

# **Interviewing, Structured and Unstructured**

Department of Government  
London School of Economics and Political Science

- 1 Formative Work
- 2 Participant Observation
- 3 Questionnaire Methods
  - Recall-type Questions
  - Evaluative Questions
  - Sensitive Topics
- 4 Elite Interviewing

# 1 Formative Work

## 2 Participant Observation

## 3 Questionnaire Methods

- Recall-type Questions
- Evaluative Questions
- Sensitive Topics

## 4 Elite Interviewing

# Problem Set 2

- Seems like there were some issues with concept definition
- How did that go? What was challenging about it?

# Classical Approach

- Specify a set of “constitutive dimensions” that *are* the concept
  - Fundamental characteristics of the concept
  - Not causes or effects
  - Not measures of the concept

# Classical Approach

- Specify a set of “constitutive dimensions” that *are* the concept
  - Fundamental characteristics of the concept
  - Not causes or effects
  - Not measures of the concept
- Dimensions are *necessary and jointly sufficient*

# Family Resemblance

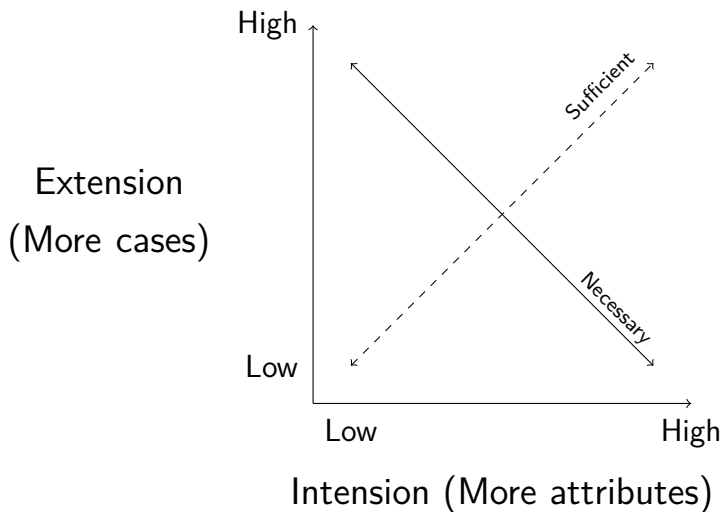
- Classical approach focuses on *necessary* elements
- Some concepts have no necessary elements but are still meaningful

# Family Resemblance

- Classical approach focuses on *necessary* elements
- Some concepts have no necessary elements but are still meaningful
- We might also think about elements that are *sufficient* to establish membership



# Trade-offs



# Small Points

- 1 Follow the formatting guidelines
- 2 Do not copy the questions into the assignment
- 3 Be succinct but expressive and clear
- 4 Be anonymous (filename and contents)

# Strengths and “Wish For”s

## Strengths

- Classical approach
- Case Identification

# Strengths and “Wish For”s

## Strengths

- Classical approach
- Case Identification

## Wish For

- Clarity of family resemblance definitions
- Completeness of measurement and operationalization

# Concept Definition I

- Example of classical definition:  
“the illegal use of violence or threat by an individual or a group in service of a political agenda with the intention of creating a climate of fear or insecurity”

# Concept Definition I

- Example of classical definition:  
“the illegal use of violence or threat by an individual or a group in service of a political agenda with the intention of creating a climate of fear or insecurity”
- Essential features:

# Concept Definition I

- Example of classical definition:  
“the **illegal use of violence or threat** by an individual or a group in service of a political agenda with the intention of creating a climate of fear or insecurity”
- Essential features:
  - **Illegal use of violence or threat**

# Concept Definition I

- Example of classical definition:  
“the illegal use of violence or threat **by an individual or a group** in service of a political agenda with the intention of creating a climate of fear or insecurity”
- Essential features:
  - Illegal use of violence or threat
  - **Carried out by individual or group**



