

How Overturning Roe Will Be An Example Of How To Win A Battle and Lose The Public Relations War, And Why Massive Positive Media Coverage Does Not Result In Election Victories



Arthur Solomon

Ever since the conclusion of the 2020 presidential election, I stayed away from writing columns about politics. That's because political pundits of the broadcast and print media are not contributing factual information to their audiences. New information is disseminated in the news sections and the pundits use those details to try to convince followers that

what the pundits write or say is reality, when, actually, it is nothing but the ego-centric opinions of pundits. It was this way yesterday, it is this way today and, thus, it will be this way tomorrow and the many tomorrows that follow until the end of time.

Every so often a pundit presents an opinion based on the secret leaked discussions of law makers. But in those rare cases the pundits are being used by leakers for political purposes, but the ego-inflated pundits refuse to admit so, whether their opinions are made public via TV or print.

I didn't intend to write another political column until we were into the 2024 presidential season. But unexpected events occurred. And slowly, like Russia's probable victory against Ukraine, the overturning of Roe is a Republican Party example of how to win a battle and lose the public relations war. That's not just my belief. It's an opinion based on facts that reveal that Russia, because of its invasion of Ukraine, has become a pariah state to much of the world and that the great majority of Americans are against outlawing abortion.

The unexpected event that took me to my computer, of course, was the leaked Supreme Court draft opinion that would erase Roe V. Wade. In affect, it turned the November mid-term election and the 2024 presidential election into a one subject issue: Are you for or against women having the right to choose?

A short history lesson about Roe:

The Supreme Court made Roe the law of the land on January 22, 1973, when seven of the nine sitting justices agreed that the Constitution protects the right to abortion. That immediately set off a culture war that to this day has divided the country, not because Americans are anti-Roe, but because Republican politicians campaign on the issue and too many voters vote a party label, ignoring the differences between

the GOP and Democratic candidates.

The decision also changed American politics for the worse. An estimated minority of strict anti-abortion Americans, 15 to 19 percent, became political activists and eventually controlled the Republican Party, while the majority of Americans who were in favor of a women's right to choose, ignored the onslaught against Roe until it was too late to organize a productive counter attack. Because of other issues, the low percent of strict anti-abortion activists were often joined by other Republican voters who voted the party line, even though it went against their views about Roe, thus conceding abortion rights positions to a very small, but vocal and activist percentage of GOP voters.

Sadly the politics of abortion has spilled over to non-political issues and has alienated Americans, who used to debate political issues, shake hands after the debates and share a meal. On May 7, the New York Times reported, "In 1960, 4 percent of Democrats and Republicans said they would be unhappy if their children married someone from the other party. Today, according to the Public Religion Research Institute, that number has grown to 35 percent among Republicans and to 45 percent among Democrats. Over the course of just four years, the Institute for Family Studies found marriages in America between Republicans and Democrats fell by half. As it was, in 2016 only 9 percent of marriages involved couples from opposite parties; by 2020, that figure had slid to just 4 percent.

Today, Democratic leaders in the Senate do not have enough votes – 60 are required – to bring up a House bill that voted to codify the right to an abortion. They also are at least two votes shy – 50 are needed – that would change the filibuster rules and allow the legislation to pass with a simple majority.

Two Democratic Senators, Joe Manchin and Kyrsten Sinema have

broken with their party and refused to change the filibuster rules. But two GOP senators, Susan Collins and Lisa Murkowski, who support abortion rights, but not the Democrats bill, have stood with their leadership and have prevented changes to the filibuster rules. Whether the Roe controversy will change their position is anyone's guess. My pundit's guess is that it will not.

A glimmer of hope for abortion rights supporters were the remarks by Sens. Collins and Murkowski because of their comments after the leaked draft report. However, they think the Democratic bills to codify a women's right to abortion needs revision.

Sen. Collins said, "If this leaked draft opinion is the final decision and this reporting is accurate, it would be completely inconsistent with what Justice Gorsuch and Justice Kavanaugh said in their hearings and in our meetings in my office. Obviously, we won't know each Justice's decision and reasoning until the Supreme Court officially announces its opinion in this case." (If I was a pro-abortion rights advocate, I wouldn't do hand stands over her remarks. The senator from Maine has a long record of mostly saying one thing and then standing with her party when votes are counted.)

Sen. Murkowski, much more independent minded than Sen. Collins, opined that if a leaked opinion striking down Roe v. Wade represents a Supreme Court majority, it "rocks my confidence in the court" and suggested it would mean that conservative nominees gave her the wrong impression about whether they would uphold the right to an abortion. Murkowski said Republican-nominated justices she met with during the Senate confirmation process told her that they viewed Roe v. Wade as settled law and precedent and gave her the impression they would uphold it. She added, "Sen. Collins and I in February introduced a bill that would codify Roe v. Wade. I thought it made sense then and I think it makes

perhaps more sense now," she said.

