Qualitative Transparency Deliberations

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Background knowledge and transparency

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Background knowledge and transparency

Posted: **Tue Nov 15, 2016 11:35 pm**
by **pahall**
Surely a concern for all non-statistical studies in political science, although perhaps especially so in cross-national comparative studies, is the role that background knowledge (of the history, political context, culture, etc.) of the national/regional case plays in the causal inferences that are drawn from the observations. For example, even if a (hypothetical) French civil servant said to me roughly the same thing as a British civil servant, I might give more credence or weight to one than the other based on this contextual knowledge. I have difficulty seeing how this can be adequately summarized in a transparency index when it applies to what are often hundreds of such observations relevant to the conclusions about a specific case, even if the role of this background knowledge can be discussed for a few key observations. My broader point is that there is invariably an interpretive element to qualitative research that turns heavily on are often complex features of the background context. To apply criteria that might (?) make some sense when the causal inferences are made largely on the basis of counting up various kinds of observations and noting whey they are pertinent to qualitative studies in which what counts most is the quality of those observations -- and a quality that is determined based on deep contextual knowledge -- seems to me not to make sense.

Re: Background knowledge and transparency

Posted: **Sat Nov 19, 2016 5:56 pm**
by **Tasha Fairfield**
Thank you very much for these comments Peter. I entirely agree--background information is extremely important, and we should aim to explain how it informs our analytical judgements, but within reason. There is no way to enumerate all of the background knowledge on which we draw. I think authors need to have leeway to ascertain at what level of detail they need to engage, and in what context (whether in text, or in some kind of appendix). Regarding your mention of transparency indices--did you have something specific in mind? Do you have any concerns along these lines with regard to the new APSR guidelines? (I mention APSR because I think theirs are the most specific guidelines so far.)

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