

Univerzita Karlova
Fakulta sociálních věd
Institut politologických studií

Diploma thesis project

Thesis title



Name:

Academic advisor:

Study programme:

Year of project submission:

Note (not to be included in the project, please delete)

Your key source of guidance in the preparation of the project and the thesis is your advisor, but there are also general requirements that any evaluation committee will take into account. Deviations from this structure, if they occur, typically require solid justification.

We expect the thesis project to be around 7-10 pages long. The minimum required length for the thesis written in English is 50 so-called norm-pages (90 000 characters, including breaks, of the plain text, i.e. without the list of references, the annotation, and notes; for theses written in Czech, the minimum required length is 60 norm-pages, or 108 000 characters, see https://fsv.cuni.cz/sites/default/files/uploads/files/Pravidla_studium_FSV_2017_FIN03_0.pdf). It is recommended that the thesis is no longer than 100 norm-pages for the thesis written in English and 110 norm-pages for the thesis written in Czech and. In general, lengthiness of the text is not considered a virtue; on the contrary, ability to write a concise text is valued positively. At the same time, if the topic of the thesis so requires, a longer text is of course not a problem.

Plagiarism is taken extremely seriously, and any signs of plagiarism in the theses are automatically reported to the disciplinary committee of the Faculty. For first guidance, consult the library website (<https://knihovna.jinonice.cuni.cz/en/research-aids/how-to-cite>) or any of a number of major websites discussing at length the nature and problems of plagiarism (e.g. <http://www.plagiarism.org/>).

We recommend that students familiarize themselves with the standard thesis evaluation form used for the evaluation of theses in International Relations. A useful general guide for writing a thesis in political science is provided by Van Evera, 1997, *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science*, Cornell University Press, especially chs. 3 and 4.

The language of the project corresponds to the language of the thesis. It is possible to write and defend a thesis in Czech and English language.

What follows is the typically expected structure of a thesis proposal.

Introduction to the topic

Outline briefly the topic to be addressed in the thesis, and its political/social as well as scholarly relevance. Political and social relevance is given by the ability of the project and the thesis to speak to important topics, issues, and problems in the realm of international politics, broadly defined. Scholarly relevance is given by the ability of the project and the thesis to draw on and contribute to the existing stock of knowledge, as reflected in academic literature.

When identifying a suitable topic, keep in mind the relative brevity of the thesis and the need to engage with the topic in sufficient depth. The more broadly the topic is defined, the more difficult it is to achieve the necessary analytical depth, on the relatively limited space provided. Consult with the thesis advisor, and consider this issue very carefully.

Research target, research question

Identify a specific research target of the planned thesis. In other words, define relatively precisely the criterion against which it will be possible to judge whether the projected has been successfully implemented. Formulate this research target also as a specific, well-defined, cogent research question (RQ) which the thesis will seek to answer. In some cases one research question can be just enough, in other cases having a few research questions may be suitable as well. In general, for theses that seek to explain something, RQs should be conceived as *why...*, while for theses that are interpretive (e.g. discourse analytical studies) RQs should be conceived as *how...* That is, when the target is explanatory, RQ(s) should be normally either articulated so that a certain state is to be explained through a (causal) relationship between phenomena (A -> B). When the target is interpretive, RQ seeks to understand and explore the conditions of how the state is possible (e.g. what are the historical conditions of emergence of a certain discourse and its constitutive effects on subjects, their interests or norms governing their actions).

Literature review

Provide a brief review of key scholarly resources you will draw on in your thesis. At the time of writing the project, you should be well familiar with the sources and able to summarize their key insights

relevant for the thesis. The review should be synthetic in its nature, i.e. it should represent an informed, structured summary of the relevant insights from the literature, possibly identifying existing gaps, not a mere list of potentially relevant sources. Normally, it is likely that the thesis is in its structure, theoretical background, and the empirical-analytical approach inspired by one or a synthesis of two or more of these key sources. That means that the literature covered in this section should be directly and as closely as possible related to the specific topic and specific research question addressed in the thesis. In the very exceptional cases in which no scholarly literature exists directly on the topic of the thesis, the project needs to elaborate on the scholarly literature that is closest and most relevant to the topic, even if it does not match it perfectly.

This literature review should cover at least 10 most important sources, possibly with a brief list of further relevant references.

Conceptual and theoretical framework, research hypotheses

In this section, outline briefly the key concepts the thesis will work with. Typically, the key concept of the thesis corresponds very closely to the topic of the thesis and is also captured in the research question. In explanatory research, the key concepts are normally those corresponding to the dependent variable and to the key independent variable or variables. Specify, again briefly, what theoretical framework or frameworks you will draw on in our research, and refer to the key authors with whose theoretical texts you will work. In other words, what are the theories and models that will guide you in your search for the answers to your research questions? In most cases, it is not suitable to stay on the most general level of the grand theories of international relations, but instead to use a more specific model, with corresponding mechanisms, from that given framework.

