

# Religion, Politics, and Public Funding for Abortion

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*An abundance of research examines Americans' attitudes toward abortion legality and morality with particular attention to polarization around this issue and the influence of social movements, religious organizations, the media, and political leaders. There is a relative dearth, however, of research focusing on attitudes toward the public funding of abortion services. Using three national, random samples of American adults, we address this gap in the literature. We find that the oft-cited "bipartisan consensus" around opposition to public funding of abortion is a myth. In fact, there is more bipartisan consensus around abortion legality than abortion funding, across religious traditions. As national debates about abortion funding intensify, these findings underscore the importance of future surveys consistently measuring Americans' attitudes toward public funding of abortion, above and beyond abortion legality or morality.*

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There is no lack of research concerning Americans' attitudes about abortion, particularly how religion, race, and partisanship shape attitudes toward the morality and legality of abortion (Bruce 2020a, 2020b; Munson 2018). We also know a great deal about the role that abortion debates play in the culture wars and the rise in partisan polarization in the United States (Ginsburg 1998; Jaenicke 2002; Killian and Wilcox 2008; Lewis 2018; Luker 1984; Munson 2018). Finally, we know much about how religious organizations, social movements, the media, and political leaders compete to frame the abortion issue, over time and cross-nationally (Dillon 1996; Ferree et al. 2002; Munson 2008; Rohlinger 2002). Yet much of the public debate about abortion in the United States for the past several decades has concerned a more specific, and curiously understudied, matter: whether public funds (aka "tax dollars") should be used to directly pay for or indirectly subsidize abortion services (Jaenicke 2002; Tribe 1985; Ziegler 2017). Given the amount of political oxygen that is spent on this issue—whether in the form of debates about the Hyde Amendment, the Mexico City policy (called the "global gag rule" by its opponents), or whether to fund Planned Parenthood—it is surprising that so little scholarly attention is paid to the discourse of "taxpayer funding for abortion" or public attitudes about abortion funding.

This gap in scholarly knowledge may be due to the fact that the question of whether federal funds could be used to pay for abortion was largely settled for decades, due to abortion funding

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bans like the Hyde Amendment that have been framed as the product of a long-standing “bipartisan consensus against taxpayer funding for abortion.”<sup>1</sup> Yet it is no longer clear that a bipartisan consensus exists, as evidenced most recently by President Joseph R. Biden’s reconsideration of his support for Hyde in 2019. This shift—by the country’s second Catholic president and longtime supporter of *both* abortion rights and abortion funding restrictions—has reignited public debates about this issue.

As observers clamor to predict the fate of abortion funding bans like Hyde, there is surprisingly little scholarly analysis of the public’s views toward this issue. Yet we cannot assume that views toward public funding of abortion will perfectly mirror views about abortion morality or legality, given long-standing support for abortion funding restrictions among some leaders who also support legalized abortion (Green 2019; Robert et al. 2019). Moreover, like Biden’s own position, the Democratic Party and the national debate about abortion have evolved significantly since Hyde was first passed in the 1970s, yet talk of a long-standing bipartisan consensus ignores these changes (Green 2019). Finally, the relatively technical debates about abortion funding center partisan elites rather than members of the public (Jaenicke 2002), and we know that Americans’ views on abortion are much more complex than those of partisan elites (Bruce 2020b). Therefore, it is time to look more closely at public opinion on this issue. This research note addresses this lacuna by first providing a brief history of debates about public funding of abortion. It then provides an analysis of recent survey data to offer insight into public attitudes on this issue. Finally, it outlines open questions that remain to encourage additional research.

### **PUBLIC FUNDING FOR ABORTION: A BRIEF HISTORY**

Following the Supreme Court’s 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision that legalized abortion nationwide, debates flared concerning whether public funds (aka “tax dollars”) should be used to directly pay for or indirectly subsidize abortion services (Tribe 1985; Ziegler 2017). On one side of this debate are those who argue that if abortion is legal, then access to it—like access to other healthcare services—should not depend upon a woman’s income level. Those who take this position generally support coverage of abortion services by publicly funded health insurance plans (like Medicaid) and public support for organizations that provide access to healthcare services, including abortion, for low-income women (like Planned Parenthood). On the other side of this debate are a mix of people who both support and oppose legalized abortion, but find consensus in the position that just because abortion is legal does not mean it is appropriate for the state to endorse it with public dollars, or to require taxpayers who conscientiously oppose abortion to pay for it with their tax dollars.

