

## Political Psychology Research Project

This project is designed for you to experience the production of political psychology knowledge. You will design and conduct original political psychology research. Your project will ultimately resemble a pilot study in political psychology.

There are two parts to this project – a group project that involves the execution and presentation of the research and an individual report on your research.

In this project, you should do *one* of the following:

1. Replicate an existing study on a new population.
2. Execute a new test of an existing theory.
3. Extend an existing theory to a new domain.
4. Propose an entirely new theory in an existing domain of political psychology.

### 1 What is a pilot study?

A pilot study is a small-scale study performed before it is implemented on a larger scale. Pilot studies are often conducted to test the validity of a particular design or to show the possibility of successfully testing a hypothesis in order to obtain funding for a larger test of the hypothesis. Political psychology research is often considerably more expensive than other political science research, so pilot studies are particularly important.

For your purposes, this means that your study can be small and incomplete – you do not need to test every possible implication or permutation of your question and you *do not need to have enough subjects to obtain statistical significance*.

### 2 Choosing a topic

No two groups in the same section may research the same topic. The topics are those listed by letters in the syllabus – for example, a group can research on “personality” or “social identity”.

Topics will be claimed on a first come, first serve basis. You may not choose a topic until you have a complete group. You will claim a topic by informing your TF of the names of all members of your group and your chosen topic.

#### 2.1 What topic should I choose?

Whichever you find most interesting and has not been chosen by another group. However, timing is an important consideration: we will not cover some topics until late in the semester, this means that in order to complete the assignment, some topics will require planning ahead.

### 3 Groups

You are responsible for forming your own groups. Groups may only consist of students with the same Teaching Fellow. The teaching team reserves the right to alter groups. If, for some reason, you can't find a group, it is your responsibility to inform your TF.

All members of a group are responsible for all material – including presenting your findings, so do not join a group if you will not be available for the presentation.

Groups should consist of four or five students. If you want to form a group of a different size, seek permission from your TF.

### 4 Research Design

Before beginning your research, you must gain approval of your research design from your Teaching Fellow. If you do not gain approval, you will be in violation of the University Human Subject Research Board policy, so it is crucial that you obtain approval. If you will be recruiting subjects for your study, *you may not contact subjects in any way before your design is approved.*

Again, it is important to consider **timing** because you must give your Teaching Fellow adequate time to read your proposed design and return it to you. You must also give yourself adequate time to address any concerns that they raise – this could take several back and forth iterations.

You can submit your research design whenever you are ready. **However, it must be submitted to your Teaching Fellow by March 23.**

Your research design should carefully describe, in detail, your question, hypothesis, proposed subjects, and proposed test.

Only one research design is needed per group and must be submitted in writing.

#### Important information about research designs:

- All research involving human subjects requires approval for the research by an *Institutional Human Subjects Review Board*. This approval is intended to protect the rights and well-being of research subjects. Blanket permission for projects undertaken by this class has already been obtained, *but only if your research design is approved by the instructional team.*
- Your Teaching Fellow knows about resources that may be of use to you in this project. For example, do you want to do an online survey? The university has access to Qualtrics, an online survey program.

### 5 Data

Your data can consist of original or existing data with human subjects. Original data means that you collected it yourself. Most data will probably be original. Your subjects will probably consist of other Harvard students, but not necessarily. The uniqueness of your

subjects will not affect your grade - but regardless of the subjects, you must consider how the subjects affects the validity and interpretation of your study. For example, how are your subjects different than the general population and what is your relationship to the subjects, e.g. do you know them personally?

## 5.1 Anonymity

As a general rule, the identity of your subjects should remain anonymous. If for some reason, you do not plan on protecting their anonymity, you must make this known to your subjects prior to their participation.

## 5.2 Number of subjects

There is no minimum or maximum number of subjects. However, keep in mind that you are *not* being asked to consider statistical significance, so you do not need to go out of your way to find a large number of subjects. Because these studies are only intended to resemble a pilot, you should instead use your judgment about what is *reasonably* convincing. A good rule of thumb might be 20 subjects per condition. This means, for example, if you have a treatment condition with 20 subjects, you should also have a control condition with 20 subjects.

# 6 Testing a hypothesis

You must formulate, justify, and test a reasonable hypothesis. Even if you are retesting an existing theory – you must formulate a hypothesis that is tailored to your subjects. For example, if your subjects are current Harvard undergraduates, do we expect similar or different results with your subject population than with the population used in the original study?

## 6.1 How do I test my hypothesis?

In most cases, political psychology research involves tests that establish whether a researcher can statistically reject the null hypothesis. *You do not need to do that.* If you want to perform statistical tests, you are welcome to, but it is not expected. In general, you are not expected to have enough subjects to make a statistical test of much use anyway.

Your test will simply involve the comparison of summary statistics - a summary statistic is usually something like a mean, median, or sum. So, for example, you might administer a test to your subjects that yields a quantitative score - you can then examine and report the mean of this score, possibly by comparing an experimental and control group. However, you will not necessarily have experimental groups because you will not necessarily be conducting an experiment – survey work, for example, does not usually have experimental groups.

## **6.2 What happens if I was wrong about my hypothesis?**

Nothing – that’s part of science. In fact, if you are never wrong about a hypothesis, this is an indication that there might be something wrong with your scientific process. Just think about and report on why the results did not match your expectations.

## **7 What do I have to do?**

As a group, you will present your research to your section and, as an individual, you will turn in a written report. One group, nominated by each section, will also present their findings to the entire lecture.

### **7.1 Group report**

In your group report, you should report the following by speaking and using visual aids:

1. What is your question?
2. What are the theoretical antecedents of your question?
3. What is your hypothesis?
4. Walk your audience through your test and explain your design choices (e.g. your subjects, where your test was performed, etc.).
5. What are your findings?
6. Examine the external and internal validity of your study.
7. What, if anything, would you do differently if you were to do it again?
8. What are the implications of your study?

Expect questions from the audience.

### **7.2 Individual report**

In your individual report, you should do the same as in the group report, however the written report will likely be more thorough than the group report because you will have fewer space constraints and you will have received the feedback on your group presentation.

Your written report should probably be about 1000–1500 words long. If for some reason you feel like writing more than 2000 words, you should have a very good reason. No two individual reports should be the same.

### **7.3 Lecture presentations**

These are the same presentations given to your section. As noted above, only one group per section will present to the lecture. These presentations are intended to serve as examples of good research for the other students and the material from these presentations will be incorporated into the final exam.

## 8 Due dates

As noted in the syllabus, the due dates are as follows:

- **Week of April 9:** presentations to your section
- **April 17:** presentations to the entire class
- **April 26:** written reports due

## 9 Good luck

Good luck.