

A cross-national perspective on attitudes towards abortion among Muslim minorities and majority group members in Western Europe

Abortion is one of the most controversial topics in Western societies. Besides the crucial meaning of these attitudes for population development, attitudes to abortion cut across societies; they reflect a society's and individuals' core values and prevailing norms about life and death, gender equality, self-determination of women, and state interference in personal decisions (Gerhards and Rucht 2000). Yet, it seems that research on abortion – on both attitudes as well as behavior – disregards the growing religious and ethnic heterogeneity of populations due to immigration. Europe is now home to approximately 16 million Muslims (Laurence 2012). These increasing levels of religious diversity may spark a heated debate about abortion and shift politic alliances between religions in near future. Christian churches, which oppose abortion, have lost power in the wake of secularization, but might find new allies among other faiths. Studies investigating religiosity and/or processes of integration of immigrants have hardly paid attention to attitudes on abortion. On the one hand, there is a growing number of studies paying attention to fertility behavior and how migration affects this (Kulu and González-Ferrer 2014). Yet, the question of abortion – as other aspects of reproductive health – has been hardly mentioned in studies on minorities' fertility and family planning, which focus on the timing and number of children. On the other hand, there is a growing bunch of literature concerned with values and norms of minorities, such as towards gender equality (e.g. Röder 2014) or religious attitudes and customs (e.g. Van Tubergen and Sindradóttir 2011). However, they do not take into account attitudes towards abortion.

For an issue that remains so controversial – even in the 21st century, it attracts unabated attention from feminists, human rights organizations, and religious institutions – this is surprising. The issue divides the pious (churchgoers) and non-religious (non-churchgoers) to a greater extent than other moral issues such as homosexuality (Halman and van Ingen 2015). Despite the liberalization trends inaugurated by the sexual revolution of the 1960s and 1970s, some societies are currently experiencing a pushback against abortion (PEW 2009). In light of this pushback, it is important to consider the role of individuals with immigrant origin in this debate: Do their attitudes vary from those of the majority populations at destination, and – if so - do they maintain different attitudes, or adopt attitudes from the receiving society?

Previous literature has brought forward competing hypotheses on the development of religiosity and its impact on other domains of integration of immigrants and their descendants (Foner and Alba 2008). Religiosity may be maintained over generations due to religion being a means of group identity and/or an expression of intergenerational transmission. In contrast to this view, religiosity may decline due to various processes of adaptation to the host populations (e.g. Van Tubergen and Sindradóttir 2011; Diehl and König 2009; Phalet, Gijsberts, and Hagendoorn 2008). Our working hypotheses are twofold: Are minorities' attitudes towards abortion subject of adaptation processes over immigrant generations, as it has been observed for other attitudes, such as on gender equality? Or are attitudes on abortion rather stable over generations, as found in the context of religiosity?

Our paper aims at answering these questions by using the original dataset EURISLAM that was collected in 2011. It contains more than 6,000 interviews with natives in Belgium, Britain, France, Germany and Switzerland as well as minorities from the former Yugoslavia, Morocco, Turkey and Pakistan in the same five Western European countries.¹ To our best knowledge, this is the first quantitative study investigating such attitudes among minorities in comparison to non-minorities (the majority group) at the respective destinations. We add to the literature by applying a country-comparative perspective. Previous literature on other indicators of integration has demonstrated that the country of residence, its institutional context, policies, and cultural norms, affects the integration processes of immigrants and their descendants; this was termed comparative integration theory (Crul, Schneider, and Lelie 2012). Countries might influence individuals through the societal climate (e.g. created through policies, their implementation and an emphasis on gender equality). From these considerations, we can deduce that inhabitants in Germany and France form the most contrasting cases where French inhabitants have the highest likelihood to approve abortion and German inhabitants the lowest, followed by British, Swiss and Belgian.

