

PSCI 4012

Global Development

Geography and Development

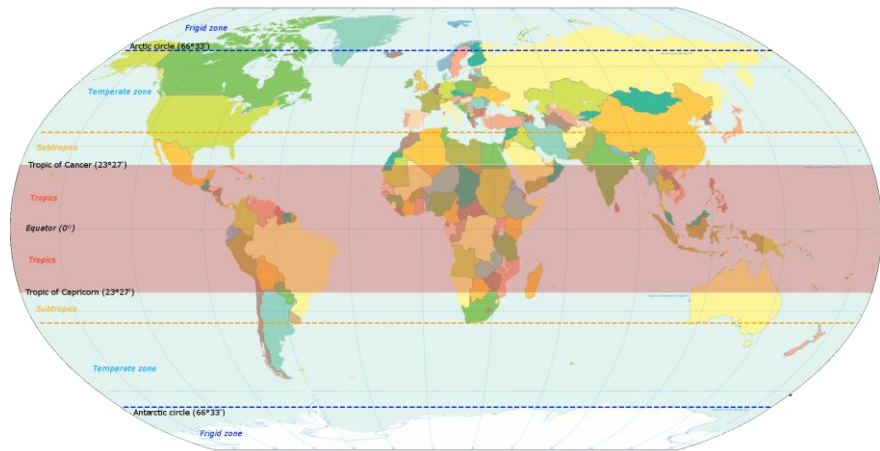
Erkan Gunes
University of Colorado Boulder

Today's Plan

- Geographical commonalities of LDCs
- Guns, Germs and Steel
- Critiques of the geography hypothesis
- Group discussion

Geography of LDCs

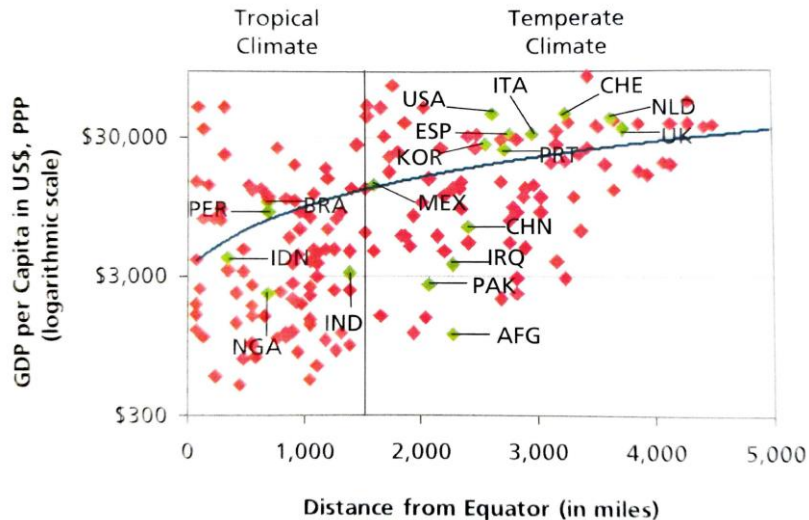
- Average economic output becomes larger as one moves further away from the equator
- Question: Can we observe a similar pattern within continents or within countries that have a large north-south span?



Geography of LDCs

Figure 13.1

Relationship between GDP per Capita and Distance from the Equator

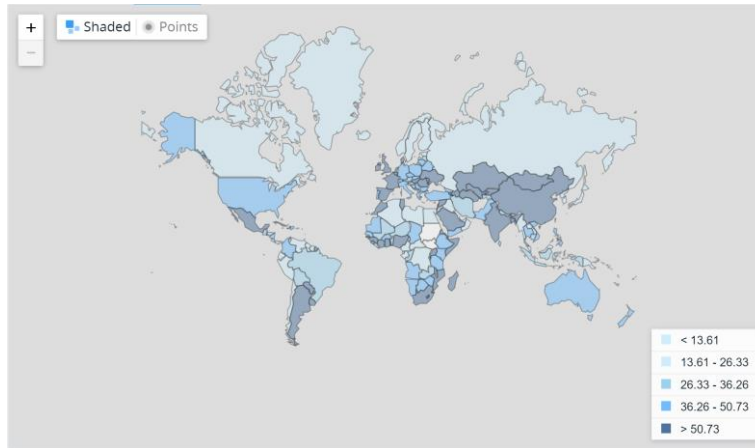


Tropical Disadvantage

- Montesquieu's hypothesis:
 - Climate affects body chemistry, personal character, and as a result the degree of prosperity. Heat slows down the flow of blood, breeds laziness and a hot-tempered capriciousness that worked against resolute and sustained action.
- Disease burden is higher in the tropics than in temperate climates
- Diseases can cause lost workdays, which translate into lower productivity
- Expected loss of children leads to higher fertility rates
- Diseases also affect animals

Tropical Disadvantage

- Crop yields per square acre are on average 30 percent to 40 percent lower in the tropics than in the temperate climate
- Jeffrey Sachs: Sustained agriculture led development has always been a temperate zone affair.

