

Abortion: Worldwide Levels and Trends

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Background

- Induced abortion is important from health, political, religious and rights perspectives
- Accurate information on abortion can inform policies and the public discourse

Objectives

- Estimate incidence and recent trends in
 - Safe abortion (Guttmacher Institute)
 - Unsafe abortion (WHO)
 - All abortions worldwide and by region

Definitions

- **Safe abortions**

- (a) Abortions in countries where the law is not restrictive and

- (b) those that meet legal requirements in countries where the law is restrictive

- **Unsafe abortions**

- Abortions done by people lacking the necessary skills or in an environment that does not conform to minimum medical standards, or both

Definitions (2)

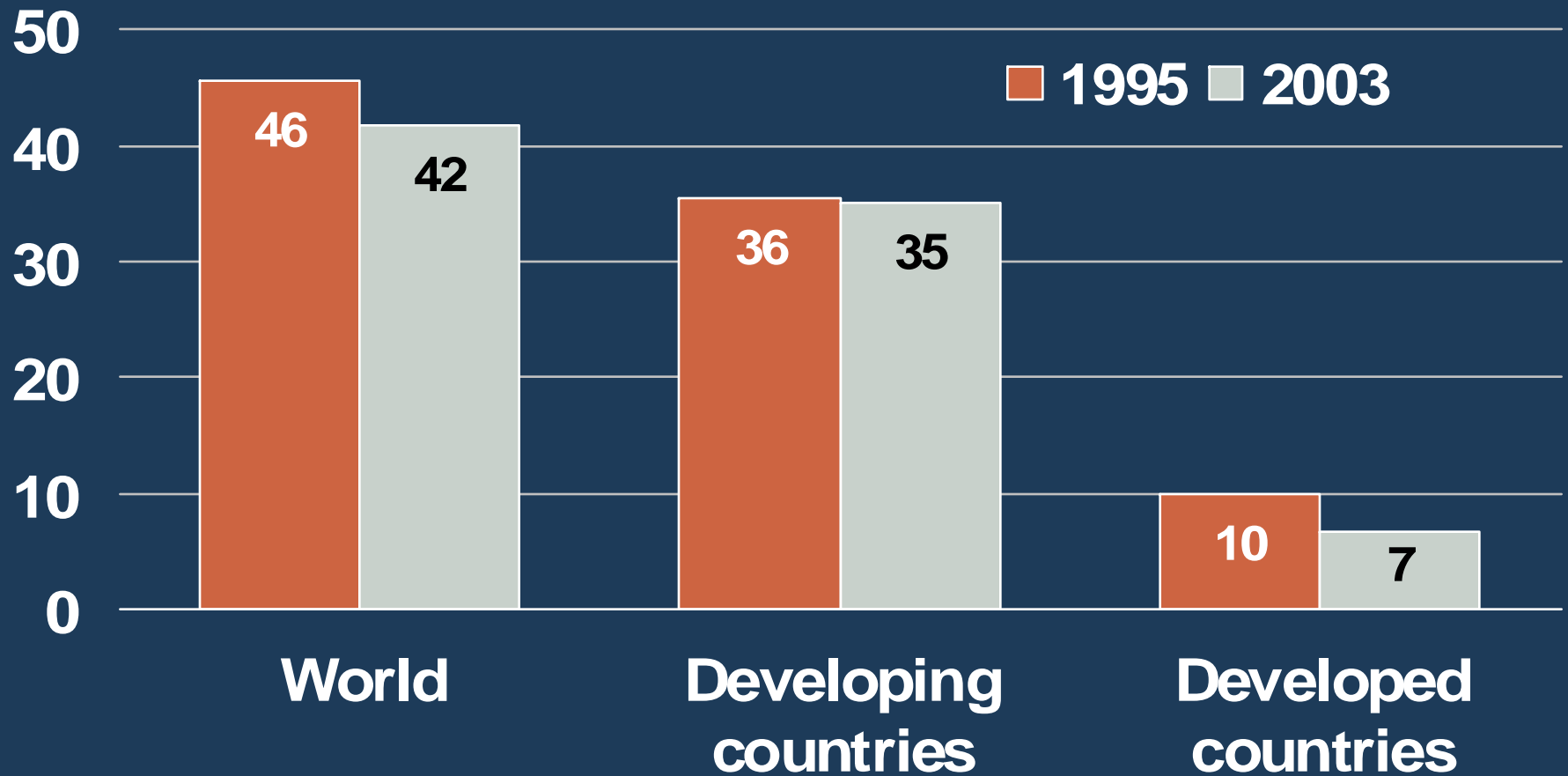
- **Unsafe abortions**, operational definition:
 - (a) Abortions in countries where the law is restrictive and
 - (b) those that do not meet legal requirements in countries where the law is not restrictive

Data sources

- Safe abortion:
 - Official statistics, national surveys, experts
- Unsafe abortion:
 - Hospital-based studies, community surveys, qualitative research
- Trends:
 - 1995 estimates using comparable methods (Henshaw, Singh and Haas, 1999)

