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To adopt or not to adopt an abortion policy

A case study of the abortion reform processes in Spain and Portugal

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Abstract

This thesis analyzes two attempts at restricting women's access to abortion with different outcomes. In 2014 a policy proposal seeking to criminalize abortion in Spain was withdrawn after a ten month long debate, while a policy proposal introducing obstacles for women to have an abortion was adopted in Portugal in 2015 after a quiet reform process. Process tracing is used to uncover the factors conducive for the adoption of the Portuguese reform proposal and the withdrawal of the Spanish reform proposal in order to offer a more comprehensive understanding of under which circumstances conservative abortion reform proposals are adopted or withdrawn. The theoretical framework draws primarily on previous research in the field of gender policy adoption and theory on political parties as strategic actors. The findings show that there were three central factors for understanding the contrasting outcomes of the two abortion reform processes. First, the opposition forces differed in their strength and composition. Second, public opinion did not support the Spanish reform proposal. Third, the Spanish reform proposal demanded extensive changes to the current abortion law while the Portuguese reform proposal required less extensive changes.

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1. Introduction

Most European countries, with a few exceptions, allow abortion upon a woman's request during the first weeks of pregnancy and under specified circumstances during later stages of pregnancy (Acosta, 2015). Abortion has long been a debated issue even though the European abortion laws are some of the most liberal in the world. Recent developments in Europe have proven that the right to abortion is not guaranteed even in countries where liberal abortion laws have been adopted. Policy proposals restricting women's access to abortion have been presented in several European countries in the last few years (Bergfeldt, 2014). The right to abortion seems to have to be defended time and again. Under what circumstances are conservative abortion laws adopted and the right to abortion threatened? This issue will be investigated by delving into the abortion reform processes in two of the countries where conservative abortion reforms have been proposed: Spain and Portugal.

Abortion reforms in Spain and Portugal have historically been very alike in terms of the time of adoption and the content of the reforms. Socialist governments in Spain and Portugal adopted laws allowing abortion in case of health risks, rape and fetal malformation in 1985 and 1984 respectively. Abortion was forbidden under all circumstances before this. Both countries have adopted liberal abortion laws during the last decade. The socialist government in Spain made abortion legal in 2010 up to week 14 of pregnancy and up to week 22 in case of health risks or fetal malformation. Portugal held two referendums on whether a liberal abortion law should be adopted or not, one in 1998 and one in 2007. The Portuguese people voted against a liberal abortion law in 1998 and in favor of a liberal abortion law in 2007. The socialist government consequently adopted a law in 2007 allowing women to have an abortion up to week 10 of pregnancy and longer in case of health risks, rape or fetal malformation (Astudillo, 2014; Requejo, 2011; Oliveira da Silva, 2009; Karlsson, 2014, 2012b).

Policy proposals introducing restrictions on women's access to abortion have since then been presented in both countries, but with different outcomes. The right wing ruling party in Spain, Partido Popular (PP), announced a draft law in December 2013

that would only allow abortion in case of rape or if the pregnant woman's life was in danger. Even though PP had the majority of seats in the parliament, the draft law was withdrawn in September 2014 after a long process characterized by lively debate (Janzon, 2014). A legislative initiative was presented in Portugal in October 2014 by Portuguese citizens with close ties to the Catholic Church. The initiative proposed introducing obstacles for women wanting to have abortions, including user fees and mandatory psychological and social counseling before having an abortion. Women would also have to view and sign an ultrasound (Oliveira 2015a; João Lopes, 2015; Campos, 2014). The majority right wing government supported the initiative and adopted parts of it in July 2015 after a remarkably quiet reform process (Sydsvenskan, 2015). Given that Spain and Portugal have had similar developments in the area of abortion legislation during the last decades, it is puzzling that the proposed restrictions in 2013 and 2014 led to different outcomes. This study investigates if there are mechanisms in the reform processes in Spain and Portugal that can reveal something about when conservative abortion reforms are adopted or withdrawn.

1.1 Purpose

The overarching purpose is to understand under which circumstances the right to abortion can be restricted with the adoption of conservative abortion reforms. One of the principal points of focus in previous research in the field of abortion policy adoption has been the circumstances under which liberal abortion policies have been adopted (Htun, 2003; Lopreite, 2012). This thesis adds to the literature by shedding light on cases where conservative abortion reform proposals have been successfully adopted or shot down. I will highlight the issue of the right to abortion not being permanent by shifting the focus to cases where liberal abortion laws have been passed in the last decade but conservative abortion reforms still pose a threat. Liberal abortion reforms are understood as laws granting women access to abortion on demand without stipulations up to a certain week of pregnancy, while conservative abortion reforms are understood as laws limiting women's access to abortion. This could for instance be reducing the number of weeks abortion is legal or creating obstacles that make it more difficult to have one, such as the introduction of fees.

The question of when the right to abortion is threatened is explored in a case study of Spain and Portugal. Conservative abortion reform proposals have been presented in

both countries only a couple of years after liberal abortion legislation was adopted, but the conservative reform proposal was only adopted in Portugal. This suggests that these cases can tell us something about which factors are important for the adoption or withdrawal of a conservative abortion reform proposal. More specifically, the purpose is to understand the differences between the abortion reform processes in Spain and Portugal. The research question of this thesis is therefore:

Which factors were important for the adoption of a conservative abortion reform proposal in Portugal and the withdrawal of a conservative abortion reform proposal in Spain?

1.2 Disposition

The following section will present the theoretical framework constructed specifically for this case study based on previous research. It describes the place of abortion policies in the broader category of gender policies before going into the factors that are important in abortion reform processes. The subsequent section is a discussion of methods, including case selection, process tracing, material and a presentation of the analytical framework. The analysis begins with separate accounts of the reform processes in Spain and Portugal with separate analyses of each case, after which a comparative analysis of the cases concludes the analysis section. The conclusions made from the study are presented at the end of the thesis.

2. Theory and previous research

This section will present relevant factors for gender policy outcome based on previous research in the field, which will make up the theoretical framework for this thesis. Previous feminist research has mostly focused on “successful” cases, in the sense that a gender policy has been adopted. Bergqvist et al. (2013) emphasizes the importance of complementing this research by studying “unsuccessful” cases, in other words cases where reform attempts have not resulted in the adoption of a gender policy, in order to better understand which factors are present in gender policy adoption and withdrawal. This study compares a successful case, Portugal, with an unsuccessful case, Spain, to map out the differences between the cases that can help us understand

when conservative abortion policies are adopted or withdrawn. But before the theoretical framework is presented, the distinctiveness of abortion policy will be discussed to understand how the abortion reform process differs from other gender reform processes. This is necessary in order to understand why certain factors in the theoretical framework are especially relevant when studying abortion.

2.1 Distinctiveness of gender policies

Gender policies are not one uniform category of policies, but a bundle of gender issues with varying character. Issues differ in the ideas at stake in change, the groups participating in policy debates and how they are politically processed. One type of analysis can therefore not be applied to all gender policies. Htun and Weldon (2010, 207-209; Htun, 2003, 4-5) emphasize this distinctiveness of different gender issues and have introduced a typology for analyzing cross-national variation in the adoption of gender policies, which can be used to understand the particular characteristics of abortion policies.

Scholars within this field have primarily focused on women as political agents in parliaments as MPs and in civil society as the explanations to why gender equality policies are adopted, but few have addressed the puzzle that gender equality policies have been adopted when women's representation in government is low and women's rights movements are weak. Htun and Weldon (2010) offer an explanation to this puzzle by disaggregating gender issues in two dimensions to uncover the variation in the reform process of different issues.

The first dimension categorizes gender equality policies into status policies and class-based policies. Status policies address injustices that affect all women, regardless of their socioeconomic position, while class-based policies address inequalities among women. For example, policies directed at the sexual division of labor are class-based. Even though all women are affected, the consequences vary greatly with social class. Women with economic means have the choice to pay for child care, cleaning and cooking while women of lower social class cannot buy their way out of the double burden of paid work and unpaid care work. Htun and Weldon (2010, 207-210) argue that the legalization of abortion is a status policy affecting all women, but the funding of abortion is class-based since wealthy women can pay market rates for abortion.

However, the legality of abortion cannot be completely separated from the funding of abortion and therefore categorized as a status policy. Whether women of lower class are forced to turn to cheap and unsafe clandestine abortions are dependent on the legal access to abortion (Kane, 2008; Loppreite, 2012). Scholars (Htun, 2003, 154; Reuterswärd et al. 2011, 808) have also found that upper and middle class women in Latin America have not advocated for legal abortion to the same extent as lower class women, which further confirms that the legality of abortion cannot be described as affecting all women equally regardless of socio-economic status.

Many gender equality policies challenge religious or cultural traditions of a major cultural group in a society, which is why the second dimension of the typology makes a distinction between doctrinal and non-doctrinal policies (Htun and Weldon, 2010, 210). Doctrinal policies touch upon religious doctrine and codified tradition in a society and engage actors that would not be part of policy debates on non-doctrinal issues. Doctrinal gender issues most often include abortion and contraceptives, while non-doctrinal issues usually include parental leave, violence against women and gender quotas. In Spain and Portugal the Catholic Church is a major cultural group with great influence over society, despite the long-standing separation between church and state. The Catholic Church has been known to be a central actor in abortion reform processes (Htun, 2003; Reuterswärd et al. 2011; Kampwirth, 2008; Kane, 2008). The church perceives itself to be the guardian of moral values and have historically validated male domination and female submission, particularly regarding reproduction and sexuality (Htun and Weldon, 2010, 210). The abortion policies addressed in this thesis can thus be categorized as doctrinal policies that challenge the religious doctrine of the Catholic Church. In sum, abortion is a doctrinal issue that to a large extent can be described as class-based, due to the fact that the legality of abortion cannot be completely separated from the funding of abortion.

