

Principles of Ethics for Human Subjects Research and Guidance

General Principles:

- 1. Political scientists have an obligation to respect autonomy, to consider the wellbeing of participants and other people affected by their research, and be open about the ethical issues they face and the decisions they make when conducting their research.**
- 2. Political scientists bear sole responsibility for the ethics of their research and its impact on participants, other parties, communities, and the discipline. Researchers should understand that their ethical obligations may go beyond what regulatory bodies require.**
- 3. Political scientists have a general obligation to follow these principles. In exceptional cases there may be good reasons to deviate from these principles, or these principles may even conflict with each other. In such case researchers should acknowledge and justify deviations in scholarly publications and presentations of their work.**

Legality

- 4. Political scientists have a general obligation to comply with relevant laws and regulations when they are conducting research in domestic and foreign settings. (see guidance)**

Political scientists should generally comply with relevant laws and regulations as they apply to both the research process and any activities associated with the research. This includes laws and regulations regarding prospective review and permitting as well as laws and regulations related to the activities of the research project.

Political scientists who are conducting research in a foreign country should generally comply with local review, permitting requirements, and other laws and regulations. When researchers think that local review requirements are inappropriate, they should be prepared to justify why they did not comply with local approval processes. For example, when local review may be inconsistent with protection of research participants; when there is reason to believe that review bodies do not fairly represent the interests of the people under study; when political elites try to use those approval processes to prevent research on topics that might jeopardize their power; or when researchers make a good faith effort and discover that the review or permitting system is non-functioning. In these cases, researchers should seek input from area specialists (regardless of whether such review is required by an IRB or other regulatory body).

Consent and Deception:

- 5. Political scientists have a general obligation to seek informed consent from participants and other parties directly affected by the research process. They should:**
 - a. ensure that consent is fully voluntary and not unduly induce or coerce participation with the promise of benefits;**
 - b. seek continuing consent in research settings where expected risks and realized harms change during a study; and**
 - c. be open about the parties from whom they sought consent, why consent from these parties was meaningful and sufficient, and whether and how consent was documented. (see guidance)**

When seeking consent, researchers should clearly communicate:

- researcher name and affiliation (and contact information when appropriate),
- the general purpose of the research,
- an explanation of what participation entails,
- potential risks to participant,
- potential benefit (or clarification that none are expected),
- whether and how identities and data will be protected, and
- sources of financial support for the research (this is essential for participants to assess risk in some settings, including conflict or polarized zones);
- any other information relevant to the study, setting, or context.

Researchers who do not communicate this information to participants during the consent process should identify and justify their deviation from this practice in scholarly publications and presentations of their work.

- 6. Political scientists should generally avoid deception and misrepresentation. Researchers who engage in deception should identify their use of deception, explain why deception was necessary to address the research question, and justify their decisions in scholarly publications and presentations of their work. If a study involves more than minimal harm, use of deception requires exceptional justification. (see guidance)**

Deception can take at least four forms.

- a. Identity deception: Deception about who you are (a researcher in political science) or who you are working with.
- b. Activity deception: Deception about what you are doing (e.g. research for social science) or the situation confronting research participants.
- c. Motivation deception: Deception about the reasons for the research or the use to which the research or data will be put.
- d. Misinformation. Providing false information about the state of the world---e.g. by providing unreliable or inaccurate information about political candidates.

Deception can be an act of commission or an act of omission. That is, researchers can deceive research participants by providing false information or by providing incomplete information that misleads participants. Not telling participants that they are in a research study is a form of deception, commonly termed covert research.

Concerns with deception extend beyond participants to deception of others involved in research including research staff and research partners. In the case of research partnerships, researchers should ensure that partners are not deceived regarding the purposes of research and the questions that can be addressed with the research.

When researchers engage in deception, they compromise the autonomy of research participants. In addition to violating a core value, this lack of autonomy can render research related harms unjustifiable.

In some research designs, blinding of participants or research staff is required for research integrity.

