



Research Questions | Elite Interviews

Doing Political Research, Week 3



Research Questions

- What makes for a good research question?
- What makes for a bad research question?
- What research questions do you have?

Ross

- Was Ross' question a 'good' research question?
- Did Ross' article answer his question? Would another question have fitted his research better?
- What else could Ross have done to answer his research question?

Is Democracy Good for the Poor?

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Many scholars claim that democracy improves the welfare of the poor. This article uses data on infant and child mortality to challenge this claim. Cross-national studies tend to exclude from their samples nondemocratic states that have performed well; this leads to the mistaken inference that nondemocracies have worse records than democracies. Once these and other flaws are corrected, democracy has little or no effect on infant and child mortality rates. Democracies spend more money on education and health than nondemocracies, but these benefits seem to accrue to middle- and upper-income groups.

Many studies claim to show that democracies do a better job than nondemocracies of improving the welfare of the poor (Boone 1996; Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2003; Dasgupta 1993; Franco, Alvarez-Dardet, and Ruiz 2004; Lake and Baum 2001; McGuire 2001; Moon and Dixon 1985; Przeworski et al. 2000; Sen 1981, 1999; Siegle, Weinstein, and Halperin 2004; Zweifel and Navia 2000). These claims are consistent with leading political economy models, which suggest that democracies produce more public goods, and more income redistribution, than nondemocracies (Acemoglu and Robinson 2005; Boix 2003; Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2003; Ghorbarah, Huth, and Russett 2004; McGuire and Olson 1996; Meltzer and Richard 1981; Niskanen 1997).

There is good evidence that democracies fund public services at a higher level than nondemocracies (Avelino, Brown, and Hunter 2005; Brown and Hunter 2004; Gerring, Thacker, and Alfaro 2005; Kaufman and Segura-Ubiergo 2001; McGuire 2006; Stasavage 2005a; Tavares and Wacziarg 2001). But it is not obvious that these infusions of money actually reach the poor; nor is it obvious that they produce better social outcomes, such as longer, healthier, or more productive lives. If democracy produces better outcomes for low-income families, then countries that transit from autocratic to democratic rule should see improvements in their infant and child mortality rates. In general, they do not. Figure 1 displays changes in the log

of infant mortality rates of all 44 states that made a single, unambiguous transition to democracy between 1970 and 1999.¹ While the infant mortality rates of these states collectively fell by 7.4% during the first five years after their transitions, they fell by 10.7% during the five years before their transitions.²

Perhaps this helps explain why people in newly democratized countries often vote for candidates and parties associated with former dictators. A recent United Nations survey found that 54.7% of respondents in Latin America would prefer a dictatorship to a democracy, if it would help "resolve" their economic problems (UNDP 2004).

This article suggests that past studies of democracy and the poor have been flawed by a surprising form of selection bias: most cross-national studies omit from their samples nondemocratic states with good economic and social records, which creates the false impression that democracies have outperformed nondemocracies. Most also fail to control for country-specific fixed effects and global health trends. Once these flaws are corrected, democracy has little or no effect on infant and child mortality.

If democracies spend more money on public services than nondemocracies, why do they fail to achieve better results? Perhaps democracies subsidize the budgets of middle- and upper-income groups who can afford to buy food and health services privately, but not the poor, who

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Designing an Interview Study

- Choose a research question to investigate a political process or phenomenon and design an elite-interview-based study to answer it.
- Who will you interview? How will you get access to these 'elites'?
- How will you conduct the interview? What questions will you ask?
- What issues might be raised by the 'elite' nature of the participants? How might power relations affect the answers to your questions?
- How will you analyse the data?

Matthews

- Who was/wasn't interviewed? How might this have affected the results?
- How might the 'elite' nature of the interviewees have affected their answers to Matthews' questions?
- How reliable are the results? How would you improve the study? What other methods could have been used?

Gendered Candidate Selection and the Representation of Women in Northern Ireland

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In an attempt to account for the exceptionally low levels of female representation in Northern Ireland, this paper provides an analysis of the contemporary candidate selection procedures of the region's five main political parties. Drawing on evidence gathered from 29 elite interviews, plus official internal party documents, the study finds that the localised nature of the parties' selection procedures may disadvantage women aspirants. Also important are 'supply-side' factors influencing legislative recruitment and female participation rates, namely the strongly embedded social norm of female domestic responsibility, a masculinised political culture and the lack of confidence of potential female candidates.

Despite greater moves towards achieving gender equality in other spheres (Inglehart and Norris, 2003, pp. 3–7; Scott *et al.*, 2010) the political underrepresentation of women in modern states persists, with the most recent estimate showing that women comprise just 19.8% of the world's parliamentarians (IPU, 2012). Accounting for such disparity is a complex and difficult task. The literature suggests that political gender inequality is essentially a multi-dimensional crisis, forged by a medley of cultural, socioeconomic and political forces (Norris and Lovenduski, 1995) which often combine or overlap and can differ in respective strength in individual case studies (see Galligan and Tremblay, 2005; Sawyer *et al.*, 2006; Gelb and Palley, 2010). Unsurprisingly, such convolution poses a problem for analysts when determining causality, as Tremblay (2008, p. 9) asks: 'do cultural factors precede socioeconomic and political factors, or is it the opposite?' In the last two decades, however, a global research trend has emerged that asserts the primacy of political or institutional factors—such as electoral systems, party organisation or party procedures for the selection of candidates—over cultural and socio-economic variables in producing and maintaining political gender inequality (Lovenduski and Norris, 1994; Inglehart and