

AN EXCERPT FROM:

THE

**ALTERNATIVE**

TO

**ABORTION**

WHY WE MUST BE  
PRO **ABUNDANT** LIFE

**FRAMEWORK ONE**

ABORTION:  
WHY POLITICS WON'T SAVE US

**ROLAND C. WARREN**

# FRAMEWORK ONE

## ABORTION: Why Politics Won't Save Us

People always say, “Never discuss politics in polite company,” and considering today’s volatile political climate, you can’t blame them. We’re not at dinner or on a date, though, so I think we’re safe to do it here. Let’s talk politics.

If you ask some Christians if they’re pro-life, many will say yes and tell you who they voted for. Don’t get me wrong, this issue does have a political component. But as Christians, abortion cannot be primarily a political issue. From a pro abundant life perspective, it’s primarily about living out the Great Commandment to fulfill the Great Commission.

For decades the political goal of the pro-life movement was straightforward: overturn *Roe v. Wade*. Every January, a faithful flock of devoted pro-lifers gathered in Washington, DC, to participate in a march that ended at the US Supreme Court building. Victory for those who viewed abortion primarily as a political issue would be won when the right ratio of pro-life justices was seated on the bench. Then they would rule in favor of life.

Then, in June 2022, it happened. The Supreme Court overruled both *Roe* and *Casey* (the 1992 case *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* that further broadened abortion freedoms). In *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization*, the Supreme Court ruled the “substantive right” to abortion was not “deeply rooted in this Nation’s history or tradition.”<sup>1</sup> The court ruled the right to abortion could not have been considered a right when the due process clause was ratified in 1868 because this was unknown in US law until *Roe*.

After more than four decades of fighting abortion in the courts, it

seemed pro-life supporters had won. Our celebrations were great. Sweet victory. *Victory at last.*

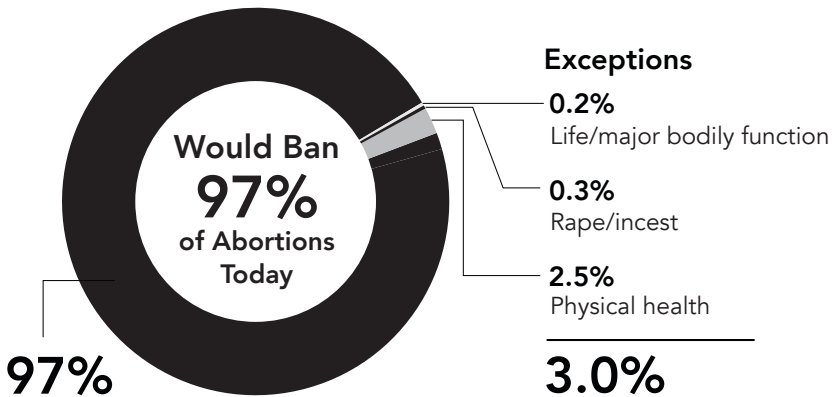
But did we really win? Or did we declare victory too soon?

Since the *Dobbs* decision, events have transpired that should cause us to reflect, reenergize, and act beyond the realm of politics.

## The Role of Politics in Stopping Abortion

The Democratic national policy position regarding abortion has remained largely unchanged since I became the president and CEO of Care Net in 2012: abortion on demand at any time during pregnancy, for any reason, no exceptions. In fact, supporting abortion is now a litmus test for the Democratic Party. However, the Republican national policy position has changed dramatically, and the implications should transform the national dialogue around the issue of abortion.

