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‘Not the end but just the beginning’: historicising anti-abortion politics and the far-right counter-offensive in contemporary Australia

Barbara Baird[a], Prudence Flowers[a] and Erica Millar[b]

[a]Flinders University, Adelaide, Australia; [b]La Trobe University, Melbourne, Australia

ABSTRACT

In late 2024, a series of anti-abortion political interventions disrupted Australia’s two-decade trajectory of abortion law liberalisation. A South Australian bill proposed live delivery and adoption for abortions after 28 weeks; a Queensland politician pledged to repeal abortion decriminalisation; and a federal shadow minister called for a debate on abortion to feature in the upcoming federal election. These events were linked by shared actors, notably a prominent South Australian anti-abortion influencer, and occurred amid intensified media and political focus on abortion, both locally and globally. This article situates these developments within transnational far-right movements that increasingly mobilise around gender and sexuality. We argue that these incidents represent a strategic counter-mobilisation against abortion reform, reflecting the global convergence of anti-abortion and anti-gender ideologies. By tracing these connections, we show how far-right rhetoric and tactics are seeping into Australia’s political mainstream, reshaping the terrain of reproductive politics.

KEYWORDS

Abortion politics; far-right movements; anti-gender ideology; reproductive rights; anti-abortion activism; gender; sexuality

Between 2002 and 2023, all eight Australian states and territories decriminalised abortion. However, a short burst of events in the latter months of 2024 threatened to interrupt this liberal trajectory. In September, a bill in South Australia (SA) proposed offering live delivery and adoption to people requesting abortions from 28 weeks.[1] Shortly afterwards, in the context of the Queensland state election, a politician pledged to introduce a bill repealing the decriminalisation of abortion if

CONTACT Erica Millar e.millar@latrobe.edu.au Department of Social Inquiry, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, La Trobe University, Melbourne, Australia

[1]Sophie Holder and Evelyn Leckie, ‘South Australian Upper House Narrowly Votes Down Late-Term Abortion Law Amendments, with Controversy between MP’s’, *ABC News*, 17 October 2024, https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-10-17/abortion-legislation-vote-south-australia/104477762.

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the Liberal National Party (LNP) won.[2] Federally, an opposition shadow minister in the Liberal-National Coalition (Coalition) called for a national debate on abortion, prompting the opposition leader to demand party silence.[3] This flurry in the federal Coalition followed the movement through the parliament of an anti-abortion bill introduced by three conservative Senators. Each case study was marked by the involvement of a prominent South Australian anti-abortion influencer.[4] These incidents, despite occurring in different political circumstances, are most fruitfully considered together. A small group of anti-abortion politicians and activists appear across contexts, while all three events played out against a backdrop of heightened national media and political attention to abortion politics at home and abroad, to the US Presidential election in particular.

In this article, we place this intense contemporary moment in context, tracing its links to broader local, national, and global anti-abortion and far-right movements around gender and sexuality. The 'far right' is a flexible term, encompassing religious and secular conservative politics. In Australia, the far right has not traditionally focused on gender or sexuality, though it often relies on patriarchal ideas and structures.[5] Globally, however, the twenty-first century far right is highly focused on abortion and LGBTQIA+ issues, increasingly bringing together disparate concerns under a unified framework. As Judith Butler observes regarding the strategic use of 'gender' within the anti-gender movement, this approach enables the ideology to 'circulate all the more widely, catching different audiences as they go'.[6] We argue that the Australian anti-abortion politics that erupted in late 2024 represents a localised version of global far-right gender politics, and should be understood as the counter-offensive to the abortion decriminalisation of the past two decades. We also suggest these incidents reveal the seeping of anti-abortion, 'anti-gender ideology' and far-right rhetoric and tactics into the political mainstream.

We begin with an outline of the Australian anti-abortion movement and politics since the late 1960s, placing it within national histories of conservative and far-right gender politics. We then connect this account to global trends, where gender issues are increasingly intertwined with nationalism, white supremacy, and anti-immigration

[2]Emma Pollard, 'Robbie Katter Clarifies Plan to Amend Queensland Abortion Laws First, Before Any Repeal Attempt', *ABC News,* 22 October 2024, https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-10-22/robbie-katter-abortion-laws-queensland-election/104502092.

[3]Karen Middleton and Sarah Basford Canales, 'Peter Dutton Rules Out Coalition Abortion Policy Changes and Blasts MPs for Stirring Debate', *Guardian (Australia)*, 5 November 2024, https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2024/nov/05/peter-dutton-liberal-coalition-abortion-policy-ntwnfb.

[4]Stephanie Richards and Harvey Biggs, 'Power, Passion and Preselection: How Social Media has Influenced South Australia's Abortion Debate', *ABC News*, 2 November 2024, https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-11-02/how-social-media-influenced-south-australias-abortion-debate/104548584; Martin Riedl, Lukito Josephine and Samuel Woolley, 'Political Influencers on Social Media: An Introduction', *Social Media + Society* 9, no. 2 (2023), https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051231177938.

[5]Callum Jones, Verity Trott, Brady Robards, and Steven Roberts, '"You Can't Trust the Mainstream Media": Exploring Shifts in Racist, Homophobic, Transphobic, Sexist, Antisemitic and Islamophobic Sentiment within Australian Far-Right Alternative News Media', *Media International Australia* (2024), https://doi.org/10.1177/1329878X241291312; Evan Smith, Jayne Persian, and Vashti Jane Fox, eds., *Histories of Fascism and Anti-fascism in Australia* (Taylor and Francis, 2022), 1–19.

[6]Judith Butler, *Who's Afraid of Gender?* (Random House, 2025), 39.

rhetoric. Against this backdrop, we analyse three 2024 political case studies, and the presence of an anti-abortion influencer to reflect on the impact of social media in the new Australian abortion politics. These events indicate a shift in style and confidence among anti-abortion actors, posing concerns for abortion rights advocates and drawing them back into legal and political battles most commentators thought were resolved.

Anti-abortion politics and activism during the liberalisation and decriminalisation eras

The Australian anti-abortion movement emerged in the 1970s and, in its first decades, was small but influential. While officially non-partisan, it was shaped by Catholic ties to the Australian Labor Party and funded by churches, right-wing groups, and overseas allies.[7] The national Right to Life movement formed in 1973, focusing on legislative change while also targeting clinics and protesting outside them. Its membership ranged from 'conservative but timid Christian moralists to the rabid right'.[8] The early Australian anti-abortion movement was prone to factionalism and schisms, with splits, personality clashes, and repeated name changes. In 1979, Right to Life Australia emerged in Victoria under Margaret Tighe, becoming the movement's more militant and confrontational arm.[9] Tighe, a polarising figure within the early movement, was central to the increasingly tumultuous clinic protests, vigils, and 'rescues' that emerged in Australia in the late 1980s, working alongside controversial Americans.[10]

In the first two decades of the movement, anti-abortion bills were introduced into most state and territory parliaments, including failed efforts in New South Wales (NSW), Queensland, and SA.[11] Federally, the 1979 Lusher Amendment's attempt to remove abortion from Medibank (subsequently Medicare) cover also failed, in the face of 'the emergence of a feminist case for abortion'.[12] In the Australian Capital Territory (ACT), early anti-abortion efforts were more successful. A 1979 government ordinance blocked private abortion clinics until 1992.[13] Despite repeated legislative defeats, anti-abortion groups have long promoted the myth that supporting abortion harms the electoral chances of politicians – a claim without substance in the Australian context. Helen Pringle has noted that despite this lack of evidence, MPs tend to 'set aside the long-standing [pro-choice] consensus among voters', blaming a conservative electorate for their timidity in voting rather than 'their own

[7]Karen Coleman, 'The Politics of Abortion in Australia: Freedom, Church and State', *Feminist Review* 29, no. 1 (1988): 83–84, 86, 87; Judy McVey, 'The Right to Life Offensive Since 1969', *Hecate* 9, nos. 1–2 (1983): 35.
[8]McVey, 'The Right to Life Offensive Since 1969', 36.
[9]Ibid., 35–36.
[10]Jocelyn Hedley, '"On the Side of the Saints": A History of the Sydney Catholic Pro-Life Organisation Family Life International with Reference to Identity Formation' (PhD Thesis, University of Notre Dame, Australia, 2017), 123–29.
[11]Coleman, 'The Politics of Abortion in Australia', 89, 93–95; Rebecca Albury, 'Abortion: But I Thought That was Settled Years Ago', *Refractory Girl* nos. 31–32 (1989): 12–16.
[12]Leigh Boucher, 'The Lusher Motion: Women's Citizenship and the Surprising Defence of Abortion by Australian Parliamentarians', *History Australia* (2025): 1–19.
[13]Barbara Baird, *Abortion Care is Health Care* (Melbourne University Press, 2023), 173–35.

lack of will or policy choices'.[14] Yet simultaneously, Karen Coleman observed that after repeated legislative defeats, even conservative and anti-abortion MPs came to view abortion bills as 'political anathema'.[15]

A moment of anti-abortion resurgence occurred at the turn of the century. In 1996, the newly elected conservative government of Prime Minister John Howard, in a deal with Independent Senator Brian Harradine, passed legislation which effectively blocked the introduction of the abortion drug Mifepristone into Australia for 10 years.[16] In 2001, a man associated with anti-abortion protesters murdered the security guard at Melbourne's Fertility Control Clinic.[17] In 1998 and in 2001, police arrested or threatened to arrest abortion providing doctors in Western Australia (WA) and Tasmania respectively, and in 1998 the ACT passed legislation which restricted abortion services.[18] However, liberal reforms followed. WA and Tasmania retrospectively removed the threat of criminal prosecution from the targeted doctors. In 1998, WA introduced what was, arguably, the most progressive abortion law in the country. The ACT decriminalised abortion in 2002, marking the start of a pro-choice reform era, whereby abortion was decriminalised across all jurisdictions between 2002 and 2023.[19] These parliamentary debates were always conscience votes, meaning they passed without political commitments from the major parties.

