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BUILDING AN EFFECTIVE RESEARCH SAFETY PROTOCOL AND EMERGENCY EXIT STRATEGIES

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ABOUT THE PROGRAM

The Drugs, Security and Democracy (DSD) Program strives to create a stronger, more systematized knowledge base on drugs, security, and democracy in Latin America and the Caribbean; to build capacity—both institutional and individual—by supporting relevant research; and to encourage policy-relevant, evidence-based research that could lead to the development of alternatives to present-day drug policies. Support is provided for research across a variety of disciplines—anthropology, criminology, economics, history, international relations, journalism, legal studies, political science, public health, public policy, sociology, and other related fields—to create a network of scholars interested in developing alternative approaches to drug policy.

ABOUT THE SERIES

Over the last generation, activists, journalists, and researchers working in Latin America have increasingly faced the challenge of operating in areas affected by chronic police and non-state violence. Further, rising crime rates are leading a growing number of scholars to conduct research on high-risk topics, which involves gathering data on communities that experience conflict, writing and publishing on these difficult and sensitive issues, and developing and implementing programs to deal with the needs of communities affected by violence as well as the wider conflicts in which those communities are embedded. Despite these trends, the literature on safe practices for those working in high-risk environments remains thin. The DSD Working Papers on Research Security series seeks to address this deficit by examining a range of research security concerns, providing a framework to help those working in the region consider how they can enhance their own safety as well as the safety of their associates and research participants.

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This examination of strategies to minimize risks and identify dangerous situations for researchers in conflict and crime-ridden areas focuses on the design of a flexible safety and exit protocol that can help researchers return home safely. Safety depends on how scholars gain access to research locations, introduce their work to potential subjects, and pose questions to them. Naturally, defining what security is and determining levels of danger is a subjective and fluid process contingent on factors intrinsic to the project. The aim here is to help researchers think through security issues systematically and build a working written protocol to deal with emergency situations they may encounter.

The discussion first addresses risk assessment and its role in building effective safety protocols. Risk assessment depends on variables such as research location, type and duration of research, and personal characteristics of the researcher. The second section examines the role of pre-field-work preparation in researcher safety, and the third analyzes the role of routine field safety procedures in maintaining awareness of evolving security threats and exit strategies. Ultimately, this examination seeks to go beyond how to conduct research safely, emphasizing instead how to increase the chances of the researcher's safe return home. Thus, the fourth section

builds on sound safety procedures to outline the basic elements of exit protocols that can help researchers and their supporters obtain or render aid under emergency circumstances. The conclusion presents a rubric for creating and thinking through safety before, during, and after field research.

This guide is intended to help researchers think through crucial questions regarding risks and safety. They do not need to consider every issue mentioned here but should focus on those that appear more relevant to their projects. Scholars can define safety according to their own professional needs and develop exit protocols that can assist them in navigating both the ordinary fear and danger and the more extreme threats that affect their research locations.

ASSESSING AND UNDERSTANDING RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH FIELD RESEARCH

Research on crime and security issues plays an important role in helping our societies tackle the complex causes and consequences of violence, insecurity, and fear. Scholars who conduct research in locales affected by these problems are exposed to greater routine challenges than other researchers, however. Their home institutions and even funding agencies rarely provide meaningful support to promote their security while in the field. Among many other challenges, researchers working in these areas are faced with maintaining their own physical security along with that of their informants and any assistants working on the project. Effective security protocols can help them perceive the dangers they encounter more fully and minimize at least some of the risks.

Researchers should carefully consider safety issues before going into the field and assess risks on an ongoing basis once there. Many methodological and logistical decisions, as well as the ability to recognize different levels of risk, are essential for designing and maintaining safety and exit protocols. Researchers' self-awareness of their individual characteristics as well as the requirements of the project can shape decisions about when and how to conduct interviews, what areas to visit, what topics to discuss, and even the choice of research methods, ranging from experimental designs and surveys to participant observation or semi-structured interviews. The following are some crucial aspects of risk assessment that researchers may consider as they prepare to enter the field.

Research Location

Violence-prone areas can present varying levels and types of risk. Cities pose different challenges to researchers than isolated towns, for example. Evaluating the sources of conflict in a particular place and the types of threats they pose to a researcher is an important starting point in developing safety protocols. Different types of risk emerge, depending on whether state violence, vigilante groups, rebel organizations, or gender-based violence prevail in a given space. Researchers should seek advice from individuals who have meaningful experience in the area they plan to research to help develop a perspective on the types of risk they may face there. This is essential, because in many cases perceptions about security in a particular area do not necessarily correspond with reality. For example, in Mexico City everybody advised me not to travel to the border cities of Ciudad Juarez and Tijuana, but in most cases the advice came from people who had never traveled to either. When I talked to people who had actually gone to or lived in these cities, I received many words of caution but a much more realistic assessment of the situation.

Understanding the context, actors, and power dynamics of research sites is important to assessing risk. The number of armed actors present in a particular setting can determine, among other things, the frequency, types, targets, and locations of violence that are likely to emerge. Places where one armed actor dominates may be more predictable and less openly violent than ones in which multiple groups contest control. A single combatant who has established control can also guarantee a researcher's security, and investigators may be well advised to inform that actor of their presence and intentions in the area. Situations of relative hegemony pose other very serious risks, however. Locals, for example, may be more hesitant to talk openly if they fear retaliation.¹ Dominant actors may be wary of researchers if they perceive them as a threat to their control. Elisabeth Wood, for example, notes how, in her choice of research locations during the civil war in El Salvador, she preferred to work in places contested by two factions. An actor dominating a municipality, she believed, could follow her, compromising the identity and security of her research participants.²

A careful assessment of the research site can improve the basis for making safety and logistical decisions such as where to live, how to move around, how long to stay, and how to organize and schedule research activities. Researchers should gather as much information as possible to help them

make these decisions before traveling to their research sites but should also recognize risk assessment should continue once they settle in and learn more about their surroundings.

Researcher Identity

Risk assessment and mitigation strategies also depend on the researcher's personal background. Local scholars who live in or close to the areas they study may have an advantage in evaluating risk, as they know the place and its cultural norms. They may, however, experience more difficulties exiting a locale than researchers from elsewhere, and, if the research site is in their home city, they or their families may face real dangers even after the completion of fieldwork. Fears about the impact of research on their immediate environment can then affect their decisions to publish and disseminate results. In some situations, local scholars may have more difficulty gaining access to people than foreigners, as residents may not perceive them as neutral observers.

Locally based scholars thus may consider including in their protocols strategies to make clear the beginning and end of fieldwork, even if they remain in the country afterward. This may require taking a short break outside the country or far from the field site after completing research. While all researchers working in violent areas should consider avoiding certain routines during data-gathering periods, local scholars seeking to protect their friends and families may find this especially important and want to limit contacts with their networks at such times. Of course, change can sometimes affect the researcher's relationship with the community of study or his or her personal networks. Nevertheless, all researchers should be aware of crucial support their home academic institutions and interlocking networks of national and international contacts can offer in volatile situations. Powerful local contacts such as politicians, key public authorities, and high-ranking university administrators are often well positioned to support a researcher during difficult times, if they choose to.

