

Contemporary Issues in Comparative Politics

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WEEK 1

Introduction

Module Objectives

Lecture Contents

Assignments

The Comparative Approach

Theories, Hypotheses, and Evidence

What is Comparative Politics?

- Comparative politics
 - *Subfield of political science that uses the comparative method to analyze multiple case studies*

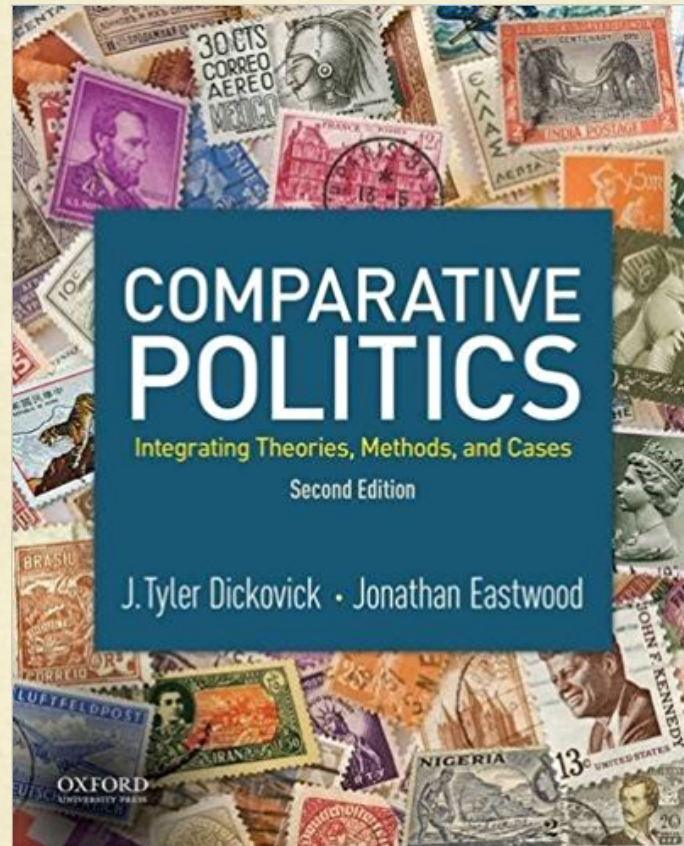




Objectives

- To teach real-world politics through the eyes of comparative politics scholars.
- To provide a deeper understanding of questions linked to state, nationalism, democracy, authoritarianism, development, political institutions, ideology, religion, conflict, and globalization.

Textbook



The code is: WEBXSTU98.

<https://global.oup.com/academic/>

Module Contents

- Week 1 – Introduction, Methods, and Theories (Chapters 1 and 2)
- Week 2 – The State, Nationalism, Secessions (Chapters 3 and 13)
- Week 3 – Democracies and Authoritarian Regimes (Chapters 6 and 7)
- Week 4 – Development and Political Economy (Chapters 4 and 5)
- Week 5 – Institutions of Government – Constitutions and Legislatures (Chapters 8 and 9)

Module Contents

- Week 6 ~ Institutions of Government - Executives, Political Parties, Elections (Chapters 10 and 11)
- Week 7 ~ Social Movements, Revolutions, and Civil Wars (Chapter 12)
- Week 8 ~ Ideology and Religion, Race, Ethnicity (Chapters 14 and 15)
- Week 9 ~ Globalization – Migration – European Union (Chapter 16)
- Week 10 ~ Essay Presentations and Workshop

Assessments

- In Class Exam 40% – Week 6
 - Short Answers and Short Essay covering topics from Week 1 to Week 5
- Long Essay (2500 / 3000 words) 60% – End of the Term (January 10)
 - Choose a Research Prompt from the Textbook based on your interest. Week 6.
 - The grade includes a presentation of your essay during the last week of classes. Week 10

Today

- Comparative Approach
- Theories, Hypotheses, and Evidence

Asking Why

- Comparative Politics involves asking “Why” questions
- These are questions of cause and effect
 - “Why” does something happen?
 - “Because...” (note the root word: cause)

Major Questions in Comparative Politics

- Why did modern states emerge and grow?
- Why are some countries rich and others poor?
- Why are some countries democracies and others not?
- What are *effects* of different institutions?
- Why do revolutions happen?
- Why do identities and beliefs matter?
- Why do ideology & religion affect modern politics?

