

# China, Foreign Aid, and Global Development

RESEARCH ARTICLE WORKSHOP

Summer 2026

[bgpopescu.net/teaching/research\\_workshop/research\\_ir\\_china\\_aid.html](http://bgpopescu.net/teaching/research_workshop/research_ir_china_aid.html)

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## Details

Instructor: Bogdan Popescu

Program Duration: 15 Weeks (9 mentor meetings)

Structure: Nine one-on-one, remote weekly sessions for 1 hour

## Course Description

This course is an intensive, hands-on introduction to writing a research article in the social sciences, with a focus on political science, sociology, or economics. By the end of the course, students will have developed and refined a complete research paper through a series of iterative assignments and structured feedback. The course integrates methodological training, substantive readings, and practical writing skills. Course content is divided into weekly units covering both technical skills and theoretical content. This course is demanding, but it's designed to give you the tools to write your first publishable article. I am here to guide you every step of the way.

This course introduces students to the international relations of foreign aid and development finance through four thematic modules: the foundations of foreign aid, China's emergence as a global development financier, debt and dependency in recipient countries, and great-power competition between the United States and China. Students begin by examining the classic debates over why donors give aid and whether aid works through Alesina and Dollar, Burnside and Dollar, and Easterly, then turn to the rise of China as a lender and builder of infrastructure across the developing world—including the Belt and Road Initiative—through Dreher et al., Horn, Reinhart, and Trebesch, and Blair, Custer, and Roessler. The course then evaluates the consequences of Chinese finance for recipient states such as Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and countries across Africa, engaging the “debt-trap diplomacy” debate and the evidence on debt distress and political capture through Bräutigam, Horn et al., and Dreher et al. It concludes with the geopolitics of development finance—how aid builds soft power and how Washington's instruments, from the DFC to the Blue Dot Network, respond to Beijing's—through Doshi, Blair, Marty, and Roessler, and Eichenauer, Fuchs, and Brückner. Throughout, students acquire foundational quantitative skills in R and apply them to aid, lending, and survey data, culminating in an empirical research paper that connects theories of international political economy to real-world development outcomes.

Assessment will be based on the progressive development of a research project, including submission of a research question, proposal, outline, draft, and final paper, as well as in-class presentations. No prior experience with coding or statistics is required, but students should be ready to engage with challenging material in a supportive, step-by-step environment.

## Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of this course the students will be able to:

- Develop a research question and transform it into a publishable paper.
- Master essential academic tools including reference managers (e.g., JabRef), markdown-based word processing, and professional presentation software.
- Write each section of a paper: abstract, introduction, argument, methods, literature review, findings, discussion, and conclusion.
- Conduct basic quantitative analysis in R, including data merging, regression modeling, and visualization.
- Understand and apply core methods in social science research, including qualitative methods, difference-in-differences (DiD), and regression discontinuity design (RDD).
- Create a personal academic website using GitHub Pages to showcase their work.

## Weekly Presentations

Students will deliver a 20-minute presentation on a topic assigned in advance. Presentations should include a clear introduction, main points, and conclusion. Use visual aids (e.g., slides) effectively, ensuring text is legible and visuals are relevant. Practice beforehand to stay within the time limit and maintain a confident, professional tone. Be prepared to answer 2-3 questions from peers or the instructor during and after the presentation. Remember to cite your sources and avoid reading verbatim from slides or notes.

In addition to summarizing the key arguments or findings, your presentation should include critical analysis of the material. Highlight what the author does not address, the limitations of their research, or potential problems in their analysis or methodology. Think about how the research could be improved, expanded, or connected to broader themes discussed in class, and incorporate these insights into your presentation.

Each week, you will give a short presentation on that week's readings. You can download the [template for the paper presentation at this link](#).

**How weekly homework works:** after each meeting, your homework has two components: (1) the slide decks listed under the current week, and (2) the readings listed under the *following* week. The readings must be completed before the next meeting — they are the basis of your weekly presentation and of our discussion.

## Research Paper

The research paper should provide an extensive background on the topic and a clear contribution to the literature. The analysis should include some quantitative analysis to test hypotheses. The statistical part of the research project involves using data (collect and prepare the data to run quantitative analyses and produce graphs) and specialized software (R). For topics on aid, Chinese development finance, and recipient-country outcomes, rich publicly available data include AidData's Global Chinese Development Finance Dataset, the OECD DAC Creditor Reporting System, the World Bank International Debt Statistics, the Afrobarometer surveys, and the replication data accompanying the published studies on the syllabus.

