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Data Usage in Quantitative Comparative Politics

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The quantitative study of comparative politics is often described as a data-driven enterprise. Employing an original dataset of comparative politics articles published in leading academic journals between 1989 and 2007, this article offers the first empirical analysis of data usage in comparative research. Tracing potential biases induced by data dependence, it assesses the structure of quantitative comparative research (by year, research design, geographic focus, and subject area), the use of country-specific and region-specific datasets, the introduction of original data, and the degree of concentration in data usage. Its empirical findings question cherished assumptions about the structure of the discipline.

Keywords: *comparative politics; quantitative methods; cross-national datasets*

Over the past two decades, according to the prevalent self-image of the discipline, the empirical study of comparative politics has taken an incisive quantitative turn. Although some dismiss the distinction between qualitative and quantitative research as “exaggerated and largely artificial” (Benoit 2005, 9), it continues to structure methodological debates even for those who issue conciliatory calls for “bridging the gap” between methods they believe to be complementary.¹ Immersed in persistent methodological debates, however, we know little about the actual magnitude and nature of this apparent tectonic shift that has redrawn the landscape of comparative politics. What we believe to know is based on common preconceptions, rather than systematic knowledge.

The present piece of meta-research examines some widespread assumptions about the nature of quantitative comparative politics. Its core concerns relate to the data dependence of quantitative comparisons. Like all quantitative empirical research, the quantitative study of politics is dependent on the availability of numerical information (“data”). Despite the incessant construction of new cross-national datasets, quantitative comparative politics continues to be tightly constrained by available political data. Moreover, it often seems to be *driven* by available data—above all, by a small number of cross-national datasets that provide the informational infrastructure

for quantitative work in determinate subfields. As Paul Diehl (1992, 334) observed with respect to studies of civil war, “A significant portion of quantitative research is data-driven. The availability of [established global datasets] conditions the type of questions asked, the variables selected, their indicators, and the techniques of analysis.”

Methodologists have been debating the desirability of political science being method driven, theory driven, or problem driven (see Shapiro, Smith, and Masoud 2004). On the basis of original data on the profile of quantitative comparative research published in leading journals (1989-2007), we strive to assess, in a partial and preliminary way, the extent to which quantitative studies in comparative politics have been data driven—in particular, driven by a few global datasets that circumscribe the questions they ask, the methods they choose, and the answers they get. Our inquiry pretends to be diagnostic, not normative. We wish to empirically establish some structural features of quantitative comparative politics, rather than normatively evaluate the usage of data.

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Evaluating data usage would require a prior examination of their quality. Such an evaluative assessment lies beyond the scope of this piece.

The article proceeds in two parts. In its first section, it examines the structure of quantitative research in comparative politics. It strives to empirically assess received wisdom by answering four broad questions: Has quantitative analysis become the predominant mode of analysis in the empirical study of comparative politics? Are quantitative studies synonymous with large-*N* research of global coverage? To what extent are they global in scope or circumscribed to data-rich regions? And does quantitative political research pursue a thematically broad agenda or one limited to data-rich subfields? In its second section, the article analyzes patterns of data usage in quantitative comparative research by addressing three concerns: To what extent do quantitative studies in comparative politics make use of worldwide cross-national datasets? Do quantitative scholars invest in the development of original data, rather than accepting the constraints imposed by data availability? And do we face a field dominated by a few datasets?

The Data

We conduct our subdisciplinary radiography on the basis of an original dataset, the Dataset of Articles in Comparative Politics (DACP). It contains a broad sample of 581 comparative studies that were published in leading academic journals between 1989 and 2007.² The sample includes all articles in comparative politics that were published in six selected journals during full calendar years at three-year intervals from 1989 through 2007. For our analysis, we chose three leading comparative politics journals, *World Politics* (WP), *Comparative Politics* (CP), and *Comparative Political Studies* (CPS) as well as the three leading general political science journals, *American Political Science Review* (APSR), *American Journal of Political Science* (AJPS), and *Journal of Politics* (JOP). Our sample of articles thus covers roughly a third of comparative politics pieces that appeared in some of the most distinguished journals over the past two decades.³

Defining Comparative Politics

To trace the boundaries of our sample, we adopted a residual definition of comparative politics. We classified as comparative research those articles that put forward empirical studies of domestic politics in any

country except the United States. All over the world (except in Scandinavia), political science departments understand comparative politics as a residual subfield. It covers the empirical study of politics in foreign countries, excepting their international relations. Naturally, the definition of “foreign countries” is always relative to the speaker. If one switches perspectives among countries, comparative politics appears essentially as coextensive with the empirical research of politics (within national boundaries, though increasingly intermingling and overlapping with the study of international politics).

The definition *ex negativo* adopted for the purpose of the present study is resignedly U.S.-centric, accepting the hegemonic conception of the field by the hegemonic player in the field: it excludes studies of American politics. Following convention, it also excludes the field of international relations: the study of interstate relations, international diplomacy, international organizations, and regimes.⁴ Given its emphasis on empirical research, our definition also excludes four categories of nonempirical work (unless they contain some kind of systematic empirical inquiry): theoretical articles (spanning from political philosophy to formal theory), concept and measurement analyses, methodological discussions (on research methods, research design, and the logic of scientific inference), and laboratory experiments (even if conducted outside the United States).⁵ The resulting collection of comparative political studies contains 581 journal articles. More than two-thirds of them were published in the subdisciplinary journals (69 percent), and well over half of them appeared in the last three years of the dataset (55.8 percent).⁶

Defining Quantitative Research

The use of quantitative methods in the social sciences is often associated with a commitment to a nomothetical model of “hard” sciences. Given the purported hardness of quantitative methods, it is surprising to note that the very identity of quantitative methods is rather soft at its outer boundaries. It is not a huge wall that separates quantitative from qualitative research but a rather thin and discreet line. According to a widespread conception, qualitative research relies “on words as opposed to numbers” (Munck and Snyder 2007, 12). “*Quantitative* research characterizes observed phenomena using numbers, while *quantitative* research does not” (Benoit 2005, 9). Although plausible at first sight, this characterization is unhelpful. Even the most sophisticated piece of quantitative research

remains dependent on natural language (words), while most qualitative studies do contain some kind of quantitative information (numbers).

As a matter of fact, in research we commonly describe as qualitative, we find all kinds of quantitative data. These numerical pieces of information may be sparse or abundant. They may be embedded in the text or formally presented in tables and figures. They may be descriptive only or central to the main explanatory argument. And they may serve a variety of argumentative purposes: Numerous qualitative studies present contextual information in tabular form (examples in our sample are Levitsky [2001] and Morrison [2004]). Others use quantitative data to show variations in their dependent variable and thereby establish their explanatory puzzle (examples are Steinmo [1989] and Wampler and Avritzer [2004]). Still others present numerical information that documents variations in independent variables in order to establish the empirical plausibility of their causal claims (examples are Cox [2001] and Staton [2004]).

All these pieces of research contain some relevant numbers in text or tables. Yet classifying them as quantitative would create irresolvable problems of boundary delimitation. In practical terms, we would be compelled to count almost *all* empirical work as quantitative. Embracing the use of numbers as the defining criterion of quantitative research brings the distinction between qualitative and quantitative methods to collapse. What distinguishes, in our view, quantitative research is not the use of numerical information (the form of evidence), but its statistical treatment (its mode of inference). Accordingly, we classify empirical research as quantitative when *its primary inference (be it causal or descriptive) is supported by statistical techniques of data processing*.⁷ Statistics can do what numbers cannot: provide a valid as well as reliable criterion for identifying quantitative research.⁸

Within our sample of 581 comparative politics articles, our definition of quantitative methods led us to classify 255 articles as qualitative (43.9 percent) and 326 as quantitative (56.1 percent).⁹ Slightly skewed towards quantitative work, this overall distribution is statistically different from an even balance of research methods ($p = .003$, bilateral t -test). Still, it does reflect a rough equilibrium between the two approaches. Though majoritarian, the share of quantitative approaches looks less than overwhelming.¹⁰

The approximate equilibrium between qualitative and quantitative methods is the aggregate result of remarkably divergent publication patterns between

journals. As Table 1 shows, the general political science journals are almost exclusive terrains of quantitative empirical research. While contributing less than one-third to the overall sample, these journals publish more than half of the quantitative pieces (52.2 percent). They practically do not publish qualitative comparative studies; the odd exception confirms the overpowering regularity. On average, these journals publish one qualitative comparative study every other year, thereby accounting for a meager 3.6 percent of qualitative studies in our sample. The comparative politics journals, by contrast, are more open to diverse methods. Qualitative comparative work finds its outlet almost exclusively in these subdisciplinary journals. As a matter of fact, one journal (*CP*) publishes almost half of all qualitative studies in our sample (44.3 percent). At the same time, the subdisciplinary journals are receptive to quantitative work as well. *CP* publishes quantitative work occasionally, *WP* does so frequently, and *CPS* looks fairly balanced. In faithful reflection of its overall share of articles, it accounts for one-third of all quantitative pieces in the dataset (32.5 percent).

