Methodological issues in the studies of political elites

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DRAFT VERSION

Abstract: Using the examples of research on candidates in the south of Europe (Greece, Portugal and Spain), this paper will deal with the many problems researchers face when studying political elites. It covers both qualitative interviewing, quantitative elite surveys and statistical analysis of MPs’ biographies. The paper will address the whole research process covering from data production (for example the wording of questions in surveys or semi structured interviews) to sampling, data collection and access or the uses of internet to interview politicians. Special attention will be paid to illustrate problems with clear and real examples from different researchers carried out by the authors. Once problems have been identified, the authors will discuss the optimal solutions and their implications for research.

Keywords: political elites, research on political elites, surveys and interviews, South of Europe

Introduction

Researching political elites is not an easy task. Social scientist know a lot about political institutions, but much less who are those that lead these institutions, their cognitive framework, their beliefs, opinions and attitudes. And yet, these are relevant matters insofar politicians, understood in a broad sense as Higley and Burton (2006:7) do, decide about matters that are crucial for citizens’ lives and the quality of democracies.[1]

There are three paths to identify politicians for research purposes (Putnam 1976:15-16). The first one is based on the reputation (Hunter 1959), the second relies on the analysis of decisions taken by/in institutions (Dahl 1961), and the third one is based on the positions occupied by politicians. Most recent studies of political elites use the positional analysis. It consists of identifying a particular political elite according to the positions defined previously in a representation or government institution (parliament, municipality). Thus, MPs or local councilors, members of government, will be part of the political elite.
When adopting the positional method, researchers face basically two choices—analyze the whole population or just a sample of it. Obviously, the choice will be determined by the nature of the research. But both options pose problems for researchers. This paper will delineate pros and cons of both choices by analyzing some of the most relevant studies carried out in Greece, Portugal and Spain.

Analyzing the whole population of political elites

Studying political elites using the positional method involves identifying a particular institution (government or chamber of representation) and a territorial level (European, national, regional, or local). Members of the institutions will be easily identified and the information needed conveniently collected. WebPages usually offer a good deal of useful information, although if the research has a historical edge, it will be necessary to use other sources like official publications, newspaper clips, specialized books, directories, and the like.

These type of studies are limited to the few variables for which researchers can find reliable information: sex, date of birth, place of birth, studies, profession, party, time served. The main problem when carrying out this research is the existence of the information needed and its access. Sometimes, we know that a person has occupied a seat in Congress during a term, we know his/her sex by the name, but we ignore all other information. There is no solution for this problem but keeping searching. Sometimes, journals show a short bio of elected MPs or local councilors right after elections. Sometimes, this type of biographical data are the result of the answers of the candidates to a very short questionnaire (namely with questions about sex, age, education, profession, address, party), needed to complete their candidature to the parliament, or of the answers of the MPs to a very short questionnaire (namely with questions about sex, age, education, profession, party, and about previous positions occupied at the professional, civic and political levels) they have to fill when they enter the chambers.

As will be seen later, accessing the information required does not guarantee reliability since the social desirability bias may operate. There are, for instance, MPs who declare that they have a university degree without being true. Although no good solution can be applied and the frequency of social desirability may be low, it is good to double check whenever possible.

Analysis of a particular population of political elites gets much easier if a database is built. Coller et al. (2014) give useful examples and a guide, and highly recommend a good balance between parsimony and a good reflection of reality, avoiding future multicollinearity, and paying attention to the time span.

Parsimony means that while reality is quite complex, it can be presented in a more simple way. Imagine that you are building an MPs database and the variable “party” has a range of 75, but some of these 75 parties are just members of stable coalitions (creating the same parliamentary group) or regional branches of national parties (incorporated in the same parliamentary group). Imagine that in both cases, you fuse stable coalitions with just one single name and both regional and national parties
into just a single party. The range of the variable might have been reduced to 25. The researcher loses a bit of accuracy in favor of a much more reasonable analysis.

