

A Response to Rossello

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We have carefully read Rossello's reaction to our paper, and we appreciate his taking the time to provide helpful comments and critiques. In this short reaction paper, we explain some of our ideas in greater detail. We will first discuss our argument regarding positivism and interpretivism and the role of causal and descriptive inference in qualitative research. We then will discuss Rossello's critique of the idea of "replication-in-thought." We suggest there is a trade-off between transparency and the ability to problematize the situation of disadvantaged groups. We conclude with a general assessment of Rossello's perspective and the debate concerning DA-RT.

Rossello criticizes our distinction between positivist and non-positivist qualitative research. It is not our intention to debate the location of the boundary between positivist and interpretivist research. This has been extensively discussed elsewhere (e.g. Almond 1988; George and Bennett 2005; Goertz and Mahoney 2012; Koivu and Damman 2015). For example, when presenting the tools for conducting case study research, George and Bennett claim: "The term 'qualitative methods' is sometimes used to encompass both case studies carried out with a relatively positive view of the philosophy of science and those implemented with a postmodern or interpretative view" (George and Bennett 2005, 18). In the same spirit, our only purpose in making this distinction is to set the scope conditions for the ideas we advance. Thus, we recognize that significant differences exist within the positivist qualitative tradition (Koivu and Damman 2015), and that interpretivists and positivists share some common ground.

In a similar vein, regarding the role of descriptive inference and causality, we agree that interpretivism also makes descriptions and causal claims. Nevertheless, interpretivists are more oriented toward understanding a case in its context (Koivu and Damman 2015). They construct an interpretation of a phenomenon based on

the way actors understand their reality. Moreover, the researcher herself plays a role in the construction of meaning. Thus, for an interpretivist, it makes no sense to pre-register research that is not theoretically oriented and that is completely context dependent.

Rossello also criticizes the idea of "replication-in-thought" (c.f. Büthe and Jacobs 2015) and offers a critique similar to that raised by Pachirat (2015). He claims (this issue, 9) that DA-RT "...is actually inviting us to do something that many political scientists with a rich theoretical background have been doing pretty seriously for quite some time." However, against his point, the logic of "replication-in-thought" is not about the logical consistency of the argument and the relationship between the argument and its empirical grounds. "Replication-in-thought" refers instead to the possibility of knowing the process of data collection and, in the case of qualitative research, the iteration between theory-building and evidence. Replication is only possible in the qualitative setting if there is information about what evidence was sought, what was not sought (or could have been sought), and what was used and not used to generate descriptive and causal inferences. The process facilitates research transparency because it reveals, to readers and to the research community, the decisions made during the iterative process that led to a set of given conclusions.

Rossello finally states that transparency is not necessarily a desirable goal of research or of democracy. Moreover, he states that a "...certain understanding of democratic transparency can in fact *fail* to make relevant political agendas *more visible*" (this issue, 10). The problem with this point is that there is no trade-off between transparency and raising awareness of the conditions of disadvantaged groups. In democracy, transparency is necessary for accountability. For example, it helps citizens determine whether allocated public funds are expended in accordance with the original goals of the public policy. Transparency reduces the discretion available to those

in power—in this case, politicians vis-à-vis citizens. Researchers, like politicians, are in a position of privilege and hold power. Research transparency limits that power and holds researchers accountable vis-à-vis those who fund their research—beyond the self-control exerted by the academic community. Transparency in democracy is not oriented towards calling attention to disadvantaged groups. The point is whether progress in terms of transparency affects the visibility of disadvantaged groups. Is there a trade-off? The two examples cited by Rossello do not show such a trade-off. Instead, they illustrate a different problem, namely, the forms of domination of disadvantaged groups. As far as we know, there are neither theoretical nor empirical grounds to support the existence of such a trade-off.

Finally, our argument does not ascribe different scientific status to different research traditions. Nor do we aim to promote a standard that suffocates

researcher creativity and the generation of knowledge. We simply suggest a tool to improve the practice of a given tradition in political science. Yet, as with every proposal, discussion of the tool's merits should address the potential trade-offs that it might imply in practice. Does it differentially affect scholars in the North versus the South? Does it necessarily produce a bias against particular research agendas? Does it negatively affect a given group of scholars? Does it negatively affect the chances of publication or the academic career of a given group, e.g. women? These are all crucial questions for any scientific community. Unfortunately, the different debates about how to conduct research in the social sciences at times seem concerned more with dismissing different ways of producing knowledge than with devising ways to improve the practice of research and the democratization of scientific knowledge generation.

References

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