



The Relationship Between Marital Status and Abortion Approval Rates in Varying Circumstances in the U.S.



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Introduction

- Abortion is a contested issue in American society, with 63% of Americans surveyed in 2025 believing abortion should be legal in most or all cases and 38% believing abortion should be illegal in most or all cases (Pew Research Center, 2025).
- Marital status has been studied as a demographic factor associated with differing opinions on abortion, along with race, sex, political party, and religion (Begun & Walls, 2015; Cannedy & Lee, 2022; Hess & Rueb, 2005; Ruppner et al., 2019).
- Different studies have come to varying conclusions regarding the association between marital status and approval of abortion. Hess & Rueb (2005) and Cannedy & Lee (2022) found that marital status was not significantly associated with abortion opinion. Ruppner et al. (2019) found that marital status had a significant association with abortion approval among white women but not among women of color.
- Previous research has not examined how marital status influences individuals' opinions on specific circumstances in which abortion occurs or focused on marital status independent of other factors.

Research Questions

- Is there a relationship between marital status and one's opinion on abortion in different circumstances?
- Does this relationship exist when other factors (political ideology, religion, race, and sex) are controlled for?

Methods

Sample

- Respondents (n=1,317) were drawn from the General Social Survey (GSS) of 2024, a cross-sectional and nationally representative survey of non-institutionalized civilians aged 18 years or older in the United States.

Measures

- Approval of abortion: Examined through a series of seven questions asking whether respondents approved of abortion in various circumstances. I chose to focus on approval of abortion to protect maternal health ("Please tell me whether or not you think it should be possible for a pregnant woman to obtain a legal abortion if the woman's own health is seriously endangered by the pregnancy?") and for any reason ("If the woman wants it for any reason?"). Responses were categorized as agree or disagree.
- Marital status: Measured with the question, "Are you currently married, widowed, divorced, separated, or have you never been married?". This categorical variable was coded into two possible responses: married or previously married and never married.

Results

Bivariate

- Chi-Square analysis showed that marital status was significantly associated with approval of abortion in instances of maternal health protection ($p = .02683$). Marital status was also significantly associated with approval of abortion for any reason ($p = .0001504$).

Multivariate

- Logistic regression analyses showed that individuals who had never been married were significantly more likely than people who are or had been married to approve of abortion to protect maternal health (OR 1.775, $p = 0.0215$). Additionally, individuals who had never been married were also more likely than people who are or had been married to approve of abortion for any reason (OR 1.606, $p = 0.0001$).
- Sex and race were not significantly associated with approval of abortion to protect maternal health or for any reason.
- Political party and religion were significantly associated with approval of abortion to protect maternal health or for any reason. Republicans were significantly less likely than Democrats to approve of abortion to protect maternal health (OR 0.227, $p = 3.32 \times 10^{-7}$) and for any reason (OR 0.123, $p = 2 \times 10^{-16}$). People who identified as religious were significantly less likely than non-religious individuals to approve of abortion to protect maternal health (OR 0.343, $p = 0.002$) and for any reason (OR 0.175, $p = 1.18 \times 10^{-14}$).
- Political party and religion separately acted as confounding variables in the relationship between marital status and approval of abortion to protect maternal health, but not in the relationship between marital status and approval of abortion for any reason. However, when both political party and religion are accounted for in a singular logistic regression, they act as a confounding variable in the relationship between marital status and approval of abortion for any reason. The effect of political party on the association between marital status and approval of abortion for any reason can be seen in Figure 1, and the effect of religion on this association can be seen in Figure 2.

