

Goals of the Statistical Abstract

The goals of the *Statistical Abstract of Latin America* (SALA) are ten:

1. To provide a yearly one-volume selection of important statistics culled from nearly 150 sources.
2. To offer the latest figures available on a timely basis.
3. To provide a context for present and future-oriented statistics by presenting whenever possible the data in series covering several decades or years.
4. To generate through research new data not published elsewhere.
5. To develop new types of data and/or to provide new analytical treatment of statistical series through SALA-sponsored research.
6. To guide the user of this volume to the wide variety of statistical material and sources available.
7. To suggest kinds of data that may be found in other sources as well as where to look for more complete coverage than can be abstracted here.
8. To present maps and graphs so that statistics take on greater meaning than would otherwise be possible to achieve.
9. To provide a SALA Supplement Series which offers interpretation, longitudinal data, and cartographic analysis of statistics on Latin America.
10. To coordinate presentation of statistics in SALA with the theory and model presented in James W. Wilkie, *Statistics and National Policy*, Statistical Abstract of Latin America, Supplement 3 (1974).

Organization

In order to accomplish these goals, SALA is organized in the following ways:

1. Historical statistics are presented across time. As new statistics become available, they can be traced back in time from volume to volume generating a long-term profile of Latin America's past and present as well as providing baselines for projecting into the future.
2. Explicit sources and qualifying notes are given for all data presented. Sources are given at the end of each table, not at the end of chapters where difficulty of use would be increased manifold.
3. Source abbreviations and symbols are standardized. A key to sources is included for convenient reference.
4. A section on "Explanation of Terms" lists the abbreviations used. This information is repeated in the front endsheets for easy use.

5. The "Editor's Note on Methodology" defines "Latin America," itemizes regional groupings, and explains alternative methods for calculating rate of change over time.
6. Data are cross-referenced from one table to another throughout the volume.
7. Each volume is fully indexed to help readers find topics and related subjects.
8. A "Guide to Data" section in some volumes leads the user to additional sources and supplemental bibliographic aids.
9. The "Development of Data" section contains analysis of concepts, problems, and methods in organizing new topics or chapters included in SALA.
10. A carefully selected international advisory board guides the research and compilation for SALA and its Supplements.

Thus, SALA is intended to be the standard source for statistical information on Latin America and to encourage the use of data by scholars, researchers, business, and governments.

Cautions in Use of Statistics

Readers are cautioned that all data for any topic vary according to definition, parameters, methods of compilation and calculation, and completeness of coverage as well as date gathered, and/or date adjusted. Indeed, readers are reminded that statistics do not reveal "truth," but rather serve as proxy to interpret reality, and alternative statistics are available for most data series. Although such data as import statistics are often suspect because they do not take into account the extensive smuggling of goods, such figures are important because national and international policy decisions are made on the basis of the data recorded, data which interact with events to help change the course of "history." In this manner, "statistical reality" becomes quite as important as "reality" itself.

Revised Presentation

To help make the SALA series more useful to readers, beginning with this twenty-fourth issue (and the eighth for which I have served as editor), we have included here alternative data in the form of partial tables from previous issues going back to volume 17. Previously we included in a cumulative index references to tables not reprinted from volume to volume. Such an index, however, created a problem for investigators who had to consult each back issue in order to determine whether or not (regardless of title) the table format carried the information (or additional data) actually sought.

x Preface

For example, the method of presenting here a partial table showing subheadings and data for one country among the twenty permits the reader to see at a glance the relevance of the type of information given, hence eliminating searches in earlier issues.

Elimination of the cumulative index also has two added advantages:

1. Data and references (to full data in the partial tables) on similar topics are now grouped together and not separated between the chapters and the index.
2. No cumulative index is necessary—the cumulative index often led readers to the same table (with no new information) reprinted in more than one volume for persons who might not have a complete set of SALA.

We hope that this change in presentation of partial tables integrated at the appropriate place in the chapters will aid researchers.

Readers will note also that SALA has been reorganized and chapters shifted and/or divided to facilitate access to topical materials.

Analysis of New Trends in Latin America or in Availability of Statistical Data

In addition to explaining the goals, organization, and presentation of the data, the Preface to SALA often seeks to assess new trends in the Latin American situation as well as types of data becoming available (or decreasing in availability). Previous issues of SALA contain discussion of the following topics in the preface:

"On the Accuracy of Statistics and Development of Time-Series Data" (vol. 19)

"Mexico's 'New' Financial Crisis of 1982 in Historical Perspective" (vol. 22)

"On Defining the Concepts of Latin America, the Caribbean, and Economically Questionable Nations (EQNs)" (vol. 23)

In a recent new trend, political cartoons have dealt with the topic of statistics and those who generate them. The drawings below, from *The New Yorker*, *San Juan Star* (Puerto Rico), and *La Nación* (Buenos Aires), illustrate an increasing popular awareness of statistics, their meaning, and their use.



The San Juan Star, March 10, 1984, p. 24.



"Frankly, Harold, you're beginning to bore everyone with your statistics."

Drawing by Levin; © 1983, The New Yorker Magazine, Inc., October 31, 1983, p. 58.



"Have you heard? They've reduced the military budget by ten percent." (Carlos Basurto in La Nación, Buenos Aires)

Reprinted in Times of the Americas, Washington, D.C., May 26, 1982.