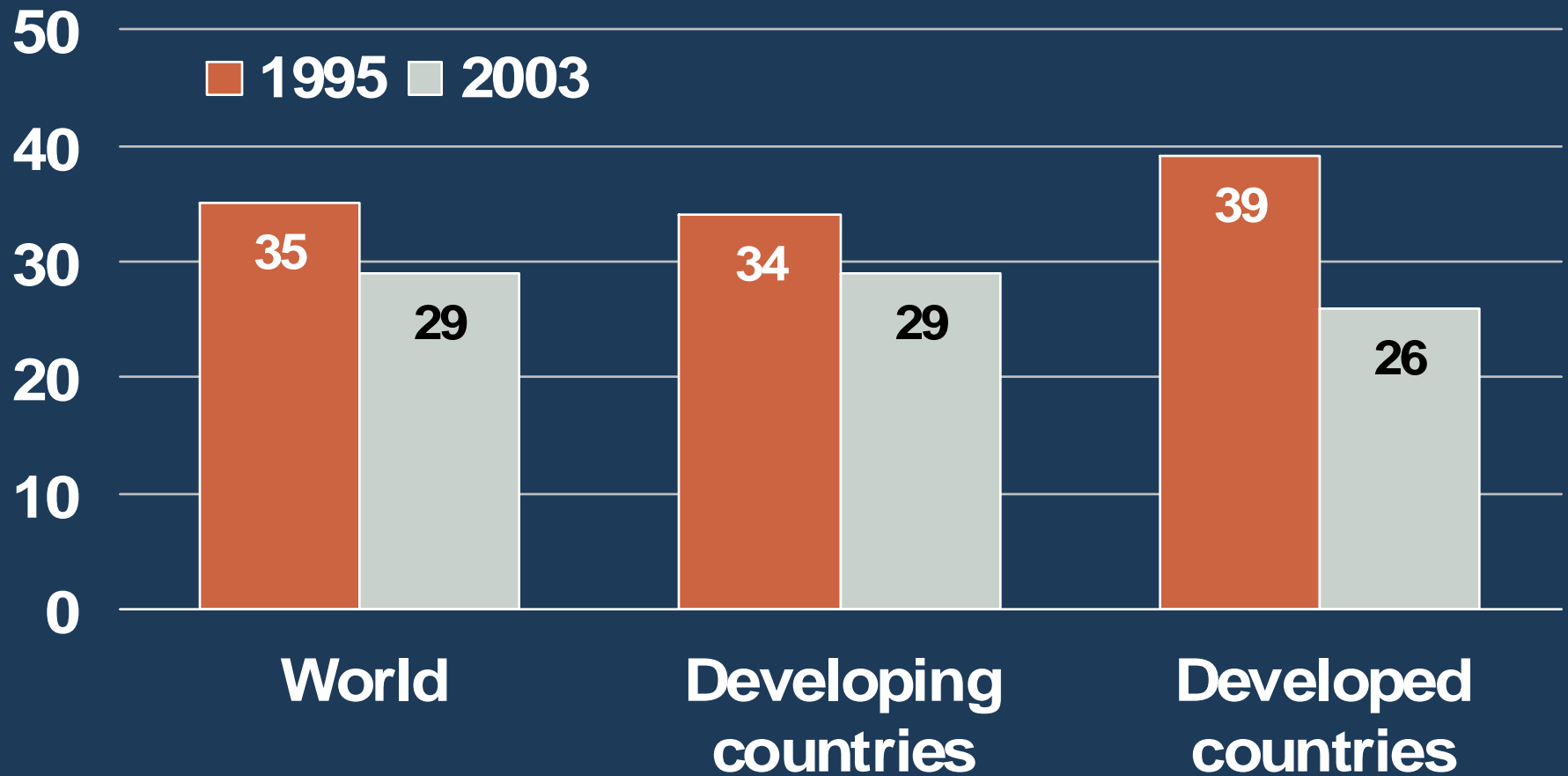
There were almost 42 million abortions in 2003, down from 46 million in 1995

Millions of abortions



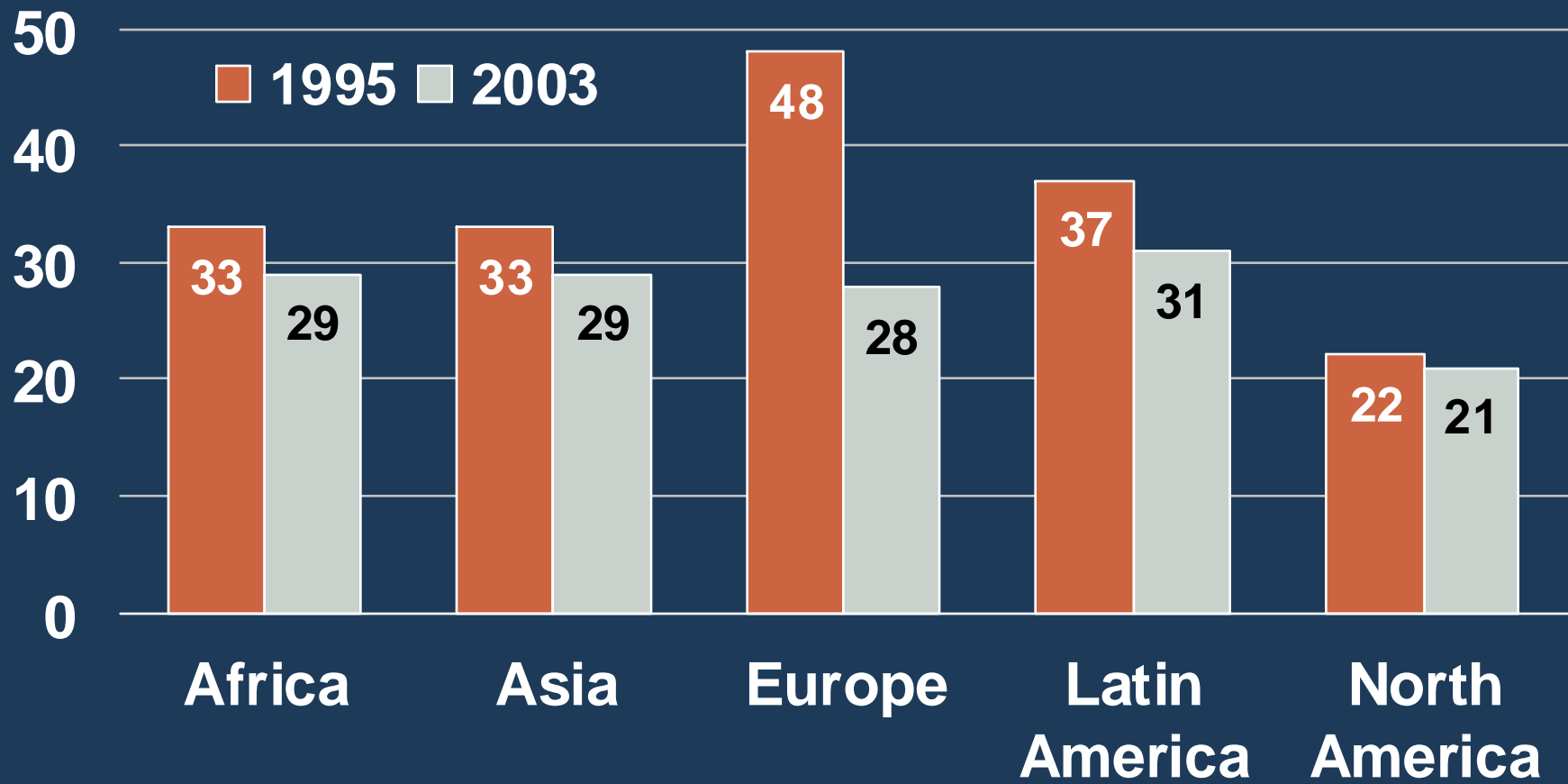
The decline in the abortion rate is primarily in developed countries