# Concept Definition I

- Example of classical definition:  
“the illegal use of violence or threat by an individual or a group **in service of a political agenda** with the intention of creating a climate of fear or insecurity”
- Essential features:
  - Illegal use of violence or threat
  - Carried out by individual or group
  - **Service to a political agenda**

# Concept Definition I

- Example of classical definition:  
“the illegal use of violence or threat by an individual or a group in service of a political agenda with the **intention of creating a climate of fear or insecurity**”
- Essential features:
  - Illegal use of violence or threat
  - Carried out by individual or group
  - Service to a political agenda
  - **Intention to create climate of fear or insecurity**

# Concept Definition II

- Sufficient features?
  - 1 Illegal use of (violence or threat)
  - 2 Carried out by (individual or group)
  - 3 Service to a political agenda
  - 4 Intention to create (climate of fear or insecurity)

# Concept Definition II

- Sufficient features?
  - 1 Illegal use of (violence or threat)
  - 2 Carried out by (individual or group)
  - 3 Service to a political agenda
  - 4 Intention to create (climate of fear or insecurity)
- Examples of sufficiency:
  - 1,3,4 (allows state actions to be terrorism)
  - 2,3,4 (allows non-violence to be terrorism)
  - 1,2,4 (allows criminal activity to be terrorism)
  - 1,2,3 OR 1,2,4 (can be political or fear-inducing)

# Operationalization

## 1 Measure features

- Level of measurement
- How to score each case on each feature
- Be concrete (e.g., carbombing versus railway bombing)

## 2 Aggregate feature measurements

- Sum? Average? AND logical?
- Level of measurement of final scale
- Range of possible values
- Justify against criticisms/alternatives

# Problem Set 3

- Any challenges with this so far?

# Research Proposal

- This is a *prospectus*
  - Introduction
  - Theoretical literature review
  - Plan of data collection
  - Planned analysis
  - Reflective, critical conclusion

# Research Proposal

- This is a *prospectus*
  - Introduction
  - Theoretical literature review
  - Plan of data collection
  - Planned analysis
  - Reflective, critical conclusion
- Presentations are intended for feedback
  - You can change your topic later
  - Please also use office hours



Formative Work

Participant Observation

Questionnaires

Elites

- 1 Formative Work
- 2 Participant Observation
- 3 Questionnaire Methods
  - Recall-type Questions
  - Evaluative Questions
  - Sensitive Topics
- 4 Elite Interviewing

1 Formative Work

2 Participant Observation

3 Questionnaire Methods

- Recall-type Questions
- Evaluative Questions
- Sensitive Topics

4 Elite Interviewing

# “Field work”

- Any research activity outside the university setting
  - Textual or archival searches
  - Interviews (structured or unstructured)
  - Focus groups
  - Participant observation
  - Some mix of these
- Term is agnostic about approach, theory, and method
- Might be one-off, sporadic, or long-term

# Participant Observation

- Definition: “Participant observation is a research strategy whereby the researcher becomes involved in a social situation for the purpose of understanding the behaviour of those engaged in the setting. . . The outcome of the research is a detailed account of the activities and behaviour of those involved.”<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>p.265 from Burnham et al. 2008. *Research Methods in Politics*. 2nd Edition. Palgrave.

# Participant Observation

# Participant Observation

- Intentionally subjective/reflective; no belief in possible observational objectivity

# Participant Observation

- Intentionally subjective/reflective; no belief in possible observational objectivity
- Generally inductive in nature



# Participant Observation

- Intentionally subjective/reflective; no belief in possible observational objectivity
- Generally inductive in nature
- Typically does not generate DSOs

# Assorted Examples

- 1 Goffman, A. 2014. *On the Run: Fugitive Life in an American City*. Chicago.

# Assorted Examples

- 1 Goffman, A. 2014. *On the Run: Fugitive Life in an American City*. Chicago.
- 2 Fenno, R. 1978. *Home Style: U.S. House Members in their Districts*. Pearson.

# Assorted Examples

- 1 Goffman, A. 2014. *On the Run: Fugitive Life in an American City*. Chicago.
- 2 Fenno, R. 1978. *Home Style: U.S. House Members in their Districts*. Pearson.
- 3 Cramer, K. 2016. *The Politics of Resentment*. Chicago.

