

## **QUALITATIVE METHODOLOGY AND COMPARATIVE POLITICS**

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## QUALITATIVE METHODOLOGY AND COMPARATIVE POLITICS

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Beginning in the 1990s, the field of comparative politics saw an unprecedented wave of publications concerning qualitative and small-N methods (Munck 1998). These publications built on earlier work on comparative methodology dating to the 1970s (e.g., Lipjhart 1971, 1975; Przeworski and Tuene 1970; Smelser 1973, 1976). However, whereas the earlier work often viewed qualitative methodology as advancing a set of “last-resort” techniques that should be employed only when other methods (e.g., statistical methods) are not appropriate, the current work emphasizes the distinctive advantages of qualitative research. This new emphasis corresponds to research practices in the field. Students of comparative politics frequently turn to qualitative methods *instead of* or in *combination with* alternative techniques because they believe that qualitative methods are essential for addressing many substantive questions of interest.

Today, scholars using qualitative methods explore all of the major substantive topics in comparative politics. For evidence, one can point to influential work across the any of the key areas of the field: democracy and authoritarianism (e.g., Collier 1999; Linz and Stepan 1996; Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens 1992); economic development (e.g., Amsden 2003; Evans 1995; Kohli 2004); state formation (e.g., Downing 1992; Ertman 1997; Tilly 1990; Waldner 1999); nationalism and ethnicity (e.g., Lustick 1993; Marx 1998; Varshney 2002); violence and state collapse (e.g., Reno 1998; Boone 2003), social revolutionary change (e.g., Colburn 1994; Goodwin 2001; Parsa 2000); social movements (e.g., Goldstone 2003; McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001;

Tarrow 1994); electoral and party systems (e.g., Collier and Collier 1991; Kitschelt 1994); and social policy (e.g., Esping-Anderson 1990; Hicks 1999; Skocpol 1992). Although this listing only scratches the surface of huge literatures, it does point to the leading place of qualitative methods in the field.

Studies that are associated with alternative methodologies also suggest the centrality of qualitative methodology. For example, rational choice works often draw on qualitative methods to help formulate assumptions and test hypotheses. This is especially true in the field of comparative politics, where analysts often employ rational actor assumptions in relatively non-mathematical ways to generate hypotheses that apply to a small number of cases (e.g., Bates 1981; Geddes 2003; Laitin 1999; see also Munck 2001). Indeed, the recent project of “analytic narratives” is an explicit attempt to meld many of the virtues of qualitative research with the assumptions of rational choice theory (Bates et al. 1998). Likewise, statistical work in comparative politics increasingly uses qualitative case studies as a supplementary mode of causal inference (e.g., Huber and Stephens 2001; Lieberman 2003; Swank 2002; see also Lieberman forthcoming). In fact, in some of these multimethod studies, the qualitative case studies provide the main leverage for causal inference.

The ascendance of qualitative methodology has been accompanied by excellent synthetic articles that discuss different strands and various proposals related to the comparative method (e.g., Collier 1991; Ragin, Berg-Schollosser, and de Muer 1996; Munck 1998). Yet the publication of no less than 10 major books on qualitative methodology in the last five years has made it difficult for scholars of comparative politics to keep pace with rapid developments in this field. These new books include: *Time Matters: On Theory and Method*, by Andrew Abbott (2001); *Rethinking Social*

*Inquiry: Diverse Tools, Shared Standards*, edited by Henry E. Brady and David Collier (2004); *Paradigms and Sand Castles: Theory Building and Research Design in Comparative Politics*, by Barbara Geddes (2003); *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*, by Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett (2005); *Social Science Methodology: A Criterial Framework*, by John Gerring (2001); *Social Science Concepts: A User's Guide*, by Gary Goertz (2006); *Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences*, edited by James Mahoney and Dietrich Rueschemeyer (2003); *Politics in Time: History, Institutions, and Social Analysis*, by Paul Pierson (2004); and *Fuzzy-Set Social Science*, by Charles C. Ragin (2000). In addition, many new articles on qualitative methodology have been published over the last few years, including in the top political science journals with general readerships.

Given this outpouring of new work, it is helpful to bring together recent insights and debates about qualitative methodology in comparative politics. This essay attempts to do this by examining the contributions of qualitative methodology across two broad areas: theory development and theory testing. In adopting these emphases, I focus especially on aspects of qualitative methodology that are related to causal analysis, though I also consider some work in the area of interpretive analysis as well.

## **THEORY DEVELOPMENT**

In other subfields of political science, researchers may commonly work within well-defined general research programs that provide clear base-level assumptions for formulating testable theories. For example, as Bennett and Elman (this volume?) suggest, the field of international relations is marked by intellectual progress across Lakotosian research programs such as neorealism and constructivism (see also Elman and

Elman 2003). But in comparative politics, analysts usually do not draw on such well-defined research programs. Instead, they find theoretical inspiration in a wide variety of general orientations – strategic choice models, state-centric approaches, patron-client models, theories of international dependency, and many more – that emphasize certain key causal factors but that lack the all-encompassing generality that we normally associate with a Lakotosian research program. In fact, comparative analysts – whether rational choice theorists, structuralists, or culturalists – quite frequently combine different elements of diverse research orientations to formulate their theories. In the process, they may develop novel theoretical ideas that may become part of the overall toolkit of resources available in the field.

