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## US Infant Mortality Rate: National Embarrassment?

by  
**Milo Schield, Augsburg University**  
*Fellow: American Statistical Association*  
*US Rep: International Statistical Literacy Project*  
**December 2, 2018**  
*Twin Cities Critical Thinking Club (CTC)*  
 Slides: [www.StatLit.org/pdf/2018-Schild-CTC3-Slides.pdf](http://www.StatLit.org/pdf/2018-Schild-CTC3-Slides.pdf)

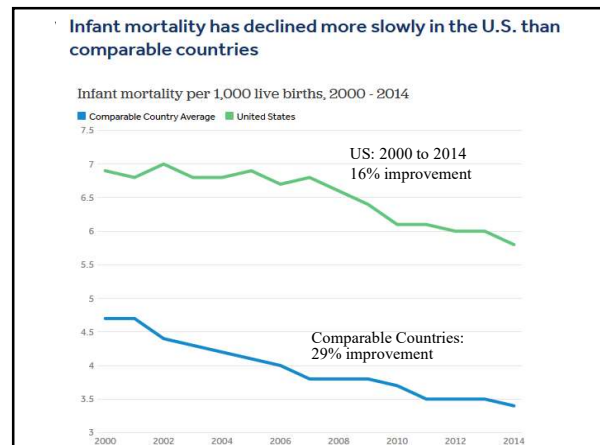
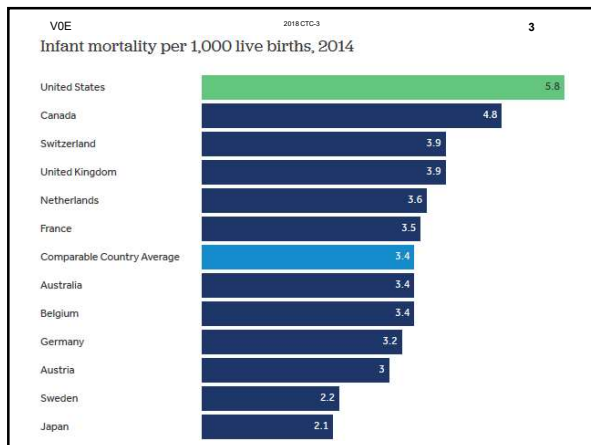
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## US: Highest Infant Mortality Rate of 27 Wealthy Countries

“A baby born in the U.S. is nearly *three times as likely to die* during her first year of life as one born in Finland or Japan. That same American baby is about *twice as likely to die* in her first year as a Spanish or Korean one.

Despite healthcare spending levels that are significantly higher than any other country in the world, a baby born in the U.S. is *less likely to see his first birthday* than one born in Hungary, Poland or Slovakia. Or in Belarus. Or in Cuba, for that matter.”

www.washingtonpost.com/news/wnk/wp/2014/09/29/our-infant-mortality-rate-is-a-national-embarrassment.



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## Define “Improvement”

Improvement between 2000 and 2014:

- United States: From 6.9 to 5.8: a 16% drop
- Comparables: From 4.8 to 3.4: a 29% drop

Q. What is another way to measure improvement?

A. Percentage point decrease.

- United States: a 1.1 point decrease
- Comparables: a 1.4 point decrease.

