

“Kinlessness” and Living Alone: *Cross-National Perspectives & the Role of Public Policy*

Christine A. Mair, PhD

Associate Professor - Sociology & Gerontology

Director - Center for Health, Equity, & Aging

Department of Sociology, Anthropology, & Public Health

University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC)

christine_mair@umbc.edu



UMBC

**CENTER FOR HEALTH,
EQUITY, & AGING**

Department of Sociology, Anthropology, & Public Health



Conceptual and Empirical Distinctions and Issues



Aging “Alone”



Living Alone

“Kinlessness”



Loneliness

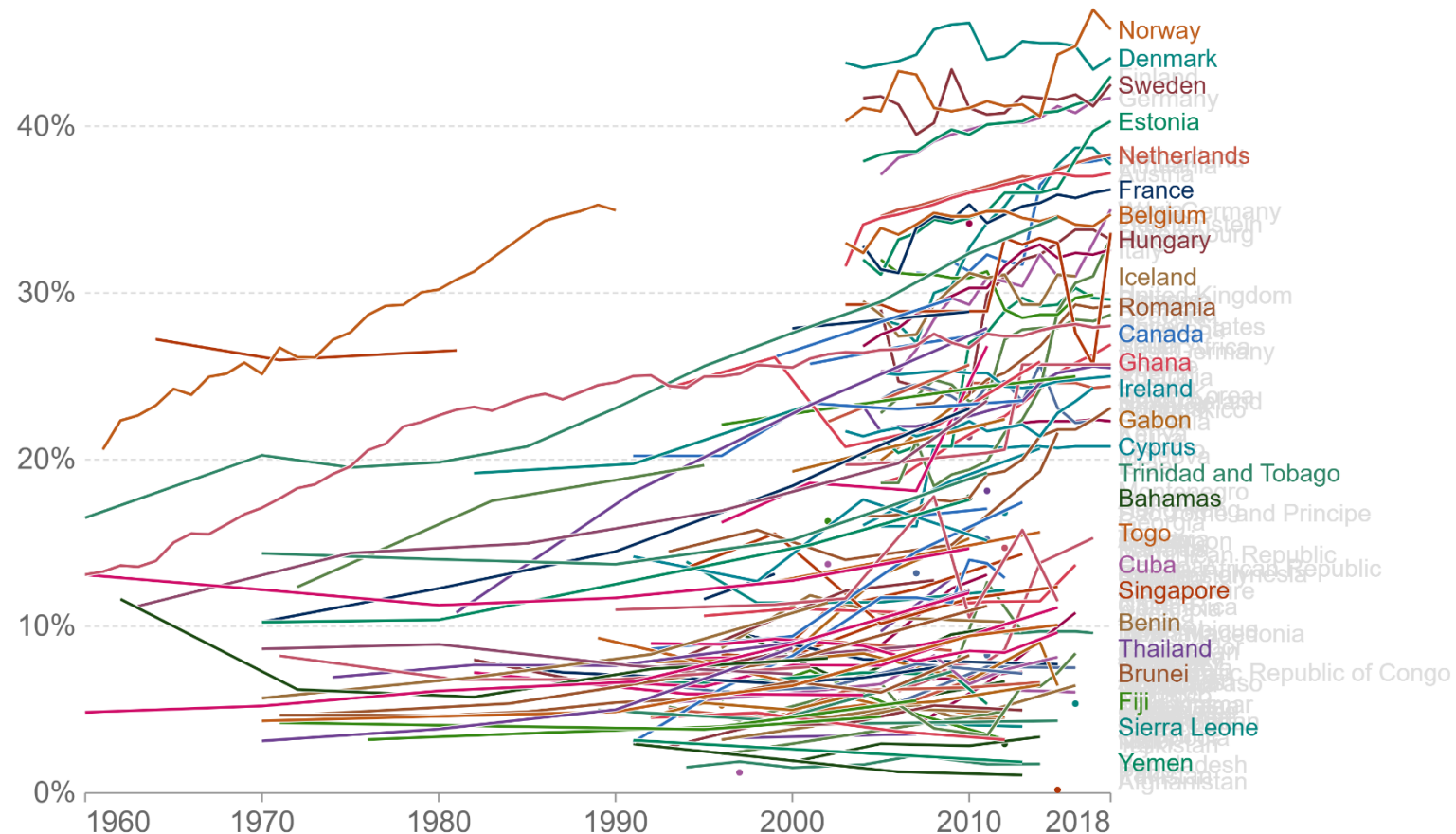


Living Alone is (Mostly) Increasing, Especially in Specific Regions

Percentage of one-person households, 1960 to 2018

Number of one-person households as a share of the total number of households. Estimates combine multiple sources, including cross-country surveys and census data.

Our World
in Data

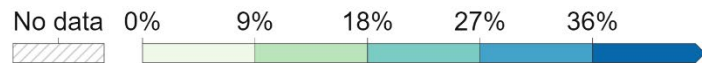


Source: OWID based on UN and other sources

OurWorldInData.org/social-connections-and-loneliness • CC BY

Living Alone by Country (2018)

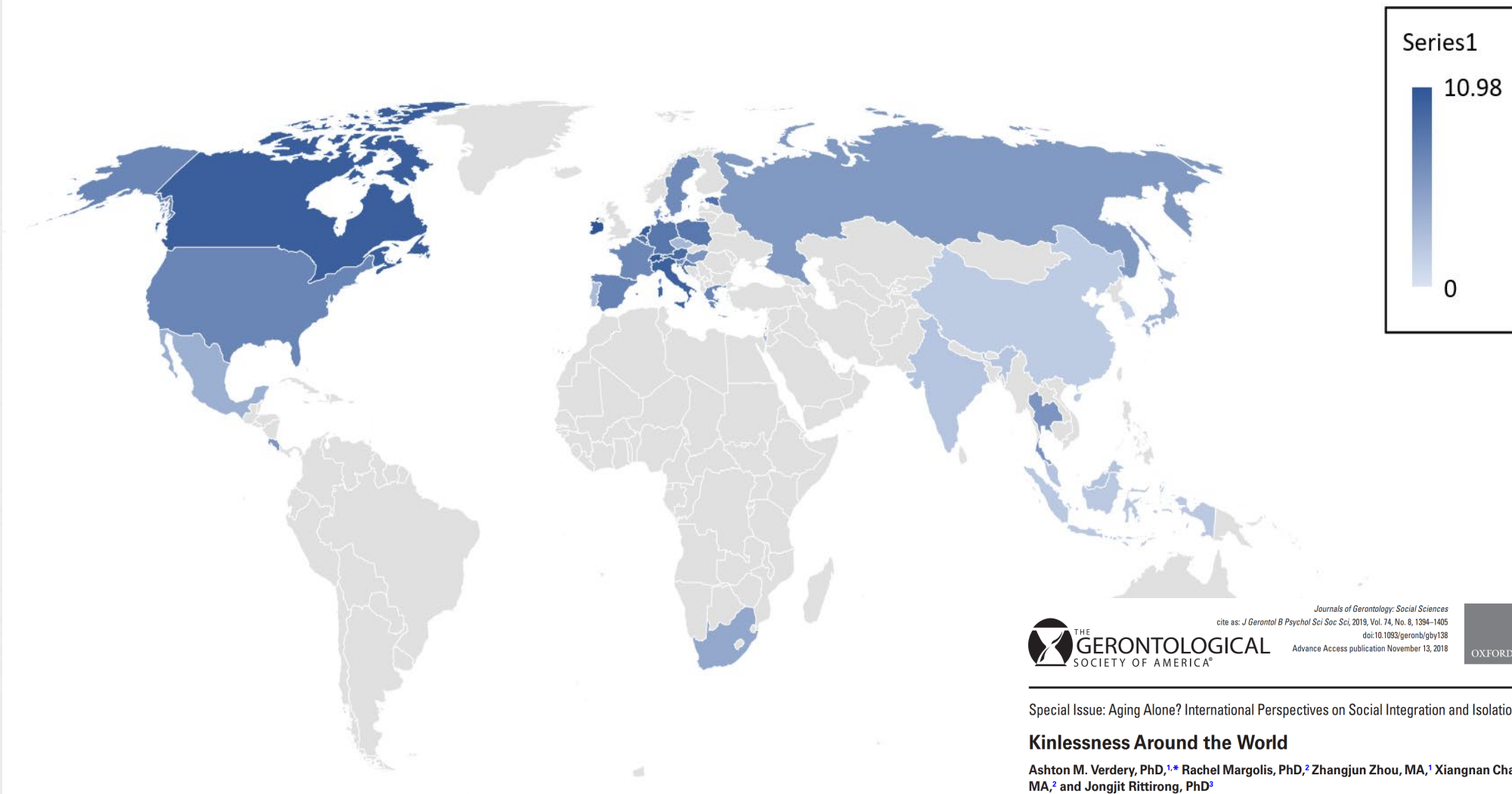
Number of one-person households as a share of the total number of households. Estimates combine multiple sources, including cross-country surveys and census data.

