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Region, rights and religion:
Cross-national determinants of
abortion laws

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Abstract

This paper analyses a correlate of abortion law that has not been discussed in previous research: policy diffusion. In particular, this paper examines this factor to determine the geographically bounded effects of policy diffusion on abortion law and morality-policy broadly. The article also examines other social, political, and economic conditions that affect the level of abortion liberalism in order to address the question guiding this research: *under which social, political, and economic conditions will a country adopt liberal abortion laws?* A quantitative analysis of 192 countries shows that the average degree of abortion liberalism of a country's neighbours has a strong relationship to the degree of liberalism in the abortion law for that country. The results also confirm that a communist tradition, gender inequality and religiosity are predictors of abortion liberalism.

1 Introduction

It is now widely accepted that the right of access to induced abortion significantly improves maternal health outcomes (WHO 2012). However, dominant attitudes within civil society towards abortion and the legal status of abortion continue to vary significantly between countries (Center for Reproductive Rights 2009). It is evident that information about the relationship between maternal mortality and access to reproductive health services, in particular legal abortion, is insufficient to result in policy activity (Finer & Fine 2013). The debate surrounding the legal and ethical aspects of abortion is imbedded in a deeper social, economic and political context, which is highly variable across the globe (Finer & Fine 2013). Therefore, it is important to understand the nature of this context to determine how it is impacting the debate surrounding abortion within national communities.

While there are many studies examining the social attitudes and legal status of abortion within certain countries (sf: Abramowitz 1995; Belton et al 2009; Norup 1997; Rossier 2007), comparative studies between two or three countries (Jelen and Wilcox 1997; Yishai 1993), and regional studies (Field 1979; Boland 1993; Brookman-Amisssa & Moyo 2004), there have been very few large-n studies examining the social, political, and economic factors that predict abortion law globally (notable exceptions are Asal et al. 2008 and Hildebrandt 2015). This is surprising given that abortion is a highly politicised issue that is often studied by scholars of gender studies, political science, and sociology.

Current literature points to religiosity (Field 1979; Jelen & Wilcox 1997; Pillai & Wang 1999), gender equality (Wolf 1991; Jelen 2015), ideological position (Hildebrandt 2015) and various other social, political, and economic factors that may as potential correlates to liberalism of abortion laws. This paper aims to contribute to the existing scholarship on the legal status of abortion by determining which of these factors are significant on an international scale. Furthermore, by testing the effect of policy diffusion it contributes to this

body of literature by examining if and when moral policy is diffused geographically.

The research question guiding this dissertation will be: *Under which social, political, and economic conditions will a country adopt liberal abortion laws?*

The paper examines policy diffusion, and in particular the geographically bounded effects of policy diffusion on abortion law and morality-policy broadly. The article also examines other social, political, and economic conditions that previous studies have found have an affect on the level of abortion liberalism.

The effects of these variables are tested using a series of single, piecewise, and multiple regression analyses. This analysis shows that while religiosity, gender inequality, and policy diffusion effects, as well communist tradition, all show consistently significant relationships in the early models, only diffusion effects and communist tradition are significant in the final model.

This paper firstly contextualizes the politics of abortion law by outlining the primary arguments used by both proponents and opponents of abortion to advocate for their position. The various social, political, and legal indicators that the existing literature indicates may be predictors of abortion law are then developed, focusing on religiosity, gender inequality, and policy diffusion effects. Following this, the independent variables are operationalized, and an analysis of the results from the statistical analysis is conducted on those variables.

The paper concludes with a discussion about the implications of these findings, and how they may inform future policy and research.

2 Literature review

Abortion has long been practiced as a method of birth control, with evidence of abortive medications being sold in China from as early as the 2700s BC (Cabot 1980). While abortion has long been a controversial issue, widespread prohibition of induced abortion was not codified into state law until the 19th Century (Cabot 1980). Abortion laws began to liberalise in the early-mid 20th Century, with states gradually beginning to adopt exceptions to abortion prohibition (such as in cases of the pregnancy threatening maternal life or health, in cases of rape, in cases of severe congenital disorders etc) (Rahman, Katzive & Henshaw 1998). In 2009, almost 30% of states have decriminalised abortion (usually with some gestational limit restrictions), providing women with legal abortion on demand (Center for reproductive Rights 2009).

The way in which abortion legality and availability is instrumentalised by political elites relies on a number of different perceptions and ideas about abortion that may exist within any given community. These can be broadly categorised as ‘rights’ arguments, ‘privacy’ arguments, and ‘gender equality’ arguments. Understanding these arguments and ideas are key to unravelling the related social, political and economic conditions that may impact of the degree of liberalism in abortion laws.

Advocates for legal abortion regard access to safe abortion as a human right. Most commonly, this is framed in terms of the “right to choose”, evoking the language of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (OHCHR 1989), which guarantees the right “to decide freely and responsibly on the number and spacing of their children.” Other rights that are frequently evoked are the right to the highest attainable standard of health, and the right to bodily autonomy and integrity (Shaw 2010; Smyth 2002). On the other side of the rights argument, anti-abortion groups maintain that a foetus is a rights-bearing person whose right to life

carries a heavier moral weight than the rights of choice, health, or autonomy of the would-be mother (Smyth 2002).

The argument that a pregnancy termination is a medical procedure and, as such, is a private matter between a physician and her patient is frequently cited by those who favour liberal abortion laws. This rationale holds that state intervention into physical/patient relationships threatens the physician's fundamental obligation to provide the best care for her patient (McHale & Jones 2011). Counterarguments to this claim note that "[t]he pregnant woman cannot be isolated in her privacy" (*Roe v Wade* 1973), thus the physician is obligated to provide the best possible care for both woman and foetus (Smyth 2002). Additionally, privacy arguments do not adequately make space for the permissibility of abortion for reasons outside of the scope of poor health consequences, such as social repercussions, economic difficulties, or mere preference of the patient (Peach 1994).

Gender-equality arguments for legal abortion note that limiting control of women over their reproductive function denies full and equal citizenship to women (Nostiff 2007). Denying a woman full control over the number and spacing of her children has spill-over effects in terms of her ability to participate in economic, social, and political life (Nostiff 2007). However, it may be argued that this approach ignores the physical fact of reproductive differences between men and women; symbolically denigrating the reproductive powers of women, by standardising the full citizen as male-bodied (Smyth 2002).

This paper takes the view that all people have the right to bodily integrity and autonomy; regardless of whether exercising this right is harmful to another person (or to a foetus or embryonic matter). It therefore regards abortion on demand as an important element of ensuring equal rights as embodied individuals to women.