Making Questions Specific

- Consider the question:

Why are some countries democratic and others not?

- Make this question specific to case(s) to research

- Ex.: Why is India a democracy?

- Ex.: Why is China not a democracy?

- Ex.: Why is Ghana a democracy and Togo not?

- Why questions can generate debate about what are the best answers

- They involve arguments: *evidence in support of a position or claim*

Major Questions in Comparative Politics

- It is possible to ask questions that don't begin with "Why"
 - What are the *consequences* of different kinds of institutions for policy?
 - What are the *consequences* of presidential vs. parliamentary systems for education policy?
 - *Under what conditions* will democracies emerge and consolidate?
 - How do major social revolutions *affect* subsequent political developments in given countries?
- These questions are about **cause and effect**

Major Questions in Comparative Politics

- Causal questions lead to *empirical* arguments
 - *Drawn from observations of facts in the world*
 - Explanations about why the world **is** the way it is
- This is distinct from *normative* questions and moral arguments
 - *Concerned with what is moral or ethical*
 - Arguments about how the world **ought** to be

Empirical Evidence: Strong vs. Weak Evidence

Student 1	Student 2
Claim: <i>Saudi Arabia is not democratic</i>	Claim: <i>Saudi Arabia is not democratic</i>
Evidence: • Saudi Arabia has not held free and fair elections for government • Women do not have the same political and social rights as men	Evidence: • Saudi Arabia is Islamic country • Its economy is based on oil • It is an ally of the United States • It is led by a large royal family
<i>Claim: strong</i> <i>Facts: correct</i> <i>Evidence: strong</i>	<i>Claim: strong</i> <i>Facts: correct</i> <i>Evidence: weak</i>

Cases and Case Studies

- Cases: units of analysis in comparative politics
 - *example of phenomenon to be studied*
- Often a country, but may take other forms
 - Country for a period of time (France in 1960s, e.g.)
 - Event or set of events (French Revolution, e.g.)
 - Certain group (US civil rights movement, e.g.)
 - Other geographic unit (South Wales, e.g.)

The Comparative Method: Variables and Comparison

- Comparative politics examines cases
- Looks at how variables interact in those cases
 - Variable: *element or factor that can change, or vary, from case to case*
- Focus on causes and effects
 - Effects also called “consequences” or “outcomes”
 - X variable → Y variable

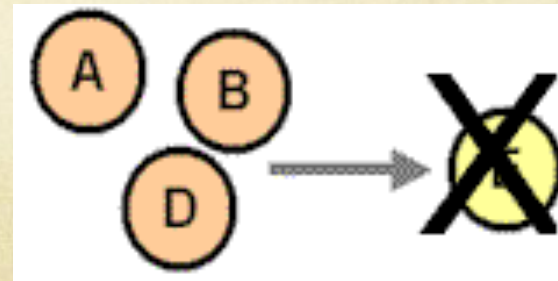
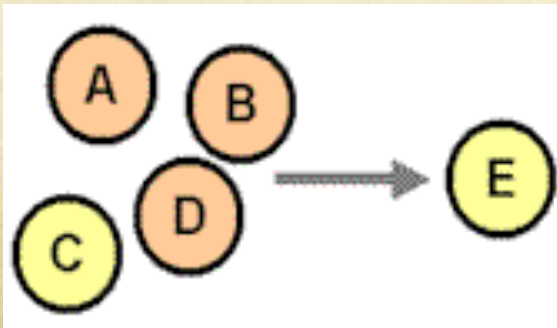
The Comparative Method: Variables and Comparison

- Example: two country cases, Ghana and Togo
- The two cases have different “regime types”
 - Ghana is democracy
 - Togo is authoritarian
- Why the variation between the two cases?
 - We want to explain difference in the variable “regime type” (democracy vs. authoritarian)
 - In our comparative question, regime type is the outcome (or Y variable)
 - We look for the *causes* (or X variables) in the two cases that explain the variation in regime type



