

[Opinion](#)

[Guest Voices](#)



Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz and Dr. Sarah Traxler look on as U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris speaks as she visits an abortion clinic in Minneapolis March 14. It was the first time a president or vice president visited an abortion clinic. (OSV News/Reuters/Nicole Neri)



by Rebecca Bratten Weiss

[View Author Profile](#)

[\*\*Join the Conversation\*\*](#)

September 20, 2024

[Share on Bluesky](#)[Share on Facebook](#)[Share on Twitter](#)[Email to a friend](#)[Print](#)

I was standing in an aisle at Whole Foods, comparing prices on coconut milk, when I felt something like a cork popping inside me. Suddenly, I was hemorrhaging. By the time I got to my car, my trousers were soaked with blood, and before I made it home, the cramping had started.

About a week before, I'd had a miscarriage, which had been sad, but undramatic, and uncomplicated. I'd assumed the sick, shaky feeling that had bothered me for a few days was normal, and that a batch of Thai coconut soup would help me feel better. But as it turned out, I needed a lot more than coconut soup. At the ER, the medical team told me my miscarriage had been incomplete. I was losing blood rapidly, and at risk of infection. I needed a procedure I'd never heard of, called a D&C, with a general anesthetic. I was so dizzy and light-headed that it's difficult to remember the details, but I vividly recall the relief at seeing the anesthesiologist loom over me, a promise of blissful unconsciousness.

Since the repeal of *Roe v. Wade*, I've had ample opportunities to recall my first miscarriage, as women tell stories about similar experiences. Some of these women, like me, received swift care for their medical emergencies. Others, who miscarried in states that have passed strict abortion laws, tell stories about being denied care, being sent home, or being forced to wait and bleed in their cars. These stories make me aware of how different my life-threatening miscarriage might [have turned out](#), had the pro-life movement achieved its goals sooner. The movement I supported [could have killed me](#).

So when Pope Francis, commenting on the United States' 2024 presidential race, [asserted that](#) both former president Donald Trump, a Republican, and Vice President Kamala Harris, a Democrat, are "against life" â?? the former because of his immigration stance, the latter because of her abortion stance â?? I felt he was assessing the situation on a very superficial level.

**[Related: Pope Francis should have ducked the question about the US election](#)**

This is not a criticism of Pope Francis, who is not a policymaker. As the head of the Roman Catholic Church, he is obliged to represent its teachings. Trump's extreme anti-immigration policies and Harris' permissive abortion policies put both of them firmly outside the parameters of Catholic orthodoxy. The church teaches that procuring an abortion is wrong. It also teaches that harming immigrants is wrong.

But when we vote for candidates, are we voting for them because of the beliefs they hold, or because of the policies they intend to enact? A voter may disagree with Harris' personal stance on abortion and still recognize, on the level of practical politics and actual outcomes, that her policies will help build a society that is genuinely pro-life — both in the broad "consistent life ethic" sense, and in the narrow "anti-abortion" sense.

In the broad sense, Harris' policies tend to align with a [consistent ethic of life](#). On [gun violence](#), for instance, Harris supported the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act, which involves violence prevention programs, expanded background checks and stricter penalties for gun trafficking. Presently, she oversees the White House Office of Gun Violence Prevention. Trump, on the other hand, thinks gun laws do not work, despite [significant evidence](#) to the contrary. Given the epidemic of [gun violence](#) in the United States, opposition to gun control is a fundamentally anti-life position.

[On health care](#) Harris favors access to affordable health care for all Americans. As a senator, she co-sponsored the Medicare For All act. She has worked to protect patients' rights, to reduce prescription drug costs, and to expand protections for people with preexisting conditions. Trump, meanwhile, tried to cut funding to Medicare. He also proposed cutting funding to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which could put public health in the United States at risk, especially in the event of another pandemic.

Harris [also supports](#) raising the minimum wage, stopping corporate price gouging, expanding the earned income tax credit, expanding the child tax credit and other policies that protect lower income and middle-class families.



