Spring 2004, Vol. 2, No. 1

Qualitative Methods

Newsletter of the
American Political Science Association
Organized Section on Qualitative Methods

Contents

Letter from the Editor

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The *Qualitative Methods* newsletter is one year old! It seems like only yesterday . . .

Volume 1, Issue No. 1 (Spring 2003) focused on the practical task of teaching a qualitative methods course. It featured retrospective evaluations by a number of instructors and an extensive canvas of qualmeth syllabi and textbooks. Volume 1, Issue No. 2 (Fall 2003) focused on interpretivist approaches, and included contributions from Robert Adcock, David Dessler, Clifford Geertz, David Laitin, Laura Stoker, Dvora Yanow, and myself. (Following protocol, past issues will be available to non-section members one year after publication. Thus, Volume 1, Issue No. 1 is now available on-line on the CQRM web site at http://www.asu.edu/clas/polisci/cqrm/QualitativeMethodsAPSA.html. Volume 1, Issue No. 2 will become available this Fall.)

The current issue takes on two challenging topics, field research and content/discourse analysis. The field research symposium, with contributions from Marc Howard, Evan Lieberman and Julia Lynch, is the culmination of a series of seminars led by the authors at APSA and IQRM meetings over the past several years. It commits to print, for the first time, the practical, hands-on wisdom imparted in these valuable sessions.

The second symposium, organized by Yoshiko Herrera and Bear Braumoeller, addresses comparisons and contrasts between two research methods directed to the analysis of textual evidence – content analysis and discourse analysis. Since the material of politics is often textual in nature, it behooves us to consider these methodological issues carefully. What does it mean to analyze a text? What assumptions are required? What is the most appropriate method(s)?

Plans for future issues of the newsletter are beginning to take shape. If all goes as planned, the Fall 2004 issue will include three ***s***ymposia. The first, on Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA), will include contributions from Andrew Bennett, James Mahoney, Charles Ragin, Benoit Rihoux, and Jason Seawright. The second, on the application of economic models to the study of politics, will include a lead essay by Sanjay Reddy, along with various responses. The third, on the

ISSN 1544-8045

pitfalls of qualitative methods, will include a lead essay by Gerardo Munck, together with several commentaries.

The newsletter has been, and will continue to be, responsive to section members' suggestions and contributions. We continue to look for suggestions for future symposia topics. We also welcome short responses to already-published symposia, which will either be printed in the newsletter or posted on the newsletter's web site. The newsletter is also looking for broad state-of-the-field book reviews to publish in later issues. As always, I solicit your suggestions for published work to include in our annual Book Notes and Article Notes, which will appear regularly in the Fall issue.

In other news, the third annual Institute for Qualitative Research Methods (IQRM) was held at Arizona State University from January 5-16. The 2004 institute hosted 93 attendees – the largest group to date. IQRM's parent, the Consortium for Qualitative Research Methods (CQRM), is now supported by over 20 subscribing institutions, as well as by a generous grant from the National Science Foundation.

The Qualitative Methods section continues to grow. Membership has now topped six hundred, qualifying us as the tenth largest of APSA thirty-five organized sections. Consonant with its increasing size, the section will be sponsoring twelve sections at Chicago this September. (For a full list of panels and roundtables, see page 39.) Please note that our panel allocation for APSA 2005 will depend in large part on attendance at our panels in Chicago. So, please come to as many panels as you can.

By way of conclusion, let me take this opportunity to thank you for supporting the newsletter with your contributions and your annual section dues. I also want to acknowledge the generous support of CQRM and Boston University in under-writing our production and publication costs.

Please feel free to circulate this issue of the newsletter among friends and associates. You might also encourage them to join the Qualitative Methods section!

Symposium: Field Research

Between 2001 and 2004, the three authors of this symposium presented a "short course" on the topic of managing field research to a variety of audiences, including at the annual meetings of the APSA in 2001, 2002, and 2003, as well as at the Institute for Qualitative Research Methods in January 2003 and 2004.[1] This series of brief articles highlights the "strategies" we have discussed during those courses. Our contributions are primarily intended to be useful for doctoral students preparing for field research. These suggestions are largely based on our own experiences with field research: Howard in Russia and Germany (1997-99)[2]; Lieberman in Brazil and South Africa (1997-99)[3]; and Lynch in Italy and the Netherlands (1998-2000), as well as conversations with various colleagues, and suggestions and comments from our various short courses.

Introduction: The Promise and Pitfalls of Field Research

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Overseas field research can be an extremely valuable tool for gathering data and theoretical insights for political science research, particularly in the sub-fields of comparative politics and international relations. In addition to making what Brady, Collier and Seawright (2003: 9) describe as "data-set observations," which generate scores on independent and dependent variables, field researchers may be particularly well suited to make "causal process observations," which shed light on "context, process, and mechanism, provid(ing) insight into the relationships among the explanatory variables, and between these variables and the dependent variable." Learning about a particular society and polity from close range allows scholars to carry out "reality checks" for various theories through active engagement of people, places, and contexts. Scholars engaged in intensive field research may generate new theoretical insights based on fresh views of social and political processes which have not been previously captured by other social scientists. They may also use field research as an opportunity to determine if their research will have any broader relevance for the societies under investigation.

Along with such promise, field research presents a host of practical and logistical problems which make it a risky endeavor in terms of potential costs of time and money. Because there are few formal courses in field research for political science graduate students, information about how to address standard and recurring problems is exchanged anecdotally and unevenly. Our articles for this newsletter are intended to begin to fill a gap in methods training by focusing on the problem of self-management in field research-based projects and by offering a set of extremely practical observations and suggestions, with few pretensions of discussing high-level theoretical issues. Undoubtedly, our suggestions are grounded in our own views of what constitutes "good" and "doable" social science research: a middle ground between barefoot empiricism and highly deductive hypothesis-testing. Along these lines, we view fieldwork as a research strategy that seeks to accomplish two key objectives: It is both an opportunity to collect data in order to explore specific hypotheses, and a strategy for inductively deriving new propositions and new understandings about various social and political processes.

In our articles, we discuss how to address the challenges of gathering the right amount of data, in a usable form, in a reasonable amount of time, at an affordable cost, and without losing one's sanity. There are no panaceas, and field research is inevitably a highly personal process not amenable to any cookie-cutter approach. Nonetheless, we believe that through

conscious self-management, data collection in field research can be carried out more efficiently and effectively. By highlighting potential tradeoffs of various strategies, we hope that scholars will make informed decisions about logistical and other concerns that can have far-reaching consequences for the quality of research that is eventually produced, given time and financial constraints.

It is important to note that in this series of articles, we do not discuss specific techniques of research design, causal inference, survey design, interviewing, historical research methods, participant observation, ethnography, etc., because much has been written on this elsewhere.[4] Rather, we are concerned with the issues that may come between such components of a research design and actual research execution. Our goal is largely to raise issues, and to suggest tradeoffs in various approaches that can help to mitigate or to avoid such practical problems. Moreover, we are not the first to write on logistical and practical concerns. For example, the contributions to the edited volume by Devereux and Hoddinott (1993) provide a series of important discussions about local-level field research that may be of interest to political scientists working at the village level and/or working on household surveys.

Similarly, Barrett and Cason (1997) also discuss many of the practical and logistical challenges associated with field research, particularly through the use of anecdotes and tips from various scholars. Indeed, many of our suggestions resonate with the advice proffered in these volumes, but our intent is to present a unified management strategy, updated for current trends in political science, and available technological tools.