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Living Alone and “Kinlessnessness” Partially Correlated

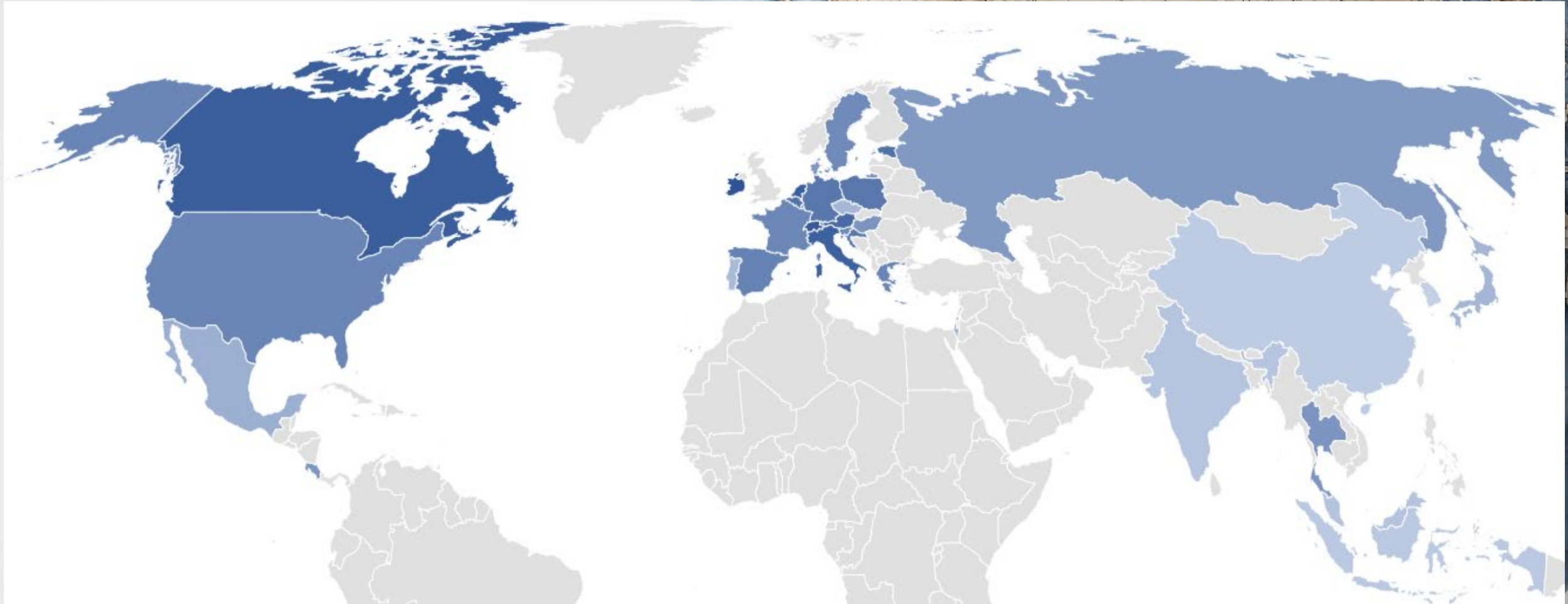
% no partner, no child





Are the living alone and the “kinless” lonely?

Zooming in on the Global North...

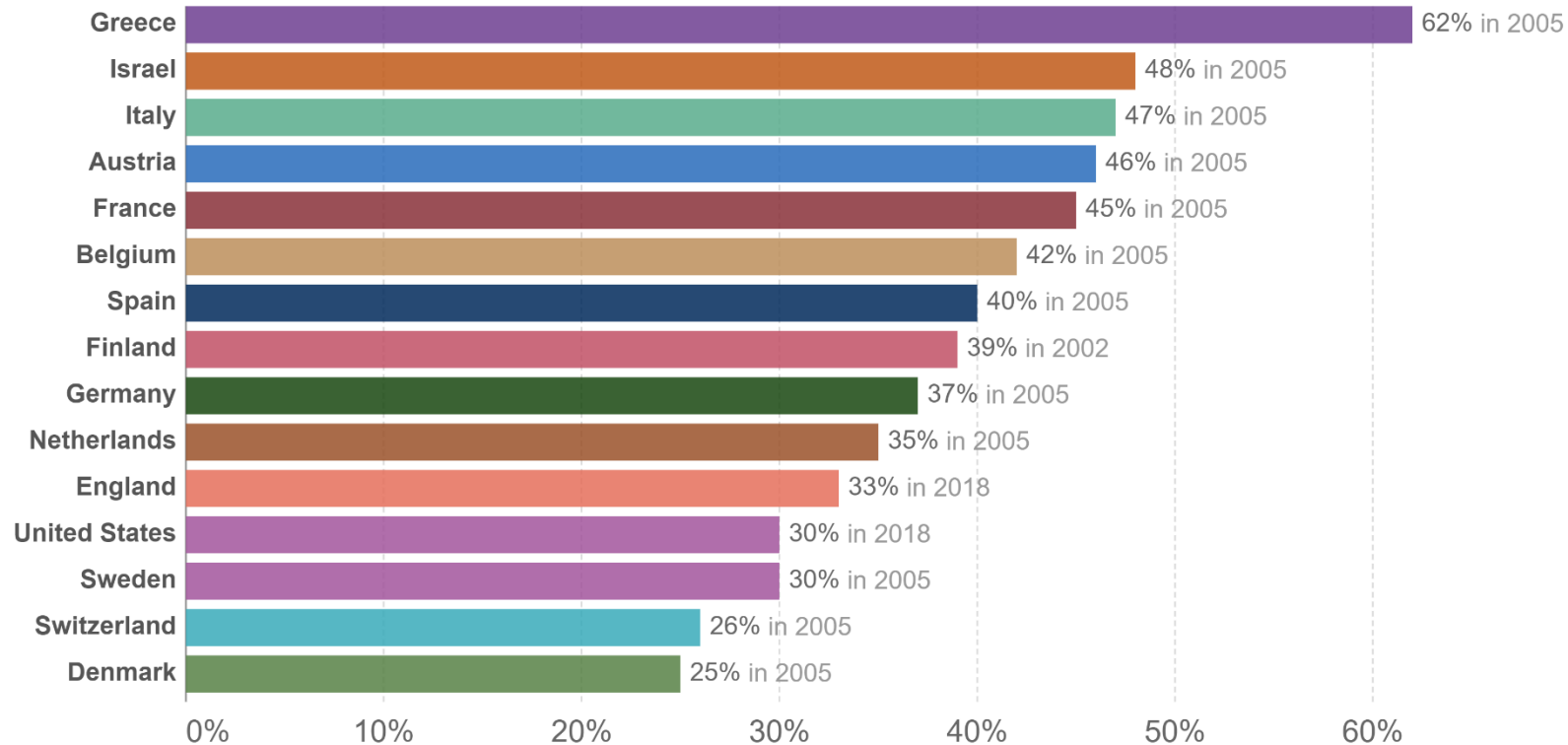


Global Patterns of Living Alone and “Kinlessness” Do Not Clearly Correlate to Loneliness

