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An organized section of the American Political Science Association (APSA)

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Message from the President

In this second issue of the International History and Politics Newsletter we take up the most important issue facing APSA this season: the DA-RT initiative. An impressive list of contributors has weighed in, including Karen Alter, Giovanni Capocchia, Eric Grynaviski, Jeffrey Isaac, Andrew Moravcsik, James A. Morrison, and Jelena Subotic.

With this issue of the Newsletter, the International History and Politics (IHAP) section stakes out an important place in the debate on this issue, which will certainly be one of the focal points of APSA annual meetings in Philadelphia.

I would like to thank all of the contributors to this issue of the Newsletter for their thoughtful and serious contributions. I also want to thank James A. Morrison (Newsletter Editor) and Joanne Yao (Assistant Editor) for their fabulous work pulling this issue together.

At our upcoming meeting in Philadelphia, we will be holding our annual business meeting and award ceremonies on Friday September 2 from 6:30-7:30 pm in the Tubman room at the Loews Hotel. The business meeting will be followed by a reception that we are jointly hosting with our good friends in the Politics and History section. I look forward to seeing you there.

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FRIENDLY FIRE

Qualitative Transparency: Pluralistic, Humanistic and Policy-Relevant

By Andrew Moravcsik, Princeton University

Data Access and Research Transparency (DA-RT) is an informal initiative to enhance the transparency of political science research.¹ It encourages more public access to evidence and details about scholarly interpretation, analysis and research design. This effort has generated considerable support in the profession, but also much criticism.

Prominent among those who oppose transparency is Jeffrey Isaac, editor of *Perspectives in Politics*. In an influential editorial criticizing DA-RT, Isaac divides political science into two warring camps with incompatible visions of the discipline's future.² He charges that DA-RT is a partisan effort: a "one-size fits-all" scheme that deliberately helps impose upon all political scientists "a broader agenda" of "resurgent neo-positivism," "methodological purity," "scientific rigor" (or "scientism"), and "a quest for certainty" modelled on the quantitative and experimental social sciences, for example psychology. Isaac opposes DA-RT in the name of an opposing camp, which he characterizes as favouring a "pluralistic, reflexive, and relevant political science" based on "greater methodological pluralism," more practices drawn from "humanities," and "a more broadly interesting political science" that is "publicly relevant, intelligible and readable." Opposition to DA-RT, he argues, defends the legacy of the "Perestroika" reform movement in political science a decade ago.³

Isaac is sincere and passionate. His critique is valuable in that the controversy it helped to spark has drawn scholarly attention to transparency in a way that five years of non-stop open meetings, consultation groups, conferences and published symposia by DA-RT advocates could not. DA-RT's most basic organizing principle is autonomy among

pluralistic research communities and individuals. No one disputes the right—indeed, responsibility—of those running a journal like *Perspectives in Politics* to vet and reject proposals they deem incompatible with the values of their research community.

Yet Isaac's editorial is not just as the statement of one journal's policy. It is framed as a call for all political scientists—at least, all qualitative scholars who favour openness, pluralism, and relevance—to oppose DA-RT transparency. This is problematic, because while I share Isaac's laudable objectives, his description of the DA-RT initiative and of the values that inspire me and other qualitative scholars to support it is largely incorrect. Limited space permits just three responses, which focus on how transparency affects qualitative political science.⁴

First, far from establishing a "one-size fits-all" plan, DA-RT is better seen as a decentralized, flexible, individualized, and non-binding set of norms predicated on pluralism and autonomy among individual journals and scholars—the very core values Isaac advocates.

Second, I (and others in DA-RT) do not, as Isaac charges, aim to universalize a quantitative (or any other) notion of scientific rigor. Rather, I view transparency is a meta-norm shared by scholars in every discipline. In qualitative political science, DA-RT norms have the opposite effect. Above all, they encourage more richness: work infused with local knowledge of diverse languages and cultures, policies, and histories. They expand the visible presence of epistemologies, skills and techniques from the humanities and interpretive social science. They help reverse recent format changes (shorter word limits, scientific citation, less narrative) hostile to qualitative research. Transparency helps further Isaac's own aim of greater methodological diversity.

Third, a look across political science and disciplines such as law and history belies Isaac's claim that transparency would undermine the theoretical diversity or political relevance of scholarship. To the contrary, scholars, journals and disciplines with higher qualitative transparency tend also to be theoretically richer and more policy-relevant. Again,

¹ I am grateful to Colin Elman, Peter Hall and Skip Lupia for comments.

² Jeffrey C. Isaac, "From the Editor: For a More Public Political Science," *Perspectives in Politics*, Vol. 13, Issue 2 (2015): 269-283.

³ Isaac 2015: 269, 270, 272, 274-6, 282-283. Isaac devotes the first 13 pages to situating the DA-RT debate in this dichotomy. For example, on p. 282: "It is important to be explicit about what is at stake in current disciplinary discussions... and why it is important... Gary King is correct to observe that 'large parts' of the social sciences are 'moving from the humanities to the sciences.' But large parts of the political science discipline are not part of this move and do not wish to be part of this move."

⁴ I address other transparency issues elsewhere. See, for example, "Trust, but Verify: The Transparency Revolution and Qualitative International Relations," *Security Studies*, Vol. 23, Issue 4 (2014b): 663-688; "Active Citation: A Precondition for Replicable Qualitative Research," *PS: Political Science & Politics*, Vol 43, Issue 1 (2010).

enhancing transparency furthers Isaac's own vision of a political science relevant to the real world.

Qualitative Transparency as a Pluralist Project

Do DA-RT's qualitative proposals, as Isaac claims, establish "new bureaucratic procedures" enforcing "one-size-fits-all expectations" that undermine "methodological and intellectual pluralism?"⁵ No. DA-RT's basic institutional value is the decentralized autonomy of pluralistic research communities.