Because analysts of comparative politics tend to work outside of singular and overarching theoretical programs, they are especially likely to begin their research without well-developed and readily testable hypotheses. Methodological tools for developing testable hypotheses therefore are of great utility to comparativists who seek to move from research topics to sets of specific propositions. Quantitative methodology is relatively silent about the procedures analysts might follow to formulate the sets of hypotheses that constitute testable theories; for example, graduate students in comparative politics do not learn the major techniques of theory formulation in their courses on statistics. By contrast, qualitative methodology offers concrete tools for framing research questions and formulating testable hypotheses. It also provides tools for conceptualization, measurement, and case selection. Taken together, these sources of leverage help make qualitative methodology the site of much of the most exciting theory development in comparative politics.

### **Novel Hypothesis Formulation**

Perhaps no one disagrees that over the years qualitative researchers have formulated some of the most interesting hypotheses in the field of comparative politics. We only need to think of our most provocative and recognizable propositions, such as Michel's (1911/1999) iron law asserting that "Who says organization says oligarchy," Moore's (1966, p. X) claim that "No bourgeoisie, no democracy," and Skocpol's (1979) structural argument that "revolutions are not made, they come."<sup>1</sup> However, what is often less recognized is the role of qualitative data collection – interviews, participant observation, immersion in secondary sources, and archival research – in the development of novel hypotheses. Consider, for example, Scott's famous book, *Weapons of the Weak* (1985). Scott developed his critique of the Gramscian hypothesis of false consciousness and formulated an alternative theory of everyday forms of peasant resistance above all through the close inspection of and engagement with a particular village (designated as Sedaka) in Malaysia during two years of field research. As Scott makes abundantly clear (pp. xvii-xix), the major conceptual innovations of his book grew out of observations and participation in this village. Indeed, without case-intensive knowledge of actual villagers, it would have been nearly impossible for him to learn how non-rebellious peasants recognize quite well their "objective" interests and act on them accordingly. The book thus stands as an excellent example of what Collier (1999) calls "extracting new ideas at close range."

Writings on qualitative methodology – both old and new – have taken steps toward formally codifying the procedures involved in generating new hypotheses. Perhaps the most widely discussed technique is a "deviant case study" design (Lipjhart 1971; Eckstein 1975; Emigh 1997; George and Bennett 2005). Deviant cases are observations with outcomes that do not conform to theoretical predictions. Qualitative

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<sup>1</sup> Skocpol (1979, 17) cites Wendell Phillips in making this claim.

analysts frequently study these cases intensely to understand the reasons why they defy theory, often in the process discovering novel hypotheses that can be tested more generally.<sup>2</sup> Qualitative deviant case studies in comparative politics include very well-known and theoretically innovative works, such as Lipset, Trow, and Coleman's *Union Democracy* (1956), Lijphart's *The Politics of Accommodation* (1968), Johnson's *MITI and the Japanese Miracle* (1983), and Skocpol's *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers* (1992). While deviant case analysis almost always involves close qualitative inspection, it can be creatively combined with quantitative research. In particular, regression analysis can be used to identify outlier cases that are then appraised using qualitative methods (see Coppedge [2002] and Lieberman [forthcoming] for discussions and examples).

Comparison of cases is vital to theory development, and qualitative approaches to comparison are well suited for the task. Qualitative analysts juxtapose multiple features of cases with one another, including features that they discover in the course of case-study analysis or that emerge as salient in the process of matching patterns across the cases (Campbell 1975; Ragin 1987). In this way, almost as a by-product of contextualized comparisons, new variables may be formulated and introduced as parts of explanatory hypotheses. By contrast, while statistical approaches certainly also systematically compare aspects of cases, they lack an obvious means of generating new hypotheses through the discovery of new variables. As George and Bennett (2005, 21) put it, "Unless statistical researchers do their own archival work, interviews, or face-to-face surveys with open-ended questions in order to measure the values of the variables in their model, they have no unproblematic inductive means of identifying left-out

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<sup>2</sup> As George and Bennett (2005, 114) note, "The most general kind of finding from a deviant case is the specification of a new concept, variable, or theory regarding a causal mechanism that affects more than one type of case and possibly even all instances of a phenomenon."

variables.” That is, unless statistical researchers turn to qualitative research of some kind, they are likely to include only those variables present from the start of the research.

Finally, qualitative research is a leading site of hypothesis creation in comparative politics because it facilitates the study of over-time data and a concern with temporal processes. Especially in the field of comparative-historical analysis, researchers take seriously the unfolding of events over time, and they often formulate new hypotheses that stress how the temporal intersection or duration of variables is decisive for outcomes (Mahoney and Rueschemeyer 2003; see also Abbott 2001; Pierson 2004). It thus no accident that qualitative researchers have been at the forefront of developing techniques to analyze critical junctures and path-dependent processes of change (Lipset and Rokkan 1967; Collier and Collier 1991; Mahoney 2000; Pierson 2004; Thelen 2003). These techniques, in turn, have inspired some of the most interesting theories of long-run political change in the field, such as Collier and Collier’s (1991) hypotheses about the effects of labor incorporation periods on long-run electoral dynamics in Latin America; Marx’s (1998) contention that the Civil War and Boer War in the United States and South Africa triggered coalitional patterns that forged reactionary racial orders for decades to come; and Thelen’s (2004) argument that the long-run evolution of the German Handicraft Protection Law of 1897, originally designed to shore support among a reactionary artisanal class, was critical to the development of contemporary Germany’s vocational training system.