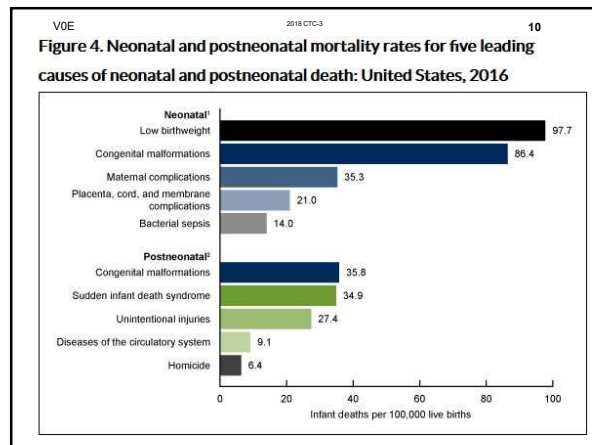
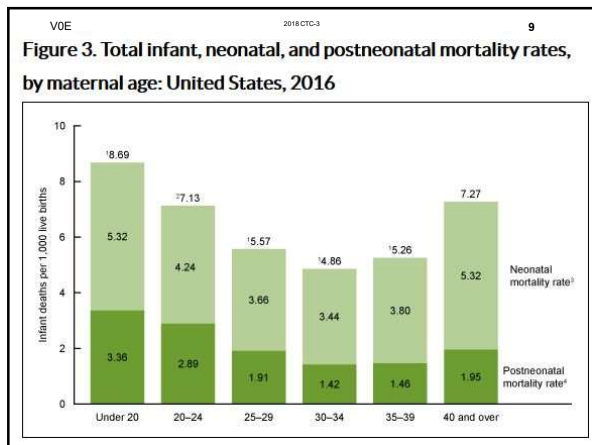
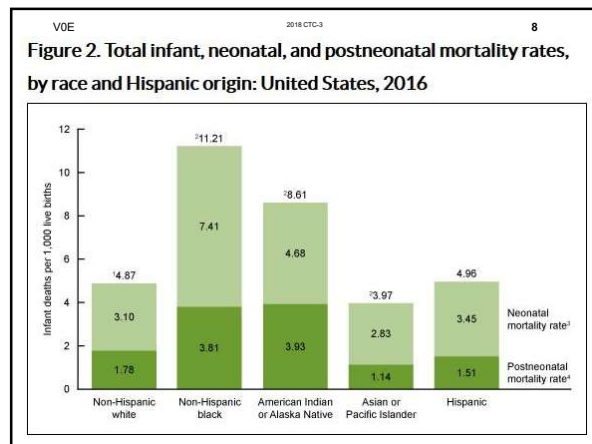
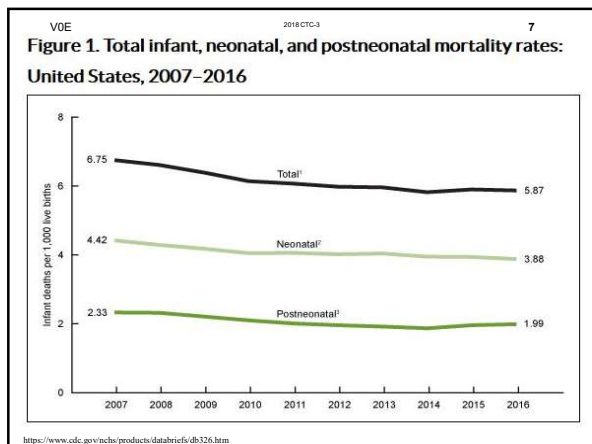
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## Define “Infant Mortality”

“Extremely preterm births recorded in some places may be considered a miscarriage or still birth in other countries. Since survival before 22 weeks or under 500 grams is very rare, categorizing these births as live births will inflate reported infant mortality rates ”

Oster and her colleagues found that this reporting difference accounts for up to 40 percent of the U.S. infant mortality disadvantage relative to Austria and Finland.

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**Alternate Explanations?**

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What explains why US has high infant mortality rate?

- Broken medical system
- Lack of health insurance
- \_\_\_\_\_

Moral: Always look for the story behind the story.

