

WMC MEDIA WATCH



THE GENDER GAP IN COVERAGE OF REPRODUCTIVE ISSUES



WOMEN'S MEDIA CENTER



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ABOUT THE WOMEN'S MEDIA CENTER

In 2005, [Jane Fonda](#), [Robin Morgan](#), and [Gloria Steinem](#) founded the Women's Media Center (WMC), a progressive, nonpartisan, nonprofit organization endeavoring to raise the visibility, viability, and decision-making power of women and girls in media and thereby ensuring that their stories get told and their voices are heard.

To reach those necessary goals, we strategically use an array of interconnected channels and platforms to transform not only the media landscape but also a culture in which women's and girls' voices, stories, experiences, and images are neither sufficiently amplified nor placed on par with the voices, stories, experiences, and images of men and boys.

Our strategic tools include monitoring the media; commissioning and conducting research; and undertaking other special initiatives to spotlight gender and racial bias in news coverage, entertainment, film, television, social media, and other key sectors.

Our recent publications include the books *Unspinning the Spin: The Women's Media Center Guide to Fair and Accurate Language* and *The Women's Media Center Media Guide to Gender Neutral Coverage of Women Candidates + Politicians*, as well as our reports "The Women's Media Center Guide to Covering Reproductive Issues" and "The Status of Women in the U.S. Media."

Our original content channels — [WMC Features](#), [WMC FBomb](#), [WMC Speech Project](#), [WMC Women Under Siege](#), and the "[Women's Media Center Live with Robin Morgan](#)" radio program — provide women's perspectives on both headline stories and timely events that are ignored, not wholly captured, or misrepresented in the mainstream media. Our content contributors are a racially and globally diverse group.

Our WMC training programs sharpen the media savvy and interview skills of women and girls. [WMC SheSource](#), our ethnically diverse online brain trust of roughly 1,000 women experts on a wide array of topics, helps journalists, talent bookers, and other content producers to get their jobs done.

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WMC Media Watch: The gender gap in coverage of reproductive issues

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WMC Media Watch: The gender gap in coverage of reproductive issues

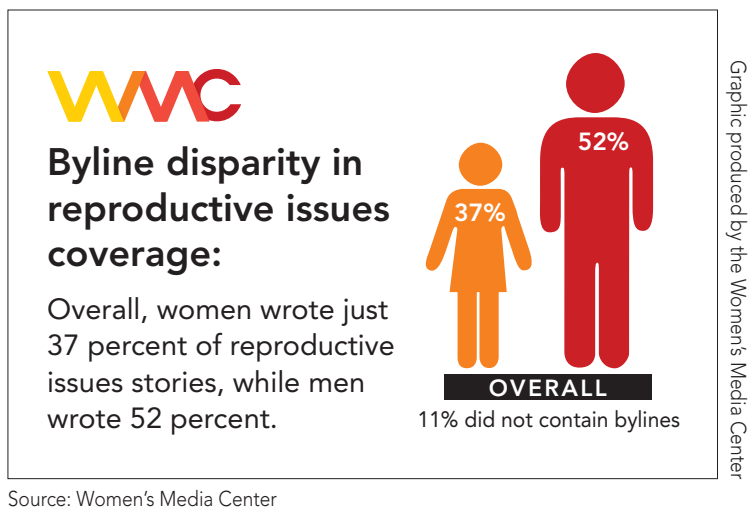
Introduction

In 2015, more laws restricting reproductive rights were passed than there are states in the nation—57, with hundreds more under consideration. Since 2011, 288 laws curtailing a woman's right to make her own reproductive decisions have been enacted in the states. This spring, the United States Supreme Court is set to evaluate the constitutionality of sweeping legislation in Texas that has all but eliminated access to safe abortions in that state for many women; the court is set to issue what may be the most important abortion-related decision in nearly a quarter century. The last time the Supreme Court considered an abortion rights case of this magnitude was in 1992, when its ruling on *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* laid out the framework for how and why legislators could permissibly restrict abortion rights and access. Republicans in Congress, holding majorities in both chambers, voted in 2015 to defund Planned Parenthood, one of the largest providers of reproductive health care in the United States, leaving it up to President Barack Obama to veto that legislation. Reproductive freedom will almost surely be an issue in November's presidential election.

Yet news coverage of reproductive issues remains uneven in American media, with the people whose bodies do the reproducing (or not) often left out of the discussion. New findings from the Women's Media Center (WMC) show that even in coverage of women's health issues, men's voices still eclipse out

women's. Women journalists wrote just 37 percent of articles about reproductive issues, while their men counterparts penned 52 percent (the rest were not by-lined). Quotes from men accounted for 41 percent of all quotes in articles about reproductive issues; by contrast, quotes from women accounted for 33 percent (the remainder were either quotes from organizations or otherwise not identifiable by gender).

This imbalance contributes to the pervasive presentation of matters related to reproduction as political controversies rather than as questions of healthcare or of normal parts of women's lives. Such framing feeds into the politicization of abortion rights and contraception in particular, perpetuating a cycle of conflict and controversy that eclipses the complex realities facing women and men when it comes to reproductive health.



“When it comes to stories about abortion rights and contraception access, women’s voices are systematically stifled as writers and as sources,” said Julie Burton, president of the Women’s Media Center. “In articles about elections and reproductive issues, men’s perspectives prevail, especially in coverage of presidential campaigns, with male reporters telling 67 percent of all presidential election stories related to abortion and contraception.”

To get a clearer picture of who is writing about reproductive issues, what they’re covering, and how they’re covering it, the Women’s Media Center conducted an in-depth review of 1,385 news stories, columns, op-eds, and editorials about reproductive issues published between August 1, 2014 and July 31, 2015. The research focused on 12 high-circulation media outlets and widely used wire services: *Chicago Sun-Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, *New York Daily News*, *New York Post*, Reuters, *San Jose Mercury News*, Associated Press, *The Denver Post*, *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Washington Post*, and *USA Today*.

