

# One-third of American women have lost abortion rights since *Roe v. Wade* overturned

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Nearly a third of American women of childbearing age, around 21 million, lost access to abortion immediately after the Supreme Court's decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade*. This week, trigger laws in five states have deprived even more of that right. Thirty-six percent of American women will lose abortion rights should courts lift injunctions blocking anti-abortion legislation in other states.

On Thursday, legislation outlawing most abortions went into effect in Texas, Idaho and Tennessee. A stipulation in Idaho's law, which would have made it illegal for doctors to perform abortions to preserve the mother's health, was blocked by a federal judge. In Texas, abortion providers now face felony charges and can be sentenced to life in prison.

A law in Indiana, which will take effect on September 15, bans abortion at any time except in some cases of rape or incest, fetal abnormalities incompatible with life, and to protect the life or health of the mother. North Dakota's stringent anti-abortion legislation was blocked by a judge for a second time on Friday. Laws in Arizona, Utah, Montana, Wyoming, Michigan, South Carolina, West Virginia and Iowa have been blocked.

If these laws are allowed to take effect, 23 million women of childbearing age will reside in states where abortion is either banned entirely or is banned after six weeks gestation. Gestational age is not calculated by the likely date of conception but is instead counted from the mother's last menstrual period. Most women are at four weeks gestation before a missed period alerts them to possible pregnancy.

Many states have not banned abortion outright, but instead have restricted it to the first six weeks of pregnancy or deny it after a fetal "heartbeat," a non-scientific medical term, can be found.

Clinics, abortion rights advocates, and expectant mothers have worked feverishly over the past two months

to halt the progression of anti-abortion laws or to beat pending legislation. Hours after *Roe v. Wade* was overturned, workers at one Choices clinic feverishly began calling patients with scheduled abortions, urging them to "get here now."

Many women have traveled from states where abortion was banned, sometimes driving hours to the nearest clinic only to be turned away by providers wary of running afoul of swiftly changing and confusing laws.

Caitlin Gustafson, a family physician and abortion provider in Idaho, filed suit against the state over three separate abortion laws after the *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Center* decision was announced. "It's a very confusing landscape," Gustafson told the *Washington Post*.

Meanwhile, lawmakers and anti-abortion activists seek to make abortion even harder to procure, with proposed bans on interstate travel and efforts to give legal rights to fetuses. In Utah, proposals that would end exemptions for rape and incest have put anti-abortion groups and lawmakers at odds with the ultra-conservative Church of Latter Day Saints, which permits abortions in those instances.

In Wisconsin, Republican lawmakers have asked courts to dismiss a lawsuit challenging the state's 1849 anti-abortion laws on grounds that the lawmakers named in the suit have no ability to enforce the law and that the plaintiffs, which include Democratic Governor Tony Evers and Attorney General Josh Kaul, are not private citizens who will be affected by the law.

The bans have forced women to seek help from Mexico in obtaining abortions. Sandra Cardona Alanis, founder of volunteer abortion network Red Necesito Abortar, has said that her organization received over 70 messages from US women after *Roe* was overturned—most of them from Texas.

Since then, the numbers of American women calling

upon Red Necesito Abortar (I Need an Abortion Network) has increased so much that Cardona Alanis has had to expand space to accommodate them. “Earlier, we were letting them borrow our bedroom,” she told the BBC, “but we saw the need to open up more space.”

Cardona Alanis started the organization six years ago after she struggled to find an abortion in the aftermath of a rape. From her home in Monterrey, she answers texts from women who find her via social media. Most women take the drug misoprostol home with them, but some stay and allow Cardona Alanis and her volunteers to “accompany” them until the abortion is complete. She also mails the medication when necessary.

Cardona Alanis does not speak English and she initially used Google translate to communicate with English-speakers. Red Necesito Abortar has now hired translators to accommodate the American women who call or visit.

Red Necesito Abortar is not the only Mexican organization that is expanding as US abortion rights narrow, with an entire network developing, especially along the border. Volunteers provide information about medical abortion to the women who contact them. They accompany women to the pharmacy to acquire the right pills, which are sold over the counter in some Mexican states, or they supply them directly to the client. Some services mail or smuggle the misoprostol tablets to women in the US.

An anonymous 22-year-old American woman told the BBC how she used an organization in the network to obtain misoprostol. She was assigned a caseworker, who kept in touch with her through FaceTime, Skype and Zoom, reassuring her and making sure the process went smoothly.

Veronica Cruz, founder of abortion advocacy organization Las Libres, told the BBC, “It is a crazy thing. We always saw the United States like an example country on this matter. Now the world is in reverse.” Until last year, most of Red Necesito Abortar’s clients were Mexican or migrant women. That changed in 2021, when several Republican-led states passed stringent anti-abortion laws in anticipation of *Roe v. Wade* being overturned. Texas passed its abortion laws in September, the same month that abortion became legal throughout Mexico.

Laws in Texas have had the “chilling effect” abortion rights advocates had predicted they would, with abortions falling by 60 percent in the first month after passage of its anti-abortion law. In addition to penalizing doctors who provide abortions, it also encouraged informants to turn in

those who obtained one. This is the backdrop against which Las Libres and Red Necesito Abortar have expanded.

The coordinated right-wing attack on abortion has denied most American women unrestricted access to abortion. So-called “heartbeat laws” and laws that restrict abortion to the first six weeks are cruel and irrational, and they form a toehold for further assaults on democratic rights. These laws must be seen for what they are—a vicious attack on the working class.

These laws predominantly affect working class women who cannot afford to travel out of state for abortion services. They reject the humanity of women, even children, whose pregnancies are the result of abuse. Meanwhile, for wealthy women the laws are only an inconvenience. Most abortions are sought by women who have already had at least one child, and most often for economic reasons. It is not a coincidence that most of these laws have been passed in states with the most skeletal social programs.

This assault on abortion rights cannot be countered by voting more Democrats into office. The Democratic Party has steadfastly refused to push for greater reproductive rights, even when they held the majority in both houses of Congress. The party that regards Republicans as their “intramural scrimmage” partners will not fight for abortion rights when the elections are over. They have worked hand in hand with the Republicans to cut social spending to the bone.

The fact that America’s abortion crisis is spilling over the southern border highlights the international character of workers’ struggles. Democratic politicians and the courts will not halt the assault on abortion rights. Rather, workers must take up the fight for abortion rights, seeing rightfully seeing their place among democratic rights that only they can defend.



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