### **Concepts and Measurement**

Concepts are central to theoretical innovation. The discovery of a new explanation or the development of a new research puzzle often goes hand in hand with conceptual formulation and reformulation. In the field of comparative politics,

qualitative researchers probably have been the scholars most persistently concerned with the definition (as opposed to quantitative operationalization) of the field's key concepts. We see this, for example, by considering the range of articles by qualitative methodologists analyzing particular concepts: corporatism (Collier 1995), democracy (Schmitter and Karl 1991; Collier and Levitsky 1997), ideology (Gerring 1997), institutionalization (Levitsky 1998), peasant (Kurtz 2000), political culture (Gerring 2003), revolution (Kotowski 1984), and structure (Sewell 1992). Moreover, through typological analysis (Elman 2005; George and Bennett 2005), qualitative researchers routinely develop conceptual distinctions that play a major role in driving theories of comparative politics. These typologies include, to name only a few, Linz and Stephan's (1996) specification of types of regimes (e.g., democratic, authoritarian, totalitarian), Esping-Anderson's (1990) types of welfare states (e.g., Christian, liberal, social-democratic), and Evan's (1995) typology of states (e.g., predatory, developmental, intermediary).

Methodological writings have uncovered some of the reasons why there is an affinity between qualitative research and conceptual development. One answer is the fact that qualitative researchers match background understandings of preconceived concepts with fine-grained evidence from their cases. This process of matching, which often proceeds through many rounds of iteration, stimulates new conceptual understandings. For example, O'Donnell's (1973; 1979; 1994) creation of various new concepts over the years – bureaucratic-authoritarianism, *lo popular*, brown areas – has always occurred in conjunction with the close qualitative examination of actual cases. To capture a changing political reality in Latin America, O'Donnell has found it essential to invent new

concepts – something quite different than devising new quantitative measures for existing concepts.

A growing methodological literature explicitly on concepts also has promoted conceptual innovation in qualitative research. The starting point of this literature is Sartori's (1970; 1984) work, which explores concept formation through "checklist" definitions that treat conceptual attributes as individually necessary and jointly sufficient for conceptual membership. Sartori's insights about an inverse relationship between a concept's intension and extension provides the basis for further insights concerning "conceptual stretching" and the broader semantic fields of concepts. More recently, Collier and collaborators (Collier and Mahon 1993; Collier and Levitsky 1997) have drawn on ideas developed in cognitive science and linguistic philosophy to explore the family resemblance approach to concepts and tools for analyzing "radial" concepts (see also Lakoff 1987). Additional approaches available to comparative researchers include Gerring's (2003) "min-max strategy" and Goertz's (2006) major new work built around necessary and sufficient conditions.

This literature has made students of comparative politics increasingly self-conscious about how they use and develop concepts. For instance, consider work on the political economy of capitalism. Recent studies of the transition to market economies in Eastern Europe (e.g., Ekiert and Hanson 2003), market adjustment in Latin America (e.g., Weyland 2002), and economic transition in advanced capitalist nations (e.g., Kitschelt, Lange, Marks, and Stephens 1999) have all used concepts with a high level of methodological sophistication (including many citations to the leading methodological work). Scholars in each of these research areas routinely build on the previous conceptual work of others, such that one can identify real knowledge accumulation. This

methodological self-consciousness further has helped scholars guard against the danger of too much conceptual innovation, in which analysts unreflectively propose new labels for concepts that already exist.

The close examination of cases in qualitative research further helps comparative analysts achieve measurement validity, a goal shared by scholars of all orientations in political science. At the most basic level, qualitative research is essential to good measurement because, as Brady (2004, 63) notes, “qualitative comparisons are the basic building blocks of any approach to measurement.” Moreover, measurement validity is enhanced when operational definitions and indicators can be refined in light of detailed case knowledge. For example, in their famous comparison of famines and poverty in China and India, Dreze and Sen (1989, 207-08) drew on their case expertise to question statistical measures of GNP per capita which suggested that China grew at a much faster rate than India before 1980. In turn, their alternative measure of GNP per capita refuted the idea that China’s better social performance was rooted in higher growth. As this example suggests, qualitative researchers are especially capable of assessing the meaning of indicators across diverse contexts. To cite another example: it is probably no accident that a qualitative researcher uncovered early programs of social provision in the United States that call into question the extent to which this country really was a social spending laggard (Skocpol 1992).

