Religion and the Sources of Public Opposition to Abortion in Britain: The Role of 'Belonging', 'Behaving' and 'Believing'

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Abstract
This article examines the relationship between religious factors and opposition to abortion in Britain. It provides a detailed analysis of public opposition towards abortion undertaken for different reasons, as well as general views on whether abortion is justified or not. It assesses the relative influence of religious faith using the multi-dimensional 'belonging, behaving and believing' framework for micro-level analysis, as well as the impact of personal salience. It also accounts for the impact of socio-demographic factors and political partisanship. It uses data from two nationally representative social surveys and multivariate estimation techniques. The main finding is that opposition to abortion is not solely based on differences in faith or denominational affiliation but that greater religious involvement or commitment, as measured by attendance at services and personal salience, and more traditionalist beliefs underpin opposition. These findings generally hold across surveys, different estimation techniques and different specifications of the dependent variable.

Introduction

This article examines the contemporary relationship between religious factors and opposition to legal abortion in Britain. Ipsos MORI's (2011) periodic surveys of attitudes to abortions have shown a decrease in the proportion of people who agree that a woman should not have to continue with her pregnancy if she wants an abortion (declining from

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65% in 2001, to 63% in 2006 and to 53% in 2011). Furthermore, leaders of the Church of England and the Catholic Church have continued to make controversial and well-publicised pronouncements on the issue of abortion, often stating objections to the current legal framework or urging religious adherents to consider the abortion issue when casting their vote at national or subnational elections (Blake, 2007; Carrell, 2010; Jones, 2005). There has also been greater mobilisation and advocacy by Christian campaign organisations on social issues such as abortion, utilising tactics and strategies from US-based groups (Booth, 2012; Quinn, 2011).

However, despite this wider context and the prominent role played by religious leaders and organisations, there have been few detailed micro-level analyses of how religious faith influences contemporary public attitudes towards abortion in Britain (Chapman, 1986; Hayes, 1995). Using data from nationally representative social surveys, this article provides a detailed assessment of attitudes in Britain towards legal abortion undertaken for elective or traumatic reasons. It assesses the relative influence of religious identity using the 'beliefs, belonging and behaviour' framework (Leege and Kellstedt, 1993) for micro-level analysis. It also accounts for the impact of socio-demographic factors, educational attainment and partisanship. It represents the most detailed empirical analysis of the impact of religion on abortion attitudes in contemporary British society.

The article is structured as follows. First, it discusses existing findings on religion and attitudes towards abortion and sets out the research questions examined here. Second, it discusses the data sources and analytical procedures used, including measurement of the dependent and independent variables. Third, it presents the results and discusses the main empirical findings. Fourth, it concludes the analysis and discusses lines of future enquiry.

Religion and Opposition to Abortion: Specification of Research Questions

Previous research has demonstrated that religious factors are important determinants of public attitudes towards abortion in Britain and other national contexts. As Jelen has observed: 'Given the relationship of the abortion issue to ultimate concerns of human life, and to questions of sexual morality, it is not surprising that much opposition to legal abortion has had a religious basis' (2009: 223–4). Indeed, previous research on this topic in Britain has shown that significant differences exist based on religious affiliation; that is, Catholics were less likely to support abortion compared to Anglicans and those who are not religious (Hayes, 1995). This article builds on previous research into the micro-level factors affecting abortion attitudes in Britain (Chapman, 1986; Hayes, 1995) and other countries, particularly in the USA (Adell Cook et al., 1992; Hoffman and Mills Johnson, 2005; Jelen, 2009; Jelen et al., 1993; Legge, 1983; Scott, 1998; Unnever et al., 2010; Wang, 2004; Wilcox, 1992; Woodrum and Davison, 1992). However, there is currently little empirical evidence bearing on how different dimensions of religion affect social attitudes in Britain, including opposition to abortion. Using a more multifaceted framework for analysing the effects of religion is important: using a single measure of religion, whether affiliation or some other indicator, 'will give only a partial picture of

someone's overall faith' (McAndrew, 2010: 89). By using multiple operational measures of different aspects of religious faith, based on the Leege and Kellstedt (1993) approach, we can provide a more detailed empirical assessment of how religion shapes attitudes in British society. To help fill this lacuna in the literature on religion and attitudes towards abortion in Britain, this article examines two research questions:

> RQ1 Is opposition to abortion in contemporary British society influenced by differences in religious affiliation ('belonging')? Specifically, are Catholics more likely to oppose abortion compared to other religious adherents and the non-religious?

> RQ2 In addition to affiliation, is opposition to abortion influenced by other aspects of religious faith: 'behaving', 'believing', and personal salience?

The analysis also assesses the religious sources of opposition to legal abortion undertaken for different reasons, which are broadly categorised as *elective* (social) or *traumatic* (physical) reasons (Hoffman and Mills Johnson, 2005; Jelen and Wilcox, 2003), also dichotomised as 'soft' or 'hard' reasons (Scott, 1998: 179). Previous research has shown that large majorities of public opinion favour abortion for 'hard' medical reasons, while opinion is more divided over abortion on 'soft' social or economic grounds (1998). The traumatic grounds concern risks to physical health of the expectant mother, serious fetal defects, or the pregnancy being the result of rape or incest. The elective reasons cover personal and familial circumstances, such as a family being socio-economically disadvantaged and not being able to afford another child or a woman deciding on her own she does not want another child.