Recent polling about Roe:

President Biden's 2020 presidential election victory was decided by women, black voters in urban areas and white suburban women, who voted not because they supported the Democratic agenda but because they were fed up with Donald Trump.

Some stats:

- Nearly all of the states who have recently passed restrictive bans on abortion rank in the top 10 states for maternal mortality, infant mortality, or both, according to data from the CDC and a USA Today analysis in 2019. (The majority of these and more recent states that have passed anti-abortion legislation are in GOP controlled states.)
- "Polling shows relatively few Americans want to see Roe overturned, " said a 2020, AP VoteCast survey of the electorate, which revealed that 69% of voters in the presidential election said the Supreme Court should leave the Roe v. Wade decision as is; just 29% said the court should overturn the decision. In general, AP-NORC polling shows a majority of the public favors abortion being legal in most or all cases," according to a January story on NPR.
- A January 2022 Marquette Law School national Supreme Court survey found that, among those with an opinion on Roe, 28% are in favor of overturning the decision and 72% are opposed to overturning it.
- "Amid reports of a draft Supreme Court opinion that would overturn Roe v. Wade, an ABC News/Washington Post poll finds that majorities of Americans support upholding Roe and say abortion should be legal in all or most cases and – by a wide margin – see abortion as a decision to be made by a woman and her doctor, not by

lawmakers,” said a story published on May 3. The poll was conducted before the leak of the Supreme Court draft opinion opposing Roe v. Wade.

- On May 3, the day of the leaked Supreme Court draft overturning Roe, the Boston Globe reported, “Pew Research Center a nonpartisan research institute that has tracked attitudes toward abortion rights going back to the 1990s, found that support for abortion rights among the public has outpaced opposition since at least 1995. In fact, public support for abortion has rarely dipped below 50 percent. It did so once in 2001 and again in two surveys in 2009, according to Pew data, but support for abortion rights has hovered around 60 percent since 2016” and that “Opposition to abortion, or those who believe the procedure should be illegal in most or all cases, has likewise remained relatively consistent and in the minority, hovering between 36 and 48 percent since 1995, the Pew data show.”
- Forbes.com reported on 2021 polls on May 3: A January CNN poll found a 59% majority want their state to have laws that are “more permissive than restrictive” on abortion if Roe goes away, while only 20% want their state to ban abortion entirely; another 20% want it to be restricted but not banned.” Forbes also reported, “Strongest support for abortion—within limits: An Associated Press/NORC poll in June found 87% support abortion when the woman’s life is in danger, 84% support exceptions in the case of rape or incest, and 74% support abortion if the child would be born with a life-threatening illness.
- On May 6, the Wall Street Journal reported, “A range of polling finds little appetite for the Supreme Court to overturn Roe. Surveys by CNN and Pew Research Center have found about 70% support for retaining Roe and Gallup polls have pegged support at about 60%.”
- On May 6, a study released by the Pew Research Center, conducted before the leak of Justice Alito’s draft

document, showed, "A majority of Americans say abortion should be legal in all or most cases, but many are open to restrictions; even many opponents of legal abortion say it should be legal in some circumstances. The poll of 10,441 adults revealed that about six-in-ten U.S. adults (61%) say abortion should be legal in all or most cases, while 37% say it should be illegal in all or most cases, according to the survey, which was conducted March 7-13. Only 8% of the respondents said abortion should be illegal in all cases.

If polls over the years show that the great majority of Americans support abortion rights, even in states like Florida with a strict anti-abortion governor, (The Palm Beach Post reported on May 3, "A University of North Florida survey released in February found that a majority of Florida voters opposed new abortion restrictions approved by the Legislature this year), why has the anti-abortion pressure groups slowly been chipping away at women's rights to choose against voters concerns?

Part of the reason is that the Republican's PR strategy, as usual, is far better than the Democrats, whose splintered messages cancel out each other. For the better than part of a year the GOP messengers have convinced voters that the Democratic control of the presidency and Congress has resulted in a do-nothing administration, even though that is not true.

The Republican propaganda machine was working, with poll after poll showing that the Democrats would lose control of the House and, possibility, the Senate. But now the narrative has changed as polls on abortion rights have consistently showed the great majority of voters do not favor anti-abortion laws.

