Lauren M. MacLean is associate professor of political science at Indiana University. E-mail: macleanl@indiana.edu.

Cathie Jo Martin is professor of political science at Boston University. E-mail: cjmartin@bu.edu.

Layna Mosley is professor of political science at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. E-mail mosley@unc.edu.

Robert Pekkanen is chair of the Japan Studies Program and associate professor at the Henry M. Jackson School of International Studies at the University of Washington. E-mail: pekkanen@u.washington.edu.

William Reno is associate professor in the Department of Political Science at Northwestern University. E-mail reno@northwestern.org; also see www.will reno.org.

Reuel R. Rogers is associate professor in the Department of Political Science at Northwestern University. E-mail: r-rogers@northwestern.edu.

Introduction

"JUST TALK TO PEOPLE"? INTERVIEWS IN CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL SCIENCE

Layna Mosley

In December 1996, I was preparing to begin my dissertation research in earnest. I had received a fellowship to conduct research abroad, and I was excited to finally "do" political science. My proposed project involved identifying the ways in which financial market participants considered government policies and political institutions as part of their investment decisions. I had fulfilled my course requirements, defended my dissertation prospectus, and arranged for housing in London. I had even set up a few initial meetings with professional investors there, so that I could use my time in the field efficiently. But beyond making those first appointments, I had little idea how to identify and select interview subjects, how to interview someone, how much interview material to gather, or what to do with my interview material once I had it. Worried that I might confess too much in terms of my ignorance, but also concerned that I use my fellowship funding wisely, I broached the subject with one of my dissertation committee members.

His advice to me? "Just talk to people." When I pressed the issue, he explained that, once I had met a few professional investors, academics, and journalists, they would be able to recommend others to me, and I could take it from there. And he suggested that, through these initial meetings, I also would figure out how to ask the right questions, as well as how to conduct a meeting, take notes, and sift through the information. To an extent, this was all good advice: my mentor had done his share of time in the field, and he was right that interviewing involves a good deal of learning by doing.

But, in another way, his advice revealed what continues to be a gaping hole in many political science graduate programs—and the hole that this volume begins

to fill. Students who want to employ regression analysis are not advised to "see what variables you can find" or to "estimate a few models and see how it goes." Rather, they are required to take at least one, and usually several, graduate courses in econometrics and statistical analysis. They are encouraged to think seriously about how to operationalize variables of theoretical interest, and how to evaluate which family of models will best estimate the statistical relationships about which they hypothesize. Similarly, students who want to use formal methods of analysis find themselves in graduate courses in positive political theory, game theory, and bargaining, where the careful, *ex ante* specification of assumptions and utilities is de rigueur.

Given the lack of formal training in interview methods, some graduate students may believe that interview-based research is less important and less useful as a method. But nothing could be further from the truth: interviews are an important, and often an essential tool for making sense of political phenomena. Interviews allow scholars to interact directly with the individuals, or some of the individuals, who populate our theoretical models. For those political scientists who think about social outcomes in terms of microfoundations—in terms of the beliefs, incentives, and behaviors of individuals—interviews can directly and deeply assess the roots of individual actions and attitudes. Such interviews can provide a basis for constructing more-general theories, or they can be used for testing the accuracy of theories; in both cases, interviews reveal causal mechanisms—why do activists focus on some human rights issues but not on others, or how do legislators allocate their time and effort across policy issues?

Interviews were an essential component of my dissertation research, and of my subsequent book (Mosley 2003a): I was interested in the relationship between private investors, especially in sovereign debt (government bonds) and government policymaking. I wondered whether, as many observers claimed in the 1990s, the need to access international capital markets created a "golden straitjacket" or necessitated a "race to the bottom" for government policies. Did portfolio market (stock and bond) investors demand that governments eschew active labor-market policies or public investments in education and welfare? Did these investors treat left-leaning governments more harshly than right-leaning governments, pressuring them for Mitterrand-style policy U-turns and market-friendly structural adjustments? Or did these investors care only that governments maintained low rates of inflation and small fiscal deficits, leaving the details of how governments achieved such outcomes to political authorities?

For scholars interested in the extent to which investors affect government policies, the most frequently used empirical approach is a statistical one. In a cross-national, time series context, what sorts of government policy outcomes and government characteristics are significantly associated with the interest rates

paid by sovereign borrowers? To what extent do sovereign credit ratings vary as a result of governments' fiscal, monetary, social, and tax policies? While a large-n approach to the government–financial market relationship has many merits, including the capacity to identify general patterns over time and across countries, it leaves much to be desired.

Most important, of course, is that correlation does not necessarily mean causation. If we want to know about the conditions under which government policies change investors' behavior, statistical relationships are a good starting point, but they do not rule out alternative relationships that would generate the same statistical patterns. To draw a line more directly from cause to effect, we need better evidence about how investors make asset allocation decisions: we need to ask them how they evaluate sovereign borrowers, as well as how these evaluations might change over time (in boom periods versus bust periods), and how they might vary across countries (for example, between developed and developing nations, or between Economic and Monetary Union [EMU] and non-EMU member states). Moreover, if we are ultimately interested in how these market behaviors contribute to governments' policy choices—whether they avoid certain policies for fear of capital market punishment—we need to ask government officials what motivated their policy decisions. How much attention did they pay to bond markets, versus to domestic constituents?

My interviews, of financial market participants in Frankfurt and London, and of government officials in various European capitals, gave me just these sorts of insights. They allowed me to theorize more accurately about the conditions under which financial market influence on government policymaking was weaker or stronger, as well as the circumstances under which financial markets influenced a broad, versus a narrow, set of government policy outcomes. In my case, interviews became part of a multi-method research strategy, which also included statistical analyses, surveys of professional investors, and archival research at investment banks.

But it was the interviews, coupled with previous literature, that provided the strongest foundations for my project. Moreover, where quantitative data were not of very high quality (as was true with some developing nations), and where the concepts in which I was interested were not easily transformed into a quantitative indicator (for instance, the mix of government micro-level policies that deal with infrastructure, taxation, and labor markets), interviews were the primary source of data on which I relied. And when I surveyed a broader set of professional investors, as a means of expanding the external validity of my work, interviews were invaluable: the interviews had suggested not only what factors I should ask about, but also how I should frame and phrase my questions. Indeed, when I applied for academic jobs and when I sought to publish the resulting book

manuscript, it was the interviews that captured readers' attention—the fact that I had not only hypothesized about, but actually investigated, investors' and government officials' motivations was what distinguished my work. It was not only that the interviews provided many interesting vignettes to use in presentations or as epigraphs to articles and book chapters; rather, it was that the interviews were a direct window into identifying cause and effect.

