

**Political Preferences of QCA Methods Institutes?
A Comment on the Availability and Gender Gap
Disparity Problems**

Political Preferences
2021, vol. 28: 23-31
journals.us.edu.pl/index.php/PP
Submitted: 10/05/2021
Accepted: 12/06/2021
DOI:10.31261/polpre.2021.28.23-31



Dawid Tatarczyk

Albion College, United States

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4042-7562>

Abstract:

In this research note, I examine a set of two interrelated questions about the Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) methods institutes. First, I assembled and analyzed a novel dataset that tracks every QCA related training worldwide from 2002 to 2018. My examination finds that although QCA trainings are becoming more popular in Europe, the US is still the single most frequent host country for such events. Secondly, I examine the extent to which gender gap exists among QCA instructors. My findings show that female QCA instructors are severely under-represented, which likely limits their academic and professional opportunities. Thus, the QCA research community appears to be marked by the same structural challenges to diversity and gender equality as other areas of political science. Overall, this paper should of interest to scholars interested in the impact of academic infrastructures on future research trajectories as well as those concerned about gender equality in academia.

Keywords: QCA, methods institutes, gender gap

Introduction

While the importance of qualitative approaches in political science is not as contested anymore (Bennett & Elman, 2007), teaching qualitative methods remains a challenge (Fonseca & Segatto, 2019). Emmons and Moravcsik (2019) report that 40% of top political science programs are not offering any formal training in qualitative methods. This trend holds despite the fact that some subfields in the discipline are dominated by the use of qualitative approaches (Moravcsik, 2010, p. 29). Because qualitative methods appear less structured than statistical approaches, there is even a perception that they do not need to be taught in a formal manner (Schwartz-Shea, 2003). Moreover, teaching qualitative methods is further complicated if done outside the Anglo-Saxon context (Eszter Simon, 2013; Fonseca & Segatto, 2019).

The quantitative-qualitative divide in our discipline is not new. Recently, the two camps have sorted themselves into either the Section on Political Methodology or the Section on Qualitative and Multi-Method Research, and thus their differences became semi-institutionalized (Goertz & Mahoney, 2012, p. 5). Beyond grouping political scientists according to their preferred mode of analysis, professional infrastructures also help drive methodological innovations. Collier and Elman (2010) contend that methodological institutes aided the development of qualitative approaches, while the creation of *the Journal of Mixed Methods Research* has been crucial for the spread of mixed methods research (Seawright, 2016, p. 4). Similar developments can be observed in other areas of political science. For example, the study of religion was once considered anachronistic (Gill, 1998, p. 3), but became more prominent after the founding of the journal *Politics and Religion* by the American Political Science Association's Religion and Politics organized section in 2008 (Kettell, 2012).

Purpose

If political science is indeed simultaneously experiencing a multi-method boom (Seawright, 2016) and a disciplinary crisis of teaching qualitative methods (Emmons & Moravcsik, 2019), then methods institutes will continue to play a crucial role in the evolution of our discipline. In this paper, I look at the availability of advanced trainings in Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) to see where such opportunities are most readily available. I also examine the extent to which a gender gap exists among QCA method institutes' instructors. The discipline of political science is currently undergoing a variety of efforts to make it more diverse, and yet despite considerable monetary investments these programs have had a limited impact (Reid & Curry, 2019; Sinclair-Chapman, 2015). Women scholars continue to leave academia because of structural barriers to promotion and salary discrepancies (Henehan & Sarkees, 2009; Mershon & Walsh, 2015).

Findings reported in this paper contribute to mixed method research in two important ways. First, it becomes evident that approaches created to bridge the quantitative-qualitative gap, such as QCA, are being taught more regularly around the globe. Interestingly, while QCA trainings are becoming more popular in Europe, the US is still the single most frequent host country for such events. On the one hand, this state of affairs signals greater demand for

approaches that go beyond traditional statistical approaches. On the other hand, the availability of QCA trainings in some places but not in others, means that students based in North America and Europe enjoy less entry barriers than their colleagues from other regions of the globe. Second, I also find that women are severely under-represented among the cohort of QCA instructors. This suggests that female QCA experts are less likely to influence future generations of QCA practitioners and that their professional networking opportunities, including the possibility of scholarly collaboration with talented graduate students, the prospects of securing additional compensation as well as disciplinary prestige, are severely constrained. It is thus important to recognize that the benefits of a multi-method boom in social sciences should be shared with equity, while structural inequalities need to be reduced.

