

STRATEGIES FOR SOCIAL INQUIRY

Field Research in Political Science

Practices and Principles

DIANA KAPISZEWSKI,
LAUREN M. MACLEAN AND
BENJAMIN L. READ



Field Research in Political Science

Field research – leaving one's home institution in order to acquire data, information, or insights that significantly inform one's research – remains indispensable, even in a digitally networked era. This book, the first of its kind in political science, reconsiders the design and execution of field research and explores its role in producing knowledge. First, it offers an empirical overview of fieldwork in the discipline based on a large-scale survey and extensive interviews. Good fieldwork takes diverse forms yet follows a set of common practices and principles. Second, the book demonstrates the analytic benefits of fieldwork, showing how it contributes to our understanding of politics. Finally, it provides intellectual and practical guidance, with chapters on preparing for field research, operating in the field and making analytic progress while collecting data, and on data-collection techniques including archival research, interviewing, ethnography and participant observation, surveys, and field experiments.

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Strategies for Social Inquiry

Field Research in Political Science: Practices and Principles

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Preface

This book emerges from a trend toward new thinking, teaching, and writing about fieldwork in the discipline of political science since the early 2000s. We see at least four interacting dynamics prompting these scholarly discussions. First, political scientists of all epistemological, methodological, and substantive persuasions have paid increasing attention to the critical links among theory, research design, and analysis. This focus has opened the door to conversations about the fundamental role that the systematic collection and careful consideration of data play in the development and success of each.

A second factor that has led political scientists to more actively and critically assess the processes and challenges of collecting data in context is the ongoing development, institutionalization, and systematization of qualitative and interpretive methods. The effective use of these methods often relies heavily on data collected through interpersonal interactions, encouraging scholars to consider the conduct and meaning of those exchanges.

A related development is the evolving dialogue about pluralism in the discipline, and emerging debates and innovations in multi-method research. Even as scholars who are passionate about their particular approach to research are writing and organizing amongst themselves in subgroups, discussions have emerged across the discipline about the intellectual benefits of using multiple approaches to analyze data. A logical next step is to consider the strengths and weaknesses of the multiple approaches available to collect, scrutinize, process, and combine them.

An additional factor encouraging a steadier focus on fieldwork is the increasing emphasis on reflexivity and transparency in political science. Both at the level of the discipline's flagship association as well as among many individual political scientists, greater attention is being paid to transparency with regard to how research is designed, how data are collected and analyzed, and how conclusions are drawn.

These dynamics together have encouraged and inspired political scientists to begin to think more carefully about how to plan and execute field research.

That, in turn, has fostered consideration of how we can share and benefit from the immense amount of collective knowledge accumulated by the generations of political scientists who have ventured out from their home campuses to explore field sites near and far. Every scholar who has conducted fieldwork has learned invaluable lessons about how to do so effectively. Yet, while practically every scholar has also passed some knowledge on to others, this informal and piecemeal transmission is inefficient and inevitably incomplete. In short, to date political scientists have not fully capitalized on the significant yet scattered stock of knowledge about conducting field research in the discipline.

In combination, we submit, these dynamics and realities have produced a growing trend toward thinking and writing about field research in political science – scholarship that draws on and complements the wealth of literature about fieldwork in cognate disciplines, but also stands apart, reflecting disciplinary differences. This trend has had its most visible instantiation in the various short courses on field research and archival methods taught annually during the American Political Science Association (APSA) meetings since 2001, and the modules on fieldwork, ethnography, historiography, and archival research taught at the Institute for Qualitative and Multi-Method Research (IQMR) each year since 2002. As a result of these courses, hundreds of graduate students have received training in field methods.

These courses also serve as the most direct origins of this project. Through teaching these courses, which all three co-authors have done, and through additional presentations on field research we have offered around the United States as well as in intensive workshops in a variety of international settings from Romania to Botswana, we have been repeatedly struck by how hungry many colleagues, and particularly graduate students, are for guidance on how to plan and carry out field research. That hunger, we believe, has two main sources, which bring our discussion full circle. It springs in part from gaps in the methods curricula of many political science graduate programs, as methods courses tend to focus heavily on the analysis, rather than the collection, of data. It is also rooted in the absence of a disciplinary consensus on, and (the increasing amount of scholarship notwithstanding) the lack of an established corpus of texts about, field research in political science – what it is, what constitutes *good* field research, and what value it adds to scholarship.

This book is our response to these evolving dynamics, pressures, and needs. It has several ambitions. First, it offers an empirical overview of political scientists' field research practices and how they have evolved, based

on a large-scale survey of political science faculty and an extensive series of in-depth interviews. Second, it elucidates the analytic benefits of field research, showing how it contributes to our knowledge about politics. We demonstrate the creative ways in which scholars use many types of data-collection techniques, and how they iterate among data gathering, data analysis, and research design. All these processes enhance conceptualization, measurement, the formulation of descriptive and causal claims, the identification of causal mechanisms – and thus theory building. Third, the book provides intellectual and practical guidance for those embarking on fieldwork. Indeed, one of our central themes is that field research in political science takes very diverse forms, yet is bound together by common concepts, logics, and practices. These fundamental similarities and synergies allow us to offer this guidance – and to identify a set of principles that underpin good field research. In short, the book aims not merely to serve as a primer on field research, but also to fill gaps in the discipline's growing methods literature.

We anticipate that the book will be of interest – and hope it will be of assistance – to those who are preparing to strike out on field research for the first time or embarking on new kinds of fieldwork, be they undergraduates, master's students, Ph.D. candidates, or faculty. Yet we also believe it will be useful to other constituencies: to faculty who advise graduate students; to scholars considering the tradeoffs among different data-collection techniques and forms of data for the research they plan to do; to all political scientists who are reading, reviewing, or otherwise evaluating scholarship based on field research; and to anyone who teaches methods courses at any level. We also expect that the book will be of use to those working in the policy world, and to non-governmental organization and donor groups that want to evaluate programs and initiatives they have put in place.

In addressing all of these groups, we are reaching across what may seem like stark dividing lines, speaking to scholars in different subfields, who employ different analytic methods, and who have contrasting epistemological philosophies. Our eclecticism is intentional. We strongly believe that fieldwork is a common disciplinary good, one in which all political scientists can productively engage, and one from which all can learn. As such, while we acknowledge disciplinary divides and realize that scholars hailing from different traditions think about the processes and products of field research differently, we hope that our guidance, examples, and arguments will resonate with all political scientists, and that all types of scholars can adapt what we are saying to their own intellectual predilections and sensibilities.

To be clear, this book is hardly the first or the last word on the conduct of field research in political science. Rather, we see our contribution as advancing an ongoing, vital, vibrant, and extraordinarily fruitful conversation about fieldwork in the discipline. Indeed, as part of our effort to foment that debate and dialogue – in political science and cognate disciplines as well – we have created a companion web site for this volume (www.psfieldresearch.org). The purpose of the site is to disseminate information and lessons about field research in a comprehensive and dynamically updated fashion. Ultimately, we envision the site including interactive features that will allow those who conduct fieldwork to share their knowledge and experiences more easily, quickly, and effectively.

In this spirit, and as a real-life demonstration of the ongoing discussion of field research in the discipline, we wish to acknowledge the many people to whom we owe a debt of gratitude for inspiring, encouraging, and making possible the writing of this book. First we would like to give very special credit to Evan Lieberman, Julia Lynch, and Marc Morjé Howard, who taught the first version of the APSA short course in 2001. Their vision and pioneering spirit provided the foundational inspiration for this project, and they deserve credit for some of the ideas on the process of field research that are developed here in Chapters 3, 4, and 10 (Lieberman, Howard, and Lynch 2004). We also acknowledge the other scholars who have co-taught the APSA short courses or IQMR modules on conducting field research, including Melani Cammett, Naomi Levy, and Sara Watson. We are indebted to the editors of the Cambridge University Press Strategies for Social Inquiry series – Colin Elman, John Gerring, and James Mahoney – for proposing the idea for this volume, for patiently fielding our many questions and requests, and for offering guidance and insights on the project. And we are grateful for the support and assistance of our editors, John Haslam and Carrie Parkinson, and the rest of the team at Cambridge.

We would like to thank the many political scientists who so helpfully discussed draft chapters of the book at several Midwest Political Science Association and APSA conferences; those who read a draft of the book (and helped us refine our survey) as part of the weekend Research Group during IQMR in June 2010; all who took part in the manuscript review session at Indiana University in December 2011; those intrepid individuals who “test drove” the draft manuscript in their graduate seminars and whose students gave us extraordinary feedback (in particular, Jaimie Bleck at the University of Notre Dame, Jennifer Brass of Indiana University, David Siddhartha Patel at Cornell University, and Hillel Soifer at Temple University); the dozens of

colleagues who pre-tested our survey on field research practices in the discipline; the survey methodologists at UC Berkeley, Northwestern University, and Indiana University who helped us design a better instrument; the 1,142 political scientists who took the survey; and the 62 scholars who were kind enough to grant us interviews, spending hours revealing the “scaffolding” and evolution of their projects and offering their thoughts on the underpinnings, conduct, and future of field research in the discipline. We thank APSA’s administrative committee for helpfully allowing us to sample from the organization’s list of US-based political scientists for our survey, and we thank Sean Twombly for facilitating this. We are also grateful to all those involved in the several institutions whose existence and influence have been supportive as we developed the ideas in this book, including the Consortium for Qualitative and Multi-Method Research and APSA’s Qualitative and Multi-Methods Research section and Interpretive Methodologies and Methods group. Finally, we are thankful to our graduate students, Neil Chaturvedi (UC Irvine) and Katie Scofield (Indiana University) for their research assistance at various points in the writing of the book.

We also owe a huge debt to the people from whom we learned about field research, and those who demonstrated so clearly to us its importance and value. Diana thanks the justices, clerks, government officials, academics, and so many others in Buenos Aires, Argentina, and Brasília, Rio de Janeiro, and São Paulo, Brazil, who gave selflessly of their time to help her understand their country. Lauren extends thanks to the many people and communities in Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana, Kenya, and the United States who have shared their time and insights about politics and life. Ben thanks the many people in Beijing, Taipei, and elsewhere who sat for in-person interviews, filled out questionnaires, or responded to phone surveys; he is especially grateful to the neighborhood leaders who put up with his presence and questions during his “site-intensive” loitering.

Finally, we each owe immense thanks to those who have supported us personally through the process of writing this book. Diana’s unending thanks and love go to her husband Kapi, who kept her company on Skype during many long days in the field, and whose love, patience, and kindness are perpetual sources of strength. Lauren could not do any of this without the tremendous support and happy distractions of her husband, Jason, three children, Jasper, Skylar, and Benjamin, and the entire “village” of extended family and friends who help keep them going. Ben gives heartfelt thanks to his wife Yingwei, whose hard work, multi-disciplinary learning, and buoyant spunk provide inspiration every day.

Field research in political science: practices and principles

“Fieldwork continues to be the most productive and exciting part of what we do.”

Philippe Schmitter (quoted in Munck and Snyder 2007, 337)

Fieldwork is “one of the more disagreeable activities that humanity has fashioned for itself.”

William Shaffir and Robert A. Stebbins (1991, 1)

Field research – leaving one’s home institution in order to acquire data, information, or insights that significantly inform one’s research – has been a critical form of inquiry in political science since at least the 1950s. Countless books and articles produced by scholars from all subfields of the discipline, including many milestone works, have drawn on fieldwork to illuminate and answer fundamental questions about the political world. Scholars who have set out to talk to policy makers, survey citizens, and comb through archives have amassed new knowledge that has enriched our understanding of politics in the United States and around the globe.

Yet what constitutes field research in political science, how we do it, and its status in the discipline have remained curiously underspecified and under-examined. Until the early 2000s, very few political scientists had written or taught about field methodology. The term “field research,” its definition, and many of the techniques political scientists employ in the field were borrowed from other disciplines, notably anthropology, sociology, history, and even economics. In fact, an extensive survey of the literature suggests that scholars from other disciplines continue to dominate intellectual output on the topic, in particular those from anthropology (e.g., Gupta and Ferguson 1997a; Amit 2000; Wolcott 2005; Bernard 2006; Borneman and Hammoudi 2009) and sociology (Burgess 1994, 1995; Emerson 2001a; Bailey 2006; Schutt 2009).¹

¹ In the early 1990s, more anthropologists and sociologists conducted field research than scholars in any other social science discipline (Shaffir and Stebbins 1991).

Indeed, our research turned up only a handful of books on fieldwork written by political scientists (Ward 1964b; Feldman, Bell, and Berger 2003; Heimer and Thøgersen 2006; Carlson *et al.* 2010) – although several books target the social sciences generally (e.g., Robson 2002; Perecman and Curran 2006). Perhaps not surprisingly, anthropologists and sociologists writing about field research rarely address or incorporate political science and its special concerns.² Thus not only is the vast majority of the existing literature on fieldwork not designed *by* political scientists – it is not designed *for* them. Of course, perspectives from other fields have much to offer. Yet the topics about which political scientists conduct research and write, our theoretical frameworks, and our methodological concerns only partially overlap with those of other social scientists, rendering certain fieldwork practices and norms from other disciplines less relevant.

In addition to lacking authoritative and comprehensive accounts of and guidance on conducting field research, the discipline has also wanted for systematic assessments of its principles, processes and practices. Political scientists often summarize how they went about collecting data in the field when writing up their research (some more systematically than others), but relatively few have composed stand-alone pieces *about* the conduct or analytic value of field research. Most political science methods texts, like most methods courses, focus on conceptualization and measurement, research design, *analyzing* and deriving inferences from data, and making arguments and building theory. They dedicate far less time to addressing the challenges and imperatives entailed in *collecting* data – to conceptualizing, planning, and conducting fieldwork.

Because there has never been anything like a unified template for field research – a set of accepted patterns specifying in general terms what political scientists *should* do or *actually* do in the field – we remain unclear as a discipline about the nature and value of field research. Some political scientists retain the stylized image of a year-long trip as the hallmark of field research in the discipline. Others hold stereotypical notions that field research necessarily involves either deep ethnographic observation or qualitative interviewing of elites. Even among those who engage in field research, deep divisions exist concerning how to understand the enterprise, how to carry it out, and how to think about the information they gather. Views about

² Few of the anthropologists or sociologists writing on field research even acknowledge that political scientists conduct fieldwork: political scientists were rarely mentioned as belonging to the “intended audience” of these books.

the value of fieldwork likewise vary significantly, in part because we have no standards to evaluate it. For some political scientists, field research is essential – almost a rite of passage – for establishing credibility as experts on the phenomena they study. Others have overtly questioned the utility and necessity of fieldwork, challenging its potential to contribute to theory building, and suggesting that graduate students in particular are more likely to achieve professional success by mastering cutting-edge analytic techniques and applying them to existing data (e.g., Stevenson 2005). Still others locate themselves in a pragmatic middle ground, focused on acquiring the data they need to answer their questions, and open, but not committed, to gaining that information through field research.

The traditional lack of scholarly focus on and debate about fieldwork in the context of (tacit) disciplinary disagreement on its practices, principles, and utility has generated a number of problems. First, it has impeded the development of common frameworks for thinking and teaching about field research in political science. There is no vigorous discussion around or evolving disciplinary understanding of how to generate data in the field, how to assess the evidentiary value of information collected through fieldwork, or how that information can be put to work to tackle crucial analytic tasks and address significant social science questions. As a result, scholars often lack the training they need to meet the diverse challenges (financial, emotional, ethical, and analytical) that field research involves – let alone to carry out the tasks they carefully described in their prospectus or project plan (Mertus 2009, 1–7). Of course, tips and ideas about doing field research are passed from scholar to scholar in an ad hoc manner. Yet ultimately the many missteps and obstacles that fieldwork inevitably involves – as well as the inventive solutions that field researchers devise – remain buried in scholars' memories, or perhaps in the boxed-up notes in their attics. Political scientists thus often reinvent the wheel when planning and executing fieldwork. The lack of focus on field research also has negative ramifications for fieldwork's image and reputation, for our ability to assess its merits objectively, and for the quality of scholarship based on field research.

Encouraging signs of change have emerged, however. In disparate conference papers, journal symposia, and book chapters, political scientists have begun to write more about field research procedures, issues, challenges and debates (see, e.g., Lieberman, Howard, and Lynch 2004; Loaeza, Stevenson, and Moehler 2005; Carapico *et al.* 2006; Read, MacLean, and Cammett 2006; Wood 2007). Further, graduate students now have a few more opportunities to learn about field research: more departments are offering pertinent

methods courses, and other intensive training opportunities have become available.³ The emerging literature and teaching on field research in the discipline suggest that political scientists are increasingly eager to debate the practices and value of fieldwork. Still, space constraints on articles and time constraints on courses often conspire against in-depth, nuanced treatment of field research's challenges, strategies, and analytic benefits.

The time is thus ripe for a reconsideration of, and a sustained disciplinary debate on, the conduct and value of field research in political science. As the previous discussion highlights, the literature on political science methodology has a significant gap that needs to be filled. Yet it is not *solely* that gap that necessitates a broad disciplinary discussion about field research and, we would argue, a book on field research in the discipline. An additional – and even more fundamental – motivation is the indisputable fact that without properly generated data there is no social science. Sustained, intense debate about the data generation and interpretation processes that fieldwork entails will help us to think more critically and creatively about, be more truthful and transparent about, and ultimately improve, fieldwork *methodology*. It will help us do better political science. And it will help us demonstrate the strength of field research as a mode of inquiry, as well as the contribution fieldwork makes to the generation of knowledge about politics.

We capitalize on these imperatives and trends to write the first full-length methods text on the design and execution of field research in political science.⁴ We draw on multiple types of expertise and new empirical evidence gathered through an online survey, more than sixty interviews, and a review of published scholarship about, and based on, field research. Our survey of political scientists based at colleges and universities in the United States provides data on multiple parameters of fieldwork as employed in actual research projects, as well as short narratives about challenges faced and

³ For instance, the two short courses on doing fieldwork offered annually at the APSA conference; several modules on field research offered at the IQMR held each June at Syracuse University; the summer institute on survey research techniques at the University of Michigan (under the Institute for Social Research program); the workshop on Designing, Conducting, and Analyzing Field Experiments, co-sponsored by the Institution for Social and Policy Studies at Yale University and the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Relations; the Summer Institute on Conducting Archival Research at George Washington University; and workshops sponsored by the National Science Foundation, such as one on Interpretive Methodologies in Political Science, held in August 2009 at the University of Toronto.

⁴ To be clear, while other books on field research in the discipline exist, they mainly focus more narrowly on the challenges of doing fieldwork in a particular region of the world, such as China (e.g., Carlson *et al.* 2010), or on a particular technique, such as interview research (e.g., Mosley 2013a) or field experiments (e.g., Gerber and Green 2012).

strategies adopted in the field.⁵ In addition, we interviewed a diverse group of political scientists who have conducted fieldwork for a wide variety of projects.⁶ We interviewed scholars from every subfield in political science, ranging in rank from doctoral students to full professors with distinguished chairs, working at top-tier research universities and smaller liberal arts colleges alike. We guaranteed anonymity in these interviews in order to elicit respondents' unguarded perspectives and reflections on their experiences conducting fieldwork and lessons learned. Finally, we carefully analyzed books and articles based on fieldwork. Our frequent failure to find, in that work, clear descriptions of the data-collection techniques scholars used or justifications for their choices reinforces our call for a disciplinary dialogue on the expectations for good field research.

Finally, we draw on our own experiences as field researchers – both our mistakes and our successes. Together, the co-authors have conducted research in a wide range of field sites, from some of the wealthiest cities of the advanced industrialized world to some of the more remote villages of the Global South. In addition to their level of development and infrastructure, these field contexts vary in the extent and quality of democracy at the level of the regime, and with regard to the nature and conduct of everyday local politics. Correspondingly, we faced diverse conditions on the ground, producing contrasting challenges, obstacles, and opportunities. We have also employed diverse methodological approaches and data-collection techniques. Advising graduate students has also helped expand our knowledge of fieldwork experiences and contexts. Except for some research conducted in the United States, we have largely experienced fieldwork as non-natives, although our graduate students have recounted to us the complexities of conducting research in their hometown or “native” land.

Our goals: depicting and demystifying fieldwork and demonstrating its contributions

The book has three central goals. First, we offer an original, empirical study of the variety of field research practices used by US-based political

⁵ See the Appendix for an explanation of the survey methodology.

⁶ See the Appendix for detailed information on the number of scholars interviewed by gender, rank, and subfield.

scientists and how they have changed over time. Grounded in that inquiry, which clearly demonstrates that there is no single “correct” model of fieldwork, we advance an understanding of fieldwork that captures its heterogeneity. High-quality fieldwork takes a variety of forms in terms of length of stay; frequency of visits; number of field sites; and number, type, and combination of data-collection techniques employed. Furthermore, rigorous fieldwork is undertaken by scholars with different epistemological leanings, reflects a variety of methodological approaches, and occurs at different points in the research cycle and in a scholar’s life and career trajectory. Our inquiry also reveals how multiple factors – for instance gender, career stage, and the ranking of a scholar’s institution – shape fieldwork practices.

Second, we aim to demonstrate how field research has contributed to the production of knowledge about politics – and continues to do so, even in the face of evolving disciplinary pressures and the increasing availability of datasets from many corners of the globe. Through analyzing published political science scholarship as well as responses to our survey and interview questions, we assess the benefits and value of field research for theory development in the discipline. Moreover, we identify the multiple practices and processes through which fieldwork generates that value, leading us to reconceptualize field research as entailing both the generation *and analysis* of data, with a great deal of iteration between the two.

Given this goal, it bears noting that we operate with a specific – although encompassing – definition of data. We draw a distinction between the raw information a researcher hears, reads, senses, and collects in the field as well as the diffuse observations she makes, on the one hand, and data on the other. For us, data are materials and observations that have been processed by the researcher – considered in relation to the context from which they were drawn and assigned some analytic significance – such that they can be employed in her analysis. A researcher’s impression of an interviewee’s credibility (an observation) becomes a datum if and when the researcher uses it to evaluate the evidentiary value of the information that respondent provided. A researcher’s sense of the power dynamics in a room (an observation) becomes a datum when it is used as an indicator of (i.e., to measure or evaluate) the authority structure in a certain context. Sometimes such materials are organized into a systematic, standardized, row/column format, but they need not be. Sometimes they are considered “causal process observations” (Collier, Brady, and Seawright 2010), but again, this is not necessary for something to be considered data. Our conceptualization of data is

agnostic to form, and appreciative of the fact that data can play many different roles in quantitative, qualitative, and interpretive analysis.⁷

Third, we hope to demystify fieldwork and provide guidance for how to do it better. We highlight the operational, intellectual, and interpersonal challenges that arise when conducting field research, and offer a wealth of practical strategies and advice – based largely on the real-life experiences of a wide range of field researchers – to help political scientists evaluate their skills, decide what kind of field research to do, and conduct fieldwork efficiently and effectively. The book should thus be helpful to a broad audience. Advanced undergraduates conducting field research during a volunteer, internship, or study-abroad program;⁸ graduate students heading into the field for the first time; as well as faculty planning their first fieldwork trip, contemplating new types of field research in unfamiliar contexts, or considering how to make field research more effective and enjoyable – as well as faculty who teach methods classes or advise graduate students – should all find it useful.⁹

Given this intent, some of what we say may seem commonsensical and perhaps even obvious. Yet simply because something is mundane or commonplace does not mean it is unimportant or impossible to overlook. This is particularly true when one is operating in a context in which much is unfamiliar, juggling multiple tasks, and facing many new challenges simultaneously, as field researchers do. Moreover, time and money are precious when conducting field research, and scholars often have just one opportunity – or at most a few – to collect data in context for any particular project. Accordingly, small missteps can have enormous consequences, potentially putting months of research in jeopardy. It is also true that what may seem like an obvious point, or an obviously superior practice, is in fact only one of multiple ways of looking at or going about things. We thus err on the side of inclusivity with our advice.

Even if some of our guidance is aimed at those who are new to field research, we believe that much of what we offer will be useful to all political

⁷ This definition notwithstanding, throughout the book we deploy the commonly used term “data-collection techniques” to refer to the processes scholars employ to gather information and materials in the field.

⁸ Barrett and Cason (2010) highlight a large increase in undergraduate experiences abroad, growing 143 percent from 1997 to 2006/7. They also note a shift to non-European contexts.

⁹ Even though much of the book’s evidence emerges from interviews with US-based scholars or English-language books and articles (as discussed below), many of the arguments are relevant for scholars working at institutions around the world.

scientists, regardless of their level of experience. To be clear, we do not provide A-to-Z instruction on the use of particular data-collection techniques – although we supply (and urge readers to consult) an extensive bibliography of specialized work addressing the fundamentals of interviewing, survey research, ethnography, archival research, field experiments, and other such techniques. Rather, we seek to *contextualize* these techniques, providing high-yield pointers on their application in the field, considering how scholars' position and the context in which they are working affect their use, and suggesting how field researchers can objectively evaluate alternative techniques against analytic goals and theoretical motivations to develop an optimal field research design.

In accomplishing these goals, the book converses with several bodies of literature. First, it engages with the published literature on fieldwork in other disciplines (i.e., anthropology, sociology, history, economics, geography, and psychology) as well as the relatively new and emerging literature in political science. Second, it draws on more specialized work on particular data-collection techniques. Third, the book connects with the discussions and debates in the methodological literature in political science focused on research design, concepts, and causal mechanisms from quantitative, qualitative, and interpretivist perspectives.

Contemporary political science debates around field research

This book's three major goals relate to the explicit and implicit debates within political science concerning field research. We discuss a series of these contested issues below. We begin with debates among believers over what constitutes field research. We then turn to the debates between believers and skeptics over whether field research has value. Finally, we consider broader debates in the discipline about the possibility and desirability of shared standards for social science research, acknowledging how they might shape the practices and evaluation of field research.

Debates among believers over the definition and nature of field research

Even scholars who believe field research is valuable differ over its definition and nature. As noted at the outset, we understand field research to refer to leaving one's home institution in order to acquire data, information, or insights that significantly inform one's research. This definition diverges

from others offered in the literature in important ways.¹⁰ Wood (2007, 123), for instance, defines field research as “research based on personal interaction with research subjects in their own setting.” In the foreword to Perecman and Curran’s edited volume, Featherman (2006, xviii) suggests field research involves “taking social science questions or hypothetical propositions constructed about one societal or cultural setting into another.” And Shaffir and Stebbins (1991, 5) assert that “fieldwork is carried out by immersing oneself in a collective way of life for the purpose of gaining firsthand knowledge about a major facet of it.”¹¹

Our definition is more encompassing and more inclusive than these and others. For us, field research can be done in one’s own neighborhood – it does not necessarily entail going to a foreign context. Further, we hold that field research need not involve extensive interpersonal interaction. Hence, our understanding includes such techniques as archival research and passive observation. For us, as soon as a scholar enters and engages in a context beyond her home institution in order to learn about her research topic (even if this simply entails requesting documents from an archivist or collecting maps of the region from a government agency), she has begun to do field research. Our definition does leave out certain data-collection techniques, such as online surveys, downloading survey data collected by others,¹² and phone or Skype interviews from one’s office. While these practices indubitably represent useful data-gathering techniques, by our definition and understanding they do not constitute *field* research. A key aspect of our definition is that the scholar is gathering evidence *in context* – within the settings where the political decisions, events, and dynamics of interest took place or are recorded.

Finally, our definition highlights the fact that field research entails more than simply collecting data. While doing so is unquestionably a crucial part of fieldwork, scholars who conduct field research simultaneously engage in a varied set of analytic tasks. These range from informal “back of the brain” cogitating (rethinking an interviewee’s responses, or comparing what one read in a newspaper with what one heard in a focus group), to organizing and processing data, to carrying out process tracing or employing other methods

¹⁰ It bears noting that field research is not explicitly defined in most political science work that is written about it or that references it.

¹¹ There are other definitions. Emerson (1983) and Schatz (2009b), for instance, both offer even more ethnographic and anthropological conceptualizations. See also Wedeen (2010).

¹² Note, however, that if one were to travel to Zimbabwe to acquire the same dataset, we would categorize that as field research.

in an effort to evaluate their hypotheses, and everything in between. As we will argue more forcefully later, it is precisely the informed iteration between data generation and data analysis that lends field research much of its power as a mode of inquiry.

If believers in field research differ in relatively nuanced ways as to the definition of the term, they sometimes disagree to a greater degree on how to conduct field research. Of course, scholars working in urban versus rural settings, and democratic versus authoritarian regimes, or peacetime versus conflict zones (Lee-Treweek and Linkogle 2000, Sriram *et al.* 2009) may use radically different techniques in the field.¹³ Yet the deeper divergences about how to approach fieldwork spring from scholars' contrasting epistemological and ontological views. More positivist quantitative and qualitative scholars on the one hand, and interpretivist researchers on the other, are often understood to ask different questions, design their research differently, engage with their field sites differently (looking for different things using different techniques), think of themselves as researchers differently (holding differing views of reflexivity, for instance), consider power relationships between themselves and those they study differently, have different views on the possibility and desirability of objectivity, and have different standards for rigor – to name just a few distinctions. One symbolic marker of this divide is seen in the discrete and uncoordinated short courses on field research these two “camps” now offer at the American Political Science Association meetings.

The multi-faceted nature of this debate – and the fact that all participants value the field research enterprise – militate against our discussing each “side’s” viewpoint on each aspect of the debate. Presumably, the central dividing line has to do with the possibility of objectivity in, and of identifying truth through, field research and social science research more generally, and the utility of delving into the meanings political action has for political actors. We return to these issues below.

Debates between believers and skeptics about the value of field research

Far-reaching though the above differences of perspective are, debates between believers and skeptics go much deeper, centering on the intrinsic value of field research and scholarship produced based on data gathered

¹³ Mertus (2009, 168) suggests that new communication and transportation technologies have made it easier for a wide range of researchers to travel to the heart of conflicts. She notes that during the Vietnam War only a handful of journalists went to the battlefields, while during the Balkan wars of the 1990s, journalists and academics flooded into the region.

in the field. Most obviously, skeptics suggest that field research is unsystematic, entailing repeated ad hoc decisions and changes on the fly that undermine the promise of the scientific method. Our research on the fieldwork practices of political scientists suggests that this is a misperception. We challenge the characterization and the conclusion below. Two related but more fundamental critiques are more difficult to evaluate and dismiss.

Some skeptics argue that fieldwork inevitably produces biased and thus questionably valid data, and thus biased and questionably valid research. On the one hand, the mere presence of the researcher in the context being studied (let alone his or her interventions) changes that context, biasing the data collected therefrom. Shaffir and Stebbins (1991, 15) express this point, suggesting that “the undisciplined procedures of fieldwork enable researchers, to a greater degree than practitioners of other methodologies, to influence the very situations they are studying, thereby flagrantly violating the canons of scientific objectivity.” On the other hand, some allege that the immersion of the researcher in the field context can cause a loss of objectivity that leads to biased data generation and research. Barrington Moore indicted “poor fieldwork” as having “inconsistencies, obvious bias and lovie dovie” (Munck and Snyder 2007, 106).

Becker (1970, 43–44), however, makes a cogent counter-argument, suggesting that data gained via fieldwork are *less* likely to be biased, for two reasons. First, people are constrained to act more honestly by the very fact of being in a social situation (rather than in a laboratory); second, a field-worker’s more continuous presence in the context he is studying allows him to gather more data and test his hypotheses more thoroughly. In a similar vein, Juan Linz insisted that a greater amount of time in the field would not have undermined his analytic perspective but rather would have allowed him to document his argument more powerfully (Munck and Snyder 2007, 188). Indeed, some hold that fieldwork teaches us so much that it is used as an evaluative marker: it forms part of the process through which graduate students and others prove their ability as independent scholars and establish credibility as experts on the places they study. As a senior Asia scholar once commented to a beginning graduate student: “You need to go over there and have your ticket punched.”¹⁴ Interpretive scholars might offer a different response to the allegation of bias: guilty as charged. Such scholars believe that the knowledge produced through interpersonal interaction is inescapably “biased” if that means that the researcher ineluctably places her imprint on it.

¹⁴ Personal communication with Read, c. 1996.

Another argument put forth by skeptics is that scholars who collect data via fieldwork are by definition limited in terms of their ability to generalize the conclusions they draw on the basis of those data.¹⁵ To begin with, perhaps on the assumption that it must always be ethnographic or small-*n* in nature, field research is often associated with idiographic (or case-centered) approaches and is criticized by scholars who take a nomothetic approach. More broadly, some wonder how much research based on deep immersion in particular cases (a few parts) can tell us about the larger whole more generally. The late Samuel P. Huntington was essentially making this point when, asked his opinion of fieldwork, he responded, “I don’t believe in it!” He went on to clarify that he was being facetious, but added that fieldwork can render the scholar “a prisoner of a particular experience,” so that any positive benefits are outweighed by how difficult it becomes to make empirical generalizations (Munck and Snyder 2007, 223).¹⁶

Yet field researchers can and do adopt both idiographic and nomothetic approaches. In fact, as our survey data suggest and a review of published scholarship shows, many scholars combine them (Tashakkori and Teddlie 2003; Lieberman 2005; Fearon and Laitin 2008). Indeed, political scientists carrying out small-*n* comparative work have long been encouraged to replace proper names with relevant variables (*à la* Przeworski and Teune 1970) in part to make it easier for them to generate a causal story that will apply to a broad set of cases. Moreover, political scientists often undertake field research with the aim of developing broad theories or testing widely applicable hypotheses; indeed, some would insist that the generation of well-grounded understandings of particular cases is a prerequisite for any grand theorizing.

Broader methodological debates about standards for political science research

A third and broader set of methodological debates, while not focused explicitly on the nature or value of field research, has clear reflections in the other two discussions and implications for how field research is perceived and judged. We refer to debates among quantitative, qualitative, and interpretive scholars concerning how we draw valid descriptive and causal inferences about the political world and, more broadly, what constitutes rigorous

¹⁵ We will leave aside our views on the inherent value of fully understanding a particular context, what went on there, and why, and the question of whether producing generalizable theory must be the goal of all social scientific inquiry, and consider the critique on its own terms.

¹⁶ When asked whether scholars can do fieldwork and be broadly comparative theoreticians, Barrington Moore replied skeptically: “I don’t think you can swing it” (Munck and Snyder 2007, 107).

research. In their ground-breaking book – sufficiently prominent to be universally recognized in the discipline as “KKV” – King, Keohane, and Verba (1994) argue that a single logic of inference underlies (good) political science scholarship. Brady and Collier’s edited volume (2010) challenges the appropriateness of applying the KKV model of research to all social science questions, arguing that different methodologies with dissimilar epistemological underpinnings can co-exist and complement each other. Yet the Brady and Collier volume does not fundamentally disagree with the premise that there can be “shared standards” for evaluating social science research. Gerring (2012) likewise argues for a unified framework for social science research.

In contrast, Goertz and Mahoney (2012) argue that quantitative and qualitative research are the products of two distinct “cultures,” implying that it would be difficult to develop one set of standards against which both types of scholarship could be judged. Yanow and Schwartz-Shea (2008) raise an even more fundamental epistemological challenge, delineating a sharp boundary between positivist and interpretive views and objectives of research.¹⁷ They articulate an interpretive mode of research more focused on understanding how meaning is constituted by people, and would likely consider inappropriate the evaluation of their work against standards derived from a supposed “single logic of inference.”

All of these debates relate in key ways to the conduct of field research (i.e., the generation and analysis of data in the field), the evaluation of field research, and the production of scholarship based on data gained through field research. Each invokes fundamental epistemological differences and cleavages. And at the heart of each are questions about how to design and conduct rigorous social science research, and whether social scientists can (and should) identify standards for inference and for “good” research more generally. What those standards might consist of and how widely shared they could be across heterogeneous methodological terrain remain open questions, of course. Yet any consensus political scientists ultimately reach will have critical implications for fieldwork in the discipline.

As such, readers might expect us to take a clear stand on these debates. Yet we have intentionally taken no epistemological position, and have sought to make this book ecumenical. We have strived *not* to assume (let alone judge) readers’ epistemological predilections or trespass on their methodological

¹⁷ We offer here a very small window on these debates for illustrative purposes; for instance, we leave out extensions of these debates with those who advocate a formal analytic or experimental approach.

choices. We simply aim to help them to conduct fieldwork as effectively as they can given those preferences and priors. Put somewhat differently, rather than beginning from a particular epistemological stance, we developed the book largely on the basis of what our research on fieldwork – and field-workers – in the discipline taught us about the principles and practices that underlie good field research. That is, as scholars conducting research in the “field” of political science, we proceeded inductively rather than deductively.

What became clear to us is that the Manichean positions reviewed above are a poor guide to actual practice. Our survey and interview data indicate that many (if not most) field researchers occupy a middle position on the epistemological spectrum, calling into question the various efforts to delineate boundaries between these groups. Indeed, we found that scholars who enter the field with a positivist bent sometimes confront realities that make them question that model and adopt a more interpretivist posture, eventually ending up somewhere in the middle. These findings suggest, and we firmly believe, that there is a considerable gray area – an encompassing methodological middle – in which positivists and interpretivists can productively discuss the practices and merits of fieldwork, and the considerable amount that they share. The existence of this gray zone implies that it may in fact be possible and productive to identify adaptable fundamentals that underlie much field research in the discipline. We have sought to do so.

Our stance, then, is that the practice of field research “belongs to” no one – and belongs to everyone. The more scholars who engage in debates about its conduct, the richer the discussion, and the stronger fieldwork methodology will become. In sum, we seek to speak in a unified way to a diverse discipline in an effort to provide all political scientists with strategies that will motivate them to carry out, and help them excel at – and enjoy – field research.

Our arguments: the nature, practices, and principles of political science field research

In this section, we advance the book’s three key arguments, which speak directly to the concerns discussed above. First, while the shape and nature of fieldwork differ dramatically across the discipline, field research has a common center – shared challenges, opportunities, and inclinations that cut across significant geographical and epistemological divides. Second, while fieldwork practices in the discipline are varied, most scholars employ a multi-dimensional approach: they use several data-collection techniques,

apply them to multiple analytic tasks in a given project, and iteratively update elements of their research design, theory, and concepts as they learn and analyze in the field. Third, many field researchers follow a set of core principles (if sometimes only implicitly) – engagement with context, flexible discipline, triangulation, critical reflection, ethical commitment, and transparency – that help them to maximize the potential that fieldwork's practices hold. We draw on these arguments to show – and forcefully argue – that fieldwork is vital for collecting new data, stimulating innovative ideas and perspectives, and producing rigorous and path-breaking social science scholarship no matter what one's research paradigm.

The nature of field research: commonality within diversity

Data from our original survey and interviews testify to the many different forms that political scientists' fieldwork has taken over the past several decades, and to the variation across subfields, departments, and individual scholars that continues to mark the enterprise today. Yet despite significant diversity in form and function, we argue that some central and uniting commonalities characterize much fieldwork in the discipline. We share below just a few findings that underpin this argument, which are further developed in Chapter 2.

While most political scientists conduct fieldwork in the United States and Western Europe, our respondents reported field sites in 150 countries. Likewise, far from the stereotypical notions that field research either involves deep ethnographic observation or qualitative interviewing of elites, significant heterogeneity exists in terms of what political scientists actually do in the field. As we discuss in more detail in the next subsection, scholars often employ a variety of data-collection techniques, including archival research, surveys, and field experiments, and engage in a range of analytic tasks. Accordingly, the length of time political scientists spend in the field also varies widely, from a few weeks to over two years.

The degree to which research projects rely upon fieldwork also differs considerably across the discipline. For some scholars, field research involves immersing themselves for a year or two at a site overseas, and writing a study that draws entirely or mainly from information gathered at this locale. For others, field research entails weekend trips to other states or provinces, a month spent at a national archive, or a series of short visits to cities in multiple countries over the course of several years. For these scholars, field research may not be the primary vehicle for collecting data but a supplement,

preceding or following the quantitative component of a multi-method inquiry, for instance. Political scientists who conduct field research also do so in pursuit of different goals. For instance, some seek to adjudicate among rival hypotheses while others strive to interpret lived experiences. And field research projects also differ widely in both levels and types of grant support.

In short, what constitutes “fieldwork” for political science varies considerably – and will likely continue to diversify due to changing family structures, evolving disciplinary standards, and major shifts in geopolitical tensions and even nation-state boundaries. Moreover, an ongoing revolution in information and communication technologies is reshaping field research week by week. These changes have made it both much simpler to access troves of information without ever leaving one’s office, *and* far easier to travel to, and work and live in the field. These realities challenge already tenuous notions about what it means to do fieldwork in our discipline and what value doing so adds. They simultaneously create an environment rich with possibilities for innovation, triangulation, and syncretism (i.e., blending data collected via fieldwork and through other means). The diversity our inquiry uncovered buttresses our contention that no single template or stereotype can be applied to political science field research.

Yet despite this diversity – and the fact that scholars from every political science subfield are conducting field research, including political theory and public administration – field research in the discipline is marked by certain central tendencies. To begin with, fieldworkers often face similar types of challenges. A first set is logistical, including where to live, how to travel, and how to recruit and effectively manage people on a research team. Graduate students who are required to take a sequence of methods courses and simultaneously experience countervailing pressures to compress the time spent in getting their degree face additional challenges when seeking to conduct fieldwork. And securing funding for field research can be difficult even for seasoned faculty well-versed in grantsmanship. Yet some of fieldwork’s most significant challenges are emotional, ethical, and analytic.

Field research for most scholars is emotionally stressful. Adapting to different cultures and managing security concerns in new contexts, as some field researchers are called upon to do, can take a toll (Mertus 2009). Indeed, many researchers reported experiencing hardship conditions in the field – for instance, political repression or a lack of infrastructure. Moreover, fieldworkers must deal with the frustration that obtaining entrée, satisfying gatekeepers, and negotiating roadblocks of innumerable kinds can often entail. They also confront loneliness, or the equally daunting challenge of

never being alone. And they face the constant strain of performing a role and negotiating their personal identity, deciding who they want to be as a researcher, who they want to be when “off-duty,” and what correspondence to maintain between the two (Punch 1986, 17; Brown 2009).