Male voices still dominate reproductive issues coverage, according to the WMC research. Men are quoted more often about reproductive issues; men journalists outnumber women journalists in covering reproductive issues; and men journalists quote other men more than do women journalists. Over the period reviewed, some news organizations, such as the *New York Daily News*, published a nearly equal number of stories bylined by men and women journalists. Two—*USA Today* and *The Washington Post*—had slightly more stories with women’s bylines than stories with men’s. But most had more male writers covering reproductive issues than female writers. A few news organizations, such as *The New York Times* and *San Jose Mercury News*, had male writers’ bylines on stories about reproductive issues almost twice as often as those of women. The Associated Press featured men’s bylines more than twice as often as women’s.

The gender of the reporter appears to affect whom they choose to quote and how they cover the story. WMC’s research shows that, for the outlets and news services examined, female journalists quote women more often than their male counterparts, while quotes from male sources predominate in articles written by men.

Male journalists tended to focus more on reproductive issues as political issues, relying on a larger number of sources who discussed political platforms or elections. Female journalists were more likely than men to use quotes that dealt with abortion and contraception primarily as health care subjects.

Those “hard” political stories led the coverage. Receiving the most ink were Colorado’s anti-abortion ballot measure and its implications for candidates; Texas abortion clinic closures; reproductive issues as they were playing out in the mid-term elections and the presidential campaigns; and the contraception mandate of the Affordable Care Act (the subject of a Supreme Court case). Men disproportionately wrote about elections—a topic that includes midterms and presidential campaigns—and their articles accounted for nearly 30 percent of the reproductive issues articles in the WMC survey. Of election-related reproductive issues articles, men wrote 57 percent, women just 36 percent (the rest were not bylined). The WMC research also found that many journalists who covered reproductive issues only did so once or twice within the period studied, which may contribute to a lack of expertise and a simplistic understanding of complicated issues.

When the news media view reproduction-related subjects through a political lens, a kind of myopia ensues. Nearly all the articles examined portrayed women's rights advocates on the defensive, fighting against encroachments on reproductive freedoms; there was very little coverage of more proactive moves, such as proposed legislation to expand reproductive rights and access, or efforts to reduce the stigma around abortion and to share women's stories.

Among the 6,370 quotes about reproductive issues the Women's Media Center analyzed, 43 percent were about state legislation, 27 percent about federal legislation, and 14 percent about elections. Drilling down into subtopics, the highest number of quotes in the articles we surveyed were about the regulation of abortion clinics at the state level, followed by reproductive rights as an electoral issue. And highly unusual, shocking, negative stories with limited social impact got more play than positive ones that could have wide influence. For example, two stories out of Colorado this year: One about a woman whose fetus was cut out of her uterus, an appalling but very rare crime; the other about a long-acting contraception program that significantly reduced unintended pregnancy rates and, by extension, rates of unplanned births and abortions. The murder story got more coverage not only generally, but also in the context of reproductive rights specifically.

Over the past several years, reproductive rights groups and advocates have worked hard to push their messages that abortion and contraception are normal, that abortion and contraception are moral, and that women need the power to plan their families. Even when they translate into proactive legislation or big media campaigns, those messages are routinely ignored by the media in favor of coverage of partisan fights. Covering abortion and contraception purely as political issues, rather than normal parts of life for millions of women, may contribute to the stubbornness of the political debate, the hostility women and abortion providers face, and the continued treatment of reproduction as more about politics than about health—all of which leads to further political encroachments on a range of reproductive freedoms.

The landscape of reproductive issues coverage and why it matters

Today, 89 percent of United States counties lack an abortion provider; more than a third of American women live in those counties. In Texas, anti-abortion laws have shut down two thirds of the state's clinics, forcing some women there to drive hundreds of miles if they want to terminate a pregnancy. These same laws have affected scores of others, with recent research out of the University of Texas finding that as many as 100,000 Texas women have tried to self-induce abortions. This spring, the United States Supreme Court will rule on a case challenging some of the restrictive Texas laws, evaluating for the first time in more than 20 years the meaning of the term "undue burden" as it applies to anti-abortion laws and assessing how much a law can restrict a woman's ability to end a pregnancy. The results could fundamentally shift the landscape of abortion rights for generations.

Access to reproductive health care has been curtailed in other ways. The 2014 Hobby Lobby Supreme Court case opened the door for opponents of women's rights to claim "religious freedom" as a reason to refuse to comply with generally applicable laws. As a result, private, secular companies can now refuse to provide insurance coverage for contraception, as mandated by the Affordable Care Act, to employees. Related cases continue to wind their way through the courts, and women see their access to health care held hostage to the whim of legislators and judges and cast as a "religious liberty" issue rather than as a basic necessity.

Two major reproductive rights stories fell mostly outside the scope of this assessment: Anti-abortion advocate Robert Lewis Dear's fatal shooting of three people at a Colorado Springs Planned Parenthood center and the videos that may have inspired his actions. Secretly made by the anti-abortion Center for Medical Progress, the videos show Planned Parenthood officials discussing the donation of fetal tissue. The Colorado Springs shooting occurred after the period our review examined, and the videos were released at the tail end of that period. But both stories will undoubtedly shape media narratives and political opinions in the months and years to come.

While countless women in the United States have seen their reproductive freedoms chipped away at over the past few years, a smaller but still significant number have found their physical liberty curtailed as well. Women in the United States are again going to jail for having abortions. In Indiana, 33-year-old Purvi Patel was sentenced to 20 years in prison for what prosecutors say was feticide by way of abortion-inducing drugs; Patel says it was a miscarriage. In Pennsylvania, Jennifer Whalen was incarcerated for ordering abortion-inducing pills online for her pregnant daughter.

(The incarceration of Anna Yocca for allegedly trying to induce an abortion with a coat hanger occurred after the period examined by this study; the state of Tennessee charged the 31-year-old with attempted first-degree murder in December.)

It is in this climate that journalists are covering abortion, birth control, and other topics that fall under the umbrella of reproductive health care, rights, and access. And it is in this climate that the voices, perspectives, and experiences of women are being overshadowed by the voices, perspectives, and opinions of men.

Gender and media coverage

A 2015 [report](#) from the Women's Media Center found that just 37 percent of print news bylines were women's. WMC findings here mirror those results, with female journalists accounting for 37 percent of lead bylines on articles about reproductive rights. Male journalists had the lead bylines in 52 percent of the stories we assessed (the rest did not include bylines).

