

Could Drones Delivering The Abortion Pill Help American Women Access The Care They Seek?



Dan Mullan/Getty Images Sport/Getty Images



ERIN CORBETT

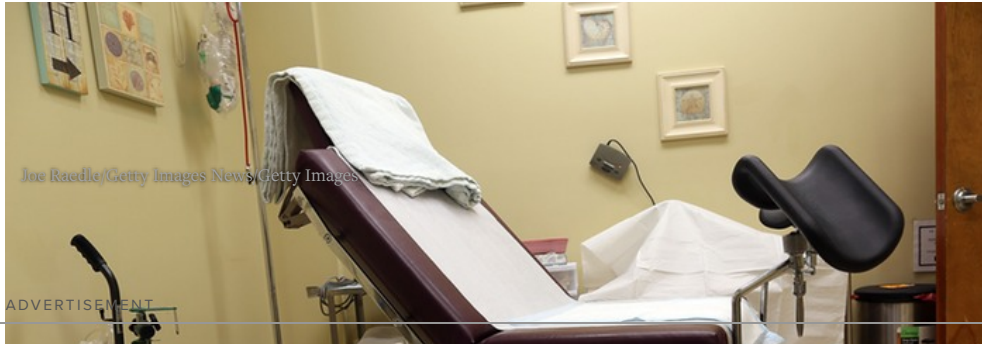
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As the commercial drone has made its way to global markets, its uses have so far gone beyond just flying the tool for fun, or for film and photography purposes. In some countries, drones have been used for what some might call a “subversive” purpose, one that makes reproductive healthcare more accessible to those in need. Specifically, pro-choice groups have used the tool to deliver abortion pills to women in countries with restrictive abortion laws. Since they have been used in an international context, [could drones also deliver abortions to U.S. people](#) seeking the procedure?

Last summer, Women on Web, formerly known as Women on Waves used [drones to deliver the abortion pill](#) to women in Poland, where the procedure is banned except in cases of fetal abnormality, if a patient’s life is at risk, and in cases of rape or incest. The group also recently collaborated with pro-choice groups in [Northern Ireland to deliver the pill](#) to women who are unable to travel outside the region to seek the procedure. Ireland’s abortion laws allow women to seek an abortion only in cases where the patient’s life is in danger.

With [abortion restrictions only expanding](#) in the U.S. — and especially in rural states like Utah and Indiana, which have seen some nightmarish anti-abortion bills just this past year — drones could transcend the reproductive healthcare boundaries that American women face, just as they have in European countries.



Unfortunately, the same services would not necessarily be provided by Women on Web, the international service that aims to make medication abortions accessible to women in countries where the procedure is illegal or restrictive. U.S. federal law mandates that abortions are legal, due to the [1973 landmark case of *Roe v. Wade*](#).

However, individual states can limit abortions and make them inaccessible based on specific medical regulations. For instance, [Utah passed an abortion law](#) in March that would require doctors to administer anesthesia to individuals seeking a surgical abortion from 20 weeks gestation onward. The requirement increases the risk of complications during the procedure, which is so short that general anesthesia is often unnecessary. Insidious laws of this nature present hurdles for women in the U.S. who hope to access

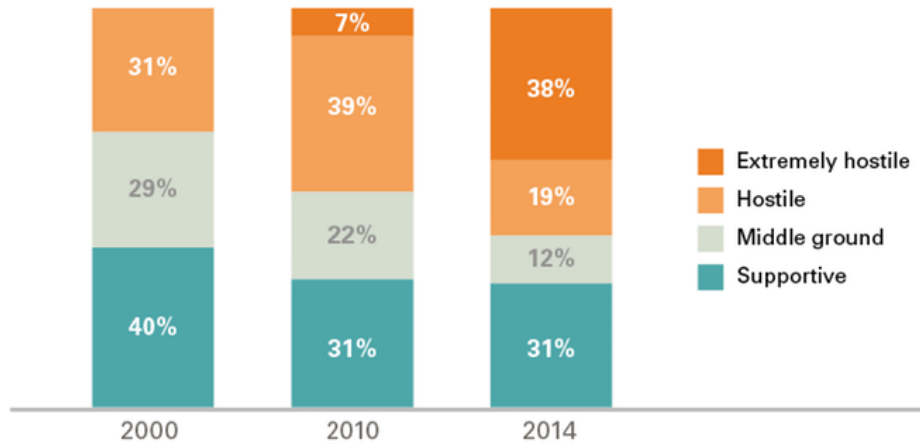
reproductive healthcare, and their right to terminate a pregnancy.



Many rural states enforce mandatory consent laws, waiting periods, and counseling for women seeking abortions that force them to seek the procedure in another state. For instance, Indiana requires written consent from a parent for minors to receive an abortion and a mandatory waiting period. South Dakota law also enforces counseling and a mandatory 72-hour waiting period, and [98 percent of counties](#) across the state did not have an accessible abortion clinic in 2011. The state also prohibits remote abortions, meaning anyone seeking a medication abortion can not proceed with the service from their own home, according to the Guttmacher Institute, posing another issue for those who would feel more comfortable proceeding with an at-home abortion.

This creates emotional, economic, and geographic hurdles for individuals. Eighty-nine percent of counties across the country did not have an abortion clinic in 2011, forcing women to travel to access the procedure, according to the Guttmacher Institute. In fact, a third of women living in the U.S. have to [travel over 25 miles](#) to receive an abortion, and 57 percent of women between the ages of 15 and 44 live in a state that is "hostile or extremely hostile to abortion rights."

More than half of U.S. women of reproductive age live in states that are hostile or extremely hostile to abortion rights



Supportive states have no more than one type of major abortion restriction. Middle ground states have 2-3 types of major restrictions, hostile states have 4-5 and extremely hostile states have 6-10.

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administered by the Hampshire County Commissioner every five years.

Commercial drone operators with a device that weighs more than .55lbs. must also register their drone with the [FAA's Federal Drone Registration](#), and failure to do so can result in [sanctions that include civil penalties of \\$27,500](#) and criminal penalties that include \$250,000 or three years in prison. But it's hard to say whether drones delivering abortion pills across the U.S. would even be possible.

Abortion drones in the U.S. could help women in rural states to at least access the medical procedure without having to undergo the waiting period, or mandatory consent and counseling laws. But the process of offering this kind of delivery on such a large scale would be extremely challenging.

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