

AN ANALYSIS OF ONE COUNTRY
FOCUSED STUDIES IN POLITICAL
SCIENCE

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Introduction

“Methodological discussions”, it is argued “are often reinventing what has been forgotten”. (Scheuch, p.148, quoted in Sartori, p.15). And Sartori argues that to rediscover the ‘forgotten unknown is just as important as to discover an unknown. (Sartori, p.15). An important part of methodological discussion in the study of political science, is the choice among different areas of focus. A student of political science is lucky since he/she has many different and alternating tools to employ in order to reach its defined scientific objective.

In this short paper, I will try to discuss advantages and disadvantages of one of these different and alternating tools, namely one-country focused study. In the first part of paper, I will try to define some criteria to employ in the analysis of this method. In the second part; I will evaluate this specific method of politics by using previously introduced criteria and by exposing well-known examples from political science literature.

Theory as the determinant of methodology

Major aim of science is defined as to provide systematic and responsibly supported explanations. Parallely, the goal of social science is to explain social phenomena. A student of social science tries to answer question of why such as “why the Welfare Party became the major party of Turkey”. Or “why some countries are ruled by coalition governments and other are not” or “why public support for European Community is higher in Germany than England” etc. However, to ask and to answer this kind of questions are not sufficient to be categorized under the label of scientific inquiry.

Most important characteristic of a scientific approach is its **generalizability**. According to Holt and Turner “ [t]he goal of any science is to develop a valid, precise and verified general theory” (p.2). Przeworski and Teune state that all observations of the sociopolitical realm are anchored in time and space and the goal of science is to explain and predict why certain events occur when and where they do. (p.18).

Consequently, asking why the Welfare Party became the major party of Turkey is not a scientific inquiry unless some generalizations are drawn from it

Another important characteristic of a scientific approach, is its **testability**. An argument is accepted scientific when it is possible to be tested. For example, the argument of “the God is the creator of the universe” is not a scientific argument, because it is not possible to prove or falsify that the God created the universe. Another example of unscientific arguments is “blue is the most beautiful of colors”. In order to be able to test this argument, you need to operationalize two important and subjective concepts: **blue** and **beauty**. Unless this operationalization is made and a conventional understanding of **blue** and **beauty** is accepted, this argument is not scientific.

It is argued that the major goal of the science is to develop a valid, precise and verified general theory. According to Holt and Teune, we never do not verify theories; we verify logical consequences of the theory. Verification is defined as “the process of seeing whether something predicted is really so” (Holt and Teune, p.2). And Przeworski argues that “a theory [has to] be accurate, to explain as completely as possible and to predict as much of the variation as possible”. We can label this characteristic as the **explanatory power** of a theory and a scientific approach is one that has an explanatory power. For example, argument of “all trees are green in the spring” is not a scientific argument since it does not explain why all trees are green in the spring.

To summarize, we can rephrase characteristics of a scientific approach as **generalizability**, **testability** and **having explanatory power**. These three characteristics are important for our objective of evaluating advantages and disadvantages of one country focused study, since they are employable as criteria of being scientific or not.

One Country Focused Study and Its Problems

It is possible to define one country focused study as seeking for understand some social phenomena by emphasizing on only one country by analyzing its current situation or historical development. For example, a study that focused on the rise and fall of Ottoman Empire in order to understand why great empires rose and declined is a one country focused study. Another study that focused on Japan in order to

understand how a latecomer country became successful is an example of one country focused study. Or a study that aims to understand why the Welfare Party became the major political party is a one country focused study.

Yin defines one country focused study (he labels one country focused study as **single holistic case study**) as “an empirical inquiry that (1) investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context, when (2) the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident, and in which (3) multiple sources of evidence are used. (Yin, quoted in Johnson and Joslyn). Case studies may be categorized according to their purposes as exploratory, descriptive and explanatory case studies. Explanatory case studies are used when little is known about some political phenomenon while descriptive case studies focus on what happened in single situations. According to, Johnson and Joslyn “the emphasis is not on developing general explanations” (p.121).