Abortions per 1,000 women aged 15-44



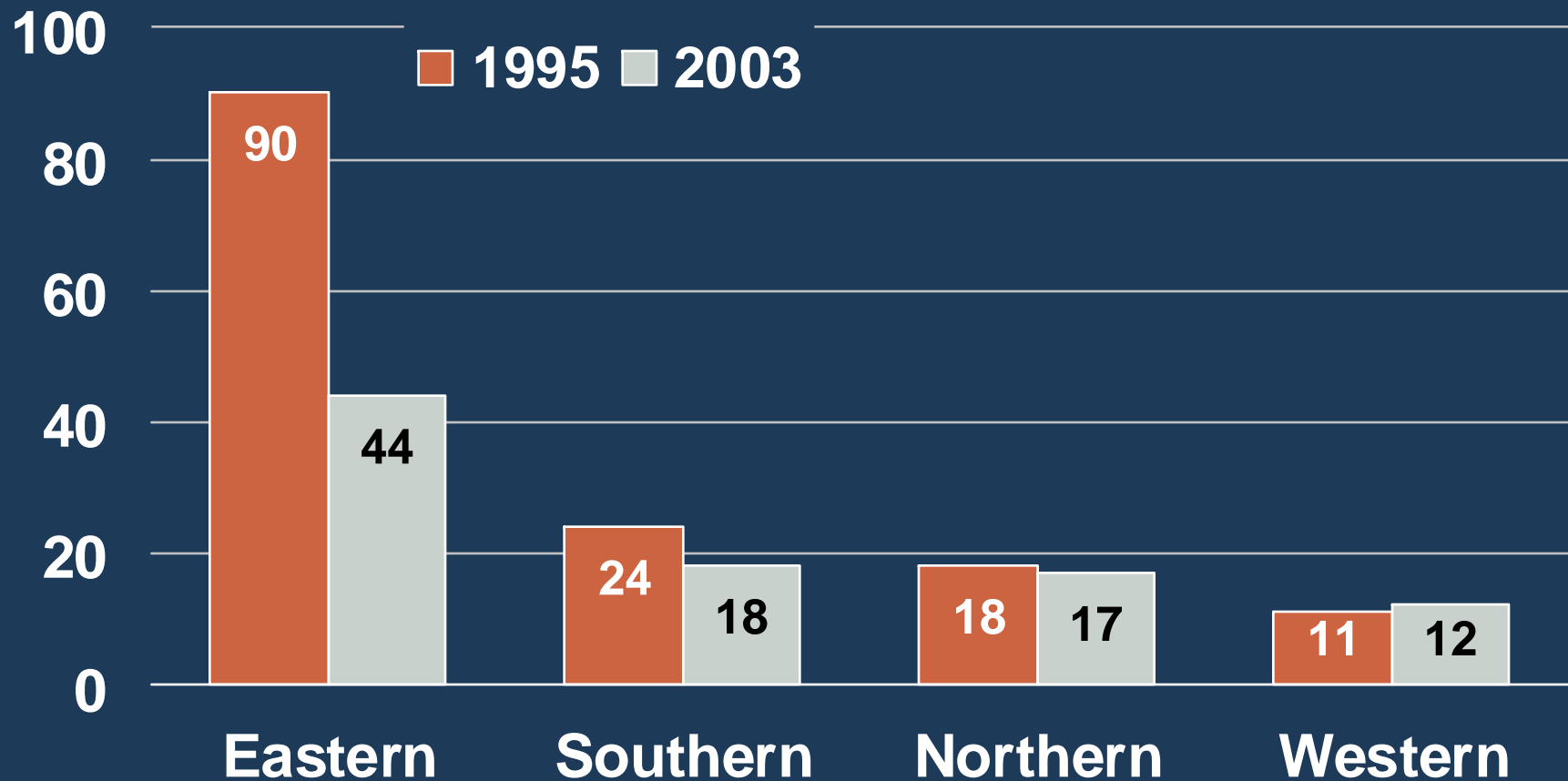
Abortions declined dramatically in Europe

