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Faith, Race-Ethnicity, and Public Policy Preferences: Religious Schemas and Abortion Attitudes Among U.S. Latinos

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Research has demonstrated that white conservative Protestants are more opposed to abortion than their Catholic counterparts. At the same time, conservative Protestantism has made significant inroads among U.S. Latinos. This study augments existing research on religion and racial-ethnic variations in abortion attitudes by comparing levels of support for legalized abortion among Catholic and conservative Protestant Latinos. Data are drawn from a nationally representative sample of U.S. Latinos. Significantly greater opposition to abortion is found among religiously devout conservative Protestant Latinos when compared with their Catholic counterparts. Latino Catholicism, which functions as a near-monopolistic, highly institutionalized faith tradition among Hispanics, produces weaker antiabortion attitudes than those exhibited in Latino conservative Protestantism. Among Latinos, conservative Protestantism operates as a niche voluntaristic faith. These factors produce a religious schema that yields robust antiabortion attitudes. This study has important implications for understanding the intersection of race-ethnicity, religion, and public policy preferences.

Keywords: *religion, abortion, Latino, Hispanic, schemas.*

INTRODUCTION

Scholars have long studied the links between religion and abortion, and have found that people who are highly religious tend to be more opposed to abortion (see, e.g., Gay and Lynxwiler 1999; Guth et al. 1993; Jelen and Wilcox 2003; Steensland et al. 2000). Moreover, conservative religious adherents who are highly active in their faith tradition evince the greatest opposition to abortion (e.g., Guth et al. 1993; Hoffmann and Johnson 2005; Hoffmann and Miller 1997; Steensland et al. 2000). Conservative Protestants¹ are now considerably more likely to oppose abortion than are Catholics, and there is little attitudinal variability among conservative Protestants on this issue when compared with those from other faith traditions (Hoffmann and Johnson 2005; Hoffmann and Miller 1997, 1998). Despite the consistency of these observations across studies conducted in different years with various data sources, the literature on religion and abortion could benefit from additional consideration of the pathways through which opposition to this practice is formed. For the most part, scholars have argued that religious communities, particularly theologically orthodox faith traditions, create a moral ethos that lends itself to political conservatism. While

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¹ Recognizing that many sociologists of religion use the term “conservative Protestant” as a broad category composed predominantly of evangelicals in addition to some other conservative Christian groups (e.g., fundamentalists, Pentecostals), we generally opt for this term throughout the article. In a few instances, we use the term “evangelical” interchangeably for stylistic convenience.

this interpretation is plausible, it fails to examine the social mechanisms associated with religious involvement that might underlay the connections between religiosity and public policy views.

Moreover, relatively little attention has been given to the linkages between religion, race-ethnicity, and abortion attitudes. Non-Hispanic white Americans have received the lion's share of attention in the religion and abortion attitudes literature (Jelen and Wilcox 2003). And, where race-ethnicity has been explored, African Americans have most often been the subject of investigations (e.g., Gay and Lynxwiler 1999; Lynxwiler and Gay 1994), with Latinos² receiving scarce attention on this score. This oversight is lamentable, given the rapid growth of Latinos as a proportion of the American population and the increasing religious diversity observed among American Latinos. Decennial U.S. Census data reveal that there were 35.3 million Latinos in the United States in the year 2000, up significantly from 22.4 million in 1990 (U.S. Census Bureau 2010). In 2000, Latinos were estimated to make up 12.5 percent of the American population, and this figure registered at 16.3 percent in 2010. Long-term growth projections estimate that 20 percent of Americans will be of Latino origin by 2030, with additional increases to just under a quarter of the overall U.S. population expected two decades thereafter.

This fast-growing racial-ethnic group is also experiencing significant religious diversification (Barton 2006; De La Torre 2008; Diaz-Stevens and Stevens-Arroyo 1998; Dolan and Deck 1994; Espinosa, Elizondo, and Miranda 2005; Hunt 1999; Maldonado 1999, 2002). While the Catholic Church had enjoyed a longstanding monopoly on Latino religious affiliation, recent years have witnessed increasing inroads that Protestant faiths have made into the Latino religious market. Some have argued that Hispanic Protestants are "doubly marginalized" by being situated outside the Latino Catholic mainstream and at the edges of predominantly non-Hispanic white American Protestantism (De La Torre 2008; Maldonado 1999). A review of multiple national studies has revealed that Latinos are still quite likely to be born and raised Catholic (about 70 percent), even as a significant minority of Latinos now identifies as non-Catholic Christian (about 20 percent) (Perl, Greely, and Gray 2006). Most of the remainder (about 8 percent) claims no faith at all (Pew Hispanic Center and Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life 2007). Conservative Protestant denominations have been especially successful at attracting Latino adherents, with over 15 percent of Latinos now claiming such an affiliation (Pew Hispanic Center and Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life 2007). The "evangelicalization" of American Latinos raises important questions not only about the contours of religious diversity among America's largest, fastest-growing racial minority. It also prompts questions about the cultural and political sensibilities of conservative Protestant Latinos when compared with their Catholic counterparts.

