

# **Political Science Scope and Methods**

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**Case Studies, Comparing Cases,  
and Statistical Analysis**

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# Cases: From few to many

- Last week: Experiments
- This week: Everything else
- Overview
  - Case studies: what are they good for?
  - Comparative method
  - Large N analysis

# The logic of Degrees of Freedom

- Lijphart: small-N analysis a way-station on the road to large-N studies
- What does more cases buy us? Degrees of freedom
  - Need as much information as inferences
  - Like equations and unknowns problem in algebra

# Case Studies



- What are case studies good for?
  - Theory generation?
  - Theory testing:
    - Process Tracing (Van Evera and Mahoney)
      - Break down causal links; look for evidence
      - Multiple tests in a single case (?)
    - Congruence Paradigm
      - Compare values of IV and DV to “normal” values

Getting comparative...

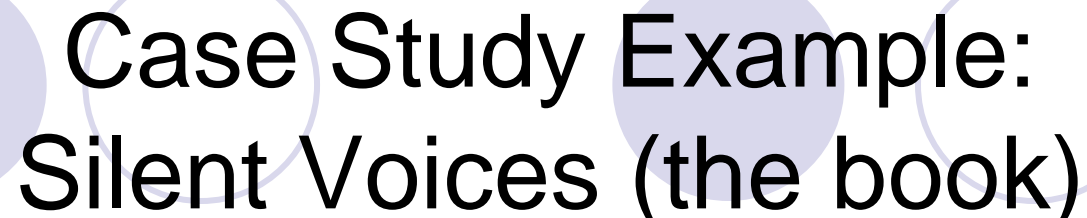


# Comparative Method

- Controlled comparison of cases
  - Mahoney, Collier
  - Aside: different strategies of causal inference? (Mahoney)
- How do you pick cases to make the strongest inferences?
  - How do you design a “strong test”?
  - Case selection (more next week)

# Strategies of Controlled Comparison

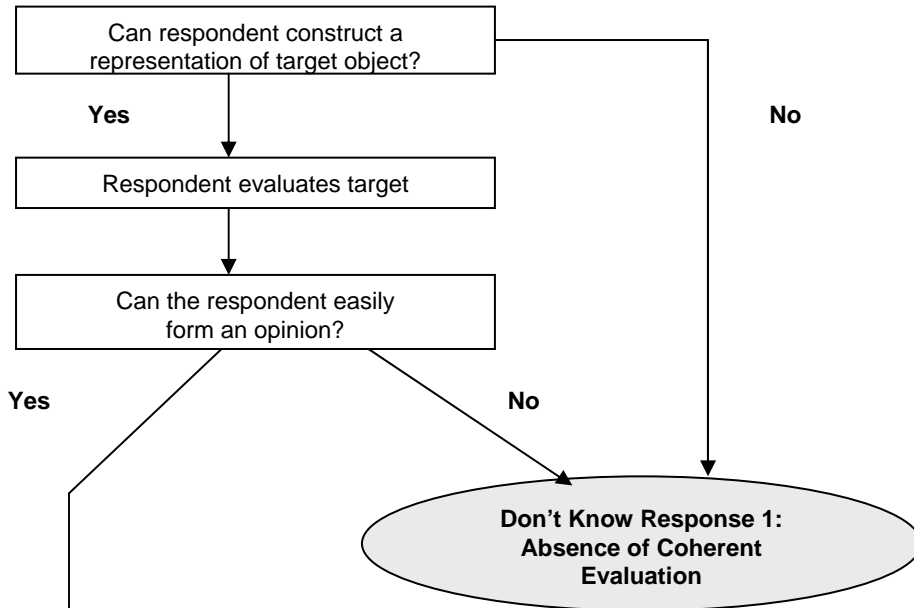
- Most different vs. most similar
- “Method of difference”
  - Select cases that are as similar as possible except in their value on the IV of interest
- “Method of agreement”
  - Select cases that similar on IV, but different in other ways



