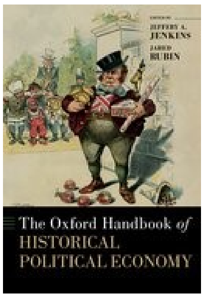

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CHAPTER

Data in Historical Political Economy

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Abstract

Empirical data is essential for studies in historical political economy. The range of data is vast—scholars collect quantitative information from both primary and secondary sources, and the scope of data collection over time and space depends on the research study. Yet this chapter provides an overview of different types of quantitative historical data, commonly used in historical political economy: sociodemographic and population data, government or institutional records, geographic and spatial data, political data, economic data, ethnographic data, and civil society data. Research highlighted in this chapter serves as an introductory overview for scholars wishing to work with historical data.

Keywords: historical data, census, population data, spatial data, ethnographic data

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Empirical data are essential for studies in historical political economy (HPE). Thanks to advances in both digitization and investment in online archives and data repositories, it is increasingly possible to assemble comprehensive collections of quantitative historical data (Cirone and Spirling 2021; Bisin and Giovanni 2021; Kim 2022). As a result, the range of applications is vast: scholars have collected novel data on kinship networks using tomb epitaphs in imperial China (Wang 2022), anti-Semitism using children's stories in Germany (Braun 2022), political participation using handwritten petitions in the United States (Carpenter 2021), as well as the locations of Holy Land Crusaders (Blaydes and Paik 2016) and seventeenth-century peasant uprisings in Mexico (Garfias and Sellars 2022). Readers of this handbook will also find a wealth of historical studies with corresponding data in each themed chapter.

This chapter provides an overview of different types of quantitative historical data commonly used in historical political economy. While the chapter is by no means exhaustive, its goal is to provide an introduction to academic examples and considerations for each type. By "historical data," I refer to data from and preceding World War II. This scope condition is perhaps arbitrary, but it restricts the focus to data collected and stored by prior generations that are more challenging to work with because we have limited contact with those generations and thus limited ability to supplement or correct this data. It also allows this chapter to focus on the collection of data prior to the advent of modern survey and data collection methods.

There are many different types of historical data, but for ease of exposition, this chapter discusses a number of broad categories: sociodemographic and population data, government or institutional records, geographic and spatial data, political data, economic data, ethnographic data, and civil society data. These categories are not definitive—and aren't even mutually exclusive—but they allow for a reasonable grouping to discuss salient characteristics. Scholars of historical political economy collect quantitative information from primary and secondary sources, and the scope of data collection over time and space should be dictated by the hypotheses and design of the research study. Yet research highlighted in this chapter serves as a starting point, in that scholars interested in similar data exercises can find inspiration from such work.

Sociodemographic and Population Data

Sociodemographic and population data contain information about individuals or populations, typically consisting of 'vital records' such asage, education, marriage, family, race, religion, class, income, occupation, and location. The most common source of this type of information is census or equivalent population survey data. Sociodemographic data was inherently valuable throughout history, for economic and social control, so there were strategic incentives to collect and preserve population data; fortunately, this means historical census data are more readily available. Online access to and consolidation of historical census data are also improving. For example, IPUMs (https://www.ipums.org) is a growing central repository for survey and linked census data (including new methods of linking, see Helgertz et al. 2022). It holds US census data at the county and state level since 1790; it also has census data for over one hundred countries around the world, with some originating in the 1960s and 1970s.

The regularity and depth of census information doesvary by country, however. The United States is a notable case with extensive local and national data since its founding; scholars have used micro-level data from the US census to study the modern-day effects of slavery (Acharya, Blackwell, and Sen 2016), rugged individualism in frontier culture (Bazzi, Fiszbein, and Gebresilasse 2020), post–Civil War Reconstruction (Chacon and Jensen 2020; Suryanarayan and White 2021), and the socioeconomic backgrounds of politicians (Feigenbaum et al. 2022). Prussia and the German central state are other notable examples for high-quality census data, in that there exist regular and detailed censuses of the population over time (Becker and Pascali 2019; Hollenbach 2021). Even if a full population census is lacking, smaller surveys or population registers can still provide insight into historical populations. For example, the China Multi-Generational Panel Datasets provide the records of two million people between 1749 and 1913 (Campbell and Lee 2020). Even for historical cases that didn't have regular data collection exercises, there might exist premodern censuses or the equivalent, like the medieval census of India's Emperor Akbar (Jha 2013).