This study is designed to examine the influence of religion among Latinos on a key public policy issue, namely, abortion. In undertaking this study, we explore how a combination of racial-ethnic homology (shared Latino heritage) and religious diversity (Catholic vs. conservative Protestant affiliation) is associated with abortion attitudes. We use nationally representative data with a rich repository of religion measures to do so. In addition, we seek to advance theoretical understandings of the linkages between race-ethnicity, religion, and abortion. We identify religious schemas (cognitive frameworks) as a key mechanism through which abortion attitudes are formed, and compare the efficacy of religious schemas across denominational contexts. While we recognize that both Catholic and conservative Protestant schemas are linked to antiabortion attitudes, our comparison of these two religious groups within the broader Latino population permits us to consider how religious schemas influence public policy attitudes differently across faith traditions. We anticipate that the greatest opposition to abortion will be expressed by devout Latino conservative Protestants given (1) the especially robust antiabortion attitudes among conservative Protestants at large, (2) the market niche status and voluntaristic nature of religious affiliation among conservative Protestant Latinos, and (3) the degree of network integration

² We use the terms "Latino" and "Hispanic" interchangeably for stylistic convenience.

and cultural exposure of highly churched Latino conservative Protestants. Where public policy preferences are concerned, Latino conservative Protestantism is expected to contrast markedly with the near-monopolistic and more institutionalized nature of religious affiliation within Latino Catholicism.

PRIOR RESEARCH AND ANTICIPATED CONTRIBUTIONS

A great deal of research has examined the antecedents of abortion attitudes (for reviews, see Coleman et al. 2005; Jelen and Wilcox 2003). Conservative Protestants are most strongly opposed to abortion and exhibit little attitudinal variation about what is, within this denominational family, arguably the social issue that most defines religious conservatism today (Hoffmann and Johnson 2005; Hoffmann and Miller 1997, 1998; Steensland et al. 2000). Catholics are considerably more antiabortion than the religiously unaffiliated. As a group, however, Catholics are not as opposed to abortion as their conservative Protestant peers. For their part, mainline Protestants fall between Catholics and the unaffiliated in their opposition to this practice. More frequent worship service attendance also consistently predicts stronger opposition to abortion. Increasingly, scholars have explored racial-ethnic variations in this key public policy area (see Jelen and Wilcox 2003 for review). Whereas early scholarship reported a significant racial-ethnic gap in abortion attitudes, with African Americans more opposed to abortion than non-Hispanic whites, more recent research has tracked the erosion of this gap (see Gay and Lynxwiler 1999). Moreover, the precise religious mechanisms underlying abortion attitudes for persons of faith appear to differ significantly across racial-ethnic groups. For example, worship service attendance and biblical literalism do not predict antiabortion sentiments as robustly among African Americans as they do among non-Hispanic whites (Hall and Ferree 1986; Lynxwiler and Gay 1994; Wilcox 1990).

A small research literature has emerged on Latino views of abortion (Bolks et al. 2000; Ellison, Echevarria, and Smith 2005). Latinos are generally more opposed to abortion than their Anglo counterparts, and higher levels of religiosity among Latinos are linked with stronger opposition to abortion. However, such studies have been based on small samples that are unrepresentative of important Latino subgroups like Cubans, South Americans, and Central Americans. Moreover, this research features data that are now two decades old and potentially far removed from current trends (Bolks et al. 2000; Ellison, Echevarria, and Smith 2005). Finally, research on Latino opposition to abortion has been more focused on generating empirical observations than developing theoretical explanations.

Our study redresses these shortcomings by using current nationally representative survey data drawn from the 2006 survey, "Changing Faiths: Latinos and the Transformation of American Religion." (Data for this survey were collected in 2006, while the report based on the survey was published in 2007. See Pew Hispanic Center and Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life 2007.) These data permit us to explore the linkages between various dimensions of Latino religiosity (e.g., denominational affiliation, attendance, biblical literalism) and abortion attitudes. And, because this survey features sizable subsamples of Latinos who affiliate with different faith traditions (e.g., conservative Protestant, mainline Protestant, and Catholic), we can examine how views of abortion vary across faith traditions for Hispanic Americans. The case of Latino religiosity and abortion also affords us an opportunity to theorize about how abortion attitudes may be linked not only to the content of faith traditions (doctrinal opposition to abortion), but might also be influenced by the social location of those traditions (mainstream vs. marginal faiths).

THEORY AND HYPOTHESES

In recent years, social researchers have developed Sewell's (1992) concept of schemas to make sense of a wide range of social attitudes and behaviors, even as sociologists of religion have

examined the contours and influence of religious schemas (Ellison and Sherkat 1995a; Hoffmann and Bartkowski 2008; Koenig 1995; McIntosh 1995; Sherkat and Wilson 1995; Taylor 2001). What, then, is a schema? According to Sewell (1992), a schema is an element of social structure that, along with resources (the other key component of social structure), exerts a strong influence on human social behavior. Schemas are cognitive frameworks that at once enable social actors to interpret the worlds they inhabit and provide recipes for appropriate action. Schemas are often rooted in taken-for-granted assumptions, and are linked to resource acquisition and allocation because they often serve to legitimize authority, power, and inequality.

Religious schemas consist of assumptions about things held sacred (e.g., beliefs about God, divine law, life purpose) and serve to “direct religious role taking. . . , influence actions, and ultimately inform choices regarding religious behavior” and, more broadly, social morality (Ellison and Sherkat 1995a:1261). Thus, religious schemas not only direct action in the everyday world. In an even more fundamental sense, religious schemas shape perceptions about appropriate conduct under particular circumstances. In short, then, religious schemas create a system of values from which moral judgments can be formulated. Consequently, “schemas influence what is perceived . . . [and] how people understand what they perceive . . . Further, those with a particular religious schema may understand events much differently than those without that schema” (McIntosh 1995:3).

Where abortion is concerned, those who embrace a pro-life position may adopt any one or combination of rationales for their opposition to this practice (e.g., life begins at conception, abortion undermines women’s mental or physical health, the unborn should be granted the same rights as the born, and abortion is an affront to motherly nurturance and compassion) (Emerson 1996). And, of course, any of these antiabortion rationales can be informed by religious schemas (e.g., God is the giver of life, children are a blessing from God, adverse personal and social events reflect God’s punishment for abortion as a transgression of divine law). Thus, antiabortion attitudes are quite capable of resting on religious schemas.