If the story involves statistics, remember,

- statistics are numbers involving reality.
- Statistics can be influenced (unlike numbers)
- Statistics can be influenced by confounders
- Alternate explanations require hypothetical thinking

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**Bibliography**

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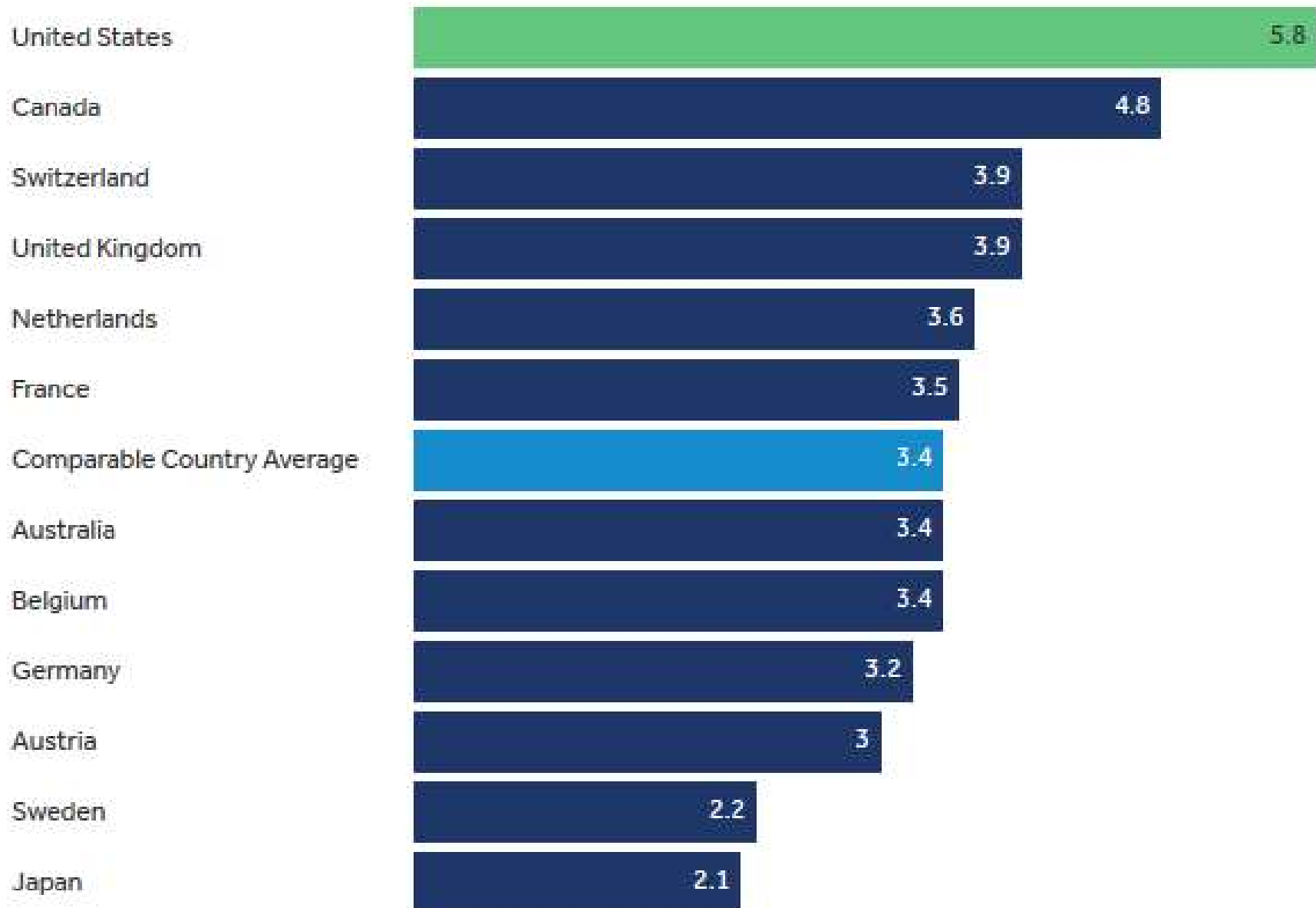
# **US: Highest Infant Mortality Rate of 27 Wealthy Countries**

