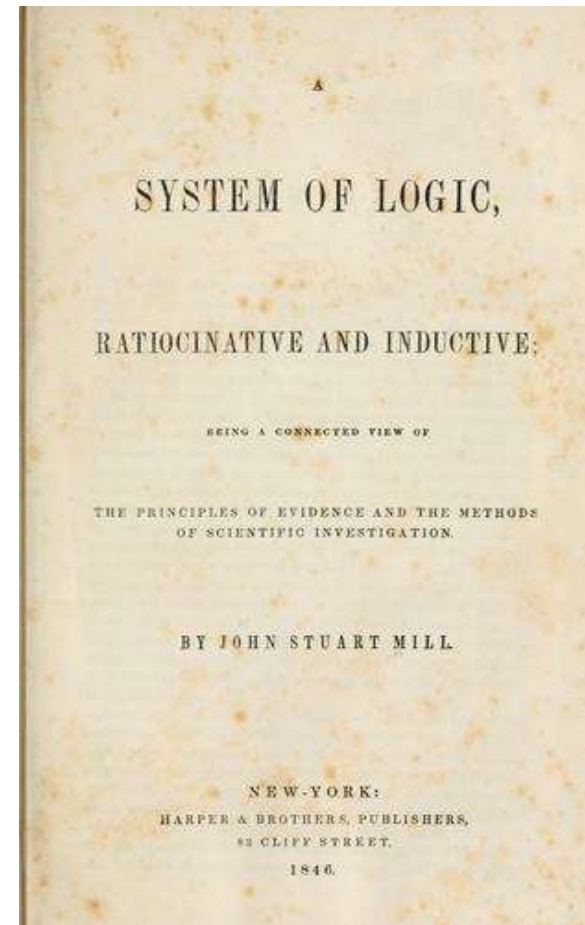# Comparative Case Studies

Doing Political Research

History of Comparative Methods

- Comparison is fundamental to political research

- Aristotle: comparison of 158 Greek city-state constitutions

- Mill's Methods: Logically inferring causation from necessary and sufficient conditions

What is a Case?

- An instance of a political system, event or phenomenon in a specified place and/or at a certain time
- For example:
  - British parliamentary elections in 2001, 2005, 2009
  - Parliamentary elections in UK 2001, France 2002, Germany 2002
  - IMF bailouts: UK 1976, Greece 1978, Mexico 1982
  - Electoral systems: FPTP in UK, US; PR in Spain, Portugal
  - Coups: Nigeria 1993, Thailand 2014, Burkina Faso 2022
  - Failed coups: Burkina Faso 2016, Turkey 2015
- What is the universe of cases?
- To what extent are your cases representative of the universe?

Necessary and Sufficient Conditions
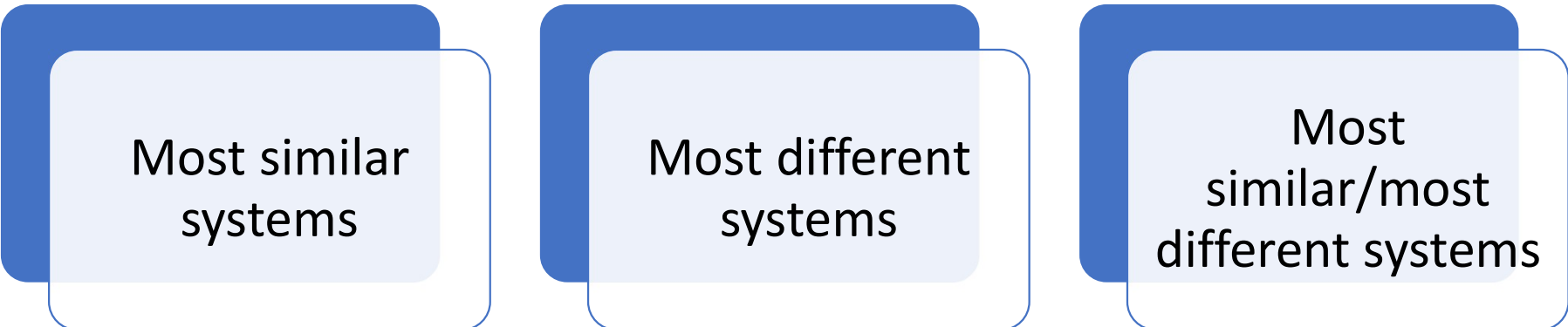
Necessary conditions:	Sufficient conditions
• Without this condition (or set of conditions), the outcome cannot occur • For example, Barrington Moore: "No middle class, no democracy"	• With this condition (or set of conditions), the outcome will occur • For example, perceived fiscal irresponsibility is sufficient for bond market instability