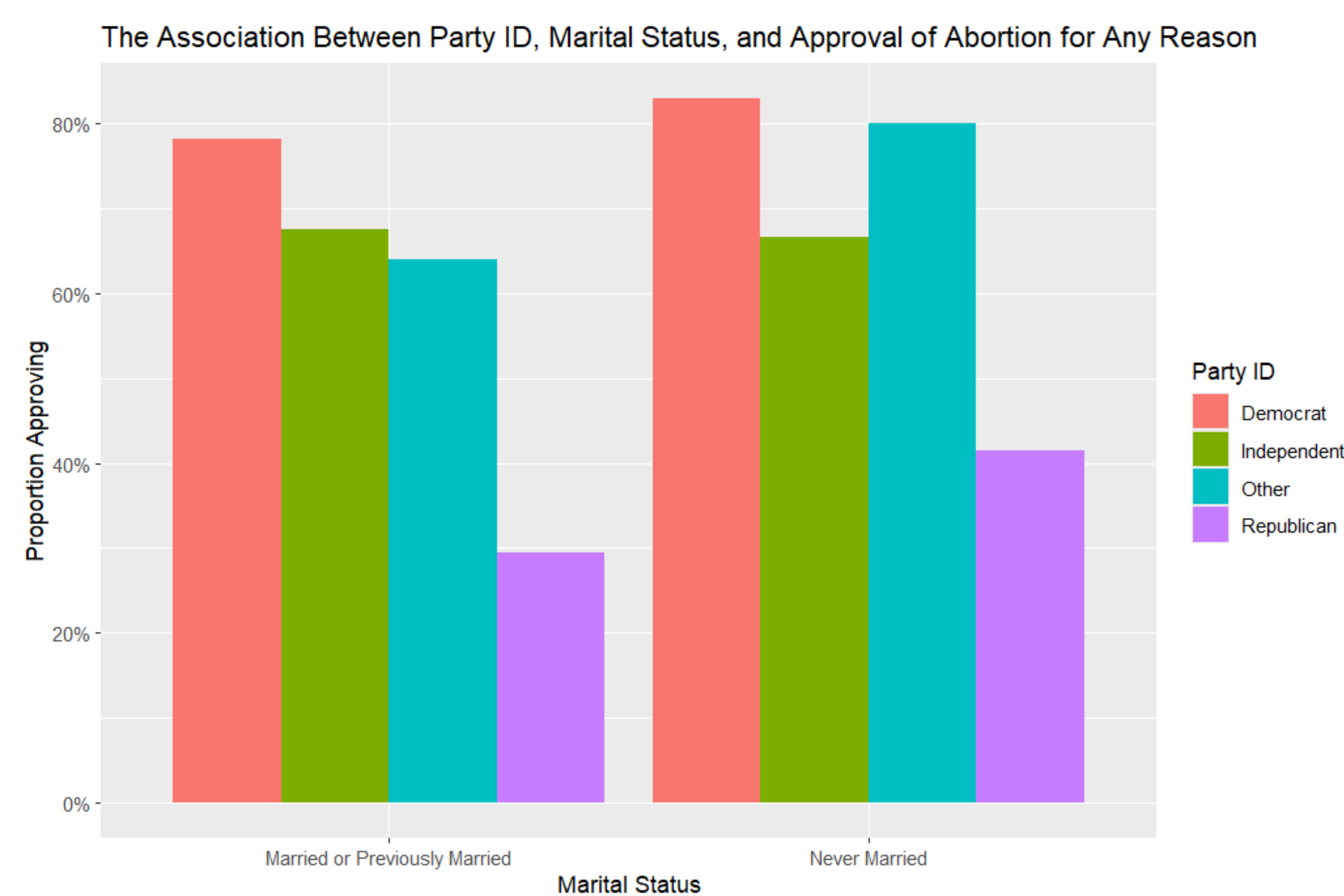


Figure 1: The Association Between Party ID, Marital Status, and Approval of Abortion for Any Reason

