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Challenges to Democracy
Session 14: On writing a research paper

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Plan for today's session

1. expectations on term paper
2. how to develop a research question
3. ...and how to develop a theory on it

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On the expectations

There will be a document clarifying my expectations on your term
paper.

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Formal expectations

- submit by March 31: late submission leads to downgrading
- 6,000 words ($+/-$ 10 percent)

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Substantive expectations

- your term paper should relate to these points
  - research question and its relevance
  - relation to existing literature
  - theory (clarify its sub-components and concepts and specify hypotheses)
  - case selection
  - data + methods (which indicators do you use to measure your dependent and independent variables; where do you find these? what's your research method?)
  - outlook on strengths and contributions
  - you don't need to implement your analysis! you only pitch a potential design

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Substantive expectations

- are you able to justify your argument and design choices?

- can you think of alternative explanations?

- can you relate your research idea to the session we had in class?

- do you select a plausible design?

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Stylistic expectations

- clarity of writing
- smooth transition between paragraphs
- precision (e.g., when defining a concept)
- proper citation and referencing

Any open questions?

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Designing your own follow-up research...

Which question would you like to develop in your term paper?

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On formulating research questions

Different questions, different goals

1. Should citizens fight for democracy?
2. What would have happened to the Republican Party if they nominated Ted Cruz instead of Donald Trump in 2016?
3. How do citizens define democracy in their own words?
4. How does polarization affect tolerance of anti-democratic behavior?

Which type of questions do these examples pose?

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On formulating research questions

1. Should citizens fight for democracy? → **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 citizens define democracy in their own words? → Descriptive questions
4. How does polarization affect tolerance of anti-democratic behavior? → Causal-explanatory questions

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

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A good question

How does a good research question look like?

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A good question

Powner (2014, November 4) 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

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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 the quality of rule of law instead of the V-DEM indicator you use to measure it)

Does your RQ correspond to the do's and don'ts? If not, what should be changed?

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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

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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.

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A response to your question

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

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A response to your question

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

What's a theory?

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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

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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 term paper, you should follow the deductive approach (without analysing the data).

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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

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An example theory from our class

Polarization and anti-democratic behavior (Graham and Svolik 2020)

- RQ: Does polarization increase the support for anti-democratic political elites?
- Theory:
    - **Expectation**: Political polarization leads to growing acceptance of norm breaches.
    - **Mechanism**: The higher the policy-related costs of voting for another candidate, the more voters are incentivized to accept anti-democratic behavior.
    - **Assumptions**: Voters respond to party's programmatic portfolios. They put a weight/value on their policy preferences and democracy.
    - **Scope conditions**: Two-party system?

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A good theory

How does a good theory look like?

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A good theory

Good theories should fulfil different criteria theories (List and Valentini (2016, August 3) and here:

- *consistency*: a theory needs to be logically consistent
  - violation: if democratic peace theory expects democracies to be more peaceful, how can we explain that democracies pursue wars against non-democracies?
- *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

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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?*

Get back to your theoretical framework and refine it.

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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 polarized citizens are, the more likely they are willing to accept politicians pursuing anti-democratic behavior** → what's the dependent variable? what's the independent variable? which direction is hypothesized?

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From theory to hypotheses

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

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The next steps

- for your term paper: you should think of a preliminary RQ and theory, then schedule an office hour and we can discuss a suitable design
- deadline for term paper: 31 March
- in the longer run, consider taking other classes at our Chair
  - Prof. Daniel Bischof: 'Was wir von wissenschaftlichen Studien lernen können' and 'Einführung in die Vergleichende Politikwissenschaft'
  - Elena Leuschner: 'Applied Introduction to Data Science in R for Political Scientists'
  - myself: 'Text as data'

Any further questions?

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Graham, M. H., & Svolik, M. W. (2020).Democracy in America? Partisanship, Polarization, and the Robustness of Support for Democracy in the United States. *American Political Science Review, 114*(2), 392–409. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055420000052

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Powner, L. C. (2014, November 4). *Empirical Research and Writing: A Political Science Student's Practical Guide*. CQ Press.