

Case Study Methods in International Political Economy

JOHN S. ODELL

University of Southern California

IPE scholars frequently use qualitative methods to contribute to theory-building, but we could get greater value from them. Single case studies are actually a family of research designs: the disciplined interpretive case study, the hypothesis-generating case study, the least-likely, most-likely, and deviant case studies. The method of difference employs comparison and attempts to eliminate rival interpretation by choosing two or more cases that match in important respects. These methods enjoy several inherent advantages relative to statistical methods, and they suffer from several disadvantages. Neither family of methods is sufficient. The two complement one another and ultimately must be combined.

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Research on the world political economy relies heavily on qualitative methods, but we scholars could generate greater value from many of our case studies. Thoughtfully designed case studies can make several types of contributions to the collective research enterprise. They offer advantages as well as disadvantages when compared with statistical methods. This article illustrates single case methods as well as the comparative method of difference and concludes with an evaluation of these research designs.¹

Case studies have been used to develop and critique diverse theories ranging from dependency² to international power³ to market liberalism⁴ to domestic structures⁵ to policy ideas⁶ to two-level games.⁷ Case studies have illuminated virtually every subject studied by political economists: imperial expansion,⁸ interdependence and war,⁹ world depressions,¹⁰ trade wars, policy decisions and

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¹I build on classic political science works on this subject, including Lijphart 1971, Eckstein 1975, George and McKeown 1985, and King, Keohane, and Verba 1994. Refer to them for more elaboration on how to use these methods.

²E.g., Gereffi 1978, Evans 1979, Ahiakpor 1985.

³E.g., Grieco 1990, Krasner 1991.

⁴E.g., Keohane and Milner 1996.

⁵E.g., Katzenstein 1978, Cowhey 1993, Keohane and Milner 1996.

⁶E.g., Odell 1982, Adler 1987, Hall 1989, Irwin 1989, Sikkink 1991, Goldstein and Keohane 1993.

⁷E.g., Evans, Jacobson, and Putnam 1993, Wolf and Zangl 1996.

⁸E.g., Eyck 1958, Wolff 1974, Rosen and Kurth 1974, Fieldhouse 1973.

⁹E.g., Papayouanou 1997, Paris 1997.

¹⁰E.g., Kindleberger 1973, Gourevitch 1986, Eichengreen 1992.

negotiations,¹¹ monetary policies and negotiations,¹² interest group pressures on economic policies,¹³ efforts to form and change regional and larger international economic regimes and organizations,¹⁴ the influence of these organizations on state goals and behavior,¹⁵ multinational corporations and governments,¹⁶ regulation, de-regulation and privatization,¹⁷ globalization and liberalization in developing and post-communist countries,¹⁸ economic sanctions, and environmental cooperation.

What counts as a case can be as flexible as the researcher's definition of the subject. By a *case* I mean a single instance of an event or phenomenon, such as a decision to devalue a currency, a trade negotiation, or an application of economic sanctions. One could select three cases defined as decisions by three different countries to devalue their currencies. Or three events in the history of a single country could be defined as three cases. Furthermore, within a single case study, however defined, multiple observations of theoretically relevant variables normally can be made. Selecting one case of a phenomenon need not mean making only one theoretically relevant observation.

The terms "qualitative" and "case study" are used by diverse scholars who disagree on epistemological basics. This essay operates from the foundation of what could be called pragmatic positivism, the mainstream epistemology in United States social science. Many other sources introduce qualitative methods practiced by adherents of humanistic and other philosophies of knowledge.¹⁹

This article is addressed to advanced students, teachers, and others who wish to review a menu of method options and learn how case studies contribute to theory-building, especially in international political economy (IPE). It is designed to be suitable as an assigned reading in a methods course. With its concrete examples, it might serve as a platform for launching a broader debate about case study methods, which could go beyond the IPE subfield.

Single Case Designs

The single case study is actually a family of research designs. The following types are distinct but not mutually exclusive. A particular work can fit more than one category.

The Descriptive Case Study

One common type aims only to document an important event. Some descriptive studies are written by participants or historians.²⁰ The aim is to get the story down for the possible benefit of later policy makers, scholars, and other citizens. These works make little effort to engage scholarship already published on the subject and little effort to generalize to other cases. Such works can be influential. They may create memorable analogies that later practitioners use to identify pitfalls to avoid and strategies that work. Descriptive studies may stimulate schol-

¹¹ E.g., Schattschneider 1935, Destler, Fukui, and Sato 1979, Conybeare 1987, Hart, Dymond, and Robertson 1994, Mayer 1998.

¹² E.g., Moggridge 1969, Feis 1966, Kapstein 1989, Goodman 1992, Oatley and Nabors 1998.

