THE ABORTION REFERENDUM IN PORTUGAL: THE INFLUENCE OF PSYCHOSOCIAL VARIABLES IN THE VOTING INTENTIONS AND BEHAVIOUR OF PORTUGUESE YOUTH

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Abstract

February 11th 2007 set the date for what would be an intense and passionate discussion on a gendered health related issue in Portugal: abortion. In the referendum, approximately 44% of the eligible population voted, and from these 59% voted for the legalization of abortion in Portugal. Hence, this referendum brought about changes in the Portuguese law, which now allows legal abortion to occur at the desire of the woman until the 10th week of pregnancy. The present research consists of a study in which 205 university students fully responded to 4 data collection sessions between November 2006 and March 2007. The goal of the study was to understand the most relevant psychosocial variables when trying to explain the voting intentions and voting behaviour of Portuguese youth. The variables in the present study included participants' gender, political orientation, religious affiliation and practice, sexual attitudes and attitudes towards abortion. Our results show that all of the above variables, except for gender, are relevant for the opinion formation about this topic. Approximately 94% of our participants reported they had the intention to vote, although only 64% of these actually voted on the day of the referendum. Finally, we found that participants rely mostly on the strength of their attitudes towards abortion in relation to their voting intention, while relying mostly on the strength of their normative religious beliefs in relation to their voting behaviour. Implications of our results for understanding the politics of abortion legislation are discussed.

Keywords

Abortion; voting intentions; voting behaviour, political orientation; religious affiliation and practice; sexual attitudes; attitudes towards abortion

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The first author acknowledges the support of COES (Centro de Estudios de Conflicto y Cohesión Social, Chile) and a CONICYT grant from the Chilean Ministry of Education (CONICYT/FONDAP/15130009) during the elaboration of this manuscript.

In 2007, Portugal had its second referendum regarding the legalization of abortion. There was much discussion in the mass media, and the mobilization efforts for the campaigns, both in favour and against the legalization of abortion, were enormous. Never before had the discussion about abortion in Portugal been so relevant and widely discussed in Portuguese society. The results of this referendum have introduced significant changes in the Portuguese legislation and on April 17th 2007, the new law was introduced. From that date forward, women in Portuguese society had the right to have a voluntary abortion until the 10th week of pregnancy and they are given a reflection period of 3 days between the first consultation and the abortion procedure.

The present manuscript focuses on different psychosocial variables related to the voting intentions and behaviours of Portuguese youth regarding the 2007 abortion referendum, namely: gender, political orientation, religious affiliation and practice (i.e. attendance of religious ceremonies), sexual attitudes and attitudes towards abortion.

The legislation of Abortion and its Discussion in Portuguese Society

Until 1984, abortion in Portugal was completely prohibited, but a new law approved that year allowed legal abortions when there were serious health risks for the woman, and in cases of foetus malformation and rape.

In 1998, Portugal had its first referendum to change the legislation of abortion. On June 28th 1998, 31% of the electorate voted in the referendum and the *Não* won by 51% of the votes. At this point in time, the law was maintained as previously and abortion was only legal in three instances: when there were health risks for the mother, malformation of the foetus and rape. This year also set the beginning of a stronger prosecution for women and practitioners that conducted abortions in Portugal. As Alves, Santos, Barradas and Duarte, (2009) stated: “Indeed, between 1998 and 2004 were recorded, at the Ministry of Justice, 223 crimes of abortion which resulted in 34 cases, 43 offenders and 18 convictions. Thereafter, and until the referendum in 2007, these numbers continued to increase” (pp. 34-35).

It was not until 2004 that abortion and its decriminalization were again discussed widely in the Portuguese media. In August 2004, an international campaign, carried out by Portuguese pro-choice organizations and by Women on Waves (a Dutch NGO), tried to bring to Portuguese waters what would be named the “abortion boat” in the media (“Barco do aborto chega”, 2004). The boat was prohibited by the Portuguese Government to enter Portuguese waters (LUSA, 2004) and, after a court case carried out by the organizations involved in the campaign, the Portuguese Supreme Court also ruled in favour of the Government’s previous decision (“Supremo mantém decisão”, 2005). During this campaign and for the next months, the decriminalization and the legalization of abortion were widely discussed in Portuguese society and in the mass media (Monteiro, 2012; Tavares, 2008). For example, Portuguese Prime Minister Pedro Santana Lopes raised the possibility of having a new discussion about the abortion law in Portugal, but this only happened during the national electoral campaign of 2005. These legislative elections were called after President Jorge Sampaio decided to dissolve the Parliament due to the political instability of the Government led by Prime Minister Pedro Santana Lopes (Social Democratic Party) in coalition with the Popular Party (PP).

During the 2005 electoral campaign, the Socialist Party put in its electoral program the abortion referendum and, after winning the Government’s elections, in October 2006, the second referendum was approved in the Parliament, with favourable votes by the Socialist Party (PS), the Left Block, (BE) the abstention of the Social Democratic Party (PSD) and with votes against by the Portuguese Communist Party (the PCP was in favour of the decriminalization of abortion,

but was against having the referendum), the Greens (PEV) and the Popular Party (CDS-PP). During the campaign for the referendum, the Socialist Party, the Left Block and the Portuguese Communist Party defended the decriminalization of abortion, while the Social Democratic Party officially abstained from taking a position and gave freedom of vote to its supporters, and the Popular Party campaigned for the No in the referendum. Furthermore, there were 19 collectives of citizens that gathered to conduct campaigns for the referendum, 14 against the change of law and 5 in favour of the legalization of abortion (for a detailed overview see Alves et al., 2009). Furthermore, although the Catholic Church did not officially mobilize for the campaign in the referendum, many Catholic representatives publicly stated their opposition to the change of law and the legalization of abortion (Alves et al., 2009; Monteiro, 2012). On February 11th 2007, 44% of the total electorate voted in the referendum and, although the referendum did not have a binding effect, the 51% of voters who defended the change in the abortion law and the decriminalization of abortion won. On April 17th 2007 the new abortion legislation was implemented.

