

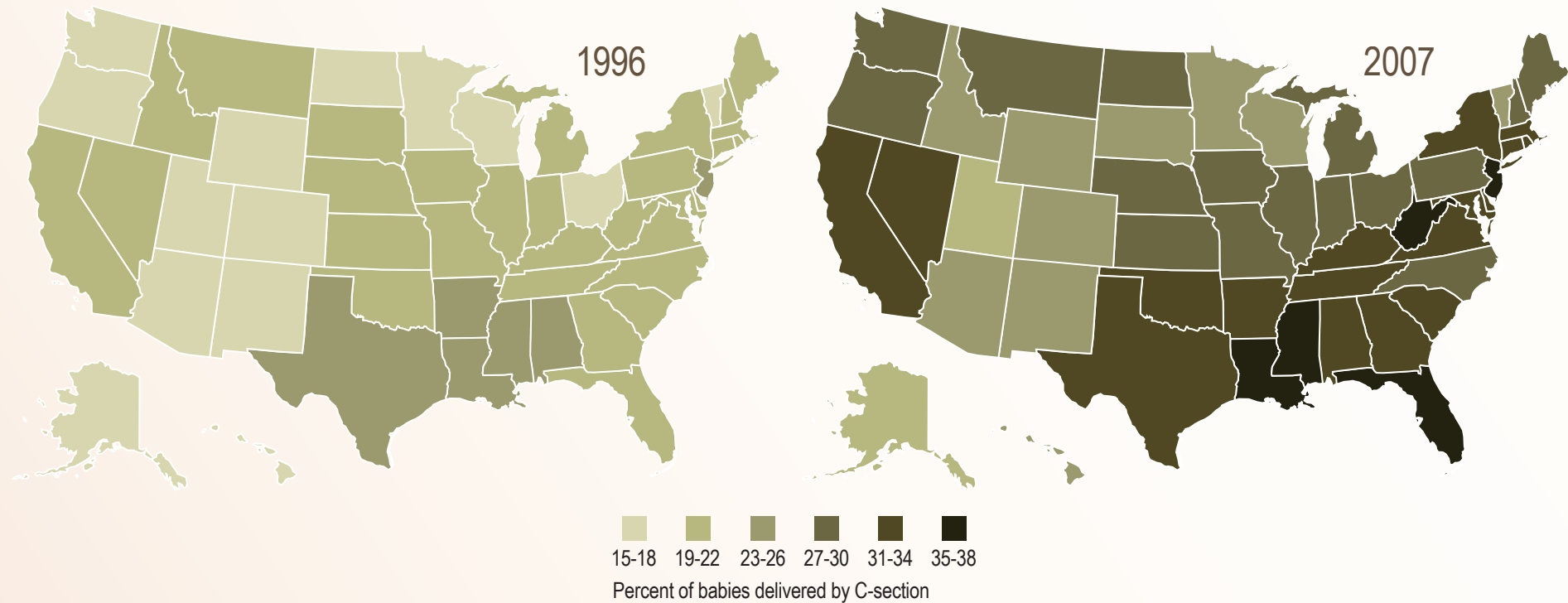
# RISE OF THE C-SECTION

In 2007, nearly one-third of babies born in the U.S. were delivered by Cesarean section—representing the highest C-section rate in U.S.

history. Although there are many legitimate medical reasons to opt for C-section delivery, some worry that the increase reflects a rise in unnecessary surgeries. Experts estimate the optimal percentage of C-section births to be between 5 and 15 percent—far lower than what we're seeing in practice.

