Case Comparisons

Department of Government
London School of Economics and Political Science

What is a case study?

- Definition: "an intensive study of a single unit for the purpose of understanding a larger class of (similar) units" (Gerring 2004, 342)
- Broad uses:
  - Description
  - Induction/Theory development
  - Theory testing
  - Exploration of mechanisms
  - Concept definition and measurement

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  - What is Sep. 11th a case of?
  - What is Wales a case of?

Types of testing

- Hypothesis confirming: "most likely" case
- Hypothesis weakening: "least likely" case
- Hypothesis generating: "deviant" cases
- Concept definition: "new" cases

Doner, Ritchie, Slater (2005)

In pairs, discuss the following:

- What is the outcome?
- What is the theory?
- What are the cases examined?
- How are the cases compared?

You have 3 minutes.

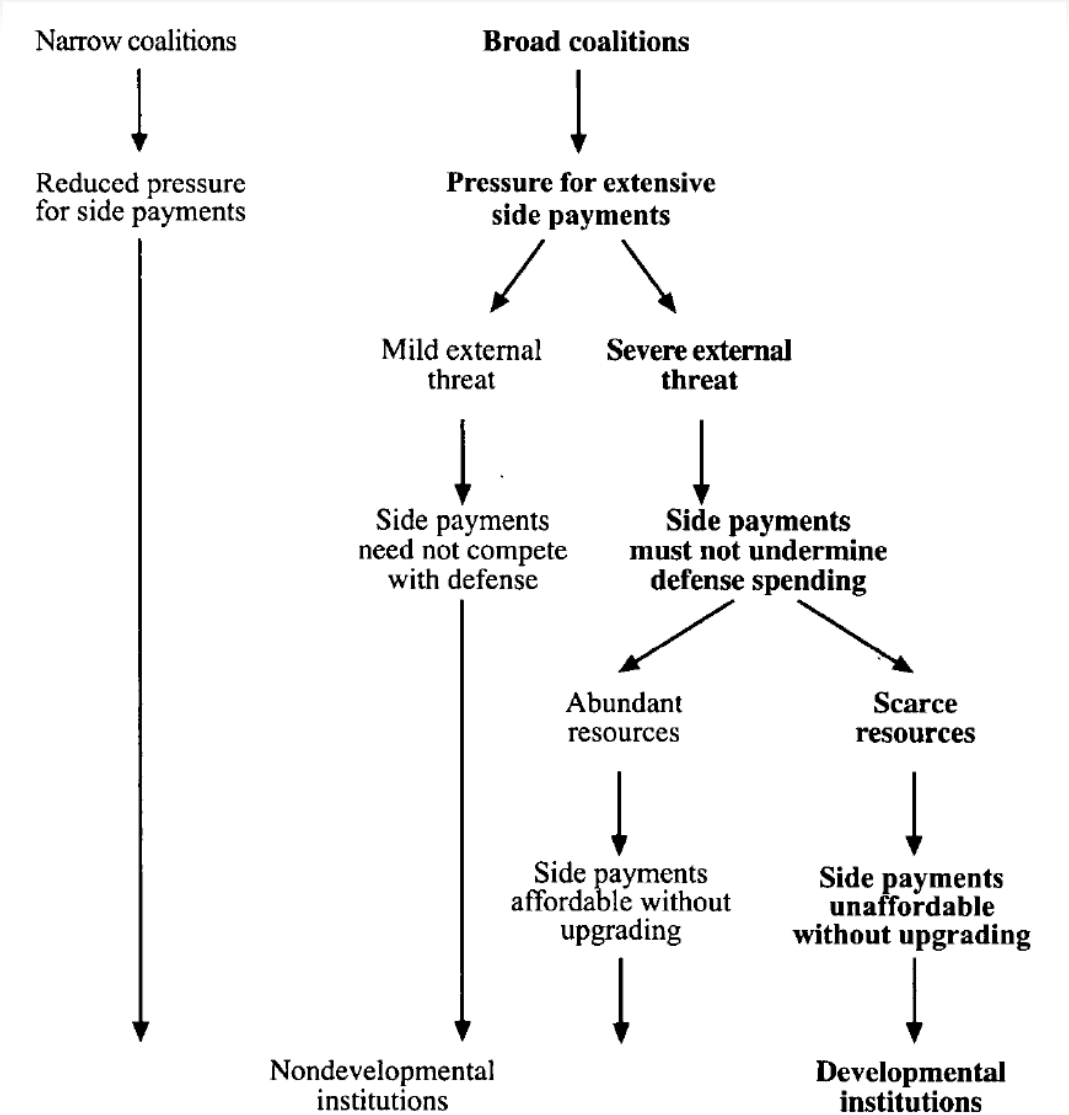
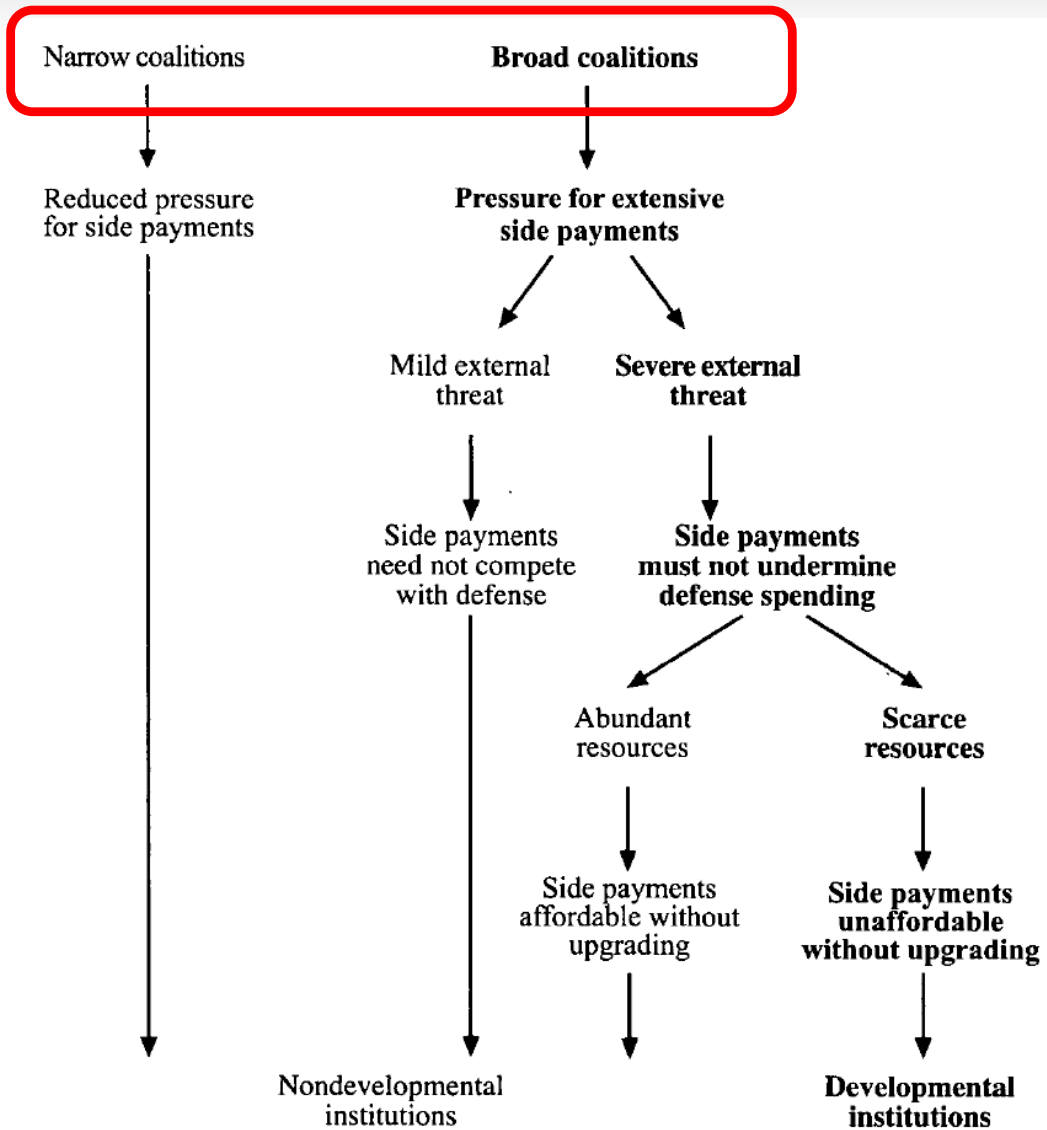