A good example of the use of historical sociodemographic data comes from the study of migrations, in particular the Age of Mass Migration (1860–1920). Scholars have compiled data tracking migration across countries from 1850 to the present day (Özden et al. 2011; Clemens 2020). Scholars have also used census data to analyze the effects of immigrants on industrialization and economic growth (Sequeira, Nunn, and Qian 2020), labor movements and strikes (Karadja and Prawitz 2019), racial inequalities (Nix and Qian 2015) or long-term social mobility (Abramitzky and Boustan 2022). Other scholars have looked at the social ties and economic fortunes of refugees in Germany (Burchardi and Hassan 2013) and Poland (Charnysh 2019) after World War II, or societal outcomes for descendants of German immigrants in the United States after World War I (Fouka 2020). The collective study of the Age of Mass Migration has also resulted in technological innovations in the methods for linking census records across individuals and time

(Abramitzky and Boustan 2022; Abramitsky et al. 2021). These papers all highlight the possibilities and challenges that come with working with census data.

Government or Institutional Records

Government or institutional records are the source for key information on bureaucracy or state capacity, and records of the human and physical capital needed for state administration. Examples of this data focus on government officials, administrative structures and staffing, tax collection and extractive capacity, institutions of law enforcement, or public goods and financial institutions (railways, banks, etc.). I also include institutional data relating to health and healthcare in this category. Such information is typically found in official government archives or libraries, though records can also be located elsewhere. This type of data is also more likely to be systematically collected in recent periods, and more reliable after the advent of institutionalized record keeping.

Potential data held in state records are vast, which means the types of variables that can be collected varies quite a bit by case. Some historical cases are notable for their state capacity. France is a good example; after the French Revolution, the French Constituent Assembly began a process of state-building that involved extensive local and national administration (Chambru et al. 2022; Acemoglu et al. 2011; Cirone and van Coppenolle 2018; Kreuzer 2001), resulting in high-quality data over time. China is another fascinating case; well-documented historical records are available from Imperial China, including historical land, taxation, and population data as well as detailed data on bureaucrats (Liang 2008; Sng 2014; Campbell and Lee 2020, Jiang and Kung 2021; Dincecco and Wang 2021; Wang 2022). It’s often also the case that bureaucratic data go hand in hand with census data; polities that are able to sustain one type often have good records on the other; the United States (Suryanarayan and White 2021) and Prussia (Mares and Queralt 2020; Hollenbach 2021) are cases in point.

State records can also include information not only from the collecting country but data gathered from other countries. This is especially the case for colonial archives, which can contain significant amounts of useful data. India is a notable example, thanks to the British East India Company archive (Srivastava 2022), though colonial archives are widespread. For example, Guardado (2018) uses colonial archives to assemble a dataset of the price of provincial offices sold by the Spanish Crown during times of fiscal crisis, while Xu (2018, 2023) exploits personnel records with vital statistics from 1856 onward to study colonial officers and bureaucratic representation in India. Bolt et al. (2021) provide detailed district-level data on the existence of native authority institutions during colonial rule in British Africa, Garfias and Sellars (2020) look at the value of holding office in colonial Mexico, and Mattingly (2017) uses data on schooling, health, and bureaucratic density as a result of the Japanese colonization of northern China. Johnson-Kanu (2021) uses the composition of bureaucrats in the Nigerian Federal Civil Service spanning nearly a century to study colonial-era access to bureaucracy. Overall, colonial records provide an alternative source of information on state capacity.

