Guidelines for the research design final assignment

Requirements

Students are required to write and submit a Research Design, articulating a theory, hypotheses, and a workable empirical strategy to test them, on a topic of their choice directly associated to at least one of the topics covered in this course. This assignment is to be done in pairs, which the students are free to form. There are no exceptions to this rule, except in class groups where an odd number of students are enrolled, where one group of 3 will be allowed.

This assignment is worth 20% of the grade. All team members will receive the same grade. The research design is due on December 9 by 23.59 (that is, 9 days before the final exam) on Blackboard. Only submissions on Blackboard will be accepted, and late submissions will be penalized.

The deliverable is a 2-page write up (with up to 1 additional page for references and a potential appendix). These 2-3 pages are to be written in 12-point, single-space text, using normal margins. The title and authors should be listed on top of the first page.

Expectations

While the deliverable is short, students are expected to produce a high-quality academic text in both form and substance, abiding by academic standards on both fronts. In essence, the challenge here is to produce a thoughtful, original, and academically rigorous piece of writing that showcases students' creative thought on a topic of political science. The research design must engage with at least some academic literature on the topic, ideally recent articles published in top political science journals such as APSR, AJPS, JOP, BJPS or CPS.

The research design needs to:
- Articulate a theory, that is a proposition or set of propositions about the relationship between variables, providing an internally consistent logic to explain a given political phenomenon. The theory should have some generality (i.e., abstract from empirical cases) but be specific, and include details on mechanisms (or channels through which the key variables of interest are connected) and any relevant scope conditions.
- Specify hypotheses, that is falsifiable claims that can be derived from the proposed theory and that can help us test it empirically.
- Advance an empirical strategy, that is a plan that can test the hypotheses and in that way the theory. The proposed empirical strategy should specify what cases will be examined, what comparisons will be done, how data will be collected and analyzed, how uncertainty will be addressed, and an overall justification of how the proposed design would help us test the hypotheses. The design should also include a discussion of internal and external validity.

Recommendations

I strongly encourage students to:
- Start early by forming pairs, thinking through topics, and narrowing down their focus for this assignment.
- Brainstorm and discuss among themselves significantly before writing any sections of the research design. In the meantime, a shared document with ideas, questions, and resources would be useful.
- Revisit the slides, handout, and readings from sessions 2 and 3 on how to do political science.
- Read academic studies to refine the theory and empirical strategy, and to make sure the research design speaks and contributes to recent academic debates on the topic.
- Use weekly readings and discussions to continue refining their theory, hypotheses, and empirical design.
- Reach out to me during breaks, by email, or in office hours for additional help refining their research design.