HST 121: History of Europe, 1648-present

"Long Data" Assignment: Looking for Patterns and Cycles in History

Description: The final project for HST 121 asks you to look at quantitative historical data over a long period of time to see if you can draw out larger meanings about the past by looking for relationships among the different historical variables. You will be provided with datasets for this assignment, and given a tutorial on how to use this information in Google Sheets. For the final product, you will make a definitive claim about the historical data you’re using, and present your evidence in a slideshow with visual and textual components. This project will help you gather pertinent facts and ideas to explore complex issues and problems, along with providing important practice interpreting data and appraising evidence.

**Step 1**: Look over the datasets shared with you here: <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1_hRAJ5cb5HdwScG4LxXWZL_dIcVQdrbI?usp=sharing>

Dataset 1: GDP per capita and population in Europe, China and the United States, 1648-2018

This dataset provides historical data on all European countries’ gross domestic product scaled to population size (per capita). GDP is defined as the market value of all goods and services produced in a country’s borders for the year(s) in question. GDP per capita divides GDP by the size of the population. If you’re interested in economic and population growth over time, look over this dataset. The data is organized by country and year. There is also a smaller dataset that compares European economic and population development with other world regions. The values for gdp per capita are in 2011-equivalent dollars and the values for population size are in thousands (i.e., 200 = 200,000)

Dataset 2: “Polity V” democracy and autocracy ratings for Europe (country specific), the United States and China, 1800-present

This dataset rates countries for various democratic and autocratic characteristics for each year that political data is available. Each country is rated on a scale of 0 to 10 for both democracy and autocracy. The autocracy score is subtracted from the democracy score to determine each country’s aggregate democracy score. A negative number is a sign of high levels of autocracy, whereas a positive score demonstrates various levels of democratic development, with a “10” indicating a perfect democracy. If you’re interested in political development over time, you can use this dataset to figure out how and when democracies rose (and fell).

Dataset 3: Trans-Atlantic Slave Voyages, 1514-1866

This dataset shows the number of enslaved people who unwittingly embarked on the trans-Atlantic journey to the Americas. The dataset also marks the number of enslaved people who disembarked, which demonstrates the attrition rates (subtract disembark from embark to find out) on the journey itself, and it charts the number of voyages by the European country of origin. If you’re interested in the patterns and cycles of the slave trade, then take a look at this dataset.

Moreover, there are plenty of possibilities for using more than one of these datasets together.

Here are some ideas for topics that could use these datasets (as always, this is not an exhaustive list). When considering your topic, think about relationships, change over time, and comparisons between different countries):

* Contextualizing periods of intense population/economic growth (what else is happening at the time? Why is this growth concentrated in only one or a few countries?)
* Relationship between population growth and economic growth
* Relationship between slave voyages and economic growth
* Contextualizing periods of slave voyages (why were some countries more involved in the slave trade at certain moments and others at other times?)
* Relationship between economic growth and the emergence of democracy
* Contextualizing periods of democratic expansion (when does it happen? Why does it only happen with some countries and not others?)

When you’re considering a topic for this project, think about time, place, and the availability of comparable data:

* Which countries do you want to look at? why?
* Which period of time do you want to look at? Why?
* Do you have enough data to look at these countries at this time?

Before moving to Step 2, think through what question you want to ask of the data, and what you expect to discover from the data. This is your **research question** and your **hypothesis**. Please fill out this form once you have a handle on what you want to do (NO LATER THAN NOVEMBER 20): <https://forms.gle/98BarWbdxjsnwea56>

**Step 2**: Based on your own decisions about the data you’re interested in analyzing, create a working dataset from one or more of the three located in the folder.

* First, while the dataset is open, make a copy (click on the “File” menu and then “Make a Copy”) and place the copy in your shared folder.
* Next, get rid of the data that you don’t need for your project (i.e., delete columns and rows you don’t need by highlighting them, right-clicking (or Ctrl+clicking) and deleting). This will include countries you’re not interested in, time periods you’re not interested in, and variables you’re not interested in.
* Finally, combine any data you’re using from multiple datasets. For example, you might want to combine country of origin data from the “Slave Voyages” dataset with GDP per capita data. Highlight the relevant data, then copy and paste it onto a new column in the other dataset. **Be careful to line up the data correctly by year and/or country.**

**Step 3**: Create an appropriate chart using Google Sheets (in the “insert” menu, click on “chart”). Play around with the settings to get the chart that is appropriate to your project. Again, think through the question you’re asking of these data, and what you hope to discover. Does the chart clearly answer your question? Did you label all the pertinent information on the chart? Note: Sometimes you may need more than one depending on what you want to do.

**Step 4**: Create a Google Slide presentation in your shared folder. Put four pieces of information on the first slide: 1) your title; 2) your research question; 3) your hypothesis; and 4) your name. The next slide(s) should contain your chart(s), along with proper attribution of the datasets, from which each chart was drawn. The final slide should contain a discussion of what you did in this project, what the results were, and why you think those results occurred. Was your hypothesis correct or not? Why or why not? This is also the place where you should bring in additional historical context pertinent to your research question and hypothesis. This final slide should be 2-4 paragraphs. This slide presentation should be done neatly and creatively. Play around with the settings to get the desired visual outcome.

All materials (the working dataset from Step 2 and the slide presentation) should be in the shared folder that I created for you at the beginning of the semester by **Saturday, December 11** at 11:59pm.

Nathan and I will grade this assignment according to the following criteria:

* Presented a compelling research question and hypothesis, based on the real possibilities of working with the datasets presented to you.
* Successfully created a working dataset based on the information relevant to your project
* Created a clear visual representation of the data in a chart that is appropriate to what you wanted to say with this project, and which attempts to demonstrate the validity of the hypothesis (don’t worry if the hypothesis is wrong, however, as this happens a lot)
* Quality of the writing in the explanation of what you were doing and what worked and/or didn’t work out with it
* Your ability to follow directions

THE TWO MOST IMPORTANT PIECES OF ADVICE ARE: 1) I’M HERE TO HELP, SO USE IT; AND 2) DON’T WAIT UNTIL THE LAST MINUTE BECAUSE YOU WILL RUN INTO PROBLEMS.