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## **Does religiousness affect personal issue salience? The aberrant case of US abortion politics**

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**Does religiousness affect personal issue salience? The aberrant case of US abortion politics**

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## **Introduction**

Abortion has been a complicated topic in the American political landscape for decades. In the past 50 years, after the passing of *Roe v. Wade* in 1973, the issue has been significantly remoulded, from crossing party lines and revolving around personal morals to being a highly divisive partisan conflict (Williams, 2011; Sullivan, 2022). Having a pro-life stance on abortion policy has become a quintessential part of the conservative party's rhetoric. In the recent decade, a similar message has also been adopted by rising right-wing parties in Europe. Especially since the reversal of *Roe v. Wade* in 2022, more anti-abortion groups are emboldened and emerging from the fringes (Martuscelli, 2022). However, there has been a variation within the US either by social groups or state, when it comes to the level of importance abortion is awarded in a political context. Southern states are significantly more likely to exhibit higher levels of abortion salience for example (Newport, 2024). In order to explain the factors causing this difference, the concept of issue salience is key. While being defined in a variety of ways throughout literature, the focal point expresses, how some issues matter more than others, whether to an individual, to a community or a nation (Wlezien, 2005; Miller et al., 2016). For a topic to rise in relevance in political discussion and therefore become more salient, it must be of interest and importance to people.

While there is a plethora of factors like age, sex, economic state etc. that might affect issue salience, the one of interest here will be religion. There is vast writing done on the nexus of religion and politics, with evidence showing, how religious affiliation can influence partisan choice, especially towards more conservative parties as well as direct opinions on specific policy issues (Campbell et al., 2018). It also affects opinions on cultural issues, which are more individual and emotionally charged than general political policy. When those cultural issues are

then politicised, like is the case with the abortion policy in the US, those previous opinions, shaped by religious influence, will be attached to the political context as well (Campbell et al., 2018). It has been claimed that religion as an identity is the primary determinant of an individual's attitudes concerning politics in the US (Margolis, 2018). Additionally, studies have shown that close to 72% of people in the US consider religion fairly or very important in their lives (Gallup, 2023). These numbers illustrate, how the majority of the US public's life includes religion to a notable degree and as religion aims to guide people's way of life, morals and beliefs, political issue salience also falls under this umbrella. With abortion politics gaining more and more stronghold in the United States with increased laws banning it and subsequent protests, it is relevant to understand the background which guides its salience to begin with. Additionally, as mentioned above, increasingly the topic of abortion politics is also crossing over the pond to European countries like Poland, Hungary etc. (Giuffrida & Garamvolgyi, 2022). Understanding the reasoning for the political issue salience of abortion would therefore be, beneficial to explaining current and potential future developments in Europe as well.

This paper will thereby focus, on the connection between issue salience and religion. More specifically the aim is to look at the concept of individual issue salience, as in what issues are more important to one personally. While it is part of the growing body of issue salience literature, in the political science context, it has often been overshadowed by national issue salience (Moniz & Wlezien, 2021). This paper will aim to remedy that. Individual issue salience will be a more prudent choice for evaluating religious effects, as the salience of abortion policy is likely to be linked to personal circumstances. This paper will also specifically differentiate between identifying with a religious denomination and religion having active involvement in one's life. Focus will be put on religious involvement, in terms of believing in religious ideas like

heaven and hell, going to church regularly, following the word of the bible etc. This will ensure that the data included will represent people with actual religious involvement in their lives. It will improve accuracy and limit the possibility of people, who just identify as religious while not having active involvement.

The variables of individual issue salience and religious involvement will be tackled through a research question as follows: Does involvement with, and belief in religion increase one's issue salience towards abortion? This question will be examined by utilizing data obtained from the ANES 2020 Time Series Study and statistically analyzed using an OLS regression model. The paper will first separately outline previous literature covering issue salience as a concept and religion in relation to politics. The specific conceptualizations of both variables, used throughout this research, will also be covered. The overall research design will then be discussed, focusing on case and data selection, before explaining the research method, and data analysis and finishing with some concluding thoughts.

## **Literature review**

### *Issue salience*

While issue salience is a topic commonly covered in public opinion and electoral choice literature, there seems to be a great deal of variance regarding its definition and conceptualisation (Miller et al., 2016; Dennison, 2019). As of 2016, according to an article by Miller et al., about 62% of articles that featured issue salience lacked any conceptual definition for it at all. It is therefore key to discuss these various interpretations and clearly lay out the concept of issue salience as it pertains to the research at hand. There is a variety of definitions used across articles to explain issue salience. Originally, for example, the concept was developed and used by voting behaviour scholars to “designate the importance individual voters attach to different issues when evaluating political candidates” (Wlezien, 2005). Each of these definitions, however, conveys that in order for an “issue” (whether it be a policy, vote choice, candidate etc.) to be salient some weight is attached to it, usually by a portion of citizens while being of less or no importance to others (Epstein & Segal, 2000; Wlezien, 2005; Heffington et al., 2017; Miller et al., 2016; Dennison, 2019; Moniz & Wlezien, 2021). The more salient an issue is the more attention is likely directed to it, in addition to more knowledge being developed about its causes and solutions and participation around it becomes more likely (Dennison, 2019).

Through reviewing previous literature there has been a plethora of distinctions made around the concept of issue salience, however some are more relevant than others. The most important of such relates to the difference between personal and national issue importance. National issue salience pertains to the importance an issue poses to the country as a whole and to what degree it is a problem. In previous data collections and questionnaires, people are often

asked about “The biggest issue” / “The most important problem” (MIP) facing the country at any current time (Wlezien, 2005; Heffington et al., 2017). Many issues may be of importance to people personally but not be of great influence on the country, making them ultimately not salient issues from the point of view of policymakers (Miller et al., 2016). In political science literature, personal issue salience has received less attention as a dependent variable, and will thereby be the focus of this paper. It can be an important determinant of more nuanced opinions and attitudes related to one’s personal values (Miller et al., 2016). As personal issue salience expresses the degree to which the person engages with and relates to the topic, it is more connected to long-term memory and self-conception. People usually have a stronger and more long-term reasoning behind feeling a certain way about topics and perceiving it as salient or not, making it more durable to outside influences that might change it (Moniz & Wlezien, 2021). People are also more likely to obtain information about issues they care about and this is later more accessible for them in their memory (Krosnick, 1988b). Additionally, issues people consider salient to them, have a lesser likelihood of changing in importance or opinion over time. They are also more likely to be open about their opinions publicly if the issue is salient to them, which in terms of abortion policy is greatly illustrated in taking part in protests and picketing events (Krosnick, 1988a).