It is our conviction that field research-based projects present significant management dilemmas. Such projects—especially when carried out as part of one's doctoral research—are typically multi-year, multi-method endeavors that cost tens of thousands of dollars. Even if one only spends a few months in the field, the time span from grant application to the completion of analysis and writing is rarely less than a year. In other fields and professions, related work tends to be supported with much greater institutional resources. Social science, however, emphasizes scholarship carried out by lone individuals—particularly at the stage of doctoral research—and resources are more limited. As a result one is forced to take on the roles of project manager, administrator, budget comptroller, and data archivist, in additon to being a researcher/scholar. In the later stages of one's career, this may be less true, as a proven track record can help one to gain access to greater institutional resources for field research, but especially for graduate students, and even for most scholars, self-administration is a central part of field research.

We suggest a set of "ideal" strategies for dealing with very practical issues that may only be achievable in part, but we hope that they may be useful for others in managing their projects. Lieberman discusses a set of strategies useful for preparing for field research; Howard discusses strategies associated with obtaining and recording data; and Lynch discusses the need to keep track of progress while in the field in order to ensure that one is gathering the correct data, and within an acceptable time frame.

Notes

[1] In 2002, Lauren Morris McLean and Benjamin Read co-taught the course with Howard and Lynch.

[2] Now published as Marc Morje Howard. 2003. *The Weakness of Civil Society in Post-Communist Europe*. Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press.

[3] Now published as Evan Lieberman. 2003. *Race and Regionalism in the Politics of Taxation in Brazil and South Africa*. Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press.

[4] Indeed, other disciplines and sub-disciplines within political science have had more to say on these topics than scholars in comparative politics and international relations. These works are far too numerous and extensive to list here.

Preparing for Field Research

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Preparations for field research go well beyond the tasks of obtaining funding and purchasing a plane ticket. In order to maximize the benefits of one's time abroad, a great deal of advance planning is necessary and should be carried out for at least six months prior to an extended trip. Given personal, professional, and diplomatic constraints, time in the field is finite and valuable, and there are several strategies that can be used to increase the likelihood of returning home with the desired data and insights, which were the objective of the journey in the first place.

Don't Save for the Field What Can Be Done at Home

Because field research is an iterative process in which new findings lead to new inquiries, it is impossible to prepare for everything. But, to the extent possible, all research that can be done at one's home institution should be carried out prior to departure in order to improve the quality of the work that gets done in the field. For example, extended time searching internet resources while in the field—often at quite slow dial-up speeds—is a true waste of precious field time, since such work obviously could have been completed prior to departure. Depending on the countries being studied, an enormous amount of information may be available on the internet, and it is often easier to gather (relatively recent) newspapers, government documents, official statistics, many survey data sets, and other information on the internet from an American university connection. Similarly, many foreign documents from the pre-internet era are available in American research libraries. Importantly, the names and contact information of individuals at various organizations may be available on the internet, and to the extent possible, it is useful to try to gather all of this information, and to begin contacting people to arrange meetings or to learn how to obtain materials even be-

fore arriving at the field destination. Similarly, it may be possible to conduct electronic searches of foreign libraries while still at home, which would allow one to arrive at a library or archive with a prioritized set of requests. There is no special value in sitting at a computer terminal in a foreign country, if the same work could be done at home.

As more and more information becomes available to us through advanced communications technologies, it is useful to keep a focus on what will be available only through in-person contact. This may include the specific attitudes and histories of individuals within a country (to be gathered through interviews), special primary sources (to be gathered in libraries or archives), or nuanced information about norms and language (gathered through everyday contact with individuals and/or through more deliberate ethnographic approaches) that may shed light on other sources of data. For scholars working on areas that have been thinly researched, and that are "unwired," it will be necessary to spend more time in the field, as a much larger proportion of essential data will not be available from alternative sources.

Timing and Duration of Field Research

In preparing for field research it is important to reflect upon the ideal duration and timing of travel in conjunction with one's stage of research, including the state of theoretical debate around the question at hand, as well as one's own empirical knowledge and local skill-set. Field research trips may serve various purposes and it is useful to keep these in mind. One class of field research is the "fishing expedition," which involves the search for a specific outcome of interest or puzzle to explain, or attempts to identify methodologically and logistically sound sites for research. On such a trip, the scholar may work to identify professional and personal contacts, to become familiar with the language and culture, and/or to develop a researchable project to be executed during a future trip. As is well known, funding agencies tend to be far more amenable to proposals that have already completed such initial research. Even at this less structured end of the continuum, preparations for interviews, meetings, and/or archival visits are critical in order to engage the types of conversations and observations that can lead to new ideas.

By contrast, a field research trip may be extremely focused, and the central objective may be to gather very specific forms of data about well-defined variables and observational units. At the extreme, one may manage and/or execute a closed-ended survey project, which involves the execution of a tightly formulated survey instrument in a foreign location.

In between, many or even most political science field research trips are neither completely open-ended nor completely closed-ended. To borrow the phrase from the literature on interviewing techniques, such field research tends to be "semi-structured." The goals of such trips include the identification of specific data items, through the systematic execution of a research design, in addition to an open-ended component of the trip, in which leads developed during early stages of the research are pursued during later stages.

Particularly in this last instance, scholars must decide whether to carry out their field research as one long trip, or as a series of short stays. The benefits of a single, long trip include the continuity of logistical arrangements, not needing to finance additional overseas plane trips, greater opportunities for integration within various communities, and less pressure to make every day "count." A long stay—which in political science tends to be a year or more—may be desirable for all sorts of personal and long-term professional development reasons, including developing language skills and contacts. On the other hand, shorter trips may be less disruptive to one's life back home, and may prove more efficient if one prepares an extremely tight schedule. In the latter case, advance planning is particularly crucial, because one wants to walk off the plane with a very clear schedule of meetings and tasks in order to focus on "content" for the duration of one's stay.

It is true that many grants, such as those from the Social Science Research Council or Fulbright, are offered with the expectation that scholars will spend 9 or 12 months in a country, but this does not imply that one should spend every minute of that time gathering new data. As Lynch discusses, a good portion of that time needs to be spent on analysis and perhaps even writing.

For multi-country (or multi-site) studies, it may not be necessary to spend the same amount of time in each place, even if each location counts equally as a "case" in one's analysis. (In fact, all three contributors to this symposium carried out research in two different countries for our doctoral dissertations, and we each spent varying amounts of time in our respective field sites.) It may make more sense to spend more time in places with greater logistical challenges, where one's own language skills and/or personal contacts are weaker, where there is a less extensive secondary literature, or where one hopes to develop lasting contacts for the future. Moreover, one may find during the process of gathering data for the first country of a multi-country study that many of the types of "mistakes" and dead-ends that tend to be encountered during the earlier stages of research can be avoided in field research trips to additional countries, reducing the total time needed for executing one's research design.

Translate a Research Design into a "To Get" List

Field research can be likened to a giant shopping expedition for various types of data. Like other shopping trips, preparation can ensure that most of the needed and/or desired items will be acquired. Of course, exposure to a wider selection of items when one arrives at the store, or the discovery that certain items are no longer in stock or are over-priced can force a complete rethinking of the week's menu. While the uncertainties of the market suggest the need to be flexible, without any forethought about one's needs, it is all too easy to return home with many delicious items that looked great at the store, only to discover that key items went unpurchased simply because they were forgotten/not anticipated, or because of lack of time and/or money to purchase them.

If this analogy holds, we think it is extremely useful to convert one's research design into a very extensive and highly operational "to get" or "to do" list. In most cases, a research design that might have been submitted as a dissertation prospectus or funding proposal says something like "Interview top 40 business elites" or "Examine 1970s archives." One needs to move from such generalities and get very, very specific, breaking down every component of the research design into discrete items of data that can be gathered and that can be stored away in a retrievable "data container" that will be readily accessible at a later time. This means identifying, to the extent possible, each person that would be desirable for an interview or meeting (even if identified only by title, and not specific name), every place to visit, and when, in order to begin to organize one's schedule and travel within a country. To the extent possible, it is desirable to arrange interviews and other types of meetings and library visits in such a way that each day's activities are confined to a manageable area.

