



3: (Semi-)Structured Interviews

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[Introduction to Qualitative Methods]

PART 1: Comparative Methods



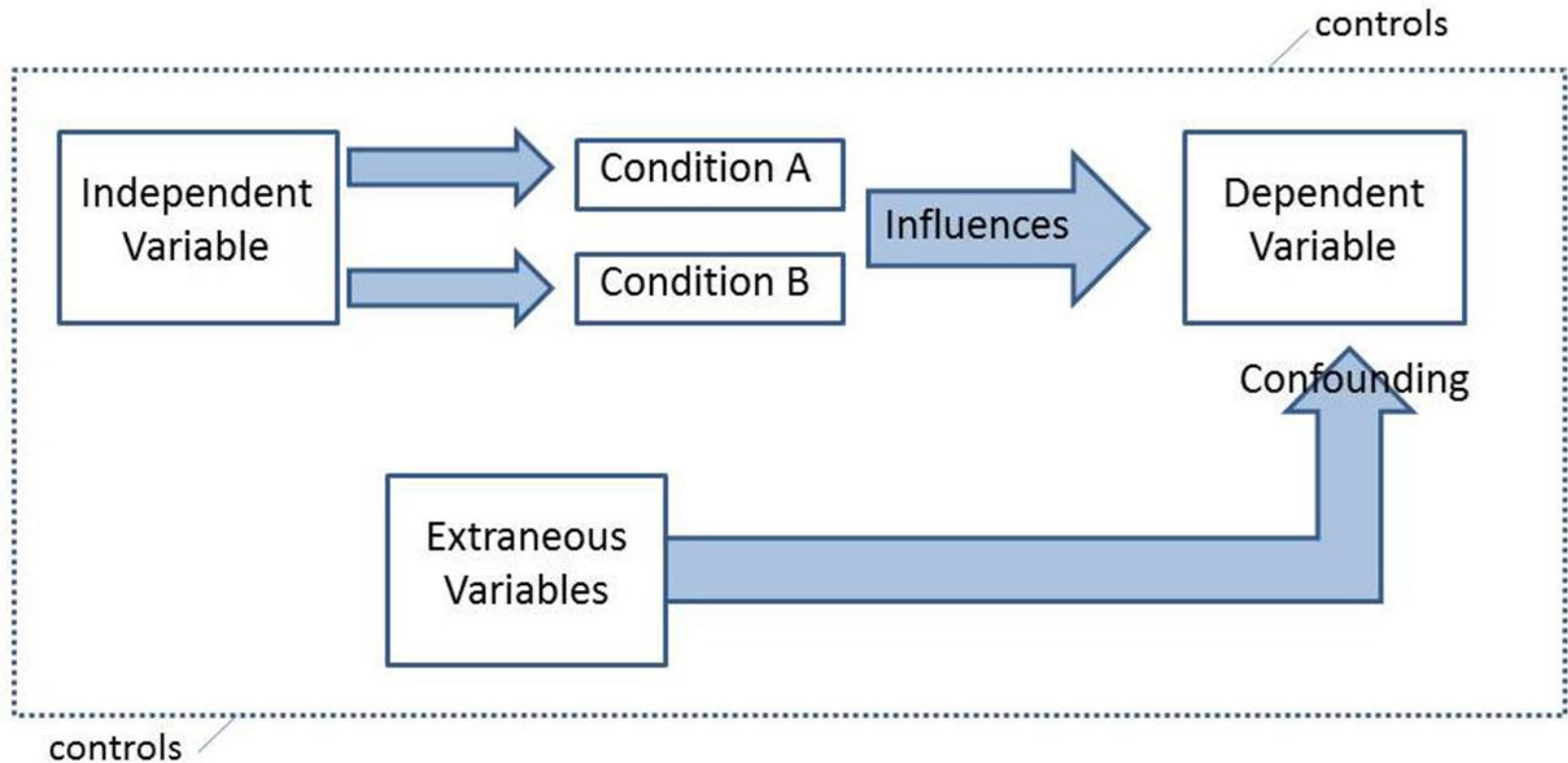
- (1) Causality
- (2) Comparative research designs
- (3) Examples
- (4) Geddes' Argument

Variables



= any entity that can take on different values, i.e. anything that can vary.

Examples: *Age*: it can take different values for different people or for the same person at different times || *Country*: a person's country can be assigned a value.



Correlation vs. causation



The fact that two variables vary simultaneously (e.g. smoking and lung cancer death) does not necessarily mean that they are logically correlated!

The relationship between two variables is only confirmed through theoretical considerations and careful consideration of the potential influence of any third variables.

CONTROL

The researcher's efforts to remove the influence of any extraneous variables that might have an effect on the dependent variable.

The goal is to ensure that the only difference between groups is that related to the independent variable.

