

A Trilemma of Conceptual Validity, Generality, and Causality :

Research Strategies in Comparative Analysis*

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· **Keyword:** research design, comparative methods, conceptual validity, generality, causality

【ABSTRACT】

This paper explores a methodological examination of several important works in comparative politics. From the analytic frame of a virtual *trilemma*---consisted of conceptual validity, generality, and causality,---several influential works in contentious politics, “civic” political culture, and comparative political economy are examined.

I argue that scholars respond to the trilemma situation by adopting a particular methodological strategy. While sometimes the methodological strategy may turn out to be successful, it more often than not creates a problem, which may bring about a negative consequence. The paper raises two issues. First, any careful methodological application may have to bear a trade-off between merits and drawbacks of a particular method. Second, methodological choice in research ought to be guided by well-specified theory.

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I. Introduction

Recent discussions on comparative methods have encouraged comparativists to be more sensitive in applying methods in their research projects. Both elaborated investigation within qualitative analysis and constructive debates between qualitative and quantitative camps have contributed to methodological self-awareness in the enterprise of comparative politics.¹⁾ In particular, recent revisits and innovations of advice provided by scholars almost thirty years ago have reflected methodological development over the intervening years.²⁾

This paper explores a methodological examination of several important works in comparative politics. From the analytic frame of a virtual *trilemma*——consisted of conceptual validity, generality, and causality,——several influential works in contentious politics, “civic” political culture, and comparative political economy are examined. The main questions of this paper are: How do these works pursue a particular set of methodological virtues? In what direction do they make a choice in a trilemma situation? I argue that scholars respond to the trilemma situation by adopting a particular methodological strategy. While sometimes the methodological strategy may turn out to be successful, it more often than not creates a problem, which may bring about a negative consequence.

In initiating a methodological evaluation of several works in comparative politics, this paper raises two general, methodological issues. First, any careful methodological application may have to bear a trade-off between merits and drawbacks of a particular method. Second, recent attempts of methodological triangulation——applications of three methodologies (formal modeling, statistical analysis, and comparative case studies) in one research——are not always successful unless its methodological choice is guided by well-specified theory.

The paper proceeds as follows. In the next section, I present a synopsis of Sartori’s classical discussion of conceptual validity and conceptual stretching as well as Collier and his collaborators’ recent innovations of Sartori’s framework. I then present

1) David Collier, “The Comparative Method: Two Decades of Change.” in Dankwart A. Rustow and Kenneth Paul Erickson (eds.), *Comparative Political Dynamics: Global Research Perspectives* (New York: Harper and Collins, 1991); David Laitin, et. al. “The Qualitative and Quantitative Disputation.” *American Political Science Review* 89-2 (June 1995), pp.454-481.

2) Collier (1991); David Collier and James E. Mahon, Jr. “Conceptual “Stretching” Revisited: Adapting Categories in Comparative Analysis.” *American Political Science Review* 87-4 (December 1993), pp.845-855.; David Collier and Steven Levitsky, “Democracy with Adjectives: Conceptual Innovations in Comparative Research.” *World Politics* 49-2 (April 1997), pp.430-451.

Przeworski and Teune's four criteria for the evaluation of theories. I then present a trilemma framework, drawn from Sartori's and Przeworski and Tenue's discussions about research strategies. I then present examinations of several works in comparative politics, followed by concluding remarks.

II. A Trilemma of Research Strategies

1. Discussions about Conceptual Validity and Conceptual Stretching

Sartori's classical framework of "the ladder of generality (abstraction)" posits an inverse relationship between "intention" and "extension."³⁾ The intention refers to the number of defining attributes of a concept, whereas the extension denotes the range of cases to which the concept refers. More specific categories or concepts tend to have more limited extension and greater intention. By contrast, more general categories tend to have greater extension and lesser intention. The quest for generalization among comparativists provides a major source for 'conceptual stretching' in which a distortion occurs when a concept does not correspond to the new cases. Therefore, the problem of establishing the validity of observation and measurement across cases becomes an essential task confronted by comparativists. A merit of the Sartori's framework is, as Collier and Mahon put it⁴⁾, "it encourages scholars to be attentive to context, but without abandoning broad comparison." Hence, a broad comparison requires a use of categories sensitive to context.