We know that media coverage of pregnancy, contraception and abortion and the treatment of these subjects in popular culture may influence public opinion, political discourse, and even behavior. For example, a Brookings Institution study indicated that the airing of MTV's *16 and Pregnant*, a reality show about teen pregnancy, led to an uptick in online searches about abortion and birth control. In the 18 months after the series aired, there was a 5.7 percent decrease in births among American teenagers, according to the study.

WMC found substantive differences in how women and men covered reproductive issues, what they focused on, and whom they interviewed. Overall, journalists quoted more men than anyone else about reproductive rights, despite the fact that the issues most commonly covered—abortion and contraception—primarily affect women's bodies and medical options. Of the total 6,370 quotes in the stories we examined, 41 percent were attributed to identifiably men sources, while only 33 percent were attributed to identifiably women sources (an additional 15 percent were from statements issued under the aegis of an organization and 11 percent were attributed to sources whose gender could not be determined based on their names, generic sources or anonymous sources.)

As a general rule, women covering reproductive issues were more likely to interview women, while men covering the same mostly interviewed men. Women journalists relied on female sources in 42 percent of quotes and male sources in 36 percent of quotes. Men journalists quote women sources in just 27 percent of quotes; 48 percent of the quotes men published were from men sources.

Journalists were particularly reliant on male sources on a handful of issues that fall within the reproductive rights spectrum. Nearly twice as many quotes on federal funding for reproductive health services, and reproductive health as an electoral issue, were sourced from men as from women. Quotes from male sources outnumbered those from female sources by a less significant margin on topics including federal legislation to ban some types of abortion, federal legislation on contraception, federal legislation regulating the use of fetal tissue, state late-term abortion bans, state legislation on contraception, state legislation regulating the use of fetal tissue, state legislation on contraception, state legislation on telemedicine for reproductive health services, and state legislation on ultrasounds as a requirement before a legal abortion.

Reproductive health as a general topic (not as an electoral issue) was the only topic on which women were quoted at more than twice as much as men in the sample. Quotes from female sources outnumbered quotes from male sources slightly on the topics of contraception, state legislation regulating abortion clinics, parental consent for abortion care, and state legislation on mandatory waiting periods for abortion.

Women's perspectives, opinions, and experiences show up far less often than the viewpoints and opinions of men, even though it is women who overwhelmingly use contraception and have abortions. (Some transgender men, it should be noted, use contraception and terminate pregnancies, but they make up a very small minority of the total number of people in the United States who have abortions and/or rely on birth control.)

The importance of expertise

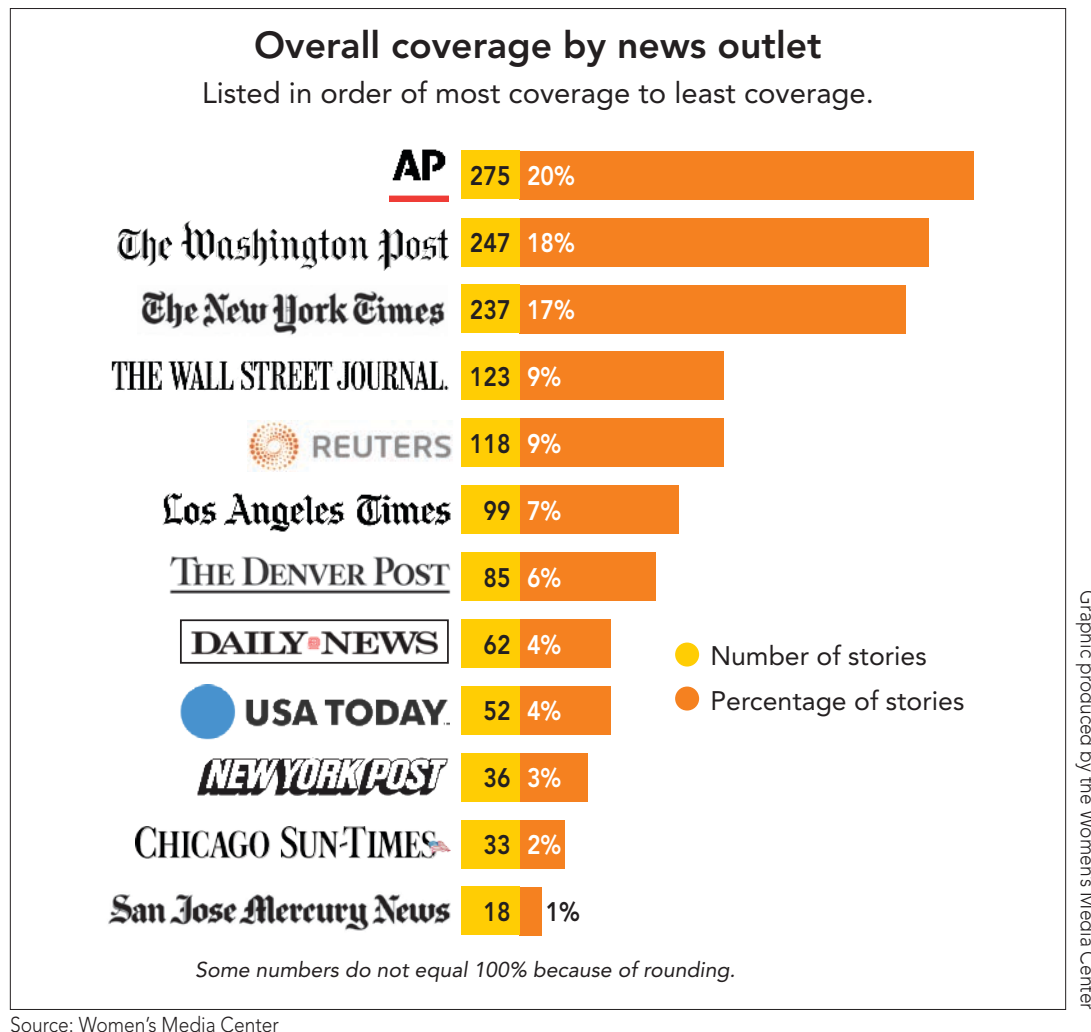
In addition to uncovering startling gender gaps in bylines and quotes, we also found an expertise gap: many journalists, men or women, who wrote about reproductive issues did so only a few times in the assessed period. Instead of relying on writers who are familiar with the subject matter, have covered it extensively, and have a solid network of sources and experts at their disposal, the news outlets studied seemed to call on a variety of journalists to cover the topic. Many of them may not have been familiar with the intricacies of reproduction and gynecology, nor the convoluted political landscape around women's health issues. A mere third of all the 1,385 articles assessed were written by journalists who covered reproductive issues five or more times over the course of our survey. Among those journalists, 59 percent were men and 41 women, and nearly a quarter of the quotes in their stories were about state regulation of abortion clinics. Some media outlets, such as the Associated Press, *New York Daily News*, *San Jose Mercury News*, *The Denver Post*, *The New York Times*, and *The Washington Post*, had these same journalists bylining a third or more of articles on reproductive rights. None of the outlets published more than half of its reproductive rights coverage under the byline of a journalist who covered the issue five or more times in our sample period. At the other extreme, the *Chicago Sun-Times* and the *New York Post* had no single journalist who covered reproductive issues in five or more articles.

