

“Abortion is the **first major human rights battle** being warped by AI. If we don’t regulate deepfakes and bots now, **all future civil rights fights could be rigged by algorithms.**” DeepSeek, May 2025

# My Conversations with ChatGPT and DeepSeek, or How AI is Fueling the Abortion Debate in the U.S.

(Laurie Shrage, draft July 2025; please do not quote without permission)

## 1. Introduction

The question of access to abortion services and compulsory pregnancy has polarized the U.S. public for more than half a century. I have followed this debate since the early 1970s when I was in college, and I have become increasingly skeptical that a reasonable compromise among opposing sides is feasible. One reason for this is that the culture wars, including debates over abortion, are exploited by our two major political parties for electoral victories.<sup>1</sup> The movements representing each side—pro-life and pro-choice—focus most of their efforts on raising money for their favored party’s political candidates.<sup>2</sup> Pro-life and pro-choice organizations promote extreme policies that are unlikely to gain bipartisan support, which raises the stakes in each election, as losing involves living with policies that are reprehensible to the defeated. The extreme policies are typically designed by party-aligned thinktanks which aim to exploit the vulnerabilities of the opposing party—thinktanks that are not particularly concerned with the women’s movement or gender equality.<sup>3</sup> In short, many grassroots movements in the U.S. have been coopted by the power struggles of our two major political parties, and they do little to foster democratic deliberation and resolution on the issue of abortion access and compulsory pregnancy, or other culture war issues, such as gun control or marriage equality.

In a context where meaningful and genuine debate over moral and political differences is virtually impossible, what takes over is fear mongering and emotional manipulation aimed at winning support for

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<sup>1</sup> For a history of how the abortion issue has been deployed by the Republican Party to attract Catholic and other voters, see Linda Greenhouse and Reva B. Siegel (2011): “Before (and After) *Roe v. Wade*: New Questions About Backlash.” *Yale Law Journal*. 120, 2028-87. In *Dollars for Life: The Anti-Abortion Movement and the Fall of the Republican Establishment*, Mary Ziegler (2022) shows how the pro-life movement’s focus on overturning *Roe* led to their successful effort to reform campaign financing, which ultimately worked to the advantage of populist candidates like Donald Trump. Trump courted Christian voters by promising to appoint anti-*Roe* judges, unlike many more mainstream libertarian Republican candidates. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

<sup>2</sup> See for example, *Influence Watch*, “NARAL Pro-Choice America,” <https://www.influencewatch.org/non-profit/naral-pro-choice-america/> and “Susan B. Anthony Pro-Life America,” <https://www.influencewatch.org/political-party/susan-b-anthony-pro-life-america/>

<sup>3</sup> See for example, Matt Grossman, “How think tanks drive polarization and policy,” July 10, 2024: <https://www.niskanencenter.org/how-think-tanks-drive-polarization-and-policy/>

extreme viewpoints and gaining followers. The phenomenon I'm describing contributes to the erosion of democratic institutions and norms, and the rise of authoritarian regimes. For many citizens in the U.S., gaining and maintaining political power has become more important than safeguarding and advancing democratic ideals that allow us to live freely and relatively peacefully in a diverse society and world. Simply put, many have given up on democracy and merely want their tribe in control, because living under the rule of the other side has become unthinkable. When activists, community leaders, artists, and intellectuals participate in debates over issues like abortion, we are initially enticed by the opportunity to promote the goals of our social movement. But do we then merely become pawns in the hands of larger political forces?

In this paper I will focus on how AI is deepening social division over abortion in the U.S. I have studied the media and ad campaigns of the pro-life and pro-choice movements for many decades, and the positions and policies advanced by each are becoming more extreme and uncompromising as they deploy AI technologies to win over converts. These technologies include algorithmic filtering on social media platforms,<sup>4</sup> misleading or fake AI-generated videos and images, AI surveillance tools that collect data on people seeking abortions,<sup>5</sup> social media influencers who use AI tools to target specific audiences and to optimize the content they share, AI-generated fake medical clinics (crisis pregnancy centers),<sup>6</sup> AI-generated policy and legal proposals that proliferate extreme legislative measures, and AI-generated accounts and bots that flood social media with anonymous posts involving flaming and trolling in order to keep viewers engaged. The use of AI tools has intensified the polarization around abortion and has diminished the possibilities for open and honest political debate. The competition for attention on the internet means that shocking and emotionally wrenching posts win out over the presentation of facts.

