

Societal Response to Legal Judgments: What Society Can Learn from Librarianship in the Context of the US Jurisprudence on Abortion Rights

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Abstract

Librarianship is a profession guided by ethical principles that prioritize access to information and the protection of intellectual freedom. These principles can provide a framework for understanding how society should respond to legal judgments, particularly those that result in societal division. One such example is the 1973 landmark judgment in the United States, *Roe v. Wade*, which legalized abortion. Despite multiple attempts to repeal it, a successful attempt in 2022 resulted in another landmark decision to overturn the ruling, prompting a political outcry from the Left.

However, it is crucial for all parties involved to adhere to ethical standards in responding to such divisive issues. This paper argues that librarianship can serve as a model for navigating divisive legal judgments. If society can adopt principles such as access to information and protection of intellectual freedom, it can move towards a more inclusive and respectful discourse. The adoption of these principles can enable all parties, including judges, citizens, and lawmakers, to better respond to divisive legal judgments. Librarianship emphasizes the importance of respectful and informed discourse, and its ethical principles can be used as a guide for creating an atmosphere of mutual respect and understanding.

Keywords: *Roe v. Wade*, *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, Librarianship, Judges, Ethics, America, United States, Constitution

INTRODUCTION

In 1969, Norma McCorvey, under the name “Jane Roe,” challenged Texas’s criminal abortion laws as a twenty-five-year-old single woman. Texas deemed abortion unconstitutional, except in circumstances where the mother’s life was in danger. McCorvey filed a lawsuit when she was pregnant with her third child and claimed that the state’s abortion laws violated the US Constitution by infringing on a woman’s right to privacy. However, she initially lost her case, and she was forced to give birth. The case was eventually heard alongside that of Sandra Bensing, a twenty-year-old woman from Georgia, at the Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS).

In a landmark ruling in 1973 (*Roe v. Wade*), SCOTUS voted seven to two that the US government lacked the power to prohibit abortions, thereby determining that a woman’s right to terminate her pregnancy was protected by the Constitution.¹ However, many on the political right pushed to repeal *Roe*, arguing that the ruling was unconstitutional because the US Constitution does not mention abortion.

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¹ BBC News, “*Roe v Wade*: What Is US Supreme Court Ruling on Abortion?,” May 4, 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-54513499>.

Over the years, court battles arose over abortion, but the federal safeguards for abortion rights withstood these legal challenges for almost half a century. However, in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, SCOTUS overturned this longstanding precedent, marking an extreme departure for the Court, which became significantly more conservative during the Trump administration.² In *Dobbs*, Justice Samuel Alito wrote, "Until the latter part of the 20th century, there was no support in American law for a constitutional right to obtain an abortion."³

Before the 1960s, abortion was illegal in most parts of the United States unless it was a therapeutic treatment performed to save the mother's life. However, the push to liberalize state laws during the 1960s led to a change in the perception of abortion, making it a topic of discussion in the press, state legislatures, and public forums across the country. Colorado was the first state to change its abortion law in 1967. By 1973, fourteen US states had changed their laws to allow for a broader definition of therapeutic abortion, and four states had repealed their prohibitions, allowing abortion on demand.⁴

Abortion liberalization was supported by a diverse group of people, including physicians, lawyers, Protestant clergy, rabbis, moderate Republicans, and population-control advocates. However, it was second-wave feminists who revolutionized the cause, with the Berkeley Women's Liberation group stating in 1969 that "by denying a woman ultimate ownership of her body, present abortion laws also deny her a final decision in determining the direction of her life."⁵ It was not until the end of the 1970s that large numbers of conservative evangelicals and fundamentalists organized against abortion, a shift that ultimately transformed the right-to-life cause,⁶ viewing the growing permissive culture as the "greatest assault on Christian values."⁷

Despite criticism of the decision, *Roe v. Wade* remained the legal precedent on abortion rights in the United States until 2022. The principle of *stare decisis*, which requires adherence to previous decisions on the same or similar grounds, had been the main obstacle to overturning *Roe*.⁸ However, in 2022, SCOTUS's decision in *Dobbs* overturned the almost half-century-old *Roe v. Wade* precedent.⁹ The Guttmacher Institute, a pro-abortion think tank, had stated earlier that if SCOTUS reversed *Roe*, twenty-six US states were likely to outlaw abortion.¹⁰ Democrats had already started the push for a federal codification of *Roe* and had prompted President Joe Biden to pack the courts,¹¹ indicating that Democrats were unlikely to give up the cause.