The Comparative Method: Most Similar Systems (MSS) Design

- *Research design in which we compare cases that are similar with respect to a number of factors, but with distinct outcomes*
- Two (or more) cases similar on many variables
 - If so similar, why the different outcomes?
 - Logic is that analyst can rule out (or “control for”) many possible variables that are similar
 - Leaves a few other variables to explain outcomes



The Comparative Method: The Most Similar Systems Design

Regime Types in Africa

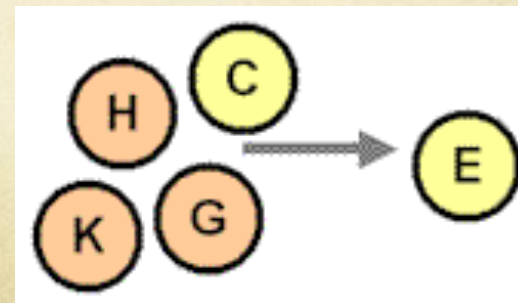
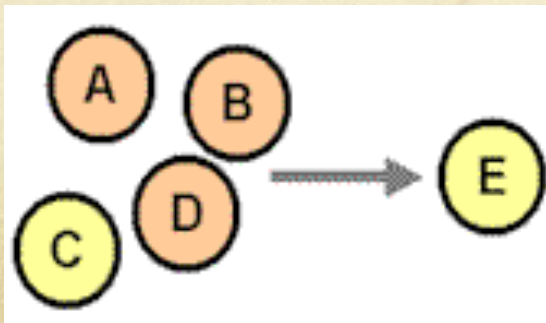
Variables	Case 1: Togo	Case 2: Ghana
Similarities		
Climate	Hot / tropical	Hot / tropical
Income	Low	Low
Ethnic demography	Heterogeneous	Heterogeneous
Largest religion	Christianity	Christianity
Other religions	Islam, traditional	Islam, traditional
Outcomes		
Regime Type	Authoritarian	Democracy
Cause		
Hypothesis: Colonizer	France	United Kingdom

Sliding Doors

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4u7akRLnGyk>

The Comparative Method: The Most Different Systems Design

- *Research design in which we compare cases that differ with respect to multiple factors but in which the outcome is the same*
- Two (or more) cases different on many variables
 - If so different, why the similar outcomes?
 - Logic is that analyst can rule out (or “control for”) many possible variables that are different
 - Leaves a few other variables to explain outcomes



The Comparative Method: The Most Different Systems Design

Major Social Revolutions

Variables	Case 1: France 1780s	Case 2: China 1940s
Differences		
Continent	Europe	Asia
Population	< 30 million	> 500 million
Century	18 th	20 th
Regime	Monarchy	Nationalist party
Outcomes		
Social Revolution	YES	YES
Cause		
Hypothesis	???	???

Other ways to compare?

- Same country over different time periods
- Large - N

Theories, Hypotheses, and Evidence

Theory

- *General explanations for empirical phenomena*
- In comparative politics, theories are explanations for *why* things happen as they do
 - Emphasis on cause and effect

Theories, Hypotheses, Evidence

- Fan theories from Game of Thrones:
- $R + L = J$
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kHqzFwodZqQ>