Concerning moral and ethical challenges, while field researchers are obligated to be honest in their work, they sometimes have to consider whether, when, and how much to keep their interests and purposes under wraps. They need to manage risks to respondents when interacting with them and when writing up their research, and devise ways to maintain anonymity and confidentiality while still developing persuasive descriptive and explanatory accounts (Sriram 2009). The fact that fieldworkers often have to deal with these challenges “situationally and spontaneously,” under less-than-ideal circumstances, and without the benefit of reflection or the ability to seek advice from trusted colleagues or advisors makes them even more difficult to address (Punch 1986, 13).

Field research also entails a set of widely shared analytic challenges. “Field research design” – developing a practical plan for implementing a research design in the field – begins well before scholars leave for their field sites and continues after they arrive. Indeed, while in the field, scholars often need to select cases and engage in sampling (sometimes at multiple levels), operationalize (and, sometimes, re-operationalize) concepts so that on-the-ground measurement is valid and reliable, and evaluate the evidentiary value and analytic usefulness of the data collected. And they must carry out all of these tasks with an eye to the methods they will use to analyze the data. These tasks are difficult to get right on the first try (which is sometimes the only “try” scholars have), and doing them all simultaneously is tough under the best of circumstances. In short, while no single archetypical model of field research predominates in political science today, scholars often need to surmount similar sorts of obstacles while seeking to accomplish similar types of analytic tasks in the field.

Yet the multiple versions of fieldwork in which political scientists engage have much more than challenges in common. There are identifiable commonalities in the overall contours of field research in the discipline as well. For instance, our survey data reveal that most investigators use more than one data-collection technique in the field, and this has been the case for decades. Furthermore, scholars often combine multiple analytic approaches: many projects use some combination of quantitative, qualitative, and/or interpretive methodologies, frequently contemporaneously. Indeed, the vast majority of field research projects have a qualitative dimension, including

those that are primarily oriented toward obtaining quantitative data. These findings suggest that a good number of field researchers may lack a hard and fixed epistemological commitment to a single methodological tradition. Their failure to fall neatly into the categories the discipline has sought to establish presents an opportunity for dialogue and information sharing about the processes political scientists employ to analyze and understand the political world. And, finally, we contend that scholars produce intellectual value in all types of fieldwork – in part due to the multiple tasks they accomplish simultaneously in the field, and the way in which they iterate among them, to which we turn next.

Fieldwork practices: variety and iteration

Most scholars go into the field to obtain data or source material of some kind. Yet, as we suggested earlier, our research reveals that fieldwork helps political scientists to advance many aspects of a research project – not only data collection, but also research design, data analysis, and ultimately theory development. Moreover, we found that scholars cycle repeatedly among the range of practices connected to these phases of research during their time in the field – that is, they iterate. We argue that this *iteration* (the updating of elements of research design as information acquired in the field is analyzed) is critically important to the way in which field research contributes to the generation of political knowledge and development of theory.

Research design

Political scientists have generated an extensive body of prescriptive literature focusing on research design (e.g., King, Keohane, and Verba 1994; Van Evera 1997; Geddes 2003; Collier and Gerring 2009; Brady and Collier 2010) as well as particular design aspects such as case selection (Collier 1995; Collier and Mahoney 1996; Box-Steffensmeier, Brady, and Collier 2008), and the comparative method and case studies (e.g., Collier 1993; Locke and Thelen 1995; George and Bennett 2004; Mahoney and Goertz 2004; Lynch 2005; Gerring 2007). Yet this work tends not to discuss explicitly how field research contributes to design decisions such as case selection, or how key methodological decisions and debates intersect and interact with the choices and exigencies of data collection or field research more generally. This may be because the subtle ways in which fieldwork often informs the creation of knowledge are not always boldly announced in the final published work. We believe that they should be.

Most broadly, field research puts scholars in a position to encounter the unexpected and unexplored, and thus to benefit from serendipity. This can take the form of stumbling upon a new – and thus unstudied – political issue or movement. It might present itself in the form of lunch-break conversations with scholars from other institutions and disciplines who introduce new ideas. Or it might mean noticing documents or statements that contradict received wisdom in the discipline, suggesting anomalies or new puzzles. In all of these important, yet frequently unheralded ways, fieldwork shapes and informs our research choices and sets the stage for innovation.

Once a scholar has decided upon a research topic, particularly at the early stages, field research can help her to sharpen her vision of what the project is about, and aid her in formulating or re-formulating significant research questions. Preliminary research trips, or early stages of longer trips, often provide critical information for case selection as well, making it possible to identify cases that are likely to yield the greatest theoretical payoff while avoiding ones that would prove unworkable or irrelevant.

Political science concepts – “rule of law,” “democratic consolidation,” “power” – are often complex and highly abstract, complicating our ability to develop them. Field research is indispensable for helping scholars nail down what the key concepts in their work actually mean. It puts researchers in vantage points from which to observe gaps between concepts and reality and nuances that facilitate conceptual precision. Unfortunately, the wealth of political science scholarship on the issue of concept formation (e.g., Collier and Mahoney 1993; Collier and Adcock 1999; Adcock and Collier 2001; Goertz 2006) infrequently discusses fieldwork’s contributions to this crucial research goal. The many real-life examples from scholars’ research that we include in this book show the important ways in which field research facilitates conceptualization.

Field research is likewise important for measurement – and for testing the validity and reliability of measures. Measurement error is a ubiquitous problem that political scientists have developed a range of strategies to address (see e.g., Adcock and Collier 2001). Being in the field offers scholars opportunities to assess the face validity of their measures (through consultation with other experts and scholars) and perhaps even to have others code some of their cases on key parameters, subsequently checking inter-coder consensus. Careful fieldwork can also help illuminate whether context-specific indicators might capture concepts better than uniform measures (see, e.g., Locke and Thelen 1995).

Data collection

Field research is obviously critical for collecting data. Even in today's digitally interconnected world where instant communication across vast distances and immediate access to immense amounts of information are commonplace, it remains true that much data can only be obtained through personally engaging with individuals and institutions, and up-close, on-the-ground study. To give just a few examples, the opinions of migrant farm workers in a distant rural area, historic records buried deep in government archives, and the complex internal processes of a particular social movement can only be accessed by being there.¹⁸ As we have noted and Chapter 2 demonstrates in more detail, political scientists employ diverse data-collection techniques in the field, and most scholars use multiple techniques, thoughtfully and creatively combining them to gather, triangulate among, and verify the data they are gathering.

Collecting data in the field enhances our comprehension of the context of the political dynamics we study. Regardless of the kind of data with which one is working (even archival data), seeing them in context rather than in isolation can lead to more, and more accurate, insights. For instance, understanding the environment in which a survey was conducted – and getting the “back-story” and details about the trials and tribulations of administration from those who fielded it – helps one interpret the resulting data. Moreover, by generating their own data in context, researchers are freed from relying on the (possibly implicit or unknown) data-collection decisions and practices of other researchers or institutions.

Analysis for inference and interpretation

Conventional wisdom might hold that fieldworkers focus hungrily (if not frantically) and single-mindedly on gathering data, squirreling information away onto hard-drives and into boxes for later perusal and parsing. Our research shows that this is far from the case. Rather, political scientists who conduct field research are *constantly* examining, considering, and processing

¹⁸ Wood (2007, 126) outlines four scenarios in which discovering the “preferences and beliefs of political actors” might require engaging with them: (1) when the political actor is at a permanent disadvantage as a result of repression, domination, or lack of education; (2) when scholars seek to disaggregate an organization or movement into factions or individuals whose beliefs and preferences may differ from the official line available in publications; (3) when scholars seek to understand internal processes of a group, which may become available only through participant observation or interviews; (4) when actors have reasons to hide or obscure preferences and beliefs from public view – i.e., engage in strategic interactions with others.

the data they are generating, deploying a diverse array of analytic techniques to develop and refine their questions and their answers. Of course, because political scientists undertake field research at different stages of their projects and employ diverse analytic methods, they engage in distinct combinations of analytic tasks and do so in many ways. Moreover, the degree to which scholars engage in analysis in the field appears to be correlated with how long they spend there. Nonetheless, most scholars engage in some sort of analysis while carrying out fieldwork. They do so to several ends.

First, the immersion and engagement with context that fieldwork often entails encourage analysis aiming to produce descriptive inference. We believe that the descriptive aspects of research projects are far more significant than the general sense of opprobrium that lingers around the word “description” would suggest. Particularly in understudied contexts, such as those emerging from conflict or authoritarian rule – but actually just about everywhere – documentation and analytic description are crucial to the social science enterprise. Put simply, by offering investigators the opportunity to observe myriad on-the-ground dynamics, fieldwork helps them to generate clear, detailed accounts and to “get the story right.”¹⁹

Beyond being important in its own right, accurate description is obviously a fundamental foundation for explanation: if one’s descriptive assumptions or understandings are off, one is unlikely to develop a valid causal story.²⁰ As such, field research also helps scholars get the *causal* story right by allowing them to better understand causal processes and mechanisms, and to evaluate how well their hypothesized account, and alternatives, accord with local dynamics. It can also offer political scientists the opportunity to observe causal processes at work,²¹ thus facilitating process tracing (see, e.g., Bennett 2010). As Wood (2007, 125) asserts, analyzing contingent events, critical junctures, and path dependence often depends on process tracing that is impossible without field research.²² Observing first-hand meetings where decisions are being made, collecting oral histories, and talking face-to-face with eyewitnesses and participants can all provide persuasive evidence of causal processes. In particular, field research can help scholars identify causal

¹⁹ Of course, it is important to guard against getting caught up in some romanticized view of reality sold to us in the field. As we discuss below, triangulation in particular helps scholars to do so.

²⁰ King, Keohane, and Verba are among those who endorse this point (1994, 34).

²¹ To put this another way, fieldwork allows scholars to gather causal process observations (CPOs) that would otherwise remain elusive at best (Brady and Collier 2010; Collier 2010).

²² On contingency, critical junctures, and path dependence, see Mahoney (2000), Pierson (2000), Lieberman (2001), Bennett and Elman (2006), and Barnes and Weller (2012).

mechanisms (see Mahoney 2003, 363–365; George and Bennett 2004, 132–149), and to evaluate them by assessing their observable implications.

Likewise, fieldwork reveals causal complexity and conjunctural causation (Ragin 1987, 2000; Mahoney and Goertz 2006). Scholars who engage in field research obtain a first-hand view of complicated political dynamics, affording them an appreciation of how unusual it is for a single cause to determine any outcome. They develop intuitions and collect evidence that make it possible for them to weigh the relative effects of multiple causes and assess how they interact with each other to produce the outcome of interest. Scholarship based on fieldwork can thus faithfully reflect the intricacies of empirical reality, offering perhaps more complete, if more complex, causal stories.

Field research also facilitates the testing and sharpening of scholars' arguments. Political scientists who have conducted interviews are familiar with the experience of indirectly posing one or more hypotheses to an interlocutor in order to gauge her response. Texts or records can also be read with an eye to whether they square with or challenge one's key propositions – or suggest another account altogether. Accessing multiple data sources in the field offers countless opportunities to identify facts or views that run counter to one's hypotheses. Naturally, the subjective perspectives of interested parties should not be taken as the gospel truth – yet field researchers often feel that they are better off obtaining such reactions than remaining ignorant of them. Literature on hypothesis testing and theory generation (Fearon 1991; Tilly 1997; Mahoney 2000) sometimes overlooks fieldwork's contributions in this regard.

Iteration

The previous subsections demonstrated that political scientists engage in an extensive set of research tasks while in the field, revealing fieldwork to be a fundamentally *analytic* undertaking. We conclude our description of fieldwork practices by arguing that *iteration* among those tasks is a ubiquitous aspect of field research, and one that is essential to the critical role fieldwork plays in producing knowledge about politics. As scholars observe and learn in the field, they commonly pivot multiple times, shifting from collecting data to analyzing them; from analysis back to research design; and from research design on to data collection, and on to analysis again. What guides and propels this iteration are scholars' ongoing efforts to make sense of and structure the information they are gathering, what they are learning about their subjects and cases, and what it all means for their project, their questions, and their answers. The simple reality is that, as scholars critically

reflect on what they are learning about the field context, their ideas change, and those changes can necessitate renegotiation of certain aspects of their project.

As scholars iterate, they review and revise their research design – reformulating their research question, refining concepts, developing new hypotheses, identifying more appropriate cases, developing and enhancing research instruments (e.g., interview protocols and survey questionnaires), and so on. These design revisions, in turn, often lead them to collect more or different data, or to modify their analysis in some way, in the search for valid answers to their research questions. While veteran researchers intuitively appreciate the benefits of iteration, the way in which iteration occurs is rarely openly discussed, and its benefits (and costs) are infrequently explicitly acknowledged, in the published scholarship based on field research.²³

In fact, the notion of iteration in political science research has already been recognized as legitimate by scholars from diverse methodological traditions.²⁴ Scholars with more interpretive epistemological leanings strongly resist imposing pre-established concepts and categories at the outset of a research project: iteration has long been a central and essential element of their approach to social inquiry. Schwartz-Shea and Yanow write that, according to the “abductive reasoning” logic of interpretive research, inquiry begins with a puzzle or a tension, then undertakes a search for insight and understanding in which “the researcher tacks continually, constantly, back and forth in an iterative-recursive fashion between what is puzzling and possible explanations for it” (2012, 27, also 32, 55–56). In the mid-1980s, Ragin wrote eloquently about what he called the dialogue of ideas and evidence in social research, explaining that “most hypotheses and concepts are refined, often reformulated, after the data have been collected and analyzed” (1987, 164). George and Bennett (2004, 73) hold that “some

²³ The multiple tasks scholars carry out in the field highlight a related – but distinct – aspect of research based on fieldwork: it is not linear but rather *dynamic*. While the pre-fieldwork, fieldwork, and post-fieldwork phases of the research process might have particular *emphases* (research design in the first, data collection in the second, and data analysis in the third), none of the three phases is fully delimited or self-contained, and in none of the three do scholars focus on (or complete) just one task.

²⁴ Moreover, political scientists are hardly the only ones to identify the utility of iteration. For instance, in technology design, a software company might release a web-based product in an unfinished state, then enhance and rework it incrementally based on responses from users. One discussion of the etymology of the term “iteration,” including its applications in technology and mathematics, can be found in a *New York Times* language column: www.nytimes.com/2010/06/13/magazine/13FOB-onlanguage-t.html.

iteration is often necessary” among the design, execution, and assessment phases of case study research.²⁵

Collier, Seawright, and Munck, drawing on Ragin (2004), Munck (2004), and Tarrow (2004), note that “the refinement of theory and hypotheses through the iterated analysis of a given set of data is an essential research tool, and researchers lose other aspects of analytic leverage by not employing it” (2010, 62). Indeed, iteration is clearly foundational to a Bayesian view of probability in which a scholar’s beliefs about the likelihood of hypotheses constituting valid explanations (“priors”) are updated as new data are discovered. Even King, Keohane, and Verba, while arguing that theories should not be modified in a way that narrows their scope after data have been collected, allow that “the need for creativity sometimes mandates that the textbook be discarded!” (King, Keohane, and Verba 1994, 21–22).²⁶

Despite some disciplinary consensus on the value of iteration, by drawing attention to and arguing for the importance of iteration to fieldwork, and thus highlighting its profoundly inductive nature, we are spotlighting and reinforcing precisely the aspects of field research that many of its detractors find most objectionable. Methodological texts often portray (and thus implicitly advocate for) a strictly linear research process, rather than one marked by feedback loops and reformulation (e.g., McNabb 2010, 29–39). For some, iteration might sound very akin to unguided intellectual wandering. Fieldwork’s inductive nature flies in the face of the increasing emphasis in some corners of political science on the primacy of deductive reasoning. And some field research skeptics might consider iteration to be the qualitative analogue of “curve fitting” in quantitative work – repeatedly re-specifying a statistical model, swapping variables in and out, until something “interesting” is found; most methodologists would agree that this is not good practice (as would we).²⁷

We seek to counter these negative views on iteration. We argue that fieldwork’s iterative nature and the mid-course adjustments it allows are essential to the ways in which field research contributes to the production of knowledge about politics. Fieldwork often involves exploring what is poorly understood and confronting new, complex empirical realities; as such,

²⁵ They also discuss iterative processes in case study research elsewhere in the book: pp. 84, 112, etc.

²⁶ Vah Evera (1997, 105) and Mahoney (2010, 134, 141–142) also highlight the value of iterative processes.

²⁷ The statistical issue concerns parameter estimation: engaging in curve fitting will eventually result in finding something with certainty, but leaves one open to capitalizing on chance to discover spurious relationships.

induction and iteration are unavoidable if valid inferences are to be drawn and interpretations developed. Indeed, the repeated discovery that fieldwork entails is one of its strengths as a research technique. Engaging in iteration allows scholars to integrate their growing knowledge and new ideas into their projects, and to respond directly to relevant changes in research conditions. As a result, they can develop and test well-grounded hypotheses and explore the most appropriate research questions and cases – which are not always the same propositions, questions, and cases that seemed promising when the project was being designed, based on existing theory, from the comfort of the home institution. Quite obviously, continuing to pursue explanations, questions, and cases that are clearly dead-ends does not advance research but rather impedes the generation of valid findings and strong arguments.

Moreover, and to emphasize, the iteration in which field researchers engage is intensely analytic, rather than unguided or ad hoc. It is a constant process of correction and refinement driven by their ongoing consideration of the evidence gathered and their continual mapping of evidence to theory in a directed attempt to find valid answers to their questions. To say that fieldwork is inductive and iterative in no way implies that it lacks rigor or is haphazard and unsystematic; it simply connotes that it is neither linear nor purely deductive.

Of course, iteration is not costless and we do not mean to suggest that it is; we are not positing that the skeptics' points are completely wrong all of the time. There are tradeoffs associated with most changes scholars make to their projects based on new discoveries in the field. Revising one's ideas and assumptions, and carefully considering and then introducing even small modifications can be distracting and can delay a project, for instance. The costs, downsides, and inferential implications of iteration should be carefully considered, articulated, and evaluated – *and this is precisely our point*. Acknowledging the multiple analytic processes in which political scientists who undertake field research engage, recognizing how they iterate among them and between them and data collection, and evaluating the costs and benefits of doing so, will produce multiple benefits.

Recognizing and validating fieldwork's iterative nature will encourage field researchers to be more forthcoming and transparent about the fieldwork enterprise – and about its complicated and synthetic nature. We imagine and hope this will be liberating as it will allow researchers, as a group, to counter the misleading “immaculate conception” narrative of fieldwork – that scholars design the perfect project before heading into the field, and execute that research design to a “T.” Allowing for more open discussion and creative

thinking about fieldwork, in turn, will encourage scholars who wish to engage in field research but may be daunted by the (misguided) idea that they need a valid and fully executable plan prior to departing. More discussion of iteration and fieldwork practices more generally will also help us to improve those practices – to identify the potential pitfalls associated with fieldwork’s inevitably iterative nature and develop strategies to avoid or address them. Doing so, in other words, will help researchers prepare for the circuitous path down which their inquiry will likely take them. Being more forthcoming about the field research process will also facilitate evaluation of fieldwork and scholarship based upon it. Accordingly, we call on all field researchers, regardless of their position on the epistemological spectrum, to acknowledge, discuss, and even spotlight the special role of iteration in field research projects – to give voice to what they have learned and will learn through experience.

In short, because field research involves the collection of data using multiple techniques and the analysis of data at multiple levels – and due to its iterative nature – it contributes mightily to the production of knowledge and the building of theory in political science. Yet we hasten to add that the experience of field research is not just a scientific one of gathering data and triangulating and developing internally valid descriptions and explanations of political dynamics. It often entails a set of *human* interactions that helps to spur passion about the normative issues that underlie the research questions that drive our scholarly inquiry.²⁸ We invite and encourage those who engage in field research to consider the many less concrete but still critical ways in which they benefit from engaging productively with the people whose behavior and institutions they strive to understand. These, we submit, are also important aspects of fieldwork’s value added.

The principles of field research

The above discussion of the multi-purpose and iterative nature of field research leads naturally to our third argument: that a shared set of principles underlies political scientists’ diverse fieldwork practices. We discuss six core principles – engagement with context, flexible discipline, triangulation,

²⁸ Robert Dahl made this point when discussing his best students: “Passion, absolutely. That’s a quality of all the best students ... [they] have some connection with the real world and real people in it. Their interest in the study of politics is more than library- or mathematics-driven. There is some understanding, almost at the gut level, of what the world outside is” (Munck and Snyder 2007, 144).

critical reflection, ethical commitment, and transparency – that we identified inductively through our analysis of the experiences of a wide range of scholars of different ranks, genders, and ages, employing different analytic approaches, in diverse subfields. To be sure, no single individual mentioned all six, nor did our respondents use precisely the same terms. But, collectively, they repeatedly described and seemed to agree intuitively on the significance of the same set of principles. Despite the fact that these principles already seem to guide the fieldwork of many scholars, they are rarely articulated consciously or publicly. Indeed, as of this writing, even the APSA Organized Section on Comparative Democratization has no explicit criteria for its award for the “Best Field Work” prize for dissertation students.²⁹

We argue – and seek to demonstrate throughout this book – that these principles undergird good political science field research, and help fieldwork to contribute to knowledge accumulation and theory generation. In so doing, we hope to encourage scholars to adopt these principles, and to open a dialogue about their utility as criteria for evaluating field research. Explicit articulation and tailored application of these principles, we hold, will enable scholars to do better fieldwork, which will contribute to more powerful analysis, compelling writing, and an expansion of what we know about politics. We hope that these principles can provide guidance to faculty and graduate students who are unsure what to do when facing particular situations in the field. And we believe that operating according to the principles can help scholars with limited funds supporting their research to maximize the intellectual potential of their field forays. Moreover, these principles offer a common vocabulary for discussing field research – a lexicon that will help scholars to articulate the strength and value of what they have accomplished in the field, and aid those who seek to evaluate others’ fieldwork.

Before discussing the six principles, we offer a few clarifications. First, these principles can serve as guidelines for conducting fieldwork and evaluating its practices and processes, but not for assessing the *products* of fieldwork. That is, they neither reiterate nor supplant established standards by which political science research of all kinds is evaluated.³⁰ Second, we intentionally use the term “principles” rather than “standards” to resist the

²⁹ The prize description emphasizes that the fieldwork should be “innovative” and “difficult” but those terms are left unspecified.

³⁰ Indeed, the quality of one’s fieldwork *practices* and *processes*, and the quality of the *product* one generates on the basis of fieldwork, are not perfectly correlated: it is possible to conduct highly effective fieldwork and yet create unsatisfactory publications on the basis of it (although the inverse is probably far less likely).

notion of a rigid, top-down designation, or one uniform set of expectations. We also avoid the term “best practices” as this also seems to imply an effort to identify a single, specific template. We argue throughout the book that one size does not fit all when it comes to field research. Yet we believe that most scholars can customize and apply these core principles.

Finally, given that the six principles were more often implied by our respondents than articulated self-consciously, and because some were emphasized more than others, the six vary in terms of the degree to which they are empirically descriptive – i.e., the extent to which they faithfully reflect the way political scientists actually *do* carry out fieldwork. Yet the principles are normatively prescriptive: informed by multiple perspectives, we believe they represent guidelines for how most scholars *should* conduct field research. Of course, due in part to the synergies and the tensions among the principles (which we discuss in more detail in Chapter 11, the book’s conclusion), each is best conceptualized as a continuum: different scholars will contemplate, and different contexts necessitate, a different weighting of each principle vis-à-vis the others.

Engagement with context

Engagement with context gets to the essence of field research. According to our definition, inserting oneself into the context where the political dynamics of interest occurred, or are recorded, is a defining feature of field research, and one of the reasons it is such a rich source of knowledge. What engaging with context means and how political scientists do so, however, vary considerably across locations, researchers, projects, and time. Engagement might include incorporating local scholarship and sources into one’s study; having a host institution or an NGO connection; or partaking in discussions or collaborating with local scholars. It may mean intense, direct conversations and social interchange with people in one’s field sites – or it may not. Moreover, engagement with context is neither synonymous with, nor necessarily proportional to, cumulative time in the field: it concerns the nature or even the *spirit* of a scholar’s connection to the field site. Likewise, we are not suggesting that all field researchers need to actively engage with context at every single moment in the field. How much time scholars need in order to meaningfully engage with context can vary considerably, in particular with a researcher’s previous knowledge of that context. Developing a deep knowledge of the language, history, and culture of a place prior to visiting can help scholars with scarce resources to engage more fully and quickly despite their inability to spend long weeks or months in the field.

Flexible discipline

A creative tension lies at the core of the second principle of field research. By flexible discipline, we mean carefully preparing for, planning, and organizing fieldwork – considering its goals, anticipating possible obstacles, and systematically tracking progress – while simultaneously allowing time, room, and energy for adaptation to inevitable hurdles, unexpected challenges, and unforeseen opportunities. Flexible discipline, then, is part and parcel of the analytically driven iteration discussed previously. Of course, scholars will put more or less emphasis on the different halves of this term. While all field researchers need to keep their eyes on the prize, those who equate being disciplined with being systematic, and flexibility with a lack of rigor, will err toward the noun rather than the adjective. Overall, however, given the inevitable vagaries of most research contexts, and the obstacles *and* opportunities that they can deliver, we think scholars are best served, most of the time, by leavening their discipline with a healthy, thoughtful dose of flexibility.

Triangulation

By triangulation, we mean collecting data – to measure a certain concept or to demonstrate that a particular relationship exists, for instance – from multiple sources. More loosely, we also use the term to refer to gathering diverse perspectives and viewpoints and voices. Sometimes utilizing a variety of data-collection techniques can facilitate access to the relevant range of viewpoints, but triangulation does not require doing so. Likewise, the idea is not to gather *as many* data points as possible, but rather to gather data and sources that comprehensively represent the empirical reality under study, and provide the most opportunities to identify facts or views that run counter to one's hypotheses. Triangulating strengthens faith in a study's inferences and conclusions, although naturally scholars should be cautious in drawing both even when distinct sources seem to point in the same direction.

Critical reflection

Another principle underlying good field research – one that is again closely tied to its iterative nature – is critical reflection. Scholars should be actively thinking about and evaluating their practices, the data they are collecting, and what they are learning throughout the fieldwork process. Put differently, outstanding field researchers reserve mental space to critically process, and make connections among, data and ideas – and they do so as they carry out

their daily work. Adopting this cognitive habit allows them to advance intellectually in the field, to catch problems early on, to remain aware of what they have accomplished and what still lies before them, and to take advantage of opportunities to sharpen their projects. While the value of engaging in such self-scrutiny might seem obvious, it is easy to develop tunnel vision in the field and plod onward, engrossed in the challenges of setting up interviews or the logistics of survey administration. Such behavior can lead vital questions to go unasked, or data to be incorrigibly tainted. Rather than shrugging off and dismissing their micro-epiphanies and the small, nagging doubts that seep into their consciousness, field researchers should nurture and attend to them, repeatedly asking themselves, “What does that tell me?”; “What am I doing wrong here that I will later regret?”; “What could I be doing better?” This recurrent and self-conscious consideration of options and choices, and their short- and long-term implications, lays the foundation for the principles of ethical commitment and transparency discussed below.

Ethical commitment

Another core principle of good field research is ethical commitment to the individuals whom researchers involve in their projects, and to those in the field site more broadly. The downsides of acting *unethically* – for one’s research, the research community, and researchers who wish to work in one’s field site in the future – seem clear. Yet how researchers think about acting ethically varies widely, and scholars make different choices depending on the sensitivities of their project and the peculiarities of the fieldwork context, among other factors. Indeed, we can envision a spectrum of ethical commitment: scholars on one end might have a “do no harm” conception of ethics, or a commitment to minimizing potential risks to study participants and the field-site communities during the study period. Those on the other end may emphasize a more ambitious notion of beneficence or feel an obligation to ensure that their research has some positive impact. Those at the former end may see it as ethically sufficient to submit their projects to all relevant Institutional Review Boards (IRBs), and follow the strictures those boards dictate. Yet for many, acting ethically is more than being legally compliant, and we encourage researchers to consider holding themselves to a higher standard.³¹ At bottom, self-conscious consideration of where one

³¹ See also Scheyvens and Storey (2003, 233–237).

sits on the ethical spectrum, and self-regulating and active commitment to that position, underpin all good field research.

Transparency

Finally, the best field researchers are transparent about their practices and processes. Building on the principles of critical reflection and ethical commitment, operating transparently involves openly describing one's relationship with the field setting and its inhabitants; tracking, documenting, and justifying the choices one made, strategies one employed, and iteration in which one engaged while generating data; detailing how the reliability and validity of those data were evaluated; and clearly articulating how one began to analyze and interpret data in the field (for instance, indicating what evidence was used to develop hypotheses and how they evolved). This principle in particular is being introduced on a more prescriptive than descriptive basis. Books and articles based on data gathered in the field, if they address fieldwork practices at all, generally contain brief summaries of data collection, analysis and interpretation, or the iterative updating of research designs. Being more candid and forthright will help scholars to demonstrate the power of their work, and help readers to evaluate it better, facilitating the accumulation of knowledge (Punch 1986, 15).³²

Summing up our arguments, then: field research in political science is heterogeneous, yet is marked by a common, uniting center. Scholars employ a variety of data-collection techniques and engage in an equally diverse range of analytic tasks while in the field, and do so in iterative, mutually reinforcing ways. Finally, six principles underlie the best of political science field research, and their tailored application can strengthen fieldwork in the discipline. These arguments make clear why fieldwork is able to make such important contributions to political science and to our understanding of politics at home and around the world. Field research stimulates innovative ideas and perspectives, encourages scholars to ask and answer significant questions, and helps us to produce knowledge and develop theories about politics, policy, and power – the core issues that animate all political science research. In the chapters that follow, we develop these arguments further with the goals of fomenting a spirited dialogue about, and improving the conduct of, political science field research.

³² We understand that publication word-limits, given the space that being transparent about qualitative research requires, may dampen enthusiasm for transparency. We discuss this challenge in Chapter 11.

The road ahead

The rest of the book proceeds in several parts. Chapter 2 surveys the varied currents that have shaped the development of field research in post-World War II political science. It also draws on our survey of fieldwork in the discipline to paint a nuanced picture of its practices, underlining both their heterogeneity and commonalities. Chapters 3 and 4 examine how fieldwork's intellectual and operational aspects intersect. Chapter 3 considers the logistical and analytic preparations that precede field research, and Chapter 4 offers practical advice for managing data, research, and people in the field. Both discuss how scholars can effectively (and simultaneously) serve as Principal Investigator and Project Manager of their research ventures.

Chapters 5 through 9 form the basis of a data-collection tool chest, examining the main data-collection techniques that political scientists employ in the field: collecting pre-existing materials (including but going well beyond archival techniques); conducting interviews, oral histories, and focus groups; employing site-intensive methods (i.e., participant observation and ethnography); engaging in survey research; and conducting field experiments. To emphasize, our goal is not to offer detailed instruction on using these techniques, but rather to contextualize them – to discuss how employing them *in the field* affects their deployment and the information thereby gathered. The chapters address the benefits and downsides of each technique, comparing and contrasting their employment and function and discussing how they can be combined. They also consider how to evaluate the evidentiary value of the data collected through using these techniques, and illustrate how those data can contribute to theory building in political science. Finally, the chapters highlight some challenges researchers face when using the techniques in the field and offer strategies for addressing them. Naturally, we aim for each chapter to be useful for scholars who already use the technique in question. Yet we believe that scholars who do not use a particular technique can also learn by reading about it, considering the inferential leverage they could gain from employing it or gaining insights that will be valuable while using other data-collection techniques. We also hope reading the chapters will help political scientists to become better consumers of scholarship based on field research, and better teachers of its practices.

Chapter 10 returns to thinking about the research endeavor as a whole. It emphasizes the inevitability and importance of engaging in analysis – beginning to process and make sense of data – while still in the field, and

offers practical advice on how to do so. The chapter also discusses how to manage the transition away from the field and return back to one's home institution. Finally, Chapter 11 summarizes the book's key arguments; explores how changes in world politics, technology, funding levels, ethical norms, and disciplinary standards for research transparency will shape the practice and teaching of field research in political science in the future; and offers a call to arms to improve the process, and realize the promise, of fieldwork in the discipline.

A historical and empirical overview of field research in the discipline

The August 1943 issue of the *American Political Science Review* included an unusual item, a short polemic titled “A challenge to political scientists.” Its author was a young scholar, William Foote Whyte, who in the same year published *Street Corner Society*, a study of Italian gangs based on years of immersive research in Boston’s North End. He alleged that with few exceptions, political scientists failed to understand and illuminate the workings of actual politics. This he attributed to excessive concern with the normative aspects of politics and an unwillingness to probe beneath the surface of democratic institutions into the relationships, class structures, and ethnic hierarchies that underlie them. He audaciously instructed political scientists to become “participant observers in the field of practical politics”:

The complexities of the [political] organization can be understood only by one who is in a position to talk intimately with a number of men of various ranks *and*, at the same time, to observe their behavior through the course of political activity. It takes time to establish such a position and to gain such information . . . Furthermore, it requires a skill in personal relations, a flexibility in adapting oneself to different sorts of people. This does not flourish in the academic realms of political science. It develops only through intensive field experience. (Whyte 1943, 696–697)

Whyte’s challenge provoked rejoinders, but these focused on his call to “leave ethics to the philosophers,” not on his criticism of the empirical weakness of political science research (Hallowell 1944, 1946; Dexter 1946). Gabriel A. Almond mildly agreed that “a greater stress on field research in practical politics” would benefit the discipline (1946, 284).

It is no accident that this critique came when it did, and from a University of Chicago sociology Ph.D. It was the “Chicago School” that, in the 1920s, led the adoption within sociology of the study of local communities and subcultures through prolonged in-person field research. Major figures of this program, notably Robert Park and his associates and students, including

Robert Redfield and W. Lloyd Warner, championed the value of participant observation for understanding urban life (Bulmer 1984; Whyte 1994; Fine 1995; Platt 1996).

The Chicago School, in turn, took inspiration from the field methods that anthropologists pioneered in this period and in prior decades. Early versions of the methods used by cultural anthropologists emerged in the late nineteenth century in the work of observers like Charles Booth, Beatrice Webb, and Sidney Webb, which included first-hand observation in working-class homes. Researchers such as Alfred Haddon and Franz Boas initiated the study of non-Western societies through expeditions to places such as the Torres Strait and the Northwest coast of the United States. Bronislaw Malinowski's extended stay "right among the natives" (Malinowski 1961, 6) on several New Guinea islands during World War I is often cited as a foundational influence on anthropology's expectations for field research, centering on observation of and interaction with the subject population over years. Malinowski's influence remains undeniably powerful, even though his work later raised profound questions about his racial beliefs and his power relationship with his subjects.¹

It is not the case, of course, that, prior to an epiphany in the mid twentieth century, political scientists eschewed everything that this book defines as field research. Whyte himself acknowledged that political scientists sometimes conducted interviews, and he singled out for praise the dissertation of David Harold Kurtzman, who studied vote-buying in Philadelphia intensively over a period of four years.² Still, it is fair to say that our discipline took many cues from sociologists and anthropologists when it finally began to adopt field methods more wholeheartedly, starting in the 1950s. Moreover, as Chapter 1 observed, political scientists have, until very recently, been disinclined to reflect on and write about field research methods in formats other than the abbreviated methods sections of their empirical work.

This chapter begins by considering the expansion of field research in the US political science profession after World War II, identifying several forces that drove that development. Of course, the discipline does not generally catalogue its scholarly products in terms of whether or how they draw on

¹ See Burgess (1982), Shaffir and Stebbins (1991), Gupta and Ferguson (1997b, 6), Wedeen (2009), and in particular the detailed description and critique of Malinowski's fieldwork in Emerson (2001b).

On the partially related Chicago School of Political Science, see Heaney and Hansen (2006).

² As Whyte notes, this 1935 dissertation, "Methods of controlling votes in Philadelphia," was apparently never published, though its author went on to a prominent career.

source material gathered through fieldwork.³ Moreover, it is hardly possible to do justice to all the books and articles that fieldwork has enabled and enriched over the course of nearly seven decades. Thus, this section of the chapter focuses on the evolution of major research programs and key debates. It illustrates the fact that scholars of all subfields of the discipline have undertaken field research and used it to generate influential work. It observes that field research in political science has been syncretic – drawing on multiple distinct traditions, often ones pioneered by other disciplines. And it demonstrates that field research has been uneven in its coverage, focusing heavily on certain places and less on others.

The second part of the chapter draws on our survey of US-based political scientists, as well as our interviews, to paint a vivid portrait of field research in the discipline. It starts with a descriptive overview, presenting information on our survey respondents and the hundreds of projects they reported: where they went, challenges they faced, funding they obtained, languages they used, how much time they spent in the field and so forth. From there, we turn to data that amplify and provide evidence for the arguments introduced in Chapter 1 concerning the nature of field research in the discipline and the kinds of practices it employs. Survey and interview data alike convey the heterogeneity of research practices but also common themes among them: the ways in which researchers in the field tend to draw on multiple streams of data, employ more than one mode of analysis, engage in many kinds of analytic processes, and rethink and redesign their projects iteratively on the basis of what they learn in the field.

The post-war expansion of field research

A range of forces and institutions helped drive the expansion and development of field research in political science after the mid twentieth century. Evolving paradigms in the discipline put a premium on the collection of data, often fine-grained data on individual political beliefs and behavior. And in the post-war period the US academy created institutions that facilitated new forms of research at home and abroad. The federal government, in some

³ Thus, for example, “state of the discipline” overviews, review essays, methodological texts and debates, manifestos laying out this or that theoretical concept or paradigm, and other meta-writings are rarely organized around or even address field research as a category. Asked to name important or classic works in their subfields that drew centrally on field research, some of our interviewees had difficulty coming up with a clear-cut list.

cases motivated by the geopolitical competition of the Cold War, financed and encouraged many of these institutions. At the same time, it would be misleading to reduce every innovation to a simple outcome of such high-level processes. The imperative of understanding new problems and generating new answers, often motivated by particular debates within their subfields and by dialogues with other disciplines, have been just as important in encouraging scholars to conduct field research.

To begin with, the behavioral revolution, which began after World War II, pushed scholars to extend their inquiries beyond elites and the formal workings of institutions to examine public opinion and political processes. In American politics, the behavioral revolution is associated with the rise of nationwide survey projects such as the early post-war election projects, conducted by the University of Michigan, which eventually became the American National Election Studies.⁴ But it also is reflected in publications such as Robert Dahl's *Who Governs?* (1961), which involved substantial data-gathering in New Haven, Connecticut. Dahl's book, which responded to work by sociologists – Floyd Hunter's field-based study of Atlanta (1953) and C. Wright Mills's *The Power Elite* (1956) – sparked critical reactions and led to an ongoing debate over "community power." This debate drove political scientists as well as sociologists to investigate cities and other localities in an intensive fashion, aiming to lay bare the sinews of power relations within them (Agger, Goldrich, and Swanson 1964; Wolfinger 1971, 1973; Domhoff 1978; Gaventa 1980; Polksby 1980; Stone 1988, 1993; Gendron and Domhoff 2009).

Post-war Americanists benefitted from previously unavailable sources of data and opportunities for up-close study of politics. The National Archives were established in 1934, and expanded rapidly in the decades that followed. Franklin D. Roosevelt founded the first Presidential Library in Hyde Park, New York, in 1939. In 1955, this pattern was institutionalized by the Presidential Libraries Act as a means through which to preserve for study the documents of all administrations from Herbert Hoover on – resulting in what are now fifteen libraries and museums around the country. In 1953, APSA began its Congressional Fellowship program, which by 2011 had provided some 2,400 scholars, journalists, and other professionals a chance to observe the workings of Congress from the vantage point of 10-month staff positions on Capitol Hill.⁵

⁴ www.electionstudies.org/overview/origins.htm, accessed October 3, 2012.

⁵ www.apsanet.org/content_4162.cfm, accessed August 23, 2012. Biggs (2003) chronicles the Congressional Fellowship program.

Fieldwork in the discipline's subfields

Over the course of decades, field research in American politics has resulted in influential publications in all major domains of inquiry. At the national level, notable works address policy-making processes (Bauer, Pool, and Dexter 1963; Kingdon 1984; Light 1995); bureaucracies and regulation (Carpenter 2001, 2010); congressional representatives (Fenno 1978; Swain 1993; Miler 2010), the presidency (Beckmann 2010), the Supreme Court (Segal and Spaeth 1993), and interest groups and think tanks (Kollman 1998; Rich 2004; Teles 2008; Baumgartner *et al.* 2009). Studies of social policy have been informed by up-close research on people who participate in or are subject to government programs, from welfare recipients to veterans to prisoners (Lin 2000; Soss 2000; Campbell 2003; Mettler 2005; Allard 2009; Lerman 2013). At the local level, fieldwork has informed research on ideology (Lane 1962), regional politics (Key 1949), race (Cohen 1999; Kim 2000; Miller 2008), immigrants (Wong 2006), urban politics (Katzenelson 1982; Berry, Portney, and Thomson 1993), policing (Brown 1981; Ostrom 2010, 7–11), state legislatures (Barber 1965), political participation (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995; Gerber and Green 2000; Walsh 2004; Han 2009a; Redlawsk, Tolbert, and Donovan 2011; García Bedolla and Michelson 2012), and social movements (Blee 2002; Frymer 2008; Skocpol and Williamson 2012). Needless to say, this is merely a sampling of relevant work, and further examples can be found elsewhere in the book, particularly in the five chapters on particular data-collection techniques. Our point is simply that field research informs the study of a wide range of topics within American politics.⁶

Even more dramatic transitions took place in the post-war period with regard to analyzing politics beyond the borders of the United States. Political scientists rapidly began to conduct field research in a great variety of contexts, including smaller European polities and less-developed countries (LDCs) in Latin America and, as colonial rule waned, in Africa and Asia. Underlying and encouraging intellectual shifts in the subfield of comparative politics at this time was the Social Science Research Council (SSRC). This body was founded in 1923 at the initiative of Chicago political scientist Charles E. Merriam in collaboration with leaders of the national professional associations for economics, sociology, and statistics, who were eventually

⁶ In compiling this selection of field research-based work in American politics, and the subsequent discussions of work in other subfields, we have drawn on our interviews, email exchanges with fifteen other scholars, and other sources. We have not attempted to provide a fully representative sample of work published in each subfield, let alone an exhaustive treatment.

joined by the leaders of the national associations for anthropology, history, and psychology (Worcester 2001, 20). By the early 1950s, the SSRC was actively promoting area studies research and administering a wide range of committees and funding sources. Its Committee on Comparative Politics (chaired by Gabriel Almond from 1954 to 1963) was influential in setting the agenda of this subfield at least into the late 1960s.

