RESEARCH IN POLITICAL SCIENCE: AN UNDERGRADUATE GUIDE

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Preface

This guide is intended to provide instruction and practical tools for undergraduates conducting research in political science. It is adapted from a guide created by one of my own mentors Andrew J. Enterline. *A Guide to Writing Research Projects in Graduate Political Science Courses* helped establish my foundation for conducting research in political science. A tea-stained, crumpled up version of Enterline's guide served as my most essential resource while a graduate student. As a professor, Enterline's guide has become an essential teaching tool, one that I reference more than any other when teaching Research Methods in Political Science. It is practical, straight to the point, and makes otherwise difficult tasks seem easily achievable.

As this resource has been one of my best teaching tools, I adapted Enterline's guide to directly meet the needs of my undergraduate students. By adding sections that graduate students are familiar with, but undergraduates are not, I hope to provide undergraduate political science students with a foundational resource that assists them in conducting their very own research.

Much like Enterline's original guide, this guide identifies the necessary components of a research project, and then breaks them into smaller, more easily accomplished tasks. It provides definitions for key concepts, examples of various components of a project, and suggestions for how to complete the components of a research project. Checklists for each section intended to help students assess their own work are also provided. This guide should be read and referred to repeatedly by students as they engage in political science research for the first time.

Chapter 1: Introduction to Political Science

Section 1.1 What is Political Science?

Political science is most simply described as the examination of political phenomena. Political science is a discipline of social science which analyzes political institutions, political behavior, and political thought. Research in political science takes many forms, but most work serves one of two key purposes: 1) to describe and explain the existence/emergence of political phenomena; and, 2) to predict or forecast political phenomena. In other words, political scientists seek to explain the world around them, as well as conduct research that results in forecasting, predictive analysis, and policy recommendations. Most political science research is empirical in nature. **Empirical** simply means supported with evidence or observation. Both quantitative and qualitative approaches to conducting research in political science are grounded in evidence and therefore empirical.

Section 1.2 Identifying Research Puzzles and Questions

Developing a suitable research question is the first step in the process of conducting research in political science. In order to settle on one research question, though, you must first identify a research puzzle. A **puzzle** is an observation (by you) of a discontinuity in some political phenomenon for which you do not have a ready causal explanation. For example, you might be interested in the relationship between human rights and democracies, and you observe a great deal of variation in the human rights practices of states that meet the necessary requirements to be considered a democracy. You might also observe that this variation is not readily explained by current explanations for how and why democracies repress their citizens. What explains this variation? A good or fruitful research puzzle provides the foundation for several interesting research question which can result in a rich research agenda or more questions than one scholar can possibly investigate.

Puzzles may also be identified by current events and/or history. You might read a quote or claim that you are not sure can be substantiated with evidence. You might attend a political event and hear a candidate make a claim that you think is testable. You might read a book or journal article in another class that leaves you curious about the explanation for some observed variation. Regardless of origin, puzzles drive scientific inquiry and are the result of both observation and critical thinking.

Once you identify a puzzle, the next step is to identify a research question. A **research question** is an analytical question that seeks to identify causes or consequences of political phenomena. In other words, it begs for a causal explanation. The process by which one formulates a research question can be simultaneously exciting and bedeviling, as you move from identifying an area of research interest, to identifying and refining a question such that it is both original and manageable given available time and resources. In this, the first of your tasks in completing a research project, you are to pursue this refinement process by addressing a set of questions that are intended to encourage you to accomplish the following: (a) select a specific research question of interest from a set of questions that you identify in your research area; and (b) consider the potential academic and societal implications of your study of said question, so that the project is not an isolated event, but part of a broader research agenda.

These questions should encourage you to think very broadly about your investigation and exert your creative and intellectual capacities to their fullest, before narrowing your focus to a single question. Thinking broadly will enable you to identify additional issues and research questions viable for subsequent study, perhaps in graduate school. Thinking broadly means considering your area of interest beyond one case or proper noun. Try to broaden your scope so that you begin to think about patterns and variation across time and space, rather than one instance of a particular kind of event. For example, rather than asking why election violence occurred in the most recent Colombian elections, ask why election violence occurs in general.

In thinking broadly, it is important that you communicate with your professor and peers in order to engage in the proverbial tossing around of ideas, so that you begin to sharpen your skills in thinking about issues and puzzles from different perspectives. You must learn how to talk about the subject matter you are examining with your professors, peers, and friends. Your professors have a great deal of experience in talking about research questions and ideas, and they can demonstrate their expertise during your conversations. Use these interactions as a guide for your own investigative process.

As a start towards developing a suitable research question for your project, consider the following questions:

1. What is your general research area of interest? What draws you to the field of political science? Is there some experience that rivets you to political relationships and behavior? Do you have a particular substantive interest? For example, are you interested in human rights, democracy, civil wars, military strategy, voting behavior?

2. What behavioral puzzles do you observe? Depending upon how you've learned about the process of research, you might not have encountered the term "puzzle" before. I remind the reader that a puzzle is an observation (by you) of a discontinuity in some political phenomenon for which you do not have a ready causal explanation. What variation puzzles you?

3. Identify three cases associated with your subject. Cases may be events, countries, organizations, or examples of the behavior you are interested in studying. They vary by subject matter. How do outcomes associated with your interest vary in the cases identified? If there is no variation, are you able to think of a case that exhibits some variation?

4. Given the identification of a research puzzle, what is an appropriate research question? Your research puzzle will generally stimulate several research questions,

large and small in terms of scope, that might warrant your investigation. If you only have one semester to complete the paper, your scope should be a bit narrower. If you are writing an honors thesis, your scope should be much bigger. It is useful to list and consider at least five potential research questions associated with your area of interest before settling on the most appropriate one. If you reach a mental block, discuss your potential research questions with a peer or professor.

5. What might be the broader implications of your research question for your field of specialization? What are the potential implications of your study for political science more generally? How might your examination add to the existing body of literature on the subject? Further, what policy implications might there be if we better understand the political phenomenon that is the subject of your investigation? At this point, you should identify and read a minimum of 10 political science journal articles associated with your area of focus to get a sense of the state of the discipline.

After you have skimmed some of the existing research, you should select your question from your previously created list. Once you have selected one question, consider the following:

1. Is the question clear and concise? That is, can the question be stated in a single, interrogative sentence of moderate length?

2. Is the concept that reflects your phenomenon of interest (i.e., your dependent variable) visible in the question? That is, if your puzzle attempts to better understand why governments use repression, is this concept the subject of your research question? The focus of your investigation should be clearly stated in your research question.

Once you have what you believe is a viable research question in hand, pose your question to a peer, querying your peer as to the clarity and conciseness of your question. Ultimately, research questions are not "written in stone"—i.e., they can change and evolve as you read and explore. For example, you might find that, upon reading some of the literature, you discover that a great many scholars have explored your question previously, and you wish to explore a similar, but slightly different research question that is relatively unexplored. Alternatively, as you read the literature you might find a particular sub-area or nuance of your original question that you find of interest and wish to explore instead. Research question evolution notwithstanding, the question that you do arrive at must be clearly and visibly stated in your research project. That is, there should be absolutely no uncertainty on the reader's part as to your research question and its validity as the focus of your research project. It should be stated on the first page of your paper.

At this point it is useful to write a research statement that describes the motivation for the investigation and the research question selected. Make sure to explicitly state the research question as a question. The research statement should briefly explain the observed variation and political phenomenon of interest, as well as the example, article, or quote that originally sparked your interest. Once you've completed the remainder of your paper, this research statement should be edited into a formal introduction for your paper. It is my advice that you write the introduction last, but with inspiration from the early stages of the project. The first two to three paragraphs of the introduction should state the research question, as well as the value in examining such a question, before introducing the remainder of the paper.

