



## ROMANIA'S ABORTION BAN – A WARNING FOR TODAY

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### ABSTRACT

*In a time when society claims to champion women's empowerment and human rights, the ongoing reality of abortion challenges the integrity of these values. This paper explores abortion not merely as a medical procedure but as a deeply moral and social crisis—one that has taken the lives of over 63 million unborn children and left countless women unsupported and unheard. Drawing from both history and present-day realities, it revisits Romania's Decree 770 under Nicolae Ceaușescu, where forced pregnancies and abortion bans turned women into tools of the state, stripping them of bodily autonomy and leading to devastating human costs. Today, though the messaging around abortion has shifted, the consequences remain stark: women are often made to believe that motherhood and ambition are incompatible, and abortion is presented not as a choice but as the only option.*

**Keywords:** Abortion Ethics, Women's Autonomy, Reproductive Rights.

### INTRODUCTION

In a world where women continue to break barriers in politics, science, and industry, one fundamental question remains disturbingly unresolved: Does a woman have the right to control her own body? In the 21st century, an age marked by scientific progress, legal reforms, and growing awareness of human rights, it is both staggering and disheartening that a woman's right to make decisions about her own body remains a subject of fierce political debate and legislative control. The issue of abortion is not just about pregnancy; it is about power, autonomy, and the persistent societal belief that a woman's body is not truly her own. Across the world, and in varying degrees, governments continue to legislate against a woman's right to choose, often under the banner of protecting life or preserving tradition. But beneath these

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claims lies a deeper, more troubling truth: abortion bans are rarely about life—they are about control.

These bans, enforced in courtrooms and parliaments far removed from the realities of everyday life, reflect a long-standing pattern of systemic mistreatment and marginalisation of women. Women are expected to bear children, raise families, and serve as caretakers of society, yet when it comes to making personal, intimate decisions about their health and future, their voices are often dismissed or silenced altogether. In many countries, abortion is criminalized even in cases of rape, incest, or where the mother's life is at risk—signaling that even the most traumatic circumstances do not earn a woman the right to govern her own body.

This control extends beyond reproductive health. In places where abortion is banned or severely restricted, access to contraception, sexual education, and maternal healthcare is also often limited. Women face economic penalties, social shame, and in some cases, imprisonment for choices that should be protected as basic human rights. Their pain is dismissed, their consent overlooked, and their lives devalued—all in service of outdated ideologies that prioritise the abstract concept of "life" over the living, breathing individuals forced to carry pregnancies against their will.

It is no coincidence that these restrictions often go hand in hand with broader forms of gender inequality. In societies where abortion is banned, women are more likely to face domestic violence, wage gaps, political underrepresentation, and inadequate healthcare. When women are denied agency over their reproductive choices, they are denied agency in every aspect of life, from education and employment to personal safety and freedom. This article challenges the reader to confront a difficult but necessary question: If a woman cannot even be trusted to make decisions about her own body, what rights does she truly have at all?

## **WOMEN OR MACHINES**

In 1966, just a year after Nicolae Ceaușescu rose to power as the communist leader of Romania, he implemented one of the most draconian reproductive policies in modern history by making abortion illegal. Driven by his vision of national strength through population growth, Ceaușescu declared that the fetus was not merely a private matter but "the property of the entire society." He condemned those who avoided parenthood, labelling them as "deserters" who betrayed the fundamental law of national continuity. This policy, known as Decree 770, was

part of a broader effort to boost Romania's declining birth rate and solidify state control over citizens' private lives.

Decree 770, enacted in 1967 under the authoritarian regime of Romanian dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu, was a cornerstone of his aggressive pro-natalist policy. Signed into law by the communist government, the decree severely restricted access to abortion and contraception, aiming to increase the country's population rapidly. Ceaușescu envisioned a stronger Romania built through demographic expansion, viewing large families as a patriotic duty and a means of national development.

As a result of this decree, a significant baby boom occurred, and the children born in the years that followed became known as the "decreței"—a term derived from the Romanian word *decret* (meaning "decree"), with *decrețel* as a diminutive. These individuals represent a unique generation shaped by the social, economic, and political consequences of Ceaușescu's reproductive policies, which had lasting impacts on Romanian society, including widespread illegal abortions, overcrowded orphanages, and increased maternal mortality.

