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

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

2. Can the respondent easily form an opinion?
   - Yes: Are there costs associated with the free expression of opinion?
   - No: Respondent reveals opinion: Opinion expressed is the same as opinion formed

3. Are there costs associated with the free expression of opinion?
   - Yes: Respondent edits opinion: Opinion expressed is not the same as opinion formed, but respondent answers question
   - No: Respondent reveals opinion: Opinion expressed is the same as opinion formed

Opinion Expression

1. 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
Typology of Issue Difficulty

Cognitive Complexity

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<tr>
<th>Easier</th>
<th>Harder</th>
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<tr>
<td>No Bias</td>
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Social Complexity

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### Case Selection

#### Cognitive Complexity

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<tr>
<td>Vietnam Early 1970s</td>
<td>Vietnam Mid-1960s</td>
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<tr>
<td>Race Early 1970s</td>
<td>Social Welfare Policy</td>
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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