Exploring this dilemma of conceptual validity and conceptual stretching, Collier and Mahon argue that adopting "family resemblance category" or "radial category" can enable comparativists to avoid stretching without having to give up the quest for generalization.⁵⁾ The "family resemblance category" shows a similar pattern, but for most cases the match is not perfect. For instance, Collier and Mahon cite the concept of corporatism as a family resemblance category in that various subcategories such as liberal corporatism, societal corporatism, or state corporatism, have similar elements but not quite correspond with each other. In this respect, it is close to Weber's notion of

3) Giovanni Sartori, "Concept Misformation in Comparative Politics," *American Political Science Review* 64 (1970), pp.1033-1053; Giovanni Sartori, "Guidelines for Concept Analysis," in Giovanni Sartori (ed.), *Social Science Concepts: A Systematic Analysis* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1984).

4) Collier and Mahon (1993), p.845.

5) Collier and Mahon (1993), p.847.

'ideal types' in which key attributes associated with the concept are expected to be present to varying degrees.⁶⁾ It is essential that one explore the underlying analytic relationship among the attributes that constitute the family resemblance, thereby establishing the justification for retaining the category. On the other hand, contrary to the classical categories Sartori assumed, in which secondary categories bear components *in addition to* the characteristic attributes of the primary category, the attributes of secondary categories of a 'radial category' are *contained within* the primary category. While the concept of authoritarianism is an example of classical category, the concept of democracy is that of radial category. In radial category, the attributes of secondary categories (e.g., participatory democracy, liberal democracy, etc.) are contained within the attributes of the primary category (democracy).

Investigating conceptual renovations in recent discussions about democratization, Collier and Levitsky mention that the concepts of democracy "with adjectives" entail analytic strategies to increase analytic differentiation (to capture diverse forms of democracy) and to secure conceptual validity (to avoid stretching).⁷⁾ Students of democratization, according to Collier and Levitsky, have used alternative strategies--- "diminished subtypes," "precising" the definition, and "shifting" overarching concepts.⁸⁾ However, there still remains a trade-off vis-a-via the two goals of achieving differentiation and avoiding conceptual stretching. It is because these two goals are likely to lead to the loss of generality. Refining or precisizing a concept through analytic differentiation may be associated with a 'domain restriction'---the contexts in which the concept could be applied are restricted. This point can be thought of a return to Sartori's concern for conceptual accuracy and concept stretching.

2. Przeworski and Teune's Four Criteria for the Evaluation of Theories

In their analysis of comparative research strategy, Przeworski and Teune postulate criteria for the evaluation of theories: accuracy, generality, parsimony, and causality.⁹⁾ A theory is expected to be accurate, to explain as completely as possible, and to predict as much of the information as possible. However, they point out that "when the accuracy of theories is maximized, their generality and parsimony will often be low."¹⁰⁾ Generality of

6) Collier and Mahon (1993), p.853, fn. 8.

7) Collier and Levitsky (1997), p.430.

8) Collier and Levitsky (1997), pp.450-451.

9) Adam Przeworski and Henry Teune, *Logic of Comparative Social Inquiry*. (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1970), Chapter 1.

10) Przeworski and Teune (1970), p.21.

a theory refers to the range of social phenomena to which it is applicable. The greater the generality of a theory is, the greater the range of phenomena that can be explained by the theory. Generality is usually accompanied with parsimony. The smaller the number of factors provided for a complete explanation of a given class of events is, the theory is more parsimonious. As for causality, they point out that a system of variables is said to be causal to the extent that (1) the dependent variable is not 'overdetermined' ---no two variables within the system explain the same part of variation of the dependent phenomenon, and (2) the system of variables is isolated---the explanatory pattern does not change when new variables are added.¹¹⁾ Przeworski and Teune advocate a model of theory as general, parsimonious and causal set of statements, while relatively under-evaluating the criterion of accuracy. What their advice of research strategies implies is that it is unavoidable to confront with a trade-off among the four criteria for the evaluation of theories.

