



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on February 4, 2014

Guttmacher Says Abortions in U.S. Have Declined Since 1973

The Guttmacher Institute, formerly part of Planned Parenthood, issued a news release on February 3 showing that the abortion rate in the United States has dropped to its lowest level since 1973, the year when the Supreme Court handed down its *Roe v. Wade* decision.

The release cited the recently completed report "[Abortion Incidence and Service Availability in the United States, 2011](#)" by Guttmacher's research associates, Rachel K. Jones and Jenna Jerman.



The report notes that "the U.S. abortion rate declined to 16.9 abortions per 1,000 women aged 15-44 in 2011, well below the 1981 peak of 29.3 per 1,000 and the lowest since 1973 (16.3 per 1,000)."

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The report also found that the abortion rate fell 13 percent between 2008 and 2011, which represented a continuation of a long-term downward trend that had temporarily leveled off between 2005 and 2008. The number of abortions (1.1 million in 2011) also declined by 13 percent during the same time period.

The Guttmacher Institute was founded in 1968 by former Planned Parenthood president and former vice president of the American Eugenics Society, Alan F. Guttmacher. It was originally a division of Planned Parenthood Federation of American but became an independent, non-profit corporation in 1977.

The researchers who authored the report did not investigate reasons for the decline in abortions but did note that the period they studied (2008-2011) "predates the major surge in state-level abortion restrictions that started during the 2011 legislative session, and that many provisions did not go into effect until late 2011 or even later."

Rachel Jones, who was the lead author of the study, observed:

With abortion rates falling in almost all states, our study did not find evidence that the national decline in abortions during this period was the result of new state abortion restrictions. We also found no evidence that the decline was linked to a drop in the number of abortion providers during this period. Rather, the decline in abortions coincided with a steep national drop in overall pregnancy and birth rates. Contraceptive use improved during this period, as more women and couples were using highly effective long-acting reversible contraceptive methods, such as the IUD. Moreover, the recent recession led many women and couples to want to avoid or delay pregnancy and childbearing.

The Guttmacher report closely follows another report released by the Washington, D.C.-based National Right to Life Committee (NRLC) last month, "The State of Abortion in the United States." (To read a PDF of the report, click [here](#).) Upon its completion, National Right to Life President Carol Tobias said, "While the most recent data indicate a decrease in the annual number of abortions, tragically, more



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than 3,000 unborn children are still killed every day in the United States under the legal doctrine of *Roe v. Wade* and *Doe v. Bolton*.”

The NRLC report utilized data compiled by both the Guttmacher Institute and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC). The NRLC found: “After reaching an all-time high of over 1.6 million in 1990, the number of abortions performed annually in the U.S. appear to have fallen to around 1.1 million a year.”

NRLC continued:

If the percentages of decline CDC found were applied to Guttmacher’s most recent figure, abortions for the United States would now be just over 1.1 million a year, rather than the 1.2 million as Guttmacher said it recorded as recently as 2008. To get an idea of how far we’ve come, consider that 1.6 million unborn babies died in 1990.

While encouraging, the results of both reports indicate that pro-life people still have a long way to go to win their battle, as NRLC’s Tobias is painfully aware. She stated:

While overall fewer unborn children are being killed by abortion, the Guttmacher report tragically finds that more than one in five pregnancies ends in abortion and takes the life of a living unborn child. The right-to-life movement must continue its efforts to protect these children and their mothers from the tragedy of abortion and our society must do a better job in providing life-affirming alternatives.

As noted above, Guttmacher downplayed the impact of the many pro-life laws passed since 2011 because its study did not cover those years. However, it is likely that the sentiment responsible for the enactment of abortion restrictions has existed for a longer period than the laws themselves, since it is a time-consuming process to translate the will of the people into law. With more people joining the pro-life side of the issue, it makes sense that abortions would decline, with or without laws to restrict them.

Troy Newman, president of Operation Rescue, said that his group’s statistics indicate that 87 abortion facilities discontinued offering surgical abortions in 2013, with 81 of them closing permanently. He believes that among the reasons for the closures are a large increase in pro-life sentiment, a decline in demand for abortions, and the new state laws that set more stringent safety standards for abortion facilities.

“After the 2010 mid-term elections, conservative gains resulted in a wave of pro-life legislation flooding statehouses across America,” said Newman. “Much of that legislation was inspired by information gathered by pro-life groups, including Operation Rescue, which have increasingly publicized documentation of abortion abuses. Once legislators find out what is really going on at abortion clinics in their states, they understand the urgency of passing pro-life laws that protect women and their babies from clinics that prey on their vulnerabilities.”



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