Since 1980, this latter group has been successful in preventing most federal tax dollars from being used directly or indirectly to fund abortion services (Conover 2015). Their first success came shortly after the *Roe* decision, when lawmakers coalesced around a proposal to prohibit the funding of abortion through Medicaid. In 1974, approximately one-third of all abortions—250,000 to 300,000 each year, at a cost of 45–55 million dollars annually—were funded by Medicaid (Green 2019). The Hyde Amendment, as it came to be called, was first passed in 1976 and went into effect in 1980. It has been reenacted—with slight modifications—every year since.

<sup>1</sup>This framing is central to recent efforts to “save” the Hyde Amendment. Examples can be found in a February 2021 letter from the Senate Pro-Life Caucus (<https://www.rubio.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/press-releases?ID=A42A46BD-1762-40CE-A907-E29F2DF8BDFD>); a January 2021 letter signed by 200 House Republicans (<https://www.foxnews.com/politics/200-house-republicans-sign-letter-to-protect-hyde-amendment>); and a United States Conference of Catholic Bishops factsheet, “Reality Check: The Extreme Campaign Against the Hyde Amendment” (<https://www.usccb.org/resources/reality-check-extreme-campaign-against-hyde-amendment-0>).

Meanwhile, “Hyde-like restrictions” have also “restrict[ed] abortion coverage or services for other groups of women who obtain their health insurance or health care from the federal government,” including women in the military, Peace Corps, and federal prisons, as well as federal employees, Native Americans and many Washington, DC residents (Starrs 2016). And in 2010, following debates about whether the Affordable Care Act would allow public funds to be used to subsidize private health insurance plans that offered abortion coverage, President Barack Obama signed an Executive Order affirming that it would not, and that it “maintains current Hyde Amendment restrictions governing abortion policy and extends those restrictions to the newly created health insurance exchanges” (Rovner 2018).

The Hyde Amendment has stood virtually unchallenged for 40 years. Its proponents interpret its repeated passage as evidence of a “bipartisan consensus,” but it is no longer clear this consensus exists. In 2016, the Democratic Party platform explicitly called for the repeal of the Hyde Amendment for the first time, and there are declining numbers of pro-life Democrats (Murdock 2020). Moreover, continued support for the Hyde Amendment is inconsistent with Democrats’ other positions on public funding of abortion—they have been united against calls to “defund Planned Parenthood,” Biden received Planned Parenthood’s endorsement during his campaign (McCammon 2020), and Biden reversed the Mexico City Policy/global gag rule at the start of his presidential term (Sharma et al. 2021). These shifts among Democratic elites raise the question of whether a “bipartisan consensus” around Hyde still exists, particularly among the general public.

## DATA AND METHODS

We draw on three sources of recent data to explore Americans’ attitudes toward abortion funding. The first is from PRRI’s (Public Religion Research Institute) Abortion and the 2018 Election survey. The polling firm SSRS collected the data using bilingual random-digit dial telephone interviews between August 22 and September 2, 2018. The national, random sample survey was designed to represent the adult U.S. population from all 50 states. The final sample size was 1856 and the following analyses use the sample weights provided by PRRI.<sup>2</sup>

The second data source is the Cooperative Election Study (CES), administered in November 2020 by a team of researchers at Harvard University using the YouGov online platform. The total sample size of the 2020 CES was 61,000 respondents. The team behind the CES calculated survey weights to align the sample with that of the general population on several demographic dimensions including race, gender, and education.<sup>3</sup>

The third data source is the 2020 Religion and C19 Survey collected in March 23 to March 27, 2020 (see Djupe and Burge 2021; Smothers, Burge, and Djupe 2020 for more information on this data source). This sample was collected using a nonprobability Qualtrics Panel. Through a quota system this Qualtrics panel closely aligns with Census distributions of the United States on age, gender, and region. The final sample size for the 2020 Religion and C19 Survey was 3100.

Although questions regarding the legality of abortion are commonly included in large, national surveys, there is a relative dearth of reliable measures examining Americans’ beliefs about public *funding* of abortion. Likewise, many national polls and surveys fail to include quality measures of religion. The data sources used in the following analyses avoid these shortcomings and are well-positioned to provide a glimpse of where the American public stands regarding abortion funding.

