

# Description and Evidence Gathering

Department of Government  
London School of Economics and Political Science

## 1 Review Quantitative Description

## 2 Observation and Description

## 3 Texts as Sources

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# Last Week's Material

- Data Description
- Variable summaries
  - Statistics
  - Tabulation
  - Aggregation
- Visualization

# Preview

- You have everything you need to complete:
  - Problem set 1
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- Next week is reading week, so no lecture or class
- Keep thinking about what kinds of topics interest you as possible research proposals

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# Features of *Quantitative Description*

- A *rectangular* dataset (case-by-variable)
- A clear *unit of analysis*
- Typically multiple cases
- Quantitative and qualitative measures
- Calculation of summary *statistics*
- Inferences based on “dataset observations”

# Dataset Observation (DSO)

“a score for a case on a variable”

State	Year	Var1	Var2
Afghanistan	2016	1	TRUE
Afghanistan	2015	1	TRUE
Algeria	2016	1	FALSE
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# Description Beyond DSOs

- Sometimes hear about “qualitative” and “quantitative” research
- This divide is illusory because all research is qualitative and some involves quantitative description
- Role of quantitative analysis
  - The primary research objective
  - A piece of evidence that is analyzed together with other descriptions

Review Quantitative Description

**Observation and Description**

Texts as Sources

# Goals of Descriptive Research

- 1 To *answer* research questions
- 2 To *generate* research questions

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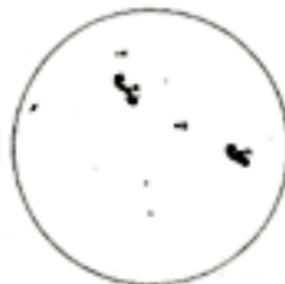
- 1 To *answer* research questions
- 2 To *generate* research questions
- 3 To do both of these, *iteratively*

# Ex.: Galileo's Drawings of Sunspots

*Sunspots drawn by Galileo, June 1612*



24<sup>th</sup>



25<sup>th</sup>



26<sup>th</sup>



27<sup>th</sup>

# Ex.: Broad Street Cholera

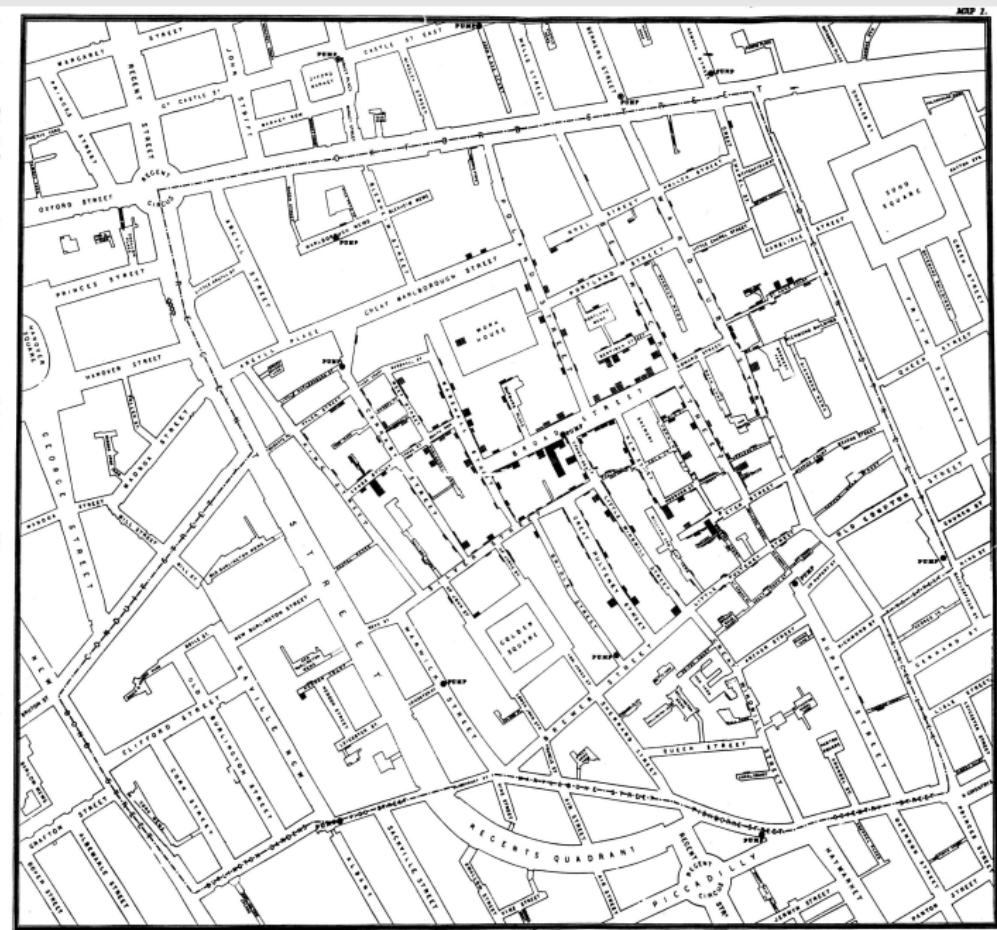
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  - Around Broad Street (Soho)
  - 616 eventual deaths