Most important critic of one country case study is based in its deficiency of generalizabilities. Whatever the purpose of the study is, are causal relations and other findings of analysis applicable to other cases independent from time and space, or not? Since one of most important characteristics of the scientific approach is generalizability and the major goal of social sciences are defined as “to develop a general theory”; if a one country focused study does not allow to generate generalizations or these generalizations are externally invalid; scientific quality of this study is a matter of discussion.

Problem of generalizability of one country focused studies are merely presented by David Truman’s work about interest groups, *The Governmental Process*. In this book, Truman emphasized on role and development of interest groups as groups effecting institutions of government. Truman’s analysis was based on development of interest groups of United States of America such PTA (Parents Teacher Association), UAW (United Workers of America). By emphasizing on USA, Truman kept some external factors that may be stemming from cultural, economic or political differences within countries and accepted as residual. Examples from USA were supporting theoretical expectations of Truman and strengthening explanatory power of his arguments. However, external validity of his arguments was questionable. Although that I do not want to over-emphasize on uniqueness of US case, different pattern of development of societal relations are generally accepted. Thus, are findings of Truman valid for

other countries? It is a matter of discussion. Are interest groups of US and France similarly organized and developed? Contrary to US case, interest groups of France are highly politicized and tightly controlled by the government. Even in UK, interest groups are highly politicized even that labor unions were represented in the Labour Party. Moreover, in Germany, interest groups are operating in coordination with the government (Hart). These observations are threatening the validity of arguments of Truman. If environmental factors are different in these countries, it is unrealistic to expect that interest groups function similarly. Despite these methodological problems stemming from emphasizing on only one country, Truman's book is still a milestone in the history of political science however; his arguments need to be tested in different countries in order to guarantee generalizability.

Another classical example of problems of one country focused study, is the *Wealth of Nations* of Adam Smith. Smith tried to answer question of why some countries are wealthier than other countries by emphasizing on history of England. According to him, main impediment of wealth was the interventionist nature of Mercantilist State of 18th century. If the state was minimized with certain well-defined responsibilities such as external affairs, military and security; and leave entrepreneurs operate under invisible hand of free market, it would result on increasing welfare of nation and citizens. Universal formulae of Smith may be summarized as lesser state, more wealth. This analysis of Smith was also characterized with the problem of generalizability. Smith's book was based on experience of UK and his arguments were face to face with problem of validity both in terms of space and time. First of all, maximizing freedom of entrepreneurs was possible in UK in which merchants and commercial activities were always appreciated and became a source of social prestige; but in France in which merchantal activities were despised, such a possibility did not exist because, individuals seek for increasing their social prestige by obtaining posts in the government (Hirschman). Moreover, by using arsenal of modern economics, it is accepted that most important obstacle behind development is the lack of sufficient level of capital stocks. Smith's argument of maximizing freedom of entrepreneurs and minimizing the state was valid in a degree for UK in which a certain level of capital accumulation was accomplished; but this argument was not easy to adopt for other countries that were face to face with lack of capital stock.

Second problem of one country focused study approach is its deficiency to be tested. It is previously argued that a theory has to be testable. Findings of a theory based on a one country focused study are not easy to test. For example, if the author argues that the rise of anti-system parties is dependent to development of postmodern attributes of the society, by emphasizing on the case of the WP in Turkey; you have many problems to test this argument. First of all, you can test this argument within Turkish context and try to falsify this argument by emphasizing on whether post modern attributes of Turkish society exist or not. If you are not able to falsify this part of argument, you have no chance to falsify theoretical proposition of the author within Turkish context. Secondly you have the opportunity to test this argument by emphasizing on other countries however you are now face to face with problem of generalizability that is discussed above in details. If you shift your focus on other countries, your previously neglected environmental factors may effect your dependent variable; thus you may under or overestimate your independent variable. In our case, shifting our focus to other countries in order to test the hypothesis that postmodern attributes of society result on rise of anti-systemic party may be effected positively or negatively by other factors such as economic environment, political system etc. For example, if the electoral system of a country does not allow emergence of minor parties (ie. USA or Australia), you can not test your hypothesis since an anti system party does not exist.

