

Health

Number of abortions in U.S. hit historic low in 2015, the most recent year for which data is available

By Ariana Eunjung Cha

November 21 at 4:30 PM

Fewer U.S. women are having abortions than at any time since *Roe v. Wade*, according to new government figures released Wednesday.

In 2015, the most recent year for which data is available, a total of 638,169 abortions were reported, a decrease of 2 percent from 652,639 abortions in 2014. The abortion rate was 11.8 abortions per 1,000 women ages 15-44 in 2015, compared with 12.1 in 2014 and 15.9 in 2006.

In the years immediately after abortion was legalized nationwide in 1973, the number of legal abortions rose dramatically, reaching its peak in the 1980s. Abortions then began dropping at a slow rate until around 2006 to 2008, when they increased slightly, followed by even greater decreases in recent years.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention surveillance report comes at a heated time for abortion politics in the country, with Trump administration officials introducing new policies to reduce funding to abortion providers and state legislatures debating ever more restrictive laws on abortion. Just this week, a federal court in Mississippi [blocked the state's ban against abortions past 15 weeks gestation](#). In signing the bill into law, Mississippi Gov. Phil Bryant (R) had said he hoped to make the state the “safest place in America for an unborn child.”

While the CDC paper did not delve into the reasons for the decline,

Thank you.

Your subscription supports journalism that matters.

analysts have cited improved access to birth control, which has led to a decrease in unintended pregnancies, especially among teens, as well as the state laws regarding parental consent, waiting periods and other conditions that make it more difficult for women to get abortions.

"Analyses have suggested that improved contraceptive use played a role in the long-term declines. In some states, decreased access to abortion services contributed, as well," said Rachel Jones, principal research scientist for the Guttmacher Institute, a research group that supports women's right to abortion.

Chuck Donovan, president of the Charlotte Lozier Institute, the research arm of Susan B. Anthony List, which opposes abortion, added other possible causes: "a higher percentage of women today decide to carry an unexpected pregnancy to term, teenagers are less sexually active and with fewer partners, pro-life views are more prevalent among the rising generation than they were 40 years ago."

He called the decline "sharp and consistent" and pointed out that the U.S. abortion rate is half of what it was in 1980.

The data is isn't 100 percent complete — California, Maryland and New Hampshire did not participate, and the reporting is better in some places than others — but it nonetheless provides a window into the overall trends and demographics of who is seeking abortions. The report shows tremendous variation by age, race and geographic region.

While the abortion rate decreased across all age groups in 2015, women in their 20s accounted for nearly 60 percent of all abortions. The abortion rate was 19.9 for women ages 20-24 and 17.9 for ages 25-29.

White women had the lowest abortion rate, at 6.8 abortions per 1,000 women, and black women had the highest abortion rate at 25.1 per 1,000. “The findings in this report indicate that the number, rate, and ratio of reported abortions have declined across all race/ethnicity groups but that well-documented disparities persist,” Tara C. Jatlaoui, from the CDC’s division of reproductive health, and co-authors wrote.

There was also considerable variation among jurisdictions, from a rate of 2.8 abortions in South Dakota to 23.1 abortions in New York.

One major source of controversy in recent years has been the widespread availability of medical abortions or pills such as RU-486 that can be taken to induce abortion without surgical intervention. In 2015, about a quarter of all abortions involved medical abortion, which can be done only early in a pregnancy.

The report did not have information about deaths from complications of abortion in 2015, saying the data was still being assessed. In 2014, six women died as a result of legal induced abortion.



Ariana Eunjung Cha

Ariana Eunjung Cha is a national reporter. She has previously served as The Post's bureau chief in Shanghai and San Francisco, and as a correspondent in Baghdad. Follow 
