

NEWS ANALYSIS | REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

2025 Was a Year of Chaos for Reproductive Rights Under the Trump Administration

Project 2025 initiated a war on reproductive rights that could escalate into even higher gear in 2026.

By Lauren Rankin, TRUTHOUT
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Abortion rights advocates gather outside the U.S. Supreme Court as oral arguments are delivered in the case of *Medina v. Planned Parenthood South Atlantic*, on April 2, 2025, in Washington, D.C.

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With a decidedly anti-choice Trump administration taking office at its start, 2025 was poised to be yet another brutal year for abortion rights. Advocates feared (<https://truthout.org/articles/7-states-just-enshrined-abortion-rights-as-possibility-of-a-federal-ban-looms/>) the imminent resurgence of the Comstock Act (<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/pill-anthony-comstocks-chastity-laws/>), an 1873 law that made it a criminal offense to share contraceptives, abortifacients, and information about either across state lines or through the mail.

As of now, the last month of this very difficult political year, that is yet to happen.

It feels disingenuous (and dehumanizing, I would argue) to tally “wins” and “losses” for something as fundamental to our personhood as the right to an abortion. But in a year like this, it’s impossible. The only narrative for abortion that emerges from this bizarre and horrifying year appears to be chaos.

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Chaos can feel haphazard by nature. But it can also be leveraged strategically, a means of catching the opposition off guard and rendering them incapable of responding with any certainty. While Project 2025, the playbook for this hostile and authoritarian administration, does contain specific provisions (https://www.gutmacher.org/fact-sheet/how-project-2025-seeks-obliterate-srhr?gad_source=1&gad_campaignid=742432537&gbraid=0AAAAAD-Q3tpwnZE6nysLKRYdpL9G2iWiO) on how to limit and even ban abortion, many of those haven’t happened yet. That seems odd, considering that half (<https://www.project2025.observer/en/>) of Project 2025 has already been completed, according to trackers.

But perhaps, like abortion opponents have done for decades, the Trump administration is now playing the long game. Immediately banning abortion would be extremely unpopular, since nearly two-thirds (https://apnorc.org/projects/support-for-legal-abortion-remains-strong/?doing_wp_cron=1764952605.8958780765533447265625) of Americans believe that abortion should be legal in all or most cases.

Medication abortion has become the primary political battleground for abortion access.

Because it can be prescribed from safe states and is, by nature, more covert and private than a procedural abortion at a clinic, medication abortion has become the primary political battleground for abortion access. Taking a bird’s eye view regarding medication abortion, this year seems all over the map.

In July, a federal appeals court upheld (<https://truthout.org/articles/federal-appeals-court-upheld-west-virginia-ban-on-medication-abortion-now-what/>) West Virginia’s draconian ban on medication abortion — the first time a federal court has allowed such a ban to stand. It’s a direct violation of the Food and Drug Administration’s (FDA) authority to oversee and approve medication. Notch that as a significant “loss.”

Less than three months later, the FDA approved (<https://www.nbcnews.com/health/womens-health/fda-approves-generic-abortion-pill-mifepristone-rcna235265>), a generic form of mifepristone, a huge win for clinics and patients. It could make medication abortion cheaper and more accessible for providers and patients alike. Despite the lack of announcement from the FDA, it was celebrated (<https://reproductivefreedomforall.org/news/reproductive-freedom-for-all-responds-to-fda-approval-of-new-generic-mifepristone/>) by abortion rights advocates. Yet Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. had just announced (<https://abcnews.go.com/US/health-secretary-rfk-jr-launches-review-abortion-pill/story?id=125908299>) that the FDA will conduct a new “review” of mifepristone’s safety record, despite the fact that more than 100 studies published (https://law.ucla.edu/sites/default/files/PDFs/Center_on_Reproductive_Health/Reproductive%20Health%20Researchers%20Comment%20Letter%20to%20FDA%208.27.25.pdf), OVER the past few decades definitively show that it is safe. Overseen by the man who erroneously links Tylenol with autism and irrationally hates vaccines, it’s understandable why abortion advocates are concerned.

