

KING, Gary; KEOHANE, Robert; VERBA, Sidney
Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research
Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994

The logic of any good research project remains essentially the same whether qualitative or quantitative techniques are used. This is the main argument of the famous book by King, Keohane and Verba. In 1994, just at the point when the debate about the relative merits of quantitative or qualitative methods was apparently becoming endless and threatened to undermine the legitimacy of social sciences, this book offered a single conciliatory focus: both types of research have to follow the same logic of inference. The authors insist on the major legacy that qualitative writers like Barrington More, O'Donnell, Skocpol, Dahl, Putnam or Lipset have bequeathed to sociology and political science. This, probably, is the book's main contribution to the academic debate.

While it is true that the two kinds of research are clearly different in style, King *et al.* maintain and demonstrate that the underlying inferential logic is always the same. What distinguishes social sciences from occasional observation is precisely that the former aims to make valid inferences through the systematic use of contrasting procedures. In brief, social researches should use immediate data that will lead to something on a broad scale that cannot be directly observed. This "something" may involve the use of descriptive or causal inference depending on whether the aim is to reveal facts hitherto not observed or to discover causal effects on the basis of the data collected doing the research.

The main goal of the book is to encourage qualitative researchers to use scientific inference in their work. Thus, the book analyses significant issues in

social research design, such as the ways of increasing the number of observations, the use of observable results to link theory and data, how to avoid bias (with particular attention to selection bias), and how to deal with the problems of endogeneity and multicollinearity. Nevertheless, according to the authors, all these subjects are important for the researchers using quantitative methods too, who should be as careful as those using qualitative methods in order to avoid the same kind of problems in their research.

This is a major book for social scientists that emphasizes for the first time the singular scientific procedures that should guide both qualitative and quantitative research. Even though it is primarily a book for academics, it was written for political and other social scientists of all persuasions and career stages, from qualitative field researchers to statistical analysts, from advanced undergraduates and first-year graduate students to senior scholars. Consequently, it can offer to young scholars invaluable and essential insights into the logic of qualitative research: a unified approach to valid descriptive and causal inference. Summing up, King's *et al.* book clearly highlights that "valid inference is possible only so long as the inherent logic underlining all social scientific research is understood and followed" (p. 230).

Alex Boso

Universitat de Barcelona
Departament de Teoria Sociològica,
Filosofia del Dret i Metodologia
de les Ciències Socials
alexboso@ub.edu