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Symposium:

Varieties of Transparency in Qualitative Research

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Introduction: Case Studies in Transparent Qualitative Research

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The discipline of political science has been engaged in vibrant debate about research transparency for more than three decades. Over the last ten years, scholars who generate, collect, interpret, and analyze qualitative data have become increasingly involved in these discussions. The debate has played out across conference panels, coordinated efforts such as the Qualitative Transparency Deliberations (Büthe et al. 2021), articles in a range of journals, and symposia in outlets such as *PS: Political Science and Politics*, *Security Studies*, the newsletter of the Comparative Politics section of the American Political Science Association (APSA), and, indeed, QMMR. Until recently, much of the dialogue has been conducted in the abstract. Scholars have thoroughly considered the questions of *whether* political scientists who generate and employ qualitative data and methods can and should seek to make their work more transparent, *what* information they should share about data generation and analysis, and *which* (if any) data they should make accessible in pursuit of transparency (see Jacobs et al. 2021).

Building on the important groundwork laid by these discussions, researchers have recently begun to develop and experiment with a range of exciting, creative approaches to achieving transparency in qualitative inquiry. Making their work more transparent can help scholars who engage in all types of qualitative inquiry to elucidate their research practices and clarify the empirical underpinnings of their work. Doing so enables scholars to demonstrate the rigor, enhance the comprehensibility, and augment the evaluability of their research.

As is well known, however, multiple pressures—epistemological, ethical, legal, and logistical, for instance—compel and constrain the pursuit of transparency (see e.g., Elman, Kapiszewski, and Lupia 2018; cf. Feldman and Shaw 2019). The creation and use of a range of distinct strategies for achieving transparency reflects and reinforces the reality that the effect of those pressures—on the degree to which scholars are transparent about their work and how they achieve that end—varies across types of inquiry. The diversity of techniques, in other words, demonstrates that transparency is neither an "all or nothing" nor a "one size fits all" proposition: it can be and is pursued to different extents, in different ways, in different kinds of research.

It is critically important that the communities of scholars who conduct qualitative research continue to develop, pioneer, and refine epistemologically appropriate and ethical techniques and strategies for making the kinds of inquiry that they conduct transparent. Encouraging continued progress toward that end is our goal in assembling this symposium. It offers and elaborates on an initial menu of options for making scholarship more open among which scholars may choose as appropriate to the way they conduct research.

Specifically, the symposium gathers five contributions that detail how the authors used one or more techniques to enhance the transparency of their qualitative research. In these coordinated contributions, authors describe what transparency techniques they used; how they integrated them into their writing process; how doing so benefited their scholarship; what difficulties and costs increasing transparency entailed; and what lessons they suggest for other scholars who wish to use similar strategies. These authors hold varying epistemological commitments, use different methods of data generation and analysis, and explore varied topics across a range of disciplinary fields and subfields. Consequently, they pursue research transparency in different ways. Demonstrating that emerging transparency techniques accommodate the epistemological and methodological heterogeneity that is a hallmark—and strength—of qualitative political science, as well as highlighting the enthusiasm for transparency among scholars engaging in such diverse types of inquiry, are important contributions of this symposium.

To briefly summarize, Slaven discusses the methodological appendix assembled to accompany an article in which he and co-authors used process tracing to examine the link between immigration and welfare policy in Germany, France, and the United Kingdom, drawing on both archival research and elite interviews. Betancourt, Piñeiro, and Rosenblatt, working within a positivist framework, focus on strengthening the evidence of objective empirical claims: they describe how they created a pre-analysis plan for their study of how organizational rules awarding a political role to grassroots organizations advanced party activism in Uruguay, which drew on both an online survey and in-depth interviews. O'Mahoney outlines how he used Annotation for Transparency Inquiry (ATI) to enhance his comparative historical analysis of how the normative arguments states make in international negotiations affect subsequent behavior, with an illustration from the Indo-Pakistani war of 1971. Rohlfing and Bermakutnova R. consider how Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) can be made more transparent and reproducible through sharing QCA Software Output, basing their discussion on an article examining the political trajectory of federal ministers in Germany.

