

Attitudes Towards the Abortion Law in Germany, 1990-1992: Determinants and Political Implications

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With data from a 1990-1992 panel survey determinants and political consequences of attitudes towards the abortion law in Germany are investigated. Compared to other issues, the topic is found not to be personally very salient to the average respondent. If it is perceived as highly important, however, such attitudes can be well accounted for, and have significant effects on voting intentions. General value orientations emerge as most important determinants, and the strongest impact on partisan preferences is found among women in the former GDR.

INTRODUCTION

In June 1992 the German Bundestag passed a reform of paragraph 218 of the penal code. This law was to apply uniformly to all of Germany. By making good on the mandate of Article 31 of the Unification Treaty, it was to be a further step in the standardisation of the legal systems in both parts of Germany. It was also the second attempt to introduce a law on term limits in West Germany – after the first one by the social-liberal coalition in the 1970s had failed in the Federal Constitutional Court. In August 1992 the Constitutional Court suspended the new law and prescribed a provisional regulation, pending final decision. That ruling was handed down in May 1993. Abortions, the Court concluded, have to remain unlawful on constitutional grounds, but can go without punishment under certain circumstances; the health insurance system generally must not pay for the cost.

Despite the sensitivity of the topic, social science research on the issue of abortion in Germany (compared to other countries) is not very well developed.¹ So far, two separate themes have stood at the forefront of research. First, the determinants of the decision to continue or discontinue a pregnancy were examined, by considering social background, personal situation, and

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general values and attitudes of pregnant women as predictors. Such studies are concerned exclusively with potential 'perpetrators'. This approach is not pursued in this contribution. The second major question of pertinent social science research aims at the attitudes of the general public towards governmental regulation of abortion. Such opinions may naturally not be separated from attitudes about abortion itself. Available (mainly descriptive) analyses conclude that individual attitudes toward state regulation of abortion are influenced primarily by social background variables (such as age, sex and education) and also by fundamental value judgements.² It has been shown, moreover, that these two groups of determinants are not independent from each other.³

Denomination and religious commitment have particularly strong effects on views about abortion. Individuals highly attached to religion and church object most strongly to legalising abortion. Differences between Catholics and Protestants stem from unequal religiosity, not religion itself.⁴ General political orientations and individual value judgements further shape views on abortion.⁵

An interesting differentiation regarding the influence of denomination and religious commitment on opinions towards abortion has been proposed by Wilcox and Berry.⁶ Here not only individual characteristics of respondents are taken into account, but also their religious context, and significant effects of the latter are identified. Members of both major denominations adhere particularly 'radically' to the position of their church when they are in a minority situation, while they tend to be more 'liberal' than their church when they are the majority in the region. Finally, it is demonstrated with more recent data that the difference between east and west Germans to be discussed later in this article (in that the former are more in favour of liberal governmental regulations than the latter) can be completely explained by the highly unequal denominational composition of both parts of the country, that is the much larger share of non-religious citizens and the lower number of Catholics in the east.

Against the background of such findings the programme for this contribution is as follows: a short description of the data base is followed by an overview of popular opinions about abortion. Differences between east and west Germany will be shown and linked to the different legal regulations over the past decades. The descriptive section concludes with an examination of the stability of these attitudes over time. Thereafter, we will investigate by which factors opinions on governmental regulations of abortion and the personal salience of this issue to respondents are best explained, both cross-sectionally and over time. This search for predictors follows a multivariate approach to social background variables, different dimensions of general political orientations and societal values, as well as to assessments of the eco-

conomic situation and living conditions in Germany. The study concludes with an analysis of the impact of opinions about abortion on voting intentions, controlling for long-term partisan attachments.

DATA

The data set analysed here comes from a 1990–92 panel survey. In the framework of a research project on models of voting behaviour funded by 'Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft' and co-directed by the author, this three-wave study was initially designed for west Germany. After the first survey in May 1990 (about 2,000 respondents) it was decided that, given the approach of unification, the study should be extended to east Germany. Due to cost limitations, the west German sample had to be reduced. Thus, in May 1991 932 respondents in the 'old' Länder were interviewed for a second time, with 606 in the 'new' Länder polled for the first time. The final wave took place in May 1992 (716 and 325 interviews, respectively). All interviews were face-to-face; the EMNID Institute was in charge of fieldwork.