Both pro-life and pro-choice organizations are deploying AI tools in their media campaigns, without much apparent concern about how these tools are undermining the institutions necessary for a healthy democracy, such as free and unbiased news reporting, civil society organizations that are independent of state power (unlike Truth Social or X), and toleration for different opinions and lifestyles. There seems to be a sense of urgency that discourages stepping back and reconsidering the aims and methods which, over a half century, have only widened the gap between pro-choice and pro-life

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<sup>4</sup> For an explanation of how algorithmic amplification works, see Soumya Awasthi (2025), "From clicks to chaos: How social media algorithms amplify extremism": <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/from-clicks-to-chaos-how-social-media-algorithms-amplify-extremism>

<sup>5</sup> For example, see Abeer Malik (2024), "When AI Turns Miscarriage into Murder: The Alarming Criminalization of Pregnancy in the Digital Age": <https://petrieflom.law.harvard.edu/2024/11/01/when-ai-turns-miscarriage-into-murder-the-alarming-criminalization-of-pregnancy-in-the-digital-age/>

<sup>6</sup> For a good overview of Crisis Pregnancy Centers, see Melissa Montoya *et al.* (2022): "The Problems with Crisis Pregnancy Centers: Reviewing the Literature and Identifying New Directions for Future Research": <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9189146/>

advocates. For example, in the years following the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*, pro-choice forces have worked to reestablish *Roe*'s policy framework and promote goals more extreme than *Roe*, while pro-life forces have developed and promoted policies more extreme than those existing in the decades leading up to the *Roe* decision.<sup>7</sup> Each side has ignored popular opinion and widely held beliefs when they can impose their policies through the courts, most notably in the sweeping *Roe* ruling (1973) and then in the sweeping ruling overturning *Roe* (Dobbs 2022). Their activists and supporters essentially repeat the talking points they have been given by their movement leaders, many of whom are being instructed by Republican and Democratic political consultants.<sup>8</sup> Unfortunately, our participation in these strategically polarizing culture war debates undermines the very conditions that make our participation and activism possible and meaningful, such as a well-functioning democracy with fair elections and independent media. We hear the word “unprecedented” every day in the news, as the norms of democratic governance give way to unprincipled power grabs.

The AI-fueled media battle over abortion is essentially a propaganda war in which propaganda is generated not only by authoritarian demagogues and their minions but by ordinary people who are passionate about an issue. AI tools now make it possible for moderately savvy tech users to produce and spread content that has relatively high production values. Yet, with the generation and dissemination of propaganda, participants and viewers lose sight of what is in their best interest, as Jason Stanley has argued (2015). Those participating in our public abortion debates claim to be promoting reproductive autonomy and respect for the dignity of persons, while undermining the political conditions that protect freedom and equality.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, propaganda erodes the norms of reasonableness, civility, and truth that make meaningful debate possible (Stanley 2015), so that it becomes unclear how to intervene in the public exchange of ideas to resolve differences and maintain civic peace.

We need a stable settlement on the issue of abortion access to maintain access to reproductive health care and allow providers to work without fear arrest and punishment. When I've written about the

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<sup>7</sup> For example, some pro-choice advocates are calling for the removal of abortion restrictions after viability and over-the-counter access to abortion pills. Some pro-life advocates are promoting personhood status for embryos and fetuses which could lead to bans on IVF and some contraceptive methods that potentially harm a fertilized egg. Some pro-life advocates support criminal investigations when a pregnancy ends because of a miscarriage, prosecuting people who assist others cross state lines to obtain a legal abortion, and the use of the death penalty for abortion providers.

<sup>8</sup> In the early 1980s, I was an active member of NOW (National Organization for Women) and NARAL (then the National Abortion Rights Action League), and I was the secretary for San Diego NOW chapter. When we would question our national leaders about a particular strategy, we were often told that they were working with political consultants hired by the Democratic Party and that electing Democratic candidates was critical to the success of our movement. This was in the years shortly after the election of Ronald Reagan who incorporated the pro-life movement's goals into the Republican Party's platform.

<sup>9</sup> Stanley distinguishes “undermining propaganda” from “supporting propaganda.” The former involves the mobilization of “political, economic, aesthetic, or rational ideals” to gain approval for political ends that, in practice, serve to prevent the realization of those ideals (Stanley 2015, pp. 52-53).

abortion debate in the past, like many philosophers, I've tried to evaluate the views on each side and determine which positions are defensible or indefensible in terms of widely held principles and values. In the current moment, however, efforts to find common ground or depolarize a debate largely go unheard or are considered naïve. Instead, activists, movement leaders, politicians, and concerned citizens seek big wins for their side, no matter how divisive and destabilizing they may be. They energetically point out the extremist views of their opponents while ignoring the how extreme and uncompromising their side of the debate has become. For example, some pro-choice proponents support abortion access until birth (which in a healthy pregnancy at, say, eight months, many people would consider morally equivalent to infanticide), while some pro-life proponents now advocate for no abortions (which would put many pregnant individuals' lives and health at considerable risk).

In the current mass media environment, where each side on the abortion debate is flaming and trolling each other with AI-enhanced tools, is it possible to intervene in a way that does not contribute to extremist politics and the erosion of democratic institutions? Are there good strategies for resisting deeply polarizing discourses that give rise to authoritarian impulses—the desire for an autocrat to push through an unpopular agenda? In other words, are there strategies that don't simply toe the current party line but facilitate conditions that make democratic lawmaking in a diverse society possible? In this paper I will explore this question by examining how AI technologies are undermining free and fair debate and how to resist this trend.