Since the *Dobbs* decision in 2022, the regulation of abortion has been left to individual US states. As of July 2024, twenty-seven US states had enacted laws restricting abortion based on gestational age, with bans ranging from six weeks to more than twenty-four weeks of pregnancy.¹² Another fourteen states had implemented near-total bans on abortion, with limited exceptions.¹³ This legal landscape is continuously evolving, with many laws facing court challenges and ongoing legislative action. Some states have enshrined abortion rights in their constitutions, while others have imposed severe restrictions or outright bans, reflecting a deeply divided national stance on the issue.¹⁴

² Kevin Breuninger, "How Supreme Court Went from *Roe v. Wade* to Drafting Opinion to Overturn It," CNBC, May 6, 2022, <https://www.cnbc.com/2022/05/06/how-supreme-court-went-from-roe-v-wade-to-drafting-opinion-to-overturn-it.html>.

³ *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Org.*, 597 U.S. 215, 241 (2022).

⁴ Mary C. Segers and T.A. Byrnes, eds., *Abortion Politics in American States* (New York: Routledge, 2016), eBook, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315286730>. First published in 1995 by M.E. Sharke.

⁵ Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America* (New York: Penguin Books, 2001).

⁶ Seth Dowland, *Family Values and the Rise of the Christian Right* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Penn. Press, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.9783/9780812291919>.

⁷ Axel R. Schäfer, *American Evangelicals and the 1960s* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 2013), <https://doi.org/10.1093/jahist/jau450>.

⁸ Melissa Murray, "The Symbiosis of Abortion and Precedent," *Harvard Law Review* 134 (2020): 308.

⁹ Julia Haines, "State Abortion Laws in the Wake of *Roe v. Wade*," June 28, 2024, <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/articles/a-guide-to-abortion-laws-by-state>.

¹⁰ Kyle Morris, "Roe v. Wade: What It Is and What the Leaked Supreme Court Draft Opinion Could Signal," Fox News, May 3, 2022, <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/what-is-roe-v-wade-leaked-supreme-court-draft-opinion>.

¹¹ Sam Dorman, "If *Roe v. Wade* Is Overturned, Here's What Happens," Fox News, May 3, 2022, <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/if-roe-v-wade-is-overturned-what-happens>.

¹² Haines, "State Abortion Laws in the Wake of *Roe v. Wade*" (n 9).

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*; Center for Reproductive Rights, "Abortion Laws by State," accessed July 29, 2024, <https://reproductiverights.org/maps/abortion-laws-by-state/>.

As a result of the controversy that at times surrounds court cases, it is crucial for interested parties to exhibit ethical standards and conduct themselves with prudence. While the division in American society is inevitable, it is essential for citizens, lawmakers, and judges to learn from the principles of librarianship. This can help reduce or eliminate the division by promoting principles such as impartiality, integrity, and commitment to providing access to information and knowledge to all members of society. By embracing these values, individuals with differing opinions can engage in productive discussions and find common ground, leading to a more united and harmonious society.

THE “SACRED DOCUMENTS OF LIBRARIANSHIP”

Librarianship is a noble profession built on a foundation of values and ethics that are intricately connected to the cultural norms of society. Despite their operational differences, libraries across the world are united by these shared principles. These documents vary depending on the location of the library, but some of the most prominent include the Library Bill of Rights (LBR), the Code of Ethics, and the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) statements.