This study is designed to advance not only scholarship on the social bases of antiabortion sentiments but also theorizing about the role of religious schemas in shaping public policy preferences. What is missing in current discussions of religious schemas is an appreciation of how the contours and consequences associated with religious schemas may vary across faith traditions and cultural contexts. Given the increasing degree of religious diversification among devout Latinos, we seek to determine if evangelical Latinos have distinctive attitudes toward abortion when compared with their Catholic counterparts. The distinctiveness of their attitudes could vary in terms of the intensity of antiabortion beliefs and the social antecedents of such beliefs.

Schemas, then, provide us with a fruitful avenue for probing the complex interconnections between religion, public policy preferences, and race-ethnicity. It is important to recognize that we do not introduce this core concept with the goal of generating a “measurable indicator” of schemas. Theories, and the concepts they provide, can be enlisted in various ways to guide the conduct of social research. In terms explicated quite well by Lemert (2010), theories have a variety of possible “uses.” Following its initial exposition in seminal work on the duality of structure (Sewell 1992), we use the schema construct as a conceptual framework that assists us in interpreting empirical patterns that are observed in data. As complex habits of mind, schemas (like worldviews or standpoints) are not easily operationalized or measured. Thus, our goal here is not to operationalize and “test” a theoretical construct so much as to enlist that concept in the process of interpreting data.

Why, then, would we expect the abortion attitudes of Latino evangelicals and Latino Catholics to vary? Here, we must attend to the denominationally specific character of religious schemas and the broader cultural contexts within which such schemas are situated. First, conservative Protestants at large consistently express more robust antiabortion sentiments than other religious groups, including Catholics (Guth et al. 1993; Hoffmann and Johnson 2005; Hoffmann and Miller 1997,

1998). To be sure, Catholic elites have condemned abortion in public pronouncements, sometimes equating it to murder. Papal encyclicals like *Humanae Vitae* use natural law reasoning to argue that sexual relations in marriage are a means through which a couple becomes partners with God in the creation of life. However, American Catholics have long questioned papal authority, and are notorious for selectively appropriating Vatican doctrines on matters of sexual morality (D'Antonio et al. 2007; Greeley 1990). Flagging allegiance to Vatican doctrine has also been observed among Latino Catholics, for whom religious expression may be manifested through popular devotional practices and folk beliefs (e.g., veneration of saints and the Virgin of Guadalupe) that are largely detached from papal pronouncements and official church teachings (Maldonado 2002; Matovina 2005; see Ellison, Acevedo, and Ramos-Wada 2011).

By contrast, conservative Protestantism is a more pervasively decentralized faith, one defined by its commitment to the authoritativeness of the Bible, which is viewed as the literal word of God. And, although the Bible has relatively little to say about abortion per se, conservative Protestants seize on biblical passages that describe God as having intentionally “weaved” or “formed” human beings “in the womb” (e.g., Psalm 139:13–16; Isaiah 44:2, 24), which are viewed as evidence that life begins at conception. These scriptural interpretations are consistent with the pro-family worldview of conservative Protestantism, one that hinges on gender traditionalism, pronatalism, and the sanctification of motherhood (Emerson 1996).

In fact, previous research has documented that conservative Protestant support for “pro-family” issues is closely linked to this subculture’s commitment to biblical literalism (e.g., Burdette, Ellison, and Hill 2005; Sherkat and Ellison 1997). Such research has demonstrated that conservative Protestant acceptance of the Bible as the inerrant, authoritative word of God is responsible, in no small part, for negative views of pornography, homosexuality, and divorce that circulate in this subculture. More importantly given the focus of our study, extant scholarship has uncovered significant links between biblical literalism and opposition to abortion among white conservative Protestants (e.g., Gay and Lynxwiler 1999). Consequently, it seems reasonable to presume that biblical literalism would have an important bearing on Latino conservative Protestant views of abortion. Thus, we anticipate that Latinos affiliated with conservative Protestant faiths will be more opposed to abortion than their Catholic peers because broadly conservative Protestant religious schemas can be readily transposed into Latino evangelicalism.

At the same time, it is important to recognize that schemas are not free-floating ideologies. Rather, the character and the influence of religious schemas are reinforced through routinized cultural practices and embeddedness in social networks. Therefore, we expect that Latino conservative Protestants who regularly attend worship services (Hoffmann and Johnson 2005) and, to a somewhat lesser degree, their frequently attending Catholic Latino peers (Perl and McClintock 2001) will be among the most opposed to abortion. Thus, it is quite likely that frequent attendance will enhance adherents’ commitment to existing schemas through reinforcement by fellow congregants.

Beyond normative reinforcement through regular interactions with fellow congregants, religious leaders have a privileged platform for disseminating religious schemas concerning important social issues. Previous research has shown that the pastoral articulation of political rhetoric from the pulpit is quite common in conservative Protestant denominations and can have a formidable influence on religious adherents’ views (Smidt 2004; Smith 2005). Consequently, it seems reasonable to expect that these factors will exhibit an influence on conservative Protestant Latinos’ abortion attitudes.

Second, the cultural (racial-ethnic and religious) context in which conservative Protestant Latinos are situated is quite different than that of Catholics. Conservative Protestant Latinos are more of an “embattled minority” or “niche market” than are their Catholic counterparts. The strong grip that the Catholic Church has had on the Latino population, at least in terms of stated affiliation, is much like that of a religious monopoly. For many Latinos, Catholicism is a communal religious tradition, one in which religious and ethnic identity are closely intertwined.