Methodology

Although QCA originated as a qualitative based alternative to statistical approaches (Ragin, 1987, 2000, 2008; Schneider & Wagemann, 2012), the method does in fact share important epistemological overlap with regression analysis (Paine, 2016) and has been even incorporated into a curriculum of institutes specializing in providing advanced training in quantitative methods (Tatarczyk, 2018). To see where QCA trainings are most readily available, I use the Comparative Methods for Systematic Cross-Case Analysis (COMPASSS) network's website (www.compass.org). The network was established in 2003, in part to develop QCA courses for the European Consortium for Political Research (Marx et al., 2014, p. 125), but the first newsletters listing QCA trainings appear in 2005. I therefore supplement COMPASSS newsletter data with syllabi from the Institute for Qualitative and Multi-Method Research (IQMR) for years 2002-2018.ⁱ

Findings

Between 2002 and 2018, 141 unique QCA trainings were offered. Eighty-two of these trainings (58%) occurred in Europe, while 53 (38%) took place in North America and only 6 trainings (4%) were held at other continents.ⁱⁱ Figure 1 illustrates that from about 2011, Europe is the primary destination for pupils interested in advanced QCA training and since 2012 the number of meetings on the European continent is increasing rapidly. However, the perception that Europe is

the primary location for QCA trainings is mitigated once we disaggregate the examination to country-level analysis.

Figure 1. QCA trainings by continent (2002 - 2018)

