

# What is Public Square Outreach?

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Pro-Life Waco

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## Introduction

Pro-Life in the Public Square is a new organization dedicated to strengthening the “Public Square Outreach” branch of the pro-life movement. (I will use the abbreviations PLPS and PSO). PSO includes all initiatives that influence a community BROADLY. Holding signs on a pedestrian overpass over a busy highway is clearly Public Square Outreach. A pregnancy care fundraising banquet is only marginally PSO. Both events are important for the pro-life cause. However, the former engages and penetrates the public square more broadly. The banquet mostly engages the pro-life faithful. Public Square Outreach reaches a broad spectrum of a community, not just pro-life supporters or opponents.

The pro-life movement currently does not have adequate engagement of the entire spectrum of public sentiment, particularly the mushy middle. This must change to recover from significant setbacks since the Dobbs Supreme Court decision.

## What Public Square Outreach is Not

Before getting deeper into what Public Square Outreach is, let's consider what PLPS is not. At the local level, pro-life activity may be categorized as

- politics
- sidewalk counseling
- pregnancy support and abortion recovery
- prayer vigils
- church involvement
- Public Square Outreach

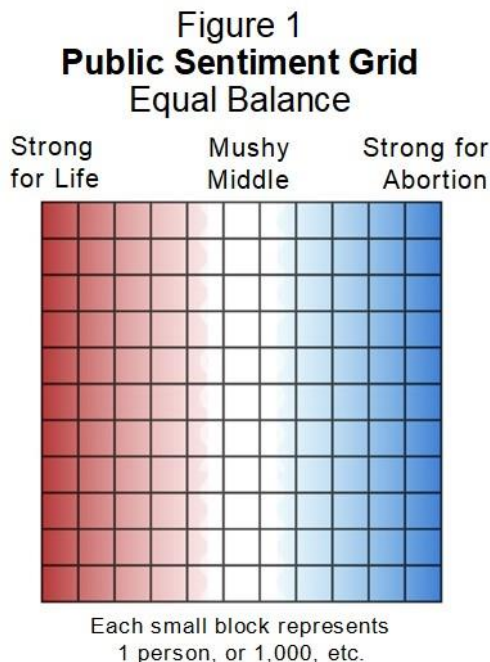
In my view, in this century, the first four branches have experienced substantial growth and resources devoted. However, the last two have languished.

(Regarding church involvement, see Eric Metaxas, [Letter to the American Church](#).) The mission of the PLPS website is to strengthen Public Square Outreach ASAP.

## PSO and the Public Sentiment Grid

The grid shown in Figure 1 makes the central point regarding Pro-Life Outreach. The grid represents the population of a community, state, or nation. Each small square can represent one person, 100, 1,000, or more depending on population size. Three groups are depicted along a horizontal spectrum or continuum. Pro-life neighbors or citizens of the community are shown in red. The red rectangles show greater pro-life intensity. Conversely, the dark blue squares represent abortion supporters. The largest group is the "mushy middle". These are the squares that are white, light red, and light blue. The challenge for PLPS is to effectively penetrate the entire grid to shift the voters in the

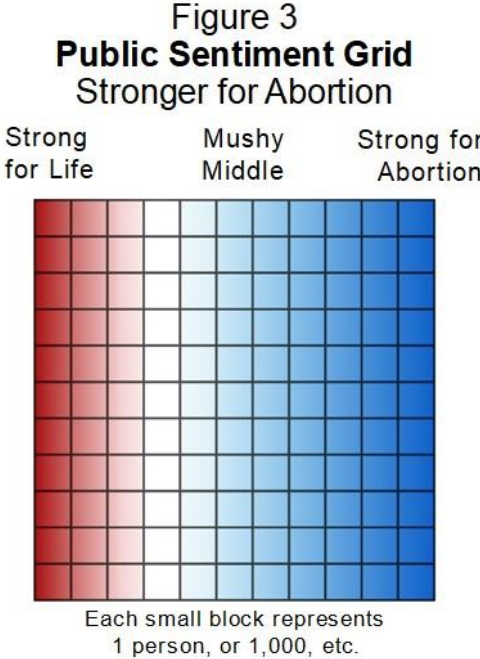
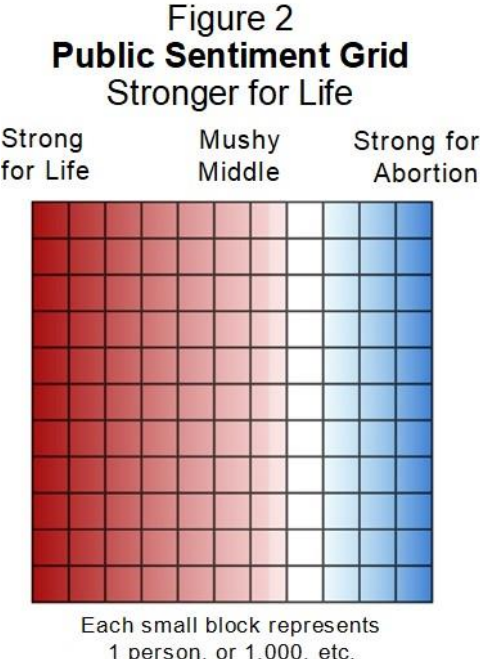
pro-life direction.



