



The Logic of the Method in Comparative Research

Stefano Bartolini

First Term (October – December 2016)

Thursdays, 17-19; Badia Seminar Room 4

Registration with Adele Battistini (adele.battistini@eui.eu)

Topic

The Autumn seminar on the Logic of the Method in Comparative Research focuses on the key logical choices in preparing a comparative research design and on the implications of the distinction between comparative statements, comparative research, and the comparative method. The seminar reviews the methodological issues of explanatory comparative research. The main goals are 1) to underline their point of strength and disadvantages of the multiplicity of approaches to comparative politics; 2) to increase the awareness of the conceptual complexity of a comparative research design and of the comparative control of generalizations.

Audience

The seminar is devoted to first and second year researchers, but third year researchers are welcome.

Requirements

The course takes the form of lectures accompanied by readings and discussions. The list of readings is restricted; it is general for the entire course and readings are not assigned weekly. Participants are expected to read them thoroughly and attentively in the early phase of the seminar so as to use them in the discussions throughout it. Participants are asked to pick up one specific methodological issue discussed during the course and present an exemplary application of it to their preferred research topics. Such exemplary or applicative papers should be between 4 and 8 pages long. Schematic and/or dialogic papers are both acceptable. Depending on the number of participants, these reports will be discussed individually. If deemed useful, a two days workshop can be scheduled after March for these discussions. The researchers' participation to the seminar and the seminar papers will be the basis for the accreditation of the seminar.

Schedule

The seminar will run from October 6th to December 15.

Thursday 6 October, 17:00 – 19:00 Seminar Room 2
Thursday 13 October, 17:00 – 19:00 Seminar Room 2
Thursday 20 October, 17:00 – 19:00 Seminar Room 2
Thursday 27 October, 17:00 – 19:00 Seminar Room 2

Thursday 3 November, 17:00 – 19:00 Seminar Room 2
Thursday 10 November, 17:00 – 19:00 Seminar Room 2

Thursday 17 November, NO CLASS

Thursday 24 November, 17:00 – 19:00 Seminar Room 2

Thursday 1 December, 17:00 – 19:00 Seminar Room 4
Wednesday 7 December, 17:00 – 19:00 Seminar Room 2

Thursday 15 December, 17:00 – 19:00 Seminar Room 2

Syllabus

1) Problem ‘selection’ and Problem ‘formulation’

Assumptions

- That some external (to our mind) reality exists
- That human beings’ minds have some common properties that allow inter-subjectively exchangeable perceptions
- Science as effectiveness; science as inter-subjective control
- Why are we interested in generalizable knowledge? Truth versus ‘utility’

Problem selection

- motivations: subjective, theoretical, and socio-political
- normative versus empirical components (relationships)

Problem formulation

- clearness (to avoid terminological ‘vagueness’ and ‘ambiguity’)
 - explicitness (central question versus secondary and peripheral questions)
 - theoretical value (formulated in such a way as to contribute to existing and accumulated knowledge)
- examples:

2) Why to compare?

- Comparison and ‘comparing’ as mental activity;
- Comparison as a method to generate hypotheses about variations;
- The ‘comparative method’ for controlling hypotheses

3) What can be ‘compared’?

- what is comparable? a false question?
- the logical analysis of the 'minimal' comparative statement
- the conceptual construction of the comparison.
- the incomparability of objects: properties, values/statuses
- do we need more than one object to compare? properties, value/statuses, *and* time
- Conclusion: the conceptual construction of comparisons.

4) From elementary to causal comparisons

- From the 'minimal/elementary' comparison to the 'causal' comparison
- the logical analysis of the 'causal' comparative statement
- 'Hypotheses':
 - selection*,
 - reflection about alternative hypotheses
 - bases for choice/exclusion of hypotheses (division of labour; *coeteris paribus* clauses, existing literature, etc.)

formulation (relationships among properties of objects)

control

5) How to compare. Concept formation

- Concept definitions
 - 'Observational' and theoretical concepts
 - Vagueness and ambiguity
 - Lexicographic definitions
- Concept treatment:
 - level of abstraction
 - Conceptual intension and extension
- Concept 'measurement'
 - concept operationalization
 - direct and indirect operationalization
 - indicators,
 - the 'validity' and 'reliability' of indicators
 - the impoverishment of operationalization
- Operationalization: from concepts to 'variables' (nominal, ordinal and cardinal)
- Conclusion: the complex relationship between theory and empirical research

6) How to compare: classificatory and typological treatment of concepts (the 'nominal' measurement)

- two meanings of 'classification'
 - Classifications as mental organization of the extension of a concept
 - Classification as 'classifying', filling objects and cases within the extension of the concept

- criteria of good classification
- Classification as a mental prerequisite? More or less of what?
-
- Two meanings of Typologies
 - Typologies as substantive 'types'
 - Typologies as heuristic devices (parametrizing instrument, see *infra*)
- Building meaningful typologies:
 - reducing the combination of values/statuses
 - logical, frequential and pragmatic reductions
- Too many types and too few typologies? Making explicit the implicit typologies
- The 'ideal-type': a useful instrument?