However, Przeworski and Teune do not spell out a potentially inverse relationship between causality and other criteria. Moreover, Collier and his collaborators do not pay attention at all to the issue of causality.¹²⁾ From the methodological discussions about qualitative case studies to theoretical debates over causal mechanisms, the task of explaining causation has been the key to successful analytic research in comparative analysis.¹³⁾ Taking the importance of causality into account, we can include the criteria of causality into an interconnected trade-off in research strategies. This leads us to make a point of a "trilemma" situation. That is, a research project can maximize at most two virtues only at the cost of a third one. We now turn to explicating the trilemma.

3. A Trilemma in Research Strategies

As mentioned above, Sartori's inverse relationship between concept validity and concept stretching makes a dilemma situation. More general theories are more likely to be vulnerable to the problem of concept stretching. It is because extending a concept to broader contexts may entail a danger of losing valid contextual meaning of the concept.

11) Przeworski and Teune (1970), p.23.

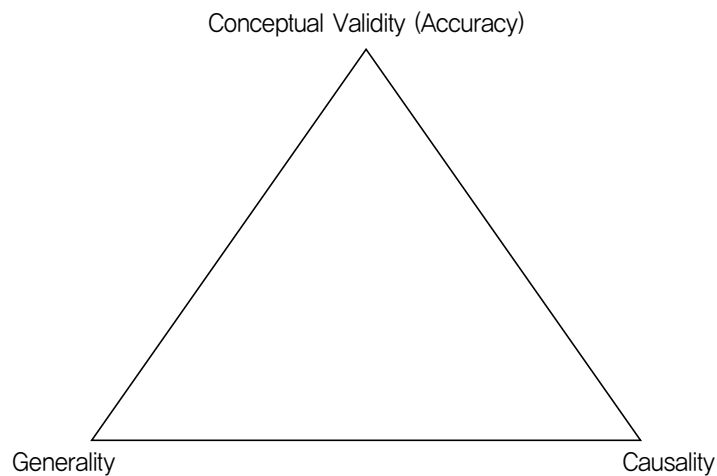
12) An anonymous reviewer pointed out that conceptual accuracy and generality are the issue of methodology, whereas causality is a theoretical issue. While agreeing with the reviewer, I nonetheless include the issue of causality within the framework of trilemma because there are important methodological issues related to causality. For instance, the endogeneity bias (i.e., reversed causality problem) is one of the critical issues in econometrics, in general, and political methodology, in particular.

13) Charles Ragin, *The Comparative Method* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987).

On the other hand, Przeworski and Teune's four criteria for the evaluation of theories imply interconnected trade-offs among them. Based on these two discussions on research strategies, I present a trilemma framework. Figure 1 shows the trilemma framework. I exclude the virtue of parsimony because it most times overlaps with the virtue of generality. It should be noted that this trilemma in research strategies is by no means a logical result. In other words, the trilemma reflects practical research situations rather than some axiomatic constraints that each and every research project is facing. Practically, it is hardly easy to maximize all the three virtues in comparative analysis. But, it is not logically impossible.

In this trilemma situation, a research project can maximize at most two values while costing a third one. For instance, approaches seeking a general applicability could pursue both generality and causality, but at the expense of the accuracy of concept in particular contexts. In pursuit of generality and causality, a research project is more likely to lose the virtue of conceptual validity, by extending a concept beyond a specific historical setting that generated the concept.