2.2 Factors for understanding abortion policy adoption and withdrawal

Constructing a theoretical framework for a successful and an unsuccessful case of conservative abortion reform attempts raises the question of whether the same factors are conducive for both the adoption and the withdrawal of a conservative abortion reform proposal. The theoretical framework constructed for this thesis is based on the

assumption that failed attempts at reform can be understood by analyzing the lack of the factors important for understanding successful attempts at reform. This is because both reform proposals in Spain and Portugal are conservative and previous research suggests that the same factors are recurrent in different types of abortion policy reform processes.

The factors important for understanding abortion policy adoption can be divided into 1) actors promoting or resisting the adoption of a policy proposal and their characteristics, 2) the strategies they use and 3) the nature of the specific abortion policy proposal at hand. The theoretical framework constructed for this thesis is loosely based on Htun's (2003) theory about which actors and strategies are important for gender equality policy adoption, which has been influential in the field (Reuterswård et al. 2011; Kane, 2008; Lopreite, 2012), but I have developed her theory to include and highlight other factors important in abortion policy reform. Htun presents feminist issue networks and the Catholic Church as critical actors in abortion policy adoption, but pays little attention to the role of political parties in this process. The specific characteristics of parties can make them critical actors in the adoption or rejection of policy proposals. Parties, in particular ruling parties, are central actors in representative democracies with the power to introduce and sometimes adopt policies. They are strategic actors with their own agenda, which cannot be disregarded when analyzing abortion policy adoption without risking an insufficient analysis (Bergqvist et al. 2015; Kampwirth, 2008).

The actors involved in abortion policy reform processes are presented first. They interact in the sense that feminist issue networks and the Catholic Church aim to influence political parties to promote their preferred abortion legislation, although political parties may influence other parties as well. After presenting the critical actors in abortion reform processes, the strategies they use to reach their goal are discussed. Previous research has found that framing (Htun, 2003; Hobson, 2003; Bergqvist et al. 2015), protests (Htun, 2003; Reuterswård et al. 2011; Kane, 2008) and building alliances with the state (Htun, 2003; Reuterswård et al. 2011) have been effective strategies for promoting or resisting gender policy reform. Lastly, the nature of an abortion policy proposal can affect the reform process. More specifically, the level of radicalness of an abortion policy proposal is a necessary piece of the puzzle to

understand abortion policy adoption and will be presented at the end of the theory section.

2.2.1 Actors

As mentioned above, feminist issue networks, the Catholic Church and political parties are important actors in the abortion reform process. Feminist issue networks are proponents of liberal abortion laws and the Catholic Church are proponents of conservative abortion legislation, while political parties' stance on abortion depend on the political context.

What Htun (2003, 5) labels issue networks, I call *feminist issue networks* because of the solely feminist nature of the issues they mobilize around. They are elite coalitions of feminist activists, lawyers, legislators, state officials, journalists and doctors that are instrumental in the adoption of gender policies (Htun, 2003, 5). Research within the field of gender policy adoption has pointed to networks of critical actors from different parts of society as being crucial in the process of adopting gender equality policies (Htun, 2003; Reuterswärd et al. 2011; Kane, 2008; Lopreite, 2012). They can grow out of or be influenced by social movements. However, while social movements can refer to sequences of actions among social actors to achieve multiple goals, feminist issue networks mobilize around one specific gender equality policy issue. Members of feminist issue networks are not primarily linked by collective identity, shared values, ideological orientation, ethnicity, class or gender, but by interest in a particular policy issue. These networks mobilize public opinion and make strategic interventions by raising awareness and providing information (Htun, 2003, 15). Htun is vague regarding how feminist issue networks are to be analyzed – is the crucial factor for gender policy outcome whether a feminist issue network exists or not, or does the strength of a feminist issue network need analyzing as well? The extent to which a feminist issue network mobilizes and offers opposition to a conservative abortion policy proposal is a vital part of abortion policy outcome, which is why it is not sufficient to simply observe whether a feminist issue network was active in a reform process. The strength of feminist issue networks is therefore not disregarded in this thesis.

As previously established, abortion policy engages *the Catholic Church* because of the doctrinal nature of abortion. Liberal abortion laws challenge the view of the Catholic Church, which prefer strict abortion legislation (Kane, 2008, 363). It is a typical doctrinal actor in the abortion reform process in societies where the Catholic Church is a major cultural group, but it might not be engaged in other gender policy issues (Htun and Weldon, 2010, 210). The Catholic Church has been known to exercise its power to counteract liberal abortion legislation and to promote policies restricting access to abortion (Htun, 2003). In Latin America, where the Catholic Church is the most influential religious and social tradition, opposition from the Catholic Church has long obstructed the abortion rights movement (Kane, 2008, 363). In 2006 Nicaragua adopted a total ban on abortion shortly before the presidential election, which in part can be explained by the fact that the Catholic Church in Nicaragua made use of its influence over political parties and the media (Reuterswärd et al. 2011; Kampwirth, 2008; Kane, 2008). The Catholic Church formed an alliance with the Evangelical Protestant Church and proposed a ban on abortion, which was supported by the two biggest parties – Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSNL) and Constitutionalist Liberal Party (PLC) – who needed the votes that the church could round up in the close electoral race. The proposal was fast-tracked through the legislature and the Nicaraguan parliament voted unanimously to criminalize abortion under all circumstances, only ten days before the presidential election. The Catholic Church also launched a campaign to stop liberal abortion legislation in Colombia, but failed in their attempt. The campaign included pressuring the government not to pass the bill, filing a lawsuit in the Constitutional Court and discrediting the leader of the campaign promoting liberal abortion laws. Colombia liberalized its abortion law in 2006 despite the efforts of the Catholic Church (Reuterswärd et al. 2011; Kane, 2008).

The role of *political parties* has been given little attention in the field of gender policy adoption, but it has been studied in the broader field of political science. Political parties are strategic actors and one of their primary goals is to win elections. This means that the likelihood of parties supporting a gender policy proposal is conditional on the affect it will have on their electoral outcome. Bergqvist et al. (2015, 17-18) encourage scholars in the field to investigate the role of parties' short-term electoral concerns, which is the decisive factor in explaining why the Swedish Social

Democrats failed to reform the parental leave legislation in 2005. This was due to a worry that a core constituency – the working class – did not approve of the reform, which could have cost them votes in the next election. Returning to the case of Nicaragua, Kampwirth (2008, 129-132) argues that the passing of a total ban on abortion in Nicaragua in 2006 cannot be understood outside of the electoral context (much like Reuterswärd et al. 2011). She says that supporting a ban on abortion was an electoral strategy by the presidential candidate Daniel Ortega and his party FSLN to win votes and ensure Ortega's return to presidency, rather than a political conviction that abortion is wrong. This emphasizes the fact that political parties should not be overlooked when analyzing gender policy reform processes since they are the actors in the reform process that actually adopts or rejects a policy proposal. Feminist issue networks and the Catholic Church aim to influence political parties because of their legislative power. One way of doing this is by impacting public opinion, which can force parties to adopt or reject a policy proposal because of their electoral concerns.

Whether a party, in particular a ruling party, supports and adopts a policy proposal or not depends partially on the level of party unity. Factions deviating from the party line may make it difficult to pass legislation, both because of a potential lack of votes in the legislature and because of a lack of support for the party among voters. Internal heterogeneity within parties affects party unity (Ceron, 2015, 247).

The party has long been conceived as a unitary actor whose members display cohesive behavior consistent with party preferences. This claim, however, is nothing but a fictional representation of reality. Parties are not monolithic structures, as they are usually composed of a variety of subgroups (i.e. factions) retaining similar but non-identical preferences (Ceron, 2015, 247).

Scholars have identified two main ways of reaching party unity: homogeneity of policy preferences among party members and discipline, which can be understood as anticipated sanctions for deviating from the party line (Bowler et al. 1999; Ceron, 2015, 247; Hazan, 2003; Russell, 2012). Party leaders and whips can discipline party members in various ways, for example by withholding promises of re-selection, committee seats, funding and support. Hazan (2003, 3) says “discipline starts where

cohesion falters”. This view is based on the assumption that legislators are rational actors, who Strøm (1997, 158; Russell, 2012, 713) describes as “goal-seeking men or women who choose their behavior to fit the destinations they have in mind”.

Gabel and Scheve (2007) have found support for the hypothesis that party members who publicly diverge from the party line inspire voters to do the same. Based on Zaller’s (1992) general model of opinion formation, Gabel and Scheve show that voters adopt the opinions of like-minded elites in their preferred party. When the opinion of the preferred party is cohesive, voters adopt the party opinion. But when the opinion of the preferred party is not cohesive, voters may adopt opinions that differ from the official party line depending on the opinion of the party members who share their personal interests and values. This suggests that deviating party members may not only make it difficult to adopt a certain policy proposal due to a lack of votes in the legislature, but could also decrease the support of a policy proposal among the party’s voters. Party unity could therefore also have an indirect impact on the adoption of a policy proposal by affecting the short-term electoral concerns that could make a party withdraw a policy proposal. However, a decrease in support of a policy proposal among a party’s voters might also motivate party members to condemn the policy proposal due to a fear of losing future elections (Indridason, 2008).

2.2.2 Strategies

The actors presented above use several strategies to promote or oppose an abortion policy proposal. They primarily use framing, protests and alliance building with state actors to do this, which are accounted for below.

