DIVINELY ORDAINED DEATH? EXPLORING RELIGIOUS DETERMINANTS OF SUPPORT FOR
CAPITAL PUNISHMENT, ABORTION, AND EUTHANASIA

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DEDICATION

I dedicate my dissertation work and give special thanks to my dear family members. A special feeling of gratitude to my loving parents who have always supported me in my life. My grandmother who always encouraged me to follow my dreams and helped me in all stages of my life. My sister Sarvenaz who has always supported me and is very special. I will always appreciate all they have done.
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ABSTRACT

SOHEIL SABRISEILABI

DIVINELY ORDAINED DEATH? EXPLORING RELIGIOUS DETERMINANTS OF SUPPORT FOR CAPITAL PUNISHMENT, ABORTION, AND EUTHANASIA

MAY 2021

Whether individuals may decide to end other people or their own life has always been a matter of ethical and social debate. The current research explores attitudes toward three cases of unnatural death: capital punishment, abortion, and euthanasia. One considerable factor that shapes individuals’ attitudes toward human intervention in death is religion. Another salient determinant is the effect of racial differences. This dissertation argues that religion and race cause significant changes in individuals’ mindsets toward human intervention in the death process. Therefore, the present research examines how religion affects attitudes toward the death penalty, abortion, and euthanasia and how those effects may be moderated by race.

This study proposes differentiating religion into four dimensions: religiosity, spirituality, afterlife beliefs, and religious affiliation. Using data from the 2018 wave of the General Social Survey (GSS), the present research found that religion’s various dimensions have distinct effects on attitudes toward the death
penalty, abortion, and euthanasia. However, religion is often influenced by racialized emotions, leading to divergent effects based on race.

Results from Logistic regression analysis showed that, without the interaction effect of race, support for the death penalty was significantly influenced by religiosity, spirituality, afterlife beliefs, being Catholic, being female, being Republican, being Liberal, and being Black. For Black people, the effect of religiosity on support for the death penalty was higher than White people. Also, the effect of spirituality on support for the death penalty was greatest for Black people, followed by other races, and smallest for White people.

With regard to abortion, results from OLS Regression demonstrated that, without the interaction of race, support for abortion was significantly influenced by religiosity, spirituality, being Catholic, and being Republican, being Liberal, and education. For Black people the effect of spirituality on support for abortion was higher than White people.

Finally, results from Logistic regression analysis showed that support for euthanasia was significantly influenced by religiosity, spirituality, being Liberal, and education. For Black people the effect of religiosity on support for euthanasia is lower than White people. The effect of spirituality on support for euthanasia is greatest for other races, followed by Black people, and smallest for White people.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the study’s topic and provides a general understanding of the different aspects of this research. It explains the importance and the necessity of conducting such research, the rationale to do it and what the present study is going to test. At the end of the chapter the structure of the dissertation is mentioned.

One of the fundamental questions regarding the meaning of life and death is whether it is ethical for individuals, or states, to terminate the life of a human being. If the answer is affirmative, then the questions would be: who can do this, under what circumstances, and with what justifications? This research focuses on three legally sanctioned methods of life-termination: capital punishment, abortion, and euthanasia. The focus of this study is the influence of religion and race on attitudes toward those cases. In each of these three “end-of-life practices” humans and social institutions play a role, either through the criminal justice system or the healthcare system.

Religion plays an undeniable role in shaping people’s mindsets about death, by giving meaning and purpose to life. It appears that people’s attitudes toward legally sanctioned life-termination are influenced by religion. The question is, do individuals have similar opinions toward all three methods, or do they support some while opposing others. Although public attitudes may vary by each society the present research uses only data from the U.S. Thus, its results may not be generalizable to other societies with very different levels of social organization or religious traditions. Norms and values regarding each of these methods vary
among groups within societies. This complexity prohibits the generalization of norms and values as universally agreed upon mores and ethics. Therefore, religious concepts become salient as they provide individuals with precepts concerning the value and meaning of death. Specifically, it is the belief within monotheistic religions, prevalent in the United States, that God is the divine arbiter of life and death. Therefore, according to these beliefs, human beings should not be allowed to terminate a human life. Assuming that religion is a complex set of ideas including different dimensions, this research explores how each of these dimensions influences individuals’ mindsets toward capital punishment, abortion, and euthanasia.

In the U.S., race is another factor that impacts people’s attitudes toward societal issues. As Ioanide (2015) states, people see their environment through the lens of their racial identity. Race is not a mere notion of an individual belonging to a majority or a minority; it is also historically situated as collective experiences of discrimination and domination. Thus, the complexity of race can influence many aspects of an individual's identity and their world-view (Barnes 2014). Based on this argument, the present research investigates how race moderates the effect of religious beliefs on attitudes toward three cases of human-life termination.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Exploring the determinants of attitudes toward legally sanctioned death makes it plausible to consider the key role of dimensions of religion in shaping people’s opinion toward this reality. By religious dimensions, this research means those aspects of religion that refer to different religious beliefs, values, and affiliation. Each dimension concerns individuals’ belief about a certain aspect of religion. Scholars have also shown that religious forces can be affected by one’s race (Sherkat, Di Vries, and Creek 2010). For example, religious teachings and
practices within Black churches are different than those of White churches (Paris 1985). Therefore, in discussing the effect of religious dimensions on capital punishment, abortion, and euthanasia it is important to consider the moderating effect of race. In order to examine the moderating effect of race, this research explores the effect of religion dimensions on attitudes toward three cases of life-termination based on individuals’ race.

Therefore, the current study limits itself to two primary foci. First, it examines different dimensions of religion in order to understand how each of them influences people’s attitude toward the death penalty, abortion, and euthanasia. Second, it examines the effect of those religious dimensions as moderated by race.

Based on the above discussion, this study seeks to answer the following questions: (1) How do different dimensions of religion affect support of capital punishment, abortion, and euthanasia? (2) How does the effect of those dimensions of religion vary by race?

RATIONALE

Previous studies have addressed the effect of religion on public support of capital punishment, abortion, and euthanasia (Minkenberg 2002; Moulton, Hill, and Burdette 2006; Unnever, Cullen, and Agnew 2006). However, there is a gap in the literature concerning the effects of different dimensions of religion, and the way the effect of those dimensions vary across racial groups.

To study different dimensions of religion, the current study separates religious beliefs into four different categories: religiosity, spirituality, afterlife beliefs, and religious affiliation. Therefore, the first contribution of this study is that it adds to the literature on the effect of various dimensions of religion on attitudes toward the death penalty, abortion, and euthanasia.
The second contribution of this study is that it addresses the gap in literature concerning the question of how race moderates the effect of dimensions of religion on attitudes toward the death penalty, abortion, and euthanasia. Finally, by providing a comprehensive image of how religious forces may determine attitudes toward capital punishment, abortion, and euthanasia the present research has some policy implications. Such implications can be used by criminal justice and healthcare systems regarding their encounter with three mentioned cases of unnatural. It should be noticed that religion’s salience is increasing for both the criminal justice and healthcare systems. Any effort to abolish capital punishment or legalize abortion and euthanasia needs to consider people’s religious beliefs and feelings. In fact, religious forces may affect the levels of acceptability and effectiveness of judicial policies in each society. Therefore, the findings of this research can have a practical significance for legislative purposes.

STRUCTURE OF DISSERTATION

Chapter 2 reviews the relevant literature. First, it discusses dimensions of religion and the relationship between race and religion. Next, each sample of unnatural death including capital punishment, abortion, and euthanasia are discussed separately. Chapter 3 describes the methodology. The first section describes the data, data collection, and the sample of the study. General features of the General Social Survey (GSS) are discussed. The next section describes measures of the study including dependent, independent, and control variables used in the study. Hypotheses of the study are presented in the next section. Finally, the data analysis process including the analytical approach of the study is explained. Chapter 4 presents the findings related to each hypothesis. This chapter is divided into three subsections that discuss findings related to each dependent variable (capital punishment, abortion, and euthanasia). Chapter 5
summarizes key findings of the study and discusses whether hypotheses of the study can be supported by the findings. Then, implications of the study is discussed. Discussing the limitations of this study is another section that is presented in this chapter. At the end, potential ideas for future studies are suggested.
CHAPTER II

Literature Review

This chapter reviews related literature. The first section discusses different aspects of religion including religiosity, spirituality, afterlife beliefs (belief in afterlife, heaven, and hell), and religious affiliation. The relationship between religion and race is also discussed in this section. The second section discusses the existing literature about the effect of religion and race on three cases of legally sanctioned death: capital punishment, abortion, and euthanasia. The final section relates the hypotheses to be tested. At the end, the hypotheses of the present study are discussed.

DIMENSIONS OF RELIGION

As discussed above, religion includes different dimensions. Since the present research asserts that each dimension of religion has a special impact on attitudes toward unnatural death, it is important to operationalize each dimension before any discussion of religion’s effect can be initiated.

Religiosity is a measure of religion that influences peoples’ mindsets. Participating in religious activities whether individually, like praying, or collectively, like church attendance, affect individuals’ understanding of different phenomena such as human intervened death. Attending religious services demonstrates strength of religious commitment because churches also work as factors of socialization (Ellison, Echeveria, and Smith 2005).

Besides religiosity, spirituality is another aspect of religion that may directly affect peoples’ attitudes. According to Ammerman (2013), there is an increasing number of people who identify themselves as spiritual but not religious. This indicates that even though these people
are not affiliated with any religious organizations, they still believe in supernatural forces as determining factors in their lives. Such beliefs in metaphysical realities may also affect perception of death in peoples’ minds. As Selebalo-Bereng and Patel (2018) have demonstrated, both religiosity and spirituality impact attitudes toward death.

Religion’s impact on unnatural death is not only because of religiosity or spirituality, but other religious precepts such as afterlife, divine justice, heaven, and hell also play significant roles in these attitudes (Clements 2014). In other words, fear of divine punishment and expectation of divine rewards are strong motivations to follow religious commands such as approving or condemning capital punishment, abortion, and euthanasia.

As Ellison, Echeveria, and Smith (2005) contend, denomination is another important determinant of public opinion in the U.S. Also, Hoffmann and Johnson (2005) demonstrate that although there are internal differences among religious affiliations, they have a pivotal role in providing individuals with moral reasoning about different subjects. Thus, understanding doctrinal differences between religious affiliations helps explain existing conflicts over capital punishment, abortion, and euthanasia. For example, the Catholic Church is an important opponent of using capital punishment, which explains why most Catholic countries have abolished this method of punishment (Mathias 2013). In addition, the impact of Catholic Church’s opposition to abortion (Mavuso and Chiweshe 2017; Kozlowska, Béland, and Lecours 2016) and euthanasia can be observed among Catholic populations.

It can be argued that attitudes toward unnatural death are among the important subjects that separate conservative religious affiliations from liberal ones. In other words, being a member of a conservative Protestant denomination has a considerable impact on attitudes toward
capital punishment, abortion, and euthanasia (Adamzyc 2008). What is the reason for such a huge difference between religious affiliations? Are there some different divine principles that cause such a difference? The premise of the present study is that most religious differences of this nature come from different teachings about the role of God in the world. Believing in an omnipotent, omnipresent God who always intervenes in the world is an important source of opposition toward any human intervention in the death process, unless it is justified by God’s command.

Based on the above discussion, this study proposes to operationalize religious beliefs by measuring religiosity, spirituality, afterlife beliefs, and religious affiliation to explore the way these forces influence individuals’ attitudes toward three cases of human-intervened death: capital punishment, abortion, and euthanasia.

RACE AND RELIGION

There are significant differences between Black and White churches regarding a variety of theological as well as social topics. Such differences are manifested in distinctly different attitudes between Black and White people toward different subjects. An important part of African Americans’ lives in the U.S. is religiosity (Brega and Coleman 1999). As the findings from a Pew research study in 2009 show, 80% of Black people see religion as a very important component of their lives. This is 10% higher than the same belief among the White people (Masci 2018). The reason for such importance is the Black churches’ impact on African Americans’ lives. The concept of “super-churched” refers to the reality that Black people are most likely to go to church several days in a week (Barnes 2014). This explains why Black churches are still a salient factor in the sociopolitical life of their members.
Black churches have historically been an important part of African Americans’ lives by providing them with social and psychological support. Explaining this effect, Taylor, Chatters, and Jackson (2007) note that Black churches are among the few institutions that are independently controlled by African Americans themselves. Mattis and Jagers (2001) refer to both religiosity and spirituality as distinguishing factors in Black peoples’ lives.