Political Science as *Science*



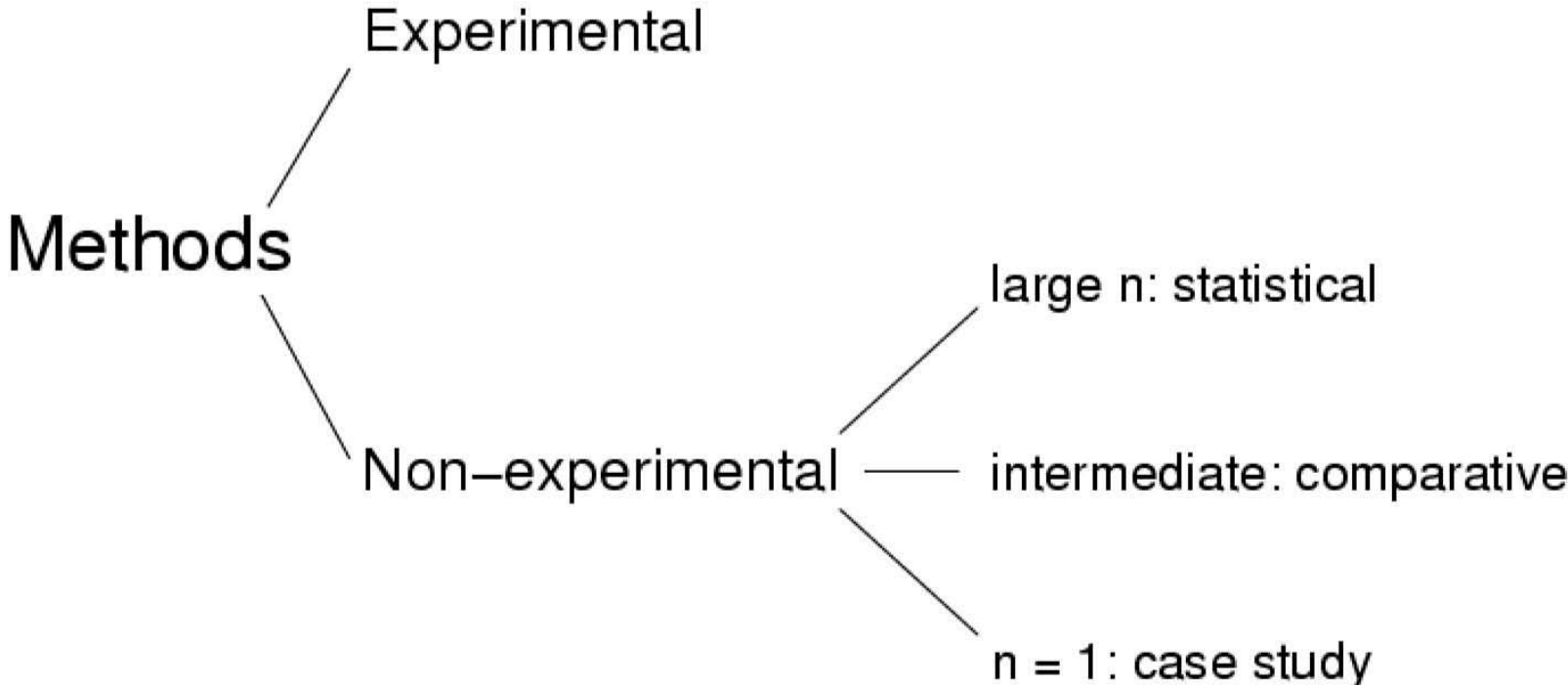
How Do You Know If You're Right?

Short answer: We have to be able to “test” the argument in some manner

- In the natural sciences, this testing is often (though not always) done through **experimentation** (or the **experimental method**), that is, the creation of carefully controlled conditions in which certain variables can be controlled for in order to isolate others
- In the social sciences, “testing” is often done indirectly through **comparative analysis** or the **comparative method**



Comparative Methodology



Experimental designs (1): Random sampling



IV = sleep	
1.	2.
2 hours per night	10 hours per night
Group A (10 students)	Group B (10 different students)
DV	Reaction Time
Reaction Time	Reaction Time

Different participants are used in each condition of the independent variable., selected by random allocation to ensures that each participant has an equal chance of being assigned to one group or the other.

→ Control for differences between participants in the groups

Experimental designs (2): Matched pairs



		IV = sleep	
		1. 2 hours sleep	2. 10 hours sleep
		Group A. (10 students)	Group B. (10 students, matched for age, gender, normal sleeping length)
DV	Reaction Time	Reaction Time	Reaction Time

One pair must be randomly assigned to the experimental group and the other to the control group. Reduces participant (i.e. extraneous) variables because the researcher has tried to pair up the participants so that each condition has people with similar abilities and characteristics.