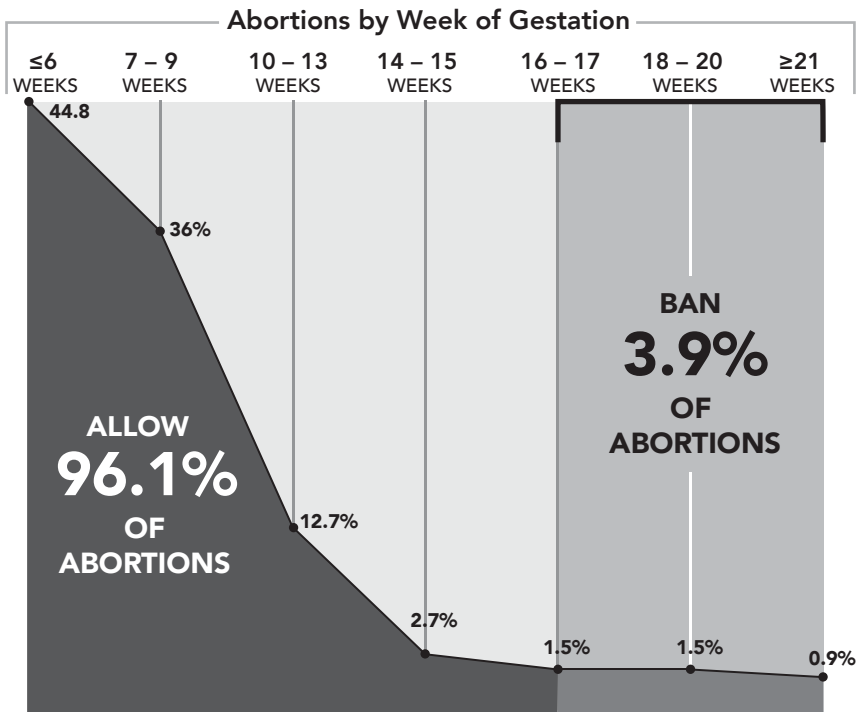
In 2012 when Mitt Romney was the Republican nominee for president, he and the Republican Party opposed all abortions, except in cases of rape, incest, and the life of the mother.<sup>2</sup> This exceptions-based position would make 97 percent of abortions illegal. Furthermore, even the exceptions (though problematic in the case of rape) were evaluated through a moral lens aimed to balance compassion for the vulnerable woman harmed during conception or childbirth with the vulnerable baby harmed by the abortion procedure.



Data provided by Charlotte Lozier, *Fact Sheet: Reasons for Abortion* January 14, 2023

Today, the national Republican policy position on abortion is very different. At the time of the publication of this book, presidential candidate Donald Trump announced that, essentially, the Republican Party does not have a national position on abortion, but the issue should instead be left to “the will of the people” at the state level. Other major Republican figures have publicly supported anything from a six-week ban to a fifteen-week ban, which would include the 2012 exceptions. The most recent Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) abortion statistics indicate that a fifteen-week ban, plus the exceptions, would allow nearly 98 percent of abortions. (See chart below)

### Impact of a 15-Week Abortion Ban



Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
 Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report Surveillance Summaries / Vol. 72 / No. 9 November 24, 2023  
 TABLE 14. Number and percentage of reported abortions, by known weeks of gestation, age group, and race and ethnicity — selected reporting areas, United States, 2021

Moreover, the Republican Party dramatically retreated from its pro-life position in its 2024 platform. For example, the platform no longer affirms

the unborn child has a “fundamental right to life which cannot be infringed,” and it abandoned the long-standing support for a Human Life Amendment to the Constitution. Although it still refers to the Fourteenth Amendment protections, by removing language asserting the unborn child is a person, this reference is hollow and moot. Finally, the only abortions the Republican platform specifically opposes are late-term abortions (generally after twenty weeks), which account for less than 2 percent of abortions.

While some states have passed stricter limits on abortion, it is clear the Republican Party’s current position is starkly different from the unified 2012 Republican position. In fact, despite rhetoric on both sides, the abortion debate from a national policy perspective is no longer about bans, but rather about abortion availability.

As a result, the inconvenient truth when evaluating each party’s national policy positions through the metric of saving babies in the womb from abortion is this: both parties are essentially pro-choice—one pro-choice *with no exceptions* and one pro-choice *with some exceptions*.

## **A Need for Steadfast Commitment to our Convictions**

In the move to a politically driven “weeks’ gestation-based” strategy to limit abortions, we face a further loss of commitment to the core pro-life convictions. To be clear, I am referring to two convictions: 1.) human life begins at conception and is worthy of protection, and 2.) the circumstances of a baby’s conception and birth must not determine his or her value and worth.

Consequently, any moral or political strategy must not undermine this guiding conviction. A weeks-based argument clearly undermines this conviction because one is negotiating about when it is acceptable to kill an innocent human life in the womb. This should be as nonnegotiable as the conviction that it is wrong to kill an innocent human life outside of the womb. Simply having convictions—even the right ones—is not enough. One must have a steadfast commitment to a conviction for it to matter. If one does not commit to an action connected to a conviction, it’s no better than having no conviction at all.