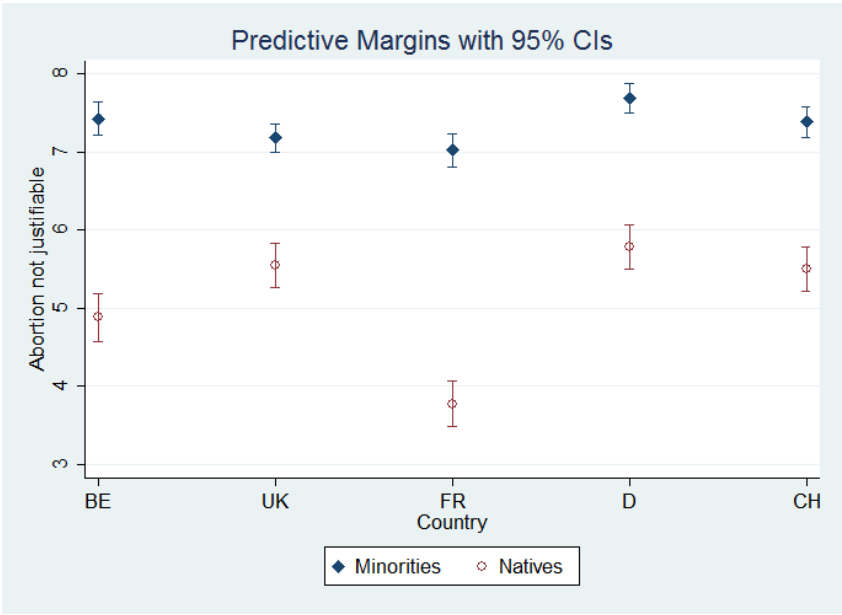
Largely in line with our expectations based on a country's emphasis on gender equality and restrictiveness of abortion, France shows indeed the greatest deviation from Germany, i.e., the lowest opposition/highest support whereas Great Britain and Belgium are in the middle. All countries are on average more liberal with regard to

¹ For more information, please see www.eurislam.eu. Respondents did not have to identify themselves with Islam but have parents or grandparents with a Muslim background. Native respondents' parents and grandparents had to be born in Western Europe.

abortion than Germany. Gerhards and Rucht (2000) also observe great opposition in the German public debate on abortion and explain this with the historical experiences during the Second World War where the Nazis defined who is entitled to live. Consequently, this experience might have led to a greater sensitivity regarding human life.

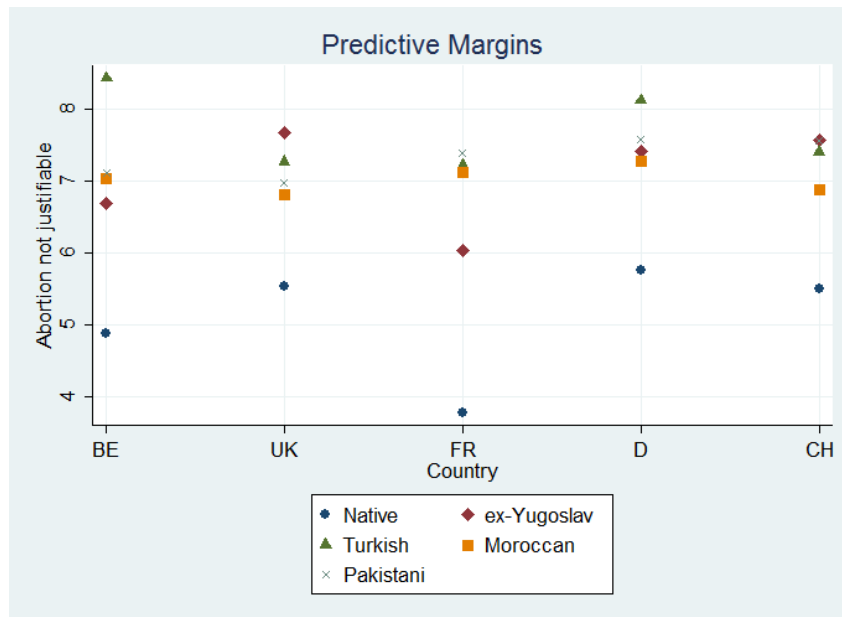
From the figure below, we can conclude that minorities mostly reflect attitudes of the majority group in the respective country of residence (albeit to a lower extent).

Figure 1:



Hence, it is not solely country of origin but country of residence that seems to be important for attitudes towards abortion. Members of the same ethnic group differ across countries despite having a shared origin (Figure 2).

Figure 2:



For instance, Turkish minorities in Belgium and Germany show a relatively high level of disapproval of abortion, whereas minority groups in other countries do not differ much from each other. This suggests that ethnic origin is a less powerful explanation for attitudes towards abortion. Instead, cleavages still seem to run along the lines of denominations rather than ethnic origin (not shown). While levels of religiosity, disapproval of premarital sexuality, and the importance of family honor are associated with greater opposition to abortion, they cannot entirely explain the gaps between denominations. Importantly, we also learn that socio-economic status alone cannot explain differences between groups. Yet, the question is whether this gap between groups might close in the long run. We find that minorities, who resided for more than 20 years in the country of residence, are more likely to approve of abortion compared to subsequent generations. This finding contradicts the common assimilation theory as well as theories on intergenerational transmission.

To sum up, this paper contributes to the highly relevant field of abortion by highlighting the dynamics introduced by immigration from Muslim majority countries. Our findings ultimately illustrate that we need to take religion into account in future studies.