



# Conservative Attacks on Birth Control

**The Radical Right's Attacks on Reproductive Freedom Won't Stop With Abortion. Blocking Access to Birth Control Will Be Their Next Target.**

## SUMMARY

Despite contraception being available and popular since the 1960s and 1970s, anti-choice activists have recently gained steam in their campaign to stigmatize and ban contraception. Now, they're admitting that if they succeed in banning or otherwise undermining access to abortion, attacking contraception is their next focus.

We continue to see increasingly aggressive efforts to attack contraception access and push harmful disinformation about contraception:

- Even before the 1990s, the anti-contraception movement was considered the radical fringe because of the overwhelming popularity of contraceptives.
- During the Clinton presidency, the Radical Right poured millions of dollars into stigmatizing contraception so they could continue their efforts while avoiding some backlash.
- During the Obama administration, anti-contraception activists aggressively attacked the Affordable Care Act, which expanded birth control access, and showed their true colors during the *Burwell v. Hobby Lobby* debate.
- In recent years, anti-choice activists have been increasingly clear about their desire to undermine contraception access.
- The Trump Administration has further eroded access to contraception by nominating Brett Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court and moving to gut contraceptive coverage in the ACA.

## The Radical Right Has Poured Millions Into Opposing Contraception, Aiming to Shift Sentiment Against Birth Control

**1965: Birth control was legalized for married couples. Seven years later, birth control was legalized for unmarried couples.** In 1965, the U.S. Supreme Court issued the landmark *Griswold v. Connecticut* decision, which guaranteed access to birth control for married couples. Seven years later, *Eisenstadt v. Baird* extended the right to contraceptives regardless of marital status. [The Nation, [3/20/12](#)]



**Even then, the anti-contraception movement was considered fringe.** “If the pill and the IUD may prevent implantation, and if implantation is where anti-abortion groups draw the line, why haven’t such groups railed against them for decades? Some have, but they got no traction. What happened, over the past 40 years, is that contraception became an accepted fact of life, and those who were opposed to it found themselves residing on the outer fringe.” [New York Times, [5/7/06](#)]

**During the Clinton presidency, right-wing foundations and think tanks poured millions of dollars of research into propaganda demonizing reproductive freedom.** “Exploiting inevitable tensions in the wake of profound social and economic changes occurring across the country as the result of altered gender roles and expectations – changes symbolized and made all the more palpable by Hillary Clinton’s activist role as First Lady – conservatives, with the support of powerful right-wing foundations and think tanks, poured millions of dollars into research and propaganda promoting family values and demonizing reproductive freedom, including emotional television ads that ran for years on major media outlets. A relentless stigmatizing of abortion, along with campaigns of intimidation and outright violence against Planned Parenthood and other providers, had a chilling effect on politicians generally shy of social controversy.” [Roosevelt Institute, [2/14/12](#)]

**Pro-choice advocates noticed a shift in anti-birth control sentiment in the late 1990s and early 2000s.** “The Guttmacher Institute, which like Siecus has been an advocate for birth control and sex education for decades, has also felt the shift. ‘Ten years ago the fight was all about abortion,’ says Cynthia Dailard, a senior public-policy associate at Guttmacher. ‘Increasingly, they have moved to attack and denigrate contraception. For those of us who work in the public health field, and respect longstanding public health principles – that condoms reduce S.T.D.’s, that contraception is the most effective way to help people avoid unintended pregnancy – it’s extremely disheartening to think we may be set back decades.” [New York Times, [5/7/06](#)]

## **Through the Early 2000s, Anti-Choice Activists Would “Soft-Pedal” Their Attacks on Contraception for Fear of Public Backlash**

**In the early 2000s, many Radical Right groups, including Concerned Women for America, “soft-pedal[ed]” their positions on contraception to appear more palatable.** As the New York Times noted in 2006, conservative groups like Concerned Women for America (CWA) “soft-pedal their position” on contraception rather than publicly opposing contraceptive access. CWA’s then-president Wendy Wright claimed that, “Concerned Women for America does not take a position regarding birth control,” but her organization also published pamphlets full of anti-contraception disinformation. As the Times noted, the claims in CWA’s supposedly “educational” resources on contraception included information that went “well beyond” the science. The brochure included a wide range of counterfactual claims that stigmatized contraception use: “Its section on emergency contraception advises that ‘its main function is to abort a living human embryo.’ One function of the birth control pill, it states, is to induce ‘a chemical abortion.’ The section on the IUD indicates none of its practical benefits (its 99 percent effectiveness in preventing pregnancy, its reversibility) and consists mostly of a litany of health complications, many of which health experts refute.” [New York Times, [5/7/06](#)]



