

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Abortion, religion, and racial resentment: Unpacking the underpinnings of contemporary abortion attitudes

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Abstract

Background: For many Americans, pro-life attitudes are directly attached to their religious beliefs, especially white evangelicals. Some have argued that evangelicals came to oppose abortion not simply because of their views on the sanctity of life, but out of a growing racial resentment as government policy and society moved towards greater racial equality.

Objectives: This study explores the relationship of evangelicalism, racial attitudes, and views on the legality of abortion to explore whether racial resentment is behind evangelical opposition to abortion.

Methods: To carry out this exploration this study employs American National Election Studies data from 2000 to 2020 and the 2020 Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI) Values survey.

Results: We find no support for the idea that racial attitudes are disproportionately correlated with the abortion views of white evangelicals. Rather, we find that racial attitudes are now correlated with views on abortion for all Americans. Where abortion attitudes are distinctive from attitudes on other policy issues is in having very strong religious determinants, suggesting that genuine religious beliefs do indeed underscore the pro-life views of white evangelicals.

Conclusion: This study provides a good baseline for understanding the relationship between racial attitudes, evangelicalism, and abortion attitudes at the cusp of the Dobbs decision overturning Constitutional protections for abortion, and should be revisited in the post Roe era.

KEYWORDS

abortion, evangelical, pro-choice, pro-life, public opinion, *Roe v. Wade*

In 2016, presidential candidate Donald Trump pledged to appoint pro-life justices to the Supreme Court, which he said would automatically lead to the overturn of *Roe v. Wade* (Managan 2016). This is exactly what came to pass. In June 2022, the religious right achieved a momentous and long-sought victory when the Supreme Court, with three of President Donald Trump's nominees among its members, overturned the Constitutional right to abortion in the *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* decision. White evangelicals,¹ who strongly oppose abortion (Deckman, Greene, and Lizotte 2021) and have been leaders in the effort to outlaw it, celebrated this ruling (Silliman 2022).

For many Americans, pro-life attitudes are directly attached to their religious beliefs, especially conservative, white, evangelicals. Yet some, such as *New York Times* opinion column Thomas Edsall, make the case that for white evangelicals "Abortion has never been just about abortion." His argument is that white evangelicals came to lead the movement against legalized abortion not simply because of their views on the sanctity of life but out of a growing racial resentment as government policy and society moved toward greater racial equality. In this way, abortion has become a proxy for racial resentment for white evangelicals. Scholarship from a range of disciplines has also identified a connection between white evangelical political activism and efforts to oppose civil rights and racial integration (Balmer 2021; Butler 2021; Martin 1996; Perry et al. 2022; Stewart 2020; Whitehead and Perry 2020).

The relationship between racial attitudes, evangelical adherence, and views on abortion policy, however, has not yet been explored rigorously with public opinion data. This study employs American National Election Studies data from 2000 to 2020 and the 2020 Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI) Values survey, to do just that—explore the relationship of racial attitudes with views on the legality of abortion. This study, then, asks two central research questions: Are racial attitudes associated with attitudes on abortion in contemporary America? Is racial resentment more strongly correlated with the pro-life attitudes of white evangelicals than other voting blocs such as non-evangelicals or Democrats?

Given the disproportionate impact abortion policy has on the health and bodily autonomy of women, as well as women's greater religiosity, this study pays particular attention to the role of gender in its analyses. The gendered nature of abortion is reinforced by elite and activist rhetoric; both pro-life and pro-choice activists invoke the protection of women's mental and physical health in their campaigns (Haugeberg 2017; Roberti 2021; Rohlinger 2006). Moreover, pro-choice individuals argue that access to abortion is a necessary condition for gender equality (Nossiff 1998).

We find that racial attitudes are strongly related to abortion attitudes, but unlike the racialization of social welfare issues, which began in the late 1980s and 1990s (Gilens 1999; Winter 2008) the racialization of abortion attitudes did not begin until 2012. We find no support, however, for the idea that racial attitudes are disproportionately correlated with the abortion views of white evangelicals or Republicans more broadly. Rather, racial attitudes are now correlated with views on abortion for all Americans. The primarily liberal racial attitudes of Democrats are strongly correlated with their pro-choice views and the higher levels of racial resentment held by Republicans correlate with their pro-life views. Finally, we find that racial attitudes have a strong correlation with all major policy issues in the 2020 election, not just abortion. In other words, abortion attitudes are not distinctive in this regard. Where abortion attitudes are distinctive from attitudes on other policy issues is in having very strong religious determinants, suggesting that genuine religious beliefs do indeed underscore the pro-life views of white evangelicals.

