

The challenges the DA-RT regimen poses for qualitative scholars have been discussed at length. In particular, [Aili Tripp](#) and [Kristen Monroe](#) have written excellent pieces about the difficulties DA-RT poses to researchers who interview human subjects. I wish to raise two additional points about DA-RT protocols insofar as they affect qualitative researchers: the contingent nature of elite interviews, and the costs DA-RT imposes upon under-resourced researchers.

First, the Transparency Appendix (TRAX) posed by journals adhering to the DA-RT guidelines requires not just making interview transcripts available, either wholly in part, but disclosing the process the researcher took to identify and access informants. This information should certainly be reported generally—i.e., as a scholar researching the gendered effects of electoral reform in Latin America, I contacted members of the electoral regulatory bodies, politicians and activists prominent in electoral reform networks, and academics expert in the topic. However, if the objective of DA-RT is that researchers provide the steps needed to guarantee full replicability, this generic description seems insufficient: how would someone reproducing my work know *who* to contact? Further, wouldn't the *mode of contact* need to be reproduced, in order to guarantee that the new researcher could also get the subject to agree to the interview?

As most qualitative scholars conducting elite interviews know, audiences are infrequently obtained through cold-calling. Elites grant interviews because the “right person” asked them to do so. I have been conducting elite interviews in Argentina and Mexico since 2005: I have amassed a complex network of contacts inside and outside of the government, who know me and trust my work, and who are willing to leverage *their* networks to help me obtain otherwise unobtainable interviews. These colleagues and friends no more want their name in print than my actual interviewees; they do not want to be “outed” as the person with that senator’s cell phone number or the person who is buddy-buddy with that presidential candidate. To reveal their identities as part of my protocol for identifying informants would jeopardize carefully-cultivated networks of trust. This naming would be unethical whether or not the IRB prohibited it.

The contingent nature of obtaining elite interviews also speaks to the near impossibility of replicating this kind of qualitative work. Even if someone interviewed the exact same informants as me, using the exact same modes of access as me, and asked the same questions as me, they would obtain different answers—because elites’ willingness to disclose sensitive information depends on everything from the researcher’s reputation to the phases of the moon. Interviewees’ stories even change over time, as our relationship evolves and their distance from the events grows; as the researcher, I use my accumulated case knowledge and experience to contextualize each response. The complex process of drawing inferences from elite interviews does not mean that I or any other qualitative researcher should be held to lesser evidentiary standards. However, it suggests that DA-RT misunderstands not just human subjects protections (as Tripp and others have pointed out), but the very nature of obtaining, conducting, and interpreting elite interviews.

Second, for scholars conducting qualitative research, especially those at under-resourced universities, meeting DA-RT standards could be prohibitive even were ethical concerns not a consideration. Interview transcription is expensive (\$60-\$100 per hour of audio). Often, I forego transcriptions in favor of careful note-taking and listening and re-listening to the recording. Further, what of interviews or source material (i.e., news articles, statutes, congressional debates) in a foreign language? The DA-RT guidelines do not specify language parameters, but paying for

professional translations lies far beyond the reach of most scholars. Recently, I paid a professional translator \$0.10 per word—or \$500 for a 5,000 word text. Dozens of interview transcriptions, or databases of new articles or congressional debates, will easily contain hundreds of thousands of words. The logistical and cost barriers for both transcription and translation could mount for research conducted in less common languages.

To ask scholars without financial resources to transcribe and/or translate materials themselves would impose a dramatic burden on their time. The rule of thumb I learned in graduate school was that transcriptions take non-professionals about 6 hours per hour of audio. In terms of translation, it recently took me 20 hours to translate a 6,500 word text from English to Spanish. Research-one universities account for about 10 percent of all 4-year degree granting institutions in the United States: the vast majority of political scientists are working at other public and private universities or small liberal arts colleges.¹ We have less time and less money to support faculty research. And even scholars at R1s face resource constraints that could limit their ability to pay for transcription and translation.

In summary, DA-RT only risks exacerbating divisions in the profession between the haves and the have nots, and between the “quants” and the “quals.” It suggests that the best publication opportunities will continue to accrue to highly-resourced researchers, who can rely on teams of graduate students and other paid assistants to help them create the appendices necessary to meet access, transparency, and replicability standards. I would further argue that the proposed solution of exempting qualitative researchers from DA-RT standards exacerbates this division. If a quantitative researcher must now share her entire dataset, while I can screen my interview transcripts (or recordings) under the guise of human subjects protections, then I obtain an advantage: I can publish multiple pieces from my interviews without making the data available, while the quantitative researcher can only publish one article out of her dataset before she must share her materials. DA-RT proponents have been remarkably blasé about the unfairness to junior scholars, who may spend years constructing a dataset, to only see it yield one publication. The conventional wisdom is that young scholars publish one or two “dissertation articles” to establish their names and generate buzz for their forthcoming book—though now their future publications could be preempted by other scholars using their data.

DA-RT will not “save” political science—if it even needed saving. Politicians, pundits, and voters skeptical of ivory-tower academics will not reverse course simply because they can now access our raw data, with all its source materials, custom software programs, and codebooks. If anything, this high-minded empiricism is precisely what data skeptics reject. DA-RT will not stem the anti-intellectual, anti-science bias that has gripped American politics. DA-RT will, however, significantly narrow what research questions are answered and what truths become known, curtailing intellectual inquiry and prejudicing the publication opportunities of our peers.

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¹ The [Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education](#) identifies approximately 300 institutions as research-dominant, and the [National Center for Education Statistics](#) lists roughly 3,000 4-year colleges and universities.