

Religion and Abortion Attitudes Among U.S. Hispanics: Findings from the 1990 Latino National Political Survey*

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Objective. The goal of this article is to examine the relationship between religious involvement, gauged mainly in terms of affiliation and frequency of attendance at services, and abortion attitudes among three major Hispanic subgroups: Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, and Cuban Americans. *Method.* The study analyzes data from the Latino National Political Survey, a sample of over 2,700 U.S. Hispanics completed in 1990. *Results.* Committed (i.e., regularly attending) Hispanic Protestants, most of whom belong to conservative groups, are more strongly pro-life than any other segment of the Latino population, and are much more likely than others to support a total abortion ban. Committed Catholics also tend to hold pro-life views, but they are relatively more likely to endorse an abortion ban that includes exceptions for rape, incest, and threats to the mother's life. Less devoted Catholics and Protestants generally do not differ from religiously unaffiliated Hispanics in their abortion views. There are also modest variations in the links between religious involvement and abortion attitudes across the three Latino subgroups. *Conclusion.* Religious factors are highly important predictors of Hispanics' preferences regarding abortion policies. Contrary to some previous discussions, it is committed Protestants, more so than Catholics, who are the staunchest opponents of abortion in the Latino population.

Numerous researchers have explored religious differences in public opinion regarding "pro-family" issues, especially attitudes toward abortion, during the past two decades (McIntosh, Alston, and Alston, 1979; Jelen, 1984; Hertel and Hughes, 1987; Tamney, Johnson, and Burton, 1992;

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Welch, Leege, and Cavendish, 1995; Emerson, 1996). However, most of this empirical research relies on predominantly non-Hispanic white samples. Although a handful of studies examine black-white differences (e.g., Lynxwiler and Gay, 1994), and the possible role of religion in shaping such differences (Wilcox, 1992), there is very little systematic evidence regarding religious differences in abortion attitudes among U.S. Hispanics (for an exception, see Bolks et al., 2000). This oversight is especially noteworthy given: (1) the impressive growth of the Latino population, which is rapidly becoming the largest U.S. minority population, surpassing African Americans; (2) the high religiosity and evidence of contemporary religious ferment among Hispanics; and (3) the strong “pro-family” traditions that prevail within many Latino communities.¹

Our study contributes to this literature by examining links between multiple dimensions of Hispanic religious involvement and attitudes toward abortion, operationalized here in terms of preferences regarding abortion policy. After briefly reviewing previous research on religious variations in abortion attitudes in the general population, we explore these issues using data from the 1990 Latino National Political Survey (LNPS), a nationally representative sample of more than 2,700 Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans (mainland residents only), and Cuban Americans. We conclude the article by discussing the implications of the findings for our understanding of U.S. Hispanic religion and sociopolitical attitudes, and by highlighting several promising directions for further research.

Background

Religious Affiliation, Participation, and Abortion Attitudes

According to most available evidence, religious affiliation is among the strongest correlates of abortion attitudes in the general U.S. population (Hertel and Hughes, 1987; Cook, Jelen, and Wilcox, 1992; Welch, Leege, and Cavendish, 1995; Emerson, 1996; Sullins, 1999). Taken together, the evidence indicates that Catholics and conservative (i.e., fundamentalist, evangelical, and charismatic) Protestants are more likely than other persons to oppose abortion. Although on average conservative Protestants and Catholics tend to be less supportive of abortion rights than other Americans, it is important to acknowledge that there is greater diversity of opinion on this issue among Catholics than within most other religious communities (Hoffmann and Miller, 1997; Sullins, 1999). By contrast, pro-choice views are most evident among religiously unaffiliated persons, Jews, and, to a lesser

¹The terms “Hispanic” and “Latino” are often used to refer to U.S. residents who trace their origins to Spanish-speaking countries of Latin America or to Spain (del Pinal and Singer, 1997). These terms are used interchangeably throughout this article.

extent, members of most mainline Protestant denominations (Hertel and Hughes, 1987; Cook, Jelen, and Wilcox, 1992).

The Catholic Church has long opposed both legalized abortion and contraception (for a review, see Connery, 1977). The authoritative statement of Church doctrine, the Catechism of the Catholic Church, articulates the official stance on abortion clearly: "Human life must be respected and protected absolutely from the moment of conception. From the first moment of existence, a human being must be recognized as having the rights of a person—among which is the inviolable right of every innocent being to life" (U.S. Catholic Conference, 1994:2273). Consistent with this official position, several empirical studies report that belief in the sanctity of all human life is among the strongest predictors of opposition to abortion among Catholics, perhaps more so than among persons from other religious backgrounds (Jelen, 1984; Tamney, Johnson, and Burton, 1992).

The anti-abortion views of most conservative Protestants are based on particular convictions regarding scripture (Cook, Jelen, and Wilcox, 1992). Most fundamentalist, evangelical, and charismatic Protestants believe that the Bible is the inerrant word of God, and that it contains the necessary and sufficient information to inform and guide human affairs (Boone, 1989). Many inerrantists invoke scriptural passages to justify contentions that the embryo is human (e.g., Luke 1:40–44; Ps. 139:13, 16), and that the fetus is entitled to at least some legal protection (Ex. 21:22). Thus, many conservative Protestants view legalized abortion as a triumph of personal selfishness and expediency over moral principle (Luker, 1984).

