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CHAPTER

Pluralism in Practice: How Fieldwork Can Strengthen Diversity and Engagement in Political Science 🔓

Diana Kapiszewski, Lauren M. MacLean, Benjamin L. Read

Abstract

Fieldwork in our discipline embodies both epistemological and methodological pluralism. Pluralism in field research entails different understandings of how knowledge is created, of how politics is studied, as well as of who we are as individual scholars and research teams, and of how our multiple identities intersect with dynamic landscapes of power in our field sites. This chapter considers three trends in methodological writing on, and in the practice of, fieldwork. We posit that each trend strengthens fieldwork as a form of research, and both reflects and promotes pluralism. First, the chapter examines how the practice of field research reveals the importance of the researcher's positionality and encourages reflexivity and an interpretive sensibility, potentially increasing mutual understanding among scholars who conduct fieldwork. Second, it highlights efforts to produce knowledge in more inclusive ways by conducting engaged or collaborative research, empowering more rigorous and meaningful scholarship. Third, it notes how "digital fieldwork" can facilitate the involvement of more research participants, make forms of fieldwork more accessible to a wider set of scholars, and enable the ethical and responsible sharing of data generated through fieldwork. These pluralistic trends can enrich fieldwork's conduct and processes, enhancing the resulting scholarship and increasing fieldwork's impact in the broader discipline.

Keywords: fieldwork, field research, positionality, reflexivity, collaborative research, engaged research, digital fieldwork

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Introduction: Pluralism in Fieldwork

Although we all recognize and use the word *fieldwork*, the term conjures up different images, practices, and methods for political scientists who conduct field research. Fieldwork in our discipline is heterogeneous and versatile; a broad range of research activities carried out in myriad settings fit under its umbrella. Going to the field can mean driving across town to observe a community meeting or flying halfway around the world for months of interviews. It can entail an open-ended process of exploration that develops a vague topic or hunch into a well-formed research question, or it can involve a targeted search for specific pieces of data that test a hypothesis. Field researchers with different epistemological commitments, ranging from various forms of interpretivist to positivist, may think about the process of knowledge generation differently, and thus adopt different approaches to gathering information. Some might conduct an experiment, others may administer a survey, and still others might immerse in a community's homes or meeting rooms, gather focus groups, or sift through boxes of documents in an archive; many may adopt more than one strategy. The versatility of field research thus embodies both epistemological and methodological pluralism.

Yet, pluralism in field research entails more than different ways of understanding knowledge creation and of studying politics. It also involves who we are as individual scholars and research teams, and how our multiple identities intersect with dynamic landscapes of power in our field sites. More than ever before, today political scientists are consciously confronting questions about the identity constructs and power relationships in which our research practices are embedded, and that those practices sometimes recreate and reinforce. Scholars are more actively considering how the same research project carried out in villages of northern Sichuan will proceed differently and yield different insights if conducted by a White woman from Johannesburg, a Black man from New York City, and a Chinese woman from Chengdu. These reflexive processes are producing increasingly innovative forms of inquiry involving greater recognition of the role of positionality when carrying out research involving interactions with others, and of the benefits of greater engagement and collaboration with the people whose practices and politics we wish to understand. Moreover, the proliferation of digital and internet-based strategies for interacting with research participants and sharing the information generated through those interactions is stimulating new types of interpersonal interactions and new dynamics of power among scholars who conduct fieldwork.

Throughout years of surveying and interviewing other field researchers, reading books and articles created through fieldwork, and considering other works that reflect on and prescribe advice for the conduct of fieldwork—as well as conducting our own fieldwork—we have often been struck by the things that unify this diverse community (Kapiszewski, MacLean, and Read 2015, 15–18, 80–1). Field researchers recognize one another, acknowledge the sweat and stress and sometimes tears behind what eventually emerges neatly packaged in a thirty-five-minute job talk or between the covers of a book. They learn from the hard-won lessons of other fieldworkers' challenges and successes, such as those reported in Krause and Szekely's recent compilation (2020). They know that conducting fieldwork often means confronting realities that make a mockery of one's initial conjectures, that might well necessitate major course corrections or even a wrenching re-thinking of an entire research design (Kapiszewski, MacLean, and Read 2022); that having made a plan, sometimes one must "be ready to toss it" (Krause and Szekely 2020, 81–124). They would agree that theory and hypotheses must be tested, and that knowledge is continually enriched, by encounters with human beings' lived experiences, with the raw materials underlying abstract claims, with the "ground truth."