EVANGELICALISM AND RACIAL ATTITUDES AS DETERMINANTS OF ABORTION VIEWS

In the many studies exploring the determinants of attitudes on abortion, religion is consistently one of the strongest correlates. A number of religious traditions oppose abortion, and, not surprisingly, surveys reveal higher levels of abortion opposition among their adherents. After Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses, two

¹ Burge and Lewis (2018) find that evangelical and born-again identification are operationally equivalent. Therefore, we use these two terms interchangeably through this study.

fairly small denominations, it is white evangelical Christians that are the most pro-life religious denomination in the United States with 65 percent believing abortion should be illegal in all or most cases (PRRI 2021). Deckman, Greene, and Lizotte (2021) find that white evangelical Christians have been more pro-life than non-evangelicals since the 1970s but have moved even further to the right on abortion over the past half-century. Scholars have explored and debated the factors behind the increasingly pro-life position and activism of white evangelical Christians. Some argue that it is the result of increased signaling from evangelical leaders, who became active in the pro-life movement in the late 1970s driven in part by feminism's challenge to patriarchal theology (FitzGerald 2017; Martin 1996) and in part as a way to protect the traditional family from threatening social trends such as an increase in premarital sex and divorce (Putnam and Campbell 2012).

In comparison to white evangelicals, slight majorities of most mainline Protestant groups as well as Jewish Americans are more in favor of abortion remaining legal in all or most cases. Black Protestants, though initially opposed to abortion rights, have become more liberal in their positions. And 70 percent of Americans who are religiously unaffiliated support abortion's legality in all or most cases (PRRI 2021). While Catholic identifiers are more pro-life than mainline Protestant and non-religious Americans, they are actually fairly split on the abortion issue and are decidedly less anti-abortion than white evangelicals (PRRI 2021). Studies also show that commitment to religion and church attendance—even when controlling for religious affiliation—is associated with greater opposition to abortion (Deckman, Greene, and Lizotte 2021; Jelen 2017).

Many are surprised to find that there is not a sizable or consistently significant gender gap on the issue of abortion. Lizotte (2015a) shows that this is due to women's greater religiosity, compared to men. In other words, if women and men were equally religious, there would be a significant gender gap on abortion with women being more liberal. Moreover, abortion attitudes do not have a greater influence on women's party identification and vote choice, compared to men (Lizotte 2015b). Holman, Podrazik, and Silber Mohamed (2020) find that evangelicalism and religiosity are more strongly associated with anti-abortion attitudes for Latino men than Latinas. Controlling for religiosity, ideology, party identification, and various demographic characteristics, black women are significantly more supportive of abortion legality, compared to black men (Lizotte and Carey 2021). Men are also more likely than women to view abortion as a moral issue (Silber Mohamed 2018).

A number of studies have looked at the relationship between the race of respondents and abortion attitudes, finding that Americans of color have become more pro-choice over time, presumably because of their Democratic identification (Deckman, Greene, and Lizotte 2021). However, studies have not explored the role of *racial attitudes* in shaping abortion attitudes.

In the 1990s, scholars started uncovering ways that issues other than civil rights and explicitly race-related issues, such as crime and social welfare policies, became proxies for racism as holding racist beliefs became socially unacceptable in American society. Gilens (1999) found that holding negative stereotypes about black Americans was a primary reason why people disliked welfare. Enders and Scott (2019) find that the relationship between racial resentment and attitudes about health insurance and the role of government began in 1988 and strengthened each ensuing year. The role of negative racial attitudes and racial resentment in shaping political attitudes increased after the election of President Obama, the nation's first black president (Tesler 2016) and increased even more with the emergence of Donald Trump on the national stage (Abramowitz and McCoy 2019; Sides, Tesler, and Vavreck 2018). Benegal (2018) finds that racial attitudes are strongly related to public opinion about climate change.

There is another vein of research that explores the role of racial resentment in the political activism of evangelicals. These scholars argue that a desire to counter the civil rights movement and maintain racial segregation has long motivated white evangelical political activism. Butler (2021) argues that throughout U.S. history, white evangelicals have relied on the Bible to defend slavery, deny the right to vote to black Americans, support segregation, and defend racially discriminatory policies in contemporary America. Balmer (2021) and Stewart (2020) argue that evangelical leaders used the abortion issue as an expedient way to get their followers involved in politics and aligned as the religious right, but their real aim was to

stop forced racial integration in religious schools. In this way, opposition to abortion was transformed into a proxy for racism (Edsall 2021).

