

The Great Divide: The Impact of Political and Religious Conservatism on Attitudes toward Rape-Related Abortions.

Ketty Fernandez¹, Madelyn Diaz², and J. Scott Carter³

1 University of Central Florida, Orlando, FL, USA kfernandez1@knights.ucf.edu

2 University of Central Florida, Orlando, FL, USA Madelyn.diaz@knights.ucf.edu

3 University of Central Florida, Orlando, FL, USA carter@ucf.edu

Received September 9, 2019

Accepted for publication March 12, 2020

Published March 23, 2020

Abstract

The growing ideological divide between political and religious liberals and conservatives is a popular topic among the media and scholarly research. This division is never more evident than when looking at the perceptions of abortion. Using pooled data from the General Social Survey (GSS), this study particularly examines attitudes from 1972 to 2016 towards rape-related abortions, a topic less studied. Given the circumstances behind the pregnancy that led to the request for an abortion, this paper assesses whether such circumstances reduce the ideological divide separating the political and religious conservatives and liberals relative to abortions in general. Furthermore, we examine shifts across conservative and liberal subgroups to assess if the divide is stable or if it is increasing over time by one or both of the respective groups. Our findings suggest a political and religious attitudinal gap exists between general abortions and rape-related abortions. We also find that the divide is growing over time, and it is being impacted to a greater extent by an increase in opposition among conservative respondents, while moderate and liberal respondents remain stable. Theoretically, these findings are further discussed within the broader socio-political landscape.

Keywords: Abortion, Rape, Polarization, Attitudes, Women

Publication Type: Original research article

Preferred Citation: Fernandez, Ketty, Madelyn Diaz, and J. Scott Carter. 2020. "The Great Divide: The Impact of Political and Religious Conservatism on Attitudes toward Rape-Related Abortions." *Sociation*, 19(1), 15-28.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 2.0 Generic License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/2.0/)

Introduction

The growing political divide between liberals and conservatives has been a prominent and well-discussed issue on social media and in scholarly research (Baldassarri and Gelman 2008; DiMaggio, Evans and Bryson 1996; Evans 2003). The recent election of Donald Trump to the Presidency of the United States has only heightened the concern for a growing irreparable divide and impending policy implementation (Lemire and Swanson 2017). These concerns have raised the question of who is accountable for the gap resulting in pundits aiming at opposing parties. For instance, Antonova (2017)

suggests that the new Republican Party has shifted so far to the right that mainstream Republicans more closely align with Democrats and that Republican leadership should be labeled as the radical right. Others disagree with this assertion and pose that Democrats are the problem. Wehner (2015) argued the idea that Republicans are becoming more extreme is a false narrative and that Democrats are indeed the ones who have moved to the extreme. Regardless of who is accountable, if any, the concern and outrage are evident. Concerning broader public opinion, some pose that polarization is indeed an issue (Abramowitz and Saunders 2005; Bafumi and Sharpiro 2009) while

others downplay a larger divergence of public opinion on a broader set of issues (DiMaggio, Evans, and Bryson 1996; Evans 2003).

Even the staunch opponents of the polarization thesis find a deep divide in public views toward abortion. Generally speaking, the polarization of viewpoints on this issue is most noticeable when looking at subgroups of the population (Hegselmann and Krause 2002; Baldassarri and Bearman 2007). For instance, those who espouse more conservative political and religious ideologies are more likely to oppose abortion than are their liberal counterparts (Lynxwiler and Gay 1994; 1996; Gay and Lynxwiler 1999; Carter, Carter, and Dodge 2009; Simon and Abdel-Moneim 2010). It is not surprising that some scholars have argued that abortion stands as one of the primary reasons Catholics and Evangelicals have voted for Republican candidates at increasing rates (Jelen and Wilcox 2003). In this light, religious and political conservatism are inextricably connected. Furthermore, Abortion is an issue that consistently influences voting platforms with indicators that it can even lead to changes in citizen partisanship (Adams 1997; Jelen and Wilcox 2003).

A great deal of scholarly research has studied abortion attitudes for more than three decades resulting in a few basic conclusions (Lynxwiler and Gay 94, 96; Gay and Lynxwiler 1999; Jelen and Wilcox 2003; Carter, Carter, and Dodge 2009; Simon and Abdel-Moneim 2010). An overwhelming number of Americans believe it to be an important issue to them (Lynxwiler and Gay 94, 96; Gay and Lynxwiler 1999; Jelen and Wilcox 2003). Abortion attitudes and beliefs have been generally stable at an individual level but remain a topic that can influence a voter's political stance (Jelen and Wilcox 2003). While abortion, in general, is the topic of many debates, certain types of abortion are never within the forefront of public discussion. Despite its numerical relevancy, rape-related abortions remain an understudied issue. Views on this issue only make headlines when prominent politicians, such as Lawrence Lockman, Sarah Palin, Marco Rubio, Todd Akin, and John Koster speak against abortion even if the pregnancy is the result of rape. Rape induced pregnancies are common; the national estimate of rape-related pregnancies of rape victims is roughly 5% (Holmes, Resnick, Kilpatrick, and Best 1996; Perry, Murphy, Haider, and Harwood 2015b; Perry, Murphy, Rankin, Cowett, and Harwood 2016). Most importantly, it is critical to note that reported estimates of rape-related pregnancies are also likely to be underestimated given the underreporting of rape cases.

The purpose of this paper is two-fold. While abortion is indeed a pivotal issue dividing those who hold more conservative and liberal viewpoints (both

political and religious), we propose that due to the heinous nature of rape, the issue of rape-related abortion may minimize sub-group differences. Individuals on the political and religious right and left may maintain more similar attitudes toward abortion due to rape than when considering abortion in general because, in part, rape-related abortions may be viewed as more accepting than abortions in general. While research on attitudes toward rape-related abortion is limited, scholars looking at national trends show a great deal of stability and support for women's choice to abort given the situation (Smith and Son 2013). Even though there is a notable decline in attitude trends, the approval rating in 2012 remained at 72 percent (Smith and Son 2013). In other words, 7 of 10 respondents believed that women should have the choice of abortion. With such support, we assess whether these extreme conditions reduce the effect of political and religious polarization on abortion attitudes. If a divide exists, this would provide more evidence of a broader ideological division among conservatives and liberals.

The second purpose of this study is to follow trends over time for each of these conservative and liberal sub-groups (political and religious). Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope (2008) argue studying polarization trends using data collected over time is more important than studying polarization levels, which tends to be arbitrary. We mainly look at the change in attitudes of these groups toward abortion in general, a major topic often depicting division and rape-related abortions. Using nationally representative data from the General Social Survey (GSS) from 1972-2016 to evaluate shifts across these groups, we attempt to assess which group, conservatives or liberals, are shifting and causing a divide. Are political and religious conservatives growing more extreme in their views while their liberal counterparts are staying stable over time or vice versa? Or could it be that simply both parties are moving towards the extreme right and left of center? This paper attempts to answer these questions by untangling changes in views over time and assess how these subgroups are contributing to the ideological divide.