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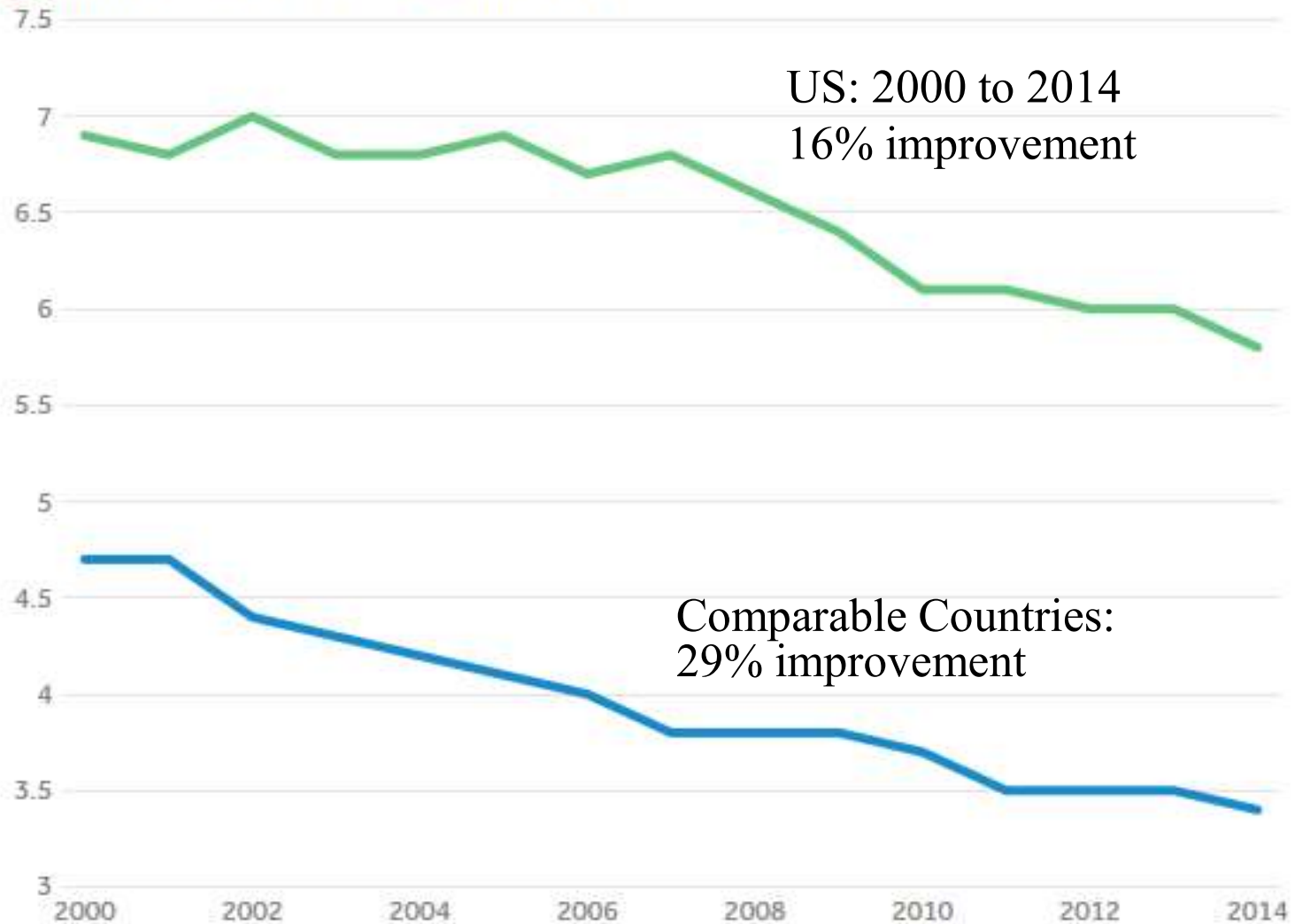
## Infant mortality per 1,000 live births, 2014