Figure 1 from Doner, Ritchie, Slater (2005). "Systemic Vulnerability and the Origins of Developmental States." *International Organization* 59: 327–361.



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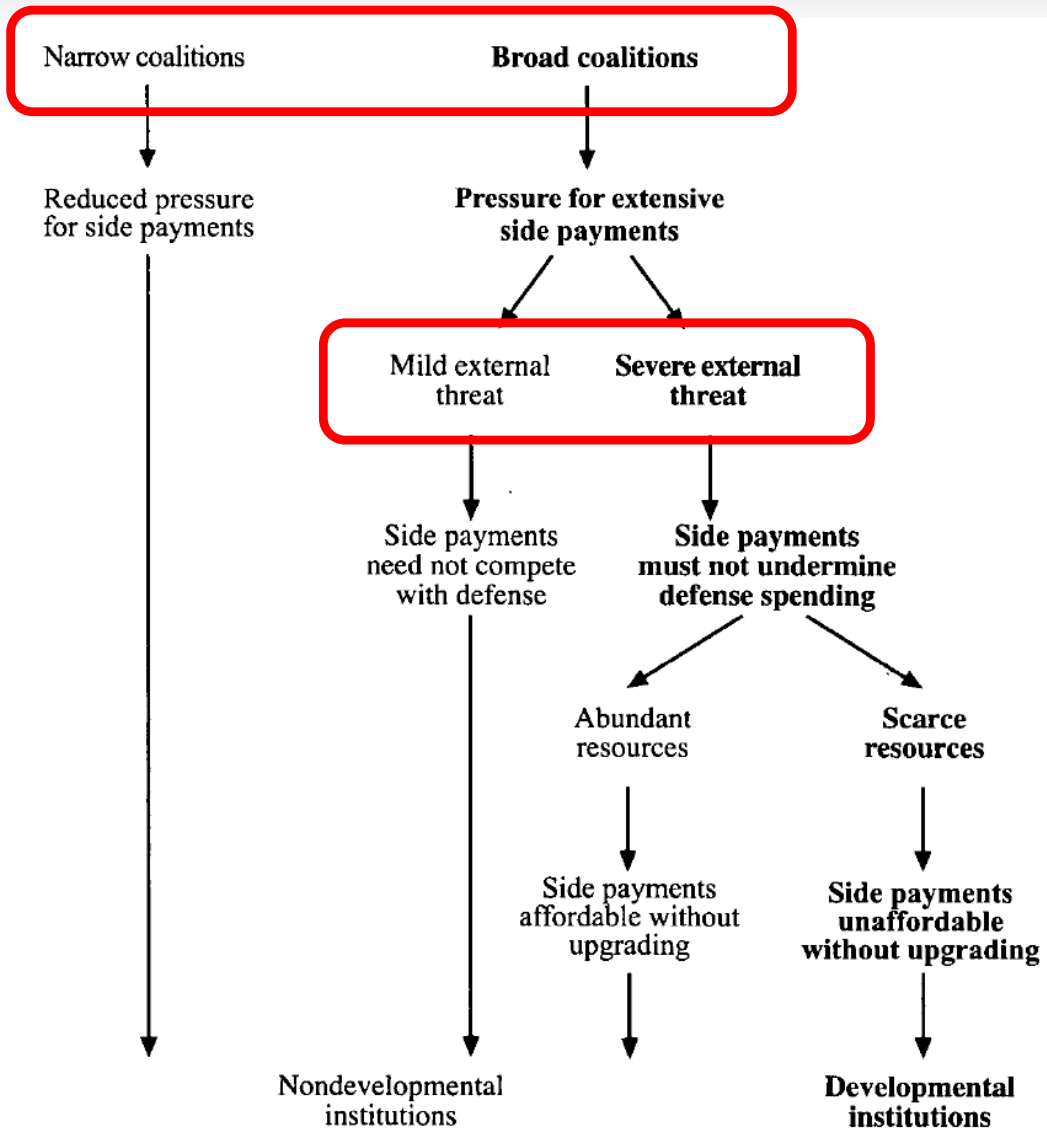