The clearest way to appreciate the depth of DA-RT's commitment to institutional pluralism is to examine its proposals for qualitative work. Oddly, this is something Isaac never does. He devotes paragraphs to rehashing American Political Science Association (APSA) Council discussions—which are irrelevant, because DA-RT norms do not stem from APSA decisions—yet tells us nothing about DA-RT's concrete proposals, which are actually at issue. Here I focus on the institutional *form* of DA-RT proposals, while in the next section I turn to their substance. The key is this: *DA-RT proposals respect pluralism among methods, journals and scholars.*

Pluralism among Major Methods: From the start, DA-RT has been divided methodologically into separate qualitative and quantitative committees and processes, which have promulgated different sets of transparency recommendations.⁶ This properly reflects (I argue elsewhere) the distinct epistemologies, practical constraints and normative values that inform quantitative and qualitative research.⁷ No one would subject quantitative and qualitative research to identical rules, which is why DA-RT's general norms are actually quite vague.

Pluralism among Journals: DA-RT norms and recommendations also remain non-binding (except as ethical duties) on individual journals. Editorial boards, representing diverse research communities, decide whether to implement transparency. Neither DA-RT nor the APSA has enforcement power in this matter. DA-RT has never been a formal APSA initiative—a point Isaac himself, after having

repeatedly accused DA-RT proponents of stealthy bureaucratic centralization, now quietly concedes.⁸

Yet pluralism among journals runs deeper. DA-RT norms are broad, so even if a journal chooses to embrace them, exactly how it does so—i.e. what implementation actually means—remains flexible. This matters because transparency, even within a particular epistemology of explanation, is never an absolute imperative. Each journal must decide the appropriate balance between transparency and ethical responsibilities to human subjects, intellectual property law, logistical burdens, reasonable "first use" of data, and existing journal practices. Diverse research communities in our discipline adjudicate such trade-offs in distinctive ways, with editorial boards acting as *de facto* representatives of those communities, reflecting those differences—a role Isaac himself assumes and acknowledges in his editorial.⁹

Pluralism among Scholars: DA-RT's institutional pluralism digs even deeper. Case-by-case discretion about how to comply with norms stays largely in the hands of individual authors. Journals set general formats, but individual authors make almost all substantive decisions about how to employ them: which empirical claims are "contestable" and "knowledge-based" enough to require transparency, how much (or what type of) source material to provide, and what annotation or process information to add. The DA-RT requirements do not require that these be subject to review, and it does not foresee editors or reviewers exercising extensive case-to-case discretion or enforcement of qualitative content.

To see how decentralized and non-bureaucratic this actually is in practice, consider the form of qualitative transparency journals are most likely—for both epistemological and practical reasons—to employ as a "default" standard. (It has already been adopted by the APSR.¹⁰) This is *Active Citation (AC)*, a system of digitally enabled citation. AC is the only cost-effective and epistemologically appropriate "default" model of qualitative

⁵ Isaac 2015: 276, also 270.

⁶ Arthur Lupia and Colin Elman, "Openness in Political Science: Data Access and Research Transparency," *PS: Political Science & Politics*, Vol. 47, Issue 1 (2014): 19-42. Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S1049096513001613>.

⁷ Andrew Moravcsik, "Trust, but Verify: What the Digital and Transparency Revolutions in Social Science Mean for You" (Presentation at the 2015 University of Chicago – Peking University Summer Institute on International Relations Theory and Method, August 2015); Moravcsik 2014: 669-670.

⁸ Jeffrey C. Isaac, "Further Thoughts on DA-RT," *The Plot: Politics Decoded*, Blog Posting, November 2 (2015b).

⁹ A simple example is the trade-off between human subject protection and transparency. Almost all qualitative journals give absolute priority to human subject protection and would never reject an article because it employs confidential evidence. Some quantitative journals would. DA-RT leaves unchanged the right of journals and research communities to resolve this tension according to their diverse and pluralistic beliefs and practices.

¹⁰ APSR "American Political Science Review Submissions Guidelines," (2016) Available at: <http://www.apsanet.org/apsrsubmissions2016>

transparency on offer. Political scientists may find this surprising, because they often think the natural default mode of transparency is to archive documents in a self-contained database. Yet, though archiving might sometimes be useful, it is too often logistically burdensome, or incompatible with human subject or intellectual property considerations, to serve as a default transparency format for qualitative work. It also fails to render the interpretation of evidence transparent. DA-RT does not mandate archiving, and I would oppose any effort to do so.¹¹

Active Citation (AC) is far less demanding and cumbersome than archiving. In AC, scholars provide a limited number of “law review”-style discursive notes in a digital appendix. It works like this. Each conventional citation (footnote, endnote, in text citation) to a source that backs a “contestable “knowledge-based” research claim” is hyper-linked (within the document) to an entry in an attached appendix (“Transparency Appendix” or TRAX). Each resulting appendix entry contains at least three elements: (1) a source excerpt (recommended 50-100 words); (2) an interpretive annotation, at a length of the author’s choice, explaining how the source supports the underlying descriptive, interpretive or causal claim; (3) a full citation; and (4) *optionally*, and if legally and logistically feasible, a scan of or link to the original document. The TRAX also reserves a unique, open-ended first entry to address general issues of how evidence, theories, interpretation, and research design were selected, again at a length of the author’s choice. That’s all.

AC is simple, practical, familiar and useful. For readers, it places textual evidence, the author’s interpretation, and research design information one click away. Yet articles remain as easily readable as they are today, because all the new material remains invisible to any reader who chooses not to click.

For journal editors, existing hard-copy formats remain unchanged, and digital formats add only hyper-links. AC can also be added to journal submissions, unpublished papers, e-books—all as stand-alone appendices, a known quantity. It is easy to implement: DA-RT is developing beta- software (a Word add-on) that creates active citations at a touch, and *ad hoc* software is easy to write.

¹¹ Current discussion forums and committees could contribute positively by removing any remaining misunderstanding.

