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Abortion Legality and Morality

A Preliminary Investigation Examining the Influence of Religiosity on Abortion Attitudes Among a Sample of US Latinxs

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Abstract

Religiosity is a common predictor of abortion attitudes, especially among US Latinxs. In this article, we examine religiosity, operationalized in various ways (e.g., affiliation, beliefs, practices), and abortion attitudes among US Latinx adults. We administered a web-based survey to English and Spanish-speaking US Latinx adults (n=169) using quota-based sampling to achieve demographic diversity. We tested differences in abortion attitudes using k-group median tests. Results indicate participants were less likely to support abortion legality and morality in some circumstances (e.g., if the woman is not married) than others (e.g., if the woman's life is at risk). Participants who see the Bible as God's literal word or attend religious services regularly were significantly less likely to support abortion legality or perceive abortion as moral. Biblical literalism and church attendance may be stronger predictors of abortion attitudes than religious identity. These findings highlight how religiosity may predict support for abortion legality and morality across several circumstances among Latinx adults.

Keywords: abortion, Latinx, morality, legality, biblical literalism, church attendance

Introduction

Christian religious denomination/affiliation, beliefs, and behaviors have been some of the most consistent and strongest predictors of abortion attitudes (Bartkowski et al. 2012; Bolks et al. 2000; Holman et al. 2020). Those who strongly identify with a religious denomination tend to be more opposed to legalized abortion compared with unaffiliated (or non-religious) people who often hold more progressive views on abortion (Bruce 2020a; Pew Research Center 2014a). Similarly, individuals who interpret the Bible literally tend to hold more negative abortion beliefs (Holman et al. 2020), and adherents who attend church regularly tend to be more hostile toward abortion than those who seldom attend services (Adamczyk and Valdimarsdóttir 2018; Bartkowski et al. 2012; Ellison et al. 2011; Holman et al. 2020; Jones and Cox 2012).

Although the relationship between religiosity and abortion attitudes is well documented (e.g., Adamczyk 2008, 2013; Adamczyk and Valdimarsdóttir 2018; Barkan 2014; Cook et al. 1993; Gay and Lynxwiler 1999; Hoffmann and Bartkowski 2008; Hoffmann and Johnson 2005; Strickler and Danigelis 2002), less is known specifically about these associations among Latinxs, an ethnic group collectively known for strong religious beliefs and conservative social views (see Bartkowski et al. 2012; Branton et al. 2014; Ellison, Echevarria, and Smith 2005; Holman, Podrazik, and Silber Mohamed 2020). While there are higher rates of abortion in the Latinx community than the general US population (see Medoff 2014), there seems to be less support for abortion among Latinx people than among the general US population (e.g., Bolks et al. 2000). Given the well-established link between Catholicism and Latinx identity (Hunt 2001) as well as recent trends that show growing movement among Latinx away from the Catholic Church into Evangelical denominations (Espinosa 2004; Lugo and Pond 2007), a nuanced exploration of the relationship between religiosity and Latinx abortion attitudes is warranted.

Herein, we examine the relationship between religiosity and Latinxs' attitudes toward abortion legality and morality, drawing on data from a multilingual (English/Spanish) Latinx sample. We account for various aspects of religiosity, including religious affiliation (e.g., Catholic, Protestant), religious beliefs measured by biblical literalism, and religious behaviors measured by church attendance. We also measure abortion attitudes using a multidimensional approach to assess different aspects, such as abortion morality and legality, of people's attitudes toward abortion. As such, we aim to take a more nuanced approach to examining abortion attitudes among Latinx in the US, with a specific focus on how religiosity influences those attitudes among a heterogeneous population.

Background

Abortion Attitudes in the United States

Attitudes toward abortion are multidimensional and contextual (Hans and Kimberly 2014; Jozkowski et al. 2018; Smith and Son 2013). For example, in the United States, abortion attitudes vary depending on moral/legal dimensions and the intersection between those dimensions. Indeed, most US adults believe abortion should be legal, yet do not necessarily believe abortion is moral (Jones and Cox 2012). However, assessments of abortion legality seem far more common than assessments of abortion attitudes in other contexts, like morality

(see Bowman and Sims 2017). For example, the General Social Survey (GSS) includes items that assess attitudes from legal dimensions – the GSS asks whether “it should be possible for a pregnant woman to obtain a legal abortion” providing six specific circumstances (e.g., “If there is a strong chance of serious defect in the baby”; “If she is married and does not want any more children”) with a seventh item for any reason (Smith and Son 2013).

Despite its focus on the legal dimension of abortion attitudes only, a strength of the GSS is evaluating support for or opposition to abortion across different circumstances. Items from GSS are commonly divided into two categories – abortion for “elective/hard” and “traumatic/soft” reasons – and summed into a single scale that measures people’s support for abortion legality (Blake 1971; Jelen 1984; Rossi and Sitaraman 1988; Smith and Son 2013; Tedrow and Mahoney 1979). Janiak and Goldberg (2016) argued that such differentiation based on the reason for seeking abortion (“elective” v. “traumatic”) reinforces implicit bias about abortion in certain circumstances and creates a dichotomy between justified abortions and those that are not. Although the labels associated with this categorization may be problematic, some scholars (e.g., Blake 1971; Jelen 1984; Rossi and Sitaraman 1988; Smith and Son 2013; Tedrow and Mahoney 1979) have used them to contextualize the reasons for abortion.

Without expressly measuring moral viewpoints about abortion and considering different contexts of abortion, nuance in attitudinal assessments may be lacking. Further, given that religiosity may yield insight into the moral and legal dimensions of abortion, measuring different components of religiosity may be helpful to determine the role of each component in the support (or lack thereof) for abortion legality and morality across several circumstances.

