

The politics of conditioning social benefits in Latin America: Evidence from Argentina, Chile and Uruguay

Registration Metadata	1
Study Information	2
Design Plan	6
Data Collection	15
Analysis Plan.....	15
References	16

Registration Metadata

1. **Title: The politics of conditioning social benefits in Latin America: Evidence from Argentina, Chile and Uruguay**
2. **Description:** Although all Conditional Cash Transfers (CCTs) that have been promoted in Latin America establish some kind of conditionality, there is high heterogeneity in the way they condition cash benefits. This project explores the origins of Latin America's different approaches to designing and implementing CCT programs, based on three case studies (Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay) with different conditionality models. We use process-tracing to test four main explanations of the variation in conditionality models: partisanship, political competition, diffusion and policy legacies. This method allows us to generate systematic new evidence concerning the diverse conditionalities that characterize CCT programs in the region. More specifically, our approach advances understanding of the causal processes that lead governments to choose between different types of conditionalities. In so doing, the project contributes to the literatures on the politics of conditionality in welfare programs and on the politics of social policy in Latin America.
3. **Contributors:** Florencia Antía (Universidad de la República, Uruguay), Cecilia Osorio (Universidad de Chile, Chile), Cecilia Rossel (Universidad Católica del Uruguay) and Mora Straschnoy (Universidad de Buenos Aires, Argentina)
4. **Affiliated Institutions:** Universidad de la República, Uruguay; Universidad de Chile, Chile; Universidad Católica del Uruguay; Universidad de Buenos Aires, Argentina.

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Study Information

1. Research Aims

Many governments around the globe have adopted the strategy of conditioning welfare benefits. In many countries, the expansion of welfare policies conditioned on behavioral requirements has been accompanied by the introduction of additional requirements along with sanctioning recipients who do not comply with conditionalities (Dwyer, 2004; Barker & Lamble, 2009; Langenbucher, 2015; Adler, 2016; Watts & Fitzpatrick, 2018; Fletcher & Flint, 2018; Immervoll & Knotz, 2018; Knotz, 2018 & 2019; Sage, 2019). In the developed world, several studies have documented the trend towards more stringent conditionalities for unemployment benefits (Knotz, 2018 & 2019) as well as in other welfare policies, such as monetary transfers and housing benefits (Watts & Fitzpatrick, 2018). Also, recent studies document variation among countries in the stringency of welfare conditionalities.

In Latin America, conditionalities have become the key policy device linking monetary transfers to human capital investment among the poor, most frequently linking the monetary transfer to compliance with children's school attendance and health checkups.¹ Despite the fact that compliance requirements are a common feature of all conditional cash transfer (CCT) programs in the region, there is considerable variation in how they are designed and implemented (Bastagli et al., 2016). Some programs take a 'punitive' approach and emphasize the monitoring of compliance with conditionalities, as well as the application of sanctions to non-compliers. In other programs, with a more 'tolerant' approach, conditionality does not play such an important role and both monitoring and sanctioning of non-compliers are carried out with more lenient criteria (Bastagli, 2009; Cecchini & Martinez, 2011; Schüring, 2010). There are also programs in which conditionality and sanctions for non-compliance are included as a mere formality, with no

¹ There is no single agreed-upon definition of conditionality (Schüring, 2010). Some authors include the eligibility/targeting requirements established by the CCTs (Pellerano & Barca, 2014), while others refer exclusively to the behavioral conditions that programs impose on recipients in order to maintain the monetary transfer, such as children's attendance at school and health checkups (Cecchini & Madariaga, 2011). For the purposes of this paper we adhere to this second approach.

intention to enforce them (Rossel et al., 2022). However, the literature fails to address the fact that there are different ways to condition cash transfers. In sum, since all CCTs implemented in Latin America establish conditionality, it is important to understand the types of conditionality adopted as well as the scope and application of sanctions on those who do not comply with the conditions.

In this project, we aim to fill this gap in our knowledge by developing in-depth case studies of three countries that vary in terms of the model of conditionality they have adopted. They also vary in the way they have implemented conditionalities. We pursue two main goals. First, we aim to provide a thick description of the different models of conditionality that have been adopted and implemented in different countries. Second, we intend to provide empirical evidence concerning the causal mechanisms that explain these differences. Through three case studies, we seek to unravel the political processes that led each country to adopt a different conditionality model and to adopt different strategies of modifying their original CCT program over the years.