The LBR, which the American Library Association (ALA) issued in 1939, serves as a cornerstone for libraries in the United States. It outlines the rights that library users should expect and provides a clear policy statement on intellectual freedom, guaranteeing everyone access to library materials without restrictions or limitations on free thought and expression.¹⁵

ALA’s Code of Ethics is a comprehensive policy guide that helps librarians make ethical decisions in the course of their work. The Code of Ethics emphasizes the special obligation that librarians have to ensure that information and ideas continue to flow freely to future generations.¹⁶

IFLA also has a wealth of documents and frameworks that address privacy and information access. These include the “IFLA Statement on Libraries and Intellectual Freedom,”¹⁷ which outlines the role that libraries play in promoting and protecting intellectual freedom. IFLA also has documents that address privacy in the library environment¹⁸ and the right to be forgotten,¹⁹ which guide libraries on how to balance the right to privacy with the public’s right to information. Together, these “sacred documents of librarianship” collectively serve as a beacon for librarians and libraries, guiding them in their efforts to promote knowledge, freedom, and access to information for all citizens.

VALUES AND ETHICS OF LIBRARIANSHIP

Values and ethics are integral to the profession of librarianship. Values serve as guiding beliefs that motivate librarians to pursue a certain course of action, while ethics represent the set of rules and norms that govern behavior. The two are intertwined and play a critical role in shaping the practices and principles of librarianship.

As Gorman²⁰ has noted, the values of librarianship include stewardship, service, intellectual freedom, rationalism, literacy and learning, equity of access to recorded knowledge and information, privacy, democracy, and the greater good. These values serve as the foundation for the ethical obligations of librarians who have a duty to fulfill the needs of various stakeholders, including readers, the soul of the book, the profession, staff, and themselves.²¹

¹⁵ Martin Garnar and Trina Magi, eds., *A History of ALA Policy on Intellectual Freedom: A Supplement to the Intellectual Freedom Manual, Tenth Edition* (Chicago: American Library Association, 2015), <https://www.alastore.ala.org/IFM10supplement>.

¹⁶ American Library Association, ALA Code of Ethics (adopted at the 1939 Midwinter Meeting by the ALA Council; amended June 30, 1981; June 28, 1995; Jan. 22, 2008; and June 29, 2021), <https://www.ala.org/tools/ethics>.

¹⁷ IFLA, “IFLA Statement on Libraries and Intellectual Freedom” (International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), Mar. 1999, <https://repository.ifla.org/handle/123456789/1424>).

¹⁸ IFLA, “IFLA Statement on Privacy in the Library Environment – IFLA” (endorsed Aug. 14, 2015), <https://www.ifla.org/publications/ifla-statement-on-privacy-in-the-library-environment/>.

¹⁹ IFLA, “IFLA Statement on the Right to Be Forgotten” (Feb. 25, 2016), <https://www.ifla.org/news/ifla-statement-on-the-right-to-be-forgotten/>.

²⁰ Michael Gorman, *Our Enduring Values Revisited: Librarianship in an Ever-Changing World* (Chicago: American Library Association, 2015).

²¹ Priti Singh and Rajani Mishra, “Professional Ethics in Librarianship: An Indian Perspective,” *Library Waves* 3, no. 1 (June 30, 2017): 74–79, <https://www.librarywaves.com/index.php/lw/article/view/52>.

Ethics in librarianship is a discipline of applied ethics that focuses on the ethical duties and dilemmas of librarians and information workers when making decisions about information gathering, processing, and dissemination. When faced with ethical dilemmas, librarians are motivated by a sense of responsibility, consideration of consequences, respect for user rights, and questions of virtue.²² In their role as intermediaries between information producers, distributors, and users, librarians must constantly strike a balance between fulfilling the needs of information seekers and preserving the legitimate use of information resources within the bounds of the law.²³ Political impartiality and privacy are two of the most important values in this area, as they are integral to ensuring the fair and impartial dissemination of information.

Therefore, values and ethics play a crucial role in shaping the principles and practices of librarianship. By upholding these values and ethical principles, librarians serve as role models and instructors of intellectual activity, helping to form people's views on how they see and use information.

