

Examining the Effects of Overturning Roe v. Wade in the US and Its Impact on Other Countries

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“No woman can call herself free who does not control her own body. No woman can call herself free until she can choose consciously whether she will or will not be a mother.” Margaret Sanger

Abortion is a broad and important topic of discussion, especially in current times when most governments are trying to impose new laws, changing the availability of this medical procedure. While only a few of the changes made are good, such as fewer women getting abortions, the majority of these changes have been unwelcomed and have had negative effects on the lives of people: the restriction of women's rights. This is an immensely controversial topic because people do not know what side of the issue they agree with, either placing themselves under the opposing beliefs, pro-life or pro-choice. Still, it is imperative that people speak about abortion and how the overturning of Roe v. Wade in June 2022 not only set the United States back several years but also the entire world. This paper expounds on the infringement on women's rights by the US government, stemming from the introduction of new abortion laws that prevent women from having the fundamental right to make decisions about their bodies and choices that benefit them. Further, this paper highlights the chain reaction of this decision in international discourse about women's reproductive health and rights.

The topic of abortion is essential as it leads to public engagement in other parts of the world. In 2022, the United States Supreme Court decided to overturn Roe v. Wade, the law that protected women who wanted to get abortions for almost fifty years. This is significant because, as a universal topic, it affects every country in the world as people engage in sexual activities and conceive children. Some countries, such as Argentina, Brazil, Switzerland, Ireland, and Canada, have recognized that abortion rights are a part of fundamental human rights. On the other hand, some other countries, such as the United States, Poland, and Mexico, have multiple conditions attached to being granted an abortion. In the case of the United States and Mexico, they have created abortion laws to be specific to each state in the country (Center for Reproductive Rights, 2024). Another reason why abortion discourse is and should be a necessary discussion in the world is because the result of strict abortion laws or just the prohibition of abortion altogether can cause

severe medical issues: thousands of women have lost their lives or have had irreparable damage done to their reproductive systems or psychological health, trying to obtain this service illegally.

The multifaceted debate about religious views and scientific perspectives encompasses the complexity of a nuanced understanding of fetal development and women's reproductive rights. The introduction of religious theories includes the argument of how it is against the teachings of the Bible to take a life. As that, the Bible says "thou shalt not kill," (*King James Version Bible*, 2019, Exodus. 20:13), which is a part of the Ten Commandments; however, numerous medical theories have arisen and debunked the theory of when a life starts, arguing that life does not begin until the baby is born or can stay alive outside of the mother's womb with help of medical devices. Some medical professionals argue that it is not murder until the baby is out of the womb, identifying different gestational periods where the government recognizes the unborn baby as a living organism. Individuals and organizations put forward innumerable number of views, arguments, and perspectives to explain the eradication of abortion laws.

Explaining in extensive detail about the two major social movements dealing with abortion rights and laws are the pro-life movement and the pro-choice movement. It is understood that they are both forms of collective behaviour. Chesters and Welsh (2011) explain collective behaviour as "socially meaningful responses to the prevailing social structure associated with social change" (p.47). These social movements happen to bring significant change to the social issues at hand because people come together to protest issues concerning them and others in the society, and that way, the government takes into consideration the main points raised.

The abortion debate highlights the clash between both the pro-life and pro-choice movements, which advocate for distinct perspectives. According to Kirsten Piper (2022), "Merriam-Webster defines them as follows: Pro-life (adj): opposed to abortion. Pro-choice (adj): favouring the legalization of abortion" (para. 3). The author points out that these terms are subjective and particular to the person asked to define them, as people interpret them differently. Further, the author gives more accurate definitions for both sides of the social movement, explaining that in the case of the pro-life movement, it is the belief that "all human life is created equal regardless of size, level of development, education and degree of dependency," (Piper, 2022) and as a result of this definition and the people who support this movement, abortion goes against the fundamental human right to life. Piper (2022) also observes a more detailed definition for the pro-choice

movement, explaining that anti-abortion laws do not provide a woman with all the necessary resources needed to obtain a safe and legal abortion, thus “denying her the right to bodily autonomy or the right to privacy” (para. 7). Many articles and journals define these terms differently and explain how they view and understand both social movements; however, Piper’s article explains the definitions well while respecting both sides of the debate.

The reversal of *Roe v. Wade* created a seismic shift in the US and other countries, intensifying the advocacy efforts of the pro-life and pro-choice movements. According to Wallis (2022), “*Roe v. Wade* made abortion legal across the entire country. Overturning *Roe v. Wade* returns the legal decision back to state legislatures, potentially making abortion illegal and unobtainable for millions of American women” (p. 9). This is the basis of both the pro-life and pro-choice social movements. The title of Wallis’ article, “When America Sneezes, the World Catches a Cold,” has a deeper meaning: the United States is one of the most powerful countries in the world, and the decisions that the government makes tend to have a ripple effect on other countries in the world.

Wallis (2022) points out that “restricting abortion rights in the US sends a signal to the world that abortion rights are not human rights” (p. 9). The author notes that some conservative parties or groups all over the world have taken this decision made by the US Supreme Court “as a declaration that abortion rights are not human rights” (Wallis, 2022). Because of how the world views the US and the implementation of *Roe v. Wade* in 1973, “since the 1990s, about 60 countries have expanded laws or policies related to sexual and reproductive health and rights” (Saldinger, 2022). Some countries in the world value the United States and sometimes incorporate the decisions they make into their own country’s systems. Saldinger (2022) reports that Lucky Palmer, IPA’s Nigeria country director, stated that anti-abortion advocates in Nigeria were happy about the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*, saying advocates will use this decision to make sure that Nigerian women would not be able to make a choice about their bodies.