For authors, AC provides benefits with only limited demands. Because appendices lie outside word limits, qualitative authors gain unlimited new scope to present their research. The explicit demands are relatively narrow, because only a fraction of citations—sometimes none—in published work would be actively cited. AC applies *only* to that subset of citations backing “*contestable knowledge-based research claims*”—that is, empirical research findings that are essentially controversial within the context of the existing research, largely as defined by the author. Unlike law review practice, no additional information is needed for definitions, obvious points, background information (even if controversial in another context), literature reviews, theoretical claims, conjectures, interpretations unconnected with specific evidence, philosophical claims, or informal (i.e. non-ethnographic) personal impressions. Many qualitative articles—normative topics, literature reviews, theoretical work, etc.—might have no or almost no active citations at all.

“Textual quotations, annotations, and procedural information need not be extensive or even present at all. If you don’t care and you don’t think anyone else does, just don’t fill in the blanks.”

Authors choose the length of source excerpts and annotations, within legal and human subject limitations—as with discursive footnotes today. Even if a journal permits review of active citations, binding oversight often cannot occur—such as in exactly how to balance transparency and human subject protection, or the extent of logistical burden—because the information required to make a decision is known only to the author.¹² Even where such information can be shared publicly, it is unlikely that authors would be asked to do more than “provide more evidence” for this or that scattered point—a demand to which we are all already subjected today and which qualitative scholars intensely engaged with local knowledge would surely welcome. In practice, real-world decisions

¹² This is another area where forums and committees could contribute by removing ambiguities.

about how to employ the AC format, once a journal adopts it, remain largely at the author's discretion.¹³

Some may still fear that AC, despite its limits, imposes on scholars so much busy-work that their productivity will suffer. Yet how onerous is AC? In essence, it is simply a softer, non-binding, invisible version of something we know: citation in law reviews, historical journals and those political science journals where rich qualitative work is most prized. Publishing in an AC journal involves less work than in a law review, with much longer word limits and far more thorough transparency standards (for all footnotes, not just contestable empirical ones). It requires effort analogous—albeit slightly different in form—to publishing in many historical, sociological or policy journals, or in those political science journals that still permit longer articles with interpretive footnotes, such as *International Security*, *Studies in American Political Development*, or *Comparative Politics*. Scholars publish in such venues without complaining about the “imposition” of extra length. Why? Because almost all qualitative scholars—especially ethnographers, interpretivists and policy analysts—want to write more words, not fewer. AC subtly pressures the political science discipline to let them show more of what they do best.

We know AC is workable because it is essentially a “back to the future” scheme. In recent decades, most journal word limits in political science have shrunk from 10-14,000 words to around 8000 words, and are dropping in some cases toward 4-6000. Citation formats have increasingly shifted from discursive footnotes, which permit interpretive annotation, to

¹³ AC functions as a weak form of what legal theorist Cass Sunstein calls a “personalized default rule”—that is, a formal normative expectation that is substantively activated only by voluntary individual choice. Sunstein recommends such rules to avoid “one-size-fits-all” regulation and centralized enforcement. (Cass R. Sunstein, “Deciding by Default,” *University of Pennsylvania Law Review*, Vol. 162, Issue 1 (2013): 1-57) In this case, journals mandate the *form* of AC transparency, i.e. the hyperlinks and the empty appendix, but authors retain in practice nearly all the *de facto* choice over its *substance*, i.e. what they want to put into it, what is a “contestable knowledge-based claim,” how much of the source to cite, how much and how to annotate, and what research design elements to emphasize. The same goes for the management of issues such as human subject protection. Qualitative research communities generally believe authors are in the best position to decide what evidence must be anonymous, redacted, summarized, or suppressed entirely, because they negotiated with IRBs and human subjects, they are most familiar with local knowledge and research conditions, and they assume the logistical and legal costs of any solution. All this remains unchanged, but qualitative scholars have more options, not just to portray the richness of their work, but to empower others to engage with it.

brief name-and-date “scientific” notes. This suits quantitative scholars just fine but is deeply unfair to qualitative researchers, who can present rich evidence and interpretation only through *words*, and for whom notes are employed to cite evidence, not just other scholars. AC simply turns the clock back, restoring a format friendly to rich qualitative work—and, most importantly, restoring our ability as qualitative scholars to have a rich conversation amongst ourselves about such work—by expanding *de facto* word limits, citation formats and narrative structures. We know it is viable not just because other disciplines function this way, but because we have been there before and it worked.

“...transparency applies only to the subset of citations backing ‘contestable knowledge-based empirical claims’... So only a fraction of citations, sometimes none, in published work would have to be actively cited.”

Still, if you are an exceptional qualitative researcher who prefers publishing shorter articles with *less* evidentiary richness and interpretive nuance, remember that qualitative articles need provide active citations only for a modest sub-set of sources (those backing “contestable knowledge-based empirical claims”), and that what you what you deem contestable knowledge, necessary source text, relevant annotation, and pertinent procedural information remains your authorial choice. Textual quotations, annotations and procedural information need not be extensive or even present at all. If you don't care and you don't think anyone else does, just don't fill in the blanks.

Qualitative Transparency as a Humanistic Project

Isaac asserts that qualitative scholars (like me) who promote enhanced transparency actually do so for a hidden purpose. We seek to spread “scientism” at the expense of methods from the humanities; to privilege “technically advanced” approaches and “methodological purity” over richness and relevance as the “primary thing that political scientists ought to be worrying about;” and to establish “neopositivism” and the “standard method of hypothesis-testing...normative for the entire discipline.”¹⁴

¹⁴ Isaac 2015: 282, 276. Isaac makes this very clear: “It is important to be explicit about what is at stake in current

I share Isaac's view about the discipline, but he misunderstands and misreads the motives of qualitative transparency advocates. We are his allies. Of course we praise some virtues of scholarly rigor, as does Isaac. He rightly cites a paragraph of my own that enumerates reasons why transparency might help scholars to conduct “more careful, systematic and replicable” research. Yet it does not follow, as he asserts, that qualitative scholars pursue transparency out of a “methodological obsession” with rigor akin to what quantitative scholars espouse. And he errs in singling me out as one scholar typical of the qualitative fellow traveller: “At the same time, [Moravcsik] also makes clear that what joins DA-RT proponents is a commitment to heightened methodological rigor,” which Isaac expressly links to a peculiar “preoccupation with methodological purity” characteristic of quantitative political science.¹⁵