Further, many conservative Protestants believe that women's control over their fertility may threaten divinely ordained gender roles, increasing the tendency of women to cultivate careers and other public sphere commitments, presumably to the detriment of their families. Contemporary conservative Protestant ideology tends to be strongly pro-natalist as well, viewing child rearing as a central mission of family life (Wilcox, 1998). However, Emerson (1996) found that while religious conservatives tend to reject abortion partly for these reasons (see also Tamney, Johnson, and Burton, 1992), the most important underpinning of pro-life sentiment among religious conservatives is adherence to dualistic moral reasoning, that is, the tendency to see moral issues in terms of black versus white, with few if any shades of gray. In practice, this permits little nuance or room for compromise with opposing views.

In addition to such denominational differences, several studies have also linked the frequency of attendance at religious services with abortion attitudes (McIntosh, Alston, and Alston, 1979; Cook, Jelen, and Wilcox, 1992). Frequency of attendance at services may reflect the strength of religious beliefs and commitment, and persons who feel deeply about their faith tend to hold more restrictive positions on abortion than their less religious counterparts. Churches also offer contexts for socialization on this and other public issues, via sermons and other formal or official statements, classes, and discussion groups,

as well as informal social contacts among members. Although most of these studies of abortion attitudes conclude that religious attendance is associated with anti-abortion views regardless of denomination (e.g., Cook, Jelen, and Wilcox, 1992), others raise the possibility that the influence of attendance on “pro-family” attitudes may be greatest among the members of those denominations with clearly articulated norms on these issues, for example, among Catholics and conservative Protestants (Hertel and Hughes, 1987).

Hispanic Religion and Abortion Attitudes

Scholarly interest in U.S. Hispanic religion has expanded slowly in recent years. Although the vast majority of Latinos continue to identify with Catholicism, several studies of pooled data from the NORC General Social Surveys show that the numbers of Hispanics belonging to Protestant churches, and those with no religious affiliation, have increased markedly since the 1970s (Hunt, 1999). Greeley (1994) has estimated an 8 percent “defection” rate among U.S. Hispanic Catholics in recent decades, with many departees apparently joining evangelical or charismatic Protestant churches. Although nonwhite U.S. Hispanics (especially Puerto Ricans) are more likely to be Protestant than others (Diaz-Stevens and Stevens-Arroyo, 1998), conservative Protestantism also seems to be on the rise among Mexican Americans, although the growth of evangelicalism among Hispanics overall may have slowed during the 1990s (Hunt, 1999).

Given that most U.S. Hispanics identify with Catholicism or evangelical Protestantism, traditions that tend to embrace conservative theological and social values, it is also important to explore the implications of religious affiliation, practice, and commitment for Hispanic views on contentious social issues, such as abortion. To date, however, few studies have examined religious variations in Latino abortion attitudes. Greeley (1992) has suggested in passing that Hispanic Protestants may be more likely to oppose abortion than Hispanic Catholics. In one recent analysis, Brown, Jewell, and Rous (2000) present evidence that among Latinas residing in border counties of Texas, the likelihood of terminating a pregnancy through abortion is lower in those areas with high Catholic and/or high Baptist concentrations.

In perhaps the only systematic investigation of the correlates of Latino abortion attitudes, Bolks and colleagues (2000) report that committed Catholics and persons who received a great deal of guidance from their faith tend to express greater opposition to abortion rights than others, while less devout Catholics tend to exhibit greater acceptance of legalized abortion. Although this study is an important contribution, a number of important issues remain unresolved. First, despite the growing number of Protestant and nonreligious Latinos, no attention has been given to their abortion attitudes, potentially obscuring important interfaith differences on the abortion issue. Second, although the frequency of religious attendance is

clearly a strong predictor of abortion attitudes among the general population, this relationship has not been explored among Latinos. Third, although previous work (e.g., Diaz-Stevens and Stevens-Arroyo, 1998) has documented substantial variations in the religious profiles and cultures of Latino subgroups, there is no information about how religious variations in abortion attitudes may differ among Mexican-origin, Puerto Rican, and Cuban-origin persons. Fourth, this previous work omits important control variables—nativity status and family status, for example—that could alter the relationships between religious variables and abortion attitudes.

Data

To explore religious variations in Hispanic abortion attitudes, we analyze data from the 1990 Latino National Political Survey (LNPS). A multistage probability design was utilized to select adult respondents of major Hispanic subgroups residing in the continental United States: Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, and Cuban Americans. These three Hispanic subgroups were selected for two primary reasons: (1) together they comprised approximately 80 percent of the total U.S. Hispanic population in 1990; and (2) historically they are the most politically active of all U.S. Hispanic groups. A respondent was identified as a member of one of these three Latino groups if the respondent, one parent, or two grandparents were solely of Mexican, Puerto Rican, or Cuban ancestry (de la Garza et al., 1992).