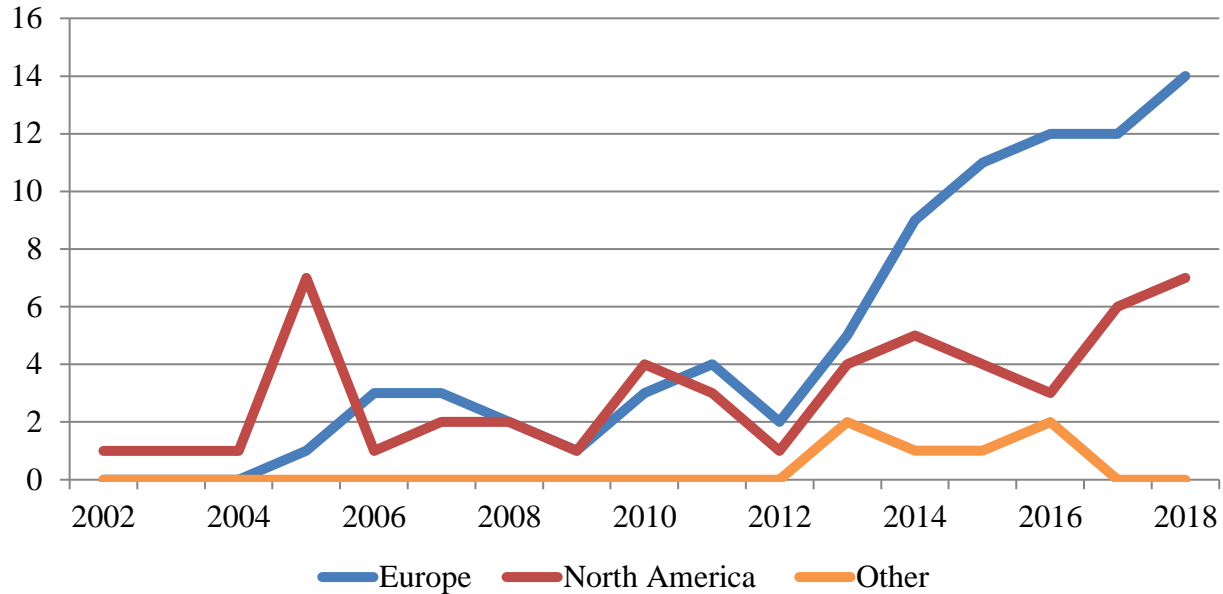
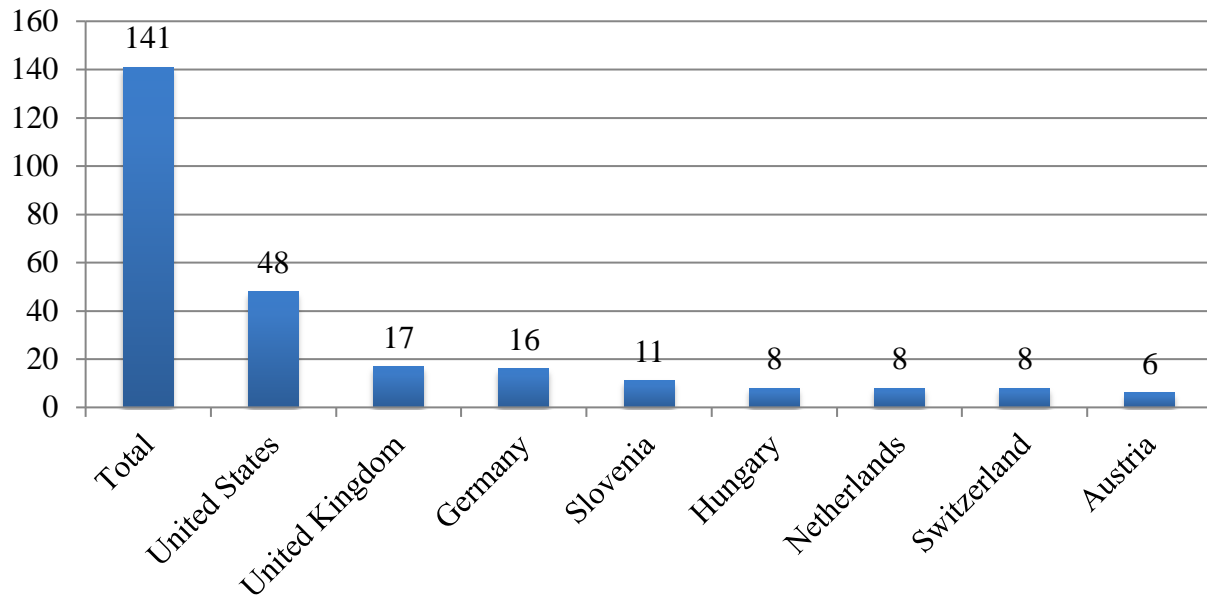
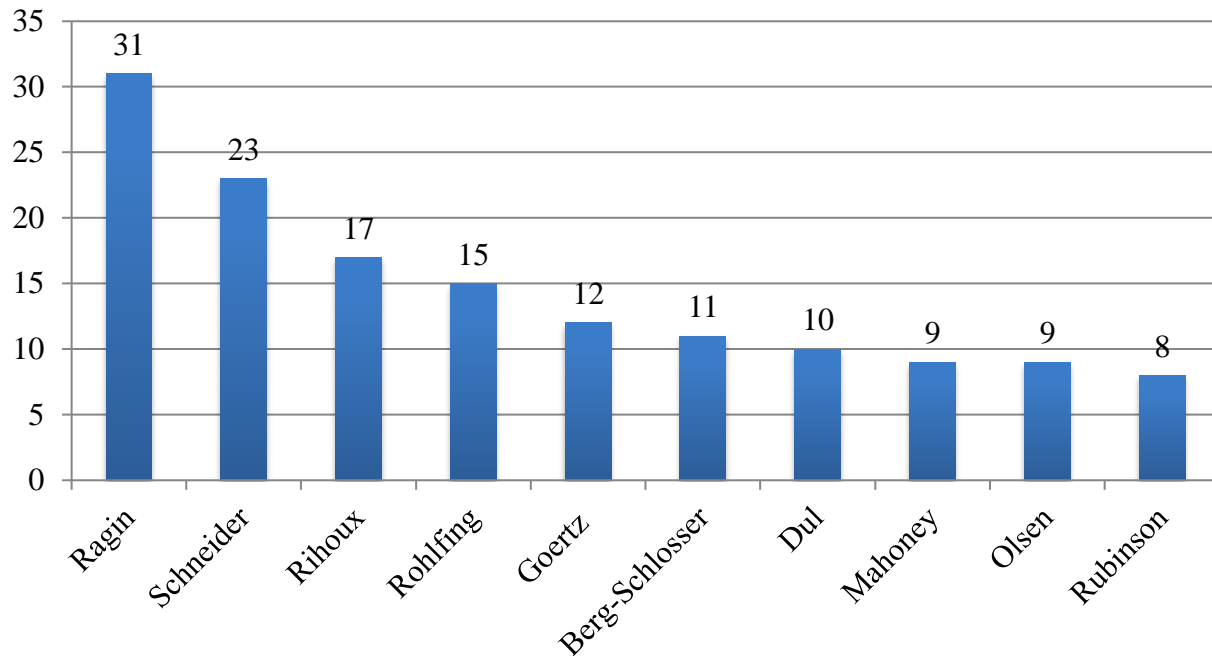


Figure 2 lists every country that held at least five QCA trainings since 2002.ⁱⁱⁱ The US is responsible for hosting most QCA trainings, 48 out of 141 trainings (34%). In fact, the next three most popular training destinations combined (the UK, Germany, and Slovenia), offered fewer trainings than the US alone. So while at the macro-level, Europe is the most likely destination for future QCA training, the US is by far the single most frequent host country for such meetings. The fact that QCA trainings are almost exclusively taught in Europe and North America (96% of trainings combined) certainly has important implications for graduate students from universities outside of the West. At the time when resources for higher education and advanced learning are scarce, the availability of QCA trainings in some regions but not in others favors those students who already are already based in North America or Europe.