The long history of racial segregation and discrimination toward Black people has resulted indifferent racial emotions and religious beliefs among this minority group. This reality can cause differences regarding the effect of religious beliefs on their opinions toward unnatural death. Lynxwiler (1999) found that while White Protestants churches mainly have an individualistic approach toward social issues Black churches’ approach is more collective. This feature of Black churches, according to Lynxwiler, has led them to move beyond a mere spiritual role. That is why Black churches are actively engaged in sociopolitical matters related to African Americans. It can be stated that Black people’s denominations have created a sacred and social environment in which their members learn and experience religious subjects differently than members of White Protestant denominations (Lynxwiler 1999).

Based on this argument, it can be argued that race and religion are significantly related and intertwined. This point confirms the premise of this study that religious differences explain at least a part of the racial variation in attitudes toward unnatural death in the U.S. In discussing Black vs. White religiosity and attitudes toward unnatural death, one important difference is collective vs. individual perspectives. While the individual orientation considers an individual as the only one responsible for a mistake and the one who has to be blamed, the collective approach takes into account social and psychological factors as well. While Black churches have a
collective orientation, White churches have mostly an individualist approach (Unnever and Cullen 2007b). Fundamentalist churches, which are mainly White, highlight individual responsibility, but Black churches concentrate on a situational attribution style (Calhoun-Brown 2000).

As previously argued, Black churches have protected African Americans against discrimination and racist tendencies in American society by providing social and emotional support. This means that Black churches are not a mere religious institution but can work as a broader social protective network that help individuals resist the pressures of mainstream society. This argument is illustrated in Cone’s (2011) notion of “Black liberating theology,” which demonstrates the effect of Black people's religion in defying discrimination and resisting oppression. The above arguments lead to the conclusion that African Americans’ religion is a fundamental part of their racial identity. As a result, it can influence their attitudes toward subjects such as the death penalty, abortion, and euthanasia.

CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

Capital punishment has been a response to crime in the United States since the establishment of the country and it remains popular in many states (Banner 2009; Little 1998). According to Gallup reports in 2016, about 59 percent of Americans favor the death penalty (Jones 2019). As Ellsworth and Gross (1994) explain, most proponents of the death penalty rely not on rational reasons for their support, but on emotional states. One of the important emotional predictors of attitudes toward the death penalty is religious sentiments. As Bjarnason and Welch (2004) argue, religious communities have a considerable role in giving meaning to life and solving moral dilemmas. However, religion consists of numerous and sometimes contradictory...
ideas and messages. This means that religion may have different effects on attitudes toward the death penalty.

Race is another salient determinant of individuals’ attitudes toward the death penalty. One of the general assumptions of many criminal theories is the racial invariance hypothesis according to which all people may engage in deviant behavior for similar reasons, regardless of their racial/ethnic background (Steffensmeier et al. 2010). However, as Sampson et al. (2006) point out, scholars’ recent findings have cast doubt on this hypothesis with results that show similar variables have different effects across racial groups.

Members of racial groups may have different views about criminal justice and methods of punishment that are rooted in their “racialized emotions.” This is why the present research contends that racialized emotions may affect existing attitudes toward the death penalty, which are influenced by dimensions of religion. For instance, while White people’s racialized emotions lead to increasing support for the death penalty, African Americans’ racialized emotions have an opposite effect. Buckler and Unnever (2008) refer to a huge racial gap between Black and White people that leads to different views about punitive policies, especially in the case of capital punishment (see also Borg 1997). It should be noted that this racialized emotion is shown to be higher among Black people when compared to other racial minority groups (Unnever, Cullen, and Barnes 2016). This is due to the fact that Black people are more likely to interpret and conceive contemporary events as discriminatory because of their experience of past acts of discrimination (Buckler and Unnever 2008).

Numerous studies have examined the effect of race and religion on support for the death penalty (Bones and Sabirseilabi 2018; Unnever, Cullen, and Agnew 2006). However, what
remains unknown is how the effect of religious beliefs (as emotional factors) varies across racial
groups. Racial differences and racialized emotions play important roles in shaping people’s
attitudes toward crime. Can Black people /White people’s differences in support for the death
penalty be solely attributed to their racial identity? Do other emotional factors contribute to this
variance? The argument of the present research is that religious beliefs are important factors in
determining people’s attitudes toward the death penalty. Additionally, the present study
examines racial variance and racialized emotions by measuring attitudes toward the death
penalty in the U.S. criminal justice system. Therefore, it also contends that race can moderate
the effect of religious beliefs on support for the death penalty.

While other studies have addressed the effect of religious beliefs on public support for
capital punishment there is no existing study that investigates how those effects vary across race.
Thus, one of the contributions of this study is filling the gap in the death penalty literature by
examining the way different dimensions of religion affect support for the death penalty.
Discussing racialized emotions toward the death penalty and the ways in which they may
moderate the effect of emotional determinants (here religious beliefs) is another contribution of
this study. This dissertation sheds light on Black/White differences toward certain punitive
policies. This provides a more comprehensive explanation of racial discrimination in the
criminal justice system and a more robust understanding of attitudes toward the death penalty by
identifying numerous variables each of which explains a specific aspect of this phenomenon.

Religion and Death Penalty

Although capital punishment is a phenomenon related to political policies, religious
beliefs and practices play a key role in influencing attitudes toward the death penalty by affecting
individuals’ moral beliefs (Applegate et al. 2000). It is a fact that most religious scriptures such as the Bible and Quran approve using capital punishment. Therefore, believing in a God who dispenses eternal judgment is a link between physical and spiritual punishment (Laurin et al. 2012). Religions may provide their believers with two opposite concepts: punishment and redemption. While most religions provide messages in favor of both punishment and redemption individuals may lean more on one of them. According to Atkinson and Bourrat (2011), all religions have a punishment/reward system by which they construct a kind of supernatural social control. Thus, one may argue that the mechanism by which religion may affect one’s punitive vs. redemptive attitude is through a belief in afterlife that includes notions of heaven and hell.

According to Unnever and Cullen (2005), those who hold a loving image of God are more likely to see God as a forgiving figure. Therefore, belief in a divine power that can prescribe punishing sinners or reward the righteous depends on whether an individual has a punitive or redemptive religious outlook. While Bader et al. (2010) stated that believing in a judgmental God is associated with supporting harsh punishments, Escher (2013) demonstrated that those who believe in a forgiving God have an opposite mindset. This dichotomous image of God, loving vs. judgmental, creates two opposing religious notions: a redemptive message that decries the death penalty, or a punitive message that condones the death penalty.

Another important religious factor that may affect individuals’ attitudes toward punishment is religious affiliation. For instance, several studies have found that Catholics are less likely than other Christian groups to support the death penalty (Mathias 2013). Also, Grasmick et al. (1992) found that moderate and liberal Protestants are less punitive than others.
Therefore, religious traditions can be considered as significant in individuals’ attitudes toward the death penalty.

It should be mentioned that spirituality, as an emotional factor independent of religiosity, may also affect attitudes toward the death penalty. In the contemporary world a growing number of people identify themselves as spiritual rather than religious (Fuller and Strong 2001; King and Carrette 2004; Saucier and Skrzypińska 2006). This suggests that spirituality, as a personal and emotional connection with a higher power, can also help explain the way religion influences support for the death penalty.

The above discussion demonstrates that religious beliefs work as emotional components that affect peoples’ attitudes toward the death penalty. As mentioned before, part of the racialized emotions in American society is related to religious beliefs. This is especially so in the case of Black people’s view of religion vs. White people’s view of religion. Thus, when assessing the relationship between racialized emotions and attitudes toward the death penalty, religion is a key factor.

*Race and Death Penalty*

Black people and White people have opposite views toward the American criminal justice system. The majority of White people tend to be supportive of a punitive criminal justice system, which Bobo and Johnson (2004) attribute to anti-Black prejudice. According to their results, African Americans are less favorable to a punitive criminal justice system than White people are.

Several studies have shown higher support for the death penalty among White people as compared to Black people (Cochran and Chamlin 2006; Unnever and Cullen 2007a; Young
Historically, while White people’s support for capital punishment is about 70%, Black people’s is about 50% (Unnever et al. 2006). However, during the 2000s, African Americans’ support decreased to 42% (Unnever et al. 2006). Unnever and Cullen (2007a,b) also found a 24% difference between White people and Black people in supporting the death penalty even after controlling for other variables. With regard to the existence of a huge racial gap in attitudes toward the death penalty, it can be argued that race is an important determinant of peoples’ opinion about capital punishment. Due to the existence of racial prejudice and discrimination and other social factors within the American society, members of different racial groups may have disparate feelings and emotions toward criminal justice issues including the death penalty.

Based on Young’s (1992) findings, the difference between Black people and White people’s attitudes toward the death penalty is due to their opposing conceptualizations of this issue. While White people’s conceptualization can be attributed to their assumptions of minorities’ threat Black people’s conceptualization has roots in their understanding of sentencing inequity and lack of trust in the criminal justice system. According to Peffley and Hurwitz (2007), Black people favor racial arguments (such as the inherent racial disparity of the death penalty) and non-racial arguments (such as inhumanity and uncertainty inherent in the process) against the death penalty. In contrast, White people become more supportive of the death penalty when they are aware of this discriminatory punishment of Black people. This explains the importance of racial emotions in evaluating Black people/White people attitudes toward the death penalty.

Unnever et al. (2006) explain White people’s higher support of capital punishment by referring to their prejudice toward racial groups. On the other hand, Black people’s opposition to
This punishment can be attributed to the fear of state power or so-called state threat. Also, using conflict theory, Hagan, Shedd, and Payne (2005) argue that it is through an individual’s structural location, which is largely determined by racial identity, that we can understand public sentiments about the death penalty and punitive crime control. In fact, conflict theory attributes racial differences in supporting the death penalty to self-interests (Kinder and Winter 2001). By this argument, it can be stated that African Americans may collectively feel that the death penalty has been applied against them in a discriminatory fashion.

**Racial Invariance or Racialized Emotions?**

The racial invariance hypothesis assumes that all individuals have similar motivations for committing criminal activities, regardless of their race or ethnicity. This hypothesis assumes that criminal behavior occurs due to the same general reasons and that racial background cannot make a significant difference in increasing or decreasing the probability of committing crime (Unnever et al. 2016). As Sampson et al. (2006) argue, the racial invariance hypothesis minimizes the effect of structural characteristics which influence racial groups and neglects comparable disadvantages of Black communities compared to White communities.

It is an important fact that stigma and socioeconomic pressure makes minority youths more vulnerable than others toward structural conditions and increases their likelihood of committing crime (Hannon and DeFina 2005; Krivo and Peterson 2000; Ousey 1999; Peterson, Krivo and Harris 2000). In other words, although the structural causes of crime may seem the same for all individuals, the fact is that individuals may interpret and react to these factors in different ways, based on their social backgrounds as well as their cultural traditions and expectations (Steffensmeier et al. 2010).
Buckler and Unnever’s (2008) study demonstrates an enduring racial divide in understanding of injustice. African Americans and Latinos are more likely than White people to perceive injustice. White people, on the other hand, tend to view the criminal justice system as a racially neutral institution. Buckler and Unnever refer to the effect of injustice perception on criminality and crime control and argue that because of higher injustice perception Black people are more likely to oppose punitive policies of the criminal justice system, like the death penalty.

According to Hagan et al. (2005), a higher perception of injustice among Black people is due to their lower power in political and cultural aspects of social life that restricts their ability to prevent policies that tend to criminalize them. The other factor that increases African Americans’ higher perception of injustice, even compared to other minority groups, is that they are more likely to interpret and conceive contemporary events as discriminatory. This can be attributed to past experiences with acts of discrimination, such as lynching (Barger, Donoho, and Wayment 2009; Buckler and Unnever 2008).

Compared to other racial groups, Black people usually receive more severe penalties or mandatory prison sentences (Walker, Spohn, and DeLone 2012). Research suggests this tendency may be due to perceptions of minority threat (Ruddell 2005; Ruddell and Urbina 2004). Discrimination against Black people by the criminal justice system has a long history in the U.S. and has continued until today (Ramirez 2015). This perception of criminal justice discrimination leads Black people to be more aware of crime and punishment and consequently makes them oppose harsh punishments, including capital punishment, which disproportionally impacts African Americans.
According to Unnever et al. (2016), awareness of discrimination influences Black youth differently than other racial groups. Racialized views among Black people have emerged from living in a racialized society rooted in slavery, Jim Crow laws, lynching, and White people’s historical domination in the criminal justice system and other social and political institutions (Hagan et al. 2005; Omi and Winant 2014). According to Unnever and Gabbidon (2011), this systemic discrimination has provided African Americans with a racialized understanding of living in a racist society. This point supports the argument that racialized emotions vary depending on which racial or ethnic group is being discussed.