Self-reported loneliness among older adults

Share of survey respondents who report feeling lonely at least some of the time. For all countries estimates correspond to population ages 65+, except in the following cases: US (ages 72+); UK (ages 65-74); and Finland (ages 75+).

Our World
in Data



Source: Our World in Data based on Sundström et al. (2009), Savikko et al (2005), ONS (2019) and CIGNA (2018)

Note: Estimates correspond to people who report feeling lonely "some of the time", "most of the time", or "almost all the time". This is in contrast to those that report feeling lonely "rarely", "almost none of the time", or "never".

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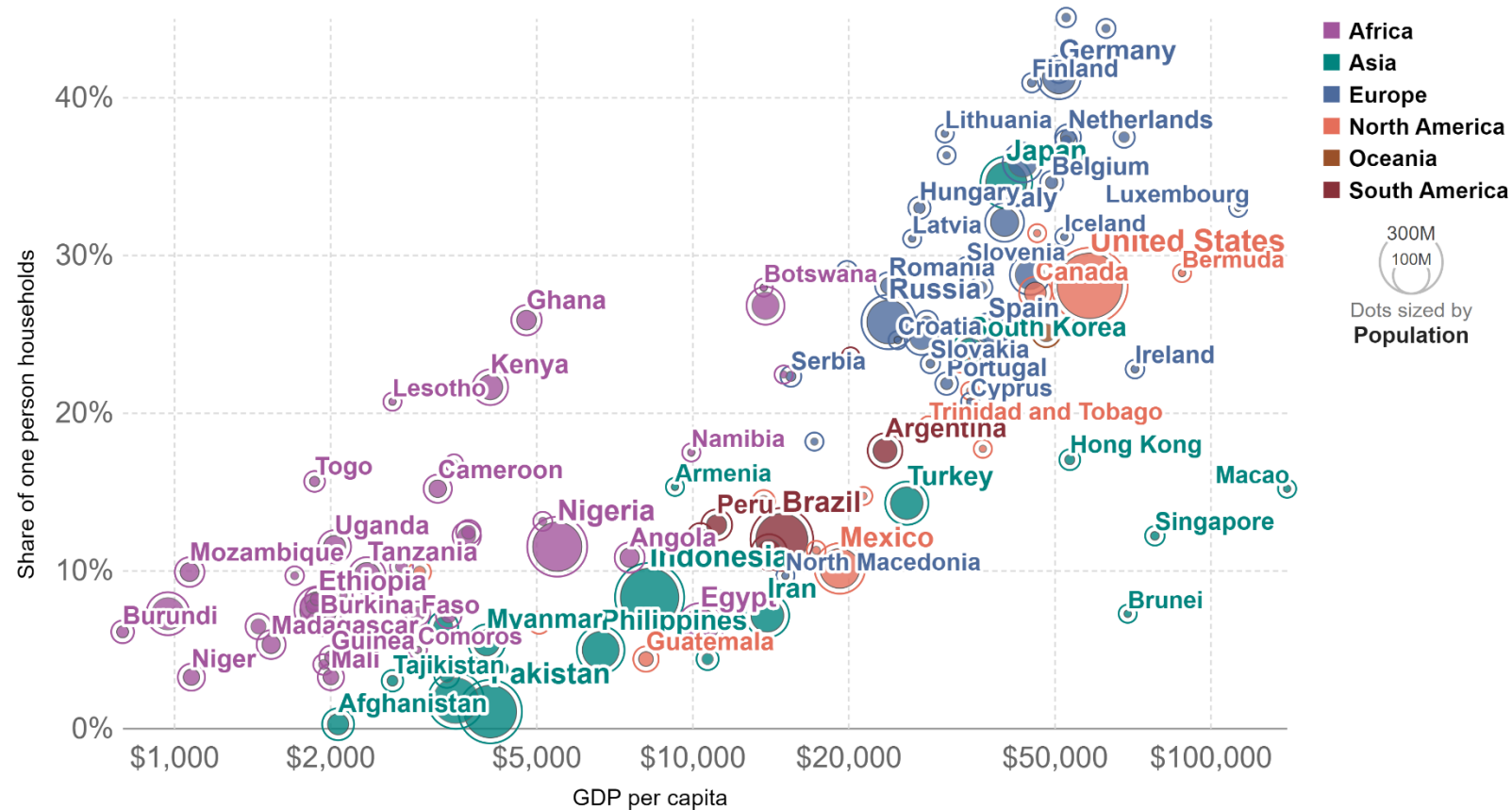


What Explains Cross-National Variation?

Economic Development? One-Person Households by GDP

Share of one-person households vs. GDP per capita, 2015

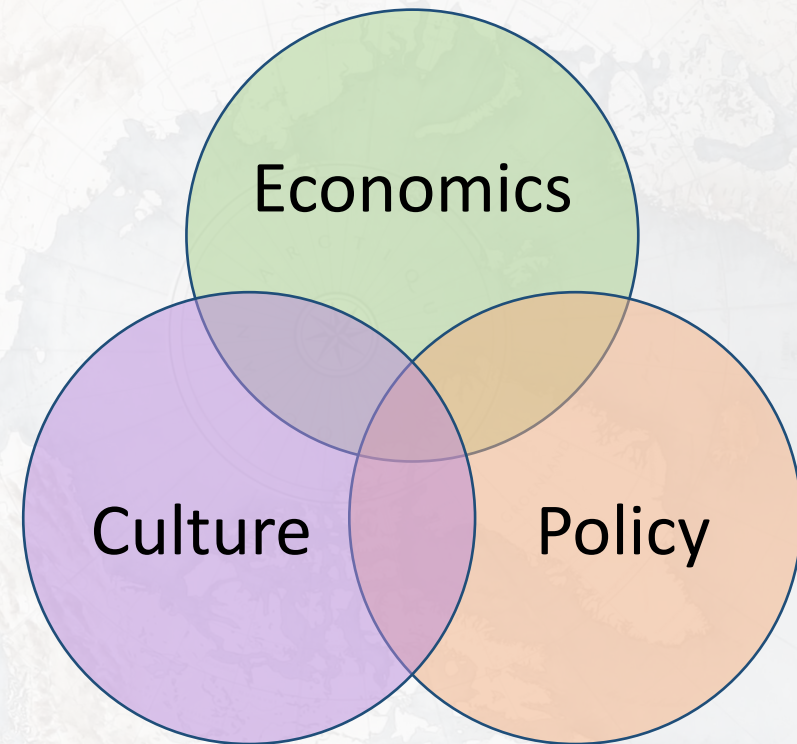
GDP per capita is adjusted to account for inflation and differences in prices between countries. Colors represent world regions. Bubble sizes are proportional to the population of the country.