In this chapter, we shift from our past focus on commonalities to consider the diversity and pluralism that mark field research, and the heterogeneous community of political scientists who conduct fieldwork. We first consider some of the specific ways in which fieldwork varies across projects. We then discuss three trends in methodological writing on, and in the practice of, fieldwork that both reflect and promote pluralism.[1] We suggest that part of fieldwork's pluralism springs from its often-interpersonal nature and,

relatedly, from the contingency that often marks it. First, we examine how the practice of field research reveals the importance of the researcher's positionality and encourages an interpretive sensibility, regardless of epistemological commitments. Second, we highlight efforts to produce knowledge in more inclusive ways, i.e., through partnering and engaging with those in "the field" rather than merely studying and drawing upon them. Third, we note how newly popularized forms of information technology are democratizing access to fieldwork, facilitating the involvement of more participants, making forms of fieldwork more accessible to a wider set of scholars, and enabling the ethical and responsible sharing of data generated through fieldwork.

Diversity in Fieldwork

In previous writings, we have drawn special attention to commonalities that unite the community of fieldworkers across various lines of potential division, and over time—despite the broad range of practices and methods that fieldworkers use. The commonalities go far beyond the sense of mutual recognition and respect mentioned above. Evidence for some shared general practices and approaches to research clearly emerged in the sixty-two interviews we conducted in 2011-2012 with political scientists with field experience, and in the 1,142 sets of responses to a survey we distributed during that same period to U.S.-based political scientists.[2] While this information is somewhat dated as of this writing, many aspects of the broad picture that emerged appear to be stable over time and to hold up in light of what we have seen subsequently.

Field research, as we found, is undertaken by political scientists of all subfields, even if it is generally thought to be especially central to comparative politics. Also, wherever an individual scholar goes, they tend to gather information and data using not just one or two but a range of techniques. For example, while the great majority of political scientists carry out interviews while in the field, they combine this with multiple other forms of data gathering, whether that be archival research, ethnography, fielding original surveys, or collecting books, articles, and other secondary materials. Whether or not their work also involves quantitative data and analysis, the great majority of fieldworkers consider their projects to have a qualitative dimension. Perhaps most profoundly: political scientists use fieldwork not only to gather data but also to create or refine the design of their research projects. They reported that what they learned in the field did not just help them understand context or causal processes, but also assisted in developing concepts, measures, hypotheses, and even the very research questions they were asking. Field research thus contributes to an ongoing and iterative process of dynamic research design (see Kapiszewski, MacLean, and Read 2022 for more on this point).

While bearing in mind these widely shared orientations and common practices, we also note that political scientists are indeed plural and diverse in many aspects of their fieldwork. Simply put, different scholars do different things in the field.

Scholars in our discipline travel to states, provinces, cities, and villages in countries all over the world. Notably, however, U.S.-based researchers tend to focus on certain places more than others, with 75% of projects reported in our survey involving rich countries and only 5% involving low-income countries. Also, just over half of all subnational destinations outside the United States were national capitals. Such caveats notwithstanding, the substantial geographic diversity in the places field researchers visit means they encounter tremendously different kinds of challenges. Fieldwork for some entails visiting modern office buildings in London or Paris or elsewhere in the global North; for others it means determining which neighborhoods are safe and unsafe in the context of civil wars and insurgencies (Paluck 2009). Especially in authoritarian settings, some researchers must take extraordinary precautions to protect their data and the safety of those with whom they speak.

Fieldwork can mean taking a long succession of day or overnight trips from home base to research sites, such as Cramer's drives from Madison, Wisconsin to coffee klatches in small towns throughout the state (2016, 26–44, 230–2). Alternatively, it might mean spending a year or more overseas – or myriad other points on these geographic and temporal spectra. The total amount of time scholars spend in the field in the course of a given project seems to have declined somewhat over time, perhaps in part because of the reduced availability of funding, or the increased availability of digitized information.[3] Relatedly, the proportion of project data acquired through fieldwork has also declined markedly over time. Researchers' choices about where and when to conduct fieldwork are also shaped by the personal contours of their lives; on average, they spend much less time in the field when handling parenting responsibilities (Tripp 2002), and/or when in marriages and partnerships. Resources scholars have to support field study vary widely as well; some conduct fieldwork on a shoestring and some have large grants.

Apart from this diversity in what we might call the structural parameters of field research projects, different researchers hold widely varying views about how to go about fieldwork. Those views are influenced by scholars' key intellectual traits, such as research competencies and epistemological commitments. With regard to the latter, our research found that the great majority of political scientists embrace multiple approaches to analysis: 54 percent of projects reported involved interpretive analysis, 51 percent quantitative, 87 percent qualitative; 18 percent involved all three.

In short, our discipline includes scholars who adopt quite different styles of and approaches to fieldwork. In this section we sketch some dimensions of this variation by considering two key issues that directly pertain to the face-to-face nature of much fieldwork: the importance of competency in the language spoken in the field context, and the use of interviews.

