



Religious Influence and Abortion Disapproval Around the Globe

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Religion and abortion are tightly linked in the American imagination. From courthouse steps to campaign platforms to Sunday sermons, religious beliefs, especially among conservative Christians, have long shaped how Americans think and vote on the issue. But is this connection unique to the United States? Do people in other countries respond to abortion in the same way? And what exactly is it about religion—personal faith, cultural context, or institutional power—that most strongly shapes people’s attitudes?

To answer these questions, I drew on two sets of data for my latest book, *Fetal Positions: Understanding Cross-National Public Opinion about Abortion*. First, I analyzed survey responses from three waves of the *World Values Survey*, which includes over 200,000 people in 88 countries, covering every major world religion and representing the vast majority of the global population. Then, I conducted a comparative case study of China and the United States, interviewing 40 individuals, including religious leaders, medical professionals, social movement organizers, academics, and government workers. While we already know a good deal about how religion shapes *abortion attitudes in the United States* and *other Christian-majority nations*, we know far less about these dynamics in more secular contexts, especially those shaped by non-Christian traditions. By examining both a deeply religious democracy and a largely secular state that once enforced a one-child policy, the comparison between the U.S. and China offers a unique window into how religion may or may not shape attitudes in very different social environments. Taken together, the data reveal a consistent and striking global pattern.