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Elections in Japan, Korea, and Taiwan
under the Single Non-Transferable Vote

The Comparative Study of an Embedded Institution

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Preface: Methodological Steps toward the Study of Embedded Institutions

Bernard Grofman

This volume is motivated by the belief that, as I was taught in graduate school by David Easton, if political scientists are to seek explanations, they must of necessity be comparative in the nature of their analyses (cf. Easton 1953). The nature of the comparisons will vary, but we may think of them as falling under the rubric of what A Waffle¹ has called the “TNT Principle,” that is, comparisons across time, across nations, or across types of institutions or actors.²

In developing the research design that led to the cooperative project represented by this volume, I began with three predilections as to research methodology. One was a recognition of the potential power of what Harry Eckstein has called the “theoretical case study” (Eckstein 1975, 1992),³ that is, a case study designed to test theory by looking at the evidence from a “best case” example in which the expectations generated by a given model can be compared with reality. The second was a belief that useful insights can be derived from operating with “stylized facts” as puzzles to be explained. This mode of analysis is most commonly made use of by scholars working in the public choice tradition.⁴ The last predilection was a fondness for “natural experiments” that permit a Millsian analysis that focuses on the impact of a single variable (or a small set of variables) without the strong assumptions required by the usual multivariate analysis techniques of cross-sectional data.⁵

There are several different models for preparing edited volumes of comparative cross-national research. One is simply to juxtapose essays

on a given topic by country specialists. Here each author discusses the politics of his (or her) own country/research area, and the cross-national comparisons are largely, if not entirely, left to a synthetic chapter written by the editor and to the discernment of the reader. This strategy can be rewarding if there is sufficient unity among the chapters, but we are all familiar with edited volumes that purport to be comparative but consist of a series of country chapters that seem to have no common organizing principles. Alternatively, we can hope to have cross-national research done by a single scholar with expertise in multiple countries/research domains, but few scholars possess detailed knowledge of more than a few countries. For larger *Ns*, although necessarily relying heavily on secondary sources and aggregate data, a single scholar with great knowledge and theoretical insights of his/her own can produce monumental work (e.g., Lijphart's *Democracies* [1980]), but authors who fall prey to misunderstandings of local political realities or lack a rich theoretical framework with which to organize their data all too often produce work that is pedestrian at best or misleading at worst.

One promising strategy to avoid the twin sins of inadequate knowledge of particulars, on the one hand, and inadequate attention to theory and generalizability, on the other, has been to enlist multiple scholars with divergent backgrounds to do joint research but to insist that the work be organized around a common theme.⁶ For this volume, I am especially pleased to have been able to enlist the cooperation of a distinguished set of coeditors and authors who include leading specialists in comparative electoral systems and leading scholars of Japanese, Korean, and Taiwanese electoral politics. The research reported in this volume is intended to be more than a collection of disparate works of first-rate scholarship. To enhance the sharedness of the research endeavor, early drafts of the essays by Mo and Brady, Fukui and Fukai, and Reed and Bolland were distributed to all the contributors so that they could be used as models for the other chapters in the corresponding section. Before final versions of the essays were done, contributors had access to drafts of all the other chapters.

The essays in this volume offer an interlinked set of research pieces that together constitute a model for what I will call the study of "embedded institutions," in which the interaction of particular institutional choices and the wider political arena and political culture can be better understood. The term *embedded institutions* has been used by authors with similar, but not identical, meaning to what we intend. Here my coeditors

and I use it to refer primarily to the notion that (1) a given institution is embedded in a wider institutional framework and social setting, and thus seemingly identical institutions may not always yield similar behavior once we recognize contextual factors and constraints; and (2) the choice of institutions is not independent of context, thus longitudinal historical analysis is important if we are not to mistake the nature of causality. In the words of Robert Putnam (1993, 3): "How do formal institutions influence the practice of politics and government? If we reform institutions, will practice follow? Does the performance of an institution depend on its social, economic and cultural surround?"⁷ In short, what is the *independent* effect of political institutions? Or, to put it more poetically, the issue here is: "How can we separate the dancer from the dance?"