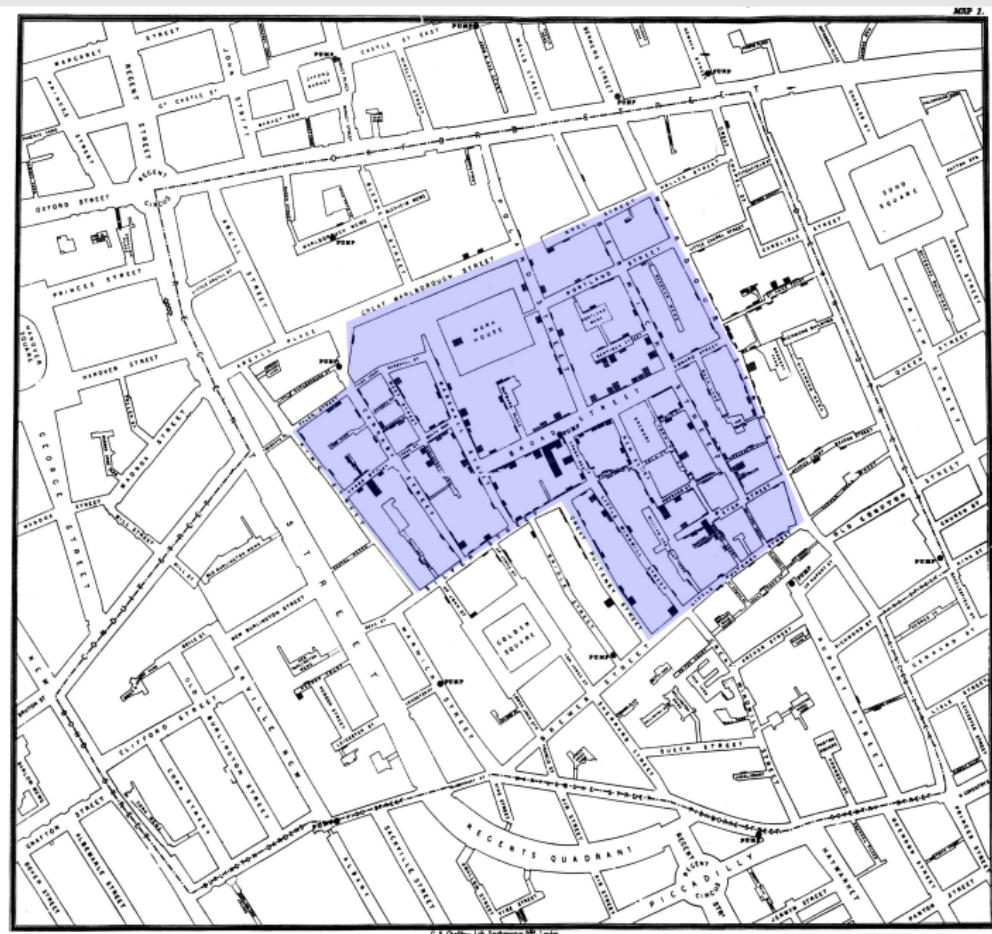
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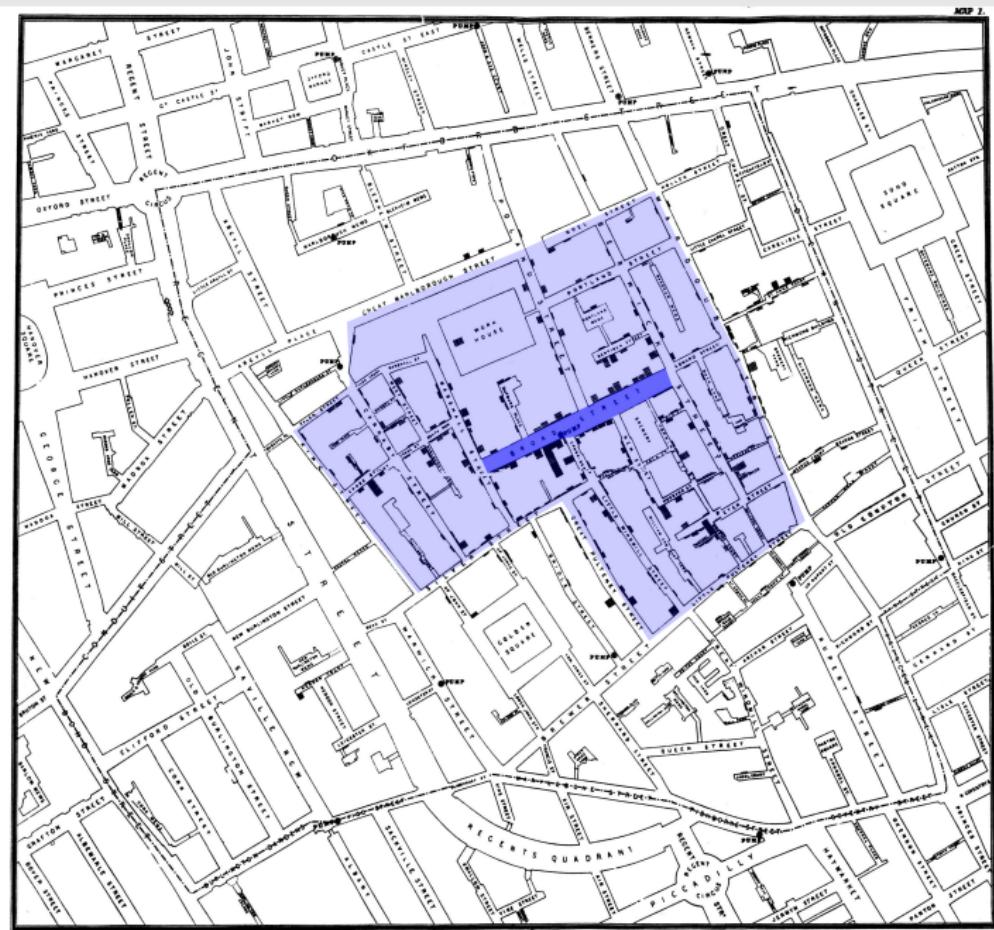