Finally, scholars who pursue qualitative research are less likely to find their work subject to “data-induced measurement error,” in which inaccurate, partial, or misleading secondary sources lead to the poor coding of cases (Bowman, Lehoucq, and Mahoney 2005). The reason once again is the case-oriented nature of qualitative research: by learning a great deal about each of their cases, qualitative researchers tend to avoid

simple coding errors that are common in large-N, statistical data bases. For example, leading quantitative data sets measuring democracy seriously miscode the Central American countries by relying on superficial data sources that contain elementary errors in their characterization of these countries. The codes generated by case-oriented, qualitative research for the Central American countries are strikingly different (Bowman, Lehoucq, and Mahoney 2005). The remedy to data-induced error is not more intense quantification or the development of more precise indicators; rather, the solution is learning more about specific cases, which typically will mean pursuing qualitative research.

### **Populations and Case Selection**

Almost all theories in the social sciences are designed to apply to some cases and not others; social-science theories are thus bound by “scope conditions” that put limits on their generality. As a result, specifying the scope of a theory must be viewed as a major part of theory development itself. In recent years, qualitative methodologists have begun to develop a set of best practices for researchers to follow when formulating this part of their theories (Collier and Mahoney 1996; Ragin 2000; Mahoney and Goertz 2004; George and Bennett 2005; Goertz and Mahoney 2006).

These methodological writings in many ways were developed in response to criticisms pertaining to case selection in small-N research. It is therefore useful to briefly consider the critiques before turning to the positive contribution of qualitative methodology. Achen and Snidal (1989), Geddes (2003), and King, Keohane, and Verba (1994) all suggest that selection bias in small-N studies produces serious error that can be

avoided in good large-N, quantitative research. The heart of criticism is that qualitative studies “select on the dependent variable” and thereby fail to study samples with the full range of variation on this variable. Indeed, qualitative studies sometimes select only cases with the same value on the dependent variable, frequently an extreme value (e.g., exceptionally high growth rates), and thus from the perspective of mainstream statistical analysis cannot identify the causal factors that differentiate cases with this value from those without it. In specifically the field of comparative politics, Geddes (2003) has been especially forceful in arguing that selection on the dependent variable is a major problem in well-known works on economic growth, social revolution, and inflation.

One response of qualitative researchers to these concerns is to emphasize how within-case analysis, a technique of causal assessment discussed below, is not subject to the same kinds of selection issues that arise in large-N, regression studies (see Collier, Mahoney, and Seawright 2004). Likewise, qualitative methodologists may stress how the absence of variation on the dependent variable is not a methodological fallacy for studies that analyze necessary causes (Dion 1998; Braumoeller and Goertz 2000; also see below). As a result, qualitative analysts may be convinced that concerns about selection bias in their research are a fundamental misapplication of ideas from regression analysis.

However, another response, more relevant in the present context, involves the ways in which qualitative researchers constitute populations and establish the scope of their theories. Most basically, qualitative analysts often believe that samples drawn from large populations are heterogeneous vis-à-vis the theories that interest them. Qualitative researchers therefore choose to locate smaller populations of cases that exhibit sufficient similarity to be meaningfully compared to one other. In particular, they attempt to ensure that their populations of cases meet the assumptions of “causal

homogeneity” and “conceptual homogeneity” that are required for most modes of causal inference in the social sciences (see King, Keohane, and Verba 1994; Ragin 2000; Goertz and Mahoney 2006).

The absence of homogeneity – i.e., heterogeneity – produces instability in causal inference, and it can be generated in various ways. It may be that, in cases outside an initial context, unknown or unanalyzable variables are present that produce unstable causal inferences. Or the problem could be stability in the measurement of key variables across diverse contexts. Indeed, the very meaning of the units being analyzed (e.g., states) may change across temporal and spatial contexts, thereby generating heterogeneity and unstable estimates of the effects of causes.

The methodological challenge of establishing an appropriate scope therefore involves identifying a population of cases that avoids problems such as omitted variable bias, incorrectly specified relationships among included independent variables, and unstable measurement across units and variables (Goertz and Mahoney 2006). While the case-intensive knowledge of qualitative research does not fully solve these problems, it does seem to help considerably. For example, as already suggested, case-intensive knowledge helps analysts achieve measurement stability across units and thus enables them to make better decisions about where to draw the line when constituting homogeneous populations. Likewise, by virtue of developing contextualized knowledge about each of their cases, qualitative researchers are less likely to exclude key variables or misspecify the interrelations among included variables. On this point, it is worth noting that complex causal theories – such as path-dependent arguments (Pierson 2000), two-level theories (Goertz and Mahoney 2005), and theories of multiple causation (Ragin 1987) – are relatively common in qualitative studies and relatively rare in quantitative

studies (see also Hall 2003). This is true because qualitative researchers learn more about their cases, they come to increasingly appreciate the complexity of causal relationships in those cases. For instance, in the absence of her deep historical knowledge of France, Russia, and China, one can scarcely imagine Skocpol (1979) being able to hypothesize about the complex ways in which international pressure, dominant-class political leverage, and agrarian backwardness combine to produce state breakdown. Analogously, Collier and Collier (1991) surely would not have been able to hypothesize about the path-dependent linkages between labor incorporation and party-system regimes in Latin America without knowing a great deal about the modern histories of the Latin American countries.