I take the view that institutional effects and the implications of their embedding in different settings can be studied in a straightforward fashion using the methodology I will soon describe. I reject the view, attributed by Peter Lange to "researchers in the area studies tradition," that we cannot seek for "generality of explanation" because "the 'context' in which politics gets played out is highly determinative of outcomes, yet itself not subject to variable analysis" (quoted in Laitin 1995, 456).⁸

The central elements of the study of embedded institutions that the essays in this volume are intended to illustrate are as follows.

Stage I

1. Identify a particular institution (or practice) found in more than one place.
2. Develop a theory about the "independent" consequences of that institution that can be operationalized and tested (at least in terms of "stylized facts").
3. Look at sites where that institution is in place that are otherwise as similar as possible and determine whether the posited independent effects of the institution are observed in all these sites.
4. Look at sites where that institution is in place that are otherwise as different as possible and determine which of the posited independent effects of the institution are observed in each of these sites.⁹
5. Look at sites that permit before and after comparisons of situations where the institution was found but is no longer, or was not found but is now present, to see if predicted changes in behavior occur.

Stage II. Look at institutions that are similar in critical ways to the institution under study and try to generalize the model of that institution's effects to apply to a broader class of institutions and to more precisely specify mechanisms through which effects are realized.

Stage III. Try to understand how the effects of the institution vary across the sites in terms of the characteristics peculiar to those sites.

Stage IV. Look at institutional arrangements that are very different from the one previously focused upon to further develop and test theories of institutional impact.

The first of these stages involves the logic of classic experimental design. The second and third stages involve the logic of discovery, where research is more intuitive, oriented more toward hypothesis formation than hypothesis testing. The fourth stage may develop in either an exploratory or hypothesis testing mode depending upon the degree of success in formulating useful theories in the earlier stages.

These suggestions for how to do small N comparative analysis were developed in 1992, before the publication in 1994 of King, Keohane, and Verba's superbly insightful work, *Designing Social Inquiry*. Just as King, Keohane, and Verba emphasize in their response to comments on their 1994 book that science is a "collective enterprise" (1995, 477), I would emphasize the cumulative nature of research and the potential complementarity of strategies of hypothesis testing and strategies of open-ended exploration, especially in situations where theoretically derived expectations are found to fail.¹⁰ No one study can do it all. Thus, in particular, the chapters in this book should be viewed as part of a collective endeavor — an endeavor that is still very much in progress.

The application of the theory of embedded institutions in this volume is to the study of electoral systems. In line with the logic of studying the effects of an institution that is formally identical (or nearly identical) across different settings, the principal focus of most of the essays in this volume is on one particular electoral mechanism, an electoral method called the single non-transferable vote (SNTV), a method of election from multimember districts in which each voter has only one vote to cast (Grofman 1975). Many of the studies in this book look only at SNTV. Such a strategy is known as selecting on the independent variable and may be regarded as problematic in various ways. In the context of the four-stage research design laid out previously, however,

such studies should be viewed as first steps in developing a more general theory and they have a critical complementary role in other types of analyses.¹¹

There are many well-known confounding factors that may bias causal inferences in supposed natural experiments or comparative analyses more generally. First, there is the problem of selection bias. If we compare consequences in settings with institution A with those in settings with institution B, we may find that we are mistaking causality, that is, that choice of institution should not be viewed as exogenously given. For example, if, in the U.S. South, we compare the effects of at-large elections and single-member-district elections on black officeholding of city council posts at two points in time (say, 1970 and 1990), we find that the difference in mean degree of proportionality of racial representation between these two election types has diminished considerably. This has led some authors to assert that the degree of racially polarized voting has gone down greatly, that is, that the willingness of southern whites to vote for black candidates has increased. However, between 1970 and 1990 many southern cities that used at-large elections shifted to single-member-district (or mixed) systems as a result of voting rights lawsuits. The at-large cities that did not face such challenges (or that faced such challenges and prevailed in court) tended to be those where black electoral success had been greatest. Thus, the remaining at-large cities tended to be those where barriers to black electoral success had been fewest. The effect of such a selection bias effect is to reduce the apparent consequences of choice of election system (see Grofman and Davidson 1994 for further elaboration; cf. the discussion in Shugart 1992, 1).

A second reason for caution is that, even if we have what seems a straightforward comparison in a given setting between institution A at time t and a shift to institution B at time $t + k$, we may find that other changes took place simultaneously, thus confounding our analyses of consequences. For example, one study of the consequences for jury verdict consensus of a shift from twelve-member to six-member juries that was favorably cited by the U.S. Supreme Court was, in fact, fatally flawed because it failed to control for other important procedural changes that were taking place at the same time (see discussions in Grofman 1980a, 1980b).