The Structure of Quantitative Comparative Politics

Before surveying the use of datasets, we wish to map the rough topography of quantitative comparative politics (as reflected in our sample). In particular, we wish to address four pieces of established wisdom: Can we observe the alleged turn towards quantitative methods in comparative politics? Does the use of quantitative methods involve a shift towards large- N studies? Does it lead to a concentration of research on regions well endowed with political data? And does it entail a concentration of research on topics well endowed with political data?

Temporal Trends: A Quantitative Shift?

The chronological tabulation of qualitative and quantitative work in Table 1 confirms the temporal trend we tend to assume as a commonsensical fact: quantitative comparative studies have become much more common over the past two decades. The last year in our dataset (2007) contains almost three times as many quantitative pieces as the first year (1989). Moreover, almost half of the quantitative articles in our sample (47.6 percent) were published in the last two years under review (2004 and 2007).¹¹ In terms of individual journals, this increase in the number of

Table 1
Distribution of Qualitative and Quantitative Articles, by Journal and Year of Publication

| | <i>APSR</i> | <i>AJPS</i> | <i>JOP</i> | <i>CP</i> | <i>CPS</i> | <i>WP</i> | Total | Percentage |
|------------------------------|-------------|-------------|------------|-----------|------------|-----------|-------|------------|
| Qualitative research | | | | | | | | |
| 1989 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 16 | 7 | 5 | 28 | 11.0 |
| 1992 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 18 | 13 | 9 | 42 | 16.5 |
| 1995 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 17 | 8 | 7 | 33 | 12.9 |
| 1998 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 14 | 8 | 6 | 30 | 11.8 |
| 2001 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 16 | 21 | 8 | 46 | 18.0 |
| 2004 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 19 | 15 | 5 | 42 | 16.5 |
| 2007 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 13 | 16 | 5 | 34 | 13.3 |
| Total | 6 | 1 | 2 | 113 | 88 | 45 | 255 | 100 |
| Percentage | 2.4 | 0.4 | 0.8 | 44.3 | 34.5 | 17.6 | 100.0 | |
| Quantitative research | | | | | | | | |
| 1989 | 9 | 4 | 6 | 3 | 7 | 1 | 30 | 9.2 |
| 1992 | 7 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 5 | 0 | 21 | 6.4 |
| 1995 | 6 | 5 | 6 | 0 | 8 | 1 | 26 | 8.0 |
| 1998 | 8 | 9 | 8 | 3 | 12 | 7 | 47 | 14.4 |
| 2001 | 7 | 11 | 6 | 2 | 16 | 5 | 47 | 15.4 |
| 2004 | 8 | 15 | 9 | 2 | 26 | 7 | 67 | 20.6 |
| 2007 | 7 | 18 | 15 | 7 | 32 | 9 | 88 | 27.0 |
| Total | 52 | 66 | 53 | 19 | 106 | 30 | 326 | 100.0 |
| Percentage | 16.0 | 20.2 | 16.3 | 5.8 | 32.5 | 9.2 | 100.0 | |

Source: Authors' Dataset of Articles in Comparative Politics (DACP).

APSR = *American Political Science Review*; *AJPS* = *American Journal of Political Science*; *JOP* = *Journal of Politics*; *CPS* = *Comparative Political Studies*; *CP* = *Comparative Politics*; *WP* = *World Politics*.

quantitative studies derives from several parallel trends: *CPS* has been constantly expanding the number of issues and articles it publishes annually (including quantitative pieces), the two other comparative journals have been opening up to quantitative work (quite early for *WP*, much more recently for *CP*), and two of the general quantitatively oriented political science journals (*AJPS* and *JOP*) have opened up to comparative politics.

In absolute terms, the expansion of quantitative studies has not come at the expense of qualitative studies. With some fluctuations, the six top journals have been publishing on average about three dozen qualitative comparative politics pieces per year (although the dip in 2007 might signal the beginning of a downward trend). In relative terms, however, the share of qualitative work has started to decline. In the first three years in our dataset, the majority of studies were still qualitative. In the last two years, the share of qualitative work has descended to around a third. The new imbalance between research methods has been particularly pronounced in 2007, when only 27.9 percent of all articles were qualitative (see Table 1).

Country Coverage: The Prevalence of Large-N Research?

While comparative politics is the study of politics in foreign countries, it is also defined as a specific method. In the encompassing sense it tends to be understood today, it is simply the study of politics "in comparative perspective" (whatever that means). In a classical piece almost four decades ago, Arend Lijphart (1971, 685) defined "the comparative method" more narrowly as the nonstatistical study of "an intermediate number of cases." Today, the distinction between large-*N* studies and small-*N* work is commonly conceived as a distinction *within* comparative politics. Yet to what extent does the distinction between research methods (qualitative versus quantitative) overlap with the distinction between research designs (few versus many countries)?

Even if we conceive comparative politics as the enterprise of "comparing what happens [in] different countries" (Peters 1998, 1), our *countries* usually do not constitute our *cases* but the *contexts* of our comparative observations. Accordingly, cutting across Lijphart's (1971) distinction between comparative

and statistical studies, our numbers of observations may well be large enough for statistical treatment even when we examine small numbers of countries. Yet how often is this the case really? To what extent has the advance of quantitative research been crowding out what Lijphart identified as the disciplinary core of comparative politics, that is, the comparison of small numbers of countries? Inversely, to what extent has quantitative comparative research been thriving upon the much-cited methodological advice of “increasing the number of observations” within chosen units of analysis (King, Keohane, and Verba 1994, chap. 6)?

Table 2 displays the distribution of qualitative and quantitative studies in our dataset according to their research design (country coverage). The empirical pattern we observe on the qualitative side conforms to common expectations. A majority of qualitative articles comprises single-country studies (54.0 percent), about a fifth paired comparisons (19.7 percent), and another fifth medium-*N* comparisons (22.2 percent). Only the heroic few analyze country samples larger than 11 (4.2 percent). On average, qualitative comparative articles study 2.8 countries ($N = 240$).¹²

By contrast, quantitative research displays patterns of country coverage that run counter to widely held assumptions. Less than a quarter of all quantitative studies in comparative politics examine more than 20 countries (23.1 percent). About a fifth (20.3 percent) works with medium-sized samples that contain between 11 and 20 countries, and a similar percentage may be classified as quantitative small-*N* studies with sample sizes between 2 and 10 countries (18.2 percent). Finally, most clearly subverting the standard image of large-*N* statistical studies, almost two-fifths of all quantitative articles (38.4 percent) are single-country studies. What Lijphart (1971) once identified as the defining method of comparative politics, the comparison of an intermediate number of countries, thus seems to be the *least* inviting terrain for quantitative comparative research. Quantitative researchers either go for larger numbers of countries or follow the methodological advice of augmenting their number of observations within single countries. On average, they cover 19.3 countries per article ($N = 320$), although the arithmetic mean, of course, masks the underlying bimodal distribution. The U-shaped pattern of country coverage by quantitative studies has remained fairly stable. As our data show (not tabulated here), the only discernible time trend concerns large-*N* studies (with $N = 100$) whose absolute number has increased from less than 4 per year until 2001 to 28 in 2007, when