In this respect, Latino Catholicism has a “semi-involuntary” quality not unlike the role that predominantly black churches play in the lives of many African Americans (Ellison and Sherkat 1995b). Latino conservative Protestantism is a more “costly” sectarian affiliation in a subculture dominated by Catholicism. Conservative Protestantism, like other conservative religions, places significant demands on its adherents, particularly those related to controversial public policy issues such as abortion. And, in the Latino context, joining or remaining in a conservative Protestant group creates religious distance between its adherents and a large segment of the Latino population, including family, friends, and neighbors. Consequently, we expect that convictions about abortion will be more strongly held among Latinos who affiliate with a conservative Protestant denomination.

Third, the institutional character of conservative Protestantism and Catholicism are quite different, particularly in the Latino context. Conservative Protestantism is a faith that is largely decentralized and, in fact, is more likely to be chosen intentionally by its adherents. In this religious subculture, believers “accept Christ” as their personal Lord and Savior and infant baptism is commonly criticized because it abrogates personal choice in affiliating with the faith. Indeed, the voluntary nature of conservative Protestant affiliation is probably nowhere more evident than among Latinos. Given the longstanding predominance of Catholicism among Hispanics, Latinos who leave or remain apart from the Catholic fold must do so with a strong sense of personal conviction given the serious sanctions they may face in leaving the faith of “la familia” (current and ancestral relatives). In contrast to the voluntaristic and deinstitutionalized character of conservative Protestantism is the near-monopolistic, highly institutionalized nature of Catholic affiliation. Catholicism continues to enjoy a large market share (over two-thirds) of the Hispanic population. Moreover, the nature of the attachment between the Catholic Church and its believers is one of institutional imposition, an ascribed status of sorts that is conferred rather than chosen, particularly for Latinos. In the past few decades, however, the market share of Catholicism among Latinos has declined, providing a ripe opportunity for exploring how religious diversification might shape distinctive public policy preferences.

As we have noted, previous research has established that conservative Protestants are more opposed to abortion than are Catholics, and has also demonstrated relatively little variability among conservative Protestants on this issue (e.g., Hoffmann and Miller 1997, 1998). Consequently, it seems reasonable to suspect that Latino conservative Protestants will oppose abortion more vigorously than their Catholic peers. This pattern will mirror those present among white Americans affiliated with each of these faith traditions. And yet, it is also quite possible that the core beliefs of a minority (“niche”) faith could be amplified by religious voluntarism. Latinos who are displeased with Catholic laypeople’s more lenient views toward abortion may, in a diversified religious economy, now have a viable alternative with which to affiliate because conservative Protestant churches are more critical of abortion.

Based on the arguments articulated above, we advance the following hypotheses, after which we turn to the data and measures used to conduct our investigation.

- H1: Interfaith variations in abortion attitudes will be exhibited, such that regularly attending conservative Protestant Latinos will be significantly less supportive of legalized abortion than regularly attending Catholics and mainline Protestants. Religiously unaffiliated Latinos will be most supportive of legalized abortion.*
- H2: Intrafaith variations in abortion attitudes will also be observed, such that regularly attending conservative Protestant and Catholic Latinos will be significantly less supportive of legalized abortion than infrequently attending co-religionists from their respective denominations. No such intrafaith variations will be observed for mainline Protestants because abortion is not a core doctrinal issue in this denominational family.*
- H3: Biblical literalism, a key marker of a conservative Protestant religious identity, and clergy outspokenness against abortion will both exhibit a significant negative relationship with*

Latino support for legalized abortion. However, because schemas are sustained principally through religious network integration (affiliation-attendance), these factors will reduce but not eliminate the significant effects of frequent attendance on abortion attitudes for Latino conservative Protestants.

METHODS

Data

To explore the role of religion on Latino abortion attitudes, we analyze data from a national probability sample of persons of Latino background or descent. All respondents were 18 years of age or older residing in the United States and self-identified as “of Hispanic or Latino origin or descent such as Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Dominican, Central or South American, Caribbean or some other Latin American background.” This CATI-assisted telephone survey was executed by ICR, Inc. of Media, Pennsylvania on behalf of the Pew Hispanic Center and the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life (2007). Interviews with those in this nationally representative sample were conducted in English or Spanish, according to respondent preference, between August 10 and October 4, 2006. The final sample included a total of 4,016 Latino respondents with a margin of error of 2.5 percent. The cooperation rate was 54.4 percent, and the nationally representative sample of Latino respondents features those from many heritages (listed above). Latino non-Catholics were intentionally oversampled, and weights were created (and are used here) to adjust for this oversampling. The Pew data are particularly appropriate for this study because: (1) this survey yields more recent data than that used in prior studies (e.g., Ellison, Echevarria, and Smith 2005); (2) Latino respondents vary by national origin groups and immigration status; and (3) the survey features an array of items on religious affiliation, practice, and belief, along with other key measures.

Dependent Variable

Opposition toward abortion was measured by responses to the following question: “On another subject, do you think abortion should be legal in all cases, legal in most cases, illegal in most cases, or illegal in all cases?” Answers were recoded to create a dichotomous outcome variable gauging either support for or opposition to abortion, such that 1 = “support” (that is, legal in all or most cases) and 0 = “opposed.” Although a case could be made for the benefits of condition-specific (dis)approval of abortion (e.g., rape/incest, mother’s health), the single-item measure of abortion attitudes used here is a valid indicator of this key construct. Supplementary analyses were conducted with the ordinal measure of support for legalized abortion to ensure the validity of our binary coding strategy for this item. The results of such analyses were substantively similar to those using the binary measure and, for ease of interpretation, we decided to use the dichotomous dependent variable. The frequency distribution of the ordinal dependent measure of support for legalized abortion by conservative Protestant and Catholic respondents is available from the authors on request.