Chapter 2: Reviewing Existing Literature in Political Science

Section 2.1 How to Write an Annotated Bibliography

During the process of identifying your research puzzle and related research questions, it is likely that you examined some of the scholarly literature that bears on your puzzle and question. Once you have settled on a path of inquiry, it is necessary to vet thoroughly the scholarly literature that is relevant to your research question. In doing so, you are engaged in the process of "reviewing the literature," or identifying and familiarizing yourself with prior efforts by scholars that bear in some way on your investigation of the aforementioned research question.

The first step in reviewing the literature is identifying sources that are related to your question. There are several manners by which you can begin to identify sources. You can utilize your library either by visiting it physically on campus and searching for material or by using their online search engine. Much of the scholarly progress that occurs in political science does so in academic journals that publish articles. Subscriptions vary, but most universities have access to a wide variety of academic journals in which academic articles are published. Many of these are published online, but some libraries do have hard copies of some journals. Academic books found in the library are also relevant, useful, and increasingly available online.

Another manner by which sources for your literature review may be found is **Google Scholar**. Google Scholar is a free search engine powered by google that limits results to scholarly works. Search results are ordered according to relevance and citation count. Articles cited frequently appear at the top of the search results; articles cited less frequently appear toward the end of the results. While you will still need to sort through the results in order to select the most appropriate articles, Google Scholar is an intuitive and user-friendly search engine that is easily accessible for first time researchers to begin searching for scholarly literature.

Google Scholar also provides some additional information about each result that may assist you when writing your literature review. Below each return, there is a star, quotation marks, "Cited by x", "Related articles", and "All x versions" options. Clicking the star allows you to add an article to your library—this requires a Google account and login. Selecting the quotation marks provides the bibliographic information necessary to properly cite the work according to MLA, APA, Chicago, Harvard, and Vancouver styles. The "Cited by x" option allows you to view all the works that have cited by the work displayed in the search results. The "Related articles" option presents articles that are related in subject matter to the displayed search result. And, the "All x versions" option provides links to all versions of a particular work that are available online. When searching for sources whether it be via your library search engine or Google Scholar, use key words or phrases, quotation marks for specific phrases, and avoid using prepositions to improve search results.

Determining whether or not an article is relevant can be difficult at first. Once you have identified a piece of work that you think is relevant, read the abstract, skim the intro and conclusion, and examine the references section. Ask yourself the following questions. Is this work considered political science? While it is okay to have a few articles from other disciplines, a majority of your references should be political science. Does the article investigate the question you have identified? If not, does it investigate something related that is relevant to your research? What is the author's key finding? Does the references section cite sources that may be useful for your research? Spend about 15 minutes exploring the article to determine if it is relevant or not. If so, great; use it as a source and use the references section of the article to identify more relevant sources. Identify and follow these literature trails until you have a significant number of sources to engage and cite. Once you have searched through the existing literature enough that you feel familiar with the subject matter, begin creating your annotated bibliography.

An **annotated bibliography** is a tool used to organize references, important findings, and other information found in key sources prior to writing the paper or article associated with your investigation. It consists of a list of your properly cited references, each followed by a short description and evaluation of the source, as well as any other notes you want to include. Unlike most writing, the annotated bibliography is written for the author, not another audience. As it will be graded and therefore read by your professor, it should be logical and organized, but the information is intended to meet your needs as an author.

While not part of your final draft, an annotated bibliography will make writing your literature review, composing your references list, and other parts of conducting your research simpler and more organized. Feel free to adapt the annotated bibliography as necessary to make it an effective tool for your purposes. Include more than the proper citation, brief summary, and evaluation if it will help organize your thoughts. The annotated bibliography serves as a quick reference to the key sources identified by the author.

An annotated bibliography should include the following at a minimum but is subject to adaptation based on the author's needs.

1. Properly and consistently cited bibliographic source information organized alphabetically.

2. A minimum of 10 scholarly works. Additional works such as novels, films, or newspaper articles may be included in addition to, but not in lieu of the 10 required academic books and/or articles.

3. Summaries must include both descriptive and evaluative information. Make sure to use critical thinking when summarizing sources. Do not simply regurgitate information, but rather evaluate the various strengths and weaknesses of every cited source.

Some things to consider adding to your summary include, but are not limited to, definitions of key terms, direct quotes, statistics, and page numbers for figures or tables that you may want to reference in your paper. You might also consider noting the author's website or additional works of interest. Below are two examples of how to write an entry in an annotated bibliography. The first example is simple and accomplishes the bare minimum outlined above. Example B provides more detail and is adjusted to the author's needs. You may follow either of these examples or create something a little different. Regardless, make sure you create your annotated bibliography with your writing needs in mind.

> Example A:
>
> Gizelis, T. I. (2011). A country of their own: Women and peacebuilding. Conflict Management and Peace Science, 28(5), 522-542. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0738894211418412?casa_token=gSFj6QbDvOMAAAAA:2mVfylSkSlSjfeXU11usyQE0wlMqEO1HFSuR5dwsruZes3WmYb4hmefSXoR9sxgzgS8h2MAuE5aA2Q
>
> This article examines the relationship between women and peacebuilding. While analysis is limited to two cases—Sierra Leon and Liberia—the author argues that the framework developed is generalizable to other cases. The author's theoretical mechanism lies in women's social status as a dimension of social capital. Social capital is defined as "resources embedded in social structures that can be mobilized towards a purposive collective action" (Gizelis 2011, 524). Gizelis (2011) argues that when women have a relatively higher status, they also have greater prospects for successful peacebuilding. When women have enough status in society to be included in peacekeeping processes, the benefits of these processes seem to be greater. When UN peacekeepers are able to connect with local women and build networks that crosscut differences, peacebuilding efforts are more likely to be successful. "[W]omen's social status is a dimension of social capital that is largely independent of general economic development" (Gizelis, 538). This impact is observed in the presence of UN Peacekeeping Operations (PKO).

> Example B:
>
> Gizelis, T. I. (2011). A country of their own: Women and peacebuilding. Conflict Management and Peace Science, 28(5), 522-542. Retrieved from https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0738894211418412?casa_token=gSFj6QbDvOMAAAAA:2mVfylSkSlSjfeXU11usyQE0wlMqEO1HFSuR5dwsruZes3WmYb4hmefSXoR9sxgzgS8h2MAuE5aA2Q
>
> This article examines the relationship between women and peacebuilding. While analysis is limited to two cases—Sierra Leon and Liberia—the author argues that the framework developed is generalizable to other cases. The author's

theoretical mechanism lies in women's social status as a dimension of social capital. Social capital is defined as "resources embedded in social structures that can be mobilized towards a purposive collective action" (Gizelis 2011, 524). Gizelis (2011) argues that when women have a relatively higher status, they also have greater prospects for successful peacebuilding. When women have enough status in society to be included in peacekeeping processes, the benefits of these processes seem to be greater. When UN peacekeepers are able to connect with local women and build networks that crosscut differences, peacebuilding efforts are more likely to be successful. "[W]omen's social status is a dimension of social capital that is largely independent of general economic development" (Gizelis, 538). This impact is observed in the presence of UN Peacekeeping Operations (PKO).

Notes:

- "Porter (2007) argues that although not all women are natural peacemakers, the social roles of women for nurturing interpersonal relationships often make them effective peacebuilders, typically in informal rather than formal ways" (Gizelis 2011, p. 525).

- "The role of women in conflict resolution and their relevance to post-conflict reconstruction is likely to be more notable at the local level rather than the national level" (Gizelis 2011, p. 525).

- *"H1:* Higher pre-war status of women increases the probability of local cooperation with UN peacebuilding efforts" (Gizelis 2011, p. 528).

- Dependent Variable→cooperative or conflictual UN PKO events (p. 529): This variable is a little confusing.

