

**Title:** The Breadth of Population Change following Puerto Rico's Mass Sterilizations Beginning in the 1930s

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### **Short Abstract**

The US was concerned with population growth in Puerto Rico in the 1930s, which began a campaign of sterilizations that lasted until the mid-1960s. In this project I map out the population change in Puerto Rico (PR) and the mainland United States (US) before, during and after these sterilizations took place. The US is used as a comparison group. In the analysis I use IPUMS-sourced census data to calculate two measures: 1) the ratio of children under the age of five per woman in their child-rearing years (16-49) in a given time period and 2) the ratio of children aged ten and under from one time period to the next. The results show more intense population decline in PR compared to the US following the sterilizations.

### **Extended Abstract**

#### **Introduction**

The Puerto Rican government passed a law allowing sterilization to be conducted at the discretion of a eugenics board in 1937 (Andrews 2017). As a result of the passage of this law, it is estimated that one-third of married Puerto Rican women aged 20-49 years were sterilized by 1965 (Presser 1980). Due to pressure from groups that opposed contraception, the law was repealed in 1960 (Andrews 2017). There are many qualitative studies that highlight that many women were coerced, bribed or tricked into "la operacion," meaning operation in Spanish, which was coined as the term for the sterilization procedure in Puerto Rico (Boring 1986; Bauza 1994; Mass 1977, Rochat & Becerra 1988).

#### **Purpose**

The goal of this project is to understand the breadth of population change in Puerto Rico around the time of the mass sterilizations.

#### **Data**

The samples that were used for information on the US were the 1930 1%, 1970 1% state fm1, 1990 5% state, 2000 1%, 2010 American Community Survey (ACS), 2010 ACS 1-year estimate, and the 2019 ACS 1-year estimate. The samples that were used for information on Puerto Rico were the 1930 PR 5%, 1970 PR 5% state, the 1990 PR 5%, the 2000 PR 5%, and the 2010 Puerto Rican Community Survey (PRCS). The samples were weighted using the person weight provided by the US Census Bureau

#### **Findings**

Figure 1 shows the ratio of children under five per woman in child-rearing years (16-49) during and following the sterilization period: 1930-1970, 1970-1990 and 1990-2010. Ratios from the United States are used as a comparison group. The IPUMS repository does not include census samples from Puerto Rico from 1940-1960, so 1930-1970 was considered for the period of sterilizations.

We would expect to see a higher percentage change in child-woman ratios in Puerto Rico than the United States due to the mass sterilizations, which is demonstrated in Figure 2. The exact values of the percent change in child-woman ratios are listed in Table 1.

Figure 1. Child under 5 years of age to women aged 16-49 in US & PR

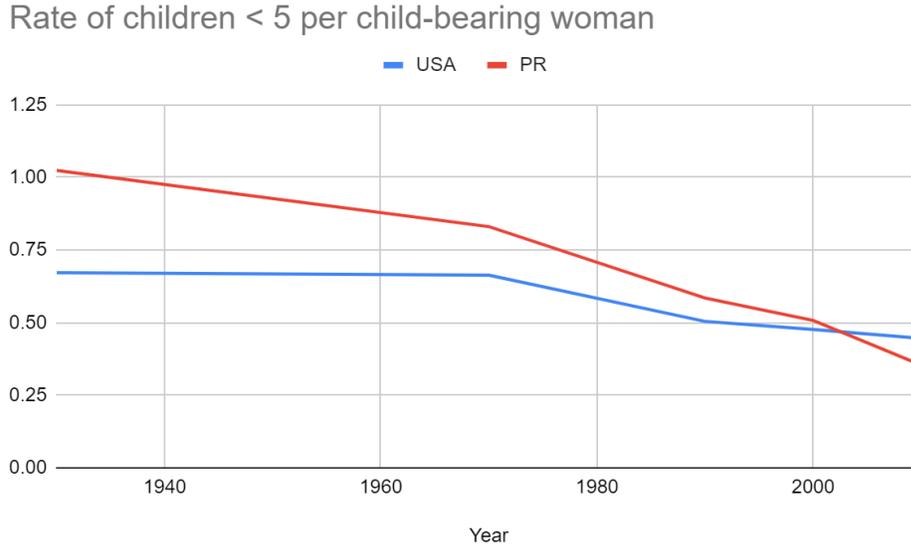


Figure 2. The percent change in child-women ratios in the US & PR

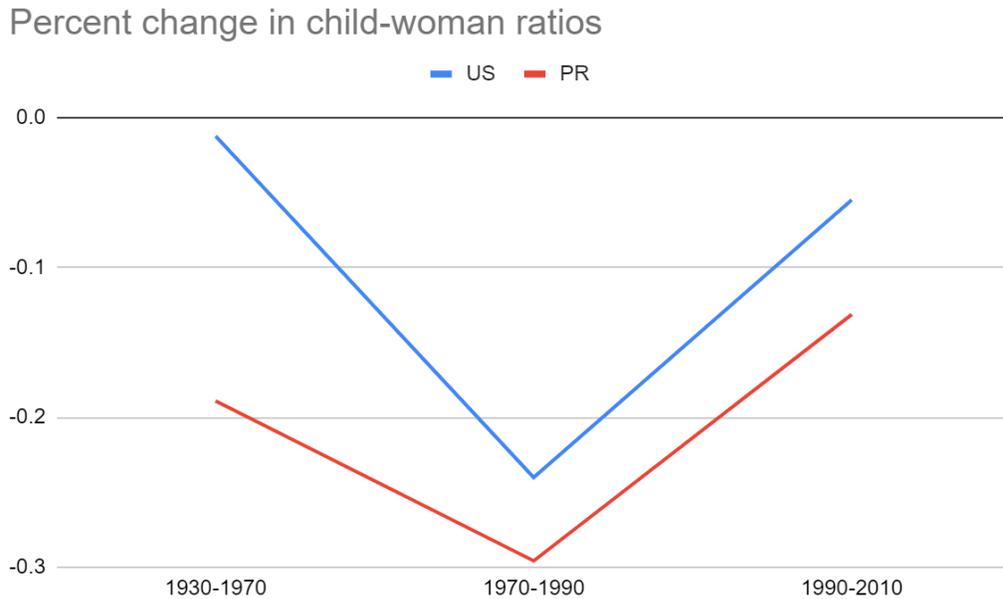


Table 1. Exact values of percent change

	Percent Change US	Percent Change PR

1930-1970	-0.0124	-0.1890
1970-1990	-0.2402	-0.2958
1990-2010	-0.0551	-0.1314

## Discussion

Puerto Rico experienced a -12.50% change in population from 2020-21 (PRB 2021). Given Puerto Rico is still experiencing population decline, it is important to consider its history. This project maps out population change during the time period in which mass sterilizations took place in Puerto Rico.

Although this project is useful in showing the extent of population change during this time period, it is important to note that migration and morality may account for some of this change. Future research should account for the effect of these processes on population change during this time period.

## References

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