# Assorted Examples

- 1 Goffman, A. 2014. *On the Run: Fugitive Life in an American City*. Chicago.
- 2 Fenno, R. 1978. *Home Style: U.S. House Members in their Districts*. Pearson.
- 3 Cramer, K. 2016. *The Politics of Resentment*. Chicago.
- 4 Nielsen, R.K. 2012. *Ground Wars*. Princeton.

# Assorted Examples

- 1 Goffman, A. 2014. *On the Run: Fugitive Life in an American City*. Chicago.
- 2 Fenno, R. 1978. *Home Style: U.S. House Members in their Districts*. Pearson.
- 3 Cramer, K. 2016. *The Politics of Resentment*. Chicago.
- 4 Nielsen, R.K. 2012. *Ground Wars*. Princeton.
- 5 Festinger, Riecken, and Schachter. 1956. *When Prophecy Fails*. Harper.

# Four Ideal Types<sup>2</sup>

- 1 Complete participant
- 2 Participant as observer
- 3 Observer as participant
- 4 Complete observer

---

<sup>2</sup>Gold, R. 1958. "Roles in Sociological Field Observation." *Social Forces* 36(3): 217–23.

# Complete participant

- Participate without disclosing observer/researcher role
- Essentially covert (“being undercover”)
- May be useful in sensitive domains
- Raises ethical concerns



# Participant as observer

- Participate, but not fully
- Retain explicit observer role
- Negotiate exact role in the situation and access to group members and information

# Observer as participant

- Essentially interviews
- Limited time frames
- Note: Sometimes seen as indistinguishable from “complete observer”

# Complete observer

- Purely observer role; no participation
- Still requires negotiated access in many cases, but may not require the same types of consent as participant roles
- Easier to keep a distance and avoid “rapport” with group members

# Participant vs. Observer

- Not always a choice
  - Access might be limited
  - Ethical obligations

# Participant vs. Observer

- Not always a choice
  - Access might be limited
  - Ethical obligations
- Is situation public vs. private?

# Participant vs. Observer

- Not always a choice
  - Access might be limited
  - Ethical obligations
- Is situation public vs. private?
- How does your presence change the situation?

# Participant vs. Observer

- Not always a choice
  - Access might be limited
  - Ethical obligations
- Is situation public vs. private?
- How does your presence change the situation?
- How does being a participant change your interpretations of events?

# Participant vs. Observer

- Not always a choice
  - Access might be limited
  - Ethical obligations
- Is situation public vs. private?
- How does your presence change the situation?
- How does being a participant change your interpretations of events?
- How does being an observer change your interpretation of events?



# Ethnography vs. Journalism

What's the difference?

Formative Work

Participant Observation

Questionnaires

Elites

1 Formative Work

2 Participant Observation

3 Questionnaire Methods

- Recall-type Questions
- Evaluative Questions
- Sensitive Topics

4 Elite Interviewing

In lieu of direct observation/participation, we may ask *other people* to *describe* the phenomena we are interested in by asking them *questions*.

In lieu of direct observation/participation, we may ask *other people* to *describe* the phenomena we are interested in by asking them *questions*.

- May generate DSOs

In lieu of direct observation/participation, we may ask *other people* to *describe* the phenomena we are interested in by asking them *questions*.

