

# Measuring organised crime: Challenges and solutions for collecting data on armed illicit groups

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## 1. Introduction

Organised criminal activities, by their nature, are hard to measure. Administrative data are often missing, problematic, or misleading. Moreover, organised criminal activities are under-reported, and under-reporting rates may be greatest where gangs are strongest. Researchers hoping to quantify organised crime systematically face daunting challenges.

Collecting information on organised crime is inherently a slow process of cautious trial and error. It will vary from city to city, and typically within a city as well. Dozens of qualitative and quantitative researchers have shown that this can be done with care, ethically, and with adequate protection for human subjects. What they all have in common is that they commit themselves to a place, and they all take their time.

While there are risks, the benefits can be enormous. The information these investigators collect is often rare and invaluable. Officials and policymakers commonly have little insight into criminal organisations, with terrible consequences for policy, be it inaction, mediocrity, or adverse and unintended consequences.

Here we draw on our experience in Colombia, Brazil, and Liberia of collecting systematic data on illicit activities and armed groups, in order to share our learning with other researchers or organisations that fund research in this area, who may find this useful for their own research. We address: first steps before asking questions, common challenges and solutions, and alternative sources.

Our work thus far emphasises the relevance of deep qualitative work to identify local partners; the need for intense piloting of survey instruments and a close oversight of survey firms, ranging from how they hire enumerators to how they plan and implement field work; the power of using survey experiments to mitigate and measure measurement error; and the relevance of cross-validating findings with complementary data sources.

## 2. First steps

### This is a long-term commitment

Collecting information on organised criminal groups, and the people affected by them, is a long and difficult process, fraught with some risk for researchers and research subjects. Most of all, it involves a slow process of cautious trial and error just to find reliable means of gathering information. It will vary from city to city, and typically within a city as well. Dozens of qualitative and quantitative researchers have shown that this can be done with care, ethically, and with adequate protection for human subjects. What they all have in common is that they commit themselves to a place, and they all take their time.

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### Is it safe? Do your homework

A great deal depends on whether it is safe for qualitative researchers and enumerators to ask questions (and for residents and shop owners to answer them). There's little gang control and intimidation in some cities we work in, such as Bogotá or Chicago, and people can speak freely. In others, like Medellín and Rio de Janeiro, gang control is strong but relatively respectful of journalists and citizens because many gangs seek legitimacy and loyalty. In other places, such as El Salvador and many parts of Mexico, asking and answering questions is hazardous.

Find local, experienced sources who can help you understand the dangers. One of the best places to start is journalists, especially those covering the local organised crime beat. Also, look for ethnographers and other researchers at local universities or independent consultancies (often doing investigatory work for the municipal government or international

donors). Any investigatory NGOs that collect information on gangs, or work with them, are a good next stop. Also, speak to expert sources (see other data sources below).

Also, getting information about your research context can help you determine what is sensitive and what is not, and thus, plan the strategies you will need to deal with measurement error and safety (both your safety and that of your research subjects). Getting local knowledge on your research context is the golden rule of conducting research in dangerous contexts (Baird, 2019).<sup>6</sup>

### Look for ‘outreach workers’

As gang members get older, many get out. Some reform their ways and start to work to help the youth they once resembled. Some emerge from prison after a decade or more and find that their main skill set is working with gangs and troubled youths. In many (though not all) cities, these ex-members find themselves doing formal or informal social work. Sometimes they work for municipal agencies, sometimes they work for traditional NGOs, and many times they form their own cooperatives and organisations. Look for them. They may be open to advising your work. They may be available for hire as consultants, enumerators, or advisers. Even when they are occupied, they may have friends and colleagues from similar circumstances looking for work.

