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Emma C. Hazen

Northern Illinois University, z1865888@students.niu.edu

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Northern Illinois University

The Effect of Abortion Rights' Political Activity on Engagement with Planned Parenthood

A Capstone Submitted to the

University Honors Program

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of the Baccalaureate Degree

With Honors Department of

Nonprofit and NGO Studies

By

Emma Hazen

Z1865888

Dekalb, Illinois

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Abstract

In 2022, *Roe v. Wade* was overturned by the Supreme Court of the United States. Abortion became a hot topic of debate. Activists turned their attention to the issue with new vigor, and countless nonprofits became involved as well. The purpose of this study serves to explore the influence of political activity pertaining to abortion rights on Planned Parenthood. The aim is to analyze the ways that Planned Parenthood, as a national nonprofit, is affected by changes in the political sphere, which in turn generates activity via abortion activists.

This study will evaluate the extent to which abortion activity in the political sphere influences Planned Parenthood's support through cross examination. We will look at Planned Parenthood's history of public support through donations, volunteerism and social media engagement in comparison to dates of major political attention towards abortion rights. Major dates in this field will be determined by increases in news reporting, attention on social media and major legislation. The study seeks to answer: To what extent do changes in political activity related to abortion rights affect engagement and donations to Planned Parenthood?

Upon this methodology, the study reflects on the high increases of involvement and support towards Planned Parenthood during major political events in the abortion realm. Correlations between abortion legislation and media attention demonstrate that these are, in fact, factors in attention to Planned Parenthood. Rage giving and media both contribute to the nonprofit's success and longevity. The following research reviews the extent of success Planned Parenthood receives from increases in involvement.

Introduction

Advocacy frequently shifts with influxes based on societal occurrences and media. With some political matters drawing a large audience through controversy, social movements often center around specific hot topic issues. As the public reacts to these happenings, there is an all around increase of involvement in the issue at hand. Rage giving is a major influence on nonprofit support and attention as it funnels major political events into actionable change for nonprofits. Does this involvement equate to an increase in activism and advocacy? Additionally, what is the extent of change that political activity and advocacy have on nonprofits? This research will delve into the extent of changes in political activity pertaining to abortion rights, and the engagement provided for Planned Parenthood. Additionally, it will reflect the specific political events which turned monetary profit for Planned Parenthood within the last decade.

This project will research the correlation between spikes in political activity and support for Planned Parenthood. As advocacy for abortion rights fluctuates, a correlation with Planned Parenthood would be impacted significantly. I aim to measure the ways that involvement with Planned Parenthood shifts with public attention towards abortion laws. Specifically, I will look to major changes in donations and volunteerism. There have been many recent instances of high political involvement with abortion rights. When looking at *Roe v. Wade* overturning, numerous observants noticed an increase in activism with abortion legislation. This is one example of the trends I want to delve into with the research. Crowdfunding, and fundraising as a whole, is heavily influenced by the political sphere for nonprofits that touch hot topic issues. However, I would like to take this research into an understanding of the effects of extremely high attention. I hope to discover if this brings positive or negative support overall. Additionally, I aim to answer if nonprofits such as Planned Parenthood survive largely on rage giving, and if there is longevity

to the concept. My quantitative research will be based on finding trends in both abortion rights activism and media buzz surrounding the issue. I will look at trends within Planned Parenthood in order to review when they receive the highest amount of monetary support. A combination of primary and secondary sources will assist me in creating a well rounded comprehension of trends. I hope to form research that utilizes trends and correlations in order to better see how national nonprofits are influenced by rage giving and media buzz.

This research holds importance as it reflects the level and consistency of support that nonprofits receive based on political activity and passion. I believe that this project would be significant in demonstrating the correlation between activism and nonprofits. Nonprofits often rely on public support, such as donations and volunteers, which changes rapidly with political conditions. This research can also be used for the public to see how important consistent support is to nonprofits. Creating an understanding of the effects of advocacy on national nonprofits allows leaders in the nonprofit sphere to prepare for influxes or decreases in centralized attention. I believe that understanding the correlation between advocacy and nonprofits will allow organizations to have a stronger standing within the political sphere.

Literature Review

Constituent Influence in Nonprofit Advocacy

Measuring the scope of influence that advocacy holds over nonprofit success requires a look at the ways in which constituent practices present in activism. A study performed at the University of Georgia delved into the relationship between political activity by constituents and nonprofit organizations' advocacy activities. Their methodology looked to nonprofit organizations in Arizona via 2007. Researchers sent out a survey which investigated advocacy activity in eleven categories which were: research, media advocacy, direct lobbying, grassroots lobbying, public events and direct action, judicial advocacy, public education, and expert testimony.

