



# 101 ABORTION ABOLITIONISTS

By Hannah Silver and Cloee Cooper | October 2023

## Introduction

A militant wing of the anti-abortion movement has long looked to the 19th century anti-slavery abolitionists for inspiration and guidance. By comparing embryos and fetuses to enslaved people, religious leaders use the history of the abolition of slavery as a moral justification to rally against the bodily autonomy of pregnant people. In 2020, as a wave of racial justice movements swept the nation, a wing of the anti-abortion movement cohered nationally under the banner of abortion abolition. In the midst of a growing prison and police abolition movement in the U.S. following the murder of George Floyd, the Right claimed the legacy of “abolition” towards an entirely different end.

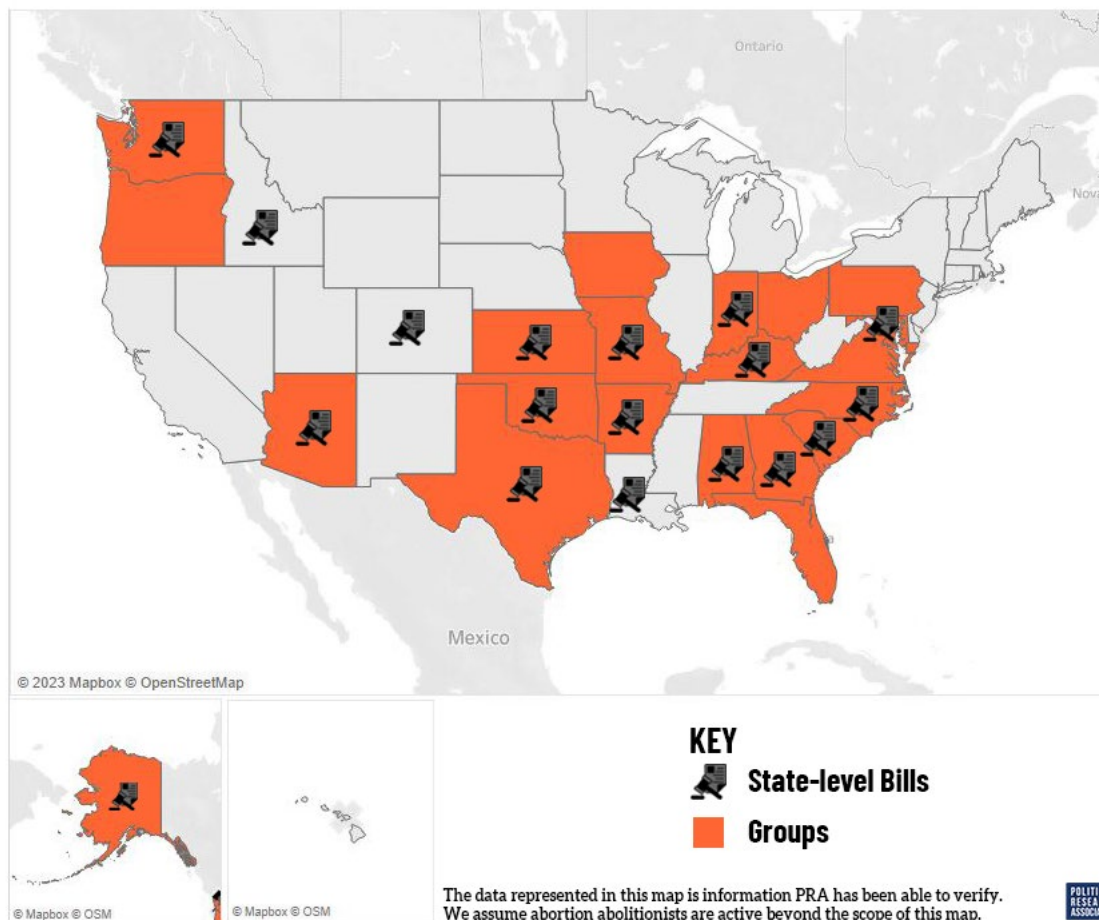
The anti-abortion movement first started comparing abortion to slavery following the passage of *Roe v. Wade* in the 1970s, in an attempt to link their campaigns to civil and human rights work. In the wake of the Trump administration’s support of the anti-abortion movement, a new generation of White male conservative Baptists, Presbyterians, and Christian Reconstructionists joined forces to advance the total criminalization of abortion. Referring to themselves as abortion abolitionists, this movement distinguishes itself from the self-proclaimed pro-life movement. Their leaders criticize this movement for being reformist, compromising with the Supreme Court (which they view as tyrannical and secular), and for failing

