

Opinion

Religious leaders supercharged Trump's presidency. SCOTUS just proved why.

How the alliance between evangelicals, Catholics and the far right against abortion created a potent political juggernaut.



— Demonstrators gather in front of the Supreme Court on Wednesday as the justices heard arguments in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health*, a case about a Mississippi law that bans most abortions after 15 weeks.

Chip Somodevilla / Getty Images

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By Anthea Butler, MSNBC Opinion Columnist

After [disastrous oral arguments Wednesday](#), the [Supreme Court seems poised](#) to hand religious conservatives their biggest victory yet: the gutting of Roe V. Wade, with the ability of the states to block the right to abortion.

Catholics, evangelicals and right-wing Republicans have been playing a long but clear game in their bid to undermine bodily autonomy for women.

Many court watchers are (rightly) [decrying the loss of “stature of the court.”](#) Others simply look on in shock at the justices’ rightward pivot. But this seemingly alarming moment for abortion rights in America has been 40 years in the making. And religious scholars have seen it coming.

Wednesday’s Supreme Court hearing on a [Mississippi law banning abortions after 15 weeks](#) left little doubt that conservative justices are more than ready to roll back a crucial part of Roe v. Wade.

This shouldn’t surprise anyone. Catholics, [evangelicals](#) and right-wing Republicans have been playing a long but clear game in their bid to undermine bodily autonomy for women. That long game, which included voting for candidates who support pro-life positions, fundraising, [National Sanctity of Human Life Day](#) and clinic picketing and lobbying, has been written off by far too many liberals as fringe behavior. In fact, the religious right’s incredibly consistent and persistent advocacy on abortion molded the Republican Party. And it motivated candidates at every level, from state legislatures to the presidency, to make curbing abortion a key campaign promise.

Anti-abortion Supreme Court justices unconvincing with neutrality feint



conservative. And with the appointment of [226 judges](#) at the trial court, appellate and Supreme Court levels during the Trump era, it is inevitable that not just women's reproductive rights are rolled back, but voting rights, as well.

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[Wendy Davis' amazing 11-hour filibuster](#) in the Texas Senate chamber in 2013 could not stop the rollback of abortion clinics in Texas or the [current vigilante abortion law S.B. 8](#), which is also on the Supreme Court docket. Indeed, for pro-life Catholics and evangelicals, the spate of decisions expected in June can't come soon enough.

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Meanwhile, the hand-wringing of liberals and Democrats is warranted. But frankly, the party's inability to mount a strategic political and fiscal response to the religious right's decadeslong campaign rankles. (Never forget [Hillary Clinton's saying](#) "pro-life women could be feminists too.")

Women on both sides of the debate are bracing themselves. There are, of course, many women who believe abortion is wrong; the owner of a "[maternity ranch](#)" in Texas is preparing to take care of the babies that will now inevitably be born to women who can't get abortions. A 21st-century Gilead right in Texas, leader of curtailing abortion rights.

And while we have been trained by pro-life arguments to think about abortion as a moral issue, it is also an economic one. Any reversal of rights [will have grave implications for women](#) who are poor, have limited access to prenatal care or abortion fees, or are underage. Young, financially insecure victims of sexual assault are at particular risk. Rich women will almost always be able to obtain abortions, legal or not. Other women will scrape up the means from partners. Other women will go without.

The writing is on the wall of the Supreme Court. But the drafts of that writing can be found in churches around the country. The court, which [Justice Brett Kavanaugh said should be "scrupulously neutral on the question of abortion,"](#) is definitely not neutral in its present iteration. That may be surprising to some – but it represents the message that has been broadcast for decades from pulpits around America.

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