POLITICAL IMPARTIALITY

In addition to the ethical obligations of maintaining political impartiality, librarians also play a crucial role in promoting freedom of information and intellectual freedom. This is reflected in the LBR, which states that “[l]ibraries should provide materials and information presenting all points of view on current and historical issues. Materials should not be proscribed or removed because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval.”²⁴ It is the responsibility of librarians to ensure that all individuals have equal access to information, regardless of their political views or beliefs.

Moreover, political impartiality is not just about remaining impartial but also about respecting the diverse perspectives and opinions of all users.²⁵ Librarians must provide access to a wide range of materials and viewpoints, and they must not allow their personal opinions to interfere with their professional duties. This includes avoiding the promotion of political ideologies and not allowing personal beliefs to influence collection development or reference services.²⁶

Librarians must also be aware of the legal implications of their actions, as they are subject to the same laws as other citizens. This includes the right to free speech, as well as the laws protecting freedom of information and intellectual freedom. Librarians must balance their obligation to maintain political impartiality with their responsibility to respect the rights of library users and to follow the law. Therefore, political impartiality is a fundamental value of librarianship and is critical in ensuring that libraries remain safe spaces for the free exchange of ideas and information.

PRIVACY

Warren and Brandeis²⁷ have described privacy as being free of intrusion and having “the right to be let alone.” This is consistent with Alfino’s²⁸ definition, which views privacy as being concerned with the right to personal space and the ability to live a rational, autonomous life. Privacy is vital in libraries because it allows users to pick and access material without fear of judgment or punishment. The right to read can be jeopardized if

²² Don Fallis, “Information Ethics for Twenty-First Century Library Professionals,” *Library Hi Tech* 25, no. 1 (2007): 23–36, <https://doi.org/10.1108/07378830710735830/FULL/XML>.

²³ A. Reddy and L. Aswath, “Understanding Copyright Laws: Infringement, Protection and Exceptions,” *International Journal of Research in Library Science* 2, no. 1 (2016): 48–53, <http://www.ijrls.in/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Understanding-Copyright-Laws-Infringement-Protection-and-Exceptions1.pdf>.

²⁴ American Library Association, Library Bill of Rights (adopted June 19, 1939, by the ALA Council; amended Oct. 14, 1944; June 18, 1948; Feb. 2, 1961; June 27, 1967; Jan. 23, 1980; Jan. 29, 2019), <https://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/librarybill>.

²⁵ Adebowale Jeremy Adetayo, “Examining the Ethical Dilemmas of Political Impartiality in Records Administration: A Phronetic Approach,” *Records Management Journal* 33, no. 2/3 (2023): 136–47, <https://doi.org/10.1108/RMJ-02-2023-0008>.

²⁶ David K. Berninghausen, *The Flight from Reason. Essays on Intellectual Freedom in the Academy, the Press, and the Library* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1975).

²⁷ Samuel D. Warren and Louis D. Brandeis, “The Right to Privacy,” *Harvard Law Review* 4, no. 5 (Dec. 15, 1890): 193, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1321160>.

²⁸ Mark Alfino, “Information Ethics in the Workplace: Mislplacing Privacy,” *Journal of Information Ethics* 10, no. 2 (2001): 5–8, <https://search.proquest.com/openview/2cac0f9bd278fee7f1be97038579aee7/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=2035668>.

an individual's privacy is jeopardized, and full freedom of choice in libraries necessitates both a diverse range of literature and confidence that interaction and choices are not being monitored.

Librarians are ethically obligated to protect their users' privacy. Principle III of ALA's Code of Ethics states,²⁹ "We protect each library user's right to privacy and confidentiality with respect to information sought or received and resources consulted, borrowed, acquired or transmitted." Article VII of ALA's LBR reads, "All people, regardless of origin, age, background, or views, possess a right to privacy and confidentiality in their library use. Libraries should advocate for, educate about, and protect people's privacy, safeguarding all library use data, including personally identifiable information."³⁰ IFLA also has provisions for privacy protection in its Code of Ethics for Librarians and other Information Workers.³¹ This underscores the importance of privacy in libraries and the role of librarians in upholding these values.