<sup>2</sup>For more information on this data source, find the full report, survey methodology, and topline questionnaire at: <https://www.prrri.org/research/abortion-reproductive-health-midterms-trump-kavanaugh/>

<sup>3</sup>For more information on this data source, see: <https://cces.gov.harvard.edu/>

## Dependent Variables

We examine two questions each from the PRRI and CES surveys, and one question from the 2020 Religion and C19 survey. First, the PRRI study asked respondents, “Do you think abortion should be legal in all cases, legal in most cases, illegal in most cases, or illegal in all cases?” Possible response options included “Legal in all cases,” “Legal in most cases,” “Illegal in most cases,” “Illegal in all cases,” “Do not know/Refused.” We coded responses such that 1 = “Illegal in most cases” and “Illegal in all cases.”<sup>4</sup> The second question we used asked, “In your view, should government health insurance programs for low-income women, like Medicaid, cover abortion, or not?” with possible response options “Yes,” “No,” and “Do not know/Refused.” In our analyses 1 = “No.” We code “Do not know/Refused” responses as missing for all of these measures.

CES asked respondents a series of questions, “On the topic of abortion, do you support or oppose each of the following proposals?” Of these, we focus on the following two: “Permit abortion only in case of rape, incest, or when the woman’s life is in danger,” and “Prohibit the expenditure of funds authorized or appropriated by federal law for any abortion.” We coded responses such that 1 = “Favor” and “Oppose” was coded as 0. All those who did not answer the question or answered “do not know” were omitted from the analysis.

From the 2020 Religion and C19 survey, we use one measure that asks, “A Democratic President will force you to pay for abortions,” with possible response options of “Strongly agree,” “Agree,” “Neither agree nor disagree,” “Disagree,” or “Strongly disagree.” We recode responses such that 1 = “Strongly agree” and “Agree.” The wording of this measure intentionally reflects the right’s rhetoric surrounding this issue, which frames public funding of abortion as akin to forcing individuals (primarily conservative Christians) to pay for abortions.

## Independent Variables

The independent variables we focus on are political party and religious tradition. In the PRRI survey, respondents were asked if they identified as a “Republican,” “Democrat,” “Independent,” or “Other.” The CES and 2020 Religion and C19 survey offered a range of seven options ranging from “strong Democrat” to “strong Republican” with the middle option being “independent”; these were collapsed into “Republican,” “Democrat,” and “Independent.”

For religious tradition, we created the following categories using the PRRI and CES survey: Born-again Protestant, Other Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, Other religion, No affiliation. For the 2020 Religion and C19 survey, we constructed eight separate religious traditions categories: Evangelical Protestant, Black Protestant, Mainline Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, Other tradition, Unclassified, and No affiliation.

## FINDINGS: ATTITUDES TOWARD PUBLIC FUNDING OF ABORTION

In Table 1, we display the results of the three questions related to public funding of abortion, including breakdowns by political party, religious tradition, and various cross-sections of political party and religious tradition. The PRRI and CES measures both gauge support for abortion funding restrictions akin to those enshrined in the Hyde Amendment: that government health insurance programs for low-income women should not cover abortion, and a prohibition on the

<sup>4</sup>Americans’ attitudes toward abortion are more complex than binary labels suggest, with people on both “sides” recognizing limits and exceptions (Bruce 2020b; Munson 2018). So does the Hyde Amendment, which has since the early 1990s allowed federal funds to pay for abortion services in the cases of rape, incest, and when the life of the mother is in danger. To reflect this range of attitudes on each side of this issue, we combine response options into “Legal in all/most cases” and “Illegal in all/most cases.”

Table 1: Attitudes toward public funding of abortion among American adults by political party and religious tradition (percentages shown)