The US government's role in fueling the expansion of international field research, motivated in no small part by geostrategic concerns, can hardly be overstated. The exchange program and grants brought into existence by the Fulbright Act of 1946 have supported research by many social scientists, among other purposes of the program. The National Defense Education Act of 1958 established Title VI federal funding, supporting programs that remain powerful influences on teaching and research to this day, notably Foreign Language and Area Studies Fellowships and what are now called National Resource Centers promoting area-specific training and study. The programs opened many research opportunities, but also led political scientists to concentrate their attention on the parts of the world they targeted, to the neglect of others. It was during the post-war period that national area studies associations began to form in the United States, as well.⁷ Finally, some foreign governments have also established programs that fund field research, such as the German Academic Exchange Service.

This pattern of funding and institutional development helps explain the special place that field research occupies in the subfield of comparative politics. For comparativists rooted in Title VI centers organized around area specialization, language training, and longstanding multi-disciplinary traditions of scholarship, academic culture encouraged or even demanded deep immersion in the countries under study. Within these communities, a field stay lasting at least a year, and perhaps including advanced language study and cultivating a well-rounded historical and cultural conversancy with the country or region in question, was considered a normal part of doctoral training. Indeed, such norms became embodied in institutions such as the Inter-University Program for Chinese Language Studies (started in Taipei in 1963, later moved to Beijing) and in the firm requirement of some Fulbright and other grants that the recipient remain in-country for a full calendar year.

⁷ As Munck notes, the Association for Asian Studies, the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies, the African Studies Association, the Latin American Studies Association, and the Middle East Studies Association all were created between 1941 and 1966 (2007, 46n26). Most associations subsequently created area studies journals.

These research subcultures have engendered countless field projects, facilitating unprecedented immersion in overseas locales, but have also drawn criticism on grounds that they isolate area specialists from the ideas and research programs of other parts of the discipline (e.g., Geddes 2002). And, of course, many comparativists pursued cross-national or inter-regional modes of inquiry. Nonetheless, the stamp that these institutions have placed on parts of the comparative politics subfield is unmistakable.

Such institutions were not the only reason why comparativists have been drawn to overseas fieldwork, however. For many, traveling to other parts of the world has an intrinsic appeal. And in contrast to political scientists studying courts, politicians, or voters within the United States, who have had ready and increasing access to research materials from their home institutions, comparativists often have had little choice but to go into the field for their sources. This was especially true before the 1990s, when data frequently did not exist, were not reliable, or were not relevant to many of the pressing questions in developing countries on which scholars were beginning to focus.⁸ Indeed, what appears to be the first book on field research in political science was targeted specifically at those setting out for developing areas (Ward 1964b). Even with the changes that the internet and the electronic proliferation of available data have brought, it remains true that many kinds of information require on-the-ground collection.

Starting in the 1930s, America's expanding universities absorbed faculty and graduate students from Europe and elsewhere (Loewenberg 2006). In some cases, these scholars' backgrounds facilitated post-war field research on their home countries or other countries where their native language prevailed.⁹ In later decades, an influx of international talent continued from Asia, Latin America and other developing areas as well as Europe, further pluralizing international research. The assumption that the US-based political scientist traveling abroad is necessarily a foreign outsider marked by "the differences of appearance, speech, and living patterns that distinguish the foreigner from the native inhabitant," which may often have been accurate a generation ago, is far from consistently correct today (Ward 1964a, 61).

According to our survey, comparativists have been responsible for about half of all field research projects in the discipline. The topics under

⁸ For example, regarding public opinion data: the World Values Survey was initiated in 1990, while regional surveys in the developing world were established even later with the Latinobarometro beginning in 1995, the Afrobarometer in 1999, and the Asia Barometer Survey in 2001.

⁹ As Munck and Snyder's interviews make clear, Juan Linz and Arend Lijphart are examples (2007, 150–209, 234–272).

exploration have evolved over the years. Earlier work in comparative politics was marked by a tendency toward broad issues such as political development, modernization, and political culture. More recent work has been focused on specific actors, dynamics, and processes, producing a panoply of scholarship on issues such as migration (Ellermann 2009; Adida 2014; Goodman 2014), associations (Haddad 2007; Jamal 2007; Tsai 2007), voter–politician links like networks and clientelism (Wantchekon 2003; Baldwin 2013), public opinion (Baker 2009; Tessler 2011), social movements (Stokes 1995; Perry and Li 1996; Baldez 2002), and much more. Comparativists have delved into topics in Europe and other industrialized settings, from civic culture (Banfield 1958; Putnam 1993) to labor (Thelen 1991) to parties (Kitschelt 1989; Grzymala-Busse 2002) to social policy (Immergut 1992; Pierson 1995; Häusermann 2010; Jacobs 2011). In developing-world settings, they have examined politics at the national level (Liddle 1996; Ames 2001; Slater 2010; Vu 2010) and at the local and micro level (Scott 1985; Kohli 1987; Boone 1992; Schatz 2004; O'Brien and Li 2006; Thun 2006; Fox 2007). Comparativists have also pioneered new approaches for conducting research in repressive, authoritarian political environments (Wedeen 1999; Carlson *et al.* 2010). Comparative researchers have pursued up-close exploration of subjects that once tended to be studied in indirect ways, such as rebellion and insurgency (Reno 1998; Wood 2003; Weinstein 2007) and racial or ethnic identity and conflict (Brass 2003; Chandra 2004; Yashar 2005; Straus 2006; Fujii 2009; Habyarimana *et al.* 2009).¹⁰

If fieldwork was once unusual in international relations (IR), it has become substantially more common over time.¹¹ One examination of some 300 studies of international organizations published in the 1960s revealed that only 16 involved what the author considered to be field research techniques, including interviews and observation (Alger 1970, 431–432). Yet, as early as the 1950s and 1960s, a handful of researchers were already studying institutions like the United Nations, the Council of Europe Assembly, and the International Labor Organization through fieldwork (Alger 1963, 1966, Haas 1964; Miles 1970). And today, many IR scholars regularly visit their countries of specialization to exchange ideas with local experts, and

¹⁰ As noted in the discussion of American politics, in these subfield overviews we do not strive for a fully representative treatment but merely aim to convey the range of subjects that have been studied through field research. Many further examples follow in later chapters.

¹¹ In our survey, discussed later in this chapter, projects by scholars identifying IR as their primary or secondary subfield grew over time as a percentage of all field research projects, from 24 percent in the 1960s and 1970s to 37 percent from 2000 on.

some do stints of service in government agencies and multilateral organizations, enriching their understanding of the practice of statecraft (Barnett 1997, 2002; Krasner 2009, 254–274). Field research has contributed to work on traditional topics within this subfield, such as alliances (Pressman 2008), sovereignty (Carlson 2005), decision-making (Saunders 2011), and other aspects of foreign policy. Yet the scope of subjects under study has broadened to include global governance in dozens of issue areas, international legal regimes, tribunals, and courts (Bass 2000; Peskin 2008), epistemic communities (Cross 2011), transnational social movements (Lynch 1999; Khagram 2004; Sikkink 2011; Brysk 2013), civil wars (Lischer 2005, 2011), peacekeeping (Howard 2008; Autesserre 2010), nuclear proliferation (Hymans 2006), and international political economy (Mosley 2003; Newman 2008). The constructivist movement and its insistence on examining norms, ideas, and the creation of identities and interests has clearly been one impetus driving new forms of empirical research.¹² While these phenomena can be studied in multiple ways, many international relations scholars have fruitfully explored them through interviews, archival work, and immersive forms of observation.

While political theorists might not generally be known for their peripatetic ways, the work of influential figures such as Benedict Anderson (1991) – who conducted research in Indonesia in the 1960s prior to being banned by the Suharto regime, and also lived in Thailand – illustrates the crucial contributions field research makes to intellectual progress even in this disciplinary subfield.¹³ Many theorists travel to distant libraries and repositories to examine rare texts and archival materials or exchange ideas with local experts (e.g., Kohn 2003; Jenco 2010; Seth 2010; Bajpai 2011; Keating 2011; Thomas 2012). In other cases, theorists have explored questions of political philosophy through interviews with ordinary citizens (Hochschild 1986; Monroe 1996; Jung 2008; Apostolidis 2010). Other work, too, examines empirical processes through field research in ways that are in dialogue with political theory (Bonura 2008; Leebaw 2011; Pachirat 2011; Ciccarello-Maher 2013). The recency of most of these examples may reflect trends in the subfield, such as the influence of postcolonial studies and a broadening of subject material beyond canonical Western texts and topics, that have driven theorists into work that rewards field research. The push for comparative political

¹² Finnemore and Sikkink make this argument in their review of constructivism, though they do not make a link between constructivism and field research in particular (2001).

¹³ A biography of Anderson at <http://postcolonialstudies.emory.edu/benedict-anderson> (accessed November 24, 2013) mentions his research in Indonesia and Thailand; see also Cheah (1999).

theory since the late 1990s has helped to spur projects that cut across conventional boundary lines and investigate new terrain; some scholars in this camp have explicitly stated that “political theorists may realize the need to join their comparativist colleagues in language study, historical research, and fieldwork” (Jenco 2007, 753; see also Flikschuh 2014).¹⁴

In short, while we might tend to associate field research with comparative politics – and while many scholars who identify with this subfield do in fact gather data in the field – field research is a disciplinary, not subfield-based practice. Information gathered through interacting with actors and players in context informs our analysis in an immense range of topics across all subfields¹⁵ and research agendas in the discipline of political science.

Fieldwork's syncretic nature

In all subfields, when it comes to field practices and techniques, political scientists have absorbed influences from a wide array of research traditions, spanning multiple disciplines and even extending outside the academy. The influence of Chicago-style sociology and anthropological ethnography has already been mentioned, but it is worth pointing out that these influences have come in waves over time, with successive generations looking again and again to developments in other disciplines.¹⁶ Over the course of decades, field research practices in anthropology and sociology evolved and were contested in various ways (Tolman and Brydon-Miller 2001; Borneman and Hammoudi 2009). In particular, anthropologists and sociologists interrogated their role in broader structures of power (e.g., of colonialism, the West, the academic institutions) and some questioned the possibility of

¹⁴ Jenco cites Cheah, who writes that “what is needed is work of genuine comparative reach; detailed and empirically grounded research on particular regions outside the North Atlantic; and a theoretically sophisticated understanding of the complexity of material culture and social-scientific evidence” (Cheah 1999, 17). In advocating “philosophical fieldwork,” Flikschuh writes that she means “a preparedness to step outside one’s comfort zone *conceptually* rather than physically,” but notes that “I do believe that physical exposure to different contexts can be conducive to appreciating the intelligible distinctiveness of others’ moral and philosophical thinking” (2014, 15). On comparative political theory, see Dallmayr (1997, 2004) and Godrej (2009).

¹⁵ Because political science departments in the United States vary in how they self-organize by subfield, we have focused in this section on the four most commonly shared subfields of American politics, comparative politics, international relations, and political theory. As we show, field research is also prevalent and used to investigate a wide range of questions in departments that include a subfield of public administration and public policy.

¹⁶ As shown in Chapter 6, interviewing techniques have been shared among disciplines for many decades, and as Chapter 7 illustrates, political scientists have continually drawn on examples of participant observation and ethnographic research from sociology and anthropology.

scientific objectivity in their field research. These debates have resonated to a certain degree in political science, with some scholars embracing post-modern epistemologies while others remain committed to forms of positivism that shrug off such critiques.¹⁷

While the work of political scientists who have taken a “historical turn” – whether in American political development, political theory, comparative historical work, or international relations – and who thus grapple with texts and archival material may initially have drawn somewhat on methods used by historians, scholars in the discipline have developed their own (often more selective) archival approaches. The development of survey research methods, discussed in Chapter 8, has featured much interchange with sociologists, economists, and others. As Chapter 9 makes clear, field experiments in politics have been encouraged in part by the work of development economists, and that of laboratory-based experimentalists in psychology, economics, and political science itself. The enterprising efforts of investigative reporters, and journalistic practices and experiences more generally, have inspired some political scientists.¹⁸ In certain cases these templates are explicitly cited, studied, or imitated; in other cases they are merely taken as inspiration. Often the adoption of other research traditions is ad hoc and eclectic.

This *syncretic* aspect of field research in our discipline is a great strength. With no single set of practices enshrined as orthodoxy, political scientists have continually innovated by adopting varied sets of tools in order to obtain data and answer research questions. Yet too often, we believe, scholars have taken up the practices of other disciplines with little reflection. In so doing, they may have neglected possibilities for dialogue with other methodological lineages through which they might learn about the strengths and weaknesses of those borrowed techniques, and how to use them critically and effectively. For example, as Chapter 7 illustrates, scholars in our discipline engaging in what we group together as site-intensive methods often identify with just one tradition within that rubric, either ethnography or participant observation, to the neglect of the other. Moreover, this borrowing facility may have inhibited the emergence of a more unified self-identity among field researchers in

¹⁷ For example, Wedeen explores these issues in her discussion of the varied forms of ethnography practiced by political scientists (2010).

¹⁸ One interview respondent (BR-8, August 16, 2012) mentioned, as an example related to his own work, reporter Jonathan Rubinstein’s book based on a year in which he joined the Philadelphia police force (1973). Alfred Stepan, among others, notes synergies between his early work as a foreign correspondent in Brazil and his academic research (Munck and Snyder 2007, 399–403, 406–410).

political science, and a common conception of what it is they do. We hope at least partially to fill those gaps with this book.

The uneven geographic coverage of field research

The story of political science field research is not one of monolithic, unchecked expansion to all possible locations and topics. As we will see later in the chapter, while field research does extend to a great many places around the world, it exhibits a pattern of heavy concentration on certain regions and countries. Perhaps unsurprisingly, American academics conduct many field projects in the United States itself; they also visit Europe and particularly Western Europe in great numbers. Latin America, East Asia, and some parts of South Asia also receive sustained attention. Meanwhile, field research in (for instance) Africa, Central Asia, and Southeast Asia is spotty at best.

Multiple causes contribute to this uneven coverage. On the one hand, political dynamics have shaped, and continue to shape, the fieldwork emphases of political scientists. Closed borders, political repression, and military conflict have rendered field research impractical or impossible in certain parts of the world for periods of time. During China's insular Mao era, for example, an entire generation of social scientists grew accustomed to observing events in the mainland from afar, interviewing émigrés in places like Hong Kong and reading between the lines of newspaper reports and broadcast-media transcripts. As Tessler and Jamal observe, for decades, research on political attitudes, values, and behavior in the Middle East was heavily constrained with regard to "the countries where systematic survey research could be conducted, the degree to which representative national samples could be drawn, and the extent to which sensitive questions could be asked" (2006, 433). Indeed, as our survey data attest, researchers studying areas ridden with military conflict, ethnic strife, or violent crime must weigh a complex set of concerns, from personal security to ethics, in assessing whether or not fieldwork is feasible.

Yet restrictions or risk factors that deter research in certain places do not explain all of the waxing and waning in the scholarly attention paid to certain regions and particular countries. As we mentioned before, the priorities of organizations that contribute significantly to funding field research have also played an important role in directing researchers' geographic focus. Likewise, scholars tend to take an interest in countries that loom large in geopolitical significance and that have well-developed area studies institutions training specialists and encouraging research. The poorest countries of

the world, conversely, for the most part receive scant or sporadic attention. The precise mix of causes aside, the upshot is that we know far more about the on-the-ground politics of some places than of others. Our hope is that this book might contribute to evening out our knowledge base by helping scholars imagine branching out and pursuing research projects in less-traveled terrain.

The shape of field research in political science

The nature of field research and the general absence of aggregate information about political scientists' fieldwork practices would ordinarily make it difficult to go beyond a broad-brush characterization of trends punctuated by reference to specific examples. The desire for more precise and fine-grained data about field research in the discipline motivated us to conduct a survey of political science faculty, the Field Research in Political Science (FRPS) survey. Here we present some basic findings from this inquiry.

We have several objectives in this discussion. Most generally, we aim to convey key aspects of the nature of field research in our profession and flesh out the preceding discussion of the development of field research over time. In so doing, we also provide support for the arguments that we introduced in Chapter 1. First, while the form and function of fieldwork differ quite significantly from one political scientist to the next, there are also significant commonalities across fieldwork in the discipline. Second, a central commonality is political scientists' eclecticism, both with regard to data-collection techniques and data-analysis techniques: most scholars employ several data-collection techniques and engage in multiple types of analysis in the field, relating to every stage of political science inquiry; moreover, most scholars iterate between data collection and analysis, updating key aspects of their research design as they go. Third, field research is often guided by a set of core principles, which help to account for why it is an irreplaceable way to accumulate knowledge and generate theory about politics.

The survey

As discussed in detail in the Appendix, this survey was administered online from November 2011 to August 2012. In all, 1,142 political scientists with faculty appointments at US academic institutions took the survey.

The questionnaire asked about respondents' overall preparation for and experience with field research, but focused on questions concerning discrete *field research projects*.¹⁹ Each respondent who had conducted field research was asked to complete a battery of questions about her first such project, and then another about her most recent project, if applicable. Respondents were then given the option of completing a third battery of questions if they felt that another project was "most representative of how you approach field research." Collectively, 899 of the respondents reported on 1,468 discrete field research projects.

It is important to point out some of the survey's limitations. Ideally we would have liked information on field research stretching back to the early post-World War II era. But the gradually moving window of living memory as well as other constraints did not allow us to reach quite so far back in time. The earliest field research project reported in the survey commenced in 1955, but only twenty-two projects in the dataset were initiated before 1970. In short, the data prior to the 1970s are sparse. Indeed, the survey generally provided more data on relatively recent projects than on those farther in the past. The median project began in 2001, and only a quarter of all projects in the dataset began in 1992 or earlier.

The sampling frame was derived from a list, provided to us by APSA, intended to include every US-based political science faculty member (not merely APSA members). This list appears to have excluded many emeritus and retired members of the discipline, however. As explained in the Appendix, while our invitation emphasized that we encouraged the participation of all faculty "even if you have never done field research," only 182 respondents (16 percent) had never conducted fieldwork and had no plans to do so.²⁰ This evident response bias makes it problematic to compare respondents who have done field research and those who have not, or to model propensity to conduct field research. Thus, in this book, we employ data only from

¹⁹ Our survey of the discipline presented our definition of field research, which at the time of the survey was, "leaving your home institution to collect data or information that significantly informs your research." After synthesizing what we learned from the survey, and upon further critical reflection, we modified our definition slightly to the one we use for the purposes of this book: "leaving one's home institution in order to acquire data, information, or insights that significantly inform one's research." We are confident that presenting this subsequent definition in the survey rather than the one we advanced would have had no material impact on survey responses.

²⁰ The respondents who had not done field research, and sixty-one others who reported only being in the planning or early stages of their first field research projects, were asked a short, separate battery of questions. We plan to report results from those questions in a separate article.

those respondents who reported having completed or nearly completed one or more field research projects; we treat this as comprising a random sample of political science faculty with field research experience, mostly excluding those in the discipline who had already retired by 2011, rather than of all political science faculty. Likewise, the data most accurately reflect field research in the discipline since the 1970s.

Profile of field researchers and their projects

Who does field research: gender, ethnicity, and subfield

Who does field research? The data paint a picture of substantial and increasing diversity. The proportion of women among field researchers grew steadily from 21 percent in the 1960s and 1970s to 42 percent in projects from the year 2000 on. The latter figure is significantly larger than the proportion of women in the overall pool of political science faculty in the United States (30.2 percent in Fall 2011, according to APSA's list of US-based political scientists). Scholars who identified as Asian, Black, Latino, Native American, Arab American, or who specified a multi-racial identity constituted just 3 percent of field researchers in the early years covered by our study, but 15 percent in the last decade.²¹

In terms of subfield specialization, as noted earlier in the chapter, political scientists often think of field research as something that mainly comparativists do. Yet the data provide a reminder that this is not necessarily the case. As Figure 2.1 illustrates, Americanists and scholars of international relations made up a significant portion of the respondents who reported having done field research – and members of smaller subfields, from methods to political theory to public policy, also do plenty of field research.²² In fact, while comparativists constitute an outsized fraction of field researchers, the percentage of fieldworkers in the discipline constituted by scholars from each other subfield is generally proportional to the percentage of the overall discipline that those subfields comprise.

²¹ For comparison, the 15 percent figure is slightly higher than that found in 2004 for all non-student APSA members identifying as Native American, Asian American, Latino, African American, or "other." See Chart I.A.6: Ethnicity Distribution of Current APSA Members in U.S., www.apsanet.org/imgtest/IA6.pdf.

²² Figure 2.1 shows all subfield affiliations, not merely primary affiliations. If only primary affiliations are considered, some proportions change noticeably – political scientists whose *primary* subfield is methodology, for instance, make up less than 1 percent of those who have completed a field research project.

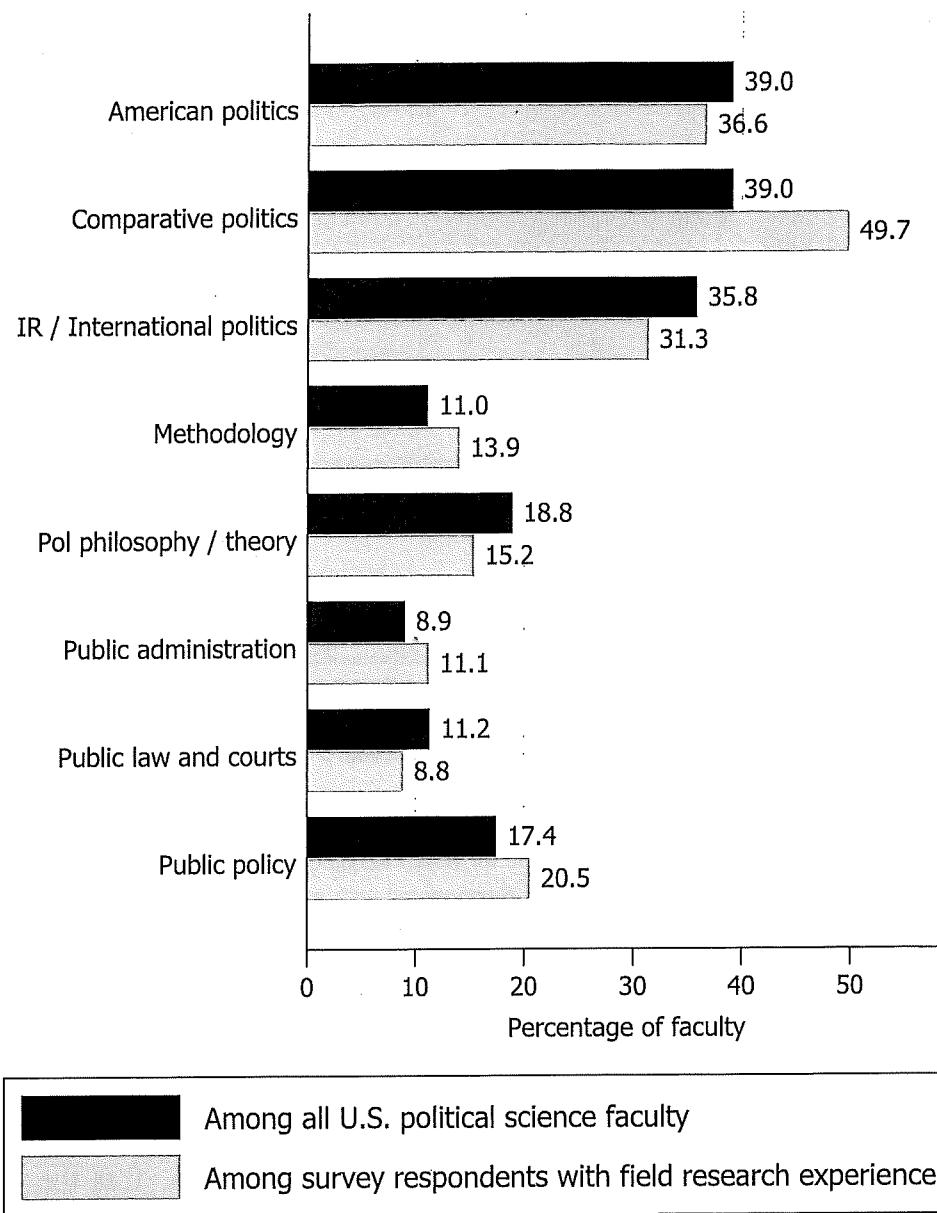


Figure 2.1 Subfield affiliations

Note: Faculty in database of US political scientists: 10,558. Survey respondents with at least one field research project: 899. 79.4 percent of faculty in the former and 65.6 percent in the latter indicated more than one subfield affiliation.

Experience with field research

Respondents from all subfields reported a wide range of experience levels with respect to field research. Some had never gone into the field while others had a dozen or more projects under their belts.²³ A histogram

²³ It is not always a straightforward matter to determine when a project has been completed, as scholars may draw on data they have collected over a period of years to inform one or more projects, or

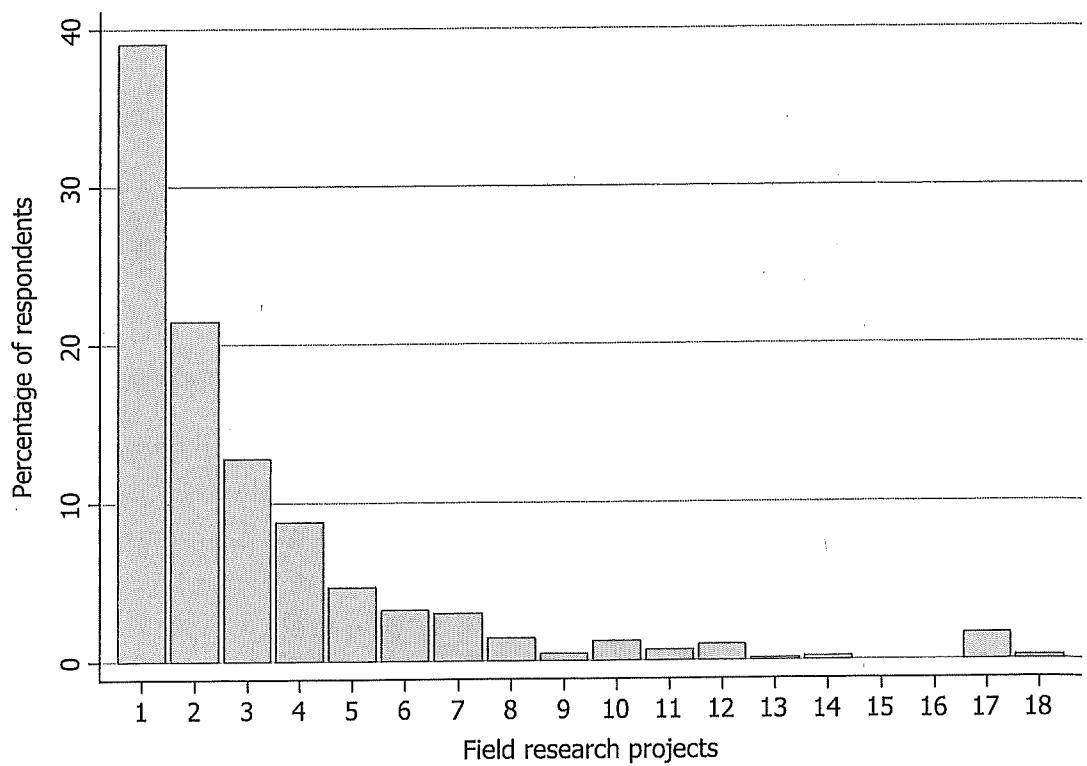


Figure 2.2 Number of completed field research projects

Note: Completed projects include those for which the field research was finished, or close to finished, at the time of the survey. Number of respondents with at least one field research project: 899.

(Figure 2.2) shows this distribution in full. Among respondents with any field research experience, 39 percent had completed just one project, while 27 percent had finished four or more projects. About half (49 percent) of all reported projects were dissertation projects or extensions thereof, while the remainder were projects begun sometime after the dissertation, whether in a non-tenure-track position (4 percent), as an assistant professor (17 percent), an associate professor (15 percent), or a full professor (15 percent).

Preparation for field research

Because of the trepidation that many graduate students express before venturing forth, we sought to determine whether, in general, political

may do research for a number of projects during any fieldwork trip. For purposes of the survey, a field research project was considered completed if “most” or “all” of the field research for it had been finished.

The shape of field research in political science

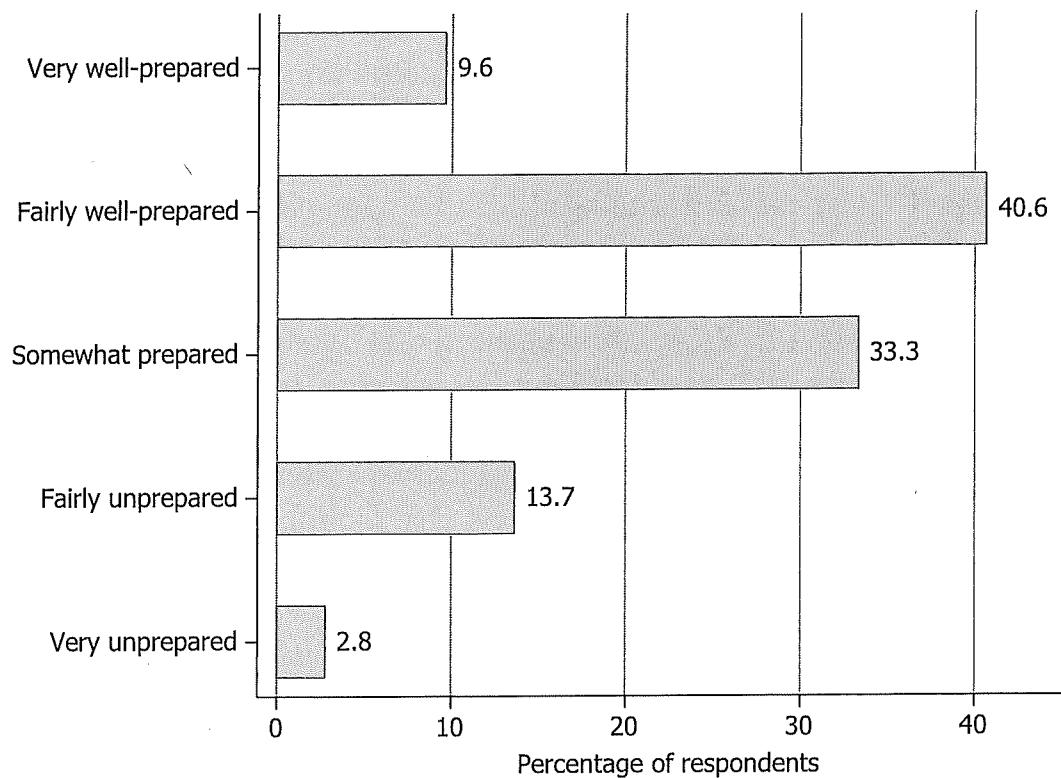


Figure 2.3 Overall preparation for first field research project

Note: Number of respondents: 945.

scientists feel they have adequate training and background when they set out on field research projects. Accordingly, we asked: “In retrospect, how well-prepared were you prior to your *first* field research trip?” Responses to this question were mixed. As Figure 2.3 demonstrates, about half of those who answered this question were “fairly” or “very” well-prepared, while the other half were only “somewhat prepared” or less. One might expect that researchers headed for destinations outside the United States would feel less well acquainted with field sites and thus less well prepared, but among such researchers the proportion feeling at least fairly well prepared was still 48 percent. Of course, for some researchers, field sites are familiar places, whether from their childhood backgrounds, pre-graduate school travel, or coursework. Of respondents who had completed a field research project, 84 percent indicated that graduate courses about the areas of research, study or travel in those locations, or relevant research, work, or volunteer experience had helped them prepare. Being well prepared for fieldwork situates scholars to pursue the kinds of engagement with context and critical reflection that we suggest are central to good field research.

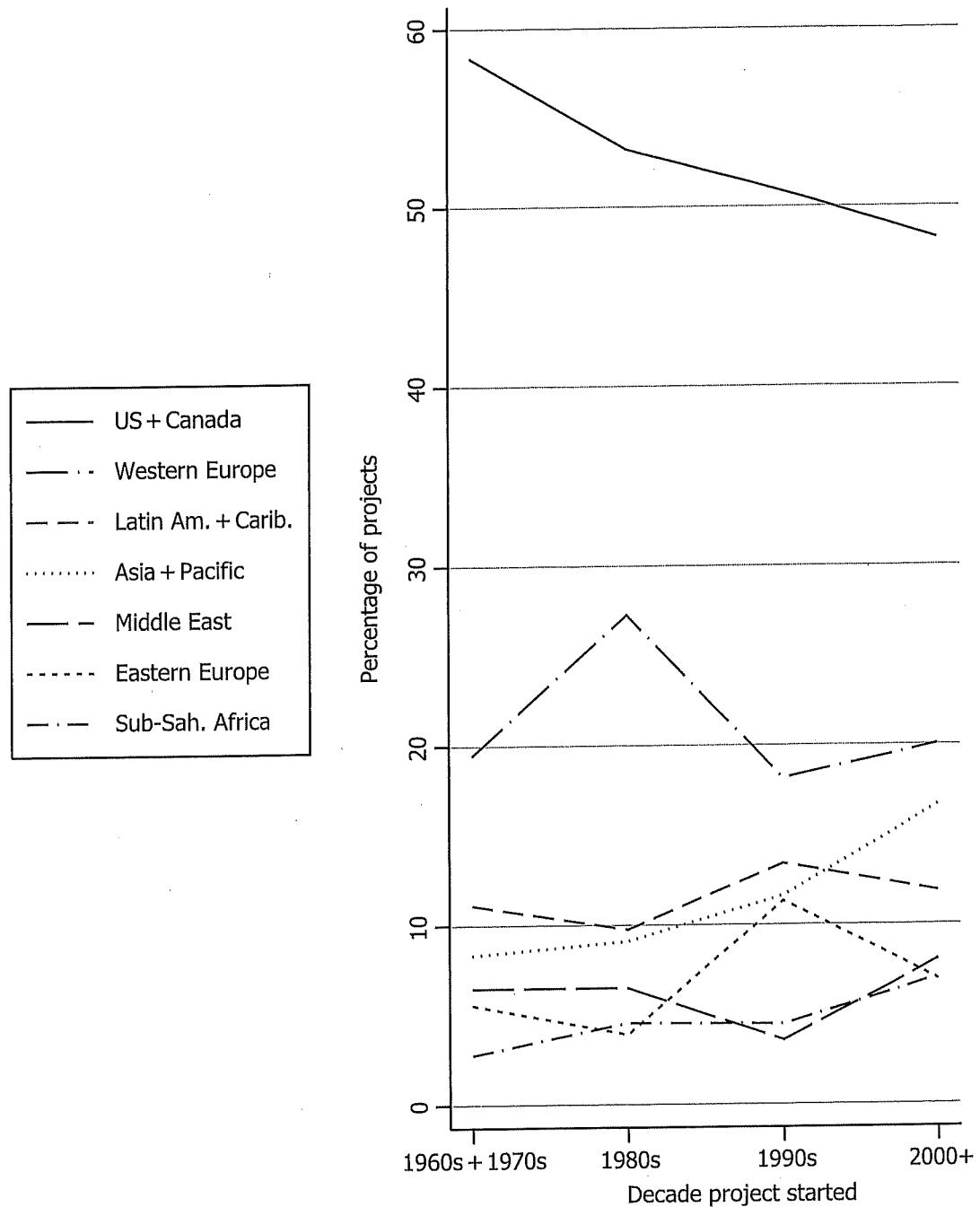


Figure 2.4 Region of project locations, by decade

Note: Total number of projects: 1,307. Some projects include locations in multiple regions.

The geography of field research

The distribution of field research projects by region over time in our sample is shown in Figure 2.4.²⁴ Most immediately noticeable is the predominance of

²⁴ In general, the World Bank's categories were used to define regions, with some exceptions to keep the data in line with general conventions in political science – such as differentiating Western Europe

projects in the United States and Canada²⁵ throughout the period under study, though the proportion of field research done in these two countries has declined slightly over time. Fully half (50 percent) of all reported projects included at least one location in the United States, sometimes in addition to other international locations.²⁶ Conversely, 57 percent of projects involved travel to at least one non-US location: more than a quarter (26 percent) of projects discussed by survey respondents entailed work in Europe, about 14 percent involved work in Asia and the Pacific, 12 percent in Latin America and the Caribbean, 7 percent in the Middle East, and 6 percent in Sub-Saharan Africa.²⁷ Together, Western and Eastern Europe, and in particular the former, have played host to a large plurality of international field research locations: 45 percent of all international projects included locations in Europe. Projects in Asia and the Pacific, and those in Latin America and the Caribbean, occupy the next tier, with Asian destinations growing notably in prominence over the last four decades. Projects involving the Middle East, Eastern Europe, and Sub-Saharan Africa each constitute 10 to 13 percent of all international projects, with Eastern Europe having experienced a temporary surge in the 1990s, the Middle East growing in popularity since the 1990s, and Africa research expanding slowly but steadily since the 1960s. These trends hint at a broad pattern of fieldwork in the discipline following important changes in macro-political dynamics.

The map in Figure 2.5 presents a visual picture of all field research locations reported in the survey, with the size of each bubble proportional to the number of projects for which the corresponding location served as a research site. Table 2.1 provides more detail on the most common destinations. Again, the overall prominence of locations within the United States is striking, reemphasizing the reality that fieldwork is not just for comparativists. Further, while Washington DC is the most-frequented city among American research destinations, included in 30 percent of domestic projects, most research in the United States happens in places other than the capital;

and Eastern Europe rather than combining them both with Central Asia. The Middle East category includes Turkey and North Africa.

²⁵ Projects in Canada constituted a small minority within this category; only 17 projects in the dataset included one or more locations in Canada, fewer than for Peru.

²⁶ Because international projects are similar to those based in the United States in some ways but different in many others, in many of the figures we report survey findings separately for international and domestic research.

²⁷ Some projects involved locations in multiple regions. Therefore, these figures sum to more than 100 percent.



Figure 2.5 Map of field research locations

Note: Capital cities are in dark gray. Circle size is proportional to the number of projects in which the location was reported as a research site. A full-sized version of this map can be found at www.psfieldresearch.org.

85 percent of locations in domestic projects were outside Washington.²⁸ Apart from major cities like New York and Boston, the locations of major research universities, Presidential Libraries, and national archive facilities are also notably represented, as well as state capitals. A total of 355 unique cities and localities within the United States were reported.

In international research, the cluster of large bubbles in Europe reinforces the fact that this region has received much attention. London is the foreign city most visited by US-based political scientists doing field research, followed by Paris, Beijing, Berlin, and Brussels. Naturally, such locations are sometimes visited in order to learn about other countries, such as former colonies.²⁹ In terms of other countries and regions that emerge as research

²⁸ To be precise: the unit here is not the location but the project-location. Thus, the 61 instances of New York City as a location in a field research project, the 45 instances of Boston, the 35 instances of Atlanta, etc., together total 85 percent of all project-locations in projects limited to the United States.

²⁹ For example, of the 97 projects including the United Kingdom, 12 indicated that the purpose of the research was to study the politics and history of countries other than the UK itself, through colonial archives and other sources.

Table 2.1 Top 40 field research locations: domestic and international

US location	Projects	Country	Projects
Washington DC	212	United States	670
New York City NY	61	United Kingdom	97
Boston MA	45	Germany	69
Atlanta GA	35	France	68
Chicago IL	32	China	61
Los Angeles CA	28	Belgium	41
Austin TX	26	Japan	36
Ann Arbor MI	24	Russia	35
College Park MD	20	Italy	32
Abilene KS	18	Argentina	30
Minneapolis MN	17	Mexico	29
Denver CO	17	Brazil	25
Simi Valley CA	15	India	24
Sacramento CA	13	Netherlands	24
Philadelphia PA	13	Switzerland	23
Independence MO	13	Hungary	21
San Francisco CA	13	Poland	21
Detroit MI	12	Spain	20
Columbus OH	12	Turkey	20
Seattle WA	12	Chile	19
Baltimore MD	11	South Korea	18
Palo Alto CA	10	Peru	18
College Station TX	10	Venezuela	17
New Orleans LA	10	Israel	17
Phoenix AZ	9	Canada	17
Jackson MS	8	Costa Rica	17
New Haven CT	8	Bolivia	16
San Diego CA	8	Colombia	15
Hyde Park NY	8	South Africa	15
St. Louis MO	8	Egypt	15
Springfield IL	8	Austria	14
Princeton NJ	8	Taiwan (ROC)	14
Cambridge MA	7	Ukraine	13
Montgomery AL	7	Ireland	12
St Paul MN	7	Denmark	12
Norman OK	6	Hong Kong (UK/China)	12
Richmond VA	6	Kenya	11
Rochester NY	6	Nigeria	11
Raleigh NC	6	Czech Republic	11
Des Moines IA	6	Norway	10

Note: Number of projects involving at least one research location: 1,337.

focal points, China and Japan are the most-visited non-Western countries; and field researchers leave particularly large footprints in South Korea, India, and the major cities of Central and South America. In fact, among all subnational locations outside the United States reported by our respondents, fully 52 percent were national capitals.³⁰ Southeast Asia, Central Asia, and most parts of Africa have received far less attention than other areas have. We have previously noted some evident reasons why scholars flock to certain field locations and avoid others: trends in the discipline, assumptions on the part of funders about what places most deserve study, issues of security and political accessibility, and the existence of strong area studies institutions for some but not all regions. The data we look at next provide further details and perspective.