2. Research questions

Although all CCTs that have been promoted in Latin America establish some kind of conditionality, there is high heterogeneity in the way they condition cash benefits. What explains this variation? Why do governments choose to adopt different conditionality approaches when designing and implementing cash transfer policies for the poor? Are these choices related to governments' social policy ideologies? Do they depend on political competition dynamics, or result from international influences? Are they shaped by domestic policy legacies?

Extant work discusses the political conditions under which CCTs are adopted. Studies reveal that government ideology does not explain CCT adoption, as centrist and center-right governments have also adopted CCTs (Sugiyama, 2011; Brooks, 2015). Similarly, there is evidence that the adoption of CCTs as the result of partisan alliances with interest groups led to specific social policy strategies in the 2000s (Holland and Schneider 2017). Second, a strand of the literature suggests that increased political competition contributed to the adoption of CCTs (De la O, 2015; Garay, 2016). CCTs bring electoral benefits to incumbents through recipients' votes/support (Hunter & Power, 2008; Díaz-Cayeros, Estévez & Magaloni, 2009; Manacorda, Miguel & Vigorito, 2011; Baez, Camacho, Conover & Zárate, 2012; Zucco, 2013; De la O, 2013). These studies suggest incumbency effects are being fostered by CCTs mainly through the high visibility of the programs and their characteristics rather than by clientelistic vote-buying (De la O, 2013; Zucco, 2013). Third, scholars have suggested that the diffusion of ideas played a crucial role in the adoption of CCTs in the region along with assistance from

international organizations, such as the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank (Fenwick, 2013; Osorio Gonnet, 2019; Sugiyama, 2011). Finally, legacies from existing welfare policies have also been identified as important factors in several countries' adoption of CCTs (Fenwick, 2013; Pribble, 2013).

While this literature helps explain why CCTs were adopted, it fails to address the political drivers that lead a country to adopt one particular approach to conditioning rather than another. It also neglects the important differences between designing a particular type of conditionality and implementing it once adopted. In other words, we argue that while adoption and implementation are deeply connected, they should be addressed separately.

We consider below four theoretical causal mechanisms to explain different developments in the design and implementation of conditionalities in Argentina, Chile and Uruguay.

First, recent studies have focused on the role government ideology plays in CCT policies (Borges, 2018). In line with Borges (2018), we hypothesize that right-wing governments will prefer to attach strict conditionalities to the transfers, assigning recipients responsibilities and obligations with which they must comply with in order to 'deserve' the benefit. Therefore, right-wing governments will be willing to establish clear conditionality procedures when designing CCTs. By contrast, left-wing governments will be more willing to prioritize poverty relief with a more flexible approach to conditionalities. Left-wing governments' perspective may be grounded in concerns about the negative effect on beneficiaries of suspending the transfer, the importance of recipients receiving economic support and a desire to promote the use of basic services through incentives.

While finding support for an alignment between political ideology and program design could shed light on how different conditionalities' approaches are shaped by ideologies, it is reasonable to expect more subtle influences on conditioning, monitoring and sanctioning go beyond traditional ideological boundaries and, as happens with many other policy issues, what actors think and are willing to say is less clear, more contradictory and less consensual than what theory predicts. We argue that unveiling this complexity will help advance understanding of why governments choose to be stringent or lenient when conditioning CCTs.

Second, we argue that political competition may play a crucial role in shaping governments' decisions when adopting or implementing conditionalities. Conditionalities play an important role in shaping the predisposition of the middle and upper classes to assist the most vulnerable members of the population. As mentioned earlier, evidence suggests that although CCTs elicit electoral benefits for governments among the poorest voters (Díaz-Cayeros et al., 2009; Manacorda et al., 2011; C. Zucco, 2013), middle- and high-income voters tend to disapprove of CCTs (Corrêa &

Cheibub, 2016). Conditionality is supposed to help governments overcome resistance from these middle- and high-income sectors (Fiszbein & Schady, 2009)—basically those who provide the resources that will benefit others and not themselves. Conditionality can be a good tool for governments to ‘buy’ support for social assistance programs in highly unequal societies, where these programs can be unpopular because they transfer money to the ‘undeserving poor’ (Morley & Coady, 2003; Fiszbein & Schady, 2009; Layton, 2020; Barrientos & Hulme, 2008; Hanlon, Barrientos & Hulme, 2010). Therefore, it is more likely that middle- and high-income sectors will support transfers if they are linked to concrete requirements the recipients need to fulfill in order to receive the money (Fiszbein & Schady, 2009: 59-60; Pritchett, 2012; Barrientos & Villa, 2015; Myamba & Ulriksen, 2016).