Table 2
Distribution of Qualitative and Quantitative Articles by Research Design (Country Coverage)

| | Qualitative articles | Quantitative articles | All articles |
|-------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|--------------|
| Case study | | | |
| <i>N</i> | 129 | 123 | 252 |
| Row % | 51.2 | 48.8 | 100.0 |
| Column % | 54.0 | 38.4 | 45.1 |
| Total % | 23.1 | 22.0 | 45.1 |
| Paired comparison | | | |
| <i>N</i> | 47 | 22 | 69 |
| Row % | 68.1 | 31.9 | 100.0 |
| Column % | 19.7 | 6.9 | 12.3 |
| Total % | 8.4 | 3.9 | 12.3 |
| 3-10 countries | | | |
| <i>N</i> | 53 | 36 | 89 |
| Row % | 59.6 | 40.4 | 100.0 |
| Column % | 22.2 | 11.3 | 15.9 |
| Total % | 9.5 | 6.4 | 15.9 |
| 11-20 countries | | | |
| <i>N</i> | 5 | 65 | 70 |
| Row % | 7.1 | 92.9 | 100.0 |
| Column % | 2.1 | 20.3 | 12.5 |
| Total % | 0.9 | 11.6 | 12.5 |
| 21-100 countries | | | |
| <i>N</i> | 5 | 56 | 61 |
| Row % | 8.2 | 91.8 | 100.0 |
| Column % | 2.1 | 17.5 | 10.9 |
| Total % | 0.9 | 10.0 | 10.9 |
| >100 countries | | | |
| <i>N</i> | 0 | 18 | 18 |
| Row % | 0.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| Column % | 0.0 | 5.6 | 3.2 |
| Total % | 0.0 | 3.2 | 3.2 |
| All articles | | | |
| <i>N</i> | 239 | 320 | 559 |
| Row % | 42.8 | 57.2 | 100.0 |
| Column % | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

Source: Authors' Dataset of Articles in Comparative Politics (DACP).

Chi-square test: Pearson $\chi^2 = 115.2$, $p = .000$.

they accounted for almost a third of quantitative studies (32.2 percent).

World Regions: A Global Discipline?

On average, richer countries are richer in political datasets. Accordingly, for a long time, the industrial democracies of Western Europe have been pioneering the development of cross-national political data. Well-known examples are the (politically relevant) social and economic data provided by the Organization

of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the annual Eurobarometer surveys conducted by the European Commission, the electoral data compiled by Thomas Mackie and Richard Rose (1991), and the Comparative Manifestos Project led by Ian Budge and Hans-Dieter Klingemann (Budge et al. 2001). To what extent does the enterprise of quantitative comparative politics reflect historical asymmetries in the availability of cross-national data?

As Table 3 shows, the quantitative study of comparative politics is indeed, to a considerable degree, the study of the politics in advanced democracies. A clear plurality of quantitative articles in our dataset focuses on industrial countries (38.2 percent). With more than one article in eight (13.5 percent), Latin America stands out as the second world region explored by quantitative comparativists. The remaining three regions, the postcommunist sphere, the Asian continent, and Africa (including the Middle East and Northern Africa), each unite about 8 percent of quantitative pieces. Despite their paradigmatic status in quantitative cross-national research, worldwide studies and multiregional research jointly represent only a fourth (24.9 percent).¹³

At first sight, the regional coverage of quantitative studies appears to mirror long-standing geographical inequalities in the availability of cross-national data. However, the uneven geographic coverage seems to be reflective of deeper inequalities in scholarly attention. The regional focus of *qualitative* comparative work published in top journals is far from balanced either. Nevertheless, it does look slightly less Eurocentric and a bit more geographically dispersed (see Table 3). The share of all quantitative articles from all other world regions (36.9 percent) roughly equals the share of quantitative pieces on industrial countries (38.3 percent). By contrast, the portion of all qualitative studies on these regions (56.4 percent) almost doubles the portion of qualitative work on industrial countries (32.0 percent).

If we look at temporal trends, though, the relative lag of quantitative comparative research on the global South and East may soon be a matter of the past. In the last two years in our sample, quantitative research on all world regions (except the postcommunist region) has augmented significantly. When compared with the mean number of articles published in the preceding five years in our dataset, in 2004 and 2007 we have seen twice as many quantitative articles on Asia, three times as many on Asia and Latin America,

Table 3
Distribution of Articles, by Geographic Focus

| | Qualitative articles | Quantitative articles | All articles |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|--------------|
| Worldwide | | | |
| <i>N</i> | 0 | 36 | 36 |
| Row % | 0.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| Column % | 0.0 | 11.1 | 6.3 |
| Total % | 0.0 | 6.3 | 6.3 |
| Industrial countries | | | |
| <i>N</i> | 79 | 124 | 203 |
| Row % | 38.9 | 61.1 | 100.0 |
| Column % | 32.0 | 38.2 | 35.5 |
| Total % | 13.8 | 21.7 | 35.5 |
| Postcommunist region | | | |
| <i>N</i> | 31 | 24 | 55 |
| Row % | 56.4 | 43.6 | 100.0 |
| Column % | 12.6 | 7.4 | 9.6 |
| Total % | 5.4 | 4.2 | 9.6 |
| Africa | | | |
| <i>N</i> | 35 | 26 | 61 |
| Row % | 57.4 | 42.6 | 100.0 |
| Column % | 14.2 | 8.0 | 10.7 |
| Total % | 6.1 | 4.5 | 10.7 |
| Asia | | | |
| <i>N</i> | 31 | 26 | 57 |
| Row % | 54.4 | 45.6 | 100.0 |
| Column % | 12.6 | 8.0 | 10.0 |
| Total % | 5.4 | 4.5 | 10.0 |
| Latin America | | | |
| <i>N</i> | 42 | 44 | 86 |
| Row % | 48.8 | 51.2 | 100.0 |
| Column % | 17.0 | 13.5 | 15.0 |
| Total % | 7.3 | 7.7 | 15.0 |
| Multiregion study | | | |
| <i>N</i> | 29 | 45 | 74 |
| Row % | 39.2 | 60.8 | 100.0 |
| Column % | 11.7 | 13.8 | 12.9 |
| Total % | 5.1 | 7.9 | 12.9 |
| Total | | | |
| <i>N</i> | 247 | 325 | 572 |
| Row % | 43.2 | 56.8 | 100.0 |
| Column % | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

Source: Authors' Dataset of Articles in Comparative Politics (DACP).

Chi-square test: Pearson $\chi^2 = 42.3$, $p = .000$.

and five times as many of worldwide scope. Over the past years, datasets on politics outside the industrial world have been growing in number and quality—and so have quantitative studies on the politics of the global South.¹⁴

Thematic Subfields: A Limited Agenda?

To what extent do quantitative studies reflect the thematic breadth of the discipline? And how are they constrained thematically by the availability of cross-national data? For the purpose of determining the substantive focus of the articles in our dataset, we divided the discipline of comparative politics into three broad subfields of research: political institutions, public policies, and society-state relations. As it turned out, almost half of comparative politics (as published in the top journals) studies formal political institutions (48.4 percent). The other half is evenly divided among the study of public policies (26.3 percent) and society-state relations (25.3 percent). Among these three subfields, public policy analysis is the least quantitative one. While about two-thirds of studies of institutions (58.4 percent) and state-society relations (63.3 percent) employ statistical techniques, less than half of public policy analyses do so (45.1 percent).¹⁵

Within these broad subfields of comparative inquiry, we grouped articles according to their primary thematic orientation by locating each of them in one of fourteen more specific areas of research.¹⁶ Since articles may touch several research themes, situating them in one field often does not accurately reflect their substantive breadth. Quantitative comparative research tends to be *y*-centered rather than *x*-centered. With explanatory variables *x* often covering a broad range of phenomena, it is usually the *explanandum y* that provides its substantive focus. Our thematic classifications therefore primarily capture the subject matter of dependent variables.¹⁷

