

Anabelle Daly

Schlatter

Composition II

15 November 2022

### Impact on the Overturning of *Roe v. Wade* on American Women

It was the end of my shift as a camp counselor on June 24<sup>th</sup>, 2022, when I saw the notification on my phone: “*Roe v Wade Officially Overturned*”. It was around 2:30pm, during our final coloring activity of the day and I remember hearing my name called from one of the kids in my group and becoming emotional as the little girl in front of me asked for my help with her drawing. While wrapping up the activity and wrangling the kids into a straight line, I remember barely keeping it together as I got the kids all put-together and prepared to go home. After all the kids had gone, and my fellow counselors gathered our things and got ready to leave, no one talked about what had just happened, even though we all had gotten the messages and notifications. Today was a day we would all remember. When I got home the news was already on, and as I watched the reports and stories already being covered of the unprecedented decision, I began to cry. My mom comforted me, while my dad questioned me: why I was so upset? How does this even affect me? Is there anything he can do to help? I couldn’t put the feeling into words. Grandmothers have now experienced a life with more bodily autonomy than their granddaughters will have. Young women have grown up understanding that abortions are there to help them and now must accept that that right is now no longer offered to them and has been taken back because of a politically motivated decision. The *Dobbs v. Women's Health Organization* decision by the Supreme Court, also known as the overturning of its judicial precedent *Roe v. Wade*, is and will continue to affect women, socially and geographically, from

varying degrees, across the United States of America. However, some argue that there is, and will be, little to no impact from the decision because the right to decide now belongs to the states and they will decide in accordance with the people. Though this argument is valid in theory, in practice it is an unreachable goal and unjust to women.

Prior to examining the many impacts that the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* will have on American women, it is imperative to understand what an abortion is. According to Planned Parenthood, a trusted worldwide health care provider who delivers vital reproductive health care, sex education, and information to millions, an abortion is, “a medical procedure that ends a pregnancy” (Planned Parenthood). Within the category of abortion there are different types, the primary being, a medical or surgical abortion. The medical, also known as a nonsurgical, abortion is done when the patient is within the first nine weeks of the pregnancy. This method can be seen most commonly in the form of the Abortion Pill, allowing the abortion to be done privately at home. A surgical abortion is done on a patient who is between five to twelve weeks pregnant. This procedure only lasts only 3 to 5 minutes to complete, using a suction that gently removes the pregnancy, emptying the uterus. When discussing abortion, it is crucial to first understand that an abortion is, first and foremost, a medical procedure most women will receive as healthcare within their lives (Planned Parenthood). There are many politicized myths that have been used to both misinform and to spread disinformation to people about abortions. One of them most popular myths being that many women use abortions as a form of birth control. This is untrue as according to the National Abortion Federation, the professional association of abortion providers, “If abortion were used as a primary method of birth control, a typical women would have at least 2 or 3 pregnancies per year- 30 or more total during her lifetime” (National Abortion Federation). Essentially, if abortions were used as recklessly as this myth implies, then there would be much more evidence of pregnancies to back this claim. Another popular myth is

that many women come to regret the abortions they receive later in life. This is once again a false, and generalized, myth. The first problem with it being the overarching assignment of regret to all abortion receivers, when many have had their lives saved by the very procedure the myth claims to cause regret. Now, while there are undoubtedly some cases where women feel grief, loss, or regret, but research shows most women who feel regret after an abortion is from becoming pregnant in the first place, not from the abortion specifically. In fact, research indicates that relief is the most common emotional response following abortion and psychological stress is at its peak prior to the procedure, not after (National Abortion Federation). There are many more myths that have been spread throughout society about abortion, including its history as a medical practice in the United States.