Foreigners who are unfamiliar with local cultures and idioms may have more difficulty than locally based scholars in recognizing signs of risk, but they may also have stronger international networks to call upon for support, including embassies, foreign universities, and international funders, and they can choose to exit the field entirely if necessary. In some locations, communities may view foreigners with circumspection or open hostility. For

instance, researchers from the United States may encounter significant difficulties in places where much of the population has a negative perception of the US government or its policies. In other circumstances, however, US or European citizenship may cause armed actors to refrain from acting if they fear retaliation for attacking a national of one of these states.³

Nationality and race also affect whether researchers can blend in or will stand out. When researchers' physical appearance differs greatly from that of the local people, "blending in" becomes more difficult. This poses different types of risks but also may provide opportunities for researchers to increase their safety since, again, some armed actors may want to avoid the problems associated with harming a foreign national.

Gender and gender identity also present risks. For women, the fear of sexual harassment and rape is usually greater than for men. Depending on local customs and cultural codes, women may have more difficulty moving around independently, since individuals in the research site may see this as inappropriate, leading to an increased risk of harassment or sexual assault. In some cases, informants may prevent women from participating in local activities that provide critical information as a result of both the existence of spaces where female presence is rare and the informants' efforts to protect women from perceived risks. For example, after one of my visits to Ciudad Juarez in Mexico, I found out that a crucial contact had decided not to take me to areas of the city he deemed unsafe for me, although he later took a male researcher to those same locations.

Gender-related dangers also affect men, but in different ways. In certain places or situations, they may be seen as likely to be members of security forces, posing threats to armed actors operating in a particular territory. In contexts where informants perceive women as nonthreatening, they may actually receive more information than their male counterparts. Researchers of different sexual orientations may also face particular risks, especially in areas where "social cleansing" groups target those communities.

Gender-related risks thus require consideration in the safety protocol of such pertinent aspects as dress codes, hours and areas in which to move about, body language, and other subtle behaviors.

Type of Research Strategy

The types of threats a scholar may encounter also depend in part on the methodology and design of the research. When researchers stay in the field for long periods, they can learn from the local population about how to deal with danger, and they can develop local networks that can help to mitigate risks. Prolonged stays can also result in lower risk awareness, however, as researchers become more familiar with and complacent about the conditions surrounding them. Conversely, during short-term or multi-sited fieldwork, researchers are likely to remain more actively aware of risks, and their limited presence in the field may help them avoid unwanted attention from armed actors; but a lack of strong local networks may result in their not gaining information crucial to risk assessment.

Decisions about how long to stay in one location depend not only on methodological and disciplinary considerations but also on the conditions in the field site. In high-risk situations, scholars should seek to build into their methodologies the security concerns discussed here regarding local presence. In my own research, for example, comparing three different Mexican cities where rival criminal groups operate, I decided to conduct several short-term visits instead of two-month stays in each location, as originally planned, to help avoid attention and lessen the possibility of being singled out as an informant for a rival organization.

Of course, research methods themselves have important impacts on risk assessment and response. When qualitative interviews are the main data-gathering tool, many safety decisions pertain to strategies to gain local access, identify informants, and conduct interviews on sensitive matters. If the project requires the participation of research assistants, translators, drivers, or survey personnel, these decisions may involve how to discuss and socialize security protocols with these collaborators and consideration of practices that can enhance the team's security. For researchers using survey enumerators, decisions include whom to hire, how to organize their daily work, what size groups they should work in, and what equipment they need to use. Global positioning system (GPS) tracking devices, for example, can help locate missing researchers. Recording devices may be essential to certain research activities but can expose their users to additional risks. When research involves collective subjects, as in experiments, participant observation, or focus groups, scholars need to devote significant time to explaining to the local community and its official representatives the purpose

of the project. Each should consider these methodological and technical issues before starting fieldwork and explain them carefully to supporting institutions, which may provide advice or resources to assist in these efforts.

Understanding Types of Risk

Safety threats can emerge both in everyday routines and under more extreme circumstances. Individuals in high-risk environments often focus their energies on situations that carry the highest danger, such as crossing a frontier between areas dominated by armed groups; yet the most serious risks often emerge during more ordinary activities, when researchers are familiar with their environments and let their guards down.

Some physical risks, such as being caught in crossfire, can appear random. Others, such as kidnappings and death threats, result from individuals directly targeting researchers. Psychological and emotional risks emerge because, among other things, researchers are exposed to stories and experiences of victimhood, periods of loneliness, and distance from their homes, families, and friends⁴, and to the ethical dilemmas generated by research under these conditions. In addition to the stress foreign scholars experience, locally based researchers may feel anxiety associated with studying a society they are and will remain a part of, and in which research subjects could affect other parts of their lives.⁵ Ethical dilemmas multiply when researchers contemplate the possibility that their presence in an area can bring harm to their informants, and as they consider ways to reciprocate and acknowledge their informants' contributions to their projects.

These challenges become particularly acute when scholars witness illegal activities or interact with key informants engaged in illegal behaviors, or when they witness, listen to, or indirectly become part of situations that challenge their own values. Legal risks derive from the liability scholars may incur if they witness or come across illegal situations, or if they are accused of wrongdoing. In some cases, this information carries a physical risk; in others, it may carry the possibility of lawsuits that may require a researcher to turn over data to state authorities or lawyers. It is important for researchers to make themselves aware of laws that govern their activities in the research location and secure their data against such threats.

Psychological risks accumulate in the course of fieldwork. Taking breaks from the field, maintaining a social network independent of research activ-

ities, and consciously allowing time for leisure can help in handling stress. Particular events can pose immediate psychological challenges, however. Prior to entering the field, scholars should ask themselves how they think they would react to particularly intense situations, such as hearing direct accounts of personal suffering, having a research subject break down emotionally or become unstable during an interview, receiving a direct threat, or witnessing a violent, traumatic, or illegal event. While fully preparing for these events may be impossible, scholars should consider their eventuality and their possible responses.

Scholars working in dangerous areas should not be afraid to seek out advice from advisors, colleagues, and friends to help them through these moments. Before starting fieldwork, researchers may wish to designate a trusted person, ideally outside the field, who can help them think through dilemmas or provide psychological relief. As I will discuss later, this person can be the same point person designated to initiate the safety and exit protocol, but he or she can also be someone else, such as a close friend or academic colleague with some distance from the project. Gauging these possibilities and understanding different risks beforehand can help significantly during critical situations.