As personal issue salience plays a significant role in people’s political actions and has overarching effects, it is of high importance to examine more clearly the factors that affect it. The question of why people even attach salience to some issues has been covered by many authors in previous literature and three main reasons emerge. Issue salience can be determined by material interests, as people attach more meaning to issues that they have a vested interest in (Miller et al., 2016; Eaton & Visser, 2008; Krosnick, 1990). For example, if a person is a house



owner, they are significantly more likely to be interested in new property tax policies than people, who do not own a house. Secondly, if they are actively affected the issue is going to be more salient to them. Identification with a reference group is also going to play a role. For example, if new laws or policies are directed towards the LGBTQ+ community and you identify as part of it, you would be much more interested in those developments than a person who is not identifying as such (Miller et al., 2016; Eaton & Visser, 2008; Krosnick, 1990). Lastly and perhaps most importantly, general values also play a role. Value systems dictate, what a person prioritises in their life as significant and they also guide which issues become more personally salient to them (Eaton & Visser, 2008; Miller et al., 2016; Moniz & Wlezien, 2021). The closer the individual perceives the linkage between a specific issue and their values (especially if the value is very important to them), the more important this issue is going to be to them (Krosnick, 1990).

In this research, a combination of group identification and values will be examined, through religious influences. The assumption here would be that a person who identifies with religious values and is influenced by that sees abortion as a sin, is likely to perceive the issue of abortion as much more salient to them, even if it objectively does not personally affect them. Similarly, if a person actively takes part in religious activities with people who perceive abortion as a salient issue to them, they are more likely to adopt a similar stance to conform to the group. This is also illustrated by Krosnick in his 1990 writing, where he brings the same example with Catholic church followers, who are likely to adopt the same personal abortion views as the church and perceive it as a more important topic to them (Krosnick, 1990). This is of particular interest as a research topic because while personal issue salience has been covered previously in political research, there is a lack of newer papers written, as can be seen from many papers used

in this literature review (most are originating from the 90s to 2010s). Additionally, there is little written about the direct influences of specific factors on personal issue salience. If this type of research is conducted it is done using national issue salience instead.

### *Religion*

Religion is a complex concept that can broadly be divided into three elements, also dubbed the 3B's approach, involving belief, behaviour, and belonging. They each characterise a different element of religiosity, with belief signifying believing in the substance of the chosen denomination like in Christianity believing in heaven and hell etc. Behaviour encompasses the everyday tasks like praying going to church etc. that are outlined by religion. Belonging is the most common way in political science research, where religion is viewed and means the self-evaluation of which religion one affiliates with (Ben-Nun Bloom et al., 2015). These terms are not universal in title and differences occur between literature, for example in a paper by Yamane & Oldmixon, (2006) they differentiate between affiliation, salience and advocacy. The substance of the understanding however seems to be largely the same.

Religion is widely considered to be one of the key determinants of political attitudes, especially in the US (Margolis, 2018; Gallup, 2023; Newport, 2024). There are several theories as to how religion can have such effects, either through changes in behaviour (Castles, 1994), alterings in worldview (Yamane & Oldmixon, 2006) or values. One such reasoning can be traced to the basic human values theory, first presented by Schwartz in 1994, which has since become a key theory in explaining the link between values and political engagement. The theory outlines 20 core values, that can be broadly divided into four categories, two of which are self-transcendence and conservation. These two value categories specifically are said to guide people socially (Schwartz et al., 2013). Most importantly self-transcendence and conservation

values predict scores of symbolic ideology, racial conservatism, cultural conservatism, and civil liberties, which overlap with values promoted by religious doctrine (Goren et al., 2016). Basic personal values are attributed to providing reasons for political engagement and action as well as letting people make fast and frugal decisions that relate to abstract political beliefs. They also motivate attitude expression and judgment (Goren et al., 2016; Schwartz et al., 2013). Overall "the expression of human values through political opinions lets people signal what they view as important in public life" (Goren et al., 2016). The values that are dubbed under conservation are of most interest in this research as they are closely related to values promoted by religious groups. They call for accepting and maintaining the beliefs, practices, ideas, and modes of behaviour that are known and are distrustful of change. In terms of cultural issues like abortion and gay rights, they are of the belief that tradition should prevail (Goren et al., 2016; Novis-Deutsch et al., 2022).

There is ample evidence that following a religion is influential to people's opinions on policy issues and being in a group setting like a church is likely to strengthen and conform those opinions to the norm of the group (Miller et al., 2016; Eaton & Visser, 2008; Krosnick, 1990). It is well documented that groups defined by shared characteristics like a religious group are likely to also share political views, which can extend to single issues or develop to following the same political parties (Margolis, 2018a; Miller et al., 2016; Eaton & Visser, 2008; Krosnick, 1990). Looking back at the deciders of issue salience, religious belonging and views seem to relate to two of them - group influence and values. This makes it a reasonable assumption that religious belief is likely to have an influence not only on people's political engagement and choice but also on what they deem as politically important in the first place.

The information provided by previous research is insightful, however, there is little written about the direct connection between religious involvement and personal issue salience. Much of previous research is more concerned with representing religion in denominations only. The focus on involvement rather than denomination would therefore be a welcome addition to the literature.

The guiding hypothesis that will be examined by this paper will therefore be as follows:

*Hypothesis 1:*

“Higher levels of religious belief increase the personal issue salience of abortion.”

The concept of religious belief will be handled here regardless of denomination and considered in terms of “higher belief” meaning the closer following of religious doctrine (e.g. the Bible, the Quran) and making one’s decisions based on it. The assumption behind this hypothesis is that people, who subscribe to more religiously influenced beliefs in their life are more likely to have moulded their personal beliefs and value systems around the group influence. This would then include the attitude and salience of abortion policy. As, for example, the Christian church in the US has shown close links with pro-life ideology towards abortion and is vocal about it being of importance, the hypothesis assumes that the same is done by a person highly subscribing to the Christian belief system.

*Hypothesis 2:*

“Higher levels of religious activity increase the personal issue salience of abortion”

There is a differentiation made between activity and belief as they are different aspects of religious involvement and could provide a more nuanced explanation. High levels of activity in this hypothesis include things like going to church many times a month and taking part in bible

study. When the levels of activity are higher, the contact with religious beliefs and ideas within the group is assumed to also be higher, which will again lead to a greater chance of the individual adopting similar views and putting higher importance personally on issues that are of importance to the group. Issue salience in this study will be a direct measure based on self-evaluation of how much a person considers the topic of abortion as important in their life. High and low levels there will be self-explanatory. The overall expectation that this research is trying to examine is therefore that when religion is a more significant part of a person's life through their beliefs and practices, they are likely to be more concerned with abortion policy and political developments around it.