Literature Review

Evidence of Polarization and Broader Ideological Shifts

As with general attitudes toward abortion, the research looking at polarization and ideological division among the masses is mixed (Baldassarri and Gelman 2008). Some scholars argue that political polarization is not as severe as one may think and that such a divide may be overstated by the media and political interpreters

(Fiorina and Abrams 2008). Fiorina and Abrams (2008) pose that the Monica Lewinsky scandal in 1998 and political discussion of the red-blue map in the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections stoked concerns of growing ideological division among the masses. This perspective finds that while polarization may exist on certain issues, it only amounts to a division on a few issues and not a larger divergence of public opinion on a broader set of issues (DiMaggio, Evans, and Bryson 1996; Evans 2003) suggesting polarization is simply overstated. On the contrary, other scholars argue that the divide among the people is real and that broader ideologies are at play, even if they are only reflected on a few issues (Abramowitz and Saunders 2005; Bafumi and Sharpiro 2009; Baker 2005; Ellison and Musick 1993). Hunter (1991) even posed that we are in a culture war being waged by conservatives and liberals. He further stated that this divide is more egregious among the political elite and religious than the public.

Even if polarization among the US population is exaggerated in media, a few takeaways can be made. First, differences in views toward various social issues across subgroups are apparent. Significant ideological differences are observed for various groups, including whites and blacks, men and women, urban and rural, and the religious and political right and left (Baker, 2005). Focusing on the political divide, one explanation is that political polarization due to party identifiers are aligning with party elites and thus moving to more extreme positions (DiMaggio, Evans, and Bryson 1996; Layman and Carsey 2002a,b; Carsey and Layman 2006). Second, views toward abortion is a very divisive issue. While a broader polarization of viewpoints on social issues may be overstated, opinions toward abortion among political and religious groups are mixed throughout literature.

Abortion Attitudes

Issues surrounding and attitudes towards abortion have been well documented since the 1970s with the U.S. Supreme Court decision in its *Roe v. Wade* in 1973. Although research suggests that attitudes are fluid and change over time (Lynxwiler and Gay 1994, 1996; Gay and Lynxwiler 1999), abortion is one of the few social issues that has maintained and has a profound impact on politics and public policies (Boonsta 2007; Boonsta and Sonfield 2000). Studies suggest that political ideologies and religious views are the two strongest predictions of attitudes towards abortion (Lynxwiler and Gay 1994, 1996; Gay and Lynxwiler 1999). Individuals who highly value their religion tend to not support abortion (Simon and Adbel-Moneim 2010). Interestingly, Jones, Darroch, and Henshaw (2002) found that women over the age of 17 and who terminated their pregnancy

reported a religious affiliation. Protestants (43%) and Catholics (27%) were the highest of their group. Thus, while research has consistently shown that religion to be a strong predictor of abortion attitudes, Jones, Darroch, and Henshaw (2002) indicate that it will not necessarily stop a woman from seeking to terminate her pregnancy. While analyzing differences between religious groups, Evans (2002) found that out of all religious groups, Evangelicals are the most opposed to all abortions. Catholics, who were also opposed to all abortion, have slightly changed their views. Catholics are still against abortions for elective reasons but have accepted abortion if due to rape (Evans 2002; Hoffmann and Johnson 2005; Jelen and Wilcox 2003). However, research yields mixed results as to whether or not a religious stance still influence attitudes (Bolzendahl and Brooks 2005; Gay and Lynxwiler 1999; Lynxwiler and Gay 1994;1996).

Whereas abortion is now a controversial, partisan issue, it has not always been the case (Carmines and Woods 2002). Between 1972 and 1980, there were no significant differences between Republicans and Democrats. However, since 1984 there has been an increasing gap between the political parties (Jelen and Wilcox 2003) and considering attitudes influence partisanship, this may potentially increase the gap in both directions (Killian and Wilcox 2008). Previous studies further support that abortion attitudes are strongly associated with their voting tendencies for Presidential, House, and Senate elections (Jelen and Wilcox 2003; Abramowitz 1995; Smith 1994; Cook, Jelen, and Wilcox 1994a; Cook et al. 1994b; Abraham and Saunders 2008). Moreover, these attitudes are also strong enough to lead people to switch political parties (Killian and Wilcox 2008). While the elites started to polarize in the mid-1980s and throughout the 1990s, the general public also started to divide and switched parties most appropriate to their beliefs.

Rape-Related Abortions and Attitudes under these Circumstances

Rape is a severe, underreported social and public health issue. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS 2002), 63% of completed rapes from 1992-2000 were not reported to the police. Moreover, between 1995-2013 roughly 80% of rapes among student victims between the ages of 18-24 were not reported, while 67% of rapes among nonstudent populations of the same age were not reported (BJS 2014). Current estimates suggest one in every five women will be a victim of rape (Black, Basile, Breiding, Smith, Walters, Merrick, Chen, and Stevens 2011). Furthermore, roughly 19.3% of women in the United States have been raped (Black et al. 2011). Holmes et al. (1996) imply that because oftentimes the victims know their perpetrator, rape-related

pregnancies are highly linked to domestic and family violence.

With research suggesting that roughly 32,101 pregnancies result from rape annually for adult women, it is evident that this is an alarming social and public health issue (Holmes et al. 1996; McFarlane, Malecha, Watson, Gist, Batten, Hall, and Smith 2005). Though we have an estimate of rape-related abortions of adult women, less is known of adolescents (Holmes et al. 1996). Studies have also suggested that 1 to 1.9% of women seeking to terminate their pregnancy in abortion clinics are due to rape (Perry et al. 15b; Perry et al. 2016; Perry, Zimmerman, Al-Saden, Fatima, Cowett, and Patel 2015a). While Perry, Zimmerman, Al-Saden, Fatima, Cowett, and Patel (2015a) found that 1.9% of their population that sought to terminate their pregnancy was due to rape. Holmes et al. (1996) found that “rape-related pregnancy resulted from a single assault in 58.8% of cases, but 41.2% of cases involved repetitive assaults, one of which was assumed to result in pregnancy” (p. 322).

Historically, tracing attitudes towards rape-related abortions (1972-2012) reveal some stability. Following Roe vs. Wade decision, support for legalized abortion for any reason increased between 1972 and 1973. Support for legalized abortions due to rape peaked at 84% in 1982 (Smith and Son 2013). Such finding reveals a robust level of support for abortions due to rape was almost 8 of 10 respondents supported the choice of the woman to terminate their pregnancy. However, when analyzing trends, approval ratings for such abortions have notably declined over the years. Smith and Son (2013) found support for rape-related abortions hit an all-time low of 72% percent in 2012. While declining, these findings still show that a majority (7 of 10) of respondents would support a woman's choice under this situation.

