However, just as easily granted authority can it be taken away from a politician if they are perceived as not worthy or justified to speak on or govern a particular issue. Author Hanna F. Pitkin (1967) writes about the varying interpretations of representation, explaining that while most understand representatives as those who are called to act "for those in his charge, but that he must do what he thinks best, using his own judgment and wisdom, since he is chosen to make decisions for (that is, instead of) his constituents," while the "minority maintain that the

representative's duty is to reflect accurately the wishes and opinions of those he represents"
(p. 4). This contradiction can be observed in American democracy as elected representatives
are charged with representing a diverse group of constituents, of whom have varying
identities, priorities, beliefs as both people and as voters, but they are also elected to office
with their own ideology and priorities, despite being elected by their constituents as a
representative for them. Maintaining allegiance to constituents, parties, and their own
ideology can be difficult and explainable by the fact that George Washington was the first
and only member of government to be elected unanimously, meaning the ability of a
representative to act and make decisions for all those he or she represents is somewhat of a
unfortunate fallacy in a representative democracy. Despite this reality, rather than the white
and male dominating legislature that persisted throughout most of history, our government
showcases more diverse representatives with different backgrounds, interests, and identities
who found themselves at the legislative table that had once constructed policy for them
without their voice or perspective.

One may argue that when the government still featured very little diversity among its
governing members, a proposal of legislation by a woman or someone of color may have
been perceived as self-interested and therefore less authority would be granted to the
member. However, as disproportionate as Congress still may be to the demographics of the
country today, there are nonetheless men and women elected to serve who are Black, Latinx,
and members of the LGBTQIA+ community. With this in mind, while Congresspeople are
elected to serve those who elected them, they likely do not ascribe to the identities to which
they are called to represent. Therefore, authority can be provided to those individuals who do
represent those varying perspectives to speak on issues related to different groups of people.
An increasing amount of research focuses on how representatives, for instance female or
Latinx, are more likely to propose or speak on topics related to their own identity that are a

minority in Congress. For example, authors Reingold, Widener, and Harmon (2020) study the role of intersectionality in the legislature in terms of gender and find that women and minority lawmakers are not only more likely to introduce bills that pertain to those groups but also to those of other "disadvantaged subgroups of women and minorities," as they are able to harness the authority to address these kinds issues and even on behalf of those who also fall under the umbrella of minority groups or identities, particularly who identify as women of color (p. 820). Beyond allegiance to party or even constituencies, the identity of being a woman and/ or minority is the powerful motivator for addressing topics of this nature (Pitkin 1967).

Understanding authority is significant when considering the behavior of women in government and as well as how it relates to partisanship. When it comes to specifically women's issues, one cannot ignore the proportional difference of women in the Democratic Party versus the Republican Party, so if authority to speak or advocate on women's issues is a matter of being a woman, it is imperative to examine how the gender-partisan makeup (meaning the lower female GOP representation) impacts the Republican Party's ability to address such issues. But more so today, as more Republican women assume elected office and face more discussion on gender-related issues, it is imperative to consider how gendered assumptions shape public opinion on competence and authority, uniquely impacting not only Republicans women's' potential authority to speak on these topics but also the choice to–or not to–advocate or address issues as candidates. Overall, there is evidence that the attribution of gender characteristics to ability and authority manifests uniquely for female Republican candidates. Gender can influence voters' beliefs on the level of conservatism, and extensive research has examined how female candidates, specifically Republicans, are assumed to be more liberal and how women's issues offer a nuanced challenge and point of contention for some candidates.

LIBERALIZATION OF FEMALE CANDIDATES AND THE IMPACT ON REPUBLICAN

WOMEN

The disproportion of Republican to Democratic women serving in Congress begs the question of why this representation gap not only exists but persists. The electoral process can create uniquely different circumstances for candidates, with challenges taking shape differently between party and level. In attempting to explain the nuanced hurdles faced by female GOP state legislators and the partisan imbalance for women in Congress, author Danielle Thomsen (2015) emphasizes how more moderate women can face a more difficult electoral climate in GOP primaries and can be a factor in the whether a candidate's moderate positions may cause a concern or become a liability for acquiring the Republican Party's trust, support, or endorsement, which is a relevant factor in candidate success. (Dolan et al. 2021). Party support serves as a valuable stamp of approval in order to move on to a general election to face–most likely– a Democratic challenger. As previously mentioned, public opinion and gender beliefs often result in female candidates appearing more liberal-leaning, but these assumptions manifest uniquely for Republican women, impacting their flexibility on certain issues, especially those related to women's rights and reproductive health. A byproduct of the public's liberal perceptions of female Republicans can result in these women shifting towards a more conservative ideology on some or maybe all issues, in order to remain viable candidates, rather than a potential liability for the GOP. After the 2020 midterms showcased higher numbers of female candidates, author and expert on women Michele Swers stated that "ideologically, this new class of GOP women represent a range of views" but also "brought more extremely conservative women to Congress" (Dolan et al. 2020, p. xxiii). Studying this ideologically diverse yet more conservative group of women can allow for better analysis on those issues they appear to hold more conservative stances on

but also certain issues that especially today present an ideological challenge, women's issues being particularly notable in this case.

Republican Women and GOP Ideology

An abundance of research has suggested that voters perceive Republican women to be on the ideological left of their Republican male counterparts (Huddy and Terkildsen 1993; Hogan 2008; Dolan 2004, 2010, 2019; Carroll and Sanbonmatsu 2013; Roberti 2022; Thomsen 2015; Meeks and Domke 2016; Fox and Lawless 2011; Koch 1999, 2002; Kahn and Goldenberg 1991; Boles and Durio 1981; Alexander and Andersen 1993); however, whether these conclusions are drawn by analyzing the entire candidate pool (which is likely to feature candidates that can present a range of positions) or not, based on the women who are successfully elected in the past decade, liberal-leaning perceptions appear to be unfounded. While in the past, one could argue that voters afforded GOP women more bandwidth on certain issues, the electoral field today proves, not only, that women–especially candidates– are not afforded the flexibility as may have once existed but that Republican women are more ideologically conservative than ever before. For example, based on a comprehensive analysis of Republican legislators (both male and female) in 1981 and 2008, authors Carroll and Sanbonmatsu (2013) concluded that legislators in 2008 were more conservative than those in 1991 in terms of "self-identified political ideology," and "women legislators and their male counterparts in both chambers were more likely to describe themselves as conservative or very conservative in 2008 than in 1991" (p. 79). Despite the level of conservatism that continues to exist among Congresswomen elected in 2022, as candidates, voters–and their subsequent perceptions and assumptions– still serve as an important hurdle that candidates must consider. Therefore, examining GOP women as candidates (versus observing behavior primarily as elected officials) allows better understanding of the relevant factors that influence electability, especially as the political

climate over the past decade has ushered in new heights of political extremism and
polarization.

When it comes to voters' understanding of candidates some scholars (Koch 2002;
Dolan 2004, 2010) argue that party affiliation serves a consistent tool for predicting candidate
ideology but easier for Republican men to utilize than women, while other research goes
further to assert that perceived stereotypes attached to political parties themselves facilitate a
voters' decision at the ballot box (Koch 1999). Conceptualizing Republican women may
require more cognitive effort because their "partisanship suggests a conservative orientation,
but the candidate's gender implies a liberal position" as opposed to a female democratic
candidate whose ideology and partisanship is considered aligning more consistently to voters.
(Koch 2002, p. 455) For Republican women, their success in the Republican Party may
increase as they adhere to more traditional, conservative ideology in order to prevent
assumptions of liberal or moderate-leaning positions. For Republican women who experience
more competition from men in elections, moderate policy positions are likely to weaken their
electability and advocating for more conservative policies can attract more conservative
constituents, especially male voters.

Danielle Thomsen (2015) explains that for women's representation, the value of
"party fit", or the "interactions between the candidate and the party", is an important indicator
for female electability in Congress (p. 301). Republican women's level of conservatism is an
increasingly relevant factor in determining "party fit", and Republican men often express
more freedom to adhere to more moderate policies, as opposed to women, and have a lower
threshold of conservatism expected to meet to be elected. Thomsen espouses on the idea of
"party fit" further, stating the theory hypothesizes that liberal Republicans or conservative
Democrats are unlikely to run for office, adding that a likely contributing idea behind this
phenomenon and its stricter impact on Republicans is as a result of a more widespread and

varying Democratic ideology that voters may be receptive to more so than Republicans. This reasoning is based on the findings of Stanford professor and researcher Adam Bonica (2013) who studies candidates and to what extent fundraising contributions from PACs are impacted by ideological movement from a baseline from what the author determines as more centrist ideology, finding that more extremism sees less monetary gain but that more extremist Democrats do not suffer as greatly as Republican candidates. Bonica's analysis focuses more on the effects of moving away from centrist ideology, and while my study centers around the impacts of Republican candidates– women specifically–appearing more moderate or liberal, Bonica's conclusions help emphasize how electability for Republican candidates can be more dependent on adherence to conservative ideology and potentially give way to if and why female candidates may work to counteract moderate or liberal perceptions by expressing more conservative positions, or why those who do not are not as successful GOP candidates.

Huddy and Terkildsen (1993) argue belief stereotypes play a role in the flexibility granted to female Republicans on certain issues because voters' assumptions of candidate's issue positions can be shaped when stereotypes render female candidates as significantly more Democratic, liberal, and feminist than male candidates, arguing that it may be "easier for liberal female candidates to get their message across to voters but may create problems for female Republicans who find that voters misperceive their political platform" (p. 143). Research continues on to suggest this unique challenge faced by Republican women when it comes to establishing and communicating ideological stances to voters is a result of the perceptions of issue and traits aligning better with Democratic women than of Republican women (Dolan 2004). In general Democrats are more inclined to support the general presence of women in political office than Republicans, yet this support is not offered to Republican women (Dolan 2010, p. 76). More recent work argues that more conservative women have been elected to serve in the legislature than moderate or liberal men (see for instance Carroll

and Sanbonmatsu 2013; Dolan et al. 2021), but obtaining party support is the consistently crucial factor to enable this success for women (Carroll & Sanbonmatsu 2013; Dolan 2004, 2010, 2018; Thomsen 2015) because while GOP women may benefit from independents and Democrats assuming them to be more moderate–due to the appearance of seeming less extreme than GOP men, Republicans are less inclined to expressing support and vote for GOP women because of this same logic which painted them as more moderate than GOP men than they would like or tolerate (Dolan 2019). Additionally, authors (Dolan et al. 2020) explain the emergence of more conservative women as a result of moderate Republican women feeling they no longer "fit the modern Republican Party," and the byproduct is that "only a smaller pool of conservative women can win" (p. 221). Research of the different election levels has also pointed to primaries creating a more difficult electoral climate for Republican women who lean more moderate in any way compared to general elections since moving past party primaries to face a Democratic challenger can lead to the public's assumption that the female candidate already possesses the valuable party support (Dolan et al. 2020; Carroll & Sanbonmatsu 2013).