- Independent Variable→women's education attainment (p. 530) great table on p. 530

- A lot of relevant sources in references, use later

Section 2.2 How to Write a Literature Review

A **literature review** is a comprehensive overview of existing scholarship, which focuses on key findings, strengths, and weaknesses of the body of work, and directions for future research. Knopf (2006, 128) describes the literature review as an attempt to "summarize the existing state of knowledge about a subject and, in research proposals to frame the proposed research's expected contribution to knowledge." Reviewing the literature requires you to provide the reader with just enough information about prior efforts, without regurgitating the details of each and every study that is relevant to your inquiry. Usually, it is helpful if you organize your discussion of the pertinent literature around theoretical themes. For example, if you are interested in the way by which third parties influence the outcomes of civil wars, you might introduce the reader to the role of third parties in conflict generally before dividing the literature into works that deal with interstate conflict and works that deal with civil conflict. If you are interested in explanations for government repression, you might divide the extant literature by regime type discussing explanations for repression first in fully autocratic regimes, followed by a discussion of repression in transitional regimes, and finally end with a discussion of when and how democratic regimes engage in repression. The themes chosen by the author should directly relate to the subject matter and should appropriately reflect the existing scholarship.

In addition to reviewing how previous efforts have approached theoretical and empirical issues relevant to your study, you might also be interested in demonstrating to the reader the strengths and weaknesses of a particular source in an effort to set the stage for your own investigation. Regardless, in reviewing the literature it is essential that you demonstrate to the reader how your contribution will add constructively and significantly to an existing research agenda.

Sometimes, a literature is enormous (e.g., the democratic peace), while other times a literature is relatively small (e.g., the study of interstate occupation). In the former case, you need to develop the ability to cite prior research that is representative of classes of prior research, while avoiding discussing at length each and every contribution to the literature (e.g., you might identify and discuss the prior work that is representative of the study of, for example, democracy and economic development research agenda, and cite subsidiary contributions collectively). In the latter case wherein, the literature is quite limited, it might be possible and suitable to discuss each piece of research in greater detail.

The purpose in writing a literature review is, broadly speaking, three-fold:

1. To discuss the scholarly work relevant to your project;
2. To point out the strengths and weakness of this body of research (and, in doing so, keeping in mind a respectful, even-handed approach to evaluating this work); and
3. To Identify how this body of research as it currently stands has not addressed sufficiently the research puzzle/question that you have identified, or that this body of research might be helpful in addressing your question or puzzle.

Of the aforementioned three tasks, the third task in developing your literature review is most critical because it informs the reader as to the reason(s) why further research (i.e., your paper) is warranted, and provides the setup for the theoretical portion of your project. It is very important that you devote some project space to elaborating the reasons why the current literature is inadequate for understanding *your research question* in some way or ways. As an exercise, you might consider yourself confronted by a very skeptical reader who is deciding whether or not to spend the time to read the remaining pages of your project. Ask yourself how well you are doing in convincing this reader to read on. Are you really providing an analysis of the literature, something that will draw the reader in, or is the paper simply a regurgitation of existing work?

A note about objectivity: Remember that even if you are critical of a prior finding, this is not an adversarial process, as you are engaging prior work in order to perpetuate a research agenda that is important for your area of interest. The scholars that published the extant work are invested in understanding the political phenomenon of interest. In other words, scientific inquiry is cumulative resulting in a collective enterprise where new work often builds on rather than refuting existing scholarship. While refutation does occur, it is not the dominant manner through which social science progresses.

Section 2.3 Example and Discussion

In this section, I provide an example of a shortened version of a former student's literature review for your reference. Notice how Jeffrey organizes the literature into two subject appropriate subcategories for evaluation, as well as how he calls the reader's attention to the contribution his research will make to the broader literature. Does this literature review excerpt accomplish the three goals described above?

Example: Insurgent Violence Against Civilians
Author: Jeffrey Coltman-Cormier

Political scientists have investigated a variety of factors that influence why insurgents do or do not perpetrate different types of violence against civilians (Green, 2016; Hovil & Werker, 2005; Hultman, 2007; Kalyvas, 2006; Mkandawire, 2002; Salehyan, Siroky, & Wood, 2014; Thaler, 2012; Weinstein, 2007; Wood, 2014a, b; Wood & Kathman, 2015). Researchers in this literature typically use one of what I discern as two theoretical emphases: insurgents' interactions with other actors and events or internal traits of insurgent organizations. Collectively, the findings provide important explanations for patterns of civilian victimization by insurgents. However, scholars have neglected to consider the cross-border nature of many insurgencies. Not addressing this dimension of civil conflict hinders further accumulation of theoretical knowledge about present-day

insurgents and what compels them to harm civilian populations. In the rest of this literature review, I outline the findings that existing research has produced and highlight how future work can further improve theorizing about the causes of insurgents' behavior.

I first describe the interactions emphasis utilized in the literature on insurgent violence against civilians. This segment of research highlights factors that exist in the conflict environment but outside of insurgent organizations themselves. For instance, Hultman (2007) and Wood (2014a) explore battle losses, arguing that insurgents harm more civilians after these situations as a tactical or material need, respectively. A different interactions-oriented contention is that increases in competition between insurgent groups — more than one group may exist in a single conflict — intensifies violence against civilians because insurgents seek to maintain or wrest control over them away from rival organizations (Wood & Kathman, 2015). In his popular work, Kalyvas (2006) argues that insurgents harm civilians based on both the former's levels of territorial control and the influence of allied noncombatants encouraging violence against civilians aligned with opposing insurgent groups. As a whole, studies that embrace an interactions emphasis implicitly assume that insurgents perceive civilian populations as possessing strategic value in a conflict-ridden context. Clearly, then, insurgents' interactions with conflict dynamics play an important role in shaping their treatment of civilians.

The other theoretical emphasis in the literature on insurgent violence against civilians is the internal emphasis, which primarily scrutinizes attributes of insurgent organizations. One well-known argument in this research considers the type of resources that a group relies on early in its existence for recruitment. Weinstein (2007) claims that the use of economic endowments attracts self-interested, less disciplined individuals who are more willing to perpetrate violence. This is because social endowments like ideology differ in drawing devoted insurgents who are more disciplined and, therefore, less likely to victimize civilians.

External state sponsorship of insurgent groups has also been found to shape their patterns of civilian victimization. This support may produce increased violence by making an organization stronger and less reliant on civilian support (Wood, 2014b) or by enabling a sponsor to order attacks on civilian targets (Hovil & Werker, 2005). Others have found that this general dynamic is more pronounced when an organization has multiple and/or authoritarian state sponsors (Salehyan, Siroky, & Wood, 2014).

Yet additional scholars who focus on internal attributes highlight insurgent groups' political goals. Mkandawire (2002) claims that urban-based insurgents are more likely to perpetrate violence against civilians in rural areas, who probably provide less willing support. More generally, the ideological orientation of a group's leadership may influence its willingness to command violence against civilian populations (Thaler, 2012). Green (2016) builds on this argument by emphasizing the institutionalization of political education programs within insurgent organizations. Groups who

implement such programs, especially when they explicitly instill restraint, commit less violence against civilians. Regardless of the specific factors that they highlight, the above authors collectively show that internal characteristics of insurgent organizations impact their patterns of violence against civilians.

The literature I have reviewed addresses a range of important factors that influence the insurgent-civilian relationship. However, scholars conceptualize insurgent violence as occurring purely within the borders of a single country. The more accurate reality is that since 1945 a slight majority of insurgent organizations have utilized territory in countries other than that of target states (Salehyan, 2009). This *transnational* insurgency fundamentally differs from the wholly domestic kind. Such insurgent groups exploit the fact that states are bound to operating their military and police forces only within their respective territories.

Recognizing this constraint, transnational insurgents cross international borders to establish camps and supply routes, connect with allied civilian populations or even states, and conduct attacks. As such, the development of a transnational insurgency enlarges the spatial domain of civil conflicts (Buhaug & Gates, 2002). Scholars have found that civil conflicts involving transnational insurgents last longer (Buhaug, Gates, & Lujala, 2009) and that transnationality results in increased group violence against civilian, military, and government targets in border areas (Martínez, 2017). Clearly, it is essential that studies of insurgents' behavior, including their levels of civilian victimization, should theoretically incorporate the consequential aspect of transnationality.

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Buhaug, H., Gates, S., & Lujala, P. 2009. "Geography, rebel capability, and the duration of civil conflict." *Journal of Conflict Resolution, 53*(4), 544–569.