Though research has noted trends in attitudes towards abortion, less is known about attitudes specifically focusing on rape-related abortions. It is suspected under such an extreme circumstance, the divide between pro-life and pro-choice advocates would decrease. There is sufficient evidence that respondents may consider an abortion under certain circumstances (Jelen and Wilcox 2003). However, due to stringent ideological divisions, it could very well be that the divide in attitudes will persist regardless of the reasoning behind for the abortion.

Research Design

This paper uses data collected by the General Social Survey (GSS). The GSS is biannually administered by The National Opinion Research Center (NORC) to a nationally representative sample of the non-institutionalized U.S. population 18 years of age and

older. The sampling strategy used by NORC is a stratified, multistage area probability sample of clusters of households in the continental United States. This dataset is often used in social science research because it asks a topically rich set of questions on various social issues while collecting demographic information on respondents. For this study, we analyzed answers from questions dealing with abortion attitudes, basic questions about political viewpoints, and other demographic characteristics for theoretical testing. The GSS also allows researchers to assess changes in attitudes over time as it has collected cross-sectional data on this topic for over four decades (1972 to 2016) (Smith, Marsden, Hout, and Kim 2016).

Analytical Strategy

The analytical strategy of this study has two primary components: First, we will assess the impact of political and religious conservatism on attitudes toward abortions in general and abortions due to rape. This part will look at the dataset by decade using descriptive statistics. We decided to present the trend in descriptive statistics by decade to ease the reading. Secondly, we will use pooled data to further assess change in abortion attitudes (both rape-related and in general) over time using a stepwise OLS multivariate regression analysis. This will allow us to control for spurious variables controlled for in the literature and to use interaction terms to assess change in the primary independent variables (political and religious ideology) over time. As will be described in more detail below, one way to assess change over time is to interact with our primary independent variables with a measure of time (YEAR). Using interaction terms in this manner will allow us to assess whether the impact of conservatism remained stable or has shifted over time linearly.

Dependent Variable:

To assess attitudes toward rape-related abortions, the GSS asked the following question: “Please tell me whether or not you think it should be possible for a pregnant woman to obtain a legal abortion.... If she became pregnant as a result of rape?” Response options provided to participants for this question were yes (0) or no (1). Accordingly, responses were coded so that a higher score reflected more conservative views toward rape-related abortions.

To assess attitudes toward abortion in general, we included the following questions asked of respondents by the GSS. The questions were combined to create an index that assesses attitudes toward abortion. The questions referred back to an opening statement: Please tell me whether or not you think it should be possible for a pregnant woman to obtain a legal abortion.

- 1) If she is married and does not want any more children?
- 2) If the woman wants it for any reason?
- 3) If the family has a very low income and cannot afford any more children?
- 4) If she is not married and does not want to marry the man?

Preliminary analyses reveal a high level of consistency across the abortion questions. A principal component analysis of the questions found only the first component had an eigenvalue greater than zero (3.352), and it accounted for over 83 percent of the variance. Responses were “yes” (1) and “no” (0) for each question. The index ranged from 0 to 4, with a score of 4 reflecting more conservative views toward abortion in general. We would like to emphasize the factor analysis revealed that indeed the abortion based on rape question loaded as a separate factor than the abortion in general questions.

Independent Variables

The primary independent variables for this paper are measures of religious and political conservatism. Similar to past research, religious conservatism was measured with an ordinal variable assessing the self-proclaimed level of religious fundamentalism/Liberalism (Liberal=0, Moderate =1; Fundamental=2). Political conservatism was measured using the following question: “We hear a lot of talk these days about liberals and conservatives. I’m going to show you a seven-point scale on which the political views that people might hold are arranged from extremely liberal--point 1--to extremely conservative--point 7. Where would you place yourself on this scale?” Responses ranged from “extremely liberal” to “extremely conservative,” with a moderate option. Similar to the religious variable, we treated it as an ordinal three-category variable: “conservatives” (1), moderate (2), and liberal (0). Respondents who rated themselves as slightly conservative, conservative, or extremely conservative were collapsed together to compare with moderates and liberals (Extremely liberal, liberal, and slightly liberal).

To assess whether the impact of conservatism on attitudes toward rape-related abortions were independent, several relevant control variables such as sex, race, age, marital status, number of children in the household, household income, education, place of regional residency, and a measure of religious fundamentalism were also included in the models. These variables have been shown to impact abortion and other attitudes in past research (Carter and Corra 2012; Carter, Corra and Jenks 2016; Carter et al. 2009; Jenks, Carter, and Jenks 2007). Sex and race variables were treated as a nominal variable. For sex, male

respondents were coded as 1 and females as 0. For the race variable, white respondents were coded as 1 and black respondents as 0. The age and education variables were coded as continuous variables, with age ranging from 18 to 89 (and over) years and education ranging from 0 to 20 years of formal education.

Following the coding style of the GSS, the household income variable was treated as an ordinal variable ranging from 1 (lowest income level) to 12 (highest income level). As briefly stated, marital and familial status has also been shown to impact views toward abortion. Accordingly, we controlled for marital status (married=1 and not married=0) and the number of children in the family.

Previous research suggests that the region of residency (Carter et al. 2005; Gay and Lynxwiler 1999; Wilcox 1992) may impact abortion attitudes. Accordingly, we included a variable comparing U.S. Census South (1) to other regions (non-South = 0). We also included a measure of urbanism (1=urban; 0=nonurban) as well. This technique of measuring region and urbanism has been used in past research (Carter 2005; Carter and Borch 2005; Carter and Carter 2014; Carter and Corra 2005; Carter et al., 2014).

RESULTS

As previously stated, the purpose of this paper is to assess the impact of 1) conservatism of both political and religious groups on attitudes toward abortion in general and abortion due to rape and 2) to assess whether that impact is changing over time. It has been debated whether conservatives and liberals alike are becoming more extreme or whether conservatives or liberals groups are shifting to one extreme independently. Either example would result in a growing division among conservative and liberal respondents.

Figure 1 provides an abortion index means scores by political ideology (conservative versus moderates and liberals) over a five-decade period (1972-2016). The outcome variable here is attitudes toward general abortion. Concerning political ideology, we use a measure that is a conservative estimate of political ideology as moderate and liberal respondents are collapsed together and then compared to their conservative counterparts. Looking initially at the data pooled (not included in the table), it is clear that political conservatives are less supportive of abortion in general than are political moderates and liberals over most years. Looking at mean scores overall (years collapsed, not included in the table), an ANOVA reveals the mean differences for each group to be significant at the .001 probability level, with political conservatives ($m=2.654$) followed by moderates

($m=2.264$), and liberals ($m=1.619$). Turning to Figure 1, the differences are apparent and play out universally over the periods included in the analysis; although, there appears variation across time.