Although the Australian public has been strongly pro-choice for decades, feminist perspectives have not always outweighed anti-feminist and foetal-focused views on abortion.[20] From the mid-1980s, abortion opponents deployed traditional gender norms and pseudo-scientific claims about harm to women,[21] while the 1990s witnessed intensified stigmatisation of abortion providers.[22] Under the Howard government, this culminated in Health Minister Tony Abbott's pursuit of a 'politics of shame' regarding abortion rates.[23] Parliamentary debates did, however, also serve as crucial sites where feminist frameworks successfully repositioned abortion as healthcare. The 2005–06 federal Mifepristone debates, led by a cross-party group of female Senators, helped normalise abortion and reject shame-based narratives,[24] while Victoria's 2008 decriminalisation process positioned pregnant women as autonomous agents.[25] Progressive legislative changes reflect public opinion. Repeated surveys show

[14]Helen Pringle, 'Abortion in Australian Elections: A Vote Loser for Women?', *Australian Feminist Studies* 27, no. 74 (2012): 400.
[15]Coleman, 'The Politics of Abortion in Australia', 96.
[16]Barbara Baird, 'Abortion Politics During the Howard Years: Beyond Liberalisation', *Australian Historical Studies* 44, no. 2 (2013): 245–261.
[17]Susie Allanson, *Murder on His Mind: The Untold Story of Australia's Abortion Clinic Murder* (Wilkinson Publishing, 2006).
[18]Barbara Baird, 'The Futures of Abortion', in *Women Making Time: Contemporary Feminist Critique and Cultural Analysis*, ed. Elizabeth McMahon and Brigitta Olubas (University of Western Australia Press, 2006), 116–51.
[19]Baird, *Abortion Care is Health Care*, 171–200.
[20]Albury, 'Abortion', 13.
[21]Donna Wyatt and Katie Hughes, 'When Discourse Defies Belief: Anti-Abortionists in Contemporary Australia', *Journal of Sociology* 45, no. 3 (2009): 235–53.
[22]Margie Ripper, 'Abortion: The Shift in Stigmatisation from Those Seeking Abortion to Those Providing It', *Health Sociology Review* 10, no. 2 (2001): 65–77, 68.
[23]Barbara Baird, 'Abortion Politics During the Howard Years', 257–58.
[24]Rebecca Albury, 'Too Many, Too Late and the Adoption Alternative: Shame and Recent Abortion Debates', Public Policy Network Summer Conference 2007, Adelaide, 1–2 February 2007.
[25]Alissar El-Murr, 'Representing the Problem of Abortion: Language and the Policy Making Process in the Abortion Law Reform Project in Victoria, 2008', *Australian Feminist Law Journal* 33, no. 1 (2010): 121–40.

around 80 per cent of Australians support ensuring access to abortion care when needed.[26] Nevertheless, conservative ideologies about family and womanhood continue to perpetuate abortion stigma and expectations of psychological damage.[27] 'Abortion exceptionalism' – reflecting persistent anti-abortion influence – remains embedded in Australian law through gestational limits, 'born alive' provisions, continued criminalisation of unauthorised providers, and conscientious objection protections beyond professional ethics codes.[28]

The Australian right

Although Australia's abortion politics lack the partisan tenor that dominates countries such as the US, these debates still occur in a broader national context shaped by conservative religious and far-right politics. Throughout the twentieth century, Australia's far right promoted fascism, white supremacy, and anti-communism through both legitimate means – like infiltrating major political parties – and violent or criminal acts.[29] While these groups were implicitly concerned with masculinity and fatherhood, explicit gender-focused organising only emerged in the late 1970s-early 1980s, evident in a 'terrorist campaign' against the new Family Court which encompassed 'fatal bombings and shootings' and led to the death of a male judge and the wife of another. The Court was seen by father's rights groups as elevating women's power in the home and producing a declining white birth rate.[30] From the late twentieth century, far-right activity has centred around figures like federal parliamentarian Pauline Hanson, a wave of micro-parties, and Islamophobic and anti-immigrant mobilisations that echoed European and US right-wing populism.[31] Groups like the United Patriots Front – linked to the Australian terrorist who murdered 50 Muslim people in Christchurch in 2019 – emerged from this trend.[32] Neo-Nazism and overt white supremacist nationalism is resurging in the 2020s, fuelled in part by the COVID-19 pandemic.[33] Mark Davis describes the contemporary far right as 'intersectional', combining racism, misogyny, science denial, and

[26]Monica Cations, Margie Ripper, and Judith Dwyer, 'Majority Support for Access to Abortion Care Including Later Abortion in South Australia', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health* 44, no. 5 (2020): 349–52.
[27]Anne O'Rourke, 'The Discourse of Abortion Law Debate in Australia: Caring Mother or Mother of Convenience', *Women's Studies International Forum* 56 (2016), 37–44; Erica Millar, 'Mourned Choices and Grievable Lives: The Anti-abortion Movement's Influence in Defining the Abortion Experience in Australia since the 1960s', *Gender & History* 28, no. 2 (2016): 501–19.
[28]Baird, *Abortion Care is Health Care*, 201–31, 183–34; Barbara Baird and Erica Millar, 'When History Won't Go Away: Abortion Decriminalisation, Residual Criminalisation and Continued Exceptionalism', *History Australia* 21, no. 3 (2024): 422, 433; Johanna Commins and Erica Millar, 'Exceptionalising Abortion Law: Decriminalised Jurisprudence in Australia', *Griffith Law Review* 33, no. 3 (2024): 253–72.
[29]Evan Smith, Jayne Persian, and Vashti Jane Fox, 'Introduction', in *Histories of Fascism and Anti-Fascism in Australia*, 1–19.
[30]Leigh Boucher, Michelle Arrow, Barbara Baird, and Robert Reynolds, *Personal Politics: Sexuality, Gender and the Remaking of Citizenship in Australia* (Monash University Publishing, 2024), 65–94, 66.
[31]Smith et al., 'Introduction', 1–19; Geoff Dean, Peter Bell, and Zarina Vakhitova, 'Right-Wing Extremism in Australia: The Rise of the New Radical Right', *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism* 11, no. 2 (2016): 121–42.
[32]Mario Peucker and Debra Smith, 'Far-Right Movements in Contemporary Australia: An Introduction', in *The Far-Right in Contemporary Australia*, ed. Mario Peucker and Debra Smith (Springer, 2019), 1–17; Peter Lentini, 'The Australian Far-Right: An International Comparison of Fringe and Conventional Politics', in *The Far-Right in Contemporary Australia*, 42–44.
[33]Callum et al., 'You Can't Trust the Mainstream Media', 15.

social division 'that are at once antithetical to democratic practice and yet which increasingly influence that practice'.[34] Notwithstanding its complexity and evolving nature, its roots remain tied to the nation's settler-colonial white supremacy.[35]

Tim Jones argues that Australia's New Christian Right, which emerged in the 1970s, framed conservative sexual ideology in secular terms amid declining religiosity, creating a politics based not on 'common faith but on a common conservative sexual ideology'.[36] Marion Maddox frames the early Howard era as key to the rise of conservative religion in politics, highlighting the impact of the Australian Christian Lobby (ACL), formed in 1995, whose agenda she links to right-wing extremism.[37] Religious conservatism, long tied to anti-abortion politics, was re-energised during the marriage equality debate from 2004.[38]

Over the past decade, gender concerns have been increasingly central to the far right's rise in Australia,[39] focusing on misogyny, white male victimhood, and nostalgia for traditional masculinity, which aids recruitment, particularly of young men.[40] Schools are a troubling site of far-right masculinist politics as seen in the example of the 'manosphere' and social media influencers such as Andrew Tate.[41] Within far-right activist discourse, white women are framed as mothers needing protection, often from non-white men, while feminists are blamed for endangering them.[42] Trans and gender-diverse people are frequent targets of far-right activism. For example, black clad neo-Nazis attended a 2023 'gender critical' anti-trans rally, claiming to be mobilising in defence of women and children. Their performance of a Nazi salute attracted international attention and condemnation.[43]

Gender and the global far right

These Australian developments are part of the global rise of the 'anti-gender ideology' movement, a network of antifeminist and anti-LGBTQIA+ groups emerging