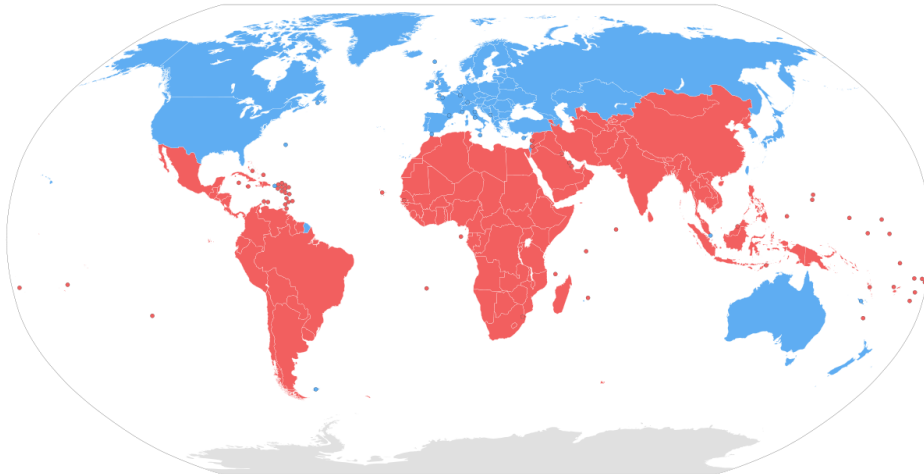


Tropical Disadvantage

- Tropical Africa has for millennia been the most sparsely populated continent
- Centralized states and cities only rarely emerged
- Difficulty of achieving economies-of-scale in agriculture due to low population density
- Difficulty of developing economic specializations due to low population density

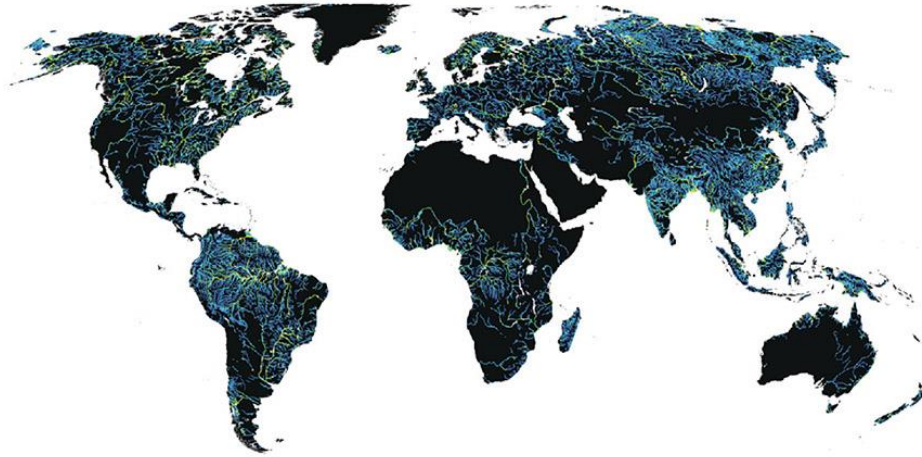
Geography of LDCs

- Many LDCs are distant from the epicenters of trade



Geography of LDCs

Adam Smith: Societies reliant on or limited to land transport will have less specialization, less industry, and as a result less prosperity.

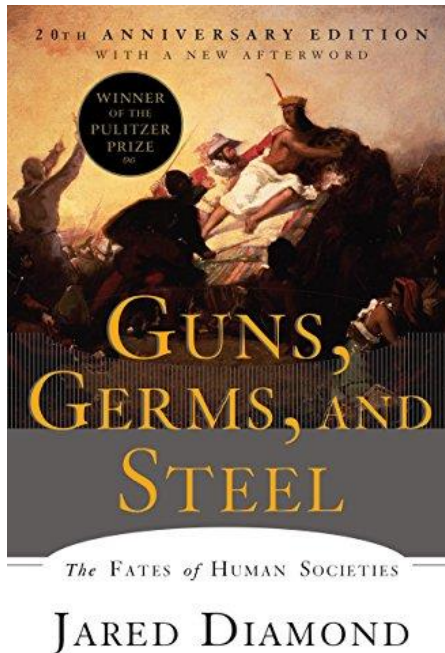


Geography of LDCs

World Railroads Map



Guns, Germs, and Steel



Guns, Germs, and Steel

- What gave Western Europe such a huge advantage over non-Eurasian societies before the two entities made contact?
- Diamond's answer: "Location, location, location"
- Eurasia has had the greatest supply and variety of consumable plants and large domesticable animals, which translated into large agricultural surplus
- Living close with other people and animals endowed Europeans with immunity to crowd and animal borne diseases

Guns, Germs, and Steel

- Two factors allowed Europeans to colonize much of the world:
 - supremacy in military technology (gun and steel)
 - immunity to diseases (germs)
- Another geographical advantage of Europe is its geographical proximity to the Fertile Crescent

Critiques of the Geography Hypothesis

- Humanity has impressive ability to control its natural surrounding and overcome natural constraints
- Diseases are widespread in the tropics because of the failures of human action
- We currently have the technology to make agriculture in the tropics more productive
- Before the modern times, some of the most advanced civilizations were in the tropics (e.g. The Aztecs, Incas etc.)
- Geography is a slow changing phenomenon. It can't explain why some societies grow quickly
- Land transportation is more expensive, but the costs rarely outweighs the gains

Group Discussion

- Question: Does warmer climate only have disadvantages? Has the relationship between climate and development been same throughout the history?
- Why did other parts of Eurasia not develop as quickly and sustainably as Europe? Can geography explain this?
- Is underdevelopment inevitable under certain geographical conditions?