- May generate DSOs
- May generate other kinds of descriptions

# Topics of questions

- Recall
  - Behaviour
  - Knowledge and beliefs
  - Perceptions
  - Demographics
- Evaluation
  - Opinions

# Structure of a question



# Structure of a question

- 1 Survey mode

# Structure of a question

- 1 Survey mode
- 2 Survey context

# Structure of a question

- 1 Survey mode
- 2 Survey context
- 3 Vignette or introductory text

# Structure of a question

- 1 Survey mode
- 2 Survey context
- 3 Vignette or introductory text
- 4 Question itself

# Structure of a question

- 1 Survey mode
- 2 Survey context
- 3 Vignette or introductory text
- 4 Question itself
- 5 Response format and options

# Structure of a question

- 1 Survey mode
- 2 Survey context
- 3 Vignette or introductory text
- 4 Question itself
- 5 Response format and options
- 6 Follow-ups, branches, checks, validation, clarification

# Questions as Operationalization

- Questionnaires start with concept definition
- Multiple ways to operationalize any concept
- Important concepts may require multiple measures
- Question should measure concept of interest

# Problem Set 4

- Work as class groups to conduct a “pilot” study
- Use a Eurobarometer survey of your choice
- Conduct in-person interviews
- Evaluate process of collecting interview data



# Evaluating a questionnaire

## Evaluating a questionnaire

- Is the question easy for respondents to understand?

## Evaluating a questionnaire

- Is the question easy for respondents to understand?
- Are the number and types of response options appropriate?

## Evaluating a questionnaire

- Is the question easy for respondents to understand?
- Are the number and types of response options appropriate?
- Are the categories sufficiently distinct from one another?

## Evaluating a questionnaire

- Is the question easy for respondents to understand?
- Are the number and types of response options appropriate?
- Are the categories sufficiently distinct from one another?
- Is a “no opinion,” “don’t know,” or “neither support nor oppose” response option available?

## Evaluating a questionnaire

- Is the question easy for respondents to understand?
- Are the number and types of response options appropriate?
- Are the categories sufficiently distinct from one another?
- Is a “no opinion,” “don’t know,” or “neither support nor oppose” response option available?
- Is one survey item (i.e., one question) sufficient to measure this construct?

## Evaluating a questionnaire

- Is the question easy for respondents to understand?
- Are the number and types of response options appropriate?
- Are the categories sufficiently distinct from one another?
- Is a “no opinion,” “don’t know,” or “neither support nor oppose” response option available?
- Is one survey item (i.e., one question) sufficient to measure this construct?
- How long does it take to read and answer this question?

Formative Work

Participant Observation

Questionnaires

Elites



# Cognitive interviewing methods

# Cognitive interviewing methods

- Retrospective think-alouds

# Cognitive interviewing methods

- Retrospective think-alouds
- Paraphrasing

# Cognitive interviewing methods

- Retrospective think-alouds
- Paraphrasing
- Definitions

# Cognitive interviewing methods

- Retrospective think-alouds
- Paraphrasing
- Definitions
- Probes

# Cognitive interviewing methods

- Retrospective think-alouds
- Paraphrasing
- Definitions
- Probes
- General discussion/evaluation

# Recall-type Questions

- Knowledge
- Behaviour
- Events

# Recalling Knowledge

- Factual items with “true” responses
  - Political knowledge
  - Knowledge about products/services
  - General knowledge
- How do we deal with “don’t know” responses?
  - Genuine expression of lack of knowledge?
  - Insufficient time to think?
  - Question was unclear/ambiguous?



# Recalling Behaviours

- Things respondent did in the past
  - Media use
  - Eating/dietary habits
  - Past voting
- Challenging to measure accurately
- Can (sometimes) be easily validated

# What affects responses to recall questions?

- Question misunderstanding
  - Vague concepts
  - Confusing or long wording

# What affects responses to recall questions?

- Question misunderstanding
  - Vague concepts
  - Confusing or long wording
- Forgetting

# What affects responses to recall questions?

- Question misunderstanding
  - Vague concepts
  - Confusing or long wording
- Forgetting
- Recency/primacy biases among responses

# What affects responses to recall questions?

- Question misunderstanding
  - Vague concepts
  - Confusing or long wording
- Forgetting
- Recency/primacy biases among responses
- Motivated misreporting

# What affects responses to recall questions?

- Question misunderstanding
  - Vague concepts
  - Confusing or long wording
- Forgetting
- Recency/primacy biases among responses
- Motivated misreporting
- Reference period ambiguity