For example, it is often not suitable to use merely 'realism' as the theoretical framework, but instead, for example, 'balance of power' as one specific model inherent in the realist theory, but more specific and empirically better tractable. Similarly, it is often of little value to claim that you use post-structuralism as the theoretical framework, without specifying which concrete strand of post-structural theorizing will guide your analysis.

Sometimes students do not seek to engage directly with the application or an assessment of a specific theory, but are rather interested 'only' in the description of an important phenomenon. That is absolutely possible, but it is important to keep in mind that the description needs to be well structured

and systematic, and this is always achieved only through careful conceptualization of the phenomenon of interest. Yet, the act of conceptualization itself is inherently a theoretical exercise anyway, in that every concept is derived from one or more theories. Hence, in such cases students should be aware of and make clear these theoretical roots of the concepts they work with, even if their target is not to engage with the theories directly.

Similarly, students with strongly policy-oriented interests are welcome to write theses on policy-related topics. Yet, they should understand and make clear in their theses that underlying various policies and practical decision-making are implicit or explicit theories and models of what effects the policies and decisions are supposed to bring about. Such theoretical underpinnings of the policies and problems dealt with in the thesis, even if possibly quite eclectic, need to be explicitly discussed.

Theses topics which border other disciplines, or that fall primarily into other disciplines than international relations and political science proper, such as law, economics, sociology, or history, need to develop the connection to the discipline of international relations, wherever possible. That means, it is the responsibility of the student to make himself or herself familiar with the relevant existing interdisciplinary research that provides the connection between the respective disciplines and international relations. It rarely happens, if ever at all, that no such relevant connections would exist in the scholarly literature. This may be a challenge for the student, as such inter-disciplinary literature is sometimes not covered in the compulsory international relations curriculum. Hence, the student needs to actively seek such works, beyond what is necessarily required in the courses forming the programme of International Relations.

Very importantly, and generally, the project needs to address the methodological considerations so that the RQ and methods used to answer the question are duly linked. It needs to be clear whether the thesis seeks to e.g., establish recurrent patterns of covariation that can be used to tentatively establish a relationship between independent and dependent variable, explore causal mechanisms or provide deep interpretation of sufficiently documented discursive patterns.

Based on the outlined theoretical framework, on the literature presented in the literature review, and on your own reasoning, you should be able to formulate one or more research hypotheses, i.e. reasoned expected answers to your research questions. These can be descriptive (hypotheses of how things are) or explanatory (hypotheses of why things are the way they are). In some research traditions (e.g. in post-positivist research) this may not be suitable, but this should be carefully considered and discussed

with the advisor. Research design in interpretive projects will not operate with concepts of dependent and independent variable, but is expected to outline the conceptual framework of interpretation drawing on an existing paradigm (e.g., Critical Discourse Analysis) that should be duly implemented in the actual analysis.

Empirical data and analytical technique

Identify as closely as possible the key sources of primary data you will use in your research. That is, outline the operationalization of the key concepts used, typically corresponding to the key phenomenon of interest in the thesis. In explanatory research, this means operationalization first and foremost of the dependent variable and of the key independent variable(s). Indicate the exact sources from which the data necessary for the successful answering of the research question will be collected. In interpretive research, it is similarly key to establish a conceptual framework for interpretation and define and delimit the corpus of source material in terms of e.g., time period, sites from where documents are collected etc.

Describe briefly the analytical technique to be used. Do not limit yourself to shallow statements indicating you will use e.g. quantitative methods or a comparative method, or similarly. Be more specific and provide a brief but convincing description of how the empirical data will be analysed (e.g. specific quantitative technique suitable for the given type of data, specific case selection choice for case study research, specific comparative technique, specific type of discourse analysis, etc.). Refer to relevant methodological literature attending to the method you will use.

Planned thesis outline

Present the expected thesis outline. Typically, an empirically oriented thesis will follow the following or similar structure:

- Introduction
- Conceptual/theoretical framework
- Data
- Methods
- Empirical-analytical section 1

- (possibly Empirical-analytical section 2)
- Conclusions

Note that each thesis needs to contain also a review of the relevant literature. It can be presented in one section with the conceptual/theoretical framework, it can be a part of the introduction, or it can constitute a separate section (typically right after the introduction).

References

List of references to the works referred to in the project, using the standard European citation format ISO 690. Students can consider using a citation manager (such as Mendeley, Zotero,...). For more on referencing see <https://knihovna.jinonice.cuni.cz/en/research-aids/how-to-cite>.