



Seminar on Economic Progress Summer Term 2026

“Culture, Economic Policy and Development”

Content

The question of what drives differences in economic development remains central in economics. Beyond explanations focusing on geography and institutions, cultural factors and social norms also play an important role. They influence trust, individualism, long-term orientation and risk attitudes, which are all crucial for economic development. In addition, culture shapes economic behaviour and affects how people respond to economic policies. Because societies differ in their cultural backgrounds, one-size-fits-all policy approaches may lead to unintended consequences.

In this seminar, we will explore how culture and economic policy are connected, and why taking cultural differences into account is important for effective policymaking. We will address questions such as: *What are the long-run effects of colonial medical campaigns on health and trust today? What are the consequences when development initiatives are misaligned with local populations? How does policy change culture? And how can policy design account for cultural differences?*

Course Goals

The aim of the seminar is threefold. First, we will read and analyse recent academic articles and critically discuss how the effectiveness of economic policies may depend on underlying cultural practices. We will also explore how cultural factors can be taken into account when designing economic policies. Second, students will become familiar with empirical methods such as OLS, instrumental variables (IV), difference-in-differences (DiD), and randomized controlled trials (RCT). Third, students are expected to prepare and present an academic presentation based on one of the seminar articles, thereby strengthening their ability to synthesize complex arguments and communicate academic research clearly.

Target Group

Students should be familiar with regression analysis and have a good understanding of how to read and interpret econometric results. The seminar will be held in English. The course is **mainly addressed to Bachelor students**, but Master students are also allowed to participate. However, in case of overbooking, Bachelor students are given priority.

Students can earn credit points for the following degree programs:

- Internationale Wirtschaft und Entwicklung (B.A.): Seminar on Development
- Economics (B.Sc.): Seminar on Development
- Philosophy and Economics (B.A.): Seminar on Development
- Internationale Wirtschaft und Governance (M.A.): Individual Focus or Specialization „Governance & Public Management“
- Economics (M.Sc.): Individual Focus
- Philosophy and Economics (M.A.): Electives
- Development Studies (M.A.): D3 (“Topics in Economics and Governance”) or E1 (“Individual Deepening or Catching Up”).
- History and Economics (M.A.): Specialization “Economics”
- Business Administration (M.Sc.): Supplementary Module

Registration

To apply for the seminar (first-come-first-served basis), please fill out the following form by **Sunday, 19.04.2026**:

Google Forms Registration

The seminar is limited to **14 participants**. Please enrol to the e-learning course for more information and updates:

E-Learning Course

Seminar Organization

- Application period until 19 th of April 2026 -	
Date	Topic
Monday, 20.04.2026 16:15-17:45 S 45	Introduction I Presenter: Lara Bieske
Tuesday, 21.04.2026 14:15-15:45 S 45	Introduction II Presenter: Lara Bieske
- Preparation of Presentations -	
Monday, 11.05.2026 16:15-17:45 S 45	Cultural Responses to Economic Policy I: Health Literature: Lowes, Sara, and Eduardo Montero. 2021. "The Legacy of Colonial Medicine in Central Africa." <i>American Economic Review</i> 111 (4): 1284–1314. Presenter: TBA
Tuesday, 12.05.2026 14:15-15:45 S 45	Cultural Responses to Economic Policy II: Education Literature: Ashraf, Nava, Natalie Bau, Nathan Nunn, and Alessandra Voena. 2020. "Bride Price and Female Education." <i>Journal of Political Economy</i> 128 (2): 591–641. Presenter: TBA
Monday, 18.05.2026 16:15-17:45 S 45	Cultural Responses to Economic Policy III: Savings Literature: Godoy, Ricardo, Dean Karlan, and Jonathan Zinman. 2021. "Randomization for Causality, Ethnography for Mechanisms: Illiquid Savings for Liquor in an Autarkic Society." <i>NBER Working Paper</i> No. 29566. Presenter: TBA
Tuesday, 19.05.2026 14:15-15:45 S 45	Cultural Responses to Economic Policy IV: Agriculture Literature: McGuirk, Eoin F., and Nathan Nunn. 2024. "Development Mismatch: Evidence from Agricultural Projects in Pastoral Africa." <i>NBER Working Paper</i> No. 33191. Presenter: TBA
Monday, 01.06.2026 16:15-17:45 S 45	Can Policy Change Culture? Literature: Bau, Natalie. 2021. "Can Policy Change Culture? Government Pension Plans and Traditional Kinship Practices." <i>American Economic Review</i> 111(6): 1880-1917. Presenter: TBA
Tuesday, 02.06.2026 14:15-15:45 S 45	Culture in Policy Design I: Literature: Bursztyn, Leonardo, Alessandra L. González, and David Yanagizawa-Drott. 2020. "Misperceived Social Norms: Women Working Outside the Home in Saudi Arabia." <i>American Economic Review</i> 110 (10): 2997–3029. Presenter: TBA
Monday, 08.06.2026 16:15-17:45 S 45	Culture in Policy Design II: Literature: Alsan, Marcella, Owen Garrick, and Grant Graziani. 2019. "Does Diversity Matter for Health? Experimental Evidence from Oakland." <i>American Economic Review</i> 109(12): 4071–4111. Presenter: TBA
Tuesday, 09.06.2026 14:15-15:45 S 45	Summary and Recap Presenter: Lara Bieske
- Individual Exam Preparation -	
End of June Date: TBA	Written exam

