8
Systematic Matching and Contrasting of Cases

The broader historical, social-structural, political-cultural, institutional and so on features, on which the respective similarities and dissimilarities of our cases are based, constitute the givens in any particular crisis situation against which the specific impact and extent of the crisis and the reactions of the major actors have to be assessed. These are indicated by the additional variables of categories 8 and 9 in the Appendix. In this way, both longer-term structure-oriented approaches and specific actor-oriented analyses or, in Jon Elster’s (1989) terms, the “opportunity set” in any given situation and the specific choices made can be integrated into a more encompassing perspective. We also concur with Michel Dobry’s (1986) conceptualization of major political crises which stress, within certain limits, the fluidity of such situations where some of the given structures may become somewhat more malleable and create a somewhat broader space of manoeuvre for the major actors and certain moves than had hitherto been conceivable.

8.1 Most different systems–same outcome

Among the countries considered in our project, eight represent cases in which democratic regimes successfully survived, another four are more classical authoritarian breakdowns (such as in Portugal) and six were cases in which strong fascist or similar movements played an important role in the process of breakdown even though the type of regime to which this intervention gave rise may not necessarily have been fascist itself (as, for example, in Estonia).
8.1.1 Democratic survivals

Among the survival cases two characteristic configurations emerged which contrast Czechoslovakia with the UK and Sweden on the one hand and Finland with the UK, the Netherlands, Belgium and Ireland on the other (see Chapter 7, Figure 7.7). In this figure the values indicated \((D_0 - D_3)\) represent distinct levels of difference for each of our seven categories. \(D_0\) indicates a complete difference of all variables within the respective category while \(D_1, D_2\) and \(D_3\) represent successively less restrictive levels. The categories referred to in each instance are listed in parentheses. For example, the differences between Czechoslovakia and the UK – the most different cases in our first constellation – show the general historical and geo-political background (G) and the external factors (F) as being completely different across all the variables within these two categories \((D_0)\). The differences at level \(D_1\) refer to three categories (general background, social composition, foreign relations), and those at levels \(D_2\) and \(D_3\) to four categories, respectively – general background, social composition, intermediary structures and external factors.

8.1.1.1 Czechoslovakia vs. the UK and Sweden

After having completed the selection of contrasting cases in the manner shown, it was then possible to list the individual variables in each category which characterized the remaining similarities within the configuration concerned. It is among these similarities that the reasons for the common outcome may be considered to lie. The two pairs of cases in our first configuration and the corresponding triple comparison are reproduced in Table 8.1 (here, as the first example, the entire range of background variables is reproduced).

As can be seen, even in this “most different systems” design 35 of the original 63 variables could still be identified as similar for Czechoslovakia and the UK, and 35 for Czechoslovakia and Sweden. When all three cases were considered together, some more idiosyncrasies disappeared and 22 similarities remained. The addition of further cases can lead to the elimination of some other, but not many more variables since the selection of cases was made on the basis of the greatest difference between them. Rather than mechanically pursuing this line of inquiry further, the qualitative judgement of the historically informed and theoretically conversant observer should come into play at this stage and help to evaluate the remaining similarities in greater detail.

It becomes apparent that the major similarities within the constellation under consideration lie in the socio-economic and political spheres.