

Information and Power: Ethical Considerations of  
Political Information Experiments

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## Introduction

A growing body of political science research today involves three things: human subjects; experiments (field, survey); and fieldwork (Druckman et al. 2006, Brady 2000, Kapiszewski et al. 2015). This chapter considers a particular body of political science research: experiments providing information to citizens in democracies about their government. Experiments providing information address compelling research questions that relate to the core of political science literature. As many dependent variables in political science are behavioral (e.g., voting; corruption; declaring war; engaging in protest), and behavioral change is challenging to set in motion, the interventions associated with information experiments are often designed to be as strong as possible.

The strong interventions involved in this body of research have unique characteristics: 1) they often affect group-level outcomes, making them highly likely to incur spillover effects; 2) the interventions often cause lasting harm to at least one person or group;<sup>1</sup> and 3) the positive and negative outcomes from these interventions are ambiguous in time horizon, causal relationship to the research, and normative value. These characteristics are particularly salient when the information is executed in the context of an election, as incumbent officials rarely have the turnaround time or monetary resources to respond to the information, which subsequently affects voters' actions at the polls and, sometimes, the results of the election.

These attributes pose corresponding ethical challenges regarding calculating the costs and benefits of this research and obtaining consent from those affected. Since these attributes are not present in the medical trials that heavily influence most IRB processes, they are not often addressed in obtaining IRB approval. As an initial attempt to mitigate this gap, I suggest a framework for evaluating the ethics of these experiments in the research design phase. Using

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<sup>1</sup>There is a prevailing norm of treating political elites as different from other human subjects. Rather than weigh in on the circumstances under which this is acceptable, I treat them as any other human subject for purposes of this discussion.

my own proposed audit experiment as a case study, I offer concrete ideas for assessing the costs and benefits of information experiments, disseminating information about the research to affected parties, and obtaining consent from participants and non-participants.

In what follows, I first delineate the scope of experiments considered in this chapter. Then, I discuss the unique ethical considerations associated with these experiments. I next revisit the original Belmont Report (1978) and its ethical guidelines for human subjects research, considering its implications for the unique body of experiments considered in this chapter: those which provide information to citizens in democracies about their government. Finally, I suggest a framework for evaluating the ethics of information experiments and develop a case study in applying the framework. Throughout the discussion, I draw on my experience considering the ethics of my own research: a citizen survey; a survey of government officials (with embedded survey experiment and behavioral games); and a national transparency experiment with top-down and bottom-up components.<sup>2</sup>

## **Scope: Citizen Information Experiments**

This chapter focuses on a particular body of research in political science: that involving interventions that provide information to citizens in democracies about their government. For purposes of this discussion, this category of experiments includes anything that provides a message to a group of citizens by any means. The defining characteristic of the experiments considered in this chapter is that they are designed to answer research questions about the effect of information in democracies, where there is a chain of accountability from citizens to government officials via elections.

Experiments that fall under the scope of this discussion may provide information about corruption (Banerjee et al. 2010, Chong et al. 2011, Ferraz and Finan 2008), violence (Collier and Vicente 2014), government performance (Björkman and Svensson 2009, Got-

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<sup>2</sup>Throughout this chapter, “top-down” transparency interventions are those that intervene in the relationship between a government official and his political superiors (e.g., party bosses, higher level elected officials, central government institutions), whereas “bottom-up” transparency interventions are those that intervene in the relationship between a government official and the citizens in his area.

tlieb 2012), government policies (Obradovich and Zimmerman 2015, Wantchekon 2003), government spending (Chong et al. 2011), or voting (Ferree et al. 2011, Gerber et al. 2008). Information can be provided through survey experiment (Obradovich and Zimmerman 2015), in-person canvassing (Chong et al. 2011, Collier and Vicente 2014, Ferree et al. 2011), campaigns (Wantchekon 2003), community meeting (Banerjee et al. 2010, Björkman and Svensson 2009, Collier and Vicente 2014, Gottlieb 2012), media (Ferraz and Finan 2008), written reports (Ferraz and Finan 2008, Gerber et al. 2008), or community theatre (Collier and Vicente 2014). Finally, this information can be expected to affect turnout (Chong et al. 2011, Collier and Vicente 2014, Ferree et al. 2011, Gerber et al. 2008), vote choice (Banerjee et al. 2010, Chong et al. 2011, Ferraz and Finan 2008, Gottlieb 2012, Obradovich and Zimmerman 2015, Wantchekon 2003), public opinion on issues (Collier and Vicente 2014), public opinion on government (Chong et al. 2011, Obradovich and Zimmerman 2015), or other forms of political action (Björkman and Svensson 2009, Collier and Vicente 2014, Gottlieb 2012, Obradovich and Zimmerman 2015).

