

Fall term 2025

**Development Economics: A Long Term Perspective –
The Influence of Institutions, Geography, Technology and Culture**

Dr. Kai Gehring

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Time of Lecture: Wednesday, 10.15 -12.00

Place: Seminarraum S 101, UniS

Mode of examination:

30%: Take-home Assignment using R to work with spatial data in a historical context.

Deadline: 11.11.2025

70%: Research proposal (10 pages) + Summaries.

Presentation: 10.12.2025 and 17.12.2025

Deadline: 15.01.2026

Notes: Teaching will be in English. This syllabus, in particular specific choice of literature per topic, may be subject to change and updates. First ideas of research proposals are pitched as a short presentation in a final session.

Content:

The seminar examines the historical origins of the huge differences in economic and social development of countries today. Participants discuss both seminal contributions and recent research in the field. Students are introduced to the historical background and facts, as well as to state-of-the-art econometric techniques and methods used to analyze current and historical data empirically. Weekly tutorials and exercises in geocomputation with R will help to introduce students to the necessary skills for working with geographical data that is often crucial for historical work.

This course uses a historical and comparative political economy approach to understand the evolution and development of societies. We will study and discuss different mechanisms and channels through which history matters. Particular attention will be paid to the role of institutions, geography, culture, technology and war in shaping development. After completing the course, students will be able to understand and evaluate complex research papers, and to assess the advantages and disadvantages of different empirical approaches for causal identification. They will

also develop and discuss their own research idea and discuss it with peers as well as present it in class.

Learning outcomes: Students will learn to efficiently read academic papers and evaluate both the theoretical and empirical contribution. They will be enabled to provide meaningful summaries of papers through repeated forms of discussions, and to critically evaluate possible identification strategies. Students will also become familiar with geographic information systems and the use of spatial data in economics. They will understand the importance of history, path dependence and persistence for development and as an explanation for existing wealth difference throughout the world.

Introduction to spatial analysis with R

Throughout this course, we will complement our curriculum with comprehensive tutorials on geocomputation and spatial analysis using R. These tutorials will be accompanied by practical exercises designed to reinforce your understanding of the material covered. While participation in these exercises is entirely optional and will not be formally graded, we highly encourage students to take advantage of them as valuable learning opportunities. Solutions to each exercise will be provided in the subsequent week. These tutorials will equip students with the essential tools required to successfully complete the final assignment, and they will also empower students to embark on their own independent projects involving spatial data. See more information at the end of the syllabus.

Compulsory reading, helpful books and materials

Methods (compulsory):

- “*Mastering ‘Metrics:’ The Path from Cause to Effect*, Joshua D. Angrist & Jörn-Steffen Pischke.

Introductory material:

- Spolaore, E., & Wacziarg, R. (2013). How deep are the roots of economic development? *Journal of Economic Literature*, 51(2), 325-69.
- Nunn, Nathan (2020): The Historical Roots of Economic Development, *Science* 367, S. 1-7.

Additional books:

- Robinson, James A., and Daron Acemoglu. Why nations fail: The origins of power, prosperity and poverty. *London: Profile*, 2012.
- Diamond, Jared, and James A. Robinson, eds. Natural experiments of history. *Harvard University Press*, 2010.
- Diamond, Jared. Guns, germs, and steel: the fates of human societies. *Norton & Company, New York*, 1997.

There is no specific course book fitting or required for this course, but these three books provide at least partly a very good coverage of many of the ideas covered in the course and add many more historical backgrounds and examples.

Preparation and active participation:

Students will choose one paper per week on ILIAS, which they read and summarize following a common scheme to understand the main research question, empirical strategies and data. It is crucial that students do read the paper and have a summary, as an important part of the course will be pair and group discussions. In those discussions students will explain and discuss “their” paper with others who read the respective other paper. The scheme to be applied to summarize papers will be introduced in more detail in the first class and available as a template on ILIAS.

Accessibility of literature:

All papers can be found using www.scholar.google.com. From session 5 onwards they are on purpose not shared as finding papers and their correct version will be important for writing the research proposal. Generally, it is advisable to search for the published journal version of an article, which can often be quite different than earlier working paper versions.

Schedule:

I Introduction: General.....17.09.2025

Introduction, no reading

Methodological Learning: Fixed Effects

II Introduction: Spatial data.....24.09.2025

Introduction, no reading

Methodological Learning: Geocomputation with R

III Origins of Divergent Development.....01.10.2025

Acemoglu, D. Johnson, S. James, A. Robinson, J. A. (2001) “The Colonial Origins of Comparative Development: An Empirical Investigation,” *American Economic Review*, 91: 1369-1401.