Requirements

The course work consists of three parts: (1) an academic presentation, (2) a written exam, and (3) active participation.

- 1) **Presentation:** Students are expected to give an academic presentation on one article published in an academic journal. Depending on the number of participants, students are asked to give the presentation individually or in teams of two (individual: 30 minutes; team: 40 minutes). Students are expected to inform themselves on additional related literature and to prepare a small set of questions to initiate the discussion following the presentation. Topics will be allocated during the introductory sessions.
- 2) **Written exam:** There will be a final written exam at the end of June. The exam consists of two structured essays related to the seminar topics, as well as a small number of additional questions or gap texts based on the material discussed in class. The exam duration is 120 minutes. Students are allowed to bring up to three A4 recto-verso “cheat sheets” (handwritten).
- 3) **Active participation:** Active participation in discussions during the seminar is expected of all participants, and attendance is compulsory.

The final grade is defined by the presentation (40%) and the written exam (60%).

Additional Literature

- Alesina, Alberto, Paola Giuliano, and Nathan Nunn. 2013. “On the Origins of Gender Roles: Women and the Plough.” *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 128 (2): 469–530.
- Bau, Natalie, Sara Lowes, and Eduardo Montero. 2025. “Culture, Policy, and Economic Development.” *NBER Working Paper* No. 33947.
- Bazzi, Samuel, Martin Fiszbein, and Mesay Gebresilashe. 2020. “Frontier Culture: The Roots and Persistence of ‘Rugged Individualism’ in the United States.” *Econometrica* 88 (6): 2329–2368.
- Becker, Sascha O., Katrin Boeckh, Christa Hainz, and Ludger Woessmann. 2016. “The Empire Is Dead, Long Live the Empire! Long-Run Persistence of Trust and Corruption in the Bureaucracy”. *The Economic Journal* 126 (590): 40–74.

- Buggle, Johannes C., and Ruben Durante. 2021. "Climate Risk, Cooperation and the Co-Evolution of Culture and Institutions." *The Economic Journal* 131 (637): 1947–1987.
- Cagé, Julia, and Valeria Rueda. 2016. "The long-term Effects of the Printing Press in Sub-Saharan Africa." *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics* 8 (3): 69–99.
- Guiso, Luigi, Paola Sapienza, and Luigi Zingales. 2009. "Cultural Biases in Economic Exchange?". *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 124 (3): 1095–1131.
- La Ferrara, Eliana, and Annamaria Milazzo. 2017. "Customary Norms, Inheritance, and Human Capital: Evidence from a Reform of the Matrilineal System in Ghana." *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics* 9 (4): 166–185.
- Michalopoulos, Stelios. 2012. "The origins of ethnolinguistic diversity." *American Economic Review* 102 (4): 1508–1539.
- Moscona, Jacob, and Awa Ambra Seck. 2024. "Age Set versus Kin: Culture and Financial Ties in East Africa." *American Economic Review* 114 (9): 2748–2791.
- Nunn, Nathan, and Leonard Wantchekon. 2011. "The Slave Trade and the Origins of Mistrust in Africa." *American Economic Review* 101 (7): 3221–52.
- Rao, Gautam. 2019. "Familiarity Does Not Breed Contempt: Diversity, Discrimination, and Generosity in Delhi Schools." *American Economic Review* 109 (3): 774–809.
- Rohner, Dominic, Mathias Thoenig, and Fabrizio Zilibotti. 2013. "Seeds of distrust: conflict in Uganda." *Journal of Economic Growth* 18: 217–252.
- Tabellini, Guido. 2010. "Culture and Institutions: Economic Development in the Regions of Europe". *Journal of the European Economic Association* 8 (4): 677–716.
- Tella, Rafael Di, Sebastian Galiani, and Ernesto Schargrotsky. 2007. "The Formation of Beliefs: Evidence from the Allocation of Land Titles to Squatters*." *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 122 (1): 209–241.