In fact, the opposite is true: quantitative and qualitative DA-RT advocates came to agree on transparency despite deep disagreements about relative importance of that—or any type—of scientific rigor. To the limited extent I do advocate transparency as a means to encourage greater rigor—that is, “careful and systematic” scholarship—I favour a very different notion of “rigor” than my quantitative colleagues. I believe transparency makes visible, and thus helps encourage and reward, more problem-driven research, humanistic learning, cultural understanding and multi-perspectival analysis—precisely the academic virtues that Isaac thinks DA-RT advocates are trampling in their rush toward rigor. Isaac obscures our agreement by taking my quotation about “rigor” above badly out of context. Immediately after the sentence he cites, I provide concrete examples of methodological “best practices.” They are not from economics, psychology or natural science, but from history and law. Moreover, when I mention “enhancing qualitative methodological skills,” I list “fine-

disciplinary discussions... Gary King is correct to observe that ‘large parts’ of the social sciences are ‘moving from the humanities to the sciences.’ But large parts of the political science discipline are not part of this move and do not wish to be part of this move.” *Ibid.* The first two sections of his essay discuss only this dichotomy, which remains a *Leitmotif* throughout.

¹⁵ Isaac 2015: 275-276, also 270. Isaac is unambiguous. After parsing my statement, he portrays “quantitative and qualitative methodologists...joined by a commitment to methodological rigor as the preeminent source of political science’s credibility.” These characterizations of my scholarship and commitment to transparency are so wide off the mark that I have Isaac to thank for much subsequent ribbing from my quantitative colleagues.

grained process tracing,” “superior qualitative data collection,” and “virtues such as the ability to read texts carefully and creatively, to place them in historical and cultural context, to speak and read foreign languages, and to appreciate multiple perspectives.”¹⁶ This is not the “scientism” Isaac eschews but precisely the humanistic respect for perspectival diversity he advocates.¹⁷

Yet the most basic reason I favour enhancing transparency is not to increase rigor. Isaac seems to miss the essential point, namely that transparency is a meta-norm one may favour for many reasons: to render research (and conversations about it) richer, more relevant *or* more rigorous.¹⁸ And one may define these virtues in many ways. Whether a scholar is interpreting a Shakespeare sonnet, analysing the causes of World War I, or measuring gravitational waves, transparency is a widely acknowledged norm. It is an ethical responsibility to other scholars and outsiders; a way of rendering scholarship richer and more vivid; a means to encourage more careful, rigorous and nuanced interpretation; a precondition for effective debate and criticism; a necessary means of promoting improvement and secondary use of research; a tool to increase the policy relevance of research; and a legitimating force inside and outside of academia. For all these reasons, transparency enables rich and fair conversation among scholars and with the public—the value of which does not depend on a specific method or epistemology.

“...the most fundamental benefit of qualitative transparency is the greater richness of scholarship—and of the subsequent conversation about it. That is the main reason I support DA-RT.”

For me the most fundamental benefit of transparency is the greater *richness* of scholarship—and of the subsequent conversation about it. That is the main

¹⁶ Moravcsik 2014b: 36, emphasis added. I also mention some distinctively qualitative social science techniques, such as counterfactual analysis, case selection and analytic narratives.

¹⁷ Ironically, had Isaac actively cited this passage and provided 50-100 words of context, he might well have realized that he actually agrees with the motives of DA-RT advocates.

¹⁸ At one point Isaac all but *defines* DA-RT transparency as a form of “rigor” in “data analysis,” thereby making the point essentially tautological. Isaac 2015: 275.

reason I support DA-RT. Transparency helps authors render qualitative evidence, and scholarly interpretation of it, more vivid, subtle and contextual. Readers find it more informative and compelling to read source material in which a political actor or observer addresses the reader in his or her own words, rather than a reference to, say, “Interview Materials.” Like most qualitative scholars, I also believe that scholars interpret each of evidence. Thus a massive difference in real comprehension exists between a text accompanied by interpretive annotation explaining how and why a scholar interprets it as she does (as in AC), and a naked cite or quote, which leaves the reader to puzzle out its precise meaning.¹⁹

Can transparency realize this humanistic promise? AC should inspire confidence, for it brushes up for the digital age the tried-and-true humanistic tool for linking evidence to interpretation within narrative: the discursive footnote. Such notes were once the norm in political science, and still are in law, history and humanistic disciplines. The fact that AC lengthens articles adds further richness. All this helps make the experience of publishing qualitative work in *APSR*, *IO* or *Comparative Political Studies* closer to publishing in an academic law review, a history journal, a monograph, or one of the remaining political science journals with longer articles (14,000 words or more), interpretive citations and a tolerance for discussing text, such as *International Security*, *Studies in American Political Development* or *Comparative Politics*. Does Isaac really object to this—or just misunderstand it?

In a deeper sense, every time scholars employ AC, they vindicate basic principles of humanistic and interpretivist social science. One example is the insight that scholars always select, interpret, contextualize, arrange and weight individual pieces of evidence in ways that are neither obvious nor incontestable.²⁰ Making this interpretive act transparent via annotation creates the precondition for what Isaac rightly terms a “productive dialogue” about “interpretive dimension of inquiry... characteristic... of all human living.”²¹ If we want disciplinary pluralism, we can start by making journals as supportive of rich narrative, text and interpretation as they are of derivation,

specification and calculation. A close reading of AC and other DA-RT proposals shows that they address Isaac’s precise concerns. Many readers of *Perspectives in Politics* might well share these humanistic aspirations, though DA-RT preserves the right of Isaac and his editorial board to disagree.

Qualitative Transparency as a Relevant Project

Isaac’s final concern is that enhancing transparency will undermine the theoretical richness and policy relevance of political science by narrowing the number of interesting ideas and theories that scholars consider and by couching them in complex and specialized language intelligible to a public concerned with real-world problems. Isaac lists many relevant insights published in *Perspectives in Politics*, implying that transparency norms would have prevented their publication. He favours a “plain speaking” political science aimed at introducing more new and relevant ideas into disciplinary debates and disseminating them more widely.