Despite the contribution of interviews to research on global capital markets, I am certain that I could have used interviews more effectively. Much of what I did during my initial time in the field was learning by doing, with an expected amount of trial (and even more error). This reflected, in many ways, the attitude toward interviews that prevailed in graduate programs in political science in the 1990s. While there has been some movement to thinking more systematically about the general use of qualitative methods within political science (e.g., Gerring 2007, 2012; Mahoney 2009; Wood 2007), there are still few graduate courses focused on using interview methods. Rather, "qualitative methods" courses tend to cover a broad spectrum of methods, ranging from case studies to archival analysis to field experiments. But "qualitative methods" is a broad category, encompassing everything from interviews and process tracing to archival fieldwork and ethnography. These methods often are quite different from one another (also see Schatz 2009b). At the same time, scholars in other fields—such as anthropology, economic and social geography, and sociology—have long used interview-based research designs. While the guidance they provide certainly is useful (e.g., Gubrium and Holstein 2002; Rubin and Rubin 2005), it does not address many of the features and issues specific to political science research.[1]

The purpose of this volume, therefore, is to encourage scholars from all subfields of political science to use interviews in their research, and to provide them with a set of lessons and tools for doing so. Many research projects in political science lend themselves to interview-based methods, either as the primary empirical strategy, or as one of several empirical tools. By providing potential users of interviews with guidance related to designing interview-based research, implementing interview projects, and analyzing data generated by interviews, we hope that students of political science will increasingly embrace interview-based methods.

In the remainder of this introductory chapter, I describe the use of interviews within political science. I begin with a discussion of the qualities of interviews that are typically used within the discipline. Next, I explore how one's epistemological orientation—broadly, where one falls on the interpretivist-positivist continuum—colors one's approach to and use of interviews. I note that this book's approach reflects that of the contemporary political science profession: its orientation is largely positivist, but with some diversity across scholars, and

with the recognition that not all work fits neatly into the interpretivist or the positivist camp. I then discuss four challenges faced by political science interviewers—ethics, sampling, validity, and reliability. The contributors to this volume discuss each of these challenges, and sometimes reach differing conclusions regarding how best to address them. My purpose in this introduction is to offer a sense of the trade-offs that scholars face when using interviews as a research method. The context in which one uses interviews, and the purposes for which interviews are used, will determine the exact choices that one makes regarding how best to address each challenge.

Interviews as a Distinct Research Method

This volume focuses on in-person interviews, involving both elite and non-elite informants.[2] We consider the use of interviews across the subfields of contemporary political science. Our primary focus is on one-on-one interviews, normally conducted in person (rather than via phone, Skype, e-mail, or online chat). The contributors to this book have used interviews in a wide range of field settings and with a variety of aims. For example, Mary Gallagher describes her interviews with clients of a legal aid office in Shanghai, while Beth Leech and her coauthors discuss the techniques used to interview lobbying organizations in Washington, DC. Melani Cammett's informants are potential recipients of social services in Lebanon, as well as business leaders and government officials involved with trade policy in Morocco and Tunisia. Lee Ann Fujii conducts interviews on war-related violence in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Rwanda, while Cathie Jo Martin has met with executives of firms in Britain and Denmark, in order to assess their preferences over various welfare state policies. Reuel Rogers employs interviews with new minority populations in the United States, with an eye to evaluating how well concepts used to explain political behavior among African Americans can be applied to other groups.

What unites this diverse set of scholars and research projects is a belief that interviews are an important and distinct means of understanding contemporary political actions and outcomes. Interviews can serve to identify causal mechanisms that are not evident in other forms of data: for instance, Gallagher's (chapter 9) interviews of legal aid recipients in China allowed her to understand the conditions under which interviewees used state apparatuses to resolve workplace disputes; the interviews suggested, in a way that surveys could not, that earlier political socialization was a key influence on how individuals viewed and addressed workplace disputes. Or interviews may serve as the central

source of data, particularly in situations involving civil conflict or human rights violations—as both Fujii and William Reno describe. Or interviews can be used to generate data that are later employed in statistical analyses, as Matthew Beckmann and Richard Hall (chapter 10) do by querying congressional staffs about the way in which members of Congress work on specific issues. More generally, the contributors to this volume employ interviews for a variety of purposes, including theory building, survey design and interpretation, and hypothesis testing. Some contributors use interviews as the only means of testing causal claims, while others employ interviews as one component of a mixed-method research strategy (Laitin 2003).

In addition to using interviews for a variety of purposes, scholars also use a range of terms to refer to the individuals they interview. These terms include "subjects" (a term that has fallen out of scholarly usage but is still favored by many institutional review boards), "participants," "interviewees," "respondents," "interlocutors," and "informants." Some terms, such as "informants," are less widely used today than they were a generation ago. Others, including "interlocutors," are more commonly used by scholars with a more interpretivist perspective (see part 2); positivist scholars may be more inclined to "participants" or "interviewees." "Respondents" is sometimes the chosen terminology for those who also employ survey methods. Our varied usage throughout this volume reflects the diverse usage in the discipline and the varying epistemological as well as methodological orientations of the volume's contributors.

Although interviews often are used in conjunction with other forms of empirical evidence, such as surveys, they are a distinct empirical tool. Compared with surveys, interviews usually involve a (much) smaller sample of participants. But interviews also allow the researcher to gather a much deeper set of responses: she can ask questions that allow for open-ended responses; if these responses generate additional queries, the researcher can ask these as follow-ups, probing more deeply into the actions and attitudes of respondents. Such follow-up questions can be particularly enlightening when the respondent appears to hold contradictory views, or when the phenomenon of interest is multifaceted. Length and cost considerations, as well as problems of nonresponse to certain types of questions, usually make such actions impossible in the context of a survey. Along these lines, Rogers (chapter 12) uses interviews both as follow-ups to surveys and as tools for ascertaining whether concepts developed and deployed in previous survey research can be used when surveying different populations.

Relative to an individual survey response, a single interview can generate more points of inferential leverage. The interviewer may be able to use a single in-depth interview—for example, of a pivotal figure in a policy decision—to assess a range of observable implications that stem from his theoretical framework. A single interview also can provide information about actions taken or attitudes held by others—the interviewee's neighbors, colleagues, superiors, or subordinates. And perhaps most important, the interviewer usually has more metadata at her disposal than does the survey researcher (assuming that the survey researcher does not administer each survey herself). An interview researcher knows not only what a respondent says, but also how the respondent behaved during the interview, whether the respondent hesitated in answering some questions more than others, and the context in which the interview took place. This metadata facilitates more-accurate use and interpretation of interview data, in a way that often is not possible for survey responses or other quantitative indicators.[3] Indeed, Erik Bleich and Robert Pekkanen's (chapter 4) interview methods appendix serves to provide access to such metadata not only to the interviewer, but to subsequent users of interview-based information.

The individual interview also differs from focus groups, which usually involve one researcher and multiple informants. Focus groups typically progress in a semi-structured fashion, with the interviewer posing initial questions and then allowing participants some involvement in directing the discussion. Focus groups allow access to a larger set of individuals, but they also may present logistical as well as methodological difficulties (also see Hertel, Singer, and Van Cott 2009). The tone and content of the focus group exchange may be driven by the views and personalities of participants, so that one strongly opinionated individual could dominate the discussion. Moreover, if focus group participants worry about social sanctioning or peer pressure, they may be less forthcoming—and more worried about guarantees of confidentiality. Although focus groups can be useful in some research settings and for some research questions, this book concentrates on one-on-one interview methods.[4]

Political scientists who use one-on-one interviews tend to do so in a face-to-face, in-person setting, rather than via phone, e-mail, or video chat. These other modes of communication have long facilitated the fieldwork process, allowing scholars to establish contacts, arrange meetings, and share informed-consent documents prior to arrival at the research site. The rise of new, affordable communication technologies, such as voice over Internet (VoIP) and Skype, now makes it more feasible to conduct the interview itself from a different physical location. This strategy may be particularly appealing when the researcher faces cost or time constraints.

