clear, and highly innovative reflection on the relationship between democracy and violence against civilians during civil wars.

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— Ellen Lust, University of Gothenburg

Janine A. Clark and Francesco Cavatorta’s edited volume, *Political Science Research in the Middle East and North Africa: Methodological and Ethical Challenges,* is an entertaining and insightful collection of essays regarding the challenges of political science research. The volume draws together researchers who have worked in and on the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). The title suggests that this work is written primarily for scholars of the MENA region; however, the volume provides important lessons regarding research challenges and major epistemological and methodological issues facing our discipline more broadly. It should be read by political scientists regardless of their focus, subfields, and methods.

*Political Science Research in the Middle East and North Africa* is a rich and diverse collection of essays. It consists of 23 chapters written by 26 scholars drawn from Asia, Europe, North America, and the Middle East. In their work, these researchers have used a wide range of methods ranging from interpretivist methods and ethnography to process tracing, survey research, population-based experiments, qualitative case studies, and coding—to explore topics from political Islam and Salafist movements to gender and the political economy of development. In their essays, the authors offer honest reflections on the challenges they faced, lessons they learned, and suggestions they have for other scholars interested in studying this region and beyond.

The book is divided into three sections: the first part examines the impact of context, the second considers issues of methods, and the third reflects on ethical considerations. The seven chapters included in “Context” focus on research challenges in Iran (by Paola Rivetti and Shirin Saeidi), Egypt (by Atef Said and by Ray Bush), Jordan (by Jillian Schwedler and Janine A. Clark), Lebanon (by Sarah E. Parkinson), Saudi Arabia (by Gwenn Okruhlik), and the Palestinian Occupied Territories (by Benoit Challand). The 11 chapters that comprise “Methods” reflect on interviewing (chapters by Janine A. Clark, Massimo Ramaiolli, Zoltan Pall and Mohamed-Ali Adraoui, and Emanuela Dalmasso), process tracing (by David Waldner), ethnography (by Stacey Philbrick Yadav), coding in qualitative research (by Mohammad Yaghi), quantitative research methods (by Miquel Pellicer and Eva Wegner), experimental research (by Steven Brooke), and social media (by Elizabeth Monier and by Geoffrey Martin). Finally, the section on “Ethics” contains four chapters, with a strong emphasis on positivism (by Irene Weipert-Fenner, Paul Kingston, Lihi Ben Shitrit, and Malika Bouziane).

The scholars have taken three stylistic approaches to their chapters. These are not mutually exclusive, and many essays include some combination of these approaches. Yet, they result in distinct strengths that are worth considering.

Some scholars emphasized their personal experiences, weaving illuminating narratives on the obstacles they faced and the choices they made. For instance, Gwenn Okruhlik reflects on the impact that university affiliation and the national context had on her research in Saudi Arabia; Stacey Philbrick Yadav gives a vivid account of how she learned to be less dismissive of women in Yemen; Jillian Schwedler and Janine Clark provide an in-depth look at their engagement with the internal security services, or *mukhabarat*; Sarah Parkinson gives a frank account of her personal challenges conducting fieldwork in the context of violence; Massimo Ramaiolli and Lihi Ben Shitrit, in separate chapters, reflect on the challenges of interviewing those with whom you have political differences; and Paul Kingston offers a pensive account of how his positionality changed over the course of his research in Lebanon. For every narrative, authors draw out lessons learned, successes, and failures while candidly exploring the different facets of research. By emphasizing the “messiness” and serendipity inherent in working in the field, these accounts may be particularly reassuring to younger researchers navigating fieldwork for the first time.

Other contributors provided a more “straightforward” overview of research issues, organizing their essays around the lessons learned while drawing on personal experiences for examples. Steven Brooke’s discussion of survey experiments, David Waldner’s fascinating account of the development of process tracing, Janine Clark’s detailed essay on interview techniques, and Mohammed Yaghi’s overview of coding qualitative research all provide important insights into these research methods. The examples they draw on are from their work in the MENA region, but the lessons learned could easily be placed in any context. Much the same can be said regarding the reflections in the “Ethics” section of the volume. As Irene Weipert-Fenner explores the “blurred lines” of inclusion and exclusion, focusing on how activism shapes research relationships, and Malika Bouziane reflects on her German Moroccan identity affected fieldwork in Jordan, the complex relationships between researchers and their context are delineated in a way that transcend the MENA region. These chapters offer a varied overview of research techniques and ethical issues, as well as a guide and reference for students and researchers working on any region in the world.