The more specific and more concrete one's "to get" list is before leaving for the field, the more successful the time in the field is likely to be. There is a big difference between a plan to interview "a mid-level government bureaucrat in capital city," and a plan to interview "Mary Rodriquez, director of human resources, department of finance, in Santiago, Chile on April 7 at 2pm; Call to confirm day before with her assistant." It can take weeks and months to track down the names of appropriate people to meet and to confirm appointment dates, and to the extent that this can be done via electronic mail, regular mail, or phone prior to departure, one's daily life in the field will be much more productively oriented towards content, rather than more mundane logistical work.

In a similar manner, if the use of archives or libraries is demanded by one's research design, it is worth estimating the amount of time that will be required to carry out the anticipated research. It may be useful to ask about the extent of the materials available on a particular subject, and if they are available on-site or if they will be ordered. In addition, it is worth inquiring about any special rules or regulations about the use of computers and pens, or the need for letters of introduction or affiliation. More generally, various "official-looking" letters of introduction, written on university letterhead, can come in handy as a passkey to get through bureaucratic snafus.

There are larger psychic rewards to making a thorough "to get" list: It can help one to envision actual completion of one's research. In the absence of a relatively finite list, one's research project can become an ever-expanding black hole that will make it impossible to experience completion. This list can help one to measure progress during long periods without much feedback (though, as Lynch discusses, soliciting feedback should be an important component of the field research experience).

Moreover, if the "to get" list appears truly overwhelming prior to departure for field research given available time and resources, then one's research design is clearly in need of revision, and it is better to learn this sooner rather than later. Just as problematic as gathering insufficient information is the threat of data overload. It may be tempting to endlessly gather information in a "scorched earth" strategy in the absence of a plan for what's actually needed. Careful planning will facilitate the appropriate acquisition of materials.

Develop an Information Management System

Even relatively short field research expeditions can generate vast quantities of information, which are likely to arrive in different forms and shapes:

• One may conduct *interviews*, and wind up with dozens of cassette tapes and hundreds of pages of notes and transcriptions from the taped interviews.

• One may carry out *archival* research, and arrive home with hundreds of pages of handwritten or typed notes, and perhaps boxes of copies.

• One is likely to stumble upon useful new *secondary sources* that were not discovered or available prior to your departure.

• One may obtain various *data sets*—either in printed form or, hopefully, in electronic form. These may be surveys others have conducted, national accounts data, or other collections of data that may be useful.

• In the course of casual conversations with people, reading the newspaper, and simply looking around, one is likely to make a set of *observations* that may shed light on one's analyses of the place/society/polity under investigation. Whether one is doing rigorous participant observation, or simply taking note of something that appeared interesting or revealing, such observations can later be extremely valuable in demonstrating the validity of one's more systematice analyses.

• Finally, most field researchers wind up with loads of–for lack of a better label—*miscellaneous documents*. These are brochures, song lyrics, annual reports, and various other printed matter or ephemera that may be useful that come one's way during the course of one's stay. Some of these may turn out to be useful as office decorations, but oftentimes, random stuff helps to capture exactly the point one wants to make in a way that could not be gleaned from a survey, and such documents are exactly why field research can be a gold mine of revealing data.

While it may be exciting to think about these various sources of field-based data, one should anticipate that by conducting field research, an enormous volume of physical and electronic documents will be amassed. As a result, it is extremely important to develop a thorough *information management system*. Frankly, there is no point in going to all the trouble of finding data, if such data are impossible to retrieve when needed.

Every time a report is obtained, an interview conducted, or an archive combed, there should be a clear place for this information to be stored. There is simply nothing worse than returning from the field with loads of unorganized boxes marked "dissertation" or "research project." It will take at least twice as long to sort through those boxes, and much more likely, one will simply never open most of them, rendering the fieldwork itself pointless. In my own case, a great many documents went un-filed from my doctoral field research, and even after publishing my dissertation as a book, those

documents have remained largely unexamined! The point is not that every item of data gathered needs to be incorporated into one's analysis, but that such non-incorporation should be a willful decision and not simply a product of disorganzation.

The development of an information management system may involve a variety of strategies, but I believe it is useful to:

1. Make parallel electronic and physical filing systems. That is, develop a logic for sorting all items and documents that can be applied both to hard copies and objects as well as to one's computer hard drive. For example, create main folders or boxes with the top-level categories of "administration" (for letters, itineraries, etc.), "data" (for specific observations and information gathered), "analysis" (for outlines and summaries of the data) and "papers/output" (to store chapters and conference papers).

2. Keep track of every data item with a master index, preferably by using a bibliographic software package, such as Endnote. You will thank yourself later when it comes time to actually create a biliography if you enter this information religiously along the way.

3. Keep track of contacts in a systematic manner. Most scholars will contact dozens, if not hundreds, of individuals while in the field. While this information may be easily stored in a notebook, there are several more "high-tech" strategies that are likely to be more useful. By creating a spreadsheet or other database, one can quickly search and sort contacts, helping to manage one's schedule and keeping track of leads for interviews. Also, one can back up this very important information quite easily—the loss of such information would be devastating. When an interview has been completed, most word processors contain "mail merge" functions that can facilitate sending out thank-you notes later. Indeed, this is an important norm to follow given that many people in foreign countries spend an inordinate amount of time with American researchers with no tangible reward.

At a minimum, the following information ought to be gathered and stored:

- Name
- Address
- All relevant phone and fax numbers, email addresses
- Names/numbers of assistants
- Dates when contact was made
- Information about messages exchanged
- Information about when and how to follow up
- Date of interview/meeting
- Anecdotes/comments about the contact
- Information about need for post-interview follow-up
- Whether or not a thank-you letter was sent

The contacts one makes in the field may be useful not just for this project, but for future work, and it is a good idea to keep track of as much anecdotal information as possible; for example, by systematically recording which items various individuals promised to send the field researcher or that the field researcher may have promised to send to them, one can ensure that these transactions actually take place. Also, it is nice to recall, was this person helpful? Friendly? Would you want to contact them again? Such information can prove quite valuable for future research projects. Depending upon the nature of one's contacts, and agreed-upon human subjects protocols, it may be necessary to password-protect such information in order to maintain confidentiality and/or anonymity.

Use Technology to your Advantage

Given the pace of technological change, any recommendations for electronic tools are likely to become dated in short order, but I will make a few suggestions nonetheless.

First off, at this point in time, a laptop is basically essential for field research, and it goes without saying that there is no better insurance policy than backing up. It is imperative to bring some type of backup solution to the field—which may mean sending files back home electronically, and making CDs or Zip disks or using USB keys, which can store quite a bit of information—but don't pack those in the same bag as the laptop, so that if the bag is lost or stolen you won't have lost everything.

Second, where service is available, a cellular phone is extremely useful for making and confirming appointments, and for safety. While international cell phones are available in the United States, the call rates tend to be geared towards business travelers (i.e., extremely expensive), and one winds up with a U.S. phone number, forcing people to make international calls in order to reach you. Instead, it is best to wait until arriving in the country of destination, and to buy a cell phone that will allow the use of pre-paid phone cards—which is increasingly an option in the many countries that use GSM technology. In recent years, prices have become extremely reasonable. Again, it is always important to remember that one's time is valuable, and any opportunity to confirm meetings before arriving to an empty office—where your contact forgot about your meeting or was called away at the last minute—will be critical to productivity and sanity.

