

A *hypothesis* is a testable statement with an *independent variable* (cause) and a *dependent variable* (effect). Your variables are *concepts* that you need to *operationalize* in order to conduct an *empirical* test (i.e., one that involves *data*, i.e., a collection of observations, and analysis of the data) of your hypothesis. We operationalize concepts by identifying characteristics of them we would see in the real world so that we can *apply* them in our analysis of that world. For instance, here is a hypothesis:

The more economically developed a country is, the more likely it is to be democratic. The concepts are *economic development*, which is the independent variable, and *democraticness*, which is the dependent variable.

Conceptually, economic development refers to the wealth (or impoverishment) in an economy and democraticness refers to the political freedom and openness of government of a nation. To operationalize them, we could use GDP/capita as an indicator of economic development and we could use the presence (mark such a country a “1”) or absence (mark such a country a “0”) as our indicator of democraticness.

Now, we can test our hypotheses by examining the relationship between our indicator of economic development and our indicator of democracy.

We can operationalize concepts with qualitative data as well. For example, one might operationalize "economic development" with a narrative on information-technology yuppies in [Bangalore](#). One might operationalize "democracy" by discussing the increasing curtailment of press freedom through crackdowns by Russian president, Vladimir Putin.

Political scientists analyze qualitative and quantitative data in their tests, i.e., *verification*, of hypotheses. Verification of hypotheses is the means for developing *theories* on how the world of politics works.