# Meaningful Comparisons

## The Method of Systematic Process Analysis and Different Explanatory Approaches in Case Study Research

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How can political reforms be meaningfully analysed in a comparative setting? Taking Peter A. Hall's method of systematic process analysis as a starting point, I argue that the combination of three different explanatory approaches in case study research can be used as an alternative to medium-N quantitative approaches of political reforms. First, a *co-variation design* can be used to assess whether different values of a given independent variable lead to different outcomes. Just like quantitative approaches, co-variation designs rely on the analysis of between-case variation and allow for the contingent generalization of findings to a population of cases that are similar in respect to all control variables. However, unlike quantitative approaches, they allow for the usage of indicators in a more context-sensitive way than more formalized approaches. Second, a *causal-process tracing design* can be used to identify the causal mechanisms that lead to a specific outcome. Causal-process tracing designs allow for the identification of the configurations of conditions that are necessary and together sufficient for the outcome. Finally, a *congruence analysis design* can be used to compare the explanatory merits of the different theoretical explanations proposed in the literature. The congruence method follows a deductive logic in the sense that theories are used to formulate observable implications that are subsequently tested against empirical evidence. I demonstrate the benefits of combining these three explanatory approaches in case study research using the example of the historical development of job security regulations in Western Europe.

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**Introduction**

How can political reforms be meaningfully analysed in a comparative setting? Given the large number of landmark studies and 'modern classics', comparative research is a success story (Munck and Snyder 2007). However, it seems as if comparative research is largely a success story without a method, or at least no sophisticated one. Some forty years ago, Lijphart (1971: 682) argued that comparison is such a basic method "that a methodology of comparative political analysis does not really exist". According to him, the comparative method is identical to the statistical method except for the number of cases, which is too small to use statistics. Hence, the comparative method is essentially "the statistical method under relatively unfavorable, but improvable, circumstances" (Lijphart 1975: 163) and it is therefore "advisable to shift to the statistical method if sufficient cases are available" (Lijphart 1975: 165).

Forty years on, the situation has not changed dramatically. Comparative researchers continue to publish important books and articles, but discussions of the comparative method have not advanced much further (cf. Keman 2005), leaving qualitative comparative analysis (Ragin 1987, 2000, 2008) and multi-method research (Lieberman 2005; Collier et al. 2010) aside for the moment. Hence, a few years ago, Hall (2003: 375) concluded that "the ontologies of comparative politics have substantially outrun its methodologies".

In response to his own observation, Hall (2006) developed the method of systematic process analysis to describe the methodological approach many comparative researchers use. In a nutshell, the method of systematic process analysis tests theoretically derived predictions against empirical data. It emphasizes the role of processes to increase the number of observations per case. This means that theories are not only used to identify the relevant variables but also to predict the processes whereby these variables are expected to exercise their impact. Finally, Hall (2006: 30) advises researchers to apply the method of systematic process analysis to several cases to increase researcher's confidence that the causal process observed is not idiosyncratic to one of them.

By developing the method of systematic process analysis, Hall (2006) has made an important contribution to the literature on the comparative method. However, his discussion of the method leaves a series of questions unanswered. Most importantly, it seems as if Hall's (2006) method of systematic process analysis conflates multiple sources of causal inference. For instance, it remains unclear whether the causal inference is based on the observed congruence between theoretical predictions and empirical evidence, on the processes connecting independent variables and the outcome or the co-variation between independent variables and the outcome.

In this paper, I am trying to make a contribution to the process of catching up with the ontologies of comparative politics. My goal is to strengthen the method of systematic process analysis by identifying its main sources of causal inference. I argue that the method of systematic process analysis is in fact based on the combination of three different explanatory approaches in case study research (co-variation designs, causal process-tracing designs and congruence analysis designs). It is the implicit combination of these three explanatory approaches that makes systematic process analysis such a successful approach to the study of comparative politics.

This paper is structured as follows. In the next section, I briefly outline the development of the debate on the comparative method and discuss the important contributions made by Lijphart (1971, 1975), Ragin (1987), Lieberman (2005) and Hall (2006). Subsequently, I discuss the three different explanatory approaches in case study research as outlined by Blatter and Haverland (2012), namely co-variation designs, causal process-tracing designs and congruence analysis designs. In this section, I also show how Hall's (2006) method of systematic process analysis implicitly conflates these three case study designs. In addition, I show how making explicit these methodological cornerstones of the method of systematic process analysis allows to answer a series of methodological questions that have not been addressed so far (e.g. case selection). In the subsequent section, I briefly demonstrate the benefits of combining these three explanatory approaches in case study research using the example of the historical development of job security regulations in Western Europe. A final section concludes.

**The comparative method in the literature**

The comparative method has a somewhat odd status in social science methodology. In his now classic contributions, Lijphart (1971, 1975) differentiates between four basic methods in political science: the experimental one, the statistical one, the comparative one and, finally, the case study method. The experimental method identifies causal relationships by the situational manipulation of variables. The statistical method controls for confounders by incorporating control variables. The comparative method, too, controls for confounders by incorporating control variables. However, the small(er) number of cases makes the usage of statistics impossible. Finally, the case study method is based on the intensive but ultimately uncontrolled examination of single cases. In this taxonomy, the comparative method is considered a 'weak' method. As Lijphart (1971: 684) notes:

> The comparative method resembles the statistical method in all respects except one. The crucial difference is that the number of cases it deals with is too small to permit systematic control by means of partial correlations. […] There is, consequently, no clear dividing line between the statistical and comparative methods; the difference depends entirely on the number of cases.

