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Opinion

# United States (abortion): Roe v Wade has been overturned. Here's what this will mean

Monday 27 June 2022, by [DONEGAN Moira](#) (Date first published: 24 June 2022).

**Millions of women are now less free than men, in the functioning of their own bodies and in the paths of their own lives**

The story is not about the supreme court. Today, the sword that has long been hanging over American women's heads finally fell: the supreme court overturned Roe v Wade, ending the nationwide right to an abortion. This has long been expected, and long dreaded, by those in the reproductive rights movement, and it has long been denied by those who wished to downplay the court's extremist lurch. The coming hours will be consumed with finger pointing and recriminations. But the story is not about who was right and who was wrong.

Nor is the story about the US judiciary's crumbling legitimacy, or the supreme court's fractious internal politics. In the coming days, our attention will be called to the justices themselves – to their feelings, to their careers, to their safety. We will be distracted by the stench of partisanship and scandal that emanates from the shadowy halls of One First Street; by the justices' grievance-airing and petty backbiting in public; or by their vengeful paranoid investigation into the leak of a draft of Samuel Alito's opinion some weeks ago. We will be scolded not to protest outside their houses, and we will be prevented, by high fences and heavy gates and the presence of armed cops, from protesting outside the court itself. But the story is not about the supreme court.

The story is not about the Democratic politicians, whose leadership on abortion rights has been tepid at best, and negligent at worst, since the 1990s. In the coming days, people who have voted to uphold the Hyde Amendment, a provision that has banned federal funding of abortion since 1976 – effectively limiting the constitutional right to an abortion to only those Americans wealthy enough to afford one – will tell us how terrible this is. They will issue statements talking about their outrage; they will make platitude-filled speeches about the worth and dignity of American women. They will not mention their own inaction, persisting for decades in the face of mounting and well-funded rightwing threats to Roe. They will not mention that they did nothing as all that worth and dignity of American women hung in the balance; they will not mention that most of them still, even now, oppose doing the only thing that could possibly restore reproductive freedom: expanding the number of justices on the courts. But the cowardice, hypocrisy, and historic moral failure of national Democrats is not the story. And certainly, the story is nothing so vulgar as what this withdrawal of human rights might mean for that party's midterm election prospects.

The story is not, even, about the legal chaos that will now follow. It is not about the fact that in 13 states, today's order has made all abortion immediately illegal, the consummation of sexist ambitions that had long been enshrined in so-called trigger laws, provisions that have been on the books for years and decades that ban abortion upon the court's reversal of Roe – misogyny lying in wait. Nor is

the story about the other 13 states that will almost certainly ban abortion now, too, meaning that the procedure will be illegal in 26 of the nation's 50 states within weeks.

The story is not about how legislatures, lawyers and judges will handle these laws; it is not about whether they will allow merciful exemptions for rape or incest (they won't) or impose draconian measures that aim to extend the cruelty of state bans beyond their borders to target abortion doctors, funders, and supporters in blue states (they will).

The story is not about the cop who will charge the first doctor or the first patient with murder – that's already happening, anyway. The story is not about the anti-choice activists, sneering in their triumph, who will say that they only want the best for women, and that women can't be trusted to know what's best for themselves. The story is not about the women who will be imprisoned or committed at the behest of these activists, or the desperate pregnant people, with nowhere to turn, who will be ensnared by them into deceitful crisis pregnancy centers or exploitative "maternity ranches".

The real story is not about the media who will churn out the think pieces, and the crass, enabling both-sidesism, and the insulting false equivalences and calls for unity. It is not about the pundits who will scold feminists that really, it is the overzealous abortion rights movement that is to blame; that really, women must learn to compromise with the forces that would keep them unequal, bound to lives that are smaller, more brutal, and more desperate. The story is not, even, about those other rights – the rights to parent, and to marry, and to access birth control – that a cruel and emboldened right will come for next.

The real story is the women. The real story is the student whose appointment is scheduled for tomorrow, who will get a call from the clinic sometime in the next hours telling her that no, they are sorry, they cannot give her an abortion after all. The real story is the woman waiting tables, who feels so sick and exhausted these past few weeks that she can barely make it through her shifts, who will soon be calling clinics in other states, hearing that they're all booked for weeks, and will be asking friends for money to help cover the gas, or the plane, or the time off that she can't afford. The real story is the abortion provider, already exhausted and heartbroken from years of politicians playing politics with her patients' rights, who will wonder whether she can keep her clinic open for its other services any more, and conclude that she can't. The real story is the mom of two, squinting at her phone as she tries to comfort a screaming toddler, trying to figure out what she will have to give up in order to keep living the life she wants, with the family she already has.

The real story is about thousands of these women, not just now but for decades to come – the women, whose lives will be made smaller and less dignified by unplanned and unchosen pregnancies, the women whose health will be endangered by the long and grueling physical process of pregnancy; the women, and others, who will have to forgo dreams, end educations, curtail careers, stretch their finances beyond the breaking point, and subvert their own wills to someone else's.

The real story is in the counterfactuals – the books that will go unwritten, the trips untaken, the hopes not pursued, and jokes not told, and the friends not met, because the people who could have lived the full, expansive, diverse lives that abortions would allow will instead be forced to live other lives, lives that are lesser precisely because they are not chosen.

The real story is the millions of women, and others, who now know that they are less free than men are – less free in the functioning of their own bodies, less free in the paths of their own lives, less free in the formation of their own families.

The real story is not this order; the real story is these people's unfreedom – the pain it will inflict and

the joy it will steal. The real story is women, and the real story is the impossible question: how can we ever grieve enough for them?

**Moira Donegan**

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**P.S.**

- The Guardian. Fri 24 Jun 2022 15.18 BST:  
<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/jun/24/overturing-roe-story-is-women-unfreedom>

- Moira Donegan is a Guardian US columnist.

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<https://www.theguardian.com/profile/moira-donegan>

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