[34]Mark Davis, 'Transnationalising the Anti-Public Sphere: Australian Anti-Publics and Reactionary Online Media', in *The Far-Right in Contemporary Australia*, 129.
[35]Smith et al., 'Introduction', 2.
[36]Timothy Willem Jones, 'Australian Secularism, the Sexual Revolution and the Making of the New Christian Right', *Australian Historical Studies* 52, no. 3 (2021): 317–30.
[37]Marion Maddox, 'Right-Wing Christian Intervention in a Naive Polity: The Australian Christian Lobby', *Political Theology* 15, no. 2 (2014): 147.
[38]Elenie Poulos, 'The Power of Belief: Religious Freedom in Australian Parliamentary Debates on Same-Sex Marriage', *Australian Journal of Political Science* 55, no. 1 (2020): 1–19.
[39]Callum Jones, Steven Roberts, and Brady Robards, 'White Warriors and Weak Women: Identifying Central Discourses of Masculinity in Neo-Nazi Telegram Channels', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* (2024): 1–26, https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2024.2318813.
[40]Pam Nilan, Josh Roose, Mario Peucker, and Bryan S. Turner, 'Young Masculinities and Right-Wing Populism in Australia', *Youth* 3, no. 1 (2023): 285.
[41]Stephanie Wescott, Steven Roberts, and Xuenan Zhao, 'The Problem of Anti-Feminist "Manfluencer" Andrew Tate in Australian Schools: Women Teachers' Experiences of Resurgent Male Supremacy', *Gender and Education* 36, no. 2 (2024): 167–82.
[42]Jones et al., 'White Warriors and Weak Women'.
[43]Natasha Frost, 'Australian State Moves to Ban Nazi Salute After Clashes at Rally', *New York Times,* 20 March 2023, https://www.nytimes.com/2023/03/20/world/australia/melbourne-nazi-salute.html.

amid 'rising populism and illiberalism'.[44] The twenty-first century intertwining of neoliberalism with far right and religious conservatism is a key theme in the research literature. Butler attributes the anti-gender ideology movement to a 'strengthening of church and family' amid cuts to social services in a privatised economy.[45] They describe these groups and their ideology as a historically new formation of gender politics that emerged in the mid-1990s.[46] This formation is driven by the desire to restore 'a patriarchal dream-order where a father is a father; a sexed identity never changes; where women, conceived as "born female at birth," resume their natural and "moral" positions within the household; and white people hold uncontested racial supremacy'.[47] Like many, Butler comments on the contradictoriness of the ideology, and its anti-intellectualism, as key to its flexibility and adaptability to various national contexts.[48] Manuela Caiani and Ivan Tranfic observe that calls to 'protect family values and children puts new wind in the sails of both national and transnational far-right actors'.[49]

Despite – or perhaps in response to – global trends toward liberalising abortion,[50] opposition to abortion is a growing part of this broader anti-gender ideology movement.[51] In Europe and the US, this includes a wave of restrictive laws and funding cuts, including the dramatic 2022 US Supreme Court ruling that overturned *Roe v. Wade* and ended the constitutional right to abortion.[52] Global anti-abortion activism is often financially backed by American ultra-conservatives (and possibly Russian oligarchs), receiving spiritual encouragement from the Vatican and the Orthodox Church.[53] Anti-feminist and anti-LGBTQIA+ movements – some directly opposing abortion – have also emerged in Latin America, Asia, and Africa, blending transnational influences with local religious and cultural contexts.[54] Globally, single-issue groups opposing abortion are often moving to also oppose other sexual and gender rights, especially transgender rights.[55]

Far right and anti-gender groups connect on and offline. Social media plays a central role, intensifying networked engagement and increasing exposure to fringe ideas, including the crossover between the far right and the 'manosphere'.[56] Social

[44]Manuela Caiani and Ivan Tranfić, 'Weaving the Transnational Anti-Gender Networks', *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 29, no. 4 (2024): 423.
[45]Butler, *Who's Afraid of Gender*, 70.
[46]Ibid.,73–74.
[47]Ibid., 14–15.
[48]Butler, *Who's Afraid of Gender*, 22, 70; Justin Ellis, *Representation, Resistance and the Digiqueer: Fighting for Recognition in Technocratic Times* (Policy Press, 2023), 1–24; Tiffany Jones, 'Trans Bans Expand: Anti-LGBTIQ+ Lawfare and Neo-fascism', *Sexuality Research and Social Policy* 22, no. 1 (2025): 69–84.
[49]Caiani and Tranfic, 'Weaving the Transnational Anti-Gender Networks', 23; Riedl et al., 'Political Influencers on Social Media'.
[50]Marge Berer and Lesley Hoggart, 'Progress Toward Decriminalization of Abortion and Universal Access to Safe Abortions: National Trends and Strategies', *Health and Human Rights* 21, no. 2 (2019): 79.
[51]Lynn Morgan, 'Anti-Abortion Strategizing and the Afterlife of the Geneva Consensus Declaration', *Developing World Bioethics* 23, no. 2 (2023): 185–95.
[52]Rachel Rebouché and Mary Ziegler, 'Fracture: Abortion Law and Politics after Dobbs', *SMU L. Rev.* 76 (2023): 27.
[53]Claudia Mattalucci, Joanna Mishtal, and Silvia De Zordo, 'Emerging Contestations of Abortion Rights: New Discourses and Political Strategies at the Intersection of Rights, Health and Law', *Antropologia* 5, no. 2 (2018): 8.
[54]Butler, *Who's Afraid of Gender*.
[55]Tiffany Jones, 'Trans Bans Expand', 70, 71, 76, 82.
[56]Jones et al., 'White Warriors and Weak Women', 6.

media enables transnational *and* distinctively national forms of far-right politics, and this is true of Australia.[57] The longstanding trend of Australian anti-abortionists and religious conservatives connecting in person with their global counterparts has become more overtly political in the last decade. Liberal and National federal politicians such as Jacinta Nampijinpa Price, Amanda Stoker, Alex Antic, Matt Canavan, and former Liberal Prime Ministers John Howard, Tony Abbott, and Scott Morrison attend conferences of far-right global groups, including major US and UK organisations such as Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC), the Alliance for Responsible Citizenship (ARC), and World Congress of Families.[58] These events typically feature speakers from several countries, including prominent anti-abortion, anti-transgender, men's rights, and conservative Christian figures. Several of the aforementioned federal politicians figure in the case studies that follow.

'Forced birth', South Australia, September–October 2024

On 25 September 2024, Liberal Member of the Legislative Council (MLC) Ben Hood introduced a bill to amend SA's 2021 Termination of Pregnancy Act. The Act permits abortion on request up to 22 weeks and 6 days, and later if two doctors agree that the procedure is necessary in the interests of the patient's health, to save the life of the pregnant person or another foetus, or in the case of 'serious foetal anomalies'.[59] Hood's bill sought to ban abortions after 27 weeks and 6 days' gestation by requiring that the only lawful procedural response to a request for an abortion would be informed by the intent to deliver the foetus alive, with the standard care provided to all neonates when delivered.[60] Opponents dubbed it a 'forced birth' bill.[61]

Prior to the implementation of the 2021 Act, abortion had been lawful only under certain conditions, including the approval of two doctors and performance in a hospital. Following a campaign initiated by activist group the SA Abortion Action Coalition, the Attorney General in the Liberal government asked the SA

[57] Ellis, *Representation, Resistance and the Digiqueer*, 1–24; Davis, 'Transnationalising the Anti-Public Sphere', 138–40.
[58] Kevin Moss, 'The World Congress of Families', in *The Routledge Handbook of Sexuality in East Central Europe*, ed. Agnieszka Kościańska, Anita Kurimay, Kateřina Lišková, and Hadley Z. Renkin (Routledge, 2025) 275; David Robinson, 'Does the Alliance for Responsible Citizenship have a Better Story?', *AP (Australian Presbyterian)*, 23 October 2024, https://ap.org.au/2024/10/23/does-the-alliance-for-responsible-citenship-have-a-better-story/; Graham Readfearn, Catie McLeod and Benita Kolovos, 'Bridget McKenzie, Moira Deeming and Key News Corp Figures to Attend Jordan Peterson's "Civilisation" Conference', *Guardian (Australia)*, 11 February 2025 https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2025/feb/12/bridget-mckenzie-moira-deeming-and-key-news-corp-figures-to-attend-jordan-petersons-civilisation-conference; Dan Jervis-Bardy, 'Five Coalition Senators Billed Taxpayers $10k to Attend Conservative Conference CPAC', *Guardian (Australia)*, 16 March 2025, https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2025/mar/16/coalition-senators-taxpayer-funded-trip-cpac.
[59] *Termination of Pregnancy Act 2021* (SA), https://www.legislation.sa.gov.au/lz?path=/c/a/termination%20of%20pregnancy%20act%202021.
[60] *Termination of Pregnancy (Terminations and Live Births) Amendment Bill 2024* (SA), https://www.legislation.sa.gov.au/lz?path=/b/current/termination%20of%20pregnancy%20(terminations%20and%20live%20births)%20amendment%20bill%202024_hon%20benjamin%20hood%20mlc.
[61] Tory Shepherd, 'Bill proposing South Australians seeking later abortions give birth tantamount to "forced birth", Greens say', *Guardian (Australia)*, 25 September 2024, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/sep/25/south-australia-late-term-abortion-bill-liberal-party-greens-ntwnfb.

