

Abortion data for countries of mainland Latin America

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Abstract: This document summarizes abortion data for countries of mainland Latin America (i.e., South America, Central America, and Mexico). Data is reported for six countries and one territory not included in the 2018 Abortion Worldwide Report: Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Uruguay, and the former territory of Panama Canal Zone.

Since the *Abortion Worldwide Report (AWR)* was published in 2018, additional data for several South American countries has become available. Some data for Colombia and Paraguay were reported in the *United Nations Demographic Yearbook 2016* (UN, 2018). (Data were also reported for Ecuador, but spontaneous miscarriages are likely included.) Other data are identified for Argentina, Chile, Ecuador, Paraguay, and Uruguay. Data for a single year each are reported for Suriname and Venezuela. This report reviews these data, including previously reported data in the AWR, and comments on the results relative to published claims regarding abortion levels in Latin America.

For context on the data in this report, first we summarize abortion policies and data caveats by listed country. Countries with (*) next to the name are those with abortion data listed in the 2018 AWR. Unless otherwise specified, policy information is from Jacobson (2018).

- **Argentina** only permits abortion to save the mother's life or in cases of rape. On 9 August 2018 the Argentine Senate rejected legislation that would have permitted abortion under broad circumstances (Politi and Londoño, 2018). Data presented here are for illegal abortions.
- **Belize*** since 1980 permits abortion to save the mother's life, in cases of maternal or fetal health issues, or for economic and social reasons.
- **Brazil** prohibits abortion, although no penalty is imposed for abortions to save the mother's life or in cases of rape. In 1999, 2005, and 2011 policies were amended to facilitate abortions in cases of rape (Madeiro and Diniz, 2016). In April 2012 the Brazilian Supreme Federal Court ruled that abortion is legal in cases of fetal anencephaly, a condition sometimes occurring in pregnancies involving Zika infection.
- **Chile*** permitted "therapeutic abortion" until 1989 when all abortions were banned. In September 2017 legislation went into effect permitting abortion in cases of risk to the

mother's life, fetal health, and rape (Reuters, 2017).

- **Colombia** banned all abortions until 2006, when abortion was legalized in cases of threat to the mother's life, maternal health, or rape/incest.
- **Costa Rica*** permits abortion in cases of risk to the mother's life or maternal health.
- **Ecuador** prohibited abortion until January 2014 when the law was revised to permit abortion in cases of risk to the mother's life, maternal physical or mental health, or rape (MSPE, 2015). However, large numbers of reported "justified medical abortions" for 2004-2014 imply the law was not enforced. Data presented here are estimates for medical abortions based on total abortions for 2004-2014, and the assumption that such abortions are proportional to sales of misoprostol as reported in (Ortiz-Prado et al., 2017). The *UN Demographic Yearbook 2016* (UN, 2018) reported abortion data for Ecuador for 2012-2015, but these figures include spontaneous miscarriages (Ortiz-Prado et al., 2017) and likely only a small fraction are induced abortions.
- **French Guiana*** is an overseas department of France; abortion is legal on demand.
- **Guyana*** banned abortion until 1995 (though the law was rarely enforced). Since 1995 abortion is permitted for any reason in the first 8 weeks, and later in pregnancy it is only permitted in cases of maternal or fetal health issues.
- **Mexico*** has varying abortion policies as they are set at the state level. Mexico City (formerly Distrito Federal) since 2007 has permitted abortion on demand in the first 12 weeks of pregnancy, and nearly all reported abortions have occurred there. About 29% of abortions in the Federal District in 2007-2017 were for residents of other states of Mexico (CDMX, 2018). Of 31 Mexican states, all permit abortion in cases of rape, all but three permit abortion to save the mother's life, 14 permit it in cases of fetal health, and one (Yucatan) permits it for economic reasons (Becker and Olavarrieta, 2013).
- **Panama*** only permits abortion to save the mother's life, in cases of rape, or in cases of fetal health issues.
- **Panama Canal Zone** was a territory of the United States until 1979 when it was transferred to Panama. Legal abortions were reported for 1970-1978.
- **Paraguay** permits abortion only to save the mother's life. Reported abortion data are incomplete as private abortions are not included (it is unclear if miscarriages are excluded).
- **Suriname** permits abortion only in cases of risk to the mother's life. Data are reported for only a single year: 262 abortions in 1994, corresponding to 3.02% of known pregnancies (excluding miscarriages) and an abortion rate of 2.60 per 1,000 women ages 15-44.
- **Uruguay** in October 2012 legalized abortion on demand during the first 12 weeks of pregnancy and for more limited reasons later in pregnancy (Wood et al., 2016).
- **Venezuela** permits abortion only to save the mother's life. Data are reported for only a single year: 3,085 abortions in 1968, corresponding to 0.80% of known pregnancies (excluding miscarriages) and an abortion rate of 1.42 per 1,000 women ages 15-44.