PRE-FIELDWORK CONSIDERATIONS

Before executing a research plan, scholars should gather as much information as possible from secondary materials and from contacts, such as other scholars and journalists, who are familiar with the field site. Of course, a great deal of information may still be lacking prior to entering the field, and obtaining it is often the objective of the research project itself; but consulting as many sources as possible and establishing a primary network of contacts before going is a way to mitigate this limitation.

Establishing a few local contacts before starting fieldwork is essential to gaining access to informants and evaluating risk. From them and through other preparation, the researcher can obtain information about the area and advice on how to navigate it. Pre-field planning also allows the researcher to vet sources and evaluate the potential reliability of any particularly dangerous informants and brokers. Local contacts established at the beginning and cultivated throughout research can also help during emergencies. Nevertheless, relations even with these key contacts may change as research

evolves. Gaining access does not equate to maintaining a constant flow of information.⁶

Researchers may benefit from asking the following questions as they prepare to go into the field:

- Has anyone done work in this area or about this actor before? If so, what can I learn from their experiences?
- What are key security issues and forms of violence in this area?
- Who are the main state and non-state violent actors? What is the correlation of forces between those actors? How does this affect the dynamics of violence and social control?
- What is the role of the state in this area? Is the state reliable? How and to what extent does the state generate violence?
- Are the main armed actors and social organizations in the area trustworthy? Do they adhere to local or international norms? (Researchers should remember that no generalized perception about actors is a final indication as to what to expect of them, and their behavior can change over time.)⁷
- Do any formal or informal actors need to grant permission before a researcher enters the area? For example, in some areas of Guatemala, researchers may require the consent of indigenous authorities to gain access to communities.⁸ In other places, permission informally depends on illegal actors. How should scholars obtain these permissions, and how can the need or failure to gain them affect research?
- Have critical changes recently occurred at the research site? For example, has a new actor entered the area, has one group's dominance broken down, or has the state carried out combat operations?
- Is the infrastructure sufficient to support travel and basic living standards? What can the researcher do to make a study viable under existing conditions?
- What are the prevalent dress codes and local practices, and how might they affect researchers and their teams?
- What are the possibilities for communications and connectivity in the area?

It is essential to bear in mind that this list is not exhaustive. Scholars do not need to ask all these questions, and some important questions may not appear on this list. Ultimately, researchers should focus on asking the questions most relevant to their projects and continue to ask themselves those questions as they move ahead with fieldwork. These considerations may, in turn, guide specific decisions that will affect the researchers' routines and the possibilities and means to exit the field.

Decisions about lodging play an important role in researcher safety plans. For example, a scholar needs to think about how easy it would be to get to his or her house in case of emergency, how safe the proposed housing would be in an emergency, and how easy it would be to leave the research site from the house. The choice of lodging also has implications for local transportation, another key security concern. Geography, the nature of local public services, and type of research methods may help the researcher choose between renting a car, using public transportation, or hiring a local driver; these choices may have considerable impacts on safety. Scholars should consider different exit possibilities as they decide on both lodging and transportation, because difficult access often means a difficult exit.

Another key decision researchers can make before initiating fieldwork regards how to store and move field notes. They should include data security concerns in their safety protocols, and, for long-term stays, contemplate creating a mechanism that allows them to transfer information and notes safely outside the field on a regular basis. Local scholars based near their research sites may face particular challenges in securing data, both during and after research.

When starting fieldwork, scholars also make decisions about how to engage state authorities. For some projects, talking to state officials is essential for gaining access to the research site. Notifying state authorities upon arrival can make research activities transparent and provide a form of protection. In some situations, however, contact with government or police forces may generate suspicion among other informants or attract unwanted official attention to project participants. Scholars should gauge these possibilities when deciding how and when to contact state authorities.

Similarly, researchers also may need to consider how to engage informal authorities and local gatekeepers, who may play important roles if dangerous situations emerge and researchers need to consider leaving the field.

For example, a gatekeeper may, under some circumstances, facilitate exit by helping appease particular actors who feel uncomfortable with the researcher. As engaging informal leaders may generate tensions with state authorities, however, some scholars prefer to communicate with these often competing actors at different stages of research. Thinking through possible interactions between different types of informants and authorities is an important pre-fieldwork consideration.

Before entering the field, scholars may also consider how international actors (such as embassies, international governments, or international organizations) can be part of their safety protocols. At one level, foreign scholars should generally make their own embassies aware of their presence in the country, and make them a key contact in the written safety protocol. At another, communication with international organizations may help in building a network of contacts that can assist in times of danger. These organizations can be particularly useful not only for foreigners who have no previous contacts in the field, but also for local scholars who may find a layer of protection in international funders and collaborators.

A researcher who is going to work in an area with a high risk of kidnapping should consider taking a special training course; under these conditions, the order and protocol for contacting authorities in the event the scholar disappears may differ from those for other types of emergencies. A government may, for example, have laws against negotiating with certain types of kidnappers, creating legal jeopardy for those seeking the release of a kidnapped scholar. These complexities should be discussed in detail with the point person and with the first-tier contacts established in the exit protocol. Ultimately, pre-fieldwork assessment helps the researcher create an initial safety protocol that includes exit options after fieldwork has concluded, when the researcher is under direct threat, or when the researcher cannot be located or cannot exit the field on his or her own. All the considerations mentioned above could help the researcher in determining exit strategies to minimize risks. These strategies require working closely with funders and home and host institutions that are critical both in providing material support (such as key resources necessary to guarantee data security or allow for frequent trips in and out of the field) and institutional support in cases of emergency. Pre-fieldwork discussions with these institutions are essential to explain to them how allowing flexibility in both expenses and research schedules can contribute to the researcher's safety.

RISK ASSESSMENT THROUGH ROUTINE SAFETY PRACTICES

Conflict and crime situations are often quite fluid. Safety depends on researchers' ability to reassess their security situation constantly and remain aware of their surroundings, allowing them to identify and address both existing and emerging risks. In some cases, these risks will already have been included in the activities and their exit protocols, but in others, researchers may have to change practices or reconsider some elements of their protocols.

The researcher's knowledge of an area evolves over time. Closely watching for changes and understanding them within the local context can help in determining the level of local instability and in making decisions to mitigate risk. Key local contacts can help scholars understand security developments at the research site, and journalists and community leaders can provide ongoing information about them. In general, analyzing the historical evolution of the research location may help the researchers contextualize the risks faced at particular moments, but routine safety practices are also key tools for assessing risk.

Risk assessments can benefit from researchers' regular consideration of how their identities, interactions, and behaviors shape community perceptions, the information they obtain, and their own emotional and physical safety. For instance, a scholar's relationship with the community can change if he or she interviews somebody whom others perceive as a threat. An awareness of these changes can help scholars decide if they need to curtail their work in an area or adapt research strategies. Likewise, knowledge about potentially risky areas can help the researcher decide whether to notify the point person (described in the next section) about a trip to such an area or to avoid it altogether. Furthermore, awareness of their own behavior relative to the rules and customs of the location can help researchers assess if they have violated local norms. For example, using a camera without permission from particular individuals in an open-air drug market can cause drug dealers and users to fear that the researcher works for the police.