If this dynamic is present, governments that are in an adverse electoral context, in which the vote of the middle classes is determinative, will seek to satisfy the middle classes by reinforcing in politics the idea that transfers exist only for recipients who “deserve” the benefit. In other words, a context that would make cash transfers politically hard to adopt or sustain, where either middle-income sectors or the political opposition criticize cash transfers, may lead governments to adopt or change conditionality towards a more stringent approach.

Considering both partisanship and political competition as explanatory factors, a more stringent approach to conditionality may reflect the preferences of right-wing governments since the transfer is linked to concrete requirements with which recipients need to comply with (Fiszbein and Schady, 2009; Pritchett, 2012; Myamba and Ulriksen, 2016). But a stringent approach also could help a left-wing government ‘buy’ support for CCTs from opposing political actors, especially when it faces harsh opposition or an antagonistic legislature.

Third, in line with suggestions in the literature regarding the role of diffusion in the adoption of CCTs, governments might follow a stringent approach if they are influenced by the ideas of some international organizations, such as the World Bank (de Janvry and Sadoulet, 2006; Fiszbein and Schady, 2009) or the International Development Bank (IDB) (Ibarrarán, et al, 2017). By contrast, they would choose a more lenient approach if they were exposed to the philosophies of other organizations. There could also be a diffusion process based on direct relationships between governments.²

Fourth, countries’ previous experiences with similar social policies that include conditionality probably influenced the type of conditionality they

² For example, Mexico’s and Brazil’s pioneering *Progresas* and *Bolsa Familia* programs, respectively, were taken as a model by other countries when designing their own CCTs (Borges, 2018; Sugiyama, 2011).

adopted in their CCT, as well as the way conditionalities are implemented. These previous policies can have several feedback effects, either reinforcing previous models (i.e. CCTs adopting the same type of conditionality as before) or influencing governments to adopting a different approach. Similarly, the capacity of the state to monitor and sanction conditionalities may explain particular choices in how governments implement CCTs.

In sum, we hypothesize the following causal mechanisms:

H_1: Differences between conditionality models adopted and implemented in Argentina, Chile and Uruguay are the result of differences in government partisanship and differing ideological preferences regarding welfare conditionality.

H_2: Differences between conditionality models adopted and implemented in Argentina, Chile and Uruguay result from different political competition contexts, particularly regarding the vote of those who do not receive CCTs.

H_3: Differences between conditionality models adopted and implemented in Argentina, Chile and Uruguay are the result of differences in diffusion processes that occurred when each country initially adopted or implemented conditionalities.

H_4: Differences between conditionality models adopted and implemented in Argentina, Chile and Uruguay are the result of differences in institutional capacities and legacies. Existing institutional legacies affect the processes of approval and implementation of conditionalities.

3. Anticipated Duration

The project started on July 2022 and will finish on July 2023.

Design Plan

4. Study design

We use a process-tracing method based on in-depth exploration of the politics of conditionalities in the three cases. Our strategy is based on a theory-testing approach to account for the adoption and implementation of different approaches to conditionalities.

To carry out the process-tracing, we developed four causal mechanisms and the deductive logic through which we actually carry out the testing, including the evidence we should expect to find if these causal

theories were true (CPOs), the type of test each piece of evidence represents for our theories (Van Evera, 1997; Bennet & Checkel, 2015; Beach & Pedersen, 2013), and the sources in which we should expect to find the evidence. In this section we register our empirical strategy, and inductive updates to our theories will be included in future amendments of the pre-analysis plan (Piñeiro & Rosenblatt, 2016).

Although our inferences are valid only within each country, we compare the cases to increase analytical leverage (George and Bennett 2005, Goertz and Mahoney 2012).

To test each causal explanation, we will rely on different sources of information, including review of the popular press, analysis of legislative records and parliamentary debates about transfers, review of official program documents and evaluations, and in-depth interviews with key actors involved in the design and implementation of CCTs in each country (see details in data collection section).