Law Reform Institute to investigate 'modernising the law'. After broad consultation and a progressive report, a bill was introduced and supported by key ministers and cross-party pro-choice MPs, with Liberal and Labor allowing a conscience vote. The debate drew strong media attention, and the bill had broad public support.[62]

Opposition was led by the new anti-abortion group Love Adelaide, the Catholic and Orthodox Churches, and social conservatives in both major parties.[63] Federal Liberal Senator Alex Antic strongly opposed the bill, calling it 'brutal' in a 2020 letter sent to all party members. Antic claimed that, in seeking 'to permit the destruction of a viable foetus up to and including the day prior to birth', it violated 'the Party's principles'. Attorney General Vickie Chapman and Minister Michelle Lensink responded publicly in their defence of the bill, noting that Antic would 'never need a termination' and disputing his account of Liberal Party principles.[64]

After decriminalisation, Antic continued to intervene in internal state Liberal Party matters. Seen as a leader of the Liberal's emerging 'alt-right' faction,[65] Antic backed efforts to recruit conservative Pentecostal Christians and manipulate pre-selection votes, supporting public meetings and recruitment drives, especially in SA's south-east, Ben Hood's home region.[66] Since 2022, far-right politicians have effectively displaced moderates in key SA Liberal Party roles, secured a Senate seat, and gained federal and state pre-selections. These events have been described as a 'takeover'.[67] Hood was appointed to the Legislative Council to fill a vacancy in this period. Antic approvingly described him as the (Trumpist Republican) 'Ron DeSantis of South Australia'.[68]

The day prior to Hood's introduction of his bill a supportive anti-abortion rally was organised outside parliament by activist Joanna Howe, a law professor at the University of Adelaide. Cards numbered one to 45, accompanied by 45 stuffed animals, were laid out on the steps of parliament and these visuals dominated much of the early reporting on the bill. The figure of 45 represented the number of abortions performed over an 18-month period that occurred after 22 weeks and six

[62] Baird, *Abortion Care in Health Care*, 180, 183–34.
[63] Rebecca Puddy, 'Adelaide's Catholic Archdiocese Wants to Stop "Radical" Changes to Abortion Laws', *ABC News*, 15 February 2019, https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-02-15/catholic-church-to-send-letter-on-abortion-law-reform/10816294.
[64] Elizabeth Henson, 'Libs Slam Colleague Over Abortion Bill Vote', *Advertiser*, 28 October 2020.
[65] Tory Shepherd, 'Alex Antic: Liberal who Rolled Female Frontbencher Described as Nice Guy Turned "Trumpian" by Colleagues', *Guardian (Australia)*, 19 March 2024, https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2024/mar/19/alex-antic-liberal-who-rolled-female-frontbencher-described-as-nice-guy-turned-trumpian-by-colleagues.
[66] Tom Richardson, '"Make the Party Great Again": Libs' Right Faction in Colton Coup', *InDaily*, 26 May 2022, https://www.indailysa.com.au/news/archive/2022/05/26/make-the-party-great-again-libs-right-faction-in-colton-coup; 'Liberal Party Tour "All Ears"', *The SE Voice*, 29 January 2024, https://sevoice.com.au/liberal-party-tour-all-ears/.
[67] Sarah Basford Canales, '"It's a takeover": The South Australian Power Player Reshaping the State Liberal Party', *Guardian (Australia)*, 20 July 2025, https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2025/jul/20/liberal-party-south-australia-power-player-alex-antic-reshaping-conservative-politics-ntwnfb; Sarah Basford Canales and Dan Jervis-Bardy, 'Moderate Liberals Losing Ground as Hard-Right Faction Looms Large in Senate Battle', *Guardian (Australia)*, 31 January 2025, https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2025/jan/30/moderate-liberals-hard-right-senate-battle-leah-blyth-simon-birmingham-alex-antic.
[68] Cam Wilson, 'Newspaper Writes about Liberal MP 100 Times—But Doesn't Disclose He Helped Set It Up', *Crikey*, 28 April 2023, https://www.crikey.com.au/2023/04/28/ben-hood-se-voice-south-australian-liberals/.

days gestation for maternal health reason.[69] This was an emotive and tactical misrepresentation of health data as fewer than five of these abortions had occurred after 27 weeks and six days – the ostensible focus of Hood's bill.[70]

The anti-abortion discourse that emerged during the SA debates and parliamentary speeches effected an erasure of pregnant people's rights, agency and subjectivity,[71] consistent with the far right's portrayal of (white) women as 'weak or feeble' and in need of protection.[72] In parliament, supporters referred to scientific claims of foetal viability to argue that 'a second life is present' and maintained the bill would 'balance the interests and the rights of the mother and the child'. Adoption was central to the bill's imaginary. Supporters linked declining fertility and ageing populations 'in our Western world' to a need to boost birth rates, framing this as a 'societal benefit'. One MLC, then a member of Pauline Hanson's One Nation party, claimed that the West had lost its 'moral compass', and that 'our fundamental beliefs and values are consistently challenged and changing'. The racialised theme of Western moral and demographic decline is familiar in both Australian anti-abortion discourse and the global 'anti-gender ideology' movement; Butler describes the movement's 'moral righteousness' as 'moral sadism'.[73] Hood thanked many groups and individuals, including Love Adelaide and the ACL, but gave special credit to Howe, whom he credited as the 'legal lead' on the bill. Howe described herself as the bill's 'public face' and her name appeared in brand-like fashion on promotional information about the legislation.[74]

On 16 October, after nearly three hours of debate, Hood's bill was narrowly defeated 10 votes to nine. Yet in 2021, the vote on abortion decriminalisation in the Legislative Council had been 12 votes to nine. The margin of defeat in 2024 reflected the rapidity of the Antic-supported takeover of the SA Liberals, with the advent of four new, arguably far-right, MLCs in the Legislative Council. Hood announced he would not introduce another abortion bill in the current parliament.[75] However, Howe insisted to journalists that opponents of abortion 'know this is not the end but just the beginning'.[76]

The day after the defeat of Hood's bill, media reported on the 'parliamentary chaos' that had occurred during the vote. Lensink, a vocal pro-choice MLC undergoing chemotherapy, had arranged a pairing agreement – where an absent member is matched with someone who would vote the other way who then abstains. During

[69]'SA Abortion Law Proposal Triggers Debate, Within and Across Party Lines—What's Been Proposed?', *ABC News*, 25 September 2024, https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-09-25/sa-abortion-law-amendments-prompt-debate/104391348.
[70]Holder and Leckie, 'South Australian Upper House Narrowly Votes'.
[71]All quotations from MLCs are taken from: *Parliamentary Debates*, South Australian Legislative Council, 16 October 2024, 6809–78, https://hansardsearch.parliament.sa.gov.au/daily/uh/2024-10-16/54?sid=28e55fb06b444590a5.
[72]Jones et al, 'White Warriors and Weak Women', 3.
[73]Baird, *Abortion Care is Health Care*, 3–4; Butler, *Who's Afraid of Gender*, 11.
[74]Tory Shepherd, 'Anti-Abortion Activist Joanna Howe Says She Pressured South Australian MP to Back Out of Voting Deal', *Guardian (Australia)*, 30 October 2024, https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2024/oct/30/anti-abortion-activist-joanna-howe-says-she-pressured-south-australian-mp-to-back-out-of-voting-deal-ntwnfb.
[75]Thomas Kelsall, 'Abortion Vote Falls Short After Night of Parliamentary Chaos', *InDaily*, 17 October 2024, https://www.indailysa.com.au/news/just-in/2024/10/17/abortion-vote-falls-short-after-night-of-parliamentary-chaos.
[76]Tara Miko and Michael Owen-Brown, 'Hood Comes Clean on Agonising Abortion Bill Dilemma', *Advertiser*, 17 October 2024.

second reading speeches of the Hood bill, the initial 'pair' unexpectedly withdrew from the arrangement with Lensink, a move the Attorney General described as 'the single most dishonourable act I think you can do as a member of parliament'.[77] In the final moments, a conservative anti-abortion Liberal supporter of the bill gave the pair, ensuring its narrow defeat. On social media, Howe accused this MLC of 'abject betrayal'.[78] A fortnight later, the MLC who withdrew her pair apologised in parliament to Lensink, citing persuasion from an 'unexpected visitor' with regard to her future preselection and calling her action 'an "unthinkable decision under pressure"'.[79] Interviewed on ABC Radio Adelaide, Howe admitted she had mentioned her strong social media influence to the MLC, telling her that 'many Liberal party preselectors who vote on this follow me and I know how pro-life that membership is and I think it will affect your preselection'.[80] In response, the Legislative Council President banned Howe from parts of the chamber, citing complaints that she had 'insulted, intimidated and threatened' MLCs during the debate.[81] Howe denied the claims.[82] By year's end, she was named, and pictured prominently, in Adelaide newspaper the *Advertiser's* Power 100 list of influential people in SA.[83]

'Clean repeal', Queensland, October 2024

While the SA abortion debate was in full flight, abortion simultaneously erupted as a political issue in Queensland. Less than three weeks before the state election, the Katter Australia Party (KAP) MP Robbie Katter pledged that if the then opposition LNP won, he would introduce a bill to revisit the 2018 Termination of Pregnancy Act, preferring a 'clean repeal' and a return to the 1899 criminal code.[84] Cherish Life Queensland, the state's largest anti-abortion group, praised Katter for making abortion 'a key issue' in the state election.[85]

Since the late twentieth century, Queensland's abortion politics have been more partisan than elsewhere in Australia. Cassandra Byrnes links this regionally distinctive characteristic to the enduring power and influence of Premier Joh Bjelke-Petersen