¹³ E.g., Kindleberger 1951, Milner and Yoffie 1989, Schamis 1999.

¹⁴ E.g., Gardner 1956, Winham 1986, Milner 1997, Moravcsik 1998, and works cited there.

¹⁵ E.g., Martin 1992, Finnemore 1996.

¹⁶ E.g., Moran 1974.

¹⁷ E.g., Vogel 1996, Kessler 1998.

¹⁸ E.g., Shirk 1994, Haggard and Webb 1996, Haggard and Maxfield 1996, Snyder 1999, Burgess 1999.

¹⁹ Sample Geertz 1973, Denzin and Lincoln 1994, Neufeld 1994, Puchala 1995, Alker 1996, and works cited there.

²⁰ E.g., Feis 1966, Hart, Dymond, and Robertson 1994, Paemen and Bensch 1995.

ars to think of new analytical ideas, and their evidence may be used in evaluating theories. But the generation of these wider benefits depends largely on others. This article will concentrate hereafter on other types of study conducted at least partly for the purpose of contributing directly to theory-building.

The Preliminary Illustration of a Theory

Another common type of case study aims to illustrate a theoretical idea. It puts concrete flesh on the bare bones of an abstract idea in order to help readers see its meaning more clearly, and to convince them that the idea is relevant to at least one significant real-world instance. This type neither examines alternative interpretations of the case nor attempts to judge which are more valuable or appropriate. Keohane (1984) introduces the theory that states form international regimes because a regime can supply information and otherwise reduce the transaction costs of reaching subsequent agreements.

The Disciplined Interpretive Case Study

Many cases are selected for investigation because they are recent or seem intrinsically important. Major events such as wars, the onset of the Great Depression, the creation of the Bretton Woods institutions, and decisions to change domestic economic institutions have probably sent history down a track different from what would have occurred otherwise. Understanding crucial break points is as important as testing any hypothesis that might be valid between them. But a case study need not be limited to reporting the facts or to an intuitive understanding of such a turning point.

The disciplined interpretive case study interprets or explains an event by applying a known theory to the new terrain. The more explicit and systematic the use of theoretical concepts, the more powerful the application. Although this method may not test a theory, the case study shows that one or more known theories can be extended to account for a new event. This type of research will interest critics as well as defenders of the theories, even those who care little about the particular event. This type of case study cannot fairly be called atheoretical nor its broader contributions nil.²¹

As Harry Eckstein (1975:103) notes, "Aiming at the disciplined application of theories to cases forces one to state theories more rigorously than might otherwise be done."²² As a result of this conceptual work, the author may often be able to generate an additional type of contribution: new suggestions for improving the theory.

An example of a disciplined interpretive study concerns the 1971 U.S. decision to suspend the dollar's convertibility into gold and achieve a dollar depreciation in the currency markets (Odell, 1982: chap. 4). This study first explicated five general perspectives for explaining changes in any government's foreign economic policy. None of these perspectives was completely unheard of, but the study attempted to sharpen, refine, and contrast them while working with them. It formulated an international market perspective for *explaining* government actions, as distinct from prescriptions based on pro-market thinking. Another theoretical perspective emphasizing policy makers' subjective beliefs was synthesized from psychology, security studies, and scattered ideas in economic history. This chapter then used the five refined perspectives to construct an interpreta-

²¹ Contrast Lijphart 1971:692.

²² Verba 1967 calls this method a "disciplined configurative approach." For an alternative meaning of interpretive case studies, see Geertz 1973.

tion of the 1971 policy change. It concluded that the market, power, and ideas perspectives identified the most powerful sources of policy change. The international currency market for the dollar had dropped into deficit; U.S. power relative to other states had slipped; and there had been a striking shift in policy predispositions at the top of the Nixon administration, especially in early 1971.²³

Most events are consistent with more than one interpretation. One general risk of this method is selective reconstruction of the event to support a favored theory by underplaying evidence inconsistent with the theory or supporting an alternative. A check against this risk is faithful presentation of one or more of the most powerful alternative theories, and interrogation of the evidence to check each. Doing so also makes an interpretive case study more disciplined.

Having done this, we all prefer not only to report a list of the important factors but also to say which were more important and which less so. Assigning weights to different causes rigorously is difficult, however, when observing only a single case. One way to discipline private intuition is to add explicit counterfactual arguments.²⁴ Conduct a mental experiment. Ask how much difference it would have made to the result if factor C had taken a different value, assuming all else had been the same. Spell out the most plausible chain of reasoning to a conclusion about what would have happened. Increase plausibility by relying on well-established theoretical generalizations if any can be found. Observe other actual cases in which C was different. Bring to bear any other relevant known facts and theories about human behavior. This procedure is analogous to comparing the case with a second observed case; the reference point here is an imagined rather than an observed case. Repeat this procedure with other causal factors, one at a time. Then ask whether it is plausible that any of these changes would have produced a greater effect than others. In some situations nearly all observers may agree that the effects of a change in C would have swamped those of D.

