

PLS 210
Political Science
Research Methods

Week 12:

Interviews and focus groups

Recap

- Introduction to Part II
- Ethnography

Plan for this week

- Interviews
- Focus groups

Interviews

- Conversations held with the purpose of collecting data



Interview design

- Types:
 - Structured
 - Semi-structured
 - Unstructured
- Instruments



Interview design

- Sequencing:
 - Easy questions
 - More important questions
 - Sensitive questions
 - Validating questions
 - Next topic
 - Rinse and repeat
 - Remaining points



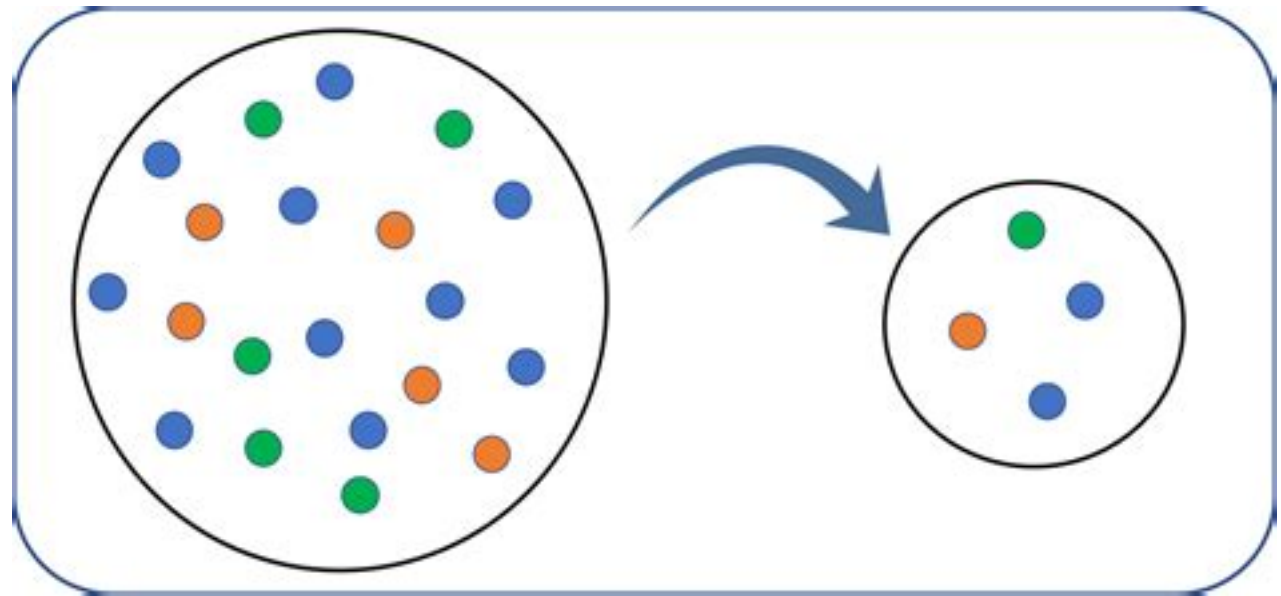
Interview design

- Rapport, interviewer-interviewee relationship, and positionality
- Double-barreled, affectionately-worded, and complex questions
- Interview length
- (A)synchronicity
- Recording:
 - Audio / video
 - Notes



Sampling

- Data quality and representativeness
- Strategies:
 - Probability
 - Non-probability:
 - Convenience
 - Purposive
 - Snowball
 - Quota



Interviews on conflict resolution in Kenya

- Snowball sampling
- Response rate
- Semi-structured interviews
- Confidence levels and triangulation



Interviews on effects of conflict in Rwanda

- Meta-data:
 - “[S]poken and unspoken expressions about people’s interior thoughts and feelings [...] as valuable as the testimonies themselves because they indicate how the current social and political landscape is shaping what people might say to a researcher.”
- Types of meta-data:
 - Rumors
 - Inventions
 - Denials
 - Evasions
 - Silences



Focus groups

- Interview style designed for small groups of unrelated individuals, formed by a researcher and led in a group discussion
- Focus on group interactions
- Analysis: consensus, dissensus, resonance
- Confidentiality issues



Focus groups on HIV / AIDS in Malawi

- Research design, positionality, and research ethics
- Sampling
- Focus group interactions
- Data analysis
- Participants' ability to “display and act on their strengths, resilience, compassion, and power to meet everyday challenges” and create “collective narratives to mobilize individuals to action”



Takeaways

- Focus group and their (potential) value in Political Science research
- Interviewing and its central role in Political Science