Waxing enthusiastic about what seemed to him the ubiquity in the developing world of “young American research scholars bent on field work,” Lucian Pye once wrote that: “There is no land too remote, no village too ordinary or too primitive, no governmental process too imposing or too esoteric for this new breed of scholar” (1964, 5). Our data only partially bear out this impression: we find that not only are political scientists often drawn to politically central cities, they also gravitate toward richer countries. Figure 2.6 shows the countries of research locations broken into income categories based on the World Bank’s classification system. The high-income category includes Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) members as well as other rich countries such as various Gulf states and Singapore. Upper-middle-income countries include, for instance, Iran, Romania, and Malaysia; the lower-middle income bracket includes Indonesia and Senegal; and the poorest category includes Haiti, Kenya, and Nepal, for example. As the figure shows, three-quarters of projects scholars reported on were carried out partially or entirely in high-income countries. Even among international projects alone, only 9 percent included a country in the poorest income bracket. Further, outside of the developed world, attention is concentrated on countries that loom large in size and global prominence. For example, of all projects that included at least one country in the lower-middle income category, fully 38 percent included China or India. Of projects that included any of the 103 countries in the two middle-income

³⁰ Here too, the unit is not the location but the project-location. Thus, the 73 instances of London as a location in a field research project, the 59 instances of Paris, the 41 instances of Beijing, etc., together total 52 percent of all project-locations. If we look only at projects in lower-middle or low-income countries, the proportions are similar: 48 percent of project-locations in such countries are capitals.

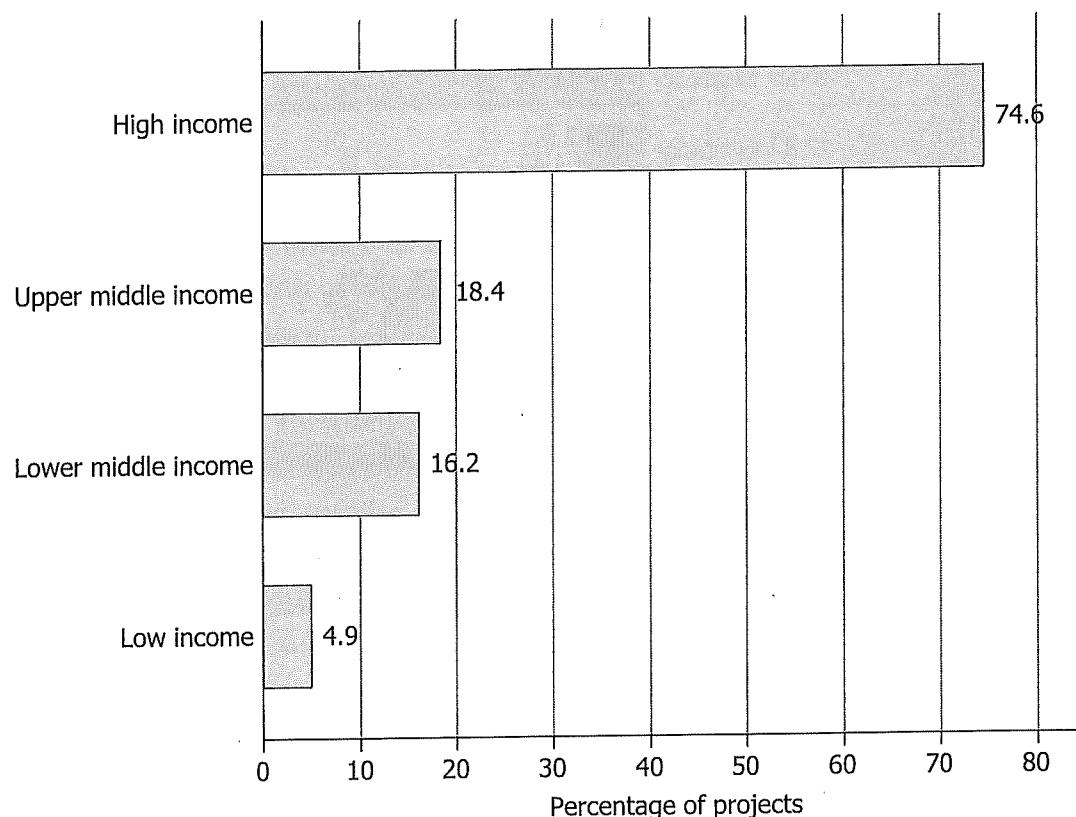


Figure 2.6 Income group of countries visited in project

Note: Total number of projects: 1,468. Income groups are taken from the World Bank's World Development Indicators 2010. Some projects include locations in multiple income groups.

categories, a third involved visits to at least one BRIC.³¹ Meanwhile, only eleven projects in the dataset reported Nigeria as a destination (0.8 percent of all projects, 1.4 percent of all international projects); 8 projects included Indonesia; 3 included Pakistan; 3 included Vietnam; 2 included Saudi Arabia; and 1 included Malaysia. A total of 55 countries were studied by no one at all in our sample.³²

Particular field settings can pose a range of challenges beyond those connected with socioeconomic level, of course – costs, one might say, of engagement with certain kinds of contexts. The survey tried to ascertain the incidence of some of the field-site conditions that can affect the conduct of research, in two main categories. One concerned particular kinds of social conditions that might complicate research: gender inequality; intolerance

³¹ That is, Brazil, Russia, India, or China.

³² Many of these countries are tiny and obscure, but others are less so, such as Azerbaijan, Belarus, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Laos, Libya, Montenegro, and Sudan.

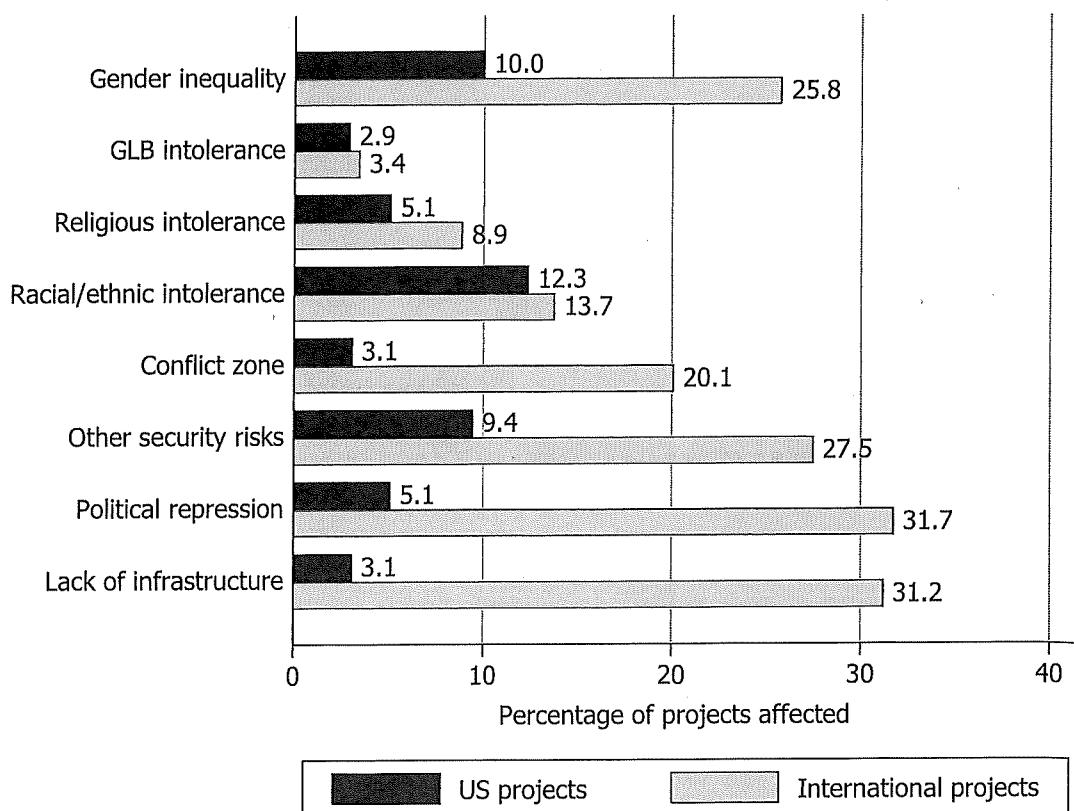


Figure 2.7 Conditions affecting field research, by project location

Note: Number of projects with locations only in the United States: 569. Number of projects with some or all locations outside the United States: 768.

for gays, lesbians, or bisexuals; religious intolerance; and racial or ethnic intolerance. The other concerned, in essence, security and political challenges.³³ Figure 2.7 depicts the frequency of these conditions. All told, in about 24 percent of US-based projects the conduct of research was affected by at least one of these challenges, a figure that rises to 62 percent among projects that extended to international locations. These data remind us that researchers' experiences in the field vary substantially, and advice that applies to one investigator may not apply to another. But they also suggest a commonality: by highlighting the real problems and risks that field research can pose, the data reinforce the importance for all fieldworkers of training, planning, and full-spectrum preparation for the varieties of adverse circumstances that can make field research difficult (see Chapter 3). They also suggest that flexibility and resourcefulness are

³³ Specifically, these were defined as "conflict zone"; "other risks to personal security, e.g., high crime rates"; "repressive political environment"; and "lack of infrastructure, e.g., electricity, potable water, transportation, etc."

indispensable skills that all scholars must develop in order to navigate their way through fieldwork environments.

Number of trips to the field and length of stay

We consider the number of trips made in the course of a project to be an important dimension of research, with significance for advising, funding, and the way we think about fieldwork. As noted previously in this chapter, in one model of fieldwork, absorbed from disciplines like anthropology, researchers travel to and steep themselves in a research site for a year or two, then return to their home institution to write up. Indeed, fellowships for international research sometimes require researchers to spend an uninterrupted year in-country, and this may be part of some advisors' expectations. Yet scholars may find it more productive, or simply necessary, to conduct fieldwork in a series of shorter stints, whether for personal, intellectual, or other reasons. Sometimes scholars may return to their home institution only briefly between trips, for a quick break; at other times they may take longer hiatuses from the field, processing and reflecting on the data they have gathered quite thoroughly before going back for more.

The FRPS faculty survey data show that, while plenty of political scientists engage in long-term, single-trip immersion, it is not the most common form field research in the discipline takes. First, researchers frequently spread their time in the field across multiple separate trips.³⁴ All told, only one quarter of reported projects (27 percent) involved just a single trip. On average, political scientists made five or six trips (5.6) in the course of a given project. Researchers working in sites that were relatively close to their home institutions tended to shuttle back and forth between the two more often. As Figure 2.8 shows, those conducting US research within the city or state in which they were based made ten or more trips 44 percent of the time, while only 21 percent of those traveling to other states made that many forays. But even those traveling to international locations made nearly four trips on average (the median number of trips in such projects is two). One implication of the above is that field researchers often have more than one chance to get the material they need. Another implication is scholars have opportunities

³⁴ The survey instrument clarified: "By separate trip, we mean leaving your permanent home or home institution, going to one or more of the project locations, then returning." Note that the time between trips could be short (e.g., returning briefly for a conference or vacation) or long (e.g., returning from the field for the academic year, then going back the next summer).

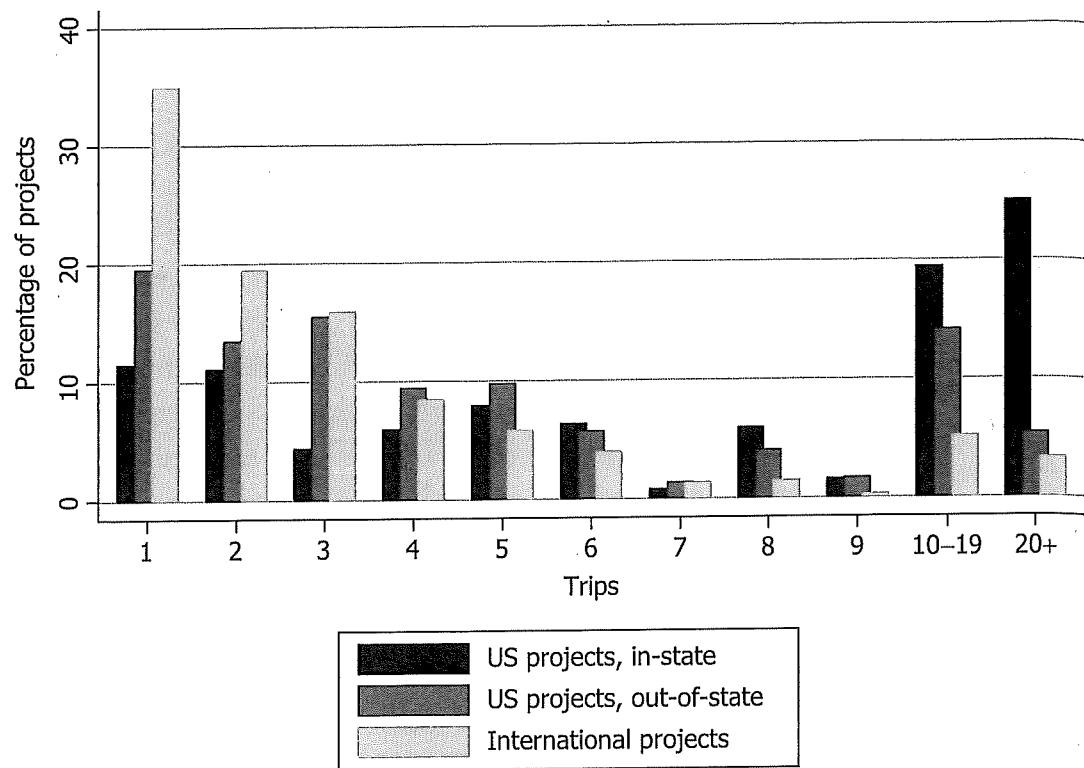


Figure 2.8 Number of trips, by project location

Note: Number of projects with locations only in the United States: 549. Number of projects with some or all locations outside the United States: 756.

to iterate, updating their design and engaging in additional analysis as they travel back and forth to the field.

The practices of political scientists often diverge from the long-term-immersion model in a second way as well: only slightly over one quarter of reported projects involved the researcher spending a total of one year or more in the field. Figure 2.9 shows a significant contrast between domestic projects and international projects in this regard. Scholars researching just in the United States were much less likely to spend 365 days or more in the field (regardless of the number of trips across which those days were spread) than were scholars conducting international research (16 percent of projects and 33 percent of projects respectively). Moreover, in just 18 percent of all international projects, total time-in-field was a month or less – which is true of 45 percent of US-based projects. The variation observed here relates to an important distinction explored in the chapters that follow: between lean-and-mean research trips that focus tightly on a set of well-defined goals, and more expansive sojourns where research can proceed in a more open-ended and broad-spectrum fashion. In either type of project, we have contended,

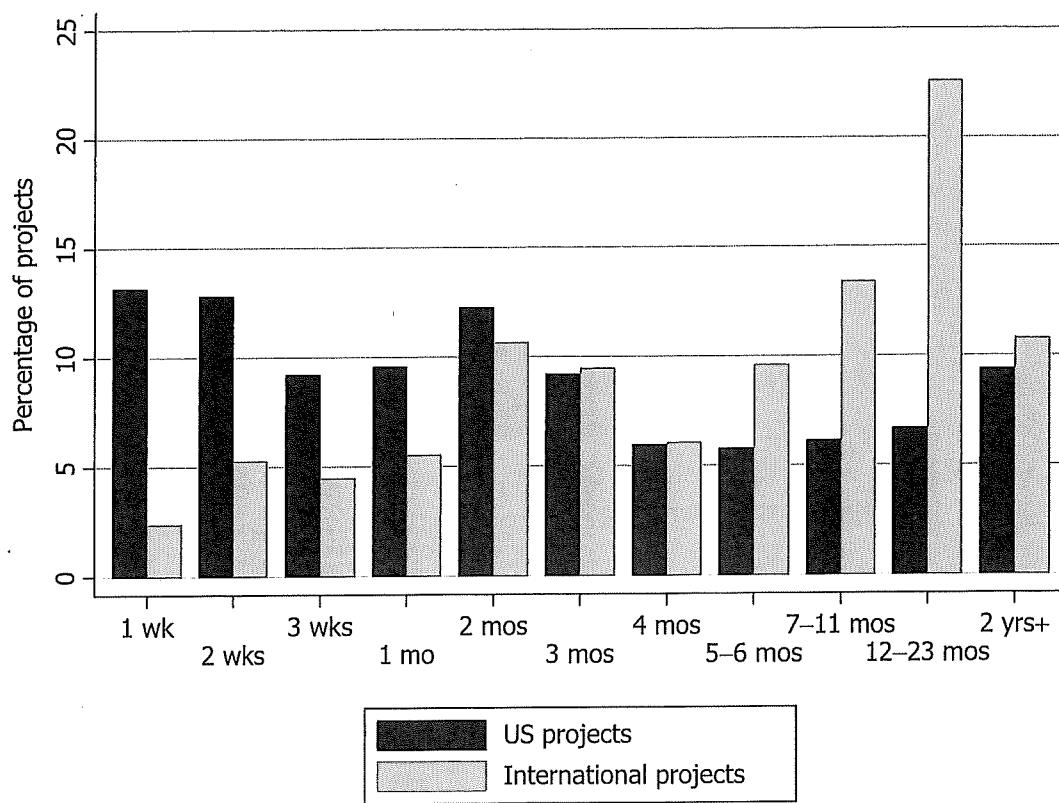


Figure 2.9 Time spent in field, by project location

Note: Number of projects with locations only in the United States: 555. Number of projects with some or all locations outside the United States: 762.

scholars can engage with the context in the consequential ways that make fieldwork a valuable research technique.

The amount of time spent in the field provides insights into the ways in which field research intersects with political scientists' career trajectories and life cycles. It is demonstrably the case that political scientists whose dissertations involved field research tended to take longer to obtain their Ph.D.s compared with those who started field research only later in their careers, or never did field research (8.5 months longer, on average).³⁵ Anecdotally, it can sometimes seem that political scientists do their most ambitious field research while in graduate school or early stages of their careers, scaling back fieldwork later.³⁶ The survey evidence on domestic field

³⁵ A two-group mean-comparison t-test placed the mean difference between 5.2 months and 11.8 months at the 95 percent confidence level.

³⁶ An interviewer (Munck and Snyder 2007, 187) stated to comparativist Juan J. Linz the proposition that: "As we move on in our lives and careers, it often gets harder to do fieldwork because we accumulate personal and professional obligations that make it difficult to spend a lot of time in the field. As a result, the typical pattern is to do fieldwork for the dissertation and first book and then shift

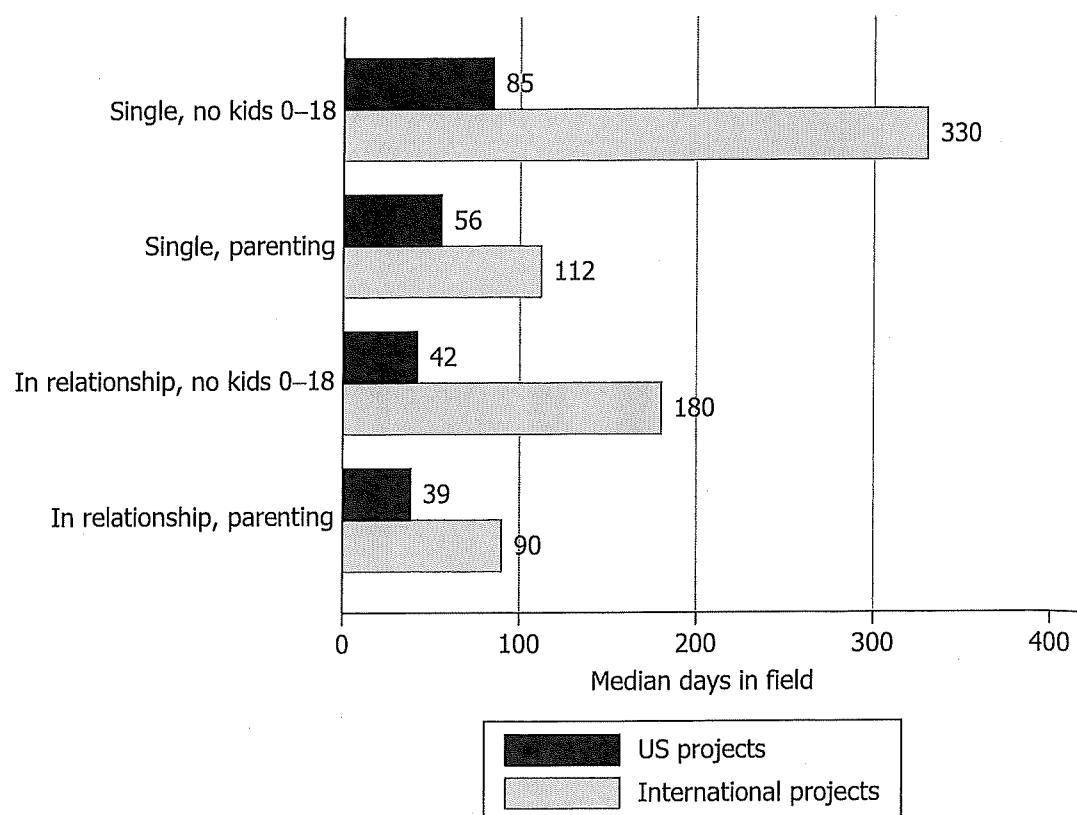


Figure 2.10 Time spent in field, by relationship/parenting status and project location

Note: Number of projects with locations only in the United States: 542. Number of projects with some or all locations outside the United States: 744. Relationship and parenting status were reported as of the start of the project. Relationship was defined as a marriage, domestic partnership, or other committed relationship.

research does not bear this out. But among 245 respondents who reported on two international field research projects, the later project was about 4 months shorter than the first, on average.³⁷ The survey also provides concrete evidence to support one other proposition that intuitively rings true: researchers' life circumstances affect the kinds of projects they carry out and the ways in which they pursue them. As Figure 2.10 shows, political scientists who were single and were not parents of children under the age of 18 tended to spend more time at their field sites than did those in marriages, domestic partnerships, or other committed relationships, and those raising

away from fieldwork in subsequent research." Linz explained that "My experience was actually the opposite of what you describe."

³⁷ A paired mean-comparison t-test placed the mean difference between 80 days and 164 days at the 95 percent confidence level. Four outlier projects were dropped for this analysis.

children (regardless of relationship status).³⁸ These patterns serve as a reminder that the forms of research we pursue are not driven entirely by methodological or intellectual considerations; rather, one way or another, field research is often made to fit into our lives.

Funding for field research

Regardless of life circumstances, field research requires money. The amounts involved vary widely, however. Projects reported in our survey ran the gamut from shoestring operations to lavishly financed ventures. Among projects involving research only in the United States, about half had less than \$5,000 in total funding, while the top 9 percent of projects drew on \$50,000 or more.³⁹ Among projects that included at least one international location, only about 20 percent scraped by on less than \$5,000, while the top 18 percent involved at least \$50,000. It stands to reason that overseas research costs more than projects confined to the United States, and indeed, the median international project absorbed \$17,276 in funding while the median domestic project used only \$4,810. (All funding amounts are in constant 2011 dollars unless otherwise stated.)

With regard to funding sources, about half of the time scholars reach into their own pockets to support part or all of their fieldwork. Personal savings were used in 48 percent of all projects, with the median amount lying just over \$2,000 among projects that required any personal funds.⁴⁰ Much more commonly, however, political scientists rely on funding from other sources: 73 percent of US-based projects, and 94 percent of international projects, included some non-personal funding. Political scientists commonly obtain support from their own colleges or universities: this was the case for 52 percent of US-based projects and 66 percent of international projects, with median funding amounts of \$3,810 and \$6,137, respectively. Funding from government granting agencies and other public sources looms particularly large in international research, with a median amount of \$23,184 going to the 34 percent of international projects that obtained support from these sources; by contrast, only 15 percent of projects within the United States were

³⁸ The survey's "relationship status" question asked whether respondents were "single" or "married, or in a domestic partnership or other committed relationship" – admittedly not an exhaustive set of possibilities.

³⁹ Total funds include personal funding provided by the researcher him- or herself as well as funds coming from public and private granting agencies and one's own institution.

⁴⁰ A relatively large proportion (56 percent) of US-based projects involved the use of personal savings, but the amounts were relatively smaller (median: \$1,380) compared to international projects (43 percent, median: \$2,730).

supported by government funds, with \$11,595 the median amount among those that were. Private organizations gave financial assistance to 23 percent of domestic projects and 31 percent of overseas projects, in amounts somewhat smaller than those awarded by government sources. These figures showcase the importance of becoming familiar with the range of sources that are available to fund field research, investigating granting agencies' processes and procedures, and learning to write strong, compelling funding proposals as part of preparation for field research.

Figure 2.11 plots trends over time among dissertation projects only, a category that allows for particularly meaningful comparisons across projects on this dimension. This graph illustrates, first, the previously noted funding difference between US and international projects. Second, the graph depicts the difference (for international fieldwork) between projects carried out by doctoral students in top-20 programs and projects by those in other departments.⁴¹ consistently over time, students at elite institutions marshal more funds for field research, particularly for international projects. This resource gap needs to be borne in mind when considering the kinds of field research projects that are feasible for graduate students. Third, Figure 2.11 shows a general decline, in inflation-adjusted dollars, in funding used in field research projects, even as nominal funding levels have by and large increased.⁴²

These changes are proceeding in step with other trends. Researchers working in the United States are making fewer trips per project, with the average declining from 11.2 in the 1960s and 1970s to 5.8 in first projects begun since the year 2000.⁴³ Field researchers are also spending less time in the field per project. Domestic projects shortened from an average of around 200 days from the 1960s through the 1980s to just over 100 days since 2000, and international projects declined from an average of more than 400 days in the 1960s and 1970s to 273 days since 2000.⁴⁴ These trends may be the result

⁴¹ Top-20 departments were coded on the basis of the National Research Council's 1995 rankings, as recoded by H. Joseph Newton of Texas A&M University. See www.stat.tamu.edu/~jnewton/nrc_rankings/area39.html, accessed August 26, 2012.

⁴² This figure may somewhat overstate the decline in purchasing power, as constant 2011 dollars were calculated using standard Consumer Price Index (CPI) values for the United States, whereas some field research inputs (e.g., airline tickets) may have become relatively cheaper due to deregulation, and the value of the dollar in overseas locations, of course, varies. Also, for the relatively sparse 1960s/1970s data, it may be that respondents selectively reported big, costly projects.

⁴³ These numbers are derived from first projects alone to enhance comparability across projects. The average number of trips in international projects has changed little over time, hovering at just over three trips.

⁴⁴ These numbers too are derived from first projects alone.

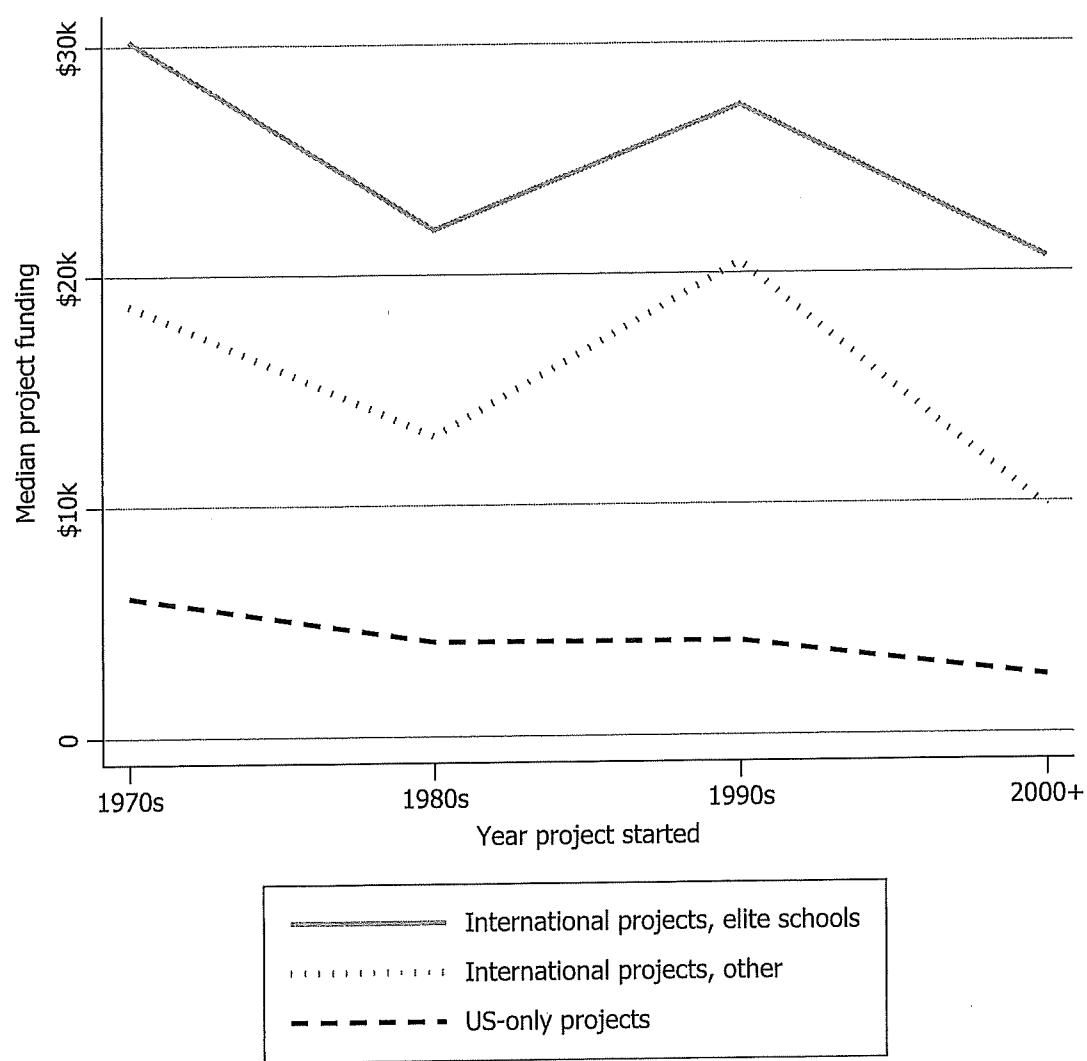


Figure 2.11 Total funds for dissertation field research projects, by decade and project location

Note: Funding is shown in constant 2011 US dollars. Number of dissertation projects with locations only in the United States: 244. Number of dissertation projects with some or all locations outside the United States: 374. Elite departments are PS Ph.D. programs ranked in the top 20 of the 1995 NRC rankings, as recoded by J. Newton (www.stat.tamu.edu/~jnewton).

of funding declines, or, indeed, the cause: on a per-day-in-field basis, median real funding levels have not, in fact, declined over the years. The trends may also stem from the greater availability of digital data, or many other factors. Regardless of their precise origin, they indicate a notable evolution in how field research is conducted. On the one hand, less time spent in the field might mean that scholars are increasingly able to carry out somewhat more streamlined and expeditious projects. On the other hand, some researchers may not have the choice to spend as much time

Table 2.2 Non-English languages used most frequently in field research projects

Language	Number of projects
Spanish	179
French	136
German	82
Russian	64
Chinese (Mandarin)	63
Arabic	42
Portuguese	31
Japanese	29
Turkish	19
Italian	19
Hindi	16
Polish	15
Hebrew	14
Dutch	14
Korean	13
Serbo-Croatian	12
Swahili	8
Czech	6
Hausa	5
Romanian	5

Note: Number of projects in which at least one non-English language was used: 658.

as they would ideally prefer and have to make difficult tradeoffs in terms of the questions they ask and how deeply they engage with the field sites in order to answer them.

Language use and preparation

Conducting overseas research often suggests the need to make a significant investment, with regard to money and time, in language study – another potential cost of field research. Much of the field research reported in the survey was conducted using English, due in large part to the high frequency of domestic projects: 93 percent of projects carried out in the United States (including Puerto Rico) involved no languages other than English. However, only 20 percent of international projects entailed using just English. Table 2.2 lists the most frequently used non-English languages across all the field research projects reported in the survey. Spanish was the single most

The shape of field research in political science

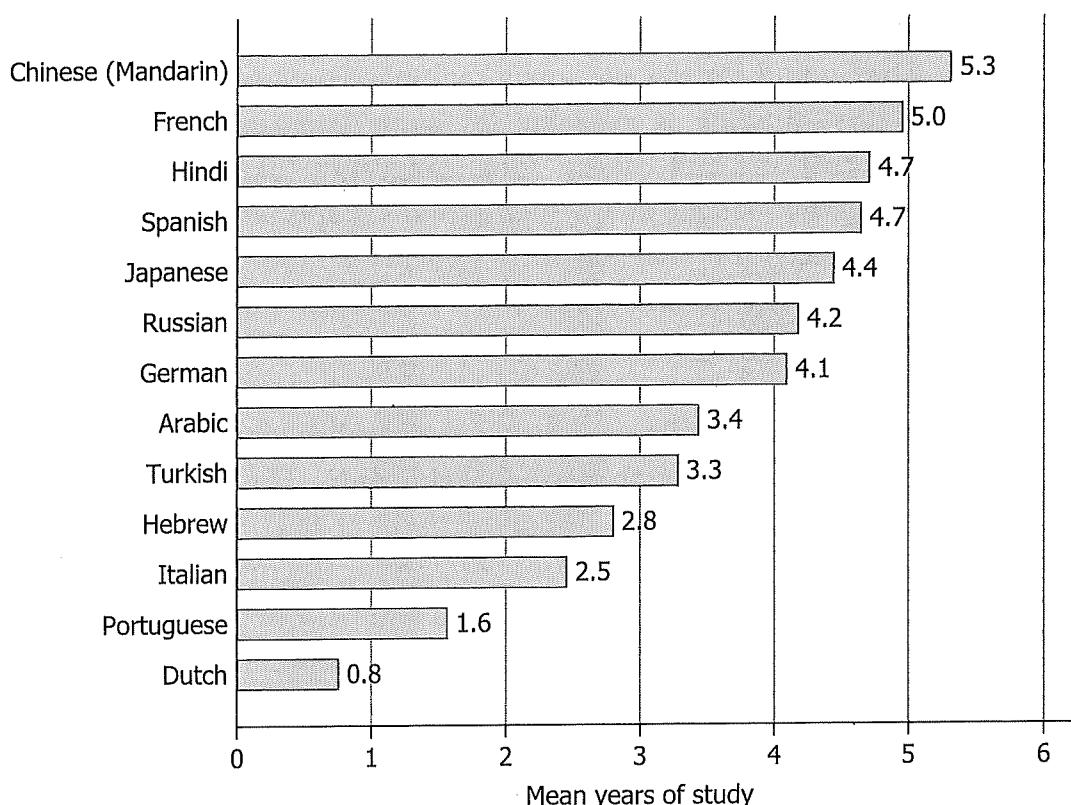


Figure 2.12 Years of language study, by language used in field research

Note: First field research projects only. Native languages not included. Languages used in 10 or more projects reported.

frequently used language, followed by French, German, Russian, and Chinese. All told, 87 distinct non-English languages or variants were reported.⁴⁵

The survey also collected data on researchers' prior training and degree of fluency in the languages they used to conduct fieldwork. Sometimes, field research in non-US locations involved the use of at least one language that was a native tongue for the researcher, whether that be English used by an American in Abuja or Hindi used by an Indian in Uttar Pradesh. In 21 percent of international projects, non-English native languages were employed, testifying to the number of US-based field researchers with upbringings in other countries or in linguistically diverse households. More often, though, political scientists reported using languages that they had acquired through study. The average number of years of study varies by language, as Figure 2.12 makes clear.⁴⁶ Some languages were studied in a relatively abbreviated way,

⁴⁵ Some seven distinct dialects of Arabic were reported, for example.

⁴⁶ Survey takers were instructed that "years of study should reflect formal training at the time of this field research project."

perhaps just in advance of fieldwork, while others were cultivated for years. The reasons for this are surely multiple. Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) funding is available for some languages (including Chinese and Russian) and not others; some languages (like French and Spanish) are extensively taught in US high schools. Expectations of advanced fluency – and indeed the *need* for fluency (dependent upon how many of the people with whom the researcher will be interacting are proficient in her native language) – vary across destination countries. It is also possible that, for some languages, there are larger numbers of heritage learners (those with some exposure to a language during their upbringing) requiring relatively little classroom training to become field-ready. The time invested in language training represents an important facet of field research, and, as these data imply, can entail a significant cost, but, again, may be important for the kind of engagement that we suggest is a hallmark of good field research. Current reductions and threats to eliminate the Department of Education's Title VI funding for language education thus have significant implications for the future of field research, as discussed in Chapter 11.

Practices of field researchers

So far we have considered the overall profile of field research projects and the scholars who undertake them. Here we turn to examining data on field researchers' specific practices. What do political scientists do in the course of these projects, and what do their practices suggest about the general nature of fieldwork in the discipline? As Chapter 1 indicated, one core contention of this book – and commonality of fieldwork in the discipline – is that political scientists who engage in field research employ multiple data-collection techniques *and* engage in a diverse mix of practices that extend far beyond data collection. Moreover, most political scientists *iterate* between data collection and data analysis as they carry out field research. That is, for many scholars, the very framing of their project remains productively and necessarily in play while they are in the field. Iterating among the research tasks we discuss below allows them to strengthen and refine their project's design, and ultimately conduct better research.

One important variable with regard to fieldwork practices is how much data for any particular research project scholars who engage in fieldwork collect in their field locations. While an initial hunch might be “the lion's share,” projects ranged very widely in this regard. As the histogram in Figure 2.13 shows, less than a quarter of all reported projects involved the

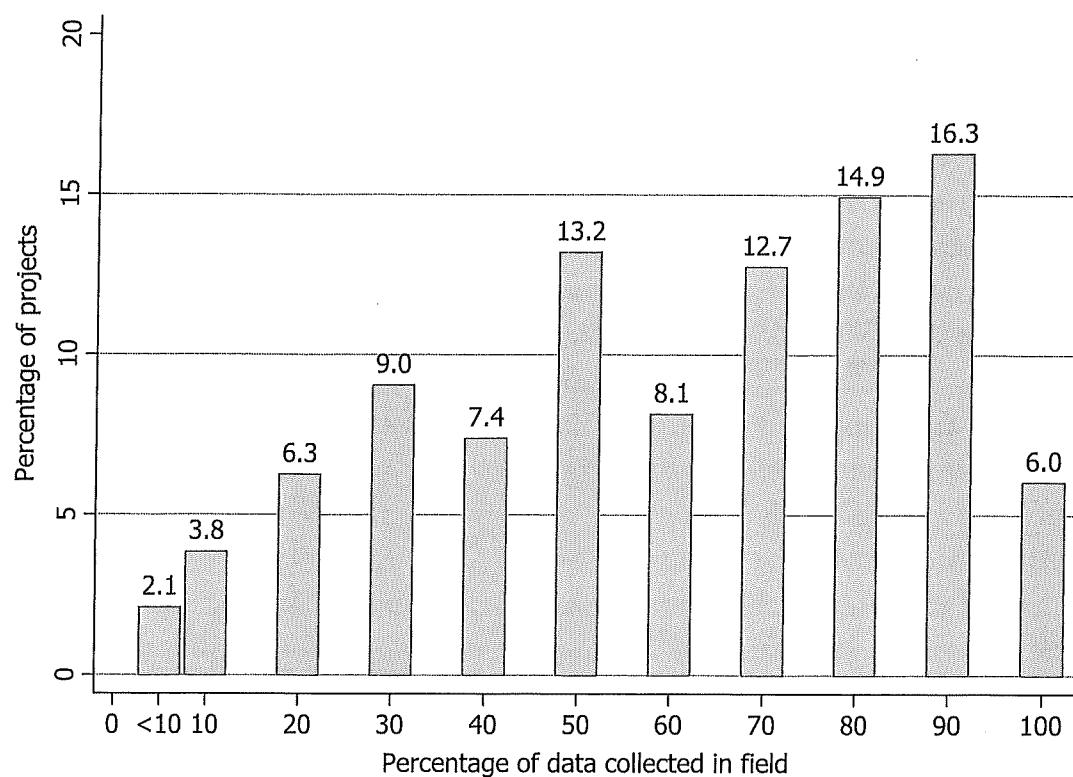


Figure 2.13 Proportion of project data collected in the field

Note: Total number of projects: 1,326.

collection of 90 or 100 percent of the data in the field, and in two-fifths of projects, field research accounted for no more than half of all the data that were collected. Information gathered in context, in other words, is commonly combined with data gathered through other means; fieldwork sometimes provides supplementary data rather than the primary wellspring of source material. This opens the opportunity for triangulation – and highlights the importance of considering strategies for integrating data from different types of sources, and techniques for evaluating the evidentiary value of data with varying provenances in order to assess how heavily to rely on them as one engages in analysis.

