Framing Innovation & Persistence

The graphs here provide a visualization of counts of words and phrases associated with particular legal frames utilized in Supreme Court abortion cases in which the undue-burden legal-framing contest occurred. The series of legal cases are listed chronologically on the horizontal axes of the graphs below and the framing counts are indicated on the vertical axes.

The graphs immediately below illustrate both an innovation and persistence in the legal-framing contest. In the graph on the left, you can see that the language associated with a particular frame was effectively not utilized until about midway through the (horizontal) list of legal cases. Then at the midpoint in the list of cases, the framing language begins to show up in the legal cases. That is, the bars become substantially higher in the graph. This indicates a new, innovative legal frame being introduced at this juncture in the legal debate.

The graph on the right (just above) shows a legal frame that is used fairly routinely across the set of legal cases. Unlike the graph on the left, the graph on the right indicates a legal frame that persisted across legal cases in the framing contest.

Overall, then, the two graphs, with their computerized text analysis results, illustrate a framing innovation and frame persistence.

Dialogic & Monologic Framing

The next two sets of graphs illustrate dialogic and monologic framing, the second structural feature in the framing contest.

In the two graphs below, you can see an example of dialogic framing. Dialogic framing occurs when both sides in the debate engage in a discursive struggle over an ideational element, with actors on both sides attempting to infuse their preferred meaning into the particular concept or frame. In the graph on the left, you can see the reproductive-rights side’s framing of the particular concept or frame and, on the right, the antiabortion side’s framing of the very same concept or frame. The two sides engage in this framing at pretty much the same time in the legal debate, and thus the graphs suggest a dialogic framing struggle over the particular discursive element.

Conclusion

Using computerized text analysis, I identify recurring structural aspects in the undue-burden legal-framing debate unfolding across a series of pivotal Supreme Court cases. While this investigation examines a dispute in a legal context, these structural features may occur in other framing contests, in individual-level, less formal disputes or in other advocacy-based disputes in other institutional settings.

Suggested Readings


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