**Antonis A. Ellinas, The Interview Method in Comparative Politics: The Process of Interviewing Far Right Actors, *Government and Opposition*.**

**Online Appendix 1: Bibliometric analysis regarding the use of the interview method**

The Web of Science provides bibliometric data for major journals since 1970 and includes abstracts since 1992 or later. The number of abstracted articles that include the words “interview” and “survey” total 1740 – 262 abstracts mention the word interview and 1478 abstracts mention the word survey. After reading the 1740 abstracts, I removed 87 of them from the analysis because the use of the two words did not accurately reflect the method used in the article (e.g. “When politicians are interviewed, they tend to…”; “I survey the literature on…”). The analysis included here relies on the remaining 207 articles mentioning the word interview and 1446 mentioning the word survey. The analysis of the abstracts mentioning the word survey includes abstracts mentioning survey experiments.

The aggregate data for each major journal is shown below. The analysis includes the following journals: *American Journal of Political Science*, *American Political Science Review*, *British Journal of Political Science*, *Comparative Politics*, *Comparative Political Studies*, *European Journal of Political Research*, *Government and Opposition*, *Party Politics*, *Perspectives on Politics*, *West European Politics* and *World Politics*.

A caveat about the bibliometric data presented here is that the abstract of the article does not always signal the method used.

To mitigate this problem, I examined in more detail the 207 articles that mentioned the word interview in the abstract (Appendix 2).



**Online Appendix 2: Analysis of articles in political science and comparative politics journals using of the interview method**

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **Table 1: Methods used in articles using interviews (n=207)** | | |
|  | **Articles** | **%** |
| Interviews alone | 52 | 25.1 |
| Survey, then interview | 26 | 12.6 |
| Interviews and documents | 23 | 11.1 |
| Original dataset, then interview | 18 | 8.7 |
| Interview, then survey | 15 | 7.3 |
| Documents then interviews | 14 | 6.8 |
| Interviews and other methods | 59 | 28.4 |
|  |  |  |
| **Table 2: Empirical focus on interviews (n=207)** | |  |
|  | **Articles** | **%** |
| Single case | 150 | 72.5 |
| Paired comparison | 31 | 15.0 |
| Small-N | 17 | 8.2 |
| Not applicable | 9 | 4.3 |
|  |  |  |
| **Table 3: Type of actor interviewed in all articles** | |  |
| **using interviews (n=207)** |  |  |
|  | **Frequency** | **% of total number of articles** |
| Politicians | 85 | 41.1 |
| Bureaucrats | 56 | 27.1 |
| Key actors | 43 | 20.8 |
| NGOs and IGs | 22 | 10.6 |
| Party officials | 22 | 10.6 |
| Citizens | 21 | 10.1 |
| Business | 11 | 5.3 |
| Academics | 8 | 3.9 |
| Others | 37 | 17.9 |
| Note: Many articles use interviews with more than | |  |
| one type of actor (e.g. politicians and bureaucrats). | |  |
|  |  |  |
| **Table 4: Number of interviews conducted (n=207)** | |  |
|  | **Articles** | **%** |
| 1-50 | 108 | 52.2 |
| 51-100 | 37 | 17.9 |
| 101- | 26 | 12.6 |
| Not mentioned | 36 | 17.4 |

**Online Appendix 3: Access, rapport, observations and ethics**

The fieldnotes mentioned in the article cover a period from 2012 to 2018. They are observations I recorded before, during and after 58 interviews with 43 leaders and functionaries of far right parties as well as after the attendance of public events in five European countries. I interviewed 6 individuals twice, 3 individuals three times and one individual four times. Below, I describe how I gained access, established rapport and analyzed interviews and I reflect on ethical aspects of my study.