As Figure 2.14 shows, the proportion of data underlying particular research projects that is collected in the field has gradually declined over time for both international and US projects. This trend may have many root causes. To name just two, it may be caused by a contraction in funding for field research, or by the rising availability of online data and their increasing use as a complement to data gathered in person. This graph also demonstrates that, overall (considering all non-US locations, developed and developing alike), researchers going abroad tend to obtain a greater fraction

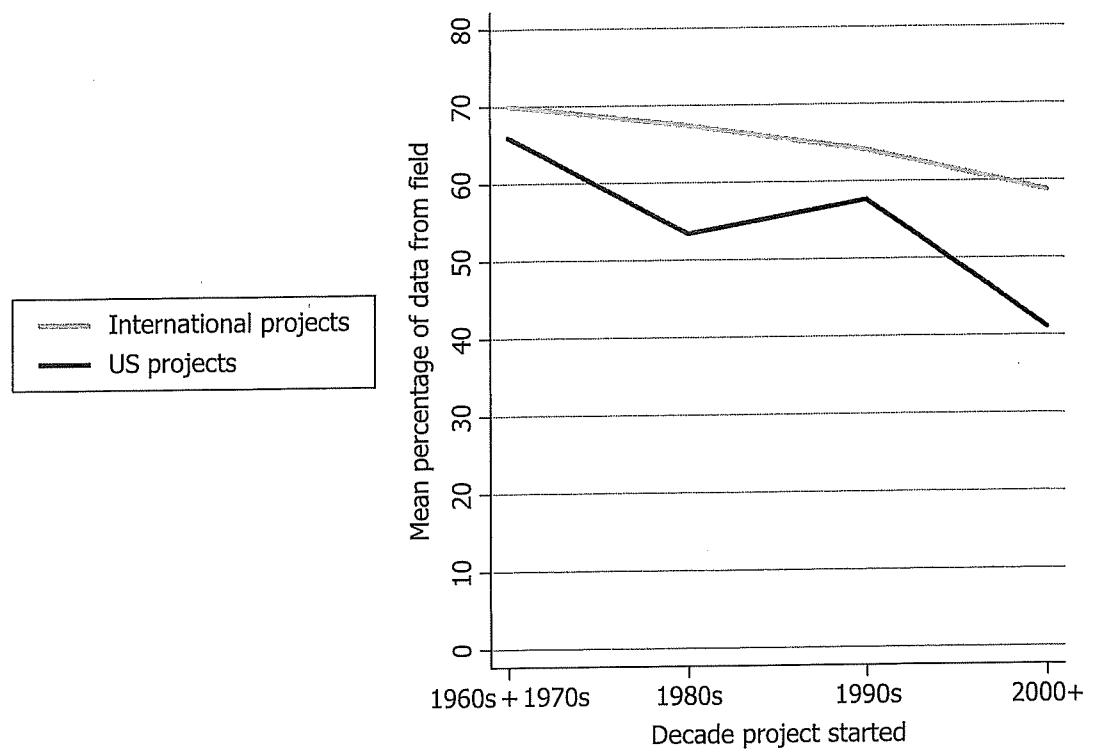


Figure 2.14 Proportion of project data collected in the field, by decade and project location

Note: Dissertation projects only. Number of projects with locations only in the United States: 245. Number of projects with some or all locations outside the United States: 379.

of their data from the field than do scholars who carry out fieldwork in the United States – perhaps because there are more pre-existing datasets, troves of records and archives, and other non-field sources more readily at hand for research on American politics.

For each field research project, the survey asked researchers to report which of thirteen data-collection techniques they made “significant use of” while in the field.⁴⁷ The results show that political scientists use a wide array of strategies to gather data in the field; moreover, they are omnivorous in their appetites, commonly employing a wide range of techniques rather than just one or two. This further establishes the point that field researchers often triangulate: they take advantage of the richness of local contexts to gather and combine multiple forms of information creatively, using results from one

⁴⁷ To clarify: the fourth category was defined as “Compilation of quantitative data (in ways other than the above)” and the last three were “Collection of articles or data from newspapers, radio, or other media (other than those found in archives)”; “Collection of published books, reports, etc. (other than those found in archives)”; and “Collection of other documents, e.g., maps, brochures, posters, etc. (other than those found in archives).”

type of inquiry to inform and refine another. The single most prevalent technique was interviewing, which figured significantly in about 81 percent of all projects. Rarely, it seems, do scholars pass up opportunities to shed light on their topics by posing questions in face-to-face conversations. Substantial numbers also reported gathering quantitative data (through surveys, field experiments, laboratory experiments, and other means), and collecting media reports, documents and other published material both inside and outside of archives. Smaller numbers conducted oral histories or focus groups.

Figure 2.15 shows the techniques used in projects by researchers in three major subfields (American politics, comparative politics, and international relations).⁴⁸ It begins to suggest ways in which the day-to-day work of field research varies in different parts of the discipline, with Americanists (for instance) doing somewhat more collection of survey data and other forms of quantitative data than comparativists and IR scholars, and somewhat less interviewing and collection of media reports and other publications. Notably, a full 45 percent of projects by comparativists employed ethnography or participant observation; members of other subfields also employ these techniques, but not as commonly. While the prevalence of particular techniques does vary among branches of the discipline, the data also caution against associating any one form of data collection exclusively or too closely with a particular subfield.

While we have noted that political scientists tend to employ more than one technique to gather data, even more striking is that, since the 1960s and still today, most political scientists use multiple data-collection techniques in the course of a *single project*. Indeed, a typical project drew on five data-collection techniques, and 31 percent of all projects involved *seven or more* techniques.⁴⁹ While the use of multiple techniques is common in all types of projects, this tendency is particularly pronounced in international research. As Figure 2.16 depicts, just considering fieldwork in the United States, 65 percent of projects involved four or more data-collection techniques, while among international projects, the corresponding figure was 81 percent. In US projects, the median number of data-collection techniques was five, as opposed to a median of six for international projects.

Our interviews accorded with this and provided details concerning how political scientists put multiple techniques to work. Our respondents

⁴⁸ The other five subfields are omitted here, for the sake of simplicity.

⁴⁹ The median number of data-collection techniques used is 5, and the mean is 4.9.

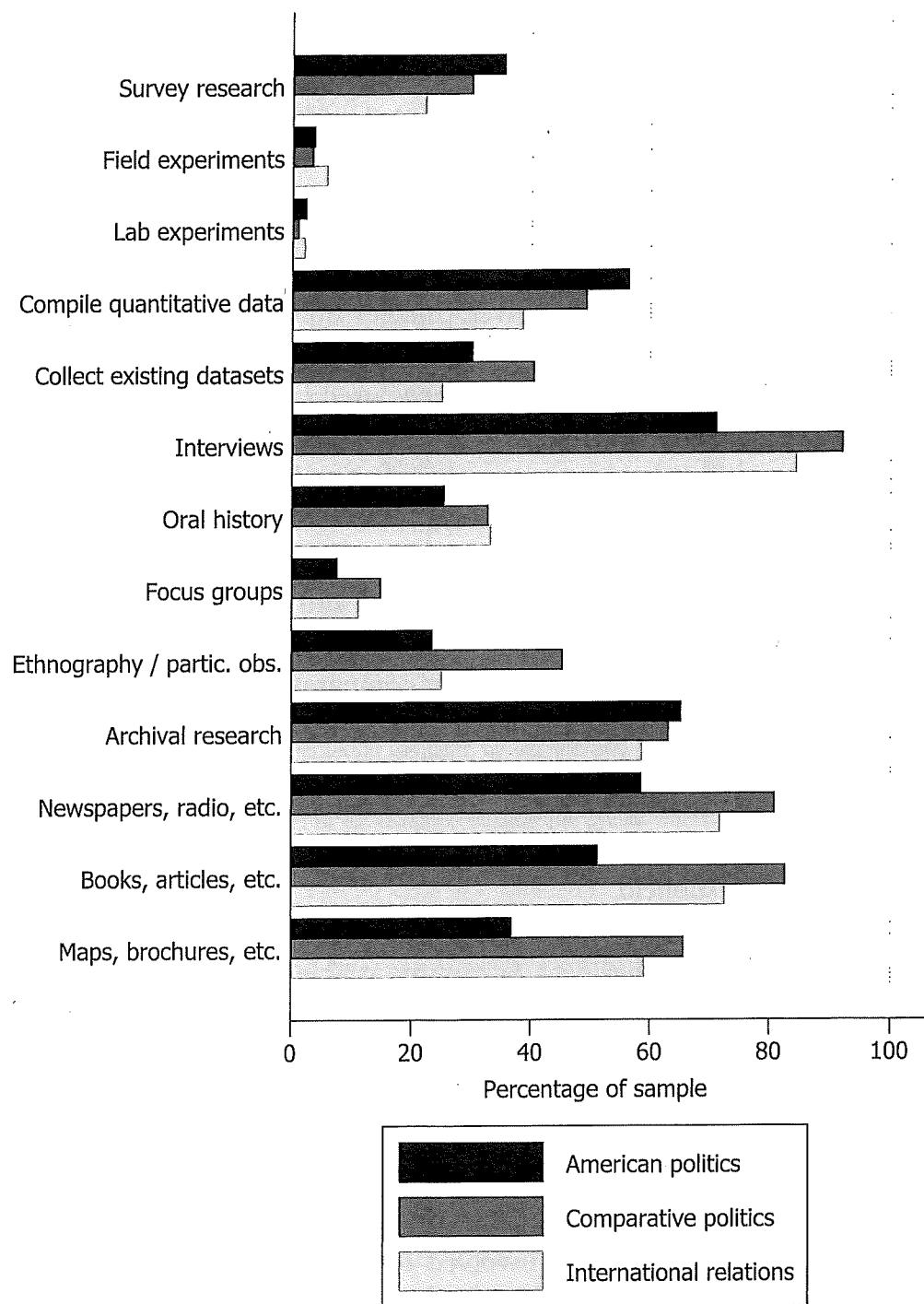


Figure 2.15 Data-collection techniques, by subfield

Note: Number of projects in American politics: 376; comparative politics: 519; international relations: 251.

recounted availing themselves of a wide variety of data-collection techniques, and it was the rare scholar who mentioned using just one strategy to gather data. One scholar of international relations in Europe indicated that he commonly did interviews and archival research, sampled secondary sources,

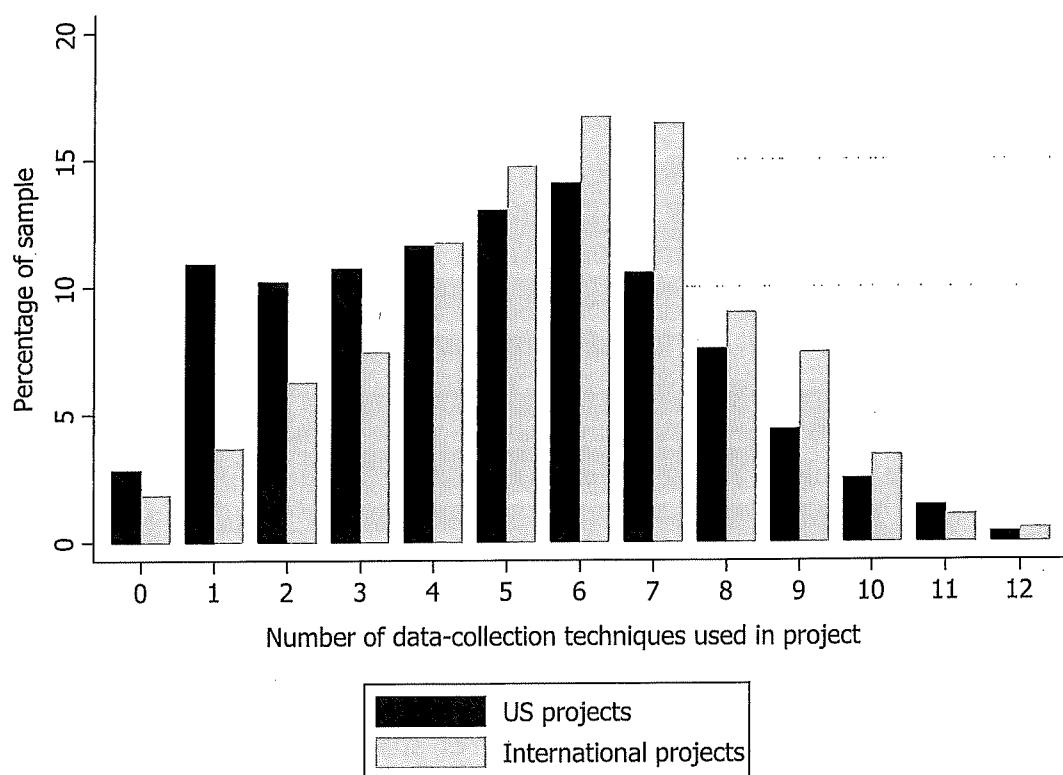


Figure 2.16 Number of data-collection techniques, by project location

Note: Number of projects with locations only in the United States: 569. Number of projects with some or all locations outside the United States: 768.

collected newspaper articles, engaged in participant observation, did ethnography, and collected quantitative data.⁵⁰ Moreover, we found that political scientists pair and combine data-collection techniques in perhaps unexpected ways. An investigator examining political economy in Sub-Saharan Africa, for instance, carried out a survey, did open-ended interviews, conducted a survey experiment, and did archival research (all in the same project).⁵¹ Another combined surveys with Geographic Information Systems (GIS) analysis, as well as ethnographic methods.⁵² And many others highlighted how “soaking and poking” and open-ended interviews were indispensable for determining how to carry out surveys or experiments in the field.⁵³

As Chapters 8 and 9 show, it is in fact common for political scientists to employ multiple techniques in the process of setting up, interpreting, and

⁵⁰ Interview, DK-6, July 31, 2012. ⁵¹ Interview, LM-13, September 7, 2012.

⁵² Interview, LM-8, August 30, 2012.

⁵³ Interviews, LM-13, September 7, 2012; BR-2, July 30, 2012; BR-6, August 14, 2012. We discuss the meaning of “soaking and poking” in Chapter 7.

following up on surveys and field experiments. In short, the deployment of multiple techniques within a single project – a form of triangulation – is a hallmark of data collection in political science field research.

An overarching argument of this book is that field research can inform many facets of the design and execution of research projects. It might seem obvious that one conducts field research because needed data or source materials are not otherwise available, and thus “gathering data” is the primary task in the field. Yet the survey provides powerful evidence that scholars make progress on multiple aspects of the research process – in addition to accumulating data – while conducting fieldwork, a point that we highlight in the chapters to come.

The questionnaire asked respondents to “indicate the tasks or analytic processes that the research you conducted *in the field* facilitated,”⁵⁴ and offered yes/no responses in nine different categories.⁵⁵ As Figure 2.17 shows, the overwhelming majority of respondents found their fieldwork to have been important for understanding the context of what they were studying, and for grasping causal processes. Yet substantial majorities also reported that critical elements of research design were also furthered by experiences in the field. These include the core tasks of developing or refining the research question, the hypotheses, and the concepts at issue. All told, in 76 percent of projects on which respondents reported, field research facilitated at least five analytic tasks or processes. In a clear majority of projects, fieldwork facilitated seven or more analytic tasks. In as many as 22 percent of projects, respondents reported that their field activities fed into *all nine* of the analytic tasks about which we inquired. While international projects involved a slightly larger number of analytical tasks than did domestic projects (an average of 6.8 in the former and 6.2 in the latter), the data demonstrate that reshaping or adjusting the major ideas and parameters of an inquiry on the basis of what is learned in the field – i.e., iteratively updating research design – is very common in both international projects and those based in the United States.

All this likely rings true for many readers with field experience, as it did for our interviewees. To briefly preview the many ways in which field research helped our interview respondents to carry out key analytic tasks,⁵⁶ many

⁵⁴ Emphasis in the questionnaire.

⁵⁵ As spelled out fully in the questionnaire, these were “Understanding the research context, Developing or refining the research question, Developing hypotheses, Developing concepts, Developing measures or operationalizing concepts, Selecting cases, Gathering previously unavailable data, Testing hypotheses, [and] Understanding causal processes.”

⁵⁶ Each example is expanded on later in the book.

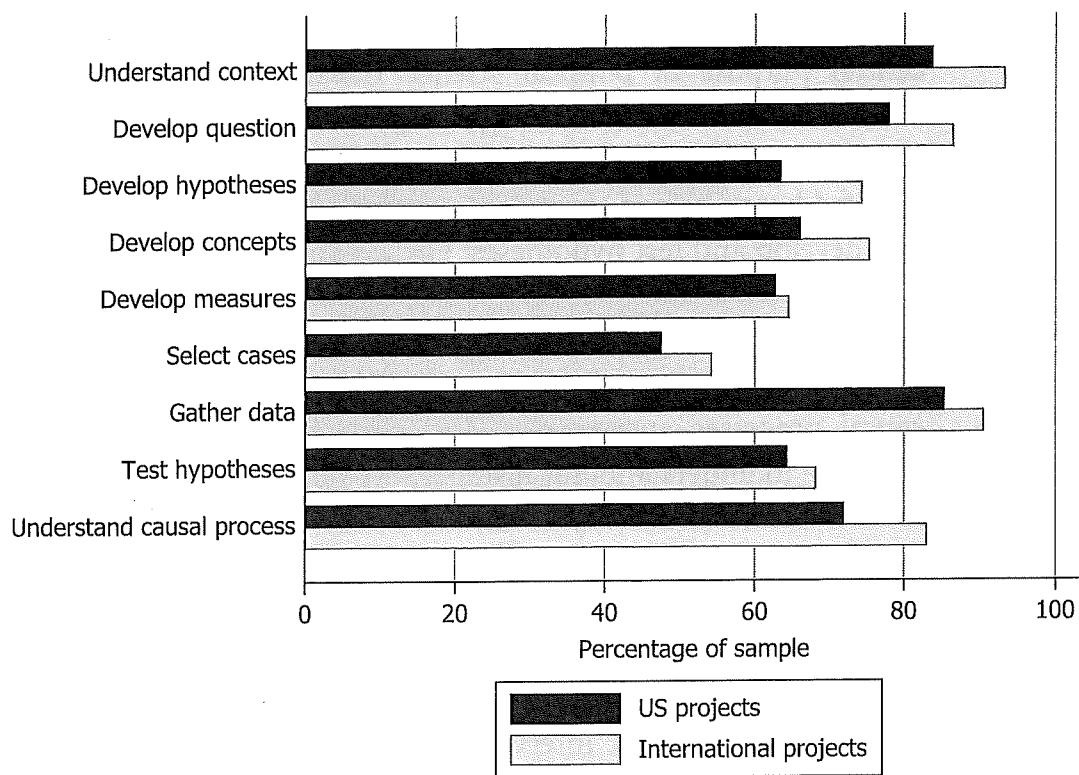


Figure 2.17 Analytical tasks and processes facilitated by field research, by project location

Note: Number of projects with locations only in the United States: 569. Number of projects with some or all locations outside the United States: 768.

(although not all) of our interviewees emphasized how field research – particularly in the early stages of a project – helped them to sharpen their vision of what the project was about, and to formulate, re-formulate, or refine their research question, whether those changes concerned the empirical focus of the project,⁵⁷ or its theoretical moorings.⁵⁸ Our interviewees also discussed carrying out case selection and sampling in the field, sometimes at multiple levels – for instance, identifying court cases to analyze,⁵⁹ communities in which to study grassroots organizations,⁶⁰ or individuals to survey.⁶¹ Others suggested that field research was indispensable for refining concepts; developing and testing measures of key concepts – for example, immigration;⁶² and challenging standard typologies – for instance, of party systems.⁶³

⁵⁷ Interview, DK-9, August 2, 2012.

⁵⁸ Interview, LM-4, August 27, 2012. To be sure, other interviewees (e.g., BR-4, August 9, 2012; BR-5, August 13, 2012) reported that their research questions did not change in the field.

⁵⁹ Interview, DK-9, August 2, 2012. ⁶⁰ Interview, DK-13, August 8, 2012.

⁶¹ E.g., interview, BR-14, October 24, 2013. ⁶² Interview, BR-6, August 14, 2012.

⁶³ Interview, DK-7, August 1, 2012.

Many consider inference – and particularly causal inference – to be the central purpose of political science research. While the ways in which fieldwork can contribute to gaining descriptive and causal leverage are generally undervalued, our interview respondents repeatedly emphasized how fieldwork helped them to draw valid descriptive and causal inferences, and develop and test hypotheses. For instance, one scholar emphasized how field research illuminated the causal connections between electoral institutions and campaigning styles.⁶⁴ Our interviewees also offered examples of how field research enabled them to observe and thus better understand causal processes and mechanisms, particularly through in-depth process tracing – to understand, for instance, the spread of new nationalist ideologies in mid-twentieth-century Mexico.⁶⁵

The examples briefly recounted above illustrate the many analytic functions that data gathered in the field can perform (that is, they highlight the *versatility* of those data), demonstrate the many ways in which field research helps political scientists build theory, *and* highlight the iterative nature of fieldwork. Indeed, our interview respondents described an extensive set of feedback loops and repeated shifts from research design to data collection to analysis and back again, often leading to significant changes in their projects – from rethinking the puzzle at the heart of a project to redefining key concepts.⁶⁶

If field researchers display a common tendency to draw on multiple data-collection techniques and to update central design elements of their projects dynamically on the basis of incoming information, they also quite commonly employ more than one mode of analysis. FRPS survey respondents were asked to characterize “the approach or approaches that [they] took, overall, when doing the analysis for and writing up” their projects. They checked yes or no to four categories – formal/game theoretic, quantitative, qualitative, and interpretive – selecting all that applied. The questionnaire gave no definitions of these terms, leaving it up to respondents to apply their own understandings of these categories. An overwhelming majority (87 percent) included “qualitative” among their responses, and roughly half of reported projects involved interpretive analysis (54 percent) and/or quantitative analysis (49 percent; 51 percent including game theory). Game theoretic analysis figured in only 6 percent of projects. Figure 2.18 indicates some differences among the subfields of American politics, comparative politics,

⁶⁴ Interview, DK-7, August 1, 2012. ⁶⁵ Interview, DK-2, July 26, 2012.

⁶⁶ Interviews, DK-15, August 21, 2012 and BR-9, August 16, 2012, respectively.

The shape of field research in political science

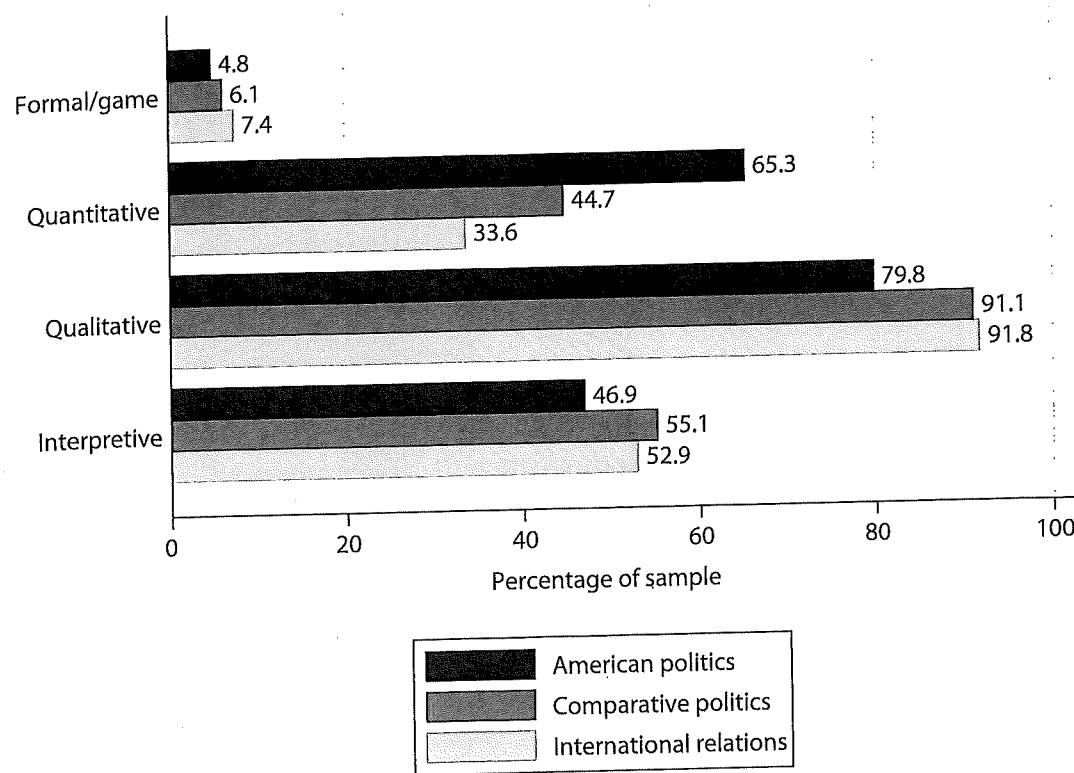


Figure 2.18 Approach to analysis, by subfield

Note: Number of projects in American politics: 376; comparative politics: 519; international relations: 251.

and international relations, such as the substantially larger proportion of projects by Americanists employing a quantitative approach compared to those by comparativists or IR specialists.

While some investigators work exclusively within one methodological tradition, in only 25 percent of projects did researchers report employing just a single mode of analysis. Rather, scholars who engage in field research often consciously adopt multiple analytic approaches, using some combination of quantitative, qualitative, and/or interpretive methodologies.⁶⁷ To give just one example, a scholar we interviewed had artfully combined interviews, participant observation, and formal modeling.⁶⁸ The Euler diagram in Figure 2.19 illustrates this eclecticism with three overlapping ellipses, each representing the proportion of projects in which a given analytic

⁶⁷ Not everyone, of course. At least one of our interview respondents specifically argued against methodological pluralism (at least on an individual level), professing a "lack of belief" in multi-method research due to the untenability of combining very different epistemologies. Interview, LM-18, September 14, 2012.

⁶⁸ Interview, DK-16, August 21, 2012.

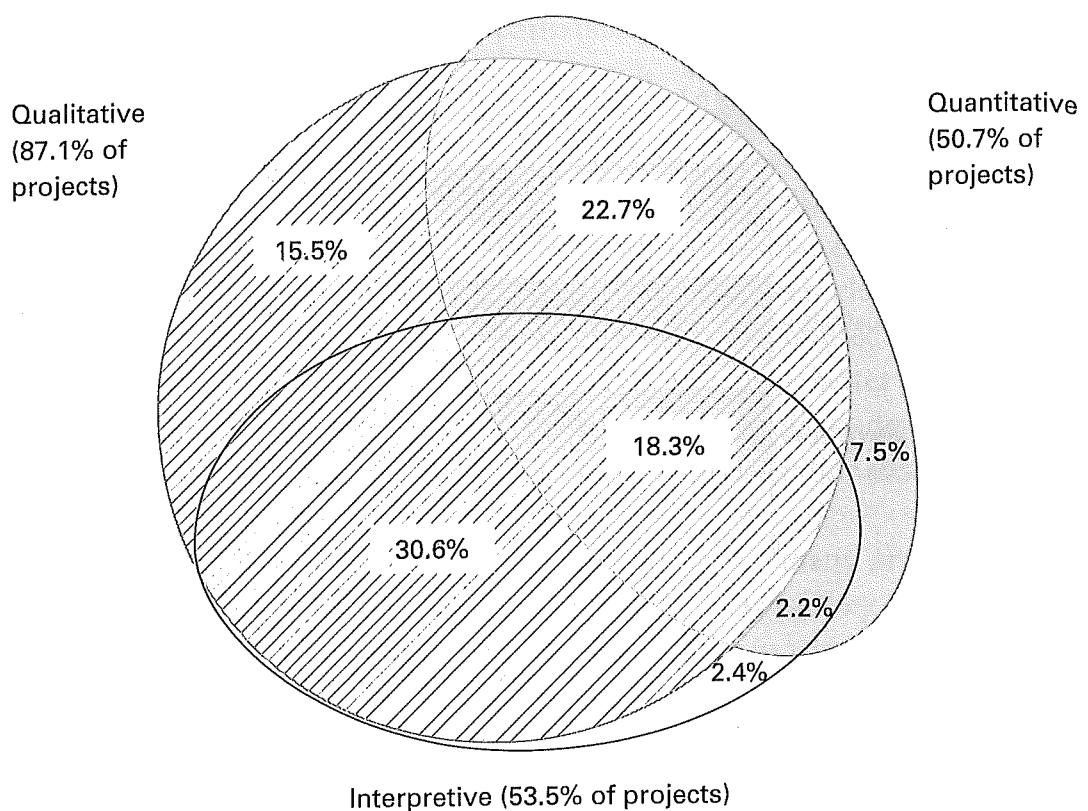


Figure 2.19 Multiple approaches to analysis

Note: Number of projects including at least one approach to analysis: 1,331. Formal / game theoretic approaches were combined with quantitative approaches for this graph.

approach was employed.⁶⁹ As it shows, 43 percent of projects used quantitative analysis in conjunction with qualitative and/or interpretive methods. Qualitative and interpretive analytic approaches were also frequently paired (49 percent). Remarkably, in nearly a fifth of projects (18 percent), respondents said they used qualitative, interpretive, *and* quantitative approaches. Moreover, while the terms “mixed method” or “multi-method” have attained wide currency in political science only recently, scholars doing field research have been mixing methods for a long time. For example, while 41 percent of projects started in the year 2000 or later involved both qualitative and quantitative approaches to analysis, the same was true of 36 percent of projects in the 1960s and 1970s. The use of multiple methods does vary by subfield, however. About half of projects by Americanists and public law scholars employed both qualitative and quantitative approaches, but only

⁶⁹ The relatively small number of formal/game theoretic approaches was combined with quantitative approaches for this graph.

39 percent of those by comparativists, 27 percent of those by IR specialists, and 15 percent of those by political theorists did so. In short, as we noted earlier, many field researchers are not tightly and exclusively tied to a single epistemological foundation.

Conclusion

Accounts of the history of political science rarely pay much attention to the place of field research in the discipline's trajectory. This chapter has sketched out some of the main forces that drove political scientists to embrace field research in multiple forms and in myriad locations, beginning in the post-World War II period. These forces included intellectual trends and influences such as the behavioral revolution, ethnography, and experimentalism, some of which stem from other disciplines. Political scientists both adopted these trends in syncretic fashion and simultaneously developed field methods in their own ways as well. Major institutions, many of them creations of the US government, have also played roles in encouraging field study. While our survey was unable to capture the entirety of this evolution, limited as it was to the past three or four decades, it provides a broad and objective overview of some of the key dimensions of field research as practiced in our discipline. In our analysis, we have sought not only to include compelling descriptive information, showing the general shape of field research and ways in which our findings confirm or cut against conventional wisdom, but also to highlight important themes that will run throughout this book.

As many of our interviewees agreed, "fieldwork" has often been thought of as something that scholars of comparative politics do, something with less resonance in other subfields. While field research is especially salient among comparativists, we have seen that political scientists from virtually all sub-fields engage in field research – the practice belongs to the entire discipline. Americanists in great numbers have set out for field sites, and these are widely dispersed across the country; the nation's capital is just one of many destinations. International relations scholars have sit-downs with diplomats, bureaucrats, and NGO activists. And plenty of political theorists, scholars of public policy, and others also take to the road in search of sources, ideas, and insights, whether delving into government archives in Manila or watching oral arguments at the US Supreme Court.

Political scientists have journeyed to places far and wide, as the map of research locations testifies. Yet field research has been uneven in its coverage,

with the United States itself, Europe, and certain capitals in Latin America and East Asia (as well as India) receiving relatively large numbers of visits, and other areas markedly fewer. Some of the less-studied countries are known for conflict or political restrictions that have surely inhibited field study, but it also appears that poor countries, or those without the benefit of area-studies communities in which political scientists participate, have been relatively neglected. These patterns, and other factors, also shape the languages that political scientists employ overseas, with five or six languages constituting mainstays of competence and presumably further influencing the choice of research locations and topics.

The many different forms and varieties that field research can take belie any single pattern or template. In part this variation stems from particular communities within political science engaging in dialogues with members of other disciplines and borrowing selectively from them. This chapter has also noted multiple ways in which projects inside the United States tend to differ from those that are carried out overseas, such as funding patterns, length of stay, number of trips, and the prevalence of adverse conditions that complicate fieldwork. Our data suggest that the stylized image of a well-funded, long-haul field research *trip* is actually not the norm. To be sure, for some scholars, field research means immersing oneself for a year or two at a site overseas, and writing a study that draws entirely or mainly from information gathered at this locale. But for others, field research means weekend trips to other US states, a month spent at a national archive, or a series of short visits to cities in multiple countries over the course of several years. Others employ field research not as the primary vehicle to collect data but as a brief add-on contributing supplementary information to a multi-method inquiry. We also observed a gap between funding levels for dissertation projects at top doctoral programs and at other institutions, and more generally saw that projects range from self-funded endeavors to those backed by six- or even seven-digit grants. Variation in all of these conditions and circumstances may seem to complicate any effort to specify what, exactly, “field research in political science” is.

Yet in the midst of all this diversity, we find commonalities. For instance, we have identified a tendency toward a kind of eclecticism, a wide-angle perspective on the field setting. Field researchers by and large avail themselves of multiple kinds of information and data-gathering techniques while engaging in the field context. They also tend toward plural and overlapping approaches to analysis; while some are strictly quantitative in orientation and others purely qualitative, many blur those boundaries. Even projects that

center around numerical data typically also have a qualitative dimension to them. We have also seen a tendency to use data gathered through field research to shape or reshape fundamentals of the design and conceptualization of research projects, to measure important ideas or variables, to generate and test arguments, and to grasp causal mechanisms. On a practical level, our survey suggests ways in which political scientists pragmatically adapt field research based on their own needs and the constraints and opportunities found in a given piece of research.

The perspective on over-time change provided by the survey suggests that some field research practices in the discipline have evolved over the decades, while others have stayed more constant from the 1960s to the present. In the aggregate, political scientists spent less time in the field on a per-project basis in the past decade than they did in prior decades. This may be either cause, effect, or both of the related reality that recent projects have less overall funding, in real terms, than was once the case. Researchers these days more often combine data gathered from the field with data from other sources than they did in the past. Yet the findings also suggest that some practices that are commonly understood to be emerging are actually old hat for political scientists – such as the use of multiple research techniques or combining qualitative and quantitative work.

A full seventy years after William Foote Whyte delivered his challenge to our discipline, his specific indictment clearly no longer applies; field research practices *do* flourish in the realm of political science. They range far beyond the kind of Chicago-style direct observation and long-term cultivation of informants that Whyte had in mind, extending to techniques such as surveys, archival investigation, and experiments. Yet field researchers today recognize the core truth in his message: up-close study of actors and events, whether in person or through first-hand texts and records, provides insights into politics that otherwise would be missed. In the rest of this book, we offer detailed examinations of the specific processes and techniques that make the acquisition of such insights possible, enjoyable, and analytically productive.

As Chapter 2 showed, field research practices in the discipline of political science are tremendously diverse.¹ Scholars conduct field research in a wide variety of contexts, stay for varying periods of time, and employ different techniques to collect data that they use for a range of purposes. Despite this heterogeneity, political scientists often face similar intellectual and logistical challenges when preparing for field research. Regardless of whether they are doing initial groundwork for a survey project on agenda-setting by state legislators in the United States, or observing social movement organization for two years in Ecuador, researchers must learn as much as they can about their topic, and carry out multiple research design – and field research design – tasks in advance of departure. They must also determine how many trips to take, for how long, and when to go – plus apply for funding, obtain IRB approvals, connect with other scholars, and make logistical arrangements before starting the actual data collection.

Further complicating preparing for field research is the reality that political scientists have few resources to help them effectively complete these steps. As discussed in more depth in Chapter 1, only a handful of graduate programs offer formal training in field research. Indeed, only 22 percent of respondents to our faculty survey with field research experience had taken a graduate course specifically on field research methods, although 39 percent reported having taken a graduate course that *dealt with* field research. Only 9 percent of respondents indicated that they had participated in one of the APSA short courses or IQMR modules focused on field methods. Hence, while most political science graduate students are required (or strongly encouraged) to take courses in statistical analysis, they get far less training concerning collecting data – for instance, with regard to the challenges of

¹ Some of the ideas developed in this chapter originated with Evan Lieberman (2004).

constructing and carrying out an original survey,² or deploying any of the other data-collection techniques scholars use in the field.

Due to this lack of formalized training, most political scientists who conduct fieldwork teach themselves how to design it, prepare for it, and carry it out. Doing so entails a significant individual investment of time and energy, however, and is often frustrating given the significant gaps in the existing literature. On the one hand, as we noted in Chapters 1 and 2, while other disciplines – anthropology and sociology in particular – have produced a wealth of provocative and insightful literature on doing field research (e.g., Amit 2000; Emerson 2001a; Bailey 2006; Lofland *et al.* 2006; Perecman and Curran 2006; Borneman and Hammoudi 2009), the questions asked, epistemological perspectives taken, and methods employed in political science may differ from those of these other social science disciplines.

On the other hand, political scientists also find the methodological literature in their own discipline wanting. As noted in Chapter 1, the relatively small subset of this literature that treats data collection, rather than analysis, tends to focus on using one single research method without addressing strategies to prepare for fieldwork as a whole. And even the vital work addressing research design tends to disregard its field dimensions. The existing methodological literature in the discipline of political science, in other words, leaves out important issues involved in designing and preparing to conduct *field* research. Topics such as how the availability of funding and other “real-life” circumstances shape how long scholars can stay in the field and thus the selection of cases, what it means – practically – to execute one’s research design in the field, and what kinds of pressures different field contexts put on data collection and project design more generally are not discussed. Consequently, there is often a big gap between political scientists’ research design document (the dissertation prospectus, grant proposal, etc.) and what they actually *do*, operationally, in the field.

This chapter aims to fill these gaps. It offers strategies and concrete steps researchers can take to design and prepare for field research. The chapter makes several overarching points. To begin with, designing research and designing *field* research (i.e., developing a practical plan for implementing one’s research design) are linked yet distinct processes, equally important for successful empirical research. Also, in order to effectively design a project

² In recognition of this gap in training, in 2013 an APSA working group on Survey Methods for Developing Countries was organized to facilitate discussion about the challenges of survey implementation in the field.

requiring field research, scholars need to know a good deal about the field context and to build that knowledge into the structure of the project. Given that imperative, we encourage political scientists to think of fieldwork as forming part of a long process that begins months before they leave their home institution: the more thorough scholars' pre-departure work, the more effective they are in the field. Yet, here and throughout the book, we encourage flexible discipline. We urge scholars to have a "Plan B" for many aspects of their project, and perhaps even multiple alternative plans for different types of contingencies. Every scholar encounters unanticipated obstacles, and considering alternative ways to carry out critical research tasks in advance will ease circumnavigation of the inevitable roadblocks.

The chapter proceeds as follows. The next section examines the links between the basic elements of research design and fieldwork design. We show how building knowledge about both the research topic and the potential field site(s) is necessary to design fieldwork effectively. The third section discusses the importance of clearly identifying what information needs to be collected in the field and developing an appropriate data-collection plan. The fourth section considers how to structure fieldwork overall, i.e., deciding how many trips to take, how long to stay in the field on each trip, and when in the research cycle to carry out field research. The fifth section highlights how the field context, as well as researchers' methodological backgrounds and personal preferences and situations, shape the design of fieldwork. With the basic parameters of fieldwork design established by this point in the chapter, the sixth section discusses in more depth the intellectual and logistical aspects of preparing for fieldwork.

The challenges outlined here, and in Chapters 4 and 10, may seem like easy ones to address, and the strategies we suggest may appear straightforward and obvious. Yet scholars conducting research in the field are often seeking to accomplish 100 things at once, struggling to manage their lives, those working with them, and the research project as a whole. As such, it can be difficult to remember all the tasks that need to be done. And when the inevitable dilemmas of fieldwork demand "on the spot" problem-solving, it can be challenging to develop good, justifiable strategies on the fly.³ Moreover, solutions to the problems faced in the field are not always unequivocal or clear – and even small missteps and oversights when preparing for field research can have expensive, time-consuming, and stressful consequences.⁴

³ Interview, LM-17, September 11, 2012.

⁴ We thank Colin Elman for encouraging us to frame our approach in these terms.

As such, we have sought to be comprehensive in our examination of potential pitfalls and suggested solutions. While each field researcher will negotiate the challenges we discuss differently, we hope these chapters provide a starting point for thinking through some of the analytic quandaries and personal predicaments confronted when doing field research.

(Field) research design

Research design and *field* research design go hand-in-hand, continually interacting with, informing, and influencing each other. While we lay out the basic steps of research design and field research design in an ordered, linear sequence for the purpose of logical presentation, we maintain that both processes are fundamentally iterative and frequently jumbled together. As scholars think and learn more about their projects and the context in which they are carrying them out, they skip back and forth between research design and field research design, and among the different stages of each.

Building broad and deep knowledge of the context in which fieldwork will be conducted – coming to understand the relevant history, culture, and political situation of one’s field sites – is a necessary prerequisite for effective research design. Knowledge of the field helps scholars to identify a relevant and appropriate research question, to learn how to think about key concepts and relationships among them, and to consider what cases might be used to investigate the question. As one political theorist who conducted archival research in Europe suggested, the value of “do[ing] your homework ahead of time” cannot be overestimated.⁵ This remains true even when the field sites are right around the corner. A scholar of international relations who did archival research in the United States and elite interviews in Washington DC reinforced this point, saying, “The better prepared you are, the more you are going to get out of an interview”⁶ – and, we would add, field research in general. While this knowledge-building begins in the early preparation stages, it continues throughout the life of the project, and perhaps even after the resulting thesis, book, and/or articles have been published.

How can this knowledge be built? Obviously scholars should delve deeply into existing research on the topic of interest, using electronic databases, archives, and contacts with other scholars to track down relevant books, articles, dissertations, theses, conference papers, substantive blog entries, etc.

⁵ Interview, LM-4, August 27, 2012.

⁶ Interview, LM-15, September 10, 2012.

Taking detailed notes from these sources (establishing background facts, identifying unanswered questions, hypotheses, empirical gaps, etc.) and developing an extensive bibliography can be very useful. If some of the research is based on concrete data sources or surveys, it might even be possible to call or email the author and request the sources, survey, or any related qualitative data collection or quantitative dataset.