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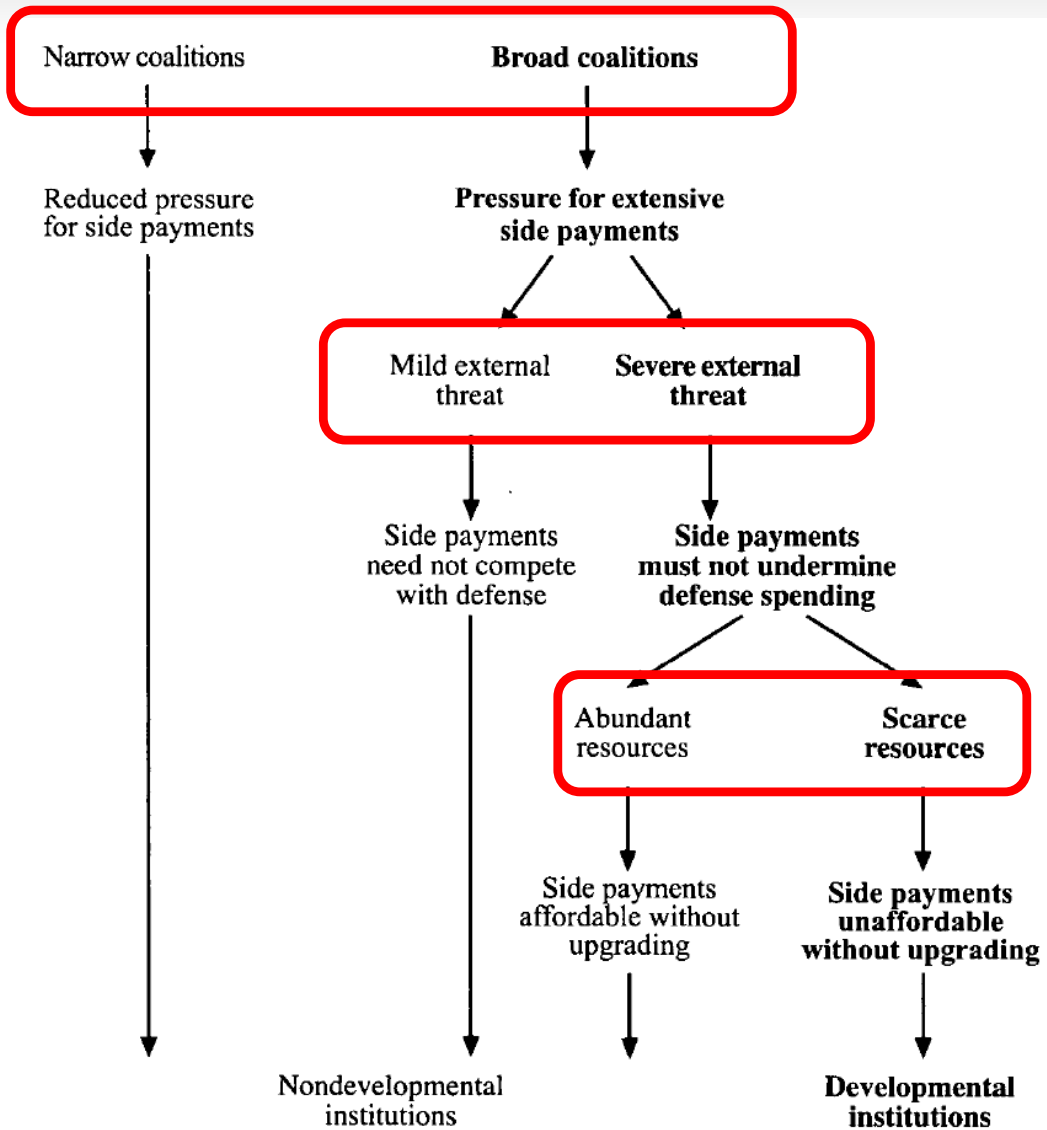