Methodological Learning: IV

Podcasts:

- **People I Mostly Admire;** Daron Acemoglu on Economics, Politics, and Power.
<https://freakonomics.com/podcast/daron-acemoglu-on-economics-politics-and-power/>
- **EconTalk;** Daron Acemoglu on Why Nations Fail.
<https://www.econtalk.org/acemoglu-on-why-nations-fail/>
- **Conversation with Tyler;** Nathan Nunn on the Paths to Development.
<https://conversationswithtyler.com/episodes/nathan-nunn/>

IV. Historical Institutions.....08.10.2025

1. Dell, M. (2010) “The Persistent Effects of Peru's Mining Mita,” *Econometrica*, 78 (6): 1863-1903.
2. Becker, S. O., Boeckh, K., Hainz, C., Woessmann, L. (2014) "The Empire is Dead, Long Live the Empire! Long-Run Persistence of Trust and Corruption in the Bureaucracy." *The Economic Journal*: 40-74.

Podcast:

- **GrowthChat;** *The Persistent Effect of Peru's Mining Mita.* <https://growth-chat.com/podcast/melissa-dell-the-persistent-effect-of-perus-mining-mita/>
- **GrowthChat;** *Pre-Colonial Ethnic Institutions and Contemporary African Development.* <https://growth-chat.com/podcast/elias-papaioannou-pre-colonial-ethnic-institutions-and-contemporary-african-development/>
- **GrowthChat;** *Freedoms Delayed and Political Legacies of Islamic Law in the Middle East.* <https://growth-chat.com/podcast/a-chat-with-timur-kuran-on-freedoms-delayed-and-political-legacies-of-islamic-law-in-the-middle-east/>

V. Geography and Agriculture.....15.10.2025

1. Jia, R. (2014) "Weather Shocks, Sweet Potatoes and Peasant Revolts in Historical China," *Economic Journal*, 124 (575): 92-118.
2. Alsan, M. (2013) "The Effect of the TseTse Fly on African Development," *American Economic Review*.

Methodological Learnings: **IV, DiD**

Podcast:

- **People I Mostly Admire;** *Jared Diamond on the Downfall of Civilization – and his Optimism of Ours.* <https://freakonomics.com/podcast/jared-diamond-on-the-downfall-of-civilizations-and-his-optimism-for-ours/>
- **GrowthChat;** *The Invention of Agriculture.* <https://growth-chat.com/podcast/andrea-matranga-the-invention-of-agriculture/>
- **GrowthChat;** *Measuring Economic Growth from Outer Space.* <https://growth-chat.com/podcast/chat-with-david-weil-on-measuring-economic-growth-from-outer-space/>

VI. Colonialism I: Slave Trade.....22.10.2025

1. Nunn, N. (2008) "The Long-Term Effects of Africa's Slave Trades," *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 123 (1): 139{176.
2. Nunn, N. Leonard W. (2011) "The Slave Trade and the Origins of Mistrust in Africa," *American Economic Review*, 101 (7): 3221-3252.

Methodological Learnings: **IV**

Podcast:

- **GrowthChat;** *The Slave Trade and the Origins of Mistrust in Africa.* <https://podtail.com/de/podcast/growthchat-by-marco-lecci-and-sascha-o-becker/a-chat-with-leonard-wantchekon-about-the-slave-tra/>
- **Conversation with Tyler;** *Nathan Nunn on the Paths to Development.* <https://conversationswithtyler.com/episodes/nathan-nunn/>

- **Trade Talks;** *Did Britain's slave trade help drive its industrial revolution.*
<https://tradetalkspodcast.com/podcast/173-did-britains-slave-trade-help-drive-its-industrial-revolution/>

VII. Colonialism II: Colonial and Pre-colonial Institutions.....29.10.2025

1. Michalopoulos, S. Pappaioannou, E. (2013) "Pre-colonial Ethnic Institutions and Contemporary African Development," *Econometrica*, 81 (1): 113- 152.
2. Michalopoulos, Stelios and Elias Pappaioannou. 2014. National Institutions and Subnational Development in Africa," *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 129 (1): 151-213.

Methodological Learnings: IV, RDD

Podcast:

- **GrowthChat;** *Pre-Colonial Ethnic Institutions and Contemporary African Development.* <https://growth-chat.com/podcast/elias-papaioannou-pre-colonial-ethnic-institutions-and-contemporary-african-development/>
- **GrowthChat;** *The Long-Run Effects of the Scramble for Africa.*
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-9dF6ybAsTs>
- **History Extra;** *The Scramble for Africa – everything you wanted to know.*
<https://podcasts.apple.com/nz/podcast/the-scramble-for-africa-everything-you-wanted-to-know/id256580326?i=1000702064049>

VIII. Origins of Social Preferences.....05.11.2025

1. Alesina, A. Giuliano, P. Nunn, N (2013) "On the Origins of Gender Roles: Women and the Plough." *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 128.2: 469-530.
2. Lowes, S., Montero, E. (2021) "The Legacy of Colonial Medicine in Central Africa." *American Economic Review* 111.4: 1284-1314.

