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Seminar:

The Key Challenges Our Societies Are Facing and How to Address Them:
From Climate Change to Inequality
Version: April 27, 2025

Prof. Dr. Daniel Bischof

Term: summer term	**Time:** Tuesdays 14.00 ct – 16.00 Uhr
Office: SCH 100.206	**Lecture Room:** 100.107
Office hours: just after class	**E-mail:** dan.bischof@uni-münster.de

Course description:

- MA seminar

- 2 hours per week

- Language: English

- Exercises & exams:

  1. rotating session leadership *(rotating roles: presenter, note-taker, discussant)* (+/-)

  2. policy memo *(1,000–1,500 word policy brief on one societal issue)* (+/-)

  3. Term paper ($\approx$ 7 500 words; $\approx$95 % of your grade)

This seminar explores pressing societal challenges and the potential solutions to address them. Students will examine topics such as climate change, economic inequality, political representation deficits, populism, far-right extremism, terrorism, pandemics, and global crises like starvation and war. Each week, we will focus on one major issue by analyzing a key academic text, discussing the roots and proposed policy responses to the issue. Through structured debates and critical evaluations, students will explore whether and how these challenges can be mitigated. Student engagement is central: participants can propose additional topics of interest. The seminar emphasizes interdisciplinary approaches, encouraging participants to connect political, economic, and social perspectives. By the end of the course, students will have developed a deeper understanding of complex global issues, gained analytical tools to evaluate policy responses, and sharpened their ability to critically engage with contemporary policy debates.

Introductory Readings:

- **General readings:** The following readings are helpful to support you in the process of conducting your own research assignments throughout your studies. Specifically the readings on how to write appear to have a crucial impact on the quality of your writing.

  Writing:

  1. Graff, G. and Birkenstein, C. (2014). *They Say, I Say – The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing*. W.W. Norton Company, New York

  2. Zinsser, W. (2001). *On Writing Well*. Quill

  Research Design:

  3. Cunningham, S. (2021). *Causal Inference: The Mixtape*. Yale University Press, New Haven & London

  4. Angrist, J. D. and Pischke, J.-S. (2009). *Mostly Harmless Econometrics: An Empiricist's Companion*. Princeton University Press, Princeton & Oxford

  5. Imai, K. (2018). *Quantitative Social Science: An Introduction*. Princeton University Press, Princeton

- **Non-scientific reading:** Besides the academic readings I can highly recommend reading: **Andy Weir, "Project Hail Mary"**. Sci-fi in which a strange alien creator along with a lonely space cowboy attempt to safe our planet from extinction.

My teaching approach:

This is a "student-led seminar". This means that students take an active role throughout the seminar and course. I act as a facilitator, helping with framing, providing feedback, and maintaining academic rigor. First, you yourself will tell me which topics we are going to cover for the entire term. I will give guidance, but that's pretty much it. Each session will be based on brief lecturing parts by me. But mostly you lead a discussion-based learning environment in which you take responsibility for organizing and conducting seminar sessions. Rather than me delivering content, students guide discussions, ask questions, and sometimes even assess their peers during discussions. Besides lecturing and class discussion each session will provide students with peer/group-work exercises during which we critically examine and apply the ideas introduced in the readings.

Expectations:

- **Active participation**

- Each student as part of a group of students will co-lead one seminar session. Your goal is to facilitate a focused, engaging, and critical discussion of a major societal challenge. To do so you prepare a short 10-minute presentation outlining the issue, framing key concepts, and offering a starting point for discussion. Then, together with me, you facilitate the seminar discussion using prepared questions and formats *(e.g., debate, role play, breakout groups)*. One week ahead of your session you send me a brief session plan with a title, 2-3 learning goals, outline of activities and a list of minimum 5 guiding discussion questions.

- Students write a brief **"policy memo"** (mid term; 2 pager; font size 12; 1.5 spacing; justified text). A concise, persuasive policy memo addressing one of the challenges discussed in our class. The memo should define the problem, analyze existing responses, and recommend a clear course of action. It is thereby not sufficient to repeat the key arguments of the readings: Imagine you have 5 minutes to convince a key policy player of a plan for action. This is what the memo delivers.