The LNPS sample was drawn from 40 Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas (SMSAs) in states where the combined Mexican-origin, Puerto Rican, and Cuban-origin populations exceed 5 percent of the total state population. Secondary sampling units were selected where these three Hispanic groups made up at least 3 percent of the sampling unit population. The LNPS was specifically designed to include Latinos from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. Thus, one-half of the respondents reside in majority Latino areas that tend to be working-class or poverty areas, while roughly one-quarter of the respondents come from middle-income Latino areas, in which 20–49 percent of the population is Hispanic, and the remainder of the LNPS respondents come from high-income areas, where 5–20 percent of the population is Hispanic (de la Garza, Falcon, and Garcia, 1996).

The LNPS is an appropriate data source for our investigation. For several reasons, this sample is representative of 91 percent of all Mexican-origin, Puerto Rican, and Cuban-origin persons residing in the United States (ca. 1990), and it is sufficiently large to permit reliable estimates of relationships between religious variables, covariates, and abortion attitudes for each of the major Latino subgroups. As other authors (e.g., Hunt, 1999) have lamented, samples that are representative of the overall U.S. population (e.g., the NORC General Social Surveys) typically contain only a small number of Hispanics, thus requiring investigators to pool many years of data.

Moreover, because those sampling frames typically are not designed to generate representative samples of geographically clustered population groups (e.g., Hispanics, Jews, Asian Americans, African Americans), findings from these subsamples may not be generalizable. With the LNPS it is possible to surmount this common obstacle to systematic research on U.S. Hispanics. In addition, the LNPS contains suitable items on religious affiliation, attendance, personal religiosity, and abortion attitudes, as well as sociodemographic and political covariates. Although the LNPS data are somewhat older than we would have liked, the age of the data presents less of a concern than in other substantive areas given evidence of the aggregate stability of abortion attitudes over time (Cook, Jelen, and Wilcox, 1993).

Measures

Dependent Variable: Abortion Attitudes

This study explores religious variations in Hispanic abortion attitudes, which are measured via responses to the following item: "There has been some discussion about abortion during recent years. Which one of the statements on the card best agrees with your view? By law: (1) an abortion should never be permitted; (2) an abortion should be permitted only in cases of rape, incest, or when the woman's life is in danger; (3) an abortion should be permitted but only after the need for the abortion has been clearly established; or (4) a woman should always be able to obtain an abortion as a matter of personal choice." Based on responses to this item, we identify individuals who favor a total ban (Response 1), those who favor a ban with specific limited exceptions (Response 2), and those who embrace some form of pro-choice position (Responses 3 and 4). We combine the latter two response categories because while the meaning of Response 3 is vague (i.e., it is not clear what would constitute a "need" that had been "clearly established"), it reflects a modified pro-choice position. Further, only a small proportion (roughly 10 percent) of LNPS respondents chose this option, and preliminary bivariate analyses (not shown) revealed no clear religious differences in the likelihood of selecting Response 3.² Although the LNPS measure of abortion attitudes differs from measures used in some previous studies (e.g., the NORC General Social Surveys), it has the distinct advantage of tapping mutually exclusive policy preferences, which correspond very closely to ongoing political debates over the abortion issue (see Cook, Jelen, and Wilcox, 1993).

²We recognize that labels like "pro-choice" and "pro-life" are contentious and potentially confusing (e.g., Sullins, 1999:367, n.1). The four response categories presented in the LNPS item correspond roughly to consistent pro-life (Response 1), moderate pro-life (Response 2), moderate pro-choice (Response 3), and consistent pro-choice (Response 4) positions discussed elsewhere (e.g., Tamney, Johnson, and Burton, 1992). In this article, we use the labels "pro-life" and "pro-choice" broadly, to encompass both moderate and consistent positions, and where feasible we refer to specific policy positions (e.g., total ban, ban with exceptions).

Independent Variables: Religious Involvement

For purposes of this study, religious affiliation is coded into three broad categories: Catholic, Protestant, and no religion. The LNPS also contains information on affiliation with specific Protestant bodies. Although some previous studies of Hispanic religious affiliation patterns have distinguished between conservative (i.e., fundamentalist, evangelical, and charismatic) and mainline Protestants (e.g., Greeley, 1997; Hunt, 1999), only 9.1 percent of the LNPS Protestants (only 1.5 percent of the total LNPS sample) are affiliated with religious groups that we can confidently classify as mainline denominations (e.g., Methodist, Episcopal, Presbyterian). Approximately 75 percent of the LNPS Protestants belong to Baptist, Pentecostal, Jehovah's Witness, and other conservative churches. In addition, significant numbers of LNPS respondents indicate only that they are "Christian" or "Protestant," and some mention "other" denominations; although we cannot be certain, it seems likely that many of these persons are fundamentalists or evangelicals as well. Given these unavoidable ambiguities, we have opted to retain the omnibus Protestant category in most of our analyses (but see note 4). We retained affiliates of Jehovah's Witnesses or the Mormon Church as Protestants, but dropped 12 cases for respondents who reported their affiliation as either Muslim or Jewish.