To the extent that one's budget allows, other electronic items can be very useful and may save you either time or money in the long run. Personal digital assistants (PDAs) are increasingly inexpensive, and allow for quite a bit of portability with contact lists and other information that you may want with you at all times. It is now possible to purchase collapsible keyboards designed to work with PDAs, which can be quite useful for going into libraries to take notes rather than taking around a bulkier laptop, which might be more vulnerable to being stolen and is likely to have much shorter battery life. Portable printers and scanners can also be very useful as you set up a mobile office in libraries and other places.

A good-quality tape recorder or digital voice recorder may be necessary for recording interviews, but can be very useful even if you're not. It's difficult to write or type when on the road, and it's nice to be able to quickly record any ideas or observations you may have. It is important to test these out before departing, and to keep checking that they are working well, because few things are more frustrating than finding out later that notes and interviews are incomprehensible because the sound was garbled. A benefit of digital voice recorders is

that one can easily create backups and duplicate copies of the recording, including those to be used for transcription.

Budgeting and Prioritizing Time and Resources

Finally, in the area of preparations, it is critical to take one's "to get" list, and to start setting priorities for what needs to be done in the field even before leaving. Given the various personal and real-world snafus that one is likely to encounter, chances are that one's initial "to get" list can turn out to be overly ambitious, even when one thinks one is being realistic. As a result, it is important to start out knowing what is top priority and what is simply "gravy" when it comes to gathering data.

Quite understandably, most funders require a budget as part of the grant-writing process, and as a result, most scholars will have constructed some type of budget well in advance of departure for the field. However, such budgets are generally constructed in very general form, with a dated exchange rate and purchasing power. (As someone who regularly conducts research in South Africa, where the purchasing power of the U.S. has fluctuated wildly in the past four years, this is quite a significant issue.) As a result, it is very important to update one's budget with more realistic estimates of spending needs based on a detailed "to get" list. One should not feel guilty if exchange rate windfalls allow one more spending power than originally planned (because on the flip side, most funders will not revise grants upwards for exchange rate punishments). In the face of hard budgetary constraints, the question for the researcher involves selection of a life strategy:

- Will you take buses or taxis?
- Will you hire a research assistant?
- Will you pay someone to transcribe your interviews?
- Will you allow time and money for exploratory travel to consider novel hunches or to gather materials for a future project?

Each item of the "to get" list implies a budgetary estimate in terms of time and money. Once tallied up, one may find that the time and money required is more than you have. If so, there are two choices:

- Revise the research design to a manageable—i.e., completable–project, given your budget constraints
- Revise the budget constraint, either by obtaining additional resources from funders or by using personal resources. In most cases, the first option is probably the better one at least initially!

Obtaining and Recording Data

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The main priority of field research—whatever the topic or country involved—is to acquire data. In doing so, or in attempting to do so, researchers are bound to face all kinds of questions, conundrums, obstacles, and roadblocks that will inevitably arise and complicate their research. In this article, I will present some strategies that can help researchers make informed decisions about how to deal with the difficult challenges and trade-offs of field research, so that they can obtain and record data in a way that best suits their particular projects and constraints. My purpose is not, however, to provide "set" answers that will apply to everyone, since each person's project, situation, and personality will, of course, vary quite widely. In fact, in order to be successful, field researchers need to be creative, crafty, and able to adapt to unforeseen situations—indeed, that is the very beauty and fun of fieldwork. In other words, while there is no simple "formula" for how to obtain data in the field, my main recommendation is for researchers to think through the potential problems and trade-offs in advance, and during the *early* stages of fieldwork, so that they will make choices that are wiser, more efficient, and more practical in the long-run.

Set Concrete and Realistic Goals

When conducting fieldwork, any researcher is bound to face numerous and often quite tempting distractions. These may include getting "settled" into domestic and social routines, becoming acclimated to a new research environment, and trying to figure out how best to implement one's social scientific research design within a complex real-world setting. Some adjustment period is of course understandable—particularly for scholars who intend to spend a full year in the field, and who may be struggling with a foreign language—but upon arriving in the field, it is important to develop some kind of an organized research plan from the very beginning. Of course, all people have different *styles* of organization, but the main thing is to know what is in store for the next day (or week), so that, as much as possible, one can avoid the scenario of not knowing what to do next. This does not mean, of course, that researchers should *always* be working, but when they are working, it is important to stay focused on the next steps.

In his article, Lieberman presented the idea of a master "to get" list for any research project. But, of course, one cannot work on everything at once on a daily basis. Rather, researchers need to break down their research objectives into smaller, more concrete, and specific tasks that they will then tackle on a daily or weekly basis. For research involving interviews, for example, one should plan out a schedule for writing letters to potential interviewees, following up (whether by phone, fax,or email), scheduling the interviews over a certain period of time, and of course drafting the questions or questionnaire. These types of seemingly basic tasks may take days, if not weeks, to

accomplish.

The best way to keep track of what will soon become very complicated planning is by maintaining "to do" lists of one's schedule and upcoming tasks. Depending on personal style, some people may prefer daily, weekly, or biweekly lists. It does not necessarily matter if the list is stored in an electronic organizer or scribbled on a little piece of paper—but a personal organizer certainly allows for better back-up and safe-keeping, in case those scraps of paper get misplaced or lost! Either way, the main point is that researchers should wake up each day with a plan for what they are going to do—for that particular day and for the days ahead. Given how easy it is to lose track of things, and to get distracted by a new environment, a "to do" list will help to provide focus and enhance productivity.

It is also important to allow time for logistics and planning, something that few people really consider at first when constructing a schedule. Even if a researcher has followed all of Lieberman's suggestions for preparations before leaving, there will certainly be a great deal of new, and unpredictable, logistical hassles on the ground, as well. These may include following up with people and institutions upon arrival, adapting to conditions and situations that were far different from what one expected, or having to devote much time and energy to negotiating one's way into particular data sources. It is important to recognize that some logistical frustrations will arise, and to actually plan this into a daily or weekly schedule—rather than panic later on, when one obstacle or another inevitably leads to delays. There will always be set-backs and problems, but a little bit of foresight and planning can help to avoid or mitigate major logistical disasters.

Finally, although I am focusing on methodological (not personal or social) elements of fieldwork, on the topic of time management, I should also mention the importance of allowing for some down time and relaxation. Too many people get burned out, and stress themselves out, without necessarily being more efficient. In many cases, one can actually learn more about another country by relaxing there a bit, and that "down" time may even lead to some valuable research insights. And the friendships and networks that develop during the fieldwork experience will probably help to improve any given project, not to mention other projects down the road.

Anticipate Everyday Trade-Offs

As anybody who has conducted research abroad knows, research money can disappear very quickly. One should therefore think about some trade-offs at the early stages of fieldwork. Although I cannot provide generic answers, here are some questions to consider:

• For a project that includes some form of archival research, how will information be collected? Photocopying, scanning, and old-fashioned note-taking all have distinct advantages and disadvantages. Photocopying is, of course, very accurate, but it can also be extremely time-consuming and costly, and the paper produced can be quite heavy (and therefore expensive to ship home). Scanning is also very accurate, and it is certainly less costly and heavy than copying, but both of these technologies can lead to "information overload," where the researcher just keeps copying or scanning, with the hope that the information will be useful down the road (or with the fear that something valuable might be missed). And of course note-taking (whether on a computer or with pen and paper) can be time-consuming at first, but if the person is well-organized, it can be very efficient. Either way, researchers would be well-served by deciding early on which technique will work best for them, given their personal style and the nature of their research project. Moreover, as Lynch discusses in her article, whatever method is chosen, it is essential to record one's initial reactions to the documents, since these can be just as valuable as the material itself.