- The **term paper** is a written paper to be submitted at the end of the course ($\approx$ journal article length (7 500 words including bibliography); font size 12; 1.5 spacing; justified text). More on the formal requirements can be found here: Formal requirements for submission of take-home assignments . Please list the number of characters (with blanks) on the frontpage of your paper.*

    Term papers should develop an original argument and test this argument empirically. Term papers contain an 1) introduction 2) literature review 3) theoretical argument 4) research design 5) results 6) conclusion section. It is key to re-capture the original arguments/discussion in the academic literature, to develop an own argument on the subject and to test this argument rigorously. Thereby, the paper needs to be based on a student's presentation and might as well be based on the literature review.

- **Norms of interaction:** It is central to academic seminars that we all engage together in a respectful manner: Let others be part of the conversation, seek to understand their perspective, engage with it and never use strong, discouraging language or strategies of bullying. Any form of intolerance or discrimination is not welcomed in any of my seminars.

Grading:

- How will I evaluate your papers? A brief indicative overview: 1) Motivation of research questions (academically and beyond) 2) structure and logic of argumentation 3) quality of literature review (e.g. debate covered exhaustively; quality of discussion; structure) 4) adequate expansion of readings used in the seminar 5) quality of theoretical argument (e.g. mechanisms clear; logical derivation of hypotheses) 6) quality of research design (e.g. limitations correctly discussed) 7) correct, adequate and embedded discussion of findings 8) meaningful discussion of limitations, scope conditions and frame.

Work load (an example):

- 1 ECTS = 25-30 hours (according to Bologna rules)

- 15 ECTS $\times$ 25 hours = <u>375 hours</u>

- Weekly = 375 hours / 14 term weeks $\approx$ <u>26.8</u> hours per week

Table 1: Work load, a pessimistic approximation:

	week	term
Seminar attendance	2.75	38.5
Readings	6	84
Policy Memo		8
seminar-lead		8
Term paper	4	56
$\sum$	12.75	197.5

All in all the workload should be way below the actual goals of Bologna.

Prerequisites:

- Knowledge of key concepts in political science, more specifically in Comparative Politics & Political Behavior.

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*I don't care much about these – I will not recount them – but the formal requirement is given in characters (max. 7500 words correspond to 20 pages approximately.)

- Knowledge of basic quantitative methods in political science (OLS regression (*needed*); panel data analysis (*preferred*); intro to causal inferences (*at best*)

Studienleistung:

If you are certain – meaning you have full knowledge of the requirements by e.g. talking to your Studienkoordinator – that you only need to fulfill the course performance requirements: You will need to do both, a session lead and a policy memo. This is your Studienleistung, which I will then grade as pass or fail.

Use of AI:

- If you use AI (chatGPT, Claude, etc.) to write your term paper, you are required to be transparent about it. More specifically, list the prompts and answers in a separate appendix at the end of the term paper.

- This appendix does not count towards the word count. You do not need to list the use of AI for coding, data analysis, and grammar corrections (e.g., Deepl Write, Grammarly, etc.).

- Please remember always to respect the rules of academic integrity and honesty!

Plagarism:

Students must comply with the university policy on academic integrity found at https://www.uni-muenster.de/imperia/md/content/wwu/rektorat/dokumente/info_plagiate_prueflinge.pdf.
There are no excuses for plagiarism.

Key dates!!!:

1. Send session plan . . . . **one week** before your session

2. Policy memo . . . . **week 9: 03.06.2025**
   please acknowledge that due to this deadline no class will take place in week 7 ("reading week", 20st of May) and week 9 (deadline to hand in)

3. Handing in of term paper **30.09.2025**

Relevant techniques and tricks to navigate an academic seminar:

- *Reading scientific papers:* There is tons of information on the web how to read and engage with scientific articles. Many of these push you to a) read faster b) read more c) find the key information from papers quicker. Some of the readings I encourage you to use here are: "How to Read a Paper by Keshav", "How to Read Political Science: A Guide in Four Steps by Green" or "How to read and understand a scientific paper: a guide for non-scientists by Jennifer Raff". In many ways the starting point to read a paper is to classify it quickly into which type of a paper it is and how you can then extract the relevant info you need from it. There is also no shortcut to reading: you need to read! The more you read the better you get at it and writing as well.