In some field projects, investigators draw on languages they have acquired through years of immersion or study. Some consider mastery of the language of the research locale a firm prerequisite. "What choice do you have? You're going to do something terribly incompetent or you're going to know the language," as one senior scholar put it.[4] Yet not everyone believes that fluency is a must. Driscoll, in his notes to field researchers-in-training who ask whether they can skip language study altogether, points out many long-term payoffs of deeper fluency in a foreign language but advocates acquiring at least a rough-and-ready phrasebook-level competence and building from there (2021, 24–5).

Lee Ann Fujii makes a nuanced argument in favor of working with interpreters, either in lieu of or as a supplement to having or acquiring language skills. She notes that different projects require different degrees or even types of fluency (2013, 147). She observes that even researchers fluent in tongue commonly spoken in their field site (say, Spanish) might not speak the languages of subcommunities (Quechua or Mixtec); further, she highlights that formal classroom training might not afford cultural fluency. Good interpreters do much more than simply translate words, she writes; they can also "bring insight, perspectives, and instincts that may be critical to the researcher's ability to navigate the field safely and soundly and to make sense of what people mean, not just what they say, in interviews" (2013, 146–50).

Reflecting this diversity of opinion, our survey found a range of language competencies among field researchers operating in contexts in which languages other than their first language were spoken. Eighty-five percent of those using a given non-native language extensively in a project had at least an "advanced" grasp of it, if not full or near-native fluency, reflecting more than five years of training in the language on average. But when it came to languages that featured less centrally in a given project, more than two-thirds of scholars had only beginning or intermediate proficiency, with about three years of training on average. Political scientists thus have been willing to invest substantial time in language study, proportional to their need for linguistic competency, but presumably find practical linguistic workarounds in settings where languages in which they are less than fully fluent are spoken.

With regard to the use of interviews, despite being a time-honored workhorse among field techniques,[5] what an interview actually entails can vary tremendously for different scholars. For most political scientists, an interview seems to mean a single encounter of an hour or two with a participant. Yet those who aim to gather a great deal of information from a given participant might carry out a succession of oral history interviews aimed at capturing information across many periods of the participant's life or career. Or they may undertake serial interviews, perhaps spread out over time, to probe an interviewee's perspectives more deeply than is possible in a single session and to learn from his or her reactions to emergent events (Read 2018).

Some political scientists use interviews to gather precisely defined pieces of information, as in a questionnaire-driven survey interview. Beckmann and Hall describe interviews with "Beltway elites" around Washington, DC (such as lobbyists) the central purpose of which was to obtain factual answers to questions like "How many face-to-face or phone conversations did you have with someone in each of these offices?" (2013). Others, seeking to delve into people's conceptual worlds and the meanings through which they understand political phenomena, may engage in much more open-ended conversations. Soss, for instance, explains how he employed interviews with clients of two government welfare programs, for instance spending many hours in the home of a woman and her pre-teen son, "talking about this and that, shoveling the snow off the front walk together," in the course of exploring the interviewee's own "understandings and sense-making efforts" in ways "not hemmed in by the fixed scope, order, and wording of items on a survey questionnaire" (2006, 166, 172, 176). Many others operate in a way that fits somewhere between these two poles.

Most interviewers spend at least a little time establishing a degree of personal familiarity with interlocutors, as is sometimes recommended in literature that discusses interview practices (Dexter 1970, 50–5). Fujii (2018, ch. 2), however, makes a counterintuitive case for not always needing "rapport" or "trust." In some cases, she writes, she was able to learn things from people who were guarded or hostile toward her. In short, even taken-for-granted aspects of our most established research techniques can be and are rethought.

Field researchers in our discipline tend to share a remarkable sense of fellow-feeling, mutual recognition and respect. Using Driscoll's term, we belong to a kind of "guild" (2021, 1–22). Those working in similar locales may enjoy especially close networks and community, helping one another find their way and sharing tips about visas, regulations, or accommodations, or specific archives or interlocutors. Even those laboring in entirely different parts of the world have much to learn from and appreciate about each other's work processes, trials, and tribulations. Yet amid this general commonality, fieldwork is deeply pluralistic—including scholars with widely ranging epistemologies, working in very different settings and employing a range of methodologies—and, moreover, can *promote* pluralism, as we discuss next.

Reflexivity, Positionality, and Interpretivist Sensibilities in Fieldwork

The literature on conducting fieldwork, in political science and also other disciplines such as anthropology, geography, and sociology, encourages scholars to engage in reflexivity—to continuously reflect critically on how knowledge is being produced. During this ongoing self-reflection, researchers may consider their positionality, i.e., how their values, beliefs, and identities shape both their interactions with participants in the research setting and their interpretation of the information they find and receive. That is, scholars may consider how who they are shapes how they do their work and what they learn (Shehata 2006; Fujii 2008; Wedeen 2009).