The survey received a response rate of 12.7% with 174 responses. The survey's findings demonstrated a strong correlation between constituent participation in organization decision making through nonprofit organizations and an organization's involvement with activism. According to the study, "Our conclusion, that health, environment and animals and mutual benefit organizations are associated with the increased scope and intensity of advocacy activities, is consistent with prior studies" (Guo and Saxton, 2010). The researchers state that these nonprofit organizations provide a representation to constituents who choose to be active within advocacy. With this, we can find that there is a correlation between politically active constituents and charitably based nonprofits in which civilians rely on organizations to influence their strategies. However, this study fails to connect the ways in which nonprofits conversely rely on constituents for advocacy support and movement. With the information of this study, I aim to utilize their connection between constituency and nonprofits while incorporating the dependency that nonprofits may hold in support from activists.

“Rage Giving”

Rage giving is a phenomenon that captures the relationship between activism and nonprofit success. According to a publication by Cambridge University, rage giving centers on the idea of viral fundraising and emotional charitable giving. Oftentimes, this concept is heightened by controversial or hot topic political activity. This publication is useful in capturing the effects of rage giving on nonprofit organizations and understanding the influxes in charitable giving.

This research specifically targets the increase of rage giving during the Trump presidency wherein constituents felt highly compelled to support nonprofits due to political conflict. It shares that political mobilization is directly connected to emotional action based in anger. With this, civic anger demonstrates itself with charitable giving when individuals are dissatisfied with political events or decisions (Taylor and Miller-Stevens, 2022).

Furthermore, research has begun to reflect the emotional and financial response that civilians had with the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*. According to The Chronicle of Philanthropy, “shortly after the May 2022 leak of the Supreme Court’s draft decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, NARAL Pro-Choice America, an organization that advocates for access to abortion, saw a 1,400 percent increase in donations within 24 hours” (Miller-Stevens and Taylor, 2022). Similarly, the Brigid Alliance (a nonprofit abortion fund) shared that its number of donors quadrupled from May to July with gifts ranging from \$5 to \$50,000. With this information, the research concludes that people who engage in rage giving view philanthropy as a form of action based civic engagement. The authors argue that this phenomenon is backed by constituents’ need to feel as if they are making a difference when they feel helpless in the political sphere. They also conclude that women are more likely to donate to nonprofits during high political moments. I hypothesize

that this will in turn result in high correlations between rage giving and Planned Parenthood organizations. My theory is based on the presumption that the majority of donors for Planned Parenthood come from women, which requires more investigation within my research.

Mobilization with Collective Giving Responses

Based on research from The British Psychological Society, exposure to advocacy and activism correlates nonprofit donations. This conclusion was found with an online experiment with United States residents. Participants were shown examples of NFL players kneeling during the national anthem as well as the public's reaction through Twitter. Researchers then measured the participants' anger toward the advocacy, the degree of which they felt they could affect change pertaining to the issue, and their willingness to donate after gaining this knowledge.

As the study predicted, people preferred to donate toward causes congruent with their beliefs (Chapman et al., 2020). Anger was measured as a high predictor of giving in periods of political conflict. The research concluded that advocacy can have both mobilization and demobilization effects, "Supporting advocacy sometimes indirectly weakens preferences for making cause-congruent donations by reducing anger, but sometimes indirectly promotes collective giving via increased efficacy" (Chapman et al., 2020). In other words, people can feel as if nothing will contribute largely to the issue at hand and develop a sense of helplessness if they lack faith in the nonprofit sphere towards effective change. I will utilize this information in my research to grasp a thorough understanding of the ways in which advocacy and activism can negatively impact nonprofit involvement from the public.