The difficulties associated with virtual interviews, however, result in a continuing bias in favor of face-to-face interactions. First, virtual interviews lack much of the contextual information that can be important to interpreting interview data. The researcher gains an understanding of how to interpret data from observing the respondent's situation, which could range from the demeanor of

office staff to the social environment in a village or on a reservation. Related, virtual forms of exchange may limit the presence of interviewer effects, generated when the researcher's personal characteristics influence the type of information gathered. This could be either a help or a hindrance to the research process. Second, it is more difficult for the researcher to establish rapport with the subject from afar, and this can limit the depth and accuracy of the information offered. Third, the ethical considerations that arise during in-person interviews certainly are present for those conducted electronically. In some ways, the risk to an informant may be greater if her responses are recorded and can be forwarded (as in an e-mail exchange), or if there is a possibility that her phone or Internet connection is not secure. Given these considerations, political scientists continue to rely largely on in-person interactions; when virtual modes are employed, they can be most useful in the context of an initial interaction (a preview of an in-person interview), or a follow-up interview (for which context and rapport have been established already). This distinguishes political scientists from journalists, who routinely rely on virtual means of communication for interacting with informants. For journalists, the practical demands of much shorter time-horizons increase the appeal of new technologies. For political scientists, new technologies sometimes are useful, but they come with some important drawbacks. While we certainly recommend attention to ethical and research design issues when nontraditional modes of interviewing are employed, we retain a focus on fieldwork that generally involves travel to the research site.

Furthermore, changes in technology may reinforce the importance of interviews to answering research questions. Technology renders many other types of evidence, such as transcripts of hearings or records of campaign contributions, more easily available. Yet this increased transparency also may lead those involved in the political process to move their activities out of the limelight. For instance, in their discussion of legislative politics, Beckmann and Hall argue that interviews have been rendered *more* important as a research tool by the increase in information availability that is a hallmark of the Web 2.0 era. As records of formal legislative activity have become more readily available to journalists and the public, legislators and their aides have moved more of their efforts behind the scenes. Interviews may be the only means of gathering data on the informal behaviors that lead to political outcomes. Technological change notwithstanding, then, "talking to people" remains a central means of producing outstanding and innovative political science scholarship.

The Political Scientist as Interviewer

The unique features of interviews offer many opportunities to political scientists, but they also require that we carefully address certain issues. Interviews are used in a wide variety of fields, including public health, sociology, economic and social geography, psychology, history, and anthropology. Indeed, in the absence of research method guidance that is specific to political science, graduate students and faculty often rely on advice based in other academic disciplines. But the features of political science interviewing—both in terms of the epistemological orientation of the discipline *and* the interviewer's relationship to interviewees—combine to create specific considerations for scholars of political science. I discuss these two issues in turn.

Epistemological Considerations

One can classify scholars of political science along an epistemological continuum that ranges from positivist to interpretivist. The positivist view acknowledges that while the subjects of social science research are perhaps messier than those of natural science research, the social researcher should aim to identify patterns of cause and effect (Steinmetz 2005). Based on these patterns and on theoretical reasoning, the researcher should develop falsifiable hypotheses and test these hypotheses empirically. While admitting the possibility of some slippage between theoretical concepts and their empirical operationalization, a positivist orientation assumes that qualitative—as well as quantitative—methods can facilitate the discovery of truths.

An interpretivist viewpoint, on the other hand, treats the world as socially made; knowledge is impossible to separate from historical context and power relationships. While some interpretivist social scientists aim to make generalizations or to generate causal explanations (Wedeen 2010), many focus instead on causal understanding—on developing knowledge about how subjects understand their own actions and circumstances, and on how this understanding is conditioned by power and social relations. When interpretivist scholars employ ethnographic methods (as many do), they are sensitive to the difficulty of separating the collection and processing of interview data from the individual researcher's circumstances and knowledge. Indeed, political ethnography—while itself encompassing a diverse set of approaches and subjects—is marked by the use of participant-observation, an attempt to understand interactions from the perspective of an insider, and a desire to develop a "sensibility" about the context in which one is immersed (Schatz 2009b). Kuhn (1970, 113) also advances such a claim: "what a man sees depends upon both what he looks at (observations)

and also upon what his previous visual-conceptual experience has taught him to see."[5]

Those who work from a largely positivist tradition treat interviews as a means of generating objective knowledge, either to generate or test falsifiable hypotheses. For these scholars, interviews serve to identify the causal processes that generate specific outcomes, and—when used for theory testing rather than for theory development—to allow one to differentiate between alternative hypotheses. Although positivist scholars are sensitive to the existence of "interviewer effects"—in that their individual characteristics, and how these are perceived by their interviewees, may influence the information that is provided—their focus is more on interview data as a product, often collected over a relatively short period of time.

Scholars operating from an interpretivist stance—currently more common in anthropology or social geography, but also represented by some contributions to this volume[6]—doubt the extent to which a purely objective social science is possible. Therefore, while these scholars may employ interviews in service of broad social science aims (including testing falsifiable claims), they highlight the need for attention not only to information itself, but also to how, and by whom, the information is generated and gathered. The researcher brings subjective elements to the knowledge-gathering process; these are an asset to the research process, but they make truth claims impossible to achieve. Interpretivists tend to see interviews as a process, rather than a product: they ask how interviewees themselves make sense of the world, and why the interview data take the form that they do. Seen this way, interviews are a useful way for an individual researcher to develop knowledge regarding a certain community or issue; but replication of this knowledge by others may be difficult, and interview-based knowledge may not offer definitive tests of a given set of propositions.[7]

The discipline of political science currently is centered at the positivist end of the spectrum; this is particularly true for research-oriented universities in the United States. The content of this volume, in terms of the balance between positivist-oriented and interpretivist-oriented approaches, mirrors the current state of the discipline.[8] Although there are many scholars who would place themselves in the middle of the continuum or at the interpretivist end of the spectrum, and some scholars whose placement on the continuum shifts over the course of their careers, much of the profession remains centered on positivism. Given that the main objective of this volume is to help scholars in political science use interviews systematically and well, many of the contributors approach interviews from a positivist perspective. Such a perspective also allows us to achieve another objective, which is to complement the vast array of extant work on interviews from an interpretivist or ethnographic perspective.[9] Indeed, despite

the fact that mixed methodologies are encouraged in most graduate programs, there is very little formal training available for those who want to deploy mixed-method approaches. This volume fills part of this gap by illustrating how interview techniques connect to positivist political science, and how they can be used (and are being used) by political science scholars.

Often, rather than living or working among interview participants, as would an ethnographer or participant-observer, political science graduate students choose to include two or three case studies in their dissertations, spending a few months—or even just several weeks—at each research site. Or a faculty member might conduct interviews with policymakers during a semester-long research fellowship, aiming to speak with forty or fifty interview subjects during that time frame. The information gathered from such interviews could offer greater external validity than a longer-lasting, more narrowly defined ethnography. But such interview data has its limitations: it does not allow for immersion, nor for the "insider" perspective that is a hallmark of ethnographic approaches (see Schatz 2009b). This challenge to the internal validity of political science interview data renders the appropriate design of interview studies—asking the right questions of the right people—particularly important. I return to these challenges in part 3.