The final paper should be approximately 15–20 pages double-spaced (somewhat shorter or longer is acceptable depending on the target journal's requirements) and should engage critically with the

literature, citing at least 5–10 papers in the field.

### Research Paper Template

Use the following as a starting point for writing your own research paper:

- [Research Paper Template | Replication](#)

### Research Paper Examples

This section provides two complete examples of finished research papers and presentations. These are not templates to copy, but illustrations of different research designs. Use them to see how arguments, methods, and findings can be structured and communicated in practice.

- **Quantitative Example**
  - [Research Paper \(Quantitative\) | Replication Files](#)
  - [Presentation \(Quantitative\) | Replication Files](#)
- **Qualitative Example**
  - [Research Paper \(Qualitative\) | Replication Files](#)
  - [Presentation \(Qualitative\) | Replication Files](#)

### Recommended Optional Books

#### Writing Articles

Coppedge, M. 2012. *Democratization and Research Methods*. Cambridge University Press.

Halperin, S., & Heath, O. (2012). *Political Research: Methods and Practical Skills* (3rd ed.). Oxford University Press.

Punch, K. F. 2014. *Introduction to social research: Quantitative and qualitative approaches* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.

Van Evera, S. 1997. *Guide to methods for students of political science*. Cornell University Press.

#### Statistics

Cunningham, Scott. 2021. *Causal Inference: The Mixtape*. Yale University Press. <https://mixtape.scunning.com>.

Ismay, Chester, and Albert Y. Kim. 2019. *Statistical Inference via Data Science: A Modern Dive into R and the Tidyverse*. Chapman and Hall / CRC. <https://modern dive.com/>.

Huntington-Klein, Nick. 2021. *The Effect: An Introduction to Research Design and Causality*. Boca Raton, Florida: Chapman and Hall / CRC. <https://theeffectbook.net/>.

Llaudet, Elena and Imai, Kosuke. 2023 “Data Analysis for Social Science.” Princeton: Oxford University Press.

Warne, Russel T. 2018. “Statistics for the Social Sciences. A General Linear Model Approach.” London: Cambridge University Press.

## Causal Inference

Bauer, Paul C. and Dennis Cohen. 2023. *Applied Causal Analysis (with R)* <https://bookdown.org/paul/applied-causal-analysis/>.

Keyes, David, R for the Rest of Us: 2025. *A Statistics-Free Introduction* <https://book.rfortherestofus.com>. No Starch Press

## Geographic Information Systems (GIS)

Lovelace, Robin, Nowosad, Jakub, and Jannes Muenchow. 2021. *Geocomputation with R*. <https://bookdown.org/robinlovelace/geocompr/>.

Mieno, Tara. 2023. *R as GIS for Economists*. <https://tmieno2.github.io/R-as-GIS-for-Economists/>.

## Week 1

- Intro to the Course - 2026-06-06

**Homework 1: Research Design and Presentation:** Go over:

- [The Topic and Research Question Slides](#)
- [Quarto Presentations Slides](#)

**Homework 2: Statistics and R Programming:** Go over:

- [Operations and Objects in R Slides](#)
- [Intro to Statistics Slides](#)

**Homework 3: Readings:** Read the Week 2 readings (listed below) and prepare a short presentation on them for the Week 2 meeting.

## Week 2

Foundations of Foreign Aid - 2026-06-11

- Alesina, Alberto, and David Dollar. 2000. "Who Gives Foreign Aid to Whom and Why?" *Journal of Economic Growth* 5 (1): 33–63. [[PDF](#)]
- Burnside, Craig, and David Dollar. 2000. "Aid, Policies, and Growth." *American Economic Review* 90 (4): 847–868. [[PDF](#)]
- Easterly, William. 2003. "Can Foreign Aid Buy Growth?" *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 17 (3): 23–48. [[PDF](#)]

**Homework 1: Research Design and Presentation:** Go over:

- [Essential Tools for Writing a Paper Slides](#)
- [The Abstract and the Argument Slides](#)

**Homework 2: Statistics and R Programming:** Go over:

- [Working with Data in R Slides](#)
- [Dplyr and Basic Visualization Slides](#)

**Homework 3: Readings:** Read the Week 3 readings (listed below) and prepare a short presentation on them for the Week 3 meeting.