Framing is a strategy that refers to how actors in policymaking processes shape their arguments to gain support. Scholars have suggested that certain lines of arguments are more successful in gaining support than others (Bergqvist et al. 2015; Hobson, 2003). Benford and Snow (2000, 614) say “frames help to render events or occurrences meaningful and thereby function to organize experience and guide action”. A frame is a way of perceiving the world and can be used as a deliberate strategy by feminist issue networks, the Catholic Church and political parties to promote a certain perception of reality. By framing abortion in different ways – which essentially means

using a certain set of arguments for or against abortion – actors can gain support for their policy proposals.

Promoters of strict abortion legislation, foremost the Catholic Church, have often framed abortion as a religious and ethical issue. For example, the ethical dilemma of weighing the rights of the unborn child against the pregnant woman's rights is often referred to. Actors in favor of liberal abortion legislation, such as feminist issue networks, have used a variety of framing strategies to promote liberal abortion legislation and to counteract religious-based opposition. The leader of the campaign for legalizing abortion in Colombia discussed abortion in relation to international law, claiming that Colombia's abortion laws was in violation of international law, and refused to participate in religious or medical discussions about abortion. Other activists for liberal abortion laws have promoted ideas about the separation of church and state, in an effort to limit the church's influence. During the abortion reform process in Mexico City, proponents of liberal abortion laws positioned abortion as a secular issue. This resonated with the public because a secular state was important for large parts of the Mexican public. Feminist movements in Uruguay have worked to frame abortion as a public health issue. In 2006, feminist movements in Nicaragua tried to frame abortion as a health issue and an individual rights issue, in particular as an issue of women's right over their bodies and sexuality. Even so, the Catholic Church managed to change the discussion to a religious agenda in the context of the presidential election (Kane, 2008, 6-12).

Protests are frequently used in abortion reform processes. Non-violent protest is a powerful tool to put pressure on governments in advanced democracies and have proved to be an often effective way of influencing policy making (Welzel and Deutsch, 2012, 465; Dalton, Van Sickle and Weldon, 2010, 51). Demonstrations and other forms of public protest have been used by feminist issue networks and the Catholic Church in several contexts to oppose abortion policies not in alignment with their preferred abortion legislation (Htun, 2003; Reuterswärd et al. 2011; Kane, 2008). This is an effective strategy because the particular characteristics of political parties make them especially receptive for popular protests mobilizing public opinion. Parties in representative democracies are representatives of their constituencies and need therefore listen to their voters, especially if they want to win elections. However,

parties can be the initiators of protest as well as the actors affected by protest. Like feminist issue networks and the Catholic Church, opposition parties can use demonstrations to protest abortion policies promoted by the government. Beyond this opposition parties have other means of protest available to them in capacity of being members of parliament. These may include handing in motions for parliament to vote on, depending on the rules of a particular parliament.

Actors in abortion reform processes can also use *alliance building with state actors* to promote policies. Abortion reform, both liberal and conservative reform, can be achieved by building strategic alliances with state actors who have legislative power, often ruling parties. For example, when the church have a relationship with state actors, in which the church exercises a great deal of influence over these state actors, it may be difficult to pass liberal abortion legislation. These are also favorable conditions for passing legislation restricting access to abortion. When the State-Church relationship is weak, it can be used as a window of opportunity to promote gender equality policies that challenge the views of the church.

Reuterswärd et al. (2011, 823-824) offer an illustrative example of how alliances can be built and taken advantage of with the case of Nicaragua, where the Catholic Church historically has had close ties to the government. They found that the presidential election in Nicaragua in 2006 presented an opportunity for the church to use its strong influence over public opinion and push for a total ban on abortion in the elections, which politicians were pressured to support because of their need of votes. As shown in the case of Nicaragua, these alliances can be mutually beneficial. The Catholic Church succeeded in having their policy proposal adopted and the ruling party gained the support of the church in the election.

The state actors with whom to form alliances is not limited to entire parties, but can be factions or members of a party who diverge from the party line. For instance, feminist issue networks and the Catholic Church can take advantage of these actors (if their policy preferences coincide) to form alliances and mobilize opposition. This is closely connected to the concept of party unity. When the level of party unity is low, external actors outside the party have the opportunity to hook into the diverging factions to promote their own agenda and weaken the ruling party. It is foremost

feminist issue networks and the Catholic Church who can benefit from building alliances with state actors with legislative power to promote their agenda, but it is possible for parties in parliament to form alliances with other parties to promote or oppose an abortion policy proposal. For example, opposition parties may take advantage of low party unity within a ruling party and form alliances with the diverging factions.

2.2.3 The nature of abortion policy proposals

Abortion policies vary greatly in nature. For example, some propose criminalization of abortion with only a few exceptions, while others propose limiting the number of weeks women are allowed to have abortions. Different policies are likely to be received and handled differently. Abortion policy adoption cannot be fully understood without paying attention to the differing nature, and particularly the level of radicalness, of abortion policies. Much like Htun and Weldon (2010) argue that the distinctiveness of different gender policies affect the process of adopting a policy proposal, I will argue that whether a gender policy proposal is more or less radical will affect the reform process. A very radical policy proposal is a policy proposal that demands extensive changes to the current laws in place in a given society, while a less radical policy proposal only demands minor changes. The level of radicalness of a policy proposal can act as a catalyst that may affect other factors important for gender policies to be adopted. It may therefore have an indirect affect on the adoption of a policy proposal rather than a direct affect.

For example, whether a policy proposal is more or less radical can affect the motivation for different actors to form feminist issue networks and their possibilities to form strategic alliances with state actors. Though the level of radicalness of a policy proposal might not affect the given relationship between the state and the Catholic Church at the launch of a policy proposal, it can affect the degree to which the Catholic Church will make use of any influence it may have over the state, the public and the media. Depending on the public opinion in a certain issue, the degree of radicalness is likely to affect the behavior of political parties. How the level of radicalness of a policy proposal affects the reform process will be discussed in further depth in the comparative analysis.

3. Methods

The study conducted in this thesis is a case study that employs a process tracing method. The section on methods begins with a discussion about the selection of Spain and Portugal as cases before the process tracing method and the material is described. The discussion about the chosen research methods is concluded with a presentation of the analytical framework.

3.1 Case selection

Spain and Portugal were chosen for this case study because of their similar history of abortion legislation and the puzzle that the recent developments present. As mentioned in the theory section, Portugal represents a successful attempt at conservative abortion reform while Spain represents an unsuccessful attempt at abortion reform. Even though cases are most commonly understood as temporal or spatial units, cases studied with a process tracing method can also be understood as types of problems. The similar history and starting points but the differing outcomes of the abortion reform processes in Spain and Portugal presents the type of problem that can help uncover important factors for understanding abortion policy adoption and withdrawal, which is the main reason for why they offer an interesting comparison. It is although not sufficient that the cases are similar in the area of interest. The cases need to be alike in other areas as well in order to be comparable.

Beyond having similar histories of abortion legislation, Spain and Portugal have comparable political systems. Both countries had right wing majority governments during the abortion reform processes. Portugal has a proportional electoral system and Spain uses a combination of proportional and majority electoral systems. One socialist and one right wing party make up the dominant parties in both countries (Karlsson, 2015a, 2015b). Given the importance of the Catholic Church in abortion policy adoption, it is necessary that the church's standing is comparable in Spain and Portugal. Approximately 75 % of Spaniards and 80 % of Portuguese are Catholic. The Catholic Church is formally separated from the state in both countries, but the church has historically had great influence over the societies. The church still enjoys certain privileges and power even though this influence has significantly decreased during the last decades (Karlsson, 2012a, 2012c). In addition to the above-mentioned

similarities, Spain and Portugal had very similar Gender Inequality Index scores in 2012 (0.103 and 0.114). This indicates that the two cases have similar gender equality policies beyond abortion, such as in other areas of reproductive health, political participation and labor force participation (Globalis, 2012). Making sure that the cases are contextually comparable in other regards than only abortion legislation minimizes the risk of missing underlying factors with this research design (Esaiasson et al. 2012, 125).

There are primarily two reasons for why Spain and Portugal may not be comparable cases. The first is the difference in nature of the policy reform proposals presented. The abortion policy proposal in Spain was a radical reform that demanded extensive changes while the abortion policy proposal in Portugal was a less radical reform that did not dramatically change the previous law. The findings of this study suggest that the difference in the level of radicalness of abortion reform proposals is one of the factors important for abortion policy adoption. The level of radicalness of a policy is therefore included in the theoretical framework and an integral part of the comparative analysis.

The second reason why Spain and Portugal may not be comparable is the time lag between the reform processes. Because the reform process in Spain preceded the one in Portugal, Portuguese actors may have seen the difficulties that the Spanish government had when presenting a radical abortion policy proposal and decided to go with a less radical policy proposal in Portugal. This type of policy learning could imply that the cases are not independent from each other. Even though I have not found any indications of policy learning in the study, it is possible that this was a strategic decision made behind closed doors. However, it would have been very difficult to make sure that the cases were independent from each other even if the reform processes would have been completely parallel. Finding cases with similar reform proposals and background variables, which often are in close geographic proximity of one another, that have not informed the reform process in the other case in any way is a task too complicated for the scope of this thesis.

3.2 Process tracing

The method used for studying the reform processes in the two cases is process tracing. It is a within-case method for in-depth examination, which means that the process tracing for Spain and Portugal are conducted separately before the two cases are analytically compared in the comparative analysis. Process tracing is used with the ambition to trace mechanisms. Studying mechanisms is a way to bring out the micro level dynamics of macro level developments (Beach and Brun Pedersen, 2013, 1; Esaiasson et al. 2012, 129-133; Pierson, 2004). Glennan (1996, 52) defines a mechanism as “a complex system, which produces an outcome by the interaction of a number of parts”.

