Crafting a Research Question (Supplemental Resource for POLS-120)

NOTE:

- Many of these strategies are derived from *Writing a Research Paper in Political Science* by Lisa A. Baglione.

Traits of a Good Research Question:

- Your research question should be interesting to you! Choose something that you want to spend a lot of time working on.
- Research questions should be important to scholars, public policy makers, and ordinary citizens.
- Your research question should be controversial so that others can argue and debate it.
- Your research question should be clear and concise. Try not to talk about too many things at once. Similarly, do not cover too broad of a subject. For example, "How does the idea of Manifest Destiny influence US foreign policy." is *far* too broad. US foreign policy *where*? What *kind* of foreign policy: diplomacy, military action, etc?
- Your research question should be doable! You should pick a question that you can answer with the resources available to you.
- Your research question should start with the appropriate words (why, how, what, etc).
- It is ok if your question is puzzling. This often promotes better understanding of theory!

Good Research Questions vs. Bad Research Questions: 1

Good Research Questions

Have no simple answer – are openended and consider cause/effect

Are "researchable" - can be answered with accessible research, facts, and data

Open the door for other areas of research and inquiry

Often begin with – how, why, what, which?

Pass the *so what* test – are interesting to others

Have simple or easy answers – can be answered with one word, a number, or a list

Cannot be answered -- there is no answer, or the information to answer the question is not accessible

Can only be answered with an opinion

Often begin with – who, when, where, how much, how many?

Do not pass the so what test – no one really cares about the answer

¹ https://libauides.umac.edu/c.php?a=709287&p=5388938