## **Research Design**

### *Data and Case Selection*

The data used in this analysis will be taken from the ANES (American National Election Study) 2020 Time Series Study. The ANES study is highly reputable as a source for political science research, which conducts the largest US election studies. It conducts data collection on a large pool of respondents and asks a wide variety of questions, which makes it the optimal choice for this analysis. This study used a cross-sectional sample of the US population, in two waves (pre- and post-election). The data was collected partly through telephone, face-to-face interviews and online. The sample of participants is representative of the US population as a whole so the results are generalizable. For this study, only the pre-election data will be utilised which included 8,280 respondents. This choice was made partly because it ensures that the respondent's attitudes are not heightened or influenced by the recent election results and the data collected reflects the normal and stable attitudes and opinions. Additionally, the role of the effect of elections on

public opinion is not under scrutiny in this paper, making the inclusion of the post-election responses not relevant.

This paper will be based on a single case study of the United States. This case was selected, because the US is unique in the prevalence of religion in society, specifically compared to other wealthy Western nations. Especially in the United States, religion is much more closely and overtly intertwined with politics. For example, as of 2021 88% of Congress identify as Christian (Pew Research Center, 2021) and being openly atheist would significantly decrease one's chances of getting elected to office as opposed to other characteristics like race, gender and age (McCarthy, 2023). These patterns suggest that in the US religion is bound to have a greater effect on the public consciousness and decision making than in democratic countries of similar status. Choosing a single case study design will therefore allow for a more in-depth and nuanced analysis of the specific dynamics in the US.

Additionally, the US seemed to be the optimal choice in terms of data availability. Their election surveys cover both the questions related to religion and abortion opinion in one study, As mentioned in the introduction, due to the disparity in salience between Europe and the US, on abortion issues, comparable sources were not available from a European context. As ANES is a reputable election survey, with a wide pool of participants and includes detailed and thorough questions, it is the most suitable option for this research.

### *Dependent variable*

The dependent variable used for analysis will be issue salience, specifically personal issue salience. This means that focus will be put on what topics are individually salient to the person, rather than nationally or to the community. This is mostly done as religion is likely to have more personal influences on a respondent's life and does not necessarily translate to their

opinions on national importance. While the ANES survey covers many questions related to abortion opinions and attitudes, the one that directly relates to issue salience is V201337. The question asks the respondent to evaluate on a 5-point scale, how important is the issue of abortion to them personally (from “not at all important” to “extremely important”). While exploring the theoretical background of issue salience it is explained that issue salience does go beyond just importance, and is also related to interest and willingness to engage with the topic. Unfortunately, due to limited data, this aspect is not explored with this dependent variable. ANES does not include questions specifically related to engaging with abortion-related research etc. and alternative data sources did not provide more optimal solutions either. While this will to some degree limit my conclusion, I believe measuring importance alone will still be insightful and significant enough to represent personal issue salience.

Table 1 shows the results of the frequency analysis that was conducted on the variable. The responses are relatively evenly distributed between the higher 3 evaluation levels with each having 27% of the responses. This suggests the responses are not skewed and provide a reasonably representative sample.

**Table 1. Frequency table of the salience of abortion policy variable**

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	1.00 <i>“Not at all important”</i>	351	4.2
	2.00 <i>“Not too important”</i>	1036	12.5

3.00 "Somewhat important"	2287	27.6
4.00 "Very important"	2282	27.6
5.00 "Extremely Important"	2281	27.5
Total	8237	99.5
Missing System	43	.5
Total	8280	100.0

### *Independent variables*

The independent variable of religious involvement will be divided into two subgroups, according to the outlined hypothesis. The first of the two will be concerned with religious belief, meaning that focus will be placed on the more abstract concepts of religion and how much the respondent subscribes to them. This is illustrated by questions like "How important is religion in your life?", "Do you believe in god?", "Do you think the bible is the word of god" etc. Within the data collected by ANES, two variables fit these criteria: V201433, and V201434. The first question is concerned with, how important the respondents deem religion to be in their lives, which is measured on a 5-point scale. For interpretation of results, higher importance indicates higher involvement. The second question asks if they believe the bible is the word of god, which offers 3 alternatives. The highest in terms of religious involvement, in this case, will be 1 ("Bible is the word of god and should be taken literally") and the lowest 3 ("Bible is the word of man").



While these options are not overtly on a numerical scale, the interpretation of these options allows for these deductions.

Tables 2 and 3 show the results of the frequency analysis conducted on these variables. Table 2, showing the importance of religion in one’s life, displays a fairly even distribution with the highest frequency for religion having very little importance at 27.5%, followed by 20.8% for religion having very high importance. Table 3 shows the results of the question related to the respondent's interpretation of the Bible. The most dominant category is number 2 (Yes, the Bible is the word of god, but should not be followed to the letter) with 41% of the results. The rest of the responses are fairly equally divided between the other two categories.

**Table 2. Frequency table of the religious involvement variable - importance**

		<b>Importance of religion</b>	
		Frequency	Percent
Valid	1.00 <i>“Extremely important”</i>	2277	27.5
	2.00 <i>“Very important”</i>	1585	19.1
	3.00 <i>“Somewhat important”</i>	1596	19.3
	4.00 <i>“Not too important”</i>	1066	12.9
	5.00 <i>“Not at all”</i>	1725	20.8

	<i>important</i>		
	Total	8249	99.6
Missing	System	31	.4
Total		8280	100.0

**Table 3. Frequency table of the religious involvement variable - the Bible**

**Is the Bible the word of god or men?**

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	1.00 <i>“The Bible is the actual word of God and is to be taken literally, word for word”</i>	1981	23.9
	2.00 <i>“The Bible is the word of God but not everything in it should be taken literally, word for word”</i>	3395	41.0
	3.00 <i>“The Bible is a book written by men and is not the word of God”</i>	2250	27.2
	Total	7626	92.1

Missing System	654	7.9
Total	8280	100.0

The second category is related to attendance and activities. Variable V201453 is effective in illustrating this as it is concerned with how frequently the respondent attends religious services. The frequency of this continuous variable is measured on a 5-point scale from “every week” (1) to “never” (5). A higher frequency of attendance here will mean, a higher degree of religious involvement in one’s life. All these variables touch upon specific parts of religiousness and allow for the data to be reflective of respondents' behaviour and attitudes towards religion. Table 4 also shows the frequency analysis conducted on this variable. The data included with this question is significantly less as people who reported in a previous question that they do not attend religious services at all are not included. This leaves 48.1% of the total participants. The responses are divided relatively equally and there is no significant skewness towards one response. The most popular frequency of church attendance seems to be “every week” with 15% of the respondents.

