

It's actually true!

Yet Another False Narrative: Abortions Decreased More Under Democratic Presidents.

[This document was first posted to the MDFL website on 9/22/20. It was updated on 3/22/22 to include data on abortion trends during the Trump administration]

Note: The original article was published by *Michigan Right to Life* on September 16, 2020 in *Prolife News* and it is quoted here in full. The second chart, the footnotes, and the annotations in red or outlined in red have been added by *Michigan Democrats for Life*.

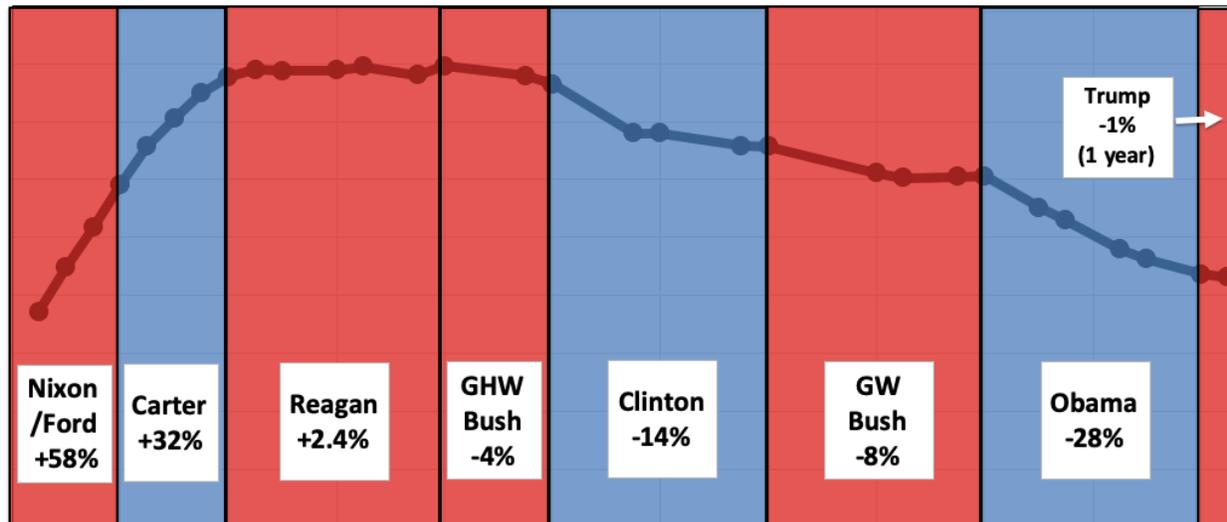
Go to <https://rtl.org/abortion-decrease-democratic-presidents/> to see the original article without annotations.



The article starts with a deceptive graphic. Why did they leave out Nixon, Ford, Clinton, and Obama?

Let's see what happens when we include all of the presidents since Roe v Wade.

Number of Abortions in the U.S.: 1973-2017



UPDATE: Abortions increased by about 3.6% under Trump. (See details below.)

Republican presidents are indicated by red and Democrats by blue.

When every administration is included, it is clear that abortions REALLY HAVE decreased more under Democrats. Read on to see why.

Summary:

- Stop pretending Jimmy Carter doesn't exist. **[I'll be glad to. How about also not pretending that Clinton and Obama don't exist and that Nixon and Ford were not Republicans?]**
- California, the state with the most abortions, stopped reporting abortion statistics in 1998; Bill Clinton doesn't get credit for pretending zero abortions happen in California. **[He doesn't need to. Even according to the data provided by *Michigan Right to Life* in this article, he still presided over the second biggest drop in abortions, surpassed only by Obama.]**
- Reagan reversed massive abortion increases before 1981 and initiated a decline that continues today—thanks to what President Obama called a “historic effort” to pass state-level prolife laws during his administration. **[Read on to see a better explanation.]**

For those who want the details:

Before we begin, it's important to note that the abortion issue is a lot deeper than who the president is. It ignores the 50 states and their individual abortion policies, cultural events, and the American people. **[That is true.]**

That said, there's been a talking point going around for some time claiming that abortions decrease more under Democratic presidents. The talking point has been revived in recent weeks as a way of whitewashing Joe Biden's support for abortion-on-demand through all nine months of pregnancy and tax-funding of abortion.