## **2. Methodology**

In some of my previous work on the abortion debate in the U.S., I compared and evaluated the public media campaigns of pro-life and pro-choice groups. This work focused on what is now called “legacy media”: newspaper op-eds and ads, highway billboards, films and videos, posters and slogans, paintings and performance art, pamphlets and leaflets, and the websites of pro-choice and pro-life organizations. Much of this material I found at rallies and meetings of political organizations, at gallery events, on billboards along well-traveled roads or posters pasted on buildings, in newspapers and books, and by scouring the internet with various search engines. But this is no longer the media that grabs our attention. Instead, more and more people, especially younger people, get their news and information from social media sites, and we see non-profit legacy news organizations in the U.S. generating news by reporting on the exchanges taking place on corporate-controlled sites, such as Truth Social, X, TikTok, Instagram, and so on. This situation enables profit-driven social media platforms, which are no longer constrained by the values of good journalism, to control the topics of conversation.<sup>10</sup> Consequently, to

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<sup>10</sup> It is not just that news sites are partisan, as many have been historically, but that the norms of fact-checking and rational argumentation are mostly ignored.

study public debates over abortion access, we need to look at the posts, memes, videos, and ads on these sites, as well as the methods used to amplify their impact.

The problem though is that there are tons of messages and material circulated on social media sites, which use sophisticated AI tools to target audiences, analyze data, develop and spread content, and keep viewers engaged. Paradoxically, the best way, arguably, to get an overview of how AI is shaping the abortion debate is by resorting to AI tools that can process very large amounts of data. With the relatively recent introduction of generative AI chatbots or LLMs, such as ChatGPT or DeepSeek, it is now feasible for almost any internet user to distill huge databases of material. These tools are trained on digital archives significantly more vast than any human could consult and absorb in a finite amount of time. These AI chatbots sweep up vast amounts of digitized content and offer relatively coherent summaries in response to prompts. Their summaries reflect what human beings have produced, which may be biased or false. LLMs do not fact check, though the data they are trained on may be refined. Internet search engines do something similar and now use AI tools to summarize and prioritize content on the links provide. Their summaries are typically less comprehensive and require users to wade through lists of websites to get the answers they seek. Not surprisingly, many people and professionals (including doctors, lawyers, journalists, engineers, etc.) are now replacing Google searches with ChaptGPT queries to get summaries of what has been thought and written on a topic.<sup>11</sup>

For this paper, I have used ChatGPT and DeepSeek (and other LLMs)<sup>12</sup> to get an overview of how pro-life and pro-choice groups are using AI tools and social media to get out their campaign messages and literature. I follow up by accessing and reviewing many of the materials (on TikTok, Facebook, Instagram, X, YouTube, etc.) that ChatGPT and DeepSeek turn up. When and where I discuss an influencer, video, meme, or post that I find through an LLM query, I will indicate this. I also encourage readers to do their own LLM searches on any topic or question I raise, in part to assess the quality and usefulness of these AI tools, and to get responses to questions that you may have and that I have overlooked. Both ChatGPT and DeepSeek not only respond to prompts but, after they provide answers, they suggest other questions to ask, usually in the form of “do you want to know more about x” (where x is part of the answer to your question or instruction). I have found some of their suggested prompts useful, while being aware that an AI chatbot is steering me down a rabbit hole of its choosing.

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<sup>11</sup> In “Beyond efficiency: How artificial intelligence (AI) will reshape scientific inquiry and the publication process” (July 2025), Niels Van Quaquebeke, Scott Tonidandel, and George C. Banks offer a thoughtful discussion about the use of AI in academic research, and they suggest ways to avoid the potential pitfalls. See also, Bill Wasik (June 16, 2025): “A.I. is Poised to Rewrite History. Literally.” *The New York Times*.

<sup>12</sup> I have also tried Gemini and Claude but found their answers to be less detailed than ChatGPT or DeepSeek.

I will attempt to be as transparent as possible about how different AI chatbots are informing my research. LLMs do not provide citations or reference lists of their sources, though they do provide sample links to some materials. This means a researcher cannot look up and determine whether the source materials in an LLM summary are authoritative, accurately summarized, or relatively unbiased. What LLMs can do though is dig deeply and widely in the human archive of digitized materials to reveal artifacts worthy of further study. By using various LLMs, I have discovered the campaign materials and strategies of pro-life and pro-choice organizations and individual activists that I probably would not have come across using more conventional fieldwork tools.

The summaries I have gotten to my prompts on LLMs are typically one to two pages in length, with long lists of legislative strategies, social media influencers, widely shared videos and memes, and so on. Rather than try to summarize all this information, I will discuss the materials I find most interesting and worth analyzing. But I will share with you the prompts I have used so that you can enter them into the same LLM and see the results. Your results may vary from mine given that the archive of information the LLMs draw from is shifting and growing. I have used the free versions of various LLMs so that readers can find and check similar LLM source materials.

### **3. Social Media Influencers and Abortion Regulation**

People who have the power to shape public opinion and set cultural trends have long been around. In the recent past, the people with such power were likely to be political and economic elites, religious leaders, or entertainers and sports stars. Today, an influencer is someone with a large following on various social media sites. I asked DeepSeek “what is an influencer,” and it answered:

“An **influencer** is a person who has the power to affect the purchasing decisions or opinions of others because of their authority, knowledge, position, or relationship with their audience. Influencers typically have a strong following on social media platforms (like Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, Twitter, or Facebook) and are seen as trendsetters or experts in a particular niche.