Either the right hand isn’t talking to the left hand, or HHS is deploying chaos and randomness as a means of undermining abortion access by sowing confusion and doubt among abortion rights advocates.

We have no idea what’s coming next, and that makes it difficult to prepare.

It’s the same story at the state level. A new Texas law

(<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/dec/04/texas-law-abortion-pill-access-lawsuit>) now allows individual residents to sue people they suspect of making, mailing, and distributing medication abortion in the state. This doesn’t just threaten abortion providers from safe states (who are protected by their state’s “shield laws” (<https://time.com/7261130/what-are-abortion-shield-laws/>)) from extradition and prosecution), but could also be used to target, harass, and criminalize abortion funders and practical support workers who help abortion seekers travel out of state for abortion care. This could create a chilling effect around the abortion support ecosystem by sowing suspicion and fear. This serves to create more chaos for abortion seekers, in and out of Texas.

All the while, pregnant people are still dying as a result of abortion bans. Tierra Walker (<https://www.propublica.org/article/texas-abortion-ban-tierra-walker-preeclampsia>), a pregnant, 37-year-old Black mother, was denied life-saving care at a San Antonio hospital after a series of seizures and dangerously high blood pressure. On her son’s birthday, he found her draped over her bed, dead from preeclampsia.

Walker should be alive. Preeclampsia (<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/preeclampsia/diagnosis-treatment/drc-20355751>) is treatable — even without having an abortion. Black women are routinely ignored and mistreated (<https://www.kff.org/racial-equity-and-health-policy/five-facts-about-black-womens-experiences-in-health-care/>), by medical professionals, with racism and misogynoir undermining their ability to access basic care that white women often take for granted. But this tragedy is even deeper. It shows the culture of fear and brutality that abortion bans have created. Doctors in states like Texas are unable or unwilling to provide care to pregnant people, fearful that they will violate the state’s strict abortion bans and end up in prison. This isn’t just chaos, it’s cruelty — and it’s literally killing people.

That may be the ultimate point.

We have no idea what’s coming next, and that makes it difficult to prepare. The Comstock Law still looms large — it’s a central part of Project 2025 — and the HHS and FDA are overseen by anti-science quacks who seem hell-bent on eradicating decades of research and advances in health care.

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Medication abortion is still approved by the FDA, but for how long we don’t know.

abortion crisis pregnancy center (CPC) in New Jersey filed suit against the state’s attempt to regulate them by requiring them to share internal records and donor information. The case made it all the way to the Supreme Court. After oral arguments, it seems likely that the Supreme Court will hand a victory (<https://www.politico.com/news/2025/12/02/supreme-court-crisis-pregnancy-centers-arguments-00673174?nid=00000169-5991-d01a-a169-5d9f0cc10001&nname=women-rule&nrid=0000015b-b670-dac6-addb-bffcb7e40000>), to CPCs and undermine states’ abilities to regulate them.

Medication abortion is still approved by the FDA, but for how long we don’t know. And pregnant people in states with abortion bans are still at risk of serious health complications or even death because their physicians are terrified to provide care.

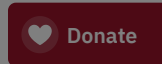
This is a mere snapshot of where the U.S. stands, and the image is a decidedly fuzzy one. It’s hard to make out the contours of legality and restrictions around abortion in this country, and that will continue into 2026 and beyond. That’s no accident — that is the legacy of *Dobbs*.

Now, on the precipice of one of the most important midterm elections in history, and with their new “Project 2026” detailing their even starker commitment to ending abortion access and eroding basic rights, the chaos and confusion will only get more acute. And it’s up to all of us to see through it.

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Lauren Rankin is the author of *Bodies on the Line: At the Front Lines of the Fight to Protect Abortion in America*, about the legacy of everyday volunteers on the fight for abortion right. Her writing has been featured at the *Washington Post*, *The Cut*, *Fast Company*, *Slate*, *Teen Vogue*, *TIME*, and many more. She spent six years as a clinic escort in New Jersey and is on the board of A is For, a reproductive rights advocacy nonprofit.

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