

Litmus Test Conformity in American Politics

*Republican Party platforms and the Presidential Politics of
Abortion, 1976-2008*

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To Renate

Acknowledgements

My interest in the religious factor in American politics was born on a bus trip from Jefferson City, Missouri, to Washington, D.C, in January 2002. Organized by the local Catholic Church, the object of the trip was to participate in the 2002 March for Life. Organized every year since 1974, the March for Life commemorates the anniversary of the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling on *Roe v. Wade* on January 22, 1973, which legalized abortion.

As a young foreign exchange student, I approached the trip as a tourist eager to visit the American capital for the first time, but as I walked through the streets of Washington, D.C. among the protesters, my understanding of American politics evolved. I felt nauseated by the images on some of the posters carried by the protesters, and angered by some of the slurs thrown from people protesting the march.

In the end, it was not the sight of the White House or the Washington Monument that made the biggest impression on me. Instead, it was my abrupt awakening to the importance of the abortion issue to average Americans from all across the country. In hindsight, my participation in the perennial march formed my interest in the intertwined nature of politics and religion, and it made me take on the research project that eventually evolved into this thesis.

Along the way, my approach has matured, and the final product would not have materialized without the love and support of my beautiful wife Renate, my wonderful family, and the guidance of Professor Lawrence E. Rose (fall 2009 – spring 2010). In addition, I would like to thank my father, Reverend Ivar Flaten, for reading and commenting on several drafts. His insights gave me new ideas and perspectives, but the mistakes and shortcomings of the project are entirely my own.

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Prelude

Thomas Jefferson's notion of a "wall of separation" between church and state has not kept religion out of American politics, and this thesis demonstrates its presence by focusing on the abortion issue in presidential politics. The role of religion in politics is particularly evident during presidential election campaigns, in which candidates are pressed to express their religious faith by both the voters and a controversy driven news media.

The evolving story of the fictional Republican presidential nominee Arnold Vinick, played by the actor Alan Alda on the TV-series *The West Wing*, serves as a perfect backdrop for the topics covered in this thesis. As a pro-choice¹ Republican presidential nominee, Vinick is truly a fictional character, since every Republican presidential nominee up until 2008 has opposed abortion and been pro-life.² Nonetheless, *The West Wing*'s portrayal of Vinick's general election campaign alludes to the dynamics of the abortion issue in American politics. Following a tough primary campaign against the pro-life Reverend Butler, Vinick is posed the following question related to a brewing controversy during a news conference: "Senator, are you going to reconsider Reverend Butler's invitation to his church this weekend?" Vinick responded:

I fully respect Reverend Butler's position. I mean - I appreciate his invitation. And, ah... Look, ... I respect the Reverend Butler, and I respect his Church too much to use it for my own political purposes, and that's exactly what I'd be doing if I went down there this Sunday – cause the truth is it would just be an act of political phoniness. I may be wrong, but I - I suspect our churches already have enough political phonies.

I don't see how we can have the separation of church and state in this government if you have to pass a religious test, to get in this government. And I wanna warn everyone in the press and all the voters out there: If you demand expressions of religious faith from politicians, you are just begging to be lied to. They won't all lie to you, but a lot of them will. And it will be the easiest lie they ever have to tell to get your votes. So every day until the end of this campaign, I'll answer any question anyone has on government, but if you, if you have a question on religion – please, go to church (NBC 2005a).³

¹ Abortion proponents use the term "pro-choice" to describe their positioning on abortion. Pro-choicers thus support *Roe v. Wade* and the continued legality of abortion.

² Abortion opponents use the term "pro-life" to describe their positioning on abortion. Pro-lifers thus oppose *Roe v. Wade* and want to ban abortion.

³ Season 6, Episode 20. Timestamp: [41:27-42:45].

Vinick's response runs in the same vein as a speech on the role of religion in politics given by John F. Kennedy as a presidential candidate in 1960. In his speech, Kennedy spoke of a nation where a president's "views on religion" would be "his own private affair," where decisions would be made "without regard to outside religious pressure or dictates," and "where the presidency would not be 'limited or conditioned by any religious oath, ritual, or obligation'" (Domke & Coe 2008:139).

Like Kennedy's speech, the striking thing about Vinick's answer is its idealism – building on a view that religion can somehow be kept out of American politics. In a country in which approximately 80 percent believe in God (Gallup 2008),⁴ religion will always be a factor in its politics, and certain segments of the electorate will pay close attention to candidates' positioning on an issue such as abortion – and especially so during presidential campaigns. The pro-choice Republican presidential candidate John Anderson experienced this during the 1980 Republican primaries. When faced with protests and questions from pro-lifers, the Congressman defended his views, stating:

I can't use theological interpretations as the basis for public policy. ... I wish we had more guidance clinics, more alternatives to individual decisions. There are inevitable conflicts. But we've got to reconcile this in favor of the person who decides, however rightly or wrongly, on the basis of free choice (Yuenger 1980).

According to the news report, Anderson's response was met with "scattered boos. ... Then, a sudden burst of applause showed that Anderson had won the crowd over" (Yuenger 1980). As I will touch upon in Chapter 4 of this thesis, Anderson stuck to his pro-choice position throughout the campaign. Vinick, on the other hand, departed from the clear cut reasoning laid out in his statement above. During the last months of his fictional general election campaign against the Democratic nominee, Texas Representative Matthew Santos, social conservative forces within the Republican Party pushed his message rightward on abortion. I will return to Vinick's evolving positioning on abortion in the Postlude following the thesis' concluding chapter.

⁴ According to a May 2008 Gallup poll, 90% of Republicans, 77% of Democrats, and 78% of Americans believe in God.

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Abortion was legalized in the United States in 1973 following the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling in *Roe v. Wade*.⁵ Following the ruling, religious conservatives mobilized and contributed to the creation of a powerful grass-roots movement which eventually grew in size and gained momentum as leaders and organizers from a wide range of religious denominations joined the cause. Thirty-seven years later, abortion is perhaps the best contemporary example of the intertwined nature of politics and religion in the United States. The link between religion and opposition to abortion is based on a respect of God's creation, a belief in the holiness and the unique value of human life, the importance of family, and a conservative view of sexuality. The most important linkage is the view that God's creation is sacred, and that God's children should be protected at all costs.

The abortion issue was brought into presidential politics with the release of the 1976 Democratic and Republican Party platforms, and while the Democratic platform supported *Roe v. Wade*, the Republican platform opposed it. Thirty-four years after it was first dealt with in a presidential campaign, abortion is still one of the most contentious and emotionally charged issues in American politics. For example, several studies have shown that abortion is "one of the few issues" that has consistently influenced "voting behavior" at all levels of U.S. government (Jelen & Wilcox 2003:489), and Jelen and Wilcox (2003:489) conclude that abortion is one of the few issues "in modern times" that has demonstrated such a "political force" that it has led parts of the electorate to change their party affiliation. Furthermore, evidence presented by Strickler and Danigelis (2002:200) suggests that passionate abortion opponents tend to be more politically active than passionate abortion proponents. If one adds the fact that a majority of Americans

⁵ The court's seven-to-two decision nullified all previous state restrictions on abortion on the basis that such restrictions violated a constitutional right to privacy protected under the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.

have been more liberal on abortion than the Republican Party platforms in the period between 1976 and 2008 (General Social Survey 2008), it would be interesting to see how the party platform has evolved over time, and relevant to study the relationship between the party platforms' conservative stance and Republican presidential candidates', nominees', and presidents' positioning on abortion over time.

With this as a backdrop, the thesis focuses on the Republican Party's stance on abortion – as reflected in the party platforms – and on the relationship between the official party line on abortion as manifested in the platforms and the positioning on and framing of abortion among those running for, and among those who are elected, president. With this in mind, the thesis deals with the following research question:

What is the relationship between the positioning on and framing of abortion among Republican presidential candidates, presidential nominees, and presidents, and the Republican Party platforms' emphasis and positioning on, and framing of abortion in the period between 1976 and 2008?

1.2 The role of party platforms in American presidential campaigns⁶

The American political system is commonly referred to as a system where the candidate is more important than the party he or she represents. According to Herrnson (2002:47), both the Democratic and Republican campaign committees “have adapted to the candidate-centered ... style of modern campaign politics”, and can thus be viewed as “electoral institutions” that “focus more on elections and less on initiating policy change than do parties in other Western democracies.” In the words of Bibby (2002:20), the American political parties have evolved into parties that operate “‘in service’ to its candidates and officeholders”, without the ability to control them.

Brox and Shaw (2006:146-147) provide the historical background to these developments. First of all, survey data from the 1940s and 1950s weakened the notion “of voters as attentive observers of the day-to-day events” and activities of political campaigns. Secondly, television fundamentally changed broadcasting, and could

⁶ The following section draws on the content of my term paper in STV4020, Fall 2008, entitled “Republican Party platforms on abortion: Methodological thoughts and reflections on a forthcoming research project.” The material is reworked and organized differently than it appeared in the term paper.

“empower candidates at the expense of political parties.” Thirdly, the reform of the parties’ internal nomination processes in the late 1960s and early 1970s led to a “forfeiture of party control over the nominating processes.” As candidates ran against each other in primaries, “they developed campaign organizations and expertise independent of the political party.” As a consequence of these developments, Brox and Shaw (2006:147) state that “by the late 1960s”, the United States “had entered a period of ‘candidate-centered politics.’”

What is the function of the party platform in this “candidate-centered” reality? Released during the national conventions that signal the start of the general election, the platforms spell out “principles and programs to be presented to the electorate” (*Population and Development Review* 1992:587). According to Ware (2006:272), “American parties do not ... campaign on the basis of” party platforms during elections, and argues that party platforms “are general in nature,” that they “do not constitute a kind of promise to the electorate,” and that “the party’s candidates are not bound to support it.” Similarly, Truman considers party platforms as being “almost meaningless” (quoted in Walters 1990:437), and Maisel (1993:671) states that party platforms are “the most important document that a political party produces,” while they at the same time are close to being “worthless pieces of paper.”

Monroe (1983:27) presents some of the main theories regarding the making of policy within a two-party system such as the American. The *party responsibility notion* “holds that each party should formulate its policy proposals on the basis of ideology,” whereas *the spatial explanation* rests on “an economic rationality approach” that “argues that parties seeking to maximize voters will adopt ... stands ... that will tend to accomplish that goal” (Monroe 1983:27).

Page (1978) was not satisfied with the applicability of these theories, and thus suggested a ‘*cleavage*’ theory, according to which “parties must react to a variety of other forces” than the average voter when “determining their policy stances” (in Monroe 1983:28). Party leaders, interest groups and activists both within and outside the party are examples of such forces. The ‘cleavage’ theory thus widens the scope of potential factors that can lead a political party to adopt positions that are not supported by a majority of the electorate.

With this in mind, Monroe (1983:38) states that political parties rarely “advocate a ... stand” contrary to that of a majority of public opinion, but that the “dynamics of the nominating process and convention decision making mean that minority positions favored by relevant interest groups and party activists may sometimes [be] adopted.” Monroe’s (1983:27) research supports this notion and demonstrates that the Republican and the Democratic Party have “tended to go against popular majorities on issues of greatest concern to their established constituencies.” The Republican Party platforms’ support of a ban on abortion seems to fit this profile.

Walters (1990:437) points out that few studies have looked at party platforms and their political function. However, according to one of the predictions of saliency theory, as described by Laver and Garry (2000:620), a “strong relationship between party position on, and party emphasis” of an issue ... ‘emphases equal direction.’” From this perspective, a link exists between a party’s focus on a specific issue, and the strength and weight of that party’s emphasis on that particular issue. According to saliency theory, then, if an analysis shows increased attention to the abortion issue within Republican Party platforms over time, this can be interpreted as the result of the party’s increased emphasis on its anti-abortion stance.

Although increased emphasis on a particular issue can be the result of various factors, the strength and well-being of the party’s base is surely one of the prevalent ones. Pomper sees party platforms as a “useful ... indication of the nature of the party coalition” (in Walters 1990:437), and Walters (1990:437) adds that party activists are important in this regard since they are “skilled in identifying salient issues in the electorate.” Research by Monroe (1983:39) supports the notion that so-called “issue activists ... performed the function of ‘linking’ the party agenda to national public policy” (Walters 1990:437).

According to Domke and Coe (2008:103), party platforms are important because they are in fact “opportunities to narrowcast messages to targeted segments of the electorate,” and parties thus “create platforms knowing that engaged groups will look for distinct ‘planks’ ... that discuss their pet concerns.” Domke and Coe (2008:73) define *narrowcasting* as the targeting of “a particular constituency with words and actions that are public but that fly below the radar of most Americans”, and the abortion plank is thus

an important tool in the wooing of abortion opponents. Consequently, candidates can campaign on the abortion related content of the party platforms knowing that it is already “approved” by the pro-life community, and that their message will be well-received among those who are paying attention.

Framing is a key ingredient in narrowcasting, and it is an integral part of political debate – in which people tend to define their position in the best possible light, while trying to portray people with opposing views in the worst possible light.⁷ Aristotle described such a dynamic by stressing the rhetorical significance of promoting oneself, while dethroning one’s opponent (Krogstad 2004:11). The power of rhetoric and our understanding of language are based on different “frames”, which Lakoff (2004:xv) defines as “mental structures that shape the way we see the world.” Framing, then, as defined by Iyengar (1991:11), refers to “subtle alterations in the statement or presentation of judgment and choice problems.” In short, politicians are in the trade of actively seeking to shape and affect the media’s framing of themselves, their opponents, the policy issues they discuss, and last but not least, the voters’ perception of the issues at hand.

Republican Party platforms’ stance and positioning on abortion is framed with a specific purpose, and this framing can be described by the term “value-framing.” Central to the concept of value-framing is the fact that the “distinction between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ hinges in the balance” (Ball-Rokeach et al. 1990:249), and opponents in such a “legitimacy contest” tend to confront each other “in the language of values,” cloaked in value-frames that “establish legitimacy (morality and/or competence) at the expense of their opponent” (Ball-Rokeach et al. 1990:255). If successful, the creation of a dominant value-frame can contribute “to a condition of ‘restrictive power,’” in which the public discourse occurs (Ball-Rokeach et al. 1990:255). I will return to the issue of framing in Chapters 2 and 3, in the candidate- and president-narratives in Chapters 4 and 5, and in the discussion in Chapter 6. In short, value-framing is central to Republican Party

⁷ Part of this section draws on the content of my term paper in STV4308B, Spring 2009, entitled “The Elephant, the Donkey, and the Framing of Abortion in American Politics.” The material is reworked and organized differently than it appeared in the original.

platforms', Republican presidential candidates', nominees', and presidents' framing of abortion.

1.3 The relationship between the party platforms and the party's nominees

As previously mentioned, the prevailing view of American party platforms is that they are "almost meaningless" (Walters 1990:437), and that while they on the one hand are "the most important document that a political party produces," they are close to being "worthless pieces of paper" (Maisel 1993:671). If party platforms are indeed almost meaningless documents consisting of worthless pieces of paper, presidential candidates, nominees, and presidents will not bother adhering to its positions or applying its language in speeches or statements. By focusing on the abortion issue, the thesis seeks to unravel the relationship between the Republican Party platform on the one hand, and Republican presidential candidates', nominees', and presidents' positioning on and framing of abortion on the other.

The fact that the average voter does not read American party platforms simply implies that they are primarily written for a different audience. As Walters (1990:438) points out, the party platform performs at least two "crucial political functions" in addition to defining the party and the party's nominee politically in the campaign environment. It also "binds campaign organizations together" and binds together "various constituency groups and provide a basis for their mobilization" (Walters 1990:438). The party platform can thus be seen as a uniting factor within the party coalition, and as a tool in the mobilization of the greater electorate.

If I can demonstrate the existence of a clear relationship between the party platforms', and the candidates', nominees', and presidents' treatment of the abortion issue, then this would weaken the notion that party platforms are close to being worthless pieces of paper. In fact, a dichotomy of whether party platforms are important or not is useless, since Republican Party platforms can be worthless pieces of paper to the average voter, and a list of commandments to abide by to Republicans with presidential ambitions. Furthermore, the existence of a clear relationship would shed light on the process surrounding the party platforms' "defining" of "the party's nominee politically" (Walters 1990:438). Since the Republican Party platforms' abortion plank has opposed

abortion since 1976, the platform not only defines the candidate politically, but it also advocates a party line – regardless of the nominee’s personal stance on abortion. In this perspective, revisions of party platforms are not only aimed at pleasing specific constituency groups and party loyalists, but they also function as a message to the party’s presidential hopefuls about the desired positioning on a range of issues come election time.

If this is the case, the notion of the “candidate-centered” reality of American politics would sound strange, and the premise that American party platforms are unimportant would be weakened – based on a finding that Republican Party platforms matter to Republican presidential candidates, nominees, and presidents on the issue of abortion. Although my analysis of the party platforms is conducted against the backdrop of scholarly perspectives on the importance and significance of these platforms, my analysis of the abortion issue within Republican Party platforms is not primarily aimed at assessing the importance of American Party platforms per se. It can, however, be viewed as an effort to assess the importance of the Republican Party platforms’ abortion plank, by contrasting it to the presidential candidates’, nominees’, and presidents’ positioning on abortion.

My findings only relate to the Republican Party’s treatment of the abortion issue in presidential politics, and it shines light on the past three decades, in which the clout of “social conservatives”, according to the *National Catholic Register* (2007), “was such that any candidate had to undergo a ‘forced conversion’ before running for national office.” During the 2008 Republican primaries, the Republican presidential candidate Mike Huckabee alluded to such developments when he uttered his amazement “at the number of people who come to the conclusion to be pro-life when it comes time to run for president” (Nagourney et al. 2007). From the sidelines, candidates’ rightward drift on abortion reeks of political convenience, and Darman (2008:43) has summed it up nicely: “too many candidates have offered conversion narratives that track too perfectly with the course of political expediency.”

1.4 Litmus Test Conformity

The title of this thesis is “Litmus Test Conformity in American Politics: Republican Party platforms and the Presidential Politics of Abortion, 1976-2008.” My use of the terms “litmus test” and “conformity” warrants a few remarks.

First of all, the term “litmus test” is commonly used in journalistic accounts of politics and religion, and it refers to matters where a specific policy stance qualifies or disqualifies a candidate for a certain office, post or job. For example, presidential candidates on both sides are routinely asked whether or not they would conduct a litmus test when choosing nominees to the Supreme Court, and the Republican Party platform includes language stating that it supports judges “who respect ... the sanctity of innocent human life.”

In the present context, the litmus test analogy alludes to the difficulties of pro-choice Republicans seeking the presidency, based on the fact that the Republican presidential nominee has to support the party line on abortion. Obviously, there are no formal test results, but a certain perception of acceptability or unacceptability emerges among party loyalists and Republican primary voters informed about the candidates’ stance on abortion. The logic behind the use of the analogy is that an anti-abortion stance is tightly connected with the party’s socially conservative image, and that candidates who support abortion rights are not suitable – or eligible – to head such a coalition.

Outside the world of politics, a litmus test measures pH levels. PH levels below 7 are defined as acid and turn out red, whereas pH levels above 7 are defined as base and turn out blue. Taking the analogy one step further, a pro-choice stance turns out red – signaling a stop sign – whereas a pro-life stance turns out blue – signaling blue skies and one less obstacle on the road towards the nomination. Furthermore, a pro-choice stance registers as *acid*, whereas the Republican *base* favors a pro-life stance. Taking one step back, the litmus test analogy simply alludes to the importance of a pro-life stance on abortion on the road towards obtaining the Republican presidential nomination.

Secondly, my use of the term “conformity” refers to the fact that since 1976, all Republican presidential and vice-presidential nominees have voiced their pro-life views and pledged allegiance to the party platform’s abortion plank. Thus, pro-choice views are in the minority, and candidates with pro-choice views seem to face a much steeper climb

to obtain the Republican presidential nomination than pro-life Republicans do. In short, it appears as if pro-choice Republicans who are serious about seeking the presidency need to shape and *conform* their abortion stance in accordance with the party platform.

The combination of these terms – “litmus test conformity” – alludes to the thesis’ findings. In short, one specific position on abortion seems to disqualify Republicans with presidential ambitions, and with the benefit of hindsight, “litmus test results” seem to push candidates to conform, and drift rightwards on abortion.