〈Figure 1〉 A Trilemma of Research Strategies



Consider, for instance, a rational choice theory of the institutional impact on actors' behavior. Clearly, rational choice theoretic models furnish the microfoundation of causal mechanisms through which a certain type of behavior and outcomes result in. However, concepts like democratic institutions and accountability may be stretched. As Levi points out, rationalists are "almost always willing to sacrifice nuance for generalizability, detail for logic, a forfeiture most other comparativists would decline."¹⁴⁾

When a research project pursues conceptual validity and generality, it may result in a risk of a murky causality. The “civic culture” tradition from Almond and Verba onward has emphasized a civic political culture as a strong determinant of democracy.¹⁵⁾ However, a civic political culture characterized by high levels of mutual trust, a willingness to tolerate diversity of opinion and a propensity for accommodation and compromise could be the result of protracted functioning of democratic institutions that generate appropriate values and beliefs.¹⁶⁾ From this discussion, we observe a reversed relationship between a key independent variable and the outcomes to be explained. The “endogeneity” problem or “reversed causality” issue¹⁷⁾ is more often than not frequently observed in research projects which pursue conceptual validity and generality at the cost of causality.

A research project that focuses on conceptual validity and causality is more likely to have a narrower range of applicability of concepts or theories. Most single case studies or the ‘thick description’ tradition are included in this case. Consider, for instance, Scott’s cultural study to explain why and how political conflicts take the course they experienced.¹⁸⁾ Scott analyzed responses to irrigation and the institutionalization of double cropping in Sedaka, Vietnam, in terms of how the richer and poorer rice farmers understood the demands from traditional norms and obligations in light of new opportunities. What he shows us is how competing interests are pronounced within a culturally homogeneous village. The villagers’ shared understanding that contributed the continuing struggles over the access to resources, according to Scott’s framework, are not generalizable to other cases.

Faced with the trilemma, a research project tends to adopt a particular methodological strategy to save or minimize the cost of a third virtue. First, we observe that a work on social movements and contentious politics---*Dynamics of Contention*,---which stresses conceptual validity and causality as the values it pursues, adopts a strategy of “paired comparison of uncommon foundation.”¹⁹⁾ While the research project may have

14) Margaret Levi, “A Model, A Method, and A Map: Rational Choice in Comparative and Historical Analysis,” in Mark Irving Lichbach and Alan S. Zuckerman (eds.), *Comparative Politics: Rationality, Culture, and Structure*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p.21.

15) Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations and Analytic Study* (New York: Little Brown and Company, 1965).

16) Terry Karl and Philippe C. Schmitter, “Modes of Transition in Latin America, Southern and Eastern Europe.” *International Social Science Journal* 128 (May 1991), pp.270-271.

17) Gary King, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp.185-194.

18) James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

achieved a third value---generality,--- its original strength in conceptual validity becomes to be in perils. Second, Putnam's *Making Democracy Work*²⁰ is in close line with the 'civic culture' tradition, which emphasizes the general applicability of the concept of civic-ness. The problem is causality. Putnam's strategy of 'triangulation' of different methods can be considered a strategic choice to make a case of causality in the book. That is, he employs a rational choice theoretic framework to uncover the microfoundation of a causal relationship between the civicness and institutional performance. But, his strategy leads to an invalidation of the conceptual accuracy--- What does the civicness exactly mean? Third, the literature on the varieties-of-capitalism in comparative political economy emphasizes on the causal effect of a concept with emergent properties (e.g., "liberal market economies").²¹ The concept such as "coordinated market economies" entails various aspects and dimensions in political economy. But, students of the varieties-of-capitalism argument suggest that the concept be understood as more than the sum of all the parts. The issue here is whether the concept with emergent properties ensures conceptual validity or accuracy. Lijphart suggests a strategy of combining variables as a solution to the case in which the number of systems cannot outnumber potential number of variables representing rival explanations.²² Nonetheless, there remains the problem of conceptual accuracy.

Table 1 shows a summarized trilemma situation of selective works in comparative politics. The reason behind my selection of the three works is that they represent innovative works---both substantively and methodologically---in important subfields in comparative politics. These works also initiated methodological debates in their respective subfields. We examine the three works in next sections.

19) Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

20) Robert Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

21) Peter Hall and David Soskice (eds.), *Varieties of Capitalism*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

22) Arend Lijphart, "The Comparable Case Strategy in Comparative Research." *Comparative Political Studies* 8-2 (1975).

〈Table 1〉 A Trilemma in Research Strategies

	Dynamics of Contention	Making Democracy Work	Varieties of Capitalism
Virtues	Conceptual validity Causality	Conceptual validity Generality	Generality Causality
Cost	Generality	Causality	Conceptual validity
Strategy	Paired comparison of uncommon foundation	Triangulation	Emergent-properties concepts
Potential	Gain of Generality	Gain of Causality	Context-richness
Consequence	Loss of Accuracy	Loss of Validity	Approximation error

III. A Trilemma in Application

1. Dynamics of Contention

In seeking to explain how and why causal mechanisms concatenate in various settings in resulting in similar outcomes (*i.e.*, contention), McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly's *Dynamics of Contention*²³⁾ emphasizes the importance of accurately defined concepts and causal relationships. In chapters dealing with various phenomena such as democratization, nationalism, and revolution, specification of concepts takes a priority. McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly are cautious about potential concept stretching. They are at pains to mention a defect of the concept of 'political opportunity structure.' That is, "...so broad had the concept become that there is a danger of its confusion with the political environment in general and with *post hoc* explanation that find opportunities only after movements have had success."²⁴⁾ If the pitfall of unspecified relations between contentious politics and politics in general remains further unrecognized, it may be a potential source of conceptual stretching. A concern may be related to their attempt to bring political phenomena that have hitherto been considered as triggering different and independent logic of operations under the rubric of the same mechanism of contention.

The collaborators of *Dynamics of Contention* obviously reject the idea of covering law deduced from a universal logic. As Tarrow points out, "[t]hese combinations and permutations appear to us too complex to reduce to a single covering law of contention."²⁵⁾

23) McAdam et al. (2001).

24) Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly, "Towards an Integrated Perspective on Social Movements and Revolution," in Mark Irving Lichbach and Alan S. Zuckerman, (eds), *Comparative Politics: Rationality, Culture, and Structure*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p.153.

If we can consider a continuum---from generality to peculiarity---it remains to be seen where the authors of *Dynamics of Contention* would posit themselves. We also observe a strong emphasis on causality rather than mere correlation: “[t]he genuine payoff from dynamic process-oriented analysis arrives with the ‘specification of recurrent small-scale causal mechanisms’ that concatenate differently in contrasting historical settings.”²⁶⁾ It is interesting to see that their causal analogies are similar to what John Stewart Mill termed “chemical causation.”²⁷⁾ It is, to quote Ragin, the “intersection of a set of conditions in time and in space that produces many of the large-scale qualitative changes, as well as small-scale events, that interest social scientists, not the separate or independent effects of these conditions.”²⁸⁾ Both the concatenation of mechanisms and the “multiple conjunctural causality”²⁹⁾ emphasize the conjunctural and combinational nature.

Given these observations, it appears that *Dynamics of Contention* pursues maximizing the virtue of causality (through mechanism-based causal analogies) and accuracy (through a better specification of concepts) at the cost of generality. To what extent could they pursue generality? The generality of *Dynamics of Contention* may be increased through a more cautious selection of cases compared. It is notable that there exists a dilemma in selecting cases to be compared---whether to include ‘negative cases’ to define the appropriate frame of comparison for evaluating competing explanations, on the one hand, or rather to focus on more homogeneous set of cases, on the other.³⁰⁾

McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly’s strategy of “paired comparison of uncommon foundation” fits the first option rather than the second, which is more common in comparative political analysis.³¹⁾ Tarrow mentions that “no less attractive for its qualitative depth than the ‘common foundations and paths’ approach, but based on a broader range of variation, is the search for mechanisms that produce similar outcomes in different kinds of system.”³²⁾ In so doing, he argues, the analyst need not lose context-rich comparison, while maintaining a broad range of variation across different systems. Two consequences follow. First, to search for causal mechanisms in various settings appears

25) McAdam et al. (2001), p.86.