Nonprofits in Democracy

Prior research points to nonprofits as the vision for constituents to hope for political change. Nonprofit political advocates push that they represent a collective interest rather than

elite professionals (Powell, 2006). The Nonprofit Sector: A Research Handbook presents a hesitant stance in the ability of nonprofits in political activity. The hesitancy rests on the idea that nonprofits cannot act in a way that makes every donor happy with the outcome. Additionally, the effectiveness of nonprofit advocacy is doubted. With this, the writers compiled prior research which summarizes the realm of possibility for nonprofit action. This research supports the concept of negative nonprofit influence in political advocacy. It finds that nonprofits are often involved extensively in negotiations over the implementation of governmental service programs and civic advocacy activities, although not under the guise of this action being “advocacy” (Powell, 2006). On another hand, other researchers argue against this logic. According to Warren, “the nonprofit sector does not exist in a vacuum, nor does it grow spontaneously. It is something we- our society- have engineered into our social and political system- through laws, policies and protections” (2003). Both points of view acknowledge the presence of nonprofits within the political sphere and their influence on policy. However, they represent the line between researchers in attitude towards the matter. In my following research, I aim to represent both modes of thought. Each creates a new view point on a nonprofit’s ability to make effective change based on high political activity and large donations.

Methodology

This research will focus on the nonprofit organization Planned Parenthood. Planned Parenthood is a national organization in the United States which provides reproductive and sexual healthcare and sexual education. According to Guidestar the organization “believes in the fundamental right of each individual, throughout the world, to manage his or her fertility, regardless of the individual’s income, marital status, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, national origin, or residence.” Planned Parenthood advocates in the political sphere for public policies that support the privacy and reproductive rights of individuals. The nonprofit is the largest sexual health educator in the country with their education programming reaching 1.1 million people annually in the country. With this, they hold a large influence over United States policy and advocacy.

Their legislative strategies are based on organizing grassroots bases through outreach to individuals. Outreach methods include social media, phone calls, online advertising, and in person events. Planned Parenthood has special initiatives in place to allocate and retain young people and minority communities. According to Guidestar, they specifically aim to represent Latino communities. Planned Parenthood summarizes their grassroots approach as such: “We often complement our grassroots strategies in multilayered campaigns that also include educating policymakers as well as outreach to the media to generate coverage and further increase the visibility of our issues.”

Although I do not have an existing relationship with the organization, this research will utilize public information to conduct measurements. My research design for this project will be quantitative. I will base the findings on trends in both abortion rights activism and media buzz around the issue. I will also look at trends within Planned Parenthood in order to review when

they receive the highest amount of monetary support and volunteer rates. Data on Planned Parenthood will most likely require primary sources. However, locating patterns in abortion rights will utilize secondary sources. With these data sources, I will lay out dates of occurrences. I plan to create a chart to compare peaks in support for the nonprofit alongside peaks in abortion rights activism. Additionally, I will include data for major abortion events in the United States to correlate a cause and effect. Based on this information, I will connect the extent of which abortion rights encourage participation of the public with Planned Parenthood. If I am able to connect with a member of Planned Parenthood, I would like to conduct a portion of qualitative data through an interview. It would be useful to receive this information to explain the direct effects of fluctuating support towards nonprofits. This is information that I don't believe I can generate from statistical data. If I was able to interview an employee, I would create a list of questions beforehand for my mentor to review. They would consist of questions about the importance of donors and support, patterns they find in support, and what political activity they find connects to them the most when relating to abortion rights.

