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Prime-Ministerial Studies and the Comparative Method

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This article presents an argument for the suitability of the comparative method to the studies on prime-ministerial power in policy-making. The last decade saw a decided advance in prime-ministerial studies.¹ However, the field has not yet substantiated a method to explore its subject with satisfaction. This article in the first section reveals the nature and problems partly inherent in prime-ministerial studies. Section two discusses comparative politics as a discipline while the third section illustrates the *methods* of comparative politics, particularly distinguishing the comparative method from the statistical method. The comparative method, which is effectively a multiple qualitative case method, naturally involves multiple case studies. Section four clarifies the problems incidental to case selection and proposes desirable procedures for the comparative method.

1. Methodological Problems of Prime-Ministerial Studies

Existing prime-ministerial studies carried discernible problems, which partly derived from the nature of the subject. This section identifies four issues over their research methods. This article addresses three of them while conceding on the first issue.² They include: (1) the necessity of qualitative analyses, (2) the “ $N = 1$ ” problem, (3) lack of coherent questions, and (4) intervention of selection biases.

First, qualitative analyses were vital to confirm the dependent variable and its value in studies of prime-ministerial power. Policy-making involved various interactions between actors and different roles the prime minister played. Cases were extremely complicated. Even though the observer clarified definitions and points to observe, the assessment could not be straightforward but was argumentative. In prime-ministerial as well as presidential studies, some scholars have resorted to analysing the available power resources of the leaders.³ Yet the combination of resources, the significance of each resource and their actual usage might cause different effects. Power resources and power were distinct from each other. Power was not only a dispositional concept but it was also relational and facilitative.⁴ It was desirable to display the case in detail to prove the validity of the researcher’s assessment of prime-ministerial power. The adoption of qualitative analyses prevented the observer from substantially increasing the number of the cases.

Second, prime-ministerial and presidential studies shared a problem referred to as the “ $N = 1$ ” problem, N signifying the number of the cases. According to Gary King, it was “the idea that only one president is in office at any one time, and so inference is inherently difficult if not impossible”.⁵ This fashion of research did not allow the extension of the

number of the cases and, hence, imposed a severe limitation on the research.

Third, prime-ministerial studies did not provide clear “questions”. Some studies emphasised the distinctiveness of the individual prime ministers’ personalities and their circumstances. “Thick description” with countless variables was introduced to show the complexity of the events and the leader.⁶ Martin J. Smith’s study on Margaret Thatcher’s rise and fall exemplified this approach. It listed the power resources, environmental factors and strategies the actors might take and showed the possibility of fluctuating relationships between the actors. Yet it did not say anything about what caused the differences in those relationships when Thatcher retained her position and when she fell, save her strategic mistake of being “bossy”. This feature was not a drawback if the question of the research was to discover what had happened to the prime minister and how he/she had acted at the time. However, it was not much of use for constructing causality or a generalisation. As Gary King rightly asserted;

“a wide-ranging collection of all possible explanatory variables will not help us achieve any relevant goal of social scientific causal inference. In fact, it is even worse, since each additional variable for which we simultaneously estimate a causal effect reduces the precision of all of our causal estimates. Thus, “success” in amassing a larger and larger number of variables will automatically produce failure in learning about any one causal inference”.⁷

More explanations were probable than those that could possibly have been examined. Anthony King argued the problem was the research questions rather than the explanations. King arguably noted, “There are no answers because there are almost no questions”.⁸ Clearer questions and more explicit and focused variables were essential, the more complicated the subject became.

Finally, cases were often selected on the basis of the dependent variable in prime-ministerial studies. Until recently the background of prime-ministerial studies, particularly in Britain where they mainly advanced, was the dispute over prime-ministerial government.⁹ The proponents provided cases where the prime minister indeed exercised substantial power in government, while the opponents proposed the contrary. When the presence/absence of prime-ministerial government was the point at issue, it was invalid to turn deliberately only to a single variance of the dependent variable.¹⁰ In the case of the conventional prime-ministerial studies it was equivalent to selecting cases that fitted the observer's own argument.

The following sections present the suitability of the comparative method to the prime-ministerial studies, which have problems and features depicted as above. They clarify, first of all, the position the comparative method occupies in the methodology of political science and comparative politics.