• For research that includes interviews, one trade-off to consider right away is whether or not to tape record them. Researchers need to weigh their need for completeness and accuracy against the possibility that a tape recorder will make a respondent uneasy, too cautious, or speak like a bland propaganda statement. Tape recording may be more appropriate for interviews with ordinary citizens—who have much less to hide or fear—than for elite interviewing, but either way researchers should be forewarned that listening to the tapes can be quite unwieldy and time-consuming, and transcription costs are often extremely high. In my case, for my doctoral research, I did record and transcribe my interviews (which were with ordinary citizens), since I drew upon a number of the exact quotations of my respondents, and this analysis constitutes an essential part of my book. But I would suspect that for most political science dissertations, the costs of recording and transcribing may not be worth the payoff.

• Many researchers consider hiring a research assistant while in the field. This may be a strange feeling for graduate students, who are often RAs themselves, but as the head of a major research project, it might actually be entirely reasonable (and cost- and time-efficient) to invest in some help during fieldwork. It will obviously depend on the location of the field research, since in some countries the cost of hiring an assistant may be prohibitive. But in other locations, it might be a plausible option that is worth considering, and an RA could help with a number of possible tasks, such as helping to translate interview questions or archival documents, helping to arrange appointments, providing an entrée into a local community, or tabulating and coding data for a content analysis. If one does decide to hire an RA while in the field (or, for that matter, as a professor later on in one's career), it is important to define the RA's tasks very clearly, to maintain regular contact with that person, and to oversee his or her work and progress closely. Otherwise, if the results are of poor quality, all of that work, time, and money may be wasted. Although I personally had a very good experience with an RA in Russia, I know of many others who have had more mixed results.

•Sub-contracting a survey is a relatively high-cost endeavor, which most people only do if they have a separate grant for it, but it may not be prohibitively expensive, especially for those who would consider buying a question or several questions off of a weekly or monthly "Omnibus" survey. In fact, many survey organizations that conduct polling for newspapers and businesses actually have special prices for

academic research. In my case, thanks to a small grant from the NSF, I was able to subcontract a series of questions on a survey (at "negotiated" rates—especially in Russia), the results of which provided multi-method complementarity, and which eventually constituted an important part of my book.

Develop a Strategy for Gaining Access to Data Sources

In these articles, we are not focusing on the specifics of interviewing techniques or archival research—for which there are already larger, well-developed literatures on which to draw—but I do want to emphasize here the fact that it takes a tremendous amount of work simply to gain access to one's data sources. This applies whether a researcher is trying to schedule and carry out interviews with elites, to make ordinary citizens feel comfortable telling their life stories, to get a librarian at an archive to grant special access to restricted and sensitive documents, or to make an arrangement with a survey institute to ask a question on a survey.

In order to develop specific techniques for any of these types of tasks, I would strongly recommend talking to other experienced scholars about their own experiences, in order to receive advice and tips that will fit with both a particular research project and the location of the fieldwork. Much of this can be done before actually leaving for the field, which can also be helpful over the longer term, as one integrates into a network of scholars who work on the same countries or region. But researchers should also seek out other colleagues and journalists who are on-site, and who may have valuable suggestions and insights.

It is also important to think about appropriate ways to sequence one's research in order to get the most out of each source. For example, it often makes sense to speak with low-level bureaucrats before high-level bureaucrats, in order to avoid asking silly questions of the individuals who possess information that cannot be gotten elsewhere, and who are likely to offer researchers only a very limited time to meet. Moreover, it is usually a good strategy to plow through printed materials before interviewing too many people, again, because one may find that many of one's questions can be answered ahead of time, and it is easier to probe more deeply with interview subjects given prior information about background. Given the time constraints that interview respondents have, it is best to avoid wasting their time asking questions that could easily be answered with other sources.

Overall, a major challenge of field research is showing people why it is that they ought to be providing their time and help. Many people—whether elite or ordinary citizen interview respondents, archivists, or employees of an institute—are extremely generous and helpful, in ways that often exceed a researcher's expectations. But it is important to remember that making them want to help takes a fair amount of work and effort, and it is critical to the success of the overall project.

Consider Interacting with Local Institutions and Scholars

One of the most valuable and rewarding elements of fieldwork can come from interactions with local scholars and institutions. But there are definitely both advantages and drawbacks to these interactions, and it is important for each researcher to think through what will work best in a given context.

If possible, it helps to become affiliated with a local research institute. This often allows photocopying and printing privileges, and sometimes office space, but also the opportunity to become part of an organization and intellectual community, to discuss and develop one's ideas and sources with other scholars, and even perhaps to acquire some added local status while in the field. And in most cases, foreign institutions will be very happy to have a visiting researcher come for a year, especially if it does not cost them anything financially.

There are also some potential downsides, however, such as the expectation that the researcher will come regularly to the office, and perhaps also read and comment on the work of others, which could be distracting and time-consuming. Another potential drawback of an affiliation—which could be relevant in certain contexts—is the risk of losing one's neutrality by becoming affiliated with a partisan institute, or one with a certain reputation. In other words, researchers should not *automatically* rush to become affiliated just for the sake of it, but rather only if they think it will really help, which it often does.

Field researchers will also want to consider some other potentially tempting offers that may come up, and to think about whether certain opportunities will be useful for them. They may, for example, be asked to give a formal presentation about their work, to teach a class, to write an article while in the field, or even to do some outside consulting. These can obviously be tremendous opportunities that are both very flattering and gratifying, but it is important for researchers to make sure that they do not get too side-tracked by them. In some situations, it could also be problematic for a researcher to broadcast her views and analyses too widely, at the risk of future respondents already forming an opinion about her research, before she has had a chance to hear their own views. Moreover, if a researcher makes a presentation, writes an article, or undertakes some service that is far from his topic and expertise, he may lose valuable time. In fact, some people get so wrapped up in these types of activities that they never leave the field! In any case, the main point is to know in advance that these kinds of situations may well come up, and to think through what is, and is not, worth undertaking.

Be Prepared for Uncomfortable Situations

Fieldwork is usually a positive experience, but many field researchers do encounter some uncomfortable situations at one point or another, and it is best to be prepared for them, as much as possible. A researcher's gender and race can obviously influence how people perceive and interact with her, in any number of ways, depending on the context. But by thinking through how such situations might come about—particularly by talking to other colleagues who have field research experience in the same or similar countries and contexts—and considering what would be an appropriate response, one can help to minimize their effect on one's research, as well as the unpleasantness itself. I am not suggesting that researchers should have a scripted or prepared response, but rather that

they learn to expect the unexpected in potentially awkward or difficult situations.

For those who do encounter sexist, racist, or otherwise offensive behavior while conducting their research, what colleagues who have encountered these types of situations suggest is that the most important thing is not to get overwhelmed, not to get rattled, and certainly not to let it alter one's self-worth and self-perception as a professional. At some point the researcher will have to make a judgment call. For example, if a female researcher experiences some form of sexual harassment, or is subjected to offensive remarks, should she walk out of the interview? Or how much should someone relax his principles by keeping quiet (or nodding his head) in an interview with a neo-fascist? I cannot tell people how to react if they are confronted with an uncomfortable situation, but researchers should know that these things do happen—and, unfortunately, not infrequently—and they should try to think through their possible reactions ahead of time, so that they do not later regret how they responded.

Act Like a Professional Researcher

A final point about obtaining and recording data, which is particularly important for graduate students, is that field researchers should think of themselves as professionals. Graduate students are often used to feeling low on the totem pole, but while in the field, any field researcher should hold his head up high, and remember that he is a scholar who is going to write a potentially important piece of research.