Religiosity and Abortion Attitudes

Among the predictors of abortion attitudes, religiosity is often considered the strongest (Bartkowski et al. 2012; Bolks et al. 2000; Holman et al. 2020). Religiosity can refer to people’s involvement in a faith, measured by people’s religious affiliation, practices, and beliefs (Fehring and Ohlendorf 2007). These three dimensions are associated with abortion attitudes in slightly different ways (Adamczyk and Valdimarsdóttir 2018; Barringer, Sumerau, and Gay 2020; Bartkowski et al. 2012; Ellison, Echevarria, and Smith 2005; Jelen and Wilcox 2003).

Traditionally, religious affiliation – or the self-identified association of a person with a religion, denomination, or sub-denominational religious group – is perceived as an influential factor linked to abortion attitudes (Adamczyk and Valdimarsdóttir 2018). There is evidence that religious affiliation predicts support and opposition to abortion in varying contexts (Adamczyk and Valdimarsdóttir 2018; Bartkowski et al. 2012; Ellison et al. 2011; Holman et al. 2020; Jones and Cox 2012). Indeed, those who strongly associate with a religious denomination tend to be more opposed to legalized abortion than unaffiliated (or non-religious) people who may hold more progressive views on abortion (Bruce 2020a; Pew Research Center 2014a). There is also evidence that the extent of negative abortion views varies by religious denomination (Bartkowski et al. 2012; Holman et al. 2020; Kelly and Kelly 2005; Wong 2015). For example, conservative religious groups, such as Evangelical Protestants and Catholics, tend to condemn abortion and hold anti-abortion attitudes. By contrast, more liberal religious groups, such as Jews and mainline Protestant denominations, tend to be more

supportive of legal abortion or reproductive positions that value autonomy (Adamczyk and Valdimarsdóttir 2018; Holman et al. 2020).

Religious practices also seem to influence abortion attitudes regardless of religious affiliation (Adamczyk 2013; Jelen and Wilcox 2003). In this paper, we operationalize religious practice as people's participation in religious activities such as attending religious services. More religiously committed people – those who attend church more regularly or are more socially connected to the church – are more likely to be exposed to religious teachings and ideologies through their social interactions that expressly condemn controversial practices (Bartkowski et al. 2012). Yet this relationship may also vary by the denomination itself and degree of attendance by that denomination. Adamczyk and Valdimarsdóttir (2018) argue, for example, that some mainline Protestants may be more accepting of abortion because they attend church less frequently than some Evangelical Protestants or Catholics. Specifically, highly devout followers who attend church regularly tend to be more hostile toward abortion and have a greater tendency to oppose legal abortion than those who seldom attend services (Adamczyk and Valdimarsdóttir 2018; Bartkowski et al. 2012; Ellison et al. 2011; Holman et al. 2020; Jones and Cox 2012).

Anti-abortion attitudes are also reinforced by religious beliefs, which include biblical literalism. We conceptualized biblical literalism as a religious worldview in which the Bible (and sometimes other sacred texts) are perceived as the literal word of God. Individuals who interpret the Bible literally, such that the Bible is the unequivocal word of God, tend to hold more negative abortion beliefs (Holman et al. 2020). Historically, more conservative groups such as Evangelical Protestants perceive the Bible as the actual word of God (Bartkowski et al. 2012; Ellison et al. 2011). This interpretation has been used to argue that life begins at conception (Bartkowski et al. 2012; Ellison et al. 2011). By contrast, moderately religious groups view the Bible and other religious texts as the word of God, but not as something that needs to be taken literally (Leal and Patterson 2014). For example, Leal and Patterson (2014) found that Catholics read the Bible in a less literal way, whereas more liberal groups tend to see the Bible as a book of history or stories written by men (Kelly and Morgan 2008).

Research suggests Catholics and Evangelicals interpret the Bible differently (Hoffmann and Bartkowski 2008). For example, Hoffmann and Bartkowski (2008) argue that Catholics do not generally embrace a literalist ideology of the Bible. Traditionally, most Catholics' views of social issues, such as abortion, are shaped by authority figures such as priests and bishops who interpret the Bible and teach about the morality of abortion and other social issues (Jelen 1992). In other words, most Catholics do not study the Bible nor know the biblical basis of their abortion beliefs. This may be primarily due to the centralized doctrinal authority of the Catholic Church (Jelen 1992). In this way, a Catholic interpretation of the Bible differs from a Protestant interpretation, especially Evangelical Protestants. The latter believe that the Bible is the final authority on beliefs and practices (Hoffmann and Bartkowski 2008).

US-Based Latinx Abortion Attitudes

Beyond religiosity, cultural norms and views tied to race and ethnicity may affect abortion attitudes (Bruce 2020b; Dillon 2014; Holman et al. 2020; Thomas et al. 2017). For example, Thomas and colleagues (2017) found that people who identify as Latinx seem to hold less supportive attitudes regarding abortion legality. Similarly, others have argued that US-based

Latinxs tend to exhibit a somewhat higher overall opposition to abortion when compared with the general population (Bolks et al. 2000; Hartig 2018). Findings from several leading polls, which corroborate this body of work, indicate that the majority of Latinxs do not support abortion legality, with only 45% of US-based Latinxs believing that abortion should be legal in all or most cases compared with 54% of the general population (Jones et al. 2019). Findings from Gallup also indicate that more Latinx (61%) believe that abortion is morally wrong compared with less than 47% of the general public (Gallup 2018–2020). Although Latinx individuals seem to have more negative views toward abortion overall, there are internal variations driven by, among other factors, their religiosity (Bartkowski et al. 2012).

Religiosity and Abortion Attitudes among US-Based Latinx

Data from recent polls show that US Latinx are slightly more opposed to abortion than other racial and ethnic groups (PRRI 2019). To understand the nuance in Latinx abortion attitudes, it is helpful to examine the intersection of Latinx identity and religiosity. Some argue, for example, that Latinx social conservatism may partly stem from a concurrent Catholic identity (Bartkowski et al. 2012; Branton et al. 2014). However, this relationship between Latinx identity, conservatism, and Catholicism has become less clear over time (Bartkowski et al. 2012; Branton et al. 2014).