2. Aims of Comparative Politics

Comparative politics is not a clearly defined discipline in political science. Scholars pointed out various elements of comparative politics. Focusing on the substance, studying foreign countries, was often raised as one of its characteristics chiefly to understand their own countries and avoid ethnocentrism. On the other hand, theoretical concerns, such as using "concepts applicable elsewhere" or "theory-building and theory-testing through systematic comparison between countries", were also seen as part of the discipline.¹¹ Peter Mair summarised, "If comparative politics is distinctive, therefore, then it is really only in terms of the combination of substance and method, and to separate these out from one another

necessitates dissolving comparative politics either into political science as a whole or into the social sciences more generally”.¹²

Comparative politics includes consideration of the research methods that define research designs. Some literature focused on this methodological aspect of the discipline. Giovanni Sartori pointedly emphasised, “To be sure, one may engage in comparative work for any number of reasons; but *the* reason is control” (original emphasis).¹³ To make explicit the understanding in this article, comparative politics is defined by its principle concern, namely comprehending general propositions across systems, which are primarily nations at present.¹⁴ The comparative method is another concept, which narrows its focus solely to methodology.

The basic assumption in comparative politics is that there are “discernible patterns in the flux of reality”.¹⁵ When different systems or same systems at different periods are compared, an understandable scepticism concerns this assumption. To take some examples, the power of the prime ministers may not mean the same; organisations may operate in distinct manners; cultural difference is undeniable, such as attitudes towards leadership, consensus, age or backgrounds of the actors. As Mattei Dogan and Dominique Pelassy put it, “Aren’t we here misled simply by verbal similarities?”.¹⁶

What “comparable” means and what units are “comparable” are far from self-evident. Gene DeFelice explained this problem by noting the ambiguity of the word “comparable”.

“If two things are said to be comparable, this usually means they are being represented as similar; but often it may mean instead that they can be assessed for likenesses and differences. It is in the first sense that we are warned against comparing apples and oranges. But it is still a proper

procedure to compare these fruits in the second sense - as long, of course, as we take care to use a concept that is applicable to each. And the test of a concept's applicability depends not on the actual presence or absence of the relevant characteristic, but rather on the *capability* of the item in question to exhibit that characteristic" (original emphasis).¹⁷

The issue is, therefore, "comparable with respect to which properties or characteristics, and incomparable (i.e. too dissimilar) with respect to which other properties or characteristics".¹⁸ As long as some theoretical concern leads the comparison, and the properties to be compared are (at least potentially) discernible, comparison stands. Theories and concepts must be provided to give the focus of the research.¹⁹ Variables do not emerge from the data but from the theory, which is presented prior to the data. Potential variables are selected on the basis of the question being asked and the theoretical hypotheses. If the phenomena cannot still be fully explained, other variables ought to be brought in. Comparability depends on the questions posed and the concepts adopted.

3. Methods of Comparative Politics

Arend Lijphart defined the comparative method as one of the basic methods of establishing general empirical propositions with experimental, statistical and case-study methods.²⁰ He praised the experimental method as "the most nearly ideal method for scientific explanation" because it allowed the observer to see the explicit relationships between the variables concerned by controlling their conditions.²¹ Yet the experimental method was not practical for political science, because experiments were practically and morally not allowed.²² The statistical method was regarded as the alternative to the experimental method in political science. Although it could not artificially manipulate the conditions of the relevant variables, it dealt with the problem of control by means of *partial correlations*.²³ The

difficulty was to collect adequate data for a sufficient number of cases.²⁴ Lijphart gave the case study method a dual assessment. On the one hand, a valid generalisation could be neither drawn nor rejected by a single case study. On the other hand, he argued some types of case studies, as the deviant case study, could contribute to “the establishment of general propositions and thus to theory-building in political science”.²⁵ Lijphart had a clear sense of order of “scientific” methods.

To Lijphart, the comparative method occupied a rather vague position amongst these categories. Notwithstanding the title of the essay, Lijphart did not provide a clear definition of a comparative method.²⁶ He admitted, “There is, consequently, no clear dividing line between the statistical and comparative methods; the difference depends entirely on the number of cases”.²⁷ The comparative method was used when sufficient cases were not available to enable partial correlations for systematic control of the variables.

