Research Proposal Guideline (Prof. Zeynep Bulutgil, January 2014)

Research question: What is your research question? (The proposal should address a “why?” question)

Why is it interesting?

Concept & Measurement: Provide an abstract definition for the phenomenon that you are seeking to explain and then discuss how you would measure this concept (if the methodological part will include both a statistical and case-study/field research part, you might include the cross-unit measurement here and discuss the case-based operationalization in the part that focuses on the case)

Theory: What have other people said about your research question? Provide a critical assessment. What is your argument/theory? (Your contribution could be a novel theory or you can test existing theories against each other). Either way, you have to specify the hypotheses and empirical implications that follow from each argument. (Remember that sometimes arguments can be eliminated because they are logically inconsistent even before you use data)

Methodological Section: What methods are you going to use to answer your question? And why?

Statistical Methods: Specify the unit of analysis you would use. Describe how you would measure the dependent and independent variables (if you have already indicated how you would measure the dependent variable before, you need not do it here again). Indicate which independent variables test or control for which theory that you have mentioned. Discuss how much of the data is already in existence and how much of it you would need to collect? If you have to collect data, what sources will you use?

Comparative case study/historical method: Which cases will you consider? Why do you choose these cases? What types of sources are you going to use to analyze the cases? Be very clear on which type of findings/expectations would contradict or support which theory. Remember that case studies are especially useful for testing empirical implications that do not directly relate to your dependent variable.

Field Research: Why do you choose to conduct field research in specific areas/countries? What do you intend to do in the field (surveys, field experiments, open-ended interviews, participant observation)? Why do you choose these particular methods? What types of findings from these surveys, interviews or experiments would support or contradict the theories that you mention in the theoretical section?

Archival: Which archives will you use? Why? What type of information do the archives entail? How reliable are they? What do you expect to find (or not) based on the theories you discussed above?
Methodological Section should entail the following:

Regardless of which methods you use you need to address the below issues (there might of course be additional issues that you need to address depending on your research). Discuss the extent to which each constitutes a problem and how you would tackle these problems.

1. Endogeneity
2. Controlling for alternative explanations/Omitted variable bias/many variables-large N
3. Bias (selection bias & bias in sources/archives/reporting)