

# Political Parties in a Comparative Perspective

## Parties in Government

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## Last week/this week

Last week, we discussed why accommodating the far-right (might) fail.

**This week,**

- ...we speak about your ideas for your own research questions and how you can start a literature review on them
- we discuss how parties behave in (coalition) governments

## Preparation for the oral exam

1. This week: 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)

## Designing your own follow-up research...

We have now engaged with several aspects of political parties: from their origins to different functions (recruiting, interest articulation and aggregation, competition). Almost all of you have formulated questions in your essays or questions to the literature. Which question would you like to develop in your oral exam? Share on <https://flinga.fi/s/FR8BZVK>



## On formulating research questions

Different questions, different goals

1. Should parties follow mass opinion or should they guide mass opinion?
2. What would have happened to the Republican Party if they nominated Ted Cruz instead of Donald Trump in 2016?
3. How do political parties appeal to working class voters?
4. How does the candidate selection method affect women's representation in politics?

Which type of questions do these examples pose?

## On formulating research questions

1. Should parties follow mass opinion or should they guide mass opinion? → **Normative questions**
2. What would have happened to the Republican Party if they nominated Ted Cruz instead of Donald Trump in 2016? → **Hypothetical questions**
3. How do political parties appeal to working class voters? → **Descriptive questions**
4. How does the candidate selection method affect women's representation in politics? → **Causal-explanatory questions**

For your term paper, you should focus on the latter, **causal explanatory questions**.

# A good question

How does a good research question look like?

## A good question

Powner (2014) lists some **dos** and **don'ts** in drafting research questions.

### Dos

- start with a puzzle for which there's no good answer available (on a subject you know already)
- a question should have a question mark (e.g., *how...?* or *why...?*)
- highlights the outcome, not the causes (these will be nevertheless important later!)
- relate to theory

# A good question

## Don'ts

- ...have a clear, even tautological answer
- ...focus on a single case (do not use proper nouns, like states or persons in the research question, they should be more general)
- ...translate the relationship into empirical indicators in the question (e.g., talk about which positions parties take on migration policy not their score on the Manifesto Project migration indicators)

*Present the question to your neighbor, does it correspond to the do's and don'ts? If not, what should be changed?*

# How to do a literature review on your questions...

## Strategies for a review

- look into the reference list of an article which is close to yours
- scrutinize literature reviews (e.g., Annual Review of Political Science)
- use tools to search for other sources

# How to do a literature review on your questions...

There are different **tools to use** for a literature review:

- Google Scholar
- Web of Science
- University Library
- Elicit
- Connected Papers

*On your research question, identify relevant literature through one of these techniques/tools.*

# Relevance and Gap?

**Empirically:**



(a) How it started... ([Source](#))



(b) How it ended... ([Source](#))

## Relevance and Gap?

### Gap in theory:

Research on coalitions...

- disregards political communication
- focuses on coalition emergence and termination

There's a lack of research analysing how parties as coalition partners communicate their agenda during a legislative term.

## Argument

Coalitions open up a dilemma for political parties:

- as we discussed: parties can only survive if they are distinct (taking their niche in the political space)
- in coalitions: parties need to compromise

How can parties fulfil this dual burden? Voters need to be able to distinguish them but they need to govern successfully as well?

## Argument

They emphasize different issue priorities in their communication (*salience theory*). But not always:

- beginning of legislative cycle: parties come from campaigning, they want to signal voters they are still following their pledged issue priorities (high diversity)
- middle of legislative cycle: parties need to work together to implement their coalition agreement (low diversity)
- end of legislative cycle: campaigning starts again high diversity

## Data and Methods

- **Case:** Germany → multi-party system, governments very stable
- **Data:** >40,000 party press releases from 2000-2010
- **Indicators**
  1. **Dependent variable:** Issue diversity in press releases
  2. **Main independent variable:** Electoral cycle (time to elections)