Two qualifications to the generally positivist perspective of this volume are in order. First, the dividing line between positivist and interpretivist approaches in political science is sometimes blurred. Researchers may be simultaneously thinking about how to address sources of bias in interviews (something more in a positivist tradition) *and* also about why interview subjects answer questions in the ways that they do. Moreover, an individual scholar's placement on the interpretivist-positivist continuum is not necessarily fixed: it may vary with the particular research project being undertaken. Within this volume, some contributors represent approaches that are self-consciously interpretivist; for instance, Lauren MacLean (chapter 3) and Lee Ann Fujii (chapter 7) are centrally concerned with positionality and power relationships. Other contributors, including Bleich and Pekkanen, Gallagher, and Martin, work in a positivist manner, but with an awareness that converting interview transcripts and answers into more discrete concepts and categories always involves some type of interpretive work. Throughout this volume, therefore, we highlight the areas of overlap between interpretivist and positivist interview research.

Second, our volume offers many lessons that are useful to *all* political scientists who use interviews. For instance, we discuss how to navigate the IRB process, whether and how to use an interpreter, or how to report a sufficient amount of information about one's interview study. Such practical matters confront all researchers who use interviews, regardless of subject matter or epistemological outlook. Our volume intends to underscore the similarities across, as well as the

differences between, broad approaches to knowledge. We acknowledge that interview studies can be used to address a range of substantive questions at a variety of stages in the research process, and as the core empirical tool or as one part of a mixed-method approach. While we certainly are aware of broader debates regarding research design within the field,[10] our volume is intended to appeal to a wide audience within the discipline.

Identity and Interview Effects

Scholars from across the epistemological spectrum recognize that their individual traits can affect the interview research process. A young woman conducting interviews with (almost entirely male) investment bankers may find the gender dynamics that prevail in the financial industry more generally (McDowell 1997) also color the interview process. A scholar who is perceived as an "expert," given his university affiliation, age, or class, may receive a different set of answers from one who is viewed as naïve or uninformed. And a scholar who is assumed to hold certain political views may have difficulty gaining access to some communities: Woliver (2002) notes, for instance, that she faced greater hurdles in attempting to interview pro-life activists (as compared with pro-choice activists), because they often assumed that she did not agree with their views.

Scholars working in the positivist tradition usually label these as "interviewer effects"; they are important to the analysis and interpretation of interview data, because they may affect the (non)response to individual interview questions, as well as the tone and amount of information given in response to questions. Within the interpretivist tradition, these considerations closely relate to the concept of "positionality," which refers to the researcher's awareness of her position in the world relative to her informants (Ortbals and Rincker 2009a).[11] Interviewees and potential interviewees use various social, physical, linguistic, and cultural markers (ranging from eating habits and dress to accent and hair type) to make sense of a given researcher. Many of these features may be obvious to informants, while others, such as religion, sexual orientation, or previous research site experiences, may not. And informants may ascribe incorrectly certain qualities to a researcher, especially at the stage of arranging interviews (assuming, for instance, that American scholars conducting research in southern Africa will be white; see Henderson 2009).

Whether scholars think about this phenomenon as "interview effects" or as "positionality," it is quite possible that different researchers using very similar research designs will wind up with different sets of interview data. Part of this difference could stem from variation in access (which makes providing information about how the sample was conducted important; see chapter 4); another portion

of this variation would be due to differences in information provided during the actual interview process. Yet another piece of the variation comes at the interpretation stage: how a scholar understands evidence from an interview may depend on her own experiences and worldview (see, for instance, chapter 3).

Scholars vary in their concerns about the extent to which interviewer effects or positionality affects the nature of the evidence gathered in interviews. For the strictest of interpretivists, positionality cannot be overcome: it should be acknowledged and studied, but it is unavoidable that interview data (and all data) are somewhat subjective and contextual. A different researcher—one who is older, male, and African American, for instance—may well receive different responses to his questions and understand the same responses in a different way. Positivist scholars often acknowledge interviewer effects (see chapters 9 and 5, for example), but they are not viewed as limiting the objective knowledge that can be gleaned from interviews; rather, positivists view interview effects more as a source of (quantifiable) bias or measurement error (also see the discussion of reliability in part 3). MacLean (chapter 3) approaches this issue from an interpretivist point of view: she traces work on the topic in other disciplines, paying particular attention to how positionality relates to the power of the interviewer vis-à-vis the interview subjects. She suggests that a more collaborative relationship between the researcher and her interlocutors not only improves the researcher's access, but also can enhance the theoretical quality of the work itself.

Related to interviewer effects and positionality are concerns about access. In some situations, a researcher's individual qualities improve his access: local politicians may be more willing to share their views with a foreigner affiliated with a major research university than with a local scholar. Or a woman may be more willing to speak with another woman, than with a male researcher, about the use of sexual violence in the context of civil wars. Conversely, in male-dominated societies, young women may have difficulty gaining access to, or gathering sufficient information from, older male political leaders. In politically closed societies, informants may worry that U.S.-based researchers are, in fact, spies (Reinhardt 2009).

In chapter 6, Cammett explores how, in conducting research in Lebanon as well as elsewhere in the Middle East, her outsider status limits her capacity to effectively carry out interview-based work. Cammett offers the strategy of "matched, proxy" interviewing to address these limitations. With this technique, the researcher relies on carefully trained local proxies to carry out interviews. The proxies are matched with the respondents according to various features (including religion, sect, age, and socioeconomic status), with the notion being that respondents will be more forthcoming when speaking with someone who appears more similar. In describing her work on the provision of social services in Lebanon,

Cammett details the recruitment, training, and supervision of hired interviewers. And she considers the tradeoff between community access (where hired interviewers should look most like the intended interview subjects) and research skills (where hired interviewers should have training in social science methodologies, but might be of a higher socioeconomic class than their interviewees). Similarly, Fujii's (chapter 7) advocacy of using an interpreter to carry out interviews is based, in large part, on considerations related to the researcher's identity compared with those of her interlocutors.

Note, however, that not all contributors to this volume view differences between the researcher and her interviewees as impediments to access. MacLean, for example, suggests that outsider status and social differences smoothed her access to village residents in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire. Similarly, some contributors to the Ortbals and Rincker (2009b) symposium suggest that outsider status can facilitate the research process.

Challenges: Ethics, Sampling, Validity, and Reliability

This discussion of access, as it relates to identity and interviewer effects, exemplifies some of the challenges associated with conducting interview research. While this volume aims to encourage the use of interviews in a wide array of political science research, we are very aware of the challenges associated with interview evidence. These involve not only the practical elements of gaining access to interview subjects, but also the theoretical elements of sampling the right set of respondents, convincing others of the reliability and validity of interview data, and ensuring that research is conducted ethically. Addressing these challenges allows one to reap the benefits of interviews, which often are—alone or in combination with other research methods—an incredibly useful means of measuring key variables and assessing central causal connections. In this section, I discuss four challenges facing interview researchers: ethics, sampling, validity, and reliability.