Green, A. 2016. "The commander's dilemma: Creating and controlling armed group violence." *Journal of Peace Research, 53*(5), 619–632.

Hovil, L., & Werker, E. 2005. "Portrait of a failed rebellion: An account of rational, sub-optimal violence in Western Uganda." *Rationality and Society, 17*(1), 5–34.

Hultman, L. 2007. "Battle losses and rebel violence: Raising the costs for fighting." *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 19(2), 205–222.

Kalyvas, S. 2006. *The logic of violence in Civil War*. Cambridge University Press.

Martínez, L. 2017. "Transnational insurgents: Evidence from Colombia's FARC at the border with Chávez's Venezuela." *Journal of* Development Economics, 126, 138–153.

Mkandawire, T. 2002. "The terrible toll of Post-Colonial 'Rebel Movements' in Africa: Towards an explanation of the violence against the peasantry." *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 40(2), 181–215.

Salehyan, I. 2009. *Rebels without borders: Transnational insurgencies in world politics*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Salehyan, I., Siroky, D., & Wood, R. 2014. "External rebel sponsorship and civilian abuse: A principal-agent analysis of wartime atrocities." *International Organization*, 68(3), 633–661.

Thaler, K. 2012. "Ideology and violence in civil wars: Theory and evidence from Mozambique and Angola." *Civil Wars, 14*(4), 546–567.

Weinstein, J. 2007. *Inside rebellion: The politics of insurgent violence*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wood, R. 2014a. "From loss to looting? Battlefield costs and rebel incentives for violence." *International Organization, 68*(4), 979–999.

Wood, R. 2014b. "Opportunities to kill or incentives for restraint? Rebel capabilities, the origins of support, and civilian victimization in civil war." *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, 31(5), 461–480.

Wood, R., & Kathman, J. 2015. "Competing for the crown: Inter-rebel competition and civilian targeting in civil war." *Political Research Quarterly, 68*(1), 167–179.

Section 2.4 Citation Style

The literature review example in the previous section uses the American Political Science Association (APSA) citation style which is the discipline specific citation style for political science. A style guide can be found **here**. APSA is most similar to Chicago following most of the same guidelines, but Harvard and APA are also acceptable for political science and social science more generally. Other citation styles exist (MLA), but are more likely to be used in the humanities. Some journal or book editors will require a different style, but APSA is most frequently used in political science. As such, it is relied upon for the purposes of this guide.

When using primary or secondary information in the body of your text, make sure to cite appropriately using in-text citations (not footnotes or endnotes). If you summarize or reference a particular work, simply include a parenthetical citation with the author's last name and year following the summary or reference as shown in Example A. Then include the full bibliographic information in the references section at the end of the paper.

> Example A:
>
> Interest in transitional justice from both a policy and scholarly perspective has grown a great deal in the last 20 years (Loyle and Davenport 2015).

If you quote a source directly and the quote is fewer than 40 words, put the quote in quotation marks as shown in Example B.

> Example B:
>
> "Over the last 20 years, a popular, political, and scholarly interest in what is commonly referred to as transitional justice (TJ) has essentially exploded, becoming one of the more important topics in comparative politics and international relations" (Loyle and Davenport 2015, 1).

If the quote is longer than 40 words, use a block quote or omit the quotations marks and indent the quotation by ½ inch as shown in Example C.

> Example C:
>
> Transitional injustice is characterized by the legitimization and consolidation of an autocratic or authoritarian state. Instead of working towards the development of democratic, liberal ideals, transitional injustice consolidates authoritarianism. The degree to which the justice process supports a democratic regime is determined by the characteristics of the regime itself. (Loyle and Davenport 2015, 1)

Chapter 3: Theory Building

Section 3.1 Theorizing

The **theory** section of a research paper explains the causal process through which the relationship under investigation unfolds. It tells the story—a detailed story—about the variation you observe in the political phenomenon you are researching. Theorizing is one of the more difficult, but perhaps the most rewarding, components of your research project. Like any project, pondering the task of developing your theory in its entirety can be daunting. Yet tackling the task incrementally, piece by piece, can make theorizing more manageable.

What conditions and behaviors constrain or encourage the outcome you are investigating? In order to develop theory, you must first identify the logical assumptions and mechanisms that underly the political behavior or phenomenon of interest to you (i.e., the dependent variable reflected in your research question). **Assumptions** are things accepted as true or as certain to happen, often without proof. It is common, however, in academic work to support assumptions with evidence from examples, anecdotes, and prior work. This strengthens the foundation upon which your theory unfolds. Do not assume that the reader is fully informed or would necessarily draw the same logical conclusions as you do from a set of conditions. Instead, assume they know very little and explain everything in detail. It is necessary for you to be as explicit as possible in identifying the logic and causal mechanism that generates the outcome that is of interest to you.

For exemplary purposes, consider Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone* argument. Putnam's investigation begins with the identification of a change in behavior among Americans. He observes that while they are bowling more, they are doing so alone, rather than in leagues as they had previously. He then elaborates by telling us a story about the decline of civic engagement in the U.S. and how that has led to a decline in civil society. Individual participation in associations and social groups has resulted in a lack of opportunity for folks to interact with people they may not know well in a manner that builds interpersonal trust. Putnam expands upon this theory providing examples and detail. This theory is founded on an assumption that people's trust for one another will increase when they interact with one another in groups. This assumption must be explained fully.

It is necessary to make clear what you consider to be obvious. For example, you would specify that social groups provide opportunities for people to interact who would likely not do so otherwise. The statement of this obvious assumptions leads to less obvious theoretical components allowing you to elaborate that these interactions create opportunities for the people in the groups to learn to trust one another or build interpersonal trust. Without the group interaction, the interpersonal trust among what would otherwise be strangers could not develop. Once you have laid out the necessary assumptions, tell the story of how x leads to y or how some factor you've identified explains some of the variation you observe in the phenomenon of interest. The theory should lead to an expectation in the form of a causal explanation.

An expectation is a strong belief that something will happen or be the case in the future. This expectation should be expressed as a hypothesis (see section 3.3). In other words, what results from the assumptions and logic you identify? Formulating theory is a not an easy task, as such it is frequently avoided. Indeed, one often finds it attractive to skip from the research question to variable measurement or data gathering. Skipping this hard work, however, distracts you from thinking critically and theoretically about the variation you seek to explain, which weakens the overall impact and potential contribution of your project. You must develop a logical explanation which leads to a testable hypothesis before engaging in the research design components of the project.

Section 3.2 Step-by-Step

Breaking up the theorizing task into components, or sub-tasks is a useful tactic. These sub-tasks are essential components of your theory:

1. Develop assumptions about the primary elements, or actors, reflected in your causal linkage. If you are interested in repression and democratic institutions, explain what these two concepts. What is repression? What are democratic institutions? How do you define these concepts and why?

2. Once you have developed the necessary logical assumptions, you need to identify the primary causal relationship about which you are interested in developing expectations. For example, the heart of your research question might concern the relationship between economic growth and the level of democracy. You need to discuss why economic growth encourages or creates opportunity for increased democracy. In other words, how do these concepts fit together causally? How does a change in x lead to a change in y? What is it about economic growth that fosters democracy? What other conditions must be met for this to occur?

3. Identify an expectation about the anticipated behavior of the key concepts in your examination. You should elaborate this expectation in paragraph form before stating it in one concise sentence know as a hypothesis.

Section 3.3 How to Formulate a Hypothesis

Once your theory is developed, it is important that you begin to derive from this story one or more testable hypotheses. In general, a **hypothesis** identifies the primary relationships that your theory predicts, or expects, will occur given a given set of conditions outlined in your theory. It is imperative that any hypothesis you formulate contain reference to at least one concept that represents an independent, or predictor variable and reference to one concept that represents a dependent variable. Additionally, it is imperative that each hypothesis reflect conciseness and clarity.