1.5 Plan of the thesis

The remainder of the thesis consists of six chapters. Chapter 2 introduces the method of content analysis and presents the thesis’ research strategy. Chapter 3 analyzes the abortion related content of Republican Party platforms between 1976 and 2008 by focusing on emphasis, positioning, and framing. Chapter 4 lays out Republican presidential candidates’ and nominees’ positioning on and framing of abortion in the time periods covered by a set of news searches, and Chapter 5 does the same for Republican presidents based on their publicly available documents. Chapter 6 includes a discussion of the thesis’ findings and widens the scope of their potential implications. Chapter 7 summarizes the thesis’ findings and points out areas for future research on the subject.

Chapter 2

Methodology

2.1 Introduction

This chapter deals with methodological considerations underlying the thesis' analysis. It presents the method of content analysis and the thesis' research strategy, and lays out, step by step, how the research is conducted.

My analysis of the positioning on and framing of abortion in (I) Republican Party platforms, and among Republican (II) presidential candidates and nominees, and (III) presidents, is based on textual analysis. As the study of these three levels of textual data primarily includes (counting and) tracing of words and phrases, content analysis seems to fit the analytical purposes well.

2.2 Content analysis⁸

Content analysis is quantitative and instrumental in nature, and involves counting and tracing (of words) more than interpretation. Krippendorff (2004:18) defines content analysis as "a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts ... to the contexts of their use", and states that the approach can "cope with large volumes of data" (Krippendorff 2004:42). The issue of validity is closely connected to the issue of reliability, and these two concepts are viewed as "methodological requirements" within a content analytical framework (Krippendorff 2004:18). "Validating evidence" is seen as "the ultimate justification of content analysis" (Krippendorff 2004:89), and Weber (1990:12) notes that in order to make valid inferences from a text, "it is important that the classification procedure" is "reliable in the sense of being consistent," meaning that "different people should code the same text in the same way." Ontologically, then, content analysis is "realist" by assuming "that an independent reality exists" within a text; and epistemologically, "meaning is fixed and reflects reality in ways that can be ascertained through the use of scientific methods" (Hardy et al. 2004:21). More

⁸ The following section draws on the content of my term paper in STV4312B, Fall 2009, entitled "Republican Party platforms on abortion, 1976-2008." The material is reworked and organized differently than it appeared in the original.

specifically, content analysis relies on logical positivism, which holds that assertions are only meaningful if they can be tested through observation (Knutson 1997:217).

In applying a content analytical approach, it is important that all of the steps in the gathering and analysis of the textual data are thoroughly accounted for. I have described all of the relevant word searches, word counts and coding procedures in detail below. Thus, the analysis I have conducted, and the results it has produced, are both readily replicated.

2.2.1 The Manifesto-approach to the analysis of party platforms

As mentioned in Chapter 1, scholars differ on the importance of party platforms. Nonetheless, the party platform is the single most important document produced and released by a political party, and it is an important piece of data when studying a political party's treatment of a particular issue.

Part of my analysis of the Republican Party platforms is based on the so-called Manifesto-approach. The Manifesto Research Group's (MRG) focus on the content of election programs is driven by the fact that such texts represent important and authoritative statements of a political party's priorities (Klingemann et al. 1994:21). The Manifesto-approach consists of coding *sentences* into 56 categories, grouped within seven different policy domains. The focus on sentences rests on the fact that party platforms are "carefully considered and finely honed documents," in which no sentences appear "without a purpose" (Budge 2001:79). The essence of the Manifesto-approach is that the percentage of sentences grouped within the various categories and domains can be studied in comparative analyses between different party platforms over time.

The theoretical perspective underlying the Manifesto-approach is one of saliency. Saliency theory "sees parties as trying to make 'their' issues prominent in an election (by highlighting them in their manifestos) and de-emphasizing rival issues" (Budge & Bara 2001:62). *Saliency* can be defined as "the selective emphasis given to issues by parties" (Budge 2001:79), and as Budge (2001:87) points out, "all computerized procedures based on word counts base themselves on the relative saliency of words." In the present work, I use a Manifesto-like-approach to focus on the selective emphasis given to the issue of abortion within Republican Party platforms between 1976 and 2008. Saliency is "measured" by four different *measurements of saliency*: The number of words describing

the platforms' positioning on abortion (relative to the total amount of words within the party platform), the numerical mentions of the word "abortion", the number of abortion related policy positions, and the number of abortion frames within Republican Party platforms over time.

While the Manifesto-approach is focused on the coding of sentences, the Wordscore-approach focuses on the counting of words. As Budge (2001:90) points out, "specialized investigations may well need their own specialized codings", and so my approach can be described as a triangulation of methods: In addition to focusing on the *percentage of words* within party platforms dealing with abortion (as opposed to the Manifesto-approach's focus on the number/percentage of sentences) and conducting various word counts, I code abortion related words and sentences within Republican Party platforms into policy positions.

In short, while the Manifesto-approach is applied with respect to the *emphasis* on abortion within Republican Party platforms, a different content analytical approach is applied in the mapping and analysis of the *positioning* on and *framing* of abortion within Republican Party platforms between 1976 and 2008. All in all, the emphasis is on the *tracing*, *counting* and *coding* of words and policies, and the details of the research strategy are described below.

2.3 Research strategy

The thesis question involves an analysis of *textual data* on three different levels: the (I) emphasis and positioning on, and the framing of abortion within Republican Party platforms, and the positioning and framing among Republican (II) presidential candidates and nominees, and (III) presidents. With this in mind, Figure 2.1 illustrates the thesis' independent and dependent variable.

The first level of analysis, described as the independent variable in Figure 2.1, focuses on Republican Party platforms' emphasis and positioning on, and framing of abortion – from the first time abortion was mentioned in 1976 up until the 2008 version of the platform. Levels two and three represent the dependent variables in Figure 2.1. The second level consists of data gathered from news searches focusing on the candidates'

and nominees' stance on abortion, while the third level consists of data gathered from Republican presidents' (1974-2009) publicly available documents.

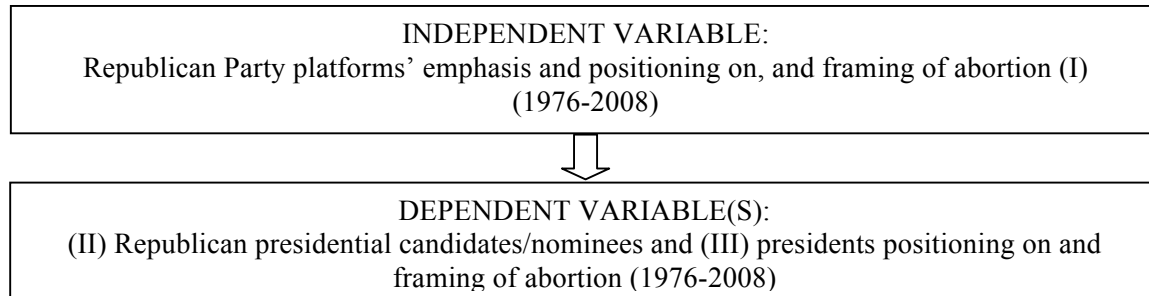


Figure 2.1 Independent and dependent variables

2.3.1 Republican Party platforms

The data on level one – Republican Party platforms (1976-2008) – are available online from The American Presidency Project (2009a). My emphasis is solely on the abortion related content of these platforms, and the approach thus differs from that of Maisel (1993), who has conducted a *detailed content analysis* of the various drafts of the 1992 Democratic and Republican Party platforms. Maisel used the paragraph as the unit of analysis. Since my focus is solely on the issue of abortion within Republican Party platforms, my units of analysis are the (I) paragraphs including the word abortion. In instances where sentences including the word abortion appear in a (II) paragraph dealing with a wide range of issues in addition to abortion (for example, a listing of various GOP⁹ priorities), only the sentence including the word abortion will be extracted. The textual data extracted in this manner (I and II) will be referred to as “abortion words.” The total amount of words within each party platform will be referred to as “platform words.”

Word counts of the *abortion words*¹⁰ and the *platform words*¹¹ are conducted in every single party platform in order to measure the saliency of the former when compared to the latter. By applying such an approach, it is possible to determine whether the

⁹ GOP – short for the Grand Old Party – is a commonly used acronym for the Republican Party.

¹⁰ Headlines are not included in the word counts of the “abortion words.”

¹¹ Footnotes and endnotes are not included in the word counts, which begin with the “preamble” in each platform document. In 2004, the names of the members of the platform committee listed at the end of the document, and the table of contents at the beginning, is not included in the count. The counting starts at “Ronald Reagan believed that ...” In 2008, the counting starts at “This platform is dedicated ...”

coverage of the abortion issue has increased in prominence over time relative to the total length of the party platforms. Similarly, word counts of the word "abortion" are conducted within the various party platforms in order to reveal whether or not the use of the term has increased over time.

In addition to focusing on the saliency of the *abortion words* and the appearance of the word "abortion" over time, I also focus on abortion related policy positions and the framing of abortion within the various party platforms. The coding of *policy positions*¹² is based on the *abortion words* extracted from the party platforms, and the coding procedure adheres to the following principles: There can be more than one policy within each sentence, and different ways of describing a policy position within different party platforms can be coded in the same manner. In addition to coding policy positions, I pay specific attention to the framing of abortion. Based on the extracted *abortion words*, I focus on certain words and phrases used to frame the abortion issue. I refer to these words and phrases as "abortion frames." Abortion frames can be described as terms and slogans touting the GOP's approach to, and positioning on abortion. The abortion related policy positions and the abortion frames found within the various party platforms are presented at the end of Chapter 3, and an appendix containing the (I) Republican Party platforms (1976-2008), (II) the *abortion words* extracted from the various party platforms, the (III) details of the various policy-codings and (IV) abortion frames, and the candidate- and president-narratives are available on the CD accompanying this thesis.¹³

2.3.2 Republican presidential candidates, nominees, and presidents

The data on level two – Republican presidential candidates' and nominees' positioning on and framing of abortion – are based on a variety of news searches within the archives of *The New York Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Time Magazine*, and *Newsweek*,¹⁴ in addition to Presidential Nomination Acceptance speeches and presidential debates including the word "abortion" (The American Presidency Project 2009b; 2009c). As far as the news

¹² By an abortion related policy position I mean a stance on abortion, in the form of a plan, a course of action, a commitment to, or the support of a broad or specific cause. In short, promises and/or statements of intent pertaining to the issue of abortion.

¹³ The "CD appendix" is also available upon request from the author: are_flaten@hotmail.com.

¹⁴ I conducted the news searches within LexisNexis' search engine and Google News' Advanced News Archive Search-engine. Read more about the news searches in the Appendix.

searches' search criteria go, I have treated candidates running for the first and second time differently. In order to try to track the candidates' positioning on and framing of abortion over time, the searches for candidates running for the first time stretches back ten years from Election Day in the presidential election in question. In this way, it is possible to track the candidates' (some of them end up as nominees) positioning on and framing of abortion in the time leading up to, during, and following the Republican primaries.

However, when it comes to the searches for candidates running for the second time, the time period covered stretches from Election Day in the presidential election in question, and back to the day after Election Day in the previous presidential election in which the candidate ran. I will illustrate with an example: When covering Bob Dole, the first search covers the period between November 8, 1978 and November 8, 1988 (Election Day in 1988), while the second search covers the period between November 9, 1988 and November 5, 1996 (Election Day in 1996).

All news searches included the following terms: a set of specified dates, the name of the candidate, and the words "abortion" and "pro." "Pro" is a relevant search term since it is part of the two main terms used to describe a person's positioning on abortion: "pro-choice" and "pro-life." Furthermore, these terms are well known and frequently used by journalists covering politics and abortion. Thus, they appear in most articles dealing with abortion, but a direct consequence of including the word "pro" was a reduction of the data material and the exclusion of potentially useful articles. However, a reduction of the empirical material was the only feasible research strategy due to the huge amount of news articles retrieved by only searching for the word "abortion." Nonetheless, the data material underlying the thesis' analysis is extensive.¹⁵

The data on level three – Republican presidents' positioning on and framing of abortion – are based on The American Presidency Project's archive of the presidents' publicly available documents.¹⁶ As the data on levels two and three will be compared to

¹⁵ For example, the analysis in Chapter 4 is based on 580 articles (1881 pages) for the 2008 candidates, 1004 articles (2673 pages) for the 2000 candidates, and 827 articles (2234 pages) for the 1996 candidates.

¹⁶ The data material is accessed by entering www.presidency.ucsb.edu, and by scrolling down until the boxes with the search options appear. In the box titled "Option 1: Search", type in the word "abortion",

the abortion related content of Republican Party platforms (level one), the data will be compared to the content of the “newest” party platform at any given time. As an example, President George Bush’ one term as president will be dealt with as follows: Sources from the period between January 20, 1989 and August 16, 1992 will be compared with the 1988 Republican Party Platform. As the 1992 Republican Party Platform was released on August 17, 1992, the sources from that day until Bush’s last day in office on January 20, 1993, will be compared against the 1992 Republican Party Platform.

The abortion related content of the party platforms is compared to abortion related statements in order to try to track eventual changes in tone and approach following the release of a new party platform. However, since the party platforms have been consistently “Pro-Life” for a long time, it might be hard to track clear changes following the release of new party platforms. I focus on this particular issue towards the end of Chapters 4 and 5. On the other hand, it is possible that candidates tune their positioning on and framing of abortion based on the perceived or expected content of future party platforms, thus making the effect of new party platforms harder to trace. According to this logic, it is feasible that candidates who run for the presidency for a second time adjust their abortion strategy based on the perception of how it played out for them the first time. I will return to this discussion in Chapter 6.

Summing up, Table 2.1 lists the different research strategies and the relevant data sources for the three different levels of analysis.

Table 2.1 The thesis’ three levels of analysis

<i>ANALYTICAL LEVEL</i>	<i>RESEARCH STRATEGY</i>	<i>SOURCES</i>
I Republican Party platforms	Paragraphs and/or sentences including the word “abortion”	The American Presidency Project (2009a)
II Republican presidential candidates and nominees	(1.) News searches including name, a set of dates, and the words “abortion” and “pro.” (2.) Nomination speeches and (3.) general election debates including the word “abortion.”	1. The New York Times, Chicago Tribune, Time Magazine and Newsweek. 2-3. The American Presidency Project (2009c+d)
III Republican presidents	Official presidential documents including the word “abortion”	The American Presidency Project

choose the relevant time period, choose the president of interest in the box titled ”President”, mark the box titled ”Exclude documents from the Office of the Press Secretary”, and hit the ”Send In” button.

2.3.3 Limiting the scope of analysis

Obviously, the step-by-step research strategy sketched out above accumulates a large amount of textual data. Consequentially, some decisions were made to limit the scope of the analysis. First of all, and as previously mentioned, I included the word “pro” in the news searches to limit the number of retrieved news articles to a workable amount. Secondly, I focused exclusively on the top five candidacies, nationally, in every Republican presidential primary between 1976 and 2008.¹⁷ So-called “unpledged” votes¹⁸ ranking second to fifth are ignored, and candidates originally ranking sixth (and so on) are not included.

Speaking of presidential candidates; when an incumbent president is running for reelection, he faces very few contenders for the presidential nomination. Furthermore, some of the candidacies are neither realistic, nor well covered by the news media. Simply put, some candidates are not mainstream material – such as the former Ku Klux Klan-member David Duke, who ran as a Republican presidential candidate in 1992. Others seek the presidency over and over again, such as the 1984 Republican presidential candidate Harold Stassen – a perennial candidate who ran for the presidency ten times between 1944 and 1992. With such considerations in mind, the 1984 candidacies of Harold Stassen and Benjamin Fernandez, the 1992 candidacy of David Duke, and the 2004 candidacy of Bill Wyatt have been left out of the analysis.

However, I have not left out all presidential candidates who ran against an incumbent Republican president. I have included the 1976 candidacy of Ronald Reagan and the 1992 candidacy of Pat Buchanan. Unlike Stassen, Fernandez, Duke, and Wyatt, Reagan and Buchanan received a significant amount of attention in the news media, and a substantial number of votes in the Republican primaries. Coincidentally, both Reagan and Buchanan pushed their opponents further to the right on the abortion issue by making it an important issue in their campaigns.

With these considerations in mind, Table 2.2 lists the Republican presidential candidates, presidential nominees, and presidents covered in this thesis.

¹⁷ I am relying on ourcampigns.com (1976, 1980, 1988, 1992, 1996, 2000) and uselectionatlas.org (2008) for the Republican primary results.

¹⁸ “Unpledged” votes are votes cast for no specific candidate during the national convention. By casting an unpledged vote a convention delegate states that he’s not supporting a specific candidate.

Table 2.2 Republican presidential candidates, nominees, and presidents, 1976-2008

<i>YEAR</i>	<i>PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES and NOMINEES</i>	<i>PRESIDENTS</i>
1976	Gerald Ford (nominee) and Ronald Reagan	Gerald Ford (August 9, 1974 - January 20, 1977)
1980	Ronald Reagan (nominee), George Bush, John Anderson*, Howard Baker, and Phil Crane	Ronald Reagan (January 20, 1981 - January 20, 1989)
1984	Ronald Reagan**	
1988	George Bush (nominee), Bob Dole, Pat Robertson, and Jack Kemp	George Bush (January 20, 1989 - January 20, 1993)
1992	George Bush (nominee) and Pat Buchanan	
1996	Bob Dole (nominee), Pat Buchanan, Steve Forbes, Lamar Alexander, and Alan Keyes	
2000	George W. Bush (nominee), John McCain, Alan Keyes, and Steve Forbes	George W. Bush (January 20, 2001 - January 20, 2009)
2004	George W. Bush**	
2008	John McCain (nominee), Mike Huckabee, Mitt Romney, Ron Paul, and Fred Thompson	

Note: *John Anderson ran as a Republican, but bowed out of the primaries on April 24, 1980, and ran as an Independent. **Ronald Reagan's and George W. Bush's reelection bids are covered in Chapter 5.

2.3.4 Coding abortion related statements

As Carmines and Woods (2002:375-276) show, the norm within survey questionnaires on questions dealing with one's positioning on abortion is to operate with four different categories, ranging from totally opposed to abortion to favoring a woman's right to choose. Although my analysis of presidential candidates', nominees' and presidents' positioning on abortion relies on statements retrieved from a variety of news searches and not responses to survey questionnaires, I have decided to stick with this four-category formula. In doing so, however, I have modified the name and content of one of the four categories applied in the main abortion question in the National Election Studies (NES) since 1980, and in the Convention Delegate Studies (CDS) since 1992.

The category in question is that which in my terminology is "Wishy-Washy" (see Table 2.3). The original category within the NES and CDS studies was the following: "The law should permit abortion for reasons other than rape, incest, or danger to the woman's life, but only after the need for the abortion has been clearly established" (Carmines & Woods 2002:375). After completing the news searches and organizing the textual data, it became apparent that this category would be difficult to handle. Very few of the statements retrieved from the news searches are so specific that they fit this

category. However, a far more common theme in the data material is the wishy-washiness of various candidates’ description of their own positioning on abortion. Some are unwilling to pinpoint their own positioning, while others simply duck the issue. Furthermore, a candidate’s recurring repositioning on the abortion issue fits the “Wishy-Washy” category.

Table 2.3 Coding abortion related statements based on a four-category schema

<i>CATEGORY</i>	<i>DESCRIPTION/THEME</i>
PRO-CHOICE	A woman should always be able to obtain an abortion as a matter of personal choice.
WISHY-WASHY	Unwilling to state one’s position, AND/OR Ducking the issue, AND/OR Constant repositioning
PRO-LIFE with exceptions	Abortion should only be legal in cases of rape, incest, and when the woman’s life is in danger.
PRO-LIFE	Abortion is only permissible to save the woman’s life.

Note: The categories (except the “Wishy-Washy” category and my inclusion of “save the woman’s life” exception in the “Pro-Life” category) are based on the ones applied in the main abortion question in the NES studies since 1980, and the CDS since 1992 (See Carmines & Woods 2002:375).

In addition to creating the “Wishy-Washy” category, I have rephrased the “Pro-Life” category to include exceptions for self-defense – meaning cases where the mother will die if the child is born. Although the party platforms do not mention this exception, it is supported by the Judeo-Christian tradition on the premise that you can take someone else’s life if that is your only chance of surviving. Even Ronald Reagan supported this exception (The American Presidency Project 1984a).

The material retrieved from the news searches and the searches within the presidential documents has been coded according to the four-category schema. The relevant textual data for each candidate, nominee and president has been organized in individual timelines, including the date, the quote, the coding and the framing.¹⁹ Before considering this material, however, I will first focus on Republican Party platforms and their emphasis and positioning on, and framing of abortion in the period between 1976 and 2008.