Process tracing is useful when studying long causal chains where the factors important for the outcome of interest are interlinked with one another, which makes it suitable for this thesis. Political change – not least abortion reform processes – are complex processes with several different factors at play. The links between these multiple factors can be disentangled with process tracing (Pierson, 2004; Esaiasson et al. 2012, 129-133). Hall says:

In short, process tracing is a methodology well-suited to testing theories in a world marked by multiple interaction effects, where it is difficult to explain outcomes in terms of two or three independent variables – precisely the world that more and more social scientists believe we confront (Bennet and George, 2005, 206).

Using process tracing implies a movement back and forth between explorative and more systematic techniques. At the beginning of a study one must be open-minded and consider multiple reasons behind a certain outcome. The researcher is on the one hand guided by previous research and on the other hand by the particular circumstances of the studied case. As the researcher’s familiarity with the case increases, it becomes easier to identify the instrumental factors in the case at hand (Beach and Brun Pedersen, 2013, 168; Pierson, 2004). Using a combination of explorative and systematic techniques reduces the risk of confirmation bias. Confirmation bias refers to the tendency to search for information that confirms a theory and giving disproportionately less attention to alternative factors. An

explorative approach allows for finding factors that were not initially included in the theoretical framework while a systematic approach makes it easier to handle large amounts of material without missing important information. This study began with a somewhat explorative approach loosely based on the findings in previous research. As important factors were identified I went back to previous research of similar cases to understand these factors in a larger context. The technique became more and more systematic as the major factors contributing to the outcomes in Spain and Portugal were discovered and as the theoretical framework was constructed.

An increasing familiarity with a case can also help deal with the problem of infinite regress. Infinite regress refers to how it can always be argued that there are preceding steps that have not been studied in a process that can supply more information. Pierson (2004, 89) argues that researchers using process tracing makes the decision about when the in-depth examination is enough based on their knowledge of a case and the theoretical expectations. At a certain point in the study I found that no new information emerged that suggested that there were other factors (within or outside the theoretical framework) important for the outcome in Spain and Portugal than the ones already uncovered, which indicated that the depth of the study was sufficient.

The aim of using process tracing is to uncover factors important for understanding certain outcomes in specific cases and not to establish law-like regularities. However, factors found in one process tracing study can be reformulated in analytically general terms to inform future studies in the field (Pierson, 2004; Esaiasson et al. 2012, 129-133). Even though the findings of the study conducted in this thesis are not generalizable beyond the particular context of Spain and Portugal, I intend to aggregate the insights of my study and the theoretical implications so the findings can be considered when constructing the theoretical framework of similar studies in future research.

3.3 Material

The material for this study consists foremost of newspaper articles in the online database Factiva (<https://global.factiva.com>). The database gathers articles from over 32 000 media sources, such as newspapers, magazines and radio transcripts, including the largest newspapers in Spain and Portugal. This makes Factiva useful for studying

the media coverage of a particular process using multiple and varied sources concerning a certain subject. In the case of Spain, the abortion debate in the media was systematically studied from the beginning of 2013 until September 2015. This time span ranges from one year before the draft law on abortion was officially presented by PP to one year after the draft law was withdrawn and consists of 374 articles. The abortion debate in the media in the case of Portugal was systematically studied from July 2014 until October 2015. This time span ranges from three months before the legislative initiative was presented to three months after the abortion reform proposal was adopted in the parliament and consists of 282 articles. These particular time spans were chosen because no media coverage concerning the abortion reform processes was found at the starting and ending points of the time spans for each case. The time span is longer in Spain due to the simmering abortion debate in Spain both before the draft law was presented and after it was withdrawn. Websites of organizations and parties active in the reform processes in Spain and Portugal have been used as complementary sources to the above-mentioned articles.

The articles concerning the reform process in Spain were in English while the articles concerning the reform process in Portugal were in Portuguese. This was due to the very limited number of articles available in English about the Portuguese reform process. My limited skills in Spanish allow me to have a very rudimentary understanding of Portuguese, but I have no prior knowledge of Portuguese. Because of this the articles in Portuguese had to be translated, which opens up a possibility of bias. First, it is possible that some information was lost in the translation from Portuguese to English. I have made an effort to be mindful of the limitations of online translation tools and to not over- or misinterpret the translated material. Second, only using articles in Portuguese means that the articles were published foremost by Portuguese newspapers while the articles concerning the reform process in Spain were published by both Spanish and international newspapers. This is however a reflection of the difference in the international attention the two cases attracted. Although newspapers and journalists can be guided by political ideology or loyalties, the risk of bias in the material is low due to the variety of sources and almost exclusively using descriptive accounts for developments in the abortion reform processes.

3.4 Analytical framework

The construction of the analytical framework used when studying the reform processes in Spain and Portugal was guided by the theoretical framework. It is a basic operationalization of the concepts introduced in the theory section to make the analysis transparent with the exception of the third part of the theoretical framework, which is the nature of the reform proposals. The nature of the reform proposals, in particular the level of radicalness, is not included in the analytical framework because this factor operates at a different level in the analysis than actors and strategies. The level of radicalness of the reform proposals is a factor comparative to its nature and is therefore discussed in the comparative analysis. The discussion regarding the nature of the reform proposals in the comparative analysis will center around whether the factors in the analytical framework are contingent on the level of radicalness of the reform proposals. The main factors of analysis in the analytical framework, which will guide the separate analysis of each case, are the following:

1. The actors involved in the reform process and their role. The theoretical framework, based on previous research, suggest that the analysis should focus on the following factors:
 - *The Catholic Church's* promotion of its conservative stance on abortion and its influence over society.
 - The mobilization and function of pro-abortion actors in *feminist issue networks* and to which extent they offered opposition against conservative abortion reform proposals.
 - *Political parties'* characteristics as parties that affect their stance on abortion and their behavior in abortion reform processes.

2. The strategies the actors use to achieve their goal (whether it is to promote or oppose a certain abortion reform proposal). The analysis will focus on the strategies identified in the theoretical framework:
 - Strategic *alliance building with state actors* that could help promote or oppose an abortion reform proposal.
 - How actors strategically *framed* abortion reform proposals to fit their agenda.

- To what extent *protests* were used and whether this strategy was successful in influencing public opinion and ruling parties.

4. Analysis

The analysis starts with descriptions of the abortion reform processes in Spain and Portugal to give an introduction to the course of events that led to the withdrawal of the reform proposal in Spain and the adoption of the reform proposal in Portugal. A separate analysis of each reform process directly follows each case. After dealing with each case separately to understand the outcomes of each reform process, a comparative analysis is offered at the end to show how the two reform processes can be understood in relation to one another. The comparative analysis will discuss the most important findings and relate them to previous research.

4.1 The reform process in Spain

PP promised to reform the abortion law when they won the Spanish election in 2011. The reform was repeatedly postponed until April 2013 when Minister of Justice Alberto Ruiz-Gallardón announced that PP would promptly tighten the abortion law, after being pressured by the Catholic Church (The Local, 2013a). However, it was not until December 20th 2013 that PP presented a new draft law on abortion that only allowed abortion in case of rape or grave danger to the physical or psychological well-being of the woman (which had to be confirmed by two doctors). The draft law also required girls 16-17 years old to have parental consent before having an abortion (NT News, 2013). The main opposition party, Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE), and women's rights groups had condemned the reform long before it was officially announced. When PP presented the abortion reform proposal, PSOE and other opposition parties mobilized together with women's rights groups and organized demonstrations on December 21st with thousands of people in 21 cities across the country in protest (El País, 2013a; The Local, 2013b; Fotheringham, 2013).

The Catholic Church is considered a powerful lobby in PP with close connections to the conservative section of the party (The Local, 2013b). It provides PP with substantial organizational and financial support during elections. Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy was strongly pressured by the Catholic Church and the conservative

section of PP to give in to their demand to reform the abortion law, both publicly and in private (Financial Times, 2014b). For instance, the head of the Catholic Church in Spain publicly insisted that the government move forward with the reform proposal. The Catholic Church backed their religious arguments by saying that the draft law was an urgent matter because the liberal abortion law adopted in 2010 had “increased the number of abortions to terrifying levels” (which was based on highly contested statistics) (The Local, 2013b). Rajoy’s decision to act on the abortion reform was an effort to please the Catholic Church and the conservative section of PP. In addition to using its alliance with PP to reform the abortion law, the Catholic Church tried to influence Spanish Society by arranging several demonstrations in favor of the draft law presented by PP. One of the larger ones was a mass in Madrid, which was attended by thousands of people and given the Pope’s blessing (CNS News, 2013).

There was a great deal of speculation that internal dissent within PP slowed down the reform process. The disagreements supposedly regarded the criteria under which abortion would be legal and the image the reform would give of Spain to the rest of Europe (The Local, 2013b). This dissent was taken public a few days after the draft law on abortion was presented in December 2013, when several high-ranking members of PP publicly expressed their opposition against it. The central government delegate in Madrid, the government spokesman in Castilla-La Mancha and the premier of Galicia wanted the government to review and improve the law. The mayors of Zamora and Valladolid spoke out against the fact that women were not allowed abortion in case of fetal malformation under the new legislation (El País, 2013b, 2013c). This public argument was unprecedented since PP had been a highly disciplined party with very few public disagreements (Financial Times, 2014a; Dowsett, 2014). The group of PP dissidents continued to grow when the premier of Castile and León and government spokesman in the Basque Country urged the government not to go through with the draft law (El País, 2014a). PP premier of Extremadura José Antonio Monago said in his new year’s speech:

No one can deny anyone the right to be a mother, nor can anyone force someone to become one. Extremadura supports a reform of the abortion law by consensus (The Local, 2014a).