**Gaining Access**

To gain access to my interviewees, I tried to approach them directly through various public events (Dobratz and Waldner 2021) or through intermediaries. Some of the events included outdoor commemorations, demonstrations and speeches and others were held at the national or subnational premises of these parties. Indoor events are usually addressed to party loyalists and can become quite uncomfortable towards the end, because everyone is asked to stand and sing the party anthem. I usually asked permission to be present at these indoor events but, on some occasions, I chose to pay a cold visit. I thought this would allow me to observe whether my presence affected what people did at the event (I have no evidence that it did). I would simply seat through the events and, at the end, I would approach people and try to connect. Not standing and not singing the party anthem made participants curious enough about my presence to talk to me after the event but it was also a way to clearly signal that I am there as distant observer rather than a sympathizer (Blee 2002). When it first happened, this was more of a reflex rather than a well-thought-out tactic, but upon reflection it reinforced my effort to project transparency rather than attempt deception (but see Simi and Futrell 2010: 129).

The intermediaries were usually individuals whom I had already interviewed, thereby opening different snowball paths into the party I studied the most, the Greek Golden Dawn. For this party, I was able to establish four different points of entry.

In all cases, the intermediaries and the interviewees had my real name, university affiliation and were briefed on my study (i.e. “I study nationalist, or as the literature calls them, far right parties in Europe”). They were informed that the study was funded by my university. I was introduced to potential interviewees by people I had previously interviewed or I would walk up to them, start talking and exchange phone numbers. I would then contact interviewees via a text message and then a phone call asking for an interview.

All interviewees gave their oral consent to participate in the study and, as the main text of the article indicates, they could withdraw their consent at any point during the interview process.

Throughout the years of the study, it was important to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of our conversations, not only from the scholarly community but, more importantly, from curious party leaders and functionaries (“Who told you this?” was a common question I got asked; see also Lancaster 2017).

My interviewees were asked at the beginning of the interview whether they would mind if I handwrote or typed notes. Some asked to be recorded, others gave their consent for handwritten or typed notes and others preferred we just talk. When no recording or notes were taken, I would try to note down what I could recollect from the conversation afterwards.

**Building rapport**

To overcome the intrinsic challenges of building rapport with far right interviewees, I adopted a number of tactics over the years.

First, I tried to be as transparent as possible about my work. Knowing that my name and work are only a web search away from my interviewees, I sometimes sent them samples of my work before the interview meeting or gave them copies of my book (on far right parties) before the interview commenced. I usually began the interview by explaining how I have been doing this type of research for many years, with different far right actors across Europe. My approach meant that a number of the individuals I approached declined to be interviewed, due to mistrust (see Blee and Taylor 2002, 98). I sensed that many of those interviewed appreciated the transparency, largely because in the past a number of under-cover researchers, officials or journalists had deceived them and purportedly sought to damage the party reputation.

Second, I let the interviewees talk as much as they wanted early on and, depending on whether I thought there was some rapport with them or not, only started asking key questions after the first half of the interview (Richards 1996; Cowley 2021). In a number of cases, I sensed that interviewees appreciated that I was carefully listening to what they had to say rather than try to impose my research agenda on our interaction. This was a very time-consuming process, which meant that some interviews lasted as long as three hours. It also meant that I could not schedule more than a couple of interviews each day, since many went on for much longer than originally anticipated. Relying on my instinct of how the interview is going before getting into more sensitive topics also meant that a number of the interviews were not that informative: on a number of occasions, I felt the interviewee was not ready for more sensitive questions and I never got to ask them. Given the importance of sustaining access within an organization across time and across individuals (see main article; also Ostrander 1993), I think this was a reasonable price to pay for establishing rapport with (some) of the interviewees.

Third, I never talked about other interviews or interviewees. Many of the interviewees eagerly asked early on in the interview who else I talked to (apart from the intermediary) and what they said. I believe this was because they wanted to know how I connected to the various networks of power-holders within their organization. Relatedly, I think they wanted to make sure that what they say is in line with what others say. I responded by telling them that I talked to many people but I cannot tell them who, for the same reason I will not tell anybody else that I interviewed them and what they told me. I sensed that many interviewees appreciated this real-time test of anonymity and confidentiality and that this approach paid off in terms of building rapport.