¹⁹ The timelines are included on the CD accompanying this thesis.

Chapter 3

Republican Party platforms on Abortion, 1976-2008

3.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the emphasis and positioning on, and the framing of abortion within Republican Party platforms between 1976 and 2008.²⁰ It serves as an empirical foundation for the analyses reported in Chapters 4 and 5. The content of the Republican Party platforms are dealt with according to the principles described in Chapter 2.

The chapter starts out by mapping the varying saliency of the abortion issue within Republican Party platforms over time, before the various abortion related policy positions are presented chronologically, and the contexts underlying their introduction, molding and exclusion are briefly discussed. Lastly, the chapter deals with the various party platforms' framing of abortion.

3.2 Saliency and emphasis

Since 1976, every Republican Party platform has mentioned the issue of abortion. However, the emphasis – measured by comparing the *abortion words* to the *platform words* – has evolved over time. Below, Table 3.1 shows the percentages of *abortion words* within Republican Party platforms, 1976-2008:

Table 3.1 *Abortion words* within Republican Party platforms, 1976-2008. Percent.

	1976	1980	1984	1988	1992	1996	2000	2004	2008
Abortion words %	.81	.30	.61	.61	.57	1.23	.94	1.12	1.89
Change		-.51	+.31 (-.20)		-.04 (-.24)	+.66 (+.42)	-.29 (+.13)	+.18 (+.31)	+.77 (+1.08)

Note: Abortion words = the abortion related material within the party platform. Platform words = the total amount of words within the party platform. The percentages are obtained by comparing the number of *abortion words* to the number of *platform words*. The numbers in parenthesis in the last row compare the *abortion words* percentage to the *abortion words* percentage of the 1976 party platform. *Source:* The American Presidency Project (2009a).

²⁰ Different versions of Tables 3.1-3.8 were originally included in my term paper in STV4312B, Fall 2009, entitled “Republican Party platforms on abortion, 1976-2008”, but the presentation here is different.

As Table 3.1 shows, the relative emphasis on abortion within Republican Party platforms has increased over time. However, the trend is not linear, as there was a decline in the relative emphasis on the abortion issue on three occasions – between the party platforms of 1976 and 1980, 1988 and 1992, and 1996 and 2000, respectively. Furthermore, the increasing emphasis on abortion is particularly evident between the party platforms of 1992 and 1996, and 2004 and 2008. In order to get a clearer picture of the pattern over time, the party platforms are grouped into three different time periods in Table 3.2:

Table 3.2 Abortion words split into three time periods: 1976-1984, 1988-1996, and 2000-2008. Percent. Mean.

	1976-1984	1988-1996	2000-2008
Abortion words %	.57	.80	1.32
Change		+.23	+.52 (+.75)

Source: The American Presidency Project (2009a).

By grouping the party platforms in this manner, the pattern of increased emphasis on abortion over time clearly stands out. The percentage of words dealing with the abortion issue has more than doubled in the period between 1976 and 2008. By viewing this as a *measurement of saliency*, it is evident that the issue of abortion has become increasingly important within Republican Party platforms over time.

Another way of measuring the importance of the abortion issue within the various party platforms is based on a similar but more simplistic approach: *word counts of the word “abortion”* within the various party platforms. The results are shown in Table 3.3:

Table 3.3 The number of times the word *abortion* is mentioned within Republican Party platforms, 1976-2008.

	1976	1980	1984	1988	1992	1996	2000	2004	2008
Abortion w. count	5	3	6	6	4	11	8	12	12
Change		-2	+3		-2	+7	-3	+4	
			(+1)	(+1)	(-1)	(+6)	(+3)	(+7)	(+7)

Source: The American Presidency Project (2009a).

Clearly, the use of the word abortion has increased over time. The pattern in Table 3.3 is not one of linear increase over time, but when the party platforms are grouped into three time periods, such as in Table 3.4 below, the pattern of a clear increase over time is

evident. The use of the word “abortion” has more than doubled when comparing the first group of party platforms (1976-1984) to the third (2000-2008):

Table 3.4 *Abortion* word counts grouped into three time periods. Mean.

	1976-1984	1988-1996	2000-2008
<i>Abortion</i> w. count	4.6	7	10.6
Change		+2.4	+3.6 (+6)

Source: The American Presidency Project (2009a).

A third approach to measuring the saliency of the abortion issue within Republican Party platforms is based on a count of abortion related *policy positions* within the various party platforms. Based on the policy-coding procedure described in Chapter 2, Table 3.5 shows a pattern of an increasing number of abortion related policy positions over time:

Table 3.5 The number of abortion related policy positions within Republican Party platforms, 1976-2008.

	1976	1980	1984	1988	1992	1996	2000	2004	2008
Abortion policies	3	4	8	10	10	13	13	17	15
Change		+1	+4 (+5)	+2 (+7)		+3 (+10)		+4 (+14)	-2 (+12)

Source: The American Presidency Project (2009a).

The pattern is much clearer here than in the previous tables. The only exception to the pattern of a steadily increasing number of abortion related policy positions over time is the 2008 party platform, which nonetheless included more policy positions than the other party platforms with the exception of the 2004 version. The party platforms have been grouped into three different time periods in Table 3.6:

Table 3.6 Abortion related policy positions within Republican Party platforms grouped into three time periods. Mean.

	1976-1984	1988-1996	2000-2008
Abortion policies	5	11	15
Change		+6	+4 (+10)

Source: The American Presidency Project (2009a).

When the nine party platforms are divided into three separate groups, it becomes clear that the number of abortion related policy positions doubled between the first group

(1976-1984) and the second (1988-1996), while tripling between the first (1976-1984) and the third group (2000-2008) of party platforms. Furthermore, when comparing the 1976 to the 2008 party platform, the number of policy positions quintupled – from three policy positions to fifteen.

A fourth approach to measuring the saliency of abortion within Republican Party platforms is to count *the number of abortion frames* used to describe the platforms’ position on abortion. Based on the principles described in Chapter 2, the tables below tell the quantitative story of the party platforms’ framing of abortion:

Table 3.7 Abortion frames within Republican Party platforms, 1976-2008.

	1976	1980	1984	1988	1992	1996	2000	2004	2008
Abortion frames	3	2	5	6	6	10	10	17	14
Change		-1	+3	+1		+4		+7	-3
			(+2)	(+3)	(+3)	(+7)	(+7)	(+14)	(+11)

Source: The American Presidency Project (2009a).

Again the pattern is clear, and only two party platforms break with the linear trend. The trend of a clear increase in the number of abortion frames over time, however, stands out when the nine party platforms are divided into three groups:

Table 3.8 Abortion frames within Republican Party platforms grouped into three time periods. Mean.

	1976-1984	1988-1996	2000-2008
Abortion frames	3.3	7.3	13.6
Change		+4	+6.3
			(+10.3)

Source: The American Presidency Project (2009a).

As Table 3.8 shows, the number of abortion frames found within Republican Party platforms quadrupled in the period between 1976 and 2008. Thus, the four different *measurements of saliency* (abortion words percentages, the number of times the word “abortion” appeared, the number of abortion related policy positions, and the number of abortion frames) all tell the same story, namely that Republican Party platforms focused more and more on the issue of abortion in the period between 1976 and 2008. However, the various measurements tell a slightly different story about which party platforms had the highest and the lowest emphasis on abortion. The *abortion words* percentages and the counts of the word “abortion” show that the emphasis was at its lowest in 1980, followed

by 1992. According to the number of abortion frames the emphasis was at its lowest in 1980, followed by 1976, while the number of policy positions shows that the emphasis was at its lowest in 1976, followed by 1980. According to the *abortion words* percentages, the emphasis was at its highest in 2008, followed by 1996 and 2004, while the counts of the word “abortion” show that the emphasis was at its highest in 2008 and 2004, followed by 1996. According to the number of policy positions on abortion, the emphasis was at its highest in 2004, followed by 2008, while the number of abortion frames shows that the emphasis was at its highest in 2004, followed by 2008.

Summed up quantitatively, Republican Party platforms’ emphasis on the abortion issue has increased substantially in the period between 1976 and 2008. By shifting the focus to the qualitative nature of the abortion related sections within the party platforms, I will now introduce the various abortion related policy positions found in the platforms, before I end the chapter by focusing on the platforms’ framing of abortion.

3.3 Policy positions²¹

All previously existing state restrictions on abortion were deemed unconstitutional by the U.S. Supreme Court’s ruling in *Roe v. Wade* in 1973. Abortion was legalized, and three years later, in 1976, the Republican Party platform introduced its stance on the issue. The 1976 party platform stated that it was in favor of a continuation of the public dialogue on abortion [policy 1], while at the same time stating that it supported a constitutional amendment to protect the rights to life for unborn children [policy 2].²² Furthermore, the platform also opposed the Supreme Court’s intrusion into the family structure, which according to the party platform denied parent’s the right and obligation to guide their minor children [policy 3]. This policy was dropped in 1984.

In 1980, the language favoring a continuation of the public dialogue on abortion [policy 1] was dropped, and replaced by language recognizing differing views on the

²¹ The abortion related policy positions are introduced in the order of their appearance within the party platforms. The numbers in the brackets signify the policies’ appearance.

²² Since 1984, Republican Party platforms have supported a human life amendment to the Constitution. Several versions of this amendment exist, but they all share the intention to overturn *Roe v. Wade* and protect the life of the unborn. Back in 1974, The National Committee for a Human Life Amendment (NCHLA) had been created by Catholic bishops as a (lobby) group independent of the Catholic Church, because of an American public that “frowns on any official church role in pressure or electoral politics” (Craig & O’Brien 1993:44).

abortion issue among both Americans in general, and within the Republican Party more specifically [policy 4]. This policy was dropped in 1984. The fates of these two policies allude to the Republican Party's initial positioning on the abortion issue – a positioning that was completed by 1984. From 1984 onwards, the Republican Party was firmly “Pro-Life”, and did not reach out to abortion proponents.

The 1980 party platform also created a link between the abortion issue and economic policy, and introduced a policy of opposing the use of public revenues for the performance of abortions [policy 5]. Four years later, the 1984 party platform pledged to eliminate funding for organizations advocating or supporting abortion [policy 6]. On a similar note, the platform document that laid the framework for Ronald Reagan's second term pledged to eliminate U.S. funding for organizations supporting abortion or research on abortion methods [policy 7].²³

In addition to these economic policies, the 1984 party platform introduced language stating that the unborn child has a fundamental individual right to life which cannot be infringed [policy 8], and that the Fourteenth Amendment's protections should apply to children [policy 9].²⁴ The 1984 platform also pledged to support those who provide positive alternatives to abortion, such as adoption [policy 10]. Furthermore, the platform voiced its support of judges who respect traditional family values and the sanctity of innocent human life [policy 11]. In 1984 and 1988 this policy position included language stating that this applied to “judges at all levels of the judiciary”, but since 1992, this phrase has not been included.

The 1988 party platform included two new policies, both of which dealt with education. First of all, the party platform voiced its opposition to public school-programs that were providing birth control, abortion services, or referrals [policy 12]. Secondly, the platform voiced its support of abstinence education [policy 13], meaning education aimed at convincing teenagers to abstain from sexual activities until they are married. Beginning in 2000, Republican Party platforms have included calls for increased funding of abstinence education.

²³ This policy is generally known as the Mexico City Policy, although its opponents usually refer to it as the “global gag rule”.

²⁴ Policy 9 is aimed at extending the Fourteenth Amendment's equal protection under the law to the “unborn.”

The 1992 party platform did not introduce any new policies. In 1996, however, additional language dealing with the Fourteenth Amendment was introduced. Building on the premise underlying policy 9, the platform voiced its support of legislative and judicial protection of unborn children's protection under the Fourteenth Amendment against those who perform abortions [policy 14]. The platform also reached out to women by pledging to support women with problem pregnancies in a compassionate way [policy 15]. In addition to these policies, the 1996 party platform pledged to oppose so-called partial-birth abortions [policy 16].²⁵

Similar to the 1992 version, the 2000 party platform did not introduce any new policies. In 2004, however, four new policy positions were introduced. The platform voiced its support of crisis pregnancy programs [policy 17], parental notification laws [policy 18], and health care coverage for unborn children [policy 19]. Lastly, it supported the Born Alive Infants Protection Act [policy 20], an act that would ensure that an infant born alive, including those who survive an abortion procedure, would be considered a person under federal law.

Summing up, Table 3.9 lists the twenty abortion related policy positions introduced in the period between 1976 and 2008, grouped according to the platform documents in which they appear. As Table 3.9 clearly shows, there is a piling-on tendency with respect to abortion policies over time. Usually, the policies that are introduced in one party platform survive and are included in subsequent versions. In a few instances, however, policy positions are dropped – which was the case with policy 1 in 1980, policy 3 and 4 in 1984, and policy 14 and 17 in 2008.

The initial “positioning” on the abortion issue – represented by the introduction and subsequent exclusion of policy 1 and 4 – seems settled by the abortion plank presented in the 1984 platform. This plank has remained untouched up until 2008 – with new policies added along the way. However, and as I will demonstrate in the next couple of chapters, various presidential candidates have voiced the idea of once again including language acknowledging differing views both among Americans and within the Republican Party [policy 4]. In the end though, such efforts have not led anywhere.

²⁵ So-called partial-birth abortion is a form of late-term abortions. The medical term is “intact dilation and extraction.”

Table 3.9 Abortion related policy positions within Republican Party platforms, 1976-2008

POLICY NUMBER	PLATFORM YEAR								
	1976	1980	1984	1988	1992	1996	2000	2004	2008
1	X								
2	X	X	X ^A	X	X	X	X	X	X
3	X	X							
4		X							
5		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
6			X	X	X	X	X	X	X
7			X	X	X	X	X	X	X
8			X	X	X	X	X	X	X
9			X	X	X	X	X	X	X
10			X	X	X	X	X	X	X
11			X	X	X ^B	X	X	X	X
12				X	X	X	X	X	X
13				X	X	X	X ^C	X	X
14						X	X	X	
15						X	X	X	X ^D
16						X	X	X	X
17								X	
18								X	X
19								X	X
20								X	X
Total	3	4	8	10	10	13	13	17	15
Change		+2, -1 (+1)	+6, -2 (+5)	+2 (+7)	(+7)	+3 (+10)	(+10)	+4 (+14)	-2 (+12)

POLICY NUMBER:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>1. Continue the public dialogue on abortion.</p> <p>2.^A Support a constitutional amendment restoring protection of the rights to life for unborn children.</p> <p>3. Opposing the Supreme Court’s intrusion into the family structure by denying parent’s the right and obligation to guide their minor children.</p> <p>4. Recognizing differing views on abortion, both among Americans in general and within the Republican Party.</p> <p>5. Oppose the use of public revenues for abortion.</p> <p>6. Eliminate funding for organizations which advocate or support abortion.</p> <p>7. Eliminate all U.S. funding for organizations which in any way support abortion or research on abortion methods.</p> <p>8. ”The unborn child has a fundamental individual right to life which cannot be infringed”</p> <p>9. “The 14th Amendment’s protections apply to children”</p> <p>10. Support those who provide positive alternatives to abortion, including adoption.</p> | <p>11.^B Support the appointment of judges who respect traditional family values and the sanctity of innocent human life.</p> <p>12. Oppose programs in public schools which provide birth control, abortion services, or referrals.</p> <p>13.^C Support abstinence education.</p> <p>14. Support legislative and judicial protection of unborn children’s protection under the 14th Amendment against those who perform abortions.</p> <p>15.^D Support women with problem pregnancies in a compassionate way.</p> <p>16. Oppose partial-birth abortion.</p> <p>17. Support crisis pregnancy programs.</p> <p>18. Support parental notification laws.</p> <p>19. Support health care coverage for unborn children.</p> <p>20. Support the Born Alive Infants Protection Act.</p> |
|--|--|

Note: A. From 1984: Support of a human life amendment to the Constitution. B. Prior to 1992: judges *at all* levels. From 1992: not specified. C. From 2000: Calls for increased funding of abstinence education. D. In 2008: change in tone from ”problem pregnancies” to ”the challenges of an unplanned pregnancy.” *Source:* The American Presidency Project (2009a).

The “core” within the Republican Party platforms’ positioning on abortion can be described as policies that make it over time. Put differently, such a core can be described as the party platforms’ “Canon Law” on abortion. Six policies were added to such a core of abortion policies in 1984, two more were added in 1988 and 1996,²⁶ and three more were added in 2004 (although it might be too early to determine whether these are truly part of the “core”). The 2008 party platform is the only platform in which policy positions were dropped without the inclusion of new ones (including policy position 14 – introduced in 1996 – which appeared to be one of the “core” abortion policies up until it was dropped).

Every single one of the Republican Party platforms in the period between 1976 and 2008 supports a constitutional amendment to ban abortion and thus reverse *Roe v. Wade*. Furthermore, none of the party platforms support abortions in cases of rape or incest. Although the platforms do not spell out that abortions are allowed in cases where a woman’s life is in jeopardy, there is a common understanding that the right to self-defense applies. For example, Ronald Reagan argued in a 1984 presidential debate that abortion equals the killing of a human being, but that a woman has the right to have an abortion if she would die otherwise (The American Presidency Project 1984a). Going back to the four-category schema introduced in Chapter 2 – which will be applied on the data material in Chapters 4 and 5 – this positioning on abortion can be classified as “Pro-Life.”

3.4 Framing

While the previous section dealt with the specific abortion related policy positions in the Republican Party platforms, this section lays out the manner in which the abortion issue is framed within the various party platforms.

In the 1976 party platform, abortion was framed, for the first and last time, by the term “abortion on demand” – hinting to the lack of legal limits on when a woman can have an abortion. The 1976 party platform also included the term “right to life”, and this term has been included in every single party platform up until 2008. The focus is on the

²⁶ Three policies were added in 1996, but only two of these made into the “core” of abortion related policies.

right of “unborn children” – another term used in every single party platform up until 2008 – to be born.

The 1980 party platform did not introduce any new framing of abortion, but the 1984 version introduced three new frames, in addition to elaborating on the “right to life” frame, by adding the words “fundamental individual” in front of, and “which cannot be infringed”, after “right to life.” As to the new frames introduced, the platform voiced support of “alternatives to abortion”, “traditional family values”, and the “sanctity of innocent human life.” Similar to the fate of the abortion related policy positions introduced in 1984, the abortion frames introduced in 1984 have been included in every single party platform up until 2008.

The 1988 party platform introduced one new frame: “abstinence education”, while the 1992 party platform did not include any new framing of abortion. The 1996 party platform introduced three new frames: “problem pregnancies”, “pro-life agenda” and “partial-birth abortion.” In 1996 and 2000, “partial-birth abortion” was described as “4/5 infanticide.” In 2004, it was described as “brutal and violent” and “inhumane,” while it was described as “barbaric” in 2008. The term “pro-life agenda” was not included in the 2008 party platform, while the term “problem pregnancies” was substituted by the term “unplanned pregnancy” in 2008.

The 2000 party platform did not include any new framing of abortion, but the 2004 party platform introduced eight new frames, and talked about the “Born Alive Infants Protection Act”, and described “partial-birth abortion” as a “brutal and violent” and “inhumane” procedure. Furthermore, the 2004 party platform talked about the “inherent dignity and worth of all people,” “crisis pregnancy”, “parental notification”, “defense of life”, and “culture of life.” The 2008 party platform left out five of the frames introduced in 2004, but introduced four new abortion frames: “choose life,” “children before birth,” “unplanned pregnancy”, in addition to describing “partial-birth abortion” as a “barbaric” procedure.

Summing up, Table 3.10 lists the twenty-three abortion frames introduced above, grouped according to the party platforms in which they appear.

Table 3.10 The framing of abortion within Republican Party platforms, 1976-2008

<i>ABORTION FRAME</i>	<i>PLATFORM YEAR</i>									
	76	80	84	88	92	96	00	04	08	
Abortion on demand	X									
Right to life	X	X	X ^A	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Unborn children	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Alternatives to abortion			X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Traditional family values			X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Sanctity of innocent human life			X	X	X	X	X	X	X ^B	
Abstinence education				X	X	X	X	X	X	
Problem pregnancies						X	X	X		
Pro-life agenda						X	X	X		
Partial-birth abortion						X	X	X	X	
= 4/5 infanticide						X	X			
= Brutal and violent								X		
= Inhumane								X		
= Barbaric									X	
Crisis pregnancy								X		
Parental notification								X	X	
Born Alive Infants Protection Act								X	X	
Inherent dignity and worth of all people								X	X ^C	
Defense of life								X		
Culture of life								X		
Children before birth									X	
Unplanned pregnancy									X	
Choose life									X	
Total	3	2	5	6	6	10	10	17	14	
Change		-1	+3	+1	+1	+4	+4	+8, -1	+4, -7	
			(+2)	(+3)	(+3)	(+7)	(+7)	(+14)	(+11)	

Note: A = From 1984 onwards: “Fundamental individual right to life which cannot be infringed.” B = “Sanctity and dignity of innocent human life”, and “fundamental assault on the sanctity of innocent human life” C = “Inherent dignity and sanctity of all human life.” *Source:* The American Presidency Project (2009a).