Abortions per 1,000 women aged 15-44



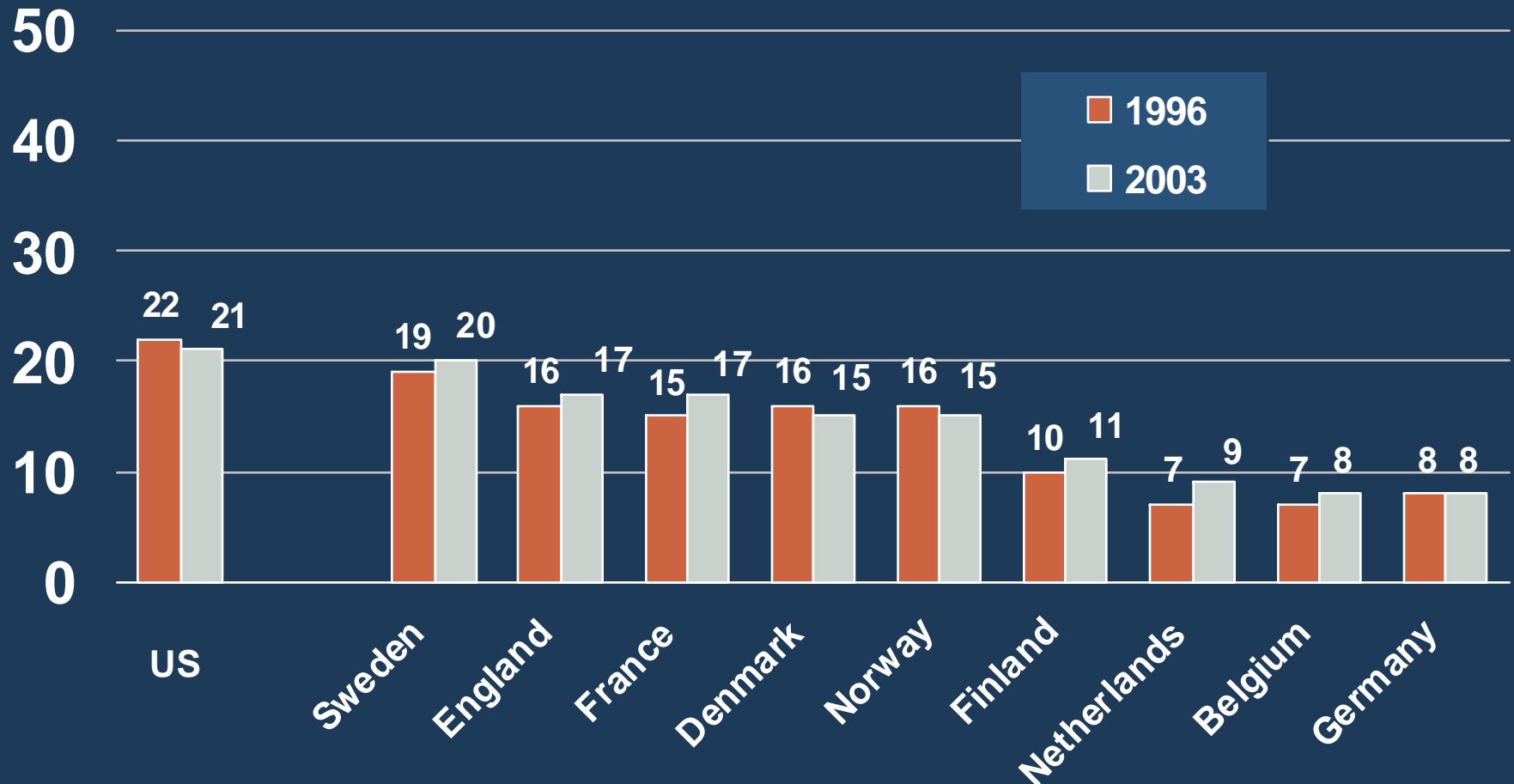
The biggest decline was in Eastern Europe