Predictors of Voting Intentions and Voting Behaviour in the Referendum

In what concerns political orientation, previous studies have shown that political ideologies and affiliation to political parties allow individuals to discuss and reflect about different social and moral issues (e.g. Bolzendahl and Myers, 2004; Jost, Nosek, & Gosling, 2008; Mouw & Sobel, 2001; Roccas, Klar, & Liviatan, 2004). Therefore, one may expect that these political ideologies may present different consequences for the discussion regarding abortion and its legislation. For example, in Portugal, four political parties officially campaigned for the referendum. Three of these parties (Socialist Party, the Left Block and the Portuguese Communist Party) campaigned in favour of the legalization of abortion, while the fourth party (Democratic and Social Centre – Popular Party) campaigned against the new law. Except for PSD (Social Democrat Party, which did not conduct a political campaign although most of the party's representatives opposed the legalization of the abortion), all of the political parties with representation in the Parliament mobilized their efforts in accordance with their positions.

Although the gap between the right and the left in present day politics has become more permeable and mutable and although political ideologies cannot be completely defined, we argue that the concept of “politicized moral issues” (Mouw & Sobel, 2001, p. 913) can help us understand the role of individuals' political orientation in predicting their intentions and actual voting behaviour in the referendum (Bolzendahl & Myers, 2004). In relation to this, it has also been stated that “abortion has become increasingly a politicized and partisan” (Bolzendahl & Myers, 2004, p. 781) theme and, thus, we expect that a more liberal or left-wing political orientation is associated with more positive attitudes towards abortion, as well as voting intentions and behaviour in favour of the legalization of abortion. Although this relationship has been found across different samples, it is usually stronger for females than for males (Bolzendahl & Myers, 2004).

Another important aspect when discussing matters such as abortion, in which morality comes to play, is the role of religious affiliation and practice in individuals' attitudes and behaviours. In Portugal, although the Catholic Church announced they would not campaign for the referendum, several representatives of this institution publicly stated their opinions and positions regarding this issue. As the Cardinal of Lisbon, D. José Policarpo, stated:

the doctrine of Church about this issue never changed and will never change. In fact, since the beginning, the Church condemned abortion, because it considers that since the first moment of conception there is a human being, with all its dignity, with the right to exist, to be protected. (Gomes, 2006, p. 2) ¹

Hence, one may argue that religion can indeed be a significant predictor of the voting intentions and behaviour in the abortion referendum.

More specifically, several authors have shown that religion is important to understand sexual attitudes, sexual behaviour and attitudes towards abortion (e.g. Beckwith & Morrow, 2005; Bègue, 2001; Davidson, Moore, & Ullstrup, 2004; Le Gall, Mullet, & Shafighi, 2002; Lefkowitz, Gillen, Shearer, & Boone, 2004; Meier, 2003; Thornton & Camburn, 1989). For example, Davidson and colleagues (2004) found that, in women, higher levels of religiosity are negatively related with sexual attitudes, in terms of sexual activities without procreative purposes, higher feelings of guilt in relation to masturbation, less likelihood of having sexual intercourse and a lower number of sexual partners. Furthermore, these authors also found that women who go to church more frequently, generally have more conservative sexual attitudes in relation to oral, genital, and anal sex and feel higher levels of sexual guilt than women who go to church less frequently (Davidson et al., 2004). These results also suggest that individuals who attend religious ceremonies weekly tend to give more importance to love as a pre-requisite for having sexual intercourse, while the other groups, who go to church monthly or annually, tend to be more liberal in relation to sexual life and abortion. In a trans-generational study about religiosity, sexual attitudes and behaviour, Thornton and Canburn (1989) showed that youth who attend Church regularly and value religion in their lives tend to have less positive attitudes regarding sex before marriage and to be less experienced in sexual activities. These authors also showed that attendance to religious activities is more important than religious affiliation in determining participants' sexual attitudes and behaviours. Also, Meier (2003) states that there is a "protective effect of religious frequency and strength of conviction in the formation of sexual attitudes" (Meier, 2004, p. 1032). Both Thornton and Camburn (1989) and Meier (2003) argue that there can be reciprocity between religion and sexual attitudes although this mutuality was only found in Meier's (2003) study. Lefkowitz and colleagues (2004) also proved that individuals usually follow their religion's teachings in defining their own sexual behaviours and attitudes and those individuals who are more religious tend to have more conservative sexual attitudes than individuals who are not religious.

In the same line, Bolzendahl and Myers (2004) also argue that religious convictions are a good predictor of attitudes towards abortion given that "the differences at the level of religious affiliation and practice and political position are becoming more salient in the position that individuals have towards feminist issues, particularly regarding abortion" (p. 778) and their results showed that religious men and women present a consistent opposition to abortion and its legalization. For this reason, Kaufmann (2004) has affirmed that the public discussion of themes such as abortion have brought religious values to the political sphere.

Also, based on the premise that religious teachings translate into personal conservative values that form the bases for thinking about "politicized moral issues" (Mouw & Sobel, 2001, p. 913), Kaufmann (2004) proved that, in regards to cultural issues such as abortion, individuals who attend religious ceremonies tend to be more conservative than individuals who are not religious or individuals who are religious but do not attend to ceremonies, this being true both for men and women. This relation is probably due to the fact that "among religious devotees, for

1 Portuguese in the original. Our translation.

whom religion is salient, there is a psychological need for internal consistency that may result in conservative political attitudes” (Kaufmann, 2004, p. 493).

Other authors, such as Ellison, Echevarría and Smith (2005) have also shown that religious factors are an important predictor of public policies about abortion among the Hispanic community in the United States. In this study, it is argued that Catholics believe in the sanctity of all human life since conception and this belief is among the strongest predictors of opposition to abortion. The frequency of attendance to religious ceremonies can also reflect the strength of the beliefs and religious commitment, given that individuals with higher levels of religiosity tend to impose stronger restrictions to abortion (Ellison et al., 2005).

Scott and Schuman (1988) have also shown that most Catholics oppose abortion considering such topic to be very relevant in their lives. Supporters of abortion show less concern about the topic and give it less importance than individuals who oppose it. Among the supporters of the legalization of abortion, women tend to give more importance to the topic than men, while this gender difference does not exist in the group of people that oppose it. This study corroborates the idea that individuals’ attitudes in relation to a specific issue are strongest when this issue is personally relevant to them (Ajzen, 2001).