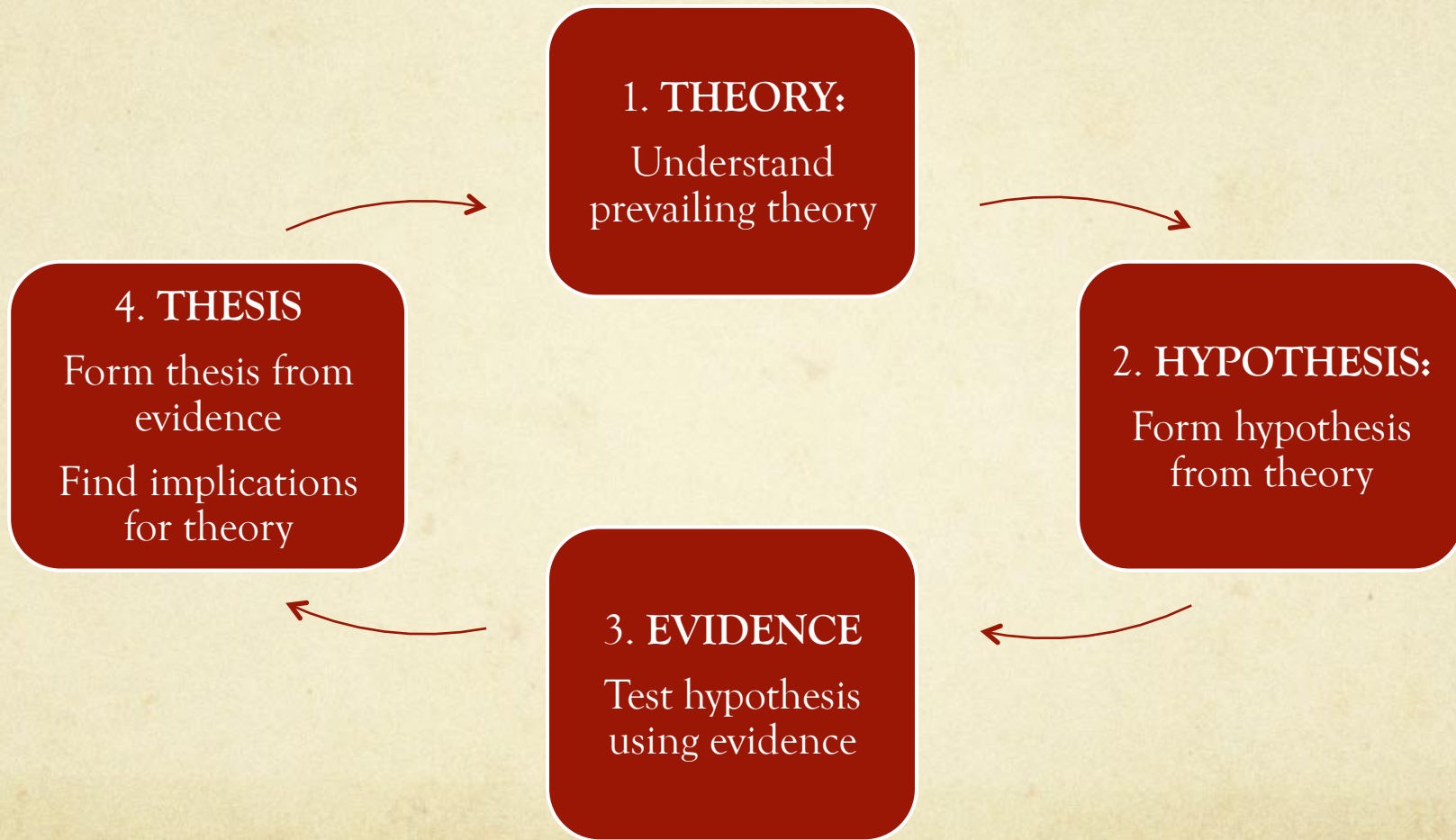


Theories in Comparative Politics

What kinds of explanations (theories) do we have in CP?

- **Institutions matter.** They shape and constrain the behaviour of individuals.
- **Interests matter.** Individuals are self-interested utility maximizers and engage in political action to receive benefits and avoid costs.
- **Ideas matter.** Conceptualization of ideas such as trust, ideologies.
- **Individuals matter.** Psychological studies and elite theories.
- **International environment:** In a globalized world, isolated analysis is increasingly difficult.
- **Interaction** among all these!

Theories, Hypotheses, and Evidence: a Cycle



Theories, Hypotheses, and Evidence

Types of Evidence

- Qualitative
 - Analysis based on facts in narrative form
 - Ex.: historical accounts and historical records
 - Ex.: constitutions, laws, personal narratives, etc.
- Quantitative
 - Analysis using mathematical examination
 - Typically involve a many cases or observations
- Both types of evidence can be used for inference

Hypothesis Testing: Correlation and Causation

- Understanding causation is central task in comparative politics
- Many key errors in comparative politics come from confusing correlation with causation
- There are several ways variables can be correlated, but not causally related