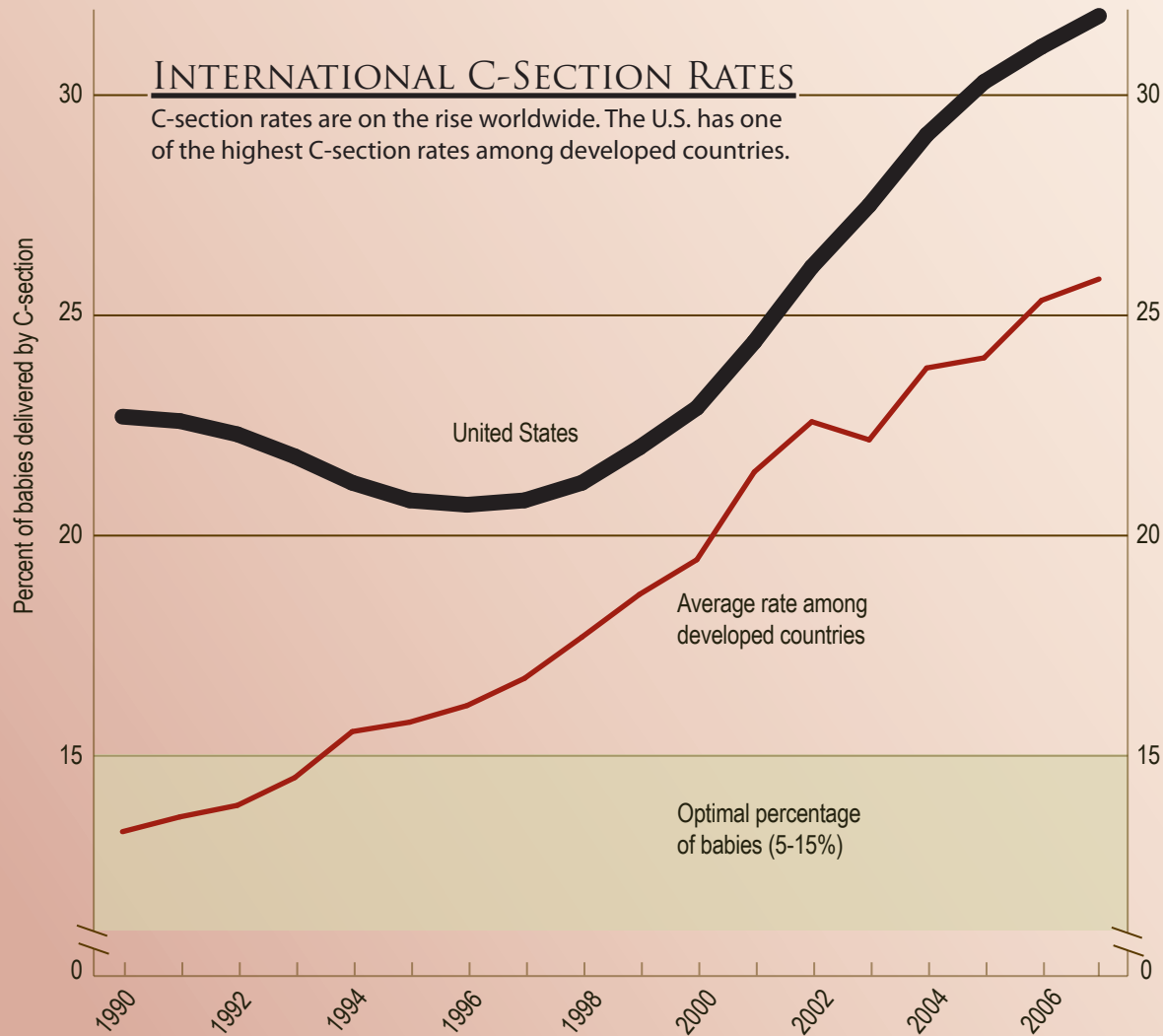
## STATE C-SECTION RATES

The percentage of babies delivered by C-section varies across the states. However, each state has seen a marked increase in Cesareans over the past decade.



## INTERNATIONAL C-SECTION RATES

C-section rates are on the rise worldwide. The U.S. has one of the highest C-section rates among developed countries.



## WHAT'S GOING ON?

It appears that many C-sections being performed today are not medically necessary, making the continued increase of Cesarean delivery a troubling trend. Contributing factors that have been investigated include:

### Doctors' fear of malpractice suits.

"Failure to perform C-section" is a common allegation in obstetrics lawsuits, so opting for a Cesarean whenever there's any doubt about the baby's health is a way for doctors to protect themselves in case they're sued. Higher malpractice premiums have been shown to be correlated with higher C-section rates.

### Use of labor interventions.

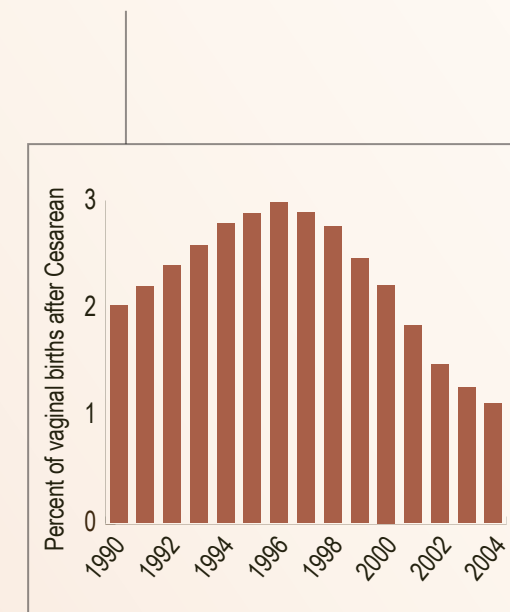
Drugs used to induce labor, as well as hormones and painkillers administered during labor, may slow the process of vaginal birth, leading doctors to resort to C-sections more frequently.

### Incentives for efficiency in medical care.

As healthcare costs rise, there's a greater incentive for doctors and hospitals to utilize methods to speed up delivery, potentially resulting in more Cesarean deliveries.

### Hospital policies against vaginal birth after Cesarean.

Doctors and hospitals have become less willing to attempt vaginal birth for women who have had a C-section in a previous birth. This produces a snowball effect as the proliferation of C-section births builds on itself in subsequent pregnancies.



### Demographic changes among mothers.

The percentage of mothers who are older or have health problems—and are thus more likely to need Cesarean delivery—has risen. However, there's some debate about whether this factor can account for the increase in C-sections, because the rise in C-sections has been reflected across all maternal ages, races/ethnicities, and other demographic factors.

### Maternal choice.

Anecdotal, some women have requested scheduled Cesarean delivery for their convenience, even when there's no medical reason to do so. However, surveys have shown this to be relatively rare, so it doesn't likely account for the increase.

SOURCES: International data from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2009. State and vaginal birth after Cesarean data from the National Center for Health Statistics, 2010. 2007 is the most recent year for which these data are available; 2004 is the last year for data on vaginal birth after Cesarean. Information graphic designed by Anne Frances Johnson.