Ethics

Social scientists routinely confront ethical issues in the course of designing and conducting research. General standards of ethical research dictate that scholars do not harm participants in a given study (Woliver 2002).[12] If a study provides direct benefits to participants—for instance, a medication that can stop the growth of cancerous tumors, or a more successful early intervention for children with autism—then exposing them to some degree of risk (such as side effects

from medication) may be ethically acceptable. But where research provides little in the way of direct benefit to participants—as is usually the case with social scientific studies—then the risks to participants also must be minimized.

Although one could argue that many political science research projects do not expose participants to significant levels of individual risk, it would be a mistake to assume that ethical considerations are absent from the interview process. In extreme cases (for instance, comments against a repressive political regime), breaches of an interviewee's confidentiality or anonymity could lead to imprisonment or violence. In other instances, interview participants may find that the interview leads them to discuss traumatic individual or collective experiences, such as sexual violence or civil war. More routinely, the disclosure by researchers of interview data with identifying information intact could have negative professional or social consequences. One scholar's breach of professional ethics also can diminish the willingness of participants to participate in future studies, harming the broader research enterprise.

Minimal risk to participants is not only what professional ethics demands; it also is required by university IRBs, which authorize research involving human subjects. For participants in interview studies, risk often relates to concerns about confidentiality. Interviews are generally aimed at collecting information that is specific to an individual or a class of respondents: the researcher wants to know how a policymaker came to a decision about a given issue, or how a rebel fighter decided whether to join a local insurgent group, or how connected an individual of Afro-Caribbean descent feels with others who share her ethnic identity. While the interviewer certainly can use the "people like you" phrase to depersonalize the interview,[13] the fact remains that the interview subject is being asked to provide information that may be private and sensitive. These concerns are particularly acute when the behaviors in question include illicit behavior, such as the payment of bribes or the participation in insurgent movements.[14]

In chapter 2, Sarah Brooks investigates the role of ethics in the interview research process. She explores the origins of IRBs, as well as the expansion of their purviews to social science research and their concerns with minimizing risk. She offers practical suggestions for political scientists to navigate the university-level IRB process. Brooks points out that, given its origins in medical studies, the IRB process does not always easily accommodate the types of work done by political scientists. For example, Reno (chapter 8) notes that scholars who study civil conflicts may face specific difficulties with institutional review boards: their standard categories do not normally include options for "rebel fighters." More generally, the IRB process can be focused more on protecting universities and their personnel from risk (or liability) than on protecting research participants.[15]

Central to the process of IRB approval, as well as to the conduct of ethical research generally, is the granting of informed consent by the interview participant. Informed consent establishes that informants realize the purpose of the research being conducted, as well as the risks (and potentially the benefits) to them from participation. Participants also are made aware that their participation is voluntary, and that they will not suffer harm (e.g., not have access to a given service) if they decline to participate. As Brooks discusses, the exact procedures for obtaining consent vary with the research setting; for example, semiliterate informants often give oral, rather than written, consent. And where informants may worry more about the confidentiality of their comments, oral (versus written) consent can increase participation rates (Wood 2006).

Most informed-consent procedures involve guaranteeing the confidentiality of participants, both in terms of their identities and participation in the study, and in terms of what they reveal in the interview. Policymakers in democratic nations may be willing to be interviewed "on the record" and to have their responses cited in academic publications.[16] But many other types of participants may not. And as informants' actual and perceived risk increases, the researcher must think more deeply about the limits that should be placed on the research effort—who should be contacted, and how should they be interviewed?

In the short run, guaranteeing confidentiality includes keeping field notes separate from identifying information (so that one's notes refer to interviews by number, but the master list of these numbers is stored separately, in a password-protected or encrypted document).[17] In the longer run, guaranteeing confidentiality means not naming informants in publications that result from interviews. Again, one might use a list of interviewees arranged by number (and perhaps by broad location and interview date). The scholar is ethically obliged to trade the protection of subjects against the transparency of the research process. In the case of non-elite informants, this is likely sufficient to satisfy academic reviewers. If one's informants are elite policymakers in democratic nations—who are perhaps less at risk from breaches of confidentiality, and about whom revealing more information is important to the use of interview evidence—then interview citations might offer more detail. For instance, a "senior finance ministry official" or a "mid-level central banker who works on regulatory policy" might be cited.[18]

When informants are particularly exposed to risk—for instance, when they are members of an opposition movement in a politically closed society—the "interview appendix" (see chapter 4) should reveal less about the sample. In special circumstances, such as conflict and post-conflict environments, even greater considerations of confidentiality may be necessary (see chapter 8, for instance). There may be locations and situations in which the ethical pursuit of research is

impossible or nearly so (also see Wood 2006). At the extreme, then, ethical considerations could include embargoing publication or circulation of a document for some period of time. This can create professional challenges for graduate students or untenured scholars, and it suggests that some research questions, or some field locations, may need to be excluded, at least for a time.

Communicating the risks of one's study, and the ways in which respondents will be protected from risks—how confidentiality of responses is assured, for instance—often requires going beyond what one's university IRB mandates. Rather, the discussion of consent needs to be put in a context that potential informants understand, one that seeks to remove coercive elements from the process. The lead scholar also needs to ensure that all additional members of the research team—graduate students, research assistants, interpreters—are aware of the informed-consent principle and of its implications for behavior.[19]

Last, while some scholars would argue that minimizing risk to participants in interview studies, as university IRBs require, is all that is needed to fulfill the political science researcher's ethical obligations, others would argue that ethical considerations go far beyond IRB approval and informed-consent procedures. In chapter 3, MacLean notes that many entities other than universities—such as American Indian tribes—have IRBs. These entities can encourage the researcher to think about his or her relationship with the subject community. While most political science scholars do not treat their interview subjects as active participants in the research process—for instance, offering them the opportunity to collaborate in the interpretation of interview findings—MacLean posits that political scientists should consider moving in a more participatory direction (also see Hertel, Singer, and Van Cott 2009). This might include sharing the results of research—giving a public talk, or sending copies of publications—with participants (Woliver 2002). Or it may include the researcher offering (to the local community, not only to those individuals who consent to participate directly) other services, such as tutoring children in English or providing information about available government health care programs.[20]

More generally, the interviewer needs to consider her ethical obligations, as well as her professional responsibilities vis-à-vis her home academic institution. These obligations often demand a careful consideration of whom to interview, how to protect the data that are gathered, and how to interact with informants before, during, and after the interview process. Finally, note that "risk" also can extend to the researcher. Many political scientists are interested in phenomena—insurgency, human trafficking, corruption—that can be dangerous to study. Other scholars find themselves in research locations that have high levels of personal crime; that do not guarantee personal liberties; or that are undergoing momentous social change. In such instances, individual researchers

must weigh the benefits of conducting interviews against the risks they present (Johnson 2009).

Sampling

Another central issue that a scholar using interviews confronts is whom to interview: How should the population of potential interviewees be defined? Are groups of individuals, such as investment bankers or Lebanese citizens, the subject of interest? Leech et al. (chapter 11) note that individuals or organizations are not always the unit of analysis; their project sought to draw comparisons across issues, which were selected in a largely random fashion. But the informants on a given issue were selected in a non-random fashion; researchers made sure to sample lobbying groups on both (or all) sides of a given issue. This level of selection was purposive rather than random. Once the unit of analysis is identified, the bounds of the population must be specified; for instance, is the sample drawn from all Lebanese citizens, only those in certain geographic areas, or only those belonging to certain religious and ethnic groups?