Of course, the sensitive nature of this form of terminology should be acknowledged at the outset. This distinction has, however, been widely utilised in both cross-national (Scott, 1998) and single-country (Adell Cook et al., 1992; Jelen, 2009; Jelen and Wilcox, 2003) studies of public attitudes. Therefore, while recognising the sensitive nature of these terms, the analysis, in keeping with the wider literature, retains and employs this dichotomous categorisation for its important heuristic value. The next section discusses the data sources, analytical procedures and measurement of dependent and independent variables.

Data and Method

The data analysed here come from the British Social Attitudes survey (BSA)[1] and European Values Study (EVS),[2] utilising cross-sectional surveys undertaken in 2008. Both surveys involved face-to-face interviews, with the BSA also using self-completion questionnaires. The BSA series involves annual surveys undertaken since 1983, while the EVS surveys are undertaken periodically (1981, 1990, 1999 and 2008). The EVS interviews those aged 15 and older, while the BSA interviews adults aged 18 and over. To ensure comparability, the analysis of the EVS excludes the small number of cases in the sample aged 17 or under (1.5% of the sample).

The use of the BSA 2008 and EVS 2008 surveys allows for a more comprehensive examination of the relationship between religious factors and opposition to abortion.

First, we can provide a more detailed assessment of religious identity (Leege and Kellstedt, 1993) by utilising measures of religious affiliation ('belonging'), attendance at religious services ('behaving'), traditionalist views ('beliefs'), as well as the personal salience of religion. Second, questions asking about the legality of abortion in differing circumstances can be broadly categorised as support for abortion for *elective* or *traumatic* reasons, the latter relating to the personal and material circumstances of the mother or couple and the latter concerning the health and well-being of the mother or baby (Jelen and Wilcox, 2003: 490). Unlike other surveys, the BSA 2008 included questions on both elective and traumatic reasons for abortion (Jelen, 2009; Jelen and Wilcox, 2003). The BSA 2004 survey carried seven binary response items on abortion, four relating to elective reasons and three concerning traumatic reasons, but did not possess an extensive set of measures on religious factors. More widely, the BSA survey series is a valuable resource for analysing how religion affects attitudes and behaviours in Britain (Heath et al., 1993; Lee, 2012; McAndrew, 2010; Voas and Ling, 2010), including views on abortion (Hayes, 1995; Scott, 1998). The EVS includes questions on approval-disapproval of elective grounds for abortion, though not physical trauma reasons, but has the advantage of also including a more general measure of support or opposition for abortion. By utilising both surveys, we can compare the effect of religion-based variables on elective and traumatic reasons for abortion and a summary indicator of support or opposition. Using both surveys for the analysis allows a more robust analysis of the effects of religion variables across two nationally representative surveys, using different statistical estimation techniques and specifications of the dependent variables.

The BSA 2008 questionnaire was split into four versions and administered to different subsamples, each comprising a quarter of the sample (total = 4468 cases). In 2008 a component of the questionnaire schedule focused on religious issues. Two different sets of questions about religion were administered (*Faith Matters* module: A and B; the *International Social Survey Programme* module: C and D). Both questionnaires asked the different subsamples about social and health-related reasons for abortion. The question wordings for the dependent variables from the BSA 2008 used in the analysis are as follows.

Subsamples A and B

Do you personally think it is wrong or not wrong for a woman to have an abortion.

If there is a strong chance of a serious defect in the baby?

If the family has a very low income and cannot afford any more children?

Subsamples C and D

There are a number of circumstances in which a woman might consider an abortion. Please say whether or not you think the law should allow an abortion in each case.

The woman decides on her own she does not wish to have a child?

The couple cannot afford any more children?

The woman's health is seriously endangered by the pregnancy?

The analysis also uses data from the fourth wave of the cross-national EVS. The sample size for the British component is 1561 cases. The relevant sample size for the EVS 2008 (restricted to those aged 18 and over) is 1485. Three items are used as the basis for analysis. First, two approve-disapprove items on abortion and, second, a self-placement scale – ranging from 1 to 10 – asking whether abortion is ever justified. The question wordings for the three items are as follows:

Do you approve or disapprove of abortion under the following circumstances?

Where the woman is not married.

Where a married couple does not want to have any more children.

Please tell me for each of the following whether you think it can always be justified, never be justified, or something in between, using this card.

Abortion.

The EVS 2008 approve-disapprove questions, while focusing on elective grounds for a termination, do differ in their wording from those used in the BSA 2008 survey. Nonetheless, using the EVS measures allows a more careful comparison of the effects of the religion-based variables on opposition to elective reasons for abortion

Before proceeding to the multivariate analysis, Table 1 presents responses to each question on abortion in the BSA 2008 for five categories of religious affiliation (Anglican, Catholic, other Christian (members of the nonconformist denominations and those unaffiliated), members of non-Christian faiths, and those who do not belong to a religion). The top section of Table 1 gives responses for those respondents in the BSA A and B subsamples, while the bottom section shows views for those in the BSA C and D subsamples. Note that the response options differed for the questions asked to the A and B or C and D subsamples. Respondents in the A and B subsamples were asked whether they thought abortion was 'always wrong', 'almost always wrong', 'wrong only sometimes' or 'not wrong at all'. Respondents in the C and D subsamples were given a binary choice of 'allow by law – yes' or 'allow by law – no'. For all questions, the proportions which could not choose or did not answer are also reported (the *Cramer's V* statistic reports the strength of association between the categorical variables in each case, where 0 = no association and 1 = perfect association, along with the associated *p* values; overall, the strengths of association are not particularly strong).