**Table 4. Frequency table of the religious involvement variable - attendance**

**How often do you attend religious services?**

		Frequency	Per cent
Valid	1.00 <i>“Every week”</i>	1244	15.0
	2.00 <i>“Almost every week”</i>	916	11.1
	3.00	661	8.0

	<i>“Once or twice a month”</i>		
	4.00 <i>“A few times a year”</i>	1054	12.7
	5.00 <i>“Never”</i>	104	1.3
	Total	3979	48.1
Missing	System	4301	51.9
Total		8280	100.0

In this paper, religion will not be specified in terms of a denomination like Christian, Muslim, Jewish etc. in terms of the independent variable. This is so for several reasons. Firstly, with survey questions, as people are answering based on their self-evaluation, results are likely to be, to some degree, subjective. Self-evaluation is, however, the best and most effective way to collect data as of now. Evaluating practices and beliefs is likely to yield higher accuracy than affiliation as measuring one's actions and principles in terms of religion requires further thought and consideration (Novis-Deutsch et al., 2022). Affiliating with a religion can be affected by many factors including past experiences, family influences etc. but not necessarily translate to overt practice. If one only loosely affiliates themselves with a religion it is significantly less likely to affect their everyday life and political decision-making. Additionally, a variety of sources indicate, how only approximately 5% of Americans identify as an alternative religion to Christianity (PRRI, 2023) (not including people who identify as agnostic/atheist), so making a

differentiation is statistically not likely to make a difference and not relevant to the conclusions, making it not necessary.

### *Model and control variables*

To effectively analyse the relationship between the dependent and independent variables and receive accurate results, it is vital to include several control variables. This is necessary to ensure that the statistical results represent true interaction between the dependent and independent variables and do not mask an alternative relationship causing the effects. These variables include:

Firstly “Sex” (V201600) as abortion is likely to enlist stronger opinions from women either in terms of being heavily pro or against. Men are more likely to be neutral or apathetic in their opinion as they are not directly affected by abortion policies and laws. It is a binary variable, with 1 = male and 0 = female (originally 2 = female, but recoded for clarity). The second variable will be “Age” (V201507x - summary variable consisting of V201504-6). Older people are more likely to have opinions leaning towards strengthening/banning abortions while younger people are likely to be more pro-choice. This is due to generational transformation in societal values towards more openness and acceptance. It is a continuous variable, from 1-100. “Level of education” (V201510) is third as higher education level is likely to affect knowledge about possible reproductive options including abortion and birth control. This could indicate greater tolerance for legal abortion from those, who report having higher levels of education (Pew Research Center, 2022). It is a categorical variable, featuring 8 categories. The reference category will be “Bachelor degree”. “Race” (V201549x - summary variable consisting of V201547a-z) is the last control variable as it is well established, how ethnicity plays a significant

part in the US public's political decision-making. It is a categorical variable, featuring 6 categories. The reference category will be "White".

The last three variables are all categorical and thereby for the interest of the analysis, are each recoded into dummy variables. The research will be conducted by using the Ordinary Least Squared (OLS) statistical model. Through assumptions testing no issues arose (further detail in Appendix B). As there are two hypotheses under examination, the OLS regression will be conducted twice. First with the inclusion of two independent variables, "Importance of religion" and "Is the Bible..?" alone with the dependent variable. The same will be then done using only the independent variable "How often do you...?". Both regressions will be run with and without the inclusion of the control variables to deduce if the results are accurate.

## **Analysis**

Hypothesis 1:

*"Higher levels of religious belief increase the personal issue salience of abortion."*

The results of the OLS regression are interesting. As can be seen from Table 5 the B coefficient is -0.169. This reflects that with every 1 unit increase in the independent variable, in this case, "Religious importance", the dependent variable decreases by 0.169 unit points. This means that on our scale when people deem religion as less important, their attitude towards abortion also decreases by 0.169 value points. The dependent variable of "Abortion importance" and the independent variable of "Religious importance" are both measured on a 5-point scale but follow the opposite logic. For "Abortion importance" 5 equals the highest level of importance while for religion this would be 1. When this factor is taken into consideration the result of -0.169 actually reflects a weak positive relationship instead. A similar effect is present with the accompanying

variable of “Bible the word of god?”. The coefficient table reflects that with every 1 unit increase, “Abortion importance” decreases by -0.108 scale points. This reflects that when the response moves from more religious belief to less the respondent's “Abortion importance” level does increase, although the level is minute. These responses differ in their statistical power as values obtained for “Religious importance” are statistically significant at  $p=0.001$ , while the value of “Bible word of god?” at -0.108 is not. These are the results when no control variables are included in the analysis. When this is done the “Religious importance” variable sees no significant change, only going to -0.160. The “Bible word of god?” variable however does change quite significantly. With the control variables, the relationship changes from a weak positive one to a weak negative one at - 0.160. As the values are very low it can be deduced that there is no exceptional connection between the two variables.

**Table 5. Hypothesis 1&2 coefficients**

		Coefficients <sup>a</sup>								
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B		Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	4.381	.054		81.506	.000	4.276	4.487		
	Attend_religious_services	-.060	.017	-.067	-3.460	<.001	-.094	-.026	.688	1.454
	Importance_of_religion	-.169	.021	-.168	-7.880	<.001	-.211	-.127	.574	1.743
	Bible_word_of_god	-.110	.032	-.065	-3.441	<.001	-.173	-.047	.723	1.384
2	(Constant)	4.575	.105		43.689	.000	4.369	4.780		
	Attend_religious_services	-.063	.017	-.070	-3.603	<.001	-.097	-.028	.669	1.494
	Importance_of_religion	-.160	.022	-.159	-7.444	<.001	-.202	-.118	.557	1.794
	Bible_word_of_god	-.108	.034	-.064	-3.214	.001	-.174	-.042	.640	1.561
	Male	-.232	.036	-.104	-6.398	<.001	-.303	-.161	.967	1.034
	Age	-.002	.001	-.028	-1.651	.099	-.004	.000	.899	1.113
	Black	-.267	.062	-.078	-4.337	<.001	-.388	-.146	.787	1.270
	Hispanic	.080	.065	.021	1.222	.222	-.048	.207	.890	1.124
	Asian	.039	.106	.006	.367	.713	-.170	.248	.974	1.027
	Native_American	.130	.133	.016	.977	.329	-.131	.391	.982	1.018
	Multiple_races	-.006	.104	-.001	-.063	.950	-.209	.196	.968	1.033
	Less_than_HS	.076	.090	.014	.839	.402	-.101	.253	.851	1.176
	High_School	-.070	.057	-.023	-1.220	.223	-.181	.042	.705	1.419
	Some_college_no_degree	.014	.053	.005	.270	.788	-.089	.118	.685	1.460
	Associate_occupational	.004	.071	.001	.052	.958	-.135	.143	.813	1.230
	Associate_academic	.115	.078	.025	1.463	.143	-.039	.268	.840	1.191
	Masters_degree	.017	.060	.005	.282	.778	-.100	.134	.749	1.335
	Doctorate	.067	.091	.013	.744	.457	-.110	.245	.878	1.139
	Republican	.079	.047	.035	1.688	.091	-.013	.172	.583	1.716
	Independent	-.109	.048	-.043	-2.252	.024	-.203	-.014	.703	1.423