Historically, abortion has been a common part of women's healthcare for much longer than the public realizes. According to Michele Goodwin, a law professor at the University of California- Irvine, dating back to the periods of 1600 to 1900, abortion was frequently practiced in North America, as many tribal societies knew how to induce abortions (Goodwin). It was not until the 1860's in America for abortion to become something that was illegal, much of the motivation to criminalize abortion rooted in white supremacy. Goodwin explains, "Half of the women who provided reproductive healthcare were Black women, some of whom were enslaved; midwives also included Indigenous and white women" (Goodwin). Under the law at the time of the Civil War, white men owned Black women's bodies, as their slaves were their property, and they controlled all aspects of Black women's lives, including their reproductive rights. When slavery was abolished in 1865, the control over Black women's bodies remained, becoming the first to experience the examples of control that Congress, and politicians have over all women's bodies today. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a coalition of male doctors led a movement, recognized historically by the Center for Reproductive Health, Research, and Policy at the

University of California- Los Angeles, as a full-fledged criminalization campaign to outlaw abortion across the board, founding the American Medical Association, known today as the AMA, in the year 1847 (Dynak, H, et al.). The male-dominated medical profession of doctors sought to take authority from the female-dominated profession of midwifery. This resulted in the nationwide abortion ban by 1910, leaving the decision to move forward with any abortion procedure to the doctors, of whom 95% were male (Lewis and Shimabukuro). Throughout the 1930's through the 1950's women continued to find access to abortion, through illegal, unsafe means, resulting in death for nearly 2,700 women in the year 1930 alone (Gold and Guttmacher). It took until the Trial of the San Francisco Nine in 1966 for the first movements of abortion reform to make headway. When nine well respected doctors were sued for providing medical abortions to women who had been exposed to a disease known to cause birth defects, known as rubella, the country came to the defense of the nine doctors and resulted in the allowance of medical abortions in many hospitals across America (Dynak H, et al.) After nearly a decade more of fighting for reform, in 1970, New York State legalized abortion, becoming the first state to do so. Following this, in 1973, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the due process clause of the 14<sup>th</sup> amendment to the Constitution protects the right to abortion, making abortion a legal right in all 50 states (Planned Parenthood). Becoming the first of its kind, in 2022, the United States Supreme Court decided to overrule the judicial precedent set by *Roe v. Wade* under the opinion of the court to be that the original decision of *Roe v. Wade* was “egregiously wrong from the start” with “weak reasoning” and “damaging consequences”, as Justice Samuel Alito stated in the *Dobbs v. Women's Health Organization* court opinion (Alito). While this has not only never happened before in the judicial history of the United States, but this is also something that will have ripple effects lasting decades, when the fight for women's rights has already been going on for over 150 years.

The fight for the women's right to choose to have an abortion is a fight that started in a time of slavery and radically different social laws. Over 100 years later, and American society, generally, views social justice in a very different and far more progressive view. Civil rights for people of color and minorities have aligned with the fight for women's rights have intersected and overlapped many times in the modern fight for civil rights. The social implications of revoking a right woman have now lived their whole lives having will not just affect all women but will disproportionately affect women of color. According to the federal Abortion Surveillance System from the Center for Disease Control, in 2019 about 38% of abortions were among Black women, 33% among White women, 21% among Hispanic women, and 7% among other women (Kortsmitt, et al.). Not only are abortions had most by women of all ethnic groups, but now that *Roe v. Wade* has been overturned there are a multitude of racial disparities have occurred. According to polling done by the Kaiser Family Foundation, a reputable nonprofit organization providing a non-partisan source of facts, in 2019 over 4 in 10 women (43%) between the ages of 18 to 49 live in states where abortion has become or will likely become illegal are women of color. In other words, almost half of all the women living within the most heavily affected areas by the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* are women of color (Hill and Artiga). Furthermore, women of color between the ages of 18 to 49 face greater barriers to accessing health care overall in comparison to white women in that age group, along with more limited financial resources and transportation options, which now makes it more difficult, if not impossible for them to travel out of state for an abortion (Hill and Artiga). With all of the aforementioned inequality in mind, women of color are also more likely to experience certain birth risks and adverse birth outcomes, as wells women of color, specifically Black women, having a higher rate of pregnancy related mortality, from 2007 to 2016, 40.8% of Black women dying, in comparison to White women's 12.7% rate of pregnancy-related mortality (Hill and