Table 4 provides the resulting distribution of comparative politics articles across thematic fields. As it shows, almost the entire body of comparative research published in the leading journals (a full 85.5 percent) is situated in only five broad substantive fields of inquiry: economic, social, and labor policies (23.9 percent); states and regimes (18.2 percent); parties and elections (18.2 percent); public opinion and civil society (16.5 percent); and executives and legislatures (8.1 percent).¹⁸ Qualitative and quantitative studies show similar degrees of thematic concentration, although their frequency distribution varies within the five major areas of research. Quantitative research is predominant in the study of executives and legislatures (80.9 percent), parties and elections (72.6 percent), and public opinion (65.6 percent);

Table 4
Distribution of Articles, by Substantive Theme

| | Qualitative articles | Quantitative articles | All articles |
|---|-------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------|
| I. Political institutions | | | |
| 1. States and regimes | | | |
| <i>N</i> | 69 | 37 | 106 |
| Row % | 65.1 | 34.9 | 100.0 |
| Column % | 27.1 | 11.3 | 18.2 |
| Total % | 11.9 | 6.4 | 18.2 |
| 2. Executives and legislatures | | | |
| <i>N</i> | 9 | 38 | 47 |
| Row % | 19.1 | 80.9 | 100.0 |
| Column % | 3.5 | 11.7 | 8.1 |
| Total % | 1.5 | 6.5 | 8.1 |
| 3. Courts | | | |
| <i>N</i> | 3 | 6 | 9 |
| Row % | 33.3 | 66.7 | 100.0 |
| Column % | 1.2 | 1.8 | 1.5 |
| Total % | 0.5 | 1.0 | 1.5 |
| 4. Bureaucracies | | | |
| <i>N</i> | 0 | 4 | 4 |
| Row % | 0.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| Column % | 0.0 | 1.2 | 0.7 |
| Total % | 0.0 | 0.7 | 0.7 |
| 5. Military | | | |
| <i>N</i> | 7 | 2 | 9 |
| Row % | 77.8 | 22.2 | 100.0 |
| Column % | 2.7 | 0.6 | 1.5 |
| Total % | 1.2 | 0.3 | 1.5 |
| 6. Parties and elections | | | |
| <i>N</i> | 29 | 77 | 106 |
| Row % | 27.4 | 72.6 | 100.0 |
| Column % | 11.4 | 23.6 | 18.2 |
| Total % | 5.0 | 13.3 | 18.2 |
| II. Public policies | | | |
| 7. Economic, social, and labor policies | | | |
| <i>N</i> | 74 | 65 | 139 |
| Row % | 53.2 | 46.8 | 100.0 |
| Column % | 29.0 | 19.9 | 23.9 |
| Total % | 12.7 | 11.2 | 23.9 |
| 8. Environmental policies | | | |
| <i>N</i> | 3 | 3 | 6 |
| Row % | 50.0 | 50.0 | 100.0 |
| Column % | 1.2 | 0.9 | 1.0 |
| Total % | 0.5 | 0.5 | 1.0 |
| 9. Cultural policies | | | |
| <i>N</i> | 7 | 1 | 8 |
| Row % | 87.5 | 12.5 | 100.0 |
| Column % | 2.7 | 0.3 | 1.4 |
| Total % | 1.2 | 0.2 | 1.4 |

(continued)

Table 4. (continued)

| | Qualitative articles | Quantitative articles | All articles |
|--|-------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------|
| III. Society-state relations | | | |
| 10. Public opinion and civil society | | | |
| <i>N</i> | 33 | 63 | 96 |
| Row % | 34.4 | 65.6 | 100.0 |
| Column % | 12.9 | 19.3 | 16.5 |
| Total % | 5.7 | 10.8 | 16.5 |
| 11. Gender | | | |
| <i>N</i> | 3 | 9 | 12 |
| Row % | 25.0 | 75.0 | 100.0 |
| Column % | 1.2 | 2.8 | 2.1 |
| Total % | 0.5 | 1.5 | 2.1 |
| 12. Corruption and clientelism | | | |
| <i>N</i> | 4 | 6 | 10 |
| Row % | 40.0 | 60.0 | 100.0 |
| Column % | 1.6 | 1.8 | 1.7 |
| Total % | 0.7 | 1.0 | 1.7 |
| 13. Ethnicity and nationalism | | | |
| <i>N</i> | 10 | 10 | 20 |
| Row % | 50.0 | 50.0 | 100.0 |
| Column % | 3.9 | 3.1 | 3.4 |
| Total % | 1.7 | 1.7 | 3.4 |
| 14. Various | | | |
| <i>N</i> | 4 | 5 | 9 |
| Row % | 44.4 | 55.6 | 100.0 |
| Column % | 1.6 | 1.5 | 1.5 |
| Total % | 0.7 | 0.9 | 1.5 |
| Total | | | |
| <i>N</i> | 255 | 326 | 581 |
| Row % | 43.9 | 56.1 | 100.0 |
| Column % | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

Source: Authors' Dataset of Articles in Comparative Politics (DACP).

Chi² test: Pearson $\chi^2 = 67.4$, $p = .000$.

holds a balance with qualitative methods in the analysis of economic and social policies (46.8 percent); and loses out to qualitative treatments only in the study of states and regimes (34.9 percent).¹⁹ All in all, the thematic cartography of comparative politics conveys a similar impression as its geographic mapping. Despite some intriguing nuances and variations, the overall structure of quantitative comparative studies does not look so much different from the structure of qualitative research. Their thematic concentration, just like their geographic concentration, is notably similar.

The Use of Datasets in Comparative Politics

Debates on the use of datasets in comparative politics usually revolve around the few prominent global datasets everyone knows and seems to use, such as the Freedom House annual reports on political rights and civil liberties and the Polity data on political regime characteristics and transitions in the study of regimes, Minorities at Risk (MAR) and Correlates of War (COW) in the study of civil conflict, or the conflict data from the Arthur Banks Cross National Time Series (CNTS) in the study of contentious politics. Scholars routinely voice concerns about the dominant market position these big cross-national time-series datasets occupy in subfields of comparative politics. The core of their criticism concerns issues of data quality. Monopolies of data provision are not bad per se. On the contrary, if the data are of high quality, such monopolies should encourage the accumulation of knowledge.

A discussion of quality issues lies beyond the scope of the present article. Here, we shall only examine the extent to which quantitative scholars actually do depend on the few global datasets that seem to monopolize, if nothing else, our methodological attention. In particular, we wish to address three questions: To what extent do authors actually use these global datasets, rather than regional or national datasets? To what extent do they invest in the development of original data? And to what degree do we face a market structure dominated by a handful of datasets?²⁰

Geographic Scope: The Dominance of Global Datasets?

If only a minority of quantitative comparative research studies large numbers of countries, as we found in the previous section, only a minority of comparative research is likely to make extensive use of global datasets. To get a more precise idea of the geographic scope of the data in use, we analyzed if authors employed either national datasets (which are specific to particular countries) or regional datasets (which are specific to particular regions). National census data, local election results, or national opinion polls are examples of the former; surveys like Eurobarometer and collections of election data like Mackie and Rose (1991) are examples of the latter.²¹

As our data indicate, the use of national datasets is quite common in quantitative comparative politics. Almost two-fifths of the articles in our sample employ