To further support privacy, libraries have implemented various measures, such as computer screens that protect against prying eyes and noise-dampening technologies that prevent eavesdropping. They also have policies in place to ensure that the privacy of both patrons and staff is protected. In conclusion, privacy is an essential aspect of libraries, and librarians are ethically obliged to protect the privacy of their patrons and staff. A diverse range of literature and protection of user information must be maintained to uphold privacy rights and to guarantee freedom of choice for users. This includes protecting against censorship, intrusion, and monitoring, and also implementing measures to ensure that privacy is maintained within the library environment.

LIBRARIANSHIP AND ABORTION

Librarianship has been intertwined with the ongoing debate surrounding abortion, which has been a source of controversy in the United States for many years. The right to access information and the importance of information freedom have led US librarians to play a significant role in ensuring that accurate and comprehensive information about abortion is readily available to those who seek it. In 2008, when database managers discovered entries declaring that abortion is a human right, the term "abortion" was included as a stop term in the reproductive health database Popline. This decision was eventually reversed thanks to the efforts of librarians at the University of California, San Francisco, who gained national attention and support.³² More recently, a team of librarians and health science information professionals at the University of Michigan Library created a research guide to assist researchers, students, and anyone else searching for reliable information about abortion policy and research.³³ This is in line with the views expressed by members of Bixby,³⁴ including Jill Barr-Walker, Nancy Berglas, Biftu Mengesha, and others, who argue in an article published in the *American Journal of Public Health* that health science librarians have a responsibility to provide evidence-based information about abortion.³⁵

However, following SCOTUS's decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, the Oklahoma state legislature approved a law that banned almost all abortions, starting from fertilization, making it the strictest abortion prohibition in the country. As a result, Oklahoma librarians were reportedly instructed to "avoid providing any counseling on abortion to patrons seeking information about the process."³⁶ In response, ALA's Executive Committee issued a statement condemning states that adopted measures that would result in criminal or civil liability for providing information

²⁹ American Library Association, Code of Ethics (n 16).

³⁰ American Library Association, Library Bill of Rights (n 24).

³¹ IFLA, IFLA Code of Ethics for Librarians and other Information Workers (short version), Aug. 2012, <https://www.ifla.org/publications/ifla-code-of-ethics-for-librarians-and-other-information-workers-short-version/>.

³² Bob Roehr, "US Federal Funded Website Bans 'Abortion' as Search Term," *BMJ* 336, no. 7648 (Apr. 10, 2008): 792–93, <https://doi.org/10.1136/BMJ.39545.500833.DB>.

³³ University of Michigan Library, "New Guide Offers Resources on Abortion Policy and Research," July 18, 2022, <https://www.lib.umich.edu/about-us/news/new-guide-offers-resources-abortion-policy-and-research>.

³⁴ Bixby Center for Global Reproductive Health at UCSF, <https://bixbycenter.ucsf.edu/>.

³⁵ Jill Barr-Walker et al., "Countering Misinformation About Abortion: The Role of Health Sciences Librarians," *American Journal of Public Health* 111, no. 10 (Oct. 1, 2021): 1753–56, <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2021.306471>.

³⁶ Jana Hayes and Dana Branham, "Oklahoma City Library Releases Guidelines on Patrons Seeking Abortion Information," *The Oklahoman*, July 22, 2022, <https://www.oklahoman.com/story/news/politics/2022/07/22/okc-library-workers-now-have-guidelines-on-giving-abortion-information/65379342007/>.

about abortion.³⁷ This highlights the delicate balance that librarians in general must strike in maintaining their commitment to intellectual freedom while also respecting the sensitive nature of certain topics and avoiding any potential harm to their patrons.

APPLYING LESSONS OF LIBRARIANSHIP VALUES AND ETHICS TO LEGAL OUTCOMES

SCOTUS's overturning of *Roe v. Wade* sparked widespread protest and left a lasting impact on American society, highlighting the need for the various players involved, such as judges, citizens, and legislators, to learn from the principles of librarianship.