As Unnever et al. (2016) explain, African Americans’ collective experience of injustices in criminal justice constructs their interpretation and influences their reaction toward police, courts, and other criminal justice institutions. This perception of injustice among Black people has led to the emergence of negative feelings and hostility toward police and the criminal justice system, which consequently reduces legitimacy of the law (Unnever and Gabbidon 2011). While Black people are most likely to have a collective understanding of a racist criminal justice system, compared to other racial and ethnic groups, this understanding is what constructs their racialized emotions toward crime and the criminal justice system.

Racialized emotion, as a kind of collective emotion, is a concept that can be applied to different experiences of racial groups within the society. As Ioanide (2015) argues, many criminal justice policies indirectly invoke ideas about race, but are framed in political terms. However, not all races respond in a similar manner to these racially charged ideas. Accordingly, it can be concluded that race is an important factor in determining peoples’ emotions toward social phenomena.
Therefore, a part of the racial gap between Black people and White people can be explained by their different racialized emotions. This point becomes more salient when different religious beliefs between Black people and White people are considered. Focusing on this point, the present study argues that different racialized emotions between Black and White people can also be the result of their different religious beliefs.

ABORTION

Historically, abortion has been an ethical and moral challenge for most societies (Greasley 2017). Even today, abortion is a controversial issue for many individuals (Hoffmann and Johnson 2005; Pinney 2017). As Emerson (1996) has pointed out, abortion has a considerable importance in the U.S. social life. One reason for such importance goes back to extreme ideas, for support or opposition, about legalization of abortion. Many studies show that opposition to legal abortion is due to religious reasons (Clements 2015; Jelen 2009). That is why the highest levels of opposition toward abortion can be found among more religious persons (Jelen and Wilcox 2003; Steensland et al. 2000).

In fact, religion is such an important source of individuals’ mindset about abortion that some scholars argue religion is the most important factor in shaping the way people feel about abortion (Adamczyk 2008; Jelen and Wilcox 2003). Most religions in the world disapprove abortion in one way or another (Maguire 2001). The major reason of such disapproval is based on the idea of “sanctity of life” and believing in God as the only arbiter of life and death. In other words, religions contain ethical principles about living and dying that lead them to condemn abortion (Maguire 2016). However, there are a lot of differences among these religions regarding their positions toward abortion. Usually, mainline Protestants have a positive attitude
toward abortion and more than 80% of Jews support abortion (Masci 2018). What can be added to this point is that while the rate of abortion among evangelical women is half of all women, non-affiliated women’s experience of abortion is two times greater than all women. Therefore, religion is a salient factor in women’s decisions about obtaining abortion (Jerman, Jones, and Onda 2016). Ellison et al. (2005:1) state that the reason for opposition of many conservative Protestants to abortion is that they believe that women’s control over their fertility endangers what they call “divinely ordained gender roles.”

As Frohwirth, Coleman, and Moore (2018) state, this condemnation influences attitudes toward abortion. According to a Pew research report in 2018, while 58 percent of Americans support legalization of abortion in most cases, 37 percent of them believe that it must be illegal (Hartig 2018). However, taking religion into account, these numbers would significantly change. This point becomes more obvious when we notice this fact that 87 percent of atheists are in favor of abortion but only 33 percent of evangelicals believe that abortion should be legal (Masci 2018).

There are significant differences between religious teachings of Black churches vs. other churches that can affect their attitudes toward abortion. In other words, African Americans have different religious beliefs than their White counterparts, even if they belong to similar religious affiliations.

One such difference is rooted in the historical status of the Black churches in protecting its members against racism and discrimination (Barnes 2014). African Americans’ image of God is a loving being who supports the faithful and helps them overcome society’s injustices and inequalities (Barnes 2014). This image of God is consistent with a more positive view toward
abortion, because of God’s more forgiving feature. As Lynxwiler (1999) demonstrates, when considering biblical literalism and church attendance, Black people are meaningfully more supportive of abortion compared to White people.

With regard to the above discussion, it can be stated that religious beliefs are an important determinant of peoples’ attitudes toward abortion. Religion has a salient role in responding to people’s questions and concerns about the ultimate meaning of life. This shapes their moral beliefs about what is right and what is not. Numerous studies have addressed the effect of religion on abortion attitudes from different perspectives (Hoffmann and Johnson 2005; Jelen and Wilcox; Petersen 2001).

The important question that remains unresolved is how different aspects of religion may have different effects on attitudes toward abortion. This study argues that religion is a complex set of ideas and dimensions. It also asserts that each of these dimensions have different effects on attitudes toward abortion because they provide different images of God and His role in the worldly matters. Therefore, although the effect of religion on abortion has been discussed in the literature, there is still considerable uncertainty with regard to how different dimensions of religion shape abortion attitudes. In fact, the mechanism by which religion influences people’s mindset about abortion needs to be further investigated.

What are the reasons behind racial differences between Black people and White people regarding their attitudes toward abortion? Can such differences be attributed only to historical events and discrimination in American society against Black people? Or can some of these differences be due to different transcendental precepts? This study hypothesizes that an important part of racial differences in abortion attitudes is related to differences in religious
beliefs. Thus, another way by which this study can add to the abortion literature is by demonstrating to what extent racial differences in abortion attitudes are related to Blacks’ and Whites’ religious differences. Thus, a central goal of this study is to assess how different dimensions of religion affect individuals’ mindsets toward abortion and the way the effects of those dimensions vary across race.

As Frohwirth et al. (2018) maintain, religion and abortion are connected in the U.S. political sphere in a variety of ways including in legislative issues and voting behavior. Abortion is one of the important subjects that affect the relationship between religious beliefs and politics (Mavuso and Chiweshe 2017; Yamane and Oldmixon 2006). Therefore, the findings of this study can also help understand the potential impacts of abortion and religious beliefs on political and legislative issues. This point becomes clearer when it is considered that abortion has always been an important subject in the U.S. political environment such that the two main political parties, Republican and Democrat, have different platforms and policies about abortion (Glaeser, Ponzetto, and Shapiro 2005).

Sanctity of Life

Judeo-Christian culture has played an important role in restricting individuals’ freedom to make personal decisions (Tamney, Johnson, and Burto 1992). Assuming nature as “God’s rules” some Christian traditions disagree with any human intervention in natural processes, which signifies the concept of “sanctity of life.” Religious condemnation of abortion emerges from this principle.

As discussed before, religion is a determining factor in the construction of ethical notions and moral principles (Wainwright 2012). One of these principles, which is directly related to
attitudes toward abortion, is the concept of “sanctity of human life.” Based on this concept, every human life is valuable and no one is allowed to take away another person’s right to live (Dworkin 2011). As Stephens et al. (2010) argue, religion is the major factor in determining opinions about beginning and terminating life, especially in the case of abortion. Believing in the human soul, which is directly formed by God, is one important reason why many religions oppose abortion. Some religions even consider abortion not only a wrong deed but a kind of unjust homicide. This view considers all children, even at the fetus stage, as gifts from God.

Almost all religions in the world have emphasized the sanctity of human life. As Minkenberg (2002) mentions, religion is the most important determinant with respect to abortion attitudes. In the case of Abrahamic religions, taking a human life is one of the “great sins.” While Judaism and Islam consider abortion, after a certain stage, a sin, Evangelical Protestant Christianity goes as far as considering abortion, at any stage of pregnancy, a homicide.

What makes abortion controversial is its relevance to the concepts of life and death. According to Clements (2015: 1), “when talking about religious people’s attitudes toward abortion it is important to notice that these views are related to what they believe about ‘the ultimate concern of human life.” In other words, believing that God is the only one who gives life affects individuals’ views toward abortion.

Pro-Life vs. Pro-Choice Ethical Debate

Debate over abortion has divided the U.S. sociopolitical environment into two major groups, which are called pro-life and pro-choice. While the pro-life perspective emphasizes the sanctity of human life, pro-choice perspective states that women have rights over their bodies and can decide whether they want to give birth to a fetus (Pinney 2017). An important part of
the pro-life vs. pro-choice debate, as Emerson (1996) argues, may be attributed to liberal vs. conservative approaches. While liberals believe in peoples’ unrestricted freedom to make decisions, conservatives emphasize the selfish nature of human beings and the necessity of controlling the human nature.

The main argument of anti-abortion activists is that the unborn are complete and innocent human beings. They emphasize that since every human being has equal rights, the unborn should be protected under the law as they have the right to live complete lives. Rejecting the idea that illegal abortion causes many dangers for women, pro-life activists state that murder is wrong regardless of its consequences for the woman (Sider 2010). They believe that the unborn have the right to live by the virtue of their humanity without regard to any danger or difficulty that women may have. Most pro-life proponents accept exempting the cases in which the mother’s health is in danger. However, they assert that the majority of abortions happen because of socioeconomic reasons instead of health issues.

Pro-choice proponents, on the other hand, believe that the argument that considers abortion as “baby killing” does not adequately and fairly represent the pro-life position. Pro-choice supporters argue that it is not ethical to talk about the sanctity of life without addressing poverty and systematic violence when every year thousands of children die as a result of treatable diseases. It is important to notice, as she argues, that pro-choice groups do not support abortion as an action but support its legalization. They actually believe that the state cannot be engaged in very personal issues and force women to have unwanted children. While both pro-life and pro-choice camps agree that the ideal situation is when there is no abortion, the first group supports prohibiting abortion and the second one tries to achieve this goal by stressing
education and contraception. The pro-choice argument is that throughout history women have continued obtaining abortions despite all limitations and punishments. According to this argument, making abortion illegal just creates more difficulties for women and does not solve any problem (Joffe, Weitz, and Stacey 2004).

Religion and Abortion

People have different views about abortion based on their religious background and beliefs. As Unnever et al. (2016) state, emotions play a key role in shaping people’s views on abortion. Religious ideas have played a key role in prohibiting abortion whether through influencing legal systems or by causing self-reproach. This conflict has continued to this day.

Although in most Western industrial societies obtaining abortion is legal, religion is still an important factor in preventing abortion and shaping people's mindsets about it (Wilson 2012). This effect is particularly salient in the United States. One way in which religion influences peoples’ attitudes toward abortion is the conceptualization of God and divine decree. An important feature of Christian theology is “the sinfulness of human nature” (Tamney et al. 1992: 1). Thus, Christianity justifies controlling corrupt desires to seek pleasure and comfort (Kärkkäinen, Savolainen, and Koski 1999). Based on Tamney et al.’s (1992) findings, elective abortion is considered one example of such corrupting desires according to the Christian tradition.

Historically, there have been important religious conflicts over abortion in the U.S. As Evans (2002) points out, after the Supreme Court decision to legalize abortion in 1976, the Catholic Church started its efforts to make it illegal again. On the other hand, mainline Protestant churches supported that decision. Thus, abortion has become an important source of
polarization in U.S. society. In other words, the issue of abortion is one of the important issues that divide Americans and religious factors are a crucial source of such a division (Adamczyk and Valdimarsdóttir 2018). Adamczyk (2008) further states that abortion is an important determinant that separates religious conservatives from religious liberals.

Abortion supporters state that the Bible does not say anything about abortion and there is no evidence in the Bible that establishes the unborn as fully human (Bartkowski et al. 2012). Abortion opponents argue that the Bible should not be perceived as the only source of ethics, because it selectively discusses some topics and leaves many others out (Klusendorf 2004). They argue that the biblical condemnation of the unjust taking of a human life extends to the unborn human beings.

Based on the above discussion, this study argues that in order to understand people’s attitudes toward abortion, it is necessary to investigate different dimensions of their religious beliefs. As Sabriseilabi and Williams (2020) argue, religion has different dimensions. Based on this observation, this study examines different dimensions of religion on peoples’ attitude toward abortion. Specifically, this research considers those dimensions of religion that have to do with divine approbation and foreordination in relation to opposition toward abortion. On the other hand, having a loving image of God, who is supportive and forgives sinners, is related to greater tolerance toward abortion.

Religion and Women’s Decision to Obtain Abortion

Abortion has been used by women throughout history. As Tamney et al. (1992) argue, legalization of abortion, which is defended by resorting to the notions of individualism and restricting the role of government, helps women achieve dignity as full persons. This point, as
they state, is further highlighted when it is emphasized that the reason for much opposition to abortion is rooted in ideological beliefs about gender and family, which consider women’s place limited to the home (Luker 1984; Stetson 2001). Different factors affect women’s decisions to obtain an abortion. However, what makes abortion a sensitive issue is its association with religious beliefs and moral attitudes toward sexuality (Woodrum and Davison 1992). Making a decision about obtaining an abortion has always been a serious challenge for women. Foster et al. (2012) study of 5,378 abortion patients demonstrates that 36 percent of women had spiritual concerns about obtaining abortion. As Jerman et al. (2016) showed, 79 percent of American women of reproductive age affiliate themselves with a religion. It is also known that 25 percent of American women experience an abortion by age 45 (Jones and Jerman 2017). As Jerman et al. (2016) state, 60 percent of those who obtain an abortion are affiliated with a religious tradition. This implies that many religiously affiliated women obtain an abortion even if it is condemned by their religious affiliation. The fact is that whether women identify themselves as religious or not, they are in contact with the country’s religious culture and have to decide about the morality of abortion from a religious point of view.