[77] Kelsall, 'Abortion Vote Falls Short'.
[78] Tara Miko and Michael Owen-Brown, 'Adelaide Uni Abortion Crusader Joanna Howe Accuses Pro-Life Liberal MP Dennis Hood of "Abject Betrayal"', *Advertiser*, 17 October 2024.
[79] Harvey Biggs and Rory McClaren, 'Liberal MLC Jing Lee Apologises to Michelle Lensink for Reneging on Deal Ahead of Vote on Late-Term Abortion Law Amendments', *ABC News*, 29 October 2024, https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-10-29/sa-jing-lee-apologises-for-reneged-deal/104532858.
[80] 'Anti-Abortion Campaigner Joanna Howe Admits to Pressuring Liberal MP Jing Lee to Abandon Vote-Pairing Deal', *ABC News*, 30 October 2024, https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-10-30/joanna-howe-admits-to-conversation-with-jing-lee/104535728.
[81] 'Anti-Abortion Campaigner Joanna Howe Banned from Parts of South Australia's Parliament Over Alleged "Threatening" Tactics', *ABC News*, 31 October 2024, https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-10-31/joanna-howe-barred-from-sa-parliament-upper-house/104545392.
[82] 'Anti-Abortion Campaigner's Ban from Parliament a "Total Abuse of Power"', *CathNews*, 1 November 2024, https://cathnews.com/2024/11/01/anti-abortion-campaigners-ban-from-parliament-a-total-abuse-of-power/.
[83] 'Power 100 – South Australia's Most Influential People', *Advertiser*, 18 December 2024.
[84] Andrew Messenger and Ben Smee, 'Crisafulli Wedged on Abortion as Katter Party Flags Vote to Criminalise Terminations', *Guardian (Australia)*, 9 October 2024, https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2024/oct/09/queensland-state-election-abortion-rights-lnp-policy-law-changes-ntwnfb.
[85] Matthew Cliff, 'Abortion: Queensland's Defining Election Moment', *Cherish Life Queensland*, 18 October 2024, https://www.cherishlife.org.au/abortion-queenslandsdefiningelectionmoment/.

and the conservative Country Party (later National Party, later LNP) that dominated state politics until 1990, which pursued an explicitly 'Christian, heteronormative, reproductive framework'.[86] In 2017, the Labor government asked the Queensland Law Reform Commission to review the state abortion law. Its report supported decriminalisation, leading to a 2018 bill 'to modernise and clarify the law', bringing 'Queensland's laws into the 21st century'.[87] At a September 2018 March for Life rally, Nationals Senator Matt Canavan claimed the proposed law would result in 'some of the most radical and extreme legislation of abortions in the world' because it would allow 'unrestricted abortions beyond 22 weeks', a claim fact checked by the ABC as 'baseless'.[88] Despite LNP efforts to lower the gestation limit in the bill from 22 to 16 weeks and to make counselling compulsory, it passed unamended 50–41. Both parties allowed a conscience vote, but only three LNP members supported it, reportedly amidst threats of disendorsement.[89]

Before the 2020 state election, Cherish Life Queensland pushed the LNP to commit to restricting abortions after 12 weeks to 'medical necessity'.[90] LNP leader Deb Frecklington promised to review the law with a focus on the gestation limit but simultaneously told mainstream news outlets that this was 'not a priority'. However, to conservative Christian audiences, LNP politicians offered a different message, giving an 'iron-clad guarantee' the 2018 abortion law would be amended.[91] The *Courier Mail* reported money as 'rolling in' for the anti-abortion campaign, with Cherish Life Queensland boasting it had allocated $200,000 to target marginal Labor seats. Their campaign included pamphlets, TV ads, billboards, and a website and election materials warning that under Labor 'even more babies would die'.[92] Nevertheless, Labor won a third term and their successful handling of COVID-19 delivered them an increased majority.

In 2024, LNP leader David Crisafulli seemed to have concluded that a public anti-abortion stance was a vote loser for the party. Throughout the state election campaign, he insisted abortion law reform was 'not part of our plans', even declining to answer the ACL's policy survey.[93] However, powerful positions in the party were still populated by opponents of abortion. Crisafulli had opposed decriminalisation

[86] Cassandra Byrnes, *A History of Abortion and Contraception in Queensland, Australia, 1960–1989* (Routledge, 2024), 167.
[87] Yvette D'Ath, Attorney-General, *Parliamentary Debates*, Queensland Parliament, 22 August 2018, 1962.
[88] Ellen McCutchan, 'Fact Check: Will Queensland's Proposed Abortion Laws Allow Unrestricted Access After 22 Weeks?', *ABC News*, 4 October 2018, https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-10-04/fact-check-queensland-abortion-laws-unrestricted-access/10264402.
[89] Lydia Lynch and Felicity Caldwell, 'LNP Plans to Review Labor's Historic 2018 Abortion Reform if Elected', *Brisbane Times*, 3 June 2020, https://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/politics/queensland/lnp-plans-to-review-labor-s-historic-2018-abortion-reform-if-elected-20200602-p54ypz.html.
[90] 'Rebel NSW Pro-Life MP to Protest Laws Up Here', *Courier Mail*, 11 October 2019.
[91] Ben Smee, 'Queensland Election: LNP Tries to Keep Anti-abortion Push Out of Sight', *Guardian (Australia)*, 17 October 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2020/oct/17/why-queenslands-opposition-leader-wants-partys-anti-abortion-push-kept-out-of-election-sight.
[92] Des Houghton, 'In a Fight for our Lives', *Courier Mail,* 12 September 2020; Cherish Life Queensland, 'Labor Has Legalised Abortion Up to Birth for Any Reason', accessed 25 March 2026, https://laborlast.org.au/.
[93] Ben Smee, 'Abortion Wasn't on the Queensland Election Agenda. So Why is it Now a Threat to the LNP Campaign?', *Guardian (Australia)*, 13 October 2024, https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2024/oct/13/queensland-election-2024-lnp-abortion-policy-david-crisafulli.

in 2018, and Deputy Leader Jarrod Bleijie's speech had defended criminalisation as vital to ensure the state's future workforce.[94] New LNP candidates included prominent anti-abortion figures such as former Liberal Senator Amanda Stoker, who had regularly addressed the annual March for Life in Brisbane, appearing alongside Canavan and Howe.[95]

The LNP's silence on abortion during the 2024 election was particularly striking given two abortion bills had been introduced that year. In March, parliament passed a law allowing nurses and midwives to prescribe early medication abortion, aligning with other states. Cherish Life Queensland decried the change as making 'nurse and midwives abortionists'.[96] All LNP MPs, along with Katter, voted against it. Also in March 2024, Katter introduced the Termination of Pregnancy (Live Births) Amendment Bill 2024, modelled on federal 'born alive' strategies discussed later in this article. Howe, credited with shaping the Queensland bill, interviewed Katter for her social media platform and was positioned as a leader in the legislative process because of her role working for the federal bill.[97] She testified at public hearings, lobbied MPs, and filmed vox pop social media content – including an incident in the Premier's office that led to police being called.[98] In September, the parliamentary committee recommended Katter's bill not be passed.[99]

After Katter's shock announcement, abortion dominated reporting in the final weeks of the 2024 campaign. Crisafulli avoided over 100 questions on abortion and conscience votes. Although disappointed, Cherish Life Queensland still urged voters to oppose 'the pro-abortion Labor Government'.[100] Days before the election, during the last leaders' debate, Crisafulli declared 'we are not changing that law'.[101] Labor had been expected to experience a punishing defeat after nine years in power, but late polling showed a rebound. The *Brisbane Times* argued it was abortion that had 'derailed' the LNP's campaign.[102] Crisafulli narrowly won on 26 October and immediately, Katter vowed to 'test the parliament' with a conscience vote, criticising the LNP for its hypocrisy.[103] To silence debate, Crisafulli moved a motion banning

[94] Jarrod Bleijie, *Parliamentary Debates*, Queensland Parliament, 17 October 2018, 2918.
[95] 'Pro-Life LNP Candidate Supports Leader's Stand', *Courier Mail*, 28 September 2024.
[96] *Cherish Life Queensland* (Newsletter) 53, no. 1 (April 2024).
[97] Samuel Hartwich, 'QLD Katter Party Introduces Bill to Protect Babies Born Alive After Abortion', *The Daily Declaration,* 25 March 2024, https://dailydeclaration.org.au/2024/03/25/qld-katter-party-introduces-bill-to-protect-babies-born-alive-after-abortion/.
[98] Tory Shepherd, 'State and Federal MPs Describe Death Threats and Vile Abuse in Wake of Joanna Howe's Anti-Abortion Campaign', *Guardian (Australia)*, 21 May 2025, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/may/21/state-and-federal-mps-describe-death-threats-and-vile-abuse-in-wake-of-joanna-howes-anti-abortion-campaign-ntwnfb.
[99] Health, Environment and Agriculture Committee, *Termination of Pregnancy (Live Births) Amendment Bill 2024*, Report No. 15, September 2024, https://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/Work-of-the-Assembly/Tabled-Papers/docs/5724t1963/5724t1963-fc62.pdf.
[100] Cliff, 'Abortion: Queensland's Defining Election Moment'.
[101] Andrew Messenger, 'David Crisafulli Vows to Repeal Ban on Developer Donations and Ditch "Corrupt" Full Preferential Voting System', *Guardian (Australia)*, 16 October 2024, https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2024/oct/16/queensland-election-david-crisafulli-lnp-developer-donations-ban.
[102] Matt Dennien and Cameron Atfield, 'Queensland at a Crossroad: Fight for State Power Comes Down to the Wire', *Brisbane Times,* 25 October 2024.
[103] Ben Smee, 'Robbie Katter to "Test the Parliament" on Abortion as Queensland Election Count Continues', *Guardian*, 29 October 2024, https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2024/oct/29/queensland-election-lnp-kap-robbie-katter-abortion-policy-crisafulli.