a. Dependent Variable: Importance\_of\_abortion

## Hypothesis 2:

*“Higher levels of religious activity increase the personal issue salience of abortion”*

The testing of the second hypothesis also provided similar results as the coefficient for attending religious services variable was relatively low, at only -0.060, the same slightly positive trend as before is present. While the inclusion of control variables does increase the effect slightly to -0.063 it is not of significance. Here it would also be important to note that due to the structure of the survey only about half of the respondents pool replied to this specific question. This significantly limits the amount of data available and thereby also the validity of the results. Overall it seems that frequent participation in religious services does not have a substantial effect on the importance of abortion issue.



## **Conclusion**

The aim of this research was to examine the possible causal link between active religious involvement and high issue salience towards abortion. The hypothesis predicted that with higher levels of religion, the abortion salience would increase. The results, approved of that but showed only a slightly positive pattern. This seemingly approved the connection between active religious involvement and abortion issue salience. The preceding theory and research approve of it as well, so it is likely that the specific model of this study led to such weak results. One potential reason for it could be the only partial inclusion of factors of issue salience. As the survey set some limitations, there was not a variable that was more directly related to personal issue salience and therefore the results are not likely as representative as they could be. Additionally, the scaling of responses on an only 5-point scale limited the statistical possibilities with a Linear model.

The case of the US while easier to choose based on the plethora of specific datasets available, also has its downsides. The specific relationship that religion has with politics in American society is relatively unique and the results are therefore enlightening only on a limited level. One could make the assumption that similar patterns are not going to be present in countries where religion is not as tightly intertwined with political life. For future research purposes, exploring this connection with alternative case studies would be extremely useful. There are significant limitations that would need to be faced in terms of data availability first but once a survey is conducted the results would be extremely enlightening. The US is also unique compared to any potential cases in Europe for example, as they lack the potential input of an international organization like the EU. Any change in abortion legislation made in the US has only the potential to receive backlash within the confines of its borders. People are perhaps more likely to be engaged with the issue of abortion and attach high salience to it due to the fact that

they lack the veil of protection from the outside. This would be another interesting dynamic to explore further in the future.

Overall it is clear from previous research and this paper that religion has a connection to personal issue salience. Whether these results show definitively the strength and extent of it, especially in relation to abortion is doubtful and further testing is definitely necessary in the future. However, this paper manages to provide a potential explanation to the difference that has recently become apparent in the public's consciousness in relation to abortion in the US and Europe. Furthermore, knowing the reasons behind this difference is paramount in predicting the future developments that are likely to happen in European countries, with the rise of the right wing's crusade on abortion policies.

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## Appendix A. Survey questions

PRE SELFGENG\_GENDTYP

### CASI PRE: WHAT IS YOUR (R ) SEX? - REVISED

Survey Question	<b>What is your sex?</b> <b>1. Male</b> <b>2. Female</b>
Display Spec	If type=phone or if type=video, insert "I'm required to ask." before question.
Response Order	As listed
Misc Spec	- NO CAPI DK ALLOWED - NO CAPI RF ALLOWED
Release Variable(s)	V201600

PRE DEM\_BIRTHYR

### BIRTHDATE: YEAR OF BIRTH

Survey Question	<b>YEAR:</b>
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170

PRE-ELECTION SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

Display Spec	If ( DEM_BIRTHMO =2 and DEM_BIRTHDY=29 and DEM_BIRTHYR not in(1908,1912,1916,1920,1924,1928,1932,1936,1940,1944,1948,1952,1956,1960,1964,1968,1972,1976,1980,1984,1988,1992,1996,2000) ) then error message('Feb 29 date in year that is not leap year. Please correct month, day, or year')
Response Order	No response options
Misc Spec	- Response Type: Numeric Entry - Web Item Banking: DEM_BIRTHMO, DEM_BIRTHDY
Release Variable(s)	V201506



PRE DEM\_EDUCR

HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION

Survey Question: What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received?

- 01. Less than 1st grade
- 02. 1st, 2nd, 3rd or 4th grade
- 03. 5th or 6th grade
- 04. 7th or 8th grade
- 05. 9th grade
- 06. 10th grade
- 07. 11th grade
- 08. 12th grade no diploma
- 09. High school graduate - High school diploma or equivalent (for example: GED)
- 10. Some college but no degree
- 11. Associate degree in college - Occupational/vocational program
- 12. Associate degree in college - Academic program
- 13. Bachelor's degree (For example: BA, AB, BS)
- 14. Master's degree (For example: MA, MS, MEng, MEd, MSW, MBA)
- 15. Professional school Degree (For example: MD, DDS, DVM, LLB, JD)
- 16. Doctorate degree (For example: PhD, EdD)
- 95. Other {SPECIFY}

Response Order: As listed

Release Variable(s): V201510 V201510z

PRE PTYID\_RPTYID

PARTY ID: DOES R THINK OF SELF AS DEM, REP, IND OR WHAT

90 PRE-ELECTION SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

Survey Question: Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as [a Democrat, a Republican / a Republican, a Democrat], an independent, or what?