**Anti-choice groups have had to moderate their tone because of the overwhelming public support for birth control.** “According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 98 percent of all women who have ever had intercourse have used at least one contraceptive method. Worldwide, about 76 million women currently use the birth control pill. It would be suicide for an organization that hopes to influence public policy to assert outright opposition to contraception. Instead, attacks are mostly around the periphery of the issue: on the health aspects of various forms of contraception, on the mechanism by which they work, on the efficacy of certain methods.” [New York Times, [5/7/06](#)]

## **Conservative Attacks on Contraception Increased During the Obama Presidency**

**Under President Obama, the Affordable Care Act dramatically expanded birth control access in the U.S., including a provision requiring employers to provide contraceptive coverage at no cost to individuals.** [Washington Post, [8/1/12](#)]

**Anti-choice organizations attacked the expanded contraception access, pushing the disinformation that emergency contraceptives and IUDs constitute abortion and claiming the ACA violated religious freedom.** [Guttmacher Institute, [12/9/14](#)]

**Anti-choice advocacy group Americans United for Life (AUL) called the contraceptive mandate a “back door abortion mandate” and falsely labeled contraception “life-ending drugs.”** AUL stated that contraceptive coverage in the ACA was a “back door abortion mandate” that required employers to cover “life-ending drugs that have been deceptively labeled as contraception.” [Americans United for Life, [11/15/10](#); One More Soul, [6/30/14](#)]

**Anti-choice political group Susan B. Anthony List inaccurately referred to the ACA’s contraceptive coverage provision as an “Abortion Drug Mandate.”** [Susan B. Anthony List, accessed [4/21/20](#)]

**The conservative Heritage Foundation said that the mandate required “coverage of abortion-inducing drugs and devices.”** [Daily Signal, [8/22/14](#)]

**In *Burwell v. Hobby Lobby*, brought by a conservative company that objected to its employees’ expanded access to contraception, the Supreme Court ruled that certain business owners could refuse to purchase employees insurance coverage that included contraception if they claimed a religious objection.** [New York Times, [6/30/14](#)]

## **In Recent Years, the Radical Right Has Increasingly Worked to Attack and Stigmatize Birth Control**

**Guttmacher: Anti-choice groups have run a “strategic campaign” to falsely conflate some types of birth control with abortion “as a way to undermine access to birth control.”** In a Guttmacher report entitled, “Contraception Is Not Abortion: The Strategic Campaign of Antiabortion Groups to Persuade the Public Otherwise,” Guttmacher wrote: “Yet, these same mainstream antiabortion groups have not



shied away from asserting in other contexts that certain methods of contraception are actually methods of abortion. They have in effect selectively embraced the core ‘personhood’ argument—that U.S. policy should in some circumstances recognize pregnancy as beginning at fertilization—as a way to undermine access to birth control. That strategy reached a new high water mark when it featured centrally in *Burwell v. Hobby Lobby*, the high-profile 2014 U.S. Supreme Court case that granted certain for-profit employers an exemption from the Affordable Care Act’s (ACA’s) contraceptive coverage guarantee. During this debate, leading organizations dedicated to banning abortion unequivocally endorsed the view—in legal briefs, press statements and elsewhere—that emergency contraceptives and IUDs constitute abortion.” [Guttmacher Institute, [12/9/14](#)]

**REALITY: “The weight of the evidence clearly shows that emergency contraceptives and IUDs are not abortifacients.”** As Guttmacher Institute notes, “The campaign to conflate contraception with abortion is based on the assertion that certain methods of contraception actually end – rather than prevent – pregnancy. That assertion, however, contradicts what science says about how pregnancies are established and how contraceptives work.” According to “the most up-to-date evidence about how hormonal and copper IUDs and the emergency contraceptives Plan B and ella work... none have been shown to disrupt an existing pregnancy – meaning that none can accurately be called an abortifacient.” [Guttmacher Institute, [12/9/14](#)]

**Students for Life President Kristan Hawkins said “in my ideal world,” birth control pills and IUDs would be illegal.** During an MSNBC appearance, host Joy Reid asked Hawkins if birth control pills and IUDs should be illegal. On IUDs, Hawkins said clearly: “I don’t think they should be legal. They put women at risk and they kill children.” When Reid pressed, “What about the birth control pill?” Hawkins further stated: “I do not think it should be legal, I think that shouldn’t be legal.” Hawkins summarized her position by saying: “in my ideal world, yes,” both the pill and IUDs should be illegal. She claimed that outlawing contraception was not something she was actively working towards, but acknowledged that she was working to divert funding away from health centers like Planned Parenthood that provide contraception access and toward other organizations that refuse to offer contraception. [MSNBC, [1/28/17](#), via Raw Story]

**Anti-choice activist Abby Johnson: “Birth control is not the answer. We need self control.”** Johnson tweeted: “54% of women who have abortions were contracepting at the time they got pregnant. Birth control is not the answer. We need self control.” [Twitter, [3/22/18](#)]