Finally, Bryan and Freed (1992) found that college students who strongly oppose abortion are more religious, believing that abortion is murder, are more punitive regarding women and health practitioners involved in abortion practices, have less sexual activity and have less likelihood of knowing anyone who has performed an abortion, when compared to students who are in favour of abortion. In general, these authors also state that men and women do not present significant differences for their reasons to have an abortion, but that when differences emerged, men seemed slightly more in favour of abortion (Bryan & Freed, 1992).

From the literature here described, it becomes interesting to ask what are the most important psychosocial variables influencing not only attitudes towards abortion but, in a more novel point, how these variables influenced the voting intentions and voting behaviour of youth in the Portuguese abortion referendum.

Voting intentions and behaviour

Voting behaviour is a research area that emerged in the 1940s (for a detailed overview please see Bartels, 2008) and that cuts across different disciplines, such as political sciences, personality, social and political psychology and sociology, among others. These different disciplines have focused on understanding the dynamics of voting behaviour from multiple perspectives and several theories have been developed with the aim to understand voting behaviour (Bartels, 2008). Interestingly, for several years, the study of voting behaviour has focused mainly in electoral voting, but recently, several authors have come to analyse referendum voting and its dynamics (Butler & Ranney, 1994; Darcy & Laver, 1990; E, van der Eijk, & Marsh, 1995; Leduc, 2002). For example, Leduc (2002) has shown that, when trying to understand the voting behaviour in referendums, one must take into consideration the context and theme of the referendum itself. In this line, if a referendum involves a strong ideological issue and political parties take predictable positions about the theme at hand, there should be less opinion change during the campaign. On the other hand, if the issue at hand is completely new to the voters, then the campaign may play an important role in the prediction of voting behaviour in the referendum (Leduc, 2002).

In the case of the abortion referendum in Portugal, we argue that most of the potential voters already have pre-existing views on the topic that may strongly shape their intention to vote. Furthermore, we think that these pre-existing beliefs may be further fed and consolidated during the campaign led by the political parties and civic society movements’ positions about

this issue.

Furthermore, there have also been efforts to understand voter turnout in different contexts (for overviews see Blais, 2000; Schlozman, 2002), and specifically to understand the low percentage of voter turnout among young individuals (e.g. Highton & Wolfinger, 2001; Wolfinger & Rosenstone, 1980). From a psychosocial perspective, three theories have been widely applied in efforts to understand how individuals' behaviour can, in general, be predicted. One of these theories is the theory of reasoned action (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980), which postulates that individuals' personal attitudes and the subjective group norms surrounding the behaviour at stake would be the main predictors of an individual actually carrying out the behaviour. In turn, the theory of planned action (Ajzen, 1985; Azjen, 2001) claims that it is also important to consider the perceived behavioural control, which means that, for a specific behaviour to occur, individuals must feel that they can perform and control the behaviour required. Finally, the information–motivation–behavioural skills (IMB) model (Fisher & Fisher, 1992, 1993) posits that, for appropriate behaviour prediction, we must consider three complementary aspects: the individual's information (i.e. knowing about the topic and the behaviour), motivation (both at the individual level at the level of social support regarding the behaviour) and behavioural skills (i.e. the degree of perceived efficacy to perform the behaviour). These three models have been found to have good predictive power in terms of voting behaviour (e.g. Ajzen, Timco, & White, 1982; Bowman & Fishbein, 1978; Glasford, 2008).

The Present Research

Drawing from the literature previously presented, we argue that, in order to understand Portuguese youths' voting behaviour in the abortion referendum, we must consider several psychosocial variables previously shown to have direct associations with the issue of abortion and voting intentions and voting behaviour. Thus, we propose that variables such as gender and individuals' attitudes towards sex and abortion can help us predict the voting intentions and behaviours in the referendum, along with variables which are more focused on the subjective norms of relevant social groups, as it is the case of political orientation and religious affiliation and practice. Finally, we also aim to understand if these variables can differently predict the voting intentions and the actual voting behaviour in the referendum among Portuguese youth. To our knowledge, this is one of the first studies to analyse both attitudinal and individual level variables along with subjective normative beliefs of relevant groups for the prediction of voting intentions and behaviours in referendums.

Summarizing, the main research questions for this study are as follows:

- 1 – Are gender, political orientation, religious affiliation and practice, sexual attitudes and attitudes towards abortion associated with participants' voting intentions in the referendum?
- 2 – Are gender, political orientation, religious affiliation and practice, sexual attitudes and attitudes towards abortion associated with participants' actual voting behaviour in the referendum?

For the purposes of answering these questions, we conducted a study with university students throughout the timespan in which the campaign of the referendum happened and finished our data collection just after the date of the Portuguese abortion referendum.

Method

Participants

Two hundred-five university students enrolled in the 2nd and 3rd years of Psychology at the University of Coimbra were recruited for the present study, for course credits. Participants had to fill in four questionnaires in collective sessions during the school year of 2006/2007, more concretely between November 2006 and March 2007.

The participants' ages ranged from 18 to 35 years, with a mean age of 20.13 ($SD = 1.90$). For males ($N = 20$), the extreme values were 18 and 28 years old ($M = 20.90$, $SD = 2.69$); for females ($N = 185$), the above values were 18 and 35 years ($M = 20.04$, $SD = 1.78$), respectively. Of a total of 205 respondents, 164 (80%) declared themselves as Catholics, 7 (3.4%) said they profess another religion and 34 (16.6%) claimed to have no religion.

Procedure

The information was collected in the classroom context and in four waves of measurement. Students were explained that the study had the purpose of better understanding their attitudes regarding abortion and other topics related with sexuality. The researchers were present in all sessions, in order to provide the necessary clarifications, to ensure the conditions of confidentiality and anonymity, and to confirm the filling of the individual questionnaires. For the present manuscript only the relevant sections of the questionnaires were selected. In this way, we only focus on relevant items for the purposes of our analyses, namely economic and socio-demographic variables, political orientation, affiliation and religious practice, sexual attitudes, attitudes towards abortion and voting intentions and actual voting behaviour in the referendum.

Measures

Gender. Participants were asked about their gender using a two-choice option (Male or Female).

Political orientation. For the creation of an indicator of political orientation, we asked participants the degree of proximity with the different Portuguese political parties on a scale from 1 – *not close at all* to 9 – *very close*. Afterwards, we created an *index of closeness to the right* using the average of responses for the right-wing parties (PNR, CDS-PP and PSD) and an *index of closeness to the left* (BE, PS and PCP) using the average of responses for the left-wing parties. Finally, we created a *left-right proximity index* by calculating the mean of the two indexes described above.