7) Methods: Strategies for controlling the truthiness of HPs

- The logic of control methods: parametrisation
 - causal relations and the process of research
 - reduction of the potential sources of variation
 - the logic of parametrisation in science
 - experimental parametrisation
 - statistical parametrisation (covariation)
 - qualitative techniques of parametrisation:
 - argumentation
 - inadequacy of alternative HPs
 - counterfactual mental experiments
 - comparative parametrisation of potential causal conditions

8) Necessary and sufficient conditions analysis

- Necessary and sufficient causal conditions
- The truth tables
- logic based on the effects
- logic based on the causes.
- The argument of the sufficient cause
- The argument of the necessary cause
- 'Law-like' statements and frequential statements
- Bivariate and multi-variate analysis

Conclusion: the existence of a comparative method (as opposed to the experimental/statistical)

- Problems of the comparative parametrisation of potential causal conditions

9) Strategy of research and case selection

- Units of analysis and cases of analysis
- From 'units' of analysis to 'cases'
 - the choice of the 'number' and 'type' of units
 - the choice of the number of properties

- cases 'representative' of the variation in the causes (independent variables) or in the effects (dependent variables)
- 'reasoned' non-representative choice of cases in order to maximise/minimise the variance
- homogeneity-non-homogeneity in causes, effect and contexts variables
- why this choice of cases?
 - with which relations with the definition of the problem?
 - with which implications for the strategies of control of the HP?
- Mental data matrix:
 - time dimension (synchronic versus diachronic)
 - space dimension: from one to many cases (more or less extensive strategy)
 - property dimension: (more or less intensive strategy)
- The case study: does it exist?
 - a-theoretical, descriptive
 - interpretative, hypotheses generating
 - explicative
 - theory controlling
 - deviant-case study

10) A neglected problem in comparative research: temporal units

- temporal and spatial units
- the definition of temporal units
- types of diachronic comparisons
- Developmental versus synchronic generalisation in comparative research
- Multi-co linearity in space and time
- A possible strategy combining space and time variation to maximise control

Conclusion: Paradigms, schools, sects and the comparative method

Readings:

Almond G., *Separate Tables: Schools and Sects in Political Science*, in *A Discipline Divided*, Newbury Park (Ca.), Sage Publications, 1990, pp. 13-31.

Bartolini S., 'On Time and Comparative Research', *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, 5 (1993), n. 2, pp. 131-167.

Caramani, D., *Introduction to the Comparative Method with Boolean algebra*, London, Sage, 2009.

Chatterjee, Abhishek (2011), 'Ontology, Epistemology, and Multimethod Research in Political Science', *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, 20: 1-27.

Collier D. and J. E. Mahon, 'Conceptual 'Stretching' Revisited: Adapting Categories in Comparative Analysis', *American Political Science Review*, 87 (1993), pp. 845-855.

Collier D., H. E. Brady and J. Seawright (2004), *Sources of Leverage in causal Inference: toward an Alternative View of Methodology*, in Brady H. E. and D. Collier (eds), *Rethinking Social Inquiry: Diverse Tools, Shared Standards*, Lanham, Rowman and Littlefield, 229-266.

Dowding K., 'The Compatibility of Behaviouralism, Rational Choice, and 'New Institutionalism', *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, 6 (1994), pp. 105-117.

Hall P. A. (2003), *Aligning Ontology and Methodology in Comparative Research*, in Mahoney J, Rueschemeyer D, (eds), *Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences*, Cambridge, UK and New York, Cambridge University Press ; 2003. pp. 173-404.

Lazarsfeld P. F. and A. H. Barton, *Qualitative Measurement in the Social Sciences: Classification, Typologies, and Indices*, in D. Lerner and H. D. Lasswell (eds), *The Policy Sciences*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1951, pp. 155-192.

Pierson P. (2000), 'Not Just What, but When: Timing and Sequence in Political Processes', *American Political Development*, 14: 72-92.

Qualitative & Multi-Method Research (2008), Vol 6, N° 2, pp. 1-47:
Symposium: Case Selection, Case Studies, and Causal Inference;
Symposium: Field Experiments and Qualitative Methods.

Ragin C. C., *The Comparative Method. Moving Beyond Qualitative and Quantitative Strategies*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1987, pp. 34-84.

Sartori G., *Guidelines for Concept Analysis*, in G. Sartori (ed.), *Social Science Concepts. A Systematic Analysis*, London, Sage, 1984, pp. 15-85.

Smelser N. J., *Comparative Methods in the Social Sciences*, Englewood Cliffs, Prentice Hall, 1976, pp. 151-243.