

Pro-choice, Pro-women's Economic Rights

Economics is the study of choice – in the simplest models, agents decide how to allocate their time and other resources in order to maximise their welfare. When you restrict a fundamental choice, such as a woman's decision to have a child, it is natural to expect their economic welfare to decline. In this article, I will evaluate how the legalisation of abortion improved women's economic rights and examine the consequences of overturning it.

Abortion rights have been a hot topic recently. This is partly due to the ongoing Supreme Court case following Texas' decision to [overturn the ruling made in the landmark Roe v Wade trial](#). There has been a general trend in Southern US states and in Eastern Europe, where pro-life activism has been increasingly successful. For example, Georgia, Mississippi, Kentucky and Ohio have [followed Texas](#) in banning all abortions after 6 weeks of pregnancy – a time when most women do not know they are pregnant yet. Earlier, an appeal against the Texas Supreme Court decision was unsuccessful, demonstrating that we are entering a wave where being pro-choice is no longer the norm.

The 1973 Roe v Wade verdict has been instrumental in improving gender equality in the United States. A Supreme Court brief carried out by economists was used in the Texas appeal and found a causal link between the legalisation of abortion and the improvement of women's economic rights. The main groups benefiting were teenagers, for whom teen [motherhood declined by 34%](#), and black women who have seen a decline in maternal mortality by up to 40%. As the legalisation of abortion has benefited low-income and minority groups disproportionately, it has contributed to a reduction in inequality amongst women, not just in a general decline in gender inequality.

Furthermore, offering women the choice to terminate their own pregnancies has drastically improved educational attainment and labour force participation. A [study](#) found that it has increased the probability of women finishing college by nearly 20 percentage points and the probability that they entered a professional occupation by nearly 40 percentage points. Thus, the legalisation of abortion has contributed to a reduction in the gender pay gap and has given access to higher-skilled jobs to many women, benefiting the economy as a whole.

We can expect a reversal of Roe v Wade to set women's economic welfare back and raise income inequality. Although women are still able to travel to nearby states to receive an abortion, this adds a cost – both in terms of travel expenses and time is taken off work. The cost of receiving the procedure in another state is \$550, so low-income women, who [represent 70% of abortion cases](#), will often struggle to pay. Thus, implementing barriers that restrict access to abortions will cause inequality to increase – either by forcing women to spend a large share of their income on the treatment or by forcing them to provide for a child which they cannot necessarily afford. Furthermore, stronger restrictions will reduce female labour force participation: even if women are able to receive the treatment, they will have to take time off work to travel to the nearest clinic. This will also decrease women's productivity in the workplace, which means that they are less likely to be promoted and earn higher incomes. Not only does the fall in productivity have detrimental effects on women, but it also

affects the whole economy. According to the Institute for Women's Policy Research, the fall in earnings and [labour force participation can cost states \\$105bn a year.](#)

In countries like the US, where capitalism and economic freedom are highly valued, it seems counter-intuitive to impede women's economic freedom by restricting their abortion rights. Some men may think that this will help them achieve higher levels of welfare by increasing their own labour force participation and access to high-paid jobs (if the women don't get them, surely the men will...?) However, reducing inequality benefits most people in society as it leads to economic growth, and will accelerate the development of industries that generate high levels of profits. So, unless you're a man at the top of the income distribution – which unsurprisingly, most lawmakers are – being pro-choice will often be the best strategy to maximise your own welfare.

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