A counterfactual argument is speculation, by definition. Nevertheless it is common, though often not explicit, throughout scholarship and political debate. When an author says "a hegemonic power structure in 1945 was necessary to reopen a liberal world economy," the statement must mean that if the power structure had not been hegemonic in 1945—a counterfactual—a liberal world economy would not have been reopened. When an author claims "IMF actions made things worse during the 1997 financial crisis," the implication is that had the IMF acted differently, the results would have been better. As bottom, such a claim is speculative. A single case study that presents counterfactual thought experiments explicitly and carefully is likely to convince more readers than assertion or private intuition would. For supporting rigorous conclusions about which causes are more important in general, a larger number of cases is needed, though large-n methods have risks and drawbacks of their own.

A disciplined interpretive case study can usefully complement formal and statistical research. When a formal model has suggested hypotheses for testing, and even after large-n quantitative tests have provided confirmation, there always remains the question whether the causal mechanism suggested by the theory was actually responsible for connecting the measured cause with the measured effect variable in any case. Other mechanisms are always conceivable. Statistical tests are always qualified by the assumption that no omitted variable would have biased the conclusions had it been included. A thorough case study can investigate these questions in detail, checking whether events unfolded according to

²³ Other examples of this method include Spar 1992, Finnemore 1996, and Berejikian 1997.

²⁴ For elaboration see McClelland 1975, Fearon 1991, Tetlock and Belkin 1996, Andrew Bennett in Sprinz and Wolinsky (forthcoming). Tetlock and Belkin (1996) warn of dangers of bias in making counterfactual arguments and develop explicit criteria for accepting or rejecting them.

the proposed model in at least one case, while also checking for rival interpretations and omitted considerations. A rigorous case study that confirms such a theory leaves it stronger than it was without the case study.

For example, aggregate data in Lisa Martin's *Coercive Cooperation* (1992) provide strong support for the hypothesis (among others) that cooperation among states to impose economic sanctions will increase dramatically when an international institution calls on them to cooperate. One chapter (among others) adds a case study of economic sanctions imposed against Argentina during the 1982 conflict with Great Britain over the Falkland/Malvinas Islands. After the UK imposed sanctions, London sought cooperation from allied governments. Martin's interpretation holds that the institutions of the European Community, and linkages between the sanctions issue and EC budget negotiations, were decisive in achieving and maintaining cooperation from increasingly reluctant partners.

The Hypothesis-Generating Case Study

A case study begun for any purpose can become a hypothesis-generating case study as well. One of the most valuable contributions of any method would be the generation of a new hypothesis that turned out to be valid or generated fresh lines of investigation. E. E. Schattschneider's *Politics, Pressures, and the Tariff* (1935), a case study of how the famous 1930 Smoot-Hawley tariff was enacted, proved to be highly influential later in U.S. political science. For years it was cited as authority for the view that U.S. trade policy results from pressure groups running amok in Washington. Charles Kindleberger (1973:305) inquired why the Great Depression was so wide, so deep, and so prolonged. The trail led him to the collapse of the international monetary system after 1929. The lesson of the interwar experience, Kindleberger said, was "that for the world economy to be stabilized, there has to be a stabilizer, one stabilizer." When in 1929 "the British couldn't and the United States wouldn't" supply the public good of leadership, down went the interests of all" (Kindleberger, 1973:292). This book stimulated other scholars to think of the hegemony theory of international economic stability.

The Least-Likely (Theory-Confirming) Case Study

Let us shift now to methods that select a single case not for its novelty or intrinsic interest but for its ability to contribute to theory-building. It is unlikely that any single case study will be able, alone, to prove or disprove a theory decisively.²⁵ Probably the closest a single case study can come to approximating a neutral test would be when the researcher selects an extreme case that is highly unlikely to confirm, and finds that even this case does so. Such a least-likely case study would provide strong, though not unqualified, support for the inference that the theory is even more likely to be valid in most other cases, where contrary winds do not blow as strongly.

Edward Morse's thesis in *Foreign Policy and Interdependence in Gaullist France* (1973: chap. 5) is that increasing modernization and interdependence transform foreign policy, making it less nationalistic and more cooperative. Morse observes a breaking down of the distinction between foreign and domestic policy, and directs attention to domestic social structure as the primary determinant of foreign policy. What country case might be least likely to confirm such a thesis? President Charles de Gaulle's famous nationalism stands out among industrial states of his time. De Gaulle defended the primacy of foreign policy over domestic policies, and during the 1960s attempted to use foreign economic policy to maintain independence from the monetary system led by the United States.