	PRRI Government Health Care Programs for Low-Income Women Should NOT Cover Abortion	CES Prohibit the Expenditure of Funds Authorized or Appropriated by Federal Law for any Abortion	2020 Religion and C19 A Democratic President Will Force You to Pay for Abortions
Full sample	48.9	46.8	28.3
Republican	75.9 <sup>†</sup>	76.9 <sup>†</sup>	47.6 <sup>†</sup>
Independent	47.8 <sup>†</sup>	45.2 <sup>†</sup>	17.6
Democrat	29.2	21.1	17.1
Born-again Protestant	66.7 <sup>‡</sup>	69.9 <sup>‡</sup>	—
Other Protestant	43.3 <sup>‡</sup>	44.7 <sup>‡</sup>	—
Catholic	53.6	51.3	—
Jewish	16.1 <sup>‡</sup>	25.9 <sup>‡</sup>	—
Other religion	43.3	42.6 <sup>‡</sup>	—
No affiliation	35.2 <sup>‡</sup>	30.4 <sup>‡</sup>	—
Evangelical Protestant	—	—	41.2 <sup>‡</sup>
Black Protestant	—	—	21.0 <sup>‡</sup>
Mainline Protestant	—	—	22.1 <sup>‡</sup>
Catholic	—	—	32.9
Jewish	—	—	29.9
Other religion	—	—	28.7
Unclassified	—	—	32.7
No affiliation	—	—	15.2 <sup>‡</sup>
Born-again/Evangelical Republicans	90.0 <sup>††</sup>	84.1 <sup>††</sup>	54.6 <sup>††</sup>
Born-again/Evangelical Independents	59.2 <sup>††</sup>	61.4 <sup>††</sup>	22.9
Born-again/Evangelical Democrats	40.9	38.9	23.4
Catholic Republicans	72.1 <sup>‡‡</sup>	74.9 <sup>‡‡</sup>	46.7 <sup>‡‡</sup>
Catholic Independents	53.5	49.3 <sup>‡‡</sup>	22.2
Catholic Democrats	42.1	29.1	24.9
Other/Mainline Protestant Republicans	62.5 <sup>*</sup>	72.9 <sup>‡‡</sup>	33.1 <sup>*</sup>
Other/Mainline Protestant Independents	49.3 <sup>*</sup>	49.4 <sup>‡‡</sup>	18.8
Other/Mainline Protestant Democrats	24.6	17.9	14.1
No affiliation Republicans	62.7 <sup>**</sup>	64.7 <sup>**</sup>	39.0 <sup>**</sup>
No affiliation Independents	38.0 <sup>**</sup>	35.4 <sup>**</sup>	11.8
No affiliation Democrats	17.7	13.5	7.5

<sup>†</sup> Significantly different from Democrats at  $p < .05$ .

<sup>‡</sup> Significantly different from Catholics at  $p < .05$ .

<sup>††</sup> Significantly different from Born-again/Evangelical Democrats at  $p < .05$ .

<sup>‡‡</sup> Significantly different from Catholic Democrats at  $p < .05$ .

<sup>\*</sup> Significantly different from Other/Mainline Protestant Democrats at  $p < .05$ .

<sup>\*\*</sup> Significantly different from No affiliation Democrats at  $p < .05$ .

“expenditure of funds authorized or appropriated by federal law for any abortion,” respectively. In both cases, slightly less than half of all respondents—49 and 47 percent, respectively—support these restrictions. The 2020 Religion and C19 Survey assesses agreement with a framing of this issue that is prevalent within the anti-abortion movement and more generally on the right: that “a Democratic president will force you to pay for abortions” (i.e., with your tax dollars). Given the partisan nature of this framing, it is not surprising that fewer respondents overall (28 percent) agree.<sup>5</sup>

There are also clear partisan divides in all three questions, with significantly fewer Democrats agreeing than Republicans (and in the case of the PRRI and CES data, Independents). It is noteworthy that only 21 percent of Democrats in the CES favor funding prohibitions compared to 29 percent in the PRRI data, but this is likely because the prohibitions outlined in the CES appear broader than those in the PRRI question. Even so, in both data sets, more than three-quarters of Republicans, less than one half of Independents, and fewer than one-third of Democrats agree with these prohibitions. Although fewer respondents overall agree that a Democratic President will force you to pay for abortions, there is a significant partisan divide on this question as well, with nearly three times as many Republicans agreeing with this statement as Democrats and Independents.

Beyond partisan divides, there are clear religious divides on this issue. On both the PRRI and CES measures, Born-again/Evangelical Protestants are the strongest supporters of abortion funding restrictions, while Catholics are much more evenly split. Around 4 in 10 Other Protestants and Other Religion respondents favor restrictions, while Jews and those with no religious affiliation are most likely to oppose prohibitions on abortion funding. On the question of whether a Democratic president will force you to pay for abortions, Catholics again trail Evangelical Protestants, while they are effectively the same as Jewish, Other Religion, and Unclassified respondents. Black Protestants, Mainline Protestants, and the Unaffiliated are the least likely to agree.

