



**GREENBERG QUINLAN ROSNER** RESEARCH

# Message Handbook for Progressives from Center to Left:

## How to Talk about Abortion

*Voices for Progress Project*  
February, 2009



Administered by American Family Voices

## Project Summary and Methodology

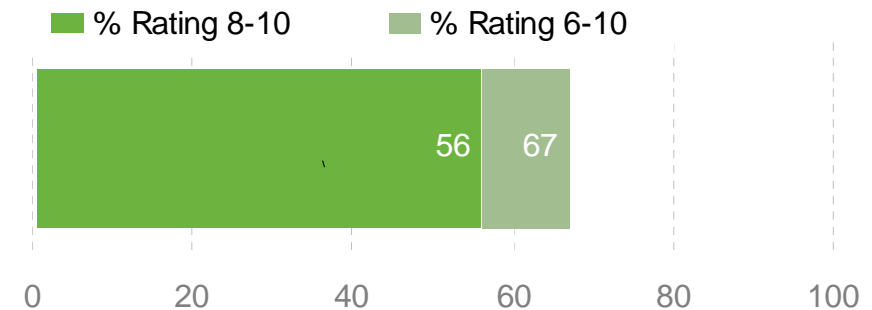
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- The following are progressive messages on abortion that test strongly in representative national samples. Each message provides a brief narrative that summarizes an often complex position in five or six sentences, usually including a “tagline” that captures its essence, indicated in bold.
- Messages were developed through 3 rounds of qualitative and quantitative research which tested them against strong conservative messages. All data presented are derived from survey research of likely voters, developed over the following phases:
  - **Focus Groups:** 8 groups among swing voters and weak partisans testing various message concepts and language.
  - **Internet panel survey of national likely voters (June 11, 2008):** In 2 online surveys respondents heard conservative and progressive messages delivered by a Republican and Democratic candidate, respectively, in an audio format. Along with other measures, respondents rated messages in moment-to-moment dial testing, which helped identify which elements resonated the most. (N = 405 respondents per message tested.)
  - **Telephone survey of national likely voters (October 5, 2008):** Respondents heard conservative and progressive messages on a variety of issues delivered by a Republican and Democratic candidate, respectively. They were then asked to rate each message and vote for the candidate whom they preferred based on the message. (N = 412 respondents per message tested.)

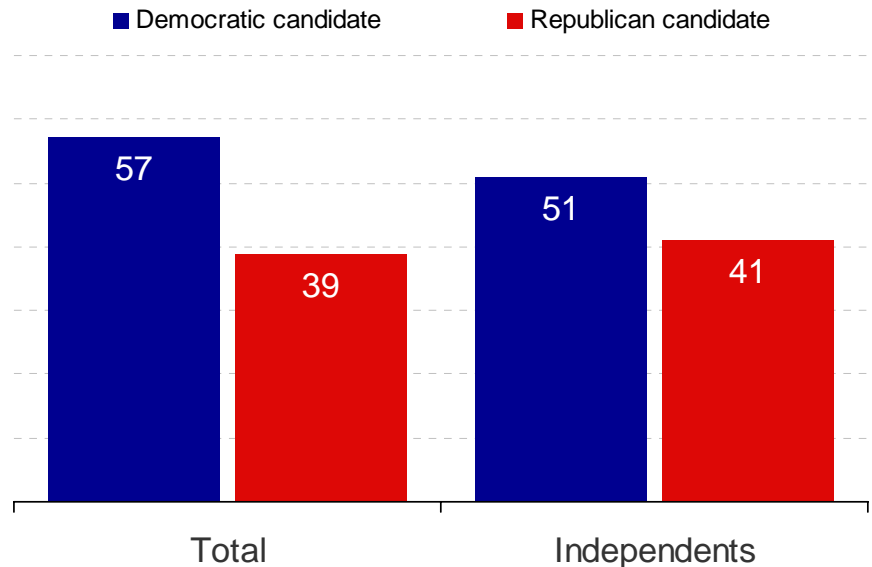
## Survey Results of a Strong Progressive Message

**Abortion is a matter between a woman, her doctor, and her God.** This is a moral and a personal issue, not a political one, and politicians need to stop using it to try to score political points. But we need to do everything possible to reduce the number of unwanted pregnancies, teen pregnancies, and abortions. That means **teaching our kids not only about abstinence but also about responsible use of birth control, so that all the children born in this country are wanted children.** And it means preventing abortions late in pregnancy, except when the mother's life or health is in danger, because abortion shouldn't be used as a form of birth control, and it shouldn't be used when a fetus is able to live on its own.