A related concern is with feedback effects that may create unanticipated selection bias. For example, if we wish to understand the conse-

quences of a reduction in jury verdict unanimity requirements on conviction rates (e.g., a shift from unanimous verdicts to a requirement for only 9 of 12), we must be careful to appreciate the fact that if a jury decision rule is seen as affecting the likelihood of conviction then the set of cases that are plea-bargained before trial will change, and thus the set of cases that actually get to juries will be different. Without recognizing/modeling such effects, we cannot really understand how jury verdict rules will affect the criminal justice system.

Another potential problem is with the timing of effects. Changes in institutions do not necessarily operate to produce their consequences instantaneously. There is the dead hand of inertia as well as a learning curve as actors adjust their behavior to new constraints/rules of the game. Thus, we must be careful not to estimate prematurely the effects of any given institutional shift.

The complex multistage research design just described is intended to help us deal with such potential problems by employing a mix of cross-sectional and longitudinal analyses,¹² a mix of within-nation and cross-nation design, and a mix of studies that focus on SNTV alone and those that focus on SNTV in comparison with other institutions.¹³

In line with the desire to examine cases in which it should be most likely to find SNTV having similar consequences, the essays in this volume focus on three nations, Japan, Korea, and Taiwan, that have made use of SNTV for parliamentary elections for some or all of the post-World War II period, that have relatively similar political traditions and political cultures (at least compared to Western European democracies), and that have one dominant political party. Such cases are ones in which, if our initial expectations of uniform effects are rejected, we can best hope to reformulate the model in identifying (additional) critical variables — since the settings are generally similar, what we may subsequently hypothesize to be critical features of the settings that impact the consequences of SNTV are more likely to stand out. Importantly, in two of these countries, the use of SNTV has been discontinued — giving us the basis for a natural experiment as well as important information about motivations for change.

My concluding essay also briefly considers the use of SNTV for local elections in the state of Alabama as evidence bearing on whether the effects of SNTV we observe in Japan, Korea, and Taiwan hold up when SNTV is used in a quite different political setting, one with nonpartisan elections and a racial rather than partisan cleavage structure. Thus, we

have the basic elements needed for stage I of the model of studying embedded institutions.

The several essays in the section comparing SNTV's effects with those of closely related systems such as the single transferable vote (STV) and plurality voting in single-member districts (SMDs) illustrate stage II of the process of studying embedded institutions. Here we wish to try to identify the similarities and differences between the effects of SNTV and those of other systems, on the one hand, and the specific mechanisms that produce those effects on the other. Note that, quite deliberately, the focus is on first studying institutional arrangements that have strong similarities as well as identifiable differences with the institution whose effects we seek to analyze, so as to better develop theory about the mechanisms through which effects are produced. If, for example, we can develop a good model about how and why SNTV operates to increase the likelihood of localistic politics, then we can test that model by looking at settings where SNTV is in place; and we can test the proposed mechanisms by looking at arrangements similar in form to SNTV (such as STV) where such mechanisms (or closely related ones) might also be expected to exist. Of course, there almost certainly will be other, quite different institutional arrangements that could also increase the likelihood of localistic politics, but those can appropriately be investigated in other studies (stage IV of our process).

The final essays in this volume can be taken as preliminary efforts to approach stage III of the proposed process for studying embedded institutions in that they provide detailed comparisons of SNTV's effects in different settings. My own concluding essay, in addition to summarizing the nature of the theoretically anticipated commonalities in SNTV's effects, considers country- and context-specific differences in how SNTV operates due to its embeddedness in wider political institutions or the lingering effects of the historical context of its adoption.¹⁴ However, although some of the key factors that may account for differences in the way SNTV functions in different settings are suggested, that essay should only be considered a first step toward a full theory of SNTV as an embedded institution. In future stage III and stage IV work on electoral systems as embedded institutions, we will need to articulate and precisely formulate and test hypotheses on the interaction between electoral and nonelectoral institutions and other features of political life. We hope the work in this volume can be one important starting point for such efforts.

NOTES

1. I am pleased to say that Easton is now a colleague of mine at the University of California at Irvine (UCI), as, of course, is Wuffle.