Figure 1: Mean Abortion Index Scores of Political Conservatives and Moderate and Liberals by Decade

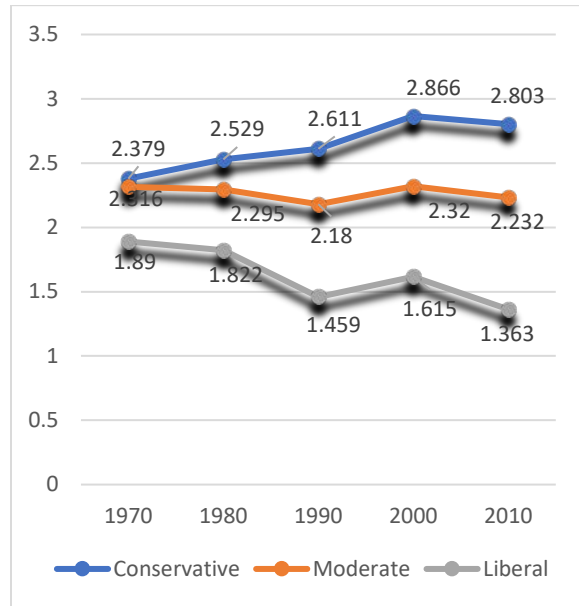


Figure 1 also provides insight into trends over time. As shown, the divide concerning abortion attitudes in general for the three sub-groups increased from the 1970s to the 2010s. Interestingly, in the 1970s the mean differences between the three political groups were quite minimum. However, this changed over time, resulting in the largest observed mean differences in the 2010s. For example, the differences between liberals/moderates, and conservatives in the 1970s was .063 and .489, respectively. Conversely, in the 2010s, the absolute differences between liberals/moderates, and conservatives jumped considerably to .571 and 1.44, respectively.

The trend data also provides insight into what subgroup mean is driving the increasing gap. From the 1970s to the 2010s, mean abortion scores for the politically conservative respondents increased from 2.379 to 2.803, a net positive shift upwards of .424. Conversely, mean scores for the politically moderate and liberal respondents decreased by .004 and .527, respectively, over that same period. While a multivariate analysis is needed, these findings support the notion that the political divide over abortion is statistically related to an increase in mean scores (that is, an increase in anti-abortion sentiment) for political conservatives, while their more liberal/moderate

counterparts are expressing somewhat more pro-abortion attitudes over that same period.

Figure 2: Mean Abortion Due to Rape Scores of Political Conservatives, Moderates and Liberals by Decade.

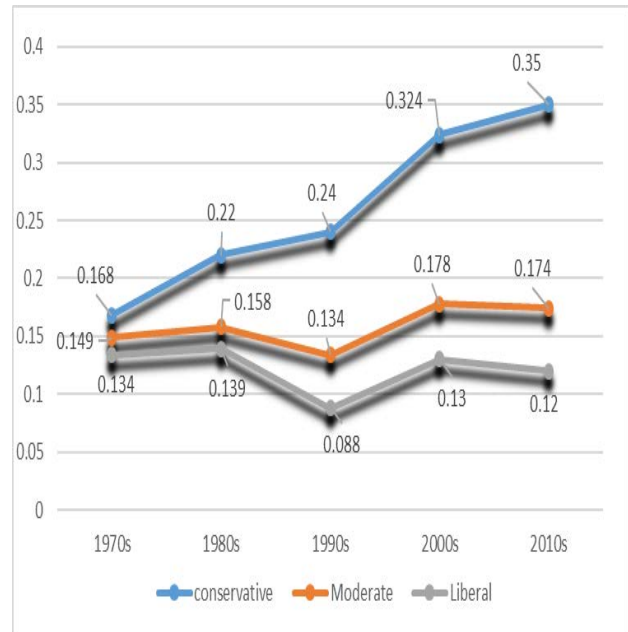


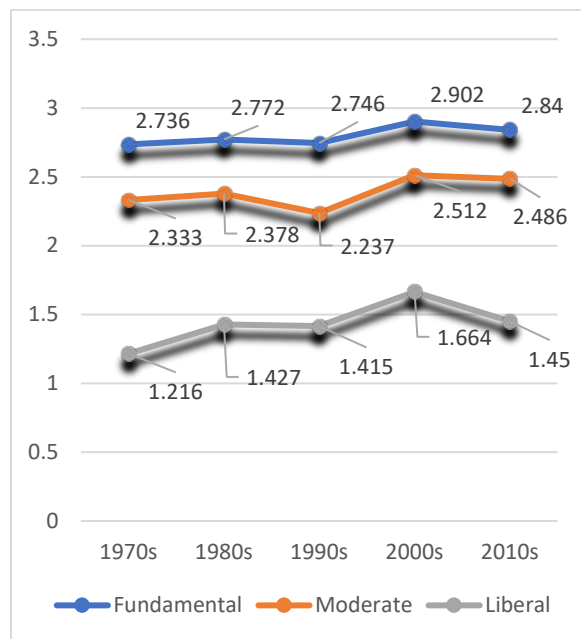
Figure 2 provides abortion means scores by political ideology (conservative versus moderate and liberal) over a five-decade period (1972-2016) as well. However, this measure of abortion is focusing solely on abortions due to rape. We report means to provide comparable findings to our findings for the abortion index presented in figure 1. A few overall observations can be made by generally looking at the findings. First, results with the data collapsed suggest the politically conservative respondents ($m=.255$) were more likely to express anti-abortion attitudes even under circumstances of rape than were moderates ($m=.157$) and liberals ($m=.123$). This finding was significant at the .001 probability level.

Furthermore, similar to views toward abortion in general, these significant differences play out over the decades, with only the 1970s being the exception. In context, the 1970s was a time of great upheaval and change when it came to abortion. The landmark Supreme Court case *Roe v. Wade* decision was handed down in 1973 and legalized abortion in the first trimester of a woman's pregnancy. Thus, this finding demonstrates that at least for abortion associated with rape, viewpoints for both conservatives and liberals were very much alike than different in the 1970s.

While little differences among conservatives and moderates/liberals were noted in the 1970s, this

shifted drastically in the 1980s and beyond. Figure 2 reveals a trend in the descriptive statistics where the ideological divide is increasing over time. The mean difference for each of these years is statistically significant at the .001 level using a t-test of independent means. In the 1980s, the difference between conservatives, moderates, and liberals was .062 and .081, respectively. Moreover, that difference linearly increased into the 2010s. Figure 2, like the results in figure 1, also provides evidence that the divide is associated with an increase in mean scores for political conservatives paralleling a static and even downward shift among moderates and liberal. The trend for conservatives is generally increasing over time in a positive linear fashion (change from the 1970s to 2010s = .182) while means scores for moderates/liberals are much more stable and even decreasing over that same period (moderate mean change = .05; liberal mean change = -.014). We will return to this question of change with a more complicated multivariate analysis below.