Grandiose proclamations were a hallmark of Nicolae Ceaușescu's rule, as he pursued a sweeping—and ultimately disastrous—vision of a society moulded after the so-called “new socialist man.” His regime was marked by contradictions: while constructing colossal palaces to glorify his power, Ceaușescu subjected his people to brutality, poverty, and neglect. In his drive for industrialisation, he abandoned traditional agriculture and forcibly relocated rural populations into bleak, unheated concrete apartment blocks as part of his urbanisation policy.

Nepotism flourished under his regime. Ceaușescu appointed over 40 of his relatives to high-ranking government positions, most notably his wife, Elena Ceaușescu (sometimes mockingly referred to as “Madame Ciciu”), who was officially praised as “the best mother Romania could have,” despite her notorious lack of warmth or compassion. Lavishly indulgent, she reportedly demanded 40 residences and a steady supply of luxury items, including furs and jewels sourced from ordinary shops.

Elena viewed dissent with deep suspicion—even within her own family. To ensure absolute loyalty, she allegedly had her children's conversations monitored. Her contempt for the Romanian people was unmistakable. When faced with public complaints about food shortages caused by her husband's catastrophic economic policies, she is infamously quoted as saying, “The worms are never satisfied, no matter how much food you give them.”

Ceaușescu's abortion ban—formalised through Decree 770—was a central pillar of his broader agenda to strengthen Romania by dramatically increasing its population. Before 1966, Romania had one of the most liberal abortion policies in the world. Abortion had become the primary means of birth control, with an estimated four abortions for every live birth. But with the stroke of a pen, that changed overnight: abortion was outlawed for the vast majority of women. Only a few exceptions were allowed—women who had already given birth to at least four children, or those with high-ranking positions in the Communist Party, could still legally obtain abortions. Simultaneously, the regime banned all forms of contraception and sex education, removing virtually every option for family planning.

To enforce the decree, the government created an intrusive and dehumanising surveillance apparatus. So-called “menstrual police”—a nickname for state agents tasked with monitoring reproductive compliance—were dispatched to workplaces and schools to conduct regular pregnancy checks on women of childbearing age. If a woman failed to conceive after repeated checks, she was labelled unproductive and could be subjected to a “celibacy tax”, a punitive fine meant to pressure women into motherhood. This oppressive policy reflected the regime's view of women not as individuals with agency, but as instruments of state policy, valued primarily for their reproductive capacity.

Ceaușescu's draconian reproductive policies produced the initial result he sought. Within just one year of the abortion ban, Romania's birth rate doubled. But the long-term consequences were far more devastating. These children—born not into privilege but into a crumbling, authoritarian state—would go on to face some of the harshest conditions in modern Europe. Unless you were part of the Ceaușescu inner circle or the communist elite, life was bleak. Yet for this generation of children, it was particularly unforgiving.

Studies later revealed that those born in the years immediately following the abortion ban fared significantly worse than children born just a year earlier. They scored lower on cognitive tests, struggled more in school, had poorer outcomes in the labour market, and were far more likely to end up in prison. Deprived of adequate resources, parental care, and opportunities, many grew up in overcrowded orphanages or on the streets, abandoned by a system that had forced their birth but failed to ensure their well-being. The decree remained in effect until the final days of Ceaușescu's rule. On December 16, 1989, in the city of Timișoara, a spark of resistance ignited what would become the Romanian Revolution. Thousands took to the streets to protest decades of oppression. Many of the demonstrators were teenagers and university students—

members of the very generation born under Decree 770. Security forces responded with brutal violence, killing dozens.

One opposition leader, a 41-year-old professor, later reflected on what moved him to protest despite his fear: it was his 13-year-old daughter who insisted he go. “What is most interesting,” he said, “is that we learned not to be afraid from our children.” Most of the protesters were between 13 and 20 years old—the very children the regime had demanded into existence.

Just days later, on December 21, Ceaușescu stood before a crowd of over 100,000 in Bucharest, attempting to deliver another bombastic speech. But this time, the crowd turned. Young people again led the charge, shouting “Timișoara!” and “Down with the murderers!” His rule had finally collapsed.

Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu attempted to flee the country with an estimated \$1 billion, but were quickly captured by the military. After a brief trial—held on Christmas Day, 1989—they were found guilty of crimes against the state and executed by firing squad. Thus ended one of Eastern Europe’s most repressive regimes, toppled in large part by the very generation it had coerced into being. Nicolae Ceaușescu may not have used the literal term *machine*. Still, in both policy and practice, he reduced women to their biological functions, viewing them less as individuals with rights and more as state assets to manufacture future citizens. His regime treated women's bodies as factories for the state, monitored, controlled, and punished for failing to produce.

## **WOMEN OR SLAVES**

Women have undergone huge sufferings since they can remember. Even the basic rights were denied to them in almost all parts of the world, and even today, women are still fighting for a lot of things. Marches and movements for different social causes like inequality, discrimination, property and inheritance rights, etc, and now, still, the freedom of not being able to choose what's best for her own body?

In the past, one could still give the benefit of the doubt that the people of those times had backwards thinking and only wanted women to be more or less slaves, to clean, cook, and reproduce. But now that the times have changed, women want to rise and shine and wish to do more than just be a housewife or reproduce for the “betterment of the economy”. The Bolsheviks viewed abortion not merely as a moral issue, but as a tragic consequence of

capitalist exploitation. They believed that under capitalism, women were so economically oppressed and unsupported that many were left with no choice but to terminate pregnancies they could not afford to carry to term. In their eyes, abortion was a symptom of a broader social injustice, not a personal failing.

Despite this ideological stance, the early Soviet state initially chose to retain the tsarist-era ban on abortion, which classified the procedure as premeditated murder and imposed severe criminal penalties. This was largely due to the Bolsheviks' focus on rebuilding the war-torn country and their belief that a growing population was essential to building socialism. It wasn't until 1920, under Lenin's leadership, that the Soviet Union became the first country in the world to legalise abortion, marking a significant ideological and policy shift. This move was framed as a temporary solution, acknowledging the desperate conditions many women faced, while promising that under a fully developed socialist system, abortion would become unnecessary as the state provided full support for mothers and children.

Is it wrong for a woman not to want to be a mother? Is it wrong for a woman not to want to be a mother of more than one child? Is it wrong for a woman not to want to be a mother of more than two children? Is it wrong for a woman not to want to be a mother of the child that she conceived from her rapist? Is it wrong for a woman not to want to be a mother at the age of just 14? Is it wrong for a woman to make her own decisions about her own body? Why is everything about the society, about the economy, the army, and not about the one who is reproducing them? If people believe that women not reproducing are running away from their social role and harming the population of the country, then it's supposed that forcing someone to undergo immense pain and suffering is running away from the moral values of a human being. Now, I have seen men arguing that their mothers never complained about being in pain during or after labour, and that they didn't take much rest and were able to work immediately after giving birth, so the women who complain about the pain these days are just making excuses and want attention. This is the problem: women were never understood. They weren't allowed to speak on this matter, often hiding their emotions, as even if they did, there would be little to no help at all. Additionally, comparing the 90s and the 2000s, the environment was much healthier in the former. Lifestyles have changed with the ever-evolving luxuries in life. Pollution, overcrowding, eating habits, and so much more affect our lives daily, bringing slow yet drastic changes.

Women are woken, and hundreds of studies are being done. What is often overlooked in discussions about repeated childbirth is the significant physical toll it takes on a woman's body. Each pregnancy and delivery introduces new risks, and the trauma of childbirth compounds with every repetition. Multiple pregnancies can become life-threatening, as the risk of maternal mortality increases with each subsequent birth. After the first pregnancy, the likelihood of premature births rises—a condition where the baby may be born before vital organs are fully developed, often resulting in lifelong physical disabilities.

Medical experts warn that after five vaginal deliveries or even just three cesarean sections, a woman's body begins to show signs of serious strain. The risks of uterine rupture, bladder injuries, abnormal placentation, and ectopic pregnancies increase substantially. In abnormal placentation, the placenta embeds too deeply into the uterine wall, while in ectopic pregnancies, the embryo implants outside the uterus—both of which are potentially fatal if not addressed promptly.