Since individuals in the community may express their fear indirectly, researchers' awareness of others' behavior as well as their own is also important in assessing evolving risks. Changes in people's attitudes can signal dangers that may warrant leaving the field or shortening a scholar's stay. Along these same lines, analyzing why people allow or do not allow

the collection of information may provide clues about possible risks. As researchers in civil war locations have pointed out, residents are often willing to share their personal and collective stories despite the danger of the situation.⁹ This can also occur in crime-ridden areas. People's unwillingness to talk, can therefore reflect a latent fear of retaliation from armed actors in the area. It is important to note that foreigners or scholars who spend short periods of time in a field location may find following this "ethnographic" approach to researcher safety more difficult. For them, key local contacts could be essential to interpreting indirect expressions of fear in the community.

Adequate preparation before interviews, such as gathering as much information as possible about the interviewee, is another tool that can aid in risk assessment and guide adjustments to the safety protocol. Understanding the risk levels of particular interviews can help researchers determine whether they should notify their point persons about riskier ones that require more constant check-in. This assessment will also affect decisions about where and how to conduct interviews, what equipment to carry, how to organize and schedule interviews, and how to frame and order questions.¹⁰ In circumstances where scholars deem it absolutely necessary to carry out activities that reduce their safety, such as conducting interviews in private locations chosen by the subject, they should keep their point persons apprised of the decisions they make. This is also essential in light of the unforeseen risks that sometimes emerge during the interview itself.

Maintaining alertness during interviews is vital. Sudden changes in tone, physical expressions of discomfort, or direct challenges to the researcher, usually signal the interviewee's discomfort or mistrust. If confronted with such a situation, the researcher may try to end the interview as smoothly as possible and leave the area. Some challenges emerging during interviews can have long-term impacts, depending on the issues discussed and the role the informant plays in the community. Many years ago, in my first field experience in the emerald-producing region of Colombia, I asked an emerald "businessman" about the connections of some older emerald traders to drug trafficking. Even though the interviewee himself had first brought up the issue, his discomfort was transparent and my fear endless, as the access to and exit from the area were entirely in his hands. I tried to change the topic as quickly as possible, but the communication had clearly broken down, and I knew I could not come back to this area, as the informant was a very powerful regional leader.

After interviews are concluded, an assessment of the information obtained can help the scholar determine if legal implications and physical dangers not initially considered in the safety protocol derive from newly acquired data. Potential legal threats may require holding the information very closely or indefinitely delaying publication. New physical threats may lead researchers to consider early exit from the field. Scholars may prefer to stay away from questions designed to elicit particularly sensitive technical information about armed activities, focusing instead on learning about local dynamics and patterns of behavior rather than individual activities and obligations. Determining beforehand what information the researcher will need to seek and what information interviewees will see as sensitive is not always possible, however. Likewise, scholars often receive testimonies from actors involved in illegal activities, but it may be difficult to realize whether these stories can in turn carry legal, physical, or emotional risks for the scholar or the interviewee.

Ultimately, routine safety practices should be directed toward avoiding risky situations that could hinder the scholar's safe return home; thus, they depend on the ability to judge whether the nature of risks requires significant changes to research plans or the execution of an existing exit protocol. The golden rule for assessing threats is simple but powerful: trust your feelings—and if things feel wrong, get out. Many times, the researcher's feelings will determine whether a risk seems unusual and requires either an immediate action, such as ending an interview, or a more dramatic change, such as abandoning the research site. Key danger signals may include the following:

- Direct or indirect threats to the researcher, threats to key local contacts, or a physical assault on either the researcher or an informant
- Learning that key actors in the research locale or gatekeepers have changed their views and perceptions of the researcher
- An increase in the open, armed presence of either or both state and non state actors, a change in the frequency of armed confrontations, or the researchers' witnessing of illegal practices
- The emergence of new information that carries physical or legal dangers

In sum, routine safety procedures are instrumental to assessing existing and emerging risks. Understanding when foreseen risks materialize or new threats are likely to emerge can be essential for the scholar to return home safely when difficult situations develop, and for those people included in the safety protocol to assist the scholar appropriately.

DESIGNING AN EXIT PROTOCOL

An exit protocol establishes a set of contacts and procedures to help a researcher exit the field during emergencies. The risk assessment, pre-field planning, and routine safety strategies discussed above are essential to the design of an exit protocol. The elements of the protocol guide key individuals in assisting a researcher in trouble.

The most important element of the exit protocol is to establish a single key emergency contact, referred to here as the point person. This individual should carry out other elements of the protocol to assist the researcher's exit from the field should he or she become incapacitated, disappear, or otherwise need emergency assistance. The point person should be generally aware of the researcher's whereabouts and activities and should regularly receive check-ins to remain up to date on the scholar's safety. The frequency of these check-ins will vary, depending on the degree of danger the researcher and point person foresee based on the particular activities undertaken. The researcher's failure to check in with the emergency contact at the set interval will trigger the execution of the protocol. The researcher can also initiate a protocol when he or she has been detained or is in some other serious, immediate danger.

The following outlines the essential elements of an exit protocol, which can vary a great deal in its process and details, depending on location, type of research, and the specific risks the researcher faces.

The Point Person

The most difficult part of constructing a protocol is choosing a point person. For the protocol to function, the researcher must regularly check in with this individual, and the individual must have the capacity in terms of time, commitment, resources, and language skills to carry out the protocol when the researcher is lost or in need of help. This key emergency contact must also be prepared to deal with the stress of knowing the nature of the work the

researcher is carrying out. Often, a researcher has few people in his or her life who can be trusted to carry out this role. Those who may take it on include family members, dissertation supervisors, close friends, colleagues, and, under some circumstances, funding agencies. Each of these options has different advantages and disadvantages that researchers should weigh carefully when considering their choice.

Academic contacts should be one starting place in considering who can serve as a point person. A supervisor in the researcher's home institution is an option if the flow of communication between supervisor and student is constant. In many cases, supervisors are overloaded with work and thus not willing to take on additional responsibilities. If the communication is not constant, a supervisor should probably still serve as a secondary emergency contact to help initiate an intervention by an academic institution's senior administrator, should a researcher find him- or herself in a dangerous situation. Junior scholars may also find colleagues and other researchers working in the same region to be good options.

Family members and relatives are perhaps the most willing to receive constant updates, but researchers may not want their loved ones to be aware of the high levels of risk to which their work may expose them. Researchers who do consider family members for this role need to be honest with them about the nature of their work and prepare them for the actual types of information they will need to receive and manage. Family members may also lack language skills and the knowledge of the field necessary to carrying out the protocol. If a family member is, indeed, to be the person receiving the most constant updates, the scholar may find it useful to designate someone with adequate language skills whom the family member can contact in case of emergency to actually carry out the protocol.