Most US-based Latinx fall into the Christian branches of Catholicism and Protestantism (Reyes-Barriénte 2019). Among US-based Latinx, Catholicism is the dominant religion (Ellison et al. 2011); however, more recently, US-based Latinx are leaving the Catholic Church and converting to Protestantism (Espinosa 2004). Importantly, this growth in the Protestant denomination is mainly occurring among Evangelical variants of Protestantism rather than mainline (Bartkowski et al. 2012; Ellison et al. 2011; Reyes-Barriénte 2019). Indeed, Latinx in the US – and Latin America at large – are experiencing a theological shift, with more Latinx people becoming Evangelical Protestants (22%) or unaffiliated (18%) from religion entirely (Ellison et al. 2005; Hunt 2001; Reyes-Barriénte 2019). According to the Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI 2019), opposition toward abortion legality is stronger among Latinx Protestants (58%) than Latinx Catholics. However, the high levels of opposition toward abortion among Protestants is primarily driven by those who identify as Evangelical Protestants. In other words, Evangelical Protestants are more opposed to abortion (62%) than non-evangelical Protestants (43%) (PRRI 2019). Thus, the “Latinx evangelicalization” is overwhelmingly associated with greater opposition toward abortion (Lugo and Pond 2007; Pew Research Center 2014a; Taylor, Gershon, and Pantoja 2014). Additionally, Latinx Catholics may have greater diversity in opinion regarding abortion; and those who have moved away from religion entirely tend to hold social views that mirror the general population and are less anti-abortion, with more than 60% of Latinx unaffiliated believing abortion should be legal in most cases (Ellison et al. 2005; Holman et al. 2020; Jones and Cox 2012; Reyes-Barriénte 2019).

In addition to religious affiliation, other dimensions of religiosity, such as church attendance and biblical literalism, are strong predictors of abortion attitudes, specifically among US-based Latinx (Amaro 1988; Barringer et al. 2020; Bartkowski et al. 2012; Ellison et al. 2005; Holman et al. 2020; Kelly and Morgan 2008; Pantoja 2010; Ruiz et al. 2017). Among Evangelical Protestant and Catholic Latinx, religious service attendance increases socio-

political conservatism (Pantoja 2010). In turn, regular attendance at religious services is associated with less support for legal abortion and more support for abortion being illegal (Branton et al. 2014). Further, regular church-attending Latinx Evangelical Protestants are the least supportive group of legalized abortion (Bartkowski et al. 2012) and the most supportive of anti-abortion policies, especially among Latinx men (Holman et al. 2020). Similarly, studies have shown that biblical literalism is associated with lower support of legal abortion among Latinx communities (Bartkowski et al. 2012; Holman et al. 2020). In general, Latinx people who believe the Bible is the literal word of God hold more conservative views on abortion (Holman et al. 2020).

Given that religious practices and beliefs may offer a more nuanced perspective of the relationship between religiosity and Latinx abortion attitudes than religious affiliation alone, we seek to examine whether support for abortion legality and morality among a Latinx sample differ across their religious affiliation, beliefs regarding approaches to biblical interpretation, and religious service attendance. Most of the studies that examine the link between religiosity and abortion attitudes in the Latinx community focus only on responses to one or two abortion attitude items and focus specifically on the legality of abortion; moral positions about abortion are often overlooked. However, by examining multiple dimensions of abortion attitudes (i.e., legality and morality), including several contexts of abortion (e.g., if there is a strong chance of serious defect in the baby; if she is married and does not want any more children), and assessing their linkage with various aspects of religiosity (i.e., religious affiliation, practices, and beliefs), we add new and needed complexity to this area of research.

Current Study

In this study, which is part of a larger national study, we investigated the relationship between religious affiliation, beliefs, and practices and Latinxs' attitudes about abortion legality and morality across several circumstances. The study is guided by three research questions:

RQ1) Does support for abortion legality and morality among a Latinx sample differ across their religious affiliation (i.e., Catholic, Protestant, born-again Christian)?

RQ2) Does support for abortion legality and morality among a Latinx sample differ across their beliefs regarding the Bible (e.g., biblical literalism)?

RQ3) Does support for abortion legality and morality among a Latinx sample differ across their religious behaviors (i.e., church attendance)?

We anticipate Latinx participants who attend religious service would be more likely than those who do not participate in religious service to oppose abortion legality and find it morally unacceptable. Similarly, we anticipate that Latinx participants who believe the Bible is the literal word of God would be more likely to oppose abortion legality and find it morally unacceptable in all types of circumstances. Finally, we anticipate that Evangelicals or born-again Protestant Latinxs would be more likely to oppose abortion legality and morality than Catholic and mainline Protestant Latinxs across all types of circumstances. Findings from this study will contribute to the discourse about the extent that religion, a strong cultural marker of Latinx identity, predicts support for the legality and morality of abortion across several circumstances.

Methods

Data Collection and Participants

A web-based survey on abortion attitudes was administered to English- and Spanish-speaking adults in the US via Qualtrics, an online web-based survey company that distributes surveys and aggregates responses. Qualtrics uses opt-in panels, in which eligible people are invited to participate in a study (Yu et al. 2019). In general, in non-probability-based panels, potential participants either come across the panel's website or are directed to it by a friend or advertising, resulting in panels that may contain difficult-to-recruit groups (Yu et al. 2019). To achieve greater demographic diversity, we set quotas to achieve ample representation across race/ethnicity, gender, age, and political affiliation. We specifically recruited and oversampled Latinx Spanish speakers, setting their quota at one-third of the sample. All participants were offered Qualtrics credits as an incentive for participating in the survey. Indiana University's Institutional Review Board approved all protocols outlined herein.

