

Qualitative Methods

Newsletter of the
American Political Science Association
Organized Section for Qualitative and
Multi-Method Research

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Letter from the Editor

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Gary Goertz

University of Arizona

ggoertz@u.arizona.edu

At APSA 2007, the section was very active, sponsoring or co-sponsoring nearly 30 panels that were arranged by program officers Dan Slater and Randall Strahan. For APSA 2008, Craig Thomas and Hillel Soifer will serve as the section's program officers. Please send them your proposals!

The big event at the section business meeting was the discussion and vote on a proposal to change the name of the section to the APSA Organized Section for Qualitative and Multi-Method Research. The proposal was formulated by David Collier, Melani Cammett, and Andrew Bennett. After a lively discussion, the section enthusiastically approved the proposed name change. Thus, we are now the Section for Qualitative and Multi-Method Research.

The recommendations put forward by the nominating committee (Marc Howard, Rick Doner, Jacob Hacker, and Melani Cammett) were also approved. Colin Elman of Arizona State University was elected to serve as Section President in 2009–11. Margaret Keck was elected as Vice-President to serve from 2007–09. Peri Schwartz-Shea of the University of Utah and Rose McDermott of the University of California, Santa Barbara, were elected as At-Large Executive Committee members, to serve from 2007–09. At the meeting, Jim Mahoney also passed the section presidency over the John Gerring, who will serve from 2007–09. Finally, the article, paper, and book prizes were announced. The winners are reported in the back of this issue. (If I were Stephen Colbert I would have more to say).

The rapid increase in interest in qualitative methods of the last five years has been accompanied by a renewed interest in case study methodology. In this issue, we have a symposium on John Gerring's important new book, *Case Study Research: Principles and Practices* (Cambridge, 2007). The newsletter has already published a symposium on the George and Bennett volume on case studies (*Case Studies and Theory Development*) in the Spring 2006 issue. Beyond this, I have just read a very interesting volume (Jan Dul and Tony Hak, *Case Study Methodology in Business Research*, Butterworth-Heinemann, 2007). If one confronts these three books one is struck by how varied the topics and approaches to case study methodology can be. For example, Gerring emphasizes case studies and their relationship to experimental methodologies. George and

and Bennett discuss case studies and their relationship to typological theories. Dul and Hak talk about case studies and their relationship to linear probabilistic versus necessary and sufficient condition hypotheses. All of these books also express in various ways the rapidly growing interest in mixed and multiple methods and at the same time the need to connect methodology more closely to theoretical concerns.

The diversity of approaches to case studies means that there will be disagreements about core issues. The Lieshout contribution to this newsletter illustrates a natural and positive consequence of the flowering of work on case studies. King, Keohane and Verba devoted basically one chapter to philosophy of science and causation issues; George and Bennett make this topic central to their volume. Lieshout raises important concerns about the nature of causal mechanisms

and causation in George and Bennett. In the Gerring symposium, one point raised by several contributors is the nature of “single-outcome studies,” i.e., studies that focus on explaining just one case. This raises the core issue of the role of case studies in causal generalizations and the importance of this as a goal in case study research. I suspect that this will be a continuing topic of conversation among qualitative methodologists. The Casellas essay discusses the concept of representation and its relationship to case selection and typologies. It thus also illustrates how critical issues arise at the intersection of different methodological approaches.

Finally, I am still planning to have a review of qualitative methods and research design syllabi for the next issue so please email me your syllabi or the syllabi in use at your university if you have not done so. Thanks.

Symposium: John Gerring, *Case Study Research: Principles and Practice* (Cambridge, 2007)

Case Studies Are for Intensive Testing and Theory Development, Not Extensive Testing

Michael Coppedge
University of Notre Dame
coppedge.1@nd.edu

Case Study Research is a landmark book. This culmination of years of careful thought by John Gerring is by far the best dissection of case studies in the literature, in several ways. First, it is the most comprehensive discussion. It looks at case studies from every possible angle, and in a penetrating way that exposes the term “case study” as a handy label for what is actually a great variety of methods. It also examines case studies broadly, going beyond political science to describe variants of case studies that are done in economics, psychology, and medicine. The breadth of Gerring’s reading about this family of methods is extremely impressive. Second, it is clearly thought through and clearly explained. It corrects several mistaken notions about case studies. Third, chapter 7 is the most sensible and clear assessment of process-tracing that I have yet read. Fourth, because it is comprehensive and clear, it offers a new set of concepts for the different types of case studies and their goals and procedures, which could become a standard set of concepts that will make it easier for us all to debate these claims without getting tangled up in definitional issues. So it is a very important book. It’s probably a bit too technical for most undergraduates (although I am assigning chapter 3 to my undergrads this semester), but it should be required reading for graduate students, especially those in comparative politics.

I have only a few outright disagreements with Gerring’s arguments, and they are all about minor points. However, I do have a more significant disagreement on matters of emphasis.

If I were writing this book (which probably violates the “minimal rewrite rule” [206] because I am far less well-read than Gerring is on this topic), I would want to be more categorical in my judgments. It often seems that Gerring is trying too hard to find something nice to say about every possible kind of case study. (One exception is the “most-different cases” method, which he effectively dismisses.) I would want to state outright that some kinds of case study or cross-case analysis are very useful for certain purposes but not at all for others, and some are just not worth doing.

In particular, I would make a more rigid distinction between theory development and hypothesis testing. Gerring recognizes this distinction but does not make it stick everywhere that it should. This problem arose, I think, because he chose to define “case studies” in a way that makes generalization one of their inherent purposes. A case is an element in a sample, which is drawn from a population, he reasons, so by definition, there is no point in doing a case study unless it generalizes to the population in some way. Maybe the problem is that there is an unnoticed ambiguity in the term “generalization.” It can mean using a case to test whether a hypothesis is generally true, as Harry Eckstein and Douglas Dion have advocated doing. This, in my opinion, is impossible. There are no truly crucial cases in political science due to the multicausal and probabilistic nature of political phenomena, and our priors are not strong enough to support Dion’s prescription. There is a kind of testing we can do with a single case, which I will discuss below. But usually the kind of generalization that one does in a case study is not *testing* generalizations, but *hypothesizing* them. It is true that the case must relate to the population to be relevant, but it relates by proposing relationships that *might* be generally true. But a case study cannot tell us whether they really are generally true; that requires large-sample testing within the whole domain in which the theory applies.

That kind of testing could be called “extensive testing.” There is a different kind of testing, which is sometimes called