

## Rethinking Comparison

Qualitative comparative methods – and specifically controlled qualitative comparisons – are central to the study of politics. They are not the only kind of comparison, though, that can help us better understand political processes and outcomes. Yet there are few guides for how to conduct non-controlled comparative research. This volume brings together chapters from more than a dozen leading methods scholars from across the discipline of political science, including positivist and interpretivist scholars, qualitative methodologists, mixed-methods researchers, ethnographers, historians, and statisticians. Their work revolutionizes qualitative research design by diversifying the repertoire of comparative methods available to students of politics, offering readers clear suggestions for what kinds of comparisons might be possible, why they are useful, and how to execute them. By systematically thinking through how we engage in qualitative comparisons and the kinds of insights those comparisons produce, these collected essays create new possibilities to advance what we know about politics.

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## *Innovative Methods for Qualitative Political Inquiry*

Edited by

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We dedicate this volume to the memory of Lee Ann Fujii and Kendra Koivu, both of whom were committed to helping us rethink how we see the world.

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## Acknowledgments

The idea for this project was born during conversations between the editors near the end of our time in graduate school together and early in our careers as assistant professors at the University of Wisconsin–Madison (Simmons) and at the City University of New York–City College (Smith). We believed that while we had each benefited enormously from learning comparative methods rooted in the Millian paradigm, such methods often sat awkwardly against the political worlds we each confronted during our dissertation and book projects. How to practice comparison outside of controlled methods, though, was something about which we had little insight, even as it was something that we saw regularly in the social science “classics” we read during graduate school. We decided that developing a guide on one potential approach to performing such comparisons would be a useful service for the next generation of graduate students and that it might open the kinds of questions students would feel empowered to ask. We also hoped it might help our colleagues not only understand the methodological logics behind our own work but also encourage them to think differently about possibilities for their own research designs. To that end, we drafted a paper of some initial ideas rooted in our experience as ethnographers, thinking it would be a one-time exercise that might open a conversation within the discipline of political science about comparison beyond its controlled variants. Through our conversations, though, we realized that our own view was limited by the fact that we were trained primarily in ethnographic and comparative historical methods and that scholars outside of these paradigms would have insight on forms of comparison that went beyond our relatively narrow views. In other words, we realized we needed conspirators.

Our first major step in assembling this team was to hold a workshop at the City College of New York in the fall of 2017. Through generous funding supplied by the National Science Foundation (Award #1713769) and the Dean’s Office of the Colin Powell School for Civic and Global Leadership, then under the leadership of Dean Vince Boudreau and his chief of staff, Dee

Dee Mozeleski, we were fortunate to bring an extraordinary set of scholars to City College's campus to talk about comparison. We purposefully assembled scholars who saw the world differently from one another – some positivists, others interpretivists; some quantitatively oriented, others qualitatively driven; some comparativists, others Americanists; some theorists, others empiricists – all with the goal of pushing one another to think harder about why the claims we make about the world hold up. Over the course of two days, surprising lines of epistemological agreement emerged, methodological disagreements were clarified, and a sense of joint purpose was formed. We then published an early and abbreviated selection of the papers as part of a symposium on “Rethinking Comparisons” in *Qualitative and Multimethod Research*, while plotting how to expand the work begun at the workshop into the present volume.

Over the many years it has taken this book to come to fruition, we have been fortunate to have received support from a remarkable set of colleagues, some of whom were present at the initial workshop and some of whom offered comments or advice in its wake. The contributors to this volume deserve the first thanks for their seriousness, hard thinking, and patience over several years as we worked to publish this volume. Additionally, Jennifer Cyr, Daragh Grant, Annika Hinze, Murad Idris, Helen Kinsella, Samatha Majic, Zachariah Mampilly, Dipali Mukhopadhyay, Timothy Pachirat, Rachel Schwartz, Peregrine Schwartz-Shea, Dan Slater, Dvora Yanow, and Deborah Yashar all provided comments, shared insights, or presented papers at various points in both our individual research processes and our efforts to produce this volume that sharpened our thinking about comparative methods. Dan Slater and Lisa Wedeen deserve specific mention. Without the inspiration, support, and guidance they provided to both of us while we were graduate students at the University of Chicago, we never would have felt the freedom to question dominant approaches to comparative methods. Audiences at two panels featuring papers from this volume at the 2018 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association asked sharp questions that improved several of the papers while making clear the need for a volume like this. Without the hard work of Rachel Schwartz, the original workshop at City College never would have been possible. Coordinating schedules, meals, travel, and lodging for twenty scholars coming from all over the country is no small feat, and Rachel pulled it all off while also contributing a paper herself to the discussion. Without the hard work of Anna Meier, the final manuscript never would have come together. Anna not only copyedited and assembled the final volume but she also chased down contributors (including ourselves) for everything from missing citations to past-due chapters. Linda Benson also served as a superb copyeditor, making sure early on that the prose in our own chapters was intelligible and then joining us in the final stages of the project to copyedit the entire manuscript. Robert Dreesen at Cambridge University Press has been an unfailing advocate for this project since we first brought the idea to



*Acknowledgments*

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Yet, even as we have been fortunate to benefit from the engagement of remarkable scholars, we have also been profoundly saddened by the passing of two wonderful colleagues in the years it has taken to bring this project to light. Lee Ann Fujii and Kendra Koivu contributed remarkable papers, intellectual vitality, and warm spirits at our original workshop at the City College of New York. Their impact on each of us and on the discipline of political science went far beyond the workshop, as each worked to open the sometimes closed intellectual and social spaces of the discipline for us to see the world more fully. For that reason, we dedicate this volume to their memory.

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