# INTERVIEW RESEARCH

*in Political Science*

EDITED BY

LAYNA MOSLEY

# Contents

# ALIGNING SAMPLING STRATEGIES WITH ANALYTIC GOALS

*Julia F. Lynch*

In political science, information gleaned from interviews can serve a number of purposes, depending on the stage in the research process, the goals of the research, and external constraints on the amount or type of interviews we can do. Interviews can be undertaken as a preliminary to the main study, as the main source of data for a study, or as one component in a multi-method research project. Interviews may be used to generate data or metadata, to test descriptive or causal hypotheses, to enhance the validity or reliability of our measures, or as a source of illustrative material that enlivens our analyses and makes our writing more enjoyable and accessible. Each of these uses of interview research suggests a different set of requirements for selecting people to interview (and sometimes how to interview them). In turn, the choices we make about sampling have implications for the role that interview data can play in our analyses and in the larger enterprise of theory building in political science. The aim of this chapter is to develop a set of guidelines that will help researchers align sampling strategies with analytic goals in interview-based research.

How should interview researchers sample their respondents, particularly if they hope to use interviews as a part of a larger multi-method research agenda? One argument runs that because random sampling is required to generate unbiased descriptive and causal inferences about larger populations of people, organizations, or events, "real" data from interviews can only come when there is random sampling. Some authors argue that epistemological underpinnings of arguments about the value of in-depth data derived from interviews are at the very least incommensurate with the requirements of large-n research (Ahmed

and Sil 2009; Beck 2009). Hence data derived from non-randomly selected inter-views do nothing to enhance the validity of claims based on statistical analysis of aggregate-level data, and multi-method "triangulation" using such inter-view data isn't worth much more than the paper the interview transcripts are printed on.

To be sure, studies that make claims about population characteristics based on convenience samples should be approached with skepticism. And when in-terview data are used as window dressing, there is often a temptation to select only quotations that are supportive of the overall argument of the analysis, or to anoint non-randomly selected respondents as "typical." These practices may enliven an otherwise dry research narrative but cannot be considered multi-method research because they do not enhance the validity or reliability of claims generated using other methods.

However, even interviews with non-random samples of individuals (or of individuals associated with non-random samples of organizations and events) can add to our store of knowledge, and to multi-method research. For example, interviews conducted as a precursor to survey work can aid in the creation of more-reliable measures used in large-n studies. Case study interviews may add meat to large-n causal arguments by using causal process observations to gener-ate Bayesian updates about what is happening and why at a given point in a causal chain or process (J. Mahoney 2009). Purposive or quota samples may be good enough in many cases to verify relationships first observed and validated using other methods. Insights drawn from in-depth research with non-randomly selected respondents may also generate relational, meta-level information about the society or organization in which they are embedded—information that is simply unobtainable any other way. For all these reasons, even non-random-sampling designs for interview research can enhance multi-method research. And interviews of randomly selected individuals can, when conducted and analyzed with rigor, contribute data that are ideal for integration with other forms of data in multi-method research.

Most political scientists who use, or plan to use, interview data in their work are familiar with at least one or two works whose findings hinge on data drawn from in-depth in-person interviews. In American politics, for example, Robert Lane's *Political Ideology* (1962), Jennifer Hochschild's *What's Fair* (1981), and Richard Fenno's *Home Style* (1978) are three classic works that place interview data at center stage. Lane's book, subtitled "Why the Common Man Believes What He Does," draws on a small number of in-depth interviews with non-elites to explore the roots of political views in the mass public. Hochschild conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with a larger number of non-elites—twenty-eight residents of New Haven, Connecticut—to understand how they thought

about justice and fairness in a variety of domains of life (the economy, politics, and the social domain encompassing family, friends, and schooling). Fenno's interviews with eighteen members of Congress as they went about their daily routines in their home districts allowed him to understand how elected officials' views of their constituencies affect their political behavior. Interviews need not, of course, be the only or even main source of data for a research project. Inter-views can be equally useful playing a supporting or costarring role. Deciding how to use interview data and figuring out whom to interview are both impor-tant decisions that need to be made with an eye to the role the interview data will play in the larger research agenda.[1]