JUDGES

As judges play a crucial role in any legal system, they must maintain a constitutional perspective in their decisions. However, making laws from the bench, rather than basing decisions solely on the constitution, may indicate a disregard for the very document judges have sworn to uphold. This is a concern that has been raised by prominent US legal scholars, including Archibald Cox, Alan Dershowitz, and Laurence Tribe, who deemed the initial SCOTUS ruling of *Roe v. Wade* (before it was overturned) as fundamentally flawed, as well as former SCOTUS Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg who emphasized that laws regarding such sensitive issues should be made by the legislature, not the Court.³⁸⁻³⁹⁻⁴⁰ In this context, the guidance provided by librarianship can be extremely valuable.

Librarianship, as a profession, is governed by a strict ethical code that requires its members to maintain political impartiality. ALA's Code of Ethics⁴¹ states that librarians should not advance private interests at the expense of library users or their employing institutions. Similarly, the IFLA Code of Ethics for Librarians and other Information Workers⁴² emphasizes the importance of maintaining the neutrality of users in the workplace. This ethical code, which is universally applicable to librarians across the world, requires them to function solely based on the code, rather than personal beliefs or political affiliations.

Judges, like librarians, should operate based solely on the principles outlined in the constitution and judicial precedents and refrain from legislating from the bench or allowing personal beliefs and political affiliations to unduly influence their decisions. Just as librarians must remain impartial gatekeepers of information guided by their ethical codes, judges have a duty to uphold the constitution as impartial arbiters of the law. They should interpret laws and review legislation through an objective constitutional lens rather than be swayed by partisan interests or a results-oriented approach aimed at achieving a particular policy outcome. By steadfastly adhering to their roles as impartial judges devoted to upholding constitutional tenets, judges can help preserve the integrity, independence, and legitimacy of the judicial branch. Drawing inspiration from the ethical obligations of the library profession to remain free from conflicts of interest and political entanglements, judges can better insulate courts from being viewed as just another political institution. Doing so may avoid future legal controversies that undermine faith in the judiciary as an apolitical branch meant to serve as a check on the excesses of the other branches of government.

³⁷ Andrew Albanese, "ALA Responds as Legislation Threatens Librarians for Offering Information on Abortion Services," *Publishers Weekly*, Aug. 11, 2022, <https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/industry-news/libraries/article/90051-ala-responds-as-legislation-threatens-librarians-for-offering-information-on-abortion-services.html>.

³⁸ Timothy P. Carney, "The Pervading Dishonesty of *Roe v. Wade*," *Washington Examiner*, Jan. 23, 2012, <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/the-pervading-dishonesty-of-roe-v-wade>.

³⁹ Bill Donohue, "Lying About *Roe v. Wade*," *Newsmax*, May 4, 2022, <https://www.newsmax.com/billdonohue/roe-wade-lying-abortion/2022/05/04/id/1068493/>.

⁴⁰ Meredith Heagney, "Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg Offers Critique of *Roe v. Wade* During Law School Visit," *University of Chicago Law School*, May 15, 2013, <https://www.law.uchicago.edu/news/justice-ruth-bader-ginsburg-offers-critique-roe-v-wade-during-law-school-visit>.

⁴¹ American Library Association, Code of Ethics (n 16).

⁴² "Just Released: IFLA Code of Ethics for Librarians and other Information Workers (Full Version)," Aug. 12, 2012, <https://www.ifla.org/news/just-released-ifla-code-of-ethics-for-librarians-and-other-information-workers-full-version/>.

CITIZENS

Citizens can greatly benefit from librarians' strict adherence to privacy codes. These codes ensure that the personal information and privacy of patrons are protected at all times, and librarians make sure not to infringe upon this right. A prime example of this can be seen in a US state case where a woman approached a school media specialist for information regarding her stepchildren's library circulation records.⁴³ The woman and her husband had previously obtained a court order requiring the children to use the surname of the natural father. However, when the woman requested that the library disclose the children's names as recorded in their records, the library declined, stating that doing so would violate state confidentiality laws.