Ironically, the pro-choice side has not only conviction but also commitment that directs their actions, politically and otherwise. In their case, the conviction is that a woman should never be denied her bodily autonomy during pregnancy or at any time afterward. When you ask them when they would restrict or deny a woman's bodily autonomy, they say "never." It's nonnegotiable. Thus, they support abortion up until birth with no exceptions. This is why, despite how reasonable the compromise that pro-life people might offer, the pro-choice side refuses to negotiate. That's why they fought Mississippi's *Gestational Age Act* (Dobbs) all the way to the Supreme Court, which had a conservative majority that would likely overturn Roe. The Act would have prohibited abortion after fifteen weeks of pregnancy, with exceptions for medical emergencies and fetal abnormalities, and would allow nearly 98 percent of abortions.

The pro-life movement's approach of negotiation based on weeks of gestation has a fatal flaw in a moral, political, and practical sense. First, from a moral perspective, it's an incremental approach that undermines the baby's personhood and the sanctity of life, because we are negotiating on when it's acceptable to kill a vulnerable life in the womb. This is very different from the ban on partial birth abortion, an incremental approach that affirmed the baby's humanity by prohibiting a very heinous act. Second, from a political and practical perspective, our goal is to inspire more people to adopt the pro-life conviction about the protection of life in the womb. Compromising on conviction does not move people toward adopting those convictions. I can't think of a single successful

religious, political, or social movement where this approach has worked.

Consider the issue of slavery, which is often referenced as a parallel to the fight against abortion.

Before the Civil War, people like Abraham Lincoln were antislavery. In 1859 Lincoln said, "I think slavery is wrong, morally and politically."<sup>3</sup> Despite this, he focused on stemming the spread of slavery rather than abolishing it. In

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his first inaugural address he said, “I have no purpose, directly or indirectly, to interfere with the institution of slavery in the States where it exists.”<sup>4</sup> He was willing to compromise on his conviction that slavery was morally wrong and negotiate with the southern states. This is similar to a weeks-based ban approach that does not seek to end abortion, but rather stop it from spreading beyond fifteen weeks. Although Lincoln had a conviction, the conviction was not linked to actions that would accomplish the conviction.

Abolitionists like Frederick Douglass had the same conviction as the antislavery folks. Both groups believed slavery was politically and morally wrong. However, the abolitionists’ conviction was linked to a commitment to end slavery at all costs. They rightly believed this was a logical and consistent outcome for their conviction. They were not willing to compromise on their conviction and linked their actions and strategies to this conviction.

So, what happened? Douglass consistently engaged Lincoln based on their shared conviction, challenging Lincoln to take further action. Their shared convictions would demand the action to free all slaves everywhere. Over time, the weight and moral clarity of Douglass’s commitment to his convictions had a powerful impact on Lincoln. By the end of the Civil War, it was inconceivable for Lincoln to have a union that included the institution of slavery. Lincoln’s second inaugural speech reflects this shift because he makes no reference to ending the “terrible war” to preserve the union. Moreover, he sees the Civil War as a God-ordained “woe due” to those by whom the moral offense of slavery came into the nation.<sup>5</sup>

In Lincoln and Douglass’s final meeting after the speech was given, Lincoln asked Douglass what he thought of the speech. When Douglass demurred, Lincoln told him, “There is no man in the country whose opinion I value more than yours.”<sup>6</sup>

In a moral and political sense, people in the pro-life movement want pro-life politicians to have the moral clarity of Abraham Lincoln. When we cosign a weeks-based framework to limit abortion for political expediency, our lack of commitment to our core convictions does not inspire moral and political courage, nor does it inspire or persuade the broader culture that we embrace our convictions. Without a willingness to act like Frederick Douglass, you will rarely get a politician to act like Abraham Lincoln.

## Pilate's Dilemma and the Way Forward

I acknowledge and appreciate that many Republican politicians at all government levels are deeply pro-life. They speak forcefully for the cause of life and are working earnestly to put policies and initiatives in place to support women at risk for abortion. Moreover, I'm thankful for the significant work done to make the *Dobbs* decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade* a reality.