Although white Christian nationalism—the idea that America was founded and continues to be a Christian nation, and that the Federal Government should advocate for culturally conservative policies—is not synonymous with white evangelicalism, there are key ways these two groups intersect. Christian nationalists' commitment to a hierarchical worldview, which is challenged by changing demographic and gender norms, leads white Christian nationalists to embrace high levels of racial resentment and opposition to women's rights. Whitehead and Perry (2020) find that those Americans who espouse Christian nationalist beliefs hold, by far, the most conservative attitudes about both abortion and racial indicators, such as whether police treat black Americans the same as whites or whether police officers shoot blacks more often because they are more violent than whites. In a different study, Perry et al. (2022) conclude that “for Whites, appeals to America's ‘Christian’ heritage are racially coded and contribute to an ideological defense of White supremacy, including the denial of blatant anti-Black injustice and a commitment to White victimhood” (p. 913). Although the number of Americans who hold Christian nationalist views is a minority, Christian nationalism's influence in the Republican Party, according to many, is growing (Rubin 2022). While most abortion opponents are by no means white supremacists, white supremacist organizations such as Patriot Front are vocal opponents of abortion because they believe that white Americans are being replaced because the white birth rate is too low (Sherman and Winstead 2022).

HYPOTHESES

Our two key hypotheses sit at the intersection of these two bodies of research that explore the relationship of evangelicalism and racial views with abortion attitudes.

Hypothesis 1a: We expect to find that racial attitudes are strongly correlated with abortion attitudes in the 2020 election data, even when controlling for partisanship, ideology, and demographics. More specifically, we expect to find that greater levels of racial resentment are strongly correlated with pro-life views, and liberal racial attitudes are strongly correlated with pro-choice views. One reason for this expectation is the broader racialization of American politics and public opinion combined with the reality that abortion is one of the most prominent policy issues in contemporary America. Racial attitudes may also be linked to abortion attitudes because racial resentment and abortion opposition have in common a shared perception that traditional hierarchies are under threat. In other words, fears of a changing society, whether that involves an increasingly racially diverse citizenry that is demanding more political power or challenges to the nuclear family that involves women taking greater ownership of their bodies, may link these two sets of attitudes together.

Hypothesis 1b: We expect to find that the relationship between racial attitudes and abortion views has grown stronger over time as American politics have become increasingly racialized, particularly in response to the presidencies of Barack Obama and Donald Trump.

Hypothesis 2a: We expect to find that racial resentment is a particularly strong predictor of abortion policy attitudes for white evangelicals. In other words, we expect that the interaction between evangelicalism and racial resentment will be positive and statistically significant. As noted above, scholars of white evangelicalism argue that racial resentment has motivated and fueled pro-life activism among evangelicals.

Hypothesis 2b: Politics and religion scholar Ryan Burge (2021) has argued that the difference between evangelicals and Republicans has become blurred in contemporary society. Therefore, we also predict that there will be a very strong relationship between racial resentment and abortion attitudes for Republicans. In other words, we expect to find that the interaction between Republican identification and racial resentment will be positive and significant.

METHODS

To explore whether racial attitudes are a significant correlate of abortion attitudes in 2020, we employ American National Election Study (ANES) data and the PRRI 2020 American Values Survey, both of which were in the field in the fall of 2020. The reason we employ two data sets is that they each use somewhat different measures of our key concepts—religion, racial resentment, and abortion. If we are able to replicate findings across both data sets and multiple operationalizations of our key variables, we can be more confident in the reliability and robustness of our findings.

The dependent variables in these models are abortion attitudes. In ANES, abortion is measured on a four-point scale (never permitted, permitted in cases of rape and incest, permitted after the need is clearly established, or, always permitted as a matter of personal choice). We code this variable (and all ideologically valenced variables) so that conservative views are higher. We use multiple measures of religious belief and activity. We include a dummy variable coded 1 if the respondent identifies as an evangelical/born-again Christian. We also include measures tapping how frequently the respondent attends religious services (a six-point scale from not at all to more than once a week) and how subjectively important religion is in the daily life of the respondent (a five-point scale from not at all important to very important).

The PRRI data set uses a somewhat different measure of abortion attitudes asking respondents whether abortion should be: legal in all cases, legal in most cases, illegal in most cases, or illegal in all cases. It also includes similar measures of evangelical/born-again Christian identity and religious attendance on a six-point scale. It does not include a measure of subjective religious importance.