The theories used to explain these social movements include the Resource Mobilization Theory. According to Almeida (2019), this theory allows scholars to see the use of “unconventional strategies by less powerful groups, such as street demonstrations, rallies, boycotts and strikes” (p. 47) as a very rational and effective way to gain the government’s attention. The author highlights that scholars analyze the movements that took place in the 1960s and 1970s, movements that included people who struggled and fought for numerous issues, including “voting rights and equal

rights for women and people with disabilities and against legalized racism, legalization discrimination” (Almeida, 2019). These movements are now known as Resource Mobilization Theory. The pro-life and pro-choice social movements are both collective movements. This theory explains how resources are gathered and executed to achieve the goals of the organizations that support either movement.

The Resource Mobilization Theory also focuses on the resources that excluded social groups could implement to “sustain mobilization” against the government and other people in power when needed (Almeida 2019). Almeida (2019) mentions that the theory and its application has evolved over the years: “notice also that these are largely nonprofit everyday-life associations and groups not explicitly established for social movement mobilization” (p. 48). The author explains that nowadays, we can see collective action and behaviour come out of organizations that are not exactly structured to carry out collective action.

Almeida (2019) gives reasons about how individualism has increased, and people do not have tight relationships with others in their communities, which is why people need to mobilize their resources: it is informal organizations they are a part of that are at the forefront of building social relationships with others in the same social groups. The author also gives some more examples, such as the parent-teacher association, nonprofit organizations, and religious organizations, which are the first to usually get involved and “mobilize in a social movement because the social ties are already solidified” (p. 48). We can see this theory utilized in both the pro-life and pro-choice social movements. It is mainly religious institutions and reproductive health institutions that get involved in the protests. Also, students from colleges and universities and smaller organizations use their resources to support as well.

The Intersectionality Theory involves mobilizing people who have multiple identities and share similar systems of oppression (Almeida, 2019). The author explains that this theory is essential for people who are “impacted by multiple forms of inequality” (Almeida, 2019). As Almeida says, “Intersectionality acts as a powerful tool of resistance in unequal societies that are stratified along multiple social dimensions” (2019). This theory is a great tool for both of the social movements (pro-life and pro-choice), especially the pro-choice movement, as multiple groups of people can join to promote the movement, including people with different sexual orientation, race, religious belief, and gender.

Using the Intersectionality Theory as a pathway into how this decision affects women's rights and the feminist movement, I will explain how this has developed in the past few years and how one cannot be a feminist and also support the pro-life movement. Williams (2022) observes that when the pro-life movement increased in the early 1970s, it clashed with second-wave feminism. The author explains that men led most of the pro-life movements. It was never an issue until the National Organization for Women endorsed the pro-choice movement, contending that "women's equality depended on abortion rights" (Williams, 2022) and gender equality would not be attainable, not until women had the right to control their bodies. bell hooks (2000) alleges that "a woman cannot be anti-abortion and an advocate of feminism" (p. 6). The author reiterates that "if feminism is a movement to end sexist oppression and depriving females of reproductive rights is a form of sexist oppression, then one cannot be anti-choice and be feminist" (hooks, 2000). Reproductive rights and abortion rights are for women, so enforcing laws that prevent the freedom of choice is going against everything the feminist movement fights for.

The decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade* was an exacerbation of the innumerable obstacles women already face, going from being able to get safe reproductive healthcare to increased health risks, financial burdens, minimal options for safe healthcare and possibly, loss of life. Cane (1973) brings up the issue of the right for a woman's privacy, which was what the Supreme Court used as its rationale for the decision to make abortion a constitutional right. After many years of fighting for women's rights, it is somewhat appalling to see how backward the United States has gone because of the decision made in 2022. Orrell (2022) highlights quite several problems women have faced and will continue to face because of the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*. The author makes mention of health insurance, which is big, especially in a country like the United States, where healthcare is privatized and not covered by the government. The majority of the population has to pay large amounts to receive adequate care. Women with low income who accidentally get pregnant and cannot afford healthcare or childcare now, in some states, have to give birth to a child they know they cannot care for, with very little to no help from the government. Orrell (2022) mentions the already high rates of infant and maternal mortality due to inadequate care and poverty in states that have made abortion illegal in the US. People can interpret this as the government not caring about the rights of women and accepting that they may lose their lives or experience mental and psychological damage by going through illegal and extreme measures to obtain an abortion. It

is sad to see this happening in the United States and how this might continue to affect the lives of so many other women all over the world.

In conclusion, the decision made by the United States Supreme Court to overturn *Roe v. Wade* has had both domestic and international impact on the reshaping legal and social frameworks of different countries. This action shows that although the United States might be unaware, the world watches its every move and decision. The pro-life and pro-choice movements have set off in countries that have begun making legal changes to reproductive rights, and people have taken notes from how these movements were implementing their goals and beliefs in the United States. There are global repercussions for the redefining of reproductive rights in the United States; thus, there is a need for ongoing advocacy to safeguard said rights and defend fundamental freedoms on a global scale.

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