By way of example, if you are developing a theory about the impact of technological innovation on civil society, your expectation may be that increased access to technology contributes to a decline in civil society. The two concepts of interest are access to technology (key independent or explanatory variable) and civil society (dependent variable). A hypothesis that reflects this expectation is,

H1: As access to technology increases, civil society erodes.

A well written hypothesis conveys three key pieces of information: 1) the expected relationship, 2) the direction of that expected relationship, and 3) the comparison examined. In our example above, the relationship is between access to technology and civil society. The direction of that relationship is negative. An increase in the key independent variable (access to technology) leads to a decrease in the key dependent variable (civil society). The comparison being made is to previous lower levels of access to technology (which is implied but can be stated using a than statement). Make sure to label your hypothesis clearly so that it can be easily identified.

Chapter 4: Research Design & Analysis

At this point, you have written a discussion of the research question, a review of the literature, a new theory, and a testable hypothesis. Next, you need to develop your research design. A **research design** is a statement of the plan that you will execute to test the hypotheses specified in your theory. This chapter explains how to build a research design. The first section of this chapter underscores some of the general issues that you should keep in mind as you develop your research design. The second section outlines sequentially the components of your research design.

Section 4.1 The Research Design

1. *The Plan*. Your research design is a recipe for the hypothesis testing procedure that you intend to carry out in the remainder of your project. By recipe, I mean a plan or road map of the method by which you will construct and execute your hypothesis testing procedure. In writing this section of your project, you should imagine a scenario in which you are charged with recreating an existing hypothesis test from scratch without the privilege of (a) communicating with the author, or (b) examining the final data sample assembled by the author. Your instructions need to be as clear as possible so that they may be replicated. Transparency is an essential component of science. It incentivizes objectivity, rigor, and collective knowledge. It also ensures that researchers follow scientific processes and introduce minimum bias. When creating a research design, you have the responsibility of describing how you went about testing your hypothesis such that your average reader is able to replicate your hypothesis test. Therefore, it is imperative that you write precisely and explicitly about the various decisions you make in designing and conducting your hypothesis test.

   Do not assume knowledge on the part of the reader, even if several extant studies cover the same material and one might presume (incorrectly) that an average reader is up to speed on the state of the literature. Do not assume that you reader will naturally draw the same conclusions that you do, or that your design decisions are necessarily intuitive. Ultimately, as an author of a research design your mantra should always be the following: "clarify and explain, and clarify and explain some more." Finally, never doubt the ability of a reader to misunderstand what you've written and adjust your explanations to minimize these potential misunderstandings. To discover inconsistences or misunderstandings, consult peers and the university writing center. Ask those who read your work if they understand your research design. Such a conversation will likely reveal research design decisions that need to be clarified.

2. *Think Broadly*. You should strive to keep an open mind about your research design. In other words, you should think through each design decision (e.g., choosing a unit of analysis, determining how to measure a concept), rather than deciding on a strategy simply because many scholars before you have chosen strategy A over strategies B and C. While there is something to be said for building on the hard work of previous scholarship, revisiting these decisions may stimulate insights into novel strategies for testing your hypotheses more completely. Furthermore, there is also something to be said for injecting innovation into what has become the accepted research design gospel in the literature; in- deed, ingenuity can provide you with an advantage when presenting your work, because it demonstrates independent thought, creativity, and well, ingenuity. Be careful, though; do not reinvent the wheel simply to do so, but if potential improvements are to by challenging the status quo, do engage in thinking outside the proverbial "box". Innovation is useful when fully explained and clear to the audience. One warning, though, do not overcomplicate things to appear innovative. Make sure your innovations are supported with strong reasoning and comparison to existing dominant approaches.

3. *Convince the Reader*. In writing your research design, you are essentially presenting your strategy for testing your hypotheses, and convincing the reader that your strategy is valid, objective, fair, or simply put, scientifically rigorous. You will need to think about several issues, such as the identification of an appropriate testing strategy, selection of a unit of analysis, operationalization of concepts, and the structure of your tests. You also need to discuss why the strategy you selected to operationalize each of your variables is superior to an alternative strategy. Further, it is important that you review the basic characteristics of any concepts that you operationalize (i.e., mean, minimum, maximum, standard deviation, mode, median.)

A **conceptual** definition which describes what each of your key concepts mean abstractly has been relied upon until now. At this point it is necessary to operationalize those key concepts into variables. **Operationalization** is the process of defining the measurement of a phenomenon that is not directly measurable in standard forms. In other words, it means to describe the specific manner by which you observe the concepts of interest, often via some form of measurement created for comparison that does not intuitively exist. For example, the Political Terror Scale (PTS) measures political terror defined as "violations of basic human rights to the physical integrity of the person by agents of the state" using a five-point scale. The scale ranges from one to five where one indicates the lowest level of state terror in a given country-year and five indicates the highest level of state terror in a given country-year. The indicator is an ordered variable based on the human rights reports from Amnesty International, the State Department, and Human Rights Watch for each country.

Section 4.2 Components of Your Research Design

First Paragraph
The first paragraph of your research design should outline the basic parameters of your hypothesis tests. Specifically, in this section of the paper you should briefly outline the spatial and temporal domain of the sample that you will be using to test your hypotheses. **Spatial** refers to space. **Temporal** refers to time. For example, if your hypothesis necessitates studying the OECD countries, you might explain the OECD and the members of this organization. In doing so, you would identity any nuances of the spatial component of your study (e.g., Lithuania is excluded for *x* reason.) The same goes for the temporal component of your study, such that you should identify the basic temporal range of the spatial units that you will be observing and recording data for the dependent and independent variables. If you are studying civil wars, you will alert the reader to the fact that will examine all civil wars from 1945 to the present day, for example. It might also be the case that you are introducing a phenomenon or unit that is new to the literature, and therefore requires some explanation prior to operationalizing the dependent and independent variables. You should use this brief section to outline the coding of this new unit.

These parameters help delineate both the population of cases, as well as your sample. The **population** is the entire universe to which your questions and theory apply. If you are examining civil war. The population of cases is every civil war. The **sample** is the selection of observations from the population upon which your hypothesis will be tested. Please be explicit in your paper by indicating both your population and sample.

It is critical that you identify the **unit of analysis** or object of your analysis, which frames what is being analyzed in your study. For example, if you are studying each country in your sample once per year, your unit of analysis is the country-year. Alternatively, if you are studying pairs of countries per year, then the unit of analysis is the dyad-year. If you only have one observation per country, your unit of analysis is simply the country (there is no temporal component). Regardless of the unit that you select, its identification should be placed in italics or underlined in your text, so that there is absolutely no doubt in the reader's mind as to the unit upon which you are observing the attributes associated with your dependent variable.

Dependent Variable
Your dependent variable is the paramount variable in your study; it is the variable that you are interested in explaining. Thus, it is important that you are explicit in your operationalization of this variable. Operationalization refers to the specific manner by which you observe the concept, often via some form of measurement. First, however, you should remind the reader of the concept (reflected in your hypotheses) that you intend to operationalize empirically, so that the reader understands your strategy; that is, your

translation of theoretical concept into empirical measurement. Next, you should discuss the pros and cons of various methods of operationalizing your dependent variable. What are the tradeoffs between different operationalization strategies? Why does one strategy provide an operationalization that more closely reflects the concept that is identified in your theory? How have previous scholars operationalized this concept? How reliable and valid is your operationalization of choice? After you have selected your operationalization strategy, and clearly identified the source data for your operationalization, it is necessary for you to provide a short label for your dependent variable, such as "Interstate War" or "Per Capita Growth." When you refer to this variable, use the variable label as a reference.

Next, you need to turn to the task of describing the empirical characteristics of this variable to your reader. Recall, that your goal is to enable the reader to picture, or envision, your data structure without being able to set his or her eyes on the sample. You can accomplish this task by discussing the distribution characteristics of the data on your dependent variable (e.g., minimum, maximum, mean, standard deviation, mode, median), something that might require inserting a table or a figure. How many observations are missing, and are missing observations or units a reflection of bias (e.g., countries engaged in civil war are less likely to report data on economic conditions)? Are the data normally distributed? If not, why not and what special precautions need to be undertaken when employing the dependent variable and interpreting any findings? The remainder of your research design should answer these questions for the reader, so that you (and your average reader) are confident that your dependent variable is a sound approximation of the concept of interest in your theory and hypotheses.