Some caution is warranted. Many of these individuals and organisations struggle to get by, and still drift back and forth between legal and illicit work. Some organisations maintain ties to gangs and active armed groups. And even if the vast majority of these outreach workers are not any of these things, they often do not have the training or expertise of social workers or enumerators. They will need training and will benefit the most from longer-term, stable contracts. The more professionalised the better. Typically, we have found that you have to work with many such potential staff to find the smaller number – perhaps just one or two – that are well-suited to the work.

## 3. Running population-based surveys

### What are you trying to measure? Conceptualisation and operationalisation

Many of the things you will want to measure will be abstract and challenging, such as ‘How organised are gangs?’ or ‘How strong is the state?’ or ‘Whose governance is more legitimate?’ There are no off-the-shelf measures for such things; in fact, there may not even be agreement about what these terms mean. In situations like this, it is useful to spend some time thinking about what it is you are actually trying to measure. First, start at the abstract level of conceptualisation. For example, what do you mean by legitimacy? How does a low-legitimacy case differ from a high one? What is its range of variation: in other words, how low or high can legitimacy get, both theoretically and in practice? In a perfect world, how would you measure this concept and why? Qualitative interviews can be very helpful here. How do locals conceive of legitimacy and capacity? What is important and relevant to them?

A next step is to operationalise your variable. Now that you have a theoretical idea of what counts, what actual, observable things in the world are you going to use to measure it? For instance, you could measure legitimacy of the state and the gang through a combination of survey questions on trust, satisfaction, willingness of subjects to obey rules, and subjects’ sense of the appropriateness of the gang’s and the state’s roles. The operationalisation step is more pragmatic – the goal is to come up with a way to actually measure your variable. Again, extensive qualitative interviews can be important here. What is people’s day-to-day experience of these organisations, how can questions about this be easily asked and how can observable outcomes relate to the deeper concepts you want to measure?

<sup>6</sup> Baird, A (2019). *Dangerous Fieldwork*. In Atkinson, P, Delamont, S, Cernat, A, Sakshaug, JW & Williams RA (eds.) *SAGE Research Methods Foundations*, SAGE Publications.

A rule of thumb: be wary of slippage between what you are actually able to measure and the concept you are trying to capture. For example, you may think that violence against civilians indicates a lack of legitimacy. Maybe it does, but the absence of violence towards civilians could mean either that civilians are happy to obey or that they are cowed into terrorised silence. Be careful not to jump to conclusions without considering all plausible explanations and weighing these up against available evidence.

## Developing and testing instruments

Surveys always take time and careful testing, but when touching on crime-related sensitive topics, your language, approach, and instruments require unusual levels of time and effort. It is an iterative process, requiring you to go to neighbourhoods to test the instrument (or parts of it), and ask qualitative, follow-up questions of respondents to learn whether they understood the questions in the sense they were asked, or whether they felt safe and comfortable talking to us. Pilots are important to address, for instance:

- **Neutral language.** Avoid implicit judgements. This is particularly important when asking questions about organised crime and criminal activities. Respondents might not see some specific behaviours as illegal, but the wording used by the enumerator might imply it. This, in turn, could lead to social desirability bias in a way that is problematic for interpreting results.
- **Framing and ordering.** In many cases, respondents might reply differently depending on how they perceive the questions they are being asked. For instance, we commonly observe higher under-reporting rates of gang governance if we start the survey by directly asking questions about it. If, on the contrary, we first ask questions about less sensitive topics, we allow respondents to feel confident talking about the specific issue.
- **Slang.** In many instances, people use specific slang to refer to organised crime activities or members. We use pilots and qualitative investigation to learn about this language and incorporate it directly into the questions. For instance, in Medellín people would often talk about the ‘muchachos’ when referring to gang members.

## Some nuts and bolts of building basic trust with respondents in the haste of a survey

Surveyors have a brief time in which to build trust with respondents and will never achieve much trust or confidence in a single short visit. Still, there are some small efforts that can improve the quality of data.