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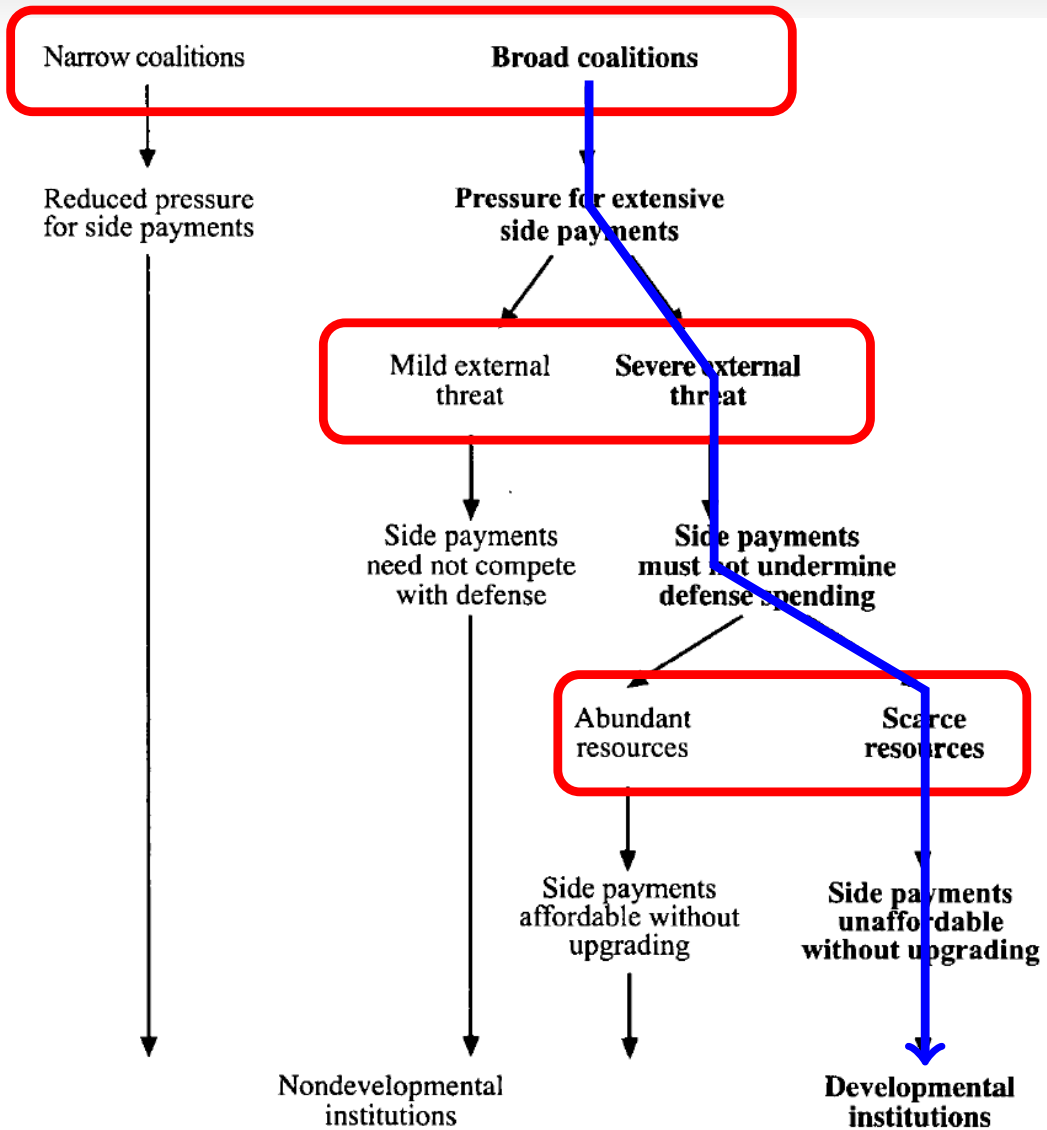