Independent Variables

Your discussion of the independent variables should follow the same strategy in explicating your dependent variable. In doing so, it is helpful if you treat each independent variable in a separate subsection with a separate subheading, so that the reader is clear about which variable you are operationalizing. Again, it is important that you identifying the source data for your operationalizing, provide a label for each variable, identify the level of measurement for each variable (i.e., nominal, ordinal, interval, ratio), and the distributional characteristics of each variable. Ultimately, it is necessary that you convince the reader that you've taken the appropriate steps to operationalize your variables in the most scientifically rigorous manner possible. Your key independent or explanatory variable should be explained first, followed by the control variables identified. Each variable requires the same explicit operationalization as the dependent variable.

Methodology

The final subsection of your research design should discuss the method, or methods, that you will employ to carry out your hypothesis test(s). You should first specify if your approach is quantitative, qualitative, or mixed. A **quantitative approach** relies on mathematical representations of concepts and statistical analysis for hypothesis testing. The operationalizations of your variables discussed in the preceding paragraphs meet these criteria. A **qualitative approach** relies on descriptive narrative rather than numbers to describe key variables, analysis, and findings. A **mixed approach** employs both approaches to hypothesis testing in the same study. Your discussion of the selected approach should entail significantly more than simply stating, for example, that you intend to specify a particular statistical method. Rather, in keeping with your practice in the prior components of the research design, you should walk the reader through the logic underlying your choice of method.

In doing so, you should cite the appropriate authorities on the subject, and weigh the costs and benefits of using various methods. How and when will you determine whether a hypothesis is confirmed? What are your standards for rejecting or accepting the null hypothesis? Additionally, you should also discuss any diagnostics that you will employ to ensure that your analysis, and by extension your hypothesis tests, are robust.

Section 4.3 The Analysis

Now that you've developed a research question, traced the treatment of this question in your literature review, developed a set of theoretical expectations, and developed a research design enabling you to test these expectations, it is now time for you to report these tests. This portion of your research project is referred to as the "Analysis" section of your project, and it is in this section that you will execute the important task of putting your theory to the test against some evidence, and in turn, assessing whether your theory "works" as an explanation of your phenomenon of interest. Your overarching goal is to convince the reader that you've provided fair, valid test(s) of the hypotheses that you've derived from your theory, such that the average reader is relatively confident in your conclusions. Below, I identify some items that you should keep in mind as you carry out your analysis and write up your findings.

1. *Refresh the reader's memory*. As you know, academic papers can be long and complex, and it is reasonable to assume that it is difficult for a reader to recall the nuances and finer points of your project as they have been identified in the previous sections of your paper (e.g., how a concept identified in your hypotheses is operationalized with one or more empirical indicators.) Therefore, it is important that you refresh the reader's memory where necessary. For example, instead of stating that you are planning to test "Hypothesis 1," remind the reader of the basic expectation reflected in this hypothesis (e.g., negotiated settlements are more likely to be followed by the cultivation of democratic institutions.) This refreshing of the reader's memory may be necessary for the operationalization of variables that have similar names or those concepts for which you are exploring a set of operationalizations. The basic rule of thumb is to keep your language simple, efficient, clear, and constantly

imagine whether the average, moderately informed reader could replicate the experimental conditions that you're undertaking in this paper. If you have any doubt, then further clarification is necessary.

2. *Be skeptical because readers are*. It is recommended that you assume a skeptical, but confident, approach to writing up your analysis. Despite hard work, you are basing your assessments of theoretical expectations on estimates of some truth and then assessing the performance of your theory against this estimate. Some measure of skepticism might also gain the reader's confidence that you, as the scientist in charge, are providing stringent tests of your hypotheses and not, as often seems to be the case, giving your theory an advantage, or even the benefit of the doubt when it comes to assessment. Stated differently, you want to convince the reader that you've "set the bar" very high for verifying your expectations. Objectivity remains paramount.

3. *References to visual aids*. You should be careful and clear in your references to tables and figures, making sure train your reader's eyes on a particular variable or column in a given table or figure. Similarly, you should make your tables and figures easy for a reader to digest, and therefore learn the fine art of constructing visual aids that have a minimum of clutter, as well as visual aids that have informative titles, keys, and notes regarding sources.

4. *Substantive effects of variables*. When relying on a quantitative approach, it is important to recognize the statistical significance of various relationships, but it is equally important to try to assess the substantive importance of statistical relationships. It is often the case that your attention is riveted to the statistical significance (yes, those pesky asterisks!), rather than substantive significance. But, it also the case that relationships can register as statistically very significant (i.e., you have high confidence that the estimated relationship in the sample holds in the population), but substantively weak (i.e., the unit change in Y given some value of X is picayune.) Ultimately, it is important to assess whether a particular relationship in question has importance in the material world and to do so in straightforward terms (e.g., for every dollar of ODA provided by a donor state, a recipient state's level of democracy increases by 1 percent).

5. *Discussion*. After you have tested your hypotheses, you should engage in a discussion of any issues, broadly defined, that emerged during your analysis. For example, it is very likely that not all of your expectations will be supported by your analysis. Why is this the case? Is this a function of poor theorizing? Lack of data? You should explore these questions, as well as others that come to mind as you work on your paper. Where does your theory makes sense and

where does it not? Perhaps you might go about amending your theory or exploring the robustness of your findings by removing outliers or influential cases from your sample. Again, be skeptical and try exploring issues and questions that you suspect an average reviewer, a person with some expertise in your areas of research, might raise in an assessment of your research. In short, you are to assess where you went right and where you went wrong and to determine what you've learned from your tests of your theoretical expectations. Make sure to leave the reader with the key take-away from your hypothesis test(s). What do you want the reader to remember from this analysis?

Chapter 5: The Introduction, Conclusion, and Abstract

At this juncture, you should have rough drafts of your research question, literature review, theory, hypotheses, research design, and analysis sections. It is time to turn your attention to crafting two short, but essential, components of your project: the introduction and conclusion. Certainly, there are myriad ways that one might proceed in writing these two sections. Here, I identify what I consider to be the basic goals of these sections, as well as their general structure in political science research reports. While your creativity in terms of form is welcome, keep in in mind that it is necessary for you to accomplish these goals in some manner. The remainder of this guide is divided into two subsections, the first covering the structure of the introduction, and the subsequent subsection covering the conclusion.

Section 5.1 The Introduction

Your introduction is designed to communicate several items very concisely, in no more than two (2) double-spaced pages, or about six paragraphs.

1. *First paragraph/research question*. No matter how you choose to introduce your inquiry, perhaps beginning with an example of your puzzle (something gripping would be nice), it is absolutely imperative that you identify your research question somewhere in this first paragraph, and place this question in *italics*, so that there is absolutely no question in the mind of readers what question you are investigating. Sometimes, authors simply identify the question, or questions, in the first sentence of the first paragraph, and discuss why said question reflects political behavior that is puzzling. Alternatively, some studies begin with a vignette (During the Falklands War, Argentina sought third party mediation with the United Kingdom, but during the Soccer War, Nicaragua did not seek third party mediation. . .). A transition is then necessary to transition from the vignette to a statement of the question. The choice of style is yours, but make sure your research question is nestled somewhere in this first paragraph.

2. *Prior research.* Some studies follow up the first paragraph with a paragraph that outlines the major research threads relevant to the aforementioned research question, summarizing the arguments and finding

of each thread in a sentence or two, with a parenthetical citation including the most important examples of a particular thread. This paragraph should be formulated such that a smooth transition occurs with the subsequent paragraph focusing on your study's relevance.