²⁵ The final section of this article returns to the question of testing theories with case studies.

During a run on the French franc in November 1968, he proudly declared that the franc would not be devalued. Europe's economy was becoming more closely integrated, however, as governments implemented the Common Market. Domestic student protests of 1968 had accelerated an erosion of the franc's underpinnings. Even de Gaulle's determined effort proved futile. Shortly after President Pompidou succeeded him in 1969, France devalued the franc and accepted the U.S. scheme to create a new form of money in the International Monetary Fund. If even Gaullist France yields to interdependence, is it not likely that other governments will do the same?

The plausibility probe is a weaker form for a like purpose. The researcher conducts a single case study only to check the plausibility of a theory, using a case that may not be especially difficult for the theory. One might even select a case whose circumstances are thought to be favorable to the theory as a pilot study before undertaking a more extensive evidence-gathering effort. If this probe does not confirm the theory's plausibility, resources can be better directed; if it does, a more comprehensive and costly test can be undertaken with greater confidence. If the case chosen is not especially difficult for the theory, however, then it alone will not support as strong a claim.

The Most-Likely (Theory-Infirming) Case Study

If a theory were invalid, the most powerful single case to show that would be one that disconfirmed it even though conditions seem to make the case unusually favorable for the theory. If the theory failed even in a most-likely case, this evidence would provide strong support for the expectation that it will fail even more clearly in less hospitable circumstances.

I do not know of a published IPE study that exemplifies this logical type perfectly. As an approximation, consider dependency theory with its thesis that dependency of a less developed country on the world capitalist system retards or even reverses its development. The 1959 Cuban revolution was a sharp break with the world capitalist system, and so the case of Cuba before and after 1959 would seem to be likely, if any would, to support a thesis implying that dependency retards development and breaking dependency improves it. Evidence that Cuba did not experience improvement in development terms would be more telling against this theory than evidence from most countries that did not make as clear a break. (Cuba experienced some improvements along with many disappointments.)²⁶ Again, even an extreme historical case will be subject to more than one interpretation. Here the dependentista might attribute disappointments to the fact that the United States worked aggressively to undermine revolutionary Cuba after 1960, or to avoidable errors by the Castro government.

The Deviant Case Study

When a body of theory is fairly well developed and substantial evidence has confirmed it, a detailed study of a deviant case can be illuminating. Considering a case where the main causes were present but the expected effect did not occur might shed light on the theory's limits, helping to identify conditions that are necessary or favorable for its operation. An anomaly sometimes can suggest new hypotheses that also account for cases previously thought accounted for. Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor has been explored as a deviant case for deterrence theory (Russett, 1967).

²⁶ LeoGrande 1979 finds that Cuba's international economic dependency was lower in the post-revolutionary period than before, but that it remained highly dependent on the USSR in some senses. This study does not investigate other indicators of development.

This essay does not cover all types of case study. The problem-solving case study is designed to help solve a particular problem rather than mainly to contribute to theory. Robert Rothstein's *Global Bargaining* (1979) inquires why the North–South commodity trade negotiations of the 1970s achieved so little and what could be done to improve such negotiations. Richard Haass's *Economic Sanctions and American Diplomacy* (1998) reports eight single case studies of sanctions attempts and draws lessons for future policy. The problem-solving design deserves a set of guidelines of its own.²⁷ Still other case studies are written for teaching purposes and often deliberately purged of explicit analysis in order to put the analytical burden on the student.

Reference is sometimes made to a “process-tracing case study,” but thinking of this as an additional menu option could be confusing. Virtually all case studies entail documenting some dynamic process—a process of decision, policy change, depression, conflict, negotiation, or the spread of norms. Process-tracing is better viewed as a technique involved in writing almost any case study.

The Method of Difference

Between single case methods on one end of the spectrum and large-n statistical methods on the other stand comparative case methods. They add the analytical leverage that comes from comparison to the strengths of the case study. J. S. Mill's method of difference proceeds “by comparing instances in which the phenomenon does occur with instances in other respects similar in which it does not” (Mill, 1970, taken from Mill, 1843, book 3, chap. VIII). Some applications begin with a hypothesis linking a cause C with an effect E. Two or more cases are selected to illustrate a difference in C. If the observed cases differ in C and differ as expected in the supposed effect E but are similar in other respects, then by elimination it can be inferred that the reason for the E difference must have been the difference in C.