Data were collected from November 2018 to February 2019. A total of 580 respondents completed the survey. Because this study was uniquely concerned with the effect of religiosity on Latinx participants, our analytic sample was restricted to only include people who identified as Latinx, were at least 18 years of age, and currently reside in the US. Participants were identified as Latinx if they 1) selected Hispanic/Latinx as their primary race/ethnicity variable; 2) if they selected bi-racial or multi-racial as their primary race/ethnicity and then selected Hispanic/Latinx on a follow-up question; and 3) if they selected "other" as their primary race/ethnicity *and* typed-in a reference to being Hispanic/Latinx. This resulted in a final analytic sample of 169 Latinx participants.

The sample representation for gender was 47% women, 50% men, and 3% identifying as non-binary, and the average age was 46 ($SD = 16$), ranging from 18 to 97. A third of our participants indicated they have a high school diploma or GED, with 24.3% having a bachelor's or graduate degree (see Table 1). Just under half of our participants (46.2%) classified themselves as Democrats, 11.2% as Republicans, and 21.9% as Independents. Most sample participants (52.7%) completed the survey in Spanish. This high rate of Spanish participants is due to our purposeful oversampling of Hispanic/Latinx participants using the second language survey. Most participants were born in the US (66.9%), with 48.6% of these participants having parents born outside the US or birthplace unknown.

Regarding the religiosity variables used in the study, most participants classified themselves as Catholic (53.3%) or Christian (29.6%), with the remaining 17.2% identifying as another religious group (i.e., Hindu, Mormon, Jewish, Muslim, non-denominational) or non-religious (i.e., atheist, agnostic; see Table 1). Slightly more than one-third of the participants indicated that they have had a "born-again" experience (36.1%), and a similar percentage believed the Bible is the literal word of God (37.9%). Although most (95.2%) of our participants selected a religious identity, the percentage that attends religious services weekly was 32.0%, and 24.3% indicated that they never go to religious services.

Table 1: Sample Demographic Characteristics

Age		M = 45.95	SD = 15.94
		<i>n</i>	%
Gender	Women	79	47.0
	Men	84	50.0
	Non-binary gender	5	3.0
	Missing	1	0.6
Education	Some H.S. or less	18	10.7
	H.S. diploma or GED	55	32.5
	Some college	33	19.5
	Associate's degree	22	13.0
	Bachelor's degree	29	17.2
	Graduate degree	12	7.1
Political Party	Democrat	78	46.2
	Republican	19	11.2
	Independent	37	21.9
	Libertarian, Green, Other	5	3.0
	No party identity	29	17.2
	Missing	1	0.6
Abortion Identity	Strongly pro-choice	38	22.5
	Moderately pro-choice	13	7.7
	Slightly pro-choice	13	7.7
	Equally pro-choice and pro-life	17	10.1
	Slightly pro-life	10	5.9
	Moderately pro-life	6	3.6
	Strongly pro-life	34	20.1
	I am neither pro-choice nor pro-life.	20	11.8
	I prefer not to answer	18	10.7
Survey Version	Spanish	89	52.7
	English	80	47.3
Nativity	US-Born	113	66.9
	Foreign	53	31.4
	Missing	3	1.8
Religious Affiliation	Catholic	90	53.3
	Christian	50	29.6
	Agnostic or atheistic	8	4.8
	Other	21	12.4
Born-again Experience	Yes	61	36.1
	No	91	53.8
	I do not know	17	10.1
Biblical Literalism	Bible is the literal word of God	64	37.9
	Bible is the word of God, but not to be taken literally	57	33.7
	Bible is a book of history	7	4.1
	Bible is a book of stories	16	9.5
	I don't know	25	14.8
Church Attendance	Once a week or more	54	32.0
	Few times a year	41	24.3
	Never	41	24.3

Measures

The survey was developed in English and translated into Spanish. The translation was conducted using a team-based approach to ensure that the translation kept the content of the questions semantically similar, kept the question format similar within the bounds of the target language, and retained the same content for both the source and target instruments (Mohler

et al. 2016; Valdez et al. 2021). Participants were asked to complete an anonymous 15-minute survey to assess social attitudes about controversial issues. Upon completing the survey's demographic portion – which included items related to religious affiliation, practices, and beliefs – participants were asked a series of questions regarding the morality and legality of abortion. In this study, we operationalized abortion morality as a person's belief whether abortion is morally permissible or not morally permissible. Generally, this position is influenced by religious beliefs. Conversely, we operationalized abortion legality as a person's beliefs regarding whether abortion should be legal in various circumstances.

Dependent Variable

Abortion attitudes were measured by asking participants whether they believe abortion (1) should be legal and (2) is morally acceptable in nine circumstances (see Table 2). The nine circumstances included six circumstances similar to core abortion-related items used in the General Social Survey (Smith et al. 2019). In addition, three circumstances were added to measure a broader attitudinal range. We grouped circumstances into three major categories based on the reasons for abortion identified in the literature.

From the sets of abortion circumstance items, three subscales were created: those related to extreme (previously referred to as traumatic or hard reasons) and social (previously referred to as elective or soft reasons; Blake 1971; Jelen 1984; Rossi and Sitaraman 1988; Smith and Son 2013; Tedrow and Mahoney 1979). The third set of items refers to selective reasons, which includes circumstances related to recent state-level abortion bans in cases of sex or race selection (see Guttmacher 2020). Four items (items 3, 4, 6, 7) were aggregated for the extreme circumstance subscale. Responses to three items (items 1, 2, 5) were aggregated to create the social circumstance subscale. Finally, two circumstances (items 8, 9) were deemed selective and combined to create the third subscale. We calculated the mean scores to measure the rate at which support for abortion legality and morality was expressed in the various circumstances. The response options for the legality and morality questions were recoded as “No” = 1, “Unsure” = 2, and “Yes” = 3. Item responses were averaged to calculate scores ranging from 1 to 3, with higher scores indicating more favorable views toward abortion morality and legality and lower scores indicating less favorable abortion morality and legality views.