Next, the interviewer must decide how to sample interviewees from within the population. Researchers should always think carefully about how the sample is drawn. But, as Julia Lynch (chapter 1), Martin (chapter 5), and Leech et al. (chapter 11) discuss, sampling decisions often depend on the stage and purpose of the research (theory building or hypothesis testing). If the purpose of the interviews is to test a theory, and the researcher is therefore concerned with generating a representative sample, then a random sample may be most appropriate. Random sampling facilitates better causal inferences from the sample to the population and, as such, is the "gold standard" for observational research, including survey research.[21] A random sample helps to ensure the external validity—from the sample to the population—of one's findings. Interview researchers who pursue random sampling strategies often aim to generate "data set observations" (DSOs), which can be thought of as values (qualitative or quantitative) for a set of variables on a single observation (Brady and Collier 2010). For instance, if the unit of analysis is a member of parliament, the variables might include the amount of time she spends on constituency service, the three most important issues on which she has worked in the last year, and the three most important sources of information for her. These DSOs could be analyzed qualitatively or, as in the case of Beckmann and Hall's (chapter 10) and Leech et al.'s (chapter 11) projects, statistically. Scholars who employ random sampling strategies will need to pursue various strategies to ensure access to a representative sample—for instance, following up repeatedly on requests for interviews, or making multiple visits to the same research site.

Many interview researchers, however, employ a non-random sampling strategy. They may do so for theoretical or practical reasons. On the theoretical side, when the purpose of interviews is to develop causal explanations or to generate theories, the researcher may be interested more in specific cases than in a representative sample. These specific cases may be "most likely" or "least likely" instances, and they may be chosen because of the insights they provide regarding the causal circumstances that generate particular outcomes. Deliberately choosing cases or interview subjects that are outliers or exemplars in important ways ("least likely" or "most likely" instances) can offer "smoking gun" evidence that facilitates theory development. On the basis of one's theory, for instance, one might employ purposive (quota) sampling, selecting individuals on the basis of certain characteristics (Danish firms in specific industrial sectors, Chinese workers in specific types of firms). Used in this way, interview data are likely to take the form of "causal process observations," defined as "an insight or piece of data that provides information about context, process or mechanism, and that contributes distinctive leverage in causal inference" (Brady and Collier 2010 277–278; also see Beck 2009; Seawright 2002).[22] Within this volume, both Cammett's and Fujii's projects rely on non-random samples to generate causal process observations.

Practical considerations also can lead researchers to employ a non-random sampling strategy. Resource and time constraints, an unwillingness of individuals to participate in the study, or the sensitivity of the subject matter can render random sampling impossible. For example, in describing her research in El Salvador, Wood (2006) notes that, in the context of a civil conflict with multiple insurgent groups and low levels of societal trust, constructing representative samples of local respondents was impossible. Rather, she attempted to gain access to a wide variety of individuals, but with the awareness that bias was unavoidable. Reno (chapter 8) expresses similar concerns about, and implements a similar solution, gaining access to insurgents and rebel fighters.[23] In other contexts, activists may worry about granting access to a stranger, even one with academic credentials: Woliver (2002) notes that abortion activists worry about physical harm, thereby rendering them reluctant to be interviewed. And elite interview participants, such as former or current government officials, may be reluctant to be interviewed.[24]

Non-random samples of interviewees can limit the researcher's capacity to generalize, especially in the area of theory testing.[25] But non-randomly sampled interviewees can still provide the researcher with significant inferential leverage, as Lynch discusses in the next chapter, and as Martin describes (with respect to a snowball sampling strategy) in chapter 5. Moreover, non-random samples can be very useful for purposes other than theory testing. As both Gallagher and

Rogers (chapters 9 and 12) describe, non-random samples of interviewees can be used to assess the extent to which larger-n surveys capture the concepts that scholars aim to measure. Additionally, Cammett (chapter 6) posits that, while necessarily non-random in their selection (given the research context and the sensitivity of her subject), her interviews with ordinary citizens related to social service provision by sectarian parties in Lebanon were an important part of her overall empirical strategy. In her case, this strategy included a mass survey, geographic information systems (GIS) data, elite interviews, and government documents. Each sampling strategy, from convenience sampling (talking with whoever happens to be available) to random sampling, has its benefits as well as its drawbacks; these also vary with the type of interview data collected and the purpose for which the data are used. Regardless of the strategy one ultimately employs, an awareness of these tradeoffs is central to designing and conducting an interview study.

Furthermore, the author should make her sampling choices clear—whatever they are—in reporting interview findings. Scholars who use quantitative data are now expected to make their datasets, variable descriptions, and statistical software code available once their manuscripts are published. This not only allows others to understand more completely the results presented; it also allows others to replicate the analysis (King 1995). While confidentiality constraints may prohibit the sharing of interview transcripts (Golden 1995), information about the sampling process certainly should be shared. Indeed, one could envision two different types of replication of interview studies: one in which the collected data are provided and then reanalyzed (the way that "replication" usually is practiced in statistical studies), and another in which the entire data collection process—defining a population, identifying a sample, and conducting interviews with those in the sample—is replicated.[26] The latter is facilitated by scholars' transparency regarding sampling decisions. And even if other scholars do not attempt to replicate one's research, greater transparency about the interview process will increase confidence in the researcher's conclusions. In this spirit, Bleich and Pekkanen (chapter 4) suggest that researchers provide a wide range of information about how their samples were constructed—who was chosen for interviews, how many potential interviewees declined to participate, and what "type" (in a quota sampling sense) each interviewee is.

Validity

Information about the sampling process pertains to a third issue related to interview research: the extent to which one's measuring instrument (in this case, the interview) actually gauges the properties it is supposed to measure. In the context

of the interview, concerns about validity revolve around whether the researcher is asking the right questions, or asking questions in the right way, as well as whether the interview participant is offering truthful answers (and, if she is not, whether the researcher is able to detect this).

For the interview researcher, asking the right questions often requires not only substantive knowledge of the issues at hand (for instance, what extant accounts from the media or by other scholars indicate about a given policymaking episode, or what other interview subjects have reported with respect to how violence unfolded in a particular region or village), but often some experience in conducting interviews on a given subject. For example, in my interviews of investment professionals, it was important to gain a sense of how they talked about politics, so that I could assess how political events entered their decision-making calculus. "Government partisanship" meant very little to most professional investors; but "left-leaning government" or "the Labour Party" or "the Swedish Social Democrats" did.

Early interviews that allow the researcher to discover how best to ask questions—not to get the answers she wants, but to get at the right underlying phenomena—can therefore be very important. Indeed, this is the rationale for many predissertation fellowship programs, as well as for the "learning by doing" model with which this chapter begins. Additionally, in many contexts, interview questions are more useful when they ask for information about actual behavior (*what* happened in a specific instance), rather than for interlocutors' explanations of *why* things happen (see Beckmann and Hall, and Leech et al., in this volume). In other contexts, gaining a sense of how informants understand their reality (the "*why*" view) may be a central aim of the research project (see Fujii, MacLean, this volume).