The key independent variable in our analyses is racial attitudes. With the ANES, we use the now-standard racial resentment scale, based on the level of agreement with four items: Blacks should work their way up without special favors like other minority groups; slavery and discrimination has made it difficult for blacks to work their way out of the lower class; over past years, blacks have gotten less than they deserve; and if blacks tried harder, they would be as well off as whites. The items are all coded in the same direction so that more racial resentment is a higher score and then averaged into a single item. The Cronbach's alpha for this scale is 0.88. In the PRRI data, our racial attitudes scale is based on seven items that include traditional measures of racial resentment—slavery and discrimination has made it harder for blacks to work their way up and discrimination against whites is as bad today as discrimination against blacks—as well as more contemporary items—how important is the issue of racial equality, whether the confederate flag is a symbol of racism or Southern pride, whether confederate statues are a symbol of racism or Southern pride, whether police killings of black men are isolated incidents or part of a larger problem and whether one favors the goals of the “Black Lives Matter” movement. The Cronbach's alpha for the scale is 0.89.

The models also include other variables known to be correlated with abortion attitudes including the seven-point partisanship identification scale, the seven-point ideology scale (“do not know” coded at the scale midpoint to avoid extensive missing data) as well as standard demographic variables including age, gender, race (non-white or not), marital status, education (college degree or not), income, and whether respondents live in the south. Since both the ANES and PRRI measure abortion with a four-category variable, we estimate ordered logit models with abortion as the dependent variable and all the independent variables just described.

In short, these models allow us to see how racial attitudes correlate with abortion attitudes, even when controlling for the most likely political and demographic confounds. By estimating these models with differently worded measures of abortion policy attitudes and racial resentment measures, while otherwise having almost identical political and demographic controls, we can have even more confidence in the generalizability of our findings.

To see whether racial attitudes have become more strongly associated with abortion attitudes over time, we use the ANES cumulative file for presidential election years from 2000 to 2020. This model is largely the same as the one we use for the 2020 ANES analysis, but the cumulative file, unfortunately and inexplicably, lacks the “born-again” item for 2020. Otherwise, though, it gives us the opportunity to meaningfully

explore the dynamics of the relationship between racial attitudes and abortion positions over the past two decades. The model includes dummy variables for year and interactions between year and racial resentment. This allows us to draw statistically valid conclusions about the changing impact of racial attitudes on abortion over time.

To test our second set of hypotheses to see whether there is an especially strong relationship between racial resentment and abortion attitudes of white evangelical Christians, we conduct a couple of different analyses. First, we chart the racial attitudes of white born-again Christians against other groups over time. Second, we interact racial resentment with white born-again status and with partisanship, in the models described above, to explore the degree to which the impact of racial attitudes on abortion attitudes may be especially prominent based on religion and/or partisanship.

RESULTS

Turning first to our 2020 ordered logit models (Table 1), our results show that racial attitudes are strong predictors of abortion attitudes with greater racial resentment correlated with more pro-life/anti-abortion attitudes, even with a full set of controls. The results are very robust, with racial resentment significant at $p < 0.001$ in both the 2020 ANES and 2020 PRRI analyses.

There are several significant findings in the models that are important to note. Unsurprisingly, partisanship, ideology, and religious attitudes all have the expected and highly statistically significant effects. College education and higher incomes are also statistically significant predictors of greater support of legal abortion. Notably, neither race nor sex has a significant impact once these other factors are controlled for. It is notable that even in 2020, after President Donald Trump had successfully appointed three pro-life justices to the Supreme Court, there was no gender gap on the issue of abortion.

Although ordered logit coefficients can be less straightforward to interpret, in our models, every independent variable has been recoded from a 0 to 1 scale, so even though the coefficients are conditional, in each case, the coefficient represents the impact of a shift on the whole range of the independent variable. In both the ANES and PRRI results, political ideology is a dominant factor, and the religious variables are also very important, but a shift from minimum to maximum racial resentment remains roughly as impactful as shifting from strong Democrat to strong Republican. As far as substantive impact, it is important to note that in both data sets, the effect of racial resentment is substantively notable and equivalent. In terms of odds ratios (not shown in Table 1), a shift from least to maximum racial resentment leads to a roughly 2.3 times greater likelihood of moving up a category of opposition to abortion (odds ratio of 2.3 in ANES data, 2.2 in PRRI data). So, not only is the impact of racial attitudes statistically meaningful, but there is clearly a sizable real-world impact on abortion attitudes. Thus, we find strong support for Hypothesis 1 that attitudes on abortion are now heavily racialized.