2.1 Primary Determinants of Abortion Liberalism

As demonstrated in the various arguments for or against abortion liberalism, the debate surrounding the legal and ethical aspects of abortion is imbedded in a deeper social, economic, and political context, which is highly variable across the globe. It is therefore important to examine these contexts to understand how they are impacting the debate within national communities.

2.1.1 Religiosity

Of the most commonly cited determinants of the degree of liberalism in abortion policy is religiosity, in particular, affiliation with the Catholic Church (Field 1979; Jelen & Wilcox 1997; Pillai & Wang 1999). While the Church's position on the permissibility of abortion, and the conditions under which abortion is permissible has wavered throughout history, over the past 250 years, a doctrine of absolute prohibition of abortion has been increasingly solidified through papal rulings, Canon Law and released statements (Noonan Jr. 1967). This position rests on a belief that life begins at conception, and to artificially terminate this life is tantamount to homicide (Noonan Jr. 1967).

The Catholic Church has long been a highly influential and outspoken critic of liberalising abortion laws, and this influence has been exerted in cases of both domestic and international lawmaking (Fleishman 2000). Pillai and Wang (1999) confirm this influence, finding that the percentage of Roman Catholics in a community had an adverse affect on the strength of liberalism of abortion laws in those communities.

During the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo in 1994, which had a focus on women's education, maternal mortality, and reproductive rights, the Holy See was able to lobby for significantly less progressive recommendations than might otherwise have been agreed to

(Pillai & Wang 1999). In order to do this, they found a value-alliance with delegates from conservative Muslim-majority countries. Although Islam has no central authoritative structure and therefore views vary widely on if and when abortions are morally permissible, Islamic scholars tend to agree that abortion is generally permitted only for health reasons (ie. to preserve the life or health of the mother or in cases of severe foetal impairment) (Shapiro 2014).

Minkenberg (2002) found that levels of religiosity were a better predictor than church membership in western democracies. Harris and Mills (1985) reveal a conflict between “responsibility-for-others” values and “self-determination” values with respect to the attitudes of religious people and abortion. They conclude that support for abortions is largely similar among religious and secular populations, provided it is undertaken for physical reasons (birth defect, rape, maternal health), and only significantly diverge in cases in which an abortion is undertaken for social reasons (economic, not wanting more children, being unmarried) (Harris & Mills 1985).

2.1.2 Gender Equality

If abortion rights are to be understood to be a vital part of achieving equality for women, it stands to reason that in countries that acknowledge women’s contribution to the social life, political institutions, and economic structures of the community would also acknowledge their capacity and right to exercise sovereignty over their bodies. While there are no studies that focus on overall gender equality and its impact on abortion liberalism, there are several studies that have explored the link between attitudes towards gender roles and attitudes towards abortion (Wolf 1991; Jelen 2015). While Wolf (1991) finds that people who identify as pro-life are more likely to want their children to exhibit “appropriate gender roles”, Jelen (2015) notes that the link between gender role egalitarianism and abortion support is weak.

Education is one of the most important predictors of social engagement (Helliwell & Putnam 2007). While highly educated women are not necessarily more or less likely to support abortion rights than highly educated men, girls are more vulnerable worldwide to be excluded from schooling than boys (Bellew, Raney, & Subbarao 1992; King 1990). Because higher education levels in general are positively correlated with more liberal attitudes towards abortion (Abramowitz 1995; Wang & Buffalo 2004), and education is a key factor in building the capacity to self-advocate and to participate in civic discourse (Berinsky & Lenz 2011), it follows that in countries where women and girls are included fully in the education system, the abortion laws will be more liberal.

Women, once in office, are more likely to introduce legislation that reflects the interests of women, children and families (Sapiro 1981). Ramirez and McEneaney (1997) point out that abortion rights, unlike other rights aimed at gender equality, are not simply an extension of rights already granted to men, making this issue fraught for many male legislators. While gender may not be a good predictor of attitudes towards abortion in the wider population, women legislators tend to be more in favour of liberal abortion laws than their male counterparts (Berkman & O'Connor 1993). Berkman and O'Connor (1993) found that women in the legislature were able to affect abortion policy. While in that study, those effects were mostly confined to preventing regression in abortion rights, rather than liberalising them further, a more recent study has shown that abortion policies tended to be more liberal in jurisdictions with a greater percentage of women legislators (Asal, Brown & Figueroa 2008).

Economic equality and participation in the labour force is considered a necessary component for achieving gender equality, female empowerment and autonomy (UN Millennium Project 2005). Participation in the labour force has a socialising effect on women, increasing their propensity to take on feminist ideological values (Klein 1984). Luker (1984) reasons that women

engaged in the workforce are more likely to want to exercise control over the number and spacing of their children in order to prioritise their careers. Furthermore, men with wives who work are more likely to have progressive views on traditional gender-roles, including their attitudes towards abortion (Smith 1985; Huber & Spitze 1981).

2.1.3 Policy Diffusion

Noticing that the spread of economic liberalisation policies were clustered geographically and temporally, Simmons and Elkins (2004) developed a theory of policy diffusion. This theory posits that a country is more likely to adopt a policy if others in its proximity have already done so. This tendency transcends similarities stemming from independently rational responses to similar regional pressures and shocks (Simmons & Elkins 2004).

Shipan and Volden (2008) identify four mechanisms through which policy diffusion takes place: learning from successful examples, competition with neighbours, mimicry of larger neighbours, and coercion by government bodies. These mechanisms are undertaken both from top-down and bottom-up directions: policy-makers and legislators use networks with officials in nearby states in order to develop policy ideas, whilst concerted efforts are taken by interest groups, community organisations, and the media to expand the scope of their interest concentrically (Haider-Markel 2001).

Diffusion effects may be particularly meaningful for morality issues such as abortion rights. Morality policies are those in which at least one side frames the issue in terms of morality or sin, and the resultant policy aims to validate one morality claim at the expense of the other (Kreitzer 2015). Abortion, like other morality policies, is considered to be an 'easy' political issue; that is, abortion is a non-technical, highly salient issue that is easy for voters to be well informed upon (Abramowitz 1995). Furthermore, the redistribution of moral values has less technical complexity than, for example, the

redistribution of economic value; the outcome of a new policy is necessarily that one side wins and the other side loses, and that division is immediately obvious (Mooney & Lee 1999). It is therefore easier for interested actors to mobilise the public to agitate for (or against) change, and easier for policymakers to win (or lose) support for a policy decision. This means that, should the policy represent the majority within the community, policy diffusion would be affected quickly, with a shorter introductory learning period (Mooney & Lee 1999).

Rebecca Kreitzer (2013) looked specifically at diffusion effects on abortion policy in the United States, noting that geographical contiguity was a strong and consistent predictor of abortion policy outcomes. On the other hand, Haider-Markel (2001) found that organised interests and internal state considerations were better predictors of policy change with respect to same-sex marriage than geographic proximity. This suggests that policy changes around morality issues are more likely to be driven by community-level actors rather than policy innovation from the legislative level, reducing the regional effects of diffusion.