The talking point makes two gigantic errors. First, it acts like Jimmy Carter doesn't exist. Abortions increased massively under Carter, followed by a dramatic shift during the Reagan years of stopping those increases. **[Here is a more comprehensive narrative, based on the data provided by *Michigan Right to Life* in this article: After abortion was legalized nationwide by *Roe v Wade*, the number of legal abortions increased 58% over the last 3 years of the (Republican) Nixon/Ford administration and 32% in the (Democratic) Carter administration. That was followed by a dramatic shift, highlighted by a 14% decrease in the (Democratic) Clinton administration and a 28% decrease in the (Democratic) Obama administration. There were also much smaller decreases in two of the remaining Republican administrations and a small increase in the other. UPDATE: Abortion increased under Trump as well as Reagan, as detailed below.]**

Second, the claim relies on the CDC's abortion report. **[Actually, the claim is also borne out just as well by the data provided here by *Michigan Right to Life*.]** However, California stopped reporting abortions in 1998. California is the largest state, accounting for 23% of abortions in the country in 1997. Their abortion rate was the highest in the nation, nearly twice the national average.

It's dishonest to pretend that Clinton deserves credit for reducing all of these abortions that simply stopped being reported. People who don't realize this obviously have never researched abortion statistics, so their expertise isn't worth your consideration. **[The**

CDC actually avoids the problems that could be caused by missing data by basing each of its time-series tables on only the states that reported data for all of the years covered by that particular table.]

Let's look at the Guttmacher abortion numbers, which always includes California and a couple other smaller states that don't report abortions. Guttmacher is openly pro-abortion, and no friend of the prolife movement. While they don't have numbers yet for most of Trump's term in office, they have estimates going back to 1973.

Abortion Under Prolife Presidents:

Ronald Reagan: 1% increase

[I was able to confirm all of the figures cited except this one. The Guttmacher data actually indicates a 2.4% increase under Reagan.¹]

George H.W. Bush: 4% decrease

George W. Bush: 8% decrease

Abortion Under Other Presidents

Richard Nixon/Gerald Ford: 58% increase

Jimmy Carter: 32% increase

Bill Clinton: 14% decrease

Barack Obama: 28% decrease

Since the article purports to be about abortion under Democratic presidents, let's divide the candidates by political party.

Abortion under Republicans

Nixon/ Ford: 58% increase

Ronald Reagan: 2.4% increase

George H.W. Bush: 4% decrease

George W. Bush: 8% decrease

Abortion Under Democrats

Jimmy Carter: 32% increase

Bill Clinton: 14% decrease

Barack Obama: 28% decrease

It should also be noted that abortions decreased only 1.3% during the first year of the Trump administration, which is the last year for which national figures are available.¹

[UPDATE as of 3/22/22: The number of abortions then *increased* in the next two years of the Trump administration by 0.9% and 1.7% respectively, based on data from the 47 states that reported data to the CDC for all of the relevant years.² Another data source, which includes estimates for every state (including the 11 states that had not yet released data for 2020) indicates that this was followed by a 2.6% increase from 2019 to 2020.³ Together, these figures suggest an overall increase of about 3.6% during the four years of the Trump administration. These increases largely reflect

New

¹ Guttmacher Institute: <https://data.guttmacher.org/states/trend?state=US&topics=66&dataset=data> (click on button to download data)

² U.S. Center for Disease Control: <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/70/ss/ss7009a1.htm> - T1 down

³ Abort73: https://www.abort73.com/abortion_facts/us_abortion_statistics/

weakening of the 'economic safety net' and increases in the number of people without health insurance. The increase in 2020 also reflects the impact of the pandemic.]

A keen observer of these numbers will notice the chronological order of these presidents matches the abortion trends. There's important reasons for that, which we'll get to in a second. **[It does not even take an astute observer to notice that the title and rhetoric of this article are TOTALLY inconsistent with the data.]**

You may think it isn't fair to include Nixon and Ford in the non-prolife president list, but Republican doesn't necessary equal "prolife." **[That is certainly true.]** Though they made public statements expressing disapproval of abortion, it was Nixon's Supreme Court nominees who made Roe v. Wade possible, and Ford's one nominee, John Paul Stevens, spent decades as an abortion advocate on the Court. Doesn't that sound familiar? **[Yes, it sounds very familiar. It reminds me of how Michigan's purportedly pro-life Republican leadership never let legislation to end dismemberment abortion come out of committee during eight years with Republicans in control of the governorship and both houses of the legislature.]**

The narrative we are debunking usually includes a discussion of Joe Biden expressing his personal moral handwringing with abortion. The argument is that prolife people should totally ignore his policy positions and judicial nominee philosophy, because Biden has "struggled." Nixon struggled, but his judicial nominees are morally responsible for the death of nearly 60 million unborn children, who struggled in the womb to no avail.