Methodological Learnings: IV, RDD

Podcast:

- **GrowthChat;** *On the Origins of Gender Roles – Women and the Plough.*
<https://open.spotify.com/episode/1FKUwcMuIGWAvBmeaaXjL4>
- **GrowthChat;** *The Legacy of Colonial Medicine in Central Africa.*
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PXxDDMOXauk>
- **The Seen and the Unseen;** *Alice Evans Studies the Great Gender Divergence.*
<https://seenunseen.in/episodes/2022/10/3/episode-297-alice-evans-studies-the-great-gender-divergence/>

IX. Reversal of Fortunes.....12.11.2025 No summary required, plus methods repetition

1. Nunn, N. Puga, D. (2012) "Ruggedness: The Blessing of Bad Geography in Africa," *Review of Economics and Statistics*, 94 (1): 20-36.
2. Dell, M. Olken, B. A. (2020). "The Development Effects of the Extractive Colonial Economy: The Dutch Cultivation System in Java." *The Review of Economic Studies*, 87.1: 164-203.

Methodological Learnings: IV, RDD, Machine Learning⁶

Podcast:

- **Charter Cities Podcast;** *Historical Events and Economic Development.* <https://nathannunn.arts.ubc.ca/media/>
- **People I Mostly Admire;** *Daron Acemoglu on Economics, Politics, and Power.* <https://freakonomics.com/podcast/daron-acemoglu-on-economics-politics-and-power/>
- **Development Drums;** *Why Nations Fail.* <https://developmentdrums.org/795>

X. Violence.....19.11.2025

1. Dippel, C. (2014) "Forced Coexistence and Economic Development: Evidence from Native American Reservations," *Econometrica*.
2. Grosjean, P. (2011). "A History of Violence: The Culture of Honor as a Determinant of Homicide in the US South," *Journal of the European Economic Association*, 12(5), pp.1285-1316.

Methodological Learnings: IV, DiD, RDD

Podcast:

- **American Diagnosis;** *Guns and Honor.* <https://www.justhumanproductions.org/podcasts/e3-gun-violence-in-america-guns-honor/>
- **Seriously Social;** *Masculinity 2.0 – Why is it so hard to move past toxic masculinity.* <https://seriouslysocial.org.au/podcasts/masculinity-2-0-why-is-it-so-hard-to-move-past-toxic-masculinity/>
- **How the world works;** *The Systemic Suppression of Native Americans' Economic Outcomes.* <https://howtheworldworks.podbean.com/e/the-systemic-suppression-of-native-americans-economic-outcomes/>

XI. Trade and Exchange.....26.11.2025

1. Nunn, N. and Qian, N. (2011) "The Potato's Contribution to Population and Urbanization: Evidence from a Historical Experiment," *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 126 (2): 593-650.
2. Pascali, L. (2017) "The Wind of Change: Maritime Technology, Trade, and Economic Development." *American Economic Review*, 107 (9): 2821-54.

Methodological Learnings: IV, DiD

Podcast:

- **GrowthChat;** *Maritime Technology, Trade, and Development.* <https://growth-chat.com/podcast/luigi-pascali-maritime-technology-trade-and-development-in-the-20th-century/>
- **The Dissenter;** *The History and Politics of the Potato.* <https://www.thedissenter.net/podcast/930-rebecca-earle-the-history-and-politics-of-the-potato/>

- **Trade Talks;** *Did Britain's slave trade help drive its industrial revolution.* <https://tradetalkspodcast.com/podcast/173-did-britains-slave-trade-help-drive-its-industrial-revolution/>

XII. Technology.....03.12.2025

1. Dittmar, J. (2011) "Information Technology and Economic Change: The Impact of the Printing Press," *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 126 (3): 1133-1172.
2. Hornung, E. (2014) "Immigration and the Diffusion of Technology: The Huguenot Diaspora in Prussia," *American Economic Review*, 104(1), 84-122.

Methodological Learnings: IV, DiD

Podcast:

- **In Our Time;** *Caxton and the Printing Press.* <https://podcasts.apple.com/bm/podcast/caxton-and-the-printing-press/id73330895?i=1000353657728>
- **GrowthChat;** *A Chat with Daron Acemoglu on Power and Progress.* <https://growth-chat.com/podcast/a-chat-with-daron-acemoglu-on-power-and-progress/>
- **The Forum;** *Who were the Huguenots.* <https://podcasts.apple.com/ie/podcast/who-were-the-huguenots/id284278990?i=1000490765953>

XIII: Research outline presentations.....10.12.2025

- Presentation of early stage research design ideas
- Fixed equal time slot for each student (conditional on participants)

XIV: Research outline presentations.....17.12.2025

- Presentation of early stage research design ideas
- Fixed equal time slot for each student (conditional on participants)
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Introduction to spatial analysis with R

Although prior experience with R is not necessary, we expect that all students to take care of installing R and R studio, and make sure that everything is operational.

