

Roe v. Wade and the Abortion Ban

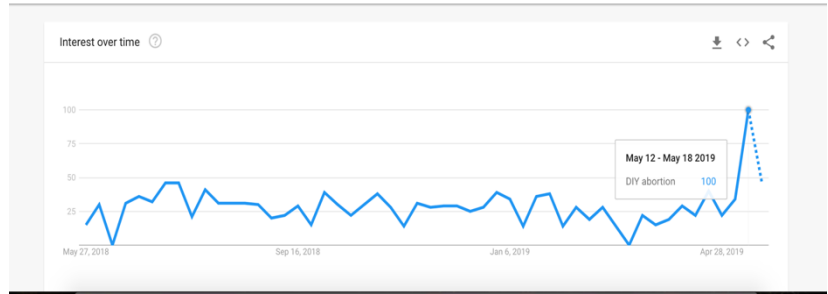
As United States legislatures pass laws restricting access to abortion and almost completely ban it in their states, many are quickly reminded why the issue of abortion is so divisive. Alabama passed the most restrict abortion law in the country on May 15, 2019, inspiring other states to follow suit. Some are taken back to the time where they had to fight for this right to choose, while many are seeing their right threatened for the first time. For many young women today, this struggle for privacy and autonomy is not something they fought for firsthand; their grandmothers and mothers gave them this opportunity. Living in a world where abortion is illegal is foreign to many young women in the US. Many probably do not know the dire consequences that outlawing abortion could create. Banning abortion goes beyond taking away the women's right to chose what to do with her body. The debate surrounding abortion needs to be less about if the fetus is human or not and more about the ways in which making abortion illegal creates mounting civil rights issues for the public health system, those in poverty, racial injustices, and most importantly a woman's physical life.

Abortion is a controversial issue across the world. Many countries have either banned abortion entirely or have strict laws with few exceptions. Public health researchers claim that 40 percent of the world's population live in an area where abortion is banned or heavily restricted. It is widely believed that banning abortion decreases abortion rates, however, the paradoxical conclusion to this is that banning abortion does not decrease the amount of abortions performed, in fact the rate stays the same. Abortion ban laws do not work. Research has show that they only increase the amount of at-home or self-abortions. There are approximately 42 million abortions a year across the world, and around 20 million of which are conducted in a manner that is considered short of the medical standard of practice. This means that nearly half of all pregnancies that are aborted are being performed by the mother themselves or in non-hospital scenarios, putting the safety and lives of women at risk. On average 47,000 women a year die of self-abortion complications and another five million are hospitalized, making unsafe abortion one of the leading causes of maternal mortality around the world. Banning abortions does not stop abortions and it probably never will. An abortion ban merely prevents access to safe abortions

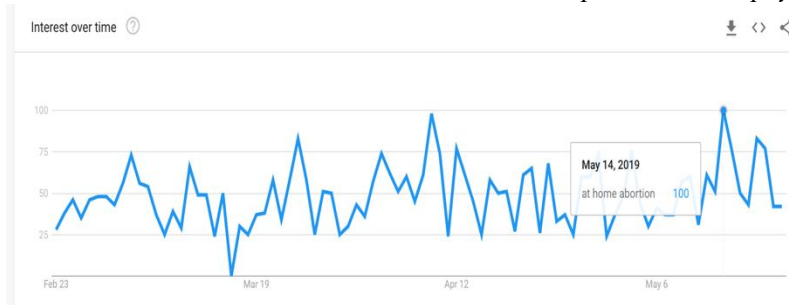
Many of the countries that ban abortions or heavily restrict it have had these abortions law for a long time. Rarely do we see a country changing their abortion laws to be stricter. Oh wait, cue the United States. In 1973, women were granted the civil right of privacy to obtain a legal abortion across the United States due to the famous Supreme Court Case *Roe v. Wade*. In one swift vote, abortions were legal by request in every state in the US. Ever since that vote, conservatives have been disgruntled and worked to restrict abortions in any way possible.

Recently, conservatives feel that in today's political climate they may have a chance to overturn *Roe v. Wade*. Alabama's new law bans all abortions even in the case of rape and incest, with the only exception being if the mother's physical health is at risk. Although it is too soon to say if the ban decreases the abortion rate (statistics show most likely not), all it takes is a quick Google search to see the most likely outcome. Two years ago with the inauguration of President Donald Trump, Google searches for "at-home" and "DIY abortion" (Do-it-yourself abortion) spiked. This may be due to Trump's stance on abortion for which he publicly opposes. Ever since, online interest in this topic has decreased and remained constant, up until May of 2019. If one searches "DIY" abortions on Google trends, they would find that in in late May of 2019, Google searches for "DIY abortions" spiked at what Google calls 100% percent interest (meaning its is trending over google).

More interestingly, if you search “at-home abortion” we see a pretty constant trend with a spike on May 14, 2019. This is important because on May 14, 2019 Alabama passed its new abortion law. If you look to see where these searches are trending, you will notice that the two top states that “at-home abortions” is trending are Alabama and Georgia. This is not a coincidence that on the day that Alabama almost entirely bans abortion that the Google search for “at-home” abortion spiked at 100 percent interest. It is clear that women are searching this on Google and they are searching it in a response to Alabama’s new