The upshot of these considerations is that qualitative researchers often have good methodological reasons for treating a small number of cases as the full population about which they seek to generalize. If extending beyond this population risks introducing causal heterogeneity, they may be better off with the small sample. Moreover, qualitative researchers often are in a strong position to make suggestions about the kind of modifications that would be necessary to extend their causal theories to additional cases. For example, Skocpol (1979) suggests that extending her theory of social revolution beyond France, Russia, and China would require introducing the complexities of colonial legacies and taking into consideration the effects of economic dependence. However, she maintains that her structural perspective – which emphasizes state organization, international pressures, and community solidarity networks among lower-class actors – would still be a highly fruitful approach for analysis.

## **THEORY TESTING**

In comparative politics, theories are partly developed from and tested with empirical cases. In good large-N statistical work, the fact that cases are used both to develop and test theories is not usually considered a problem because the specific cases from which the theory is developed do not constitute the full population of cases against which the theory is tested. Although less recognized, the same is true in good qualitative research: the observations from cases that lead to theory formulation are not the same ones against which the theory is explicitly tested. In writing about single-case historical studies, Rueschemeyer (2003, 318) makes this frequently misunderstood point quite clearly:

“case studies can do more than generate theoretical ideas. They can test theoretical propositions as well, and they can offer persuasive causal explanations. Skepticism about this claim rests ultimately on the mistaken identification of a single case with a single observation. Good historical analysis that is analytically oriented goes through frequent iterations of confronting explanatory propositions with many data points. If this confrontation does not proceed with the quantitative use of standardized items but typically works in a qualitative way, examining many different implications of the explanatory propositions entertained, it nevertheless involves many empirical checks. And it gains its credibility precisely from the fit between the theoretical ideas and their complex implications, on the one hand, and best empirical evidence, on the other. In this confrontation of theoretical claims with empirical evidence, analytical history enjoys two advantages compared to all but the most exceptional quantitative research: it permits a much more direct and frequently repeated interplay between theoretical development and data, and it allows for a closer matching of conceptual intent and empirical evidence.”

This section elaborates Rueschemeyer’s argument by examining techniques of theory testing that are now commonly used by qualitative analysts of comparative politics. The section begins with an exploration of techniques of within-case analysis, then considers strategies of cross-case analysis, and finally discusses the interrelationship between the two.

## **Within-Case Analysis**

Within-case analysis is a mode of causal inference in which researchers test hypotheses in light of multiple features of their cases. The technique has long been discussed in the field of qualitative methodology (e.g., Barton and Lazarsfeld 1969; Campbell 1975; George and McKeown 1985), but in recent years there has been an intensification of effort to codify its procedures. For example, within-case analysis is featured in Collier, Brady, and Seawright's (2004, 12, 252-58) discussion of a "causal-process observation," defined as "an insight or piece of data that provides information about context or mechanism" (p. 252). Likewise, George and Bennett's (2005, chap. 10) new discussion of process-tracing develops considerably the tools used "to identify the intervening causal process – the causal chain and causal mechanism – between an independent variable (or variables) and the outcome of the dependent variable" (p. 206). Although different authors use different labels to designate within-case analysis,<sup>3</sup> all describe techniques in which hypotheses are evaluated by elucidating intervening processes and other observable implications of arguments.

Perhaps the most common use of within-case analysis in comparative politics involves efforts to locate the intervening mechanisms linking a hypothesized explanatory variable to an outcome. These efforts help analysts who work with a small number of cases avoid mistaking a spurious correlation for a causal association: when clear mechanisms linking a presumed explanatory variable and outcome variable are identified, one's confidence that the relationship really is causal is increased; if such mechanisms cannot be identified, one's confidence about causality is challenged. For example, Luebbert uses process tracing to eliminate the "Moore-Gerschenkron thesis," which holds

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<sup>3</sup> See Blalock (1961: 9); Elster (1989: 4-7); Hall (2003: 391-95); Hedstrom and Swedberg (1998: 7-11); Goldthorpe (2000: 149-51); Sewell (1996: 262-65).

that fascist regimes result from the presence of a labor-repressive landed elite that is able to draw substantial lower-class rural support for fascism (Luebbert 1991: 308-309).

Although there is a matching between the presence/absence of a repressive landed elite and the presence/absence of fascism in the European cases, Luebbert (1991) suggests that the mechanisms through which this specific factor supposedly produces fascism are not supported by the historical record. Thus, lower-class rural support for fascism was generally not present in areas where a landed elite predominated. Likewise, the evidence shows that the landed elites who could deliver large numbers of votes did not usually support fascism (Luebbert 1991, 308-309). In short, despite the matching, Luebbert rejects the Moore-Gerschenkron hypothesis because it is not validated by process tracing.