A good example of difficulty to test hypotheses drawn by one country focused studies is the book of Eugene Kaplan about Japanese industrial policy. *Japan Inc.: The Government-Business Relationship*. In this book Kaplan argues that the effectiveness of Japanese industrial policy is dependent to power and vision of MITI (Ministry of International Trade and Industry). According to Kaplan, MITI is the most important responsible of the “Japanese miracle” thanks its unique organizational structure and autonomy. This point of view became highly popular among students of political science aiming to explain reasons behind development and underdevelopment and they analyzed the problematic of development dependent to existence of effective central planning agencies similar to MITI. Problem of testability of this case arose here: it was not easy to find similar organizations. Many countries had employed such central planning agencies but almost none of them were operated similar conditions to MITI. Other “East Asian Tigers” exposed similar economic performances but while

Taiwan had no such a central organization, South Korean central planning agency was operating in very different conditions (Wade). Moreover, effectiveness of MITI is overestimated by Kaplan. Okimoto's book of *Between MITI and the Market* is a good work that presents this fallacy of Kaplan; but it's beyond the scope of our discussion.

Third problem of one country focused study is its limited **power of explanation**. Depending to previously argued problems of **generalizability** and **testability**; explaining power of this kind of study remains limited. Even that your analysis expose very important findings, you are not sure that these findings are valid for other cases. Your findings may be proper to some specific conditions of time or place. Since replication of these specific conditions is not easy to do, your prediction may be false and your predicted variation may be lesser than residual. For example, if you have argued that emergence of post modern attributes results on the rise of an anti-systemic party, by emphasizing on Turkish case; it is expected that whenever postmodern attributes emerge, an anti systemic political movement tends to rise... However, if the rise of the WP is a result of economic crises of 1994, or semi-orthodox/neo-liberal economic policies of 1980s; it is not possible to observe such a situation. Perhaps, by arguing that emergence of post modern attributes results on the rise of an anti-systemic party; you have succeeded in explaining Turkish case (thanks to problem of testability of your argument) but it does not mean that your theory is valid for other cases.

An example of problem of limited explaining power is presented by Robert Wade, leading to the conclusion that these problems are not only specific to one country focused study; but also observable on comparative studies focused on very similar cases. Wade, by criticizing Free Market approach to East Asian rapid development, gives many examples of argument that relates the success of these countries to lack of government intervention and efficiency of the free market mechanism (p.22). Theoreticians from neoliberal schools emphasized on lessening role of the government by using East Asian countries as textbook examples. According to them, in order to be successful in development attempts, state intervention has to be minimized and let the market to work. Limited explanatory power of this theory is presented by Parraeira, Przeworski et al.: many countries that pursued neo-liberal politics became face to face with serious economic and distributional problems. This failure of neoliberal scholars was stemming from both limited power and lack of

generalizability of their theories. Moreover, their arguments are not valid even for East Asian countries, but this discussion is beyond our scope.

Conclusion and Remedial Measures

To summarize, it is possible to argue that one country focused studies are face to face with failures in previously defined three important characteristics of a scientific approach: **generalizability**, **testability** and **power of explanation**. It does not mean that works focused on only one country are not scientific. It is possible to waive these problems by employing different methods. First of all, you can compare time periods: you can compare economic performance of Turkey before and after 1980. Such a comparison may help us to understand short run effects stabilization programs. Or you can compare voting turnout in Turkey before and after 1980s. Such a comparison will help us to understand how constitutional structure effects political participation. Another remedial method is to employ a strong theoretical framework that is previously tested in other countries. For example, if you are trying to show that education has a positive effect on participation to unconventional political activities; you can employ theoretical framework provided by Ingelhart, Flanagan etc. and you can test logical consequences of this theoretical framework by using data obtained from Turkey. Such a study means to compare Turkey with all other countries in which such studies held. Third of remedial measures is the simplest: **just compare with other countries...**

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