EMPIRICAL POLITICAL RESEARCH

Causal Relationships in Political Science / Tutorial 1
by Aleksandra Butneva

WHAT IS EMPIRICAL POLITICAL RESEARCH?

WE ARE OBSERVERS

(EMPIRICAL)

WE STUDY POLITICS…

(POLITICAL)

IN A SCIENTIFIC WAY

(RESEARCH)

HOW DO SCIENTISTS WORK?

- We first think about an interesting question or puzzle

puzzle = we observe a phenomenon but have not understood it yet

- Then we think of a theory to explain the puzzle

… and do a lot of literature research

- We formulate hypotheses, i.e., something what we can test

- Then we operationalize all concepts, i.e., make them measurable

e.g., public sentiment can be assessed by looking at hashtags that people use in Twitter

- Lastly, we design an empirical test of our hypotheses: you will learn how during Data Analysis class next semester

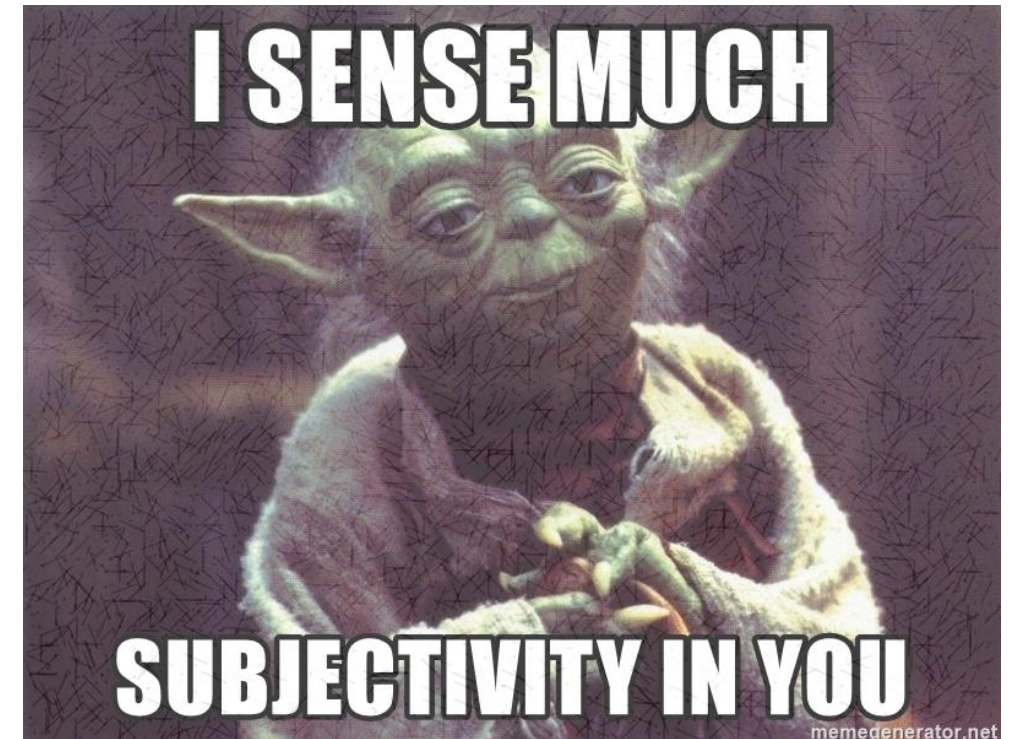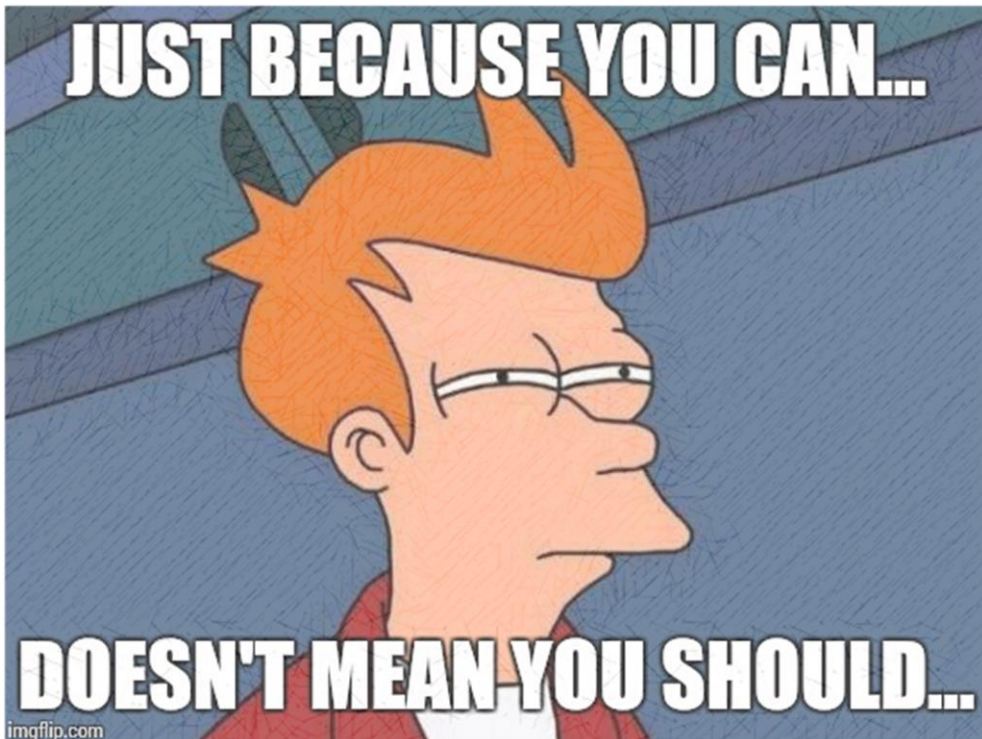… and discuss our results: their weaknesses and strengths

HOW DOES THE (SCIENTIFIC) WORLD LOOK LIKE?

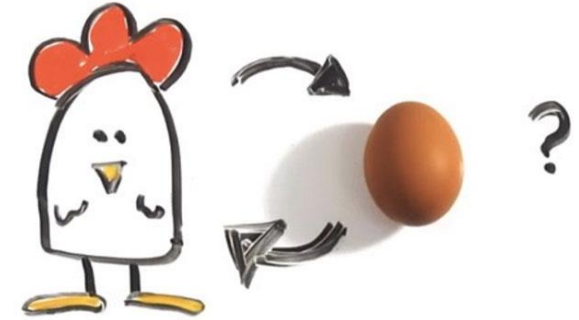Empirical = based on facts, objective, falsifiable

Normative = subjective, value-laden

WHY DO WE LOOK FOR CAUSALITY?

- Because everything has a cause (believe it or not)

- Because we want to understand how the world works

- Because only if you can communicate your why-argument, your (scientific) work makes sense

… so, we need to learn about four necessary conditions to explain relationships between things, i.e., build good theories and hypotheses

what are other words for causality?

causation, source, occasion, cause, origin, root, antecedent, provenance, influence, element

FOUR CONDITIONS FOR CAUSALITY
OR HOW DO I CHECK WHETHER A STATEMENT WORKS WELL

- Do I observe an association, e.g., wage cuts (X) and strikes (Y)?

- Was X before or after Y? … X should occur before Y

- What is the reason for observing Y?

 e.g., workers do not have enough money to provide for family

- Is there an alternative explanation?

e.g., a lot of extreme-left voters in the region