We refer to such reflections as "interpretive sensibilities," and contend that not only scholars who self-identify as interpretivists, but also scholars with more positivist leanings, may develop such sensibilities while conducting fieldwork.[6] Doing so can lead them to think in new ways about the production of

knowledge. Of course, few scholars will completely rethink their ontological assumptions, epistemological commitments, or affiliations to methodological scholarly communities. Moreover, positivism is and will likely remain dominant in the discipline of political science (Steinmetz 2005). Nonetheless, the experience of fieldwork can lead scholars who otherwise differ on fundamental aspects of how knowledge is created and evaluated to reflect critically on what they are doing. As more scholars develop such sensibilities, the boundaries between different epistemic communities can blur. In sum, doing fieldwork can promote methodological pluralism when it encourages scholars to carefully consider their core intellectual understandings and recognize the value of others'. Moreover, field researchers' diversity of positionalities mean that fieldwork and its findings are plural in multiple ways.

Of course, fieldworkers with more interpretivist commitments think about the role of positionality differently from their colleagues with more positivist leanings. When considering positionality, a more positivist scholar would likely worry about how their own views and beliefs entering into a research encounter can introduce "bias," and to try to reduce or at minimum control for "interviewer effects." Melani Cammett recommends anticipating these effects and attempting to match interviewers with respondents who are similar to them in some theoretically relevant respects to generate more reliable data when conducting research in deeply divided societies such as Lebanon (2013). If a scholar with more positivist leanings were conducting survey research, they might test for intercoder reliability by segmenting the dataset and analyzing the data generated by each enumerator to explore whether any of their personal views or biases significantly skewed the data.

Scholars with more interpretivist leanings, however, might consider all knowledge to be co-produced through intersubjective interactions with research participants. Rather than trying to eliminate the results of these dynamics from the data generated, these scholars would take notes on and incorporate these observations into the analysis and discussion of the data. Thus, Cramer (2016) incorporates discussion of her identity as a native of the state of Wisconsin and also a faculty member at the University of Wisconsin into the narrative of her participant observation of informal coffee groups in small towns far from the capital city of Madison.

Positionality is an important aspect of some scholars' field research due to the intimacy of the face-to-face interactions that such research often entails. For instance, when scholars download an aggregate dataset from a website, the data may be practically ready-to-use after a bit of cleaning or recoding. Since the scholar is not generating their own original data from the field, the research is distanced from the messy process of data creation. Using data drawn from internationally recognized organizations, such as the World Bank's World Development Indicators, may make a scholar feel that their analysis is "objective"—even though the data may incorporate numerous subjective decisions and unknown flaws (Jerven 2013). The notion of scientific neutrality is reinforced, and the relevance of positionality seemingly muted, by the multiple layers that separate the scholar doing the analysis from the real people from whom the information underlying the quantitative dataset was originally sourced.

By contrast, when a scholar leaves their home institution to carry out fieldwork in another site, they are often personally interacting with their sources to generate original evidence, employing practices that Lee Ann Fujii has characterized as "relational" (Fujii 2018). Whether conducting an interview, running a field experiment, or meeting an archivist, the investigator is profoundly implicated in, rather than distanced from, the data-generation process. These interactions can lead scholars to think carefully about their positionality in the research process, i.e., about how different dimensions of their identity shape how study participants perceive and interact with them in the field setting, and how scholars interpret the information they receive. A scholar's different traits and views may produce connections (or contention) with their interlocutors, which may in turn facilitate (or complicate) the interaction and production of knowledge.

Moreover, these complex dynamics of positionality may play out in unexpected ways. For example, MacLean, a White woman born in Louisiana with a Ph.D. and three kids, connected with Ghanaian women as mothers while doing fieldwork in Accra, but navigated suspicions about whether she had a racial bias when she conducted field research with Native American health officials in Seattle. Particularly for the interviews with Native American communities that had suffered a history of marginalization and exploitation by White scholars in the past, it was essential for MacLean to be introduced through local inter-tribal organizations and to obtain research clearance through all relevant tribal Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) in addition to carrying out the requisite university IRB process. In both field sites, additional time was spent to introduce the project and to share more personal details about the researcher's positionality so that a relationship of trust could begin to be established.

Unfortunately, given the unpredictable influence of local understandings and even prejudices on how researchers are seen in the field, some scholars conceal central aspects of their identities when conducting field research. Some female scholars do not feel comfortable revealing that they are unmarried in heavily patriarchal societies, for instance. Scholars who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, intersex, asexual, and more (LGBTQ+) may not feel safe sharing that they are gay in homophobic and transphobic cultures.[7] For example, researchers working on transnational queer activism have described the need to self-censor their own personal identities in countries such as Morocco or Uganda, where same-sex relationships are criminalized.[8] While such uncertainty and self-censorship may be heightened or occur more often in certain contexts, such as conflict zones (Paluck 2009; Cronin-Furman and Lake 2018), even scholars who conduct field research in more peaceful contexts must navigate the unpredictability of these interpersonal dynamics.