PP held an executive committee meeting on January 8th 2014, during which Prime Minister Rajoy and Minister of Justice Gallardón tried to seek consensus on the draft law (El País, 2014b). Their attempt failed and Rajoy insisted that Gallardón, the designer of the draft law, listen to the opinions of other high-ranking PP officials. The Justice Ministry said the day after the executive meeting that there would be modifications but not substantial changes to the draft law. Rajoy also urged the executive committee to keep the abortion debate within the party, but less than a day later the PP premiers of Cantabria and Galicia spoke out against the bill in public (El País, 2014c). A week later the PP branch in the Extremadura regional assembly drew up a motion advising the Prime Minister's administration to seek a less divisive abortion reform that was "in line with legislation in neighboring countries" (El País, 2014d). Shortly thereafter Monago, PP premier of Extremadura, publicly offered to join the opposition party PSOE in their efforts to ensure that the draft law on abortion was withdrawn (El País, 2014e). Party unity could not be accomplished on the abortion reform proposal despite Rajoy's efforts to reach consensus.

Over 300 associations in Spain formed the platform *Decidir nos hace libres* (Deciding makes us free) in protest of the draft law. It consisted of women's rights groups, family planning associations and other interest groups. The platform made up a feminist issue network with the opposition parties, which the platform had a close collaboration with. They mobilized around stopping the draft law on abortion and argued that criminalizing abortion was a serious threat to women's independence as well as women's health. The feminist issue network used a combination of strategies. The opposition parties foremost used the political means available to them as parties in parliament while the platform arranged various protests. For instance, a demonstration was held in front of the French embassy in Madrid at the end of January 2014 to demand judicial protection in France by handing over 220 letters requesting asylum for women wanting access to abortion (Ansamed, 2014a; The Guardian, 2014a). Another example was when over 200 women went to property registration offices across Spain on February 7th 2014 to register their bodies in protest of the government restricting women's autonomy with the draft law (Ansamed, 2014b). These creative initiatives were joined by the opening of an abortion travel agency in April 2014 in protest of the draft law, where women were

able to get information about how they could travel abroad to have abortions and how much it would cost (The Guardian, 2014d).

One of the platform's largest protests took place on February 1st 2014 when women's activists from all over Spain travelled to Madrid to protest the draft law and to ask Gallardón to resign. 30 000 people walked through the streets of Madrid to hand over a text to the parliament asking the government to withdraw their draft law on abortion. They waved signs with messages such as "My ovaries: not those of priests, nor of politicians". Opposition against the draft law had risen outside of Spain as well, in particular among women's rights groups and in the European Union. These sympathizers joined the Spanish protest on February 1st. Hundreds of demonstrators walked the streets of London and Rome and over 5000 people participated in protests in several French cities. 2000 people walked from the Spanish Embassy in Brussels to the European Parliament to show their opposition against the draft law, which several MEPs joined (Human Rights Watch, 2014; López, 2014; The Guardian, 2014a, 2014b). The international attention was not limited to joining the feminist issue network's demonstrations. The draft law on abortion was discussed in the European Parliament and was condemned by parliamentary groups European United Left-Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL), Socialists and Democrats (S&D) and Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE). GUE/NGL also filed a petition against the Spanish draft law for all national and European parliamentarians to sign (Contexte, 2014).

The opposition parties tried to stop the draft law in the parliament with several initiatives. On February 11th 2014 the Spanish parliament voted on a proposal submitted by opposition party PSOE to immediately withdraw the draft law. PP held a majority of seats in the parliament, but the opposition hoped that the growing dissent within PP regarding the bill would inspire MPs to vote against the draft law. PSOE took advantage of the internal dissent within PP and insisted that the vote should be secret, which is an unusual voting procedure. PP deputy speaker of the house Celia Villalobos supported the secret vote and called on PP to let members vote as they wished, aligning herself with the growing group of high-ranking PP dissidents. However, PP leaders warned its MPs not to break rank and the parliament voted to not withdraw the draft law (The Local, 2014b; Reuters, 2014; El País, 2014f). Two

days later the Congress of Deputies (the lower house of Spain's legislative branch) voted openly on a similar motion by the opposition coalition Plural Left, in which Celia Villalobos voted against her party and was financially sanctioned by PP. The opposition was not successful and the Congress of Deputies voted to not withdraw the draft law (El País, 2014g).

The adoption of the draft law was repeatedly put off by PP after it was presented in December 2013. Rajoy and Gallardón publicly ensured that they would go through with the reform several times during the spring of 2014, but PP was silent about the draft law during the summer (New Europe, 2014; Yahoo News, 2014). Polls showed that between 70 and 80 % of Spaniards did not support the draft law (The Guardian, 2014c). In the elections to the European Parliament in May 2014, PP's representation declined from 24 to 16 seats. It was suggested by political advisors that this was partly due to the fact that voters felt uncomfortable with the party's stance on abortion (The Local, 2014c). After speculation and rumors that the draft law would be withdrawn, Rajoy announced on September 23rd 2014 that PP would not move forward with the new abortion legislation (Global Post, 2014). Gallardón announced a few hours later that he would be resigning his post as Minister of Justice and leaving politics all together (El País, 2014h). Rajoy said to reporters:

We will continue studying ways to obtain greater acceptance of the reform, but I think I have taken the most sensible decision at this time. We cannot have a law that will be changed in a minute as soon as another government comes along (Global Post, 2014).

4.1.1 Understanding the reform process in Spain

The following analysis of the reform process in Spain is based on the analytical framework. This section is therefore structured around the actors and their strategies that were important in the reform process and thus important for understanding the outcome of the attempt at abortion reform, while the nature of the reform proposal will be discussed in the comparative analysis in relation to the Portuguese reform proposal.

4.1.1.1 Actors

The Catholic Church was an important actor in the attempt to reform the abortion law in Spain, since it is likely that PP would not have introduced the draft law had the Catholic Church not pressured them. It used its long-standing alliance with PP to pressure the party to keep their election promise to reform the abortion law, which proved to be very effective in having the abortion reform proposal introduced. The church had leverage in this relationship due to its influence over Spanish society and their support for PP during elections. This was although not enough to have the abortion reform proposal adopted.

The *feminist issue network* opposed the conservative reform proposal presented by PP and managed to sway public opinion their way. The network grew out of the women's rights movement in Spain when women's rights groups formed the platform *Decidir nos hace libres* and combined forces with the opposition parties. The platform and the opposition parties made up a strong feminist issue network in the sense that they were very active in the reform process and put up fierce opposition against the promoters of the reform proposal, which proved effective in having the draft law withdrawn.

Several *political parties* were crucial actors in the Spanish reform process. Apart from the opposition parties positioning themselves as opponents of the reform proposal, the ruling PP was the actor that presented and withdrew the reform proposal. Rajoy's decision to introduce the draft law on abortion and his decision to withdraw it were both rational and strategic choices, the former to please the Catholic Church and the conservative section of the party and the latter not to lose public support. Reaching consensus proved to be very difficult for PP, which was partly because of the substantial disagreements on abortion both within and outside of the party and Gallardón's unwillingness to compromise. There were several strong-willed stakeholders with completely different interests in the Spanish case. The feminist issue network and the Spanish people demanded that the draft law was withdrawn, the dissenting faction of PP wanted the draft law to be revised and the Catholic Church and the conservative section of PP demanded that the draft law was adopted in the form it was presented. Several stakeholders joined the debate because some other stakeholder with a different agenda had joined the debate, which illustrates that the

behavior of actors involved in abortion reform processes is contingent on the actions and standpoints of the other actors in the reform process. They do not act in a vacuum and their behavior is interlinked with the behavior of other actors.

The internal struggle within PP is an instrumental factor in understanding why the attempt to reform the abortion law failed. The fact that many high-ranking PP officials spoke out publicly against the draft law suggests that they felt very strongly about it, considering the fact that PP has been known for being a united party that rarely argues in public. Their strong opposition against the draft law could have been because they disagreed with it or because their electoral concerns made them fear losing support, or a combination of both. It is not possible to determine what motivated them with the material at hand because the growing internal dissent within PP and the growing external opposition against the draft law were parallel processes. The internal disagreement may not have become public until after the draft law was officially presented, but both the internal disagreement within the party and the external opposition against the conservative abortion reform proposal planned by PP dates back long before it was presented on December 20th 2013.

Irrespective of whether the dissenting PP officials were concerned about the lack of support for the draft law among voters, their public dissent may have decreased the public support. As discussed in the theory section, party members who publicly diverge from the official party line may inspire voters to do the same (Gabel and Scheve, 2007). This means that the dissenting PP party members may not only have made it difficult to adopt the draft law in the parliament due to a lack of votes, but also because of decreased public support for it. This presents a chicken or the egg causality dilemma of which came first – did the PP dissidents inspire voters not to support the draft law, or did the PP dissidents see the lack of public support and therefore intend to have the draft law withdrawn? This question offers a perspective to consider in future research of the role of party unity in gender policy adoption, but no indications that either scenario is more likely in the case of Spain were found in this study.

4.1.1.2 Strategies

Both the proponents and the opponents used *alliance building with state actors* to promote their agendas. As previously established, the draft law was put on the political agenda partly due to the alliance between the Catholic Church and PP. The religious influence over PP made it difficult for the feminist issue network to form a similar alliance. The feminist issue network did however build an alliance with the opposition parties to collaborate in having the draft law withdrawn, but the strength of an alliance depends in part on the strength of the opponent's alliance. Considering PP's majority, the alliance between the feminist issue network and the opposition parties was not very fruitful in the parliament. Even though no findings suggest an alliance between the feminist issue network and the dissident faction of PP, this possibility cannot be ruled out. The nature of such a relationship would have been secretive. Any attempts from the feminist issue network to hook into the dissident faction of PP and drive a wedge in the party would most likely have taken place behind closed doors, which means that this study cannot determine whether such an alliance existed or not.