For the purposes of this chapter, I argue from a positivist worldview: in other words, I assume that researchers will be using interview data in the ser-vice of a research agenda that ultimately aims to frame and test hypotheses about the political world. My focus on sampling and the related problems of inference derives from this epistemological position. It is worth noting, how-ever, that many political scientists who use interview research take a different approach. Scholars working in a constructivist or interpretivist vein are more likely to view the information that comes out of an interview as discursively constructed and hence unique to the particular interaction among interviewer, interviewee, and interview context. When viewed from this perspective, the central methodological issue of interview research is not so much sampling in order to facilitate generalization, but rather interpreting the data from a given interview in light of the interactions that produced it. (Of course, positivists who look to interviews to provide "evidence" should pay at least as much atten-tion as interpretivists do to the quality and characteristics of data produced in the interview setting. Many of the chapters in this volume treat this topic in more detail.)

The next section of this chapter explores some of the different ways that interview research can be used to contribute to a positivist political science research agenda. The subsequent section discusses alternative sampling tech-niques, with an eye to understanding the analytic leverage that these different techniques offer and how this leverage can be used in the pursuit of specific analytic goals. The conclusion brings us back to ground level with a discussion of practical constraints that may hinder researchers' attempts to create optimal linkages between sampling strategies and research goals. A central message of the chapter is that the sampling methods researchers employ in their interview research are critical in determining whether and how interview data can be used to enhance the validity of interview-based and multi-method research.

# Interviews and the Research Process

Interviews can be used productively in the service of a variety of different re-search goals, and at a variety of stages in the research process. The following ex-amples are organized chronologically around the stage of research, and within that according to the analytic goals of the research.

## Using Interviews in Preliminary Research

Preliminary research is research that occurs before collection of the data on which the main descriptive or causal hypotheses of a study will be tested. Inter-views can be a valuable source of information in preliminary research, whether or not the main research project will use interview data.

In case study–based research, interviews at the pre-dissertation or scoping-out-a-new-project stage can use process-tracing questions to identify fruitful (and fruitless) avenues of research. Talking to people is often quicker than archi-val research for figuring out what happened when, who was involved, what were the important decisions, or where documentary materials related to your re-search question may be found. This type of preliminary interviewing is one method for quickly generating and testing in a "rough-and-ready" way a num-ber of alternative hypotheses about a particular case study or case studies (Ger-ring 2007, chap. 3). Using preliminary interviews to get the lay of the land aids the purposive selection of cases for small-n studies, since some hypotheses have already been identified as irrelevant or, alternatively, in need of further testing.

Interviews also can be used (and often should be used) in advance of con-ducting a survey or behavioral experiment. In-depth interviews help the re-searcher get a sense of the opinions, outlooks, or cognitive maps of people who are similar to the research subjects who will eventually take part in the study. Interviews can help determine what questions are relevant and the appropriate range of response options (see e.g. Gallagher, this volume, chapter 9). Even if the researcher is fairly certain of the content of the questions she would like to ask or the games she would like her subjects to play, pretesting in a setting that allows for instant feedback from the respondent can help fine-tune question wording, question ordering, or visual prompts.

We have seen so far that preliminary interviews are often particularly useful because they allow us to refine our concepts and measures before embarking on a major research project. But interviews also can be an essential precursor to larger research projects when they are used to establish the sampling frame for a random sample or to figure out which characteristics to select for in a purposive sample. We will talk more about these types of sampling in the next section. What

is important for the moment is that preliminary research is very often necessary before we can draw a sample, particularly if the aim is eventually to make infer-ences beyond the elements in your sample.