As such, the small number of cases (small-*N*) was regarded as an inherent characteristic and a fundamental problem of the comparative method.²⁸ The “small-*N*” problem was precisely that of “over-determination”.²⁹ When there were a far fewer number of cases compared with that of the variables, which might possibly affect the dependent variable, it was impossible to distinguish the genuine from the false and spurious independent variables. Too many potential independent variables existed, which might determine or explain the value of the dependent variable. To overcome this problem, Lijphart suggested three strategies, namely (1) to increase the number of cases, (2) to focus on matched cases, and (3) to reduce the number of variables. Increasing the number of cases would have brought the comparative method close to the statistical method. Yet if the cases could be increased sufficiently, there was no need

to use the comparative method. Instead, the statistical method could substitute. In the 1975 article, Lijphart specified the definition of the comparative method to the so-called “comparable-cases strategy”, which was equivalent to the “most similar systems design (MSSD)”. It concentrated on comparison of similar cases to decrease the number of variables that might affect the dependent variable. Supposing the dependent variable displayed different values across the cases, a variable which had the same value across the cases could not arguably be the cause of this difference. However, even though MSSD enabled the researcher to disregard the elements that the cases shared, still there remained a countless number of elements showing different values which might be relevant for the causality under consideration.

Other methods, in contrast to MSSD, such as the “most different systems design (MDSO)” were proposed to master the “over-determination” problem.³⁰ MDSO compared cases which possessed almost completely different characteristics, save one variable, which was supposed to correlate with the dependent variable that displayed a same value between the cases. Because all other variables differed, (taking a determinist view) the variable with a particular value shared between the cases was considered to be the cause of the dependent variable. Yet MDSO required even more cases to eliminate potential variables, and it could still not assure no hidden variable was working unnoticed, affecting the dependent variable. Theoretical relevance was significant for both MSSD and MDSO to restrain the number of the relevant variables and avoid the problem of overdetermination as much as possible.^{31 32} Stanley Lieberon launched a most ruthless attack on MSSD and MDSO.³³ He argued the two methods carried in their logic four inappropriate assumptions to infer causality: (1) the existence of deterministic in stead of probabilistic causes, (2) no errors in measurement, (3) the presence of only

one cause, and (4) the absence of interaction effects of variables.³⁴ Lieberson described the two methods to be “*outdated and inappropriate procedures*”.³⁵ The comparative method was seen to be inferior to the experimental and statistical methods.

4. Comparative Method, Theory, and Case Selection

In contrast to the criticisms against the comparative method, scholars claimed its advantages from various aspects. Charles Ragin asserted; (1) the comparative method was better in dealing with “questions concerning the consequences of different combinations of conditions”, (2) it was better for explaining the details of a certain phenomenon, and thus more suitable for interpreting specific historical cases as well as for constructing new theories and synthesising existing theories, (3) the researcher could *set the boundaries of the examination. Cases were not samples of a particular population, which was often arbitrarily defined or undefined.* (4) The researcher became familiar with the relevant cases as a meaningful whole. Researcher’s dialogue with the material thus became possible.³⁶ A qualitative analysis was therefore more advantageous to discern errors in measurement, possibilities of other multiple causes and interactions of variables.

The comparative method requires a number of cases to be observed. Cases are defined as “an entity on which only one basic observation is made and in which the independent and dependent variables do not change during the period of observation - which may cover a long time, even several years”.³⁷ The multiple cases observed are used against each other to control the potentially affecting variables on the dependent variable.

When a sufficient number of cases are available, such as in the

statistical method, random sampling is the orthodox manner to select cases. The population is identified for the research, and the cases are selected randomly. By using random sampling the researcher is able to carry out case selection, uncorrelated to any of the variables, not only to the independent and dependent variables but also to any unknown variables. However, this random sampling is not a suitable fashion for selecting cases for a “small-*N*” research. Gary King *et. al.* provided an interesting example to illustrate this point.³⁸ Suppose there are three units that have values of High, Medium and Low, respectively. Two units amongst them are selected for the analysis. The possible combination would be High-Medium, High-Low, and Medium-Low. Only one of these combinations, namely High-Low, fully represents the population amongst them. If the two cases are selected randomly, the probability of selecting biased cases is two-thirds. As King *et. al.* put it, “if we have only a small number of observations (‘observation’ was their favourite term for a ‘case’), random selection may not solve the problem of selection bias but may even be worse than other methods of selection”.³⁹

What was often observed instead in the comparative method was selecting the cases based on the dependent variable. The problem of this approach was particularly emphasised when the dependent variable was not allowed to vary. A common example would be a study on revolutions, which explored only cases that investigated successful revolutions. The researcher can never safely hold that a particular variable was the cause of the dependent variable. Because unsuccessful cases of revolutions were not examined, one could not know how this particular variable appeared in these latter cases. This manner of case selection has been under dispute recently⁴⁰. Yet as far as prime-ministerial studies were concerned, it was not a suitable way of selecting the cases, as explained in section one. An alternative case-selection procedure other than random sampling and that

based on the dependent variable had to be constructed.