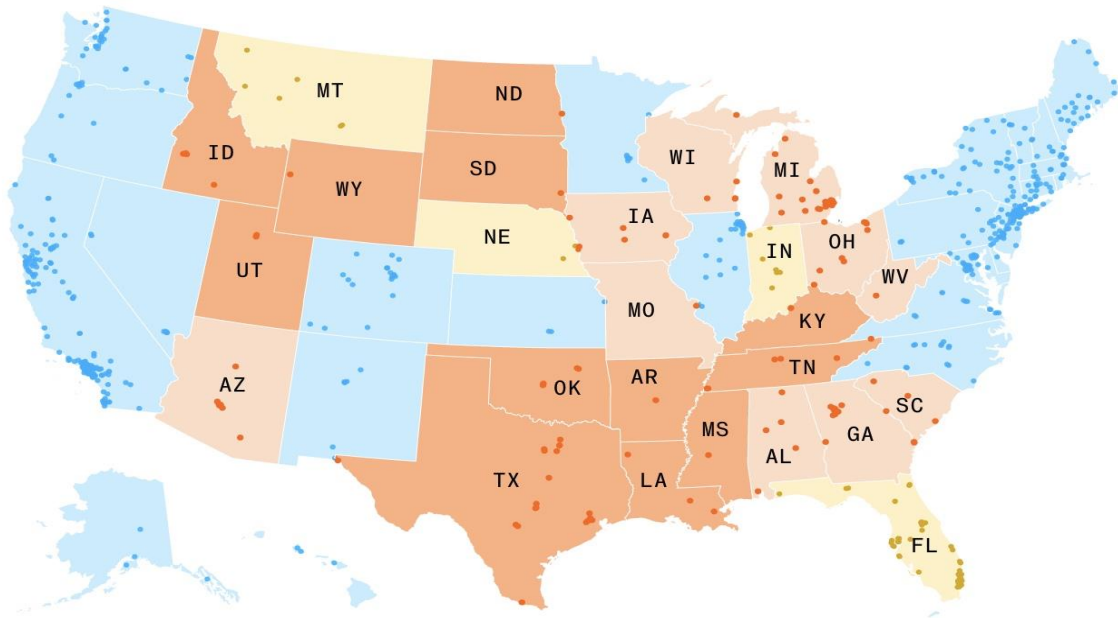
Artiga). Women of color are now, more than ever, disproportionately unequal to not only their male counterparts, but also their white female counterparts, to the point of losing their lives due to the social impacts of *Roe v. Wade* being overturned.

Once *Roe v Wade* was officially overturned, 26 states initiated immediate abortion bans or came to pass abortion bans. According to the Guttmacher Institute, a leading research and policy organization committed to advancing sexual and reproductive health rights worldwide, there is roughly 33 million women of child-bearing age live in these states with abortion bans in place (Benhamou et al.). Furthermore, due to the abortion bans, over a quarter of the country's abortion clinics were set to close, pushing the distance for interstate travel to an abortion clinic to be on average 276 miles each way (Benhamou et al.). The effects of these clinic closures can be seen in the map below, as every dot represents an abortion facility, and the color shows the status of that clinic (see fig. 1.)

### Clinics at Risk of Closure Post-Roe

Abortion facility status now that the landmark decision has been overturned

- Trigger ban
- Bans or restrictions will take effect
- Bans or restrictions likely
- Hasn't banned, or protects



Source: Guttmacher Institute

Fig. 1 "Nearest US Abortion Clinics: How Far Americans Have to Travel for Legal Abortions."; Bloomberg.com, Bloomberg, 24 June 2022 <https://www.bloomberg.com/graphics/2022-supreme-court-abortion-travel/?leadSource=verify+wall>

This map provides a clear image of the amount of access that is no longer available to women. According to calculations done by Bloomberg News based on data from the Guttmacher Institute, it is, on average, 6 times farther for women in the most affected part of the country to receive health care (Guttmacher Institute). Additionally, distance is not the only problem now as volume of patients in the remaining open abortion clinics in the legal states are overwhelmed with new patients. Illinois, for example, will see an over 8,000% increase in patients, nearly 8.9 million women, due to the closures and bans in neighboring states (Benhamou et al.). Not only are women affected disproportionately depending on their race and status as a minority, but women who live in certain states are now disproportionately affected to women living in states

where abortion is legal. The access to abortion is a different opportunity for White women who live in Massachusetts versus Black women who live in Texas. Together, they share the common loss of their national right, yet individually women of color in abortion banned states will have a very different experience than most other women in the United States.