Discernable from Table 3.10 is a pattern similar to the one apparent in Table 3.9; there is a piling-on tendency with respect to abortion frames over time, and there exists a “core” among the abortion frames. Among the long-term patterns, perhaps the most prominent one is the framing of fetuses as human beings with a right to life.²⁷ This point is important, since it is the whole basis on which the pro-life movement bases its opposition to abortion. Unsurprisingly, and as I will touch upon in the next few chapters, several presidential candidates, nominees and presidents have emphasized the importance of this distinction, in addition to applying several of the abortion frames listed in Table 3.10.

²⁷ Technically, the term “fetus” applies from the ninth week following fertilization until the birth takes place, although abortion opponents might interject that the term “fetus” is framing as well.

Based on the abortion related policy positions and the abortion frames found within Republican Party platforms, the next two chapters present narratives of Republican presidential candidates', nominees', and presidents' positioning on and framing of abortion, in addition to comparing these narratives to the content of Tables 3.9 and 3.10.

Chapter 4

Republican presidential candidates and nominees on Abortion, 1976-2008

4.1 Introduction

The object of this chapter is to describe and compare the positioning on and framing of abortion among the top five Republican presidential candidates in every Republican presidential primary since 1976, based on the abortion related content of Republican Party platforms. The chapter goes through the Republican primary elections chronologically – and each review focuses first on the candidate finishing last, and ends with the one clinching the nomination. The assessments of the candidates' positioning are based on the four-category schema presented in Chapter 2, and the candidates' framing are assessed against the framing found within the party platforms. The chapter ends with a short summary of the candidates' positioning on and framing of abortion. Additional analysis and a discussion of the long-term trends are dealt with in Chapter 6.

4.2 The Nationalization of the abortion issue: The 1976 Republican primaries

As abortion was legalized in January 1973, 1976 was the first presidential election cycle in which the abortion issue made it into the midst of a presidential campaign. President Gerald Ford ran as an incumbent in the Republican primaries and was challenged from the right by former actor and California Governor Ronald Reagan. As a consequence of Reagan's candidacy, Ford was pushed to the right, and forced to accept several conservative measures in the party platform. Ford won in the end, but the prolonged primary fight with Reagan probably hurt him in the general election against Jimmy Carter, which he lost.

4.2.1 Governor Ronald Reagan on abortion

Even before he left the Governor's office in Sacramento, Reagan had become somewhat of a hero for the conservative movement. He campaigned on behalf of conservative Republicans all across the country, and he recorded ads spearheading conservative

efforts, such as opposing early versions of Medicare.²⁸ Reagan launched his bid for the 1976 Republican nomination against a weakened and unpopular Ford, fueled by the pardon he had granted former president Richard Nixon.

As Governor, Reagan had signed a liberalized abortion statute into California State Law in June 1967. Defending his position, Reagan stated that “a liberalization of the abortion laws” was “necessary,” and he signed the law although it did not “meet each and every objection” that he had to it (Korman 1967). The law that Reagan signed was clearly “Pro-Choice”,²⁹ and it replaced language from 1861 that only allowed for abortions in order to save the life of the mother. The new law legalized abortions when a “pregnancy would gravely impair physical or mental health of the prospective mother, or when a girl under 15 becomes pregnant as a result of rape or incest” (Korman 1967).

By the time of the 1976 Republican primaries, Reagan had reached a different position than the one he held back in 1967. He told journalists that the “liberalized abortion bill he signed ... led to ‘abortion on demand’ in many of that state’s hospitals,” that he “would not make the same ‘mistake’ today,” and that if he could turn back time, he “would have [added] more restrictions” than he originally “agreed to” (*The New York Times* 1976). Reagan blamed the increase in the numbers of abortions following the introduction of the liberalized abortion statute on “very liberal interpretation by some psychiatrists in order to justify abortions that should not have been made” (Rivera 1976).

Reagan’s new positioning on abortion was based on the belief “that the interruption of a pregnancy is a taking of a human life” (Rosenbaum 1976). In March 1976, Reagan described the abortion issue as a “nationwide matter” that could only be solved by “a constitutional amendment,” and “that the Human Life Amendment” offered “the best opportunity to insure that those not yet born” would “have the right to life” (Rivera 1976). In fact, Reagan’s new position on abortion – that abortion should only be allowed to save the life of the mother – was identical to the 1861 California abortion statute that he repealed in 1967, which also only allowed for abortions in cases where the life of the mother was in jeopardy.

²⁸ In a famous speech from 1961, Reagan warned against what he described as “socialized medicine”. You can listen to his speech here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fRdLpem-AAAs>

²⁹ The term “pro-choice” was not part of the political/journalistic vernacular until the 1970s.

In the ten years leading up to the 1976 Republican primaries, Reagan had gone from signing a “Pro-Choice” abortion statute to voicing his support of a solidly “Pro-Life” amendment to the U.S. Constitution. A key component of Reagan’s strategy in the 1976 primaries was based on the courting of social conservatives, and the message was received among pro-lifers, who rated him “militantly pro-life” (Anstett 1976).

As far as framing goes, Reagan did not use any particular frame when talking about the abortion issue prior to the 1976 primary. During the primary, however, Reagan stated that the California law he had signed into law went further than he had intended, and that it effectively led to “abortion on demand.” Later in the primary, Reagan stated that “the interruption of a pregnancy is a taking of a human life”, and that the Human Life Amendment to the Constitution would “insure that those not yet born will have the right to life.”

4.2.2 President Gerald Ford on abortion

The striking thing about Gerald Ford’s positioning on abortion³⁰ is that it changed with the release of the 1976 Republican Party Platform. Prior to its release, Ford’s position was “Wishy-Washy” at best, and he stated that *Roe v. Wade* “went too far” while at the same time stating that “the proposals that are made by some for a constitutional amendment ... are far too restrictive” (The American Presidency Project 1976a). However, following the release of the party platform – on the heels of his primary fight against Reagan – Ford supported a constitutional amendment banning abortion. When confronted with his shifting views on abortion, Ford simply tied himself to the position voiced in the party platform, and stated: “I subscribe to the Republican platform. ... My position is that of the Republican platform, and I will stick with it” (The American Presidency Project 1976b). To be clear, Ford’s position was not lock step with the platform. Ford stated that he supported a constitutional amendment “that would permit the individual States to make the decision” on the legality of abortion, but the 1976 platform did not describe the details of any such amendment (The American Presidency Project 1976b).

³⁰ Unfortunately, the retrieved data material does not cover Gerald Ford’s positioning on abortion prior to his ascendance to the presidency in 1974.

Like Reagan, Ford seems to have moved to the right on abortion, but whereas Reagan's change preceded the release of the 1976 party platform, Ford's change on the issue was closely aligned with the release of the platform. Framing wise, the only abortion frame used by Ford was "abortion on demand", a frame he used both prior to, and following the release of the 1976 party platform.

4.3 The GOP drifts further to the right on abortion: The 1980 primaries

For the first time since 1952, neither Republican presidents nor vice-presidents were seeking the Republican nomination in 1980. In addition to Ronald Reagan, former Texas Congressman and former head of CIA George Bush, Representative John Anderson of Illinois, Representative Phil Crane of Texas, and Senate Minority Leader Howard Baker of Tennessee all ran for the Republican nomination.

4.3.1 Phil Crane and Howard Baker on abortion

The only source available for the positioning of Representative Phil Crane includes a direct quote stating his opposition to abortion:

Personally, I'm totally opposed to it – with exceptions, such as saving the life of the mother. I've supported the right to life amendment. An easier way to address that problem, though, is simply to strip the federal courts of jurisdiction and put it back on the shoulders of the states (Terry 1979).

Crane's support of the right to life amendment puts him on the pro-life side of the fence. However, the quote also includes several somewhat "Wishy-Washy" positions, such as framing his position by the word "personally", and by stating that the issue should be turned over to the states, which implicitly means that he would not object if a state decided to legalize abortion.

The news search only returned two hits dealing with Senator Howard Baker's positioning on abortion, and none of them included any direct quotes. However, the content of the news articles paint him as a supporter of a "Pro-Choice" position on abortion. Anstett (1976) writes that the National Right to Life Committee distributed information during the 1976 election cycle stating that Baker, among others, "are unsuitable to them for the vice presidential nomination because of their pro-abortion stands." Furthermore, a *Newsweek* article states that Baker was the subject of a bitter

campaign waged by “conservative ideologues ... for his readiness to compromise” (Morgenthau et al. 1980).

Sadly, the empirical material is too thin to place Crane and Baker in any specific category, but Crane appears to have been somewhere between the “Wishy-Washy” and the “Pro-Life with exceptions” category, while Baker appears to have been “Pro-Choice.”

4.3.2 Mr. Independent: John Anderson on abortion

Congressman John Anderson’s “Pro-Choice” positioning on and framing of abortion was briefly mentioned in the Prelude. His “Pro-Choice” positioning was consistent throughout the primaries, and he based his position on a belief in the “freedom of choice” (Axelrod & Ciccone 1980). According to *The New York Times* (1980a), Anderson “argued for Federally funded abortions” during his 1978 Congressional reelection campaign. Although Anderson ran as a Republican, he bowed out of the primaries after dismal results on April 24, 1980, and ran as an Independent. After his decision to run as an Independent, The National Right to Life Committee attacked Anderson on the grounds that he had written “fund-raising letters for pro-abortion groups” (*The New York Times* 1980b), and Anderson criticized the Republican Party platform “for its support of a constitutional amendment banning abortion” (*The New York Times* 1980c). Furthermore, Anderson attacked the Republican platform by stating: “I can’t believe it is pro-family when the Government forces a 13-year-old to bear a child” (*The New York Times* 1980c).

In his presidential debate against Ronald Reagan on September 21, 1980, Anderson described his support of abortion rights by stating: “I believe in freedom of choice. I don’t believe in Constitutional Amendments that would interfere with that” (The American Presidency Project 1980). Anderson’s positioning on and framing of abortion was consistently “Pro-Choice” both as a Republican and as an Independent candidate, and he positioned himself by using the terms “freedom of choice” and “pro-choice.”

4.3.3 George Bush on abortion

Unfortunately, the news search did not return any direct quotes from Bush on abortion during the 1980 primaries. However, accounts from both the *Chicago Tribune* and *The New York Times* allude to his somewhat “Wishy-Washy” positioning on abortion. Margolis (1979) writes that “Bush opposes abortions but stops short of favoring a

constitutional amendment to ban them”, while *The New York Times* (1980b) writes that Bush’s candidacy was opposed by the National Right to Life Committee due to the fact that he was “against a constitutional amendment barring abortion.”

Although the news search did not reveal it, it is a well-known fact that Bush ran as a pro-choice Republican in the 1980 primaries, and that he famously shifted his position on abortion once he became Reagan’s vice-presidential nominee.³¹ While the news search did not pick up these events in the time period covering Bush’s 1980 bid for the presidency, his shift on abortion becomes apparent in section 4.4.4, when I deal with his second bid for the presidency.

4.3.4 Ronald Reagan on abortion Part II

Reagan’s position on abortion was identical to the one he voiced in 1976: He supported a Human Life Amendment to the U.S. Constitution – calling for a federal ban of abortion. Tellingly, the National Right to Life Committee endorsed Reagan for president, and the president of the organization stated: “Governor Reagan has taken the strongest pro-life stand of any of the candidates running for President” (*The New York Times* 1980b). In his debate against the then Independent John Anderson on September 21, 1980, Reagan declared he thought everyone “should have a respect for innocent life,” and that “an unborn child” is in fact “a human being” (The American Presidency Project 1980). Framing wise, Reagan used the terms “innocent life” and “unborn child.”

4.4 Reagan has left the building: The 1988 primaries

Reagan left the White House as an exceptionally popular figure within the Republican Party, and his successor had a tough act to follow (no pun intended). George Bush, Reagan’s vice-president and opponent in the 1980 primaries, was the Republican front-runner for the 1988 Republican nomination. The Minority Leader in the Senate, Bob Dole, televangelist and Christian Coalition-founder Pat Robertson, and Representative Jack Kemp of New York challenged Bush for the Republican nomination.

³¹ Based on the research strategy, the candidates are assessed according to the information retrieved from the news searches. However, in the case of Bush’s first run for the presidency, I have alluded to a well-known historical account. See Schaller (2007:61) and Hudson (2008:242-244) for more information on Bush’s shift on abortion.

4.4.1 The former quarterback: Jack Kemp on abortion

Known to the average American as a gifted football player in his youth, New York Congressman Jack Kemp ran as a pro-life Republican in the 1988 primaries, and described his own position by stating that he was “‘100 percent pro-life’ and that he would work to ‘protect the unborn’ by appointing judges ‘who uphold our Judeo-Christian values and continuing to seek constitutional protection for human life’” (Dowd 1987). Back in 1985, Representative Kemp and Senator Orrin Hatch of Utah offered identical amendments stating that no “federal funding could be used for abortion counseling or referrals” and that no federal money “could go to a group, clinic or hospital that performed abortions with its own funds” (Goodman 1985). In the same article, Goodman (1985) writes that this was “the first time that Kemp” took “such a lead role on a conservative ‘social issue’,” and that he appeared “to be priming his right wing for the flight of 1988.”

Kemp’s “Pro-Life” positioning on abortion was consistent both prior to and throughout the 1988 Republican primaries, and he spoke at the 1986 convention of the National Right to Life Committee together with Republican primary opponents Senator Bob Dole and Reverend Pat Robertson (Coates 1986). In his speech, Kemp appealed for “not just a change of law but a change of heart” on abortion, and was met with “ovations that surpassed the reception given Robertson” (*Time Magazine* 1986). In the end, Kemp nonetheless finished last in the primaries, behind Robertson, Dole and Bush.

4.4.2 The Televangelist: Pat Robertson on abortion

In 1988, Reverend Pat Robertson was one of the most popular television evangelists in the United States, and his route to the nomination hinged on receiving the support of a large share of his viewers. Similar to Kemp, part of Robertson’s appeal to the base of the Republican Party rested on his conservative stance on social issues such as abortion. However, Robertson’s approach to abortion was slightly more combative than that of Kemp, evidenced by the following quote: “Just as these people are saying we can never allow private choice to become the rationale for killing the elderly and the infirm, we can no longer permit pro-choice to be the rationale for the slaughter of 1 ½ million unborn babies every year” (Smith 1987). In a similar tone, Robertson stated to a group of supporters in February 1986 that the fact that the United States was “offering up 1 ½

million babies a year upon the altar of sensuality and selfishness” would have to stop (Ostling et al. 1986).

In the end, Robertson’s “Pro-Life” positioning on and framing of abortion was consistent both prior to and during the Republican primaries, and he finished ahead of Jack Kemp, but behind Bob Dole and George Bush, winning a total of only four states.

4.4.3 Senate Minority Leader Bob Dole on abortion

Senate Minority Leader Bob Dole, who was Gerald Ford’s vice-presidential running mate in 1976, approached the abortion issue much as Jack Kemp did: Never as a favorite issue, but always “Pro-Life.” Back in 1981, Dole received a nod of acknowledgement from the president of the National Right to Life Committee (Greenhouse 1981), and in 1986 he was asked the following question; “Why are you going out there to pander to the right-to-lifers?” Dole’s response: “It’s a little late for that. I’ve been voting with them for 13 years!” (Press et al. 1986).

Furthermore, Dole stated in December 1987 that he had “a very strong pro-life voting record” that had “been consistent,” and that he viewed it as “a fundamental issue, a basic issue. People feel strongly about it. So do I” (Weinraub 1987). In short, Dole’s positioning on abortion was consistently “Pro-Life” both prior to and during the 1988 Republican primaries. Framing wise, he used the terms “pro-life”, “right to life” and “unborn” when describing his own positioning on abortion.

4.4.4 Vice-president George Bush on abortion

As previously mentioned, George Bush repositioned himself on abortion following the 1980 Republican primaries, when he ran as Reagan’s vice-presidential nominee. As Reagan’s vice-president, Bush’s positioning was clearly opposed to abortion, but it was not as conservative as Reagan’s positioning. From the fall of 1980, Bush favored abortions in cases of rape, incest and to save the life of the mother. Reagan, however, only favored abortions in cases where women would die during childbirth (*The New York Times* 1984).

However, by the time of the 1988 Republican primaries, Bush had taken yet another step to the right on abortion, and after he secured the Republican presidential nomination, Bush ran on essentially the same abortion plank as Ronald Reagan had done

in 1984 (see Chapter 3). In his nomination speech at the Republican National Convention in New Orleans, Bush declared:

Is it right to believe in the sanctity of life and protect the lives of innocent children? My opponent says no - but I say yes. We must change from abortion - to adoption. I have an adopted granddaughter. The day of her christening we wept with joy. I thank God her parents chose life (The American Presidency Project 1988a).

In his debate against the Democratic nominee Michael Dukakis, Bush admitted to his changing view on abortion, stating: “Yes, my position has evolved. And it's continuing to evolve, and it's evolving in favor of life” (The American Presidency Project 1988b). As a 1980 presidential candidate, Bush was “Pro-Choice.” As a vice-presidential nominee and as vice-president Bush was “Pro-Life with exceptions”, and as a 1988 presidential candidate and nominee, Bush was “Pro-Life”, and in line with the Republican Party platform on abortion. Framing wise, Bush used the term “sanctity of life.”

4.5 The incumbent and the challenger from the right: The 1992 primaries

Pat Buchanan, President Reagan’s former communications director, challenged President George Bush from the right in the 1992 Republican primaries.

4.5.1 The challenger from the right: Pat Buchanan on abortion

Unlike Bush’s various positions on the abortion issue, Buchanan had no previous history of wavering on the issue, and he was consistently “Pro-Life” both prior to and during the 1992 primaries. Describing himself as an “anti-abortion candidate” (Madigan 1992), Buchanan insisted that the Republican Party “should be pro-life”, even if that would lose the party votes (Lacayo 1992). Buchanan wanted the pro-life movement to know that he put his anti-abortion principles over the prospects of electoral victory. That made him a favorable candidate among ardent abortion opponents, but cast doubts on his ability to topple Bush and a Democratic opponent outside the hardest segments of the Republican base. In the end, Bush won all 50 states, but Buchanan’s candidacy, including his

infamous speech at the 1992 Republican National Convention,³² made it harder for Bush to appeal to moderates in the general election. Framing wise, Buchanan used the term “pro-life.”

4.5.2 The incumbent: President George Bush on abortion

As previously mentioned, Bush moved further to the right on abortion prior to the 1988 Republican primaries. In 1992, Bush was getting close the end of his first term as president, and he had addressed the abortion issue several times as president. He was in line with the 1988 and the 1992 party platform while in office, and he referred to the abortion issue by using the terms “unborn children”, “abortion on demand”, “sanctity of human life”, “pro-life” and “right to life”, just to mention a few. I will deal with President Bush’s positioning on and framing of abortion more thoroughly in the next chapter. Suffice to say, Bush’s positioning on and framing of abortion was close to that of the abortion plank within the Republican Party platform.

4.6 An Open Field of Presidential Hopefuls: The 1996 primaries

For the first time since 1980, there was not a clear front-runner in the field of Republican presidential candidates in 1996. The former Minority and the present Majority Leader Bob Dole ran for the second time, and so did Pat Buchanan, and they ran against publisher Steve Forbes, the former Governor of Tennessee and Secretary of Education under President George Bush, Lamar Alexander, and radio talk show host Alan Keyes.

4.6.1 Firebrand: Alan Keyes on abortion

Keyes’ conservative stance on abortion was central to his bid for the 1996 Republican presidential nomination. During the early days of the primaries, Keyes talked about the pro-choice positioning on abortion in the following terms:

Their pro-choice position is based on the notion that a woman has a choice. If she wants the baby, then it’s human and she has to respect its life. And if she doesn’t want it, it’s not human and she doesn’t have to respect it. We are placing that human choice in the

³² During his speech at the 1992 Republican National Convention, Buchanan stated: “There is a religious war going on in our country for the soul of America. It is a cultural war, as critical to the kind of nation we will one day be as was the Cold War itself” (Buchanan 1992).

place of God's exercising authority in such a way as to cut the ground out from under our claim to be free (Kolbert 1995).