Race and Abortion

Racial identity is an undeniable factor in shaping American attitudes toward different issues including abortion. There are significant differences regarding abortion among racial groups. As Strickler and Danigelis (2002) argue, while during the 1970s White people were more in favor of abortion than Black people; this trend reversed during the 1980s. According to the most recent findings, Black people and White people’s support for the legalization of abortion is similar (Hartig 2018). However, does this mean that the effect of religious beliefs on
Black people and White people’s support of the abortion is also similar? The fact is that there are serious differences between Black people and White people with regard to their religious beliefs and implications of such beliefs for their attitudes about abortion (Wilcox 1992). Therefore, in explaining the effect of race on abortion it is necessary to address the potential role of religion in Black and White attitudes.

EUTHANASIA

The history of euthanasia debate goes back to ancient Greece when Aristotle supported euthanasia based on the idea of minimizing pain. Ethical and religious arguments have added to this debate (Shuriye 2011). Euthanasia is a highly controversial subject in many societies because it may cause serious challenges for their religious and moral principles (Porter and Warburton 2018). The basic questions about euthanasia are morality and the role of society in regulating euthanasia (Somerville 2014).

There are differences and disagreements over defining euthanasia. Generally, it can be described as a terminally ill patient’s decision to end their life in order to avoid suffering, pain, and useless treatments (Chochinov and Wilson 1995). During recent decades, the moral dilemmas about euthanasia have increased as a result of new technologies that can prolong patients’ lives (Campbell 1999). Also, some countries like Belgium, the Netherlands, and Canada have legalized euthanasia (Boer 2018), which has led to serious ethical questions among philosophers, medical professionals, and religious activists.

According to Carmichael (2016), whether euthanasia is ethically acceptable is a matter of debate throughout the world. However, there are different views toward it based on the countries or the states under discussion. These different views depend on religious, political, and
demographic factors. Whether euthanasia is ethically acceptable has been a subject of social debate since ancient times. It is important to refer to numerous historical arguments for and against it. However, like capital punishment and abortion, most of these arguments and reasons are based on emotions rather than rational reasoning (Harris 2006).

Such controversy over the morality of euthanasia has caused debate in the discussion surrounding its status in the legal system. In the U.S. context, there are different views among courts regarding the possibility of applying 14th amendment liberty for using euthanasia (Pervin and John 1999). Generally speaking, different views about euthanasia are the result of different beliefs over the sanctity of human life. As Pervin and John (1999) argue, since conceptualizing the sanctity of human life is the result of religious beliefs, the constitutional protection of religious liberty must allow people to behave according to their religious beliefs. This is why religious forces are one of the most important obstacles toward legalization of euthanasia. This point becomes more highlighted when it is emphasized that religiosity is the strongest predictor of negative opinion toward euthanasia in many societies (Aghababaei and Wasserman 2013).

Most arguments against euthanasia are based on the belief that considers euthanasia as a kind of suicide in which an individual intentionally decides to terminate their own life to avoid suffering and useless treatment. According to the teachings of most religions, it is only God who can decide about humans’ death and no one is allowed to choose it by himself. Based on this assumption, euthanasia is a real challenge because it is an intervention in God’s will. In other words, euthanasia challenges the sanctity of life for those who believe in an omnipotent God. Therefore, in order to understand the effect of religious beliefs on attitudes toward euthanasia, it is necessary to first review religious opposition toward suicide.
As mentioned, religion is a complex and contradictory phenomenon consisting of different dimensions (Bones and Sabriseilabi 2018). As different scholars have mentioned, each aspect of religion may have different effects on peoples’ attitudes toward a specific issue. For instance, those aspects of religion that are related to afterlife beliefs and divine justice have different effects compared to those that are related to attending religious services or participating in religious activities. Religious affiliation is another important part of religion that shapes attitudes toward social subjects. Focusing on euthanasia, this study's argument is that different dimensions of religion have different effects on individuals’ attitudes, which is why this research proposes separating those dimensions and consider them as independent variables in the analysis.

Race is another important aspect of American social life. Black people and White people have different views toward social and political issues that go back to historical events in the United States. The long history of slavery and segregation against Black people has made them aware of systematic discrimination by the white majority. As MacDonald (1998) points out, a part of Black people’s more negative views toward euthanasia may be attributed to their fear of giving the criminal justice system the authority to take their lives. This fear makes more sense when discriminatory use of capital punishment and other harsh punishments against African Americans by the criminal justice system are considered.

Another important difference between Black people and White people, that can explain their different attitudes toward euthanasia, is the difference in their religious beliefs. As already mentioned, there are significant differences between Black people and White people’s religious beliefs even when they follow the same religion. As Stroope, Draper, and Whitehead (2013) state, Black people tend to have a loving image of God who is supportive and protects them
against the numerous discriminations of the larger society. This loving image of God makes Black people more spiritual and more likely to believe in miracles and supernatural forces especially with regard to end-of-life-decisions. Based on these points, the present research believes that when investigating the effect of religious beliefs on attitudes toward euthanasia it is necessary to address different religious beliefs among racial groups as well.

Therefore, one of the questions that this research explores is how different dimensions of religion have different effects on euthanasia attitudes and how those effects vary across racial groups. In other words, this study will assess how religious forces influence people’s mindsets toward euthanasia and how race moderates the effect of those forces toward euthanasia.

*Religion and Suicide*

What distinguishes euthanasia from suicide is that in euthanasia ending life benefits patients. Also, euthanasia is not always an intentional act and can be done without patient’s consent, which is another point that differentiates it from suicide (Shuriye 2011). On the other hand, euthanasia is similar to suicide because it implies allowing oneself to be killed, cooperating in its process, or being indifferent to it. This similarity to suicide explains why religion is an important factor in the modern debate over euthanasia in a way that the more societies are committed to faith in God the more they are opposed to this phenomenon (Shuriye 2011). The religious argument against euthanasia is based on this assumption that it is a kind of suicide in which a terminally ill patient, actively or passively, decides to terminate their life either by a physician’s help or by discontinuing the treatment process. There is no world religion that recognizes individuals’ right to commit suicide (Ritter, Zitterl, and Stompe 2011). Mosaic religions of resurrection are significantly stricter in condemning suicide compared to Eastern
religions of reincarnation. Abrahamic religions tend to believe that humans are the image of God. Such belief makes them more opposed to suicide compared to other religions, especially Eastern religions that believe in the notion of transmigration and the possibility of human rebirth (Stompe and Ritter 2011; Ritter, Etzersdorfer, and Stompe 2009). Therefore, one way to explain different rates of suicide is to pay attention to different religious beliefs.

According to Boyd and Chung (2012), both individual and country level factors affect how people think about suicide. Dervic et al. (2004) found that unaffiliated people are more likely to commit suicide during their lives compared to religiously affiliated individuals. This point, as they argue, is related to the fact that unaffiliated people have fewer moral objections against suicide and fewer reasons to continue their lives especially in case of suffering an incurable disease. There are also different studies that show the rate of suicide among participants pf religious activities is significantly lower compared to others (Nisbet et al. 2000).

The effect of religion and spirituality on suicide has been attributed to the protective role that religion and spirituality play against suicidal ideation (Gearing and Lizardi 2009; Lizardi and Gearing 2010; Rasic et al. 2008). This protective role varies across religions and is based on the level of religious commitment as well as involvement in religious activities. Colucci and Martin (2008) argue that since many individuals have spiritual and religious feelings in their lives, such feelings may have a deterrent effect on people’s behavior especially against committing suicide.

As mentioned, one way religion influences people’s perspectives about life and death is through giving meaning to life. Using this point, Simonson (2008) states that the mechanism by which religion protects believers against suicide is by providing hope and meaning of life for
those who have suicidal thoughts. Mandhouj’s (2017) study shows that being religious and spiritual both lead to lower probability of suicide because they provide individuals with meaning of life. In the study of the relationship between religion and suicide, it is not sufficient to measure religiosity relying only on individuals’ religious affiliation (O’Reilly and Rosato 2015). Thus, although religion has a protective effect against suicide, different dimensions of it may have different impacts (Lawrence et al. 2016).

Investigating the relationship between suicide and different dimensions of religion, Lawrence et al. (2016) found that religious affiliation, the importance of religion, and attending religious services may all affect attitudes about suicide. This point, according to them, highlights the necessity of considering religious beliefs in treating individuals’ suicidal risk factors. Vanderweele et al. (2016) found that individuals’ attendance in religious services leads to lower risk of suicide. This finding was consistent with results of Koenig’s (2016) study of the association between religious involvement and suicide.

Another important dimension of religion that affects attitudes toward suicide is religious affiliation. For example, Catholics more than Protestants are opposed to suicide (Moksony and Hegedűs 2018). As Stack and Kposowa (2011) state, there are theological differences among Catholics and Protestants regarding their position toward suicide, which explains why Catholics are less likely to accept or commit suicide. Church attendance, religious commitment, and religiosity also affect Catholics’ attitudes toward suicide more strongly than Protestants.

**Ethical Debates over Euthanasia**

Euthanasia brings to mind the complicated issue of the right to life and right to terminating it. There are important debates regarding bio-ethical subjects especially those
related to beginning and end of life. According to Aghababei and Wasserman (2013), the euthanasia debate is at the intersection of ethics and medicine which is why it always causes moral dilemmas. One of the controversial issues that intersects medical and ethical debates is the way to achieve a comfortable death. As Daaleman and Van de Creek (2000) argue, any effort to improve end-of-life care has to consider the importance of patients’ physical and psychological needs as well as their spiritual and religious beliefs.

As Campbell (1999) argues, the death process has increasingly been subject to medicine and technologies (like respirators and organ transplantation) that make extending life possible. However, the other side of new medical technologies is the possibility of hastening death (Arnold 2004). An important part of the increasing debate over euthanasia is due to the availability of such medical technologies. While these technologies have made it possible to prolong patients’ death, whether terminally ill patients decide to continue their treatment or choose an easy death has caused moral issues and questions. This is where ethics and religious beliefs become engaged because deciding to use such technologies is a moral decision relating to fundamental concepts of life and its preservation. This point demonstrates how ethically controversial it is for individuals and their families to decide about euthanasia. Such controversy also exists for societies as there are different countries that revise their laws regarding end-of-life decisions.

The philosophy of euthanasia is to provide patients with an easy death. Specifically, it refers to a gentle and easy process of dying. However, the idea of good death is ethically and religiously debatable. There are three different perspectives toward euthanasia in different countries’ criminal justice systems including: equating euthanasia with murder, murder under
privileged circumstances, and as a legal medical procedure supported by law (Banović and Turanjanić 2014). Deak and Saroglou (2017) argue that much opposition toward abortion and euthanasia in secularized modern countries is based on other-oriented motives such as the necessity of protecting weak people. Also, another important part of ethical opposition toward euthanasia is due to concerns about patients who are deprived of social and economic resources to afford useful treatments that are usually expensive (Campbell 1999).

Euthanasia can be divided into two main types: active and passive. Active euthanasia refers to using particular methods to cause death or what is known as mercy killing. Passive euthanasia implies the discontinuation of treatment (Shuriye 2011). With regard to the fact that there are numerous views toward end-of-life practices it should be mentioned that this ethical debate is what makes both active and passive euthanasia extremely controversial topics.

One important source that provides ethical principles about the morality vs. immorality of euthanasia is religion. It is a fact that different religions have different views toward this subject. As Battin (2003) proposes, different religious views can be separated into two main groups of liberals and conservatives. The first group considers euthanasia an ethically acceptable phenomenon; whereas the second one believes that any legalization of assisted dying is immoral. While euthanasia supporters emphasize autonomy and self-determination opponents refer to religious reasons as well as constitutional right to life (Campbell 1999).

However, some religious traditions can support this method of dying based on the idea of individual dignity. This belief in human dignity provides a political possibility for self-determination in which individuals can decide about the time, circumstances, and methods of their death and physicians can help them to do this process more easily (Campbell 1999).
Religion and Euthanasia

In any discussion of euthanasia or physician assisted suicide it is necessary to consider different factors such as tradition, religion, ethical principles, and state laws (Nuland 2000). There are a variety of different views toward the euthanasia debate from philosophers, doctors, theologians, and even ordinary people. Euthanasia is an intriguing ethical, medical, and legal concern because most religions have a similar view toward it (Larue 1985).