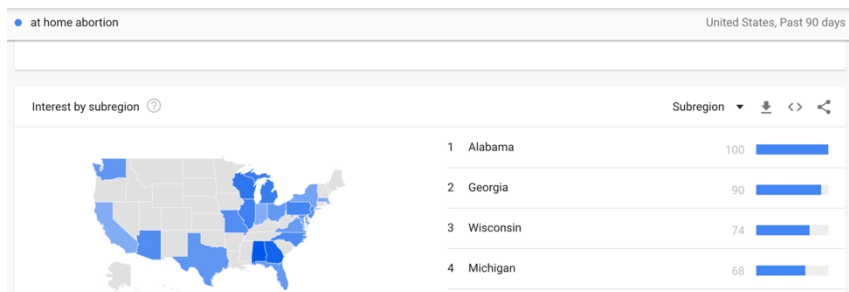


abortion law. If on the day that this new abortion law was passed there was a spike in the the searches for “DIY” and “at-home” abortions, it is clear that women will look to other means for an abortion, even if that means risking their life. This leaves only one outcome. The outcome will be the same as what the rest of the world has proven. In response to strict abortion laws, abortion rates will not change, but the rate of unsafe abortions will increase. While strict abortion laws put a womens physical health at risk it also creates a public health nightmare.



For example, Alabama’s abortion ban will criminalize doctors who perform abortions with up to 99 years in prison. They are giving a life sentence to any doctor that performs an abortion that the governemnt deems not a good

enough reason. In a state, where the health care system is already inadquate, this creates a larger issue. Punishing doctors runs the risk of doctors deciding to not practice their care in that state. Experts say “The ban forces doctors to make this impossible choice of whether or not to treat their patients or face jail time...The shortage could become worse if people choose to not practice in our state. Doctors may leave the states or choose not to move there if



threatened with criminal charges for performing abortions” (Hailstorks). In a state where half of its counties lack a local OBGYN for women to see for care and rural communities have to drive an hour or more to reach a hosptial, having doctors refuse to work in their state will hurt their healthcare system drastically. A lack of great medical care hurt the state and it hurts all their citizens in general. More specifically it hurts those in poverty and people of color, who coincidentally also happen to be who abortion effects the most.

It is no concidence that banning abortions impact those in poverty and people of color the most. By contrast, Black and Latina women are more likely to have an abortion versus white women. In 2017, the abortion rate for black women was 27 for every 1,000, while hispanic women were 18 for every 1,000, and only 10 per 1,000 for white women. Among these patients 75 percent were poor or low-income, while 49 percent of

those lived below the federal poverty line. “If you ask women why do you want an abortion, their most common reason is they feel like they can’t afford to have another child. And when they are denied an abortion, they are much more likely to be poor than women who receive an abortion,” said Diana Greene Foster, the director of research at Advancing New Standards in Reproductive Health. It is no doubt that children are expensive. For those in poverty, adding another child to their life could put them so far into poverty that they may never get out. By banning abortion, you are forcing these women to stay poor. As Alabama state senator Linda Coleman-Madison says, “Women of color are the ones who are really going to be impacted by this, more so than anyone else. And the people who don’t have the means of transportation ... to cross state lines to go and receive their abortion services that they need...That’s something that our legislators just don’t understand, because they are too privileged.” For those with means, it does not matter if Alabama bans abortion, if they need an abortion they can afford to get one. However, those with lesser means, may not be able to afford the travel costs or the cost of an abortion itself. They are forced to look to different ways to abort a baby. For women of lesser means being denied access to safe legal abortions means they may choose to try to end the pregnancy themselves, which may lead them to a hospital that is not equipped to deal with obstetric emergencies and where the doctors may be worried about their own legal liability; “the outcome is clear: women will die” (Hailstorks) and women will be stuck in poverty. This is the reality for women of color and those in poverty. Banning abortion creates a never ending cycle of poverty, mostly effecting women of color, which in turn perpetuates the racial injustices that are already prevalent in this country.

It is obvious that banning abortion does not decrease the rates of abortion nor does it help to ending the cycle of poverty. So if banning abortion does not work, then what will. Research shows that expanding access to contraceptives such as birth control and proper sex education has been proven to decrease the rate of abortion by 75% as well as teen pregnancies by 80%. This looks promising and much more successful than restrictive abortion laws. To add, they are much more cost effective than abortions. The key to decreasing the rate of abortions is to make abortion not a form of birth control and you do this by making contraceptives more accessible to all women, especially those in poverty.

Its clear the GOP platform does not want abortions to be legal. They are trying to work around the law as much as they can and even some states are testing the law to its core. However, I feel this debate on abortion has been misconstrued. Many people think the only argument for or against abortion is on whether the fetus is considered human life or not, but as laid out above it is easy to see that when debating abortion politicians should be looking towards the lasting effects that banning abortion would have on society as a whole, especially women who are in poverty and women of color. Banning abortion does not achieve its goal, but rather perpetuates the problems in this country that we strive to fix. Abortion is an extremely controversial issue, where many people have many different opinions. I encourage those who decide to look deeper in to this debate, that when making a stance, to look beyond the obvious argument. To implore into the facts and see that abortion is much more than a black and white argument, but rather a collection of troubling issues that hinder the civil rights and some basic rights of many citizens of this country.

For more information, please visit:

<https://www.gutmacher.org/gpr/2008/08/abortion-and-women-color-bigger-picture>

<https://www.businessinsider.com/anti-abortion-womens-health-effects-2016-7>

<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2019/may/19/abortion-ban-alabama-women-of-color-poor>

<https://newsone.com/3852704/alabama-abortion-ban-black-women/>

<https://www.vox.com/first-person/2019/5/18/18630514/missouri-alabama-abortion-ban-2019-racism>

<https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/05/16/what-actually-happens-when-a-country-bans-abortion-romania-alabama/>

<https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/women/news/2018/01/29/445517/rhetoric-vs-reality-abortion-bans-hurt-women/>