Figure 3: Mean Abortion Index Scores by Level of Religiosity by Decade



As previously stated, the second purpose of this paper is to analyze religious trends over time regarding support for general abortion and rape-related abortions. Figure 3 provides mean abortion index scores (abortion in general) by decade for fundamentalists, moderates, and liberals. Similar to political conservatism, the impact of religious fundamentalism is clear: the most religious conservative express significantly greater anti-

abortion attitudes with the religious conservatives (m=2.799) maintaining the higher means scores followed by religious moderates (m=2.389) and liberals (m=1.434). Regarding trends by decade, a few observations can be made. One, it appears that the viewpoints (mean scores) toward abortion, have been stable across each decade. Moreover, it appears that the attitudinal differences reflected in the comparison of the means across groups are also remaining quite stable over time.

Figure 4: Mean Abortion due to Rape Scores by Level of Religiosity by Decade

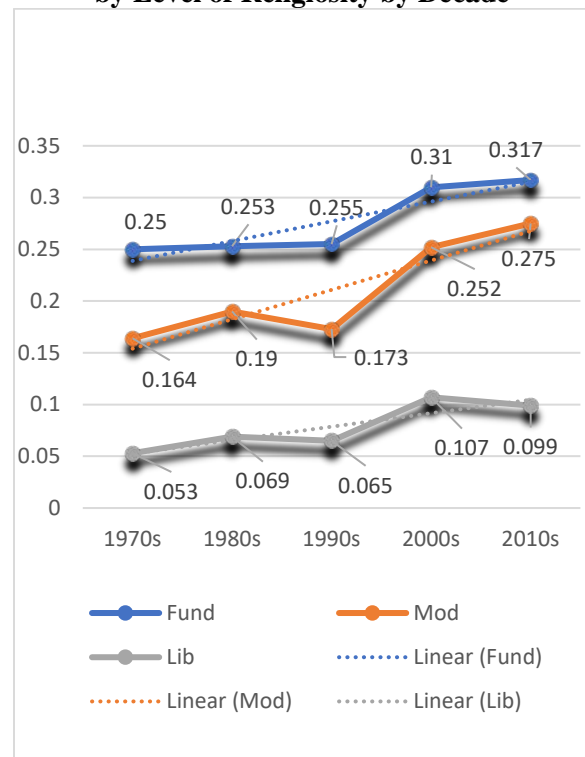


Figure 4 provides mean abortion due to rape scores by decade. Similar to Figure 3, views tend to be polarized based on the level of religiosity, even when considering such circumstances. Looking at the data pooled initially, an ANOVA comparing the means of the three groups revealed the differences to be highly significant. Respondents who described themselves as being more fundamental in their religious orientation maintained a mean of .268 followed by religious moderates at .198 and religious liberals at .077. To highlight and clarify the shift across the three religious groups, we also include abortion mean scores by the decade in Figure 4. Again, religious fundamentalists and moderates maintain greater anti-abortion attitudes relative to religious liberals. Looking at the shifts across time, any change appears to be rooted in anti-abortion shifts made by the religious moderates. Mean

shifts from the 1970s to 1990s for religious liberals (difference of .046) is quite less than religious fundamentalist (.067) and moderates (.111). We now turn to the multivariate analysis to assess whether the impact of political and religious conservatism remains when we control for important predictors variables shown to impact abortion attitudes. The multivariate analysis will also allow us to further assess the impact of these variables over time.

To reassess whether political and religious conservatism continues to impact views toward abortion, an OLS regression analysis was conducted. Models 1 and 3 provide an assessment of the primary independent variables alone, Models 2 and 4 provide full models with control variables that have been shown to impact attitudes toward abortion in past research (Carter et al., 2009). Similar to past research, Model 1 reveals that political conservatives were significantly more likely to express anti-abortion attitudes towards abortion in general than were moderates and liberals and this was significant at the .001 probability level. Religious conservatives were also more likely to express anti-abortion attitudes relative to religious moderates and religious liberals, and these parameter estimates were also significant at the .001 probability level. While Model 2 increases explained variance from .114 to .160 and account for some of the religiosity differences (effect size decreased), the findings from Model 1 and 2 remain quite similar when controls are included. Political and religious conservatives both express greater anti-abortion attitudes while the religious moderates fall into a middle ground. Those who are married, have more children in the home, are younger, less educated, reported lower household income, from the South, and live in non-urban areas are more likely to express anti-abortion attitudes as well.

Models 3 and 4 of Table 1 provide an assessment of our primary independent variables on attitudes toward abortions due to rape. Similar to abortion in general attitudes (Models 1 and 2), the political and religious conservatives were more likely to express anti-abortion attitudes than were their liberal counterparts, and these findings were significant at the .001 probability level. While adding the control variables accounted for some of the effects of religiosity, findings did not drastically change. Political conservatives were significantly more likely to express anti-abortion attitudes than their moderate and liberal counterparts. Religious conservatives were similarly more likely to express such sentiment relative to their more moderate counterparts. The impact of the control variables was similar to Model 2, although females and non-whites are more likely to express anti-abortion attitudes.

Finally, we assess whether the gap between political and religious factions are remaining stable, increasing, or decreasing over time. To do this, we interact with the primary independent variables with a measure of time (survey year). Table 2 presents coefficients for the main and trend effects for the two models (main effects are in columns 2 and 4 while trend effects are located in columns 3 and 5). These main and trend effects can be combined (interaction) to give the effects of the independent variables at any point in time. Thus, one can assess the effect size at time 1 (1974) and then at time 2 (2016). If a trend effect is significant, that means that the gap or effect size is increasing or decreasing significantly over time. To illustrate, look at the impact of marital status on attitudes toward abortion based on rape over time. Call the main effect b_0 and the interaction effect b_1 . The estimated effect of a variable is given by $b_0 + b_1 * \text{TREND}$, where TREND is the measure of time or survey year). Hence, the estimated effect of marital status in 1974 (year 1), for example, is $(-.001) + -.001 * 1 = .000$, while the estimated effect in 2016 or year 28 is $(-.001) + .001 * 28 = .027$. Note that the estimated effect in 2016 is greater than the estimated effect in 1974. Since the trend is significant, this would suggest a growing divergence between the married and not married on the issue of abortion. However, had the trend coefficient been insignificant, this would suggest that the growing divergence observed in the estimate is probably due to statistical chance alone and not an actual divergence. Rather than a divergence or convergence, a not significant trend variable reflects a stable effect over time.

When analyzing our primary independent variables and their impact on abortion attitudes in general, model 5 (column 3) reveal that some trends are indeed significant. This suggests a growing divergence or convergence in these variables over time. With a significant trend effect in Model 5, the effect size for political moderates (conservatives = comparison group) is becoming more pronounced over time. At time 1 (1974) the effect is $-.098 ((-.082) + (-.016 * 1))$ while at time 28 (2016) the effect is $-.53 ((-.082) + (-.016 * 28))$. Such finding supports the notion that the attitudinal gap between political conservatives and their moderate counterparts is growing over time. This finding is also found when comparing political conservatives and liberals. Interestingly, the impact of religiosity appears to be remaining quite stable over time. Additionally, we find that the significance of race appears to be diminishing over time.

