

**DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
AND
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
Research Methods Posc 302**

RESEARCH PROJECTS

The research project offers you a chance to apply many of the concepts and techniques discussed during the semester. Using a general topic that I will assign you should write a report that contains the major elements of research design and analysis. In particular, you will need to identify and state precisely and clearly the subject, hypotheses, operational definitions of concepts, analysis methods, and data sources. Your paper will also contain simple descriptive and inferential statistics that test the hypotheses. Finally, based on this analysis you will draw substantive conclusions that a general reader can understand and apply to the study of public opinion.

Assume that you are writing a report for a public service organization. It has paid you a lot of money for your advice about public opinion and may wish to employ you in the future. Hence, you know your work is going to be distributed to a group of people who are familiar with general research procedures, although they are certainly not experts, and are very knowledgeable American politics. Your task is to convince them that your conclusions are sound and that you are competent to carry out empirical research in case they need your services in the future. Consequently, your final report should not only be substantively and methodologically solid but also meet professional standards of methods and appearance.

Everyone should look over **all** of the notes for directions and suggestions regarding the preparation and presentation of the project. In particular, your report should contain at least the following:

- An introduction that clearly states the topic and its importance. To have a chance an A (not a guarantee but a chance) you should properly cite some “literature” that pertains to the subject.
- A “methods” section that fully describes the source of the data and the variables and questions you are going to analyze and a brief description of your statistical methods. If, for instance, you are looking for trends, tell the reader at the outset what you think constitutes a meaningful change or difference.
- Analysis: a full discussion complete with tables, graphs, and statistics of your findings.
- A conclusion that summarizes the main findings, discusses their importance and implications, and suggestions for further research.

Topics:

If your last name begins with a letter between A and H, choose this topic:



Is there a racial gap in American public opinion? Your paper should answer these questions: are there important differences between the races on public policy issues? Do these differences exist after social class has been taken into account?

Some tips and guidelines:

- Choose a manageable number of issues to investigate. The point is to make important points about American politics with a limited amount of data.
- Whenever possible you should try to relate your topic and/or findings to previous research. That is, you should scour the Internet or Library for at least one article that covers your topic, if at all possible, speak to the claims raised in it. Make sure article is fully cited.
- Clearly define **all** relevant terms so that the “committee” knows what you are talking about. Remember: its members are intelligent but don’t have access to the raw data that you do. So, they are not going to understand either vaguely stated ideas or abbreviated labels.
- As a practical matter you can choose between data in the General Social Survey or the 1996 National Election study. The reader should know which you chose and should have (in an appendix perhaps) a verbatim list of questions and variables.
- You should make clear whether differences are a substantively, statistically different or both.

If your last name begins with a letter between I and M, choose this topic:

Is there a political culture gap in the United States? This paper should compare how respondents living in different regions of the country feel about matters of some of the important issues of the day. Do these differences persist after social class has been controlled?

Some tips and guidelines:

- Choose a manageable number of issues to investigate because although you want to demonstrate something important about American politics, you have limited time and resources.
- Clearly define **all** relevant terms so that the “committee” knows what you are talking about. Remember: its members are intelligent but don’t have access to the raw data that you do. So, they are not going to understand either vaguely stated ideas or abbreviated labels. How, for instance, do you operationalize the term culture? Okay, you use region or place of region. But make sure the reader knows what exactly “South” means.
- As a practical matter you can choose between data in the General Social Survey or the 1996 National Election study. The reader should know which you chose and should have in an appendix perhaps a verbatim list of questions and variables.



- You should make clear whether differences are a substantively, statistically different or both.
- Try to relate your topic and/or findings to previous research. That is, you should scour the Internet or Library for at least one article that covers your topic, if at all possible, speak to the claims raised in it. Make sure article is fully cited.

If your last name begins with a letter between N and Q, choose this topic:

Is there a generation gap in American politics? If there is a gap, does it persist after persist after controls for social class have been introduced?

Some tips and guidelines.

- Choose a manageable number of issues to investigate. You should be able to make some important insights about public opinion in America with a limited data set.
- Try to relate your topic and/or findings to previous research. That is, you should scour the Internet or Library for at least one article that covers your topic, if at all possible, speak to the claims raised in it. Make sure article is fully cited.
- Clearly define **all** relevant terms so that the “committee” knows what you are talking about. Remember: its members are intelligent but don’t have access to the raw data that you do. So, they are not going to understand either vaguely stated ideas or abbreviated labels. What, for example, is a generation gap? How is it measured in your paper? Why? You will presumably control for certain demographic factors such as income or education. Why did you pick those?
- As a practical matter you can choose between data in the General Social Survey or the 1996 National Election study. The reader should know which you chose and should have in an appendix perhaps a verbatim list of questions and variables.
- You should make clear whether differences are a substantively, statistically different or both.

If your last name begins with a letter between R and Z, choose this topic:

Has the public become more or less conservative since 1972? This topic differs some what from the others in that 1) you’ll have to use the General Social Survey and 2) you’ll have to compare public opinion on a set of issues at two or more years.

- Choose a manageable number of issues to investigate. The point is to demonstrate 1) that you can say something important about American politics while 2) limiting the amount of work need to make the point. You simply don’t have the time to look at all controversies. **Note: the General**



Social Survey does not always include the same question year after year. Thus, you need to be sure variables are available for the years you choose to study.

- Clearly define **all** relevant terms so that the “committee” knows what you are talking about. Remember: its members are intelligent but don’t have access to the raw data that you do. So, they are not going to understand either vaguely stated ideas or abbreviated labels. The reader should know which attitudinal variables you chose and should have (in an appendix perhaps) a verbatim list of questions and variables. Clearly indicate the years used in the comparison. (Example: choosing 1976, 1984, and 1996 would cover three decades and the particular years would involve presidential elections.
- You should make clear whether differences are a substantively, statistically different or both.
- Whenever possible you should try to relate your topic and/or findings to previous research. That is, you should scour the Internet or Library for at least one article that covers your topic. Make sure it is fully cited.

You have enough training and information to begin now. The material covered in the remainder of the semester can be incorporated into the body of your research paper as needed.

Make sure that your paper follows the guidelines for organization, writing, and presentation that we have discussed throughout the semester.

Deadline:

Due May 22, 2000 in the main political science office, 347 Smith. If you don’t get it there by 4:00 p.m., you’re out of luck.