Figure 2. QCA trainings by country (2002-2018)

Beyond the question of availability, it is also important to look at who is teaching at these trainings because they often serve as important networking opportunities. The benefits of academic networking should not be overlooked. Sekara et al. (2018) underscore this point by demonstrating the so-called chaperone effect, which highlights the role of experience in academic publishing. The authors find that people who have not published in top multidisciplinary journals as junior faculty members are unlikely to publish in these outlets later in their academic careers. In all likelihood, academics who teach QCA during methods institutes can network and promote their scholarship, earn additional income and disciplinary prestige, and take advantage of exposure that other QCA researchers do not enjoy. At the same time female scholars from other areas of political science have been systematically excluded from participation in such professional events (Barnes & Beaulieu, 2017; Beaulieu et al., 2017).

Figure 3. Most prolific QCA instructors (2002-2018)



Overall, 54 different individuals have taught QCA trainings around the globe. Out of that group, 21 teachers (39%) were based in North America, while 31 academics (57%) were working for European institutions. The remaining two scholars came from Australia and Japan. Furthermore, there were only 16 female QCA instructors (30%). The 141 QCA trainings created 213 unique teaching slots, but female QCA instructors filled only 27 of them (13%). Figure 3 lists the ten most prolific QCA instructors who are also widely recognized as top QCA scholars and practitioners. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the inventor of QCA, Charles Ragin, has taught the highest number of trainings. Four members of the top ten group teach at American universities (Ragin, Goertz, Mahoney, Rubinson), the other six are affiliated with European universities. Once again women are also severely under-represented in this group as well, with Wendy Olsen (University of Manchester) being the only female QCA expert in the cohort.

Originality

The burgeoning of mixed methods research is one of the newest and most powerful trends in social sciences (Seawright, 2016) and this development includes both methodological as well as empirical studies. However, the rise of mixed methods scholarship is facilitated by the necessary

institutional infrastructure. Such infrastructure can consist of new academic outlets committed to methodological diversity (e.g., *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*) and institutes providing additional training in research methods that would be otherwise overlooked. This, in turn, suggest that methodological training and innovation do not happen in a vacuum. QCA is an example of a method that arose as an alternative to statistical methods, but is often combined with process-tracing and other within-case methods of analysis (Schneider & Wagemann, 2012). Today, QCA is used and taught more readily than ever before (Tatarczyk, 2018). And yet, as we have seen in the case of female QCA instructors, the resulting infrastructure perpetuates the very inequalities that many social scientists are trying to actively resist. If the rise of mixed methods scholarship and approaches related to it is analyzed holistically, then it is necessary to point out, and hopefully address, the asymmetry between men and women lecturing at QCA methods institutes.

Conclusion

Although the availability of advanced QCA trainings may seem of concern to only a small group of social scientists, it should in fact interest anyone who cares about the impact of academic infrastructures on the scholarship produced by social scientists. At the time when training in qualitative methods is declining, graduate students and junior academics are likely to increase their dependence on methods institutes. The availability of such institutes will doubtlessly shape future research trajectories. Second, my analysis corroborates previous research about underrepresentation of women in a variety of academic settings. The finding that only 30% of QCA instructors are women, shows that the efforts to diversify our discipline is still an ongoing and slow-moving process.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Jim Butterfield and Emily Hauptmann for their valuable feedback. I am also grateful to Elizabeth Mansour for her excellent research assistance. Finally, I would like to thank the editors and reviewers for constructive suggestions. This work was supported by a grant from the Hewlett-Mellon Fund for Faculty Development at Albion College (Albion, Michigan).

Endnotes

ⁱ Colin Elman, Director of the Center for Qualitative and Multi-Method Inquiry in the Maxwell School (Syracuse University), generously shared old IQMR syllabi with me. The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, upon reasonable request.

ⁱⁱ The North America category is comprised of the USA and Canada.

ⁱⁱⁱ Three trainings were held in Belgium, Brazil, and Canada. Mexico and Singapore each had two, while single training session occurred in Iceland, Italy, Norway, Poland, Russia, and South Africa.