Looking in detail at group percentages for the A and B subsamples, it is clear that Catholic respondents are most likely to think abortion is wrong to some degree, followed by other Christians and adherents of non-Christian minority faiths. Those least likely to think that abortion is wrong are Anglicans and those who do not belong to any religion. Around three-fifths of Anglicans and the non-religious think that abortion is not wrong at all in the case of the baby having a serious defect. The non-religious are also most likely to think abortion is not wrong at all when a family has a very low income and

Table 1. Dependent variables: attitudes towards abortion by religious affiliation, BSA 2008.

	Anglican (%)	Catholic (%)	Other Christian (%)	Other religion (%)	No religion (%)	All (%)
BSA 2008 subsamples A and B						
If there is a strong chance of a serious defect in the baby						
Always wrong	4.9	14.2	11.9	14.4	2.9	6.6
Almost always wrong	4.4	14.2	9.9	8.8	4.3	6.4
Wrong only sometimes	23.6	23.1	25.7	25.6	19.7	22.3
Not wrong at all	59.5	39.6	45.1	44.8	63.6	56.2
Can't choose / not answered	7.6	8.9	7.5	6.4	9.6	8.5
Cramer's V = .128***						
If the family has a very low income and cannot afford any more children						
Always wrong	18.6	31.4	28.6	30.6	16.8	21.4
Almost always wrong	14.4	16.0	15.2	5.6	10.8	12.5
Wrong only sometimes	20.7	18.9	19.0	24.2	19.6	20.1
Not wrong at all	27.9	13.0	19.0	26.6	37.2	29.0
Can't choose / not answered	18.4	20.7	18.2	12.9	15.7	17.0
Cramer's V = .110***						
BSA 2008 subsamples C and D						
The woman's health is seriously endangered by the pregnancy						
Allow by law – yes	91.0	87.6	90.7	89.8	90.6	90.4
Allow by law – no	3.6	7.0	5.0	7.6	3.6	4.4
Can't choose / not answered	5.4	5.4	4.2	2.5	5.8	5.1
Cramer's V = .053						
The couple cannot afford any more children						
Allow by law – yes	49.1	38.9	48.1	32.5	60.4	51.7
Allow by law – no	38.7	50.8	43.1	59.8	30.2	38.4
Can't choose / not answered	12.2	10.3	8.7	7.7	9.4	9.9
Cramer's V = .134***						
The woman decides on her own she does not wish to have a child						
Allow by law – yes	58.0	51.6	53.1	46.6	67.5	59.8
Allow by law – no	33.1	41.8	39.5	46.6	26.1	33.0
Can't choose / not answered	8.8	6.5	7.4	6.8	6.4	7.2
Cramer's V = .110***						

Note: *p ≤ .05; **p ≤ .01; ***p ≤ .001. Source: BSA survey 2008. Weighted data.

cannot afford further children. While there are differences between the religious groups, across the board opposition to abortion is much higher towards social reasons for having a termination, as has been found in studies of public attitudes in the USA (Jelen and Wilcox, 2003).

Looking at the three questions asked to the C and D subsamples, there is near-unanimous support for abortion in the case of a woman's health being seriously endangered by the pregnancy, while opposition is higher in the case of the couple not being able to

afford further children and a woman deciding alone not to have a child. Interestingly, Catholic respondents are not the group most likely be opposed in response to these questions. Members of other minority faiths are marginally more opposed than Catholics to abortion when a woman's health is seriously endangered, and around 5 and 10 per cent more opposed for the two 'social' rationales given for abortion. The 'other religion' group comprises members of different minority religions who comprise small numbers of cases in the BSA subsamples and it is not feasible to disaggregate this category further. Again, opposition to abortion is much higher for the questions which pose a 'social' or elective reason for having an abortion. Interestingly, while in the USA abortion is thought of as a 'classic "easy" issue, about which citizens can easily form opinions without great technical knowledge' (Jelen and Wilcox, 2003: 489), for all questions there are varying proportions which do not provide a clear answer.

Next, Table 2 provides a similar breakdown for attitudes to abortion by religious affiliation based on the EVS 2008 data and using the same five categories for religious groups. Two questions ask about elective grounds for an abortion. Looking at the proportions who express disapproval in response to these questions, Catholics are more likely to oppose abortion compared to Anglicans and those who do not belong to a religion. However, higher levels of opposition are evident on behalf of members of minority faiths, while other Christians are marginally more opposed than Catholics to a woman having an abortion when she is not married. Again, there are varying proportions of 'don't know' or no answer responses, particularly for the question concerning whether a couple cannot afford more children (highest at 28.7% for the other Christian category).