Among many other questions, sizeable batteries of position-issues were included in each survey. Respondents were asked for their own position, what they perceived the positions of various parties to be, and for the personal salience of the respective issue. The abortion question asked in all three waves reads: 'Should governmental regulations be modified so as to make getting an abortion easier, or to make it more difficult?' As a response aid a scale with values from one to seven was presented, where one denoted 'easier' and seven 'more difficult'. After going through the full battery of position-issues, respondents were asked: 'And how important are the topics just mentioned to you personally? Please tell me according to this list.' The response aid in this case consisted of a list from one (for 'completely unimportant') to five (for 'very important'). Answers to these questions represent the key variables for this contribution.

DESCRIPTION

A first rough comparison of attitudes toward state regulation of abortion between east and west Germany, and between women and men, is presented in Table 1. To begin with, more people in the 'new' Länder have an opinion on this subject than in west Germany. In both parts of the country the share of respondents with an opinion rose from one wave of the survey to the next. This can be attributed to the increasing public discussion of the topic, but probably also reflects panel attrition of politically less interested respondents. East Germans are more inclined toward an easing of legal regulations, but in the west a trend in the direction of 'liberalisation' is visible between 1990 and 1991. This is most likely due to the fact that after unification the need to

standardise legislation was brought to public attention, and that this would bring some changes in the direction of previous east German laws.

There are only minor distinctions between the sexes. The strongest such difference is found in the share of respondents with an opinion on this subject in west Germany, which is significantly lower among men than women. The most important variation in public opinion thus exists between east and west. In 1991 and 1992 east Germans placed themselves somewhat over one scale point away from the extreme category of 'ease governmental regulations', while west Germans, on average, were a little less than two scale points away from this extreme.

TABLE 1
ATTITUDES TOWARDS GOVERNMENTAL REGULATION OF ABORTION AMONG WOMEN AND MEN IN EAST AND WEST GERMANY, 1990, 1991 AND 1992

	West Germany			East Germany	
	1990	1991	1992	1991	1992
Total					
Average on abortion scale	3.4	2.9	2.9	2.3	2.2
% with own position	88.4	92.1	93.0	95.4	98.2
Average personal importance	3.5	3.5	3.5	3.8	3.8
% responding on importance	99.6	98.4	99.9	98.2	99.7
Number of cases	2007	932	716	606	325
Women					
Average on abortion scale	3.3	2.9	2.8	2.4	2.2
% with own position		92.6	95.9	95.2	96.7
97.5 Average personal importance	3.7	3.7	3.7	3.9	4.0
% responding on importance	99.7	98.5	100.0	98.4	99.4
Number of cases	986	438	332	307	163
Men					
Average on abortion scale	3.4	3.0	3.0	2.2	2.1
% with own position	85.5	89.2	91.6	94.6	98.8
Average personal importance	3.3	3.3	3.3	3.7	3.7
% responding on importance	99.5	98.2	99.9	98.0	100.0
Number of cases	1021	494	384	299	162

Abortion scale: 'Should governmental regulations be modified so as to make getting an abortion easier, or to make it more difficult?' Scale values from 1='easier' to 7='more difficult')

Personal importance: 'And how important are the topics just mentioned to you personally? Please tell me according to this list.' (List: 1='completely unimportant', 2='not that important', 3='of medium importance', 4='important', 5='very important')

As to the personal salience of our topic, Table 1 shows high aggregate stability. Personal importance was always rated by nearly all respondents, and their answers follow a clear pattern. The topic is least important for men in west Germany; men in the east and women in the west report identical and intermediate salience; and the issue is most important for women in east Germany. The average saliency scores indicate a skewed distribution. Such

distributions are well known for this sort of scale, when the importance of a theme is to be judged without requiring a rank order, because there is a tendency for respondents to declare everything as at least 'important'. Therefore, the personal salience of the abortion topic has to be judged in comparison to the other position-issues that were polled.

