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WORKSHOP 15: Comparative Methods on Diversity.

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Introduction

In this chapter there will be the definition of terms, we are going to have a knowledge of using comparative methods in the study of diversity. There will also be a contrast of comparative research with other research strategies, an explanation on the goals of comparative research, the process of comparative research and finally the various ways of using comparative methods.

Ragin(1994) defines **comparative research** as the basic strategy of social research that most often focuses on configurations of similarities and differences across a limited range of cases. Here the number of cases are limited because the researcher's concern is to establish familiarities with each case included in the study. The comparative researcher always try to use those relevant aspects of investigation to make sense out of each case. Thus, knowledge of cases is often considered the most important goals of comparative research, independent of any other goal.

Case is a fundamental element of social research that is used most often to describe the members of a set of comparable phenomena And sometimes refers to as observations

Ragin(1987:105) says even though there are many types of research, the distinctiveness of the comparative approach is clearest in the studies that focus on diversity. He says in

comparative research on diversity, the category of phenomena that the investigator is studying is usually specified at the outset of the goal of the investigation to explain the diversity within a particular set of cases. Ragin(1994:41) says **exploring diversity** means ignoring dominant patterns and focusing on the variety of circumstances that exist.

Contrast of comparative methods with Other Research Strategies

The main difference between comparative research on diversity and qualitative research on commonalities is that their basic orientation toward cases differs. A qualitative researcher in their study of commonalities view multiple cases as many instances of the same thing whereas, Comparative researchers who study diversity, tend to look for differences among their cases. Comparative researchers examine patterns of similarities and differences across cases and try to come to terms with their diversity.

Quantitative researchers also examine differences among cases, but with a different emphasis. In quantitative research, the goal is to explain the covariation of one variable with another, usually across many, many cases.

In quantitative research, the focus is on differences in levels and how different variables like income and education covary across cases. While in comparative research the focus is on diversity-patterns of similarities and differences. The disadvantage of qualitative research is that the quantitative researcher typically has only broad familiarity with the cases included in a study. As the number of cases exceed fifty or so, it becomes increasingly difficult to establish familiarity with each case.

Another contrast of comparative research with qualitative research is that in qualitative research the frames are always fluid and the researchers often don't finish developing their frames until after all the work of collecting and studying the evidence is complete. While in comparative research frames are established at the outset of a research project but they remain flexible.

The Goals of Comparative Research

The main goals of comparative research include: exploring diversity, interpreting cultural or historical significance, and advancing theory.

(1) Exploring Diversity The comparative approach is better suited for addressing patterns of diversity than the qualitative and quantitative approaches. **Diversity** is said to be most often understood in terms of types of cases. The typical goal of comparative research is to unravel the different casual conditions to different outcomes.

Comparative researchers often discern types in the course of the examinations of patterns of diversity, they may also begin their research with a tentative delineation of types. A common strategy is to categorise cases according to their different outcomes. The goal of the research in this case will be to unravel the casual conditions that generated the different outcomes. And if the different cases match to the different outcomes, then the research will confirm the investigator's understanding of the factors that distinguished these cases. If not, then the frame for search will need to be reformulated. The goal of exploring diversity is most important because most than not people and social researchers tend to assume uniformity or generality when there is a great deal of diversity

(2) Interpreting Cultural or Historical Significance: In interpreting cultural or historical significance, the relevant set of cases are usually defined in advance and there is usually a finite moderate number of cases. Thus is are usually historical and geographical delimitations in the study of cases. Time and place boundaries are either plainly stated or implied. Since comparative studies focus on categories it makes it well suited for the goal of interpreting historical and cultural significance of phenomena, especially when there is a moderate number of cases.

Comparative approach facilitates historical interpretations because it focuses on the differences between cases and the differentiation of types of cases. Generally, when a set of comparative cases are specified this aid in the interpretation and understanding of the new case

(3) Advancing theory: The basic features of comparative approach like its use of flexible frames, its explicit focus on the cause of diversity, and its emphasis on the systematic analysis of similarities and differences in the effort to specify how diversity is patterned makes it a good strategy for advancing theory. In comparative research, frames are always established at the outset of a research project but they remain flexible. Even with this, the comparative

researchers always expect their frames to be revised and conduct research in order to sharpen the ideas expressed in a frame.