Yet does qualitative transparency really undermine theoretical fruitfulness and policy relevance? This claim—for which Isaac provides no evidence—is exaggerated, if not wholly imaginary. Isaac seems mostly concerned to defend space for that small subset of political science not based on what he terms “data analysis.” This worry is misplaced, however, because such work is largely exempt from transparency norms. Isaac’s most extended example is research linking political theory and empirical sub-disciplines to generate a “multidimensional and rich understanding of “democracy.”²² One example that fits this category well is an article I co-authored recently in *International Organization* with colleagues in political theory (Stephen Macedo) and international relations (Robert Keohane).²³ It addresses the policy-relevant normative issue of how best to define and evaluate the “democratic deficit” in global governance.²⁴ Yet DA-RT imposes few transparency obligations upon it, because it consists largely of definitions, legal claims, normative premises, non-controversial empirical claims and secondary research. As in Isaac’s other examples, no more than a few published quotes would be needed.

¹⁹ Andrew Moravcsik, “Transparency: The Revolution in Qualitative Political Science”, *PS: Political Science & Politics*, Vol 47, Issue 1 (2014a): 676ff; Moravcsik 2015. The great majority of qualitative scholars employ more traditional humanistic and interpretive case-study approaches.

²⁰ Moravcsik 2014b: 52.

²¹ Isaac 2015: 269.

²² Isaac 2015: 281 and, on “data analysis,” 275.

²³ Robert O. Keohane et al. “Democracy-Enhancing Multilateralism,” *International Organization*, Vol. 63, Issue 1 (2009): 1–31.

²⁴ Let’s set aside the obvious irony, namely that Isaac accuses DA-RT supporters like me of acting, consciously or unconsciously, to narrow political science to exclude just such normatively-infused, problem-driven, policy-relevant research.

Most political science, of course, does involve data analysis. Yet even where policy-relevant articles report original empirical analysis, no clear trade-off exists between transparency and policy relevance or theoretical fruitfulness. Indeed, the reverse may be true. A distinct methodological advantage of “process-tracing” is its fruitfulness in generating new hypotheses. The richer and more open the evidentiary and interpretive basis of the case studies, the easier it is for authors and readers alike to engage in this generative process. As qualitative scholars like James Scott attest, the most detailed and transparent qualitative scholarship is often not only the most vivid, but also the most theoretically and politically engaging.²⁵ Moreover, transparency may well strengthen the quality and prestige of qualitative research in the discipline, thereby bolstering diversity of theory, method and substance, and sparking more policy-relevant work.

This is not just hype. A quick cross-disciplinary comparison suggests, indeed, that *qualitative transparency is correlated with theoretical fruitfulness and policy relevance*. Consider first political science. Qualitative journals committed to the highest standards of qualitative transparency—narrative detail, long articles, extensive footnotes, nuanced local knowledge—are also among the most theoretically fruitful and politically engaged. These include *International Security* (widely read in the foreign policy world on issues of moral and political importance), *Studies in American Political Development* (in which recent articles cover the history of tax policy, the welfare state, judicial review, vote suppression, immigration policy, banking regulation, gun control), and *Comparative Politics* (covering conflictual domestic issues across the globe, especially in developing regions).

The same elective affinity exists in neighbouring disciplines. Legal academia sets the “Gold Standard” for qualitative transparency, demanding much more than DA-RT proposes. Yet no discipline conducts such impassioned and policy-relevant debates about current policy issues, with such a self-consciously reflexive impact on politics. And few fields house a

wider range of normative and positive approaches, from “critical legal studies” to “law and economics.” History, anthropology, education, development studies, and other disciplines with qualitative excellence are similarly engaged.

This correlation exists because policy research must often be transparent in order to be relevant. Political decision-makers, policy analysts and journalists typically possess detailed knowledge and considerable “feel” for issues. And, sadly, they are often now *more* transparent than we scholars who study them. Making a genuine and credible academic contribution requires corresponding substantive command, interpretive subtlety and openness. What good, for example, does it do for a legal academic to interpret existing laws or facts in a way that could never withstand scrutiny before a court of law or a legislature? Similarly, a World Bank project in which I am currently involved seeks to supplement current, largely quantitative, assessments of program evaluation with qualitative analysis, so better to incorporate local political, social and cultural factors. Such research must be transparent to be effective: to fulfil legal mandates, to enhance credibility inside the organization, and to facilitate nuanced adoption by developing countries.

Isaac and others concerned with policy-relevance have one last worry. Would more transparent qualitative research become too complex and cumbersome for “plain-speaking” people to read? Here AC offers an innovative solution. The existence of two separate digital layers (the main text and the appendix) joined by hyperlinks creates a novel opportunity, never before available, for political scientists to write at once in different styles for diverse audiences. The main text can employ a more direct and persuasive narrative style aimed at a broader audience, while the appendix contains the methodological, analytical and evidentiary “scaffolding” of more interest to experts. This bifurcated approach is increasingly the norm in modern journalism, policy analysis, government documents, the natural sciences, and websites. Political science should change with the times.

For all these reasons, I believe enhanced transparency can help qualitative political science be more readable, relevant and diverse, as well as richer and more rigorous—all at modest cost.

²⁵ “A hero student of mine [wrote] an ethnography of vision in the slaughterhouse...you cannot put down, it is so gripping.... You could only write this ethnography, I think, by actually doing this work...I always believed that social science was a progressive profession because it was the powerful who had the most to hide about how the world actually worked and if you could show how the world actually worked it would always have a de-masking and a subversive effect on the powerful.” “An Interview with James C. Scott,” *Gastronomica*, Vol 15, Issue 3 (2015) <http://www.gastronomica.org/fall-2015/>.

In Praise of Transparency, But Not of DA-RT

By Jeffrey C. Isaac, Indiana University

Andrew Moravcsik is a distinguished scholar of international relations, and I am an admirer of his work. Because he has chosen to center his most recent defense of DA-RT on a critique of my writing, I feel the need to offer some response. At the same time, because I have already published a great deal on this topic that is easily accessible to interested readers, and because the topic itself increasingly bores me, I will try to be as concise as possible.