Republican Women and Women's Issues

Women in the Democratic Party have consistently and increasingly dominated most seats relative to women from the Republican Party over the last few decades, and while Democrats' representation has grown, the number of Republican women in Congress has only experienced minimal growth in comparison. This "party imbalance" between women increases polarization between the two parties leading to a decreased presence of moderates in Congress, inadvertently dissuading those with moderate ideology from running for office (Thomsen 2015, pp. 295-296). But while women's issues have not been central to the GOP platform and framework, as more Republican women are elected to serve in districts across the country, in the past decade, conservative women have begun to step up and lead the

charge on specifically women's issues, an effort that challenges the accusations from voters or Democrats that the GOP is anti-women or anti-feminist which the media has often coined them as. However, this differs across the country as not all voters perceive women's issues as a salient and heightened political topic of concern that will ultimately fuel their support for the party. But there lies an important distinction regarding this more recent move by some female politicians to claim women's issues by Republican women because these women are those who have already won their respective elections and may more freely be able to advocate or claim these issues without fearing liberal-leaning assumptions of voters that can impact their electability in the present moment; these women are utilizing the flexibility that is granted to them from already being in office.

Abortion has consistently stood out among women's issues in the past few decades and has garnered loads of attention as a salient issue for many Americans, especially young and female voters. Extensive research has examined how this particular topic has manifested differently in terms of partisanship, gender, and ideology; however, the climate surrounding abortion in 2022 offers key insights into how the issue–heightened to a new level– can play an important role in the subsequent Congressional elections. The reality of the Supreme Court's decision revealed not only how states differ across the country in terms of abortion policy (some with trigger bans, others with abortion protections, etc.) but also how Americans themselves, across all states, differ in their attitudes and beliefs, showing that the emphasis and attention placed on abortion may be heightened among from states and districts compared to others, thus potentially being more important during elections versus others. Observing how the increase of Republican women in Congress impacts conversation and legislation related to women's issues is worth considerable interest moving forward; however, the recent 2022 midterm elections showcased the uniquely different electoral

environments faced by candidates that I infer have resulted from the post-Dobbs abortion climate.

REPUBLICAN WOMEN AND ABORTION

Recently conservative women have emerged in the Republican Party as political figures challenging the anti-woman narrative that has continuously harmed the party which has revealed more about what ideological direction some candidates are moving to. In general, the Republican establishment has historically continued to adhere to a more traditionally conservative ideology; therefore, higher levels of support for ideological conservatism rather than moderate conservative continues to increase among the GOP. The emergence of social conservatives in the Republican Party came about with the help of Ronald Reagan's presidency, resulting in the party doubling down the pro-life stance, and authors Dolan, Deckman, Swers (2020) present the obvious truth that "Today women's rights is a major fault line between parties and abortion is among the most fiercely debated issues" (p. 46). However, in the last decade, as more Republican women take their seat at the lawmaking table, women's issues within the GOP have stirred up more "pro-woman" rhetoric as a political tactic to challenge partisan attacks that label conservatives anti-women. However, while some Republican women have risen to take on women's issues, this tendency is "systematically constrained and conditional" as explained by authors Reingold, Kreitzer, Osborn, and Swers (2021). These authors acknowledge how "Republican women have been in the shadows of conservative women's-issue legislative advocacy," in comparison to Democratic women who have stood at the forefront of women's issues; however, while more Republican women have begun to speak on female issues, conservative party leadership by GOP women is limited to "ideologically conservative women who are able to justify their approach as "'pro-woman' while furthering their party's strategic interests" to avoid alienating conservative supporters (pp. 403-406). Additionally, these

authors find that partisan environments that are significantly more competitive can aid GOP women in utilizing women's issues as a platform, specifically anti-abortion legislation, as it "can mobilize the party base on a key social conservative issue while harnessing her moral authority as a woman" (p. 406). While women may appear more restricted on some issues, particularly women's issues, this can differ for Republican men, who may use this as a strategy to hone in more moderate or female voter support, potentially helping their candidacy. Depending on the issue or targeted demographic, men who may take a more moderate stance on women's issues may be hailed by women in their constituency or intended audience due to the support and advocacy while Republican women are not afforded the same luxury. Abortion policies stand as a particularly unique issue for conservatives, though, but for Republican men, if they seek to rally support from constituents whom they know to be conservative, "GOP men may have incentives to sponsor anti-abortion legislation in the name of preserving 'family values,' traditional gender roles, and religious principles, and few incentives to defer to or promote the leadership of their female colleagues" (p. 405). Therefore, issue framing of abortion not only differs per gender and party but also depending on the contexts and constituents in their respective districts or states.

The Power of Issue-Framing

Issue framing is a powerful and influential tactic for politicians to take control of their messaging or even manipulate a topic so that they may benefit or be successful among the public. This is especially relevant for social movements, and author Melody Rose (2011) explains that framing topics can be a means for political leaders to strategically shift an argument and "control the rhetoric" in order to attract or capture key supporters or constituents that may prove influential and effective especially for success in a campaign (pp. 2-3). There is an argument that the conservative stance on abortion has been largely contradictory, and for a party that seeks to limit the federal government's controlling arm, one

may conclude that the GOP would support an individual's choice for their body. Some authors (Dolan et al. 2020) explain that, "if their principles guide their positions," they would be in favor of choice, "but their principles would not challenge a major long-standing party ideology because it would likely threaten their credibility and overall support from conservative men and definitely Republican men" (p. 45). Although the context that leads up to an abortion involves both men and women, abortion has been framed as a "women's issue," primarily because it only physically impacts the female's body.

Scholars have continued to study how conservative have utilized anti-abortion rhetoric to their benefit–or demise– and found that while the Republican Party has been on the defensive of anti-women attacks, GOP women can more effectively counter these claims by (1) framing them as "pro-women" bills that "empower women" as opposed to take away their autonomy and control and (2) utilizing arguments based on religion and science or even citizen's rights, rather than just female rights (Rose 2011; Reingold et al. 2020; Roberti 2022). Author and professor Amanda Roberti (2022) writes on female conservative's abortion rhetoric shift and references how this reaction by female lawmakers to advocate for "pro-women" bills is a means to separate themselves from the political fallout that may result from affiliating with the Republican Party which is "waging a 'war on women'" but that has also been engulfed in a "decades-long shift towards right-wing extremism due to the their increasingly conservative viewpoints held by party leaders" (pp. 140-141). Roberti argues that while GOP women adhere to the similarly consistent conservative abortion positions, they want to distance themselves by utilizing rhetoric that focuses on female empowerment and choice as they propose legislation "for" their female constituents, and that advocating for more abortion regulation and restriction *is* representing women's rights. Additionally, by championing "empowerment" in their approach, it may have an "intersectional approach" for women of diverse backgrounds, identities, ethnicities, etc. because "it goes beyond 'choice'

and veers into more contemporary expressions of autonomy-based feminism employed by more diverse voices in the reproductive justice movement" (Roberti 2022, p. 143).

While conservative women have harnessed support from championing pro-life positions, the abortion climate of 2022 (post-Dobbs) has complicated the movement, and some Republican women– and women in general– across the country recognize the complexity of the issue and understand allowing women to make individual decisions regarding their own health but these opinions. Framing abortion legislation in terms of pro-women has proved to be effective for lawmakers; however, it would be a mistake to assume the presence of female conservatives' outspokenness about restrictions means that differences in the convictions of Republican women do not exist. And with the newly heightened abortion climate that exists today, more voters may have found themselves and their own opinions increasingly at odds with those of their respective politicians who are tasked with legislating the complex and divisive issue for them. New York Times author, David Leonhardt, argues that looking ahead in time, "court decisions are unlikely to have the final work over abortion policy," and that "legislation will." He continues by making the distinction that "judges merely interpret law–sometimes, it's true–but they cannot write the laws…only legislators, in Congress and at the state level, can pass laws."

Facing the Post-Dobbs Abortion Climate

Irrespective of the newly divisive climate created by the Dobbs decision, authors Carroll and Sanbonmatsu (2013) have presented ample research showing that "there is little doubt that among the ideological litmus tests that are likely to be employed by Republican Party gatekeepers, abortion is an important one." In reflecting on the studies on CAWP recruitment in 1981 and 2008 mentioned previously, these authors also found that Democratic women state representatives were significantly more likely to publicly claim a women's organization as a key component to their candidacy than did Republican women.

For Republican women, there is a growing divide along women's issues, specifically abortion rights, sparking an ideological discussion of what it means to be a conservative in the Republican Party going forward. With a new abortion landscape unfolding today, the inability to align with more conservative pro-life policies may serve as an important factor in determining the electability and success within the Republican Party, meaning moderate women may face additional challenges during elections. However, what is considered a conservative policy has recently evolved to encompass a variety of approaches, some appearing more progressive or moderate in nature or even those which would be pushed by Democrats.

