Example question:

As Arendt Lijphart (1971) has said, comparative politics is the only field of politics specifically focused on methods. As a result, there are many different methods a researcher can use when selecting a research design. In this essay, I will outline the advantages and disadvantages of four types of research designs as well as give examples of each type of research in the field. The four types of research design are: 1) large-n statistical analysis, 2) a small number of deliberately chosen cases, 3) laboratory experiments, and 4) study of a single case. (2014 Fall)

Answer:

**Large-n:**

Strategy: Aggregative measures + representative sample + hypothesis tests.

Advantage:

1. Theoretically, connect aggregative, general theory with individual opinions and behaviors, offering a powerful tool for inferences of causal effects (Jackman 1985, Curtice 2007)
2. Methodologically, it has a high representativeness and is readily replicated (Jackman 1985, Gerring 2007)
3. In terms of process, large-n approach has a complete, systematic measurement and hypothesis testing procedure, and a broad coverage of the information (KKV 1991, Collier 1993).

Disadvantage:

1. Theoretically, what the large-n study usually tests are correlation. But the correlation is not causality. Also, the internal validity can be threatened by conceptual stretching (Lijphart 1975, Sartori 1970).
2. Methodologically, measurement error easily happens in every steps because of over-aggregative issue or subjective judgement (Lijphart 1975, Przeworski & Teune 1970). Also, against KKV, not the more model the better, one can get significant result as long as having a large enough n (Lieberman 2005).
3. Difficult to address context influences, such as multi-causality, context-conditionality, and endogeneity (Franzese 2007).

Example: Inglehart & Welzel (2005)

**Lab:**

Strategy: natural, policy, downstream, survey, lab as types; Rubin causal model (test causal effects) and formal theory approaches in terms of approach (Morton & Williams 2010).

Advantage:

1. Isolate causal variables, high internal validity (Morton & Williams 2010)
2. Not constrained by sample representation.
3. High manipulation.

Disadvantage: Morton & Williams (2010):

1. Needs theoretical assumptions (FTA requires less)
2. Less representation
3. Hard to conduct.

Example: Tang & Yang 2014

**Comparative case:**

Strategy:

1. In terms of researching goal (Lieberman 2005), there are
   1. Model testing approach (use main and rival theories in decidedly important and seemingly anomalous outcome in specific time and space), setting a base for large n.
   2. Model building approach (use wide-ranging and inductive ways to develop well-specified theoretical account and measurements).
2. In terms of research design (Przeworski & Teune1970), there are
   1. MSS: Start from system level. Seeking Concomitant variance (Naroll, 1968), to reduce the systemic reason for difference.
   2. MDS: Start from below the system, i.e., assuming systemic factor doesn’t affect, or say, the populations the samples were drawn are homogeneous. The goal is to eliminate irrelevant systemic factors.

Advantage:

1. Theoretically, the controls are more complete and thorough (Przeworski & Teune1970). The contextual influences and causal mechanism are more adequately addressed (Collier 1993).
2. Empirically, save source and time (Lijphart 1971) and can address deviants.

Disadvantage:

1. Theoretically, MSS requires positive identification of relevant systemic factors and systemic influence can be isolated. MDS assumes the systematic factors can be ignored (Przeworski & Teune1970).
2. Empirically, not always can find suitable cases (Lijphat 1971). The degree of freedom is always a concern (Lijphart 1971, Tarrow 2010). So are the selection bias and representativeness (Tarrow 2010).

Example:

1. Skcopol (1974)
2. Ruechemeyer et al.(1992): comparative historical work is the most important in explaining causal relationships and in developing an adequate theoretical framework for the transition to democracy. It can show complex interaction between class struggle, the power and autonomy of the state, and transnational influences.   
   Evidence: use comparative historical works on western Europe and western Hemisphere showing working class always pro-democracy, and landowners always anti-democracy.

**Field work:**

Strategy:

1. Within area study can compare the sub-regional cases, using MSS, or do one case diachronically (Lijphart 1971)

Advantage:

1. Address the contextual conditions more thorough and enlighten the further studies (Lijphart 1971, Collier 1993)

Disadvantage:

1. Need crucial controls and set an end for detail comparison (Lijphart 1971)

Example: Shi & Lu (2010)

**Single case:**

Definition: A case does not equals an observation; it could include multiple observations. The goal is to use a case to explain a theory based on a set of similar cases (Gerring 2007). A case refers to a spatially delimited phenomenon observed at a single point in time or over several period of time. Can be used for a disprove a deterministic causal position.