The self-reported frequency of attendance at religious services was originally coded with five response categories, but based on the results of preliminary analyses (not shown), we constructed the following three groups: (1) almost every week or more; (2) at least a few times a year; and (3) almost never or never. LNPS respondents who reported having no religious affiliation were not asked additional questions about their religious involvement or commitment. We used this information to construct the following affiliation/attendance categories: (1) committed Catholics (Catholics who attend services weekly or more); (2) occasional Catholics (those who attend sporadically); (3) nominal Catholics (self-identified Catholics who attend services never or almost never); (4) committed Protestants (Protestants who attend services weekly or more); (5) occasional Protestants (those who attend sporadically); (6) nominal Protestants (self-identified Protestants who attend rarely or never); and (7) unaffiliated persons. Because very few of the Protestants (approximately 3 percent of the total LNPS sample) fall into the "nominal" category—too few to permit reliable analyses—these individuals are combined with the "occasional" Protestants in our analyses.

Covariates

Our analyses also control statistically for other established covariates that predict religious affiliation and/or abortion attitudes (e.g., Cook, Jelen,

and Wilcox, 1992; Lynxwiler and Gay, 1994). These include sociodemographic factors such as age (measured via three categories: 18–34, 35–49, and 50 and over); gender; marital status (married and living with spouse vs. all others); and parental status (parents or legal guardians of at least one child vs. all others). Respondent education is measured via three categories: 0–11 years completed, high school diploma, and at least some college. Pretax (1988) family income was originally coded into 15 categories, ranging from under \$5,000 (1) to \$75,000 or more (15). However, consistent with other data on the socioeconomic standing of Latinos (e.g., Guzmán, 2001; del Pinal and Singer, 1997), only small percentages of LNPS respondents reported incomes in the higher ranges. Thus, for purposes of this study we have recoded this income measure into four categories: under \$11,000; \$11,000–19,999; \$20,000–39,999; and \$40,000 and over. We also distinguish between Mexican-origin, Puerto Rican, and Cuban-origin respondents, and between U.S.-born and foreign-born respondents. For Puerto Ricans, “foreign born” refers to individuals who were born on the island of Puerto Rico.

A Note on Missing Data

For most variables, only a very small percentage of cases contain missing data, and as a rule these cases are handled via listwise deletion. However, approximately 8 percent of LNPS respondents failed to provide valid information on the family income item. To retain as much of the original LNPS sample as possible, missing income values were imputed using a mean substitution method, contingent on respondents’ Latino subgroup, educational attainment, and gender. Each case was then assigned to one of the four family income categories described above. A dummy variable identifying those cases that were initially missing valid income data was consistently nonsignificant in our models of abortion attitudes, and was dropped from the final analyses in the interest of parsimony. After deleting missing cases on other variables, our effective total sample size was 2,782, including 1,518 Mexican-origin, 587 Puerto Rican, and 677 Cuban-origin respondents (unweighted).

Results

Bivariate Results

We begin by examining bivariate associations in the LNPS sample, displayed in Table 1. These data reveal several important patterns. First, Latinos are generally pro-life (anti-abortion); in the 1990 LNPS, only 42 percent of respondents express support for legalized abortion, and slightly

TABLE 1
Unweighted Percentage Distribution of Sociodemographic Characteristics
by Abortion Attitude

