

matter in which research tradition these tests are grounded.

Carsten Q. Schneider, *Central European University*

Case Study Research: Principles and Practices. John Gerring (Cambridge University Press, 2007).
doi:10.1017/S0022381607080243

Case-study research, as John Gerring points out in his erudite primer on the method, occupies a central position in a great variety of social science disciplines. This suggests a paradox, however, because case studies are often viewed with circumspection, even in disciplines responsible for a large output of actual case-study work. Along with several other recent contributions in political science, Gerring's new book seeks to put case studies on firmer methodological ground, illuminating the inferential logic and value of the case-study research design.

The book is also concerned with the relationship between case studies and other methods. Gerring suggests, provocatively, "there is no such thing as a case study, *tout court*. To conduct a case study implies that one has also conducted cross-case analysis, or at least thought about a broader set of cases (13) . . . Case study analysis does not exist, and is impossible to conceptualize, in isolation from cross-case analysis" (90). The point is well-taken, for only from this perspective does the familiar question asked about case studies—what is this a case of?—make sense. Yet there are other issues to explore. How should cross-case analysis inform the selection and implementation of case studies? How does the inferential logic of the case study relate to the logic of other methods? What are the distinctive sources of inferential leverage provided by case studies relative to other methods?

Gerring offers several kinds of answers. In a chapter coauthored with Jason Seawright, the authors elaborate a range of strategies for using cross-case (often regression) analysis to select cases for intensive study. These include strategies familiar from other writings on case-study research, such as the selection of crucial (Eckstein in *Handbook of Political Science*, 1975) as well as most-similar and most-different cases (J.S. Mill, *A System of Logic*, 1843; Przeworski and Teune, *The Logic of Comparative Social Inquiry*, 1970). Gerring and Seawright also advocate the use of various regression diagnostics to identify "typical," "deviant," "influential" and other kinds of cases. They describe increasingly popular statistical matching procedures as a useful way to formalize a notion of most-similar cases.

The authors concede that the regression techniques they advocate are heavily model dependent; if the regression model that is fit to a large N dataset is misspecified, then there may be little value in using the model to choose cases for intensive study. Thus, while the chapter by Gerring and Seawright offers advice on how to merge quantitative and qualitative methods, the cautionary notes may be even more important than the advice.

In another chapter, coauthored with Rose McDermott, the logic of case studies is compared to the logic of experiments. Following Jerzy Neyman ([1923] 1990), much recent writing on randomized experiments emphasizes the following inferential problem. Imagine a medical patient who can either take a pill or not take the pill; the patient cannot do both. In the experimental template, the *causal effect* of the pill on the patient's health is the difference between what would happen to the patient with the pill and without it. The causal effect is therefore unknowable. A randomized controlled experiment solves the inferential problem by estimating, not the causal effect of the pill for a particular patient, but rather the average causal effect for all patients in some defined universe. Gerring and McDermott lay out the logic of "counterfactual comparison" underlying experiments and advocate its usefulness for thinking about causal inference in case studies (165–68).

Yet the authors' claim that the logic of experimental inference contains broader lessons for case studies, beyond providing a sharp way to define causal effects, seems exaggerated. In actual experiments, causal effects are estimated by assigning some of the patients at random to receive the pill and others at random to control; estimates of causal effects get more precise as the groups randomly assigned to treatment and control conditions grow in size. To get around the problem of estimating the causal effect of treatment for a particular patient by estimating the average causal effect for all patients in the universe, however, it is necessary to have at least a medium-sized N. With only a few cases at hand, the experimental template may have little relevance, except as a way of defining causal effects—when causation is to be understood in terms of interventions. Nonmanipulationist accounts of causation are also little discussed in this volume, yet they may play an important role in much social science research (Goldthorpe, *European Sociological Review* 17 [1]: 1–20).

One reason that Gerring finds a discussion of experimental and related quasi-experimental templates useful, I believe, is that he does not understand case-study research as an inherently small-N method.