Scholars should also read current and archived editions of local newspapers (which are often available online). As they do so, they might keep running lists, for example, of key people who continually appear in the news – a “who’s who” for their field site or research area that can be annotated with relevant information. A senior comparativist described how she spent months in advance of dissertation fieldwork poring over newspaper articles, making a list of elites to help her develop effective interview questions later on.⁷ Another option is to build a glossary of specialized terms that the scholar will need to recognize, understand, and produce fluently in conversation. Researchers might also create a timeline of important events to assist in keeping straight key dates,⁸ and in particular maintain a running list of significant *current* events and issues. Interviews with elites sometimes begin with a “quiz” during which the respondent seeks to find out how much the researcher knows about what is going on in the field site. “Doing well” on the quiz (i.e., appearing informed) can set the tone for the rest of the interview (Leech 2002a).

All of the above efforts to accumulate knowledge about one’s topic and field site(s) help scholars to take the first crucial step in research design: to identify a research question. The research design literature discusses in detail what makes a “good” research question (e.g., Booth, Colomb, and Williams 2003; Shapiro 2004, 2007; Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2012, 24–43). The notion of unearthing a “puzzle” is often emphasized, in interpretive as well as positivist research; also stressed is the importance of one’s question – and its potential answers – having recognizable larger implications, both empirical and theoretical (Grofman 2001; Geddes 2003).⁹ As one senior scholar put it, good field research asks questions that have “both breadth and depth,” which are well grounded in the context but also “go beyond one little village

⁷ Interview, LM-8, August 30, 2012.

⁸ Chapter 10 discusses this idea in more depth and mentions several types of software to build such timelines.

⁹ On beginning with puzzles, surprises, or tensions in interpretive research, see Schwartz-Shea and Yanow (2012, 27).

in Senegal.”¹⁰ In short, one should choose compelling questions, the answers to which matter on the ground and in the academy – already a tall order.

Yet characteristics of the potential field context also impinge on this (and other) design decisions. The question needs to be one around which the scholar can build a research design that is realistic and executable in the field sites in which he is considering working. On the one hand, the data needed to answer the question must be available for gathering. For example, for a researcher wishing to illustrate variation in electoral participation across six cities in three Latin American countries in the early part of the twentieth century – hypothesizing a connection between these historical trends and regime stability later in the century – the historical electoral data to measure these trends must be accessible. On the other hand, it must be possible for the *individual scholar who will be conducting the field research* to collect the data. A scholar who is irredeemably uncomfortable in cities, for instance, might be fascinated by dramatic variations in the level and sophistication of community organizing across major urban centers in the United States – but poorly suited to carrying out the fieldwork required to explain them. In a case like this, the research question can be revised to maximize the individual researcher’s personal preferences and strengths. This revision is not only legitimate, but essential for success.

Following the identification – and concrete and clear specification – of the research question, scholars begin to develop an intellectual plan for answering that question. This entails drawing on relevant literature to think through the problem, identifying explanatory factors (or independent variables) that might cause the outcome being studied (or variation in that outcome or dependent variable), and developing hypotheses (or perhaps even a theory) about how the causes lead to the outcome, considering what causal mechanisms might underlie those hypotheses, and thinking through what their observable implications might be. Of course, the researcher should also carefully consider potential rival explanations for the same set of outcomes. Likewise, she should begin to think about how she will evaluate her hypotheses once she is in the field – how will she operationalize her independent variables, assess causal mechanisms, and identify observable implications on the ground? A more interpretive researcher might prefer to avoid establishing fixed meanings of concepts and specifications of hypotheses prior to departure, in order to privilege meanings that emerge during field research itself through close interaction with people, communities, or

¹⁰ Interview, LM-8, August 30, 2012.

documents under study. Scholars in this tradition would still prepare for field research by exploring bodies of theoretical work that will later be brought into dialogue with bottom-up findings from the field (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2012, 45–57).

The formulation of theoretical explanations critically informs the next important step in the research design: selecting cases to study (see Mahoney and Goertz 2004; Box-Steffensmeier, Brady, and Collier 2008; Mahoney 2010; Gerring 2012). Case selection, of course, happens at multiple levels. Scholars must decide on the appropriate cases at the macro level, for example selecting what world region(s), country/ies, branch(es) of government, broad policy area(s), or world event(s) to study. They must also take some meso-level decisions, for example, which sub-national regions or towns, time periods, sectors, political parties, or civil society groups to examine. And, inevitably, they will face a series of micro-level decisions such as which households, individuals, documents, or paragraphs within a document to select for data collection or analysis. As a rule of thumb, the lower the “level” of the decision, the less likely that researchers will have reliable access to fine-grained information about the population of cases in advance of departing for their field sites, and the more likely the decision will need to be deferred until they arrive in the field. Even for case-selection decisions that are postponed, scholars can begin to develop the strategy they will implement to choose cases, or at least start to think through the questions they will need to ask once they reach the field site: what will they need to measure, see, or do, in order to select cases that will offer inferential leverage on the question at hand?

To give an example, in researching informal institutions and citizenship in Africa, MacLean (2010) chose to study Ghana and Côte d’Ivoire (a macro-level decision) because they shared similar levels of economic development, comparable degrees of integration into the global economy, and had both recently managed democratization with the incumbent winning the first two rounds of multi-party elections. These were all explanatory variables of potential theoretical importance for the research question. MacLean then faced the meso-level question of which subregions within each of the countries to compare. She was able to make some of these meso-level decisions from afar but others required a preliminary field trip to confirm. Ultimately, MacLean chose subnational regions in each country that shared similar precolonial ethnic histories (and thus precolonial chieftancy institutions and customary land and inheritance systems), additional key variables for explaining different outcomes. Another meso-level choice, the selection of

comparable village communities, was facilitated by discussions with regional and district-level government officials as well as in-person meetings with village chiefs during a predissertation field trip. None of the criteria used to make the choice – estimated population size, distance to a paved road, level of infrastructure,¹¹ and overall willingness to participate in a research study – was knowable in advance of the preliminary trip to the potential field sites. Finally, all micro-level decisions were made once MacLean and her research team arrived and conducted a census of housing units in order to draw a random sample.

Of course, things might not go as planned – the tentative case-selection strategy a scholar designs from afar may not work on the ground. As with many (field) research design decisions, and in line with the principle of flexible discipline, it is an excellent idea to have a well-developed “Plan B” that can be implemented if one’s favored case-selection strategy cannot be used. The foundation for the “Plan B” is the above process of reflecting critically on the theoretical and logistical rationale for case selection at each level, and identifying which cases might be “next best” if studying one’s favored cases turns out to be infeasible. This discussion again illustrates the dynamic and iterative nature of field research. While much research design occurs before leaving for the field, initial designs are often repeatedly adapted during fieldwork.

Once these main parameters of research design have been outlined, scholars can continue to develop their more detailed field research design within those bounds. Given the research question and the project being constructed to answer it, exactly what information needs to be collected, how, and when? And at what point or points in the research process should a scholar conduct fieldwork, which field sites should she visit, and how long should she stay in each? We offer suggestions for addressing these questions in the next two sections of the chapter.

Developing a data-collection plan

Designing field research entails identifying what information needs to be gathered in the field, and developing a coordinated set of strategies for

¹¹ Level of infrastructure was a criterion not only because of its theorized effect on the outcomes, but also considering its potential effect on the health and safety of the research team.

gathering it.¹² Scholars should carefully consider exactly what data need to be collected in order to measure central variables, evaluate key hypotheses (a scholar's own, and rivals), illuminate causal processes and mechanisms, and assess observable implications; what techniques will be used to collect those data; and where, how, and in what order they will be deployed. As one scholar advised, "You really need to think ahead of time about what evidence would confirm your hypothesis, and what would disconfirm it. It's very easy not to do the latter. What is really important is that work laying out the project at the beginning."¹³ Making these choices entails thinking through whether quantitative, qualitative, interpretive, or some combination of methods will be used to *analyze* the data gathered and to generate claims and conclusions, as one's choices concerning analytic methods inform the form in which data must be collected. Even for researchers who do not think in terms of variables and hypotheses, it is a good idea to consider in advance what information they will collect and how they will collect it, and what they will need to see (or not see) on the ground in order to know they have figured out the answer to their question or arrived at their interpretation.

We advocate developing a data-collection plan, and offer two templates in Figure 3.1 and Table 3.1.¹⁴ As the name suggests, a data-collection plan outlines the data a scholar needs to gather in order to understand and evaluate key concepts, measure variables, test hypotheses (or evaluate the importance of potential explanatory factors), answer the research question, and wrap a convincing, compelling account around that answer. By formulating a data-collection plan, the scholar moves from theorizing abstract concepts to structuring the quest for concrete bits of evidence in the field. A data-collection plan can be usefully thought of as the operational components of a dissertation prospectus, or proposal for grant funding, disaggregated and broken down into bite-sized pieces. One might make such a plan for each separate fieldwork foray or create one master data-collection plan for various closely timed field stays.

¹² See Chapter 1 for our definition of data. For us, data may take many different forms (e.g., words, numbers, images, etc.); see also Schwartz-Shea (2006, 92–93) and Weldes (2006, 178).

¹³ Interview, LM-15, September 10, 2012.

¹⁴ Our notion of a data-collection plan originated with the idea of a "to-get list," developed by the first trio of scholars to teach the APSA Short Course on "Strategies for Field Research in Comparative and International Politics" from 2001 to 2003: Evan Lieberman, Julia Lynch, and Marc Morjé Howard. See Lieberman, Howard, and Lynch (2004). Our conceptualization of a data-collection plan expands this initial idea by emphasizing the dynamic and iterative updating of the plan as well as its potential adaptation by scholars at various stages of research, employing different research designs, and having diverse epistemologies.

Developing a data-collection plan

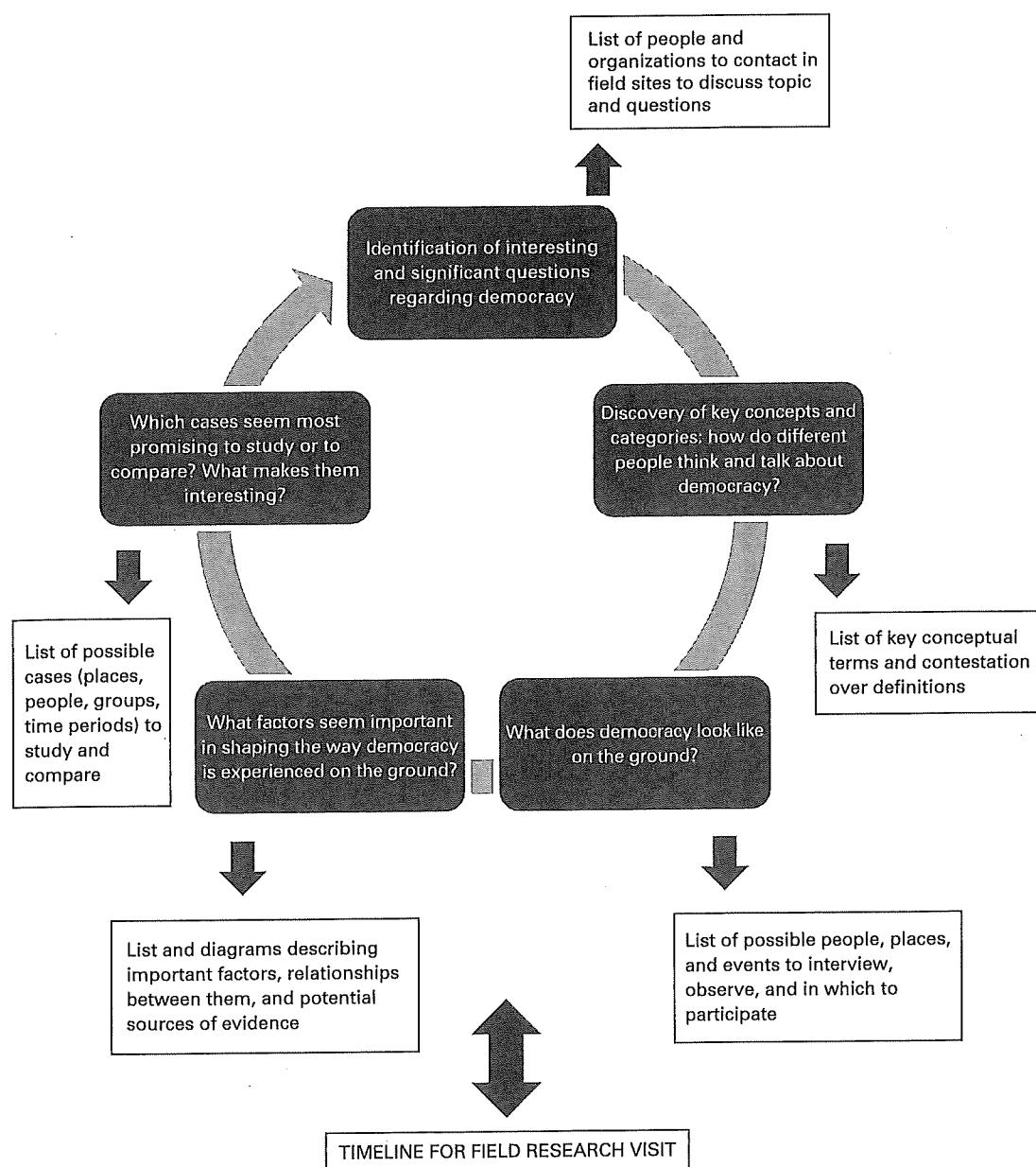


Figure 3.1 Example of an open-ended or exploratory data-collection plan

Table 3.1 displays a more structured and variable-oriented data-collection plan that a scholar with prior knowledge of or strong hunches about the data sources in a field context might adopt. This plan reflects a systematic approach to data collection focused on clarity, planning, and efficiency. Yet this plan embodies both discipline *and* flexibility. We recognize that because it is impossible (and inadvisable to seek) to completely plan fieldwork in advance, most scholars change many aspects of their initial data-collection plans as they conduct fieldwork. By advocating such a system, we in no way

Table 3.1 Example of a structured and variable-oriented data-collection plan

RESEARCH DESIGN			FIELD RESEARCH DESIGN				
Concept	Sub-dimensions of concept	Operationalization (measures/indicators)	Where and how		When	How long	
			What	Data needed to evaluate/measure			
Outcome (DV)	Democracy	Participation	Voting participation (percentage of citizens that registered/voted)	Data on voter registration and participation rates over time	Request from National Electoral Commission	Before departure or upon arrival	2 weeks
				Expert opinion on voting patterns	Interviews with experts	Month 5–6	2 months
			Contacting of local officials	Citizens' contacting behavior	Interviews with citizens	Month 5–6	2 months
		Competition	Number of political parties	Electoral data over time	Request from National Electoral Commission	Before departure or upon arrival	2 months
			Opposition share of state assembly	Electoral/government data	Request from government offices; download from government web sites	Month 2–3	1 week
			Number of alternations of chief minister	Secondary sources	Access in library	Before departure	1 week

Explanatory factor #1	Education	Literacy	Adults' and children's ability to read	World Bank Development Indicators (adult literacy / primary school enrollment rates over time)	Download from World Bank web site	Before departure	1 day
Explanatory factor #2	Variation in economic development at regional level	Civic literacy	Knowledge of civic institutions GDP	Citizens' views	Request from Ministry of Education Interviews with citizens	Month 1	1 week
Explanatory factor #3	Class structure	Poverty at household level	Number of people living below the poverty line	National and state government data	Request from Ministries of Economy	Month 3-4	2 months
		Size of the middle class	Number of people in the 3rd/4th quintile of income	World Bank Development Indicators	Download from World Bank web site	Month 4-5	Several weeks
			Number of people who own a television	Expert opinion	Interviews with local economists and sociologists	Month 4-5	3 months

seek to discourage the iteration that is fundamental to good fieldwork, or to deny or diminish the importance of staying open to the creative, framework-changing ideas that fieldwork can generate. Structure and creativity are not necessarily at odds, but rather can easily feed and inform each other synergistically. Indeed, one of the reasons scholars do fieldwork is because it can wholly reshape the way that they think. Expressing a common theme from the interviews for this book, one scholar explained that field research provides “an opportunity to hear something that you hadn’t thought about or known about previously.”¹⁵ In short, our motivation for offering this data-collection plan is our belief that many scholars will be better able to hit the ground running, and will engage more effectively in and better capitalize on iteration, with an initial version of such a plan in hand.

Interpretive scholars contemplate a much less linear process of research, in which concepts and key pieces of evidence for meaning-making emerge from the context and from respondents’ understanding thereof, rather than being imposed *a priori* (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2012). For interpretive scholars, the notion that the fieldwork process could be mapped out in such detail months in advance might seem preposterous and counterproductive. Such scholars might be more comfortable with a relatively open-ended approach, such as the cycle outlined in Figure 3.1. Using this template still involves planning and list-making, but is less constraining and structured, and quite naturally and clearly iterative. Scholars who are at an exploratory stage of their projects might likewise resist a highly specified data-collection plan. Yet even these researchers, we believe, can benefit from thinking through their hunches, or contemplating where they might look for ideas and evidence to emerge.

Of course, these two types of plans are not irreconcilably different. In order to generate each, scholars must think carefully about what precisely they intend to examine, how to conceptualize it (and what sub-dimensions their conceptualization might entail),¹⁶ and how to evaluate it. Moreover, both template plans reflect a movement from broad and abstract reflection to more concrete tasks. Both also allow for iterative updating as scholars gain more knowledge in the field. Moreover, in neither case is the data-collection plan the last word in mapping out fieldwork. Scholars’ data-collection plans inevitably spawn associated “to do” lists that include the precise tasks they will need to accomplish in order to fill out their plan and gain the additional information they need to answer their questions. Such lists might include

¹⁵ Interview, LM-15, September 10, 2012.

¹⁶ See Goertz (2006) on subdimensions of concepts.

items like “contact professors at the local university,” “hire three research assistants,” “identify interview respondents in Taipei from various walks of life,” “get bids from several survey firms,” or “check the data archive at Academia Sinica for relevant existing studies.” Developing these accompanying lists can strengthen and bolster one’s data-collection plan, no matter what type it is.

In short, regardless of how political scientists position themselves in terms of our discipline’s methodological and epistemological debates, we contend that thinking through the range of information they seek to obtain in the field and making a plan for gathering it is an essential step in pre-field preparation. We hope field researchers will amend, reimagine, twist, and augment the data-collection plan templates we offer to accommodate their way of approaching fieldwork, the nature of their questions, the stage of their project, and their epistemological assumptions.¹⁷ These customizations might lead their “output” to look very different from the two examples we discuss next.

Example data-collection plans for a project on democracy

Consider how two scholars might employ different data-collection plans to approach the same broad topic – the tremendous variation in the quality of democracy across states in India. The open-ended data-collection plan in Figure 3.1 reflects more uncertainty about the project, perhaps due to a lack of available preexisting data or published literature, or because of an epistemological commitment to remaining flexible throughout the process of research design. As a consequence, the researcher begins with the broad topic of democracy and then works to identify a puzzle and accompanying research question. Indeed, the formulation or sharpening of a research question may be the primary objective of an exploratory field trip. The circular shape of the sample data-collection plan illustrates how the scholar cycles repeatedly through the exploration of potential concepts, outcomes, explanations, and cases in order to refine the study question and theoretical framework. This scholar will not arrive in the field in search of the data to

¹⁷ Modifications to our templates might be minor or quite major. A field experimentalist, for instance, might further tailor the more structured data-collection plan to describe the creation of the experimental treatment as well as the nature of randomization among the population. Other scholars might envision developing something completely different – a mental map, causal diagram, or a more curvilinear or overlapping Venn diagram with different goals and tasks identified in the different circles or rings. See www.psfieldresearch.org for additional types of data-collection plans.

measure democracy according to several predetermined indicators; instead, he goes to the field to discover how the very notion of democracy is discussed and understood by different groups.

The planning for this more open-ended or exploratory field project centers on thinking through the potential range of related concepts and explanatory factors in order to develop preliminary lists of contact people, organizations, places, or political events to investigate in India. Thus, each of the more abstract primary research design tasks (featured in the shaded bubbles on the primary circuit) generates several concrete lists of candidate questions, outcomes, and cases (featured in the rectangular spin-off boxes) to be fleshed out and evaluated continually as the open-ended investigation progresses. Throughout the field stay, the scholar remains conscious of the amount of time remaining for fieldwork in order to prioritize the sequencing and duration of various tasks.

In contrast to the exploratory approach detailed above, the more structured and variable-oriented data-collection plan in Table 3.1 assumes that the scholar has tentatively settled on a research question and arrived at some hypotheses to be tested. This type of plan might include seven parameters. The information in the three left-hand columns emerges from the scholar's research design. A scholar begins with the most general concepts: the outcome to be explained (or the dependent variable [DV]) and the key explanatory factors (or the potential independent variables [IVs]).¹⁸ Moving across the columns of the table, the researcher considers sub-dimensions of these concepts, and next identifies specific measures or indicators for each. In this example, democracy is conceptualized as having two subdimensions, participation and competition. Participation could be operationalized as the percentage of adult citizens that have registered to vote, or that actually showed up at polling stations and cast a ballot in the most recent round of state elections. Or the researcher might investigate non-electoral types of participation, such as the frequency with which citizens contact local officials to express demands or resolve problems. Competition could also be operationalized with multiple indicators or measures, including, for example, the number of political parties, the opposition share of the state assembly, or the number of times a new chief minister has come to power. When these conceptual subdimensions have multiple possible measures, the

¹⁸ If a project explores more than one outcome, or includes multiple links of a causal chain, it might be advisable to create several separate data-collection plans.

task is to prioritize the indicators that are most appropriate and most feasible. The alternative indicators then become part of “Plan B.”

The scholar’s attendant field research design occupies Columns 4 through 7. As noted above, the first task is to identify the data that need to be collected in the field in order to evaluate or measure the project’s main outcomes and potential explanatory factors. What pieces of evidence might the scholar need in order to assert that the explanatory factors to which he points caused the variation he seeks to explain? As we discuss in more detail in Chapter 4, prioritization is important: which data are absolutely necessary, and which are helpful but perhaps less critical? In what form should the scholar collect the needed data? The answers to these questions help researchers to identify the locations of the appropriate data and what data-collection technique(s) to employ to gather or generate them.¹⁹ Finally, scholars should think about when during the field stay it would be best to collect different pieces of data, and attempt to estimate approximately how long each data-collection task might take.²⁰

To continue with the example, data on registration and voting will no doubt be important for measuring participation in India. Given that triangulation among multiple data sources is a principle underlying good field research, the researcher might also wish to elicit expert opinion concerning patterns in voter registration and turnout. The data-collection strategies implied, then, are accessing electoral data from state electoral commissions and conducting expert interviews with, e.g., polling station organizers, party observers, external election monitors, and so on. Concerning sequencing, the gathering and evaluating of official electoral data should happen relatively early during fieldwork, as understanding how the outcome of interest varies informs the development of possible explanations (and perhaps case selection). Collecting (and interpreting) these data could take a couple of weeks, depending upon how centralized and publicly available they are.

The scholar may have several hypotheses for why certain regions of India are marked by a higher quality of democracy – relating to education, economic development, and class structure. Each of these concepts has

¹⁹ The advantages and disadvantages of the main data-collection techniques, and what factors scholars should consider when determining whether or not to use them, are discussed in Chapters 5 through 9.

²⁰ In estimating time, researchers should keep in mind the likelihood of not working at 100 percent productivity during the entire fieldwork period due to illness or other unplanned contingency, as well as the utility of building in time for analysis and writing, as discussed in Chapters 4 and 10.

subdimensions and could be measured in several ways. For instance, concerning education, the researcher might decide to gather data on both literacy and civic literacy, collecting information from the World Bank, the Indian government, and citizens themselves. The scholar also needs to think through what evidence he will need to show that one (or both) of those factors *actually caused* variation in levels of political participation; while collecting data on causal mechanisms is not explicitly included in this plan, it could easily be added. Finally, the researcher needs to consider what other information he will need to tell his tale, and to evaluate how compelling one hypothesis is compared to alternative explanations. These data are likewise not included in the current plan, but they – and the sequencing and timing of collecting them – also need to be considered. These questions and issues are all important ones for scholars to consider long before they enter the field, and to continue to contemplate once they are there.

The advantages of a data-collection plan

Creating a data-collection plan well in advance of travel to the field has a number of benefits. First, sometimes a subset of the data identified as particularly important can be gathered before leaving one's home institution. Alternatively, it may be possible to evaluate the suitability and accessibility of potential data sources prior to departure. For instance, the scholar carrying out the example project above should be able to find out whether Indian electoral data are available online for the districts and time periods included in the study. Creating a data-collection plan also encourages scholars to consider alternate ways of designing certain aspects of their research and field research – i.e., to develop some “Plan B’s” – with regard to case selection, indicators for key concepts, sources, and data-collection methods. Thinking through some alternatives will help them to modify their research design or field research design, as they will almost inevitably have to do as they learn more about the context in which they are conducting research – because new cases emerge as more important or feasible, because needed sources are unavailable or incomplete, or for many other reasons. In short, systematically considering the range of data sources and then collecting multiple types of data for any particular analytic purpose can only strengthen one's analysis.

Creating a data-collection plan pushes scholars to move from general ideas and concepts to specific data targets. Moreover, entering the field with a well-developed plan helps scholars to clarify research tasks and manage

objectives. It also helps them to assess how the information they are gathering relates to their inquiry, and whether they are collecting sufficient data for each aspect of the project; in other words, the plan helps scholars to keep data collection and the details of fieldwork linked to the larger project. One of the biggest challenges researchers carrying out fieldwork face is seeing both the forest *and* the trees, and the data-collection plan helps them to do just that. In sum, we believe that the more complete a scholar's data-collection plan – the more clearly he thinks about the timing and sequencing of research tasks, and the more data-related questions he asks and answers prior to leaving for fieldwork – the better prepared he will be to begin to collect data in the field.

Structuring field research

Designing field research also requires scholars to make decisions about when they will conduct fieldwork and how they will structure their time in the field. We consider two key questions: how many fieldwork trips to take and how long to stay in the field on each trip (and if visiting multiple field sites, how long to stay in each).

We distinguish three types of fieldwork trips as seen in Table 3.2: short trips, medium-length trips, and long-haul stays. The key distinguishing features are the overall profile of the trip, its degree of structure, the length of time spent in the field, and the number of field sites visited. Short trips are generally either exploratory or targeted but not both, and are typically either high breadth (and low depth) or high depth (and low breadth). We consider short trips to be those of fewer than 30 days. While the majority of short trips include only one location, our data suggest that perhaps a third to nearly one half of short field visits include more than one location, or perhaps multiple sites that are found in close proximity to one another. Medium-length trips may be exploratory, targeted, or some combination of the two, and allow a moderate level of breadth and depth of data collection. These trips generally run from 1 to 5 months and may involve one or more field sites. Long-haul trips may also be exploratory, targeted, or some combination of the two, and allow the highest levels of breadth and depth of data collection. Such trips are generally of 6 months' duration or longer, and may involve one or more field sites. Of course, there are a range of possibilities between these ideal types.

A scholar's research question and research design heavily influence the number and length of their fieldwork trips. The point or points in the

Table 3.2 Overview of three types of fieldwork stays

Type	Overall profile	Structure	Length of time in field	Number of field sites visited	Analytic tasks	Advantages	Disadvantages
Short	Exploratory	High breadth; low depth	Up to 30 days	Usually one or two	Identify research topic and question Acquire necessary language skills Select cases Conceptualize key variables Generate hypotheses	Forced efficiency Analytic reflection through moving in and out of field site Easier assessment of feasibility of and institutional support for subsequent fieldwork	Potential for greater logistical costs Scheduling difficulties Highest chance of missing data Inadequate time to observe and build knowledge of context Highest level of time-imposed stress
Targeted		Low breadth; high depth			Refine research question Select cases Generate hypotheses Address gaps in data collection	Shortest absence from home Forced efficiency Analytic reflection through moving in and out of field site Quick identification of variation	Shortest absence from home Moderate opportunity to reduce logistical costs Interactions with research subjects can be rescheduled while retaining perception of urgency
Medium-length	Exploratory, targeted or a combination	Moderate breadth; moderate depth	1 to 5 months	One or more	Refine research question Select cases Conceptualize key variables Collect data Develop and test hypotheses	Moderate chance of missing data Moderate absence from home Moderate level of time-imposed stress	

research cycle at which field research occurs also affects the types of trips, however. In general terms, fieldwork tends to be more structured the later it occurs in the life of a particular project, as the scholar develops more precise ideas about what information she needs. Researchers may take multiple types of trips in the course of a given project. For example, a researcher might take a short exploratory trip early on in a new project, a long-haul trip later, and then a final short targeted trip to obtain a few last pieces of data.

The goals scholars pursue on these different types of trips vary, and thus the data-collection plans they take with them will evolve in length, detail, and specificity. For instance, scholars frequently take a short exploratory trip (in some cases, a pre-dissertation probe) as they develop a study. Among domestic field research projects reported in the FRPS faculty survey, 33 percent included a preliminary, exploratory trip; for international projects, the percentage was 47. Such trips, which often occur during university breaks, serve many purposes: they can help scholars to identify, narrow, or further develop a research topic; to generate more precise research questions; to acquire or improve language skills; to obtain formal research clearance and affiliation; or to assess the feasibility of different sorts of projects, the availability of data, and general field conditions. Put differently, they help scholars to avoid research and fieldwork design mistakes that can result from making decisions purely on the basis of information available from their home institution. Modest amounts of internal or even external funding can often be obtained for preliminary field research, and scholars who have the opportunity to take such trips should seriously consider doing so. As one of our interviewees explained:

None of us knows anything before we go into the field . . . We don't know what the relevant questions are; we don't have enough nuance to design a study well. Also, we have no experience doing fieldwork . . . We need to spend time learning, and the only way to learn how to do fieldwork is to do it.²¹

Alternatively, a scholar might take a series of short, targeted trips as she carries out research. Or she might take a single short, narrowly focused follow-up trip after the bulk of her research has been completed – perhaps even once she has begun to write – to obtain a few pieces of missing information, explore a concept or sub-question that emerged during the analysis

²¹ This faculty member even advises graduate students that, if they have to choose between failing their comprehensive exams and doing an exploratory trip, they should fail their exams. Interview, DK-15, August 21, 2012.

and write-up, or follow-up on a dynamic that was just beginning to unfold during a previous visit to the field site. Scholars might also take one or more short targeted trips later in the research cycle to add a case study or shadow case (i.e., an abbreviated case study in which only certain key elements are highlighted for comparative purposes) to a more fully developed quantitative or comparative historical analysis.

There are advantages and disadvantages to taking short trips. One benefit is efficiency: a short time-frame imposes discipline on the researcher, forcing him to focus on gathering the most important information without delay. Taking such brief trips also compels researchers to break out of “data-collection mode,” take stock of and analyze the information being collected, and consider what data are still needed to answer their questions. As one scholar noted, “You can go and do some of the fieldwork but then you can stop and reflect, do more legwork, and talk to someone else to reflect on what you’ve done. It’s so intense when you are out there and out of your element and trying to get as much as you can with the time you have.”²² Finally, shorter trips to different field contexts can help – and may compel – researchers to identify relevant comparisons and contrasts more quickly.

Yet short trips also have down-sides.²³ Settling into a new context, even if one plans only the briefest of stays, can be time-consuming. A series of abbreviated visits can also be more costly than one long one: staying in hotels is typically more expensive than renting an apartment, and airfare to visit several research locations can also be expensive (especially if one is traveling with an ever-growing mountain of data). Short trips can also complicate data collection. It can take a long time to get the necessary permissions to visit archives and libraries, and to access other data sources. Short trips can also generate scheduling difficulties. For instance, the individuals a researcher wishes to interview may not be around or available during the period she is in their city or country. Moreover, respondents may be reluctant to invest time in a researcher’s project if, by their estimation, the scholar is investing little time learning about their context. More broadly, short trips may not afford researchers enough time to collect the data they need to answer their questions or to understand complicated political phenomena. And short trips offer little time to adjust if (when) things do not go according to plan.

²² Interview, LM-14, September 7, 2012.

²³ Some of these disadvantages may be mitigated when a scholar takes multiple short trips to a single field site.

Medium-length and long-haul trips entail different analytic tasks, and have different attendant advantages and disadvantages. Because the contrasts between these two types of trips are mainly differences of degree, we treat these two types of trips together. Some scholars confess that they feel pressure to take “at least” a medium-length trip, if not engage in long-haul fieldwork. These pressures may emanate from funding sources (some grants stipulate continuous residence in a field site for 9 months to 1 year) or from their advisors who had earlier done extended field stays.²⁴ These institutional and disciplinary norms may be changing, however, as funding for fieldwork fluctuates and more scholars have working partners and spouses.

Medium-length and long-haul trips have a number of features that recommend them. Such trips afford researchers a better opportunity to experience another setting or culture. Certainly more in-depth research and data gathering are possible during medium-length and long-haul trips; a greater variety of data-collection techniques can be employed, and more triangulation is possible. Further, long-haul trips in particular give researchers the ability to develop an extensive network of local contacts, which can greatly facilitate the employment of a range of data-collection techniques. Trips of longer than a month likewise offer researchers more time to identify additional interesting dynamics and ideas for future projects. Scholars who take such trips also experience less time-imposed stress.

Medium-length and long-haul trips also have their disadvantages, however. Such trips may involve being far from family and friends for a long time, leading some researchers (and their loved ones) to feel as if their personal lives have been placed “on hold.” Further, the lack of pressing urgency during long-haul trips in particular can have a number of negative implications. Researchers who feel that they have ample time to carry out data-collection tasks can be more easily distracted and pulled into side projects or initiatives; it can be harder for them to keep their “eyes on the prize,” that is, collecting the data they need in order to complete their projects. Additionally, this perceived lack of urgency may rub off on local colleagues and research assistants, and may also affect scholars’ interactions with interviewees, gatekeepers, and other people whose cooperation is essential. If the scholar needs permission to access a certain archive, for instance, bureaucrats may feel no urgency to grant it when he has indicated he will be

²⁴ Interview, LM-16, September 11, 2012.

in the country for a year. Likewise, if potential interview respondents know the researcher will be in their country or city for a long period, they can keep putting him off.²⁵ Finally, researchers who take long-haul trips amass a tremendous amount of data that must be sorted through and organized. This can take a lot of time and may become an excuse for postponing data analysis and writing, either in the field or once back at the home institution.

As we hope readers have gathered, there is no single correct way to structure field research. The optimal structure – i.e., the structure that maximizes the likelihood of collecting the data one needs and generating an answer to one's question – will differ from project to project. In the next section, we discuss several factors that affect researchers' choices in terms of the frequency, length, and sequencing of fieldwork trips.

Factors shaping fieldwork design

For any project, what data to collect and what data-collection techniques to utilize are driven in large part by the research question and the research design – i.e., the hypotheses that a scholar has developed from the relevant theoretical literature about the outcome or variation she wishes to explain and how she has conceptualized and plans to measure key variables (the elements in the three columns under the “Research design” heading in the sample data-collection plan in Table 3.1). To the extent that there is standard advice about fieldwork design, it is that choices about what data to collect, where and how to collect them, when to do so, and how much time to take (i.e., the elements in the four columns under the “Field research design” heading in the sample data-collection plan in Table 3.1), should be driven by similar concerns. We certainly consider this guidance to be sound. We have also noted that the point in the research cycle at which fieldwork occurs affects its contours. Yet contextualizing fieldwork leads us to see that several *additional* factors – the analytic methods a researcher anticipates employing, the particularities of the field sites she will visit, and her personal preferences – also influence how she designs and conducts her field research.

²⁵ A common strategy is simply to respond to inquiries about the length of time one plans to stay in a field site with vague references to “a few months” – estimates that can continually be extended.

Methods

In line with the idea that fieldwork is an iterative enterprise, the methods a researcher intends to use to analyze the data he collects can influence what kinds of data he gathers and in what form. As such, scholars should identify the methods they hope to employ (and achieve some competency in them) before fieldwork begins. For instance, if quantitative techniques are the best choice for answering a scholar's question, then a large number of observations will be needed (perhaps ideally in the form of a random sample), and the data gathered will need to be internally comparable and quantifiable; if the data will be collected from individuals, a large number of structured interviews, a survey, or an experiment is likely called for (see Chapters 6, 8, and 9). To offer another example, researchers hoping to construct an index variable from structured interviews need to be sure to ask questions corresponding to each component of the index in order not to lose data points.²⁶ Researchers hoping to use content analysis to analyze responses to interview questions may wish to tape and transcribe the interviews in order to capture the precise words respondents employed. Similarly, if the researcher intends to use content analysis on government documents, he should plan to photocopy, scan, or take digital pictures of them, as opposed to taking detailed notes.

The analytic methods a researcher will employ may also influence how he structures fieldwork. For instance, suppose a scholar plans to complement a large-N quantitative analysis with a series of case studies. If both facets of the project require original data, and if the results from the quantitative analysis will be used to select cases for the qualitative aspect of the project, he will likely need to carry out fieldwork in at least two phases. This has implications for when and how much funding he seeks to acquire, how he schedules the academic year in which the data gathering will take place, and more. These examples address just a few of the many possibilities. Our point is that scholars should seek to identify the methods they will use to analyze their data early in the research process, and consider the implications that using those methods has for data collection specifically, and the structure of fieldwork in general.

Field site(s)

The nature of a scholar's field site(s) affects field research in myriad ways – particularly with regard to what data he can collect and what

²⁶ Interview, BR-10, August 21, 2012.

techniques are best for collecting them. Because we discuss these issues in more detail in Chapters 5 through 9, we offer here just a few ideas. To begin with, logistics and infrastructure can often have a very meaningful impact on what is possible in the field. Will there be reliable electricity? What about dependable access to high-speed internet? Will photocopying data sources be simple and inexpensive, or problematic and costly? Arranging interviews may take longer in a field site where cell-phone coverage is poor.

Certain characteristics of a scholar's field sites may also influence how he structures research. For instance, is there anything about the locations a scholar wishes to study – their overall accessibility or distance from each other – that suggests visiting them during a single long trip, or taking multiple trips and having more than one home base? Might something about the intended field sites – cultural, political, or even weather-related cycles, for instance – recommend traveling sooner rather than later, or at a particular time of year? In some country contexts, for instance, roads may be impassable in certain areas during the rainy seasons of the year. To offer another example, a scholar studying cross-party coalition building in Congress will need to schedule field visits to Washington, DC when Congress is in session so that representatives are in the capital rather than visiting constituents.

Finally, attributes of the field site will also affect scholars' more specific choices about data-collection techniques. For instance, the ease with which a scholar can access relevant actors – be they peasants, cabinet members, party leaders, or community council members in an urban slum – might inform whether he chooses interviews as a primary data-collection technique. Similarly, the availability of polling data and accessibility of newspaper articles will influence how scholars are able to evaluate public opinion. Scholars can begin to investigate these data-availability questions prior to embarking on field research.

The answers to these types of questions – which amount to no more than the tip of the iceberg – have serious implications for one's data-collection plans and how one structures field research. Which field-site characteristics are most relevant and consequential will differ from project to project – and of course no scholar knows everything about his field sites prior to leaving his home institution. Nonetheless, learning as much as possible about multiple aspects of each field site prior to arriving, and considering the implications of those characteristics for fieldwork design, will smooth the research process.

Personal attributes

Finally, scholars' personal preferences, personal lives – and personalities – also play a role in how they design and conduct their fieldwork. Many political scientists whom we interviewed described how the structure of field research evolved over their career and lifecycle. Some were unable to replicate the singular and intensive focus that marked dissertation research, as multiple competing demands – such as those from collaborators, teaching, administrative service, marriage, children, personal health issues, and elder care – pulled on them and their subsequent research projects.²⁷ In response, these scholars relayed that they built later research projects so that they required less extended stays, entailed field sites closer to home, or involved collaborating with bigger research teams or delegating research tasks to research assistants. As Chapter 2 noted, our survey discovered that this tendency for later projects to involve less time in the field than first projects applied to international but not domestic research.

Operationally, as scholars design and structure field research, they should think carefully about how much time they can allocate to being in the field, and who might accompany them. With regard to time, what is the minimum amount of time they need to achieve basic goals comfortably, and what is the maximum amount of time they can spend in case of delays? They should also consider whether there are any important events or dynamics in the foreseeable future (for instance, the desire for a family or the ticking of the tenure clock) that recommend a particular timing, length, or sequencing for fieldwork.

In terms of family, in the past, the field researcher was often the sole breadwinner for the household, so it was common for spouses and families to tag along for extended field research stays.²⁸ Today, given the greater prevalence of two-income families, a field researcher's spouse can find it difficult to arrange time off from work (if he or she cannot continue to do his or her job remotely while in the field). Scholars thus need to consider on which trips (if any) family members might accompany them. If a scholar is taking an extended trip and family members can travel, should they accompany the scholar during his or her whole trip or perhaps just during the

²⁷ In his presentation at the "Field research in Africa in the 21st century" roundtable at the 2013 APSA meeting (August 29), Dennis Galvan suggested that over the career of a political scientist, fieldwork varied along three dimensions: length of field stay, intensity of direct engagement, and nature of collaboration with local scholars.

²⁸ Interview, DK-15, July 18, 2012.

summer months?²⁹ Several scholars described the many benefits of bringing children to the field, including “contributing global citizens to the world.”³⁰ Others, however, acknowledged the difficulties of finding appropriate child-care or schools, and the emotional hardships involved, especially for older kids when uprooted from one of their parents, their friends, or routines.³¹ The amount of funding scholars have secured can also influence whether dependents may come along, and for how long.

With regard to data collection, what emotional, psychological, and ethical challenges and issues are foreseeable? As we noted before, rather than developing a field research design based on a perceived “ideal type,” scholars should design fieldwork that they *personally* can conduct effectively. For scholars who thrive on human interaction, designing fieldwork that requires spending months on end alone in an archive may not be the best choice. Likewise, researchers who have rarely or never “roughed it” (or have not enjoyed doing so) should think twice about carrying out research in a remote village in rural Cameroon. We do not mean to suggest, of course, that fieldwork should not be challenging, and that scholars should not push themselves to do things they are mildly uncomfortable doing. This is almost inevitable. For instance, it is the rare scholar who looks forward, without any trace of anxiety, to picking up the phone to request the first few interviews. Nonetheless, we recommend scholars take their personal situation, limitations, and preferences into account – as one set of factors among many – when designing field research.