Unfortunately, the news searches did not retrieve any abortion frames used by Keyes, but all the news reports in the time leading up to and during the 1996 primaries describe his firm "Pro-Life" positioning on the issue. In the end, Keyes finished fifth in the primaries.

4.6.2 Mr. Plaid Shirt: Lamar Alexander on Abortion

The former Governor of Tennessee was known for the plaid shirts he frequently used. On abortion, Lamar Alexander frequently described his own position by the term "pro-life," although his actual positioning on the issue was sometimes "Pro-Choice", mostly "Wishy-Washy", and only occasionally "Pro-Life". News reports from 1994 and 1995 paint him as pro-choice, but he drifted rightwards sometime in 1995, evidenced by the endorsement he received from the Christian Coalition based on his comment that *Roe v. Wade* was "wrongly decided" (Goodgame & Baker 1995). At the same time, however, Alexander described his position on abortion with statements such as the following: "I would try to keep the Federal Government entirely out of abortion: no subsidy, no encouragement, no prohibition" (Carlson 1995).

The "no prohibition" comment puts him squarely in the "Pro-Choice" category, but Alexander skillfully sent out mixed messages by stating he wanted the decision left entirely to the states (Nagourney 1996), and that he would permit abortions in cases of rape (Seelye 1996). Wishy-washiness aside, Alexander stuck to framing his position on abortion with the term "pro-life", and ended on fourth place in the primaries.

4.6.3 The publisher: Steve Forbes on abortion

The multimillionaire publisher Steve Forbes ran as a Republican in the 1996 primaries. He focused most of his message and attention on what he called the "flat tax", but due to the dynamics of Republican presidential primaries, Forbes also had to elaborate his position on abortion.

Forbes' positioning on abortion in the 1996 primaries was as "Wishy-Washy" as that of Lamar Alexander. Describing his position in September 1995, Forbes would not reveal whether he was pro-choice or pro-life, but stated that he wanted "to create an environment where abortion" would "disappear" (McNulty & Orr 1995). Later in the

primaries, Forbes added that the country needed “a change of heart” (Kolbert 1996), and that a constitutional amendment banning abortion was unlikely because a change in the law would only occur following a change in the “culture, little by little. It takes persuading other people. There is no other way in a democracy” (Gibbs et al. 1996).

The news searches did not retrieve any abortion frames used by Forbes in the time leading up to or during the 1996 primaries. His positioning, however, was sometimes “Pro-Choice”, and mostly “Wishy-Washy” – unwilling to pin down his own position, focusing instead on the need to change the culture in order to change the law on the matter. Forbes won two states, and finished ahead of both Alexander and Keyes, and behind Buchanan and Dole.

4.6.4 Pat Buchanan on abortion Part II

Emboldened by his 1992 bid for the presidency, Pat Buchanan ran again in 1996. In 1993, Buchanan described his own positioning on abortion and stressed the importance of the Republican Party sticking to its pro-life message: “If a political party would turn its back on the 4,000 unborn children doomed to death every day in this country, then it is time to find a new party. We are a pro-life party, and we are going to keep our party pro-life” (*The New York Times* 1993). In 1995, Buchanan gave the following promise to the pro-life movement: “If I am elected to the Oval Office, I will be the most pro-life president in the history of the republic” (*Chicago Tribune* 1995).

Framing wise, Buchanan used the following terms to describe his positioning on abortion: “pro-life”, “unborn children”, “right to life”, “culture of death” and “the innocent unborn.” Among the 1996 contenders for the Republican nomination, Buchanan was the most outspoken abortion opponent. In the end, Buchanan won four states, and ended behind Dole in the race to the nomination.

4.6.5 Bob Dole on abortion Part II

Serving as the Senate Majority Leader and running for his second time, Bob Dole was considered as somewhat of a front-runner in 1996. His position on abortion was similar to the one he ran on in 1988, and in April 1995, Dole stated that his positioning had been “consistently pro-life” (Berke 1995). Furthermore, Dole had a “100 percent rating on his lifetime voting record from the National Right to Life Committee” (McNulty 1995).

However, several of Dole's statements on abortion during the 1996 primaries put him at odds with the Republican Party platform's position on abortion. On the issue of a constitutional ban on abortion, he stated that he would not support it again, and hinted that he might choose a pro-choice running mate (Seelye 1995). A few days after these statements, Dole backpedaled, and claimed that he meant to say that he would oppose a ban on abortion if it did not include exceptions for rape and incest (*The New York Times* 1995). The party platform did not include these exceptions, and later in the campaign, Dole also emphasized the need to include a "declaration of tolerance" in the party platform "welcoming those who favor abortion rights" (*Chicago Tribune* 1996). In the end, the 1996 Republican Party Platform on which Dole based his general election campaign did not include exceptions for rape and incest, or a 'declaration of tolerance'.

On the one hand, Dole's various statements did not push away pro-lifers – who still believed he was one of them – and on the other hand, they led pro-choicers to believe that he was not a conservative hardliner on the issue. Framing wise, Dole used the following terms when addressing the abortion issue: "pro-life", "parental notification", "sanctity of human life", "partial-birth abortion", "infanticide", and "abortion on demand." Dole ended up winning 44 states in the primaries, but suffered a bruising defeat against Bill Clinton in the general election.

4.7 An Open Field of Presidential Hopefuls Part II: The 2000 primaries

Similarly to 1980 and 1996, no presidents or vice-presidents ran for the 2000 Republican presidential nomination. Forbes and Keyes ran again, and they were challenged by Texas Governor George W. Bush and Arizona Senator John McCain.

4.7.1 Steve Forbes and Alan Keyes for the second time around

The 1996 version of Steve Forbes was "Wishy-Washy" on abortion. The second time around, however, Forbes campaigned on a different strategy, focusing more on his social conservatism than on his advocacy of a "flat tax". Already in September 1997, Forbes stated that "life begins at conception" in a speech to the Christian Coalition's 'Road to Victory' conference (*Chicago Tribune* 1997). However, Forbes was still unwilling to support or oppose a constitutional amendment on abortion, focusing instead on his opposition to partial-birth abortions (Berke 1997), and talking about every child's

“freedom to be born” (Berke 1999). While Forbes had been unwilling to describe himself as either pro-choice or pro-life in 1996, he frequently attacked George W. Bush for being a “pro-life pacifist” during the 2000 primaries. Furthermore, Forbes ran the following ad on television: “If someone kills a pet, it’s called a crime. If someone aborts a child, it’s called a choice” (Bruni & Wayne 2000). Framing wise, Forbes used the terms “partial-birth abortion” and “pro-life”, and cast himself as an ardent abortion opponent. However, due to his unwillingness to support a federal ban on abortion – even one including a range of exceptions – Forbes’ positioning was still “Wishy-Washy.”

Alan Keyes was the most outspoken abortion opponent among the Republican candidates in 2000. He shouted, “stop killing the babies” to a crowd in 1997 (*Chicago Tribune* 1997), and he lambasted his opponents for not being conservative enough on abortion during several primary debates (Anderson & Pearson 2000). Framing wise, Keyes used the terms “pro-life” and “pro-abortion.”

4.7.2 The “straight-talk express”: John McCain on abortion

The Vietnam War veteran John McCain ran on his “maverick” image in 2000 and became a favorite among reporters due to the unprecedented access they were granted on his “straight talk express”-campaign bus. On the campaign trail, the Arizona Senator’s “17-year pro-life voting record” was a favorite talking point (Marks 2000), and McCain stated during the primaries that he was “pro-life” and that he supported the party line on abortion based on “the belief that life begins at conception” (Clymer & Mitchell 2000).

However, the news search revealed several cracks in McCain’s “Pro-Life” positioning. First of all, he answered a hypothetical question about what he would say if his teenage daughter became pregnant by stating that she would have the “final decision,” backpedaling days later by stating that it would be a “family decision” (Mitchell 2000). Secondly, in August 1999, McCain stated the following:

I’d love to see a point where [Roe v. Wade] is irrelevant and could be repealed because abortion is no longer necessary. But certainly in the short term, or even the long term, I would not support a repeal of Roe v. Wade, which would then force x number of women in America to [undergo] illegal and dangerous operations (Pooley et al. 2000).

Then, in December 1999, McCain called the *Roe v. Wade* decision “overreaching” and “flawed,” and stated that exceptions for rape, incest and danger to the life of the mother should be included in the party’s abortion plank (Pooley et al. 2000). With this belief as a backdrop, McCain attacked George W. Bush during a primary debate – holding up a flyer distributed by the Bush campaign touting Bush’s support of the party line on abortion. McCain then asked Bush if he supported abortion in cases of rape, incest and to save the life of the mother, and Bush answered that he did. McCain then stated that Bush’s flyer was misleading since these exceptions were not included in the party platform. The heated exchange that followed boiled down to the following: McCain supported a revision of the party platform so that it would include exceptions for rape and incest, while Bush tried to have it both ways by stating that he agreed with McCain, while at the same time pledging to uphold the party platform (*The New York Times* 2000). Despite McCain’s sometimes “Wishy-Washy” statements on abortion, his framing was not, evidenced by his use of the terms “sanctity of human life”, “pro-life” and “unborn.” In the end, Bush beat McCain, who only won seven states in the Republican primaries.

4.7.3 In his father’s footsteps: George W. Bush on abortion

Texas Governor George W. Bush’s positioning on abortion during the 2000 primaries was somewhere between the “Pro-Life with exceptions” and the “Pro-Life” category. However, Bush’s previous history on abortion was somewhat “Wishy-Washy.” In 1998, Bush described himself as personally “pro-life”, but added that he considered a woman’s right to choose as settled law:

The United States Supreme Court has settled the abortion issue: there will be abortions in Texas and the rest of the United States. I believe the best public policy is to encourage fewer abortions through strong adoption laws and by sending a clear abstinence message to our children (Verhoek 1998).

The wishy-washiness endured after Bush unveiled his exploratory committee, being unwilling to answer questions about his stance on the Republican Party’s anti-abortion plank and on whether or not abortions should be legal in the first trimester (Tackett 1999). During the spring of 1999, Bush’s talking points on abortion was in line with the “Pro-Life with exceptions” category, and he was thus at odds with the party platforms’

abortion plank. Then, in January 2000, Bush stated the following: “I think that the Republican Party ought to keep its pro-life plank the way it’s written now” (Bruni 2000).³³ In his nomination speech at the Republican National Convention in Philadelphia, Bush declared: “I will lead our nation toward a culture that values life -- the life of the elderly and the sick, the life of the young, and the life of the unborn” (The American Presidency Project 2000).

In short, Bush went from stating that “the country is not ready for a constitutional amendment” in November 1999, to voicing his strong support for the party platform’s language on abortion in January 2000 (Pooley et. al 2000). Framing wise, Bush used the following terms: “pro-life”, “parental notification”, “parental consent”, “abstinence programs”, “partial-birth abortion”, “unborn” and “culture of life.” Bush won the Republican nomination, and went on to serve two terms as president, which I will deal with in detail in the next chapter.

4.8 An Open Field of Presidential Hopefuls Part III: The 2008 primaries

Since George W. Bush’s vice-president Dick Cheney decided not to run for the 2008 Republican nomination, the Republican Party lacked a clear front-runner. Arizona Senator John McCain ran for the second time, and he ran against former Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee, former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney, Representative Ron Paul of Texas, and the actor and former Tennessee Senator Fred Thompson.

4.8.1 The “Consistent Conservative”: Fred Thompson on abortion

Fred Thompson had the advantage of high name recognition due to his role in the popular television series *Law and Order*, but his campaign was dogged by the fact that he entered the primaries late, and by the low intensity of his lackluster campaign. Thompson described himself as a “consistent conservative” in television ads, and his “100 percent voting record on the pro-life issues” was a favorite talking point on the campaign trail (Hulse et al. 2007). A closer scrutiny of Thompson’s positioning on abortion reveals that he was “Pro-Choice” during his 1994 Senate run. In 1994, Thompson stated that he

³³ Intriguingly, Bush’s repositioning was voiced on the day of the 2000 March for Life – the nation’s biggest pro-life march since its introduction in January 1974, commemorating the anniversary of *Roe v. Wade* (1973). I have written shortly about my own experiences at the 2002 March for Life at the outset of this thesis.

opposed criminalizing abortion, and he checked “‘opposed’ to a proposed constitutional amendment protecting the sanctity of human life” in a 1996 Christian Coalition questionnaire (Bailey & Conant 2007). During his nine years in the Senate, however, Thompson was consistently “Pro-Life.” Framing wise, Thompson used the terms “pro-life” and “partial-birth abortion”, and bowed out of the primaries early following dismal results.

4.8.2 The Internet sensation: Ron Paul on abortion

Texas Congressman Ron Paul built his 2008 presidential bid on an impressive online fundraising effort, and the unconventional candidate surprised the political establishment with his long-lived campaign. Unfortunately, the news search did not retrieve any abortion frames used by Paul, but the retrieved articles allude to his positioning. In November 2007, Paul stated that “states, not the federal government, should deal with issues such as abortion” (Anderson 2007), and an article from January 2008 states that Paul sponsored a bill in the House of Representatives that would bar federal courts from interfering with state abortion laws (*Chicago Tribune* 2008).

Paul did not emphasize his position on abortion during the 2008 primaries, and his position was at odds with the Republican Party platform, which supports a (federal) constitutional amendment banning abortion. Sadly, the empirical material is too thin to place Paul in any specific category, but his position seems grounded in the importance of protecting states’ rights, and not in a fundamental opposition to abortion per se.

4.8.3 “Reagan did it too”: Mitt Romney on abortion

In his failed run for the Senate in 1994, Mitt Romney stated that abortions should be “safe and legal” (Belluck et al. 2005), and he defended his positioning with a personal story:

Many, many years ago, I had a dear, close family relative that was very close to me, that passed away from an illegal abortion. It is since that time my mother and my family have been committed to the belief that we can believe as we want, but we will not force our beliefs on others on that matter, and you will not see me wavering on that (Pearson 2007).

Romney’s position was the same during his successful campaign for Governor of Massachusetts in 2002, when he answered “yes” on a question on whether or not he

supported the essence of *Roe v. Wade* (Belluck et al. 2005). Up until 2005, Romney's position on abortion was "Pro-Choice", but he changed his position in 2005, when he came to the realization that *Roe v. Wade* had devalued respect for life (Chapman 2006). Still, Romney's position was not entirely in line with the Republican Party platform as he favored abortions in cases of rape and incest.

During the 2008 primaries, Romney's opponents painted him as a flip-flopper. Romney responded by admitting that he had previously worn a pro-choice cloak as a politician, but that he had always been pro-life personally. He defended bringing his pro-life views into the public domain by pointing to Ronald Reagan's evolving positioning on abortion: "On abortion I was not always a Ronald Reagan conservative. Neither was Ronald Reagan" (Healy 2007). Romney's positioning can be categorized as "Pro-Life with exceptions", and he used the term "pro-life" to describe his current position, and "pro-choice" to describe his previous position. In the end, Romney spent more money than any of the other candidates, and ended up winning eleven primaries – three more than Mike Huckabee – but he still ended on third place due to a lower delegate count than Huckabee.

4.8.4 The Pastor from Hope, Arkansas: Mike Huckabee on abortion

The former Governor of Arkansas was virtually unknown nationally when he announced his candidacy, but he changed that with the release of a campaign ad in which the actor Chuck Norris appeared. Huckabee's appeal to the voters rested on a strategy based on his social conservative credentials balanced with a large dose of humor and folksy charm. The voters of Iowa liked him, and Huckabee scored a surprising victory in the Iowa caucuses. Describing his positioning on abortion on the Sunday talk show *Meet the Press*, Huckabee stated that he would always "err on the side of life" and that life "begins at conception", but that it does not "end at birth" (Toner 2007). In a similar vein, Huckabee stated during the primaries that respect for life was the most important moral issue facing the country (Parsons & McCormick 2007), and attacked Romney's wavering on the issue by uttering his amazement "at the number of people who come to the conclusion to be pro-life when it comes time to run for president" (Nagourney et al. 2007).

Framing wise, Huckabee used the terms "pro-life" and "the sanctity of human life", and his positioning was consistently "Pro-Life" both prior to and during the 2008

primaries. Huckabee won eight states – with a higher delegate count than Romney – and was John McCain’s hardest competitor for the Republican nomination.

4.8.5 Shifting gears: John McCain on abortion Part II

McCain stated in 2007 that his position on right to life had been “consistent”, and that he had not changed his position “on even-numbered years or ... because of the different offices” that he might be running for (Nagourney & Santora 2007). As late as in May 2008, McCain reiterated his belief that abortions should be legal in cases of rape, incest and to save the life of the mother, and that he favored including these exceptions in the party platform. McCain had been outspoken on this matter in the 2000 primaries, more so than he was in 2008, and although he stated in May 2008 that he would work to include these exceptions in the party platform, “McCain in fact did little to push for the exceptions, and told *Glamour* on July 30 that he had ‘not gotten into the platform discussions’” (Seelye 2008).

In the last of the three presidential debates against his Democratic opponent Senator Barack Obama, McCain declared the following: “We have to change the culture of America. Those of us who are proudly pro-life understand that” (The American Presidency Project 2008). Although McCain campaigned on a positioning on abortion equal to that of the “Pro-Life with exceptions” category both in the 2000 and the 2008 primaries, he ended up running on an abortion plank without such exceptions in the general election. Framing wise, McCain used the terms “pro-life”, “partial-birth abortion”, “unborn”, and “right to life” to describe his own positioning on abortion.

4.9 A short summary of positioning and framing

In order to provide an overview of the candidates’ and nominees’ positioning on abortion in the period covered by the news searches,³⁴ I have summarized the essence of the chapter’s review in Table 4.1.

³⁴ The searches stretch back ten years from Election Day in the candidate’s first presidential election. When running for the second time, the searches cover the period between Election Day and back to the day following Election Day in the previous election cycle.

Table 4.1 Presidential candidates' and nominees' positioning on abortion

	Pro-Choice	Wishy-Washy	Pro-Life w/ exceptions	Pro-Life	Consistent positioning	Grew more conservative
Reagan				X	X	
Ford				X		X
Anderson	X				X	
Bush Sr.				X		X
Kemp				X	X	
Robertson				X	X	
Dole				X	X	
Buchanan				X	X	
Keyes				X	X	
Alexander		X				X
Forbes		X				X
McCain				X		X
Bush Jr.				X		X
Thompson				X		X
Romney			X			X
Huckabee				X	X	
Totals	1	2	1	12	8	8

Note: I have coded the candidates' positioning into the four-category schema based on the position they ran *on most recently*. Candidates who drifted in the direction of the "Pro-Life" category are labeled as "grew more conservative." Reagan drifted rightwards on abortion prior to the release of the 1976 Republican Party Platform, and is therefore labeled with a "consistent positioning." The retrieved material on Crane, Baker and Paul was not large enough to place them in any of the categories.

As Table 4.1 shows, the sixteen³⁵ Republican presidential candidates covered in this chapter can be split into two large groups: eight in the group of candidates who grew more conservative in their positioning on abortion, and eight in the group of candidates whose positioning on abortion was consistent in the period covered by the news searches. Furthermore, Table 4.1 shows that none of the candidates grew more liberal on abortion, and that a clear majority of them (12) were or ended up as "Pro-Life", and in support of the Republican Party's anti-abortion plank.

Framing wise, Table 4.2 compares the candidates' framing of abortion with the abortion frames used in the Republican Party platforms. The table demonstrates that the presidential candidates vary greatly in their framing of abortion, and that the most commonly used abortion frame is "pro-life", followed by "unborn" and "right to life." Furthermore, the numbers in the last column in Table 4.2 show the number of abortion frames used by the various candidates and nominees, and these numbers allude to

³⁵ The thesis covers nineteen candidates, but the news searches did not retrieve a sufficient amount of news articles on Crane, Baker and Paul.