Overall, the picture painted is not entirely bleak. There are many journalists covering reproductive issues stories repeatedly, with depth and vigor. But there are not enough of them, and there are certainly not enough women among them (or, for that matter, among the journalists covering these stories less frequently). In addition, journalists are simply not interviewing and quoting enough women, and are not often enough representing pregnancy, abortion, contraception, and the other topics that fall under the broad heading of "reproductive rights" as women experience them: as health issues, as life-sustaining choices, as necessities. Framing reproductive issues as mostly a subject of political debate rather than as a topic vital to women does a disservice to matters that have a most profound impact on women's health, lives, and happiness.

Coverage and byline breakdowns

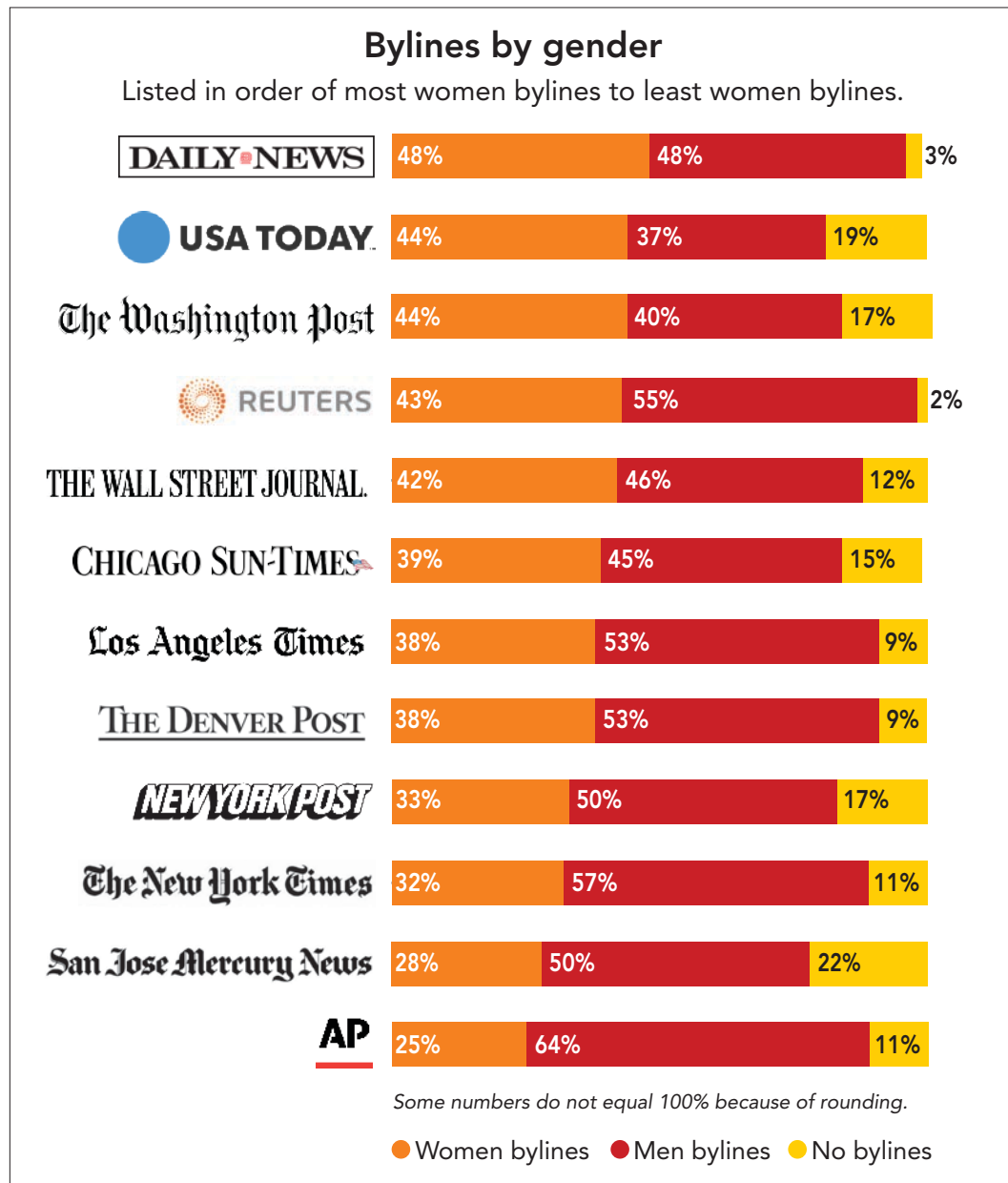
In total, we reviewed 1,385 articles from 12 media outlets. Those outlets did not cover reproductive issues equally; some gave the topic significantly more attention than others. The Associated Press, *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times* each accounted for nearly a fifth of the coverage and together produced more than half the stories on reproductive issues in our sample. The impact of a lack of women sources in wire service stories is amplified by the fact that these stories run in many, many news outlets across the country. Republication of wires content in print outlets were not included as part of the tally for these print outlets.