This also means that researchers should dress and act appropriately. Attire and inter-personal behavior are often more formal and reserved in other cultures, and a field researcher may make a better impression—and probably be more successful in getting a repeat interview or access to restricted archives—by presenting herself more professionally than she might in the U.S. Not only will it make other people more inclined to cooperate, but it will hopefully also remind that researcher that she is there for a reason, with a job to do.

Even in difficult situations, fieldwork is a challenge that is extremely rewarding. The data-gathering stage is probably the most fun and inspiring part of a research project, and while much of it requires "rolling with the punches" and "expecting the unexpected," a little bit of strategic planning and foresight can go a long way.

Tracking Progress While in the Field

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Evaluating realistically the progress of research while in the field can be, from an intellectual and emotional standpoint, one of the most difficult aspects of managing fieldwork. How does one know if one is getting the data one needs to answer one's questions, especially if one's understanding of what the right questions are keeps changing as one gathers more information? Many field researchers find themselves thinking uncomfortable thoughts as their time in the field wears on: Why is it taking me so long to figure things out? What if I never get the information I need? Am I working hard enough? Why on earth did I start this project? Why on earth would anyone want to know the answer? Should I just chuck it all in and write for a travel magazine?

These uncomfortable questions about one's place in the cosmos may be good for the soul, but they can wreak havoc in the field. In the name of efficiency, if not personal enlightenment, I offer some strategies for suppressing the internal demons: (1) have a plan for digesting data as they come in, (2) periodically assess progress towards the goal of a completed piece of scholarship, and (3) gather only the data that one needs. Digesting data and assessing progress help in the almost inevitable moment of crisis that occurs when researchers become convinced that their research designs and research questions just aren't working. The first part of this contribution describes some ways to keep track of the status of a research agenda while one is in the thick of field research. The second part lays out some strategies for retooling on the fly if necessary, and the final segment offers some thoughts on figuring out how and when to stop collecting data.

Digesting While You Collect

One's research designs typically tell a lot about the data that one needs to collect, and some about how one will evaluate the sum total of the information that one has gathered once one has it all in hand. What they don't do is instruct us how to evaluate smaller pieces of the puzzle as information trickles in. I have found that digesting data as it comes in, rather than simply collecting it, is a crucial first step that enables us to evaluate our progress while in the field, and to rework a research agenda on the fly when necessary.

Digesting data helps break down the information one has gathered into usable "nutrients" that can then be used to build an argument. It also aids in condensing data into a more readily accessible form, just as Readers Digest does with the world's great literature (well, maybe that's not such a compelling analogy for scholarship, but…). One can think about digesting data as a way of justifying every piece of information that one collects. For every chunk of data collected, one needs to be able to answer two questions: Why am I gathering this information? And what is it telling me that I didn't know before? There are three main steps involved in thoroughly digesting data gathered in the field: recording one's reactions to the data, placing the information in the context of the overarching research question, and synthesizing occasionally for an audience.

Recording your Reactions

Fieldwork involves holding conversations, real or imagined, with our sources. Recording our half of these conversations —our reactions to what our sources are telling us—is the first step in digesting. Reading notes, interview notes, ethnographic notes, field journals, and literal recordings of our own voices are some of the many forms that these recorded observations

may take. What is important to note here is that what one is recording is not the data presented by the source in question (an interview, a document, a slice of daily life), but our own reactions to these data.

An example may help clarify: Say I've just found a document I've been trying to get access to for a couple of weeks. It's a section from a 1954 Italian government report on poverty. I don't have time to read the whole thing right now, but I've made a photocopy of the relevant sections and stuck it in a folder. Right there in the archives, I begin the task of digesting by recalling the task on my list of research priorities that this document is related to, and scribbling myself a note on the cover of the folder: "photocopied because I need to know whether the government was aware of the problem of poverty among children in the early post-war period. This is important for my project because I need to know whether the government was consciously directing more welfare dollars towards the elderly than towards children because they thought the elderly needed it more."

That evening, as I am putting my day's work to bed, I make a note in my field diary of what this document (or it could have been a sentence, or a facial expression, or a poster observed on the street) tells me about my research question. I note that the government publication "had 3 big sections on issues related to the problem of poverty among young people, and only one brief one on poverty among the elderly." I record my reaction to this information. What does it make me think about my hypotheses? What new or unexpected issues does it bring up? How does it fit in with information I've received from other sources? (Just to finish off this example,) I note "I was really surprised to see this, because I expected that there was more welfare spending on the elderly because of a perception among policy-makers that the elderly were really worse off, and younger people could better take care of themselves."

I have not yet read the document or taken notes on the actual contents. None of the notes I've made to myself are particularly profound, and the whole process took less than five minutes. But the payoff is large. When I am at leisure to read the full document I will remember why I collected it in the first place, and what I expected to find. And in the mean time, I know where I stand with the task on my "to do" list that is concerned with collecting documents that will allow me to evaluate government priorities with respect to the impoverished elderly and the young.

Placing the Data in Context

I recommend taking time out from data collection periodically—after each interview, after a day's work, at the end of each week, and/or at the completion of each research task on the to-do list—to record and evaluate what one has have learned *in terms of the overarching goals of the research project*. When a researcher ties the data that he has gathered into the larger framework of his project, it serves as a reminder of where he is going, and keeps him abreast of the progress he is making.

One needn't write whole chapters or articles while one is in the field — though of course that is a tremendously productive way of synthesizing material, and I encourage the attempt even when it seems impossible. Writing to digest can take many other forms. It does not have to be for public consumption, and it can take place before one has read or transcribed or cross-tabulated every datum in the document, interview, dataset, etc. When transcribing interview notes from notebook to computer, for example, one might develop a system for recording how and why statements by respondents fit in to the three categories of "justificatory schemes" that you expect to discuss in the three chapters of your book. Another kind of writing to digest is making careful notes about the potential relevance of each source, even if it is impossible to read every page of photocopies from an archive before it goes into a box to ship back home. Notes should serve as a reminder of why each piece in a growing archive was collected. For example, the researcher might record that a particular article from a trade publication was photocopied because it illustrated how the industry association's leadership perceived the government's introduction of a new water safety regulation. She might go on to remind herself that this is important in the larger framework of her thesis because it contradicts the lobbying efforts of key individual textile manufacturers, which in turn is important because… Ultimately, notes on each small piece of the research should be tied logically into the overarching research question.

Synthesizing for an Audience

Keeping up with the not-for-public-consumption tasks above helps us to keep track of and reward data collection as it occurs in the field. But without some more sustained synthetic and analytic attention to the information coming in, fieldwork can stall. I find particularly helpful the discipline of periodically producing a somewhat more formal summary of our intellectual progress on the journey towards a completed project.

One digesting technique that we've found useful is to write weekly or bi-weekly briefs describing the work we've carried out in that period, and summarizing the conclusions that we've drawn, even if only tentatively, from the information we've gathered so far. These briefs might take the form of an electronic field work journal or an email archive of periodic messages to a colleague, advisor, or favorite pet. While the analysis should be as disciplined as if it were for public consumption, there need not be any actual exchange of information with another human being. Some researchers may find it more helpful to write up these findings in a more formal way, for a real audience like a dissertation chair, funding agency, or colloquium. Whatever method is chosen, and I suggest experimenting with a few, writing while in the field is the key to digesting gathered data. And digesting is the key to being able to assess the progress of ongoing work, in order to retool if necessary.