For this comparison, two criteria can be used, that is average personal salience and the percentage of respondents classifying issues as 'important' or 'very important'. According to both criteria the topic is at the lower end of personal salience in west Germany, while among east Germans it takes more of a middle rank. Vehement constitutional debates over the abortion issue, and the pain of those personally affected notwithstanding, on average our samples are personally more concerned about other topics. This implies, of course, that we have to scale down any expectations about the political impact of abortion attitudes that we might have.

STABILITY OF ABORTION ATTITUDES

Due to the comparatively low personal saliency of opinions about abortion one could suspect that, despite their high *aggregate* stability, *individual* stability might be rather low. However, this is not the case. Total over-time correlations (top half of Table 2) indeed are not very high. But if one considers the possibility of purely random fluctuations from one interview to the next, the percentages of those who did not change their responses at all or at most by one point on the scale (lower half of Table 2) are more meaningful. Around two-thirds of our samples do not significantly change their opinion between two subsequent interviews, according to that criterion. Differences in stability between east and west Germany do not exist.

Not surprisingly, however, the degree of attitudinal stability differs considerably between people for whom the topic is either important or less important. In Table 2 the stability of individual opinions about abortion is also differentiated according to whether or not the issue is declared to be at least 'important' in both interviews. In west Germany over-time correlations differ greatly between the two sub-samples, and in both parts of the country about 75 per cent of those who view the theme as at least 'important' to themselves maintain their position on the issue (according to the criterion of maximum change by one scale point). Among all others it is only about 60 per cent. Personal saliency contributes to attitudinal stability.

PERSONAL SALIENCE OF THE ABORTION ISSUE

When the individual stability of opinions about abortion depends on the personal importance of the topic, the question arises, of course, for which people

TABLE 2
STABILITY OF ABORTION ATTITUDES

	West Germany in both waves			East Germany in both waves		
	total	at least 'important'	all others	total	at least 'important'	all others
Correlations of the abortion scale						
1990/1991	.48 (788)	.57 (307)	.39 (481)	-	-	-
1991/1992	.50 (519)	.63 (214)	.36 (305)	.46 (310)	.42 (161)	.43 (149)
1990/1992	.45 (609)	.51 (217)	.39 (392)	-	-	-
% no change or at most by one scale point						
1990/1991	64.0	73.0	58.2	-	-	-
1991/1992	65.3	74.8	58.7	66.8	77.0	61.1
1990/1992	61.9	70.0	57.4	-	-	-

Numbers of cases in parentheses.

it is more or less salient. A first hypothesis is that it should be more so for respondents with 'extreme' positions than for 'moderate' ones. This is fully-confirmed for both parts of Germany, but the distribution is not quite symmetrical. The issue is most important for respondents who are strongly opposed to restrictions of abortion. Those who strongly favour restrictions are in the middle range, and for those with moderate views the topic is least important. In east Germany the number of cases at the 'conservative' end of the scale is rather low, of course.

Personal opinions about abortion are not the only determinants of the salience of the issue, of course. Therefore, Table 3 presents a comprehensive regression analysis for personal salience as the dependent variable (due to limitations of space for 1991 only). Following the considerations summarised in the introduction, predictor variables come from these four groups: first, social background, demographic characteristics, and family situation; second, general social and political values; third, political involvement and activity; and, fourth, perceptions of the social and economic situation and trends in Germany.

The following individual items belong to the first group: sex, age, education, marital status, household income, size of household, size of town, and (only in the west) region (north, middle, south). The second group consists of religious affiliation, self-placement on a left-right scale, an anomy scale, the materialist-postmaterialist scale of Inglehart, and, finally, Schumann's ASKO-scale ('Affinity towards stable cognitive orientations'),⁷ in which the three dimensions of conservatism, rigidity and tolerance of ambiguity are brought together. The third group comprises interest in politics, attention to political media contents, political information, and political activity. Finally,

in the fourth group are assessments of the general economic situation (past development, current status, expectations), an analogous scale for one's personal economic situation, satisfaction with the social security system of Germany, and judgements about the development of equality of women over the past few years. Given this large number of potential predictors, a stepwise regression analysis was performed for each part of Germany, in order to avoid reproduction of numerous insignificant coefficients. Accordingly, Table 3 reports only those variables which in at least one part of the country are found to have a significant effect.