Model 6 turns our attention toward attitudes regarding abortion due to rape. Similar to Model 5 in table 2, the

Table 1: OLS Regression Models - Estimated Main Effects (Standard Errors in parentheses) for the Conservatism Variables and other Demographic Variables on General Abortion Attitudes Index and Abortion Associated with Pregnancy Caused by Rape.

Independent Variables	Main Effects		Main Effects	
	General Abortion		Abortion Due to Rape	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Political Conservative	-	-	-	-
Political Moderate	-.329 (.023)***	-.389 (.025)***	-.092 (.005)***	-.097 (.005)***
Political Liberal	-.861 (.025)***	-.807 (.027)***	-.111 (.005)***	-.106 (.005)***
Religious Conservative	-	-	-	-
Religious Moderate	-.358 (.023)***	-.209 (.026)***	-.055 (.005)***	-.034 (.005)***
Religious Liberal	-1.206 (.026)***	-.807 (.027)***	-.170 (.005)***	-.134 (.006)***
Married (married=1)	-	.185 (.023)***		.026 (.005)***
Number of Children	-	.088 (.007)***		.018 (.001)***
Age	-	-.003 (.001)***		-.001 (.000)***
Sex (male = 1)	-	-.033 (.021)		-.017 (.004)***
Race (white=1)	-	.037 (.032)		-.017 (.007)*
Education	-	-.077 (.004)***		-.008 (.001)***
Household Income	-	-.037 (.005)***		-.008 (.001)***
Region (South=1)	-	.154 (.023)***		.015 (.005)***
Urban (urban=1)	-	-.329 (.025)***		-.032 (.005)***
Year	-	.013 (.001)***		.003 (.000)***
R ²	.114	.160	.048	.075
Df	30443	26182	35773	30957

Note: * p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001

Table 2: OLS Regression Models - Estimated Main Effects and Interaction Effects of Measures of Conservatism and Control Variables on Attitudes toward Abortion Associated with Pregnancy Caused by Rape.

Independent Variables	General Abortion		Abortion Due to Rape	
	Model 5 Main Effects	Trend	Model 6 Main Effects	Trend
Political Conservative	-	-	-	-
Political Moderate	-.082	-.016***	-.004	-.005***
Political Liberal	-.202	-.033***	.000	-.006***
Religious Conservative	-	-	-	-
Religious Moderate	-.168	-.002	-.018	-.001
Religious Liberal	-1.028	.004	-.096	-.002
Marital Status (married=1)	.191	-.001	-.001	.001*
Number of Children	.073	.001	.016	.000
Age	-.001	.000	-.002	.000
Sex (male=1)	.019	-.003	.029	-.003***
Race (white=1)	-.250	.015***	-.090	.004***
Education	-.076	.000	-.007	.000
Household Income	-.046	.001	-.009	.000
Region (South=1)	-.013	.009**	.000	.001
Urbanism (urban=1)	-.287	-.003	-.037	.000
R2		.164		.082
Df		26,182		30,957

Note: * p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001

conservative trend variable is significant. This reveals a growing divergence with moderates and liberals over time as well. For moderates at time 1 (1974), the effect is $-.009$ while at time 28 (2016) the effect is $-.284$. This finding demonstrates that the effect of the conservative variable is becoming more pronounced over time relative and that the gap between political conservatives and their more moderate counterparts is increasing over time. This finding plays out when comparing conservatives with liberals as well and parallels the impact of conservatism in Model 5. Based on the descriptive statistics presented in Figures 1 and 2, it appears that while moderate and liberals are stable regardless of reasoning on their views toward abortion, conservatives are becoming more anti-abortion over time. Such a shift creates an ideological gap between the more politically moderate/liberal and conservative sub-groups.

Findings from Model 6 reveal a unique finding for the religiosity measures not found in Model 5. Findings suggest significant trend effects for the religious liberal variable. Using the formula above reveals that the gap separating religious liberals and conservatives appears to be increasing over time ($-.095$ at time one as compared to $-.151$ at time 28). The gap between moderates and conservatives appears to be remaining stable over that same period. Concerning the growing gap that separates liberals and conservatives, descriptive statistics from Figure 4 may provide some insight. From the 1970s to the 2010s, the abortion due to rape mean increased by $.067$ for religious conservatives while the increase for religious liberals was only $.046$. Thus, the rate of increase in anti-abortion attitudes over time is greater for the religious conservatives than their liberal counterparts. Such a trend suggests the growing divide in abortion attitudes is due to the more conservative religious sub-group as they are becoming more anti-abortion even if due to rape at a faster rate than are their more religiously liberal counterparts.

CONCLUSIONS

We propose that sub-group differences in attitudes toward abortion may be minimized among conservative and liberal respondents if the pregnancy was a result of rape. We argue that, in contrast to abortions in general, abortions due to rape may be viewed with more empathy and women seeking to terminate their pregnancy under these circumstances would be viewed as victims of the violent act regardless of their political or religious backgrounds, ultimately reducing the ideological divide among these subgroups. Anecdotally, we have seen widespread outrage among the public when politicians such as Sarah Palin espoused a position that did not

support abortion under these extreme conditions. Palin was viewed as an apathetic and out of touch with the experiences of real women. She was also charged with pandering to the base of the Republican Party because she took such an extreme position and was summarily dismissed for such views (Hamby, Hornick, and Johnson 2008).

Results from this study found that respondents from both the political and religious conservatives were more likely than their liberal counterparts to denounce abortion in general. These findings also provide substantial evidence that the divide is growing over time, and it is contributed to the growing anti-abortion sentiment among conservatives. Reflecting on the figures, the mean score of general abortion for political conservatives is growing stronger over time while the mean score is remaining stable and even decreasing at times for their more liberal/moderate counterparts over the same period. For change over time for religious sub-groups, findings suggest that all groups are slowly becoming more conservative over time.

This study adds to the current literature on polarization and abortion attitudes by showing that there is indeed a religious and political divide when reflecting on abortion where the pregnancy was due to a violent act such as rape. Similar to attitudes toward abortion in general, there is a clear difference between respondents from different subgroups. Those who hold more conservative ideologies are more likely to denounce abortion even if it was as a result of rape than more liberal respondents. Further supporting previous studies, we argue that this finding supports the idea for a broader ideological shift (Evans 2003; Jelen and Wilcox 2003; Abramowitz 1995; Smith 1994; Cook, Jelen, and Wilcox 1994a; Cook et al. 1994b; Abraham and Saunders 2008). Results suggest that even in cases of abortions due to rape, there is a notable political and religious rift. As such, conditions that are empathy inducing are met with very different viewpoints that speak to the broader political and religious divide.