In order to understand when abortion attitudes became racialized and whether this relationship has grown stronger over time, we employ the ANES cumulative file. Figure 1 summarizes the strength of the relationship between racial attitudes and abortion views, while the full regression models can be found in the Online Appendix. Racial attitudes were not significantly predictive of abortion attitudes in previous years including 2000, 2004, and 2008. But, beginning in 2012, racial attitudes become significant and continue to be so while growing in substantive impact over 2016 and 2020.² These results indicate that abortion attitudes became racialized later than many other issues such as crime, healthcare, and public assistance (Enders and Scott 2019; Gilens 1999; Tesler 2016, 2012; Winters 2008). It is quite notable that abortion attitudes became racialized during the presidency of Barack Obama, the nation's first black president, and grew substantively stronger during the presidency of Donald Trump.

We now turn to our second hypothesis, which predicts that racial resentment will be a particularly strong correlate of abortion attitudes for white born-again Christians. We do not find support for this hypothesis.

² Our additional models in the Appendix show that this growth in the impact of abortion over the years is statistically significant and that the lesser size of the impact in years prior to 2020 is statistically significant.

TABLE 1 Ordered logit models of abortion attitudes using 2020 American National Election Study (ANES) and Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI) Values survey

	ANES	PRRI
Racial resentment	2.312** (0.440)	2.250** (0.658)
Religious attendance	3.144** (0.498)	4.501** (1.045)
Religious Importance	5.180*** (0.916)	
Born Again	1.767** (0.175)	2.131** (0.313)
Female	0.945 (0.0810)	1.017 (0.124)
Age	0.599** (0.106)	0.496* (0.167)
Parent	1.141 (0.113)	0.929 (0.137)
Minority	0.935 (0.105)	1.002 (0.143)
Income	0.557** (0.0964)	0.437** (0.319)
College Degree	0.764** (0.0682)	0.854 (0.116)
Married	1.153 (0.117)	1.804** (0.268)
South	1.117 (0.0976)	
Party Identification	2.361** (0.446)	2.130** (0.611)
Ideology	14.30**	5.390** (1674)
Observations	5490	1615

Note: 2020 ANES data and 2020 PRRI. Ordered logistic regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses.

** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$.

Two sets of empirical analyses lead to this conclusion. First, Figure 2 shows the racial resentment scores (on its original 1–5 scale with 5 being higher levels of racial resentment) for white born-again Christian Republicans, compared to other Republicans, all Americans, and white Democrats from 2000 to 2020, which allows us to see if white born-again Christians are distinctive in their levels of racial resentment over time. Figure 2 nicely illustrates what other scholars have noted that there has been a dramatic shift among white Democrats, as well as all Americans, toward more liberal racial attitudes (Englehart 2021) but that white evangelical Christians have not been a part of this liberalization. Rather, they have maintained fairly high levels of racial resentment over the last 20 years. Importantly, Figure 2 also shows that the racial attitudes of white born-again Christians are indistinguishable from non-born-again white Republicans. In

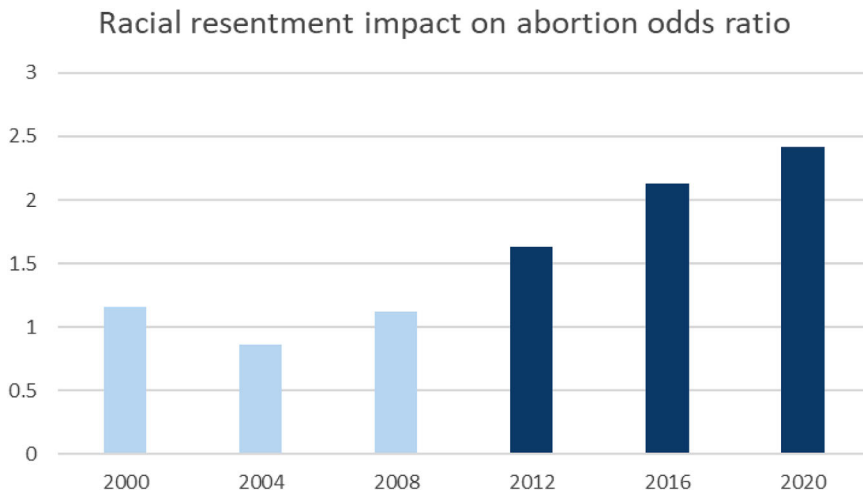


FIGURE 1 The impact of racial resentment on abortion over time.