TABLE 3
REGRESSION ANALYSIS OF THE PERSONAL SALIENCE OF THE ABORTION
ISSUE IN 1991

Beta coefficients of	West Germany	East Germany	Sequence in East Germany
Position on abortion scale	-.85 ^c	-1.11 ^c	1
Position on abortion scale squared	.65 ^c	.85 ^c	2
ASKO-scale	-.08 ^a	-.09 ^a	4
Women (dummy variable 0/1)	.17 ^c	-	-
Age	-.13 ^c	-.13 ^b	3
Catholic (dummy variable 0/1)	.10 ^b	-	-
Left-right self placement	-.09 ^a	-.08 ^a	5
Political media attention	.15 ^c	-	-
Evaluation of the general economic situation	-.07 ^a	-	-
Household size	-	.08 ^a	6
R ²	.197	.216	
Number of cases	926	605	

Explanatory variables are listed in the order in which they were entered into stepwise regression in west Germany. The last column lists the sequence in which they were entered in east Germany.

a: $p < .05$

b: $p < .01$

c: $p < .001$

-: not entered into stepwise regression

Even though we are controlling for a great number of third variables, individual positions toward the legal regulation of abortion in both parts of Germany actually have the strongest impact on the personal importance of the topic. The second variable entered into these equations is the squared position on the abortion scale, which reflects the non-linear association just discussed. In west Germany the ASKO scale follows in third place (fourth in the east). Its negative sign indicates that more conservative and cognitively rigid per-

sons tend to assign the question less personal meaning. Sex shows up as significant only in west Germany, which has to be expected from the data in Table 1. In both parts of the country the importance of the issue declines with increasing age (a test for non-linearity proved such a specification to be superfluous). While self-placement on the left-right continuum in east and west has a parallel effect as the ASKO scale (the farther to the right, the less important the topic), the remaining variables diverge between 'old' and 'new' Länder.

In the west the issue is personally much more salient for Catholics than for other citizens, while in the east there is no such difference. Moreover, in west Germany it is more important to those who follow political news in the media more closely, and who evaluate the overall economic situation as less favourable. Household size proves to have an influence only in east Germany, in that members of larger households think the issue to be personally more important. Percentages of explained variance are around 20 per cent. That they are not much higher is hardly surprising. Our study (due to its focus) certainly did not cover some key dimensions which should impact strongly on the personal importance of our topic, such as individual histories of partnership and family, beliefs about sexual morality, and direct or indirect personal experience with the subject.

DETERMINANTS OF ATTITUDES ABOUT THE REGULATION OF ABORTION

Cross-Sectional Analysis

Why do people in Germany hold the opinions about the abortion law that they do? In order to answer this question, a regression analysis was performed of the individual positions on our abortion scale, with predictor variables as detailed in the previous section. However, some of these variables were combined into three scales, in order to simplify the analysis, as follows. Political interest and attention to political contents of the media were brought together into a joint scale. The same was done with assessments of the economic situation, of the development of equal rights, and of the social security system. Finally, a scale of political orientations was constructed from self-placement on the left-right continuum and party identification of respondents, with the latter defined as follows: independents were assigned a value of zero, those identifying with one of the more restrictive (liberal) parties on the question of abortion were assigned the strength (scale: one to five) of their identification, multiplied by +1 (-1).

Our results (Table 4) show that individual opinions about legal regulations of abortion can be best accounted for by fundamental religious, societal and political orientations. The coefficients of social background and demographic variables point, as a rule, in the directions which have to be plausibly expected; they are, however, for the most part not statistically different from

zero. In both parts of Germany almost identical and strong effects of religious affiliation and church attendance are found for 1991 and 1992. As long as church attendance (which was not surveyed in 1991) is not included, Catholics are significantly less inclined to approve of easing abortion restrictions than others, but as soon as that variable is introduced into the model the impact of denomination disappears. If religiosity of family and friends is also incorporated (1990 in the west and 1991 in the east), it consistently exerts a significant influence. Almost always significant (the sole exception is east Germany in 1992) is the effect of cognitive rigidity (as measured by the ASKO scale), and of general political orientations (self-placement on the left-right dimension and identification with pro- or anti-abortion parties), in that more rigid or right-leaning persons tend to be more in favour of restrictions.