Furthermore, the WHO reports that pregnancy and childbirth are among the biggest causes of death for women in developing countries like India. Even researchers at Columbia University have found that women who have given birth more than five times face a significantly higher risk of postpartum haemorrhage. This dangerous condition occurs when the uterus, having lost elasticity from repeated pregnancies, fails to contract properly after the placenta is removed, leading to severe, often life-threatening bleeding. It's all about asking questions that we already know the answers to. The abortion ban is just one of the inequalities towards women. When does it stop? All of it?

## **WOMEN OR JUST A HUMAN**

A simple thing to understand here is that if a woman wants to have a baby, they can have the baby. If that woman is happy to do so despite the situation, we should be encouraging her, but if not, for whatever reason, one still needs to be sensitive about her decision. Men don't go through periods every month, which is like stabbing nonstop for almost seven days straight, and they don't know what it feels like to give birth, which feels like breaking 20 bones at once. So why do men and even some women who believe that abortion is murdering a living being get to have a say on someone's body? At the end of the day, it is the mother's health that needs to matter first to have a healthy baby or even a baby at all!



Over five years, researchers at the University of California, San Francisco conducted a comprehensive longitudinal study involving more than 1,000 women across 21 states. The findings revealed that women who received abortions were no more prone to experiencing negative emotions, psychological distress, or suicidal ideation than those who were refused the procedure. Five years after the abortion, an overwhelming 99% of participants affirmed that they had made the correct choice, with relief emerging as the most frequently reported emotional response. Conversely, women who were denied abortions showed heightened psychological distress. A study led by Biggs and colleagues found that those unable to access abortion care initially exhibited greater anxiety, lower self-worth, and diminished satisfaction with life when compared to their counterparts who successfully obtained abortions. As time passed, the mental and emotional burdens were compounded by a rise in physical health complications, and tragically, two women eventually died due to childbirth-related issues. These outcomes underscore the profound and potentially life-threatening impact of restricting access to safe and legal abortion services.

Women who are denied access to abortion also encounter heightened economic instability. According to findings from the Turnaway Study, as analysed by the Advancing New Standards in Reproductive Health (ANSIRH) group at the University of California, San Francisco, these women face significantly more financial hardship than those who successfully obtain abortion care. Indicators of this economic strain include lower credit scores, increased rates of bankruptcy and eviction, and a higher likelihood of living below the poverty line. Additionally, women denied abortions are more likely to remain in abusive relationships or to raise children without a supportive partner.

The repercussions extend beyond the mothers themselves—children born from unwanted pregnancies often endure severe disadvantages. Because their mothers are more likely to experience financial hardship, these children are disproportionately affected by poverty and material deprivation. Research also shows that such children tend to form weaker emotional bonds with their mothers, a factor associated with adverse developmental outcomes both in the short term and throughout life. Over time, they are more prone to social, emotional, and psychological difficulties, and studies have found they are more likely to require hospitalisation for psychiatric conditions than either their siblings or children born from planned pregnancies.

Moreover, when abortion is inaccessible within one's state, the necessity to travel long distances imposes additional psychological and financial burdens. State-level bans and



restrictions create logistical, emotional, and economic barriers, contributing to increased stress, anxiety, and feelings of powerlessness. The need to disclose their reasons for travel, especially in stigmatising environments, can further erode a person's sense of privacy and autonomy. For individuals already struggling, those living in poverty, in rural areas, or belonging to marginalised groups, including people of colour, LGBTQ+ individuals, and adolescents, these challenges are even more pronounced. They are often the most affected by abortion bans and the least equipped to overcome the barriers imposed by restrictive laws, underscoring the deep health and social inequities embedded in reproductive policy. Hence, decades of psychological research affirm that the most effective way to protect women's mental and emotional well-being is to ensure that abortion services are safe, affordable, and accessible to all, without discrimination, delay, or fear, because they are women but are humans first.

## CONCLUSION

The very concept of abortion sparks ongoing debate, largely because it hinges on a deeper philosophical and ethical question: What defines a human life? Some argue that a fetus is merely a cluster of cells, while others firmly believe that abortion equates to taking a life. If abortion is indeed murder, as some claim, how can it be supported at all? The core of this dilemma lies in one crucial question: Is a fetus a person?

