Universität Münster

Political Parties in a Comparative Perspective

Choosing the right data and method

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Last week

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- ...you developed a theory to your research question
- ...you learned about the building blocks of a theory
- ...and what counts as a good theory

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)

Deriving hypotheses

You have a research question and a (preliminary) theory, how can you translate the theory into empirically testable hypotheses? [10 minutes]

Basics of case selection

Case selection is usually preceding your data and method section.

- before selecting a case, make a list of the population of cases that exist (e.g., if you are studying the role of parties in two-party systems, which countries have a two-party system?)
- always offer a proper justification on why you selected the case(s)
- don't limit yourself to reasons of practicability ("because I got the data on the case"): these reasons matter but they are not sufficient

Basics of case selection

- case selection is both relevant for quantitative and qualitative research but small-N methods (qualitative methods) are usually more sensitive to case selection, so the justification of the case should be more encompassing

Criteria to keep in mind when selecting your cases

Following Powner (2014), there are three main questions you should be able to respond to when it comes to case selection:

1. *variation*: you can only test your theory if there is variation in the independent and dependent variable
2. *generalizability*: your case should be representative of the population you want to make inferences on
3. *difficulty*: if your case(s) have favorable surrounding conditions to support your argument, they make your hypothesis testing less convincing $\rightarrow$ look for difficult, more conservative tests

Identifying the indicators you need

Your hypotheses usually include concepts, e.g., Hobolt and Vries (2015, p. 1164):

"Hypothesis 1b: Parties that have experienced *electoral defeat* are more likely to adopt an *issue entrepreneurial strategy* than parties that had electoral success, all else being equal." (own emphasis)

Identifying the indicators you need

In your empirical application, you need to translate these concepts into indicators (a process which is called operationalization). Try to identify how you could measure your...

1. *dependent variable*
2. *independent variable(s)*

Picking the right method

Before selecting your data, you need to know what's the right approach to test your theory.

- *qualitative research*: few cases to analyse, you want to gain a lot of in-depth case knowledge from which you can infer mechanisms and context conditions
- *quantitative research*: many cases to analyse, you are interested in average patterns between cases and not in case idiosyncracies (= specifics)

Types of quantitative and qualitative designs

	Quantitative analysis	**Qualitative analysis**
Type of Data	Survey (experiments), annotated text and/or audio, administrative data, web data	(Un)structured interview data, archival text or audio sources, data on processes
Methods	• cross-tabulation • regression • scaling models (e.g. item-response, factor analyses) • quantitative content analyses and machine-learning approaches (text, images, audio)	• *within-analysis*: process tracing, ethnography • *between-analysis*: structured comparisons (most-similar / most-differences) • *medium-N*: qualititative content analysis

Types of quantitative and qualitative designs

Now you: *Think of your question and theory, which method seems most appropriate for you to test your theory? Can you think of an alternative method (e.g., if you selected a quantitative method, would a qualitative method be feasible as well?)*

Which data should I use?

As established, the data depends on your method:

1. quantitative analysis: many cases → macro-level data (e.g., election results), survey data (citizens? politicians?), textual data (e.g., party manifestos, press releases)
2. qualitative analysis: few cases → textual data (e.g., party manifestos, press releases), interviews (citizens? politicians?), event data (e.g., historic data on how an event unrolled)

Analysing voters...

What kind of data could we use to analyse voters?

- macro-data (voting records, socio-economic composition from administrative data)
- micro-data (survey data, textual data, experimental data)

Survey data

Which information would be interesting in surveys?

- socio-demographic background
- political attitudes
- voting behaviour
- voters' evaluations of parties
- ...

Data to use...

- macro-data: OECD data (e.g. on migration or labour), national administrative offices, poll of polls
- textual data from social networks (difficult to access) or the PARTYPRESS data base (press releases)
- survey data:
  - European Social Survey (ESS)
  - European Election Survey
  - Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES)
  - national election studies (e.g. German Longitudinal Electional Study (GLES))
  - national panel studies (German Socio Economic Panel, Understanding Society (UK), etc.

European Social Survey

On of the most respected data sources to study voting behavior is the European Social Survey (ESS).

- the data can be downloaded here (requires free login)
- data can also be visualized online

European Social Survey

The ESS offers...

- cross-sectional study of 39 countries in 11 waves
- wide-range of repeated socio-political survey items (e.g. voting consideration, trust in politicians)
- changing special modules (e.g. Wave 11 on health and gender)

Comparative Study of Electoral Systems

Almost every (Western) liberal democracy regularly conducts national election surveys. The Comparative Study of Electoral Systems synthesises these studies:

- data availability starts from 1996 and goes until 2025 (depending on the country); usually more than 30 polities are covered in each data release
- provides, among others, data on citizens' socio-demographic background, political preferences, voting behavior and usually on the election context
- often, more data is available in national election studies (only items which are asked in multiple election studies make it into CSES)

Measuring parties

What kind of data could we use to analyse parties?