We also examine various cross-sections of political party and religious tradition. Because Catholic Democrats (like Biden) have been high-profile advocates for the Hyde Amendment and Hyde-like restrictions, we expect that the partisan divide among Catholics may be relatively smaller than the partisan divide among other religious groups. We find some support for this (see Figure 1). Responses to all three questions reveal sizeable partisan gaps among Born-again/Evangelicals, Catholics, Other/Mainline Protestants, and those with No affiliation, with between 1.7 and 5.2 times more Republicans than Democrats favoring funding restrictions. But of these groups, Catholics and Born-again/Evangelicals exhibit the smallest gaps between Republican and Democratic coreligionists. The largest partisan gaps were found between Republicans and Democrats with No affiliation.

To put these numbers into context, Table 2 explores *differences* in attitudes about abortion funding and abortion legality, based on PRRI and CES data. Since few would argue that there is a bipartisan consensus on abortion legality, we are interested in how attitudes toward abortion funding compare to attitudes on this more well understood issue. First, we assess whether there is higher overall public support for abortion funding restrictions than for restrictions on abortion legality. The overall samples tell a mixed story. In the full PRRI sample, about 10 percent more respondents favor restrictions on abortion funding than on abortion legality, but for the CES there is essentially no difference in support (less than 1 percent). This difference may be due to the wording of the abortion legality questions: PRRI asks the question in the negative (“abortion should be illegal...”), while the CES question is posed affirmatively (“Permit abortions only in

<sup>5</sup>All of these figures fall below the 58 percent of Americans who “oppose or strongly oppose using tax dollars to pay for a woman’s abortion,” according to a 2021 Marist/Knights of Columbus poll on “Americans’ Opinions on Abortion,” which has been widely cited by groups currently campaigning to defend Hyde. This discrepancy is likely due in part to question wording, as Marist’s explicit references to “using tax dollars to pay for” abortion may lead more respondents to view this spending through a personal moral lens rather than as a matter of public policy, and to thus oppose it.

Table 2: Differences in percentage agreement regarding abortion legality and public funding of abortion by various subcategories of political party and religious tradition

	PRRI			CES		
	Abortion Should be ILLEGAL in All or Most Cases	Government Health Care Programs for Low-Income Women Should NOT Cover Abortion	Difference in Percentage Agreement Across Questions	Permit Abortion Only in Case of Rape, Incest or Woman's Life is in Danger	Prohibit the Expenditure of Funds Authorized or Appropriated by Federal Law for Any Abortion	Difference in Percentage Agreement Across Questions
Full sample	39.1	48.9	9.8	47.2	46.8	-0.4
Republican	59.0 <sup>+</sup>	75.9 <sup>+</sup>	16.9	63.2 <sup>+</sup>	76.9 <sup>+</sup>	13.7
Independent	36.5 <sup>+</sup>	47.8 <sup>+</sup>	11.3	49.7 <sup>+</sup>	45.2 <sup>+</sup>	-4.5
Democrat	24.6	29.2	4.6	31.6	21.1	-10.5
<i>Partisan gap (R - D/R/D)</i>	<i>34.4/2.4</i>	<i>46.7/2.6</i>		<i>31.6/2.0</i>	<i>55.8/3.6</i>	
Born-again/Evangelical Republicans	77.2 <sup>*</sup>	90.0 <sup>*</sup>	12.8	62.7 <sup>*</sup>	84.1 <sup>*</sup>	21.4
Born-again/Evangelical Independents	55.0 <sup>*</sup>	59.2 <sup>*</sup>	4.3	59.3 <sup>*</sup>	61.4 <sup>*</sup>	2.1
Born-again/Evangelical Democrats	37.3	40.9	3.6	53.5	38.9	-14.6
Catholic Republicans	50.2 <sup>**</sup>	72.1 <sup>**</sup>	21.8	64.2 <sup>**</sup>	74.9 <sup>**</sup>	10.7
Catholic Independents	43.3	53.5	10.2	54.7 <sup>**</sup>	49.3 <sup>**</sup>	-5.4
Catholic Democrats	32.6	42.1	9.4	43.9	29.1	-14.8

(Continued)

Table 2: (Continued)