Who sits on the U.S. Supreme Court is the area presidents have the most impact. **[That is certainly the hope of many pro-life voters, but the track record is not at all encouraging. Republican appointees constituted a majority of the court when five of them voted for Roe v Wade, and they have continued to constitute a majority of the court ever since. Republican presidents backed by prominent pro-life organizations have made ten of the last fourteen appointments to the court.⁴ Nevertheless, progress has been elusive and the future is likely to hold more disappointments for those who look to the Supreme Court to take bold steps to uphold a right to life.]** Since every abortion law in the nation has to be approved by the Supreme Court, almost every public policy choice comes down to who is appointing judges. When it comes to actual policies, it's tax-funding of abortions that has the greatest impact on abortion numbers, as we've seen undeniably in Michigan. **[Read on to see what has had an even greater impact.]**

Rather than just assume presidents are totally responsible for everything, here's the best "narrative" for presidents and national abortion statistics.

⁴ Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Justices_of_the_Supreme_Court_of_the_United_States

- Following Nixon's careless judicial nominations, *Roe v. Wade* and *Doe v. Bolton* legalized abortion through all nine months of pregnancy in America in 1973. Abortion numbers skyrocketed after being made legal. **[In all fairness, the huge increases under Nixon, Ford, and Carter reflected the impact of *Roe v Wade* more than any policies of those presidents.]**
- *Ford vetoed the original Hyde Amendment, which bans tax-funding of abortions. It was actually the Democratic-controlled Congress that overrode his veto, securing the first Hyde Amendment. [emphasis added]* The Hyde Amendment finally went into full affect in 1980 following a Supreme Court decision. While Ford expressed prolife sentiments in office, in later years he advocated for Republicans to ignore abortion. He led no substantive national prolife policy effort during his administration.
- Carter was not a loud abortion advocate, and at least did not touch the Hyde Amendment. However, he did nothing to actively address the alarming abortion increases. **[That puts him clearly ahead of Nixon and Ford and roughly on par with George H.W. Bush.]**
- Reagan was the first true prolife president, having reversed from signing a bill to legalize abortion as governor of California in 1967. Reagan made the issue a priority with judicial nominations (not all of which panned out, thanks to Joe Biden "borking" his top pick), administrative policies, and actively speaking out on abortion. Under his administration, the prolife movement found its footing, and the abortion increases stopped. **[Well, at least the increases slowed down.]**
- George H.W. Bush was not a natural prolife guy, but continued the policies of Reagan, resulting in the first sustained abortion decreases since *Roe v. Wade*. While deciding to uphold *Roe v. Wade* in 1992, the Supreme Court critically began to allow a new wave of prolife legislation in the states through *Planned Parenthood v Casey*, including parental consent for minors, waiting periods, and informed consent before abortion—all policies which help reduce abortions. **[The *Planned Parenthood v Casey* decision had a pro-choice component and a pro-life component. All five votes for the 'pro-choice' component were from Republican appointees. Four of the eight Republican appointees then joined the court's lone Democratic appointee in largely upholding a pro-life decision made by a lower court.⁵ The *Casey* decision was rightly seen as a disappointing setback for the pro-life movement.]**
- Clinton tried his best early in his administration to overturn the Hyde Amendment, but could only weaken it in cases of rape/incest, which account for less than 1% of abortions. During his administration, states began focusing on passing prolife laws. Despite public opinion moving towards abortion following *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, the revelation of the existence of partial-birth abortion in 1995 brought about a dramatic change in public opinion on abortion. Following the 1994 Republican

⁵ Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Planned_Parenthood_v._Casey

takeover of Congress and mired in personal scandals, Clinton lost the ability to advance his original policy agenda. **[Why doesn't this discussion of Clinton's record mention that the number of abortions decreased by 14% during his administration? That is a bigger decrease than occurred in all of the Republican administrations put together, even if the ones with increases are left out of the calculation.]**