In sum, the face-to-face interactions that fieldwork often entails may encourage researchers with a diverse range of epistemological inclinations to engage in reflexivity. Fieldworkers may be inspired to think critically about their own positionality before leaving for the field and once there, and to adopt an interpretive sensibility, interrogating and documenting in fieldnotes how different dimensions of their identities shape the data they are collecting. While it can be difficult for some field researchers to know in advance of working in a field site which dimensions of their identity may be more or less salient there, scholars should do their best to anticipate the potential dynamics and then continuously reflect and carefully document how interpersonal relationships evolve over time and may shape the data collected. Reflexivity about the researcher's interactions and roles in the field site can enable them to pivot quickly to a new plan B, C, or D (Hajj 2020; Posner 2020; Kapiszewski, MacLean, and Read 2022), just as the contingency and fluidity that mark fieldwork can encourage reflexivity. Such critical self-reflection can facilitate broader consideration of the longer-term risks and benefits of the project for the communities involved in the work, to whom we turn next.

Collaboration, Community Engagement, and Civically Engaged Field Research

Political scientists are increasingly considering how they can intentionally and meaningfully engage—and possibly collaborate—with the people with whom they interact in the places they study. This engagement might take a range of forms, including consulting with individuals and communities on the design or execution of a research project, soliciting help with data collection, gathering those whom the research entails or impacts to consider its findings and their implications for the community—or actively building more long-term and deeply collaborative research partnerships.

The context-dependent and intimate nature of field research encourages such engagement, which in turn encourages pluralism and inclusion. While some social science field research has been depicted as

representing an extension of colonialism,[9] engagement in the field can potentially "decolonize" field research, disrupting extractive modes of knowledge production that have historically privileged wealthier white scholars and institutions of the Global North.

Also underpinning the emphasis on engagement and collaboration in the field is a concern with the ethical dimensions of field research and the production of knowledge. As the American Political Science Association's (APSA) recent update to its guidance for human subjects research suggests,[10] some scholars have begun to think more expansively about research ethics.[11] For some, ethical commitments anchor and ground their work from the formulation of a research question to the dissemination of findings. Rather than being limited to submitting a research project to an ethics board for formal approval, some understand conducting research ethically to entail treating those whom they encounter in the field respectfully and justly, and carrying out their inquiry in ways that maximize its benefits and minimize its risks to those they involve in their work (Belmont Principles). In short, designing, conducting, and following up on research with an engagement-seeking, anti-extraction mindset—i.e., creating partnerships with scholars in the contexts of study and interacting meaningfully with research participants—offer opportunities to advance inclusivity and pluralism, as well as ethical inquiry.

Formal, active research collaboration between foreign scholars and partners in the contexts being studied (be they academics, government actors, nonprofits, survey outfits, or others) has increased over the last decades. Two dynamics fostering such collaboration are emerging communication technologies, and more non-U.S. citizens pursuing doctoral degrees from American universities (National Science Foundation 2018), both of which encourage cross-boundary academic interaction (Sınmazdemir 2019; 503). Such international collaborations take many forms and can make significant contributions to political science, and to inclusivity and pluralism. Collaborative engagement can deconstruct "research silos" and broaden all collaborators' perspectives on research questions, theoretical propositions, relevant literature, available data, and analytic approaches. Collaboration can also facilitate local partners' introduction into new research networks and their publishing in journals in their home countries as well as in the U.S.,[12] allowing their research contributions to be recognized, their work to be cited, and their readership to grow. Collaboration also facilitates dissemination of perspectives indigenous to the country being studied (Bleck, Dendere, and Sangaré 2018, 554–5).

Collaboration, of course, involves a range of challenges—practical, logistical, legal, and ethical—many of which relate to inclusivity and pluralism. How power is distributed among foreign versus local collaborators —a question closely related to how resources are distributed across institutions—can be a concern for a project being conducted by a single PI, as well as for a massive, multi-organization, and multi-country project.[13] For example, this concern motivated the Africanization of the Afrobarometer public opinion project: co-founded by scholars in the United States, South Africa, and Ghana in 2007–08, the headquarters were moved from Michigan State University to the Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana) and a Ghanaian scholar became the Executive Director.

Other challenges are created when the goals of foreign scholars, local researchers (and, potentially, participants, on which more next) are misaligned. When those misalignments are unaddressed or mishandled, for instance, by consistently privileging the goals of foreign over local researchers, collaboration can undermine rather than foster inclusion and pluralism (Haas 2022). Yet in aggregate, the long-term substantive and ethical advantages of collaboration often outweigh the challenges, which scholars have begun to develop strategies to address (Calfano 2018).

