

Framing the Eighth:

A Content Analysis of *Irish Times* and *Irish Independent* Coverage of the Eighth Amendment's Passage and Repeal Campaigns

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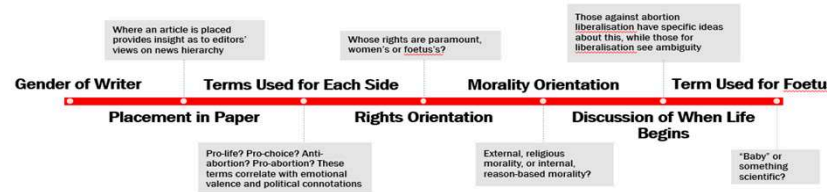
INTRODUCTION

In the space of a single generation, the people of the Republic of Ireland passed and repealed a constitutional ban on abortion (the Eighth Amendment) by popular referendum. This research assesses the national story (Smyth 2005) told about the 1983 and 2018 abortion referendums based on coverage in the country's two largest daily newspapers, *The Irish Independent* and *The Irish Times*. Using content analysis based on Swenson's (1990) multi-dimensional codes for assessing abortion coverage in US media, framing of the coverage was analysed from each year and in each paper to discern that a national consensus was pushed by the national press in both years.

METHODOLOGY

- This research consists of a **content analysis** of 593 articles that ran in the *Irish Times (IT)* and *Irish Independent (II)* coverage in the week leading up to and the week following the 1983 and 2018 abortion referendums.
- This content analysis aims to assess how the coverage differed according to newspaper and according to year, both **quantitatively** (in terms of the amount of coverage) and **qualitatively** (in terms of the language used, sources cited, and thematic focus of the coverage).

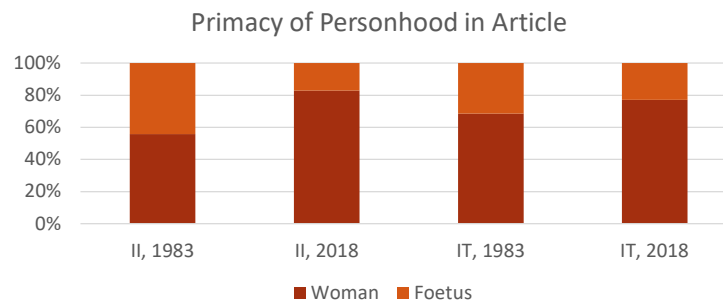
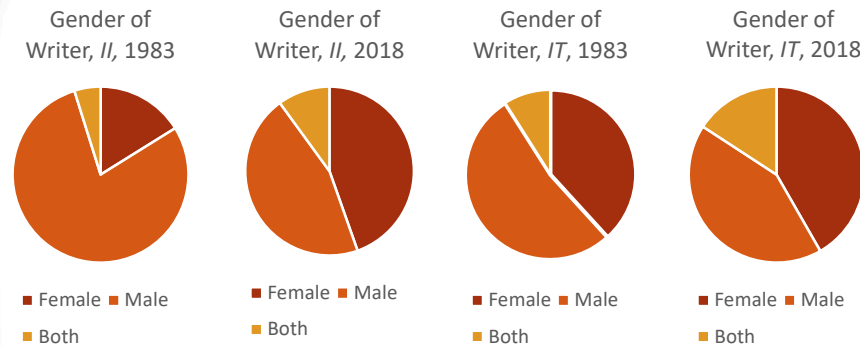
SWENSON'S (1990) CODES FOR FRAMING



ANALYSIS

- The national press's framing of the Eighth Amendment **did not change** in its stance against the amendment during the 1983 and 2018 campaigns, even as it presented **different arguments against it**.
- This aligns with **framing theory**, in that the national press reflected the opinion of media elite, not necessarily popular opinion.
- Changes in Irish political landscape and the wider media environment (digital revolution, more women writers) reflected in coverage across both referendums.
- 1983 national "commonsense":** The amendment is bad because it is sectarian, its wording unclear, only zealots will support it.
- 2018 national "commonsense":** The amendment is bad because it has harmed women; Ireland is now more global, and Repeal will be good for women and for Ireland.

SAMPLE OF RESULTS



RECOMMENDATIONS

Provincial and regional presses, which Hesketh (1990) included in his work, would likely show framing and rhetoric that hew more closely to popular opinion as reflected in exit polls.

REFERENCES

Please scan QR code for full reference list and tables outlining complete results.