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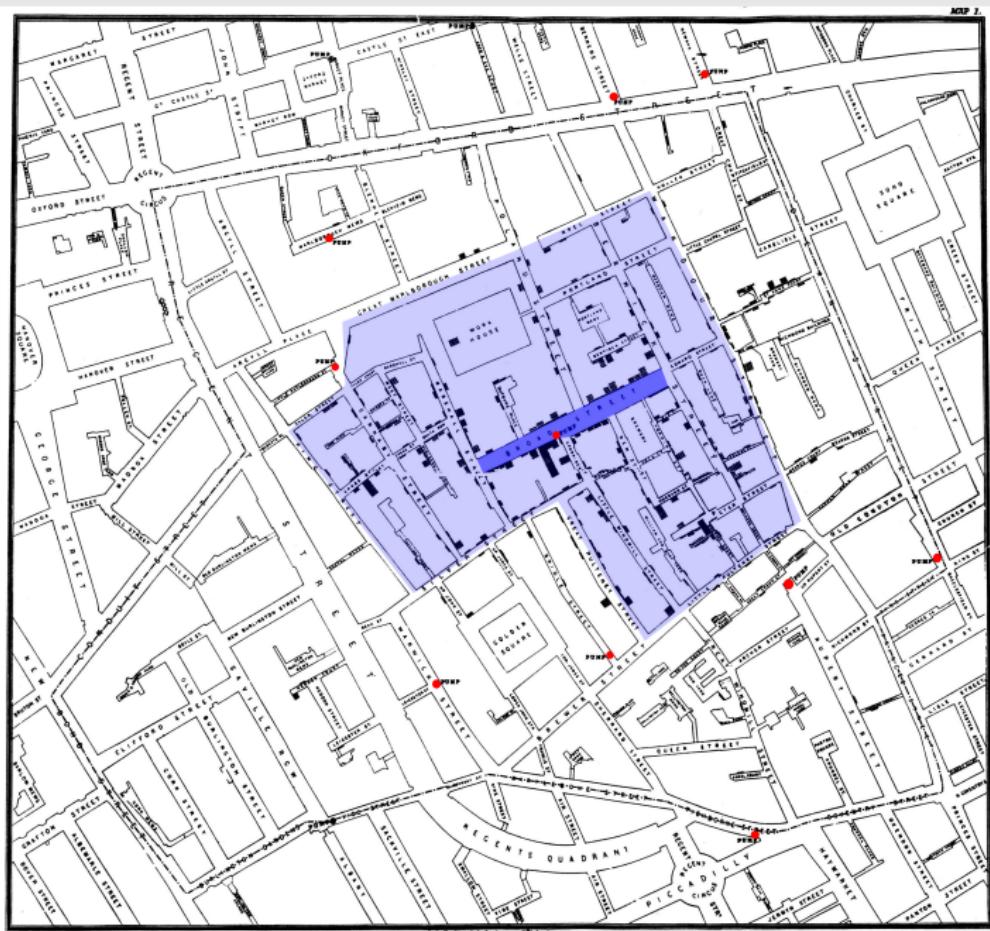
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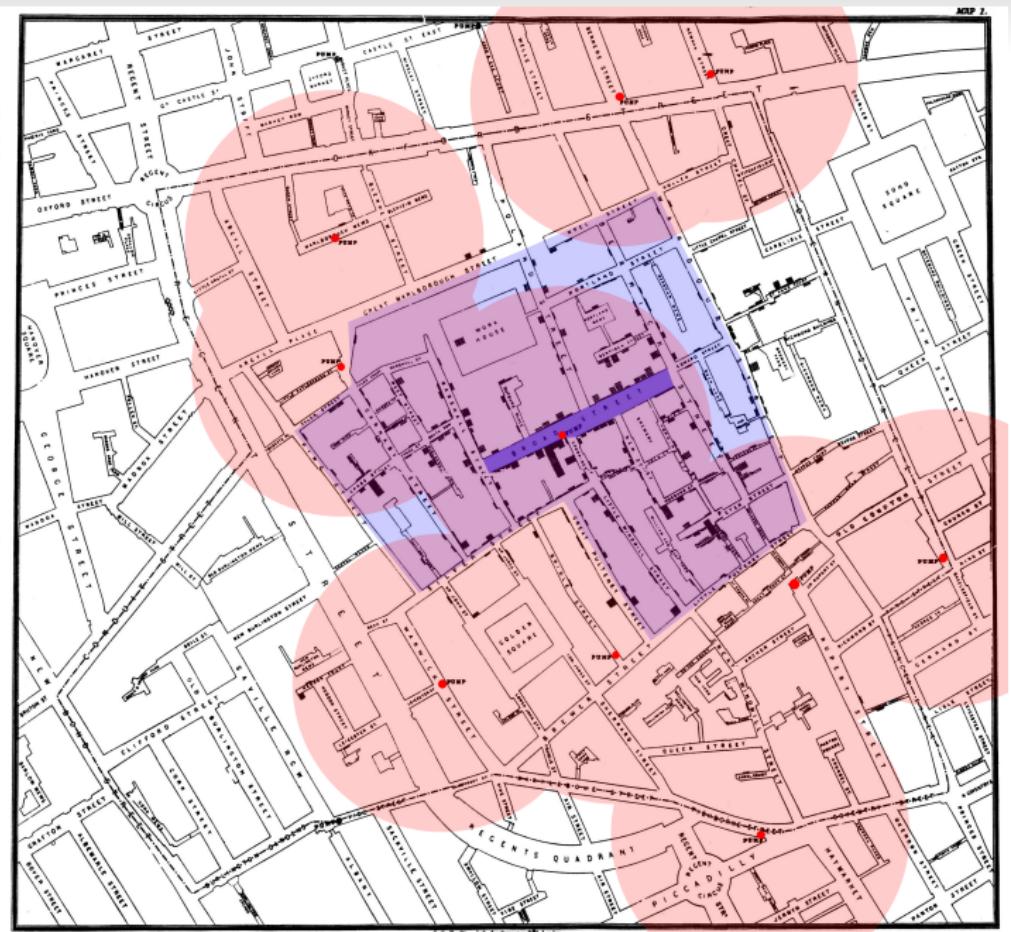
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- Causal RQ: What causes transmission of cholera?
- Descriptive RQ: Who exactly is contracting cholera?