# Infant mortality has declined more slowly in the U.S. than comparable countries

Infant mortality per 1,000 live births, 2000 - 2014

■ Comparable Country Average ■ United States



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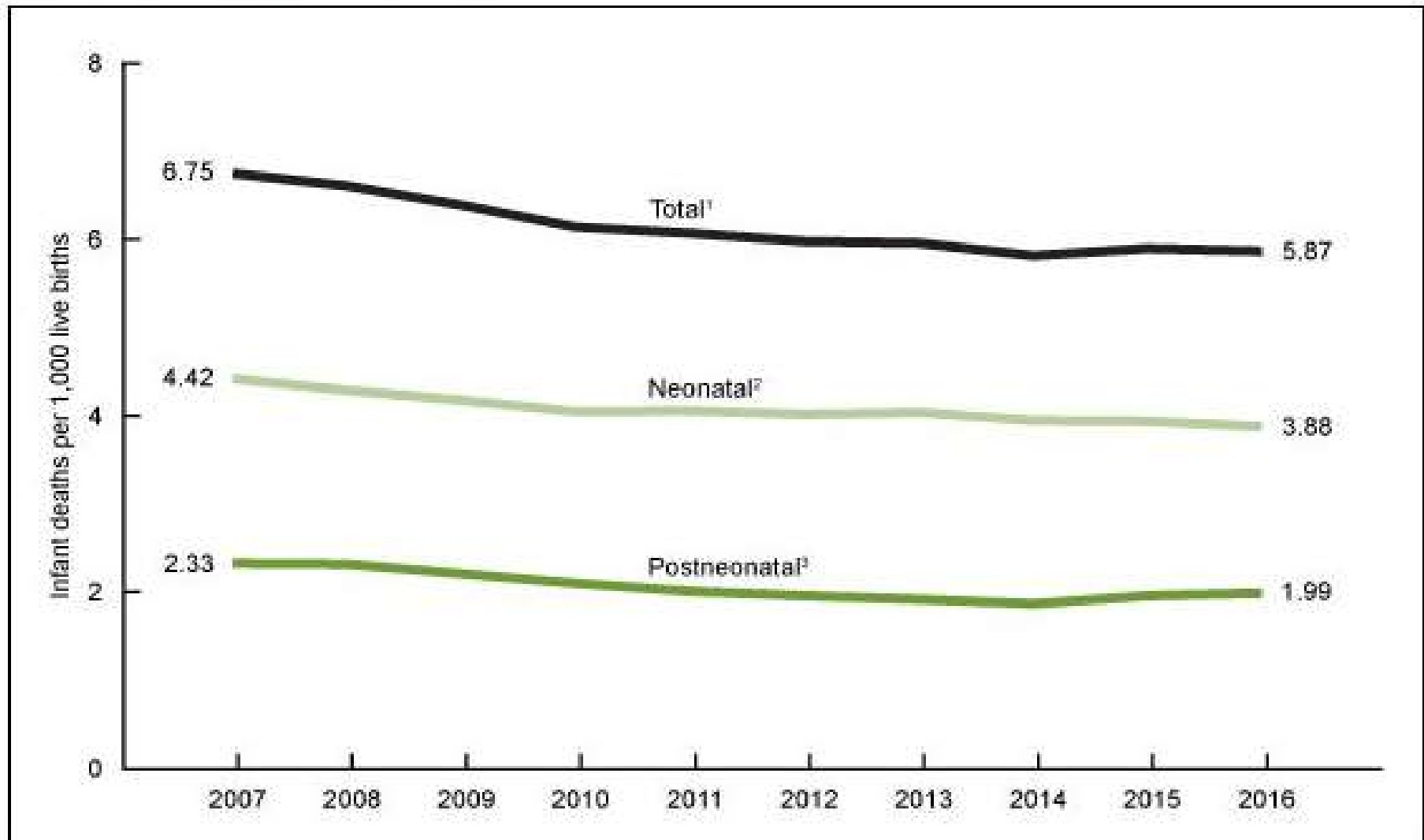
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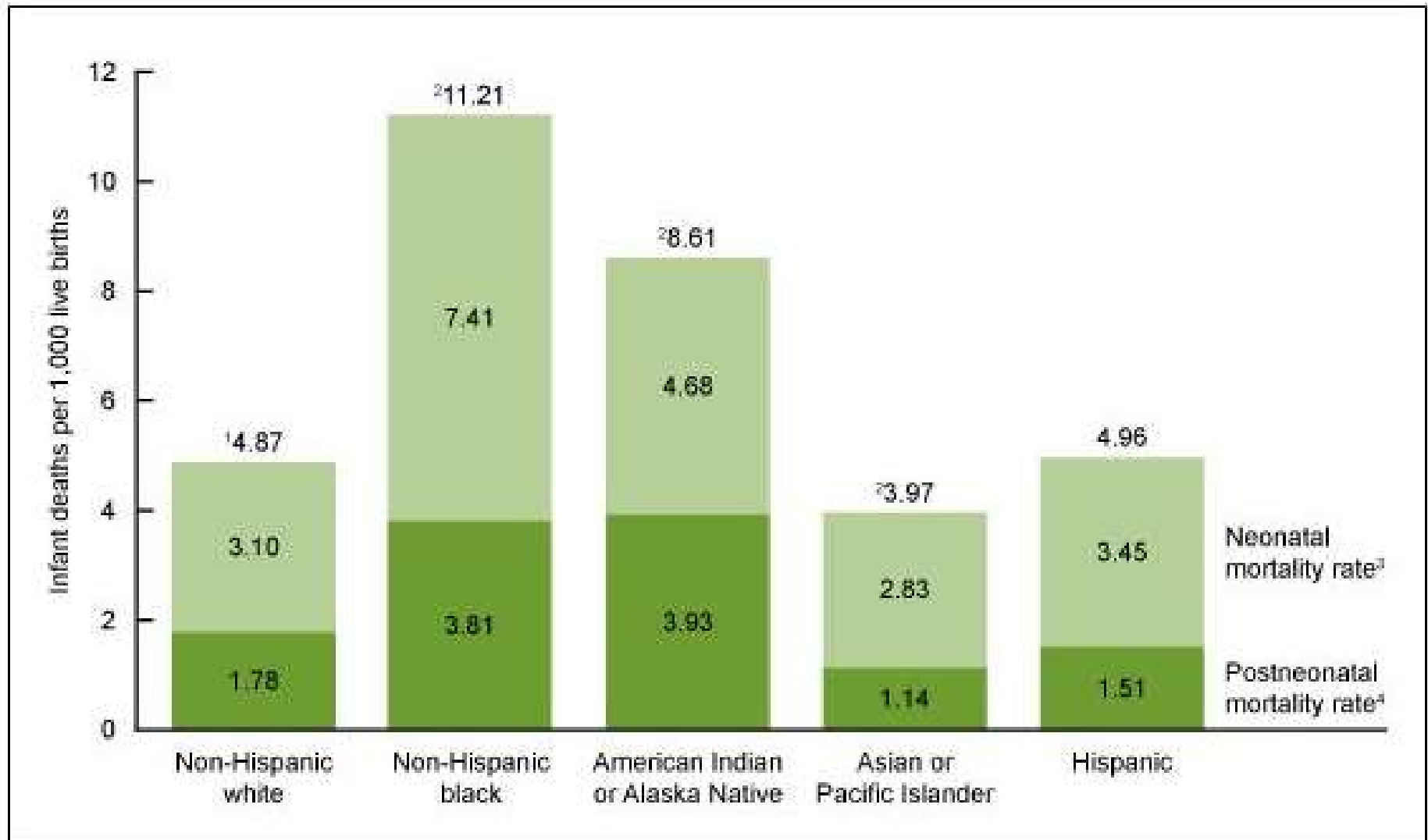