- George W. Bush was a prolife president. Abortion decreases continued during his administration **[although at a much slower pace than under Clinton]** while states continued advancing prolife laws. Efforts to pass a national partial-birth abortion ban continued to dominate the abortion conversation.
- Obama made it his mission to expand abortion during his administration but was often thwarted by Congress. Obama spent all his political capital passing Obamacare in 2010, with provisions allowing backdoor funding of abortion through insurance plans. **[That statement requires clarification. Outside of Obamacare, most employer-financed health insurance and most individual policies include coverage for abortion if permitted by state law.⁶ Obamacare is actually more restrictive in the sense that coverage of elective abortions can only come in by the backdoor, since it cannot be financed through federal funds. Individuals who purchase private insurance through Obamacare are able to opt out of abortion coverage and they must pay for such coverage themselves if they decide to purchase a policy that includes it. Thus, although Obamacare's online marketplace is built around private insurance, it is much less favorable toward abortion coverage than the rest of the private insurance market.]**

He was unable to circumvent the Hyde Amendment as originally planned and allow full tax-funding of abortions. Prolife states mounted a massive response to Obamacare by passing prolife laws. President Obama acknowledged it during a personal address to Planned Parenthood, saying prolife states were "involved in an orchestrated and historic effort to roll back basic rights when it comes to women's health. Forty-two states have introduced laws that would ban or severely limit access to a woman's right to choose." **[Some of those laws were actually passed and implemented, but the ones with the largest potential impact were blocked by state and federal courts. Under the Casey decision, the only laws that are allowed to take effect are ones that do not have "the ... effect of placing a substantial obstacle in the path of a woman seeking an abortion." Thus, it is necessary to look elsewhere to explain the unprecedented 14% drop during the Clinton administration and 28% drop during the Obama administration.]**

⁶ Kaiser Family Foundation: <https://www.kff.org/womens-health-policy/issue-brief/exclusion-of-abortion-coverage-from-employer-sponsored-health-plans/>

Why did abortions decrease so dramatically during the Clinton and Obama administrations? A few pieces of state legislation that were not blocked by the courts may have helped a little. Growing awareness of the humanity of unborn children probably helped somewhat more. But the biggest reasons are two pieces of legislation that were enacted by Democrats over Republican opposition. Clinton's *Children's Health Insurance Program*⁷ and Obama's *Affordable Care Act* brought health coverage to many low-income pregnant women and their children who had not had coverage before. Abortion can seem like the only option for someone with no insurance who faces thousands of dollars in medical bills to have a baby. Much of the progress that has been made would be erased if we went back to the days when many low-income women had no health coverage for pregnancy, so that they had to choose between an abortion that might cost one month's rent and a delivery that might cost more than a full year's pay. Democratic policies in areas such as health care, minimum wage, and earned income credits reduce abortions by reducing the number of women who feel that abortion is their only viable option.

The trajectory of national abortion statistics is clear. With legalizing abortions, there was a massive increase. When the pro-life movement paused premature efforts to pass a constitutional amendment to overturn *Roe v. Wade* and focused on building public support and passing life-saving policies, abortions began a long-term decline that continues today. Since then, pro-abortion presidents and politicians have been largely impotent in attacking these state-level pro-life policies, except in states they control like New York and California, where the abortion rates were already astronomically high.

[Successes over the past thirty years were actually achieved through a combination of Democratic policies that reduce the demand for abortions and pro-life initiatives that seek to improve our laws and change minds and hearts. What would happen if the rest of the pro-life movement joined with *Democrats for Life* in promoting both of those strategies? We have a better way to be 'pro-life'!]

So, the next time someone tries to tell you Democrats do a better job at reducing abortions, tell them to check their sources. **[They will be glad they did!]** Then, ask them why they think abortions should be reduced, and make the conversation a productive one about basic human rights **[Yes! That is what we should be talking about!]** instead of yet another fake narrative pushed by a national media in the tank for Joe Biden. **[or a fake narrative by an organization that is risking its credibility by being in the tank for Donald Trump.]**

Your comments are welcome—send an email to: MichDemsForLife@yahoo.com

⁷ Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Children%27s_Health_Insurance_Program