Abortion opponents demonstrate as U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris visits an abortion clinic in Minneapolis March 14. (OSV News/Reuters/Nicole Neri)

But what about abortion? This is the argument I heard for years. No matter how terrible a Republican candidate was, we still had to support them, because of abortion. No matter how strong a Democratic candidate was on the economy, health care, just war, capital punishment, immigration or other life issues, we still had to oppose them, because of abortion. Today, some who identify as staunchly pro-life might still withhold support from Harris because of her position on reproductive health issues. And yes, Harris is very pro-choice and does plan to codify *Roe v. Wade's* protections into law.

I understand that these pro-life voters view abortion very differently than Harris does, and would agree with Pope Francis' assessment of her personal positions. But even if one is fixated on abortion to the neglect of every other issue, it makes sense to vote for policies that functionally reduce abortion versus just ideologically condemning it. So in this narrower sense, too, Harris remains the more pro-life

candidate. I would even argue that she is the only pro-life candidate.

Since the repeal of *Roe*, abortion rates [have gone up](#). Last year saw the highest abortion rates in a decade, with approximately a million abortions being performed. So Trump's supposed pro-life achievement did not succeed in reducing abortions. It did, however, succeed in preventing women from accessing desperately needed medical care. It did cause [stress and pain](#) for women in states with abortion bans, and poorer outcomes for their children.

Fewer medical students [are pursuing careers](#) in women's reproductive health, in states with abortion bans. What will this mean for women in the future? Will my daughter be able to access ordinary reproductive health care like pap smears? If she gets pregnant, will she be able to find a doctor? If she has a medical emergency, will she be given care?

*Roe* has been gone for more than two years and pro-life leaders have done nothing to increase health care access or financial protections for low-income women.

[Tweet this](#)

Politicians who are ignorant about women's bodies â?? and unaware of the many complicated, deeply personal, often traumatizing situations women face in reproductive health â?? think they can make abortion go away simply by denying access. But they can't. Abortion will not vanish because of bans, even when those bans come with heavy penalties. Studies indicate that abortion rates in nations where it is legal and nations where it is illegal are [about the same](#). What appears to be a greater driver of abortion rates [is income level](#). Lower income nations where abortion is illegal tend to have much higher abortion rates than higher income nations where it is legal.

Anyone who is serious about reducing abortion rates will focus on building a strong economy that serves the working and middle classes, with robust safety nets and accessible, affordable resources. This is not new information. People, myself included, have been writing about this for years.

So why do pro-life leaders refuse to listen? *Roe* has been gone for more than two years and pro-life leaders have done nothing to increase health care access or

financial protections for low-income women. Should we assume that they are not serious about dealing with abortion, since they haven't put any effort into doing the things that actually work? Are they, perhaps, actually invested in harming women, since that's one area in which these bans are effective?



Pope Francis answers a question from a journalist aboard his flight back to Rome Sept. 13, after visiting Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, Timor-Leste (or East Timor) and Singapore. In response to one question, the pope said both candidates for U.S. president are "against life." (CNS/Lola Gomez)

Whether Pope Francis is right when he says Harris is against life, I don't know. I would need to talk to her personally to make such an assessment. But I do know he's wrong to compare anti-immigration policies with policies that allow for abortion. A nation could have extremely permissive abortion laws, and still have few abortions, because its leaders intelligently opted to focus on crafting policies that safeguard life and the common good.

Ultimately, it's not about what either candidate personally believes, but what policies they intend to enact, and what their outcomes will be. From this perspective, Harris' policies are more protective of life than Trump's. There's not even a comparison.

"We're not going back," Harris has said. Well, we've had a taste of what it's like to go back, and it is anything but pro-life.

A version of this story appeared in the **Oct 11-24, 2024** print issue under the headline: Maybe Kamala Harris is not 'pro-life' â?? but her policies are.