Fuji Johnson works within an interpretivist framework, emphasizing that she and her co-author are not "asserting truths but rather interpreting communicative exchanges" (this issue, p. X). Focused specifically on the impact of her piece beyond academia, she employs transparency to highlight the intelligibility and rigor of her methodology. Specifically, she describes how and why she shared the data generated by, and created an elaborate methodological appendix for, her ethnographic study of sex worker rights organizations in North America. She discusses how she reconciled her commitments to conducting research ethically and openly in this challenging terrain, in which her vulnerable subjects have experienced "criminalization, persecution, stigmatization, and other forms of oppression" (this issue, p. X). As noted above, the diversity of this work—including types of inquiry in connection with which scholars have expressed concern and doubt about pursuing transparency—demonstrates the broad possibility and promise of openness in qualitative inquiry.

We encouraged authors to write their pieces with a focus on practical issues and specifics, drawing directly and unabashedly on their own experiences. We are delighted with the wealth of practical advice and concrete recommendations they generated specific to the kind of research in which they were engaged and the specific transparency techniques they used. Still, some general themes emerged across the contributions.

Recognizing and Mitigating the Time and Effort Transparency Requires

All symposium authors point to the careful, detailed, and time-consuming work required to make their research transparent, and the opportunity costs of that work. Their reflections are in line with other scholars' discussions of the practical challenges that enhancing research transparency entails, such as writing lengthy appendices, preparing accompanying documents, or using additional software (e.g., Saunders 2014; Hall 2016, 32-4; Jacobs et al. 2021, 192, 194). In part, these costs derive from the pursuit of transparency being a new endeavor for many scholars whose work is qualitative in nature, meaning that they are developing and improving their practices as they carry them out (O'Mahoney). Importantly, all contributors find the additional effort to be worthwhile. Of course, that may be a selection effect given that we requested contributions specifically from researchers who had published transparency-related materials.

Several authors highlight steps that scholars can take to reduce the "transparency tax" on their work. For instance, some note the importance of planning in advance for how transparency will be achieved (e.g., Fuji Johnson). Others describe how structuring workflows, preparing the way for transparency as research is conducted by tracking evidence and analysis, and identifying and setting aside material to be included in an appendix or annotation, can improve the efficiency of transparency (Slaven). Others point out that identifying the optimal moments at which to integrate transparency into one's workflow, and using appropriate tools, can significantly reduce the burden of pursuing transparency (O'Mahoney; Rohlfing and Bermakutnova R.). We anticipate that as scholars become more familiar with and adept at employing different transparency techniques, some of the current costs of pursuing transparency will decrease.

Improving Manuscripts and Avoiding Mistakes

Given the time and effort that making research more transparent requires, it is important to identify the benefits that transparency delivers, as these can serve as incentives for scholars to pursue transparency. Several authors describe how being more transparent helped them to strengthen their work in perhaps unexpected ways. Betancourt, Piñeiro, and Rosenblatt discuss how creating a pre-analysis plan for pre-registration gave them a baseline against which to evaluate subsequent choices and changes and enhanced the efficiency of their field research. O'Mahoney details how planning for transparency helps authors stay organized and encourages careful thought about the selection and deployment of evidence. In particular, he notes how creating annotations helped him to identify some (albeit minor) issues with his use of primary sources. Slaven details how crafting a methodological appendix helped him and his co-authors to sharpen their analysis and strengthened the writing of the article proper. Perhaps these observations should not surprise us; as we make our data and procedures more visible to others, we are bound to consider them more closely ourselves, and in that process, clarify our own thinking or even spot mistakes we may have otherwise missed.

Assisting Readers—including Reviewers—by Working Transparently

Most contributors also highlight the ways in which transparency benefits readers and research communities as well as authors. O'Mahoney, for instance, discusses how the annotations he created allowed interested readers to learn more from his work; in this way, the original scholarship becomes an even firmer foundation on which to build, hastening and strengthening the accumulation of knowledge. Slaven recounts being pleasantly surprised at how often readers consulted his transparency materials, in turn enhancing their overall engagement with his research. Betancourt, Piñeiro, and Rosenblatt describe how reviewing their original pre-analysis plan and its amendments helped readers to understand and evaluate changes that the authors introduced to the research process as their project proceeded.