While the index of political involvement does not emerge as significantly associated with attitudes about the abortion law, there is a uniform relationship with assessments of economic and social trends. Both in 1991 and 1992 respondents in east and west Germany with sceptical evaluations in these fields also were more in favour of easing abortion regulations. Taken together, our predictors explain from 14 to 18 per cent of the variance in abortion attitudes. This is not exorbitant, of course, but one has to consider the relatively low personal importance of our topic for sizeable portions of the population. Personally less salient opinions should exhibit a higher degree of randomness.

This assertion can be tested directly with our data, by splitting the samples according to personal importance of the issue, and replicating the analysis within the sub-samples. The results (not presented in detail here) clearly confirm our expectation. In all waves of the panel the model accounts for significantly higher shares of the variance among those respondents who hold the issue to be at least 'important' than those who answer otherwise. This difference is, of course, smaller in the 'new' as opposed to the 'old' Länder, because in the former the sub-sample with lower personal importance of the issue is, in relative terms, much smaller than in the west.

Changes in Abortion Attitudes

With panel data we not only have the opportunity to examine the individual stability of opinions, but we can also investigate the correlates of over-time fluctuations. It would make little sense, however, to include all of the previously introduced explanatory variables in this analysis, since social and demographic background variables hardly change over such short periods of time. Therefore, we will relate changes of only four scales to simultaneous changes in abortion attitudes (ASKO scale, general political orientation, assessments

TABLE 4
REGRESSION ANALYSIS OF RESPONDENTS' POSITIONS TOWARDS
GOVERNMENTAL REGULATION OF ABORTION

Beta coefficients of	West Germany			East Germany	
	1990	1991	1992	1991	1992
1. Age.	.02	.09 ^a	.07	.04	.00
2. Women (dummy 0/1)	-.05	.00	-.05	.00	.00
3. Education	-.04	-.04	-.00	.07	.00
4. Single (dummy 0/1)	-.07 ^b	-.06	-.07	-.01	-.12
5. Household size	-.01	.03	-.02	-.11 ^a	-.05
6. Size of town	-.08 ^c	-.06	-.12 ^b	-.07	-.02
7. Catholic (dummy 0/1)	.01	.11 ^c	.07	.13 ^b	.07
8. Church attendance	.13 ^c	-	.21 ^c	-	.22 ^c
9. Religiosity of friends	.06 ^c	-	-	.14 ^c	-
10. ASKO scale	.18 ^c	.11 ^b	.10 ^a	.12 ^b	.05
11. Political orientation	.13 ^c	.20 ^c	.12 ^b	.10 ^a	.12 ^a
12. Evaluation of economic and social conditions	.04	.08 ^a	.11 ^b	.15 ^b	.10 ^a
13. Political interest and media attention	-.01	.01	.01	-.08	-.10
R ²	.177	.166	.168	.155	.140
Number of cases	1749	853	666	577	319
R ² only variables 1 to 6	.071	.064	.044	.031	.017
R ² only variables 7 to 11	.159	.135	.134	.114	.099
R ² only variable 12	.021	.028	.036	.037	.037
R ² only variable 13	.000	.000	.000	.010	.009
	% of variance explained by complete model				
Variables 1 to 6	28	28	21	16	10
Variables 7 to 11	63	59	63	59	61
Variable 12	8	12	17	19	23
Variable 1300056					

a: p<.05

b: p<.01

c: p<.001

of economic and social conditions in Germany, and political involvement). In addition, changes in the personal salience of the issue will be included among the predictors, because one can argue that they should be related to two other important factors which are not measured directly in our study. These factors are, first, fluctuations of individual concern with the topic on moral, ethical or legal grounds, and, second, changes in respondents' individual situation which would make the issue personally more or less remote.