Comparative researchers, more often in the conduct of research tend to be more explicitly concerned with causation and causal complexity than most qualitative researchers. The emphasis on causation is central to theory because most theories in the social science are concerned with explaining how and why.

Thus, in order to assess causation, comparative researchers study how diversity is patterned. They compare cases with others and highlight the contrasting effects of different causes. They also view each as a combination of the characteristics and examine similarities and differences in combinations of characteristics across cases in their effort to find patterns.

The Process of Comparative Research

Comparative researchers typically start with a carefully specified category of phenomena that is basically interesting in some way. There are several processes involved in comparative research which include selecting cases, using analytic frames and analysing patterns of diversity.

1). *Selecting Cases:* Comparative researchers usually initiate their research with a specific set of cases in mind. Most often, this set has clear spatial and temporal boundaries and embraces cases that are thought to be comparable with each other. Typically, the cases that comparative researchers select for study are specific to their interests and to those of their intended audience. The comparative approach can be applied to many different kinds of cases, not just countries. It is important, however, for the cases selected to be comparable and to share membership in a meaningful, empirically defined category.

2). *Using Analytic Frames:* When researchers choose their cases, they also usually select their analytic frames. Essentially, a frame is chosen when the researcher specifies what about the

cases is of interest. Analytic frames help researchers see aspects of cases that they might otherwise overlook, and direct their attention away from other aspects

Sometimes researchers are interested in many facets of their cases and don't select a frame until they are well along in their research. . Comparative researchers also may develop new frames from their evidence. comparative researchers start with a fairly good sense of their cases and the empirical category that embraces them.

3).Analysing Patterns of Diversify :In comparative research the examination of diversity-patterns of similarities and differences-goes hand in hand with the study of causes. the goal of the researcher's examination of patterns of similarities and differences is to identify causal links-how different configurations of causes produce different outcomes across the range of cases included in a study

If causes and outcomes cannot be linked in interpretable ways, then researchers must reexamine their specification of causes and outcomes and their differentiation of types. In many ways this process of differentiating types and specifying causal links specific to each type resembles the "double fitting" of categories and images that constitutes the core of qualitative methods

Using Comparative Methods

Comparative methods are used to study configurations. A configuration is a specific combination of attributes that is common to a number of cases. The examination of patterns of diversity essentially involves a search for combinations of conditions that distinguish categories of cases. Thus, researchers look for uniformity within categories and contrasts between categories in combinations of conditions. Data procedures appropriate for the study of configurations, formalized by Drass and Ragin (1989) constitute the core of the comparative approach to diversity. comparative methods are used to examine causes and effects, but the emphasis in comparative research is on the analysis of configurations of causal conditions. The main ideas behind the techniques of data procedures include,an overview of comparative methods, specifying causes and outcomes,constructing truth table, and simplifying the truth table.

Making an overview of comparative methods involves trying to see the general features of comparative methods and this will be seen in the presentation the example of a hypothetical data on sixteen countries that experienced austerist protest in the early 1980s. The general features of the comparative analysis are that,

1. Comparative analysis proceeds by comparing configurations of Causes.
2. The comparative approach allows for the possibility that there may be several combinations of conditions that generate the same general outcomes
3. Comparative methods can address complex and seemingly contradictory patterns of causation.
4. The comparative approach can eliminate irrelevant causes

Conclusion

The comparative methods presented in this chapter illustrates some of the key features of the comparative approach. With much focus on diversity. Whenever a set of cases have different outcomes comparative methods can be used to find simple ways of representing the patterns of diversity that exist among the cases. These methods identify similarities within subsets of cases that distinguish them from other subsets. Analytic frames and images play an important part in comparative research too they provide primary leads for the construction of truth tables, especially the selection of causal conditions. The construction of the truth table itself is also an important part of the dialogue of ideas and evidence in comparative research because the truth table must be free of inconsistencies before it can be truth tables in the form of configurations of conditions that different subsets of cases.

However, the comparative approach lies halfway between the qualitative approach and the quantitative approach.

Reference

Ragin , Charles C (1994) Constructing Social Research: The unity and Diversity of methods.