The manner of case selection this article proposes for the prime-ministerial studies is analogous to a simple experiment.⁴¹ According to Robert Yin, “Each case must be carefully selected so that it either (a) predicts similar results ... or (b) produces contrasting results but for predictable reasons”.⁴² It does not mean one should select cases based on the dependent variable, but on the contrary the researcher should select cases based on the independent variable that she believes would prescribe the dependent variable. By letting the independent variable vary the observer is likely, if the hypothesis is correct, to observe a different but predicted value on the dependent variable. As such, the value of the dependent variable will become known only after the research is conducted, though it is still logically possible to predict its value.⁴³ It is crucial that the selection rule does not correlate with the dependent variable.⁴⁴ The criterion of case selection is based on the (potential) independent variables. Coherent questions are vital to inducing hypotheses and thus the relevant variables. King *et. al.* gave an explanation for this manner of case selection;

“Selecting observations for inclusion in a study according to the categories of the key causal explanatory variable causes no inference problems. The reason is that our selection procedure does not predetermine the outcome of our study, since we have not restricted the degree of possible variation in the dependent variable. By limiting the range of our key causal variable, we may limit the generality of our conclusion or the certainty with which we can legitimately hold it, but we do not introduce bias”.⁴⁵

The reason for this careful case selection is the otherwise rise of selection bias. David Collier noted; “Selection bias is commonly understood as occurring when the nonrandom selection of cases results in

inferences, based on the resulting sample, that are not statistically representative of the population".⁴⁶ In statistical terms cases assume the existence of a population from which the cases are selected. When an inference is made from the cases, and if the cases represent the variance of the population properly, the researcher can safely generalise the inference gained from the research to the whole population. Hence, no selection bias should be allowed in the selection procedure.

In contrast, there are also views that cases in the comparative and case-study methods should not be seen as equivalent to samples in the statistical method. It is doubtful whether the cases in the former methods can be representative of some population with such a small number of cases.⁴⁷ Instead, the result from a particular research with a "small-*N*" should be generalised into a broader theory. Robert Yin contended;

"The problem lies in the very notion of generalizing to other case studies.

Instead, an analyst should try to generalize findings to "theory," analogous to the way a scientist generalizes from experimental results to theory".⁴⁸

The cases must, accordingly, be selected on the basis of maximising the variance of the independent variable to verify or falsify the hypothesis or theory put forward. Although the researcher does not know precisely, the dependent variable should vary as much as possible through predicting the effect of the independent variables. The concern for selection biases in the comparative method is different in nature from that in the statistical method. Case selection for the comparative method must be carried out carefully and intentionally, based on the (potential) independent variables.

What differentiates the comparative method from the statistical method is that "we must deal with the issues of controlling the sources of variance in the *ex ante* selection of the cases, rather than through *ex post* manipulations of data".⁴⁹ The control of variables is conducted through the

case selection *prior to* the research itself. The procedure to select cases is critical to make the most of them in testing the hypotheses provided.

In fact, the problem of “small-*N*” *per se* is not a problem in itself, but, of course, the problem is “the mismatch between a rather small number of cases and a large number of variables”.⁵⁰ Reducing relevant variables is not a function inherent in the comparative method. T. W. Meckstroth was right when he expressed;

“The basic problem is that the comparative method ... provides no criteria to select among the limitless supply of attributes that might be introduced as controls or as explanations for any given phenomenon. ... Thus, all possibilities are equally relevant, as far as the method is concerned, and as long as an endless variety of possibilities must be considered, the method cannot justify conclusive statements about explanatory relationships. ... [Instead,] the method is completely dependent on criteria of relevance supplied by previously formulated concepts, propositions, and theories which may be tested, but are not themselves discovered, by the method alone. ... [But] ultimately, ‘theoretical relevance’ must be relied on to limit the number of properties to be controlled and to avoid the problem of ‘overdetermination’”.⁵¹