Source: Our World in Data based on multiple sources; Data compiled from multiple sources by World Bank
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Issues with Using GDP as Country “Context”

- ❖ Economic Development & Resources
- ❖ Public Policy and Funding Allocation
- ❖ Cultural Norms, Values, Expectations

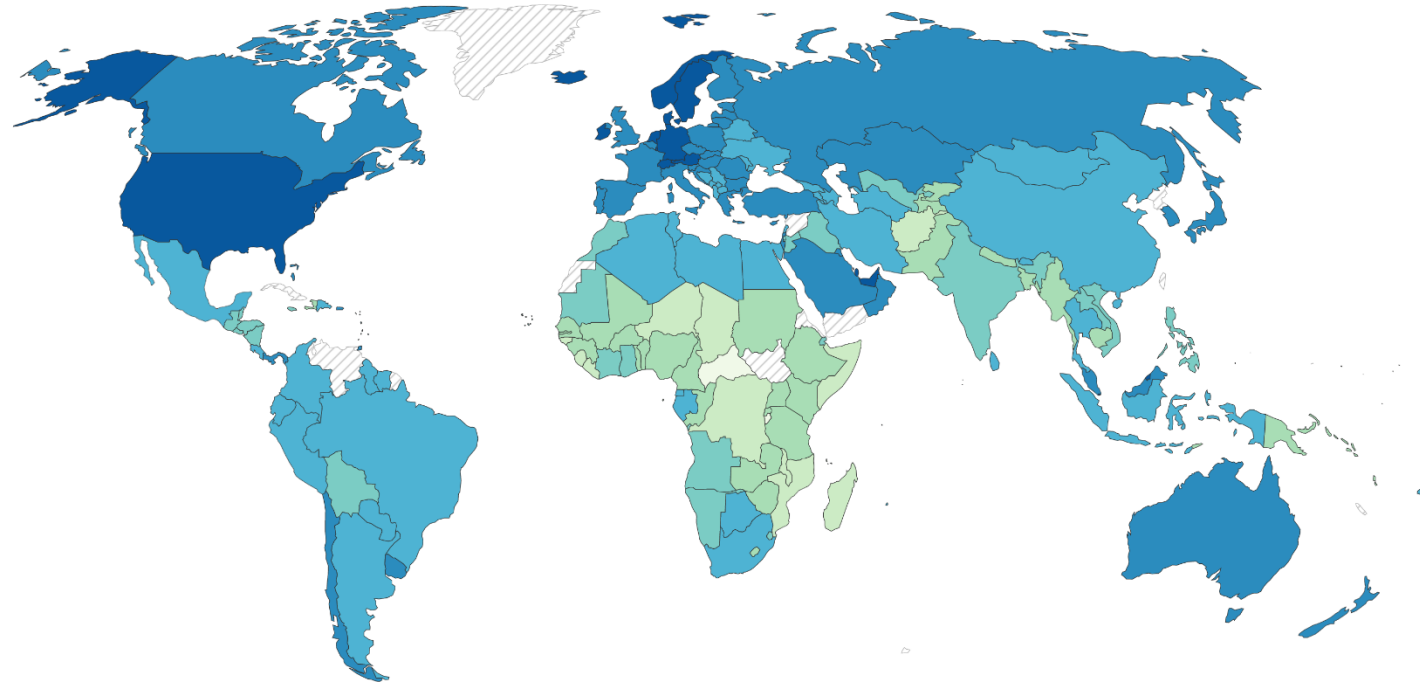


Country Wealth: Gross Domestic Product

GDP per capita, 2020

This data is adjusted for inflation and for differences in the cost of living between countries.

Our World
in Data



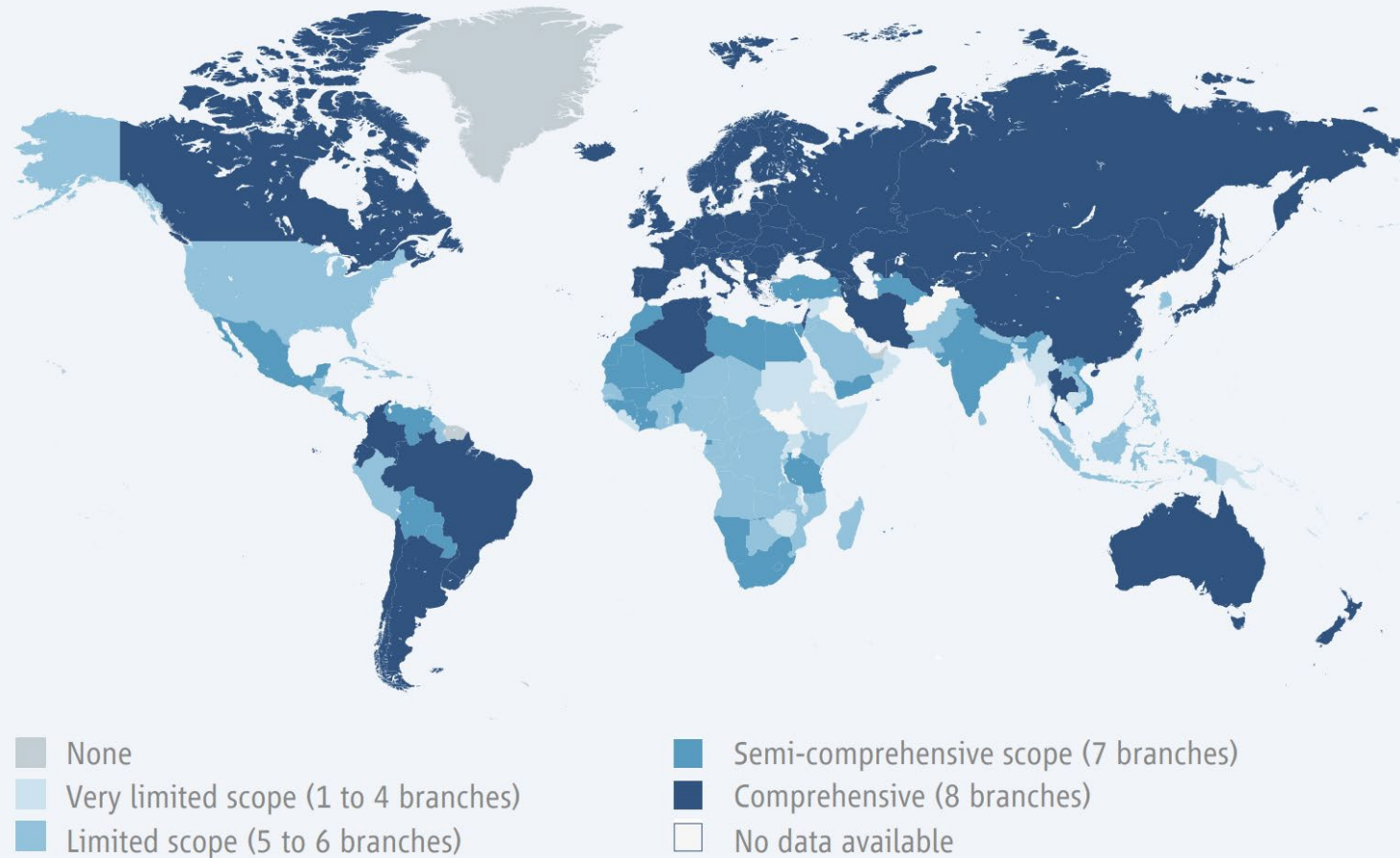
No data \$0 \$1,000 \$2,000 \$5,000 \$10,000 \$20,000 \$50,000

Source: Data compiled from multiple sources by World Bank
Note: This data is expressed in international-\$ at 2017 prices.