Another important source of institutional data relates to healthcare, though systematic data collection is more likely to be found in the past two centuries, and could be collected or stored outside of government records (particularly if healthcare is private or not distributed by the state).[1] One good example of large-scale historical data collection involving health data comes from Ansell and Lindvall (2020). Here, they assembled cross-national data from 1800 onward, including on midwifery services and training, mental healthcare institutions, and vaccination programs; they also cross-checked this data with information on centralized versus decentralized funding and provision across countries. A number of studies have also collected data or proxies on the long-term health outcomes of populations, while studying the effects of exogenous shocks or crises—looking at how the 1918 flu epidemic (Almond 2006; Arroyo Abad and Maurer

2021), nineteenth-century phylloxera blight (Banerjee et al. 2010), nineteenth-century food shortages (Baten, Crayen and Voth 2014), yellow fever (Saavedra 2017), and the Black Death (Jedwab, Johnson, and Koyama 2022) affected human capital and health outcomes.

Geographic and Spatial Data

Geographic and spatial data exploit the geographic location of information. Many types of data can be associated with a specific location, mapped, and then analyzed, and scholars are collecting data to employ spatial econometric models to study political or economic phenomena (see Whitten et al. 2021 for a review). This might take the form of natural data, such as regarding agricultural suitability, elevation, natural resources, mountains, or rivers. It also could be data on cities, borders, or nation states; trade routes, railroads, or churches; or polling places, protests, or radio stations. All historical data could be spatial data, though our ability to precisely geocode information in time and space depends on the archival material available.

Maps and atlases are important sources of historical data in this category. One of the largest resources for historical maps and atlases is the Library of Congress's Geography and Maps collection (both physical and digital collections; see https://www.loc.gov/rr/geogmap/). Many maps are also in the public domain and can be found online via various websites created by academic or private initiatives (for example, https://www.oldmapsonline.org). While we primarily consider maps as a source of political or natural boundaries and features, other kinds of historical maps can provide quantitative information. One example is the Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, which are atlases that provided detailed rendering of US cities and neighborhoods in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and that were used to help insurance companies assess risk. These maps document building materials and infrastructure, property lines and land use restrictions, public good provision data (sprinkler systems, fire hydrants, gas and water mains), other elements of the city (e.g., schools), and how urban geography has changed over time.

Maps are convenient because they are a standalone resource, but spatial data can also be reconstructed from a variety of sources. For example, Blaydes and Paik (2016) created a spatial dataset combining the geolocational origins of Crusaders and medieval cathedrals' construction across Europe, taking information from a number of primary source accounts and projecting this data onto historical maps from the time. In another example, Abramson (2017) created a new dataset on all political units in Europe between 1100 and 1790 by manually georeferencing several sets of historical maps and combining secondary and primary cartographic sources to verify the coding of units.

Geographic information systems (GIS) can also help input, analyze, and map this type of spatial data, and a number of GIS tools can be applied to historical datasets (Giuliano and Matranga 2021). The number of dedicated GIS resources are also increasing. Spatial data for the United States since 1790 can be found using the National Historical Geographic Information System (NHGIS), and similarly the International Historical Geographic Information System (IHGIS) provides shape files and boundaries for administrative and statistical units for countries around the world (though this data is more recent; see https://www.nhgis.org and https://ihgis.ipums.org, respectively). These new technologies, combined with advances in the field of digital humanities (Crompten et al. 2016), are an important frontier for historical spatial data.

Political Data

Political data relate to information on leaders, governments, and political institutions; this could be data on representative assemblies or predemocratic governing bodies, data on governance under nondemocratic monarchs or autocrats, or measures of political participation (such as voter turnout or suffrage). Political data from recent centuries have been compiled from official state records, while data further back is typically a composite of records, historical narratives, and primary sources.