Key questions and potential independent variables, which are derived from matching hypotheses and counter-hypotheses, are indispensable to prime-ministerial studies as to any other field of research. A focus on specific variables is required to use the comparative method. The concern for unintentionally excluding important variables should be managed by in-depth examinations of the individual cases. It is also necessary to classify and categorise the variables, so that it can be assured that variables do vary.⁵² The prime ministership is a fascinating topic, which involves many complicated issues around it. The power and role of the prime

minister has been explained by many variables. Yet it is not necessarily helpful to start with a complex framework, which is probably why a most sophisticated though complicated framework for leadership as that provided by Fred Greenstein did not create many successful followers. The research must have a focus. Gary King contended, “*for social science, no reasonable argument can be constructed in which all conceivable explanatory variables could be used at once in making inferences*” (original emphasis).⁵³ Terry Moe emphasised an alternative fashion of explanation, “one that places positive value on not being comprehensive, on eliminating rather than proliferating variables, on capturing just the essence of a problem rather than describing the whole thing”.⁵⁴ Statistical method can handle more variables than the comparative method. Yet still theory must do the job to eliminate the irrelevant variables. With only a small number of cases, the number of examined variables must be selected and thus limited.

5. Conclusion

This article proposed the comparative method, in other words, a method based on multiple qualitative case studies, as one of the suitable methods to examine prime-ministerial power in policy-making. Ragin *et. al.* stressed the advantage of qualitative research by stating “... researchers often ask questions that simply cannot be addressed with conventional, quantitative methods”.⁵⁵ This statement is indeed right. Yet it is not the advantage of the comparative method, but rather it is precisely the reason the observer has to rely on it. Returning to the problems and features of prime-ministerial studies illustrated in section one, this research note concedes to the first feature of prime-ministerial studies: it is often inevitable and indeed desirable to resort to in-depth qualitative analyses to examine and explore prime-ministerial power in policy-making. The

nature of the field partly requires this style of research.

The comparative method itself does not solve the “ $N = 1$ ” problem. Nevertheless, it is possible to increase the number of cases, not to a number which will satisfy statistical conditions but to one that will allow comparison against each other to check the functioning of the key variables concerned. By altering the values of the potential independent variables, “(T)he same test in a different setting expands the scope of a theory and may add confirmatory weight if additional factors thought to influence the outcome are taken into account”.⁵⁶ Instead of focusing on the individual leaders as cases, each occasion the prime minister exercises power or does not exercise power even though there was a potential to do so should be conceived as a case. By so doing, it enables on increasing the number of cases, since such (non-)exercises of power in policy-making are numerous.⁵⁷

It is the role of the theory to restrict the number of (potential) independent variables. Cases should be selected on the basis of the independent variable(s) and not merely on the availability or fascination of the cases themselves. The cases must show the appropriate value of the key variables to test the hypotheses and possess a theoretical significance to the research. Cases in the comparative method do not represent a population as in the statistical method, but they are chosen to be (or indeed not be) revelations of a particular theory to test or reject its validity against the reality.

Such concepts as “leadership stretch”, “presidentialisation” and “reactive leadership” (re-)emerge in the field of prime-ministerial studies, while older ones including “prime-ministerial government” did not bear much fruit.⁵⁸ Theories must be developed and sustained to see progress in the

studies on prime-ministerial power in policy-making. At the same time appropriate methods must also be employed to accumulate knowledge by verifying, revising (substituting) and rejecting concepts and their measurements to make the most of the effort put into the field. The comparative method is certainly not the only unique method to achieve this goal, yet it possesses a promising potential to the benefit of this field.

¹ The 1990s started with special issues on prime ministers in several journals, such as in *Public Administration*, 68 (Spring 1990); *West European Politics*, 14 (April 1991).

² As a discussion on methods, it is not the aim of this article to provide actual “questions” on prime-ministerial power. It will therefore focus on why “questions” are significant and how it ought to be as far as the comparative method is concerned.

³ Cf. Patrick Weller, *First Among Equals. Prime Ministers in Westminster Systems* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1985); Matthew Sobert Shugart and John M. Carey, *Presidents and Assemblies. Constitutional Design and Electoral Dynamics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Anthony King, “Foundations of Power”, in George C. Edwards III, John H. Kessel and Bert A. Rockman, eds., *Researching the Presidency. Vital Questions, New Approaches* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1993); Lee Kendall Metcalf, “Measuring Presidential Power”, *Comparative Political Studies*, 33 (June 2000).