Qualitative researchers may use within-case analysis in ways other than the analysis of intervening processes. For example, a given hypothesis might suggest several auxiliary hypotheses that can be tested in conjunction with the main hypothesis of interest. Likewise, a given hypothesis might suggest other specific outcomes that should be present if the hypothesis is correct. A nice illustration is found in King, Keohane, and Verba's (1994: 11-12) discussion of the meteorite collision theory of the extinction of dinosaurs. One observable implication of this theory concerns the presence of iridium in a particular layer of the earth's crust. The hypothesized iridium is not an intervening mechanism linking the meteorite collision to the dinosaur extinction. Rather, it is a separate piece of data that gives us confidence that, in fact, a meteorite collision did occur when it was hypothesized to occur. It is one of several observable implications of the theory (e.g., another would be the presence of a huge meteorite crater) that can be used to test it. These kinds of observable implications in effect make predictions about other

outcomes or relationships that should be present; they are not intervening processes but deduced facts whose existence make a given hypothesis much more plausible.

An example from comparative politics is Marx's (1998) study of racial orders in the United States, South Africa, and Brazil. Marx seeks to explain why the United States and South Africa experienced highly repressive racial domination, whereas Brazil was marked by more significant racial toleration. His cross-case argument emphasizes the role of intra-white divisions. Where whites were divided, as in the U.S. and South Africa following the Civil War and Boer War, nationalist loyalty and white unity were forged through the construction of systems of racial domination that systematically excluded blacks. Where no major intra-white cleavage developed, as in Brazil, whites did not have to achieve unity through exclusion and thus a much higher degree of racial harmony could develop.

Marx supports this argument using within-case evidence. Some of the evidence involves examining intervening mechanisms and thus follows the process-tracing approach discussed above. Yet additional evidence takes the form of facts that confirm implicit and explicit predictions about other things that should be true if this argument is valid. For instance, Marx suggests that, if intra-white conflict really is decisive, efforts to enhance black status should produce increased white conflict along the North-South fault line in the U.S. and between British and Afrikaners in South Africa. By contrast, progressive racial reforms should not generate similar intra-white divisions in Brazil. His historical narrative then backs up this proposition. Likewise, if intra-white divisions really are the key, then Marx argues that we should see evidence that more progressive white factions view political stability as more important than racial equality. Again, he finds much support for this argument. Overall, he suggests that it is highly unlikely that

the auxiliary facts supportive of his argument are simply accidental; rather, he contends that they are symptoms of the validity of his main thesis.

### **Cross-Case Analysis**

In qualitative research, hypotheses are also often evaluated through cross-case comparisons. Early discussions of cross-case techniques usually focused on Mill's methods of agreement and difference (e.g., Skocpol and Somers 1980) and Przeworski and Tuene's (1970) most similar and most different research designs. Over the years, many comparative studies have described their central methodology as conforming with these techniques (e.g., Skocpol 1979; Orloff 1993; Charrad 2001).

In more recent periods, however, three trends have pushed the discussion of cross-case methods in new directions. First, the focus on within-case analysis has served to deemphasize the importance of cross-case techniques of comparison.<sup>4</sup> Most importantly, Collier, Brady, and Seawright's (2004) discussion in *Designing Social Inquiry* stresses within-case analysis – not cross-case analysis – as the distinctive source of leverage for causal inference in qualitative research. Second, the rediscovery of Mill's method of concomitant variation (DeFelice 1986; Mahoney 1999) and its application to comparative studies has made it clear that some qualitative researchers pursue a kind of cross-case ordinal comparison that could be seen as intuitive regression. This finding is consistent with studies that explore how small-N comparisons link to large-N comparisons (e.g., Coppedge 1999; Lieberman forthcoming). Third, techniques such as the methods of agreement and difference have been greatly extended and even superseded by studies that draw insights from the methodology of necessary and sufficient conditions, Boolean

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<sup>4</sup> Likewise, writings that emphasize the value of single case studies tend to downplay the role of cross-case comparisons (see, e.g., Gerring 2004).

algebra, and fuzzy-set logic (e.g., Goertz and Starr 2003; Ragin 1987; Ragin 2000). In this section, I discuss the prospects of these latter cross-case techniques for shaping work in comparative politics.

Insights about necessary and sufficient conditions have led qualitative methodologists to recast Mill's methods of agreement and difference as tools for eliminating potential necessary and sufficient causes (see Dion 1998; George and Bennett 2004; Mahoney 1999). Specifically, the method of agreement can be used to eliminate potential *necessary* causes, whereas the method of difference can be used to eliminate potential *sufficient* causes. These methods are deterministic, in that a single deviation from a hypothesized pattern of necessary or sufficient causation is enough to eliminate a given explanatory factor. Because of this deterministic character, however, the methods provide a powerful basis for systematically eliminating rival hypotheses, even when only a small number of cases are selected. For instance, in her explanation of contrasts in the national electoral systems of three post-Soviet Central Asian countries, Pauline Jones Luong (2001) uses the method of difference to eliminate plausible causal factors (e.g., level of socioeconomic development and mode of transition from communism) that do not vary across the countries. Against the backdrop of having eliminated initially plausible explanations using the methods of agreement and difference, Jones Loung's explanation highlighting the perceptions of central and regional leaders about their relative power vis-à-vis one another seems remarkably persuasive.