Author and "Politico" journalist Megan Messerly discusses this phenomenon by referring to these recent policy shifts as a part of a "post-*Roe* era," (or post-Dobbs era) in which members of the GOP in "staunchly conservative states" are advocating for legislation that would support things such as sex-education in schools, expansions of Medicaid benefits relating to postpartum, and increased welfare that can include birth control access. Republicans have increasingly been called out for what some believe is the "hypocrisy" of advocating for pro-life but not pushing for the lacking legislation that supports life after birth like foster care, postpartum care for mothers and babies, among others–arguments that may have impacted the 2022 midterms. As Megan Messerly points out, while Republican candidates may not claim these recent policy pushes as inherently "liberal," this attempt by some lawmakers to rebrand the GOP in favor of this legislation may allow Republicans to "soften their image with moderate voters now that abortion is illegal in nearly all circumstances in a quarter of the country" and an issue which Democrats utilized to find success during the 2022 midterms. It is rather uncommon to find an elected official that stands on the opposite side of their party's position, and is outspoken about it; however, when a legislator changes his/her position on a prominent issue among Americans, the implications

can vary but some may not emerge unscathed and as electable as they once were. The potential danger of changing a stance on an important and highly polarizing issue could result in a loss of credibility and support from party loyalists and donations from organizations, PACs, and voters themselves; voters want a trustworthy leader who is representative of their interests. And abortion has revealed itself as an important and salient factor considered by the public, especially young voters. Author and "Circle" journalist Ruby Belle Booth examined the exit polls from the 2022 midterms, finding not only that voter turnout for young people reached a record high but that abortion was the top issue among the exit poll responses, with 44% claiming it as the most important issue out of the other four issues that included crime, inflation, gun policy, and immigration.

While the timing of the Dobbs decision may not be the significant point of mobilization for female candidates for the 2022 midterms, since it came about after most had declared intentions to run in respective races, abortion no doubt served as a significant motivation for voters, especially young adults and women across the country. Along with this, the amount of Republican female candidates put forward implies the potential pushing back against an anti-women narrative that has long been attached to the Republican Party. Much understanding of abortion politics and policies in the U.S. have been constructed by men throughout history, and this has resulted in a rights-based understanding for women's right to abortions and reproductive health care in general, as women try to reclaim more ability to participate in legislation (Smyth, 2002, p. 339). By increasing women's representation in the legislative process, the policies on women's rights are increasingly seen, debated, and constructed by women themselves.

Important social issues that are valued by the public–and voters– are key to a candidate's electability and success, and sometimes even a single issue that a voter feels strongly about can become a motivation that brings them to the polls. Since the Supreme

Court's ruling in *Roe V. Wade* (1973) that deemed the ban on abortions unconstitutional, abortion rights and overall women's issues have become an increasingly divisive issue between parties. Authors Brians and Greene (2004) performed an interesting study on how George W. Bush– as the Republican nominee for the 2000 election– avoided referring to the issue of abortion as he chose to advocate a "culture of life" instead of aligning with his party's official– more restrictive– conservative stance. In reflecting on their findings, these authors that established that voters from both parties misperceived the stances of both candidates Gore and Bush, thus supported the conclusion that Republican voters did not decrease their support for the GOP candidate; however, what they also acknowledge is that at the time of the election, abortion was not significantly salient among voters. This argument cannot be made for the contemporary political climate we see today (in 2023). While the Democratic Party has capitalized on their disfavor of pro-life policies, the political reality of the post-Dobbs era has Republicans pushed further into a pigeonhole of relying on conservative pro-life position, walking back a strict stance to adapt some exceptions (softening a more restrictive position), or maybe hiding in a corner to avoid political blowback from the increasingly divisive issue. Although some groups and voters have been more politically re-energized as a result of abortion–maybe more than others– considering the abortion climate as a relevant political contextual factor in the post-Dobbs era can reveal more about the unique electoral environments for Republican women that are only just now being observed.

FACTORS THAT IMPACT REPUBLICAN WOMEN

The past two midterm election seasons had ushered in a significantly more diverse group of Republican women. Understanding the ways in which this has occurred is imperative to identify future trends for women in government. Today, Republican women are facing uniquely different factors when it comes to their success and electability. Taking a

closer look at those GOP women elected and not successfully elected in the 2022 midterm general elections can provide a more in-depth analysis of what kinds of conditions and environments these women are facing. As supported by extensive academic research, there are observable factors that stand out as significant variables for the electability of female Republican candidates. Electability cannot possibly be explained by just a single factor or even a collection, as every election differs across the nation and brings different candidates to the table for different reasons; however, there are certain factors that prove to nonetheless be significant year after year. For female Republican candidates specifically, examining them as candidates and within their districts and political environments has given rise factors that cannot necessarily ensure electability but consistently prove to be relevant when they interact with one another. The section that follows details three areas that capture significant factors important to consider for the success of female Republican candidates: (1) **district characteristics, (2) candidate characteristics,** and **(3) political contextual environments** for which these women run in. The existing body of literature has established these factors as consistently important; however, because of the timely nature of this study, observing how these factors may interact uniquely with the recent abortion climate (post-Dobbs) has yet to be considered. Therefore, accounting for this factor can show how the states differ on the divisive issue but also the kinds of districts and types of candidates that may have experienced differing abortion environments during their elections, and if it served as a nuanced hurdle for female Republican candidates.

District-Related Characteristics

In addition to the 100 senators serving in Congress, there are 435 members that form the House of Representatives. Each of the 435 representatives faces a uniquely electoral environment that differs in their respective Congressional Districts across the United States. Across all Congressional Districts, while all differ in many ways, there are some variables

that prove to be significant in understanding election climates and the vote share for each candidate. Specifically, though, these particular variables are those for which I argue based on previous literature contribute most to the electability of female Republican candidates. Among these are the *(1) percent of voters who are Caucasian, voters with (2) educational attainment of a bachelor's degree or higher*, and the *(3) percent that identify as evangelical.* Higher rates of Caucasian voters are often correlated with more Republican voters, and minority populations are less likely to favor liberal policies and usually support more federal assistance and welfare policies that are championed by Democrats (Hogan 2008). In regards to educational attainment, this is significant on both gender and partisan lines; for women– and specifically single women–who have a bachelor's degree or higher, they are more likely to be Democratic, but educated women who are married and have children are much more likely to lean Republican (Dolan et al. 2020). Additionally, as mentioned previously education levels can result in better processing of political information, thus more politically aware and cognizant voters (Koch 2001). The percent evangelical is also a significant factor when it comes to voter behavior, specifically on issues relating to abortion. Christians have long made up a large portion of the GOP, and religious organizations, leaders, and institutions have been known to be major contributors, both financially and politically, to Republicans. Along with that, the argument for conservative abortion policies have been heavily rooted and justified by Christianity. By framing the issue through religion, Republicans–particularly women– have been able to navigate the divisive issue while still leaning into the Republican trend of Christianity (Rose 2011; Setzler 2016).

Along with the demographics, the *(4) community type–meaning rural, suburban, and urban densities–* have historically been significant in explaining voter behavior on party lines. Typically, districts with higher rural areas have been conservative, as voters in highly agricultural and farming areas are typically a Republican stronghold, as well as older and

more Caucasian populations which, as stated previously, is a significant indicator of support

for the Republican Party. Older, white voters tend to favor more traditional, conservative

gender norms which can negatively impact women–even GOP women– but this is likely not

as relevant in general elections (of which this study focuses on) because this demographic

will be more likely to favor a GOP woman over a Democrat. In a 2018 report published by

Pew Research Center, the authors (Parker et al.) cite that minority populations (who are more

likely to lean Democrat) have been on the rise in urban and suburban areas, and while rural

populations are less likely to have high rates of people with a bachelor's degree, urban and

suburban areas are experiencing a growth of populations of higher educational attainment,

which as mentioned previously, may be more liberal-leaning voters and especially for

younger female voters (Hogan 2008; Dolan et al. 2020). For suburban populations,

partisanship tends to stay more balanced and although the trends can vary, they are not often

trending in a particular direction consistently (Parker et al. 2018). Lastly, the *(5) percent vote*

share of GOP vote in the 2020 election between Biden and Trump is an effective variable to

consider when looking at how it may have related to the vote share for candidates in the 2022

midterm elections. As polarization continues to dominate and fester among Americans,

voting based on party may be more important than voting just based on the candidate;

however, vote shares that differed greatly from 2020 to 2022 may reveal what other factors

may have been significant for GOP women, if any. It is important to note that elections on the

national level can differ from those at the local or state level for a variety of reasons, but

partisanship of the districts in 2020 versus in 2022 can be a valuable reference measure.

Candidate-Related Characteristics

In addition to district characteristics, there are factors related to candidates themselves

that are significant. *(1)Marital status combined with parental status* is a relevant indicator of

Republican electability, with marital status referring to heterosexual marriages. The GOP

identifies more strongly with traditional family values–meaning gender norms that can appear more restrictive for women especially–and single women are more likely to be members of the Democratic Party and can be more reliant on government welfare programs (Dolan et al. 2020). Republican women who are both married and have children have better chances of circumventing the accusations that they are anti-children (more than Republican men) and may be granted more authority to speak on issues that apply to women and family due to their credibility and experience. However, this does not always serve as an impediment for GOP men as they may be able to avoid discussing women's issues (to also avoid the divisive issues) because they are simply not women and it may work to their benefit–whether intended or not– to stay off the topic. Along with the intersection of marital and parental status, *(2)age* is an important factor because—especially among those who are married, they are likely to be "older, white, more religious, and financially secure—all groups that lean Republican" (Dolan et al. 2020, p. 67). Older candidates can appear more credibly while young candidates may appear inexperienced, but age can also interact with levels or authority based on gender as well. For example, a young woman new to the Republican Party likely has more to prove than a young, male candidate considering their gender affords them the assumptions of being more conservative by appearance, if already members of the Republican Party. It can even interact with marital and parental status as married women, especially those with kids, may be more likely granted the authority to speak of issues that impact children and family life.

For similar reasons as to why ethnicity is relevant in districts, the same can be said for candidates themselves. Candidates' *(3)ethnicity* is significant, and the GOP lacks diverse representation among its members. However, for the female representatives, the vast majority are white while the men feature more of ethnic variety. Diversity can be found among Democratic members of Congress and the byproduct of this being Republican women of color may have more to prove to voters who, in addition to gender, see ethnicity (non-white)

as a liability for liberal-leaning tendencies. Beyond this, research supports the understanding that Republican women of color are far less likely to be elected by the fact that the Democratic Party is known for policies that target disadvantaged and minority populations, of which there are many more people than are member of the Republican Party, so voters who value these policies will continue to support the ample Democrats that champion these policies (Reingold et al. 2020; Dolan et al. 2020).