## Shifting a Public Sentiment Grid

The distribution from red to blue is not fixed over time for any particular population. Figure 2 depicts a more strongly pro-life population. Figure 3 depicts a highly pro-abortion population. These graphics present two important points. (1) For populations in different cities, states, or regions, the ranges may well be different. Cities in Mississippi would show a larger area of red, as in Figure 2. California cities would show a larger area of blue.

(2) Regardless of current ranges in the grid, the challenge for the pro-life movement is to *change hearts and minds* to shift the grid in a red direction. Of course, abortion supporters strive to make the grid bluer.



Shifting the distribution of our fellow citizens toward the pro-life perspective is central to the ongoing battle. In order to move our community in the red direction, we must find *and follow through* on ways to engage the mushy middle. “Preaching and teaching to the pro-life choir may be comfortable and enjoyable. However, the harvest of partial or full conversions will be limited. However, this will not yield an adequate harvest of partial and full conversions to the pro-life side. I am not proposing a weakening of other branches. The Pro-Life in the Public Square organization will work to build a stronger Public Square Outreach branch.

**Pro-Life Waco: The Foundation of PLPS**

The new Pro-Life in the Public Square organization is an outgrowth of Pro-Life Waco, which began soon after Planned Parenthood Waco commenced baby killing in 1994. Our trajectory toward Public Square Outreach began with the annual one-day sex education conference for Waco youths named “Nobody’s Fool”. The annual event was the proud creation of Planned Parenthood Waco. Leading up to the event, our challenge included yard signs, billboards, newspaper editorials, and radio ads. On the event day, dozens of pro-lifers protested at the Waco Convention Center site. This included persuading parents to reverse course with their children. From its top level of 700 children attending, Nobody’s Fool declined to less than 100. Planned Parenthood aborted the program in 2013.

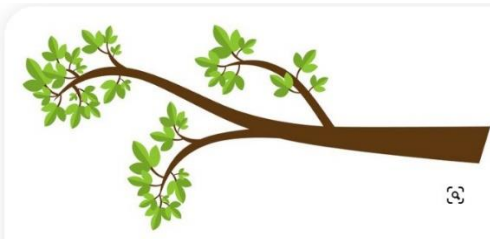
The biggest episode in the Nobody’s Fool battle was our 2004 boycott of cookie sales because of local Girl Scout promotion of Planned Parenthood Waco events. The boycott created “a tornado” in Central Texas. The controversy drew national attention. I was interviewed on the Today Show, the 700 Club and others. In response to soaring pressure, the local Girl Scout council severed all ties with Planned Parenthood Waco.

Today, Pro-life Waco is the foundation under Pro-Life in the Public Square. We continue robust Public Square Outreach in Waco. A very important feature for Pro-Life Waco is monthly outreach events. We deliver five PSO events each

month. This includes the grandfather of PSO events, Life Chain Sunday. We go beyond yearly, and are our holding signs in a prominent location every first Sunday. Overpass outreach above a major commuter artery is one Thursday each month. We have one event at Planned Parenthood Waco each month. Unlike most abortion centers Planned Parenthood Waco is on a major artery through the Waco public square.

Pro-Life Waco's highest priority since March of 2023, has been challenging CVS and Walgreens pharmacies. One such event is at a double-barrel location with Walgreens on one side of the street and CVS on the other. Our most recent event is at a CVS pharmacy adjacent to Interstate 35 and Baylor University. In November, we pivot to CVS at Waco's Target store.

The scheduling of PLW's monthly events provides multiple opportunities for foot soldier participation, in terms of day of the week for outreach, time of the day, and locations in the Waco public square.



### Three sub-branches of Public Square Outreach

The Public Square Outreach branch of the pro-life tree has three sub-branches:

1. Displaying fixed signs
2. Foot soldiers taking positions at strategic streets and overpasses to engage with signs, literature, and conversations
3. Setting up displays for fairs, festivals, and tabling events.