- R & Rstudio (first install R): <https://posit.co/download/rstudio-desktop/>

Here are some online materials you will find very useful:

- Geocomputation with R: <https://r.geocompx.org/>
- Introduction to GIS (appendix): <https://mgimond.github.io/Spatial/introGIS.html>

Structure:

Students will receive an online tutorial (R script) exploring different concepts and codes for spatial analysis at the date indicated below. Students will also receive a task that can be completed within a week (on a voluntary basis). In the tasks, students will have the chance to work with some of the data they will encounter during their reading sessions. The solutions for the task will be given the following week with the new tutorial and a new task.

Schedule:

Tutorial 1: Making maps with R.....Available: 01.10.2025

In this online tutorial, students will:

- Learn how to import different type of geographic data (polygons, lines, points, rasters).
- Learn how to make maps.
- **Task 1** with data from Dell, M. (2010) *"The Persistent Effects of Peru's Mining Mita"*.

Tutorial 2: Reprojecting data and spatial operation..... Available: 08.10.2025

In this online tutorial, students will:

- Learn about the different Coordinates Reference Systems (CRS), their implications for spatial analysis and how to work with it.
- Learn some basics data manipulation (filtering, selecting, creating, renaming, etc.).
- **Task 2** with data from Alsan, M. (2013) *"The Effect of the TseTse Fly on African Development"*

Tutorial 3: Geometry operation and data extraction..... Available: 15.10.2025

- In this online tutorial, students will:
- Learn how to combine geodata (spatial intersection)
- Work with centroids and point data.
- Learn the basics of raster data and how to extract data at different level of aggregation.
- **Task 3** following Michalopoulos, S. Pappaioannou, E. (2013) *"Pre-colonial Ethnic Institutions and Contemporary African Development"*

Tutorial 4: Data investigation and regressions..... Available: 22.10.2025

In this online tutorial, students will:

- Learn how to plot data to investigate relationship between variables.
- Learn how to run some basic linear regressions.
- **Task 4** with inputs collected throughout the tutorials.

R take-home assignment:

The Take home assignment will cover the different methods covered during the tutorials and tasks. Students will partially replicate a study using spatial data in an historical context.

START DATE: 05.11.2025: 12:00 pm

DEADLINE: 11.11.2025 23:59pm

Other topics and sessions were covered in previous versions of the course or present alternatives. In case you are interested in those topics for your proposal, the papers are provided below as a starting point for reading.

Optional: Culture and Origins of Political Preferences

1. Guiso, L. Sapienza, P. Zingales, L. (2016) "Long-Term Persistence." *Journal of the European Economic Association* 14.6: 1401-1436.
2. Dehdari, S. H. Gehring, K. (2022) "The Origins of Common Identity: Evidence from Alsace-Lorraine." *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics* 14.1: 261-92.

Methodological Learnings: RDD

Optional: (Reactivation of history)

1. Ochsner, R. (2019) "Mobilizing History". Working Paper. <https://www.dropbox.com/s/cocs2ku2efmxd4z/Mobilizing-history-2019-10-29.pdf?dl=0>
2. Fouka, V. Voth, H-J. (2013) "Reprisals Remembered: German-Greek Conflict and Car Sales During the Euro Crisis". CEPR Discussion Paper No. DP9704, Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2346221>

Methodological Learnings: IV, RDD, Machine Learning

Optional: (Genetics)

1. Ashraf, Quamrul, and Oded Galor. 2013. "The 'Out of Africa' Hypothesis, Human Genetic Diversity, and Comparative Economic Development." *American Economic Review*, 103 (1): 1-46. <https://www.aeaweb.org/articles?id=10.1257/aer.103.1.1>

Methodological Learnings: IV

Optional: (War and Conflict)

1. Acemoglu, D. Cantoni, D. Johnson, S. Robinson, J. A. (2011) "The Consequences of Radical Reform: The French Revolution," *American Economic Review*, 101 (7): 3286-3307.
2. Gennaioli, N. Voth, H-J. (2015) "State Capacity and Military Conflict", *The Review of Economic Studies*, Volume 82, Issue 4, Pages 1409–1448, <https://doi.org/10.1093/restud/rdv019>

Methodological Learnings: IV, DiD