Distinction between *correlation and causation*

- Correlation
 - *Relationship between two variables in which they tend to move in predictable relationship to one another*
 - Can be in same direction (positive correlation)
 - Ex.: wealth and democracy in countries
 - Can be in opposite directions (negative correlation)
 - Ex.: amount of absolute poverty and democracy in countries
- Causation
 - *Relationship in which one thing causes another*
 - In comparative politics, we try to understand causation between variables

Hypothesis Testing: Correlation and Causation

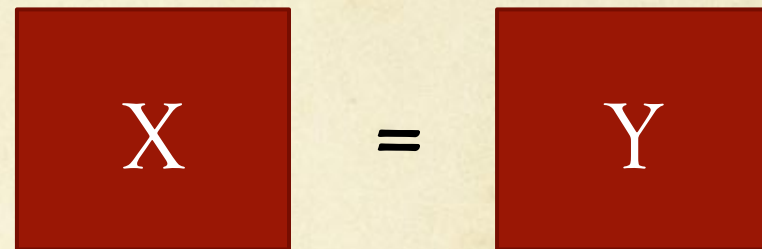
- Causal relationship is when X causes Y
 - This is simple example for two variables
- Can be represented visually where arrow represents causation



Hypothesis Testing: Correlation and Causation

- Problem:

*definitional problems or
falsifiability problem*



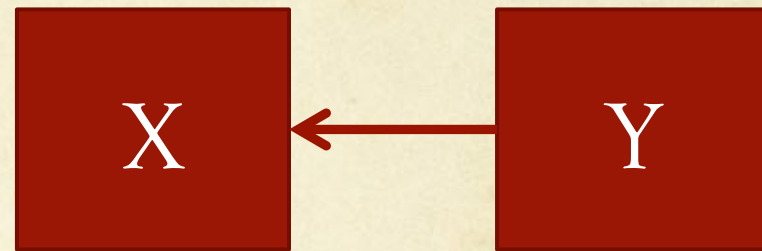
- X and Y will correlate if they are the same thing
- Ex.: Dictatorship *because* of actions of the dictator
 - This is circular or tautological argument

Hypothesis Testing: Correlation and Causation

- Problem:

reverse causation

- Y causes X vs. X causes Y
- Argument that X causes Y has causality reversed
- Ex.: cancer rates and longevity by country
 - High cancer rates do not cause longevity
 - Longevity can lead to higher rates of cancer (affects many older people)

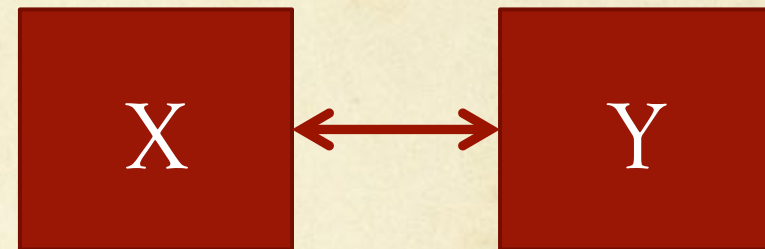


Hypothesis Testing: Correlation and Causation

- Potential problem:

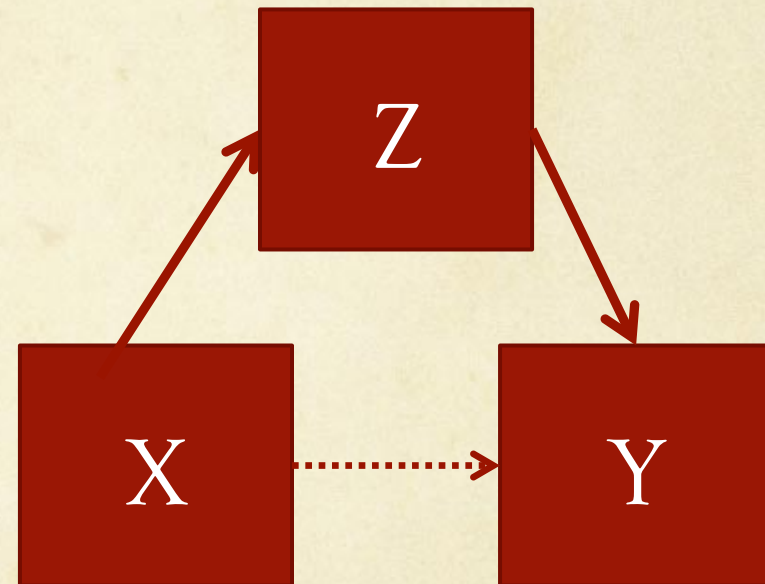
endogeneity

- X causes Y, but Y also causes X
- Ex.: health and education
 - Better health leads to better education
 - Better education leads to better health
- Not always a “problem” as long as analyst recognizes it and does not make wrong claims



Hypothesis Testing: Correlation and Causation

- Potential problem: *intervening variable*
- X leads to Y, but only indirectly (say, via variable Z)
- Ex.: Communism and democratization in E. Europe
 - Communism leads to protests or reactions against tyranny
 - These reactions culminate in democratization
 - Erroneous to say communism led directly to democracy
- Intervening variables are not a “problem” (and can be part of an answer) as long as they are included in analysis

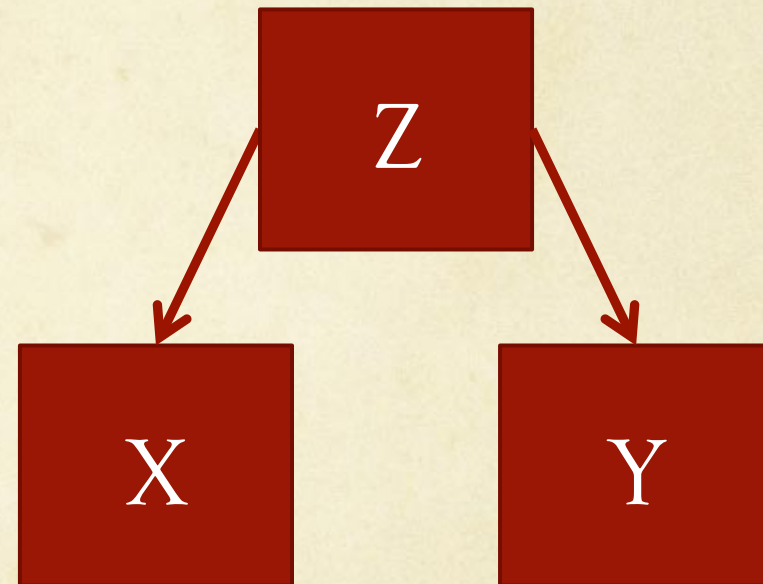


Hypothesis Testing: Correlation and Causation

- Problem:

omitted variable

- X correlates with Y, because both are caused by another variable Z
- Ex.: Ice cream sales & murder
 - These correlate by month
 - Eating ice cream → murder?
 - Murdering → buy ice cream?
 - No.
 - This is a quite common error in social science