Table 2. Abortion Unidirectional Item Set

Regardless of whether you think it is morally acceptable, should it be **legal** for a woman to obtain an abortion in the following circumstances? / Regardless of whether you think it should be legal, is it **morally acceptable** for a woman to obtain an abortion in the following circumstances?

1. If the woman cannot afford to support the child.
2. If the woman is not married.
3. If the woman's life is at risk because of the pregnancy.
4. If the baby will be born with serious birth defects.
5. If the woman does not want any more children.
6. If the pregnancy is a result of rape.
7. If the woman's mental health is at risk.
8. If the father is of a different race than the woman.
9. If the baby is of a different gender than the parents desired.

Note: Items 1-6 modeled after the General Social Survey (Smith et al. 2019).

Independent Variables

We assessed religiosity via four measures: religious affiliation, identification with being “born-again,” biblical literalism, and church attendance.

Religious affiliation. To determine religious affiliation, we first asked participants a question regarding their religious identity: “Which of the following best represents your religious identity? Catholic, Christian, Hindu, Mormon, Jewish, Muslim, Nondenominational, Atheist, Agnostic, Other.” For our study purpose, religious affiliation was coded into three categories: Catholic, Christian, and Other. There is evidence that most US-based Latinx identify as Catholics (Ellison et al. 2011; PRRI 2019) and that Catholicism is more of a nominal affiliation for Latinxs (Bartkowski et al. 2012; Ellison et al. 2005). That is, for some being Catholic is a matter of cultural roots rather than religion (Bartkowski et al. 2012; Ellison et al. 2005; Pew Research 2015). Of course, not all Christians are Catholics, but all Catholics are Christians. However, given the cultural relation between being Catholic and Latinx, it seems to be the case that most Latinx who identify as Catholics may not necessarily identify as devout Christians. Most cultural Catholics identify more with being a Catholic than any other faith traditions they may also belong to (Pew Research 2015). Further, generally, surveys that measure religious identity like Pew Research, Gallup, and the National Survey of Hispanic Adults rely on respondents’ self-identification. These surveys often combine Protestants and those who identify as Christians under the same category (see Gallup 2012; Pew Research 2014b; Perl et al. 2008). However, those who identify as Catholic are labeled as Catholics only, suggesting that Latinx who identify as Catholics are more likely to select Catholic as opposed to Christian. Similarly, a 2008 report from the American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS) divides Latinx religious identification as Catholics and Other Christians (non-Catholic Christians) (Perl et al. 2008). This separation into these two broad categories indicates that although Catholicism is a branch of Christianity, those who identify primarily as Catholics tend not to identify as Christians when reporting their religious affiliation on a survey. Within this context, we use the Christian self-identification as a religious identity that encompasses other forms of Christianity other than Catholics, such as Protestants. Those who identified with religious groups other than Catholic or Christian, and those who identified as agnostic, or atheist were combined into the “other” category due to their small subgroup sizes ($n \leq 9$).

Born-again. To obtain a comparison between Latinx who may identify with an evangelical Christian denomination versus a more mainline Christian denomination, participants were asked if they consider themselves “born-again”: “Have you ever had a ‘born-again’ religious experience? Yes, no, I do not know.” Given that Evangelicals believe in the conversion or “born-again” experience in receiving salvation, this is frequently used to assess Evangelicalism (Burge and Lewis, 2018).

Biblical literalism. To measure religious beliefs, we asked participants a question regarding their beliefs about the Bible: “Which of these statements comes closest to describing your feelings about the Bible? it is the literal word of God; it is God’s word, but not to be taken literally; it is a book of history; it is a book of stories; or I do not know.” We merged the last three response options to create three broad categories: The Bible is the literal word of God, the Bible is the word of God but not literal, and the Bible is not the word of God (i.e., it is a book of history or stories, or do not know).

Religious service attendance. Finally, as a measure of religious behaviors, participants were asked, “Approximately how often do you attend religious services? More than once a week, every week, two or three times a month, once a month, several times a year, once or twice a year, less than once a year, and never.” We grouped participants’ responses into three categories: Once or more a week, several times per year up to two or three times a month, and twice a year or less.

Analysis

We compared participants on the three sets of circumstances regarding whether they believe abortion should be legal and whether they believe abortion is moral based on religious affiliation. The distribution of abortion legality and morality attitudes were multimodal, not yielding normally distributed data. Therefore, k-group median tests for independent samples were used to compare groups. Because we leveraged multiple comparisons on six outcome variables to investigate trends in attitudes about abortion morality and legality in extreme versus social and selective circumstances, a conservative alpha level of .01 was selected to reduce type I error inflation due to multiple testing, with a Bonferroni correction employed for post-hoc analyses. Average percentiles are provided for the k-group median tests with larger percentile values indicating greater support for abortion legality and belief in abortion being moral.

Results

The average abortion subscale scores for the overall sample are presented first to provide an indication of the attitudes for abortion legality and morality in the three types of circumstances (extreme, social, selective) for Latinx participants (see Table 3). Participants indicated higher support for abortion legality in extreme circumstances than social circumstances, and the lowest level of support for abortion legality in selective circumstances ($M = 2.16, 1.66, \text{ and } 1.53$, respectively). The same trend was observed with attitudes about the moral acceptability of abortion ($M = 2.20, 1.65, \text{ and } 1.42$, respectively). Scores for extreme and social circumstances were almost identical for legality and morality for the sample. Morality scores were slightly lower than legality scores for selective circumstances. Participants indicated abortion is probably not morally acceptable for social and selective circumstances, and the majority stated it should not be legal.