In some research contexts, a preexisting sampling frame may be easy to come by. For example, one could easily sample elected officials in Italian regions (Put-nam 1993), or issues on which registered lobbyists have been active in the United States (Baumgartner et al. 2009). In other research contexts, however, official lists may be biased in ways that preclude representative sampling. For example, identifying the population of small-business owners in Lima, Peru, or Calcutta, India, based on the official tax rolls would exclude large numbers of informal entrepreneurs. Conducting interviews with both formal and informal entrepre-neurs to identify all the business owners active in a particular area of the city or sector of the local economy could be necessary in order to establish a complete sampling frame and allow for truly random sampling of the population of interest. In still other research contexts—for example, for a study of squatter settlements, undocumented migrants, or victims of ethnic cleansing—there may be no written lists available at all, and preliminary research might be needed to establish the boundaries of the population of interest.

While it is likely to be time-consuming, doing preliminary interviews in order to establish the universe of relevant cases for a research project can have positive side effects. It is for good reason that collaborative mapping and census-taking are two standard "entry" strategies for ethnographic researchers (MacLean 2010). Talking to the people who live or work in the area in which we plan to do our research not only allows us to generate a comprehensive list of potential respondents, but also to get started establishing the rapport that will facilitate data-collection efforts as we move into the main part of our research (see MacLean, this volume, chapter 3).

## Using Interviews in the Main Study

Interviews are frequently used to generate data to test central descriptive and causal hypotheses in political science research. Framing interview work in this way may make it sound little different from survey research.[2] But by "generating data" I do not only mean using tightly structured questionnaires to elicit responses that can be numerically coded and later subjected to statistical analysis. Interviews can gen-erate both overt and latent content, which can be analyzed in a variety of ways.

The overt content of an interview comprises the answers that interviewees articulate to the questions we ask them. For example, a researcher might ask a user of social services or a civic activist, "Whom did you approach about this problem?" "How many contacts did you have?" "What was the response like?"

(Note that even when the information itself is qualitative, data like type of contacts or characteristics of the response in the example above can be coded into nominal response categories.) A number of contributors to this volume (Beckmann and Hall, Cammett, Leech et al., Martin) have used semi-structured interviews to generate responses that they then coded as data and analyzed statistically.

Direct answers to direct questions may also be analyzed qualitatively, of course. For example, interviews that elicit information about how events unfolded, or who was involved in decision-making and what their goals were, are often primary sources for researchers who use process tracing, pattern matching, and other case-based methods. For example, I used qualitative data from my interviews with policymakers and current and former officials of labor unions and employer organizations in my study of why Italian and Dutch social policies developed with such different age orientations in the post–World War II period (Lynch 2006). This type of overt content—which generates data that can be characterized as "causal process observations" (Brady and Collier 2004, 227–228)—is particularly useful for research into causal mechanisms and has been used fruitfully in historical institutionalist work in comparative politics, international relations, and American politics subfields.[3]

The overt content of interviews can also be analyzed for recurrent themes, issues, and relationships that respondents raise in the course of answering our questions (see Rogers, this volume, chapter 12). Various forms of qualitative content analysis, done by hand or with the aid of software packages like NVIVO or Atlas.ti, allow us to sift through the data in our interview notes and transcripts to think systematically about the world as our respondents have recounted it to us. (For a useful guide to qualitative content analysis based in grounded theory, see Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995, chap. 6).

Latent content is information we glean from an interview that is not directly articulated by the interviewee in response to our questions. As such, it constitutes a kind of metadata that exists on a plane above the overt content of the respondent's verbal answers to our questions. Examples of latent content include the length of time respondents take before answering a question, the number of causal connections they make in order to justify a particular response, the way they link ideas together, the things they don't tell us, and even our own observations about the apparent truthfulness of respondents when answering particular questions. Latent content can provide particularly valuable information when we use systematic criteria for recording and analyzing it. For example, Hochschild (1981) examines the interconnections between ideas in her interview data to create informal cognitive maps that reveal the underpinnings of Americans' beliefs about justice. Fujii's attentiveness to the metaphors her respondents use

and the lies they tell allow her to elucidate the social and political context surrounding the Rwandan genocide (Fujii 2010).

