**Critique of “*How Abortion Has Changed Since 1973*” by FiveThirtyEight.**

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<https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/how-abortion-has-changed-since-1973/>

I found this piece particularly interesting because of the effective visualizations of compiled data for a controversial and topical subject like abortion. Although it’s been nearly 50 years since Roe v. Wade, abortion access remains a deeply personal and highly divisive subject that often fosters judgement and misinformation about the women seeking the procedure. This article looked at data from the CDC and Guttmacher institute and used graphs to show how the demographics and socio-economic status of those receiving abortions have changed in the past decades, and the results challenged even my own preconceived assumptions.

I thought the first graph depicting the falling abortion rate from 1973-2017 was the most powerful. There is a common argument that an increase in access leads to an increase in abortions, but the data showcased over time clearly challenges that notion. In my opinion (and apparently the writers / editors), this was the most surprising takeaway, and by including it at the top I think it was a great way to hook the readers. Adding too much text to a graph runs the risk of becoming cluttered or off-putting, but the additional one-sentence background on the high and low points didn’t have that effect and helped me wrap my head around what they are trying to get across.

The second graph of the trends in age breakdown of women getting abortions was also a surprising takeaway, and like the rates graph, I appreciate that they put it closer to the top of the story to grab my interest. I liked that the article did contextualize other reasons that might impact the drop in teenage abortion seekers like improved contraceptive use and simply having less sex. It demonstrated that the writers and researchers who put together this piece looked at more than just the obvious data and numbers that might spark a reaction and made worthwhile efforts to examine contributing factors. I found that forthcoming and a good example of journalistic integrity, as without that additional background I might’ve drawn a different conclusion and opinion.

However, as I praised the first graph for its layout, I found the others to be less aesthetically pleasing and I noticed it took me a little longer to digest. There is also one-sentence overlaid on top of the second and third graphs, but these are longer and comes off as more distracting than helpful. The beginning and end of the sentence goes *just* over the edge of the graph and the longer I look at it the more that bothers me. I believe their intention was to make the sentences meet horizontally at the ellipses so the reader’s eye would flow through naturally, but I would rather have had it offset a bit, so the text fits within the graph and isn’t clumped together towards the bottom.

Overall, I thought this piece did a good job of presenting decades of data in a relatively digestible way. It took a complicated and controversial macro issue and used data to navigate and highlight the various demographic intricacies of those seeking abortions. I most appreciated the additional context included between each graph that gave the reader insight on additional external factors that might have impacted the data being shown. While I was reading, that information often influenced my overall takeaway opinions on the graphs, so I believe that additional reporting is what made this article a successful cohesive piece on the subject.

My main critiques lie less in the writing and content and more in the visual design choices in many of the graphs. I will openly acknowledge my own inexperience in making these kind of graphs or tables so I am sure some of my judgement may be misguided, but there were at least one or two less than ideal visual components in each one. For example, the sentences on top of many of the graphs came off as distracting. In the unmarried rate graph towards the end, they change the color of the sentence mid-way through to accommodate for the changing background, but it really isn’t necessary as the rest of the words are the same color on each side of the graph. The first one is arguably the biggest takeaway and therefore the best designed, but the rest seem to fall into the same pitfalls of unnecessary words and questionable color choices. Although less than ideal, I don’t believe any of my critiques necessarily took away from the message and content of the article, so it is still a successful data driven article in my opinion.