Table 3. Average Scores, Attitudes for Abortion Legality and Morality

	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Median
Abortion Legality					
Extreme	1.00	3.00	2.16	.72	2.00
Social	1.00	3.00	1.66	.79	1.33
Selective	1.00	3.00	1.53	.77	1.00
Moral Acceptability of Abortion					
Extreme	1.00	3.00	2.20	.71	2.00
Social	1.00	3.00	1.65	.76	1.33
Selective	1.00	3.00	1.42	.67	1.00
Note: $n = 169$					

Religious Affiliation

Regarding our first research question (i.e., does support for abortion legality and morality among a Latinx sample differ across their religious affiliation), we were limited to religious identity groups of Catholic, Christian, and other religious and non-religious groups combined. We anticipated that mainline Christians would have similar abortion attitudes to Catholics, with both being less supportive of abortion than those with other or no religious affiliation. There were no significant differences on the three scales when comparing the attitudes toward abortion legality and moral acceptability for the three religious identity groups (see Table 4). However, a consistent trend was observed across all scales when comparing the group medians – Christians were less supportive of abortion than the Catholic group, who were less supportive than participants of other religious affiliations or no religious affiliation.

Table 4. Religious Affiliation and Abortion Legality and Morality

	χ^2	<i>p</i>	Catholic (<i>n</i> = 90)			Christian (<i>n</i> = 50)			Other and Non-Rel. (<i>n</i> = 29)		
			P ₂₅	P ₅₀	P ₇₅	P ₂₅	P ₅₀	P ₇₅	P ₂₅	P ₅₀	P ₇₅
Abortion Legality											
Extreme	7.07	.029	2.00	2.00	3.00	1.19	2.00	2.50	1.88	3.00	3.00
Social	3.85	.146	1.00	1.17	2.33	1.00	1.00	2.00	1.00	1.67	3.00
Selective	1.84	.398	1.00	1.00	2.00	1.00	1.00	2.00	1.00	1.00	2.75
Moral Acceptability of Abortion											
Extreme	7.52	.023	1.75	2.25	3.00	1.50	2.00	2.50	1.63	2.75	3.00
Social	2.45	.294	1.00	1.33	2.00	1.00	1.00	2.00	1.00	1.67	3.00
Selective	0.77	.681	1.00	1.00	2.00	1.00	1.00	1.50	1.00	1.00	2.00

Note: P₂₅, P₅₀, P₇₅ = 25th, 50th, 75th percentiles; χ^2 = median test

Table 5. Born-Again and Abortion Legality and Morality

	χ^2	<i>p</i>	Born-Again (<i>n</i> = 61)			Not Born-Again (<i>n</i> = 91)			Don't Know (<i>n</i> = 17)		
			P ₂₅	P ₅₀	P ₇₅	P ₂₅	P ₅₀	P ₇₅	P ₂₅	P ₅₀	P ₇₅
Abortion Legality											
Extreme	5.46	.065	1.50	2.00	2.50	1.75	2.50	3.00	1.50	2.00	2.38
Social	1.20	.548	1.00	1.00	2.00	1.00	1.33	3.00	1.00	1.00	2.00
Selective	0.15	.928	1.00	1.00	2.00	1.00	1.00	2.00	1.00	1.00	2.00
Moral Acceptability of Abortion											
Extreme	4.68	.096	1.50	2.00	2.63	1.75	2.50	3.00	1.63	2.00	2.50
Social	0.07	.966	1.00	1.00	2.00	1.00	1.33	2.33	1.00	1.33	1.67
Selective	0.75	.688	1.00	1.00	1.50	1.00	1.00	2.00	1.00	1.00	1.75

Note: P₂₅, P₅₀, P₇₅ = 25th, 50th, 75th percentiles; χ^2 = median test

Born-Again

There were no significant differences on the abortion legality scales or the moral acceptability scales for Latinx participants based on whether they have had a “born-again” experience (see Table 5). A consistent trend can be observed when comparing the 25th, 50th, and 75th percentiles for the scale scores for each group, with those “born-again” having the

lowest support for abortion (*Mdn* = 1.00 to 2.00) and those not born again exhibiting the highest levels of support (*Mdn* = 1.00 to 2.50); however, these differences were not significant.

Biblical Literalism

For our third research question (i.e., does support for abortion among a Latinx sample differ across their beliefs about the Bible?), we hypothesized that biblical literalism would be associated with opposition toward abortion legality and morality. Our results showed that there were significant differences regarding biblical literalism on the abortion legality social ($\chi^2(2) = 14.05, p = .001$) and selective circumstances scales ($\chi^2(2) = 12.58, p = .002$; see Table 6). Pairwise comparisons indicated that participants who consider the Bible not to be the word of God or indicated they “don’t know” were significantly more supportive of abortion being legal in social circumstances (e.g., if the woman cannot afford to support the child) and selective circumstances (e.g., reasons such as if the father is of a different race than the woman) than those who believe the Bible is the literal word of God. However, there were no significant differences in support for abortion legality between those who see the Bible as the word of God but not to be taken literally and the other two groups (i.e., Bible is the literal word of God, the Bible is not the word of God) for any of the circumstance sets.

The same subgroup differences were observed for both the social ($\chi^2(2) = 16.54, p < .01$) and selective ($\chi^2(2) = 9.69, p = .008$) circumstances in relation to moral acceptability; those believing the Bible is not the literal word of God or “don’t know” indicated higher moral acceptability than those believing the Bible is the literal word of God.

