

How Do Policies and Religiosity and Impact Abortion Practices and Attitudes. A case study

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ABSTRACT

It is generally accepted that there a strong relation exists between religiosity and abortion attitudes: the more religious a person is, the more inclined is to display anti-abortion attitudes. This positive correlation is shown to work not only in the US, but also in other (in particular, European) countries. In terms of abortion practices, the relation is not always shown to be strong.

In this paper, we argue that this relation is not necessarily straightforward neither for attitudes nor practices and that the historical path the country went through plays an unexpectedly important role. We focus our research on an East European country and, using various data from censuses and surveys, we quantify how anti-abortion attitudes and practices, on one hand and religiosity, on the other hand, are connected within this context. Our preliminary results show that, controlling for other demographic characteristics, religiosity is either not or very weakly connected with the two variables. The conclusions point to a more profound and complex relation between religiosity and abortion attitudes and practices, with historical conditions having a strong effect on the direction and shape of this.

BACKGROUND

As all the European countries in the East, Romania was under a state socialist regime for more than forty decades. In the 1960s, fearing a population decline due to low fertility, several Eastern European countries used coercive measures to raise the number of children born¹. Hungary, for example, restricted the access to abortion and contraceptives; Bulgaria, by the end of 1960s, introduced abortion restrictions for married women who were childless or had only one child. In October 1966, Romania adopted one of the strictest abortion laws, limiting legal access to abortion to a few well-defined medical situations for women of reproductive age. It also blocked access to contraceptive methods by neither producing nor importing them.

In terms of religion, although theoretically people had the freedom to practice it, religiosity was strongly discouraged and at times severely punished. As such, both anti-abortion and anti-religious attitudes became associated with the hated state socialist regime. Following the fall of communism in 1989, the law on abortion was among the first to be overturned. Simultaneously, religiosity experienced a strong revival, nowadays Romania being one of the very few religious countries in Europe.

DATA AND METHODS

In this paper, we use two types of data: aggregate level data (from the Romanian National Institute for Statistics and European databases) and micro-level data from two surveys (*Generations and Gender Survey, Romania, Wave 1 (2005)* and *Reproductive Health Survey (2004)*).

The data come from cross sectional surveys that use national representative samples of the Romanian population. Generations and Gender Survey (GGS) has 11,986 respondents; the Reproductive Health Survey (RHS) includes 6802 respondents. These two surveys included both males and females, although in the RHS the questionnaire used for males is different than the one use for females. From these surveys we extracted those questions related to the demographic characteristics of the respondents, attitudes toward abortion and religiosity.

Descriptive statistics show that about 25% of the women in the sample had at least an abortion in the last five years before the interview, 99% of this abortions being done under medical supervision. Women are strongly for abortion: 79.1% say that the woman has always have the right to decide by herself about her pregnancy (including whether or not to have an abortion). More than this, 67.7% of those who do not agree with the first (strong) statement

think that a woman can have an abortion if the pregnancy puts her life in danger, and 71.5% agree that a woman should be able to have an abortion if the fetus has genetic malformations. Only 3.2% of all women agree that a woman should not be allowed to have abortion in any situation.

In terms of religiosity only 0.1% of women declared that they have no religion. 17.2% go to church/synagogue/mosque at least once per week and 62.3% go regularly. This shows that the majority consider themselves attached to a religion and a significant percentage attend religious services on a regular basis.

In order to quantify the relationship between religiosity and attitudes toward abortion, we first transformed the battery of questions (10) on attitudes into an index with values from 0 (strongly against abortion) to 4 (strongly for abortion).

The next methodological steps will include fitting loglinear models to model the relationship between attitudes toward abortion and religiosity. Factors that will be taken into considerations include education, religion, age, ethnicity place of residence (rural/urban), marital status as well history of abortion.

SOME CONCLUSIONS

Our preliminary results show that religion (religious denomination) plays a role, but it overlaps strongly with ethnicity. Although there are some differences between men and women, they are not as significant as we expected.

Key words: Religiosity, Abortion, Gender, Romania, Post-communism