Multicollinearity means that two variables are highly related to the point that they may be almost the same. In order to avoid it, the researcher has to begin early during the building of the data base paying special attention to two variables: studies and profession. It is quite infrequent that and MP enters the chamber without a university degree and after a term or two s/he ends up having one. There are cases, though. Likely, it is not frequent that an MP enters the chamber as a lawyer and ends his/her term of service as economists or political scientist. Consequently, rather than creating a variable (profession or studies) for each legislature (which would create multicollinearity in future statistical analysis), it is preferable to create a single variable (like sex or place of birth) understood as an MP’s attribute that remains the same over the years.

Time span is the period of time your data base will cover. Best and Cotta (2000) deal with MPs covering 150 years and Linz et al. (2000) deal with ministers covering 125 years, for example, while Botella et al (2010) cover between 31 years in Spain, 25 in France and 9 in Britain when studying presidents of regional governments or Santana et al. (2016) cover 36 years in their study of women MPs. Contrary to executive members databases (local, regional, national or European), MPs databases need to pay attention to the time span and answer the following question: who is going to be in the database, the MP that begins the legislature or his/her substitute if this is the case? One or the other imply different methodological choices. How will be treated MPs that belong to a party in one legislature and to a different one in the next legislature?

### Table 1. Pros and Cons of bio data gathering

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of data</th>
<th>Pros</th>
<th>Cons</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bios on MPs</td>
<td>Cheaper fieldwork (vis-à-vis surveys); Easy accessible files.</td>
<td>Only sociodemographic and contextual (e.g. electoral system properties) data; no attitudinal data; very limited number of variables (but more than for candidates); a lot of missing data in the files; a lot of incongruences in data filled by the candidates in each bio-file; some incorrect information</td>
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</table>

In Table 1 we present the pros and cons of the research on political elites and political representation that is based on the Social background studies of MPs and candidates, using biographical files. On the positive side, we have the easy accessible data and the cheaper fieldwork process. For example, biographical data on MPs is now available online and we just need to do the appropriate classification and statistical transformation processes to overview the social and political characteristics of candidates and MPs. However, with new laws protecting personal data the access to the
bios of candidates may be much more difficult and slow. On the not so positive side, the «cons», we have the following concerning this data: no attitudinal data is available and the available sociodemographic (and contextual) data is very limited in terms of the number of variables; moreover, missing data is also a severe problem here.

Studies based on MPs biographical data have a major virtue—the information is easily accessible nowadays since the chambers usually include in their webpages a short bio of the MPs. However, these studies are limited to the information provided which is basically centered on five variables: sex, year of birth, place of birth, studies, profession, party, and position in the chamber. The problem is that the information is sometimes incomplete and researchers have two options, either they complete the information searching in other sources (newspapers, social networks or directly inquiring to the MPs) or they leave it incomplete. As Coller, Santana and Jaime (2014) show, no matter how much effort the researcher deploys, there will always be incomplete information on some variables like year of birth, studies or profession.


Analyzing a sample of political elites

Studying a sample of political elites can be attacked from two different methodological choices—a representative sample and a motivated sample. The former implies the use of a mostly closed questionnaire and the building of a random sample that takes into account variables like sex, party, and territory (or chamber) to guarantee reliability and external validity. The latter implies a selection of MPs that are related to the topic of research that is wide enough to guarantee variability in the discourses generated. While qualitative interview has been commonly used (it is cheaper and easy in terms of accessing MPs), surveying MPs has become more popular, especially with the emergence of internet surveys. Generally speaking, there are two international initiatives worth mentioning—Party Rep (http://www.partirep.eu/) and the Comparative Candidate Survey (http://www.comparativecandidates.org/), besides a number of national initiatives.

However, interviewing politicians is not easy and that explains why there are fewer surveys for politicians than for citizens, for instance. We will consider MPs (and candidates) who are the most frequently surveyed politicians. The fact that these are “special” people, with higher educational credentials and better informed than the

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1 Pay attention to the standards set by the American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR: https://www.aapor.org/)
average citizen implies that researchers need to make sure that the questions asked are appropriated, and this is especially sensitive in qualitative interviews.