2.2 Other Determinants of Abortion Liberalism

2.2.1 Social

Brookman-Amissah and Moyo (2004) draw the link between human development and abortion liberalism, noting that a lack of access to safe abortion leads to higher rates of maternal morbidity, and reduction in access to education and economic opportunity for women. However, Pillai and Wang (1999) find that there is a no link between countries with a low level of human development and conservative abortion laws. Conversely, Hildebrandt (2015) shows a strong and consistent link between human development and abortion law. Human development has been included in the analysis as a dummy variable.

2.2.2 Political

Dorothy Stetson (2001) points out that the more a state is judged to be democratic, the more that state includes societal interests. She argues further that advancing abortion rights for women is an indicator that a democracy is including women in its policy-making decisions (Stetson 2001). Relatedly, the administration's institutional willingness or capacity to respond to civil society demands (that is, how effective its governance processes are) will also affect the ways in which social policy changes are enacted (Rose-Ackerman 2005). However, the notion that more highly democratic countries, or countries with high levels of governance effectiveness will implement more liberal abortion laws is not tested in the literature. This is likely due to the fact that gender is not a good predictor of attitudes towards abortion, so in a state in which the administration is responding to civil society demands, women's voices from both sides of the debate should be heard (Bolzendahl & Myers 2004).

Hildebrandt (2015) finds that the existence of a communist tradition within a country is an important predictor of the liberalism of the abortion law within that country. These findings follow Yishai's (1993) conclusions that entrenched political ideologies are important predictors of abortion policies and how the arguments for or against legal abortion will be framed. This is based off the notion that ideology is durable and deep-seated, meaning that ideas around morality, family, gender roles, and health are internalised.

As availability of legal abortion services is linked with reductions in maternal mortality rates (Shakya et al. 2004; WHO 2012), it stands to reason that a government that is invested in reducing maternal mortality might legislate to liberalise abortion laws. Likewise, a government that is interested in reducing maternal morbidity gains political capital and legitimacy from providing public health services (Ghobarah, Huth & Russett 2004) and they might

therefore be expected to spend (relatively) more on public health. This trend can be seen in the case of Nepal: abortion legalisation corresponded with a spike in public health funding (Shakya et al. 2004; The World Bank 2015).

2.2.3 Economic

Susheela Singh (2006) finds that hospital admissions from abortion-related complications are considerably higher in poor countries than in wealthy countries. This is backed up by Grimes et al. (2006), who estimate that 97% of unsafe abortions take place in developing countries. This statistic indicates that poor countries are far more likely to have conservative abortion laws than are wealthy countries, given that the abortion rates are not significantly affected by its legal status (Shaw 2010; Cohen 2009).

Likewise, when a small proportion of the population has control over a large proportion of the resources, their financial power enables them to play a disproportionate role in agenda-setting (Blofield 2006). It is well documented that women from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are significantly more likely to need an abortion (Rasch et al. 2008; Whittaker 2002; Grimes et al. 2006). It is therefore reasonable to assume that in countries with higher income equality, there may be a lack of perceived political need to reform abortion laws.

3 Methodology

3.1 Dependent Variable: Abortion Liberalism Index

In order to measure the relative legal freedom a woman has in each country to obtain an abortion, I constructed an index. The index has been developed in order to measure “how legal” it is for a woman to obtain an abortion; as these exceptions have equal weighting under the law, an equal weighting was applied to the index. The index takes into consideration the most common exceptions to abortion prohibition or allowance as categorised by the Center for Reproductive Rights (2009).

These are: (1) Exception to preserve the life of the mother [1=Yes; 0.5=Necessity defensible¹; 0=No/Necessity unlikely to be defensible]; (2) Exception if performed to preserve the physical health² of the mother [1=Yes; 0=No]; (3) Exception if performed to preserve the mental health of the mother [1=Yes; 0=No]; (4) Exception if performed to preserve the socioeconomic wellbeing of the mother [1=Yes; 0=No]; (5) Exception if conception was a result of a rape [1=Yes; 0=No]; (6) Exception if conception was a result of incest [1=Yes; 0=No]; (7) Exception in cases of foetal impairment [1=Yes; 0=No]; (8) Exception under some other condition (eg. the mother’s age, the mother’s developmental capacity) [1=Yes; 0=No]; (9) Abortion is legal on request [1=Yes; 0=No]; (10) Abortion permissible only with parental authorisation [reverse coded: 1=No; 0=Yes]; (11) Abortion permissible only with spousal authorisation [reverse coded: 1=No; 0=Yes]; (12) Sex-selective abortion is prohibited [reverse coded: 1=No; 0=Yes]; (13) Abortion is

¹ While many countries do not explicitly state that abortion is allowable if the life of the mother is threatened, it is presumed defensible under different parts of the law as a component of medical necessity. However, in three cases (Chile, El Salvador and Nicaragua), the law explicitly prohibits abortion, even in cases where the life of the mother is threatened, making this defence unlikely.

² Although the WHO defines “health” as including physical, mental and social health, I have coded these separately, as some jurisdictions specifically exclude mental health from their laws, and in some others this definition would be unlikely to be defensible.

permissible only within certain gestational period³ [calculated as a percentage of total gestational period (40 weeks)].

These values were then indexed, generating an abortion liberalism index (ALI), with Chile, El Salvador and Nicaragua having the lowest ALIs at 0.00 and Puerto Rico and the Netherlands having the highest ALIs at 0.97. Despite the fact that these exceptions would have an unequal effect on the likelihood of a woman carrying an unwanted pregnancy to term, equal weightings were applied to each.

Three observations (Australia, Mexico and the United States) were removed from the analysis on the basis that the laws in these countries are determined at a state level (Center for Reproductive Rights 2009). States with laws allowing pregnancy termination at any gestational limit have been included in the data, despite potentially problematic implications of allowing abortion post-viability (cf: Ferguson & Furedi 1997). States with a record of performing forced abortions (China, North Korea) have been excluded from the data on the basis that this practice further subjugates the bodily integrity and autonomy of the woman to the state (Watts 2005; OHCHR 2014).

3.2 Independent Variables

3.2.1 Religion & Religiosity

Religion and religiosity were coded as two independent variables. The first, primary religion, was taken from the CIA World Factbook (2015). Religions were coded according to which group, Catholic [1], Muslim [2], or other [3] had the highest representation within the country's population.

³ The Center for Reproductive Rights (2009) fact sheet lists four countries for which the law does not indicate gestational limits (Canada, China, North Korea and Vietnam). Data for this variable for Canada and Vietnam (China and North Korea had been previously excluded from the dataset) came from external source: the Canadian Medical Association (2007) and Gammeltoft (2010) respectively.