⁴ See Keith Dowding, *Rational Choice and Political Power* (Aldershot: Edward Elgar, 1991), pp.6, 47-56.

⁵ Gary King, “The Methodology of Presidential Research”, in George C. Edwards III, John H. Kessel, and Bert A. Rockman, eds., *Researching the Presidency. Vital Questions, New Approaches* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1993), p.402.

⁶ Cf. Bernard Donoughue, *Prime Minister. The Conduct of Policy under Harold Wilson and James Callaghan* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1987); Martin J. Smith, “Interpreting the Rise and Fall of Margaret Thatcher. Power Dependence and the Core Executive”, in R.A.W. Rhodes and Patrick Dunleavy, eds., *Prime Minister, Cabinet and Core Executive* (London: Macmillan, 1995); Tomohito Shinoda, *Leading Japan. The Role of the Prime Minister* (Westport: Praeger, 2000).

⁷ Gary King, pp.399-400.

⁸ Anthony King, “Prime Minister and Cabinet”, *Contemporary Record*, 4 (September 1990), p.23.

⁹ See John P. Mackintosh, *The British Cabinet* (London: Stevens & Sons, 1962); R. H. S. Crossman, "Introduction" in Walter Bagehot, *The English Constitution* (London: Collins, 1963); George W. Jones, "The Prime Minister's Power", *Parliamentary Affairs*, 18 (Spring 1965); Patrick Gordon Walker, *The Cabinet* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1970).

¹⁰ See endnote 40.

¹¹ Mattei Dogan and Dominique Pelassy, *How to Compare Nations. Strategies in Comparative Politics*, 2nd. edn. (Chatham, N.J.: Chatham House, 1990), pp. 5-23; Richard Rose, "Comparing Forms of Comparative Analysis", *Political Studies*, 39 (September 1991), p.447; Peter Mair, "Comparative Politics. An Overview", in Robert E. Goodin and Hans-Dieter Klingemann, eds., *A New Handbook of Political Science* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p.310. See also Hans Keman, "Comparative Politics. A Distinctive Approach to Political Science?", in Hans Keman, ed., *Comparative Politics. New Directions in Theory and Method* (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1993); B. Guy Peters, *Comparative Politics. Theory and Methods* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998), pp.10-21.

¹² Mair, p.311.

¹³ Giovanni Sartori, "Comparing and Miscomparing", *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, 3 (July 1991), p.244.

¹⁴ Rose, "Comparing Forms of Comparative Analysis", p.447.

¹⁵ Andrew Murray Faure, "Some Methodological Problems in Comparative Politics", *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, 6 (July 1994), p.308.

¹⁶ Dogan and Pelassy, p.116.

¹⁷ E. Gene DeFelice, "Comparison Misconceived. Common Nonsense in Comparative Politics", *Comparative Politics*, 13 (October 1980), p.123.

¹⁸ Sartori, "Comparing and Miscomparing", 246. DeFelice's article was in fact a direct criticism of Sartori and Kallenberg, who, DeFelice argued, unnecessarily restricted the meaning of comparison. DeFelice, "Comparison Misconceived". See also A. I. Kalleberg, "The Logic of Comparison. A Methodological Note on the Comparative Study of Political Systems", *World Politics*, 19 (October 1966). Giovanni Sartori, "Concept Misformation in Comparative Politics", *American Political Science Review*, 64 (December 1970).

¹⁹ Dogan and Pelassy, pp.19-35.

²⁰ Arend Lijphart, "Comparative Politics and the Comparative Method", *American Political Science Review*, 65 (September 1971), p.682. See also David Collier, "The Comparative Method", in Ada W. Finifter, ed., *Political Science. The State of the Discipline II* (Washington, D.C.: American Political Science Association, 1993),

p.107; Tom Mackie and David Marsh, "The Comparative Method", in David Marsh and Gerry Stoker, eds., *Theory and Methods in Political Science* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995), pp.177-80; Rod Hague and Martin Harrop, *Comparative Government and Politics. An Introduction*, 5th. edn. (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), pp.71-5.

²¹ Lijphart, "Comparative Politics and the Comparative Method", p.683.