The comparative method, then, shares with the statistical method the focus on between-case variation and controlled comparisons. However, the comparative method is used only when the number of cases is not sufficient for statistical analysis. Lijphart (1975: 159) therefore suggests four strategies to address the "many variables, small N" problem: (1) maximize the number of cases by extending the analysis both geographically and historically; (2) reduce the property space of the analysis by combining variables; (3) focus on the analysis of cases that are similar in a large number of important characteristics but dissimilar with regard to the variables of interest; and (4) restrict the analysis to key variables and ignore marginal ones. And if possible, researchers are advised to use the statistical method instead of the comparative one: "Because the comparative method must be considered the weaker method, it is usually advisable to shift to the statistical method if sufficient cases are available" (Lijphart 1975: 165).

Ragin (1987) rejects this definition of the comparative method. In his account, comparative social science refers to the usage of attributes of *macro*-social units in explanatory statements. Moreover, these macro-social units are not simply data categories but also meta-theoretical categories. Hence, what separates comparativists from non-comparativists is the direct, empirical implementation of abstract, macro-social units in meta-theoretical acts that allows comparativists both to explain and interpret macro-social variation (Ragin 1987: 5). Hence, in Ragin's (1987) account, the comparative method has a certain affinity to interpretative and anti-naturalist approaches that conceptualize cases in more holistic ways and acknowledge the meaningful and contingent character of human action (Bevir and Kedar 2008).

The case-orientation of Ragin's (1987) comparative method clearly sets its apart from the variable-orientation of the statistical method. However, Ragin's (1987) comparative method, better known as qualitative comparative analysis (QCA), still primarily infers causation from between-case variation (Seawright 2005). Certainly, the affinity of QCA with the case study method (Ragin 2000: 90) allows for the fruitful combination of QCA with case studies in the framework of multi-method research, but as the discussion of Schneider and Rohlfing (2013) demonstrates, the case selection for process tracing after the formal QCA analysis is no simple matter. Hence, despite its case-orientation, the comparative method following Ragin (1987) is primarily concerned with regularities between conditions and not with within-case variation.

However, there is an emerging consensus in comparative research that a focus on within-case variation is important. In particular, it is increasingly acknowledged that a focus on mechanisms is necessary because approaches based solely on the analysis of between-case variation are insufficient to establish causality. Hence, scholars increasingly attempt to combine methods that explore within-case and between-case variation (Lieberman 2005). These nested approaches are said to have a series of advantages: analyses exploring between-case variation can guide the case selection for analyses exploring within-case variation or test hypotheses generated from analyses exploring within-case variation. In return, analyses exploring within-case variation can assess the plausibility of observed between-case relationships or generate theoretical insights from deviant cases (Lieberman 2005).

Multi-method research seems to allow for the combination of the best of both worlds. However, there are also serious limitations to multi-method research. Most notably, multi-method research designs face the formidable challenge of case selection: How are researchers to select cases for within-case analysis if they do not know whether the between-case analysis on which the case selection is based is sound (Rohlfing 2008)? Although scholars have developed sophisticated case selection techniques in recent years (cf. Seawright and Gerring 2008; Schneider and Rohlfing 2013), the quality of the case selection is ultimately a function of the quality of the preceding between-case analysis. This problem becomes apparent once the complex relationship of dependency is taken into account: The between-case analysis determines the case selection for the within-case analysis, while the within-case analysis is supposed to evaluate the validity of the between-case analysis.

Alternatively, researchers can start with the analysis of within-case variation before they analyse the extent to which their findings can be generalized by means of between-case analysis. This strategy allows researchers to bypass some of the problems listed above. However, it poses new challenges with regard to the selection of cases for within-case analysis and carries the risk that researchers fail to draw meaningful inferences that can be generalized to the population of cases – the goal of much macro-comparative research. Ultimately, then, a successful multi-method research design stands and falls with the researchers' ability to repeatedly switch between within-case and between-case analysis, thereby engaging in a dialogue between theory and evidence (Ragin 1987).

A second problem of multi-method research concerns the possible incompatibility of ontologies and conceptions of causality of the different methods employed (Ahmed and Sil 2012). If methods are not sufficiently similar with regard to these basic assumptions, their combination is unlikely to lead to the desired error-reduction and cross-validation. Put differently, it remains unclear to what extent a combination of, say, process-tracing and regression analysis adds value given that these two methods are based on different conceptions of causality (mechanisms versus regularities, see Brady 2008).

In sum, both qualitative comparative analysis and multi-method research have taken the comparative method beyond its inferior position in Lijphart's (1971, 1975) original taxonomy. However, both procedures have limitations. Most importantly, the role of the analysis of within-case variation is either limited (qualitative comparative analysis) or its relationship to the analysis of between-case variation unclear (multi-method research).