3. *Relevance of study*. As noted in the previous point, in addition to identifying ground left unexplored by previous research, you need to state in plain terms just why this oversight is important and why this gap in the literature is important. Specifically, it is necessary that you convey to the reader why an investigation of said gap will help scholars understand important political behavior, i.e., the puzzle, left unexplained in the current literature. If there are policy implications, you should also mention those here.

4. *Preview of findings*. Some authors develop a paragraph in which the results of the analysis, i.e., the hypothesis tests, are previewed for the reader. Such a preview is intended to convey the reader that you, the author, have some striking and important findings.

5. *Final paragraph/remaining framework*. The final paragraph of your introduction should lay out the framework, or structure, of the remaining sections of your paper. Given that the basic structure of research reports in political science is generally consistent, this paragraph is rather straightforward. First, it is necessary for you to walk the reader through the remaining sections of the paper. You can accomplish this task with very simple language, such as the following:

    "In the remainder of the paper, I accomplish several tasks. First, I review the extant literature that examines relationship x. Next, I develop an original theory that ________."

Section 5.2 The Conclusion

In some respects, you have more flexibility in the structure of your conclusion than you do with the structure of your introduction. In terms of length, your conclusion may run slightly longer than your introduction, but not by much. I recommend setting three double-spaced pages as your target length for the conclusion, and focusing on the following goals as you write:

1. *First paragraph: The paper's purpose*. Briefly, you should revisit the question that stimulated your inquiry and perhaps remind the reader why its investigation is important for the greater body of knowledge (a) in this research agenda, (b) political science, and perhaps, (c) social science in general. You should also review your approach to examining this issue.

2. *Paper's major contribution & implications*. Discuss your project's general, significant contribution to the study of the phenomenon of interest in simple terms. What do you want readers to remember about the contributions of this examination? Make sure to discuss the potential implications of your research project for the general study of the phenomenon of interest, as well as policymakers.

3. *Identify strengths & weaknesses*. It is prudent that you briefly discuss in an even-handed manner the strengths and weaknesses of your study. Remember that objectivity is necessary. Further, a short exploration of your study's weaknesses preempts criticism. In other words, it means you have considered the shortcomings of the work.

4. *Future research*. Discuss where you might take your research project subsequently. What questions does your paper raise that are worth exploring? If there are some limitations to your study, what tests might be run in the future to test the robustness of your findings? Where do you see the research agenda moving in the future?

5. *Final paragraph*. You should wrap up your paper with some final comments. You certainly have some flexibility in this regard. You might consider the policy implications of your findings, or touch again on the general implications of your findings. A "zinger" of a final paragraph would be nice, but it is not necessary.

Section 5.3 The Abstract

The purpose of your abstract is to provide the reader with a synopsis of your project in 200 words or less. The brevity of an abstract requires that you be concise in summarizing the purpose, theory, design, and major conclusions of your project (perhaps, literally one sentence for each of these components.) You might begin by allotting one short sentence to each component of your project (e.g., prior research, research design, findings), and then trim words where necessary to get under the 200-word limit.

Chapter 6: Presentation of Your Project

Section 6.1 Presentation Guidelines

There are several general keys to making a good presentation. Before addressing the issue of formatting, there are several general items to keep in mind:

1. *Be concise*. Your presentation slides, your verbal presentation of your project, and your response to questions should be delivered in a concise fashion. Whatever you do, do NOT jam the slide full of text. Bullets are intended to be followed by phrases or words, not complete, multi-line sentences. Use bullets. Rely on verbal communication to elaborate your points.
2. *Have rhythm*. Deliver your presentation quickly enough so that you do not lose the interest of the audience, but slow enough that the audience has time to comprehend your key points. Pace your presentation and rely on comfortable pauses as you move from one slide to the next or consider a question. It is important to learn to pace yourself, and occasional pauses are part of proper pacing.
3. *Face the audience*. Look at directly at your audience and make eye contact. Do not stare down.
4. *Never read*. Never, ever read your research paper or notes verbatim. You must be able to present your research without reading your presentation or looking down at your notes for more than a few seconds at a time.
5. *Cite sources*. Use in text citations (author year) throughout presentation when necessary. An optional References slide at the end of the presentation is also recommended."

Section 6.2 Format

The standard presentation format for academic work pretty closely resembles the format of your project, and includes slides devoted to the following items:

1. Title.
2. Research Puzzle/Question.
3. Prior Research.
4. Theory & Hypotheses.
5. Research Design.
6. Analysis.
7. Conclusions & Implications.

Slide 1: Title
The purpose of the title slide is to communicate your project's title, your full name, university affiliation, and the date that you are delivering your presentation. As with every slide, the readability of your slide is paramount, so you should use a layout that will be easily read by a member of your audience (if you're unsure, project it on a screen and pretend to be an audience member. Is it readable?) The title of your paper should appear first and in text that is larger (perhaps 18-point type) than the remaining information on the slide. The remaining information, either left justified or centered, should follow in smaller type (16 or 14-point type).

Slide 2: Research Puzzle/Question
This slide should begin with the following heading, large and in bold at the top the slide (centered or left justified): "Research Question". State your question as succinctly as possible, while still retaining the relevant information. A motivation for your examination may also be appropriate to share at this point.

Slide 3: Prior Research
This slide should begin with the following heading, large and in bold at the top the slide (centered or left justified): "Prior Research." Following a space, you should organize exemplars (e.g., examples) of various threads in previous literature that bear on your research question under indented headings. The organization of this slide should reflect your organization of the literature review in your paper. That is, if identify four relevant approaches in the literature, then four short sub-headings, followed by examples of each approach should be noted. Be aware of the fact that this is not the place for you to try to parenthetically cite every piece of relevant work, or even discuss them in anything but general terms. Recall, that the first paragraph of the literature review in your paper should provide the reader with the manner in which you will organize your discussion of said literature. This organization, or framework, should appear on this slide, accompanied by one or two parenthetical citations. In addition to noting snippets of the literature of interest, you should tell your audience why and how this literature bears on your research question.

Slide 4: Theory & Hypotheses
This slide should begin with the following heading, large and in bold at the top the slide (centered or left justified): "Theory & Hypotheses." It is paramount that the information presented on this slide be clear and concise. In terms of the theory, you should identify your primary theoretical claim. You will not be able to elaborate your theory on this slide, but you should be able to reveal its core logic to the audience. Following this statement of your theory, you should state your hypothesis.

Slide 5: Research Design
This slide should begin with the following heading, large and in bold at the top the slide (centered or left justified): "Research Design." Research designs are naturally packed with a great deal of information. As such, it may take two slides to convey the necessary information. Make sure that these slides combined contain information about the population, sample, unit of analysis, dependent variable, key independent variable, control variables, and method used for hypothesis testing.

Slide 6: Analysis
This slide should begin with the following heading, large and in bold at the top the slide (centered or left justified): “Analysis”. Report the main findings of the hypothesis test here. If that is a statistical model, report that in a table. If you’ve conducted a case study, report key findings in a figure, illustration, or as few words as possible.

Slide 7: Conclusions & Implications
This slide should begin with the following heading, large and in bold at the top the slide (centered or left justified): “Conclusions & Implications.” This is the final slide in your presentation. This slide should lay out two subsets of information. The first subset of information, your general conclusions, should consist of three of four bullets summarizing your conclusions with key words. The second subset of information identifies what you think are the implications of your project for the study of your research question and the subsequent course the broader research agenda (e.g., human rights.) Again, keep the text following your bullets brief, and rely on verbal communication to elaborate your points.

An example of a presentation is now provided. Please watch the following presentation by Jeffrey Coltman-Cormier. This presentation was part of Jeffrey’s honors thesis work entitled “Desperate Times Call for Desperate Measures: Border Fortification and Transnational Insurgents’ Violence Against Civilians”. The abstract is below for your reference.

