

# Data and methodologies for the study of political economy and labor: an Introduction

Martín Portos

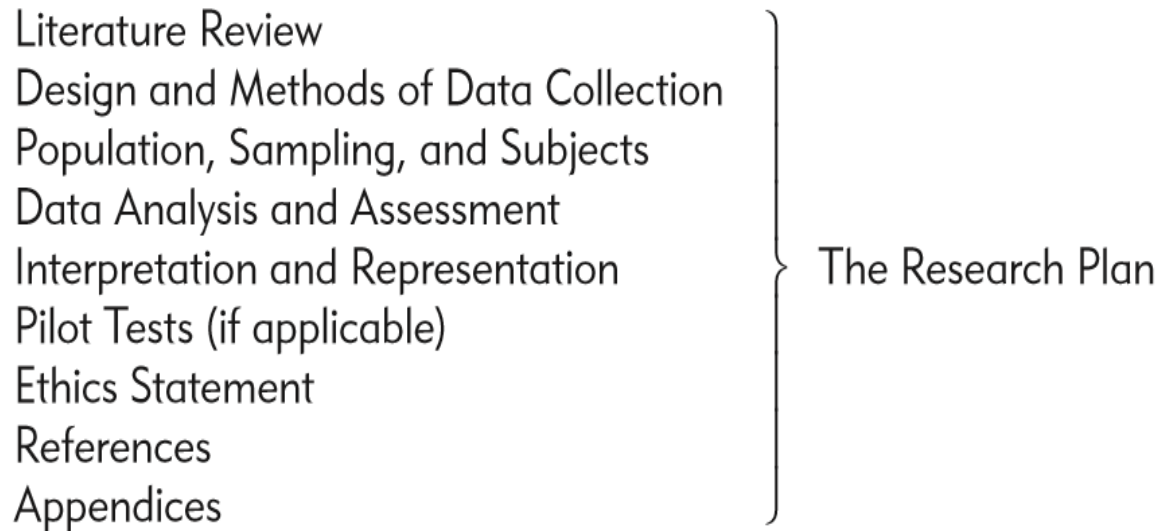
17th March, 2026



SCUOLA  
NORMALE  
SUPERIORE

# Myth #1: Quantitative research is scientific

- **Step 1:** Ask a question
- **Step 2:** Do background research
- **Step 3:** Construct a hypothesis
- **Step 4:** Test your hypothesis
- **Step 5:** Analyze your data
- **Step 6:** Report your results



Leavy, P. (2017). *Research Design: Quantitative, Qualitative, Mixed Methods, Arts-Based, and Community-Based Participatory Research Approaches*. New York; London: Guilford Pub., ch. 4.



# So, what does a quant RD consist of?

“Quantitative methods emphasize objective measurements and the statistical, mathematical, or numerical analysis of data collected through polls, questionnaires, and surveys, or by manipulating pre-existing statistical data using computational techniques. Quantitative research focuses on gathering numerical data and generalizing it across groups of people or to explain a particular phenomenon”.

<https://libguides.usc.edu/writingguide/quantitative>

# Myth #3: Quantitative research is more rigorous than qualitative

- The distinction between quantitative and qualitative designs is **not** about the **rigour** of the research approach, rather it is about how **representative and predictive** the information obtained from the research is.
- Transferability? Generalizability?

Myth #4: One approach (quantitative or qualitative) is better than the other

- Pragmatism
- Accurate generalizability
- Cost-benefit

# Myth #5: (Quantitative) sophistication can compensate for weak theory/modest theoretical contribution

- RQ, RQ, RQ:  
**Relevance** (Significance, Value, Worth)

(Mis-) **match**/correspondence **theory**  
& **empirical evidence**

**DO NOT LET THE METHOD**

**DRIVE THE RQ / THEORY !!!**



# Myth #6: Quantitative research is prohibitively expensive and/or time-consuming

- Feasibility
- Free/low-cost data, tutorials, software
- Data-wise: what's already there?

# Quant approaches: FEATURES

- Deductive
- Breadth (N)
- (Statistical) description
- Generalizability (external validity, micro-macro)
- Systematic: association between variables
  - Objectivity + Precise measurement
  - Control + Structured research methods/instruments
  - (Internal validity: Causal claims?)
  - (Replicability)
- Reliable & reusable outcome

# Fragile States Index

- Fund for Peace's Conflict Assessment System Tool (CAST) -> FSI in the 1990s
- “A critical tool in highlighting not only the normal pressures that all states experience, but also in identifying when those pressures are outweighing a states' capacity to manage those pressures”.
- Methodology:
  - 1. Content Analysis: Boolean search phrases are applied to global media data, + 10,000 English-language sources, 45-50 million articles and reports per year.
  - 2. Quantitative Data: WB, WHO, UN
  - 3. Qualitative Review
- Indicators: cohesion, political, social, **economic**:
  - Economic decline
  - Uneven economic development
  - Human flight and brain drain