# What affects responses to recall questions?

- Question misunderstanding
  - Vague concepts
  - Confusing or long wording
- Forgetting
- Recency/primacy biases among responses
- Motivated misreporting
- Reference period ambiguity
- Rare events

# What affects responses to recall questions?

- Question misunderstanding
  - Vague concepts
  - Confusing or long wording
- Forgetting
- Recency/primacy biases among responses
- Motivated misreporting
- Reference period ambiguity
- Rare events
- True “don’t know” responses



# Motivated misreporting

- Intentionally giving an incorrect response
  - Applies to recall and evaluative questions

# Motivated misreporting

- Intentionally giving an incorrect response
  - Applies to recall and evaluative questions
- Several common biases

# Motivated misreporting

- Intentionally giving an incorrect response
  - Applies to recall and evaluative questions
- Several common biases
  - Social desirability bias
  - Acquiescence bias
  - Demand characteristics

Formative Work

Participant Observation

Questionnaires

Elites

# Evaluative questions

- Name an object of evaluation
- Possibly describe that object
- Ask for a transformation of the evaluation onto a set of responses

# Question templates

- Ratings
  - Several varieties of rating scales
- Scales/Thermometers
- Agree-disagree
- Forced choices
- Open-ended
- Rankings (note: need alternatives to rank against)

# Additional Considerations

- How many response categories?
- Middle category (presence and label)
- “no opinion” and/or “don’t know” options
- Probe if “no opinion” or “don’t know”?
  - Encourage guessing?
  - Clarify/describe object of evaluation?
- Branching format?

# Activity Example

- Public opinion survey in Great Britain
- Construct: Opinion toward UK involvement in air strikes on Islamic State militants in Iraq and Syria
- Think about strengths and weaknesses of each question



## Example: Rating (bipolar)

Do you support or oppose Great Britain's participation in U.S.-led air strikes on Islamic State (IS) in Iraq and Syria?

- Strongly support
- Somewhat support
- Neither support nor oppose
- Somewhat oppose
- Strongly oppose

# Example: Rating (branching)

Do you support or oppose Great Britain's participation in U.S.-led air strikes on Islamic State (IS) in Iraq and Syria?

- Support
- Neither support nor oppose
- Oppose

## Example: Rating (branching)

Do you support or oppose Great Britain's participation in U.S.-led air strikes on Islamic State (IS) in Iraq and Syria?

- Support
- Neither support nor oppose
- Oppose

Would you say that you strongly [support—oppose] or somewhat [support—oppose] Great Britain's participation?

- Strongly
- Somewhat

## Example: Rating (bipolar)

Are you favourable or unfavourable toward Great Britain's participation in U.S.-led air strikes on Islamic State (IS) in Iraq and Syria?

- Very favourable
- Somewhat favourable
- Neither favourable nor unfavourable
- Somewhat unfavourable
- Strongly unfavourable

## Example: Rating (unipolar)

To what extent do you support Great Britain's participation in U.S.-led air strikes on Islamic State (IS) in Iraq and Syria?

- Strongly
- Moderately
- Somewhat
- Not at all

## Example: Rating (unipolar)

How favourable are you toward Great Britain's participation in U.S.-led air strikes on Islamic State (IS) in Iraq and Syria?

- Extremely favourable
- Very favourable
- Moderately favourable
- Somewhat favourable
- Not at all favourable

## Example: Numbered Scale

On a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 being “strongly oppose” and 5 being “strongly support,” to what extent do you support Great Britain’s participation in U.S.-led air strikes on Islamic State (IS) in Iraq and Syria?

1 Strongly oppose

2

3

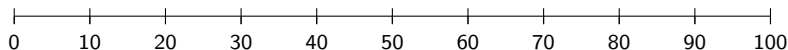
4

5 Strongly support

# Example: Thermometer

We would like to get your feelings toward some of political policies. Please rate your support for the policy using something we call the feeling thermometer. Ratings between 50 degrees and 100 degrees mean that you feel favourable and warm toward the policy. Ratings between 0 degrees and 50 degrees mean that you don't feel favourable toward the policy. You would rate the policy at the 50 degree mark if you don't feel particularly favourable or unfavourable toward.