**The method of systematic process analysis**

Is there thus no viable way of combining the analysis of within-case variation with the analysis of between-case variation? A short glance at the existing literature in comparative politics and comparative political economy shows a rather different picture. There are numerous examples of important contributions that have successfully combined the analysis of within-case variation with the analysis of between-case variation. Prominent examples include Barrington Moore's "Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy", Theda Skocpol's "States and Social Revolutions", Thomas Ertman's "Birth of the Leviathan" and Stathis Kalyvas' "Rise of Christian Democracy in Europe".

These books are generally acknowledged as landmark contributions to comparative politics, but their methodological approach is somewhat difficult to pinpoint. These books certainly do not fit into Lijphart's taxonomy. They are not case studies because in Lijphart's (1975: 160) account, case studies, although implicitly viewed in the theoretical context of a larger number of cases, ultimately examine single cases. In similar vein, these methodological approaches do not correspond to the comparative method, as defined by Lijphart (1971, 1975), because of their strong emphasis on within-case variation.

In a thoughtful contribution, Peter A. Hall (2006) has summarized the methodological approaches of Moore, Skocpol and colleagues as the method of systematic process analysis, which describes an approach that tests theoretically derived hypotheses against data from a smallish number of cases. These theories, however, do "not only identify a few variables thought to have an especially important impact on the outcome but also outline the processes whereby those variables are thought to secure such an impact" (Hall 2006: 27). Through this focus on processes and by extension within-case variation, the method of systematic process analysis gains analytical leverage that overcomes the "many variables, small N" problem that cripples Lijphart's comparative method. By formulating predictions with regard to both important variables as well as processes, each case generates a multitude of observations, which in turn increases the strength of the empirical tests of the theory.

The method of systematic process analysis thus seems to be able to capture the multifaceted methodological approach of much comparative research. It exploits both between-case and within-case variation. It is based on theoretically derived expectations that are tested against empirical data. What is more, it compares the explanatory merits of different theories to assess which explanatory approach provides more insights, thus creating a "'three-cornered fight' between observations, a theory and a rival theory" (Hall 2013: 21). Finally, the focus on processes allows for the analysis of the meanings that actors themselves associate with their actions. As Hall (2013: 24) notes:

> Given how intrinsically difficult it is to form accurate judgments about whether a theory is true or false, I think we should use all available evidence to make those judgments, including evidence about whether the theory's assumptions about the motivations and perceptions of the actors are realistic.

Hence, the method of systematic process analysis correctly describes the mixture of between-case and within-case variation as well as of explanation and interpretation that characterizes much comparative research. Hall's (2006) method of systematic process analysis is thus a welcome contribution to the social science method toolkit.

However, the method of systematic process tracing is somewhat underspecified (cf. Kittel and Kuehn 2013). For instance, it remains unclear how the method of systematic process analysis relates to the method of process tracing and causal mechanisms. Hall (2006) himself remains rather ambiguous. He acknowledges the similarities but also notes that he adopts a slightly different term for it in order to associate it with the very specific conditions he considers crucial to its practice (Hall 2006: 30; see also Blatter 2013 and Hall 2013: 22). In a similar vein, if the method of systematic process analysis is applied to multiple cases, as suggested by Hall (2006: 30), it remains unclear what type of causal inference is to be made between cases (Beach 2013) and within cases (Blatter 2013). Finally, Hall (2006, 2013) does not provide any guidelines with regard to case selection. Are cases supposed to be characterized by variation on the dependent and independent variables, only positive cases (featuring the outcome of interest), representative of the total population or least likely with regard to some theoretical expectations? Thus, Hall (2006, 2013) seems to be on to something but his method of systematic process analysis still leaves a few questions unanswered.

**The method of systematic process analysis and three different explanatory approaches in case study research**

In this paper, I argue that the method of systematic process analysis is in fact based on the combination of three different explanatory approaches in case study research (co-variation designs, causal process-tracing designs and congruence analysis designs). These three distinct approaches to case study research are internally consistent and have different implications for research (Blatter and Haverland 2012). For instance, with regard to case selection, researchers relying on causal process-tracing designs are likely to select other cases than, say, researchers relying on congruence analysis designs.

The literature on case study methodology, however, often ignores these differences. A comparison of two recent influential books on case study methodology is instructive in this regard (Blatter and Haverland 2012: 16-17): John Gerring's "Case Study Research" (2007) and Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett's "Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences" (2005) both discuss case studies, but their main focus could not be more different. While George and Bennett (2005) emphasize within-case variation over between-case variation and highlight the benefits of causal-process tracing (and to some extent congruence analysis), Gerring (2007) provides only a rather superficial treatment of causal-process tracing (and does not discuss the congruence method). Instead, he spends most pages discussing how single cases relate to larger populations (following the logic of co-variation designs) and how case studies can be used to complement large-N research that emphasizes between-case variation.

Following Blatter and Haverland (2012), I do not argue that one of these authors is right and the other wrong. Neither is it my goal to argue that one of these case study approaches is inherently superior to the other ones. Rather, I argue that these case study approaches are in fact different both with regard to the goals of research and methodological implications. Case study researchers can gainfully use both co-variation designs (following Gerring) or causal-process tracing designs (following George and Bennett) but they must be aware of the fact that these approaches have different strengths and methodological implications.