Examples of political science research that does not fall under the scope of this discussion are:

- Affecting information flow between citizens and government in a context without elections (e.g., Malesky et al. (2012))
- Opinion polling without providing them information (e.g., Gibson and Long (2009), Stokes (2005))
- Affecting the experience (either before, during or after) of engaging in protest or war (e.g., Fearon et al. (2009), Blattman (2009))

I steer clear of these types of interventions not because they do not have analogous ethical considerations, but because their possible effects and the affected individuals or groups are more challenging to anticipate, making the decision regarding whether to engage in these interventions less clear. I believe limiting the scope of this discussion in the way delineated above will allow me to develop an applicable framework for a large body of political science

research.

This discussion deliberately pertains to both field and survey experiments. Field experiments provide information via a variety of means and study the effects of the information on real world behavior. Survey experiments provide information via “vignettes” in a survey and study the effects of the information on reported behaviors in the survey. Though field experiments may have stronger or more real effects, both types of experiments can affect the relationship between constituents and government through the provision of information. This discussion is structured to consider all interventions that affect this relationship in order to develop a framework for separating those worthy of pursuing from those that are not.

## **Ethical Considerations**

In my view, there are three characteristics of research involving information experiments in democracies that sets this body of research apart: 1) they often affect group-level outcomes, making them highly likely to incur spillover effects; 2) the interventions often cause lasting harm to at least one person or group; and 3) the positive and negative outcomes from these interventions are ambiguous in time horizon, causal relationship to the research, and normative value.

The first set of ethical challenges in this body of research arises from the group-level outcomes that often accompany these interventions. When information is provided to citizens in a democracy, the affected individuals are not only those participating in the research, but also those who bear the consequences or reap the benefits of government actions (which, in a democracy, is likely all citizens in the area). For example, a get-out-the-vote intervention hopes to affect individual voters, but it can change the landscape of political competition or even the outcome of the election. A transparency intervention providing information about corruption hopes to inform individual citizens, but it can change the distribution of public goods. A survey of citizens can prime them to think about a different set of issues when communicating policy preferences to government officials. The key is that each

of these downstream outcomes is like a public good: non-excludable, because it affects everyone without regard to who participated in the research and who didn't; and non-rivalrous, because it cannot be "used up" by one group so that others are not affected.

Another way to think about the group-level effects is that this kind of research is particularly prone to spillover effects. Setting aside issues of whether these spillover effects are measurable or anticipated, the mere presence of such spillover effects poses two ethical challenges for researchers. First, consent from individuals affected by the research is challenging to obtain in the presence of spillover effects, as it may not be clear which individuals will be affected by the research in advance, and even if clear, it may be costly, time-consuming, and otherwise challenging to contact all of these individuals. However, perhaps the effort in obtaining consent from non-participants should be proportional to the magnitude, longevity, and spread of the effects of the research, rather than have a standard applied to all research projects uniformly. For example, my current research involves a transparency intervention conducted at the level of district government of Malawi. I plan to select a small number of citizens and officials to participate in the intervention, and I will obtain consent from these participants. However, my unit of analysis is actually the district, and all district citizens and district officials, whether sampled or not, could be affected by the research, either bearing costs or receiving benefits. Adjusting consent procedures to provide these non-participants with information about the research and allow them to opt in or opt out is challenging.

The second challenge posed by spillover effects is that the costs and benefits of the research are more challenging to forecast. Currently, many IRB applications require an analysis of the costs and benefits of the research for participants, but very few require an analysis of the costs and benefits of the research for those who may be affected by the treatment but who are not participating in the research. For example, though the IRB required me to delineate the costs and benefits of a recent survey providing information about corruption to citizens, I was not compelled to delineate the costs and benefits of the research to the sampled citizens' government officials or to non-sampled citizens, even though these individuals might

be affected by the survey.

