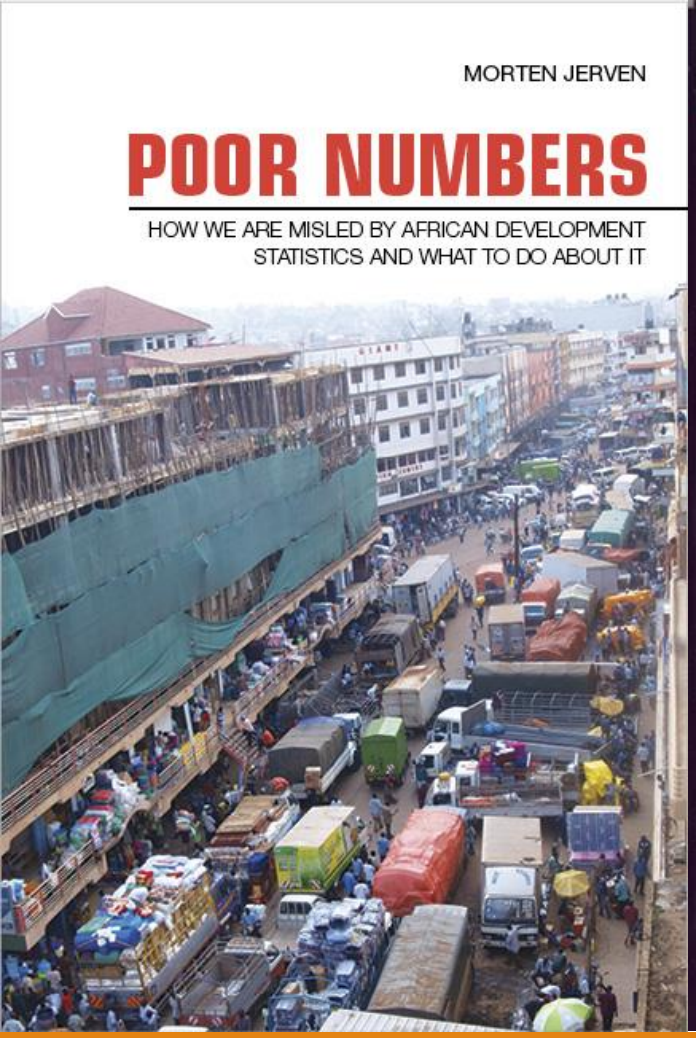

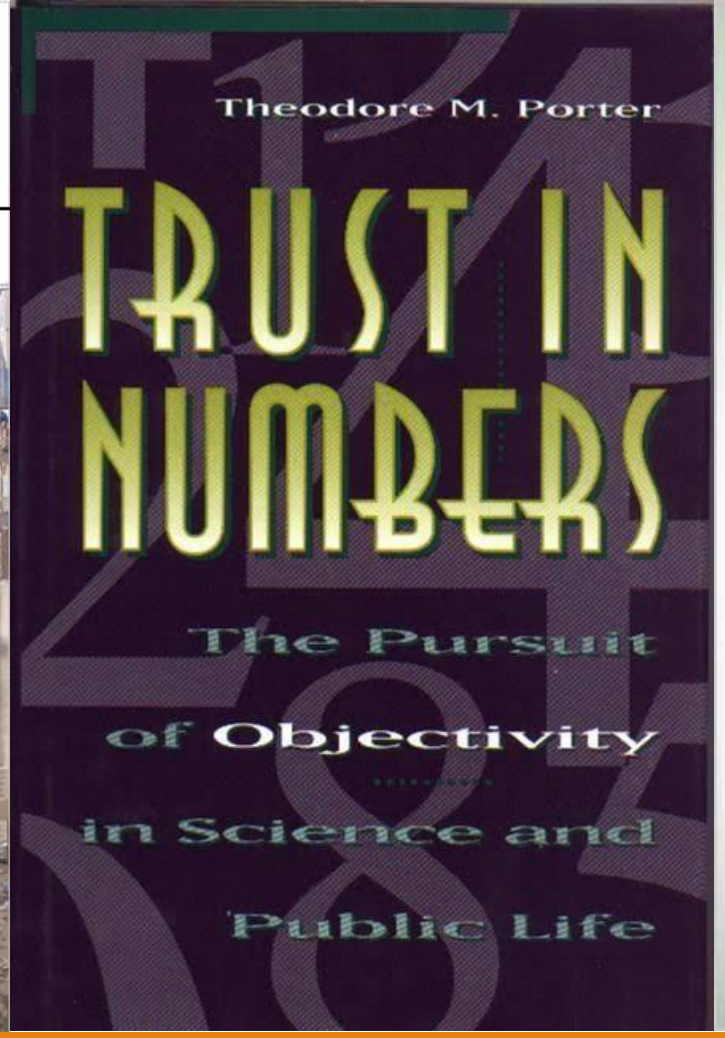

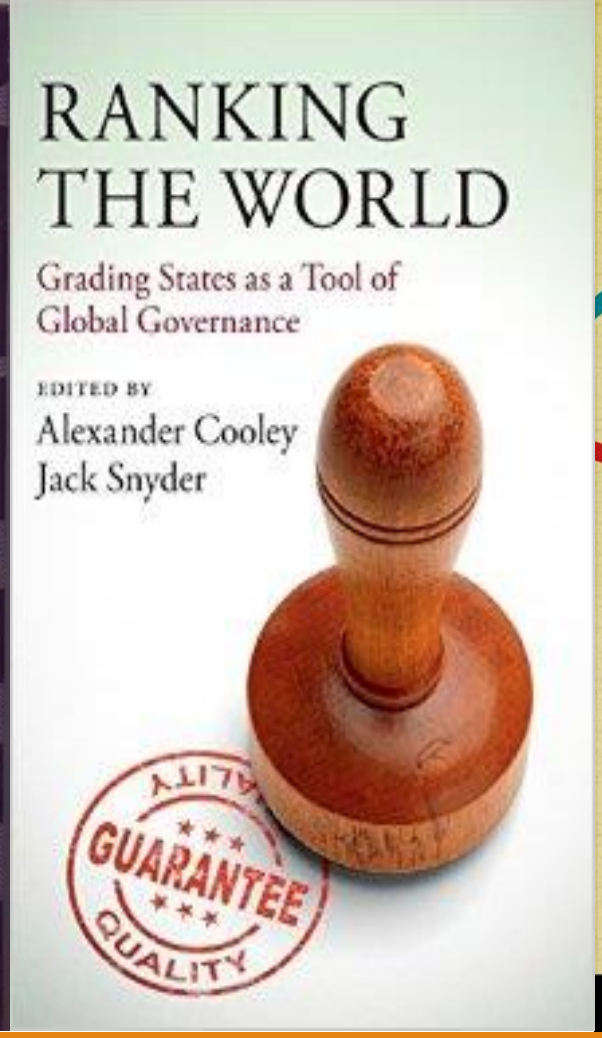

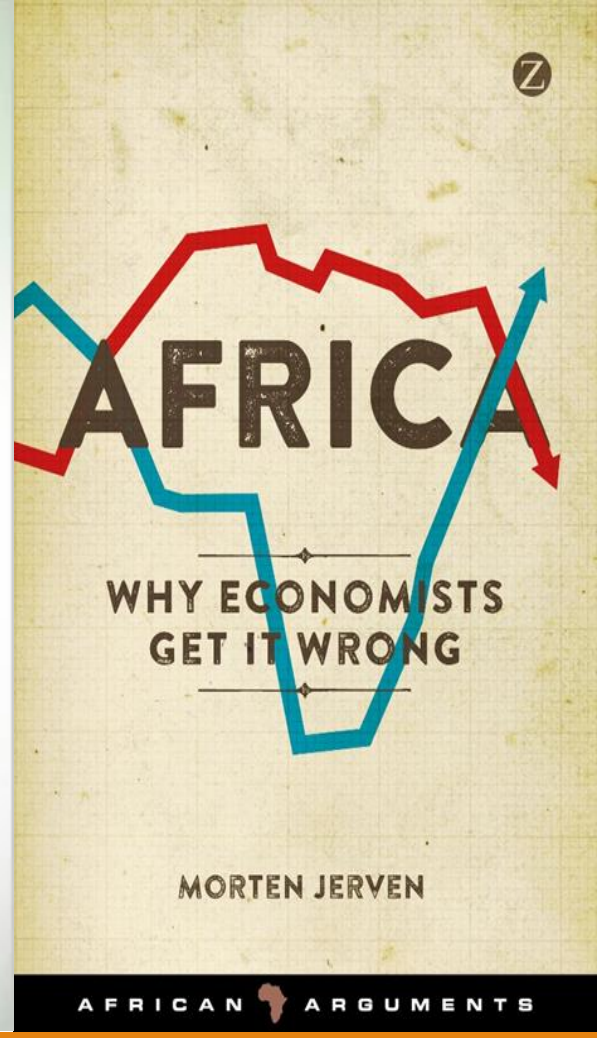

Ruling the World By Numbers

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Ruling the World By Numbers

06.02.2017	**1. Ruling the world by numbers: introduction**
13.02.2017	2. States and statistics: Why do states count?
20.02.2017	3. Auditing the world: The IMF
27.02.2017	4. Counting the poor: The World Bank
06.03.2017	5. A world that counts: from millennium development goals (MDGs) to sustainable development goals (SDGs)
13.03.2017	6. Poor Numbers? Statistical capacity in low income countries