- 0. No preference {VOL}
- 1. Democrat / Republican
- 2. Republican / Democrat
- 3. Independent
- 5. Other party {SPECIFY}

Web Spec: Online, omit response option 0

Randomization: Order of parties in question text and in response options 1 and 2 (randomized same, do not use ballotcolor)

Response Order: Randomize 2 major parties

Release Variable(s): V201228 V201228z

PRE DEM\_RACECPS

RACE OF RESPONDENT

Survey Question	<p>I am going to read you a list of five <b>race</b> categories. You may choose one or more races. For this survey, Hispanic origin is not a race. Are you <b>White; Black or African American; American Indian or Alaska Native; Asian; or Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander?</b></p> <p><b>01. White</b> <b>02. Black or African-American</b> <b>03. American Indian or Alaska Native</b> <b>04. Asian</b> <b>05. Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander</b></p>
Interviewer Instruction	<p>(PROBE FOR RACE IF R SAYS HISPANIC OR A HISPANIC ORIGIN) (DO NOT ACCEPT "OTHER-SPECIFY" ANSWERS) (ENTER ALL THAT APPLY)</p>
Display Spec	<p>Only allow DK,RF in 1st mention. Do not allow 2 punches that are the same.</p>
Web Spec	<p>Online, display the stem as, 'Here is a list of five race categories. You may choose one or more races. For this survey, Hispanic origin is not a race. Are you: White; Black or African American; American Indian or Alaska Native; Asian; or Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander?' followed by the line (Mark all that apply)'. For response option 95, display 'Other (please specify)' with a small text box</p>
Response Order	<p>As listed</p>
Misc Spec	<p>- Response Type: MultiPunch</p>
Release Variable(s)	<p>V201547a V201547b V201547c V201547d V201547e V201547z</p>

PRE ABORTPRE\_ABSELFIMP

IMPORTANCE OF ABORTION ISSUE TO R

Survey Question	<p><b>How important is this issue to you personally?</b> <b>[Not at all important, not too important, somewhat important, very important, or extremely important / extremely important, very important, somewhat important, not too important, not at all important]?</b></p> <p><b>1. Not at all important</b> <b>2. Not too important</b> <b>3. Somewhat important</b> <b>4. Very important</b> <b>5. Extremely important</b></p>
Web Spec	<p>Online, omit response options from question stem.</p>
Response Order	<p>Forward/Reverse order</p>
Release Variable(s)	<p>V201337</p>

## REVISED IS RELIGION IMPORTANT PART OF R LIFE

Survey Question	<p>Now on another topic: How important is religion in your life?</p> <p>[Extremely important, very important, moderately important, a little important, or not important at all? / Not important at all, a little important, moderately important, very important, or extremely important?]</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Extremely important</li> <li>2. Very important</li> <li>3. Moderately important</li> <li>4. A little important</li> <li>5. Not important at all</li> </ol>
Web Spec	Omit response options from question stem.
Response Order	Forward/Reverse order
Release Variable(s)	V201433

## IS BIBLE WORD OF GOD OR MEN

Survey Question	<p>Please look at page ^prepg_s of the booklet.</p> <p>Which of these statements comes closest to describing your feelings about the Bible? You can just give me the number of your choice.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The Bible is the actual word of God and is to be taken literally, word for word.</li> <li>2. The Bible is the word of God but not everything in it should be taken literally, word for word.</li> <li>3. The Bible is a book written by men and is not the word of God.</li> <li>5. Other (SPECIFY)</li> </ol>
Web Spec	Online, omit the last sentence ("You can just give...") Online, omit reference to respondent booklet.
Response Order	As listed
Release Variable(s)	V201434 V201434z

**ATTEND RELIGIOUS SERVICES HOW OFTEN**

Survey Question	<p><b>Do you go to religious services [every week, almost every week, once or twice a month, a few times a year, or never/ never, a few times a year, once or twice a month, almost every week, or every week]?</b></p> <p><b>1. Every week</b>  <b>2. Almost every week</b>  <b>3. Once or twice a month</b>  <b>4. A few times a year</b>  <b>5. Never</b></p>
Universe	IF R ATTENDS RELIGIOUS SERVICES:
Logic	Ask if RELIG_CHURCH =1, else skip.
Response Order	Forward/Reverse order
Release Variable(s)	V201453

**Appendix B. OLS Assumptions tests**

*Independent errors*

**Figure 1. Durbin-Watson test - hypothesis 1**

*Model Summary<sup>c</sup>*

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.130 <sup>a</sup>	.017	.017	1.12737	
2	.251 <sup>b</sup>	.063	.061	1.10172	2.019

<sup>a</sup> Predictors: (Constant), Bible\_word\_of\_god, Importance\_of\_religion

<sup>b</sup> Predictors: (Constant), Bible\_word\_of\_god, Importance\_of\_religion, Native\_American, Associate\_academic, Multiple\_races, Asian, Hispanic, Associate\_occupational, Male, Doctorate, Independent, Less\_than\_HS, Black, Masters\_degree, Age, High\_School, Some\_college\_no\_degree, Republican

<sup>c</sup> Dependent Variable: Importance\_of\_abortion

## Figure 2. Durbin-Watson test - hypothesis 2

### Model Summary<sup>c</sup>

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Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.181 <sup>a</sup>	.033	.032	1.08991	
2	.249 <sup>b</sup>	.062	.058	1.07559	2.029

---

<sup>a</sup> Predictors: (Constant), Attend\_religious\_services

<sup>b</sup> Predictors: (Constant), Attend\_religious\_services, Associate\_academic, Multiple\_races, Native\_American, Doctorate, Asian, Less\_than\_HS, Male, Independent, Associate\_occupational, Hispanic, Black, Masters\_degree, Age, High\_School, Some\_college\_no\_degree, Republican

<sup>c</sup> Dependent Variable: Importance\_of\_abortion

The assumption of independent errors is fulfilled as the performing of the Durbin-Watson test (seen in Figure 1 above) yielded a result of 2.019 and 2.029 (seen in Figure 2 above). It is well within the limits of normal results as it is not below 1 or above 3.