parliamentary abortion discussions for four years. Labor leader Steven Miles described the Premier as 'constraining his own party room because he cannot control them and cannot trust them'.[104]

The intense political and media focus on the threat to abortion rights in Queensland occurred in parallel with the last weeks of the US election. Media commentary linked the eruption of abortion politics in Queensland and SA with Trump and aggressive American anti-abortion rhetoric and activism.[105] Less remarked upon were the local shifts revealed by the debate. Benjamin Moffit describes KAP as representing rural populism, economic protectionism and social conservatism. Despite having an emphasis on 'Christian values', the party was initially emphatically 'agnostic on abortion'.[106] Yet in August 2024, founder and federal MP Bob Katter declared 'God Bless Joanna Howe', praising her efforts on behalf of son Robbie's 'born alive' bill and lamenting that Howe was being 'persecuted for her beliefs'. The party now seemed to fully embrace anti-abortion politics, despite these views clashing with many voters in their rural electorate.[107]

Within the Queensland LNP, anti-abortion values still dominate the party but overt abortion politics are now perceived as polarising and a distraction from their broader neoliberal agenda, a lesson likely reinforced by the events in SA. This caution frustrated Cherish Life Queensland, while Howe accused Crisafulli of 'betrayal' and called him a 'coward', demanding his resignation in a petition.[108] However, in January 2025 the LNP government paused public sector gender-affirming care for 'new trans patients' who were minors, with the Cairns Sexual Health Service – a leading state provider of gender affirming *and* abortion care – a particular target for conservative criticism. The Queensland government's anti-trans move was commended by Canavan and occurred almost simultaneously with the swathe of transphobic Executive Orders signed by US President Trump during the first days of his second term.[109]

[104]Alex Brewster, 'Queensland Government Blocks Any Change to Abortion Laws, with David Crisafulli Blaming Labor's "Scare Campaign"', *ABC News*, 10 December 2024, https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-12-10/queensland-abortion-parliament-crisafulli-termination-bill/104707698.

[105]Patricia Karvelas, 'Is Abortion Really on the Ballot Again in Australia? State Politics Indicates It Could Be', *ABC News*, 21 October 2024, https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-10-21/abortion-debate-in-queensland-and-south-australia-politics/104489634.

[106]Benjamin Moffitt, 'Populism in Australia and New Zealand', in *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, ed. Cristobal Kaltwasser, Paul Taggart, Paulina Ochoa Espejo, and Pierre Ostiguy, (Oxford University Press, 2017), 124–28; Daniel Hurst, '"Save the Humans": Katter Party MP on Abortion', *Brisbane Times*, 24 August 2011, https://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/national/queensland/save-the-humans-katter-party-mp-on-abortion-20110823-1j8bk.html.

[107]Bob Katter (@bob_kattermp), *Instagram*, 21 August 2024, https://www.instagram.com/reel/C-7MNOSS3Dp/; 'Could Robbie Katter's Abortion Views Cause Backlash for His Party in the Queensland Election', *ABC News*, 21 October 2024, https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-10-21/katter-abortion-policy-influence-young-voters/104496092.

[108]Matthew Cliff, 'Press Release: Ban on Parliament Discussing Abortion an Anti-Democratic Attack on Free Speech', *Cherish Life Queensland*, 16 December 2024; Dr Joanna Howe, 'Crisafulli the Coward!', *Facebook*, 11 December 2024, https://www.facebook.com/DrJoannaHowe/posts/premier-david-crisafulli-has-betrayed-queenslandhe-passed-a-motion-banning-all-d/560366350256704/.

[109]SkyNews Australia, '"Great News": Matt Canavan Commends Qld's Move to Halt Child Hormone Therapy', *YouTube*, 28 January 2025, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PbGfH0G47Ik; Jenna Amatulli, 'Trump Signs Executive Order to Curtail Gender Transition for People Under 19', *Guardian (Australia)*, 29 January 2025, https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/jan/28/trump-executive-order-transgender-transition.

'Late term' and 'born alive', Canberra, October–November 2024

In late October 2024, against a backdrop of intense media and political interest in abortion in Queensland and SA, Northern Territory Nationals Senator Jacinta Nampijinpa Price called for abortion to be an issue in the forthcoming federal election.[110] A week before the Queensland election, she likened abortion to infanticide, defined 'late term' as 'anywhere past the [first] trimester', and said 'our aim should always be on maintaining life'.[111] These were Price's first public comments on abortion. They came after her appearance at the 2024 Sydney ARC conference. Price's stance on abortion can be aligned with her positions on several issues – including her opposition to gender-affirming healthcare, the inclusion of trans women competing in women's sports, and Welcome to Country ceremonies. Notably, as an Indigenous woman, Price rejected the Indigenous Voice to Parliament by arguing that colonisation had a 'positive' impact on Indigenous Australians.[112]

Price's push to make abortion a federal issue sparked backlash from prominent Coalition women, including future Liberal leader Sussan Ley. Opposition Leader Peter Dutton responded with a firm party-room warning, urging 'discipline' and stating the Coalition would not pursue abortion policy changes – not on principle, but because it had 'cost us votes in Queensland'.[113] A day after Dutton's remarks, Canavan agreed abortion should stay off the federal agenda but refused to withdraw the controversial anti-abortion bill he was co-sponsoring.

Introduced in November 2022 by Antic, Canavan and conservative United Australia Party Senator Ralph Babet, the Human Rights (Children Born Alive Protection) Bill 2022 requires equal care for babies 'born alive' after abortions as for any newborn. The Senate referred the bill to the Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee (SCALC) for inquiry. The born alive strategy originated in the United States in the early 2000s. It relies on visceral, emotionally charged claims that are often medically contested. These include assertions from figures such as Howe that Australian infants are routinely being 'born alive and left to die following an abortion'.[114] The Canavan, Antic, and Babet bill echoed a 2021 version that lapsed and was followed by Katter's 2024 attempt in Queensland, mentioned above. The 'born alive' issue was also deployed in the August 2024 Northern Territory election after ACL and Pro-Life

[110] Karen Middleton and Josh Butler, 'Senior Coalition Women and Senator Matt Canavan Reject Jacina Nampijinpa Price's Abortion Comments', *Guardian (Australia)*, 23 October 2024, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/oct/23/senior-coalition-women-and-pro-life-senator-matt-canavan-reject-jacinta-prices-abortion-comments.

[111] Paul Sakkal and Natassia Chrysanthos, 'Senator Jacinta Price Wants Late-Term Abortions on National Agenda', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 October 2024.

[112] Tamsin Rose and Sarah Basford Canales, 'Indigenous People "Disgusted" by Jacinta Nampijinpa Price's "Simply Wrong" Comments on Colonisation, Burney Says', *Guardian (Australia)*, 15 September 2023, https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2023/sep/15/jacinta-nampijinpa-price-comments-colonisation-voice-referendum-linda-burney.

[113] James Massola, '"It Cost Us Votes": Dutton Reads Riot Act to MPs on Abortion', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 November 2024.

[114] Joanna Howe, 'Fact Sheet: Babies Born Alive and Left to Die Following a Failed Abortion', 12 March 2023, https://canberradeclaration.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Dr-Joanna-Howe-Fact-Sheet-Babies-Born-Alive-FINAL.pdf.

Victoria distributed materials claiming that the Country Liberal Party had committed to backing similar legislation if elected.[115]

At the SCALC inquiry's public hearing, Antic and Canavan moved between abortion and other issues of gender and far-right politics. Questioning witnesses who used gender-neutral language to describe people who have abortions, Antic repeatedly asked whether 'men can get pregnant'. He dismissed their answers as vague, insisting this line of questioning was necessary to 'clarify the parameters of who we're dealing with'.[116] Antic then posted an edited video of his exchange with a witness on his social media platforms, withdrawing the video when a complaint was made to the Senate Committee about Antic's failure to comply with Senate procedures with respect to the protection of witnesses.[117] At the same hearing Canavan questioned a doctor who worked in remote Western Australia who spoke about the cultural importance for some Aboriginal patients of allowing their babies to die on Country. Contrasting this practice with guidelines from the (UK) Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, which recommend a foetocidal injection at or after 22 weeks, Canavan asked, 'What's the difference between a baby born in Edinburgh and a baby born in Chinchilla [Queensland]?' The doctor responded, 'We are removing an Aboriginal or First Nations woman's desire to have that baby born on her country', to which Canavan responded, 'there are a lot of elements of tribal law that are not legal in Australia, because we have a different legal system'.[118] These exchanges – one dismissing Indigenous sovereignty as 'tribal' and the other enforcing binary gender – place Antic and Canavan's abortion politics within what Butler describes as the broader authoritarian patriarchal 'restoration project'.[119]