Additional preparation for fieldwork

In addition to – and as a complement to – developing their research design and field research design, scholars can and should carry out an extensive series of tasks in preparation for field research. We discuss here a crucial subset of those tasks: applying for funding, soliciting IRB approval (when necessary), developing networks, identifying a research affiliation, preparing documents, and making logistical arrangements.³²

²⁹ Some of these dilemmas will affect male and female scholars differently. Tripp (2002) examines the challenges women face in doing international field research.

³⁰ Interview, LM-12, September 6, 2012.

³¹ Interviews, LM-2, April 14, 2012; LM-6, August 30, 2012; LM-9, August 30, 2012; LM-12, September 6, 2012.

³² Barrett and Cason (2010) offers a more detailed discussion of logistical preparations. See also the FRPS website (www.psfieldresearch.org) for further suggestions on logistical preparation.

Applying for funding

Funding is obviously critical to doing field research. And, yet, as noted in Chapter 2, our survey data suggest that inflation-adjusted funding levels – at least for dissertation field research in political science – may have declined somewhat in recent years. We recommend that all scholars begin to apply for funding well over a year before they wish to access it, and that they tap a broad range of funding sources. Outlining a fundraising strategy and identifying key potential funders, in other words, are critical aspects of the field research design process.

There are many sources of information about available grants including email lists, other scholars who study similar topics, and the Graduate Division or Sponsored Programs Office of one's home institution.³³ As such information sources reveal, available grants go well beyond the best-known ones such as the Fulbright grants through the Institute for International Education, the Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research Abroad Grants, the Social Science Research Council's grants, and the National Science Foundation Dissertation Improvement grant. Scholars should seek to identify additional sources – perhaps specific to their substantive interests or geographic area of research. All scholars, particularly those who are not citizens of the country in which they are studying or working, should check grant eligibility criteria closely. They should also ask colleagues about the informal politics associated with different awards. For example, long-standing and often heated discussions continue on many campuses and within professional associations concerning the tradeoffs associated with accepting grant money from the United States Department of Defense or other intelligence and security agencies. Additionally, faculty and graduate students must carefully consider the potential conflicts of interest posed by corporate sponsorship or donor funding of their research.³⁴ While consultancies sometimes provide generous resources for field research, researchers may find themselves constrained in terms of project design and implementation, data ownership, and voicing interpretations of the results that may be critical of the sponsor organization (Wight 2008; Kayuni and Mohamed 2013).

Scholars should consider applying for more funding than they anticipate they will need. There is no shame in declining grants (and listing grants that were declined on one's CV may even enhance one's professional profile).

³³ Often the researcher's home institution holds regular workshops to provide support in the application process.

³⁴ At most institutions, faculty members are required to sign annual conflict-of-interest disclosure forms.

Moreover, fieldwork is often more expensive than scholars anticipate. Whether or not their funding applications require a budget, scholars should create a detailed accounting of projected fieldwork costs, asking other researchers who have recently worked in the context they hope to visit for guidelines on potential costs.³⁵ Finally, if researchers are successful with more than one grant, there are often ways that those grants can be combined, even if funders initially suggest that this is impossible.

While applying for funding can be a harrowing process, doing so has potential intellectual as well as pecuniary benefits. Writing effective, compelling funding proposals requires researchers to clearly formulate their core research question, cogently argue why it is important, and persuasively explain how they will answer it, demonstrating the feasibility of conducting the proposed research. Carrying out each of these tasks can help a project to crystallize in the researcher's mind.³⁶ Since grants are highly competitive, scholars must clearly demonstrate how the proposed study fulfills the funder's objectives (as outlined in the call for applications, and other materials concerning the funder). We recommend that scholars ask colleagues who have successfully applied for the grants they are targeting to share their application experience (and, ideally, their winning proposal). Of course, scholars should make time to solicit advice and feedback from colleagues as they revise and polish their proposals. Grant writing is not something that is accomplished overnight.

Obtaining IRB approvals

While Chapter 4 considers field research ethics in more detail, here we examine one critical aspect of that broader topic, as it intersects with preparing for field research: obtaining the relevant permissions from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at one's home institution, and possibly elsewhere.³⁷ IRB approval is required for all US-based scholars conducting research with human subjects. Accordingly, as they design their field research, scholars should investigate whether their project needs to be

³⁵ Budget examples are available at www.psfieldresearch.org.

³⁶ See the SSRC pamphlet on the art of writing winning grant proposals (Przeworski and Salomon 1988, rev. 1995).

³⁷ Some organizations and communities, and governments well beyond the United States, have their own independent IRB or research permit approval processes. To give two examples, many American bureaucratic agencies have separate IRBs, and the government of Rwanda has an extensive research permit application process.

reviewed. Many scholars we interviewed were under the impression that IRB processes have become more stringent over time, but they vary dramatically across institutions.³⁸

The process of passing one's project through the home institution's IRB can take an extended period of time and may entail more than one application attempt. Moreover, many universities require some type of ethics training, often an online tutorial and exam.³⁹ Starting as early as possible, then, is advisable. Scholars who will be dealing mainly with elites may be granted an "exemption," meaning their project is excluded from further IRB oversight (although they nonetheless must follow all IRB guidelines and carry out research as they indicated on the forms submitted to the IRB). Human-subjects guidelines were developed in connection with psychological and clinical trials, so the paradigm is one of avoiding harm or discomfort to the subjects (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea 2008; Brooks 2013). Consequently, scholars working with "vulnerable" populations – that is, individuals whose reputations could be compromised, or who could be placed in danger if the researcher's work is made public – may not be able to obtain an exemption. Those scholars may still qualify for an "expedited" review but will often need to file a renewal application annually until they have completed collecting and analyzing data.⁴⁰

Scholars should carefully consider the kind of informed consent they will want to elicit when they interact with research subjects. In contexts (or under conditions) where respondents may balk at having to sign a form indicating that they were apprised of the risks and rewards of interacting with a researcher, obtaining oral consent may be a more feasible option. Scholars might consider giving study participants a one-page handout with project and contact information even if they are only soliciting oral consent, as one scholar who worked with rural populations in refugee areas did.⁴¹ For some highly sensitive topics and contexts, researchers may consider conducting covert or unobtrusive research (Pachirat 2009). Being premised on the research subjects not being informed at all about a study, covert research, without a doubt, raises a host of tough ethical questions and dilemmas. We contend that researchers should reflect carefully and seek to identify

³⁸ Interviews, LM-8, August 30, 2012; LM-12, September 6, 2012; LM-15, September 10, 2012.

³⁹ Typically all members of the research team must undergo this required training, even research assistants based in the field sites.

⁴⁰ Expedited review is usually faster because it is done by the IRB chairperson or one IRB reviewer rather than convening the full Institutional Review Board.

⁴¹ Interview, LM-16, September 11, 2012.

the degree of disclosure about their research objectives that is simultaneously ethical and productive. For this and all other human subjects-related matters, scholars should work closely with their institution's Review Board, as well as trusted colleagues who have knowledge about the specific field sites they plan to visit, beginning as far in advance of their departure date as possible.

Developing networks and obtaining research affiliation

Networking with scholars in related research communities in the United States and (where relevant) in the sites where one anticipates conducting research can help field researchers to build their knowledge of the research topic and cases, and can be professionally rewarding.⁴² Researchers might request feedback on their project from such individuals; ask them to identify additional local contacts;⁴³ or arrange to meet with them at political science, area studies, or thematic conferences. One researcher described how meeting in Chicago with members of the diaspora of the community he would ultimately visit helped him establish critical contacts in the field.⁴⁴ Another recounted how her personal activism in the anti-apartheid movement on her university campus in the United States helped her meet important union leaders in Southern Africa.⁴⁵ Scholars might also consider getting on email lists regarding their topic or area, which can help to reveal who the "players" in the field are. Another option is to contact NGOs and think-tanks (based in the United States and abroad) where people have done relevant work on the scholar's topic. It may even be possible to set up some introductory interviews via email before traveling to one's field site; in seeking to do so, scholars might attach a one-page summary of their project (discussed later) to help potential respondents understand the nature of the study and why the researcher wishes to speak with them. In short, an enormous amount of networking can be done, and groundwork laid, before scholars leave their home institution.

Scholars should also consider whether having a research affiliation in their field sites might be useful.⁴⁶ Having an affiliation can facilitate entrée into the local academic community, and may make a favorable impression on interview subjects. Further, including a letter from the host institution

⁴² Interviews, LM-4, August 27, 2012; LM-12, September 6, 2012.

⁴³ Two strategies for identifying relevant local scholars are to search through the web sites of local universities, and identify local journalists with bylines on the topic of interest.

⁴⁴ Interview, DK-12, August 8, 2012. ⁴⁵ Interview, LM-12, September 6, 2012.

⁴⁶ The politics of affiliation are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4.

with grant applications can be very useful (and is required in some locales, and for some grants).⁴⁷ Having a connection with someone at the target institution – perhaps through another scholar who recently conducted fieldwork in one's field site – can make the affiliation easier to obtain. Yet a number of issues need to be kept in mind when choosing a research affiliation. First, the local reputation of the institution matters: how will this institutional affiliation be seen by potential interview respondents, or by those who will decide whether access to archives and other data sources will be offered or denied? Second, if the affiliation costs money, what services or benefits are provided for that fee? Often institutions have a library, computers, databases, or office or meeting space available only to affiliated associates. Scholars should also inquire and agree upon in advance what the institution expects of its affiliates. Some institutions have few requirements, whereas others demand teaching or other time-consuming forms of service that may obstruct progress with fieldwork.

Preparing materials for use in the field

Another important pre-departure task is to draft some of the materials that will be used in the field. First, researchers can devise different ways to present themselves and their research for varying audiences. They may write out several versions of a one-page description of the project (and themselves) to attach to emails requesting interviews or other assistance with data collection. Revealing no analytic hunches and keeping the narrative vague, one goal of these summaries is to illustrate the importance of the project and highlight the researcher's qualifications for carrying it out. If interviewing will be an important data-collection technique, or if the project entails a survey, another helpful idea is to begin to draft the interview protocol or questionnaire, or at least develop the list of topics that will likely be addressed in those interactions (further discussed in Chapters 6 and 8). Draft protocols and questionnaires may be necessary for one's IRB application, and writing them helps scholars to check that their research design and fieldwork design can be translated into action. Finally, scholars might consider drafting letters or emails that they will send to request interviews, access to archives, and so on. Carrying out each of these tasks helps the researcher to clarify her

⁴⁷ Notably, in some countries, the travel visa is contingent on having a local research affiliation.

thinking about the project, and to arrive at the most positive and productive way to introduce it to others.⁴⁸

Particularly for younger scholars, letters of introduction from a relevant senior scholar can help to open doors in the field. For graduate students, a “gold seal” letter from their department chair indicating that they are in good standing at their university can sometimes facilitate entrée.⁴⁹ All scholars might consider asking people who have done fieldwork in the locations where they plan to conduct research, and who have interacted with the types of people with whom they wish to interact, what (if any) documentation appeared to be helpful as they sought to gain access to archives, respondents, and other desired data sources. Several of the scholars interviewed for this book mentioned the importance of having printed business cards to give out.

Making logistical arrangements

Finally, many logistical issues need to be dealt with prior to leaving for the field. To mention just a few, scholars traveling overseas will need to figure out what visa they need and where to obtain it. The visa application process can be lengthy, so researchers should get started well in advance of their planned departure. Further, they should consider what other official documents will need to be taken to the field and which are best left at home (with, perhaps, a copy taken to the field).⁵⁰

Scholars also need to think in advance about what health issues may arise in the field, and prepare to the degree that they can. First, they should find out what (if any) vaccinations are recommended and obtain them.⁵¹ Researchers should also confirm that their health insurance covers them in another state, or overseas, and perhaps inquire about how payment for treatment is reimbursed. Another option (required by some grants) is medical evacuation insurance. It can also be advisable to look on the local

⁴⁸ Scholars writing in a non-native language may wish to find someone to help revise the initial drafts of these materials. More generally, researchers who will be operating in a non-native language in the field should objectively assess their language skills and potentially consider the options for improving fluency as well as building the relevant specialized vocabulary. Finding a language partner to practice speaking – and perhaps with whom to exchange emails – can be extremely helpful.

⁴⁹ These letters can sometimes require several weeks to be produced so planning ahead is essential.

⁵⁰ A non-exhaustive list of documents researchers might consider taking to the field would include: passport and copies, prescriptions, driver’s license, student or faculty ID, International Student Identity Card, photocopy of social security card, documents required when visa was obtained, etc.

⁵¹ The Centers for Disease Control web site has geographically specific information.

US embassy web site to see whether there is a list of recommended doctors, clinics, or hospitals. Finally, scholars might consider taking with them any medications they need or may need, particularly if their field site is remote.

Money issues should also be considered in advance. Scholars may be dealing in cash more often in the field, particularly in international research, than they are used to doing when they are at home. It is a good idea to think through how that cash will be accessed, and what sorts of fees will be charged (and how to avoid them, if possible). Depending on the length of stay, one option is to open a bank account in a local bank in the field site, although how easy it is to do so varies by location. It may also make sense to determine what credit cards can be used in the locations one will be studying. Often, bank and credit card companies should be notified of the dates and locations of travel and where to contact the scholar in order to verify activity and prevent fraud or theft. It is also worth investigating in advance whether one's credit card company charges a fee for foreign currency transactions.

Scholars should also decide what pieces of technology to take, and which they should purchase at the field site.⁵² When preparing for overseas research, the question of whether to take one's regular mobile phone, to rent or buy a local phone, or to go without a phone bears consideration. A related imperative is identifying a workable computer back-up system. Most scholars who have done fieldwork have at least one tale of woe involving a dead hard drive or lost data. The fear of losing part or all of their data while in the field should motivate scholars to back-up regularly.⁵³ Beyond these ideas, we recommend scholars keep their own running list of items to take to the field.⁵⁴ Another good idea is to practice with all of the gadgets prior to leaving for the field to assure that they are all in functioning order, and the scholar is familiar with how to use them (while tech support is perhaps more readily accessible).

Beginning to think about one's living situation in the field is also advisable. Several scholars we interviewed described the uncertainty surrounding living

⁵² A non-exhaustive list of items to consider would include: laptop, software/installation CDs for various applications, web camera, microphone/headset, USB drive; USB hub (so devices in excess of the number of USB ports one's computer has can be plugged in simultaneously); networking equipment; portable printer and toner; flatbed or handheld scanner, photocopier, fax, digital camera, voice recorder; cell phone; PDA; and cords and cables for all devices.

⁵³ Back-up systems can take many different forms, including web-based systems such as Dropbox and iCloud; external hard drives; and solid-state USB drives.

⁵⁴ For instance, a laptop lock, business/interview attire, electronic signature, university letterhead (actual and electronic), business cards, etc.

arrangements as frightening and stressful.⁵⁵ Talking with other scholars who have lived in one's potential field sites can help when considering housing options.⁵⁶ For instance, scholars might think through the tradeoffs of renting an apartment versus staying in a residence hotel,⁵⁷ and of renting an apartment sight-unseen versus obtaining temporary lodging for a few weeks upon arrival and personally viewing housing options. Sometimes local universities have rooms available for visitors, or offices to help identify housing options. Internet web sites for foreigners can offer some ideas, and local newspapers may also have listings (which may be searchable online). While comfort and cost are two important criteria when identifying and choosing among housing options, the choices scholars make can also have an impact on their intellectual progress, for instance, by making it more or less difficult to establish rapport with potential respondents. Such connections are discussed in more depth in the next chapter. In sum, a great deal of intellectual and logistical preparation can be carried out in advance of field research. While many of the above points may seem unmissable, it is very easy to forget the obvious in the hectic time leading up to field research. As such, there is no time like the present to begin.

Conclusion

There is significant interplay between research design and fieldwork design: the latter is essentially a practical plan for implementing the former. Yet fieldwork design is not simply a straightforward, mechanical derivative of research design. Many factors beyond social science theory and one's variables shape what data are sought, what techniques are used to collect them, and how fieldwork is structured more generally. The point in the research cycle at which scholars venture into the field, the analytic methods they anticipate employing, their personality, and myriad contextual dynamics – many of which are subject to rapid change – can affect how scholars design and conduct field research. As we will emphasize repeatedly throughout this book, researchers should try to think through a “Plan B” for crucial aspects of their project so they can remain nimble and flexible. In short,

⁵⁵ Interview, LM-16, September 11, 2012.

⁵⁶ Likewise, these people may know what documentation is needed to rent an apartment.

⁵⁷ Concerning shorter field trips, it bears noting that not all apartments can be rented month-to-month; a one-year lease may be more typical. Talking to others who have held month-to-month leases, or have done roommate swaps, can generate ideas of how to accommodate a shorter-term stay.

designing field research entails an extensive series of tradeoffs and choices, and *doing* field research often requires renegotiating those original choices and implementing next-best options. This does *not* mean scholars should simply throw in the towel and neglect planning in favor of dealing with contingencies only once they are encountered in the field. Carefully planning data collection and structuring fieldwork leaves one well-positioned for those inevitable renegotiations.

These thoughts, in addition to the lengthy list of preparations we have outlined, amount to a *lot* of “do’s,” “don’ts,” and “why haven’t you yet?”s.” Our goal is obviously not to overwhelm scholars who are planning field research, or reify an ideal preparation process. To restate a point made earlier, just as there is no single correct type of fieldwork, there is no master, magical fieldwork design. Every project is different, and what is useful to one scholar may not be useful for another. Nonetheless, starting the preparation process early and engaging in critical reflection from the start will help all scholars to do better field research.

In closing, we offer some thoughts on identifying the moment at which to leave for the field. The longer the field trip, the higher the stakes, and the more likely the researcher will not feel ready to leave. In general, however, scholars are ready to go before they think they are. One simple criterion scholars can use to evaluate whether they are ready is if they know the first ten people or organizations to contact in the field site. As we have emphasized, there is a tremendous amount that scholars can do, and should do, in preparation for field research. Yet there is also a point of diminishing returns. Researchers who are anxious about leaving for field research might liken doing so to taking off a Band-Aid; once they have spent significant time readying themselves and their materials, there is little point in postponing the inevitable. Moreover, scholars should recall that fieldwork is often a rewarding experience. Whether traveling far or just down the street, for a year or for a week, fieldwork offers scholars the chance to meet interesting people who are directly involved with their research topic, explore other cultures and political/social systems, and, indeed, see their home context from a very different perspective. To those who have thoroughly prepared but still have nagging hesitations we say, *carpe diem!*

Managing in the field: logistical, social, operational, and ethical challenges

Despite having done everything conceivable to prepare in advance, most scholars face unexpected opportunities, challenges, and choices while carrying out field research.¹ Moreover, as one scholar warned, “Things will go wrong, in big and small ways!”² We hasten to note that these realities should not discourage scholars from preparing for fieldwork. Having carefully prepared in advance helps researchers to think through the unforeseen issues, questions, and tradeoffs – and smoothly handle the unanticipated contingencies, obstacles, and challenges – that they will inevitably face as they carry out their research in the field.

Taking the initiative to engage in advance preparation is all the more important because, as we have noted, political science as a discipline and most social science graduate programs do not do as much as they could to prepare scholars for the intellectual challenges that fieldwork entails. They likewise do little to prepare researchers to be managers of large projects. Yet conducting field research demands that scholars *simultaneously* serve as Principal Investigator (PI), or intellectual leader of their project, *and* Project Manager (PM), or management head. As PI, scholars need to focus on their (potentially evolving) research design, problems of causal inference, and the broader theoretical significance of the inquiry. As PM, however, they must be attuned to the details of logistical, budgetary, and personnel issues, and their overall production timeline. These concurrent roles can pull researchers in competing directions and be very difficult to balance.

This chapter addresses some of the common challenges that political scientists – in their position as both PIs and PMs – confront when conducting fieldwork. The first section briefly examines the multiple types of challenges that field researchers may face as they seek to adjust to their field sites (especially when the contexts are unfamiliar, and/or they are engaging

¹ Some of the ideas developed in this chapter originated with Marc Morjé Howard (2004).

² Interview, DK-8, August 8, 2012.

in long-haul fieldwork). The next four parts of the chapter discuss four categories of challenges field researchers typically encounter: logistical, social, operational, and ethical. Negotiating each type of challenge can be tough in its own right. But field researchers frequently face multiple problems, coming all at once from unexpected corners, which must be resolved immediately. Furthermore, the way scholars choose to address these challenges can have serious implications for the effectiveness of their field research and the subsequent quality of their research findings.

We highlight two caveats before proceeding. First, as in the previous chapter, some of the insights and strategies offered here might seem intuitive and basic. Indeed, the guidelines we discuss may be of most value to scholars who are about to embark on their first field project. Nonetheless, even the points that seem obvious when read here may not be readily remembered in the heat of the moment in the field, particularly when scholars are making high-stakes choices involving significant tradeoffs. Moreover, even seasoned fieldworkers face new challenges each time they enter the field. We believe it is productive and important for all researchers to think systematically about – to *critically reflect* on – the logic and rationale for decisions they make in the field, and we hope the strategies we suggest here will help them to do so. Second, this chapter's suggestions will need to be adjusted if the researcher is operating in her “native” context. While the distinction is not nearly as simple as “insider” versus “outsider,” adjustments upon arrival will obviously be quite different for someone returning home, and for someone arriving in an entirely unfamiliar location. And, of course, the way each of the chapter's points applies to a scholar and his work will depend on his research question and project, the specific context of his field site, and the length of stay. Nonetheless, we hope all scholars will be able to draw adaptable ideas and insights from what we present here.

Adjusting to the field

Conducting field research can be an intense experience, and scholars often share some mixture of excitement and trepidation as they arrive in their field sites. This can be true whether the researcher is flying halfway around the world, driving to a different region of his home country, or walking to a different neighborhood in his hometown: degrees of cultural difference do not necessarily co-vary with geographic distance. Indeed, for scholars working close to home, field research often involves a greater number of

short trips, creating many more arrivals, but with less time to adjust. Taking short trips to familiar places may even create the expectation (in a scholar's own mind, or in the minds of his colleagues and/or research subjects) that adjustment should not be necessary. Nonetheless, commencing fieldwork practically always involves some sort of transition, and thus some need for adjustment.

To begin with, many researchers experience – and must accommodate – physical and cultural dislocations in their field sites. MacLean's memory of her first arrival in The Gambia is relived powerfully whenever an airplane door opens, and she is surrounded again by hot, humid, and smoky air. Even with years of language and area studies training, and several previous fieldwork trips now under her belt, she still feels a visceral wave of panic until she arrives in her first night's lodging. A scholar carrying out a series of short targeted trips in her home country (in this case the United States) also attested to experiencing cultural dislocations as she arrived in field sites in different regions. She noted significant differences across locations, and struggled to figure out why the greetings and informal banter that seemed to produce some acceptance and camaraderie with the middle-class, white, female librarians (who were not that much different from herself) at the archives in Illinois did not achieve the same success in Texas or Montana.³

Another sort of adjustment is to the intensity and pressure of fieldwork. Even if life at their home institution was hardly carefree, scholars frequently recounted in interviews how the intense pressure to "get things done quickly" was "exhausting."⁴ As we saw in Chapter 3 (see Table 3.2), time-imposed pressure and stress can be greatest for scholars carrying out short trips as compared to long-haul stays. Regardless of the length of stay, many scholars recounted worrying about their productivity in the field or experiencing extreme anxiety as to whether the project would fail. Overall, scholars highlighted the strongly contrasting highs and lows of their personal experience of fieldwork.⁵

Given the ubiquity of these experiences, our aim is to share strategies that can help political scientists adjust more readily to their field sites. First, as we detailed in the previous chapter, we recommend that scholars prepare as much as possible in advance for the multiple hurdles faced in the field. Part of this multi-faceted preparation is readying themselves for fieldwork's repeated adjustment challenges. While "culture shock" can hit scholars

³ Interview, LM-14, September 7, 2012.

⁴ Interview, BR-5, August 13, 2012.

⁵ Interview, LM-17, September 11, 2012.

immediately and forcefully upon arrival, it may descend at essentially any point during a field stay. Awareness of (and sometimes discomfort with) cultural differences of many types (e.g., the weather, sanitation options, food, social behavior, gender relations, etc.) may persist unabated or strike intermittently during one's time in the field. Likewise, the loneliness that separation from one's home institution, family, and friends may provoke, particularly for those on longer field research trips, can also ebb and flow.⁶ Scholars should anticipate these sorts of feelings, and think through how they might reach out when necessary to their support networks, whether local or virtual. One senior scholar emphasized the value of establishing new routines of regular sleep, exercise, and contact with friends, family, and colleagues in the field,⁷ and these can also be considered in advance.

Second, even if the possibility of a hard transition seems remote given a scholar's previous knowledge of or experience in a field site, or in view of a compressed timetable for the visit, setting aside time at the beginning of their visit to get set up to live, and get organized to conduct research, benefits most scholars. Doing so can ease the transition, reduce frustrations, and maximize productivity throughout the project. To offer just a few examples, scholars conducting fieldwork overseas might establish an account with a local cell phone and/or internet service,⁸ or perhaps purchase equipment such as a laser printer or fax machine in the field site. Of course, scholars need to balance the concerns of local appropriateness with professional presentation. For example, they should consider how having access to the internet in a place where that access is known to be exorbitantly expensive, or appearing in the field location with elaborate gadgetry, might affect the opinions of local people who may ultimately be research subjects, and thus the information scholars will collect from them.

Our third suggestion might be implemented at various points during a field stay, but plans to carry it out can be made before scholars even reach the field. Every researcher needs breaks from their field site during which they worry less about what is locally appropriate and can just be themselves. Many researchers we interviewed mentioned the importance of talking with

⁶ Interviews, LM-17, September 11, 2012; BR-5, August 13, 2012. More senior scholars note that the experience of fieldwork is much less lonely now with the greater ease and lower cost of keeping in touch via telephone, email, and video chat. Interview, LM-22, October 2, 2012.

⁷ Interview, LM-17, September 11, 2012.

⁸ Colleagues and neighbors can offer advice about the best phone providers and plans (for instance, whether a contract or pre-paid system is optimal) and input concerning whether different buildings and residential locations are wired differently for the internet.

other scholars while in the field – perhaps meeting for a coffee at a cafe, taking an afternoon walk, or attending a happy hour together. While such discussions of course added to their evolving stock of knowledge about their field sites, they also expanded long-term professional networks and allowed investigators to speak and reconnect in the language and culture of social science. Another scholar highly recommended taking a few short breaks from research to do paid consulting.⁹ Of those doing fieldwork overseas, several found occasional visits with non-academic expatriates based in the field-site area, such as Peace Corps volunteers, missionaries, NGO workers, business people, Foreign Service officers, or journalists, to be emotionally supportive and informative.¹⁰ One graduate student talked about how attending his “home church” on Sundays made him feel grounded.¹¹ And another scholar described how coaching a local basketball team made all the difference to her mental and physical health and productivity.¹²

As we discuss a bit more later in the chapter, for scholars engaged in long-haul trips, more extended breaks to reconnect with friends and family can sometimes be useful as well. Some researchers felt they benefitted from returning home for a visit. Indeed, the powerful conflict that many researchers experience between their “field researcher identity” and their “home identity” is frequently best recognized and worked out when away from the field site. Others may enjoy bringing friends or family members to their field sites – whether they are around the corner or around the world. Since researchers adjust to the field in different ways over the course of their project, these strategies can be used, customized, and combined, often well beyond arrival.

Logistical challenges: managing life as Principal Investigator and Project Manager

Scholars face a wide range of logistical choices and challenges as they arrive in the field and begin to conduct research.¹³ Tourist-oriented web sites and guidebooks offering detailed information about their field sites can aid scholars to address some of these challenges. Yet such resources do little to

⁹ Interview, LM-16, September 11, 2012.

¹⁰ Interviews, LM-9, August 30, 2012; LM-16, September 11, 2012.

¹¹ Personal communication, July 29, 2012. ¹² Personal communication, October 3, 2013.

¹³ See www.psfieldresearch.org for further discussion of additional logistical challenges faced in the field.

help scholars consider the implications that seemingly straightforward logistical choices may have for their research and their ability to collect data in the field. We use two logistical choices most scholars will face – choosing accommodations and modes of transport – to illustrate how the apparently clear-cut decisions that scholars make in their Project Manager (PM) role may profoundly influence the quality of field research. Our objective is to highlight the importance of *simultaneously* thinking of these decisions from the point of view of Principal Investigator (PI).

When choosing accommodations and forms of transport, for instance, scholars will consider cost, safety, and convenience. Their decisions will also be influenced by whether they are completely new to a field site or familiar with or even at home in the area – as well as by whether part or all of their family has accompanied them to the field. Several mid-career or senior faculty members noted that the logistics of fieldwork had become much harder now that they juggled the needs of working spouses, multiple children, and aging parents.¹⁴ The nature of the field site and the length of the fieldwork stay will, of course, also affect these choices. Thus, a scholar working for a long weekend in suburban Cleveland and one spending six months in Grozny, Chechnya will have very different options and tradeoffs when deciding upon housing and transport.

Yet scholars should also consider how study participants' perceptions of them will be shaped by where they live and the transportation they use. Some towns, neighborhoods, or buildings have strong identities. They might be popularly known to be dominated by a particular ethnic group, to house people of a certain socioeconomic status, to be primarily populated by local migrants or foreign expatriates, or even to be tied to a particular political party. For example, the Bridgeport neighborhood of Chicago is known historically as a white, Irish-American enclave with strong ties to the Democratic Party machine. This may not necessarily pose any problem, but scholars should be aware of the reputation of their new "hometown" area.

Similarly, how researchers get from place to place can also function as a "signal," leading to the opening of some doors or the closing of others. On the one hand, using local transportation may provide opportunities for learning about the field site and/or research topic by observing, interacting, and chatting with people while waiting or riding around town. "Take public transportation, and this gives you the pulse of what's happening around

¹⁴ Interviews, BR-2, July 30, 2012; DK-7, August 1, 2012; BR-3, August 6, 2012; LM-6, August 30, 2012; LM-9, August 30, 2012.

you," one of our interviewees advocated.¹⁵ Furthermore, being able to navigate local transportation may boost the researcher's credibility with some individuals and groups in the field site. And, in certain contexts, having a car can make a researcher appear wealthy and may make him more vulnerable to theft and requests for bribes from officials.¹⁶ On the other hand, having access to a private car may save time. For instance, one scholar we interviewed recounted that due to her inability to buy or rent a car, she was constantly scrambling to figure out the options to move her research team to the next remote field site.¹⁷ Moreover, access to private transport can legitimize the scholar in the eyes of some individuals and groups as an established professional with more autonomy and power.¹⁸ Again, however, scholars need to consider what their form of private transport signals about them. One researcher reported that her NGO contacts were "crucial for the success of the project,"¹⁹ but that joining the convoy in which they moved about the field site required her to emphasize to study participants that she was *not* an employee of the NGO.²⁰

In sum, many choices that we might think of as purely "logistical" are simultaneously intellectual when made in the context of field research. Choices about where to live and how to travel – as well as about many other things – may change the tone of one's interactions, result in different levels of access to people or materials in the field, and may even lead to respondents censoring what they share with a researcher. Scholars should take these eventualities into account as they make logistical decisions.

Social challenges: managing relations with people in the field

Every scholar also faces challenges in managing social relations while in the field. These range from initial dilemmas about how to gain entrée into the field site, to questions that emerge with more prolonged engagement in a site (for instance, concerning how to navigate friendships in the field), to the critical issues involved in hiring assistants to help conduct the research.

¹⁵ Interview, BR-7, August 15, 2012.

¹⁶ Furthermore, where transportation is scarce, having a car may bring local requests for transport, some very difficult to refuse, but all reducing the time available for conducting research.

¹⁷ Interview, LM-13, September 7, 2012. ¹⁸ Personal communication, August 30, 2013.

¹⁹ Interview, LM-16, September 11, 2012.

²⁰ Interviews, LM-11, August 31, 2012; LM-16, September 11, 2012.

Initial social challenges: gaining entrée

Gaining entrée – to organizations, communities, or networks, for instance – is an immediate challenge for many field researchers. Doing so can be particularly difficult when moving among multiple, disparate field sites in far-flung locations.²¹ Critically reflecting on this challenge and addressing it in appropriate ways can help scholars avoid future roadblocks – only some of which may be obvious to them at the start. As Chapter 3 mentioned, scholars can do a great deal as they prepare for fieldwork to help make connections, and many of these initiatives can be continued once they are in the field. As with many other aspects of field research, we recommend that scholars start with the least daunting tasks when it comes to gaining entrée – the low-hanging fruit – and build to the more challenging ones.²²

One strategy that facilitates gaining entrée is to continue deepening one's knowledge of the research topic by gathering and reading locally produced information – sources that could not have been found at home prior to departure. For example, researchers might dig into smaller newspapers that are not available online, or listen to local radio programs. For one scholar we interviewed, a small, relatively new Islamic newspaper that was only available in hard copy at the field site was very illuminating for her research question.²³ Local research centers or universities may have their own specialized libraries, sometimes with rich troves of unpublished and non-digital working papers, policy reports, local theses, etc. Likewise, it can be useful to spend time in bookstores, museums, or even government agencies that distribute or sell statistical data or maps.²⁴ Sources collected in these locations can often be scanned and converted into PDFs for easy transport,²⁵ and should certainly be incorporated into one's running bibliography. Researchers can also continue to flesh out their working list of key actors, timeline of big issues, and/or lexicon of key terms related to their research question.

²¹ Interview, DK-11, August 7, 2012.

²² Interview, LM-18, September 14, 2012. Among other reasons, beginning this way allows scholars who are not working in their native tongue to improve their language skills, perhaps by taking classes or contracting a locally based tutor.

²³ Interview, LM-5, August 27, 2012.

²⁴ Interview, LM-18, September 14, 2012. As mentioned in Chapter 3, it can be helpful to affiliate with a local institution in one's field sites, and the people who work there (or are otherwise associated with it) may be able to facilitate access to the venues (local archives, national libraries, etc.) in which these types of materials can be found.

²⁵ Researchers should develop an organizational filing system for the electronic files that is consistent – for example, using the date and content (i.e., "2007.05.28.U.S. Supreme Court decision on immigration").

Once in the field, researchers can also follow up in person with the contacts initiated as they prepared for fieldwork, and work to expand their set of contacts more generally. This process can take a significant amount of time at the beginning of a new project; indeed, one of our interview respondents reported spending the first five months establishing these networks.²⁶ Yet laying this groundwork can pay off handsomely as one's networks continue to grow and deepen with repeat visits to a field site over time.²⁷ Indeed, one scholar described building his networks of access and expertise in concentric circles, beginning with the most-accessible individuals in the center, adding new layers of contacts and cases as his knowledge and reach grew, and eventually accessing the toughest outer ring of contacts later during the field stay.²⁸ The first week of fieldwork in Damascus, for example, is most likely *not* the ideal time to attempt to land an interview with the leader of the main opposition group. Of course, many scholars, but particularly more junior ones, will find it difficult and may put off picking up the phone or going to the office to contact even the individuals in the "inner-most rings" for fear of imposing on their time. Yet it is essential to recall that, while researchers are asking for local individuals' time and help, they are also potentially broadening the network of contacts for their interlocutors by introducing themselves and their project.²⁹ Moreover, the benefits of exchanging ideas can be mutual.

Scholars can begin by reaching out to what might be termed "soft" contacts. For instance, they might exchange introductions with local scholars at institutions where they are affiliated,³⁰ or get in touch with academics or analysts based in other universities, research institutes, think tanks, NGOs, or policy organizations in the field site. As one senior faculty member we interviewed suggested, local scholars often "know exactly what you want and what you need" and are "usually more than pleased to speak."³¹ Another researcher recounted how her primary contact at her host institution not only shared ideas based on his own research and expertise, but also provided her with a list of names and email addresses of people he thought it would be helpful for her to contact.³² Academics can also suggest the names of graduate students, past and present, who are working on a topic similar to

²⁶ Interview, DK-13, August 8, 2012.

²⁷ Interviews, DK-12, August 8, 2012; LM-5, August 27, 2012; LM-13, September 7, 2012.

²⁸ Interview, LM-6, August 30, 2012. ²⁹ Interview, DK-19, August 27, 2012.

³⁰ The research affiliation may also be able to provide an official letter of introduction that will be helpful in making other contacts down the road.

³¹ Interview, LM-18, September 14, 2012. ³² Interview, LM-5, August 27, 2012.

the researcher's. They may also be aware of upcoming academic or policy conferences that fieldworkers may wish to attend or, toward the end of fieldwork, at which they might present their work.³³ These conferences can help scholars get the lay of the land, revealing who the experts and key players are with respect to a particular topic, what relationships and synergies exist between individuals and organizations, and what conflicts may be brewing. The staff of local and international NGOs can also share extensive insights about the key actors in the public, private, and non-profit sector.³⁴ Personnel at US embassies overseas can sometimes provide valuable contacts and insights into local politics and recent events,³⁵ as can journalists.³⁶ Depending on the topic, the leaders and staff of religious and community service organizations may also be able to help make introductions.

For certain projects, the researcher may need to move beyond her growing network of soft contacts in order to solicit formal or informal government approval to enter and conduct research in the field site(s). For example, MacLean obtained written and verbal authorizations from national, regional, and district ministry officials as well as village-level chiefs and elders before she began research in villages in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire. A scholar's earlier discussions with soft contacts can often help him to understand the politics and dynamics of this process.³⁷ Sometimes government approval of the study is conveyed via a formal document that scholars must present in order to access particular sources. One scholar, emphasizing how vital it was to "use the official channels," spent two weeks in discussions with the headquarters of an organization in the capital city in order to obtain a stamped letter of permission to contact political leaders lower in the hierarchy.³⁸ In other cases, the approval process is more informal and personalized. In many contexts, multiple individuals, groups, and/or organizations inside and outside of government may need to coordinate in order for approval to be

³³ Interviews, DK-8, August 1, 2012; LM-4, August 27, 2012.

³⁴ Interview, LM-13, September 7, 2012.

³⁵ Often, Political Officers, Economic Officers, and Consular Officers have extensive knowledge and in-country contacts that they may be willing to share with visiting scholars. Where expatriate Foreign Service Officers do not usually reside in one place for an extended period of time, frequently local embassy staff do have long tenures and can be very well connected.

³⁶ Interview, LM-9, August 30, 2012.

³⁷ In some contexts scholars begin by obtaining approval from the lowest unit in the hierarchy and then move up the chain of command securing additional permissions; in others, it is the reverse; and, in still others, it is a combination of the two, where the unofficial consent of the lowest unit stimulates the approval of the highest authority.

³⁸ Interview, LM-13, September 7, 2012.

granted. Again, extensive preparation and a deep background in the area can help scholars to understand how key processes work.

In many places, even once approval for a project has been awarded by the powers-that-be, the appropriate greetings must be exchanged at lower levels before the actual research can begin. Sometimes this process can be quite elaborate and time-consuming. Scholars may even feel frustrated, at what they perceive to be a waste of time, just when they are trying to get their project up and running. Yet many of our interviewees affirmed that this initial investment was returned many times over in the respondents' trust and willingness to participate freely and candidly in their field projects.³⁹ In other contexts, the proper greetings may be less prolonged and occur on a more individual basis – for example, a cordial exchange of business cards at the beginning of an interview.

As scholars move outward – as their list of contacts grows and, potentially, becomes more heterogeneous – they may wish to create new versions of the one-page project description they wrote in advance of embarking on field research (see Chapter 3), or improve the content and delivery of their “elevator pitch” about their project. They may even rework their interview protocols and survey questionnaires.⁴⁰

Of course, gaining entrée is not a discrete task that is “completed” at the beginning of the field stay. It is an ongoing process that is initiated well before arriving in the field, and continues throughout (and arguably even after) one’s fieldwork. For example, a scholar whom we interviewed pointed out that participants in her research project in Palestine initially trusted her because they knew she had grown up in a neighboring village. Even so, she had to continue working to build on that trust throughout her time in the field.⁴¹ Moreover, as our discussion will have suggested, the process of making inroads differs dramatically by context. Obtaining entrée was a different experience for a long-time native of shantytowns in Buenos Aires, Argentina⁴² than for a young female graduate student in “somewhat sexist” Portugal in the 1980s.⁴³ In the months immediately following the end of apartheid, another scholar found that being a foreigner in South Africa might have actually helped to open doors.⁴⁴ MacLean noted similar advantages

³⁹ Interviews, LM-5, August 27, 2012; LM-8, August 30, 2012; LM-13, September 7, 2012.

⁴⁰ Scholars who wish to amend such materials generally need to file a request to do so with their IRB – and receive its approval – before beginning to use revised interview protocols or questionnaires in the field.

⁴¹ Interview, BR-7, August 15, 2012. ⁴² Interview, DK-16, August 21, 2012.

⁴³ Interview, LM-17, September 11, 2012. ⁴⁴ Interview, LM-12, September 6, 2012.

of being perceived as an outsider when she interviewed state government officials in Oklahoma City on their role in a locally contentious policy issue. Regardless of the researcher's positionality, many scholars with whom we spoke emphasized that the most important way to gain entrée was to engage with genuine interest and demonstrate polite respect throughout their time in the field.⁴⁵

Emerging social challenges

Beyond the problem of how to get a foot in the door, additional social challenges that can impact the conduct and quality of a scholar's research may emerge more slowly over time as he becomes more engaged with people in the field. Some researchers may not expect to have a personal social life while doing field research, but many ultimately do. As one of our interview respondents noted: "When you haven't done fieldwork before, and you are leaving to go somewhere, you think that you are putting your life on hold. But, you get out there, and you have a life. You have friends and relationships, and you adjust to the changes."⁴⁶ Of course, ultimately researchers must make choices about how to conduct themselves socially in the field based on their own individual values and personal needs. Some scholars may enjoy and benefit from a high degree of social interaction throughout their field visit, while others may need more time alone to feel comfortable. Nonetheless, it is quite unusual for scholars conducting fieldwork to have no interaction at all with individuals living in the field site – and, when they do, sometimes interpersonal issues result.