More often, theory is not used to guide case selection. The researcher is interested primarily in E, chooses two or more cases to illustrate variance in E, such as a success and a failure, and investigates what antecedents could have produced the difference. This variant, the retrospective contrast, carries the risk that research will uncover a host of differences between the cases, each of which could have explained E. Such a study provides weaker support for any one hypothesis than a design that selected a set of cases that eliminated some hypotheses by matching on those conditions.

Even when a study is designed from the beginning to control for some rival factors, the method of difference in a social science study can never deliver airtight proof for a causal inference. The historical record never provides a set of actual cases that are perfectly matched on all other relevant variables. Between any two actual cases there is always one or more arguably relevant difference D besides the differences in C and E. The researcher then cannot conclusively rule out D as a contributing cause of E, at least not on the basis of this project.

Actual comparative studies vary by degrees in these matters. When less thought is given to rival interpretations at the design stage and less effort is invested in selecting cases for analytical reasons, the support for the main conclusion is usually weaker. The more thoroughly case selection matches other important variables, the more rigorous and convincing the support for the central hypothesis. As an additional remedy, a subsequent project could select cases so as to hold D constant or focus on D as an important cause in its own right.

²⁷ See Maxwell 1996 for some leads.

Implementing This Method

A method-of-difference study in the theoretically guided mode can be implemented in three stages, which overlap in practice and blend inductive and deductive thinking.²⁸ Stage 1 is the identification or generation of hypotheses from deduction, previous research, or preliminary study of particular events. In stage 2 the analyst searches for pairs of cases with which to study one or more of these hypotheses. One may restrict the universe to a given set of countries or events and a period of time, and within that population, sample purposively, not randomly. Some cases are studied preliminarily, enough to enable a rough classification of each according to key theoretical variables, judgments that will need to be checked later. When a case that seems high on variable C is found, then the search can turn to a case with a low value on variable C. If a second case can be found, the researcher checks these cases for possible effect variables, and checks what other causes in these cases might have also produced the effect. One searches for two cases that are matched with respect to at least one rival hypothesis. Stage 2 is also an important time for generating new hypotheses.

At some point the analyst settles on a contrasting pair of cases (or more) and shifts to stage 3—deeper research into these cases and the drawing of conclusions. If additional evidence does not bear out preliminary observations—for example, if the two do not contrast as clearly on C or E as they had seemed, or if unexpected rival causes prove salient—this pair might be rejected in favor of others, returning work to stage 2. Shifts back and forth between stages might well help identify the most productive selections.

Examples

The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism is an early example of historical comparison with limited attention to controlling for alternative interpretations. Max Weber (1958:35–40) observed in 1904 that what he called the peculiar modern rational form of capitalism had developed only in the West, not in India or China (E). He famously contended that the key reason (C) was the presence in the West of Calvinist theology, which, for believers, translated into devotion to work, ascetic personal habits, and accumulating wealth as a moral calling. Weber reported that in Germany, business leaders and skilled workers were overwhelmingly Protestant. He raised but discounted the alternative interpretation that inheritance accounted for Protestant dominance of business. He noted that a smaller proportion of Catholic (than Protestant) college graduates prepared for middle class business careers, favoring more humanistic education. Generally, though, this essay did not deliver what today would be considered thorough, controlled comparisons. Weber did not set forth a comprehensive framework identifying alternative causes, nor did he select cases for study so as to match them according to these variables. The essay stimulated a chorus of critics as well as admirers.²⁹

Great Britain's first negotiation to join the Common Market (in the early 1960s) failed while the second (in the late 1960s) succeeded (E). In another, more focused retrospective contrast, Robert Lieber (1970:123–30) conducts thorough investigations of the processes inside Britain and between Britain and the EEC during the two episodes (among other things). He concludes that greater domestic politicization of the British process in the second case turned the decision into a matter of national foreign policy and diluted the earlier influence

²⁸ This section is a revision of Odell 2000:20–21.

²⁹ Samuelsson 1957 marshals evidence contradicting the Puritanism thesis. Marshall 1982 faults Weber for not showing direct evidence on leaders' and workers' motives, as distinct from evidence from Calvinist theological writings, and for failing to raise alternative interpretations for evidence about workers.

of agricultural groups on London's negotiating position. In case 1, these groups had elicited pledges from the Macmillan government for conditions to protect agriculture that proved unacceptable to the Six. In case 2, greater politicization diminished pressure group influence, and Harold Wilson's negotiators made their application relatively free of restrictive conditions (Lieber, 1970:271). By observing two contrasting cases, Lieber was in a much stronger position to support valid conclusions about the relationship between politicization and pressure group influence, which illuminated the difference between international impasse and agreement, than if he had looked only at one case. Moreover, certain key variables were essentially constant, including the key states and their institutions and many of the issues. This pair of cases did not rule out every other conceivable interpretation. For instance, Britain's trade was also shifting increasingly away from the former empire and toward the continent of Europe (Cohen, 1977).