Prominent questions in political sciences



- why are some countries democratic and others not?
 - why are some countries rich and others not?
 - why do countries have different types of political institutions?
 - why do some revolutions succeed while other fail?
 - why do some countries go to war or establish peace?
 - why are there so many gun-related homicides in the US?
- etc....

→ Impossible to study through experiments!

Examples



- (1) Structure of Article
 - (2) Research Question
 - (3) Hypothesis
 - (4) Research Design
 - (5) Test of Hypothesis
 - (6) Control of Alternative Influences
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- Boehmelt & Freyburg in EUP
 - Schimmelfennig et al in JCMS
 - Freyburg & Richter in JEPP

Comparative logic



MSSD

Most similar system design
-> method of agreement

MDSD

Most different system design
→ Method of difference

	MSSD			MDSD		
	C1	C2	C3	C1	C2	C3
Features	a	a	a	a	d	g
	b	b	b	b	e	h
	c	c	c	c	f	i
Key explanatory factor	x	x	✕	x	x	x
Outcome to be explained	y	y	Ƴ	y	y	y

Multiple Causation



Case	Independent variables	Dependent variable
Case 1	Context A (a, b ,c,D)	Outcome X
Case 2	Context A (a, B ,c,D)	Outcome Y

It is not always – or indeed often – the case that *one* factor alone is responsible for causing a phenomenon to occur. Mill's methods can obscure multiple causal factors.

But, couldn't it also be the case that it is the combination of A + B that is causing X?

→ The methods of difference and agreement can lead us to incorrect conclusions

Necessary and Sufficient Conditions



A **necessary** condition is a condition that must be present in order for some outcome to occur. But, its presence does not guarantee that the outcome will occur.

→ Oxygen is necessary to start a fire, but it is not sufficient by itself



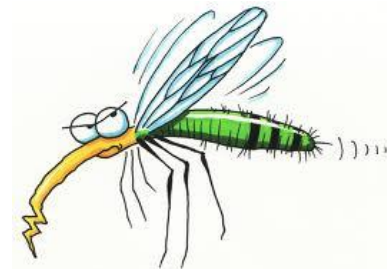
A **sufficient** condition is a condition whose presence is sufficient for the phenomenon to occur. It is enough to get the job done, but it might not be necessary.

→ 'un-friending' your ex on facebook after you break up. 'Breaking up' is sufficient for you to un-friend him/her, but it isn't necessary. You could unfriend him/her for other reasons



Conditions can also be **both** necessary and sufficient

→ Being bitten by a mosquito carrying malaria is both necessary and sufficient for you to contract the disease



Methods of difference and agreement might not be able to identify sufficient conditions or to definitively establish a causal link.

The case selection bias debate



Geddes: Selecting cases based on the dependent variable biases conclusions. It can lead the researcher to perceive a causal relationship that doesn't exist

Collier and Mahoney: There is a problem with selecting on the dependent variable, but it is the opposite one: it can obscure causal relationships that actually exist



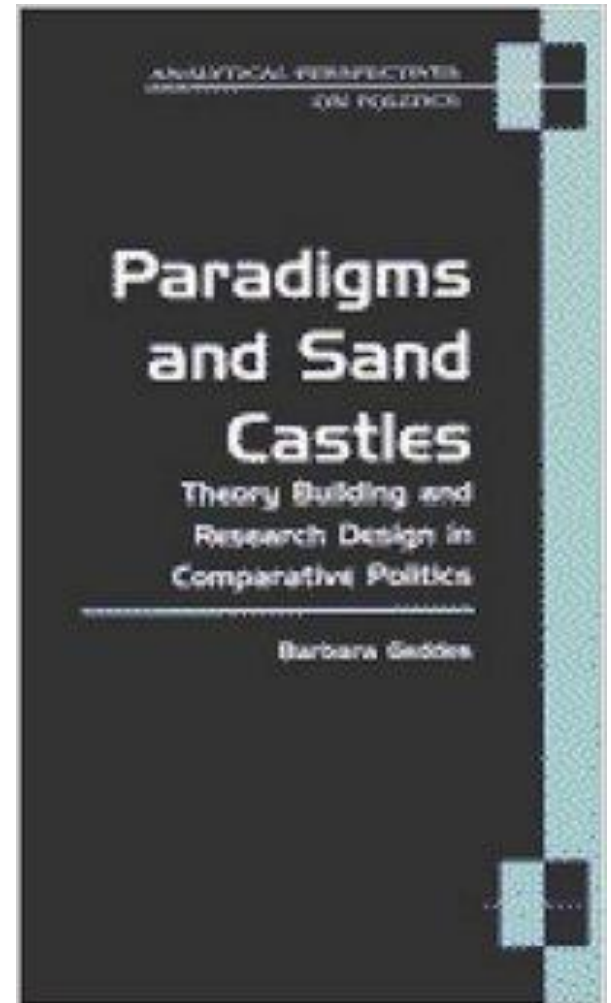
Geddes' Argument



If information is only collected on cases that exhibit a specific outcome and not on those that don't, we cannot know whether the factors identified really vary with the outcome

It is possible that there is no relationship between the identified cause and the observed effect. So while we can identify plausible variables we cannot test the theories.