Abortions per 1,000 women aged 15-44



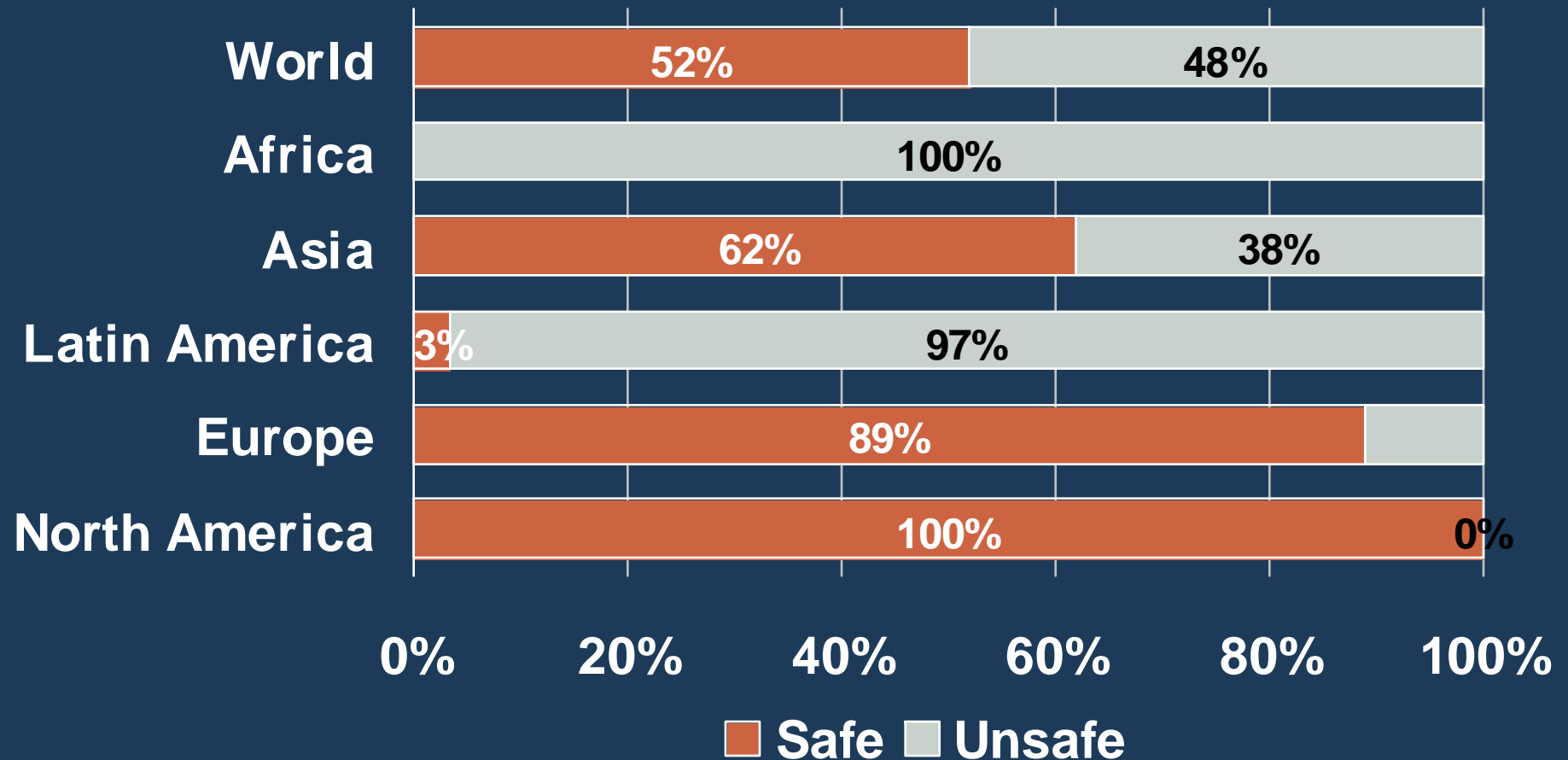
The abortion rate in the US is higher than in Northern and Western Europe