Table 4.2 Presidential candidates' and nominees' framing of abortion

	Abortion on demand	Right to life	Unborn *	Alternatives to abortion	Sanctity of (innocent) human life	Abstinence education	Pro-Life **	Partial-birth abortion	4/5 infanticide ***	Parental notification	Culture of life	Totals
Reagan	X	X	X									3
Ford	X											1
Crane		X										1
Bush Sr.					X							1
Kemp			X			X						2
Robertson			X									1
Dole	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X		8
Buchanan		X	X				X					3
Keyes						X						1
Alexander						X						1
Forbes						X	X					2
McCain		X	X		X	X	X					5
Bush Jr.			X	X		X	X			X	X	7
Thompson						X	X					2
Romney						X						1
Huckabee					X	X						2
Totals	3	5	7	1	4	1	11	5	1	2	1	

Note: The table compares the framing of abortion used in the party platforms with that of the candidates. *Source:* The American Presidency Project (2009a).

* The party platform talks about “unborn children”, but most candidates left out the word “children”

** The party platform talks about a “pro-life agenda”, but the candidates left out the word “agenda”

*** Used to described the practice of “partial-birth abortion”

The news searches did not pick up any abortion frames used by Baker, Anderson or Paul.

The following abortion frames were not used by any of the candidates: “Traditional family values”, “problem pregnancies”, (partial-birth abortion =) “brutal and violent” and “inhumane” and “barbaric”, “crisis pregnancy”, “born alive infants”, “inherent dignity and worth of all people”, “defense of life”, “children before birth”, “unplanned pregnancy”, “choose life.”

the varying degree to which the candidates emphasized the abortion issue. According to this logic, the abortion issue was more important to Bob Dole and George W. Bush than it was to Mitt Romney and Lamar Alexander. Table 4.2 also alludes to the recurring theme of increased emphasis on abortion over time: Whereas the nominees of the 1970s, 80s and early 90s used an average of 1.7 abortion frames, Dole, Bush Jr., and McCain used an average of 6.7 abortion frames. Similarly, Ford, Reagan and Bush Sr. uttered the word “abortion” a total of 11 times during their general election debate appearances, whereas Bush Jr. and McCain uttered the word 26 times (The American Presidency Project 2009c).

As portrayed by the research strategy in Chapter 2, the candidates’ and nominees’ abortion related statements have been compared to the “newest” version of the party platform in order to try to track changes in their positioning on and framing of abortion following the release of new party platforms. My scrutiny of the empirical material has not revealed any such clear changes, with one small exception, and this did not come as a surprise, since the changes in the party platforms have been detailed and incremental, and as the party platforms have been “Pro-Life” all along. However, opposition to partial-birth abortion was first included in the 1996 party platform, which was released after Steve Forbes bowed out of the primaries. He had evaded the abortion issue during the 1996 primaries, but when he ran again in 2000, he made opposition to partial-birth abortion a central issue in his campaign.

4.9 Pro-Life or Not? That seems to be The Question

Apparent from this chapter’s review of Republican presidential candidates’ positioning on and framing of abortion, “Pro-Choice” or “Wishy-Washy” are not suitable positions for Republicans with presidential ambitions. Quoting the famous phrase from Shakespeare’s Hamlet: Republican presidential candidates’ “to be or not be”-moment rests on their adherence to a “Pro-Life” positioning on and framing of abortion. More specifically, this can be viewed as one of the proverbial boxes that must be checked in order for the candidate to be able to succeed in the primaries. To be clear, a “Pro-Life” positioning on abortion is thus an important aspect of a Republican presidential

nominee's profile, but it is not a guarantee for success, as there are other proverbial boxes that need to be checked as well.

Obviously, it is impossible to unravel the thoughts and convictions of the candidates covered in this chapter. Some of them may have seen the light, while others may have understood the folly of their former position. Nonetheless, based on the empirical material presented in this chapter, such changes of heart have occurred in a politically convenient time frame. If nothing else, changing positions were announced at strategically favorable moments when viewed against the political calendar.

Having mapped Republican presidential candidates' and nominees' positioning on and framing of abortion, the next chapter shifts its focus to Republican presidents – namely Gerald Ford, Ronald Reagan, George Bush and George W. Bush.

Chapter 5

Republican presidents on Abortion, 1976-2008

5.1 Introduction

As Chapter 4 demonstrated, those who won the Republican presidential nomination were opposed to abortion and in line with the Republican Party platform during their general election campaigns. Thus, the premise underlying this chapter is that the nominees who entered the White House did so with a commitment to oppose abortion. The question, however, is the degree to which they voiced their opposition.

Following the structure of the previous chapter, this chapter focuses exclusively on Republican presidents' positioning on and framing of abortion. I start by focusing on President Gerald Ford before I turn to President Ronald Reagan, President George Bush and President George W. Bush. The chapter ends with a short summary of the presidents' positioning on and framing of abortion. Additional analysis and a discussion of the long-term trends are dealt with in Chapter 6.

5.1 President Gerald Ford on abortion

As I touched upon in the previous chapter, the striking thing about President Gerald Ford's positioning on abortion in 1976 was the fact that he rephrased his position following the release of the 1976 party platform. Prior to its release, the Republican Party did not have an official position on the issue, and so the dynamic of staying in line with the party's abortion plank was not yet in play. Before the Republican Party announced its official stance on abortion, Ford's position was that *Roe v. Wade* went too far, but that the proposed constitutional amendments to ban abortion were too restrictive:

I think the United States Supreme Court decision went too far. I think in effect it went further than it had to. On the other hand, I do not agree with those who would seek to amend the Federal Constitution to have an inflexible approach to abortion, either (The American Presidency Project 1976c).

Following the release of the party platform, Ford stated that he subscribed to the Republican Party platform's position on abortion, but added that he supported an amendment that would "turn over to the States the individual right of the voters in those States the chance to make a decision by public referendum" (The American Presidency Project 1976d) – a position that was at odds with the party platform.

President Ford did not address the abortion issue prior to February 1976, and he campaigned on a "Wishy-Washy" position in his primary fight against Reagan. His position drifted rightwards following the release of the 1976 party platform, but he still tried to have it both ways by supporting the party platform's amendment to ban abortion while at the same time supporting individual state action on the issue rather than an effort to reach a federal ban against abortion.

5.2 President Ronald Reagan on abortion

Ronald Reagan's opposition to abortion as a presidential candidate was always more conservative and outspoken than Gerald Ford's, and the same can be said about his positioning as president. However, Reagan's rhetoric on the issue was more accommodating prior to the 1984 presidential campaign than it was during and following his bid for reelection. In 1981, Reagan stated that if it "is once determined" that abortion is the taking of a human life "then there isn't really any need for an amendment" banning abortion (The American Presidency Project 1981). In a similar vein, Reagan stated the following in 1983: "The Constitution protects life, liberty and so forth. And what all we need to do, I think, is demand that someone either prove to us that the unborn is not a living being, or then recognize that it is already entitled to constitutional protection" (The American Presidency Project 1983).

Reagan geared up for his reelection campaign by cutting off foreign aid to clinics worldwide who performed, advocated or informed about abortions, and during the election, Reagan stated:

I am against abortion because it is the taking of an innocent life. While some argue that we cannot pinpoint at which moment life actually begins, I am firmly convinced that we must give the unborn child the benefit of the doubt. In my view, the unborn child has a right to life, and it is our moral obligation to protect and defend that right (The American Presidency Project 1984b).

After winning reelection against Walter Mondale, Reagan took a more active role in the courting of the pro-life movement. Beginning in 1985, he proclaimed the Sunday prior to the anniversary of the U. S. Supreme Court's passage of *Roe v. Wade* "National Sanctity of Human Life Day", and he spoke to the participants of the annual March for Life. Reagan did this to the end of his presidency, and the precedent was upheld by both of the Bushes.

When it comes to Reagan's framing of abortion, he used terms such as "right to life", "unborn child", and "the dignity of every human being and the sanctity of each human life."

5.3 President George Bush on abortion

The pro-life community was always skeptical about George Bush's pro-life credentials, and Bush could not afford to lose the support of this group in the 1988 election. As was mentioned in the previous chapter, Bush flipped from pro-choice to pro-life when he became Reagan's vice-presidential nominee in 1980, and he drifted further to the right during his time as vice-president and in the time leading up to the 1988 Republican primaries. As president, Bush's positioning on and framing of abortion was in line with the Republican Party platform.

In 1989, Bush stated that he was firmly in support of an overturn of *Roe v. Wade*, and that he was not "going to change that position" (The American Presidency Project 1989). In the summer of 1992, gearing up for the general election campaign against Bill Clinton, Bush stated that he hoped "the platform committee, in their wisdom, adopts the same language as we had before" (The American Presidency Project 1992). On the stump, Bush stated that he opposed abortion and that he favored life, and after he lost the presidential election, one of his last acts as president was signing the "National Sanctity of Human Life Day" proclamation in January 1993 (The American Presidency Project 1993).

Throughout his presidency, Bush released all the abortion related statements and proclamations that Reagan released during his presidency, and Bush's framing was almost a mirror image of Reagan's framing. For example, Bush used the following abortion frames: "unborn children", "right to life" and "sanctity of human life." In the

end, although Bush’s positioning was steadily evolving prior to his days in the White House, his positioning on and framing of abortion was steadily “Pro-Life” as president.

5.4 President George W. Bush on abortion

In the 2000 primaries, George W. Bush pledged his support of the Republican Party platform’s anti-abortion plank, although several of his statements during the campaign placed him in the “Pro-Life with exceptions” category. As president, however, George W. Bush – like his father and President Reagan had been before him – was strictly in line with the party platform’s positioning on and framing of abortion.

Throughout his presidency, George W. Bush upheld the tradition started by Reagan and followed by his father, and proclaimed the Sunday prior to the anniversary of the passage of *Roe v. Wade* as “National Sanctity of Human Life Day”, and addressed the participants of the March for Life. Likewise, George W. Bush also reinstated the Mexico City Policy introduced by Reagan in 1984, which had been rescinded by Bill Clinton in 1993. In 2002, Bush laid out his opposition to abortion in his speech to the participants of the March for Life:

We believe the promises of the Declaration of Independence are the common code of American life. They should apply to everyone, not just the healthy or the strong or the powerful. A generous society values all human life. A merciful society seeks to expand legal protection to every life, including early life, and a compassionate society will defend a simple, moral proposition: Life should never be used as a tool or a means to an end. These are bedrock principles, and that is why my administration opposes partial-birth abortion and public funding for abortion, why we support teen abstinence and crisis pregnancy programs, adoption and parental notification laws (The American Presidency Project 2002).

Framing wise, Bush’s 2002 speech to the participants of the March for Life reads like a rundown of the party platform’s language on abortion. Furthermore, throughout his two terms, Bush described himself as “pro-life” and talked about “unborn children”, “right to life”, “abstinence education”, “parental notification laws”, “partial-birth abortion” and “the sanctity of human life.” In short, Bush was consistently “Pro-Life” and he used more abortion frames than any of his Republican predecessors.

5.5 The Pro-Life Republican Presidency

As this short review indicates, Republican presidents act and talk “Pro-Life.” However, as a few searches within The American Presidency Project’s archives of official presidential documents reveal, the degree in which they emphasize the issue differs: President Gerald Ford’s archive includes 13 documents including the word abortion, President Ronald Reagan’s includes 77, President George Bush’s 85, while President George W. Bush’s archive includes 122 documents. According to this measure, and the *measurements of saliency* presented in Chapter 3, the abortion issue has grown in importance between 1976 and 2008. In the end, a quick comparison between President Gerald Ford and President George W. Bush’s abortion related public statements demonstrates the enormous difference in emphasis given to the abortion issue in the middle of the 1970s versus the first decade of the 21st century.

While the presidents’ emphasis on abortion differs, Table 5.1 shows that they have consistently been in the “Pro-Life” category in their positioning on abortion:

Table 5.1 Republican presidents’ positioning on abortion

	Pro-Choice	Wishy-Washy	Pro-Life w/ exceptions	Pro-Life	Consistent positioning
President Gerald Ford				X	X
President Ronald Reagan				X	X
President George H. W. Bush				X	X
President George W. Bush				X	X

While Reagan and the two Bushes were clearly and consistently in the “Pro-Life” category, the same is not entirely the case for Ford. Ford’s positioning on abortion could perhaps be placed in the “Wishy-Washy” category, but I have nonetheless categorized him as “Pro-Life” because of the statement in which he tied himself to the party platform’s anti-abortion plank.

Although the four presidents were consistently “Pro-Life”, their framing of abortion differed greatly, and Table 5.2 compares the presidents’ framing with the abortion frames used in the Republican Party platforms.

Table 5.2 Republican presidents' framing of abortion

	President Gerald Ford	President Ronald Reagan	President George Bush	President George W. Bush	Totals
Abortion on demand	X ¹²	X ¹²	X ¹²³	X ²	4
Right to life		X ¹²³	X ¹	X ¹²	3
Unborn (children)		X ¹²³	X ¹²³	X ¹²	3
Alternatives to abortion		X ²³		X ¹²³	2
Sanctity of (innocent) human life		X ^{1*2}	X ¹²³	X ¹²³	3
Abstinence education				X ¹²³	1
Problem pregnancies		X ²			1
Pro-life (agenda)		X ²³	X ¹	X ¹²	3
Partial-birth abortion				X ¹²³	1
= Brutal and violent				X ¹²	1
= Barbaric				X ²	1
= 4/5 infanticide		X ^{1**}			1
Crisis pregnancy		X ²	X ¹²³	X ¹²³	3
Parental notification				X ¹²³	1
Born alive infants				X ¹³	1
Defense of life				X ²	1
Culture of life				X ¹²³	1
Unplanned pregnancy				X ²	1
Choose life		X ²³	X ¹		2
Totals	1	10	7	16	
Change		+9	-3	+9	
			(+6)	(+15)	

Note: 1 = voiced “during” the “1st” party platform period, 2 = “2nd” period, 3 = “3rd” period.” For example, Reagan’s “1st” period was from his first day in office until the release of the 1984 party platform (August 20, 1984).

* Sacredness of life.

** Reagan’s reference to infanticide was about abortion in general.

The X’s in gray signal the fact that these frames were not in the platform when uttered by the president. The following abortion frames were not used by any of the presidents: “Traditional family values”, (partial-birth abortion equals) “inhuman” and “4/5 infanticide”, “inherent dignity and worth of all people”, and “children before birth.”

Intriguingly, Table 5.2 shows a pattern similar to the one found in Tables 3.9 and 3.10 in Chapter 3: Abortion is emphasized more and more over time. While Table 3.9 showed an increasing number of abortion related policy positions, Table 3.10 showed an increasing number of abortion frames included in the party platforms over time. Similarly, Table 5.2 shows that Republican presidents are using more and more abortion frames over time. The trend is started by Ronald Reagan, closely followed by George Bush, and brought to another level by George W. Bush. The increased number of abortion frames used by the

presidents is thus closely linked with the increased emphasis on abortion found in the party platforms. As the party platforms focus more and more on abortion, new terms are added to describe the party's positioning, and it should not come as a surprise that presidents' emphasis on the issue evolve in line with the party platforms' increased emphasis on abortion over time. According to this argument, then, the party platform's abortion related language works as a catalyst on the presidents' framing of abortion. In other words, had the 1988 Republican Party Platform been phrased differently, President George Bush's framing of abortion would have been different. Does this mean that Republican presidents simply restate whatever the party platforms state on abortion?

After a close look on Table 5.2, the answer is "no." As the X's marked in gray show, several of the abortion frames that eventually made it into the party platform were used before they were included in the party platform. Ronald Reagan used five and George Bush used three abortion frames before they were included in the party platform, and Reagan and the two Bushes all used the abortion frame "abortion on demand" after it was dropped from the party platform. This observation points in the direction that the relationship between party platforms and presidents can go both ways.

While Chapter 4 demonstrated that Steve Forbes changed his positioning on and framing of abortion following the introduction of the partial-birth abortion issue in the 1996 party platform, a close scrutiny of the presidents' empirical material revealed that no such clear changes occurred among the presidents after the release of a new party platform. There is one large exception, however, as Gerald Ford went from opposing a federal ban on abortion to supporting one following the release of the 1976 Republican Party Platform.

Chapter 6

Discussion

6.1 Introduction

With the previous chapters as a backdrop, I will now discuss and put the thesis' major findings into context. The approach is descriptive when I deal with the thesis' findings, and explorative and argumentative when I discuss potential explanations of these findings. While the perspective of voters' attitudes and voting patterns has been kept out of the analysis so far, I have included voters in the discussion below. It is thus important to stress the fact that the thesis' findings only point to Republican Party platforms', Republican presidential candidates', nominees' and presidents' emphasis and positioning on, and framing of abortion – and the relationship between the platform documents and the presidential hopefuls and presidents. During the discussion below, however, I discuss these findings in a broader perspective, arguing for and against various explanations of my findings, and some of these arguments include voters. These arguments are included to shed light on the topics covered throughout the thesis, but they serve more as thought experiments and ideas for future research rather than arguments serving to “defend” my findings. My findings stand their own ground, and this discussion can be viewed as a sketch of the surrounding landscape.

6.2 The increased saliency of abortion within Republican Party platforms

As Domke and Coe (2008:114) see it, “the Republican strategy since 1980” has been “a portrait of consistency and simplicity: the more emphasis on abortion, the better.” As I demonstrated in Chapter 3, four different *measurements of saliency* showed that Republican Party platforms' emphasis on abortion increased significantly between 1976 and 2008. Over time, Republican Party platforms have included more and more abortion related words, policy positions, and abortion frames.

Since party platforms are not read by the average voter, they are in fact “opportunities to narrowcast messages to targeted segments of the electorate,” and such messages “are the ultimate signaling mechanism for policy goals” (Domke & Coe

2008:103). According to such a perspective, the Republican Party platforms' increased focus on abortion rests on an increased willingness to court "engaged groups" looking "for distinct 'planks' ... that discuss their pet concerns" (Domke & Coe 2008:103). Narrowcasting can be described as the signal from a dog-whistle, and following this analogy, it is important not to blow the whistle too hard – since the dogs might get out of hand. In short, you have to court abortion opponents without alienating a troubling amount of voters. If one views the abortion related content of Republican Party platforms as narrowcasting, then there is no downside to strengthening and elaborating on the message, since it is primarily going to be received by "engaged groups" open for such messages.

Similarly, a plausible explanation of the increased emphasis on abortion is that there is no downside in adding emphasis to something that seems to please the section of the electorate who is paying attention. Put differently, there is no sense in changing a winning formula. The conventional wisdom born with Reagan's presidency was that the Republican Party gained power due in part to Reagan's success in courting born-again evangelicals and the Christian right (Byrnes 1993:506; Carty 2004:164; Domke & Coe 2008:18; Hudson 2008:25). The anti-abortion plank introduced with Reagan as the nominee in 1980 was strengthened in 1984, and it functioned as a key ingredient in the Republican Party's courting of social conservative voters. Tellingly, the abortion plank introduced under Reagan has remained intact up until 2008, and it looms like a protected set of "abortion commandments" within the party platform. The unwillingness to change any of it might be connected with the fact that Republicans view Reagan as the greatest president of all time by large margins (Gallup 2009).

A similar view of the Republican Party's embrace of the pro-life movement is that it is partly based on the belief that the gains connected with increased emphasis on abortion are larger than the gains connected with decreased emphasis on abortion. In other words, the party platform's anti-abortion plank is crucial to keep the support of the pro-life movement, and the increased emphasis on abortion stems from the wish to please abortion opponents. Such a "status-quo plus"-strategy might be defined as playing it safe, since it consists of doing more of the same.

Now, since Republican Party platforms are more conservative on abortion than a majority of the public (General Social Survey 2008), it would seem as if the GOP's strategy on abortion is aimed at courting a specific segment of the electorate. Alternative I in Figure 6.1 illustrates a hypothetical distribution of the American electorate in their positioning on abortion. According to this distribution, the Democratic and the Republican Party would gain from positioning themselves close to the center. However, the Republican Party platforms' anti-abortion plank might be part of a strategy primarily aimed at rallying the Republican base – meaning voters who, hypothetically, are positioned around position B.

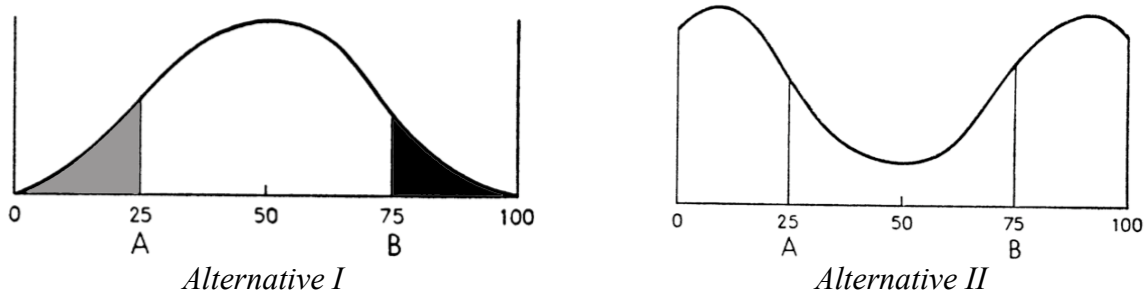


Figure 6.1 Theoretical distributions of voters in a two-party system

Source: Downs (1957:143). The labels are different in the original, and I have added the shading in Alt. 1.