One hypothesis in my *Negotiating the World Economy* (Odell, 2000) holds that gains from a threatening, value-claiming bargaining strategy will diminish as domestic divisions undermine the credibility of the government threat. Chapter 6 (Odell, 2000) supports this hypothesis with two contrasting case studies chosen from the second Reagan administration in 1985–86, in both of which the U.S. economic negotiator used a threatening strategy. The cases differ as to cause and as to supposed effect. In the first, U.S. constituents expressed significant opposition to carrying out the threat, and the U.S. negotiator gained less abroad. In the second, few U.S. constituents expressed opposition to implementing the threat, and the U.S. negotiator gained more abroad. These cases are matched with respect to several other variables thought to be relevant to bargaining outcomes. Since they occurred during the same period, there was no difference in the relevant international institutions, U.S. domestic political institutions, or the degree to which U.S. government was divided. The same president was in office and the same negotiator used the same strategy in each. The threatened party was not less powerful in the second case. In fact, the European Community (in the second case) was more powerful overall than Brazil (in the first), yet Washington gained more from the EC. Moreover, in the Brazil case the main causal variable shifted later in the negotiation (U.S. constituents fell into line behind Reagan's hard line), and almost immediately the Brazilian government made its one substantive concession to Washington. Challenges to the main inference from several standpoints can be eliminated by virtue of matched case selection.³⁰

Assessment

Advantages

Case study methods, referring now to single case as well as comparative designs, offer several significant advantages relative to statistical methods. First, qualitative studies are equal or superior for generating valid theory. More comprehensive and more detailed contact with concrete instances of the events and behavior about which we wish to generalize helps sharpen distinctions. It stimulates fresh concepts, typologies, and hypotheses. Kindleberger's investigation of the Great Depression is a prominent IPE example. Other methods are capable of generating theory as well. Actually, many of the insights that appear in statistical tests and formal models may in fact have occurred to the authors while they contemplated a particular case or two. And the further we move from direct observation of the people we wish to understand—for instance, by importing hypotheses from other fields—the greater the risk of generating a theory that turns out to

³⁰ For examples of this method on monetary policies, see McNamara 1998 and Odell 1988.

be invalid for this domain. The ultimate goal is valid theory, not just any theory. Case methods are also vehicles for refining received theory. A single case study of an event already analyzed can also uncover alternative views that force a rethinking of the received interpretation (McKeown, 1999).

Second, case studies are generally better than the alternatives for documenting processes. The world political economy is marked by significant processes—market innovation, competition, collusion, equilibration, influence, bargaining, communication, conflict, learning, institutional change, regional integration and disintegration, and politics. Several examples have already been mentioned. A pair of case studies from the 1960s documented the process of bringing the United Kingdom into the European Common Market. Another investigated the process through which the United States changed its international monetary policy in 1971. Two studies documented the economic conflict and negotiation process between the U.S. on one side and Brazil and the European Community on the other in 1985–87. Large-*n* statistical methods tend to bias theory away from processes and toward structures. Although structures are important, they alone are unable to explain much variation that occurs within the same structures, as case study literature has shown repeatedly. Processes are also essential for our understanding. And when structures and institutions do change, case studies also provide our best knowledge of how those changes come about. Successive rounds of multilateral trade negotiations, for example, have gradually changed the institutions of the world's trading system.³¹ Each of the studies mentioned does more than document a process. But of course we must document them before we can analyze, compare, and generalize about them.

Third, case methods allow stronger empirical grounding for a hypothesis for the cases studied. They allow greater confidence in the validity of the hypothesis, for the cases studied, than statistical methods can provide for the same cases, naturally. One clear illustration is the study of European economic sanctions against Argentina in connection with the Falklands/Malvinas controversy. The author of that book first provides formal models and statistical tests reflecting 99 economic sanction attempts in history. One of the 99 data points is the Falklands case. Martin (1992) constructs quantitative indicators for the degree of cooperation among sanctioners and for six possible causal variables. These aggregate data indicate a significant general relationship between cooperation and, among other things, whether an international institution had called on its members to cooperate. While the data provide strong, original support for the generalizations reported, the statistical method is inherently limited in its ability to show how well these generalizations account for the Falklands case or any other single case in particular. The statistical method restricts us to observing a limited slice of the Falklands case, and even these aspects can be observed only as filtered through the standardized indicators. We cannot even see any one instance as a whole, let alone analyze it in its wholeness. We cannot see any of the facts that had to be omitted. Some risk of omitted variable bias is inherent in statistical methods. The author added the case study to compensate for these limitations. By tracing the process chronologically as it unfolded within the EC structure, and by considering previously omitted facts and views as well, the case study leaves us with greater confidence that the hypothesis is valid and salient for this case. (Statistical methods have compensating advantages, discussed below.)

