

# *Introduction to Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA)*

”Hauptseminar Vergleichende Politikwissenschaft”

University of Cologne, summer term 2017

course number: 14335.0700

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Sessions:

- first: 18.04.2017
- last: 18.07.2017
- none: 06.06.2017 (Pfingsten); 27.06.2017(to be replaced); 25.07.2017 (to be replaced)

Place and time:

- WiSo Modulbau (100), seminar room 3
- Tuesday, 10am-11.30am

Contact details:

- instructor: Prof. Ingo Rohlfing
- office hours: Thursday, 9.30am-11.30am (during term); by appointment; open-door policy
- office: Universitätsstr. 91, room 1.04
- [i.rohlfing@uni-koeln.de](mailto:i.rohlfing@uni-koeln.de); Skype: *rohlfinguniv*

## Content

The course introduces participants to the basis, mechanics and application of Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) in Comparative Politics. QCA was introduced to the Social Sciences by [Ragin \(1987\)](#). It is based on the idea of set relations and is an alternative to statistics when it comes to the analysis of a medium or large number of cases. The course starts with the foundation of QCA, which are the notion of a 'set' and different sorts of *necessary* and *sufficient* relationships between one or multiple sets. You are then taken through all the steps required for performing a QCA:

1. the choice of potential causes of an outcome;
2. their transformation (*calibration*) into sets;
3. their arrangement in a dataset and its transformation into a *truth table*;
4. the *simplification* of a truth table with an *algorithm*;
5. the interpretation of the results

During the course, I will mainly refer to a QCA study by [Grauvogel & von Soest \(2014\)](#) ([gated version](#)). Participants should read the article carefully before the course because it is central to our discussions. Please also access and prepare the "Supporting Information" from the article's website. I will use [RStudio](#) for the analysis of the Grauvogel data and illustrate other points about QCA. The course will not teach how to run a QCA in R, but I will make available my scripts and participants are free to use it in class or afterwards.

At the end of the course, participants will have the required basic knowledge for evaluating the quality of published QCA studies. Since this is an introduction to QCA, it is not required to have prior knowledge of set theory or QCA.

## Exam and credit points

Participants who pass the course get 9 ECTS points for writing a research paper and giving a presentation. In order to facilitate a steady learning experience and to give feedback in regular intervals, participants are encouraged to submit short mid-term papers on different elements of a QCA during the course. The papers are graded (see "Grading and formalities" below) and will be commented within seven days.

At the end of the course, participants tie together the small papers and submit them as one final paper (10-15 pages in total). Participants may use the opportunity to make changes to a short paper before including it in the final paper. The final paper will be graded.

Table 1 : Deadlines to meet during course

date	assignment
02.05.	submit chosen empirical study
16.05.	summary of study (2-3 pages)
30.05.	paper on calibration (2-3 pages)
20.06.	paper on preparing truth table (2-3 pages)
11.07.	paper on minimizing truth table (2-3 pages)
15.09.	final paper (10-15 pages)

### Choose an empirical QCA study

The first requirement for the exam is that a participant chooses a published QCA study. You can pick whatever study you find interesting as long as it largely falls into the field of Comparative Politics. The study should be sent to me ([i.rohlfing@uni-koeln.de](mailto:i.rohlfing@uni-koeln.de)) by April, 31st, because I have to take a quick look to check whether it is useful for our purposes (of course, you can also send it earlier to me).

### Summarize the empirical study

The first paper a participant has to write is a summary of the empirical study. You should address the following issues.

- What is the research question? Why is it important according to the author?
- How does the author justify running a QCA?
- What is the design (how many cases, period of analysis etc.)?
- What is its main finding?
- What is positive and negative about the paper, in your opinion?

### The four short papers on specific aspects of the study

The other three papers should discuss the steps (2) to (4) (see section "Content") with regard to the chosen QCA study. The two guiding questions are:

1. What does the author do? For example, what type of set is used? Is the choice of set type justified and, if so, how?
2. What do you like and dislike about this part of the empirical study? Is something intransparent? Or even wrong?

The purpose of the short papers is three-fold. First, you learn about the key components of a QCA study in more abstract terms in the course and in more applied terms by working with

an empirical study. Second, in good ways and bad ways, you will see how social scientists do a QCA study in practice. Third, you will learn to criticize empirical research by working out its strengths and weaknesses.

## Presentation

Participants are required to give one presentation during the course. The subject of the presentation is one of the short papers and should not be longer than 10 minutes (that is, it is not much extra work). The presentations will be given on the day of the deadline (printed bold in the table below). For example, the presentations on the minimization of truth tables will be given on July, 11th. The presentations will be held before you receive my comments on the paper on which the presentation is based. The schedule for the presentations will be fixed in the third week of the course.