Overall, I believe I was able to establish rapport with 13 of the 43 far right leaders and functionaries I interviewed for my project. As noted above, I was able to interview some of these individuals two, three or four times. Upon further reflection, the informational value of the interviews I conducted with these 13 individuals far exceeded the value of the rest of the interviews. This highlights the importance of establishing rapport during an interview and of finding a way to explicate this in the analysis.

**Analysis**

The interview data consists of the transcripts from the 58 interviews as well as fieldnotes from my interview visits and my attendance of events.

The analysis of the data sought to identify consistent or repeated patterns before making claims about facts, events, or processes. I utilized four forms of triangulation processes during the analysis of the interview transcripts: data, positional, geographical and temporal (see main text).

First, I used the interview data to verify information from other sources. For example, there was some textual and oral evidence of far right events that got canceled. Antifascist publications and actors would claim that their mobilization helped cancel these events. I would carefully ask far right leaders and functionaries about these events, to verify the textual and oral sources of evidence.

Second, I used positional triangulation (Blee 2002; Solarino and Aguinis 2021). Instead of solely talking to central party leaders, I also talked to local party functionaries. The latter would often air grievances against the central party organization and significantly depart from the main party narrative. At a time when the party portrayed a picture of organizational strength and resilience, a number of local functionaries aired grievances that pointed to significant organizational troubles.

Third, I used geographical triangulation. For each of the parties I studied, I collected evidence from multiple local settings. In my research outputs, I tried to report only evidence of local facts, events or processes that I was able to corroborate with interviews across different settings. Like positional triangulation, this helped avoid making generalizations about very particular local dynamics or reproducing the party narrative about important facts, events or processes.

Finally, I used temporal triangulation of interview data through the repeat interviews with 10 individuals. Through these interviews I examined whether I would get similar answers to similar questions, before actually using the interview data in my analysis. For example, one interviewee told me in passing that he had to take an IQ test before being appointed to the central committee of his party. Since I had not come across any other similar information, I arranged another interview, about a year later, in which he gave me details regarding these tests. I considered the evidence convincing enough to report it. I was subsequently able to verify this information in an interview with another individual.

**Additional ethical challenges**

Some of the most important ethical considerations when interviewing far right actors are detailed in the main article (pp. 23-27) and here I will focus on two additional ethical challenges.

One issue relates to my choice in earlier stages of my research to avoid the use of deception. The use of deception with these particular far right actors would probably be justifiable given the difficulty of access, especially in organizations facing judicial pressure. Although I think that my choice to avoid deception was partly driven by my own research approach, it is important to acknowledge that it was also pragmatic. First, I thought that transparency would not curtail my access to the organizations I studied. Second, I thought that being open about what I do would make it easier to continue researching these organizations even after the completion of the main study.

A more important issue relates to my choice to avoid contributing to the public debate about the researched parties during the course of my research. Due to their nature, one of these organizations was often at the center of media spotlight, largely because of its violent or criminal activity. During the seven years of my research on some of these organizations, I received and declined many media requests. This was especially the case after prominent party members faced significant judicial pressure and after early scholarly publications indicated my access to these organizations. Throughout the seven years of this study, I chose to only present my findings in scholarly venues and to avoid turning the public spotlight onto my work. I thought that if, at the time, I became part of the public discourse about these parties, I would be tempted to allow my need for access to influence my public contribution or, more likely, I would simply lose access because my interviewees would have considered their interaction with me a political liability. These preconceptions of potential risks that public visibility poses for research were subsequently confirmed by the unanticipated publication of a journalistic report in a different country that referred to my research and framed it in a way that became a political liability for my interviewees. As described in the main article, that incident showed how premature (and, in this case, inaccurate) publicity of research endeavors might spoil access, and ultimately, the quality of research. Throughout the years, I critically reflected on the ethics of this choice of keeping a low profile. I have kept wondering whether keeping a low profile on hotly debated and socially important topics is a prize worth paying for having access to new information. I am now comfortable with the idea that this form of self-censorship is an ethical short-term tactic for achieving longer-term research goals.