Looking at trends in attitudes toward abortion due to rape also reveals that the political and religious divide to a certain degree can be explained by a growing anti-abortion sentiment among conservatives as those who espouse more moderate positions are remaining quite stable in their viewpoints over time. Similar to the abortion in general figures, the figures for the abortion due to rape reveal mean scores for political conservatives are increasing at a greater rate than the means for political moderate and liberal respondents. This study does not support the argument that liberal respondents are shifting more to the left. On the contrary, the left is remaining quite stable in

their viewpoints while those on the right are increasing.

While not necessarily a Trump phenomenon as attitudes have been generally trending more conservative, it is understandable why the election of Trump as President of the United States would raise a concern about a growing divergence in the US. This divergence is indeed reflective in the changing of attitudes toward abortion in general and rape-related. Given the divisiveness over abortion and the weight such views hold politically, future research is needed to assess what factors create greater empathetic reactions among those of conservative persuasion. Given the conservative leanings of the Supreme Court justices, gaining a more empathetic view will be important as we move forward.

References

- Abramowitz, Alan I. 1995. "It's Abortion, Stupid: Policy Voting in the 1992 Presidential Election." *Journal of Politics* 57(1):176-86.
- Abramowitz, Alan I., and Kyle L. Saunders. 2005. "Why Can't We All Just Get Along? The Reality of a Polarized America." *The Forum*, 3(2): 1-22.
- Abramowitz, Alan I., and Kyle L. Saunders. 2008. "Is Polarization a Myth?" *The Journal of Politics*, 70(2):542-555.
- Antonova, Katherine P. 2017. "The GOP Is No Longer A 'Conservative' Party: They've Become radical, and They Want to Remake America." The Huffington Post. Retrieved January 25, 2018 from: https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/republicans-nolongerconservative-party_us_59767dd6e4b0e201d5776f8c
- Bafumi, Joseph, and Robert Shapiro, Y. 2009. "A New Partisan Voter." *The Journal of Politics*, 71(1): 1-24.
- Baker, Wayne E. (2005). *America's Crisis of Values: Reality and Perception*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press.
- Baldassarri, Delia., and Andrew Gelman. 2008. "Partisans Without Constraint: Political Polarization and Trends in American Public Opinion." *American Journal of Sociology* 114(2): 408-446.
- Baldassarri, Delia., and Peter Bearman. 2007. "Dynamics of Political Polarization." *American Sociological Review* 72, 784-811.
- Black, M.C., Basile, K.C., Breiding, M.J., Smith, S. G., Walters, M.L., Merrick, M.T., Chen, J., and Stevens, M.R. (2011). The national intimate partner and sexual violence survey (NISVS): 2010 Summary report. Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
- Bolzendahl, Catherine, and Clem Brooks. 2005. "Polarization, Secularization, or Differences as Usual." *The Sociological Quarterly*, 46(1), 47-58.
- Boonsta, Heather D. 2007. "The Heart of the Matter, Public Funding of Abortion for Poor Women in the United States." *Guttmacher Policy Review*, 10(1), 12-16.
- Boonsta, Heather D., and Adam Sonfield. 2000. "Rights Without Access: Revisiting Public Funding of Abortion for Poor Women." *Guttmacher Report on Public Policy*, 3(2), 8-11
- Bureau of Justice Statistics. 2002. *Rape and Sexual Assault: Reporting to Police and Medical Attention, 1992-2000*. Retrieved from: <https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/rsarp00.pdf>
- Bureau of Justice Statistics. 2014. *Rape and Sexual Assault Victimization Among College-aged Females, 1995-2013*. Retrieved from: <https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/rsavca9513.pdf>
- Carmine, Edwin G., and James Woods. 2002. "The Role of Party Activists in the Evolution of the Abortion Issue." *Political Behavior* 24(4): 361-77.
- Carsey, Thomas M., and Geoffrey C. Layman. 2006. "Changing Sides or Changing Minds? Party Identification and Policy Preferences in the American Electorate." *American Journal of Political Science*, 50(2): 464-477.
- Carter, James S. 2005. "Reassessing the Effect of Urbanism and Regionalism: A Comparison of Different Indicators of Racial Tolerance." *Sociation Today*, 3(2). <http://www.ncsociology.org/sociationtoday/v32/urbanism.htm>
- Carter, J. Scott. and Casey A. Borch. 2005. "Assessing the Effect of Urbanism and Regionalism on Gender-Role Attitudes, 1972-1998." *Sociological Inquiry* 75: 548-563.
- Carter, J. Scott, and Shannon K. Carter. 2014. "Place Matters: The Impact of Place of Residency on Racial Attitudes among Regional and Urban Migrants." *Social Science Research* 47: 165-177.
- Carter, J. Scott., Shannon Carter., and Jamie Dodge. 2009. "Trends in Abortion Attitudes by Race and Gender: a reassessment over a four-decade period." *Journal of Sociological Research*, 1(1): 1-17.
- Carter, J. Scott and Mamadi Corra. 2012. "Beliefs About the Causes of Racial Inequality: The Persisting Impact of Urban and Suburban Locations?" *Urban Studies Research*. Doi:10.1155/2012/242741.
- Carter, J. S., and Mamadi Corra. 2005. "Changing