Here is an accounting of how many stories each outlet ran on reproductive issues topics, and what proportion each outlet accounted for within the overall coverage, in order of most coverage to least during the research period:



There were significant differences in the number of reproductive issues stories on which female journalists appeared as the lead byline compared to the number bylined by male journalists. Just two publications, *USA Today* and *The Washington Post*, had more women's bylines than men's on stories about reproductive issues. Not a single news organization we studied, though, had women journalists writing more than half of its articles on the topic. The Associated Press, which published the greatest number of stories, had the lowest percentage of women bylines.

Below are the gender breakdowns of the bylined stories about reproductive issues, in order of those outlets with the largest share of women bylines to those with the smallest share.



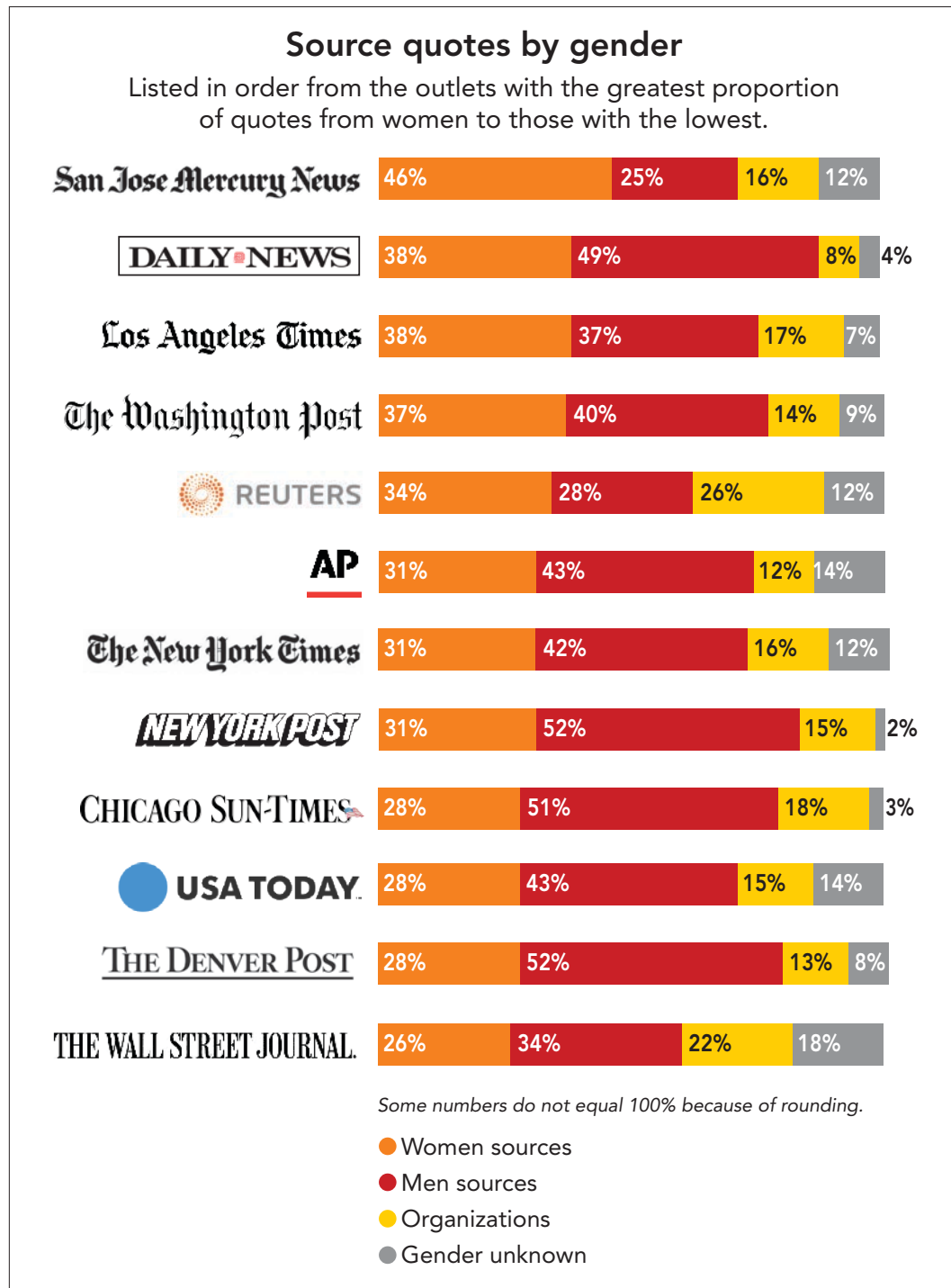
Source: Women's Media Center

Breakdown of sourcing by gender

In addition to looking at the gender of journalists writing the stories, we examined whom journalists talked to—and we found it was mostly men. In articles about reproductive issues, not a single outlet sourced more than half its quotes from women, and only three, *San Jose Mercury News*, *Los Angeles Times*, and Reuters, sourced more quotes from women than from men. And the top three sources in regard to gender parity in quotes also published relatively few articles, with the

publication that achieved the greatest quote parity, *San Jose Mercury News*, accounting for just one percent of the total articles in our sample. *The Wall Street Journal*—the worst offender in terms of gender balance in quoted sources—had just over a quarter of its quotes from women.

Below are the percentages of quotes from women sources, men sources, statements issued by organizations, and sources of unknown gender, per the total number of quotes that media outlet published on reproductive issues.



Source: Women's Media Center

There were also substantial differences in stories bylined by men and women journalists in terms of the number of quotes from women. Women journalists sourced more quotes from women, while men journalists sourced more quotes from men. Women journalists offered something closer to parity; in their stories, the percentage of women's quotes beat the percentage of men's quotes by six points. Men journalists, conversely, were far more reliant on

quotes from men than on quotes from women: in their stories quotes from men surpassed those from women by 21 percentage points. Above are the breakdowns.

Overall source quotes by gender

Women journalists



Men journalists



No byline



Some numbers do not equal 100% because of rounding.