Primary Religious Variables: Affiliation-Attendance Combinations

Respondents’ religious affiliation was identified via the following item: “What is your religion—Catholic, Evangelical or Protestant Christian, Jehovah’s Witness, Mormon, Jewish, Muslim, or Orthodox Church such as the Greek or Russian Orthodox Church?” Those indicating Protestant affiliation were then asked to specify their church from a list of 22 Protestant denominations, and were also given an opportunity to specify a different Protestant church.

Responses to these items were then recoded into the following categories, based on the REL-TRAD classification scheme proposed by Steensland et al. (2000): Catholic, conservative Protestant, mainline Protestant, other Christian, non-Christian religion, and no religion. Individuals who declined to answer the item(s) on affiliation ($n = 173$) and those affiliated with non-Christian faiths ($n = 76$) were too few in number to permit meaningful analyses and thus were dropped from subsequent analyses. We analyze the distinctive effects of affiliation categories with reference to levels of religious activity (namely, frequency of attendance), through which we distinguish regularly attending adherents (attend once per week or more than once per week) from those who do not regularly attend (ranging from attend once or twice per month to never attend). Regularly attending Catholics serve as our reference category in all models.

Other Religious Covariates and Control Variables

To explore the net effects of the various affiliation-attendance combinations on our dependent variable, a series of control variables (religious and other covariates) were also incorporated into our analysis. First, the Pew survey contains a single question asking respondents to indicate which of three statements about the Bible comes closest to describing their views. The wording of this item is similar to the wording of a widely used item in the NORC General Social Surveys. In light of numerous studies linking biblical literalism with conservative political views and activities, we created a dummy variable to identify those individuals who indicated, “The Bible is the actual word of God and is to be taken literally, word for word” versus all other responses. Second, respondents who reported attending religious services were asked: “On another subject, do the clergy at your place of worship ever speak out . . . on the issue of abortion?” Possible responses were coded 1 for “yes” and 0 for “no.” Finally, respondents were asked about the role of religion in shaping their political orientations: “Generally speaking, how important are your religious beliefs in influencing your political thinking?” Using responses to this item, we created dummy variables for the following responses: “very important” (= 1), “somewhat important” (= 1), and “not too important” (= 1). In addition, based on the results of preliminary analyses, we also included a dummy variable to identify those respondents who “do not know” (= 1) or “refused” (= 1). Persons in each of these categories were compared with respondents who indicated that religion was “not at all important” (= 0) in shaping their political views.

Our multivariate models controlled for possible covariates that may be linked to religion and attitudes toward abortion. Therefore, we incorporate statistical controls for gender (1 = female, 0 = male), age (dummy-coded, 1 = under 30 years old and 1 = 60 or older, vs. 0 = ages 30–59), political ideology (1 = conservative or very conservative vs. 0 = moderate, liberal, or very liberal), marital status (dummy-coded, 1 = never married, 1 = divorced or separated, vs. 0 = married or widowed), having children under 18 at home (1 = have children under 18, vs. 0 = no children under 18), educational attainment (dummy-coded, 1 = less than high school diploma, 1 = some college, 1 = college degree, 1 = graduate school, vs. 0 = high school diploma or some vocational training), family income (dummy-coded, 1 = under \$15,000, 1 = \$15,000–29,999, vs. 0 = all others), nativity status/time in the United States (1 = immigrant, 15 years or more vs. 0 = all others), and community type (1 = rural, 0 = all others). Finally, in exploring the effect of potential predictors explaining abortion attitudes among Latinos, it is important to account for specific Latino heritages. Because preliminary analyses revealed strong Central American opposition to abortion and conservative Protestant overrepresentation among Central Americans, we also include a dummy variable that identifies Latinos of Central American origin (1 = Central American origin vs. 0 = all others). And, in creating a variable to gauge nativity, we also distinguish between respondents born in the United States (coded 1) and those born elsewhere (coded 0).

RESULTS

Table 1 provides a summary of the variables used in our study, while comparing unweighted and weighted data. In the unweighted means, 38 percent of respondents opposed abortion. Roughly 53 percent of all respondents are Catholic, with 23 percent of the overall sample attending Catholic services regularly. Among the Catholic subsample, more than four in ten Catholics attend regularly. Nearly one-quarter of the overall sample (24 percent) is conservative Protestant. Eighteen percent of the total sample is composed of regularly attending conservative Protestants, with three out of four conservative Protestants attending regularly. Five percent of the sample are mainline Protestants, four percent belong to other Christian groups (e.g., Latter Day Saints, Jehovah's Witnesses), and the remaining 13 percent have no religious affiliation. When the data are weighted to adjust for oversampling of certain national-origin groups, the proportion of Catholics increases from 53 percent to 68 percent. This change comes mainly at the expense of the conservative Protestant proportion, which falls from 24 percent to 16 percent. The religiously unaffiliated share of the sample declines as well, from 13 percent to 8 percent. Thus, the weighted religious distributions in the Pew sample correspond very closely to the estimates provided by Perl, Greely, and Gray (2006) in their analyses of data from 16 other Latino samples. (For a description of weighting and other methodological issues in the Pew data, see Survey Methodology [2007]).³ A majority of Latinos (55 percent) endorse a literal interpretation of the Bible. More than half (54 percent) of the respondents indicate that they attend congregations in which the clergy member has spoken out about laws concerning abortion. Most respondents (66 percent) report that religion is a very important or somewhat important influence on their thinking about political matters. Descriptive statistics for other control variables are also featured in Table 1.

