

PLS 140
Introduction to
Comparative Politics

Week 1, Lecture 2:
Comparative research

Recap

- Introduction to the course content and the pedagogical approach
- Comparative Politics as a subfield of Political Science
- The use of the comparative method to make inferences about political phenomena

Plan for today

- The comparative method and Political Science methods:
 - Theories, hypotheses, and theses
 - Association and causation
 - Challenges to valid causal inference

Theories, hypotheses, and theses

- Theories:
 - Logically connected systems of propositions made up of concepts and relations between concepts
 - Empirical theories in Political Science vs. Political Theory
- Hypotheses: testable relationships derived from theories, generated deductively or inductively
- Theses: statements encapsulating key components of theories

Hypothesis testing

- Empirical evidence: observations collected to establish the veracity of scholarly claims
- Observations: units of data collected in scholarly projects (distinct from units of analysis, i.e. cases)
- Data analysis:
 - Qualitative
 - Quantitative

Inference-making

- Who, what, when, and where questions —> description
- Why and how questions —> explanation
- Descriptive and causal inference
- Causation: property that obtains when one thing can be shown to cause another
- Association: covariation between variables

Association vs. causation

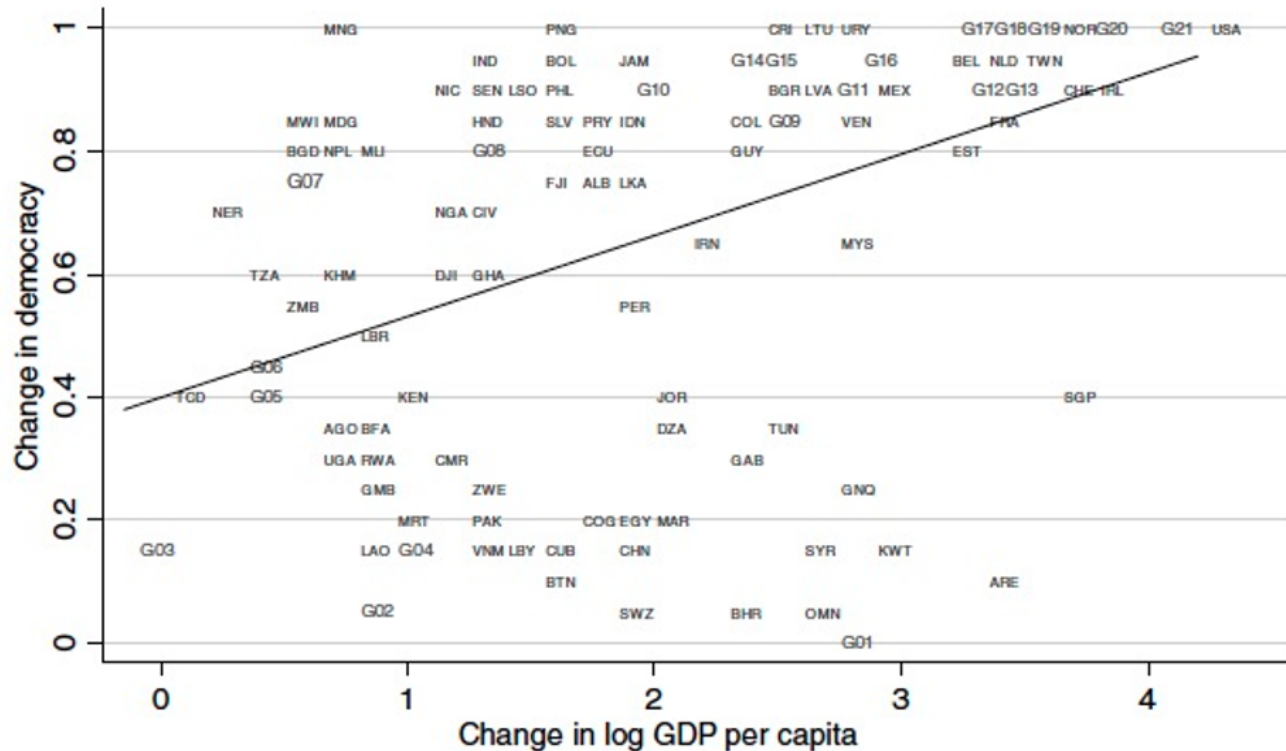
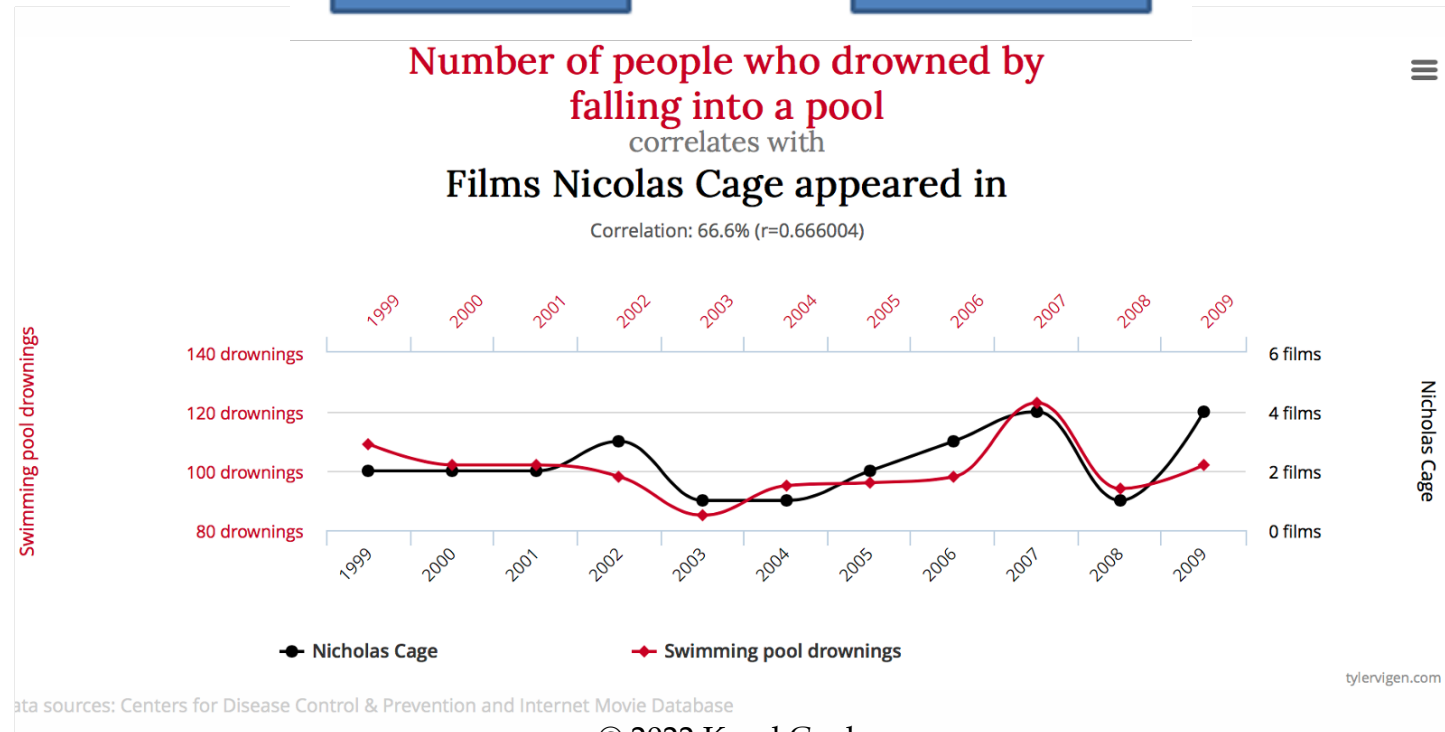
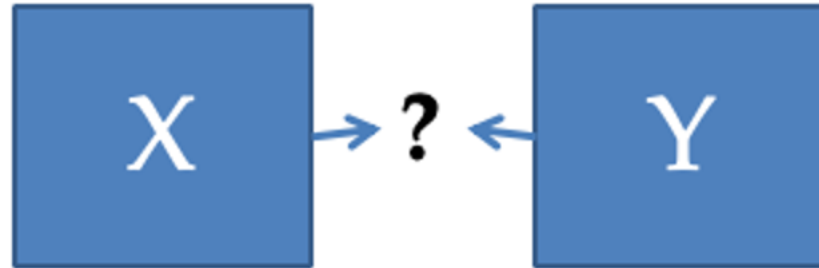