BUT – others have responded and noted that this problem only applies to studies that are looking for sufficient conditions. If we are looking for necessary conditions, then this approach is entirely appropriate.



Example: Skocpol, *States and Social Revolution*



The argument:

State crisis (independent variable) → social revolution (dependent var.).

The Criticism:

By only selecting cases that experienced social revolution, she misses the fact that there are many other cases that have experienced state crisis but not experienced social revolution. She exaggerates the relationship between state crisis and social revolution.

	Revolution	No Revolution
Defeated or Lost Territory	Bolivia Defeated 1935 Revolution 1952	Peru, 1839 Bolivia, 1839 Mexico, 1848 Paraguay, 1869 Peru, 1883
Not Defeated within 20 Years	Mexico, 1910 Nicaragua, 1979	All Others

... matter of perspective



If Skocpol is claiming that state crisis is *sufficient* to cause social revolution, her study suffers from selection bias

BUT – if she is claiming that state crisis is simply a *necessary* condition, then her research design still holds up.

	Revolution	No Revolution
Defeated or Lost Territory	Bolivia Defeated 1935 Revolution 1952	Peru, 1839 Bolivia, 1839 Mexico, 1848 Paraguay, 1869 Peru, 1883
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Case selection affects types of inferences



- State crisis is a necessary condition for social revolution
 - A good design to test this claim would be to compare countries that have experienced social revolution and see if they all experienced state crisis (selecting on the dependent variable)

- State crisis is a necessary and sufficient condition for social revolution
 - A good design here would be to look for state crises and see if they all lead to social revolution (selecting on the independent variable)



What to compare?



- 1) On your own or with one or two fellow students, prepare an interview protocol to investigate your specific research question, and conduct at least two semi-structured interviews each using this protocol. *Keep your interview notes!* Place in the dropbox your research question and interview protocol. If this exercise is done as teamwork, I encourage you to organize one observed interview each, so that a fellow student can provide feedback on interview style.
- 2) Go to one top political science journal (e.g. American Journal of Political Science, International Organization, Comparative Political Studies) and select three articles in the most recent issue. Based on the abstract only, what are the cases in the presented study? Think about the external and internal validity of the respected study.

PART 2: Interviews



- (1) Types of Interviews
- (2) Your research projects (Group work)
- (3) Hooghe's Study
- (4) Interview protocol

The Benefits Of Direct Data Collection



Surveys and interviews are key in social science data collection because they allow researchers to directly ask what they want, the way they want to.

- **Surveying** involves gathering information from respondents related to their characteristics, attributes, how they live, opinions, etc. through administration of a questionnaire.
- **Interviewing** involves asking respondents a series of open-ended questions. They can generate both standardized quantifiable data, and more in-depth qualitative data.

Types of Interviews



Style

- (1) Structured
- (2) (Semi-)structured
- (3) Unstructured
- (4) Focus groups

Purpose

- (1) Expert information
- (2) Subject of interest
(e.g., Attitudes)

‘Pilot interviews’

Examples



- (1) For what purpose did they conduct interviews?
 - (2) With whom did they conduct interviews? What is the selection technique?
 - (3) What role do scientific standards – reliability and validity – play? How are they taken into account?
 - (4) How are interview data analysed and communicated?
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- Schimmelfennig et al. in JCMS
 - Hooghe in BJPS

Get your hands dirty



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Group work: Your interviews!



- (1) What was the purpose of the interview?
- (2) What type of interview?
- (3) Whom did you interview? Why?
- (4) What challenges did you encounter?
- (5) What did you do to ensure ... ?
 - (1) Reliability
 - (2) Validity
- (6) What would you do different next time?
- (7) Any questions?

Roadmap



Part I - **RESEARCH DESIGN**

- Causal thinking and research designs
- **Comparative analysis and case selection**

Part II - **DATA COLLECTION**

- (Semi-)Structured Interviews
- Observational research and ethical questions
- Qualitative text analysis

Part III - **DATA ANALYSIS AND CAUSAL INFERENCE**

- Case studies and process-tracing
- Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA)
- The mixed-methods approach

Next week



- (1) Ethics in social science research
- (2) Participatory observation – what is it? When do we use it?
- (3) Examples: Applied readings
- (4) Exercise: Try to study YOUR questing through (participatory) observation



4: Observational research and ethical questions

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