To address whether abortion constitutes murder, we must first define personhood. According to the dictionary, a person is "an individual possessing human traits and emotions." Determining personhood involves examining both similarities and distinctions, whether the being in question shares biological systems, emotional capacities, and physical characteristics with recognised human life, while also existing as a distinct entity. The real question, then, becomes: Do unborn children meet the criteria for personhood?

Although a fetus may not initially appear human in its earliest stages, much of what defines a person is determined shortly after fertilisation. Within hours, genetic traits such as eye colour, hair type, gender, and even aspects of personality are already encoded in the embryo's DNA. In just a few weeks, often before a woman even realises she is pregnant and external features like ears, eyes, fingers, and toes begin to form. Internally, the early structure of bones and ligaments is also being laid down.

By the 20th week of gestation, a female fetus has already developed her full reproductive system, including all the eggs she will ever produce in her lifetime. And perhaps most

compelling for many is the fact that around five weeks into pregnancy, the fetal heart begins to beat, a milestone often used to argue that life has officially begun. This point raises a powerful question: if we consider the stopping of a heartbeat as a clinical sign of death, should we not also regard the start of a heartbeat as an indication of life? If so, could this heartbeat mark the moment when a fetus gains moral or legal consideration as a living human being?

Developmental biology and embryology both confirm that from the earliest stages, preborn children are living, individual members of the human species—*Homo sapiens*. Despite their size, level of development, or dependence, they exhibit both shared human traits and distinct genetic identity, making them undeniably part of the human family. Seen in this light, the unborn are not fundamentally different, only in stage. Just as a newborn differs from a toddler, and a child from an adult, a fetus represents an earlier phase in the continuum of human life. And if human dignity and personhood are not tied to age, ability, or independence, then every human being—regardless of developmental stage—should be afforded equal moral worth and the same fundamental rights. To deny that worth based solely on location or level of development risks creating arbitrary standards for whose life deserves protection, and whose does not.

Abortion is more common than many realise. Statistics show that one in four women will undergo a chemical or surgical abortion by the age of 45. Of these women, more than half (54%) identify as Christian, and six out of ten are already mothers. These facts challenge the assumptions often attached to those who seek abortions. The woman making this choice may not match any caricature. She might be the one sitting next to you in church each week, the woman who smiled at you in the grocery store, or the kind barista who handed you coffee this morning. Unplanned pregnancies are just that, unplanned. They can happen to anyone, regardless of values or background. We must remember that while premarital sex may be considered a moral failure in some belief systems, pregnancy itself is not a sin. It is a human experience that demands compassion, not judgment.

Yet we live in a culture where abortion is often promoted as a form of empowerment, with companies and institutions investing millions into that narrative. But behind that messaging lie complex realities and not only for the women affected, but also for those in the medical profession. Former abortion providers like Dr. Anthony Levatino, Dr. Kathi Aultman, and Dr. Patti Giebink have spoken out about how their views changed over time, revealing that even professionals can come to reconsider what they once believed to be healthcare.

In a post-Roe world, the responsibility of the pro-life movement has only deepened. It is not enough to oppose abortion; the goal must be to support women before and after birth, not with condemnation, but with compassion. No woman should feel that abortion is her only option. By offering real alternatives, such as adoption, emotional support, financial resources, and community care, we can show that empowerment does not have to come at the cost of a life. True choice means meeting women where they are with empathy, honesty, and hope. And it means building a world where no one faces an unplanned pregnancy alone.

Abortion remains one of the most pressing moral and human rights issues of our time. Every procedure ends a life before it even begins, silencing the heartbeat of a child before they draw their first breath. At the same time, women are being failed—not empowered—by a culture that tells them they must choose between their future and their motherhood. Society sends the message that a woman cannot pursue her goals and carry a child at the same time, as if her biology and dreams are inherently at odds. But abortion often isn't a true choice. It's a decision made in fear, isolation, or under pressure, not freedom. There is no empowerment in being told the only path forward is the loss of life. The toll is staggering, over 63 million lives lost. It is time to reframe the conversation: to defend both women and children, to build systems that support life, and to replace despair with hope. The ending of life through abortion must stop, not just for the unborn, but for the dignity, value, and strength of every woman who deserves better than what abortion offers.