# Fragile States Index

## Fragile States Index 2024

Select Year:

Sort by Indicator: *Hover your mouse at the top of the column you wish to sort and click the sort button:*

Total            

Country	Rank	Total												
Somalia	1st	111.3	9.7	10.0	9.0	9.2	9.0	8.5	9.7	9.5	8.7	10.0	9.0	9.0
Sudan	2nd	109.3	9.3	9.6	9.6	9.4	8.8	8.0	9.5	9.0	9.3	8.9	9.7	8.2
South Sudan	3rd	109.0	10.0	9.2	8.7	8.6	8.6	6.4	9.9	9.8	8.8	9.7	10.0	9.3
Syria	4th	108.1	9.7	9.9	8.8	9.9	6.6	7.7	10.0	9.1	8.8	8.4	9.2	10.0
Congo Democratic Republic	5th	106.7	8.3	9.9	9.4	8.2	8.5	6.3	9.4	9.2	9.0	9.8	9.9	8.8
Yemen	6th	106.6	8.1	9.9	8.8	9.6	7.6	6.2	9.8	9.7	9.3	9.3	9.3	9.0
Afghanistan	7th	103.9	9.2	8.7	8.0	9.6	8.3	7.0	9.6	9.7	8.8	8.9	8.1	8.0
Central African Republic	7th	103.9	7.5	9.9	7.8	7.7	9.3	6.0	9.4	10.0	8.7	8.9	9.6	9.1
Haiti	9th	103.5	7.0	9.7	5.8	8.6	8.9	8.0	10.0	9.9	9.2	8.9	7.8	9.7
Chad	10th	102.7	8.4	9.5	8.4	8.1	8.4	7.4	8.7	9.6	8.1	9.0	9.5	7.6
Myanmar	11th	100.0	9.3	9.0	9.4	7.8	7.2	6.0	9.5	9.2	9.6	7.1	8.9	7.0
Ethiopia	12th	98.1	7.9	9.3	8.6	6.5	7.8	5.9	8.0	8.9	8.5	9.9	9.0	7.8
Palestine	13th	97.8	8.0	8.3	6.2	7.0	7.0	9.4	8.8	8.0	8.1	9.0	8.0	10.0
Mali	14th	97.3	9.7	7.6	8.2	7.0	6.9	7.4	8.7	8.9	7.6	9.1	8.2	8.0
Nigeria	15th	96.6	8.7	9.6	8.3	8.9	8.0	6.6	8.3	8.9	8.3	9.6	6.1	5.3
Libya	16th	96.5	9.2	9.0	7.0	8.4	6.9	4.9	9.3	7.7	9.4	7.0	8.4	9.3
Guinea	17th	96.4	8.7	10.0	9.2	7.5	7.2	6.0	9.4	9.2	7.3	9.1	5.9	6.9

<https://fragilestatesindex.org/global-data/>

# Relative Political Capacity

- governments' ability to extract economic resources from that population, reach and mobilize their population, and allocate those resources to pursue desired policies
- cross-sectional (204 countries) & time-series (1960 to 2018)

<https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataset.xhtml?persistentId=doi:10.7910/DVN/NRR7MB>

# WB's World Development Indicators

- <https://databank.worldbank.org/home>
- WDI is the most current and accurate global development data available (education, gender, population, health...)  
<https://databank.worldbank.org/source/world-development-indicators>
- You can customize it to address your RQs& needs, e.g. want to know about colonialism? Why not protection and investment in exchange of taxes?  
<https://databank.worldbank.org/Research-data--Institution-and-Colonialism/id/23e951ac#>