Message Rating, 0 - 10



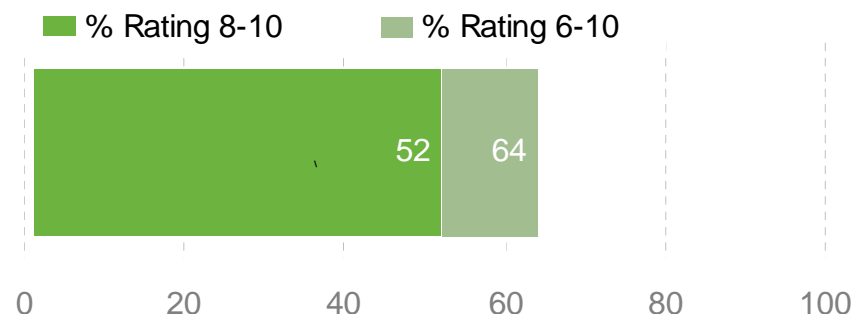
Vote on Abortion



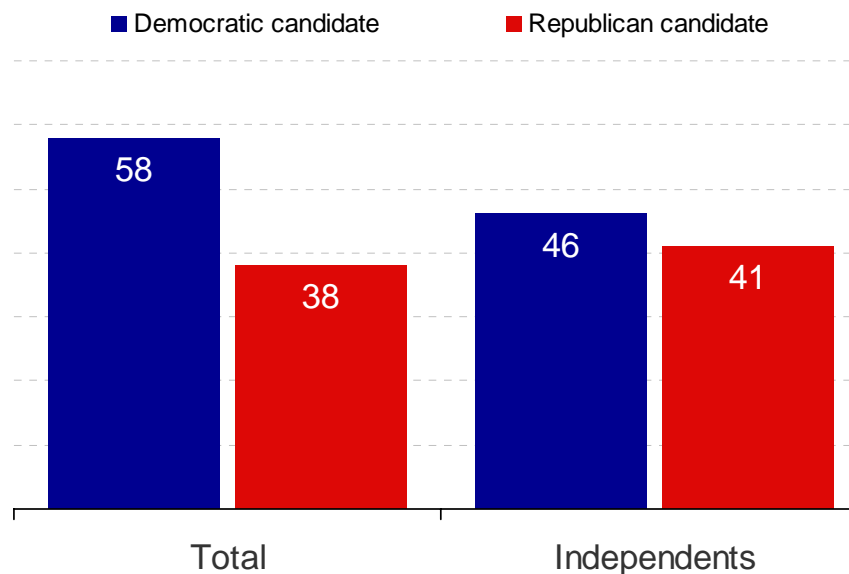
## Survey Results of a Strong Progressive Message

I'm not pro life, I'm not pro choice, I'm pro common sense. None of us truly knows what's in the mind of God, and the government has no business telling a man and a woman when they should or shouldn't have kids based on somebody else's interpretation of Scripture. But we need to find the common ground on abortion, reflecting our shared moral beliefs, not the beliefs that divide us. That means doing everything we can to reduce the number of unwanted pregnancies, teen pregnancies, and abortions. And it means preventing abortions late in pregnancy, except when the mother's life or health is in danger, because abortion shouldn't be used as a form of birth control, and it shouldn't be used when a fetus is too far along. **This should be a personal and moral issue, not a political one.**

Message Rating, 0 - 10



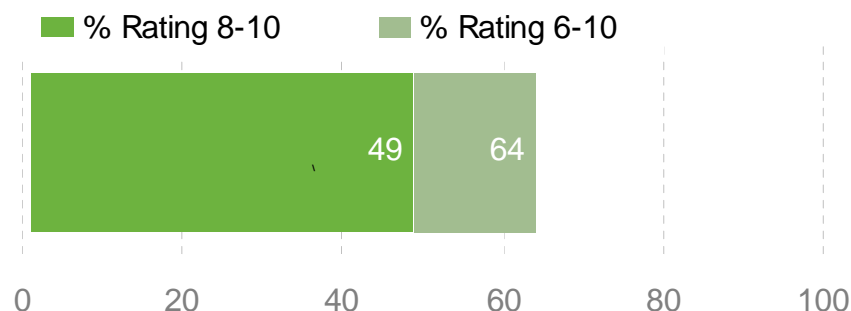
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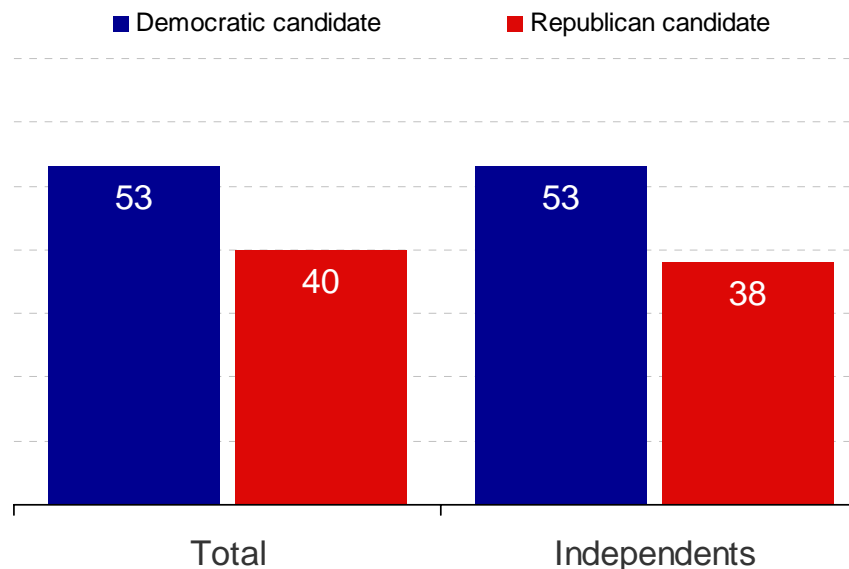
## Survey Results of a Strong Progressive Message