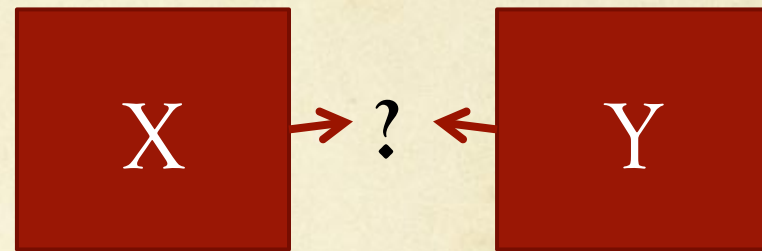


Hypothesis Testing: Correlation and Causation

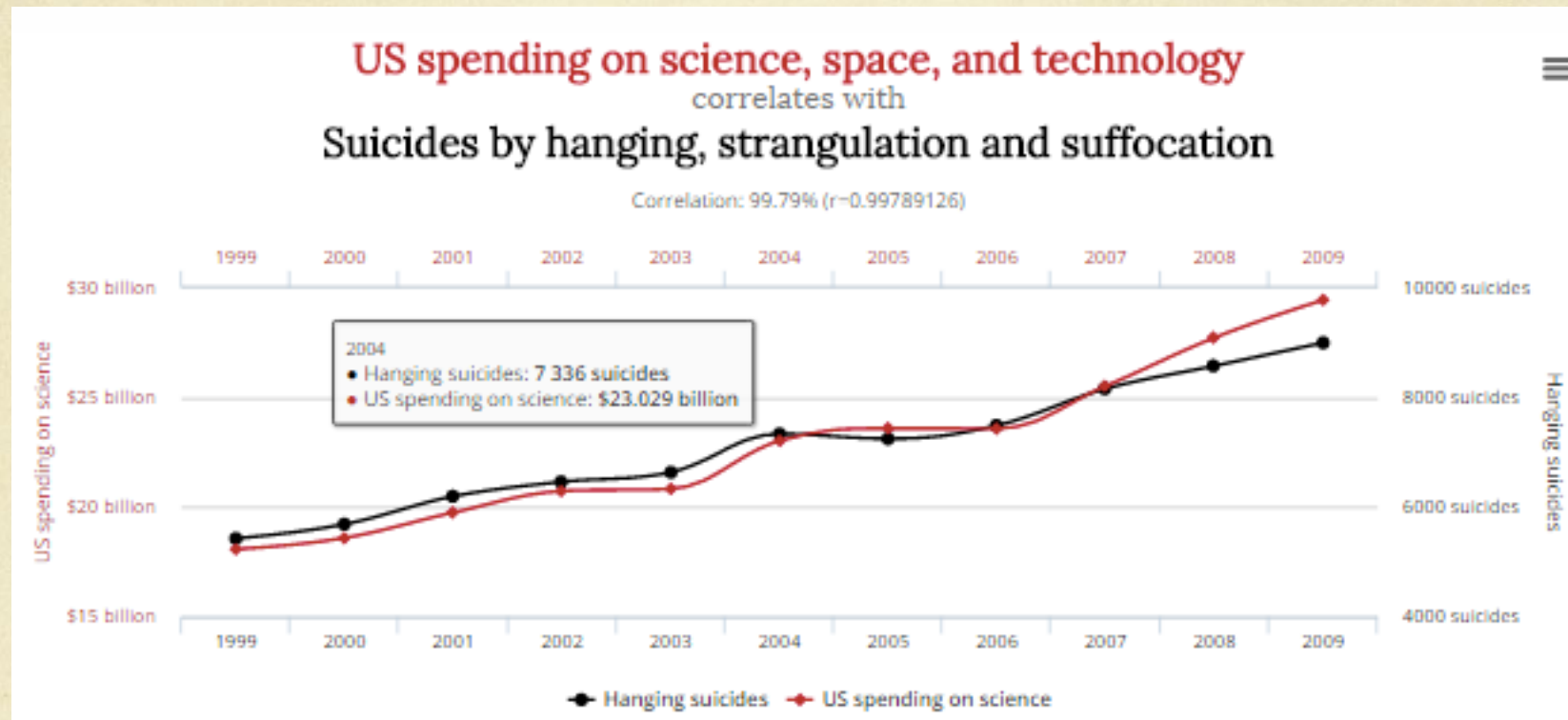
- Problem:

spurious correlation

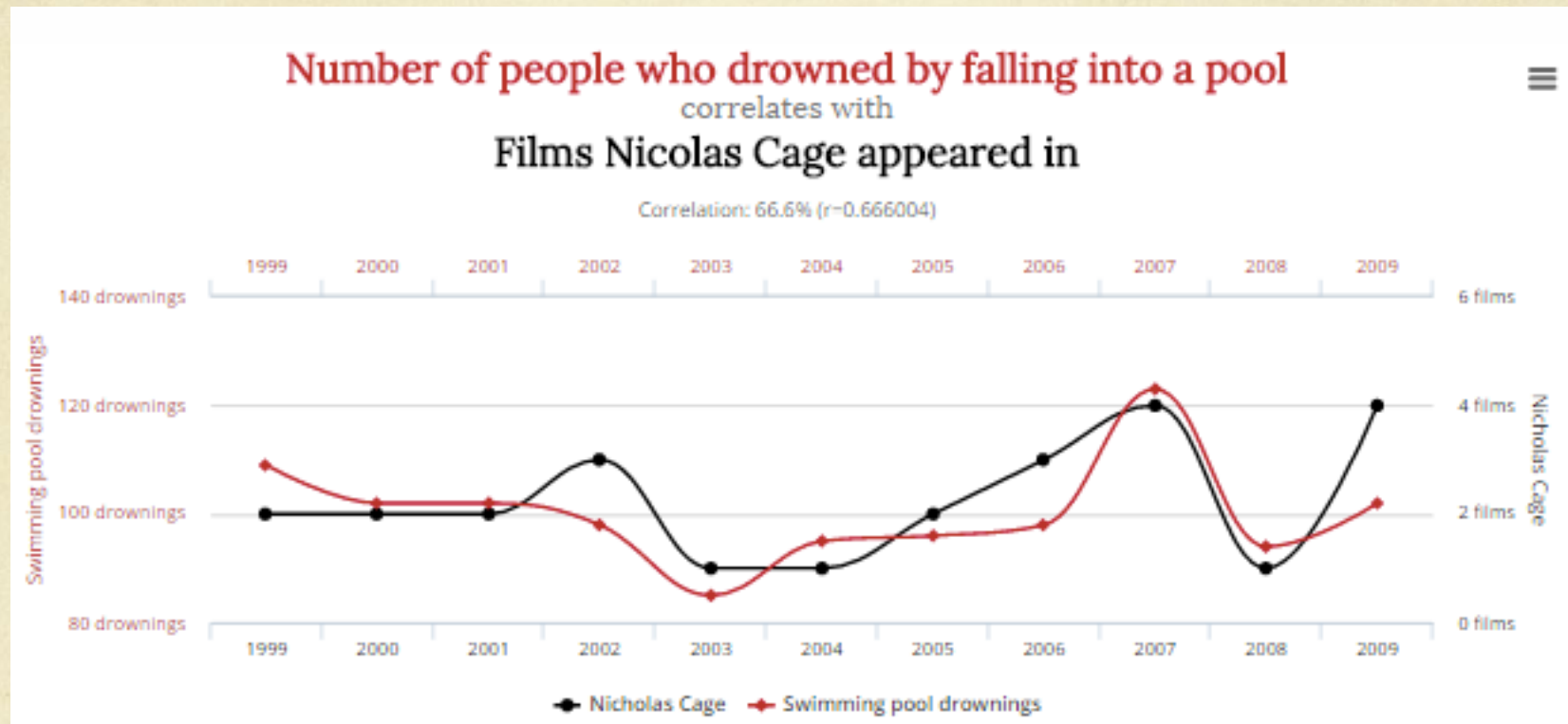
- X and Y correlate, but no good logic explains why
- Ex.: U.S. stock market
 - Correlates with butter production (in Bangladesh!)
- Ex.: superstitions
 - No causal relationship even if there is apparent correlation



Spurious Correlations



Spurious Correlations



She's a Witch!

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k3jt5ibfRzw>

Thinking Comparatively: Good Analysis and Argumentation

Guideline	1. Ask Good Questions	2. Test Hypotheses	3. Develop Argument
Do the basics	Ask open-ended WHY questions about cause and effect	Define concepts and variables clearly	Read and use scholarship on topic
Be original & informed	Ask questions for which you don't have answers decided before research	Use scholarly theories to form hypotheses, not just your own ideas	Make meaningful claims, not just laundry lists of what matters
Examine evidence	Ask questions for which evidence is available to test hypothesis	Be aware of biases and rely on evidence (not assumptions)	Use evidence and opinion to back the claims and arguments

Argument Clinic

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kQFKtI6gn9Y>

Is Politics a Science?

Limits of the Comparative Method

- Political science rarely results in “proofs”
- Most social science findings have exceptions
- Relationships between variables are about probability and likelihood, not “laws”
- Unlike the physical and natural sciences, the social sciences often cannot make use of controlled experiments
 - Note that comparative method approximates a controlled experiment
 - MSS and MDS hold certain variables constant to examine others

Next Week

- The State, Nationalism, Secessions (Chapters 3 and 13)