In terms of *framing*, the Catholic Church and the feminist issue network both partly framed abortion as a rights issue. The feminist issue network framed abortion in the context of women's rights by referring to women's autonomy over their bodies and women's right to make decisions about their lives and health. This was challenged by the Catholic Church, which framed abortion as a religious and ethical matter by saying that the interests of the unborn child were overlooked in the current abortion legislation. The church argued that women's right to abortion must be balanced with the rights of unborn children.

The feminist issue network promoted their framing of the draft law with tireless and extensive *protests*, which drew international attention. It is evident that the Catholic Church was not successful in its attempt to spread their perception of abortion to the public to any considerable extent, but it is unclear whether the efforts of the feminist issue network changed the view of the Spanish people. Polls found that 81 % of Spaniards were opposed to conservative reforms of the abortion law in 2012 and that 70-80 % of Spaniards did not support the draft law on abortion in 2014 (The

Guardian, 2013, 2014c). This suggests that the feminist issue network may not have increased the discontent with the draft law among the Spanish people, but they succeeded in making it clear to the government that the public did not want the draft law to be adopted. The large scale protesting to mobilize the public against the reform proposal was an effective strategy because it targeted the electoral concerns of PP. With an upcoming election in 2015, PP had a lot to lose by forcing a consensus and adopting a controversial law that the majority of voters did not support.

Even though the alliance between the Catholic Church and PP was more profitable than the alliance between the platform and the opposition parties due to PP's majority, the opposition parties proved to be capable allies in protesting the draft law in the parliament. The disagreement within PP was substantial enough for the opposition parties, foremost PSOE and the Plural Left, to see an opportunity to take advantage of the dissenting faction of PP to stop the reform proposal from being adopted. The opposition parties initiated votes to withdraw the draft law with the hope that the dissenting PP parliamentarians would vote against their own party, but their attempt to take advantage of the lack of party unity was not successful. As presented in the theory section, previous research has found that party leadership turns to discipline when party unity cannot be achieved with homogeneity of policy preferences among party members (Hazan, 2003). PP leadership used discipline when it was obvious that PP would not reach party unity with homogeneity of preferences. This was done by threatening their parliamentarians with sanctions if they did not vote with the party in the votes initiated by the opposition. Practicing discipline was effective since PP won the votes, even though deputy speaker Celia Villalobos was financially sanctioned for breaking ranks in one of the votes. Although the opposition parties protests in the parliament drove PP to practice party discipline, discipline was not practiced enough to display party unity to the public.

With the majority of seats in the parliament PP was in a favorable position to reform the abortion law in Spain, especially with the influential Catholic Church to back the draft law. In sum, the attempt to reform the abortion law in Spain was not successful because of a combination of factors. First, the presence of a strong feminist issue network mobilized public opposition and sparked international protests against the reform, even though the promoters of the draft law had considerable influence over

the Spanish society. Second, the lack of party unity within PP made it difficult for the party to reach consensus and invigorated the opposition forces against the reform. Third, the lack of public support for the reform (which partly was an effect of the efforts of the feminist issue network and the dissenting faction within PP) made PP fear losing voters.

4.2 The reform process in Portugal

Portugal has a system where citizens can have a legislative initiative brought up in the parliament if it is signed by at least 35 000 people. In October 2014, a group of anti-abortion activists with close connections to the Catholic Church saw this as an opportunity to restrict the Portuguese abortion law and announced a legislative initiative called *Pelo direito a nascer* (The right to be born). Two of the initiators were Isilda Pegado, the president of the Portuguese Federation for Life, and Braga de Cruz, the former rector of the Catholic University (Sapo, 2015a; João Lopes, 2015; Edicao Publico Lisboa, 2015). They argued that sufficient time had passed since the referendum in 2007 to review the abortion law because it was not a matter yet terminated by the Portuguese society (Oliveira, 2015a; João Lopes, 2015; Campos, 2014).

Portugal had one of the lowest birth rates in the world and the initiators of the legislative initiative said they wanted to deal with what they called a serious birth crisis by reducing the number of abortions. This framing of abortion was unusual, since anti-abortion activists with close ties to the Catholic Church in other settings have been known for framing abortion as a religious matter and have thus argued that the rights of the unborn child must be balanced with the rights of the pregnant woman. The initiators also considered the liberal abortion law to be taken advantage of and used as contraception, since 25 % of women who had abortions did not have it for the first time (Oliveira, 2015a; João Lopes, 2015; Campos, 2014). The Catholic Church has historically had a great deal of influence over Portuguese society and politics, which they used to publicly support the legislative initiative and pressure the government to accept it. The Catholic bishops in Portugal announced their support and said that the Catholic Church has a firm position against abortion. The bishops also urged the parliament to hold a new referendum on abortion (Jornal de Notícias, 2014; Cunha, 2015).

The initiative reached over 48 000 signatures in February 2015 and it was then handed over to the parliament. The liberal-conservative Partido Social Democrata (PSD) ruled with the conservative Centro Democrático e Social – Partido Popular (CDS-PP) in a center-right majority government. CDS-PP was openly against abortion and campaigned against liberal abortion laws in the referendums in 1998 and 2007, while PSD had remained neutral. PSD's neutral stance on abortion changed on March 23rd 2015 when the initiators of the legislative initiative met with President Cavaco Silva (PSD), after which the initiators announced that the president's views coincided with those of the legislative initiative (João Lopes, 2015; Oliveira, 2015b). PSD and CDS-PP pledged on June 2nd 2015 to review and consider the legislative initiative (Correio de Manhã, 2015).

Opposition parties Partido Socialista (PS), Partido Comunista Português (PCP), Partido Ecologista (PEV) and Bloco de Esquerda (BE) and women's rights groups positioned themselves completely against the legislative initiative. They mobilized to protest the changes to the abortion reform in what resembled a feminist issue network, but only under a short period of time and to a limited extent. The feminist issue network showed nearly no opposition against the legislative initiative when it was announced in October 2014 and when the Catholic Church pushed for it to be adopted during the first half of 2015. It was not until after PSD and CDS-PP announced that they would consider the draft law on June 2nd 2015 that women's rights groups and the opposition parties noticeably joined the public debate on the abortion reform proposal. By that time the Catholic Church and the initiators of the legislative initiative had managed to steer the debate on abortion in their favor, even though it was a remarkably quiet debate without any evident opposition until June 2015.

When the feminist issue network joined the debate, they argued that making women pay for abortions and sign an ultrasound before having one was attacking and penalizing women (Sapo, 2015a, 2015c; Jornal de Notícias, 2015). They accused the initiators of trying to create obstacles for women to have abortions and said that the abortion reform would be a serious setback for women's sexual and reproductive rights (Diário de Notícias, 2015; Dnoticias, 2015; Sapo, 2015b). Several women's rights groups appealed to the parliament to reject the legislative initiative and respect

the result of the referendum in 2007 (Tvi 24, 2015; Visão, 2015a). They argued that increasing the birth rate could and should be achieved in other ways and warned that the legislative initiative could drive women to have clandestine and unsafe abortions, due to the economic setback and the humiliation the initiative would cause (Atlas da Saúde, 2015; Publico, 2015a). The feminist issue network used a combination of arguments, referring to the initiative both as a threat to women's health and patient safety as well as in terms of women's rights. The opposition forces against the new abortion law tried to stop it by appealing to the parliament, giving public statements, publishing debate articles and organizing demonstrations outside the parliament (Notícias ao Minuto, 2015; Publico, 2015b; Sá, 2015; Mónica, 2015; Rêgo, 2015; Sapo, 2015d).

PSD and CDS-PP announced at the end of June 2015 that they would present a draft law that introduced user fees for abortions, which would be voted on alongside the legislative initiative in the parliament on July 3rd 2015 (Gomes, 2015). PSD and CDS-PP announced on July 2nd 2015 that there would not be a vote the next day, but that the draft law presented by PSD and CDS-PP and the legislative initiative would be merged into one single draft law that would be put to a vote on July 22nd 2015 (Campos and Martins, 2015).

The altered draft law came to include user fees for abortion and mandatory psychological and social counseling for women who have abortions. The draft law also proposed allowing doctors who are conscientious objectors to attend to women having abortions and participate in their consultations, and thereby changing the previous law that excluded doctors who oppose abortion from abortion care. PSD and CDS-PP said that the draft law could have gone further, but they would have lost consensus (López, 2015; Rodrigues, 2015). On July 22nd 2015 during the last plenary session of the legislature before the Portuguese election on October 4th 2015, the draft law was adopted in the parliament under protests from opposition parties and women's rights groups. Women's rights activists stormed the assembly shouting "shame" and were removed by security guards (Sapo, 2015d; El Confidencial, 2015; Lopes and João Lopes, 2015). Opposition parties PS and BE promised to change the law as soon as possible (Expresso, 2015; Visão, 2015b).

4.2.1 Understanding the reform process in Portugal

Like the analysis of the reform process in Spain, the following analysis of the reform process in Portugal is based on the analytical framework to untangle the important factors in the reform process. It is structured around the actors and strategies that were conducive for the adoption of the conservative abortion reform proposal, while the nature of the reform proposal will be discussed in the comparative analysis. Parallels are drawn to the case of Spain where it is appropriate in order to highlight differences not discussed in the comparative analysis.

4.2.1.1 Actors

The Catholic Church did not formally present the legislative initiative to restrict the Portuguese abortion law, but the initiators were Catholics with close ties to the church that actively supported the initiative. The initiators of the legislative initiative were instrumental actors in the reform process, given that they put abortion reform on the political agenda. It is likely that the reform would not have happened had the legislative initiative not been presented since the ruling coalition had no concrete plans on abortion reform before the legislative initiative was presented.