| | Abortion Attitude | | | Total % | X ² | N | Total |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------|---------------------|------------|---------|----------------|-------|-------|
| | Total Ban | Ban with Exceptions | Pro-Choice | | | | |
| <i>Latino Origin</i> | | | | | ** | | |
| Mexican origin | 22.4 | 36.7 | 40.9 | 100.0 | | 1,518 | 54.6 |
| Puerto Rican | 22.0 | 39.5 | 38.5 | 100.0 | | 587 | 21.1 |
| Cuban origin | 13.4 | 37.4 | 49.3 | 100.0 | | 677 | 24.2 |
| <i>Religious Affiliation</i> | | | | | ** | | |
| Catholic | 17.6 | 38.9 | 43.5 | 100.0 | | 2,153 | 77.4 |
| Protestant | 32.3 | 34.7 | 33.0 | 100.0 | | 450 | 16.2 |
| None | 19.7 | 27.0 | 53.4 | 100.0 | | 179 | 6.4 |
| <i>Religious Attendance</i> | | | | | ** | | |
| Never/almost never | 15.5 | 31.4 | 53.2 | 100.0 | | 652 | 23.3 |
| Few times year/1-2 times mo. | 15.6 | 38.9 | 45.5 | 100.0 | | 1,232 | 44.4 |
| Weekly | 29.7 | 40.0 | 30.4 | 100.0 | | 898 | 32.3 |
| <i>Attendance/Affiliation Groups</i> | | | | | ** | | |
| No affiliation/attendance | 19.7 | 27.0 | 53.4 | 100.0 | | 179 | 6.4 |
| Nominal Catholic | 14.0 | 33.6 | 52.4 | 100.0 | | 397 | 14.2 |
| Occasional Catholic | 14.9 | 39.0 | 46.1 | 100.0 | | 1,103 | 39.7 |
| Committed Catholic | 24.4 | 42.0 | 33.6 | 100.0 | | 653 | 23.5 |
| Occasional Protestant | 18.5 | 35.1 | 46.3 | 100.0 | | 205 | 7.4 |
| Committed Protestant | 43.9 | 34.4 | 21.7 | 100.0 | | 245 | 8.8 |
| <i>Age</i> | | | | | ** | | |
| 18-34 | 19.1 | 33.5 | 47.4 | 100.0 | | 1,137 | 40.9 |
| 35-49 | 20.6 | 38.0 | 41.4 | 100.0 | | 830 | 29.4 |
| 50+ | 21.0 | 42.5 | 36.5 | 100.0 | | 815 | 29.7 |
| <i>Gender</i> | | | | | * | | |
| Male | 21.0 | 34.4 | 44.7 | 100.0 | | 1,156 | 41.4 |
| Female | 19.6 | 39.7 | 40.8 | 100.0 | | 1,626 | 58.6 |
| <i>Education</i> | | | | | ** | | |
| 0-11 | 24.0 | 40.7 | 35.3 | 100.0 | | 1,533 | 55.1 |
| High school diploma | 17.8 | 36.1 | 46.1 | 100.0 | | 693 | 25.0 |
| College+ | 12.5 | 30.2 | 57.1 | 100.0 | | 556 | 19.9 |
| <i>Marital Status</i> | | | | | * | | |
| Not married | 18.4 | 37.1 | 44.5 | 100.0 | | 1,354 | 48.8 |
| Married | 21.8 | 37.9 | 40.4 | 100.0 | | 1,428 | 51.2 |
| <i>Place of Birth</i> | | | | | ** | | |
| U.S. born | 18.2 | 33.2 | 48.6 | 100.0 | | 985 | 35.5 |
| Foreign born | 21.2 | 39.8 | 39.0 | 100.0 | | 1,797 | 64.5 |
| <i>Parent/Legal Guardian</i> | | | | | ns | | |
| No | 18.8 | 37.1 | 44.1 | 100.0 | | 894 | 32.1 |
| Yes | 20.8 | 37.6 | 41.6 | 100.0 | | 1,888 | 67.9 |
| <i>Year Gross Income</i> | | | | | ** | | |
| \$0-10,999 | 24.0 | 44.1 | 31.9 | 100.0 | | 855 | 30.8 |
| \$11,000-19,999 | 21.2 | 37.6 | 41.3 | 100.0 | | 735 | 26.4 |
| \$20,000-39,999 | 17.8 | 34.5 | 47.7 | 100.0 | | 862 | 30.9 |
| \$40,000+ | 13.6 | 27.9 | 58.5 | 100.0 | | 330 | 11.9 |
| Total % | 20.1 | 37.5 | 42.4 | | | | |
| N | 562 | 1,041 | 1,179 | | | 2,782 | 100 |

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; ns = not significant.

X²—distribution test for proportionality deviation from a random distribution.

SOURCE: Latino National Political Survey (1990).

more than 20 percent back a total ban, without exceptions for cases of rape, incest, or threats to the mother's health. The response patterns of Mexican-origin and Puerto Rican respondents are very similar, while Cuban Americans are notably more pro-choice in their orientation.

Second, religious variables are clearly linked with abortion attitudes among Hispanics. In terms of affiliation, Protestants tend to be more strongly pro-life than their Catholic or religiously unaffiliated counterparts; nearly one-third of Protestants (32.3 percent) back a total abortion ban, while an equivalent percentage of Protestants adopt a pro-choice position. Regular church attenders are also much more supportive of a complete ban on abortion (29.7 percent) than occasional attenders (15.6 percent) or nonattenders (15.5 percent), and they are also much less likely to report pro-choice leanings.

When affiliation and attendance variables are combined, it is the committed (regularly attending) Protestants who are most pro-life; indeed, only slightly more than one-fifth (21.7 percent) report pro-choice leanings, while roughly two-fifths (43.9 percent) support a total abortion ban. They are followed by the committed Catholics, many of whom (42 percent) tend to support a ban with some exceptions, but relatively few of whom (33.6 percent) endorse pro-choice positions. There are few differences in abortion policy preferences between occasional and nominal Catholics, occasional Protestants, and religiously unaffiliated Latinos.

In addition to these patterns involving religious involvement, Table 1 displays several significant associations between sociodemographic variables and abortion attitudes. First and foremost among these, support for abortion rights increases dramatically, and support for an abortion ban declines sharply, as levels of education and family income rise. Abortion attitudes vary only modestly by age/cohort, gender, and family status (i.e., marital and parental status). Native-born respondents express more favorable views toward abortion than foreign-born Latinos.