**Susan B. Anthony List President Marjorie Dannenfelser claimed funding family planning services leads to “an escalation” of abortions.** “As the money (for family planning) goes up, so do the number of abortions,” Dannenfelser said. “We have not seen a reduction in abortions since the full funding of family planning. We have seen an escalation.” [NPR, [9/7/11](#), via Susan B Anthony List]



**REALITY: As contraception access increased, “A Steep Drop in Unintended Pregnancy Is Driving Recent Abortion Declines.”** As extensive research from Guttmacher confirmed, broader access to free or low-cost contraception meant fewer unintended pregnancies which coincided with an overall decline in abortion. [Guttmacher Institute, [3/18/16](#)]

**Dannenfelser: “The bottom line is that to lose the connection between sex and having children leads to problems.”** In an interview at the 2011 Faith and Freedom Conference, Dannenfelser falsely claimed: “Every year that contraception and family planning increases, the abortion rate also increases in direct proportion – not inverse. This is an undeniable fact. It happens every year.” She also said, “The bottom line is that to lose the connection between sex and having children leads to problems.” [Dannenfelser Remarks via Faith In Public Life, [6/8/11](#)]

**Concerned Women for America President Penny Nance deliberately stigmatized the morning after pill and inaccurately called it an “abortifacient.”** Nance told OneNewsNow, “Now that we’ve made the morning after pill available for anyone at any age, we’re seeing an extreme increase in teen use... About a decade ago, it was one in twelve kids using it, and now a report has come out that about one in five teenage girls have used the morning after pill, which we know is an abortifacient.” [OneNewsNow, [9/26/15](#)]

**AUL has falsely conflated contraception with abortion, saying those acknowledge the scientific evidence put “The Con in Contraceptive.”** AUL’s website claimed: “Abortion industry advocates put ‘The Con in Contraceptive’ by mislabeling life-ending drugs and devices as contraception, when in fact drugs such as ella, intrauterine devices and Plan B can end the life of an unborn child.” [Americans United for Life, accessed [6/28/18](#)]

**Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF) warned that allowing doctors to explain birth control options was tantamount to “bullying women into not reproducing.”** ADF, an SPLC-designated hate group, attacked an Oregon Foundation for Reproductive Health (OFRH) initiative that recommended healthcare providers ask “Would you like to become pregnant in the next year?” As ADF put it: “If women say no, or they’re unsure, then the provider gives them contraception counseling. This so-called ‘counseling’ program is disturbing on many levels... Care providers are strongly encouraged to counsel women to use long-acting reversible contraception (LARC) - IUDs and implants that chemically sterilize women while in use and require a doctor’s administration and removal... we’re all about giving women ‘reproductive choices,’ if by choice you mean bullying women into not reproducing? Who’s really ‘pro-woman’ here?” [Alliance Defending Freedom, [11/16/15](#)]

**Former AUL President Charmaine Yoest opposed birth control, but also said AUL takes an incremental strategy: “Never attack where the enemy is strongest.”** The New York Times Magazine reported, “Yoest’s end goal isn’t to make abortion safer. She wants to make the procedure illegal. She leaves no room for exceptions in the case of rape or incest or to preserve the health of the mother. She believes that embryos have legal rights and **opposes birth control, like the IUD, that she thinks ‘has life-ending properties.’**” Separately, the National Catholic Register reported that Americans United for Life has long favored an incremental in its fight against reproductive freedom, typically denying the extent of its true goals: “For us, it’s very much a military strategy,” says Yoest. “We don’t make frontal



attacks. Never attack where the enemy is strongest.” [National Catholic Register, [10/5/11](#); The New York Times Magazine, [11/2/12](#)]

**VIDEO: “National Right To Life Speaker: Contraception And Abortion Are The Real War On Women, And They Come From ‘The Pit of Hell.’** Right Wing Watch reported, “The National Right To Life Convention kicked off this morning with a panel discussion featuring National Review Online editor Kathryn Jean Lopez, anti-choice activist Dr. Jean Garton, and radio host and crisis pregnancy center director Joy Pinto. All three, along with National Right to Life president Carol Tobias, who introduced the panel, struck back against the ‘War on Women’ label that has been used for legislative assaults on abortion rights, contraception access, equal pay, and domestic violence protections. Pinto – who runs a crisis pregnancy center in Birmingham, Alabama, which, like many such centers appears to misleading claim to offer medical consulting for women considering an abortion – argued that the ‘real war on women’ consists of legal abortion and access to contraception, particularly emergency contraception. She added that this ‘war on women’ came from the ‘pit of hell’ and implied that women who have abortions are like Eve eating the forbidden fruit in the hopes of eternal life: ‘It’s the same lie. It’s the same war.’” [Right Wing Watch, [6/26/14](#)]