The validity of the interview instrument also hinges on the accuracy of information provided by the informant. Even if the researcher asks the right questions, she may not receive answers that are accurate or truthful; she must guard against the possibility that the interviewee is—deliberately or inadvertently—"playing her." Decision makers, when asked to reflect upon past events, may strategically misremember or revise their accounts, and likely in a way that is favorable to them. For example, in chapter 8, Reno describes how, in recent years, members of rebel groups in Africa shifted from describing themselves as perpetrators of violence to focusing on their roles as victims of violence. Moreover, even if interview subjects do not intend to deceive researchers, they may not remember accurately. Decades of research in psychology, much of it focused on the accuracy of witness testimony, suggest that eyewitness accounts are often unreliable (Loftus 1979; Wells and Olson 2003). Especially when interviewed about disturbing or chronologically distant events, interlocutors may make errors without intending to do so.

The researcher can guard against this threat to validity by considering a given interview in the context of other information—something that becomes easier to do as the research project progresses. Researchers can use what they have learned in previous interviews to check the validity of future interviews. Indeed, one of the benefits of interviews is that the researcher is aware of the context in which they are conducted, and of how informants might attempt to frame their answers or evade certain questions. The interview can use this metadata to assess validity; one of the advantages of interview data is that the researcher usually has a sense of the internal consistency of the interviewees' answers, the biases revealed by the interviewee, and the points of hesitation during the interview. This is much more information than users of quantitative indicators, especially those from other sources, usually have. And this interview metadata can be useful not only for thinking about validity of the answers, but also for understanding the social context in which answers are offered (Fujii 2010). The researcher might therefore ask herself whether one former cabinet minister's account comports with another cabinet minister's account. If it does not, she might consider why their answers to specific questions would differ, or how the context in which they were interviewed could condition their responses. Note, however, that guarantees of confidentiality—and professional ethics—usually preclude making this strategy obvious to informants ("that's not what Mr. Jones told me about what your party promised!"). Of course, the fact that there are multiple accounts and views of the same issue or story may be part of what is interesting to the researcher (Fujii 2010). In such cases, ensuring that all points of view are captured in the interviews is important. In their study of a range of U.S. public policy issues, Leech and her colleagues (chapter 11) aimed to ensure that the interviews represented every side of the issue. Often, an issue had only two sides, so that interviews with three individuals provided sufficient coverage of the issue. In other cases, though, the number of interviews required to cover the case fully was greater—up to fifteen, in one instance. This reminds us that the "right number" of interviews depends on the specific task and subject (see chapters 4 and 5).

The validity of interview evidence also depends upon the scholar's use, synthesis, and interpretation of interview material: to what extent do the facts and viewpoints revealed in interviews correspond to the researcher's theoretical constructs? [27] Is the researcher operationalizing and measuring key concepts appropriately (Gerring 2012; King, Keohane, and Verba 1994)? Once the interviews are completed, what conclusions should researchers draw from them? Here, the researcher must guard against hearing what she wants to hear. A good means of doing this is to employ various triangulation strategies, all of which evaluate interview data in light of other empirical material (see Gallagher, chapter 9, for an

expanded discussion). One could consider how well interview participants' accounts fit with journalistic accounts of the same episode (this also is useful for addressing concerns about deception, as above). Or the researcher might consider how well the interviews line up with scholarly studies of the same or similar phenomena. For example, the researcher could compare what lobbyists say about which groups supported gun control legislation with the campaign contributions made by gun control advocates to members of Congress. If lobbyists' reports differ from what the contributions data suggest, then one might question whether other elements of their accounts are accurate. Or one could compare the International Monetary Fund's archival materials regarding its lending decisions with IMF staff members' accounts of such decisions.[28] Such strategies are particularly important when interviews are the sole form of evidence on which a research project relies. This concern is not unique to interview-based work; those using archival sources must confront the fact that the preservation of some materials—and the destruction of others—can generate a bias in the historical record. And an individual researcher's decisions about which archival materials to use, and how to interpret these materials, also can generate debate and criticism (Lieberman 2010).[29]

Within multi-method studies, the researcher can compare interview evidence with other types of data. She might evaluate how well the interview data line up with comparative statics from a formal model, results from regression analysis, or findings from archival research. In my research on financial markets' evaluations of government policies, I found that professional investment managers pay little attention to government ideology (whether a left- or right-leaning government is in office) in wealthy democracies. I used statistical analyses to assess whether this pattern was borne out in the sovereign bond market's aggregate pricing decisions. Using cross-sectional time series regressions, I found that left-leaning governments paid borrowing costs that, all else equal, were not very different from those paid by their centrist or right-leaning counterparts (Mosley 2003a).

Of course, if differences across types of evidence exist, these do not necessarily mean that interview information is invalid. Indeed, they could indicate that interviews are capturing a process more accurately than other forms of analysis. But such disparities do suggest to the researcher that she consider whether and how her interpretations might be biased. Furthermore, in order to make a compelling case that the assessment of the interview data is a valid one, the scholar should provide sufficient information for readers to understand the ways in which interview data are interpreted, as well as the context in which interview data are cited. Bleich and Pekkanen (chapter 4) suggest providing information about the sample frame, as well as about the broader data set from which reported

interview evidence is drawn. If only some interviews or portions of other interviews are employed or quoted, why were these interviews chosen? When quoting or reporting from interviews, scholars also should provide context: To what extent is a specific view that is reported from one interview consistent with the overall tone of that interview and, more important, with the overall picture that emerges from the entire sample of interviews?

The object here is to guard against the selective use of "outliers" from the interviews. Quantifying or coding interview data—not necessarily for use in statistical analysis, but often for summary statistics—can be a useful means of providing a sense of the entire interview landscape: for instance, a researcher may note that "85 percent of informants mentioned that someone they knew had been asked to pay a bribe in order to obtain a business license." The best way to address concerns about one's interpretation of interview data might be to make all data public—the analogy to sharing one's quantitative data set and codebook, so that others can reevaluate a scholar's coding and modeling decisions. But doing so, which would mean sharing full interview transcripts, often will conflict with ethical and IRB considerations, specifically with guarantees of confidentiality (but also see Bleich and Pekkanen, this volume, as well as Aldrich 2009).

Reliability

A final, and related, concern for interview researchers is reliability. Reliability is about the confidence we can place in a given instrument of measurement. To what extent is the information collected in an interview accurate, and how much confidence do we have that, were the interview to be repeated again, the same information would be generated? Just as users of statistical data would do well to ask how indicators of interstate disputes, unemployment, or legislative effort are measured, and how these measurements might vary across units of analysis, users of interview data should be vigilant for threats to reliability.