For this study, *(4)incumbent status* is an important consideration as those who have been elected previously have proven their electability before and are likely to be re-elected once again. However, with the redistricting after 2020, there were new seats added to the Congressional map, and there are some cases where incumbents are defeated. Nonetheless, incumbency consistently serves as a strong indicator of electability since these candidates have been successfully elected previously, but this factor is strengthened when considered along with district variables of age and ethnicity mentioned above (Richardson and Hougen 2020). In addition to incumbent status, another factor considered is *(5)candidate quality.* While this variable will not reveal anything new for incumbents (as they clearly have prior experience), for non-incumbents, this will reveal the candidates who may have posed more competition to the incumbent (if the incumbent was defeated by the challenger), as prior elective experience strengthens a candidacy. Lastly, *(6)abortion stance of candidates* is among the factors I consider to be uniquely contributing to a different political environment post-Dobbs. Adhering to pro-life can be a cue for voters as it can prove allegiance to the party's position; however, some candidates may avoid abortion because of the divisiveness. For Republican women specifically, though, as a women's issue, they are uniquely strained on the topic; their decision on how to address abortion—if at all—can reveal more about how the issue has manifested itself in the contemporary political climate (post-Dobbs). As literature has explained, Republican female representation has increased slowly but the still

lack of numbers relative to men or even Democratic women offers stands as an impediment for reaching significant conclusions. However, for the last few decades that have experienced the slow growth for GOP women, these women have been more likely to express a more extreme position on abortion, mostly when they take a pro-life stance but are also less likely to take a moderate position than they are to align with either complete prohibition or no restrictions whatsoever (Dolan et al. 2020).

<div align="center">**Political Contextual Characteristics**</div>

Finally, in addition to district and candidate related variables, there are political contextual characteristics that are notable to consider important for Republican women specifically. *(1)Sex of the Democratic challenger* is relevant as stated in the existing literature that focuses on gender-based stereotypes on perceived competence and behavior. Additionally, when it comes to political topics during elections, women's issues are likely to be considered more prominent in a general election where there are two women facing each other (Meeks and Domke 2016), but GOP candidates face greater risk of potential alienation of constituents if the prominence of a more Democratic championed topic leads to liberal assumptions. If facing a Democratic man, women's issues can be more easily avoidable and cause less political harm (can obviously differ per face and Democratic candidates). Additionally, controlling for *(2)campaign expenditures* is important, as money spent on campaigns can be a significant indicator of the strength of a candidate. Previous research has demonstrated that campaign fundraising is among the most influential predictors of electability, and contrary to the Democratic Party that prioritizes female representation in government, the gender imbalance can point to the lack of female GOP candidates receiving enough resources to be competitive or even viable candidates (Dolan et al. 2020; Carroll and Sanbonmatsu 2013). Finally, some states featured an *(3)abortion policy on the ballot* during the 2022 midterm elections, and many states had *(4)preexisting pre-Dobbs abortion policies*

or trigger bans already in place if abortion were to be overturned. Therefore, considering these two factors is important in concluding if there was a flare or increase of attention surrounding abortion, thus potentially impacting elections differently (depending on policy) and more significantly in some states and the respective Congressional districts. To help explain this variable, also noting the *(5)state's policy on abortion prohibition* can be helpful, meaning the gestational point in time a state restricts access to abortions, which can provide additional contexts for policies that exist across the nation.

<div align="center">HYPOTHESIS</div>

Based on and supported by the prior research, there are certain factors–variables– that can contribute and thus should be considered when examining political environments for women, and specifically the unique ways in which these factors manifest in the electoral climates for Republican women. For my study, I rely upon the extensive examination of the academic literature to fully assess the factors that have consistently proved relevant for Republican women's electoral success; however, this project differs from existing studies as I consider the contemporary abortion climate (post-Dobbs) in addition to the district and candidate characteristics that are relevant factors for electability.

There are limitations on this research considering the post-Dobbs political environment has existed for only ten months at the time of this study; therefore, this study is not directly testing the impact of the new abortion climate (as will be better observed as time progresses). Rather, I will examine what has been noted through extensive literature as important factors for female electability and infer how the post-Dobbs environment may serve as a unique additional layer to consider for Republican women. In addition to the district and candidate characteristics I will be analyzing for female Republican candidates, for the purposes of my study, I refer to the contemporary abortion climate as creating unique political contextual environments for these women. This study will consider how these

environments differentiate among districts across the nation and manifest uniquely for candidates, if at all. Previous literature has revealed more about the political contextual environments that have existed for Republican women (pre-Dobbs); however, my study will uncover how these environments have been altered by the new abortion climate (post-Dobbs). Hence, my hypothesis can be established.

Hypothesis: The impact of the district, political, and contextual variables in the post-Dobbs electoral environment uniquely impacts the electoral success of Republican women.

After testing this hypothesis, I will be able to answer the question: Are the political contextual factors that typically affect women based on extensive literature still as relevant today for Republican women, given the phenomenal change in the abortion climate in the midst of the 2022 elections?

RESEARCH DESIGN

This research relies on the extensive examination of academic literature regarding the electoral environments for Republican women to fully assess how these environments may differentiate as a result of the contemporary abortion climate. By relying on this academic literature that facilitates an understanding of electoral environments pre-Dobbs, this research will observe if the political contextual factors that normally affect Republican women are still relevant and how these particular environments have been uniquely impacted post-Dobbs. There are obvious limitations due to the recent nature of the Dobbs decision and the few numbers of elections and candidates that have occurred at the time of this study; however, based on previous literature, I infer there will be some observable effect of the abortion climate on the political climate for Republican women that may prove meaningful.

In order to compile meaningful data for worthwhile results, I examine the 82 congressional districts that featured a female Republican candidate competing in the general election for the House of Representatives in 2022, using data compiled by the Center for

American Women and Politics (CAWP). Only female candidates for the House are included–Senate candidates excluded–for the purpose of examining a larger pool of cases among a smaller, more confined area to evoke more variation across multiple variables. The abortion climate post-Dobbs, has resulted in policies that differ from state to state; however, the smaller ratio of district to one representative–compared to an entire state for two state senators–is more substantial when considering the significantly larger number of candidates available to examine.

This study only includes general elections because, as opposed to primaries which likely featured a much higher number of women, general elections are more ideal for utilizing controlling variables and also comparing data on an aggregate yet specific level (by studying fewer candidates). Additionally, female GOP candidates who compete in the general election have more or less gained a layer of credibility from being affiliated with the GOP, which will enhance the ability to reflect on these women in relation to Democratic challengers, who have also arguable earned their party's same support, or stamp of approval (Thomsen 2015; Dolan et al. 2020). Examining only general elections eliminates the need to control for candidate viability, as primaries often include a wide range of candidates that have much lower chances of moving to the general election. When vote share is distributed across fewer candidates, one can look to alternative variables to explain distribution.

Dependent Variable – Percent GOP Vote in General Election

In this study, vote share is the dependent variable. Using data from Ballotpedia, the percent vote for the GOP candidate is used as the measure of candidate electability.

Independent Variables– Factors that contribute to electability of Republican women

For each of the 82 general elections, aggregate data was collected from among district characteristics, candidate characteristics, and political contextual environments. From each of these three general groups are 5-6 different variables that encompass each one which have

been established as relevant for female Republicans based on extensive academic literature. However, this data accounts more intently for the abortion climate when referring to the political contextual environments, as this study is focused on examining how abortion has contributed uniquely to contemporary electoral landscapes after the Dobbs decision. Each of the 16 total variables affect electability of candidates, some more significant than others depending on the relevance of the other variables included. The data collected was acquired from various sources which include, Census Reporter, the CityLab Congressional Density Index (CDI), Ballotpedia, 2022 Cook Partisan Voting Index (Cook PVI), David Jarman, the Fuller Report, OpenSecrets, Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP), the Center for Reproductive Rights, as well as the WayBackMachine for candidate campaign websites whose domains were not still active at the time data was collected. Otherwise, each campaign website was utilized to collect data on variables corresponding to those being considered in this study.

Methodology

Data was collected from various sources and compiled into a single dataset to test on an aggregate level as well as to perform more localized tests for certain key variables. SPSS was used to conduct descriptive statistical analysis on all of the variables and to perform inferential bivariate and multivariate analyses. Both Pearson's Correlation Test and Kendall's Tau-B Tests were utilized to examine inferential relationships and bivariate correlations. Additionally, after examining the relationships between individual variables, ordinary least squares multiple linear regression was used to predict the percent GOP vote using each category of independent variables (district, candidate, and political contextual) which was a total of 16 variables. However, in light of the significantly high correlation shown by the correlation matrix between the percent GOP vote in 2020 and the dependent variable of GOP vote in 2022, a second regression test was conducted with %GOP vote in 2022 removed in

order to better observe the relationships between the other variables since the two variables were too strongly correlated to effectively control and difficulties in interpreting the data would occur as a result of multicollinearity. Additionally, prior elective experience was excluded from the second regression test because incumbent status and prior elective experience represent similar data (prior elective experience includes non-incumbents who have prior experience but also includes incumbents as they have prior experience but weighted differently); therefore, to avoid the results being skewed by two variables highly correlated to one another, yet differently with percent GOP vote, only incumbency was included to observe the true effect since this variable represented far more of the cases being considered in the test.

<div align="center">RESULTS</div>

Descriptive Statistics

Analysis of all general elections with Republican women shows that of the 82 total candidates, 33 GOP women won and 49 lost. Figure 1 provides a visual representation of those who won and lost with the corresponding %GOP vote received. Among the 33 winners were 27 incumbents and 7 challengers, whose average age at the time of the 2022 election was 53-years-old with the oldest winner being 80 and youngest being 33. Of the 33 Republican women who won, 58% of their Democratic challengers were male and 42% were female. Among the 49 candidates that lost in the general elections, 3 were incumbents compared to the 46 challengers, and 53% of their Democratic challengers were male and 47% were female. The age distribution for these women was relatively wider with the oldest candidate being 76 and the youngest being 25, while the average age of 48-years-old is not significantly different from average age of the winners.