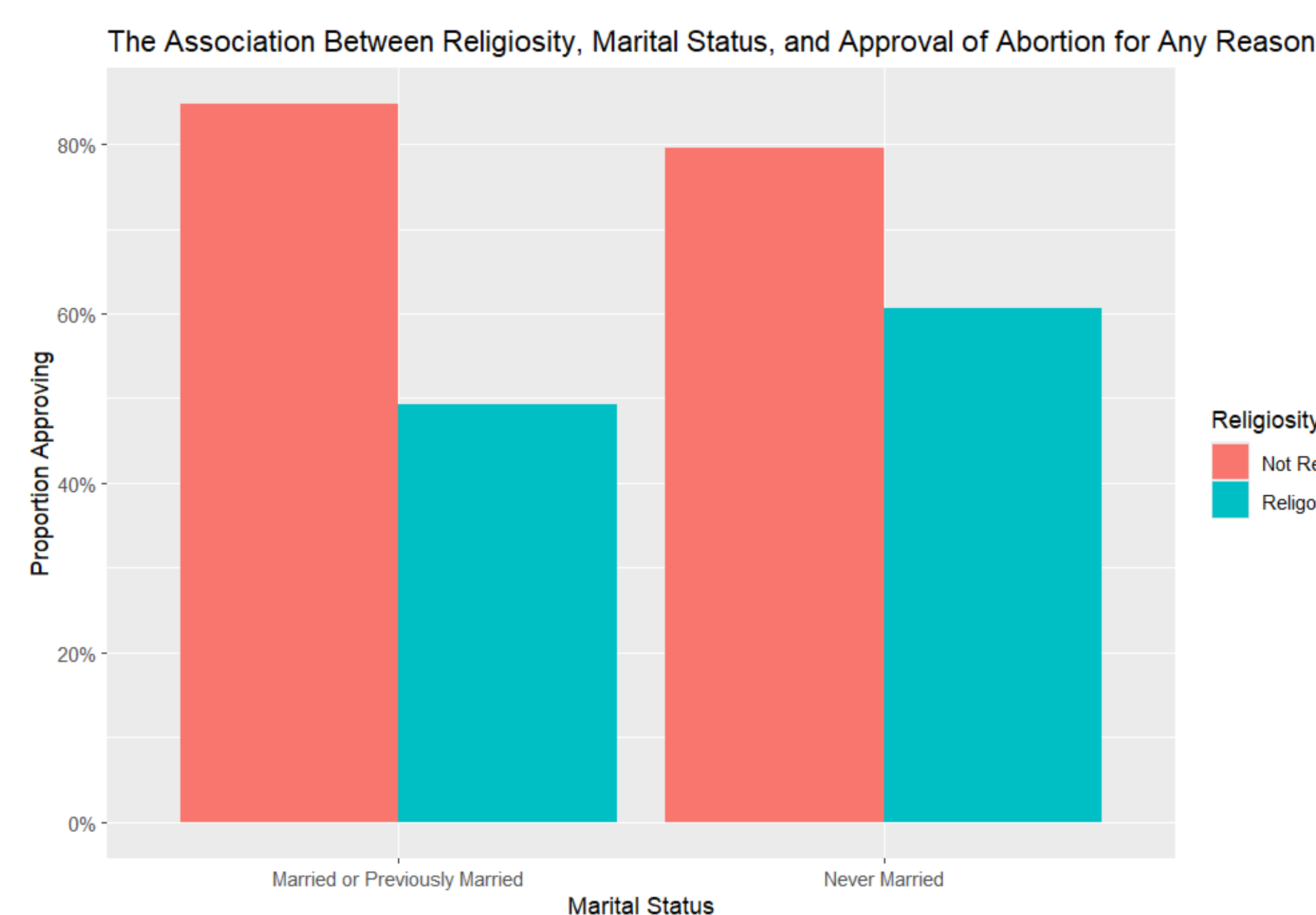


Figure 2: The Association Between Religiosity, Marital Status, and Approval of Abortion for Any Reason

- Religion: Measured with the question "What is your religious preference?" and categorized into nonreligious and religious.
- Political party ideology: Measured with the question "Do you consider yourself as a Republican, Democrat, Independent, or what?" and responses were categorized as Democrat, Republican, Independent, and Other.
- Sex: Categorical variable with male and female as possible responses.
- Race: Categorical variable with white, Black, and other as possible responses.

Discussion

- Marital status is associated with approval of abortion in instances of maternal health protection and for any reason. However, religiosity and political party account for this association to varying degrees.
- These findings may contribute to political science research regarding how different demographic factors influence the public's approval of abortion in distinct circumstances.
- Future research is needed to determine the role of other potential covariates (e.g. income, age, and education) and approval of abortion in other circumstances examined in the GSS (e.g. birth defects, financial distress, rape).

References

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