

# Global Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights in a Post-Roe World

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In June 2022, the Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS) eviscerated the federal protection for abortion that women had relied on for nearly 50 years in its *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* decision. In so doing, SCOTUS punted decisions about abortion rights and abortion access back to individual states.

Several states had already enshrined [“trigger laws”](#) in anticipation of an eventual reversal of *Roe v. Wade*. These trigger laws enable states to immediately start restricting or outlawing abortions as soon as the ruling was released. Meanwhile, other states sought to dust off and enforce old abortion laws which remained on the books but had been nullified under the *Roe v. Wade* decision.

The *Dobbs* decision sent shockwaves across the United States and around the world. Older Americans grieved the loss of a long-cherished, hard-won human right and many young people suddenly had even fewer reproductive rights than their mothers or grandmothers.

## Biden Administration Response

In the hours following the decision's release, the Biden administration jumped into action to mitigate harm caused by the ruling by urging Congress to immediately reestablish federal protections for abortion rights. While the President's focus was understandably on the domestic impacts of the decision, his statement emphasized that the U.S. was now “an outlier” in the world. Since 1973, when *Roe v. Wade* was decided, the United States has stood alongside many countries as they collectively moved toward liberalizing their abortion laws. The U.S. now joins only Nicaragua, El Salvador and Poland in rolling back abortion rights over the past three decades.

The U.S. government tried to allay concerns among reproductive rights and health rights groups about the precedent that this decision sets and the potential impact on U.S. investment in reproductive health programs globally. Secretary of State Antony Blinken stated that “Under this Administration, the State Department will remain fully committed to helping provide access to reproductive health services and advancing reproductive rights around the world.”

## Global Reactions

Global leaders reacted swiftly to the decision. France and Canada reasserted that abortion is a fundamental right. The World Health Organization condemned the decision as a harmful “setback,” stating that “Safe abortion is healthcare. It saves lives.” Meanwhile, the Vatican and far-right, anti-choice politicians in countries from Europe to Latin America welcomed the decision and noted how it would strengthen their anti-choice agendas.

Globally, health equity and social justice advocates were alarmed by the decision, noting that it sets a dangerous precedent and emboldens anti-choice politicians and groups around the world. In Latin America, some of PAI's partners expressed concern that the decision could slow progress toward the legalization and decriminalization of abortion in the region, particularly given the significant influence the United States has in the Western Hemisphere. Similar sentiments were echoed by partners throughout Africa.

However, for feminist activists in these areas, much like in the U.S., the decision also prompted a sense of urgency and has reenergized and brought new allies into their efforts to liberalize abortion. This has especially been the case with those involved in the Green Wave movement in places like Argentina and Columbia.

### HELMS AMENDMENT

Prohibits U.S. foreign assistance funds from being used to pay for abortions as a method of family planning.

### SILJANDER AMENDMENT

Prohibits the use of U.S. funds to lobby for or against abortion.

### U.S. Investment in International Sexual and Reproductive Health Programs Unaffected

While the Dobbs decision eliminates the U.S. federal right to abortion and damages the country's reputation abroad, it has no immediate impact on U.S. investments in international reproductive health programs or any of the policies that govern them.

As such, funds continue to flow to bilateral family planning programs, as well as to the United Nations Population Fund. Similarly, U.S. executive branch policies regarding foreign assistance on family planning and reproductive health, like the 2021 repeal of the Global Gag Rule, were not affected. Sadly, restrictive and harmful legislative amendments, such as the Siljander and Helms amendments, remain in force.

### U.S. Policy Recommendations

- Immediately support the passage of the **Women's Health Protection Act (WHPA)** to enshrine abortion access protections throughout the United States.
- **Permanently repeal anti-sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) policies like the Global Gag Rule and Helms amendment** through Congressional passage of the Global Health, Empowerment and Rights (HER) Act and the Abortion is Health Care Everywhere Act to ensure that providers who rely on U.S. foreign assistance can offer comprehensive care to their patients.
- Continue to use multilateral forums to **reiterate the current U.S. administration's support for SRHR** around the world.