Finally, when comparing mean scores for the scale item asking if abortion is never or always justified (ranging from 1 to 10, with higher scores denoting support for abortions never being justified), members of minority religions are most likely to oppose abortion. Their mean score is 7.83 compared to 7.07 for Catholics, 6.77 for other Christians, 6.04 for Anglicans and 5.63 for the non-religious, which represent significant between-group differences accounting for within-group variation (ANOVA: $F = 22.53^{***}$). Just 2.7 per cent of EVS respondents could not place themselves on the abortion scale.

Dependent Variables: Measurement

For the multivariate analysis, binary logistic regression is generally used, to allow for an across-survey comparison of the variables affecting those groups categorised as supportive of or opposed to abortion. This involves analysis of dichotomous dependent variables. For the questions asked of subsamples C and D, the binary response options are scored as 1 ('allow by law – no') and 0 ('allow by law – yes'). For subsamples A and B, who were given a wider set of response categories, those who oppose abortion to some degree are coded as 1 while those who respond 'not wrong at all' are scored as 0. For the EVS 2008 data, response categories for the two approval-disapproval questions are similarly coded into binary variables. Those who express disapproval are scored as 1 and those who approve are scored as 0. Finally, the general item from the EVS asking whether abortion can be justified is kept as a scale (running from 1 to 10) and used as the basis for linear regression analysis. The scale is reverse-scored so that 10 indicates that abortion *can never be justified* and 1 indicates that abortion *can always be justified*. 'Don't know'

Table 2. Dependent variables: attitudes towards abortion by religious affiliation, EVS 2008.

	Anglican (%)	Catholic (%)	Other Christian (%)	Other religion (%)	No religion (%)	All (%)
The couple cannot afford any more children						
Approve	48.1	35.8	25.3	24.8	55.3	46.7
Disapprove	32.0	49.4	46.0	58.6	23.9	33.4
Don't know / not answered	19.9	14.8	28.7	16.5	20.8	20.0
*Cramer's V = .185***						
The woman is not married						
Approve	45.9	38.9	30.7	23.3	55.8	46.7
Disapprove	40.0	48.1	50.0	64.7	27.2	37.9
Don't know / not answered	14.1	13.0	19.3	12.0	17.0	15.4
*Cramer's V = .175***						
Whether abortion is justified or not						
Mean score (1 to 10 scale)[a]	6.04 (2.87)	7.07 (2.76)	6.77 (2.55)	7.83 (2.46)	5.63 (2.96)	6.17 (2.91)
*F = 22.53***						

Note: *$p \leq .05$; **$p \leq .01$; ***$p \leq .001$. Source: EVS 2008. Weighted data. Standard deviations in parentheses.
[a]Scale reverse-coded so that higher scores represent opposition to abortion.

responses are treated as missing data and are excluded from the multivariate analysis of the EVS 2008 survey. The analysis uses weighted data.

Independent Variables: Measurement

This analysis assesses the relative influence of the 'belonging', 'behaving' and 'believing' dimensions (Leege and Kellstedt, 1993) of religious faith. Accordingly, it provides separate operational indicators for these three dimensions, discussed below, rather than using data reduction techniques to try and generate a single underlying or latent dimension of 'religiosity' (Voas, 2007). The variables for religious affiliation and attendance at religious services are measured in the same way for the BSA 2008 and EVS 2008 surveys. Religious affiliation ('belonging') is based on a series of five dummy variables reflecting the categories used in Table 1. The omitted reference category represents those with no religion. Religious 'behaviour' is based on a scale measuring frequency of attendance at religious services (scored from 1 to 7, where 1 = 'never or practically never' and 7 = 'once a week or more'). A scale is also included tapping the perceived salience of religion (ranging from 1 = 'not at all important' to 4 = 'very important'), carried in both the BSA 2008 and EVS 2008 surveys. For the 'behaviour' and perceived salience variables, higher values denote more frequent attendance and greater personal importance of religion, respectively.

Where the surveys differ in certain respects is in the operationalisation of variables for religious beliefs ('believing'). This aspect of the multi-dimensional approach (Leege and Kellstedt, 1993) can be seen as referring 'to the strictness with which an individual interprets and understands the teachings of his or her particular faith tradition' (Olson and Warber, 2008: 195). These beliefs measures are included in order to tap into more traditionalist or conservative religious orientations. Some of the belief items carried in the BSA 2008 could not be employed as they were administered using a split-sample format; their inclusion would have considerably reduced the numbers of cases available for analysis. For subsamples C and D, two questions ask about the literalism of holy scripture – with views on biblical inerrancy often used in studies of attitudes towards abortion in the USA (Adell Cook et al., 1992; Bader and Froese, 2005; Unnever et al., 2010) – and theological exclusivism (Merino, 2010). The literalism of holy scripture item is measured as a dummy variable, whereby the response 'Scripture is the actual word of God and to be taken literally' is coded as 1 and all other responses as 0. Similarly, theological exclusivity is measured as a dummy variable: the response 'one religion is true and others are not' is scored as 1 and other responses as 0. For subsamples A and B, no suitable item of religious belief was available. For the EVS 2008 survey, the single belief item is based on a similar question about theological exclusivity and is likewise measured as a dummy variable.