Table 6. *Biblical Literalism and Abortion Legality and Morality*

	χ^2	<i>p</i>	Literal Word of God (<i>n</i> = 64)			Word of God–Not Literal (<i>n</i> = 57)			Book of History, Stories, or Don’t Know (<i>n</i> = 48)		
			P ₂₅	P ₅₀	P ₇₅	P ₂₅	P ₅₀	P ₇₅	P ₂₅	P ₅₀	P ₇₅
Abortion Legality											
Extreme	6.78	.034	1.00	2.00	2.50	2.00	2.50	3.00	2.00	2.25	3.00
Social	14.05	.001	1.00	1.00	1.67	1.00	1.67	3.00	1.00	2.00	2.58
Selective	12.58	.002	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	2.00	1.00	1.50	2.38
Moral Acceptability of Abortion											
Extreme	3.43	.180	1.50	2.00	2.50	2.00	2.50	3.00	1.81	2.50	3.00
Social	16.54	< .001	1.00	1.00	1.67	1.00	1.33	2.33	1.00	1.67	2.58
Selective	9.69	.008	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	2.00	1.00	1.25	2.00

Note: P₂₅, P₅₀, P₇₅ = 25th, 50th, 75th percentiles; χ^2 = median test

Religious Attendance

For the last research question (i.e., does support for abortion among a Latinx sample differ across their religious behaviors?), we anticipated that Latinx participants who attend religious services regularly would strongly oppose abortion morality and legality. We found no significant differences in the abortion legality and morality scales. However, there was a consistent trend with participants who attend religious services twice a year or less frequently. This group was more supportive of abortion being legal (*Mdn* = 1.00 to 2.50) than those who attend religious services once a week or more frequently (*Mdn* = 1.00 to 2.00; see Table 7).

Table 7. Religious Service Attendance and Abortion Legality and Morality

	χ^2	<i>p</i>	Once or More a Week (<i>n</i> = 54)			Several Times per Year (<i>n</i> = 44)			Twice a Year or Less Frequent (<i>n</i> = 71)		
			P ₂₅	P ₅₀	P ₇₅	P ₂₅	P ₅₀	P ₇₅	P ₂₅	P ₅₀	P ₇₅
Abortion Legality											
Extreme	6.91	.032	1.50	2.00	2.56	1.50	2.00	3.00	2.00	2.25	3.00
Social	3.17	.205	1.00	1.00	2.33	1.00	1.17	2.00	1.00	1.67	3.00
Selective	0.68	.712	1.00	1.00	2.00	1.00	1.00	2.00	1.00	1.00	2.00
Moral Acceptability of Abortion											
Extreme	5.13	.077	1.50	2.00	2.50	1.56	2.00	3.00	1.75	2.50	3.00
Social	2.81	.245	1.00	1.00	2.00	1.00	1.33	2.00	1.00	1.67	2.67
Selective	1.02	.602	1.00	1.00	1.50	1.00	1.00	2.00	1.00	1.00	2.00

Note: P₂₅, P₅₀, P₇₅ = 25th, 50th, 75th percentiles; χ^2 = median test

Discussion

Religiosity is one of the principal factors that shape attitudes toward abortion (Adamczyk and Valdimarsdóttir 2018). In the context of the Latinx religious diversification, our study goes further than previous work to examine the link between Latinx respondents’ religious affiliation, beliefs, and practices across both moral and legal dimensions of abortion attitudes with particular emphasis on different abortion contexts or circumstances. Consistent with the extant literature (e.g., Bartkowski et al. 2012), we found that different dimensions of religiosity are related to Latinx participants’ legal and moral attitudes toward abortion. Specifically, we found that biblical literalism was more strongly associated with differences in abortion attitudes than religious affiliation and religious attendance for the present sample. These findings complement the literature supporting the link between high levels of religiosity and abortion hostility (e.g., Bartkowski et al. 2012; Ellison, Echevarria, and Smith 2005; Holman, Podrazik, and Silber Mohamed 2020). Yet, other findings in this study present more nuanced perspectives that warrant further attention.

Biblical Literalism Strongly Predicts Abortion Attitudes Among Latinx

We found that biblical literalism was the strongest differentiator of abortion attitudes. Participants who believe the Bible is the literal word of God endorsed abortion legality and moral acceptability for social circumstances (e.g., if the woman cannot afford to support the child) and selective circumstances (e.g., if the baby is of a different gender than the parents desired) at significantly lower rates than those who believe the Bible is not the word of God or do not know. This finding is consistent with previous research that shows that biblical literalism is associated with greater opposition to abortion (e.g., Bartkowski et al. 2012; Hoffmann and Bartkowski 2008; Holman, Podrazik, and Silber Mohamed 2020). This may be because biblical literalism facilitates a religious rationalization and judgment on abortion. For example, conservative religious traditions have used the Bible to argue that life begins at conception, children are a blessing, and abortion equals murder (Bartkowski et al. 2012; Hoffmann and Bartkowski 2008; Holman, Podrazik, and Silber Mohamed 2020). Therefore, those who endorse this perspective of the Bible may be more inclined to hold anti-abortion attitudes.

Interestingly, there were no significant differences in attitudes toward abortion morality and legality by biblical literalism for extreme reasons (e.g., if the woman's life is at risk because of the pregnancy). This is in line with previous literature (e.g., Hoffmann and Johnson 2005) that shows that extreme circumstances garner more support for abortion compared with social circumstances. Amaro (1988) and Ellison and colleagues (2005) add that Latinx people tend to approve of abortion for health reasons, especially if the pregnancy endangers the woman's life. However, their support decreases for other reasons, such as if the woman cannot economically support the child. More research is needed to investigate how Latinx adults interpret these circumstances, justify moral and legal differences to abortion attitudes based on those circumstances, and what about those circumstances influences their supportive/hostile beliefs.