Abortions per 1,000 women aged 15-44

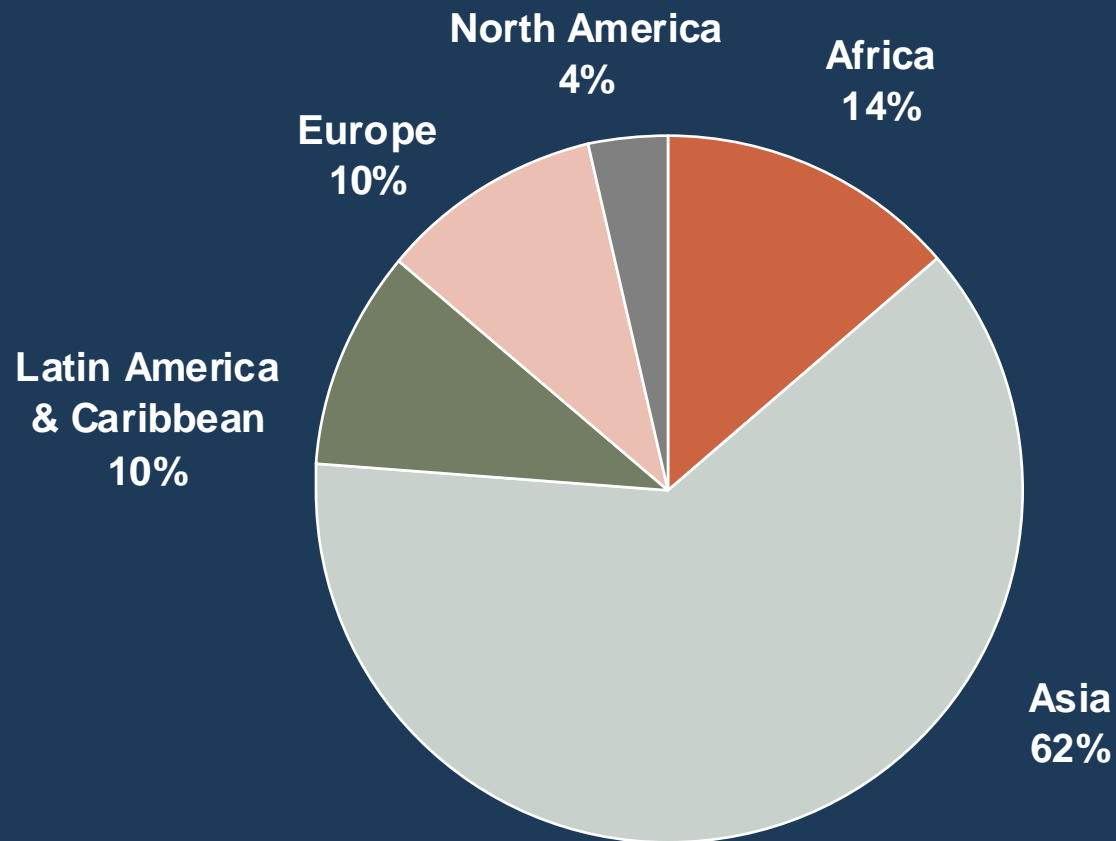


Almost half of all abortions are unsafe

% of all abortions

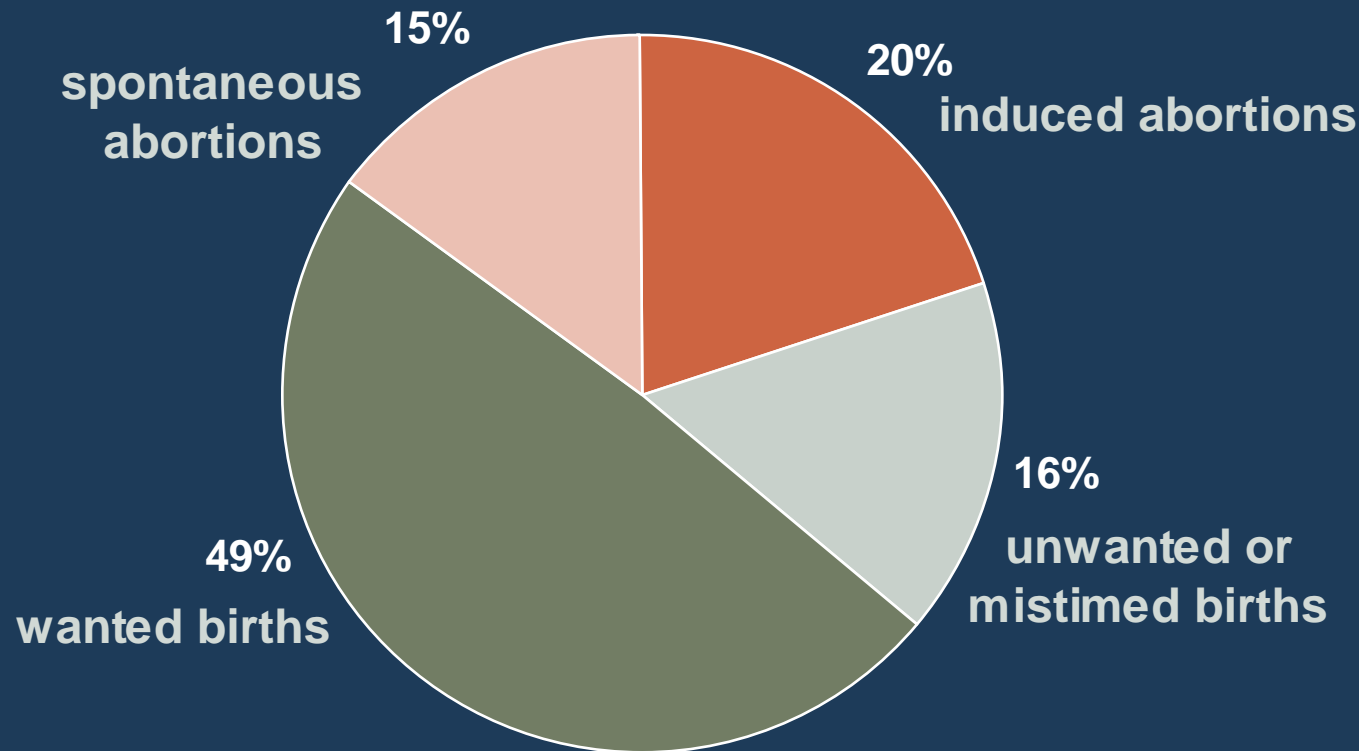


Most abortions occur in Asia



Abortions worldwide (42 million)

More than a third of all pregnancies are unintended, and one in five ends in abortion



Pregnancies worldwide (205 million)