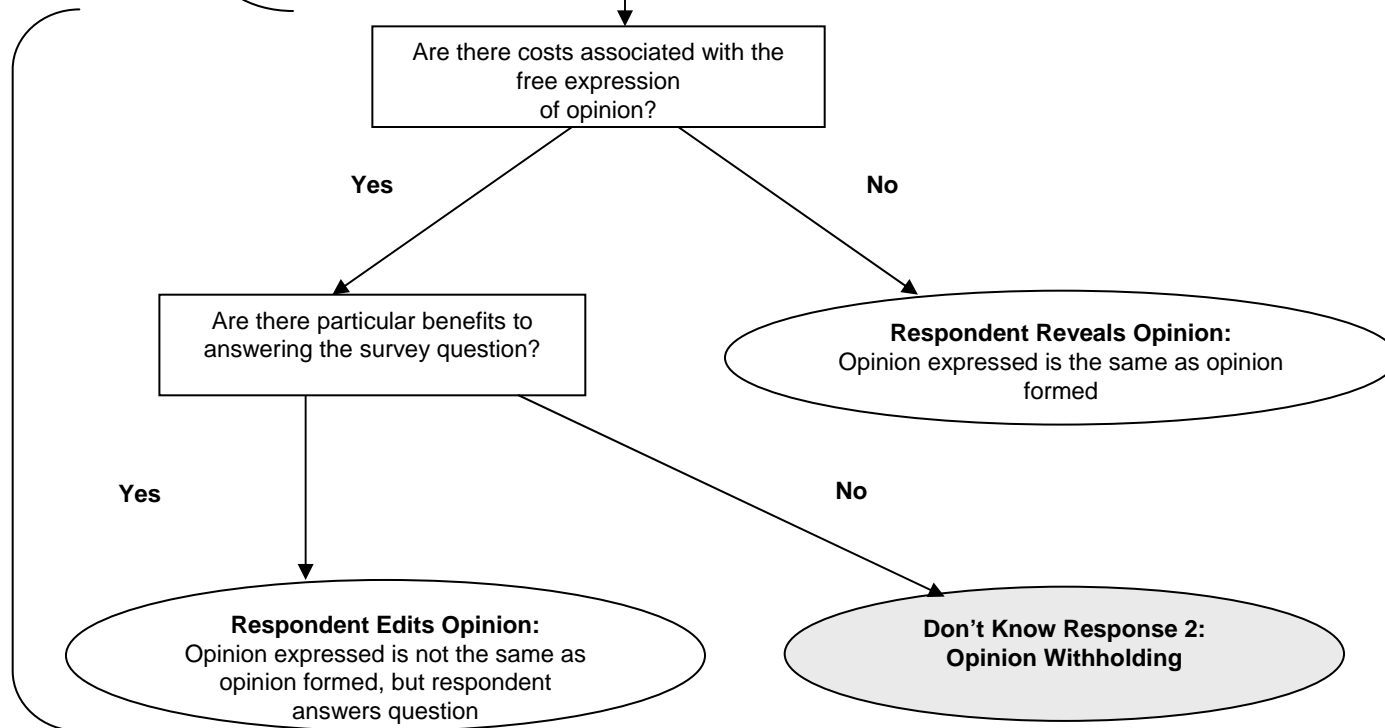
## Case Study Example: Silent Voices (the book)

- Examine interaction between individual survey response and political context
- Look at effects of changes in context
- Case studies: 3 issue areas, 6 cases (and 3-12 observations within each case)
- Example: Racial policy questions:
  - “Method of difference”
  - “Method of agreement.”

## Opinion Formation



## Opinion Expression



# Typology of Issue Difficulty

		Cognitive Complexity	
		<i>Easier</i>	<i>Harder</i>
Social Complexity	<i>Easier</i>	No Bias	Bias
	<i>Harder</i>	Bias	Bias



# Case Selection

## Cognitive Complexity

*Easier*

*Harder*

**Social Complexity**

*Easier*

Vietnam Early 1970s

Race Early 1970s

Vietnam Mid-1960s

Social Welfare Policy

*Harder*

Race 1990s

# Case Selection: Racial Policy Issues

	School 1972	Employment 1972	School 1990	School 1992	School 1994	Employment 1992
School 1972						
Employment 1972	A					
School 1990	D	D				
School 1992	D	D	A			
School 1994	D	D	A	A		
Employment 1992	D	D	A	A	A	



# Large N (Statistical) Analysis

- Internal vs. External validity tradeoff
  - Be mindful of C&S's threats to Quasi-Experiments
- Questions of robustness
  - In random data 5% of relationships appear significant
  - Account for competing theories
  - Look at independent data sets

# Large N (Statistical) Analysis (Cont.)

- Be honest about results
  - Report uncertainty
- Art and science