- **Meet respondents privately and monitor your surveyors closely to ensure this happens.** While this may seem obvious, many survey firms, in their hurry to conduct surveys, do not properly train their surveyors to debrief and interview respondents indoors, out of sight, with privacy. Many survey firms who say they do this actually see their teams break protocol in the heat of data collection. If using an outside firm, we typically hire independent supervisors to monitor training and data collection and selectively audit enumerators to ensure compliance.
- **Give respondents control over the interview.** In the debriefing and consent, be clear that respondents have command over the interview: they can refuse to answer any question; they can skip any question; they can check your notes at the end of the interview; and they can end the interview at any time and ask you to leave.
- **Make interviews anonymous.** Whenever possible, do not collect any personal information. Explain to respondents that you will not collect this information and explain the steps you are taking to make it difficult for anyone to link the data to them.

- **Stress independent organisational affiliations.** While this will vary from context to context, our experience is that people are most willing to talk to independent and neutral organisations. Academic institutions and some non-governmental affiliations are examples. Any survey done in collaboration with the government or criminal justice actors, on the other hand, has the risk of raising respondent concerns.
- **Use soft starts.** Consider beginning interviews in open-ended ways, asking respondents to tell you what they know or want to share about the phenomena you are interested in – such as personal security and crime in the neighbourhood. They may volunteer information on issues of organised crime. This gives interviewers a chance to evaluate how willing respondents are to talk about those aspects. In qualitative interviews, this shapes what questions to ask next. In more structured surveys, this gives enumerators material to refer back to.
- **Highlight your awareness of the issues.** Start the conversations with plain, neutral statements about the phenomenon, to reduce the stigma of raising it. For example, preceding questions on extortion in Medellín, for example, we tell people that we know that, in many neighbourhoods, the gangs charge households and businesses with security fees, using the appropriate slang for these groups and the fee. This helps people understand that, if they tell us about the phenomena we are asking about, they will not be revealing a secret to an outsider, something that may prevent people from talking.
- **Pay attention to timing.** Finally, the context of the community being visited should be considered. Did they suffer a spike in homicides or violence last week? Is there a police operation going on? If something unusual is going on, this might not be the best time to ask questions. On the other hand, if changes are for the better, and people feel safer, it can be an opportunity to ask about how things were before.

## Some nuts and bolts of working with survey companies

Survey firms are running a business. They typically try to minimise logistical costs when collecting data. They will promise and probably try to implement quality control procedures, but compliance often suffers in the intensity of data collection. There will be slowdowns, cost overages and unexpected events, and these firms will try to stay on budget and schedule by whatever means. In these circumstances, all of the factors that protect respondents and increase trust and data quality can quickly get lost.

- **Do not outsource questionnaire development or trust existing questionnaires.** Survey firms (and many researchers) do not usually develop the survey questions and the question wording through exhaustive pre-testing and pilot exercises, as we discuss above. In some instances, they apply the same questionnaire across multiple cities, regardless of contextual differences that require question adaptation. In other instances, they use questions that were designed at a desk by the organisation that hired the survey. Develop your own questions and instruments.
- **Take extra effort with training.** Survey firms do not always carry out rigorous recruitment and training processes for field teams. Training in these processes spans well beyond the instrument itself. Some key aspects of training include the following:
  - **Surveyors should be trained in the field.** One of the key components of the training of any surveyor should be going to the field to ask the survey questions in contexts like the one the survey is going to study. Survey firms sometimes rely mainly on classroom training where surveyors practise asking the questionnaire with their colleagues. Testing the questions in real life environments is the best way to prepare surveyors for what they may find when running the survey.