**We need to have an honest discussion about sex and birth control in this country.** It's been a long time since most people were virgins when they got married, and most people aren't going to wait until their mid twenties or thirties to have sex. Teaching our kids about abstinence but not about other forms of birth control doesn't prepare them for adulthood, and everywhere it's been tried, the number of teen pregnancies, abortions, and sexually transmitted diseases has gone up. We need to teach our kids good values, including the importance of responsible sex and contraception, so they don't use abortion as a form of birth control. The best way to reduce the number of abortions is to reduce the number of unwanted pregnancies. It's time we speak honestly and stop playing political games with our children's lives and health. **When we have abstinent politicians, we can talk about abstinence-only education.**

Message Rating, 0 - 10



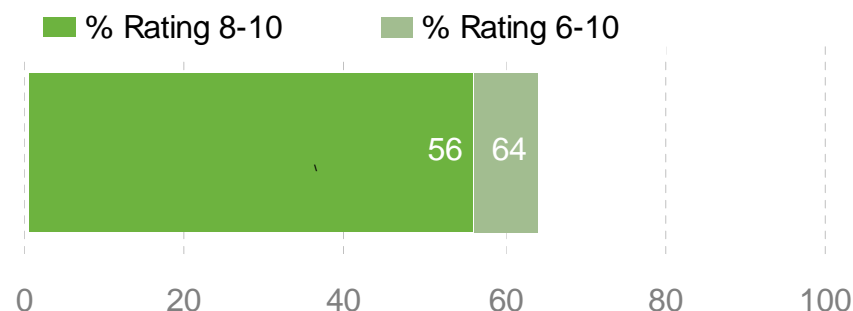
Vote on Abortion



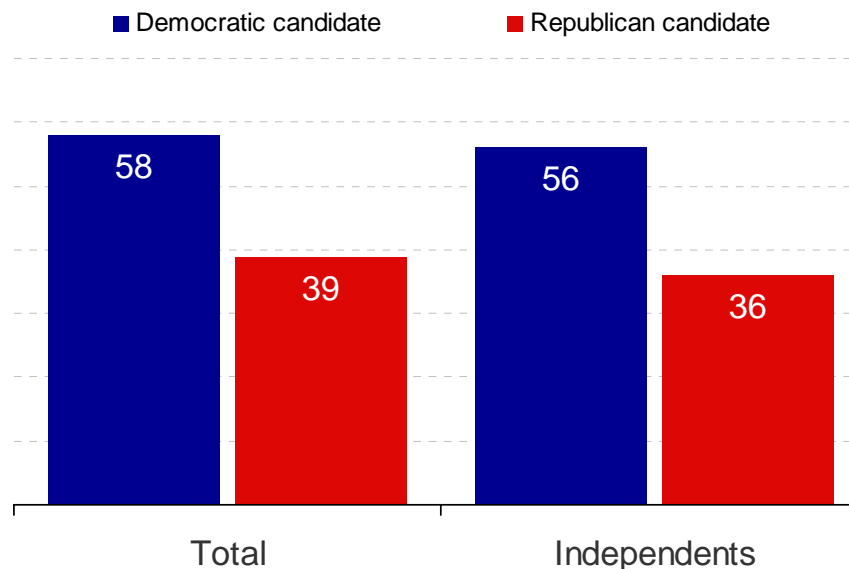
## Survey Results of a Strong Progressive Message

**Freedom and responsibility go hand in hand. That's why I'm both pro-choice and pro-personal responsibility.** Politicians shouldn't intrude on a woman or couple's most personal and painful decisions, and no one has the right to use government to impose their religious beliefs on somebody else. A woman should be able to trust that the advice she gets from her doctor reflects what her doctor really believes, not something the government forced her doctor to say. But that doesn't mean people should engage in unprotected sex and use abortion as a form of birth control. **The best way to reduce abortions is to reduce unwanted and teen pregnancies.** That means making sure every adult has access to medically accurate information and birth control, and providing honest, age appropriate sex education to our kids.

