

Anthropic's Economic Data: Feedback & Interest Form

Questions & Answers

Anthropic Question:

Do you have any feedback about the data format described above and whether it would be useful for your research? Is there any other information not present above that you suggest we include?

We value your input on our dataset structure and content. We'd love your feedback in particular on:

- Whether the current data format is useful for your research needs
- What additional fields or metadata would make this dataset more valuable
- What specific data aggregations or cross-tabulations would benefit your analysis
- Whether there is anything we could pre-compute (e.g., more O*NET mappings) that would make downstream analysis easier

Your feedback will help us refine the dataset to better serve the research community.

Answer:

Full disclaimer - I have applied to an Anthropic position and began building a demonstration project. The one most relevant to this team is being hosted at: chrisbuildswithclaude.com/economic-index. I just saw a LinkedIn post about the update and read the blog. I look forward to diving into that further. I don't have particular feedback on the current data, but my next answer will hopefully provide some insights the team may find valuable or helpful.

Anthropic Question:

If you're comfortable sharing, what research ideas would you be interested in exploring with this data?

Understanding the kind of research you might pursue will help us better tailor our work to the needs of the research community.

Answer:

The claim: using population as a proxy for data significantly hurts, disenfranchises, and overlooks a vast number of Americans (I cannot speak globally). The issue: population is a fat-tailed distribution. Most of our federal government's financial and policy decisions come from the use of population as THE data point. This is inherently a problem because this opens up the door for black swan events more frequently and more intensely. If you are familiar with the work of Nassim Nicholas Taleb, you may be familiar with this or 'Extremistan'. The likes of John Kay and Mervyn King have also recently published writing to disclose the true nature of the misunderstanding that many professionals and leaders have either turned a blind eye or simply don't understand the ramifications ever since Bernoulli brought probabilistic reasoning to economics.

I understand this may sound delusional to some, but I will provide a simple analogy for this case:

- A. Take a random sampling of a hundred Americans and put them on a scale to measure the weight. There will be some small, some large, but most fall within a Gaussian distribution. Now, let's go find the absolute largest human alive on the planet and put them on the scale. How much will the scale change? It's negligible.
- B. Take a random sampling of a hundred Americans and put them in a room to measure their net worth. There will be some poor, some rich, but most fall within a Gaussian distribution; except wealth is not the same as weight. Once we put Elon Musk in the room, the average net worth of everyone in the room skyrockets. When he leaves, it drops significantly.

Mathematically speaking, a fat-tail distribution can be defined when the ratio of the 98th percentile to the 50th percentile is greater than or equal to 5.6. When we look at population across the United States, this is what we see WITHOUT metropolitan cities included:

- 98th percentile is 10,000 population
- 50th percentile is 500 population
- the ratio is 20

When we include metropolitans:

- 98th percentile is 60,000 population
- 50th percentile is 1,600 population
- the ratio is 37.5

The ratio of our country's population distribution is 4-7x the ratio to be defined as fat-tailed. As I'm sure you are aware, these are also not linear models. So, a negative 'impact' is going to be MUCH worse than 4-7 x's even our best predictions because those sorts of events are not even within our economic models.

I decided to build chrisbuildsclaude.com before turning my attention further to this research, but I came across it again as I was utilizing Anthropic's Economic Index data to put a geographic display of "Economic Index by MSA score". I was going to take it a step further by utilizing the BLS Location Quotient (LQ) to show intensities of 'concentration of AI usage' by combining your data with occupations and where they are located with both raw numbers and as a percentage of the total local economy.

Because of the sheer size of metropolitans, it makes it impossible to show anything meaningful for the rest of the communities. As I've shared above, it's still not possible when we move to even just nonmetro.

- Median LQ for all MSA's = 0.98
- Median LQ for non-metro = 1.02

That seems to be okay, until you consider the magnitude of difference:

With all occupations across all MSA's, 1,268 have an LQ of less than their median.

With all occupations across all of nonmetros, over 24,000 have less. Twenty times as many.

- STDEV of LQ for MSA's: 2.58
- STDEV of LQ for nonmetro: 3.72
- MAX of LQ for MSA: 350
- MAX of LQ for nonmetro: 190

Using population as a proxy for data systematically misrepresents non-metro areas due to the mathematical properties of the metric itself. It creates feedback loops where decisions based on these flawed metrics disadvantage rural communities ,making their economic development even more challenging. When funding, policy, strategy, leadership, planning, etc etc decisions are made with this data, we are over and over again causing systemic issues for most communities in America.

The two main arguments I've come across are either:

1. One metric alone usually isn't used to make decisions, or
2. It's too difficult to change because the calculation is just easy.

#1 is far from reality as (from my brief research) nearly \$3 trillion of the United State's federal budget is based on population metrics of some kind. #2 is an answer that I won't ever accept, because humanity deserves better.

Anthropic is in an incredibly unique position where it can make fundamental changes to historical issues that have been unable to even be discussed. I love the company's mission with the #1 value being "Act for the global good."

Again, while I completely understand the medium and nature of my communications, and that I may be considered a nobody to people in San Francisco, I sincerely hope you will take these concepts into serious consideration as you continue your work.

Anthropic Question:

Is there anything else you'd like to share?

Answer:

Second disclaimer - I do not have a Ph.D. nor am I an institutional researcher. I have, though, spent the past decade designing, building, and scaling multiple programs from scratch in small towns and rural communities and have been across the nation helping people, organizations, and other similar communities. This work has led to millions of dollars in grant-funded support and thus allowed me to really dive deep into "boots-on-the-ground" problems.

For some time I've had a hunch that certain economic modeling has been more hurtful to small towns and rural communities, and it was not until recently that I discovered the cause and am now finding it in many places. I co-founded a couple of organizations over a decade ago focused on startup- and tech-based economic development, and I have recently made a successful transition out so that I could focus my efforts on AI, bring more awareness and identify larger-scale solutions to hopefully solve some of these problems as they have already caused so much lasting damage--and AI is only going to exacerbate it.

I am quite literally just now beginning to put pencil to paper to these concepts, and thus, I do not have any publications, whitepapers, or even blogs to share with you. Yet. Believe me, the irony of me sharing this with you on a Google form as the start of communications is not beyond me. I would love to come to Anthropic and it be the outlet for this work, but I feel as though the increase in velocity of technology and the current disruptions in historic intuitions means that the timing of this cannot wait for me to have a buttoned up concept with a bow. I hope the medium of my communications does not dilute the seriousness of the issues. If I don't get a chance to hear back from you all, thank you all for your work.