Religious affiliation and practice. To construct a single measure of religious affiliation and practice, we combined two items ("What is your religion" and "With what frequency do you attend religious ceremonies?") to create a global index of religious affiliation and practice (i.e. attendance of religious ceremonies) with four categories: *Practicing Catholics* (Catholic affiliation and frequency of religious ceremonies equal or more than once a month); *Not Practicing Catholics* (Catholic affiliation and no frequency of ceremonies or frequency limited to weddings, christenings, funerals, etc.), *Individuals without religion* (No religious affiliation), and *Individuals with other religion*.

Sexual attitudes. Participants answered to the Sexual Attitudes Scale (SAS; Hendrick & Hendrick, 1987) translated and adapted to the Portuguese population by Alferes (1997). This scale consists of 42 items ranging from 1- *strongly disagree* to 9 – *strongly agree*, which are divided into five subscales: Permissiveness, Communion, Instrumentality, Impersonal Sex and Sexual Responsibility (Alferes, 1997). We conducted an exploratory factor analysis and in the extraction of five the factors, after VARIMAX rotation, the percentage of the total variability explained is 41.3%, with the proportional contributions of each factor being, 12.5%, 8.8%, 8.7%, 6.5% and 4.8%, respectively. The scale, globally, presents an alpha coefficient of .87. The five factors: Permissiveness (F1, consisting of items 36, 28, 08, 02, 06, 12, 18, 38, 23, 10, 33, 40 and 32),

Instrumentality (F2, consisting of items 11, 17, 42, 14, 31, 39, 34, 16, 20 and 05), Communion (F3, items 29, 41, 25, 37, 21, 09, 35, 24, 03 and 15), Impersonal Sex (F4, formed by items 26, 22, 30, 19, 04) and Sexual Responsibility (F5, items 07, 01, 27 and 13), featuring alpha coefficients of .85, .77, .72, .29 (in the Impersonal Sex factor, if we eliminate the item 19, the subscale presents an alpha of .62) and .59, respectively. For the purposes of the present study, we did not analyze all subscales of the SAS, only using two of the subscales, namely Permissiveness (F1) and Sexual Responsibility (F5) (for the complete list of items of all the subscales please see Annex 1).

Attitudes towards abortion. To measure attitudes towards abortion, we used the scale developed by Snegroff (1978), which includes 30 items, measured on a Likert-type scale from 1 – *strongly disagree* to 9 – *strongly agree*. This scale was translated into Portuguese by the authors of the questionnaires used in the present study. The results on this scale vary between 30 (*Not favourable at all regarding abortion*) and 270 (*Completely favourable attitudes towards abortion*), having an average point of 150. The internal consistency analysis of this scale offers an alpha coefficient of .96.

Voting intention in the referendum. To measure the voting intentions in the referendum we used one item (“How will you vote in the abortion referendum?”). Participants could choose between four options: *Yes*, *No*, *Blank or null vote* and *Abstention*. In total, and regardless of the direction of the voting intention, 94.1% of individuals state that they will vote in the referendum. 79.5% claim they will vote *Yes*, 12.2% claim they will vote *No*, 2.4% say they will vote *Blank or null* and only 5.9% say they will *Not vote in the referendum*.

Voting intention/Effective vote in the referendum. In our final questionnaire, we asked participants “How did you vote in the referendum about abortion?”. Of the 205 respondents, 51.7% voted *Yes* in the referendum, 10.2% voted *No* and 38.1% stated *Not having voted* (Abstention) or voting *Blank or null*. Given these results, the percentage of individuals who actually voted in the referendum was 63.9%, a value much lower than indicated when asked about the participants’ voting intentions (94.1%). Given the discrepancy between the voting intentions of the majority of individuals and the actual voting behaviour in the referendum, it seemed important to identify the individuals who, although claiming to vote in the referendum, decided not to vote in the referendum, from those individuals who actually voted according to their voting intentions. For this end, we created an interactive variable to distinguish individuals who claimed they would vote in the referendum and actually voted and those who declared to vote but did not vote on February 11th of 2007. The groups with most interest to this analysis are: the group of individuals who claimed to have an intention to vote No for the decriminalization in the referendum and who indeed voted No (*Group Intention No/Vote No*); the group of subjects who declared an intention to vote Yes but who abstained in the referendum date (*Group Intention Yes/Abstention*); and the individuals who declared an intention to vote in the referendum in favour of the decriminalization of abortion and actually voted Yes in the referendum (*Group Intention Yes/*

Table 1

Frequencies of the interactive variable voting intention/effective vote in referendum [N=165]

	Intention No – Vote No	Intention Yes – Abstention	Intention Yes – Vote Yes
N	11	53	101
%	6.7	32.1	61.2

Vote Yes). In Table 1 are presented the frequencies of each of these groups. Given the low number of individuals ($N = 40$; 19.5%) in other groups of the interactive variable voting intention/real vote (*Intention Abstention/Abstention*, *Intention No/Abstention*, *Intention No/Vote Yes* and *Intention Yes/Vote No*), we did not carry out analyses with these groups.

Results

Factors influencing the variable voting intention in the referendum

First, we were interested in understanding the most relevant variables influencing the voting intentions in the referendum. For this purpose, we conducted a contingency analysis which showed that there are no statistically significant differences between the different voting intention groups in terms of gender [$\chi^2(2) = 0.17, p = .92$].

To verify if there was a relationship between the political orientation of individuals and the voting intention in the referendum, we performed an ANOVA analysis, and the results show that there are statistically significant differences between the groups, $F(2.202) = 5.38, p = .005$. The variance in voting intentions explained by the political orientation of individuals was 5.1%, as indicates the η^2 of 0.051. Simple *a posteriori* comparisons using the Tukey test, showed that individuals who intended to vote *No* in the referendum ($M = .23, SD = 1.31$) differ significantly from individuals who intended to vote *Yes* in the referendum ($M = -.53, SD = 1.24$) in terms of political orientation, in the sense that the first group of individuals has a right-wing political orientation and the second group as a more left-wing orientation.