Message Rating, 0 - 10



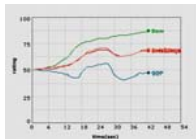
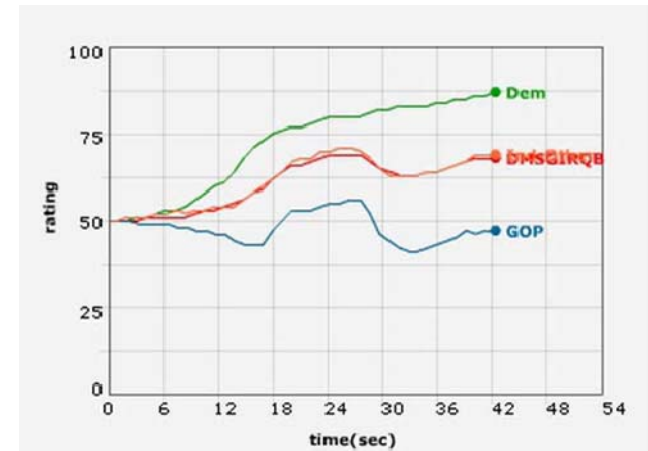
Vote on Abortion



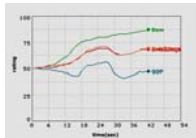
## Internet Panel Dial Tests of Strong Progressive Messages

The following are message dial tests among likely voters. Click each message below to play its dial graph.

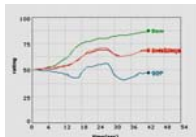
The graph plots the mean rating score for the message on a 0-100 scale. The colored lines represent the scores among **Republicans**, **Independents**, **Democrats** and **all respondents**.



**Abortion is a matter between a woman, her doctor, and her God... (CLICK TO VIEW)**



**I'm not pro-life, I'm not pro-choice, I'm pro-commonsense... (CLICK TO VIEW)**

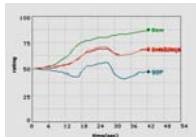
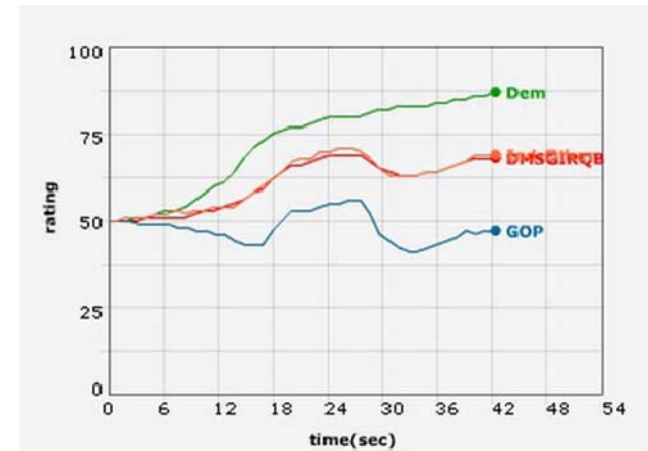


**...We should do everything we can to reduce unwanted pregnancies... But government has no business intruding on personal freedom... (CLICK TO VIEW)**

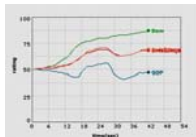
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*When a majority of people don't agree on moral question like abortion, we should leave it to a person's own faith and values... (CLICK TO VIEW)*



*As strongly as we may feel about our own beliefs about when life begins, we have to respect the rights of other people to live by their faith, not ours... (CLICK TO VIEW)*



## How to Talk about Abortion: Key Points

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- When discussing abortion, progressives should use a **religious freedom** vs. **intrusive government** framework.
- Use alternative formulations to the pro-choice vs. pro-life debate: “no one’s actions should be dictated by another person’s faith.”
- Emphasize that abortion is not only a deeply personal decision but also a painful one.
- Emphasize the shared goal of reducing unwanted pregnancies and avoiding abortion as a form of contraception.

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- Re-enfranchise the other 50% of the population when discussing abortion: no one should tell “a woman **or a couple**” or “**a man and a woman**” when “they should or shouldn’t start their family.”
- Emphasize comprehensive sex education and access to contraception.
- Recognize that the majority of voters do not consider an early-term fetus a person but become progressively less comfortable with abortion as a pregnancy proceeds. Reducing late term abortion is a goal that people to agree on.

## Language to Avoid with Voters in the Center

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- Starting the discussion by defining yourself as “Pro-choice.”  
Independents don’t respond to partisan jargon in this debate.

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