Explanatory Research Design

Introduction
1. Research question (RQ) (= one sentence, ending with a "?")
    1. y-centred research design: How can variation in a dependent variable (DV) be explained?
    2. Or x- centred research design: Which difference does variation in a specific independent variable (IV) make for one or several dependent variable(s)?
2. 4-6 sentences on the relevance of the research question (empirical, theoretical, etc.).
3. Paragraph on how the paper/thesis is structured.
4. Paragraph on major finding of paper/thesis.

Empirical Puzzle; empirical/theoretical relevance of research question
1. y-centred research design: Definition of DV (concept, parameter values, operationalization and measurement), detection of DV-variation (e.g. over time, over institutions, over actors, over policies etc.), presentation of DV pattern & discussion why observed DV-variation is counterintuitive and require explanation
2. Or x- centred research design: Definition of IV (concept, parameter values, operationalization and measurement), detection of IV-variation (e.g. over time, over institutions, over actors, over policies etc.), presentation of IV pattern and linkage to DV(s), discussion of counterintuitive elements//elements that require explanation

Theory
1. Identification of relevant theories; very brief discussion of major findings/insights and gaps in literature and how your own paper/thesis is contributing towards closing these gaps
2. Selection of at least two theories and short (!) presentation (short, theory is not an end in itself but a means to develop hypotheses in order to answer the research question)
3. Specification of hypotheses (at least two competing hypotheses need to be formulated)
    1. Hypothesis: specification of causal relationship between IV and DV with a deterministic (if IV change, then DV change) or probabilistic (the more IV, the less DV) formulation, including specification of causal mechanism and scope conditions
4. Specification and operationalization of IV and DV as well as causal mechanism and scope conditions

Method selection
1. Methods: Discussion of selected method of data collection and data analysis – both needed to empirically examine the plausibility of hypotheses
    1. qualitative or quantitative or mixed methods
    2. if qualitative – discussion of case selection and choice of qualitative techniques applied
    3. if quantitative – discussion of choice of quantitative techniques applied

Empirics – Plausibilization/test of hypotheses
1. Empirical examination of hypotheses (this is the major part of the paper/thesis and should be considerably longer than introduction, puzzle, and theory section)
2. Major insights: which hypotheses are most, which ones least plausible and why

Conclusions
1. What was your RQ and what is the answer based on your theory-guided, methodological sound empirical analysis?
2. Essential findings and take away message.
3. Generalisations and implications.
4. Outlook: limitations of your study & how to address them; future avenues for research.

Essential: *Comply with standards of scientific work (citations, sources, etc.).*