	PRRI			CES		
	Abortion Should be ILLEGAL in All or Most Cases	Government Health Care Programs for Low-Income Women Should NOT Cover Abortion	<i>Difference in Percentage Agreement Across Questions</i>	Permit Abortion Only in Case of Rape, Incest or Woman's Life is in Danger	Prohibit the Expenditure of Funds Authorized or Appropriated by Federal Law for Any Abortion	<i>Difference in Percentage Agreement Across Questions</i>
Other/Mainline Protestant Republicans	44.1 <sup>†</sup>	62.5 <sup>†</sup>	18.4	66.5 <sup>†</sup>	77.8 <sup>†</sup>	11.3
Other/Mainline Protestant Independents	35.5 <sup>†</sup>	49.3 <sup>†</sup>	13.8	53.6 <sup>†</sup>	50.3 <sup>†</sup>	-3.3
Other/Mainline Protestant Democrats	18.2	24.6	6.4	28.5	20.5	-8.0
No affiliation Republicans	36.0 <sup>‡</sup>	62.7 <sup>‡</sup>	<b>26.8</b>	61.7 <sup>‡</sup>	64.7 <sup>‡</sup>	3.0
No affiliation Independents	21.8	38.0 <sup>‡</sup>	16.2	43.1 <sup>‡</sup>	35.4 <sup>‡</sup>	-7.7
No affiliation Democrats	13.9	17.7	3.8	20.3	13.5	-6.8

*Note:* Bold values means the difference in percentage agreement across questions is significant at  $p < .05$ .

Italicized values in the third and sixth columns represent the difference between the values in columns two and one and columns five and four, respectively. Italicized values in the fifth row represent the gap between the responses of Republicans (row two) and Democrats (row four), expressed as both the difference between Rs and Ds, and the multiple of Rs to Ds.

<sup>†</sup> Significantly different from Democrats at  $p < .05$ .

<sup>\*</sup> Significantly different from Born-again/Evangelical Democrats at  $p < .05$ .

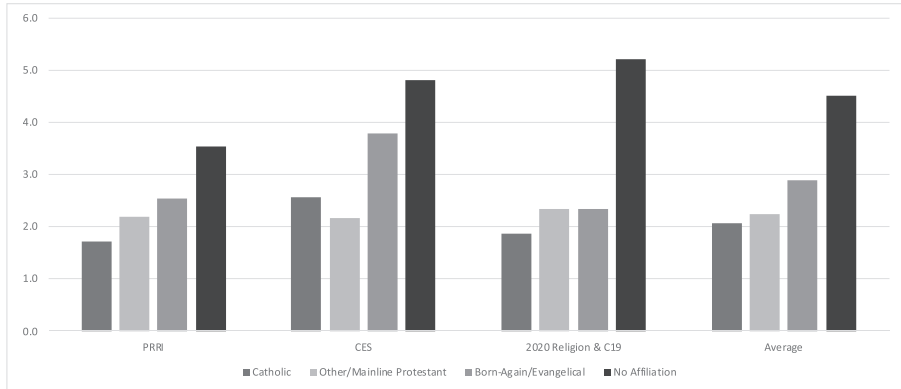
<sup>\*\*</sup> Significantly different from Catholic Democrats at  $p < .05$ .

<sup>‡</sup> Significantly different from Other/Mainline Protestant Democrats at  $p < .05$ .

<sup>‡</sup> Significantly different from No affiliation Democrats at  $p < .05$ .



Figure 1  
Partisan gap within each religious tradition in percentage favoring abortion funding restrictions



*Note:* Partisan gap is calculated as the percentage agreement of Republicans divided by the percentage agreement of Democrats within each religious subgroup.

the case of...”). Because Americans have contradictory opinions about abortion (Bruce 2020b), a subtle switch in question wording may be enough to shift results several percentage points.

We then turn to a comparison of partisan responses on these issues. Given decades of partisan sorting around abortion legality, a meaningful bipartisan consensus on abortion funding would likely require significant numbers of Democrats who *both* oppose major restrictions on legal abortion *and* support restrictions on government funding of abortion. In other words, we would expect to find a substantial gap between Democrats’ responses to questions about abortion legality and abortion funding. But we do not. In the PRRI data, there is less than a 5-point difference between Democrats’ responses to these two questions, yet this difference more than doubles for Independents, and increases to almost 17 percent among Republicans. In the CES data, it is again Republicans—and not Democrats—who have the largest difference in response to these questions, with a 14-point higher share of Republicans supporting abortion funding bans than limits on abortion legality. Where the data sets differ is that, in the CES data, Democrats and Independents are more likely to support restrictions on abortion legality than restrictions on abortion funding.