Third, a 4x3 contingency table analysis was performed in order to assess whether there were differences in the intention to vote in the referendum due to the affiliation/religious practice of individuals. When analyzing all the respondents, the association between the variables is on the threshold of statistical significance [$\chi^2(6) = 12.35, p = .055$]. However, if we remove from the analysis seven individuals who claim to profess another religion other than Catholic, the relationship between the variables becomes statistically significant [$\chi^2(4) = 11.67, p = .02$].

Practicing Catholics represent the largest share of individuals with intention to vote *No* in the referendum (62.5%), as well as the majority of individuals who intend to abstain in the referendum (52.9%). Still, the group of individuals intending to vote *Yes* has 31.2% of practicing Catholics in its composition. As for non-practicing Catholics, 77 (84.6%) individuals had intention to vote *Yes*, 6 (6.6%) intended to abstain and 8 (8.8%) of the respondents intended to vote *No* in the referendum. Finally, in the group of individuals without religion ($N = 34$), two individuals (5.9%) claim to abstain from voting, only one respondent (2.9%) intends to vote *No* and 27 (79.4%) individuals without religion intend to vote *Yes* in the referendum. Four individuals in this group failed to respond the question about their intention to vote (11.8%).

To analyze the influence of Permissiveness and Sexual Responsibility in the voting intentions in the referendum, we performed a univariate analysis of variance. There is a global effect of the Permissiveness Scale in the voting intentions [$F(2.202) = 3.63, p = .028$], being the strength of this relationship 0.035, according to the η^2 .

Using the Tukey test, *a posteriori* comparisons indicated that the mean score for the Permissiveness scale is significantly higher in the group of individuals who intended to vote *Yes* in the referendum ($M = .09, SD = .99$) than in the group of individuals who intended to vote *No* in the referendum ($M = -.47, SD = 1.06$). The remaining *a posteriori* comparisons did not show any significant differences between the groups.

In relation to the Sexual Responsibility subscale, the groups of individuals with different voting intentions did not differ significantly from each other, [$F(2.202) = 0.84, p = .433$].

To finalize our analyses of the variables influencing the voting intentions of our participants, we performed an ANOVA to study the association between attitudes towards abortion and the voting intentions and we found a significant effect [$F(2,202) = 63.63, p = .00$]. The simple *a posteriori* comparisons showed that all groups differed significantly from each other. The individuals who intend to vote *No* in the referendum have less favourable attitudes towards abortion ($M = 101.00, SD = 33.90$); individuals who declared an intention to vote *blank or null or abstain* in the referendum had a mean of 135.18 ($SD = 51.24$) on attitudes towards abortion and those who said they intended to vote *Yes* in the referendum presented values which are more favourable regarding abortion ($M = 183.06, SD = 34.78$).

The strength of the association, given by the η^2 , is 0.386, i.e. 38.6% of the variance between groups with different voting intentions is explained by attitudes towards abortion.

Discriminant analysis of the variable voting intention in the referendum

We conducted an analysis of direct discriminant function, using our six main variables as predictors of belonging to the three voting intentions' groups, to assess which variables were able to distinguish the 205 respondents in terms of their intention to vote in the referendum. The predictors included were: gender, political orientation, affiliation/religious practice, permissiveness and sexual responsibility regarding their sexual attitudes and attitudes towards abortion. The different groups analyzed were: intention to vote *No* in the referendum (Group 1), *blank/null vote or abstention* in the referendum (Group 2) and intention to vote *Yes* in the referendum (Group 3). The variability explained by two possible discriminant functions is 99.0% and 1.0%, respectively. The Wilks Lambda for the first function is significant, $\Lambda = .60, \chi^2(12) = 101.87, p = .00$, which indicates that the predictors included in this function differentiate the respondents regarding their intention to vote. The test for the second function provides a Wilks Lambda equal to .99, $\chi^2(5) = 1,289, p = .936$.

As seen in Table 2, the first function polarizes primarily the predictor attitudes towards abortion, while the second polarizes the remaining predictors. Given the ease of interpretation of the first discriminant function, this will be referred to as "*Strength of attitudes towards abortion*".

The discriminant function's average scores also showed that individuals with intention to vote *No* had more negative values ($M = -1.91$), followed by the group intention to vote *blank/null or abstain* ($M = -.98$). The group that presented higher values in the discriminant function is the one that intended to vote *Yes* ($M = .39$). More specifically, the mean values of the attitudes towards abortion for the groups whose intention is to vote *No*, intention to vote *Yes* and *blank/null or abstain* were, respectively, 101.00 ($SD = 33.90$), 135.18 ($SD = 51.24$) and 183.06 ($SD = 34.78$).

On the whole, the discriminant function analysis allows us to classify correctly 71.7% of all participants. The percentage of cases correctly classified for the groups *Intention Yes*, *Intention blank/null or abstention* and *Intention No* are 68.0%, 41.2% and 75.5%, respectively. To understand how well the classification procedure may predict a new sample of group memberships, we estimated the percentage of correctly classified individuals using the leave-one-out technique, which indicated an index of 67.8% for all respondents.

Factors influencing the interactive variable voting intention/effective vote in the referendum

All analyses described in this section follow the same rationale as the previous section, although in the present section, our main interest is to understand how the different variables of interest are associated with the interactive variable regarding the voting intentions and actual voting behaviour of our participants.

Hence, firstly, a contingency analysis (table 2x4) showed that there were no significant gender

Table 2
Correlations between the predictor variables and the discriminant functions

Predictor variables	Function 1	Function 2
Gender	-.014	.326
Political orientation	-.281	-.503
Religious affiliation/practice	.261	.447
Sexual permissiveness	.098	.562
Sexual responsibility	.232	-.302
Attitudes towards abortion	.980	-.104

differences among the various voting groups in the referendum [$\chi^2(2) = 0.49, p = .784$].

Secondly, a Univariate Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) showed that there was a statistically significant relationship between the political orientation of individuals and the interactive variable of voting intention in the referendum/real vote in referendum [$F(2.162) = 7.49, p = .001$]. Given that the Levene test does not guarantee the homogeneity of variances, we used simple *a posteriori* comparisons with the Games-Howell test. The results showed that the group of individuals *Intention Yes/Abstention* ($M = -.21, SD = 1.01$) differed significantly from the group *Intention Yes/Vote Yes* ($M = -.75, SD = 1.31$), showing that the latter have a more left-wing political orientation. The other groups did not differ significantly among themselves, although it is visible that the group *Intention No/Vote No* did not present a more right-wing political orientation ($M = .56, SD = 1.62$).