Great Britain's participation in U.S.-led air strikes on Islamic State (IS) in Iraq and Syria.





## Example: Agree/Disagree (bipolar)

To what extent do you agree with the following statement: I support Great Britain's participation in U.S.-led air strikes on Islamic State (IS) in Iraq and Syria.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

## Example: Agree/Disagree (unipolar)

To what extent do you agree with the following statement: I support Great Britain's participation in U.S.-led air strikes on Islamic State (IS) in Iraq and Syria.

- Agree completely
- Agree to a large extent
- Agree to a moderate extent
- Agree a little bit
- Agree not at all

## Example: Forced choice

When thinking about Great Britain's participation in U.S.-led air strikes on Islamic State (IS) in Iraq and Syria, which of the following comes closer to your opinion:

- Great Britain should participate in air strikes
- Great Britain should not participate in air strikes

## Example: Open-ended

In your own words, how would you describe your opinion on Great Britain's participation in U.S.-led air strikes on Islamic State (IS) in Iraq and Syria?

Formative Work

Participant Observation

Questionnaires

Elites

# Sensitive Questions

- Definition: Topics “seen as intrusive or embarrassing”

# Sensitive Questions

- Definition: Topics “seen as intrusive or embarrassing”
- Factors affecting topic sensitivity
  - Individual differences
  - Mode
  - Interviewer
  - Survey context
  - Survey sponsorship
  - Perceived privacy

# Sensitive Questions

- Definition: Topics “seen as intrusive or embarrassing”
- Factors affecting topic sensitivity
  - Individual differences
  - Mode
  - Interviewer
  - Survey context
  - Survey sponsorship
  - Perceived privacy
- Why do we care?



# Sensitive Questions Activity

# Sensitive Questions Activity

- 1 To the nearest \$1,000, what is your parents' total household income?

# Sensitive Questions Activity

- 1 To the nearest \$1,000, what is your parents' total household income?
- 2 Have you ever stolen anything from a current or former employer?

# Sensitive Questions Activity

- 1 To the nearest \$1,000, what is your parents' total household income?
- 2 Have you ever stolen anything from a current or former employer?
- 3 When was the last time you had unprotected sex?

# Sensitive Questions Activity

- 1 To the nearest \$1,000, what is your parents' total household income?
- 2 Have you ever stolen anything from a current or former employer?
- 3 When was the last time you had unprotected sex?
- 4 During today's lecture, how much time have you spent on your computer on things unrelated to this course?

# Eliciting Sensitive Answers

- Ensure privacy, anonymity, or confidentiality
- Change modes
- Indirect measures
- Provide population base rates
- Placement in survey instrument

Formative Work

Participant Observation

Questionnaires

Elites

1 Formative Work

2 Participant Observation

3 Questionnaire Methods

- Recall-type Questions
- Evaluative Questions
- Sensitive Topics

4 Elite Interviewing



# Elite Interviewing

- Rules of questionnaire design style apply
- Unique challenges/opportunities:
  - Time constraints
  - Guarantees of anonymity?
  - Public information may be available
  - Often exempt from research ethics review

# Structured versus Unstructured

- “Structured” interviews
  - Strict order of questions
  - Questions are precisely worded
  - Often, closed set of response categories

# Structured versus Unstructured

- “Structured” interviews
  - Strict order of questions
  - Questions are precisely worded
  - Often, closed set of response categories
- Elite interviews often “semi-structured”
  - Greater use of open-ended questions
  - More flexible ordering of questions
  - More respondent-driven



# Focus Groups

- Definition: “A discussion among a small number of members of a target population, guided by a moderator.”<sup>3</sup>
- A bridge between interviewing and ethnography
  - Less structured than an interview
  - Typically brief (1-2 hours)
  - Gather mostly *qualitative* data

---

<sup>3</sup>Groves et al. 2009. *Survey Methodology*. 2nd Edition. Wiley.