Religiosity was based off a Gallup (2010) survey conducted in 2009⁴ in which asked approximately 1,000 adults in 114 countries if religion was an important part of their daily life. The proportion of those who responded 'yes' to this question was used as the measure of religiosity in this analysis, with Bangladesh, Indonesia and Niger recording the highest religiosity rates at over 99%, and Estonia with the lowest rate, at 16%.

3.2.2 Gender Equality

Four measures of gender equality were incorporated into the data to determine whether there was a difference in the effects of relative social, political and economic equality of women, as well as their overall equality, on abortion liberalism. In the final analysis, only this overall measure was used in order to reduce the effects of collinearity.

The social measure that was used was education ratio; that is, the proportion of girls to boys enrolled in secondary education, averaged over the years 2000-2009 (World Bank 2015)⁵. The political measure used was the proportion of female legislators in government, averaged over the years 2000-2009 (World Bank 2015). The economic measure used was the proportion of the labour force represented by women, averaged over the years 2000-2009 (World Bank 2015). Finally, overall gender inequality was measured using the UNDP's (2010) Gender Inequality Index (GII) from 2008. This measure takes into consideration the educational attainment, economic and political participation and reproductive health indicators to assess overall levels of equality within communities.

⁴ Although for many of the other variables, average values for the years 2000-2009 have been taken, it was considered acceptable to use a single temporal snapshot for this measure, as this value would not be expected to change much over time. In their analysis, Gallup noted that their key findings were unchanged from other years they had conducted similar studies.

⁵ Ten year averages were taken for many in order to both control for shocks in the system and to optimise the number of observations collected.

3.2.3 Policy Diffusion

In order to test for policy diffusion, I identified the contiguous countries⁶ to the country in question and took an average of their abortion liberalism indices⁷.

3.2.4 Human Development

Countries were grouped into levels of human development, low [1], middle [2], and high [3]. These groups were defined according to the UNDP's (2014) human development level cut-off points, and based off the average human development index for each country for the years 2000, 2005 and 2008. Human Development Index data was dropped from the final analysis due to problems stemming from collinearity. This variable is included as a dummy variable.

3.2.5 Governance

A governance index was generated from information taken from the World Bank's Worldwide Governance Indicators Project (2013). This project collates data from 215 countries and generates indicators based on six dimensions of governance: voice and accountability, political stability and absence of violence, government effectiveness, regulatory quality, rule of law, and control of corruption. I took the average for the years 2000 and 2002-2009⁸ for

⁶ Countries that share a boundary by bridge or tunnel were also included in these calculations on the rationale that creating an overland passage between nations implies a high level of diplomatic cooperation and therefore effects of policy diffusion are likely to be more pronounced than sharing a maritime boundary with no overland passage.

⁷ This process of codification is a hybridised process of two of the most common specifications of diffusion, modified for the use of an index rather than a binary value (Berry & Berry 2007).

⁸ No data was available for 2001.

each individual indicator, then indexed it back to the original scale used for each of its components (ranging from -2.5 to .5).

3.2.6 Communist Tradition

Countries with a communist tradition were grouped together by first of all including those countries that are currently ruled by a communist party (China, Cuba, Laos, and Vietnam), adding former Soviet states (n=15), former Yugoslav states (n=7), and other formerly communist states⁹ (n=18). After dropping China and North Korea from the observations, 42 countries were coded as having a communist tradition [coded as 1] and 150 as not having a communist tradition [coded as 0].

3.2.7 Health Expenditure

In order to test whether the overall political interest a country's government has in ensuring its citizens have a high standard of health and good access to health services has an impact on abortion law liberalism, health expenditure was measured for each country in the analysis. This data was taken from the average state health expenditure (as a percentage of the GDP) for the years 2000-2009 (World Bank 2015).

⁹ Other countries are: Afghanistan, Albania, Angola, Benin, Bulgaria, Republic of Congo, Czech Republic, Hungary, Ethiopia, Grenada, Cambodia, Mongolia, Mozambique, North Korea, Poland, Romania, Slovak Republic and Somalia. Yemen and Germany were both coded as not having a communist tradition, as the unification of both suppressed many of the social values associated with communism. Likewise, in multiparty democracies in which communist parties currently or have previously governed, without attempting to create a single-party state (Cyprus, Nepal, Nicaragua, San Marino) have also been excluded, on the basis that widespread socialisation to communist social values would require longer-term exposure to communist rule.

3.2.8 Economic Development

The log¹⁰ of the average gross domestic product (at purchasing power parity) for the years 2000-2009 was taken as the measure of overall economic welfare (World Bank 2015).

3.2.9 Economic Inequality

Finally, in order to test whether the level of economic inequality has an effect on abortion laws, the Gini index was averaged for the years 2000-2009 (World Bank 2015).

3.3 Summary Statistics

	Min	Max	Mean	St. Dev
Abortion Liberalism Index	0.000	0.970	0.461	0.280
Religiosity	0.160	0.990	0.748	0.240
Education Ratio	0.309	1.337	0.951	0.178
Female Political Representation	0.000	0.454	0.146	0.094
Workforce Ratio	0.135	0.542	0.402	0.095
Gender Inequality Index	0.174	0.853	0.550	0.179
Neighbourhood	0.070	0.890	0.495	0.245
Governance	-2.230	1.910	-0.081	0.920
Health Expenditure	0.021	0.187	0.062	0.024
Economic Development	6.170	11.584	8.799	1.239
Economic Inequality	0.231	0.658	0.401	0.096

Table 1: Summary Statistics

3.4 Method

First, in order to ascertain which of the dependent variables has an effect on the abortion liberalism index, I conducted a simple linear regression analysis. Secondly, a stepwise multiple regression analysis was used to determine if, and to what extent, a combination of variables impacted on the degree of

¹⁰ Log scale is used for this measure to reflect the multiplicative nature of income.

abortion law liberalism (ie. The effects of primary religion, the effects of communist history, the effects of human development). Finally, a multiple regression analysis was undertaken to see if which, if any, of the variables retained significance once all other considerations were taken into account.

A potential limitation of this research design is that several of the independent variables have high levels of collinearity. Although the design has been optimized to reduce the problems stemming from collinearity, there are still residual effects in the final analysis.