26) McAdam et al., (1997), p.160.

27) Ragin (1987), p.23.

28) Ragin (1987), p.25.

29) Ragin (1987), pp.23-30.

30) Collier and Mahoney (1996), pp.68-69.

31) For example, see Peter Katzenstein, *Small States in World Markets* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985); Peter Hall, *Governing the Economy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

32) McAdam et al., (2001), p.83.

unavoidably to be related to the quest for generalization. The credibility of the mechanisms is enhanced significantly by demonstrating their generalizability to other cases.³³⁾ Hence, the methodological strategy of ‘paired comparison of uncommon foundation’ appears to come up with the quest for generalization. Second, in the course of paired comparison, the problem of conceptual validity and potential danger of stretching may be observed. One of the costs of the strategy is that by comparing politics across a wide range of political practice and structure, a research is likely to overlook contextual factors.

Therefore, while the “paired comparison of uncommon foundation” may play a role in generalizing their theory and causal mechanisms leading to contention, it is likely to cause problems in seeking the validity of concepts derived from particular contextual configurations.

2. The Peril of Triangulation without Theory: Murky Causality

Putnam’s *Making Democracy Work* has been acclaimed to be “a stunning breakthrough in political culture research.”³⁴⁾ As briefly mentioned above, *Making Democracy Work*, in line with the “civic” political culture tradition, seeks general applicability of the effect of civic culture on democracy across wider settings. The issue of causality remains unexplored, however. It stems from theoretical under-specification of causal relationships between the “civicness” and institutional performance of Italian regional governments.

Although *Making Democracy Work* has been considered an example of “triangulation of different methods on sample problem,”³⁵⁾ critical reactions have also been presented. While some cautious qualitative-oriented scholars drew our attention to an inherent selection bias problem in Putnam’s research design,³⁶⁾ a practitioner of rational choice theory pointed out Putnam’s misunderstanding of core concepts and lack of causal mechanisms in his framework.³⁷⁾

Putnam’s use of rational choice theoretic approach can be considered his attempt to uncover the microfoundation of the link between civicness and institutional performance.

33) Levi (1997), pp.33–34.

34) David D. Laitin, “The Civic Culture at Thirty.” *American Political Science Review* 89–1 (February 1995), pp.168–173.

35) Sidney Tarrow, “Making Social Science Work Across Space and Time: A Critical Reflection on Robert Putnam’s *Making Democracy Work*,” *American Political Science Review* 90–2 (June 1996), p.389.

36) Collier and Mahoney (1996), p.62.

37) Margaret Levi, “Social and Unsocial Capital,” *Politics and Society* 24–1 (1996), pp.45–55.

However, as Levi pinpoints³⁸⁾, the two pitfalls in Putnam's rational choice theoretic framework are related to his relative ignorance of causal links. First, Putnam misunderstands and hence misapplies the concept of 'path dependence.' Past circumstances circumscribe or condition contemporary choice, but they neither *determine* nor *predict* choices. However, Putnam's analysis of "virtuous circle" and "vicious circle" implies a lock-in situation in which actors' choices are predetermined by paths. There is obviously no or little room, in Putnam's framework, for strategic behavior of actors. Second, causal mechanisms are hardly easy to find in his framework. According to his logic, participation in secondary associations increases the norm of reciprocity and trust, which in turn leads to a better institutional performance. By what causal mechanism does participation in civic community increase the norm of reciprocity and trust? Is some kind of cognitive or psychological mechanism operating here? The problem of causality is not clearly taken into account in Putnam's use of rational choice theoretic framework.

