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The rapidly growing popularity of abortion pills speaks to the current state of reproductive rights

[Kylie Cheung @kyliecheung](#) | 11.3.16 | 1:14 pm

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It appears the state of reproductive rights in America has reached a pivotal turning point: [American women are ending pregnancies with medication](#) virtually as often as they are via surgical abortion procedures, according to Reuters. Rates of abortion using the abortion pill, or [misoprostol used together with mifepristone](#) (a drug inhibiting the hormones necessary for pregnancy), soared to 43 percent of pregnancy terminations at Planned Parenthood clinics in 2014, from 35 percent back in 2010, according to previously unreported data from the organization.

New federal [prescribing guidelines for the abortion pill](#) took effect in March, allowing the drugs to be prescribed as far as 10 weeks into pregnancy, reducing the number of required medical visits from three to two, and authorizing trained professionals, not just physicians, to distribute the pills. The Food and Drug Administration also reduced the required dosage of mifepristone from 600 milligrams to 200 milligrams. The push for these new guidelines came largely from Danco Laboratories, the sole producer of the pills in the U.S., as well as data indicating the safety and efficiency of abortion medication.

Danco Laboratories' spokeswoman Abby Long noted to Reuters that sales for the pill have surged since these new guidelines went into effect, so much so that medication abortion now appears to be "a second option and fairly equal" to the surgical procedure. "We have been growing steadily year over year, and definitely the growth is larger this year," Long said. It's possible the ratio of medication and surgical abortions has evened out even more in the past two years.



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Medication abortions were first approved in the United States in 2000, but have been the dominant method for [terminating pregnancies in European countries](#) like France, Finland, and Scotland since the 1980s. In fact, [95 percent of abortions in Finland in 2014](#), and 80 percent in Scotland in 2015, were induced using the medication.

In America, the rapidly growing popularity of abortion pills speaks a lot to the current state of reproductive rights. In June, the Supreme Court ruled TRAP (Targeted Regulation of Abortion Providers) laws, or laws placing expensive, medically unnecessary requirements on clinics, unconstitutional and an undue burden on women seeking abortions. These laws, largely [protested by medical experts throughout the nation](#), were primarily meant to stigmatize and portray abortion as dangerous, despite all of the [research that indicates it is actually far safer](#) than other more socially acceptable procedures.

TRAP laws resulted in hundreds of clinics across the country shutting down and have forced women seeking abortions to travel long distances to obtain the procedure, delay having the procedure potentially until the second trimester, or to self-induce. The anti-abortion laws may close clinics, but they [fail to actually achieve the anti-choice movement's goal](#) of stopping abortions from happening.

Historically, self-induced abortions resulted in unspeakably gruesome, sometimes fatal injuries, that thanks to the availability of medication abortion, women with no other choice but to self-induce are increasingly able to access. However, it is worth noting that medical abortions differ dramatically from inducing an abortion on your own, without medication, and that plenty of barriers still stand in the way of [accessing abortion pills, varying by state](#). At the end of the day, abortion pills still need to be prescribed by doctors, but through availability on various websites, from [Women on Web](#) to [Safe 2 Choose](#), medication abortion has become marginally more accessible than surgical abortion.



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TRAP laws [target medication abortion and the facilities](#) that administer them, too, but Reuters’ research certainly shows that new FDA guidelines have made them more accessible. Reuters’ research also ultimately highlights how TRAP laws, whether they’re attacking clinics offering surgical or medication abortion, might be making things unnecessarily difficult for women, but certainly aren’t keeping abortion from happening.

While the Supreme Court ruled against these TRAP laws limiting surgical abortions, implementing the decision could take years, rendering abortion pills by prescription far more accessible to women seeking to end their pregnancies. Just think about it: while TRAP laws were exploding across the nation, reasonable guidelines for abortion pills were being developed. Today, more than [2.75 million U.S. women have used abortion pills](#) since they were approved in 2000. At least 1 million of these women obtained them at Planned Parenthood.

The increased use of abortion pills to end pregnancies ultimately speaks to the determination of women to have abortions, often underestimated by the anti-choice movement. Like last-ditch sidewalk counseling efforts meant to dissuade them, TRAP laws aren’t going to change the minds of women, who, based on scientific research, are more often than not [pretty damn sure about needing/wanting an abortion](#).

Still, it’s worth noting that it could be a while before abortion pills are available over the counter, despite the relative safety of the medication. But as Slate’s Nora Caplan-Bricker properly pointed out in June, if the polarized political climate surrounding abortion and reproductive rights were to suddenly, [magically approve of over-the-counter abortion pills](#), surgical abortions would also probably become easier to obtain.

Tags: [abortion](#), [abortion pill](#), [politics](#), [reproductive rights](#), [trap laws](#)

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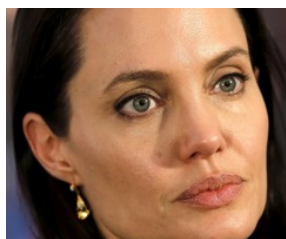
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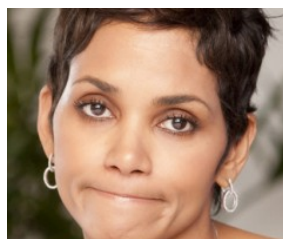
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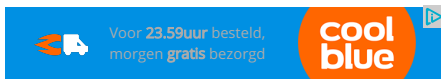
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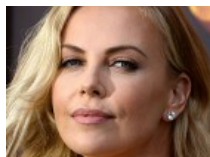
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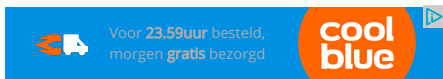
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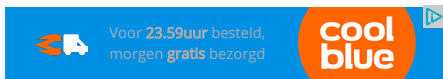
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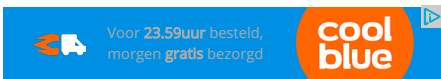
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