There are three conditions and two perceived risks making difficult the interview. On the one hand, MPs are highly mobile citizens serving generally in one city (where the institution of representation is placed) and living in another one. Second, that condition reinforces the idea that MPs have a tight agenda. Third, and most importantly, they are usually surrounded by gatekeepers (secretaries, counselors) that sometimes make it difficult to access the politician. Furthermore, MPs are usually afraid of talking to researchers for the risk of saying something inconvenient, something that goes against the party lines or could push electors away.

Throughout the paper, we will indicate pros and cons of different techniques for gathering information through surveys. Let’s indicate that there are a number of different techniques for surveying politicians—mail, face-to-face, telephone (including skype, facetime, cell phone or landline), and online surveys. All have virtues and defects that the researcher will have to evaluate according to his/her criteria, resources (economic and human).

### Table 2. Pros and cons of different methods of surveying.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of interview</th>
<th>Pros</th>
<th>Cons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Face to face</td>
<td>Respondents are MPs (higher quality of data)</td>
<td>They can lie…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>More and richer data</td>
<td>High costs (money, effort, people, time)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Solid results</td>
<td>Social desirability bias</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High response rate</td>
<td>Takes more time</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Difficult questions can be clarified by interviewer</td>
<td>More privacy</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Less DK/DA</td>
<td>Anonymity guaranteed</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low rate of mistakes filling out the questionnaire</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>More privacy and anonymity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Less risk of sharing questionnaire among MPs.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone (landline, cell, facetime, skype)</td>
<td>Easier</td>
<td>Access costs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Respondents are MPs (higher quality of data)</td>
<td>Finding the time…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Needs to be short</td>
<td>Needs to be short</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low cost</td>
<td>Social desirability bias</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interview can be done in different times (more flexibility).</td>
<td>More distractions</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Less effort to answer</td>
<td>Light answers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>More and richer data</td>
<td>Long questionnaire may be a problem</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Good alternative in absence of email addresses</td>
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<tr>
<td>email</td>
<td>Low cost</td>
<td>Low response rate</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Who answers?</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Costs of pursuing MPs to answer</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Social desirability bias</td>
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<tr>
<td>Method</td>
<td>Pros</td>
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<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mail</td>
<td>Low cost</td>
<td>Risk of MPs sharing questionnaire and emulating answers</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The MP can look for info</td>
<td>Who answers?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Less risk of social desirability</td>
<td>Low response rate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Less risk of answering inconveniently or against the party line.</td>
<td>Costs of pursuing MPs to answer</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The respondent can answer in different moments.</td>
<td>Requires more efforts from respondent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Less incoherence in answers.</td>
<td>More DK/DA</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ensures anonymity of answers</td>
<td>More drop-outs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>online, web</td>
<td>Low cost</td>
<td>Risk of MPs sharing questionnaire and emulating answers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The MP can look for info</td>
<td>Short questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Less social desirability</td>
<td>Needs reinforcement for access.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Less risk of answering inconveniently or against the party line.</td>
<td>No identity control (who answers?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The respondent can answer in different moments.</td>
<td>Needs to build an eplatform</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Less incoherence in answers.</td>
<td>Risk of MPs sharing questionnaire and emulating answers</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Possibility of getting paradata</td>
<td>Fast data collection</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Fast data collection</td>
<td>Less errors in recording data by independent agents</td>
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</table>

