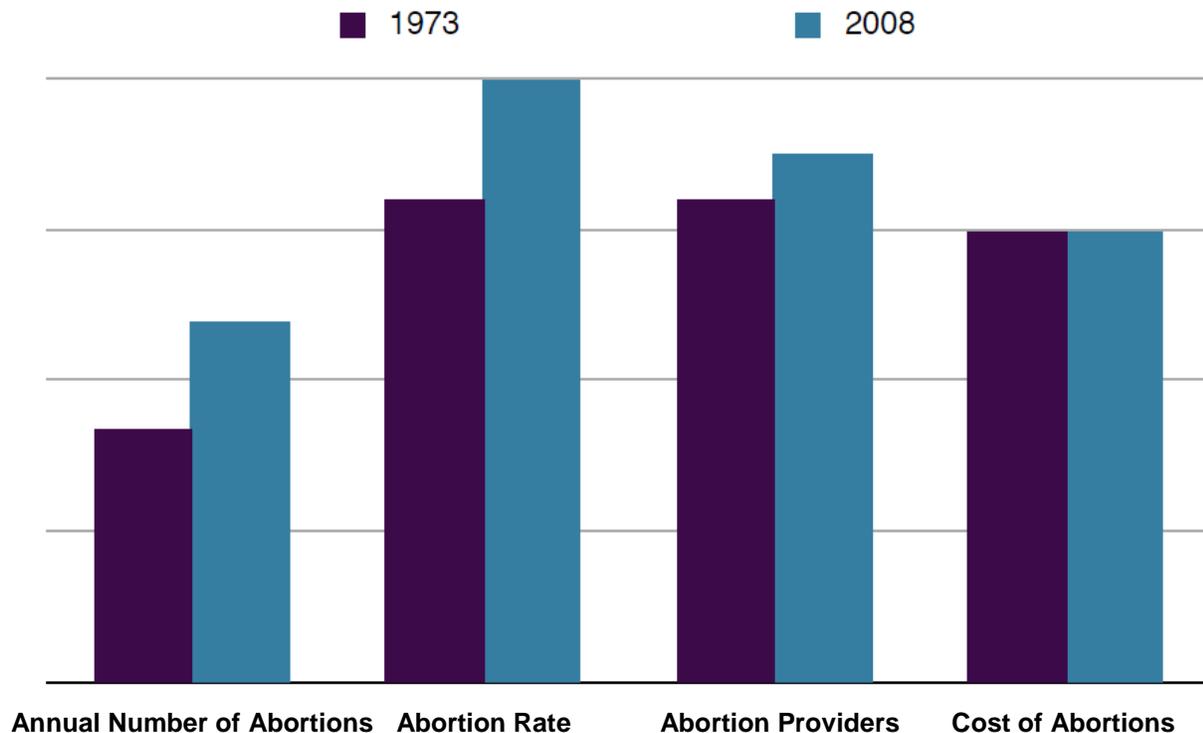


“Each time history repeats itself, the price goes up.”

An Assessment of the United States Pro-Life Movement After 35 Years

As the pro-life movement prepares to enter its fourth decade of fighting abortion, it is imperative that it look in the mirror and assess its progress towards ending abortion.

The 2011 Alan Guttmacher Report



The latest abortion statistics available to the public are provided by a January 2011 Alan Guttmacher Institute report titled, *Trends in Abortion in the United States, 1973-2008*.

The findings of this report are **devastating** to analyze.

Annual number of abortions: STABLE

Between 1973 and 2008, the annual number of abortions increased through the 1970's, leveled off in the 1980's, fell in the 1990's, and is now stable.

Abortion Rate: STABLE

The abortion rate rose following *Roe v. Wade*, began to decline in the 1980's, and is now stable.

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Abortion Rate Among Teenagers: STABLE

The abortion rate among teenagers declined in the late 1980's and the 1990's, and is now stable.

Proportion of abortions obtained by Hispanic women: INCREASING

The proportion of abortions obtained by Hispanic women increased between 1991 and 2004.

Poor and low-income women's share of abortions: INCREASING

Poor and low-income women account for an increasing share of U.S. abortions.

