

The Comparative Method

Political Science

How political scientists compare across countries.

Most similar design

- Compare similar cases
- Differ on the outcome
- Isolate the differing factor
- Risk: many differences remain

Most different design

- Compare very different cases
- Share the outcome
- Find the common factor
- Risk: coincidence across few cases

THE DIFFERENCE THAT MATTERS

With few cases and many possible causes, comparative claims are rarely as identified as statistical ones.

Educational reference. Selecting cases on the outcome you want to explain is the classic and most damaging design error.