Figure 1 shows the ethnic makeup of all 82 candidates as well as the women who won and lost. Overall, 64.6% of all candidates were white, but there is an observable difference

when comparing ethnicity of winners to losers; white Republican women had greater success than did women of color. Approximately 27% of candidates who competed in general elections were not white, but no Black GOP women won in the general elections, despite 7.3% of all female GOP candidates were Black. This reflects the literature that denotes that lack of diverse ethnic representation among candidates can stem from the lack of diversity among voters, as minority or underrepresented populations make up large portions of the Democratic Party, thus is reflected in the higher numbers of ethnic minorities being elected to the Democratic Party.

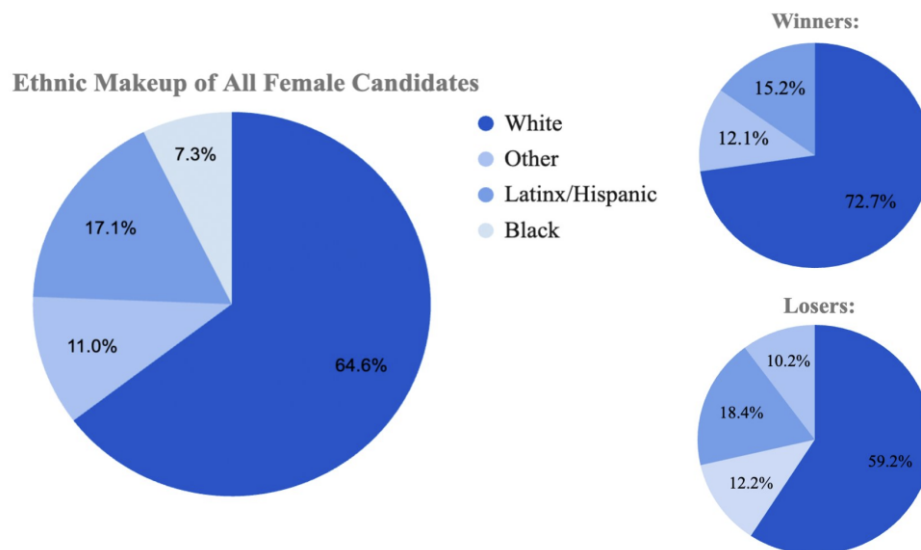**Figure 1: Ethnicity of Candidates**

Figure 2 illustrates, in more detail, the maximum, minimum, and average campaign expenditures for candidates, explained in terms of both winners to losers and as well as incumbents to challengers. While the quantities across the four groups are relatively similar, it is clear that when comparing each of the four categories, winners significantly outspent their Democratic opponents and incumbency also a strong predictor, considering most incumbents won their elections.
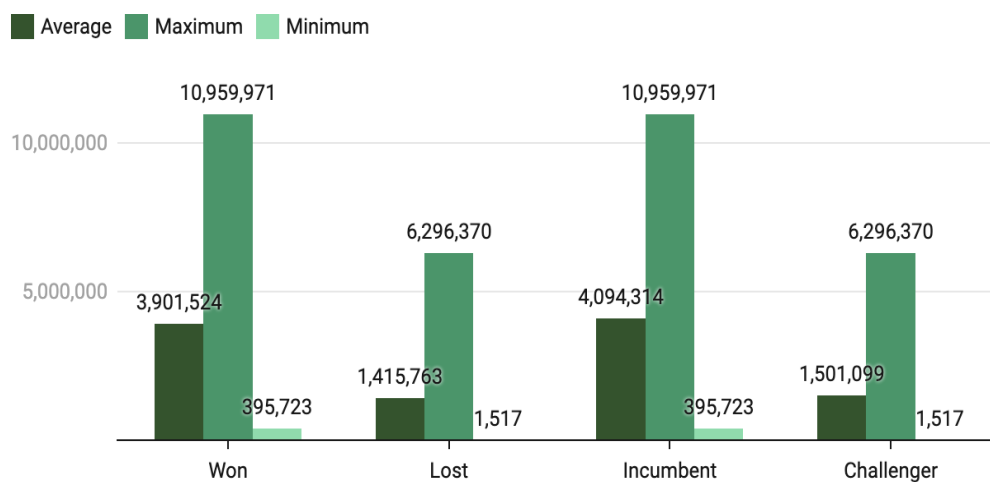
Figure 2: Campaign Expenditures—Total Amount Spent by Candidates

Chart: Laura Lane Heathcott • Source: OpenSecrets.org • Created with Datawrapper

Note: Expenditures is the total amount of money spent by candidates during campaigns

Moving to the results of the district-related characteristics, figure 3 displays the distribution of the winners and losers relative to geographic location, along with the GOP vote share for each congressional district. This figure illustrates the diversity in geographic location where Republican women ran but also those areas–or regions– that they appeared to be more or less successful. For example, while there is variety as to where GOP women are running across the country, these candidates were more successful in the Midwest and southeast regions, as opposed to western or northeastern regions as there were more concentrations of candidates running in those areas. Of the 82 candidates, 21% ran in urban districts (24% won and 76% lost), 41% ran in suburban districts (38% won and 62% lost), and 38% ran in rural districts (52% won and 48%). Figure 4 shows the percent Caucasian in the district corresponding to the districts where Republican women ran. When comparing the vote share in the respective districts, the combination of figure 3 and 4 reveal Republican women in 2022 more successful in districts with higher rates of Caucasian populations than those with lower rates of Caucasian populations.

Figure 3: Percent GOP Vote for All Female Republican Candidates
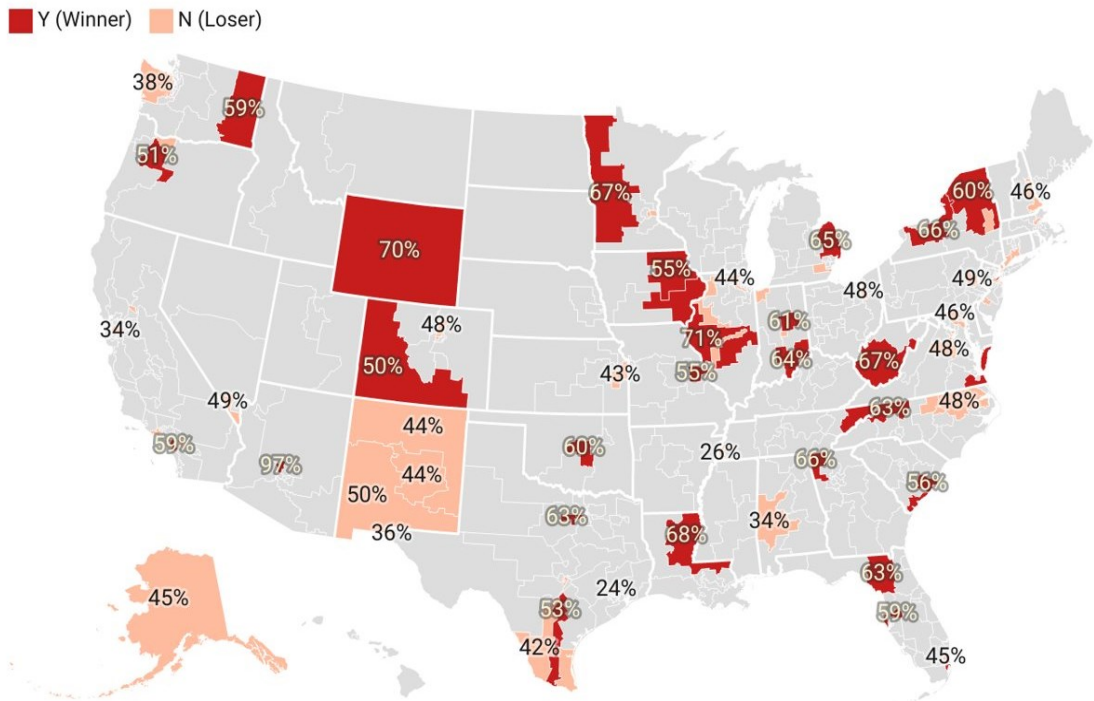
Map: Laura Laura Heathcott • Source: Ballotpedia • Created with Datawrapper

Figure 4: Percent Caucasian for Districts of Female Republican Candidates in 2022
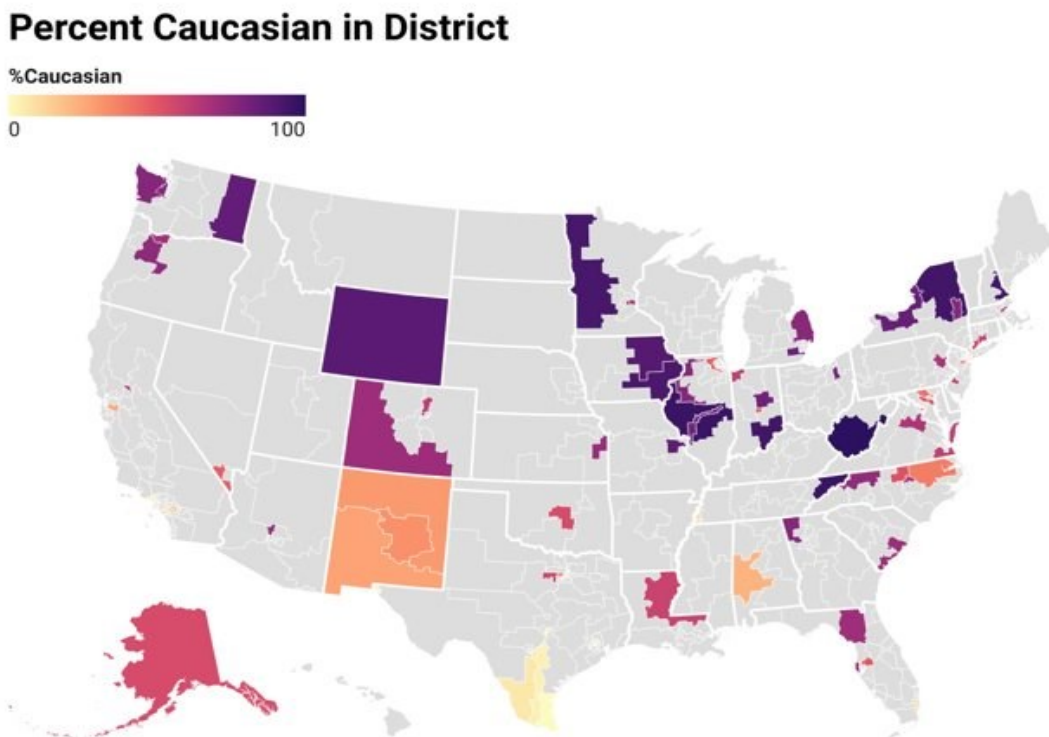
Map: Laura Lane Heathcott • Source: Census Reporter • Created with Datawrapper

Inferential Statistics

   With respect to candidate-related variables already mentioned, table 1 displays the

Pearson Correlation test shows that percent of GOP vote and candidate age is positively

correlated ($r=0.279$) and significant at the 0.05 level and also showed campaign expenditures

are positively correlated to percent GOP vote ($r=0.421$) which is statistically significant at

the 0.01 level. Finally, the Pearson Correlation test found that percent GOP vote and percent

Caucasian have a positive linear relationship ($r=0.418$) which is statistically significant at the

0.01 level. Figure 5 displays this correlation and the linear direction.