OurWorldInData.org/economic-growth • CC BY

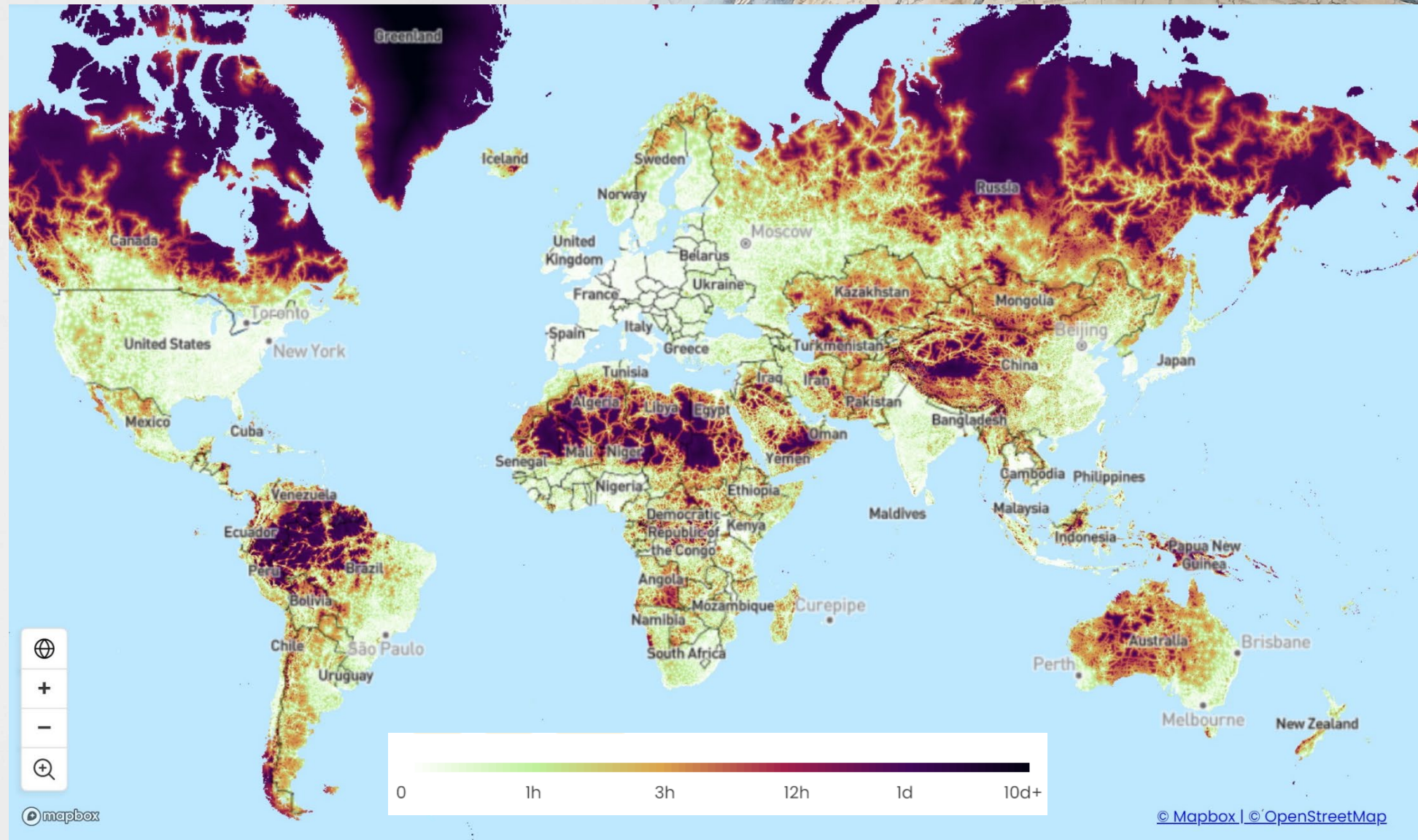
Public Policy: Social Security Programs

Statutory provision of social security programmes (2014)



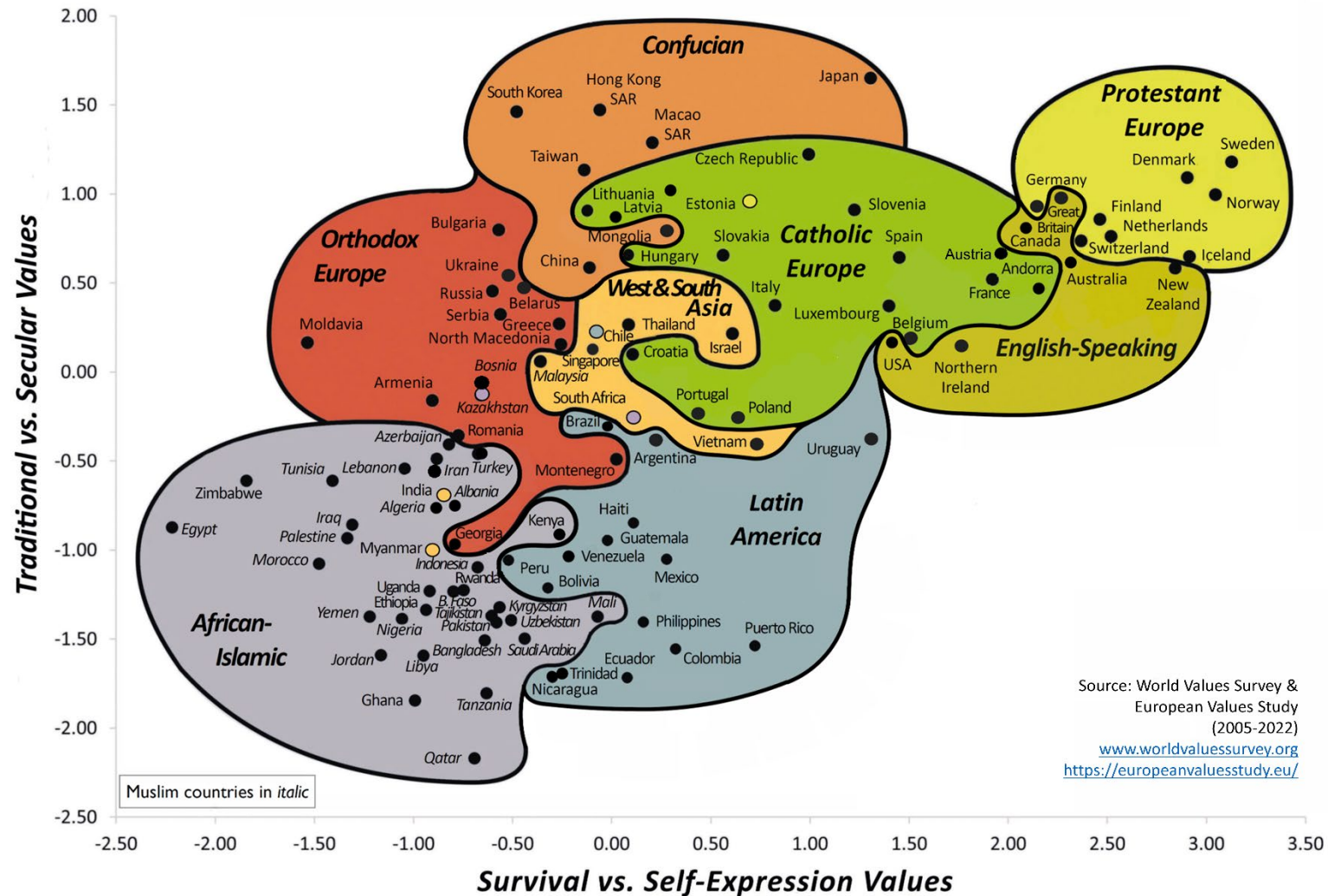
Sources: US Social Security Administration / ISSA. *Social security programs throughout the world*.
Data consolidated by the International Labour Office.