With this in mind, Alternative I can be viewed as a distribution of the general electorate, whereas Alternative II illustrates the partisan divide between Democratic and Republican party loyalists. By viewing the space to the right of position B in Alternative I and II as the positioning of the Republican primary electorate, then the Republican Party platforms' anti-abortion stance looks like a reasonable positioning from a strategic vantage point. Another aspect of this strategic vantage point is alluded to in Alternative I, in which the extremes on the continuum are shaded in two different colors. In this context, the white area between the shaded areas represents voters who are not paying attention to the abortion debate, and the abortion planks of the party platforms can thus be viewed as courting one's own shaded area. Abortion proponents occupy the gray area, whereas abortion opponents occupy the black area. The different colors represent the tendency of passionate abortion opponents to be more politically active than passionate abortion proponents (Strickler & Danigelis 2002:200). In short, this argument portrays

the Republican Party platforms' increased emphasis on abortion as a strategy of courting the segments of the electorate who are tuned in and opposed to abortion, and that such a strategy can work despite the fact that a majority of the electorate favors abortion rights.

Viewing the party platform as a tool to achieve such an outcome, it is important to dwell on the fact that the platform documents are written and agreed upon by a set of committees meeting in the months prior to the Republican National Convention. Pro-life groups were lobbying for the inclusion of language opposing abortion already in 1976, and they are still active. The pro-life movement is thus continuously lobbying for more restrictions on abortion, and is strongly opposed to any loosening of the party platform's anti-abortion stance. Since past lobbying efforts resulted in the inclusion of new language in the party platform – such as in 1976, 1980, 1984, 1988, 1996 and 2004 – lobby groups are encouraged and emboldened to keep pushing for new and strengthened abortion provisions.

Based on such lobbying efforts, the following description is a plausible explanation of the relationship between the Republican Party and the pro-life movement: As the Republican Party embraced the pro-life movement and increased the emphasis on abortion in the party platform, pro-life groups wanted the Republican Party to embrace more of their ideas, and made sure the party did not depart from its pro-life position on abortion. This dynamic is thus a self-enforcing mechanism, since the GOP's embrace of the pro-life movement is met with open arms, and both sides hold on believing they need the other – the GOP because of the pro-life movements' electoral support, and the pro-life movement because the GOP is their best hope to reverse *Roe v. Wade*.

The Republican Party's fundamental stance against abortion has been the same all along, but as the abortion debate evolved, new issues emerged, and new abortion related policies made it into the party platform. Instead of viewing the increased emphasis on abortion as a political ploy to please the pro-life movement, the increased emphasis can be a natural effect of the contemporary abortion debate. Since the Republican Party opposes abortion, it is bound to restate that position according to the issue of the day. According to this argument, a new abortion controversy results in new language, new policy positions, and probably also the introduction of new abortion frames. In this perspective, the Republican Party's increased emphasis on abortion over time is a result

of the party's "Pro-Life" position, and the need to restate this position according to the contemporary political debate.

6.3 Drifting rightwards on abortion

A "big tent" analogy – referring to the tendency of big national parties to embrace a wide range of interests in order to attract as many voters as possible – is not suitable to describe the Republican Party's positioning on abortion. In fact, John Anderson – the only openly "Pro-Choice" presidential candidate covered by the empirical material – decided to run as an Independent after dismal results in the Republican primaries. By applying the "big tent" analogy, it seems as if "card carrying" abortion opponents are allowed access to the tent much easier than abortion proponents. In order to ease one's access to the Republican tent, conforming one's position to that of the party line on abortion seems to be password.

The long-term trend of eight presidential candidates growing more opposed to abortion, and the prevalence of the consistency-strategy during the primary and the general election campaign (see Table 6.2, page 78), both allude to a dynamic based on the premise that it is best to drift rightwards on abortion *before* the presidential campaign begins. A rightward drift *during* an election would receive much more attention from the media, and the candidate hopes to avoid close scrutiny by completing one's move to the right on abortion prior to the launch of the campaign. In short, the best time to move rightwards on abortion is when you are out of the limelight. However, Chapter 4 demonstrated that even if candidates drifted rightwards prior to the campaign, this shift was nonetheless highlighted by the media and brought into the campaign. It is thus naïve to believe that it is possible to shift one's position on abortion without having to defend this shift later on. Nonetheless, it seems better to drift rightwards on abortion prior to, rather than in the middle of a campaign.

As eight³⁶ of the sixteen presidential candidates³⁷ covered in this thesis drifted towards a position more in line with the party platform's staunch opposition to abortion

³⁶ Reagan drifted rightwards on abortion prior to 1976, and could not have been influenced by the party platform's stance on abortion, since it was first introduced in the Fall of 1976.

³⁷ The thesis originally covers nineteen presidential candidates, but the news searches did not retrieve enough material on three of the candidates.

during the time periods covered by the news searches, it is safe to say that the phenomenon is not one of coincidence. When this rightward tilt is viewed together with the steadily increasing emphasis on abortion in Republican Party platforms since 1976, the following argument emerges: *As an issue becomes more important for a political party, the incentives for party members to conform their view to the party line grow.* As the GOP's opposition to abortion grew in prominence compared to other issues, Republicans seeking the highest office of the land had to accept and campaign on the platform's abortion plank. While some candidates sought to include language in the party platform accepting the views of abortion proponents, others wanted the platform to support abortion in cases of rape and incest. Tellingly, however, none of these efforts resulted in any changes, and the same nominees who advocated change, ran on party platforms without such changes.

However, this last fact might actually allude to the *unimportance* of the platform document. In this perspective, the nominee did not bother putting his own position into the platform because he knew it would not matter in the end. On the other hand, it might point in the direction that candidates' and nominees' talk of such changes were nothing more than lip service – and that they never seriously planned to incorporate such changes in the party platform. After all, if Dole and McCain – presidential nominees in 1996 and 2008 respectively – *really* wanted to include exceptions for rape and incest in the abortion plank, they could have done more to obtain such an outcome.

While this argument perceives that candidates and nominees can actively mould the abortion plank to their liking, a different view is that candidates tune their positioning on and framing of abortion based on the perceived or expected content of future party platforms. This argument, hinting at “anticipatory effects”, casts the party platforms more as “off limits”, and projects that since they have been consistently “Pro-Life” since 1976, they will probably continue to be so in the future, and candidates would thus gain from a “Pro-Life” positioning on abortion. Similarly, candidates who do not conform their views on the issue prior to a presidential bid might do so the second time around based on the perception of how their abortion stance played out for them the first time. According to these arguments, Republican presidential candidates' positioning on abortion is heavily influenced by the abortion related content of the Republican Party platform.

It is impossible to accurately decipher why eight of the Republican presidential candidates covered in this thesis drifted rightwards on abortion. I am not a psychic, but it *is* possible to draw upon the candidate-narratives presented in Chapter 4 and the empirical material on which they are constructed. First of all, words matter, and as a result of the textual data retrieved from the extensive news searches, it is possible to compare the candidates' statements with the political calendar. What did the candidate say when he was not running for president, what did he say just prior to announcing his candidacy, and what did he say during the Iowa caucuses? In addition to an observation of, say – “candidate X started to drift rightwards on abortion one year before he announced his candidacy, and campaigned on an anti-abortion message during the primaries” – one can look at the words used by the candidate to defend his shift. However, if the candidate does not describe *why* he changed his position, this is also a clue of the forces at play. One would think that a candidate who suddenly shifts his position without informing the electorate is not particularly interested in revealing the fact that he previously supported a different position.

What we are left with, then, is the fact that eight Republican presidential candidates grew more opposed to abortion in a *politically convenient time frame*. Although I have put the candidate-narratives into context by discussing a range of possible explanations for the candidates' rightward drift on abortion, such an analysis cannot produce a definite conclusion on why candidate X acts the way he does. Similar to Domke and Coe (2008:19), I am “agnostic about the authenticity of politicians' religious beliefs” since “it is impossible to know whether a politician truly shares or cares about the religious sentiments of the citizenry.” Furthermore, my approach throughout the thesis can be summarized by the following quote: “Are these religious signals authentic? Perhaps. Are they strategic? Absolutely” (Domke & Coe 2008:19). Thus, even if it is impossible to unravel candidates' inner thoughts and ideas on abortion, the words they use and the strategies they choose matter.

6.3.1 Framing abortion

Table 3.10 in Chapter 3 listed the abortion frames used in the various versions of the party platforms and demonstrated that more and more of them were added over time. Based on this information, Table 4.2 in Chapter 4 and Table 5.2 in Chapter 5 compared

the presidential candidates' and the presidents' framing of abortion to the party platforms' framing of abortion. While Table 4.2 showed the varying degree to which candidates applied the platforms' abortion language, Table 5.2 showed that the presidents' framing of abortion have evolved according to the number of abortion frames found within the party platforms. I will deal with the presidential candidates first.

According to the information in Table 4.2, it is clear that the candidates emphasize the issue differently, and that the most commonly used abortion frames are the ones who perhaps best describe the Republican Party's position on abortion: "pro-life" – tying the party to the term abortion opponents prefer to describe themselves with, and "right to life" and "unborn" – focusing on the unjust practice of abortion and framing the fetus as a human being yet to be born, thus framing abortion as the taking of a human life.

Among the abortion frames, the term "pro-life" is the one most frequently used by both the presidential candidates and the media. Furthermore, the term "pro-life" is understood by the average American to mean "abortion opponent". Based on this dynamic, then, it is possible for candidates, regardless of their previous positioning, to describe themselves as simply "pro-life", and thus send the message that they are in line with the Republican Party platform on abortion – which is commonly just referred to as "pro-life on abortion." Thus, in addition to presenting one's position in the most favorable light, the power of framing is to send signals about one's position to people who are not necessarily aware of previous statements on the issue. In the words of Domke and Coe (2008:6), one of the most important lessons "in contemporary American politics" is that "to compete successfully, politicians need not always walk the religious walk, but they ... better be able to talk the religious talk."

According to this argument, framing can be applied as "lip service" – by telling a group what they *want* to hear. If that means opposing abortion – so be it. On the one hand, the belief in such tactics reek of cynicism and contempt for politicians, but on the other hand, if a candidate is on record saying one thing, and then suddenly frames his position with a term that completely contradicts his previously stated position, is not that evidence of lip service? In similar terms, such an act is pandering at best, and downright lying at worst. If lying is defined as stating something that is not factually true, then lip service, in this context, can be defined as describing one's position through a set of

abortion frames which convey an image of one's position that is not factually accurate. In this light, framing can be used to conceal one's position by putting makeup on it. However, contrary to the famous saying – “you can put lipstick on a pig, but it is still a pig” – a successful framing strategy omits the second part, and the lipstick completely conceals, or muddles, one's actual position.³⁸

A different version of this argument is that Republican presidential candidates' and nominees' use of abortion frames is a way of telling the voters what they are *used* to hear. Viewed together with the party platforms' anti-abortion plank and its pro-life-movement-approved-vernacular, candidates' anti-abortion positioning and framing can be viewed as a straitjacket of sorts. The candidate is allowed a limited amount of wiggle room in his treatment of the abortion issue, but he cannot go rogue without facing the consequences. According to this perspective, the party platforms' anti-abortion plank is a powerful primer of candidates' and nominees' treatment of the issue.

When it comes to the presidents' framing of abortion, Table 5.2 demonstrated that the presidents' use of abortion frames increased in a similar fashion to the number of abortion frames found within the party platforms over time. Now, as I mentioned towards the end of Chapter 5, it can be argued that the party platforms' abortion related language works as a catalyst on the presidents' framing of abortion. This argument thus closely resembles the wiggle-room-available-inside-the-straitjacket-argument, and suggests that presidents' framing of abortion is tightly connected with that of the party platform. However, since the president campaigns on the basis of this platform – contrary to Ware's (2006:272) generalization of party platforms – it should not come as a surprise that the president utters its abortion related language during the campaign, and during his time in office.

According to this argument, one could infer that Republican presidents simply restate whatever the party platforms state on abortion. This is not entirely the case, however, since the overview of the presidents' framing of abortion in Table 5.2 shows that certain abortion frames are left out of the presidents' abortion related language. With

³⁸ The saying sparked a “controversy” in the 2008 presidential campaign, and I am aware of the fact that those events might color the perception of the analogy. However, it is an old saying, and it functions as a nice analogy of the dynamic I am describing.

this as a backdrop, a slightly different version of this argument is that the presidents' framing of abortion takes place within the bounds of the party platforms' abortion plank, but that it is up to the president himself to choose which abortion frames to use.

Comparing the abortion frames used by the presidential candidates and the presidents, it is safe to say that the presidents' framing bear closer resemblance to the party platform's framing of abortion. Since Table 4.2 in Chapter 4 shows that Ford, Reagan and George Bush used few abortion frames as presidential candidates, their framing of abortion as presidents is not caused by their past framing of abortion. Something else is at play here, and the party platforms loom large.

However, the shaded areas of Table 5.2 in Chapter 5 showed that six of the ten abortion frames used by President Ronald Reagan, and four of the seven abortion frames used by President George Bush were not included in the party platform when the president uttered them. These abortion frames were included in the party platform by the time George W. Bush became president, which would point in the direction that words and phrases used by presidents can be included in the party platform over time. While the presence of this pattern demonstrates that the president can frame abortion by words and phrases that are not included in the party platform, and that this framing can make it into the platform over time, it should be stressed that George W. Bush stuck to the platforms' abortion frames.

While the examples mentioned above deal with abortion frames uttered before they were included in the party platform, the "abortion on demand" frame was only included in the 1976 party platform, but has been used by all of the presidents. Considering the precedents set by Reagan's proclamations and statements, this could mean that the presidents' framing of abortion is not only based on the content of the party platform, but also on the content of past presidents' statements on the issue.

6.3.2 The strategy of framing

The essentials of the Republican Party platforms' framing of abortion can be described by three main points. First of all, the framing is based on the basic premise that the fetus is a human being yet to be born. By using phrases such as "unborn children" and "children before birth", the Republican position on abortion is in "defense of life," and aimed at convincing people to "choose life." Secondly, life is sacred. By framing life as sacred by

a term such as “the sanctity of human life”, and linking the support of life to “traditional family values,” the platform’s language draws on morality and religious sentiments, and casts the support of abortion as something unsacred and immoral. Building on the first and second point, the last piece in the framing puzzle holds that abortion equals the killing of a human being.

In the end, the framing found within the Republican Party platforms are aimed at casting abortion procedures and abortion proponents in the worst possible light. Obviously, abortion proponents are guilty of the same in their framing of abortion opponents. Based on this reality, political framing is a continuous battle over the voters’ vocabulary. Thus, political framing precludes what the Nineteenth Century Norwegian author Aasmund Olavsson Vinje called “tvisyn”. Although there does not exist a suitable English equivalent to this term, “tvisyn” is based on the notion that it is possible to see both the negative and the positive sides of an issue at the same time. By framing one’s position on abortion as “pro-life,” however, the focus is exclusively on the evil of terminating a pregnancy, and not on the mother’s well being. Furthermore, it casts those in favor of abortion as anti-life, and ignores perspectives of women’s health all together – both physically and psychologically. Thus, political framing casts the opposition in a negative light, and one’s own positions in a positive light, and as a consequence, political framing precludes “tvisyn” – since it ignores negative aspects or consequences of one’s own position.

By using the Republican Party platforms’ abortion related language, candidates, nominees and presidents willfully simplify the issue by framing it to further their own cause. Of course, language is never neutral, but it is still possible to describe one’s position without ignoring the negative consequences of this position, although this might not always be the best strategy in politics. While people who cannot see the whole picture fail to “see the forest for the trees,” a pro-life framing of abortion describes a forest while ignoring the trees. In this analogy, the forest represents the immorality of abortion, and the trees symbolize the women who would be affected if *Roe v. Wade* were overturned.³⁹

³⁹ This analogy can also describe a pro-choice framing of abortion, in which the forest represents women’s right to choose, and the trees symbolize the fate of the fetuses/the “unborn.” Either way, political framing ignores that which is of less concern to one’s position, and focuses on the “greater good”, so to speak.

In this way, the framing is truly abstract since it focuses on “family values” and “the sanctity of life” instead of the personal stories of individual women.

According to such a view, one might think it is easy for middle-aged men to rally against the evils of abortion since the reality of the procedure – including the circumstances surrounding the decision, and the consequences of the outcome – is abstract. Building on this perspective, politicians can easily oppose abortion because of the abstract nature of the issue. One would thus think that candidates would not be so clear-cut in their answers if the issue were not so abstract – having to deal, for example, with abortion related questions regarding one’s own wife or daughter. As I mentioned in Chapter 4, McCain initially gave a “Pro-Choice” answer when he was asked about the prospects of his daughter having an abortion, before he backpedaled. It might be easy to oppose abortion when tough decisions are kept at a safe distance, but much harder to do when one’s family is brought into the picture.

In the grand scheme of things, political framing is a tool to win a fight, and on a contentious and emotional issue such as abortion, people with strong convictions seek to have one’s own definition of reality dominating “discourse and decision-making” (Ball-Rokeach et al. 1990:254). According to Woliver (1996:6-7), “abortion politics” is “so evocative of emotions and symbols” that “the language used to frame the debate has heavy implications for policymaking,” and that the applied definition “shapes the rest of the policy debate, and very likely the outcome as well.” In the end, framing matters, and abortion opponents and proponents will never find any common ground, unless they change the tone of their language.

6.4 The strategy of one’s positioning on abortion

As the presentation of the nineteen Republican presidential candidates’ positioning on abortion in Chapter 4 demonstrated, some candidates were consistent in their positioning on abortion, whereas others drifted rightwards or wobbled between various positions. Based on this observation, I have created a four-category classification schema of Republican presidential candidates’ and nominees’ strategy on abortion.

Table 6.1 Republican presidential candidates' and nominees' strategy on abortion: A four-category classification schema.

Strategy	Description
CONSISTENCY	A consistent message (though not necessarily “Pro-Life”).
DRIFTING	Conform your views, step by step, towards the Republican Party Platform’s abortion plank (based on the current version and/or the expected content of the forthcoming platform).
WOBBLING	Wobble left and right by deliberately sending mixed messages so that abortion proponents think you are not really part of the pro-life movement, while abortion opponents still believe you are really on their side of the fence.
EVADING	Downplay or ignore the abortion issue, and avoid stating one’s position in clear-cut terms.

Out of the four strategies, the consistency-strategy is the most common one *during* the primaries, whereas the drifting-strategy is more common in the period *prior* to and in the period *between* primaries. The wobbling-strategy can be applied both prior to and during the primaries, whereas the evading-strategy is less usual, and unsuitable in the long haul, since the abortion issue is “a difficult issue for candidates to fudge,” and an issue “on which the major political parties take distinct and clearly defined positions” (Koch 2001:5).

The consistency-strategy rests on the basic premise that a candidate is best served by repeating his position over and over again without any sort of drifting, wobbling or evading. In short, repeat your message endlessly, and hope the voters get the message. This strategy is particularly evident in the candidates’ stump speeches on the campaign trail, and it is traceable by looking at the issues raised and the framing used to describe one’s positioning.

The drifting-strategy is not as easy to dissect as the consistency-strategy. Candidates can drift rightwards openly, by admitting they have changed their view on abortion, or they can drift rightwards covertly, by trying to slip unnoticed into the “pro-life tent”, so to speak. Furthermore, some candidates might have experienced a personal change of heart, whereas others are acting on political calculations. Thus, candidates can have different motives behind their drift in the direction of the party platform’s abortion plank, but such motives are beyond our grasp. In short, then, the drifting-strategy consists

of aligning oneself closer with the party platform's anti-abortion plank. The motives behind moving rightwards on abortion are beside the point – it is the rightward drift that matters.