Local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), host institutions, and key contacts in the field may also be good options, given their knowledge of local circumstances. The difficulty is that sometimes foreign researchers have not had enough time to build a strong rapport with these organizations or individuals. As research progresses, however, the researchers may be better able to ask for this kind of support from their local network of contacts. In any case, local organizations should serve as first-tier contacts to whom the point person can reach out in the event the researcher requires assistance.

Finally, when scholars belong to particular advocacy or academic networks, members of these networks can also represent an option for point person, provided their communication with the scholar is constant.

Check-In Period

Different types of risk entail different frequencies of contact with a point person. Generally speaking, researchers working under moderately risky conditions should probably consider a daily check-in, sending an email or making a phone call to their emergency contacts in the evening to indicate they arrived home safely. In higher-risk situations, however, more frequent contacts may be needed. One journalist who went to interviews with powerful criminals reported sending text messages to a back-up contact every ten minutes. Individuals may consider a twice-daily or even hourly contact. A researcher and his or her point person can also agree on a contact after a specific meeting has concluded. Researchers, however, should take care not to schedule excessive communications, since these may unnecessarily trigger the protocol, as well as put excessive stress on the point person.

Under some circumstances, the researcher may need to designate a subpoint person. This is most likely to occur under very high-risk conditions when the researcher decides to make multiple daily contacts, either putting too much stress on or making it difficult to communicate with the main point person at a particular time. For example, the main point person may live in a foreign country, making it difficult to send him or her multiple instant messages daily. Under such circumstances, a researcher may designate a trusted associate in the field to receive those contacts. If the researcher were to fail to make one of these contacts, the subpoint person would contact the main point person. The main point person should remain aware of this arrangement.

In the end, protocols only function properly when the researcher responsibly maintains the agreed-upon contact frequency with the point person. Failure to do so can result in an unnecessary initiation of the protocol.

Basic Information

The protocol should contain the following basic information:

- Specific and detailed travel information, including travel dates, means of conveyance (such as airline), flight number, reservation code, and ticket number. Researchers traveling by boat or land should provide similar information.
- Lodging information, including address and phone number. When the researcher will be staying at a hotel, the protocol should include the name of the hotel, address, and detailed contact information, including phone number and email address. If no address is available, the researcher may include a description of the location and a photograph of the building.
- Researcher contact information, including all telephone numbers and key email addresses.
- Information for any insurance the researcher is using while traveling. This can include travelers' general and health insurance, home health insurance, and medical evacuation insurance.
- Password and login information needed to secure electronic data.
- Any financial information necessary to aid the point person in removing the researcher from the field.
- Information for any tracking devices the researcher may be carrying.
- Names of first- and second-tier as well as other key contacts.
 - First-tier local contacts include an initial group of individuals who might help locate a researcher who has missed a check-in. These consist of the individuals close to the scholar at his or her host institution, and, if not the point person, the researcher's professional supervisor. This list may change as the researcher's contacts and friendships develop.
 - Second-tier contacts are individuals the researcher knows who may help in rescue and extraction efforts. Among them are important local contacts, such as NGOs or public officials, funders, and contacts at the researcher's home institution, including the researcher's

supervisor, if not contacted earlier, but also other key administrators. This list can vary a great deal based on the researcher's contacts. If the point person is not an immediate relative, someone from the researcher's family should appear on this list, where possible. As with first-tier contacts, this list may change as contacts develop.

- Where first- and second-tier contacts comprise those who will seek to locate and aid the researcher immediately, a third tier of contacts may include people or institutions that can help secure electronic data or deal with financial issues that could result in an emergency.
- The researcher should keep the point person informed of interview schedules, activities, and meetings on a regular basis, notifying him or her when a specific meeting or research activity seems to carry particular risk. The researcher should regularly update contact lists and other information.
- The investigator should update all of this information on a regular basis.

Missed Contact or Call for Assistance

In the event of a missed contact, or if the researcher can directly communicate a need for assistance, the protocol should contain execution instructions. These include the following:

- *When to reach out to initial contacts.* Depending on the level of risk, the researcher and point person may agree on a buffer interval before the point person begins protocol execution. It may be a few minutes or a few hours.
- *First-phase actions to locate the researcher.* Unless a more aggressive strategy is agreed on, in the event that danger to the researcher may be imminent or if the researcher is kidnapped, the first phase of an exit protocol will usually focus on locating the researcher. If he or she carries a tracking device, the point person may seek to access that device's information. In the absence of such a device, the point person's efforts during this phase should focus on reaching out to first-tier contacts to learn where the

researcher is and whether the contact failure constitutes an emergency or has resulted from, for example, a breakdown in communication equipment.

- *Second-phase actions to aid the researcher.* If, after initial inquiries, the point person fails to locate the researcher or learns the whereabouts of the researcher but determines there is an emergency that requires assistance, the point person should call second-phase contacts, inform them of the situation, and discuss how they can best help the researcher reach safety. At this juncture the point person or other contacts should consider reaching out to government authorities and, if the researcher is a foreigner, his or her local embassy. To the extent possible, and within the limits of the protocol, the point person should ensure that second-tier contacts are in touch with one another so they can work together to assist the researcher. This is especially important if the main point person and researcher are in different countries. The point person should remain in communication with other contacts to ensure efforts to aid the researcher move forward.
- *Third-phase actions to secure the researcher.* Having located the researcher, the point person, on the advice of contacts in the field, should seek to help the researcher reach safety and, if necessary, return home. This can involve helping the researcher receive proper medical care. It can also involve ensuring the researcher has adequate funds and is able to obtain transportation to return to safety, and it may require working with authorities and others to ensure the release of the researcher from detention by state or non-state actors. Some of these situations are very complicated, and the point person, in consultation with other contacts, may decide to contact a lawyer. Where possible and necessary, the protocol should make financial and other provision for these eventualities.
- *Third-phase actions to secure data.* Finally, a point person may also secure data. This may involve remotely wiping electronic devices and deleting or securing sensitive files the researcher may be storing on the Internet through services such as Google Drive or Drop Box and may be particularly important if state actors kidnap or detain the

researcher. Other contacts named in the initial protocol may carry out some of these often-complex activities. Depending on the severity of the situation, a third layer of notification should include national and international organizations and mass media.

Limitations

A clear exit protocol has two limitations:

- First, fieldwork is highly fluid. Although researchers should try as hard as possible to clarify an agenda as far in advance as possible, many times important opportunities emerge in the field in unexpected ways. Researchers should try to notify the point person as soon as possible of agenda changes, before the meetings take place. This can be difficult when communications are inconsistent, but researchers should make all necessary efforts to notify the point person of crucial changes. More broadly, researchers need to keep their point persons up to date regarding any changes in their lives that may affect the protocol, including a change of address or phone information or new priority contacts.
- Second, extended ethnographic field research may place substantial burdens on both the researcher and the point person. Both should be aware of and prepared to deal with these challenges.