Interpersonal dilemmas unrelated to one's research may at first seem to belong to a separate, private realm. Yet these seemingly private challenges can have a critical impact on one's professional reputation, what one is able to do in the field, and thus on the quality of the field research. Successfully completing most field research projects requires that scholars set professional boundaries, and constantly demonstrate interpersonal respect. This does not preclude developing relationships during fieldwork, and many researchers have developed fruitful and long-lasting friendships and romantic relationships in the field. Nonetheless, such relationships must be handled thoughtfully. Many researchers take trips to the same field site repeatedly

⁴⁵ Interviews, DK-19, August 27, 2012; LM-12, September 6, 2012; LM-14, September 7, 2012; LM-22, October 2, 2012.

⁴⁶ Interview, LM-16, September 11, 2012.

over a long professional career, and other researchers will likewise seek to visit those locales. Thus scholars need to consider not only their own long-term personal reputation, but also that of their local affiliate institution, their home institution, and potentially scholars from their home country more broadly when interacting with people in the field.

Scholars might employ several strategies to navigate what can be complex and delicate issues. Learning about the culture and context of the field site can help scholars begin to understand what is locally permissible behavior for someone of their age, gender, and marital status. For example, in some places, a female scholar who shares a beer with a colleague in a bar may unwittingly signal promiscuity. Even a one-on-one interview in a public plaza between a man and a woman may be interpreted locally in unintended ways. Being familiar with the context will also help scholars understand signals being sent by others' invitations, and know when and how to respond in the negative politely. Sometimes humor can lighten a scholar's rebuff of an unwanted advance by a stranger, close colleague, or neighbor – yet again, the humor must be context-sensitive. Particularly if one is operating in a foreign language, it can be very helpful to actually practice potential responses for imagined future encounters. It is particularly crucial for scholars making short trips to new contexts to critically reflect on their behavior (and that of others) and act with caution, as the lack of background knowledge and experience makes reading social cues more difficult and misunderstanding even more likely.

Of course, it can be just as important to know when and how to say “yes” to personal invitations. While, for some scholars, giving in to personal demands on their time may seem to represent an unwanted distraction from their work, time spent socializing can build rapport and trust in the field-site community and hence improve the subsequent productivity of formal research activities. Visiting socially with neighbors, colleagues, or even study participants can also be an enjoyable way to reciprocate with the field-site community.

A final emergent social question, briefly mentioned earlier in the chapter, concerns how to handle relationships with family and friends at home if one is in the field for an extended period without them. These are intensely personal decisions. Our best advice is for scholars to have candid conversations about how the separation will be navigated *before* leaving for the field. Sharing the experience of the field site by inviting family and friends to visit periodically can be enjoyable and reinvigorating, but scholars should remember that it can be particularly difficult to balance work commitments

when family and friends who have traveled from afar are present. Moreover, many scholars find they need to get away from the intense pressure, demands, and social atmosphere of the field site in order to rest, rejuvenate personally and intellectually, and reconnect with their significant others. Clear communication in advance about mutual expectations for the daily routine and the trip as a whole are again crucial in these instances.

Recruiting and managing research assistants

For many scholars, research assistants (RAs) make numerous types of valuable (and, sometimes, indispensable) contributions to their research projects. RAs well-versed in the research topic can offer significant intellectual assistance. Some scholars noted that they were much more efficient when they delegated specific tasks to a research assistant with the appropriate skills.⁴⁷ Other scholars argued that recruiting and training a team of RAs, while more work, gave them much more control over the quality of the data collected when compared to subcontracting discrete research duties, such as fielding a survey, to a private firm.⁴⁸ Moreover, some scholars recounted feeling safer or more culturally accepted when a research assistant accompanied them in the field site.⁴⁹ Research assistants can also offer camaraderie. Of course, a scholar's need to hire an RA depends upon the contours of her project, and her ability to do so relies critically on the availability of funds. But even scholars taking short trips and working with limited budgets frequently find it valuable and possible to hire at least one person to help with some well-defined task.

At the same time, it is important to recognize that recruiting and managing RAs represents a significant commitment. Moreover, finding the appropriate people to hire, training them, and overseeing and guiding them can be challenging, particularly for scholars for whom managing people is completely new. And, depending upon the type of work they are called on to do, hiring RAs can have serious implications for the intellectual quality of one's project.

Before seeking to recruit assistants, scholars should carefully consider which skills – for instance, familiarity with social science methodology,

⁴⁷ Interviews, LM-2, April 14, 2012; LM-5, August 27, 2012.

⁴⁸ Interviews, LM-1, April 13, 2012; LM-8, August 30, 2012; LM-9, August 30, 2012; LM-13, September 7, 2012. See Chapter 8 for a more detailed discussion of the tradeoffs involved with managing versus subcontracting survey research.

⁴⁹ Interviews, BR-6, August 14, 2012; BR-7, August 15, 2012; LM-5, August 27, 2012.

or facility in certain languages – they would like their RA(s) to have. They should also think through what social characteristics they would ideally like their assistant(s) to possess. And they should contemplate what type of time commitment they will require from them.⁵⁰ They might also seek to anticipate how the desired qualities might change during field research. For instance, one scholar we interviewed described how the skills her RA needed to have changed over the course of the study as her own ability to communicate in Swahili improved.⁵¹ Finally, researchers may wish to prioritize the qualities they desire in case no candidates with the ideal combination of qualities apply.⁵²

While skills and availability seem like straightforward criteria for choosing RAs, how their gender, ethnicity, age, social class, and membership in other social categories might affect their participation in a research project may be less clear. Accordingly, we offer some examples. In field contexts with patriarchal cultural norms and strictly segregated public and private spaces for men and women, RAs' gender will play a significant role in the research. One male scholar found it nearly impossible to interview women in urban centers of North Africa until he hired a female RA who worked independently.⁵³ Yet recruiting qualified female RAs can be difficult in countries where very few women have the opportunity to complete secondary school or pursue a university education.

Fujii (2009, 32) discusses in detail the multiple criteria she considered when she selected an interpreter to assist her in conducting interviews in post-genocide Rwanda. She chose an interpreter who would not be quickly stereotyped as belonging to a particular ethnic category based on physical characteristics, hoping that doing so would make both Hutu and Tutsi respondents feel more comfortable sharing their views. In her study on sectarian parties in Lebanon, Cammett (2013) employed the opposite strategy, choosing assistants who were obviously associated with a particular group and matching them with their “peer” respondent groups. In a slightly different vein, MacLean found that better-educated, urban-based RAs had difficulty according the power of informed consent (and most importantly, refusal) to potential respondents who were “just villagers.” Meanwhile, the village residents perceived the RAs as “strangers” from a foreign region of their nation. In later rounds of fieldwork, MacLean chose RAs with less

⁵⁰ Interview, LM-5, August 27, 2012. ⁵¹ Interview, LM-16, September 11, 2012.

⁵² Interviews, LM-11, August 31, 2012; LM-13, September 7, 2012.

⁵³ Personal communication, March 2, 2012.

education who were born in the region and recognized as belonging to “local” ethnic groups, but who had no immediate familial connections in the sampled village (MacLean 2010, 247).

Researchers who anticipate using RAs should begin to think through, and consult with trusted colleagues about, how they will recruit appropriate assistant(s), and address the challenges of doing so, early in their field stay.⁵⁴ One strategy that can be useful is to draw on local contacts to advertise the RA position, and then interview a subset of the applicants.⁵⁵ Researchers noted that this competitive vetting process allowed them to leverage local colleagues’ knowledge of local talent, while simultaneously preventing those colleagues from imposing a candidate who was not genuinely suited for the position.⁵⁶ Some scholars emphasized the importance of having RAs complete a brief trial period of work to evaluate whether they were a good match for the position.⁵⁷

Part of ensuring that the match is a good one is clearly communicating responsibilities, and developing a structure of compensation that fairly rewards RAs for their role in one’s project.⁵⁸ Scholars should ask local colleagues about what rate and periodicity of remuneration to offer and, if applicable, which benefits to provide (i.e., meals, accommodation, health care or sick leave / vacation days).⁵⁹ Both parties should sign a written document or informal contract,⁶⁰ clearly laying out the expectations and rewards for both the PI and the RA. Several researchers preferred to pay RAs for the work they completed during a set time period (e.g., a month) rather than piece rates (e.g., for completing a certain number of questionnaires), suggesting that RAs did better work when they were paid a daily, weekly, or monthly salary for their overall contribution to the project rather than rushing to hit their target.⁶¹ Another strategy is to provide additional

⁵⁴ Many people can provide translation and other kinds of help, even if they are not formally hired and paid as RAs (interview, LM-13, September 7, 2012); of course, it is incumbent upon the researcher to show appropriate respect and recognition for the contributions of individuals hired under such less-formal arrangements.

⁵⁵ Interviews, BR-14, October 24, 2013; LM-5, August 27, 2012; LM-8, August 30, 2012; LM-13, September 7, 2012. Some scholars prefer to cast a wider net by distributing flyers announcing the available position; for examples, see www.psfieldresearch.com.

⁵⁶ Interview, LM-8, August 30, 2012.

⁵⁷ Interviews, LM-10, September 18, 2012; LM-13, September 7, 2012.

⁵⁸ For several examples of RA contracts, see www.psfieldresearch.com.

⁵⁹ In some very poor contexts, it can be important for the researcher to ensure that all project members have adequate food and safe drinking water so they can remain healthy and productive. Directly providing meals rather than offering a per diem, for example, will prevent RAs from saving the latter for other expenditures.

⁶⁰ Interview, LM-5, August 27, 2012. ⁶¹ Interview, LM-13, September 7, 2012.

incentives, such as rewarding the completion of the full duration of the contract or the delivery of high-quality work. Scholars should consider what types of rewards would be particularly meaningful and beneficial to their assistants. For instance, Kapiszewski periodically invited one of her RAs to accompany her when she interviewed high-profile respondents,⁶² thus making a professional connection for the RA that it would otherwise have been very difficult for him/her to make. Lastly, researchers should consider what professional supplies and equipment – pens, notebooks, digital recorders, cell phones (or airtime or call credit) – they should provide in order to help their RAs be successful in the field.⁶³

The next step is to train the RA(s).⁶⁴ Depending on the number of RAs and the range of assignments, the training can last a few days, a few weeks, or a few months. Researchers should provide guidance on the specifics of *what* is to be done and *how* it is to be done, and also convey the underlying logic of *why* the tasks are to be carried out in a certain way. RA training should begin with a discussion of the overall purpose of the field project as a whole. The principles and practices of ethical research should be explained carefully. Then, researchers can explain the objectives and methodology,⁶⁵ and detail the day-to-day duties expected of the RAs; here the way in which RAs' social characteristics might affect their work could be openly addressed. One way to apply the concepts discussed during the training sessions is to pre-test the survey questionnaire or interview protocol (or other relevant research tool), and then facilitate a focus group discussion among the RAs about what did and did not work well.

Even after extensive training, RAs require ongoing management and supervision in order to reinforce the training and achieve success. Cell phones, the internet, and GPS technology have revolutionized the management and supervision of RAs in the field: today, scholars can agree upon certain times to talk or text daily with their assistants, allowing them to monitor their assistants' progress and troubleshoot problems as they arise.⁶⁶ Still, many researchers emphasized the importance of regular, face-to-face

⁶² Scholars adopting this practice should think carefully about how having the RA present will affect the interview, the respondent's comfort level, and the type and quality of the data they collect.

⁶³ Interviews, LM-8, August, 30, 2012; LM-13, September 7, 2012.

⁶⁴ For an example of an RA training manual, see www.psfieldresearch.com.

⁶⁵ While scholars might anticipate that these tasks could be tedious, or that they might experience some resistance from assistants who might not see the value of their particular way of doing things, Kapiszewski found that her RAs were extremely appreciative of the social science methodology that she taught them implicitly and, once she recognized their interest, explicitly.

⁶⁶ Interview, LM-13, September 7, 2012.

interaction with their RAs. Depending on the size of the team and whether the researcher will remain in the field as they work, it can be valuable to hire a local field supervisor to coordinate and manage the RAs. While everyone “has to find their own management style,”⁶⁷ many scholars emphasized the importance of communicating with RAs frequently, openly, and respectfully.⁶⁸ Kapiszewski sought to motivate the RAs she hired in Argentina and Brazil by creating a sense of team spirit among them, highlighting their contributions during regular meetings, and celebrating milestones in the project.

Thoughtfully recruiting and thoroughly training RAs, and continually supervising, guiding, and motivating them once they are hired, take an enormous amount of time, effort, and patience. However, doing so has tremendous payoffs if done well, and huge costs if not done at all.⁶⁹ We recommend that, very early in their fieldwork stint, scholars begin to carefully consider the benefits and challenges of hiring people to work with them. And we encourage them to award these individuals appropriate credit for their contributions throughout their time in the field, and as they are writing up their research.

Operational challenges: managing data collection and staying organized

Having considered some of the logistical and social challenges field researchers often encounter, we now turn to the multiple operational challenges scholars who conduct field research face. While more experience doing fieldwork does not make such operational hurdles disappear, it can make them easier to scale.⁷⁰ This section offers a range of strategies – many shared with us by the diverse set of scholars whom we interviewed in connection with this book – that we hope will help scholars confront such challenges. We examine how to: (1) implement a data-collection plan; (2) capitalize on technology in the field; and (3) stay organized.

Implementing a data-collection plan

Regardless of how carefully scholars formulate their data-collection strategy, most face unexpected problems as they seek to implement that strategy on

⁶⁷ Interview, LM-13, September 7, 2012.

⁶⁸ Interviews, LM-8, August 30, 2012; LM-11, August 31, 2012.

⁶⁹ Some of the potential costs include having to replace an RA who quits mid-way through the project or to redo survey interviews when the RA did not follow the sampling methodology.

⁷⁰ Interviews, LM-6, August 30, 2012; LM-8, August 30, 2012.

the ground, and many need to adapt their plan to the contingencies of the field context. One basic problem scholars often confront upon arrival is that of quickly becoming overwhelmed by the volume of information available in the field, and losing sight of their project's big-picture objectives. We suggest scholars regularly take inventory of the progress they are making toward completing the tasks outlined in their data-collection plan. This plan can serve as an important touchstone, helping scholars to keep their study's overarching questions and goals in mind, and determine how much they have accomplished toward achieving those objectives.

As a scholar begins to make headway in collecting data, priorities often have to be reconsidered and revised. Researchers may find that more data are available than originally anticipated. While at first blush data abundance hardly seems to be a problem, when this occurs, they may need to critically assess and prioritize those data. Keeping data collection tied to the data-collection plan can help a researcher exercise discipline in the field and not become overloaded with information that may never be used. Alternatively, scholars may discover that key data sources are too biased to be useful. Or researchers may encounter obstacles even accessing the data sources listed in their original data-collection plan. A particular census map may be missing for a local government office, or a certain archival box may be frustratingly unobtainable. A seemingly phantom respondent may never return phone calls, or the field site may become so dangerous that respondents on whom a scholar has been counting suddenly disappear or go silent.

When facing these latter types of challenges, scholars must carefully consider the costs of continuing to hunt down elusive data sources. Rarely is any single source so intrinsically valuable that the whole project would stall in its absence. Consulting their data-collection plan helps researchers to think beyond the particular obstacle they are facing and consider how to explore their research question, or measure a variable of interest, from other angles, using alternative sources. That is, such obstacles encourage and reinforce the importance of triangulation – gathering data from various sources and multiple perspectives in order to corroborate a particular account, check facts, enhance measurement, or illuminate how concepts are constituted and contested. Collecting data in several separate ways at once allows scholars to maintain momentum and continue progress even when encountering obstacles on a particular data-collection front. Circumnavigating such obstacles may lead scholars to re-prioritize data sources or even revise the sequence or timing of data collection. Again, the data-collection plan

a scholar brings with her to the field is simply a draft framework that is often revisited and reformulated during her time in the field.

This brief discussion of some strategies scholars can use to address data-collection obstacles simply offers a general orientation. We discuss problems of access and bias more specifically in Chapters 5 through 9, which address particular data-collection techniques. And, in Chapter 10, we consider strategies for identifying whether the problems scholars are encountering are just the inevitable obstacles of field research, or something more serious. Overall, and to repeat, routinely checking their evolving data-collection plan can help scholars to reorient themselves with the big theoretical picture, and allow that big-picture vision to guide the prioritizing (and re-prioritizing) and sequencing (and re-sequencing) of data-collection tasks.

Technology in the field

The many kinds of portable electronic devices that can now be brought into the field, and, more generally, emergent forms of technology that enable or augment field research processes, can significantly ease data collection and create the potential for innovation. These technologies and the data-collection strategies they facilitate are important to discuss because of their potential to change the face of field research in political science, *and* because of the innovative ways scholars have begun to combine them since the mid-1990s with the more traditional data-collection techniques on which this book focuses.

To begin with the most basic, the ever-increasing amount of information available on the internet and the continued growth of cellular networks both geographically (to remote corners of the world) and demographically (to nearly every socioeconomic and age group) have transformed how scholars collect data in the field. With this increase in information available on the web, it has become simpler for scholars to find contact and background information for some respondents and organizations. Further, cell phones allow for quicker and easier meeting scheduling (even in advance of arrival to the field site). One scholar described his frustration in the 1990s when “you would wait sometimes three hours before they would come out and tell you to come back in a week; and then you would have wasted a whole day for one interview.”⁷¹ Cell phones also significantly facilitate communication within research teams. Mid-career and senior scholars we interviewed remarked how their efficiency in the field has

⁷¹ Interview, LM-22, October 2, 2012.

increased exponentially now that almost everyone uses cell phones, making shorter and more targeted trips more feasible than in the past.⁷²

Further, some field researchers are employing laptops or small tablet computers to enter interview data directly in electronic form, thereby avoiding the use of notebooks or paper questionnaires. One scholar claimed that this technology had “revolutionized” the way she worked in the field.⁷³ The ability to compile data digitally in real time is particularly helpful when doing a large number of interviews, as in some survey projects.⁷⁴ In addition to efficiency considerations, this technology can also help field researchers protect the human participants in their study: interview data can be uploaded to and encrypted on a remote server immediately, thereby making respondents’ identifying information relatively inaccessible. Of course, laptops and tablets can also be used to enter many other types of data – for instance, information garnered via archival research (depending upon archival rules regarding tool use; see Chapter 5).

The use of MP3 players to record interviews is likewise expanding. Scholars exploring highly sensitive and controversial topics have also used MP3 players in more creative ways – for example, giving respondents headphones and playing digital recordings of the most difficult questions. In this way, study participants are given more privacy and discretion in responding with intentionally innocuous pre-coded answers,⁷⁵ as no one else can overhear the questions.

While cell phones and laptops have become commonplace and, for many, indispensable technological tools in the field, the use of other types of technology is less typical, but growing. One example is technologies that track and analyze spatial relationships. Space-based Global Positioning System (GPS) technology allows researchers to use hand-held receivers (either a dedicated device or sometimes integrated in a cell phone) to map and record the precise geographic location of respondents or other items of interest. Then, scholars can use Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to link these data to other variables such as the incidence of crime or the location of schools, police stations, or polling places, presenting them in a spatial format that can make them easier to visualize, interpret, and analyze.⁷⁶ For example, Cammett and

⁷² Interview, LM-9, August 30, 2012. ⁷³ Interview, LM-8, August 30, 2012.

⁷⁴ Interview, LM-10, September 18, 2012. ⁷⁵ Interview, LM-1, April 13, 2012.

⁷⁶ Anthropologists, demographers, geographers, historians, and sociologists have done more to integrate spatial variables into their analyses than have political scientists (Tarrow 2006); see Sinton and Lund (2007) for a basic introduction to GIS and Kocher and Laitin (2006) for an excellent discussion of potential applications of GIS in political science.

Issar (2010) used information on the spatial locations of the Sunni Muslim Future Movement and Shiite Muslim Hezbollah welfare programs in Lebanon to investigate under what conditions they served out-group members. GIS has also been used to trace the evolution of nation-state boundaries in studies that assess the legacies of colonialism (see Abramson and Blair 2011). Geographic information technologies can also help scholars develop sampling frames, particularly in sites where few (if any) maps exist, such as the uncharted and exploding slum neighborhoods in many developing countries.⁷⁷

A related technology that is emerging as useful in field research – in particular in tandem with “on-the-ground” data-collection techniques – is remotely sensed or satellite imagery. Satellite imagery can provide critical pieces of data that are not reliably available from other sources. For example, Lyall (2009) sought to analyze the relationship between government bombing of Chechnya between 2000 and 2005 and subsequent insurgent activity, but was unable to get information from the Russian government about what locations they had bombed. Instead, he used satellite images to identify which villages had been targeted by Russian authorities. Lyall was then able to draw on evidence from prior field research and existing datasets to analyze differences with regard to insurgency between matched treatment and control villages. Another researcher described how his original plans to use remotely sensed images changed when he discovered that government officials had been employing such images to verify land claims. Worried that the intention of his project would be misunderstood, this scholar switched to using a handheld GPS instrument to achieve approximately the same goals, but with the added advantage of spurring insightful discussions with the residents on the ground about who has the authority to measure land and with what consequences.⁷⁸

Another set of potentially useful technologies are the interactive social media sites of Web 2.0. Moving beyond traditional media’s more passive dissemination of news and public information, social media sites have become public arenas for political interaction, discussion, contestation, and even mobilization. These sites have thus stimulated new sets of questions for political scientists and provided new kinds of tools for analyzing politics. For example, scholars have examined how social networking sites facilitated

⁷⁷ Personal communication with Jeff Paller, July 2012; see also Landry and Shen (2005) and Vigneswaran and Quirk (2013), as well as Chapter 8.

⁷⁸ Interview LM-3, November 16, 2013.

coordination efforts among demonstrators during the Arab Spring uprisings in the late 2000s and early 2010s, gathering Twitter feeds and data from sites like Facebook and YouTube.⁷⁹ These sites are also a tremendous resource for background information, facilitating preparation for interviews in the field.⁸⁰ On a different note, researchers might use their own social media sites to obtain potential contacts from their networks and post preliminary analysis and findings from the field.

Of course, new technological devices are not an unalloyed good. For instance, taking notes on a laptop during an interview may increase the physical, material, or psychological distance between researchers and study participants, particularly in more rural, remote, or impoverished field sites. Moreover, some researchers might question what will be missed or lost if scholars are less immersed in the field due to technology use, or if the more-compressed field stays that technology has the potential to facilitate become the norm.⁸¹ Others might worry that an increasing emphasis on technology will direct research activities to locations where the desired technologies are available, meaning that particular questions or locations might systematically be under-studied.

Yet as surely as technology will continue to evolve and develop, so will views on and solutions to these challenges. For instance, some researchers concerned about the negative effect laptops might have on rapport have found that the smaller size of tablets, combined with the nearly ubiquitous use of cell phones all around the world, makes these devices less foreign and more acceptable.⁸² Other scholars suggested that research assistants may be highly motivated when they are given such new technology-based tools to carry and use in the field, and possibly keep at the end of the project.⁸³ As with many fieldwork choices, assessing the tradeoffs involved in using these technologies – weighing the logistical imperatives one worries about as PM and the intellectual concerns one has as PI – becomes easier as scholars become more familiar with their field sites.

⁷⁹ See Howard *et al.* (2011) for an example of this sort of analysis drawn from the discipline of Communication. See also the analysis of censorship of social media posts in China by King, Pan, and Roberts (2013).

⁸⁰ Interview, LM-22, October 2, 2012. Parakh Hoon made a related point during his presentation at the roundtable discussion on “Field research in Africa in the 21st century” at the APSA Annual Meeting, August 29, 2013.

⁸¹ Parakh Hoon made a similar point during his presentation at the roundtable discussion on “Field research in Africa in the 21st century” at the APSA Annual Meeting, August 29, 2013. See also Jeff Paller (2013).

⁸² Interview, LM-8, August 30, 2012. ⁸³ Interview, LM-1, April 13, 2012.

Systematic organization of the project

A fundamental operational challenge of fieldwork is developing systems to organize the tremendous quantity of data one is collecting, the contacts one is making with individuals and organizations, and one's synthetic thoughts and analytic progress. Each scholar's personal preferences will dictate a different optimal system. Our overarching suggestion is that scholars make their systems simple enough to be navigated easily and expanded over time. They should have organizational logics or rationales that are easy to recall, rather than being overly complex and labyrinthine such that documents, contacts, and thoughts disappear without a trace.

Organizing data

An organizational system may sound intuitively like an excellent idea, but keeping the data one is gathering well organized from the start and throughout the study is critical for at least two reasons. First, remaining organized allows a scholar to be more *effective* – better able to see what facets of the project have already been covered, and where more evidence is needed. Again, the idea behind fieldwork is not to collect as *much* data as possible, but rather to collect the data that are *necessary* to build a compelling argument. Second, the more organized a researcher is, the more *efficient* she is. Fieldworkers are often strongly tempted to photocopy and stash in big undifferentiated boxes labeled “field research” countless documents that look potentially important to read later. However, confronting a mountain of disorganized data upon returning to one’s home institution can induce procrastination and stall the analysis and writing process.⁸⁴ Scholars who have organized their data as they collected them can jump into (or, ideally, continue) the writing process much more readily once they and their materials have returned to the home institution.

It is wise to begin developing a system for organizing data even prior to arriving in the field. Since scholars usually collect and generate data in both electronic and hard-copy form, it can make sense to have parallel filing systems for organizing electronic and physical materials.⁸⁵ Of course, no particular filing system will work in all cases since the best way to organize data will depend on the data-collection techniques being utilized and the type

⁸⁴ Such boxes can also be extremely expensive to ship back from the field.

⁸⁵ A related question is how much data collected in physical form to digitize while in the field; digitizing can save on space and shipping costs.

of data being collected, as well as scholars' own predilections and logics.⁸⁶ Further, scholars will likely refine their systems as they employ them. We recommend developing systems that are simple to remember and to maintain conscientiously.⁸⁷

Finally, it is worth re-emphasizing a point forcefully made in Chapter 3: all information collected and generated in digital format – data, contacts, and thoughts – should be backed up regularly (and truly as often as possible). Many universities have free space available on their servers, and commercial services such as Dropbox can also be utilized. Scholars needing to encrypt sensitive data should investigate which systems can accommodate this step. Practically everyone who has conducted field research has horror stories of data lost or nearly lost in the field. Hard drives die. Computers or papers get wet, lost, or stolen – or may even get confiscated in some contexts. The clear lesson from all of these experiences is to back up early and often.

Organizing contacts

Developing a system to organize and manage research contacts likewise facilitates efficient operation in the field. Whether or not their project relies primarily on interviews, most scholars will interact with a variety of people and organizations while in the field. Field research requires a higher degree of organization and greater specificity of contact information than most scholars use for their personal contacts in their everyday life. For example, in addition to the usual phone numbers and email addresses, it is often valuable for researchers to keep track of how they made a particular contact (for example, who referred them to the contact or where they located the name), when the contact was called or met, what follow-up is necessary, etc. Beyond these logistical notes, which supplemental details are important will differ by project. For example, in some projects, data related to people's ancestry, ethnicity, age, job history, political affiliation, property holdings, or associational memberships may be relevant.

While the system one adopts is a personal choice,⁸⁸ we again emphasize that it must be easy to use, scrupulously maintained, and frequently backed up. Scholars might construct a dedicated contacts-management system for each research project – one that is not integrated with their personal

⁸⁶ Issues particular to specific data-collection techniques are covered in more depth in the book's later chapters.

⁸⁷ See an example of a filing system: www.psfieldresearch.org.

⁸⁸ See an example of a contacts database template: www.psfieldresearch.org.

contacts. They could employ database software,⁸⁹ or simply make clear and well-organized lists using Word or Excel. Keeping contacts well-organized makes it easy to eventually produce lists of interviewees or tables of cases for use in publications based on field research.

Organizing thoughts about the project

As they carry out field research, scholars continually sort through and reflect critically on the information they are gathering, what it is teaching them, and what it means for their project. Indeed, it is through these ponderings that scholars iteratively alter, update, and refine their projects, as we emphasize throughout the book. Depending on their approach to research, during their time in the field, scholars may reconcile their research design with the empirical situation they are observing on the ground; challenge their previous understandings of how categories are constituted; revise measurement schemes; modify the way they are thinking about outcomes and variables; puzzle through causal processes and seek to identify causal mechanisms – or engage in a broad range of other analytic tasks. They will make countless observations and arrive at myriad insights, ranging from minor intuitions to big “a-Ha!” moments along the way. The multiple observations and analytic connections scholars make every day in the field can provide a rich context for understanding the other data they are collecting. Indeed, as Chapter 7 notes, such everyday observations are important data in their own right, even in projects that are not explicitly ethnographic.

Despite their importance, scholars may be reluctant to record these observations and insights. On the one hand, they may believe they could not possibly forget such great intuitions. Yet even intensely vivid insights can become fuzzy memories all too rapidly, particularly once the researcher leaves the field site. On the other hand, they may feel that conducting more interviews, collecting more data, and gathering more evidence are better uses of their time in the field.⁹⁰ Yet these insights can be critical to the formulation (or reformulation) of scholars’ data-collection logics and strategies.

As we discuss in more detail in Chapter 10, we urge scholars to systematically document this buzz of intellectual activity. They might organize their daily or weekly schedules to create and protect time for this documentation of thoughts. Scholars might begin by organizing and reading through the

⁸⁹ For example, Microsoft Access; Microsoft Outlook or Gmail Contacts can also be tailored for this purpose.

⁹⁰ Interview, LM-22, October 2, 2012.

notes from the interviews they conducted that week, the documents they collected, or the government data accessed, jotting down thoughts that occur to them as they do so. Those synthetic thoughts might be centralized in a field notes journal (either physical or digital). Another possibility is to create dedicated documents – for instance, one that summarizes thoughts on the outcomes or dependent variables being studied, and another that includes thoughts on how well the data being gathered appear to support the main hypotheses being tested in the study. It can also be helpful to have a document for ideas for future projects. Cataloguing amazing new ideas for later consideration can help scholars to resist the urge to run off in a wholly new direction while in the field. Some scholars find that the best way to organize their thoughts is to actually begin to draft an article or book chapter. Again, specific organizational styles will vary. The key is to track one's thoughts and organize them so that they can be rediscovered and refined over the course of the field study.

Ethical challenges: managing power, positionality, and expectations

A commitment to ethical practices is one of the six core principles we identify as underlying good field research. Indeed, we have reserved discussion of ethical questions to the end of this chapter on managing challenges in the field *not* because they are unimportant, but rather because ethical issues and concerns shape and undergird all of the challenges and strategies presented in this chapter (and, indeed, throughout the book). As we began to discuss in Chapter 3, managing ethical issues is a difficult, ongoing challenge for scholars conducting fieldwork – “a constant,” as one scholar put it.⁹¹ Negotiating such issues involves more than simply securing IRB approval from one’s home campus or obtaining consent at the beginning of an interview.⁹² Moreover, field researchers often have to figure out the most appropriate responses to ethical challenges – responses that draw on their knowledge of the field context and affirm their own values – quickly, and under circumstances that do not facilitate critical reflection.

Our interviews revealed that while political scientists generally shared an abstract commitment to ethical practices in the field, they conceptualized and operationalized that commitment in different ways. Drawing on their views, we can identify a continuum of ethical practice (see Table 4.1), with points

⁹¹ Interview, DK-16, August 21, 2012.

⁹² Interviews, DK-5, July 31, 2012; DK-11, August 7, 2012.

Table 4.1 Continuum of ethical practice

	Minimalist ethical practice	Maximalist ethical practice
Goal	Do no harm	Provide benefit
Time horizon	Immediate, short-term	Extended, long-term
Guidelines for action	IRB document	Multiple including Belmont principles, project participants, etc.

along the continuum reflecting scholars' positions on three key dimensions: goals; time horizon; and sources of guidance for their actions.

At one end of the continuum, scholars have a more procedural and minimalist conception of ethics, involving adhering to campus IRB requirements to protect human subjects from harm (negative consequences from the study) in the short term. Scholars toward the middle of the continuum might go beyond the one-shot application of specific IRB rules, drawing continually on "common sense"⁹³ to navigate broader ethical questions throughout their research projects. At the other end of the continuum, several scholars suggested that the standard for ethical field research should be higher than "to do no harm."⁹⁴ They proposed that scholars draw on sources such as the Belmont principles of respect, justice, and beneficence, and/or input from project participants, to do research that "demonstrates respect for [the] experience [of those we involve in it],"⁹⁵ that is "salient,"⁹⁶ and that has a "positive impact."⁹⁷ Scholars at this end of the continuum also contemplate a longer time horizon of responsibility, considering for instance how ongoing political processes could eventually adversely affect those known to have participated in the study.⁹⁸ To be clear, we are not advocating that scholars situate themselves at any particular point along this continuum: there is no single normatively ideal position for all researchers and projects. We do, however, urge scholars to frequently reflect critically on their values, where they stand on the ethical issues that can arise in the course of field research, and why they adopt the positions that they do.

In addition to their position on this abstract continuum, the field context significantly shapes how scholars negotiate ethical issues. For example,

⁹³ Interview, DK-12, August 8, 2012.

⁹⁴ Interviews, BR-19, December 4, 2013; LM-13, September 7, 2012; DK-19, August 27, 2012.

⁹⁵ Interview, DK-19, August 27, 2012.

⁹⁶ Interview, LM-16, September 11, 2012.

⁹⁷ Interview, LM-13, September 7, 2012.

⁹⁸ Interview, LM-17, September 11, 2012.

ethical questions may be particularly salient and urgent for those who work in conflict zones or in countries with highly authoritarian regimes. In these field contexts in particular, scholars have the responsibility to learn what questions are too sensitive or dangerous to investigate.⁹⁹ Furthermore, they may need to be willing to put their research projects on hold and even leave the field site (at least temporarily) if told by the relevant authorities that it is unwise to continue.¹⁰⁰

Yet it is not only in high-risk and dangerous settings that thorny ethical issues arise. Subtle yet critical ethical issues can arise in practically any context, in relation to virtually any project. For example, questions of differential power and positionality are ubiquitous, and play out in different ways across field contexts (MacLean 2013). While the dynamics of positionality have been thoroughly debated in other disciplines,¹⁰¹ they are rarely discussed in political science despite significant variation in viewpoints within our discipline. Some scholars assume that researchers can obtain objective information more or less unproblematically (Steinmetz 2005). Others insist that positionality cannot be eliminated, and emphasize the importance of considering how a scholar's identity and that of his study participants may shape data collection.¹⁰² For example, one scholar noted that her status as "just a student" facilitated the cooperation and support of the field-site communities.¹⁰³ Others described how their rising academic rank over the years facilitated access to certain government and industry elites.¹⁰⁴ Yet it can be difficult to understand how scholars' identities are perceived by individuals in the field context, how those perceptions might shift over the period of field research, and how they might influence the data that study participants are willing to point out or provide. For instance, when an (American) faculty member shared her sense that her status and that of illiterate, elder women in a rural African community were essentially equal given the latters' level of wisdom and indigenous knowledge, a local colleague quickly challenged her "delusions of power relations," reminding her that the women saw her as a "powerful professor from America with a car."¹⁰⁵

⁹⁹ Interviews, DK-18, August 24, 2012; LM-8, August 30, 2012.

¹⁰⁰ Interview, LM-8, August 30, 2012.

¹⁰¹ Anthropologists, for example, have suggested that one's positionality cannot be erased even by studying "up," i.e., studying those who are more powerful than the researcher, or by conducting autoethnography with one's peers (McCorkel and Myers 2003).

¹⁰² Interview, LM-18, September 14, 2012. ¹⁰³ Interview, LM-16, September 11, 2012.

¹⁰⁴ Interviews, LM-6, August 30, 2012; LM-15, September 10, 2012.

¹⁰⁵ Interview, LM-8, August 30, 2012.

What can scholars concerned with issues of positionality do? First, they might take careful notes – in a field notebook, or together with the notes they took when administering the survey, doing the interview, or interacting with the archivist in question – on how they believe their interpersonal interactions shaped data collection. Alternatively, they might adopt a more participatory and collaborative approach to field research, soliciting ongoing critical feedback on their relative position and its effects on information exchange from study participants themselves (McCorkel and Myers 2003; Nagar, Ali, and Collective 2003; Chacko 2004; Khan 2005). Of course, as Norton (2004, 84) points out, this narrowing of the distance between investigators and research participants entails tradeoffs: “Familiarity, experience and affection limit what one sees, but they also open what might remain concealed or unnoticed.”

A related ethical dilemma that scholars should consider and discuss in advance of fieldwork is compensation for study participants.¹⁰⁶ Participating in a field research project can involve considerable time and effort for research subjects, raising the question of how to show thanks and reciprocate appropriately. Scholars resolve this conundrum in a variety of ways, with the field context significantly influencing their choices. Indeed, some researchers acknowledged that, even though they do not consider it to be “morally appropriate” to give small gifts to study participants, it was nevertheless culturally expected in their field sites.¹⁰⁷ Scholars concurred that there is no universally acceptable gift, and that it can be useful to solicit local advice and give relatively small, in-kind gifts that will be valued by the recipients.¹⁰⁸

In many advanced industrialized countries, research subjects are routinely given cash payments as a reward for their participation in a survey or experimental study. Several researchers working in developing countries noted that, due to the practices of academics, donors, government agencies, and NGOs who had worked in their field contexts in the past, their study participants increasingly expected some sort of payment, allowance, or per diem.¹⁰⁹ While some researchers reported paying a small cash amount to participants in survey and experimental projects, for instance, others declared that they “*never* paid anyone” for an interview.¹¹⁰ Offering benefits for project participation puts upstream pressure on, and raises questions of equity and fairness in relation to, participant selection. Some scholars resolved

¹⁰⁶ Interviews, LM-13, September 7, 2012; LM-16, September 11, 2012.

¹⁰⁷ Interview, LM-13, September 7, 2012.

¹⁰⁸ Interviews, LM-8, August 30, 2012; LM-13, September 7, 2012; LM-16, September 11, 2012.

¹⁰⁹ Interviews, BR-2, July 30, 2012; LM-16, September 11, 2012.

¹¹⁰ Interview, LM-6, August 30, 2012.

this dilemma by compensating organizations or communities instead of individuals, by organizing local archives, providing electronic and hard copies of the data they collected, or sending brief reports giving the analytic highlights relevant to a particular group.¹¹¹ Others used a highly transparent process of randomization to select study participants, including a public lottery (Chapter 9 discusses how this technique is employed in some field experiments).

Ethical dilemmas do not end when researchers return home. Some scholars have observed or heard about illegal activities,¹¹² or have collected significant information that could cause serious harm if published or otherwise made public. In very rare circumstances, researchers have faced demands for their data from corporations, national governments, or even international bodies such as the International Criminal Court.¹¹³ Other scholars felt ethical pressure emanating from the opposite direction: they wished to publish their results rapidly and widely, particularly in non-academic outlets in hopes of facilitating policy dialogue and intervention with regard to the problems they had studied in-depth.¹¹⁴ Finally, several researchers acknowledged the ethical problems that local displeasure about their analysis and writing can raise. One researcher operating in a more democratic setting recalled how study participants' initial anger with the portrayal of political events or dynamics gave way to a discussion focused on whether the analysis was fair and well supported.¹¹⁵ In more authoritarian settings, however, both researchers and study participants have experienced more serious consequences for the publication or presentation of unwanted perspectives, such as the destruction of project data, refusal for future visa reentry or exit, or even physical intimidation and prison.¹¹⁶ Scholars, in particular those working in less free settings, should try to anticipate such issues and discuss how to respond to them with their core network of trusted colleagues so they are better prepared in the unlikely event that they should arise.

Conclusion

Engaging in field research stimulates a wide range of emotions. Some scholars recall their initial fieldwork experiences warmly as “honeymoon”

¹¹¹ Interviews, LM-13, September 7, 2012; LM-22, October 2, 2012.

¹¹² Interview, DK-16, August 21, 2012. ¹¹³ Interview, DK-12, August 8, 2012. See also Reno (2013).

¹¹⁴ Interview, LM-6, August 30, 2012. ¹¹⁵ Interview, LM-15, September 10, 2012.

¹¹⁶ Interview, LM-22, October 2, 2012 on becoming a *persona non grata* and being denied a return visa. See also Subotic (2010).

periods, during which their discovery of every new intimate detail about their research topic and field sites caused them to fall more deeply in love with each. Others recount the constant anxiety of living in a new and difficult place, compounded by the mortal fear of failing to accomplish their intellectual and professional goals while there. Our interviews suggest that most scholars' experiences lie somewhere between these two poles – or oscillated between the two depending on the hour or day.

This bouncing from jubilation to stress, we believe, is related to the ongoing logistical, social, operational, and ethical challenges of engaging in field research: while scholars quickly learn that they will face all of these difficulties at some point, they can rarely predict when they will face any particular one. Field research, in other words, entails a great deal of uncertainty. The emotional roller-coaster probably also relates to the broader challenge of serving as both PI and PM for one's project, which requires continual refocusing from the big picture to the smaller details. Because successes on the big-picture and small-details fronts are not necessarily correlated, exuberance due to progress on the first can co-exist with frustration relating to a potentially significant roadblock connected with the second.

The strategies outlined here should be useful for navigating some of the challenges fieldwork entails, no matter where a scholar is conducting research or what data-collection techniques she is employing. Details of their implementation, however, will depend on a scholar's question, the field site in which she is working, and the scholar herself. In the following chapters, we offer extensive discussions of the main data-collection techniques political scientists use and the issues that arise when employing them in the field.