## Grading and formalities

The final grade is a weighted grade of the presentation and the final paper:

- a presentation: 10%
- a final paper: 90%

The presentation and the paper will be grade on a 100-point scale. Participants have the opportunity to collect bonus points for each of the four papers described above. Per paper, participants can collect up to 10 extra points. If a participant submits a mid-term paper, the final grade is the sum of the weighted grade of the presentation and final paper and the bonus points.

Two identical versions of each mid-term paper and the final paper have to be submitted in print and as PDF. The PDF should be send to [i.rohlfing@uni-koeln.de](mailto:i.rohlfing@uni-koeln.de). You can drop off the print version at the Center's office on the 1st floor of the IBW building in the Herbert-Lewin-Str. 2, or send the paper version by mail to, or give it to me before class (if it is a mid-term paper):

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Cologne Center for Comparative Politics  
Herbert-Lewin-Str. 2  
Universität zu Köln  
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The paper version must contain the "[Erklärung zu Arbeiten](#)" that is signed by you by hand (sorry, it is only available in German). We would like to point out that all term papers submitted in this context will be checked anonymously for plagiarism with the software Turnitin. Term papers will not be saved permanently on the Turnitin server. ([more information on Turinitn](#))

## Possible reading before the course

If you want to get an idea about what QCA is, you can take a look at the chapters in the volume edited by [Rihoux & Ragin \(2009\)](#). You can get a free, short overview by looking at [a slide set from Charles Ragin](#), the founder of QCA.

## Course literature

- Grauvogel, Julia, & von Soest, Christian. 2014. Claims to legitimacy count: Why sanctions fail to instigate democratisation in authoritarian regimes. *European Journal of Political Research*, **53**(4), 635–653.
- Marx, Axel, Rihoux, Benoît, & Ragin, Charles. 2014. The origins, development, and application of Qualitative Comparative Analysis: the first 25 years. *European Political Science Review*, **6**(1), 115–142.
- Ragin, Charles C. 1987. *The Comparative Method: Moving Beyond Quantitative and Qualitative Strategies*. Berkeley: University of Berkeley Press.
- Ragin, Charles C. 2006. Set Relations in Social Research: Evaluating Their Consistency and Coverage. *Political Analysis*, **14**(3), 291–310.
- Rihoux, Benoît, & Ragin, Charles. 2009. *Configurational Comparative Methods*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Schneider, Carsten Q., & Wagemann, Claudius. 2012. *Set-Theoretic Methods for the Social Sciences. A Guide to Qualitative Comparative Analysis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Thiem, Alrik, & Dusa, Adrian. 2012. *Qualitative Comparative Analysis with R: A User's Guide*. Springer.

Table 2 : Topics and readings (preliminary, see 'dates' above)

Date	Topic	Reference
18.04.	Short history of QCA, basics of sets	<a href="#">Marx et al. (2014)</a> , <a href="#">Schneider &amp; Wagemann (2012, sec. 1.1)</a>
25.04.	Basics of set theory I	<a href="#">Schneider &amp; Wagemann (2012, chap. 2, chap. 3)</a>
02.05.	Basics of set theory II, exercise 'set theory'	<a href="#">Schneider &amp; Wagemann (2012, chap. 2, chap. 3)</a>
09.05.	Choice of conditions, calibration I	<a href="#">Schneider &amp; Wagemann (2012, sec 1.2)</a> , <a href="#">Thiem &amp; Dusa (2012, 27-32, 51-62)</a>
16.05.	Calibration II	<a href="#">Schneider &amp; Wagemann (2012, sec 1.2)</a> , <a href="#">Thiem &amp; Dusa (2012, 27-32, 51-62)</a>
23.05.	<b>Presentations 'calibration'</b>	-
30.05.	Construction of truth table I	<a href="#">Schneider &amp; Wagemann (2012, sec. 4.1, 4.2, 6.1, 6.2, 6.3)</a>
13.06.	Construction of truth table II	<a href="#">Schneider &amp; Wagemann (2012, sec. 4.1, 4.2, 6.1, 6.2, 6.3)</a>
20.06.	<b>Presentations 'construction of truth table', minimizing truth table I</b>	-
27.06.	Minimizing truth table II	<a href="#">Schneider &amp; Wagemann (2012, sec. 4.3, sec. 6.4, chap. 7)</a>
04.07.	Minimizing truth table III	<a href="#">Schneider &amp; Wagemann (2012, sec. 4.3, sec. 6.4, chap. 7)</a>
11.07.	<b>Presentations 'minimizing truth table'</b>	-
18.07.	Interpreting solutions	<a href="#">Ragin (2006)</a> , <a href="#">Schneider &amp; Wagemann (2012, chap. 5)</a>
25.07.	Exercise 'interpreting solution', what makes a good QCA study, Q & A	-