All (or almost all) the major advantages and disadvantages of these candidate and MPs surveys are synthesized in Table 2. So, we just underline some of them. On the «pros» side we have the richness of the data, both attitudinal and socio-demographic and socio-political, the possibility of international comparisons and of comparisons with similar mass survey data. However, on the not so positive side, the «cons», we have the cost, the long time for fieldwork and, overall, the high difficulties in interviewing political elites. From our experiences with the several candidate and MPs surveys conducted under the umbrella of the «Elections and Political Representation» framework (http://er.cies.iscte-iul.pt/), some «lessons» to increase the response rates and the quality of material are worth to be mentioned. First, use short questionnaires (around 20-30 minutes at maximum) because they increase the likelihood of higher response rates and also of a higher quality of the material. This is not easy to achieve due to the fact that we have several research team members asking to include questions, besides the ones from the core research team, but it is a very, very important objective to be pursued. Second, involve the institutions to do the surveys in an institutional partnership: we always did that with Portuguese Parliament and the National Electoral Commission, plus the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Third, involve the parties and/or the parliamentary groups to do the surveys in an institutional partnership. Fourth, involve all your personal contacts among the political (and administrative) elites to help to field the surveys. Fifth, in a web-survey, make it easy to answer / user friendly. Sixth, send several reminders: mail surveys and web-surveys.
The first choice the researchers have to face is the type of survey they want to carry out. There are different methods that the researcher has to evaluate considering the resources available (human and economic), the time and the effort that has to be invested. Interviewing politicians is not easy and sometimes it requires a lot of phone calls, emails, letters and visits. The most efficient (considering quality of data) is the face to face interview, however, with the consolidation of mobile devices and internet, a mix methods strategy can be applied very efficiently.

There are three basic challenges to face to face survey studies when dealing with a population of MPs to guarantee a proper response rate and data quality. The first one is the type of questionnaire, the second one the type of sampling and the third one is the access to MPs. As for the questionnaire, there are few issues that should be dealt with--extension, wording, and type of questions.

(a) **Extension.** The researcher has to evaluate whether a long questionnaire touching different issues is better than a short one focused on very few topics. On face to face surveys researchers have more leeway for longer questionnaires, while in web based or telephone surveys, more than 20 minutes of interview may not be a good idea. In the case we are concerned with, interviews ranged from 40 minutes to four hours (the longest). Many MPs lake to qualify their answers and talk about their political life. This is an advantage that should never be ignored. In the study of reference, instructions were given to interviewers to avoid some marginal questions if time was running out.

(b) **Wording.** MPs are not like ordinary citizens in the sense that they are experts on politics. The researcher is granted with some level of complexity in the question that would not be granted when interviewing citizens. General rules apply here: simplicity, clarity, order in the sequence of questions. Clear examples of the complexity of some questions asked to MPs are Miley (2006) and Coller (2004).

(c) **Type of questions.** Although open questions enrich the research, the number of them needs to be limited and the questionnaire needs to be based on closed questions with clear answers. This is common to most survey research done in Spain, but it is especially true for CIS 2250, Méndez and Martínez (2002) and López Nieto (2004). Questions incorporating Likert scales (or similar) are quite convenient for the further statistical treatment of data.

The questionnaire design is a fundamental factor that can minimize measurement and nonresponse errors. Especially, the length of the questionnaire is an important element which influences the response rate of the survey. Evidence from the Greek Candidate survey of 2015 shows that a lower percentage of drop-outs and more completed questionnaires are noticed in a short questionnaire (20 questions) comparing to a more extended version of it (85 questions). Therefore, we can conclude that when we are more interested in a smaller sub-group of question within the entire questionnaire of a survey, it can be more useful or effective to split the long survey in
smaller parts, placing the sub-group of questions that we are more interested in, in the first part of the survey, since there are more chances to have all the questions of this part completed. (Kartsounidou & Andreadis, 2015). The effect of the length of the questionnaire on participation rates is also studied by Galesic and Bosnjak (2009) who observed that the shorter the survey questionnaire the more respondents will start it and complete it in the end.

Furthermore, there is evidence that the biggest amount of the respondents who abandoned the questionnaire is noticed in the beginning of the survey. According to Hoerger (2010) approximately 10% of students participating in Internet-mediated university studies drop out almost immediately. After the first items, it takes about 100 items of survey content for a 2% additional drop out increase. Andreadis (2013a) analyses the relationship between the time spent on the survey and dropout, i.e. the outcome of the respondent's decision to abandon the web-survey. Using Wageindicator data he finds that surveys suffer by many dropouts during the first pages of the questionnaire. As a result, these drop-outs leave the majority of the questions without answer and the corresponding records can be discarded entirely. The dropout rates are low for the following pages and they can increase again when the respondents face a difficult question (such as asking them about their wages) or when their interest to the survey gets lower (Galesic, 2006).