4 Analysis

Variable	S.E	β	Adj. r^2
Religion			
Religiosity	0.098	-0.573 ***	0.3225
Neither Catholic nor Muslim majority (Base)	0.031	-	
Muslim Majority	0.047	-0.217 ***	0.0501
No Catholic or Muslim Majority	0.049	-0.233 **	
Gender Inequality			
Education Ratio	0.119	0.158 *	0.0194
Female Political Representation	0.209	0.334 ***	0.1067
Workforce Ratio	0.214	0.352 ***	0.1187
Gender Inequality Index	0.118	-0.546 ***	0.2933
Policy Diffusion			
Neighbourhood	0.073	0.642 ***	0.4087
Dummy Variables			
Low Human Development (Base)	0.037	-***	
Medium Human Development	0.054	0.216**	0.1437
High Human Development	0.048	0.459 ***	
Governance	0.022	0.338 ***	0.1095
Communist Tradition	0.043	0.477 ***	0.2233
Health Expenditure	0.008	0.259 ***	0.0618
Economic Development	0.016	0.296 ***	0.0825
Economic Inequality	0.233	-0.443 ***	0.1906

[Notes: * $p \leq 0.05$, ** $p \leq 0.01$, *** $p \leq 0.001$]

Table 2: Correlates of abortion liberalism

Table 1 shows the results of a simple regression analysis testing each of the independent variables' effect on the ALI. This preliminary evidence supports all of the hypotheses. Religiosity is strongly associated with less progressive abortion laws, and we can also see that there is a significant association between Catholic and Muslim majority countries and more conservative abortion laws.

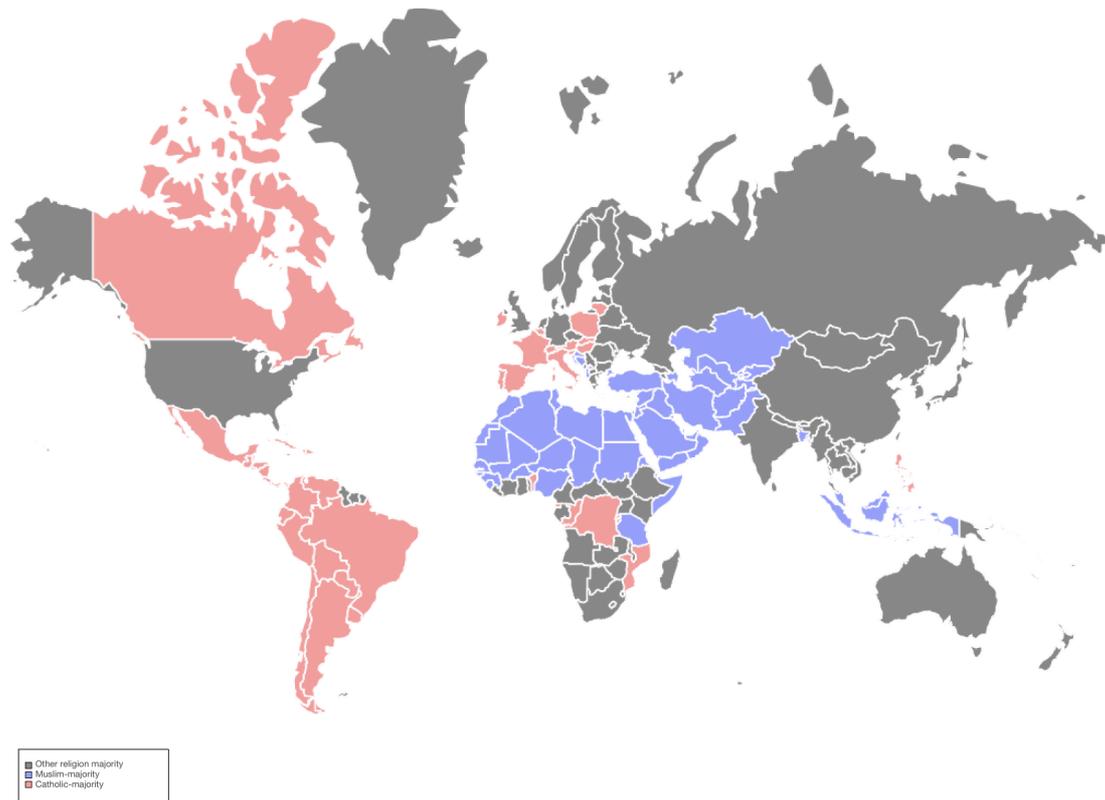
Higher levels of women's inclusion into social, political and economic life has a liberalising effect on abortion law, with the most important variable appearing to be economic inclusion. This is likely due to the fact that when women have relative financial independence, they are likely to be more empowered to choose the number and spacing of their children, and more likely to be empowered to agitate for the political conditions that would allow them to have this freedom (Luker 1984).

Policy diffusion effect appears to be a highly significant and strong predictor of the level of abortion liberalism. This indicates that morality policy diffusion may be geographically bounded when examined in an international context. This does not necessarily refute the findings of Haider-Markel (2001) that national networks are able to draw on their support structures cross-nationally with little top-down policy-seeking behaviour. Rather, it may indicate that international interest groups tend to operate regionally.

The results also find that the average ALI for countries with no communist tradition is 0.39, meaning that on average countries with no communist history allow abortion in only four or five of the twelve conditions. By contrast, the average ALI for countries with a communist tradition is 0.71 - the equivalent of allowing eight to nine of the twelve exceptions.

4.1 Effects of Primary Religion

Table 2 shows the results of a simple regression analysis within religious categorical variables. Predictably, the importance of religion is a much stronger indicator of abortion conservatism in the countries where, by and large, there is strong religious opposition to abortion under most circumstances. Amongst Catholic majority countries, education ratio and workforce ratio is no longer a significant predictor of abortion liberalism. However, several other factors grow in importance. Gender inequality in Catholic religious dominance is a strong, highly significant predictor of abortion liberalism, moreso than in countries without a Catholic majority (although it remains a significant factor across all groups). Likewise, policy diffusion effects are stronger in Catholic dominated countries than in other countries. This is counterintuitive; the Catholic Church's highly centralised authority structure and its global sphere of influence suggests that its pattern of policy diffusion would be less geographically bounded. Furthermore, Catholic-dominated countries are more geographically diffuse than are Muslim-dominated countries (see Map 1), indicating that we would see less regionalism in abortion policy if it were driven exclusively or primarily by religious interests in Catholic countries.



Map 1: Geographic diffusion of primary religions.

Stronger even than diffusion effects for Islamic countries is the effect of a communist tradition. This effect is largely created by Muslim-dominated countries from the former Soviet Union and former Yugoslavia: Azerbaijan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. In all of these cases abortion laws were derived from the laws of the former unions and have not been revisited since independence (United Nations Population Division 2002), with ALIs of 0.88 in former Soviet countries and 0.81 in former Yugoslavian countries.

