

# Research Methods in Development Economics

Ritwika Sen, PhD

LS (Seminar)

Wintersemester/winter semester 2025/26

This seminar is designed for Master's students interested in the empirical tools and practices that drive research in development economics. It serves as a complement to the Master's Lectures (M6 Course) on Development Economics, with a distinct focus on how empirical work is actually done in the field: what questions are asked, how data is collected, and how evidence is interpreted.

The goal of the course is to provide a broad, intuitive overview of the methods development economists use to generate causal evidence, and to demystify the analytical choices behind influential papers. We will cover a range of empirical strategies—randomized evaluations, natural experiments, instrumental variables, regression discontinuity, panel data methods, and more. Along the way, we'll discuss practical issues around data collection, measurement, research ethics, and the political economy of evidence generation.

This is not a theory-heavy econometrics course. Rather, the emphasis is on artisanship—the judgment, communication, and intuition involved in applying empirical methods well. Through readings, discussions, and student presentations, the course aims to foster a deeper understanding of how to read, critique, and ultimately do applied research in development economics.

By the end of the semester, students should:

- Be familiar with a range of empirical tools and the types of questions they are best suited to answer.
- Develop the habit of interrogating papers for the “experiment”—explicit or implicit—that underpins the causal claims.

No prior experience with development economics is required, though an introductory background in econometrics and microeconomics is recommended.

<b>Studiengang:</b> <i>Program:</i>	MSc
<b>Termin Vorbesprechung (tt.mm.jjjj):</b> <i>Date of preliminary meeting (dd.mm.yyyy):</i>	20.10.2025
<b>*Bearbeitungszeitraum für die Hausarbeit:</b> <i>*Working period for term paper:</i>	Monday, October 27 to Monday, November 24, 2025 (4 weeks)
<b>*Seminartermin:</b> <i>*Seminar date:</i>	Monday, December 15 <sup>th</sup> and Tuesday, December 16 <sup>th</sup> , 2025
<b>Veranstaltungsort:</b> <i>Venue:</i>	LMU Munich (exact location TBD)
<b>falls außerhalb: Kostenschätzung:</b> <i>if out of Munich: estimated costs:</i>	€
<b>Sprache:</b> <i>Language:</i>	English
<b>Empfohlene Vorkenntnisse:</b> <i>Recommended courses:</i>	Econometrics, Microeconomics
<b>Methodischer Schwerpunkt:</b> <i>Methodological background:</i>	Introduction to causal inference
<b>*Grundlagenliteratur:</b>	Background Reading:

<p><i>*Basic references:</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Scott Cunningham, Causal Inference: The Mixtape, <a href="https://mixtape.scunning.com/">https://mixtape.scunning.com/</a></li> <li>- Angus Deaton, The Analysis of Household Surveys (available on World Bank Knowledge Repository online)</li> </ul> <p>Select Papers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Jayachandran, S., Biradavolu, M., &amp; Cooper, J. (2023). Using machine learning and qualitative interviews to design a five-question survey module for women's agency. <i>World Development</i>, 161, 106076.</li> <li>- Asher, S., &amp; Novosad, P. (2020). Rural roads and local economic development. <i>American economic review</i>, 110(3), 797-823.</li> <li>- Amirapu, A., &amp; Gechter, M. (2020). Labor regulations and the cost of corruption: Evidence from the Indian firm size distribution. <i>Review of Economics and Statistics</i>, 102(1), 34-48.</li> <li>- Murphy, D. M., Nourani, V., &amp; Lee, D. R. (2022). Chatting at church: Information diffusion through religious networks. <i>Review of Economics and Statistics</i>, 104(3), 449-464.</li> </ul>
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\* Optional (falls schon bekannt) / optionally (if already known)