

The Effects of Religion on Abortion Attitudes and Capital Punishment Attitudes

Stacie Pham

University of La Verne

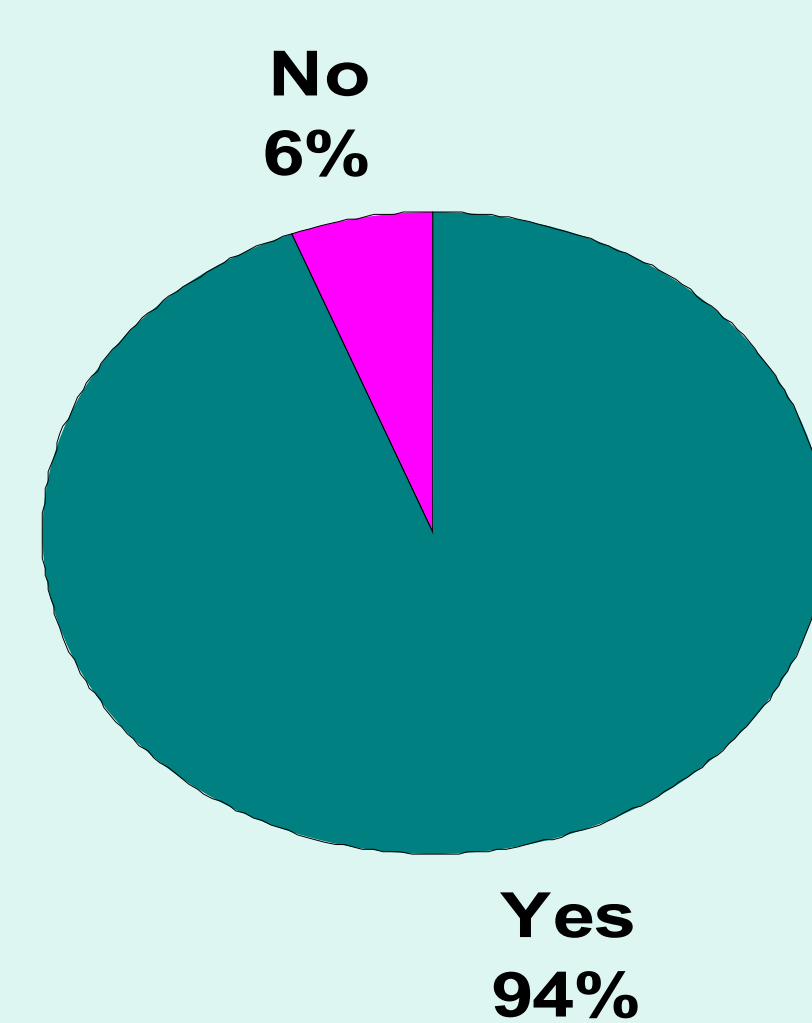
Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine whether or not religion or the belief in a higher being has an affect on attitudes about abortion and capital punishment. A nonrandom sample of 120 participants (22 males and 98 females) at a Southern California university responded to questionnaires concerning their religious behaviors and attitudes, and attitudes towards abortion and capital punishment. Religious behaviors and attitudes were measured using a modified version of the Religiousness Measure (Sethi & Seligman, 1993), which was designed to assess religious hope, involvement and influence. The Abortion Attitude Scale (Berne, 1998) had 14 questions which measured abortion attitudes on a 6-point Likert scale. The Capital Punishment Scale (Balogh & Mueller, 1960) had 15 statements that asked participants to either check “agree” or “disagree” for each statement. Results suggest an individual’s belief in a higher being had no significant affect on attitudes towards abortion and capital punishment. However, the results did suggest that the degree to which an individual was influenced by religion did have a significant correlation with attitudes about abortion, but not with attitudes about capital punishment. These findings indicate that more research is needed to understand why religion may have an affect on abortion and not on the death penalty, considering they both deal with the value of life. Future research can examine other factors that affect attitudes about abortion and capital punishment. Additional research can also investigate the effect of gender and the media on individual attitudes towards abortion and capital punishment.

Hypotheses

- Individuals who believe in a higher being will be less tolerant in the support of abortion and capital punishment.
- The level of importance that religion plays in an individual’s life will have an impact on his or her view on abortion and capital punishment.
- The frequency at which an individual participates in religious services will play a positive role in the way he or she views abortion and capital punishment.
- Religious beliefs play a positive role in influencing an individual’s perspective on abortion and capital punishment.

Beliefs in a Higher Being



Method

Participants (120)

Characteristic	Value
Gender	Age
- 22 men and 98 women	- 18 to 59 (24 the mean age)
Ethnicity	
- 12% African American	- 7% Asian
- 46% Latino/Hispanic	- 44% Euro-American
- 10% Other	- 1% declined to state

Measures

Independent Variable

- Religiosity

Dependent Variables

- Abortion attitudes

- Capital punishment attitudes

Results

Table 1

Means and standard deviations on capital punishment and abortion attitudes for beliefs in a higher being or not

Dependent Variable	M	SD	Beliefs in a higher being		t	p
			Yes n = 111	No n = 7		
Capital Punishment	28.78	12.95	20.50	13.91	1.79	NS
Abortion	53.02	19.27	39.57	19.26	1.53	NS

Table 2

Correlations for the importance of religion, capital punishment attitudes and abortion attitudes

	1	2	3
1. Importance of religion	--	--	--
2. Capital punishment	.08	--	--
3. Abortion	.44**	.08	--

n = 119; ** p < .01

Results

Table 3

Correlation for the frequency of participation in religious services, capital punishment attitudes and abortion attitudes

	1	2	3
1. Frequent attendance	--	--	--
2. Capital punishment	-.04	--	--
3. Abortion	-.45**	.08	--

n = 120; **p < .01

Table 4

Correlations for strength of religious beliefs, capital punishment attitudes and abortion attitudes

	1	2	3
1. Religious beliefs	--	--	--
2. Capital punishment	.06	--	--
3. Abortion	.53**	.08	--

n = 120; ** p < .01

Conclusion

The purpose of this analysis was to understand if religion affected abortion attitudes and capital punishment attitudes in a similar fashion. It was revealed that religiosity strongly affected abortion attitudes, but not capital punishment attitudes. Results also indicated that more individuals were anti-abortion than they were anti-capital punishment. Thus, religious aspects had a strong relationship with the way individual’s felt concerning abortion.

Future research can look into gender differences at being a potential variable in affecting consistent life views – being pro- or anti- for both abortion or capital punishment. This study only looked at the different aspects of religion that may have affected attitudes concerning abortion and capital punishment. Thus, one of the limitations of this study is that it did not examine how gender may have affected abortion attitudes and capital punishment attitudes.

Another area to include when investigating abortion attitudes and capital punishment attitudes is the media. Previous research has shown that the media has influenced an individual’s attitude regarding capital punishment. Potential research can look into how the media affects both abortion and capital punishment attitudes. Furthermore, it would be interesting to see if the political climate or societal values may have any correlation to the attitudes that individuals may have.