In studies where deception is used, researchers should consider:

- seeking alternative forms of consent, assent, or review (for example asking a small sample of representative participants to assess the study, or asking for consent retroactively);
- whether debriefing participants at the conclusion of the study is possible, appropriate, or even necessary;
- whether it would be appropriate to compensate participants post study.

When justifying their use of deception, researchers should discuss the basis on which they anticipated no more than minimal harm, and how they addressed these and other relevant concerns. If a study involves more than minimal harm, use of deception requires exceptional justification.

Researchers should not use deception when they have good reason to believe that participants would have not consented to participate if asked. Exceptions might include when the subject of study is causing harm to others (see Principle 7) or when the subject of study is a public official or powerful actor (see Principle 10b). Finally, when researchers are conducting studies with expected costs and harms to participants, they should use the minimum study size necessary. These considerations are of special import when studying low-power participants.

Research projects in which deviations from this principle might be justified might include, for instance, studies of abusive behavior, discrimination, or collaborations with governments seeking to measure or counter corruption. In such cases researchers should acknowledge and justify deviations in scholarly publications and presentations of their work.

The covert observation of anonymized public behavior does not require consent.

Harm and Trauma

- 7. Political scientists have a general obligation to consider the harms associated with their research.**
 - a. Researchers should avoid harm when possible, minimize harm when avoidance is not possible, and not conduct research when harm is excessive.**
 - b. When assessing possible harms, researchers should not limit their concern to physical or health-related risks to the participant. Researchers should also recognize psychological, social, and economic harms; harms to other parties affected by the research, and harms to research assistants and staff. (see guidance)**

When assessing possible harms, political scientists should not limit their concern to physical or health related risks to the participant. The researcher also should consider:

- psychological, social, and economic harms;
- harms to others as well as to direct participants that are caused by the research process; and harms to others as well as to direct participants that are caused by the dissemination of research findings, e.g., a breach of confidentiality that reveals the identity of a dissident or her associates who were not studied;
- these considerations of harm are irrespective of participants' behavior, i.e. whether it is immoral or criminal.

Importantly, a researcher's obligation to protect participants from harm sometimes extends beyond what might be required by an IRB or other regulatory bodies.

Political scientists recognize that there may be exceptions to this general principle, but exceptions require strong justification. For example, when the subject of study causes severe harm to other people and when the study promises to stop, reverse, or reduce these harms, the researcher's obligations to the person may be outweighed by competing obligations to prevent harm to others.

Researchers should identify and justify potential and realized harms in scholarly publications and presentations of their work.

8. Political scientists have a general obligation to anticipate and protect participants from trauma stemming from participation in research.

- a. Researchers should avoid traumatization and re-traumatization when possible, minimize traumatization and re-traumatization when avoidance is not possible, and not conduct research when the potential for traumatization or re-traumatization is excessive.**
- b. Researchers should not intentionally induce traumatization and re-traumatization, and not expose participants to traumatization or re-traumatization without participants' informed consent. (see guidance)**

Research may generate painful emotional or psychological responses by participants, as they are exposed to or asked to discuss sensitive topics. In some instances, the research study itself could be a source of trauma. In other cases (“retraumatization”), the research may ask participants to recall past injuries, such as human rights abuses.¹ Trauma may be more likely when research involves war or sexual violence, but trauma may emerge in a wide range of research settings. Political scientists should understand that not all research that asks participants to recollect past events – even traumatic ones – necessarily deepens trauma. Consenting participants may judge that their narration of past events is beneficial to themselves or others even though doing so may be painful or traumatic.

When designing a study, the researcher has an obligation to reasonably and realistically anticipate the potential for trauma and retraumatization. In scholarly publications and presentations of their work, researchers should disclose how they assessed and managed the risk of trauma to participants. Specifically, they should report the prospective steps they took to identify and manage the risk of trauma (for example, excluding certain participants, avoiding some themes, and renewing consent); report whether participants actually experience trauma; and report the steps they took to address trauma if and when it occurred.