This assumption is indeed valid. Changes in the personal salience of the abortion issue is the only variable that without exception exerts a highly significant effect on changes in individual abortion attitudes (Table 5). Increases in

TABLE 5
REGRESSION ANALYSIS OF CHANGES OF RESPONDENTS' POSITIONS TOWARDS GOVERNMENTAL REGULATION OF ABORTION

Beta coefficients of changes of	West Germany		East Germany
	1990/1991	1991/1992	1991/1992
Personal importance of the issue	-.18 ^b	-.20 ^b	-.43 ^f
ASKO scale	.06	.08	-.05 ^c
Political orientation	.15 ^d	.06	.12
Evaluation of economic and social conditions	-.02	.04	-.05
Political interest and media attention	.03	.05	.02
R ²	.064	.063	.214
Number of cases	284	180	95

In this regression analysis only respondents are included who had changed their position by more than one scale point between the two surveys.

a: $p < .05$

b: $p < .01$

c: $p < .001$

personal importance are associated with 'liberalisation' of these attitudes, and vice versa. All the other variables in this model have no significant impact, the only exception being changes in general political orientations in west Germany between 1990 and 1991, where those who shift to the right and/or towards a 'restrictive' party become more restrictive themselves, and vice versa. For the west this model explains only about six, but in the east over 21 per cent of the variance of changes in abortion attitudes – a highly plausible difference. With a unified law imminent, east German citizens, for whom the topic became less important, could adjust their own position to accommodate the forthcoming restrictions (compared to previous GDR law). Those for whom it became more important, for whatever reasons, had to regard the preparation of the new regulation as threatening, and shifted more toward extreme rejection of legal restrictions.

THE IMPACT OF ABORTION ATTITUDES ON VOTING BEHAVIOUR

For political scientists the question of how abortion attitudes affect voting behaviour is of great interest, of course. To deal with this question simple bivariate analysis is insufficient, due to findings previously presented here. First, general political orientations of respondents must be controlled for, because they have been shown to exert a considerable influence on positions

toward abortion regulations (and naturally on voting decisions, too). Secondly, the differentiation according to personal salience of the issue again has to be heeded. One will expect that effects of opinions about the abortion law on voting, if they exist at all, will be stronger among those for whom the topic is personally important.

To take these considerations into account, voting intentions are first regressed on party identifications alone, then on individual positions vis-à-vis the abortion law alone, and then on both variables simultaneously. In a next step, an interaction term (position multiplied by importance) is introduced, to allow for the possibility that the effect of abortion attitudes on voting could differ according to personal salience of the issue. The results (Table 6) show, first, that party identification is essential as a control variable. Secondly, regressions with positions towards abortion as the only predictor turn out consistently significant findings, but to a large degree this is due to common dependence on party identifications. A statistically 'conservative' estimate of the effects of abortion attitudes on voting can be obtained through the increase in explained variance when these issue positions are entered into the model in addition to party identification, and these figures show much weaker effects.

The sceptical expectation that personally relatively unimportant issues cannot exert a strong impact on voting is thus confirmed. In west Germany abortion attitudes, controlling for party identification, account for less than one per cent of the total variance in voting intentions. In the east this is somewhat higher (maximum 2.1 per cent), but even there one may not speak of a decisive electoral effect. A moderate rise in explanatory power normally occurs by incorporating the interaction term for personal importance. Only twice, however, is this term statistically different from zero (1990 in west, and 1992 in east Germany).

We have seen earlier that abortion is not a 'women's issue', since their attitudes, when controlling for other social and demographic variables, value judgements, and so on, hardly differ from men's. This does not, however, rule out that women's attitudes might have a stronger impact on their party preference. To investigate this possibility, the analysis in Table 6 was replicated, splitting samples by sex (not reported in detail). While for the 'old' Länder this produces no additional insights, in east Germany the results conform to this speculation: voting intentions among men can hardly be explained by their abortion attitudes. At the same time, among women these attitudes account for from 3.4 (1991) to 4.6 per cent (1992) of the variance in voting, even controlling for party identification. Women in east Germany thus do not hold different opinions from men, when third variables are controlled for, but their opinions on this issue prove to be more relevant for shaping their current partisan preferences.