Tables 1-6 (at the end of this report) summarize reported abortions, abortion percentages, and abortion rates for the countries listed above, excepting Suriname and Venezuela (for each of those two countries see above for the single year of available data). These data plus additional data (e.g., live births, fetal losses) are available on country pages at *Johnston's Archive* (Johnston, 2018). Figures 1 and 2 below show abortion percentages and rates, respectively, for selected countries and regions.

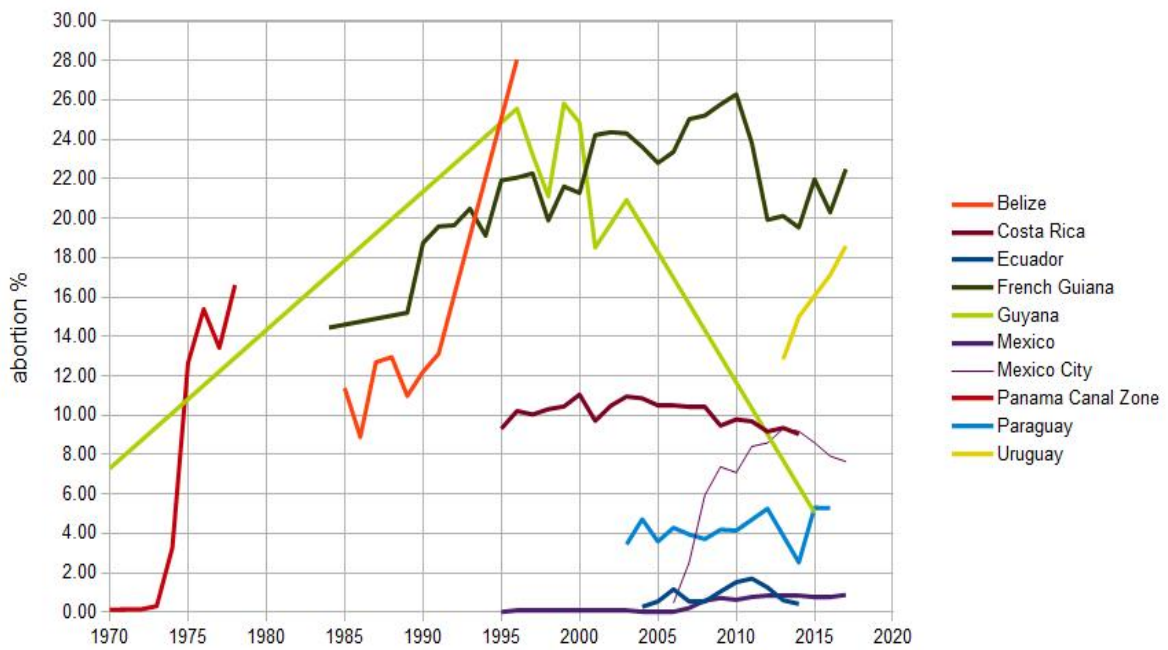


Figure 1. Abortion percentages for 8 Latin American countries plus Panama Canal Zone and Mexico City (Distrito Federal).