- *Writing scientific papers:* it is key for you that you engage with your term paper as early as possible. In each session we will work on parts of your term paper. We will begin by trying to understand how in the world you can come up with a research topic and question all the way to understand the key parts you need to discuss in your research design section. The goal of this is to provide you as much guidance as possible for your term paper. There are many good readings to help you navigate academic writing, e.g.: https://www.uvm.edu/~cbeer/ps174/ResearchPaper.html, "Writing a Political Science Essay by

King" or Graff, G. and Birkenstein, C. (2014). *They Say, I Say – The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing*. W.W. Norton Company, New York. In my experience the key part if to get started as soon as you enter a seminar, try to find out what interests you the most and dig into it.

Softwaretipps:

The days without technical and software skills are long gone in the social sciences: Work is written on laptops, literature is consumed on iPads, and statistics are part of basic training. This means it is relevant to acquire certain software skills and develop coding skills.

- **Officesoftware** You can choose your own office software. As a student, you can get access to Word, etc., at a low cost or even for free. If not, there's Open Office. I use $\LaTeX$ for both my publications and presentations. Overleaf makes it easy to train yourself in the commands and handling. However, learning it is only worth it if you want to work statistically and are possibly considering a PhD.

- **Citation programs** greatly simplify your life. I use the free software Zotero, which also offers direct browser apps and macros for office software. The program is self-explanatory: install Zotero, install apps. Click Zotero Connector in the browser, and the literature ends up in Zotero.

- There are many **statistical programs**, but most come with issues for you: either they are not free (e.g., Stata, SPSS) and/or they don't offer the necessary skills (e.g., SPSS). I recommend downloading the free software R: R-Studio. R has become the most widely used statistical software in social sciences, followed by Stata. Thanks to Chat-GPT, learning R has never been easier. Try it out by asking Chat-GPT to create a world map based on the Freedom House Index. You can typically run the generated code directly in R-Studio to get a world map (though with erroneous values, which you can easily correct with the actual Freedom House dataset). In my teaching, you will often come across graphics/results based on "own illustration". When this is the case, I usually also provide the code for replication in the learning space.

Contents

Detailed course outline

Each session is based on several readings. Out of these readings usually **two readings** are assigned to be read by each student *before* the session takes place. It is expected that students not only read the texts, but also critically engage with them. You should be able to summarize the key arguments of each assigned reading and come-up with at least three discussion points for each reading.

Legend:
reading - stuff you need to read
lit - stuff you might want to read
⌨- link to replication data & code

Week 1 Organization

- Logistics

- Finding our topics

- What actually is a topic, a problem in society? What isn't?

lit Graff, G. and Birkenstein, C. (2014). *They Say, I Say – The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing*. W.W. Norton Company, New York

Block 1: Identity, Norms, and Information

Week 2 Prepared by Daniel: Gender Norms

? How do gender norms shape economic and political outcomes?

reading 1 Bursztyn, L., Cappelen, A. W., Tungodden, B., Voena, A., and Yanagizawa-Drott, D. (2023). How Are Gender Norms Perceived?

reading 2 Bertrand, M., Black, S. E., Jensen, S., and Lleras-Muney, A. (2019). Breaking the Glass Ceiling? The Effect of Board Quotas on Female Labour Market Outcomes in Norway. *The Review of Economic Studie*s, 86(1):191–239

Week 3 Misinformation and Public Opinion

? How does misinformation affect voter behavior and trust?

reading 1 Bak-Coleman, J. B., Kennedy, I., Wack, M., Beers, A., Schafer, J. S., Spiro, E. S., Starbird, K., and West, J. D. (2022). Combining interventions to reduce the spread of viral misinformation. *Nature Human Behaviour*, 6(10):1372–1380

reading 2 Budak, C., Nyhan, B., Rothschild, D. M., Thorson, E., and Watts, D. J. (2024). Misunderstanding the harms of online misinformation. *Nature*, 630(8015):45–53

more Kaiser, B. and Mayer, J. (2023). It's the Algorithm: A large-scale comparative field study of misinformation interventions. http://knightcolumbia.org/content/its-the-algorithm-a-large-scale-comparative-field-study-of-misinformation-interventions

