Historical/Comparative Research

- Seeks to discover patterns in the histories of different cultures. This research method appeals most to sociologists, political scientists, historians, and anthropologists interested in tracing the development of social forms & institutions and comparing these processes across cultures.

Putting Historical/Comparative Research Into Context

Research Methods (two general types).

1: Reactive/obtrusive
- Surveys, focus groups, experiments, and some field research.

2: Unobtrusive
- comparative/historical research, archival research, content analysis

Putting Historical/Comparative Research Into Context (2)

- Where do History and Sociology intersect and differ?
  - General (nomothetic) -- prevailing mode in sociology.
  - Specific (idiographic) -- prevailing mode in history.
- Types of Research
  - explanatory -- more prevalent in sociology
  - descriptive -- more prevalent in history

The Rise of Historical/Comparative Research: Motivations

- Political/Social Context of Social Change in the 20th Century
  - Totalitarianism in Germany and Russia
  - Transitions to socialism
  - Resistance movements
  - Nationalist movements
- Early Examples (Comte, Durkheim, Marx, Weber)

Historical and Archival Data

- Statistical (quantitative) Data
  - public
  - private
  - examples
    - Durkheim's study of suicide
    - Princeton project
- Non-statistical (qualitative) Data
  - example
    - Diaries in family research

Advantages and Disadvantages of Historical and Archival Data

- Advantages
  - Nonreactivity, wealth of information.
- Disadvantages
  - Representativeness
  - Accuracy of information
  - Categories or definitions are interpreted or socially constructed
  - Selective destruction of records

Logic of Historical/Comparative Analysis

- A. Data in Comparative/Historical Analysis
  - Number of cases
  - Units of analysis
  - Variables
- B. Use of comparisons
  - helps to validate theories and hypotheses.
  - The reason for using comparisons depends on which of the following three major types of H/C analysis is being used.

Three Major Types of Comparative/Historical Analysis.

- 1. Parallel Demonstration of Theory

- 2. Contrast of Contexts

- 3. Macro-causal Analysis

1. Parallel Demonstration of Theory

- Purpose - show that a theory applies in many cases
- How are cases selected? - so they are different from each other
- Critique - selectivity bias
  - Not really theory testing, but theory presenting

2. Contrast of Contexts

- Purpose - to show that processes are distinctive; cannot be reduced to universal principles or theory.
- Selection of cases - select cases that appear to be similar
- Critique - doesn't help develop alternative explanations.

3. Macro-causal Analysis

- Purpose # 1 - developing new explanations
- Purpose # 2 - "setting scope conditions" for theory
- Method of Agreement
- Method of Difference
- Critiques

Method of Agreement

- 1. Select cases with same outcome (dependent variable)
- 2. Compare possible causal factors across cases
- 3. Try to isolate one or a few features that are the SAME across cases
- 4. Conclude that this is the causal factor producing the similar outcome
- Example from Skocpol's States and Social Revolutions

Example of Method of Agreement:
Causes of Revolution in Russia, China, and France

Cause	Russia	China	France
Differences: type of government, religion, level of industrialization, and other factors			
State Breakdown	Yes	Yes	Yes
+	+	+	+
Peasant Revolt	Yes	Yes	Yes
‖	‖	‖	‖
Revolution	Yes	Yes	Yes

Method of Difference

- 1. Select cases with different outcomes (dependent variable)
- 2. Compare possible causal factors across cases
- 3. Try to isolate one or a few features that are DIFFERENT across cases
- 4. Conclude that this is the decisive difference (i.e. the causal factor) producing different outcomes.
- Another Example from Skocpol's <u>States and Social Revolutions</u>

Example of Method of Difference:
Causes of Revolution in France and Germany

Causes	France	Germany in 1848
Fragmented elites	Yes	Yes
Military threat	Yes	Yes
Village autonomy high, so peasants could revolt	Yes	No
‖	‖	‖
Successful Revolution	Yes	No

Critiques of Macro-Causal Analysis

- 1. Researcher must assume deterministic causality
- 2. Measurement error – esp. in coding of ordinal and interval variables
- 3. Might have multiple causes or interaction effects
- 4. Unlikely that you could measure all causal factors – major omitted variable bias problems
- 5. Selection on the dependent variable

Integration of Theory and Analysis

- Essential link between theory development and causal analysis
  - Analysis of small N may not be generalizable
  - Theory developed w/o reference to analysis may be even less generalizable (may be completely unsupported)
  - Need to test theory with analysis
  - Need to refine theory based on findings of analytic research