According to the wobbling-strategy, it is favorably politically to be “off message” – contradicting the contemporary campaign logic of staying “on message” (Norris et al. 1999). More precisely, the wobbling-strategy consists of being on message to various groups, which gives bystanders catching both messages the perception that they are off message. Thus, the purpose of the wobbling-strategy is to have one's pie and eat it too, and the goal is to attract proponents of abortion, without pushing away abortion opponents. This act of political theater is based on the premise that although you might court pro-choicers one day and pro-lifers the next day, both sides believe you are really on their side. Furthermore, with a smart media strategy, the candidate can court pro-choice voters on a well-publicized television show, and backpedal and excuse oneself to the pro-life community through campaign officials and less publicized statements. You court both sides, but through different channels. The wobbling-strategy thus resembles what Domke and Coe (2008:130) describe as “The God Strategy,” requiring politicians to walk “a fine line” by sending signals “to devout religious believers that they share and appreciate” their faith, “without pushing away religious moderates or secular-minded voters.” According to Domke and Coe (2008:130), this strategy builds on “the golden rule of today's U.S. politics: exhibit faith, but don't be too strident or nakedly partisan in doing so.”

The evading-strategy consists of ducking questions about abortion and attempting to keep abortion out of one's campaign. Arguably, this can be done in a consistent manner, which would include it as a part of the consistency-strategy, but the two strategies differ on the grounds that whereas the evading-strategy seeks to avoid talking about abortion, the consistency-strategy seeks to drive home a specific abortion related message. Although several different motives might favor the use of the evading-strategy, the key ingredient is the absence of an abortion message, and if pressed, an unwillingness to lean to either side of the issue.

Below, I have categorized the presidential candidates and nominees based on the strategy they applied in the various primaries and general elections.

Table 6.2 Republican presidential candidates’ and nominees’ strategy on abortion

Strategy	Election-cycle
CONSISTENCY	Reagan 76/80/84, Anderson 80*, Bush 88/92, Dole 88, Kemp 88, Robertson 88, Buchanan 92/96, Keyes 96/00, McCain 00, Forbes 00, Bush 04, Huckabee 08, Romney 08, Thompson 08
DRIFTING	Ford 76, Bush 80
WOBBLING	Dole 96, Alexander 96, Bush 00, McCain 08
EVADING	Forbes 96

Note: *Anderson ran as a Republican until he launched his bid as an Independent on April 24, 1980. Crane, Baker and Paul are not included in the table due to the limited amount of news articles retrieved from the news searches. The various candidates and nominees are grouped into the four categories based on the narratives presented in Chapters 4 and 5.

Whereas Table 4.1 in Chapter 4 grouped the candidates based on whether or not their positioning was consistent when considering the entire time period covered by the news searches, Table 6.2 groups the candidates and nominees according to the strategy they used in the various presidential elections they participated in. Thus, there is no contradiction in the fact that a candidate categorized as “grew more conservative” in Table 4.1, can be categorized as adhering to the consistency-strategy in Table 6.2. For example, Ronald Reagan drifted rightwards on abortion between 1966 and 1976, but his strategy was consistently anti-abortion in 1976, 1980, and 1984. Similarly, Steve Forbes is categorized as “grew more conservative” in Table 4.1, but he applied the evading-strategy in 1996 and the consistency-strategy in 2000. Consequently, whereas Chapter 4 showed that eight out of sixteen candidates grew more conservative on abortion between 1976 and 2008 – pointing in the direction of the drifting-strategy’s importance – only two candidates actually drifted rightwards during a presidential campaign. As Table 6.2 shows, the consistency-strategy is by far the most usual one *during* presidential campaigns, followed by the wobbling-strategy, the drifting-strategy, and the evading-strategy.

A close look at Table 6.2 reveals the fact that, with the exception of Gerald Ford, Republican presidential nominees have applied two main abortion strategies. Whereas Ronald Reagan and George Bush applied the consistency-strategy in their first (and second) campaign as the nominee, the three last presidential nominees have all utilized

the wobbling-strategy in their first campaigns as the nominee: Bob Dole in 1996, George W. Bush in 2000, and John McCain in 2008. In other words, the consistency-strategy can be viewed as the “old” way to the Republican nomination and the White House, whereas the “new” way seems to depend on the wobbling-strategy. However, George W. Bush’s first presidential campaign was the only instance in which a candidate applying the wobbling-strategy actually won the general election, which points in the direction that the consistency-strategy is actually the most effective strategy when it comes to winning the general election.

6.5 What does it all mean?

Since 1976, Republican Party platforms have focused more and more on abortion. Furthermore, in the same time period, half of the presidential candidates covered in this thesis drifted rightwards on abortion.⁴⁰ While the saliency of the abortion issue within Republican Party platforms increased, the incentives to conform to the party line on abortion grew. Apparently, then, pro-choice Republicans with presidential ambitions need to drift rightwards on abortion and come up with a convincing narrative of why they have changed their positioning. If they decide to hold on to their pro-choice views, they need to apply the evading-strategy for all that it is worth. Steve Forbes did this in 1996, but as I showed in Chapter 4, he drifted rightwards between 1996 and 2000, and applied the consistency-strategy in 2000 – touting his opposition to abortion by labeling George W. Bush a “pro-life pacifist.”

As already mentioned, the precedents set by the party platforms of the 1980s were increasingly viewed as important cornerstones of the Republican Party platform – and Domke and Coe (2008:114) have described this development as a strategy resting on the following premise: “the more emphasis on abortion, the better.” As a result, the possibility of changing or including more accommodating language in the abortion plank dissipated. Consequently, such changes will only be included in the party platform if the Republican coalition drifts considerably to the left, or if the abortion issue’s political

⁴⁰ Reagan drifted rightwards prior to 1976, and the news searches did not retrieve a sufficient amount of news articles dealing with Baker, Crane and Paul.

importance decreases significantly. Based on the data covered by this thesis, such a development seems highly unlikely, to say the least.

However, a close look at the abortion related content of the 2008 Republican Party Platform might allude to a new trend in the platforms' treatment of abortion. While the *abortion words* percentages (Tables 3.1 and 3.2) clearly show that the 2008 platform's emphasis on abortion is higher than in any of the other party platforms, the number of abortion related policy positions and abortion frames is lower than within the 2004 party platform. In fact, the 2008 party platform represents the first instance in which policy positions were dropped without the introduction of new ones. In addition to leaving out two policy positions, the 2008 platform left out seven abortion frames that had been included in the 2004 platform.⁴¹ It remains to be seen whether or not the 2008 party platform represents a new development, and the abortion related content of the 2012 party platform will provide a good indication of whether or not this is the case.

Considering the large size of the country, the diversity of views and beliefs among voters, and the heavily contested primaries – a presidential candidate has to jump through a lot of hoops to even be a serious contender for the presidency. Furthermore, candidates and nominees in either party have to earn the support of different business sectors, industries, unions and so forth, and in order to do so, candidates have to cast a wide net. However, some voting blocs are more crucial than others – such as abortion opponents to the GOP – and so while candidates might have different goals and intentions, the strategies they choose follow predictable paths in some areas. In short, a presidential candidate has to check a large number of proverbial boxes, do a lot of campaigning, and please a lot of people to become president. Cillizza has stated that “everything that happens in politics has to do with campaigns,” and especially so in “even-numbered” years “freighted with politics” (CNN 2010). In this perspective, presidential candidates have to do a lot of things they might not otherwise have done, just to get to the position to actually govern. Campaigning can thus be seen as something that has to be done to

⁴¹ Policy 14 and 17 were dropped (see Table 3.9). The following abortion frames were left out: “problem pregnancies”, “pro-life agenda”, (partial-birth abortion is) “brutal and violent” and “inhumane”, “crisis pregnancy”, “defense of life”, and “culture of life” (See Table 3.10).

achieve what you actually want. Cynically, such an argument almost takes it for granted that candidates and nominees pander during the campaign.

However, it is important to stress the fact that what looks like pandering might not be pandering at all, and it is hard to know for sure. Still, by focusing on the realities of a campaign and the road to victory, and keeping in mind the carefully crafted image of the candidates that reach the average voter, it might be useful to ponder what it is that voters expect of politicians. What is the ideal? And what is acceptable? Is the ideal to speak one's mind and stick to his or her principles? And is it acceptable to leave such ideals behind just as long as you say the right thing, even if you do not actually mean it?

The candidates' and nominees' apparent "conforming" to the party platforms' positioning on and framing of abortion allude to the importance of the party platforms. If party platforms do not mean anything, then it would not matter what they say about abortion. However, the difference in how one perceives the importance of party platforms might rest on the group one considers, since the party platform means different things to different people. While it might be true that party platforms are not important to the electorate at large, they are important for abortion opponents, Republican presidential hopefuls, and presidents. Republican Party platforms are thus the complete opposite of "worthless pieces of paper." Whether or not presidential candidates abide by the abortion plank of the Republican Party platform is in fact a litmus test of immense importance, and is thus a bellwether⁴² of one's chances in the Republican primaries. *Crucially, the content of Republican Party platforms are important to those who matter.*

Presidential candidates – the very definition of political animals – reflect the nature of politics, and in order to bring change, they have to be a part of the system, or align themselves with people who are. It might not be politically expedient to "speak one's mind" when dealing with a contentious issue such as abortion while balancing a partisan divide in the midst of a presidential campaign. At least if your position differs from the one laid out in the platform document belonging to the party you are trying to represent in the White House. Suffice to say, party platforms *matter*, and Republican presidential candidates, nominees, and presidents know this – and act accordingly.

⁴² A bellwether is the leading sheep of a flock, and it bears a bell hung round its neck. In political terms, the word "bellwether" is used to symbolize an early indicator of future trends and developments.

Chapter 7

Summary and Conclusion

This thesis has dealt with the abortion related content of Republican Party platforms, and the relationship between the platforms' abortion plank and Republican presidential candidates', nominees' and presidents' positioning on and framing of abortion. Based on four different *measurements of saliency* – abortion words percentages, the number of times the word “abortion” was mentioned, the number of abortion related policy positions, and the number of abortion frames – the analysis demonstrated that the emphasis on abortion has increased significantly within Republican Party platforms in the period between 1976 and 2008. In line with the narrative of an increased emphasis on abortion, the number of abortion frames used by the presidents and the number of separate occasions in which the presidents addressed the abortion issue both increased over time. The increasing saliency of the abortion issue within Republican Party platforms can thus be described as a piling-on tendency driven by the following premise: “the more emphasis on abortion, the better” (Domke & Coe 2008:114).

Furthermore, the analysis of the retrieved news articles demonstrated that eight of the sixteen presidential candidates on which the news searches retrieved a sufficient amount of data, grew more conservative on abortion upon running for the Republican presidential nomination. The analysis also revealed that eight candidates upheld a consistent positioning on abortion, and that no one grew more supportive of abortion rights. While the analysis of the party platforms demonstrated the increased emphasis on abortion, the candidate-narratives revealed that opposition to abortion remains the prevalent position among Republican presidential candidates and nominees.

The three first words of the title of this thesis is “litmus test conformity.” This term refers to the fact that only candidates who opposed abortion obtained the Republican presidential nomination, and that the four Republican presidents all adhered to the party platform's anti-abortion plank. Furthermore, the fact that eight presidential candidates drifted in the direction of the party platforms' stance on abortion upon running for the presidency alludes to the power of conformity. Aware of the party line on abortion, and

the nominee's responsibility to abide by the party line, Republicans with presidential ambitions know that they have to be closely aligned with the party platforms' anti-abortion plank if they are serious about obtaining the nomination. Litmus test conformity is thus self-enforced, as events of the past lead potential Republican presidential candidates onto the "Pro-Life" path – knowing that every Republican presidential nominee and president has treaded it since 1976. Quoting the famous phrase from Shakespeare's Hamlet: Republican presidential candidates' "to be or not to be"-moment rests on their adherence to a "Pro-Life" positioning on and framing of abortion. Pro-Life or not? That seems to be the question, since those who are *not* face a much tougher path to the nomination – a path that has not been treaded before.

In short, the thesis has demonstrated the increased emphasis on the abortion issue within Republican Party platforms, and the (increased) importance of presidential candidates' and nominees' adherence to the party platform's anti-abortion plank. Thus, a relationship clearly exists between the abortion related content of Republican Party platforms and Republican presidential candidates', nominees', and presidents' positioning on and framing of abortion. Against this backdrop, the party platform is an important guide for Republican presidential candidates, nominees, and presidents when it comes to their positioning on and framing of abortion. *The party platform matters to Republicans with presidential ambitions.*

Future research could extend the project at hand to focus on the Democratic side of the aisle. Furthermore, the thesis' research strategy could be replicated to focus on the relationship between party platforms and presidential candidates in future presidential campaigns. In addition, the information on the Republican Party platform's abortion plank can be applied to assess the prospects of Republican presidential hopefuls, and such an analysis could also apply the four-category classification schema in the analysis of their positioning on abortion. The tools applied in the analysis of the past can thus be applied in the analysis of events still to come.

While this thesis has focused on abortion, the research strategy can just as easily be applied to any issue within any party platform, in any country. The research strategy is suitable to comparisons of party platforms over time, and in comparisons between the content of party platforms and the public statements of politicians. Furthermore, it can

reveal the emphasis on a specific issue over time, and compare different parties' emphasis on various issues to one another.

Postlude

Having initially stated his intention to keep religion out of his presidential campaign, *The West Wing*'s Republican presidential nominee Arnold Vinick eventually drifted onto a more common path trodden by Republican presidential candidates and nominees, and courted the social conservative base of his party.

The first step taken in this direction was when Vinick promised a pro-life activist in a closed meeting that he would nominate pro-life judges. Later that same day, however, Vinick appeared on television pledging he would do no such thing. The pro-life activist then leaked the story about Vinick's promise, and Vinick's pro-life vice-presidential nominee had to deal with the issue. In Vinick's own words: "I was just trying to get through the meeting. He had me cornered. So I figured, what the hell – tell him what he wants to hear, and then ignore him when I'm in the White House" (NBC 2005b).⁴³ Later in the campaign, a pro-life group launched a TV-ad against Vinick's Democratic opponent:

This November, America faces a vote of conscience. Matt Santos on Human life: "Do I wanna limit access to abortion? No." No on telling you when your daughter wants an abortion. No on banning partial-birth abortions. Is that a vote you want on your conscience? Paid for by the Committee for the Integrity of Human Life.

Vinick's response: "Who the hell is the Committee for the Integrity of Human Life? And who told them to drag abortion into my campaign?" (NBC 2005c).⁴⁴

Even though Vinick had so eloquently stated that religion should be kept out of politics at the outset of the general election, the forces at play was out of his hands, and the abortion issue was central to his campaign even without his consent. Pro-choice groups eventually picked up on Vinick's unwillingness to side with the pro-life movement, and approached his campaign about the prospects of an endorsement. However, Vinick did not want their support – fearing the political fallout among

⁴³ Season 7, Episode 3. Timestamp: [32:30-32:38].

⁴⁴ Season 7, Episode 6. Timestamp: [04:34-05:03].

Republican voters – and instead told his campaign strategist that he needed “speech language on partial-birth abortion” that would “mollify the right” (NBC 2005c).⁴⁵

The Vinick analogy is a fictional tale of the forces at play in the politics of abortion during presidential elections. It does not, however, provide any new answers on what drives Republicans with presidential ambitions in the direction of a “Pro-Life” positioning on abortion. Even if the next presidential election does not provide any new clues on the matter, it will nonetheless demonstrate, once more, that Jefferson’s ideal of a “wall of separation” between church and state is in fact a notion far away from the intertwined nature of politics and religion in contemporary American politics. So much so, in fact, that Jefferson’s ideal of a “wall of separation” looks more like “a bridge of integration” (Domke & Coe 2008:139).

⁴⁵ Season 7, Episode 6. Timestamp: [26:50-28:13].

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Appendix

I conducted the news searches within LexisNexis, which is a subscription based electronic search engine. Since the University of Oslo did not subscribe to LexisNexis, I applied for a one-month free trial period through LexisNexis Netherlands. Once I gained access and ran the news searches, it became apparent that I would have to go elsewhere to gather news articles for the time periods that were not covered by LexisNexis. Google News' Advanced News Archive Search⁴⁶ became the solution, and I used the same search criteria and purchased article packs individually from *The New York Times* and *Chicago Tribune* (the retrieved articles from *Time Magazine* and *Newsweek* were free). In addition to the search criteria mentioned in Chapter 2, I excluded articles categorized as “op-eds” or “commentary”, since such articles might have been written with a certain bias.

Example of one the articles retrieved from LexisNexis:

7 of 35 DOCUMENTS

Chicago Tribune

January 26, 1992, Sunday, FINAL EDITION

Abortion: Lots of noise, but marginal issue

BYLINE: By Charles M. Madigan, a Tribune senior writer

SECTION: PERSPECTIVE; Pg. 1; ZONE: C

LENGTH: 1278 words

Listening to the debate, the politics of **abortion** sounds on both sides like a gathering of angry hornets, intense, threatening and potentially dangerous for anyone who moves too close to the nest.

This issue is revived at least once a year, when supporters and opponents of **abortion** gather in big cities across the nation to plead their cases and stage demonstrations on the anniversary of the Supreme Court ruling in 1973 that cleared the way for nationwide legal **abortion**.

The latest set of protests coincided last week with the Supreme Court's announcement that it would accept for argument and decision a case constructed around Pennsylvania's new and somewhat restrictive **abortion** law.

Opponents as well as those who support continued access to **abortion** say this is the case that the court, more conservative now than in 1973, will use to redefine and restrict access to **abortion**.

Whether that is accurate is open to debate.

What is certain is that the court's timing will push the issue directly into the path of the presidential campaign, particularly if the court rules, as expected, in midsummer.

⁴⁶ You can find the search engine here: http://news.google.com/archivesearch/advanced_search

Example of one of the articles purchased from the *Chicago Tribune*:

From tent to tube

Religion takes its message through channels

By Timothy McNulty

VIRGINIA BEACH, Va.—In the upper reaches of the television channels, where the screen goes scratchy with "Sgt. Bilko" and "I Love Lucy" reruns, there is a growing presence in living color and pinstriped plety.

The ratings have not yet alarmed the networks, but viewers of this Bible band of TV signals are intensely loyal, generous with their contributions, and homogeneously "born-again" in their beliefs.

"You will prosper if you call on God," says religious broadcasting superstar Rev. M.G. "Pat" Robertson, in his color studio here. And his words are videotaped, beamed across town to two 10-meter satellite dishes, and directed heavenward and down again to some 200 local stations and 900 more cable TV systems.

ALTHOUGH THE Christian Broadcasting Network's 24-hour satellite transmission is the most sophisticated, the message is the same as promoted by scores of other preachers who, as Oral Roberts once said, have gone "from tent to tube."

By one estimate, religious broadcasters in both radio and television spent

include production costs and salaries for thousands of workers.

The last three years have escorted Americans into the age of "The Electric Church," says Ben Armstrong, author of a new book by that name. "Religion has finally joined the free enterprise system, which is American," he says.

There are 26 "Christian-owned-and-operated" television stations nationwide. Applications for some 20 more are pending before the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). Religious radio stations now number 1,200 in the United States.

BUT IT IS the growth rate that is staggering, says Armstrong, who is executive director of the 850-member National Religious Broadcasters trade association. License applications for TV stations come in at one a month and for radio at one a week.

Along with cheaply acquired rerun rights to old network sitcoms, the stations open the airways to hopeless amateurs, professional evangelical hucksters, and such slick and upbeat shows such as Robertson's "700 Club" and the "PTL Club."

The majority of the programs—perhaps 75 or 80 per cent—that still cluster in the Sunday morning ghetto, are presented by Christian fundamentalists. Their preach-

line" churches such as Lutheran and Methodist congregations and a smattering of Catholic masses, the programs are nondenominational, appealing to a broad range of Christian believers.

Many of the most successful are also considered "charismatic" in the sense that healing, in body and mind, is a major part of their ministry and appeal.

In auditorium, stadium, or church revivals, preachers, such as Rex Humbard, whose Cathedral of Tomorrow transmits from Akron, find thousands who have seen them on television and are willing to embrace their vision of Jesus.

THE MOST RENOWNED have kept up with the cool demands and pacing of television.

Oral Roberts used to tell his radio listeners in the 1950s to place their hands atop their radios to establish greater contact in the healing process, which did and still does range from warts to incurable cancer.

Now Roberts and others prefer three-piece suits and celebrity guests to the sweating rolled-up-shirt-sleeved Elmer Gantry approach. The major producers from the Trinity Broadcast Network to Jerry Falwell's "Old Time Gospel Hour" have come a long way.

The CD accompanying this thesis includes a more extensive appendix.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ It is also available upon request from the author: are_flaten@hotmail.com