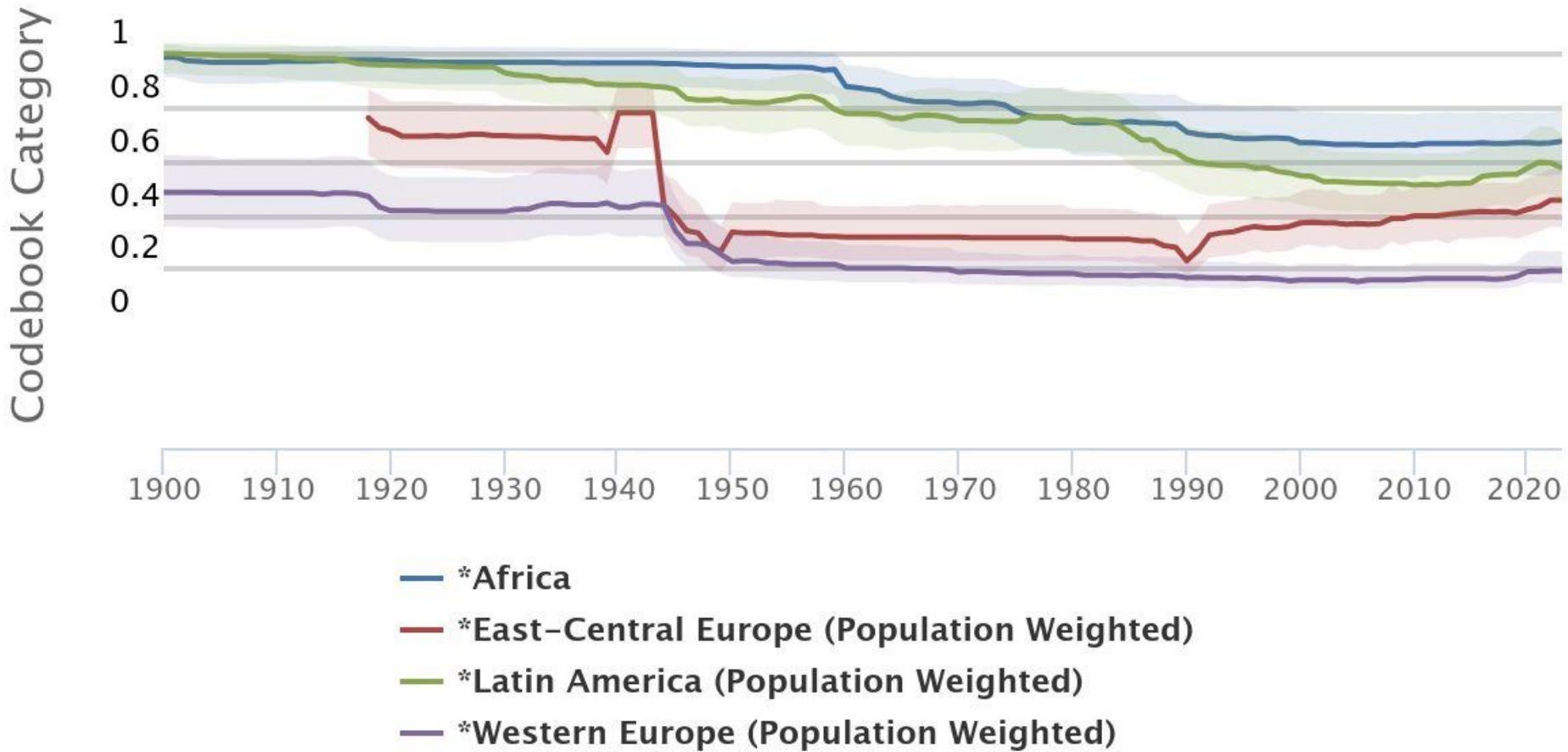
# WID: World Inequality Database

- The most extensive available database on the historical evolution of the world distribution of income and wealth, both within and between countries <https://wid.world/>
- Great methodology section <https://wid.world/methodology/>
  - Also reports, working papers, notes, briefs, etc. <https://wid.world/methodology/#library-key-reports>
- Data <https://wid.world/data/>
- Stata package to get WID data ‘ssc install wid’
- the long-run objective is the production of annual Distributional National Accounts describing the entire distribution of income and wealth, from bottom to top, using concepts consistent with macroeconomic national accounts – will be implemented gradually.
- WID includes series for the distribution of income (pre-tax and post-tax), wealth, labor income by gender for all countries in the world—series are imperfect and provisional (some w/ imputations).

# Measuring democracy & much beyond: V-DEM

- the world's most comprehensive and detailed democracy ratings  
<https://v-dem.net/data/the-v-dem-dataset/>
- <https://www.v-dem.net/data/reference-documents/>
- The 470 V-Dem specific indicators listed in the V-Dem Codebook fall into a number of main types:
  - (A\*) factual indicators pre-coded by members of the V-Dem team and provided in the surveys for Country Coordinators and Country Experts to indicate their confidence regarding the pre-coded data.
  - (A) factual indicators coded by members of the V-Dem team.
  - (B) factual indicators coded by Country Coordinators and/or members of the V-Dem team
  - (C) evaluative indicators based on multiple ratings provided by Country Experts.
  - (D) composite indices. Type (D) data consists of indices composed from (A), (B), or (C) variables.
  - We draw Type (E) data directly from other sources.

## Exclusion by Socio-Economic Group



# OECD/AIAS ICTWSS: Visser's Database on unions & beyond

- <https://web-archive.oecd.org/temp/2023-10-03/577157-ictwss-database.htm>
- 56 countries/territories (all OECD/EU members); 60 years; 100+ variables

Very useful 'country snapshots' section

- Detailed info of modern political economies:
  - A. Rights of association, collective bargaining and strikes, private and public sector;
  - B. Wage setting: state intervention, coordination, centralisation, conflict resolution, indexation, extension, derogation, etc.;
  - C. Social pacts, central agreements and social dialogue;
  - D. Works councils and employee representation in the enterprise;
  - E. Employer organisations;
  - F. Trade union membership and union density;
  - G. Collective bargaining coverage.