A deeper approach to engagement entails scholars interacting closely with the communities they study— that is, with those who contribute to, are impacted by, or are otherwise present in, the dynamics they wish to understand (aptly identified as "stakeholders" in Gellman 2021). Researchers can center communities as allies in research at many points as they carry out their study, and in many ways (Firchow and Gellman

2021). Indeed, some consider it impossible—or at least inadvisable—for our research to remain disengaged from the people and places that we study, as through engagement we can generate "actionable knowledge" about critical local issues (Pepinsky 2018).[14]

We can consider the benefits and challenges of engagement with those whom we study from three angles: professional, intellectual, and ethical. With regard to the first and second, scholars may face challenges balancing rigor with pressures for activism—or balancing differing viewpoints and ideas within a community with which they are engaging (Kaplan 2021). Others may face career incentives and have methodological concerns that discourage engaging and collaborating with communities (see especially the thoughtful consideration in Cyr 2021). Fearing mission creep, some believe that political scientists should stay "firmly in academic territory," i.e., that their domain of dialogue is more properly through and with "the literature," filling "knowledge gaps" therein (Michelitch 2018). Others worry that engaging with communities of study—particularly on research design and execution—undermines the rigorous and scientific conduct of research, complicates fulfilling neutrality requirements that call for keeping participants at arm's length, and potentially introduces biases (mentioned in Bracic 2018; Firchow and Gellman, 2021). Still others consider such engagement a potential obstacle to producing findings and drawing conclusions of relevance to broad academic audiences, a disciplinary desideratum (Thachil and Vaishnav 2018).

Yet such engagement can also help scholars produce better research that advances their professional goals. Engaging with communities of interest can produce advances in research design (strengthening case selection, conceptualization, and measurement),[15] and allow for contextual fine tuning of methods. Members of studied communities can also aid scholars to interpret their data and results, eschewing dominant but inaccurate understandings, and fostering the production of more valid findings. Likewise, community members can expand scholars' networks and enhance their access to people and sources of evidence, and well as help them to establish credibility in the research setting, all of which can improve current and future projects (Bleck et al. 2018; Bracic 2018; Thachil and Vaishnav 2018; Asiamah et al. 2021). More profoundly, when engagement brings into view the "interests, voices, and concerns" of populations that have not been considered by social scientists, it can shine a spotlight on "excluded history," enhancing inclusivity and pluralism and opening new terrains of knowledge (Watanabe 2021).

Considering the question from an ethical point of view draws us back to—and beyond—the notion of decolonizing fieldwork. As noted, involving research participants in the design and/or conduct of research studies—granting them agency rather than treating them simply as objects or subjects of inquiry or sources of data—empowers communities that are being "researched" and helps to address power imbalances, particularly in research involving marginalized communities (Firchow and Gellman 2021; Gellman 2021). Given the resources that participants expend to join in scholars' studies, and expectations they may have about how those studies can benefit the community, researchers may be ethically obliged to consult with communities on the questions they ask and the practical implications of their work for those they involve in it (Thachil and Vaishnav 2018). At a minimum, ethical engagement may call for researchers to share their results with studied communities in a form that will seem relevant and be helpful to them; they might publish in local news venues or local scholarly publications, or present at local conferences and workshops attended by local audiences (Abbarno and Bonoff 2018; Thachil and Vaishnav 2018). Engagement may also entail training those on the ground, such as research assistants, who help with the conduct of the research (Bleck et al. 2018; Lupu and Zechmeister 2018).

Of course, engagement can entail ethical dilemmas and challenges (with intellectual implications) as well. With regard to the conduct of the research, how do scholars decide with whom to engage—how are decisions about alliance and partnership made? Who will have the opportunity to be "unsilenced" and how are such choices made? How should a researcher proceed if a community does not wish to engage? How can or should collaboration continue if a researcher ultimately does not want to proceed as a community wishes

(Cyr 2021)? How should we think about the possibility of deeply engaged research being used by powerful actors, or changing political outcomes—and about scholars' insulation from the political consequences of their work (Pepinsky 2018)?

In sum, intellectual partnerships and engagement between scholars and those whom they study can enhance pluralism, allowing for and encouraging the involvement of more voices in intellectual dialogue. Simultaneously, engagement can make research richer and more rigorous by helping scholars to understand complex dynamics and hidden nuances. Indeed, a prerequisite for successful collaboration is scholars being open to learning as they go—which is also a hallmark of good field research (Yom 2015; Kapiszewski, MacLean, and Read 2022). Of course, involving more people in one's work can present ethical, intellectual, and professional challenges. Yet if these challenges can be overcome, over time engagement can lead to the creation of networks of knowledge production that extend far beyond the global North, ultimately resulting in fieldwork becoming a global enterprise entailing a global production of knowledge.