Another set of ethical challenges in this body of research arises from the fact that the interventions almost always cause great harm to at least one individual or group. Some scholars have asserted that electoral politics is a zero-sum game (see, for example, Cox and McCubbins (1986), Weingast et al. (1981)). Even if this is not absolutely true, it is definitely the case that information interventions have winners and losers: a person or group who “looks better” in light of the information; and a person or group who “looks worse.” This stands in stark contrast to the gold standard biology intervention, where one person’s benefit rarely results in another’s downfall. For example, providing information about one candidate’s good performance decreases the chances of another, but no other individual bears a significant cost when chemotherapy saves a cancer patient’s life.

One reason there is potential for great harm in conducting experiments with information interventions, especially when conducting research in low income environments, is that researchers are often relatively wealthy and powerful compared to the participants and non-participants under study. Perhaps more precisely, it is often the case with information interventions that the researcher’s “willingness to pay” for giving information to a participant is greater than the participant’s willingness to pay for not receiving that information. For example, a get-out-the-vote campaign run by a research team in a rural, low income setting is likely more costly than many low-level government officials’ campaigns. The intended outcome of both activities is to mobilize voters, but the research team is much more empowered to achieve this outcome, and may significantly shift the body of voters mobilized and therefore the outcome of the election. This discrepancy means that it is possible for researchers to execute activities with persistent and far-reaching effects but not possible (at least, not realistic) for officials or citizens to counteract these effects. In other words, researchers have “undue influence” over the political outcomes in a system. If information is truly the “currency of democracy,” then researchers are entering many democracies distributing this “currency” and possibly changing the course of various political processes.

This ethical concern will not be accounted for in the framework proposed in this chapter, but can be considered by the researcher separately.

Much of evaluating the ethics of a research project involves weighing costs against benefits. However, since the costs and benefits for each individual are not uniform across the individuals affected, comparing the outcomes for different individuals results in an apples-to-oranges calculation. Even if the costs and benefits of the research can be anticipated, valuing the costs and benefits for individuals affected by the research is incredibly challenging. For example, how would I place a value on a politician being removed from office as a result of my research? Does this cost borne by 5 officials outweigh the benefit of making 10,000 citizens more informed or opening an opportunity for 10 non-incumbents? Would it make a difference if 100,000 citizens were informed instead of 10,000?

Not only are the effects challenging to anticipate and compare across affected parties, they are often ambiguous in time horizon, causal relationship to the research, and normative value. Anticipating the likelihoods of different outcomes is nearly impossible, partially because many of these outcomes are persistent effects of the intervention that won't be realized until far into the future. For example, an anti-corruption information campaign may not overturn an election in the near future, but it could affect the kinds of candidates citizens support for years to come.

Further, in information experiments, it is challenging to causally link outcomes to the research. Even when convincingly demonstrated, the causal mechanism is typically not understood. This is partially because other pressures in conducting research place an emphasis on measureable outcomes, but there are often unmeasurable (and therefore often not mentioned) outcomes of the research. For example, my research considers the effect of transparency increases on politician *choices* in office. Choices can be observed and measured. However, politician and citizen *attitudes* may also shift as a result of the intervention, but if I don't focus on attitudes as part of my research strategy, I would likely never anticipate this effect.



Finally, some effects are challenging to categorize as costs or benefits. The literature frames certain outcomes as normatively positive, but it isn't clear that this is always the case. We can envision situations where benefits are actually costs. For example, it may not be a "benefit" to an individual that she was compelled to vote in an election by a get-out-the-vote campaign if the opportunity cost of her doing so was earning a wage. Similarly, increased knowledge about government responsibilities may not be a "benefit" if individuals with this knowledge bear the psychological consequences of dissatisfaction or cognitive dissonance. In designing information experiments, researchers must scrutinize the prevailing assertions about the normative value placed on the effects of their research.