Many resources document rulers and succession patterns throughout history. Data on world leaders and their successions are readily available, both cross nationally and sometimes dating back to before AD 1000 (Blaydes and Chaney 2013; Kokkonen and Sundell 2020; Kokkonen and Møller 2020; Jones and Olken 2005; Goemans, Gleditsch, and Chiozza 2009). Scholars have used historical data on leadership to study the effect of queenly rule on going to war (Dube and Harish 2020), the effect of the national leader on economic growth (Jones and Olken 2005; Acharya and Lee 2019), or regime transitions (Goemans, Gleditsch, and Chiozza 2009).

There is also a large literature on early governing bodies—their emergence, evolution, and relationship with modern political institutions today (Stasavage 2010; Van Zanden et al. 2012, Angelucci et al. 2022, among many others). For example, Abramson and Boix (2019) and Kokkonen and Møller (2020) have documented the emergence of political bodies in Europe over the centuries. These scholars help to catalog the existence of parliaments, local councils, territorial assemblies, or other early legislative or executive bodies, as well as their relationships with monarchs between 1000 and 1900. Other studies focus on the existence of various institutions of self-governance under autocratic or predemocratic regimes; for example, Dower et al. (2018) collected data on peasant representation in local assemblies called zemstvo in Imperial Russia under Tsar Alexander II, and Charnysh and Ziblatt (2022) and Mares (2015) studied citizen experience with elections in pre-democratic Imperial Germany.

Data on elections and political parties are also comprehensive, from about the eighteenth century onward. The Constituency-Level Elections Archive (CLEA) has constituency and party data for the lower and upper chambers of legislative bodies around the world, with data beginning as far back as 1788 (https://electiondataarchive.org). ParlGov, a cross-national database for parliaments and governments since 1945, is also currently expanding to include pre–World War II data (see http://www.parlgov.org). The cross-national Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) dataset is a comprehensive set of indicators measuring democracy and aspects of democratic institutions, including elections, political parties, executive and legislative institutions, as well as civil society and the media. Historical V-Dem extends these indicators back to 1789, for eighty polities across the world. Historical election returns by country can also be found using data repositories in the social sciences, such as Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICSPR) or the Harvard Dataverse. There's even a comprehensive dataset on the origins, tenure, and characteristics of autocratic ruling parties since 1940 (Miller 2020).

Roll call votes are another key source of data when studying legislative politics, and this field was defined in research on the US Congress by Keith T. Poole and Howard Rosenthal. They created a multidimensional scaling technique to determine legislator ideal points called NOMINATE (and iterations such as DW-NOMINATE, etc.). Subsequent work has resulted in the analysis of over thirteen million individual roll call votes in the United States (Rosenthal 2007 Poole 2005), and a comprehensive dataset and website called VoteView that contains every Congressional roll call vote in American history (see Voteview.com). Scholars have now extended spatial models of roll call voting and discussed their use in historical contexts (Clinton, Jackman, and Rivers 2004; Caughey and Schickler 2016; Bateman and Lapinski 2016; Jenkins and Sala 1998; Jenkins and Nokken 2000; Jenkins and Stewart 2013) as well as applied them to countries around the world (for example, Lupu 2015; Bräuninger, Müller, and Steckler 2016; Hix and Noury 2016, among others).

Scholars have also created other ideological measures and datasets for other political bodies; for example, one can access the dataset of ideal point "Martin-Quinn" measures for every US Supreme Court justice since 1937 (Martin and Quinn 2002, or see https://mqscores.lsa.umich.edu), or a dataset of roll call votes in the UN General Assembly from 1946 to 2021 (Voeten et al. 2009).

There is also a large body of scholarship using parliamentary data from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, digitizing the text of legislative speeches, roll call votes, committee assignments, and ministerial appointments (see Cirone 2020 for a review of the HPE of parliaments). Some examples include Victorian Britain (Cox 1987; Eggers and Spirling 2014, Kam 2014), the French Third Republic (Cirone and van Coppenolle 2018), Weimar and post–World War II Germany (Sieberer et al. 2020; Hansen and Debus 2012; Hage 2019), nineteenth-century Canada (Godbout and Hoyland 2017), and the nineteenth-century United States (Jenkins, Peck, and Weaver 2010; Bateman et al. 2017; Gordon and Simpson 2020. The databases featured in such studies are usually available for public use.