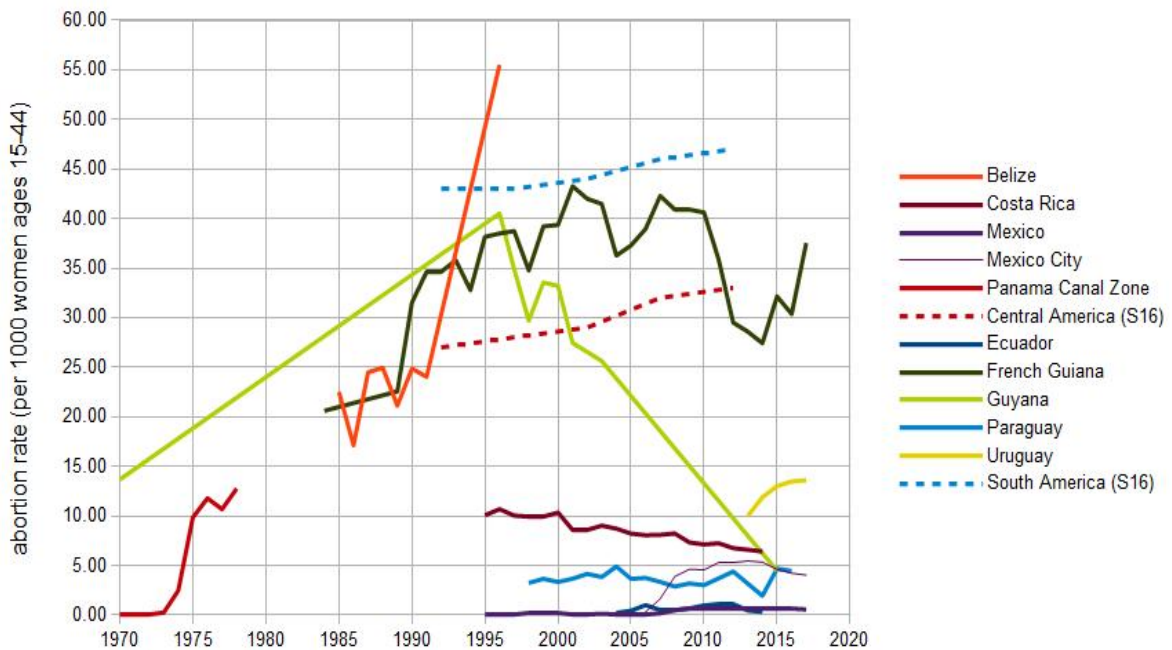


Figure 2. Abortion rates for 8 Latin American countries plus Panama Canal Zone and Mexico City (Distrito Federal). Dashed lines show regional estimates by Sedgh et al. (2016).

Abortion advocates claim that illegal abortions throughout Latin America are far higher than indicated in these reported figures. For example, Sedgh et al. (2016) (hereafter S16) claimed abortion rates that imply over 40% of pregnancies in South America are aborted, and over 25% in Mexico/Central America. Such claims have been refuted in general (e.g., Antkowiak and O'Bannon, 2003; Johnston, 2017) and in particular (e.g., Koch et al. 2012a,

2012b, 2012c). Unreported legal abortions as well as illegal abortions certainly occur in large numbers in most of these countries, but the extremely high claims by abortion advocates are implausible. Figure 2 shows the S16 claims for Latin American abortion rates compared to reported abortion rates for 10 countries and other areas. The S16 estimates are comparable to the highest observed rates which are in countries with broadly permitted abortion—Belize, French Guiana and Guyana. But in other cases of broadly permitted abortion, abortion rates are far lower: 14 per 1,000 women in Uruguay, 5 per 1,000 women in Mexico City (limiting to data for Mexico City residents), and 12 per 1,000 women in the former Panama Canal Zone. These cases tend to refute claims of uniformly high abortion rates. In locations where abortion is permitted only for limited reasons, observed abortion rates are more typically 1-6 per 1,000 women.

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Table 1: Reported abortions for Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Uruguay, and Panama Canal Zone.

year	Argentina	Brazil	Colombia	Ecuador	Panama Canal Zone	Paraguay	Uruguay
1970					1		
1971							
1972					1		
1973					2		
1974					21		
1975					84		
1976					98		
1977					87		
1978					104		
~							
1998						3,617	
1999						4,180	
2000		8				3,913	
2001						4,407	
2002		1				5,115	
2003		3				4,850	
2004	94	6		(700)		6,328	
2005	79	18		(1,400)		4,822	
2006	93	9		(3,300)		5,050	
2007	74	56		(1,600)		4,585	
2008	62	3,000	322	(1,600)		4,020	
2009	87	1,831	69	(2,300)		4,520	
2010	68	1,693	81	(3,400)		4,353	
2011	73	1,504	120	(4,000)			
2012	33	1,655	209	(3,800)		6,579	
2013	50	1,543	628	(1,700)			7,171
2014		1,612	873	(1,200)		3,021	8,537
2015		1,704	3,100			7,411	9,362
2016		1,680				7,156	9,719
2017		1,636					9,830