## Using Interviews in Multi-method Research

Interview data have particular strengths that other forms of data may lack. Well-conducted interviews give access to information about respondents' experiences and motivations that may not be available in the public or documentary record; they allow us to understand opinions and thought processes with a granularity that surveys rarely achieve; and they can add microfoundations to events or patterns observed at the macro level. At the same time, the interpersonal nature of the interview experience can raise concerns about the objectivity or reliability of data that come out of that process; and in-depth interviews require a commitment of research resources—particularly time—that often makes it infeasible to conduct enough interviews to permit generalization to a larger population. In order to take advantage of the strengths of interview data and mitigate the weaknesses, many researchers use interviews in conjunction with other forms of data to make arguments and test hypotheses.

In some multi-method research, interviews are used in order to triangulate with other methods—in other words, to bring different forms of data to bear to answer the same question. For example, in my book on the origins of divergent age-orientation of welfare states, I used interviews in conjunction with archival research to fill in blanks in the archival record and uncover the motivations of particular policy actors (Lynch 2006). Others have used interviews to identify and explore the mechanisms underlying findings based on analysis of aggregate-level data, as in Mosley's study of the influence of political and economic factors on the asset allocation decisions of professional investment managers (Mosley 2003), or Stone's analysis (2002) of the conditions under which the International Monetary Fund continues lending to governments that have failed to comply with conditionality requirements. This type of multi-method research can be quite iterative: interviews generate new questions to examine using other methods, which may then in turn generate new questions to pose to interviewees.

Interview data also are frequently used in multi-method research to enhance the internal and external validity of data gathered using other methods. For example, interviews conducted in conjunction with or as a follow-up to survey research can improve internal validity by allowing researchers to verify that survey respondents understand the questions in the way they were intended (see e.g. Gallagher and Rogers, both this volume). Alternatively, when used as an adjunct to formal modeling, interviews can enhance external validity by empirically verifying that actors hold the interests and preferences that they are stipulated to hold.

For example, David Laitin's work on language and identity among Russian speakers in Estonia, Latvia, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan relies on interviews (as well as ethnographic observation and survey data) to demonstrate that his game theoretic model of a "tipping game" "reflects practical decisions that real people face" (Laitin 1998, 27) in choosing between languages in a bilingual setting.

While interviewing can be used successfully to enhance the validity of inferential claims in multi-method research, interview data also sometimes appear alongside other types of data in a more decorative vein. Including quotations or examples from interviews can add zest and appeal to analyses that draw mainly on more impersonal forms of data like surveys or aggregate data analysis. For example, Lawless and Fox (2005, 2010) illustrate the findings from their survey of potential female candidates for public office with extensive quotations from women with whom they conducted in-depth interviews. A well-chosen quotation or piece of information gleaned from an interview might also serve as an epigraph to an article, or the focal point of a job talk or conference presentation. Of course, selecting illustrative, theory-confirming pieces of interview data does nothing to enhance the validity of inferential claims made using other forms of evidence. This is not to argue that illustrative material from interviews shouldn't be used—but interview data used in this fashion can do little more than hint at the plausibility of claims based on other data. To generate and test inferential claims using interview data, we need sampling strategies that are appropriate to the nature of our research goals.