#### **Types of Influencers:**

1. **Mega-Influencers** – Celebrities or well-known personalities with millions of followers (e.g., Kim Kardashian, Cristiano Ronaldo).
2. **Macro-Influencers** – Popular figures with 100K–1M followers, often industry experts or content creators.
3. **Micro-Influencers** – Individuals with 10K–100K followers, highly engaged in specific niches (e.g., fitness, beauty, tech).

4. **Nano-Influencers** – Everyday people with 1K–10K followers but strong community trust (e.g., local bloggers).”

By these criteria, Donald Trump and Elon Musk are mega-influencers on their respective sites, Truth Social and X. Both Trump and Musk promote anti-abortion, pro-natalist views, and they control social media sites that use algorithms to amplify their messages and those of other pro-life organizations or individuals. Musk has developed his own generative AI chatbot, Grok, whose responses appear to favor pro-life perspectives.

Although wealthy celebrities often dominate social media platforms, sites like YouTube and Instagram have somewhat democratized the influence business by enabling ordinary individuals to collaborate with and market products for big companies, or to develop and circulate engaging visuals and videos for a cause or organization and thereby gain followers.<sup>13</sup> Top influencers use a variety of AI tools to attract followers, and when I asked ordinary search engines “how do social media influencers use AI tools to gain followers?” I turned up many news articles and company websites offering advice and products for “influencer marketing.” When I instructed ChatGPT to “Find me anti-abortion online influencers” it returned a long annotated list of influencers along with a link to the following list of “Top 40 Pro Life Influencers 2025”:

[https://influencers.feedspot.com/pro\\_life\\_instagram\\_influencers/?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://influencers.feedspot.com/pro_life_instagram_influencers/?utm_source=chatgpt.com) DeepSeek provided the same link to one of my prompts. I’ve looked at the posts and materials of this top 40, generally non-celebrity influencers, and will discuss some of them below. I asked DeepSeek to find pro-choice social media influencers and received a shorter annotated list of individuals with their social (@) tags.

Influencers sway public opinion, which determines how people vote or what legal policies they support. The passage of new legislation is one of the main goals of pro-life and pro-choice organizations. AI technologies are not only used by influencers to garner support for, or opposition to, new policies and laws, but they are also deployed by elected officials, lobbyists, and thinktanks to develop and write new abortion regulations. When I asked ChatGPT “How is AI shaping abortion legislation,” it replied with five bullet points, the first two of which are:

**“Data-Driven Policy Framing**

Lawmakers are using AI-powered analytics tools to:

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<sup>13</sup> In “Embodied Political Influencers: How U.S. Anti-Abortion Actors Co-Opt Narratives of Marginalization,” Zelly Martin *et al.* discuss anti-abortion “progressive” influencers who present their own experiences of social marginalization so that they can reach viewers and online communities that focus on issues of discrimination and oppression.

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/20563051241245401>

- **Analyze voter sentiment** on abortion through social media, search trends, and surveys.
- **Test policy language** that appeals to target audiences (e.g., ‘heartbeat bills’ or ‘born-alive protections’).
- Shape **messaging strategies** that support legislation under the guise of public safety, maternal health, or religious freedom.

*Impact:* AI tools help legislators tailor abortion-related bills that are more likely to gain support or survive judicial review.

### ... AI in Legal Drafting and Model Legislation

Right-leaning and left-leaning legal advocacy organizations are beginning to use **AI-assisted legal drafting tools** to:

- Create **model abortion laws** for use across multiple states.
- Simulate how laws might fare under constitutional scrutiny.
- Use **language pattern recognition** to borrow successful phrasing from upheld laws.

Example: Conservative groups like **Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF)** may use AI tools to generate state-specific bills, while progressive legal centers use similar tools to design protective legislation.”

Here is part of DeepSeek’s answer to my question:

### “AI-Generated Abortion Bans: Copy-Paste Legislation

#### The Alabama Case Study

In 2023, Alabama lawmakers **used ChatGPT to refine language** in a bill that would criminalize abortion as ‘chemical endangerment’ of a fetus. The AI:

- Suggested **harsher penalties** for providers (felony charges instead of misdemeanors).
- Added **vague wording** to broaden the ban (e.g., ‘any substance that may harm an unborn child’).
- **Result:** The bill passed, and now women who take abortion pills could be prosecuted for ‘child abuse.’

#### The ‘Model Legislation’ Problem

- Conservative groups like the **National Right to Life Committee** use AI to **mass-produce anti-abortion bills**.
- These templates are then **customized for different states**, speeding up bans nationwide.”