Digital Technologies and the Democratization of Field Research

Over the last several decades, multiple types of information and communication technologies have emerged that can facilitate digital fieldwork. Employing these new technologies broadens access to or "democratizes" the conduct of fieldwork, increasing its inclusivity and pluralism in at least three ways. Such technologies enable more people who have personally experienced and potentially shaped the dynamics that scholars wish to understand (including members of hard-to-reach populations) to participate in research; allows more scholars to engage (directly and indirectly) with the populations of interest; and enables the ethical sharing of the information gathered and generated through fieldwork. We consider each in turn.

One important way in which technology can increase fieldwork's inclusivity is by facilitating participation in research by members of populations whom scholars wish to engage. In particular, it can provide ways of including populations that are otherwise difficult to reach, such as internally displaced persons, workers in the informal economy, or migrants. For instance, given the ubiquity of cell phones, scholars have begun to distribute surveys and conduct interviews via cell phone, allowing them to connect with broad swaths of people as well as target specific sub-populations (see, e.g., Hoogeveen et al. 2014). Scholars can also use social media to build connections and trust with, share information with, and ultimately recruit community members and communities whom they hope to involve in their work (Glazier and Topping 2021).

Moreover, emerging technologies allow more scholars based in a broader range of locations to conduct fieldwork in more contexts.[16] While the outbreak of a global pandemic in early 2020 catalyzed intense discussion about "digital fieldwork," scholars have long used technology to interact with research participants from afar, and these practices will certainly continue now that the pandemic has subsided. The development and greater diffusion of, and growing familiarity with, digital communications platforms (e.g., Zoom and WhatsApp), and some archives' increasing emphasis on digitizing their holdings, are just two examples of how technology broadens access to fieldwork, increasing its inclusivity. Using such tools allows scholars who cannot carry out field research in situ (due to personal, professional, financial, immigration, safety, or many other reasons) to accrue many of the intellectual benefits that fieldwork generates, enhancing fieldwork's inclusivity.

Finally, emerging technologies make it much easier for researchers who conduct fieldwork to safely, responsibly, and ethically share with other scholars some or all of the information they have collected or participated in creating in the field, as encouraged by the "transparency revolution" (Moravcsik 2014) in the social sciences and beyond. For those who can do so ethically, sharing evidence—both that which directly underpins analyses published on the basis of fieldwork, and the larger collection of information inevitably

gathered during field research—has important implications for pluralism and inclusion.[17] Indeed, fieldwork plays an important role in helping scholars understand how best to fulfill their ethical commitments to study participants. Researchers sharing information generated through their research encounters—whether through self-service outlets such as Dataverse or Figshare, institutional repositories, or domain repositories such as the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR) or the Qualitative Data Repository—helps other researchers who lack the resources to engage in fieldwork, supporting their scholarly efforts.

Of course, scholars engaging in digital fieldwork and employing technology to share data pose a range of challenges—some similar to and others different from those posed by fieldwork "in context" (Kapiszewski, MacLean, and Smith forthcoming). Building on the discussion above, ethical challenges, in particular, can be both attenuated and aggravated in digital fieldwork, especially human subjects research. For instance, the increased availability of potential respondents that technology allows could inadvertently lead to repeated study and exhaustion of particular populations; conversely, using technology to contact participants may result in the exclusion of those who live in remote communities without reliable internet access. Moreover, interacting with human participants remotely can prevent scholars from taking in critical cues that facilitate the full and accurate interpretation of the information those participants convey. Kim (2022) considers how digital archival research can exacerbate various types of biases, e.g., "survival, transfer, digitization, and reinforcement bias [as well as] source bias."

These challenges cannot be taken lightly. However, they need to be considered in tandem with, and balanced against, the intellectual, ethical, and inclusionary upsides of the increased use of technology in the conduct of field research. As scholars continue to develop new strategies for deploying technology to enhance research, and actively work to counter the challenges that arise as such strategies emerge and evolve, we will learn to capitalize on technology's profound power in ways that increase the inclusivity of all kinds of field research.

Conclusion

Over the last few decades, an increasingly diverse group of political scientists have been researching and writing about the conduct of field research. Their scholarship plays a pedagogical role: by sharing their experiences, the insights they gained, and the lessons they learned from carrying out their research, scholars demystify fieldwork, reveal its challenges, highlight its intellectual benefits, and teach and inspire others.

After considering various types of diversity that mark field research, we focused on three emerging trends in the conduct of and writing on fieldwork, each with connections to pluralism. One emerging emphasis is on how field researchers—no matter their epistemological commitments—can develop what we refer to as "interpretivist sensibilities," reflecting on their own positionality and integrating the resulting insights into the conduct of their work. A second focus is on field researchers engaging and collaborating with those whom they encounter in the field, rather than merely "extracting" knowledge and insights from those individuals. A third emphasis is on how emerging digital technologies allow more people (including those who are part of hard-to-reach populations) to participate in research, more scholars to conduct (and collaborate on) research, and more information gathered and generated through fieldwork to be ethically shared and reused, thus democratizing fieldwork.