Table 5
The Use of National, Regional, and Self-Made Datasets, by Research Design

| | National Datasets | | Regional Datasets | | Original Data | | |
|-------------------|-------------------|-------|-------------------|-------|---------------|---------|-------|
| | No | Yes | No | Yes | No | Partial | Yes |
| Case study | | | | | | | |
| <i>N</i> | 37 | 86 | 121 | 2 | 66 | 11 | 46 |
| Row % | 30.1 | 69.9 | 98.4 | 1.6 | 53.7 | 8.9 | 37.4 |
| Column % | 19.0 | 68.8 | 44.2 | 4.3 | 41.5 | 19.6 | 43.8 |
| Paired comparison | | | | | | | |
| <i>N</i> | 8 | 14 | 21 | 1 | 11 | 2 | 9 |
| Row % | 36.4 | 63.6 | 95.5 | 4.5 | 50.0 | 9.1 | 40.9 |
| Column % | 4.1 | 11.2 | 7.7 | 2.2 | 6.9 | 3.6 | 8.6 |
| 3-10 countries | | | | | | | |
| <i>N</i> | 25 | 11 | 31 | 5 | 24 | 2 | 10 |
| Row % | 69.4 | 30.6 | 86.1 | 13.9 | 66.7 | 5.6 | 27.8 |
| Column % | 12.8 | 8.8 | 11.3 | 10.9 | 15.1 | 3.6 | 9.5 |
| 11-20 countries | | | | | | | |
| <i>N</i> | 59 | 6 | 44 | 21 | 32 | 17 | 16 |
| Row % | 90.8 | 9.2 | 67.7 | 32.3 | 49.2 | 26.2 | 24.6 |
| Column % | 30.3 | 4.8 | 16.1 | 45.7 | 20.1 | 30.4 | 15.2 |
| 21-100 countries | | | | | | | |
| <i>N</i> | 48 | 8 | 41 | 15 | 19 | 21 | 16 |
| Row % | 85.7 | 14.3 | 73.2 | 26.8 | 33.9 | 37.5 | 28.6 |
| Column % | 24.6 | 6.4 | 15.0 | 32.6 | 11.9 | 37.5 | 15.2 |
| >100 countries | | | | | | | |
| <i>N</i> | 18 | 0 | 16 | 2 | 7 | 3 | 8 |
| Row % | 100.0 | 0.0 | 88.9 | 11.1 | 38.9 | 16.7 | 44.4 |
| Column % | 9.2 | 0.0 | 5.8 | 4.3 | 4.4 | 5.4 | 7.6 |
| Total | | | | | | | |
| <i>N</i> | 195 | 125 | 274 | 46 | 159 | 56 | 105 |
| Row % | 60.9 | 39.1 | 85.6 | 14.4 | 49.7 | 17.5 | 32.8 |
| Column % | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

Source: Authors' Dataset of Articles in Comparative Politics (DACP).

country-specific datasets (38.3 percent, $N = 326$). Reliance on regional datasets is less frequent: only about one in eight pieces are grounded in region-specific data (14.1 percent, $N = 325$). In temporal terms, the use of national datasets has remained rather stable over the past decade (at an annual average of 22.7 articles). However, its relative weight has been decreasing in the face of an expanding use of cross-national and cross-regional datasets. Until 2001, the ratio of national to cross-national datasets stood at 1:1. In 2004, it decreased to 1:2, and in 2007 to 1:3. The use of regional datasets, by contrast, is a rather recent phenomenon. More than three-quarters of articles that rely on region-specific data (35 out of the 46) were published in the last three years of our sample.

Unsurprisingly, the use of geographically circumscribed datasets varies according to the number of countries under study. As Table 5 shows, single-country

studies account for two-thirds of the national datasets used (68.8 percent); paired comparisons and small- N comparisons account for another 10 percent each. In a similar fashion, studies in the intermediate range of sample size (between eleven and one hundred countries) account for the bulk of the few regional datasets employed (78.3 percent).

By disaggregating the use of subglobal datasets by world region, Table 6 documents that the use of *country-specific* datasets is not a "poor-nations" phenomenon. The portion of studies on industrial nations that use national datasets (37.9 percent) lies close to the total average. Differences among regional studies in their recourse to national datasets are statistically insignificant, with one exception: Latin America. Almost three-quarters of quantitative studies on Latin American politics are based on country-specific data (70.5 percent).²² By contrast, existing *region-specific*

Table 6
The Use of National, Regional, and Self-Made Datasets, by Geographic Focus

| | National Datasets | | Regional Datasets | | Original Data | | |
|----------------------|-------------------|-------|-------------------|-------|---------------|---------|-------|
| | No | Yes | No | Yes | No | Partial | Yes |
| Worldwide | | | | | | | |
| <i>N</i> | 32 | 4 | 32 | 4 | 14 | 8 | 14 |
| Row % | 88.9 | 11.1 | 88.9 | 11.1 | 38.9 | 22.2 | 38.9 |
| Column % | 16.0 | 3.2 | 11.5 | 8.7 | 8.6 | 14.3 | 13.1 |
| Industrial countries | | | | | | | |
| <i>N</i> | 77 | 47 | 101 | 23 | 71 | 21 | 32 |
| Row % | 62.1 | 37.9 | 81.5 | 18.5 | 57.3 | 16.9 | 25.8 |
| Column % | 38.5 | 37.6 | 36.2 | 50.0 | 43.8 | 37.5 | 29.9 |
| Postcommunist region | | | | | | | |
| <i>N</i> | 16 | 8 | 24 | 0 | 9 | 2 | 13 |
| Row % | 66.7 | 33.3 | 100.0 | 0.0 | 37.5 | 8.3 | 54.2 |
| Column % | 8.0 | 6.4 | 8.6 | 0.0 | 5.6 | 3.6 | 12.1 |
| Africa | | | | | | | |
| <i>N</i> | 16 | 10 | 24 | 2 | 12 | 3 | 11 |
| Row % | 61.5 | 38.5 | 92.3 | 7.7 | 46.2 | 11.5 | 42.3 |
| Column % | 8.0 | 8.0 | 8.6 | 4.3 | 7.4 | 5.4 | 10.3 |
| Asia | | | | | | | |
| <i>N</i> | 11 | 15 | 26 | 0 | 10 | 6 | 10 |
| Row % | 42.3 | 57.7 | 100.0 | 0.0 | 38.5 | 23.1 | 38.5 |
| Column % | 5.5 | 12.0 | 9.3 | 0.0 | 6.2 | 10.7 | 9.3 |
| Latin America | | | | | | | |
| <i>N</i> | 13 | 31 | 37 | 7 | 28 | 3 | 13 |
| Row % | 29.5 | 70.5 | 84.1 | 15.9 | 63.6 | 6.8 | 29.5 |
| Column % | 6.5 | 24.8 | 13.3 | 15.2 | 17.3 | 5.4 | 12.1 |
| Multiregion study | | | | | | | |
| <i>N</i> | 35 | 10 | 35 | 10 | 18 | 13 | 14 |
| Row % | 77.8 | 22.2 | 77.8 | 22.2 | 40.0 | 28.9 | 31.1 |
| Column % | 17.5 | 8.0 | 12.5 | 21.7 | 11.1 | 23.2 | 13.1 |
| Total | | | | | | | |
| <i>N</i> | 200 | 125 | 279 | 46 | 162 | 56 | 107 |
| Row % | 61.5 | 38.5 | 85.8 | 14.2 | 49.8 | 17.2 | 32.9 |
| Column % | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

Source: Authors' Dataset of Articles in Comparative Politics (DACP).

datasets of the global East and South have barely found their way into the leading journals. Again, Latin America represents a (minor) exception. Within our sample, the use of regional data is concentrated within studies of industrial democracies (50.0 percent), worldwide and multiregional studies (30.4 percent), and Latin American studies (15.2 percent).²³

Reliance on geographically circumscribed data is not a matter of underresearched thematic fields that have failed to develop datasets of global reach. As Table 7 shows, among the major thematic areas, studies of elections and parties, with a long pedigree in comparative research, show the highest tendency to ground their empirical research in country-specific

datasets. No surprise: they rely on national election data. Almost two-thirds of articles in this category (63.6 percent) employ country-specific data, almost two-fifths of all articles with such datasets (39.2 percent). The reliance on national data is close to the mean in the study of executives and legislatures (36.8 percent) and public opinion (33.3 percent). It lies below average in the study of states and regimes (16.2 percent) and socioeconomic policies (16.9 percent).²⁴ Region-specific datasets are prominent in those fields where they have been flourishing the longest: socioeconomic policies (with 34.8 of all regional datasets), parties and elections (19.6 percent), executives and legislatures (15.2 percent), and public opinion (13 percent).