The foregoing is a model for how individual researchers can build effective safety and exit protocols. Individual research projects, as I have made clear, vary considerably in terms of methods, discipline, and objectives. Scholars should use this as a framework they can adapt to their particular research needs and concerns. Their priority should be having an emergency point person who has key information to help them and a system of check-in periods that can initiate emergency protocols should they disappear. The exact structure of these provisions, of course, needs to vary according to the needs of particular scholars and the types of research they are doing.

CONCLUSION

Carrying out research in dangerous locations is challenging and requires extra work and effort. Early-career researchers often do not have any previous training or support to help them navigate these challenges. The researcher's commitment to assessing risk and preparing for difficulties is essential for successful research activities. There are vastly different forms of research, and the recommendations presented here are neither exhaustive nor necessarily applicable to all situations. Nevertheless, they can guide scholars in making crucial decisions. The issues discussed are not intended to paralyze researchers while they think through endless possibilities; indeed, many could become routine for scholars. Researchers still need to assess risks and develop strategies to mitigate them, however. An essential element in this process is building an exit protocol that can help bring a researcher home in an emergency situation.

While this discussion has focused on fieldwork, one last vital point is that safety does not stop when fieldwork is completed. Publication and follow-up research can create new risks and challenges. Safety should always be the priority, and researchers should not embark on projects that pose extreme risks. With proper care and assessment, researchers can help ascertain these risks and make informed decisions about whether and how to undertake research projects.

RUBRIC: BUILDING RESEARCH SAFETY AND EXIT PROTOCOLS

The following is not intended to be an exhaustive list of issues researchers need to consider when designing a research safety and exit protocol, nor does it aim to tell researchers what to do and how to do it. It is, rather, a guide to assist researchers as they ask essential questions and assess their own security and devise strategies to respond to potential risks.*

Risk Assessment before Going to the Field

Research safety starts well before a scholar travels to the field, and depends critically on careful consideration of how the characteristics of the individual researcher, the research location, and the methodological strategies affect risk levels.

CATEGORY	ASPECTS TO CONSIDER	KEY DECISIONS	RISK ASSESSMENT AND POTENTIAL RESPONSE
<p>Location</p> <p><i>How the research location affects entry and exit possibilities, mobility, relationships with armed and state actors, and types of violence and order</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rural vs. urban areas Large vs. small locations Types and sources of violence Number of armed actors and patterns of behavior Police and state presence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Where to live How long to stay How to move around How to dress and act How to gain access to the community (Who are the key actors and gatekeepers?) How to schedule and organize research activities 	<p>Logistical challenges and security risks associated with field site:</p>

* Each researcher should complete the blank boxes in the "Risk Assessment and Potential Responses" column individually after considering the main risks pertinent to him or her in each category. For example:
Type of risk: Physical, not having reliable transportation when arriving at the location (at airport or bus station), risk associated with theft or with taxis being part of informal "intelligence" in the area
Potential response: Hire reliable driver beforehand or coordinate arrival with a local institution that can send somebody to the station or airport.

CATEGORY	ASPECTS TO CONSIDER	KEY DECISIONS	RISK ASSESSMENT AND POTENTIAL RESPONSE
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mobility, access points, transportation needs, communication, infrastructure • Local practices: culture, dress codes • Legal environment • Presence of NGOs, international actors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess whether the risks are high enough to prevent the researcher from conducting research 	
<p>Researcher's identity</p> <p><i>How the researcher's personal background affects connections, perceptions of the environment, and perceptions of the researcher by local communities</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local vs. foreign scholars (note that considerations of a foreign national living permanently in the research area may be similar to those of a local researcher) • Gender and race • Support networks of the researcher 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whom to contact and interview • How to gain access • How to interpret reactions and information • Are there certain areas/activities that should be avoided? 	<p>Risks (and advantages) associated with personal background:</p>

CATEGORY	ASPECTS TO CONSIDER	KEY DECISIONS	RISK ASSESSMENT AND POTENTIAL RESPONSE
<p>Research strategy</p> <p><i>How the duration of fieldwork and the methods used can affect security</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long vs. short research trips • Multi-sited research vs. research in one location • Methods used: interviews, participant observation, ethnography, experiments, archival work • Additional issues that emerge when research teams are involved 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where to live, how long to stay • How to establish access • What institutions, actors (state and nonstate), and individuals should I contact to approve research? • How to store, handle, and transfer data • How to organize research activities 	<p>Risks associated with research proposal:</p>

CATEGORY	ASPECTS TO CONSIDER	KEY DECISIONS	RISK ASSESSMENT AND POTENTIAL RESPONSE
<p><i>Establishing networks in and outside the field</i></p> <p><i>Networks are essential both for gaining access and for building exit strategies</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has somebody carried out research here before? If so, can the researcher use these previous contacts? • What is the first layer of contacts with which to get access in the field? • Role that informants, “fixers,” and other local actors can play in emergency situations • Reliability of key informants and local brokers • Role that funders, host institutions, colleagues, and family play and, in the case of local researchers, how family and friends can become part of the safety assessment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact and notify local authorities (police) and foreign embassies, if relevant • Determine what role funders and host and home institutions (if any) can play in case of emergency • Are there some actors/ institutions with whom you want to conduct interviews but whom it may be preferable not interview? • Is it appropriate to layer interviews by categories of informants? 	<p><i>Identify critical actors in the field; unreliable actors; and main local scholars, local NGOs, international NGOs:</i></p>

CATEGORY	ASPECTS TO CONSIDER	KEY DECISIONS	RISK ASSESSMENT AND POTENTIAL RESPONSE
<p><i>Designating point person(s) and creating initial safety and exit protocols^a</i></p> <p><i>Point persons are those contacts whom the researcher keeps constantly informed about his or her situation, and who should react and trigger steps in case of extreme emergency. Point persons may vary in levels of responsibility and roles, and different people can be designated to fill different roles.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Availability of the point person to respond quickly in case of emergency • Emotional and logistical capacity, and commitment of the point person to receive constant information from the field and act upon it (this may include, for example, their ability to speak the language) • Level of trust: the point person may be responsible for handling sensitive data and information about sensitive meetings and interviews • Roles and institutional constraints: funders (and embassies) may play a role in an extreme situation but only after some other levels of action have been triggered. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is it appropriate to use family member as point person? • Is it appropriate to use supervisor as point person? • If a foreign researcher, what local institution/person can serve as point person? • What role can funders and home and host institutions play? • Is it possible to establish different layers of contact? 	<p><i>List of people who are close to me and to my research and their potential responsibilities:</i></p>

CATEGORY	ASPECTS TO CONSIDER	KEY DECISIONS	RISK ASSESSMENT AND POTENTIAL RESPONSE
<i>Data gathering, use, and storage</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential threats to privacy (e.g., are checkpoints common inside research location?) • Costs of different methods of storing data • Technical requirements and needs for data handling and storage • Procedures for handling data when research involves teams • Connectivity and communication in research location 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How often should I store and transfer data, and what procedures should I use? • What technical, economic, and logistical resources do I need to carry out an effective data storage plan? • What are the necessary procedures for guaranteeing anonymity and reducing harm to informants? 	<i>Identify security needs, data safety risks, and technical needs:</i>

^aThe point person is also sometimes described as the security monitor or backup person.

