

# Comparative Analysis

MEVIT4800 11 February 2009

Tanja Storsul

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## Expectations MEVIT4800 Spring 2009

**In general**  
How useful do you expect this course to be for you?  
15 Very useful    17 useful    1 not very useful    2 waste of time

**Background**  
What background in methodology do you have?  
2 Methodology in MEVIT1310    9 MEVIT2800    9 No background  
15 Other (.....)

**Language**  
What do you think about having this course in English?  
10 Good, I don't speak Norwegian  
16 Good, I speak Norwegian, but my English is good enough  
9 Challenging

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## Comparative method

- Why compare?



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## Arend Lijphart 1971

- Four basic empirical methods:

- Experiments
- Statistics
- Comparative methods
- Case studies



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## Many variables, small N

- Suggested strategies (Lijphart):

- Increase the number of cases.
- Reduce the number of variables.
  - Combine variables (reduce property space)
  - Focus on key variables
- Focus on “comparable cases”.

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## What are comparable cases?

- Similar in a large number of important characteristics (variables) which one wants to treat as a constant, but dissimilar as far as those variables are concerned which one wants to relate to each other.

(Lijphart 1971)

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## John Frendreis 1983

- Competing research strategies:
  - **Most similar systems design**  
(Lijphart's comparable cases)
  - **Most different systems design**
- Suggests third strategy:
  - **Mixed systems**

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## Most similar systems

Variables		Cases				
		1	2	3	4	5
X1		0	0	0	x	x
X2		0	0	0	0	0
X3		0	0	0	0	0
X4		x	x	x	x	x
X5		x	x	x	x	x
Y		0	0	0	x	x

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## Most different systems

Variables		Cases				
		1	2	3	4	5
X1		x	x	x	x	x
X2		x	x	0	0	0
X3		0	x	x	x	0
X4		0	0	0	x	x
X5		x	0	x	0	x
Y		x	x	x	x	x

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## Frendreis' critique of the two competing strategies

- Several causal explanations may still be tenable after all irrelevant factors are eliminated.
- The researcher must systematically include and exclude certain cases.
- Difficult to find comparable cases.
- A dataset systematically selected for these strategies will be less useful if interest turns to phenomenon that is not "correct" for the design.
- Suggests a **mixed systems approach**.

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## Mixed systems

		Cases			
		1	2	3	4
Variables	X1	x	x	0	0
	X2	x	0	0	0
	X3	x	x	x	0
	X4	x	x	0	x
	X5	x	x	x	x
	Y	0	0	x	x

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## David Collier 1993

- **3 goals of comparison:**
  - Causal analysis (as above)
  - Parallel demonstration of theory
  - Contrast of contexts

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## Justifications for small N

- Pursue disciplined **configurative approach**
- Avoid problem of **conceptual stretching**
- Facilitate **thick descriptions**
- Achieve analytic **depth** of case-oriented approach
  - Collier 1993

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## Compare what, why, how?

### Possible research questions:

- What do broadcasters do on the web?
- To what degree does level of economic development matter for freedom of speech in a country?
- Your project...

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## Next time: Case studies

- Collier:
  - **Case studies are the basis of most comparative research.**
  - Much can be learned from making explicit the comparisons that are often implicitly built into case studies.

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