FIGURE 5. CHANGE IN DEMOCRACY AND CHANGE IN INCOME, 1500–2000



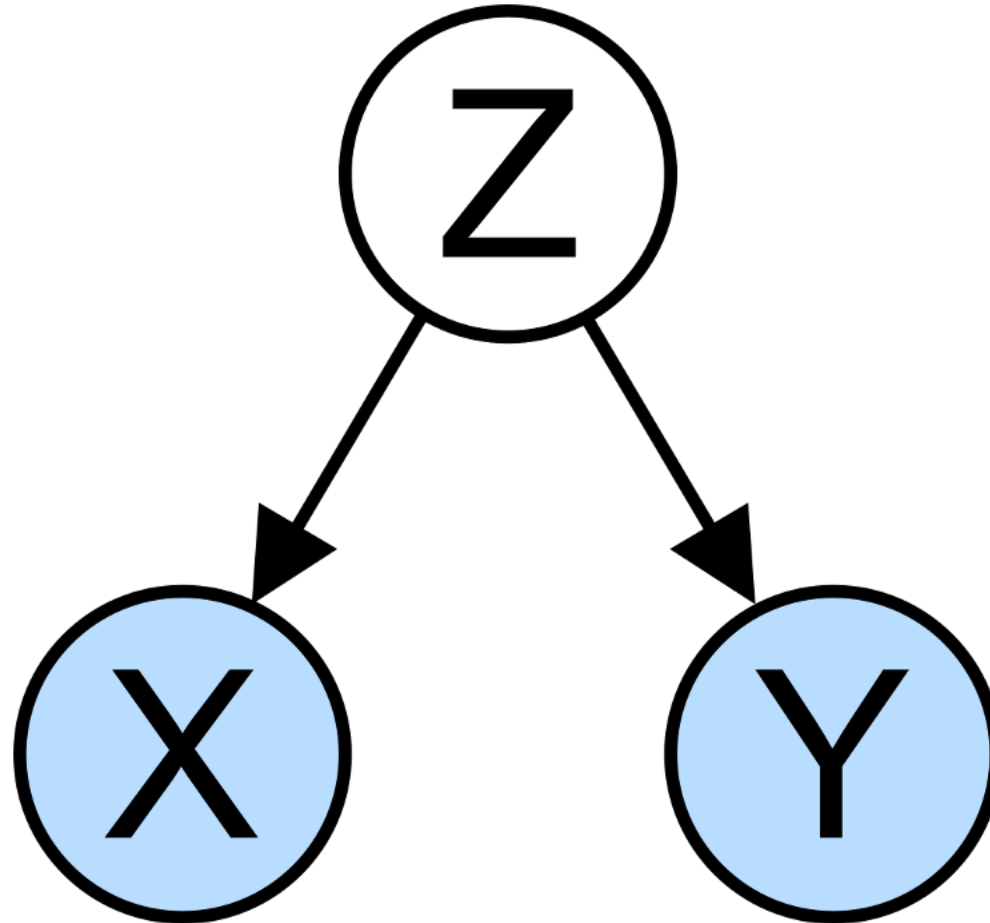
Spuriousness



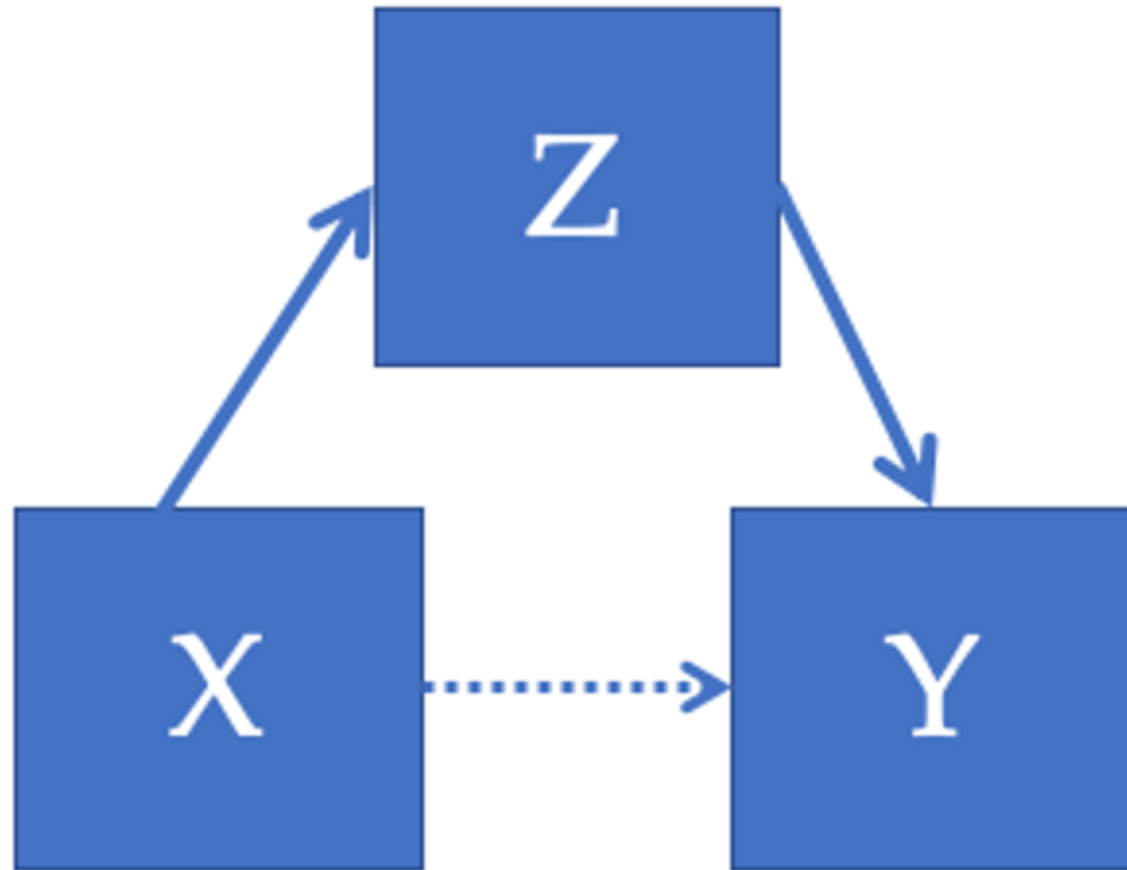
