



INSIGHTS FOR POLICY ADVOCATES

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VOICES TO INSPIRE

The abortion rights landscape has been evolving across the United States and Latin America for decades. In Latin America, the Marea Verde ("Green Wave") movement that originated in Argentina rapidly spread across the region, catalyzing policy change for women's autonomy, which led to the legalization of abortion in Argentina (2021), Colombia (2022), and several Mexican states. In the United States, the fall of *Roe v. Wade* in 2022 triggered a wave of state-level restrictions and renewed anti-abortion policy advocacy. Since then, reproductive rights movements and advocates have responded with legal challenges, ballot initiatives, and reform effort, which have met both progress and resistance.

The VITAL project identified key factors shaping abortion policy across the Americas and fostered cross-border learning among advocates, practitioners, activists, and policymakers. Through 45 key informant interviews and three focus groups in Argentina, Colombia, Mexico, and the United States, we explored what enables or hinders successful abortion rights advocacy, how and why movements collaborate, and how they have responded to policy challenges in their respective contexts. The findings from VITAL highlight actionable lessons and strategies that can inform practical, context-specific, and collaborative approaches to advancing abortion rights and access across the region.



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KEY ISSUES FOR POLICY ADVOCATES

Policy makers and reproductive rights advocates are key players in addressing legal barriers to abortion. While much of their work focuses on overturning restrictive laws, challenges persist even where abortion is legal. VITAL participants offered suggestions for refocusing their efforts to expand access and strengthen reproductive rights, even in restrictive settings.

EVEN THOUGH EACH REGION AND STATE HAS ITS OWN UNIQUE POLITICAL AND SOCIAL CONTEXT, POLICY ADVOCATES WANT TO COLLABORATE WITH AND LEARN FROM ONE ANOTHER ACROSS BORDERS.

Most participants emphasized that their states and regions were politically and socially unique, making the direct transfer of strategies difficult. Still, some noted that studying successful tactics, lessons learned, and roadblocks elsewhere could strengthen decision-making and spark innovation at home. In Latin America, for example, activists adapted strategies from neighboring countries to build strong movements and advance legal and social change, while adjusting to local contexts. Learning from past and present strategies, sharing narratives, and engaging in cross-border collaboration can offer valuable insights for overcoming legal barriers to abortion rights and access worldwide.

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- Argentina, Grassroots Organizer

ACCESS TO ABORTION IS NOT ONLY INFLUENCED BY THE LAW BUT ALSO BY THE WAY THE LAW IS INTERPRETED AND IMPLEMENTED.

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- California, Direct Service Provider



Because abortion is regulated in all contexts, even criminalized in some, the interpretation of the law can create barriers to care. The wording of abortion laws is often intentionally ambiguous, creating uncertainty for both patients and providers. In California, for instance, abortion is permitted up to fetal viability, generally assumed to be 24 weeks, though the law does not define it. Beyond that point, abortion is allowed when the pregnant person's life or health is at risk. Still, providers must interpret what counts as "viability" and what constitutes risk, creating uncertainty and a fear of legal repercussions.

In Argentina, abortion is legal up to 14 weeks and permitted afterward in cases of rape or when the life or health of the pregnant person is at risk. In Colombia, abortion is legal up to 24 weeks, and beyond that in three circumstances: when the woman's health is at risk, in cases of severe fetal malformation, or when the pregnancy results from rape, incest, or non-consensual artificial insemination. Despite these legal allowances, providers often adopt a "play-it-safe" approach, refusing abortions that are technically legal because they fear legal repercussions—further restricting access.



INCREASED RESTRICTIONS IN ACCESS TO ABORTION CAN CATALYZE ACTIVISM AND POLICY RESPONSES.

Participants shared examples of how certain events and situations can help focus attention and action within the abortion rights movement. The Dobbs decision in the US and SB8 in Texas motivated action not only from the affected states but also from states that wanted to expand and protect abortion rights. This response to access restrictions was also reported in Mexico. Elsewhere, cases that reflect the injustice and risks behind criminalizing abortion, such as the deaths of Amber Thurman and Candi Miller in Georgia or the imprisonment of women for having abortions in Latin America, propel discussions onto the public agenda that can generate change.

"In the US, this tension is holding us back: we need to drastically shift the priorities of our movement away from this grand investment in (national-level) policy advocacy that leads to these splintered campaigns that actually end up going nowhere because they're more for brand recognition and donor dollars than the actual end goal. We need to invest first in abortion funds and direct service work and then let those organizations be the guide, be the leads, the folks that are called to the table for the hearings."

-Texas, Direct Service Provider

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY ADVOCATES

Seek opportunities to collaborate with policy advocates, grassroots activists, and providers across borders. Advocates can learn from both the successes and failures of those in other contexts and apply those lessons to strengthen their own strategies for advancing abortion rights. Working with policy advocates in their own communities, they can adapt these insights to local conditions while maintaining cross-border collaboration to advance universal access and expand reproductive rights.

Educate and support direct service providers in navigating shifting legal landscapes and accessing legal assistance when needed. Because abortion laws are often designed to create uncertainty, policymakers and advocates should make legal expertise readily available to help providers uphold access within existing constraints. Providers also need clear protocols to assess cases and determine the appropriate legal course of action. Practical resources—such as hotlines or written guidance on the legal implications of different decisions—can reduce confusion and give providers the confidence to offer abortion care within their legal context.

Dedicate resources to analyzing the social, cultural, and political context so that strategies are ready to implement when windows of opportunity open and when rights are threatened. In contexts where abortion is legal to any extent, monitoring can identify barriers and support a strategy refresh. In places where abortion is criminalized, research should document the impact of abortion restrictions on the lives of pregnant people, people with childbearing potential, their families, and communities. By working with grassroots activists in moments of opportunity, policy advocates can capitalize on momentum to change public perception, build support, and move the needle towards better abortion access and the expansion of reproductive rights.