However, if the national pro-life policy position is either nonexistent or tolerant of a framework that allows nearly 98 percent of abortions, then the impact of the rhetoric and past efforts will be muted and short-lived. Indeed, embracing the current

policy position cedes the abortion issue to the pro-choice side before there is chance for debate. There is no doubt Democrats would not consider politicians to be pro-

choice if they indicated we should "leave it up to the states," or if they embraced a policy position that allowed abortion in just 2 to 3 percent of cases.

Political dynamics are obviously at play here. But one needs to be clear regarding the foundation of the abortion debate. It seeks to answer the question, "When is it acceptable for the powerful to take the life of the vulnerable, for the sake of the powerful?" When considering this important question, every politician is faced with the same dilemma that Pontius Pilate faced when he sent an innocent man, Jesus, to his death.

Should the shouts of a powerful and vocal crowd sway a politician to concede, even if it means the innocent are sacrificed? It takes Lincoln-like moral clarity to resist these voices. After all, the politics of abortion do not change the morality of what happens in an abortion. In the 2012 presidential election season, the Republican Party had a measure of moral clarity, and I remain hopeful that it can be regained. Moreover, I fervently hope the Democratic Party can gain moral clarity, because vulnerable lives in the womb are at risk.

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Given the reality that the two major political party positions on abortion are increasingly less divergent, where should Christians expend their pro-life energy? I do not think we should abandon the political process. We still have a duty to call for just laws that protect the innocent, and to align our moral positions with our political positions as much as possible.

In a political context, when Christ stood before Pilate it taught us three things: the limits of politics; the danger of politicians who don't prioritize truth; and the power of the crowd. It's important to remember that Jesus never expected Pilate to save him. When questioned by Pilate, the crowd shouted for the release of the criminal Barabbas, not the innocent Jesus. Pilate the politician, who was not interested in truth, gave them Barabbas. If we want to change the decisions that politicians make, we have to change the crowd.

A common aphorism is that culture is upstream from politics. However, as Richard John Neuhaus aptly stated, politics is a function of culture, and culture is a reflection of, if not a function of, religion.<sup>7</sup> In other words, if you lose the pews, you lose at the polls. And if you lose the pastors, you lose the pews. This is exactly what we have seen with the abortion issue. Consider the 2023 Ohio ballot initiative to amend the Constitution to make abortion a right in the state. Ohio is considered to be a pro-life state, but the initiative passed with nearly 57 percent voting yes.<sup>8</sup> Based on the exit poll data, when you consider both Catholics and Protestants, the percentage that voted yes was in the range of the broader culture. We lost the pews and we lost at the polls. Frankly, we should not be surprised at this outcome because 54 percent of women who have abortions profess to be Catholic or Protestant.<sup>9</sup>

While I agree we need to reach the broader culture on the abortion issue, we also need to urgently prioritize our pro abundant life time, talent, and treasure on a specific segment of culture—Christians.

Consider again Jesus standing before Pontius Pilate. Now, imagine you are a follower of Jesus in the crowd standing before Pilate. Of course, you are yelling with all your might, "Jesus!" in response to Pilate's query. But your voice is being drowned out by the crowd yelling "Barabbas!" Clearly, you need to change the crowd, but how? Out of the corner of your eye, you see

Bartimaeus, the formerly blind beggar that Jesus gave sight. To your surprise, he is yelling “Barabbas!” He has clearly wandered from the way, the truth, and the life.

You go to him and ask, “Why are you yelling Barabbas?” He sheepishly looks at you and says, “Well, everyone else was...” You then remind Bartimaeus that he knows Jesus and what Jesus did for him—how Jesus lived out the Great Commandment, loving him sacrificially, to fulfill the Great Commission in his life. Bartimaeus responds, “You’re right! And then begins to yell “Jesus!” And then, you see the woman with the issue of blood, and she is yelling “Barabbas!” too. So, you head toward her.

The way forward when dealing with moral issues like abortion has never changed. Yet so much of our effort on the abortion issue is to persuade “Pilate” to save us or try to reach the broad crowd of unbelievers. Jesus said the gates of hell, which abortion represents, will not prevail against the church. Indeed, his church must lead on the abortion issue in word and ministry deed. That’s why when Jesus came, he didn’t start with just anyone in the “crowd.” He started with the people of the Book who *should* know him. As followers of Christ, we must follow his example as our way forward. We must start by reaching our pews and removing the log in our eye to clearly see how to reach our lost culture. While that seems like a monumental task, by God’s grace and with focus, it’s achievable.