Multivariate Results

In Table 2 we present a series of multinomial logit models, estimating the effects of religious variables (affiliation/attendance combinations) and other predictors on the simultaneous odds of preferring either a total abortion ban or a ban with specific exceptions, relative to a pro-choice position. We display odds ratios for the combined LNPS sample based on the exponentiated multinomial logit coefficients (Menard, 1995:80–81), which were generated using the CATMOD procedure in SAS software. Taken together, these results demonstrate that religious variables have strong, independent estimated net effects on Hispanic abortion attitudes, even with controls for a wide array of covariates. Comparisons of model fit statistics show that the addition of religious variables (in Model 3) significantly enhances the

TABLE 2
Fitted Odds Ratios Showing Effects of Sociodemographic Factors,
Political Identification, and Religious Factors on Abortion Attitudes for
All Latino Groups

| | Abortion Choices (Pro-Choice) | | | | | |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------|-----------|---------------------|-----------|---------------------|
| | Model 1 | | Model 2 | | Model 3 | |
| | Total Ban | Ban with Exceptions | Total Ban | Ban with Exceptions | Total Ban | Ban with Exceptions |
| <i>Attendance/Affiliation (None)</i> | | | | | | |
| Nominal Catholic | 0.67 | 0.60* | | | 0.63 | 0.56** |
| Occasional Catholic | 0.89 | 1.33 | | | 0.76 | 1.18 |
| Committed Catholic | 2.14** | 1.77** | | | 2.07** | 1.69** |
| Occasional Protestant | 1.19 | 1.04 | | | 1.45 | 1.15 |
| Committed Protestant | 5.19** | 2.01** | | | 5.80** | 2.05** |
| <i>Latino Origin (Mexican Origin)</i> | | | | | | |
| Puerto Rican | | | 0.87 | 0.88 | 0.85 | 0.98 |
| Cuban origin | | | 0.36** | 0.55** | 0.44** | 0.64* |
| <i>Age (50+)</i> | | | | | | |
| 18–34 | | | 0.82 | 0.82 | 0.97 | 0.88 |
| 35–49 | | | 0.94 | 1.05 | 0.96 | 1.09 |
| <i>Gender (Male)</i> | | | | | | |
| Female | | | 1.09 | 1.08 | 0.91 | 0.99 |
| <i>Education (Beyond High School)</i> | | | | | | |
| 0–11 | | | 2.44** | 1.77** | 3.02** | 1.87** |
| High school diploma | | | 1.48* | 1.52** | 1.72** | 1.58** |
| <i>Marital Status (Unmarried)</i> | | | | | | |
| Married | | | 1.59** | 1.38 | 1.46** | 1.32** |
| <i>Place of Birth (U.S. Born)</i> | | | | | | |
| Foreign born | | | 1.69** | 1.59** | 1.83** | 1.57** |
| <i>Parent/Legal Guardian (No)</i> | | | | | | |
| Yes | | | 0.58** | 0.87 | 0.63** | 0.88 |
| <i>Household Income (\$0–10,999)</i> | | | | | | |
| \$11,000–19,999 | | | 0.77 | 0.66** | 0.68* | 0.62** |
| \$20,000–39,999 | | | 0.58** | 0.60** | 0.52** | 0.56** |
| \$40,000+ | | | 0.56** | 0.43** | 0.56** | 0.42** |
| <i>Intercept</i> | –0.90 | –0.40 | –0.85 | –0.36 | –1.26 | –0.56 |
| –2 LL | –5772.6** | | 5735.40** | | 5546.18** | |
| N | 2,782 | | 2,782 | | 2,782 | |

(Reference Group); * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$.

SOURCE: Latino National Political Survey (1990).

predictive power of the sociodemographic model (Model 2).³ A Wald test ($\chi^2_{10df} = 182.08$, $p < 0.0001$) suggested that it was highly unlikely that religious measures have no effect.

³In addition to religious affiliation and attendance, the LNPS also contains items tapping (1) the extent to which respondents receive guidance from religion in their daily lives and (2) whether they have had a life-changing religious experience. Although both variables are associated with preferences for more restrictive abortion policies at the bivariate level, their inclusion does not significantly enhance the predictive power of any of the models presented here. Therefore, they have been dropped from the analyses in the interest of parsimony.

Several specific findings in Table 2 merit brief discussion. Most impressively, committed Protestants are nearly six times more likely ($OR = 5.80$, $p < 0.01$) than religiously unaffiliated respondents to favor a total abortion ban, as opposed to a pro-choice position, and approximately twice as likely ($OR = 2.05$, $p < 0.01$) to endorse a ban with exceptions. Interestingly, the magnitude of these net effects is increased between Models 1 and 3, with the addition of sociodemographic controls. Ancillary analyses (not shown) indicate that the differences between committed Protestants and all other groups—including committed Catholics—in support for a complete abortion ban are highly statistically significant ($p < 0.01$). Compared to religiously unaffiliated persons, committed Catholics in the LNPS are also more likely ($OR = 2.07$, $p < 0.01$) to back a total ban on abortion, as well as more likely to support a ban with exceptions ($OR = 1.69$, $p < 0.01$), as opposed to a pro-choice policy orientation. Other religious categories (e.g., occasional and nominal Catholics, occasional Protestants) do not differ significantly from religiously unaffiliated Hispanics, except that nominal Catholics are actually significantly less likely to endorse a partial abortion ban ($OR = 0.56$, $p < 0.01$) than their unaffiliated counterparts.

For the most part, the estimated net effects of covariates are similar to those reported in the bivariate findings: Cuban-origin respondents are much more pro-choice than other Latinos. Support for restrictions on abortion diminishes as education increases, and such pro-life sentiment is also strongest among respondents with extremely low household incomes. Foreign-born respondents are more likely to favor restrictive policies toward abortion than native-born Latinos. Although gender and age/cohort effects are minimal, married respondents are more pro-life than their unmarried counterparts, while parents (or legal guardians) are notably less likely to endorse a total abortion ban (but not a partial ban) than other respondents.