Sometimes it is more preferable to put the most important questions in the beginning of the questionnaire. This approach is also related to the length of the questionnaire. In general, we believe that drop-outs observed in the beginning of the questionnaire caused mostly by respondents who are not that ready to start answering the questionnaire. On the other hand, drop-outs observed in the middle of questionnaire are mainly due to fatigue or boredom. Hence, in very long questionnaires where more drop-outs are expected (even after the first pages) reordering the questions in order to put the most important at the beginning maybe will be useful.

As for the sampling, there are studies that have better samples than others. In the study of reference, the researcher targets a representative sample which involves randomness and the incorporation of basic divides: chamber (if it is a multichamber study), sex and party. However, there are few challenges here.

(a) Selection. In qualitative studies like that of Jerez et al (2015), it is advisable a reduced motivated sample since researchers are not looking for external validity. However, in survey research to MPs, selection needs to be random (applying quotas if necessary) to guarantee equal chance of every MP to be part of the sample irrespective of their relevance in chambers or their seniority, for instance.

(b) The role of small parties. Should the researcher interview MPs from small parties if they will most likely end up in the “others” category when analyzing data? In the referred survey MPs from small parties where interviewed and later, according to the needs of the research where further included in categories like “other regionalist parties” or “other nationalist parties”. It would have been acceptable as well to have “other conservative parties” or “other leftist parties”.
Coverage errors, is one of the most frequent problems that are observed generally in web surveys. Coverage issues can question the representativeness of the sample. In web surveys the representativeness of the sample is directly related to the percentage of the respondents who have access to the internet (Andreadis, 2013b). However, candidates and elected MPs are specialized target population that differs considerably from a sample of general population since are people publicly exposed and they use the Internet in their daily lives in order to communicate and interact with the public and their voters. Hence, coverage issues do arise less frequently in surveys related to parliamentary candidates and MPs (Andreadis & Kartsounidou, 2016). Since coverage issues are not very important in candidate surveys, the main challenge is the nonresponse. The nonresponse refers both to cases that they did not participate at all at the survey and to cases that they abandoned the questionnaire before completing it, the so-called drop-out or break-offs. Usually, the main reasons for nonresponse are the lack of time and the lack of interest (Cranford et al., 2008; Key, Layton, & Shakir, 2002). However, in a candidate survey the lack of time is expected to be more the case than the lack of interest. Candidate MPs are expected to be highly motivated to participate in political survey because politics is expected to be one of their main interests.

In addition, it should be emphasized that as reported by Crawford et al. (2001), the privilege given to the respondents to record their own answers may also have negative effects such as the abandonment of the questionnaire prior to completion, the so-called drop-outs. The absence of an interviewer, burden from long questionnaires, possible distractions (e.g. a new incoming urgent email), questionnaire design non-optimized for all devices (Andreadis, 2015) are factors that increase the possibility of abandoning the questionnaire before its completion.

As for the access to MPs, few considerations should be taken into account. The first one is the MP condition we talked about in the introduction. MPs are usually busy, highly mobile (unless they live in the same city as the chamber) and usually subjected to three types of pressures: work in parliament, relationship with citizens/electors, and task related to their party life. Accessing them may be a difficult task. Add two more factors.

(a) Gatekeepers. Many MPs have secretaries or they centralize the information in the parliamentary group. Whatever contact needs to be done have to go through these gatekeepers.

(b) Distrust and/or lack of interest. Many MPs have not understood yet that answering surveys is also a way of being held accountable to citizens as well as paying a service to the scientific community. They usually distrust whatever has attached the name “research” or “investigation”. Furthermore, they may legitimately ask “why me? why do you have picked me to know my opinions?” Sometimes, there are so many surveys coming to their mailboxes that they lose interest in answering more. For whatever reason, it may be the case that MPs are
reluctant to answer, which will demand a high level of effort and time investment to get them to answer the survey.

