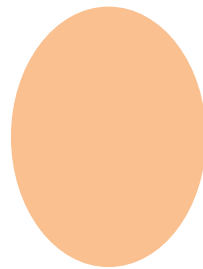# BSSn4495: Qualitative research in security studies

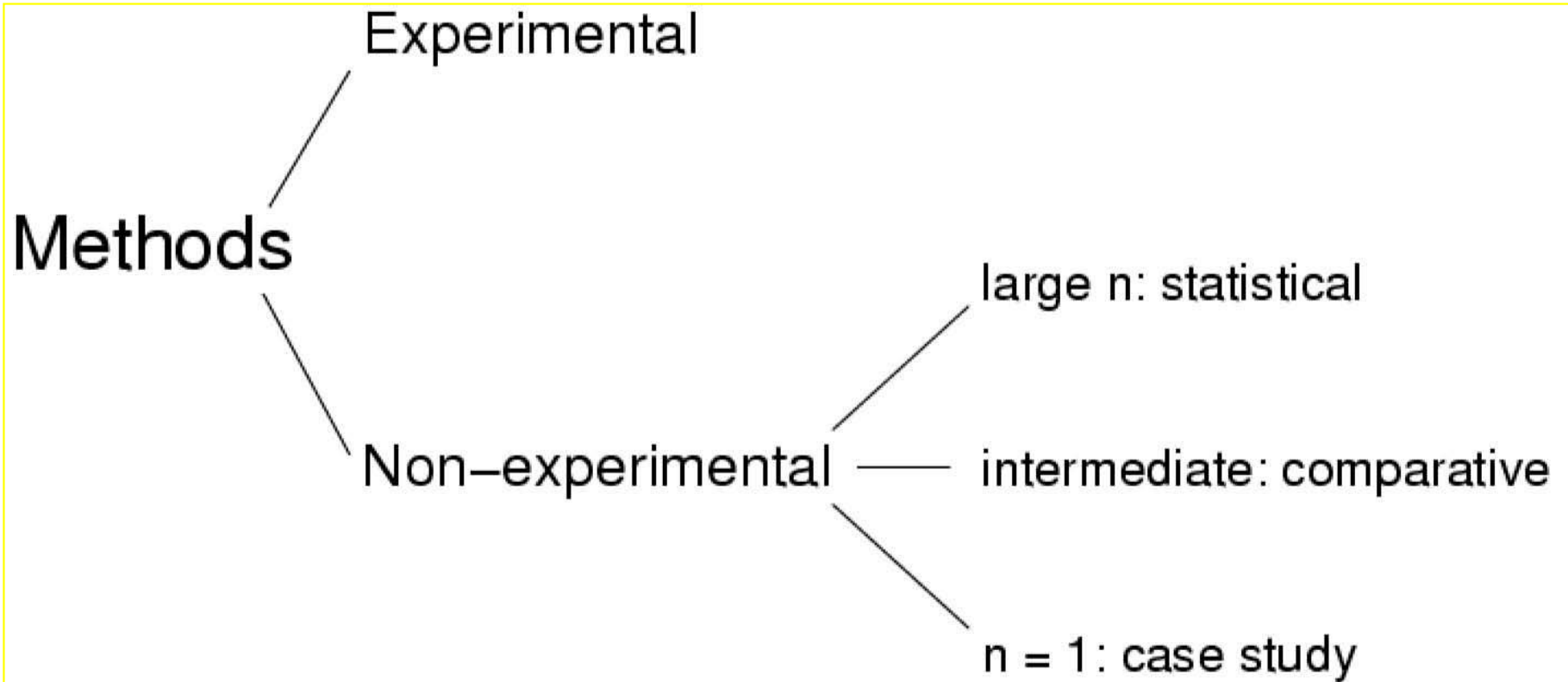## The comparative method

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Miriam Matejova, PhD

Agenda

- A note on variables
- Theory vs methods
- Qualitative vs. quantitative methods
- The comparative method

Theory vs. methods

Quantitative vs. qualitative methods

- Ragin: case-oriented vs. variable-oriented approaches
  - Case-oriented researchers: cases as meaningful but complex configurations of events and structures; singular, whole entities purposefully selected
  - Variable-oriented research: "homogeneous observations drawn at random from a pool of equally plausible selections" (Ragin 2004)

Quantitative vs. qualitative methods (cont.)

- Quantitative methods focus often on theory testing
  - BUT we also need concept creation, elaboration, refinement ← qualitative methods are good at this
- The issue of conjunctural causation
  - in-depth investigations of individual cases can identify complex patterns of conjunctural causation

Comparative research

- Goals:
  - Causal analysis;
  - "Parallel demonstration of theory" (i.e., show that a theory explains the case);
  - "contrast of contexts" (i.e., show how different the cases are; how parallel processes play out in different contexts)

The comparative method

- When should we use the comparative method?
- <u>Purpose</u>: primarily to test hypotheses; discover empirical relationships among variables
  - Could be used to build new theories
- <u>Good for</u>: addressing spurious correlation

The comparative method (cont.)

- One of the four fundamental methods that can be used to test the validity of general empirical propositions (Lijphart 1971)
- Methodology of comparison; *a method or approach, not a technique*
- Focus on cases instead of variables alone
- Usually involves small-N research

Most Similar Systems (MSS) design/ Mill's method of difference

- Comparing similar cases that show different outcomes will make it easier to control for factors that are *not* the causal agent and isolate the independent variable that explains the presence or absence of the dependent variable.

The Method of Difference

Positive Case(s)	Negative Case(s)
a	a
b	b
c	c
x	not x
y	not y

} Overall Similarities

} Crucial Difference

x = Causal Variable
y = Phenomenon to be explained

Most Different Systems design/ Mill's method of agreement

- Comparing very <u>different cases</u> that all have the <u>same dependent variable</u> will allow identification of a point of similarity between otherwise different cases → identification of the independent variable that is causing the outcome.

The Method of Agreement

Case 1	Case 2	Case n
a	d	g
b	e	h
c	f	i
x	x	x
y	y	y

} Overall differences

} Crucial similarity

x = Causal Variable
y = Phenomenon to be explained