References

Barnes, T. D., & Beaulieu, E. (2017). *Engaging Women: Addressing the Gender Gap in Women's Networking and Productivity*. 50(2), 461–466. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096516003000>

Beaulieu, E., Boydston, A. E., Brown, N. E., Dionne, K. Y., Gillespie, A., Klar, S., Krupnikov, Y., Michelson, M. R., Searles, K., & Wolbrecht, C. (2017). *Women Also Know Stuff: Meta-Level Mentoring to Battle Gender Bias in Political Science*. 50(3), 779–783. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096517000580>

Bennett, A., & Elman, C. (2007). Qualitative Methods: The View From the Subfields. *Comparative Political Studies*, 40(2), 111–121. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414006296344>

Collier, D., & Elman, C. (2010). Qualitative and Multimethod Research: Organizations, Publications, and Reflections on Integration. In J. M. Box-Steffensmeier, H. E. Brady, & D. Collier (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Political Methodology* (pp. 780–795). Oxford University Press.

Emmons, C. V., & Moravcsik, A. M. (2019). Graduate Qualitative Methods Training in Political Science: A Disciplinary Crisis. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 1–7. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096519001719>

Eszter Simon. (2013). Teaching Political Science Research Methods in Hungary: Transferring Student-Centred Teaching Practices into a Subject-Focused Academic Culture. *European Political Science*, 13(1), 78–95. <https://doi.org/10.1057/eps.2013.43>

Fonseca, E. M. D., & Segatto, C. (2019). Teaching Qualitative Research Methods in Political Science: Does One Size Fits All? *Journal of Political Science Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15512169.2019.1656081>

Gill, A. J. (1998). *Rendering unto Caesar: The Catholic Church and the State in Latin America*. University of Chicago Press.

Goertz, G., & Mahoney, J. (2012). *A Tale of Two Cultures: Qualitative and Quantitative Research in the Social Sciences*. Princeton University Press.

Henehan, M. T., & Sarkees, M. R. (2009). Open Doors and Closed Ceilings: Gender-Based Patterns and Attitudes in the International Studies Association. *International Studies Perspectives*, 10(4), 428–446. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1528-3585.2009.00387.x>

Kettell, S. (2012). Has Political Science Ignored Religion? *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 45(1), 93–100. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096511001752>

Marx, A., Rihoux, B., & Ragin, C. (2014). *The Origins, Development, and Application of Qualitative Comparative Analysis: The First 25 years*. 6(1), 115–142. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755773912000318>

Mershon, C., & Walsh, D. (2015). How Political Science Can Be More Diverse. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 48(3), 441–444. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096515000207>

- Moravcsik, A. (2010). Active Citation: A Precondition for Replicable Qualitative Research. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 43(1), 29–35. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096510990781>
- Paine, J. (2016). Set-Theoretic Comparative Methods: Less Distinctive Than Claimed. *Comparative Political Studies*, 49(6), 703–741. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414014564851>
- Ragin, C. C. (1987). *The Comparative Method: Moving Beyond Qualitative and Quantitative Strategies*. University of California.
- Ragin, C. C. (2000). *Fuzzy-Set Social Science*. University of Chicago Press.
- Ragin, C. C. (2008). *Redesigning Social Inquiry: Fuzzy Sets and Beyond*. University of Chicago Press.
- Reid, R. A., & Curry, T. A. (2019). Are We There Yet? Addressing Diversity in Political Science Subfields. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 52(2), 281–286. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096518002068>
- Schneider, C. Q., & Wagemann, C. (2012). *Set-Theoretic Methods for the Social Sciences: A Guide to Qualitative Comparative Analysis*. Cambridge University Press.
- Schwartz-Shea, P. (2003). Is This the Curriculum We Want? Doctoral Requirements and Offerings in Methods and Methodology. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 36(3), 379–386. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096503002488>
- Seawright, J. (2016). *Multi-Method Social Science: Combining Qualitative and Quantitative Tools*. Cambridge University Press.
- Sekara, V., Deville, P., Ahnert, S., Sinatra, R., & Lehmann, S. (2018). The Chaperone Effect in Scientific Publishing. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 115(50), 12603–12607. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1800471115>
- Sinclair-Chapman, V. (2015). Leveraging Diversity in Political Science for Institutional and Disciplinary Change. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 48(3), 454–458. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096515000232>
- Tatarczyk, D. (2018). The Reshaping of the Quantitative-Qualitative Divide: A Case of QCA. *Qualitative and Multi-Method Research*, Fall 16(2), 44-52. DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.3524376