What separates comparative researchers from case study researchers is the number of cases covered by the analysis. While the focus on single cases forces case study researchers to rely on one explanatory approach, the larger number of cases allows comparative researchers to combine the three different explanatory approaches. To use again the example of case selection, some cases might be selected to show that currently dominant explanatory approaches cannot explain most-likely cases (congruence analysis design), while other cases might be selected to analyse the unfolding of causal processes (causal process-tracing design) and to analyse the extent to which findings can be generalized to a larger population of cases (co-variation design). This is possible because comparative research, unlike typical case study research, analyses multiple cases. What is more, I argue that this is a sensible methodological strategy because the three explanatory approaches in case study research complement each other.

In addition, due to limited diversity, cases often play multiple roles in an analysis. For instance, Germany is often used in the varieties of capitalism literature to demonstrate that employers in fact support some of forms of labour market regulation (Thelen 2000; Hall and Soskice 2001; Estevez-Abe et al. 2001). Hence, Germany is a most likely case for this literature and thus an appropriate choice in a *congruence analysis design*. However, Germany is also an example of an early and successful formation of the labour movement. According to some authors (cf. Korpi 2006), it is this strength of the labour movement (rather than employer preferences) that explains the extent of labour market regulation. Hence, some researchers have used *causal-process tracing* to identify the political actors who pushed for further regulation in Germany and to what extent demands by the labour movement faced employer opposition (Emmenegger and Marx 2011; Paster 2012). Thus, cases often play meaningful (albeit different) roles in more than one of the three case study approaches.

In the following, I briefly present the three explanatory approaches in case study research. The discussion is based on Blatter and Haverland's (2012) careful analysis of the case study literature, which they group into three distinct approaches: (1) co-variation designs that assess whether different values of a given independent variable lead to different outcomes; (2) causal-process tracing designs that focus on the causal mechanisms that lead to a specific outcome; and (3) congruence analysis designs that compare the explanatory merits of different theories. Table 1 provides an overview of the main differences.

Table 1: Three explanatory approaches in case study research

| | Co-variation design | Causal-process tracing design | Congruence analysis design |
|---|---|---|---|
| Research goal | Does variable X make a difference? | What makes the outcome (Y) possible? | Which explanatory approach provides more insights? |
| Variation | Between-case variation | Within-case variation | Both between-case and within-case variation |
| Generalisation | Drawing conclusions about the causal effect of X on Y from sample to population | Drawing conclusions about the set of proven causal mechanisms | Drawing conclusions about the relevance of theories in the scientific discourse |
| Case selection | Variation on the independent variable (controlled comparison) | Positive cases (displaying outcome) and theoretical relevance of cases with regard to outcome | Likeliness of cases in respect to the selected theories |

Source: Blatter and Haverland (2012: 27-29).

*Co-variation designs* test whether different values of an independent variable of interest lead to different outcomes. Like most quantitative methods, these designs thus rely primarily on between-case variation. However, case studies relying on co-variation designs allow for the usage of indicators in a more context-sensitive way than large-N studies.[1] Case studies based on co-variation designs focus on the influence of independent variables on outcomes. Hence, researchers typically select multiple cases that differ in respect to the independent variable of interest, while the selected cases are supposed to display a high degree of similarity with regard to control variables (comparable cases). Researchers then use empirical data to score all cases on each variable. Causal inferences are drawn by analysing co-variation among the scores of the dependent variable and the scores of the independent variable and under the assumption that there is no theoretically plausible co-variation among the scores of the dependent variable and the scores of control variables. Finally, the findings can be generalized to a population of cases that are similar with regard to all control variables.

*Causal-process tracing designs* are rather different. These designs analyse the temporal interplay among conditions that are expected to lead to a specific outcome. Put differently, causal-process tracing designs emphasize within-case variation and aim to identify the necessary and together sufficient conditions for the outcome of interest. With regard to case selection, this implies that researchers typically select positive cases (displaying the outcome of interest). What is more, researchers typically select cases on the basis of the accessibility of data (important to trace causal processes) and theoretical relevance in a given academic debate. Empirical data is used to analyse the temporal unfolding of causal processes and to understand the perceptions and motivations of important actors. At the end of the empirical analysis, researchers are able to provide a comprehensive storyline that documents the unfolding of the causal processes (what happened?) as well as so-called smoking gun observations and confessions that clearly identify the causal conditions. With regard to generalization, causal-process tracing designs allow to identify causal mechanisms that might also be at work in other cases (possibilistic generalization).

[1] For instance, case studies using a co-variation design allow for more interpretation of actors' (real) motives or more valid measurement of variables.

Finally, the *congruence analysis design* starts from existing theoretical arguments in the literature and evaluates the explanatory merits of different theories. Put differently, the focus of congruence analysis designs is clearly theoretical in the sense that researchers want to make contributions to theoretical debates and not necessarily explain a specific case. Hence, researchers select multiple theories to compare (following the logic of the 'three-cornered fight' mentioned above) and at least one empirical case. The selection of the empirical case(s) is a function of the empirical case(s) position in respect to the selected theories. For instance, researchers may select a case for which – given what we know – a theory is most likely to be hold. If it turns out that the theoretical predictions do not hold for this most likely case, our confidence in the theory declines. In contrast, if researchers select a least likely case for a theory to hold but the theory's predictions are borne out by the data, then our confidence in the theory increases. With regard to empirical data, congruence analysis designs privilege observations that allow for the discrimination between different theories' predictions. Finally, congruence analysis designs allow for theoretical generalizations in the sense that they allow for conclusions about the relevance of theories in the scientific discourse.

