Political Science Scope and Methods

Case Studies, Comparing Cases, and Statistical Analysis
Cases: From few to many

- Last week: Experiments
- This week: Everything else

Overview
- Case studies: what are they good for?
- Comparative method
- Large N analysis
The logic of Degrees of Freedom

- Lijphart: small-N analysis a way-station on the road to large-N studies
- What does more cases buy us? Degrees of freedom
  - Need as much information as inferences
  - Like equations and unknowns problem in algebra
Case Studies

What are case studies good for?

- Theory generation?
- Theory testing:
  - Process Tracing (Van Evera and Mahoney)
    - Break down causal links; look for evidence
    - Multiple tests in a single case (?)
  - Congruence Paradigm
    - Compare values of IV and DV to “normal” values

Getting comparative…
Comparative Method

- Controlled comparison of cases
  - Mahoney, Collier
  - Aside: different strategies of causal inference? (Mahoney)

- How do you pick cases to make the strongest inferences?
  - How do you design a “strong test”?
  - Case selection (more next week)
Strategies of Controlled Comparison

- Most different vs. most similar
- “Method of difference”
  - Select cases that are as similar as possible except in their value on the IV of interest
- “Method of agreement”
  - Select cases that similar on IV, but different in other ways
Case Study Example: Silent Voices (the book)

- Examine interaction between individual survey response and political context
- Look at effects of changes in context
- Case studies: 3 issue areas, 6 cases (and 3-12 observations within each case)
- Example: Racial policy questions:
  - “Method of difference”
  - “Method of agreement.”
Opinion Formation

Can respondent construct a representation of target object?
- Yes: Respondent evaluates target
- No: Don't Know Response 1: Absence of Coherent Evaluation

Respondent evaluates target
- Can the respondent easily form an opinion?
  - Yes: Are there costs associated with the free expression of opinion?
    - Yes: Respondent Reveals Opinion: Opinion expressed is the same as opinion formed
    - No: Don't Know Response 2: Opinion Withholding
  - No: Respondent Edits Opinion: Don't Know Response 2: Opinion Withholding

- No: Are there costs associated with the free expression of opinion?
  - Yes: Respondent Reveals Opinion: Opinion expressed is the same as opinion formed
  - No: Don't Know Response 1: Absence of Coherent Evaluation

Opinion Expression

Are there particular benefits to answering the survey question?
- Yes: Respondent Reveals Opinion: Opinion expressed is the same as opinion formed
- No: Don't Know Response 2: Opinion Withholding

Respondent Edits Opinion: Don't Know Response 2: Opinion Withholding
## Typology of Issue Difficulty

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Complexity</th>
<th>Cognitive Complexity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Easier</strong></td>
<td><strong>Easier</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No Bias</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bias</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Harder</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bias</td>
<td>Bias</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Case Selection

**Social Complexity**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cognitive Complexity</th>
<th>Easier</th>
<th>Harder</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vietnam Early 1970s</td>
<td>Vietnam Mid-1960s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Race Early 1970s</td>
<td>Social Welfare Policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easier</td>
<td>Race 1990s</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harder</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 1972</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment 1972</td>
<td>A</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 1990</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 1992</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 1994</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment 1992</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Large N (Statistical) Analysis

- Internal vs. External validity tradeoff
  - Be mindful of C&S’s threats to Quasi-Experiments

- Questions of robustness
  - In random data 5% of relationships appear significant
  - Account for competing theories
  - Look at independent data sets
Large N (Statistical) Analysis (Cont.)

- Be honest about results
  - Report uncertainty
- Art and science