Political scientists who reasonably anticipate that participation in research might cause traumatization or re-traumatization have three additional obligations: (1) during the conduct of research, researchers should regularly renew consent by asking participants whether they wish to continue (particularly if signs of distress emerge); (2) researchers should identify local resources to which participants might feasibly turn to help them address resulting trauma and re-traumatization; and (3) researchers should report in scholarly publications and presentations of their work how they minimized the risk of trauma.

¹ In the remainder of this item, “trauma” is used to refer to trauma that results directly from the researcher’s project, as well as retraumatization triggered by the researcher’s efforts.

When identifying resources to which participants might feasibly turn for help, researchers should be aware that, in some research settings, the *de jure* existence of a resource may not guarantee its *de facto* availability.

Confidentiality

- 9. Political scientists have a general obligation to keep the identities of research participants confidential; when circumstances require, researchers should adopt the higher standard of ensuring anonymity.**
 - a. Researchers should clearly communicate assurances of confidentiality or anonymity to the participant during the consent process.**
 - b. When researchers do not promise confidentiality (for example, research on elites or oral histories in which the participants prefer to be identified) they should clearly communicate the lack of confidentiality to the participant during the consent process and acknowledge and justify their decisions in scholarly publications and presentations of their work.**
 - c. Even when researchers have not promised confidentiality or anonymity, they should assess possible risks and harms to participants and bystanders when deciding whether or not to identify participants and their responses in scholarly publications and presentations of their work.**
 - d. When confidentiality or anonymity is promised, the researcher must remain attentive to these guarantees. If research materials are shared, researchers should ensure that the material is sufficiently redacted so that even well-informed parties cannot infer the identity of any person to whom specific statements or information can be attributed. In cases where the risks to participants are particularly high, researchers should decline to share any material. The researcher bears sole responsibility for the decision to share materials, and cannot transfer accountability for this decision to editors, reviewers, or any other party.**
 - e. Researchers who determine that it would be unethical to share materials derived from human subjects should be prepared to justify their decision to journal editors, to reviewers, and in oral and written reports of their research findings. (see guidance)**

Political scientists must make a good faith effort to anticipate the ways in which research participants could be harmed by breaches of confidentiality, to anticipate the ways in which confidentiality can be breached, and to design their research projects accordingly. For example, some projects may require researchers to adopt the higher standard of ensuring anonymity, which means not collecting identifying information, including audio and video recordings. Other projects may require researchers to destroy certain identifying information after data collection and analysis. Threats to confidentiality can come in many forms, including carelessness, data sharing, cybersecurity failures, freedom of information (FOIA) requests, and subpoenas. Researchers should discuss the steps they took to protect participant confidentiality in scholarly publications and presentations of their work.

Assurances of confidentiality or anonymity are essential to informed consent; they therefore comprise a core ethical commitment. The researcher should clearly explain to research participants the meaning and implications of confidentiality (or anonymity) and how she will ensure the confidentiality (or anonymity) of the participant's identity.

The researcher is obliged to respect assurances given to participants. The researcher should not retroactively change the commitment to confidentiality; doing so would not only break the promise to the participant and the general obligation to confidentiality (or anonymity), but also could hinder the work of future scholars. If identities are revealed despite commitments to confidentiality or anonymity, research participants and their associates may fear exposure to harm or risk, and may be less inclined to participate in future research.

The researcher bears sole responsibility and accountability for the decision to share materials derived from research participants (if permitted in the informed consent process); accountability for this decision does not reside with editors, reviewers, or any other party. Even if an editor requires data sharing as a condition of publication, this does not release the researcher from the ethical obligation to protect the confidentiality of their participants. In this case, the researcher must continue to decline, and if need be, pursue publication in another venue. When deciding not to share materials derived from research participants, researchers should be prepared to justify their decision to journal editors, reviewers, and in oral and written reports of their research findings.

Political scientists who feel they are being pressured by reviewers, editors, other scholars, or other parties to engage in practices that are disrespectful or potentially harmful to participants should contact the APSA Committee on Professional Ethics, Rights and Freedoms.