Critics of cross-case methods in qualitative research are quick to point out the limitations of Millian methods (e.g., Lieberson 1991; Goldthorpe 1997). However, they are less quick to acknowledge that these limitations often do not extend to Boolean algebra as codified in Ragin's (1987) qualitative comparative analysis (QCA). Unlike the

Millian methods, which focus on individual causes, QCA allows the analyst to treat several different *combinations* of variables as the causes of an outcome (Ragin 1987). In particular, this methodology provides a logical basis for identifying combinations of causal factors that are *sufficient* for the occurrence of an outcome. Because several different combinations of factors may each be causally sufficient, the method further allows for multiple paths to the same outcome (which is sometimes called equifinality or multiple causation).

An interesting Boolean study is Hicks et al.'s (1995) analysis of the origins of a consolidated welfare state by 1920. These authors focus on 15 developed countries, eight of which consolidated welfare states. To explain welfare state development, five dichotomous independent variables are examined: Liberal Government (LIB), Catholic Government (CATH), Patriarchal State (PAT), Unitary Democracy (UNI), and Working-Class Mobilization (WORK). Through Boolean analysis, the authors find that there were “three routes to the early consolidation of the welfare state” – (1) a Bismarckian route, (2) a liberal-labor route, and (3) a Catholic paternalistic route (p. 344). In particular, there were three combinations of variables sufficient for early welfare consolidation (capitalized variables are present; lower-class variables are absent): (1) cath\*PAT\*UNI\*WORK; (2) LIB\*cath\* UNI\*WORK\*; and (3) lib\*CATH\*PAT\* UNI\*WORK. Hence, unitary democracy and working-class mobilization are necessary causes that can join with different factors to produce a combination sufficient for a welfare state. In the Bismarckian and lib-lab routes, Catholic governments must be absent; by contrast, in the Catholic paternalistic route, these governments must be present. Thus, Catholic governments may need to be present or absent for early welfare state development, depending on the values of other variables. In Bimarckian and Catholic paternalist

routes, a paternalist state must be present; by contrast, this kind of state could be present or absent in the lib-lab route. Hence, in general a paternalist state is associated with early welfare development, though it is not a necessary cause.

More recently, Ragin (2000) has introduced fuzzy sets as a means of continuously coding variables according to the degree to which they correspond to qualitative categories of interest. Fuzzy-set measurement is highly appropriate for the analysis of necessary and sufficient causation, including under probabilistic assumptions where different degrees of necessary or sufficient causation are considered. To employ the technique, the analyst must measure all variables as fuzzy sets and then assess the relationship between their values. With a *necessary* cause, fuzzy membership scores on the *outcome* will be less than or equal to fuzzy membership scores on the *cause*. By contrast, with a *sufficient* cause, fuzzy membership scores on the *cause* will be less than or equal to fuzzy membership scores on the *outcome*. To incorporate considerations of probabilistic causation, the researcher might argue that if no case's score on the outcome (or cause) exceeds its score on the cause (or outcome) by more than a small portion of a fuzzy-membership unit, then the pattern is consistent with the interpretation of causal necessity (or sufficiency). Likewise, probabilistic benchmarks and significance tests can be applied when using fuzzy measures of variables. Although the procedures involved become especially complicated when *combinations* of variables are considered using probabilistic criteria, a free software package that performs the operations is available (Ragin and Drass 1999).

A growing number of studies have used Boolean and fuzzy-set techniques for testing hypotheses about necessary and sufficient causes. Examples of QCA works from major social science journals include Amenta's (1996) study of New Deal social

spending; Berg-Schlosser and DeMeur's (1994) analysis of democracy in interwar Europe; Huber, Ragin, and Stephens' (1993) work on the welfare state; Griffin et. al's (1991) study of trade union growth and decline; Mahoney's (2003b) work on long-run development in Latin America; and Wickham-Crowley's (1991) study of guerrillas and revolutions. These works provide examples of how qualitative researchers now use formal methods to identify complex patterns of causation that could not easily be analyzed using statistical methods (but see Braumoeller 2003). They also suggest a challenge facing scholars who use QCA techniques: balancing the technical apparatus of this methodology with case-oriented research. In an article-length format, in particular, it is difficult to formally employ the technical side of QCA without sacrificing at least some of the case-based orientation of QCA. By contrast, book-length studies (e.g., Wickham-Crowley 1992; Hicks 1999) may more more naturally combine both sides of the QCA methodology. These last observations raise the challenge of integrating cross-case and within-case analysis in individual pieces of qualitative research.

### **Combining Cross-Case and Within-Case Analysis**

Although a great deal of writing has been dedicated to within-case analysis and cross-case analysis, much less has been said about the specific relationships between the two (but see George and Bennett 2005, chap. 11; Ragin 2000). One reason why is that the two modes of theory testing interact in complex ways, making generalizations about their typical relationships difficult. Nevertheless, certain tentative conclusions about these interrelations may be made here.