Political participation data can be collected from a number of different sources. The most common measures of participation are suffrage[2] and voter turnout, and many scholars have collected data on which individuals can vote when, over the course of democratic development. Notable research looks at suffrage expansion, turnout, and the presence of voting restrictions in Europe (Berlinski and Dewan 2011; Berlinski, Dewan, and van Coppenolle 2014; Kam 2014; Kam 2017; Aidt and Jensen 2009; Amat et al. 2020) or the United States (Miller 2008; Teele 2018; Bateman 2018; Gray and Jenkins 2022; Williams 2022). Political participation under no or limited suffrage can be measured in alternative ways, such as using data on petitions (statements of grievances with signatures, submitted to the government). Carpenter (2021) collected a comprehensive dataset on petitions in the United States from 1790 to 1870 in the United States, offering a way to measure political participation for women and men excluded from other types of democratic participation.

Finally, there are many sources for data on political culture, or the relationship between the individual and the state. This often takes the shape of event data—on protests, violence, strikes, and repression—collected from primary source accounts or newspapers. For example, the Dynamics of Collective Action dataset records demonstrations of collective action in the United States from 1960 to 1965 during the civil rights movement and Mazumder (2018) uses this data to study how historical civil rights protest activity affects modern racial attitudes. For an earlier period of the United States, García-Jimeno, Iglesias, and Yildirim (2022) used newspaper-based data on antiliquor protests by the Women's Temperance Crusade in 1873. Geloso and Kufenko (2019) created a database that matched census data with rebellious event data to explain the 1837–38 rebellion of the British colonies of Upper and Lower Canada. Aidt et al. (2022) collected social unrest events as part of the English Swing riots of 1830–31. Arnon, McAlexander, and Rubin (2023) look at civilian agency under conflict and collect data on citizen evacuation and forced displacement by combining historical accounts from archives and contemporary surveys of Arab Palestinian villages conducted during the early 1940s. The range of scholarship using event data is vast, and many future historical datasets could fall under this banner.

Economic Data

Economic data contain information relating to economic growth or economic development, and historical economic data (and corresponding proxies for missing data) are plentiful. Luckily for those looking for data, historical economics has long been a robust academic area of inquiry. The recent *Handbook of Historical Economics* (Bisin and Giovanni 2021) provides an excellent overview of the field, as well as the many sources of data; notably the chapter on economic data (Giuliano and Matranga 2021) provides a useful review. Recent books on global historical wealth and growth (Piketty 2014; Pietty and Saez 2013, Rubin and Koyama 2022, Hamilton and Hepburn 2017) also demonstrate the vast quantities of time-series, cross-sectional data available.

There are many existing datasets relating to economic history—on stock prices, global financial data, labor statistics, import and export data, public debt, bonds, and countless other variables too many to list—but fortunately they are easily found and accessible by researchers. Notable examples include the International Monetary Fund's Historical Public Debt database (see https://www.imf.org/external/datamapper/datasets/DEBT), which provides data on GDP and government debt from 1800 onward or the NBER Macrohistory database (https://www.nber.org/research/data/nber-macrohistory-database), which takes a more expansive view and provides data on all aspects of a nation's economy (adding variables like employment, trade, and government capacity to data on money, prices, and assets). The Economic History Association also provides a convenient listing of historical datasets (https://eh.net/databases/).