TABLE 6
REGRESSION ANALYSIS OF THE IMPACT OF ABORTION ATTITUDES ON
VOTING INTENTIONS

	West Germany			East Germany	
	1990	1991	1992	1991	1992
Regression analysis without interaction term					
R ² total	.635 ^c	.705 ^c	.699 ^c	.529 ^c	.606 ^c
R ² party ID	.633 ^c	.701 ^c	.698 ^c	.508 ^c	.598 ^c
R ² abortion position	.062 ^c	.087 ^c	.055 ^c	.064 ^c	.047 ^c
Increase in R ² by abortion position	.002	.004	.001	.021	.008
Regression analysis with interaction term (position* importance)					
R ² total	.636 ^c	.707 ^c	.699 ^c	.529 ^c	.612 ^c
R ² abortion position plus interaction term	.063 ^c	.093 ^c	.055 ^c	.066 ^c	.081 ^c
Increase in R ² by abortion position	.003	.006	.001	.021	.014
Beta coefficients in model with interaction term					
Party identification	.79 ^c	.82 ^c	.83 ^c	.69 ^c	.75 ^c
Abortion position	.01	.11 ^c	.02	.16 ^c	.19 ^c
Interaction term	.05 ^a	.05	.02	-.01	.13 ^a
Number of cases	1774	858	666	578	319

Party identification and voting intentions are defined as follows:

+1: Identification with/preference for an 'anti-abortion' party (CDU/CSU, Republikaner)

0: No party identification or voting intention

-1: Identification with/preference for a 'pro-abortion' party (SPD, FDP, Greens, Bündnis 90, PDS)

For computation of the interaction term, personal salience of the issue was coded as follows:

1: 'completely unimportant' to 'of medium importance'.

2: 'important'

3: 'very important'

a: $p < .05$

b: $p < .01$

c: $p < .001$

Since we have panel data available, we can now in a final step relate over-time changes in voting intentions to changes in abortion attitudes. The results (Table 7) run largely parallel to those of the cross-sectional analyses. Without any doubt the most important factor to affect changes in voting preference between two subsequent interviews is changes in party identification. In west Germany, changes in attitudes toward abortion have virtually no additional explanatory power, with or without an interaction term. This is quite different in the 'new' Länder. There, where naturally attachments to the political parties cannot yet have acquired the same degree of strength and stability as in

the West,⁸ even if one controls for changes in party identification the political impact of attitude changes toward abortion between 1991 and 1992 becomes very clear. Equally recognisable is the sizeable effect of the interaction term for personal salience. Changes in positions on abortion rights between these two years are able to explain a good 6.9 per cent of the variance of changes in voting intentions. The difference in the personal importance of the issue between both parts of the country thus is mirrored by a parallel difference in the impact of these attitudes on voting preferences, that can be observed both in cross-sectional and longitudinal analyses.

TABLE 7
REGRESSION ANALYSIS OF THE IMPACT OF CHANGES OF ABORTION ATTITUDES ON
CHANGES OF VOTING INTENTIONS

	West Germany		East Germany 1991/92		
	1990/91	1991/92	Total	Men	Women
R ² total	.497 ^c	.343 ^c	.407 ^c	.700 ^c	.334 ^c
R ² change in party identification	.495 ^c	.341 ^c	.338 ^c	.655 ^c	.150 ^c
R ² change of position	.019	.001	.021	.017	.190 ^b
R ² change of position plus interaction term	.019	.002	.097 ^a	.069 ^a	.300 ^c
Increase of R ² by abortion position	.002	.002	.069	.045	.184
Number of cases	186	125	87	43	44

In this regression analysis only respondents are included who had changed their voting intention between the two surveys. Party identification and voting intention are coded as in Table 6.

a: $p < .05$

b: $p < .01$

c: $p < .001$

The difference between the sexes in the 'new' Länder is also fully confirmed in this longitudinal perspective. Separation by gender is superfluous in the west, given the minimal total effect. The last two columns of Table 7, on the other hand, make it very evident that our issue has the most significance for fluctuations of the party preferences of east German women. 4.5 per cent of this variance among east German men can be attributed to changes in opinions on abortion rights, but for the women from the same part of the country this figure stands at 18.4 per cent, which despite the relatively small number of cases is statistically highly significant. Only among them are the effects of changes in abortion attitudes stronger than those of changes in party identifications. Stated simply, one can summarise that in the west individual positions toward abortion legislation did hardly at all influence voting preferences

over the past few years, and among men in the 'new' Länder had some limited impact. At the same time, for women in the former GDR, the group for which this issue is most personally salient, it had considerable effects on current party preferences and their modification.