Results

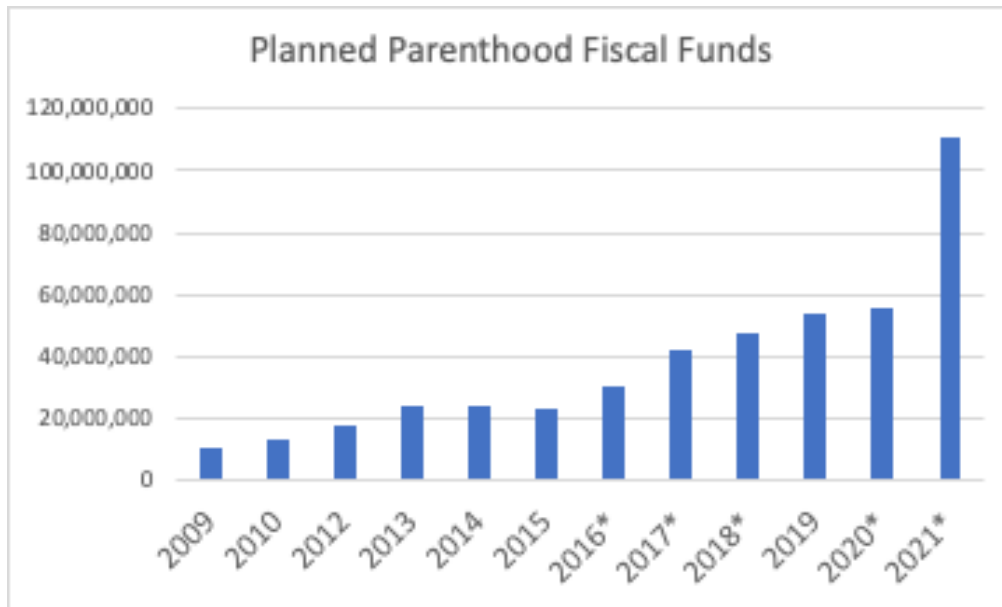


Figure 1

In order to understand the effect of the political climate on Planned Parenthood, I compiled data which correlates two factors. The first factor was fiscal earnings of the nonprofit which derived from public donations. Information on these donations was found using reports from Planned Parenthood on GuideStar. The second factor of the chart above was a set of major events which held influence over the public, specifically with concerns to abortion rights. The events charted are as below:

- 2016: Election of President Donald Trump
- 2017: Neil Gorsuch nominated to the Supreme Court
- 2018: Brett Kavanaugh nominated to the Supreme Court
- 2020: Amy Coney Barrett nominated to the Supreme Court
- 2021: States began passing strict abortion laws

Looking to these factors, it can be observed that events which garnered a large amount of public attention, and caused concern for the security of abortion rights, influenced higher rates of public donations to Planned Parenthood. The events noted above show a trend of events which held buzz in traditional media and social media. The factors discussed above aim to encompass and measure rage giving. Rage giving can be explained as, “charitable giving due to individuals’ dissatisfaction with events, politics, and policies in the public sphere... empathetic anger [which] motivates people to counter injustice” (Taylor and Stevens 8). Altogether, these trends demonstrate rage giving from the public on a high scale.

This research demonstrated how the public is influenced by the media. Prior to researching this topic, I had predicted that the public would feel most moved to donate to Planned Parenthood when legislation was moved through the government. I assumed that actionable items by the government would have the most cause for concern, and in turn produce the most support for Planned Parenthood. However, my predictions were incorrect. Within this research I found that people are most moved to donate when the media gravitates towards an issue, event, statement, etc.

As noted by Figure 1, Planned Parenthood witnessed increases of donations in accordance with the chart of notable events. 2021 proved to be the most impactful year of donations. With states tightening abortion access and restriction laws, citizens felt the most moved to donate. This is also when the media began to center on abortion rights and the fear of losing abortion rights. Beginning with the election of President Trump, there is an almost linear rise in donations until the major 2021 spike. This demonstrates that the public grew increasingly concerned about abortion rights from 2016 to 2020, at a nearly steady pace.

The political events that correlated with monetary support to Planned Parenthood share a trend in public influence. Each of these events are notable for the uproar they received publicly. The nonprofit shared that social media interaction spiked exponentially during the 2016 electoral debates (shown below).

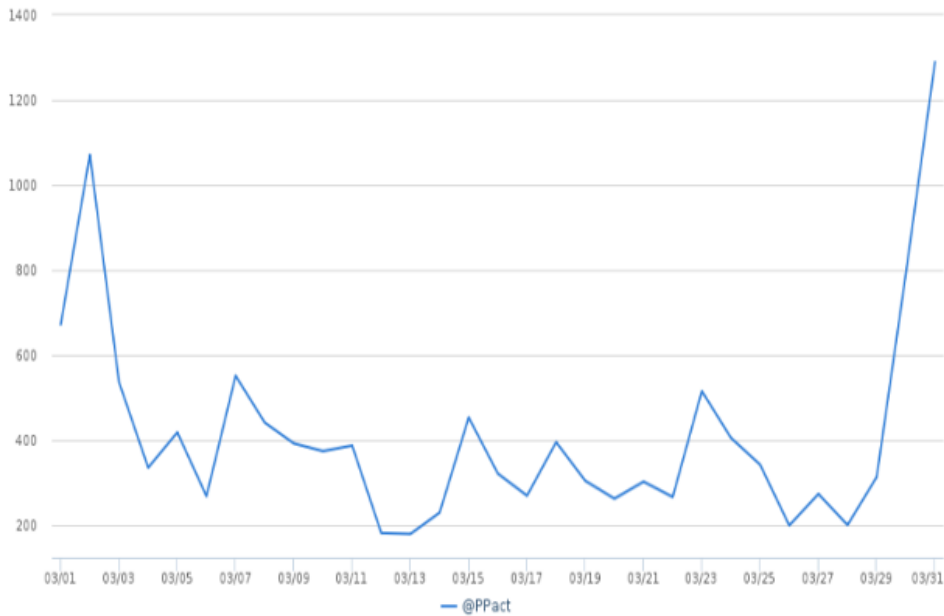


Figure 2

This chart tracks interaction and engagement with Planned Parenthood’s Twitter. It finds that people are most interested in the nonprofit when there is a large amount of attention towards abortion rights, set out by controversial or attention gardening political figures.

