

RAGIN, Charles C.

The Comparative Method: Moving Beyond Qualitative and Quantitative Strategies

Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989, 185 p.

Fuzzy-Set Social Science

Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000, 352 p.

Without a well-developed and formalized technique of qualitative, holistic comparison, social and political science researchers encounter considerable frustrations and difficulties in terms of undertaking comparative work. In cases of cross-national data sets, which are relatively small in size, conventional quantitative techniques, such as multivariate statistical analysis cannot maintain patterns of statistical interaction. Moreover, if researchers want to compare different countries, statistical methods encourage them to increase sample size and ignore or at least skip other issues of comparability like historical, cultural or geographical aspects of the social phenomenon in the study.

Charles Ragin tries to move beyond qualitative and quantitative strategies in comparative social research. His first book, *The Comparative Method: Moving Beyond Qualitative and Quantitative Strategies* (1989), continues to represent the leading methodological work in comparative social science. It represents a significant attempt to step back from traditional statistical techniques, particularly in comparative social and political science, and explore alternative ways of linking theory and evidence. Ragin proposes a synthetic new strategy, based on an application of 'Boolean Algebra', in order to simplify complex data structures in a logical and holistic manner. The strengths of both quantitative and qualitative social science methods are, therefore, deliberately combined with some sophistication, in order to get to the task of comparing cases.

Before starting a more in-depth review of the book, it would be imperative to underline Charles Ragin's major contribution to Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA). The School of Comparative Social Research had its earlier roots in substantive social research, especially Theda Skocpol's substantial studies of comparative historical trajectories and J.S Mill's comparative methods (the methods of agreement and difference). However, it is indisputable that Ragin's book stands out as the most representative work on comparative social research. In the book, he tries to reveal the epistemological vigour of combining qualitative and quantitative methods in comparative research.

Charles Ragin is Professor of Sociology and Political Science at the University of Arizona; he has developed his contribution in the area of comparative methods and their role in advancing systematic cross-case analysis and small-n studies. Thus, books like the edited collections of *Essays, Issues and Alternatives in Comparative Social Research* (1991), *What Is a Case? Exploring the Foundations of Social Inquiry* (1992), the short introductory methodology text *Constructing Social Research, The Unity and Diversity of Method* (1994), and the edited collection *Formal Methods of Qualitative Analysis* (1994), deal with issues such as the balancing emphasis on cases and on variables in good comparative social science; 'configurational' comparative research as a middle path between the very small-n and the very large-n approaches; the nature of the case and the

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