Likewise, the level of religiosity in formerly communist Islamic countries is lower than the average for Islamic countries (0.63 compared with 0.87). There is reasonably high collinearity between religiosity and communist tradition ($\beta = -0.368$), which is unsurprising given the atheistic nature of communist ideology, particularly in the Marxist-Leninist ideology espoused in the former USSR, which accounts for the largest proportion of countries with a

communist tradition (Zrinščak 2004). However, given that these variables measure objectively different potential predictors, and that both of these predictors are considered highly relevant in the literature, both are examined. The precise effects of this collinearity are illustrated in Table 3.

4.2 Effects of Communist Tradition

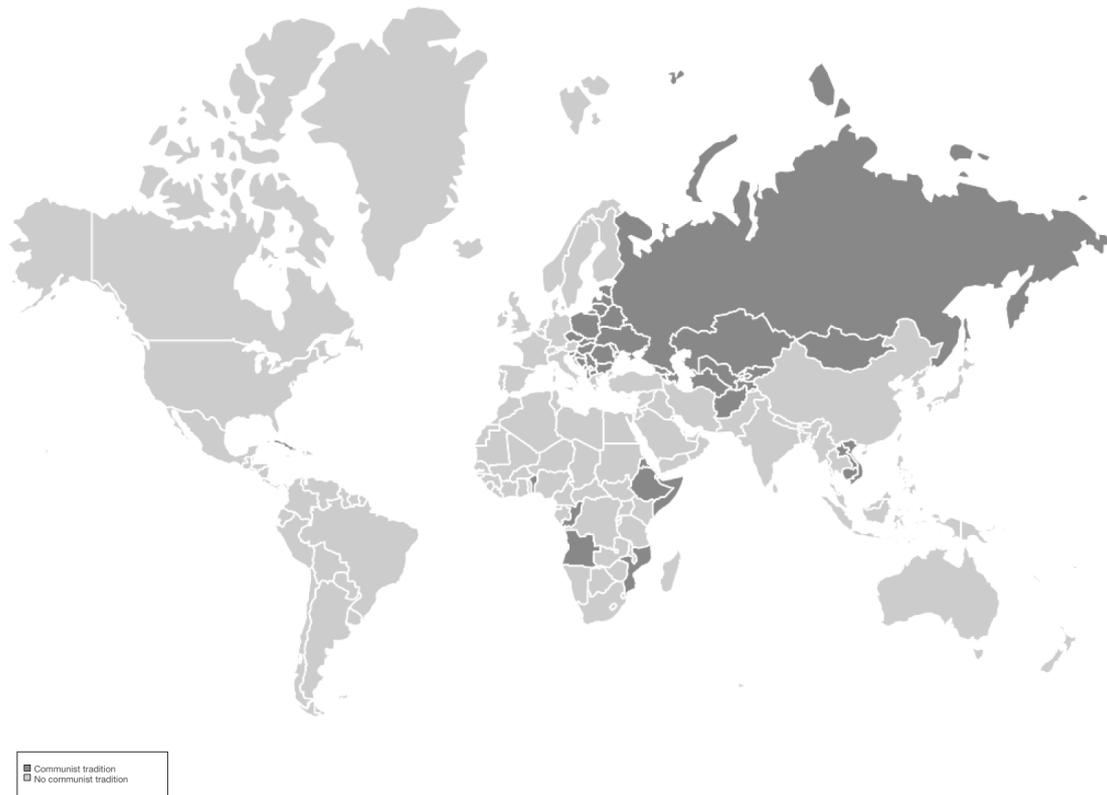
Table 3 shows the results of a simple regression analysis within political ideological categorical values; that is, those countries that have a communist tradition and those that do not. Interestingly, a higher rate of girls in education has a strong, highly significant liberalising effect on abortion laws in communist or ex-communist states, but this effect disappears in countries with no communist tradition. The education ratio outliers within the [ex]communist countries (with observations greater than two standard deviations beneath the mean) are Afghanistan (0.309), Somalia (0.460), and Benin (0.471). In each of these countries, difficulty of access, cultural expectations for girls and women to marry young, a lack of perceived importance of education for girls, and material cost of education all play a part in limiting the availability of schooling for girls (Vyas 2013; Ntiri 1987; Gaba-Afouda 2003).

Variable	Catholic Majority			Muslim Majority			Other Religion Majority		
	S.E	β	Adj. r^2	S.E	β	Adj. r^2	S.E	β	Adj. r^2
Religion									
Religiosity	0.179	-0.687***	0.4545	0.220	-0.704***	0.4816	0.131	-0.42**	0.1539
Gender Inequality									
Education Ratio	0.257	0.034	-0.0181	0.178	0.206	0.0211	0.218	0.133	0.0034
Female Political Representation	0.374	0.276*	0.0592	0.559	0.233	0.0345	0.284	0.449***	0.1907
Workforce Ratio	0.764	0.284°	0.0606	0.290	0.409**	0.1503	0.611	0.174	0.0169
Gender Inequality Index	0.176	-0.733***	0.5252	0.416	-0.358*	0.1019	0.165	-0.484***	0.2196
Policy Diffusion									
Neighbourhood	0.119	0.658***	0.4201	0.154	0.626***	0.3788	0.128	0.553***	0.2931
Dummy Variables									
Human Development	0.225	0.512***	0.2469	0.239	0.173	0.0093	0.168	0.495***	0.2344
Governance	0.039	0.500***	0.2342	0.061	0.027	-0.0193	0.032	0.317**	0.0877
Communist Tradition	0.094	0.295*	0.0707	0.068	0.657***	0.4203	0.061	0.493***	0.2336
Health Expenditure	0.017	0.326*	0.0898	0.020	0.17	0.0088	0.012	0.248*	0.0489
Economic Development	0.029	0.505***	0.2408	0.029	-0.031	-0.0199	0.024	0.393***	0.1433
Economic Inequality	0.354	-0.563***	0.3004	0.657	-0.261	0.0428	0.352	-0.461***	0.1978
Average ALI		0.409			0.395			0.541	

[Notes: ° $p \leq 0.10$, * $p \leq 0.05$, ** $p \leq 0.01$, *** $p \leq 0.001$]

Table 3: Correlates of abortion liberalism in Catholic dominated, Muslim dominated, and other religion dominated countries.

Interestingly, although gender inequality is a significant factor regardless of the existence of a communist tradition, it is the other two composite factors, political representation and workforce ratio that are significant (to a threshold of $p \leq 0.05$) in countries without a communist tradition. This relative lack of importance of female political representation in [ex]communist countries might partially be explained by a lack of trust in political institutions, and therefore a lack of engagement by civil society with those institutions, found in formerly communist countries (Pop-Eleches & Tucker 2011; Pietrzyk-Reeves 2008).



Map 2: Geographic distribution of countries with a communist tradition.