Table 2: Reported abortions for Belize, Chile, Costa Rica, French Guiana, Guyana, Mexico, and Panama.

year	Belize	Chile	Costa Rica	French Guiana	Guyana	Mexico	Panama
1964		63					
1965							
1966		38					
1967							
1968							
1969							
1970					1,868		
1971							
1972							7
1973							14
1974							16
1975							38
1976							
1977							7
1978							6
1979							11
1980							26
1981							11
1982							12
1983							
1984				388			
1985	760						
1986	599	47					
1987	890	47					
1988	941	49					
1989	825	42		(570)			
1990	1,001	29		833			
1991	990	67		955			
1992				989			
1993				1,060			
1994				1,001			
1995			8,253	1,197		463	
1996	2,603		9,009	1,236	7,711	2,724	
1997			8,705	1,270	6,614	2,938	
1998			8,850	1,166	5,591	3,189	
1999			9,160	1,353	6,249	3,486	
2000		46	9,711	1,409	6,104	3,281	11
2001		31	8,220	1,643	4,977	3,120	
2002		7	8,332	1,699		3,223	
2003		29	8,967	1,783	4,500	3,486	

2004			8,801	1,646		752	
2005			8,411	1,772		735	
2006			8,367	1,914		799	
2007			8,504	2,132		4,799	
2008			8,733	2,106		13,404	
2009			7,848	2,143		16,475	
2010			7,697	2,169		16,945	
2011			7,882	1,956		20,319	
2012			7,405	1,644		20,485	
2013			7,283	1,630		20,765	
2014			7,137	1,600		20,559	
2015				1,917	800	18,942	
2016				1,852		18,104	
2017		111				17,595	

Table 3: Abortion percentages (abortions as a percentage of total live births plus abortions) for Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Uruguay, and Panama Canal Zone.

year	Argentina	Brazil	Colombia	Ecuador	Panama Canal Zone	Paraguay	Uruguay
1970					0.14		
1971							
1972					0.15		
1973					0.32		
1974					3.28		
1975					12.65		
1976					15.38		
1977					13.43		
1978					16.61		
~							
2003						3.45	
2004	0.01			0.3		4.72	
2005	0.01			0.6		3.60	
2006	0.01			1.2		4.29	
2007	0.01			0.6		3.95	
2008	0.01	0.11	0.04	0.6		3.72	
2009	0.01	0.07	0.01	1.1		4.19	
2010	0.01	0.06	0.01	1.5		4.15	
2011	0.01	0.05	0.02	1.7			
2012	0.00	0.06	0.03	1.3		5.26	
2013	0.01	0.05	0.10	0.6			12.84
2014		0.06	0.13	0.4		2.53	15.00
2015		0.06				5.31	16.06
2016		0.06				5.29	17.12
2017		0.06					18.59

Table 4: Abortion percentages (abortions as a percentage of total live births plus abortions) for Belize, Chile, Costa Rica, French Guiana, Guyana, Mexico, Mexico City, and Panama.

year	Belize	Chile	Costa Rica	French Guiana	Guyana	Mexico	Mexico City	Panama
1964		0.02						
1965								
1966		0.01						
1967								
1968								
1969								
1970					7.31			
1971								
1972								0.01
1973								0.03
1974								0.03
1975								0.07
1976								
1977								0.01
1978								0.01
1979								0.02
1980								0.05
1981								0.02
1982								0.02
1983								
1984				14.45				
1985	11.38							
1986	8.89	0.02						
1987	12.69	0.02						
1988	12.95	0.02						
1989	10.98	0.01		15.21				
1990	12.21	0.01		18.74				
1991	13.12	0.02		19.58				
1992				19.65				
1993				20.49				
1994				19.12				
1995			9.32	21.92		0.02		
1996	28.05		10.21	22.06	25.56	0.10		
1997			10.04	22.28	23.23	0.11		
1998			10.31	19.89	21.11	0.12		
1999			10.45	21.61	25.82	0.13		
2000		0.02	11.05	21.28	24.85	0.12		0.02
2001		0.01	9.71	24.22	18.52	0.11		
2002		0.00	10.48	24.37		0.12		