Week 4 Refugees, Migration, and Political Backlash

? How do refugee crises affect voter behavior and policy?

reading 1 Cools, S., Finseraas, H., and Rogeberg, O. (2021). Local Immigration and Support for Anti-Immigration Parties: A Meta-Analysis. *American Journal of Political Science*, 65(4):988–1006

reading 2 Emeriau, M., Hainmueller, J., Hangartner, D., and Laitin, D. D. (2025). "Welcome to France." Can mandatory integration contracts foster immigrant integration? *American Journal of Political Science*, page (forthcoming)

more Steinmayr, A. (2021). Contact versus Exposure: Refugee Presence and Voting for the Far Right. *The Review of Economics and Statistics*, 103(2):310–327

Block 2: Democracy, Representation, and Polarization:

Week 5 Populism and Democratic Backsliding

? What causes democratic backsliding, and how does it affect democratic institutions?

reading 1 Graham, M. H. and Svolik, M. W. (2020). Democracy in America? Partisanship, Polarization, and the Robustness of Support for Democracy in the United States. *American Political Science Review*, 114(2):392–409

reading 2 Voelkel et al. (2024). Megastudy testing 25 treatments to reduce antidemocratic attitudes and partisan animosity. *Science*, 386(6719):eadh4764

more Grillo, E., Luo, Z., Nalepa, M., and Prato, C. (2024). Theories of Democratic Backsliding. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 27(Volume 27, 2024):381–400

Week 6 Far-Right Extremism and Political Violence

? Why do people adopt extremist ideologies and violent methods?

reading 1 Miller-Idriss, C. (2020). *Hate in the Homeland: The New Global Far Right*. Princeton University Press, Princeton (N.J.) Chapter 2 & 4

reading 2 Riaz, S., Bischof, D., and Wagner, M. (2024). Out-Group Threat and Xenophobic Hate Crimes: Evidence of Local Intergroup Conflict Dynamics between Immigrants and Natives. *The Journal of Politics*, 86(4):1146–1161

mid term policy memo:

Week 7 no seminar, mid term reading week!

Week 8 Political Polarization and Social Cohesion

? How deep is ideological polarization in European democracies, and what sustains it?

reading 1 Boxell, L., Gentzkow, M., and Shapiro, J. M. (2024). Cross-Country Trends in Affective Polarization. *Review of Economics & Statistics*, 106(2):557–565

reading 2 Santoro, E. and Broockman, D. E. (2022). The promise and pitfalls of cross-partisan conversations for reducing affective polarization: Evidence from randomized experiments. *Science Advances*, 8(25):eabn5515

more Broockman, D. E., Kalla, J. L., and Westwood, S. J. (2023). Does Affective Polarization Undermine Democratic Norms or Accountability? Maybe Not. *American Journal of Political Science*, 67(3):808–828

more Broockman, D. and Kalla, J. (2016). Durably reducing transphobia: A field experiment on door-to-door canvassing. *Science*, 352(6282):220–224

mid term policy memo:

Week 9 no seminar, deadline mid term paper!

Week 10 no seminar, Whitsun!

Block 3: Inequality, Welfare, and Participation

Week 11 Economic Inequality and Political Participation

How does inequality shape political engagement and attitudes toward redistribution?

Week 12 Ageing Societies and Political Challenges

How does ageing affect welfare states and politics?

Block 4: Crisis, Security, and Governance

Week 13 Climate Change and Political Accountability

How do governments respond to climate risks, and what explains variation in responsiveness?

Week 14 Counter-Terrorism and Civil Liberties

What are trade-offs between security and freedom?

the end:

Week 15 Q&A: final questions

- Q&A

- Discussion of course evaluation

References

Angrist, J. D. and Pischke, J.-S. (2009). *Mostly Harmless Econometrics: An Empiricist's Companion*. Princeton University Press, Princeton & Oxford.

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