Comparative Research Designs

Most similar systems

Most different systems

Most similar/most different systems

Most Similar Systems Designs

Similar cases, different outcome

Table 9.1 *Most similar systems design (I)*

Variable	Case 1	Case 2
Main explanatory variable	1	0
Possible confounding variable I	1	1
Possible confounding variable II	0	0
Other possibly causally relevant variable	1	1
Outcome	?	?

Klitgaard and Rathgeb, "Attack or Adapt? The Institutional Politics of Populist Radical Right Parties"

	Austria	Denmark
Interest intermediation	Social corporatism	Social corporatism
Varieties of capitalism	Coordinated	Coordinated
Right-wing populist parties	FPÖ since 1986 (junior coalition partner: 2000-2006; 2017-2019)	DF since 1995 (support party: 2001-2011; 2015-2019)
Union power	High	High
Independent variable: Level of party-union ties	*High*	*Low*
Dependent variable: Institutional reform strategy	*Attack*	*Adaptation*

Most Different Systems Design

Different cases, same outcome

Case 1	Case 2	Case n	
a	d	g	} Overall
b	e	h	differences
c	f	i	
x	x	x	} Crucial
y	y	y	similarity

x = Causal variable
y = Phenomenon to be explained

Source: Dr. Andreas Busch, University of Göttingen.

Gonzalez, "Reforming to Avoid Reform: Strategic Policy Substitution and the Reform Gap in Policing"

Table 2
Most-different systems design

Structure	Colombia	São Paulo State
	Unitary	Subnational/Federal
Previous dictatorship	No	Yes
Strong military	Yes	No
Violence (pre-reform)	High	Medium
Strong drug gangs/cartels (pre-reform)	Yes	No
Comprehensive structural reform	**Yes**	**No**
Strategic policy substitution	**Yes** (reactive)	**Yes** (preemptive)

Most Similar/Most Different Systems

- Combination of the two comparative methods
- Each case examined has at least one other which is similar in most aspects except in the outcome and the explanatory variable…
- and another which is different in most respects except in the outcome and the explanatory variable

Schneider, "Responding to fiscal stress: Fiscal institutions and fiscal adjustment in four Brazilian states"

	Rio Grande do Sul	Parana	Pernambuco	Bahia
Region	South	South	Northeast	Northeast
Economy	Rich, industrialised	Rich, industrialised	Poor, primary commodities	Poor, primary commodities
Budgeting	Democratic	Autocratic	Democratic	Autocratic
Response to fiscal stress	Delayed, market-governing	Swift, market-oriented	Delayed, market-governing	Swift, market-oriented

How Do We Research Cases?

- Comparative case analysis involves other methods of data collection and analysis

- Historical cases: archival research, secondary literature

- Contemporary cases: interviews, documentary research, statistics, surveys, secondary literature

- Theory guides what we look for in the case ie potential necessary and sufficient conditions

- But examining cases can help to refine theory too

Case Selection

- Variation in the dependent variable is vital
- Comparative case study designs are sensitive to case selection
  - Would adding an extra case alter your conclusions?
- Be clear about the universe of cases
  - How representative are the cases you choose?
- Theories generated by comparing certain cases should be tested by comparing other cases
  - But this is not how research often progresses

Qualitative Comparative Analysis

- Data analysis based on set theory: finding configurations of circumstances which lead to a certain outcome

- Extension of most similar/most different systems research design to a larger number of cases