Assessing Progress Periodically

As the researcher begins to accumulate and digest the pieces of information on her "to get" list, she may discover that each

piece fits neatly into her research design, and that every week she spends in the field brings her one step closer to answering in a definitive way her major research question. Alternatively, she may come to believe that all of her careful work generating falsifiable hypotheses and testable implications has led her nowhere, and that she is asking the wrong question entirely. Regardless of the methodological approach favored by any particular researcher, the reality of fieldwork usually lies somewhere in between the two extremes of completely predictable deductive research and completely disorderly induction. No one should go into the field without some kind of expectations about how the research will proceed. That said, the world is a messy place, and that messiness is why it is so important that political scientists continue to do field research as well as use more formal analytic techniques like game theoretic and econometric modeling. The messiness of the real world also means that one of the major challenges of field research is figuring out how to retool a project on the fly, often without backup from colleagues or advisors.

How does one know if a research agenda needs retooling in the field? Our experience suggests that many dissertation students, in particular, worry too much about the progress of their data collection and the state of their research agendas while they are in the field. As a general rule, I would suggest that if a researcher, guided by a "to get" list, is making progress towards gathering the data needed to make some judgments about the initial hypotheses or questions posed by the research agenda, chances are good that the project is on track.

Inevitably some tasks on the "to do" list take much longer than anticipated, just as others that seemed likely to be very complex turn out to have easy answers. Fieldwork often follows the 90/10 rule, where 90 per cent of the time, effort and other resources are expended gathering 10 per cent of the data. The feeling of "wasting time" that often occurs as a result can be discouraging. I believe that the best insurance against this feeling is to identify data needs clearly in a "to get" list and stick with the job of fulfilling these needs.

Respondents, archivists, local experts and the like are often key sources not only of data, but of much-needed feedback on the progress of a research project. Field researchers wisely rely on locals for periodic reality-checks. Unfortunately, this feedback can be discouraging if local sources convey the message that the researcher is addressing the problem in the wrong way, or addressing the wrong problem. Clearly, field researchers should not routinely ignore what their respondents are telling them—if that were the case, why bother to go to the field? But it's worth remembering that one's perspective as a political scientist is likely to be different from respondents' perspectives as politicians, policy makers, citizens, etc. And even local political scientists may, for reasons associated with the discipline's intellectual trajectory outside of the United States, place less emphasis than many American political scientists would on things like the discovery of causal mechanisms, falsifiability, or even empirical research per se. So discouraging feedback from local sources in the field should not be taken as proof positive that a research project is in trouble.

Almost all field researchers experience moments of crisis, when they come to believe that their project is fundamentally flawed. In some cases this is because data collection seems to be taking too long, or because feedback from local sources suggests a mistaken research strategy. These moments of crisis seem to us to be quite natural responses to the problem of incomplete information. One cannot know what the answers to one's research questions are until one has collected all the data; but one needs to assess the state of the project periodically in order to make sure that one is still on track. In the absence of any real yardstick for measuring progress before the job is done, many researchers fall back on the only information they have: that the job of data collection seems fraught with inefficiency, and that there are people out there who think that the approach is flawed. Again, I think that the best insurance against these moments of crisis is to bring your own yardstick with you, in the form of detailed "to get" lists. When incoming data are appropriately digested, so the researcher knows what she has and still needs, then there exists a solid basis for making decisions about where the research agenda stands at any given point in time.

Periodic re-evaluation of progress towards a completed research question may reveal problem areas. Key data may be persistently unavailable. The data that are available may contain surprises, suggesting that a researcher's original hunches or hypotheses were wrong. The researcher may come to believe that he or she is testing the wrong hypotheses, or even asking the wrong research question. All of these contingencies may suggest the need to rethink a research agenda on the fly. The question most researchers struggle with is how to interpret these disturbing revelations. When is it appropriate to stay the course, when is it necessary to shift directions, and when does the situation actually require switching horses in midstream?

When to Retool

There are no hard-and-fast rules. (Some general guidelines are summarized in Table 1.) As I indicated before, most researchers experience moments when they are certain that abandoning ship is the only sensible way to proceed, and in many cases this is simply not true. For example, if key pieces of data seem unavailable, researchers may be able to address the problem by triangulating with a creative use of multiple sources and methods. If this is not possible, a researcher might decide to plan a return trip to the field to fill remaining data needs, or find a way to do without a particular piece of information altogether. It is only when multiple, central hypotheses become untestable due to unavailable data that it would likely become necessary to consider radical changes to a research program.

Similarly, even unpleasant surprises emerging out of fieldwork need not signal the premature death of a research agenda. Even if the hypotheses laid out in a research design turn out to be unsupportable, researchers can often find a way to make these unexpected results work to their advantage. Before concluding from surprising data that the original research question was so mistaken in its framing that there is nothing to be gained from pursuing it further, researchers should consider the many ways in which a surprising result may be useful.

Table 1: General Guidelines for Field Research

What seems to be the problem?	Why is this happening?	Possible fixes	When to jump ship
I can't get the data I need to answer my question.	You've asked an unanswerable question–check for falsifiability of all key hypotheses *before* you leave for the field. You've run into problems with access to people or documents; there are records of what you're looking for.	Try multiple sources methods. *Triangulate*. Come back later if you can. Do without that piece of information.	If *multiple, central* hypotheses are untestable given the limits of the data you can get your hands on, you may need to consider changing your emphasis or your topic.
I'm surpised by what my data are telling me.	Your original guesses and hunches are wrong. Your respondents or other sources are not giving you the full story.	Find a way to make this into a "good" surpise; something that illuminates a larger theoretical debate. Is this a case of someone else's hypotheses holding up under unexpected circumstances? Of the common wisdom not prevailing? Of an unexpected application of a different literature from the one you relied on in constructing your project?	If what you've learned tells you that you were so mistaken in your framing of your research question that there's simply nothing to be gained from pursuing it further, consider retooling.
I'm testing the wrong hypotheses.	The theoretical literature was out of date, not attuned to the realities on the ground in your corner of the world, or otherwise inapplicable.	Come up with new hypotheses and ways to test them.	This shouldn't be a deal-breaker unless you have discovered the problem at the last possible moment and there is no way for you to go back to the field or get more information remotely.
My research question is the wrong question to be asking.	You're bored of your topic, and something else looks more appealing. Too much time has elapsed between conceiving the project and getting into the field, and your issue no longer seems important. Your time in the field has convinced you that life on the ground does not reflect the theoretical issues your question relates to.	Go back to your research design and remind yourself of why you picked this project: what is its import for political science theory, what attracted you to it personally? Link up to a different theoretical literature that seems more relevant given what you've learned about your topic. Take a historical view.	Better to shift the emphasis than to abandon your project altogether. Major changes only if you and your network of feedback-givers agree.

Does it illuminate a larger theoretical debate? Is it a case of someone else's hypothesis holding up under unexpected circumstances? Of the common wisdom being overturned? Of an unexpected application of a literature not considered in the original research proposal?

Researchers may also become convinced in the course of fieldwork that they are testing the wrong hypotheses. The theoretical literature on which the research proposal was based may have been out of date, not attuned to realities on the ground in a particular field site, or otherwise inapplicable. The researcher may have made an informed and intelligent but nevertheless wrong guess about a particular political dynamic under investigation. Under most circumstances, it is a simple matter even in the midst of fieldwork to come up with new hypotheses that seem more reasonable, and with new ways to test them. If the problem is discovered at the very last moment and there is no way to go back to the field or to get more information remotely, a more radical change in research strategy may be necessary. But these occurrences are rare when researchers are diligent about prioritizing their data collection needs, digesting data as it comes in, and reassessing progress periodically.

