

# Political Parties in a Comparative Perspective

How to develop an argument

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## Week before Christmas break

In the week before the break...

- ...we had our final substantive session on 'parties in government' where we learned about their trade-off between compromise and distinctiveness
- ...you developed your own research question, discussed it with your peers and evaluated its quality

## Our schedule to the exams

1. 17 December: Research Questions
2. 7 January: Developing an argument
3. 14 January: Choosing the right data/method
4. 21 January: Presenting your ideas to peers
5. in the week of 28 January: final chance for office hours (preferably earlier)

## Reconsider your research question

*You have developed a research question. In the next 5-10 minutes, sketch the theory relating to your question. Afterwards, pitch the theory to your neighbor. As neighbor, respond with a counter-argument/an alternative explanation.*

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**What's a theory?**

# Theories

A **theory** is a potential answer to your research question.

- theories are simplifications of reality: they do not attempt to capture everything
- instead, they focus on one outcome (out of many) and make the case for one/few explanations

# Theories

There are **two** approaches in theorizing:

1. *inductive* theorizing: you collect data, analyse cases and derive a theory which you test on other cases
2. *deductive* theorizing: you develop a theory, translate it to a research design and analyse data

Reverse logics. For the oral exam, you should follow the deductive approach (without analysing the data).

# Theories

Theories consist of four components:

1. **Expectations:** An expected relationship between  $X$  and  $Y$
2. **Causal mechanisms:** Theoretical reasoning of why  $X$  leads to  $Y$
3. **Assumptions:** Underlying (untested) claims of how subjects behave
4. **Scope conditions:** Limits in the applicability of the theory



## An example theories in party politics

*Issue entrepreneurship* (Hobolt and Vries 2015)

- RQ: Which parties employ issue entrepreneurship?
- Theory:
  - **Expectation:** Losing parties use issue entrepreneurship.
  - **Mechanism:** The current political landscape is not beneficial to losing parties, so they shift the attention from issues on which they face limited success to disregarded issues to mobilize voters on topics where they have not aligned yet (first-come advantage).
  - **Assumptions:** Parties seek to gain votes. Voters respond to party's programmatic portfolios.
  - **Scope conditions:** Multiparty systems with coalition governance and stable issue environments.

## A good theory

How does a good theory look like?

## A good theory

Good theories should fulfil different criteria theories (List and Valentini (2016) and [here](#):

- *consistency*: a theory needs to be logically consistent
  - violation: catch-all parties try to be ideologically coherent (catch-all parties try to appeal to broad strata of electorate, so they sometimes need to blur their positions to *catch all* voters)
- *parsimony*: a theory should be as simple as possible (avoid unnecessary complexity as they usually add assumptions)
- testable and falsifiable: we should be able to translate a theory into empirical implications (see later)
- generalizability: theories should speak to more than one case

## A good theory

*Now you:*

- *Does your theory contain all of the building blocks of a theory (expectation, mechanism, assumption, scope condition)?*
- *Does it fulfill the quality criteria outlined?*
- *Are you still convinced of it after your neighbor countered your argument?*

**Get back to your theoretical framework and refine it.**

## From theory to hypotheses

A theory is about concepts, hypotheses are about observable implications.

- hypotheses connect an independent variable (a cause) with a dependent variable (an outcome)
- they formulate an expectation about the direction of an effect
- hypothesis need to be falsifiable (you need to settle on a direction of your effect)
- theories contain justifications (mechanisms), hypotheses do not (but you can state mechanisms as hypotheses)
- *example: the more politicians post on social media, the more known they are to the general electorate* → what's the dependent variable? what's the independent variable? which direction is hypothesized?

# From theory to hypotheses

## An example

- **Research question:** How do parties select members of parliament to deliver a speech in parliament?
- **Theory**
  - Expectation: Parties assign speeches to MPs with longer tenure.
  - Mechanism: Longer tenure signals MPs have internalized party norms, reducing the likelihood of defection.
  - Assumptions: Parties control speech selection. Legislative speeches matter for parties' reputation.
  - Scope conditions: Structured parliamentary debates, strong party elite / discipline

## From theory to hypotheses

- **Hypotheses:**

- On the expectation: H1: The longer an MP has served for a party, the more likely they are to be selected to deliver a parliamentary speech.
- On the mechanisms:
  - H2: The longer an MP has served for a party, the less likely they are to deviate from the party line in their speeches.
  - H3: MPs who deviate less from the party line in their speeches are more likely to be selected to deliver parliamentary speeches.

## From theory to hypotheses

*Now you: you've formulated your theory, how can you translate it into empirically measurable hypotheses? [10 minutes]*



## Identifying the data you need

Your hypotheses usually indicate what kind of data you need.  
Identify your...

1. dependent variable
2. independent variable(s)
3. ...and the type of actors you need data for (voter-level, candidate-level, party-level, country-level, etc.)

## To prepare for next week

- In the next week, we will introduce potential data sources and methods you could use for your design
- bring your laptops/tables
- think about your question and theory: which data would you need to test it? which case(s) would you need to analyse and why?

Thank you for your attention!  
Any further questions?

## Literature



**Hobolt SB and Vries CE (2015)** Issue Entrepreneurship and Multiparty Competition. *Comparative Political Studies* **48** (9), 1159–1185.



**List C and Valentini L (2016)** The Methodology of Political Theory. *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Methodology*. Ed. by H Cappelen, TS Gendler, and J Hawthorne. 1st ed. Oxford University Press, 2016, 525–553.