Table 1

Pearson Correlation	%GOP Vote	%Caucasian	%Bachelor's Degree	Candidate Age	%Evangelical	%GOP Pres Vote in 2020	Money Spent on Campaign
%GOP Vote	1	**0.418****	**-0.253***	**0.279***	**0.33****	**0.931****	**0.421****
%Caucasian	**0.418****	1	0.011	-0.016	0.092	**0.478**	0.177
%Bachelor's Degree	**-0.253***	0.011	1	-0.196	-0.12	**-0.254***	-0.113
Candidate Age	**0.279***	-0.016	-0.192	1	0.078	**0.226***	-0.04
%Evangelical	**0.33****	0.092	-0.12	**0.078***	1	**0.404**	0.003
%GOP Pres Vote in 2020	**0.931****	**0.478****	**-0.254***	**0.226***	**0.404**	1	**0.45**
Money Spent on Campaign	**0.421****	0.177	-0.113	-0.04	0.003	**0.45**	1

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Figure 5: Positive Bivariate Correlation of %GOP Vote and %Caucasian

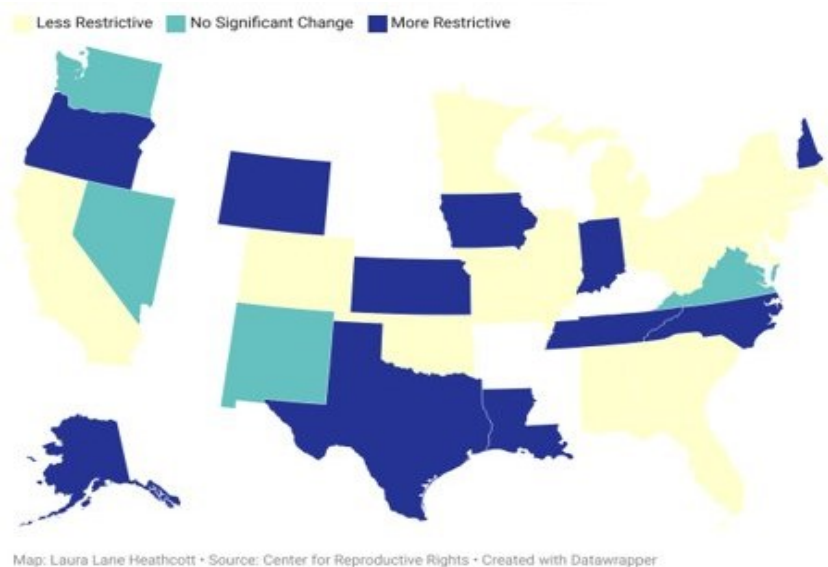%Caucasian vs. %GOP Vote in Districts with Female Republican Candidates
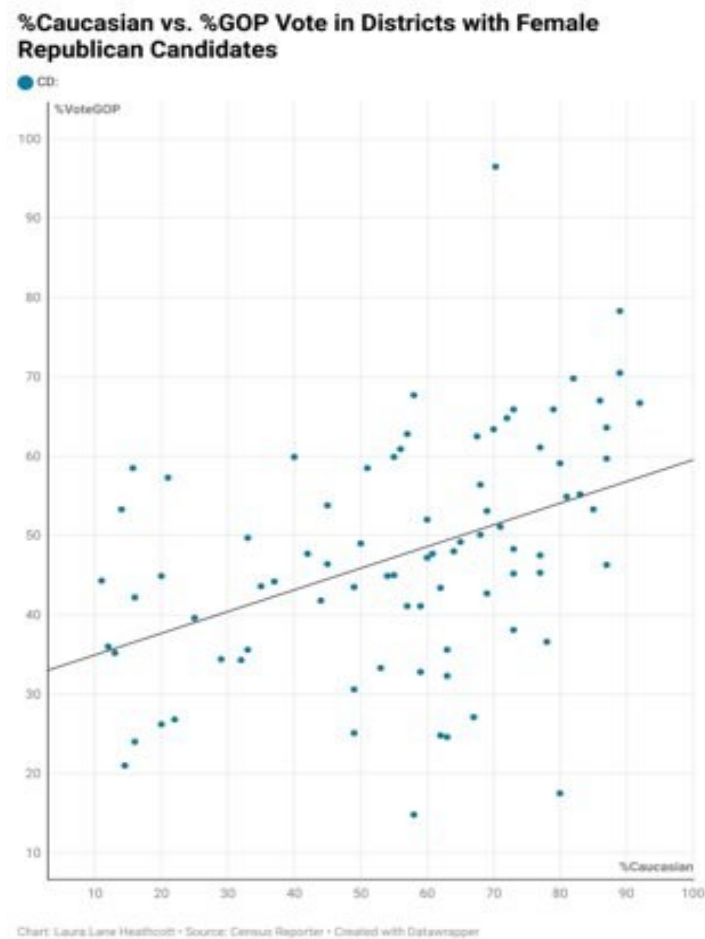
For the additional district-related variables, the Pearson Correlation test showed that the percent GOP vote for Republican women was correlated with the percent evangelical (r=0.33) and significant at the 0.01 level. This result supports the literature that religiosity is a consistent indicator of more Republican support which remains relevant for GOP women in 2022. Educational attainment (percent of the district with a bachelor's degree or higher) was negatively correlated (r= -0.253) with percent GOP vote and significant at the 0.05 level, meaning Republican women performed better in less educated areas. When comparing the educational attainment to the percent vote in 2020 (for Trump), this relationship was also negatively correlated and significant at the 0.05 level, showing that Republican women did not differ greatly from the trend from 2020. In general, the partisanship of the district in 2020

(percent vote for Trump in the 2020 election) showed the strongest and positive correlation (*r*=0.931) with percent GOP vote which was significant at the 0.01 level.

In analyzing abortion-related measures, in regard to trigger laws enacted post-Dobbs, figure 6 shows the geographical representation of states where Republican women ran and if the state had more restrictive, less restrictive, or policies with no significant policy change in 2022 (post-Dobbs). Similarly, figure 7 shows candidate abortion stance relative to geographic location of the states where they ran in, illustrating how more restrictive state policies seemed to correspond somewhat to candidates [who make up the district within those states] having a more restrictive (conservative) abortion position, if mentioned. Two states had less restrictive abortion policies on the ballot at the time of the midterm elections where 8 Republican women were running: California and Colorado. Of these elections, 3 women won–all with no mention of an abortion stance on their campaign websites–and 4 women lost–3 had no mention and 1 had an explicit pro-life stance.

Figure 6: Map of States and Trigger Law Enacted Post-Dobbs

Map: Laura Lane Heathcott · Source: Center for Reproductive Rights · Created with Datawrapper

Note: Map only includes states where Republican women participated in the general election for districts.

Figure 7: Map of Candidate's Abortion Stance Relative to State

Map: Laura Lane Heathcott · Created with Datawrapper
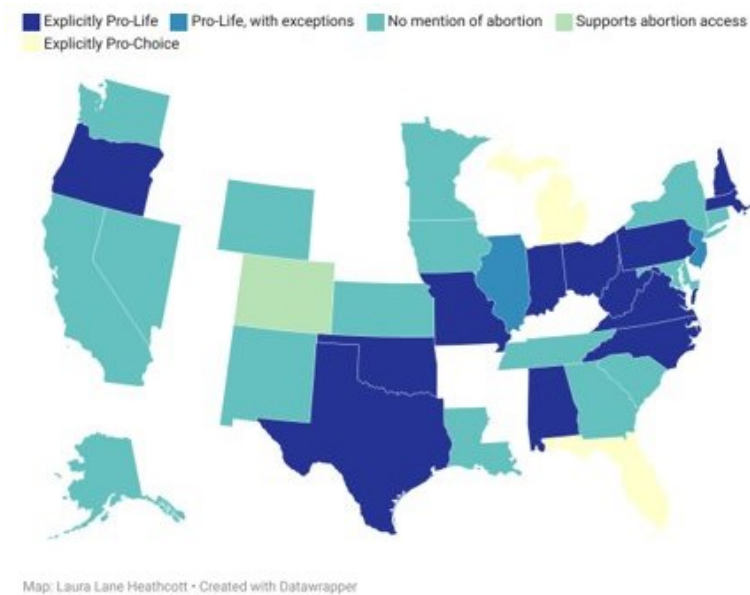
Note: Map includes states where GOP women participated in the general election.

Of the 82 candidates, 30 Republican women ran in districts whose state enacted a more restrictive abortion policy, 45 ran in those which had a less restrictive abortion policy enacted, and 7 ran where there was no significant change. Table 2 details the comparison of the type of trigger law with the average percent GOP vote for Republican women. The women who ran in districts whose state had more restrictive trigger laws post-Dobbs received a higher vote share compared to the means of women who ran in less restrictive districts and those with no significant change in policy.

Table 3 shows the comparison of the percent GOP vote and each of the five abortion stances specified by candidates (as taken from campaign websites). The results of the table show the percent GOP vote was highest for those who identified explicitly with the Pro-Life position on abortion and second highest for those that did not mention abortion in any way on candidate websites.