After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, the Japanese Admiral who planned the assault, Isoroku Yamamoto, is alleged to have said, "We have awakened a sleeping giant." I believe

the Roe v. Wade controversy has done the same and will, at last, enter in what political pundits have wrongly been predicting for years – an era of Democratic election victories.

The adage, “Be careful what you wish for, lest it come true,” is from Aesop’s Fables. The Republicans might have won the battle of Roe v. Wade but lost the war as successive Democratic majorities vote to strengthen laws guaranteeing women’s rights to abortions.

Of course, there’s a caveat or two attached to my opinion. Too often in the past voters who support the Democratic Party’s position on abortion rights and gun control have demonstrated, marched and vowed to target Republicans who are in favor of anti-abortion rights and anti gun controls. But when it comes to actual voting, many of the same people who have joined Democratic activist marches and demonstrations and have been vocal in their attacks on GOP legislators don’t show up on Election Day. Thus, the current situation regarding abortion rights and gun controls. Also, the Democrats have shown expertise in turning victory into defeat because of a vocal but impractical minority. A prime example is how the “defund the police” crowd movement resulted in a greatly reduced Democratic majority in the House in 2020 voting, even though Biden won the presidential election.

There’s no guarantee that the same scenario will not happen in this year’s mid-term elections and in the 2024 presidential election. But if I was a betting person, I’d put a few shekels that this time the talk-a-lot, walk-a-lot stay-at-home voters will cast ballots. But I’d want favorable odds because history shows that instead of casting a ballot on Election Day, abortion rights and gun control advocates would rather be guests on TV programs that highlight marches and other protest vehicles.

My advice to those who talk the talk, but don’t walk the walk

is to DVR the great Broadway show, "My Fair Lady" and follow the lyrics of "Show Me," which, in part says,

Don't waste my time, Show me!...

Don't talk of June, Don't talk of fall!

Don't talk at all! Show me!

Never do I ever want to hear another word.

There isn't one I haven't heard

Say one more word and I'll scream!..

Please don't "expl'ine," Show me! Show me!

Don't wait until wrinkles and lines

Pop out all over my brow,

Show me now!

The above lyrics should be heeded by women's rights advocates. They should stop vying for TV time. What they say during TV interviews doesn't persuade viewers. They should stop marching and staging protests. Sleeping all night in front of the Supreme Court only benefits the news media. History shows that these are nothing but "feel good" shows and don't change the outcome of elections. Past elections about subjects like health care, gun control and abortion rights prove that.

As some people might remember, after several years as a reporter and editor on New York City pubs, my first job in public relations was with a political firm, where I worked on local, state and presidential campaigns before deciding that I didn't want a life in politics. During those days I noticed a difference between Democratic and Republican approaches to issues: Democrats talked; Republicans organized.

Pro choice and pro gun legislation advocates should take a lesson from Republican anti-abortion advocates. For decades, while Democrats were making headlines with protests and garnering the great majority of TV time, Republicans were quietly winning control of school boards and concentrating on local political matters to elect majorities in state,

governments while winning their share of presidential and Congressional elections. Democrats won the battle for media coverage but neglected the rural voters that once supported them. The same is still largely true as

Democrats concentrate on winning the support of urban and suburban voters and still neglect the views of rural voters. Democratic leaders might disagree with my analysis, but just listen to the issues discussed by their spokespersons on the daily cable news political programs and any objective person would have to agree with me.

Instead of marches and other forms of protesting, abortion rights advocates should use every minute organizing people to vote. They should start ringing door bells now and not stop until after Election Day. Because on Election Day it will not be the pro or anti-abortion forces that decide the outcome. The election will not be decided by the side that gets the most TV time. The winners will be decided by what former President Richard Nixon called the "silent majority." Because it is the "silent majority" whose voices are heard on Election Day.

It always is.

There's no doubt that if you're counting placements about the abortion issue the Democrats can claim victory. But there's an important PR lesson that I always stressed to people reporting to me: It's not the number of "hits" that will satisfy a client (in this case the voters), it's the quality of the hits, meaning where they appeared, and the message points they include. By neglecting the rural voters for so long the Democrats messages were directed to too narrow an audience.



About the Author: Arthur Solomon, a former journalist, was a senior VP/senior counselor at Burson-Marsteller, and was responsible for restructuring, managing and playing key roles in some of the most significant national and international sports and non-sports programs. He also traveled internationally as a media adviser to high-ranking government officials. He now is a frequent contributor to public relations publications, consults on public relations projects and was on the Seoul Peace Prize nominating committee. He has been a key player on Olympic marketing programs and also has worked at high-level positions directly for Olympic organizations. He can be reached at [arthursolomon4pr \(at\) juno.com](mailto:arthursolomon4pr@juno.com).