Variable	Communist Tradition			No Communist Tradition		
	S.E	β	Adj. r^2	S.E	β	Adj. r^2
Religion						
Religiosity	0.123	-0.379*	0.1109	0.108	-0.500***	0.2406
Other Religion Majority (Base)	0.055	-		0.031	-	
Catholic Majority	0.096	-0.312°	0.0384	0.046	-0.177*	0.0644
Muslim Majority	0.091	-0.098		0.048	-0.301***	
Gender Inequality						
Education Ratio	0.166	0.687***	0.4568	0.123	0.099	0.0023
Female Political Representation	0.540	-0.267°	0.0482	0.185	0.460***	0.2061
Workforce Ratio	0.601	0.212	0.0202	0.215	0.276***	0.0690
Gender Inequality Index	0.252	-0.509**	0.2322	0.115	-0.576***	0.3255
Policy Diffusion						
Neighbourhood	0.155	0.684***	0.4535	0.094	0.480***	0.2240
Dummy Variables						
Human Development	0.225	0.512***	0.2469	0.168	0.495***	0.2344
Governance	0.039	0.500***	0.2342	0.032	0.317**	0.0877
Health Expenditure	0.017	0.326*	0.0898	0.012	0.248*	0.0489
Economic Development	0.029	0.505***	0.2408	0.024	0.393***	0.1433
Economic Inequality	0.354	-0.563***	0.3004	0.352	-0.461***	0.1978
Average ALI		0.712			0.390	

[Notes: * $p \leq 0.05$, ** $p \leq 0.01$, *** $p \leq 0.001$]

Table 4: Regression analysis of abortion liberalism in countries with a communist tradition or no communist tradition.

Policy diffusion effects are strongly related to abortion liberalism irrespective of a communist tradition. The effects are stronger in countries with a communist tradition, however, this is likely to be more closely associated with the geographic clustering of [ex]communist countries, and the fact that abortion legislation has not been revisited since independence for many of these countries. Nevertheless, it is curious that we haven't seen a regression in abortion law liberalism in many of the highly religious ex-communist states; as an "easy" issue, it seems likely that it would be astute to politicise abortion law to win political favour and establish moral and religious credentials.

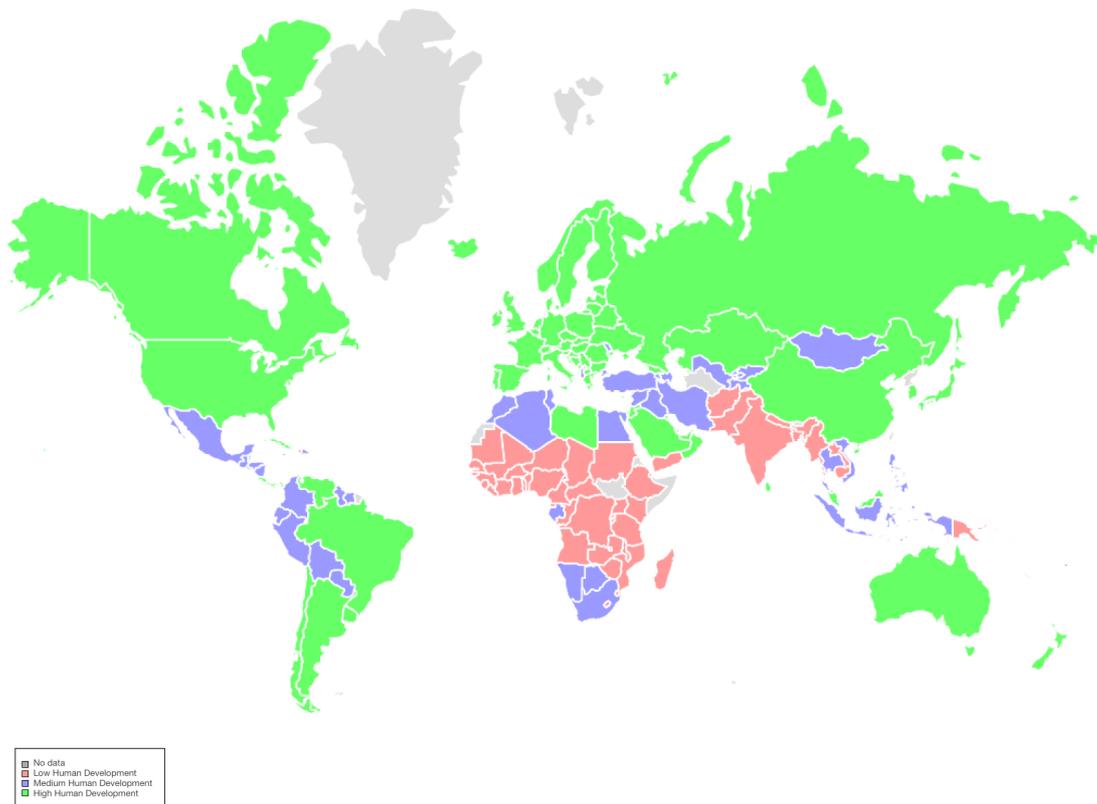
4.3 Effects of Human Development

Table 4 shows the results of a simple regression analysis within human development categorical values. It is interesting to note that the only predictors of abortion liberalism across all three categories are Catholicism and diffusion effects. Both of these effects gain strength as levels of human development increase. The lack of correspondence between many of the variables and abortion liberalism in less developed countries likely reflects the varying development priorities in an environment of limited public revenue (Fukuda-Parr 2003). Many of the development outcomes in less developed countries rely on external aid and NGO assistance. It is unsurprising, therefore, that countries with Catholic majorities do present a significant (if weak) inhibiting factor to the adoption of more liberal abortion laws. Catholic charities and development organisations tend to cluster in Catholic-dominated countries, and given the Church's strong position against abortion, these organisations tend to act as interest groups against the adoption of more liberal laws (Degeneffe 2003 & Gill 2004).

For medium-developed countries, the most important indicators of abortion liberalism are the existence of a communist tradition, policy diffusion and

gender equality. The (ex)communist countries that are represented in the medium-developed country-set are all ex-Soviet states, with the exception of Vietnam, which has pursued an aggressive family planning campaign as part of its overall development strategy (Phai 1996). The mean ALI for this group is very high (0.87). By contrast, the medium-developed countries with no communist tradition includes some of those with the most conservative laws, including El Salvador and Nicaragua, both of which have ALIs of 0. The mean ALI for this group is 0.35.

In highly developed countries, the most important indicator of abortion liberalism is the effect of policy diffusion. Highly developed countries are geographically clustered in Europe and North America (see Map 3) where there is a long history of policy diffusion, to the extent that this process has been formalised in Europe for some policy areas (Lavenex 2008).



Map 3: Geographic distribution of human development.