Summary

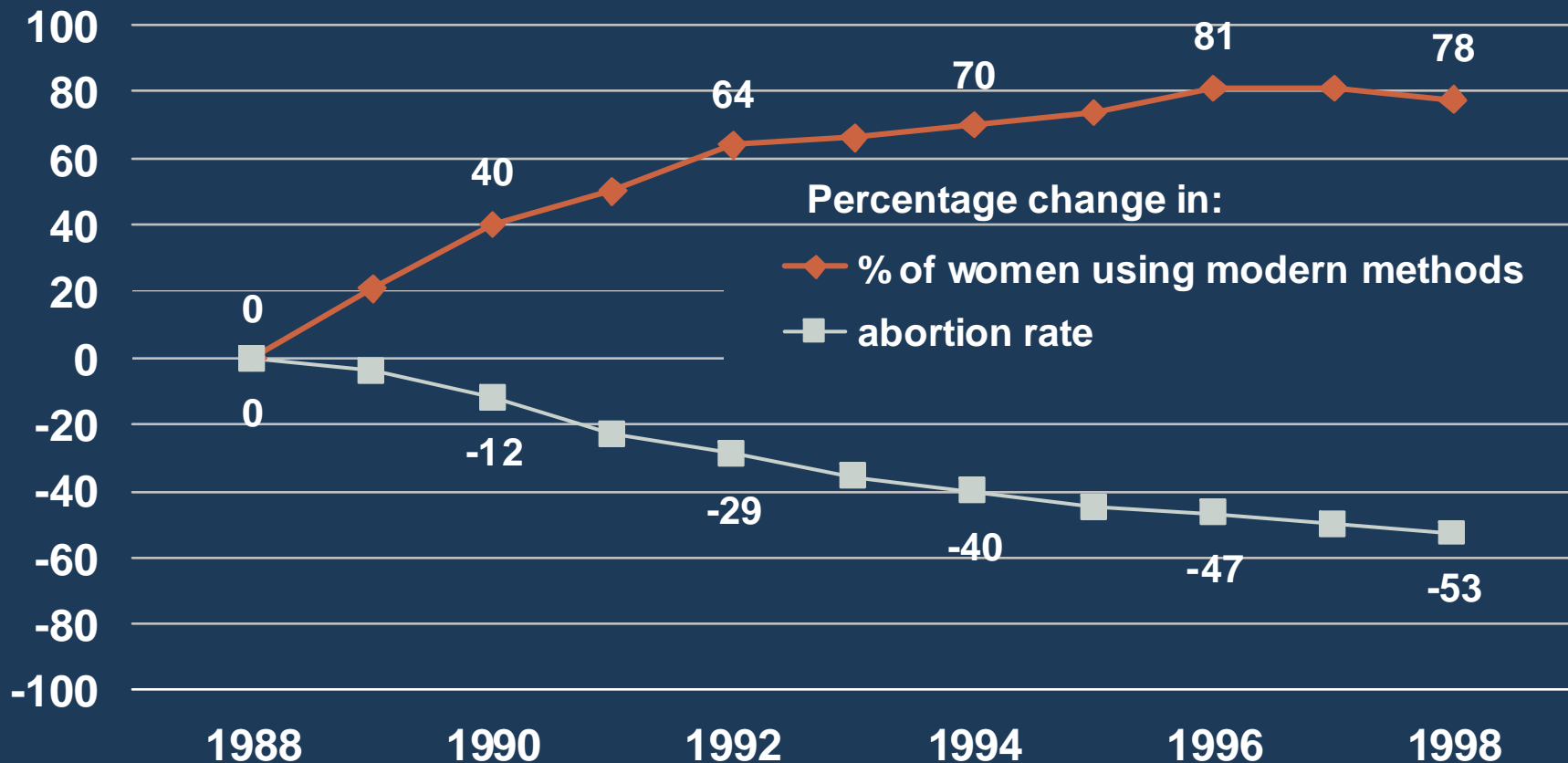
- There were about 42 million abortions, or 29 abortions for every 1,000 women 15-44, in 2003
- Most abortions occur in developing countries
- The abortion rate is comparable across regions
- The abortion rate has decreased most dramatically in Eastern Europe

Discussion points

- Level of abortion is not linked to legal status of abortion
- Other research has shown a strong link between abortion levels and prevalence of contraceptive use

