

Qualitative & Multi-Method Research

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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The Qualitative and Multi-Methods Section had another good showing at the APSA convention in Boston. Thanks from the section go to Craig Parsons and Hillel Soifer for organizing an excellent set of panels. Informal impressions from the organizers and others (including myself) were that panels were well attended, even though in some cases we had three panels in the same time slot. Paper proposals were definitely up this year. This is important for the section since the number of proposals is an important part of the formula used by APSA to allocate panels, and is hopefully also a sign of increased research in qualitative methods. Rudy Sil (rudysil@sas.upenn.edu) will be organizing panels for APSA 2009; contact him with your ideas.

Increased research needs publication outlets. This is particularly critical for graduate students and untenured assistant professors. As such it is very good that Jim Caporaso as editor of *Comparative Political Studies* has reported (see the Announcements section of the newsletter for more) the creation of a "Methodology Forum" as a part of the journal. While *CPS* has become a central journal for qualitative methods it is still nice to see official recognition of this on the part of the journal. I also note that *Political Research Quarterly* has become an important outlet for qualitative methods articles. The Announcements section also gives details on a new methods series (Palgrave Macmillan) which welcomes and encourages qualitative methods submissions.

A new APSA Conference Group on Interpretive Methodologies & Methods has been formed to provide a forum for the discussion of methodologies and methods related to interpretive research. The Announcements section provides details and a URL. This is just another sign of the expanding interest in different methodologies. The next issue of the newsletter will have a symposium on teaching interpretive methodologies, which I think will be extremely useful.

The Institute for Qualitative and Multi-Method Research is making a major move both in location and dates. Since its inception it has been held in January at Arizona State University. We have exchanged the sunny winter skies of Phoenix for the reportedly fine weather of late-spring upstate New York. The Institute will now be held in late May and early June and

will be hosted by the Maxwell School, Syracuse University. See the Announcements section for details, new website, deadlines for application, etc.

The *Oxford Handbook of Political Methodology* was published just in time for APSA 2008. Janet Box-Steffensmeier, Henry Brady, and David Collier have done an incredible job of putting together 37 chapters on methodological issues. There are at least 15 chapters that are directly relevant to qualitative methods (see the Announcements section for a list). I am teaching a graduate qualitative methods seminar this semester and have found this handbook a very useful source of readings.

It is probably not surprising that chapters in the *Oxford Handbook* have already attracted controversy. The “Case Selection, Case Studies, and Causal Inference” symposium in this newsletter leads off with David Freedman’s critique of the Fearon-Laitin and Gerring chapters of the *Handbook*. Issues surrounding case study methodology continue to provoke much discussion within the section, and have been a major topic in newsletters. This symposium addresses the core issue of selecting cases for intensive case analysis.

There has been a trend over the last 15–20 years to devalue “area studies” and along with that field research and

country-specific knowledge. In another contribution to this issue of the newsletter, Steve Hanson addresses many of the critiques of “area studies”—along with field research and country-specific knowledge. The symposium “Field Experiments and Qualitative Methods” argues that many of the core hypotheses of political science can be tested by country experts using designed (by the researcher) or natural (researcher does not control) experiments. Dunning’s contribution gives a nice example of how this works in one case in exploring classic hypotheses about crosscutting cleavages with an experiment in Mali. Paluck discusses how qualitative analysis, field experiments, and area knowledge could be profitably integrated. Malesky discusses how field experiments in developmental economics have challenged traditional large-*N*, cross-national, regression-type analyses. He also gives a nice summary of the strengths and weaknesses of this kind of research. One thing that this symposium implies is that graduate students need to be on the look-out for natural experiments as they go into the field; they often occur in unexpected places and ways. If the researcher has her eyes open, she can take advantage of these opportunities when they arise.

Symposium: Case Selection, Case Studies, and Causal Inference

David Freedman, author of the opening and closing contributions to this symposium, passed away on October 17, 2008. A Professor of Statistics at the University of California, Berkeley, Freedman strongly believed that case knowledge and qualitative evidence are crucial to causal inference. An important statement of his view, noted elsewhere in this issue of the newsletter, is found in Freedman, “On Types of Scientific Enquiry: The Role of Qualitative Reasoning” (*Oxford Handbook of Political Methodology*, 2008).

Introduction

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For scholars concerned with causal inference, how should cases be selected in case study research?

This symposium builds on previously published arguments by James Fearon and David Laitin (2008), who favor random sampling in case study analysis, and by John Gerring (2008), who favors purposive selection. The statistician David Freedman—long an advocate of case studies as an important research tool—comments on these published arguments; responses are offered by Fearon-Laitin and by Gerring; Gary Goertz adds a commentary of his own; and then Freedman offers concluding remarks.

In Fearon and Laitin’s (2008) discussion, the goal is to draw insights about causal mechanisms from case studies so as to illuminate the findings from a large-*N*, regression-type analysis. The idea of random sampling is of course central to the broad literature on statistical inference, and for Fearon and Laitin a key advantage of this approach is to prevent scholars from deliberately selecting cases favorable to their preferred hypotheses, thus engaging in “cherry-picking.”

By contrast, in advocating purposive selection Gerring (2008) draws on the tradition that reaches back at least to understandings of case studies offered by Lijphart (1971), Eckstein (1975), and George (1979). Gerring’s approach employs a large-*N* framework, which he uses to identify cases that are seen as typical, diverse, extreme, deviant, influential, crucial, pathway, most similar, and most different.

Yet another perspective, introduced in this symposium by Gary Goertz, likewise advocates purposive selection for case-study research aimed at causal inference. Goertz is primarily interested in the case studies in their own right, rather than their role in statistical analysis involving a large *N*. Goertz’s point of departure is the cross-tabulation of two dichotomies (the outcome to be explained and the potential explanation), and his discussion of case selection focuses on choices among the cells in the resulting 2 x 2 table. This approach connects with the wider tradition of analyzing matching and contrasting cases, identified in different ways with the methods of agreement and difference of J. S. Mill (1974 [1843]), most-similar and most-different designs of Przeworski and Teune (1970), and Qualitative Comparative Analysis (Ragin 1987; see also 2000).

Freedman extends, refines, and in some ways departs from the above approaches. His overall position is to prefer purposive selection. For case-study analysis concerned with check-