



Department of Political Science
POLS 2000 Introduction to Political Science

Theory Building and Hypotheses

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1

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- Classic Approach to Theory
 - Begin with (Broad) Theory
 - e.g., Rational Choice Theory
 - Human Beings Maximize Utility
 - Derive Hypotheses from Theory
 - e.g, voters, legislators, judges, interest groups, etc.

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2

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- Rational Choice Theory, Cont.
 - e.g., Downs, *Economic Theory of Democracy* (1957)
 - Applied RCT to Voting Behavior
 - Turnout
 - Vote Choice

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3

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- RCT and Voter Turnout
 - Is It Irrational to Vote?
 - Downs, *ETD*: $R = PB - C$
 - Implication: Nobody Votes
 - And Yet People Do ...
 - Other Research:
 - Add a 'D' Term: $R = PB - C + D$

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4

RTC and Vote Choice
The Proximity Model

War in Iraq

Voter

Rotten Idea Super Idea

5/22/2006 5

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- Rational Choice Theory, Cont.
 - Downs, *Economic Theory of Democracy* (1957)
 - “Political man ... approaches every situation with one eye on the gains to be had, the other on costs, a delicate ability to balance them, and a strong desire to follow wherever rationality leads him.”

5/22/2006 6

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- Rational Choice Theory, Cont
- e.g., Mayhew, *Congress: The Electoral Connection* (1974)
 - Applied Rational Choice Theory to Congress
 - Proximate Goal is Reelection
 - Congress Designed to Facilitate Reelected
 - Pork-Barrel Politics
 - Official Resources (e.g., Frank)
 - Constituent Service (Casework)

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- Rational Choice Theory, Cont
 - Mayhew, Cont.
 - “If a group of planners at down and tried to design a pair of American national assemblies with the goal of serving members’ reelection needs year in and year out, they would be hard pressed to improve on what exists.”

5/22/2006 8



- Theory, Cont.
 - Two Classifications or Approaches
 - Ideographic vs. Nomothetic
 - Induction vs. Deduction

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9



- Theory, Cont.
 - Characteristics of Good Theory
 - Simple ('Elegant')
 - Predictive
 - 'Important'

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10



- Hypothesis
 - Expected Association Between Variables
 - Dependent Variable
 - Independent Variable
 - e.g., Negative Campaign Ads → Lower Turnout
 - Expected Change in Variable Over Time
 - e.g., Trust in SC Lower After Controversial Decision (e.g., Bush v. Gore)

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11



- Hypothesis, Cont.
 - Characteristics of 'Good' Hypotheses
 - Empirical and Non-normative
 - Face Valid (Make Sense)
 - Directional
 - e.g., Positive: Negative Ads INCREASE Turnout
 - e.g., Negative: Negative Ads DECREASE Turnout

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12



- Characteristics of 'Good' Hypotheses, Cont.
 - Falsifiable
 - e.g., "The Universe is Expanding"
 - NOT "God Created the Process of Evolution"

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13



- Characteristics of 'Good' Hypotheses, Cont.
 - Testable
 - e.g., "Amicus Briefs Submitted by Interest Groups Influence Like-Minded Justices to Adopt the Positions of the Groups in SC Decisions"
 - NOT "In Deliberations, Justices Persuade Like-Minded Justices to Adopt Their Positions in SC Decisions"

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14



- Characteristics of 'Good' Hypotheses, Cont.
 - Specific
 - e.g., "In Writing Decisions, SC Justices Adopt Arguments from Like-Minded Interest Groups."
 - NOT "Amicus Briefs Influence SC Justices' Arguments" (Too Broad)

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15