Given the different histories and religious patterns of the three major Hispanic subgroups in the LNPS (e.g., Diaz-Stevens, 1993; Diaz-Stevens and Stevens-Arroyo, 1998), we also estimate group-specific multinomial logit models that are similar in structure to those presented in Table 2. Selected odds ratios from these group-specific models are displayed in Table 3. To conserve space, only estimated net effects of religious variables are discussed.

Several patterns are especially noteworthy. Among Mexican-origin respondents, committed Protestants ($OR = 6.33$, $p < 0.01$) and committed Catholics ($OR = 2.49$, $p < 0.01$) are much more likely than religiously unaffiliated Mexican Americans to favor a total abortion ban, as opposed to a pro-choice policy. No other religious effects surface, except that nominal Mexican-origin Catholics are much less likely ($OR = 0.38$, $p < 0.01$) to endorse a partial ban, as opposed to backing a pro-choice orientation. Among Cuban Americans, too, committed Protestants are vastly more likely ($OR = 6.18$, $p < 0.01$) than unaffiliated persons to endorse a total ban on abortion. Within the Cuban-origin subsample, however, no other religious

TABLE 3
Unadjusted and Adjusted Fitted Odds Ratios of Religious Affiliation/Church Attendance on Abortion Attitude for Latino Subgroups

| | Abortion Attitude (Pro-Choice) | | | |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------|---------------------|----------|
| | Total Ban | | Ban with Exceptions | |
| | Unadjusted | Adjusted | Unadjusted | Adjusted |
| Mexican Origin | | | | |
| <i>Attendance/Affiliation</i> (None) | | | | |
| Nominal Catholic | 0.58 | 0.53 | 0.39** | 0.38** |
| Occasional Catholic | 0.93 | 0.81 | 1.11 | 1.02 |
| Committed Catholic | 2.50** | 2.49** | 1.54 | 1.54 |
| Occasional Protestant | 1.36 | 1.71 | 0.98 | 1.17 |
| Committed Protestant | 5.58** | 6.33** | 1.71 | 1.81 |
| Intercept | -0.926 | -1.315 | -0.232 | -0.515 |
| - 2 LL | 3151.58 | 3030.46 | | |
| N | 1,518 | 1,518 | | |
| Puerto Rican | | | | |
| <i>Attendance/Affiliation</i> (None) | | | | |
| Nominal Catholic | 0.60 | 0.38* | 2.00 | 1.58 |
| Occasional Catholic | 0.83 | 0.51 | 4.43** | 3.61** |
| Committed Catholic | 0.60 | 0.34* | 3.52** | 2.83* |
| Occasional Protestant | 0.74 | 0.74 | 2.27 | 2.45 |
| Committed Protestant | 3.81** | 3.00* | 4.84** | 6.22** |
| Intercept | -0.564 | -2.259 | -1.239 | -1.926 |
| - 2 LL | 1198.68 | 1089.23 | | |
| N | 587 | 587 | | |
| Cuban Origin | | | | |
| <i>Attendance/Affiliation</i> (None) | | | | |
| Nominal Catholic | 2.43 | 1.38 | 1.67 | 0.98 |
| Occasional Catholic | 1.38 | 0.94 | 1.70 | 1.15 |
| Committed Catholic | 2.53 | 2.03 | 2.94* | 1.91 |
| Occasional Protestant | 1.95 | 1.59 | 0.82 | 0.59 |
| Committed Protestant | 6.88** | 6.18** | 3.18* | 2.11 |
| Intercept | -1.972 | -1.614 | -1.104 | -0.066 |
| - 2 LL | 1300.18 | 1217.76 | | |
| N | 677 | 677 | | |

(Reference Group); * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$.

NOTE: Adjusted for age, gender, education, marital status, nativity, parent status, and household status.

SOURCE: Latino National Political Survey (1990).

differences reach conventional levels of statistical significance once controls for covariates are added.

However, a very different set of patterns emerges among Puerto Ricans. To be sure, committed Protestants are much more likely than religiously unaffiliated Puerto Ricans to endorse a total ban (OR = 3.00, $p < 0.05$) and

a partial ban (OR = 6.22, $p < 0.01$), as opposed to preferring a pro-choice abortion policy. Compared to religiously unaffiliated Puerto Ricans, support for a partial ban also runs relatively high among committed Catholics (OR = 2.83, $p < 0.05$) and occasional Catholics (OR = 3.61, $p < 0.01$). Interestingly, in contrast to the other Latino subgroups, among Puerto Ricans the relative odds of backing a total abortion ban are actually lower for most religious categories than for religiously unaffiliated persons; these estimated net effects are particularly striking for committed Catholics (OR = 0.34, $p < 0.05$) and nominal Catholics (OR = 0.38, $p < 0.05$).

Discussion

We began this study by noting the dearth of systematic research on religion and U.S. Hispanic public opinion. Our work augments this literature by examining the links between religious involvement and abortion attitudes among three major Hispanic subgroups in the United States, using data from the 1990 Latino National Political Survey (LNPS). Several findings merit discussion.