Moravcsik generously describes my *Perspectives* essay as “influential” and notes that “Isaac’s critique is valuable in that the controversy it helped to spark has drawn scholarly attention to transparency in a way that five years of open meetings and published symposia by DA-RT advocates could not.” I hope this is true, and if it is, then I have accomplished my purpose, which was loudly and clearly to announce a position in a way that called attention to the issue and allowed the vast majority of colleagues, who were uninformed about DA-RT, to pay attention and to think for themselves.

I appreciate Moravcsik’s most recent clarifications of DA-RT. I also appreciate that in recent months there have been many such clarifications, and conversations, and efforts to wrestle with the challenges presented by DA-RT, and to incorporate a greater variety of voices and perspectives. Broadening the discussion was precisely my goal. It was my hope that some colleagues, and journals, would develop a more sophisticated and inclusive understanding of what DA-RT required, and other colleagues, and journals, would clarify their reasons for either refusing to participate in DA-RT or for actively opposing it. This has happened. I am pleased.

At the same time, while Moravcsik generously credits me with having “valuably” drawn attention to the issues, he attributes to me a set of positions that I do not recognize, and based on this attribution, declares me to be rather wrongheaded and something of a scholarly Know Nothing. I’d like briefly to set the record straight.

(1) Moravcsik implies that I misleadingly attribute to DA-RT a lack of flexibility and formality, claiming on the contrary that “Data Access and Research Transparency (DA-RT) is an informal initiative to

enhance the transparency of political science research.” He continues that “From the start, DA-RT’s most fundamental organizing principle has been autonomy among methodologically pluralistic research communities, and its transparency norms are nothing more than suggestions for voluntary adoption.” But in fact, from the start a great many people were very unclear about what DA-RT meant. While it is indeed true that two committees were formed, and approved by the APSA Council, to discuss “transparency” and its implications, it is also true that these committees worked mainly below the radar, and that many members of at least one of these groups lacked a clear idea about what they were discussing. Many Council members—myself included—found the entire discussion to be rather obscure. And in 2012 when the Council approved some professional ethics language about research integrity, it was very general, explicitly voluntary, and said nothing about journal policies or something called “DA-RT.”

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Moravcsik writes about “five years of open meetings and published symposia by DA-RT advocates.” I question whether most of those meetings were open; I note that the symposia in question never sought to include skeptics or critics of what DA-RT might mean; and I note in particular that the October 2014 Ann Arbor meeting at which the DA-RT principles were approved by participating journal editors was not open and did not include the editors of many important political science journals. I was included—though illness prevented me from attending, and my Managing Editor attended in my stead. And when I saw the principles, I wrote an open letter to the organizers and participants explaining why I could not agree to these principles, and why I considered their adoption by any responsible journal editors to be premature. As far as

I am aware, that letter was not shared with the list, nor was it answered in any meaningful way. When I then shared the letter with many colleagues, who included former Presidents of APSA and a number of journal editors who were not invited to attend the meeting, I discovered that many of these colleagues were shocked to learn about all of this. It was then that I decided to write the *Perspectives* essay to which Moravcsik responds.

Ironically, the DA-RT principles of transparency were *not* drafted in a fully transparent way. For a long time it was not clear that these principles were “voluntary,” or motivated, as Moravcsik says, by a deep commitment to “pluralism”—and for many colleagues, these things are still not clear. Further, it was not clear that DA-RT was an “informal” effort not promulgated by APSA. APSA supported the Ann Arbor meeting. APSA leadership seemed to give its imprimatur to DA-RT—even though these things had never been discussed, much less acted upon, by the APSA Council. Moravcsik writes that “DA-RT does not invoke centralized enforcement power and the American Political Science Association does not possess such power, which is why it is not a formal APSA initiative—all points Isaac himself, having accused DA-RT proponents of bureaucratic centralization, later quietly conceded.” In fact, I was one of a small number of APSA Council members to argue persistently that APSA needed to make *clear* that DA-RT is not a formal APSA initiative. Only in November 2015 did APSA leadership issue a number of statements designed to clarify this. These statements were not universally regarded as satisfactory, and they indeed sparked further discussion and debate (all of this is posted on the [Dialogue on DA-RT website](#), created not by the proponents of DA-RT nor by APSA, but by a group of distinguished colleagues seeking to furnish a space for genuine dialogue. I commented extensively on this in a [December 2015 post](#), “A Broader Conception of Political Science Publicity”).

Some of these things are clearer now than they were then. Some are not. But to the extent that this is true, it is precisely because my open letter, and then my essay, got people’s attention, and helped to make DA-RT the *big issue* that it now is, by highlighting the lack of transparency, clarity, and perhaps even legitimacy of much of what was moving forward under the banner of DA-RT.

While Moravcsik presents DA-RT as a benign and straightforwardly professional initiative, I would suggest that it was in fact very political (in the sense of disciplinary politics), and that as more and more

colleagues came to understand what was going on, they began to raise lots of questions and express their own concerns and objections. It is perhaps the case that the thousand-plus colleagues who signed the [“Gang of Six” letter](#) calling for delay were very poor readers. It is also perhaps the case that they were over a *thousand* very accomplished political scientists who read what was available, found much that was either obscure or objectionable, and expressed their serious objections in the very name of their commitment to political science.