It's worth noting that agricultural and geographic data are also relevant to historical studies of economic outcomes. The Food and Agriculture Organization's Global Agro-Ecological Zones dataset (GAEZ) (Fischer et al. 2002) provides time series data on land and water resources, agro-climatic resources, crop suitability, and production data for a wide range of countries. Scholars have used this data to create measures of caloric viability or caloric potential, from medieval periods to today, as in the cases of Ahmed and Stasavage (2020) or Huning and Wahl (2016). However, agricultural data are going to be country-specific; many countries also have agricultural censuses or other forms of internal data. The United States is a good example in that it has collected detailed data on farms, income, expenditures, and other factors from 1840 onward in a publicly accessible archive. Rubin and Koyama (2022) engage with a variety of empirical data to discuss to what extent climate, soil, access to coasts, disease environments, and mountains have affected global economic growth. Agricultural and natural resource suitability can be measured far back in time and often provide a proxy for economic capacity.

Detailed data on global trade has been preserved throughout the centuries, and scholars have used trade data to study a broad range of economic and political development outcomes. The Bilateral Trade Historical Series 1827-2014 is a useful general resource (Fouquin and Hugot 2016), while articles on specific cases can also provide insight into the type of data available. For example, Gaikwad (2014) uses original archival data to study the effects of trading hubs built in India by the various European East India Companies in the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, while Jia (2014) analyzes the economic development of colonial treaty ports in China, and Arteaga, Desierto, and Koyama (2020) look at Spain's monopoly of trade routes to Manila for 250 years. Pascali (2017) even exploits the invention of the steamship to study the effects of trade globalization, using a unique dataset on shipping times, trade, and development from 1850 to 1900. A number of papers also use detailed historical shipping data on the volume and prevalence of the African slave trade to study the momentous impacts it had on economic and political development (e.g., Nunn 2008; Nunn and Wantchekon 2011; Gershman 2020; Acharya, Blackwell, and Sen 2016, among others).

Ethnographic Data

Cultural and ethnographic data present information about human societies, and substantial data collection in this category focuses on identifying the types or locations of preindustrial ethnic groups. This type of data also often includes information on cultural practices and traits. Data availability varies; depending on the group and region—and the presence or absence of written record-keeping cultures—specific details of many groups' practices have been lost to history. The data we do have are often assembled by relying on the accounts of contemporary sociologists, historians, explorers, or others with knowledge of the group.

Existing work is grounded in a number of canonical datasets—namely, the Ethnographic Atlas and the Murdock ethnic group boundary map (Murdock 1959; Murdock 1967), as well as the related Standard Cross Cultural Survey (Murdock and White 1969). The original datasets provided ancestral data on the economic, cultural, political, and environmental characteristics of 1,265 ethnic groups, as well as approximate historical geographic boundaries. The range of variables collected is impressive; over one hundred variables track economic subsistence, types of dwellings, political organization and religion, language, marriage practices, and location. More recent work has critiqued or extended this data by adding several ethnicities, reducing measurement error, challenging boundary measures, or arguing for alternative coding (Wig 2016; Paine 2019; Bahrami-Rad, Becker, and Henrich 2021). A relevant and notable dataset descending from this work is the Ancestral Characteristics Database (Giuliano and Nunn 2018).

Related data sources include but are not limited to the Ethnic Power Relations Dataset family, which provides data on ethnic groups' access to state power, transitional ethnic connections, and interethnic cleavages from 1946 onward (Vogt et al. 2015); the Ethnologue, which tracks global world languages (Gordon 2005); and the Seshat Global History Databank, which focuses on the social and political organization of human societies. Other large-scale data initiatives exist to combine and extend access to ethnographic data. One example is the Linking Ethnic Data from Africa (LEDA) Project, which combines eleven prominent datasets on ethnic groups in Africa to the Ethnologue database (Müller-Crepon, Schvitz, and Cederman 2022; Müller-Crepon, Pengl, and Bormann 2021). Another is the Spatially Interpolated Data on Ethnicity (SIDE) dataset, a collection and GIS resource of 253 near-continuous maps of local ethno-linguistic, religious, and ethno-religious settlement patterns (Müller-Crepon and Hunziker 2018).