Power

- 10. When designing and conducting research, political scientists should be aware of power differentials between researcher and researched, and the ways in which such power differentials can affect the voluntariness of consent and the evaluation of risk and benefit.**
 - a. When conducting research with low-power or vulnerable participants and communities, researchers should be especially careful to respect their autonomy, protect them from harm, and treat them fairly.**
 - b. When conducting research with powerful parties, including some public officials, other actors, institutions, and corporations, covert or deceptive research with more than minimal harm may sometimes be ethically permissible (see guidance).**

Public officials and powerful actors:

“Public officials” include elected, appointed, and “merit” public servants at the federal, state, and local levels of government. Appointed and merit public officials range from “street-level” bureaucrats who interact directly with the public (e.g., police officers, teachers, etc.) to cabinet-level appointees (bearing greater responsibility for public policy) and all administrative levels in between. In their capacities as public officials, public servants have specific duties toward the public according to law, tradition, custom, and norms. Assessing their performance and their role in political systems is both a specific responsibility of political science and a public service.

Because public officials and other people who seek, hold, or wield power in the political sphere are accountable to the public in ways that are different from ordinary citizens, harms related to reputation and employability, and other economic harms (including but not limited to the individual and social costs associated with the research), may sometimes be permissible in the pursuit of the public interest. Accordingly, the need to protect unconsenting participants from these harms might not apply to some research on public officials and other powerful actors. The degree to which these harms may be permissible depends on:

- the public obligations and duties of the public officials;
- the person’s role in designing, influencing or implementing public policy. (For example, a public school superintendent bears greater policy responsibility to the general public than the front-line teacher; a powerful political donor has a greater role in influencing policy than an ordinary citizen.)

These exceptions do not apply to their private lives or to other types of harm. Researchers conducting research in both domestic and foreign settings should be aware of how reputational harms could lead to other harms.

Researchers should also be aware that if their research is federally funded, or if they work at institutions that require IRB approval for all human subjects research, they will be expected to comply with their institutional IRB. In the past, researchers could request a public officials exemption in their IRB application, but this changed in January 2019. The new regulations will no longer offer an exemption for research on elected and public officials. Accordingly, researchers should understand that:

- APSA opposed deletion of the public officials exemption from the regulations and indicated so during the public comment period;
- whereas harms to reputation and employability were permissible under the public officials exemption, IRBs now have no regulatory basis to allow these harms for research studies;
- certain types of scholarly activities, such as an “oral history, journalism, biography, literary criticism, legal research, and historical scholarship” are not considered to be “research” and therefore not subject to IRB processes and regulations [Federal Register, § ll.102(1)(2), p. 7261].

Institutions and corporations:

Regarding research critical of institutions and corporations, the American Political Science Association endorses the position set forth in the Canadian Institutes of Health Research Tri-Council Policy Statement:

"Research in the form of critical inquiry, that is, the analysis of social structures or activities, public policies, or other social phenomena, requires an adjustment in the assessment of consent.... ...Where social sciences or humanities researchers seek knowledge that critiques or challenges the policies and practices of institutions, governments, interest groups or corporations, researchers do not need to seek the organization's permission to proceed with the proposed research. If institutional approval were required, it is unlikely that research could be conducted effectively on such matters as institutional sexual abuse or a government's silencing of dissident scientists" (Canadian Institutes, 2014, pp.33-34).

" ... some research, involving critical assessments of public, political or corporate institutions and associated public figures, for example, may be legitimately critical and/or opposed to the welfare of those individuals in a position of power, and may cause

them some harm. There may be a compelling public interest in this research" (Canadian Institutes, 2014, p. 35).

Researchers designing and conducting research critical of institutions and corporations should be aware that they might still need permission from individuals with whom researchers are interacting. For more, see guidelines for deceptive and covert research (Principle 6).

Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, and Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans, December 2014. http://www.pre.ethics.gc.ca/pdf/eng/tcps2-2014/TCPS_2_FINAL_Web.pdf [Accessed: January 18, 2019].