(2) Moravcsik writes that “Isaac divides political science into **two warring camps** with **incompatible visions** of the discipline’s future,” and continues: “He charges that DA-RT is a **partisan effort**: a ‘one-size fits-all’ **scheme that deliberately seeks to impose** upon all political scientists a ‘uniform’ ‘broader agenda’ of ‘resurgent neo-positivism,’ ‘methodological purity’ and ‘scientific rigor’ (or ‘scientism’) modeled on the quantitative and experimental social sciences, especially psychology. **The ultimate goal is to suppress** ‘humanistic’ practices and politically relevant discussion in political science. Isaac opposes DA-RT **in the name of an opposing ideological camp.**”

There is an element of truth to this set of claims, for in my *Perspectives* essay I did claim that there was a “resurgent neo-positivism,” that this threatened “humanistic” and “pluralistic” tendencies in political science, and that I was against this. But it is worth noting that Moravcsik, the proponent of “active citation,” creates a misleading impression by weaving together some of the phrases in my essay with a range of more highly charged phrases which do not appear in my piece at all (these phrases are bolded in the quotation above so readers can see for themselves how *actively* Moravcsik uses citation to exaggerate the defensiveness and hostility contained in my piece). I do not believe that political science is riven by “two warring camps,” and everything I have done as an editor of *Perspectives* since 2005 has been dedicated to bridging subfield and methodological divides and to publishing problem-driven articles, essays, and reviews that appeal to a broad political science readership. I do believe that DA-RT is motivated by the sincere desire of some colleagues to elevate the level of methodological rigor in political science, and that behind this are certain commitments I consider “neo-positivist.” But I do not regard this effort as a scheme that has an “ultimate goal” or “seeks to impose” upon colleagues. I regard it as a sincere effort to promote a vision of science, and I have said this repeatedly. I acknowledge that it unites some people obsessed

with quantitative methods and others obsessed with qualitative methods and that what joins these people is *not* a particular method but a broader obsession with methodological probity. I do not impugn the motives of the advocates of DA-RT, though I question their conception of science. And I acknowledge that the people with whom I disagree include some of the most excellent political scientists in the discipline.

In short, I am not a “partisan,” and I do not speak for “an opposing ideological camp.”

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I do maintain that the advocates of DA-RT, while well-intentioned, promote a vision of political science that is methodologically obsessed and inhospitable to the way a great many colleagues do their work. And I further maintain that *Perspectives on Politics* rests on a different, more pluralistic, and more broadly “public” conception of political science. And I welcome further debate. Yes, I am opposed to DA-RT. But this does not make me a follower of Carl Schmitt who believes that everything is reducible to a simplistic opposition of “friends” and enemies.” Such a Manichean vision cannot be found in what I have said about DA-RT, and it is surely at odds with the very public work I have done with *Perspectives*—work that has twice been reviewed and praised by ad hoc APSA review committees.

I am not interested in ideological or cultural wars. I am interested in preserving and expanding the spaces for a broad, pluralistic, and publicly engaged discipline. If Moravscik is also interested in these things, then I welcome his collaboration.

(3) Moravscik accuses me of having a very simplistic idea of the public relevance of scholarly work. This is a big and complicated topic. I have no

doubt that there are a great many ways of developing and writing high-powered scholarly research so that the work is both publicly relevant and publicly accessible. And I surely am in favor of there being a range of venues and options for the publication of such work. There is no kind of work that is *a priori* irrelevant, and no approach to research or to methodological transparency that ought to be dismissed. At the same time, I do think that DA-RT is linked to an “expert” conception of public relevance and that this is not the only way of thinking about the ways that scholars and reading publics can relate. I also think that while the kinds of efforts that Moravscik would mandate are fully consistent in principle with efforts to simultaneously make scholarship more broadly accessible, as a matter of fact these bureaucratic expectations and requirements take time and energy, both of which are scarce resources. I do not think that a discipline that is serious about promoting greater scholarly relevance and accessibility would consider “data accessibility and research transparency” a top priority. And while it is not inconsistent with other priorities in principle, in practice Moravscik and his DA-RT colleagues have chosen to focus their attention *not* on the broad theme of “publicity” but on the very narrow theme of methodological probity. If that’s what they care most about, this is fine. But it is not what most political scientists care most about, nor in my opinion, what they should care about.

(4) Moravscik claims that I “oppose transparency not just in practice, but in principle.” This is both wrong and unfair. The double-blind peer review processes that I have curated since 2009 center on transparency. In the June 2015 essay that Moravscik criticizes, I state clearly that: “accessibility and transparency are no doubt good things.” In my “Further Thoughts” piece, I wrote that: “Attentiveness to data and analytic integrity has indeed always been important to the peer review processes of any serious political science journal. At the same time, greater attentiveness, in moderation, can hardly be a bad thing.” My Introduction to the December 2015 issue of *Perspectives on Politics*, “Varieties of Empiricism in Political Science,” further expands on the importance of integrity, transparency, and never-ending critique to political science. This is what I wrote:

“When a political science article, or book, is published, what happens is that it is given a particular space, and then set free in the public realm of inquiry, dialogue, debate, and further inquiry *ad infinitum*. Publication

is not sanctification. It is not a signal, to the scholarly community or to the broader public world, that the published work is True, Final, Perfect. It is a signal that the work has been evaluated by a range of scholars, and has been found to rise to a level of plausibility, validity, and excellence that merits publication and that warrants being treated with particular seriousness by scholarly colleagues. That is all. People are then free to read it or ignore it—we have all experienced both. They are free to engage it, critique it, build on it or tear it down. And every single publication will experience every one of these possible responses . . .

These observations are commonplace. We all know them to be true. But at the same time, when many political scientists talk, with a spirit of great seriousness, about “science,” they forget such things, and act as if there is some method, or set of rules, or system of bureaucratic requirements of “data access and research transparency,” that can mitigate the inherently interpretive and inherently contestable and *provisional* character of even the best contributions to political science. We want to see *all* the data. We want to know all the steps in the process of reasoning. We want to be able to subject everything to an ultimate test, to an essential judgment of Truth or Falsity. But there is no such test, no such judgment. There is no Archimedean point from which our complex and constantly changing political world can be apprehended, and no vantage point from which our truth claims can be insulated from provisionality.