Ethnographic data are used to study a range of topics in both political science and economics (for an excellent review, see Lowes 2021). Alesina, Giuliano, and Nunn (2013) and Becker (2019) used this data to study if traditional agricultural practices can explain the historical persistence of gender norms and restrictions on women's sexuality. Wig (2016) and Paine (2019) study ethnic violence in Africa, as a function of pre- and postcolonial traditional institutions, while Baldwin and Ricard-Huguet (2022) look at the relationship between land quality and leaders. Müller-Crepon et al. (2022) use spatial data on European ethnic geography from 1887 to study modern patterns of nationalism. It's worth noting that cultural data can also provide insight into the development of premodern political institutions and political organization, as studied by Ahmed and Stasavage (2020). Scholars interested in ethnographic data should also note and respect the interdisciplinary nature of these datasets, pulling from fields like sociology and archaeology in addition to political science, history, and economics.

Civil Society Data

Civil society data contain information relating to associations or organizations that largely exist outside the state, family, or market. This typically includes a wide variety of voluntary associations, including nonprofit groups, organized religions, professional associations, cultural or ethnic organizations, or philanthropic groups, among others. In this section I also discuss educational data (though this could also be classified with state records). Historical data on these groups can range from archival records and group activities or membership lists to descriptions from contemporary accounts or newspapers. Interested scholars can consult the large literature on social capital (Putnam 1995), which is characterized by collecting unique historical data on social clubs and associations (e.g., Guiso, Sapienza, and Zingales 2016; Padró I Miquel et al. 2015; Satyanath, Voigtländer, and Voth 2017; Montolio and Tur-Prats 2018; Bozcaga and Cansunar 2021). In the interest of space, I focus here on two different types of civil society data: data on education and data on religion.

Education data provide information about educational institutions and facilities, student enrollment and attainment, and teachers and staffing, from early childhood to adult. It's worth noting that widespread formal education is a more recent phenomenon in human history. While it's possible to get centuries-old data on schooling, such as data on medieval universities (Cantoni and Yuchtman 2014), data from far back in time often instead focuses on the collection of variables like literacy or access to printed materials. Dittmar (2011) exploits the introduction of the printing press to show how access to printed materials affected European cultural and economic development, and Pengl, Roessler, and Rueda (2022) use data on the prevalence of printing technologies and publications in Africa from the 1920s.

Much of the historical data on education focuses on the expansion of mass schooling and primary school enrollments in the past two centuries (Ansell and Lindvall 2013, Go and Lindert 2010). For example, Lee and Lee (2016) assembled country-level data on primary school enrollment rates as a proportion of the school-age population for 111 countries from 1820 to 2010, as well as data on secondary and tertiary enrollment rates. Paglayan (2021) extends this data, to add school enrollment for additional countries in Europe and Latin America, as well as data on the years when central government began to regulate the provision of primary education. In terms of the transition to mass secondary schooling, Goldin and Katz (2011) use micro-data on educational attainment from US censuses to study the expansion of secondary education and the building of high schools, and Bandiera et al. (2019) similarly use enrollment rates for five- to fourteen-year-olds from 1830 through 1890 for the United States.

Data on educational spending and educational facilities is also a potential resource, as shown by Ansell's comprehensive study of education policy over country and over time (2010). Others have studied specific cases, such as Aaronson and Mazumder (2011), who analyzes the socioeconomic impact of the Rosenwald School initiative in the early twentieth century, which constructed five thousand schools for Black children in the US South. In another example, Gao (2018) used data on public primary schools and expenditure on education to chart the rise of mass schooling in China in the early twentieth century. Karger (2021) even maps library construction grants to census data to estimate the effect of proximate library access from 1900 to 1940 on children's later occupation and educational outcomes.

Organized religion is another important source of historical data (Kuran 2012; Gryzmala Busse 2020; Becker, Rubin, and Woessmann, 2020). Religious institutions can provide individual-level information on church organization and staffing, attendees and members, local associations, or charitable activity; organized religions were also notable for keeping extensive economic and social records. Data on missionary activity is also a valuable resource, and sometimes religious outposts collected information for areas that might not have records otherwise. I discuss each of these in turn.