Table 2

State Trigger Law Enacted in 2022	Percent GOP Vote: Mean	N	Std. Deviation
More Restrictive	51.71%	30	17.15
No Significant Change	44.13%	7	9
Less Restrictive	45.32%	45	13.29
Total	*47.56%*	*82*	*14.74*

Table 3

Candidate Campaign Abortion Stance	Percent GOP Vote: Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Explicitly Pro-Life, no mention of exceptions	51.40	33	16.44
Pro-Life, mention of exceptions	43.70	4	7.43
No stance mentioned	45.59	41	13.28
Against federal ban, supports abortion access	36.95	2	27.51
Explicitly Pro-Choice, against Pro-Life	43	2	2.69
Total	*47.56*	*82*	*14.74*

Figure 8 shows the combination of candidate abortion stance and state trigger law enacted while also weighing them between the candidates that won and lost in districts. Of the 30 districts with more restrictive state trigger laws enacted, 16 Republican women won and 14 lost. Of those 16 winners, they either identified explicitly with pro-life positions or did not mention a position at all. While those that lost had slightly more women of those who identify with pro-life explicitly than those who did not mention abortion at all, all candidates in restrictive states appeared to have much less variation compared to states with less restrictive policies enacted post-Dobbs. The Kendall's Tau-B Correlation test, displayed in table 4, showed that candidates abortion stance is slightly positively associated with state trigger law enacted with a correlation coefficient of 0.272 which is statistically significant at the 0.01 level. The correlation test also showed a moderate association between state trigger law enacted and the state's policy that specifies the time at which access to abortion is prohibited, with a coefficient of 0.493 also significant at the 0.01 level.

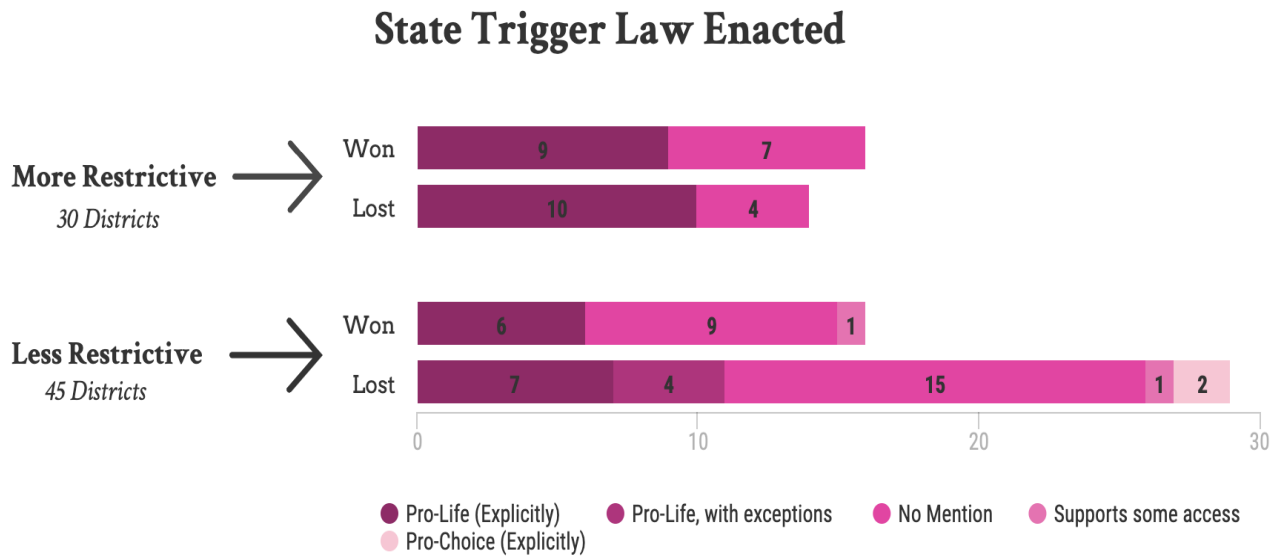**Figure 8: Type of Trigger Law Compared with Election Result and Abortion Stance**

State Trigger Law Enacted

Table 4

Kendall's Tau-B Correlations	Prior Elective Experience	Candidate Campaign Website Abortion Stance	State abortion policy on the limit to receive abortion	State trigger law enacted	Abortion policy on ballot during election
Prior Elective Experience	1	0.206	0.12	0.061	0.048
Candidate Campaign Website Abortion Stance	0.206	1	0.149	**0.272****	0.177
State abortion policy on the limit to receive abortion	0.12	0.149	1	**0.493****	0.171
State trigger law enacted	0.061	**0.272****	**0.493****	1	0.209
Abortion policy on ballot during election	0.048	0.177	0.171	0.209	1

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Multivariate Analysis:

Regression: All Variables:

Table 5 shows the model summary for the first regression test which includes all 16 variables. The adjusted R-square displays approximately 86% of the variation in percent GOP vote for Republican women is explained by these variables in this model. As displayed by the results shown in table 6 of the coefficients and their corresponding significance, community type and partisanship of the district (%GOP vote in 2020) are the only variables that are significant for this model. Percent GOP vote in 2022 is expected, as the correlation matrix showed a strong positive correlation, and the coefficient states that each percentage increase in %GOP vote in 2020 results in a 0.97% increase in GOP vote in 2020 and a significance of <0.001 in the model. Community type is the only other variable that is considered significant (while at the 0.051 level) and refers to district classifications as being more rural, suburban, or urban. Based on the results seen in table 6, moving from community type to another can result in a 2.4% change in the percent GOP vote for Republican women.

Table 5: Model Summary (Multiple OLS Regression) – All Variables

Model Summary	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.943[a]	.889	.860	5.3520

Table 6: Coefficients (Multiple OLS Regression Test) – All Variables

Model	Unstandardized B	Coefficients Std. Error	Significance
(Constant)	**13.265**	6.318	.040
Percent Caucasian	-.007	.039	.862
Percent Bachelor's Degree	-.001	.001	.368
Community Type	**-2.313**	1.161	.051
Percent Evangelical	-.046	.091	.612

Percent GOP Vote 2020	**.970**	.085	<.001
Marital and Parental Status	-.087	.642	.893
Age	.010	.063	.874
Ethnicity	-.145	.668	.829
Incumbent Status	4.984	2.659	.066
Prior Elective Experience	.278	2.566	.914
Candidate Abortion Stance	-.135	.697	.847
Sex of Democratic Opponent	-1.236	1.345	.362
Abortion policy on ballot during election	.527	2.587	.839
State trigger law enacted in 2022	.890	.900	.327
State policy on the limit to receive abortion	-.586	.515	.259
Money Spent on Campaign	-3.097E-7	.000	.331

   a.   Dependent Variable: Percent GOP Vote

Regression: All Variables (Excluding "Percent GOP Vote in 2020" and "Prior Elective Experience")

Table 7 shows the model summary for the second regression of variables tested, and as shown by the adjusted R-square, this model displays approximately 54% of the variation in percent GOP vote can be explained by these variables. By excluding the two mentioned variables, the district's percent Caucasian and incumbent status are among the only two variables that are significant in the model. Table 8 displays the results of the relationship of all the variables including the model's constant coefficient of about 24.5 with a significance at the 0.033 level. With this in mind, incumbent status is shown as very significant (<0.001 level) and based on the results, incumbency can result in a 13.9% change in the GOP vote. Prior correlation tests displayed the positive linear relationship between percent GOP vote

and percent Caucasian, and the results of the regression show the specific relationship,

illustrating that each percentage change in %Caucasian in districts can result in a 0.164%

change in %GOP for Republican women.

Table 7: **Model Summary (Multiple OLS Regression) – All Variables**

Model Summary	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.792ᵃ	.627	.544	9.6556

Table 8: **Coefficients (Multiple OLS Regression Test) – All Variables**

Model	Unstandardized B	Coefficients Std. Error	Significance
(Constant)	24.494	11.216	*.033*
Percent Caucasian	**.164**	.066	**.015**
Percent Bachelor's Degree	-.003	.002	.104
Community Type	1.948	1.993	.332
Percent Evangelical	.086	.160	.593
Marital and Parental Status	-.323	1.149	.780
Age	.156	.112	.168
Ethnicity	-.647	1.202	.592
Incumbent Status	**13.887**	3.336	**<.001**
Candidate Campaign Website Abortion Stance	-.414	1.254	.743
Sex of Democratic Opponent	-2.578	2.419	.291
Abortion policy on ballot during election	-.237	4.537	.959
State trigger law enacted in 2022	1.030	1.598	.521
State abortion policy on the limit to receive abortion	.276	.896	.759
Money Spent on Campaign	5.461E-7	.000	.326

a. **Dependent Variable: Percent GOP Vote**

DISCUSSION– ARE ELECTORAL ENVIRONMENTS POST-DOBBS UNIQUELY

DIFFERENT FOR REPUBLICAN WOMEN?

Based on my hypothesis, the expected results were that the electoral environments for Republican women are uniquely different as of the political climate post-Dobbs. This hypothesis is based on the extensive academic literature that explains the factors that are normally relevant for Republican women and apply these to the women in 2022 in order to observe how political contextual factors related to abortion–and if there was a flare of attention on the issue– interacted to change what factors are still as important. In reality, most of the factors remained relevant for all of the Republican women in 2022; however, when adding the consideration of how abortion manifested differently for districts, some variables revealed factors that were more significant than others. Therefore, while this study is only suggestive due to the limitations on implying any true causation, the results prove my hypothesis that the impact of the district, political, and contextual variables in the post-Dobbs electoral environment uniquely impacts the electoral success of Republican women.

District Characteristics

When examining the results of the research and data analysis of all district characteristics, these factors all proved to be significant in explaining the percent GOP vote. The percent Caucasian, evangelical, and educational attainment, percent GOP vote in 2020, and community type were all significant. However, community type appeared more significant than was expected and educational attainment also revealed a negative relationship with GOP vote. When considering the visual representation of the strong linear relationship between percent Caucasian and percent GOP vote, it is clear that more white populations are electing Republicans, but this also is a strong predictor for even GOP women as well. However, the maps also provide the additional understanding that districts with more Caucasian populations are more rural, less educated areas. While the high significance of all

of these variables cannot be explained necessarily by the Dobbs decision, considering how they may be explained in relation to abortion can provide additional context for why they may be heightened for Republican women in particular.