Whether at individual or country level, religion is always an important source of moral values and ethical principles about euthanasia. Religious concepts try to give meaning to death by showing it as a key moment in which an individual cultivates their spiritual identity. The religious meaning of death emphasizes the importance of sovereignty, stewardship, and the self (Campbell 1999). Sovereignty means that individuals’ bodies have a divine nature because they are created by God and return to him. The implication of this perception is encouraging efforts to preserve life by medical technologies and condemning euthanasia because God is the only one who has ultimate power to decide about human death.

The concept of stewardship assumes humans as agents of God who are signs of divine intent. According to this concept, everyone is trustee of his body and is responsible to preserve his life in any situation (Campbell 1999). The other monotheistic principle that supports the idea of preserving life is the concept of self that refers to the dignity of individuals and is expressed in the belief that every human is the image of God. Thus, according to the three mentioned principles, it can be argued that euthanasia has to resist important and strong moral principles of religions about sacredness of human life. All these principles condemn euthanasia as a kind of suicide that violates the precepts of self-dignity and harms community.
Religion's influence is also through providing conceptual guidelines that shape people’s bio-behavior. In other words, religion contributes to an internal consistency and spiritual harmony that lead to assuming any kind of suicide as unethical. This explains why most religious persons find euthanasia contrary to the teachings of the Bible. In fact, most Christians believe that any form of killing, including mercy killing, is against the tenets of their religion (Shuriye 2011).

Religion has a pivotal role in addressing the euthanasia debate especially through personal convictions and ideas (Zaccaria, Anthony, and Sterkens 2019). Religions oppose euthanasia based on the idea of sanctity of life. In fact, religion is an extremely important part of any discussion of euthanasia because any argument about death leads to serious questions about the meaning of life. Such questions have implications for people, which explain why religion is relevant to any discussion of how to die (Stempsey 2010). For example, Biggar (2015) argues that since science and ethical issues are connected, it is not possible to have a secular medicine which ignores metaphysical concerns. According to Biggar, religion is not an irrational interjection; instead it provides a forum for the negotiation of ethical controversies in medicine.

Generally speaking, the belief that God is the sole arbiter of life is likely to lead to opposition toward euthanasia or any other act that intentionally terminates a human’s life. The root of this belief, in most Western theologies, reaches to the assumption of afterlife and sovereign power of God over individuals’ lives and their death (Ahaddour, Van den Branden, and Broeckaert 2018). Arguing that human life needs to be protected against any termination, Ziebertz (2019) states that supporting euthanasia and abortion, as two forms of life termination, are related to hedonistic tendencies as well as weaker religious beliefs.
Therefore, these findings suggest that religion affects attitudes toward euthanasia (Bülow et al. 2012) and is an undeniable factor in any discussion of right to life or death (Zaccaria et al. 2019). Debate over the possibility of hastening death is an important topic in many societies. It is based on this point that religious beliefs play a crucial role in shaping attitudes toward euthanasia (Danyliv and O’Neill 2015).

Sharp (2017) found that having a traditional image of God as a father or master, leads to opposition toward euthanasia. He also states that reading the Bible is associated with a negative view toward euthanasia. For the Christian ethos, euthanasia is a kind of evil that must be resisted. In this theology, life is a gift from God that should be protected and any legalization of euthanasia breaks such protection (Jans 2002). As Francis et al. (2018) argue, both religious affiliation and religious practices influence attitudes toward euthanasia in a way that more religiosity leads to more opposition toward euthanasia. While most religions oppose legalization of euthanasia the Catholic tradition is one of the strongest opponents that attributes this phenomenon to the culture of death in the West. This culture of death is described as refusing to protect human life which can be seen in different examples like capital punishment, abortion, euthanasia, and warfare (Ziebertz 2019).

According to Gielen, Van den Branden, and Broeckaert (2009), religious affiliation can be used for operationalizing religious worldview, although other dimensions of religion need to be considered in any study of attitudes toward euthanasia. Burdette, Hill, and Moulton (2005) found significant religious differences, especially church attendance and religious affiliation, regarding opinions about euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide. According to them, both moderate and conservative Protestants are less likely to approve euthanasia compared to non-
affiliated individuals. Believing in miracles, as Sharp (2017) mentions, leads to opposition to any kind of hastening of death because of an incurable illness.

Sikora and Lewin’s (2007) study of euthanasia attitudes in Australia found that denomination, church attendance, and believing in a personal God negatively influence people’s attitudes toward euthanasia. On the other hand, positive attitudes about the right to an easy death were associated with accepting a scientific outlook, Darwinism, and modern cosmology.

**Physicians and Euthanasia**

Another way religion impacts the euthanasia debate is through influencing physicians’ mindsets toward terminating patients’ life or helping them to do so. In fact, any legalization of euthanasia implies physicians’ new roles in the health care system (Nordstrand et al. 2014). Levy et al. (2013) note that euthanasia refers to medical doctors’ intentional actions that either directly or indirectly leads to terminally ill patients’ death. This behavior is engaged by the healthcare providers based on their humanistic desire to end suffering and pain. For example, non-religious doctors are more likely to do life termination and less likely to have conservative views toward euthanasia (Seale 2009).

There are significant differences between public opinions and physicians’ opinions regarding euthanasia mostly because of their different familiarity with this subject (Gielen et al. 2009). However, many clinicians are undecided about this phenomenon, mostly because of ethical concerns (Fontalis, Prousali, and Kulkarni 2018). As Whitney et al. (2001) state, there is no consensus among U.S. physicians regarding attitudes toward euthanasia and many of them are uncertain about this phenomenon. According to Banović, Turanjanin, and Miloradović’s (2017) findings, the majority of physicians surveyed, 57 percent believe that euthanasia is ethically
wrong. Subba et al. (2016) also found that while 47 percent of doctors believe that euthanasia can be justifiable for reducing emotional and financial burden more than half of them oppose its legalization because of moral obligations and legal complications. Thus, religion has an important role in doctors’ feelings toward euthanasia.

According to Gielen et al. (2009), religion affects how nurses think about euthanasia through influencing their ideology and worldview. Barnett, Cantu, and Galvez (2018) also found an association between nurses’ euthanasia attitudes and their religious beliefs. Pomfret, Mufti, and Seal’s (2018) study of medical students’ attitudes toward euthanasia found that such attitudes are influenced by their religious background. Belief in God was negatively associated with approving euthanasia and hastening death.

One important ethical question is whether physicians can refuse to practice euthanasia when patients voluntarily have such requests, and the legal system recognizes the right to die. For instance, while Canada passed a law to give people the right to die there is still debate over whether physicians can avoid end-of-life practices that are requested by patients. What is the right of physicians who disagree with the morality of euthanasia because of their religious beliefs or any other reason? Knoetz (2018) believes that they can refuse to do euthanasia based on their religious beliefs and conscientious objection. O’reilly and Rosato’s (2015) argument also defends physicians’ right to avoid helping patients’ request for euthanasia based on their religious freedom.

Race and Euthanasia

It is important to emphasize that both religion and race may influence individuals’ attitudes toward suicide and euthanasia (Barranco 2016). Discussing Black people’s attitudes, it
is important to consider their commitment to the life-saving beliefs of their religion (Greening and Stoppelbein 2002). This point explains Davidson and Wingate’s (2011) finding that although Black people, more than other racial groups, suffer from discrimination and other risk factors they show lower rates of suicide and euthanasia. An important part of this point, as they argue, can be attributed to their religious beliefs that provide them with a spiritual support to be protected against terminating life.

Focusing on the euthanasia debate, race is an important factor in shaping euthanasia attitudes. Wasserman, Clair, and Ritchey (2006) argued that distrust of medicine affects African Americans’ attitudes toward euthanasia. Also, spiritual meanings play an important role in Black people’s attitudes toward euthanasia.

As MacDonald (1998) argues, there is an important difference between Black people and White people’s opinion toward euthanasia which is mostly due to different socioeconomic status and political conservatism as well as African Americans’ religious beliefs, which consider any kind of suicide as an unthinkable sin. It is important to refer to religious principles that support such opposition like "the Lord giveth and only the Lord taketh away" and "the soul belongs to God." Based on these points, African Americans’ religion follows this belief that only God has authority to control life and death. Mainstream interpretations of the Bible condemn any kind of taking a human’s life and mention that life must be preferred over death in any situation. This belief is strong within Black culture.

The other fact that leads to Black people’s higher levels of opposition toward euthanasia is their experience of discrimination and oppression in U.S. society. This experience makes them scared of giving others the authority over their lives (MacDonald 1998). In other words, Black
people more than White people are worried about possible abuse or misapplication of euthanasia. When discussing Black and White differences in their attitudes toward euthanasia, it is also important to address the effect of political conservatism on such attitudes because African Americans are usually less conservative compared to White people. Therefore, Black-White differences in attitudes toward the legalization of euthanasia can be attributed to the former being cautious to give others the authority to terminate life, political conservatism, and the religious belief that deciding about life and death only belongs to God (MacDonald 1998).

Johnson, Elbert-Avila, and Tulsky (2005) emphasize the role of spirituality in African Americans’ lives and their culture which leads them, more than other racial groups, to believe that only God has the authority to determine death. This higher spirituality, which makes Black people more anti-euthanasia, is manifested in believing in divine intervention and the possibility of miracles. As Johnson et al. (2005) state, such beliefs help many African Americans cope with their illnesses and refuse to terminate their lives. Carr and Luth (2016) also found that racial disparity in health care is influenced by cultural and religious attitudes. According to them, a part of Black-White differences in euthanasia attitudes is due to Black people’s belief that the time and quality of death can only be decided by God.

Based on the above literature the main assumption of the current study is that religious dimensions are important determinants of individuals’ attitudes toward human-intervened death. Consequently, this research argues that each dimension of religion has an independent effect on attitudes toward capital punishment, abortion, and euthanasia.

HYPOTHESES

Based on the above discussions the main hypotheses of the present research are:
Death Penalty: (H1) higher level of religiosity will lead to lower probability of support for capital punishment, (H2) the effect of religiosity on attitudes toward capital punishment will be moderated by race, (H3) higher level of spirituality will lead to lower probability of support for capital punishment, (H4) the effect of spirituality on attitudes toward capital punishment will be moderated by race, (H5) there is a positive association between afterlife beliefs and probability of support for capital punishment, and (H6) the effect of afterlife beliefs on attitudes toward capital punishment will be moderated by race.

Abortion: (H7) higher level of religiosity will lead to lower probability of support for abortion, (H8) the effect of religiosity on attitudes toward abortion will be moderated by race (H9) higher level of spirituality will lead to lower probability of support for abortion, (H10) the effect of spirituality on attitudes toward abortion will be moderated by race, (H11) there is a positive association between afterlife beliefs and probability of support for abortion, and (H12) the effect of afterlife beliefs on attitudes toward abortion will be moderated by race.

Euthanasia: (H13) higher level of religiosity will lead to lower probability of support for euthanasia, (H14) the effect of religiosity on attitudes toward euthanasia will be moderated by race, (H15) higher level of spirituality will lead to lower probability of support for euthanasia, (H16) the effect of spirituality on attitudes toward euthanasia will be moderated by race, (H17) there is a positive association between afterlife beliefs and probability of support for euthanasia, and (H18) the effect of afterlife beliefs on attitudes toward euthanasia will be moderated by race.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the data, measures, hypotheses, and methods. The first section describes the study’s sample. The second section describes measures that are used for the study’s analysis including the dependent variables, independent variables, and control variables. The last section describes the methods used to test the hypotheses including analytical approach of the study.

DATA

This study uses data from the 2018 wave of the GSS. The GSS is a nationally representative study conducted every two years. This data monitors demographic, attitudinal, and behavioral trends in contemporary U.S. every two years. This study has the most currently available dataset that includes relevant questions on all of the key variables of religious dimensions. This data set also includes variables that measure attitudes toward capital punishment, abortion, and euthanasia. In addition, it has indicators for measuring demographic characteristics such as race, gender, education, and age.

Sample

The GSS survey used a randomly selected sample from a nation-wide research panel. The total number of cases in this sample is 2,348. This dataset provides a nationally representative sample including respondents in households who are 18 years or older.
MEASURES

Dependent Variables

Support for death penalty. Respondents were asked: “Do you favor the death penalty for persons convicted of murder?” Since this variable is nominal dichotomous it was transformed into a dummy variable with opposition to death penalty as the reference category. This variable was measured by 1) Yes and 2) No. It was recoded so that 0 = No and 1 = Yes. The mean for this variable is 0.65 with standard deviation of 0.48.