Substantial data are available on the organized religions, even for earlier periods. The Database of Religious History (https://religiondatabase.org) serves as a centralized database for group-level data on religion around the world. Scholars have also collected extensive data on religious institutions over the past millennia. Gryzmala-Busse (2023) conducts a comprehensive study of the powerful role of the Catholic Church in the medieval era (1100–1350), collecting new data on papal conflict and early state fragmentation in Europe, as well as noting that the church provided institutional templates to rulers for administration, taxation, and record keeping. Rubin (2017) compares and contrasts the role of Christianity and Islam in technological and economic advancements (loans, printing presses, and commercial policy) that later led to the rise of the West. Chaney (2013) uses data collected on religious authorities in Egypt, from the start of the Ayyubid dynasty in 1169. Cansunar and Kuran (2020) gathered detailed financial and investment data via Islamic trusts from the late Ottoman Empire.

Other notable sources of religious data come from more recent periods. There is a large literature on the Protestant Reformation and its socioeconomic consequences (e.g., Cantoni, Dittmar, and Yuchtman 2018; Dittmar and Meisenzahl 2020; Becker and Woessmann 2009; Spenkuch and Tillmann 2018; Becker, Pfaff, and Rubin 2016). Organized religion played a role in communist infiltration in World War II (Nalepa and Pop-Eleches 2022). Missionaries are also a rich source of data. For example, Dulay (2022) uses detailed data on the presence of Catholic religious missions in the 1900s in the Philippines to study how missionary activity affects state-building. Similar papers use missionary data from countries in Africa (e.g., Wantchekon, Klašnja, and Novta 2014, China (Bai and Kung 2015), and Mexico (Waldinger 2017), or comparatively (Valencia Caicedo 2019).

Since population surveys on religiosity or religious participation are not available for the premodern period, scholars also use creative historical data to measure religion. Andersen and Bentzen (2022) use given names to construct a novel proxy for average religiosity, in a sample of 450,000 European-based authors born between 1300 and 1940 and another sample of 50,000 university students born in the Holy Roman Empire from 1300 to 1550; the authors use this to study human capital formation and economic growth over time. Blaydes, Grimmer, and McQueen (2018) study the texts of advice manuals from medieval Muslim and Christian polities, documenting the rise and fall of religious discourse. Malik and Mirza (2021) study the impact of religious leaders on long-run development in Pakistan by compiling a dataset on historically significant shrines from colonial-era gazetteers in the nineteenth century. Chen et al. (2022) show that Confucian clans maintained for two millennia affected the growth of financial markets in China, using data on location of Confucian academies and banking data in the nineteenth century. Such studies good examples of creativity in collecting historical data.

Conclusion

The collection of historical data is not for the faint of heart. It goes without saying that historical data are generally more detailed, accurate, and available in recent periods, opposed to past periods. Historical data also tend to be disproportionately found in countries that were stable enough, rich enough, and capable of collecting, storing, and preserving records. Working with historical data can also present numerous other challenges—selection bias, missing data, time decay, and confirmation bias must all be considered during historical data collection (Cirone and Spirling 2021 Kim 2022), and these apply to all categories of data discussed here.

Still, sources of historical data abound, and this chapter has provided a brief survey of data types often used in historical political economy—sociodemographic and population data, government or institutional records, geographic and spatial data, political data, economic data, ethnographic data, and civil society data. Going forward, the sky is the limit. Researchers in HPE are collecting and sharing data across disciplines, and discussions about historical data on interdisciplinary blogs for HPE such as Broadstreet. Blog only serve to help in this collective endeavor. Hopefully the resources and articles listed here, and generally throughout this handbook, can not only provide interested scholars with a way to access the historical data they need, but serve as examples of comprehensive research that engages with the specific challenges that come when using this type of data.

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Notes

1 Interested readers can also consult James Feigenbaum’s chapter in this volume on health in historical political economy.

2 Readers should also consult W. Walker Hanlon’s chapter on suffrage in this volume.