To test whether differences between the conditionality approach in each country resulted from different partisan coalitions in government, we will search for evidence regarding party preferences. We will also seek evidence of policymakers attributing the adoption or implementation of lenient/strict conditionalities to the ideology predominant in the governing party. Furthermore, we will search for evidence of whether other political actors attribute the adoption or implementation of lenient/strict conditionalities to the ideas predominant in the governing party.

To test whether a political competition dynamic is responsible for differences in the approach to conditionality in the three countries, we will look for evidence of highly competitive electoral settings in the elections and opinion polls regarding cash transfers to the poor and regarding whether the poor are deserving of public support (“deservingness”). We also will search for specific evidence in legislative records and in the media of opposition parties calling for more stringent conditions to be imposed on poor beneficiaries CCT programs and we will seek evidence of how poor people are characterized in the media. Finally, we will seek instances of policymakers perceiving and responding to the dynamics of public opinion regarding CCTs.

To test whether a diffusion process accounts for the differences in the CCT approaches adopted in the three countries, we will seek evidence of conferences and seminars about CCTs organized by different international organizations in these countries. Also, we will look for evidence of technical cooperation between different governments.

To test whether policy legacies were influential in the adoption and implementation of different models of conditionality, we will seek evidence that a given country adopted conditionalities resembling welfare models that existed at the time. We will also seek evidence that policymakers considered previous policies or institutional or policy antecedents when designing or implementing conditionalities. Finally, we will seek evidence that state

capacity shaped governments' decisions when adopting or implementing conditionalities.

Tables 1-4 present a summary of the expected evidence for each hypothesis along with the corresponding test type the suggested evidence would represent.

Table 1. H.1: Partisanship hypothesis.

Hypothesis	Evidence	Source	Test type
<p>H.1: The differences between the approach to conditionality in Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay are the result of the political ideology of the party in government.</p>	<p>Left-leaning parties prefer lenient conditionalities, while right-leaning parties prefer strict conditionalities.</p>	<p>Party manifestos.</p> <p>Legislative records (in plenary sessions and commissions).</p> <p>Interviews with key officials and experts.</p> <p>Press articles.</p>	<p>Hoop: The political ideology of the government that favors specific design and implementation features is necessary but insufficient to support the claim that partisanship influenced particular design choices.</p>
	<p>Policymakers attribute the adoption or implementation of lenient/strict conditionalities to the ideology predominant in the party.</p>	<p>Legislative records (in plenary sessions and commissions).</p> <p>Interviews with key officials and experts.</p> <p>Press articles.</p>	<p>Straw in the wind: The statements made by policymakers would indicate some influence of the ideology of the government in the approach to conditionalities.</p>
	<p>Political actors who are not members of government attribute the adoption or implementation of lenient/strict conditionalities to the ideas predominant in the party.</p>	<p>Legislative records (in plenary sessions and commissions).</p> <p>Interviews with key officials and experts.</p> <p>Press articles.</p>	<p>Hoop: The statements of the opposition parties are necessary but insufficient to support the claim that partisanship influenced particular design choices.</p>

Table 2. H.2: Political competition hypothesis.

Hypothesis	Evidence	Source	Test type
H. 2: The differences between the approach to conditionality in Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay are the result of political competition dynamics.	Highly competitive setting in previous elections	Electoral data	Hoop: The absence of a competitive scenario in the previous elections would disconfirm H.
	Hostile public opinion toward transfers and toward helping the poor, especially among middle-income sectors.	Opinion polls.	Hoop: The absence of an increasingly adverse public opinion regarding transfers and noncompliance would disconfirm H.
	Politicians from the opposition and/or the media call for attaching conditionalities to transfers.	Legislative records (in plenary sessions and commissions). Interviews with key officials and experts. Press articles.	Hoop: For our hypothesis to be true, pressures on the government from different actors need to be present.
	Policymakers perceive and respond to the dynamics of public opinion.	Interviews with key officials and experts. Press articles.	Smoking gun: If our hypothesis is true, we should find that policymakers should somehow credit political pressures for the establishment or strengthening of conditionalities. Finding this piece of evidence would strongly support the validity of our hypothesis, but not finding such evidence does not necessarily mean that the hypothesis is false.