Variable	Low Human Development			Medium Human Development			High Human Development		
	S.E	beta	Adj. r ²	S.E	beta	Adj. r ²	S.E	beta	Adj. r ²
Religion									
Religiosity	1.088	-0.188	-0.0018	0.288	-0.601***	0.3385	0.146	-0.489***	0.2234
Neither Catholic nor Muslim majority (Base)	0.035	-		0.074	-		0.047	-	
Muslim Majority	0.051	-0.236	0.0587	0.104	0.083	0.0705	0.086	-0.412***	0.1376
Catholic Majority	0.063	-0.305*		0.110	-0.367*		0.071	-0.269*	
Gender Inequality									
Education Ratio	0.130	-0.142	-0.0016	0.415	-0.032	-0.0233	0.681	-0.331**	0.0963
Female Political Representation	0.256	-0.077	-0.0143	0.645	0.200	0.0171	0.289	0.425***	0.1691
Workforce Ratio	0.255	0.168	0.0089	0.440	0.398**	0.1389	0.292	0.618***	0.3732
Gender Inequality Index	0.377	-0.018	-0.0291	0.565	-0.683***	0.4512	0.226	-0.503***	0.2406
Policy Diffusion									
Neighbourhood	0.153	0.279°	0.0576	0.176	0.671***	0.4346	0.104	0.704***	0.4866
Dummy Variables									
Governance	0.055	0.138	-0.0008	0.096	0.121	-0.0088	0.042	0.176	0.0171
Communist Tradition	0.066	0.136	-0.0011	0.083	0.689***	0.4625	0.064	0.525***	0.2655
Health Expenditure	0.012	0.133	-0.0024	0.031	0.265°	0.0482	0.014	0.420***	0.1645
Economic Development	0.035	-0.122	-0.0052	0.089	-0.245	0.0378	0.050	-0.047	-0.0118
Economic Inequality	0.340	-0.102	-0.0116	0.491	-0.223	0.0233	0.332	-0.635***	0.3909
Average ALI		0.320			0.459			0.583	

[Notes: °p=<0.1, *p=<0.05, **p=<0.01, ***p=<0.001]

Table 5: Correlates of abortion liberalism in countries with low, medium, and high levels of human development.

4.4 Multiple Regression Analysis

Model 1 in Table 5 shows the results of a multiple regression analysis determining the joint effects of the primary indicators of this study, religiosity, gender inequality and policy diffusion on the abortion liberalism index. Model 2 shows these results controlling for the effects of the dummy variables: communist tradition, governance, health expenditure, economic development, and economic inequality.

Controlling for policy diffusion and religiosity eliminates the effect of gender inequality on the abortion liberalism index. This is an unexpected result, given gender inequality's fairly stable predictive power in all of the previous models (with the notable exception of among the least developed countries). However, the literature does not consistently show that gender equality plays an important role in predicting abortion liberalism.

When the dummy variables are added to the model, the effect of religiosity also disappears, and the only variables with significant partial predictive power are diffusion effects and a communist tradition. This demonstrates that policy diffusion effects are strong and stable predictors of abortion liberalism, indicating that the diffusion of moral policy may be geographically bounded, even on the international scale, and that it represents an important factor to consider as a predictor of the extent of abortion liberalism.

Variable	Model 1			Model 2		
	t	S.E	beta	t	S.E	beta
(Constant)	3.25**	0.139	-	0.48	0.486	
Social						
Religiosity	-1.83°	0.151	-0.220	-1.37	0.170	-0.189
Gender Inequality Index	-1.53	0.201	-0.062	0.41	0.293	0.069
Political						
Neighbourhood	5.51***	0.116	0.522	3.32***	0.172	0.459
(Ex)Communist	-	-	-	2.06*	0.081	0.247
Governance	-	-	-	0.93	0.293	0.069
Health Expenditure	-	-	-	0.55	0.015	0.053
Economic						
GDP/Capita	-	-	-	0.01	0.036	0.001
Gini Coefficient	-	-	-	0.03	0.314	0.003
r²		0.5157			0.6349	
Adjusted r²		0.4988			0.5926	
Mean VIF		2.19			3.24	

[Notes: °p<0.1, *p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001]

Table 6: Multiple regression against abortion liberalism

5 Conclusion

This paper demonstrates that geographically-bounded diffusion effects considerably affect the abortion laws of a country. This relationship remains strong after controlling for several other social, political, and economic variables. The other results of this study mostly confirm existing research: abortion law is considerably more liberal in countries with a communist history. Catholic- or Muslim-dominance countries, and high religiosity in general, tends to produce a more restrictive abortion law. Low human development and gender inequality are inhibiting factors to abortion liberalism.

This research has highlighted that the three most consistently strong and significant predictors of abortion liberalism: physical location, dominant religion, and communist tradition. Given these structural roadblocks in the way of abortion liberalism, as well as well-organized transnational conservative networks acting to block liberalized abortion laws, proponents of abortion rights are faced with a challenge. Mooney and Lee (1999) in their discussion about morality policy- diffusion and the death penalty suggest that morality issues without mass support can be “demoralized” and successfully diffused in the typical fashion.

This supports Hildebrandt’s (2015) conclusion that advocates for the liberalization of abortion laws must frame the issue in terms of women’s health and maternal mortality, rather than a rights, equality, or privacy issue. This places abortion, as part of a broader family-planning strategy, as a development issue, rather than a religious or ideological one. Given that the legal status of abortion does not affect the number of abortions being performed (Grimes et al. 2006), providing safe and legal abortion reduces maternal mortality, and decreases the burden on health, social, and economic systems of women suffering from complications due to unsafe abortion.

A limitation of this design is that while the ALI takes into consideration the degree of liberalism within the letter of the law (*de jure*), this does not take into consideration the potential punishment (or lack thereof) and enforcement of these laws (*de facto*).

There are many circumstances in which the laws are restrictive in theory, but in practice, it is easy and safe for a woman to procure an abortion with little threat of criminal proceedings for either her or her doctor (Agadjanian 1998). Similarly, where laws are more liberal, it may be difficult to procure an abortion due to the threat of punishment, if not through the criminal justice system, then through social or tribal punitive measures (Kunesh 2007).

Finally, the laws that make up the ALI have been taken at a particular snapshot in time, 2009. The scope of this project does not extend to measuring the impact of the various independent variables over the course of time leading up to a change in the laws; the laws in many circumstances have not been altered since independence, or for many decades, making the analytical usefulness of comparing and contrasting the surrounding social, political, and economic conditions of each change tenuous. However, failing to take into consideration temporal factors may lead to spurious assumptions about the direction of causality. At any case, I would expect that the direction of the relationship would run both ways in many cases; higher female labor force participation would provoke and empower women to demand more liberal laws, those more liberal laws would allow more women to participate in the labor force.

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