As well as assessing in detail the impact of religious factors, the analysis examines the influence of other well-established predictors of abortion attitudes from research undertaken in Britain and elsewhere. Existing research from Britain has shown that those more likely to support abortion include younger people and those with higher levels of education (Chapman, 1986), while extensive research into attitudes towards legal abortion in the USA has shown that the groups most likely to be supportive include women, older people, those with higher education, Democrats and social liberals (Wilcox and Norrander, 2001). Those more likely to be opposed include Protestants and Catholics who attend religious services more often, evangelical Christians and those for whom religion has greater personal salience (2001). A cross-national study of six countries, including Britain, found that opposition to abortion was more likely to be found amongst older people and those with lower levels of education, while Catholics and Protestants were more likely to be opposed compared to those without a religious identity (Hayes, 1995).

To enable a clearer comparison, these other predictors are measured in identical ways in the analyses based on the BSA 2008 and EVS 2008 data. These predictors include sex (a dummy variable coded 1 if female, 0 if male), age (measured as continuous variable, ranging from 18 to 97 years), region (dummy variables for living in England, Scotland or Wales) and educational attainment (coded as a series of dummy variables measuring the highest qualification held by each respondent: degree level or higher, below degree level, A-Levels or equivalent, GCSEs or equivalent, or no qualifications). In particular, it is expected that higher levels of educational attainment will be related to lower levels of opposition towards abortion (Adell Cook et al., 1992; Hayes, 1995).

It is also important to account for partisanship. In Britain, the stronger grassroots support – expressed in long-term partisan identification and voting behaviour – traditionally

shown for the Conservative Party by Anglicans and for Labour by minority religious communities (Seawright, 2000), including Catholics, underlines the need to include partisanship (dummy variables for Conservative, Labour, Liberal Democrats, other party, no party). Moreover, the impact of religious affiliation could be mediated via an individual's partisan identity. (Question wording for the religion-based variables and a full set of descriptive statistics for both surveys are available on request). Cases with missing data are excluded via the listwise procedure.

Results and Discussion

Table 3 first presents the results for the model estimations based on data from the BSA A and B subsamples. It reports the unstandardised *B* coefficients (with standard errors in parentheses) and odds ratios. The odds ratios can be interpreted so that values greater than 1 indicate that a variable increases the likelihood of opposition towards abortion while values lower than 1 show that a variable decreases the likelihood of opposition. The reference categories are listed underneath Table 3. Overall model performance is indicated by the Nagelkerke R Square statistic.

The results for subsamples A and B show a mixed picture in terms of the effects exerted by the religion variables. Religious affiliation has an impact for the elective rationale for abortion: Catholics and other Christians are more likely to be opposed compared to those with no religion. Beyond the effects of 'belonging', personal salience of religion has an important impact: specifically, those for whom religion is of greater importance in their life are more likely to be opposed. In terms of the non-religious variables, those with a degree-level qualification are less likely to be opposed compared to those with no qualifications, as are those who support the Conservative Party. For the second estimation, concerning the baby having a serious defect, there are no effects for 'belonging', but 'behaving' has a significant impact: regular attendance at religious services is related to greater opposition towards abortion for this 'traumatic' reason. Again, personal salience is significantly and positively related to opposition. Education and supporting the Conservative Party has similar effects to those for the first estimation. Taken together, the impact of educational attainment supports the weight of findings from existing research: that is, higher levels of education underpin more liberal or less restrictive views on abortion. The models explain about 10–15 per cent of the variance in the dependent variables.

Turning to the three model estimations shown in Table 4 (based on the BSA subsamples C and D), there is a varied pattern of effects for the religion factors. Looking at the first model estimation, based on a social rationale for abortion, the explanatory power of religion is exerted through 'behaving' and perceived salience. More frequent attendance at religious services and greater personal importance of religion lead to higher levels of opposition to abortion. There are no significant effects for either affiliation or religious beliefs. When accounting for different facets of religious faith, then, there are no significant differences between any religious groups and the non-religious. In the second estimation, again based on 'social' grounds for abortion, religious affiliation has a significant impact. Specifically, Catholics and members of minority faiths are more likely to oppose abortion compared to the non-religious. Interestingly, accounting for the other religion

Table 3. Binary logistic regressions of opposition towards abortion, BSA 2008 (subsamples A and B).

Variable	Elective – couple have very low income		Traumatic – baby has serious defect	
	B	Odds ratio	*B*	Odds ratio
Socio-demographic variables				
Sex	0.11 (0.11)	1.12	0.12 (0.10)	1.12
Age	0.00 (0.00)	1.00	0.01 (0.00)	1.01
Lives – England	0.01 (0.26)	1.01	−0.38* (0.24)	0.68
Lives – Scotland	0.00 (0.16)	1.00	−0.04 (0.15)	0.96
Education variables				
Degree-level	−0.36* (0.18)	0.70	−0.62*** (0.17)	0.54
Below degree-level	−0.15 (0.22)	0.86	−0.33 (0.20)	0.72
A-Levels	−0.23 (0.20)	0.79	−0.30 (0.19)	0.74
GCSEs	−0.15 (0.17)	0.86	0.09 (0.15)	1.09
Religion variables				
Anglican	0.15 (0.15)	1.16	−0.17 (0.15)	0.84
Other Christian	0.56** (0.18)	1.76	0.31 (0.17)	1.36
Other religion	0.04 (0.26)	1.04	0.42 (0.24)	1.52
Catholic	0.89*** (0.26)	2.44	0.55** (0.21)	1.73
Attendance	0.37 (0.24)	1.45	0.64** (0.21)	1.90
Personal salience	0.30*** (0.08)	1.35	0.32*** (0.21)	1.37
Partisanship variables				
Party – Conservative	−0.40* (0.17)	0.67	−0.43** (0.16)	0.65
Party – Labour	0.11 (0.18)	1.11	−0.10 (0.16)	0.91
Party – Lib Dem	−0.41 (0.22)	0.66	−0.04 (0.21)	0.96
Party – other	0.17 (0.21)	1.19	−0.12 (0.19)	0.89
Constant	0.05 (0.38)	1.05	−1.11*** (0.35)	0.33
Weighted N	1,625		1,790	
Nagelkerke R Square	0.10		.14	