Rurality: Travel Time to Nearest Healthcare Facility



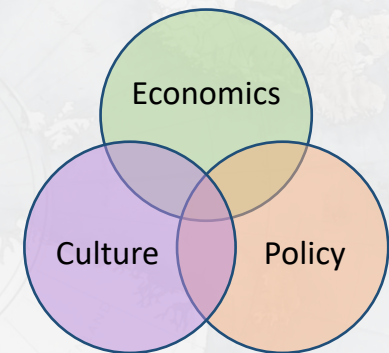
Cultural Values: Secularism and Self-Expression

The Inglehart-Welzel World Cultural Map 2023



Examples of Family-Based Assumptions Not Supported by Contextualized Cross-National Data

- 1) *“Living with children is beneficial for older adults’ health.”*
❖ (Example: 12 European Countries; Mair 2013) Policy
- 2) *“People prefer that the family be responsible for the care older adults.”*
❖ (Example: 20 Countries; Mair et al. 2016)
- 3) *“Older adults with nuclear families have support, ‘kinless’ are unsupported.”*
❖ (Example: 17 European countries; Mair 2019)
- 4) *“Older adults without children have poorer health.”*
❖ (Example: 20 European countries; Quashie et al. 2021)
- 5) *“Older adults who are ‘kinless’ will have more medically intense end-of-life experiences.”*
❖ (Example: Denmark; Mair et al. 2023)
- 6) *“Older adults who are ‘kinless’ are less likely to be able to die at home.”*
❖ (Example: 23 countries; Mair, in preparation)



Conceptual & Measurement Issues

Dominance of Family-Based Models of Care
in Healthcare Policy and Data Collection

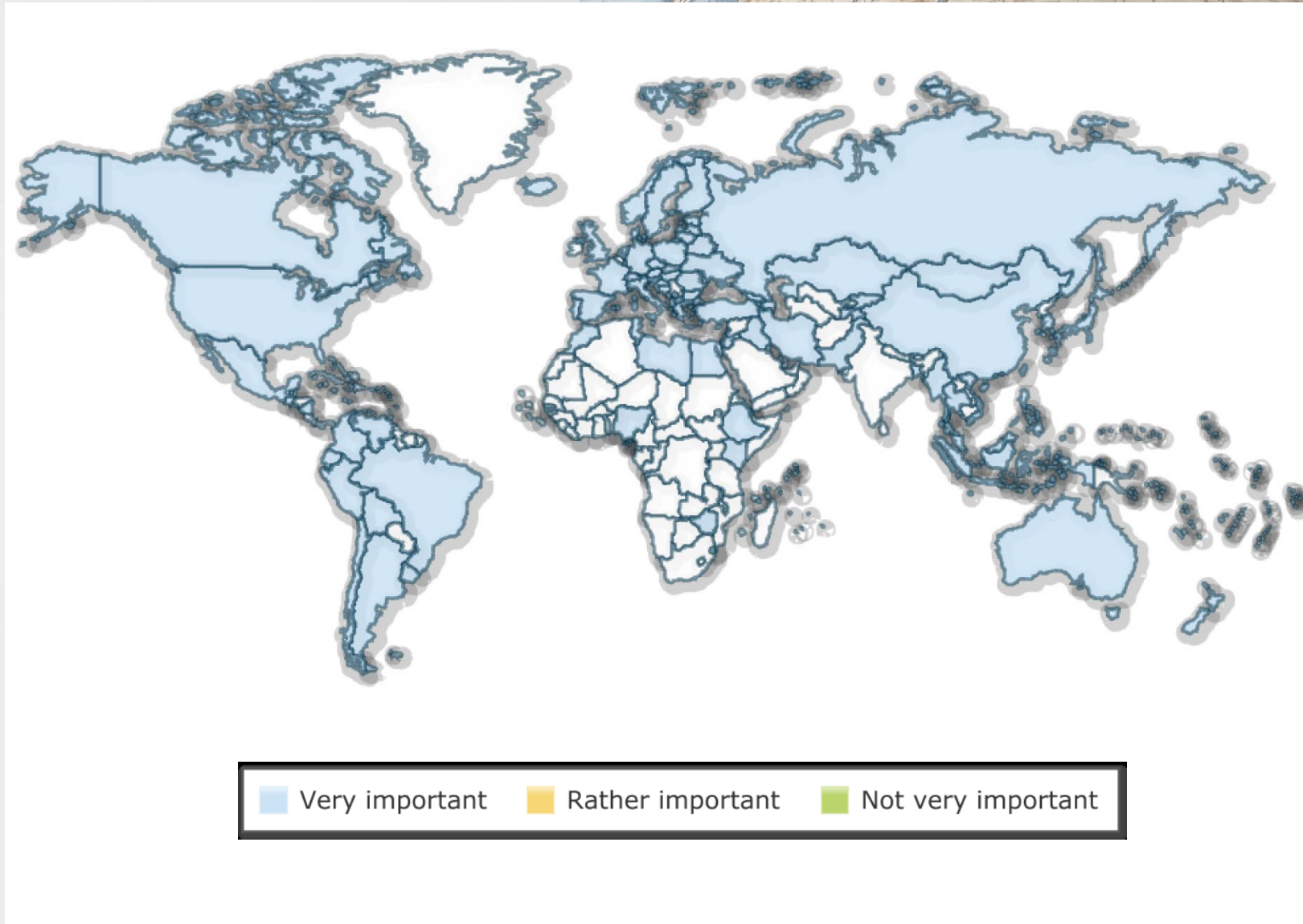
(perpetuates)

Assumptions and Definitions of the Terms
“Kinlessness,” “Alone,” and “Lonely,” and “Family”