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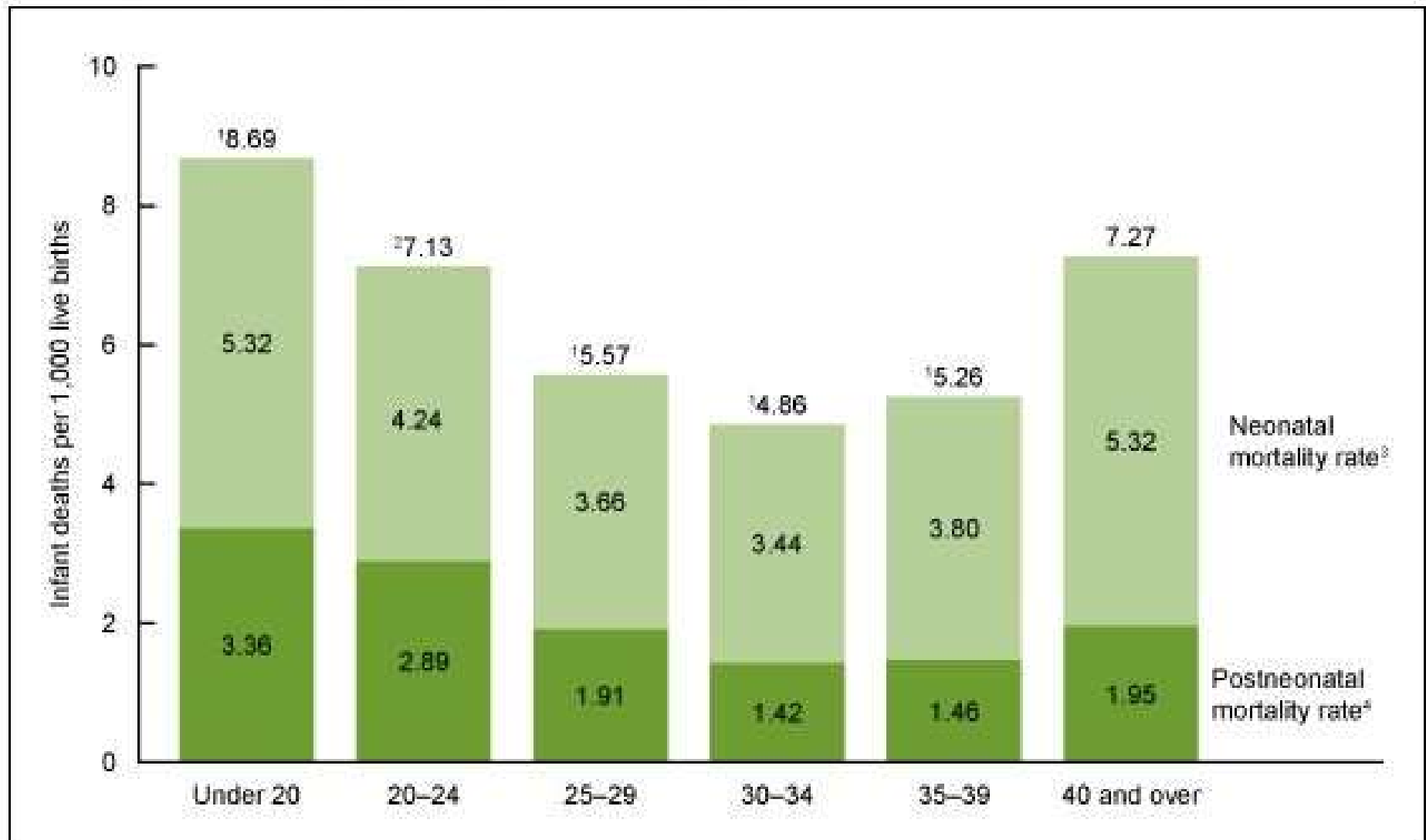
**Figure 1. Total infant, neonatal, and postneonatal mortality rates:  
United States, 2007–2016**