In my opinion, Blatter and Haverland (2012) convincingly demonstrate that there are three different explanatory approaches in case study research. They have different research goals, different strategies of causal inference as well as different strengths and weaknesses. However, they complement each other. In particular causal-process tracing designs are often used in combination with either co-variation designs or congruence analysis designs. For instance, a co-variation design allows increasing the external validity of the findings of a causal-process tracing design, while a causal-process tracing design can be used to increase the internal validity of the findings of a congruence analysis design (Blatter and Haverland 2012: 209). As I demonstrate below using the example of the historical development of job security regulations in Western Europe, the method of systematic process analysis in fact relies on a combination of all three explanatory approaches in case study research.[2]

## The method of systematic process analysis and the historical development of job security regulations

What do comparative researchers do? Thinking about what comparativists do quickly reveals that none of the three explanatory approaches in case study research corresponds to what comparativists typically do. The reason is that comparative researchers want to do more. In fact, I argue that comparative researchers typically have three different goals and that each of these three goals corresponds to one of the three explanatory approaches in case study research:

[2] It is certainly correct to argue that that there are clear affinities between the three case study approaches, on the one hand, and specific epistemological stances, on the other, thus bringing the issue of incommensurability (again) to the forefront (Ahmed and Sil 2012). However, as Blatter and Haverland (2012: 14) note, case study research should be grounded "in the ideals of an anti-fundamentalist epistemological middle ground" that allows for the combination of different case study designs. What is more, multiple case study designs are not primarily combined to validate the empirical findings of one analysis by a second one using a different research design but are to play complementary roles, i.e. they are combined to answer different questions within the same research *programme*.

1. Comparative researchers want to demonstrate that their preferred theoretical argument has more explanatory merit than the other important theoretical arguments in the field (*congruence analysis design*).
2. Comparative researchers use between-case variation to demonstrate the effect of the independent variables of interest (their preferred theoretical argument) on the outcome and draw conclusions about causal effects from the selected cases to the population of cases (*co-variation design*).
3. Comparative researchers use within-case variation to explain the outcome in all selected cases, deviant case or not, and draw conclusions about the set of proven causal mechanisms. In case of deviant cases, the goal is to determine why the case does not correspond to the identified between-case relationship (*causal-process tracing design*).

These three goals also guide my work on the historical development of job security regulations (JSR) in Western Europe. JSR are restrictions placed on the ability of employers to use labour. In particular, JSR restrict the managerial capacity to dismiss employees or to replace workers and use new forms of employment such as fixed-term contracts when hiring new workers (Regini 2000: 16). JSR have been called the most controversial labour market institution (Blanchard and Tirole 2003: 2) because of the many roles they play in comparative political economy research. While some have emphasized their role as sources of economic inefficiency and obstacle to job creation (Skedinger 2010), others have highlighted their social protection function (Bonoli 2003) and the incentives they provide to invest in skills (Estevez-Abe et al. 2001).

The level of JSR varies both across time and space. With regard to time, some countries already strengthened protection against dismissal in the immediate post-war period (after both World War 1 and 2). A second regulatory wave after a long period of stability occurred in the late 1960s and early 1970s following the May 1968 protests in France. The 1980s witnessed the shift of attention from the regulation of open-ended contracts to the regulation of temporary employment. As most Western European countries struggled to dismantle dismissal protection despite mass unemployment, most governments turned to the deregulation of temporary employment to create labour market flexibility. With regard to space, we can observe large cross-national differences with regard to the regulation of both open-ended contracts and temporary employment.

How can we account for the cross-national and temporal variation in the level of JSR in Western Europe? The scholarly literature has produced three main explanations, which I summarize *very briefly* in the following: First, the varieties of capitalism thesis (VoC) emphasizes the functional role of JSR in different production regimes (Estevez-Abe et al. 2001; Iversen and Soskice 2009). In this account, JSR are understood as means of ensuring returns on investment in firm and industry-specific skills. Hence, they help overcome market failures in the production of these skills. As a result, employers in so-called coordinated market economies are expected to be less opposed to JSR and protection against dismissal is therefore on average higher in these countries.

Second, the power resources thesis focuses on the distributive conflict between capital and labour (Korpi 1983; Saint-Paul 2002; Rueda 2005). From this perspective, JSR are means of increasing the labour movement's bargaining power at the workplace. Hence, we should be able to observe a positive correlation between labour strength and the level of JSR.