20.03.2017	7. Governance matters: democracy by numbers
27.03.2017	8. Correlates of war: Studying war and peace by numbers
03.04.2017	9. Evidence based policy : Knowledge and governance requirements
11.04.2017	Easter BREAK
18.04.2017	Easter BREAK
25.04.2017	10. Contesting poor numbers: qualitative and quantitative research.
08.05.2017	11. Conclusion

Outline

1. A world that counts?

2. Knowledge and goverance by numbers

A world that counts?

The use of numbers, performance indicators and benchmarks have grown exponentially over the last two decades, particularly in the field of international politics and development. Indicators are now firmly established as a distinct mode of global governance. The process of numbering involves translating complex phenomena into numerical values. The procedure converts what might otherwise be highly contentious normative agendas into numbers that appear technocratic and objective. The politics of numbers has implications for global governance, and particularly so for making norms, rules and regulations in the fields of international politics and economic development.

How to lie with indices

The Economist

Performance indicators

How to lie with indices

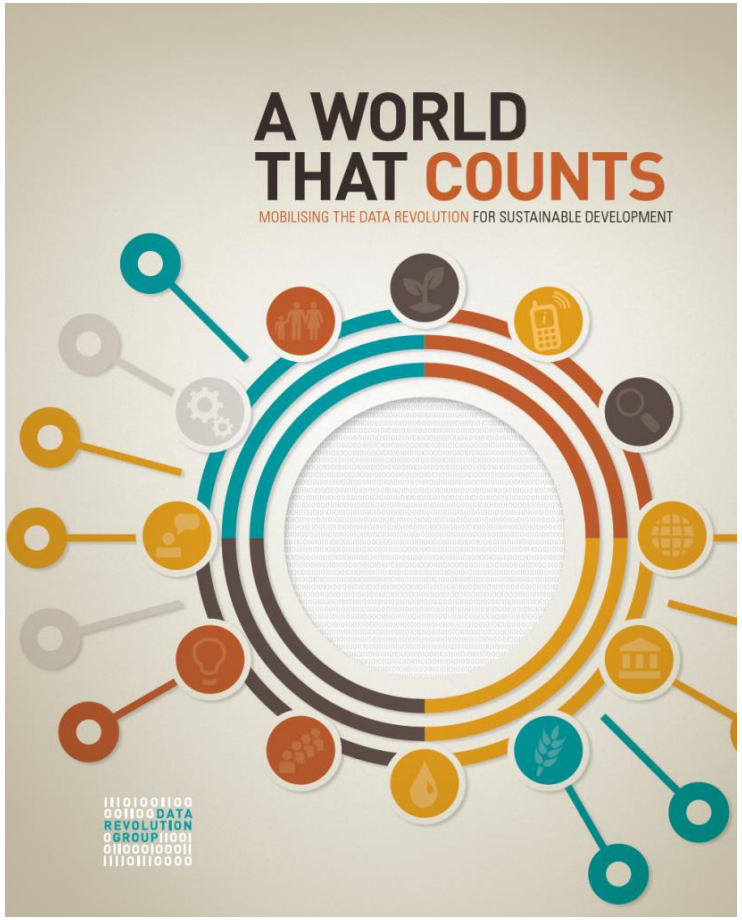
Learn the ruses of international country rankings