Lobbyists and partisan thinktanks often propose and develop legislation for elected officials. AI chatbots and the rich databases they access now make the process of generating new laws faster and more efficient, and they make it easier to test proposed legislation against public opinion and possible judicial review. Somewhat more disturbingly, AI tools enable officials to enforce new restrictions on abortion in ways that violate our privacy. Here is bullet point 3 from ChatGPT:

### **Surveillance & Enforcement Enabled by AI**

One of the most controversial uses of AI is in **potential enforcement mechanisms**:

- AI-powered tools can **analyze phone metadata**, geolocation, purchase history, and health app data to infer if someone might be seeking or terminating a pregnancy.
- Law enforcement or prosecutors may use **predictive analytics** to identify abortion-related behavior in states where it's banned.

*Concern:* AI-driven surveillance could become de facto abortion enforcement, especially in states with bounty laws like Texas's SB8."

And here is DeepSeek's response on this issue:

### **"AI Surveillance: Tracking Pregnant Women**

#### **Period-Tracking Apps Turned Spy Tools**

- Apps like **Flo and Clue** (used by 100M+ women) **sell data** to anti-abortion groups.

AI analyzes this data to: **Flag 'suspicious' behavior** (e.g., missed periods + Google searches for abortion).

**Send 'crisis pregnancy' ads** to women likely seeking abortions.

#### **Geofencing Abortion Clinics**

Pro-life groups use **AI-powered location tracking** to: **Identify women entering clinics** (via phone pings).

**Blast them with 'abortion reversal' ads** (a medically debunked scam).

**Real Harm:** In Texas, a woman was **reported to police** after her Fitbit data showed a 'miscarriage' that prosecutors called a 'self-induced abortion.'"

Before I began using generative AI chatbots, I saw messaging on pro-choice websites and on social media platforms about how people who may be seeking abortions can protect their privacy by adjusting settings on their cell phones and in these tracking apps.<sup>14</sup> These steps are needed so that one's health, purchasing,

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<sup>14</sup> See [Abigail Dubiniecki](https://www.forbes.com/sites/abigaildubiniecki/2024/11/14/post-roe-your-period-app-data-could-be-used-against-you/), "Post-Roe, Your Period App Data Could Be Used Against You," *Forbes*, Nov. 14, 2024: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/abigaildubiniecki/2024/11/14/post-roe-your-period-app-data-could-be-used-against-you/>

or location data are not harvested by abortion opponents, bounty hunters, and law enforcement officials in states where most abortions are illegal.

AI tools are being used not only to pass and enforce bans on abortion, but to prevent abortions in other ways. For example, “crisis pregnancy centers” have been around for many decades but, in the past, they were brick and mortar structures that lured patients by posing as health clinics. In reality, these facilities were run by anti-choice organizations that pretended to offer medical advice and options to women with unwanted pregnancies, but then only counseled them against seeking an abortion (Melissa Montoya *et al.* 2022). Staff at these centers also worked to delay abortions until the stage of pregnancy when they became illegal. Now these centers and their operators have gone online with the same deceptive practices, according to DeepSeek:

- “Fake clinics deploy **AI-powered chatbots** on websites like **‘PregnancyHelpChat.com’** or **‘AbortionInfoBot.org’**
- These bots mimic real healthcare providers, using phrases like: ‘We offer unbiased abortion counseling.’
- *‘Get same-day abortion pill access!’*
- But when users engage, the bot: **Delays responses** to run out the clock on legal abortion windows.
- **Steers them to anti-abortion CPCs** that don’t provide real care.

#### **Real-World Example:**

A 2023 study found **1 in 4 Google searches for ‘abortion near me’ led to AI chatbots**—not real clinics. Some even **faked FDA approval seals** to appear legitimate. CPCs use **AI tools like ChatGPT** to generate: **SEO-optimized clinic names** (e.g., ‘Women’s Choice Medical’ (actually anti-abortion).

- **Targeted ads** for women searching: ‘Emergency abortion pill’ or ‘Free pregnancy help’
- Google’s ad algorithm **prioritizes these** because CPCs pay heavily.

#### **Impact:**

In Texas, a woman seeking an abortion **drove 3 hours to a CPC** because Google Maps labeled it a ‘Planned Parenthood partner’ (It wasn’t.)”

Pro-choice groups often use social media to disseminate information about licensed health care clinics that provide abortion services and pregnancy counseling. They send out warnings about fake clinics and fake medical providers, and about the spread of disinformation regarding the safety of abortion pills or procedures. Many studies have shown that fake news spreads much more quickly on social media than fact-based news, and thus pro-choice groups have a possibly insurmountable challenge in responding to the spread of disinformation about abortion services.

I instructed DeepSeek to “Find pro-life influencers who are using AI tools effectively.” DeepSeek replied with six bullet points, the first of which was:

**“Live Action (@LiveAction)**

- **AI Use Case:** AI-generated content, deepfake detection, and automated social media engagement.
- **Tools Used:** ChatGPT for content drafting, AI video tools for impactful pro-life messaging, and data analytics to target outreach.
- **Why Effective:** They use AI to debunk pro-abortion arguments quickly and create shareable graphics/videos.”