Multivariate Results

In a series of logistic regression models, we estimate the net effects of religious variables and other predictors on the odds of support for legalized abortion. Findings from these models, which are based on weighted data, are displayed in the form of odds ratios in Table 2. Two models are featured in Table 2. Our baseline model (Model 1) features religious affiliation-attendance combinations as well as the political control variables (political ideology and political salience of religious beliefs) and demographic predictors of attitudes toward abortion. Given the prevalence of Catholicism within most Latino subgroups, these analyses treat regularly attending Catholics as the reference category (odds ratio of 1.00 for reference categories are not shown in Table 2), against which all other affiliation-attendance groupings are compared. Model 2 tests the influence of biblical literalism and clergy outspokenness against abortion on attitudinal support for legalized abortion, and examines the extent to which baseline relationships observed in Model 1 are altered by the addition of these factors. (Given space constraints, we report results solely on the estimated net effects of religious factors. Reference categories in Table 1 are featured parenthetically after each variable name.)

Recall that Hypothesis 1 predicted that regularly attending conservative Protestant Latinos would be the least supportive of legalized abortion when compared with regularly attending Catholics (reference category) and other denominational categories. We justified this hypothesis based on the strong antiabortion attitudes found in conservative Protestantism at large, as well as the niche status and voluntaristic nature of Latino conservative Protestantism. We find strong support for this hypothesis. Estimates in Model 1 indicate that the odds of support for legalized abortion are 73 percent lower for regularly attending conservative Protestants (odds ratio [OR] = .27, $p < .001$) than for regularly attending Catholics. No group is more opposed to legalized

³ In addition, the weight variable only slightly changed the coefficients of national-origin groups due to its correction for oversampling of Mexican-American respondents.

Table 1: Means/proportions for all variables used in analyses ($N = 3,465$)

	Mean/pct (Unweighted)	Mean/pct (Weighted)
<i>Opposition to abortion, dichotomous</i>	.38	.40
<i>Opposition to abortion, ordinal</i>	2.87 (1.04)	2.82 (1.05)
<i>Conservative Protestant</i>		
Regularly attending	.18	.11
Not regularly attending	.06	.05
<i>Mainline Protestant</i>		
Regularly attending	.02	.01
Not regularly attending	.03	.39
<i>Catholic</i>		
Regularly attending	.23	.29
Not regularly attending	.30	.39
<i>Other Christian</i>	.04	.03
<i>No religious tradition</i>	.13	.08
<i>Biblical literalist</i>	.55	.51
<i>Clergy outspoken on abortion</i>	.54	.54
<i>Political ideology</i>		
Conservative	.36	.34
Moderate/liberal	.52	.54
No answer/do not know	.12	.12
<i>Religious influence on political thinking</i>		
Very important	.41	.38
Somewhat important	.25	.29
Not very/not at all important	.30	.29
Don't know/no answer	.04	.04
<i>Female</i>	.56	.49
<i>Under age 30</i>	.25	.31
<i>Central American origin</i>	.14	.09
<i>Marital status</i>		
Never married	.23	.27
Divorced or separated	.16	.14
Currently married	.60	.59
<i>Children under 18 at home</i>	.50	.55
<i>Education</i>		
Less than high school diploma	.35	.40
High school diploma	.24	.24
GED	.03	.03
Vocational degree	.05	.05
Some college	.14	.16
College degree	.13	.08
Graduate or professional training	.04	.02
<i>Family income</i>		
Less than \$15K	.15	.13
\$15K–29.99K	.22	.23
Missing income data	.20	.19
All others	.43	.45
<i>U.S. born</i>	.24	.38
<i>Rural residence</i>	.06	.09

Source: 2006 Hispanic Religion Survey.

Table 2: Estimated net effects of religious variables and covariates on support for legalized abortion, logistic regression odds ratios ($N = 3,465$) (reference category in parentheses)

	Model 1	Model 2
Religious affiliation (Catholic regularly attending)		
<i>Conservative Protestant</i>		
Regularly attending	.27***	.31***
Not regularly attending	.77	.76
<i>Mainline Protestant</i>		
Regularly attending	1.41	1.27
Not regularly attending	1.27	1.10
<i>Catholic</i>		
Not regularly attending	1.66**	1.52**
<i>Other Christian</i>		
	.44*	.40**
<i>No religious tradition</i>		
	1.53*	1.20
Biblical literalist		
		.60***
Clergy outspoken on abortion		
		.58***
Political ideology (Moderate/liberal)		
Conservative	.80 ~	.82
No answer/do not know	.64 ~	.60*
Religious influence on political thinking (Not very/not at all important)		
Very important	.62**	.72*
Somewhat important	.87	.94
No answer/do not know	.93	.83
Female		
	1.07	1.11
Under age 30		
	.95	.88
Central American Origin		
	.70*	.69*
Marital status (All others)		
Never married	1.24	1.25
Divorced or separated	1.37 ~	1.34 ~
Children under 18 at home		
	.99	1.03
Education (High school diploma)		
Less than high school	.56***	.55***
Some college	1.32	1.21
BA/BS degree	1.95***	1.74**
Graduate or professional education	1.54	1.33
Family income (All others)		
Less than \$15K	.66*	.64*
\$15K–29.99K	.62**	.64**
Missing income data	.79	.75
U.S. born		
	2.13***	1.99***
Rural community		
	.51**	.52**
Constant	.82	1.45

*** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, ~ $p < .10$.

abortion than regularly attending Latino conservative Protestants. It is worth noting that the religiously unaffiliated (OR = 1.53, $p < .05$) and infrequently attending Catholics (OR = 1.66, $p < .01$) are most supportive of legalized abortion. Other Christian Latinos (Latter-Day Saints and Jehovah's Witnesses) are significantly less supportive (OR = .44, $p < .01$) of abortion than regularly attending Catholics, though not as opposed as conservative Protestants.