The feminist issue network, consisting of women's rights groups and the opposition parties, had the opportunity to oppose the legislative initiative, but they did not take it until eight months after it was presented when the government promised to take the legislative initiative under consideration in June 2015. The feminist issue network was fairly weak. It is described as weak because of the lack of a formalized hub and the short amount of time during which it was active. The fact that the feminist issue network was not formed until the last months of the reform process is puzzling. The women's rights movement and the opposition parties were very active in the referendums held on abortion in 1998 and in 2007, but they did not offer resistance to the legislative initiative before it was to be reviewed by the government. It seems as if it was too late for the feminist issue network's protests to have any noticeable effect on the reform process by that time, since PSD and CDS-PP were already set on reviewing the law. The upcoming election in October 2015 could have been seen as a window of opportunity for the feminist issue network. If they had managed to sway public opinion in opposition of the reform, the coalition would have been forced not

to adopt the reform proposal in order not to lose votes. The reform process in Spain indicates that there is a readiness to mobilize against conservative abortion laws in Europe that the Portuguese feminist issue network did not take advantage of. There are several plausible explanations to why the feminist issue network did not join the debate earlier, but no definite answers. They might have seen the changes proposed in the legislative initiative as relatively small after achieving in legalizing abortion up to week 10 of pregnancy in 2007, meaning that they saw it as a battle they could afford to lose rather than a dangerous development that could encourage more restrictions to the abortion law. They could also have perceived the legislative initiative as a battle already lost. Given PSD and CDS-PP's majority in the parliament and CDS-PP's conservative stance on abortion, it is possible that it would have been very difficult to stop the reform even if the opposition forces had been more active. However, the feminist issue network in Spain faced a similar situation with a majority government with a conservative stance on abortion and did not render it a hopeless situation. Another conceivable explanation is that the opposition forces in Portugal did not take the legislative initiative seriously until the government vowed to consider it.

Political parties were active both as opponents and promoters of the conservative abortion reform proposal in Portugal. Apart from the opposition parties' role in the feminist issue network, the ruling coalition of PSD and CDS-PP used the legislative initiative as an opportunity to present their own abortion legislation while using some of the ideas presented in the initiative. There were some disagreements about whether to consider the legislative initiative in the first place and what the government's proposed changes to the abortion law should entail. While PSD had remained neutral on abortion in both referendums, CDS-PP had openly promoted conservative abortion legislation. Despite different views, the coalition managed to compromise behind closed doors. The stakeholders in Portugal were fewer and not as vocal as those in Spain, which made it easier for PSD and CDS-PP to reach consensus. The abortion reform proposal did not appear to have affected public support for the government. With an upcoming election in October 2015, public support could have been a factor making the government reconsider the abortion reform proposal. The government was instead given renewed trust by the public when they won the October election (Lindholm, 2015).

4.2.1.2 Strategies

The initiators of the legislative initiative and women's rights groups both used strategic *alliance building with state actors* to some extent to promote their agendas. Women's rights groups built an alliance with the opposition parties to form the feminist issue network and collaborate in the opposition against the reform proposal. The meeting between the initiators of the legislative initiative and president Silva on March 23rd 2015 suggests the existence of an alliance with the government, but it is indefinite whether the initiators and the Catholic Church influenced the government behind closed doors beyond the extent of that meeting.

The promoters and the opponents of the reform proposal used very different *framings*. The promoters of restricting the abortion law – the initiators of the legislative initiative and the Catholic Church – used an unusual framing of the abortion reform proposal. Rather than stress the importance of the rights of the unborn child, they chose to promote restrictions of the abortion law in light of the low birth rates in Portugal. They presented the changes to the abortion law as measures to increase the number of births and deal with what they referred to as a “birth crisis”. This type of framing puts women's rights against the rights of the state and has not been found in previous research. The reform proposal was promoted as supporting motherhood and therefore making it easier for women to choose to carry through a pregnancy. They argued that the purpose of introducing the obstacles to having an abortion in the legislative initiative was to make women's decisions about abortion more informed. By framing the legislative initiative as a demographic measure to increase the birth rate, the promoters of the reform chose to frame the proposal as a – from their perspective – seemingly rational and practical solution to a problem in Portuguese society.

The opposition against the reform argued that the legislative initiative would only create obstacles for women wanting to have abortions, rather than support motherhood. They showed how the legislative initiative was mistargeted by pointing out that the birth rate should be increased with other measures. In addition to contradicting the arguments for the legislative initiative, they promoted abortion as an issue of women's health by warning that the proposed abortion reform could drive

women to have unsafe abortions. Both the opposition and the promoters of the reform strategically framed the abortion reform, although the promoters had a significant head start in steering the public conversation their way.

The most interesting part of how *protests* were used in the reform process in Portugal is the lack of protests from the feminist issue network during the first eight months. During the last two months of the reform process the feminist issue network used different types of protests to promote their framing of the reform proposal and stop the reform proposal from being adopted. As previously established, the protests did not appear to have had any affect on public opinion. Due to the impossibility of studying counterfactual difference, it will remain unknown whether the feminist issue network would have been able to sway public opinion if the protests would have started earlier in the reform process. With the material at hand, the lack of protests against the legislative initiative seems to have been a crucial factor in understanding the outcome of the reform process in Portugal, especially since the reform process in Spain showed that extensive protests can be instrumental in having a reform proposal withdrawn.

Even though the promoters of the legislative initiative did not succeed in having their entire policy proposal adopted, they succeeded in introducing some of the restrictions to the abortion law that they proposed. In sum, the attempt to reform the abortion law in Portugal was successful because of several factors. First, the weak feminist issue network joined the debate too late in the reform process and did not manage to change the conversation in their favor. The initiators of the legislative initiative and the Catholic Church were active promoters of a conservative abortion reform without any considerable opposition for the first eight months of the reform process. Second, because the opposition forces against the reform did not mobilize public opposition, the ruling coalition had no reason not to go through with a reform that resonated with their political standpoints.

4.3 Comparative analysis

The separate analyses of each case have mapped out several factors as crucial for the outcome of the attempts to reform the abortion laws in Spain and Portugal. The most central factors for the withdrawal of the draft law in Spain, which were closely

interlinked, were the opposition put up by the strong feminist issue network and the dissenting faction of PP and the lack of public support for the draft law. The most central factors for the adoption of the conservative abortion reform proposal in Portugal, possibly also interlinked, were the lack of opposition offered by the weak feminist issue network and the lack of public opposition against the reform proposal. The comparative analysis is centered around these two central factors in both cases – the opposition against the conservative reform proposals and public opinion – before the nature of the reform proposals is discussed.

4.3.1 Characteristics of the opposition

The findings of this study suggest that the characteristics of the opposition against a conservative abortion reform proposal are central in analyzing why such a reform proposal is adopted or withdrawn. The composition of the opposition is important in understanding its role in the reform process. In both Spain and Portugal, women's rights groups and opposition parties made up a feminist issue network that were the main opposition force against the conservative reform proposals. Officials within PP in Spain also positioned themselves in opposition of the conservative reform proposal. Even though the dissenting faction of PP did not to our knowledge have any collaboration with the Spanish feminist issue network it joined the network in opposing the reform proposal, which were efforts separate from but parallel with the network's efforts. The lack of party unity within PP is a crucial factor in understanding why the attempt to reform the Spanish abortion law failed, which shows how the particular characteristics of political parties are important in abortion policy research. Party members who undermine their own party's reform proposal are a distinctive opposition force, since they have the power to mobilize other internal and external actors and to prevent the party from reaching consensus. The involvement of feminist issue networks in abortion reform processes has been studied in previous abortion policy research (Htun, 2003; Reuterswärd et al. 2011; Kampwirth, 2008; Lopreite, 2012; Kane, 2008), but the role of political parties, in particular the role of party unity, has not been given much attention in the field. As shown with the case of Spain, important information for understanding the outcome of an abortion reform process can be found by paying explicit attention to party unity and using previous research from the broader field of political science (Gabel and Scheve, 2007; Ceron, 2015; Bowler et al. 1999; Hazan, 2003; Russell, 2012).

The different outcomes in Spain and Portugal cannot be fully understood by differences in the mere composition of the opposition forces. The characteristics of the opposition forces in the two reform processes did not only differ in the sense that a faction of the ruling party opposed the reform proposal in Spain and not in Portugal, the opposition forces also differed in the extent of their engagement in the reform processes. As discussed in the separate analyses of the cases, the feminist issue network in Spain is described as strong due to their tireless efforts to mobilize opposition against the reform proposal, while the feminist issue network in Portugal is described as weak because of their lack of engagement during the first part of the reform process. Even though feminist issue networks have been given much attention in previous research, the importance of a network's strength needs more exploration. Htun (2003) is vague on how feminist issue networks are to be analyzed, but the findings of this study show that the differences in strength of feminist issue networks are an important factor in understanding differing outcomes of attempts at conservative abortion reform.

4.3.2 Public opinion

Even though the theoretical framework constructed for this thesis touched upon how protests can affect public opinion, which in turn can force political parties to adopt or withdraw a reform proposal in order not to lose public support, the magnitude of the influence that public opinion can have over an abortion reform process was not anticipated. Actors can work to build up pressure from the public that forces political parties to pay attention to the public will, which proved effective in Spain. One of the crucial factors for understanding why PP withdrew the abortion reform proposal in Spain was the lack of public support. It is likely that the ruling coalition in Portugal would have reconsidered adopting the abortion reform proposal only three months before the election had they risked losing public support, but the lack of public opposition against the reform proposal made it easy for the ruling coalition to adopt it so close to the election. Public opinion is to some extent contingent on the actors in the reform process and their strategies, in other words how successful the promoters and the opponents of a reform proposal are in swaying public opinion in their favor. Previous research in the field of abortion policy adoption has not focused much on the role of public opinion. Htun's (2003) work focused primarily on how actors can

influence the reform process by studying the fit between feminist issue networks and state institutions. The findings of this study suggest that it is necessary to better understand how actors operate to find public support for their agenda.