### Week 3

China as a Global Development Financier - 2026-06-20

- Dreher, Axel, Andreas Fuchs, Bradley Parks, Austin Strange, and Michael J. Tierney. 2021. "Aid, China, and Growth: Evidence from a New Global Development Finance Dataset." *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy* 13 (2): 135–174. [[PDF](#)]
- Horn, Sebastian, Carmen M. Reinhart, and Christoph Trebesch. 2021. "China's Overseas Lending." *Journal of International Economics* 133: 103539. [[PDF](#)]
- Blair, Robert A., Samantha Custer, and Philip Roessler. 2024. "Elites, the Aid Curse, and Chinese Development Finance: A Conjoint Survey Experiment on Elites' Aid Preferences in 141 Low- and Middle-Income Countries." *American Journal of Political Science*. [[PDF](#)]

**Homework 1: Research Design and Presentation:** Go over:

- [Literature Review Slides](#)
- [Writing the Research Proposal:](#) question, hypotheses literature, methods

**Homework 2: Statistics and R Programming:** Go over:

- [Visualizing Data Distributions in R Slides](#)
- [Modeling Relationships Between Variables Slides](#)

**Homework 3: Readings:** Read the Week 4 readings (listed below) and prepare a short presentation on them for the Week 4 meeting.

**Deadline:** Research Question – 2026-06-26

## Week 4

Debt, Dependency, and Recipient Politics - 2026-06-27

- Bräutigam, Deborah. 2020. "A Critical Look at Chinese 'Debt-Trap Diplomacy': The Rise of a Meme." *Area Development and Policy* 5 (1): 1–14. [PDF]
- Horn, Sebastian, Bradley C. Parks, Carmen M. Reinhart, and Christoph Trebesch. 2023. "Debt Distress on China's Belt and Road." *AEA Papers and Proceedings* 113: 131–134. [PDF]
- Dreher, Axel, Andreas Fuchs, Roland Hodler, Bradley C. Parks, Paul A. Raschky, and Michael J. Tierney. 2019. "African Leaders and the Geography of China's Foreign Assistance." *Journal of Development Economics* 140: 44–71. [PDF]

**Homework 1: Statistics and R Programming:** Go over:

- [Interpreting Binary and Multivariate Regression Models Slides](#)
- [Differences-in-Differences Slides](#)
- [Data Visualization in R - 1 Slides](#)

**Homework 2: Readings:** Read the Week 5 readings (listed below) and prepare a short presentation on them for the Week 5 meeting.

**Deadline:** Research Proposal - 2026-07-03

## Week 5

US–China Competition and the Geopolitics of Aid - 2026-07-04

- Doshi, Rush. 2021. *The Long Game: China's Grand Strategy to Displace American Order*. New York: Oxford University Press. C1 [PDF]
- Blair, Robert A., Robert Marty, and Philip Roessler. 2022. "Foreign Aid and Soft Power: Great Power Competition in Africa in the Early Twenty-First Century." *British Journal of Political Science* 52 (3): 1355–1376. [PDF]
- Eichenauer, Vera Z., Andreas Fuchs, and Lutz Brückner. 2021. "The Effects of Trade, Aid, and Investment on China's Image in Latin America." *Journal of Comparative Economics* 49 (2): 483–498. [PDF]

**Homework 1: Research Design and Presentation:** Go over:

- [Methods Slides](#)
- Writing the Paper Outline

**Homework 2: Statistics and R Programming:** Go over:

- [Regression Discontinuity Design Slides](#)
- [Data Visualization in R - 2 Slides](#)
- [Data Visualization in R - 3 Slides](#)

**Deadline:** Research Paper Outline - 2026-07-10

## **Week 6**

Replication: Difference-in-Differences - 2026-07-11

**Homework 1: Research Design and Presentation:** Go over:

- [Findings, Discussion, Intro, and Conclusion Slides](#)
- [Making a website on GitHub: username.github.io](#)

## **Week 7**

Replication: Regression Discontinuity Design - 2026-07-18

**Homework:** Write:

- Work on Research Design, Data, Research Methodology

**Deadline:** Milestone - 2026-07-24

## **Week 8**

Paper Development - 2026-07-25

**Homework:** Write:

- Work on Research Design, Data, Research Methodology
- Finish First Draft

## **Week 9**

Paper Feedback - 2026-08-01

- Writing an academic CV and publishing on your personal website

- CV template:
  - [tex file](#) (open the tex file in quarto and compile after updating it with personal details)
  - [pdf file](#)

**Homework:** Write:

- Revise Paper: Methods
- Write academic CV and post on website

**Deadline:** Final Paper - 2026-08-07

## **Week 10**

Paper Development - 2026-08-08

**Deadline:** Revised Final Paper - 2026-08-28