Before continuing on to discuss how these challenges could be addressed, I want to consider whether these challenges might be even more pressing in "field" research, research in which the researcher is not from the area under study. It seems possible to me that non-native researchers might be at a disadvantage when it comes to foreseeing all the potential outcomes of a research intervention, especially those that are highly unlikely but still possible. Furthermore, it may be inappropriate for non-native researchers to normatively evaluate these outcomes. Finally, since foreigners typically hire local enumerators to assist with research, this adds another category of individuals who should be considered when evaluating the benefits and costs of the research, even though many IRB application processes do not require this. Enumerators can both reap benefits (e.g., professional experience, networking, payment) and incur costs (e.g., retribution) from assisting with information experiments.

## **Review of Belmont Report Principles**

To develop a framework for addressing these unique characteristics, I return to the Belmont Report (National Commission 1978) that is often cited regarding ethical considerations for research involving human subjects. This report poses three considerations to guide such research: respect; beneficence; and justice. Based on Sieber's (1992) interpretation of the Belmont report and my experiences with IRB proposals in the past, I interpret each of these

principles and discuss how current IRB procedures have distorted them. First, the principle of “respect” refers to protecting the autonomy of persons and treating them with courtesy. Over time, the discussion about this principle has generally been reduced to a discussion about signed, informed consent. However, this principle is more broadly about informing individuals about the potential benefits and costs of the research in terms they understand, and then upholding and reinforcing their individual autonomy to make a voluntary decision about whether they want to participate.

The principle of “beneficence” refers to maximizing positive outcomes and minimizing risks and harm associated with research involving human subjects. On most IRB applications, this principle has similarly been reduced to a review of the costs and benefits to each individual participating in the research. However, this principle is not only about the costs and benefits the participants incur as a result of their participation, but the costs and benefits the participants and non-participants incur as a result of the research occurring in their environment, both in the short-term and in the long-term. It is important to note that neither the principle nor current IRB proposals typically consider the cases in which a benefit for one party is a harm to another, as is the case with many interventions that provide political information.

Finally, the principle of “justice” refers to ensuring reasonable, non-exploitative and carefully considered procedures and their fair administration, as well as the fair distribution of costs and benefits among persons and groups (i.e., that the bearers of the costs should be the bearers of the benefits). In the words of Sieber (1992), “It is unjust that some should be left to suffer as a result of their yielding valuable knowledge that may benefit others” (Sieber and Tolich 2012). Here, the common thread when designing procedures or distributing outcomes is fairness, or the principle that these things should be done in an unbiased way. I would argue that current IRB application processes focus more on procedural justice than on outcome justice: whether the research procedures are fairly executed rather than whether the resulting benefits and costs of the research are fairly distributed. However, when the outcomes of

research can be as strong, far reaching, and persistent as those arising from the research discussed in this chapter, justice in outcomes is also important. Specifically regarding the body of research considered in this chapter, it is not enough that the information provided in campaigns is accurate and all human subjects protocols are followed. The outcomes of the information campaigns should be distributed fairly as well.

In the next section, I introduce a framework in which to evaluate research involving information experiments in democracies, keeping the core meaning of each of these principles in mind.

## **Suggested Framework for Considering the Ethics of Information Experiments**

There are two extreme responses that could result from this discussion (and the other discussions arising in this edited volume). First, researchers could decide to do nothing, refraining from research interventions of the sort considered in this chapter for fear of the ethical challenges. Second, since most of these interventions are possible to be executed by regular citizens, political science researchers could simply execute anything allowable by law, without regard to the ethical considerations that might constrain them as scholars. Realistically, the discipline will probably continue to find some middle ground, and the goal in proposing this framework is to assist in guiding the particular point of the middle ground found by scholars who execute information experiments in the future.

This framework reviews my thinking in designing my own research and makes suggestions based on this process, but does not prescribe a particular procedure. I do not propose that this framework should be included in formal IRB processes, but rather suggest a tool to informally guide researchers in designing their interventions. I envision an ethical analysis such as the one I undertake in the next section being published on researcher websites or in pre-analysis plans along with surveys, datasets, and other research materials.

There are two components of the framework I suggest. First, I suggest a more com-

prehensive cost-benefit analysis than what is currently mandated in most IRB processes. Second, I suggest more creative approaches to obtaining consent from non-participants who are nonetheless affected by the research.