Impact

11. Political scientists have an obligation to protect the integrity of democratic processes and institutions as well as the integrity of the profession. In general, researchers should not seek to manipulate political processes, especially elections, without the consent of directly affected parties. Any such engagement requires careful consideration of the potential direct, indirect, and diffuse impacts of research processes. (see guidance)

Research that intervenes in political processes requires particular justification. In such instances, the researcher's obligations to respect autonomy and avoid harm often will extend beyond what might be required by regulatory review bodies. The potential harm, though diffuse, may be significant enough that the research cannot be conducted ethically.²

Researchers who seek to carry out research that intervenes in a political process, especially elections, should respect the autonomy of participants and other people directly and indirectly affected by the research process. For instance, if a research study provides a citizen with information on how to complain against an official soliciting bribes, the citizen is directly affected; the official is possibly also affected, but indirectly through actions taken by the citizen. In such cases, researchers should consider whether consent of such indirectly affected parties is also needed, particularly if there are foreseeable adverse impacts for vulnerable populations.

² Although participant observation is not usually considered to be an "intervention" (because it typically does not seek to measure the effect of an introduced variable but, rather, seeks to understand existing processes, culture, and meanings), when participant observers intervene and manipulate processes in order to study them, then the above conditions would apply.

In scholarly publications and presentations of their work, researchers should explain whether and from whom they sought consent and why consent from those parties was both meaningful and sufficient. Researchers who do not seek consent should acknowledge and justify that decision in scholarly publications and presentations of their work.

Researchers should also strive to: (1) make the intervention and implementation non-partisan; (2) ensure that any information provided is truthful; (3) not weaken democratic processes; (4) present no more than a minimal risk of negatively affecting individual experience; (5) present no more than a minimal risk of affecting social and political outcomes; and (6) be open about whether the intervention had an actual effect (positive or negative) on the individual experience or the aggregate social or political outcome. In scholarly publications and presentations of their work, researchers should explain whether they satisfied these and other relevant conditions, and if not, why not.

Researchers may face difficult choices and competing considerations when conducting studies that intervene in political processes. A specific context may place some of these considerations in conflict with each other. For example, a corrupt electoral authority might only allow interventions that weaken democratic processes and support an incumbent power. In such cases, approval from electoral authorities might be neither necessary nor sufficient for ethical research. Researchers should carefully assess competing claims and explain their decisions. Researchers should also understand that manipulation of a political process that compromises autonomy and causes more than minimal harm cannot always be justified on the basis of the knowledge generated (or anticipated) by the research project.

In some partnerships, researchers work with third parties to learn about the effects of interventions implemented by these parties, for instance to understand the effects of election observers or anticorruption campaigns led by civil society organizations. Such partnerships might not constitute manipulations by researchers. However, third-party collaborations do not transfer all ethical responsibility to the third party. Researchers should be careful to not let a partnership compromise their integrity, the integrity of the research, or the dignity and wellbeing of research participants. A partnership should not be a vehicle to avoid the responsibilities attendant to ethical research. Finally, researchers should disclose the nature of collaborative relationships, including their role and contribution at each stage of the project as well as the nature of funding and/or privileged access granted by the third party to the researcher, in scholarly publications and presentations of their research.

Scholars engaged in commissioned research should strive to meet the criteria listed above. Regardless of whether they satisfy the criteria, they should be open about their design, their use of consent or deception; their sample size and power calculations; the individual, social, and political impact; and their efforts to prevent, minimize, or address any harm. Researchers should

identify and discuss these issues in scholarly publications and presentations of their work and public discussions of their research.

These considerations and concerns for impact do not apply to the research outcome. For example, there is generally no concern or harm if a book reaches conclusions unfavorable to a policy or political actor, and these conclusions affect opinion and votes. In addition, if voluntary and informed participation in a laboratory experiment changes opinion, and however unlikely, this changes an election outcome, these considerations do not apply.

Prospective Review

12. Political scientists have an obligation to be aware of the prospective review and permitting requirements of their funding source, employer, and field site.