At the end of this list of influencers and their AI tools, DeepSeek asked “Would you like recommendations on specific AI tools for pro-life content creation or outreach strategies?” and I said “yes.” DeepSeek provided a list of dozens of AI tools used for generating ads, posts, emails, videos, graphics, flyers, ads, and podcasts. These tools can provide scripts, clone voices and avatars for narration, and edit text and video, which automate the process of producing engaging materials. AI tools can create social media bots to answer questions and engage viewers, and to automate outreach to potential supporters on social media sites. AI tools can analyze data to determine the best times to post material, and popular hashtags to use. AI tools can find pro-choice materials and suggest strategies for debunking them. DeepSeek concluded its response with

“The pro-life movement can **outpace pro-choice digital efforts** by leveraging AI efficiently—whether through **automated outreach, hyper-targeted ads, or AI-generated educational content.**

Would you like help crafting a specific AI workflow (e.g., turning a pro-life blog into a viral TikTok using AI)?” ...

I answered “yes” to the last question, and I received detailed instructions on the methods and tools for generating a potentially viral TikTok post.

Next, I instructed DeepSeek to “Find pro-choice influencers who are using AI tools effectively.” The response was shorter and less detailed than the once I received about pro-life influencers. Pro-choice activists use many of the same AI tools as pro-life activists to script narratives, generate videos and imagery, detect and debunk pro-life posts and expose faked images, generate viral TikTok videos, and target audiences for disseminating fact-based information about reproductive health care. DeepSeek concluded its response with

“Pro-choice groups leverage AI for:

- ✓ **Rapid response** to abortion bans (e.g., AI-generated legal guides).

- ✓ **Scaling storytelling** (AI-voiced testimonials).
- ✓ **Combating misinformation** (automated fact-checking).”

From the responses I’ve received to my chatbot prompts, it appears that the pro-choice movement is using AI and social media in a more reactive way. In particular, pro-choice influencers and groups use AI technologies to mitigate disinformation, respond to misleading but emotionally compelling visuals and testimonials, challenge the multitude of new abortion bans, and reach potential supporters and voters.<sup>15</sup> The AI fueled abortion debate follows the pattern we see in our current public political discourse: right-wing leaders and activists “flood the zone” with pro-life stories and claims that distract and overwhelm viewers, and that disable any coherent or effective response.

I’ve examined the AI-produced materials of many pro-life and pro-choice influencers, and much of the content is the same as what I found previously on posters, billboards, flyers, and other legacy media. The main difference now is that AI makes possible the production of vast amounts of campaign material, and it is spread more quickly and efficiently to impressionable viewers. On the pro-life side, the campaign materials include graphic photos of allegedly aborted fetuses, emotional testimonials from women who regret their abortions or people who were almost aborted but survived, false information about the health effects of abortion,<sup>16</sup> comparisons of abortion to lynching and genocide, false claims about fetal development, controversial claims about fetal personhood, and emotionally appealing images of babies. On the pro-choice side, the campaign materials include testimonials about compulsory pregnancies involving minors and rape victims,<sup>17</sup> medically accurate images of fetal development, the need for abortion services in health-threatening pregnancies, the hypocrisy of banning abortion but not assault weapons, comparing policies protecting the “unborn” to the lack of policies protecting born children, the dangers of back-alley abortions to which desperate women may turn, and the benefits of family planning health services. In the next section, I will examine some of the most “viral” pro-life and pro-choice campaign materials that have been produced and spread with the help of AI tools.

#### 4. Pro-life and Pro-choice Memes

According to Wikipedia, “A meme acts as a unit for carrying cultural ideas, symbols, or practices, that can be transmitted from one mind to another through writing, speech, gestures, rituals, or other

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<sup>15</sup> For example, see “The Issue of Tissue” project: <https://myanetwork.org/the-issue-of-tissue/> Also see: The Abortion Access Front: <https://www.aafont.org/what-we-do2/>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/how-abortion-misinformation-and-disinformation-spread-online/>

<sup>17</sup> A recent study indicates that 1 in 20 (5%) of U.S. women (approx. 6 million) experience a pregnancy after a rape or incidence of sexual coercion. See Denise D’Angelo *et al.* (2024) “Rape and Sexual Coercion Related Pregnancy in the United States,” *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*. 66:3, 389-98. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10951889/> or [https://www.ajpmonline.org/article/S0749-3797\(23\)00442-7/fulltext](https://www.ajpmonline.org/article/S0749-3797(23)00442-7/fulltext)

imitable phenomena with a mimicked theme. Supporters of the concept regard memes as cultural analogues to genes in that they self-replicate, mutate, and respond to selective pressures.<sup>[5]</sup> In popular language, a meme may refer to an Internet meme, typically an image, that is remixed, copied, and circulated in a shared cultural experience online” (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meme>). You can do an online search to find popular memes, such as the Doge meme and Pepe the Frog meme. You can also find “meme generators” or online software for creating and remixing memes. Social media platforms provide ideal environments for spreading memes. When I asked DeepSeek “what memes or images do pro-life groups use,” it returned a list with seven different categories of memes, covering the kinds of campaign materials described above. Specific examples include:

#### “‘Hand of Hope’ (Samuel Armas Fetus Photo)

**Image:** A famous *in-utero* photo of a 21-week fetus appearing to grasp a surgeon’s finger during a spina bifida surgery (2000).