- **Surveyors should have some basic knowledge about the research project.** Some respondents may be hesitant to accept a survey and may want answers to questions on how the information will be used, what the final outcome from the research will look like, who will have access to the information, and so on. Surveyors should be able to provide good answers to these questions, which requires training that goes beyond the application of a questionnaire. When it comes to organised crime, surveyors themselves may have concerns about the questions and the data. Addressing these concerns and preparing surveyors to deal with them takes extra care.
- **Surveyors should have some basic knowledge about the research topic.** The fear of talking about sensitive topics can make people vague, imprecise, or euphemistic when answering survey questions. Because of this, and the slang used to refer to many criminal activities, surveyors should have some basic knowledge about the topic they are researching, in order to distinguish between answers that make sense and answers that do not, and to understand the different ways in which respondents may refer to the same answer.
- **Surveyors should feel comfortable asking sensitive questions.** As happens in many other contexts, your emotions can be easily transmitted to others and affect the way you interact with them. Running

surveys is not an exception. If surveyors feel uncomfortable asking sensitive questions, respondents will probably feel uncomfortable answering them. This is why surveyors should be trained to approach these kinds of questions naturally and avoid transmitting their negative emotions to the respondents.

- **Look out for incomplete sampling frames.** Some survey firms have their own sampling frames, which they build, and update based on administrative data. Sometimes, these sampling frames may not include all the population units, either because they are outdated, the data is unavailable, or their construction process had flaws. These frames may be biased in ways that are related to organised crime or low state capacity. This usually happens with sampling frames of populations that incorporate informality, like slums in the outskirts of cities, which are areas of particular interest in organised crime research.
- **Invest in quality control.** Survey firms do not have a lot of incentives to create and run good quality control systems for their data collection processes. Data collections often suffer from flaws that affect the quality of the data and thus, the conclusions of the study. There are several tools to control the quality of the data collection and the collected data, including high-frequency checks, back-checks, and spot-checks.<sup>7</sup> All these checks can be used to find programming errors, data fabrication, poorly understood questions, surveyor mistakes, and other issues.

<sup>7</sup> Gibson, M (n.d.). *Data Quality Checks*. The Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL), <https://www.povertyactionlab.org/resource/data-quality-checks>.

## Informal indicators that survey data are sensitive or measured with error

Several indicators typically demand quick actions to address them and mitigate the risk of poor-quality data.

- **Interviewer's perceptions.** Qualitatively, interviewers can assess whether respondents were at ease answering the questions and how truthful they think answers are. Although this is a subjective measure, interviewers' perceptions about honesty are also a powerful indicator of accurate answers.
- **High rates of refusal.** If many people refuse to answer a given question, this may be an indication of the sensitiveness of the underlying topic. This is a clear sign that the question is not well suited to collect data about the corresponding topic, as well as an indication that the answers of those who did not refuse to answer could be biased towards the non-sensitive answers.
- **Qualitative-quantitative divergence.** Big differences between the incidence rates of given phenomena shown by administrative or survey data, and the hypothesis on the frequency of the same phenomena built from qualitative data collected through interviews or observation.
- **Divergence between direct and indirect questions.** If many people in a city block report that their neighbours pay extortion, but nobody reports paying themselves, you may be trying to measure a sensitive topic.
- **Incoherent answers to different questions.** There are some questions whose answers are expected to go in a certain direction, given the answers provided to some previous

questions. For example, if someone answered 'yes' to a question asking whether a criminal group charges the neighbourhood households a regular fee, you should not expect that same person to answer in another question that they have not paid any fees to a criminal organisation.

- **Unusual within-neighbourhood variation.** If there are two businesses located in the same street, both have the same size and sell the same products, and one of them reports being victim of extortion and the other one does not, it is possible that extortion is selective, but it may indicate unusually sensitive reporting.

## Methods to formally test for measurement error in survey data

In addition to the common indicators listed above, there are some more formal mechanisms to formally test for measurement error in survey data. Below are some of the most common approaches:

- **Randomised response.** This technique asks respondents to use a coin flip (or other randomisation device) to select which question to answer from a set of two. One is the sensitive question and the other a trivial one, such as whether the respondent is 18 years old or more. Depending on the flip, which is unobserved to the enumerator, the respondent would answer one or another question. Because there is a 50% chance of answering the sensitive question, and the answers to the non-sensitive questions are known – in our case, for instance, all respondents were 18 years old or more – one can retrieve the answer to the sensitive question by using simple arithmetic. This technique has limitations in terms of implementation, as it is not always possible to implement randomisation on site. However, it is widely used<sup>8</sup> across social sciences.