- Women
- Men
- Organizations
- Unknown

Source: Women's Media Center

Graphic produced by the Women's Media Center

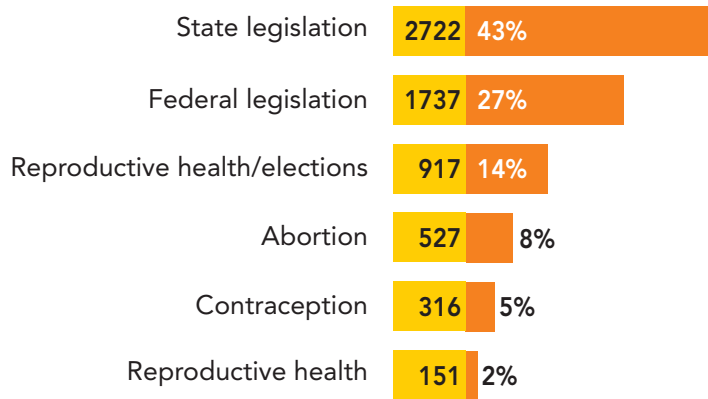
Breakdown of topics covered

Some topics under the reproductive issues umbrella received much more media attention than others. Reproduction-related state legislation received the most coverage and the largest number of quotes dedicated to that topic; federal legislation came in second, elections third. Quotes discussing abortion and contraception generally—that is, not in the context of elections or state or federal legislation but

as health or medical matters—were significantly less common.

Breaking those general topics into subtopics is even more revealing. State laws regulating abortion clinics and the role of reproductive issues in elections got the most coverage and were the only two subtopics that accounted for more than 10 percent of the total number

Major topics covered



Some numbers do not equal 100% because of rounding.

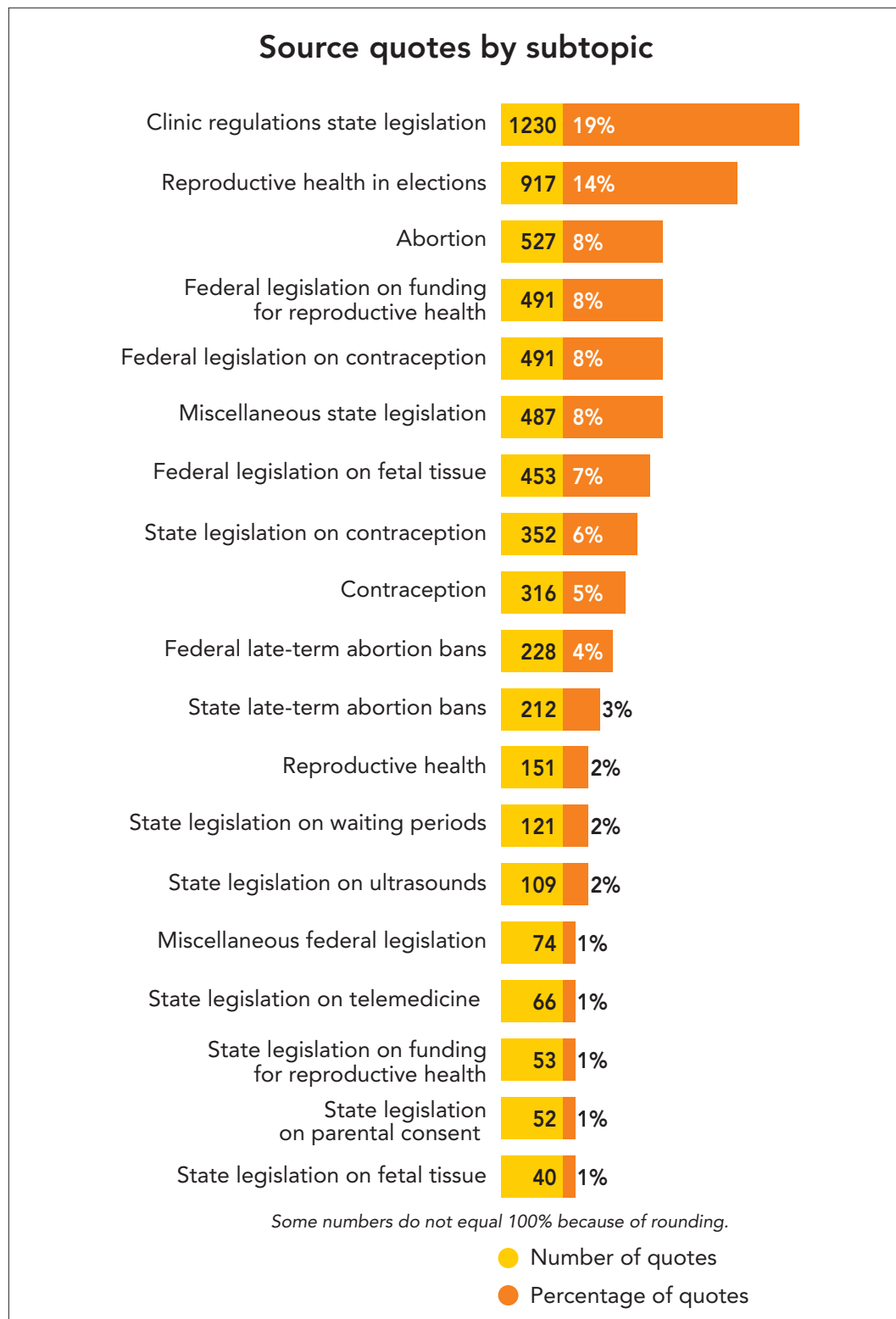
- Number of quotes
- Percentage of quotes

Source: Women's Media Center

Graphic produced by the Women's Media Center

of quotes in the articles we examined. Other state legislation, such as parental consent laws, waiting periods, mandatory ultrasounds, and telemedicine laws,

received very little coverage. Quotes relating to reproductive rights groups and women's health clinics challenging state regulations in court were classified under the "clinic regulations state legislation" tag.