Finally, the social Catholicism thesis stresses the role of Catholic social doctrines and Christian democratic parties (Esping-Andersen 1996; Algan and Cahuc 2006; Huo et al. 2008). In this account, JSR are a form of social protection that preservers and even cements traditional forms of family organization. As a result, we should observe a positive correlation between the level of JSR and the role of Catholic social doctrines as well as the strength Christian democratic parties.[3]

I contrast these three theoretical arguments with a new theory of the politics of JSR (see Emmenegger 2013). Combining the power resources thesis with recent historical institutionalist scholarship, I argue that trade unions are the main driver behind the development of JSR because they have strong organisational and representational interests in dismissal protection. What is more, trade unions prefer the regulation of job security by means of collective agreements to maximize institutional control. However, the pre-emptive regulation of job security in collective agreements was only possible under unique circumstances. Most notably, it required a strong labour movement that could conclude collective agreements before the employment contract was first regulated in labour law.

In addition, I argue that the level of JSR was crucially influenced by exogenous international developments that caused temporary spikes in labour movement strength in the years following the two world wars and during the years around the 1973 oil price crisis. A significant extension of JSR was only possible in these critical junctures because labour is generally in a weaker position than business (Lindblom 1977; Korpi 1983). However, in particular during the immediate post-war periods, the labour movements' strength varied with the extent to which the country was affected by the war.

Finally, I argue that the two-tier labour market reforms in recent decades (Emmenegger et al. 2012) are the result of the strategic interaction between trade unions and business representatives. Under pressure to allow more labour market flexibility, trade unions assent to reforms that deregulate temporary employment but leave the regulation of open-ended contracts untouched. They do so because this strategy allows them to protect their institutional involvement in the administration of dismissals as well as the interests of their core members (Davidsson and Emmenegger 2012).

These four theoretical arguments have different observable implications. The VoC thesis is certainly the most distinctive among the four theoretical arguments. It emphasizes the role of JSR in overcoming market failures in the provision of firm- and industry-specific skills in so-called coordinated market economies. Hence, demands for the expansion of JSR should be presented in terms of functional necessities and without much class struggle rhetoric. Overall, there should be some general political consensus on the regulation of job security, in particular in coordinated market economies (where the level of JSR should also be higher).

Unlike the VoC thesis, the other three explanations emphasize conflict between capital and labour on the regulation of job security. According to these three theses, demands for the expansion of JSR should be typically presented in terms of class struggle rhetoric and to be opposed by employers. However, there are also crucial differences. The power resources thesis stresses the labour

[3] It is no coincidence that these three established arguments focus on co-variation rather than causal processes because little empirical research has been conducted on historical processes so far.

movement's efforts to reduce the subordination of the working class to the business class by restricting the managerial prerogatives. Hence, the level of JSR should be correlated with the relative strength of labour versus capital. In addition, there is no reason to expect the expansion of JSR to be confined to critical junctures. Finally, recent two-tier labour market reforms should largely be a function of the extent to which trade unions and left-wing parties consider the interests of both labour market insiders *and* labour market outsiders. In particular, the more trade unions also organise labour market outsiders and the more left-wing parties consider labour market outsiders to be part of their core constituency, the more likely they are to defend the labour market outsiders' interests and thus reject two-tier labour market reforms (Rueda 2007; Obinger et al. 2012).

In contrast, the social Catholicism thesis highlights the role of political groups inspired by Catholic social doctrines. It stresses that JSR are an adequate form of social protection for societies characterized by traditional forms of family organization. Hence, political groups inspired by Catholic social doctrines and conservative social values (e.g. Christian democratic parties and unions) can also be expected to play a prominent role in debates on the expansion of JSR. Nevertheless, demands for the expansion of JSR can be expected to be typically presented in terms of class struggle rhetoric and to be opposed by employers. Overall, the level of JSR should be correlated with both the strength of the labour movement, in particular its Christian democratic variety, and the predominance of Catholic social values in society.

Finally, my new theoretical argument follows the power resources thesis and the social Catholicism thesis in emphasizing the role of the labour movement and in particular the trade unions. In similar vein, I expect demands for the expansion of JSR to be presented in terms of class struggle rhetoric and to be opposed by employers. However, unlike these two explanations, I stress the role of JSR as institutional power resources that strengthen the unions' position both in the workplace as well as in labour market policy-making. Hence, I expect unions to attempt to retain control over the regulation of job security. This can be best achieved by the regulation of job security through collective agreements, which is only possible if unions have sufficient power resources and state-society relationships allow for the non-statutory regulation of job security. In addition, I argue that significant expansion of JSR is only possible during (temporary) spikes in labour movement strength because it is only during these critical junctures that the labour movement is strong enough to impose far-reaching regulations on intransigent employers. Hence, the level of JSR cannot be expected to correlate with the relative strength of labour versus capital. Rather, the level of JSR is a function of political struggles between capital and labour over JSR during critical junctures.

In my empirical research, I have tried to demonstrate that my new theoretical argument has more explanatory merit than the other three theoretical arguments (following the logic of the *congruence analysis design*). Thereby, I took advantage of the fact that the four theoretical arguments make predictions with regard to both between-case and within-case variation. In this project, the simultaneous analysis of between-case and within-case variation was decisive. Solely emphasizing between-case variation would have tempted me to conclude that the social Catholicism thesis could explain cross-national variation in the level of JSR. However, an analysis of within-case variation demonstrated that Catholic social doctrines, conservative social policies and Christian democratic parties played little role in the historical development of JSR in Western Europe. In a similar vein, an exclusive focus on within-case variation would have tempted me to conclude that the power resources thesis could explain the development of JSR. However, an analysis of between-case variation demonstrated that there is little correlation between the strength of the labour movement and the level of JSR. In sum, following the logic of the congruence analysis design and using empirical evidence on both between-case and within-case variation allowed me to make generalizations about the relevance of theories in the academic debate.