Data sources: Centers for Disease Control & Prevention and Internet Movie Database

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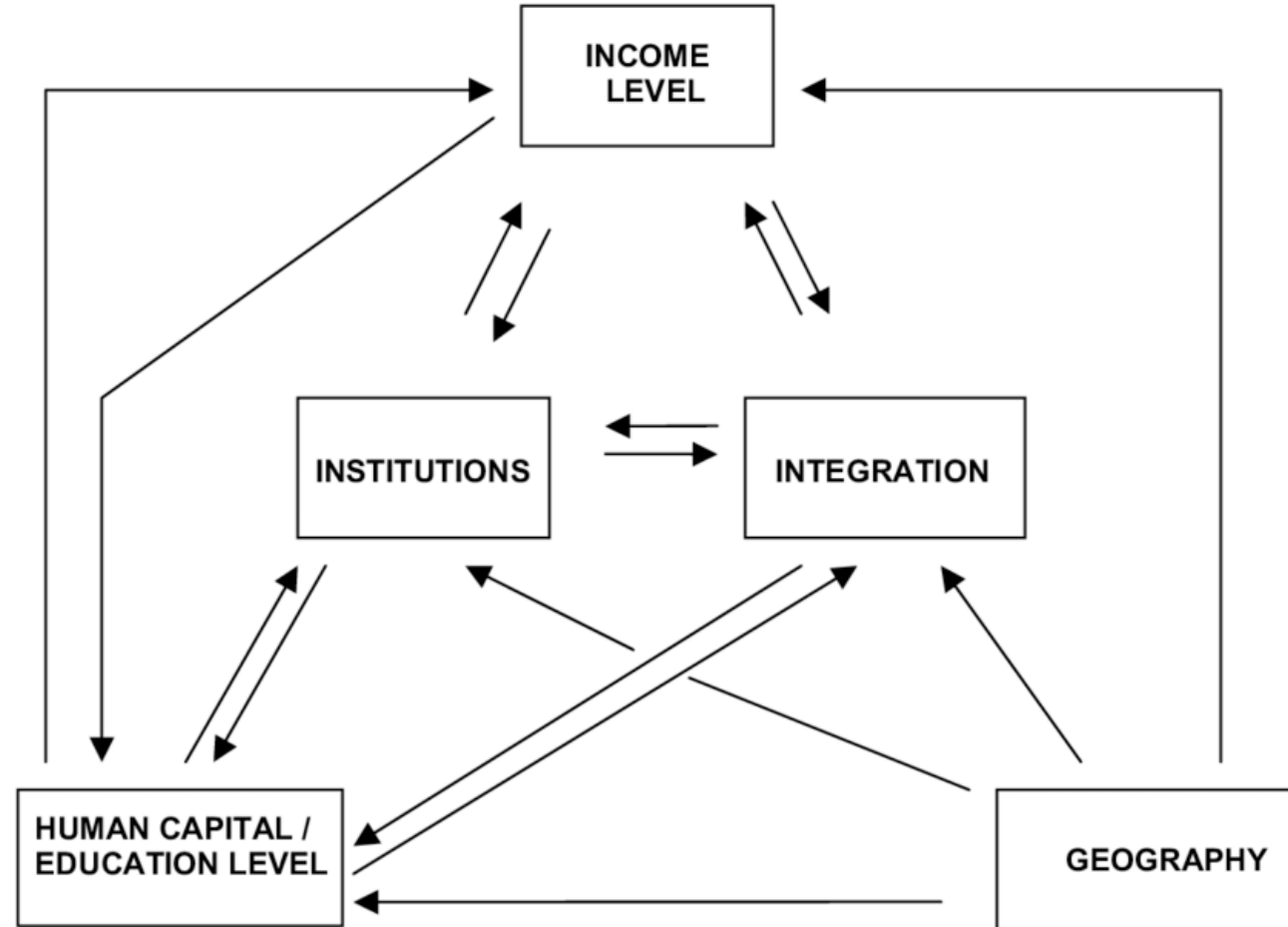
Confounding