The first suggestion is to engage in a more comprehensive cost-benefit analysis. Following the beneficence principle in the Belmont Report means considering all possible effects in deciding whether to pursue a research project, regardless of whether the effects are direct or indirect, certain or uncertain, short-term or long-term, or imposed on participants or non-participants. Following the justice principle in the Belmont Report means ensuring those who bear costs of the research also receive benefits. Combining these principles, any cost-benefit analysis evaluating the ethics of a given experiment that provides political information should evaluate:

- Costs and benefits to participants of participating in the research
- Costs and benefits to different groups of citizens of the research
- Costs and benefits to different groups of political elites of the research
- Costs and benefits to society surrounding research (considering factors such as political and economic development)
- Costs and benefits to research assistants and enumerators of the research
- Costs and benefits to the academic literature of the research

This analysis should be iterated for different time periods and for any and all outcomes of the research that might occur with a non-negligible probability. Given the growing literature involving information interventions, a thorough cost-benefit analysis should include a literature review. Outcomes, positive or negative, from others' work can provide a baseline for expectations regarding interventions in the design phase.

Perhaps the most appropriate tool for analyzing costs and benefits in this way is an expected value analysis. I would not suggest mandating (for example, in an IRB application) that researchers assign probabilities and monetary values to outcomes. Nonetheless, even independently executed, qualitative expected value analysis would enable researchers to more

holistically consider the effects of research. Such an expected value analysis could be executed separately for each intervention in a research project. I provide an example of what I envision in the next section. When calculating the expected value of the research, I think it is important to base this evaluation on conservative estimates of likelihood for benefits and generous estimates of likelihood for costs, on the assumption that it is better to fail to do ethically questionable research that would have turned out well than to follow through on ethically questionable research that results in disaster. In other words, when it comes to ethically questionable research, I assert that Type I error is preferable to Type II error.

Based on my previous experiences and discussions in considering these issues, I want to forestall one danger that could arise in this process. I think it is important that this kind of analysis remain free of judgments directed towards the individuals affected. If one person bears a great cost for the research, this would only be balanced by a great benefit. It is irrelevant whether the former individual is a corrupt politician or an honest one, a wealthy, powerful citizen or an impoverished, disenfranchised one. Researchers sometimes laud efforts to help citizens remove poor performing officials from office or mobilize resources around a common goal. I would argue that it is not our mandate as researchers to advance an agenda such as these. A life negatively affected by our research is a life negatively affected, regardless of whose life it is. This cost is only justified if outweighed by comparable benefits.

After completing this analysis and presenting the costs and benefits of the potential research design clearly, an important last step is to apply the Belmont Report's principle of justice in considering the distribution of outcomes. In the body of experiments considered here, this often means ensuring costs and benefits of information are distributed equally across citizens, candidates, parties, and electoral units. There is rarely a compelling reason to target information campaigns at only one person, group, or geography. Often, sampling strategies and treatment arms can be adjusted for a more just allocation of outcomes. For example, in a recent experiment providing information to voters in Malawi's 2014 election (co-authored with Nicholas Obradovich), we took care to provide information about the four

major parties equally, and to focus on positive information rather than negative.

The second suggestion is to go back to the core idea behind the Belmont Report's respect principle: that respecting individuals means informing them of the research occurring in their world which might affect them and allowing them to opt in or out. In experiments involving information interventions with indirect and far-reaching effects, this practically means we must develop creative methods by which to inform both participants and non-participants of the risks/benefits of the research to all parties and afford them an opportunity to ask questions or object to the research. In the body of research considered in this article, consent of participants is sometimes de-prioritized for practical reasons. However, consent procedures do not have to be cumbersome. Researchers could be more creative about obtaining consent from participants. For example, researchers planning an intervention that would post information about government performance in public spaces could obtain consent from the business managers or community (non-government) authorities proximate to the spaces. With some innovation, waivers of informed consent need occur in a minority of cases.

Consent can also be obtained from non-participants. One option for updating the informed consent procedures to reach non-participants would be to provide them with information and opportunities to ask questions, especially where allowing them the opportunity to opt in or out of the research is not possible. For example, researchers planning to conduct an information campaign during an election could announce their plans on the radio months in advance and provide a phone number and meeting time for citizens or political officials to ask questions and voice their concerns. Similarly, researchers planning to survey political officials could send the theoretical population a letter months in advance and allow them to call or email with questions or feedback.