²² Kathleen McGraw noted the experimental method was increasingly used in "mainstream" political science, for instance, in studies of public opinion, decision-making and information processing, collective action, formal theory and public choice, and public policy. She also brought attention to two problems of this method from the aspects of internal and external validity. "Although well-designed randomized experiments can provide information about whether a causal relationship exists, they do not necessarily (and in practice rarely) provide information about the underlying processes accounting for the connection between the treatment and outcome." "In practice, external validity - the ability to generalize - is 'the Achilles heal [sic]' of political science experimentation All experiments are contextually specific, characterized by samples, procedures, settings, and time that are unique to a particular research undertaking". Kathleen McGraw, "Political Methodology. Research Design and Experimental Methods", in Goodin and Klingermann, eds., pp.772 and 774.

²³ Lijphart, "Comparative Politics and the Comparative Method", p.684. See also Charles, C. Ragin, *The Comparative Method. Moving Beyond Qualitative and Quantitative Strategies* (Berkeley, L.A.: University of California Press, 1987), pp.61-4; Erwin, K. Scheuch, "The Development of Comparative Research. Towards Causal Explanations", in Else Øyen, ed., *Comparative Methodology. Theory and Practice in International Social Research* (London: Sage, 1990), p.31.

²⁴ Collier, "The Comparative Method", p.107.

²⁵ Lijphart, "Comparative Politics and the Comparative Method", p.691. See also Harry Eckstein, "Case Study and Theory in Political Science", in Fred I. Greenstein and Nelson W. Polsby, eds., *Handbook of Political Science. Vol.7: Strategy of Inquiry* (Reading, Mass: Addison-Wesley, 1975); Gideon Sjoberg, Norma Williams, Ted R. Vaughan and Adree F. Sjoberg, "The Case Study Approach in Social Research", in Joe R. Feagin, Anthony M. Orum and Gideon Sjoberg, eds., *A Case for the Case Study* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), pp.52-60; R. A. W. Rhodes, "State-Building without a Bureaucracy. The Case of the United Kingdom", in Ian Budge and David McKay, eds., *Developing Democracy. Comparative Research in Honour of J.F.P. Blondel* (London: Sage, 1994).

²⁶ Lijphart, "Comparative Politics and the Comparative Method". See E. Gene DeFelice, "Causal Inference and Comparative Methods", *Comparative Political*

Studies, 19 (October 1986), pp.417-20.

²⁷ Lijphart, “Comparative Politics and the Comparative Method”, p.684; see also Arend Lijphart, “The Comparable-Cases Strategy in Comparative Research”, *Comparative Political Studies*, 8 (July 1975), p.160.

²⁸ DeFelice, “Causal Inference and Comparative Methods”, p.419; Collier, “The Comparative Method”, p.105; Faure, p.311; Charles C. Ragin, Dirk Berg-Schlosser and Gisèle de Meur, “Political Methodology. Qualitative Methods”, in Goodin and Klingermann, eds., p.749. Other problems included selection bias, concept stretching, knowledge requirements, and interdependence of the cases. Hague and Harrop, pp.68-71.

²⁹ Adam Przeworski and Henry Teune, *The Logic of Comparative Social Inquiry* (New York: Wiley, 1970), pp.33-4; Lijphart, “The Comparable-Cases Strategy in Comparative Research”, pp.172-3; Peters, pp.38 and 65.

³⁰ Przeworski and Teune.

³¹ Faure, pp.313-4; Collier, “The Comparative Method”, pp.111-2; T. W. Meckstroth, “‘Most Different Systems’ and ‘Most Similar Systems’. A Study in the Logic of Comparative Inquiry”, *Comparative Political Studies*, 8 (July 1975), p.134; Keman, pp.49-50.

³² Charles Ragin promoted a Boolean approach to combine qualitative case-oriented and variable-oriented approaches, the latter of which was fundamentally quantitative. It was based on Boolean algebra. It allowed the observer to conduct a qualitative analysis, the result of which was reported in a binary form, as in true-false, present-absent, or 0-1. It required a truth table, which would have “as many rows as there are logically possible combinations of values on the causal variables” (Ragin, p.87). With other Boolean techniques, this approach was to achieve qualitative analysis and parsimony, and take into consideration multiple causes and interaction amongst the variables (see Ragin, ch.6). Jonathan Hopkin was right when he noted “[a] significant disadvantage of the Boolean approach is that it requires all data to be presented in binary form, as dichotomous variables”. Hopkins, “Comparative Methods”, in David Marsh and Gerry Stoker, eds., *Theory and Methods in Political Science*, 2nd. edn. (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002). Yet the more important difficulty seemed to be its demand for a far larger number of cases than a fully qualitative analysis could produce satisfactorily. If five variables were to be examined, 32 (2⁵) rows were needed, although Ragin argued every single row did not have to have a matching case. Yet it was obvious from the tables he presented that a large number of cases were required. As a consequence, we were back to square one.