<sup>8</sup> Blair, G, Imai, K & Zhou, Y (2015). 'Design and analysis of the Randomized Response Technique', *Journal of the American Statistical Association*, 110(511), pp.1304–1319.

- **List experiments.** This is an indirect questioning technique commonly used to ask questions about sensitive topics. In our experience, it is difficult to implement and highly imprecise, and not recommended. For the curious: with list experiments, respondents are asked to report ‘how many’ – rather than which – out of a list of situations they have observed or believe are true. There are many limitations to this technique, and we think it is best avoided.
- **Other survey experiments.** In addition to the common randomised response technique and list experiment, there are a wide range of other survey experiments aimed at increasing reporting rates and mitigating problems associated with measurement error.
  - In one study,<sup>9</sup> for instance, researchers experimentally varied the identity of the survey company and its sponsors and showed that non-response rates increased if governments sponsor the survey. While this might be specific to the context (Lebanon) or topic (anti-Americanism), its underlying implications might extend to other research areas and questions.
  - In another study,<sup>10</sup> researchers randomly divided Afghan respondents into two groups. Both groups were asked to rate their support for a prison system reform, with the difference that respondents in the treatment group were told that the policy was endorsed by the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF, the NATO-led mission in Afghanistan). With this endorsement experiment, researchers were able to measure support for the ISAF in areas where the Taliban had a lot of support, without having to directly ask about such a sensitive topic.
- **Qualitative survey data validation.** Another approach to measure and mitigate measurement error is through intensive qualitative work. This technique, recently developed in the context of a cognitive behavioural therapy and cash experiment in Liberia<sup>11</sup> to reduce risky behaviours and crime, consists of following a random sample of respondents to build trust and validate whether the answers they provided were true or not.
- **Test-retest.** The most common way to determine the existence of measurement error is by measuring the same variable twice. If you are running a survey, you can test the reliability of your measures by asking the complete questionnaire or a part of it twice, either to a given respondent or in a given geographical area. Although some answers are expected to vary in a brief period of time, others are not. The back-checks mentioned above are precisely aimed at determining the reliability of survey questions.

9 Corstange, D (2016). ‘Anti-American behavior in the Middle East: Evidence from a field experiment in Lebanon’, *The Journal of Politics*, 78(1), pp. 311–325.

10 Blair, G, Imai, K & Lyall, J (2014). ‘Comparing and combining list and endorsement experiments: Evidence from Afghanistan’ *American Journal of Political Science*, 58(4), pp.1043–1063.

11 Blattman, C, Julian, J, Koroknay-Palicz, T, Rodrigues, K & Sheridan, M (2016). ‘Measuring the measurement error: A method to qualitatively validate survey data’, *Journal of Development Economics*, 120, pp. 99–112.

## 4. Understanding gang structure and organisation through other sources

Besides surveys and qualitative interviews with residents and businesses, there are a large number of other primary and secondary sources for information on organised crime.

### Common informants

- **Community leaders.** Community leaders usually know the day-to-day life of their neighbourhoods very well and this usually includes knowing about the operations of the local gangs. Some community leaders have even had to directly interact with the gangs, for example to coordinate actions or to mediate in conflicts.
- **Community members.** Regular inhabitants of the neighbourhoods usually know something about the gangs. In the end, the gangs exert control over their lives. Although some of them may not know much, others may have had direct interactions with the gangs and, because of the nature of those interactions – many of them have been direct victims – they are willing to talk and express their frustrations and suffering.
- **Former gang members.** Former gang members know how the gangs work and have the ability to identify the changes that occur in their dynamics over time. They usually maintain relationships with active gang members and can provide an interesting insider-outsider perspective on the gangs.
- **Low-level municipal officials.** The local government has street-level bureaucrats in charge of managing problems, issues, or processes that make them directly or

indirectly interact with the gangs. This is the case of different types of officials in charge of managing conflicts or promoting conflict management strategies in the neighbourhoods. Since the gangs usually intervene in such conflicts or are parties to them, these officials usually know how the gangs operate and the kind of interests they defend.