Note: Darker shades indicate statistically significant impact. Odds ratio for racial resentment on abortion in ordered logit models controlling for political and demographic factors. *Source:* American National Election Study (ANES) cumulative file, 2000–2020.

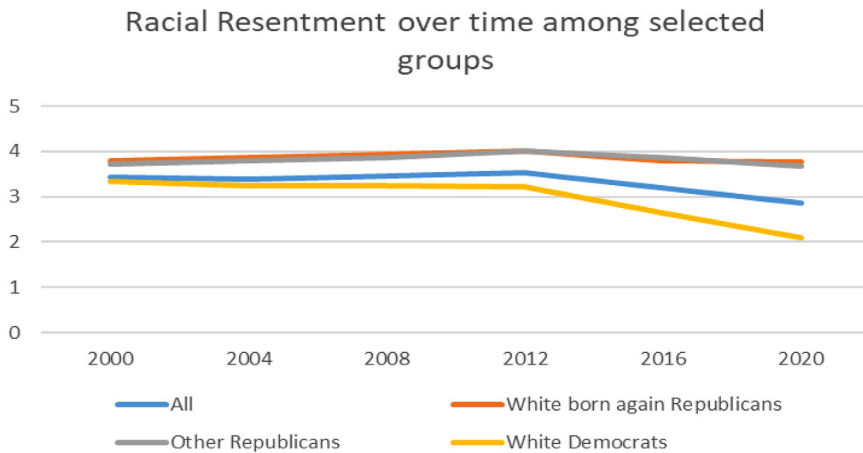


FIGURE 2 Racial resentment over time by party, race, and religion
Source: ANES Cumulative File, 2000–2020.

other words, despite the attention paid to the conservative racial attitudes of born-again Christians, the reality is that their levels of racial resentment are the same as other Republicans and have been so for the past 20 years.

To further explore whether racial attitudes are more strongly related to the abortion attitudes of white born-again Christians than other groups, we ran our multivariate models shown in Table 1 with an interaction of born-again status and racial resentment (the interaction model results are in the Appendix, Table 1A), and the interaction was not significant. This strongly suggests that racial attitudes do not play a disproportionate role in shaping the abortion attitudes of white born-again Christians. To test Hypothesis 2b that racial resentment would be a distinctively strong correlate of abortion attitudes for Republicans, we also ran these models with an interaction between racial attitudes and partisanship. The ANES model

actually finds that racial attitudes matter *less* as one becomes more Republican.³ The interaction model with PRRI data finds no evidence for any partisan interaction. A fair conclusion is that whatever may be happening between partisanship, racial attitudes, and abortion attitudes, it is decidedly *not* a case of racial attitudes driving abortion attitudes to a disproportionate degree for Republicans.⁴ Given the gendered nature of abortion policy, we also ran models including an interaction between gender and racial attitudes, but they were not significant in either the ANES or PRRI data.

So, to sum up our results so far, we found very strong support for our first hypothesis that racial attitudes have become a significant and robust determinant of abortion attitudes. Contrary to Hypothesis 2, however, we did not find any empirical support for the idea that racial attitudes are disproportionately or uniquely correlated with the pro-life attitudes of white born-again Christians or of Republicans. To place our first set of findings—the strengthening relationship between race and abortion attitudes—in a fuller context, we also compare the effect of racial resentment across a range of common ANES issue measures for 2020—government spending, healthcare, government jobs, defense spending, and environmental protection (Table 2). The results show that in 2020, racial attitudes have strong correlations with attitudes on all major policy issues, even when controlling for partisanship, ideology, and demographics. In other words, attitudes on abortion as well as all other major issues have become racialized. What seems to distinguish abortion most from these other issues is that religious attitudes are uniquely important for abortion. Religious attendance only matters on the abortion measure, not on other policy attitudes; religious importance has inconsistent effects of much smaller magnitude (again all independent variables are 0–1 in all modes) on all other issues; and born-again status likewise has a smaller and less consistent correlation with issue attitudes other than abortion.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

We find that abortion is now one of a growing number of racialized issues in American politics. It is also quite noteworthy that the shift in abortion to become a racialized issue happened during Obama's administration. As many have noted (Tesler 2016, 2012), there was a pervasive racialization of political views across Obama's presidency, and abortion seems to fit into this pattern. Additionally, the racialization of abortion attitudes only continued to grow during Trump's 4 years in office, reaching new heights in 2020.