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Mill's methods[1]

1. Agreement
2. Difference
3. Agreement and Difference
4. Residue
5. Concomitant variations

[1] Discussed in Holland (1986) from Week 2

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4. Apply Mill's methods to:
   - Identify deterministic causes
   - Eliminate deterministic causes

Agreement

> *If two or more instances of the phenomenon under investigation have only one circumstance in common, the circumstance in which alone all the instances agree, is the cause (or effect) of the given phenomenon.*

Often called “most different systems” design.

TABLE 2. *Variables*

	Control variables				*Independent variables*		
	COLONIALISM	FOREIGN CAPITAL (5)	ETHNICITY (4)	RELIGION	COALITIONS (2)	EXTERNAL THREATS	NATURAL RESOURCES (3)
NICs							
Korea	Japanese	Closed	Homogeneous	Confucian	Broad	Severe	Scarce
Taiwan	Japanese	Closed	Homogeneous	Confucian	Broad	Severe	Scarce
Singapore	British	Open	Heterogeneous	Confucian	Broad	Severe	Scarce
ASEAN-4							
Indonesia	Dutch	Open	Heterogeneous	Islam	Broad	Mild	Abundant (oil)
Malaysia	British	Open	Heterogeneous	Islam	Broad	Mild	Abundant (rubber, tin)
Philippines	U.S./Spanish	Open	Heterogeneous	Christian	Narrow	Mild	Abundant (sugar)
Thailand	Independent	Open	Heterogeneous	Buddhist	Narrow	Mild	Abundant (rice)

Sources: (1): Rauch and Evans 2000 (2) Crone 1988, Campos and Root 1996; (3) Sachs and Warner 1995, Auty 1994; (4) Mauro 1995, R and Telberg 1964; (5) Keller and Samuels 2003.

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Difference

> *If an instance in which the phenomenon under investigation occurs, and an instance in which it does not occur, have every circumstance save one in common, that one occurring only in the former; the circumstance in which alone the two instances differ, is the effect, or cause, or an necessary part of the cause, of the phenomenon.*

Often called "most similar systems" design.

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Agreement and Difference

If two or more instances in which the phenomenon occurs have only one circumstance in common, while two or more instances in which it does not occur have nothing in common save the absence of that circumstance; the circumstance in which alone the two sets of instances differ, is the effect, or cause, or a necessary part of the cause, of the phenomenon.

Limitations of Mill's Methods

- Necessary causes (Deterministic)
- Works best with limited number of variables
  - Multiple causation is difficult to accommodate
- Works best with limited number of cases
- Assume all potential explanations not examined do not matter

1: Description

- Case study might be descriptive
- Historical or interpretive
- Think “biography”

2: Theory development

- Case is an instance of a phenomenon
- There is some outcome to be explained
  - Outcome is case itself
  - Outcome of a case
  - Outcome as part of case
- Look for "Causal Process Observations"
- Attempt to identify generalizable explanations

Causal Process Observations

- Definition: "An insight or piece of data that provides information about the context, process, or mechanism, and that contributes distinctive leverage in causal inference"[2]
- Essentially pieces of evidence that offer insight into within-case counterfactuals

[2] Brady and Collier 2004, p.277

3: Theory testing

- "Actual case" comparisons
  - Mill's methods
- Fearon's "Counterfactual method"
- Process tracing

4: Mechanisms

- Imagine you already have evidence for a causal relationship
- A case study can help you explore or test for "mechanisms" of that effect
- This is our focus next week

5: Concept Definition

- Sometimes you don't know what you are studying
- Case studies can clarify what something is a *case of*
- This helps you to:
  - Refine your concept definition
  - Improve measurement

Preview

- Next week: Process-tracing
- Problem Set 3 Due
- Start thinking about research topics for Week 11