- **NGOs.** There are usually NGOs working with populations at risk on issues related to crime prevention, rehabilitation of hallucinogen use, opportunities for ex-convicts, and so on. These NGOs are regularly aware of the groups that operate in their areas of influence and also have information provided by their target audience.
- **Experts.** Experts may have access to information sources including gang members. They may also have specific knowledge about a neighbourhood, a group, or a historical process.

### Other potential sources

There is a wide array of other sources to cross-validate, complement and generate data on organised crime. These include, in our experience, the following:

- **Administrative criminal investigation data.** Oftentimes, records of criminal investigations are public, or they can be legally accessed through academic or journalistic permissions. In our case, we accessed transcripts of some of the most relevant trials concerning organised crime in Colombia. These include depositions as well as other court testimonies and records. Because of the nature of criminal investigations, these records include details that are frequently relevant for academic research and the understanding of organised crime.
- One example<sup>12</sup> of this kind of data (in this case, accessed informally but following all ethics and institutional review protocols) is the drug operation and criminal codes of the Primeiro Comando da Capital in São Paulo, Brazil.

<sup>12</sup> Lessing, B & Willis, G (2010). 'Legitimacy in criminal governance: Managing a drug empire from behind bars', *American Political Science Review*, 113(2), pp. 584–606.

- **Anonymous tip lines.** Also important are additional sources of tip lines describing organised crime activities.
  - One prominent example is that of the Disque Denúncia tip line in Rio de Janeiro. Residents call anonymously to this line and provide details of how organised crime works, what gang members do, their sources of revenue, as well as other relevant information. These data, which we have accessed through formal agreements, have been used by other researchers<sup>13</sup> to study organised crime and its consequences.
- **Firm data.** Another relevant source for this kind of data is firm information.
  - One prominent example is related to an extortion study<sup>14</sup> in El Salvador, where a delivery firm handed over data on extortion payments to a group of researchers studying the determinants of extortion and gang behaviour.
- **News articles and media content.** In many cities, you will find experienced journalists with privileged access to the underworld. Some of them publish good quality articles that include untold testimonies from criminal actors. In Medellín, for example, there is a blog called 'Underworld Revelations'.<sup>15</sup> In addition to interesting articles, the comments section of the blog is usually full of entries from readers that provide additional information on the criminal actors and activities referred to by the articles.
- **Research papers and books.** Finally, never forget that other scholars may have done previous research on your topics. Make sure you conduct exhaustive literature reviews, and be sure to cover the local production of research.

## 5. Protecting your informants

Conducting research about criminal organisations and activities may pose additional and special risks for research subjects. Law enforcement and criminal organisations may think the individuals participating in your study will put them at risk by sharing sensitive information and may decide to retaliate against them. Here are some ideas on how to deal with these additional and special risks. A wider reflection on ethics and additional guidelines for research in violent contexts can be found in Cronin-Furman and Lake (2018).<sup>16</sup>

- In some research contexts, signing a written consent form could put research subjects at risk. When research topics are sensitive and there are third parties that could retaliate against research subjects for participation, it may be wise to avoid the explicit link with the study that signing a form creates for research subjects.
- Something similar applies to field notes. Even if you do not collect personal identifiable information, notes on specific things like places or activities could be eventually linked to your research subjects. This is why, in some contexts, field notes should not include this kind of information and you will need to rely on your memory. In some contexts, field notes should not even be taken at all.
- Make sure no one is listening to your interviews and try to conduct them in private spaces. Even if you are sure that no one is listening, someone may be watching, and this could have negative consequences for your research subject once you leave.