2003		0.01	10.95	24.30	20.93	0.13		
2004			10.86	23.62		0.03		
2005			10.52	22.81		0.03		
2006			10.50	23.37		0.04	0.50	
2007			10.42	25.03		0.22	2.53	
2008			10.41	25.21		0.59	5.94	
2009			9.47	25.78		0.73	7.39	
2010			9.79	26.28		0.64	7.09	
2011			9.69	23.81		0.78	8.42	
2012			9.17	19.92		0.81	8.60	
2013			9.36	20.11		0.83	9.31	
2014			9.04	19.53		0.83	9.19	
2015				21.98	5.06	0.80	8.61	
2016				20.30		0.78	7.93	
2017		0.05		22.49		0.89	7.65	

Table 5: Abortion rates (abortions per 1,000 women ages 15-44) for Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Uruguay, and Panama Canal Zone.

year	Argentina	Brazil	Colombia	Ecuador	Panama Canal Zone	Paraguay	Uruguay
1970					0.1		
1971							
1972					0.1		
1973					0.2		
1974					2.5		
1975					9.8		
1976					11.8		
1977					10.7		
1978					12.8		
~							
1998						3.24	
1999						3.65	
2000						3.33	
2001						3.66	
2002						4.15	
2003						3.84	
2004	0.01			0.2		4.89	
2005	0.01			0.4		3.65	
2006	0.01			1.0		3.74	
2007	0.01			0.5		3.34	
2008	0.01	0.06	0.03	0.5		2.88	
2009	0.01	0.04	0.01	0.7		3.18	
2010	0.01	0.03	0.01	1.0		3.01	
2011	0.01	0.03	0.01	1.1			

2012		0.03	0.02	1.1		4.39	
2013	0.01	0.03	0.05	0.5			10.01
2014		0.03	0.08	0.3		1.94	11.88
2015		0.03	0.27			4.68	13.00
2016		0.03				4.45	13.47
2017		0.03					13.60

Table 6: Abortion rates (abortions per 1,000 women ages 15-44) for Belize, Chile, Costa Rica, French Guiana, Guyana, Mexico, Mexico City, and Panama.

year	Belize	Chile	Costa Rica	French Guiana	Guyana	Mexico	Mexico City	Panama
1964		0.04						
1965								
1966		0.02						
1967								
1968								
1969								
1970					13.68			
1971								
1972								0.02
1973								0.04
1974								0.05
1975								0.10
1976								
1977								0.02
1978								0.01
1979								0.03
1980								0.06
1981								0.02
1982								0.03
1983								
1984				20.60				
1985	22.50							
1986	17.12	0.02						
1987	24.49	0.02						
1988	24.94	0.02						
1989	21.12	0.01		22.56				
1990	24.86	0.01		31.55				
1991	24.03	0.02		34.68				
1992				34.58				
1993				35.80				
1994				32.79				
1995			10.06	38.17		0.02		
1996	55.50		10.68	38.50	40.53	0.12		
1997			10.03	38.74	34.88	0.12		

1998			9.91	34.78	29.70	0.13		
1999			9.99	39.22	33.56	0.14		
2000		0.01	10.34	39.36	33.21	0.13		0.02
2001		0.01	8.57	43.26	27.45	0.12		
2002		0.00	8.52	42.01		0.13		
2003		0.01	9.02	41.48	25.62	0.14		
2004			8.71	36.27		0.03		
2005			8.21	37.29		0.03		
2006			8.06	38.96		0.03	0.3	
2007			8.09	42.29		0.18	1.6	
2008			8.23	40.92		0.48	3.9	
2009			7.33	40.88		0.58	4.6	
2010			7.12	40.61		0.59	4.6	
2011			7.24	35.89		0.69	5.3	
2012			6.75	29.50		0.69	5.3	
2013			6.58	28.59		0.69	5.4	
2014			6.41	27.43		0.67	5.3	
2015				32.15	4.47	0.62	4.6	
2016				30.38		0.58	4.2	
2017		0.03		37.54		0.56	4.0	

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