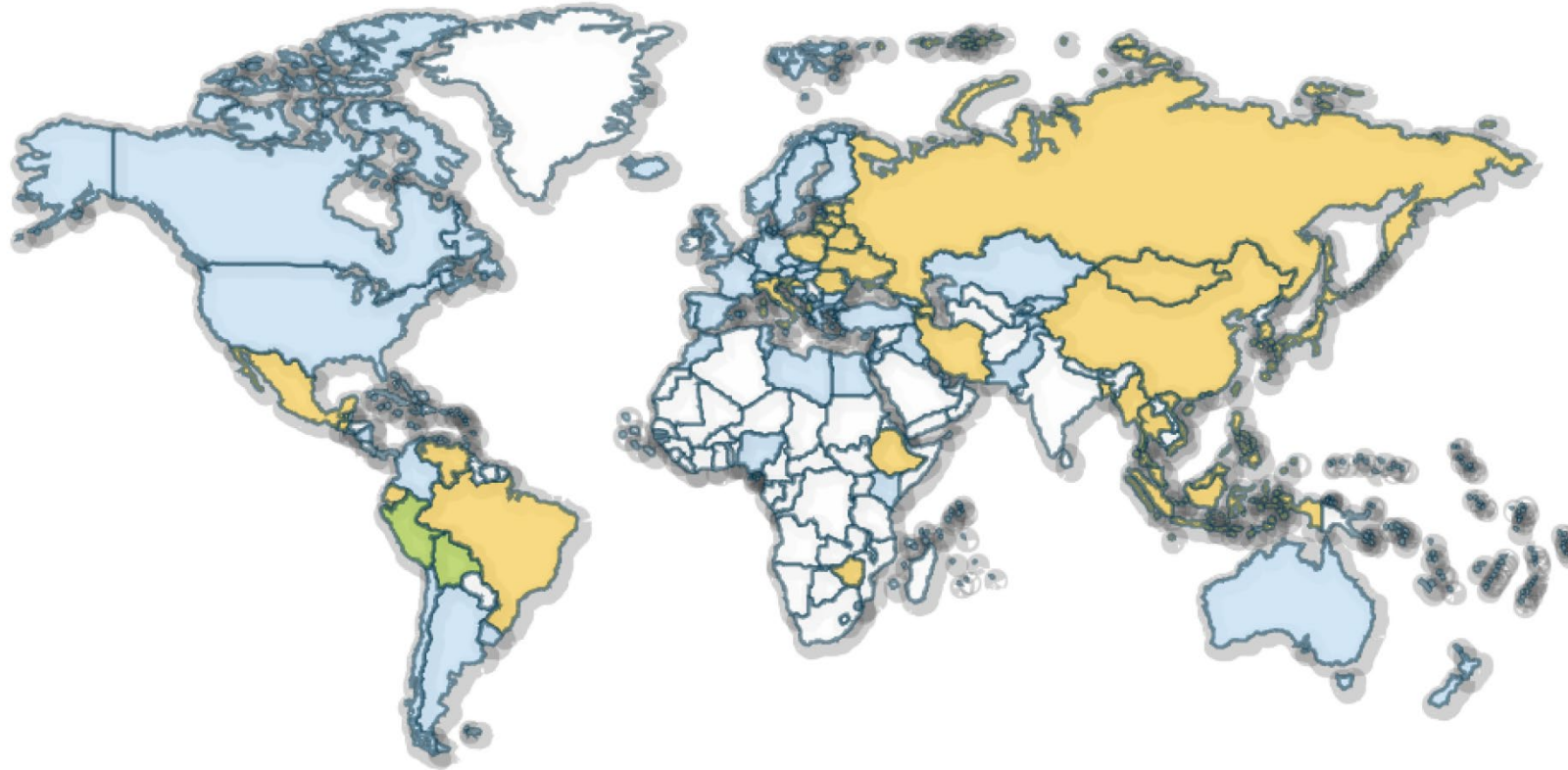
(which leads to)

Substantial Cultural and Empirical Lag
in Assessing Modern Social Behaviors and Policy Needs

***“How Important is Family in Life?”
(Most Mentioned Category, World Values Survey, 2017-2022)***

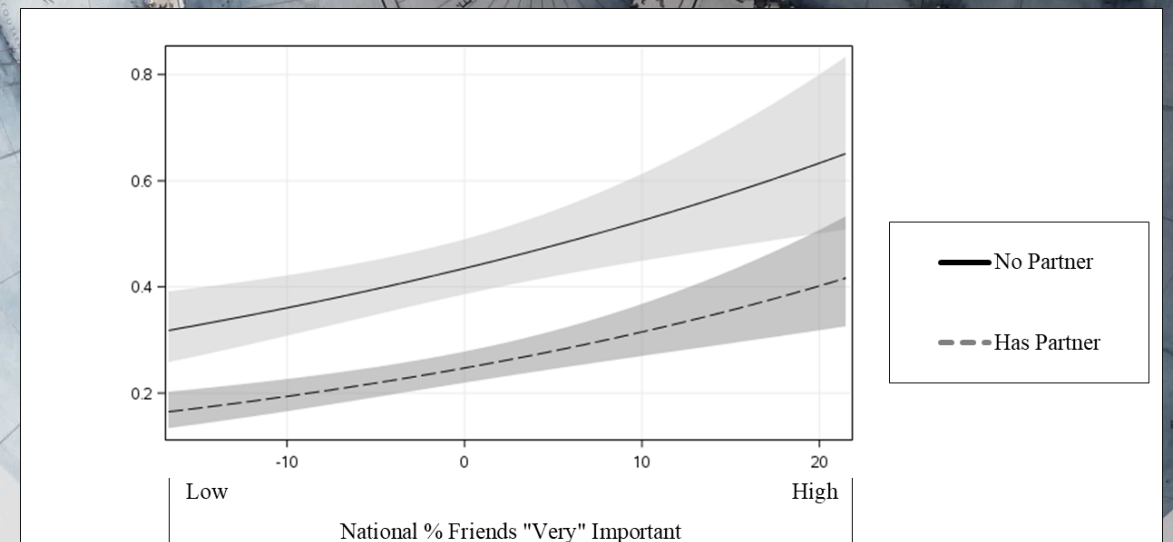
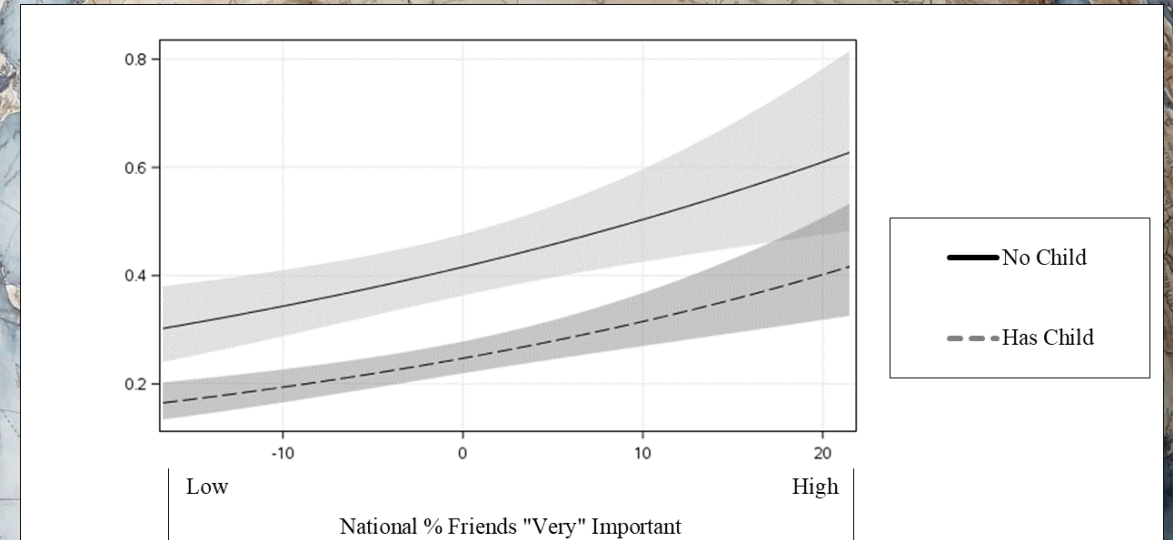
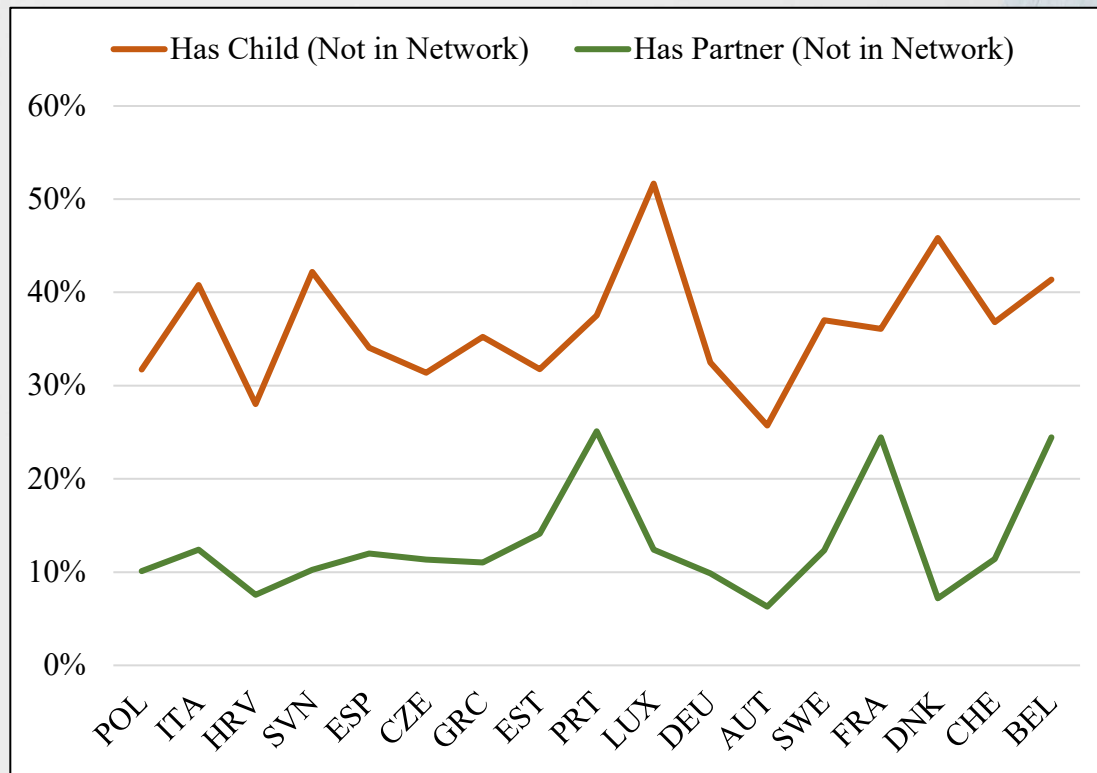