CONCLUSION

This study of public attitudes on legal regulation of abortion in Germany reveals interesting and plausible differences between east and west, and between men and women. Concerning positions vis-à-vis the abortion law such differences are largely wiped out once controls for social background of respondents, for their value orientations, and their judgements of economic and social conditions in the country are applied. For assessments of personal salience this does not hold to the same extent. With appropriate controls in place, women still regard the issue as more important than men, and east more than west Germans. However, compared to other issues it is only a minority who place this topic at the top of their list of political priorities.

Therefore, in analyses of the determinants, as well as of the political consequences, of attitudes towards abortion, differentiation by personal importance of the question proves to be indispensable. Respondents for whom it is more salient have more stable attitudes, that also can be better explained. Social and religious values and general political orientations, compared to social and demographic factors and evaluations of living conditions in Germany, prove to be most relevant for such explanations. Generally speaking, the abortion issue has little influence on current partisan preferences or their changes over time, but, as could be expected, people with a high level of personal importance of the question deviate from this pattern. This is particularly true for women in the eastern Länder. Thus, regarding the political effects of these attitudes an assumption of uniformity must not be made, rather the population must be divided according to the degree to which people are personally affected before meaningful results can be obtained.

It is not possible, due to the relatively small sample sizes, to extend this analysis by further narrowing down the 'issue public' (for example according to age). But even without any further analysis we can conclude that the issue of the reform of paragraph 218 of the penal code already has some unmistakable, even though not universal, effects on political preferences. Now that the Federal Constitutional Court has decided to reject the reform legislation, this relationship might well be strengthened. Political and social controversy over this issue is likely to continue, and it cannot be ruled out that its relevance for voting intentions and behaviour will likewise go up, particularly among those who are most affected by this ruling.

NOTES

1. See the bibliography in Clyde Wilcox and Phyllis Berry, 'Catholicism and Support for Legal Abortion in Germany: A Contextual Analysis' (unpublished paper, Department of Government, Georgetown University), Washington, DC, 1992.
2. See Alfons Bora and Karlhans Liebl, *Einstellung zum Schwangerschaftsabbruch: Zur Bedeutung generalisierter Wertsysteme in Konfliktsituationen* (Pfaffenweiler: Centaurus, 1986); Hanns-Werner Eichelberger, 'Konfession und Ethik am Beispiel der Einstellung zum Schwangerschaftsabbruch', in Karl Fritz Daiber (ed.), *Religion und Konfession* (Hannover: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1989), pp.72-92.
3. Barbara Erbslöh and Achim Koch, 'Einstellungen zur Legalisierung des Schwangerschaftsabbruchs: Das Meinungsbild in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland im zeitlichen und internationalen Vergleich', in Walter Müller et al. (eds.), *Blickpunkt Gesellschaft: Einstellungen und Verhalten der Bundesbürger* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1990), pp.95-117.
4. Eichelberger, op. cit.
5. Bora and Liebl, op. cit.
6. See note 1.
7. Siegfried Schumann, *Wahlverhalten und Persönlichkeit* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1990).
8. See Hans Rattinger, 'Parteieneigungen, Sachfragen- und Kandidatenorientierungen in Ost- und Westdeutschland', in Hans Rattinger, Oscar Gabriel and Wolfgang Jagodzinski (eds.), *Wahlen und politische Einstellungen im vereinigten Deutschland* (Frankfurt: P. Lang, 1994); Hans Rattinger, 'Parteiidentifikationen in Ost- und Westdeutschland seit der Vereinigung', in Oskar Niedermayer and Klaus von Beyme (eds.), *Politische Kultur in Ost- und Westdeutschland* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1994).