Nov 8th 2014

"CROOKS already know these tricks. Honest men must learn them in self-defence," wrote Darrell Huff in 1954 in "How to Lie With Statistics", a guide to getting figures to say whatever you want them to. Sadly, Huff needs updating.

The latest way to bamboozle with numbers is the "performance index",

A World That Counts: Mobilising The Data Revolution for Sustainable Development.



"Never again should it be possible to say 'we didn't know'. No one should be invisible. This is the world we want – a world that counts."

The MDGs

8 Goals, supported by 18 targets and 48 (60) indicators.

The SDGs

17 Goals supported by 169 targets and 230 indicators.

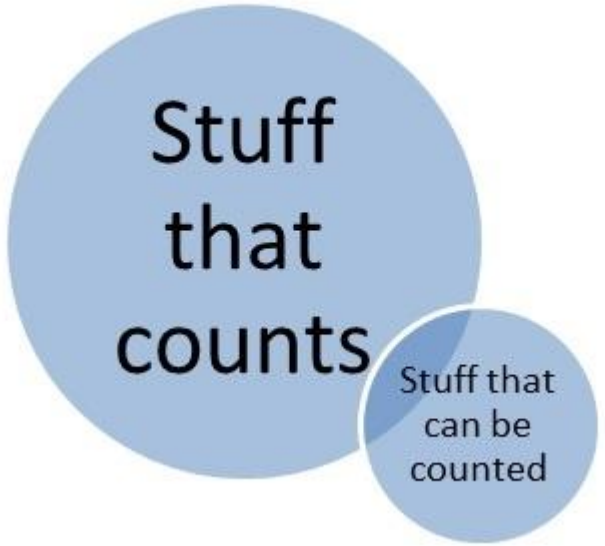
The problem with the data revolution in four Venn diagrams

The report is a cleverly crafted motivational manifest, but is it a practical roadmap?

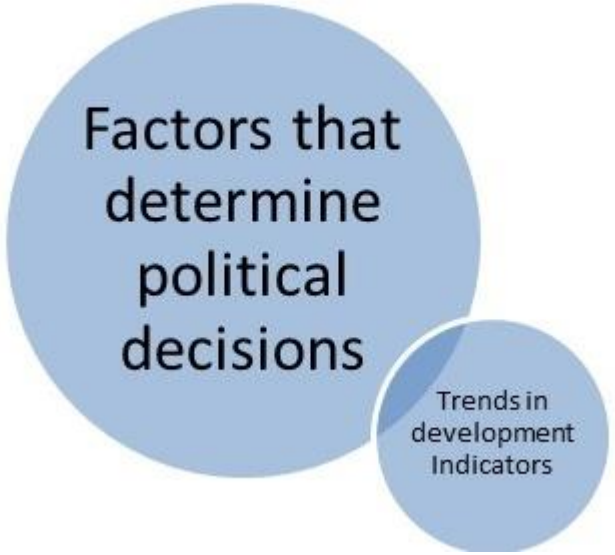
- M. Jerven in the Guardian, 2014
- http://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2014/dec/17/data-revolution-limitations-in-images