Hypothesis 2 anticipated intrafaith differences in abortion attitudes by attendance, such that regular attendance would serve as a vehicle for the amplification of religious schemas that yield antiabortion attitudes among conservative Protestants and Catholics. Consistent with this hypothesis, we find that regularly attending conservative Protestants and Catholics are significantly more opposed to abortion than their infrequently attending same-faith peers (Model 1). The intrafaith attendance gap in antiabortion attitudes is greatest for Catholics (difference between irregular attendees [1.66] and regular attendees [1.00] = .66), but is also quite substantial for conservative Protestants (difference between irregular attendees [.77] and regular attendees [.27] = .50, which ancillary tests reveal to be significant at the .001 level). Such tests also revealed that no significant intrafaith attendance gap in antiabortion attitudes is observed for mainline Protestants in Model 1 because abortion is a more peripheral concern in this faith tradition.

Hypothesis 3 predicted that two additional religious factors, namely, biblical literalism and pastoral expressions of opposition to abortion, would be negatively associated with support for legalized abortion. We further anticipated that these factors would reduce but not eliminate the significant effects of the affiliation-attendance combination for frequently attending Latino conservative Protestants observed in Model 1. These variables are added in Model 2. We find that Hypothesis 3 is supported. Both biblical literalism (OR = .60, $p < .001$) and pastoral expressions of opposition to abortion (OR = .58, $p < .001$) significantly reduce the odds of supporting legalized abortion, as expected. Yet, consistent with our expectations, the addition of these factors does not affect the significance of the effects observed for regularly attending Latino conservative Protestants.

DISCUSSION

Given the rapid growth and religious diversification of U.S. Hispanics, this study examined abortion attitudes expressed by Latino Americans of different religious affiliations, with particular attention to Catholic and conservative Protestant preferences toward legalized abortion. We defined schemas as cognitive frameworks that at once enable social actors to interpret the worlds they inhabit and provide recipes for appropriate action. Using recent data collected from a nationally representative sample of American Hispanics, we found that regularly attending conservative Protestant Latinos were decidedly more opposed to abortion than their regularly attending Catholic counterparts. We explained this finding in two ways.

First, Latino conservative Protestants may have transposed religious schemas from the broader evangelical subculture within which they are situated. These schemas yield robustly antiabortion social attitudes not only among white religious conservatives, as demonstrated in previous research (reviewed above), but also among Latino conservative Protestants (as shown here). Although leaders in the Catholic Church have condemned abortion, sometimes likening it to murder, American Catholics and their Latino co-religionists have been inclined to appropriate Vatican pronouncements about sexual morality quite selectively. Thus, the disjuncture between official Church doctrine and laypersons' views that has long been observed in non-Hispanic white Catholicism (D'Antonio et al. 2007) also seems evident among Latino Catholics. Within conservative Protestantism, abortion is seen as an affront to motherhood, pronatalism, traditional family values, and, even more fundamentally, scriptural edicts about "God's handiwork" in creating life at conception, thereby producing little variability among conservative Protestants on this hot-button social issue (Hoffmann and Johnson 2005; Hoffmann and Miller 1997, 1998). Thus, for both Latino and white conservative Protestants, religious schemas yield strong opposition to abortion.

Second, it is reasonable to interpret greater opposition to abortion among Latino conservative Protestants as an amplification of pro-life schemas that have become diluted in Latino Catholicism. Latino conservative Protestants are affiliated with a niche, highly voluntaristic faith

tradition, one strikingly at odds with Catholicism. Scholars of Hispanic religion have called attention to the “double marginality” of Latino Protestantism, which is religiously distinct from Latino Catholicism and ethnically distinct from non-Hispanic white American Protestantism (De La Torre 2008; Maldonado 1999). Abortion attitudes may be one means through which Latino conservative Protestants negotiate this numerical and cultural marginality. Strong opposition to abortion situates evangelical Latinos squarely within the broader universe of conservative Protestantism. At the same time, these convictions distinguish them from the “lukewarm” commitment to core Christian principles exhibited by their Catholic peers. Thus, even though Hispanic Catholics may far outnumber Latino conservative Protestants, the demonstration of a more aggressive commitment to a pro-life position by Latino conservative Protestants can be viewed as evidence of taking one’s (evangelical) faith “more seriously” than one’s Catholic counterparts. This is not to say that stronger antiabortion attitudes among Latino conservative Protestants may be reduced to political maneuvering. However, an interethnic alliance among conservative Protestants on the issue of abortion is one possible outcome of such shared pro-life convictions.

For both Latino conservative Protestants and Catholics, we found that worship service attendance was associated with stronger antiabortion attitudes. This finding was consistent with our expectation that network integration would be vital to the reinforcement of religious schemas and, consequently, would strengthen antiabortion attitudes. Interestingly, infrequently attending Catholics were about as supportive of legalized abortion as the religiously unaffiliated, whereas infrequently attending conservative Protestants evinced abortion views not terribly different than those of regularly attending Catholics. This finding suggests that Latinos who claim only a nominal Catholic affiliation have largely dis-identified with Catholic teachings on abortion, and perhaps other issues as well. By contrast, nominal conservative Protestant Latinos hold antiabortion sentiments similar to those of highly churching Catholics. So, while attendance significantly enhances antiabortion attitudes in both traditions, a lack of attendance undermines opposition to abortion quite profoundly for Catholics. The odds of observing Latino conservative Protestant opposition to legalized abortion were reduced slightly by biblical literalism and antiabortion preaching from the pulpit. However, significant effects persisted for regularly attending Latino evangelicals despite controlling for these other religious factors. This finding suggests that robust integration within conservative Protestant religious networks—that is, the confluence of affiliation and regular attendance—is a key mechanism through which Latino evangelicals’ antiabortion attitudes are maintained.

These findings have a number of important implications. First, our study underscores the importance of moving beyond monolithic bloc arguments about Latino religiosity and public policy preferences. This rapidly growing sector of the American population is clearly undergoing religious diversification, and this process has important consequences for public policy attitudes. We conceived of religious diversification in multifaceted terms, focusing not only on denominational pluralism but also differences in worship service attendance, biblical literalism, and the political salience of religious beliefs. Our investigation revealed that an expansive approach to studying religious diversity among Latinos yields more holistic and robust empirical explanations of political differentiation among Latinos.

