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Abortion rights USA

The Battle Over Abortion Rights in the Streets

- IV Online magazine - 2023 - IV576 - January 2023 -

Publication date: Tuesday 24 January 2023

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Protestors on both sides of the abortion issue filled streets of major American cities in January as the anti-abortion movement held its annual March for Life demonstrations in Washington, D.C. and other cities, and the Women's March, that began with Donald Trump's inauguration in January 2017, organized its rallies in defense of abortion rights for January 22 to coincide with the fiftieth anniversary of the U.S. Supreme Court's Roe v. Wade decision that established women's right to abortion throughout the United States in 1973.

The right-to-life movement, as it describes itself, marched to celebrate the high court's decision of June 24, 2022, Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health, overturning Roe. The principal forces in the anti-abortion movement are the Catholic Church and the Evangelical Churches which work through the Republican Party. The movement has recruited tens of thousands of young women and men who come to march in groups from their churches and religious schools and universities, carrying banners and flags, chanting and cheering, filled with pride in having defeated Roe and looking forward to more victories in the future. Leaders of the movement plan to pass even more restrictive state laws while pressing the U.S. Congress for a federal ban on abortions.

The anti-abortion movement has since Dobbs placed many obstacles in state laws to make it more difficult for women to get abortions. A dozen states, mostly in the South, simply ban all abortions. In some states abortion is legal only through the first fifteen weeks of pregnancy. Georgia bans abortion after six weeks. States often require the abortion be by a licensed doctor and approved by another, a waiting period of 24 hours or more, a counseling session, or an ultrasound examination. Some 33 states prohibit government funding of abortions and 12 restrict private insurance coverage. In 11 states abortion is illegal even in cases of rape or incest. Several states have laws that punish a physician who performs an abortion with 5, 10 or 15 years in prison. In Texas the penalty is life in prison. With women turning to the pill, Alabama, Florida, and Texas are trying to ban medical abortions.

The left has long criticized the anti-abortion movement for its lack of support for women and children. Now, taking a page from progressives, some in the anti-abortion movement have issued a statement called "Building a Post-Roe Future" calling for affordable health care, paid parental leave, flexible work hours, affordable child care, and child tax credits.

The abortion rights movement, led by women and with tens of thousands of new young activists, would like the U.S. Congress to pass a law guaranteeing women's legal right to abortion in all states. But the movement's leaders believe that for the time being the fight will be at the state level and they will be focusing on state legislative and congressional elections to be held two years from now.

Jennifer Knox, a leader at the progressive Working Families Party, says, "Where we are right now, with abortion access being taken away, feels similar to 2020, an inflection point where people are energized." She believes that a women's movement could surge just as Black Lives Matter did then.

Sixty-two percent of Americans support the right to abortion. While liberals and progressives dominate the abortion rights movement, socialist feminists are also active in it. The Democratic Socialists of America saw the Dobbs decision as a rightwing attack not only on women's right to abortion, but also as the opening of a broader assault that will attempt to eliminate LGBTQ rights, and other democratic rights. DSA argues that, "The leadership of the Democratic Party have proven time and time again that they cannot be depended upon to save us." While that may be true, the abortion rights movement will be concentrating its work on electing Democrats to stop the Republic assault on their rights.

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