While public opinion the overturning of *Roe v Wade* and the removal of women's national reproductive rights is generally regarded as a seriously detrimental and impactful issue, there are many politicians who believe that giving the right back to the states, and their legislators, to vote in alignment with what the people want is the way it should have operated since the beginning. When *Roe v. Wade* was overturned in June of 2022, many politicians spoke about how this was the proper decision, like Representative Mike Bost, a Republican serving Illinois' 12<sup>th</sup> congressional district, who said in a tweet, "I agree wholeheartedly with the Supreme Court's decision to restore power to the American people to determine for themselves how abortion services are regulated in their state" (Bost). In addition to Bost's comment, Bost's colleague, and fellow Republican, Representative Kenneth Buck serving Colorado's 4<sup>th</sup> congressional district, stated to a local newsletter, the *Colorado Politics*, that, "The power to decide this profound moral question has officially returned to the states, where it will be debated and settled in the way it should be in our democratic society—by the people." (Luning and Metzger). Both Representatives claim that the overturning was a positive action and openly supported it under the democratic reasoning that people will be able to vote on whether they want abortion to be legal in their state or not. Though this notion is what carried out throughout many of the celebrations of *Roe v Wade* being overturned, the claim that people will be able to vote and decide was clearly shown as not being the priority for many states. By the end of the very same day that *Roe v Wade* was overturned, 13 states had already announced their "trigger



plans” to ban abortion, either partially or completely, as seen represented by the colored states in the map below (see fig. 2).