Proportion of women having multiple abortions: STABLE

Many women obtaining abortions have had a previous abortion, but the proportion has stabilized over time.

Chemical Abortions: INCREASING

The incidence of early medication abortion has increased dramatically in the last decade.

Number of U.S. abortion providers: STABLE

The number of U.S. abortion providers declined steadily between 1982 and 2000, but has been stable for over a decade.

Cost of Abortion: STABLE

The inflation-adjusted cost of an abortion has remained relatively stable over time despite increased restrictions and a decline in demand.

Number of states using taxpayer funds to pay for abortions: STABLE

The number of states covering abortions for women under Medicaid has changed little over the past 20 years.

2011 Barna Group Survey of Politically Influential Issues

The mainstream pro-life strategy for the past 35 years has worked under the assumption that overturning *Roe v. Wade* with a direct challenge is impossible. Instead, many pro-life advocates have adopted a strategy that seeks an ever-increasing array of restrictive regulations as well as strategic laws intended to shape public opinion.

According to NARAL Pro-Choice America, there have been 5,577 “anti-choice” laws enacted since 1995. Of these 5,577 laws, not a single one was intended as a direct challenge to *Roe v. Wade*.

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From the 2011 Guttmacher report, we know that neither the total number of abortions, nor the rate of abortions, nor the cost or availability of abortion have decreased in the last decade. But what of the public’s perception of abortion? Have partial-birth abortion bans and other strategic public perception-influencing pro-life laws had any effect on the political centrality of abortion?

According to the 2011 Barna Group Survey of Influential Issues, abortion ranks as one of the least important issues to Americans, well below Employment Policies, Education, Dependence on Foreign Oil, Domestic Poverty, Immigration, and Health Care.

Furthermore, the Barna Group Survey paints the pro-life movement as a politically deflating movement. Most striking is the decrease in political importance of abortion from 1992 to 2011 among Catholics. In 1992, 57% of Catholics considered a candidate’s position on abortion as very important. In 2011, only 25% of Catholics believed a candidate’s position on abortion to be very important.

Gallup Public Opinion Polling

Perhaps, the only positive trends coming from the pro-life movement are the increasing percentage of Americans who consider themselves “pro-life.”

According to a poll by Gallup in 2011, 45% of Americans consider themselves to be pro-life, whereas in 1995, when Gallup first asked the question, only 33% of Americans labeled themselves as pro-life.

How is this indicator of public opinion reconciled with the fact shown by the Guttmacher report that indicates stabilizing and rising abortion statistics?

The answer may lie in the same Gallup poll, which also asks the question of under what circumstances should abortion be legal. In 1975, 75% of Americans believed that abortion should be legal in some or all circumstances. In 2011, 77% of Americans believe abortion should be legal in some or all circumstances. Clearly, public opinion as to the desirability of legalized abortion has not changed for the better.

How can so many Americans consider themselves pro-life, while simultaneously believing abortion should be legal in some or all circumstances?

The only possible answer is that increasingly, people who consider themselves pro-life are able to reconcile that label with the support of abortion. What is the cause of this national schizophrenia?

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Could the pro-life strategy itself be at fault for obfuscating foundational principles and lowering the pro-life standards to the point where national majorities can reconcile their image as pro-life with support of abortion?

Strategic Questions:

Is the 35-year pro-life strategy of regulating abortion winning the war against the evil of abortion?

Are there negative side effects to a political and legal strategy that aims at passing laws that are politically “achievable” at the cost of attempting to pass laws that represent first principles?

Has the avoidance of direct challenges to the “right” to abortion allowed the pro-life movement to grow in size and influence, or has it made it irrelevant and pusillanimous?

Does the future of the pro-life movement require abandoning the regulation strategy in favor of a more vigorous principles-in-action strategy?

Looking Forward

There is no doubt that the pro-life movement is losing the war against abortion. The question is what can be done differently? How can we learn from the past and turn this movement around?

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., in his *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*, wrote, “We must come to see, with one of our distinguished jurists, that ‘justice too long delayed is justice denied.’” Never were these words more aptly used than with the ongoing murder of innocent children.

The facts of the last 35 years call for an immediate and radical reconsideration of the current mainstream pro-life strategy of regulating abortion.