***“How Important are Friends in Life?”
(Most Mentioned Category, World Values Survey, 2017-2022)***



Very important Rather important Not very important

Lack of Family Support (Left) & Presence of Friendship (Right)



Issues in Conceptualization, Measurement, and therefore... Public Policy

❖ “Kinlessness”

- Why use a diminishing family structure (nuclear family) as a proxy measure for “aging alone”?*

❖ Extended Family & Non-Biological Social Ties

- Why so little data collection on social support and integration outside of the nuclear family?*

❖ Family-Based Healthcare Policies

- For how much longer will health insurance and end-of-life care policies remain tied to a nuclear family model?*

❖ (Un)measurement Bias

- What are we missing because we aren’t looking?*

❖ The Children Are the Future?

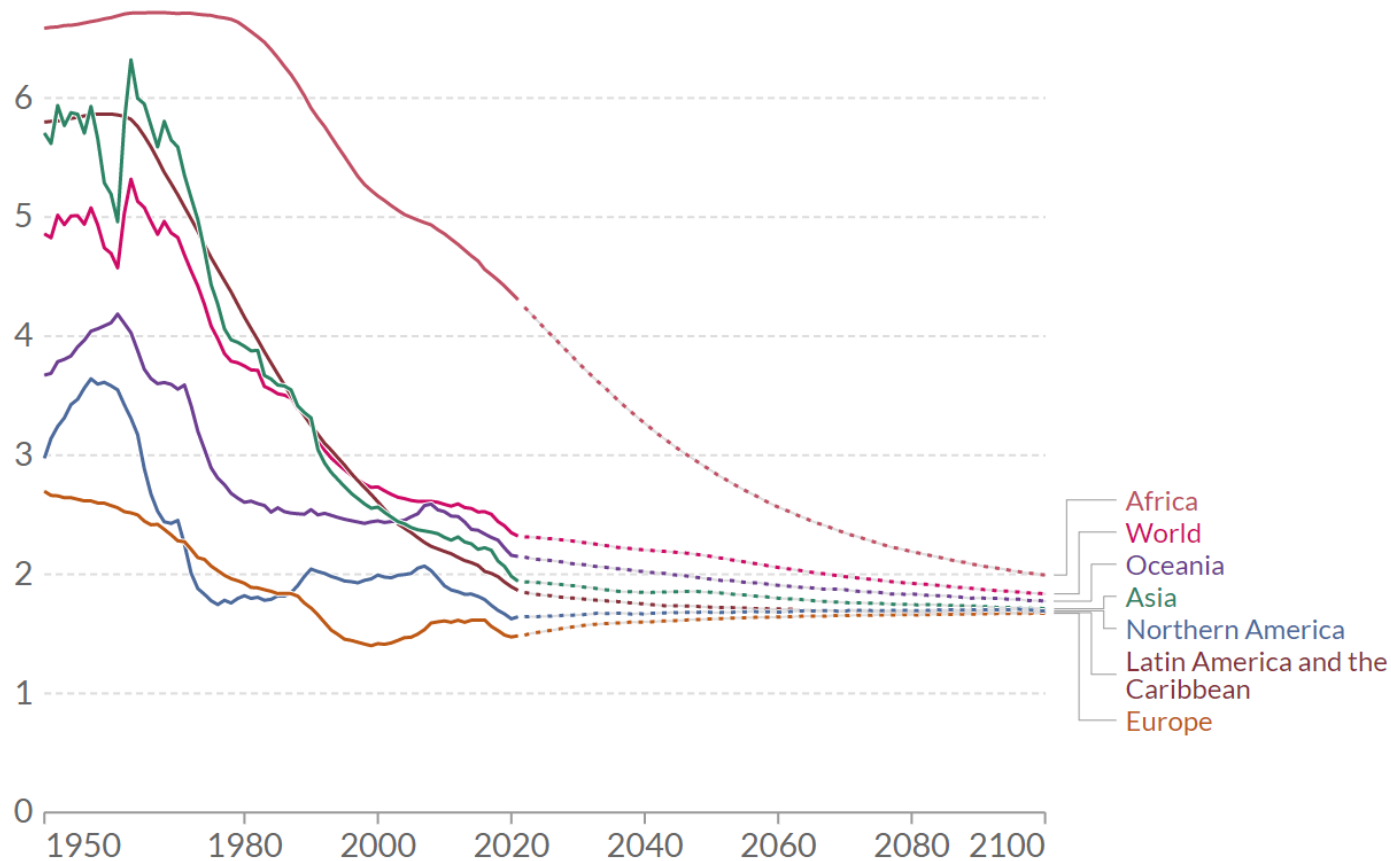
- What can we learn from measurement about youth to anticipate data collection needs and the future role of public policy?*

A Simple Look Toward the Future...

How do/will people adapt and how/when will we measure it?

Fertility rate: children per woman by world region, including the UN projections, 1950 to 2100

Our World
in Data



Source: United Nations - Population Division (2022)

OurWorldInData.org/future-population-growth/ • CC BY

Note: The total fertility rate is the number of children that would be born to a woman if she were to live to the end of her child-bearing years and give birth to children at the current age-specific fertility rates.



Thank you for inviting me! Let's discuss! 😊

Christine_Mair@umbc.edu

Nekehia T. Quashie, *University of Rhode Island (USA)*

Bruno Arpino, *University of Florence (Italy)*

Katherine Ornstein, *Johns Hopkins University (USA)*

Esteban Calvo, *University of Mayor (Chile)*

Bussarawan (Puk) Teerawichitchainan, *National University of Singapore (Singapore)*

Radoslaw Antczak, *Warsaw School of Economics (Poland)*

Dan Tang, *Renmin University (China)*