



האוניברסיטה  
העברית  
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THE HEBREW  
UNIVERSITY  
OF JERUSALEM

# Research Methods in the Study of Europe and Germany (54699)

## Lesson 2

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# Structure of the Class

1. **The Scientific Method** - What do we “know” and “how” do we know? The meaning of science (versus art?).
2. **Theory** - Link with ontology, epistemology, methodology, empirics.
3. **The Scientific Process** and its limitations.
4. **Positivism vs. other approaches** - Interpretativists; Constructivists; Normativists/Critics.



# The Scientific Method



# How do we “know” as scientists?

- We believe that we can, in principle, reach an objective understanding of phenomena in the human world.
- We accumulate knowledge about that topic through observations, measurements, data analysis.
- We make claims about how individuals / societies / countries act concerning that phenomenon.
- We examine the arguments according to observable evidence that supports them (“reliable argument”).





# Characteristics of the scientific approach?

1. VERIFICATION
2. FALSIFIABILITY
3. FACTS-BASED
4. TRANSMISSIBLE [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j7K3s\\_vi\\_1Y](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j7K3s_vi_1Y)
5. CUMULATIVE
6. GENERALIZATION
7. EXPLANATORY
8. PARSIMONY



# Ex. How do European populists mold FP?



# Theory



# Theory

- Theory - an array of variables that describes & explains a phenomenon

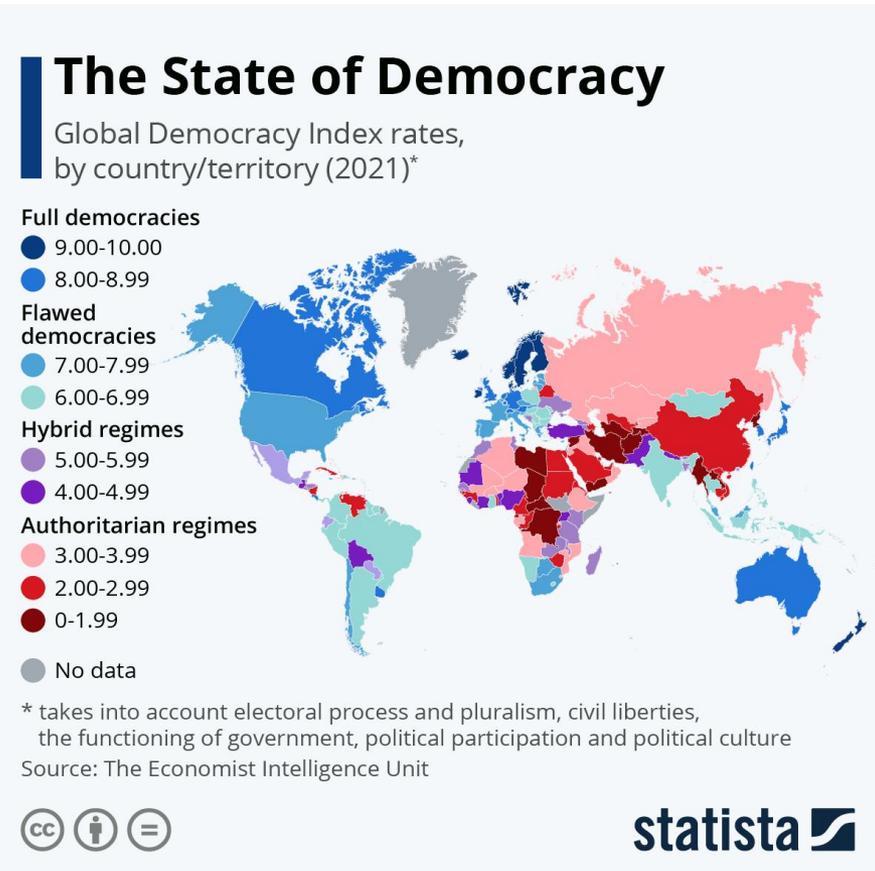
*"A set of terms, definitions, and claims that represent a view of a certain phenomenon by presenting the relationships between the terms in order to explain and predict the phenomenon"* (Marom)

- Specific predictions emerge from theory that can be tested.
- The more the evidence supports the predictions, the more the theory is confirmed.



# Example from IR: democratic peace theory

- Democracies do not fight each other, because:
  - In such countries, conflicts are resolved by compromise and agreement
  - Check and balance mechanisms within the countries and need for public legitimization “cools the flames”



# What makes it a theory?

- From the theory, **predictions** emerge, which can be verified or refuted.
- The theory is based on **causality** (IV affects DV).
- The theory is not normative.
- The theory strives for generalization.
- The theory is relatively simple.

So... how can this theory be tested?



# The Scientific Process



# The Scientific Process

- Developing an idea for research - PUZZLE
- Elaborate a question to answer - RESEARCH QUESTION.
- Consolidate expected responses - HYPOTHESES
- Design research & define strategy - METHODOLOGY
- DATA COLLECTION & ANALYSIS - are findings consistent with hypothesis?
- CONCLUSIONS - Change and expansion? Is it possible to confirm the hypothesis? Make changes? Further research?

**LIMITATIONS...? Contingency? Determinism?**



# Positivism vs. “Others”



# Positivism vs. “Other” approaches

- **THE INTERPRETATIVE APPROACH**

(We are the objects & cannot be studied objectively)

- **THE CONSTRUCTIVIST APPROACH**

(We mutually construct the phenomena through our interactions, norms, identities, & practices)

- **THE NORMATIVE APPROACH**

(We should be interested in what it should be, not what is it)



# Next Class

- **Lesson 3)**
  - Finding research puzzles,
  - Defining independent and dependent variables,
  - Writing research questions,
  - Suggesting hypothesis.
  - Causal and constitutive mechanisms.

**FIRST ASSIGNMENT!**



# Research Puzzles

- When selecting a topic, we think about how to turn it into a research puzzle.
- Many interesting topics, but much less relevant research puzzles.
- Research puzzles are complex, limiting, but allow to advance to the next step.
- Empirical studies look for patterns in the human world and try to understand them, assuming that there are certain regularities, connections between phenomena.



# Research Puzzles

- Most of the time the puzzle stems from existing information
  - Something that intrigues you.
  - News, Articles.
  - Courses.
- Puzzles usually start with something incomprehensible, unexpected, unknown.
- But they can also stem from theories: a theory that seems problematic / limited to you.



# Thanks!

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