Second, our study sheds light on the nexus of race-ethnicity and American religion. While scholars have long investigated the relationship between race-ethnicity and religion in the United States (see Bartkowski and Matthews 2006 for review), our study reveals how politically oriented religious schemas are a product not only of one’s faith tradition, but are influenced by racial-ethnic heritage. The case of Latino abortion attitudes illustrates how religious schemas linked to antiabortion attitudes are amplified in faith traditions that could be seen as upstart religions in the Hispanic context. We have argued that the relatively weaker opposition to abortion exhibited by Latino Catholics, even those who are actively churchgoing, is a product of structural dynamics in the Hispanic religious marketplace. A near-monopolistic, highly institutionalized faith such as Latino Catholicism faces more difficulty achieving “buy-in” to its core doctrinal precepts among adherents whose faith was conferred upon them rather than intentionally chosen by them.

Latino conservative Protestantism is a more “costly” faith because it places stricter, more rigorous demands on its adherents than does Catholicism, particularly where tightly cohesive evangelical opposition to abortion is concerned. And, as members of a minority faith tradition that is more likely to be chosen rather than conferred by default across generations, conservative Protestant Latinos may find themselves religiously at odds with a large segment of the Hispanic population, including their (ostensibly Catholic) family, friends, and neighbors. It seems reasonable to surmise that these factors could bolster the religious commitments and religiously based social attitudes of evangelical Latinos when compared with their Catholic counterparts.

Third, over the past three decades, some activists within the Republican Party have reached out to racial and ethnic minorities, especially Latinos and African Americans, on the basis of shared conservative religious and social values. To date, these appeals have enjoyed only limited success (McDaniel and Ellison 2008). Much of the outreach to Hispanics has been guided by the assumption that Latino cultural conservatism stems from strong Catholic roots. However, this study, along with other recent work (e.g., Ellison, Echevarria, and Smith 2005; Ellison, Acevedo, and Ramos-Wada 2011), reveals that: (a) Latino Catholic opinion is sharply divided on many hot-button social issues, and (b) the growth of conservative Protestant and sectarian (e.g., Mormon, Jehovah’s Witness) groups may increase the prominence of socially conservative views within the Latino population. Of course, whether such factors translate into support for the GOP will depend on the salience of social issues relative to immigration policy, economic and educational opportunity, civil rights, and other matters that affect Latinos and other Americans. And, to be sure, the consideration of such a broad range of possible attitudinal outcomes among religious Latinos is well beyond the scope of this article, though they are intriguing prospects for future research.⁴ Nevertheless, given the rapid growth of the Latino population, the strong social conservatism of certain segments, and the religious ferment currently underway, neither major political party in the United States can afford to take Latino allegiance for granted.

Thus, the political sensibilities of Latino conservative Protestants seem to be linked to (1) the transposition of antiabortion attitudes and political conservatism from outside the Hispanic subculture (i.e., the broader universe of conservative Protestantism), and (2) the amplification of antiabortion attitudes through adherence to a faith tradition that is stricter and more culturally marginal than Catholicism.⁵ Future quantitative research should compare more directly the abortion attitudes of non-Hispanic white and Latino religious conservatives, while qualitative

⁴ A number of promising avenues for future research present themselves. First, our dependent variable taps general support for legalized abortion, and may invite measurement error. Given this fact, the utilization of circumstance-specific measures such as support or opposition in cases of rape or incest, maternal health, and such could be advantageously explored should data become available. (Such measures were not available in our data set.) Second, examining the influence of Latino religious diversification on such issues as stem cell research, euthanasia, and the death penalty would be quite promising. It is possible that an evangelical-Catholic Latino convergence might be observed on some of these issues (e.g., stem cell research) but not others (e.g., the death penalty). Third, it would be worthwhile to explore other religious mechanisms of influence with respect to public policy preferences, including views of religious hierarchy (Catholics might be more supportive) and denominationally distinctive means of pastoral communication and cultural influence concerning public policy issues (e.g., natural law vs. biblical arguments). Such lines of inquiry are beyond the scope of our investigation.

⁵ Selection effects could provide yet another explanation for strong antiabortion attitudes among Latino conservative Protestants. Perhaps a select group of highly religious Latinos who defect from Catholicism and convert to conservative Protestantism are most opposed to abortion. Such a pattern might be expected given prior research that underscores the distinctive religious and social characteristics often exhibited by converts (e.g., Barker and Currie 1985; Paloutzian, Richardson, and Rambo 1999; Zinnbauer and Pargament 1998), and the ways in which significant life events can shape religious beliefs and behaviors (e.g., Albrecht and Cornwall 1989). In a series of ancillary regression models (not shown), we examined this possibility. These analyses revealed a pattern very similar to that observed for Latino conservative Protestants at large. Antiabortion attitudes were most strongly predicted by attendance regardless of conversion status. For instance, in full models, odds ratios predicting support for abortion for frequently attending lifelong Latino conservative Protestants (OR = 0.35, $p = <.001$) and their convert peers (OR = 0.33, $p = <.001$) were remarkably similar, when compared with regularly attending Catholics (reference). Thus, selectivity effects among devout Latino converts to conservative Protestantism, versus lifelong Latino conservative Protestants, were not observed.

investigations could explore how such attitudes are collectively sustained and transmitted in different religious communities (e.g., Latino Catholic vs. Latino conservative Protestant). Yet, in the meantime, our study has shed important light on the public policy preferences of a rapidly growing segment of American society, one for whom religion remains a key, and increasingly complex, social influence.

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