- Attitudes Toward Women, 1972-1998: The Liberalization of Religious Fundamentalists." *Michigan Sociological Review*, 19: 19-44.
- Carter, J. Scott, Mamadi Corra, Shannon K Carter and Rachel McCrosky. 2014. "The Impact of Place? A Reassessment of the Importance of the South in Affecting Beliefs about Racial Inequality." *Social Science Journal* 51:12-20.
- Carter, J. Scott, Mamadi Corra and David Jenks. 2016. "In the Shadows of Ferguson: The Role of Racial Resentment on White Attitudes Toward the use of Force by Police." *International Journal of Criminal Justice Sciences* 11: 114-131.
- Carter, J. Scott, Lala Steelman, Lynn Mulkey and Casey Borch. 2005. "When the Rubber Meets the Road: The Differential Effects of Urbanism and Region on Principle and Implementation Measures of Racial Tolerance." *Social Science Research* 34: 408-425.
- Cook, Elizabeth A., Ted G Jelen, and Clyde Wilcox. (1994a). "Issue Voting in U.S. Senate Elections: The Abortion Issue in 1990." *Congress and the Presidency* 21: 99-112.
- Cook, Elizabeth A., Ted G Jelen, and Clyde Wilcox. (1994b). "Issue Voting in Gubernatorial Elections: Abortion and Post-Webster Politics." *Journal of Politics* 56(1): 187-99.
- Corra, Mamadi, Shannon K. Carter, J. Scott Carter and David Knox. 2009. "Trends in Marital Happiness by Sex and Race, 1973-2006." *Journal of Family Issues*.30: 1379-1404.
- DiMaggio, P., John Evans, and Bethany Bryson. 1996. "Have American's Social Attitudes become More Polarized?" *American Journal of Sociology*, 102(3): 690-755.
- Ellison, C. G., and Marc A Musick. 1993. "Southern Intolerance: A Fundamentalist Effect." *Social Forces*, 72(2): 379-398.
- Evans, John H. 2002. "Polarization in Abortion Attitudes in U.S. Religious Traditions, 1972 1998." *Sociological Forum*, 17(3):397-422.
- Evans, John H. 2003. "Have Americans Attitudes Become More Polarized – An Update." *Social Science Quarterly*, 84(1): 71-90.
- Fiorina, M. P., Samuel A Abrams, and Jeremy C Pope. 2008. "Polarization in the American Public: Misconceptions and Misreadings." *Southern Political Science Association*, 70(2): 556-560.
- Fiorina, M. P., and Samuel J Abrams. 2008. "Political Polarization in the American Public." *Annual Review of Political Science*, 11:563-588.
- Gans, Herbert. J. 1995. *The War Against the Poor: The Underclass and Antipoverty Policy*. New York: Basic Books.
- Gay, D., and John Lynxwiler. 1999. "The Impact of Religiosity on Race Variations in Abortion Attitudes." *Sociological Spectrum* 19:359-377.
- Gilens, Martin. 1996. "Race and Poverty in America." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 60(4): 515-541.
- Gilens, Martin. 1999. *Why Americans Hate Welfare*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Hamby, P., Hornick, Ed., and Johnson, S. (2008, October 11). Palin heightens rhetoric on abortion *CNN Politics*. Retrieved from <http://www.cnn.com/2008/POLITICS/10/11/campaign.wrap/>
- Hegselmann, Rainer, and Ulrich Krause. 2002. "Opinion Dynamics, and Bounded Confidence Models, Analysis and Simulation." *Journal of Artificial Societies and Social Simulation*, 5(3): 1-33.
- Hoffman, John P., and Sherrie M Johnson. 2005. "Attitudes Toward Abortion Among Religious Traditions in the United States: Change or Continuity?" *Sociology of Religion*, 66(2):161-182.
- Holmes, M. M., Heidi S Resnick, Dean G Kilpatrick, and Connie L Best. 1996. "Rape-Related Pregnancy: Estimates and Descriptive Characteristics from a National Sample of Women." *American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology*, 175 (2): 320-325.
- Hunter, J. D. (1991). *Culture wars: The Struggle to Define America*. New York: BasicBooks.
- Jelen., Ted., and Clyde Wilcox. 2003. "Causes and Consequences of Public Attitudes Toward Abortion: A Review and Research Agenda." *Political Research Quarterly*, 56, 489-500.
- Jenks, David A., J. Scott Carter, and Catherine A. Jenks. 2007. "Command Staff Leadership Training and Job Commitment in the LAPD." *Southwest Journal of Criminal Justice* 4:106-119.
- Jones, Rachel. K, Jacqueline Darroch, and Stanley K Henshaw. 2002. "Patterns in the Socioeconomic Characteristics of Women Obtaining Abortions in 2000-2001." *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health*, 34(5): 226-235.
- Killian, Mitchell, and Clyde Wilcox. 2008. "Do Abortion Attitudes Lead to Party Switching?" *Political Research Quarterly*, 61(4): 561-573.
- Layman, Geoffrey. C., and Thomas M Carsey. 2002. "Party Polarization and Party Structuring of Policy Attitudes: A Comparison of Three NES Panel Studies." *Political Behavior*, 24(3):199-236.

- Lemire, Jonathan., and Emily Swanson. (2017, 17 January). Young Americans fear Donald Trump will divide the nation: poll. *Global News*. Retrieved from <https://globalnews.ca/news/3185975/trump-poll-young-americans-pessimistic/>
- Lynxwiler, John., and David Gay. 1994. "Reconsidering Race Differences in Abortion Attitudes." *Social Science Quarterly*, 75(1): 67-84.
- Lynxwiler, John., and David Gay. 1996. "The Abortion Attitudes of Black Women: 1972-1991." *Journal of Black Studies*, 27(2): 260-277.
- McFarlane Judith, Ann Malecha, Kathleen B Watson, Gist, J., Elizabeth Batten, Iva Hall, and Sheila Smith. 2005. "Intimate Partner Sexual Assault Against Women: Frequency, Health, Consequences, and Treatment Outcomes." *Obstetrics and Gynecology*, 105(1): 99-108.
- Perry, Rachel, Lindsay Zimmerman, Iman Al-Saden, Aisha Fatima, Allison Cowett, and Ashlesha Patel. 2015a. "Prevalence of Rape-Related Pregnancy as an Indication for Abortion at Two Urban Family Planning Clinics." *Contraception*, 91(5): 393-397.
- Perry, Rachel., Molly Murphy, Sadia Haider, and Bryna Harwood. 2015b. "One Problem Became Another: Disclosure of Rape-Related Pregnancy in the Abortion Care Setting." *Women's Health Issues*, 25(5):470-475.
- Perry, Rachel., Molly Murphy, Kristin M Rankin, Alison Cowett, and Bryna Harwood, B. 2016. "Practices Regarding Rape Related Pregnancy in U.S. Abortion Care Settings." *Women's Health Issues*, 26(1): 67-73.
- Sandler, L. (2011, 17 October). The Mother Majority. *Slate*. Retrieved from http://www.slate.com/articles/double_x/doublex/2011/10/most_surprising_abortion_statistics_the_majority_of_women_who_terminate.html
- Simon, Rita J., and Mohammed A Abdel-Moneim. 2010. "Does Gender Matter? Men and Women on Controversial Social Issues." *Gender Issues*, 27: 95-109.
- Smith, Tom W., and Jaesok Son. (2013). "General Social Survey Final Report: Trends in Public Attitudes Towards Abortion 1972-2012." *National Opinion Research Center (NORC)*, University of Chicago.
- Smith, Tom W, Peter Marsden, Michael Hout, and Jibum Kim. General Social Surveys, 1972-2016 [machine-readable data file] /Principal Investigator, Tom W. Smith; Co-Principal Investigator, Peter V. Marsden; Co-Principal Investigator, Michael Hout; Sponsored by National Science Foundation. -NORC ed.- Chicago: NORC at the University of Chicago[producer and distributor]. Data accessed from the GSS Data Explorer website at gssdataexplorer.norc.org.
- Smith, Kevin B. 1994. "Abortion Attitudes and Vote Choice in the 1984 and 1988 Presidential Elections." *American Politics Quarterly* 22, 354-69.
- Wehner, Peter. 2015. "Have Democrats Pulled Too Far Left?" *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/27/opinion/have-democrats-pulled-too-far-left.html>
- Wilcox, Clyde. 1992. "Race, Religion, Region, and Abortion Attitudes." *Sociological Analysis*, 53(1): 97-105.