- organizational data (e.g., how are parties structured, which resources do they have, how do they select candidates)
  - V-Party
  - Political Party Database
- policy positions and agendas
  - Manifesto Project
  - Chapel Hill Expert Survey
  - Comparative Agendas Project
- data on party behavior, including its candidates
  - ParlSpeech (parliamentary speech data)
  - Comparative Candidate Survey

The Manifesto Project

The Manifesto Project is based at the WZB in Berlin. They provide...

- data on the policy positions on numerous domains for more than 1,000 parties in over 50 democracies, starting from 1945
- their procedure is based on human annotations, the highest standard of data quality
- you can track party positions over time or compare party families in different electoral systems

The Chapel Hill Expert Survey

The Chapel Hill Expert Survey is situated at the University of North Carolina. It encompasses

- data on the policy positions and issue salience on different domains of politics in Europe from 1999-2024 (interval of roughly 5 years)
- the coding is based on expert assessments by country experts (i.e., experts were asked which positions and issue emphasis parties in their countries have)
- it's often considered as more precise than the manifesto project as it does not concentrate of a party's programme but examines parties' behavior in general

The Comparative Candidate Survey

Compared to the two prior sources, the Comparative Candidate Survey shifts the focus from parties as unitary actors to their personnel.

- synthethises national candidate studies which survey candidates of political parties on different dimensions
- so far, three modules (2005-2024) in 24 countries with 32 elections
- example items include candidates' socio-demographic background, political positions or campaigning activities
- often, the national candidate surveys include more variables (not all of them are shared in the Comparative Candidate Survey)

If there is no adequate data available...

If you cannot use secondary data, you have to gather your own data. For the oral exam, I expect that you specify:

- ...the questions you would need to test your hypothesis
- ...the population you would need to survey (voters, political candidates, parties?)

To prepare for next week

- next week, you'll have the opportunity to pitch your whole research idea (question, theory, data and methods) to your peers (in small groups)
- try to combine the steps we've made already into a short presentation (without slides and compressed to max. 5 minutes)
- it's a good chance to receive feedback on your idea from your peers and we can talk about remaining questions on the oral exam
- in addition, on Learnweb, **please submit the topic** of your presentation including the session it refers to

Thank you for your attention!
Any further questions?

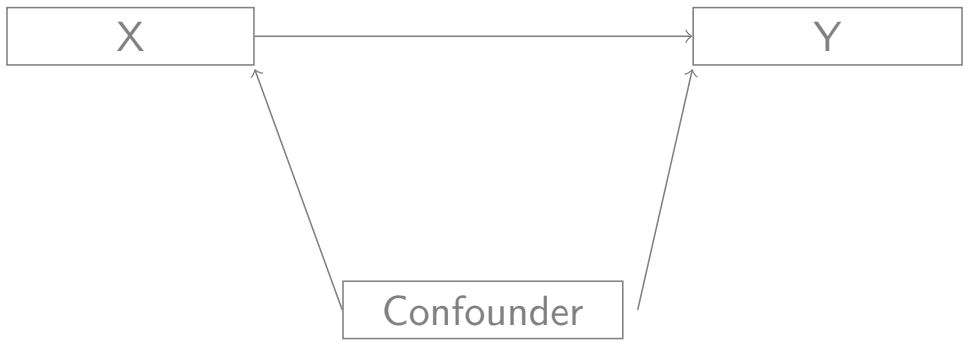
Literature

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

Powner LC (2014) *Empirical Research and Writing: A Political Science Student's Practical Guide*. CQ Press, 2014. 321 pp. Google Books: a1IvBQAAQBAJ.

Addendum: On confounders...

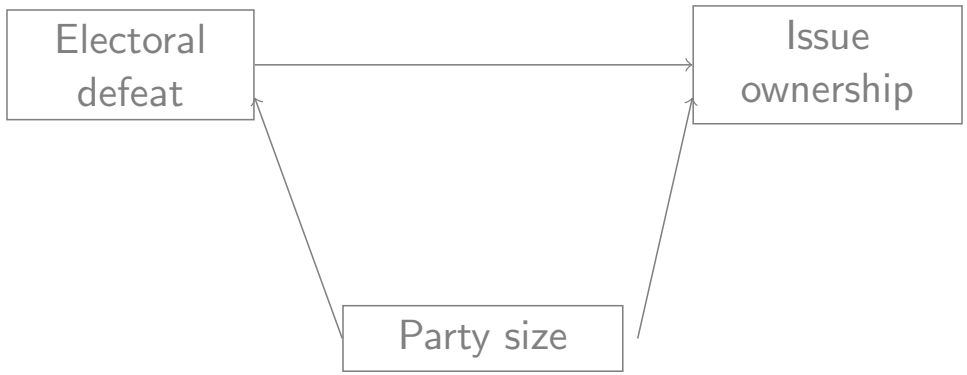
In the social reality, other factors may intervene with our causal relationship.



A **confounder** is a variable that influences both X and Y and leads to spurious relation.

Addendum: On confounders...

Example from Hobolt and Vries (2015)



What should you do about confounders? Include them in your model as **control variables**. So, essentially, you identify a dependent variable, an independent variable and control variable(s).