Case-Based Methods and Causal Inference
Draft Syllabus

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Course description: This module is designed to teach graduate students a number of advanced case-based methods that are frequently used by top US scholars in comparative politics and international relations, but that are not extensively taught in UK politics departments. The overall aim of the course is to help students design their own research, as well as critique the research of others. The central question addressed is: how do case-based methods allow us to make causal inferences? As such, the course subsequently deals with the epistemological justifications for case-based methods, concept formation and measurement, different issues of causality (Necessary & Sufficient Conditions, and Time & Sequence), research design (Single Case Designs, Comparative Designs, and Mixed-Method Designs), and both across-case data analysis (MSSD/MDSD, QCA, fsQCA) and with-in case data analysis (process tracing, and counter-factual analysis). As this course is primarily about research design, data collection and fieldwork techniques will only be briefly mentioned.

Prerequisites: This course is intended for graduate students, either MA students on a research training master, or PhD students. Students are expected to have a basic knowledge of the philosophy of social science and research design, as well as previous training in statistical analysis.

Learning outcomes: After completing this course students should:

- Have a good understanding of the epistemological foundations of case-based methods and the position of case-based methods within the social sciences.
- Have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the most common case-based methods.
• Be able to critique research designs and published research that uses the most common case-based methods or a combination of statistics and case-based methods. (assuming prior knowledge of statistical analysis).
• Be able to design their own research using one or more case-based methods or a combination of case-based methods and statistical techniques (assuming prior knowledge of statistical analysis).

Credits: 10 ECTS
Format: 12 weekly 2 hour seminars.
Literature: Approx. 1,000 pages
Assessment: Assessment consists of a combination of weekly assignments (40% of mark), a presentation in class (20%), and a 5,000 word research paper (40%). A total of 8 to 11 assignments are due. The minimum number required is 8, if more than 8 assignments are handed in only the 8 highest marks will be counted. The class presentation needs to be a critical summary of the literature discussing the working and pros and cons of that week's method and indicating possible discussion points. The research paper need not involve extensive empirical research, but could consist of a plausibility probe, an extended research proposal, or a critical reanalysis of a published article. The deadline is 2 weeks after the course ends.

Week 1: Introduction: Case Studies and Causal Inference in Social Science

Assignment: no assignment for the first week.

Required Readings:


James Mahoney and Gary Goertz, “A Tale of Two Cultures: Contrasting Quantitative and Qualitative Research,” Political Analysis 14:3 (Summer 2006): 227-249.

**Recommended Readings:**

Peter Hall, “Aligning Ontology and Methodology in Comparative Politics,” in James Mahoney and Dietrich Rueschemeyer (eds.), *Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 373-406


Keohane, King, and Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry* pp. 3-33, 99-114.

**Week 2: Concepts & Measurement**

**Assignment:** 2 page literature review (to be handed in before class)

**Required Readings:**


**Recommended readings:**


**Week 3: Necessary & Sufficient Conditions (Issues of Causality I)**

**Assignment:** problem set (to be handed in after class)

**Reading:**


**Recommended readings:**


**Week 4:** Most Similar Systems Design / Most Different Systems Design (Research Design I: Comparative Designs)

**Assignment:** problem set (to be handed in after class)

**Readings:**


**Recommended Readings:**


**Week 5:** Comparative History (Across Case Analysis I)

**Assignment:** 2 page literature review (to be handed in before class)

**Required Readings:**

Lijphart, Arend. 'Comparative Politics and the Comparative Method.' *American Political Science Review* 65 (1971), pp. 682-693


Skocpol, Theda and Margaret Somers. 'The Uses of Comparative History in Macrosocial Inquiry.' *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 22 (1980), pp. 174-197.

**Recommended Readings:**


**Week 6:** Qualitative Comparative Analysis (Across Case Analysis II)

**Assignment:** 2 page re-analysis of a published article (to be handed in after class)

**Required Readings:**


Benoit Rihoux and Gisele De Meur, “Crisp-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (csQCA)” (Chapter 3) in Benoit Rihoux and Charles C. Ragin (eds.), *Configurational Comparative Methods: Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) and Related Technique*, Sage, 2009.

**Recommended readings:**

**Week 7:** fuzzy set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (Across Case Analysis III)

**Assignment:** 2 page re-analysis of a published article (to be handed in after class)

**Readings:**


**Recommended readings:**


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**Week 8:** Time & Sequence (Issues of Causality II)

**Assignment:** 2 page literature review (to be handed in before class)

**Required Readings:**


**Recommended readings:**

Peter Hall. 2008. Systematic process analysis: what it is and how to use it.

*EPS: European Political Science* 7, 304-317

**Week 9:** Crucial Cases, Plausibility Probes, and Illustrations of Theory (Research Design II: Single Case Designs)

**Assignment:** 2 page critique of published studies based on case selection criteria (to be handed in after class)

**Required Readings:**


**Recommended Readings:**


**Week 10:** Process Tracing (Within Case Analysis I)

**Assignment:** 2 page literature review (to be handed in before class)
Required Readings:


Recommended Readings:


Scott Sagan, The Limits of Safety, pp. 1-14, 45-52 (an example)

Yuen Foong Khong, Analogies at War, pp. 1-28, 51-68. (another example)

Week 11: Counter-Factual Analysis (Within Case Analysis II)

Assignment: 2 page literature review (to be handed in before class)

Reading: book on counter-factual analysis


**Recommended readings:**


**Week 12:** Mixed-Methods Designs (Research Design III)

**Assignment:** 2 page research design combining at least two different methods and discussing the strengths and weaknesses of the methods used. (to be handed in after class)

**Required Readings:**

Carsten Q. Schneider and Ingo Rohlfing, “It’s Complex! Combining Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) and Case Studies in Multi-Method Research”, *mimeo*, (2010)


Chatterjee, “Ontology, Epistemology, and Multi-Methods”, *QMMR Newsletter* 7:2


**Recommended Readings:**