## Aligning Sampling Methods with Research Goals

Sampling involves selecting a subset of elements (e.g., individuals, households, firms, episodes of decision making) from the universe or population of all such relevant elements (e.g., all firms engaged in textile and ready-to-wear garment manufacturing in Morocco and Tunisia in the late 1990s, as in Cammett 2007b). *Defining what elements are relevant* is a critical part of most research designs, in part because making very confident generalizations to the world beyond this population is often impossible. *How to sample elements* from the population of interest is an issue that bears no less careful consideration. Survey researchers generally aim to draw large random samples of individuals that are representative of the population of interest. But because of the time and expense involved in conducting in-depth interviews, sufficiently large random samples to allow for inference to the target population may not be feasible. Furthermore, we interview people, but people are not always the elements that we are interested in

sampling. For both these reasons, interview researchers need to be attentive to the issues involved in sampling in order to make the most of our interview data, given the specific requirements of our research. In the paragraphs below, I identify some of the main ways that interview researchers may select their respondents, and when such sampling strategies are indicated. Martin's chapter in this volume highlights additional considerations.

## Random Sampling

Selecting elements for study at random from the population of interest is the gold standard for making generalizations, or inferences, from the sample to the population. In interview research, however, individual interviewees are not always sampled at random, because the target population might be composed of aggregates or events, rather than individuals. For example, Martin (chapter 5) wished to generalize from a sample of firms to the population of British and Danish firms, and so she selected firms at random. But she interviewed individuals who were chosen not at random, but because they were most likely to know the answers to her questions. Baumgartner et al. (2009) studied instances of lobbying (see Leech et al., this volume), so they selected interviewees after first identifying a weighted random sample of issues about which lobbyists had lobbied. Researchers engaged in process-tracing ideally would like to be able to make the argument that they have interviewed individuals who can inform them about the full range of relevant events that happened in the world. Random sampling of elements from a population—regardless of whether the interviewees are randomly sampled (and regardless of whether interview data are coded and analyzed quantitatively or qualitatively)—is both necessary and sufficient to guarantee valid generalizations to the population of interest, as long as the elements are sampled in sufficient numbers.[4]

Stratified random sampling is a special case of random sampling that is used to generate samples that contain sufficient numbers of cases of "rare types" (of people, organizations, events) to allow for quantitative analysis that is truly generalizable to the entire population. Stratified random sampling also can be used to ensure responses from individuals who are likely to know particular facets of a story, or who represent different parts of larger aggregates that are the randomly sampled elements. For example, one might select randomly from civil servants at particular pay grades within a ministry in order to evaluate the position or behavior of the ministry as a whole.[5]

Random sampling is often difficult, though, particularly when the sampling frame is unclear or when access to respondents is limited. Although preliminary research can often be used to identify all of the elements in a population, and

although, as Martin (chapter 5) exhorts, "lists are everywhere," in some cases it may never be feasible to generate a comprehensive list (e.g., of clandestine actors or events). More typically, random sampling in interview research is hindered by budget constraints and lack of time or emotional energy, or else by the difficulty of accessing randomly selected respondents.

Failure to interview all or nearly all the interviewees you have chosen to represent randomly selected elements can lead to both nonresponse bias and poor inferences. Random-plus-snowball sampling, in which the researcher selects elements randomly but uses personal contacts to aid in the recruitment of other interviewees on the list may be a solution to this problem (see Martin, chapter 5, for a description of this technique).

## Non-random Sampling

The good news is that not all interview research demands random sampling. Random sampling is not needed, for example, if one is using interviews to generate hypotheses that will later be tested using other data. Of course the quality of the hypotheses is likely to suffer if the initial interviews generate data that are very unrepresentative (either because the individuals or the aggregates with which they are affiliated are unrepresentative of the target population, or because the people to whom one talks cannot provide a full account of a process that you are interested in tracing). Initial hypotheses are particularly likely to be incorrect if a non-random sample is biased such that it excludes all elements representing negative examples of the phenomenon of interest (see Martin, chapter 5). Nevertheless, careful selection of preliminary interviews can mitigate many of these concerns.