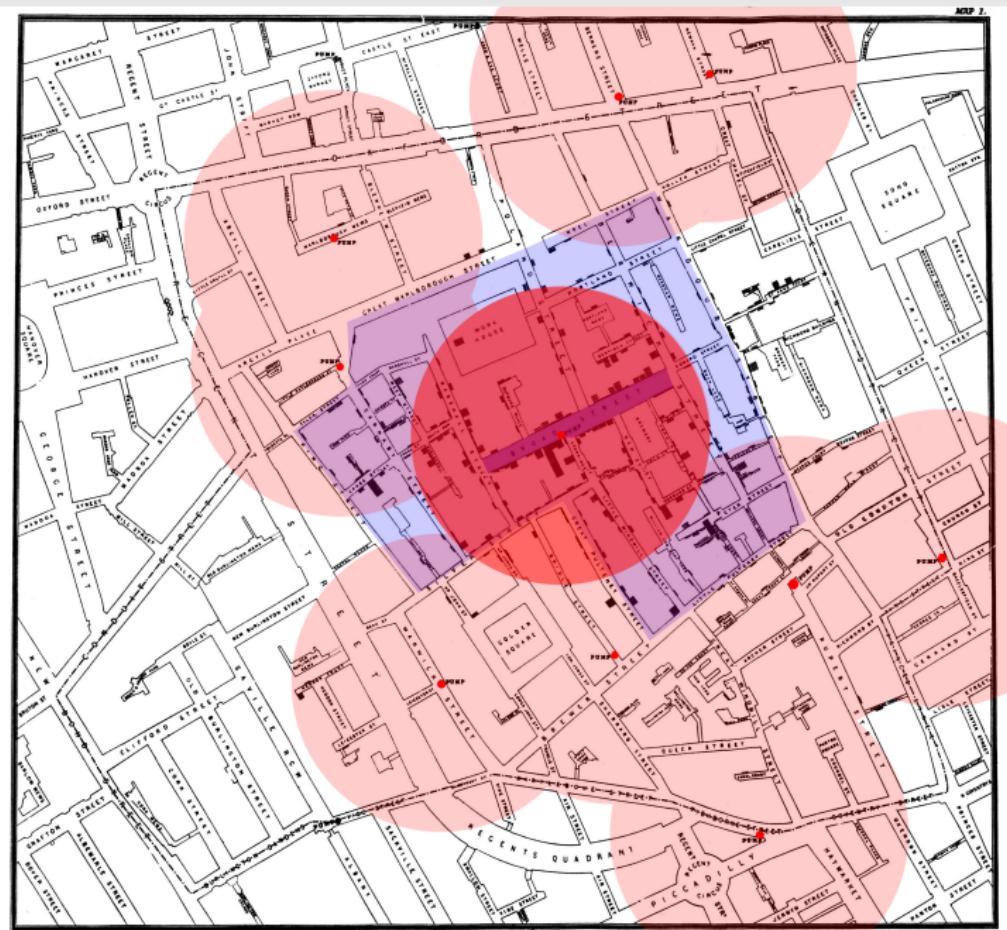


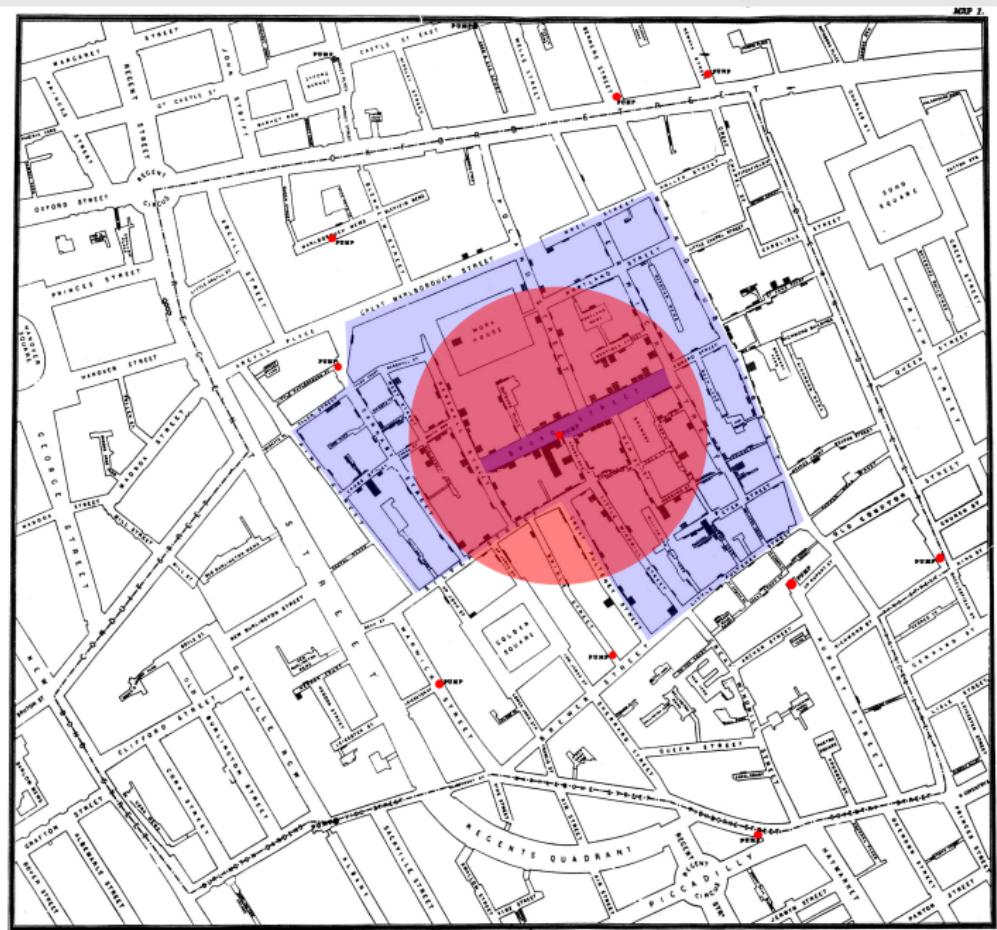




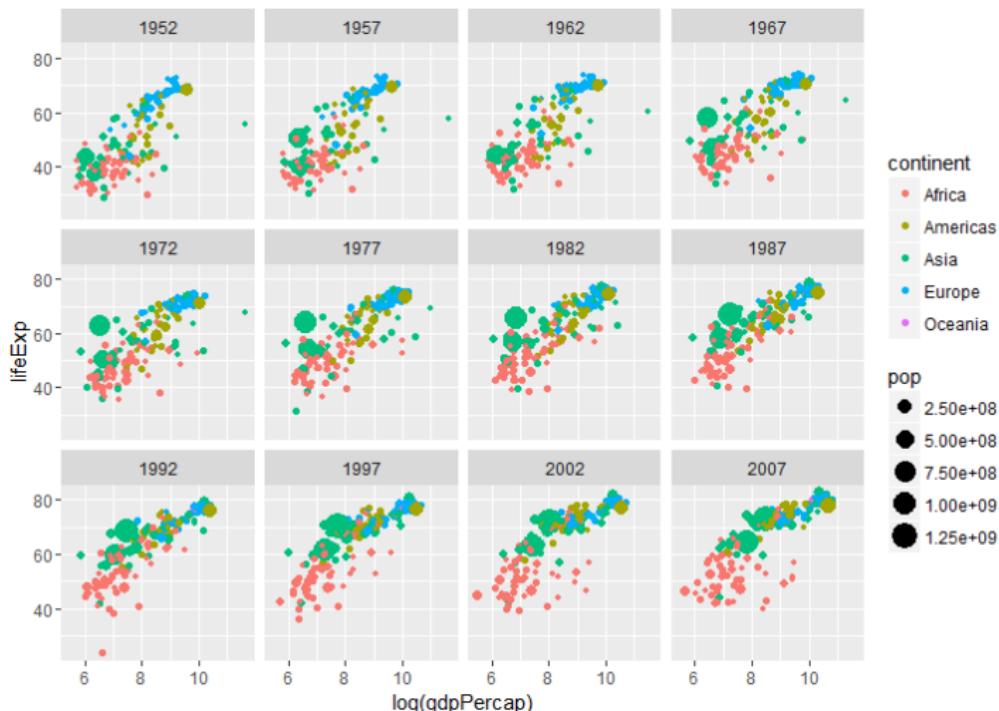








# Ex.: Gapminder Data



Review Quantitative Description

**Observation and Description**

Texts as Sources

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- Toshkov has a different typology
  - Multi-/single-case
  - Multi-/uni-variate

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  - Where is this? When is this?
  - How much of this is there?

Review Quantitative Description

**Observation and Description**

Texts as Sources

# Answering Descriptive RQs

- 1 Ask question
- 2 Decide what kind of evidence will answer that question
- 3 Gather evidence
- 4 Analyze evidence
- 5 Draw inferences and make claims
- 6 (Iterate)

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- 4 Examine associations between cholera and patient characteristics
- 5 Inference: Geographical clustering