Finally, some chapters emphasize the uniqueness of research in the MENA region. Miquel Pellicer and Eva
Wegner’s reflections on the state of quantitative research on politics in the MENA region provide a useful review. Similarly, Ray Bush’s chapter on the role of qualitative research methods in studying the Egyptian countryside and Ramaioli’s chapter on interviewing Salafis suggest a distinctiveness to these research sites and populations.

There is thus a tension that threads through the volume: Should the MENA region be understood as exceptional, with unique research challenges, or is the depiction of “Middle East exceptionalism” misleading? Many of the contributors seem to be in the second camp, asserting that the challenges facing researchers in the MENA are largely not unique. For example, Paolo Rivetti and Shirin Saeidi conclude in their essay on Iran, “We found that our reflections from the field are relevant to researchers engaged in other settings as well, beyond the geographical limitation of the MENA region” (p. 45). The editors appear to feel similarly, drawing out themes through the introduction that transcend the region. It is thus unfortunate that the title of this volume, *Political Science Research in the Middle East and North Africa: Methodological and Ethical Challenges*, may lead readers to expect otherwise.

The essays compiled here easily fulfill Clark and Cavatorta’s initial goal of “providing a guidebook on ‘how to go about meeting the methodological and ethical challenges that fieldwork, so crucial for area studies scholars and for empirics-based knowledge more broadly, throws up’” (p. 1). But they achieve far more. They provide readers with thoughtful, reflective, entertaining essays that address the full span of issues facing our discipline today—from the everyday obstacles and evolving nature of research to research methods in the field, human and data security, research ethics and the limitations of Institutional Review Boards (IRBs), the challenges of publication, and the double-edged sword of data transparency and the DA-RT initiative. These are topics of interest far beyond the MENA region. The volume should not be read as a book for and by the MENA community, but rather as insights from researchers focused on the region who are engaging in dialogue with scholars conducting research across the globe. It is an important contribution to the ongoing conversation about political science research from which we can all gain.


— Steven Lloyd Wilson, *University of Nevada, Reno*

Transparency is the sort of state attribute that tends—like low corruption or high levels of education—to be considered an unqualified positive. It is seen as a good thing to have, independent of everything else we know about a particular state. Against this backdrop, James R. Hollyer, B. Peter Rosendorff, and James Raymond Vreeland bring nuance to the study of transparency in *Information, Democracy, and Autocracy*. The authors argue that transparency is a strategic decision that in an authoritarian context can have counterintuitive effects. The book provides a new measurement approach to transparency through an array of formal models, which examine the implications of transparency on autocracies and democracies, and qualitative case studies that walk through the logic of their findings in key country cases.

The authors summarize their measurement approach cleverly as “missing data are data” (p. 2). That is, in the context of data reported to international organizations such as the World Bank, the decision to *not* provide some data is in an indicator in and of itself. The authors use an item response theory (IRT) model to estimate the latent concept of economic transparency in a country time-series dataset from 1980 to 2010 by examining missingness in the widely used World Development Indicators (WDI) dataset of some 240 economic indicators. In addition, they present the model as a general method for estimating latent concepts that are represented by missingness in other data. Although the book focuses on strategic transparency by regimes, fruitful additional work could explore whether there is systematic variance on missingness *within* subsets of the economic indicators, rather than calculating it as one overall quantity. That is, one could hypothesize that regimes with certain traits are more likely to be strategically silent about certain indicators, while being indifferent about accurately reporting others. Such additional work could provide much-needed leverage to understanding the mechanism behind transparency’s mixed effects on authoritarian stability. The authors do note that the capacity to report data is very conceptually different from the willingness to do so, yet the two are difficult to separate from one another. Zero inflation models (models that attempt to compensate for multiple categorically different types of zeroes in data) are one way to at least metaphorically consider this issue. Lack of capacity and lack of willingness are categorically different nulls, but they should be hypothetically distinguishable from each other by which patterns of indicators are null.

In any case, this exploitation of missingness as its own measure is quite novel, and the generalized applicability of the method should have a great deal of utility for other data sources, especially in comparative politics. The missingness in data such as criminal justice indicators (for example, in crime rates, conviction rates, and police expenditures), health indicators (which can be sparse outside of life expectancy and infant mortality), or various inputs to state capacity indexes can all be conceived as depending on different latent quantities about which a regime is being strategically silent.