Data Access and Research Transparency

Developing and Instantiating a Meta-Standard

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The DA-RT Initiative

• Disciplinary project to encourage openness in Political Science.
• DA-RT, committee of the American Political Science Association.
• Discipline with a lot of people strongly holding different views on how social inquiry is best conducted.
• Transparency as a common value, not a commitment unique to one episteme.
Transparency as a Meta-Standard

• We approach transparency as an “upstream” meta-standard, which applies regardless of the type of social inquiry being conducted.

• Contrast view that transparency is a “downstream” concomitant of a particular view of science. For example, registration of research designs to prevent star-gazing or publication bias.
Transparency as a Meta-Standard

• Descriptive content of the meta-standard will (or at least should) be non-controversial.
• Building consensus around things people can agree on.
• Test of whether it works: can you run it past variety of scholarly communities, response is “we knew that.”
For all rule-based social inquiry

- Scholarly communities hold shared and stable beliefs that research designed and conducted in particular ways possesses certain characteristics.

- The conduct of social inquiry and the written products that represent its conclusions are designed to capture those characteristics.

- For any given piece of research in a particular tradition, the ability of scholars to claim the underlying warrants depends on their showing that it was designed and conducted in accordance with those rules.
Open about what?

- Our prescriptive methodologies all involve:
  - extracting information from the social world,
  - analyzing the resulting data, and
  - combining evidence and its analysis to reach a conclusion.

- Examples: ethnographic field work, a laboratory experiment, archive-based case study, or the statistical analysis of a large data set.
What does DA-RT ask?

• A Guide to Professional Ethics in Political Science (2012) described new expectations and requirements for sharing data and providing information about how knowledge claims were derived. Scholars must provide:
  • Data access,
  • production transparency, and
  • analytic transparency.
A. Data Access

- To the extent that scholars’ evidence-based knowledge claims rely on data they themselves generated or collected, they should
  - provide access to those data
  - or explain why they cannot.
B. Production Transparency

• Scholars providing access to data they generated or collected should offer
  – a full account of the procedures used to collect or generate the data.
C. Analytic Transparency

• Scholars making evidence-based knowledge claims should
  – provide a full account of how they drew their analytic conclusions from the data
  – (i.e., clearly explicate the links connecting data to conclusions).
Default position limited to:

• A) address human subjects concerns
• B) comply with relevant and applicable laws, including copyright
  • Must be in good faith and on reasonable grounds.
• C) provide first use of data by scholar who generated them.
  • One year after publication but journals can require sooner.
DA-RT follows a community standards approach

• The meta-standard is by definition epistemically neutral. Applies wherever scholars use a shared logic of inquiry to reach evidence-based conclusions.

• The justification for openness (the desire to establish a knowledge claim’s legitimacy) and its general content (showing both evidence and analysis) are epistemically neutral.

• DA-RT recognizes that the optimal means of achieving openness respect the challenges and opportunities that characterize various research traditions.
Caretakers or Crusaders?
Why be caretakers and not crusaders?

- Downstream approach requires agreement on epistemological issues that are matters of belief.
- Not everyone is comfortable with a view of social science that requires leadership by Arnaud Amalric, Abbot of Citeaux.
- Epistemologies change. If you anchor transparency to one belief, it loses its justification when that belief falls.
Some next steps:

• Instantiate general principles in research tradition specific follow-on guidelines from two committees QUANT DA-RT & QUAL DA-RT

• Promulgation and outreach via APSA publications, website and panels (e.g: Symposium in January issue of PS)

• Build trust through dialogue and example.

• Provide infrastructure matched to research communities. Example, QDR.