- a. Researchers should understand that approval by a review or permitting body is not always sufficient for ethical research, and that the requirements for ethical research may go beyond what IRB's, US regulatory criteria, and other regulatory bodies may require. Researchers should understand that they are responsible for the ethicality of their research. (see guidance)**

Individual researchers and the Association should:

- promote learning *within* campus communities *and across* universities about the actual ethical dilemmas involved in social science research with human research participants; and
- provide guidance to researchers who encounter ethical issues not captured by the IRB charge and regulatory framework.

When researchers think that IRB review requirements are increasing risks to their participants or inappropriately restricting their academic freedom they may appeal to the APSA Committee on Professional Ethics, Rights and Freedoms. For example, when review may be inconsistent with protection of research participants; when there is reason to believe that review bodies do not fairly represent the interests of the people under study; or when political elites try to use those approval processes to prevent research on topics that might jeopardize their power.

Researchers conducting research in both foreign and domestic settings should be sensitive to contextual and cultural differences. Research that seems harmless in one context may be harmful or traumatizing in another. Locally-sensitive prospective review (formal or informal) can help avoid unanticipated harms or problems.

- b. Researchers should be aware that in some cases prospective review or regulatory bodies, journal editors, or other parties might require researchers to engage in practices that are disrespectful or potentially harmful to their participants or otherwise unethical. In these cases, researchers should not proceed with the research project or dissemination activity and should contact the APSA Committee on Professional Ethics, Rights and Freedoms. (see guidance)**

Individual members and the Association should:

- Help IRBs and other regulatory bodies develop a better understanding of political science research, and the way in which the regulatory criteria and the values of respect for persons, beneficence, and justice should apply to political science research; e.g. the way in which respect for persons should apply to research on corruption, or the way in which beneficence should apply to research on public officials.
- Assist individual scholars in contesting unfair and unreasonable IRB decisions and other review or permitting bodies, in this way promoting some form of appeals process and, over time, professional learning about research ethics particular to political science.
- Encourage researchers to share their experiences in working with IRBs and other review and permitting bodies in an effort to improve those processes, promote community capacity building and human participants protections, and help the APSA code evolve. For example, ad hoc and systematic evidence identifying exceptional practices, both desirable and undesirable, would facilitate constructive dialogue on the ethical issues for political science research.
- Work with US institutions of higher learning, both individually and nationally, to evolve their review systems in ways that promote transparency, evidence-based decision making, and respect for researcher expertise in methodology, methods and, as relevant, knowledge of field site norms and culture.

- c. Researchers should be open about whether they sought and received IRB (or other) approval for their studies and explain their decisions in scholarly publications and presentations of their research. Researchers conducting research in a foreign country should be open about whether their field site had local review or permitting requirements, whether they complied with the process, and explain their decisions in scholarly publications and presentations of their research. (see guidance)**

As stated in guidance for Principle 4 (Legality), researchers who are conducting research in a foreign country should generally comply with local review and permitting requirements. When researchers think that local review requirements are inappropriate, they should be prepared to justify why they did not comply with local approval processes. For example, when local review may be inconsistent with protection of research participants; when there is reason to believe that review bodies do not fairly represent the interests of the people under study; when political elites try to use those approval processes to prevent research on topics that might jeopardize their power; or when researchers make a good faith effort and discover that the review or permitting system is non-functioning. In these cases, researchers should seek some form of review by area specialists.

Researchers who feel that an IRB or other prospective review or regulatory body is inappropriately restricting their academic freedom should contact the APSA Committee on Professional Ethics, Rights and Freedoms.

Shared Responsibility

13. The responsibility to promote ethical research goes beyond the individual researcher or research team.

- a. Mentors, advisors, dissertation committee members, and instructors should help students and subordinates identify and address ethical issues related to research;**
- b. Graduate programs in political science should include ethics instruction in their formal and informal graduate curricula;**
- c. Editors and reviewers should encourage researchers to be open about the ethical decisions they made in conducting their research; encourage research on research ethics; and provide editorial expressions of concern or solicit independent commentaries when publishing ethically troubling research; and**
- d. Journals, departments, and associations should incorporate ethical commitments into their mission, bylaws, instruction, practices, and procedures.**