Table 3. H.3: Diffusion hypothesis.

Hypothesis	Evidence	Source	Test type
H. 3: The differences between the approach to conditionality in Argentina, Chile and Uruguay are the result of differences in diffusion processes that operated during the initial adoption of the CCT programs.	The design of conditionality resembles other CCT conditionality programs established in countries that are used as models.	Official documents. Conditionality database.	Hoop: The similarity is necessary but not sufficient to test the diffusion hypothesis.
	Conferences and seminars organized by different international organizations about CCTs in these countries.	Technical or financial cooperation reports or documents. Interviews with key officials and experts.	Straw in the wind: The existence of conferences organized by international organizations points to some potential influence of international organization in the policymaking process.
	Direct contact between officials from different countries centered on CCTs.	Interviews with key officials and experts. Press articles.	Straw in the wind: The existence of direct contact between officials from different countries points to some potential influence on the domestic policymaking process.
	Policymakers mentioning having been inspired by or having learned from the experience of CCTs developed in other countries.	Interviews with key officials and experts. Press articles.	Smoking gun: Government officials declaring having used as a model certain CCT experiences from other countries would confirm our hypothesis.

Table 4. H.4: Institutional legacies hypothesis

Hypothesis	Evidence	Source	Test type
<p>H_1: The differences between the approach to conditionality in Argentina, Chile and Uruguay are the result of differences in institutional capacity and legacies. The previous institutional context affects government decisions when adopting or implementing conditionalities.</p>	<p>The conditionality model in the CCT resembles the design of conditionalities in previous welfare policies.</p>	<p>Official documents.</p>	<p>'Straw in the wind.' Similarities in the design of conditionalities to previous policies are indicative of the influence of previous institutional arrangements on the model adopted.</p>
	<p>Policymakers (politicians, legislators, government officials) talk about previous policies or institutional or policy antecedents that were considered when designing or implementing conditionalities.</p>	<p>Interviews with key officials and experts.</p> <p>Legislative records (in plenary sessions and commissions).</p> <p>Motivations and introductory arguments about conditionalities in CCT laws or decrees.</p> <p>Press articles.</p>	<p>'Smoking gun.' If our hypothesis is true, we should find that policymakers considered institutional or policy legacies when designing conditionalities and their implementation. Declarations by government officials that they considered such legacies would support our hypothesis.</p>
	<p>Human resource shortages, weak professional bureaucracy, lack of a culture of transparency, lack of technical training and administrative overload are mentioned by policymakers to justify decisions regarding both the design and implementation of conditionalities.</p>	<p>Interviews with key officials and experts.</p> <p>Administrative records.</p> <p>Press articles.</p>	<p>'Smoking gun.' If our hypothesis is true, we should find explicit references made by policymakers to institutional capacity issues as a key explanation of both design and implementation choices for conditionalities.</p>

5. Sampling and case selection strategy

We study the variation in the design and implementation of conditionalities in three cases, Argentina, Chile and Uruguay (table 5). The selection of these countries enables us to test different hypotheses in three cases that differ in the conditionality model they have adopted.

Chile has transitioned from a lenient conditionality model to a relatively stringent “sanctioning” model in its transfer programs. In *Chile Solidario*, the focus was predominantly on psychosocial support within the framework of an individual contract between the beneficiaries and the state, where specific goals were established. Meanwhile, the creation of the *Ingreso Ético Familiar* maintains the social support component of *Chile Solidario*, but adds a strong component of cash transfers, both conditional and unconditional, reinforcing the importance of a “bonus” and of requiring compliance with conditionalities to access the bonus.

Argentina’s *Asignación Universal por Hijo (AUH)* is a ‘tolerant’ CCT. The program has specific regulations and procedures for conditionalities. Regarding sanctions, although it retains a percentage of the transfer until compliance is verified, it is lenient since it verifies compliance only once a year (Rossel & Straschnoy, 2020).

Finally, Uruguay’s *Ingreso Ciudadano* and *Asignaciones Familiares – Plan de Equidad (AFAM_PE)* started as typical policies with a ‘formal’ approach, since behavioral conditions were stated vaguely, and the programs did not have clear procedures and regulations regarding conditionalities (Rossel et al., 2022; Rossel & Straschnoy, 2020). Sanctions were only enforced eight years after the program’s creation, when they started to be applied twice a year.