Table 7
The Use of National, Regional, and Self-Made Datasets, by Substantive Themes

| | National Datasets | | Regional Datasets | | Original Data | | |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------|-------|-------------------|-------|---------------|---------|-------|
| | No | Yes | No | Yes | No | Partial | Yes |
| 1. States and regimes | | | | | | | |
| <i>N</i> | 31 | 6 | 33 | 4 | 15 | 7 | 15 |
| Row % | 83.8 | 16.2 | 89.2 | 10.8 | 40.5 | 18.9 | 40.5 |
| Column % | 15.4 | 4.8 | 11.8 | 8.7 | 9.2 | 12.5 | 14.0 |
| 2. Executives and legislatures | | | | | | | |
| <i>N</i> | 24 | 14 | 31 | 7 | 15 | 1 | 22 |
| Row % | 63.2 | 36.8 | 81.6 | 18.4 | 39.5 | 2.6 | 57.9 |
| Column % | 11.9 | 11.2 | 11.1 | 15.2 | 9.2 | 1.8 | 20.6 |
| 3. Courts | | | | | | | |
| <i>N</i> | 2 | 4 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 3 |
| Row % | 33.3 | 66.7 | 100.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 50.0 | 50.0 |
| Column % | 1.0 | 3.2 | 2.1 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 5.4 | 2.8 |
| 4. Bureaucracies | | | | | | | |
| <i>N</i> | 2 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 0 |
| Row % | 50.0 | 50.0 | 75.0 | 25.0 | 50.0 | 50.0 | 0.0 |
| Column % | 1.0 | 1.6 | 1.1 | 2.2 | 1.2 | 3.6 | 0.0 |
| 5. Military | | | | | | | |
| <i>N</i> | 1 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Row % | 50.0 | 50.0 | 100.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| Column % | 0.5 | 0.8 | 0.7 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 1.9 |
| 6. Parties and elections | | | | | | | |
| <i>N</i> | 28 | 49 | 68 | 9 | 45 | 15 | 17 |
| Row % | 36.4 | 63.6 | 88.3 | 11.7 | 58.4 | 19.5 | 22.1 |
| Column % | 13.9 | 39.2 | 24.3 | 19.6 | 27.6 | 26.8 | 15.9 |
| 7. Economic and social policies | | | | | | | |
| <i>N</i> | 54 | 11 | 49 | 16 | 36 | 15 | 14 |
| Row % | 83.1 | 16.9 | 75.4 | 24.6 | 55.4 | 23.1 | 21.5 |
| Column % | 26.9 | 8.8 | 17.5 | 34.8 | 22.1 | 26.8 | 13.1 |
| 8. Environmental policies | | | | | | | |
| <i>N</i> | 3 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| Row % | 100.0 | 0.0 | 100.0 | 0.0 | 100.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 |
| Column % | 1.5 | 0.0 | 1.1 | 0.0 | 1.8 | 0.0 | 0.0 |
| 9. Cultural policies | | | | | | | |
| <i>N</i> | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Row % | 100.0 | 0.0 | 100.0 | 0.0 | 100.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 |
| Column % | 0.5 | 0.0 | 0.4 | 0.0 | 0.6 | 0.0 | 0.0 |
| 10. Public opinion and civil society | | | | | | | |
| <i>N</i> | 42 | 21 | 57 | 6 | 33 | 5 | 25 |
| Row % | 66.7 | 33.3 | 90.5 | 9.5 | 52.4 | 7.9 | 39.7 |
| Column % | 20.9 | 16.8 | 20.4 | 13.0 | 20.2 | 8.9 | 23.4 |
| 11. Gender | | | | | | | |
| <i>N</i> | 3 | 6 | 8 | 1 | 4 | 2 | 3 |
| Row % | 33.3 | 66.7 | 88.9 | 11.1 | 44.4 | 22.2 | 33.3 |
| Column % | 1.5 | 4.8 | 2.9 | 2.2 | 2.5 | 3.6 | 2.8 |
| 12. Corruption and clientelism | | | | | | | |
| <i>N</i> | 2 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 1 |
| Row % | 33.3 | 66.7 | 66.7 | 33.3 | 33.3 | 50.0 | 16.7 |
| Column % | 1.0 | 3.2 | 1.4 | 4.3 | 1.2 | 5.4 | 0.9 |
| 13. Ethnicity and nationalism | | | | | | | |
| <i>N</i> | 5 | 5 | 10 | 0 | 4 | 3 | 3 |
| Row % | 50.0 | 50.0 | 100.0 | 0.0 | 40.0 | 30.0 | 30.0 |
| Column % | 2.5 | 4.0 | 3.6 | 0.0 | 2.5 | 5.4 | 2.8 |
| 14. Various | | | | | | | |
| <i>N</i> | 3 | 2 | 5 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 2 |
| Row % | 60.0 | 40.0 | 100.0 | 0.0 | 60.0 | 0.0 | 40.0 |
| Column % | 1.5 | 1.6 | 1.8 | 0.0 | 1.8 | 0.0 | 1.9 |
| Total | | | | | | | |
| <i>N</i> | 201 | 125 | 280 | 46 | 163 | 56 | 107 |
| Row % | 61.7 | 38.3 | 85.9 | 14.1 | 50.0 | 17.2 | 32.8 |
| Column % | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

Source: Authors' Dataset of Articles in Comparative Politics (DACP).

Data Development: A Culture of Recycling?

At times, critics of data-driven research conceive the quantitative study of comparative politics as something like an academic blend of intellectual laziness, money laundering, and show business. According to caricature, scholars take ready-made data from the shelves of global datasets without caring much about their quality; declare them to be proxies of theoretical concepts that bear only faint relations to the data; shrug off critics with unrealistic declarations of realism: “this is what we have” and “working with bad data is better than not working at all and going on welfare”; put their dirty measures into high-tech washing machines of statistical sophistication; and declare the results brighter than bright and whiter than white to advance our understanding of politics in statistically significant ways.

The best work in the discipline that finds its way into the top journals seems to work differently, however. Rather than going “the path of least resistance” (Diehl 1992, 334), by exploiting loatable data resources, comparative scholars invest systematically in the (often partial) development of original data. Rather than easy shortcuts to academic fame, journal publications often represent the terminal point of long and winding roads, traversed by self-enslaved scholars (and their enslaved assistants), laboriously and patiently collecting their own data.

In our own exercise of academic self-enslavement, we tried to measure the extent to which authors develop original data, rather than feeding their computers with preexisting data. We credited them with *full* data development if they constructed *at least one variable* in their dataset from qualitative sources, such as national newspapers or international news services like *Keesing's Record of World Events* (www.keesings.com). We counted their efforts as *partial* data development if they modified or extended, in either substantive, temporal, or geographic terms, at least one variable contained in a publicly available dataset (but not if they only recoded or aggregated existing measures).

As our data indicate ($N = 326$), in only half of all cases, authors exclusively work with established datasets (50 percent). In roughly one in six articles, they modify or update extant data (17.2 percent). Quite strikingly, in almost a third of the articles in our sample, authors process self-made data, hunted and gathered by the sweat of their brow (32.8 percent). Notably,

the trend towards the development of original data is on the rise. More than half of original data (52.3 percent of new data and 57.1 percent of amended data) appeared in the last two years of our sample. In 2007, the field was almost evenly split. Of the eighty-eight quantitative pieces registered that year, 38.6 percent worked with ready-made data only, another 25 percent with amended data, and 36.4 percent with at least one original variable. The construction of datasets is often described as a thankless task. Yet it does seem to pay off. About half of quantitative comparative research published in the most visible outlets of the discipline builds upon original data. Although developing data may not be the most entertaining enterprise in academic life, it does seem to pave the way into top journals.²⁵

If we revise the distribution of original data across research designs (see Table 5), we can see that data development is not an exclusive domain of small- N studies. While case studies do have a large share in the development of new data, more than half are based on available data. As a matter of fact, all research designs seem to require similar levels of measurement innovation. At the aggregate level (adding partial and full data development), none of the intergroup differences are statistically significant—except for the gap between the “least creative” and the “most creative” research design, namely, between small- N comparisons (three to ten countries) that rely to 66.7 percent on preexisting data and large- N studies (twenty-one to one hundred countries) that rely to 66.1 percent on (somewhat) original measures.

The regional distribution of self-made data is similarly even. Still, students of Western Europe and Latin America seem to be somewhat more able and willing to rely on extant datasets, while students of other world regions have been investing somewhat more to compensate for the dearth of political data. Notably, around three-fifths of worldwide and multi-regional studies require some investment in data collection (see Table 6).