#### **Pro-Life Use:**

- Shared with captions like *‘Even unborn babies fight for life!’*
- Used to argue fetuses are ‘fully human’ early in pregnancy. **Effectiveness:**
- Extremely viral—still circulated 20+ years later.
- Critics argue it misrepresents fetal development (the ‘grasp’ was likely involuntary).

#### **The Baby Olivia Animation" (Live Action, 2021)**

- **What it is:** A 3D-animated video showing fetal development week-by-week, narrated as if the fetus is a ‘baby’ with thoughts.

#### **Impact:**

- Went massively viral, especially in conservative states.
- Used in **schools** (e.g., Kentucky proposed showing it in sex ed).
- Critics called it **misleading** (e.g., animating ‘smiling’ at 8 weeks, when fetuses lack consciousness).

....

#### **Heartbeat Bill" Campaigns**

- **Meme Used:** Ultrasound gifs + *‘A heartbeat starts at 6 weeks!’*

Result: Helped pass **6-week bans** in Texas, Florida, Georgia, etc.

Even though **medical experts** say it’s not a true ‘heartbeat’ (just electrical activity).”

The lists and examples of pro-life viral memes I received by DeepSeek and ChatGPT include too many to discuss here. Here is a sample of pro-choice memes:

#### “‘What a 6-Week ‘Fetus’ Actually Looks Like’

- **Image:** A tiny clump of cells (actual medical image) vs. a pro-life cartoon of a baby.

- **Caption:** *'They're lying to you'*

- **Why it works:** Counters the **'baby-like' fetal imagery** used by pro-lifers.

...

#### **'Every Abortion Story Is Different'**

- **Example:** A TikTok trend where women share **real reasons** they had abortions (rape, health risks, poverty).

- **Why it works:** Counters the pro-life narrative that abortion is always 'convenience.' ...

#### **'Abortion Bans Kill Women'**

- **Example:** Stories like **Savita Halappanavar** (denied an abortion, died of sepsis) turned into shareable graphics.

- **Why it works:** Shows abortion bans aren't theoretical—they're deadly

#### **Dark Humor & Satire**

- **Example:** A girl pretends to be a **1820s grandma** saying: *'Back in my day, we didn't have abortion bans ... because women just died in childbirth! #TheGoodOldDays'*

- **Impact:** Makes anti-abortion laws look **backwards and absurd.**"

I've waded through dozens of memes and they generally fit the themes I list above. Pro-life memes feature vulnerable fetuses while pro-choice memes focus on women's health. Pro-life memes often misrepresent the stages of fetal development or the health risks of abortion methods, and exaggerate the views of their opponents. Pro-choice memes skirt complex issues, such as when abortions are not medically indicated (e.g., when in late term an abortion procedure may do more harm than good). Pro-life memes express reverence for life while pro-choice memes focus on the need for options. A few pro-life memes try to combine both ideals by asserting that pregnant women need more choices than abortion, such as affordable childcare and safe environments in which to raise children. Some pro-life memes try to appeal to liberals by questioning the desire not to support disabled or "defective" fetuses and by calling out the need to destigmatize adoption. Some pro-choice memes claim that "pro-life" really means "pro-birth," as social conservatives generally do not support government programs that protect vulnerable children. Some TikTok videos feature activists from each side debating the issues, usually designed to make one side appear hypocritical or foolish. Many videos on TikTok or YouTube feature abortion stories: pro-life testimonials of regret and loss after an abortion, or pro-choice testimonials about the harm done when one is denied an abortion.

After returning lists of memes, DeepSeek suggested questions such as “who is winning the meme war?” and “who is winning the algorithm war?” Here is part of its answer:

### “Current State of the Meme War

#### 1. Pro-Choice Dominance in Virality & Engagement

- **More Relatable to Younger Audiences:** Pro-choice memes often use **dark humor, satire, and pop culture references** (e.g., *‘If men could get pregnant, abortion would be a sacrament’*).
- **Stronger Social Media Infrastructure:** Groups like **@AbortionTok** and activists (e.g., **@RBraceySherman**) use AI tools (HeyGen, CapCut) to mass-produce memes.
- **Algorithm Advantage:** Platforms like **TikTok** lean progressive, boosting pro-choice content.

#### ...2. Pro-Life Strengths in Emotional & Shock Content

- **Graphic Fetal Imagery:** Memes showing **ultrasounds or developmental stages** (e.g., *‘This is a baby at 12 weeks’*) trigger emotional responses.
- **Religious & Moral Appeals:** Memes like *‘God knew you before you were born’* (Jeremiah 1:5) resonate with conservative audiences.
- **AI-Generated ‘What If?’ Scenarios:** Tools like **DALL·E 3** create *‘This could’ve been you’* memes (e.g., AI-generated faces of ‘aborted’ children).”