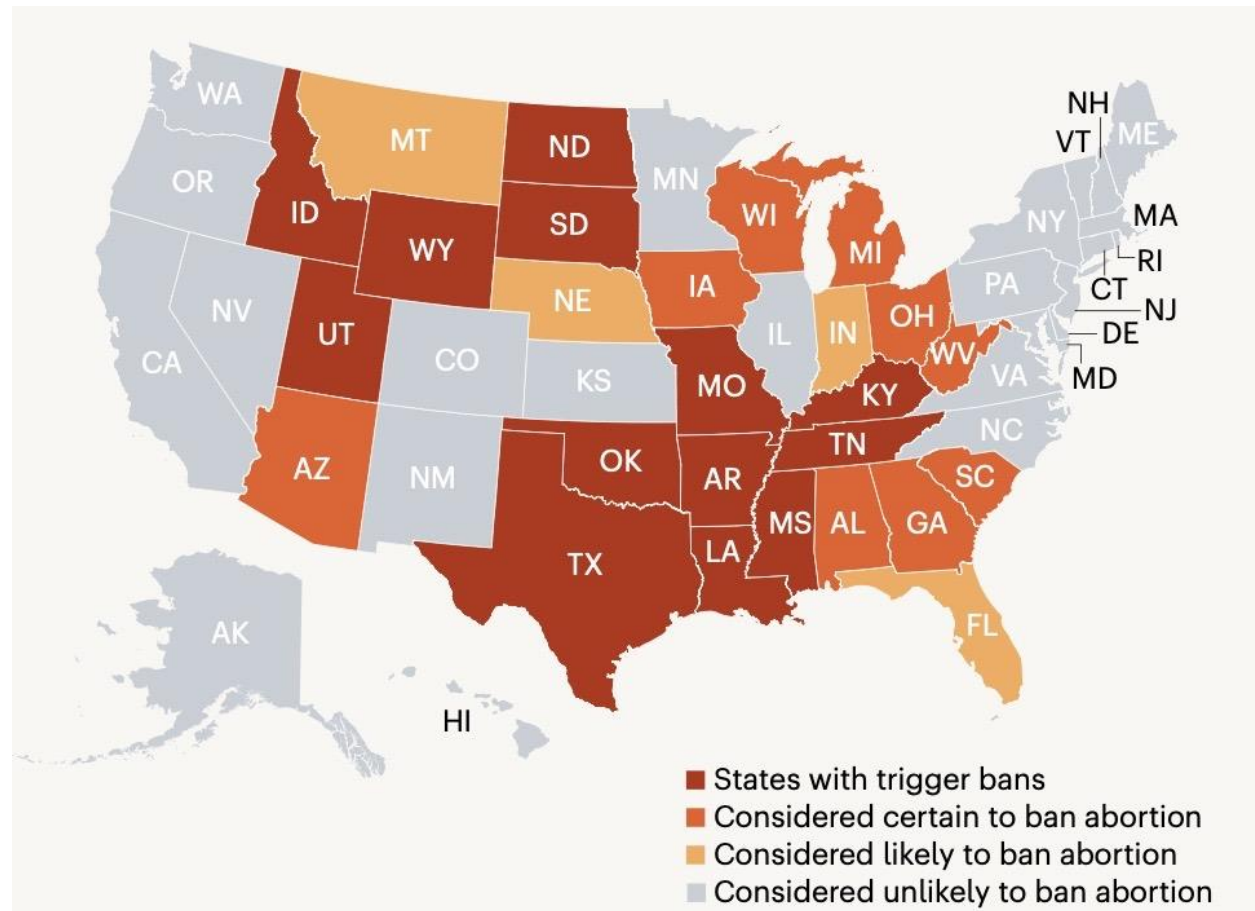


Fig. 2. Changing Landscape image from Guttmacher Institute; *Nature News*, Nature Publishing Group, 10 Aug. 2022, <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-022-02139-3>.

This instant ban of abortion, as soon as it was possible, directly goes against the claims by representatives who are arguing this decision is for the people, when in fact these were not voted on by the citizens of these states. These bans were put into place by politicians who are using access to abortion with ulterior motives, one of the most common example being using abortion as a political move to gain support from specific parties. A medical procedure apart of women’s health care should not be, and should never have been, politicized and used for any purpose, but

being a medical procedure, but now it is a topic of debate among politicians and has become a identifying political factor of national political parties. So, while many politicians have argued this decision should be up to the states, and the idea is democratic in theory, instead the opposite has happened, and the overturning of *Roe v Wade* has limited a women's right to choose for herself.

Abortion is something that in its most basic nature is a positive option for women who end up pregnant and decide they don't want to have a child. Abortion should have remained this simple. Throughout American history abortion was morphed into something much more as outside factors, like sexism, racism, and religion, came to play in this procedure. Women have been fighting ever since to gain their national right to choose and for many decades that right was theirs. Now, for the first time, we have gone backwards as a nation. At the bottom line, women have felt a loss as a whole, but the impacts and ripple effects will affect those in different areas and of different races and ethnic groups worse than other groups. Young women have the same fight that generations before fought to win, and I have no doubt the right will be re-established one day, though until that day, the impact of the overturning of *Roe v Wade* will be felt nationwide as women struggle with the social and geographical challenges, they now must face daily in their lives. Many women have already died, and many will continue to die without access to abortion. Many young women, many still children who end up pregnant due to sexual assault, both by strangers and incestual, will be forced to carry the pregnancies to birth. Many doctors will be prosecuted for helping women in need by their states. The full impacts of the overturning of *Roe v Wade* have yet to be seen, and with how drastic the immediate impacts have been, the long-term impacts seem to just be looming ahead. Though, if there is one thing I'm sure of, it is that if our grandmothers and mothers could fight this fight and win, then we can fight with our daughters until change is made for good.