**Americans United for Life’s 2018 Women Speak Conference warned contraception and abortion undermine marriage and create a “sexually permissive” environment.** Jenet Jacob Erickson, an affiliated scholar at the Wheatley Institution at BYU spoke at AUL’s 2018 Women Speak conference. She argued: “What we do know is that the assumption underlying abortion policy and widespread advocacy of contraceptives teach powerful messages about women’s and men’s relationships and their responsibilities to the life that they create... Specifically consider how contraception and abortion have impacted women’s and men’s relationships... The average woman could and did count on someone seeing evidence of commitment before sex because sex risked pregnancy, which would dramatically alter her life. But contraception and abortion have altered the playing field... This translates into lower levels of marriageable men, less commitment and a more sexually permissive climate wherein women receive less in exchange for sex and are easily objectified...For these women, advocacy for abortion only masks their deepest desire for connection and wholeness in relationships, with men as husbands and fathers, and with the children of those fathers. We must work to create a world where we do not have to impoverish relationships, tear them apart in order for women to have life... A post Roe world gives us the opportunity to effectively work towards that world.” [Americans United for Life, Women Speak, [6/13/18](#)]

## **The Trump Administration Followed the Radical Right’s Lead, Working to Gut Contraception Provisions Won in the ACA**

**Under the Trump administration, non-governmental organizations that object to providing contraceptive coverage can do so.** “Contraceptive coverage is among the ACA’s most litigated topics, leading to significant Supreme Court decisions such as *Hobby Lobby*. Much of the background of this history of litigation is outlined extensively in previous posts. In May 2017, President Trump issued an executive order directing federal agencies to address conscience-based objections to the contraceptive mandate. The Departments of Health and Human Services, Labor, and Treasury then issued interim final rules that dramatically expanded the Obama-era policy on exemptions to the contraceptive mandate for religious entities.” [Health Affairs, [1/2/19](#)]



**The rules were successfully challenged by the attorneys general of California and Pennsylvania.** “Soon after the interim final rules were issued, they were successfully challenged in two lawsuits by Democratic attorneys general, led by California in one case and Pennsylvania in the other; both courts granted a nationwide preliminary injunction to prevent the rules from going into effect. These cases were appealed to the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals and the Third Circuit Court of Appeals, respectively. (The Democratic attorney general of Massachusetts also challenged the interim final rules but was found not to have standing to do so. That ruling was appealed to the First Circuit Court of Appeals.)” [Health Affairs, [1/2/19](#)]

**Even as the litigation proceeded, the Trump administration issued two new rules on religious and moral objections to contraceptive coverage.** “Even as this litigation proceeded, the Trump administration issued two new final rules on religious and moral objections to contraceptive coverage in November 2018. These rules will supersede the interim final rules when they go into effect on January 14, 2019. The final rules largely maintain the provisions from the interim final rules, with relatively few changes despite 110,000 combined comments.” [Health Affairs, [1/2/19](#)]

## **Anti-Choice Activists Have Also Celebrated Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh’s Embrace of Anti-Contraception Disinformaton**

**Ignoring medical evidence, Kavanaugh echoed anti-choice claims that birth control and emergency contraception are “abortion inducing drugs.”** Responding to a question from Senator Ted Cruz about his dissent in the *Priests for Life v. HHS* case, Kavanaugh said: “That was a group that was being forced to provide a certain kind of health coverage over their religious objection to their employees, and under the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, the question was, first, was this a substantial burden on their religious exercise? And it seemed to me quite clearly that it was. It was a technical matter of filling out a form. They said that filling out the form would make them complicit in the provision of the abortion-inducing drugs that they were, as a religious matter, objected to.” In the case, anti-choice organization Priests for Life had objected to both an Affordable Care Act provision allowing people to access contraceptive coverage through their employers at no cost, and the process the law established to allow religious nonprofits to apply for an exemption from directly providing contraceptive coverage. [Senate Judiciary Committee Hearing on the Nomination of Brett M. Kavanaugh, [9/6/18](#), via HuffPost; SCOTUSblog, accessed [9/6/18](#)]

### **Anti-Choice Figures Immediately Echoed Kavanaugh’s False Claim.**

**Students for Life President Kristan Hawkins Tweeted:** “Protecting the ‘Little Guy’ like #PriestsforLife from coercive policies forcing purchase of life-ending drugs the right use of our legal system. Thanks Judge Kavanaugh!” [Twitter, [9/6/18](#)]

**Human Coalition’s Lauren Enriquez Tweeted:** “Fact: Hormonal Birth Control And Certain IUDs Are Abortion-inducing.” Human Coalition is a network of anti-choice fake women’s health centers. [Twitter, [9/6/18](#)]