SCALC's August 2023 report on the bill raised 'concerns' about its constitutional validity, human rights impact, and potential to limit services, but made no recommendations, framing abortion as a matter of conscience and controversy.[120] Senators Antic and Canavan used the inquiry to promote anti-abortion views, elevating activists from anti-abortion and conservative Christian groups, including the ACL, as expert witnesses who framed abortion as grotesque, and erased the pregnant person from their description of abortion. One witness reduced the pregnant person

[115]Tory Shepherd, 'Australian Conservatives Claim Babies are Sometimes "Born Alive" After an Abortion', *Guardian (Australia)*, 28 August 2024, https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/article/2024/aug/28/australian-conservatives-claim-babies-are-sometimes-born-alive-after-an-abortion-whats-the-truth.
[116]Community Affairs Legislation Committee, *Human Rights (Children Born Alive Protection) Bill 2022*, Committee Hansard, 8 June 2023, 38, https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/committees/commsen/26959/toc_pdf/Community%20Affairs%20Legislation%20Committee_2023_06_08_Official.pdf;fileType=application/pdf#search=%22committees/commsen/26959/0000%22.
[117]Tania Penovic, 'Exporting the American Playbook: The International Reach of the US Anti-Abortion Movement', in *Reproduction Policy in the Twenty-First Century: A Comparative Analysis*, ed. Hannah Zagel (Edward Elgar Publishing, 2024), 30.
[118]Community Affairs Legislation Committee, *Human Rights*, 51–52.
[119]Butler, *Who's Afraid of Gender*, 15. Also see: Karen Adams, Shannon Faulkhead, Rachel Standfield, and Petah Atkinson, 'Challenging the Colonisation of Birth: Koori Women's Birthing Knowledge and Practice', *Women and Birth* 31, no. 2 (2018): 81–88; Sandy O'Sullivan, 'The Colonial Project of Gender (And Everything Else)', *Genealogy* 5, no. 3 (2021): 67.
[120]Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee, *Human Rights (Children Born Alive Protection) Bill 2022 Report*, Parliament of Australia, 31 August 2023, https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Community_Affairs/ChildrenBornAlive2022/Report.

to a site where the foetus is 'spatiotemporally located'.[121] Howe played a key role – frequently cited and deferred to. Her recommendations, including statutory protections, coronial referrals, and mandatory data reporting, were endorsed in Antic and Canavan's dissenting report.[122] In late November 2024, two weeks after Dutton urged Coalition silence on abortion, the Greens moved to discharge the Human Rights (Children Born Alive Protection) Bill. Though many politicians claimed to oppose the actual substance of the bill, the Greens' motion was narrowly defeated. Several MPs cited concern about democratic process or setting a precedent for removing private members' bills before debate.[123]

Abortion was not a key issue in the 2025 Federal Election, which saw Labor win a record majority and Dutton lose his seat. Many blamed Dutton's likeness to Trump for this resounding defeat. Others, like mega donor Gina Rinehart, argued the Liberals lost because they failed to fully embrace Trump-style politics.[124] Ahead of the 2025 Federal Election, Price had drawn controversy for wearing a distinctive red 'MAGA' cap after vowing to 'make Australia great again'. Post-election, she left the Nationals for the Liberals and became deputy to conservative Angus Taylor in his failed leadership bid.[125] Moderate Sussan Ley narrowly became the Liberal Party's first female leader.[126] A 'profound schism' remains between her 'sensible centre' faction and those in the party focused on 'culture-wars'.[127]

The anti-abortion influencer

In all three case studies, Joanna Howe had an outsize presence, modelling a new (for Australia) type of anti-abortion militancy that occurs simultaneously online, on the streets, and in parliament. Howe's rise is illustrative of the centrality of digital platforms for the global far right's capture of audiences in the new attention economy. A first-generation immigrant from India, Catholic, mother of five, and SA-based law professor specialising in labour law and migration, Howe is a comparatively new anti-abortion activist. She made piecemeal interventions against abortion decriminalisation in NSW (2019) and SA (2021) and a submission

[121]Community Affairs Legislation Committee, *Human Rights*, 28.
[122]Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee, *Human Rights (Children Born Alive Protection) Bill 2022: Dissenting Report from Senator Canavan, Senator Antic, and Senator Babet*, Parliament of Australia, 31 August 2023, https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Community_Affairs/ChildrenBornAlive2022/Report/Dissenting_report_from_Senator_Canavan_Senator_Antic_and_Senator_Babet.
[123]Mostafa Rachwani and Emily Wind, 'Senate Crossbenchers Side with Coalition to Oppose Greens Motion to Dump Anti-Abortion Bill – As It Happened', *Guardian (Australia)*, 26 November 2024, https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/live/2024/nov/26/australia-politics-live-budget-deficit-jim-chalmers-anthony-albanese-peter-dutton-question-time-social-media-ban.
[124]Sarah Basford Canales, 'Gina Rinehart Urges Liberals to Stick with Trump-like Policies in the Wake of Election Loss', *Guardian (Australia)*, 5 May 2025, https://www.theguardian.com/business/2025/may/05/gina-rinehart-liberal-party-trump-australia-election-ntwnfb.
[125]Samantha Dick, 'Jacinta Nampijinpa Price Joins Liberal Party as Leadership Race Heats Up', *ABC News*, 8 May 2025, https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-05-08/jacinta-nampijinpa-price-joins-liberal-party-after-election/105269518.
[126]Mark Kenny, 'Sussan Ley Makes History, But Faces Unprecedented Levels of Difficulty', *The Conversation*, 13 May 2025, http://theconversation.com/sussan-ley-makes-history-but-faces-unprecedented-levels-of-difficulty-256336.
[127]Patricia Karvelas, '"We've Put off Arguments … Time to Have It Out": Liberals Reveal Deep Divisions', *ABC News*, 25 May 2025, https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-05-26/liberal-party-insiders-election-campaign-divided-four-corners/105313660.

opposing sex work decriminalisation in SA.[128] However, in mid-2022 she started her social media accounts with the goal of 'spark[ing] a national conversation on abortion'.[129]

Howe's social media activism centres on her persona and qualifications, prominently displaying her name in a stylised header, her academic titles (e.g., 'Dr Jo', 'Professor Joanna Howe'), and often her photo, across platforms, fact sheets, and letters.[130] Howe's main platform is Instagram, with 102,000 followers in early 2026, where she actively responds to and likes user comments. She has strong followings on Facebook and TikTok, a rapidly growing YouTube account, and a smaller profile on X. In February 2025, she launched a podcast, *The Dr Jo Show*, with multiple audio and video episodes per week. Howe's follower count positions her as a 'micro-influencer', which scholarship suggests allows her to build stronger, more intimate and trusted connections with her audience.[131] Howe has also gained significant media attention. Alongside regular positive coverage in News Corp publications such as the *Australian,* the *Advertiser* and on Sky News Australia, she has been quoted and given a platform on mainstream radio, print, and television programs.

Howe has attracted controversy for her adversarial in-person and online encounters with pro-choice politicians and activists. As one journalist summarised during the SA legislative debate, Howe is 'provocative' and 'unflinching in her use of contemptuous language when describing those with whom she does not agree'.[132] These views are expressed even more intensely by her online followers. Offensive and abusive comments about pro-choice politicians, activists, and abortion providers are not deleted from Howe's social media accounts. In 2025, politicians across party lines described a 'wave of death threats and vile abuse' from opponents of abortion after Howe mentioned them critically online.[133] As noted in the SA and Queensland examples, she also directs her online ire towards anti-abortion politicians that she views as insufficiently committed.

Howe has become a rising figure in conservative circles. She regularly speaks at single and multi-issue advocacy events, positioning herself as an expert guest rather than as a member. She appears to be, or has been, closely aligned with Antic, Katter, ACL, Cherish Life Queensland, and other prominent social and religious conservatives, including the anti-trans rights, anti-abortion activist Rachael Wong of Women's Forum Australia. Howe is widely seen by anti-abortion activists and politicians as the national expert on later gestation abortion, with her fact sheets and infographics

[128] RMIT ABC Fact Check, 'Have Abortions After 20 Weeks Increased 39 Per Cent in Victoria Post-Decriminalisation?', *ABC News*, 4 September 2019, https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-09-04/fact-check-nsw-abortion-law-victoria/11474570; Joanna Howe, 'Changing Hearts and Minds on Abortion', *The Southern Cross*, 30 March 2021, https://thesoutherncross.org.au/opinion/2021/03/30/changing-hearts-and-minds-on-abortion/; Jenny Brinkworth, 'Warning from women on "harmful" prostitution bill', *The Southern Cross*, 2 September 2021, https://thesoutherncross.org.au/news/local/2021/09/02/warning-from-women-on-harmful-prostitution-bill/.
[129] 'About Dr Joanna Howe', *Dr Joanna Howe*, https://www.drjoannahowe.com/my_story.
[130] Howe, 'Fact Sheet'.
[131] Lisa Harrison, *Unpacking Micro-Influence Within the Australian Creative Sectors: A Theoretical Framework for Understanding the Skills, Knowledge, and Capabilities of Micro-Influencers* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2024).
[132] Richards and Biggs, 'Power, Passion and Preselection'.
[133] Shepherd, 'State and Federal MPs Describe Death'.

frequently cited. Howe positions her 'right' to intervene in legislative debates with reference to her gender, academic credentials, and large online reach. In 2024 she claimed daily contact with 120,000 email subscribers and to have over 1 million social media views per month.[134] She was the organiser and host of the inaugural 'National Life Summit' in 2024, where she bestowed a 'lifetime achievement award' upon Margaret Tighe.[135] In early 2025, she noisily opposed a NSW bill aimed at improving abortion access for rural patients. In mid-2025, she made content with far-right Senator Pauline Hanson, who later asked a Senate question about abortion using Howe's talking points.[136]

Social media is central to Howe's ascendance within the anti-abortion movement. She can be understood through the lens of the 'political tradwife', a term Sophia Sykes and Veronica Hopner coined to describe conservative female social media influencers. Exemplifying this trend is African American far-right influencer Candace Owens, who has built an international media profile through her controversial and provocative posting and content. Political tradwives combine a feminine, wife-and-mother image with a public-facing career, using social media to advance their highly conservative views. They advance traditional nationalist ideologies 'through the birth of children and/or their positions of political, social, and cultural advocacy'.[137] Social media enables these women to disseminate their ideology while building and profiting from their personal brands. It is unclear if Howe has sought to monetise her YouTube platform or how many donations she receives through her website. However, she has spent considerable sums on Facebook and Instagram advertising, promoting both herself and anti-abortion rhetoric and talking points.[138] In 2025, Howe also sold limited edition 'merch' of mugs, t-shirts, jumpers and caps.[139] Howe shares traits with other conservative female influencers but stands out for her direct personal involvement in politics and the legislative process, and confrontational in person persona.