Of course, these ideas might affect the validity of the research, especially for certain types of information in certain locations, and perhaps such measures are not always necessary, given their costs and benefits. These suggestions are simply creative alternatives to the straightforward informed consent process intended to alleviate some of the predominant

ethical objections to this research. I see these types of actions as critically important when the research activities have the potential to affect group-level outcomes persistently, as they do for the class of interventions discussed in this chapter.

## **Case Study Demonstrating Framework**

In this section, I apply the framework suggested above to a case study: specifically, to evaluate the ethics of a transparency intervention I plan to conduct in Malawi. This is a simplified version of the ethics evaluation and is intended to illustrate the use of the framework rather than give a full analysis of the ethical issues involved.

My research considers how political officials strategically shift their corrupt behavior in response to increases in transparency. Depending on the level of accountability among citizens and political superiors in a given area, I argue bottom-up and top-down transparency interventions should have differential effects on the forms of corruption politicians choose as part of their corruption portfolio. Working in local government in Malawi, I examine this relationship between transparency, accountability, and corruption using three research instruments: 1) a citizen survey (n=600) to measure citizen perceptions of corruption and test their willingness to hold politicians accountable via a survey experiment; 2) a politician survey (n=250) to gauge baseline levels of different corruption forms and test the relationship between corruption and transparency via a survey experiment; and 3) a randomized transparency intervention with top-down and bottom-up treatment conditions. The top-down treatment condition includes an audit of local government accounts executed by the National Audit Office of Malawi and then dissemination of the findings of the audit regarding the level and forms of corruption in local government to political superiors. The bottom-up treatment condition includes dissemination of the findings of the audit regarding the level and forms of corruption in local government to citizens via written materials, radio broadcast, and community meetings. In this case study, I focus on the bottom-up treatment condition of the transparency intervention.

The first step in the framework I'm suggesting is to more thoroughly consider the potential costs and benefits of a given research project as an expected value analysis. I include a table of anticipated costs and benefits for the bottom-up treatment condition of the transparency intervention in Table 1. The table includes a list of costs and benefits across different actors and different periods of time. Based on the existing literature using similar treatments and contextual factors in Malawi, I have made qualitative estimates of the probabilities of each outcome and the number of individuals affected. Each line of the table can be read as follows (example from first two lines of Table 1): "About 300 participants will face a medium risk of incurring an immediate low opportunity cost." Or "About 200 participants will face a low chance of receiving the long-term small benefit of improved understanding of government accountability structures."

**Table 1: Expected Value Analysis of Bottom-Up Transparency Treatment**

[Table 1 about here.]

This expected value analysis does not raise any ethical issues that we wouldn't have anticipated. However, it does organize the costs and benefits for evaluation. If the costs and benefits balanced less well or if some of the most adverse effects were more likely, this table would clearly highlight the issue. The exercise of more thoroughly considering the effects of the research over time and across parties provides an opportunity to consider, document, and resolve ethical issues that may not come to light in an IRB process.

The second step in the framework is to develop creative options for informing participants and non-participants of the research and providing an opportunity to opt out. In the case of my research, I did or will obtain informed consent from the subjects recruited to participate in the citizen survey and the politician survey, as well as every local government official in a district treated with the transparency intervention and every citizen recruited to participate in the bottom-up transparency intervention. The informed consent procedures I use convey the costs and benefits of participating in the research, as well as the costs and benefits of



the research more generally. It also explains the subject selection process, something many subjects I have encountered ask for.

Informing non-participants requires more proactive creativity. In the case of the citizen and politician surveys, I informed the District Commissioner of the research in advance, overviewed the selection procedures, and allowed him or her to ask questions or object to the research on behalf of his or her citizens or other officials in the district. In the case of the transparency intervention, I plan to announce the intervention on the national radio in advance, stating the objectives of the research, overviewing the sampling procedure, and providing contact information for local partners.<sup>3</sup> This announcement will not afford the politicians enough time to change the actions that will be detected in the transparency intervention, but it will give citizens and politicians alike enough time to ask questions and raise issues with those executing research in their country. I see it as critically important to allow the affected parties to voice their concerns about the research.