Comparativists, however, typically want to do more than 'just' engaging in debates about the relevance of theories. They also want to draw conclusions about the causal effect of their main variable of interest (in my case the power of trade unions) on the outcome (JSR) from the sample they analyse (eight countries) to the relevant population of cases (Western European countries with a long history of democracy). To do this, they mostly draw on between-case variation, although cases are understood in a more holistic way (Ragin 1987). Hence, researchers could use data analysis techniques that solely rely on between-case variation to draw causal inferences (e.g. regressions techniques). However, as already emphasized by Lijphart (1971, 1975), the usefulness of data analysis techniques that solely rely on between-case variation is clearly limited if the scope conditions restrict the population to a rather small number of cases, as in the example at hand (the aforementioned many variables, small N problem).[4] At the same time though, the population of cases (despite the small N) is typically still too large to allow for the simultaneous analysis of all cases.

Hence, comparativists are typically forced to select cases and draw inferences from the sample to the population. Thereby, following the *co-variation design*, comparativists rely on two strategies to increase their confidence in the generalizations they make: First, they rely on specific case selection strategies. Most importantly, they select multiple cases that differ in respect to the independent variable(s) of interest, while they try to minimize the extent to which the selected cases differ with regard to control variables. Second, comparativists enrich their analysis of between-case variation with case-specific information that allow for comparisons in a more context-sensitive way than large-N studies and thereby increase their confidence in the causal inferences they draw.

Now that comparative researchers have demonstrated the theoretical and empirical relevance of their analysis, they might decide to stop their analysis. However, they rarely do so. Instead, comparative researchers use *causal-process analysis designs* to examine certain events and periods[5] in great detail in order to identify the configurations of conditions that are necessary and together sufficient for the outcome. Comparative researchers do this because they want to make two more (related) contributions to the literature: First, the detailed analysis of important periods in *typical cases* allows them to demonstrate how the causal processes unfold, thereby increasing their confidence in the theoretical argument. For instance, in the case of the historical development of JSR, I show in great detail how a radicalized German labour movement took advantage of the (temporary) weakness of the political right after both World War 1 and 2 to enforce more restrictive JSR. The selection of these two periods is based on empirical and theoretical considerations: My

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[4] Facing the many variables, small N problem, many comparative researchers have resorted to pooled time-series cross-section regression analysis but as comparative methodologists have abundantly demonstrated, this data analysis technique is of rather questionable quality (e.g. Kittel 1999; Green et al. 2001; Shalev 2007; Goertz 2011).

[5] Of course, the analysis of the development of JSR in eight countries over more than 100 years does not allow for a detailed analysis of causal processes across all countries over the whole period. Hence, I have identified empirically and theoretically relevant events in the historical development of JSR.

theoretical argument emphasizes critical junctures during which the power resources of the labour movement temporarily exceed the power resources of business, while German dismissal protection legislation played a pioneering role in the historical development of JSR.[6]

Second, the detailed analysis of important periods in *deviant cases* allows comparative researchers to explain why certain cases deviate from the identified between-case pattern and to evaluate to what extent these deviant cases challenge the identified between-case relationship. For instance, in the case of the historical development of JSR, I analyse why Denmark, unlike most other Western European countries, failed to reform JSR in the late 1960s and early 1970s despite its comparatively strong labour movement. A detailed analysis using a causal-process analysis design allows me to demonstrate that the reasons for this inactivity can be found in strategic considerations of the Danish trade unions (that for too long emphasized collective agreements over law) and the fragmentation of the political left (in particular the uneasy relationship between the Social Democratic Party and the Socialist People's Party). Hence, the Danish case does not undermine my theoretical argument. The case demonstrates that the causal process would have been *possible* but also that contingency matters.

Comparative researchers 'compensate' for the small number they analyse not only by examining both between-case and within-case variation, but also by substituting a strong case-orientation for the variable-orientation that is prevalent in large-N analyses. Comparative researchers cannot afford to relegate deviant cases (and measurement error for that matter) to the error term. They simply have too few cases to make this a viable strategy. Instead, comparativists try to have the best of two worlds: They want to draw conclusions about the causal effect of their variable of interest on the outcome from the sample to the population (variable-orientation) *while* also explaining the outcome in all selected cases, deviant or not (case-orientation).[7]

These multiple goals of comparative research are also reflected in the case selection strategies comparative researchers employ. Although comparative researchers often claim to rely on a case selection strategy that simply ensures sufficient variation on the both independent and dependent variables, they are actually using case selection strategies that are much more sophisticated and reflect the logic of the three explanatory approaches in case study research. Hence, comparative researchers typically select cases according to three criteria: variation on the independent and dependent variables[8], the 'ex ante likeliness' in respect to the selected theories and general theoretical and empirical relevance. Although comparative researchers select cases on the basis of three 'logics', this is typically overlooked because cases often play multiple roles in a given analysis.