The woman was eventually able to secure a court injunction, but the library's director noticed a misspelling of one of the children's names on the order. Despite the library attorney's urging to comply with the subpoena, the library declined to provide information regarding the child whose name was misspelled.⁴⁴ Subsequently, the father also requested the same information but was denied, as he couldn't produce a comparable court order.⁴⁵ This case illustrates the critical importance libraries place on observing ethical standards and patron privacy rights.

Rather than resorting to harassing judges or attempting to infringe on their privacy and peace in retaliation for unpopular rulings, citizens who vehemently disagree with a court judgment should voice their opinions through proper democratic channels to elected legislators who can take appropriate action to change laws. With the proliferation of digital media and social platforms, individuals today have an unprecedented ability to articulate their perspectives to a wider audience and lobby for legal reforms. Librarians' professional commitment to facilitating access to information can inspire citizens to productively use modern media to meet their information needs and petition governments.

Librarianship has consistently evolved to adapt to rapid technological change, seamlessly incorporating innovations like artificial intelligence (AI), the internet, virtual reality, cloud computing, and maker spaces into library services.⁴⁶⁻⁴⁷⁻⁴⁸⁻⁴⁹⁻⁵⁰ This demonstrates how the field prioritizes meeting patrons' evolving expectations and information needs using the latest technological advances. It is thus ethical and logical for citizens to leverage all capabilities of new mediums available to them to peacefully access information, engage in discourse, and advocate for their causes within the democratic process.

LEGISLATORS

Legislators play a vital role as the sole source of legislative authority empowered to enact new laws. However, they must take great care to ensure any laws passed fully comport with the constitution, as the judicial branch can invalidate legislative acts as violating constitutional principles. The ongoing debate over whether a constitution should be the preeminent governing authority versus a more malleable document that can be reshaped by contemporary majority viewpoints has profound consequences.

⁴³ Kenneth A. Winter, "Privacy and the Rights and Responsibilities of Librarians," *Katharine Sharp Review*, no. 4 (1997), <http://www.ideals.illinois.edu/handle/2142/78253>.

⁴⁴ Rhoda Garoogian, "Librarian/Patron Confidentiality: An Ethical Challenge," *Library Trends* 4, no. 2 (1991): 216–33, <https://www.ideals.illinois.edu/items/7733>.

⁴⁵ Kenneth A. Winter, "Privacy and the Rights and Responsibilities of Librarians" (n 43).

⁴⁶ Adebowale Jeremy Adetayo, "Absorptive Capacity and Smart Library," in *Handbook of Research on Emerging Trends and Technologies in Librarianship* (Hershey, PA: IGI Global, 2022), 310–26, <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-7998-9094-2.CH020>.

⁴⁷ Adebowale Jeremy Adetayo, Augustine I. Enamudu, and Folashade Munirat Lawal, "Exploiting Virtual Realities for Library Serial Services to Nigeria Disabled Patrons," *Library Philosophy and Practice (e-Journal)*, Jan. 1, 2021, <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libphilprac/6494>.

⁴⁸ Donna Ellen Frederick, "Libraries, Data and the Fourth Industrial Revolution (Data Deluge Column)," *Library Hi Tech News* 33, no. 5 (July 4, 2016): 9–12, <https://doi.org/10.1108/LHTN-05-2016-0025/FULL/XML>.

⁴⁹ Xueling Liang, "Internet of Things and Its Applications in Libraries: A Literature Review," *Library Hi Tech* 37, no. 2 (Apr. 6, 2020): 251–61, <https://doi.org/10.1108/LHT-01-2018-0014/FULL/XML>.

⁵⁰ Katy Mathuews and Daniel Harper, "One Size Does Not Fit All: Maintaining Relevancy in the Modern Makerspace Movement," *College & Research Libraries News* 79, no. 7 (July 5, 2018): 358–59, 358, <https://doi.org/10.5860/crl.n.79.7.358>.