Table 5. CCT Conditionalities in Argentina, Chile and Uruguay.

Country	Conditionalities: Main features
Argentina <i>AUH</i>	<p>Behavioral conditions: Regular student certification and medical/vaccine certification according to age.</p> <p>Monitoring process: Certification of compliance with behavioral conditions must be presented at the beginning of each year in order to receive the 20% of the transfer that is retained each month.</p> <p>Sanctions: If beneficiaries fail to present the certification in the stipulated period, but do so in the extended 90-day grace period, they still receive the reserved 20%.</p> <p>If they present the certification in the 90 days following the grace period, they do not receive the 20% but remain active beneficiaries of the program. If a beneficiary never presents certification, they no longer receive the transfer.</p>
Chile (<i>Chile Solidario, Ingreso Ético Familiar</i>)	<p>Behavioral conditions: Participation in the psychosocial support program within the framework of an individual contract between the beneficiaries and the state, where specific goals are established in the "Participation Commitment." Having worked in at least one dimension or category of the psychosocial support component during the current month.</p> <p>Process: Individual contract between recipients and the state. The social support documents the fulfillment of the conditions.</p> <p>Sanctions: Exclusion from the program after repeated non-compliance with the Participation Commitment. This is certified by a report issued by the social support agent in charge of the execution of the psychosocial component.</p> <p>Behavioral conditions: Participation in the psychosocial support program within the framework of an individual contract between the beneficiaries and the state, where specific goals are established. Regular assistance to school for children between 6 and 18 years old. Regular health checkups for children up to 6 years.</p> <p>Process: Individual contract between recipients and the state. Also, compliance with educational conditions is confirmed automatically by the Ministry of Education, which provides the Ministry of Social Development with this report. The health transfer is given to the family only once they contact their municipality and prove that the child's medical record is up to date.</p> <p>Sanctions: Loss of the transfer and exit from the program if the recipient fails to participate in the psychosocial support program or does not comply with the intervention plan. Temporary loss of the transfer in case of non-compliance with health or education condition.</p>
Uruguay (<i>Ingreso Ciudadano/AFAM_PE</i>)	<p>Behavioral conditions: School enrollment and regular attendance, periodic health controls</p> <p>Process: Not established</p> <p>Sanctions: Failure to comply with behavioral conditions should lead the suspension of the transfer, but no sanctions were applied.</p> <p>Process: Noncompliant beneficiaries are published twice a year on the website of the public organization in charge.</p> <p>Sanctions: Beneficiaries have 30 days to remedy the situation or else transfer is suspended until beneficiaries begin complying again.</p>

Data Collection

6. Data source(s) and data type(s)

We will use the following sources of data: (i) popular press in each country (La Nación and Clarín in Argentina, La Tercera and El Mercurio in Chile, El País, El Observador, La Diaria in Uruguay), (ii) legislative records and parliamentary debates about cash transfers, (iii) official program documents and evaluations, and (iv) in-depth interviews with key actors involved in the design and implementation of CCTs in each country, as well as academic experts on the field.

7. Data collection methods

We will rely on archival research to deal with press records, legislative records and official program documents. We will carry out in-depth interviews with key actors involved in the design and implementation of CCTs in each country, as well as academic experts on the field.

The combination of these different sources of data will allow us to grasp the process that led to the adoption and implementation of conditionalities in the three countries.

8. Data collection tools, instruments or plans

Interview questionnaires are presented in Appendix 1 and Appendix 2 of this document.

The guide for archival search was the following: identify references in the press to cash transfers and conditionalities, public debates or parliamentary discussions on the subject.

9. Stopping criteria (required)

We based on saturation data criteria – defined as the point in which we believe we have enough evidence to make inferences- to stop the fieldwork.

Analysis Plan

10. Data analysis approach

We will carry out process tracing for each case, reporting the results in a narrative that reveals the process behind the adoption and implementation of different conditionality models.

11. Data analysis process

The data analysis process will be carried out by all the researchers in the projects, who will classify the evidence in accordance to our process tracing design (tables 1-4).

12. Credibility strategies

We will use the following credibility strategies: (i) triangulation with other data sources, (ii) have different researchers analyze the data, (iii) cross-checks for rivaling explanations.

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