The impact of education among voters has remained of considerable interest when it comes to explaining voter behavior. As supported by the literature, rural communities feature higher rates of Caucasian populations while also lower rates of educational attainment (Hogan 2008; Dolan el al. 2020) which is where the majority of Republican women were successful in 2022. Additionally, rural communities also feature higher rates of religiosity than in urban communities (Chalfant and Heller 1991), and the results of this study show that evangelicalism is correlated positively with the GOP vote for women. Religion serves as an important argument when it comes to abortion, and recently conservative women have been championing anti-abortion policies by utilizing religion as a key point (Rose 2011; Reingold et al. 2020; Roberti 2022). These factors combined can help explain why Republican women are more successful in rural communities, but author Adam Gabbott (2023) states that "there's been a really rapid rise in American individuals who say they're not religious." Rural communities have older, more Caucasian populations that also are more religious; however, with the rate of religiosity declining in America, it is important to consider the impact of younger generations of voters who are contributing a great amount to this decline. Leaning into Christianity has been helpful to approach the divisive issue (Rose 2011; Setzler 2016), and as noted by Amanda Roberti (2022), in addition to utilizing arguments based on science and religion, conservative women in Congress have recently been reframing anti-abortion legislation in terms of pro-women or empowerment in order to push against the claims of the GOP being anti-women. Moreover, while the impact of religion declining is still being observed in American society, shifting abortion legislation may be imperative for the Republican Party to hold onto young voters. Abortion has been a key issue for many young

voters, especially women, but with religion being a key argument of the conservative, pro-life position, the GOP may need more women to facilitate the reframing of abortion to ensure the party is able to evolve and attract young voters (in assuming abortion remains a salient issue).

Contrastingly, while Republican women were significantly more successful in rural districts, suburban districts were also those which saw GOP women elected while less successful is urban districts. As the literature explains, urban communities feature higher rates of minority populations that may be less educated, thus more reliant on government programs which garner support for the Democratic Party; urban districts often have individuals who have a bachelor's degree or higher and also women who are single–not married with children– which tend to lean Democratic (Dolan et al. 2020). Additionally, young, educated voters–especially women– tend to be more liberal, and as more young people are receiving bachelor's degrees and education attainment increases amongst these younger populations, they may prove to be incredibly influential voters in future elections (Hogan 2008; Dolan et al. 2020). Suburban districts have an interesting point of discussion particularly for the synthesis of women's issues among suburban populations. Suburban districts are those which trend in different directions depending on the political climate among other factors (Parker et al. 2018); however, for the Republican women who ran and were successful in suburban districts, each district had either a more or less restrictive trigger law enacted post-Dobbs, meaning there appeared to be a flare up of attention of abortion. While it is likely too early to observe the impact of the abortion climate at this point in time, Republican women being elected in suburban districts with more restrictive trigger laws is evidence that conservative women are being elected despite a flare of attention invigorated post-Dobbs. As authors Reingold, Kreitzer, Osborn, Swers (2021) explain, targeting and mobilizing female voters can be key when parties are competing for the majority in Congress, but often in these cases, "Democrats eagerly accuse Republicans of being anti-women to

mobilize their base and attract suburban overs who lean Republican" (p. 406). This tactic has likely worked to the benefit of the Democratic Party considering the lack of female representation that has existed, but not only with female leadership increasing each election, the amount of successful suburban GOP women in 2022 poses a challenge to this strategy challengers, and despite a heightened climate surrounding women's issue where the Democratic Party usually dominate, Republican women can still be successful. However, considering these GOP women were majority pro-life or of the many who chose to avoid it entirely, future female success must consider how these women are framing these issues during the campaign, revealing more about campaign strategies.

Candidate-Related Characteristics

While candidate age was significant for percent GOP vote, incumbent status which coincided with candidate quality and campaign expenditures were the only highly significant factor for Republican women, and marital and parental status, ethnicity, and abortion stance were not statistically significant when standing amongst other important variables. However, when examining the specific women with respect to the community type and regions, more significant information can be learned about the ways in which factors interact with one another for these women. Analyzing the individual variables and trends of Republican women who were successful and not are interesting despite not being as significant. For instance, in the six general elections observed in California–typically a Democratic stronghold state– the two Republican women who won in their urban districts were both women of color. While incumbency was likely a significant factor in the 2022 elections, these women were among the very few minority women overall to have won their general election. For these two women, and the other two Republican women who ran and won in urban districts, all four had less restrictive trigger laws enacted post-Dobbs, and every candidate had no mention of abortion on their campaign website. However, unique to the California

Republican women, there was a unique flare of attention on abortion as less restrictive policies were on the ballot during their election. For the seven successful women with less restrictive abortion policies on the election ballots, each faced a male Democratic male challenger; however, for the single Kansas district with a more restrictive abortion policy on the ballot, incumbent Amanda Adkins lost her re-election to her challenger, a Democratic woman. While concluding abortion as a direct indication would be ignoring the other relevant factors, the only district aiming to restrict abortion even more on the midterm ballot saw one the few incumbents lose her race to her female Democratic challenger. The abortion climate provided women who faced Republican women ammo to target women's issues that are more easily avoided when the Democratic challenger is a male, since women's issues are more prominent in general elections featuring two women challenging one another (Meeks and Domke 2016). Additionally, Adkins was one of about seven other candidates to have been noted by the media to have relaxed her previously conservative, pro-life positions for one that acknowledged the complexity of the issue, allowing her Democratic opponent to capitalize on this by calling out Adkins' consistency. While the effect of this is merely suggestive, it remains to be seen the impact of candidates moving away from the traditional party positions in favor of more moderate policies. While voters may align with more moderate stances on abortion, moderate Republican women are not often the successful candidates in the end.

Political Contextual Factors

In terms of political contextual factors, those relating to abortion, more restrictive abortion stances and districts with restrictive trigger laws and policies all appeared to have positive relationships with the percent GOP vote; however, while this aligns with my hypothesis of having some impact on Republican women, the results are not statistically significant. While the impact of abortion factors on Republican women cannot be directly observed by this study, this research can confirm that heightened attention of abortion is a

relevant factor moving forward. Brians and Greene (2004) examined the impact of George W. Bush's position on abortion that differed from the Republican Party's official conservative stance that opposed access to abortion in favor of one where he acknowledged abortion access in cases of rape, incest, and life-threatening harm to the mother. These authors go on to explain that Bush actively avoided the issue that would have very likely brought on flak from the GOP; however, "because the voters may not see the issue as that important, they may choose to ignore their party's and candidate's views on the issue…" (p. 414). Lastly, as Brian and Greene argue, the reality of the climate at the time of the 2000 election was that abortion was not a salient issue for Republicans and likely did not work to the demise of Bush since voters did not grant the topic enough attention to feel affliction from it (Brians and Greene 2004).

It can be understood that today, abortion is not an issue weighted evenly between Republicans and Democrats, and women's issues are not prioritized as highly among the GOP (Dolan et al. 2020). Nonetheless when it comes to elections, the issues that are most salient among voters can be observed, and as more Republican women are being elected, women's issues have risen to be of great importance for especially young voters which may be placed in the hands of these women. Before the Dobbs decision, research showed that pro-life women in particular are more passionate about their feelings on abortion (2020). This has not necessarily appeared to have changed post-Dobbs, the fact that essentially all winning candidates either championed pro-life strictly or avoided it all today and losing candidates showcased a wide array of stances allows one to consider how candidates may need to be strategic when navigating issues of this nature. While candidate mobilization has not yet been observed in the post-Dobbs era, it is clear that many voters have been mobilized themselves. We are at a pinnacle point in which a political issue–women's issues– would risk alienation

of Republican constituencies has now become one of great contention that either candidates need to directly approach or avoid altogether for as long as possible, in order to be successful.

Limitations and Questions for Future Research:

Moving forward, we have yet to understand if the impact of such a divisive social issue will mobilize candidates like it has mobilized voters, and if more Republican women will step up to lead during this polarizing time for especially women's issues. There are limits to this study as the post-Dobbs political climate has only been observed for a short amount of time, and only with more candidates and time can we understand how electoral environments may have been altered for Republican women as a result of the abortion climate. Additionally, while there may be an observable flare of attention on abortion, it may be heighted primarily due to the recent nature and the public is hypersensitive to the issue as a result (and will begin to decline naturally over time). The variety of abortion policies that have been manifesting across the nation since June of 2022 have given way to the complexity behind abortion, resulting in the simple words "pro-life" and "pro-choice" coming up short in representing the complexity and confusion brought on by abortion. As explained previously, there has been a recent shift in some politicians walking back a strictly pro-life stance and specifying the exceptions for which they think abortion is acceptable for women. The reality of the political climate today is that while polarization and ideological extremism are heightened considerably today, the average voter is not as extreme as most politicians (Kedar 2005), and more voters today are faced with two candidates who both do not align with their preferences. When it comes to opinions on abortion among the public, the post-Dobbs environment increased the variety stances on abortion, meaning more people supporting some exceptions. While the public may be finding themselves in the middle of the issue, for Republican women, a moderate stance on abortion can be problematic for maintaining conservative support among their bases. Especially for candidates–especially those who are

not incumbents– it is much more difficult to survive GOP primaries for those who may be–or are perceived–more liberal on especially women's issues that serve as a litmus test among the Republican Party. Thus, by more conservative women being elected today, while these candidates may be genuinely more conservative in terms of policy positions, candidates may increase their chances by being strategic on where they run as well as the political positions they choose to highlight during campaigns.

For future research, while suggestive, looking at candidates in a more qualitative approach in conjunction with the abortion climate and the nuances of these candidates' abortion stances can reveal more about the specific ways in which politicians are reacting in the post-Dobbs environment. It is rather uncommon to find a successfully elected official that stands on the opposite side of their party's position, and is outspoken about it; however, when a legislator changes his/her position on a prominent issue among Americans, the implications can vary but some may not emerge unscathed and as electable as they once were. However, as said before, abortion is an issue that has sparked political heat amongst especially younger populations, and as these individuals' become members of the voting public—eventually candidates, more Republicans may eventually find themselves strained by a social issue like this and the pressure to elect conservative women may be imperative, or the GOP may be forced to evolve in some way to ensure strength or even survivability in the future.

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