Random sampling is also generally not called for in either process-tracing or interpretivist work. Interpretivist theories posit that because interview data are discursively constructed in ways that are specific to each research interaction, generalizability is a chimera in any case. Process-tracing methodologies, including interviews, are used to generate what Brady and Collier (2004) call causal process observations (CPOs). A CPO is a piece of information that, unlike more standard "data set observations" used to evaluate correlation across cases, "provides information about context, process or mechanism, and that contributes distinctive leverage in causal inference" (Brady and Collier 2004, 277). This extra information contained in CPOs means that non-random selection of the cases from which CPOs are derived is not necessarily a threat to inference (Collier, Mahoney, and Seawright 2004; Collier and Mahoney 1996). As a result, even non-random samples of interview subjects can generate causal process observations to test process- and mechanism-based arguments. Similarly, data from inter-

views with non-randomly selected individuals may be used in research designs involving "pattern matching" (Campbell 1975) and cognitive mapping (Axelrod 1976).

Non-randomly sampled interviews can be used for triangulation, for example, to help interpret the results of surveys or experimental studies. And non-random sampling also may be necessary in order to avoid nonresponse bias. Like in-depth case studies, in-depth interview research often allows us to better understand the cases that we have studied, sometimes—but not always—at the price of less reliable generalizations to the cases that we haven't studied.

PURPOSIVE SAMPLING, sometimes called judgment sampling, is a form of non-random sampling that involves selecting elements of a population according to specific characteristics deemed relevant to the analysis—for example, firms of various sizes, individuals of various social classes, or legislators from various parties in a political system. A purposive sampling design does not call for a complete census of every element in the population, but it does require knowing enough about the characteristics of the population to know what characteristics are likely to be relevant for the research project (either as causal variables or as potential confounds that need to be controlled for).[6] Purposive sampling can yield a sample that is loosely "representative" of the population, at least along the dimensions that are likely to be of interest for a study, without requiring a very large number of interviews. Like stratified random sampling, it can also be used to ensure that rare types or negative cases are included in the research. When nonresponse in a random sample is likely to be selective, and so high as to negate the benefits of random sampling, purposive sampling can be a partial solution because it ensures the inclusion of particular types of elements in the sample.

CONVENIENCE SAMPLING demands little of the interviewer other than identifying and making contact with individuals who are attached to elements—any elements—in your sampling frame. "Man in the street" interviews are convenience samples, as are interviews with elites with whom you happen to have a preexisting connection, or with whom you happen to be able to schedule an interview when you are in the capital city. Convenience samples can be useful during preliminary research, and may be necessary when gaining access to respondents is extremely difficult. They can also be a very effective way of generating pithy quotes or anecdotes that illustrate findings from another, more systematic, form of analysis. In general, however, convenience sampling would ideally be reserved for situations when one doesn't need or want to draw inferences to a larger population.

SNOWBALL SAMPLING, sometimes called chain referral sampling or respondent-driven sampling, is a method for gradually accumulating respondents in a sample

based on recommendations from earlier interviewees. This method of constructing a sample enhances access to respondents, since no cold contacts are required, and it can be used in conjunction with other forms of sampling (purposive, convenience, or even random-plus-snowball, as described by Martin, chapter 5). For example, in preparation for survey work, I conducted a series of in-depth interviews with Boston-area residents. I used snowball sampling to recruit a convenience sample of interviewees, beginning by interviewing one of the employees at a nearby day care center. She referred me to her former mother-in-law, who in turn introduced me to a former home health care aide, who set me up with her sister's sister-in-law, who introduced me to a colleague, and so forth. The respondents in the child care provider's referral chain were racially mixed but were mainly female and of middle to lower socioeconomic status. Since I expected responses to my questions about the fairness of inequalities in access to health care and health outcomes to vary by race, gender, and socioeconomic status, I made contact with male and upper-middle-class respondents by using additional snowball seeds, including a neighbor and an administrative assistant in the department next door to mine.[7]