³³ Stanley Lieberson, “Small N’s and Big Conclusions. An Examination of the

Reasoning in Comparative Studies Based on a Small Number of Cases”, *Social Forces*, 70 (December 1991). Stanley Lieberman, “More on the Uneasy Case for Using Mill-Type Methods in Small-N Comparative Studies”, *Social Forces*, 72 (June 1994).

³⁴ Lieberman, “Small N’s and Big Conclusions”, p.307.

³⁵ Lieberman, “More on the Uneasy Case for Using Mill-Type Methods in Small-N Comparative Studies”, p.1225.

³⁶ Ragin, pp.15-6. See also Ragin *et. al.*, p.750.

³⁷ Lijphart, “The Comparable-Cases Strategy in Comparative Research”, p.160; see also Gary King, Robert O. Keohane and Sidney Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry. Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp.51-3.

³⁸ King, *et.al.*, p.126.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.125-6.

⁴⁰ See Lijphart, “The Comparable-Cases Strategy in Comparative Research”, p.164; DeFelice, 1986, pp.422-3; Barbara Geddes, “How the Cases You Choose Affect the Answers You Get. Selection Bias in Comparative Politics”, *Political Analysis*, 2 (1990), p.132; King *et. al.*, pp.108, 129-32; for positive responses for this way of case selection, see Douglas Dion, “Evidence and Inference in the Comparative Case Study”, *Comparative Politics*, 30 (January 1998); David Collier, “Translating Quantitative Methods for Qualitative Researchers. The Case of Selection Bias”, *American Political Science Review*, 89 (June 1995), p.464. In particular, Dion demonstrated that case selection based on the dependent variable was admissible so long as the necessary (instead of sufficient) conditions were evaluated.

⁴¹ Ragin, p.26; Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research. Design and Methods*, 2nd. edn. (London: Sage, 1994); King, *et.al.*, p.137; Dogan and Pelassy, pp.15-6.

⁴² Yin, p.46.

⁴³ See also King, *et.al.*, pp.129, 140; Peters, p.31.

⁴⁴ Geddes, p.135.

⁴⁵ King, *et.al.*, p.137.

⁴⁶ Collier, “Translating Quantitative Methods for Qualitative Researchers”, p.462.

⁴⁷ Yin, p.37.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p.37.

⁴⁹ Peters, p.36.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p.65.

⁵¹ Meckstroth, p.134.

⁵² See Norton and Rose for examples of classifications of the personalities and types of (British) prime ministers. Philip Norton, “Prime Ministerial Power”, *Social Studies*

Review, 3 (January 1988); Richard Rose, "Prime Ministers in Parliamentary Democracies", *West European Politics*, 14 (April 1991).

⁵³ Gary King, p.397.

⁵⁴ Terry M. Moe, "Presidents, Institutions, and Theory", in George C. Edwards III, John H. Kessel, and Bert A. Rockman (eds.) *Researching the Presidency. Vital Questions, New Approaches* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1993), pp.353-4.

⁵⁵ Ragin *et.al.*, p.750.

⁵⁶ James A. Caporaso, "Research Design, Falsification, and the Qualitative-Quantitative Divide", *American Political Science Review*, 89 (June 1995), p.458.

⁵⁷ Gary King, p.406.

⁵⁸ Michael Foley, *The Rise of the British Presidency* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993). Foley, *The British Presidency* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000). Kenji Hayao, *The Japanese Prime Minister and Public Policy* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1993).

Prime-Ministerial Studies and the Comparative Method

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This article argues that the comparative method can offer an approach to overcome the problems attached to the studies on prime-ministerial power in policy-making. Four problems in prime-ministerial studies are revealed: (1) the necessity of qualitative analyses, (2) the “ $N = 1$ ” problem, (3) lack of coherent questions, and (4) intervention of selection biases. Comparative politics incorporates various methods within it and the comparative method is one of them. It is distinguished from other methods, particularly from the statistical method. Their key differences are in the manner of selecting their cases (samples) and in the way they generalise their findings. This article clarifies the problems incidental to the comparative method and proposes desirable procedures to tackle them.

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