

PO8053
Interviews in Political Science

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Course description

This course focuses on the use of interviews as a data collection strategy in political science research. Interviews are a very rich and fruitful source of data. What roles do different kinds of interviews play in a broader research design? How can we plan and conduct interviews in order to extract the maximum amount and best quality information from this method? What ethical issues need to be considered? How can interview data be used to draw inferences about politics? This module has an applied approach and will give students a hands-on experience of conducting and analyzing interview data.

Learning outcomes

By the end of the course students should be able to:

- Understand the different ways in which interviews can be designed and used in the context of an overall research design
- Identify when interviews are an appropriate data collection method to use
- Understand the key ethical dimensions to interviewing
- Design an interview question schedule
- Have greater understanding of how to conduct interviews
- Be able to analyze interview transcripts
- Design a research project that uses interviews as the key data collection method

Course structure

There will be 5 weekly seminars of 3 hours and is worth 5 ECTS credits. Attendance at these seminars is compulsory. Please contact me in advance by email if you cannot make a seminar.

Assessment

Participation (20%):

You will be evaluated on your participation in class: how actively you contribute to the discussion, demonstrate preparation for class, and critically engage with the material.

Class exercises (20%):

Class exercise 1: This assignment asks you to choose two of the readings for week 2 and analyze the different ways in which interviews are used as a data source in the article. Are the interviewees the subject of analysis or not? Is the theoretical approach inductive or deductive? Is this a case study or not? How does the use of the interview

data vary depending on the ways in which the method is embedded in the overall research design? How might the approach to the interviews have varied depending on the differing objectives?

Class exercise 2: Before class 3 choose one of the articles discussed in the previous class and reconstruct the interview schedule, and list of interviewees, that would have been needed to gather the data used in the article, explaining the rationale for your question choices.

Class exercise 3: A) Before class you will prepare a consent form and an interview schedule for the mock interview to be conducted in class. B) After class you will write a short reflection piece (500-600 words) on your experience of conducting the interview. Did the interview go as planned? Did you elicit the information you expected? What would be different if you were conducting this interview with someone you did not know in an unfamiliar setting?

Final Assignment (60%): The final assignment involves a research proposal that uses interviews as the major data collection method. You need to; identify a research question that can be answered using interview data; outline relevant research on this topic (specifically engaging with whether this question has been addressed previously using interviews and how your empirical approach relates to the existing literature); discuss your theoretical approach and, if deductive, the analytical framework you will use for analyzing the data; describe in detail how you will approach the interviews. The latter should involve: identifying whether the interviewees are the subject or not and the implications of this, the contextual setting of the interviews and how this relates to the broader research objectives, the ethical issues involved in the research, the proposed interviewees and how they will be identified, the form of questioning (you should also include an interview question schedule) and how the data will be coded and analyzed.

Academic Dishonesty and Citations

The university takes plagiarism very seriously. There are severe penalties associated with passing someone else's work off as one's own. This includes plagiarizing the work of others, using an essay writing service, or any similar activity. All written assignments will pass through an electronic plagiarism checker. Remember that careless note-taking can lead to this happening: remember to enclose direct quotations in quotation marks, and even when paraphrasing, ensure that a reference is provided. The university's policy regarding plagiarism can be found at: <http://www.tcd.ie/undergraduate-studies/general-regulations/plagiarism.php>.

Please use the Harvard style of citations with the authors name, year of publication and page reference in brackets in the text and the full quotation in the reference list at the end of the essay. Wikipedia, blogs, and other such online sources might be useful as a first step but they should not be relied upon when writing essays.

These readings are subject to change. Additional material may be added.

Week One: Introduction

In this class I will provide an overview of the different ways in which interviews can be designed and used in the context of an overall research design.

Mosley, Layna, ed. *Interview research in political science*. Cornell University Press, 2013. Introduction and Chapter 1

Week Two:

In this class we will discuss example articles that use interviews as one of or the main source of data in order to understand the different ways in which this data is used. The questions we will discuss, and which you should address in your assignment are:

Why are interviews the right methods used in these articles and what is their value to the research and the wider literature? Are the interviewees the object of analysis or not? Is the theoretical approach inductive or deductive? Is this a case study or not? How do these affect the sampling strategy, the questions asked, how the data is analyzed and presented? How does the use of the interview data vary depending on the ways in which the method is embedded in the overall research design? How are other sources of data used? How might the author have improved the information provided in the article about his/her methods?

Fenno, Richard F. "US House members in their constituencies: An exploration." *American Political Science Review* 71, no. 3 (1977): 883-917.

Tallberg, Jonas (2008) "Bargaining Power in the European Council", *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Volume 46. Number 3. pp. 685–708.

Cornell, Agnes. "Why bureaucratic stability matters for the implementation of democratic governance programs." *Governance* 27, no. 2 (2014): 191-214.

Cammett, Melani, and Sukriti Issar. "Bricks and mortar clientelism: sectarianism and the logics of welfare allocation in Lebanon." *World Politics* 62, no. 3 (2010): 381-421.

Richards, Joanne. "Forced, coerced and voluntary recruitment into rebel and militia groups in the Democratic Republic of Congo." *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 52, no. 2 (2014): 301-326.

Cohen, Dara Kay. "Female combatants and the perpetration of violence: Wartime rape in the Sierra Leone civil war." *World Politics* 65, no. 3 (2013): 383-415.

Week Three:

In this class we will discuss interview preparation: obtaining ethical approval, how to construct your interview schedule, and the practicalities of conducting interviews. We will begin preparing for the mock interviews the following week.

Readings

Harvey, William S. "Strategies for conducting elite interviews." *Qualitative research* 11, no. 4 (2011): 431-441.

Leech, B. L. 2002. *Asking Questions: Techniques for Semi-structured Interviews,* PS: Political Science & Politics. Cambridge University Press, 35(4), 665–668

Aberbach, Joel D., and Bert A. Rockman. "Conducting and coding elite interviews." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 35, no. 4 (2002): 673-676.

Goldstein, Kenneth. "Getting in the door: Sampling and completing elite interviews." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 35, no. 4 (2002): 669-672.

Week Four:

In this class in pairs you will conduct mock interviews using the consent form and interview schedule that you have prepared. We will then debrief after the interviews to reflect on the experience.

Reading

Mosley, Layna, ed. *Interview research in political science*. Cornell University Press, 2013. Chapter 4, 5, 6 (plus see appendix for example interview schedules)

Week Five:

In this class we will focus on how to analyze interview transcripts using either inductive or deductive approaches. We will also discuss the final assignment.

Reading

Mosley, Layna, ed. *Interview research in political science*. Cornell University Press, 2013. Chapter 9