Support for abortion. There are seven different questions available in the GSS that ask about respondents’ attitudes toward abortion. An index was created that uses an index included all seven questions to measure abortion attitudes. Therefore, the index included seven values in a way that the higher score represents higher support for abortion while the lower score represents lower support. Respondents were asked: “Whether or not you think it should be possible for a pregnant woman to obtain a legal abortion A) If there is a strong chance of serious detect in baby. (B) If she is married and she does not want more children. (C) If the woman’s own health is seriously endangered by the pregnancy. (D) If the family has a very low income and cannot afford any more children. (E) If she became pregnant as a result of rape. (F) If she is not married and does not want to marry the man. (G) If the woman wants it for any reason.” All these variables are measured by 1) Yes and 2.) No. They were recoded so that 0 = No and 1 = Yes.

Support for euthanasia. Respondents were asked: “Do you think a person has the right to end his or her own life if this person has an incurable disease?” Since this variable was nominal dichotomous it was transformed into a dummy variable with support for euthanasia as the
reference category. This variable is measured by 1. Yes and, 2. No. It was recoded so that 0 = No and 1 = Yes.

Independent Variables

Religiosity. Based on the literature, other scholars have used variables such as attending church and self-identifying as a religious person to operationalize religiosity (Stolz 2009). In the current research, religiosity was measured by an index including three different variables: self-assessed religious, religious activity, and attending religious services. Although these indicators of religiosity have different numbers of categories, it is possible to create a factor scale to extract one or more underlying factors. This factor scale represents higher religiosity for respondents who have a higher score. The mean for this variable is -7.27e-09 with standard deviation of 1.

Self-assessed religious involvement was included to account for how religious the respondent felt. This was measured using a variable that asked respondents: “Do you consider yourself a religious person?” This variable was measured by 1) Very religious, 2) Moderately religious, 3) Slightly religious, and 4) Not religious at all. This variable was reverse coded so that the higher number represents higher self-assessed religiousness.

Attending religious services asked respondents: “How often do you attend religious services?” This ordinal variable was measured by nine categories ranging from 1) Never to 9) Once a week.

Religious activity asked respondents: “How often do you take part in the activities and organizations of a church or place of worship other than attending services?” This ordinal variable was measured by 11 categories from 1) less than once a year to 11) several times a day.
**Spirituality.** Emphasizing the spiritual aspect of religion is a new way to explore individuals’ religious beliefs especially because many people tend to identify themselves as spiritual rather than religious (Fuller and Strong 2001). The most important difference between religiosity and spirituality is that the second concept refers to an individual’s personal relationship with God or other supernatural notions while religiosity is more social (Ammerman 2013). Based on this point, this research measured the spiritual aspect of religion by a variable that asked respondents’ self-assessed spirituality. Self-assessed spirituality was measured using an ordinal variable which asked respondents: “To what extent do you consider yourself a spiritual person? This variable is measured by 1) *Very spiritual*, 2) *Moderately spiritual*, 3) *Slightly spiritual*, and 4) *Not spiritual at all*. This variable will be reverse coded so that 1 = 4, 2 = 3, 3 = 2, and 4 = 1.

*Afterlife beliefs* include three questions about the extent to which they believed in afterlife, heaven, and hell. Answers are 1 = *Yes, definitely*, 2 = *Yes, probably*, 3 = *No, probably not*, and 4 = *No, definitely not*. In order to see the association of afterlife beliefs and opposition to euthanasia, this study created an index including all three variables. We reverse coded belief in afterlife and belief in heaven so that a higher score represents higher belief in afterlife and belief in heaven. However, we did not change the measurement of belief in hell because in our index the higher score is supposed to represent a more loving image of God. The reliability coefficient was 0.83, which is a good level of reliability. Thus, we created an index to measure the effect of afterlife beliefs on opposition to euthanasia. The mean for afterlife beliefs was 9.71 (*SD* = 0.97).

**Religious Affiliation.** What connects individuals to religion as a social institution is usually known as religious affiliation. In the present study religious affiliation was a nominal variable including *Protestant*, *Catholic*, *other religions*, and *not religious*. This variable was
transformed into a series of dummy variables, with Protestant as the reference category.

Protestants consist 49 percent of the sample. Catholics are 21 percent of the sample. Seven percent of the sample belongs to other religions. Finally, 23 percent of this study’s sample is identified with no religion.

Control Variables

Gender, education, political orientation, and political party affiliation were used as control variables.

Gender is measured by 1) Male and 2) Female. This variable was recoded so that 0 = Male and 1 = Female. Male was used as the reference category. Fifty-five percent of the sample was consisted of women. Education was an interval/ratio variable including 13 categories to measure respondents’ education level. The higher number indicates higher education. The mean for this variable was 13.73 with standard deviation of 2.97. Political Orientation was measured by an ordinal variable that asks respondents the extent to which they identify themselves as liberal or conservative. In this variable 1) extremely conservative and 7) extremely liberal. In order to measure political party affiliation this study created two dummy variables including Liberal and Conservative. Liberal was used as the focal category. Liberals make up 45 percent of the sample. Finally, political party affiliation was measured by a nominal variable that asked respondents the extent to which they identify themselves with main political parties in the U.S. This variable was measured from 1) strongly Democrat to 7) strongly Republican. In order to measure political party affiliation, this study created two dummy variables including Democrat and Republican. The reason for creating these dummy variables was that usually those who have a Republican affiliation are more associated with conservative values regarding the role of
religion in everyday life (Unnever et al. 2016). This is in contrast with Democrats who usually emphasize liberal principles. *Republican* was used as the focal category. Republicans made up 38 percent of the sample.

**METHODS**

Since the dependent variables of this study were measured differently, this study used multiple analysis techniques. Regarding attitudes toward capital punishment and euthanasia (since the dependent variables are dichotomous consisting of only two categories) logistic regression were used for analyzing data. However, since this study used a factor scale to measure abortion attitudes the appropriate technique will be Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression.

Regression analyses were used to demonstrate the effect of the independent variables and control variables on the dependent variables. Inspection of the correlation matrix indicated that there were no variables with inappropriately high multicollinearity. This shows that there was no serious issue with multicollinearity.

Since this study investigated the effect of different dimensions of religion as well as the moderating effect of race on those dimensions, multiple regression models were used. These models were divided into two main categories. The first category included regression models that analyzed the effect of different dimensions of religion on attitudes toward capital punishment, abortion, and euthanasia. These models demonstrated how each dimension of religion has a different effect on individuals’ attitudes toward legally sanctioned deaths.

The second category included models that depict dimensions of religion as well as the interaction term of race. Through the use of these models, the current study explored how the
effect of each dimension of religion on capital punishment, abortion, and euthanasia were moderated based on respondents’ race. In order to study the moderating effect of race, this study used interaction terms between race and three dimensions of religion. This helped explore how the effect of each dimension on attitudes toward capital punishment, abortion, and euthanasia was moderated by respondents’ race.
CHAPTER IV
RESULTS

This chapter presents the results of the analyses for each of the hypotheses. It presents the findings of the analyses for each dependent variable.

FINDINGS

Death Penalty

Table 1 shows descriptive statistics regarding the death penalty. The results of the Logistic regression analyses can be found in Table 2. Several religious dimensions were found to be significant. Religiosity, one of the religious dimensions, had a significant effect on attitudes toward the death penalty. As Model 2 demonstrates, a one unit increase in religiosity decreases the likelihood of support for the death penalty by 7% (OR = 0.93, p ≤ .01). This finding supports the first hypothesis that higher religiosity decreases support for the death penalty.

According to Model 2, the effect of religiosity on support for the death penalty varies significantly across racial categories. This supports the second hypothesis that the effect of religiosity on support for the death penalty is moderated by race. As demonstrated in Figure 1, for Black respondents, the effect of religiosity on support for the death penalty is higher than White respondents.

Spirituality, the other religion dimension, had a significant effect on support for the death penalty. As Model 2 shows, a one unit increase in spirituality decreased the likelihood of support for the death penalty by 29 percent (OR = 0.71, p ≤ .01). This means that the third
hypothesis is supported as higher spirituality leads to lower support for the death penalty. In addition, the effect of spirituality on support for the death penalty varies significantly across racial categories. This supports the fourth hypothesis that the effect of spirituality on support for the death penalty is moderated by race. Based on Figure 2, the effect of spirituality on support for the death penalty is greatest for Black respondents, followed by other races, and smallest for White respondents.

Regarding afterlife beliefs, this study found that belief in afterlife has significant effect on support for the death penalty. A one unit increase in afterlife beliefs increased the likelihood of support for the death penalty by 6 percent (OR = 1.06, \( P < .05 \)). This supports the fifth hypothesis of the present study about the positive effect of afterlife beliefs on support for the death penalty. However, adding interaction of race did not significantly change the effect of afterlife beliefs on support for the death penalty. This indicates that the sixth hypothesis of this study cannot be supported.

Among the religious affiliation variables, the analysis only found a significant difference between Catholics and Protestants’ attitudes toward the death penalty. As Model 5 shows, Catholics (OR = 0.73, \( p < .05 \)), on average, were less likely than Protestants to support the death penalty. Finally, some control variables had significant effects on attitudes toward the death penalty. Females (OR = 0.78, \( P < .05 \)), on average, were less likely than males to support the death penalty. Liberals (OR = 0.64, \( P < .01 \)), on average, were less likely than conservatives to support the death penalty. Republicans (OR = 1.48, \( P < .001 \)), on average, were more likely than Democrats to support the death penalty.
### Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for All Variables (N = 1,054): Death Penalty

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std.dev</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Death Penalty - Yes</td>
<td>0 - 1</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>0.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religiosity</td>
<td>3-22</td>
<td>-7.27e-09</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spirituality</td>
<td>1 - 4</td>
<td>2.85</td>
<td>0.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afterlife Beliefs</td>
<td>3–12</td>
<td>9.71</td>
<td>0.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protestant</td>
<td>0 – 1</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>0 – 1</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No-Religion</td>
<td>0 – 1</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>0.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Religion</td>
<td>0 – 1</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.22</td>
</tr>
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<td>Female</td>
<td>0 – 1</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republican</td>
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<td>0.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>0 – 1</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
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<td>0.72</td>
<td>0.45</td>
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<td>Black</td>
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<td>0.37</td>
</tr>
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<td>Other Races</td>
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<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.32</td>
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</table>
**Table 2.** Results from Binary Logistic Regression on Support for the Death Penalty

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td><strong>Religious Variables</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religiosity</td>
<td>0.95**</td>
<td>0.93***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religiosity x Black</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religiosity x Other race</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spirituality</td>
<td>0.78**</td>
<td>0.81**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spirituality x Black</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spirituality x Other race</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afterlife Beliefs</td>
<td>1.06*</td>
<td>1.05*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afterlife Beliefs x Black</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afterlife Beliefs x Other race</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Religious Affiliation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>0.79*</td>
<td>0.79*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>0.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Religion</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Demographic Controls</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Female</td>
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<td>0.71*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republican</td>
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<td>1.47***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal</td>
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<td>0.66**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>4.02**</td>
<td>4.19**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
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<td>1.054</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log Likelihood</td>
<td>-646.34</td>
<td>-641.71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

***p ≤ .001, **p ≤ .01, *p ≤ .05
Figure 1. Effect of Religiosity on Support for the Death Penalty across Racial Categories (Logistic Regression Coefficient)
Figure 2. Effect of Spirituality on Support for the death Penalty across Racial Categories

(Logistic Regression Coefficient)
Abortion

Table 3 represents descriptive statistics regarding abortion. Table 4 shows the findings of the OLS regression analysis. Religiosity, one of the religious dimensions, had a significant effect on attitudes toward abortion. A one unit increase in religiosity decreased the likelihood of support for abortion. This finding supports the seventh hypothesis that higher religiosity decreases support for abortion. As can be seen in Model 4, the effect of religiosity on support abortion does not vary across the racial categories. Therefore, the eighth hypothesis cannot be supported as the effect of religiosity on support for abortion is not moderated by respondents’ race.

According to Model 4, spirituality had a significant effect on support for abortion. A one unit increase in spirituality decreased the likelihood of support for abortion. This means that the ninth hypothesis is supported as higher spirituality leads to lower support for abortion. Furthermore, the effect of spirituality on support for abortion, as Model 4 shows, varies significantly across the racial categories. This supports the 10th hypothesis that the effect of spirituality on support for abortion is moderated by race. Based on Figure 3, for Black respondents the effect of spirituality on support for abortion is higher than White respondents.

