



# Introduction to QCA

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# *The Comparative Method*

MOVING  
BEYOND  
QUALITATIVE  
AND  
QUANTITATIVE  
STRATEGIES

*Charles C. Ragin*

Winner of the International Social Science Council  
STEIN ROKKAN PRIZE in Comparative Research

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# Four (relatively abstract) answers to the question, “What is QCA?”

## ***1. QCA bridges qualitative and quantitative analysis***

Most aspects of QCA require familiarity with cases, which in turn demands in-depth knowledge. At the same time, QCA is capable of pinpointing decisive cross-case patterns, the usual domain of quantitative analysis. QCA’s examination of cross-case patterns respects the diversity of cases and their heterogeneity with regard to their different causally relevant conditions and contexts by comparing cases as configurations.

# Four (relatively abstract) answers to the question, “What is QCA?”

## *2. QCA provides powerful tools for the analysis of causal complexity*

With QCA, it is possible to study “INUS” conditions—causal conditions that are insufficient but necessary parts of causal recipes which are themselves unnecessary but sufficient. In other words, using QCA it is possible to assess causation that is very complex, involving different combinations of causal conditions capable of generating the same outcome. This emphasis contrasts strongly with the “net effects” thinking that dominates conventional quantitative social science. QCA also facilitates a form of counterfactual analysis that is grounded in case-oriented research practices.

# Four (relatively abstract) answers to the question, “What is QCA?”

## ***3. QCA is ideal for small-to-intermediate-N research designs***

**QCA can be usefully applied to research designs involving small and intermediate-size *Ns* (e.g., 10-50). In this range, there are often too many cases for researchers to keep all the case knowledge “in their heads,” but too few cases for most conventional statistical techniques.**

**However, more recently QCA has also been applied to large-*N* situations marked by hundreds or thousands of cases. This kind of application requires some changes to how QCA is employed, but many of its advantages for analyzing causal complexity still remain.**

# Four (relatively abstract) answers to the question, “What is QCA?”

## *4. QCA brings set-theoretic methods to social inquiry*

QCA is grounded in the analysis of set relations, not correlations. Because social theory is largely verbal and verbal formulations are largely set theoretic in nature, QCA provides a closer link to theory than is possible using conventional quantitative methods. Note also that important causal relations, necessity and sufficiency, are indicated when certain set relations exist: With necessity, the outcome is a subset of the causal condition; with sufficiency, the causal condition is a subset of the outcome. With INUS conditions, cases with a specific combination of causal conditions form a subset of the cases with the outcome. Only set theoretical methods are well suited for the analysis of causal complexity.

# We Have Come a Long Way!

- A **growing community** and greater interest than ever before
  - ▶ Conferences, PDWs, symposia, methods retreats, etc.
- **Greater receptiveness** and **publication opportunities**
  - ▶ Recent publications in top management journals, including AMJ, AMR, JBR, JBV, JIBS, Org Science, Org Studies, ORM, and SMJ as well as a growing number and edited volumes and special issues
- **Improved software and measures**
  - ▶ QCA R packages with graphical user interfaces (Dusa, 2019), R Package “Set Methods,” fsQCA 3.0
  - ▶ Improved consistency measure (PRI consistency) becoming more widely used; set intersection emerging as an important measure
  - ▶ New forms of presenting results using Venn diagrams with multiple consistency levels



# SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA **QCA Workshop**

HOSTED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, IRVINE

*Organized by Charles Ragin and Peer Fiss*

**March 28-March 30, 2019**

10am-4pm each day

The goal of this workshop is to provide a ground-up introduction to Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) and fuzzy sets. Participants will get intensive instruction and hands-on experience with the fsQCA software package and on completion should be prepared to design and execute research projects using the set-theoretic approach.

Fee: **\$375** for faculty, **\$175** for doctoral students

Register at **[www.fsqca.com](http://www.fsqca.com)**

Space is limited.

**Questions?** Contact: [fsqca2019@gmail.com](mailto:fsqca2019@gmail.com)



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# 3<sup>rd</sup> International QCA Paper Development Workshop

**ETH Zurich, December 11-12 2019**

Unique platform for researchers working on papers involving QCA to meet QCA experts, get feedback on their on-going research, and learn about the latest methodological developments in QCA. The workshop is interdisciplinary and interactive and allows for in-depth discussions and individual feedback from internationally renowned QCA scholars.

**Submit an extended abstract of 1,000-1,500 words to  
[jmeuer@ethz.ch](mailto:jmeuer@ethz.ch) by September 29, 2019**

# 3<sup>rd</sup> International QCA Paper Development Workshop

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# QCA and the Emergence of a Neo- configurational Perspective

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## Embracing Causal Complexity: The Emergence of a Neo-Configurational Perspective

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# QCA as Configurational Theory and Method

- Causal complexity as ubiquitous feature underlying organizational phenomena
- QCA's configurational approach overcomes mismatch between theory and methods that has plagued earlier configurational research (Fiss, 2007, 2011)
- It explicitly casts causality along three lines of complexity: conjunctural, equifinal, and asymmetric (e.g., Fiss, 2011, Greckhamer, 2016)

# QCA's Neo-configurational perspective

- QCA constitutes a neo-configurational perspective in organizational research with the following foundational elements:
  - ▣ Conceptualize cases as set-theoretic configurations
  - ▣ Calibrate cases' membership into sets (using quantitative and/or qualitative data)
  - ▣ View complex causality in terms of necessity and sufficiency
  - ▣ Enable counterfactual analysis of unobserved configurations

# QCA applications in management (for further details see Misangyi et al., 2017)

- Increased use of QCA in management scholarship
- Trend from small-N to large-N analysis
  - Small-N and large-N QCA differ in research design considerations (Greckhamer, Misangyi, & Fiss, 2013)
- Extension in the level of analysis
  - QCA can handle multi-level data (see Greckhamer et. al., 2008; Fiss & Lacey, 2009)
- Inductive versus deductive theorizing
- QCA also increasingly used as part of mixed methods research designs





Visit the fs/QCA homepage:

[www.fsqca.com](http://www.fsqca.com)

(you can also download the fs/QCA software package here for free)

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