In addition, some symposium contributors (Slaven; Betancourt, Piñeiro, and Rosenblatt) see publication advantages from making their work more transparent. Reviewers found the twists and turns in their scholarship easier to follow, they suggest, because they were more transparent about how they conducted their research. In the case of Slaven, the transparency materials also offered a venue in which to respond in full to reviewers' requests and critiques, providing an opportunity to demonstrate the utility and value of those comments. In a healthy caveat that should inspire critical thought, some contributors implicitly and explicitly flagged the risk of the emergence of a transparency "arms race," in which reviewers expect authors to jump through an increasingly onerous and burdensome set of transparency hoops.

Conclusion: Linking Theory and Praxis

This symposium's contributions describe and critique a series of established and emerging techniques for achieving transparency in qualitative research. Reflecting the views and insights of scholars who have successfully made various types of qualitative inquiry more transparent, these case studies demonstrate a diverse set of suggestive possibilities. As disciplinary conversations about transparency in qualitative inquiry continue, it is critical that they expand to include more practical discussion about how transparency can be achieved, about the concrete, demonstrable challenges pursuing transparency presents, and about the concrete, demonstrable benefits pursuing transparency delivers.

Expanding the conversation in these directions should proceed *in tandem with* continuing consideration of broader questions about what transparency means for political science scholarship. As Fuji Johnson elegantly argues, being transparent is a research responsibility: contributing to the evidentiary stock in a research area, clarifying the soundness of research, and elucidating findings represent a way of ethical research. Yet simultaneously, if transparency increases the overall cost of research, that "tax" can exacerbate inequalities, calling the ethical bases of the practice into question (Fuji Johnson; Betancourt, Piñeiro, and Rosenblatt).

In short, neither the conceptual consideration nor the practical discussion about transparency should proceed independently of, truncate, or pre-empt the other. On the one hand, reflection on the broad imperatives, challenges, and concerns about transparency must inform conversations about the practical steps involved in making our work more open. On the other hand, carefully considering praxis as part of the conceptual debate can prevent the exaggeration of disagreements and the adoption of unproductive binary "for or against" stances. We hope readers will find the selection of reflections in this symposium, and the diversity of methods and perspectives they represent, instructive, inspiring, and a contribution to both conversations.

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Using Pre-Analysis Plans in Qualitative Research

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Introduction

In the last decade, there has been a significant push for greater transparency in the social sciences. For example, epistemological and methodological debates have addressed the scope, meaning, and appropriateness of research transparency, and scholars have developed tools and practices to facilitate the process. One such approach is preregistration, the practice of recording a priori a study's design and its plan of analysis in open and public repositories (Haven et al. 2020). While it is a standard practice in experimental social science, it has been a matter of contested debate in observational work, both quantitative and qualitative. Arguments in favor of using this practice in qualitative inquiry, as well as opposing views, have recently been published (Büthe et al. 2015; Elman and Kapiszewski 2014; Elman and Lupia 2016; Kern and Gleditsch 2017; Haven et al. 2020; Jacobs et al. 2021; Kapiszewski and Karcher 2020; Moravcsik 2014; Piñeiro and Rosenblatt 2016).

Preregistration serves both the overarching goal of improving research transparency and, in our experience, also improves the research process itself. Regarding the former, preregistration increases the credibility of research because it facilitates the scientific community's access to a researcher's theoretical and methodological decisions (Nosek et al. 2015). Regarding the latter, preregistration benefits the research process in several ways: it helps one develop parsimonious theories; it encourages one to articulate a clear relationship between theory, hypotheses, and evidence; it improves the dialogue between data and theory; and it fosters efficiency in fieldwork (Pérez Bentancur, Piñeiro Rodríguez, and Rosenblatt 2018b; Piñeiro and Rosenblatt 2016).

A Pre-Analysis Plan (PAP) is one tool that scholars—including those who conduct qualitative inquiry—can use to preregister their research. As defined in Evidence in Governance and Politics (EGAP)'s methods guide on the tool, a PAP is a document that "…formalizes and declares the design and analysis plan for your study. It is written before the analysis is conducted and is generally registered on a third-party website" (Chen and Grady, n.d.). There is no general agreement about what a PAP for qualitative studies (PAP-Q) should contain. There are several general PAP guidelines, models, and templates for preregistering qualitative research (Kern and Gleditsch 2017; Haven et al. 2020; Piñeiro and Rosenblatt 2016). Haven et al. (2020) conducted a study identifying the main sections that scholars who conduct qualitative research in various disciplines should include in a preregistration template. Their findings suggest that a PAP for qualitative studies (PAP-Q) should include four basic categories of information: study information, the