Regarding afterlife variables, this study found that belief in afterlife did not have any significant effect on support for abortion. Thus, this research’s findings do not support the 11th hypothesis about the effect of afterlife beliefs on supporting abortion. Adding the interaction of race did not make any significant change in the effect of afterlife beliefs on support for abortion. This implies that the 12th hypothesis of this study cannot be supported as race does not moderate the effect of afterlife beliefs on support for abortion.
This study found that among the affiliation variables, the only significant difference was between Catholics and Protestants’ attitudes toward abortion. As Model 5 shows, Catholics were less likely than Protestants to support abortion. Finally, some control variables had significant effect on attitudes toward abortion. Liberals were more likely than conservatives to support abortion. Republicans were less likely than Democrats to support abortion. Finally, higher education was associated with higher support for abortion.
Table 3. Descriptive Statistics for All Variables (N = 1,011) Abortion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
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<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. dev</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<tr>
<td>Religiosity</td>
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<td>-7.27e-09</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spirituality</td>
<td>0 - 4</td>
<td>2.85</td>
<td>0.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afterlife</td>
<td>0 – 4</td>
<td>9.71</td>
<td>0.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protestant</td>
<td>0 – 1</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>0.50</td>
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<td>Catholic</td>
<td>0 – 1</td>
<td>0.21</td>
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<td>0 – 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>0 – 1</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>0.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>0 – 20</td>
<td>13.73</td>
<td>2.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>0 – 1</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>0.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>0 – 1</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Races</td>
<td>0 – 1</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4. Results from OLS Regression Analysis on Support for the Abortion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
<th>Model 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Religiosity</td>
<td>-0.06**</td>
<td>-0.06*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religiosity x Black</td>
<td>-0.10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religiosity x Other Race</td>
<td>-0.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spirituality</td>
<td>-0.04*</td>
<td>-0.06*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spirituality x Black</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.09**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spirituality x Other Race</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afterlife</td>
<td>-0.10</td>
<td>-0.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afterlife x Black</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afterlife x Other Race</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Religious Affiliation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Reference=Protestant)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>-0.05*</td>
<td>-0.06*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Religion</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Religion</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>-0.32</td>
<td>-0.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>0.46***</td>
<td>0.46***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>-0.29**</td>
<td>-0.30**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>0.11***</td>
<td>0.10***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>2.10***</td>
<td>1.89**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
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<td>6.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R2</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

***p ≤.001, **p ≤.01, *p≤.05
Figure 3. Effect of Spirituality on Support for Abortion across Racial Categories (Regression Coefficient)
Euthanasia

Table 5 represents descriptive statistics regarding euthanasia. The results of the Logistic regression analysis can be found in Table 6. Religiosity, one of the religious dimensions, had a significant effect on attitudes toward euthanasia. As Model 6 shows, a one unit increase in religiosity decreased the likelihood of support for euthanasia by 13% (OR = 0.87, p ≤ .001). This finding supports the 13th hypothesis, which mentioned that the higher religiosity decreases support for euthanasia. Also, this study found that the effect of religiosity on support for euthanasia varies across racial categories. According to Figure 4, for Black respondents the effect of religiosity on support for euthanasia is lower than White respondents. This supports the 14th hypothesis that race moderates the effect of religiosity on support for euthanasia.

Spirituality, other religious dimensions, had a significant effect on attitudes toward euthanasia. Based on Model 6, a one unit increase in spirituality increased the likelihood of support for euthanasia by 7 percent (OR = 0.93, p ≤ .05). This finding supports the 15th hypothesis, which mentioned that the higher spirituality increases support for euthanasia. Also, this study found that the effect of spirituality on support for euthanasia varies across racial categories. As demonstrated in Figure 5, the effect of spirituality on support for euthanasia is greatest for other races, followed by Black respondents, and smallest for White respondents. This supports the 16th hypothesis that race moderates the effect of religiosity on support for euthanasia.

Afterlife beliefs did not have any significant effects on support for euthanasia. Also, as Model 6 shows, race does not moderate the effect of afterlife beliefs on support for euthanasia.
These findings reject the 17th and the 18th hypotheses as they show there is no significant relationship between afterlife beliefs and support for euthanasia even after adding interaction of race.

Among the religious affiliation variables, the analysis only found a significant difference between No-Religions’ vs. Protestants’ attitudes toward euthanasia. As Model 5 shows, those respondents who are not identified with any religion were, on average, more likely than Protestants to support euthanasia (OR = 0.57, P < .05). Finally, some control variables had significant effects on attitudes toward euthanasia. Liberals, on average, were more likely than conservatives to support euthanasia (OR = 0.67, P < .05). A one unit increase in education decreased opposition to euthanasia by 13 percent (OR = 0.87, P < .001).
Table 5. Descriptive Statistics for All Variables (N = 1,011): Euthanasia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std.dev</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Euthanasia</td>
<td>0 - 1</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>0.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religiosity</td>
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<td>-7.27e-9</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spirituality</td>
<td>0 - 4</td>
<td>2.85</td>
<td>0.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afterlife</td>
<td>3 - 12</td>
<td>9.71</td>
<td>0.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protestant</td>
<td>0 - 1</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>0 - 1</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No-Religion</td>
<td>0 - 1</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>0.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Religion</td>
<td>0 - 1</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>0 - 1</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>0 - 1</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>0.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>0 - 1</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>0.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>0 - 20</td>
<td>13.73</td>
<td>2.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>0 - 1</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>0.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>0 - 1</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Races</td>
<td>0 - 1</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6. Results from Logistic Regression Analysis on Support for the Euthanasia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Model 5</th>
<th>Model 6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Religiosity</td>
<td>0.87***</td>
<td>0.87***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religiosity x Black</td>
<td>0.95**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religiosity x Other Race</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spirituality</td>
<td>0.97***</td>
<td>0.93*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spirituality x Black</td>
<td>0.89*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spirituality x Other Race</td>
<td>0.86*</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Afterlife</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>0.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afterlife x Black</td>
<td>0.23</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afterlife x Other Race</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Religious Affiliation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Reference=Protestant)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>1.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Religion</td>
<td>0.59*</td>
<td>0.57*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Religion</td>
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<td>0.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>1.02</td>
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<tr>
<td>Liberal</td>
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<td>1.70*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>0.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>1.87***</td>
<td>1.87***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.36*</td>
<td>0.28**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>979</td>
<td>979</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log Likelihood</td>
<td>-519.22</td>
<td>-533.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psuedo R2</td>
<td>0.162</td>
<td>0.165</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

***p ≤ .001, **p ≤ .01, *p ≤ .05
Figure 4. Effect of Religiosity on Support for Euthanasia across Racial Categories (Logistic Regression Coefficient)
Figure 5. Effect of Spirituality on Support for Euthanasia across Racial Categories (Logistic Regression Coefficient)
CHAPTER V
CONCLUSIONS

This chapter describes the conclusions of this study by summarizing its hypotheses and its main findings. It also discusses the implications of the study’s findings, the limitations of the study, and potential ideas for the future studies.

Using the data from the 2018 wave of the GSS, the present research found many of its hypotheses supported. Regarding the death penalty, this study found that religiosity and spirituality decrease but afterlife beliefs increase the likelihood of support for the death penalty. Also, the effect of religiosity and spirituality on support for the death penalty was significantly moderated by race. These findings support the first, second, third, fourth, and fifth hypotheses. Considering abortion, the findings of this research indicated that religiosity and spirituality decrease the likelihood of support for abortion. Also, the effect of spirituality on support for abortion was significantly moderated by race. These results support seventh, ninth, and tenth hypotheses. Finally, this study found that religiosity and spirituality decrease the likelihood of support for euthanasia. Also, the effect of religiosity and spirituality on support for euthanasia was significantly moderated by race. These findings support 13th, 14th, 15th, and 16th hypotheses.

Death is one of the most challenging realities that people have to encounter. Following their different experiences, beliefs, and values individuals form a specific opinion toward the meaning of death. This is what makes death attitudes controversial as people with different backgrounds and views have different mindsets toward death. Unnatural death is a more
complicated type of death especially because of human conscious intervention in the death process. This study focused on three distinct cases of unnatural death: capital punishment, abortion, and euthanasia.

While numerous factors may affect people’s attitudes toward the morality of taking a human’s life at the hands of another human being, most people follow their emotions, rather than rational reasoning, when they think about a case of unnatural death. One important emotional factor that affects many aspects of individuals’ view toward the meaning of death is religion.

The focus of this study was on understanding the effect of religious beliefs on individuals’ attitudes toward capital punishment, abortion, and euthanasia. The inclusion of various religious dimensions allowed this study to separate the impact of each dimension to account for the complex and, at times, contradictory effects of religion on attitudes toward death.

In order to operationalize religion, this research divided it into four major dimensions: religiosity, spirituality, afterlife beliefs, and religious affiliation. While religiosity focuses on measuring collective aspects of religious identity, like church attendance and engaging in religious activities, spirituality is a more recent form of religious belief which refers to a personal relationship between individual and God. The importance of spirituality is especially due to the growing number of people who identify as spiritual but not religious (Fuller and Strong 2001).

Afterlife beliefs are another important dimension of religion although this dimension of religiosity is not fully addressed in the literature. This research asserts that such beliefs are important factors in determining people’s views toward death. Afterlife beliefs were measured by variables that asked respondents about their attitudes toward afterlife, heaven, and hell. Finally, religious affiliation refers to a religious organization to which an individual belongs.
Following teachings of a religious affiliation and its practices is another important factor that may influence one’s view toward the meaning of death.

Race affects people’s worldview and their opinions toward different subjects. As discussed above, individuals’ understanding of their world cannot be separated from their racial identity. The argument of the present research is that racial relations and historical experience of discrimination create emotional states in individuals, which are known as “racialized emotions.” These racialized emotions are determining factors in shaping individuals’ perspectives toward different subjects including the meaning of death. This is why the present research considered racialized emotions as a factor that may moderate the effect of religious beliefs on individuals’ attitudes toward the death penalty, abortion, and euthanasia.

The death penalty as a method of punishment has been used for a long time in the U.S. criminal justice system. Despite all opposition and challenges by human rights activists, a majority of Americans still support this punishment (Jones 2016). Trying to explain this support, emotional reasons (rather than rational ones) are the most important determinants of people’s attitudes (Ellsworth and Gross 1994; Zeisel and Gallup 1989). The current research underlines two important sources of emotional reasoning in the American society: religious beliefs and racialized emotions.

Having a loving or judgmental image of God is an important factor in shaping people’s feelings toward capital punishment as it shapes their redemptive vs. punitive perspective toward crime. Also, as literature shows, many people relay the teachings of their religious organization in their opinion about capital punishment (Evans and Adams 2003). In addition, using the concept of racialized emotions, this research demonstrated that race is another source that may
affect the way religious beliefs influence support for the death penalty. This point becomes more relevant when the discriminatory use of capital punishment against Black people by the criminal justice system is taken into consideration (Sarat 2006). African Americans are more aware of the discriminatory use of the death penalty against themselves, which is one of the reasons they are significantly less likely than White people to be supportive of this punishment. According to Cone (2011: 223), “The death penalty is primarily reserved, though not exclusively, for people of color, and White supremacy shows no signs of changing it.” That is why Cone believes that using capital punishment is the most racist act of the criminal justice system in America.

Religiosity is one of the important dimensions of religion and refers to practice, religious activities, and self-identification as a religious person. This study operationalized religiosity using three variables including self-assessed religious, attending religious services, and religious activities. As hypothesized, the results of Logistic regression analysis demonstrated that higher religiosity is associated with lower support of the death penalty. This finding implies that more religious people are influenced by the redemptive messages of their religion especially when it is considered that many religious organizations have changed their position toward capital punishment and no longer support its use.

Another dimension of religion that has become important, especially during recent decades, is spirituality. The important difference between spirituality and religiosity is that spirituality refers to a personal relationship between individual and God. In such a personal relationship an individual is more likely to perceive God as a loving being who forgives sinners and supports them, instead of punishing them. The present research argued that more spiritual
individuals are less likely to support the death penalty. This hypothesis was supported as findings demonstrated negative impact of spirituality on support for the death penalty.

Afterlife beliefs (measured by an index including belief in afterlife, belief in heaven, and belief in hell) were another dimension of religion used by this study. While belief in heaven represents a loving image of God, belief in hell refers to a judgmental God who punishes wrongdoers by a system of divine punishment. Afterlife beliefs had a significant effect on support for the death penalty by increasing the likelihood of support for the death penalty.

Among categories of religious affiliation only Catholics had a significant difference with Protestants regarding their attitudes toward the death penalty. This finding is consistent with findings of other studies about denominational differences in capital punishment attitudes (Mathias 2013).