To analyze the relationship between individuals' religious affiliation/practice and voting intention/effective vote in the referendum, we created a 4x3 contingency table. The Chi-Square showed a statistically significant global relationship exists between the variables, $\chi^2(6) = 18.12, p = .006$. Next, we created several contingency tables to better understand the differences between the various groups of individuals. When considering the three groups of the variable voting intention/effective vote in the referendum (tables 2x3), there were significant differences between the group of practicing Catholics and the group of non-practicing Catholics [$\chi^2(2) = 8.27, p = .016$], as well as differences between the group of practicing Catholics and the group of individuals without religion [$\chi^2(2) = 9.40, p = .009$]. The results showed that individuals who intended to vote *No* and, in fact, voted *No* in the referendum, solely belong to the groups of practicing Catholics and non-practicing Catholics. In the remaining religious groups, none of the participants reported an *Intention No/Vote No*. In the group of individuals with another religion, three individuals abstained although they intended to vote *Yes*, and the remaining two voted *Yes*, according to their previously reported intention. In the group of non-practicing Catholics there were approximately the same number of individuals as in the group *Intention Yes/Abstention* (47.2%) and in the group *Intention Yes/Vote Yes* (47.5%), while 80% of the individuals without religion (24 of 30 in the group without religion) intended to vote *Yes* in the referendum and, in fact, voted *Yes*. The remaining 6 individuals of this group had intended to vote *Yes* in the referendum but abstained on the voting day.

With regard to sexual attitudes, we found that the various groups defined by the interactive variable did not differ significantly in terms of the Permissiveness scale scores [$F(2.162) = 1.29, p = .277$]. The same was true for the Sexual Responsibility subscale of the SAS, $F(2.162) = .285, p = .753$, where no significant differences were found between the groups.

Finally, to assess the differences in attitudes towards abortion between groups in the variable

voting intention/effective vote, we performed an ANOVA. The results indicate that there was a statistically significant difference between the groups [$F(2.162) = 58.90, p = .00$]. Simple *a posteriori* comparisons with the Tukey test showed that all groups differ significantly from each other. The group with less favorable attitudes towards abortion was the group *Intention No/Vote No* ($M = 83.64, SD = 27.29$), followed by the group *Intention Yes/Abstention* ($M = 174.96, SD = 38.17$). The group that presented more favourable attitudes towards abortion was the group *Intention Yes/Vote Yes* in the referendum ($M = 191.82, SD = 28.00$).

Discriminant analysis of the interactive variable voting intention/effective vote in the referendum

To verify which variables would discriminate individuals in their group memberships, in terms of voting intention/effective vote in the referendum, we held a discriminant function analysis in which the predictors included were: gender, political orientation, affiliation/religious practice, permissiveness and sexual responsibility regarding sexual attitudes and attitudes towards abortion. The discriminating groups were *Intention No/Vote No* (Group 1), *Intention Yes/Abstention* (Group 2) and *Intention Yes/Vote Yes* in the referendum (Group 3) [$N = 165$].

The explained variability by two possible discriminant functions was 97.1% and 2.9%, respectively. The Wilks Lambda for the first function is significant [$\Lambda = .54, \chi^2(12) = 97.405, p = .00$], while the test for the second function provided a Wilks Lambda = .98, $\chi^2(5) = 3.709, p = .592$. Given the non-significance of the second test, we will just interpret the first discriminant function. As seen in Table 3, the first function polarized primarily the predictors attitudes towards abortion and affiliation/religious practice, while the second function polarized the remaining predictors. Although the value of the correlation of attitudes towards abortion with the discriminant function was higher than the value of the correlation between affiliation/religious practice and the discriminant function, one can affirm that religious beliefs, or the lack thereof, acted as a regulator in the formation of attitudes towards abortion. Hence, and due to its discriminatory power, we decided to name function 1 “*Strength of normative religious beliefs*”.

From our results, we can see that the group *Intention No /Vote No* suffers the greatest influence of normative religious beliefs ($M = -3.13$), followed by the group *Intention Yes/Abstention*

Table 3
Correlations between the predictor variables and the discriminant functions

Predictive variables	Function 1	Function 2
Gender	.028	-.352
Political orientation	-.314	.758
Religious affiliation/practice	.115	.479
Sexual permissiveness	.299	.017
Sexual responsibility	.020	-.335
Attitudes towards abortion	.953	.215

($M = -.19$). The group *Intention Yes/Vote Yes* showed a lesser influence of normative religious beliefs in terms of their voting intentions and actual voting behaviour in the referendum ($M = .44$).

On the whole, the discriminant function analysis allowed us to classify correctly 61.8% of all respondents. The percentage of cases correctly classified in the groups *Intention No/Vote No*, *Intention Yes/Abstention* and *Intention Yes/Vote Yes* are, respectively, 81.8%, 56.6% and 62.4%. To understand how well the classification procedure may predict a new sample of group memberships, we estimated the percentage of correctly classified individuals using the leave-one-out technique, which indicated an index of 58.8% properly classified.

Discussion

Much research has already been conducted to understand how attitudes towards abortion are formed and which are the most relevant variables associated with favourable or unfavourable attitudes towards abortion (e.g. Bolzendahl & Myers, 2004; de Zordo & Mishtal, 2011; Ellison et al., 2005; Finke & Adamczyk, 2008; Kaufmann, 2004; Mouw & Sobel, 2001; Scott & Schuman, 1982; among others). Furthermore, much literature has focused on abortion at the policy and legislative level and there has been much advocacy for women's health rights throughout the world (e.g. Bachiochi, 2012; Berer, 2002; Cook & Dickens, 2009). However, to our knowledge, this is one of the few studies focusing not only on attitudes towards abortion, but most importantly, on other psychosocial factors that may help us understand why young individuals would or would not act (in this case, vote) when matters of women's health and abortion are at stake. In the present study, we aimed to understand which were the main psychosocial predictors of voting intentions and effective vote in the Portuguese abortion referendum among Portuguese youth.