Although there is a complex history between white born-again Christians, racial attitudes, and the politics of abortion, we do not find support for the central argument offered in Edsall's (2021) *New York Times* column "Abortion was never just about abortion." In that piece, he cites a number of scholars of the religious right who argue that racial resentment was a motivating factor behind the Christian right's decision to take a leading role in pro-life political activism and that as a result pro-life attitudes have become a proxy for racism among white evangelical Christians. While we uncover evidence that racial resentment is strongly correlated with abortion attitudes among white evangelicals, we also find that born-again Christians do not rely more heavily on racial attitudes than Democrats or non-evangelicals in their views on abortion. In the present highly racialized political context, there is nothing unique about white born-again Christians in this regard. Racial attitudes are strongly correlated with attitudes on abortion for evangelicals but also for Americans across the political, religious, and geographic spectrum. American politics is

³ We have no plausible explanation for why this would be the case, so we simply emphasize that this clearly is counter to any hypothesis that racial attitudes factor especially prominently for Republicans, at least on the issue of abortion.

⁴ This is not to suggest that racial attitudes do not drive abortion attitudes at all among white evangelicals. We conducted mediation analyses, which shows that roughly 27 percent of the effect of being a white born-again Christian on abortion attitudes is explained by racial resentment using the Hicks and Tingley (2011) Stata-mediated add-on. In other words, being white and born-again contribute directly to abortion attitudes in this analysis, but being white and evangelical are also indirectly linked to abortion attitudes because they drive higher levels of racial resentment, which, itself, has a direct effect on abortion attitudes. However, seemingly unrelated regression analysis shows that there are not significant moderator relationships, meaning that *all* groups—white evangelical Christians as well as other key demographic groups—rely on racial attitudes in forming their abortion attitudes roughly equally.

TABLE 2 Racial resentment and abortion attitudes in context, 2020 ANES

	Abortion	Govt Spending	Healthcare	Govt Jobs	Defense	Environment
Racial	2.312**	3.914**	2.826**	5.100**	5.109**	5.122**
Resentment	(0.440)	(0.723)	(0.514)	(0.935)	(0.941)	(0.914)
Religious	3.144**	1.278	1.056	1.191	0.767	1.141
Attendance	(0.498)	(0.199)	(0.159)	(0.176)	(0.117)	(0.185)
Religious	5.180**	0.791	1.228	0.730*	2.936**	1.070
Importance	(0.916)	(0.113)	(0.183)	(0.110)	(0.462)	(0.160)
Born Again	1.767**	1.020	1.211*	0.994	1.027	1.271*
	(0.175)	(0.104)	(0.114)	(0.0926)	(0.0993)	(0.126)
Female	0.945	0.849*	1.185*	0.807**	1.168*	0.901
	(0.0810)	(0.0612)	(0.0852)	(0.0581)	(0.0836)	(0.0680)
Age	0.599**	1.160	1.223	1.142	2.653**	1.330
	(0.106)	(0.179)	(0.185)	(0.174)	(0.425)	(0.211)
Parent	1.141	0.830*	0.925	1.005	1.172	0.886
	(0.113)	(0.0732)	(0.0828)	(0.0854)	(0.104)	(0.0788)
Minority	0.935	0.590**	0.986	0.729**	1.111	1.046
	(0.105)	(0.0570)	(0.0903)	(0.0658)	(0.0994)	(0.102)
Income	0.557**	2.197**	1.749**	1.693**	0.788	1.020
	(0.0964)	(0.319)	(0.259)	(0.254)	(0.110)	(0.158)
College	0.764**	1.478**	1.225**	1.244**	0.777**	1.222*
Degree	(0.0682)	(0.112)	(0.0951)	(0.0924)	(0.0601)	(0.0983)
Married	1.153	1.093	1.068	1.179*	0.978	0.994
	(0.117)	(0.0930)	(0.0902)	(0.0924)	(0.0808)	(0.0853)
South	1.117	0.886	1.038	0.909	1.108	0.945
	(0.0976)	(0.0693)	(0.0789)	(0.0690)	(0.0811)	(0.0732)
Party	2.361**	3.291**	2.632**	2.962**	1.130	3.261**
Identification	(0.446)	(0.544)	(0.446)	(0.491)	(0.185)	(0.535)
Ideology	14.30**	12.71**	28.36**	16.36**	9.466**	26.40**
	(3.788)	(3.291)	(7.921)	(4.516)	(2.669)	(6.818)
		(110.6)	(62.56)	(37.34)	(47.70)	(166.3)
Observations	5490	5185	5307	5292	5206	5200

Note. 2020 ANES data. Ordered logistic regression. Standardized coefficients with standard errors in parentheses to show relative influence of each variable.

** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$.

pervasively racialized, and as abortion is one of the most salient contemporary issues, it makes sense that racial attitudes have become strongly associated with abortion attitudes across the American population.

What is unique about abortion attitudes then is not the strong relationship with racial attitudes but the extent to which multiple measures of religion continue to predict attitudes even when ideology, partisanship, and racial attitudes are controlled. So, in this sense, abortion attitudes are actually about religion. Greater evangelical and religious commitments seem genuinely related to greater opposition to abortion.

There are certainly limitations to our current study. The survey data used in this research were collected in the lead-up to and immediately following the 2020 election, a year and a half before the 2022 Supreme Court decision overturning *Roe v. Wade*. In the time since the 2022 *Dobbs* decision, we have already seen abortion attitudes shift in the pro-choice direction and become a more salient issue (Kirzinger et al. 2022). Many credit high levels of mobilization among pro-choice women and young Americans as the reason Democrats staved off a wave of Republican gains in the 2022 midterm elections (Kirzinger et al. 2022). The present study, therefore, provides a very good baseline for understanding the relationship between racial attitudes and abortion attitudes at the cusp of this new landscape and should be revisited in the post-*Roe* era.

In the wake of the *Dobbs* decision, Republican-controlled state governments have moved quickly to ban abortion or make it much more difficult to access (New York Times 2022). Such policies have a disproportionate, direct impact on the autonomy and health of women (Haugeberg 2017; Rasanen, Gothreau, and Lippert-Rasmussen 2022; Roberti 2021; Rohlinger 2006) but are being enacted with little input from women legislators or legislators of color. Although women have made gains in state legislatures, even in Southern and conservative states, these gains have been exclusively among Democrats; women now form 44 percent of Democratic state lawmakers (Elder 2022). Democratic women are particularly effective advocates for pro-choice legislation and blocking anti-choice legislation (Berkman and O'Connor 1993; Kreitzer 2015), but given the polarized nature of contemporary politics members, Democrats, as the minority party in many state legislatures, have had no input on the crafting and passage of these state-level abortion bans. Thus, to understand women's input on these bans, it is key to look at the representation of women among Republicans in the Republican states enacting bans and restrictions. Women's representation among Republican state legislators remains under 20 percent, the same level as in 1993, and women form an even smaller share of Republicans in states with a track record of enacting anti-choice legislation (Elder 2022, 2021, Chap. 5). In fact, empirical analysis reveals that the fewer women there are among the Republican legislators, the more anti-choice legislation the state has passed in recent years. As a result, Republican women legislators, who approach pro-life policy in a distinctive way from their male colleagues (Reingold et al. 2021), are having scant input on these bans.

Many have also pointed out the distinctive harms abortion bans have on women of color (Coen-Sanchez et al. 2022; Rasanen, Gothreau, and Lippert-Rasmussen 2022). Yet legislators enacting these bans are not only overwhelming men but are also overwhelmingly white. While Americans of color have made important gains in representation in state legislatures, they have, once again, been almost exclusively among Democratic legislators. For example, 23 percent of state legislators in Alabama are black, but only one is a Republican. These abortion bans are also being passed in states with high levels of Republicans and evangelicals, who as shown in Figure 1 have higher levels of racial resentment than Americans overall. Thus, while racial attitudes are not more strongly predictive of abortion attitudes for evangelicals or Republicans than Democrats, the reality remains that abortion bans are being implemented by overwhelmingly white Republican men in states characterized by high levels of racial resentment.

It is also important to underscore that while racial attitudes are linked to abortion attitudes for both Republicans and Democrats, Democrats have significantly more progressive views on racial issues (Englehart 2021), which our data also demonstrate in Figure 2. For Democrats, it is their embrace of racial equality that is strongly linked to their support of pro-choice legislation. While this study and much of the research on abortion attitudes focuses primarily on the determinant of pro-life attitudes, a fruitful area for future research would be understanding the extent to which Americans, especially Democratic and secular Americans, view abortion access as a racial justice issue. There is some evidence, for example, that Gen Z Americans are more pro-choice than older generations and are also the generation most embracing of racial equality (Deckman 2021).

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.

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