More often IPE case studies are conducted before any aggregate data on the same theoretical relationship have been analyzed. If, in that situation, thorough case studies establish strong empirical support for a hypothesis in a few instances, they give greater confidence that the theory is worth testing over a large number of cases.

³¹ See Winham 1986 on the Tokyo round and Paemen and Bensch 1995 on the Uruguay round. On the ups and downs of the specialized International Coffee Organization, see Bates 1997.

Fourth, a thorough case study preserves and reports more information about that case than a statistical study covering the same case, by definition. Fuller reporting makes it more likely that readers will construct alternative interpretations of the same events and generate new hypotheses. Reporting this information also provides researchers with materials that can be used later to construct quantitative indicators.

Fifth, even a case study that claims no explicit theoretical implications always conveys a much fuller understanding of the instance studied, with richer evidence and reasoning about process and context, than is possible with statistical methods. This is especially valuable for key events that turned the tide of history, blocked some possible future paths, and selected the one along which later events evolved. The 1925 restoration of the pound sterling to its prewar parity and the Smoot-Hawley tariff, for example, have long been regarded as policy events that, with other conditions, precipitated reactions that ended by destroying the orthodox gold standard and the nineteenth-century liberal state, discrediting floating exchange rates for two generations, and ushering in the era of the welfare state if not the Second World War. Hardly anyone would argue that the world would be better off without historical case studies of these decisive events, limiting our knowledge to what could be established through large-n statistical tests.

The method of difference offers two additional advantages compared with single case designs. A well-selected contrast between cases that are similar in several ways creates an interesting puzzle. More important, variation in the cause and the effect, plus the elimination of some competing interpretations by case selection, supplies more rigorous support for a causal hypothesis than most single case studies, or multiple case studies that have not been selected to control for competing interpretations. This method provides more convincing empirical grounding for a causal inference than all except perhaps the least-likely and most-likely single case designs.

Disadvantages

Case methods also entail several inherent disadvantages relative to statistical methods. The most obvious is that the few cases studied could be atypical; their representativeness is usually not known. A claim that the theory is valid in general cannot be considered established without having observed other cases. Every case study mentioned earlier has this drawback. The least-likely and most-likely designs are efforts to surmount this difficulty with a single case, but even there, wider checking will provide more convincing support.

For this reason and others, second, most case methods are weaker than statistical methods for testing a theory. Claims that a case study has “tested” a theory are sometimes made casually without sufficient warrant. Testing implies a neutral challenge that the idea could fail. When a case or set of cases suggests a new hypothesis, the same cases naturally cannot be regarded as an unbiased test of this idea. A claim that a theory has passed a test is understood by many to mean that the theory is valid generally, in an average case, not only in the cases observed, and such a claim is difficult to defend without a representative sample known to be unbiased. Testing also implies challenging the idea with competing interpretations. A case study that fitted a known theory C to a case and thereby helped explain that case could not be regarded as a convincing test if it did not raise alternative interpretations and show that they are inferior.³²

This does, however, suggest a way to make a single case study more rigorous as a test of hypothesis C. The disciplined interpretive case study can introduce

³² The “congruence procedure” discussed by George and McKeown (1985) is intended to test a single causal theory using “within-case observations” rather than controlled comparison. Van Evera 1997 expands on this idea.

alternative hypotheses explicitly, stating each independently of the case's facts. The analyst then compares the expectations of each theory with the facts of the case (if the theories' expectations are precise enough to be checked empirically) and asks whether the case confirms any one of them more than any other. A case study that does provide such challenges approximates a test more closely than one that does not.

Another technique for mitigating this weakness, not yet seen in IPE studies to my knowledge, is Donald Campbell's multiple implications technique (Campbell, 1975). Campbell suggests improving on the discipline offered by single-site studies by using the key theory to predict other aspects of the case, as many as possible, besides the dependent variable of greatest interest. Ask, "If this theory is valid, what else should one expect to see?" Suppose our hypothesis says that opening a developing or post-communist country to international liquid capital flows will strengthen the political influence within that country of existing holders of liquid assets, making it more likely that they will press for and get their government to open further and resist efforts to close the border again. Campbell would ask, "If that is so, what other changes should result from capital market opening?" Should greater influence by this class also lead to changes in tax regulations in their favor? By expanding the "implication space," the scholar gains more data points at which the theory could succeed or fail, all within the single case study. For Campbell, data collection should include keeping a box score of the theory's hits and misses. A theory should be rejected if it does not pass most of these tests. If it does not, the scholar might attempt to formulate and "test" a better theory in the same way on the same case.