Note: *$p \leq .05$; **$p \leq .01$; ***$p \leq .001$. Standard errors in parentheses. Weighted data. Omitted reference categories: lives in Wales; no qualifications; no religion; does not support a party.

measures, attitudes towards religion and truth have a strong effect: those with an exclusivist interpretation – who believe that there is only one true religion – are more likely to oppose abortion. There is no impact for beliefs about the literalism of holy scripture (cf. Bader and Froese, 2005; Unnever et al., 2010).

In the final estimation, concerned with a woman's health being seriously endangered, the only religion variables to have a significant impact are attendance at services and belief about truth and religion. In terms of the non-religious variables, education has a consistent effect across estimations: those with degree-level qualifications are less likely to oppose abortion, on both elective and traumatic grounds. There is a similar effect for those whose highest qualifications are A-Levels (or an equivalent). Unlike in Table 3, sex also has an impact in two estimations: in both cases, women are more likely to oppose

Table 4. Binary logistic regressions of opposition towards abortion, BSA 2008 (subsamples C and D).

Variable	Elective – woman decides on her own		Elective – couple cannot afford		Traumatic – woman's health endangered	
	B	Odds ratio	B	Odds ratio	B	Odds ratio
Socio-demographic variables						
Sex	0.24* (.11)	1.27	0.08 (.10)	1.08	0.96*** (.25)	2.62
Age	0.00 (.00)	1.00	0.00 (.00)	1.00	−0.01 (.01)	0.99
Lives – England	0.13 (.24)	1.14	0.23 (.23)	1.26	0.06 (.55)	1.06
Lives – Scotland	0.13 (.14)	1.14	0.13 (.14)	1.14	−0.13 (.35)	0.88
Education variables						
Degree-level	−0.50** (.17)	0.61	−0.50** (.17)	0.61	−1.28** (.45)	0.28
Below degree-level	−0.31 (.20)	0.73	−0.07 (.19)	0.93	−0.53 (.46)	0.59
A-Levels	−0.53** (.18)	0.59	−0.12 (.17)	0.89	−1.04* (.45)	0.35
GCSEs	−0.08 (.15)	0.92	−0.07 (.15)	0.93	−0.04 (.31)	0.96
Religion variables						
Anglican	−0.04 (.15)	0.96	0.20 (.15)	1.22	−0.14 (.37)	0.87
Other Christian	0.07 (.16)	1.07	0.21 (.16)	1.23	−0.49 (.42)	0.61
Other religion	0.25 (.25)	1.28	0.85*** (.25)	2.34	−0.52 (.54)	0.59
Catholic	0.12 (.20)	1.13	0.57** (.25)	1.77	0.21 (.44)	1.23
Attendance	0.73*** (.19)	2.08	0.37 (.19)	1.45	0.87* (.42)	2.38
Personal salience	0.23*** (.06)	1.26	0.14* (.06)	1.16	0.22 (.15)	1.24
One true religion	0.52 (.27)	1.67	1.27*** (.30)	3.57	0.91* (.40)	2.49
Scripture	0.18 (.20)	1.20	−0.07 (.21)	0.93	0.60 (.35)	1.83
Partisanship variables						
Party – Conservative	−0.22 (.16)	0.81	−0.03 (.16)	0.98	−0.97** (.34)	0.38
Party – Labour	−0.24 (.17)	0.78	0.00 (.17)	1.00	−0.48 (.32)	0.62
Party – Lib Dem	−0.26 (.22)	0.77	0.00 (.21)	1.00	−0.52 (.48)	0.60
Party – other	−0.17 (.19)	0.85	−0.30 (.19)	0.74	−1.31** (.47)	0.27
Constant	−1.28*** (.34)	0.28	−0.89** (.34)	0.41	2.73*** (.76)	0.07
Weighted N	1,816		1,761		1,854	
Nagelkerke R Square	0.11		0.09		0.16	

Note: *$p \leq$ .05; **$p \leq$ .01; ***$p \leq$ .001. Standard errors in parentheses. Weighted data. Omitted reference categories: lives in Wales; no qualifications; no religion; does not support a party.

abortion (when a woman decides on her own not to have a child, or when a woman's health is at serious risk). The partisanship variables are only significant in the final estimation: Conservative supporters and minor party loyalists are less likely to oppose abortion when the woman's health is at risk. There are no effects for the region variables, as was also the case in Table 3. Indeed, recent research has shown that, at the aggregate level, attitudes towards abortion are broadly similar in Scotland and England (Curtice and Ormston, 2012: 32–3). The model estimations in Table 4 explain similar levels of variation – between 9 and 16 per cent – in the dependent variables to that reported in Table 3.