to observe a conservative interpretation of the bible that calls for equal protection for the “pre-born.”

Since their first national conference in 2020, abortion abolitionists have influenced public policy, rhetoric, and official platforms within the Republican party. They advocate for capital punishment for anyone involved in an abortion, including those providing and accessing abortion care services. State legislators in almost 20 states have introduced abortion abolitionist bills, and the movement has expanded into a network with groups in 21 states. Abolition is already a plank in the Republican Party platform in Texas.

In the aftermath of the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*, abortion abolitionist leaders claimed that the Supreme Court decision had not gone far enough. But they also acknowledged how the legal decision created opportunities to advance their views. “The Abolitionist Movement is picking up momentum – and national headlines – at a pace that would have seemed impossible only a few short years ago,” Abolitionists Rising, a national Abortion Abolitionist organization, published on their website this year.

### ABORTION ABOLITIONIST STATE-LEVEL GROUPS AND BILLS IN THE U.S.



This map shows 21 states where abortion abolitionist groups are active throughout the U.S., primarily in the Midwest and South, and it identifies 17 states where abortion abolitionist bills have been introduced and one state (Maryland) where a bill was filed, spanning from the Pacific Northwest to the South. PRA verified this data in October 2023. (Data collection: Cloee Cooper and Hannah Silver. Data visualization: Harini Rajagopalan and Olivia Lawrence-Weilmann).

Abortion abolitionists have strong ties with other sectors of the Far Right. They are deeply connected to segments of the Christian Right based on shared belief systems and membership. The movement draws on a theocratic reading of scripture known as Christian Reconstructionism, which advocates for Biblical law. For example, the abolitionist group in Pennsylvania, Abolish Abortion PA, which among other things provides guidance on the “Five Components of an Abolition Bill,” is led by members of the Mid-Atlantic Reformation Society, an overtly Christian Reconstructionist group. In addition, the Southern Baptist Convention, the nation’s largest protestant denomination, passed a resolution “On Abolishing Abortion” at their June 2021 convention.

The movement also shares leaders with the [1990s violent wing](#) of the anti-abortion movement, [patriot movement organizations](#), the Christian homeschooling movement, and leaders of the Christian Right legislative playbook, [Project Blitz](#).

As the Abortion abolitionist movement begins to gain political and grassroots power, it not only poses serious risks for reproductive justice and bodily autonomy, it also demonstrates a victory for a broader militant theocratic strategy that aims to replace any remnants of democratic structures with Biblical law.

# Who

These are the sectors of the Right setting the cultural context and organizing to advocate for the abolition of abortion.right-wing sheriffs.

## ***Abortion Abolitionist Organizations***

The Abortion Abolitionist movement is coordinated by national and state groups. Leading organizations include the Oklahoma-headquartered Abolitionists Rising (formerly Free The States), a nationwide abolitionist organization; End Abortion Now, an Arizona-based grassroots group of churches working to criminalize abortion; Operation Save America (an early adopter of the abolitionist theme. OSA's Rusty Thomas' 2009 book, "The Kingdom Leadership Institute Manual" was an inspiration for the early abolitionists); and the Texas legal hub, Foundation to Abolish Abortion, which offers biblical principles and resources to state legislators to introduce abortion abolitionist bills nationwide.