- Based on necessary and sufficient conditions

- Embrace of equifinality

- Example: Bank et al, "Long-term monarchical survival in the Middle East: a configurational comparison, 1945–2012"
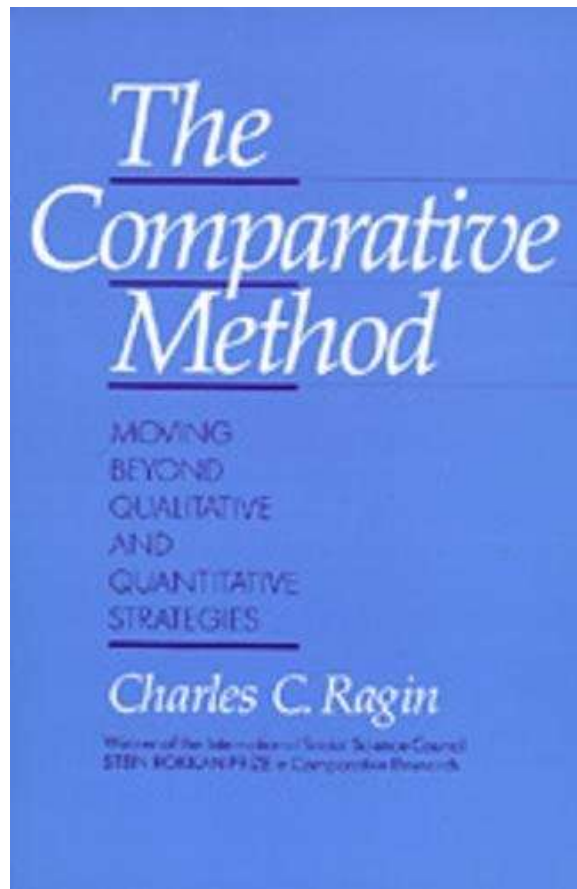
Table 1. Solutions explaining the survival of monarchies in the Middle East (contradicting cases in parentheses and italics).

	No.	Country cases	(A) Esupport	(B) Rents	(C) Family	(D) Leg-claim	(E) Repression	(Y) Survival	Number of cases
Linchpin	1 Classical Linchpin	Jordan46-50 S, Jordan51-57 S, Jordan57-70 S,Jordan70-99 S, Jordan99-11 S, Morocco56-61 S , Morocco61-71 S, Morocco71-72 S, Morocco72-99 S, Morocco99-11 S		0	0	1		1	10
Hybrid	2 Yemen Linchpin	Morocco56-61 S, Morocco61-71 S,Morocco71-72 S, Morocco99-11 S, Jordan46-50 S, Jordan51-57 S, Yemen45-48 S, Yemen48-55 S, (Yemen_N55-62 B)	0	0		1		1	9
	3 Oman Linchpin	Jordan99-11 S, Oman 71-11 S	1		0	1	0	1	2
	4 Yemen Dynastic	Saudi45-53 S, Saudi53-64 S, Yemen45-48 S, Yemen48-55 S, (Yemen55-62 B)	0		1	1		1	5
	5 Oman Dynastic	Saudi69-75 S, Saudi75-82 S, Saudi82-05 S, Saudi05-11 S, Oman 71-11 S	1	1		1	0	1	5
Dynastic	6 Classical Dynastic	Abu Dhabi71-04 S, Abu Dhabi04-11 S, Bahrain71-81 S; Bahrain81-99 S; Bahrain99-11S, Kuwait61-65 S, Kuwait65-77 S, Kuwait77-90 S; Kuwait90-06 S, Kuwait06-11 S, Qatar71-72 S, Qatar72-95S, Qatar95-11 S, Saudi45-53 S, Saudi69-75 S, Saudi75-82 S, Saudi82-05 S, Saudi05-11 S		1	1		0	1	18
	7 Saudi Arabia	Saudi45-53 S, Saudi53-64 S, Saudi64-69 S, Saudi69-75 S, Saudi75-82 S, Saudi82-05 S, Saudi05-11 S		1	1	1		1	7

Conclusion

- Comparative case studies are a popular and powerful method
- Universe of cases and case selection
- Theory-generating or theory-testing?
- Deterministic vs probabilistic causation
- Potential to combine with other methods (but remember Mahoney and Goertz's 'two cultures')