Public opinion is closely connected to other factors important in abortion reform processes included in the theoretical framework. It is also at the center how these different factors interact. Feminist issue networks, the Catholic Church and political parties can all attempt to affect public opinion, even though political parties are the actors who are directly affected by public opinion. As representatives of their constituencies and dependent on public support, political parties are heavily guided by public opinion. As shown in the case of Spain, the strategies that actors can use to mobilize public opinion may include protests and framing. It is however necessary to further study which actors and strategies can be used most effectively to influence public opinion, beyond the actors and strategies included in this theoretical framework. The importance of public opinion also highlights the value in paying attention to the role of political parties in abortion reform processes, since public opinion primarily influences the reform process because political parties are forced to take it into account in order to win elections.

4.3.3 The differing nature of the abortion policy proposals

As mentioned in the theory section, the nature of a specific abortion reform proposal can affect the reform process. The nature of the abortion reform proposals presented in Spain and Portugal were very different. The reform proposal in Spain is labeled radical and the reform proposal in Portugal is labeled not radical in this thesis. The level of radicalness of a policy proposal depends on the point of comparison. Even though it is a continuous factor in theory, it may be more conducive to label policy proposals as radical or non-radical when conducting a comparative analysis. The abortion reform proposal presented in Spain meant substantial changes to the abortion law, going back to a law that was even more conservative than the law from 1985. The abortion reform proposal in Portugal did not concern under which circumstances or during how many weeks of pregnancy abortion would be legal. It concerned the funding of abortion and certain procedures women had to go through, which were terms that more or less all women could theoretically agree to. It may seem evident that it is easier to have a less radical policy adopted than a radical policy, but what

were the mechanisms behind this relationship in Spain and Portugal? The level of radicalness of the abortion reform proposals had consequences for factors important for the outcomes of the reform processes.

First, it is likely that pro-abortion actors are more motivated to form feminist issue networks and to offer strong opposition against abortion reform proposals when they pose a great threat to women's sexual and reproductive health and rights compared to when the threat is not as great. The abortion reform proposal in Spain sparked strong opposition from the feminist issue network, while the feminist issue network in Portugal offered fairly limited opposition against the Portuguese abortion reform proposal. The Portuguese pro-abortion actors might have been more resilient and acted quicker had the changes to the abortion law been more substantial. They were very active in the Portuguese referendums in 1998 and in 2007 about the legality of abortion, but they were clearly more reserved when the policy issue was distinctly less radical in 2015. The non-radical nature of the abortion reform proposal in Portugal may therefore have had a negative effect on the strength of the opposition, making it easier to have the reform proposal adopted in the parliament.

Second, the level of radicalness of an abortion policy may limit the possibilities to frame abortion in an effective way. The Portuguese women's rights movement blamed the loss in the referendum in 1998 on their framing of abortion as a women's rights issue when they mobilized in connection to the referendum in 2007. In 1998, they used typically feminist arguments referring to women's autonomy over their bodies and their lives. The women's rights movement therefore strategically framed abortion as a women's health issue to affect public opinion in their favor in 2007. They actively refused to discuss women's right to abortion in favor of discussing how unsafe abortions posed a threat to women's health. This tactic proved effective to sway public opinion and the Portuguese people voted for liberal abortion legislation in the referendum (Whitten, 2008). The Portuguese women's rights movement surely remembered that the public was receptive to this particular framing since they upheld health arguments in the reform process in 2015 as well. It proved to be difficult to sway public opinion with this type of rhetoric this time around, not only because of the head start the proponents of the reform proposal had but also because the nature of the abortion policy proposal was different. In 2007, it was easy to argue that the

legality of abortion affected the number of women who had unsafe abortions. In 2015, it was more difficult to link the obstacles to abortion to women's health risks. Even though it would become more difficult to have an abortion, no woman would legally be denied to have one. The non-radical nature of the abortion reform proposal in Portugal may have limited the framing possibilities for the feminist issue network and hindered them from using the framing that had been proved most effective with the Portuguese people.

Third, abortion policies that are more radical may have a greater effect on public opinion than less radical abortion policies. It is fairly intuitive that the public is more likely to actively protest a radical policy proposal that they disagree with than a non-radical policy proposal that they disagree with. Polls showing that the majority of Spaniards did not support the draft law and PP's loss of eight seats in the European Parliament indicated that the Spanish draft law affected PP's support among voters. PP consequently withdrew the draft law fifteen months before the election in December 2015. Because the public opinion in Portugal did not seem affected by the abortion reform proposal it was easy for PSD and CDS-PP to adopt the proposal only three months before the election in October 2015. How the level of radicalness of a conservative abortion reform proposal affects public opinion is to some degree dependent on how the level of radicalness affects the motivation for pro-abortion actors to mobilize and their framing possibilities. A non-radical reform proposal may therefore not spark public interest in the first place due to the nature of the reform proposal, but it might also be difficult to fuel public interest since the non-radical reform proposal may not motivate actors to mobilize or could prevent them from effectively framing the reform proposal.

The level of radicalness of an abortion policy can act as a catalyst in the sense that it affects important factors in the reform process, which in turn can affect whether or not an abortion policy is adopted. The radical abortion policy proposal in Spain gave pro-abortion activists a lot of motivation to organize and sparked opposition amongst the Spanish people, which are instrumental factors in understanding why PP withdrew their policy proposal. The non-radical abortion policy proposal in Portugal did not give pro-abortion actors much motivation to organize, hindered them from effectively framing abortion as a women's health issue and did not affect public support for the

ruling coalition, which are important factors in understanding why the abortion policy proposal was adopted in Portugal. This illustrates which mechanisms that radical and non-radical abortion policies can set in motion and their indirect effect on abortion policy adoption. Previous research has not focused on how the nature of abortion reform proposals affects the reform process, which can indirectly affect the outcome. The mechanisms that different kinds of abortion reform proposals generate needs to be studied in further depth in order to untangle when and in which ways the nature of a reform proposal is important.

The Spanish and Portuguese cases do not perfectly overlap in time. This opens up the possibility that the promoters of conservative abortion reform in Portugal learned from the mistakes made in Spain. As mentioned in the methods section, there were no findings in this study that indicated that the initiators of the legislative initiative in Portugal proposed a non-radical abortion policy proposal as a strategic move based on the reform process in Spain. It can nevertheless not be ruled out that the Portuguese promoters of abortion reform saw the opposition that the Spanish radical policy proposal gave rise to in and outside of Spain, and decided to try a less radical approach.

5. Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to understand the differences between the abortion reform processes in Spain and Portugal, in order to better understand under which circumstances the right to abortion can be limited with the adoption of conservative abortion reforms. The Spanish and Portuguese attempts at reform initiated complex processes with several interlinked factors at play, but there are three important differences between the reform processes that are crucial in understanding why a conservative abortion reform proposal was adopted in Portugal and withdrawn in Spain. First, the characteristics of the opposition differed. The strong Spanish feminist issue network and the dissenting faction of PP offered great opposition against the abortion reform proposal presented in Spain, while the weak Portuguese feminist issue network did not manage to do the same. Second, there was public opposition against the reform proposal in Spain but not in Portugal, which made it difficult for the Spanish government to adopt the reform proposal without losing voters. Third, the

reform proposals differed in their nature. This affected the reform processes in different ways. The Spanish abortion reform proposal was radical, which motivated the feminist issue network to mobilize and engaged the public. The Portuguese abortion reform proposal was not radical, which did not motivate the feminist issue network to mobilize and did not engage the public to the same extent as in Spain. The non-radical abortion proposal also hindered the Portuguese feminist issue network from framing abortion as a health issue, which had been effective in previous abortion debates.

Several of the factors important for abortion policy adoption found in previous research were important in the reform processes in Spain and Portugal, such as feminist issue networks, the Catholic Church, framing and alliance building with state actors. However, the factors that accounted for the most important differences between the two cases have not been given much attention in previous research. The first theoretical implication of this study is that the particular characteristics of political parties can make them central in abortion reform processes, primarily because of party unity and their connection to public opinion. Public opinion affects the reform process foremost because it affects political parties who are dependent on public support. Lack of party unity can obstruct an attempt at abortion reform by making it difficult to reach consensus and by influencing public opinion. The second theoretical implication of this study is that the nature of an abortion reform proposal, in particular the level of radicalness, can act as a catalyst that affects other factors important for whether a reform proposal is adopted or withdrawn.

The intention of studying abortion policy reform is to inform and better equip future efforts to ensure women's right to abortion. Even though the findings of this study are not generalizable beyond the context of Spain and Portugal, the theoretical implications can be considered in future research to further study their importance for abortion policy adoption or withdrawal. The role of political parties, in particular party unity and their relation to public opinion, is likely to be important in other abortion reform processes as well and needs to be given more attention in future research. Public opinion needs not only be studied in terms of how it affects political parties, but also in terms of how actors involved in a reform process can affect public opinion. Future research should also focus on how the nature of a reform proposal

affects the reform process, for instance with case studies of radical and non-radical reform proposals. This could help uncover the mechanisms behind why taking small steps towards changing laws can be effective when dealing with sensitive issues such as abortion. Although this study has focused on abortion reform processes, the theoretical implications may not be limited to this research field. They are not necessarily specific for abortion reform and can be analytically valid in other areas as well, which is why future research may focus on the role of political parties and the nature of a reform proposal in the broader field of policy adoption.

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