Data is not the same as statistics

Not everything that counts can be counted



More data does not mean better decisions



There are other methods to knowing than through counting

Missing in our current thinking about data, decisions and knowledge

1. When do we use numbers, and when do we not? Why?
2. What is the role of statistics in making decisions?
3. How do we improve ‘statistical capacity’ and does it lead to better decisions?
4. What are good numbers and what are bad numbers?
5. What are the knowledge and governance effects of relying upon numbers?

Statements about numbers and politics

1. 87.7% of all statistics are made up.
2. We treasure what we measure
3. If you can’t measure it, you can’t manage it.
4. As soon as an indicator becomes important it becomes useless.
5. Paying for results
6. ‘Evidence based policy’ vs ‘Policy based evidence’
7. When you use a measure to stand in for something the measuregradually replaces the phenomenon itself

Knowledge and Governance by numbers

Knowledge by numbers

‘quantification clarifies issues which qualitative analysis leaves fuzzy. It is more readily contestable and likely to be contested. It sharpens scholarly discussion, sparks off rival hypotheses, and contributes to the dynamics of the research process.’ Angus Maddison

Sorting of knowledge

Hiarchy of knowledge

Effects of aggregation (you can go up, but not down?)

Allowing you to make decisions about something you do not anything about?

Governance by Numbers

Why do states count?

- Making the world ‘legible’
- Categorization and registration.

Unintended policy effects

- Implicit sorting of policy – towards measurable impact
- Letting the measure stand in for the ‘real’ phenomena

Measuring goverance

AN EXAMPLE OF KNOWLEDGE AND GOVERNANCE EFFECTS

The problem of measuring governance

‘Governance’ as such does not exist…

- Measuring ‘inflation’ versus measuring ‘the weather’

Measuring by proxy, by indicator and by ‘as if’.

The practice of observing or measuring changes behaviour

Measuring by proxy: the measure gradually replaces the phenomenon itself

Problems of ‘indicators’: only contains a signal, but little actionable knowledge

Governance by indicators tend to strengthen dominant prejudice

How do we measure governance?

By counting outcomes: murders, inflation rates, elections…

By evaluating the rules…

By subjective evaluation through surveys…

By an ‘expert’ panel…

Some Governance Indicators

Ease of Doing Business Index

Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index

Freedom House's Freedom in the World

And many many more…see Global Benchmarking Database

Two alternatives to measuring governance

Measure *de jure* legislation and regulation: WB's Ease of Doing Business Index.

Surveying subjective perceptions: Transparency International Corruption Index.

Pitfalls

The practice of observing or measuring changes behaviour

Measuring by proxy: the measure gradually replaces the phenomenon itself

Problems of ‘indicators’: only contains a signal, but little actionable knowledge

Governance by subjective indicators tend to strengthen dominant prejudice

Summing up

Are numbers powerful?

If so, is that a bad thing or a good thing? What kind of challenge does it pose?

What are good numbers and what are bad numbers? Do designers of numbers have tools to decide?

Is it true that numbers are hard and judgements are soft?

A world that counts?

How do governance and knowledge by numbers work?

Knowledge

- Legibility: Sorting, simplifying, reducing, translating complex information or making up for missing information.

Governance

- Naming and shaming, outsourcing accountability, allows for ‘as if’ ruled based governance.

Unintended consequences

- Gaming, Policy Based Evidence, perverse behavioural effects.

«Measure what we treasure» vs «treasure what we measure» revisited – maybe we should not measure what we treasure?

Interdisciplinary research required – decisions about what to measure, who to count, and by whose authority the final number is selected do matter.