“Desperate Times Call for Desperate Measures: Border Fortification and Transnational Insurgents’ Violence Against Civilians”

Abstract: It is well known that many factors contribute to insurgents’ patterns of civilian victimization. Yet, the literature has rarely considered this behavior in terms of the typically transnational character of insurgency. My theoretical argument is that border fortification causes transnational insurgent groups to perpetrate more violence against civilians. Insurgents who are transnational strategically and materially benefit from operating in target states’ contiguous neighbors and participating in cross-border commercial networks of illicit commodities. As political geographers and some political scientists have described, various states have responded to this and other forms of illicit movement by erecting border walls and fences. I contend that these border barriers deprive impacted transnational fighters of resources, prompting them to demand more voluntary support from civilians who are less likely to provide it. I expect that insurgents in this situation consequently commit more violence against civilians as a means of coercive resource extraction. This behavior transpires in the form of short-term surges because impacted insurgents can adapt to their new material contexts, but successive fortification generates new, even greater bursts of violence. Using the qualitative method of process tracing and new data on India-Bangladesh border fortification gathered for this project, I test my argument with a case study of the United Liberation Front of Assam. The preliminary evidence in this pilot study indicates that the global trend of fortifying borders to counter transnational insurgency may in fact be harming the civilians whose walls and fences are purported to protect.

Presentation Video

Questions about Presentation

1. What research question does Jeffrey investigate?
2. Is this question interesting? Why?
3. How does he divide the existing literature?
4. What is Jeffrey's expectation or hypothesis?
5. How does Jeffrey present his research design?
6. Does Jeffrey find support for his hypothesis?
7. What did Jeffrey do really well? What could he have done better?

GLOSSARY

Annotated bibliography: A tool used to organize references, important findings, and other key information found in key sources prior to writing the paper or article associated with your investigation. It consists of a list of your properly cited references, each followed by a short description and evaluation of the source, as well as any other notes you want to include.

Assumption: A notion accepted as true or as certain to happen, often supported by prior research or evidence.

Conceptual definition: A definition that describes what each of your key concepts mean.

Empirical: Supported with evidence or observation.

Annotated bibliography: A tool used to organize references, important findings, and other information found in key sources prior to writing the paper or article associated with your investigation.

Assumptions: Things accepted as true or as certain to happen, often without proof.

Conceptual Definition: describes what each of your key concepts mean abstractly.

Google Scholar: A free search engine powered by google that limits results to scholarly works.

Hypothesis: Identifies the primary relationships that your theory predicts, or expects, will occur given a given set of conditions outlined in your theory.

Literature review: A comprehensive overview of existing scholarship, which focuses on key findings, strengths and weaknesses of the body of work, and directions for future research.

Mixed approach: employs both approaches to hypothesis testing in the same study.

Operationalization: Process of defining the measurement of a phenomenon that is not directly measurable in standard forms.

Political science: A discipline of social science which analyzes political institutions, political behavior, and political thought.

Population: The universe of cases to which your questions and theories apply.

Puzzle: An observation (by you) of a discontinuity in (political) behavior in your area of interest for which you do not have a ready causal explanation.

Quantitative Approach: Relies on mathematical representations of concepts and statistical analysis for hypothesis testing.

Qualitative Approach: Relies on descriptive narrative rather than numbers to describe key variables, analysis, and findings.

Research design: A statement of the plan that you will execute to test the hypotheses that you identify in your theory section.

Research question: An analytical question that seeks to identify causes or consequences of political phenomena.

Sample: The selection of observations from the population upon which your hypothesis will be tested.

Spatial: In reference to space.

Temporal: In reference to time.

Theory: explains the causal process through which the relationship under investigation unfolds.

Unit of Analysis: The object of your analysis.

APPENDIX A: CHECKLIST

General Formatting

- The main body of the text is in 12-point type and is double-spaced.
- Page numbers appear on every sheet but the first three (i.e., the title, abstract and first page are numberless).
- One-inch margins (left, right, bottom and top) are used through-out the text.
- Headings and sub-headings are employed to sub-divide the text.
- In text citations are parenthetical and follow APSA formatting guidelines.

Specific Formatting

Title Page

- The title of the project contains the key words central to the study.
- The title is centered on the top third of the page.
- Your contact information is centered in the middle of the page.
- A draft date or version number is present on the lower third of the page.
- An informative footer is present, with appropriate thanks, location of presentation, and disclaimers.

Abstract

- The project's title appears centered at the top of the page.
- The heading "Abstract" appears left justified above the abstract proper.
- The abstract identifies for the reader the purpose of the study, its framework, and a summary of the conclusion in 200 words or less.
- The abstract is in 12-point type and is double-spaced.
- The remainder of the page is anonymous or empty.

Introduction

- The first paragraph introduces the research puzzle and question of inquiry. This question is stated explicitly as a question.
- The second paragraph summarizes previous research very briefly.
- The third paragraph explains how your study will solve the outstanding research question.
- The fourth paragraph previews your conclusions.
- The fifth paragraph explains the layout of the remainder of the paper.

Literature Review

- The first paragraph explains to the reader how you are going to organize your treatment of the literature (e.g., ". . . prior work sub-divides along two levels of analysis: a) systemic explanations for war, and b) domestic explanations for war. I discuss the central arguments and findings of each sub-literature, in turn.").
- Sub-divisions of the literature are clearly marked, and sufficient transitions developed.
- The final paragraph provides a well-developed transition to the theoretical section. Specifically, you inform the reader that, given the literature you just reviewed, more work is

necessary in order to address the puzzle and question set out at the start of your paper, or that you find some aspects of previous research helpful, you need to innovate to really address the question.

Theory & Hypotheses

- Your theory section isolates the causal mechanism central to the aforementioned question.
- You state assumptions about relationships and conditions pertaining to your theoretical arguments explicitly.
- You use consistent and sound logic to tell a theoretical story.
- Substantive (i.e., historical or hypothetical) examples are provided to illustrate your claims and arguments.
- Your hypotheses are clearly labeled and concisely stated.
- The concepts contained in your hypotheses are clearly defined.

Research Design

- The first paragraph outlines the basic parameters of the study in terms of the way in which you intend to test your expectations.
- Your population, sample, unit of analysis, and spatial and temporal domains are clearly stated.
- Your dependent variable concept is clearly operationalized and data sources are clearly documented.
- Your key independent variable concept is clearly operationalized and data sources are clearly documented.
- Your control variables are clearly operationalized and data sources are clearly documented.
- Descriptive statistics are provided for all variables.
- Your choice and rationale for choosing a methodology for testing your hypotheses are clearly identified.

Analysis

- You begin your analysis by refreshing the reader's memory regarding your theoretical expectations.
- You carefully walk the reader through the assessment of your expectations.
- You conduct and report the findings of your hypothesis test. Discuss strengths, weaknesses, and any inconsistencies.
- You conclude your analysis by discussing the implications of your findings and addressing any threats to the validity and robustness of your analysis.
- You are downright skeptical about your ability to observe truth, and as a result, are sufficiently guarded in your assessments and conclusions about whether you are right! Remember, all social science knowledge is provisional and probabilistic.

Conclusions

- The first paragraph restates the question of interest and summarizes your strategy for solving the problem.
- The second paragraph summarizes your most important findings.
- The third paragraph identifies questions for additional research
- The fourth paragraph discusses the implications of your findings for current scholarship and policy.

References

- They are listed in alphabetical order.
- They are in APSA format.
- They are 12-point type.
- They are double-spaced.

Tables & Figures

- Tables and figures are clearly labeled, and the labels are informative.
- Tables and figures are each placed on a separate page.
- The tables and figure are numbered sequentially (e.g., Table 1, Table 2, Table 3, and Figure 1, Figure 2, Figure 3).
- Tables follow the references, and figures follow the tables.

Presentation

- The font point size on slides is no smaller than 16-point.
- The amount of text on each slide is the absolute minimum. Incomplete sentences are acceptable.
- Tables and figures are clearly labeled.
- The color scheme is simple.
- Photos, if used, are appropriately cited.
- The slides are uncluttered and easily readable from 10-15 feet.
- You've practiced your presentation, such that you are intimately familiar with the information on your slides. Use notes if necessary.
- DO NOT read your presentation.