While Planned Parenthood has not published very much data on their social media, the engagement of their Twitter is significant.

Implications and Recommendations

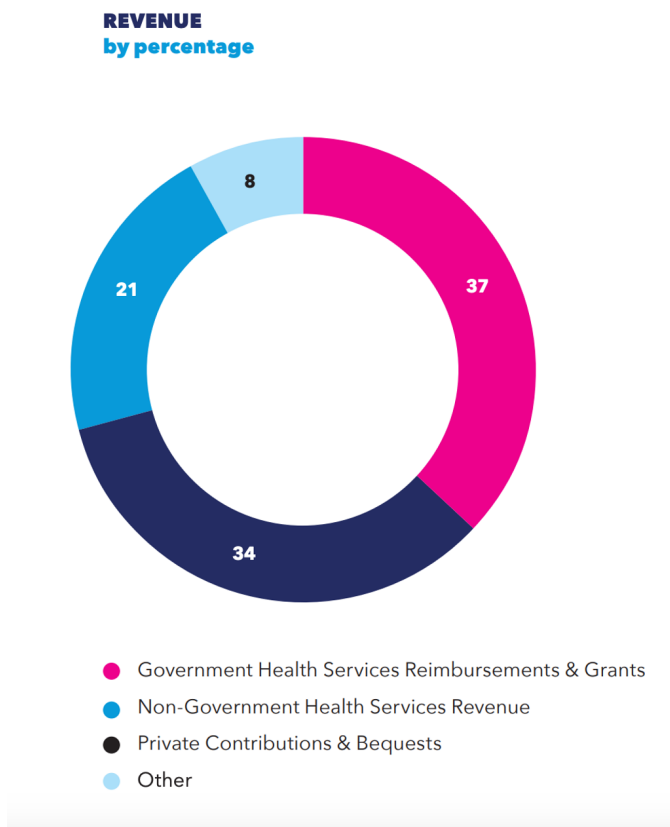
Throughout this research, there were limitations to collecting necessary data for a complete overview. Planned Parenthood had minimal information released publicly on their donations. I was unable to access information on what states their donations come from or what months they were delivered. Additionally, there was only one published report on the nonprofit's social media engagement. If I was able to continue this research I would like to include data collection on their social media, volunteerism and donations continuing into 2022. A major influence on this research would be information on

Overall, the results of this research shows that the general public is moved more hastily by media buzz and social controversy, rather than legislative action. Debatedly, 2021 shows that legislative action can be effective in pushing citizens to donate at higher rates. I argue this to be additional evidence of media buzz as this period of time was surrounded by numerous reports on abortion laws. At the same time, 2021 is also evidence that legislation can push people to donate more effectively. The lower levels of donations prior to 2016 prove that the general public was not overly concerned for abortion rights or women's healthcare until the election of Donald Trump. Therefore, people started caring heavily about abortion rights when it was most threatened and most discussed in the media.

Understanding why people donate is important so that nonprofits can estimate when they will receive support or how to garner donations. It is also useful for nonprofits to have the ability to predict when they will be getting attention as a "controversial" topic for their work. I believe that nonprofits apart from women's healthcare can find it beneficial to reflect on why people donate at certain points within the political sphere. The same can apply to immigration or

education nonprofits who find themselves frequently in the media. The impact of political events or talk is heavy on national nonprofits.

As shown below, Planned Parenthood’s second biggest monetary support comes from private contributions. Private contributions and donations are some of the biggest flows of income for nonprofits to survive and thrive productively.



This further supports the knowledge that nonprofits need to hold an understanding of what fluctuates donations and overall support. It is vital for nonprofits to hold knowledge over the

trends in support they will receive so that they can plan ahead. This research can benefit nonprofits similar to Planned Parenthood as a tool to reflect on how their monetary positions will shift with political occurrences. Additionally, it is useful for advocates to comprehend their fluctuating effect on civil society. Both advocates and nonprofits can join in affective change if they share a thorough knowledge of their abilities and trends.

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