13 Monteiro, J. & Rocha, R (2017). 'Drug battles and school achievement: Evidence from Rio de Janeiro's favelas', *The Review of Economics and Statistics*, 99(2), pp. 213–228.

14 Brown, Z, Montero, E, Schmidt-Padilla, C & Sviatschi, MM (2020). 'Market Structure and Extortion: Evidence from 50,000 Extortion Payments'. *NBER Working Papers* 28299. <https://doi.org/10.3386/w28299>.

15 El Colombiano (2022). 'Revelaciones del Bajo Mundo', blog, <https://www.elcolombiano.com/blogs/revelacionesdelbajomundo/la-terrazza-explotaba-una-cantera-en-el-nororiente-de-medellin/10913#more-10913>.

16 Cronin-Furman, K & Lake, M (2018). 'Ethics abroad: Fieldwork in fragile and violent contexts', *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 51(3), pp. 607–614.

- Avoid taking to the field electronic devices (such as mobile phones, tablets, or laptops) through which personal identifiable information can be accessed. Although the information may be password protected, some organisations may threaten you to get the passwords and then confiscate the devices.
- If you are conducting research with victims of crime or trauma, make sure your research staff get additional professional training. You need to avoid generating adverse consequences for subjects as a result of participating in the research like revictimisation and retraumatisation.
- Protect your data from being hacked and misused. As Koopman (2017)<sup>17</sup> suggests, the military, the police, or other law enforcement agencies may not only be reading your published work. They may also be accessing your data, monitoring your activities, or even listening to your interviews. This is an additional reason to password-protect and encrypt your sensitive data and put away your phone when conducting interviews about sensitive topics (turning it off may not be enough).
- For no reason should a source be exposed, even if it is someone known or who is part of the same organisation you are interviewing. Keep in mind that criminal organisations are jealous of information especially if it is sensitive, and can take reprisals against sources.
- Finally, ask yourself if you would be comfortable with someone else asking your family members to follow the research procedures you are asking research subjects to follow. If the answer is no, think carefully about what you could change for the answer to become yes.

## 6. Other resources

- In this article,<sup>18</sup> Williams, Dunlap, Johnson, and Hamid (1992) draw from their ethnographic research and field experience studying crack distributors in New York to provide some recommendations on how to conduct research safely in dangerous settings. Their recommendations are related to things such as the correct type of clothes to wear during fieldwork, the importance of not being perceived as a potential victim, and the need to find someone to perform a protector role for the researcher.
- In this article,<sup>19</sup> Campbell (2017) claims that ‘the basic ethical principles established to guide research on human subjects are necessary but insufficient for research in conflict and post-conflict environments’ (p. 89). According to her, conflict environments pose special challenges and dilemmas associated with obtaining truly informed consent, maintaining confidentiality and data security, judging risk and benefit, and dealing with researcher security and emotional impact on the researcher.
- In this book chapter,<sup>20</sup> Norman (2009) draws from her experiences conducting semi-structured interviews, surveys, and participant observation in the Occupied Palestinian Territories to make a series of recommendations for establishing trust and gaining access in conflict zones. The recommendations include things to do before, during, and after fieldwork.

17 Koopman, S (2017, May 9). ‘How to Keep You and Your Sources Safe in The Age of Surveillance’. *The Huffington Post*, <https://www.huffpost.com/>.

18 Williams, T, Dunlap, E, Johnson, B & Hamid, A (1992). ‘Personal safety in dangerous places’, *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 21(3), pp. 343–374.

19 Campbell, S (2017). ‘Ethics of research in Conflict Environments’, *Journal of Global Security Studies*, 2(1), pp. 89–101.

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