A major finding involves the strong views of committed (i.e., regularly attending) Protestants, most of whom appear to be affiliated with conservative (i.e., evangelical, fundamentalist, and charismatic) groups. It is well known that Pentecostalism and other forms of conservative Protestantism have been gaining adherents in the United States (Greeley, 1994, 1997; Hunt, 1999) and elsewhere for some time. Although most previous discussions of Latino abortion attitudes have emphasized the influence of Catholic culture (e.g., Bolks et al., 2000), our results demonstrate that committed Latino Protestants are strongly pro-life, more so than any other segment of the Hispanic religious population. On average, they are significantly more supportive of a total abortion ban (i.e., with no exceptions even in cases of duress) than any other group, while remarkably few committed Protestants voice pro-choice sentiments. These already distinctive patterns become even starker when we consider only those Protestants we can confidently classify as evangelicals.⁴ By neglecting this growing portion of the Latino public, prior research has underestimated the role of religious factors in shaping abortion policy preferences among Latinos.

A second key finding involves Hispanic Catholics. As suggested by previous research (e.g., Bolks et al., 2000), committed Catholics also lean

⁴The analyses reported in the tables and text include both conservative (i.e., evangelical and fundamentalist) and mainline (i.e., moderate and liberal) Protestant groups under the broad "Protestant" rubric. As we noted earlier, the vast majority of Hispanic Protestants belong to conservative denominations, where opposition to abortion is likely to be stronger. In ancillary analyses (not shown), we reestimated the models in Tables 2 and 3 dropping the small numbers of mainline Protestants. As expected, the already large odds ratios for committed Protestants became even more striking. Further details on these supplementary results are available from the authors.

strongly toward pro-life views. Although a significant proportion of these active Catholics endorse a total abortion ban, they are significantly less supportive of this position than their committed Protestant counterparts. Instead, the modal position of this group favors a ban with exceptions in cases of rape, incest, or threats to the life of the mother. Interestingly, aside from the committed Catholics and committed Protestants, our models reveal only a handful of significant differences in abortion attitudes between the other religious categories (i.e., occasional Protestants, occasional Catholics, nominal Catholics) and religiously unaffiliated Latinos. Overall, then, the pro-life bent among U.S. Hispanics—widely remarked, and often assumed to result from Catholic cultural influence—is evident mainly among the most religiously committed Latinos. Among researchers and political commentators alike, more caution may be needed in making such generalizations.

A third important finding involves subgroup variations within the Latino population. Although we find strong pro-life leanings among Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans in the LNPS, Cuban-origin respondents are considerably more pro-choice in their orientations. With regard to religious influences, several intriguing subgroup differences also surface. For instance, among Mexican Americans, nominal (i.e., nonattending) Catholics are actually more pro-choice than religiously unaffiliated persons. There are several speculative explanations for this pattern. For some Mexican Americans, self-identification as Catholic may be influenced by: (1) an expression of familial or cultural identity, (2) support for the crucial role of the Church in local communities (Dolan and Deck, 1994), and/or (3) a reflection of Catholic-influenced popular religiosity (Diaz-Stevens and Stevens-Arroyo, 1998; Pena and Frehill, 1998), rather than support for Church doctrine or social teaching on abortion. In any event, this finding illustrates the substantial divergence in abortion attitudes among Mexican Americans, who constitute a majority (roughly 60 percent) of U.S. Latinos (Guzman, 2001).

Otherwise, patterns of religious difference in abortion attitudes are broadly similar among Mexican-origin and Cuban-origin respondents. Interestingly, among Puerto Ricans, Catholics tend to be less supportive of a total ban than are religiously unaffiliated respondents, although the latter category comprises a small segment of the Puerto Rican subsample. By contrast, committed Protestants—who make up a larger percentage of Puerto Ricans, as compared with the other Latino subgroups—tend to be adamantly pro-life, strongly supportive of both total and partial abortion bans. Taken together, these findings amplify our call for caution in generalizing across the diverse U.S. Hispanic population with regard to abortion attitudes.

Our findings suggest several promising lines of future research. First, given the clear distinctiveness of committed Protestants—especially the substantial evangelical, fundamentalist, and charismatic portion—further study of this growing population is certainly warranted. Much more information is

needed about the social characteristics, conversion and socialization processes, and political orientations among these Latino Protestants. Second, future studies should explore religious variations in (1) other social attitudes and (2) political behavior among U.S. Latinos. To date, this entire area remains woefully neglected among social scientists. Third, although the LNPS focused on three major Latino subgroups, much less is known about the relationships between religion and sociopolitical orientations among more recent (im)migrants to the United States, including Dominicans and other Caribbean groups, as well as those refugees from Central American nations, several of which (e.g., Guatemala) have large conservative Protestant populations. Finally, as we noted earlier, the LNPS data were collected in 1990. Given the potential for religious and political changes during the intervening period, as well as the rapid growth of the U.S. Latino population (Guzman, 2001), additional survey research is urgently needed to clarify the complex relationships between religious involvement, social attitudes, and political life among America's largest racial/ethnic minority population.

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