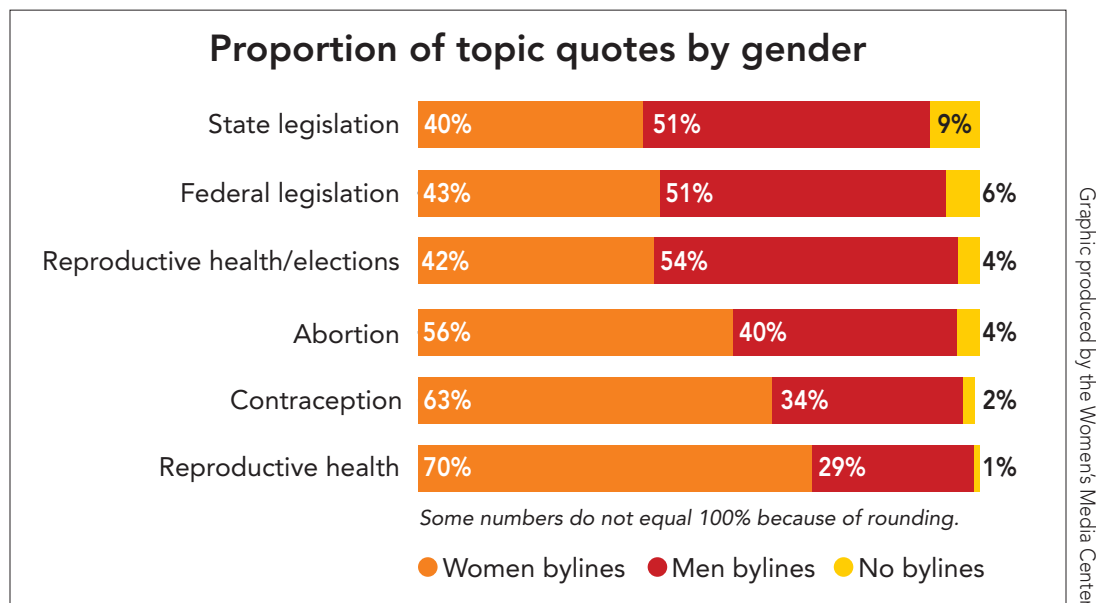
Graphic produced by the Women's Media Center

Source: Women's Media Center

A journalist's gender also mattered in the topical coverage. Women journalists covered abortion and contraception as health matters more often than men journalists, and men outnumbered women in coverage of reproductive issues as they relate to state and federal legislation. About two times more quotes about reproductive health and contraception as health issues were published in articles bylined by women as those bylined by men; 63 percent of all quotes about contraception in our sample were in pieces with women's bylines, and 70 percent of quotes about reproductive health appearing in articles by women. More quotes about abortion were also included in pieces by women journalists than by men journalists – 56 percent of quotes about abortion in our sample appeared in women's articles, while 40 percent were in men's.

By contrast, just over half (51 percent) of all quotes in our sample about federal legislation and state legislation of reproductive issues were in pieces by men journalists; 43 percent of quotes about federal legislation and 40 percent of quotes about state legislation appeared in articles with women's bylines (the rest were in articles where there was no byline). That difference matters—it indicates that women journalists are more likely than men ones to incorporate remarks about abortion and contraception as standard health issues, which is how most women actually experience them.

Below is a table of the proportion of quotes dedicated to each topic as a percentage of total quotes published by women and men journalists, respectively. The topics are in order from most to least according to the proportion of coverage from women journalists:



Source: Women's Media Center

Breakdown of elections coverage by gender

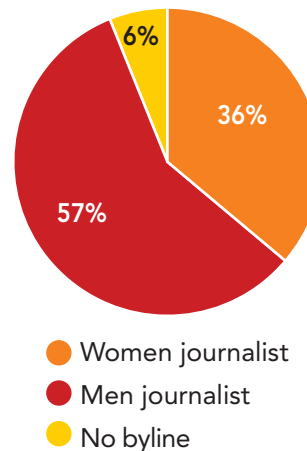
WMC found one of the largest gender gaps in the category of who wrote stories about reproductive health as an election issue. Of the total number of articles we surveyed—as opposed to the number of quotes in the articles we surveyed, which are broken out above—29 percent of the articles were about the role of reproductive health as an issue in elections or in candidates' platforms. (During the period covered by our survey, the 2014 midterm races occurred, and campaigns were underway, or getting underway, for the 2016 presidential election.) This election coverage skewed heavily men. Men wrote 57 percent of articles in our survey about reproductive issues in elections, while women wrote just 36 percent (the remainder were not bylined).

Men journalists particularly predominated in coverage of reproductive health issues addressed by potential presidential candidates. Looking at articles on reproductive health in the 2014 midterm elections alone, women wrote 43 percent of the articles, while men wrote half (the remainder were not bylined)—not an equal spread, but close. The gender gap is much starker in when it comes to the presidential candidates and their platforms. Articles about that topic accounted for 40 percent of all election-related reproductive health coverage in our sample, and 67 percent of those articles were penned by men journalists. Women wrote just 27 percent of pieces about reproductive health as an issue in the presidential campaigns. Six percent of the articles had no byline.

In 2014, Colorado had an anti-abortion personhood amendment up for a vote and a senate race in which abortion and contraception were major issues, and 26 percent of all the election-related reproductive rights coverage surveyed, including midterms and the presidential race, was about elections in that state. The next most-covered state was New York, which accounted for just seven percent of the total number of election articles. Men journalists had the lead in covering Colorado, with 53 percent of the articles penned by men, 38 percent by women, and 8 percent published without a byline. New York tilted even more men: 71 percent of articles about reproductive health as an issue in New York elections were written by men, and just 23 percent by women (the remainder had no bylines).

Elections coverage by gender

Midterm and presidential elections



Some numbers do not equal 100% because of rounding.

Source: Women's Media Center

Graphic produced by the Women's Media Center

Conclusions and recommendations

There are simple steps media outlets, writers, and editors can take to improve their coverage of reproductive issues:

Diversify. First and foremost, media outlets will benefit from more diverse staffs and more women reporters. Reporters also need to speak with a greater number of women sources. That is especially urgent when it comes to topics, such as reproduction, that are directly related to women bodies. Stories that primarily affect women are still largely being told by men, and often framed in terms of how men understand, relate to, and experience them. With reproductive rights, that's political, not personal, and so political coverage—presenting abortion and contraception as issues rather than common health matters—dominates. **Reporting on all topics** and **reader commentary** on those articles would be stronger with a commitment to more diverse newsrooms, as well as to ending newsroom gender disparities that send men reporters to cover reproductive rights as political stories and women reporters to cover reproductive health. Editors should give more diverse women the opportunity to report not just on abortion and contraception, but also on politics, elections, policy, legislation, and the courts.