As a test of the robustness of the influence of religion-based variables, further model estimations were run based on the EVS 2008 data, using the same set of explanatory variables. The results from three estimations are reported in Table 5, two binary logistic regressions and one linear regression (using the same omitted reference categories). The

unstandardised *B* coefficients (standard errors in parentheses) and standardised *Beta* coefficients are shown for the linear regression (with model performance indicated by the Adjusted R Square). Diagnostic checks based on the Variance Inflation Factor Scores did not indicate the presence of multicollinearity in the linear regression model (all scores were well below the commonly used threshold of a value of 10).

Looking at the results for the two logistic regressions, it is clear that in both cases members of minority religions are more likely to disapprove of abortion compared to those with no religion, as are Catholics and other Christians for the question relating to if a woman is not married. Taking into account affiliation, however, both 'behaving' – attendance at services – and personal salience of religion have significant effects in the logistic regressions. The same pattern is evident that was found in Tables 3 and 4. Regular attendance at religious services and greater personal importance of religion are related to opposition to abortion. Religious beliefs, again based on the question about there being one true religion, have a mixed impact, only significant in the first model estimation in Table 5. Once again, the effects of individual religious identity are transmitted not only through affiliation but also via indicators of religious involvement and commitment. Model performance is slightly better for the logistic regressions based on EVS 2008 data, with around a fifth of the variance in the dependent variables accounted for (17% and 20%).

Finally, the linear regression shows that religion variables have a strong impact on more general attitudes towards abortion, with the model overall accounting for 17 per cent of the variance in the dependent variables. The only affiliation dummy which is significant is for adherents of minority religions; again, Catholics do not differ significantly from those with no religion. The measures of 'behaving' and 'believing' have significant effects, as does the indicator of personal religious salience. Higher scores on each variable are related to a greater likelihood of believing abortion not to be justified. The other independent variables generally perform more strongly in the linear regression; in particular, education performs as expected. All groups with various levels of educational qualifications – from degree level through to GCSEs or equivalents – are less likely than those with no qualifications to think that abortion is not justified. In addition, women and older people are more likely to believe that abortion is not justified, while those living in Scotland and England are less likely to oppose abortion compared to those living in Wales. The partisanship variables also have some impact in each of the three models: the one consistent result is that Conservative supporters are again less likely to oppose abortion compared to those who do not support any party. This finding for partisanship at the grassroots level is interesting – and somewhat counter-intuitive – in the context of Conservative MPs being *most likely* to vote for reductions in the time limit for abortions in recent parliamentary votes, with party being the strongest determinant of voting in what is traditionally considered a 'conscience issue' for elected representatives (Cowley and Stuart, 2010, 2011).

It could be argued that a lacuna of the model specification and overall focus of the article is that there is not a detailed analysis of other attitudinal variables and their relationships with opposition to abortion. Existing research has indeed examined how – in addition to partisanship – views on abortion can be affected by other attitudes, such as general ideological orientations or wider social-morality beliefs (see e.g. Adell Cook et al., 1992; Woodrum and Davison, 1992). While the BSA 2008 surveys carries well-established,

Table 5. Binary logistic and linear regressions of opposition towards abortion, EVS 2008.

Variable	Elective – if woman is not married		Elective – married couple do not want more children		Whether abortion is never or always justified	
	B	Odds ratio	B	Odds ratio	B	Beta
Socio-demographic variables						
Sex	0.23 (.13)	1.26	−0.03 (.13)	0.97	0.49*** (.14)	0.08
Age	0.00 (.00)	1.00	0.01 (.00)	1.01	0.01* (.00)	0.06
Lives – England	−0.95** (.32)	0.39	−0.53 (.30)	0.59	−1.64*** (.33)	−0.17
Lives – Scotland	−0.59 (.42)	0.56	−0.57 (.40)	0.57	−1.61*** (.44)	−0.13
Education variables						
Degree-level	−0.75*** (.20)	0.47	−0.13 (.19)	0.88	−1.57*** (.21)	−0.24
Below degree-level	−0.48* (.24)	0.62	0.16 (.23)	1.17	−0.98*** (.27)	−0.11
A-Levels	−0.64* (.30)	0.53	−0.32 (.28)	0.72	−1.33*** (.32)	−0.12
GCSEs	−0.34 (.18)	0.71	−0.09 (.18)	0.92	−0.68*** (.20)	−0.11
Religion variables						
Anglican	0.12 (.17)	1.13	0.20 (.16)	1.22	−0.13 (.18)	−0.02
Other Christian	0.81* (.32)	2.24	0.52 (.30)	1.68	0.15 (.34)	0.01
Other religion	0.63* (.29)	1.88	0.73* (.29)	2.08	0.75* (.32)	0.07
Catholic	0.52* (.23)	1.67	0.24 (.22)	1.28	0.50 (.26)	0.05
Attendance	0.17*** (.05)	1.19	0.16*** (.04)	1.17	0.19*** (.05)	0.13
Personal salience	0.25** (.08)	1.29	0.23** (.08)	1.26	0.36*** (.09)	0.13
One true religion	0.62* (.25)	1.86	0.44 (.24)	1.56	0.81** (.27)	0.08
Partisanship variables						
Party – Conservative	−0.39* (.17)	0.68	−0.53*** (.16)	0.59	−0.39* (.19)	−0.06
Party – Labour	−0.01 (.19)	0.99	0.06 (.18)	1.07	−0.25 (.20)	−0.03
Party – Lib Dem	−0.47 (.25)	0.63	−0.34* (.23)	0.71	−0.28 (.27)	−0.03
Party – other	−0.22 (.25)	0.80	−0.48* (.24)	0.62	−0.75* (.27)	−0.07
Constant	−0.30 (.43)	0.74	−0.94 (.41)	0.39	6.67*** (.45)	
Weighted N	1,198		1,263		1,448	
Nagelkerke R Square / Adjusted R Square[a]	0.20		0.17		0.17[a]	