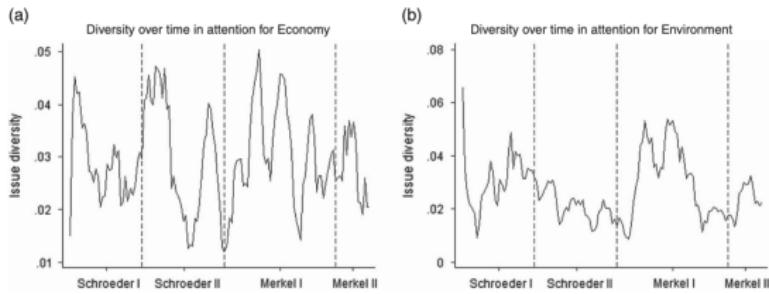
# Data and Methods

## Method

- They classify the press releases into policy areas (e.g., environment, economy, immigration, etc.)
- With 40k press releases, that would be a pretty tedious manual task
- Therefore, they use quantitative text analysis
  - idea: a model tries to detect similarities in all texts
  - outcome: each press release is assigned a topic from this automated analysis

*Which other method could one use? (@Fedor/Paul: Are press releases actually representative of where a party stands?)*

# Findings



**Figure:** Issue diversity on the economy and environment over time (Sagarzazu and Klüver 2017, p. 343)

# Findings

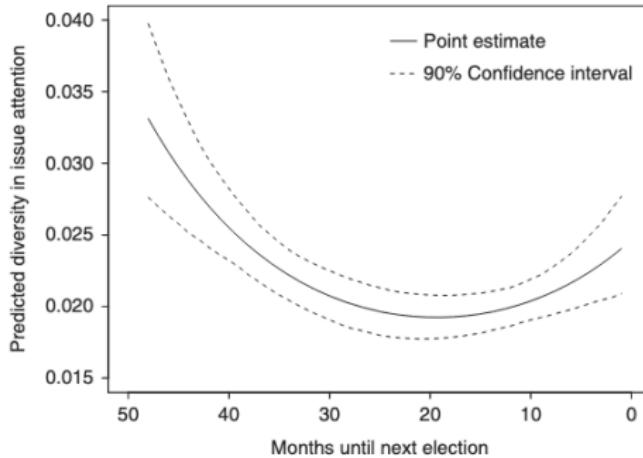


Figure: Average issue diversity over the electoral cycle (Sagarzazu and Klüver 2017, p. 345)

## Everything's said?

- **Robin:** Do parties lose believability and voter trust (authenticity) when switching from strong cooperation in the middle of a legislative term to discordance?
- **Vincent:** How robust/ representative is the U-shaped graph during major events, political shocks or other severe crisis, like war?
- **Madalena:** Does the strategic “unity” displayed by coalition parties in the middle of the electoral cycle actually reduce voter confusion, or does it make coalition partners electorally indistinguishable in the long run?

## To conclude...

- **Research Question:** How do coalition parties communicate in government?
- **Main Argument:** Parties emphasize their programmatic differences at different points of the electoral cycle.
- **Data and Method:** Issue diversity measure, obtained from text analysis of press releases of German parties; 2000-2010
- **Results:** Coalition parties talk about different issues at the beginning and at the end of a legislature.
- **Implications:** Parties navigate different functions, which may explain lacking compromise in coalitions.

## To prepare for the week after next one...

- After the Christmas break, we will continue working on your project idea, the session on the crisis of political parties is cancelled (questions and essays can still be submitted and will receive feedback)
- until the next session, think about your research question and develop an argument around it (make some notes to bring to the session):
  1. What are your **expectations**?
  2. What's the proposed **mechanism**?
  3. Are there any **scope conditions**?
  4. Which **assumptions** does your argument have?

Thank you for your attention!  
Any further questions?

## Literature

-  **Powner LC (2014)** *Empirical Research and Writing: A Political Science Student's Practical Guide*. CQ Press, 2014. 321 pp.  
Google Books: [a1IvBQAAQBAJ](#).
-  **Sagarzazu I and Klüver H (2017)** Coalition Governments and Party Competition: Political Communication Strategies of Coalition Parties. *Political Science Research and Methods* 5 (2), 333–349.