Prediction of voting intentions in the referendum

Our results showed that political orientation, religious affiliation/practice, permissiveness regarding sexual attitudes and attitudes towards abortion can all distinguish between the groups of individuals with different voting intentions in the referendum. For example, individuals who intend to vote *No* have a more right-wing political orientation, while individuals who intend to vote *Yes* in the referendum have a more left-wing political orientation. In terms of religious affiliation/practice, the group with intention to vote *No* is composed, mainly, of practicing Catholics. In turn, the group of non-practicing Catholics and the group without religion declared, mostly, an intention to vote favourably towards the legalization of abortion. These findings are consistent with previous research in which it was found that individuals with a more right-wing political orientation and individuals who are religious tend to have more negative attitudes towards abortion (e.g. Bolzendahl & Myers, 2004; Kaufmann, 2004). Also, we found a large percentage of practicing Catholics with intention to vote *Yes*. These results are very interesting, given that we could expect most of our Catholic participants to theoretically oppose the legalization of abortion, although our results proved this argument wrong. We argue that, although religious beliefs may be a very important normative variable influencing the formation and maintenance of attitudes towards abortion, perhaps our participants find these normative arguments more relevant to them at the personal level (for example, when deciding to have or not an abortion) than at the level of the implementation of laws and regulations regarding abortion in Portugal (e.g. by not wanting that their normative religious beliefs influence the choice of others). In fact, during the campaign for the abortion referendum, there were some Catholic members of the "Citizenship and Responsibility Movement for the Yes" that defended the legalization of abortion in an open letter, using arguments such as:

The truth is that the decriminalization of abortion does not oppose believers to non-believers. Or fans of life to fans of death. It is not contradictory to affirm ourselves wholeheartedly “for life” and be simultaneously favourable to the decriminalization of abortion” (...) Now, even when, for anyone who is a believer, a concrete answer to such a dilemma can be seen as a sin, commands the esteem for pluralism that we entirely repudiate any kind of criminal guardianship over particular [individual] moral judgments, because it goes against the most essential [aspects] of a democratic society (Marujo, 2006)²

Another possible explanation would be that, for these individuals, the subjective norms of other relevant social groups (such as family or friends or even secular beliefs about social life and the organization of society) play a more important role in predicting the voting intentions in the referendum. Further research should analyze and compare the role of distinct social groups’ norms and influence in the prediction of behavioural intentions about feminist issues, such as abortion.

Also, individuals with more permissive sexual attitudes are the ones who intend to vote *Yes* in the referendum, in comparison with individuals who are less permissive regarding sexuality and that intend to vote *No*. However, we found no differences regarding sexual responsibility among the different voting intention groups.

As expected, participants with more negative attitudes towards abortion had the intention to vote *No*. The group of individuals who intended to vote *blank/null or abstain* show relatively unfavourable attitudes towards abortion, while the group which intends to vote *Yes* is the only one with positive attitudes towards abortion.

When we conducted a discriminant analysis to better understand the contribution of each predictor variable to distinguish among our voting intentions’ groups, we found that attitudes towards abortion is the only variable which can reliably discriminate among the groups with distinct voting intentions. Hence, the stronger our participants’ convictions are regarding abortion (be them negative or positive), the easier it is to predict their voting intentions. As mentioned earlier, individuals with more negative attitudes towards abortion intend to vote *No*, while individuals with more positive attitudes towards abortion have the intention to vote *Yes* in the referendum. The biggest difficulty in discriminating the groups occurs with participants who intend to vote *blank/null or abstain* in the referendum, given that their attitudes towards abortion present a high dispersion. These are interesting findings given that, for example, both the theories of reasoned action (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980) and of planned action (Ajzen, 1985) and the information–motivation–behavioural skills (IMB) model (Fisher & Fisher, 1992, 1993) propose that attitudes towards an issue, along the subjective norms of relevant social groups, are very important when predicting behavioural intentions. However, in our study, when using a discriminant analysis to predict individuals’ group memberships, we can only provide evidence for the role of attitudes towards abortion in predicting voting intentions among Portuguese youth. These results may be due to the fact that, for our participants, when thinking about their intentions to vote in the referendum, the most salient variable would be their personal attitudes towards the subject at hand (i.e. abortion legalization). Further research should be conducted in order to understand if topics such as abortion and other feminist issues, in comparison with issues that are not “politicized moral issue(s)” (Mouw & Sobel, 2001, p. 913) may be differently influenced by the subjective norms of relevant social groups.

2 Portuguese in the original. Our translation.

Prediction of voting behaviour in the referendum

When considering the interactive variable voting intention/effective voting, we found that individuals in the group *Intention Yes/Vote Yes* have a strong left-wing political orientation, in contrast to the group *Intention No/Vote No*, who present a very right-wing political orientation.

Regarding religious affiliation/practice, we found that the group *Intention No/Vote No* is composed, mainly, by practicing Catholics. As for the group with another religion, none of our participants reported an *Intention No/Vote No*, while most group members reported an *Intention Yes/Vote Yes*.

In terms of non-practicing Catholics, we found more variability: relatively the same number of participants fell within the groups *Intention Yes/Vote Yes* and *Intention Yes/Abstention*. Interestingly, in the practicing Catholics group, there was a majority of individuals with *Intention Yes/Vote Yes* and a smaller percentage of individuals with *Intention No/Vote No*. We argue that there may be specific differences regarding these groups in terms of the personal relevance that their religious group has in relation to this discussion surrounding abortion. Hence, we argue that for individuals with *Intention No/Vote No*, the religious membership is more important when thinking and reflecting about abortion, than it is for practicing Catholics with *Intention Yes/Vote Yes*, who may value more their personal attitudes and beliefs regarding abortion, rather than their groups' evaluation of such theme.

An important aspect to keep in mind is that, although we found Permissiveness to be able to distinguish between the groups with different voting intentions, we were not able to find any significant associations between this subscale of sexual attitudes and the interactive variable voting intention/effective vote. We argue that this lack of relationship may be due to the fact that sexual attitudes may not have enough power in the mobilization of efforts towards the realization of an actual behaviour, in this case to potentiate the motivation of participants to vote in the referendum. So, we argue that sexual attitudes may be more strongly associated with action intentions rather than with actual behaviours.

As expected, we also found that in the group *Intention No/Vote No*, attitudes towards abortion are very negative, while for the group with *Intention Yes/Vote Yes*, these attitudes are very positive.