INTERSTITIAL CONTACTS. One final method of selecting interview respondents is worth mentioning—although in this method, it might be more accurate to say that the interviewees select the researcher, rather than the other way around. Taxi drivers, people sharing queues or waiting rooms, the domestic staff retained by our landlords, our research assistants and translators (see Fujii, this volume, chapter 7) can all be useful informants, spontaneously offering perspectives and information that we might not otherwise encounter in the process of our research. Even researchers with a well-planned sampling design can make use of information gleaned from interstitial contacts like these, so it makes sense to keep a notebook handy at all times and to record your detailed observations as soon as possible after chancing upon an accidental interview. Of course we should guard against the tendency to give heightened emphasis and credence to these informal contacts; the testimony even of "ordinary people" who choose to share their views with us is surely no more representative than the testimony of our carefully sampled respondents. Still, when we are confronted with situations in which we know little and have much to learn, all information is potentially useful.

Sometimes, despite our best intentions, it is not possible to carry out the sampling design that would best support the analytical goals of our research. We have already identified some situations in which it may not be possible to generate a reliable sampling frame. Power dynamics built into the process of inter-

viewing elites, political constraints, and ethical considerations may all also limit sampling possibilities.

Many researchers just beginning interview-based research, particularly with elites, are concerned above all about access. Thesis writers often grow accustomed to occupying a position low on the food chain and may not feel important enough to commandeer the time and attention of high-status individuals like government ministers, elected officials, or CEOs. Gender, language, or nationality can also seem to disadvantage researchers who must supplicate for an audience. In my own experience conducting interviews with economic and policy elites in Italy, The Netherlands, and the United States, such concerns about gaining access have been surprisingly unfounded. Beckmann and Hall, and Martin (both this volume) report similar ease of access to members of Congress in the United States and employers in Britain and Denmark. Of course, there may be circumstances when it is simply not possible for a political scientist to gain access to high-ranking societal elites, and research designs should not in general be premised on such access. Identifying in advance surrogate sources of information, and sampling the organization, event, or type of official rather than individual respondents, may help lessen problems of access. If large numbers of potential respondents refuse to participate for reasons that appear to be unrelated to key hypotheses or control variables, a purposive sample may be substituted for random sampling (making appropriate corrections for the certainty of causal claims based on such interview data).

Political constraints also may limit the type of respondents researchers can access and the sampling strategies we employ. MacLean and Reno (both this volume) interviewed members of populations—American Indian tribal leaders, and members of Liberian militia organizations deemed illegal under U.S. law—who for distinct reasons might be cautious about revealing information to (non-Native) American researchers. Both Reno and MacLean were able to reassure potential interviewees that their intentions were honorable and that agreeing to be interviewed would not place the respondents or their communities at risk. Nevertheless, under some circumstances it may be politically impossible to interview certain types of respondents. Cammett (chapter 6, this volume), for example, was not able to interview people who had used social services provided by Hezbollah in Lebanon, despite the fact that this type of respondent was initially included in her sampling frame.

Ethical constraints, too, may limit whom we interview. Institutional review boards (IRBs) intensely scrutinize research that involves populations they have categorized as "vulnerable" groups, such as prisoners and children, and with people who could become victims of retribution in the event of a breach of anonymity or confidentiality (see Brooks, chapter 2, this volume). Even where IRBs

approve interview subjects, however, researchers need to use their own discretion and often deeper knowledge about the contexts in which they are working to evaluate whether their interviews could endanger respondents (for example by being seen talking to an American researcher). In circumstances where ethical considerations limit whom we may interview, sampling strategies may need to be adjusted to protect human subjects.

In sum, when researchers have the ability to interview large numbers of respondents, when respondents are accessible, and when very in-depth information about a particular case is not required, the benefits to be gained from attempting to sample randomly far outweigh the costs. If we must interview a smaller number of respondents because of resource constraints or lack of access, if we are conducting process-tracing research, or if we aren't concerned about generalizing to a larger population, then an aptly chosen non-random sampling design may be the best option—as long as we remain sensitive to any inferential bias that our particular non-random sample entails.