## Works Cited

Alito, Samuel. "Supreme Court of the United States." *DOBBS, STATE HEALTH OFFICER OF THE MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, ET AL. v. JACKSON WOMEN'S HEALTH ORGANIZATION ET AL.*, [https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/21pdf/19-1392\\_6j37.pdf](https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/21pdf/19-1392_6j37.pdf)

Benhamou, Mathieu, et al. "Nearest US Abortion Clinics: How Far Americans Have to Travel for Legal Abortions." *Bloomberg.com*, Bloomberg, 24 June 2022, <https://www.bloomberg.com/graphics/2022-supreme-court-abortion-travel/?leadSource=uverify+wall>

Bost, Mike [@RepBost]. "I agree wholeheartedly with the Supreme Court's decision to restore power to the American people to determine for themselves how abortion services are regulated in their state. It's a historic decision that will help save the lives of countless innocent unborn children". *Twitter*, 24 June 2022, <https://twitter.com/RepBost/status/1540371247741149186>

Dudley, Susan. *Women Who Have Abortions - National Abortion Federation*. [https://prochoice.org/wp-content/uploads/women\\_who\\_have\\_abortions.pdf](https://prochoice.org/wp-content/uploads/women_who_have_abortions.pdf).

Dynak, H, et al. "Bixby Center for Global Reproductive Health: Evidence. Empowerment. Impact." *Bixby Center for Global Reproductive Health | Evidence. Empowerment. Impact.*, The Regents of the University of California, <https://bixbycenter.ucsf.edu/>

Gold, Rachel Benson, and Guttmacher Institute. “Lessons from before Roe: Will Past Be Prologue?” *Guttmacher Institute*, 30 Aug. 2022,

<https://www.guttmacher.org/gpr/2003/03/lessons-roe-will-past-be-prologue> .

Goodwin, Michele. “The Racist History of Abortion and Midwifery Bans: News & Commentary.” *American Civil Liberties Union*, 1 July 2020, <https://www.aclu.org/news/racial-justice/the-racist-history-of-abortion-and-midwifery-bans>

Hill, Latoya, and Samantha Artiga. “What Are the Implications of the Overturning of Roe v. Wade for Racial Disparities?” *KFF*, 6 Oct. 2022, <https://www.kff.org/racial-equity-and-health-policy/issue-brief/what-are-the-implications-of-the-overturning-of-roe-v-wade-for-racial-disparities/>

Institute, Guttmacher. “Interactive Map: US Abortion Policies and Access after Roe.” *Guttmacher Institute*, <https://states.guttmacher.org/policies/methodology.html>

Kortsmit, Katherine, et al. “Abortion Surveillance - United States, 2019.” *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 24 Nov. 2021, <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/70/ss/ss7009a1.htm>

Lewis, Karen, and Jon Shimabukuro. *Report for Congress - Everycrsreport*. [https://www.everycrsreport.com/files/20010102\\_95-724A\\_ad1f1fd461891bb40b3f054a2027edf9429958dc.pdf](https://www.everycrsreport.com/files/20010102_95-724A_ad1f1fd461891bb40b3f054a2027edf9429958dc.pdf)

Luning, Ernest, and Hannah Metzger. "Colorado's Politicos, Advocates React to U.S. Supreme Court Ruling Discarding Roe." *Colorado Politics*, 24 June 2022,

[https://www.coloradopolitics.com/colorado-in-dc/colorados-politicos-advocates-react-to-u-s-supreme-court-ruling-discarding-roe/article\\_5fb76b5a-f0f3-11ec-a662-1764813f26ae.html](https://www.coloradopolitics.com/colorado-in-dc/colorados-politicos-advocates-react-to-u-s-supreme-court-ruling-discarding-roe/article_5fb76b5a-f0f3-11ec-a662-1764813f26ae.html)

Parenthood, Planned. "Abortion in U.S. History." *Planned Parenthood Action Fund*,

<https://www.plannedparenthoodaction.org/issues/abortion/abortion-central-history-reproductive-health-care-america>.

Sidik, Saima May. "The Effects of Overturning Roe v. Wade in Seven Simple Charts." *Nature News*, Nature Publishing Group, 10 Aug. 2022, <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-022-02139-3>.