Of course this does not mean that “anything goes.” At every step in the ongoing process of scholarly inquiry—and such inquiry consists of a never-ending recursive cycle of pre-publication and post-publication review—political scientists are liable to *questioning*. “Why do you say this?” “What is your evidence for this?” “Are you sure you have interpreted this evidence properly?” “What about this alternative interpretation of your evidence?” “What about this alternative evidence?” “Are you so sure that an alternative explanation doesn’t work better?” Whether one’s work involves multivariate analysis or formal modeling or descriptive case studies or detailed ethnographic description or

constitutional analysis or textual exegesis or normative argument, one is always liable to questions such as these. Different kinds of evidence or argumentation may be relevant in different situations. Scholars will often disagree about the kinds of evidence or argumentation that are relevant. A level of meta-argument ensues, sometimes even followed by a deeper level of meta-argument. This is the life of scholarship, and every experienced editor knows that while this life can be facilitated, and in some ways regulated, it cannot be purified or perfected. Every good editor also knows that there is a difference between editing—an intellectual activity involving facilitation, engagement, communication, and the cultivation of spaces for argument—and *policing*. *Publication is not the end of critique, contestation, and critical review by peers. It is one step in an iterative and interminable process.*”

I stand by this long-standing commitment to the idea that ongoing critique is the hallmark of serious scholarship. Of course scholars ought to be held accountable for their evidence and their analysis. That is exactly what existing practices of publication in political science promote. I await some evidence from DA-RT proponents that these practices are in need of a substantial overhaul.

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At the same time, at my initiative—and after full discussion with and the unanimous support of my editorial board—*Perspectives on Politics* recently adopted a policy statement on “scholarly recognition.” This policy makes the commitment to transparency as transparent as can be, and at the same time links this commitment to broader questions of professional ethics and intellectual

integrity that I wish were as important to DA-RT activists as the new bureaucratic rules they seek to institute. Here is the statement, which is posted on the [APSA website](#).

Perspectives on Politics has long been committed to promoting scholarly sharing, among political scientists and between political scientists and other reading publics, that is serious, rigorous, relevant, honest and intellectually fair.

In light of all rhetoric of intellectual probity surrounding the controversy over the DA-RT (“Data Access and Research Transparency”) initiative, we think it important to issue a statement publicly reiterating one of our journal’s long-standing practices and also announcing a new policy regarding citation practices.

(1) *Perspectives* has long been committed to the highest standards of general research transparency.

Perspectives is a scholarly journal of political science fully committed to double-blind peer review of all research articles and to honest and open sharing of ideas and evidence. We regard such commitments as essential to the publicity and intellectual care at the heart of all serious scholarly inquiry and publication. Our policies have reflected these commitments from the start of our editorship.

Since 2009 we have thus shared versions of the letter below with all authors of articles we are publishing. The letter encourages authors to make their evidentiary sources, including data, accessible, and invites them to take advantage of resources provided by the journal and Cambridge University Press (who hosts supplemental material at permanent links) to prepare these sources in a manner that seems reasonable given their work and their personal convictions as authors and valued colleagues.

This policy has been voluntary and it will remain voluntary. At the same time, we work very closely with authors in the development of their work, and in recent years this policy has been strongly encouraged as part of a more general

conversation about how to publish the best work possible.

(2) *Perspectives* is fully committed to the ethical value of inclusivity and appropriate scholarly recognition of the work of others.

Two years ago, in response to widespread discussion of the issue within the profession, our editorial board initiated a serious discussion of the problem of gender bias in citation practices and other forms of bias as well. At our 2015 annual board meeting in San Francisco, the board voted unanimously to adopt changes in the instructions we send to all book and manuscript reviewers that underscore the importance of citing all relevant sources.

We have thus incorporated the following language into all reviewer letters:

“In considering these questions, the work’s treatment of relevant literatures and authors is particularly germane to your evaluation. If you have concerns about citation bias, regarding gender, people of color, or other under-represented scholarly communities, these would also be worth noting. Obviously, your evaluation will be based largely on your reading of the work as a scholarly expert. But please keep in mind that *Perspectives on Politics* is a distinctive kind of political science journal, and seeks to promote research that is integrative and that reaches broadly within political science.”

Both of these measures serve the same purpose: promoting forms of research practice and scholarly discourse that enact proper regard for the *intersubjective* character of scientific practice. We believe strongly that all scholars ought to pay attention to and acknowledge the work of others relevant to their own work, and that all scholars ought to present their work in a way that makes it accessible to critical scrutiny by others in the field.

Jeffrey C. Isaac, Editor in Chief,
Perspectives on Politics
James Moskowitz, Managing Editor,
Perspectives on Politics

As far as I am aware, *Perspectives* is the first and indeed the only major political science journal in the U.S. to issue such a general statement on the theme of scholarly recognition. The part about research transparency reiterates the journal's long-standing commitment in a way that is respectful of the integrity and autonomy of our authors, who we regard as "valued colleagues" and not as untrustworthy supplicants requiring new forms of policing. And the part about inclusive citation breaks new ground in making explicit both the problem of gender citation bias and the need for greater mindfulness about the importance of recognizing the work of others more generally. This is truly an *activist* citation policy, and I would hope that Moravcsik, who has written about gender equality in the academy¹, would devote the same energy to supporting such a policy for all political science journals as he has devoted to promoting his ideas about hyperlinking footnotes. Yet I am sorry to note that at least thus far the leading proponents of DA-RT have been single-mindedly obsessed with

¹ Andrew Moravcsik, "Why I Put My Wife's Career First," *The Atlantic* (October 2015).

promoting a much narrower agenda centered on policing the argumentative practices of colleagues.

I am all in favor of transparency, in scholarly research and in the activism of colleagues seeking to shape the agenda of academic disciplines. But I do not think scholarly openness requires the new principles and bureaucratic apparatuses being promoted under the rubric of DA-RT. I consider such measures unnecessary, costly, and alienating to many colleagues. I also think that they are a distraction from bigger issues of principle that ought to be at the center of a truly publicly-oriented political science discipline. I don't believe the proponents of DA-RT are bad. I simply believe they are wrong and that they do not speak for many in the discipline. And while I have quite deliberately expended some time and energy trying to explain why I consider them wrong, I choose to spend most of my time and energy editing *Perspectives on Politics*, and demonstrating in practice that a political science journal can be intellectually serious, engaging, and genuinely interesting all at the same time, and without need of new principles and rules and regulations.