Discussion

Reproductive rights have become a sudden flashpoint in Australian political discourse, often intertwined with broader cultural and ideological battles. The United States' intensified abortion politics post-*Roe v. Wade*, closely covered in Australian media, along with the rise of far right and anti-gender movements internationally,

[134] Richards and Biggs, 'Power, Passion and Preselection'.
[135] Marilyn Rodrigues, 'Pro-Life Summit a "Resounding" Success', *The Catholic Weekly*, 5 December 2024, https://catholicweekly.com.au/joanna-howe-pro-life-summit-a-resounding-success/.
[136] Joanna Howe (@DrJoannaHowe), *Instagram*, 25 August 2025, https://www.instagram.com/reels/DNxhL2Z3vNS/; Pauline Hanson, 'QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE – Stillborn Baby Payment', Senate Hansard, 26 August 2025, 771–72, https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/chamber/hansards/28834/toc_pdf/Senate_2025_08_26_Official.pdf;fileType=application/pdf.
[137] Sophia Sykes and Veronica Hopner, 'Tradwives: Right-Wing Social Media Influencers', *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 53, no. 4 (2024): 467.
[138] Helen Karakulak, 'SA Anti-Abortion Lobbyist in Top Three National Social Media Spenders', *In Daily*, 13 November 2025, https://www.indailysa.com.au/news/just-in/2025/11/13/sa-anti-abortion-lobbyist-in-top-three-national-social-media-spenders.
[139] Joanna Howe (@DrJoannaHowe), *Instagram*, 22 August 2025, https://www.instagram.com/p/DNp9cVXP_--/.

underscore the transnational nature of this politicisation. Collectively, these events in late 2024, occurring across state and federal lines, illustrate the transformation in anti-abortion organising and politics now that abortion decriminalisation has been achieved. They suggest renewed efforts to heighten political focus on abortion within Australia, mirroring the resurgence of abortion debates in other national contexts.

Within the LNP, the rising power of far-right figures, who make opposition to abortion central to their political identity, is significant. These politicians are attempting to make abortion an ideological litmus test within the party, turning it into a partisan electoral issue – a move also pursued by MP Robbie Katter within the KAP. Senator Jacinta Nampijinpa Price's rise was marked by her 2025 defection from the National Party to the Liberal Party in an unsuccessful bid for the Liberal deputy leadership. Senator Matt Canavan, more willing to toe the party line in 2024 but still closely linked to anti-abortion politics in Queensland and federally, became the leader of the National Party in March 2026. Also notable is Senator Alex Antic's growing power in SA and nationally. He views Trump as a model for 'how to dominate a party from the inside, humiliate opponents and control narrative'. Antic is part of a growing trend in Australian and global far-right politics of 'ideological actors less interested in governing than fighting'.[140] Price, Canavan, and Antic make explicit visual and rhetorical references to Trump and the Republican MAGA movement, working to bring anti-abortion tropes into the political spotlight. They reveal strategic alignment of Australian anti-abortion politicians with global far-right agendas.

Abortion, in this context, functions as a linchpin in a wider project to reassert traditional gender roles, suppress progressive reforms, and to consolidate a broader far-right agenda. In the events described there are also glimmers of the emerging co-articulation of anti-abortion politics with broader conservative ideological claims about gender and race. Antic's transphobic exchange with witnesses at the hearings into his 'born alive' bill, and the newly elected Queensland government's attack on trans health care shortly after the state election, exemplify the uses of anti-gender frames. The imbrication of abortion politics within a racialised vision of Australia is also evident – in the discussion of Hood's SA bill in relation to birth rates in 'our Western world', in Canavan's derogation of birthing on country, and in Price's broader hostility to reconciliation. Australian anti-abortion politics is increasingly enmeshed in far-right tropes and contexts, indicating the future evolution of anti-abortion claims.

These recent developments in Australian abortion politics also reveal a troubling pattern of democratic erosion and procedural manipulation. Several recent events reflect distorted applications of democratic procedure to suppress dissent and debate: the withdrawal of a parliamentary pair and reported intimidation of MPs in South Australia; the online 'trolling' of a SCALC inquiry witness by a federal anti-abortion

[140] Jason Koutsoukis, '"A Very Dangerous Man": How Alex Antic is Shaping the Liberals', *The Saturday Paper*, 21 June 2025, https://www.thesaturdaypaper.com.au/podcast/very-dangerous-man-how-alex-antic-shaping-the-liberals.

Senator; and Queensland's unprecedented parliamentary motion to prohibit abortion debate for four years. These actions undermine democratic norms. These developments coincide with increasingly strategic efforts to shift party dynamics. In particular, the Liberal Party has seen a resurgence of tactics such as branch stacking and ideological 'entryism', a twenty-first century version of the factional takeover.

Lastly, social media has transformed the reach and rhetoric of anti-abortion politics, with troubling consequences for abortion rights supporters. Activist Joanna Howe represents a new generation of digitally savvy conservative women. Her influence and follower count grow after each clash or controversy, as does her platform in mainstream media.[141] Howe's online constituency engages in digital mobilisation – petitions, form emails – and real-world activism such as letterboxing, calls, and rallies, aimed at pressuring cautious or wavering MPs. This mobilisation manifests on and offline in vitriolic, hateful, and threatening ways.

Although Howe's combative style of activism, coupled with its integration into new media, appears markedly different from the traditional conservatism associated with earlier anti-abortion figures such as Margaret Tighe, there are notable similarities. Both foreground motherhood as central to their identities and to femininity more broadly, both profess adherence to Catholicism, and both employ depictions of abortion that stress the violent destruction of foetal life while erasing the experiences and perspectives of those who seek abortions. Yet Howe's differences illustrate the far-right turn of contemporary abortion politics in Australia and globally. In the twentieth century Tighe was publicly focused on the so-called 'life issues' of abortion, euthanasia, IVF, and cloning. Over the course of 2025, Howe's content has gradually expanded from abortion to encompass anti-trans content, while she has also posted in support of Hanson and Price amidst criticism of their controversial actions and comments about multiculturalism and immigration.

Although each case study was an ostensible defeat for opponents of abortion, we argue that legislative victory is not the primary metric by which to assess the activism discussed. Each failure and setback assists in the dissemination and promotion of anti-abortion rhetoric and arguments in parliament, in media, and in ever expanding networks on social media. In this contemporary Australian moment, in which opponents of abortion seek to legislatively chip away at rights and access and seize control of the discursive construction of abortion, the counter-offensive is occurring simultaneously online and in parliament, allowing anti-abortion activists to shape events in ways that would have been unimaginable for their predecessors.

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[141] Between May 2025 and January 2026, Howe's follower count on Instagram grew by over 55,000.

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About the authors

Barbara Baird AM, Emeritus Professor in Women's & Gender Studies at Flinders University, lives and works on the sovereign land of Kaurna people. She researches the politics of sexuality and gender in twentieth and twenty-first Australia. She is the author of *Abortion Care is Health Care* (Melbourne University Publishing, 2023) and co-author of *Personal Politics: Sexuality, Gender and the Remaking of Australian Citizenship* (Monash University Publishing, 2024).

Prudence Flowers is a senior lecturer in US History at Flinders University. Her research focuses on social movement activism, modern conservatism, and the politics of gender, sexuality, and the body. She is the author of *The Right-to-Life Movement, the Reagan Administration and the Politics of Abortion* (Palgrave, 2019) and *The Reagan Revolution* (Routledge, 2025).

Erica Millar is an interdisciplinary gender studies scholar and senior lecturer in Crime, Justice and Legal Studies at La Trobe University, Naarm. Her research focuses on the cultural politics, history, law and provision of abortion in Australia, with her next major work focused on institutional power and the hospital provision of abortion. She is the author of *Happy Abortions: Our Bodies in the Era of Choice* (Zed Books, 2017).

ORCID

Barbara Baird http://orcid.org/0000-0002-2862-3176
Prudence Flowers http://orcid.org/0000-0002-3746-8112
Erica Millar http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1219-2922