The least-likely and most-likely case studies and the comparative method of difference are other ways to strengthen the inference that can be drawn with respect to hypothesis C. Even if such a study supports the hypothesis more rigorously than any previous work has done, however, all case methods are still at a disadvantage, relative to the large-n statistical method, in providing support for the more ambitious claim to have tested the theory.³³

Third, qualitative methods provide lesser precision in their descriptions, claims about magnitudes of causal effects, and claims about the relative importance of different causes, than statistical methods. The latter require operational definitions and quantitative measures for variables and for parameters, which allow the researcher to compare the magnitudes of the effects of different causes more precisely. Vagueness is not a plus, other things being equal. Here the sanctions study can illustrate again. If Martin's book had been limited to case studies, she would have been unable to support theoretical claims as precise and as general as the book does report. Her quantitative measures and statistical methods compensated for these limitations of case studies.

This being said, qualitative methods could be deployed with greater precision than is common. Case authors could pin themselves down with operational definitions of key concepts and construct ordinal scales for measuring their variations qualitatively. A process under study could, for instance, be divided conceptually into stages, with each stage concept defined precisely and operationally. Then a description of one case of this process, accomplished by coding that case with these rules, would be more precise and disciplined than is typical. Such a qualitative study could contribute its method to later studies on different cases. Greater precision would allow more convincing comparisons and contrasts across cases, and it would become possible to look for general patterns and greater accumulation in analysis. As another example, Haggard and Maxfield

³³ Harry Eckstein's (1975) effort to defend the argument that single case studies are valuable for testing theories has not, to my knowledge, been followed by many supportive examples in IPE. George and McKeown 1985, Van Evera 1997, chap. 2, and Bennett and George 1997 also argue that theories can be tested with single case studies.

1996 investigates why developing countries liberalized their financial systems in recent years. This qualitative analysis of four country case studies is strengthened by use of a twelve-value scale of financial internationalization.

The method of difference with cases selected to control some variables has special limitations. Relying on pairs of detailed case studies obviously limits the number of cases that can be investigated in any project, and this limits the number of hypotheses that can be explored rigorously in that project. To provide a more comprehensive theory, with multiple hypotheses and with each grounded empirically in this manner, requires a series of projects conducted under a common framework. The researcher who accepts the sacrifices required to make use of quantitative indicators and statistical methods can often explore more hypotheses rigorously in a single data set. Second, as already noted, perfect matching of cases from real history is impossible, so the method of difference is unable to deliver one hundred percent certainty in causal inference. The analyst is never able to show that no cause other than C could have had any role in producing E.

This complaint is sometimes expanded into a flat rejection of the method of difference, but this would be an exaggeration. The fact that cause D contributed to E does not prove that C did not contribute. Both could be important. More fundamentally, some critics seem to attack on the assumption that some other method can provide perfect certainty. J. S. Mill (1970:211) satisfied himself that he had proven that it was "impossible" to apply this method to social phenomena. Mill and others seemed to assume that perfect certainty is possible with natural phenomena, a view that was discarded by many scientists and philosophers of science during the twentieth century.

George and McKeown 1985 cites Mill and logical positivists Cohen and Nagel (1934) when complaining that the method of difference is beset by formidable difficulties. But what method is not faced with difficulties? Single case studies are limited in domain. Statistical studies face omitted variable bias and measurement error. Lieberson (1994:1225; see also Lieberson 1991) declares flatly that Mill's methods of agreement and difference "cannot be applied to historical and comparative studies in which the researcher is limited to a small number of cases." Lieberson is right to challenge an author's claim to have demonstrated, using this method, that C "necessarily" causes E generally, beyond the cases studied. He is right that Mill 1843 did not provide any formal procedure for ascertaining interaction effects. But these are hardly persuasive reasons for banning the method altogether. A problem arises if researchers claim too much for it, but this is true of any method.

In conclusion, qualitative case study methods offer appealing advantages and suffer from significant limitations relative to statistical methods, in IPE just as in other subject areas. The most general implication is familiar but still inescapable, in my opinion. Neither family is sufficient without the other. Claims made on the basis of either alone should always carry appropriate qualifications. The two are complements. Aspiring researchers should seek education in both qualitative and quantitative methods. Established analysts should learn from both and resist temptations to discriminate against one family as a means of promoting another. Educators should reconsider any required methods course that is biased against either, or offer an alternative to it.

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