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The role of political ideology and religiosity in shaping attitudes towards abortion: Italy in a comparative global perspective

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Abstract

Whether or not women should have the right to abort is a strongly divisive argument. Despite the fact that pregnancy termination is legal in many countries around the world, there is considerable variation in the circumstances under which abortion is allowed (in terms of week of pregnancy and health conditions of the mother and the fetus). Moreover, certain countries have highly restrictive laws on abortion, some have none, and in other countries existing laws are put into discussion (as it might be the case in the US if the Supreme Court overturns the landmark 1973 abortion-rights ruling in *Roe v. Wade*).

The absence of a globally shared view on abortion rights is reflected in individual attitudes on the topic, which vary greatly both between and within countries. In particular, studies show that certain individual characteristics play a decisive role in shaping attitudes towards abortion. Among these, two key background variables have been found to be especially relevant: political ideology and religiosity. Indeed, previous research has shown that, on the one hand, left-leaning individuals tend to have more favorable attitudes toward abortion than right-leaning ones, with more pronounced differences between liberals and conservatives, in that the former take a pro-choice stance and the latter a pro-life stance; on the other hand, non-religious subjects are more likely to accept abortion compared to highly religious individuals and, in particular, Christians who are guided by the principle of the sanctity of life at all costs.

Against this background, this article contributes to the literature, first, by providing an up-to-date and global assessment of attitudes towards abortion and testing whether attitudes towards abortion are more favorable in context where abortion rights are present and less restrictive. Second, the article tests the role of individual level religiosity and political ideology in shaping attitudes toward abortion in different contexts. Finally, we seek to verify whether an interaction exists between religiosity and political ideology: in other words, what happens to attitudes towards abortion when individuals' political views and religious moral standard are in conflict on this specific matter?

These questions are addressed using multilevel models based on the most recent wave of data from the European Values Study and the World Value Survey (2017-2022) and are cross-validated using data

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from the International Social Survey Program (Religion IV - 2018). Both datasets are suitable for the analyses as they contain items capturing attitudes toward abortion as well as political ideology and religiosity. While the scope of the work is comparative, national specificities will be given adequate attention. In particular, Italy will be used as main reference group, as its proximity to the Vatican and to the head of the worldwide Catholic Church are likely to play a unique role in shaping views on abortion in the country.

Keywords: attitudes toward abortion; political ideology; religiosity; Italy; EVS-WVS.