On the one hand, within-case analysis can supplement cross-case analysis by providing tests of hypotheses initially explored through the comparison of cases. For example, Waldner's (1999) *State Building and Late Development* first uses cross-case

methods of testing to provide initial evidence for the proposition that high levels of elite conflict are sufficient for the failure of development in Syria and Turkey, whereas low levels of elite conflict are necessary for successful development in Korea and Taiwan. He then backs up this proposition through a close processual analysis of these cases that teases out the causal mechanisms (e.g., the breadth of coalitions, ability to resolve Gershrnkronian and Kaldorian dilemmas) through which levels of elite conflict affect developmental outcomes. Because the cross-case comparison is the first basis for hypothesis testing, however, the within-case analysis is framed in light of the specific findings already generated by the cross-case comparison. In particular, within-case analysis becomes a means to carefully measure variables and locate linking mechanisms.

When moving from cross-case to within-case analysis to test a hypothesis, different methodological issues may arise depending on the specific concept of causation assumed in the hypothesis (e.g., whether the hypothesis concerns a necessary cause, a sufficient cause, a linear cause, or some other complex combination). The most appropriate kind of within-case analysis may vary depending on the nature of the hypothesis. At this point, qualitative methodologists have not said enough about the kinds of within-case analysis that are best suited for the study of causal hypotheses involving different kinds of causation. For example, they have not specified how within-case analysis should be used to study a hypothesized necessary cause as opposed to a sufficient cause. This would appear to be a key area of future research.

On the other hand, one can first test hypotheses using within-case analysis and then turn to cross-case techniques as a supplementary mode of inference to confirm and elaborate initial findings. For example, Wickham-Crowley's (1992) study of the origins of guerrilla movements and social revolutions in Latin America carefully applies case-

oriented research to develop and test theories about the causal role of various factors related to regime organization, peasant support, and agrarian structure. However, not until the concluding chapter does he put these findings together into a model that is formally tested using Boolean methods. When compared to the earlier within-case analysis, the QCA test has the effect of making the hypotheses more precise and the results more parsimonious. Indeed, a quite complicated argument is reduced to an elegantly simple one through the QCA procedures. At the same time, however, one has much greater faith in the validity of the QCA findings because of the substantial within-case analysis that precedes it.

In practice, qualitative researchers who compare multiple cases may move between cross-case and within-case forms of hypothesis testing in multiple rounds of iteration. When they report their findings, however, they may do so in a way that does not allow readers to understand the specific sequence of steps that was followed. Although for presentation purposes this may be necessary, methodologists should nevertheless strive to specify the issues involved in different sequences and combinations of cross-case and within-case analysis.

## **CONCLUSION**

This chapter has reviewed the state of qualitative methodology in the field of comparative politics. The general approach has been to emphasize the importance of the qualitative methods and to stress the significant contributions of research that uses these methods (though challenges and shortcomings were noted along the way). An emphasis on the strengths of qualitative methodology is warranted in part because these methods command a leading place in knowledge generation about comparative politics. But this

approach also is merited because analysts from other traditions sometimes have raised criticisms of qualitative methods based on inappropriate caricatures. This chapter has sought to correct some of these mischaracterizations and present a more balanced state of the art.

The future prospects of research that develops or uses qualitative methodology in comparative politics appear to be quite good. Qualitative methodologists and researchers have opportunities to publish their work with leading presses and in top journals. Book publications long have tended to rely heavily on qualitative analysis, in part because the scholarly community often expects books to gather and analyze new data, which usually necessitates qualitative methods. Although the editors at some top presses may currently be seeking to publish more work that employs formal models and/or statistical methods, the market for publishing excellent qualitative research in comparative politics remains strong. The one cautionary note here concerns case study monographs that describe the contemporary politics of a particular country. Although these books continue to contribute much of the basic information we have about politics in specific cases, they may be increasingly hard to publish at leading presses unless they show a strong engagement with broader theory and an exceptionally high level of methodological rigor.

In terms of journals, recent changes at the *American Political Science Review*, the advent of *Perspectives on Politics*, and the continued commitment to diversity at *World Politics* provide good opportunities for qualitative researchers and methodologists in comparative politics to place their work in the discipline's most prestigious outlets. Among more specialized journals, *Comparative Politics* publishes a high percentage of small-N, qualitative studies. *Comparative Politics Studies*, which is often now considered the flagship journal of the subfield, publishes research using a diverse

portfolio of methodologies, though it possibly has tended over time to publish fewer qualitative articles. The revival of *Studies in Comparative International Development* as a leading journal in the field has been accompanied by the publication of a large number of excellent articles using and developing qualitative methods. When taken together, these publication opportunities mean that qualitative research will almost surely continue to play a leading role in comparative politics for the foreseeable future.

Finally, as the tone of the debate about methodology in political science moves from zero-sum conflict toward toleration for different approaches, qualitative methodology in comparative politics stands to fare well. As discussed above, the emphasis on mixed-method research has served to bring qualitative and quantitative methods together in synergistic combination. Similarly, rational choice scholars and qualitative comparativists may be increasingly coming together on important methodological issues (e.g., Katznelson and Weingast 2005). Furthermore, the cooling of the debate about methodology may refocus the evaluation of work on substantive findings rather than technique. To the degree that the debate about methodology starts to revolve around substantive findings and knowledge accumulation, comparativists who use qualitative methodology would appear to be in an especially strong position (see Mahoney and Rueschemeyer 2003).

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