Our core contentions in this piece are that these emerging practices and developments strengthen fieldwork as a research practice, and reflect and promote pluralism in the discipline of political science. An enhanced awareness and appreciation of how all scholars who conduct fieldwork—as "research instruments" themselves—influence the research process can increase mutual understanding among scholars who

conduct fieldwork. Greater mutual understanding among fieldworkers strengthens the community of scholars who leave their home institutions to collect and generate data. Moreover, engaging in meaningful ways with the people we study enhances our understanding of the dynamics about which we wish to learn, empowering us to develop more appropriate research practices, and thus conduct more rigorous and meaningful research. Finally, emerging technologies that allow for the conduct of digital fieldwork mean that more people can conduct and participate in fieldwork. The involvement of more people, and the increased diversity of the people involved, in fieldwork can enrich its conduct and processes, enhancing the resulting scholarship and increasing its ultimate impact.

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Notes

1   While scholars in many disciplines contribute to the methodological literature on fieldwork, for conciseness we focus here on writings by political scientists.

2   Thirty-six percent of respondents were women, 64 percent men. Scholars who identified as Asian, Black, Latino, Native American, Arab American, or who specified a multi-racial identity constituted 11 percent of all respondents.

3   Scholars pursuing international projects in the year 2000 or later spent a median 180 days in the field, compared to 330 days for projects in earlier decades. These figures are from 822 reported field projects that were the first in scholars' careers.

4   Interview, LM-18, September 14, 2012.

5   Eighty-one percent of field research projects reported in our survey made significant use of interviews.

6   This notion of "interpretive sensibilities" builds on the development of the concept of "ethnographic sensibilities" in Schatz (2009: 5). For an overview of interpretive methods in political science, see Schwartz-Shea and Yanow (2012).

7   Interview BR-05, August 13, 2012.

8   Personal communication with early career scholars who are not identified due to the potential risk of harm.

9   According to some, scholars from the global North (funded by Western institutions) descending on parts of the global South with predetermined projects, and soliciting the help of "locals" only to facilitate and expedite the "extraction of information," represents an extension of colonialism, and has "perpetuated neocolonial power dynamics and reaffirmed inequalities" (Asiamah, Awal, and MacLean 2021: 549); see also Thambinathan and Kinsella 2021.

10   In April 2020, the APSA Council approved new "Principles and Guidance for Human Subjects Research" submitted by the Ad Hoc Committee on Human Subjects Research; the text can be found here: https://www.apsanet.org/Portals/54/diversity%20and%20inclusion%20prgms/Ethics/Final_Principles%20with%20Guidance%20with%20intro.pdf?ver=2020-04-20-211740-153

11   See, e.g., Fujii 2012; Kapiszewski and Wood 2022; and <Xref_chap>Chapter X in this volume</Xref_chap>; for treatments of ethics in field research see Glasius et al. 2018 and Knott 2019, as well as work on fieldwork in violent contexts; on ethics and field experiments in particular see Desposato 2018 and Phillips 2021.

12   Currently, by contrast, less than 10 percent of political science about Africa published in top journals is written by those based on the African continent (Bleck et al. 2018: 554).

13   The concern might be particularly acute when local collaborators are research assistants (Bleck et al. 2018).

14   A specific subset of community-centered research is identified as "civically engaged research" in which "scholars collaborate with those they study in designing, implementing, and evaluating research on civic problems and concerns … that informs the public, addresses community-grounded concerns, contributes to civic problem solving, and models reciprocal and respectful engagement with various communities and groups" (Rasmussen et al. 2021: 707). In particular, the American Political Science Association's Institute for Civically Engaged Research (ICER) focuses on conducting research through civic engagement. See the symposium on "Civically Engaged Research and Political Science" published in *PS: Political Science and Politics* in October 2021 (volume 54, issue 4).

15   Consider, for instance, the "creative corrective" to typical measurement strategies that some hold collaborative methodologies provide, e.g., Flores 2021; Levy and Firchow 2021.

16   The work found in the "References" section of the "Digital Fieldwork" website (https://digitalfieldwork.iu.edu/bib-entry/) consider myriad techniques for conducting research remotely in a variety of disciplines.

17   As has been well-documented elsewhere (e.g., Tripp 2018), and emphasized by the open science community, not all data from fieldwork projects—whether digital or conventional—can be shared responsibly. Despite significant technological developments and proliferating strategies for keeping research data safe and secure, researchers' ethical obligations to human participants may limit how much data they can share, when, where, and with whom (MacLean et al. forthcoming).