### High multicollinearity

## Figure 3. Collinearity statistics - hypothesis 1

Coefficients<sup>a</sup>

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B		Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Coefficients			Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	3.876	.039		100.642	.000	3.800	3.951		
	Importance_of_religion	-.107	.012	-.140	-8.843	<.001	-.130	-.083	.539	1.855
	Bible_word_of_god	.022	.024	.015	.927	.354	-.025	.070	.539	1.855
2	(Constant)	4.503	.074		60.551	.000	4.357	4.649		
	Importance_of_religion	-.112	.012	-.147	-9.207	<.001	-.136	-.088	.505	1.980
	Bible_word_of_god	-.012	.025	-.008	-.473	.636	-.060	.037	.491	2.037
	Male	-.358	.026	-.157	-13.610	<.001	-.410	-.307	.964	1.037
	Age	-.004	.001	-.062	-5.157	<.001	-.006	-.003	.890	1.123
	Black	-.333	.049	-.084	-6.794	<.001	-.429	-.237	.843	1.187
	Hispanic	-.010	.047	-.003	-.214	.830	-.102	.082	.909	1.100
	Asian	-.079	.075	-.012	-1.043	.297	-.226	.069	.976	1.024
	Native_American	.125	.100	.014	1.254	.210	-.070	.320	.988	1.012
	Multiple_races	.133	.073	.021	1.819	.069	-.010	.277	.971	1.030
	Less_than_HS	-.062	.067	-.011	-.936	.349	-.193	.068	.861	1.162
	High_School	-.108	.041	-.035	-2.620	.009	-.189	-.027	.707	1.415
	Some_college_no_degree	.009	.038	.003	.227	.821	-.067	.084	.687	1.455
	Associate_occupational	-.037	.054	-.009	-.682	.495	-.142	.068	.825	1.212
	Associate_academic	.038	.058	.008	.655	.512	-.076	.152	.853	1.173
	Masters_degree	.010	.043	.003	.231	.817	-.074	.094	.747	1.338
	Doctorate	.143	.064	.027	2.238	.025	.018	.268	.873	1.145
Republican	-.170	.035	-.070	-4.929	<.001	-.238	-.103	.638	1.566	
Independent	-.255	.032	-.102	-7.944	<.001	-.318	-.192	.771	1.298	

<sup>a</sup> Dependent Variable: Importance\_of\_abortion

**Figure 4. Collinearity statistics - hypothesis 2**

Coefficients<sup>a</sup>

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B		Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	4.118	.039		104.792	.000	4.041	4.195		
	Attend_religious_services	-.160	.014	-.181	-11.313	<.001	-.188	-.132	1.000	1.000
2	(Constant)	4.163	.090		46.024	.000	3.986	4.340		
	Attend_religious_services	-.151	.014	-.170	-10.490	<.001	-.179	-.123	.945	1.059
	Male	-.269	.036	-.121	-7.551	<.001	-.339	-.199	.975	1.025
	Age	.000	.001	-.005	-.314	.754	-.002	.002	.912	1.096
	Black	-.181	.060	-.053	-3.021	.003	-.299	-.064	.813	1.230
	Hispanic	.078	.064	.020	1.224	.221	-.047	.204	.895	1.118
	Asian	.023	.101	.004	.233	.816	-.174	.221	.970	1.030
	Native_American	.244	.127	.030	1.917	.055	-.006	.494	.983	1.017
	Multiple_races	.020	.102	.003	.191	.848	-.181	.220	.970	1.031
	Less_than_HS	.158	.089	.030	1.766	.078	-.017	.333	.872	1.147
	High_School	-.032	.056	-.010	-.564	.573	-.141	.078	.728	1.374
	Some_college_no_degree	.030	.052	.011	.569	.569	-.072	.132	.696	1.437
	Associate_occupational	.041	.070	.010	.589	.556	-.096	.179	.821	1.218
	Associate_academic	.147	.077	.033	1.917	.055	-.003	.298	.843	1.186
	Masters_degree	.000	.059	.000	-.008	.993	-.115	.114	.750	1.333
	Doctorate	.042	.088	.008	.476	.634	-.130	.214	.877	1.140
	Republican	.175	.045	.078	3.883	<.001	.087	.264	.623	1.606
Independent	-.067	.047	-.027	-1.424	.155	-.160	.025	.706	1.416	

<sup>a</sup> Dependent Variable: Importance\_of\_abortion

The assumption of no high levels of multicollinearity is also met as both the tolerance and VIF values, indicated on the right-hand side of Figures 3 and 4 are within normal limits. For tolerance, it is above 0.1 and for VIF it is below 5.