Note: *$p \leq .05$; **$p \leq .01$; ***$p \leq .001$. Standard errors in parentheses. Weighted data. Omitted reference categories: lives in Wales; no qualifications; no religion; does not support a party.

reliable multi-item scales which measure left-right and libertarian-authoritarian beliefs (Evans et al., 1996), including these political-ideological measures as explanatory factors raises complex issues in relation to causal ordering, which cannot be resolved with the use of cross-sectional data. For example, the libertarian-authoritarian scale is based on six

questions, employing Likert agree-disagree scales, which ask about young people's respect for traditional values, giving stiffer sentences for law-breakers, use of the death penalty, schools teaching children to obey authority, always obeying the law, and censorship of films and magazines. It is reasonable to assume that attitudes towards abortion could *influence* views on these issues as well as being *influenced* by such attitudes. The models presented in Tables 3 and 4 were re-run with the libertarian-authoritarian scale included as an explanatory variable. Across estimations, the effects were not generally statistically significant. The only exception was for attitudes towards a woman deciding on her own she does not wish to have a child (subsamples C and D), where libertarian-authoritarian beliefs were statistically significant at the $p \leq .01$ level, but, surprisingly, authoritarian beliefs were negatively related to opposition (full results are available on request).

Overall, there is an interesting pattern of effects for the religion variables across Tables 3, 4 and 5. There are interesting empirical findings for the three research questions set out earlier on. While group differences in affiliation are important (RQ1), there are important effects for other religious factors – attendance at services, personal salience and beliefs (RQ2). In terms of affiliation, Catholics are significantly more likely to oppose abortion on social grounds in the model estimations as, on occasion, are other Christians and, particularly, members of minority faiths. Both 'behaving' and perceived salience have significant effects on elective and physical grounds for abortion. The believing variables have a weaker impact overall. Where there are significant effects, more traditionalist views or stricter interpretations are related to greater opposition towards abortion. The findings also underlined the important role of education in shaping attitudes towards abortion, as demonstrated in other studies (Adell Cook et al., 1992). Specifically, higher attainment leads to more liberal or less restrictive views on abortion, in relation to both elective and traumatic reasons for terminations.

Conclusion

This analysis has advanced our understanding of how religious factors affect public attitudes towards abortion in British society through application of the 'believing', 'belonging' and 'behaving' framework (Leege and Kellstedt, 1993; Smidt et al., 2009). It represents the most comprehensive analysis yet of the impact of religion on opposition to elective and traumatic abortion in Britain. The findings from this analysis show that future research should use the multi-dimensional approach to religious faith when examining attitudes in Britain on other social issues, such as gay rights, gender relations, and other aspects of social equality.

Future research could also investigate in more detail the social and attitudinal sources of opposition to abortion – and other social issues – amongst different minority faiths, allowing for a more sophisticated analysis than could be undertaken here due to limitations in the samples of general social surveys. While this study analysed in detail attitudinal differences *between* religious groups, further survey-based research is needed into the correlates of support and opposition for elective and traumatic abortion *within* faith groups. For example, surveys of the Catholic population conducted at the time of Pope Benedict XVI's visit to Britain in September 2010 showed that, contrary to long-established religious teachings and beliefs, many supported abortion on health

grounds (McCorkell and Francome, 2010). In particular, further empirical analysis is needed of attitudinal heterogeneity within the Catholic community in Britain, to examine group differences based on age, education, levels of religious involvement and commitment, as well as political-ideological beliefs. More investigation is also needed into the attitudes of Evangelical Christians in Britain, a growing religious constituency, and how their faith shapes their views on social issues such as abortion (Evangelical Alliance, 2011).

Another important area for future research is to investigate public opinion on different aspects of the abortion issue in Britain, notably towards the public and parliamentary debates regarding the legal time limits of the current legislative framework. Also, more investigation is needed into the opinions of those who are religiously unaffiliated in Britain, a broad-based category, on abortion and other social issues. While this article has looked principally at how religious factors affect attitudes towards abortion, there is also the broader question of the secular sources of opposition to abortion on Britain, with arguments often employing scientific rather than religious rhetoric used by those inside and outside parliament.

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Notes

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2. EVS (2010) *European Values Study 2008, 4th wave, Integrated Dataset*. GESIS Data Archive, Cologne, Germany, ZA4800 Dataset Version 2.0.0 (2010-11-30). doi:10.4232/1.10188

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