Abolitionists Rising and End Abortion Now establish chapters to advocate for abortion abolition, agitate for cities and counties to pass ordinances and resolutions to declare Sanctuaries for the Unborn (see below), mobilize state legislators to introduce abortion abolitionist bills, and encourage members to run for local precinct chairs of the Republican Party on abortion abolitionist platforms.

## ***Republican State and Local Officials***

The abortion abolitionist movement has both created strong alliances with Republican state

legislators and campaigned for people within their base to seek election. State legislators have introduced abolitionist bills in at least 17 states in the American South, Midwest, and Pacific, and in some of these states, the bills have been introduced year after year. For example, Alaska State Representative David Eastman, who was endorsed by Arizona-based abortion abolitionist organization Free the States, has proposed an abolitionist bill in every legislative session since 2017. He is also a member of the Oath Keepers, a militant, far-right, anti-government group.

## ***Far Right Patriot and Christian Nationalist Organizations***

Religious and militant movements, influenced by [Christian Reconstructionists](#), flank and support the abortion abolitionist movement and cause. Guided by the belief that Biblical law should supersede U.S. law, abortion abolitionists share a movement ecosystem with [patriot movement organizations](#), leaders of the Christian Right legislative playbook [Project Blitz](#), leaders of the Christian homeschooling movement, and leaders of the [1990s violent wing](#) of the anti-abortion movement. These organizations provide security for abortion abolitionist activity, introduce their bills in state legislatures, and legitimize each other's movements.

# What

These are the most common abortion abolitionist tactics.

## ***Abortion Ministries***

The movement is known for creating chapters of churches dedicated to anti-abortion organizing that they refer to as ministries. They organize outside of abortion clinics and try to get clients to not get an abortion, continue outreach with those who leave, and collect data on their impact. They see these ministries as a way to spread their gospel.

## ***Sanctuary Cities and Counties for the Unborn***

Abortion abolitionists and other anti-choice groups have proposed hyper-local resolutions and ordinances across the country. By adopting the language and tactics of the immigrant rights movement, they have pushed city councils and county commissioners to adopt “[sanctuaries for the unborn](#).” These [resolutions and ordinances](#) classify abortion as murder, grant protections for the unborn (a term designating human life as beginning at fertilization), penalize abortion providers and clients, and ban abortion services within the jurisdiction. While mostly symbolic, these “sanctuaries” are a signal to the authorities of the state and federal government that the officials of that county or city will take matters into their own hands.

More than 60 cities have become a [sanctuary city for the unborn](#) since the first, Waskom Texas, in June 2019.

## ***Abortion Abolitionist Bills***

Abortion abolitionist organizations and leaders started to prioritize legislation that would criminalize abortion starting in 2020. Since then, legislators in at least 17 states have introduced bills to abolish abortion, with the support of Texas-based Foundation to Abolish Abortion [legal strategist Bradley Pierce](#), who has drafted dozens of equal protection bills filed to abolish abortion. Though abortion has been effectively banned in many states, these bills are distinct because at their most extreme they designate human life as starting from conception and classify abortion as murder. Furthermore, certain groups advocate for removing any exceptions based on reason or timing. A recent example of their growing influence is demonstrated in Texas where the Republican party legislature’s [political priorities for the 2023-2024](#) session includes “Abolish[ing] Abortion in Texas.”

## ***Precinct Strategy***

Since the Dobbs Supreme Court decision, abortion abolitionists have begun to adopt a precinct strategy, urging their

members and base to run for leadership [within the local Republican party](#) as a way to push the Republican party toward an abortion abolitionist lens. This strategy was [promoted by former Trump advisor Steve Bannon](#) and has become an effective tool for [grassroots activists to oust moderate Republicans and take control of state and county Republican parties](#). In 2022, the Texas Republican Party included abortion abolition as a resolution priority in their [annual report](#). After several years of highlighting the need to fully criminalize abortion, their 2022 report specifically used the language of the abortion abolitionist movement to urge “lawmakers to enact legislation to abolish abortion by immediately securing the right to life and equal protection of the laws to all preborn children from the moment of fer-

tilization, because abortion violates the US Constitution by denying such persons the equal protection of the law.”