Sub-branch #1 includes yard signs, bus benches, and billboards. Some billboards may move, such as a billboard truck or banners pulled by airplanes. Yard signs and small billboards can be an easy and accessible first step into Public Square Outreach. You can purchase a couple dozen yard signs to display in your community. (**PLPS offers you yard signs** for \$5 each for 20 to 100 signs.) A church or church organization can take the lead in a campaign to yard signs and billboards. Small cities with a highway coinciding with "Main Street" have tremendous untapped opportunity. Cities on Texas Highway 287 between Fort Worth to Amarillo are an example. Billboards have a long history in the pro-life movement. **Pro-Life Across America** is the leading national supplier of large billboards.

Sub-branch #2 is taking strategic positions to hold signs, distribute literature, and engage in conversation. Refer to the previous section for the five sub-branch #2 events delivered each month in Waco. Nationally, **Pro-Life Action League** facilitates annual Public Square Outreach events. Their website provides how-to guidance for creating effective events. The annual events Pro-Life Action League facilitates include: (1) **National Pro-Life Bridges Day**, (2) **National Day of Remembrance for Aborted Children**, and (3) **Way of the Cross for Victims of Abortion. Created Equal** is another group focused on dynamic Public Square Outreach. Much that they do is outside their home base in Columbus, Ohio. Created Equal protested the 2024 National Democratic Party Convention.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> sub-branch is displays at fairs, festivals, and through tabling events. The focus is literature distribution and personal conversation, rather than holding signs. The classic example is county or state fairs. Pro-Life Waco had a 10'x20' booth at the 9-day **Heart of Texas Fair for** two decades. Unfortunately, fair management decided to limit booth space to profit-seeking businesses. We do our best now to display at church and community festivals. The **soft-to-the-touch baby models** create enduring impressions on children. On college campuses, tabling is an effective outreach for Students for Life of America chapters. A well-placed table with a couple sharp students engages the broad cross-section of views on abortion.

## **Public Square Outreach and Protest**

Is Public Square Outreach synonymous with protest? No, it is not. A protest is a Public Square Outreach. However, not all Public Square Outreach events are protests. PLW's pharmacy outreach events clearly have a major element of protest. (They also include chemical abortion education.) By contrast, our Life Chain, Overpass Outreach, and many others events are not protests. When your organization gets involved in Public Square Outreach, you have an array of action options.

## **Geography of Public Square Outreach**

A key word regarding the meaning of Public Square Outreach is BROAD. I have emphasized the broad range of public sentiment from pro-life to mushy middle and then to pro-abortion. Another dimension of BROAD is geography. Within a city, broad engagement can be launched from many locations. Broad geographic engagement would involve cities of all sizes--not just big cities with abortion centers.

The current configuration of the pro-life movement is not nearly as broad in geography as it could and should be. With the movement's current focus on sidewalk counseling, pregnancy support, and prayer vigils, the main location for outreach is abortion centers. However, other city locations also offer outreach opportunities to touch hearts and minds. And abortion centers are concentrated in only a few big cities. Before the Texas abortion ban, all abortion centers were located in Dallas, Fort Worth, Waco, Austin, Houston, San Antonio, and El Paso. We need all cities in Texas and America on board to defend life.

Let's expand the geographical footprint of the pro-life movement. Consider the opportunities available to cities of all sizes: yard signs, billboards, Life Chains, overpass outreach, pharmacy outreach/protest, protesting other abortion enablers, fairs, festivals, and more.

The pro-life movement will be stronger when we are active in every city and throughout every city. Small cities may be able to influence people far beyond their city limits. Think of billboards at the edge of town with a highway running through the town. For example, the small city of Childress, Texas on Highway 287 can reach out to thousands of out-of-town travelers each week with inexpensive billboards. There are thousands of cities like Childress across America. Their voices can be very powerful.

## **Importance of Monthly Outreach**

A local pro-life group will benefit from going beyond annual events and having activities every month. Reliance on annual events will not provide the continuity to sustain outreach. Annual events, such as Life Chain, a fair display booth, or attending a fundraising gala are valuable arrows for one's quiver. However, it is important to shoot arrows more frequently to maintain motivation



and lessons learned. As mentioned above, Pro-Life Waco Has five monthly events.

Another reason for action each month is to build up your communication links to swing into action for one-time ad-hoc events. In the summer of 2022, we had our most recent ad-hoc situation in Waco. A pro-abortion group urged the Waco City Council to attempt to enact an ordinance that would require the Waco Police force to deprioritize enforcement of Texas abortion laws. After learning about their move, we acted quickly to mobilize a strong showing at the next city council meeting. Over 300 pro-lifers showed up. Overflow rooms were required, and 45 life defenders spoke for up to three minutes each. The press covered our initiative, and the ordinance received no further consideration. Without the foundation of monthly outreach, we could not have met the challenge to act so quickly and strongly.