Being aware of these challenges implies that the research team may delineate a line of action. The one followed by Coller et al. (2016) was to have the main advisor of the research team, Juan J. Linz, writing letters of support and introduction to every MP. Linz informed of the ensuing mail contact by the principal researcher. The principal researcher sent introductory letters to the president of each parliament, leaders of parliamentary groups, and each MP. The idea was to prevent distrust, vetoes, and to show MPs that the team was serious and professional. The letter informed about the content of the study, the topics to be covered, and announced that a “professor” (not a researcher) would contact them. We emphasized the confidentiality and anonymity of the survey, insisting in that it was carried out for academic purposes. Second, the letter was followed by a number of phone calls to set up an interview. When the MP rejected or it was impossible to answer, then, a substitute of the same characteristics (sex, party, territory) randomly selected was contacted. This is why this study has a high rate of response—substitutes were used until the sample was completed.

Once they have been accessed, interviewing MPs is not either an easy task. There are some problems that the researcher has to evaluate and decide how to tackle them. Here is a collection of some of them.

(a) Social desirability bias. Many times, interviewees (and this is not a peculiarity of MPs) answer to look good in front of the interviewer. They anticipate the expectations of the interviewer (or what they think society expect them to answer) and answer according to these expectations. This social desirability bias is less frequent in web surveys.

(b) Identity impact. The researcher (or the interviewer) has an impact on the MP. The MP usually believes that we are experts on politics (or economics) or we occupy a high rank in our organizations, and consequently they do not want to look dumb. That usually translates into very talkative or shy MPs.

(c) Limited time. The interview needs to be limited to a reasonable time span, although sometimes both MP and interviewer feel comfortable prolonging the interview beyond the limits set up. From another point of view, MPs usually have a limited time which means that the interview should either be short or be done in several times (or using a mix method strategy combining face to face with cell phone interviewing). In any case, it is not advisable to extend the interview beyond the indication given in the introductory letter.

(d) Outspoken or silent MP.

(e) Lack of interest. At some point, sometimes the MP may have lost interest in the interview because the questionnaire is too long, or the wording too complex, or just because s/he is tired.

(f) Suspicion for some questions. During the interview, there may always be present the doubt about the reason for a particular question. More often than not, the MP may be suspicious that this is a question addressed to him/herself for whatever reason. That may end up in shying the MP, which will ultimately affect the quality of the data.
Conclusions

Two type of studies about MPs: biographical and survey. Both have different problems and virtues.

Biographical information
Pros: easy access to information (chambers webpage), easy data management, cheaper and easier fieldwork
Cons: limited information (usually limited to six variables: sex, age, place of birth, studies, profession, party), incomplete information, problems in the statistical management of the database for missing information.

Survey to MPs
Unequal use of the new technologies in the south of Europe to interview MPs.
Problems related to the questionnaire and access to MPs. Additional problems with interviewing MPs in face to face surveys.

Questionnaire
In web surveys, the length of the questionnaire matters to avoid dropouts. In face to face interviews the length of the questionnaire matters to avoid long interviews but researchers have more leeway.
To avoid missing important information, place relevant subset of questions at the beginning of the questionnaires in web surveys. In face to face interviews instructions may be given to avoid certain questions in case the time runs out.
In any case, pay attention to the wording of questions.

Access
MPs are a special type of population (busy, highly mobile) and answering surveys may not be their priority.
To guarantee a good response rate, involve the institution in the survey.
Use introduction letters to reinforce your petition.

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[1] They are all also publicly available at the «Elections and Political Representation» website (http://er.cies.iscte-iul.pt/), like the 2007 Belchior MPs study (2009) and 2006 Viegas mass survey.
[1] Higley and Burton (2006:7) understand that politicians are those people that, by virtue of their strategic position in organizations and social movements (parties, trade unions, mass media, professional associations, lobbies), can have an effect on political results in a regular and substantive matter. Alcántara (2012: 83) identifies four natural areas for politicians: elected politicians, appointed (by the former) personnel in the State administration, party officials and their assessors, and those that have influence (“shadow effect”) after serving in one of the former positions.