Moreover, his quantitative analysis rather renders the accuracy of the concept of civiness unconvincing or even doubtful. With respect to the index of civiness, it would be interesting to see whether he would consider 'civic community' as a categorical or continuous variable. Given his emphasis on a stark contrast between the north and south ("virtuous circle" and "vicious circle"), it is reasonable to consider 'civiness' as a categorical variable. In this case, civiness comes to be of emergent properties that cannot be disaggregated into various elements. It nevertheless would not be clear whether civic community is a continuous or categorical variable before we are presented with clear theoretical propositions of his arguments. The other source of confusion comes from his use of factor analysis. Factor analysis is based on a fairly strong assumption that each component (*e.g.*, bird-watching clubs, newspaper readership, etc.) of a factor is highly correlated with the factor ('civiness') but not at all correlated with other factors (*e.g.*, economic development).³⁹⁾ Putting aside the question of why sports and bird-watching clubs do matter, whereas class-based unions do not, one may argue that bird-watching club membership is to a certain degree related to the level of incomes or economic development.

These two sources of confusion, to a considerable degree, lead to a problem of conceptual inaccuracy. What exactly does the civiness mean and what are the defining attributes of the term? Rooted in the civic political culture tradition, as mentioned above, *Making Democracy Work* stands in the research tradition that emphasizes

38) Levi (1996).

39) Jae-On Kim and Charles Mueller, *Factor Analysis: Statistical Methods and Practical Issues*. (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1978).

conceptual validity and generality. Without well-specified theory, however, his triangulation of different methods rather appears to render his concept of civiness less accurate, leading us to be doubtful about the validity of the concept.

An application of triangulation of different methods does not necessarily guarantee the maximization of comparative advantage of each method. As Ragin stresses, qualitative case-oriented study is more opted for discovering multiple causal conjunctures than quantitative statistical analysis, all else being equal.⁴⁰⁾ Also, rational choice theoretic framework is better designed for revealing the microfoundation of causal relationship than any other approaches.⁴¹⁾ Statistical analysis is efficient and effective in sorting out rival explanations.⁴²⁾ Nevertheless, in the absence of well-specified theory, Putnam's triangulation of different methods is not successful.

3. The Cost of Emergent-Properties Concept: Approximation Error

Discussions on the varieties-of-capitalism in the field of comparative political economy emphasize both causality and generality. Broadly put, a certain system of variables---as a whole---affects political economic outcomes. Diverse configurations of the system of variables constitute varieties of capitalism.

The analyses of Hall and Soskice⁴³⁾, and Rueda and Pontusson⁴⁴⁾ emphasize the overall institutional features whose effects cannot be disaggregated into several institutional elements. What we observe from these arguments is a clustering of empirical patterns across the advanced industrial countries. In other words, path dependence is strongly observed. Diverse paths of evolution of capitalist political economy are captured by aggregated concepts with emergent properties. By these emergent-properties concepts, scholars argue that they can cluster similar empirical patterns and types of configurations of political economy. In this respect, it is toward a generalization of a concept into a restricted domain that the emergent-properties concepts take a role. In pursuit of causality and generality, then, do their strategies of the 'emergent-properties' concepts perform well? What would be the payoffs they are likely to cost?

Most varieties-of-capitalism arguments would choose their respective concepts as a

40) Ragin (1987).

41) See Levi (1997); Jeffrey Friedman (ed.), *The Rational Choice Controversy*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).

42) Lijphart (1975).

43) Hall and Soskice (2001).

44) David Rueda and Jonas Pontusson, "Wage Inequalities and Varieties of Capitalism," *World Politics* 48 (April 2000).

nominal (categorical) variable. This has been explicitly shown in Rueda and Pontusson's quantitative study of the contingent effect of the Social Market Economies (SMEs) and various political institutional variables on distributive outcomes. By taking the concept of SMEs as a nominal variable, Rueda and Pontusson make a stark comparison between the effects of SMEs and non-SMEs. By emphasizing the attempt to capture overall institutional effect, however, the varieties-of-capitalism arguments render the source of their concepts' explanatory power unclear.