Abortion declined as contraceptive use increased in the Russian Federation

Percentage change since 1988



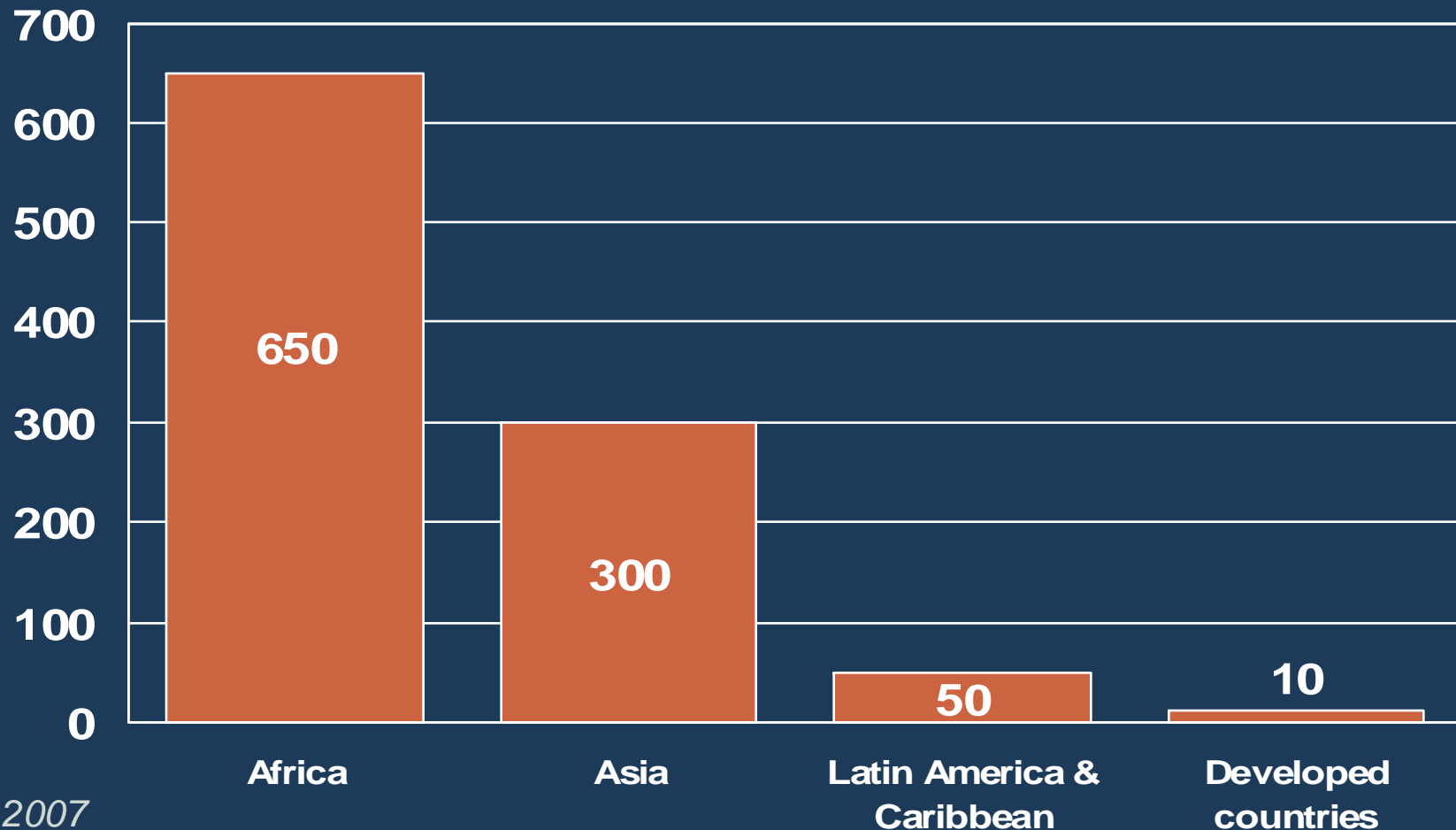
Westoff 2005

Discussion points

- Other research also shows an association between the legal status and safety of abortion

Almost all abortion-related deaths occur in developing countries

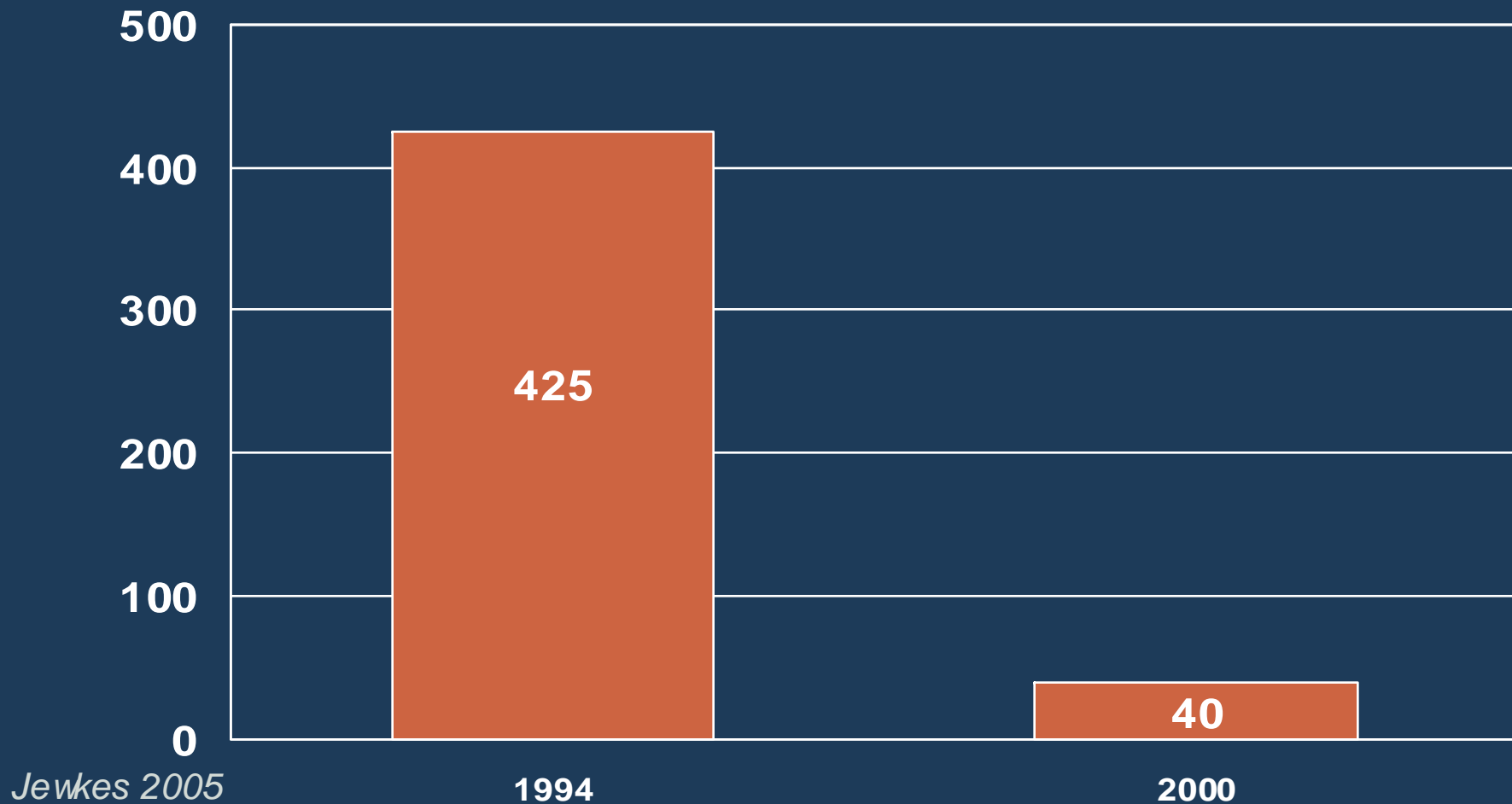
Deaths per 100,000 unsafe abortions, 2003



WHO 2007

The incidence of abortion deaths in South Africa declined by 91% after change in law

Number of abortion-related deaths, South Africa



Policy implications

- Improved access to contraceptive services can decrease the incidence of abortion
- Making all abortions safe can reduce maternal mortality

Funding source and contact information

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