2. Because most of my empirical work makes use of longitudinal and cross-institutional comparisons, I regard myself as a comparativist, despite the fact that (with the notable exceptions of my work on cabinet coalition models and some of my work on election systems), I have dealt primarily with U.S. data or formal models of institutions (such as party primaries or voter registration or ethnically motivated districting) that are largely peculiar to the United States.

3. Professor Eckstein, too, is now a colleague of mine at UCI.

4. See, for example, Weingast (1979), which identifies a universalism norm in the U.S. Congress and then tries to explain it.

5. See, for example, Grofman, Glazer, and Griffin (1990), which compares the voting behavior of U.S. senators from the same state of the same and opposite parties and looks at representative-senator comparisons in the states that elect only a single member to the House of Representatives.

6. This is the model for Davidson and Grofman (1994).

7. Putnam's own masterful work is the best study of embedded institutions of which I am aware. It reflects a doubly comparative perspective, comparing political performance in regions of Italy with identical present-day institutions for governance but very different historical political cultures and comparing those same regions at a point nearly 1,000 years in the past to seek to identify the reasons why different regions developed such divergent political cultures. It also makes use of a wide range of research instruments, from surveys to aggregate data to historical research, exemplifying Tarrow's (1995, 473) recommendation of a strategy of "triangulation," combining qualitative and quantitative approaches.

8. Arend Lijphart and I are presently coteaching a course on "The United States in Comparative Perspective," which draws heavily on the comparative politics literature and in which we warn students about the dangers of studying American politics as if it were *sui generis*, lest they do research that has all the worst features ever attributed to so-called area studies.

9. In Putnam's (1993) own words: "Just as a botanist might study plant development by measuring the growth of genetically identical seeds sown in different plots, so a student of government performance might examine the fate of these new organizations, formally identical, in their diverse social and cultural and political settings."

10. I am in almost total agreement with the general views of King, Keohane, and Verba (1994) on the methodology of social science, especially as to the lack of a real difference in the logic of qualitative and quantitative inference, but, while I fully share their concerns for research designs that allow sustainable inferences to be drawn, like Rogowski (1995, 467), I would emphasize more than they do the importance of insight. Perfect research design cannot

compensate for the lack of interesting/important ideas, preferably ones that are rooted in more general theory.

11. See related discussions in Collier (1995, 464–65) and Laitin (1995, 456).

12. Like Caparaso (1995, 459–60), I would emphasize more than King, Keohane, and Verba (1994) do the usefulness of longitudinal studies, especially those offering “natural” experiments, a.k.a. “quasi experiments.” While they assert that “both experimental and nonexperimental research have their advantages and drawbacks [and] one is not better in all research situations” (1994, 7, n. 1), King, Keohane, and Verba (7, n. 1) explicitly “reject the concept, or the word ‘quasi-experiment.’” In their view (7, n. 1): “[E]ither a research design involves investigator control over the observations and values of the key causal variables (in which case it is an experiment) or it does not (in which case it is nonexperimental research).” Having conducted some social-psychological experiments myself, I am quite skeptical of any such neat dichotomy. The kinds of experiments available to social scientists rarely allow for control over all key variables. For example, so-called mock jury experiments (e.g., Saks 1977) cannot duplicate the psychological pressures on actual jurors of knowing that their decisions have life-changing consequences for real people. Moreover, in my view, there are good reasons to be suspicious of attempts to use sophisticated statistical methodology to extract causal findings from cross-sectional or pooled cross-sectional data in the absence of evidence (or plausible inference) about temporal sequencing (see related arguments in Grofman, 1989; Grofman and Handley 1995; and Grofman, Owen, and Collet 1995).

13. The essays in this book should also be seen, collectively, as exhibiting Sidney Tarrow’s (1995, 473) recommended strategy of “triangulation,” involving both qualitative and quantitative forms of analysis. It also includes a mix of formal modeling as well as (relatively simple) statistical analyses.

14. Remarks by Edwin A. Winckler (17 September 1992) have led me to believe that a useful way to think about the logic of studying institutions as embedded systems is in terms of seeing a particular mechanism such as SNTV as a middle-level object whose effects will be mediated by macrolevel features of political life (e.g., party systems, regime type) as reflected in the microlevel choices of individual actors. For further discussion, see the introduction to this volume.