Accurately capturing the information offered by informants requires the researcher to have an effective means of recording data from the interview. Researchers vary in their practices: some record each interview, asking for permission to record after collecting informed consent and guaranteeing confidentiality. Beckmann and Hall (chapter 10) report that their requests to record were almost always answered in the affirmative, and they do not judge their informants to have been inhibited by the presence of a recording device. Leech and her coauthors (chapter 11) also recorded almost every interview. When interviews are recorded, it is advisable to transcribe the interview as soon as possible, so that any ambiguities or gaps are fresh in the researcher's mind. The recorded interview also can be consulted in the future, as a means of addressing reliability (and validity)

concerns. And for those who use an interpreter to help conduct interviews, a recorded session allows one to go over the interview later, along with the interpreter, to address any vagaries in translation. (Furthermore, as Fujii argues in chapter 7, using an interpreter can enhance reliability by allowing interviewees to answer questions conversationally and in their native language, rather than slowing the pace of their responses to match the researcher's level of fluency).[30]

Many other scholars, however, choose not to record interviews. This choice often relates to concerns about power; democracy campaigners in authoritarian societies, for instance, may worry that a recording would fall into the wrong hands. Or government officials may worry that their "off the record" comments will not be kept confidential (also see Woliver 2002). Often, then, the interviewer takes notes during the interview meeting and then more fully fills in these notes after the meeting (also see Aldrich 2009; Hertel, Singer, and Van Cott 2009; Reinhardt 2009). If this strategy is employed, the potential for measurement error is reduced by writing full notes as soon as possible after the interview concludes—perhaps in the closest coffee shop or park. In practical terms, then, it is best not to schedule immediately back-to-back interviews, but rather to allow time between meetings. Bleich and Pekkanen (chapter 4) suggest that, no matter what method of recording data one uses, information about the overall tone and context of the interview—the interview metadata—also should be noted.

Concerns about reliability also relate to interviewer effects and positionality, as discussed earlier in this chapter. First, different scholars may receive different answers (as a result of the qualities of theirs that are obvious to their interviewees). Scholars debate the seriousness of this challenge to reliability; it may be impossible to eliminate entirely, but one could use a triangulation strategy to compare the answers received by some types of interviewers (political scientists versus journalists, men versus women, graduate students versus full professors) versus others. This would provide a sense of the size and direction of interviewer effects. Second, individual scholars may receive the same answers but perceive them differently. The individual researcher's familiarity with a given research site, as well as her past experiences more generally, may lead her to privilege some details over others (or, related to validity, to privilege some interviewees' perspectives over others; see Allina-Pisano 2009). Reinterviews of the same individuals by different scholars may again be a means of assessing the extent of this phenomenon. Where reinterviewing does not occur, the individual researcher should nonetheless be aware of the potential for measurement error.

A final check on reliability addresses whether interviewees are consistent over time in the data they report: Does the same individual, interviewed by the same scholar, but at different points in time, offer similar responses? If she does not, this could indicate problems of reliability; or it could indicate that exogenous

changes—things that occur between the two interviews—have affected respondents' attitudes and behavior. When reinterviews happen very soon after initial interviews, the former is more likely; when more time elapses before the reinterview, the latter may explain differences. Multiple interviews of the same individual also may be useful as a practical matter: in many cases, the researcher's questions evolve during the process of fieldwork.

Returning to previous interview subjects, with an eye toward asking additional questions, also can enhance consistency (in terms of questions asked) across interview subjects. For instance, in my research on professional investors' assessments of sovereign borrowers (Mosley 2003a), I returned to the field approximately sixteen months after my initial research trip. On this second trip, I conducted follow-up interviews with professional investors.[31] These interviews allowed me both to gauge the consistency of investors' views over time and to inquire about how changes in the global financial climate had led to changes in their asset allocation decisions: in the time between my first round of interviews (January–May 1997) and my second round (October 1998), the Asian financial crisis, as well as Russia's near-default, had intervened. Gauging the contrast between the same actors' views in a period of global financial optimism and a time of global pessimism allowed me to consider the dynamic nature of financial market–government relations. In this instance, what was interesting was that professional investors' views often were not consistent over time; explaining this dynamism became a part of my work on the subject. Of course, using repeat interviews with the same informants to increase reliability presents the researcher with a tradeoff between intensely interviewing a smaller group of informants (perhaps about a narrow set of subjects) and interviewing a larger group of informants in a less extensive manner. Again, the researcher will want to strike a balance—where the right balance depends on the research project at hand—between the internal validity that is enhanced by deep and repeated interviews and the external validity that is enhanced by a wider population of potential interview subjects.

Interviews often are, and frequently should be, an important component of political science research. For many projects, interview-based evidence is a central component of a mixed-method strategy. In other instances, interviews are the only viable source of empirical information with which to evaluate a theory or set of hypotheses. In still other situations, interviews allow the researcher to evaluate whether or not her other tools—such as surveys—measure what she thinks they do.

This volume offers advice, both practical and theoretical, about how to effectively use interviews as part of the research process. The contributors come from

a variety of subfields in political science, and we have worked in a range of locations and with a variety of subject populations. Part 1 of this volume addresses the issues that will first confront the interview researcher: how to choose a sampling strategy, interact with interview participants, and collect and report interview data. In part 2, the contributors investigate specific challenges faced by researchers, including linking interviews with causal claims, using proxy interviews or an interpreter to improve access, and conducting research in challenging field locations. Part 3 offers examples of the varying ways in which scholars from across political science use interview data. Throughout the volume, the contributors provide insights from their own field experiences, as well as from those of others in the profession. The appendix contains various materials related to interviews and meant to serve as examples—of consent documents, semi-structured interview questions, and interview protocols, among other things.

We hope to fill the noticeable gap in the guidance offered regarding interviewing in political science. Today's graduate students are under greater pressure to complete graduate school more quickly and yet to acquire a broader range of methodological skills. They also may have difficulty obtaining funding for long periods of field research. Furthermore, although the rise of cross-country (and, sometimes, cross-regional) comparative projects serves to increase the external validity of many research findings, it also shortens the time spent at each field location. Taken together, these trends heighten the importance of "hitting the ground running" (Hertel, Singer, and Van Cott 2009). If there is less time to "do" one's research, there also will be less time for "learning by doing." A researcher can never anticipate all issues that will arise during his or her study, but an awareness of the challenges and complications greatly increases the probability of executing the study successfully—ultimately, of returning from the field with useful data.

Although PhD programs tend to offer less training in qualitative methods to graduate students, this does not mean that qualitative methods are easy or obvious, while econometric and formal ones are difficult and sophisticated. This may be particularly true when interviewing requires knowledge of foreign languages (although Lee Ann Fujii notes that this may be overcome with use of an interpreter) and cultures.[32] In some cases, then, our advice is similar to that provided in fieldwork "how to" guides that draw from several disciplines (Barbour 2008; Barrett and Cason 2010).[33] In many others instances, however, our advice is specific to the political science profession.[34] The contributors also acknowledge that the methodology of political science is continually evolving. Graduate students and assistant professors today face a different set of challenges, and possess a different set of methodological tools, than did scholars who were trained in previous decades. Indeed, most of the contributors to this volume completed their first

research projects in a different era, one in which requirements for working with human subjects were less stringent, and in which potential interviewees perhaps were contacted by letter rather than by e-mail. "Recording" interviews may have involved cassette tapes rather than a tiny hard drive or a smartphone. And preserving the confidentiality and integrity of interview notes did not necessarily involve making sure that one's laptop and USB drive were password protected. While many of the lessons offered in this book are enduring—for instance, the tradeoffs regarding various sampling strategies—others will necessarily evolve.

While this volume does not provide a specific "how to" for every element of interview research, it offers ample food for thought as one constructs one's own interview-based project. We hope that this volume will encourage political scientists from all subfields, and at all stages of their careers, to "just talk to people"—but to do so in a way that is as rigorous, transparent, and ethical as possible.

Part 1
GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS
Research Design, Ethics, and the Role of the Researcher