Abortion is one of the most controversial subjects for the U.S. public opinion to the extent that some scholars have suggested that abortion has divided the political and social sphere into two major camps: pro-life vs. pro-choice (Pinney 2017). This implies that abortion is a polarized issue within the U.S. society. Either people identify themselves as pro-life or pro-choice. This choice affects their political preferences as well as their attitudes toward the criminal justice system (Emerson 1996). It is important to note that, like the death penalty, individuals follow emotional feelings more than rational arguments when deciding about whether abortion is right or wrong (Unnever et al. 2016). This is why any exploration of abortion attitudes requires considering emotional factors, like religion and race, that shape people’s mindsets toward this phenomenon.
What makes religion a salient determinant of abortion attitudes is the concept of “sanctity of life,” which is emphasized by most religions practiced in the U.S. (Maguire 2016). However, even though all religions accept the idea of the sanctity of human life, there are differences among them regarding the role of God and humans in this world. For instance, when believing that everything in the world happens due to God’s foreordination there will be no room for humans’ decision about whether to give life to an unborn child. God is supposed to be the only one who can decide about giving or not giving life to the unborn. Therefore, the present study argued that it is necessary to consider different dimensions of religion in order to see how each of them influences abortion attitudes.

As mentioned before, in discussing abortion, race is another important factor that should be taken into account. As other studies have found, there are significant differences between Black people and White people with regard to their opinions about abortion (Strickler and Danigelis 2002; Wilcox 1992). The present study’s argument was that racialized emotions can moderate the effect of religious beliefs on abortion attitudes. With regard to the significant differences between Black churches and White churches in their religious teachings and practices (Barnes 2014), the present study hypothesized that race could moderate the effect of religion on abortion attitudes.

One important finding was about the increasing effect of religiosity on opposition to abortion. As this study’s results show, higher religiosity leads to higher opposition to abortion. In addition, when people identify themselves as spiritual, rather than religious, they become less opposed to abortion. This finding implies that having a loving image of God who does not judge and intervene in worldly matters is associated with more positive attitudes toward abortion.
With regard to the effect of afterlife beliefs on abortion attitudes this study found that there is no significant relationship between respondents’ afterlife beliefs and their attitudes toward abortion even after adding the interaction of race. It was found that religious affiliation has a significant effect on individuals’ attitudes toward abortion. Consistent with other scholars’ findings, Catholics were more opposed to abortion than Protestants. The reason for such a difference can be attributed to different teachings and beliefs that these religious traditions have about the meaning of life and death as well as the role of God in arranging worldly affairs.

The third case of human intervened death that was investigated by this research was euthanasia. Historically, euthanasia has been a challenging topic among societies. Technological achievements in medical sciences have made such debate more complicated due to providing new possibilities to prolong patients’ lives. Today, euthanasia has caused important questions regarding the role of the health care system as well as the criminal justice system in providing an easy death process. Whether the health care system can let patients and their families decide about hastening death is a matter of serious ethical debate. Also, any effort to institutionalize physician-assisted suicide requires its legalization in the criminal justice system.

In any discussion of euthanasia, it is necessary to consider different factors such as tradition, religion, ethical principles, and state laws (Nuland 2000). There are a variety of views toward the euthanasia among philosophers, doctors, theologians, and general public. In other words, euthanasia is an intriguing ethical, medical, and legal concern. As Biggar (2015) argues, since science and ethical issues are connected, it is not possible to have a secular medicine that ignores metaphysical concerns. Most religions in the world condemn any intentional effort to
terminate human life. However, what distinguishes euthanasia from a simple case of suicide is that in euthanasia life termination benefits patients.

The findings indicate that religion’s position toward euthanasia is affected by two opposite concepts: sanctity of human life and human dignity. While the first concept states that life is a gift from God and must be protected under any circumstances, the second one does not accept useless suffering and endless pain when there is no hope for an effective treatment. Whether individuals emphasize and identify with a certain religious concept, they may have different attitudes toward euthanasia. Based on this point, this research argued that many people follow teachings of their religion in their opinions about euthanasia. Furthermore, having a loving or judgmental image of God is an important factor in shaping people’s feelings toward euthanasia.

Based on the above discussion, the argument of the present study is that religious beliefs are one of the most important determinants of attitudes toward euthanasia and the effect of those beliefs may be moderated by race. Results of Logistic regression analysis demonstrated support for many of hypotheses about the effect of religious beliefs on attitudes toward euthanasia as well as the moderating effect of race on religious beliefs. As hypothesized, higher religiosity was associated with higher opposition to euthanasia. This finding implies that more religious people are influenced by those messages that emphasize the sanctity of life. This point is salient especially when it is considered that in traditional Christian ethos, euthanasia is a kind of evil that must be resisted and any legalization of it breaks such protection (Jans 2002; Stack and Kposowa 2011).
The present study also argues that the more spiritual people are, the less likely they are to oppose euthanasia. This hypothesis was supported by the results as there was a significant relationship between spirituality and opposition to euthanasia.

Afterlife beliefs was the third dimension of religion that was hypothesized to affect attitudes toward euthanasia. Belief in afterlife, heaven, and hell were three variables used to test the effect of afterlife beliefs on euthanasia attitudes. While belief in hell refers to a judgmental God who has a system of divine punishment, belief in heaven represents a loving image of God who helps individuals in all difficulties. It was found that afterlife beliefs did not have any significant effect on respondents’ attitudes toward euthanasia.

It was found that religious affiliation has a significant effect on individuals’ attitudes toward euthanasia. Respondents who were not identified with any religions were more likely than Protestants (reference category) to support euthanasia.

IMPLICATIONS

The present study has several implications. First, arguing that peoples’ attitudes toward unnatural deaths follow emotional rather than rational reasons, the present study found that support or opposition toward three discussed cases of unnatural death may depend on individuals’ religious beliefs as well as their racialized emotions. One important contribution of this study was utilizing separate dimensions of religion in order to see how they affect people’s attitudes in different ways. This study used numerous measures of religion to explore how they may influence attitudes toward the death penalty, abortion, and euthanasia. Also, using the concept of racialized emotions, this research focused on different effects of religious beliefs on unnatural death based on individuals’ race.
Regarding the death penalty, this research found that respondents are influenced by their religiosity, spirituality, and belief in hell in their attitudes. However, these dimensions do not affect individuals’ attitudes in the same direction. While some dimensions have a positive effect on support for the death penalty others have a negative effect. This implies that religion has different messages (especially with regard to punitive vs. redemptive concepts) which cause conflicting effects on attitudes toward the death penalty. When adding the moderating effect of race the strength of some variables changed either in a decreasing or increasing direction. Also, some other religious variables lose their significant effect when another racial group adopts them.

This study’s findings about the effect of religious forces on abortion were also interesting. More than punitive vs. redemptive dichotomy, religion’s influence on abortion attitudes was based on the concept of sanctity of life. This explains why religiosity had a strong effect on abortion attitudes while afterlife beliefs had a little impact. Spirituality as a more personal notion could not make any significant change in abortion attitudes. Race also made some changes in the effect of religion on abortion attitudes, which can be attributed to racial differences in religious organizations and different images of God among members of racial groups.

Euthanasia was the third case of human intervened death that this study discussed. The important difference between euthanasia and two other cases of unnatural death is that it refers to humans’ decision about their own, or their family members’, lives. Such differences can illuminate individuals’ mindsets toward the role of human beings in making decisions about their life or death. Findings of the present research demonstrated that it is very important to separate
dimensions of religion to address the complex nature of religious concepts in regard to assessing individuals’ views toward comfort death. It was found that spirituality is the strongest dimension of religion that impacts euthanasia attitudes. The implication of this finding is that one’s mindset toward life termination has a personal nature. While people are social beings they experience death alone, which means that collective and organizational aspects of religion may have less of an effect on their attitudes. Belief about afterlife and heaven also affect euthanasia attitudes, which can be interpreted by referring to human fear of annihilation. In other words, their tendency to have a permanent life in peace and joy motivate them to consider afterlife concepts in their worldly actions. In addition, racial differences make a significant change in the effect of religious factors on euthanasia attitudes, which can mostly be explained by African Americans’ different religious teachings as well as historical role of Black churches within the U.S. society.

LIMITATIONS AND ADDITIONAL RESEARCH

This study had some limitations that must be acknowledged. The first limitation is related to the secondary nature of its dataset. In using secondary data, there are limitations beyond the author’s control in regard to the precision of measurements for the dependent and independent variables. Specifically, the dependent variables for capital punishment and euthanasia are nominal and dichotomous. While this may provide a simple measure of attitudes toward death penalty and euthanasia, having them measured by more sophisticated instruments can yield more explanatory results. In regards to the death penalty, using different scenarios about death sentence and asking respondents’ attitudes toward each may provide a more exact understanding of public opinion toward this form of punishment. This point is more clearly illustrated in the case of euthanasia. While a simple yes/no makes for a straightforward study,
vignettes or scenarios would probably have served as a better measure. This is due to the fact that it is likely that there are some gray areas involved in the type of death, and contextual factors that affect support for euthanasia. Therefore, one option for future research is to consider more complicated measures for investigating individuals’ attitudes toward capital punishment, abortion, and euthanasia.

Another limitation of the present study is that in exploring racial differences in attitudes toward capital punishment, abortion, and euthanasia, there is no separate variable that considers Latinos. Latinos are an important group whose religious beliefs are significantly different from both Black people and White people. A majority of Latinos identify as Catholic, which was shown to have different opinions toward all three cases of human intervened death compared to Protestants and other religions. Also, even though Latino is categorized as an ethnicity, rather than a race, considering the fact that Latinos experience or perceive discrimination in the American criminal justice system can make significant differences in their attitudes toward the death penalty, abortion, and euthanasia. Thus, another possible avenue for future research should be comparing White people, Black people, and Latinos regarding the effect of their religious views on their attitudes toward human intervened death.

Third, in discussing the effect of religious beliefs on attitudes toward cases of unnatural death, it is important to address the differences between monotheistic and non-monotheistic religions. While Abrahamic religions emphasize the existence of afterlife and continuing life in another world, some Eastern religions do not have a divine system in which God judges individuals’ practices. Such difference leads to totally different understandings of death, its meaning, and what happens after it. Although the present study considered “Other Religions” as
an independent variable, due to sample characteristics it focused mostly on Christianity at the expense of other religious traditions. Focusing on interreligious differences in attitudes toward capital punishment, abortion, and euthanasia is an important topic for future investigations.

Finally, another possibility for future studies is to consider the effect of religious forces on attitudes toward suicide. Although the present research focused on three cases of unnatural death it did not investigate suicide. The reason for this was to restrict the study cases that are challenging for the criminal justice system and health care system. However, suicide is an important social issue that needs special concentration. Therefore, exploring the effect of religious factors on suicide can be an important topic for future studies.

Despite these limitations, this study has several strengths. First, the results of this study provide a deeper understanding of how different messages of religion lead to opposite attitudes towards capital punishment, abortion, and euthanasia. Focusing on different dimensions of religion as independent factors, is an important contribution of this study. It can be argued that this study serves as one of the first steps toward decoupling the various aspects of religious beliefs and provides a more nuanced explanation of how religious forces lead to different attitudes toward different cases of human-intervened death.

Also, demonstrating the ways in which the four dimensions of religion are moderated by race was another important contribution of this study. It was shown that although some aspects of religion had independent effects on attitudes toward the death penalty, abortion, and euthanasia, the effect of some other aspects were significantly changed when Black was added as an interaction variable. This finding implies that even though African Americans’ opinions
toward the death penalty, abortion, and euthanasia are influenced by their religious beliefs, those attitudes may also be related to their racialized emotions, independent of other factors.

Unlike most studies about abortion and euthanasia (which concentrate on these subjects as medical or ethical topics) the current study investigated these phenomena from a sociological perspective. Using a sociological standpoint in explaining these subjects can shed light on different aspects of these phenomena and provide a more comprehensive understanding of them.

Finally, considering the effect of religion and race on shaping public opinion toward capital punishment, abortion, and euthanasia may have policy implications about legalizing and regulating them. All three cases are extremely complicated and challenging subjects, which make any decision for their legalization difficult. The complexity of these issues highlights the need for careful consideration of any proposed legal reforms. Ethical and religious activists and “moral entrepreneurs” have put forward arguments both in favor of, and against legalization of capital punishment, abortion, and euthanasia, which affect public opinion and policy-making toward each case. Therefore, with regard to the fact that religion and race both affect individuals’ mindsets the present study can help healthcare and criminal justice policy-makers view these topics from a sociological point of view and have a better understanding of how regulate and encounter with them.
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