The most disheartening moment for many field researchers is that moment when they fear that the very research question motivating their field work is fundamentally misguided. I believe that this moment is almost inevitable. Good field research involves observing the often inexact fit between theories and facts on the ground. Theories often reflect ideal types, while real places are the "cases" that force us to update underlying assumptions and think about theory in new ways as one interacts with sources and data. In and of itself, this inexact fit between theory and data should not be a cause for concern. If the research question truly seems to be the wrong question to be asking under the circumstances, in the most extreme cases a project may need to be fundamentally rethought. More often, relatively minor adjustments to the research question can restore relevance.

There are other less profound, and probably more common, reasons why a research topic may come to seem irrelevant or misguided. When funding cycles or qualifying exams cause a long period of time to elapse between the initial conception of a research agenda and its execution on the ground, very topical research may come to seem less relevant. It is wise to consider at an early stage how to protect a research topic from obsolescence, particularly if it is related to very current events. In the field, it may be necessary to take a more historical view, or link up to a different set of theoretical issues if a topic that was once topical now seems passé. Researchers should also expect to confront periods of boredom with a major research project — periods when any topic other than the one at hand seems more compelling. When this happens, it may be helpful to go back to the original grant proposal, dissertation prospectus, or the like to remind oneself of the theoretical, substantive, and/or normative motivations driving the project.

Most research projects do evolve over the course of time spent in the field, in response to data limitations, new information, a changing political environment on the ground, and the iterative process of data collection and re-evaluation of theory that characterizes life in the field. Before making any major changes in a research agenda, though, I suggest soliciting input from an intellectual support network consisting of colleagues, collaborators, and/or advisors. In the midst of fieldwork, when researchers become steeped in on-the-ground understandings of a problem, it is easy to become overwhelmed with empirical detail and lose theoretical focus. An intellectual support network can often help researchers re-envision the forest during periods when trees are likely to dominate the landscape.

Solicit Input

The diminishing cost and increasing ease of staying in contact with "home base" (via email or phone) while in the field may make it feasible, depending on where one is working, to maintain up-to-the-minute contact with dissertation advisors, collaborators, or colleagues. One of the nicest things about being in the field, I think, is getting away for a while from the familiar modes of thinking that dominate our normal day-to-day circles of colleagues. Still, there will likely be times when researchers would like some feedback from advisors or colleagues on how to move forward. How much contact is the right amount? What kinds of contact are likely to be most useful?

I believe that for dissertation-writers, in particular, contact with advisors should foster the independence of the researcher, giving her permission to make her own judgments about the information she's uncovering in the field. A dissertation-writer's contact with her advisors should make her feel like she is the world's leading expert on her topic (which she often is), and should place high value on the information she has uncovered through her research. At the same time, both graduate students and more experienced researchers often want and need feedback on how to reassess the direction of a project based on the new information they've uncovered. A researcher can help elicit this kind of useful feedback by summarizing for an audience what he has learned so far, and the impact that he perceives this information to have on the research agenda as a whole. When asking for help on what to do next, his audience then has real data to work with, and a strong sense of how the researcher thinks his argument will be impacted by the information gleaned from fieldwork.

Local academics, particularly political scientists, can provide the perfect mix of country expertise and analytic ability that scholars at home may lack. But as we've noted, political science means different things in different places. As a result, relying too extensively on local contacts for "external validation" of the progress of research may be problematic, since local expectations about what constitutes good scholarship may differ quite substantially from mainstream American political science. Researchers should be wary of automatically trusting a local expert's judgment more than their own simply since the local is local. Still, informed locals can be an invaluable source of advice and support, perfectly positioned to remind the researcher that there really is a there there. I encour-

age researchers to seek them out and make them a part of their intellectual support network.

Avoid Data Overload

The final piece of advice for field workers that we'd like to offer is how to figure out when to stop collecting data. Some researchers stop collecting data when a field site becomes dangerous, or when their health fails. Most call it quits when the money or the visa runs out. We'd like to encourage researchers to adopt a different rule of thumb: Stop gathering data when you have what you need.

This seemingly simple piece of advice can be difficult to follow in practice. A few concrete suggestions are in order. First, keep track of data collection priorities, digest incoming data regularly, and keep an up-to-date "to get" list. When sources begin to repeat themselves—when you've heard or read the same thing three times and you believe it to be accurate—it's time to move on. (Only if the claim being made is highly controversial would more supporting evidence be necessary. One additional mitigating circumstance suggests itself: if during survey research in the field there is an opportunity to do more than simply attach questions to an omnibus, it pays to map out and try to fill data requirements for several research projects at once.) If you find yourself with extra time in the field after all of your data needs have been met, resist the urge to gather more. Spend the time digesting what you have more thoroughly, or better yet, begin writing up your results.

The perils of gathering too much data are real, and underappreciated by most researchers. For those on a tight budget, it pays to remember that getting data back home is expensive, particularly in paper form. Thoroughly digested data, on the other hand, weigh less! In addition to being expensive, shipping masses of undigested data back home can seriously delay the beginning of the write-up phase, as time must be devoted to reading, digesting, and organizing.

Few researchers actually gather every piece of information they need in a single trip to the field. But it can be difficult to know exactly what is missing until write-up begins. Researchers whose schedule and budget allow for return trips to the field will benefit from pausing after an initial round of data collection to take stock of real persistent data needs. But all researchers will be better able to resist the temptation to gather too much data if they act as if they will be returning to the field. Most research projects end up requiring less in the way of actual data than originally planned for. Even if a return trip seems necessary but is not possible, careful maintenance of contact addresses and phone numbers (as well as diligent writing of thank-you notes to survey respondents, interviewees, librarians, archivists, etc.) will often make it possible to access additional information remotely. Finally, remember that each individual research project, flawed and incomplete as it may be, makes up part of a larger research agenda that in its entirety can reflect a more complete view of the world.

Symposium: Discourse and Content Analysis

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This symposium grew out of our own interests in content analysis (CA), discourse analysis (DA), and the diverse epistemological and methodological issues that a comparison of the two might raise.[1] In particular, the similar goals of the two techniques made us wonder whether some amalgamation of the two might produce a method that could incorporate the major strengths of each—or whether, conversely, their superficial similarities might mask an insurmountable ontological divide.When John Gerring raised the possibility of a symposium on the subject for this newsletter, therefore, we were intrigued by the possibilities. We took the opportunity to do what, in our opinion, symposium editors should do: assemble a group of smart people and give them free rein to write about whatever they find interesting about their areas of expertise. We suggested as a starting point the general question of how discourse and content analysis are similar and how they differ; as expected, discussions along these lines led our contributors to a number of interesting additional topics, insights, questions, and (of course) disagreements.

Most of the contributors agree that discourse and content analysis differ in significant ways. The real question is the degree to which they differ—indeed, whether they are even comparable at all. We begin the symposium with a contribution by Cynthia Hardy, Bill Harley, and Nelson Phillips, who very concisely outline the two methods, their differences and potential for overlap. The next three contributions—by Neta Crawford, Will Lowe, and Mark Laffey and Jutta Weldes—discuss discourse analysis (Crawford, Laffey and Weldes) and content analysis (Lowe) separately and in greater detail. The final three contributions, by Ted Hopf, Kimberly Neuendorf, and Karin Fierke, more explicitly contrast the two methods. Some of the contributors employ an ideal-typical analysis in contrasting the differences between the two methods, but all of the contributors note that both DA and CA can be done using a variety of techniques, and some of the contributors even go so far as to outline specific techniques and innovations (e.g. Crawford, Lowe, and Laffey and Weldes).

To some extent the question of whether the methods are comparable is answered by four contributions that explicitly do so (Hardy et al., Hopf, Neuendorf, and Fierke). Hardy et al., for example, compare the two techniques across twelve dimensions. But beyond basic comparability, the question of how much overlap there actually is between the methods remains debatable. After presenting rather stark differences between