In terms of subject matters, we find high rates of measurement innovation in two of the major fields of inquiry: states and regimes (where 40.5 percent of all articles contain new data) and executives and legislatures (where 57.9 percent rest upon original measures). By contrast, quantitative work on parties and elections use higher portions of ready-made data (58.4 percent), as do studies of socioeconomic policies (55.4 percent) and public opinion (52.4 percent). Data innovation is not absent from these thematic

fields, yet perhaps more constrained, given their structural dependence on data provided by state authorities (such as election results and socioeconomic data) or well-funded research institutes (public opinion surveys).²⁶

Individual Datasets: A Concentrated Market?

Finally, after having walked through our simple categorizations of datasets, we wish to answer the question of proper names: which particular datasets do quantitative comparativists use after all? To what extent does our sample confirm the common idea that various subfields of quantitative comparative politics are grounded in a very few dominant datasets everybody criticizes but uses nevertheless?

The 326 quantitative articles in our sample make use of 71 cross-national datasets. Twenty of them appear only once, and another 20 appear in 4 articles or more. The most widely used datasets are the Polity political regime data (36 times); the Freedom House data on political rights, civil liberties, and freedom of the press (20 times); the Cross-National Time Series by Arthur Banks (15 times); the Almanac of Electoral History by Thomas Mackie and Richard Rose (14 times); survey data from the Global Barometer projects (12 times); the World Bank Governance Indicators (11 times); and Correlates of War (10 times). These 7 datasets with citation rates above 10 concentrate 42.1 percent of all instances of cross-national data usage. The 71 registered datasets appear 280 times in different articles, yielding an average of 3.9 instances of usage by dataset. If we calculate the effective number of datasets (analogous to the Laakso-Taagepera index of the effective number of political parties), it lies at 27.1 datasets, indicating a medium level of dispersion among the 280 registered instances of data usage.²⁷

Overall, our dataset gives testimony of a moderate level of concentration in the usage of cross-national data. On one hand, the field of comparative politics contains elements of dispersion, insofar as it hosts a wide array of specialized datasets that provide inputs for a wide array of specialized research. On the other hand, the field also shows tendencies of concentration, insofar as a small set of large, longitudinal datasets have established themselves as providers of critical data on fundamental political structures and events, such as regimes attributes, election results, conflict events, and political attitudes.

Of course, our sample of articles cannot provide a wholly accurate diagnosis of patterns of cross-national data usage in comparative political research. Our sample selection is designed to provide a representative picture of the subdiscipline of comparative politics. Given the inevitable thematic specialization of cross-national data, no single dataset will ever be able, or even aspire, to dominate the subdiscipline as a whole. To establish the extent to which a few datasets have created situations of dominance in particular thematic subfields of quantitative comparative politics, we would need to create weighted samples that overrepresent specific subfields we are interested in.

Conclusion

Our empirical radiography of data usage in quantitative comparative politics, based on a new dataset of comparative politics articles that have been published in six leading journals over the past twenty years, has yielded some intriguing findings, many of them running against well-established preconceptions that observers as well as practitioners of comparative politics tend to embrace. Let us recapitulate the major surprises our dataset revealed.

With respect to the structure of quantitative comparative politics, we wish to stress three points: First, in accordance with widespread assumptions, we have seen a significant expansion of quantitative methods in the study of comparative politics, in particular in most recent years. Although top journals do not publish fewer qualitative studies than before, statistical methods have become the dominant mode of analysis. Second, despite much talk about bridging the methodological divide between qualitative and quantitative methods in recent years, comparative politics bears the distinctive appearance of a divided discipline. The leading general political science journals publish almost no qualitative work in comparative politics. Third, about four decades ago, Arend Lijphart (1971) identified low case numbers as the defining constraint of cross-national comparison. If we study small numbers of countries, he asserted, we have to do without statistics. Even today, in the collective imagery of the scholarly community, large-*N* cross-national time series research that covers dozens of countries and dozens of years represents the prototypical instance of quantitative comparative work. This seems to be mistaken. Only a minority of quantitative comparative work studies more than twenty countries. Its true

representative is the quantitative single-country study.

With respect to the structure of data usage, our empirical explorations allow us to give some tentative answers to our initial question about the data-driven nature of quantitative comparative research. First, much quantitative research studies low numbers of countries and is therefore based on national or regional datasets, rather than global ones. This limits the potential magnetic pull worldwide datasets may exercise to less than half of quantitative studies (those that study more than ten countries). Second, their high rate of measurement innovation suggests that quantitative studies of comparative politics may be driving the development of data as much as they are driven by the availability of data. Third, their relative dependence on available data does not seem to induce grave distortions into quantitative comparative studies. The geographic and thematic biases they present are not that different from the biases we find in qualitative comparative research. Fourth, it may well be the case that specific subfields of quantitative comparative politics are dominated, even constituted, by a few global datasets. However, within our sample of articles that is broadly representative of the subdiscipline as a whole as it presents itself in the top U.S.-based journals, we found a more complex pattern in which concentration coexists with dispersion in the usage of cross-national data.

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Notes

1. See, for example, the symposia "Bridging the Gap: Connecting Qualitative and Quantitative Methods in the Study of Civil War," *Qualitative Methods* 6, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 13-29; and "The Quantitative/Qualitative Distinction," *Qualitative Methods* 3, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 2-22.

2. The Dataset of Articles in Comparative Politics (DACP) dataset is available in SPSS at the *Political Research Quarterly* Web site (<http://prq.sagepub.com>) as well as at the Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas (CIDE) Data Archive for Applied Research in the Social Sciences (<http://biacs.cide.edu/>).

3. Our journal sample is almost identical to the one constructed by Gerardo L. Munck, Richard Snyder, and James Mahoney for their respective contributions to the 2007 debate on "the direction of comparative politics" published in *Comparative Political Studies* (see Munck and Snyder 2007; Mahoney 2007). The only differences: we expand the sample to the year 2007 and we integrate general political science journals and subdisciplinary journals into one single dataset.

4. We consider work on the domestic consequences of international factors as comparative. The same applies for studies of civil war, even if dominated by nominal international relations (IR) scholars. Studies of the European Union as an organization count as IR, studies of the politics of EU member states as comparative.

5. The sample includes full journal articles only, excluding "minor" categories like review articles, research notes, and special issue introductions. The comparative politics articles were identified by two independent coders. Although we refrained from computing reliability scores, their degree of agreement was high. Disagreements arose in less than a dozen of articles (from a pool of several hundred pieces). In these cases, we opted for including the controversial article.

6. Since our sample of *journals* was identical to the one chosen by Munck and Snyder (2007) and Mahoney (2007) (apart from our temporal extensions), our sample of *articles* should be (almost) identical, too. Although we did not have access to the full datasets the three authors developed, our overall case figures (for the same set of journals until 2004) do indeed look very similar. From the subdisciplinary journals, Munck and Snyder had identified 319 comparative politics pieces; we found only 5 less. From the general political science journals, Mahoney had identified 140 comparative politics articles; we found only 1 less.

7. The types of statistical analysis we require to classify articles as quantitative are not very demanding. While the presentation of frequency counts, means, and percentages is not enough, we do not require more than the use of basic statistical techniques of data reduction and inference, such as correlation analysis, the estimation of confidence intervals, or the comparison of means through *t*-tests. Besides, we do not weight the importance of statistical procedures for the overall argument. We see no viable way of doing this. Thus, for the sake of reliability, we classify articles as quantitative whenever they employ some kind of statistical technique of data processing, however modest. In very few cases (less than half a dozen in our sample of several hundred), it is actually only one or two minuscule statistical exercises that separate "quantitative" pieces from their "qualitative"

neighbors. In these cases, the dividing line between research methods is very thin indeed.

8. The privilege we grant to statistical inference concords with numerous other explicit definitions of qualitative versus quantitative methods (see, e.g., Bartels and Brady 1993, 121; Byrman 2004, 19; Lewis-Beck 2008, 11). Naturally, our binary distinction of research methods does not allow us to identify “mixed methods” that bridge qualitative and quantitative approaches. Despite the emerging common sense about the desirability of multimethod research (see Ahram 2009), the operational definition of methodological hybrids is unclear. Within the constraints of journal articles, how many regression tables does a case study need to qualify as mixed-method? How much case knowledge does a large-*N* study need to qualify as mixed-method?