Religious Attendance Displays Weak Association with Abortion Beliefs

Branton and colleagues (2014) argue that service attendance is associated with more conservative views toward abortion. In our study, religious service attendance was associated with trends in attitudes toward abortion morality and legality, but the differences were not statistically significant. Specifically, participants who attend religious services more frequently (i.e., once a week or more) displayed more negative views toward abortion than those who attend less frequently. Although not significant, this finding is consistent with previous research that shows a connection between conservative moral practices and anti-abortion or pro-life attitudes (e.g., Bartkowski et al. 2012; Bolks et al. 2000; Branton et al. 2014; Ellison, Echevarria, and Smith 2005; Holman, Podrazik, and Silber Mohamed 2020; Rafi and Baunach 2013). Comparisons of the magnitude of the median differences suggest that views on abortion may be most nuanced and variable, especially in relation to religious behaviors, when abortion is sought for non-life-threatening social reasons. Resembling the biblical literalism results (i.e., smaller median differences regarding abortion morality and legality for extreme reasons), these outcomes highlight that the relationship between different dimensions of religiosity (e.g., service attendance) and abortion attitudes is not necessarily universal across circumstances. Instead, some contexts of abortion (e.g., extreme circumstances) are more supported, disregarding people's religious practices, while other circumstances (e.g., selective) are more universally opposed.

Protestants are Marginally Less Supportive of Abortion than Catholics and Other Religious Groups

Third, for the religious affiliation dimension, our results show that although differences were not statistically significant, those identifying with no religious affiliation or with a tradition other than Catholic or Christian were the most supportive of abortion on the extreme and social circumstance scales. Further, Catholics were consistently more supportive of abortion than Christians. This trend, as other researchers explain, may be related to the increase of nominal Catholicism in the Latinx community (see Bartkowski et al. 2012), meaning that those who identify as Catholics do not necessarily practice Catholicism nor follow its moral teachings but see Catholicism as a cultural identity (Ellison et al. 2005). Moreover, these results suggest that opposition to abortion may increase with growing affiliation with Evangelical Protestantism. Furthermore, since we grouped multiple and different Christian identities into one category, it is possible that having Christian denominations like Episcopalians (liberal) and Evangelical/Baptist (conservative) in the same

group diminishes the differences between Catholics, Christians, and other religious (and non-religious) groups. More research is needed regarding attitudes toward various contentious social issues within conservative religious denominations.

Similarly, there were no significant differences based on having a born-again experience – a marker of Evangelical identity. Our inability to find a significant difference could be partially attributed to the small size of our sample. However, our results show a consistent trend, with participants who claimed to have had a “born-again” religious experience exhibiting the lowest support for abortion. This trend is consistent with previous research that argues that Evangelical Christian Latinxs are more opposed to abortion than Catholic Latinxs (e.g., Ellison, Echevarria, and Smith 2005). However, others, such as Adamczyk and Valdimarsdóttir (2018), argue that religious affiliation may not have a direct effect on participants’ attitudes because “Catholics and conservative Protestants disapprove of abortion and both are Christian faiths” (p. 141). Thus, affiliation with any Christian tradition, rather than with a specific Christian faith, may be the more important affiliation-related variable, with other indices of religiosity providing additional detail and nuance to the relationship and indicating more or less support for the legality and morality of abortion within a specific Christian faith tradition.

Mirrored Abortion Support Across Morality and Legality Dimensions

Finally, when comparing our sample’s support toward abortion morality and legality, our findings show a trend in which abortion moral and legal acceptability mirror each other in all the circumstance sets. This trend suggests that for Latinx people, moral and legal views may often be intertwined. This result is in line with other studies, such as Jones and Cox (2012), that point out that 73% of Latinxs who believe abortion is morally wrong also believe that abortion should be illegal in all or most cases. In comparison, 52% of Black Americans who believe abortion is morally wrong still support abortion legality in all or most cases (Jones and Cox 2012). We contend that the lack of difference between views on morality and legality may be associated with the difficult nature of disentangling these constructs (i.e., morality and legality) in the context of abortion attitudes. However, more research is needed on how abortion morality and legality are understood among Latinxs and non-Latinxs, including whether such dimensions are interpreted within an American or Latin American context.

Limitations

This study is subject to limitations we hope to address in future research. First, our religious denomination response options may have been limiting; thus, for future investigations, we recommend including more religious differentiation, such as Protestantism as its own option. Second, our data were aggregated from a quota-based panel of self-identified Latinx respondents residing in the US. Given the limitations of quota-based sampling (Beauchemin and González-Ferrer 2011), our findings may not necessarily be generalizable to all Latinx in the United States. Additionally, Latinx who participate in opt-panels like Qualtrics may not be representative of Latinx living in the US. Indeed, it is possible that those who participate in online surveys are more acculturated. Thus, other sampling techniques should be employed in the future to obtain a more representative sample of US Latinx adults. Further, researchers could consider testing the same hypotheses among specific Latinx sub-groups

(e.g., Puerto Rican versus Cuban) and include measures of acculturation such as language preference and nativity.

Additionally, because of the small sample size and preliminary nature of our study, we could not conduct more sophisticated statistical analyses that incorporated multiple independent variables. Therefore, more research is needed to examine Latinx abortion attitudes and to understand the patterns in which religiosity may influence Latinxs' and other groups' abortion views. Finally, researchers should examine whether religious denomination moderates the relationship between church attendance and Bible literalism and abortion attitudes.

Conclusion

In general, our findings suggest that Latinx attitudes regarding abortion morality and legality are complex and not uniform and that various components of religiosity influence them. Our results also indicate that the relationship between abortion attitudes and religiosity can vary across circumstances, meaning that religious and abortion attitudes among Latinx are contextual. Additionally, they shed light on how religious affiliation, beliefs, and practices are associated with different dimensions of abortion attitudes, including attitudes toward morality and legality and attitudes toward abortion for different types of circumstances. Given the religious shifting among Latinxs and the US-based Latinx population's rapid growth, more research is needed to examine the complex relationship between religiosity and social attitudes among this group.

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