- 6 Iterate: What is different about this geographical area?

# Common Methods of Descriptive Evidence Gathering

- Direct observation
  - Participant-observation
- Interviewing
  - Surveys
  - Elite interviews
  - Focus groups
- Documentary analysis
  - Archival research
  - Text analysis

# Some RQ/Method Pairings

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Yet, we often use non-obvious methods, and multiple methods.	

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- How do we arbitrate between conflicting evidence?
- How do we decide if evidence is “true”?
- How do we know when we have “enough” evidence?

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# What counts as text?

- Primary sources
  - Raw, original evidence
- Secondary sources
  - Interpretations of raw evidence
- Tertiary sources
  - Compendia or indices of two other types of sources

# How do you use texts?

- Think about your own experience reading, interpreting, and interacting with textual sources for academic purposes (e.g, for writing a term paper).
- With the person sitting next to you, discuss:
  - 1 The process by which you try to understand the meaning and content of texts
  - 2 How you choose texts to read

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- Text as description
  - Rely on text in lieu of direct observation
  - What do we gain? What do we lose?

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  - Rely on text in lieu of direct observation
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- Text as DSOs
  - Treat texts as units (see MT Week 7)

# Challenges of Text

- 1 Source “Quality”
- 2 Subjectivity and differing perspectives
- 3 Historiography
- 4 Selection and confirmation bias

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But these are really the challenges of *any* research!