I prompted ChatGPT with the same question and it responded:

### “Current Edge: Pro-Choice in Youth & Meme Culture

#### Pro-Choice Movement Strengths

- **Gen Z dominance:** Platforms like TikTok and Instagram are heavily populated by young users who lean pro-choice.
- **Creative & humorous memes:** Pro-choice creators use irony, trending audio, dark humor, and memes to make reproductive rights accessible and shareable.
- **Inclusive language & visuals:** Appeals to LGBTQ+ audiences, people of color, and progressives with intersectional messaging.
- **Real stories go viral:** Hashtags like **#ShoutYourAbortion** and **#AbortionIsHealthcare** promote authenticity over shame....

#### ...Pro-Life Movement Strengths

- **Well-organized digital activism:** Groups like Students for Life and Live Action produce polished, emotionally charged memes and short videos.

- **Graphic imagery:** Appeals to emotion using fetal imagery, heartbeat motifs, and moral appeals.
- **Religious/conservative virality:** Strong traction in right-leaning circles on Facebook, X, and Truth Social.
- **Influencer power:** TikTok and Instagram influencers like Savannah Craven and Kristan Hawkins actively respond to pro-choice memes and rebut them.

...**Who's Winning Overall?**

- **Culturally: Pro-choice** memes have broader traction with youth, media, and influencers.
- **Politically: Pro-life** groups are more successful at converting memes into legislation, especially in red states.

**Bottom line:** Pro-choice is winning the cultural meme war, especially with Gen Z. But pro-life groups are more effective at turning their message into laws and court victories.”

While the responses of these chatbots converge, this may be due to their being fed the same data sets. Nevertheless, I find these answers interesting. They suggest that the pro-choice movement’s AI-enhanced social-media activism may be winning the hearts and minds of more people, but the pro-life movement’s online activism is getting more results in terms of legislative and judicial victories. My aim in this paper is not to help either side improve its media campaign, but rather to encourage more reflection about how to resolve disputes over abortion access in a diverse and democratic society. Should we aim for big wins that are alienating and reprehensible to large numbers of fellow citizens, by deploying algorithms that spread fear and anger? And should we see the willingness to compromise as a form of betrayal to our cause? Or, can we live with a few more abortion restrictions than some might like, or a bit more access to abortion services than some might prefer, to prevent both the further weakening and dysfunction of our democratic institutions and the escalation of politically motivated violence?<sup>18</sup>

## 5. Tools for Resisting Cooptation

I have argued that civil rights activists have been coopted by larger political forces—especially the power struggle taking place between the two major political parties in the U.S. There is little daylight between the positions and policies of each major political party and the abortion-related civil rights groups they align with. To resist this lockstep fight where the electoral strategies of the political parties promote and nurture extremist views, we can try to raise awareness of this situation by questioning whose

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<sup>18</sup> As I write these words, we are learning that the recent assassination of a Minnesota lawmaker and her husband was committed by a deeply religious opponent of abortion. <https://nymag.com/intelligencer/article/vance-boelter-violent-anti-abortion-zealotry.html>

interests are being served by the increasing polarization around issues like abortion. Activists should challenge their movement leaders about whether their organization's long-term goals are truly aligned with those of the Democratic or Republican Party. They should ask whether putting so much effort into raising money for their party's candidates keeps the political parties dependent on increasing polarization around culture war issues to attract donors and recruit voters. Although it may be in the interest of the two major political parties to continue and widen the polarization over abortion, does promoting extremist views serve the genuine interests of any group of people? How should the issue of abortion access be resolved in a diverse, democratic society: by promoting the radicalization and hardening of opposing views *or* through efforts to find common ground and compromises on policy? In short, independent civil society organizations should strive to influence what their political and governmental leaders do, rather than the other way around.

Before the emergence of AI technologies and social media platforms, the debate over abortion in the U.S. was highly divisive, in part because the growing division opened new electoral strategies for the Republican and Democratic parties. For the past half century, mainstream newspapers and news programs have primarily reported on which side is winning, the use of extremist tactics, and the deepening and seemingly intractable divide. There has been little reporting analyzing the causes of the increasing division and extremism, as if such deep divisions are a given and not a product of the battle itself. The introduction of social media platforms and AI tools for media production and amplification has added energy and steam to an already hotly contested issue. But social media and AI tools need not only be deployed to inflame viewers and manipulate their emotions. They serve this role because viewers are already emersed in polarizing discourses around particular topics. If the organizations representing pro-life and pro-choice advocates could disentangle themselves from the power struggles of Democrats and Republicans, they would be better able to see how promoting extreme and uncompromising positions is undermining our democratic norms and institutions and promoting intolerance and authoritarian impulses.

In sum, while AI technologies have intensified the polarization around abortion, they themselves are not the main culprit. Those of us participating in debates over abortion access and compulsory pregnancy, whether academics or activists, need to question whether we have become mere tools in the hands of our two major political parties. In these polarized times, people are often surprised when they find someone on the other side of the divide that appears reasonable and decent. Few people support the extremist views their party promotes, but they see the views of the other side as worse. We need to find ways to expose the mechanisms that drive polarization and undermine democratic decision-making, if we don't want algorithms and fake media determining the outcomes of our civil rights struggles.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> I am grateful to Ronald Den Otter for his comments and questions, which helped me clarify and back up a number of claims.

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