Of course, the fact that *some* Democrats agree with each position could be interpreted as evidence of bipartisan support for abortion funding restrictions. But when we compare partisan responses to the abortion funding and abortion legality questions, we find that the partisan divide on abortion funding is *even greater* than the substantial and well-recognized partisan gap on abortion legality. In the PRRI data, the 34-point partisan gap on the abortion legality question grows to 47 points on the question of public funding for abortion. In the CES data, the 32-point partisan gap on the abortion legality question grows to 56 points on the question of abortion funding.

Finally, we examine differences in opposition to abortion legality and government funding of abortion for each political party identification *within* select religious traditions. Because Catholic Democrats have been high-profile advocates for the Hyde Amendment and like Biden have historically carved out a distinctive position as supporters of both legal abortion and abortion funding restrictions, we expected this group to stand out from the rest in terms of the gap between their responses to these questions. But they did not. Across both data sets, the difference in percentage agreement across questions was far smaller for Catholic Democrats than for Catholic Republicans. In other words, a larger share of Catholic Republicans than Catholic Democrats are likely

to oppose restrictions on legal abortion while supporting restrictions on abortion funding. Similarly, among Born-again/Evangelicals, Other/Mainline Protestants, and those with No affiliation, Republicans have a larger gap between their attitudes toward abortion legality and abortion funding than Democrats and Independents. Within all of these religious groups, this pattern is largely driven by extremely high levels of support for abortion funding restrictions among the Republicans (between 62 and 90 percent). Within the PRRI data, the group with the largest (and only statistically significant) gap between their attitudes toward abortion legality and abortion funding is Republicans with *no* religious affiliation. While only 36 percent of this group agrees that abortion should be illegal in all or most cases, 63 percent agree that government health care programs for low-income women should not cover abortion.

### CONCLUSION

Without sufficient data and analysis to ground these debates, advocates and elites have relied on broad platitudes about public sentiment toward public funding of abortion. Among the most common claims is that there is a “bipartisan consensus against taxpayer funding for abortion.” Although the historical record suggests that this bipartisan consensus may have once existed—at least among political elites—continued consensus on this issue today would represent a curious aberration from decades of partisan sorting around abortion legality (Killian and Wilcox 2008; Munson 2018). More specifically, it would likely require large numbers of Democrats to support legal abortion yet oppose public funding of abortion. Our analysis suggests this is not the case; rather, abortion funding attitudes are even more polarized than views toward abortion legality.

Specifically, we find that slightly less than half of all Americans agree that the government should not fund abortion, and less than one-third believe that a Democratic President will force you to pay for abortions. Second, we find substantial partisan and religious divides on the question of whether the government should fund abortions, as well as the belief that a Democratic President will force you to pay for abortions. Third, while proponents of the Hyde Amendment often imply that there is *greater* bipartisan consensus on abortion funding bans than on abortion legality itself, we find the opposite. Finally, if there were a bipartisan consensus on the abortion funding question, we would expect to find a substantial gap between Democrats’ responses to questions about abortion legality and abortion funding. But we do not. Rather, the largest differences in agreement across these positions are found among Republicans, across religious subgroups. Put differently, while there *are* many Americans who support legal abortion and oppose public funding of abortion, they are much more likely to be Republicans than Democrats.

Explaining this finding lies beyond the scope of this research note, but we suggest two potential explanations that should be assessed in future research. One is that questions about public funding for abortion are not only about abortion; they are also about taxes and the role of government (Saletan 2004). As such, even as Republicans with varied religious commitments and views may not agree on the issue of abortion legality, they may agree that the federal government should not fund social services like healthcare. The second potential explanation is that part of being a Republican today means agreeing that the federal government should privilege Christian values. Previous research on Christian nationalism suggests that even conservatives who are not personally religious tend to agree with this premise (Braunstein and Taylor 2017; Whitehead and Perry 2020). Through this lens, Republicans with no personal opposition to abortion may nonetheless believe that the government should not infringe on Christian taxpayers’ consciences where abortion funding is concerned.

The dearth of research on attitudes toward public funding of abortion, particularly in comparison to the research available on abortion legality and morality, is striking due to the prominence of this issue in policy debates. As debates about the Hyde Amendment are likely to intensify in

the coming years, this analysis is intended to lay the groundwork for more research and to encourage the collection of more data on Americans' attitudes toward public funding of abortion. Future research should especially focus on changes in these attitudes over time; on the effects of question wording on these attitudes; on how these attitudes are shaped by other factors like gender, race, or education; and following Bruce (2020a, 2020b), on qualitative investigations of how people think about this complex issue.

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