### ***Online and Public Outreach***

Harnessing social media platforms and posting tailored and trendy content has been an important feature of this movement. For example, Pastor Jeff Durbin’s church created a media ministry, Apologia Studios, where he co-hosts Apologia Radio and Apologia TV and produces podcasts, broadcasts, and documentaries. The studio has nearly 500,000 YouTube subscribers and regularly posts videos dedicated to spreading abolitionist messages into the broader culture. On TikTok, Abolitionists Rising has more than 100,000 followers.

# Find Out More

These articles and webinars will help you build your knowledge further.

## ***To Read Right Now***

- **Abortion Abolitionists with Cloee Cooper.** Inform Your Resistance, Ep 1, Season 1. Political Research Associates. September 14, 2023.
- **Anti-abortion ‘abolitionists’ take slavery rhetoric to the next level.** Kelcie Moseley-Morris. *Georgia Recorder*. September 2, 2023.
- **The anti-abortion abolitionist movement is dangerous: here’s what you need to know.** Tina Vasquez and Cloee Cooper. *Prism*. March 11, 2020.
- **From the other side: Oklahoma abortion rights advocates weigh in on harassment by ‘abolitionists.’** by Tina Vasquez. *Daily Kos*. March 12, 2020.
- **The New Abolitionists: The Christian Anti-Abortion Movement Gaining Ground in State Legislatures.** Heidi Beedle. *Colorado Times Recorder*. March 7, 2023.
- **The Army of Gideon: Anti-Abortion Activism in Wichita.** Heidi Beedle. *Colorado Times Recorder*. March 8, 2023.
- **How the anti-abortion movement fed the Capitol insurrection.** Tina Vásquez, *Prism*. January 22, 2021.
- **No Sanctuary: Anti-Abortion Abolitionists Go to City Hall.** Cloee Cooper and Tina Vasquez. *The Public Eye*. November 9, 2020.
- **An Anti-Choice Group’s Extreme Tactics Backfire in Jackson, Mississippi.** Laurie Bertram Roberts. *Rewire News Group*. April 29, 2015.

## ***In Depth***

- **Convergence of Far-Right, Anti-Democratic Factions in the Northwest Could Provide a Model for the Rest of the Nation.** Frederick Clarkson and Cloee Cooper. *Religion Dispatches*. May 25, 2021.
- **Mobilizing for Reproductive Freedom in the Battle Over Bodily Autonomy, Webinar Recording.** Political Research Associates. July 23, 2021.
- **How Federal and State Governments are Using COVID-19 to Attack Abortion Rights.** Dawn Wolfe. *Political Research Associates*. April 14, 2020.

- **Southern reproductive justice advocates are doing ‘radical work’.** Tina Vasquez. *Prism*. June 30, 2020.
- **How Michigan’s Conservative Gerrymandering Opened the Door for Abortion Bans.** Dawn Wolfe. *Political Research Associates*. February 18, 2020.
- **States Criminalize Abortion with Roe in Reach.** Teddy Wilson. *Political Research Associates*. May 17, 2019.

### ***Become an Expert***

- **An Annotated Directory of the Prochoice Religious Community in the United States.** Frederick Clarkson. *Political Research Associates*. September 28, 2020.
- **Race, Class, and the Contradiction of Contemporary Abortion Politics.** Carole Joffe. *Political Research Associates*. January 26, 2018.
- **Anti-Abortion Bombings Related.** Frederick Clarkson. *Intelligence Report*, Southern Poverty Law Center. September 15, 1998.
- **Defending Reproductive Justice: Activist Resource Kit.** Alex DiBranco and Jean Hardisty. *Political Research Associates*. April 1, 2013.
- **Christian Reconstructionism: Theocratic Dominionism Gains Influence.** Frederick Clarkson. *The Public Eye*. March 1, 1994.
- **Wrath of Angels: The American Abortion War.** James Risen and Judy Thomas. Basic Books. 1999.