## Conclusion

One concern I have with the framework proposed in this chapter is that it might incentivize political scientists to randomize interventions with more moderate outcomes, or in other words, those with a narrower gap between the winners and the losers of the interventions. Perhaps interventions with extreme outcomes, such as changing the loser of an election to the winner of an election, would no longer be attempted under this framework. There are those who would argue that this would be a positive shift, and ethically, perhaps it would be. However, it seems like such a shift might occur at the expense of pursuing valuable research questions. An important criterion in deciding what research projects to pursue (and, by extension, how to allocate precious research time and funds) should always be the contribution of the research to academic literature.

This framework might also incentivize political scientists to avoid generating original data

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<sup>3</sup>Note that I have yet to obtain permission to execute this idea from my local implementing partners.

via experiments, exempting them from considering the ethical issues associated with executing such research. Perhaps this shift would result in increased use of pre-existing datasets, laboratory experiments, natural experiments, or even partnerships with other types of organizations. This is not necessarily a bad thing. It might be valuable to discourage the use of ethically challenging designs and encourage substituting more ethically straightforward methods wherever possible. Nonetheless, limiting experiments in political science research means severely limiting the data available for research. Research understanding the effect of information would likely be a casualty of this shift; studying the effects of artificially generated information about hypothetical government institutions or individuals on anticipated outcomes is not as convincing as the real-world information experiment equivalent.

This chapter has considered experiments that provide information to citizens in democracies about their government, their unique characteristics, and their corresponding ethical issues. I have proposed a framework and offered some initial concrete suggestions for better addressing these ethical issues in the research design process. It is my hope that the discipline increasingly considers these issues in the research design phase, and that any strategies and tools for doing so are widely disseminate and applied.

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**Table 1: Expected Value Analysis of Bottom-Up Transparency Treatment**

Affected Party	Number of Individuals Affected	Cost or Benefit	Description	Magnitude	Probability of Occurrence	Timing
Participants - Officials	180	Benefit	Financial compensation	Medium	Certain	Immediate
Participants - Officials	180	Cost	Opportunity cost of time	Small	High	Immediate
Participants - Officials	180	Benefit	Pride in contributing to good governance	Small	Low	Short-Term
Participants - Officials	180	Cost	Shame in contributing to poor governance	Small	Very Low	Short-Term
Participants - Officials	180	Cost	Immediate retribution	Large	Very Low	Short-Term
Participants - Officials	180	Cost	Downstream retribution	Large	Low	Long-Term
Participants - Citizens	500	Benefit	Financial compensation	Medium	Certain	Immediate
Participants - Citizens	500	Cost	Opportunity cost of time	Small	High	Immediate
Participants - Citizens	500	Benefit	Pride in contributing to good governance	Small	High	Long-Term
Participants - Citizens	500	Cost	Anxiety over pressure to contribute to good governance	Small	Low	Long-Term
Non-Participants - Citizens in Treated Districts	200	Cost	Political officials less available during intervention	Medium	High	Immediate
Non-Participants - Political Officials in Ruling Party	25	Cost	Renewed focus on corruption: unpleasant experiences	Small	Very Low	Short-Term
Non-Participants - Political Officials in Ruling Party	13	Cost	Renewed focus on corruption: loss of income	Medium	Very Low	Long-Term
Non-Participants - Political Officials in Ruling Party	3	Cost	Renewed focus on corruption: legal action	Large	Very Low	Long-Term
Non-Participants - Political Officials in Ruling Party	100	Benefit	Renewed focus on corruption: opportunities to take office	Small	Low	Long-Term
Non-Participants - Political Officials in Opposition Party	3	Benefit	Renewed focus on corruption: opportunities to take office	Large	Very Low	Long-Term
Society	NA	Benefit	Corruption becomes more difficult	Medium	Low	Long-Term
Society	NA	Cost	Corruption becomes more hidden	Medium	Low	Long-Term
Research Assistants	3	Cost	Blacklisted with District Commissioners	Large	Very Low	Long-Term
Research Assistants	3	Benefit	Networking	Medium	Medium	Long-Term
Research Assistants	3	Benefit	Work Experience	Medium	High	Long-Term
Academic Literature	NA	Benefit	Improved understanding of mechanisms behind corruption	Small	Medium	Short-Term