According to Gerring, “each case may provide a single observation or multiple (within-case) observations (19) . . . For those familiar with the rectangular form of a dataset [i.e., a data matrix], it may be helpful to conceptualize observations as rows, variables as columns, and cases as either groups of observations or individual observations” (22). Gerring then advises the use of experimental or quasi-experimental methods to analyze variation across within-case observations. Yet for practitioners of case studies, the advice seems problematic; as more and more observations are compared, and the inferential leverage afforded by experimental or quasi-experimental methods is brought to bear, it seems less likely that one is really conducting a case study—that is, an intensive analysis of one or several instances of a phenomenon (19–20).

The concluding chapter on process tracing, co-authored with Craig Thomas, seems to come closest to shedding light on the distinctive contributions of case-study research to causal inference. In process tracing, not-strictly comparable pieces of information are combined in a way that adds up to a convincing causal account, by rendering alternative explanations less plausible while showing that microevidence is consistent with theoretical claims. Process tracing may be akin to detective work; bits of evidence about the maid, the butler, and the suspect are combined to formulate or investigate a central hypothesis about who committed a crime. In a different but related account, Collier, Brady, and Seawright (in *Rethinking Social Inquiry*, 2004) describe how what they term causal-process observations can provide a smoking gun that demonstrates—or rules out—a particular causal hypothesis. Unfortunately, the discussion of process tracing is a relatively short addendum to the core concerns of Gerring’s book.

Definitional slippages are one distracting feature of this book, despite the inclusion of a glossary and careful attention to defining terms. At one point, for instance, Gerring notes parenthetically, “I use the terms proposition, hypothesis, inference, and argument interchangeably” (22). Nevertheless, articulating the distinctive contributions to social science of case studies has been a core challenge for qualitative methodologists, and together with other recent contributions in this area (Brady and Collier, *Rethinking Social Inquiry*, 2004; George and Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development*, 2005) Gerring’s volume takes on this challenge in a spirited fashion. It will provide useful and engaging reading for substantive researchers of all methodological stripes.

Thad Dunning, *Yale University*

Politics in Time: History, Institutions, and Social Analysis. By Paul Pierson. (Princeton University Press, 2004.)

doi:10.1017/S0022381607080280

In *Politics in Time*, Paul Pierson has written an important book that is engaging, ambitious, and provocative. Its purpose is essentially threefold: to advocate that political scientists situate arguments in temporal perspective, to illustrate a number of ways in which they might do so, and to argue that much of the discipline does not presently take time seriously enough. The book is oriented not merely toward qualitative scholars or historical institutionalists, but rather “those interested in the attempt to develop claims about the social world that can potentially reach across space and time” (7)—effectively all social scientists who seek to advance generalizable explanations. In his effort to reach such a broad audience, Pierson engages widely with the discipline and beyond, drawing upon theoretical insights from Kenneth Arrow to Arthur Stinchcombe, exploring causal mechanisms from positive feedback to absorbing Markov chains, and offering substantive examples from U.S. congressional committees to state building in early modern Europe.

The publication of Pierson’s book in 2004 occurred in the midst of a still-ongoing resurgence of interest in qualitative methods and temporal arguments—stimulated in no small part by Pierson’s *American Political Science Review* article on path dependence published in 2000. Following an initial series of articles on the sources of institutional lock-in, a second wave of scholarship by authors such as Kathleen Thelen and Jacob Hacker shifted the focus to ways in which institutions change rather than remain stable over time. *Politics in Time*, which presents revised versions of four previously published articles as well as an entirely new introduction, fifth chapter, and conclusion, plays the very useful role of encapsulating this evolution of the literature and also offering an attempt at synthesis. Ultimately, as Pierson argues in Chapter 5, change and continuity must be seen as two sides of the same coin.

Politics in Time begins with a focus on institutional continuity via path dependence and positive feedback. Examining the mechanisms that sustain stability over time in economic history, Pierson argues that such processes should be at least as common in the political realm. Reasons include the prevalence of collective action in politics; the potentially self-reinforcing accumulation of power asymmetries; the absence of a price mechanism to clearly indicate