Risk Assessment and Prevention during Fieldwork

A constant assessment of conditions and environments is essential to determine levels of risk and appropriate reactions to them. Safety routines are also essential for preventing and reacting to extreme situations. While some risks may be mitigated by changing routines for a few days or taking a break, other risks may require leaving the field.

CATEGORY	ASPECTS TO CONSIDER	KEY DECISIONS	RISK ASSESSMENT AND POTENTIAL RESPONSE
<i>Strategies for and implications of research methods</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influence of environment on safety of informant/ researcher or research team • Influence of environment on answers the researcher can get • Influence of environment on safety of informant/ researcher or research team • Influence of environment on answers the researcher can get • Possibility of receiving information about illegal activities • Possibility of listening to views that oppose one's own 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When, where, and how to carry out interviews • Whether a third person should come to some/ all interviews and, if so, how to notify the informant • How to dress and act during interviews • What electronic devices are adequate for individual interviews? • When to end interviews, and how to end one if a dangerous situation derives from it 	<i>Risks associated with research methods and techniques:</i>

CATEGORY	ASPECTS TO CONSIDER	KEY DECISIONS	RISK ASSESSMENT AND POTENTIAL RESPONSE
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Possibility of receiving personal testimonies of suffering and trauma • Possibility that interactions in focus groups or participant observation can affect community interactions outside the group • Risks derived from working with teams (such as survey enumerators) • Presence of researcher can affect local dynamics, especially in small communities where strangers are easily identifiable, which in turn can affect information obtained 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How to answer detailed questions about the project (without either misrepresenting it or using language or details that can upset participants or reveal information about other participants) • How to interpret signs and information during interviews and use them to gauge risks • How to organize and coordinate research teams and what equipment to provide them • How to socialize with research teams security protocols and safety considerations • How to accurately explain to the community the purpose of the project 	

CATEGORY	ASPECTS TO CONSIDER	KEY DECISIONS	RISK ASSESSMENT AND POTENTIAL RESPONSE
<i>Environment</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has the correlation of forces between armed actors or between armed actors and state authorities changed? How can this affect violence and threats? • How is the physical space surrounding me (e.g. are streets illuminated)? • Have I become too used to the situation? • Have rumors, expressions of fear, or people's behavior changed? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whether to change routines, routes of mobilization, or avoid certain areas if there is a change in the environment but the risk is perceived to be manageable • Whether a break is necessary to step back and become aware of whether the researcher's ability to assess risks has been reduced • Whether an exit from the field is necessary 	<i>Risks related to the physical space and to the actors present in research location:</i>

CATEGORY	ASPECTS TO CONSIDER	KEY DECISIONS	RISK ASSESSMENT AND POTENTIAL RESPONSE
<i>Assessing different types and levels of danger/risks</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emotional and psychological risks: those related to the impact of stories and experiences in the field on the emotional stability of the researcher • Ethical risks: those generated by the researcher's relationship to informants and information • Physical risks: danger of physical damage, which may appear random or targeted. The more common forms may include being caught in shootouts, getting robbed; the most extreme include kidnapping, incarceration, and death threats 	<p>After identifying the type of risk, the source, and the target, key decisions include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If the risk is associated with a particular activity or interaction, should I stop the activity (e.g. visiting a particular location)? Can this mitigate the risk? • If the risk is associated with the research location as a whole, is removal from the field required? • If the potential consequences are immediate, do they require exit from the field? • Should I notify formal or informal authorities about the situation? 	<i>Overall risk assessment for project:</i>

CATEGORY	ASPECTS TO CONSIDER	KEY DECISIONS	RISK ASSESSMENT AND POTENTIAL RESPONSE
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal risks: those that can trigger legal actions against the researcher (such as actions for libel and slander) or that entail the researcher gathering information about illegal activities • Assess the risk in comparison with previous circumstances in the area • Are risks associated with direct threats? • Are risks associated with the researcher witnessing a particular event or receiving some information? • Does the risk represent an extreme danger, or is it a routine risk? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If the potential consequences are unpredictable or likely to appear in the long to medium-run, can I still remain in the field and continue data gathering? • Can I mitigate this risk through routine safety practices? 	

Exit Protocols in Extreme Situations

An exit protocol is a set of procedures aimed at identifying extreme situations that require the researcher to remove him or herself from the research site and a set of steps for exiting the field safely. It also includes procedures to be carried out by a third person in case a researcher fails to check in with the point person and cannot be located.

CATEGORY	ASPECTS TO CONSIDER	KEY DECISIONS	RISK ASSESSMENT AND POTENTIAL RESPONSE
<i>Determining that an extreme danger is occurring (see environment and risk assessment, above) or may occur</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have there been armed confrontations, invasions, or other developments that can pose extreme risks or that represent a crucial change in the usual level of danger and fear? • Have I received threats? • Am I being followed? • Have there been unexplained problems with my data and electronics? • Has my housing been entered, searched, or robbed? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Should I remain in the field? (If not, notify point person and other key relevant institutions of the decision to leave as soon as possible.) • Should I notify local informants about my decision to leave? • What should I do with my data? • What is the safest way to leave the field under these circumstances (transportation)? 	<i>List main activities if exit from field site is required:</i>

CATEGORY	ASPECTS TO CONSIDER	KEY DECISIONS	RISK ASSESSMENT AND POTENTIAL RESPONSE
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have I witnessed events that can have legal implications? • How do I feel physically and mentally? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For local scholars: where can I take a temporary break from research? • Does the issue require a temporary break or should I consider complete exit? 	
<i>Frequency of check-ins</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Levels of risk and how they should determine frequency of check in with primary point person, agreed upon beforehand • How might communications affect the feasibility of check-ins? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do I need to check in daily or hourly? • Does weekly or monthly check-in suffice in my field site? • Has my schedule of events changed? Do I need to notify my point person? • Does a particular activity require extraordinary check-in? 	<i>Appropriate frequency of check-in for my project:</i>

CATEGORY	ASPECTS TO CONSIDER	KEY DECISIONS	RISK ASSESSMENT AND POTENTIAL RESPONSE
<i>Roles of primary point person(s) and institutions if researcher fails to check in</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review researcher's calendar and schedule: Where was the researcher last located or the last interview conducted? • Geographic location and skills (e.g., language) of point person and their impact on his/her ability to locate and help researcher • Based on the assessments made by researcher (section II above) consider the potential sources of risk • Assess reliability of communications and all possible ways to contact researcher (email, phone, tracking devices) • Once researcher is located assess needs: logistical, medical, financial 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish when to execute protocol and search for scholar (how long after a researcher has missed a contact) • People to contact and order in which they should be contacted (secondary point persons/institutions such as funders and home institutions) • If point person is not on research location, who is (or can be) main contact in the field • What should happen to existing information (e.g., whether data should be locked down data)? • When to carry out other specific protocols (e.g., a protocol on kidnapping) 	<i>List of persons and institutions primary point person should contact:</i>