Strategy:

1. Descriptive/configurative-idiographic study/thick description: atheoretical; pull together and elegantly organized wide and deep researches; an impressive feel for the case (Lijphart 1971, Eckstein 1975, Geertz 1973)
2. Interpretative/Plausibility probe: apply the theory to the real cases/assess the plausibility of the causality by the theory (Lijphart 1971, Eckstein 1975)
3. Hypothesis-generation/Heuristic study: theory building (Lijphart 1971, Eckstein 1975)
4. Theory confirming/infirming/crucial case study: null hypothesis test (Lijphart 1971, Eckstein 1975)
5. Deviant analysis/disciplined-configurative study: explore the neglected/negative cases (Lijphart 1971, Eckstein 1975)

Advantage:

1. Theoretically, explore the causal mechanism with a large number of intervening variables (context) and especially useful when the area has no established theory (George & Bennet 2005, Gerring 2004, 2007)
2. Empirically, sufficiently use information from one case and save resources (Gerring 2007)

Disadvantage:

1. Theoretically, can’t be a basis for a valid generalization or disapprove an established generalization; inconclusive (Przeworski & Teune 1970, Lijphart 1971, George and Bennet 2005).
2. Methodologically, have the risk of selection bias, lack of representativeness, variances, and independences of cases (George and Bennet 2005); lack the end of the analysis (KKV 1994)   
   Jackman & Miller (2009): Putnam (1993) use a historical analysis tracing contraries back to belie the actual record. Putnam (2000) select information, highly relying on one single survey question.

Example: Magaloni (2006)

Example question:

One of the buzz words currently circulating around political science scholars is “mixed-methods.” Discuss some commonly thought of combinations of methods paying particular attention to the advantages, and tradeoffs, of adopting these methods in combination. Next, give a well-known example of a work in comparative politics that uses a “mixed-methods” approach emphasizing the connection between the author(s) choice of mixed-method and their research question.(2010, 2011Fall)

Answer:

**Necessity of mixed-method:**

1. Two mixes: method mixed (quantitatie/qualitative) and approach mixed (rational institutionalism [Shepsle2006], analytic narratives [Bates 1998], etc.)
2. Research project rarely only involve one level (Przeworski & Teune 1970)
3. Large-n and small-n can complement each other

**Advantage:**

1. Fearon and Laitin (2008): usefulness of case studies in mixed method designs:
   1. To assess whether arguments in the empirical association are plausible causally.
   2. Adding additional data of beliefs, intentions, considerations, and reasoning of people
   3. Justify the validity and accuracy of measures used in large-N.

**Disadvantage (tradeoff):**

1. using a mixed-design increases the work-load of the researcher tremendously. In fact, it can be seen as equivalent to running the research multiple times. If the end result is only slightly more appreciated than a single methods design, researchers (especially young, pre-tenure) will not want necessarily want to put in the extra hours on a single project. Fearon and Latin’s argument about randomizing the case study, while nice in theory, would be extremely difficult for researchers to implement.
2. The entire advantage of having regional experts (knowledge of language and an intricate understanding of the local culture) would be lost if researchers were asked to use an entirely randomized case selection procedure.

**Example:** Tang & He(2010)

Example question:

One of the major challenges facing researchers is that of measurement. Our goal is to achieve accuracy and precision while still capturing the essence of the concepts being measured. Please discuss broadly the challenges associated with measurement in comparative political science research. Do not neglect issues of reliability and validity but also do not restrict your discussion to these alone. (2010, 2012, 2013Fall, and 2014Spr.)

Answer:

**Standard of measurement:**

1. Conceptual stretching: Concept stretching is to take a category developed for one set of cases and extend it to additional cases. This may lead to problem when apply a measurement to a lot of cases (Collier & Mahon 1993).
2. Conceptual equivalence: iff system inference is present and measurement involves inference (Przeworski & Teune1970)
3. Validity
4. Reliability
5. Data quality: Huckfeldt(2009): ecological/individual-level fallacy

**Validity:**

Definition: results that are true for the population we are analyzing, and robust results, results that generalize beyond our target population (Przeworski & Teune 1970, Morton & Williams 2010)

1. Internal validity: approximate truth of the inference or knowledge claim within a target population studied
   1. Statistical: whether there is a statistical significant covariance between the variables of interest which is also sizeable. Reliability can indirectly show validity (Przeworski and Teune 1970)
      1. Statistical reliability: use another sample from the same population.  
         Approach: Przeworski & Tuene(1970):
         1. indicators behave in the same way in all systems
         2. correlation with other reliable variables
   2. Causal: whether the relationship is causal (identification issue in iid)
   3. Construct: Whether the inferences from the data are valid for the theory the researcher is evaluating in a theory testing experiment (the generalization issue, which is usually mentioned as internal validity).
2. External validity: ~ beyond the target population studied.
   1. Scientific reliability: use another sample from a different population.
3. Ecological validity: whether the experiment is in a realistic environment

Approach: Addressing the systematic factor by some way (Przeworski & Teune 1970):

1. Minimize the influence of the system
2. Adding system-specific items if the indication is highly affected by the system.
3. Weight the measure in different system.