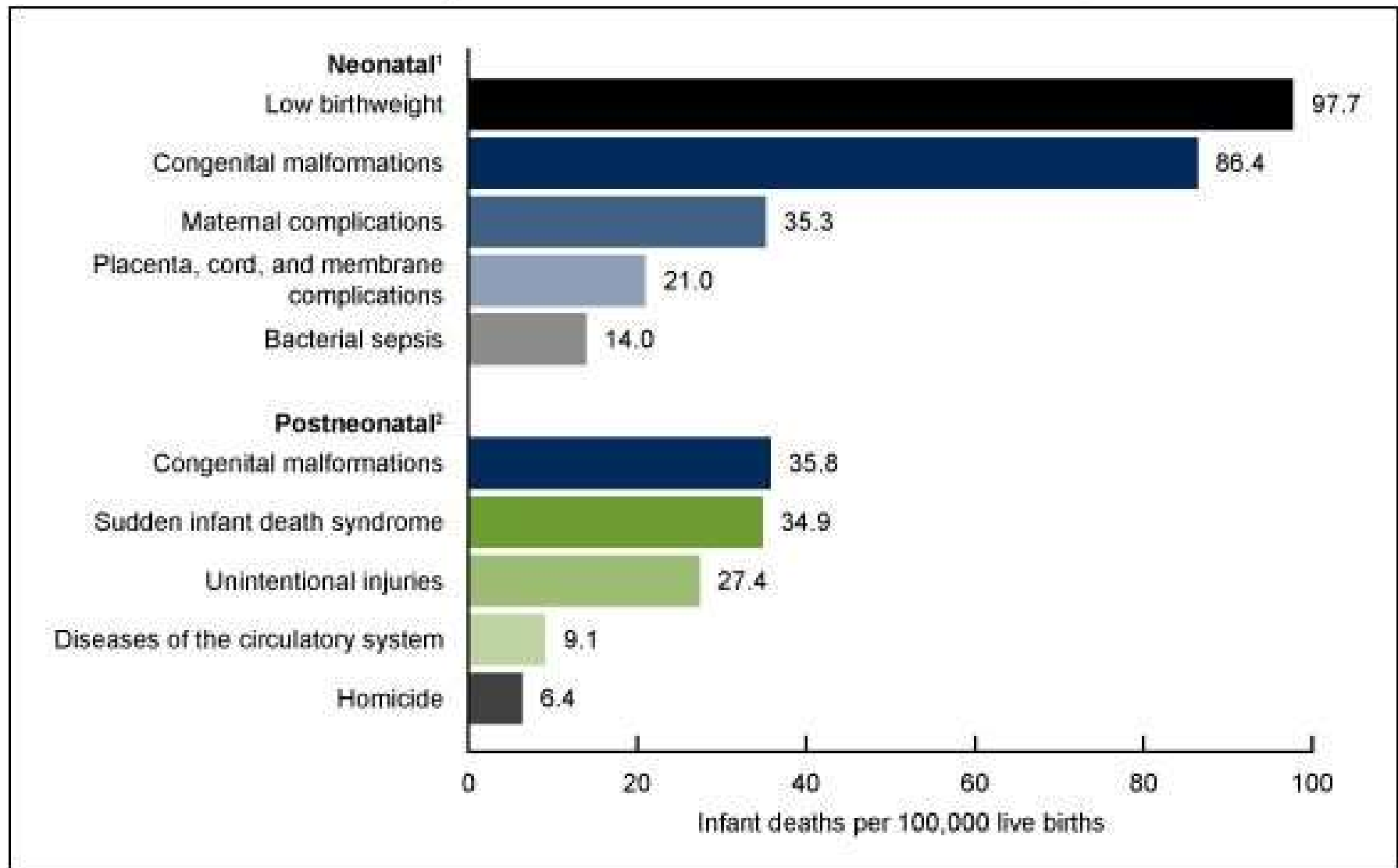
**Figure 2. Total infant, neonatal, and postneonatal mortality rates, by race and Hispanic origin: United States, 2016**



**Figure 3. Total infant, neonatal, and postneonatal mortality rates, by maternal age: United States, 2016**



**Figure 4. Neonatal and postneonatal mortality rates for five leading causes of neonatal and postneonatal death: United States, 2016**



# Alternate Explanations?

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- c. \_\_\_\_\_

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