Mediation



Simultaneity and endogeneity



Reverse causality

"The Usual"



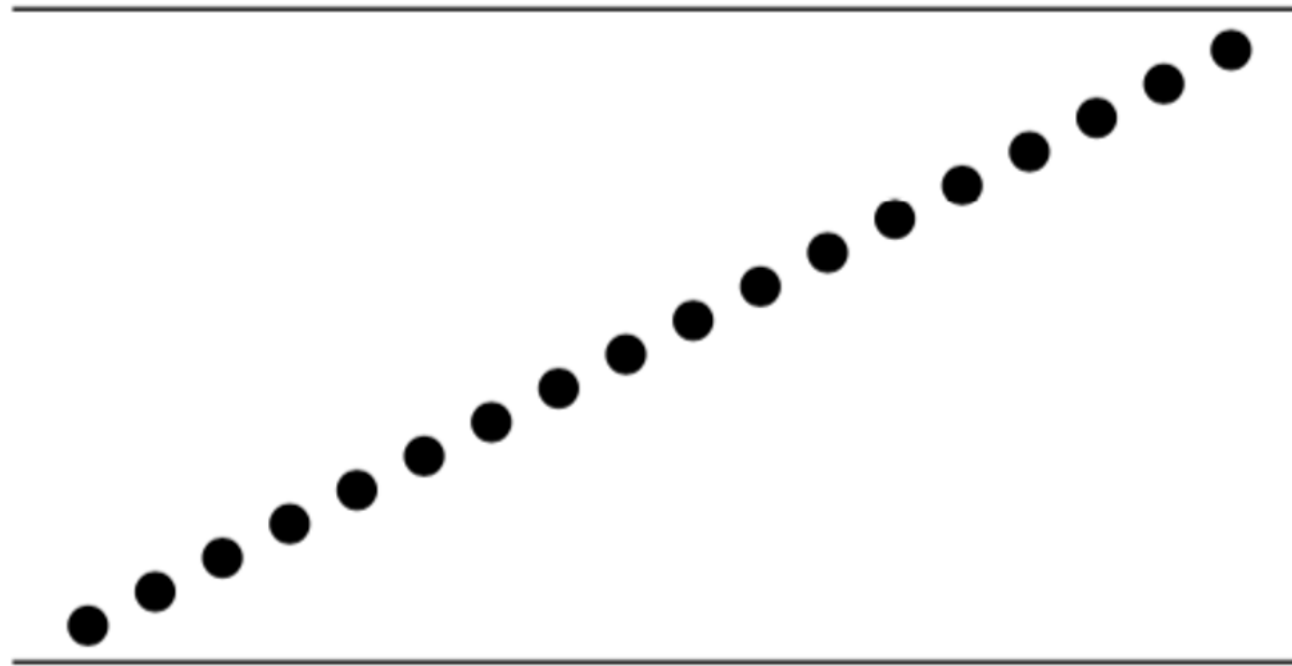
Reverse Causality



Simultaneity



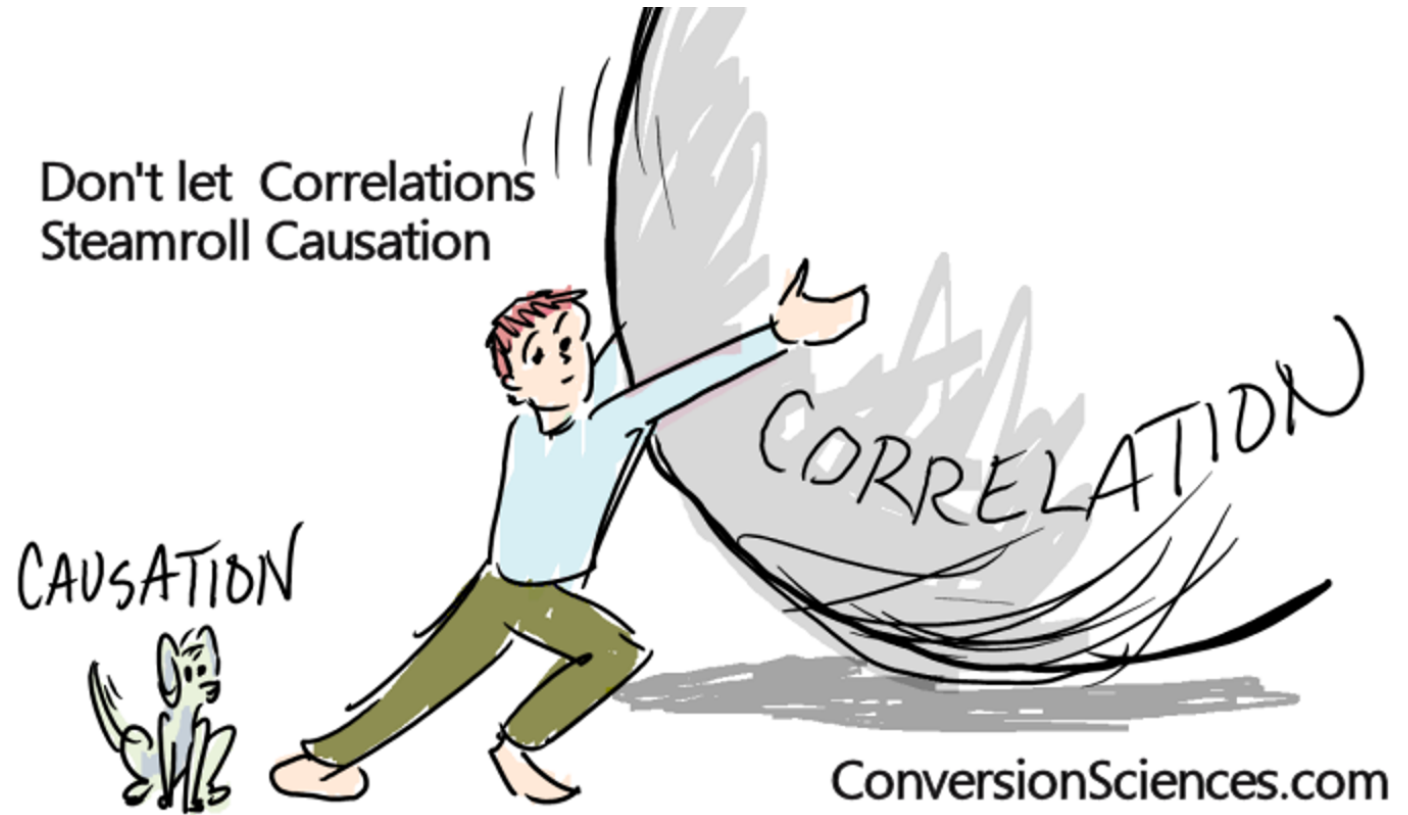
Perfect correlation



—
Perfect Correlation

Conditions of causation

- Association
- Nonconfounding
- Mechanism
- Direction / temporal precedence



Takeaways

- Methodological foundations of Political Science, necessary for understanding of empirical material in Comparative Politics