Example:

**Selection bias:**

Definition:

1. Conclusion that any characteristic that the selected cases share is a cause; assuming that a relationship (or the absence of a relationship) between variables within the selected set of cases reflect relationships in the entire population of cases (Gerring 1990). This would not be corrected by control or N-size (Dion 1998).
   * 1. the cases are selected precisely because they share the trait one wants to explain
     2. cases are selected on a variable—geographical region—that is correlated with the dependent variable.
     3. selection on the dependent variable in a complicated, contingent historical or path-dependent argument
     4. selection of the end points of a time-series or historical case study on the dependent variable.
     5. The analyst chooses as the endpoint for the study a year in which the variable to be explained has attained some high or low point.
2. Without randomly case selection, the selection bias will be widely suffered (Fearon and Latitin 2008)

Approach:

1. Random selection (Fearon & Latitin 2008)
2. Selected DV is admissible in evaluating necessary conditions (Dion 1998)

Example:

1. Skocpol (1979): No contrasting cases for all the arguments; not prove whether the theory fits other cases.

Example question:

What are the contributions to the study of comparative politics made by scholars working in the rational-choice tradition? What drawbacks or limitations might work in the rationalist vein entail? What processes, if any, cannot be explained as the result of maximizing actors pursuing rewards? (2008Fall, 2012)

Institutions play a major role in many comparative studies of politics. Indeed, those who endorse distinct, even rival, approaches to comparative analysis describe their methods as institutionalist. Take the several leading institutionalist approaches to comparative politics, explain the distinctive methods that each one entails, and then critically assess each one's methodology for advancing the field of comparative politics over the coming 25 years. You should be as specific as possible in all parts of your answer, including what kind of knowledge the field needs to pursue. (2014Fall)

Answer:

**Rational choice approach:**

Advantage:

1. Theoretically, give a high generalized and predictable theoretical base with logical rigor and internal consistence (Munck 2001). Connect individual decision with group outcomes, and address the influence of information (Ostrom 2007).
2. Offer strong and falsifiable tests (Munck 2001)

Disadvantage:

1. Can’t explain where the preferences and rules come from (Munck 2001)
2. The EU model is unrealistic (Munck 2001)
3. The equilibrium is not always important (Munck 2001)
4. Ignoring the cognitive influence on people’s decision (Levi 2009)

Example:

1. Magaloni(2006): use Mexico: macro-/micro-level data; within-case analysis.
   1. Develop the political survival model in an environment with hegemonic party (power asymmetry is significant).
   2. Showing that the autocratic hegemonic party is vulnerable to elites divisions
      1. Create an image that non invincible.
      2. Elite split occurred more frequently in period when the expenditure decreases.
   3. Showing why voters support hegemonic
      1. Both retrospective and prospective
      2. Opposition parties are highly uncertain
      3. Voters are informative and knowledgeable: being aware of economic bust after election and the electoral fraud and violence the ruling party may use.
   4. Showing the opposition party’s decision making:
      1. Coordination dilemma: diverse in oppositions
      2. Punishment regime
   5. Connect the party game with democratization
      1. Structure and economic factors enable voters to defect
      2. Party equality and economic growth are good for democratization in long term, by reduce the value of voting buying.

**Institutional approach:**

Definition:

1. Institutions as formal and informal rules that influence behavior by means of constraints and incentives (self-enforcing equilibria) (North 1998)

Strategy:

1. In terms of research target: an institutionalist can study relation (institutional rules as X), dynamic (institutions as the result), and supplement (institutions as controls, new institutionalism) (March & Olsen 2007).
2. In terms of design:
   1. Rational choice institutionalism (Shepsle 2006) + Nested game in institutions (Tsebelis 1990)
   2. Analytic narrative: deal with possibility of multiple equilibria and selection, persistence, and transformation process towards the solution that arise in particular times and places (Bates 1998).
   3. Critical juncture: analyze the important period of institutional changes (Capoccia & Kelemen 2007).

Advantage:

1. For institutions, address different levels and explain what rational choice cannot explain (Levi 2009)
2. Have all advantages of small N (Capoccia & Kelemen 2007)

Disadvantage:

1. Emphasize systematic reason but ignoring the individual variance (Shepsle 2006)
2. CJ underestimate the incremental steps(March & Olsen2007)

Example: Fish (2006)