Cover reproductive health as health. Editors are encouraged to push all reporters to contextualize pregnancy, abortion, and contraception as part of the standard human experience for more than half the population and integrate the health-care dimensions of reproductive issues into articles that focus on political battles over abortion and contraception. That also means prioritizing women's voices, experiences, and perspectives to mirror the population whose lives are often shaped by reproductive health issues in the real world. The reality of abortion and contraception for the people who use them is often less about the political debates and much more about simple health care and access. Including that perspective in an article helps to tell the full story.

Cultivate expertise. Newsroom executives should also seek to cultivate expertise by repeatedly assigning stories on reproductive issues to reporters who cover the topic thoroughly and well. In a fast-moving media economy, newsrooms are stretched thin, and reporters are expected to be generalists capable of learning about any topic quickly, which too often results in facile coverage. Editors and readers both would benefit if the former assigned reproductive justice and reproductive health coverage to reporters with good track records on the topic, who bring experience to it and comprehend its complexities—reporters who know the players as well as the experts to call for a quote. Treating the subject as a “beat” would aid a reporter in gaining a deeper understanding of the topic as well as a thicker Rolodex of a diverse range of sources.

Center women's voices. Writers and editors must prioritize women's expertise, voices, opinions, and experiences in their coverage of reproductive issues. As it stands, men's voices outnumber women's on the topic of reproductive issues. On a set of issues that overwhelmingly affect women, women's voices shouldn't just be quoted as often as men's but should outnumber them.

Combat false equivalency. Writers and editors are encouraged to combat the false equivalency that so often permeates the conversation around reproductive issues. Too often, marginal and extreme groups are given coverage equal to that given larger, more mainstream groups, or extremist organizations are put on par with health care providers. To give one example, Operation Rescue, a small but loud group which claims in its leadership a convicted anti-abortion terrorist, is set up as the antiabortion counterpart to Planned Parenthood, an organization that has a vast network of health care centers, a well-organized advocacy wing, millions of patients, hundreds of employees, and hundreds of thousands of supporters and donors. Similarly, so-called “crisis pregnancy centers,” which usually do not provide any sort of health care but rather exist to steer women away from abortion and, often, contraception, should not be presented as the equivalent of a women’s health clinic that provides such services as contraception, STD tests, and abortions.

Strive for fairness. Avoid biased or coded language and imagery. Just as good journalists examine their words for correct spelling, punctuation, grammar, usage and style, so too—at all levels of the news delivery process—should they guard against biased language that could unfairly depict issues and people in the news. *Unspinning the Spin: The Women’s Media Center Guide to Fair and Accurate Language*, is available in print and as an e-book.

Cover what’s relevant, not just what’s dire. Media outlets should cover a range of stories, not just the most dire circumstances that put reproductive rights advocates on the defensive. While the extreme situations facing many reproductive health-care providers are important stories and should continue to appear on the pages of newspapers and websites, more positive and proactive stories exist as well. Giving them some ink would paint a fuller and more accurate picture of reproductive rights in the United States.

Use Best Practices from *The Women’s Media Center Media Guide to Covering Reproductive Issues*. This [guide](#) gives reporters and media outlets factual, historic, legal, medical, polling, and policy sources. Covering reproductive issues can be difficult. Here’s why:

Opinions versus facts: Legislation affecting reproductive rights and health often reflects both medical science and, despite the separation of church and state, religious beliefs. Because the debate on these issues is often deeply felt—and may vary between and among religions, as well as between leaders of a religion and its members—reporters need to be precise. As has often been said, everyone is entitled to an opinion but not to their own facts. Information in the guide is sourced, accurate, and credible.

Medical facts and nuance: Since many of these issues involve medical science, the facts may be couched in language not readily understood by the public or by reporters. This guide provides medically accurate descriptions of some of the most common facets of reproductive issues.

False assertions and fact checking: When a source asserts that women cannot be impregnated during a rape, or that women never die in childbirth (both of which statements were in the news last year) that's not a statement of opinion, that is a false assertion. Other false assertions include those that claim a proven link between abortion and breast cancer, or between abortion and mental health issues. This guide provides factual sources.

False balance: The tendency in journalism is to reduce controversial issues, such as reproductive issues, to polarized opposites. Yet the choices people make about sexual behavior, reproductive health, childbearing, and abortion are hardly so simple or clear-cut. Public opinion and the creation of public policy concerning reproductive health and rights are similarly complex and nuanced as a result. This guide provides the facts and information about the underlying arguments surrounding these complex issues.

Methodology

The Women's Media Center commissioned Novetta, (www.novetta.com) a Virginia-based analytics research company, to conduct this study using a hybrid machine analysis and human analysis process. Selected media included the top 10 national newspapers by circulation and the two wire services. (A footnote: The *San Jose Mercury News* was one of the top 10 circulated papers in 2013 when we first conducted media research. It is no longer in the top 10, but we have included and continued to monitor the outlet for consistency.)

Content published August 1, 2014-July 31, 2015 and containing key words and phrases, such as "abortion" or "contraception" or "reproductive health" or "reproductive rights" or "reproductive justice" was retroactively aggregated from all content available via Factiva for the following newspapers and wires: Associated Press, *Chicago Sun-Times*, *The Denver Post*, *Los Angeles Times*, *New York Daily News*, *New York Post*, *The New York Times*, Reuters, *San Jose Mercury News*, *USA Today*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *The Washington Post*. Supplemental content was aggregated from publicly available areas of websites for the following outlets: *Chicago Sun-Times*, *New York Daily News*, *New York Post*, *San Jose Mercury News*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *The Washington Post*. Only content that was not exclusively online was aggregated from these sites, and only content exceeding 500 words in length from Reuters and AP was aggregated.

Content was culled prior to analysis on the basis of relevance. In long pieces covering multiple topics (such as descriptions of the platforms of candidates with a reference to reproductive rights), only content relevant to reproductive rights was processed for analysis. Content from AP and Reuters was counted only once. If the story was counted as part of the wire count, it was not counted if the same story ran in one of the 10 newspapers.

Percentages throughout were rounded to the nearest whole number.

Editor's note: WMC followed AP style using "anti-abortion" instead of "pro-life" and "pro-abortion rights" instead of "pro-abortion" or "pro-choice."



Acknowledgments

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