When we conducted a discriminant analysis for the interactive variable voting intention/effective vote with our predictor variables, we found that we could predict well the group memberships of our participants if we considered the strength of their normative religious beliefs in the formation of attitudes towards abortion. In fact, we found that the behavioural mobilization on the day of the referendum was very much motivated by participants' intensity of normative (religious) and personal beliefs about abortion. The influence of religious ideologies thus seems to constitute itself as the strongest predictor of the actual voting behaviour of our participants, alongside with their attitudes regarding abortion. Those participants who attend Church more regularly seem to feel the need to validate their convictions through their voting behaviour (*Intention No/Vote No*) in the referendum, in the same way as individuals who do not identify with religion, at least at the institutional level, tend to demonstrate their convictions (in this case favourable to abortion) through their effective vote.

If we look at the mean scores of attitudes towards abortion between the groups with different voting intentions and then we compare them with the mean values of the two groups of individuals who actually voted in the referendum according to their intention, we can see the existence of attitude polarization, in the sense that individuals who actually voted *No* in accordance with their intention present strong negative attitudes towards abortion, while the group with intention to vote *No* presents moderately negative attitudes in relation to abortion.

This polarization of attitudes is not so evident regarding individuals who voted *Yes* in

accordance with their intention, although there is a slight increase in the mean scores of attitudes towards abortion in this group, in comparison with the group of individuals with intention to vote *Yes* in the referendum.

We can thus argue that the beliefs and attitudes of individuals who had the intention to vote both *No* or *Yes* but abstained are not as strong as the ones of individuals who actually voted in the day of the referendum according to their previously reported intentions.

Given that we did not measure the strength of religious beliefs of our participants and the relative importance of these for the formation of attitudes regarding abortion, we cannot be sure of our explanatory hypothesis but further research should shed light into these dynamics of religious membership, practice and strength of beliefs in order to understand the differences here found. For example, Manuel and Tollefsen (2008) have argued that the Catholic Church, in Portugal, lost a considerable amount of their ability to define morality for its followers and that the competition with other secular voices in the discussion of topics such as sexuality, marriage and abortion may significantly hinder their efforts in influencing their members' opinions regarding such topics. However, from our results, it seems that personal relevance of religious ideologies and beliefs may be an important predictor of individuals' behaviours regarding sexuality and women's rights.

Limitations of the study and further venues of research

The present study contains an important limitation regarding the variable of voting intentions: when asking "How will you vote in the abortion referendum?", we did not include the option "*Don't know*". Participants could only choose between the options "*Yes*", "*No*", "*Blank or null vote*" and "*Abstention*" and this fact may have led some participants to choose an option that originally did not reflect their indecision regarding their voting intentions. For example, some individuals may have chosen the option "*Blank or null*" as a "*Don't know*" option. Still, given the low percentage of individuals who selected this option (only 2.4% of the total sample), we believe that this was not the case. In further studies we must bear in mind that allowing for such an option could have resulted in a better understanding of the gaps we found between the voting intentions and voting behaviours in our sample. Other studies should include this option when studying the same kind of issues.

Secondly, our study may present some limitations regarding the potential generalization of our findings, given that our sample is uniquely composed by university students. Consequently, we cannot attempt to make any conclusions regarding other age groups or less educated samples of Portuguese youth, for example. Still, we argue that this study provides interesting results that need to be further analyzed and studied in other countries, given that youths all over the world are currently being confronted and dealing with their own sexuality and decisions regarding contraceptive use, family planning and other issues that surround the discussion of abortion (Cohen, 2007).

Furthermore, it seems that our results may shed a light into understanding why in some countries, which are very religious in general and/or have right-wing political governments (e.g. Latin American countries and Poland, among others), abortion is still very restricted and there is not much public discussion about the topic.

In addition, our sample presents a very small number of males and although we did not find any gender differences in our results, we can assume that with a bigger sample, these may emerge. With a more balanced sample in relation to gender we could have been able to understand more reliably the role of this variable regarding attitudes towards abortion and voting dynamics.

Moreover, we only used a measure of religious affiliation/practice. Further research

should also include a measure of spirituality, given that some participants may not identify with institutionalized religions but may have other spiritual beliefs that can influence their beliefs about the (im)morality of abortion. By including a larger sample of participants with different types of religious affiliations and beliefs, our understanding of the politics of abortion may be much improved in the future.

Finally, we believe that in the future further research should also focus on understanding other types of variables that may influence attitudinal and behavioural positions regarding abortion, such as direct or indirect experience with abortion, and the exposure to content regarding this issue in the mass media. The inclusion of more variables in studies such as the present one may refine our understanding of individuals' beliefs about abortion, how they are formed and consolidated and may also shed a light into the dynamics of voting behaviour among youths.

Conclusion

To conclude, we were able to show that political orientation, religious affiliation/practice, sexual permissiveness and attitudes towards abortion are significantly associated with the voting intentions of our participants in the Portuguese referendum of 2007. We were also able to discriminate between the role of these different variables and come to the conclusion that, when reporting voting intentions, the most important factor to understand our participants' intentions are their personal attitudes towards abortion.

In terms of their actual voting behaviour, we further found that political orientation, religious affiliation/practice and attitudes towards abortion were the main variables to influence their actual behaviour in the referendum. We were also able to find that religious affiliation/practice, alongside our participants' attitudes towards abortion were the main discriminant variables when predicting our participants' effective voting behaviour in the referendum.

Hence, we have shown that, in terms of women's health issues (as is the case of abortion legislation), the influence of religious convictions is more important than the influence of political convictions regarding the formation of attitudes towards abortion and regarding the public regulation and legislation of moral issues, in the sense that the first strongly influence individuals voting behaviour, while the latter does not.

Finally, we can also draw a parallel between these findings and suggest further research regarding other issues where feminist discourses and claims may come into play and for which politics and religion may also play an important role in defining access to certain women's rights.

At present, women in Portugal have the right to access abortion at their desire up until the 10th week of pregnancy. Nevertheless, there are still pro-life groups lobbying for the criminalization of abortion in Portugal (IUSA, 2012). Moreover, recent events such as the one in which, in 2013, the Spanish cabinet approved a draft law to ban abortion (except for cases of health risks for the woman or rape) but that has now been withdrawn by Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy (Governo Espanhol desiste, 2014) due to the lack of consensus about it, remind us that abortion is still a very relevant and controversial debate in our society and for these reasons, further research in the field of attitudes towards abortion and abortion legislation should be sought.

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