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[6] Vogel-Polsky (1986: 189) has described the 1920 German Works Council Act as "the Trojan Horse in the citadel of the employers' discretionary right to dismiss."

[7] Overall, I would argue that comparative researchers have more of a case-orientation than variable-orientation because ultimately it is typically the goal of comparative research to explain all cases.

[8] Blatter and Haverland (2012) note that in co-variation designs case selection should be based on variation on the independent variables. However, in comparative research, case selection is often biased towards positive cases because causal-process tracing is only possible in positive cases, i.e. cases displaying the outcome (Goertz and Mahoney 2012). A typical example is Kalyvas (1996) who analyses the rise of Christian democratic parties in six European countries. In his analysis, five cases are positive cases (successful creation of Christian democratic parties) and only one case is a negative case (France).

In the case of the historical development of JSR, this case selection strategy prompted me to select the following eight cases: Denmark, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, the Netherlands, Sweden and Switzerland (given the population of Western European countries with long traditions of democratic government). This case selection is based on three rationales: First, following the *co-variation design*, these cases are characterised by variation on all relevant independent variables. They differ with regard to the power resources of the labour movement, the share of Catholic citizens, the strength of Christian democratic parties, varieties of capitalism, systems of industrial relations, legal traditions, state-society relationships, institutional veto points, the consolidation of democracy and experiences of war and occupation. In addition, they differ with regard to the protection awarded to workers as well as the importance of regulation by means of labour law and by means of collective agreements.

Second, following the *causal-process analysis design*, these eight countries include the four 'pathway' cases typically analysed in comparative welfare state and political economy research (cf. Crouch 1993; Bonoli 2003; Hall 2007). According to Hall (2007: 41), France, Great Britain, Germany and Sweden "display much of the institutional variation relevant to contemporary typologies of capitalism". Crouch (1993: 4) argues that all other Continental European political traditions can be regarded, with some distortion, as "being either the French or German type", while Bonoli (2003: 1009) analyses France, Germany and Great Britain "because they come closest to 'pure models'" of different political economy traditions.

What is more, these four pathway cases have also been highlighted in research on the political and institutional determinants of JSR. Following Emmenegger's (2011) analysis of between-case variation using fsQCA, there are three paths that lead to high levels of JSR. These three paths are best exemplified by France, Germany and Sweden respectively, while Great Britain is very typical for the English-speaking countries, which are all characterised by low levels of JSR. Hence, these four countries are particularly appropriate for the analysis of causal mechanisms (Gerring 2007: 122).

In addition, Emmenegger's (2011) analysis allows for the identification of deviant cases, i.e. cases that deviate from identified between-case relationships. In particular, Denmark, the Netherlands and Switzerland stand out as deviant cases. Denmark and Switzerland are the only two coordinated market economies that are characterised by low levels of JSR, while the historical development of JSR in the Netherlands does not seem to correspond to any of the three paths identified in the fsQCA analysis (Emmenegger 2011: 355). Hence, these three deviant cases require further analysis.

Finally, following the *congruence analysis design*, these eight cases are selected based on the ex ante likeliness of a given theory to apply. As mentioned, the three existing explanations of the historical development of JSR stress the functional role of JSR in overcoming market failures in the provision of firm- and industry-specific skills, the power resources of the labour movement or the strength of Catholic social doctrines and Christian democratic parties. Hence, the analysed cases include Germany, which is the prime example of a coordinated market economy relying on firm- and industry-specific skills (Estevez-Abe et al. 2001: 149; Hall and Soskice 2001: 21-27), as well as Italy and Sweden, which are the prime examples of countries dominated by Christian democracy and social democracy respectively (Pempel 1990). Overall, five countries qualify as coordinated market economies (Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden and Switzerland), four countries are characterised by very strong labour movements (Denmark, Sweden and, at least historically, Germany and Great Britain), four countries have strong Christian democratic parties (Germany, Italy (until the 1990s), the Netherlands and Switzerland), while five countries have significant Catholic population shares (France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Switzerland). If the three existing explanations have any explanatory merits, we should be able to find some evidence in the analysis of these eight countries.

**Conclusions**

The method of systematic process analysis, I argue, is best thought of as the simultaneous use of three explanatory approaches in case study research. A co-variation design is used to explore between-case variation and to assess the extent to which findings can be generalised to a population of cases that are similar in respect to all control variables. Second, a causal-process tracing design is used to analyse within-case variation to identify the configurations of conditions that are necessary and together sufficient for the outcome. Finally, a congruence analysis design is used to compare the explanatory merit of the different theoretical arguments.

This methodological approach has significant advantages. Most importantly, it allows for the context-sensitive analysis of a relatively large number of cases. In addition, the approach makes it possible to test the existing theories more exhaustively, while also allowing for some contingent generalisations. Finally, the approach provides for an explanation of both typical and deviant cases. However, the methodological approach also comes at a price: Most importantly, this methodological approach requires a considerable amount of space. The comparative analysis of several countries with a focus on political processes is not possible in the framework of an article. Rather, such a methodological approach can only come to fruition in the framework of a book.

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