CATEGORY	ASPECTS TO CONSIDER	KEY DECISIONS	RISK ASSESSMENT AND POTENTIAL RESPONSE
<i>Role of secondary point person</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nature of the problem: scholar cannot be located, or researcher has been located but cannot leave location on his or her own Ability (both emotional and logistical) of primary point person to reach out to key contacts Forms to coordinate actions and contacts with primary point person 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When to activate local, national, or international networks When to contact police or government authorities Whether to notify media 	<i>List of persons and institutions secondary point person should contact:</i>
<i>Leaving or exiting the field under extreme circumstances or when research period ends</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are there potential risks associated with passing through customs and immigration? Are there informal actors who control exit points? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What mode of transportation to use when leaving the field How to move data obtained during fieldwork safely out of the field 	<i>Logistical needs and challenges while exiting the field:</i>

Post-fieldwork Safety and Security

Safety does not stop when fieldwork is completed. Therefore, understanding how decisions made after finishing fieldwork could still represent a risk for the researcher and the informants is essential to maintain the long term safety of researchers.

CATEGORY	ASPECTS TO CONSIDER	KEY DECISIONS	RISK ASSESSMENT AND POTENTIAL RESPONSE
<p>Publication</p> <p><i>Even though anonymity should always be a prerogative, publication can still pose risks for informants and researchers, especially in small locations where informants can be easily identifiable.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can informants be identified even if names and personal information are not published? • Does the information carry any legal implications? • How may changing circumstances affect risks associated with the information from the time the informant first provided it to the time of publication? • Can aspects or pieces of information be corroborated by various sources, and can such corroboration reduce risks of publication? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where and when to publish • How long to withhold particularly delicate pieces of information • Whether public appearances and declarations should be avoided 	<p><i>Identify types and pieces of information that can entail risks; determine the type of risk associated (legal or physical):</i></p>

CATEGORY	ASPECTS TO CONSIDER	KEY DECISIONS	RISK ASSESSMENT AND POTENTIAL RESPONSE
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can broad assessments of the situation in a particular location still represent a threat for the researcher, his or her family, and informants (e.g. an assessment that does not favor state authorities or armed actors may still be risky even if specific people are not part of the assessment)? 		
<i>Self-care</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Possibility of experiencing post-traumatic disorders • Emotions that were not manifested during fieldwork (or that were locked in by researcher as a survival strategy) may appear once researcher has attained distance from the site. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whether to take a break after returning from the field. • Local scholars need to think about clearly marking the end of the field experience by taking a vacation or leaving their countries or cities at least for a short time. 	<i>Consider emotional reactions upon return from the field:</i>

CATEGORY	ASPECTS TO CONSIDER	KEY DECISIONS	RISK ASSESSMENT AND POTENTIAL RESPONSE
<i>Return trips</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are return trips necessary, and, if so, do they require a new assessment of the situation? • Local scholars may make “return trips” inadvertently (e.g., by running into informants unexpectedly) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Depending on the level of emotional distress, whether professional assistance is necessary • Whether sharing with colleagues and close friends and family could help with emotional health • Local scholars may need to consider what to do if they run into informants inadvertently • Can I use the safety routines and protocols established in the first fieldwork experience? Do I need to reestablish a brand new safety and exit protocol? 	<p><i>Identify possibility of return trips; identify objectives and challenges associated with new trips:</i></p>

NOTES

1. See Linda Green, "Living in a State of Fear," in *Fieldwork Under Fire*, eds. Carolyn Nordstrom and Antonius C. G. M. Robben (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).
2. Elizabeth Jean Wood, "The Ethical Challenges of Field Research in Conflict Zones," *Qualitative Sociology* 29 (2006): 373–86.
3. For a discussion of how external influences and macropolitical events can shape a researcher's interaction with informants and interpretation of data, see Raymond Michalowski, "Ethnography and Anxiety: Field Work and Reflexivity in the Vortex of U.S.–Cuban Relations," *Qualitative Sociology* 19, no. 1 (1996): 59–82.
4. Wood, "The Ethical Challenges of Field Research in Conflict Zones." The literature on the role of emotions in research is significant, but it usually focuses on the emotions of the subjects. When it does discuss the researchers' emotions, it focuses more on how they shape data collection and interpretation than on how the researchers can address their own emotional distress. For discussions about researchers' emotions see Janet Holland, "Emotions and Research," *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 10, no. 3 (2007): 195–209, and Gill Hubbard, Kathryn Backett-Milburn, and Debbie Kemmer, "Working with Emotion: Issues for the Researcher in Fieldwork and Teamwork," *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 4, no. 2 (2001): 119–37.
5. Of course, foreign researchers can also care personally about the situation they study, but it may not have the same impact on their daily lives and those of their families. For a discussion of ethical and emotional issues in interviews and the situation of local researchers, see Julia Chaitin, "'I Wish He Hadn't Told Me That': Methodological and Ethical Issues in Social Trauma and Conflict Research," *Qualitative Health Research* 13, no. 8 (2003): 1145–54.
6. For an interesting illustration of how the relationships between researcher and gatekeepers can change over time, see Carla Reeves, "A Difficult Negotiation: Fieldwork Relations with Gatekeepers," *Qualitative Research* 10, no. 3 (2010): 315–31. In some cases, it may be appropriate to establish periods of distance between researcher and gatekeepers to provide some healthy breathing space for both.
7. On this issue see, for example, Claire Metelits, *Inside Insurgency: Violence, Civilians, and Revolutionary Group Behavior* (New York: New York University Press, 2009).
8. See Daniel Nuñez, "The State and 'La Gente Organizada': Crime and Vigilantism in Totonicapán," paper presented for the Thirty-First International Congress of the Latin American Studies Association (LASA), Washington DC, May 29–June 1, 2013.
9. Nordstrom and Robben, eds., *Fieldwork Under Fire*.
10. An extensive literature on how to conduct interviews includes, for example, Beth Leech, "Asking Questions: Techniques for Semi-Structured Interviews," *Political Science and Politics*, 35, no. 4 (2002): 665–68, and James P. Spradley, *The Ethnographic Interview* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1979). For an interesting discussion of issues that challenge

critical distance between interviewer and interviewee, see Antonius C. G. M. Robben, "The Politics of Truth and Emotion among Victims and Perpetrators of Violence," in Nordstrom and Robben, eds., *Fieldwork Under Fire*, 81–99. Some critical decisions about interviewing depend on disciplinary and methodological standards, such as whether the interest is in a causal explanation or in an interpretive objective.

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