Choosing Research Designs III

Case Studies
Focus Groups
FOUR REASONS WHY COMPARISON IS USEFUL

Remember that comparison is the heart of scientific research.

Case studies rely on comparison

1. Description

2. Classification and Typology
Elements of a case study

In psychology, social work, or analysis of individual political leaders, study is done directly or as a biography of individuals. May include method of elite interviewing.

Most case studies compare other units/subjects such as countries, organizations, states, etc. and combine historical data with other government produced data.
ARISTOTLE’S TYPOLOGY OF REGIMES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rule For/Rule By</th>
<th>Common Good</th>
<th>Selfish Interests</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One</td>
<td>Monarchy</td>
<td>Tyranny</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Few</td>
<td>Aristocracy</td>
<td>Oligarchy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Many</td>
<td>Polity</td>
<td>Democracy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note how Aristotle applied this to both describe and explain (compare) different polities.
Example 1: Theda Skocpol

Skocpol compares revolutions in France, China, and Russia.

Her goal is to identify the causes of revolution: She identifies: poverty combined with economic dislocations of class, especially after loss or strains of international law.
Example 2: Peter Liberman

Liberman argues the conquering other countries is still profitable

His cases include instances of conquest from World War I, World War II, and the Soviet Union during the Cold War.
Future Case Study California and Texas?

Tort Reform

Malpractice Insurance Caps

Lower Medical Bills

Specifying the propositions that test or illustrate theoretical relationships
TYPES OF CASE STUDIES

1. Descriptive (Configurative-Ideographic)
2. Plausibility Probes
3. Most Likely Case Studies (MLCS)
4. Least Likely Case Studies (LLCS)
5. Deviant Case Studies
TYPES OF COMPARABLE CASE STRATEGIES

1. Most Similar Systems Design (MSSD)

Key is to identify what factor leads to dissimilar outcomes of Y when the cases appear rather similar in most regards.
Using MSSD to Explain Why Turnout Rates Vary in Three Countries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Features</th>
<th>Country 1</th>
<th>Country 2</th>
<th>Country 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GNP/Capita</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pres v. Parl</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regis. Rules</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key Exp. Factor: Party System</td>
<td>Multi-party</td>
<td>Multi-party</td>
<td>Two-party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcome: Turnout</td>
<td>T.O. &gt; 75%</td>
<td>T.O. &gt; 75%</td>
<td>T.O. &lt; 55%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TYPES OF COMPARABLE CASE STRATEGIES (con’t)

2. Most Different Systems Design (MDSD)
Most Different System Designs

The key to this type of design is to understand that very different units/cases have the same outcome (Y variable). The search is then for a key explanatory variable common to the cases that all appear very different from each other.

This is the approach used in the Skocpol and Liberman examples earlier.
Using MDSD to explain high levels of charitable giving.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Features</th>
<th>Israel</th>
<th>Iran</th>
<th>U.S.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Major Religion</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GNP/capita</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tax codes</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key explanatory factor: religiosity</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcome to be explained: level of giving</td>
<td><strong>High</strong></td>
<td><strong>High</strong></td>
<td><strong>High</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Case studies can also be used as:

- **Illustrations** – often complementary with statistical methodologies
- **Plausibility Probes** – similar to pilot projects to see if more extensive/intensive studies would be useful and feasible. Yin calls these “exploratory.”
- **Deviant Cases** – Seek explanation for anomalies, which may lead to new theory development.
The biggest problem: Case Selection

Random selection is optimal but not feasible in case studies.

However, some case studies select on the dependent variable in a biased manner.

Do not select cases that are known to support the hypotheses. The cases that inspired the theory should also not be used as evidence (tautology)
Case Selection and Randomness

Note that an inference is based on a sample from a greater population. The more cases the more accurate our inferences.

Hence, case studies are more error prone in making inferences, although they may do a better job telling us how processes work. This must be kept in mind. External and Internal validity are harder to obtain.
Case Selection and Randomness

Statistical analyses, however, are better at showing the overall significance of variables and measuring the magnitudes of their effects (precision).

Every study must be sober regarding its own limits and claims considering methodological trade-offs.
Single Case studies and Variation

How can a single case study be used for inferences? If it remains a single observation (N=1), it can not.

The trick is to produce multiple N by breaking into subunits or time units.

- Studying Mexico states.
- Studying policy changes across time.
Focus Groups

A demonstration
Purposes of Focus Groups

- Similar as a survey if using closed questions
- Similar to a descriptive study if seeking to get a feel for what people are thinking
- Can be used to complement other methods: survey, case studies, statistical data, etc.
Closed question approach

Do think that the United States should withdraw from Iraq within the next six months?

Do you think the Iraqi state and military is ready to stand on their own at this time?
Open ended questions:

- What should be done regarding Iraq?

- Do you support the Bush Administrations handling of Iraq or the broader terrorist threats?