*Linearity, Heteroskedasticity, Non-normally distributed errors*

**Figure 5. P-P Plot - hypothesis 1**

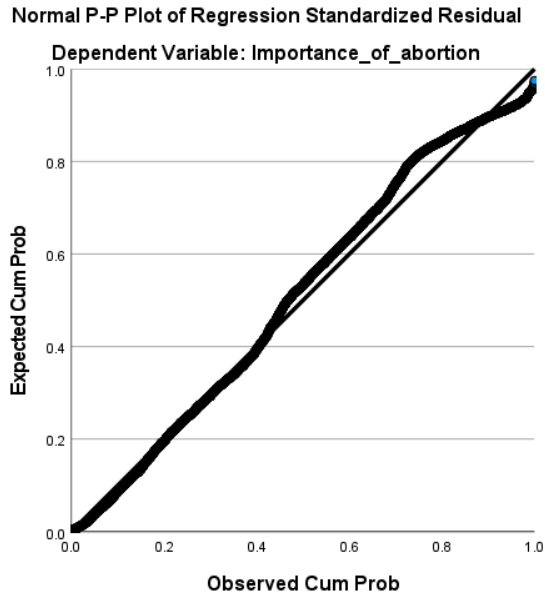


Figure 6. Scatterplot - hypothesis 1

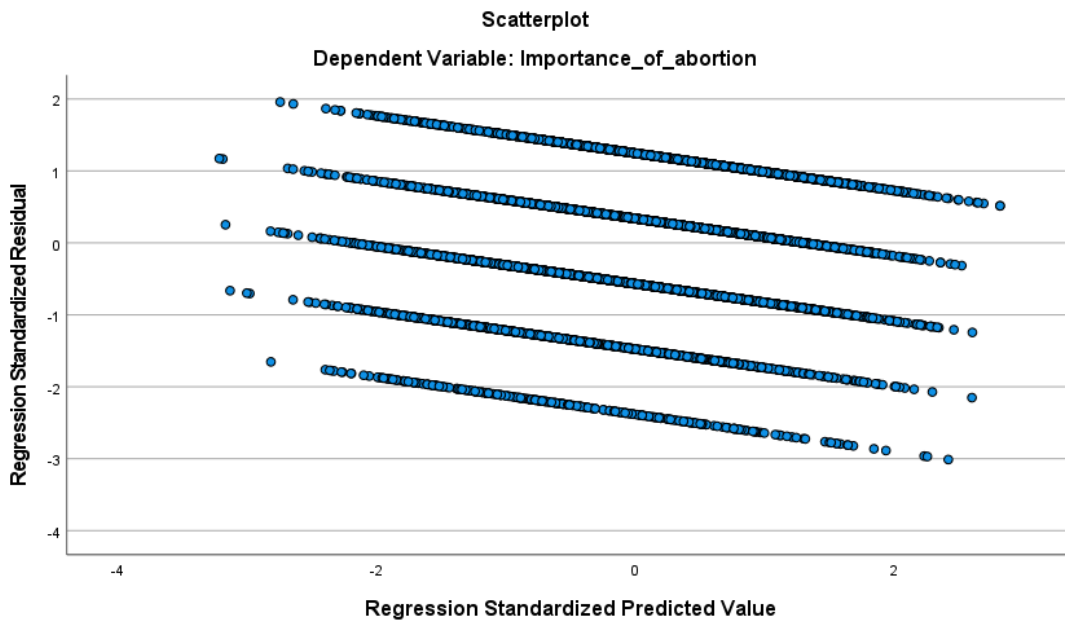


Figure 7. P-P plot - hypothesis 2



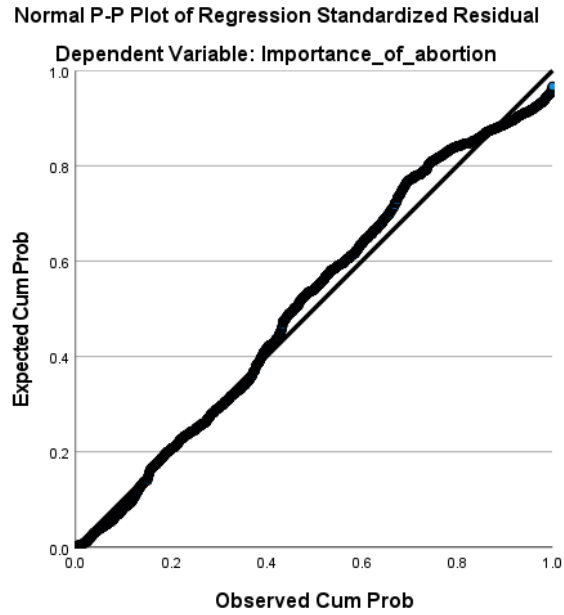
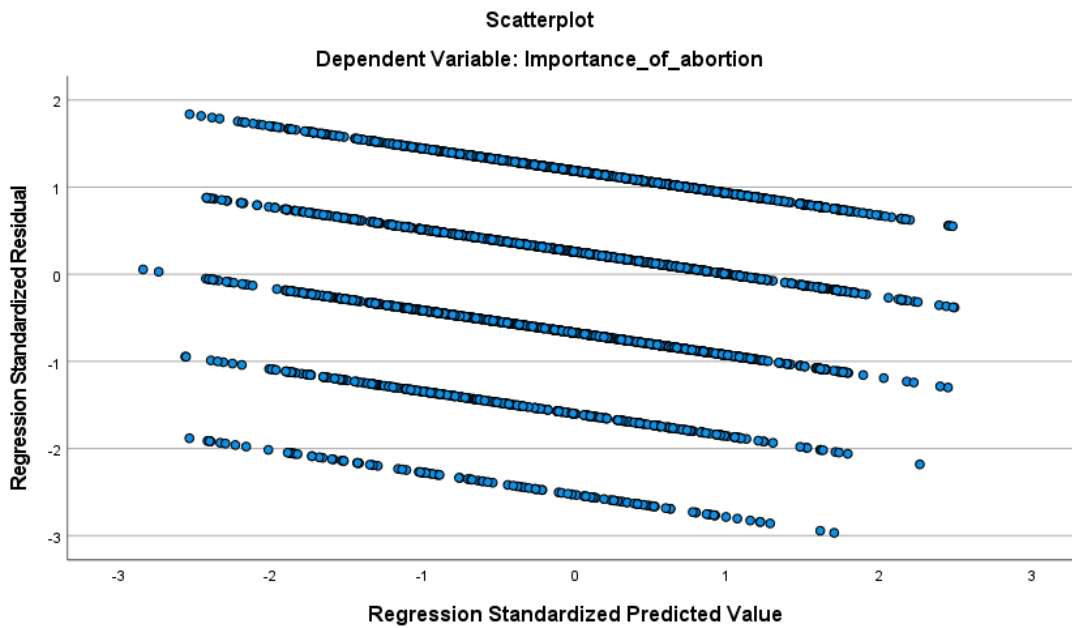


Figure 8. Scatterplot - hypothesis 2



For both variables the P-P plot is relatively linear so the assumptions met. The scatterplots both show a pattern amongs the data but this can be explained by the small number of categories as

they are both measured only on a 5-point scale. This should not affect the results drastically however and does still meet assumptions.

*Outlier and influential cases*

**Figure 9. Cook's Distance and Standardized DfBeta - hypothesis 1**

*Residuals Statistics<sup>a</sup>*

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Predicted Value	2.6016	4.4483	3.7224	.32900	3610
Std. Predicted Value	-3.407	2.206	.000	1.000	3610
Standard Error of Predicted Value	.046	.166	.076	.021	3610
Adjusted Predicted Value	2.6050	4.4437	3.7224	.32932	3610
Residual	-3.19738	2.35957	.00000	1.05819	3610
Std. Residual	-3.014	2.224	.000	.997	3610
Stud. Residual	-3.018	2.231	.000	1.000	3610
Deleted Residual	-3.20602	2.37554	.00005	1.06427	3610
Stud. Deleted Residual	-3.021	2.233	.000	1.000	3610
Mahal. Distance	5.785	86.892	18.995	12.271	3610
Cook's Distance	.000	.007	.000	.000	3610
Centered Leverage Value	.002	.024	.005	.003	3610

<sup>a</sup>. Dependent Variable: Importance\_of\_abortion

**Figure 10. Cook's Distance and Standardized DfBeta - hypothesis 2**

*Residuals Statistics<sup>a</sup>*

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Predicted Value	2.9396	4.4088	3.7214	.27559	3794
Std. Predicted Value	-2.837	2.494	.000	1.000	3794
Standard Error of Predicted Value	.044	.154	.071	.021	3794
Adjusted Predicted Value	2.9393	4.4154	3.7214	.27580	3794
Residual	-3.19084	1.97625	.00000	1.07318	3794
Std. Residual	-2.967	1.837	.000	.998	3794
Stud. Residual	-2.970	1.841	.000	1.000	3794
Deleted Residual	-3.19895	1.98375	.00001	1.07839	3794
Stud. Deleted Residual	-2.973	1.841	.000	1.000	3794
Mahal. Distance	5.336	76.538	16.996	11.601	3794
Cook's Distance	.000	.008	.000	.000	3794
Centered Leverage Value	.001	.020	.004	.003	3794

<sup>a</sup>. Dependent Variable: Importance\_of\_abortion

The partial plots depicted in Figures 1 and 3 do not reveal any outliers or significant cases. Additional testing through Cook's distance measure and Standardized DfBeta both show values below 1 which indicates such absence as well. This means the assumption of no outliers or influential cases is also met.