Maintaining fidelity to a constitution's original meaning and structure as the enduring supreme law is crucial for preserving democratic governance and civil liberties. The US Constitution, shaped by the enlightened political philosophy of the Founding Fathers, established an ingenious system of checks and balances with separated powers designed to prevent any one faction from amassing unchecked control. Any revisions opening it to being rewritten based on passing popular sentiments could unravel its strong protections for individual rights, minority groups, and the democratic process itself.

Secondly, upholding an unchanging constitution provides invaluable stability, predictability, and legitimacy that allows for an orderly transfer of political power and safeguards the impartial rule of law. Frequent revisions based on the political winds could culminate in a de facto constitutional coup, with the document's meaning continually reshaped to entrench the party in power's agenda, as has occurred in some nations contravening democratic norms.⁵¹

From a jurisprudential perspective, maintaining longstanding principles of constitutional interpretation and limiting the document's meaning to its original public understanding, is vital. This originalist judicial philosophy, championed by former SCOTUS Justice Antonin Scalia, limits judicial activism by redefining constitutional rights. It upholds the primacy of the democratic legislative process by leaving policy matters to elected representatives, not to unelected judges who invent new rights.

In discharging their lawmaking duties, legislators can draw wisdom from librarianship's professional commitment to institutional neutrality and fidelity to established principles. The ALA Code of Ethics mandates that librarians distinguish personal viewpoints from professional responsibilities, ensuring all patrons receive equitable access to information, not censorship based on individual ideological biases.⁵² This objectivity in service to all societal stakeholders, not any one political faction, should inspire legislators to similarly set aside partisan agendas when deliberating laws affecting all citizens. Upholding a constitution as an impartial, unifying framework for all must supersede any effort to unilaterally redefine its meaning for expediency.

CONCLUSION

In the aftermath of SCOTUS's monumental decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, and in the context of other complex legal and ethical issues society grapples with, all parties involved would be well-served to look to the principles and ethics of professional librarianship as a model for responsible, impartial conduct. The library profession's unwavering dedication to protecting patron privacy and confidentiality, as well as its strict adherence to codes of ethics mandating political impartiality, serves as a shining example of how to navigate contentious social issues with integrity.

For judges, strict interpretation of a constitution's original public meaning without legislating policy preferences from the bench is crucial for preserving the judiciary's legitimacy as an impartial, unbiased arbiter. Just as librarians check their personal beliefs at the door, judges must be impartial umpires upholding the constitution and judicial precedents, not political actors. Citizens dismayed by court rulings should proactively voice dissent through legitimate democratic channels to petition lawmakers for legal reforms rather than attempt to encroach on personal privacy or sow disorder. The global library community's staunch defense of patron confidentiality highlights the need to respect others' rights, even amidst disagreement. Moreover, legislators have a solemn duty to uphold their oath to the constitution as the supreme law of the land when drafting legislation. Any efforts to revise or reinterpret its meaning based on passing political winds could precipitate a de facto constitutional coup, unraveling its system of checks and balances. Legislators can learn from librarians' professional principles of institutional objectivity in service to all patrons equitably.

The enduring US Constitution, an ingenious blueprint balancing democratic rule with robust protections for individual liberties, is a precious inheritance. Preserving its original meaning is vital for safeguarding the nation's democratic character and civil rights. Librarianship models the importance of impartiality, objectivity, respect for privacy, and ethical standards that all members of society should emulate, especially amidst social upheaval. Through embodying these qualities, citizens, lawmakers, and jurists can navigate turbulent times

⁵¹ John Mukum Mbaku, "Threats to Democracy in Africa: The Rise of the Constitutional Coup," Oct. 30, 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/africa-in-focus/2020/10/30/threats-to-democracy-in-africa-the-rise-of-the-constitutional-coup/>.

⁵² American Library Association, Code of Ethics (n 16).

productively while upholding the rule of law and democratic republican principles the constitution epitomizes. Looking to librarianship's ethos provides an ethical lodestar for meeting the challenges of the day with wisdom and restraint.