It may be useful to 'unpack' the components of each of the varieties-of-capitalism concepts. Hall's concept of Organized Market Economies (OMEs) consists of financial market arrangements, production strategies, and employer associations.⁴⁵⁾

Soskice's concept of Coordinated Market Economies (CMEs) centers on financial system, industrial relations system, educational/training system, and inter-company system. He mentions that his concept of CMEs excludes the tax system, pension system, and the welfare state.⁴⁶⁾ Whereas the concept of OMEs and CMEs are more related with firm's crucial role in capitalist economies at the expense of neglecting the role of the state, Rueda and Pontusson's concept of SMEs is based on policy consequences as well as institutional features. The concept of SMEs is unpacked as welfare state decommodification, employment security, and coordination of collective wage bargaining.

Unpacking concepts of varieties-of-capitalism reveals that conceptual distinction between a set of discrete variables and overall emergent properties of institutional features is important. Without conceptual clarification between two variables---either between discrete variables or between a discrete variable and a concept of emergent properties,---estimation of the effects of the two variables would, in general, not be correct. This "proxy variable phenomenon" can lead to biased, underestimated effects of a causal variable.⁴⁷⁾ Therefore, approximation error is likely to occur in the discussion of varieties-of-capitalism. This potential problem stems from under-specified conceptual relationship between each component of the emergent-properties concepts, on the one hand, and the emergent-properties concepts as a whole, on the other. In this respect, one way to preclude the problem may be disaggregating the varieties-of-capitalism concept into various components. In this case, a researcher may have to discard the emergent-properties concept, while acquiring rich description of a set of interval-scale variables. On the other hand, as Rueda and Pontusson point out, we could think of varieties-of-

45) Peter Hall, "Organized Market Economies and Unemployment in Europe: Is It Finally Time to Accept Liberal Orthodoxy?" Unpublished manuscript, Department of Government, Harvard University.

46) Hall and Soskice (2001).

47) William H. Green, *Econometric Analysis*, 2nd ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1993), pp.442-443.

capitalism variable as “capturing the way the discrete variables are configured within a coherent whole, *i.e.*, as referring to an institutional context with emergent properties, which cannot be reduced to discrete variables.”⁴⁸⁾

IV. Conclusion

This paper points in two directions. First, provided that the trilemma of conceptual validity, generality, and causality can be reasonably assumed, it is hard for a research project to overcome the situation since there exist interconnected trade-offs among the three criteria for the evaluation of concepts and theories. Second, particular methodological strategies play a role to a certain degree in enhancing a researcher's selected goals of a research problem.

The strategy of triangulation of different methods can play a significant role in accomplishing higher values in the three criteria. It is because each method has its own merits (and drawbacks as well). While quantitative statistical analysis has strengths in testing competing explanations by way of hypothesis testing, qualitative comparative method is more adept in hypothesis-crafting and theory-building.

Recently, there have been rapid methodological development and sophistication in comparative analysis in political science. This evolution entails the fact that neither qualitative nor quantitative analysis can claim the monopoly of certain methodological merits. Just as Ragin's qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) has attained strengths in evaluating competing theories⁴⁹⁾, quantitative analysis has been successful in capturing multiple causation or interactive effects in its estimation models.⁵⁰⁾ On reflection of these developments, and given the trilemma of conceptual validity, generality, and causality, more serious attempts to make a bridge between qualitative and quantitative analysis would be a productive venue in comparative analysis.

48) Rueda and Pontusson (2000).

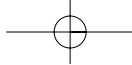
49) Ragin (1987).

50) For example, see Bruce Western, *Between Class and Market*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997); Michael Alvarez, Geoffrey Garrett, and Peter Lange, “Government Partisanship, Labor Organization, and Macroeconomic Performance.” *American Political Science Review* 85 (1991), pp.541–556; Rueda and Pontusson (2000).

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