9. The classification of articles by research method was conducted by two independent coders. Their percentage of agreement lay at 94.8 percent. Only 30 out of 581 were coded differently by the two coders. Disagreements went both ways: 15 cases were classified as qualitative by coder 1 and quantitative by coder 2, and another 15 the other way round. We had a third coder (one of the authors) revise these cases. As he found, most of the disagreements were due to coding errors. In 12 cases of “optical illusions,” one coder had classified articles as quantitative that contained a fair amount of formally presented quantitative data but no statistical data processing. In 17 cases of “oversight,” one coder had classified articles as qualitative, although the authors did support their arguments through some kind of statistical inference. In 1 case, the procedure of data processing was rather opaque yet did seem to involve statistical techniques of data reduction.

10. While our sample of *journals* was identical (except for our update), and our sample of *articles* similar, the results of our classification of research *methods* are very different from those obtained by Munck and Snyder (2007) (although convergent with Mahoney 2007). The numbers of articles we classified as quantitative look close: Munck and Snyder identified 111 quantitative articles, we 105 within the same sample. Yet as the list of quantitative articles kindly provided by the authors permits to ascertain, we actually agree only on a third of these cases. Only 35 articles were coded in a convergent way as quantitative. Of the 111 articles coded as quantitative by Munck and Snyder, 70 were coded as qualitative by us. Of the 105 articles coded as quantitative by us, 76 were coded differently by Munck and Snyder. The agreement between our classifications of research methods is thus *lower* than what we would expect if we had followed random procedures. Confident in the validity of our conception of quantitative work, the precision of our operational rules, the reliability of our coding procedures, and the transparency of our dataset, we are unable to account for this startling divergence in measurement decisions. At the same time, since it is essentially a different sample of qualitative and quantitative work we are talking about, we were led to redo some of the analysis conducted by our colleagues (the classification of articles by research design and subject matter).

11. When we compare the use of quantitative methods on a year-by-year basis, though, the year 2004 does not appear statistically different from all other years (except 1992), while the year 2007 looks statistically indistinguishable from 1989 and 1998 ($p \leq .05$, ANOVA tests, post-hoc Tukey HSD).

12. Case numbers vary due to missing data. For some articles, it was impossible to establish the number of countries under study. Similarly, our codification of regional coverage contains some minor gaps.

13. Given the rather unproblematic nature of the factual information to be captured, the regional coverage of comparative politics (as well as subsequently the structure of datasets) was coded by a single coder who consulted with the authors in case of doubt.

14. Note that our geographical radiography (as well as our subsequent thematic diagnosis) may be distorted by our sample. The English-speaking flagship journals of political science and comparative politics may not be representative of the work done outside the northwestern corners of the world, nor of the accomplishments in subfields with strong specialized research journals. A good deal of (quantitative) comparative political science (often mislabeled and disqualified as “area studies”) gets published by the numerous regional journals, some of them disciplinary, others interdisciplinary, such as the *Journal of Modern African Studies*, *East European Politics and Societies*, *Post-Soviet Affairs*, *West European Politics*, *European Union Politics*, *Latin American Research Review*, *Latin American Politics and Society*, *Journal of Asian Studies*, and *Middle East Journal*. In a similar manner, a significant share of work in different subfields gets absorbed by high-quality journals that specialize in different subfields, such as the *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, *Party Politics*, *Electoral Studies*, *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, *Publius: The Journal of Federalism*, *Political Communication*, and *Nations and Nationalism*.

15. The less frequent use of research methods in the subfield of public policy is statistically significant ($p \leq .05$, ANOVA test, post-hoc Tukey HSD).

16. The substantive contours of our thematic categories are the following: (1) *States and regimes*: state building, state capacity, state failure, civil war; democracy and authoritarianism, regime change and stability, democratic quality, rule of law; federalism and decentralization. (2) *Executives and legislatures*: Government composition, termination, and duration; presidents and coalition governments; legislative organization and legislative politics; executive-legislative relations. (3) *Courts*: judicial politics. (4) *Bureaucracies*: Bureaucratic decision making, political control of bureaucracies, recruitment of civil servants. (5) *Military*: Military policies, military coups, civil-military relations. (6) *Parties and elections*: party systems, party organization, party coalitions, party identification; electoral systems, electoral campaigns; voter behavior, turnout. (7) *Economic, social, and labor policies*: Macroeconomic policies, economic performance, fiscal and expenditure policies; social and labor policies, welfare states and welfare reform, corporatism, wage regimes. (8) *Environmental policies*: Environmental policy making. (9) *Cultural policies*: culture policies, educational policies; immigration and integration policies; ethical policies (e.g., euthanasia and abortion). (10) *Public opinion and civil society*: Citizen attitudes towards politics, political values and beliefs; civic associations, social movements (including business and labor), trust and social capital, political participation; media structure and ownership, media effects. (11) *Gender*: State feminism, gender relations and differences, women representation. (12) *Corruption*

and *clientelism*: public integrity, corruption, clientelism, patronage. (13) *Ethnicity and nationalism*: Ethnic politics, secession, nationalism, multiculturalism. (14) *Various*.

17. Our coding rule allowed for exceptions in cases of clearly y-centered pieces of research. On the distinction between x-centered and y-centered analyses, see Gerring (2001, 137).

18. Substantive themes of research were classified by two independent coders. Their level of agreement lay at 75.8 percent. Although it is open to debate what constitutes an acceptable level of intercoder reliability (Neuendorf 2002, 143), a reasonable rule of thumb establishes that their convergence should be higher than 70 percent (ibid.). We submitted the cases of disagreement to revision by a third coder (one of the authors), whose double task was to identify eventual coding errors as well as to arbitrate ambiguous cases. Placing multithematic articles into one of several plausible thematic categories is not a matter of wrong or right. It calls for judgments that strive to minimize the inevitable loss of information. In 66.8 percent of the 147 articles in disagreement, the third coder sided with coder 2, in 29.6 percent with coder 1, and in 3.6 percent he took an independent decision.

19. With one exception, these differences between the more quantitative and the more qualitative areas of research are statistically significant ($p \leq .05$, ANOVA test, post-hoc Tukey HSD).

20. The following analysis of data usage is limited to the subset of quantitative articles in our dataset. As most quantitative articles rely upon multiple sources of data, we register and classify them all.

21. We collect information only on the use of *political* data as well as some *politically relevant* contextual data that are widely employed in comparative political research (such as ethnolinguistic fragmentation). Our data on datasets exclude demographic data (such as urbanization and population density), economic data (such as data on macroeconomic performance, public finances, and external accounts), and social data (such as indicators of poverty and inequality, public health, social service provision, and human development).

22. Its frequent recourse to national data makes quantitative work on Latin America statistically different from the quantitative study of politics in other world areas, except Asia ($p \leq .10$, ANOVA test, post-hoc Tukey HSD).

23. Still, in their reliance on regional data, studies on industrial democracies and Latin America look just like the rest. Intergroup differences are not statistically significant ($p \leq .10$, ANOVA test, post-hoc Tukey HSD).

24. The use of national data in studies of parties and elections is significantly higher than in the other four fields. No other intergroup differences are statistically significant ($p \leq .10$, ANOVA test, post-hoc Tukey HSD).

25. Of course, we are looking at outputs only (journal publications), not inputs (journal submissions). If we had, in a counterfactual world of Benthamite transparency, systematic information about (1) the universe of manuscripts in quantitative comparative politics, (2) the larger subset of papers authors consider publishable and submit to a journal, (3) the subset of papers authors submit to the journals in our sample, (4) the final results of all submissions, and (5) the subsequent careers of rejected manuscripts, then we could know to what extent the journals in our sample publish a larger share of quantitative articles with original data than other journals, and to what extent eventual differences

among journals derive from author decisions (submission rates) or editor decisions (acceptance rates).

26. At an aggregate level (adding partial and full data development), the differences in measurement innovation among the five major thematic fields are statistically insignificant ($p \leq .10$, ANOVA test, post-hoc Tukey HSD).

27. END, the effective number of datasets, is $1/\Sigma d_i^2$, where d_i is the usage share of the i th dataset (the citation rate of a particular dataset, as percentage of all citations of cross-national datasets).

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