## **Demand Side and Supply Side**

I studied economics at the University of Texas at Austin and was a member of the economic faculty at Baylor University for over three decades. “Supply and Demand” is embedded in my brain, and is a lens for my view of the abortion battle. There is an abortion market, with a supply side and a demand side. Each is important and they are interrelated. The overall pro-life movement needs laborers in all sectors of the vineyard.

The demand side is propelled by the willingness or desire of moms, dads, families, and governments to pay for abortions. The supply side consists of businesses willing and able to supply abortion to gain revenue and profit.

In the overall pro-life movement, we seek to restrict supply with regulations and bans on abortion providers. The political branch of the pro-life movement is hard at work diminishing the supply of abortion and trying to counter the abortion movement’s efforts to expand supply. The “And Then There Were None” ministry curtails supply by persuading and helping abortion workers leave the industry.

The Public Square Outreach branch works mainly through the demand side by changing hearts, minds, and souls. Sidewalk counseling pregnancy support branches also work for the demand side.

The latitude and opportunities for enacting supply-side constraints are influenced by the culture and moral foundation of particular states and nations. For example, what can be achieved by the political branch in California is much less than what may be achieved in Georgia. Laws and restraints on the supply side of abortion are imperiled if they are not linked to commensurate cultural support. The soil of a pro-life culture must be cultivated and fertilized by the impact of churches, sidewalk counseling, pregnancy support, and Public Square Outreach.

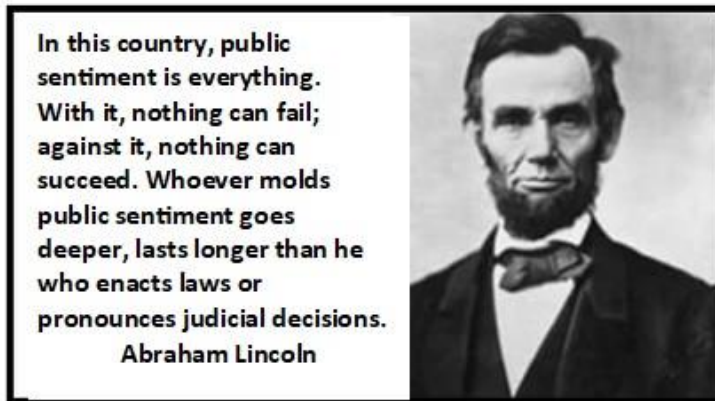
## **Upstream and Downstream**

Occasionally we encounter the phrases, “upstream initiative” and “downstream initiative”. Consider a river that floods a city due to heavy rains. A downstream initiative would be deploying sandbags at the banks of the river to protect the city from flooding. An upstream initiative would be building a dam miles up the river to absorb water at the time of heavy rain. Downstream solutions are often transitory. Upstream initiatives may permanently solve the problem.

Let’s consider downstream and upstream for an election with important pro-life implications. A downstream initiative for shifting the vote would be a voter turnout campaign involving calls and text messages to pro-lifers to encourage them to vote. This does not shift the distribution of voters on the

public sentiment grid. Rather this improves election results within a fixed spectrum of public sentiment. In a close ballot, a get-out-the-vote campaign may deliver a victory.

Public Square Outreach is not directly political. However, PSO can shift the public opinion sentiment grid by changing hearts, minds, and souls. And, this changes votes. The pro-life movement needs more focus on grid-changing Public Square Outreach to improve political outcomes. Ponder these words from Abraham Lincoln in the Lincoln-Douglas debates:



## Review

Public Square Outreach is BROAD engagement in several ways.

- Broad in terms of the sentiment of community members. This is the big idea.
- Broad in terms of locations in your community.
- Broad in terms of the cities involved in your state and country.
- Broad in terms of days of the week and hours of the day of your events.
- Public Square Outreach has three branches
- Some outreach events are protests. Others are not.
- The importance of monthly outreach events.
- Greater emphasis on upstream. The current pro-life movement focuses on downstream.
- Greater emphasis on the demand side. The current pro-life movement focuses on the supply side.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, I am not claiming that Public Square Outreach is the silver bullet for advancing the pro-life cause. Sidewalk counseling, pregnancy care centers, and prayer vigils must continue their positive trajectories. However, we have entered troubled political waters in the post-Roe era. We must think, and act, outside the box to regain our footing. One key to regaining pro-life footing is the restoration of the Public Square Outreach branch of the pro-life tree.